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The Poetics of Human- -Environmental Metamorphoses

Texturally complex and capable of creating countless textual entanglements, literature is an always active model for the studies of eccentric states of nature (emerging e.g. during the climate crisis), morphological multiplications of subjectivity, and new interconnections between both.

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The Poetics of Human- -Environmental Metamorphoses

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The climate crisis has not only caused some species to die out. Nature is responding to rapidly changing environmental conditions and this response is more often than not unpredictable. Many weird fiction texts have for a long time talked about the eccentric life of plants and animals that can undergo strange transformations and stage astonishing interventions in human worlds. Such phenomena extend beyond the widely publicized unprecedented mass invasion of the European black-bird into urban areas. Perhaps such effects of the climate crisis will reveal the powers of nature that have previously been only imaginatively described by Bolesław Leśmian and Bruno Schulz in their works? Respectively, subjectivity, which in literature has often been presented as open to exchanges with the natural world, susceptible to transformations, splits, unnatural growths of personality and consciousness, also enters the picture.

These two phenomena come face to face in some literary analyses, proving how important describing the many different unpredictable expansions and reactions of nature to the climate crisis is. Literary scholars trace its new entanglements and hypertrophies, showing how nature invades and merges with subjectivity that is constantly being “split” and problematized in some literary texts. Texturally complex and capable of creating countless textual entanglements, literature is an always active – often tested before and now increasingly popular – model for the studies of eccentric states of nature, morphological multiplications of subjectivity, and new interconnections between both. Life (bios) in them is an astonishing energy, sometimes giving rise to weird literary forms and sometimes to shapes that are fascinating, unique, and exemplary of beauty that has never been seen before, which could be metaphorically illustrated by the famous symmetriads and mimoids described by Stanisław Lem in Solaris.

The articles in this issue of Forum of Poetics address the question of literary subjectivity through the lens of environmental issues. Some analyze well-known fantastic poetic images anew. Joanna Grądział-Wójcik examines the image of a woman in Halina Poświatowska's poetry, who wrote "jest we mnie spłoszona mysz / i łasica wężąca zapach krwi" [a scared mouse is in me/ and a weasel that knows the smell of blood]. Magdalena Piotrowska-Grot shows that similar images may be found in other texts written by women. Her essay on the works of surrealist women artists shows that they often worked with the motifs of metamorphosis, eccentric transformations of the subjective and the objective. Maciej Mazur, in turn, describes the achievements of econarratology, investigating the possibility of connecting such an anthropocentric practice as storytelling with the non-human world. Mazur argues that both may cooperate in and through the self-referential, the autobiographical and the autofictional, as evidenced by the "metaleptic" fantasy about a future ecological catastrophe described by Wiktor Żwikiewicz in his novel. Such poetological issues also provide an important new context for autobiographical writing. The connections between life and subjectivity, the ingrowth of life into literature and vice versa, is traced by Patrycja Bąkowska in the texts of the Napoleonic soldier and poet Cyprian Godebski. Respectively, Mary Oliver in her collection of essays, as Shuai Tong shows, uses the convention of the ecological autobiography to describe symbiotic natural-biographical-poetic forms. In his ecopsychological analysis, Tong combines psychoanalysis and ecocriticism to reveal the dynamics of the life-sustaining entanglements between the subjective with the environmental. Olga Tokarczuk's Primeval and Other Times is also a testament to this phenomenon. Xiaojin Guo examines how the human and the non-human worlds, fantastic and magical as they are, interconnect in the novel. They become strange environments in which characters cope with different fears. Krzysztof Żydor shows the endless autofictional multiplications of subjectivity in Andrzej Czcibor-Piotrowski's prose, in which life (bios) transforms into a tangle of shapes and

a house of mirrors. Karolina Starnawska, in turn, reminds us that today the literary subject quite often creates complex real-autofictional entanglements in social media. This is evidenced by the structure of Małgorzata Musierowicz's authorial blog, which Starnawska analyzes in her article. Monika Wiszniowska describes how contemporary reporting tends to gravitate towards historical realities, unraveling dramatic connections between human and natural history. She analyses, among others, Filip Springer's Miedzianka, which tells the story of a town which sank into the ground due to predatory mining. It would be hard to find a more moving reportage about how the human and the non-human intertwine in shocking new forms in the face of an ecological catastrophe.

The connection between weird fiction and speculative realism is well-known, as evidenced by Graham Harman's study of Lovecraft. The articles in this issue of Forum of Poetics also point to literature's capacity to speculate on the ever-surprising modulations and metamorphoses of the natural environment during and before the climate crisis. The study of possible further, other expansions and transformations of nature described in literature is combined with a new perspective on literary subjectivities, which in their unique textural simulations and subjective morphological complexities also reveal their eccentric and bizarre transformations. Literature's ability to describe the encounters of these two constantly transforming environmental and subjective worlds has for a long time, and now with increased intensity, been its strength in the time of the climate crisis. It also turns out to be a challenge for the poetics of literature concerned with human-environmental metamorphoses.

translated by Małgorzata Olsza

Econarratology and the problem of metalepsis and description in Wiktor Żwikiewicz's *Druga Jesień* [A Second Autumn]*

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The descriptive turn – econarratology – weird fiction – introduction

Since the publication of the two issues of *Forum of Poetics* from autumn 2020 and winter 2020, Polish literary studies have increasingly engaged with the questions of description, mainly defined in the context of the so-called descriptive turn. First introduced and addressed in 2009 by Sharon Marcus and Stephen Best in *Representations*,¹ it was further developed by Heather Love.² The two basic assumptions of the descriptive turn concern problems of different scale. It is postulated that (1) description, considered reproductive in the humanities, should be recognized as a valuable method and (2) we should also reflect on how description functions and what role it plays in cultural texts, drawing on the most current philosophical and social theories.

In the present article, I further engage with the latter question. I propose to combine narratological tools with the postulates of the descriptive turn. This combination is the most effective approach to the study of literary description as the basic structural element of the text. On the one hand, this approach avoids inaccuracies which might appear when scholars associated with

¹ Stephen Best, Sharon Marcus, "Surface Reading: An Introduction", *Representations* 1 (2009): 1–21.

² Heather Love, "Close but not Deep: Literary Ethics and the Descriptive Turn", *New Literary History* 2 (2010): 371–391.

the descriptive turn work with such methodologies as ecocriticism, the philosophy of “presence,” speculative realism, or new materialism,³ which are not primarily intended for literary analysis. On the other hand, the category of description is not constrained within a rigid framework provided by textual linguistics or, more broadly, structuralism. This combination also brings to mind a number of questions about the possibilities and limits of description in terms of – as Heather Houser writes – animating exuberant and mysterious matter, extracting its hidden potential,⁴ as well as commenting on the interactions between the human and the non-human, conjuring up landscapes of risks and dystopian realities, (re)presenting hyperobjects,⁵ and constructing critical and careful descriptions of the environment.⁶ In the critical perspective provided by the descriptive turn, description is a privileged textual element, in and through which entities that have so far remained in the “anthroposhadow”⁷ come to light. Description engages with both real and fictional worlds. Prototypical description, in contrast to narrative, which is primarily concerned with motivations and sequences of events, simply indicates that “something is there and like that”.⁸ We may thus reflect on its potential in relation to challenges in world-building in fantasy, science fiction, and beyond, as well as in the context of the ontological turn in contemporary philosophy.

Considering the above, let us start with Erin James’s take on *e c o n a r r a t o l o g y*.

Econarratology embraces the key concerns of each of its parent discourses – it maintains an interest in studying the relationship between literature and the physical environment, but does so with sensitivity to the literary structures and devices that we use to communicate representations of the physical environment to each other via narratives.⁹

In the most recent reinterpretations of the discipline collected in *Environment and Narrative: New Directions in Econarratology*, John Heggglund,¹⁰ drawing on the now much-discussed work of Joseph VanderMeer, argues that the fundamental distinction made by unnatural narratologists¹¹ between the natural world and the unnatural text fails to account for the weird materialities of our times. The “natural world” as a plane of reference has changed beyond recognition: it is filled with objects that are no longer either artificial or natural (the Great Pacific Garbage Patch, smog, etc.); we find ourselves inside hyperobjects as they invade our bodies, and reality is becoming less and less stable.

³ In Polish literary studies, scholars who engage with the descriptive turn mainly focus on the relations between the philosophy of “presence” and the turn to things. See, among others, Tomasz Mizerkiewicz, “Justifying description’ in Zygmunt Haupt’s works”, *Forum of Poetics* 1 (2023): 22–35.

⁴ Heather Houser, “Shimmering Description and Descriptive Criticism”, *New Literary History* 1 (2020): 13–15.

⁵ Timothy Morton, “Hyperobjects. Philosophy and Ecology after the End of the World” (Minneapolis, London: University of Minnesota Press, 2013).

⁶ See: Anna Tsing, “More-than-Human Sociality: A Call for Critical Description”, in: *Anthropology and Nature*, ed. Kristen Hastrup (New York, London: Routledge 2014), 27–42.

⁷ Andrzej Marzec, *Antropocień. Filozofia i estetyka po końcu świata [Anthroposhadow: Philosophy and Aesthetics after the End of the World]* (Warsaw: Wydawnictwo Naukowe PWN, 2021).

⁸ Werner Wolf, “Description as a Transmedial Mode of Representation”, in: *Description in Literature and Other Media*, ed. Werner Wolf, Walter Bernhart (Amsterdam, New York: Brill, 2007), 34.

⁹ Erin James, *The Storyworld Accord: Econarratology and Postcolonial Narratives* (Lincoln, London: University of Nebraska Press 2015), 23.

¹⁰ John Heggglund, “Unnatural Narratology and Weird Realism in Jeff VanderMeer’s *Annihilation*”, in: *Environment and Narrative. New Directions in Econarratology*, ed. Erin James, Eric Morel (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 2020), 27–44.

¹¹ He refers to the studies of Jan Alber, Stefan Iversen, and Henrik Skov Nielsen.

All this prompts us to rethink what narrative mimesis or anti-mimesis is. Heggglund therefore proposes that greater emphasis should be placed on the analysis of texts that problematize the basic distinction between the “real world” and the “impossible world,” which, either at a discursive or narrative level, also blur the boundaries between the subject and the environment.

In his article, Heggglund does not problematize description, even though the vast majority of quotations from VanderMeer’s *Annihilation* are descriptions. The reluctance to examine such passages in depth is a result of the long tradition of associating descriptions with nature writing and, more broadly, with the tradition of the realistic novel, where in both cases its function was reduced to creating the reality effect, its ability to represent the environment and things. According to this logic, it would seem that description in weird fiction, which emphasizes the protean nature of reality that does not yield to any representative attempts, should be used sparingly, if at all. Meanwhile, the opposite is true. VanderMeer’s and, for that matter, China Miéville’s books are highly descriptive.¹² This is not surprising; after all, as Graham Harman writes, strange reality calls for strange realism. Consequently, it also calls for descriptions – specifically, allusive and indirect descriptions.¹³ These should be a s y m p t o m a t i c and s p e c u l a t i v e, suggesting the existence of other dimensions of objects that can emerge from the *accidens* which shimmer on their surfaces. To generalize this problem placing it in Harman’s terminology, it can be argued that such descriptions can, among other things, (1) create an illusion in which sensual objects are c o n f r o n t e d with their sensual qualities,¹⁴ thereby disrupting habitual perceptions; (2) challenge the descriptor’s cognitive capabilities;¹⁵ and (3) create an atmosphere (*stimmung*) of horror at times (stemming from the fear of the unknown: the withdrawn real object) and of mystery at other times (a fascination with the a l l u r e¹⁶ of objects when – by virtue of allusion – they seem to reveal the sinister abyss of their reality).

I also concur with Joanna Bednarek that the “challenge posed by the Anthropocene is best addressed by texts that are seemingly about something else,”¹⁷ that is by texts which operate through allusions, metaphors, postmodern games. This is how weird fiction operates. Therefore, using econarratological tools and unnatural narratology, I will explore the role that ontological metalepses can play within this genre. I will also focus on the descriptive aspect of weird fiction, examining the mechanisms involved in constructing illusions and the syntactic structure of non-prototypical descriptions.

¹²Stephanie Swainston argues in *The New Weird* that “[t]he details are jewel-bright, hallucinatory, carefully described [...]. It is visual, and every scene is packed with baroque detail.” Quote after: Jeffrey Andrew Weinstock, “The New Weird”, in: *New Directions in Popular Fiction. Genre, Distribution, Reproduction*, ed. Ken Gelder (Parkville: Palgrave Macmillan 2016), 184.

¹³“There are ways to talk about things without talking about them directly. And that is what authentic realism requires.” Graham Harman, Krzysztof Hoffmann, Andrzej Marzec, “Ontologia zajmuje się tym, co istotne, nie tym, co pilne”, trans. Krzysztof Hoffmann, *Czas Kultury* 1 (2023): 22.

¹⁴Graham Harman, *The quadruple object* (Winchester, Washington: Zero Books, 2011), 131-133.

¹⁵Harman emphasizes this aspect in Lovecraft’s descriptions. The narrator is not entirely sure of what he is looking at; something “seems to him” to be something, “it reminds him” of something; he emphasizes that the reality of what he imagines is uncertain, its description is not literal. Graham Harman, *Weird realism: Lovecraft and Philosophy* (Winchester, Washington: Zero Books, 2012), 33-34.

¹⁶“Allure is a special and intermittent experience in which the intimate bond between a thing’s unity and its plurality of [specific qualities] somehow partially disintegrates.” Harman, *The Quadruple Object*, 104.

¹⁷Joanna Bednarek, “Oduczenie się człowieczeństwa: fantastyka i antropocen” [Unlearning Humanity: Fiction and the Anthropocene], *Teksty Drugie* 1 (2020): 124.

Inspired by the descriptive turn and the abovementioned questions, I will analyze *Druga Jesień* [A Second Autumn]¹⁸ – the debut book of a somewhat forgotten Polish science fiction writer from the 1970s and the 1980s – Wiktor Żwikiewicz. His work stands comparison with the most influential contemporary works of weird fiction. Endowed with extraordinary imagination enriched by his knowledge of geology, botany, and the contemporary theories of evolution, Żwikiewicz filled his novels with spectacular, painterly, and illusive descriptions which rely on surreal analogies. In general, his prose is experimental, not to say avant-garde, and often employs the poetics of pastiche. The writer makes erudite historical, religious, literary, and scientific references. Żwikiewicz's writing style is eccentric, sometimes too sophisticated – it is old-fashioned, dead from the moment of its birth, groundbreaking, even though it references the outdated poetics of the Young Poland movement. It is as much graphomaniacal as it is expressive and bold, because it drifts on the troubled waters of language. Żwikiewicz's prose is insightful and even prophetic. Apocalyptic in tone, it challenges anthropocentrism by considering the agency of such entities as planets and biospheres. Indeed, Żwikiewicz's fiction becomes truly relevant only today, in the era of global warming, when the world has become so monstrous.

I retroactively classify his work as weird fiction: it constitutes an eclectic combination of different styles and genres; it subverts conventional expectations about the plot and the physical nature of the narrative world; it points to the existence of strange material dimensions that are not accessible to the senses. In this regard, it challenges human ways of conceptualizing reality. Above all, it delves into the ontological and epistemological meanders of uncertainty: “What happened?” is absolute anathema to weird fiction.”¹⁹ Last but not least, Żwikiewicz was also inspired by Bruno Schulz and Stefan Grabiński.²⁰ In *The Weird: A Compendium of Strange and Dark Stories*,²¹ Joseph and Ann VanderMeer discuss both as canonical writers of weird fiction. I therefore have great hope that the time has come to rediscover the works of the “science-fiction legend from Bydgoszcz.”

Druga Jesień's structure and diegetic levels

Druga Jesień is a diverse work, reminiscent of the *silva rerum*, with very complex and often illogical relations between the diegetic levels and the represented (sub)worlds: complications are introduced by ontological metalepses.²² The narrative world as a whole is neither functional nor physically probable. It is heterarchical in nature:²³ the hierarchy between the signifier and the signified is either non-existent or disturbed.

¹⁸Wiktor Żwikiewicz, *Druga jesień* [A second autumn] (Poznań: Wydawnictwo Poznańskie, 1982). Henceforth referenced as DJ with the page number. I would like to point out that the novel was written in 1978, the date of publication is not binding here. The title is a direct reference to a short story written by Bruno Schulz.

¹⁹Excerpt from VanderMeer's interview with Caitlin R. Kiernan, Interview: Caitlin R. Kiernan on Weird Fiction. “Deep time is critical...”. Source: <https://weirdfictionreview.com/2012/03/interview-caitlin-r-kiernan-on-weird-fiction/>, Date of access 1 Sep. 2023.

²⁰Wiktor Żwikiewicz, Marek Żelkowski, *Pył na księżycu* [Moon dust]. Source: <https://polter.pl/Pogawedki-z-Wiktorem-4-c23452>, Date of access 1 Sep. 2023.

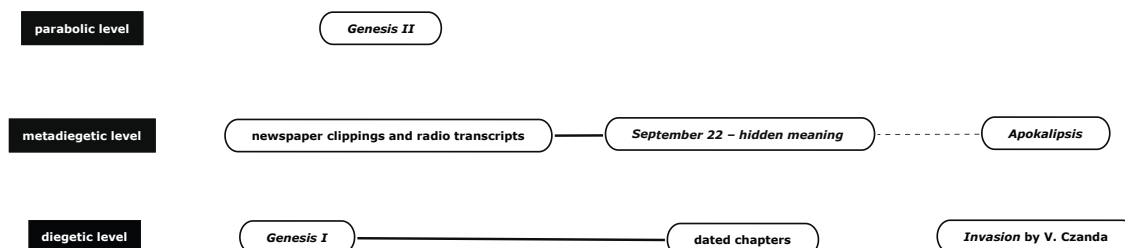
²¹The canon of Old Weird has been established retrospectively. *The Weird: A Compendium of Strange and Dark Stories*, ed. Ann VanderMeer, Jeff VanderMeer (New York: Tor Books 2012).

²²“Ontological metalepses involve disorienting transgressions of boundaries that are physically or logically impossible, and hence properly unnatural.” These boundaries may, for example, refer to narrative levels or possible worlds. Alice Bell, Jan Alber, “Ontological Metalepsis and Unnatural Narratology”, *Journal of Narrative Theory* 2 (2012): 167.

²³Brian McHale borrows the concept of heterarchy to describe metalepsis from Douglas Hofstadter. Brian McHale, *Postmodernist fiction* (London: Routledge, 1987), 120.

The novel consists of a collection of short stories which are further interwoven with newspaper clippings (articles, interviews, dispatches) and transcripts of conversations between New Wave and GT5X radio stations. The whole is united by the motif of transmutation: newspapers report on botanical anomalies; radio transcripts hint at the presence of some international conspiracy; and short narrative forms, woven through plotlines that correspond to various characters, illustrate the transformations of the biosphere. These elements constitute the core of *Druga Jesień*. Then, there are two prologues: “Genesis I”, introducing the visionary scientist David Sweetlicz (who also appears in the chapter “11 września – zmierzch” [September 11 – Twilight]) and “Genesis II” (a kind of parable concerning the origins of the alleged invasion). Also, the metadiegetic chapter “22 września – drugie dno” [September 22 – Hidden Meaning] stands out among the other dated chapters, as it features the Author²⁴ of *Druga Jesień*, who has been residing in a bunker, recording radio conversations and collecting bizarre clippings from various newspapers. The story culminates in “Apokalipsis” [Apocalypse], which describes the Earth’s transformation. This section of the novel is preceded by such a complex and multi-layered scenario that fully grasping what has transpired is nearly impossible.

The novel’s basic diegetic structure looks as follows:²⁵



Graph I (source: own study)

Druga Jesień is indeed a complex literary work. If the collection of newspaper clippings is only a subjective (manipulated) selection, and the press, after all, “goni za sensacją za wszelką cenę” [is first and foremost concerned with the sensational] (DJ 34), and the alleged radiation mentioned by Professor Boris Kukarin in *The Guardian*, which, as is prematurely assumed, “posiada pewne właściwości zdolne rekonstruować wewnętrzną strukturę materii...” [possesses properties that can reconstruct the internal structure of matter...] (DJ 38), and thus it may as well be a constant “dla całego Wszechświata, jest jedną z jego konstant, podobnie jak zjawisko czasu, przestrzeni, grawitacji etc.” [in the entire Universe, it is one of its constants, just as time, space, gravity, etc.] (DJ 38), then we should ask whether the transformation of the Earth (a second autumn) also takes place in the world of the Author who collects newspaper clippings or only in the short stories (dated chapters) that he creates.

²⁴The metadiegetic level of the Author is not the same as the level of the reader who is reading the book of the author, that is Żwikiewicz. The Author and the author are not the same person, hence the diacritical difference.

²⁵The graph does not represent an objective system, but an interpretation. Newspaper clippings and radio transcripts can just as easily be considered diegetic elements. The same is true for Apokalipsis.

“Autumn never dies”

But what is a second autumn?

Jest to eksplozja słonecznego żaru, kwintesencja wszystkich protuberancji, jakie zieleń liści tak pracowicie przeistaczała w makroenergetyczne ciągi molekuł – od rozwinięcia pąka, aby u schyłku istnienia nagromadzony ogień wyzwolić ze słonecznej baterii.

[It is an explosion of solar energy, the quintessence of all prominences that the green leaves so laboriously transformed into macro-energetic sequences of molecules – from the moment the bud opens, so that at the end the accumulated energy may be released from the solar battery] (DJ 13–14).

An ordinary red or gold autumn leaf is a sign of exhaustion, and when it turns brown it signals its own decay and death. But leaves in this extraordinary fifth season are governed by different laws. They are solar batteries – biochemical accumulators – that release energy in prominence explosions, just like the sun. Hence autumn is a function of the object’s passing, and a second autumn is its evolution. It unveils the previously hidden qualities of organic matter. It transforms not only living beings but also things made of carbon compounds. And so – with a quiet burst – wooden tables start to sprout fresh shoots from dormant buds, while books begin to bloom.

Mysterious radiation renders the Earth’s skin cancerous. The biosphere – as an interobjective and sympoietic system – turns into a teratoma. This metamorphosis is instigated by the hyperobject – an elusive and generally withdrawn entity, that serves as a catalyst of relationality. It reveals the metaphorical meshes²⁶ of unusual connections between things and eliminates the distinction between the subjective and the objective dimensions.

Szczury–olbrzymy. Zająte pilnym oddzielaniem ziarna od plew nie dostrzegają nawet, jak z niematerialnej głębi jesień nawiewa nici srebrnych pętli, cienkich – aż przenikających, wiążących na nowo, odmiennie [...].

[Giant rats. Busy with separating the wheat from the chaff, they do not even notice how autumn blows silver threads, in loops, from the immaterial depths; they are thin – they are everywhere; they re-bond, anew [...]] (DJ 15).

In the parabolic “Genesis II,” from which the above quote comes, the Earth begins to transform when the first “strange stranger”²⁷ reaches the “island” (that is the Earth) and enters a “strange laboratory” (DJ 14). It is a dead spider with the shreds of its web – gossamer – that are like Lovecraftian tentacles. They represent relationality: the process of re-bonding. *Druga Jesień* is therefore speculative science fiction about a symchthonic²⁸ apocalypse – an emergent revelation of a new form of matter.

²⁶Morton, 28.

²⁷Morton, 73.

²⁸Tentacular thinking is symchthonic for Donna Haraway – it is connected with the sinister entanglements of creative recursions of life and death. The term chthulucene has its origin in the name of the spider Pimoc chthulu. Donna Haraway, *Staying with the Trouble: Making Kin in the Chthulucene* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2016), 30–33.

The meta level of metalepsis

The apocalypse of a second autumn unfolds in all dated chapters except for the chapter “22 września – drugie dno,” which introduces significant complications that disrupt the ontology of the narrative world/s. In this chapter, the “sci-fi poet,” referenced in “Genesis II,” speaks from his bunker after seven days of solitude. He is the Author of the as yet unfinished *Druga Jesień*, though he never refers to himself as Wiktor Żwikiewicz. He delivers a long monologue on the state and prospects of contemporary science fiction and, looking for the right ending for his book, decides to open a brown envelope with a new issue of the Austrian journal *Quarber Merkur*. Inside, he discovers a review written by the journal’s editor-in-chief – the renowned Franz Rosensteiner. Rosensteiner reviews a new book titled *Inwazja* [Invasion] by V. Czanda (pen name). The book describes an attack or rather a “relocation” of the parasitic Earl race from the *Canes Venatici* constellation to Earth. Rosensteiner’s review, which briefly summarizes the book, informs us that the aliens irradiate the Earth’s biosphere, effectively destroying it, wishing to recreate the environmental conditions on their home planet. The Earls therefore bring with them a new autumnal law of nature: whatever they absorb into themselves during the summer, “w sobie spalają, aż do granic ostatecznej entropii. Po nich zostaje tylko chłód i mrok, wiecznie martwa zima” [they burn in themselves, to the limits of ultimate entropy. Afterwards, only cold and darkness remain, an eternally dead winter] (DJ 160). Rosensteiner clearly states that *Inwazja* is a bad book which celebrates the apocalypse. He criticizes Czanda for his “wątpliwą erudycję i skrajny infantylizm [...] w zagadnieniach współczesnej fizyki i biologii” [questionable erudition and very poor knowledge [...] of contemporary physics and biology] (DJ 160) but ultimately concludes that the book is timely. It offers “ledwie wyobraźnią zabarwiony obraz rzeczywistości” [a picture of reality barely tainted by imagination] (DJ 161). Rosensteiner’s review further reads:

Proszę spojrzeć za okno. Nie minęło jeszcze lato stulecia, słoneczna jesień zabarwia lasy i parki odcieniem dawno nie spotykanej czerwieni. To w rzeczy samej jakby zapowiedź innego, bajecznego świata, prorocstwo raz na tysiąc lat trafiającej się najwspanialszej piątej pory roku. Sezon kanikuły przyniósł kilkanaście sensacyjnych doniesień prasowych [...]; wybitny naukowiec ma nieostrożność przedstawić do publicznej wiadomości wyniki radiowego nasłuchu kosmicznej przestrzeni i – wystarczyło. Pech w tym, że inwencji V. Czandy daleko do błyskotliwego talentu Orsona Wellesa, którego słuchowisko radiowe, oparte na „Wojnie światów” Herberta G. Wellsa, wstrząsnęło kiedyś opinią publiczną Stanów Zjednoczonych. A poza tym, przynajmniej się szczerze, trudno dzisiaj wywołać panikę w kręgu zagorzałych wielbicieli science fiction, dawno obytych z mitomanią kosmicznych inwazji.

[Look out the window. The summer of the century has not yet passed, the sunny autumn is tinting the forests and parks with a shade of red that has not been seen for a long time. It is indeed like a harbinger of a different fantastic world, a prophecy of the most wonderful fifth season that occurs once in a thousand years. The dog days brought a dozen or so sensational press reports [...]; an eminent scientist had the imprudence to tell the public about what he discovered when he monitored space by means of *radio* signal-transmitting – that was enough. Unfortunately, V. Czanda’s creativity does not compare with the brilliant talent of Orson Welles, whose radio play, based on Herbert G. Wells’ *War of the Worlds*, once shocked public opinion in the United States. And besides, let’s admit it, today it is not so easy to terrify ardent science fiction fans. They are so familiar with the mythomania of space invasions.]

Druga Jesień could end with this metaleptic frame device, which is also a bridge between two ontologically different worlds. However, the novel becomes even more complicated in the final chapter “Apokalipsis.”

The opening page of “Apokalipsis” is peculiar: the eleven letters of the title are arranged somewhat disorderly. The reverse is blank. The following pages show that the Author, alone in the bunker, who was about to finish his novel, suddenly wakes up at his blossoming desk in the body of an Earl. He is in Czanda’s book. The novel thus turns out to be a misunderstood masterpiece, a self-fulfilling prophecy, a prediction (DJ 152). In a word, it is “Apokalipsis,” a r e v e l a t i o n .

However, the final chapter opens with these words:

Earl przekroczył grudę łachmanów zwalonych na ziemię i stanął przed ścianą – wobec jego ciała lustrzaną.

– Taki więc jestem – powiedział.

[Earl stepped over a pile of rags that had fallen to the ground and stopped before a wall – a mirror which reflected his body.

“So that’s what I am,” he said.] (DJ III, 165)

These are the final words of Czanda’s *Inwazja* quoted by Rosensteiner. His review opened with this quote. A distinct pagination of “Apokalipsis” (with Roman numerals) and the new nomenclature, which does not appear in other parts of *Druga Jesień*, suggest that this is in fact a chapter from *Inwazja* that was reprinted in *Quarber Merkur* underneath Rosensteiner’s review. It is not the novel’s ending written by the “sci-fi poet.” Neither is it proof of the prophetic nature of Czanda’s work. In this reading, the world does not undergo significant transformation. Such an interpretation also explains the aesthetically questionable style of this part.

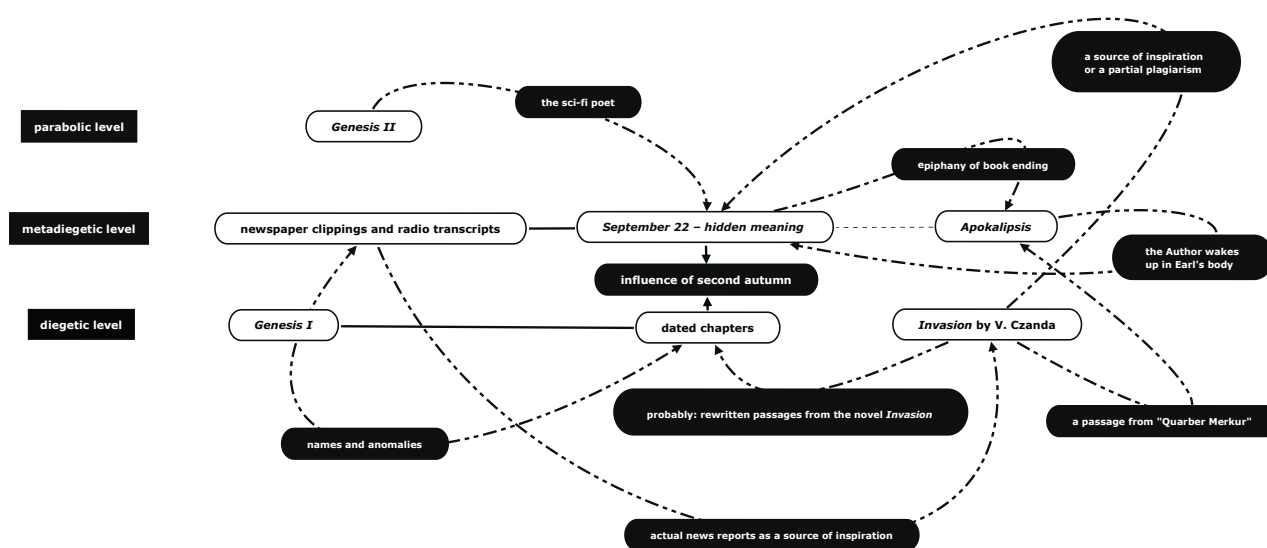
Another interpretation is probably even more interesting. “Apokalipsis” can nevertheless be read as the ending of *Druga Jesień* which came as a r e v e l a t i o n to the Author. He added some transfictional motifs (from *Inwazja*), placed himself in someone else’s fiction, and perversely declared that he did not finish the novel at all. The fragment quoted earlier – paradoxically – proves this. The passage reprinted in *Quarber Merkur* included one more sentence, but it was cut out from “Apokalipsis.” In addition, Rosensteiner also quoted in his review a passage about a native American woman called La Malinche, who is “naga i rozwarta swym czerwonym wnętrzem – między resztkami białych ścian rozwarta do nieba, czeka dopełnienia” [naked and wide open with her red interior – wide open and facing the sky; lying between the remains of white walls, she awaits completion] (DJ 159), which is after all a quote from *Druga Jesień*! Can it be that V. Czanda is the pen name of the Author – the “sci-fi poet?” What would *Inwazja* be then? A published draft version of the novel? Not necessarily. The Author of the unfinished book mentions that in his writing he in fact synthesizes illusory worlds.²⁹ Similarly to “Apokalipsis,” *Inwazja* could have been

²⁹“Dlaczego ja sam siedzę przy tym biurku i na użytek własny dokonuję syntezy iluzorycznych światów” [Why am I sitting at this desk and synthesizing illusory worlds for my own use?] (DJ 146).

a source of inspiration for the entire final draft of *Druga jesień*; the “sci-fi poet” would thus be more of a “sci-fi scribe,” that is someone who transcribes newspapers and writes down conversations he heard on the radio, a writer who is at best good at compiling different sources.

My analysis so far has been focused on the fictional world of the novel. Still, the identity of V. Czanda and the nature of *Inwazja* were further discussed by Żwikiewicz in different paratexts. In an interview conducted by Marek Żelkowski,³⁰ Żwikiewicz explained how on his way to the Czytelnik editorial office he lost the original version of *Druga Jesień*, which in his opinion was incomparably worse than the final draft. Thanks to this unfortunate accident, he rewrote the book, drawing inspiration for its experimental structure from Julio Cortázar’s *Hopscotch*. Thus, V. Czanda could be W. Żwikiewicz, and *Inwazja*, criticized by the fictional Rosensteiner, might represent the first draft of *Druga Jesień*. This would push the boundaries beyond what Stanisław Lem achieved: Żwikiewicz wrote a review of his lost novel and included it in its new version.

Overall, the metaleptic structure of *Druga Jesień* is difficult to capture by tracking the jumps between diegetic levels – there are too many of them (see Graph II³¹).



Graph II (source: own study)

A novel as intricate as this one questions the very process of an *a priori* ordering of the diegetic levels, which, in turn, highlights the limitations of the typologies of “metaleptic movements” used to describe its narrative structure.³² The book employs both the so-called vertical metalepses (a vertical transition between metadiegesis and diegesis and *vice versa*) and horizontal metalepses (a horizontal transmigration between two novelistic worlds: Czanda’s *Inwazja* and *Druga Jesień*) as well as intersecting intradiegetic and extradiegetic transitions between the levels of the story. All of these transitions are logically impossible, and through their paradoxical connec-

³⁰Żwikiewicz, Żelkowski.

³¹Graph II only takes into account selected metaleptic jumps in *Druga jesień*.

³²John Pier, “Metalepsis”, in: *The Living Handbook of Narratology*. Source: <https://www-archiv.fdm.uni-hamburg.de/lhn/node/51.html#Wagner>, date of access 1 Sep. 2023.

tions, they create a Gordian knot. Unnatural narratologists Alice Bell and Jan Alber analyze this problem within the critical framework of possible worlds, a perspective particularly well-suited for addressing the complexities of this text.³³ From this vantage point, we can distinguish between three fictional worlds with distinct ontologies (in particular: distinct climates):

- a) A world where there is no second autumn.
- b) A world where there is a second autumn, and it is a sign of the Earl invasion.
- c) A world where there is a second autumn, and it is a climatic anomaly of unknown origin.

In such a perspective, one that does not focus on individual characters, Żwikiewicz's novel is a *narrative machine* which produces various stories within three variables: a second autumn (exists/does not exist); if it exists, then (there is/there is no invasion). It also creates numerous strange loops between them.

This, in turn, raises questions about the functions of ontological metalepses in econarratology. One of the most important ones is to stimulate readers, who often identify the metadiegetic level with their own reality, to engage in deeper thought. Breaking the fourth wall encourages reflection on the agency and performativity of metaleptic narratives, which is particularly significant in the context of climate activism. The drastic nature of the described transformation, thanks to metalepses, seems to exceed the boundaries of the fictional world. Just as Rosensteiner noted in his review, the reader can look out their actual window and wonder whether another extremely hot summer they are experiencing does not resemble a second autumn.

Metalepses also complicate the distinction between micro-narratives and macro-narratives, or local narratives (that is stories in the dated chapters) and grand narratives (Anthropocene, Capitalocene; that is, at a parabolic or metadiegetic level, apocalypse, invasion). They show how profoundly and paradoxically they intertwine with and condition one another.

Metalepses also makes us realize that there is actually no meta-level. There is no outside to hyper-objects – they stick to the body, to the eyes. When we read and write, we are entangled in them. We cannot adopt a position from which we would look “holistically” at the environment, the planet, or global warming: there is only the intra-dimension. In *Druga Jesień*, the Author, isolated in a bunker, has no idea what is happening outside. He thus turns out to be just as exposed to the effects of the strange radiation as the imaginary objects he creates. Second autumn breaks free from the shackles of its fictionality – it absorbs and incorporates everything. It even nullifies diacritical difference – it devours *Druga Jesień* [A Second Autumn] and its Author. In *Apokalipsis*, we read:

Złuszczające się warstwy papierowego naskórka obnażają zawartość coraz głębszych pokładów, rozdziały obumarłych znaczeń, dalsze strony upstrzone czarnym ziarnem. [...] Kopnął ocalały stos książek na podłodze. Rozsypały się z suchym szelestem. Języki żywego ognia żwawiej zatańczyły

³³Both scholars, unlike Marie-Laure Ryan, who also employs the possible worlds theory in her examination of metalepsis, emphasize that the latter separates, rather than brings together, distinct ontological domains. Bell, Alber, 173.

płomykami liści na upstrzonych literami stronach. Pąki ukwiałów łąpczywie pożerały słowa, zdania, rozdziały całe, jakby ich treść wreszcie stawiała się ciałem.

[The peeling layers of paper skin reveal the ever deeper layers, chapters of dead meanings, further pages speckled with black grain. [...] He kicked the surviving stack of books lying on the floor. They scattered with a dry rustle. Flames, resembling leaves, eagerly danced on the printed pages. Buds of sea anemones greedily devoured words, sentences, whole chapters, as if what they talked about finally became flesh.] (DJ IV, 166; XV, 177).

The work twines in the reader's hands: sentences and syntax twist and turn, paper comes to life and scatters the letters of *Apokalipsis* about. It is no longer clear whether they were simply written with a trembling hand or disarranged by second autumn. Sentences and chapters bloom – this not only introduces a correspondence between words and things, between the description of plant growth and the beginning of life – it also points to the book's inherent complexity, reminiscent of the *silva rerum*. Perhaps the book is some kind of independent rhizomatic amalgam of texts scattered on the Author's desk: as if the pseudopodia grew out of V. Czanda's *Inwazja* and Rosensteiner's review, and then seized newspaper clippings, radio transcripts, "Genesis I," and "Genesis II," merging into the heterogeneous whole of *Druga Jesień*.

The sign of the rose – descriptions and illusions (discursive level)

In Żwikiewicz's weird fiction – mainly in the dynamic, non-prototypical descriptive segments – a gap opens up between objects and their properties, which Harman wrote about in reference to the works of H.P. Lovecraft. However, in *Druga Jesień* this gap turns into a real abyss. As in Przyboś's cathedral, it is like a roof suspended over the world and the text. At a discursive level,³⁴ this effect is achieved by the stratification of the described objects via recursive metaphorical comparisons, which at times create descriptive illusions, *mise en abyme*, and at times completely disintegrate the images of things. They point to contradictory properties or saturate the image with so many qualities that it becomes unrecognizable. This phenomenon is also visible at a stylistic level, especially in syntax – specifically, in compound-complex descriptive sentences.

The chapter "31 sierpnia – znak róży" [August 31 – The Sign of The Rose] is a condensed sample of Żwikiewicz's poetics. Written in a style reminiscent of the poetics of Young Poland, it tells the story of Doña Esther's paradise garden, which rose in less than a week from corn cake crumbs that fell upon a barren clay floor:

Patrzył dziwnie jasnym wzrokiem.

Błął brokatu pęczniał w szczelinie między murami, dojrzewał bukietem pulsujących mięśni, jakby

³⁴I refer to a very useful three-level method of studying descriptions proposed by José Manuel Lopes. Lopes distinguishes "a stylistic level, where description is analyzed at the level of micro-sentences; a discursive level, where analysis focuses on the internal organization of larger descriptive segments/blocks; and a functional level, where, through the correlation of descriptive segments with other segments in the text, such as narration, we can focus on the functions description might fulfill in the context of a given work." Analysis and interpretation of selected descriptions will be conducted at these levels. José Manuel Lopes, *Foregrounded Description in Prose Fiction: Five Cross-Literary Studies* (Toronto, Buffalo, London: University of Toronto Press, 1995), 20.

się ściany otworzyły płcią gorącą albo rozsadził je wbity klinem krwawy węzeł serca. Ogromny i żywy jeszcze. Jeszcze, a może – zachłystujący się dopiero tętentem.

Dostrzegł, jak magiczna siła – powolna jego wezwaniu – przebudziła okrężne napięcia w mięsistej torbieli. I złote łuski liści otworzyły się nagle z chitynowym chrzęstem, tam – w dole, wybiegły mu na spotkanie tunelem drążonym w falbanach konarów, jakby w dziąsłach broczących złocistym miodem śliny. Zakołysały się jeszcze, rozwarły szeroko i zastygły w zupełnym oddaniu – pąsowe, z lekka rozchylone jak do pocałunku wargi, a między nimi, na dnie samym, niby kość zaklinowana w gardle – biała plama, rozpostarta i znajoma, chociaż zatopiona w cieniu, mglista z oddalenia i niedopowiedziana, kusząca owale ledwie zarysowanego, cielesnego kształtu. Ona tam była, czekała – na powrót dziewicza, nietknięta dona Estera.

[He looked with strangely bright eyes.

Glitter swelled in a crack between the walls, ripening with a bouquet of pulsating muscles, as if the walls had opened, revealing a pulsating vagina, or as if a bloody heart nod were driven in between to part them open. Huge and still alive. Still alive or maybe only just choking on the sound of a hoofbeat.

He saw how a magic force – which he controlled – awakened circular tensions in the fleshy cyst. And the golden scales of leaves suddenly opened with a chitinous crunch, there – below – they ran out to meet him down a tunnel carved in the frills of the branches, gums salivating with golden honey. They swayed again, opened wide, and froze in complete devotion – crimson lips, slightly parted as if for a kiss, and between them, at the very bottom, like a bone wedged in the throat – a white spot, open and familiar, though hidden in the shadow, from a distance undefined and unspoken, tempting with the oval of the body that was barely visible. She was there, waiting – virgin once again, untouched once again, Doña Esther] (DJ 83–84).

In this description, the old man Paquito comes into contact with “dziwna oranżeria” [the strange orangery] (DJ 86) for the very first time. He observed the garden’s rapid growth from a window in the attic of a tenement house. When he opened it, he removed the only physical barrier between him and the garden. He noticed lush, intentional vegetation, which only at that moment, by creating a tunnel, allowed him to see a woman that was its integral part. The scene, however, is stratified: the “tunneling” resembles the development of a single flower bud – a “fleshy cyst” – out of which a scarlet rose grows, revealing a golden-brown ovary (the virgin Doña Esther).

The object, just like in Salvador Dalí’s paintings, shimmers in a surrealist illusion: at times it is a rose and at times it is a garden. This instability is further deepened by a series of comparisons to 1) a vagina, 2) a heart node, and 3) the lips – the quoted description is a metaphor for the first kiss. Descriptive illusion is meant to blur the boundary between the garden and the woman whom the voyeuristic Paquito desires. He was watching Doña Esther for a long time. He even saw her having sex with her husband, and later wondered: “kto w rzeczy samej zapłodnił jałową ziemię: zapiekłe okruchy kukurydzianego placka, czy też pijane nasienie don Estero, które zamiast w rdzawe łono, trysnęło w ceglastą glebę” [who really fertilized the barren earth: corn cake crumbs, or the drunken seed of Don Estero; it did not enter the rusty womb, and fell on the brick-red soil instead] (DJ 81).

From the moment lush vegetation swallows the alabaster-skinned Doña Esther, Paquito sees her as the copper-skinned La Malinche, Cortez’s lover and once again a virgin. His goal is to *p e n e t r a t e* the garden. He can enter through a gate – “ucho igielne” [eye of the needle] (DJ 76) – located in a gap between the walls which surround the courtyard. When he enters the “strange orangery,” Paquito begins to transform. He loses his subjectivity and becomes one with vegetation, gaining new powers

and senses. He experiences synesthetically – “widział powierzchnią skóry, jak liść – zagłębieniem dłoni, jak korzeń – opuszkami palców; dostrzegał jakieś wnętrza poprzez stopy na płask przywarte do ziemi” [he saw with the surface of his skin, like a leaf – with his palm, like a root – with his fingertips; he perceived some spaces with his feet which were flat on the ground] (DJ 87). He also has visions of glass houses, reminiscent of beehives, filled with anthropoid aphids. A moment later in the “gąbczasta gęstwina” [spongy thicket] he sees the Daughter of the Sun – “widmo hostii rozkrzyżowanej przejrzystą koronką” [the specter of a sacred host spread wide as you would spread your arms on the cross with transparent gossamer] (DJ 89) – who only now turns out to be a traitor to her tribe. She is a virgin waiting for the new Cortez, ready to help him build his utopia. Although Paquito runs out of the garden in terror, he is forever changed. He becomes the guardian of the gate.

At a functional level, the titular “sign of the rose” is therefore a prognostic of a non-human utopia, of the non-anthropocentric in the Anthropocene, that is a new era of the strange and the monstrous. In Paquito’s vision, the reinforced concrete structures of corporate office buildings are perfect habitats for strange creatures to grow and evolve. The transformed Earth-La Malinche becomes a sacred host, a sacrifice offering to an alien plant god, a cosmic flower that, once again “rozwarły swym czerwonym wnętrzem [...] czeka dopełnienia” [wide open with her red interior [...] awaits completion] (DJ 89). In the future, she will be a pregnant traitor to humanity, capable of feeding alien races – “eszelony TYCH, KTÓRZY PRZYJDĄ PO NAS” [the echelons of THOSE WHO WILL COME AFTER US] (DJ 144).

A baroque flowering sentence (stylistic level)

At a stylistic level, Żwikiewicz’s descriptions have several distinctive features. For one, he systematically uses forgotten or, especially considering the standards of contemporary Polish, rare words, which both enrich descriptions and render them strange: semantically unclear, they lose their mimetic functions. Below I list selected examples from “31 sierpnia – znak róży:” bierwiona [logs], bryzgi [splashes], brzemie [burden], cembrowina [well casing], delirium [delirium], fajansowy [faience], furkot [fluttering], gruzły [lumps], guano [guano], hacjender [haciender], kobierzec [carpet], krzta [shred], lak [sealing wax], mansardowy [mansard], matecznik [den], miech [bellows], munsztuk [bit], muslin [muslin], oranżeria [orangery], oścień [goad], parchaty [covered with scabs], plew [chaff], polepa [threshing floor], posoka [blood], powłóczysty [sweeping], prycza [bunk bed], pseudopodia [pseudopodia], na płask [flat], płowy [tawny], rachityczny [rickety], rozcapierzony [splayed], rozkrzyżowany [spread wide], szamerowany [braided], werbel [drum], wierzeja [gate], wykusze [bay windows], wężowidła [brittle stars], zapiekły [fierce].

In terms of syntax, instruments – auxiliary objects used by agents to perform actions – dominate in Żwikiewicz’s prose. As Henryka Sędziak writes in her analysis of Stefan Żeromski’s *Ashes*, instruments “are objects used to perform actions, either as a tool or material.”³⁵ In Żwikiewicz’s work, passive and active adjectival participles are most often used to express the instrumental meaning. They create unconventional combinations that influence the way the described objects are visualized and, most importantly, signal shifts in their agency. Let us take a look at one of the descriptions quoted

³⁵ Henryka Sędziak, “Składnia wyrazów przymiotnikowych z podrzędnymi rzeczownikami w «Popiołach» Stefana Żeromskiego” [The syntax of adjectival clauses with subordinate nouns in Stefan Żeromski’s *Ashes*], *Studia Łomżyńskie* 6 (1996): 276–277.

earlier: “tam właśnie białe widmo hostii rozkrzyżowanej przejrzystą koronką” [the specter of a sacred host *spread wide as you would spread your arms on the cross with transparent gossamer whitened*] (DJ 89 – emphasis MM). This is an exceptionally complicated example. It is an image of a woman-tree, a sacrifice offering in the garden which is like consecrated bread in a monstrance. The sacred host is “spread” by gossamer – a semi-transparent lace which covers the chalice and a leafy substance in which Esther-La Malinche is enveloped. It is syntax that informs us about the instrumental role of the material which covers the object and thus gives it its shape. The task of the garden is therefore to “show” (Latin: *monstrare*). The barren clay floor is a temple in which the “mystery of rebirth” takes place: dead soil comes back to life; the female body is reborn as a plant-human monster (Latin: *monere*). However, it is not so much the sacred host as its whitening specter that is “spread” by the gossamer of this strange orangery. This specter deconstructs the opposition between life and death, the undead cannot be resurrected: bread is no longer bread, but it is not yet flesh; the woman is no longer Esther, but she is not yet La Malinche. The moment of transformation – the moment when being turns into something else – is thus captured.

Żwikiewicz also often expresses the instrumental meaning by use of adjective phrases considered to be Young Poland mannerisms:³⁶ “piętrzyły się [...] pnie rozdarłe wiśniowym pożarem” [tree trunks [...] *torn apart by cherry fire* were piled up] (DJ 87); “stygły w bezruchu cieliste pseudopodia [...] rozcapierzone mglistymi zwidami parujących zgliszczy, sztywnymi członkami na stos złożonych topielców” [flesh-colored pseudopodia were cooling off, still, [...] *splayed with misty apparitions of steaming ashes, with stiff limbs of drowned people arranged in a pile*] (DJ 81–82). I would argue that in order to advance the object-oriented ontology, we should analyze such structures and assess how objects as instruments of action function in language. In Żwikiewicz’s prose, tree trunks are torn apart by fire, while pseudopodia are splayed by apparitions and the limbs of drowned people. Only thanks to my arms that I raise can I spread my arms wide as you would on the cross – they spread me. This function disappears in “ready-at-hand”³⁷ sentences which start with the subject: “rozkrzyżował ramiona” [he spread his arms wide as you would on the cross]. Respectively, it is emphasized in more poetic, “broken,” and strange-sounding constructions which employ *instrumentalis*: “rozkrzyżowany ramionami” [he is spread, as if on the cross, by his arms], which emphasize the role of the instrument.

The motif of the “mystery of rebirth” points to another interesting aspect of Żwikiewicz’s style. The semantics of descriptions correspond to the syntax: the syntactic structure of descriptions and the content are in correlation. The garden is “barok złota zakwitły na glinie” [a golden baroque which blossomed on clay] (DJ 83), and the Author relies on “barokową terminologią. Słowem-mitem” [baroque terminology. Word-myth] (DJ 144).

Cały ogród oddychał, rzeził ciężko zdławionymi piersiami, zdawał się rozpierać ściany kamiennego kufra – już przepełnionego złotem i perłami, szczelnie zarzuconego dojrzewającymi spiesznymi owocami kolczastych brzoskwiń i miękkich kasztanów, po brzegi – jak trzos – nabitego gruzłami orzechów z pąsowej porcelany, wstęgami puszystych muślinów i kulami cukrowych głów na

³⁶Urszula Dzióbaltowska, “O języku poezji Jerzego Żuławskiego” [On Jerzy Żuławski’s poetical language], *Acta Universitatis Lodzianae. Folia Linguistica* 33 (1995): 27–28.

³⁷“The peculiarity of what is proximally ready-to-hand is that, in its readiness-to-hand, it must, as it were, withdraw [zuriickzuziehen] in order to be ready-to-hand quite authentically. A tool, Heidegger writes, is noticed only when it breaks (when it ceases to be ready-at-hand, it becomes present-at-hand). Martin Heidegger, *Being and time*, trans. John Macquarrie and Edward Robinson (Oxford, UK and Cambridge, USA: Blackwell, 1964), 99.

przemian z bulwami bursztynu, które w swym żywicznym mięszu skrywają larwy gigantycznych owadów, zalążki pajaków o rubinowych tułowiach i skręcone skrzydła niewyklutych ptaków.

[The whole garden breathed, groaned with heavy chests, seemed to push on the walls of a stone trunk – already overflowing with gold and pearls, filled to the brim – like a purse – with hastily ripening thorny peaches and soft chestnuts and decorated with crimson porcelain nuts, fluffy muslin ribbons, and balls of sugar and amber, which concealed in their resinous insides the larvae of gigantic insects, embryos of ruby spiders, and the twisted wings of unhatched birds.]

Syntax represents vegetation. Descriptions branch out with internodes of subordinate and participial clauses; they blossom with unusual adjectives. What is hidden in the chest – in a baroque garden cathedral – is revealed as we study syntactic trees. This is one of the rarest features of non-prototypical descriptions: as self-referential entities, they refer to their syntactic structure.

Conclusion

The present analysis of descriptions and metalepses in Żwikiewicz's prose was rooted in the theoretical framework provided by the descriptive turn and econarratology as well as Harman's weird realism and Morton's hyperobjects. I retrospectively classified Żwikiewicz's prose as weird fiction, currently hailed as *the* literature of the Anthropocene.

Druga Jesień is surprisingly timely. It tells the story of climate change, the horrors of biosphere, and, in particular, the hidden potential of organic matter, ready to evolve into something unexpected. Through metalepses and a fragmented composition, the novel conveys a sense of epistemological and ontological uncertainty. Like the characters in the book, readers are left unsure, whether second autumn actually occurred and what this phenomenon truly entails. Describing such a complex fictional world/worlds is challenging. Żwikiewicz uses descriptive illusions which emphasize the differences between sensual objects and sensual qualities as well as multi-level structures of references, which, as the analysis at a stylistic, discursive, and functional levels has shown, stratify the object. For instance, in the chapter "31 sierpnia – znak róży," the woman is a pistil waiting for an insect, a hybrid between a plant and a human – a breathing garden, Esther-La Malinche, and the Earth colonized by a cosmic conquistador, while the garden is a baroque cathedral and a monstrosity in which the specter of a sacred host is captured in the process of transubstantiation.

The non-prototypical quality of descriptions in Żwikiewicz's prose allows them to become objects themselves – images of their own syntactic structure that correspond to what is being described. In this respect, Żwikiewicz's prose represents a linguistic approach in weird fiction, where the weird worlds are mirrored in the idiomatic, opaque style.

A secondary, but no less important, aim of the present article was to introduce a wider group of literary scholars to Żwikiewicz's prose: I suppose it is the right time for it to experience its *s e c o n d s p r i n g*.

translated by Małgorzata Olsza

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ABSTRACT:

This article presents an econarratological analysis of metalepsis and descriptive techniques in *Druga Jesień* [A Second Autumn], a somewhat forgotten experimental novel by Wiktor Żwikiewicz, which I retroactively classify as an example of weird fiction in Polish literature. Drawing on a methodological framework of the descriptive turn and Graham Harman's assertion that strange reality calls for strange realism, I argue that such a reality also requires distinctive techniques of literary representation – specifically, non-prototypical and strange descriptions that are illusive, allusive, and that challenge the cognitive capabilities of the “descriptor,” ultimately blurring the lines between the subject and environment. Furthermore, I comment on the functions of metaleptic narratives in econarratology, claiming that their paradoxical nature emphasizes the absence of a definitive “meta” perspective from which individuals can examine the planet and the biosphere.

weird fiction

WIKTOR ŻWIKIEWICZ

description

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Eco-psychological analysis of ecological autobiography. The case of Mary Oliver's *Upstream:* *Selected Essays*

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The significance of Freudian psychoanalysis in the United States

Sigmund Freud (1856-1939) is widely recognized as an Austrian neurologist and the pioneer of psychoanalysis¹, his therapeutic approach for understanding and addressing ailments believed to stem from psychological conflicts. During his psychoanalytical work, Freud discovered that patients' dreams could be effectively analyzed to uncover the intricate organization of unconscious material and to illustrate the psychological process of repression. Moreover, from August 29 to September 21, 1909, he traveled to the United States and delivered five lectures at Clark University. This visit is noteworthy as it symbolizes the sociocultural changes that commenced in the early 20th century and significantly

¹ Daniel Pick, *Psychoanalysis: A Very Short Introduction* (Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 2015), 3.

impacted the United States for decades to come.² Although some scholars believe that psychoanalysis has always been controversial as a system for understanding the world, society, and human nature, the controversies of the late 20th century have obscured the extent to which earlier intellectuals and public figures in the United States embraced psychoanalytic ideas and practices. This is evident in the influence of psychoanalysis in films or on the history of local figures and organizations. Nathan G. Hale³ even argued that “everyone agrees, Freud’s thinking had far greater intellectual and social impact than it did elsewhere on the planet.”

In the years following Freud’s visit in 1909 and leading up to World War II, historians discovered that psychoanalysis spread in the United States primarily through two channels: the medical field⁴ and the intellectual and cultural avant-garde⁵. The influx of European analysts and other intellectuals to the United States during the interwar period resulted in significant interactions. The prominent analytic practitioners often demonstrated a high level of sensitivity towards what could be regarded as philosophical inquiries in Europe. These included not only the mind-body problem and issues related to human nature, but also encompassed questions on education, social structures, literature, and the arts. As a collective, psychoanalysts displayed a remarkable interdisciplinary background. Therefore, John Burnham⁶ mentioned in his edited book it is not surprising that psychoanalysts had direct intellectual exchanges as well as professional interactions with prominent thinkers and artists. In other words, during the peak of both the dissemination and status of psychoanalysis in the United States in the 1940s–1960s, it was challenging to distinguish the fundamental psychoanalytic movement from the widespread cultural influence.

Besides, during World War II, professional psychologists were starting to acknowledge Freudian teachings and therapies, albeit reluctantly.⁷ During the same period, psychoanalysis also gained prominence in other social science fields, especially from the 1930s onwards. An examination of academic publications from the 1950s demonstrates the substantial impact of psychoanalytic concepts, scholars in anthropology and related disciplines, as well as in literature and the arts, overtly and consistently integrated psychoanalytic theories into their work.⁸ Especially, In 1959, sociologist Richard Tracy LaPiere⁹, from Stanford University, determined that in the United States, “the increasing prevalence

² John Donald Hicks, George E. Mowry, and Robert E. Burke, *The American Nation. A History of the United States from 1865 to the Present*, John D. Hicks, George E. Mowry, Robert E. Burke, 5th ed. (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1971), 512–14.

³ Nathan G Hale, *The Rise and Crisis of Psychoanalysis in the United States* (Oxford University Press, USA, 1995).

⁴ John Chynoweth Burnham, *Psychoanalysis and American Medicine: 1894-1918* (New York: International Universities Press, 1967).

⁵ Nathan G Hale, *Freud and the Americans* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1971).

⁶ John C Burnham, *After Freud Left: A Century of Psychoanalysis in America* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2012), 1–4.

⁷ David Shakow and David Rapaport, *The Influence of Freud on American Psychology* (New York: International Universities Press, 1964).

⁸ Edward J. K. Gitre, “Importing Freud: First-Wave Psychoanalysis, Interwar Social Sciences, and the Interdisciplinary Foundations of an American Social Theory,” *Journal of the History of the Behavioral Sciences* 46, no. 3 (July 9, 2010): 239–62.

⁹ Richard Tracy Lapiere, *The Freudian Ethic*, by Richard Lapiere (Duell, Sloan and Pearce, 1959).

of Freudianism as a rationale for and validation of human behavior represents a change of utmost importance.” The evidence clearly demonstrates the significance of Freud’s influence in America during the 1940s–1960s is compelling. This peak period came to an end in the aftermath of the cultural movements of the 1960s and the simultaneous revival of material, non-psychological concepts, and new psychopharmaceutical treatments for mental disorders.

The id, the ego, and the superego in Freudian psychology

According to Freudian psychology¹⁰, it is argued that the separation of the psyche into the conscious and unconscious is the foundational premise of psychoanalysis. He claimed that the field of consciousness psychology is inadequate for addressing issues related to dreams and hypnosis.¹¹

In Freud’s renowned psychoanalytic theory, he asserted that personality is comprised of three elements referred to as the id, the ego, and the superego. These components collaborate to produce intricate human behaviors.¹² Freud defined the ego as a component of the personality that facilitates the expression of the id’s desires in a practical and acceptable manner. The ego originates from the id but is shaped by real-world influence.

The interaction among the id, ego, and superego is significant, with the ego acting as the conscious, “executive” part of the personality. Instead of functioning separately and independently, the id, ego, and superego overlap and interact in various ways to influence thoughts, feelings, and behaviors. According to Freudian psychology, the ego acts as a mediator between the demands of the id, the superego, and reality. The iceberg analogy¹³ illustrates that the mind is mostly concealed beneath the conscious surface, with the id being entirely unconscious while the ego and superego function both consciously and unconsciously. This interplay among the three components is comparable to the layers of a partially submerged iceberg.

Day-dreaming and creative writers

According to Ethel Spector Person’s¹⁴ statement in the introduction part of her edited volume, Freud published “Creative Writers and Daydreaming” in 1907, presenting it to an audience of around ninety intellectuals. It serves as Freud’s most direct investigation into the creative process. He argued that both the child at play and the creative writer are exercising their imaginative capacity. They both approach their activities with seriousness

¹⁰Sigmund Freud, *The Ego and the Id* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1962), 3.

¹¹Sigmund Freud, *The Ego and the Id* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1962), 4.

¹²Simon Boag, “Ego, Drives, and the Dynamics of Internal Objects,” *Frontiers in Psychology* 5, no. 666 (July 1, 2014).

¹³Saul Mcleod, “Unconscious Mind | Simply Psychology,” *Simplypsychology.org*, 2009.

¹⁴Servulo A Figueira, Peter Fonagy, and Ethel Spector Person, *On Freud’s “Creative Writers and Day-Dreaming”* (Karnac Books, 2013).

and are able to differentiate between their imaginative creations and reality. He draws connections between creative writing and play, saying that a work of creative writing, much like a daydream, is an extension of the play of childhood. As Freud emphasized, daydreaming utilizes a present situation to construct a future image based on past experiences.¹⁵ Meanwhile, Freud observed that the connection between fantasy and time holds significant importance. A fantasy is sparked by a current event, evoking the memory of a past experience when the desire was fulfilled. He maintained that nighttime dreams and daydreams both serve as fulfillments of wishes. Thus, Ethel Spector Person contended that this insight anticipates a shift in Freud's later works, focusing on the nature and origin of unconscious fantasies.

On the other side, Trosman¹⁶ emphasized that subsequent psychoanalytic studies on creativity have concentrated on three primary areas: biographical studies utilizing literary works as a reference, analyses of literary works, and inquiries into the origins of creativity. He stressed the role of positioning fantasy as central to creativity. Furthermore, Infante¹⁷ concurs that artistic creation, akin to dreaming, frequently symbolizes the fulfillment of suppressed desires or an effort to navigate through traumatic or mourning circumstances and at times serves as a means to communicate a message.

The Perception of Ecological Autobiography in the United States

Writing as a method for processing grief has existed for as long as art has. Since the romanticism era's celebration of introspective personal expression, this type of writing has frequently manifested as autobiography. According to Paschal¹⁸, autobiography is a penetration of the past by the present. Meanwhile, Mark Christopher Allister¹⁹ pointed out in his monography that from Mary McCarthy's *Memories of a Catholic Girlhood* to Richard Wright's *Black Boy*, autobiographers have constructed narratives to articulate the pain and make sense of it all. They acquire strategies for responding that enable them to reinterpret their own histories, assisting them in mitigating their overwhelming sorrow.

On the other hand, in the ongoing development and expansion of American ecocriticism, moving away from its origins in the analysis of nonfiction nature writing, Nathan Straight²⁰ stressed in his monograph the importance of recalling that at the core of the varied genre of environmental writing lies the endeavor to grapple, through storytelling, with the connection between the individual and the world. While the environmental autobiography

¹⁵Servulo A Figueira, Peter Fonagy, and Ethel Spector Person, On Freud's "Creative Writers and Day-Dreaming" (Karnac Books, 2013), 3–13.

¹⁶Servulo A Figueira, Peter Fonagy, and Ethel Spector Person, On Freud's "Creative Writers and Day-Dreaming" (Karnac Books, 2013), xv.

¹⁷Servulo A Figueira, Peter Fonagy, and Ethel Spector Person, On Freud's "Creative Writers and Day-Dreaming" (Karnac Books, 2013), xvi.

¹⁸Roy Pascal, *Design and Truth in Autobiography*. (Routledge, 2017), 13.

¹⁹Mark Christopher Allister, *Refiguring the Map of Sorrow* (University of Virginia Press, 2001), 1.

²⁰Nathan Straight, *Autobiography, Ecology, and the Well-Placed Self: The Growth of Natural Biography in Contemporary American Life Writing*. (New York: Peter Lang, 2011).

and the ecological autobiography share many similarities, there are significant differences. For instance, Smith²¹ emphasized that the environmental autobiography is more narrowly focused, examining various environments and “special places” one has encountered. Conversely, the ecological autobiography considers the entirety of one’s experiences in connection to the natural environment and acknowledges that our perceptions of the external environment are constantly influenced by our internal environment of needs, desires, memories, and visions.

Engaging in an ecological autobiography could be seen as a contemporary form of a *vision quest*²², in which an individual devotes time and effort to delve into the wilderness of their own past experiences. This vision quest is typically a gratifying experience, as it often leads to fresh insights and understandings and is frequently accompanied by a feeling of happiness and spiritual wellness. For example, this phenomenon occurs when authors of nonfictional works find personal connection and healing through their observations of the external world, leading to an end of depression and progression through mourning.

The poet Mary Oliver and *Wild Geese* (1986)

In order to introduce specific Freudian ecopsychology within the literature of Mary Oliver, we will commence by conducting an analysis of her renowned poem *Wild Geese*. The analysis aims to highlight the dramatic essences of her writing, which are rooted in the experience of suffering and delicately outline the direction of Freudian ecopsychology. A detailed description will follow. Mary Oliver, a highly accomplished poet, is widely admired in the American literary community. She has been honored with prestigious accolades, including the Pulitzer Prize and the National Book Award for her compelling poetry. Renowned American poet Maxine Kumin praised Oliver as an indefatigable guide to the natural world in the *Women’s Review of Books*.²³ Her poetry predominantly explores themes of vivid imagery and the natural world. In her seventh collection *Dream Work* published in 1986, Oliver presented *Wild Geese*²⁴, a poem that encourages readers to embrace the beauty of nature. Also, this poem is written in the style of the Romantics, like John Keats.

You do not have to be good.
 You do not have to walk on your knees
 for a hundred miles through the desert repenting.
 You only have to let the soft animal of your body
 love what it loves.

²¹John C. Smyth, “Environment and Education: A View of a Changing Scene,” *Environmental Education Research* 1, no. 1 (January 1995): 3–20.

²²Ruth A. Wilson, “Ecological Autobiography,” *Environmental Education Research* 1, no. 3 (October 1995): 308

²³Poetry Foundation, “Mary Oliver | Poetry Foundation,” Poetry Foundation, 2019, <https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poets/mary-oliver>.

²⁴Mary Oliver, *Dream Work* (Boston: Atlantic Monthly Press, 1986), 14.

Tell me about despair, yours, and I will tell you mine.
Meanwhile the world goes on.
Meanwhile the sun and the clear pebbles of the rain
are moving across the landscapes,
over the prairies and the deep trees,
the mountains and the rivers.
Meanwhile the wild geese, high in the clean blue air,
are heading home again.
Whoever you are, no matter how lonely,
the world offers itself to your imagination,
calls to you like the wild geese, harsh and exciting -
over and over announcing your place
in the family of things.

(Mary Oliver, *Wild Geese*)

The poem provides the reader with insights in a calm and tranquil manner. Oliver recognizes the human tendency to seek direction and meaning, yet people often struggle to feel content within ourselves, consistently encountering sensations of being out of place. She advises the audience that when experiencing despair or inadequacy, turn to nature and observe the wild geese. Interestingly, novel findings emerge as we shift our focus to the intricate elements of the poem.

In the opening lines of the poem, Oliver provides counsel and direction on how to lead a fulfilling life. She asserts the importance of contemplating the concept of “to be good.” The poem commences with the proclamation, “You do not have to be good,” immediately granting permission to readers to cease their pursuit of flawlessness. Suggesting that life is challenging and rife with emotional turmoil, the poem proposes that individuals should show more compassion to themselves. With a distinctly Freudian undertone, she underscores the presence of hardships in life, including suppressed negative emotions from childhood and the past. In lines 4 and 5, the author reinforces the concept that humans are inherently animals. The implication is that we should embrace our instincts, which may superficially appear hedonistic. However, upon closer examination of the poem, it becomes evident that the author is advocating for a return to nature and a rejection of societal constraints. The message is to align ourselves with the natural order.

In the subsequent lines of poetry, Oliver conveys to the reader that regardless of the events unfolding in one’s life, the world persists in its rotation. We encounter challenges in our human existence. For instance, fretting about fitting in with a specific social group. Nevertheless, in the natural world, we witness the unwavering rising and setting of the sun. The natural world will endure unchanged, despite our tribulations. When Oliver alludes to the wild geese, she encourages us to emulate them. They are certain of their place and purpose as they return home to nature. Furthermore, in the final section of the poem, Mary Oliver presents the reader with certain resolutions while demonstrating the presence of struggle in life. When experiencing solitude, take a stroll outdoors and observe the natural surroundings. The planet reaches out to us, offering contrasts of both adversity and adventure, much like the wild

geese. We should not succumb to loneliness and life-grief, for we are integral to the organic world and belong to the community of nature.

The initial impression that many readers may have of this poem is the appealing representation of the natural world and the encouragement to appreciate its uncomplicated beauty. However, upon deeper reflection, it becomes apparent that the longing for nature originates from the author's desire to escape the hardships and suffering of life. In essence, the poem not only communicates the beauty of nature but also its significance: nature serves as a remedy for the struggles of childhood and promotes healing. In other words, regardless of one's circumstances, even if one feels isolated or adrift, one can look out into the expansive realm of nature. This profound understanding of the natural world may have also altered the initial perception of Mary Oliver for many individuals.

The concluding section of the poem emphasizes the utilization of the imagination bestowed by the world, despite feelings of isolation. This imaginative faculty grants us the freedom to craft myriad creations, from poetry to other forms of literature. Freud perceives this faculty as a form of daydreaming, enabling escape from trauma while intertwining creative writing and imagination. Moreover, she claims that nature serves as a potent aid to deal with trauma and strengthen our imaginative capacity.

The reception of Mary Oliver's *Upstream: Selected Essays* (2016)

Mary Oliver was raised in Maple Hills Heights, a suburb of Cleveland, Ohio. She found comfort in a difficult home life in the nearby woods, building shelters from twigs and grass, and writing poetry. A prolific writer of both poetry and prose, her main focus remains on delving into the connection between humanity and the natural world.

Upstream: Selected Essays (2016), in this thoughtful and illuminating spiritual compilation of essays, Mary Oliver provides further astute observations about the natural world, animals, and the literary influencers who have guided her. *The New York Times* assigned a high rating to this work, emphasizing that it presents a compelling synthesis of the poet's reflections on the natural, spiritual, and artistic realms.²⁵ Meanwhile, the *Chicago Tribune* commented that within the slender volume containing 19 spiritual essays, Oliver presents to the reader epistles after epistles from her Book of Nature and the meditations therein.²⁶ Furthermore, Danny Heitman²⁷ also referenced Oliver's works in his review, stating that Oliver's poems about nature are deceptively simple and straightforward, similar to Robert Frost's seemingly plain outdoor poems.²⁸ However, upon closer examination, both Oliver's and Frost's verses unveil deeper and more intricate themes.

²⁵Daphne Kalotay, "Essays," *The New York Times*, December 16, 2016, sec. Books.

²⁶Barbara Mahany, "Brian D. McLaren, Mary Oliver and W.S. Merwin Address the World of the Spiritual," *Chicago Tribune*, November 8, 2016.

²⁷Danny Heitman, "'Upstream' Places Poet Mary Oliver in Her 'Arena of Delight,'" *Christian Science Monitor*, October 19, 2016.

²⁸Poetry Foundation, "Robert Frost," Poetry Foundation, 2019.

The book is segmented into five parts. In the initial section, Mary Oliver describes her deep affection for nature, reading, and poetry. She also discusses her admiration for the poet Walt Whitman and reflects on writing as an art form. It is important to note the author's motivations for leaving her parents and immersing herself in nature. Oliver disclosed in a 2011 interview with Maria Shriver²⁹ that she had experienced sexual abuse at the hands of her parents during her childhood, leading to recurring nightmares and significant mental distress. As a result, she expressed a desire to become invisible and to seek safety and healing in the natural environment of the woods. In the subsequent sections, the author not only delineates the sea creatures but also portrays the avian and amphibian inhabitants surrounding the pond and turtles from a wider viewpoint. Furthermore, Oliver divulges her beloved poets such as Emerson, Poe, Whitman, and Wordsworth. The fourth section also serves as a depiction of the natural world, but in this instance, the author does more than simply observe; instead, she integrates herself as a part of nature and views animals as companions akin to humans. This is evident in her concern for the potential damage to spider webs during a household move and in her personal efforts to tend to an injured black-backed seagull. The last part focuses on the location where Oliver resided for an extended period, Provincetown. This wistful section chronicles the city's rapid expansion in the tourism sector alongside the surging influx of tourists and resultant environmental degradation as the economy flourished. Despite the inadequate mitigation of environmental issues, her affection for the land where she dwelled endures.

Hamilton Cain³⁰ penned in his critique of *Upstream* that Oliver immerses us in an ever-widening circle, in which a shrub or flower opens onto the cosmos. Thus, imagine taking this collection of essays and immersing yourself in a garden teeming with a myriad of blossoming flowers and verdant grass. The air is filled with melodies sung by birds while warm sunlight bathes your body, and a light blue sky with drifting white clouds stretches overhead. As you settle onto the lawn with a cup of robust coffee and a slice of cake, any internal worries could be dispelled momentarily, and you could relish the exquisite moments inspired by the poet and nature.

The courage to go upstream and reverence for nature

The book commences with "Upstream," a poetic segment where Oliver reminisces about wading upstream in rippling water as a child while her parents stayed downstream.

I walked, all one spring day, upstream, sometimes in the midst of the ripples, sometimes along the shore. My company were violets, Dutchman's-breeches, spring beauties, trilliums, bloodroot, ferns rising so curled one could feel the upward push of the delicate hairs upon their bodies. My parents were downstream, not far away, then farther away because I was walking the wrong way, upstream instead of downstream.³¹

²⁹Maria Shriver, "Maria Shriver Interviews the Famously Private Poet Mary Oliver," Oprah.com, September 3, 2011.

³⁰HAMILTON CAIN Special to the Star Tribune, "Review: 'Upstream: Selected Essays,' by Mary Oliver," Star Tribune, October 7, 2016.

³¹Mary Oliver, *Upstream: Selected Essays* (New York: Penguin Books, 2016), 4–5.

The author begins with a captivating narrative detailing how her individual journey distinguishes her from her parents. Her company comprises violets, trilliums, and ferns. She is gratified by the continual opening of her heart. She presents the notion of “upstream,” a metaphorical voyage against the current, an unexplored path that leads to marvels yet to be unearthed. The theme “upstream” provides a guiding framework for the entire compilation, urging readers to question traditional norms and delve into the profound aspects of their own lives. However, the reason behind the author’s immersion in nature and departure from her parents is a question that requires contemplation. From the author’s background and interview she was given, it is evident that Oliver’s childhood was overshadowed by the trauma of sexual abuse that was inflicted by her parents. According to Freudian psychoanalysis, people’s childhood memories are persistently revisited in their subconscious dreams and repressed emotions, causing significant distress to the author. Consequently, she felt the need to distance herself from her parents and seek a new world of her own. It is evident from Oliver’s accounts that the environment where she experiences profound healing is nature. Venturing into the forest and against the current, she finds solace and protection within the realm of towering trees.

She is amazed by the resilience of a hundred-year-old oak and a hungry bear. Subsequently, following these consecutive moments of wonder, Oliver implores us to assist her in teaching the children because she believes that what adults often overlook, children approach with great curiosity.

Teach the children. We don’t matter so much, but the children do. (...) Give them peppermint to put in their pockets as they go to school. Give them the fields and the woods and the possibility of the world salvaged from the lords of profit. Stand them in the stream, head them upstream, rejoice as they learn to love this green space they live in, its sticks and leaves and then the silent, beautiful blossoms.³²

The author conveys her awe for the natural world in the concluding section of the essay. Moreover, Oliver underscores the importance of incorporating natural elements, such as peppermint, into daily life to foster a stronger connection between humans and nature. She advises children to cherish green spaces, as they will serve as essential tools for dispelling inner darkness in the future. When the spiritual section is connected with the babbling of a stream and blossoms amidst colorful flowers, it creates a tranquil world free from distress and filled with hope and security. This is the meaningful message relating to the power of nature that the author aims to impart to children.

The world of poetry and Oliver’s creative writing

In her ongoing exploration “upstream”, Oliver leads readers on a captivating journey into the realm of creative intellects and her unwavering quest for art. Oliver underscores the importance of her childhood “friend” Walt Whitman, through whose work she first comprehended

³²Mary Oliver, *Upstream: Selected Essays* (New York: Penguin Books, 2016), 8.

that a poem is a temple that a place to access and in which to experience, and who urged her to disappear into the realm of her writing.

But first and foremost, I learned from Whitman that the poem is a temple—or a green field—a place to enter, and in which to feel.³³

Oliver observes that during her childhood, she lacked genuine friendships and perceived those around her as strangers. It was through poetry that she found her first friend, Walt Whitman, whom she cherished as a valued companion, despite they are in different periods. This marked the turning point in her life, as she discovered that nature healed her heart and poetry sparked her creative inspiration. This curiosity transformed her rebellious nature, which had previously led to serious truancy issues at school. In other words, poetry catalyzed her character transformation and instilled in her an appreciation for the world's beauty. It also facilitated her interpersonal connections, fostered creativity, and helped her overcome past hardships.

I never met any of my friends, of course, in a usual way—they were strangers, and lived only in their writings. But if they were only shadow-companions, still they were constant, and powerful, and amazing. That is, they said amazing things, and for me it changed the world.³⁴

Moreover, Oliver explores the profound impact of art and nature on the human spirit, encouraging individuals to find motivation in the environment. She reflects on the factors that empowered her to form a fulfilling life through work and love, emphasizing, “I could not be a poet without the natural world. Someone else could. But not me. For me, the door to the woods is the door to the temple.”³⁵ Perhaps we could interpret this passage of hers with a unique perspective. Freud employed the technical term *unconscious fantasy*³⁶ to elucidate the connection between creative writing and day-dreaming. In Oliver's journey from nature to creativity, nature serves as the primal material that stimulates her imagination. Through nature, she taps into her unconscious fantasies, which in turn prompt recollections of poems she has read and enable a deeper focus on the creative writing of her art.

Oliver also found inspiration for her creative writing in the poetry of other writers in addition to Walt Whitman. For instance, Ralph Waldo Emerson, whom she describes as being “unbelievably sweet and, for all his devotion to reason, wondrously spontaneous.”³⁷ William Wordsworth showed her that one's authentic dwelling is formed “not of beams and nails but of existence itself.”³⁸ Edgar Allen Poe, who made it clear to her that “in this universe we are given two gifts: the ability to love, and the ability to ask questions.”³⁹ It is evident that the

³³Mary Oliver, *Upstream: Selected Essays* (New York: Penguin Books, 2016), 12.

³⁴Mary Oliver, *Upstream: Selected Essays* (New York: Penguin Books, 2016), 7.

³⁵Mary Oliver, *Upstream: Selected Essays* (New York: Penguin Books, 2016), 154.

³⁶Servulo A Figueira, Peter Fonagy, and Ethel Spector Person, *On Freud's "Creative Writers and Day-Dreaming"* (Karnac Books, 2013), xii.

³⁷Mary Oliver, *Upstream: Selected Essays* (New York: Penguin Books, 2016), 65-66.

³⁸Mary Oliver, *Upstream: Selected Essays* (New York: Penguin Books, 2016), 114.

³⁹Mary Oliver, *Upstream: Selected Essays* (New York: Penguin Books, 2016), 91.

aforementioned instances are indicative of Oliver's expression of gratitude towards the authors who provided motivation and inspiration during her formative year.

Stay alive and feel the eternity of time

Oliver, as a nature enthusiast, composes her poems and essays in a manner that not only portrays the splendor of nature and her affinity for her own natural surroundings but also connects them to her personal experiences, a characteristic of environmental autobiography that surpasses the realm of nature. As noted by Ruth A. Wilson⁴⁰ in her paper, the concept of ecological autobiography goes beyond simply admiring the beauty of nature; it involves incorporating personal experiences to envision and contemplate the environment. This imaginative process frequently exhibits Freudian attributes, drawing from childhood experiences or previous traumas woven into non-fictional accounts of the environment and the evolving self. In Oliver's chapter, she discusses how adults possess the autonomy to alter their surroundings, while children lack the ability to do so and must accept their circumstances quietly.

Adults can change their circumstances; children cannot. Children are powerless, and in difficult situations they are the victims of every sorrow and mischance and rage around them, for children feel all of these things but without any of the ability that adults have to change them. Whatever can take a child beyond such circumstances, therefore, is an alleviation and a blessing.⁴¹

Through her narrative, Oliver portrays a sense of powerlessness during her formative years, enduring mental anguish without the ability to effect change. She describes a feeling of sinking deeper into this despair, mentally numb as her vitality wanes. In her quest to escape this predicament, she endeavors to seek analgesic solutions that can alleviate her suffering and restore a sense of vitality. Fortunately, she discovered that nature and literary creativity served as the remedies she required to heal from her traumatic memories. Literary creation resembles a delightful daydream, while the lush greenery of nature bestows upon her a profound sense of inner peace and keeps her staying alive.

Moreover, Oliver outlines the necessary conditions for creative work as being solitude, concentration, and self-discovery throughout the creative process. Throughout her creative process, she realized she had three selves within her. They are the past self, the child. The self that is governed by time is called the social occupation. And the self that transcends the boundaries of time is the one who hungers for eternity.

I am, myself, three selves at least. To begin with, there is the child I was.⁴²

And there is the attentive, social self. This is the smiler and the doorkeeper.⁴³

⁴⁰ Ruth A. Wilson, "Ecological Autobiography," *Environmental Education Research* 1, no. 3 (October 1995): 305–14.

⁴¹ Mary Oliver, *Upstream: Selected Essays* (New York: Penguin Books, 2016), 14.

⁴² Mary Oliver, *Upstream: Selected Essays* (New York: Penguin Books, 2016), 24.

⁴³ Mary Oliver, *Upstream: Selected Essays* (New York: Penguin Books, 2016), 24.

It is a third self, occasional in some of us, tyrant in others. This self is out of love with the ordinary; it is out of love with time. It has a hunger for eternity.⁴⁴

These three selves described by Oliver encompass the self of the past, which, though it exists in the subconscious dream world at the present possible time, never disappears and is always with us. Furthermore, upon entering society, everyone is assigned a societal role that must be fulfilled to signify their position in that society. For instance, some individuals become regular pilots, while others become ordinary company employees. It is clear that the second self is relatively influenced by time and social responsibilities. Conversely, the third self has character, a creativity that surpasses time and possesses the nature of a longing for eternity, which can be interpreted as a creative inspiration that flows constantly and is not bound by time. It is comprised of curiosity, brimming with a desire for the future and the unknown.

Interestingly, our minds have a tendency to easily make analogies to Freud's three articulated selves: id, ego and superego. The primal part of the heart, id, operates based on the principle of pleasure. The superego serves as the moral component of the mind, embodying internal social standards and values. Meanwhile, the ego adheres to the reality principle and functions as a mediator between the two.⁴⁵ If this theory is applied to Oliver's case, it will be discovered that the third self, referred to as such by her, functions similarly to the ego, utilizing imagination and creativity that transcends time to maintain a balance between past trauma, social morality, and societal norms. Oliver employs creativity to confront the haunting memories of her childhood while simultaneously challenging societal perspectives and establishing a new therapeutic world for herself through creative writing and nature.

There is a notion that creative people are absentminded, reckless, heedless of social customs and obligations. It is, hopefully, true. For they are in another world altogether. It is a world where the third self is governor.⁴⁶

Creative artists, as Oliver notes in her work, transcend social norms and responsibilities. This is something she has been striving for all along.

The healing function of nature

When Oliver was a child, residing in a small town surrounded by wooded areas and a meandering creek, her great joy and solitary pastime was constructing a series of miniature dwellings. And the small-scale homes she constructed consistently exhibited distinctive characteristics.

They were huts really, made of sticks and grass, maybe a small heap of fresh leaves inside. There was never a closure but always an open doorway, and I would sit just inside, looking out into the

⁴⁴Mary Oliver, *Upstream: Selected Essays* (New York: Penguin Books, 2016), 27.

⁴⁵Saul Mcleod, "Id, Ego and Superego," *Simply Psychology*, July 10, 2023, <https://www.simplypsychology.org/psyche.html>.

⁴⁶Mary Oliver, *Upstream: Selected Essays* (New York: Penguin Books, 2016), 29.

world. Such architectures were the capsules of safety, and freedom as well, open to the wind, made of grass and smelling like leaves and flowers.⁴⁷

Oliver built the shelter using basic branches and foliage. Her sole desire was to have a door that allowed the wind to enter, ensuring a view of nature from inside. This location serves as a protective capsule for her, blocking communication with those around her and society as a whole while maintaining a connection to nature. In essence, the trees, flowers, and green leaves provide the author with an invaluable sense of security, acting as a healing remedy for inner peace. Additionally, she responds to nature with solitude, which could be considered a sign of respect for nature.

(...) solitude was a prerequisite to being openly and joyfully susceptible and responsive to the world of leaves, light, birdsong, flowers, flowing water.⁴⁸

Meanwhile, there are numerous interactions between her and natural creatures. For example, when she goes for a walk with her dog and encounters a fox, she observes them chasing each other. Likewise, she ventures into the woods alone to search for an owl's nest, and she tends to an injured seagull to extend its life. Through these experiences, she comes to realize that humans, like any other creatures of nature, are simply a part of this ecosystem, and they support each other in times of need. This de-anthropocentric way of thinking enables the author to better comprehend nature and derive healing energy from it.

Furthermore, as the author delves into the influence of nature on herself, she further stresses that the abode she truly seeks in her own life is not a traditional house but the entire earth, or, in essence, existence itself.

And we might, in our lives, have many thresholds, many houses to walk out from and view the stars, or to turn and go back to for warmth and company. But the real one—the actual house not of beams and nails but of existence itself—is all of earth, with no door, no address separate from oceans or stars, or from pleasure or wretchedness either, or hope, or weakness, or greed.⁴⁹

It is worth considering for the reader to ponder the author's discussion regarding the essence of existence itself. Perhaps the author's true intention is to convey to the audience the sublime and eternal beauty of nature. We can speculate on the plausibility of this interpretation. Whether it is the mountains and rivers, flowers, plants, or trees, their existence seems eternal compared to the fleeting experiences of human beings. In other words, people may be too fixated on their own experiences, leading them to be trapped in the haze of the past. Therefore, viewing the constancy of nature can help us realize that although we suffer in our painful struggles, we should also remember that we are part of the natural order and that we belong to the realm of things, having a recurring feeling that we have our place "in the family of things."

⁴⁷Mary Oliver, *Upstream: Selected Essays* (New York: Penguin Books, 2016), 111.

⁴⁸Mary Oliver, *Upstream: Selected Essays* (New York: Penguin Books, 2016), 111.

⁴⁹Mary Oliver, *Upstream: Selected Essays* (New York: Penguin Books, 2016), 114.

This is why immersing ourselves in nature can provide clarity when we are burdened by mental stress or relationship issues. Its magnificence and eternity put human hardships into perspective.

Finally, the utilization of nature's healing power in the inner spiritual realm, facilitating the process of moving past traumas, provides a solution for individuals deeply entrenched in difficulties. This distinctive perspective on ecopsychology is prominent throughout Oliver's ecological memoir.

Conclusion

Eco-autobiography, as a distinctive form of non-fiction narrative, not only delves into the connection between nature and humanity from an eco-critical perspective but also underscores the vital role of the natural environment in human development. Furthermore, this autobiographical approach integrates the author's childhood experiences, and the work articulates the interplay between subconscious memories and the environment. In essence, it merges Freudian psychology and eco-criticism, which tend to call it ecopsychology, providing a novel interpretation of the role of memoirs: it unearths the author's traumatic experiences through memories and offers resolution by harnessing the therapeutic influence of the natural environment. This divergence from conventional memoirs is noteworthy.

Mary Oliver, the renowned American poet, can be considered as one of the exemplars of a comprehensive depiction of ecological autobiography combined with the methodology of Freudian eco-psychology. In particular, Freud, in his psychoanalytic theory, proposed three components of psychoanalysis: the id, the ego, and the superego. And he highlighted the moderating function of the ego between the other two. However, it is important to note that Mary Oliver also mentions three "selves" in her work, similar to those identified by Freud. These include the enduring influence of the past, the societal roles individuals assume, and a transcendent self that seeks what she loves and eternity of time. She developed Freud's idea that the ego is a crucial point in the interaction of consciousness with nature and its healing influence on us. This deliberate echoing of Freud's concepts aids readers in seamlessly integrating the two perspectives.

After conducting an analysis of the volume *Upstream: Selected Essays* (2016), in conjunction with the literary theory of ecopsychology, we can possibly derive the following conclusions: Firstly, childhood memories have the potential to become integrated with long-term memory, gradually fading but never truly vanishing. As Freud has noted, they may resurface subconsciously, such as in dreams. Secondly, the work prompts readers to revisit the relationship between humanity and the natural world. Eco-psychological theory endeavors to elucidate the interconnectedness of the natural environment and human beings. Natural creatures and green spaces not only bring tranquility to the human spirit but also aid in overcoming depressed childhood memories and attaining the joy and liberation of healing. Furthermore, for Mary Oliver, nature has evolved into a sanctuary for her daydreams and imagination, inspiring her creative writing through solitary immersion and the study of poets' works that resonate with her, repeatedly nurturing her great new works.

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ecological autobiography

THE JOY AND
LIBERATION OF
HEALING

experience of suffering

ABSTRACT:

This study examines the confluence of psychoanalysis and ecocriticism in American nonfiction, particularly analyzing the ecological autobiography “*Upstream: Selected Essays* (2016)” from the Freudian eco-psychoanalytic perspective. The paper demonstrates the interplay of the ego with the id and superego in Freud’s theory and the contribution of daydreaming to creative writing. Moreover, analysis in specific work suggests that while childhood experiences of suffering persist subconsciously, revisiting human-nature relationships is vital. It tends to be clear that natural environments offer mental relief and assist in mending memories from an eco-psychoanalytic viewpoint. Meanwhile, the therapeutic potential of creative writing through daydreaming and imagery for humans is also acknowledged.

Freudian eco-psychanalysis

DAY-DREAMING

creative writing**NOTE ON THE AUTHOR:**

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“there’s certainly enough pain (...) but not enough poetry:” Halina Poświatowska’s autothematic poems

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Halina Poświatowska is most often discussed as a poetess of love and death, two themes which she consistently examined in her work. Love and death are inextricably linked in her poems with illness and a celebration of the female body, and the latter, in turn, is read in the contexts of nature and culture. Poświatowska’s poems appear to have been written in a highly emotional state, directly communicating lived experience. And this experience is further authenticated by the lyrical I that is usually associated with Poświatowska herself. The poems “appear” to have been written in this way because in most we find spontaneity that is precisely controlled and emotions that are skillfully employed. Indeed, most poems were carefully constructed. Poświatowska brilliantly explored the poetic possibilities of language, proving that the formal aspects of poetry were important to her. The same applies in the poem [*nie potrafię być tylko człowiekiem*]/[*I cannot be merely a human...*] from the collection *Oda do rąk* [Ode to hands].¹ The poem, on the one hand, exhibitionistically opens up to the reader the private emotional world of the I and, on the other hand, it encloses the expressive whole in an intellectual frame that is inevitably meta-reflexive.²

¹ Halina Poświatowska, *Wszystkie wiersze* [Complete poems] (Krakow: Wydawnictwo Literackie, 1997), 341; Halina Poświatowska, *Właśnie kocham... Indeed I love...*, trans. Maya Peretz (Krakow: Wydawnictwo Literackie, 1997), 104. All Poświatowska’s poems in the original Polish cited in this article come from the collection *Wszystkie wiersze*. When citing, I refer to the abbreviated title of the collection (WW) and provide page number. Poświatowska’s poems that were translated into English come from the collection *Właśnie kocham... Indeed I love...* When citing, I refer to the abbreviated title of the collection (WK) and provide page number. Other poems were translated into English by the translator of this article – translations appear in brackets after the original Polish text.

² I use the terms “autothematicism,” “metapoetics,” and “meta-reflexivity” interchangeably, but I am aware of the differences in the genesis and meaning of these concepts and the definitional problems related to the fluidity of terminology and its use. On autothematicism (also) in women’s poetry, see: Nowy autotematyzm? Metarefleksja we współczesnej humanistyce [New autothematicism? Meta-reflexivity in the contemporary humanities], ed. Agnieszka Waligóra (Poznań: Wydawnictwo Naukowe UAM, 2021); Agnieszka Waligóra, *Nowy autotematyzm? Metarefleksja w poezji polskiej po roku 1989* [New autothematicism? Meta-reflexivity in Polish poetry after 1989] (Krakow: Universitas, 2023); *Stulecie poetek polskich. Przekroje – tematy – interpretacje* [A century of Polish poets. Cross-sections – themes – interpretations], ed. Joanna Grądział-Wójcik, Agnieszka Kwiatkowska, Ewa Rajewska, Edyta Sołtys-Lewandowska (Krakow: Universitas, 2020).

nie potrafię być tylko człowiekiem
 jest we mnie spłoszona mysz
 i łasica węsząca zapach krwi
 i przestrasz i pościg
 porośnię włosami mięso
 i myśl

nie umiem być tylko drzewem
 wytrwały wzrost nie jest moim jedynym
 celem
 ani tężenie konarów
 ani owoc
 ani kwiat

ciekawością nacięłam korę
 oszlifowałam zastygłe żywiczne krople
 żywą tkaninę zamieniam codziennie
 na świecące próchno słów

słowami
 skarżę się z moich udręczeń
 jak gdyby liryka była kluczem
 którym można by otworzyć
 zatrzęsnięty przed wiekami raj

I cannot be merely a human
 a scared mouse is in me
 and a weasel that knows the smell of blood
 and fright and pursuit
 hair-covered flesh
 and thought

I cannot be merely a tree
 stubborn growth is not my only
 purpose
 neither are firm branches
 nor fruit
 nor flower

with my curiosity I've cut the bark
 polished the solid drops of sap
 daily I change the living tissue
 into the glowing rot of words

with words
 I complain of my torments
 as if poetry were a key
 which could open the paradise
 slammed shut ages ago

The poem begins with a confession. The language is natural and simple. We find ourselves in the midst of the I's private reflections: "nie potrafię być tylko człowiekiem"/ "I cannot be merely a human." This declaration can be a statement of fact, an existential complaint, a nervous reproach, a violent rebellion, or a cry for help – the performative power of the sentence depends to a large extent on the pragmatic context of the utterance constructed by the reader, on the imagined context, the projected psychosomatic lyrical situation. At the very beginning, the lyrical I defines itself through negation, which will be additionally reinforced compositionally in the opening of the following stanza, when the lyrical I adds: "nie umiem być tylko drzewem"/ "I cannot be merely a tree." This triggers oppositional and complementary logic, which points to the parallelism and relationality of the natural and the human world that is so important in this poem (and many others). The opening lines conjure up a rapid, polysensual, and animated image of the I's private world. It is wild and natural. Importantly, the I does not say "I am a scared mouse and a weasel." Instead, the I says:

jest we mnie spłoszona mysz
 i łasica węsząca zapach krwi
 i przestrasz i pościg
 porośnię włosami mięso
 i myśl

a scared mouse is in me
 and a weasel that knows the smell of blood
 and fright and pursuit
 hair-covered flesh
 and thought

We find ourselves in the midst of a dramatic struggle for survival – it is animalistic, instinctive, and chaotic. However, the image of this struggle has been constructed with great precision. The poetess combined different experiences in a multi-sensory and intensely somatic image: an elliptical description of the chase, which nevertheless conveys its dynamism and visuality; the synesthetic “zapach krwi”/ “smell of blood;” the raw haptics of “porosłe włosom mięso”/ “hair-covered flesh;” as well as numerous sounds associated with struggling, rustling, and sniffing. In Polish, they are reinforced by the strongly instrumentalized tissue of the poem, which relies on a number of hissing, whistling, and rustling sounds (“spłoszona” [scared], “mysz” [mouse], “łasica” [weasel], “węsząca” [knows the smell]). They semantically concentrate around the ideas of “przestrach” [fright] and “pościg” [pursuit]. Respectively, we also find clusters of unvoiced consonants in the poem – they convey the aggressive and predatory nature of the situation (“krw” as in “krwi” [blood], “prz” and “str” as in “przestrach” [fright]) – as well as paronomastic combinations. The latter, which include “porosłe włosom mięso” [hair-covered flesh], read as more delicate thanks to the use of open vowels. They are accompanied by the dominant “m” (“mnie” [me], “mysz” [mouse], “włosom” [hair], “mięso” [flesh], “myśl” [thought]). The stanza, which tells the story of a deadly chase, employs a carefully selected repertoire of sounds. It is indeed thoughtfully composed in terms of sounds, encrypting or anagrammatically coding in this emotional, vibrant, and moving image death – which in Polish is “ś/mie/rć.” “Strach” [fear] turns into “prze-strach” [fright], a fear that moves, drives forward, but also a fear that is felt more strongly than usual, a fear that is overwhelming. Interestingly, this dynamic and hyperbolic description of internal experiences is deprived of verbs which would indicate movement – the words in the sentence which extends over the entire stanza are as if enumerated, attached to one another in succession with the help of conjunctions. Parataxis, a series of short phrases, seems to be the governing principle: “i łasicę węszącą [...] / i przestrach i pościg [...] / i myśl”/ “and a weasel that knows the smell [...] / and fright and pursuit [...] / and thought.” In Polish, the first section of the poem is framed by an imperfect, distant, and ambiguous rhyme: “mysz” [mouse] turns into “myśl” [thought]. It thus has the last word in the described chase.

The second stanza, whose layout and structure are very similar to the first one (six lines which gradually become shorter and shorter as enjambment becomes more prominent), begins with a statement that is both symmetrical and antithetical to the opening line. “nie umiem być tylko drzewem”/ “I cannot be merely a tree,” the I says this time, thus slowing down the forces of nature which dominated in the first stanza. That which is human – implicitly, that which is creationist and intellectual – begins to grow and prevail in the poem. The rustle of sounds quiets down, and the simple syntax of spoken language is replaced by hypotaxis, which allows for intellectual ordering and logical argumentation. Instead of the inclusive “i”/ “and” there appears the exclusionary “ani”/ “neither... nor” and the arrangement of lines seems to emphasize this logic:

nie umiem być tylko drzewem
wytrwały wzrost nie jest moim jedynym
celem
ani tężenie konarów
ani owoc
ani kwiat

I cannot be merely a tree
stubborn growth is not my only
purpose
neither are firm branches
nor fruit
nor flower

A creator, a constructor, an experimenter who wants to learn about the world speaks in the poem. She cuts ("kora"/ "bark"), polishes ("zastygłe żywiczne krople"/ "the solid drops of sap") and transforms "żywa tkanka"/ "living tissue" into "świejące próchno słów"/ "the glowing rot of words." Writing is absorbed into the bloodstream of nature. It is a process that is both super-natural and natural. It is superimposed over nature, but at the same time it still uses its processes and rules, referring to the Aristotelian sources of mimesis.

The creationist aspect of human existence, man's intentional agency and cognitive "curiosity" are important for the lyrical I. The third stanza, similarly to the first one, activates the sounds. It conjures up a polysensual and vibrant image in which the I comes to the fore. Creative transformation is both metaphorized and thematized:

ciekawością nacięłam korę	with my curiosity I've cut the bark
oszlifowałam zastygłe żywiczne krople	polished the solid drops of sap
żywą tkankę zamieniam codziennie	daily I change the living tissue
na świejące próchno słów	into the glowing rot of words

It is an attempt to formulate a positive answer, one that would balance the previous negative declarations: "nie potrafię"/ "I cannot," "nie umiem"/ "I cannot," "nie jest moim [...] celem"/ "is not my [...] purpose." Poświatowska often writes about helplessness and about overcoming limitations. It is not surprising considering her biography. In the poem with the telling and autothematic *incipit* [*myślę że jest trudno pisać wiersze*] (WW 373)/ [*I think it's hard to write poetry*] (WK 234), she compares writing poetry to such physically demanding physical activities as mountaineering or swimming across the English Channel. And we know that the poetess could not have accomplished either due to her heart condition. Many other poems also start with the poetess confessing how difficult it is for her to write. At the same time, she evokes metaphorical images of the natural world that is "we mnie"/ "in me:" "nie potrafię inaczej"/ "I can't do otherwise," the poetess complains, trying to tame the animal inside her (this time it is a cat: "uspokajam go słowami / kłamię / o przedziwnych kolorach i dźwiękach"/ "I comfort it with words/ tell lies/ of wondrous colors and sounds" [*nie potrafię inaczej*] WW 455/ [*I can't do it otherwise*] WK 148). In other poems, she admits: "nie potrafię pieścić / nawet słowami..." [*I cannot caress / even with words*] ([*nie potrafię pieścić*] [*I cannot caress*] WW 541); "nie potrafię uskładać ze słów / miłości / ona rośnie we mnie / pulsuje w korzeniach / nabrzmiewa w pniu / odkwita" [*I cannot make love/ out of words / it grows in me / pulsates in the roots / swells in the trunk / un-blossoms*] (*[nie potrafię uskładać ze słów]* [*I cannot make love out of words*] WW 470); "nie umiem powiedzieć słowem / nie słowem tęsknię / ale rękoma"/ "I can't say with a word / not with a word do I yearn / but with my arms" (*[nie umiem powiedzieć słowem]* WW 468/ [*I can't say with a word*] WK 158). In the often-quoted poem that begins with the question "kto potrafi / pomiędzy miłość i śmierć / wpleść anegdotę o istnieniu" [who can / weave an anecdote about existence/ between love and death], we learn that "nikt nie potrafi" [no one can] (WW 176). Therefore:

słowami	with words
skarżę się z moich udręczeń	I complain of my torments
jak gdyby liryka była kluczem	as if poetry were a key
którym można by otworzyć	which could open the paradise
zatrzaśnięty przed wiekami raj	slammed shut ages ago

This last part of the poem may be read in different ways – directly and naively, as a call for poetry that opens up better worlds and makes up for the imperfections of the mortal one, or with distance and irony, as a sign of helplessness, further emphasized by the subjunctive mood: “jak gdyby liryka była kluczem, / którym można by otworzyć” / “as if poetry were a key/ which could open.” Poświatowska’s self-reflection remains a-metaphysical and a-religious. “Zatrzaśnięty przed wiekami raj” / “the paradise/ slammed shut ages ago” is merely a cultural projection – an elusive and unfulfilled probability. The poem does not conjure or promise anything; it only constructs and at the same time exposes the artificial decorations of words, thus weakening the tragedy of the I’s “udręczenia” / “torments.”

This potential impermanent world that was created with words and tainted by death is not rejected in the poem. The I cannot be “tylko człowiekiem” / “merely a human” and cannot be “tylko drzewem” / “merely a tree” – the I still needs creativity to exist. Therefore, the I transforms the living tissue into “świejące próchno” / “glowing rot” and makes sure to include an “anegdotę o istnieniu” [anecdote about existence] somewhere between life and death. With every imperfect word, it captures the startled “mysz/myśl” / “mouse/thought,” temporarily escaping death. In other words, the I “nasłuchuje brzęczenia słów” [listen[s] to the buzzing words] hoping that it will be possible to reflect, describe, and capture “treść nikać” [vanishing content] ([*kto potrafi*] [[Who can]] WW 176). Writing poetry gives the I a chance not to lose everything.³ In a letter to Tadeusz Śliwiak, the poetess wrote: “And I have to write, and I look at the words, and I plant them very carefully. I don’t like them; there’s certainly enough pain in them but not enough poetry.”⁴

Poświatowska is maximalist in her poetry – she is lyrical and emotional, and at the same time logical and conceptual, egocentric and seemingly chaotic. She pays attention to the form, syntax, and rhythm of the poem. She pays attention to how the chosen words sound. The *signifiant* of the poem, words that have been carefully selected and arranged, matters to her. Maneuvering between the human and the non-human, she chooses a third path, becoming an experimenter who transforms reality into words. She writes about it so that the experience may be even stronger. Poświatowska’s poetry strengthens biological existence through poetic meta-reflexivity, through textualizing the described world, constantly encouraging self-reflection.

Metatextual revelations (*Wiersz o miłości*/ *A poem about Love*; *Wiersz dla mnie* [A poem for me]) and self-referential metaphors may be found in many of her poems: “skrzydła o pociemniałych zgłoskach” / “wings of darkened syllables” (*Wieczny finał* WW 64/ *Eternal finale* WK 36); “brunatne plastry książek” [brown slices of books] and “brzęczenia słów” [buzzing words] ([*kto potrafi...*] WW 176). They are held together by the sylleptic psychosomatic I who speaks as both a poetess and a sick woman: “przed chwilą napisałam słowo / jestem starsza o słowo / o dwa / o trzy / o wiersz” / “I have just written a word/ I am older/ by a word/ by two/ by three/ by a poem” ([*jeszcze jedno wspomnienie*] WW 370/ [*one more memory*] WK 114); “poezja dławi się własnym oddechem” / “why does poetry suffocate on its own breath” ([*Tego roku jest znowu wiosna...*] WW 393/ [*This year again there is spring*] WK 130); “wszystkie oddechy i słowa” [all breaths and words] and “patrzę na dzień już umarły / myślę” [I’m looking at the day that is already dead/ and I think] ([*czy wszystkie dni są*

³ “czy wszyscy tracimy wszystko / żyjąc?” [do we all lose everything / by living?], the poetess writes in her autothematic poem [czy wszystkie dni są stracone dla umarłych] [[are all days lost to the dead]] WW 563.

⁴ Halina Poświatowska, “[List z 1 II 1961 roku...]” [[Letter of February 1, 1961...]], in: Halina Poświatowska, *Listy* [Letters] (Krakow: Wydawnictwo Literackie, 1998), 265.

stracone dla umarłych] [[are all days lost to the dead]] WW 563). Some of Poświatowska's poems are also manifestos. They speak directly about writing. The poetess confronts avant-garde linguistic poetry with her original concept of art, such as in *[Stworzyć wiersz...]* / *[To produce a poem...]*. In the poem, the I rejects "zabiegi chirurgiczne wokół słów" / "surgical interventions around words" and "dwuznaczność liter spuchniętych od mądrości" / "ambiguity of letters swollen with wisdom" and says that "wibrujący ból w tkankach i zasób słów nie większy od krzyku zwierzęcia" / "a vibrating pain in the tissues and a stock of words no greater than an animal's scream" is all that is needed (WW 376/ WK 124). Poświatowska also writes protest poems – poems that are polemical and metatextual – in which she addresses the criticism and fads of contemporary poetry which often follows in the footsteps of Eliot's pessimism (*Argument pro* [Argument in favor]) or evaluates the theme of love: "Dlaczego więc potępiać wiersze o miłości, czemu mieć im za złe bezwstyd i prymityw bezładnego jęku rozkoszy powtarzanego wiernie przez niedbałe o poczytność stulecia" / "Why then censure love poems, why object to their lack of shame and primitive disorderly groan of rapture repeated perpetually for centuries oblivious of readership" (*Tego roku jest znowu wiosna...*) WW 393/ *[This year again there is spring]* WK 130).

Autothematicism is for Poświatowska a language that allows her to both tell and authenticate her story. Writing poetry is a somatic and at the same time an intellectual and artistic experience.⁵ The poetess distanced herself from Przyboś's linguistic experiments. She distanced herself from "dwuznaczność liter spuchniętych od mądrości" / "ambiguity of letters swollen with wisdom" and prelinguistic "zabiegi chirurgiczne wokół słów" / "surgical interventions around words" (*[Stworzyć wiersz...]* WW 376/ *[To produce a poem...]* WK 124). While Poświatowska did not write "laboratory poetry, governed by strict rules and assumptions," Grażyna Borkowska explains, she "liked to play with avant-garde idioms, which were skillfully incorporated into the poem, as in the poem *[Lubię pisać wiersze]* [[I enjoy writing poems]] (from the collection *jeszcze jedno wspomnienie* [one more memory])."⁶ Indeed, Poświatowska carefully examined the avant-garde experiment, taking from it what was useful to her in her own understanding of what poetry is. "I feel twice when I feel and think about what I feel; and a thought that is firmly grasped through who knows what glands may be transformed into feeling and shine," Tadeusz Peiper, the founding father of the Polish avant-garde, once wrote, trying to reconcile the expression of feelings and emotions with *ratio*, with how humans control the world.⁷ Poświatowska basically said the same, although she used different words, thematizing her way of poetic thinking: "kiedy kocham / to kocham / to wiem że kocham [...] / w samowiedzy się pograżam" [when I love / then I love / then I know that I love [...] / I immerse myself in self-knowledge] (*[kiedy kocham]* [[when I love]] WW 610). In a different poem she conjured up an image based on syllepsis – "liryczniejemy sobie / tak na przekór / po odrobinie / zachodzimy w wieczorne niebo" [we become lyrical / in spite of ourselves / little by little / we set off into the evening sky] – which wagged an "apokaliptyczny palec" [apocalyptic finger] (*[liryczniejemy sobie]* [[we become lyrical]] WW 155).

⁵ Autothematicism in women's poetry often enhances non-autonomous aspects of the poem and helps build individual epistemological projects, placing at the center not so much language itself or the problems of expression but the (self) conscious description of experience, which sometimes turns into an auto-description of the I that draws on its life. The I is aware of the auto-creative power of words. I wrote more about this question in: "Autothematic Description in Poetry by Women: The Case of Joanna Pollakówna". *Forum of Poetics* 20 (2020): 34–49.

⁶ Grażyna Borkowska, *Nierozważna i nieromantyczna. O Halinie Poświatowskiej* [Senseless and unsensible: About Halina Poświatowska] (Kraków: Wydawnictwo Literackie, 2001), 9.

⁷ Tadeusz Peiper, *Tędy. Nowe usta* [This way. New mouth] with a preface and an introduction by Stanisław Jaworski, ed. Teresa Podolska (Kraków: Wydawnictwo Literackie, 1972), 361.

Małgorzata Czermińska, years ago, defined four models of femininity rooted in the literature of the 1920s and 1930s and developed after World War 2. Those were: the nostalgic model, the feminist model, the sensual-emotional model and the intellectual-aesthetic model.⁸ Poświatowska's poetry was said to exemplify the sensual-emotional model, and it has been interpreted within this framework since. However, I would argue that it might also be examined in terms of its intellectual and aesthetic qualities – Poświatowska's poems are ironically distanced and erotically sophisticated. At times, questions of gender, sex, and sensuality are concealed – they are not always as exposed as in *Lustro* [Mirror]. Sometimes, as in [*nie potrafię być tylko człowiekiem*]/[*I cannot be merely a human...*], they are subdued. The poem may thus be interpreted without referring to the context of femininity. And although Poświatowska is probably not the best example of an independent “New Woman,” in her autothematic poems she was certainly a freethinking “new woman writer.”⁹ She followed in the footsteps of the 19th-century “woman writer” who, in pursuing her metapoetic interests, also wrote about her life as a woman.¹⁰

It is important not to limit Poświatowska's poetry to the nostalgic, the physical, and the emotional. If we read it only as love poetry, Poświatowska will forever be trapped in a rather conventional interpretative context. Although Poświatowska died before the advent of second-wave feminism, she nevertheless tried to build her own independence, step by step, consistently breaking the oppositions between body and nature as well as between intellect and aesthetics. It is precisely the tension between the two that seems to inspire new readings. It gives rise to the textualization of the body and the somatization of words, which strengthens and emphasizes the presence of the I. The poetess keenly explored the possibilities of somatopoetics and autobiographical storytelling, redirecting attention from language as the subject of expression to personal and psychocorporeal experience, which is something we often notice in poetry written by women. As such, we might read Poświatowska's works in the context provided by vitalism, the non-metaphysical body and its intimate and personal experience, where the celebration of the body is combined with thanatological reflection.¹¹ This poetry is also auto/bio/centric. In its self-reflexivity, it is open to what is both human and non-human, and thus creatively and critically anticipates the contexts of ecopoetics and biosemiotics. It paves the way for the future generation of poetesses.

translated by Małgorzata Olsza

⁸ Grażyna Borkowska, Małgorzata Czermińska, Ursula Philips, *Pisarki polskie od średniowiecza do współczesności: przewodnik* [Polish women writers from the Middle Ages to the present: A Guide] (Gdańsk: Słowo/Obraz Terytoria, 2000), 174.

⁹ Cf. *Nowa Kobieta – figury i figuracje* [The new woman – figures and figurations], ed. Inga Iwasiów, Aleksandra Krukowska, Agata Zawiszeńska (Szczecin: Wydawnictwo Naukowe Uniwersytetu Szczecińskiego, 2017).

¹⁰ Cf. More on the topic: Joanna Grądział-Wójcik, “Nowa kobieta pisząca? O projektach kobiecości we współczesnej twórczości poetek” [A new woman writer? On Femininity in the works of contemporary women poets], in: *Stulecie poetek polskich. Przekroje – tematy – interpretacje*, 408–425.

¹¹ Cf. Anna Legeżyńska, “Witalizm kobiecy. Mapa problemów, sieć tradycji” [Feminine vitalism: A map of problems, a web of traditions], *Poznańskie Studia Polonistyczne. Seria Literacka* 32 (2018): 17, 25.

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KEYWORDS

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ABSTRACT:

The interpretation of the poem *[I cannot be merely a human]* from the collection *Oda do dłoni* [Ode to hands] allows the author to reflect on Halina Poświatowska's poetry. Contrary to stereotypical readings, Poświatowska's poetry is characterized not only by emotionality but also by strong intellectualization and meta-reflexivity. Poświatowska's selected poems are analyzed with a view to explaining how the poetess skillfully constructs emotions and makes use of the poetic possibilities of language, paying particular attention to form. Autothematicism is for Poświatowska a language that allows her to tell and authenticate her autobiographical story through writing. The textualization of the body and the somatization of words strengthen the psychosomatic presence of the I.

metapoetics

CONTEMPORARY POLISH POETRY

interpretation

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Reportage stories about history

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History has always been – and probably will always be – present in reportage prose. It is difficult to point out a literary reportage whose authors would not refer to the past, although they do it in various ways. Marian Brandys has been considered a master of historical reportage for years. In his two-volume cycle *Kozietulski i inni*¹ [Kozietulski and others], published in the late 1960s, he managed to recreate not only the psychology and personality of his protagonists, but also the whole social climate of the Napoleonic Era. He created a peculiar type of “a reportage from the past” – as he recalled after years: “at some point it became increasingly more difficult to write national reportages, so I invented a historical reportage”².

Ryszard Kapuściński looked back differently; he often stressed that what he found the most fascinating about working as a reporter was the opportunity to witness history happening first-hand. He would say that “every journalist is a historian. Their work is studying, investigating, describing history at the very moment it is created”³. Indeed, he watched historical transformations unfolding in Africa, South America, Russia in this way. Doubtlessly he taught next generations of reporters that knowledge of the past helps understand the present day. Intertwining narratives about the present day with digressions about the past of the discussed region has become a standard practice for reporters who write mostly about foreign countries, such as Wojciech

¹ Marian Brandys, *Kozietulski i inni* (Warszawa: Iskry, 1967).

² “Pan Marian od szwoleżerów. Z Marianem Brandysem rozmawiają Anna Bikont i Joanna Szczęsna” [Mr. Marian from cavalry. An interview with Marian Brandys by Anna Bikont and Joanna Szczęsna], *Gazeta Wyborcza* 23.12.1994.

³ “Ismaeli continua a navigare. Z Ryszardem Kapuścińskim rozmawia Maria Nadotti” [An interview with Ryszard Kapuściński by Maria Nadotti], in: Ryszard Kapuściński, *Il cinico non è adatto a questo mestiere. Conversazioni sul buon giornalismo*, edited by Maria Nadotti, Roma: E/O, 2002; fragments translated by Jarosław Mikołajewski cited from: Ryszard Kapuściński, *Rwący nurt historii. Zapiski o XX i XXI wieku* [In the Whirlpools of History: Jottings on the 20th and the 21st Centuries] (Kraków: Znak, 2007).

Jagielski, Wojciech Górecki or Jacek Hugo-Bader. But history – especially recent – is also of interest to reporters who focus on Polish affairs. There have been a lot of such books published in Poland in recent years. Some of them (e.g. *My z Jedwabnego* [Us from Jedwabne] by Anna Bikont⁴ or *Płuczki* [Washers] by Paweł Piotr Reszka⁵) discuss difficult, painful topics from our recent past, constituting an important counterpoint for historical policy becoming increasingly more uniform, preventing it from being treated as a closed chapter. The already mentioned books, as well as works by Hanna Krall, Małgorzata Szejnert, Cezary Łazarewicz, Włodzimierz Nowak and Paweł Smoleński (among others) rediscover what has been pushed into social oblivion, a type of memory – as aptly defined by Jacek Żakowski – unsaid, or even silenced⁶.

At this point, I would like to examine another role that history plays in reportage: as a reflection or counterpoint to contemporary reality.. As convincingly argued by Ewa Domańska, history is always the history of the present in the sense that “a historian necessarily imposes on the people and phenomena they study ways of thinking peculiar to their time and culture”⁷. This concerns historians, authors of historical fiction, and reportages. However, it would seem that while for historians the starting point, the impulse to look back results from their interest in the past, for reporters it is the present, as exemplified by books by Małgorzata Szejnert, Anna Bikont, Cezary Łazarewicz, Paweł Smoleński, which are often dubbed “historical reportages”, implying that they are about some little known or completely unknown stories from the past, whereas in fact, books by those authors are usually about historical events which have been rather well described by professional historians. What motivates those authors to look back? Paradoxically, it is their interest in the present that pushes them towards studying the past – to answer important questions of the present day by providing a historical context.

There is no doubt that Kapuściński’s *The Emperor* played a pivotal role in presenting history as a universal narrative.. Beata Nowacka wrote: “Kapuściński meticulously erases traces of geographical and historical references, distancing his picture from the described reality – his 1970s Ethiopia resembles a fairytale land rather than a real state”⁸. Nowacka points out that for this reason the book is subject to numerous interpretations (evanescence, attitudes towards the world, the absurdity of human existence); it is generally considered a parable of power⁹.

We have yet to see a masterpiece that would match *The Emperor*, however, in recent years – apart from the already mentioned reporters – there have been a number of books which use history to explain present-day phenomena, especially Polish, in such a way as to turn readers’ attention to the permanence and universality of certain phenomena. However, contrary to Kapuściński, who could only hope that the question of authoritarian power would be clear not just for Poles, but also to most European societies, today’s reporters do not use history for constructing some national identity. Historian Maciej Serwański concluded:

⁴ Anna Bikont, *My z Jedwabnego* (Wołowiec: Wydawnictwo Czarne, 2015).

⁵ Paweł Piotr Reszka, *Płuczki. Poszukiwacze żydowskiego złota* [In search of Jewish gold] (Warszawa: Agora, 2019).

⁶ See Jacek Żakowski, *Rewanż pamięci* [Memory’s revenge] (Warszawa: Sic!, 2002), 15–16.

⁷ Ewa Domańska, *Historia egzystencjalna* [Existential history] (Warszawa: Wydawnictwo Naukowe PWN, 2012), 19.

⁸ Beata Nowacka, “Wstęp” [Introduction], in: Ryszard Kapuściński, *Cesarz* [The Emperor] (Wrocław: Ossolineum, 2012), CXXII.

⁹ Nowacka.

There is no single history. For every individual the future is drawn in a different dimension. Every generation has a different perspective on the past and rewrites history. [...] Of course, the way we look at past events and processes depends on our perspective, which results from various social, national, and cultural circumstances of the person looking back, their political views, knowledge, current needs [...]¹⁰.

Literary reportages are the type of books where deeper layers of narrative are easy to come by, where a private, individual vision of the world and humanity is revealed. Reporters evaluate the past, although they avoid passing judgments; the qualification appears in the choice of the subject, selection of facts, determining their significance. The authors already mentioned here are aware of the multiplicity of visions of the past, and by choosing one interpretation over others, they create a certain concept of reality, co-creating the historical discourse¹¹. At the same time, they refer to the world of values represented by their readers rather than their knowledge of history. Therefore, a reportage builds a community of concerned, like-minded individuals.

There are three ways in which reporters use historical material in order to explain the present. The first one is mythologization, whose representatives (Małgorzata Szejnert, *Czarny ogród* [Black garden]¹²; Filip Springer, *Miedzianka. Historia znikania* [Miedzianka. The story of disappearing]¹³) are not just concerned with creating a myth, but also with the choice of values and turning readers' attention to those values which feel deficient in today's world. Those stories result from disappointment with the present. They are about a foregone world, but the authors' goal goes beyond "embalming time"¹⁴ – they try to present a certain emptiness, a haunting lack. Another way of talking about the present is by demythologizing it (e.g. Małgorzata Szejnert, *Wyspa Węży* [Isle of Snakes]¹⁵; Małgorzata Szejnert, *Wyspa klucz* [Key-Island]¹⁶; Bartłomiej Kuraś, Paweł Smoleński, *Krzyżyk niespodziany. Czas Goralenvolk* [Swastika. The time of Goralenvolk]¹⁷; Paweł Smoleński, *Syrop z piołunu. Wygnani z akcji "Wisła"* [Wormwood syrup. Exiled after operation "Vistula"]¹⁸; Paweł Smoleński, *Pochówek dla rezuna* [A Ukrainian's funeral]¹⁹). Yet again, this is not about describing some "uncharted territories" of our past; such books are meant to draw attention to the consequences of our national vices, and more importantly to the fact that certain Polish phenomena may not have emerged if we

¹⁰Maciej Serwański, "Przedmowa" [Foreword], in: Tomasz Schramm, *Historia powszechna. Wiek XX* [World history. 20th century] (Poznań: Wydawnictwo Poznańskie, 1999), V.

¹¹For a discussion about historical discourse see Frank Ankersmit, *Narracja, reprezentacja, doświadczenie. Studia z teorii historiografii* [Narration, representation, experience. Studies in historiography], translated into Polish by Ewa Domańska (Kraków: Universitas, 2004).

¹²Małgorzata Szejnert, *Czarny ogród* (Kraków: Znak, 2007).

¹³Filip Springer, *Miedzianka. Historia znikania* (Wołowiec: Wydawnictwo Czarne, 2015). Henceforth all quotes from this book are marked as MI with page number.

¹⁴This term is used by Zofia Rydet, author of *Zapis socjologiczny* [Sociological record], a collection of photographs of the Polish countryside taken from 1978 to 1988. In a rare comment about her work, Rydet wrote: "My *Zapis* was supposed to embalm time, it is supposed to preserve what is changing and although it remains a real reality, it ceases to exist and soon can be difficult to imagine". *Korespondencje. Sztuka nowoczesna i uniwersalizm* [Correspondence. Modern art and universalism], edited by Jarosław Lubiak, Małgorzata Ludwisiak (Łódź: Muzeum Sztuki w Łodzi, 2012), 712–713.

¹⁵Małgorzata Szejnert, *Wyspa Węży* (Kraków: Znak, 2018). Henceforth all quotes from this book are marked WW with page number.

¹⁶Szejnert, *Czarny ogród*.

¹⁷Bartłomiej Kuraś, Paweł Smoleński, *Krzyżyk niespodziany. Czas Goralenvolk* (Wołowiec: Wydawnictwo Czarne, 2017).

¹⁸Paweł Smoleński, *Syrop z piołunu. Wygnani w akcji „Wisła”* (Wołowiec: Wydawnictwo Czarne, 2017).

¹⁹Paweł Smoleński, *Pochówek dla rezuna* (Wołowiec: Wydawnictwo Czarne, 2011).

were able to learn from the past. The third way of using the past is “history as a costume” (e.g. Cezary Łazarewicz, *Żeby nie było śladów. Sprawa Grzegorza Przemyka* [Leave no traces. The case of Grzegorz Przemyk]²⁰; Cezary Łazarewicz, *Nic osobistego. Sprawa Janusza Walusia* [Nothing personal. The case of Janusz Waluś]²¹; Wojciech Jagielski, *Wypalanie traw* [Grass burning]²²). Here the story being told – e.g. the murder of Chris Hani by Janusz Waluś, fatal beating of Grzegorz Przemyk, or the South African revolution – is a type of synecdoche aimed to identify and outline the anatomy of universal mechanisms, such as dividing people and taking advantage of their gullibility, such as lies, propaganda, or problems with regained freedom.

Three representative reportages have been selected to illustrate those three ways of using the past: *Miedzianka. Historia znikania* by Filip Springer (mythologization), *Wyspa Węży* by Małgorzata Szejnert (demythologizing), and *Żeby nie było śladów. Historia Grzegorza Przemyka* by Cezary Łazarewicz (history as a costume).

Mythologization

Miedzianka. Historia znikania is Filip Springer’s two-hundred-page long reportage debut, in which he presents the historiography of a mining town in south-western Poland from its settlement in 14th century to the present day. Kupferberg – Miedzianka, a small town near Jelenia Góra – is no more. Among other things, Springer tells the story of how Kupferberg used to be a mining town, about its brief period as a tourist attraction and a sanatorium, and about Franzki’s brewery, which no longer exists, and which used to be locally famous for its beer.

It is a peculiar, meticulously recorded chronicle of a small town, from first mentions about it in 14th-century chronicles when “a village then known as Cuprifodina was sold by one of Albert’s descendants – Heinrich Bavarus – to Clerus Bolcze, a knight at the court of duke of Świdnica-Jaworze” (MI 6), up to when “it all disappeared, destroyed, ploughed-up, sunken” (MI 247). The town’s story is rooted in over three hundred years of Polish-German history and relations. Springer tells the story of a culturally mixed community subjected to subsequent historical trials, living in an area of moving borders, where different national traditions – especially Polish and German – produce a string of intertwined human experiences. The network of events taking place in time and space, accompanied by minor episodes, comprises a dense tissue of a story about the past.

Springer’s book resembles the excellent *Czarny ogród* [Black garden]²³ by Małgorzata Szejnert. Similarly to Szejnert, Springer skillfully balances between a factual chronicle and myth. He relies

²⁰Cezary Łazarewicz, *Żeby nie było śladów. Sprawa Grzegorza Przemyka* (Wołowiec: Wydawnictwo Czarne, 2017). Dalej cytaty z tej książki będę oznaczała skrótem SP ze wskazaniem właściwej strony.

²¹Cezary Łazarewicz, *Nic osobistego. Sprawa Janusza Walusia* (Katowice: Post Factum, 2019).

²²Wojciech Jagielski, *Wypalanie traw* (Kraków: Znak, 2012).

²³I do not use *Czarny ogród* by Małgorzata Szejnert as an example for mythologization, because I have already written about it in my paper “Między mitem, pamięcią i historią. Literacki obraz Śląska w «Czarnym ogrodzie» Małgorzaty Szejnert” [Between myth, memory and history. A literary image of Silesia in «Czarny ogród» by Małgorzata Szejnert], *Anthropos* 22 (2014): 25–33, and in the book: Aleksandra Dębska-Kossakowska, Beata Gontarz, Monika Wiszniowska, *Literackie reprezentacje historii* [Literary representations of history] (Katowice: Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Śląskiego, 2013).

on the same methodology, studying archives, talking to witnesses, even the construction of the plot is similar – the narrative focuses on several people, families, and photographs. Moreover, he treats the cultural landscape as a “palimpsest in which different layers of the past overlap”²⁴.

In Miedzianka, there are three clashing realities – a German reality, from better, pre-war days, still remembered by one of my protagonists, Karl Heinz, who leaves his “little fatherland”. A post-war reality, which ties together German and Polish stories, such as the one of the Gliszczyński family, who stay and believe they will manage to get along with Polish people, but eventually leave. And finally, the saddest reality – Polish, the downfall of Miedzianka...²⁵

In Miedzianka, mythologization concerns both the organization of time and space, and a “synthetic and harmonious experience of the world in which all life forms are connected”²⁶. Thanks to mythologizing devices, Miedzianka gains singularity without losing its historical and geographic substance, it reveals its *genius loci*. From the very beginning the reader is introduced to the world of fables and legends: “the superstitious would say that it all happened because in Kupferberg one brother killed another years ago” (MI 5). There is a reason why Springer states in one interview that “Originally I meant to write a parallel fairy tale about Miedzianka – about an evil queen who cursed the town. And to write it I read various fairy tales”²⁷. Springer (re)creates the atmosphere of a lost world in such a way as to inspire awe and nostalgia through telling the story about the quiet and affluent life of its inhabitants with empathy on one hand, and on another – through idyllic images:

Even the biggest malcontent would love the view from here. Far down you can see the main road to Waltersdorf, and when you look slightly up you see the panorama of the Sokoliki. It would be difficult to find a more charming place in the area, even though there are plenty of beautiful spots there (MI 59–60).

The past which Springer talks about is a closed enclave, a separate world full of internal order: “[...] Kupferberg is almost self-sufficient. There is a plumber, electrician, tinsmith and stove-maker. Whatever merchants cannot supply is produced locally” (MI 44). And although “dark clouds are gathering” (MI 49), in his story about pre-war years, full of descriptions of local customs and mentality, Springer paints a detailed picture of the past, positively charged axiologically. It is thanks to “myths” that we can refer to the past as “building blocks of a world of values”²⁸ which have survived despite the irreversibility of events. For Springer, those “building blocks” are the perseverance of the home as the center of family life, everyday life of a hard-working community for whom honoring traditions is of utmost importance. Mytholo-

²⁴Robert Traba, *Przeszłość w teraźniejszości. Polskie spory o historię na początku XXI wieku* [The past in the present. Polish disputes about history at the beginning of 21st century] (Poznań: Wydawnictwo Poznańskie, 2009), 103.

²⁵“Nieodrobiona lekcja historii. Z Filipem Springerem rozmawia Katarzyna Kazimierowska” [Unfinished history lesson. An interview with Filip Springer by Katarzyna Kazimierowska], *Rzeczpospolita* 10.11.2011.

²⁶See Bogumiła Kaniewska, “O sposobach i funkcjach mityzacji: Nowak – Myśliński – Redliński” [On ways and functions of mythization: Nowak – Myśliński – Redliński], *Pamiętnik Literacki* 3 (1990).

²⁷“Przestrzeń trzeba przeżyć. Z Filipem Springerem rozmawia Agnieszka Sowińska” [Spaces need to be experienced. An interview with Filip Springer by Agnieszka Sowińska], *Dwutygodnik* 96 (2012), date of access: 10.01.2014.

²⁸See W. Burszta, *Czytanie kultury. Pięć szkiców* [Reading culture. Five essays], IEiAK, Łódź 1996, especially *Nostalgia i mit albo o mechanizmie powrotu* [Nostalgia and myth, or on the return mechanism].

gizing Miedzianka reveals values which are tied to identity, the power of being rooted, generational durability. But have those “building blocks” – according to Springer, so significant for building a community – actually survived? The very title, as well as the symbolic repetition of the word “memento” on numerous pages (MI 5, 17, 28, 48, 55, 64, 69, 72, 76...) foreshadowing the sinking of the ground, disappearance of animals, people, their deaths would – it would all suggest otherwise.

Springer declared that he “wanted to show how the year 1945 disrupted Miedzianka’s continuity. [...] Following 1945 we have had different inhabitants, a different picture, the beginning of an end”²⁹. People of Miedzianka have witnessed or experienced wars, relocations, displacement. The world from Springer’s story has changed its skin. This is an important moment of the story, in which Springer shares his very modern anxiety: changes can be enforced, but at a cost of damaged foundations.

There is one more significant aspect of mythologization in *Miedzianka*. Springer manages to present “a nostalgic community”: Germans miss their lost land, and Poles miss the same land as well. By clearly showing that Poles are strangers to this land – although not through their own fault – Springer not only revises the traditional understanding of national history, but also – by mythologizing the past – he creates “bipartisan” history, therefore adding an important chapter to constructing its transnational version³⁰.

Demythologization

In one of his final books, *Retrotopia*³¹, Zygmunt Bauman considers the significance and consequences of the conservative turn which he observed in modern societies. He writes about the return to the communal context, deeply rooted in values which we search for in the past rather than – as usual, heretofore – in the future. According to Bauman, the eponymous retrotopia is a past-oriented type of utopia; a type of longing for, idealizing, and, hence mythologizing the past. Additionally, this “return to the womb” is also connected to a “return to tribes”, i.e. producing a vision of a clearly defined community in opposition to the chaos of the modern world. Therefore, we escape to the past, hoping that it offers a solution to today’s problems in shared myths, constructing shared memory³².

It seems that Bauman’s observations largely point out to the reasons behind the shape of modern historical policy or construction of collective memory based on “one homogenic memory

²⁹“Nieodrobiona lekcja historii. Z Filipem Springerem rozmawia Katarzyna Kazimierowska”.

³⁰See Marcin Kula, *Historia narodowa w ponadnarodowej perspektywie* [National history from an international perspective], conference presentation at Wspólna Polsko-Niemiecka Komisja Podręcznikowa Historyków i Geografów [Common Polish-German Textbook Committee of Historians and Geographers], Łódź 4–6.06.2009. Cited from: Traba, 37–38.

³¹Zygmunt Bauman, *Retrotopia. Jak rządzi nami przeszłość*, translated into Polish by Karolina Lebek (Warszawa: Wydawnictwo Naukowe PWN, 2018).

³²See Bauman. This fragment is a partial repetition of my observations from my paper “Demitologizacja polskiej historii w reportażach Pawła Smoleńskiego” [Demythologization of the Polish history in Paweł Smoleński’s reportages], *Prace Literackie* 58 (2018): 165–174.

of «all Poles», defined as a monolithic nation”³³. We are facing the threat of an oversimplified history of Poland³⁴ – realized not only by historians, but also by reporters, including Małgorzata Szejnert. One day, Szejnert – a custodian of family memorabilia – was organizing her family archive when she noticed “the strange absence of uncle Raczkowski” (WW 12), i.e. Ignacy “Rak” Raczkowski, a soldier in the Tsarist artillery, was never spoken of at home following 1939. Intrigued, Szejnert discovered that he was buried at a cemetery in Rothesay on the Isle of Bute off the coast of Scotland. Her research revealed that her family’s silence was caused by Raczkowski’s inglorious World War 2 episode: he was forcibly sent to the Isle of Bute, with several hundred other Sanation officers, accused of disloyalty by Władysław Sikorski. Stefan Mękowski, one of the most important and frequently cited protagonists of Szejnert’s book, summarizes this practice:

Sometimes it seems to me that in the history of Polish tortures it is not the Kolyma, not the White Sea, not Komi, Starobielsk, gulags in Siberia, not Dachau, Oranienburg or Auschwitz concentration camps: instead, it is Rothesay that will be considered the place of the most grim doom of several hundred Polish intelligentsia representatives (WW 93).

The book was inspired by a family mystery, but for a skilled reporter like Szejnert this story turned into perfect material for not only completing some hidden chapters in history, but also reevaluating, demythologizing the idealized history of both the Second Polish Republic and Poles’ participation in World War 2, by revealing an inglorious page in the history of the Polish Armed Forces in the West.

In *Wyspa Węży* Szejnert debunks two of the many myths about the Second Polish Republic. The first one concerns the Polish army; every history textbook features heartwarming photographs of beautiful uhlans or generals’ uniforms. (Czesław Miłosz later wrote: “Uhlans danced in a parade”, adding that “they turned what could be glory into encomium”³⁵). Although the soldiers sent to the Isle of Bute “have an upright bearing in their uniforms” (WW90), although they feed on the myth³⁶, they do not fight – they only keep busy by organizing their own everyday life.

Szejnert successfully deconstructs another myth: about the political unity of the Polish elites in the face of the growing threat from two powerful and hostile neighbors from both west and east, one of founding myths of the Second Republic of Poland³⁷. The image of the Polish elites emerging from *Wyspa Węży* is depressing; they are presented as constantly quarreling, not only about issues crucial for the state, but also about minor problems. They write reports and

³³Traba, 77.

³⁴Traba, 79.

³⁵Czesław Miłosz, “W praojcach swoich pogrzebani” [Buried in their forefathers], in: Światło dzienne [Daylight] (Paryż: Instytut Literacki, 1953).

³⁶Tadeusz Alf-Tarczyński, a protagonist of *Wyspa Węży*, wrote in his memoir: “the Polish soldier has left history books, poetry, novels, he has stepped off the theater stage where he dwelled for a brief moment between lifting and dropping the curtain – he has left Grottger’s prints, Matejko’s, Rosen’s, Wyspiański’s, Malczewski’s, Kossak’s, Tetmajer’s paintings in order to be made flesh” (WW 231).

³⁷See Andrzej Garlicki, *Siedem mitów Drugiej Rzeczypospolitej* [Seven myths about the Second Polish Republic] (Warszawa: Czytelnik, 2013).

denouncing letters about each other, such as: “Certain individuals claim that Kościółkowski has been summoned by a «certain group of people» to London...” (WW 237).

For Szejnert, demythologization is not an end in itself. *Wyspa Węży* is not only a historical reportage, but first and foremost a book resulting from a very modern anxiety about the Polish inability to learn from past mistakes. Moreover, our national shortcomings are eternal:

Sikorski condemns Rydz for his escape from Poland, whereas he himself abandoned his troops in France once it ceased to be an ally. Rydz’s followers explain that he left Poland to fight for it, Sikorski’s – that he had to abandon his army to prepare for its stay in Great Britain. But both groups refused to listen to each other. Any presumption of innocence and goodwill was out of the question. **There is a high demand for somebody else’s fault** [emphasis mine, MW] – cowardice, short-sightedness, conceit, bungling (WW 76). Only one side was supposed to be blamed for all that (WW 60).

Additionally, Szejnert writes extensively about Polish antisemitism and mutual lack of trust. Citing journals, formal reports and bulletins, and contemporary press, she demonstrates that destructive divisions remain an issue. Her diagnosis of the “sick Polish soul” is negative:

“The sick Polish soul and the resulting moral decay is the biggest and most significant reason behind our military failure in 1939. [...] The sanatia-legion “elites” were notorious for their hatred for all things spiritually Polish and catholic, which made them shocking and incomprehensible... for any true Pole. [...] By opposing the state to the Nation and the Church, the government did everything in their power to destroy the State by destroying the only foundations on which the Nation’s Greatness and its organizational greatness can grow, i.e. the State; they mocked faith in God, fought with the Church and Polish patriotism, which they rejected as “nationalism” (WW 62).

Although Szejnert does not comment on it, clearly we are dealing with a remarkable historical continuity; as Paweł Goźliński wrote in his review “One would like to say – where do we get it from?”³⁸. A similar comment could be made about the words cited by Adrian Carton de Wiart:

“I realized that there is always some political crisis at hand. I had a lot of sympathy and admiration for Poles, but I cannot deny that they fed on crises, producing them readily and unprovoked” (WW 206).

History as a costume

In *Żeby nie było śladów. Sprawa Grzegorza Przemyka*, awarded with Nike, Cezary Łazarewicz explores more recent history than that presented in books by Małgorzata Szejnert and Filip Springer. Łazarewicz’s book tells the story of one of the most notorious political murders of the People’s Republic of Poland, commonly known and widely discussed after 1989. Grzegorz

³⁸Paweł Goźliński, “Szejnert na Wyspie Węży. Paweł Goźliński o warsztacie królowej reportażu” [Szejnert on Snake Island. Paweł Goźliński on the work of the queen of reportage], *Książki* 1 (2018).

Przemyk, son of the poet Barbara Sadowska, supporter of the underground “Solidarność” was attacked by the police. Although assaults by so-called “person or persons unknown” were not uncommon at the time, in Przemyk’s case it was clear from the start who his attackers were. The book makes it obvious from its first pages. In an interview for “Gazeta Wyborcza”, Hanna Krall says to Łazarewicz:

The case was clear, a healthy boy entered a police station, and a fatally beaten one left it. I had been a reporter for 30 years, I was not naive, and yet I was surprised. How can one lie so much?³⁹.

Since readers also know this, they can focus on the mechanisms functioning in Poland at the time of the crime rather than on solving the mystery.

Łazarewicz skillfully captures the dark atmosphere of the 1980s Warsaw, convincingly demonstrating how oppressive the People’s Republic of Poland was – a state where *de facto* any citizen could fall prey to authorities who broke people’s lives. Grzegorz Przemyk was a victim of an authoritarian regime, whose officials not only broke the law, but were also protected by their superiors. The authorities did not hesitate to destroy the lives of innocent citizens. *Żeby nie było śladów* also tells the story of resisting the system. The protagonists – Grzegorz Przemyk, his mother and friends – have become symbols of resistance. They know in advance that they stand no chance against the totalitarian regime, but they try to resist it nonetheless. Although not the first book on that topic, due to Łazarewicz’s meticulousness in finding sources, his tenacity in extracting knowledge from witnesses, *Żeby nie było śladów* demonstrates how little we know about the famous case.

For Łazarewicz, the murder of a senior high school student, similarly to the already cited reportages, is only an excuse for telling a more interesting story. Although he does not have the same ambition as Ryszard Kapuściński, who revealed the universal dimension of power in *The Emperor*, by using an event from our recent history Łazarewicz incisively presents the mechanisms of an authoritarian regime. Therefore, his book is first and foremost a story about a lie overwhelming the political reality. Hence the motto from *Struktura kłamstwa* [The structure of a lie] by Piotr Wierzbicki:

Lies do not walk alone.
they walk in packs.
Organized packs.
Lies organize into a system (SP 7).

The case of Grzegorz Przemyk is used to present the gigantic machine of manipulation of power founded on an unprecedented lie, whose structure Łazarewicz analyses. The book shocks with the number of people and institutions involved in covering up the crime – not only the police, doctors, state authorities, propagandists, but even scientists who issued fraudulent documents and opinions – as well as how easy it is to fall prey to manipulation. Łazarewicz

³⁹“Była jak wilczyca. Z Hanną Krall rozmawia Cezary Łazarewicz” [She was like a she-wolf. An interview with Hanna Krall by Cezary Łazarewicz], *Gazeta Wyborcza* 6.10.2016.

demonstrates the role played by “creating an adequate story” (Jerzy Urban, the government spokesman at the time, was instrumental in it); he gives an account of consultations with propaganda experts, including Prof. Włodzimierz Szewczuk – a sociologist from the Jagiellonian University who proposed to present “the enemy” in the darkest way possible, as well as to improve the image of the police and security service: “A year was enough to destroy the credibility of key witnesses, confuse the case, obliterate the traces and find porters who confessed to a crime they had not commit” (SP 240).

Accepting the Nike Award in 2017, Łazarewicz said that a lie can still be presented as the truth⁴⁰, and in his laudation Tomasz Fiałkowski clearly highlighted the universal character of Łazarewicz’s book:

This is a story from over three decades ago, from a closed chapter in our history, but the mechanisms it describes can always happen again. [...] It is a credible testament of those times, but also a warning against what can happen when the justice system loses its independence and becomes a political tool. [...] The author warns modern readers against wishing to return to strong, authoritarian power, which always equals lawlessness and injustice”⁴¹.

This is a key message from Łazarewicz’s reportage – a cautionary tale.

In 2009 Robert Traba attempted to name and identify two different ways of talking about history today: national homogeneity and heroization of history *versus* renegotiations and expanding the perspective⁴². The reporters discussed in the present paper represent the latter, anthropological history – as Karol Modzelewski put it – which “helps to notice the world’s cultural heterogeneity and traces of the past still present in today’s reality, sometimes very distant and surprisingly long-lasting. This may help us [and this is the dimension I observe in the reporters cited here – MW] in recognizing dangerous traps and obstacles with which, despite apparent uniformization, the present abounds”⁴³.

translated by Paulina Zagórska

⁴⁰Cezary Łazarewicz’s speech, cited from: Emilia Dłużewska, “Nike 2017 – relacja z gali” [Nike 2017 – gala report], *Gazeta Wyborcza* 1.10.2017.

⁴¹Tomasz Fiałkowski, “Nike 2017. Laudacja: «Żeby nie było śladów» jest świadectwem i przestrogą” [Nike 2017. Laudation: «Żeby nie było śladów» is both a testament and a warning], *Gazeta Wyborcza* 1.10.2017.

⁴²Traba, 34.

⁴³Karol Modzelewski, “Trzy modele historiografii” [Three models of historiography], *Nauka* 2 (2009): 21.

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KEYWORDS

reportage

ABSTRACT:

History has always been and will always be present in the Polish reportage, as showcased by such names as Ksawery Pruszyński and Melchior Wańkowicz, who wrote about recent history being aware that they lived in historically significant times. Ryszard Kapuściński repeatedly stressed that in a way, a reporter is also a historian, that explaining the present with the past is always worthwhile. Today history also plays a different role in reportages; in recent years there have been a number of so-called “historical reportages”, e.g. by Anna Bikont, Cezary Łazarewicz and Paweł Smoleński, which may suggest discovering some “uncharted territories” from the past. However, this is not the case; these reporters usually write about episodes from our history which have already been scrutinized by professional historians. In their books history works as a key to explaining the present. By mythologizing – or, conversely, demythologizing – our past, or by framing narratives within a historical context, they create models and outlines of human existence to draw attention to contemporary issues.

HISTORY

d e m y t h o l o g i z a t i o n

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The meaning of the author's biography in studies on the literature of Polish Enlightenment – the case of Cyprian Godebski

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These days, there is likely no need to convince anyone that an author's biography is important for literary studies. This is how Janusz Sławiński addressed this extremely complex issue in his classic study published in 1975, *Myśli na temat: biografia pisarza jako jednostka procesu historycznoliterackiego* [Thoughts on the subject: a writer's biography as a unit of the historical-literary process]:

It is almost embarrassing to repeat this cliché: everything writers experience is a potential topic for their works. One can't help but assume that a characteristic feature of the ways in which authors experience everything is their readiness to topicalise those experiences as possible building blocks of the literary world, as an opportunity for articulating such experiences. An "opportunity" is something feasible, therefore it follows the patterns and conventions of literary works, which are alive in a given time and place. Authors view their experiences, as well as those of other people entangled in their biography, in terms of potential for new works. This means, more or less, that

the authors merge what they have seen and heard following the stereotypes of literary tradition. Their “lives” enters the historical-literary process even before any work has begun to crystallise¹.

Sławiński's text, which postulates a break with anachronistic practices of biographical writing of the “life and works” type, was one of the most interesting voices in the debate on the relationship between the “self” of the creator and the “self” of the narrator, and as such it was nothing exceptional, contrary to what is sometimes written about structuralism-inspired literary reflections. One of many similar examples is Stefan Sawicki's essay *Między autorem a podmiotem mówiącym* [*Between the author and the narrator*], published in 1977 in “Pamiętnik Literacki”. Sawicki insisted on such restoration of the “human perspective” in literary studies which would protect “the achievements of contemporary methodology, with its predominantly structural and semantic orientation”².

Musings on the importance of an author's biography in literary-historical studies do not, of course, signify an attempt to return to old methodological perspectives³. However, looking back, especially given a quick succession of subsequent turns in the (post)humanities⁴, in the long run might offer a chance to contemplate and organize issues of the relationship between life and work as an important problem mainly for the researcher of the literature of the past. Notably, for the editors of *Pisarze polskiego oświecenia* [*Authors of Polish Enlightenment*] stressed in the first volume of this fundamental publications for the researcher of Polish Enlightenment:

regardless of methodological orientation, a literary scholar is obliged to take into account the fact that authors exist, they have names, participate in different ways in social life, they have individual fates, and above all – while under different circumstances, with different motivations and goals – they create unique literary works of their own⁵.

¹ Janusz Sławiński, *Myśli na temat: biografia pisarza jako jednostka procesu historycznoliterackiego* [Thoughts on the subject: a writer's biography as a unit of the historical-literary process], in his: *Prace wybrane*, t. 4: *Próby teoretycznoliterackie* [Selected works, vol. 4: Literary theoretical trials] (Kraków: Universitas, 2000), 168 (first printed in: *Biografia – geografia – kultura literacka* [Biography – geography – literary culture], ed. by Jerzy Ziomek, Janusz Sławiński [Wrocław: Ossolineum, 1975]).

² Stefan Sawicki, „Między autorem a podmiotem mówiącym” [“Between the author and the speaking subject”], *Pamiętnik Literacki* 2 (1977): 113, 121.

³ Due to the nature of this publication I was unable to present, even briefly, the most important concepts and research ideas concerning the meaning of the author in literary reflections. The difficult task of synthesising views on the role of the author in Polish literary studies was taken up by Tomasz Bilczewski in his „Subjekt – obiekt – abiekt: «pajęczno-wiotka tkanina»” [“Subject – object – «a spider's web-fragile fabric»”, in: *Wiek teorii. Sto lat nowoczesnego literaturoznawstwa polskiego* [A century of theories. A hundred years of modern Polish literary studies], ed. by Danuta Ulicka (Warszawa: IBL PAN, 2020), 161–230 (this work also contains a list of the most important works).

⁴ A distinct, if related issue concerns the position of reflections concerning relations between (auto)biography and literature in modern (post)humanities. It is meaningful that this is the starting point for the expert in the field, Małgorzata Czermińska, who postulates the thesis about the “critical stage” of autobiographism. Małgorzata Czermińska, „Autobiografia i metafory” [„Autobiography and metaphors”], in: *Projekt na daleką metę. Prace ofiarowane Ryszardowi Nyczowi* [A long-term project. Works dedicated to Ryszard Nycz], ed. by Zdzisław Łapiński, Anna Nasiłowska (Warszawa: IBL PAN, 2017), 99.

⁵ „Od redakcji” [„From the editors”], in: *Pisarze polskiego oświecenia*, t. 1 [Writers of Polish Enlightenment, vol. 1], ed. by Teresa Kostkiewiczowa, Zbigniew Goliński (Warszawa: Wydawnictwo Naukowe PWN, 1992), 5. The „personalistic aspect” of this publication was noticed and appreciated by Barbara Wolska, „Pisarze polskiego Oświecenia”, vol. 1, ed. by Teresa Kostkiewiczowa and Zbigniew Goliński, Warszawa 1992”, *Pamiętnik Literacki* 3 (1994); see. esp. 209, 219.

Expressed in the first volume of the publication from thirty years ago in response to the challenges of literary studies at the time, this remark is only superficially a cliché. In fact, the conviction that a special relationship between a work and its creator only started with Romantic literature is not at all exceptional. Let us quote Tomasz Kunz:

The perception of a literary work as an expression of creative genius, characteristic of the Romantic era, and the belief in the “organic” unity of the work and the creator naturally led researchers to be interested in the author and his or her biography and personality. It was developed, first of all, as a response to classicist normative poetics, which considered literature in terms of strictly codified rules and references to the concept of imitating ancient models of poetry⁶.

The above-quoted passage features in the introduction to the book *Wielec niż słowa. Literatura jako forma istnienia* [More than words. Literature as a form of existence], which - in keeping with the poetics of this type of statement - provides general remarks and observations before considering Polish poetry of the 20th and 21st centuries. It is therefore hard to expect a nuanced, in-depth reflection on authorial presence in old texts in a piece whose goals and cognitive ambitions are concerned with other issues. However, one can assume that Kunz's declaration reflects a common way of looking at the pre-Romantic eras, which can also be noticed in the works of scholars who do not deal with old literature. A radical consequence of this perspective may be Mirosław Strzyżewski's problematic remark:

A handful of facts salvaged from the lives of Jan Kochanowski, Jan Andrzej Morsztyn, as well as Ignacy Krasicki and Stanisław Trembecki, is enough and there is no need for interpretation or overt exposure of their biographies as the little there is fits perfectly in the space of domestic Renaissance, courtly Baroque and the period of Enlightenment [...]. Literary values and senses in the old periods are integral to, and stem from tradition and convention; they are unaffected by the creation of the author's subjectivity⁷.

And yet there is no doubt that reflection on the ways in which the self is manifested, pursued both by Old Polish and Enlightenment writers (often bearing the stamp of the personal author), is often a necessary part of an interpretation which takes into account the anthropological ideas of the era. Here, it is references to traditions and conventions, whose recognition plays a significant role in the reading of the works of past eras, that make up

⁶ Tomasz Kunz, „Wstęp” [„Introduction”], in his: *Wielec niż słowa. Literatura jako forma istnienia* [More than words. Literature as a form of existence] (Kraków: Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Jagiellońskiego, 2019), 7–8. See also Anna Nasiłowska, „Historia modernistycznego podmiotu” [„A history of the modernist subject”], in her: *Persona liryczna* [The lyrical persona] (Warszawa: IBL PAN, 2000), 21–22. The (definitely coincidental) similarity between Kunz's subtitle and Dariusz C. Maleszyński's phrase seems interesting: *Człowiek w tekście. Formy istnienia według literatury staropolskiej* [The man in the text. Forms of existence according to Old Polish literature] (Poznań: Wydawnictwo Naukowe UAM, 2002).

⁷ Mirosław Strzyżewski, „Model «biografii typowej» romantyka” [„A model of a Romantic's «typical biography»”], in: *Biografie romantycznych poetów* [Biographies of Romantic poets], ed. by Zofia Trojanowiczowa, Jerzy Borowczyk (Poznań: Wydawnictwo Poznańskiego Towarzystwa Przyjaciół Nauk, 2007), 109. See also Michał Kuziak's remarks on Strzyżewski's concepts: Michał Kuziak, „Biografie romantycznych poetów”, ed. by Zofia Trojanowiczowa, Jerzy Borowczyk, index by Barbara Hajdasz, Poznań 2007”, *Pamiętnik Literacki* 3 (2009): 230–231.

what Strzyżewski calls “the creation of the author’s subjectivity.” As one of the many possible cases exemplifies, Janina Abramowska’s dissertation devoted to the muse of Czarnolas highlights the role of Renaissance personal models in Jan Kochanowski’s lyrical autobiography⁸. Earlier, a similar strategy was adopted by Teresa Kostkiewiczowa in her monograph *Kniaźnin jako poeta liryczny* [*Kniaźnin as a lyrical poet*]. From the perspective of this theme, it is worth emphasising that “observing the relationship between the categories of the personal author, the literary subject and the “I” speaking, is one of the ways in which one can study the meanings of the work in its relationship with the totality of literary phenomena from which it grows”⁹.

Following from these clues, let us try to consider the case of Cyprian Godebski, not only because it is necessary to narrow down the complex issue of the relationship between “life” and “works” to just one author. The works of Godebski, who is typically described as a poet-legionary or a poet-soldier, dividing his time between Mars and Minerva¹⁰, include such texts whose interpretation requires taking considering the biographical aspect¹¹. This is clear from studies on his literary legacy, written in different periods by researchers implementing differing methodologies, to mention but Mieczysław Smolarski¹², Zbigniew Kubikowski (primarily as the author of introductions to editions of Godebski’s selected texts¹³), Ryszard Przybylski¹⁴,

⁸ Janina Abramowska, „Kochanowskiego biografia kreowana” [„A created biography of Kochanowski”], *Teksty* 1 (1978). The specificity of autocreationist mechanisms of Renaissance poetry (also in relation to Kochanowski’s works) was also pointed out by, e.g. Jerzy Ziomek. See: Jerzy Ziomek, „Autobiografizm jako hipoteza konieczna («Treny» Jana Kochanowskiego)” [„Autobiographism as a necessary hypothesis”. Jan Kochanowski’s («Laments»)], in: *Biografia – geografia – kultura literacka* [Biography – geography – literary culture], 41–60 (Abramowska cited this article in the text quoted above); Jerzy Ziomek, „Poeta jako źródło historyczne. Glosa do referatu Wiktora Weintrauba” [“The poet as a historical source. A gloss to Wiktor Weintraub’s paper”], in: *Dzieło literackie jako źródło historyczne* [The literary work as a historical source], ed. by Zofia Stefanowska, Janusz Sławiński (Warszawa: Czytelnik, 1978), 166–175.

⁹ Teresa Kostkiewiczowa, *Kniaźnin jako poeta liryczny* [*Kniaźnin as a lyrical poet*] (Wrocław: Ossolineum, 1971), 188. The scholar, returning after many years to *Kniaźnin*’s poetry, noted earlier interest in the topic of subjectivity. See: Teresa Kostkiewiczowa, „Problematyka podmiotowości w liryce *Kniaźnina*. «Do Piotra Borzęckiego»” [“The issue of subjectivity in *Kniaźnin*’s poetry. «To Piotr Borzęcki»”, in: *Czytanie *Kniaźnina** [Reading *Kniaźnin*], ed. by Bożena Mazurkova, Tomasz Chachulski (Warszawa: Fundacja Akademia Humanistyczna, IBL PAN, 2010), 131–132.

¹⁰ See, e.g. O... (L. Osiński), „Wiadomość o życiu i pismach Cypriana Godebskiego” [„A notice about the life and works of Cyprian Godebski”], *Pamiętnik Warszawski* 1 (1809): 91.

¹¹ Godebski’s case is not, of course, unusual. The inevitability of triggering the biographical context is relevant also in reference to, say, Laurence Sterne’s novels, in which the author purposefully ascribes to his protagonists features and characteristics which pointed to a personal author (see e.g. Robert Huntley Bell, *Sterne’s Autobiographical Personae*, in his: *The Rise of Autobiography in the Eighteenth Century: Ten Experiments in Literary Genre* – Augustine, Bunyan, Rousseau, Locke, Hume, Franklin, Gibbon, Sterne, Fielding, Boswell [Lewiston: Edwin Mellen Press, 2012]). In Polish Enlightenment this phenomenon is illustrated by, e.g. Maria Württemberg (see e.g. Alina Aleksandrowicz, *Twórczość Marii z ks. Czartoryskich ks. Wirtemberskiej. Literatura i obyczaj* [The works of Maria Czartoryska duchess of Württemberg. Literature and custom] [Warszawa: DIG, 2022]; especially the chapter *To także powieść z kluczem* [This is also a Roman à clef]).

¹² Mieczysław Smolarski, *Poezya legionów. Czasy, pieśń i jej dzieje* [The poetry of legions. Times, hymn, its history] (Kraków: Akademia Umiejętności, 1912); see especially 14–19, 28–33.

¹³ See footnotes 23 and 35.

¹⁴ Ryszard Przybylski, *Klasycyzm, czyli prawdziwy koniec Królestwa Polskiego* [Classicism or a true end of Congress Poland] (Warszawa: Państwowy Instytut Wydawniczy, 1983); especially the chapter *Dusza zamordowanego Królestwa* [The soul of a murdered Kingdom]).

Rafał Rippel¹⁵, Łucja Ginkowa or Artur Timofiejew¹⁶. These scholars' partiality to biographical information can be explained by the importance of events in which Godebski participated and which he witnessed. However, one should also consider "suggestions of autobiographism"¹⁷, scattered throughout his texts, which are present not only in his *Wiersz do Legiów polskich* [A poem to Polish Legions] or *Grenadier-filozof* [Grenadier-philosopher], forcing the reader who interacts with "creativity" to take a closer look at "life." It should be noted that the formula "suggestions of autobiographism" was borrowed from Jacek Lyszczyzna, who used it for describing selected biography-related phenomena in Romantic literature. Presumably, the term is likewise applicable to issues of the Enlightenment era. Lyszczyzna points to suggestions of autobiographism, among others, in the texts of Adam Mickiewicz or Juliusz Słowacki, whose works include the names and sometimes surnames of real people, they reflect the realities of specific places or depict authentic events. Similar elements can also be found in the literary legacy of Godebski, as well as other authors of past eras, for example, Franciszek Dionizy Kniaźnin, who was the subject of Kostkiewiczowa's¹⁸ work.

These suggestions were particularly important for extratextual elements framing the literary work, which perform important functions in the literature of Polish Enlightenment. *Wiersz do Legiów polskich*, to begin with Godebski's most popular text, was accompanied by a preface and explanatory notes. *Krótką wiadomość o Legiach polskich* [A short notice concerning Polish Legions], in turn, provides a coherent picture of the author fulfilling the obligations imposed on him by his writing. Thus, the reader is being prepared to read a text that requires certain background knowledge, particularly historical. It is worth recalling that among the types of prefaces in texts of the Enlightenment, distinguished by Bożena Mazurkowa, one can find prefaces highlighting the historical, cultural and geographical contexts of the works in question¹⁹. As her findings show, these were not popular themes in prefatory texts of Polish Enlightenment. However, they deserve a mention because of their importance: one may assume that they initiated a custom of opening works with commentaries purporting to be "scientific"²⁰. At the same time, Mazurkowa points to the practice of supplementing editions of the works of deceased poets with their biographies, which often adopt the format of "a notice on...", "the life of...". Significantly, this type of publication also appeared in periodicals, as illustrated by the biographies of Godebski²¹

¹⁵Rafał Rippel, „Między konwencją a odmiennością. O konstrukcji narratora w «Grenadierze-filozofie» Cypriana Godebskiego” [„Between convention and difference. On the structure of the narrator in Cyprian Godebski's «Grenadier-philosopher»], *Zeszyty Naukowe Uniwersytetu Opolskiego. Filologia Polska* 38 (1997): 27–36.

¹⁶See especially Artur Timofiejew, *Legiony i vitae lex. Problemy twórczości literackiej Cypriana Godebskiego* [Legions and vitae lex. Issues in Cyprian Godebski's literary works] (Lublin: Wydawnictwo UMCS, 2002).

¹⁷Jacek Lyszczyzna, „Romantyczna sugestia autobiografizmu tekstu” [„A Romantic suggestion of textual autobiographism”], in: *Biografie romantycznych poetów* [Biographies of Romantic poets], 139–146.

¹⁸Kostkiewiczowa, *Kniaźnin jako poeta liryczny*, 178–181.

¹⁹Bożena Mazurkowa, *Literacka rama wydawnicza dzieł Franciszka Dionizego Kniaźnina (na tle porównawczym)* [Literary frame of Franciszek Dionizy Kniaźnin's works (against a comparative background)] (Katowice: Uniwersytet Śląski, 1993), 75.

²⁰Mazurkowa, 75. See also Teresa Kostkiewiczowa, „Krytyka literacka w Polsce w epoce oświecenia” [Literary criticism in Poland of the Enlightenment era], in: Elżbieta Sarnowska-Temeriusz, Teresa Kostkiewiczowa, *Krytyka literacka w Polsce w XVI i XVII wieku oraz w epoce oświecenia* [Literary criticism in Poland of the 16th and 17th centuries and in the Enlightenment period] (Wrocław: Ossolineum, 1990), 283–294.

²¹Kostkiewiczowa, „Krytyka literacka w Polsce w epoce oświecenia”, 283–294.

quoted in this article. This preference for commemorating not only “work” but also “life” can be explained, according to Tomasz Bilczewski, by reference to the historical context and an obvious sense of responsibility to preserve national identity in the absence of an independent state²².

In the case of *Krótką wiadomość...* the need to comment on recent events (let us remember that the work in question was published in 1805) does not, as already noted, stem from their total absence in public awareness. However, the history of the legions is “badly present” – it is full of understatements and misrepresentations. That did not change, as Godebski points out, even with the return of the legionaries to lands which were once part of the Republic of Poland: “without any accurate information concerning the legions, the citizen accepted everything in good faith, on account of historical trials. Hence those misleading and bizarre stories not only about the beginning of the legions, but even about their condition, deeds, numbers [...]”²³. *Krótką wiadomość...* is a (partial) answer to this problem, “before the pen of a noble fellow citizen and erstwhile colleague bestows upon his countrymen an accurate sketch of the history of their brethren” (Ww 3). The commemoration that the legionary deed deserves must meet certain conditions. In other words, the memory of the legionaries must be truthful. While the preface in question does not make references to the author’s own experiences as an authenticating device, it seems unlikely that the then reader, who knew the name of the poem’s author (as it featured on the title page of the 1805 print), did surrender to the suggestion of autobiographism. Moreover, the title page included two lines of *Wiersz do Legiów polskich* (“Unable to do a different service to my brothers, / Gratitude, as far as it is possible, should pay the debts”), followed by the source of that quote²⁴. The term “brothers” attracts the reader’s attention, as it suggests that the author is part of the community he is addressing. The conviction that the author was also a witness and participant in the described events is reinforced through the passage preceding the quote, which concerns the death of Godebski’s brother and the consolation provided by his friend (and his superior) – Franciszek Rymkiewicz (Ww 21)²⁵.

It should be noted that one of the goals of *Krótką wiadomość...* was also to free the reader “from frequently perusing the footnotes” (Ww 3). The authorial presentation we have witnessed here is reminiscent of the Enlightenment concept of the writer-teacher, who recognises his own activity in the literary sphere as a necessary obligation to the community; an obligation which must be fulfilled. Godebski’s abandonment of the soldier’s path (which proved to be

²²Bilczewski, 180–182.

²³Cyprian Godebski, „Krótką wiadomość o Legiach polskich” [„A short notice about Polish Legions”], in his: *Wybór wierszy* [Selection of poems], edited by Zbigniew Kubikowski (Wrocław: Zakład Narodowy im. Ossolińskich, 1956), 4 (henceforth, “Ww” followed by page number; this edition will be used here as a source for quotations from Godebski, unless stated otherwise;). An interesting reading strategy for *Krótką wiadomość...* was introduced by Danuta Zawadzka, for whom Godebski’s foreword is a product of acute awareness that „the process of losing the memory of legionaries is directly proportional to the popularity of their legend”. Danuta Zawadzka, „Pokolenie 1812” [„Generation 1812”], in her: *Pokolenie klęski 1812 roku. O Antonim Malczewskim i odludkach* [Generation: debacle 1812. On Antoni Malczewski and the recluses] (Warszawa: IBL PAN, 2000), 86.

²⁴Łucja Ginkowa, „Cyprian Godziemba Godebski (1765–1809)”, in: *Pisarze polskiego oświecenia*, vol. 3, ed. by Teresa Kostkiewiczowa, Zbigniew Goliński (Warszawa: Wydawnictwo Naukowe PWN, 1996), 103.

²⁵Łucja Ginkowa, „Cyprian Godziemba Godebski (1765–1809)”, in: *Pisarze polskiego oświecenia*, vol. 3, ed. by Teresa Kostkiewiczowa, Zbigniew Goliński (Warszawa: Wydawnictwo Naukowe PWN, 1996), 103.

temporary), motivated by the Treaty of Lunéville (1801)²⁶, was not, after all, tantamount to renouncing his *pro publico bono* activity. There was no question of the importance of the word as a tool of social communication, for the co-founder of the “Dekada Legionowa”²⁷ journal (he announced it in footnote 13 to *Wiersz do Legiów polskich*; Ww 36-37) and – later still – to “Zabawy Przyjemne i Pożyteczne” [“The Games of Business and Pleasure”]. By founding the first periodical in the history of Polish culture which was intended for soldiers, Godebski (to use Józef Kalasanty Szaniawski’s term) “contributed [...] significantly to the dissemination of military news, patriotism and moral principles in [...] the newly founded settlement of the Polish nation”²⁸. In a letter to Ksawery Kossecki dated March 4, 1799, he informed his friend of his publishing activities:

“And in order not to be idle, I am publishing “Dekadowe Pismo”, that is, a legion magazine for every decade. I cannot, therefore, offer any consolation that I am of any service to the people. Now you know all about your Cyprian, who knows how to value and love you”²⁹.

The imperative of social utility, recurring in the speeches of the author of *Wiersz do Legiów polskich*, is closely related to ethical issues and anthropological ideals he promotes. Therefore, in *Pochwała Konfucjusza, filozofa chińskiego* [In praise of Confucius, the Chinese philosopher] Godebski introduces a peculiar typology of fame. In addition to “vainglorious fame”, whose splendor “fades with time”, one should mention “reliable fame” - its foundation is virtue and “making others happy”³⁰.

A shared element that unites Godebski’s writing and his educational activity, therefore, is a specific (and purposeful) creation of the speaker’s “self”, featuring strong echoes of the Enlightenment (mostly classicist) concept of the poet as a teacher of a given community. This creation is reconcilable with the new role of the writer-*proto-intellectual*, shaped under the influence of economic, social and political factors. This new writer is convinced of the need to “enlighten” fellow citizens (including rank-and-file soldiers). The effectiveness of this creation is proven not only confirmed by Szaniawski, quoted earlier. This is what Michał Janowski wrote about the author of *Wiersz do Legiów polskich* in his monograph on the birth of Polish intelligentsia:

²⁶For the aftermath of the Treaty of Lunéville see e.g. Jan Pachoński, *Korpus oficerski Legionów Polskich 1796–1807* [Officer corps of Polish Legions 1796-1807] (Kraków: Księgarnia Akademicka, 1999), 17–18. See also Przybylski, 240–44.

²⁷About „Dekada Legionowa” see, e.g. Leon Zieleniewski, „Dekada”. *Pismo legionów polskich w 1799 r.* [The Decade. A journal of Polish Legions in 1799], foreword by Stefan Krzywoszewski (Warszawa: Wydawnictwo Polskiego Związku Wydawców Dzienników i Czasopism, 1938).

²⁸Józef Kalasanty Szaniawski, „Pochwała Cypriana Godebskiego” [„In praise of Cyprian Godebski”], in: Cyprian Godebski, *Dzieła wierszem i prozą, cz. 1* [Cyprian Godebski. Works of poetry and prose, part 1] (Warszawa: wyd. K. Godebski, 1821), 21–22. The educational aspect of the Legions’ activities was studied, e.g. by Pachoński (esp. chapter.: *Kształcenie ogólne, Wkład korpusu oficerskiego do nauki i kultury* [General education, The impact of the officer corps on science and culture]).

²⁹Quoted from Maria Józefacka, „Listy Cypriana Godebskiego do Ksawerego Kosseckiego i innych osób” [„Cyprian Godebski’s letters to Ksawery Kossecki and others”], *Archiwum Literackie. Miscellanea z lat 1800–1850* [Literary Archive. Miscellanea for 1800-1850] 11 (1967): 160.

³⁰Godebski, *Dzieła wierszem i prozą*, 51–52. Przybylski, among others, wrote about the concept of fame in Godebski’s works, 231–233.

The Legions were important for yet another reason. Among their organizers was a group of intellectuals, former conspirators and insurgents, who, through their decision to participate in an armed struggle, consciously situated themselves outside the old structures of the state. Perhaps their fate was best embodied by the soldier and writer, Cyprian Godebski [...] - a freemason, conspirator and legionary. In Italy he edited the legionary periodical "Dekada Polska", and when he returned to Prussian Warsaw after the legions were disbanded, he became a member of the recently founded Society of Friends of Sciences. Godebski's most popular work, *Wiersz do Legiów Polskich* (1805), is an excellent piece of evidence on the state of mind of a Polish "proto-intellectual" at a time when there was yet no indication that the political system established in the Polish lands as a result of the Third Partition might soon collapse³¹.

Janowski's depiction of Godebski's biography as the embodiment of the fate of a legionary proto-intellectual evokes, only seemingly contradictory (given Godebski's re-entering the military path 1806), Romantic legend of poet-soldiers following a certain code of ethics, an essential element of which was total devotion to the "Polish cause"³². The author of *Wiersz do Legiów polskich* would not object to this model, an excellent example of which is *Grenadier-filozof* (1805), with an evocative subtitle: *A true story extracted from a travelogue for the year 1799*. Its autobiographical aspect was pointed out by the already quoted Szaniawski in his eulogy in honor of Godebski, delivered at a formal meeting of the Society of Friends of Science in 1809³³. Later commentators on his work also exposed this "personal element," consisting, as Konstanty Wojciechowski noted, "not only in the fidelity of the events depicted and experienced, but also in the tendentious colouring of the novel, and in its emotional aspect"³⁴. As in the case of *Wiersz do Legiów polskich*, here too we witness the author's care for the trustworthiness and accessibility of his account. The first chapter contains a description of the tragic surrender of the fortress in Mantua (1799), and the "footnotes" include, among other things, information on various localities mentioned in the work. A slightly different function is performed by footnote 25, with information about Major Kamiński's chivalrous actions at Cortona (1799), with a noteworthy comment:

Worthy Kaminski! you remind us of the once brave Kowalski Korabczyk, and if the deed of that one is testified to by ancient histories, yours is supported by the testimony of living colleagues. Our forefathers decorated their history with similar works; I decorate with your deed

³¹Maciej Janowski, „W służbie państwa (1807–1809)” [“In the service of state (1807-1809)”], in his: *Narodziny inteligencji 1750–1831* [The birth of intelligentsia 1750-1831] (Warszawa: Neriton, 2008), 118.

³²See e.g. Zawadzka, 126–128.

³³Szaniawski, 23. It seems to me that the conventionalized description of Godebski in the above-mentioned foreword, highlighted by Kostkiewiczowa, has an exemplary function and remains consistent with the project of a man-citizen, which can be discerned from the papers of the author of *Wiersz do Legiów polskich*. Kostkiewiczowa, *Krytyka literacka*, 287–288.

³⁴Konstanty Wojciechowski, *Historia powieści w Polsce. Rozwój typów i form romansu polskiego na tle porównawczym* [A history of the novel in Poland. Development of types and forms of the Polish romance in a comparative context] (Lwów: Księgarnia Gubrynowicza i syna, 1925), 87. See also Grzegorz Zająć's interpretation, which includes Godebski's *Pamiętnik oblężenia Mantui* [The diary of the siege of Mantua]. Grzegorz Zająć, „Dziennik podróży czy prawdziwa powieść? O «Grenadierze-filozofie» Cypriana Godebskiego”, [„A travelogue or a real novel? On Cyprian Godebski's «Grenadier-philosopher»], *Ruch Literacki* 6 (1996): 685–698.

a small work, which is worthy of some merit only because it was inspired by friendship and civic feelings³⁵.

The quoted passage proves that the value of the work lies in the fact that it can be treated as a testimony to the deeds of the Legions. Suggestions of autobiographism in *Grenadier-filozof* which appear, among other things, in the subtitle, dedication, analogies between the fate of the narrator and the author, are a necessary element of the story which can save the past both from oblivion and from falsification (which was expressed explicitly in *Krótką wiadomość* ... cited above). What remains to be considered is the comparison of Kamiński to “the once brave Kowalski Korabczyk,” which was described by Wespazjan Kochowski in *Roczniki* [*Annals*] and recalled at the beginning of the 19th century by Jan Paweł Woronicz in *Rozprawa pierwsza o pieśniach narodowych* [*The first treatise on national songs*] (1803) as one example of the valour of Polish knighthood³⁶. Concern for preserving the history of a nation deprived of a state, which is a constant element of metapoetic authorial statements in the post-partition era³⁷, in the text under discussion bears a trait of sentimentality, supplemented by a “personal element”. The narrator, who is asked by a host in Pont-de-Beauvoisin about an old comrade, major K..., relays the information he has heard about his serious condition due to wounds received at Cortona (Gf 49-50). This tendency always to reminisce about other legionaries and friends is characteristic of all of Godebski’s work. *Grenadier-filozof* is dedicated to Kossecki, after all:

Whatever the custom of dedicating his work to someone is, it brings the author no shame, when he is led by noble motives. Mine are gratitude and friendship. [...] If this work of mine is not received by my countrymen with what self-love would demand, I will be rewarded enough if you receive it with the kind of affection with which your constant friend C. Godebski dedicates it to you (Gf 3-4).

Gratitude and friendship, possibly reconcilable with “true” fame, which can be achieved - as stated in *Pochwała Konfucjusza*... - through bringing happiness to others, are the basis of the ideal model of human relations and thus, more broadly, of a dignified life. In his interpretation of *Grenadier-filozof* Artur Timofiejew points out that the novel’s protagonists “form [...] a ‘republic of friends’ united by a community of worldview, morality; by living ‘according to virtue’, following their inner convictions, they fully realize their humanity”³⁸. Thus, the “suggestions of autobiographism” that interest us here lend credibility to the characters presented, indicated as worthy of emulation, and ones who are guided by feeling, which allows them to establish a bond with others and themselves. The work, inspired by gratitude and friend-

³⁵Cyprian Godebski, *Grenadier-filozof. Powieść prawdziwa wyjęta z dziennika podróży roku 1799* [*Grenadier-philosopher. A true novel extracted from a travelogue of 1799*], edited by Zbigniew Kubikowski (Wrocław: Zakład Narodowy im. Ossolińskich, 1952), 74–75 (henceforth, Gf followed by page number).

³⁶Zob. Jan Paweł Woronicz, „Rozprawa pierwsza o pieśniach narodowych” [„The first treatise on national songs”], in his: *Pisma wybrane* [Selected essays], introduction, selection and commentary by Małgorzata Nesteruk, Zofia Rejman (Warszawa: Open, 1993), 237, 671.

³⁷Hanna Jurkowska is one of the authors writing about the actions for saving the memory of the nation’s past. See her *Pamięć sentymentalna. Praktyki pamięci w kręgu Towarzystwa Warszawskiego Przyjaciół Nauk i w Puławach Izabeli Czartoryskiej* [Sentimental memory. Practices of memory in the circle of Warsaw Society of the Friends of Learning and in Izabela Czartoryska’s Puławy] (Warszawa: Wydawnictwa Uniwersytetu Warszawskiego, 2014).

³⁸Timofiejew, 113.

ship and dedicated to friendship, could not therefore have been written by someone devoid of feeling. Once again it is appropriate to recall *Krótką wiadomość...*:

He who wishes to look for art, ornament and charm in my rhyme, let him not begin a poem in vain: he will find there scattered thoughts, dull repetitions; in a word, the image of a demented lover, who in a disorder of elation mourns the loss of a favorite object. I have written for my countrymen with that feeling with which the unhappy one folds his sufferings into the bosom of those similar to him (Ww 11).

The quoted passage recalls the aesthetic and literary declaration of a writer influenced by sentimentalism, treating his own works as an act of self-expression. This peculiar pattern of the poet "being himself," finds an important incarnation in the Enlightenment of king Stanisław Poniatowski era, primarily in the lyricism of Książnin. It seems to require "suggestions of autobiographism", which guarantee the implementation of a specific project, the success of which, however, depends on the opinions of other people (in this case, "suggestions of autobiographism" perform the function of authentication).

Summarizing the analyses presented so far, one may be tempted to distinguish two main reasons for the reveal of the personal author in the text. The first one relates to satisfying the need to give a "true" testimony of the legionary deed, and the second - to the expressive functions of literature. The proposed typology, the purpose of which is to provide a preliminary ordering of certain phenomena, does not, of course, exhaust the problem of the relationship between "life" and "creativity" in the study of the literature of Polish Enlightenment, even if we limit this issue to the literary legacy of Godebski (only a small proportion of which has been presented here). Indeed, in light of the works cited above, *Wiersz do siebie samego* [*A poem to myself*] causes cognitive confusion. In addition to geographical terms (the Styr, the Pina, the Horyń), which are clear indications of autobiographical elements, the aforementioned work also describes the war experience and provides comments on the cultural and social life of the time (e.g., echoes of the disputes around Józef Bielawski or remarks on the Society of Friends of Sciences). The astonishment mentioned above is mainly brought by passages of a metapoetic nature:

Jam niegdyś wśród szczupłego zagonu
 Ledwo o górach słyszał Helikonu,
 Próżnom pasterzy nad Styrem i Piną
 Pytał, gdzie zdroje kastalijskie płyną,
 Na próżnom zwiedzał lasy i strumienia
 Ciekawy faunów i satyrów pienia;
 Wszędzie milczenie panowało głuche.
 [.....]
 Zamiast Orfeja czarującej liry –
 Drzewa runęły pod ciosem siekiéry.
 Jeszcze albowiem wtenczas śpiewak nowy
 Nie natchnął życiem nadbrzeż Horyniowy;
 (Ww 40–42)

(I once, in the midst of a slender homestead
 Barely heard of the mountains of Helicon,
 To the vanity of shepherds on the Styr and Pina rivers
 Asked where the springs of Castalian flow,
 In the vacuum he explored forests and streams
 Curious about the fauns and satyrs' song;
 Everywhere silence reigned deafening.
 [...]
 Instead of Orpheus' charming lyre -
 The trees collapsed under the blow of the axe.
 For yet at that time the new singer
 Did not inspire the Horynian waterfront with life;)
 (Ww 40-42)

The distance from common literary themes expressed here can be taken as proof of a break with classicism and formed within this current ways of talking about the world and the role the poet plays in it. This is what Timofiejew wrote about the analyzed poem in a monograph devoted to Godebski's work:

The ironic dialogue between the subject-poet and the subject-advisor (an expert in the classicist conception of poetry) is intended to criticize the Enlightenment view that considers the utilitarian character of expression as a condition for becoming a poet. [...] The poet does not want to express himself in a socially engaged manner [...] and therefore, according to the advisor, he does not deserve to be called a poet, he ceases to be one³⁹.

The quoted statement is part of a chapter on Godebski's aesthetic and literary outlook, which, as Timofiejew notes in the conclusion, was marked by an eclecticism typical of the early 19th century⁴⁰. Thus, *Wiersz do siebie samgeo* becomes an example of the search for new ways of expressing the self. The status of a poet is to be determined by "the inner voice, the heart, the feeling, not the mere knowledge of the poetic craft"⁴¹.

Undoubtedly, the above-cited passage from Godebski's work reveals a distance from literary conventions, highlighted by Timofiejew, as well as acute disappointment with reality. The image of the search for inspiration is reminiscent of the trope of a meeting with the Muses and their divine guardian, familiar from ancient literature. That trope was also exploited, among others, by Klemens Janicki in his autobiographical elegy *O sobie samym do potomności* [*About myself to posterity*] or, much later, by Książnin in his work *Do Ignacego Bykowskiego* [*To Ignacy*].

³⁹Timofiejew, 22–23.

⁴⁰Timofiejew, 49.

⁴¹Timofiejew, 25.

Bykowski]⁴². Thus, *Wiersz do siebie samego* stands in opposition to traditional, “classical,” as it were, realizations of the motif of the muses or the closely associated trope of the lute⁴³.

The poem in question, however, opens with a motto from Juvenalis’ *Satire I*, which represents an important genre in classicist poetics. The phrase quoted by Godebski - *Facit indignatio versum* (“Indignation gives birth to a poem”) - was often used by writers of earlier eras (e.g., Krzysztof Opaliński, Jan Górczyzewski) as a justification for poetic activity, especially if the fruits of this activity were satires⁴⁴. Let us remember that the above-quoted passage from *Satire I* is preceded by a peculiar disclaimer - “Si natura negat”, translated as: “If nature refuses to respond”⁴⁵, “If talent refuses”⁴⁶. Thus, a creator, even one lacking innate dispositions (developed, as recommended by most classical theorists, through painstaking exercises), can reach for the pen. The prerequisite is an emotion - in this case a negative one - that does not allow the poet to be indifferent to the surrounding circumstances. Such a mode of reading would be in line with Timofiejew’s proposal. However, it should be borne in mind that *indignatio* is a rhetorical concept. As Jerzy Ziomek pointed out, “Affect can contain or be achieved by *indignatio* (indignation) or *conquestio* (complaint).”⁴⁷ The speaker’s indignation should arise a reaction from the audience and convince them of a certain position. Thus, the classical heritage, so important for the literature of the late Enlightenment, is not in opposition to the emotional sphere and can be reconciled with the ways used by the poets to express the self.

⁴²One should deal separately with this poem by Godebski in relation to other metapoetic works, which feature a definitive poetic “I, especially those from the Enlightenment period (although both ancient and Old Polish traditions need to be included too),” e.g. Adam Naruszewicz’s *Zabawa moja* [My game] (see e.g. Agata Ročko, „Poetyckie i filozoficzne credo: «Zabawa moja»” [“Poetic and philosophical credo: «My game»”], in: *Czytanie Naruszewicza* [Reading Naruszewicz], vol. 1, ed. by Barbara Wolska, Teresa Kostkiewiczowa, Bożena Mazurkowska [Warszawa: IBL PAN, 2015]) or Franciszek Dionizy Kniaźnin’s *Z Anakreonta. Sam do siebie* [From Anacreon. Me to myself] (see e.g. Tomasz Chachulski, „Między «Krotofilami i miłośnikami» a «Zalami Orfeusza nad Eurydyką» „Z Anakreonta. Sam do siebie” [„Between «Games and flings» and „Orpheus’ laments over Eurydice». “From Anacreon. Me to myself”], in: *Czytanie Kniaźnina*). I thank professor Teresa Kostkiewiczowa for this suggestion.

⁴³It is worth remembering about the lines quoted above: „Jeszcze albowiem wtenczas śpiewak nowy / Nie natchnął życie nadbrzeż Horyniowy”. According to Kubikowski (Ww 42, footn. for verse 25), they refer to Alojzy Feliński, who, like Godebski, was a graduate of the Piarist school in Dąbrowica (on the Horyń river). In early 19th c. he was already a well-known translator of Delille. If the author’s words were not meant as ironic, then Godebski’s distance towards „classical” realisations of topos might be an expression of his disappointment in his own poetic capabilities.

⁴⁴Józef Tomasz Pokrzywniak, „«Satyra prawdę mówi», czyli rzecz o fałszywych przesłankach” [„«Satire tells the truth», or a thing about false premises”] *Pamiętnik Literacki* 4 (1984): 91–93 (the article was expanded into a chapter *Satyryk wśród konwencji gatunku* [A satirist amongst conventions of the genre], published in his monograph *Ignacy Krasicki wśród pisarzy polskiego oświecenia* [Ignacy Krasicki amongst the writers of Polish Enlightenment] [Poznań: Wydawnictwo Naukowe UAM, 2015]). Information on satire and the concept of writer-satirist are reconstructed on the basis of that article, unless stated otherwise.

⁴⁵See Tomasz Sapota, *Juvenalis* [Juvenal] (Katowice: Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Śląskiego, 2009), 82. Writers of the Antiquity are ambiguous towards what was referred to as *indignatio*. On the one hand, especially in stoic ethics, „indignation” was valorised negatively, on the other – it constituted an important element of reflections on the rhetoric and stance of the speaker (also in reference to the speaker’s rhetorical skill. See, e.g. Catherine Keane, „Anger Games”, in her: *Juvenal and the satiric emotions* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015, 26–67; Sapota, 31–38, 79–87).

⁴⁶Juvenal, „Satyra I” [„Satire I”], transl. by J. Sękowski, in: *Trzej satyrycy rzymscy* [Three Roman satirists], introduction and edition by Lucyna Winniczuk (Warszawa: PIW, 1958), 119.

⁴⁷Jerzy Ziomek, *Retoryka opisowa* [Descriptive rhetoric] (Wrocław: Ossolineum, 1990), 116. The meaning of affect in Old Polish literature, likewise important for the people of Enlightenment, was studied by Barbara Otwinowska, „Afekty” [“Affects”], in: *Słownik literatury staropolskiej* [The dictionary of Old Polish literature], ed. by Teresa Michałowska, Barbara Otwinowska, Elżbieta Sarnowska-Temierusz, 3rd edition (Wrocław: Ossolineum, 2002), 12–16.

At the same time, although this would require an in-depth reflection on the various realizations of the genre of the work in question, one should consider whether “suggestions of autobiographism” scattered in the text, as well as comments on the realities of the time, are not motivated by what the satires refer to as the need to take an active stance towards reality. This would justify the creation of texts by authors who do not belong to the group chosen by the divine guardians of art. The most important duty of a satirical writer is, therefore, to make a stance on reality, especially when that reality is disappointing. It is significant that in many interpretations of satires (both ancient and modern) researchers have exposed the relationship between “life” and “creativity,” which corresponded with the concept of the satirical poet writing under the influence of difficult events and situations⁴⁸. Thus, “suggestions of autobiographism” present in the poem, including primarily the exploitation of events, themes, or situations related to the cultural, literary and moral life of the early 19th century, could be explained not only as a need to express disappointment with the surrounding reality but also as the realization of a certain concept of the poet and poetry, in this case – satirical. Thus, the relationship between life and creativity could be most described by emphasizing their mutual conditioning. Not only would “life” determine “creativity,” but it would itself also be created reciprocally - in the act of creation, subsequent reading, and functioning of “creativity” in specific reading circles⁴⁹.

translated by Justyna Rogos-Hebda

⁴⁸The dangers of treating satire exclusively as evidence of the author's reaction to reality, to the exclusion of the meaning of literary conventions and traditions of the genre, have been discussed, e.g. by Sapota, 28–30.

⁴⁹Including the author's „life” in the interpretation of their „works”, while affording a distinction of various reading strategies related to the mental atmosphere of a given era, allows one to pose questions related both to individual and collective experiences. Yet, it poses dangers, too, especially when appropriate sources are unavailable. A relevant example of this threat is information on the origins of *Dumania żołnierza polskiego w starożytnym zamku Maurów nad Tagiem* [The musing of a Polish soldier in the ancient castle of the Moors on the river Tagus] by Kantorbery Tymowski. The work was supposed to be a record of the poet's soldier experience, but, as proven by Elżbieta Z. Wichrowska's painstaking research, Tymowski did not participate in Napoleon's Spanish campaign. Elżbieta Z. Wichrowska, *Kantorbery Tymowski w świetle nowych źródeł* [Kantorbery Tymowski in the light of new sources] (Warszawa: Wydział Polonistyki Uniwersytetu Warszawskiego, 2002); see esp. 11–32.

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KEYWORDS

biography

author

Cyprian Godebski

ABSTRACT:

The article discusses the importance of a writer's biography for studies on old literature. The topic has been the focus of research for long but hitherto largely limited to 19th- and 20th-c. literature. Given the expansive nature of the issue the author has concentrated here on the works of Cyprian Godebski, who participated in the Napoleonic wars and was author of, among others, *Wiersz do Legiów polskich* [A poem for Polish Legions]. In her analysis of Godebski's literary works the author has pointed to the manners in which they deal with the biographic context, which proved to be an important element of the reading process.

"life and works"

OLDER LITERATURE

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Hard Chimeras

– A Few Words on the Works of Surrealist Women Artists

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What writers should we read?

We should read unknown, forgotten, invented writers. Long live hoaxes! Above all, however, we should read the works of writers who do not describe the world realistically: that's what newspapers and social media are for. Let's escape into literature. Let's escape from reality which is overwhelming with its excess of facts and devastating news. It won't hurt if the writers you like have a soft spot for absurdity, eroticism, black humor, irony, and ambiguity. It's great if their books return to you in your dreams.¹

This is what Agnieszka Taborska, a literary scholar, art historian, and expert in surrealist art, tells us to do in her book *Świat zwariował. Poradnik surrealistyczny jak przeżyć* [The world has gone crazy: A Surrealist guide to surviving]. However, in the end, she also adds: "Among so many men, there are only two younger women who outlived all their fellow Surrealists: Leonora Carrington [...] and Gisèle Prassinos (with her 'automatic' short stories)."² Let us follow Taborska's advice but focus solely on women writers. Let us try to read the works left behind by Surrealist women artists.

Before we can do that, however, we must first attend to other matters. Surrealist women writers must first be "discovered." The history of avant-garde movements in literature and art from the first half of the 20th century is still predominantly a history of men, or at least it seems so to us when we look at the books published on the subject as well as at the catalogues of paintings, sculptures and artifacts. This is true for all avant-garde tendencies and directions, but this artistic masculinization is definitely most visible in Surrealism. The goal of this

¹ Agnieszka Taborska, *Świat zwariował. Poradnik surrealistyczny jak przeżyć* [The world has gone crazy: A Surrealist guide to surviving] (Olszanica: BOSZ, 2021), 16.

² Taborska, *Świat zwariował. Poradnik surrealistyczny jak przeżyć*, 17.

article isto answer two questions: Have there been any great Surrealist women artists?³ And, if it is true, where have they been hiding? Both questions are extremely relevant in the year 2024, a hundred years after the publication of *The Manifesto of Surrealism*.

Muses/Medusas

Although it seems that Polish and world literary studies have provided answers to the first of these questions, the conviction that the artistic avant-garde is predominantly a male-dominated field persists. The historical avant-garde's contribution to the canon (paradoxically, contrary to the avant-garde's greatest fears⁴) is the work of men. André Breton, Paul Éluard, Max Ernst, Salvador Dali, Tristan Tzara, Luis Aragon – these names appear in almost all studies on Surrealist art. These names were most likely absorbed by the Polish research tradition under the influence of Adam Ważyk's *Antologia* [Anthology]⁵ and Krystyna Janicka, a Polish scholar who specialized in Surrealist art.⁶ Avant-garde women artists, although they are making a comeback and being (re)discovered in literary studies and art history,⁷ remain in the shadow. In the most popular and well-known studies, especially in school textbooks, they usually function as muses who inspired great avant-garde artists – we do not look at them as artists in their own right or as someone whose contribution defined the avant-garde. Of course, as Taborska points out, this situation changed in the 1990s; however, it should be clarified that this was as a result of large and important exhibitions organized in the late 1980s, which included the works of women artists. The aforementioned intensification of research in this area concerned mainly art history.⁸ In the history of literature, as Joanna Grądział-Wójcik writes, the matter looks slightly different:

In literary studies there is a dominant tendency to situate women's poetry outside modern literature, and especially outside avant-garde literature.⁹

³ This question of course refers to the title of Linda Nochlin's famous essay "Why have there been no great women artists?" It is meant to be semantically playful. I start with a cognitive error of sorts and actually ask why we do not know anything about great Surrealist women artists or know so little.

⁴ Renato Poggioli, among others, wrote about the fear of becoming ordinary and classicized in the eyes of the audience. See Renato Poggioli, *The theory of the avant-garde* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1981).

⁵ Adam Ważyk, *Surrealizm. Antologia* ([Surrealism. Anthology] Warsaw: Czytelnik, 1976).

⁶ Krystyna Janicka, *Surrealizm* [Surrealism] (Warsaw: Wydawnictwa Artystyczne i Filmowe, 1973).

⁷ Some publications only mention selected texts and paintings by avant-garde women artists; others try to offer not only comprehensive but also innovative approaches that do not place these works within the framework of stereotypical discussions on women's art or art by women. See: Jan Marx, *Grupa poetycka Kwadryga* [Kwadryga poetry group], Warsaw 1983; Andrzej K. Waśkiewicz, *Szesnaście wierszy Mili Elin* [Sixteen poems by Mila Elin], in: Andrzej K. Waśkiewicz, *W kręgu Zwrotnicy* [Zwrotnica circles], Krakow 1983; Agata Zawiszewska, *Między Młoda Polską, Skamandrem i Awangardą. Kobiety piszące wiersze w dwudziestoleci umiędzywojennym* [Among Young Poland, Skamander, and the Avant-Garde: Women poets in the interwar period], Szczecin 2014.

⁸ It is worth paying attention to the publications mentioned by the scholar: *Surrealist women. An international anthology*; *Surrealism and women*; *Mirror images. Women, surrealism and self-representation*; *Inverted Odysseys*. Claude Cahun, Maya Deren, Cindy Sherman, and also add new books: Sylwia Zientek, *Tylko one. Polska sztuka bez mężczyzn*. Muter, Rajeczka, Szapocznikow, Bilińska, Kobro i inne [Women only. Polish art without men. Muter, Rajeczka, Szapocznikow, Bilińska, Kobro and others] (Warsaw: Wydawnictwo Agora, 2023); Michaela Carter, *Leonora in the morning light* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2021) and Whitney Chadwick's classic *Women artists and the surrealist movement*. The Polish translation was published in 2024.

⁹ Joanna Grądział-Wójcik, "«Trudne» wiersze. Konstelacje neoawangardy w poezji kobiecej" ['Difficult' poems. Constellations of the neo-avant-garde in women's poetry], in: *Stulecie poetek polskich. Przekroje. Tematy. Interpretacje* [A century of Polish poets. Cross-sections – themes – interpretations], ed. Joanna Grądział-Wójcik, Agnieszka Kwiatkowska, Ewa Rajewska, Edyta Sołtys-Lewandowska (Krakow: Universitas, 2020), 421.

Is, as Marianna Bocian writes, women's poetry "doomed to be a failure"? For some reason, scholars do not pay as much attention to women writers. One may wonder whether that is because there were fewer women than men writers or because of the artistic qualities of their work, or, finally, because of manipulation [...] – the current *status quo* seems to say more about the mechanisms of reception and the politics of building a canon than about literary practice.¹⁰

What could be the possible excuses? Perhaps that it is impossible to write about everything/everyone: the poetics of a textbook, short and succinct, forces authors to make difficult choices. They often focus on the most distinctive works. However, the history of literature and art is not only full of gaps – it is often based not only on selection but on deliberate exclusion or, harmless as it may appear, silencing.

Let us begin the deconstruction of this model with a work of art that usually features in all histories of art of the interwar period. Everyone is probably familiar with *Fountain* – a work exhibited by Marcel Duchamp (although signed with the name of an unknown artist, R. Mutt). However, increasing evidence proves that it was not Duchamp's work. *Fountain* was probably created (as Duchamp wrote in one of the letters to his sister) by Baroness Elsa von Freytag-Loringhoven – a writer and performance artist born in Swinemünde in Pomerania, who worked with techniques similar to the ones used by Duchamp.¹¹ This theory has not been confirmed, but I mention it because it raises an important question: Why do we know so little about the work of Elsa von Freytag-Loringhoven? After all, she could have contributed to the creation of one of the most important avant-garde works of art. Are we even able to create an alternative list of Surrealist women artists? In addition to the names mentioned above, it should also include: Dorothea Tanning, Meret Oppenheim, Leonor Fini, Eileen Agar, Remedios Varo, Erna Rosenstein, Zuzanna Ginczanka (whose work is usually associated with the Skamander group, although it exhibits surrealist features), and Debora Vogel. Most of them focused mainly on painting, sculpture, and installations. Still, quite a few left behind extremely interesting poems and books of prose. Łukasz Kraj has already discussed the specificity of women's writing within the avant-garde tradition.¹² In this article, I analyze the works by selected Surrealist women artists not to once again assign to them some general(izing) features but to showcase their diversity and artistic individualism within the greater trend. Respectively, I will not write about what feminists owe to Surrealist women artists. Some Surrealist women artists clearly strived for (both social and political) emancipation, while others distanced themselves from feminist movements.¹³ Still, it is worth taking a closer look at how different female characters were constructed, at the tricks that were employed to convey their individuality. We can compare them with the well-known, not to say canonical, Surrealist paintings and texts created by men. Indeed, women occupy an important yet peculiar place in the work of Surrealist men artists:

Max Ernst titled the first of his three collage novels from 1929 *La femme 100 têtes*, which phonetically means both *La femme cent têtes* (The woman with a hundred heads) and *La femme sans tête* (The woman without a head). Both interpretations correspond to the Surrealist vision of women, per-

¹⁰Grądziel-Wójcik, 443.

¹¹See: Zientek, 18.

¹²Łukasz Kraj, "Feminizowanie awangardy? «Na pewno książka kobiety» Wandy Melcer" [Feminizing the avant-garde? 'Definitely a book written by woman' by Wanda Melcer], *Pamiętnik Literacki* 3 (2019): 59–75.

¹³Agnieszka Taborska writes about this question. See: Agnieszka Taborska, *Spiskowcy wyobraźni. Surrealizm* [Conspirators of the imagination. Surrealism] (Gdańsk: Słowo/Obraz Terytoria, 2007), 149.

ceived above all as enigmas and *femmes fatales*. Women are dangerous as hundred-headed hydras. They are haunted mediums who hear voices inaccessible to men. They are madwomen who – having lost their minds – connect with nature and secret rites. In short, they are women without heads.¹⁴

Women in Surrealist paintings are dangerous chimeras that men try to tame (by drawing them as objects, by decapitating them, by fragmenting their bodies, or by immobilizing their frames). In this context, let us emphasize the exceptional status of objects in Surrealist art – objects are subjected to transformation; their meanings change; they have their own unique identity.¹⁵ Unfortunately, presenting women as dismembered objects, depriving them of their faces, results not only in their objectification but also in their exclusion from the order of discourse. However, we will not analyze in detail the general features of Surrealist art, as many researchers have already written on the subject. Instead, we will look at how women artists create a Surrealist world. While they will all be called “Surrealist women artists,” in fact we will focus on extracting their individual poetics and ways of representing the world, as advised by Hélène Cixous:

But first it must be said that in spite of the enormity of the repression that has kept them in the “dark” – that dark which people have been trying to make them accept as their attribute – there is, at this time, no general woman, no one typical woman. What they have *in common* I will say. But what strikes me is the infinite richness of their individual constitutions: you can’t talk about *af*-female sexuality, uniform, homogeneous, classifiable into codes – anymore than you can talk about one unconscious resembling another. Women’s imaginary is inexhaustible, like music, painting, writing: their stream of phantasms is incredible.¹⁶

“feed them cowardly stupidities, and you’ll see how they follow us ...”. Gisèle Prassinos

Few Polish readers have had the opportunity to familiarize themselves with Gisèle Prassinos’s novel, the content and meaning of which contemporary context rendered very timely. It is a novel about artificial intelligence. About artificial intelligence let us add that this construct fails, and at the same time forces individuals to develop not only new skills but above all a different way of looking at the world and their place in it. *Le visage effleuré de peine* [Face touched with sadness] is the story of a young woman who becomes, against her will, the wife of an eccentric scientist. Prassinos explains that the husband used artificial intelligence, the only one of its kind in the world, because when he was working as a miner, his skull was perforated in an accident caused by a methane explosion.¹⁷ Although initially husband and wife live separately, over time Esentielle becomes attached to her husband. Still, she is not able to give up on her freedom and independence completely, and the scientist fears losing his young wife. Interestingly, his perfect brain cannot cope with human emotions and weaknesses – strong emotions

¹⁴Taborska, *Spiskowcy wyobraźni. Surrealizm*, 119.

¹⁵See: André Breton, “La crise de l’objet” [Crisis of the object], *Cahiers d’art* 11/6-10 (1936): 22; Jakub Kornhauser, *Całkowita rewolucja. Status przedmiotów w poezji surrealizmu* [Total revolution: The status of objects in Surrealist poetry] (Krakow: Jagiellonian University Press, 2015).

¹⁶Hélène Cixous, “The laugh of the Medusa”, trans. Keith Cohen and Paula Cohen, *Signs* 1.4 (1976): 876.

¹⁷Gisèle Prassinos, *Le visage effleuré de peine* [Face touched with sadness] (Paris: Grasset, 1964), 10. The Polish translation was published in 2005: *Twarz muśnięta smutkiem*, trans. Agnieszka Taborska (Warsaw: Państwowy Instytut Wydawniczy, 2005).

interfere with the mechanism. Although the effects of a breakdown are severe, the woman does not abandon her husband. First, she tries to find someone who will repair the artificial intelligence, and later she learns everything there is to know about it. Her goal is to help her husband. Ultimately, however, it is her feelings that help her save him (even when technology fails, the secrets of which she managed to explore; in fact, she knows more about artificial intelligence than other (male) scientists she meets). Ironic in its view of society, Prassinós also offers us something else in her prose. The novel is a parody of classical Enlightenment genres and scientific treatises. In addition, Prassinós constructs an image of a woman that is so different from the Surrealist visions of her mentors – a woman who is strong, independent, capable of enormous sacrifices, changeable, flexible, someone who enjoys life and challenges conventions. Above all and despite everything – she is also empathetic. Of course, as Taborska points out in the introduction to the Polish edition of the novel,¹⁸ instead of a happy ending the reader will be immersed in absurdity, nonsense and, ultimately, grey reality – when the scientist's brain is “repaired” by his wife, the man returns to his books and once again loses interest in what happens around him.

Prassinós was discovered by André Breton. However, this does not change the fact that the then fourteen-year-old Gisèle was treated by Surrealists as a muse, an object of observation, an idea – she was forever a child genius and in their eyes she was not their equal. Surrealists sought inspiration in the female body, but ultimately treated it as an object, as if they were trying to tame the fear of something (someone) they did not understand. They wished to possess the object of their dark desires.¹⁹

Using mainly black humor and the absurd, Prassinós inverts, as it were, the Surrealist myth of the womanhood – presented without a head, representing only the order of the body, defined as *femme fatale*. Although initially skeptical (he did not believe that such a young person may write so well), Breton eventually appreciated these features of her writing, reprinting Prassinós's texts in the *Anthology of black humour*.

One of them, entitled “A Conversation,” is a dialogue between a man and a horse. It of course challenges the myth of chivalry and knights: “In a wheatfield. The man is wearing an ochre lace tunic stained with red. The horse is naked. Hanging from its tail is a matchbox, from which a grasshopper's antennae are jutting. The man is sitting on a white cushion with green designs. The horse is on the man.” The conversation, which begins with the man asking whether they have come into the possession of a green diamond, seemingly makes no sense. It is supposed to be an attempt at automatic recording. It is not coherent and what really matters is what is communicated in the final lines:

THE HORSE: The love I've loved has always appreciated me!

THE MAN: Yes, me too.

THE HORSE: We have reached the same summits.²⁰

Prassinós parodies the philosophical tale and the animal fable, making the reader question their readerly habits. She deconstructs the world not only by rendering the animal human

¹⁸See: Agnieszka Taborska, “Wszystko to brzmi jak bajka...” [This all appears to be a fairy tale...], in: Prassinós, *Twarz muśnięta smutkiem*, 5–15.

¹⁹See: Taborska, *Spiskowcy wyobraźni. Surrealizm*, 140.

²⁰Gisèle Prassinós, “A conversation”, in: André Breton, *Anthology of black humour*, <https://theanarchistlibrary.org/library/andre-breton-anthology-of-black-humour#toc54>, date of access: 12 April 2024.

but also by making it the man's mentor. Quantifiers which are employed to talk about a completely unrealistic, absurd, and unpredictable reality are exposed as empty signifiers.

Metamorphosis of/in pain – affective effects. Leonora Carrington

Among the recycled objects, dreams, nonsense, juxtapositions, Surrealist images of objectified women without heads, Surrealist women who represented this trend in art are able to find their own distinctive language, creative philosophy (a kind of anti-representation of reality), and ways of exploring and engaging with the world. One artist who fearlessly breaks social conventions in this way is Leonora Carrington. She consistently employs two tricks/motifs in her work: animals and food.

Animalization is one of the more interesting artistic procedures, popular among practically all-Surrealist artists, both male and female. A wild animal, like other objects, was something that Surrealists did not so much intend to tame as release its energy – they wished to see themselves as one of them. People were represented in the company of animals and their two respective worlds created a thought-provoking whole, one where nature and culture came together. The wild and the elusive came to the fore. Taborska wrote about how the division between the human and the animal fades in Carrington's works.²¹ It is worth taking a closer look at selected examples of this process, for example in stories dominated by human characters who ultimately transform into (or actually return to their original form as) a horse, or more precisely, a mare:

In the hallway, Lucrecia began to resist and broke paintings, chairs, and porcelain jars. The old lady was stuck to Lucrecia's back like a mollusk to a rock. [...] I think that he had not noticed my presence. I hid myself behind the door and I heard the old man go up to the children's room. In a little while, I closed my ears with my hands: some frightening blows were heard upstairs, as if a beast were suffering unusual tortures...²²

This passage from "The oval lady" is not only a perfect example of the writer's unique style but also showcases the extraordinary power of metamorphosis, of transforming into an animal. This is something that the heroines (and heroes) of practically every story in *Six surreal stories* and *The seventh horse* go through. Interestingly, animalization is an escape, a reaction to violence and enslavement. However, it is not a fairy-tale act of regaining personal freedom, a transformation that puts an end to suffering. It draws instead on Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, where transformation is a punishment for transgressing the boundaries, a punishment for trying to free oneself from the constraints of what society calls obedience and conformity. Importantly, this punishment does not come from the outside. This internal transformation is triggered by physical attempts to oppose various forms of oppression – it is liberating and at the same time destructive:

After that, I picked up the cadavers and continued my walk. In a little while, I came across a friend: the horse that, years later, would play an important part in my life.
"Hello!" he said to me. "Are you looking for something?"

²¹Taborska, *Spiskowcy wyobraźni. Surrealizm*, 346–369.

²²Leonora Carrington, "The oval lady", trans. Rochelle Holt, in: Leonora Carrington, *Six surreal stories* (Santa Barbara: Capra Press, 1975), 16–18.

I explained to him the object of my excursion at such an advanced hour in the evening. “Evidently,” he said, “from the social point of view it’s most complicated. Around here live two ladies who are occupied with similar questions. Your pursued goal consists in the eradication of your family shame. They are two very wise ladies. If you want, I will take you to them.”²³

The eight-year-old protagonist of “Uncle Sam Carrington” embarks on a journey, almost like a Campbellian hero(ine).²⁴ Her goal is to find a way to remedy family shame, which is brought on by her uncle and aunt’s vulgar and socially unacceptable laugh. The laugh is triggered by the sight of the moon and the setting sun. Right from the beginning, Carrington ridicules the great cultural myth of the vampire/werewolf, replacing the beast with the laughing aunt and uncle. As in a distorting mirror, instead of sin, corruption, and the fall of man, we come face to face with unstoppable laughter. The play with conventions does not end here. “The cadavers” are cabbage leaves – the remains of a “fratricidal” fight between two vegetables. Two “very wise ladies” who are supposed to help the girl free her family, although they usually “arrange only matters of the oldest and most noble families of England”²⁵ (i.e. descendants of the Duke of Wellington and Sir Walter Scott, that is “noble aristocrats of fine literature”), make a blood(less) sacrifice of carrots and zucchini. The girl is given an elixir that is supposed to help solve the problem. Thus, in this short story, Carrington not only challenges the conventions of fairy tales and fantasy literature, exposing the archaic and hermetic nature of “fine literature,” but also ridicules social conventions. She critiques a world in which laughing too loudly is considered vulgar bestiality and eating is considered taboo. The title of the short story is also a form of critique – Carrington reflects on the belief in the superiority of “the most noble families of England” over the people of the United States of America. The latter are represented by the vulgar Uncle Sam.

Culinary motifs may be found in Carrington’s late novel *The hearing trumpet*. In the very first scene, a woman is trying to save a starving wolf, disregarding the threat that the animal may pose.²⁶ Hunger and gluttony intertwine in the novel, just as the animal world intertwines with the human world – as Carrington matured as a writer, she repeatedly returned to these themes, using them to dismantle the artificiality of norms imposed on society in general and on women in particular. They also appear in a different short story, in which Carrington explores the idea of sisterhood more clearly than in her others works:

In the kitchen, cakes and enormous tarts were put to the flame and taken from the oven. Pomegranates and melons stuffed with larks filled the kitchen: whole oxen were turning slowly on spits, pheasants, peacocks, and turkeys awaited their turn to be cooked. Chests full of fantastic fruit cluttered up the corridors. Drusille walked about slowly in this forest of food, tasting a lark or a cake here and there.²⁷

The feast is meant to celebrate the return of Drusille’s beloved, a former king. Everything is prepared with great care, and the dishes are the returning ruler’s favorite. In accordance with the

²³Leonora Carrington, “Uncle Sam Carrington”, trans. Rochelle Holt, in: Leonora Carrington, *Six surreal stories* (Santa Barbara: Capra Press, 1975), 50.

²⁴See: Joseph Campbell, *The hero with a thousand faces* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1968).

²⁵Carrington, “Uncle Sam Carrington,” 51.

²⁶Leonora Carrington, *The hearing trumpet* (London: Routledge, 19746).

²⁷Leonora Carrington, “The Sisters,” in: Leonora Carrington, *The seventh horse and other tales*, trans. Kathrine Talbot and Anthony Karrigan (New York: Dutton, 1988), 42.

conventions of the horror story, to which Carrington clearly alludes, the house hides a dark secret. It is Drusille's sister Juniper: "Drusille lit the candle, illuminating a dirty little attic without windows. Perched on a rod near the ceiling, an extraordinary creature looked at the light with blinded eyes."²⁸ The sister or Drusille's alter ego – a voracious and dangerous mythical siren, part woman and part bird – is kept in a locked attic. However, one time, Drusille is in a hurry and forgets to lock the door. When the hybrid sister escapes, the world so meticulously arranged by her socialized version is destroyed. Liberated from the bonds of convention, she may act on her animal, murderous instincts. Order transforms into chaos and death. The killing/animalization of the beloved, shown *via* a fantastically constructed *pars pro toto*, that is the head (or more specifically the man's beard), is combined with gluttony and overconsumption. All sensual experiences are activated – the abundance of tastes and smells, the texture of the sauces, the softness and consistency of crushed fruit: "The carcass of a peacock decorated Jumart's head. His beard was full of sauces, fish heads, crushed fruit. His gown was torn and stained with all sorts of food."²⁹

Liberation which Carrington's heroines pursue is therefore always a tragic choice – between the real world (and its annihilation) and the surreal. It is also, always, liberation from patriarchy – women reject the structures of power, reject the rules, choosing to focus on themselves and satisfy their own needs. Therefore, animalization usually manifests itself in the figure of a horse or more specifically a white mare, which often appears in Carrington's prose and paintings.³⁰ The mare is, above all, a symbol of the desired freedom. Transforming into an animal is the only way in which one may emancipate oneself. Joanna Mueller thus comments on this question: "Leonora Carrington would certainly agree with what Breton wrote in *The Manifesto of surrealism* in 1924: 'The mere word freedom is the only one that still excites me.' In fact, in each and every story in *The seventh horse* the heroines fight for their freedom."³¹

Metamorphosis is not the only way through which Carrington's heroines may find freedom. Pain (both physical and psychological), both the catalyst and result of metamorphosis, is even more important in this context. I am not talking about the pain experienced by Carrington's heroines, although it is important, but the pain felt by the reader. To draw on Claire Petitmengin's works³² (which Agnieszka Dauksza discusses in her essay on affective reading³³), the primal nature of Carrington's imagery makes us first and foremost *feel* the text and not only understand it. Striving for semantic

²⁸Carrington, "The Sisters," 44.

²⁹Carrington, "The Sisters," 49.

³⁰Agnieszka Taborska writes about it in *Spiskowcy wyobraźni*. Lucyna Urbańska Kidoń, an art popularizer, comments on this question in: "Między rzeczywistością a snem. Życie i twórczość Leonory Carrington" [Between reality and dream: The life and works of Leonora Carrington], *Nieźła Sztuka*, <https://niezlasztuka.net/o-sztuce/miedzy-rzeczywistoscia-a-snem-leonora-carrington-zycie-i-tworczosc/>. Taborska and Urbańska Kidoń both refer to Carrington's biography and the figure of her violent father.

³¹Joanna Mueller, "Nightmare narowista" [Temperamental nightmare], *Mały Format* 3-4 (2022), <http://malyformat.com/2022/05/nightmare-narowista/>, date of access 20 April 2024. When the individual stories were published matters because they are a form of protest against the structures of power – a very specific manifestation of power or domination – of which Carrington and Ernst became direct victims. "Becoming-an-animal" is therefore a form of rebellion and hiding, of moving away from a world that has become unbearable. It is also a manifestation of individuality.

³²Claire Petitmengin, "Towards the source of thoughts: The gestural and transmodal dimension of lived experience", *Journal of Consciousness Studies* 14.3 (2007): 54-82.

³³Agnieszka Dauksza, "Przemoc wrażenia. Wstępne rozpoznanie literatury i sztuki afektywnej" [The violence of impression: A preliminary reconnaissance of affective literature and art], in: *Kultura afektu – afekty w kulturze. Humanistyka po zwrocie afektywnym* [Culture of affect – affects in culture. The humanities after the affective turn], ed. Ryszard Nycz, Anna Łebkowska, Agnieszka Dauksza (Warsaw: IBL PAN, 2015), 553-591.

completeness, we, as readers, also tend to reflect on sensory impressions. The primary experience described by Carrington opens the door to understanding – of oneself, of one's individuality.

In conclusion, taking into account the changing biographical and socio-political contexts, it is impossible not to notice that Surrealist women artists, Carrington in particular, write about emancipation in their works, even though they do not openly call themselves feminists. They fight against the physical and conventional forms of objectification. Both were the result of social roles imposed on them and the vision of the female body (as seen in Surrealist art created by men). Surrealist women artists transform themselves from objects into subjects in and through the body of the Other, the foreign body, the body of a wild animal.

Life from the beginning – The helplessness of words and the infinity of worlds. Zuzanna Ginczanka

Zuzanna Ginczanka is not an unknown or a forgotten writer. A lot has already been written about her works, a lot of work and energy has been devoted to finding her traces (I am thinking here primarily of Izolda Kiec's book³⁴ and Jarosław Mikołajewski's "investigation," the results of which were published in *Gazeta Wyborcza* and then collected in a book³⁵). However, when scholars refer to avant-garde tropes in Ginczanka's poetry, her work is usually associated with the Skamander group. Ginczanka's biography and her contacts with Julian Tuwim, who became a kind of mentor to her, play a role in such a conventional reading. The poetess's playful relation with classicism, rhythmic forms, themes, and the overall aesthetics of her poems also suggest a connection to the Skamander group.³⁶ In this section, I do not intend to challenge this classification, because it is hard to disagree with the existing interpretations – not only when it comes to Ginczanka's relationship with Tuwim (it was a fact) but also when it comes to the aesthetic and formal aspects of her poetry. This does not mean, however, that Ginczanka was not influenced by Surrealism, which she did not have to learn from the "masters." She could have sought it (and experienced it) "on her own." One trope in Ginczanka's poetry may be linked to the Surreal imagination. I am talking about metamorphosis – liberation from the bonds of convention and the pursuit of freedom:

Dni ostatecznych przetopień i ostatecznych spojeń
były podobne innym jak konie nad wodopojem – :
miały kwitnienie brząsków
i pączkowanie gałązek
– – lecz z mieszaniny pierwiastków –
– stałam się ścisłym związkiem.³⁷

³⁴Izolda Kiec, *Ginczanka. Nie upilnuje mnie nikt* [Ginczanka. No one will control me] (Warsaw: Marginesy, 2020).

³⁵Jarosław Mikołajewski, *Cień w cień. Za cieniem Zuzanny Ginczanki* [Shadow in shadow. Chasing Zuzanna Ginczanka's shadow] (Warsaw: Dowody, 2019).

³⁶Several studies have already addressed how Ginczanka plays with literary conventions, how she draws on the experiences of modernism, utilizes avant-garde techniques, and experiments with language. See: Michał Głowiński, "O liryce i satyrze Zuzanny Ginczanki" [On the poetry and satire of Zuzanna Ginczanka], in: *Twórczość* 8 (1955), 117-119; see: Izolda Kiec, *Wstęp I* [Introduction I], "Szkatuła (1931-1936)" [Box (1931-1936)], in: *Zuzanna Ginczanka, Poezje zebrane (1931-1944)* [Collected poems (1931-1944)] (Warsaw: Marginesy, 2023), 11-26.

³⁷Zuzanna Ginczanka, "Przemiany" [Transformations], in: *Zuzanna Ginczanka. Mądrość jak rozkosz. Wiersze wybrane* [Wisdom as delight. Selected poems] (Warsaw: Czuły Barbarzyńca Press, 2017), 35-36.

[The days of final meltings and final fusions
 were all alike like horses at a watering through – :
 they had the blossoming of dawns
 and the budding of branches
 – – but all these elements –
 – made me a compact compound]

It would be difficult to define images Ginczanka conjures up in her poetry as unequivocally Surrealistic, but it does not invalidate the fact that her poems contain references and structures that are Surrealistic in spirit (although they might also be connected with Bolesław Leśmian's creative influence). While Surrealism never fully developed in Polish poetry, in the interwar period we still find its manifestations and transplants in the works of writers associated with different poetic groups. In the poem quoted above, the transformation (which also occurs in language) evokes both pain and a kind of dark delight. Dissatisfaction ultimately leads to unification and fulfillment. It progresses from language to the body, to its primal instincts. Fusion and melting, although seemingly final, do not bring fulfillment – it is only a stage, a process, the first step of an escape plan. This transformation stands in Ginczanka's poetry for inexhaustible transgression, which never brings relief: "Jak tyle razy wczoraj, jak tyle razy jutro, / znów będę się odradzać w nieustanności przemian" [Like so many times yesterday, like so many times tomorrow, / I will be reborn again in the incessant changes].³⁸

The motif of transformation, found in many of the poetess's works, is what connects Ginczanka to other Surrealist women artists. However, it is worth mentioning another correlation, namely the fusion of the human and the animal body. In the afterword to one of the editions of Ginczanka's selected poems, Agata Araszkiewicz draws on the findings of Józef Łobodowski and thus comments on the poetess's works:

In Ginczanka's poetry, "male-female" centaurs that "chase fulfillment" stand for androgyny, which unites the binaries of body and text. [...] All of her poetry – with its pulsating images and sensual metaphors – is represented in this doubled (male-female) and at the same time halved (human-animal) allegory. The centaur united with the centaress stands for the desire to reach the secret source of life, to capture an almost mystical delight, the "blind and brutal eternity of life that does not acknowledge the differences between man and animal."³⁹

Ginczanka, as a member of the Skamander group,⁴⁰ consciously or not, has a love affair with Surreal imagination, which Małgorzata Baranowska defines as a superhuman ability to "penetrate the mystery of things, to see hidden connections and analogies."⁴¹ The images she conjures up in her poetry prove that she reacts to the world and its complexities in a highly sensitive manner. Above all, however, these images become the driving force of poetic creation. Ginczanka's transformations and centaurs are such an act of creation. They inspire further investigations and explorations (also in linguistic terms) of the infinity of worlds.

³⁸Zuzanna Ginczanka, "Poznanie" [Knowledge], in: Ginczanka, 68.

³⁹Agata Araszkiewicz, "Rozkosz Ginczanki" [Ginczanka's delight], in: Ginczanka, 190, 191.

⁴⁰This category is used by Anna Nosiłowska in her "updated" *Historia literatury polskiej* [History of Polish literature] (Warsaw: IBL PAN, 2019).

⁴¹Małgorzata Baranowska, *Surrealna wyobraźnia i poezja* [Surreal imagination and poetry] (Warsaw: Czytelnik, 1984), 7.

Surreal sequences – what is left of Surreal imagination? Eliza Kącka and Małgorzata Lebda

Although it strongly developed in Europe and inspired a diverse group of artists, Surrealism never flourished in 20th-century Polish literature. Maria Delaperrière rightly notes that:

Each trend, in its own way, revolutionized imagination, rejecting description, narrative, and discursive language. In both cases, the role of textual collage should be emphasized, which freed poetic imagination from the constraints of *mimesis*. [...] There is nothing surprising in the fact that Polish poets constantly return to Breton's movement. Their original concepts of imagination and poetic language crystallized partly in relation to Surrealism, although most often on its margins.⁴²

This does not mean, however, that Surrealism was/is completely absent from it – as Jakub Kornhauser writes:

Regardless of how one defines the avant-garde, and Surrealism in particular [...], a need for a revolution lies at the heart of it. This revolution [...] has no end, because it is based on an oxymoronic desire to change the *status quo*, which cannot ever be satisfied. In place of one order, another order appears. It must also be critiqued and then overthrown. This cycle goes on forever.⁴³

In my account of these revolutions (it is difficult to speak of just one), I will deliberately skip the long and important history of the neo-avant-garde and the new wave-avant-garde in Polish literature, concentrating instead on how Surrealism has been reactivated in the latest works of Polish poetesses. I will quote two works below: a book by Eliza Kącka and a poem by Małgorzata Lebda. Although it is difficult to compare both works, this juxtaposition is not accidental. Kącka and Lebda both draw on a Surrealist technique of recording dreams, of creating worlds somewhere in between dreams and reality.

Taborska writes that:

Surrealists recorded dreams with great devotion. From 1919, Breton wrote down sentences that “knocked on the window of his mind” – sentences that manifested themselves when he was waking up. The painter Gordon Onslow Ford kept a notebook under his pillow to write down his dreams when he was still half asleep and half awake. They were his “guidelines” for creating drawings and paintings.⁴⁴

In this context, Kącka's *Po drugiej stronie siebie* [On the other side of me] is an extremely surprising collection of poems. The poems are not personal notes, something that could be later transformed into more complete works. Dreams recorded by the poetess are *bona fide* poems. Filled with intimate and individualized visions, referencing, most likely, extremely personal experiences and insider stories, this dream journal invites the reader to explore the writer's private dreams:

⁴²Maria Delaperrière, *Polskie awangardy a poezja europejska. Studium wyobraźni poetyckiej* [Polish avant-gardes and European poetry: A study of poetic imagination], trans. Adam Dziadek (Katowice: Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Śląskiego, 2004), 326–327.

⁴³Jakub Kornhauser, *Niebezpieczne krajobrazy. Surrealizm i po surrealizmie* [Dangerous landscapes: Surrealism and after Surrealism] (Krakow: Jagiellonian University Press, 2022), 171.

⁴⁴Taborska, *Świat zwariował. Poradnik surrealistyczny jak przeżyć*, 124.

I dreamed that I was a polar bear. heavy and indolent, I am sitting in the snow thinking that choosing “bear” on the immigration form was probably too much. I could have circled Madagascar, whatever, I could have stopped at relocating to a different place, but no, I had to change my skin. [...] third thought: can I keep eating the same things, or do I have to eat seals? and if so, will someone give me a piece? I won’t hunt, I’ll sooner die.⁴⁵

The reader explores clever and interesting linguistic constructions, but also the dynamics and plasticity of individual representations. Still, the most important feature of Kącka’s book is its unique and absurd sense of humor, which often verges on black humor.

The dreamlike nature of literature, the fusion of worlds and dimensions is not new or surprising in literature. Dreams as a poetic form have a long history. However, Małgorzata Lebda manages to avoid clichés by making dream visions private:

moje siostry przypominały chore ptaki
kiedy pierwszy raz zobaczyłam je nagie
ich ciała pokrywała wietrzna ospa

wystawiały wtedy fioletowe języki
do wiszącej nad boazerią Maryi.⁴⁶

[my sisters resembled sick birds
when I first saw them naked
their bodies were covered with chicken pox

they stuck out their purple tongues
at the picture of Mary above the wainscoting]

Individual and personal as these dreamlike human-animal images are, they are not hermetic. They are not inaccessible to readers. The reader is invited to explore a world full of raw primeval beauty and suspend their rationality. We do not know whether we are dealing with dream or reality – the atmosphere and structure of the collection make it impossible to judge whether or not, as Lebda writes, “śnię nas przywlezione przez psy łby uckermärkerów” [the heads of uckermärkers dragged by dogs are dreaming us].

Surrealist literature (or literature inspired by this artistic movement) written by women is very diverse and distinct (not to say isolated). Writing about avant-garde women writers, Anna Pekaniec notes that “women writers did not create literary groups.” “That is why they remained (un)united and lonely, or united in their loneliness. But they were free – which became their strength.”⁴⁷ This freedom was neither obvious nor easy to gain, and the lack of bigger structures

⁴⁵Eliza Kącka, *Po drugiej stronie siebie*[On the other side of me] (Krakow: Lokator, 2019), 25, 26.

⁴⁶Małgorzata Lebda, “zbliżenie: fiolet” [close-up: purple], in: Małgorzata Lebda, *Sny uckermärkerów* [uckermärkers’ dreams] (Poznań: Wojewódzka Biblioteka Publiczna i Centrum Animacji Kultury, 2017), 7.

⁴⁷Anna Pekaniec, “(Nie)solidarne i samotne? O polityczności literatury kobiet w pierwszych dekadach XX wieku (do 1939 roku)” [(Un)united and lonely? The politics of women’s literature in the first decades of the 20th century (until 1939)], in: *Polityki awangardy*[The politics of the avant-garde], ed. Agnieszka Karpowicz, Jakub Kornhauser, Marta Rakoczy, Aleksander Wójtowicz (Krakow: Jagiellonian University Press, 2021), 261–268.

was noticeable (although it is possible that this is what allowed avant-garde artists to be so aesthetically diverse). The works of the Surrealist women artists I have discussed point to an intersection. To a line that probably determined many of their creative choices, that is, the line that runs between the ways in which the male founders of the movement used the female body in art and the ways in which women artists used it. The bird woman, the girl who trades places with a hyena dressed in the skin of a devoured maid, the centaur-centauress, and the bear all represent bondage and the need to fight for freedom – the need to escape or experience a liberating metamorphosis.

In order not to end with such a dark conclusion, however, let me remind us that black humor, the absurd, and the grotesque are also part of the legacy of Surrealist women artists. They used them to ironically comment on reality and to deconstruct existing and archaic orders (not only historical and literary ones).

translated by Małgorzata Olsza

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KEYWORDS

surrealism

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ABSTRACT:

The article argues that the role of women artists is not fully acknowledged in the history of Surrealism. Works of women artists, located outside the canon, are overshadowed by the most prominent avant-garde works created by men. However, such Surrealist women artists as Leonora Carrington, Gisèle Prassinos, Dorothea Tanning, and Meret Oppenheim had a huge influence on contemporary art and literature. Surrealist women writers and visual artists create a different and extremely original world in their works, especially when judged against the background of canonical works. One example is Gisèle Prassinos's novel *Le visage effleuré de peine* [Face touched by sadness]. It tells the story of a young woman married to a scientist who relies on artificial intelligence in his daily life. The novel, although humorous, presents the woman as a strong, independent, and empathetic character, challenging the Surrealist visions of *femme fatale*. The article also attempts to show how Surrealist women writers influenced/ still influence contemporary Polish literature.

c o n t e m p o r a r y p o e t r y

L I T E R A R Y E X P E R I M E N T

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Małgorzata Musierowicz's online autobiography. Towards an analysis based on entries and comments published on www.musierowicz.com.pl

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Małgorzata Musierowicz creates her official website

Małgorzata Musierowicz, born in 1945, author of children's and young adult books, most famous for the *Jeźycjada*¹ series (22 novels), set up her official website on 16 Jun 2008. The first version, updated until 18 Dec 2014, was archived and is no longer available on www.musierowicz.com.pl, where the first available entry dates to 31 Dec 2014, and the last – to 2 April 2024. The aim of this paper is to identify the genre of the *Aktualności* [News] section of the current version of *Oficjalna strona Małgorzaty Musierowicz* [Małgorzata Musierowicz's official website], its relationship with autobiography, or rather – autobiographical practices – and an attempt at an analysis of how Musierowicz constructs her autobiography as an author. Due to the amount of material, this is a preliminary study, an attempt at delineating further research in Musierowicz's Internet autobiography, as well as other authors who publish online. The present paper is

¹ The series comprises the following titles: *Szósta klepka* [Loose screw] (1977), *Kłamczucha* [Liar] (1979) *Kwiat kalafiora* [Cauliflower flower] (1981), *Ida sierpniowa* [Ida of August] (1981), *Opium w rosole* [Opium in broth] (1986), *Brulion Bebe B.* [Bebe B.'s notebook] (1990), *Noelka* (1992), *Pulpecja* (1993), *Dziecko piątku* [Friday's child] (1993), *Nutria i Nerwus* [Nutria and Nerwus] (1994), *Córka Robrojka* [Robrojek's daughter] (1996), *Imieniny* [Nameday] (1998), *Tygrys i Róża* [Tiger and Rose] (1999), *Kalamburka* (2002), *Język Trolli* [Troll's language] (2004), *Żaba* [Frog] (2005), *Czarna polewka* [Black soup] (2006), *Sprężyna* [Spring] (2008), *McDusia* (2012), *Wnuczka do orzechów* [Nutmacker's Granddaughter] (2014), *Feblik* [Weakness] (2015), *Ciotka Zgryzotka* [Aunt Worriness] (2018). Later Musierowicz's debut novel *Małomówny i rodzina* [The taciturn and his family] (1975) was included in the series, marked as volume "0" in newer editions. It is the only novel which Musierowicz edited in subsequent editions.

limited to 71 entries published between December 2014 and December 2016, which gathered 17,592 comments including 4,906 comments by Musierowicz (using the nick MałgM)².

Oficjalna strona Małgorzaty Musierowicz is divided into several subpages: *O autorce* [About the author], *Książki* [Books], *Ilustracje* [Illustrations], *Aktualności* [News], *Księga gości* [Guestbook], *Teksty o MM* [Texts about MM]. It looks like a standard, static, somewhat old-fashioned website³, although the adjective “official” indicates it should not be treated as some private online space. In his 2015 *_ sieci* Maciej Maryl describes official websites of Polish authors, but he did not include Musierowicz⁴. Nonetheless, the conclusions of his research can also be applied to www.musierowicz.com.pl. Maryl considers an author's website as “a website of a living author, who is in some way responsible for its contents (as evidenced by e.g. the subtitle «official website»)”⁵. For Maryl auto-presentation is a basic aim of such a website, understood as “curating an image and disseminating desired information”⁶, but he does not identify it with a marketing or self-promoting strategy⁷ – he sees authors' online presence as an element of “a major shift in literary life”⁸.

In her first post⁹ (22 Jun 2008) Musierowicz welcomes her readers and explains her reasons for setting up her own website. The first one was to keep in touch with her readers, who would send her a huge number of letters (both traditional and electronic). Since Musierowicz was no longer able to answer each one separately, she decided to do it in bulk, via her website. She also informed she was going to post meeting schedules and thank-you notes for them, as well as correct disinformation (it can be assumed she meant disinformation about herself and her work). Therefore, her website seems both a tool for keeping in touch with readers, as well as a credible source of information about the author¹⁰.

That first virtual letter to readers can be considered the first entry on Musierowicz's blog. For the purpose of this paper I assume – aware of the great number of studies on blogs – that:

² Edyta Korepta wrote *Za co kochamy Małgorzatę Musierowicz? Refleksje czytelniczki blogu autorki „Jeżycjady”*, whose aim was to “confirm M. Musierowicz's huge popularity based on an analysis of entries on her personal website”. Korepta focuses on what Musierowicz communicates to her readers in entries and comments, and what her readers communicate to her about her work in their comments. In terms of the autobiography question, Korepta confirms that “In the case of M. Musierowicz's website there is little information about her private, personal life. If there is any, it is serious and deprived of details. This also concerns her work”. I would like to verify and elaborate on this rather general statement. Edyta Korepta, “Za co kochamy Małgorzatę Musierowicz? Refleksje czytelniczki blogu autorki Jeżycjady” [What do we love Małgorzata Musierowicz for? Reflections of a reader of Musierowicz's blog], *Nowa Biblioteka* 2 (2017): 84, 97.

³ For more information about home websites, see Marta Więckiewicz-Archacka, “Fatyczność internetowych praktyk autobiograficznych” [The phaticity of online autobiographical practices], *Społeczeństwo – Język – Edukacja* 16 (2022): 204. Więckiewicz-Archacka also published a study about blogs in 2012: Marta Więckiewicz-Archacka, *Blog w perspektywie genologii multimedialnej* [Blog from the perspective of multimedia genology] (Toruń: Wydawnictwo Adam Marszałek, 2012).

⁴ Maryl only mentions an article about a fan forum about Jeżycjada: Maciej Maryl, *_życie literackie w sieci. Pisarze, instytucje i odbiorcy wobec przemian technologicznych* [Online literary life. Authors, institutions and recipients versus technological transformations] (Warszawa: Fundacja Akademia Humanistyczna, IBL PAN, 2015): 327.

⁵ Maryl, 156.

⁶ Maryl, 160.

⁷ Maryl, 143.

⁸ Maryl.

⁹ This post is unavailable on www.musierowicz.com.pl, but it can still be accessed via Wayback Machine. Internet Archive, date of access 7.09.2024, <https://web.archive.org/>.

¹⁰ Małgorzata Musierowicz, website archived on 22 Jun 2008 r., [musierowicz.com.pl](http://www.musierowicz.com.pl), date of access 18.09.2024, <https://web.archive.org/web/20080622142522/http://www.musierowicz.com.pl/glowna.html>.

They are a type of a website based on a template which facilitates navigating the website. The blog is typically defined as a frequently updated website which displays posts in a chronological order, from the most recent one [...]. The dynamics of this format, its connection to time and cyclicity is highlighted by dates of entries (and of comments), as well as indexes (usually chronological)¹¹.

The *News* section – a subsection of *Oficjalna strona...* has all the characteristics listed above: frequently updated, entries organized from the latest, most with tens, hundreds, and even over a thousand comments¹² from readers¹³. Musierowicz managed to create a blog community¹⁴, which is interesting in itself and deserves its own study.

Musierowicz is aware that she writes a blog and she understands the specificity of this communication channel. Krystyna Heska-Kwaśniewicz asked Musierowicz in an interview why she did not want to publish her blog¹⁵ (in print), observing that it is “a perfect dialogue with readers”¹⁶. Musierowicz answered:

I am not sure that this blog, with thousands of comments from all around the world, would be as successful as a book. This is a peculiar form, online contact is truly unique, and its charm lies in immediacy, elusiveness and liveliness. Fortunately, *scripta manent* also here, especially that truly anything can be archived and brought back to life again¹⁷.

Blog is a paradoxical medium – elusive, lively, and yet durable. It should be noted that Musierowicz appreciates the significance of comments; it can be assumed that interacting, com-

¹¹Maryl, 225.

¹²What I mean by a “comment” in this text is an entry by a reader under an entry by the blog’s author, as well as a reply to such an entry by the author. For a survey of theoretical considerations about such messages, see a paper by Krzysztof Gajewski, in which he not only tries to define what an online comment is, but also to classify online comments: Krzysztof Gajewski. “No comment. Z poetyki komentarza elektronicznego” [From the poetics of the electronic comment], *Zagadnienia Rodzajów Literackich* 2 (2013): 115–116. Maryl classifies authors’ replies to readers’ comments (i.e. comments to comments) as “a broader category of «online entries»”. Maryl, 215.

¹³From December 2014 to June 2020 every post was commented on. In August 2020 comments were disabled, but a moderated guest book was enabled, where any registered user could leave a comment. The latest entry from the guest book is by Musierowicz herself, from 27 Oct 2023, 22:50. Since then all comments have been disabled, effectively preventing users from any form of contact with the author. The website does not provide any official e-mail address.

¹⁴Maria Cywińska-Milonas defines a blog community as the most complex form of blogging, which “led rather than written by a given blogger, who therefore serves as the discussion moderator of his own blog. Such a moderator’s role is to write an introductory note, which initiates the discussion. [...] Blog discussions which often take the form of an asynchronous chat comprising hundreds of comments take place on the blogs of the so-called “blogging stars”, i.e. bloggers who are at the center of relatively dense sociometric networks”. Maria Cywińska-Milonas, “Blogi (ujęcie psychologiczne)” [Blogs (from a psychological perspective)], in: *Liternet. Literatura i internet*, [Liternet. Literature and the Internet] edited by Piotr Marecki (Kraków: Rabid, 2002), 100–101.

¹⁵In Heska-Kwaśniewicz’s question, the words “blog” and “official website” were placed in quotation marks, but not in Musierowicz’s answer. See “Jeźycjadę można czytać wszędzie i zawsze: w pociągu, w parku i w ciszy swego domu... Rozmowa z Małgorzatą Musierowicz” [Jeźycjada can be read anywhere, anytime: on a train, in a park, and in the quiet of your own house... An interview with Małgorzata Musierowicz], Guliwer. Kwartalnik o książce dla dziecka 1 (2016): 41.

¹⁶“Jeźycjadę można czytać wszędzie i zawsze: w pociągu, w parku i w ciszy swego domu... Rozmowa z Małgorzatą Musierowicz”, 41.

¹⁷“Jeźycjadę można czytać wszędzie i zawsze: w pociągu, w parku i w ciszy swego domu... Rozmowa z Małgorzatą Musierowicz”.

municating and conversing with her readers via her blog is the essence of blogging for her. She feels confident and safe in her blog community, and as a result every so often she allows herself to post more personal entries, whose function is not informative, phatic, expressive or even impressive. Consequently, the *News* section (333 entries), and especially the comments published there between 2014-2024, provide us with fragmentary autobiographical information dispersed across many entries of the blog – which is nonetheless recorded and therefore copiable and archivable. As observed by Karolina Jędrych:

Through her website, Musierowicz looks after her faithful fans – and her vision of the world. Musierowicz.com.pl is like an extension of *Jeźycjada*, it completes it. This is where Musierowicz demonstrates that it is possible to live the life from her books – in nature, with books. At the same time, she also educates her audience a bit, providing them with translations from English poetry, verses from the treasury of Polish poetry, and quotations from valuable prose. Her website is her virtual home, and she curates her online presence in a specific way¹⁸.

Musierowicz cares not only about what she writes – or does not write – about on her website, but also which comments are published (they are moderated). It should also be added that she has seldom appeared in the media, and she rarely gives interviews. She did not publish anything in relation to her brother's, Stanisław Barańczak's, death (even though comments with condolences from readers were published to her post from December 2014¹⁹); she has made no reference to critical publications about her books or herself. Musierowicz seems to be curating her image. She only allows being interviewed by trusted experts in her work; online, she is only active on her own, official website; she worked on her private memoirs and notes from the creative process (published in print) with her daughter, Emilia Kiereś, also an author²⁰. Musierowicz's activity resembles organizing an archive, which (according to Lucyna Marzec) is an element of constructing an author's legend. In the process, some matters are omitted, and others are highlighted, which Marzec connects to autobiographical practices²¹. And although – as observed by Paul Levinson – “the sovereignty that the blogger has over his or her blog – the freedom from foreign gatekeepers (...) finds its limit (...) in the ability of anyone to copy whatever is in the blog, for saving or dissemination”²², nothing beyond what the blogger has published will be copied.

¹⁸Karolina Jędrych, “Przesunięcie centrum świata i ucieczka na wieś w Febliku i Wnuczce do orzechów Małgorzaty Musierowicz” [Recentring the world and escaping to the countryside in Feblik and Wnuczka do orzechów by Małgorzata Musierowicz], *Annales Universitatis Paedagogicae Cracoviensis: Studia Poetica* 6 (2018): 56.

¹⁹Stanisław Barańczak died on 26 Dec 2014. Małgorzata Musierowicz responded to condolences from her fans from comments to her post “Z Nowym Rokiem” [Happy New Year] twice, on Jan 2nd and 6th: “I shall keep all those personal comments and condolences for myself. I wouldn't like to sadden my guests, especially those young and very young”. Małgorzata Musierowicz's comment from 2 Jan 2015, 00:08, to the post “Z nowym rokiem”, musierowicz.com.pl, date of access: 18.09.2024, <https://musierowicz.com.pl/mm/?p=251#comment-34>. “Thank you! I am very grateful for so many positive thoughts and feelings. I am also getting a lot of private messages. I am moved. I am unable to answer all of them individually, so thank you to all of you, kind regards, and Happy 2015”. Małgorzata Musierowicz's comment from 6 Jan 2015, 01:39, to her post “Z nowym rokiem”, musierowicz.com.pl, date of access 18.09.2024, <https://musierowicz.com.pl/mm/?p=251#comment-155>.

²⁰Na Jowisza! Uzupełniam Jeźycjadę [By Jove! I am supplementing Jeźycjada] vols. 1 and 2.

²¹Lucyna Marzec, “Archiwum jako pisarski testament i depozyt legendy biograficznej” [Archive as a writer's testament and deposit of biographical legend], *Teksty Drugie* 6 (2018): 231.

²²Paul Levinson, *New New Media* (London: Pearson, 2012), 84.

Blogs and autobiography

Already in 2004, when blogs were a relatively new phenomenon in Poland, Maciej Kawka²³ noticed and described their relationship with autobiography, and more specifically – with the autobiographical pact as defined by Philippe Lejeune:

Autobiography (narrative recounting the life of the author) supposes that there is *identity of name* between the author (such as he figures, by his name, on the cover), the narrator of the story, and the character who is being talked about. What we have here is a very simple criterion, which defines at the same time as autobiography all the other genres of personal literature (diary, self-portrait, personal essay)²⁴.

Agnieszka Ogonowska conducted a more detailed analysis of the relationship between blogs and autobiography; for her, the autobiographical character of such websites seemed – following Jerzy Smulski – “a specific communicative attitude of the sender and behavior of the recipient projected by this attitude”²⁵. Ogonowska also suggests that by following the definition of the autobiographical pact we should consider whether the autobiographer is “authentic”, rather than whether they write the “truth”²⁶. According to Ogonowska “the authenticity of testimonies of someone’s existence is based on the authority of their probability and the ability to evoke in readers specific emotional states related to the impression of reality”²⁷.

Magdalena Szulc, author of a more recent study about blogs, also points out to their similarity to autobiography²⁸, adding that although blogs are assumed to be non-fiction, their readers are unable to verify whether the presented events are true²⁹. She highlights the role of trust in the relationship between bloggers and their readers, as well as the fact that the author “curates their image of a person worthy of this trust”³⁰, and the role of autcreation. Szulc’s conclusion regarding non-fictionality, that “the autobiographical character of the genre does not need to indicate complete truthfulness of the described events or self-presentation, which does not mean that blogs contain fictional descriptions”³¹ is interesting for considerations regarding the truth category in blogs, also in the case of Musierowicz’s website.

²³Maciej Kawka, “Pakt autobiograficzny Philippe’a Lejeune’a a internetowe blogi – narodziny gatunku” [Philippe Lejeune’s autobiographical pact and Internet blogs – the birth of a genre], in: *Gatunki mowy i ich ewolucja*, t. 2: *Tekst a gatunek* [Genres of speech and their evolution, vol. 2: Text and genre], edited by Danuta Ostaszewska (Katowice: Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Śląskiego, 2004), 157–168.

²⁴Philippe Lejeune, “The autobiographical pact”, translated into English by Katherine Leary, in: *On Autobiography. Theory and History of Literature*, vol. 52 (1989), 12.

²⁵Agnieszka Ogonowska, “Blog w autobiograficznym trójkącie fikcji” [Blog in the autobiographical triangle of fiction], *Annales Academiae Paedagogicae Cracoviensis* 37, *Studia Historicolitteraria* 6 (2006): 205.

²⁶Ogonowska, 204–205.

²⁷Ogonowska, 208.

²⁸The relationship between blogs and autobiography, or rather with various autobiographical genres was also indicated by Maciej Maryl: “Due to subjectivity characterizing the electronic discourse most blog entries rely on genres considered to be autobiographical or personal, such as journal, travelogue, autobiographical narrative. This is not about «expressivism» or «exhibitionism», of which blogs are often accused, but about communicating a subjective vision of the world, conceptualized through the prism of individual experience and knowledge. Maryl, 216.

²⁹Magdalena Szulc, *Od gatunku do wizerunku. Autokreacje b(v)logerów modowych w mediach społecznościowych* [From genre to image. Autcreation of fashion b(v)loggers in social media] (Poznań: Wydawnictwo Naukowe UAM, 2022), 105.

³⁰Szulc, 106.

³¹Szulc, 107.

Szulc also considers the question of what truth and fiction are, what is authentic in social media and in what ways image can be curated through them; moreover, this question opens new fields of research into Małgorzata Musierowicz's blog, who – as has been mentioned – assures that the website is a credible source of information about her. Following Musierowicz's intention we would have to assume that what she shares there in the form of posts and comments (on the website and in the guestbook) is non-fictional; that Musierowicz does not mislead us and writes the truth. However, bearing in mind that the autobiographer is not someone who tells the truth about their life, but rather someone who claims they tell the truth³², I am aware that reading any autobiography, including blogs, is reading the narrator's story about themselves, which results from certain choices regarding what to put on display. As observed by Katarzyna Piątek, who studies the autobiographism of blogs: "apart from being a valuable source of knowledge, every autobiographical genre can contain certain deformations, distortions of events, [...] which can also be valuable information for scholars"³³.

Piątek also points out to the fact that blogs can be edited – and so corrected – any time³⁴, which would make them open to different interpretations, and deprived of a strictly defined ending; they are not set in stone. Blogs also lack temporal distance; a blogger writes here and now, currently about current events, they do not write down their memories, although of course memories may appear on a blog – which is the case with Musierowicz's website³⁵.

Więckiewicz-Archacka introduces another term to the discussion about blogs and autobiography – autobiographical practice:

It refers to the everyday activity of presenting one's own life and personal experiences in the public-private space of the Internet [...] in the course of interacting with other Web users. [...] The term *autobiographical practice* can be applied wherever people talk about themselves or present themselves³⁶.

Małgorzata Musierowicz, author of the series of children's and young adult novels *Jeźycjada*, who posts on her blog in the form of letters signed off as "MM", who comments there as "MałgM", presents herself in different social roles among answering questions and comments from her fans. Maryl considers such a mix of different roles as typical for websites of authors, who present themselves as professional writers, but also as regular people, artists, or hobbyists³⁷. In the final part of this paper I shall analyze one of the roles in which Musierowicz presents herself on her blog.

³²Philippe Lejeune, "Czy można zdefiniować autobiografię?" [Is it possible to define autobiography?], translated into Polish by Regina Lubas-Bartoszyńska, in: *Wariacje na temat pewnego paktu* [Variations about a certain pact], edited by Regina Lubas-Bartoszyńska (Kraków: Towarzystwo Autorów i Wydawców Prac Naukowych Universitas, 2001), 2.

³³Katarzyna Piątek, "Blog jako współczesna forma autobiograficzna. Analiza wybranych przykładów" [Blog as a modern autobiographical form], *Media i Społeczeństwo* 17, 2 (2022): 201, <https://doi.org/10.5604/01.3001.0016.3162>.

³⁴Piątek, 204.

³⁵In the analyzed material there are only two posts and one long comment which look like a typical memory. They concern Musierowicz's early adventure with cooking, a second-hand bookstore in Toruń, and catching mice in the house at Słowackiego street. In terms of genre, all three are closest to anecdote.

³⁶Więckiewicz-Archacka, 201.

³⁷Maryl, 160.

Małgorzata Musierowicz as an author in the light of blog entries and comments on her official website

On several occasions – in her posts and comments – Musierowicz has declared “Every day I feel as a woman, mother, grandmother, and an author”³⁸, “officially I am an elderly lady, but unofficially I am I am a broad, still fresh and well-oiled”³⁹, “I am an autodidact and amateur”⁴⁰. Musierowicz also presents herself as a gardening enthusiast who loves living in the country; a mother-in-law; a cook; a reading addict; a lover of poetry, classical music, secondhand bookshops, Toruń; and an elderly lady⁴¹ who gets tired by traveling – even from her countryside home in Wielkopolska to Poznań. Those private roles are constantly intertwining with her professional role, i.e. a children’s and young adult fiction author. Her comments from 2014-2016 reveal her autobiography as an author, what truth about herself she was trying to communicate, and how she perceives her writing mission.

First and foremost, Musierowicz seems to be an independent, firm, consequent writer, who listens to her readers commenting on her stories with interest, skepticism, irritation, and from a distance, but she does not follow their advice, and she does not fulfil their wishes. In a post from 24 Jan 2015 she wrote:

Thank you so much for all your comments to my previous post – it is so inspiring to learn about your expectations and hopes! Naturally, I shall do it my way; or rather – I shall do as my protagonists tell me⁴².

Musierowicz claims that the creative process is dictated by her fictional characters, but she is joking, as suggested by subsequent comments in which she answers to her readers’ wishes regarding her protagonists’ personalities and plots. On 10 Feb 2015 MałgM wrote:

I hasten to announce that in spite of repeated pleas (coming from various people) to make my protagonists “less behaved”, my decision to write the way I please not only remains firm, but it is actually getting even firmer than ever before⁴³.

In answer to a private message from “Marta”, a reader, who supposedly messaged Musierowicz about the above-mentioned fan wishes, on 18 Nov 2015 Musierowicz published the following comment:

When it comes to my books – I always bear in mind that they are for junior highschoolers. This is a great responsibility. And so I treat those – as you call them – “wishlist concerts” (oh, there are plenty, plenty!) *cum grano salis*. After all – my books, my responsibility. And this great responsibil-

³⁸Małgorzata Musierowicz, comment from 3.03.2016., 19:42, to a post “Zima się poddaje” [Winter is giving up], musierowicz.com.pl, date of access 18.09.2024, <https://musierowicz.com.pl/mm/?p=1012#comment-12054>.

³⁹Małgorzata Musierowicz, post from 29.10.2015, “Dary jesieni!” [Gifts of fall], musierowicz.com.pl, date of access 10.09.2024, <https://musierowicz.com.pl/mm/?m=201510>.

⁴⁰Małgorzata Musierowicz, comment from 10.11.2015, 11:03, to a post “Dary jesieni!”, musierowicz.com.pl, date of access 18.09.2024, <https://musierowicz.com.pl/mm/?p=730#comment-7186>.

⁴¹Musierowicz was born in January 1945, and so at the time when the analyzed material was published she was 69-71 years old; therefore, referring to herself as an “elderly lady” is neither exaggeration nor flirtatiousness.

⁴²Małgorzata Musierowicz, post from 24.01.2015., “Okładka” [Book cover], musierowicz.com.pl, date of access 18.09.2024, <https://musierowicz.com.pl/mm/?p=315>

⁴³Małgorzata Musierowicz, comment from 10.02.2015, 19:41, to a post “Okładka”, musierowicz.com.pl, date of access 18.09.2024, <https://musierowicz.com.pl/mm/?p=315#comment-1181>.

ity seems to be getting even greater⁴⁴.

Musierowicz seems to be approaching her readers' wishes with skepticism, maybe even disdain, and admits she has a sense of responsibility. Therefore, Musierowicz can be considered an author who is fully aware of the significance of what she writes, and how her work can affect potential or ideal readers. As we shall see in the following examples, Musierowicz communicates to her fans that her books represent a specific genre whose rules she follows.

In a comment from 13 Nov 2015, 23:54, she responds to another private message:

[...] would you really like to read a novel about a family of alcoholics and their problems? And should it really be a book written by me?

It is good to remember what genre and conventions are. You see, a writer should choose the genre and conventions whose demands they can satisfy. And a dissatisfied reader can always buy a different book, or even write whatever they like themselves⁴⁵.

Musierowicz's response is not as kind as previously. She asks rhetorical questions, scolding her reader, and refers her to other authors – the tone is not neutral, with the openly patronizing concluding sentence. A few days later, on 22 Nov, 15:14, another fan, Iwona, asks for “more action and humor, like in *Kłamczucha* and *Szósta klepka*” in the next novel⁴⁶. Musierowicz responds promptly, only 14 minutes later, and once again her comment does not invite further discussion:

I am sorry, Iwona, but I shall write as I please. After all, I am an expert in writing my books. There is ample evidence.

Kind regards⁴⁷.

A similar comment was published almost a year later, on 1 Sep 2016, 20:52, also in answer to a private message, this time to a fan using a nickname “Book thief”:

Book thief (DM) – apparently, we live in two different realities. I prefer mine. I also kindly remind you that I only write books for children and young adults. [...] There are so many other authors who would be happy to satisfy your needs, please turn to them⁴⁸.

Musierowicz has never officially responded to critical articles by e.g. Eliza Szybowicz⁴⁹, who accuses her (among others) of being conservative and outdated. However, she has shared various

⁴⁴Małgorzata Musierowicz, comment from 18.11.2015 r., 18:35, to a post “Dary jesieni!”, musierowicz.com.pl, date of access 18.09.2024, <https://musierowicz.com.pl/mm/?p=730#comment-7735>.

⁴⁵Małgorzata Musierowicz, comment from 13.11.2015, 23:54, to a post “Dary jesieni!”, musierowicz.com.pl, date of access 18.09.2024, <https://musierowicz.com.pl/mm/?p=730#comment-7427>.

⁴⁶Iwona, comment from 22.11.2015, 15:14, to a post “Dary jesieni!”, musierowicz.com.pl, date of access 18.09.2024, <https://musierowicz.com.pl/mm/?p=730#comment-8151>.

⁴⁷Małgorzata Musierowicz, comment from 22.11.2015, 15:28, to a post “Dary jesieni!”, musierowicz.com.pl, date of access 18.09.2024, <https://musierowicz.com.pl/mm/?p=730#comment-8157>.

⁴⁸Małgorzata Musierowicz, comment from 13.11.2015, 23:54, to a post “Dary jesieni!”, musierowicz.com.pl, date of access 18.09.2024, <https://musierowicz.com.pl/mm/?p=730#comment-7427>.

⁴⁹See Eliza Szybowicz, “Była fanka czyta Musierowicz” [Ex-fan rereads Musierowicz], *krytykapolityczna.pl*, 11.02.2013 r., date of access 18.09.2024, <https://krytykapolityczna.pl/kultura/czytaj-dalej/byla-fanka-czyta-musierowicz/>.

wishes of her fans, and her responses to accusations from direct messages. The examples cited above represent different tones – from kindness to palpable irritation and tiredness with the topic – and may indicate that she was aware of discussions surrounding *Jeźycjada*, and decided to end them each time in the same way: by stressing that her novels represent a specific genre, and she remains faithful to it.

In a comment from 7 Nov 2015, 19.59, “monik” described one of Musierowicz’s books as a type of books which make the world a better and more interesting place⁵⁰. On the same day at 20:30 MałgM responded: “Moniku, I too like reading such books. So I thought to myself: I am going to write one! The more, the merrier”⁵¹. In a few subsequent comments Musierowicz states that she writes books for children and young people, but these books are also enjoyed by adults⁵². On 29 Oct 2015 she described the novel she was working on as humorous and slightly romantic⁵³.

Three comments by Musierowicz from 2016 are especially interesting from the perspective of this study. In two of them the author refers to a promise she – allegedly – had once made to her reader: not to kill off any major protagonist of *Jeźycjada*⁵⁴. At the same time she added that even without that promise she would not do it, as the genre in which she writes “has its rules and demands”, and her books are supposed to make both readers and herself “laugh and feel good”⁵⁵. As can be seen, Musierowicz consistently follows the rules of books for young people – although unfortunately these rules are not explicitly expressed. The third comment presents Musierowicz as an author who, being faithful to the convention, can also be faithful to what she personally believes. On 28 Mar 2016, when asked whether she actually believed “in such good fate and good, true love?”⁵⁶, she confirmed, adding that even if she did not believe in it, she considered a happy ending a criterion demanded by “heartwarming books for young people”⁵⁷. Musierowicz consequently constructs her image as an author for children and young adults, who writes heartwarming, humorous, romantic novels, in which she does not deal with brutal themes; she also refrains from directly commenting on politics, both in her books and on her blog.

⁵⁰monik, comment from 7.11.2015, 19:59, to a post “Dary jesieni!”, musierowicz.com.pl, date of access 10.09.2024, <https://musierowicz.com.pl/mm/?p=730#comment-7026>.

⁵¹Małgorzata Musierowicz, comment from 7.11.2015, 20:30, to a post “Dary jesieni!”, musierowicz.com.pl, date of access 18.09.2024, <https://musierowicz.com.pl/mm/?p=730#comment-7029>.

⁵²Małgorzata Musierowicz, comment from 4.11.2015, 22:35, to a post “Dary jesieni!”, musierowicz.com.pl, date of access 10.09.2024, <https://musierowicz.com.pl/mm/?p=730#comment-6853>. See also: Małgorzata Musierowicz, comment from 18.02.2015, 19:41, to a post “Okładka”, musierowicz.com.pl, date of access 10.09.2024, <https://musierowicz.com.pl/mm/?p=315#comment-1181>.

⁵³Małgorzata Musierowicz, comment from 29.10.2015, 23:03, to a post “Dary jesieni!”, musierowicz.com.pl, date of access 18.09.2024, <https://musierowicz.com.pl/mm/?p=730#comment-6657>.

⁵⁴Małgorzata Musierowicz, comment from 25.01.2016, 22:57, to a post “Co robiłam po południu” [What I was doing in the afternoon], musierowicz.com.pl, date of access 18.09.2024, <https://musierowicz.com.pl/mm/?p=977#comment-10793>; Małgorzata Musierowicz, comment from 8.02.2016, 11:25, to a post “Co robiłam po południu”, musierowicz.com.pl, date of access 18.09.2024, <https://musierowicz.com.pl/mm/?p=977#comment-11308>.

⁵⁵Małgorzata Musierowicz, comment from 8.02.2016, 11:25, to a post “Co robiłam po południu”, musierowicz.com.pl, date of access 18.09.2024, <https://musierowicz.com.pl/mm/?p=977#comment-11308>.

⁵⁶Agata, comment from 28.03.2016 r., 18:53, to a post “Dary jesieni”, musierowicz.com.pl, date of access 7.09.2024, <https://musierowicz.com.pl/mm/?p=730#comment-12900>.

⁵⁷Małgorzata Musierowicz, comment from 28.03.2016, 19:59 to a post “Dary jesieni!”, musierowicz.com.pl, date of access 18.09.2024, <https://musierowicz.com.pl/mm/?p=730#comment-12902>.

It also seems that Musierowicz wants to be perceived as a good craftswoman; she never writes about inspiration or afflatus, but she often mentions patience, self-discipline and routine, even claiming that she was “programed for writing”⁵⁸. Her attitude towards her protagonists is less emotional than that of her readers, she often modifies her books, she does not get attached to her ideas, and in her case creation “mostly consists of elimination”⁵⁹.

The topics presented above do not paint a full picture of what Musierowicz writes about the creative process and her role as an author, but these are mostly repetitive, and some of them – such as the question of genre awareness and the definition of “a novel for children and young adults” or Musierowicz’s attitude towards criticism of *Jeźycjada* – *deserve a separate study*.

Summary

Małgorzata Musierowicz has been blogging for sixteen years, posting hundreds of blog entries and thousands of comments in answer to tens of thousands of comments by her fans. What was initially meant to serve as a way of keeping in touch with readers and a source of reliable information about Musierowicz has evolved into a dialogue with readers, a blog community, in which Musierowicz – due to the selected form, i.e. blog posts in the form of letters with enabled comments – facts about her, her private and professional life are revealed, directly and indirectly. Her website can be treated as an archive of an author who makes detailed plans as to what to say and how to say it, and consequently – what to leave for those interested in her life and work.

This is only an outline of Musierowicz’s online autobiography, suggesting how to approach what she publishes about herself, and more broadly, to what authors write about themselves, what image they curate online. What does it mean – in the world of autobiographical blogs and social media posts – to be a writer today? What is the relationship between contemporary online autobiographical practices and traditional printed autobiographies, and what is the impact of the medium on the character of autobiography? There is a difference in how not only authors, but all Internet users present themselves on blogs, Facebook, Instagram, TikTok, or X. Autobiography – traditionally, a deliberate, organized, retrospective form – transforms into fragmentary, polimedia notes written spontaneously, incorporating images, video and audio materials. Scholars analyzing those materials can try to construct a coherent narrative about an author using already established tools for analyzing and describing various media. However, the problem is that online means of expression are changing very quickly, and those which are well-known are evolving. New social media platforms are being created all the time, working out their own formats, transforming ways in which creators communicate, and in which followers consume their content. Practice is often faster than theory, and works which are complete, impossible to delete, copy or edit are hard to come by. Scholars interested in studying online activity of writers would have to constantly keep track of their social media activity.

⁵⁸Małgorzata Musierowicz, comment from 12.11.2015, 09:50, to a post “Dary jesieni!”, [musierowicz.com.pl](https://musierowicz.com.pl/mm/?p=730#comment-7313), date of access 18.09.2024, <https://musierowicz.com.pl/mm/?p=730#comment-7313>.

⁵⁹Małgorzata Musierowicz, comment from 11.12.2015, 09:52, to a post “Święty Mikołaj. Niewątpliwie” [Santa Claus. Undoubtedly], [musierowicz.com.pl](https://musierowicz.com.pl/mm/?p=818#comment-9227), date of access 18.09.2024, <https://musierowicz.com.pl/mm/?p=818#comment-9227>.

Musierowicz's online existence also begs the question about the categories of "truth" and "authenticity", opening new fields of comparative research: what she says about herself on her blog, in interviews and other sources, including printed ones. The literary character of her online posts and their place in her creative work is another interesting matter. As already signaled by Maciej Maryl, all those questions deserve further research – not just in the case of www.musierowicz.com.pl, but also various online channels of communication of different authors who try to reach their audiences, present themselves in a variety of social roles, and have an impact on the shape of literary life.

translated by Paulina Zagórska

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KEYWORDS

Małgorzata Musierowicz

B L O G

*children's and young
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ABSTRACT:

The paper analyzes Małgorzata Musierowicz's online autobiography based on posts and comments published on her official website, www.musierowicz.com.pl, from 2014 to 2016. First, terms such as official website, blog, autobiographical pact and autobiographical practices are defined. Next, the paper analyzes how Musierowicz constructs her identity as an author, using tools typical for blogs, i.e. posts and comments. The study concludes that Musierowicz consciously uses the specificity of blog for constructing a dialogue with reader and curating her image of a hard-working, skilled author of young adult fiction. Finally, the paper points out to other questions worth considering in the context of Musierowicz's blog, as well as blog and social media activity of other authors.

autobiography

comments

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A Horneyan Interpretation of Characters' Personalities in Olga Tokarczuk's *Primeval and Other Times*

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Introduction

Interpreting literature from a psychoanalytic point of view has long been popular. Freud strongly believed in the links between psychoanalysis and literature, and referred to literature and art in 22 of his writings.¹ The mutual attraction between psychoanalysis and literature is also evidenced by the interest of many great writers in Freud, as well as the numerous articles, books, and seminars by literary critics on literary and psychoanalytic topics.

Olga Tokarczuk's *Primeval and Other Times*, originally published in 1996 under the title *Prawiek i inne czasy*, was her third novel and won her a critical success. The novel was translated into English by Antonia Lloyd-Jones.² The story takes place in Prawiek (Primeval), a fictional village in the very center of Poland, where some eccentric archetypal characters live. Beginning in 1914, the novel chronicles the lives of the residents of Primeval over a period of 80 years. It was translated into many languages and established Tokarczuk's international reputation as one of the most important Polish writers of her generation. Previous research on this novel was written mainly from the perspective of magical realism or ecofeminism, or compared it with other novels in terms of their theme. Ewa V. Wampuszyc analyzed the magical realist mode of writing in Tokarczuk's *Primeval*

¹ S. Kristiansen, "The psychoanalyst and the poet – a meeting between Sigmund Freud and Rainer Maria Rilke," *The Scandinavian Psychoanalytic Review*, 36, no. 1, (2013) :52–56. (Segal, 1991, as cited in Kristiansen, 2013).

² Olga Tokarczuk, *Primeval and Other Times*, trans. Antonia Lloyd-Jones (Prague: Twisted Spoon Press, 2010).

and *Other Times* and *House of Day, House of Night*.³ Maciej Karasinski discussed thematic parallels in *The Legends of Khasak* and *Primeval and Other Times* and interpreted forms of spiritual oppression presented in these novels, and examined the narration, symbols, making and unmaking of the places the authors call “god’s playground.”⁴ Noemi Fregara analyzed the transgressive female characters in Tokarczuk’s four novels, including *Primeval and Other Times*, through the theoretical approaches of ecocriticism, ecofeminism, and Monster Studies and highlighted their challenge to the anthropocentric and androcentric viewpoints, aimed at liberating all minorities from oppression.⁵ Jarosław Anders described Tokarczuk’s mixture of lyrical realism and fantasy, and concluded that Tokarczuk’s mythopoetic designs to express the unity of human and natural world were not entirely successful, yet they produced literature expressing eclectic curiosity, imaginative daring, and earnest concern with the moral challenges faced today.⁶ Among the research on *Primeval and Other Times*, study from the perspective of psychoanalysis was limited, so this paper analyzes this novel from the perspective of Karen Horney’s psychoanalysis to enrich study of the novel.

With the help of the neo-psychoanalyst Karen Horney’s anxiety theory, this paper analyzes the three main characters Cornspike, Misia and Paweł and their anxieties in Olga Tokarczuk’s *Primeval and Other Times*. Cornspike, Misia and Paweł are trying to get rid of their anxiety, but their attempts fail except for Cornspike’s. According to Horney’s theory of anxiety, in the process of fighting against anxiety, only through the flexible application of three strategies—namely moving towards people, moving against people and moving away from people—can the individuals ultimately succeed in conquering their anxiety and maintain a harmonious relationship as well as keep the integrity and independence of their personality.

This paper finds that Paweł and Misia belong to the aggressive and compliant type respectively, while Cornspike manages to overcome her anxiety by using three defensive strategies flexibly. Paweł and Misia’s stubbornness in applying merely one defensive strategy leads to their tragic end. Although Cornspike has suffered numerous hardships, she successfully survived in a dark world full of suffering, found comfort in nature, and remained true to herself. The reasons lie behind the three characters’ anxiety and their applying different defensive strategies worthy of our exploration and attention.

1. Karen Horney’s Anxiety Theory

According to Horney, anxiety is “a feeling of being small, insignificant, helpless, deserted, endangered in a world that is out to abuse, cheat, attack, humiliate, betray, envy”.⁷ Horney strongly

³ Ewa V. Wampuszyc, “Magical Realism in Olga Tokarczuk’s *Primeval and Other Times* and *House of Day, House of Night*,” *East European Politics & Societies* 28, no. 2 (May 2014): 366-385.

⁴ Maciej Karasinski, “Mapping the Contours of Spiritual Oppression: Thematic Parallels of Magical Reality in O. V. Vijayan’s *The Legends of Khasak* and Olga Tokarczuk’s *Primeval and Other Times*,” *Papers on Language & Literature* 58, no. 2 (Spring 2022): 165-201.

⁵ Noemi Fregara, “Ecological, Feminist, and Monstruous Trends Against Women and Nature’s Oppression in Olga Tokarczuk’s Works,” *Metacritic Journal for Comparative Studies and Theory*, no. 2 (2023): 150-166.

⁶ Jarosław Anders, “*Primeval and Other Times* by Olga Tokarczuk: The ‘Tender Narrator’ and the Perils of Myth,” *The Polish Review* 66, no. 2 (2021): 105-117.

⁷ Karen Horney, *The Neurotic Personality of Our Time* (London: Routledge, 1937), 92.

emphasizes the effects of anxiety in the development of neurotic personality, and indicates that “anxiety is the dynamic center of neurosis and thus we shall have to deal with it all the time”.⁸

According to Horney, there are two important sources of people’s anxiety. One is the macro-environment, which is mainly composed of the social and cultural conditions in which an individual lives, and the other is the micro-environment, which refers to the individual’s living experiences.⁹

To protect themselves from the torment of anxiety, the individual will generate certain neurotic needs, such as the neurotic need for power, the neurotic need for affection, or the neurotic need for isolation to battle against or escape from his anxiety. These neurotic needs will drive people to apply certain defensive and rigid strategies to deal with the people around them, which are called neurotic trends.

In *Our Inner Conflicts*, from ten types of neurotic needs, Horney concludes three trends people utilize to deal with basic anxiety.¹⁰ The three trends are “move towards others” in a self-effacing solution of love and compliance, or “move against others” in an expansive solution of mastery and aggression, or “move away from others” in a resignation solution of freedom and detachment. These neurotic trends will easily give rise to the development of three kinds of neurotic personalities: the compliant type, the aggressive type and the detached type.

The three strategies cooperate with each other to help people deal with their anxiety. But the neurotic individual will find it hard to choose and flexibly utilize the three strategies, so he rigidly uses one solution almost exclusively regardless of whether or not it is adaptive, denies or represses the other two solutions.

2. Misia as the Compliant Type—Desire for Affection and Approval

Misia belongs to the compliant type formed by her family background and social environment. Horney found that a childhood marked by lack of warmth and security and a feeling of isolation and helplessness in a potentially hostile world can lead to neurosis in either males or females. In Misia’s childhood, she was lonely, had no friends to play with, witnessed her mother’s love affair, was often spanked by her mother, and lacked her father’s love until she was 5 years old. Therefore, she was easily enchanted by Paweł’s praises and compliments, dropped out of university, married him, and then started her unfortunate life. Horney effectively demonstrates that cultural factors and approved sex roles encourage women to be dependent on men for love, prestige, wealth, care, and protection. This dependence results in overemphasis on pleasing men, on the feminine “cult of beauty and charm,” and on the overvaluation of love.¹¹

⁸ Horney, *The Neurotic Personality of Our Time*, 41.

⁹ Karen Horney, *Neurosis and Human Growth* (London: Routledge, 1950), 14.

¹⁰ Karen Horney, *Our Inner Conflicts* (London: Routledge, 1946).

¹¹ Karen Horney, “The overvaluation of love. A study of a common present-day feminine type,” *The Psychoanalytic Quarterly*, no. 3 (1934): 605-638.

2.1 Misia's Growing Environment—the Formation of Her Anxiety

Misia's anxieties are the result of social and familial environments, that is, the unstable society caused by war and her incomplete family in her childhood. When Misia was born, her father was fighting in the war, and she lived alone with her mother. Under the influence of war, Misia's world was like the world of other people and animals, dark, full of suffering, like a murky pond overgrown with duckweed.¹² Her father returned home when she was about four years old. Due to trauma caused by war, initially after his return, Misia's father staggered as he walked and often cried at night, nestling against her mother's breasts. To Misia, the image of her father was like a child and Misia treated him as her equal. However, after her father's return, Misia also began to see the world. Before then everything had been blurred and out of focus. Misia couldn't remember herself from before her father's return, as if she hadn't existed at all.¹³

During Misia's childhood, she seemed to have no friends to play with, even when she was ten, she could only play with her dolls, or went to her mother's dressing table to play or searched for things in a drawer in the kitchen table. "Misia liked the Queen of Spades the best. She thought her the most beautiful and the saddest. The Queen of Spades had a bad husband. The Queen of Spades didn't have any friends. She was very lonely."¹⁴ The Queen of Spades was like Misia herself, sad and lonely.

2.2 The Defensive Strategy of Misia—Moving Towards People

According to Horney, "the compliant type needs to be liked, wanted, desired, loved; to feel accepted, welcomed, approved of, appreciated; to be needed, to be of importance to others, especially to one particular person; to be helped, protected, taken care of, guided".¹⁵

Because of a lack of warmth in childhood, Misia had the neurotic need to be liked and approved, so she was lost in Paweł's praise and compliment. When Paweł stared at Misia and praised her, she thought about herself: "I am a pretty girl. I have small feet, like a Chinese woman, I have beautiful hair. I smile in a very feminine way. I smell of vanilla. A person might long to see me. I am a woman".¹⁶ Misia dropped out from university because she wanted to get married. Paweł wanted to get married even if he was still at school. Genowefa was satisfied with Paweł, while Michał thought Misia shouldn't marry so soon and should continue her study and enjoy life. Michał got the impression that his Misia had been written into Poweł Boski's ambitious life plans, like an object.¹⁷

After her marriage, Misia was continuously giving birth to children because Paweł wasn't willing to use condoms. At the same time, she had to cope with a large house and doing kitchen work and laundry. During her life, she gave birth to six children, including twin sisters in her fifth parturition. She lost herself in her marriage.

¹²Tokarczuk, *Primeval and Other Times*, 17.

¹³Tokarczuk, *Primeval and Other Times*, 43.

¹⁴Tokarczuk, *Primeval and Other Times*, 61.

¹⁵Horney, *Our Inner Conflicts*, 51.

¹⁶Tokarczuk, *Primeval and Other Times*, 87.

¹⁷Tokarczuk, *Primeval and Other Times*, 89.

Faced with her husband's disloyalty, poor Misia found excuses for him and thought she shouldn't resent him for that because she had been pregnant, fat and swollen, and she was then in her confinement. "After her third child she grew fat, her hair lost its shine and went straight. Now her eyes were the colour of bitter chocolate. She was pregnant for the fourth time, for the first time she thought it was too much for her. She didn't want this child".¹⁸ When she was delivering the baby, Paweł had gone on another course, so her father looked after her in her confinement. Although Misia found out her husband was unfaithful to her, she couldn't change anything and was pregnant for the fifth time, giving birth to the girls Lila and Maja. The same year her father Michał died of heart disease. Without her father's help, her life became even worse.

When their children did something wrong, Paweł would blame Misia and said she had to be tough with the children and keep them on a tight rein. Paweł was free to pursue his career and play with his friends while Misia had to take care of the house, the children and give birth to more children. Everyday Misia had lots of things to do – the cooking, the laundry, and cleaning the yard. Paweł only appeared in the evenings. Misia was unsatisfied with Paweł, but when he bought antibiotics and saved their two daughters from illness, she forgot his previous mistakes and "slid under Paweł's quilt and cuddled up to him as close as she could".¹⁹ Misia was completely subdued by Paweł.

Since Misia's marriage with Paweł, her whole life was dictated and controlled by him. Misia couldn't even choose where to be buried after her death. One day Paweł hired some men to dig the family tomb next to his father's and sister's graves, Misia asked "Why isn't it next to my parents?" Paweł mocked her, "Why, why, why, it's too cramped there".²⁰ When Misia was alive, she was dominated by her husband. Her wish to be buried next to her parents was also mocked and refused by her husband.

3. Paweł as the Aggressive Type — Madly Pursuing Power and Mastery

For the aggressive type of people, cruelty, ruthlessness and a lack of consideration for others are quite common. Paweł is a representative of the personality of the aggressive type. He develops the personality of strong egotism and aggressiveness. "He knew he would have everything he desired, that he would push forwards and on one would be able to stop him".²¹

3.1 Paweł's Growing Environment — the Formation of His Anxiety

The arrogant-vindictive people usually have a harsh childhood. Therefore, they are ferociously competitive as an adult. Bernard J. Paris, an American scholar who advocates Karen Horney's anxiety theory, believes that the arrogant-vindictive people want to "enslave others, to play on their emotions, to frustrate, disparage, and humiliate them".²²

¹⁸Tokarczuk, *Primeval and Other Times*, 176.

¹⁹Tokarczuk, *Primeval and Other Times*, 188.

²⁰Tokarczuk, *Primeval and Other Times*, 233.

²¹Tokarczuk, *Primeval and Other Times*, 83.

²²Bernard J. Paris, *Imagined Human Beings: A Psychological Approach to Character and Conflict in Literature* (New York: New York University Press, 1997), 23.

Old Boski's son Paweł was from a poor family and wanted to be someone "important". He even imagined himself to be the son of the rich Popielski, and he despised his own father and three sisters. He was afraid that if he didn't start to take action soon, he would become as "unimportant" as his father and would spend his whole life putting shingles on a roof. Therefore, when he turned 16, he got out of the house where his ugly sisters reigned supreme and found himself a job.²³

3.2 The Defensive Strategy of Paweł—Moving against People

The aggressive type of people pursue mastery crazily and has a need to control others to prove his powerfulness. Mastery attracts them most, and they tend to be hostile and aggressive. Paweł was ambitious, he desired knowledge and education. But at the same time, he was very arrogant, and disliked his poor home and his three sisters. He hated the dirt that got into the cracks in the old wooden cottage, into the floors and under his fingernails. He hated the stench of cow manure that permeated his clothing when he went into the barn. He hated the smell of potatoes being steamed for the pigs – it pervaded the entire house and everything inside it, including his hair and skin. He hated the boorish dialect in which his parents spoke and which sometimes pushed its way onto his own tongue. He hated the cloth, the raw wood, the wooden spoons, the holy pictures from the church fête, and his sisters' fat legs.²⁴

To aggressive people, any "situation or relationship is looked at from the standpoint of what can I get out of it?"—whether it is about money, prestige, contacts, or ideas".²⁵ Paweł kept gazing at Misia for several months each Sunday when she came to the church. One Sunday, he got the chance to talk with Misia and said she was dainty, like a luxury Swiss watch. He said her hair was the color of the dearest type of gold.²⁶ Paweł used "luxury Swiss watch" and "gold" to describe Misia; to him, Misia was from a better family than him, so he regarded marrying Misia as an easy way to climb up.

Through his efforts to climb upwards, Paweł finally got a job inspecting the cleanliness of shops, restaurants and bars. If he wanted, Paweł could have any shop or eatery closed down. He was important. He was given presents and treated to vodka and the freshest jellied pig's feet.²⁷ This was how he met Ukleja, the owner of a cake shop and several other, who introduced Paweł to the world of secretaries and lawyers, drinking sprees and hunting, willing busty barmaids and alcohol, which provided the courage to get as much out of life as possible.

After obtaining power, Paweł's emotion and attitude towards Misia changed. Misia knew he was squeezing and screwing all those barmaids, butcher's shop girls, and waitresses from the restaurants he monitored as a state official. One day when Paweł came home rather tipsy, Misia went up to him with all four children. "I'll kill you if you ever do it again," she said. He blinked,

²³Tokarczuk, *Primeval and Other Times*, 82.

²⁴Tokarczuk, *Primeval and Other Times*, 83.

²⁵Horney, *Our Inner Conflicts*, 65.

²⁶Tokarczuk, *Primeval and Other Times*, 87.

²⁷Tokarczuk, *Primeval and Other Times*, 156-157.

but didn't try pretending not to know what was the matter. Then he threw his boots in the corner and laughed merrily.²⁸ Paweł has achieved his aim of being important and powerful, he didn't care too much of others' feelings and even went against his father-in-law and wife.

4. Cornspike—Flexible Application of Defensive Strategies

4.1 The Formation of Cornspike's Anxiety

"There are two kinds of learning, from the inside and from the outside. Cornspike learned the world by absorbing things from the outside to the inside".²⁹ In the novel, the society and hardships taught her how to survive. Cornspike wins her battle against her anxiety by flexibly applying the three defensive strategies, that is, moving against people, moving towards people, and moving away from people. Although Cornspike has suffered a lot of hardships and contempt from other people, she successfully survived in an unstable society, found solace in nature, and remained herself.

4.2 The Defensive Strategy of Cornspike

4.2.1 Moving towards people

Cornspike was a barefoot and pathetic girl who didn't have family members nor a house to live in. She even had no name, and people called her Cornspike because she gathered ears of corn left over after the harvest. She suffered from the anxiety of conflict between starving to death and morality. In order to survive, she applied the strategy of moving towards people. She stole potatoes and whored with men to trade for food because people are unwilling to give something for nothing, for free.³⁰ However, when having sex with men, she didn't feel inferior to them. She never wanted to lie on her back in an honest way. She'd say: "Why should I lie underneath you? I'm your equal".³¹

Influenced by war and the flu epidemic in 1918, Cornspike chose to go back to the human world to search for food to avoid being starved. She went to Genowefa's mill to search for food, she went into the cool shade ahead of her, and instantly fell to her knees to gather up scattered, single grains and the heaps of dust that had once been flour. She scooped up the grains with her slender fingers and stuffed them into her mouth. Her feet were bare and wounded, with toenails as tough as an animal's claws.³²

In addition, kind-hearted Cornspike also moved towards the pathetic and lonely Florentynka, whose husband and seven of her nine children had died, while the two children left had deserted her. Her head often ached, and she couldn't sleep at night. She often shook her fist at the moon

²⁸Tokarczuk, *Primeval and Other Times*, 176-177.

²⁹Tokarczuk, *Primeval and Other Times*, 18.

³⁰Tokarczuk, *Primeval and Other Times*, 17.

³¹Tokarczuk, *Primeval and Other Times*, 18.

³²Tokarczuk, *Primeval and Other Times*, 30.

and shouted at the moon. Cornspike went to Florentynka and comforted her with her dream and told her that the moon hoped she could forgive him. Convinced by Cornspike's dream, Florentynka forgave the moon. Florentynka became the mother of Cornspike and became the grandmother of Cornspike's daughter Ruta. They often went to see Florentynka and took food to her.³³

4.2.2 Moving against people

Although Cornspike was poor, she was clever enough to see through other people's bad schemes. Mrs. Popielska, the squire's wife, didn't want Cornspike to stay in Primeval; she told Cornspike she ran a shelter in Jeszkotle and distributed food and clothing before the harvest. "People don't want you here. You bring confusion and depravity. You are a loose woman you should go away from here" Cornspike fought against her bravely and said, "Aren't I free to be where I want?"³⁴

When the carpenters whistled at her and when the Parish priest told her to keep away from Primeval and Jeszkotle, and his parishioners, she confronted contempt from those men by laughing, lifting her skirt and showing them her naked underbelly. This was her way of fighting against those men who despised her.

Although Cornspike was poor her whole life, she didn't want her daughter to marry Ukleja, a rich but rude and violent man. She knew her daughter would not be happy marrying Ukleja.

4.2.3 Moving away from people

Although she couldn't find warmth and comfort from the human world, she could find companionship in the natural world, which healed her and helped her to be herself. She didn't have to cater to others' needs and lived an independent life.

While Cornspike was rejected by the people in Primeval, she didn't lose heart and chose to live in the forest. She desired freedom and envied the hare, fish and lizard. In Cornspike's cottage in Wydy-macz, she lived with a snake, an owl, and a kite. Cornspike became close to the snake and named him Goldie. "Goldie would wait for her on every path, wherever she went, following her every move. During the day she let him lie on her bed. She carried him round her neck like a silver chain".³⁵

Cornspike seemed to be integrated into the nature through the depiction of her having sex with the masterwort plant which grew in front of her cottage. She could get along well with both animals and plants in the nature. Nature comforted her wounded heart. As Maciej Karasinski noted, "In Primeval, Cornspike acts as a fairy and the soothsayer of the community, who translates reality with the help of magic and dreams. She is an outcast with psychic prowess and deep

³³Tokarczuk, *Primeval and Other Times*, 100-101.

³⁴Tokarczuk, *Primeval and Other Times*, 19-20.

³⁵Tokarczuk, *Primeval and Other Times*, 62-63.

insight into the problems of the village".³⁶ Cornspike also found comfort and love in her dream; she dreamed of a large woman, and from the bottom of her heart she enjoyed the woman's touch and caresses. The large woman took Cornspike in her arms and cuddled her to her breast.³⁷

Because of her capability to be flexible in applying the three strategies to deal with her anxiety, Cornspike managed to cope with her hunger, protect herself from insults, and get healed by nature.

Conclusion

The main characters Cornspike, Misia and Paweł in Olga Tokarczuk's *Primeval and Other Times* suffer from anxieties caused by their social-cultural environments as well as their family circumstances. Their psychological anxiety shares qualities with Karen Horney's theory of anxiety. These main figures in the play have respectively resorted to one or more strategies to deal with their anxiety.

Misia and Paweł have respectively chosen one strategy as their only measure to relieve their anxiety. Paweł, in his pursuit of career success and power, shows his tendency of moving against people by despising his own parents, his sisters and almost everything in his parental house, as well as being unfaithful to Misia after he had career success. When his pursuit of love towards Misia was hindered by his father-in-law, he cunningly catered to his mother-in-law and Misia's needs. Before his success in his career, he seemed to be a diligent and caring husband. However, after attaining success, he revealed his real self, being harsh to his family members and whoring with other women. He moved against the people around him because he thought himself to be more important and superior to others. Finally, Paweł became a lonely man without any family members around him. Misia, growing up in an environment lacking warmth and disadvantaged by a male-dominated society, employed the strategy of moving towards people to pursue affection and approval. Being too obedient and dependent on her aggressive husband, she ended up dying filled with grief and regret.

Cornspike was the only person who conquered her anxiety. Because of her capability to flexibly apply the three strategies to deal with her anxiety, she coped with her hunger, protected herself from insults, and was healed by nature. She has wisely maintained her balance by adjusting the three strategies to certain situations. She applied the strategy of moving towards people when she was threatened with death by hunger; she applied the strategy of moving against people when she was insulted by other people; she applied the strategy of moving away from people when she was rejected by the human world and finally healed by nature. Her flexible use of the three strategies helped her to effectively maintain a healthy and complete personality as well as to avoid herself being hurt in a world of war and abuse.

By analyzing these three characters using Horney's anxiety theory, this paper shows how their anxieties are actually the product of their family background and social-cultural environment. It also demonstrates that only through the flexible application of Horney's three strategies for coping with anxiety can the characters maintain personal independence and security, and free themselves from their anxiety.

³⁶Karasinski, "Mapping the Contours of Spiritual Oppression," 185.

³⁷Tokarczuk, *Primeval and Other Times*, 24.

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ABSTRACT:

Interpreting literature from a psychoanalytic point of view has been popular, yet little research has touched upon Olga Tokarczuk's *Primeval and Other Times* from the perspective of psychoanalysis. Based on Karen Horney's anxiety theory, this paper analyzes the three main characters Cornspike, Misia and Paweł and their personalities in *Primeval and Other Times*. Through analyzing the manifestations and causes of the characters' anxieties, their defensive strategies against anxieties, as well as the consequences of their struggles, this paper reveals that social and cultural environments have influenced the characters and endangered anxieties in them. Furthermore, only by flexibly applying defensive strategies can one effectively fight against such anxieties. This paper not only deals with literary values in interpreting Olga Tokarczuk's *Primeval and Other Times*, but also has practical significance in arousing people's awareness about building harmonious familial and social relationships.

defensive strategies

OLGA TOKARCZUK

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An autofictional house of mirrors in the work of Andrzej Czcibor-Piotrowski

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Autofiction, meaning...?

In several decades since the term “autofiction” was coined by Serge Doubrovsky, this category has seen many different conceptualizations and striking definitions, also in Polish literary studies¹. The concept of the French writer and researcher was developed and argued against by, among others, Philippe Lejeune, Vincent Colonna², or Philippe Gasparini. The still unresolved debates on the interpretation of the term have rendered it incredibly opaque, which is why I need to clarify how I define the concept for the purposes of the following analysis.

Building on Jerzy Madejski’s discussion about the difficulties of defining autobiography, one can point to two basic “concepts of description”. The first would be a modality-based understanding of autobiography, one which does not delineate a rigid genre-dependent framework, and the other one, which is genre-based. The key differences between the two can be reduced to the following issue:

The former allows us to follow the various manifestations of autobiography in texts that are not autobiographies (because it is impossible to define this genre). The latter, whose authority is de-

¹ One of the best-known definitions is that of Regina Lubas-Bartoszyńska, from the 1990s: “Autofiction’ is nothing else but a novelized autobiography, which uses the name of the author, who engages in psychoanalytic activities”. Regina Lubas-Bartoszyńska, *Między autobiografią a literaturą* [Between autobiography and literature] (Warszawa: Wydawnictwo Naukowe PWN, 1993), 11.

² Who also discusses the works of Witold Gombrowicz in his 2003 book: Vincent Colonna, *Autofiction et autres mythomanies littéraires* (Paris: Éditions Tristram, 2003).

rived from the canon of autobiographical works, points to various texts which can be considered autobiographical nowadays, when using traditional forms of description of a literary work³.

Although Madejski does not use the term “autofiction” in the cited text, I believe that the division of theoretical concepts into modality- and genre-based ones is also justified in the case of works that can be included in this category. After all, as Jerzy Lis states, “[...] autofiction can be both a form and a category, a type of discourse, often even a convenient explanation for the difficulties in properly drawing the boundaries between autobiography and fiction”⁴.

Sometimes researchers advocate an understanding of autofiction close to the autobiographical novel without clearly separating the two concepts⁵. However, this view is rejected by the creator of the term. Years after the publication of his famous *Fils*, Serge Doubrovsky wrote:

[...] autofiction is not an autobiographical novel. An autobiographical novel is one in which the author tells stories that may have partly happened to him, but under a different name. [...] What is important to me is to establish oneself as one of the characters in the text; this is in line with the order of autobiography. The author cannot stay outside and tell his story from that perspective. They are in their text through the presence of their own name⁶.

According to theorists such as Doubrovsky, Regina Lubas Bartoszyńska, and more recently - Anna Turczyn⁷, a constitutive feature of works labeled ‘autofiction’ is that their subject uses them to perform “psychoanalytic activities” (the term is introduced by the author of *Między autobiografią a literaturą* [*Between autobiography and literature*]). However, I do not believe that this is a necessary exponent of the genre, unless, of course, we understand the very act of writing about oneself as an act of self-analysis. Taking this necessary correction into account, I concur with the genre-based perspective on autofiction. This is because it is difficult to accept extreme modality-based concepts that refer to the universal mechanism of fictionalization of the self, which operates in almost every literary text. They further dilute the meaning of the term, which was created in opposition to autobiography. Research literature on this manner of writing is considerable, although it must be said that definitions of its subject matter vary.

Thus, I understand autofiction as a strongly fictionalized prose literary work dealing with the fate of an individual, in which, based on a pact with the reader, the triple identity of

³ Jerzy Madejski, *Deformacje biografii* [Deformities of biography] (Szczecin: Wydawnictwo Naukowe Uniwersytetu Szczecińskiego, 2004), 13–14.

⁴ Jerzy Lis, *Obrzeża autobiografii. O współczesnym piśmarstwie autofikcyjnym we Francji* [Borders of autobiography. On contemporary autofictional writing in France] (Poznań: Wydawnictwo Naukowe UAM, 2006), 88.

⁵ This is what, among others, Joanna Jeziorska-Haładaj does. She writes: “I adopt a narrower understanding of autofiction, taking it to be a narrative based on one’s biographical facts, which are modified or fictionalized. In this sense, it is indeed close to the autobiographical novel, as Doubrovsky’s critics would have it”. Joanna Jeziorska-Haładaj, *Tekstowe wykładniki fikcji. Na przykładzie reportażu i powieści autobiograficznej* [Textual markers of fiction. On the example of reportage and autobiographical novel] (Warszawa: Fundacja Akademia Humanistyczna, IBL PAN, 2013), 67–68.

⁶ Serge Doubrovsky, „Fikcja wydarzeń ściśle rzeczywistych” [“The fictionality of strictly real events”], in conversation with Anna Turczyn, *Teksty Drugie* 5 (2005): 210.

⁷ See Anna Turczyn, „Autofikcja, czyli autobiografia psychopolifoniczna” [„Autofiction, or a psychopolyphonic autobiography”], *Teksty Drugie* 1-2 (2007): 204–211.

author-narrator-protagonist is preserved. Typically, this contract refers to onomastic issues and first-person narration (like in an autobiography), but this does not seem a prerequisite if other signals indicating this unity are strong enough.

Since the 1990s one has been able to observe in Polish literature an expansion of texts combining fiction with self-referentiality. In her article *Fikcja czy dokument? Problemy genologiczne w polskiej prozie po 1989 roku* [Fiction or documentary? Issues of genre in Polish prose after 1989], Iwona Pięta writes about “a new aesthetic quality, combined with a specific kind of expressivity contained in the selection and skillful use of seemingly inconsistent features,” which writers such as Izabela Filipiak, Olga Tokarczuk, Paweł Huelle and Andrzej Stasiuk achieved by combining intimacy with literary fiction⁸. In my text I would like to draw attention to the work of an author who, while not fully recognized, has brought to life one of the most distinctive and consistent autofictional projects in Polish literature. He thus became part of this autofictional boom, even though he belonged to an earlier generation of writers than the names mentioned above. Andrzej Czcibor-Piotrowski belongs to the generation of, for example, Ryszard Kapuściński, Marek Hłasko, Jerzy Kosinski or Tadeusz Konwicki. The latter two in particular, just like the author of *Rzeczy nienasycone* [Insatiable things], mix elements of fiction and autobiography in their works. Thus, they may constitute the background against which the distinctiveness of Czcibor-Piotrowski's literary path becomes apparent. The rise of autofiction, in which Czcibor-Piotrowski played a role at the turn of the 21st century, did not occur in isolation; rather, it stemmed from the intensification of literary trends that had been developing for decades.

The poet and translator, born in 1931, debuted with the novel *Prośba o Annę* [Asking for Anna] in 1962 after having published his first books of poetry. Following unfavourable reception of the book, he abandoned narrative forms. After several decades, as he was approaching his seventieth birthday, he returned to writing prose, announcing a trilogy about his childhood during World War II (*Rzeczy nienasycone* - published in 1999, 2nd edition in 2010; *Cud w Esfahanie* [The miracle in Esfahan] - 2001; *Nigdy dość. Mirakle* [Never enough. Miracles] - 2011). The series does not include *Straszne dni* [Terrible days], published in 2008, which were created in parallel with the third installment of the cycle and provide a direct commentary on the writing process. Thus, although formally they do not belong to the cycle, they show strong ties with it, which is evidenced by the presence of near-identical fragments in *Nigdy dość* and *Straszne dni*. All of the aforementioned works form a rich “autobiographical space,” further supplemented by the author's final book of poetry, *Autoportrety* [Self-portraits], published in 2011, and the unpublished *Rzecz o moich swowolnych rodzicach. Centurie miniatur* [About my frivolous parents. A centuria of miniatures] (dated circa 2013), which can be found in the writer's archive at the National Library. Taken together, these five extensive prose texts can be seen as a coherent autofictional project with a dynamics of its own.

However, the coherence of a literary project does not necessarily entail the stability of the “self” that emerges from it. The autofictional subject in Czcibor-Piotrowski's work is fluid, constantly shifting and self-correcting. Just when the reader feels they have grasped his es-

⁸ Iwona Pięta, „Fikcja czy dokument? – problemy genologiczne w polskiej prozie po 1989 roku” [„Fiction or documentary? – genre-related issues in Polish prose after 1989”, in: *Polska proza i poezja po 1989 roku wobec tradycji* [Polish prose and poetry after 1989 vis-à-vis tradition], ed. by Aleksander Głowczewski, Maciej Wróblewski (Toruń: Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Mikołaja Kopernika, 2007), 67.

sence, he fractures into multiple coexisting versions of himself (the issue here is not just that the protagonist narrating the series about puberty now is a boy - Drzejek, now a girl - Uta, which shifts happen naturally). Because of this, the unstable autofictional subject also opens up other connections, more external to the matter of a single work. Therefore, it is worth expanding the research reflection to include new contexts. Introducing the issues of seriality, archive, and paratext will allow us to gain a broader perspective and highlight the complexity of literary communication in the case of a genre as peculiar as autofiction.

The overarching procedure, adopted in this article to uncover the above-mentioned aspect, will be paratextual analysis. The concept of paratext, however, will be introduced in more detail towards the end of the following considerations. First, theoretical underpinnings of the seriality of autofiction and its significance for the construction of the autofictional self will be introduced, followed by information on Czcibor-Piotrowski which can be found in the National Library. It should be noted that although in the reading experience the aforementioned elements are revealed in the reversed order: first the paratext, then other works which are part of the series, finally - the archives. Yet, reversing that order can help establish the boundaries of the investigated paratext and prepare the ground for analysis proper.

Seriality

Writing about serial autofictional narratives, Ricarda Menn and Melissa Schuh emphasize that the strategies for constructing the subject stand in opposition to the perception of the subject in terms of a fixed self, with strictly delimited boundaries and closed structure, which are characteristic of traditional autobiographical projects⁹. The multiplied “self,” which combines fictional and self-referential dimensions, leads to the strengthening of the narrative’s auto-creative effect while emphasizing the aesthetic qualities of such “life-writing.” Through serial autofiction writers experiment with ways of expressing themselves and building their subjectivity, which is negotiated with each successive work. It is the autofictional self that provides structure to the series. This is why it is possible to speak of serial autofiction as a separate subcategory of a kind of writing that valorizes the sense of self as something unstable, and accidental, and points to the fact that the subject is constituted not by memorizing and recollecting things and facts¹⁰, but is subject to processes of fictionalization, a creative work of imagination and self-creation¹¹.

Marcin Wołk’s concept of “autobiographical narrative sequences” also seems to be operationally useful. The literary scholar defines those as “collections of fictional and non-fictional texts of one author, related through autobiographical intention (and, consequently, often having a common or similar narrator-protagonist, linked by mutual references, characterized by the

⁹ Ricarda Menn, Melissa Schuh, „The Autofictional in Serial, Literary Works”, in: *The Autofictional. Approaches, Affordances, Forms*, ed. by Alexandra Effe, Hannie Lawlor (Cham: Springer International Publishing AG, 2022), 102–103.

¹⁰ Since studies on the workings of memory and their influence on the creation of memoirs are not central to this article, I do not pursue this thread here. Works on the relationship between individual and collective memory demonstrate a great impact of cultural (and literary) schemata on the structuring of memory (e.g. Jan and Aleida Assmann’s concept of cultural memory).

¹¹ Menn, Schuh, 115–116.

identity, continuity or relatedness of the diegesis and recurrence of motifs), collections which do not possess formal characteristics of a cycle¹². Unlike a cycle, a sequence is not a concept from genre studies; it transcends genre and typology, which is why it includes both prose and poetic works (this is why Czcibor-Piotrowski's work *Autoportrety* belongs in the sequence¹³). For an autobiographically oriented writing, a cycle is less autonomous than in the case of collections of purely fictional texts. Wołk explains this in terms of the "totality" of autobiography, which is realized in the intertextual space and creates "quasi-cyclic"¹⁴ relations between different works of the writer. The researcher does not believe that the source of coherence in an autobiographical cycle proper are structural factors, but references to the real persona of the author (who is outside the text) and to their biography. Importantly, the autobiographical sequence understood in this way "maps the process of a person's creative struggle with the world, the institutions of literature and themselves"¹⁵. More on these struggles will be said later. It is worth noting that while Wołk does not mention the concept of autofiction, he does emphasize that in the case of autobiographical sequences, the self is created in the space between fictional and autobiographical texts.

In Czcibor-Piotrowski's work, the relatively stable subject of the trilogy is set in motion by successive elements of the sequence which transcend the cycle and reveal new manifestations of the "self." This autofictional project was not a closed work, fitting the established boundaries of the trilogy. It was open to corrections and transformations of the author's prose model, the sources of which can be seen, among other things, in the particular way in which autofiction operates in literary communication as a 'double pact' genre. Of course, one can never access the entire history of the author-reader relationship, but seriality allows one to observe some turning points: how reception affects the writer's attitude to their own work and their response to that reception. The act of inscribing oneself in autofiction is not innocent, nor is it inconsequential for the writer's self, as can be gleaned from a diachronically ordered reading of Czcibor-Piotrowski's authorial messages.

They are contained in the author's peritexts and epitexts¹⁶, but their scope cannot be limited only to the paratext, which was officially introduced into literary communication in the course of publication. That communication begins earlier, when constructing an authorial peritext (such as preface or afterword). Moreover, it should be emphasized that confining the paratext to the archive does not prevent the existence of actual communication (after all, manuscripts also have their readers), nor does it deprive it of features of a public paratext, given that it is created with a view to print publication. This is proven even by the relatively small Czcibor-Piotrowski's archive at the National Library.

¹² Marcin Wołk, „Autobiografizm i cykliczność” [„Autobiographism and cyclicity”], in: *Cykl i powieść* [The cycle and the novel], ed. by Krystyna Jakowska, Dariusz Kulesza, Katarzyna Sokołowska (Białystok: Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu w Białymstoku, 2004), 19.

¹³ While this might lead to interesting conclusions, I do not include *Autoportrety* in this analysis because I am focusing here on the issue of autofiction as a genre of prose.

¹⁴ Wołk, 24–25.

¹⁵ Wołk, 31–32.

¹⁶ Henceforth, whenever types of paratext are mentioned, I am using Gérard Genette's terminology, developed in his classic work *Seuils: Gérard Genette, Paratexts. Thresholds of Interpretation*, transl. by Jane E. Lewin (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997).

The archive

The intertextual space can also be interpretively expanded by examining manuscripts. The writer's efforts and dilemmas are rarely discernible in the printed text of the work (unless they express them explicitly, e.g., in metatextual remarks) but they become discernible in that which is "in-between": between specific texts, between the pre-text and text, between para-text and text. Following the genetic criticism framework, I would like to incorporate Czcibor-Piotrowski's notebooks and unpublished works into his autobiographical sequence. This decision has several important implications. As rightly noted by Olga Dawidowicz-Chymkowska:

The research object constructed in the first phase of a genetic critic's work can be viewed in one of two ways: as a plane of reference for the published text, which creates new interpretative possibilities, or as a testimony to the process of textual creation. [...] In the former case, the work's notebook constitutes a kind of intertextual space for the finished work, whose use in interpretation is legitimate from a historical-literary point of view. [...] The work, expanded by reference to the notebooks, becomes an open work of sorts, in which the shape of the text chosen for publication includes a range of other possible forms, and many versions of the work create an endless network of connections and mutual references¹⁷.

Moreover, contact with manuscripts reveals material traces of the creative process: the idiosyncrasies of handwriting, the reconstructable trajectory of deletions and corrections, the choice of writing material, etc. They are indications of the writer's physical existence, which is made present in this manner. Observing the dynamic process of writing equips the autofictional house of mirrors with yet another destabilizing mirror, and the autobiographical space obtains another dimension: the image of the subject actively working with the literary matter, modifying its forms. Since, due to the nature of autofiction, these operations are largely performed on the decipherable image of the self, changes and shifts within it can be observed more closely.

Unfortunately, the incomplete nature of Czcibor-Piotrowski's archive at the National Library does not allow the construction of a reasonably comprehensive, coherent narrative about his creative process. Below I list the elements of the collection that are the most interesting from the point of view of this article's focus, and which can aid the reading of Czcibor-Piotrowski's serial autofiction.

1. Andrzej Czcibor-Piotrowski's sketches and notes for the novel *Nigdy dość*, Rps 17692 III - this item includes 57 pages of manuscript notes and sketches for the third part of the series. These are short workshop notes written on various materials. For example, the writer used envelopes (or fragments thereof), advertising correspondence, flyers, etc. The whole thing is hardly legible and does not seem to be organized in any way.

2. *Nigdy dość. Mirakle*, Rps 17695 III - this is a complete typescript with numerous handwritten corrections by the author, generally minor ones, mostly concerning obvious typing errors or stylistic changes. The title page features a correction of the date from 2009 to 2011, which means that Czcibor-Piotrowski began typing the text in 2009, and then kept introducing corrections over the following

¹⁷Olga Dawidowicz-Chymkowska, *Przez kreślenie do kreacji. Analiza procesu twórczego zapisanego w brulionach dzieł literackich* [From sketching to creation. Analysing the creative process recorded in notebooks to works of literature] (Warszawa: IBL PAN, 2007), 9–10.

two years. The typescript belongs to the final phase of creating the text. However, there are no links attesting to the stages between notes from the earlier corpus of manuscripts and this notebook.

3. *Rzecz o moich swowolnych rodzicach. Centuria miniatur*, Rps 17697 III - computer printout with handwritten corrections by the author, dated roughly 2013. It contains a few minor changes applied in blue pen. The whole thing has the features of a final draft.

Given such a modest dossier, two main lines of research are possible - a micro-scale analysis of fragments based on workshop notes, or a macro-scale analysis of the perceived overall autofictional prose model and its transformations. I will focus on the latter, especially on the instability of the autofictional self. This involves treating manuscripts/typescripts as full-fledged links in the history of creativity, which are entitled to a similar status as texts published in print. Comparing published books with archival collections can shed light on otherwise hidden creative tensions and conflicts.

Paratext

At this point, the reflection must be expanded for the third time, to make room for the already mentioned paratext. Researchers of autofiction emphasize its important role in the programming of reception. It is in the paratext that the reader can find signals of the pact, as well as biographical data allowing the identification of the narrator-protagonist as one who shares, to some extent, the fate of the author who exists outside the text. These similarities facilitate the reading of the work within the autobiographical register. Such likeness refers to the author's biographical identity, following Philippe Gasparini's terminology¹⁸:

Gasparini also distinguishes the author's biographical identity defined by such elements as appearance, profession, origin, social environment, personal fate (*trajectoire personnelle*), views, tastes, lifestyle. The formation of hypotheses about biographical identity depends on the knowledge, availability and reliability of information. [...] Gasparini believes that the analysis of these aspects of identity (which requires going beyond the text and sometimes beyond the paratext), hitherto neglected in modern research or, let us add, associated with literary studies prior to the anti-positivist breakthrough, is necessary to describe more fully the overlapping roles of author and narrator.

Thus, the paratext guides interpretation and provides instructions on how a work should be read (fiction or autobiography?). In the case of autofiction, however, we are often faced with contradictory signals, with the assertion of an "impossible" pact – simultaneously novelistic and autobiographical. The analysis of the paratext can bring promising conclusions, especially if performed within the framework of the two interpretative approaches mentioned above – the one related to seriality, and the one incorporating pre-texts and unpublished works of Czcibor-Piotrowski. However, I am only interested in authorial paratext, as it relates to the creative process and often testifies to the writer's literary self-awareness. In this context, we can talk about instructive authorial messages which control the reading of the text. These should be considered

¹⁸ Jeziorska-Haładaj, 107–108.

from several perspectives, taking into account their various characteristics, for example, distance from the text (spatial and temporal), readership range, the ability to update earlier paratexts. Each of these exerts a different influence on the potential effectiveness of such a message.

Thus, for example, the author's self-commentary printed on the cover is closest to the text, it has a wide reach (the readers of a given issue), and is highly fossilised. This type of paratext can be updated by means of an authorial epithet: this happens when the author corrects earlier clues in interviews, thus demonstrating a change in the attitude to their work. Also, the peritexts accompanying the writer's subsequent works (or their new editions) can introduce meaningful updates. These are examples of actualized messages. Sometimes, however, in the writer's archive we come across potential messages - those that did not make it into literary circulation: an abandoned afterword, a draft of a preface that did not ultimately appear in a specific edition, etc. Then one could speak of, for lack of a better term, a pre-text to a paratext, an example of which is the afterword to *Nigdy dość. Mirakle* (Rps 17695 III), which was only partially published in the book. Significantly, paratextual operations can reveal interferences in communication or its breakdown.

The reading pact sometimes changes over time precisely because of the updating function, which is revealed by the peritexts of individual works or their subsequent editions, and by authorial statements which provide a commentary on the work. This is a crucial element of serial autofiction and affects the lability of the autofictional self, which can never establish itself and present itself in all its glory, even if a reader were to familiarize themselves with all available works, archives, paratexts. The new pact retroactively affects the earlier one. Let us take a brief look at how the author's messages changed in Czcibor-Piotrowski's prose, which signified attempts to reformulate the model of his autofiction and efforts to change its perception.

The cover of the first edition of *Rzeczy nienasycone* bears the following Czcibor-Piotrowski's commentary on the genesis of the book:

After many years, the temptation of prose took over me, and this story began to emerge slowly from "Notatki z pamięci" ["Notes from memory"], printed in the London magazine "My" ["We"]. I swam against the current of time into a barely remembered past. And suddenly what happened nearly sixty years ago came back to me. I was finding myself and loved ones, my people and strangers, recalling the wonders and epiphanies, the fears and hopes of childhood. I took this journey on a flying carpet and a dragon, experiencing wonderful vertigo¹⁹.

Analyzing this statement, Jeziorska-Haładaj on the one hand emphasizes the presence of the motifs of return to the past and the working of memory, which imply the credibility of events presented in the book and on the other – points to references to the fairy tale convention²⁰. Thus, a coherent paratextual framework is never constituted, and the reader is left with a "double" reading of the text.

¹⁹Andrzej Czcibor-Piotrowski, *Rzeczy nienasycone* [Insatiable things] (Warszawa: Wydawnictwo W.A.B., 1999), 4th page of the cover.

²⁰Jeziorska-Haładaj, 129.

In his 2001 interview with Grzegorz Leszczyński²¹, Czcibor-Piotrowski raised questions about the fictionality/authenticity of the characters and plots described in his book, which had been published two years earlier. He listed both characters whose prototypes existed in reality, and those who were invented (for example, father Grigorij). These comments entitle us to read the first part of the series both as a credible and, to use the author's own words, "probable" autobiography: "How brilliantly memory can reproduce things that seem impossible to remember, especially for a child!"²². His comments on the genre-related nature of the classification of *Rzeczy nienasycone* are particularly interesting: "There is a great deal of fiction in the novel"²³. This tautological formula paradoxically highlights that which is the opposite of fiction.

In that same 2001 *Cud w Esfahanie* was published. Similarly to the earlier book, the self-commentary on the last page of the cover briefly outlined the genesis of the work, again is referencing fairy tale props: "The flying carpet carries me, and invariably I am accompanied by all my loved ones wherever I go, and the trail is long: Pahlevi, Tehran, Esfahan, and then a very long journey all the way to Edinburgh...."²⁴. Thus, a quasi-genre formula came into being. The series was labelled a "fantastic fairy tale", which the writer entered "against his will" (the imperative of memory), as well as "non-fabricated fabrication". The latter is a definition of autofiction in a nutshell. Czcibor-Piotrowski thus continued to insist on the dual status of his series, which seems to be his constant disposition to the reader at this stage of his work.

In the following years Czcibor-Piotrowski was writing the third and final part of the series (originally planned under the title *Jakiż to chłopiec?* [*What boy is this?*], but in the end published as *Nigdy dość. Mirakle*) and on a piece of autofiction, which, while not a component of the cycle, remains closely connected to it by providing a commentary on the process of creating *Nigdy dość*. The text in question is *Straszne dni*, which fundamentally changed the subject of the narrative: childhood memories were substituted by the writer's old age, his daily struggles with his work and illness. Prefacing the text proper, *Zamiast wstępu* [*Instead of an introduction*] contains a slightly altered set of instructions than the ones we have witnessed so far. On the one hand, the writer described the piece as "a notebook, notes from the eye of the storm of beautiful terrible days of old age" and "loose pages from everyday life"²⁵, which are indicative of authenticity. On the other hand, at the end of this peculiar introduction he made a volte-face (after all!), addressing the following words to the reader: "An important note: everything here is a fabrication. Any similarity to actual persons and events is coincidental." This conventional phrase points to the author engaging in a game with the reader, who should not believe any declarations of (un)truthfulness. Explicitly expressed directions to treat the work as entirely fictional are undermined by numerous references to real-life people from outside the text (characters from the literary world), to events confirmed by the author's biography, as well as the metatextual nature of the narrative:

²¹Andrzej Czcibor-Piotrowski, „Moje heretyckie spojrzenie” [“My heretical view”], in conversation with Grzegorz Leszczyński, Guliwer. Czasopismo o książce dla dziecka [Gulliver. A journal on children's literature] 3 (2001): 26–30.

²²Czcibor-Piotrowski, „Moje heretyckie spojrzenie”, 26.

²³Czcibor-Piotrowski, „Moje heretyckie spojrzenie”, 27.

²⁴Andrzej Czcibor-Piotrowski, *Cud w Esfahanie* [The miracle in Esfahan] (Warszawa: Wydawnictwo W.A.B., 2001), 4th page of the cover.

²⁵Andrzej Czcibor-Piotrowski, *Straszne dni* [Terrible days] (Warszawa: Oficyna Wydawnicza „Agawa”, 2008), 4.

[...] and I was overwhelmed with anxiety, and I reached for the typescripts of “Straszne dni” and “Boy [sic!]” and I was reading through the chapters I had already written, which was twenty-eight at that time in “Dni” and half as many in “Chłopiec”, and so in the end I was only one or two chapters away in both cases and those would no longer change anything, but then shouldn’t I be writing, writing and writing again, but I barely read a dozen or so pages, I grasped that I wouldn’t be able to change anything, because no matter what I write there’s always the implied ‘bummer!’ at the back of my mind, a fear that I won’t free myself from the “oh-shit” complex [...] ²⁶.

Moreover, the allographic epitext indeed penetrated the literary tissue of *Straszne dni*, as it is quoted in the course of the narrative, for example, as an excerpt from a short review of *Cud w Esfahanie* by Izabela Filipiak²⁷, published in the magazine “Twój Styl” in 2002²⁸. This further supports the possibility of reading metatextual themes in *Straszne dni* as a sort of paratext to the trilogy about the author’s childhood in exile²⁹.

Also, the typescript of *Nigdy dość. Mirakle* in the National Library contains a firm declaration of fictionality, which, however, is missing from the published version of the text. In a fragment of the unpublished afterword, which in this form also constitutes a public paratext, Czcibor-Piotrowski proclaims:

One more necessary clarification: “Nigdy dość...” - like the other volumes of this trilogy - is a para-autobiography, so the narrator cannot be identified with me, it’s not me, it’s someone else, just as the *dramatis personae* here are someone else. Will you kindly accept that this is simply fiction, make-believe, literature, if the latter term means anything at all.

The categorical, almost official tone of this statement is striking. Czcibor-Piotrowski adopts here the persona of the Author, by the power invested in him by the institution of Literature. However, this instruction, too, is bracketed by another element of the paratext - a motto from the *Confessions* by Augustine, the patron saint of European confessional writing. This motto was also preserved in the publication, speaking to the power of memory.

After the release of *Nigdy dość. Mirakle* in his interview with Dorota Wodecka³⁰, the author addressed the issue of how his work relates to autobiographical “truth”. Czcibor-Piotrowski questioned the validity of this query, emphasising that it did not matter whether his mother and Bruno Schulz knew each other only in his poem or in reality, and talking about the role of personal myth in the creation of the self: “My childhood mythologized itself in every word, spoken or written. Now it is just a literary, made-up fiction. So is my mother, so is my life” ³¹.

²⁶Czcibor-Piotrowski, *Straszne dni*, 223.

²⁷Czcibor-Piotrowski, *Straszne dni*, 223.

²⁸Izabela Filipiak, „Erotyzm magiczny” [“Magical eroticism”], *Twój Styl* 5 (2002): 139.

²⁹I would like to thank Professor Monika Brzostowicz-Klajn for this suggestion.

³⁰Andrzej Czcibor-Piotrowski, „Skłonność do skoków na łeb” [“A proclivity for taking a header”], in conversation with Dorota Wodecka, *Duży Format* 34 (2011): 12–16.

³¹Czcibor-Piotrowski, „Skłonność do skoków na łeb”, 12.

From the analysis of the messages in the peritext and the epitext, which communicate how to read his works, one can conclude that the writer is uniquely aware of the inner workings of autofiction (although he does not use the term) in literary communication and the conditioning of the reception of a prose which is entangled in the antinomies of “fiction-nonfiction.” Agnieszka Czyżak aptly notes that:

Autofiction is also a kind of game with the reader and their tendency to perceive texts in the non-fiction mode. Indeed, contemporary practices of reception focus more often on the search for a story's existential embedding and the manners in which its framing is determined by historical realities and community relations rather than on contemplating its aesthetic dimension. The search for the story's “authenticity” typically involves finding traces of the singular “truth”, which can be dispersed at different levels of the work³².

Beyond the cycle – *Straszne dni* and *Rzecz o moich swowolnych rodzicach*. *Centuria miniatur*

Autofiction is a hybrid genre, combining fiction and self-referentiality; it juxtaposes verifiable events from the writer's life with those which were invented and sometimes even bear the signs of literary fantasy. It proposes two pacts with the reader: a novelistic and an autobiographical one. It thus poses a challenge in contemporary culture and its emphasis on the values of authenticity and sincerity, since this axiological stance “inevitably leads to an autobiographical reading of fictional texts (which contain the hallmarks of fictionality)³³.” Common reading practices, contemporary reading tendencies seem to strive to build a reasonably coherent portrait of the writer, even against clear signals of fictionalization, both in the structure of the text itself and in the accompanying paratexts. The culture of authenticity overtly resists autofiction.

Autofictional writing is loaded with a particular affective charge produced from the game of alternating self-discovery and camouflage. Objections, prohibitions and instructions which the author of autofictional texts directs at the imperfect reader, who is liable to make the mistake of a naively biographical reading, are signs of such tensions. In terms of Czcibor-Piotrowski's work one can speak of an autobiographical trap into which the writer's self falls and from which it tries to free itself with dogmatic pronouncements of pan-fictionality. Autofiction, as a genre bordering literature and life, co-creates the social image of the empirical author, with which the author may or may not want to identify. In this sense, it is a corrective to traditional autobiographical attitudes, which often seem to be unambiguous in literary communication. Paradoxically, by dispensing with the illusion of a “self” directly accessible through the act of reading, autofiction can be seen as a more sincere type of expression than autobiography. Czcibor-Piotrowski makes references to terms such as “literature,” “fiction,” “fictionalization,” not only out of concern for the autonomy of the literary work but also because he cares about the distinctiveness of the writer's “self” from the empirical “self” and the

³²Agnieszka Czyżak, „Autofikcja” [„Autofiction”], *Autobiografia. Literatura. Kultura*. [Autobiography. Literature. Culture] Media 2 (2020): 95.

³³Czyżak, 96.

integrity of the latter. In his later prose, the empirical “self” persistently refuses to be identified with the narrative “self”. This refusal to treat texts about oneself as an opportunity for literature to present a coherent social image is characteristic of autofiction authors.

In one of the final passages of *Straszne dni* Dzidka, the writer’s wife, comments on the consequences of the model of prose he adopted:

It seems to me that from the outset you’re making a significant mistake of creating the impression that what you write is entirely autobiographical... Yes, I know what you want to say... Pseudo-autobiography... But you are only teasing with your make-believe-authenticity... One needs to be direct: I made it all up, it’s not me, it’s someone else... you’re playing, simpering, shaking your booty, while they are writing into your resume whatever they please: narcissism, hermaphroditism, homoeroticism, transvesticism, transsexuality... And this can take its toll... Already in private conversations friends and acquaintances are standing up for you: now that you are not Jewish, now that you are not gay... Importantly: you cannot comment on your own case yourself, because what is there to comment on and deny if everything is fabrication... Your other mistake is adopting the first-person narrative... If you had described all of this in the third person, no one could claim: you said that about yourself... The sin of literal reception³⁴.

The above-articulated postulates were fully implemented in the unpublished *Rzecz o moich swowolnych rodzicach. Canturia miniatur*. It is a mixture of an original novel about family, an erotic novel and the writer’s diary. Its central part concerns Parents - a happy couple of doctors experimenting with medical application of sexual practices in the years immediately preceding World War II. Just as the disregard for moral norms and erotic boldness of the protagonists’ actions shocked other characters in the text, detailed descriptions of these actions can still surprise the reader today - especially once they have adopted an autofictional mode of reading, which is unavoidable if one knows the writer’s previous works. Indeed, this provocative effect is reinforced by the relation of closeness. The obvious fact that blood ties between the writer and the literary protagonist are unprovable only intensifies the impression of the paradoxical nature of autofiction. Despite the reliance on third-person narration - also, quite unusually, in a diary, which constitutes a quarter of the work - *Rzecz o...* can be considered autofiction in the genre sense. Such perspective is influenced not only by its placement in the autobiographical narrative sequence but, above all, by numerous facts that indicate the identity of the subject “he” with the empirical author. In addition, the possessive pronoun “my” used in the title can be interpreted (in connection with the third-person narrative) as a paradoxical sign of authorial self-referentiality. Such an unconventional combination of the possessive pronoun in the first person with the third-person narrative forces a reading on the borderline between the two pacts (novelistic and autobiographical). Also, *Kartki z “Dziennika”* [*Pages from the “Diary”*] bear traces of advanced fictionalization (for example, each of the notes has a title). They contain many metatextual inquiries, which concern not only the writing of *Rzecz o...*, but also the capacity of the diary format. Recalling the titles of Czcibor-Piotrowski’s actual poems, his date of birth (November 30th) and other biographical facts reinforces the impression of authenticity, although the name Andrzej is never mentioned.

³⁴Czcibor-Piotrowski, *Straszne dni*, 233.

Rzecz o moich swowolnych rodzicach is self-conscious autofiction, skillfully manipulating the tensions between the authentic and the fictional, between make-believe and truth – one which does not allow an unwelcome invasion of the auto-fictional self into the social image of the empirical author. It seems that towards the end of his life the author, who had fallen into the trap of autobiographical readings of his works, found his escape hatch. Ironically, this closing argument in Czcibor-Piotrowski's game with the reader never saw the light of day and remains a potential message.

Auto-fiction reveals what a complicated process writing about oneself can be. From the outset it is entangled in literary communication, which does not begin with the publication of a given text. The conditions and possibilities for its creation operate as a set of dispositions that a writer must take into account when bringing a work to life. While attempting to program reception, the author can also direct their own instructions to the readers, and they, in turn, can also influence the shape of the dialog. Their reactions to the issue as sensitive as the author's self-image can move the work to new directions. Traces of hesitations, dilemmas and conflicts can be seen not only in the official circulation, but also (if not predominantly) in archival collections - even those which are as modest in size as the Czcibor-Piotrowski archive. Without them, the paratext accompanying the analyzed work would be incomplete, and we would not know about *Rzecz o moich swowolnych rodzicach*, which crowns the writer's autofictional project, while turning it inside out. The change in the poetics in *Straszne dni* might have seemed to be only a temporary departure from the accepted model. A reading of the author's final major unpublished work *Nigdy dość. Mirakle* on the other hand, proves that it was a deliberate, conscious step towards his complete transformation.

The autofictional self, along with the reading of individual texts, paratexts and pre-texts, is unstable by its very nature, and subject to the ever-new forces - successive acts of agitation, stirring, questioning. As a result, we have less confidence in the reliability of the described facts, but in return we gain access to the truth of the subject, who is fully aware of his troublesome entanglement in the text, and does not hide it from the reader; on the contrary, he exposes the struggle with his own condition as an individual who has taken the risk of writing about himself. If one were to try to briefly name this characteristic of auto-fiction, one could use the oxymoronic formula of "hidden sincerity" - hidden also in the archives.

translated by Justyna Rogos-Hebda

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KEYWORDS

PARATEXT

autofiction

s u b j e c t

ABSTRACT:

The article offers a reflection on autofiction as a paradoxical genre. After introducing the definitional problems, the author analyzes the literary project of Andrzej Czcibor-Piotrowski, focusing on three possible expansions of the interpretation of autofictional texts: the category of seriality, the notebooks and unpublished works found in the archive, and paratext. He also describes the subject of autofiction as a “self” whose main characteristic is instability, in contrast to the subjectivity constructed in traditional autobiography. This is rooted, among other things, in the way autofiction operates in literary communication.

A n d r z e j C z c i b o r - P i o t r o w s k i

archive

S E R I A L I T Y

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