

# The figure of a philosophical authority in the Polish post-modernist literary criticism – on the example of Martin Heidegger

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There are not many publications characterizing the critical-literary debate in the final three decades of the 20th century which would contribute to both a revision and a simple organization of new ways of defining Polish literature from the transition period that ended with political transformation. Although works such as *Sporne postaci polskiej literatury współczesnej* [Controversial figures in the contemporary Polish literature] (2003) – on the most prominent post-war critics, *Polemiki krytycznoliterackie w Polsce* [Critical-literary polemics in Poland] edited by Sylwia Panek – a constantly growing series since 2008, or *Konstelacje* [Constellations] (2021) edited by Dorota Kozicka, Katarzyna Trzeciak and Monika Świerkocz analyze the issues of late Polish modernity, they do it in a peculiar and rather selective way. Edited volumes taking the form of dictionaries popularizing knowledge – such as the digital guide *Polska Poezja Współczesna* [Contemporary Polish poetry] (from 2017) edited by Piotr Śliwiński – fill in the gaps in the synthetically understood knowledge about that time in an *ad hoc* manner, although 1989 is commonly treated as the caesura. Synthesizing works by younger scholars on the early 1990s literary criticism are rare, entangled in current generational disagreements. Another reason behind the incomplete historical-critical discourse regarding the late 20th century is that there are few meta-critical studies which

would organize evaluative strategies and methodologies used in criticism – such as *Krytyczne (nie)porządki* [Critical (dis)orders] (2012) by Dorota Kozińska. Finally, the problem also lies in the diminishing interest in the history of literature researched in a typical way. On the one hand, this can be understandable in the face of numerous methodological doubts connected to it today; on the other, it obviously hinders a coherent discussion about critical-literary programs, worldviews, and valuation systems for which the historical context is simply necessary<sup>1</sup>.

I think that many convictions which are the basis for the reception, interpretation and valuation of new phenomena on the literary market originated from the complex historical-critical layer of the 1980s and 1990s. The currently dominating, cultural opinions related to them are incorporated in cultural narratives about the 20th and 21st centuries as something obvious – in a gesture perpetuating the arguments of the classically aesthetic dictionary. Formulas such as Kant's notion of the judgment of taste, connected with the notion of literary autonomy, are often expressed in the form of universal, Gadamer's pre-judgment, which would be justified in the social sphere of *phronesis*. Theses regarding 'the essence of poetry,' often derived from Heidegger's critical-literary theories, are frequently repeated without deeper scrutiny.

Of course, it would be interesting to consider the role played by philosophical authorities in the early post-modernist Polish literary criticism; this paper will focus on a few conclusions from the Polish critical-literary reception (mostly) of Heidegger's lectures on philosophy and the humanities, which justify the in-depth late modern hermeneutics highlighting the importance of literature's autonomy. A shared conversation about authentic, self-aware existence established in the poetic speech seemed to have formed a universalized starting point for aesthetic considerations at the early stages of the Polish post-modernism, at least for some poetry scholars and critics<sup>2</sup>. It results in homogenization of the dictionary of

<sup>1</sup> Janusz Sławiński objected to the need to write a separate history of criticism in his "Krytyka jako przedmiot badań historycznoliterackich" [Criticism as a subject of historical-literary research], in: *Badania nad krytyką literacką* [Studies in literary criticism], series 1, edited by Janusz Sławiński (Wrocław: Wydawnictwo Ossolineum, 1974), pointing out to the difficulties with distinguishing its subject. Perhaps such a perspective is responsible for the fact that numerous meta-critical studies – although sometimes undertaken as a separate topic in the history of literature – have had many empty pages. Marginalizing literary criticism as devoid of academic methodology, distinguishing it from academic criticism, is likely another reason. A certain chance for studies resulting from meta-critical interests seems to be passing – as they are methodologically unfashionable.

<sup>2</sup> Connecting Nietzsche and Heidegger, typical for the French post-structuralism and deconstruction, although without the Marxist element of this methodology, occurred repeatedly in Michał Paweł Markowski's critical-philosophical discussions. Sometimes similar philosophical motifs can also be found in works by younger scholars. Grzegorz Jankowicz – who defines himself as a philosopher of literature – clearly follows a similar path (although he does not refer to Heidegger frequently), perhaps via Agamben, an ardent fan of Heidegger's (see e.g. *Uchodźcy z ziemi Ulro* [Refugees from Ulro] [2015], *Blizny* [Scars] [2019]). In this case, Marxism of post-structuralists, implemented in the Polish criticism following the political transformation, is no longer a desirable addition. Paweł Próchniak, Adrian Gleń, as well as Jacek Gutorow (in his critical-philosophical texts, such as *Życie w rozproszonym świetle* [Life in dispersed light] [2016] or *Monaten* [2017]) seem to display Heideggerism (loftiness, abstraction and poetic character of theses referring to values which are established in language, despite being inexpressible) in their style of poetry criticism. The use of Heidegger's combination of phenomenology and existentialism as a peculiar extension for assumptions regarding the autonomy of literature resulting from Kant's criticism of judgments of taste is a phenomenon of a different sort. In this case, Heidegger's concepts partially – yet significantly – support attitudes resulting from the structuralist way of reading literature, and determined by the need to anthropologize (e.g. *Zmysł formy* [The sense of a form] by Joanna Grądział-Wójcik [2016], *Z wnętrza dystansu* [From within the distance] by Elżbieta Winiecka [2012], *Pamięć afektywna* [Affective memory] by Justyna Tabaszewska [2022] and *Nowy autotematyzm* [New self-referentiality] by Agnieszka Waligóra [2022]).

literary autonomy or, more broadly, self-reflexivity, typical for modernity. Those notions were the starting point for the Polish methodological-critical debate about poetry. I believe that it was thanks to the academic authority of philosophy that it gained a special rank in the landscape of convictions regarding the place and role of literature in social life and public debate, rapidly changing at the time of the political transformation.

Assumptions regarding aesthetics – allowing for a peculiar combination of existential matters and culture with the rules of the autonomy of an aesthetic experience – often similar to Heidegger's ideas, stand on the threshold of Polish transformations of the critical-literary language (in the second half of the 1970s, and at the turn of the 1970s and 1980s). They are expressed in a rather hermetic criticism, saturated in a dictionary of a philosophical provenance, requiring a lot of erudition from readers, but also finding for itself a peculiarly poetic outlet. Its authors do not shy away from highly individualized, rhetorical and stylistic devices, often distancing themselves from strictly literary-studies discourses which subject themselves to the accepted academic norm. Polish translations of Heidegger's works began with *Building, Dwelling, Thinking* (1977)<sup>3</sup>, and appeared soon after Mircea Eliade's anthropological treatises were published (e.g. *Myths, Dreams and Mysteries* published in Polish in 1970, *The Myth of Eternal Return* from 1976) which enjoyed a lot of popularity in Poland, as well as John Huizinga (*Homo ludens*, 1970) and Ernst Cassirer (*An Essay on Man*, 1971). Additionally, they were accompanied by Gaston Bachelard's anthropological-philosophical book (*On Poetic Imagination and Reverie*, 1975), George Poulet's essays representing thematic criticism (*The Metamorphoses of the Circle*, 1977) and Jean Starobinski's *The Style of Autobiography* (1979). We could also add philosophical-hermeneutic treatises by Paul Ricoeur (*Existence and Hermeneutics*, 1985) and Maurice Merleau-Ponty (*The Prose of the World*, 1976)<sup>4</sup>. Sociological and psychological discourses which were attributed to the global, counter-cultural debate at the turn of the 1970s, played a significant (although) different role: Erich Fromm (*Escape from Freedom*, 1970) and Herbert Marcuse (*Reason and Revolution*, 1966). Therefore, it may be said that the 1970s were a period during which many anthropological-hermeneutic texts which highlighted the significance of culture as a factor shaping the human and social awareness appeared – and these texts shaped Polish literary criticism, grounding its values in aesthetic, autotelic terms.. Up until the 1990s, spiritual Heideggerians: Andrzej Falkiewicz

<sup>3</sup> Janusz Mizera wrote that the first significant mentions of Heidegger date back only to 1955, to a paper by pr. Franciszek Sawicki in "Roczniki Filozoficzne KUL". It was not until *Building, Dwelling, Thinking*, a selection of various lectures and short treatises by Heidegger edited by Krzysztof Michalski (and translated by Krzysztof Pomian, Marek J. Siemek, Józef Tischner and Krzysztof Wolicki), when the Heideggerian discourse was finally introduced to the Polish literary debate for good – including the special language mediated by Michalski. Finally, in 1994 the Polish translation of *Being and Time* by Bogdan Baran was published; Baran was also the author of the first monograph attempt at discussing Heidegger's philosophical project in its entirety in *Saga Heideggera* [Heidegger's saga] (1988). Janusz Mizera, "Uwagi o recepcji i przekładzie tekstów Martina Heideggera w Polsce" [Some remarks on the reception and translation of Martin Heidegger's texts], *Argument* 2 (2013): 245–262.

<sup>4</sup> The reception of the entirety of the French criticism in the early 1970s is completed by individual essays by George Bataille, Maurice Blanchot, Michel Foucault and Roland Barthes, collected in the Polish edition *Współczesna krytyka literacka we Francji* by Wojciech Karpinski (1974), as well as Barthes's first books (*Mythologies*, 1970) and Foucault's (*Archeology of knowledge*, 1977), read in structuralist terms. However, those texts were not that significant at the time.

i Tymoteusz Karpowicz<sup>5</sup> wrote lively, philosophically- and culturally-poetic criticism founded on those new sources. However, they were also crucial for transformations in the historical-critical awareness of Maria Janion, one of the founders of the Polish cultural turn in the feminist dimension. This scholar, although far from Heidegger's models and influenced by various madmen of literature, and in terms of interpretation – by Eliade's poetic essays<sup>6</sup>, had an impact on the youngest critics – Stanisław Rosiek and Stefan Chwin<sup>7</sup>, who devoured Freud and Fromm – at the threshold of the 1980s. This generation also included Tadeusz Komendant, the acclaimed Polish translator of Michel Foucault.

“Cultural” literary critics aimed to soften the rigid rules of reading imposed both on literary studies and literary criticism by political doctrines on one hand, and on the other – by the Polish structuralism. This fascinating transitional period enabled Polish readers (including its elites) to join philosophical debates about literature on an international level. Heidegger's texts – or rather their first larger selection included in Michalski's anthology – immediately built his authority which included poetry, exceeding his own discipline. They also offered a justification for the social position of intellectualists in the late People's Republic of Poland – as Komendant ironically put it – promoted to the state of being rooted out from culture<sup>8</sup>. Heidegger's philosophical-poetic orientation situated the Polish debate about literature at the turn of the 1980s beyond the need to directly participate in political struggles dominating in both its circulations. In *What Is Metaphysics?*, *Letter on Humanism*, and *What are poets for?*, which are amongst the most commonly cited of Heidegger's lectures from Michalski's anthology, there are volatile thoughts that were later referred to on numerous occasions: about man, “the shepherd of being”, about language, the “house” of that being, where “the human being dwells”, or about poets who “risk more” as eulogists of the uncorrupted, and are therefore poets at “a destitute time”<sup>9</sup>. Heidegger allowed intellectualists disenchanted with the political indoctrination of the Polish counter-culture literature of the 1980s to think in terms of independence guaranteed by the same intellectual practice. Heidegger's poetics,

<sup>5</sup> This influence is especially clear in Karpowicz's critical book about Leśmian (*Poezja niemożliwa* [Impossible poetry], 1975), as well as in later books by Falkiewicz, such as *Istnienie i metafora* [Being and metaphor] (1996). Heidegger returns as a conversation topic between Karpowicz and Falkiewicz, who identify him as a significant source for their philosophical reflection about aesthetics and ontology, and (negated) metaphysics. See e.g. *dwie rozmowy* [two conversations] (Wrocław: Biuro Literackie, 2012; especially Karpowicz's essay *Metafora otwarta* [An open metaphor]) or the recently published collection *blisko z daleka* [close from a distance] (Wrocław: Wydawnictwo Ossolineum, 2022).

<sup>6</sup> See especially the famous series *Transgresje* [Transgressions] published between 1981 and 1988 as a result of Janion's famous seminar at the University of Gdańsk. Its subsequent editions, entitled e.g. *Galernicy wrażliwości* [Galley slaves of sensitivity], *Osoby* [Persons], *Maski* [Masks], *Odmieńcy* [Misfits], introduced translations of texts by French, German and American representatives of revolutionary methodological propositions to the Polish literary criticism, documenting their various relationships with romanticist concepts. With their poetic form, which goes beyond the directives of academic publications, they founded the tradition of literary studies reaching beyond academia in poetic-philosophical terms, i.e. the subject of this paper. See Maria Zielińska, “Hermeneutyka Marii Janion” [Maria Janion's hermeneutics], in: *Sporne postacie polskiej literatury współczesnej: krytycy* [Disputable characters of the contemporary Polish literature: critics], edited by Alina Brodzka-Wald, Tomasz Żukowski (Warszawa: IBL PAN, 2003); see also Beata Skarżyńska, *Mircea Eliade w Polsce* [Mircea Eliade in Poland] (Warszawa: Neriton, 2009).

<sup>7</sup> *Szkice bez autorytetu* (1981), i.e. the generational manifesto of Maria Janion's students, who founded “Punkt” – an association and a magazine.

<sup>8</sup> Tadeusz Komendant, *Zostaje kantyczka* [A canticle remains] (Warszawa: Oficyna Literacka, 1987), 7–9.

<sup>9</sup> Martin Heidegger, *Building, Dwelling, Thinking*, edited by Krzysztof Michalski, translated into Polish by Krzysztof Michalski and others (Warszawa: PIW, 1977), quotes from pages 104, 123, 222, respectively.

understood as an integral if not the most important part of existence, left the institutionalized, Platonic-Kantian norm in all its dimensions.

*Time and Being*, Heidegger's *opus magnum*, was not translated into Polish until 1994 by Bogdan Baran; before, the book was known only from fragments translated in a way which complicated its reception<sup>10</sup>. Heidegger's strong presence in post-war French philosophy shaped the critical-literary reception of his book in the 1970s. During the transformation era, his influence shifted to French post-structuralist criticism.. Polish anti-Marxism accompanying the political transformation, resulting from the strong need to cut ties with the communist past, brought about a special, political correction to post-structuralism understood in Heideggerian terms<sup>11</sup>. The specificity of the French, leftist interpretation of Heidegger, which may seem surprising already at the starting point – as we know from *Dylematy tożsamości. Wokół autowizerunku filozofa w powojennej myśli francuskiej* [Identity dilemmas. Around the philosopher's self-image in the post-war French thought] by Marek Kwiek – it related to academic interpretations of German phenomenologists in France, among whom Heidegger played a crucial role. He was “a French philosopher *par excellence*”, without whom it was impossible to think critically after the war: “The French thought breathed Heidegger for fifty years; Kojève's Hegel was extremely popular even before the war, and it was Hegel who incorporated Heidegger (together with Marx) in *The Phenomenology of Spirit*”<sup>12</sup>. A critical project by Tadeusz Komendant – a critic associated with the beginnings of Polish post-modernism and the circle of the “artistic revolution” in prose – fits into this reception in an interesting way. Komendant was the most important representative of critical reflection about literature practiced in the circle of “*Twórczość*”, the most certain continuation of the anti-academic, anti-normative, and at the same time artistic excursion beyond the walls of academia at the turn of the 1990s. Komendant, who continued the traditions from early, pre-academic forms of cultural criticism, was possibly the most daring commentator of groundbreaking phenomena in literature. He set the tone for the cognitively- and aesthetically-determined narrative about the literature of late modernism, directly shaped by the reception of French post-structuralists. Doubtlessly, Michał Paweł Markowski's book performances, increasingly more frequent up until the 1990s, fell into such a quasi-romantic tone of philosophical-literary reception; Markowski remains an advocate of deeply specialist, but also artistic, essayistic literary criticism<sup>13</sup>.

I believe that Markowski showcases the Heideggerian character of the Polish post-modernist reflection about aesthetics. In one of his essays from *Anatomia ciekawości* [The anatomy of

<sup>10</sup>Mizera, 245.

<sup>11</sup>See e.g. Tomasz Szkudlarek, “Dekonstrukcja i szczepionka z Marksa, która jednak doprowadziła do infekcji” [Deconstruction and a vaccine from Marx, which resulted in an infection anyway], in: *French Theory w Polsce* [French Theory in Poland], edited by Ewa Domańska, Mirosław Loba (Poznań: Wydawnictwo Poznańskie, 2010), p. 82 and others.

<sup>12</sup>Marek Kwiek, *Dylematy tożsamości. Wokół autowizerunku filozofa w powojennej myśli francuskiej* (Poznań: Wydawnictwo Naukowe IF UAM, 1999), 181.

<sup>13</sup>Agata Bielik-Robson – Michał Paweł Markowski's philosophical opponent – has been trying to incorporate a philosophical element determined by foreign traditions rooted in religious ethics in the debate about the Polish literature since the beginning of the 21st century. This is especially evident in “Na pustyni”. *Kryptoteologie późnej nowoczesności* (2008) [“In the desert”. *Crypto teleologies of the late modernity*], where she constructs a lecture on the phenomenological-existential and post-structuralist French philosophy of culture in the 20th century from anti-Heidegger perspectives. .

curiosity] – dedicated to Andrzej Sosnowski and Tadeusz Pióro – there is a fragment which seems to summarize certain convictions regarding the role and function of poetry in broadly understood human existence. It would be a complex problem of philosophy written from scratch, from the deconstructionist perspective. These theses are put forward in relation to various, post-structuralist reconfigurations (by Rorty, Derrida, Deleuze). They attack the loftiness of Heidegger’s conceptualization of *Dasein*, in which divine poetry has a privileged access to the authenticity of Being, with the irony of Rorty’s criticism, identifying the dense network of interpretations determined by socially understood relations in culture<sup>14</sup>. Markowski writes: “Since Heidegger [...] literature has seemed to be «the place of intercepting» the Logos, the home of the talking Being, hitherto obscured by the rationalized babbling about being. Obviously, from such a perspective it is possible to talk about poetry, not literature”<sup>15</sup>. He continues: “...poets are the shepherds of Being and depositaries of its truth”; only listening to their word will allow to go beyond the limits of philosophy as a theory of representations, because being is a certain event: what is unrepresentable, concealed, singular and peculiar”<sup>16</sup>. We should add that although Markowski breaks Heidegger’s pathos with Rorty’s irony, he does not resign from the conviction of the significance of working with literature. This fragment about Heidegger shows that although Heidegger’s “Truth” sanctified by Rorty disappears from the post-structuralist critical-literary reflection, its gleam – the priestly dignity of Heidegger’s emptiness left by ultimate things as the main topic of the Western metaphysics is intact. This “saint” echo resonating in Heidegger’s emptiness legitimizes the presence of a priest-literary scholar (shepherd of being) in the social space: in the new role of a titled accoucheur who helps deliver the self-consciousness of the post-transformation society<sup>17</sup>.

At the turn of the 1990s the post-structuralist French criticism was recovering from the shock caused by Victor Farias’s 1987 book *Heidegger et le nazisme* – a controversial, scandalous biography of Heidegger, which discussed in detail his relationship with Hitler’s regime during the second World War, which echoed in Germany as well as in the USA<sup>18</sup>. It would seem that also in Poland this scandalous context of Heidegger’s biography should constitute an important element of the critical reception of *Time and Being* – especially given that Farias’s book was published in the same year as the Polish translation of *Time and Being*<sup>19</sup>. Even if the controversy became an element of a strictly philosophical debate in Poland, its traces are invisible in criticism, which is limited to the negativist “poetics” of

<sup>14</sup>Michał Paweł Markowski, *Anatomia ciekawości* (Kraków: Wydawnictwo Literackie, 1999), 229.

<sup>15</sup>Markowski, 225.

<sup>16</sup>Markowski.

<sup>17</sup>As a critic, Komendant seems to be careful with using major ontological and metaphysical categories which dictate the essential character of Heidegger’s reading of poetry and the new German literary canon (Hölderlin, Rilke, Trakl) – and he does not resign from the lofty style of critical comments about poetry. When writing about Heidegger, both Komendant and Markowski rely on a dictionary devised by Michalski as one of the translators of the first Polish collection of Heidegger’s lectures.

<sup>18</sup>The French discussion reverberated in Germany; as Kwiek explains, from the German perspective, Heidegger’s issue had already been processed (among others, in post-war comments by Karla Löwith and Hugo Otto). In Germany, Heidegger had both prominent followers (Gadamer) and fierce opponents (Adorno).

<sup>19</sup>Cezary Wodziński, *Heidegger i problem zła [Heidegger and the problem of evil]* (Warszawa: PIW, 1994).

text adapted to the Polish literary studies together with the French post-structuralism<sup>20</sup>. In *Władze dyskursu* [Discourse authorities] from 1994 and *Upadły czas* [Fallen time] from 1995, Komendant reveals he was aware of the significance of the French thought about Heidegger, and he even tries to engage in it on the margins of his discussion. At the same time, Komendant is vigilant about approaches which dismiss Heidegger's fascination with fascism. He avoids a simple solution favored by many commentators (according to Kwiek, Philippe Lacou-Labarthe and Jacques Derrida), who present Heidegger's Nazi affiliation in terms of a bloomer independent from his intellectual legacy. In *Władze dyskursu*, Komendant – comparing Bataille's and Heidegger's pessimistic comments regarding the human condition and simultaneously referring to his famous lecture, *Hölderlin and the Essence of Poetry* – states directly in a footnote: “The text was written in 1937, when Heidegger still believed in «a not-yet, future God» (Heidegger's relationships with Nazism are by no means a coincidence)”<sup>21</sup>. It is one of very few places where Komendant is rather critical of the “king” of the modern French philosophy.

It is difficult to intellectually process the relationships between post-structuralist and deconstructionist concepts with Marxist policy without asking about Heidegger's fascism – without thinking whether it resulted directly from philosophical premises. However, from the perspective of the Polish criticism from the 1990s, Heidegger's basic theses rejecting any higher authority, or a rationalized subject as a guarantee of the certainty of cognition, first and foremost reflected the essence of what was considered as a breeze of novelty: deconstruction. In a way, the Polish literary-philosophical criticism inherited the unobvious relationship between leftist French intellectuals with Heidegger – at the same time depriving their ideas of the leftist element, troublesome at the time of the political transformation in Poland. The entirety of this simultaneously special and weird relationship – resulting from favoring Hegel's concept in Alexandre Kojève's version, from existentialism borrowed from Jean-Paul Sartre's German reflection and phenomenological texts as an obligatory element of the reflection of French philosophers – infiltrates Komendant's literary-philosophical criticism, making it a unique amalgamate, full of contradictory impulses. It is especially obvious when we compare two of his books: *Władze dyskursu* (1994) and *Upadły czas* (1996), which offer two variants of understanding Foucault.

<sup>20</sup> Kwiek wrote about the “political” part of Heidegger's biography, presenting philosophical parties arguing about his legacy. For the sake of clarity, I will mention only two: those trying to preserve something from Heidegger's legacy (Derrida and Lacou-Labarthe), and those who accused Heidegger along with post-structuralists and deconstructionalists – as spokespeople of May 1968 – of anti-humanism (Ferrit and Renaud) (Kwiek, 207). By that logic, it is possible to understand why Polish literary critics who read Heidegger in the context of post-structuralism decided to marginalize the biographic element of his work. According to Kwiek's as well as Komendant's and Markowski's interpretation, Derrida's deconstruction is identified with Heidegger's negation of Western metaphysics. This creates the opportunity to remain in poetry with criticism, in a bit structuralist way, in the world of texts freely working together in the aesthetic universe of thought. Hegel's (mediated by Kojève) specificity of the French post-structuralism, as well as the fact that after the war, Heidegger was clearly associated with the left all seem to point out to its difference from the place Heidegger took in the German perspective – and which give rise to hermeneutic interpretations of works by Hans Georg Gadamer. This is evidenced by the conflict between Gadamer and Derrida in reference to Paul Celan's poetry.

<sup>21</sup> Tadeusz Komendant, *Władze dyskursu. Michel Foucault w poszukiwaniu siebie* [Discourse authorities. Michel Foucault in search of self] (Warszawa: Spacja, 1994), 46.

In the former, Foucault's discourse (close to Komendant's ideas) is clashed with concepts by his precursors, polemicists and friends: Georges Bataille, Maurice Blanchot, Jacques Derrida, Roland Barthes, Gilles Deleuze. Foucault is suggested through the politically moderate Paul Veyne rather than the leftist Deleuze. As a result, Komendant interprets Foucault as a liberal hero: disillusioned by the revolutionary terrorism, denouncing significant ontological and metaphysical gestures in favor of documenting archives – but also “an anarchist and skeptic” who distinguishes himself by his distanced approach to Marx<sup>22</sup>. At the same time, as a philosopher, Foucault – just like Heidegger – follows Nietzsche. Komendant presents him as a representative of a constructive if volitionally motivated incorrectness in terms of social institutions, rather than a philosopher read by post-structuralists in search for new, cognitive and critical applications of rhetoric (Paul de Man would be an extreme example of this). Komendant summarizes Foucault's revisionist considerations regarding the autotelic language of speculative philosophy, only seemingly divided into questions about existence and reality as unmasking the “linguistic gulag”, explaining:

Here the radicalization of phenomenology – following Heidegger – does not lead to uncovering the founding role of speech; to the contrary – it places us beyond the truth («objective truth» – the first reduction [by Husserl – JO]) and meaning (the second reduction [by Foucault – JO]), in the hope that the sphere of autonomous discourse will reveal itself. This discourse is self-spoken and self-expressed. It is some kind of a linguistic gulag – no comparison will be too strong. People who talk only to say something, their discourse is motivated by truth and sense; however, if one can show that what they say follows the rules which are alien to their consciousness, i.e. internal rules of discourse, the faith in truth and sense becomes an illusion. We remain prisoners of those rules, and what is even worse, it is impossible to verify whether this prison «really» exists – a measure of difficulty<sup>23</sup>.

From this perspective, Foucault corrects the dangerous utopian character of Heidegger's project in his first, structuralist books, which leads Heidegger to declarations of faith in the possibility of the religion of speech, religion of poetry. Therefore, Foucault reaches the problem of the unbearable locking inside of what autotelically realizes itself within itself. Komendant describes the languages of poststructuralism and deconstruction as a metonymy of a totalitarian, Soviet prison. However, according to Komendant, Foucault's concept of history – through the initially structuralist analysis of linguistic conditions of social relationships from *Archaeology of Knowledge* and *Words and Things* – points out to the way of leading a text towards the truth of existence<sup>24</sup>. Following those intuitions, we can notice that in *Władze*

<sup>22</sup>As Michał Kozłowski observes, Foucault read Marx, he even considered himself a Marxist for some time; being familiar with works by Marx was typical for intellectuals of his time. Despite his obvious connections with Althusser he distanced himself from Marxism, which did not stop him from collaborating closely with the Maoist *Gauche prolétarienne*. By performing Marxist gestures, Foucault faced heated, spiritually Marxist debates. Michał Kozłowski, “Foucault czyta Marksa” [Foucault reads Marx], *Praktyka Teoretyczna* 4 (2011); <https://www.praktykateoretyczna.pl/artykuly/micha-kozowski-foucault-czyta-marksa-marks-czyta-foucaulta/>, dostęp 3.10.2023.

<sup>23</sup>Komendant, *Władze* dyskursu, 164.

<sup>24</sup>In this context – despite the obviously Hegelian, and so also Marxist foundation of this opinion – Komendant's accusations against the doctrines of counterculture resulting from Marxist orientation, which aim to deny Foucault's political engagement, for instance at the time of his activity in *Groupe d'information sur les prisons* – are interesting. Komendant, *Władze* dyskursu, 99–103.



*dyskursu*, Heidegger – marginalized, but nonetheless patronizing the adventures of the French literary criticism in its main discussion – plays the role of a voice which, although subordinated to the truth, checks the senses of the post-structuralist philosophy. And Foucault is a good, i.e. non-Marxist post-philosopher, who achieves freedom and independence of thought, going beyond the utopia of the poetic language in the discussions of contemporary hermeneuts (“Preachers of Good News, Heidegger and Gadamer”<sup>25</sup>). He successfully avoids the Scylla of abstracted Truth, whose stakes are hidden in Heidegger’s “speech”; however, he also sees the Charybdis of the post-structuralist “linguistic gulag”. In order to critically work out a place in the crevasse between cognition and language which would accommodate Foucault’s work, Komendant reaches for Roman Jakobson’s *Einstein and the Science of Language*:

This is a conclusive testimony and a brilliant text. It shows – despite hermeneuts – that thinking beyond language exists, that the truth does not necessarily need to be tied with discourse, that desire plays a great role in seeking the truth, that apart from the discursive truth there is also a desire for the truth<sup>26</sup>.

Komendant approaches Foucault differently in his next book, *Upadły czas*. Here, he conceptualizes poetry as ‘the speech of gods,’ aligning with Heidegger’s Polish reception. He uses this framework to elevate the motherland of this speech: the Polish literary canon, reclaimed after the political transformation.. Komendant is deeply sentimental about the canon formula, which is somewhat surprising for such an anarchist critic; it is accompanied by the trust for the national Polish tradition – critical and carefully expressed. The hermeneutic horizon of interpretation towards which Komendant turns is a repository of memories of the uprooted, exiled Polish elites, for whom a cultural nest – similarly to Rymkiewicz, Przybylski, or Janion – constitutes emigration and manor house-country romanticism<sup>27</sup>. This is where post-structuralist relationships with Foucault read through the prism of Heidegger become clear. Komendant’s erudite essay, in which the Bible constitutes the origin of all poetic readings (his first essay is entitled *Book of Deuteronomy*) unravels chronologically as a treatise about philosophical aspects of culture, in which canons – religious and secular, Polish and international, philosophical and literary – are all mixed together. Komendant considers various elements constructing the problematics of philosophical enquiries about existence – in reference to Polish, historical problems which romantically mark our tradition (in the chapter about *Domek i świat* [A little house and the world] elements of Rousseau’s Enlightenment rhetoric are mixed with Voltaire’s “cultivating one’s own garden” and considerations regarding the lost motherland). In the chapter about fallen time, Komendant turns against the Hegelian dialectic which formed the basis of the twentieth-century Marxism – following Bronisław Trentowski’s religious alternative for philosophy from *Panteon wiedzy ludzkiej* [Pantheon of human knowledge], which revises the “intellectually conceited” Hegelian concept of subjective-objectivity, and identifies “absolution” as a solution of the dilemmas of such a dialectic<sup>28</sup>. Using Trentowski’s

<sup>25</sup>Komendant, *Władze dyskursu*, 172.

<sup>26</sup>Komendant, *Władze dyskursu*, 174.

<sup>27</sup>This is evident in the critical-poetic, multi-genre essay *Lustro i kamień* [A mirror and a stone] (1994), which resembles a post-modern *silva rerum*.

<sup>28</sup>Tadeusz Komendant, *Upadły czas. Sześć esejów i pół* (Gdańsk: Słowo/Obraz Terytoria, 1996), 94–95.

arguments against the Hegelian dialectic, Komendant turns towards Heidegger's idea of humanism. "Something third" (which can be found in Heidegger's lecture) is supposed to become a cure for the crisis of the dialect order of materialism and idealism, excluding the possibility of God's existence. Therefore, Komendant surprisingly ties it with Trentowski: "In contemporary language, in Heidegger's language, it would sound as follows: man knows anything about being [*Sein*] because he is conscious, here-and-now [*Dasein*]. Heidegger makes man the guardian of being, whereas Trentowski dubbed him an «entrenched individual»"<sup>29</sup>.

In *Upadły czas*, according to Komendant, this man is first and foremost a literary protagonist – therefore, it is not surprising that he can be directly Heideggerian. In the chapter about being a refugee, entitled *Vincenzowe ziarno* [Vincenz's seed], he asks about the need to rebuild agora, referring to the concept of epos and Mikhail Bakhtin's polyphonic novel. Reconciling the private with the public was a strong postulate in the transformational criticism, which at this point gains justification rooted in antiquity. Once we understand that the historically understood tradition can help man "stand in the truth", Komendant reaches for the deep legacy of "the historic speech of the people", understood in strictly Heideggerian terms, at the same time talking about "existence" which is "completely overexposed by words". Following Heidegger, Komendant adds: "Thinking offers [the relationship with the essence of man – JO] as something that is granted to thinking by being. Offering lies in the fact that being in thinking becomes speech. Speech is the house of being. Man lives under its roof. Philosophers and poets guard this house"<sup>30</sup>.

At that point, Komendant's historical thinking boils down to the conclusion that there is a crisis – the sense of time is broken; this is how he reads Foucault as a historian in *Upadły czas*: listening only to what can concern interpretation understood as a "fold" in the timeless discourse, self-interpreting. Vincenz becomes a contemporary castaway – like Crusoe, Gulliver – an exile from the fallen history, the agora-house, who writes about Dante's purgatory of Poles exiled from the Eastern borderlands in an identity narrative sustained by a network of subtle literary allusions in his *Dialogi z Sowietami* [Dialogues with the Soviets]. In such places the subtle anti-communist directive of Komendant's criticism becomes directly political. Paradoxically, a philosopher who has a lot in common with a totalitarian regime remains a spiritual guide for Komendant. Heidegger's house of being, which becomes speech in thinking, is the beginning of the reconstructed Polish democracy: a new motherland, which up until recently had been located all around the world for the Polish exiles: "wherever a castaway sets their foot, wherever fate throws them, they will maintain one thing for ever: the sense of *civitas*. And there they shall rebuild – from gestures, from words, from memory – their closer motherland"<sup>31</sup>. Komendant summarizes the chapter:

God stepped behind the starry sky, hiding his face, but the mind cannot accept homelessness. This is why on the one hand, we deal with a return to the pre-criticism era and try to create metaphysics

<sup>29</sup>Komendant, *Upadły czas. Sześć esejów i pół*, 98.

<sup>30</sup>Komendant, *Upadły czas. Sześć esejów i pół*, 108.

<sup>31</sup>Komendant, *Upadły czas. Sześć esejów i pół*, 119.

[...], and on the other, with desperate attempts at “rooting” the subject in something that allows to forget about homelessness and soothes loneliness. The empirical and transcendental surfaces mix discreetly: this is how the metaphysics of race, environment or proletariat are made. This crisis of reason took place in the first decade of the century, with Husserl’s and Heidegger’s texts as its theoretical testimonies<sup>32</sup>.

Even the motto of *Upadły czas* references Foucault’s words, which could connect his understanding of history with Heidegger: “Everything is merely a fallen time, the poor presumption of a passage refused by the future, a thing in becoming which is irreparably less than history”<sup>33</sup>. The essay opens with declamatory words directing the Polish readers towards *Words and Things* (1966) as a significant starting point for Foucault’s later works, associated with post-modernism, such as *The Order of Discourse* (1970) or *Who is an Author?* (1969). *Words and Things* is a major, linguistically and intellectually impressive book which was published in Polish in 2005, translated by Komendant. In *Upadły czas* it is referred to as something legendary; however, Komendant introduces it to the debate about the Polish post-modernism in a manner which is far more in line with post-structuralism than we could expect based on *Władze dyskursu*. Komendant writes about Foucault who announces “man’s death and the coming of speech” at “a fallen time” – however, he does it in accordance with the expectations of contemporary Polish readers, as:

The triumph of literature, which therefore became the paramount philosophical question of the era. It was no longer about “serious” philosophical questions (what is being and what forms does it take? who is man and what is he supposed to be doing?) – henceforth, completely different questions were supposed to awaken our imagination. Foucault lists them: “What is language? What is a sign? What is unspoken in the world, in our gestures, in the whole enigmatic heraldry of our behavior, our dreams, our sicknesses – does all that speak, and if so in what language and according to what grammar? [...] What, then, is this language that says nothing, is never silent, and is called «literature»?”<sup>34</sup>.

Situating Foucault between the Nietzschean question “who is talking” and the Mallarméan “book” is in line with the theses of Komendant’s earlier book, *Zostaje kantyczka*. It allows to treat the entirety of his critical proposals in a non-contradictory way<sup>35</sup>. Komendant’s Foucault plays the role of a herald of negatively, autotelically understood literature, “literature which says that it says something”, which “does not communicate anything beyond the conditions of its own communication”, and which is simultaneously not serious and esoteric<sup>36</sup> – even if this literature is always immersed in history (or rather connected to its downfall), and referring

<sup>32</sup>Komendant, *Upadły czas. Sześć esejoj i pół*, 129.

<sup>33</sup>This quote also appears in *Zostaje kantyczka* (95), but in neither case is the source provided. Source for the English translation: Foucault, *Madness and Civilization. A History of Insanity in the Age of Reason*, 1988. New York, NY: Random House, xxxi [PZ].

<sup>34</sup>Komendant, *Upadły czas. Sześć esejoj i pół*, 7.

<sup>35</sup>See my book *Republika poetów* [The republic of poets] for a discussion about the relations of comments on literature in *Zostaje kantyczka* and *Upadły czas*. Joanna Orska, *Republika poetów. Poetyckość i polityczność w krytycznej praktyce* [The republic of poets. Poetics and politics in the critical practice] (Kraków: EMG, 2013), section: *Poetyckość i polityczność* [Poeticity and politicality].

<sup>36</sup>Komendant, *Upadły czas. Sześć esejoj i pół*, 8.

to it (both in *Władze dyskursu* and *Upadły czas*) is highly questionable. To Komendant, history – from the perspective of the twentieth-century philosophy, entangled in the dialectic logic and contaminated by totalitarian regimes – seems too closely connected to Hegelianism and Marxism, against which he fiercely defends his own way of reading poetry and Foucault. Thus Foucault proclaims the triumph of autotelically understood literature, affirmatively referring to the environment of “Tel Quel” – but also rescuing from “a fallen time” for the post-structural reading a significant element, which was omitted in *Władze dyskursu*:

Heidegger’s writing showcases the esoteric language which suspends the omnipotence of prattle in a temporary gesture of writing, a language making itself comfortable in the fold of a word. The famous Heideggerian “turn” was – from a certain perspective – a deconstruction of centuries-old, metaphysical opposition between philosophy and literature. In other words, Heidegger proclaimed the triumph of speech, as (together with poets) he went beyond the “serious” philosophical discourse, thus becoming the father of present-day deconstructionalists [...]. We know this, because we would constantly repeat Heidegger citing Hölderlin: “Yet what remains the poets found”. And we also know that “to write poetry, the most innocent of all occupations”<sup>37</sup>.

Apart from the fact that Heidegger – unlike in *Władze dyskursu* – is specified by Komendant exclusively with an affirmative comment, in *Upadły czas* he also becomes the most important Nietzschean poet-philosopher from the perspective of late modernity. *Upadły czas* is a critical or philosophical-critical book, dedicated to Foucault – in whose philosophy “immersing in history” means “making oneself comfortable in the fold of language” between a fallen time which “is irremediably less than history” – rather than with relief brought by esotericism. Its necessary vagueness, inability to express what is authentic, finds expression in the pathetic style – which derives its persuasive character from the discourse of theology left empty after God’s death, as Theodor Adorno demonstrated on numerous occasions<sup>38</sup>:

Being is the free establishment, absurd surplus, selfless gift – of someone? of something?; there are no adequate words, as we enter the field of negative theology [...]. In some way being is vain poetic exaltation, which permeates all of Heidegger’s writing. It is therefore unsurprising that he states: “Poetry is the establishing of being by means of the word”<sup>39</sup>.

Komendant’s approach to Foucault, and his views on the social role of literature and poetry, seem rooted in a version of Heideggerianism shaped by French poststructuralism. In Poland, this form omitted debates on Heidegger’s fascism, complicating deeper conceptualizations of

<sup>37</sup>Komendant, *Upadły czas*. Sześć esejów i pół, 9.

<sup>38</sup>Adorno was Heidegger’s fierce polemicist in terms of aesthetics: he accused him of indifference to the actual human history, as well as to nature, and he condemned Heidegger’s ahistorical abstraction of the notion of authenticity of being, especially in his essay *Jargon der Eigentlichkeit* (1964) which opposed the German phenomenology. Ian MacDonald, “Ethics and Autenticity: Conscience and Non-Identity in Heidegger and Adorno, with the Glance at Hegel”, in: *Adorno and Heidegger*, edited by Ian MacDonald, Krzysztof Ziarek (California: Stanford, 2008), 3–9. What is especially worth noting is Adorno’s objection to any type of idealistic homogenization of intellectual notions, unifying opposites to “negative dialectics”, which according to Martin Jay was determined by “true materialism” of the Frankfurt school, ethical at its foundations: „it must register and draw on the sufferings and needs of contingent human subjects rather than explain them away through an historiosophical theodicy”. Martin Jay, *Adorno* (Massachusetts: Cambridge, 1984), 59.

<sup>39</sup>Komendant, *Upadły czas*. Sześć esejów i pół, 13.

‘the essence of poetry.’ In the post-transformation Polish literary-philosophical criticism, this discourse became a valued hermetic anti-hermeneutics, constituting the basis for the critical-literary “poetry religion”. Poetry enables speech. The introduction to *Upadły czas* directs our attention to the philosophical authority enlightening the whole book. It is the impossibility of the empty prattle of *esse* – and a clearing in the dense forest of Being, i.e. our openness discovered in Heidegger’s style thanks to poetry, as well as its fruit: the unconcealedness of Truth expressed in poetry, making itself comfortable in “the fold” of this thicket. Finally, Komendant does not hesitate to repeat Heidegger’s words from his 1937 lecture, i.e. the time of his most intense ideological entanglement, that poetry is the “original voice or language of a people” – without reminding us that he meant Aryan Germans. The volitional, esoteric giddiness was apparently what the reading elites wanted to experience, poetically entering the new, post-transformation world understood as a space of the freedom of interpretation.

It is difficult to talk about a critical-literary line in the Polish post-transformation debate about poetry or literature which could be derived from Komendant. It seems that he was too separate, and his discourse proved simultaneously too individualized and not enough specialized in order to be able to establish a critical-literary school. At the same time, Komendant arguably contributed to the “Heideggerization” of the language of late modern poetry criticism (although he was not the only one); firstly, by making it fashionable to discuss poetry in solemn, hermetic terms, often even without directly referring to the analysis of a given text, due to the possibility to bounce off the attractive, philosophical trampoline. Such a rule can concern reading poetry in reference to various new methodologies, often substituting proper interpretation. Secondly, by extending the tradition of “realists’ jargon” – whose discourse, full of emptied holiness of great and fundamentally undefinable terms – was heavily criticized by Adorno.

translated by Paulina Zagórska

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# KEYWORDS

*Heidegger's reception*

## Heidegger

**ABSTRACT:**

The paper presents the circumstances of Heidegger's text reception in Poland in the 1970s and in during the political transformation. Just as he did in France, Heidegger proved a significant reference point for text-centric methodologies of poststructuralism also in Poland. The paper shows how the critical-literary interpretation of Heidegger's philosophical theses combined with a strong inspiration from Michel Foucault shaped one of the most original Polish critics of the literature from the political transformation period – Tadeusz Komendant. His peculiar, philosophical-literary style, together with poetic definitions with which he tried to capture the rules of post-structuralism for the sake of Polish literary criticism, had a significant impact on the discourse of post-transformation poetry criticism.

*political transformation*

**poststructuralism**

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