

teksty

D R U G I E

Texts and the Body

Bożena KARWOWSKA

Female Perspective in Szymborska's Poetry:
An Attempt at a Post-feminist Reflection

Piotr SOBOLCZYK

Miron Białoszewski's
hermetic pomographies

Anna NASIŁOWSKA

Women in the Poetry
of Czesław Miłosz

German RITZ

Gender Studies Today:
Building Theory, Traveling Theory

Katarzyna NADANA

How to Be a Queen

Special Issue
English Edition
2013

Editorial Board

Agata Bielik-Robson (UK), **Katarzyna Bojarska**, **Włodzimierz Bolecki**,
Maria Delaperrière (France), **Ewa Domańska**, **Grzegorz Grochowski**,
Zdzisław Łapiński, **Anna Nasilowska** (Deputy Editor-in-Chief), **Leonard Neuger** (Sweden),
Ryszard Nycz (Editor-in-Chief), **Michał Paweł Markowski** (USA), **Maciej Maryl**,
Bożena Shallcross (USA), **Marta Zielińska**, **Barbara Smoleń** (Executive Editor)

Advisory Board

Edward Balcerzan, **Stanisław Barańczak** (USA), **Małgorzata Czermińska**,
Paweł Dybel, **Luigi Marinelli** (Italy), **Knut Andreas Grimstad** (Norway), **Jerzy Jarzębski**,
Bożena Karwowska (Canada), **Krzysztof Klośński**, **Dorota Krawczyńska**,
Vladimir Krysin (Canada), **Arendt van Nieukerken** (Holland), **Ewa Rewers**,
German Ritz (Switzerland), **Henryk Siewierski** (Brasil), **Janusz Sławiński**,
Ewa Thompson (USA), **Joanna Tokarska-Bakir**, **Tamara Trojanowska** (Canada),
Alois Woldan (Austria), **Anna Zeidler-Janiszewska**

Address: Nowy Świat 72, room 1, 00-330 Warsaw, Poland
phone +48 22 657 28 07 phone/fax. +48 22 828 32 06

e-mail: redakcja@tekstydrugie.pl

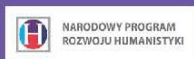
www.tekstydrugie.pl

graphic design: **Marek Wajda**, **Piotr Jaworowski**

copy editing and proofreading: **Matthew Chambers**

typesetting: **Publishing House of the Institute of Literary Research, Polish Academy of Sciences**

Special Editions of **Teksty Drugie** are gratuitous and available on-line



This journal is funded by the Polish Ministry of Science and Higher Education, through the "Programme for the Development of Humanities" for 2012-2014

Index of Content

Texts and the Body

Anna NASIŁOWSKA	
Introduction	6
Zdzisław ŁAPIŃSKI	
“My Poems are Psychosomatic”: Motive Impulse in the Poetry of Julian Przyboś	13
Bożena KARWOWSKA	
Female Perspective in Szymborska’s Poetry: An Attempt at a Post-feminist Reflection.	21
Anna NASIŁOWSKA	
Women in the Poetry of Czesław Miłosz	33
German RITZ	
Gender Studies Today: Building Theory, Traveling Theory	51
Wojciech ŚMIEJA	
From Ideology of the Body to Ideologized Carnality: Sports and Literature in 1918-1939 (selected examples)	57
Mateusz SKUCHA	
A Manly Artefact and a Mysterious Poet. Around Queer Theory	75
Dariusz ŚNIEŻKO	
How Did the Old Polish Body Read? Somatic Experiences of Reading	90

Piotr SOBOLCZYK	
Miron Białoszewski's hermetic pornographies	101
Piotr OCZKO	
Why I Do Not Want to Write about Old-Polish Male-bedders: A Contribution to the "Archeology" of Gay Studies in Poland	118
Łukasz PAWŁOWSKI	
Purity, Dirt, and the Chaos of Revolution: On the Two Parts of Przedwiośnie	135
Jeanette SŁABY	
Stereotypes of Maternity in Prose Works of Anna Nasiłowska and Manuela Gretkowska	147
Wojciech KUDYBA	
The Bareness of a Clergyman: Priestly Poetry as a Minority Discourse?.	167
Katarzyna NADANA	
How to Be a Queen	174

Text v. Body

Literature consists of texts, and texts consist of sentences and words. What ties them to the body? In theater studies, the problem of the body is related to the actor, materializing in the vibrations of voice and stage movement of the characters that actors lend their bodies to for the duration of the play. In literature, it is a more abstract matter: the body is presumed, imagined, phantasmal, described and expressed with words, moreover, rarely expressed aloud, since the time of oral literature has passed; it is read quietly. And yet, the body is present as a problem related to the fundamentals of human existence, as its most basic condition. Thus, the spectrum of issues relating to body is broad indeed, including sex, death, illness, love, lust and its varied forms, sport, beauty, disability, violence, shame, birth, adolescence, and aging. Or another list of notions, such as meat and food, hunger, and appetite. The presence of the body does not only mark itself thematically, intonation, accent and pace have their source in articulation, even gesture finds its place in a literary text – which we have known since the days of Russian Formalism. The act of reading itself is not exclusively spiritual, it may cause physical effects, including sexual arousal.

*The relationship between the spiritual and the carnal side of humanity is a complicated one. Dualism, strongly embedded in the European models, places on the one side text as a record of spiritual life, and matter on the other. Texts are related to thought, and closed. Roland Barthes used to say: *il n'y a pas dehors du texte*. And yet, there exists something outside the text, which seems inasmuch necessary as difficult to solve within a structural frame of reading. A turn to the body and to somatic readings is one of the poststructural elements of newer criticism.*

In Poland, the cultural background of the discussions on the matter always rests on the centuries old frame of the dualism of body and soul, firmly rooted in the Catholic tradition. The body should be subject to penance, and its desires restrained, so that the soul could be perfected and awarded through eternity. A verse from a 15th century folk lament: “The soul has left the body/ it stood in the meadow green” ascribes to the soul a separate, posthumous existence. A century later, Mikołaj Sęp-Szarzyński, a distinguished poet, speaks in “Sonnet No 4” about “our war against Satan, the world and the body” calling the body “our home”

but also seeing in the senses the reason for our fall. As a result, according to Sep-Szarzyński, man lives in a state of constant internal struggle. He can never find peace, torn by contradictions in a tragic conflict between the spiritual longing for God and the low sphere of sensual desires. Only death and salvation can put this to an end. Although the tradition of dualism and the hierarchy ascribing superiority to the sphere of the spiritual, as well as the idea of one's relation to the body as a form of conflict, are still present in Polish social life, our newer literature views those themes rather as a challenge to avoid stereotypes and move beyond the dualism in an attempt to express the undivided entirety of man.

Interpreting literary texts involves reading them suspiciously, reading in a way that that often subverses the previous order of understanding. Thus, if Sep-Szarzyński's sonnet, one of the classical works of the Polish counter-reformation, used to be read primarily as a declaration of interest in metaphysics, one could reverse such reading and posit that what sustains the dramatic tension of the metaphysical turn is the constant resistance posed by the body. How burning must be the desire, if an unremitting war is to be waged on it! If the yearning to set oneself free from the tension results in such a strong adverse declaration, the body must have burned with the flame of lust. Establishing a hierarchy where the body is assigned the lower position and repressed is one of the unpleasant consequences of dualism, but literature reveals even that which is repressed and denied.

The notion of "body" is a common denominator for several different methods of interpretation that emerged from the encounter of poststructuralism and newer humanities. Theoretical impulses behind such readings are varied and include the writing of Michel Foucault, feminism and gender, gay, queer and transgender studies, as well as varied types of historical criticism that turned to materiality. In fact, literary studies are not always the main field for that kind of deliberation, however, it usually turns out that that literary criticism responds faster than other branches of humanities. Newer humanities witnessed a transition from the structural approaches, relying on textual terminology, toward notions such as experience, case study, affect, excess, and transgression. This is signaled by the sensitivity to discriminatory practices and a rejection of systems.

Texts and the Body

In the 1975 Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison (Surveiller et punir. Naissance de la prison), Michel Foucault insisted that the theme of the body is not a new one, it has been, for a long time now, the object of investigations performed by historians: in the form of demographic research, histories of disease, epidemics and famine. What was new in his approach, was the introduction of the notion of the body as a self-standing topic of political importance, disclosing the connection between power and knowledge, as well as the depth of those relations, while focusing on the ways of portraying human identity and the ways of understanding and treating the body. Foucault's last work, the unfinished The History of Sexuality, is a story of talking about sexuality, talking about the ways that sex is present in regulations, norms and guidelines, connections (or a lack thereof) between the themes such as pleasure, family, woman, man, boy. The French longue durée has shown that the areas covered by fundamental notions evolve and the body is subjected to constant repressions. A suspicious reading asks, whether the same is happening today.

Thus, on the one hand, we have textual research revealing a theme present in the discourse and consistently repressed, negated and depreciated; on the other hand, literary texts that openly or indirectly subvert the stereotypes. It is difficult to say which of these appeared first in the Polish literary tradition after 1989: impulses originating in humanities stimulated the emergence of new issues while works of literature that introduced those issues, required a careful reading. Gay novels began to be published, non-heteronormative behaviors were written about. There came a wave of works on motherhood and pregnancy making the taboo practically non-functional. Young female writers wrote about adolescence, and the critics have coined a disparaging term of "menstrual literature" to use against them. Foucauldian inspirations aside, feminism claimed the body.

The history of feminist reflection in the Polish academia is closely tied to Teksty Drugie [Second Texts], even though Pełnym Głosem [In Full Voice], fully devoted to feminist issues, was its pioneer. Feminist issues were absent from the public debate after 1989, and later treated initially as a Western fad on the one hand, and on the other, as an expression of the conflicts surrounding matters such as taking away abortion rights from women, growing role of women on the job market and new career models. At that time, the business woman was viewed in positive terms, even though she was depicted grotesquely by writers. Teksty Drugie, attempting to promote certain themes, reading strategies and directions in humanities, had to begin by importing content: we published the first feminist issue in 1993 and the next one in 1995, containing, among others, my translation of the French manifest by Helene Cixous, The Laugh of the Medusa, from 1975, translations of essays by Elaine Showalter or Toril Moi and Luce Irigaray. From the very beginning, we have included also texts by Polish researchers of literary phenomena, written from a new perspective and positing their own theoretical solutions.

So widespread was the interest in the feminist issues of Teksty Drugie that in 2001 we decided to publish Ciało i tekst [Body and Text], a collection based on materials published in the journal, which quickly entered university reading lists, and as a result a second edition had to be printed. The present selection includes essays written a little later, after 2001, but focuses on similar issues and as such, carries a similar title, Tekst i ciało [Text and Body]. The essays it contains no longer reflect on the problems of the post-1989 decade, having been written in

a period when gender and gay studies were no longer a novelty. And, naturally, this time we could speak of possible export – this time it is Polish diagnoses that are the focus of interest.

A lot has changed from the day the first feminist issues appeared. Firstly, several authors who first published in our journal, wrote and published their own books.¹ Further, today, the notion of feminism is rarely used in Poland in the context of literary criticism, reserved mostly for social movements and the attitude of engagement in the current debate marked by strong differences between the liberal and the pro-social approach; liberal activists focus mostly on women's careers, the latter stress the importance of protecting motherhood and fighting discrimination. For a certain time, "gender" fulfilled the role of the key notion and basic academic term in humanities, transplanted in its English form, as the Polish language does not distinguish between sex and gender on the lexical level, using the word "pleć" to denote both, while the English "gender" is translated descriptively by adding the adjective "cultural" [pleć kulturowa]. As a term, gender appeared highly promising, mostly as it revealed the ambiguity and the process of shaping cultural patterns, or even the performativity of patterns. For a time, Judith Butler's work was a major source of inspiration. It seems, however, that with the publication of the Polish multidisciplinary gender encyclopedia, *Encyklopedia Gender*, prepared by the Institute of Literary Research and a team of upcoming researchers representing a spectrum of disciplines, one will no longer seek those reference points that would narrow down the notion of gender to a more precise term, but rather those that will allow to take further steps.

As a term, "gender" loses something that was very distinct about it in the early period – its connection to the corporeality. The manifest of *écriture féminine* by Helene Cixous (as well as other writings of the French poststructural criticism, by Luce Irigaray and Julia Kristeva) outlined a program of writing that includes an account of physicality. Women's writing, as opposed to several abstract ways of writing, does not ignore but reveals it through rhythm, pulsing intonation, emotionality. Cixous believes the way was paved by Molly's monologue in Joyce's *Ulysses* and the writing of Jean Genet, so it is not necessarily writing by women as their physicality was an object of repression. Grażyna Borkowska, in turn, defined women's writing using the "metaphor of yeast": that is growth, budding and experiencing one's own sexuality. Borkowska believes the disclosure of one's gender to be a necessary condition for this approach.²

Among the reasons why "feminism" was abandoned as a label was the fact that one must rather speak of feminisms (in the plural), gender thought has spawned several quite

¹ It is impossible to include a full list here, it would be too long. Among those published after 2000, the following books were of biggest importance: I. Iwasiów, *Kresy w twórczości Włodzimierza Odojewskiego. Próba feministyczna* (1994); G. Borkowska, *Cudzoziemki. Studia o polskiej prozie kobiecej* (1996); M. Janion *Kobiety i duch inności* (1996), E. Kraskowska, *Piórem niewieścim. Z problemów prozy kobiecej dwudziestolecia międzywojennego* (1999), K. Kłosińska, *Ciało, pożądanie, ubranie. O wczesnych powieściach Gabrieli Zapolskiej* (1999).

² G. Borkowska "Metafora drożdży. Co to jest literatura/ poezja kobieca?" *Teksty Drugie*, 1995, reprinted in: *Ciało i tekst. Feminizm w literaturoznawstwie – antologia szkiców*. IBL: Warszawa, 2001. 65-76.

differing approaches, ranging from a very descriptive treatment of the literary material to a variety of programmatic attitudes, and ultimately dissolves in transgender approaches.

Also, the history of gay studies in Poland is tied to *Teksty Drugie*. It was, initially, an area of Polish literary studies represented by a single, lone pioneer – German Ritz, a Swiss author of several essays and a book on Iwaszkiewicz's studies. Ritz described the mechanisms of presence of homosexual themes in Polish literature: camouflage, sublimation, presence of codes understood only by the insiders and the inexpressibility of the desire itself. Ritz's work from the 90s changed a long-standing belief that in Polish literature, homosexuality is a narrow subject, one not to be discussed, and, in fact, shameful. He has shown that there exists terminology allowing to speak even about that which is "inexpressible." Furthermore, his reading, similarly to several feminist and gender readings, undermined the principle of anti-biographism (that is, of focusing solely on the text) by introducing information and interpretations related to the lives of writers. Gradually, more detailed work began to appear; right now one can hardly imagine literary studies without this reading strategy. The development of literature contributed to such state of affairs, several books were published that no longer use camouflage, including the novels by Michał Witkowski. The publication of diaries and letters of the 20th century writers was another important contribution. The socially imposed camouflage, absent from personal diaries, no longer obscures anything; today we have at our disposal the diaries of Jarosław Iwaszkiewicz and his wife, containing a description of his fascination with a woman and unambiguous signals that her husband's bisexuality was not a secret to her. What on the surface appears as a heteronormative, patriarchal pattern, often has a second, much more complex layer. New readings of classical works of literature and rediscovering old literature in this fashion became an interesting field of research.

Text and Body is not as much the theme, as it is a keyword for the essays contained in the following volume. We selected what we believed to be the most interesting texts, relying on several criteria – that of the discussed author was one of the more significant. And thus, we present essays on the poetry of Julian Przyboś, Wisława Szymborska, Czesław Miłosz, and Miron Białoszewski. In other words, essays on two Nobel Prize winners, viewed from the perspective of the body, and on two other poets of extreme significance for the history of Polish poetry. Julian Przyboś was an important member of the inter-war avant-garde; Czesław Miłosz, younger by a generation, considered him a competitor. Meanwhile, Białoszewski could be viewed as a representative of the post-war avant-garde. Thus, the first circle of poetry closes.

German Ritz's essay presents a theoretical perspective; those on the prose of Dorota Masłowska, Manuela Gretkowska, and my own novel, *Księga początku*, provides a brief, far from comprehensive, but nonetheless interesting outline of the new phenomena emerging in women's writing after 1989. Wojciech Kudyba's essay on the poetry written by priest seems to us to be particularly interesting to the foreign reader: it is a phenomenon characteristic for Polish literature, undoubtedly tied to Catholic culture, but in a very complex way. Despite the fact that literary writing by priests has a long tradition rooted in the old Polish literature, in its current incarnation, it is an entirely new phenomenon. Modern poetry was pioneered among priests by Jan Twardowski, an author very popular in Poland, however,

the freedom to express opinions on controversial matters should not be taken as something obvious in case of this particular group of poets. We have also included texts discussing the historical background: Wojciech Śmieja's essay on the presence of sport in interwar literature connects the cult of beauty of the masculine body not only to homosexuality, but also to the growing wave of fascism, in other words, to the fundamental political problems of the era. Piotr Oczko, despite his declared unwillingness to discuss gay presences in old Polish literature, discusses them at length. His innovative essay fills a huge gap – it is an issue rarely explored so far, and by many historians believed to be non-existent in Poland in the past centuries. Dariusz Śnieżko explores further the theme of physical effects of reading and proves, by referencing examples from old Polish literature, that the question of the text's great influence on the body has a centuries-long tradition in our country.

The present volume summarizes a certain stage of analyses, but does it somewhat tentatively. The body cannot be ignored, superseded or negated and thus, somatic criticism will continue to develop.

Anna NASIŁOWSKA

Translation: Anna Warso

Zdzisław ŁAPIŃSKI

“My Poems are Psychosomatic”: Motive Impulse in the Poetry of Julian Przyboś

“For a long time now, for many years (perhaps even since *W głąb lasu* [Into The Depth Of The Forest])¹ my writing has been sustained by my living, in the carnal sense inasmuch as in the spiritual: my poems are psychosomatic” – Przyboś confessed to Brzękowski a few months before his death.² It was also something he never made a secret of. In *Zapiski bez daty* [Diary Without Date] he says:

The best among my poems...were not something pondered on or written while I was sitting at a desk. I do not sit through, I walk through the process of composition, and my poems swell with oxygen as my heart does in an open space, when I take a stroll, among the fields, or in a forest, or a park.

Composing my verse peripatetically, I check its rhythm and sound against the breath, movements of the body, pace of the steps, pauses and accelerations of gait. And, above all, against that which is so difficult to put in words but which most generally – and thus most imprecisely – can be described as accord with the outside world.³

Przyboś expresses his “accord with the outside world” through activities that psychology divides into perception and proprioception:

¹ Most of Przyboś’ poetry has not been translated to English; volume and poem titles will be thus presented to the reader in Polish, followed by a working translation. (AW)

² A letter to J. Brzękowski from 21 May 1970, *Korespondencja J. Brzękowskiego* [Brzękowski’s Letters Collection] A. Mickiewicz Muzeum Literatury, inv. 2192, vol. 13, 138 *recto*.

³ Przyboś, *Zapiski bez daty* [Diary Without Date], Warszawa: 1970. 177-178.

Texts and the Body

Today, as ever, we talk of only five senses: vision, hearing, touch, taste, and smell. This despite the fact that possibly the most crucial of all our senses, position and movement sense or proprioception, was first described nearly 200 years ago. It is so deep within us and so integral to our independence and movement through the world that it has for the most part remained hidden from our personal and collective consciousness.⁴

Unlike the sense of sight, the richest of our senses in terms of provided information, and, as such, an object of inquiry since the ancient times. It was also the sense of sight that has served as the base for cognitive models and standards of rationality in the Western culture (which in the last few decades drew critical commentaries from philosophers, history of ideas theorists, and writers). It is, therefore, not surprising in the least that the questions of perception in Przyboś, especially of visual perception, have long been the focus of critical attention. The critics were, however, far less interested in the aspect of proprioception, despite the fact that already in 1927 an anonymous reviewer observed that

Wierzyński and Przyboś sing of muscle and the inspiration it provides. The former looks into the world of Olympic athletes, the latter, the world of machine operators...Two years ago Przyboś did not know man. His poetry echoed the chatter and racket of machines. He was scaring us. He thought he could extract poetry from pavements, rooftops and machines, the same kind of poetry that his predecessors drew from nature...Przyboś realized that that hand operating the machine is far more interesting and he felt its pulse, which is the heart rate of life...He left mechanics to the engineers.⁵

2.

I am not aware of any classification of poets that would be based upon the posture of their speakers, but if such a taxonomy was to be introduced to 20th century Polish literature, one would need to place Julian Przyboś and Miron Białoszewski apart as polar opposites. Przyboś usually stands upright, even erect, in his poems. It is for him more than a natural way of being in the world, it is almost a manifestation, a sign of pride in the victory over the inertia of matter, an overcoming of the force of gravity. It is a victory that must be felt physically – hence his ambivalent attitude toward space travel. On the one hand, it is tempting: “I envy the astronauts who ‘orbited,’ freed from gravity, immersed in heavenly abyss. Some of them felt so good in this truly liberated space (liberated from its own weight) that they ignored calls from the ground, prolonging the state of orbiting.” On the other hand, space flights cause doubts: “how is one to experience with one’s body, with its dimensions, those altitudes and velocities imperceptible for the physical sense of movement and for the heart beat?”⁶

⁴ Cole, J. Paillard, J. “Living without Touch and Peripheral Information about Body Position and Movement: Studies with Deafferented Subjects.” Bermudez, L. et. al. (eds) *The Body And The Self*. Cambridge, MA: 1998. 245.

⁵ Anon. “Z nowych poezji.” [On Latest Poetry] *Mysł Narodowa*. 1927 Vol. 2. 56.

⁶ Przyboś, *Zapiski bez daty*. 172 and 198.

Białoszewski, on the other hand, praises lying down. "Lying down" is a title of a poem, and at the same time, as if a project for a new literary genre, resulting from the position of his body, programmatic for Białoszewski.⁷ Przyboś focuses completely on submitting the world to his energy, one so irresistible that one gesture, one glance suffices to transform the surroundings. The temptation to conquer nature, typical of our civilization, the "breathtaking anthropocentrism"⁸ is something that Białoszewski tries to overcome: he does not want to control reality, he wants to yield to it.

In Przyboś, the erect body is an indicator of high mobility: "I existed only to the degree that I ran!"⁹ But it is an impeded run, or rather, an eagerness to run, an impatient pace. For Przyboś, the world is a place where one walks and while walking, crosses the horizon.¹⁰

Any vigorous action seems suspicious to the one lying down: Białoszewski speaks of the fear of a being that is too energetic.¹¹ Meanwhile, the one that walks looks down on the one lying down. Przyboś dismisses the poems included in Białoszewski's *Było i było* wondering if they were, perhaps, "a result of boredom or artistic abulia?"¹²

And when he wants to test the truthfulness of his great predecessors, Przyboś looks at their poetic gait. "One does not find the experience of a tourist or a hiker in Słowacki's "W Szwajcarii" [In Switzerland] – a walk that involves climbing, panting and sweating in the mountains is transformed in his poem into a swan-like glide, an angelic flight to the summit." Przyboś contrasts "W Szwajcarii" with Mickiewicz's "Na Alpach w Splügen" [In Splügen Alps] that does justice to the "sense of height and the climber's effort."¹³ The work of English Romantics is impressive in that regard, especially the physical effort that preceded and accompanied creative activity. Wordsworth created not at his desk but while he wandered, peripatetically, traversing up to 30 miles of flat terrain per day: De Quincey estimates that in his life, he must have walked the distance of 175-180 thousand miles, a stimulant that replaced alcohol and other physiological stimuli, resulting in a life of uninterrupted happiness and the best part of his work.¹⁴

One must regrettably admit that Polish Romantic poets were no match for the English wanderers. They did have their share of brilliant exploits (for instance, in 1818

⁷ See also: Stawiński, J. "Miron Białoszewski: epigramaty na leżąco." *Przypadki poezji*. Kraków: 2001. (*Prace wybrane*, Vol. 5) 251-262.

⁸ I am recalling this particular expression to bring back a forgotten story, both charming and instructive, by an American historian of ideas, C. J. Glacken. *Traces on the Rhodian Shore: Nature and Culture in Western Thought from Ancient Times to the End of the 18th Century*. Berkeley, CA: 1973. 494.

⁹ Przyboś, J. "Znowu na rodzinnych polach." *Pisma zebrane* [Collected works] Vol. 1. Skręt, R. (ed.) Kraków: 1984. 203.

¹⁰ Przyboś, J. "Ziemią gwiezdnie pojętą." *Pisma...* 221.

¹¹ Białoszewski, H.M. *Rozkurz*, Warszawa. 1980. 117.

¹² Przyboś, J. "Z powodu *Było i było* Mirona Białoszewskiego." *Poezja*. 1996, Vol. 2. 98.

¹³ Przyboś, J. "W błękitu krainie" *Linia i gwar*. Vol. 1. Kraków: 1959, 294.

¹⁴ Shattuck, R. "This Must Be The Place: From Wordsworth to Proust." *Romanticism*. Thornburn, D. and Hartman, G. (eds.) Ithaca, NY: 1973. 180.

in the Mount Blanc massif Antoni Malczewski reached the summit of Aiguille du Midi – 3,843m.), but they lacked perseverance. It took Przyboś to make up for this neglect.

The poet took his first decisive steps the third volume, *Sponad* [From Above] (1930) and from that moment on, he never ceased to walk, until the last verse. He thought, perhaps, that he would be able to, just as the “bare-footed geese shepherd” in one of his poems,¹⁵ conjure a brook (or anything else) with running; he could certainly conjure a poem with walking. Should we search for a perfect form for Przyboś’ wanderer, we would find it, perhaps, in the following description.

One of Parisian squares hosts the most beautiful monument of our poet. At the top of a high column, Mickiewicz, presented as a pilgrim, is on his way, fierce and inspired, raising his hand in a clairvoyant gesture of hope and motioning to follow him towards a destination his eyes are focused on.¹⁶

3

The poet walks and at the same time performs a gesture. The latter motif is not exceedingly common in Przyboś’ work but it is always very meaningful. Even more so, gesture has been inscribed in the grammatical structure of his poetry due to the dominant role of its deictic elements which are nothing else than “gestures indicating with the help of sound” and “belong to the oldest stratum of language.”¹⁷ Przyboś devoted attention to the relationship of words and gestures in his essays and prose as well. In his laudatory speech for the writer Tadeusz Breza, awarded for his literary achievement by the “Odrodzenie” weekly, Przyboś observes: “Reading Breza’s prose, I often feel as if his speech returned to the source of the word, to the gestic genesis of human language: to gestures, facial expression, expressing with one’s whole self that which these days is expressed only through language.”¹⁸

Przyboś points to those features of Breza’s prose which can be analyzed today with the help of rich, if somewhat chaotic, knowledge resulting from the research of para-verbal and non-verbal communication. Interestingly, the poet overlooks the most striking aspect of Breza’s writing, emphasizing something secondary instead. It is truly challenging to trace in Breza the return to that which is primal – in human psyche, in behavior and language. He is open, first and foremost, to the signals exchanged in an environment where tradition is well established and rules of conduct clearly outlined, where each shade of gesture, expression or intonation carries information precisely because of its

¹⁵ Przyboś, J. “Lipiec” [July]. *Pisma zebrane*. Vol. 1. 114.

¹⁶ Przyboś, J. “Mickiewicz.” *Linia i gwar*. Vol. 1. Kraków: 1959: 269-270.

¹⁷ Kuryłowicz, J. Podstawowe kategorie morfologiczne. *Biuletyn Polskiego Towarzystwa Językoznawczego*. 1971 Vol. 28. 11. See also: Łapiński, Z. “Miejsce na ziemi i miejsce w wierszu. O składnikach deiktycznych w liryce Przybośa.” *Przestrzeń i literatura*. Głowiński, M. and Okopień-Sławińska, A. (eds.) Wrocław: 1978. 297-307.

¹⁸ Przyboś, J. *Odrodzenie*. 1946, Vol. 3. 2.

conventionality. Breza is immersed in the social context, investigates convention and wants to present sophisticated communicative processes. Przyboś, on the other hand, feels best among nature and seeks spontaneity. At the origin of his poetry, there lies the memory of the “gestic genesis of human language,” in other words, universal, biological “source of the word.”

He returns to the very same motif in his analysis of Mickiewicz’s “Farys”:

They say that primitive man expressed himself with gesture and movements of the entire body. Later, expression was economically reduced to movement of the tongue – and this is when human speech began, this is when the word – compared to the old, inarticulate cries accompanying gesture and movement – received its meaning and power. Primitive man cried and gestured a lot, consuming enormous amounts of physical energy in order to conjure the simplest image. Primitive language was directed entirely outside, destined for the eyes. Speech of the cultured man became economical, the word – a small movement of the tongue – gained weight, it does not point to the things outside but evokes them in the imagination, it is directed towards the inside of man. Cultured, strong man endows words with the power of evoking movements of internal feelings, images and ideas.¹⁹

However, in Przyboś’s poetry, the “cultured man” does not repress the “primitive man.” They simply divide their roles. The primitive man becomes the poem’s hero, present in it in the flesh, whereas the cultured man is the poem’s maker, a hidden creator of the entire work. “Inarticulate cries” turn into onomatopoeic dissonances. “In order to conjure the simplest image” the hero still uses “enormous amounts of energy,” however, it is no longer physical, but mental energy. The language is still “entirely outside, destined for the eyes,” although only “in the imagination.”

To sum up, external mobility is replaced by internal mobility: in other words, physical actions give place to mental actions. But he transformed man does not break away from his ancestor, he does not give up the archaic strata of personality. His spirituality remembers its physiology, his psyche remembers the body, and the movement of thought remembers the movement of muscles.

4

We usually put muscles in motion when we want to do something. But muscular agitation, linked to the semi-conscious pattern of future activities, can also result from the closely watched external events that we are inclined to identify with. Psychology uses here the notion of “empathy,” in other words, identification. Empathy involves co-experiencing the states experienced by others and even, by further analogy, the states and processes of nature.

Empathy triumphed in the Romantic era. It made a comeback in the period of Young Poland, and later in the expressionist movement, and the importance that Przyboś assigned to the muscular motives was his personal contribution to the tradition. His poems

¹⁹ Przyboś, J. “Słaby i mocny wiersz.” [Strong and weak poem] *Czytając Mickiewicza*. Warszawa: 1950. 179-180.

Texts and the Body

include identification with the environment, conviction of isomorphism of the subject and object, and a sense of interchangeability of motor sensations, a certain sense that my internal actions find parallels outside of me, and that someone else can experience something for me. As in the following passage:

a burdened charcoal burner, throwing off the sack for me
bent forward
straightened up
breathed out.²⁰

The quoted passage comes from a verse about poetic composition where the effort of the charcoal burner is a muscular equivalent of the poetic effort, as well as an event that liberates one from that effort. Thus, emphatic images not only are a recurrent experience of the poems' speaker but also retain direct connection to the creative act in itself.

5

Przyboś's artistic effort aimed mainly to capture the contents of what is located on the very edge of consciousness, contents that in the world of the poem result from the internal biography of the lyrical hero inasmuch as the current situation around him. The reader is assigned the role of a mute spectator of psychosomatic events. But, the poet exhibited high sensitivity to the future fate of his works and their further literary life. Przyboś believed that a poem does not find its full realization until it is recited, and he lamented the contemporary practice of pushing spoken poetry outside the spotlight. He was a juror of several popular recitation competitions, participated in public readings, and recorded the reading of his own poems for the radio.

One of the critics who participated in those events noted that Przyboś' voice "lacked inherent vigor, muscularity." "He rebelled against physiological imperfections and limitations. Reciting his poems, he challenged his voice to a fight." Failing grotesquely at times, Przyboś was nonetheless able to impart his own truth of poetry on the listeners. "The listeners discovered that the human body is always the matrix of the poem."²¹

Thus, in Przyboś, bodily sensations, tied to the motion and creative effort of the organism, find their expression also – or, perhaps, first and foremost – in the sounds of the poem, born not only in the eye and the heart, but also in the throat. A printed poem is a solidified product of the actions of the articulatory system – that is, of lungs, vocal cords and the tongue.

In one of the poems he speaks of "infant-verse."²² A work that is being composed is for the poet a physical extension of his substance. Its "organic" character, a distant and already worn out metaphor, takes on concrete shape here and is almost literal. In his essays, Przyboś returned to what he called a "motor-auditory ovary," describing it as:

²⁰ Przyboś, J. "Ciężar poematu." [The weight of the poem] *Pisma...* 253.

²¹ Gronczewski, A. "Podwieczorek z torturami." *Miesięcznik Literacki*. 1988 No. 23, 69-71.

²² Przyboś, J. "Jaskółka" [Swallow] *Pisma zebrane*. Vol. 1. 224.

“a directional tension of the gift of speech towards two senses of expression: towards the sense of hearing and the muscular-motive sense, taking place when the poet attempts to capture an unexpressed phenomenon.”²³

6

From the “motive” perspective, Przyboś’s work discloses a connection between seemingly separate elements. The theme of a wanderer is a personalization of the idea that man – and his most perfect incarnation: an artist – is a creature that is motive by nature. The motif of gesture points to the motor origins of the language, and Przyboś’s idea of the principle of empathy allows for a motive symbiosis between the subject and its surroundings. Finally, the poet’s persistent concern for the possibly fullest realization of his works, his readings of them (despite discouraging results), reveals a belief that a certain quantum of verbal energy needs to be transmitted physically from the author to the receiver.

But my attempt at capturing and commenting on the function of motor experiences in Przyboś fails to give justice to how deeply his intuition reached into the basic features of the language. One should note, perhaps, that in the first three decades of the 20th century, linguists wrote a lot about the articulatory experiences as superior – in the process of speech reception – to acoustic data. Aestheticians diligently studied those writings, until the issue was overshadowed by structuralism. In 1927, before he devoted his attention to the “semantic gesture,” Jan Mukarovsky gave a lecture on *motorické dění v poezii*,²⁴ and Mihail Bakhtin poignantly observed:

The bare acoustical side of the word has a relatively minor significance in poetry. The movement that generates acoustical sound, and is most active in the articulatory organs, although it also takes hold of the whole organism – this movement, either actually realized during one’s own reading, or experienced only as a possible movement – is incommensurably more important than what is heard. What is heard is reduced almost to the auxiliary role of eliciting the generative movements corresponding to it, or to the even more external auxiliary role of being a token of meaning, or, finally, of serving the basis for intonation, which needs the acoustical extension of the word but is indifferent to its qualitative phonic makeup, and as the basis for rhythm, which has, of course, a motive character.²⁵

After a few decades, the abandoned element resurfaced in the laboratories of psycholinguistics. Several competing theories of “motor theory of speech perception” came to life – I wish to outline briefly just one of them, created by Alvin Libermann and his associates over the course of several years. In its 1985 formulation, it is explained as follows:

²³ Przyboś, J. “Nowość potrząsa kwiatem.” *Czytając Mickiewicza*. 27.

²⁴ See: Mukarovsky, J. “O motorické dění v poezii.” Prague: 1985.

²⁵ Bakhtin, M. “The Problem of Content: Material and Form in Verbal Creative Art.” *Art and Answerability: Early Philosophical Essays*. Austin, TX: 1990. 313.

Texts and the Body

The first claim of the motor theory... is that the objects of speech perception are the intended phonetic gestures of the speaker, represented in the brain as invariant motor commands that call for movements of the articulators through certain linguistically significant configurations. These gestural commands are the physical reality underlying the traditional phonetic notions—for example, “tongue backing,” “lip rounding,” and “jaw raising” – that provide the basis for phonetic categories. They are the elementary events of speech production and perception. Phonetic segments are simply groups of one or more of these elementary events; thus [b] consists of a labial stop gesture and [m] of that same gesture combined with a velum-lowering gesture. Phonologically, of course, the gestures themselves must be viewed as groups of features, such as “labial,” “stop,” “nasal,” but these features are attributes of the gestural events, not events as such. To perceive an utterance, then, is to perceive a specific pattern of intended gestures.²⁶

The following claim is of similar importance:

The second claim of the theory is a corollary of the first: if speech perception and speech production share the same set of invariants, they must be intimately linked. This link, we argue, is not a learned association, a result of the fact that what people hear when they listen to speech is what they do when they speak. Rather, the link is innately specified, requiring only epigenetic development to bring it into play. On this claim, perception of the gestures occurs in a specialized mode, different in important ways from the auditory mode, responsible also for the production of phonetic structures, and part of the larger specialization for language. The adaptive function of the perceptual side of this mode, the side with which the motor theory is directly concerned, is to make the conversion from acoustic signal to gesture automatically, and so to let listeners perceive phonetic structures without mediation by (or translation from) the auditory appearances that the sounds might, on purely psychoacoustic grounds, be expected to have.²⁷

I shall refrain from summarizing arguments in favor of the referenced theory, I will only note how concurrent it is with the direction Przyboś took intuitively. For instance, empathy, believed so far to be active only in the presented world, becomes a principle almost organically binding the sender and the receiver of the poem. In the new perspective, the insistence to read poetry aloud presents itself as a result of a characteristic (although erroneous) belief that a motor reception of poem requires acoustic sensations. One may only assume that as a result of the emergence of similar theories, it will be easier in the future to understand and describe everything that Przyboś captured in his programmatic metaphor:

transmitting the motions and labors of my body
onto the vocal cords and onto the drive
of signifying tongue²⁸

Translation: Anna Warso

²⁶ Libermann, A. M. and Mattingly, I. G. “The Motor Theory of Speech Perception Revised.” *Cognition* 21, 1985. 2-3.

²⁷ Przyboś, J. “Więcej o manifest.” *Pisma zebrane*. Vol. 2 Skręt, R. (ed.) Kraków: 1994. 171.

²⁸ Przyboś, J. “Więcej o manifest.” *Pisma zebrane*. Vol. 2 Skręt, R. (ed.) Kraków: 1994. 171.

Bożena KARWOWSKA

Female Perspective in Szymborska's Poetry: An Attempt at a Post-feminist Reflection

“Women make up about half of the world’s several billion inhabitants, so do men, and nothing about this fact is of consequence to poetry;”¹ says Małgorzata Baranowska in an excellent essay on the poetry of Wisława Szymborska (among others.) “Gender does not determine the shape of work;”² observes Grażyna Borkowska discussing the characteristics of women’s writing. There seems to grow a conviction that it does not matter for literature whether the author is male or female, what matters is rather how they can express their femininity in the language of literature. And this precisely is the core of the issue at stake, as it is not entirely clear how exactly one expresses femininity in the language of literature and what femininity in literature is or should be. Borkowska believes that “we are...helpless against the phenomenon of female literature/poetry, as we are convinced that definitions, paradoxically, do not meet the need for clarity inscribed in every act of expression and that clear expressions are not entirely true.”³ The problem we are facing here is, in fact, even more serious as it concerns the concept of “femininity” in general, as well as the different ways of defining femininity. For instance, femininity defined within the male world order meant a complete (or an almost complete) submission to the stereotypes and formulas created by men for women. Feminist criticism, on the

¹ Baranowska, M. “Szymborska i Świrszczyńska – two poles of the everyday.” *Sporne postaci polskiej literatury współczesnej. Kontynuacje*. Brodzka, A. and Burska, L., eds. Warszawa: 1996. 17.

² Borkowska, G. “Metafora drożdży. Co to jest literatura / poezja kobieca.” *Teksty Drugie*, 1995. Vol. 3/4. 38

³ Ibid.

other hand, attempts to tackle the popular (patriarchal) uses of this category and adjust its meanings to its own needs. It also does not help that what is referred to as “femininity” includes, in fact, two terms: biological affiliation (female) and a set of properties or values (feminine) while their culturally determined relationship remains one of the subjects of feminist analysis. The very fact that these two are not distinguished in the Polish language is also significant.

Clearly, the problems with the concept (or, perhaps, with the concepts) exceed terminological frame. Thus, for instance, Cynthia Griffin Wolff, notes that in literature:

the definitions of women's most serious problems and the proposed solutions to these problems are...tailored to meet the needs of fundamentally masculine problems...Women appear in literature ...as conveniences to the resolutions of masculine dilemmas.⁴

Wolff believes that a sufficiently non-stereotypical female literature is yet to emerge which is due to the fact that women have also allowed themselves to be dominated in their work by the models created by men. German Ritz⁵ believes that in Polish poetry, the female voice, dominated by the male imagination, had to work its way through the world of stereotypical images of women and femininity, created as part of the male symbolic order. Interestingly, opinions presented above, despite their extreme poignancy regarding the general phenomenon of women's writing, find little application to Szymborska's poetry while Szymborska herself has not attracted particular interest of the feminists.⁶

That Szymborska's “femininity” largely escaped the attention of feminist criticism⁷ may result from the fact that her poetry neither focuses on the problems of women, nor attacks the male world order, in other words, Szymborska's is not feminist poetry. Several feminist categories⁸ – especially those that emphasize political aspects of literature and literary criticism seem unfit in reference to her work, unable to reveal much about it or even describe it. It is thus no coincidence that in her attempt to define female literature/poetry – having assumed that “wherever the gender of the speaking subject is emphasized, wherever the connection between the body and the text is revealed, we are dealing with female literature/poetry” – Borkowska did not use a single example from

⁴ Griffin-Wolff, C. “Mirror for Men: Stereotypes of Women in Literature.” *Woman: An Issue*. Edwards et. al., eds. Boston: 1972. 207, 208 and 217.

⁵ Ritz, G. “Dyskurs płci w ujęciu porównawczym.” *Teksty Drugie*, 1999. Vol. 5. 117-123.

⁶ I can recall only one attempt to use feminist categories in an analysis of Szymborska's poetry – Grażyna Borkowska's “Szymborska ex-centriczna” – that I refer to further in my essay. One should bear in mind, though, that in the 12 years from its publication both feminist criticism and Szymborska's poetry have developed to include new aspects.

⁷ It is astounding the name of the only Polish female Nobel Prize poet appeared just once (in the footnote) in a recent book on feminism as a research method and perspective. (*Krytyka feministyczna. Siostra teorii i historii literatury*. Borkowska, G. and Sikorska, L., eds., Warszawa: 2000).

⁸ Betsey, C., Moore, J. “Introduction: The Story So Far.” *The Feminist Reader: Essays in Gender and the Politics of Literary Criticism*. Betsey, C. and Moore, J., eds., Blackwell: 1997. 1-15.

Szymborska's poetry.⁹ Borkowska's attempt to use the feminist category of "therapeutic strategies" led her to conclude that "as a result, Szymborska rejected the feminist replacement strategies."¹⁰ At the same time, the fact that Szymborska is a woman, is decidedly important for her poetry.

These are not the only categories of poetic description that the critics rejected when discussing Szymborska. "[The poet] is also a stranger to the Romantic belief in the power of poetry,"¹¹ notes Borkowska. To clarify, Szymborska's is not a bard, nor a patriotic poet, she does not claim to know more nor understand more than her readers and therefore does not give lessons, she was not chosen by the gods etcetera. My use masculine form [of nouns such as "bard" or "poet" in Polish¹²] is intentional – Szymborska simply does not stand for anything that the Polish literary tradition associates with the role of a poet, a role almost exclusively reserved for men; she does not fit in the existing order of the patriarchal world, refusing to accept the established model of a Romantic poet. At the same time, her poetic persona has nothing in common with a platonic (or demonic) mistress, nor with the patriotic maternal figure, nor with any other role assigned to women by the same tradition. Borkowska astutely observes that

Szymborska's poetic proposal is astounding. It is a consistent criticism of universalist, abstract thinking imposed by the "patriarchal" order. In this sense, Szymborska approaches the practices of deconstruction and feminism, however, no formula – neither deconstructivist, nor feminist, exhausts her richness.¹³

While entirely and undeniably feminine, Szymborska's poetic voice demands a description that will go beyond the categories and formulas aiming to fight for the recognition of female space and value in literature and culture. As such, Szymborska's poetry poses a challenge to feminist criticism, even though it is a realization of several of its postulates.

Szymborska's poetry does not fight the existing tradition of gender discourse because it seems not to notice its existence. It passes over it. It does not reject it but it does not accept it either. It takes a similar approach to cultural novelties – such as talk shows, targeted, after all, mainly at the female recipient, and creating a culture of public deliberations over what was once referred to as intimate matters. It seems almost as if Szymborska did not see that the male and female roles are defined very precisely and in several dimensions, while their hierarchies are culturally determined. In other words, Szymborska's poetry does not enter a direct discussion with the tradition, nor with the present, even though it is formed within their discursive frame. "Sometimes Szymborska's poetry seems to come from a future time where the struggle for the woman's place [in the world], in other words, the place for the human being, both male and female, is no

⁹ Borkowska, G. "Metafora drożdży..."

¹⁰ Borkowska, G. "Szymborska ex-centryczna." *Teksty Drugie*, 1991. Vol. 4. 58.

¹¹ Ibidem 46.

¹² Polish nouns and verbs are gendered, as a result a male poet translates to "poeta" whereas a female poet to "poetka." [AW]

¹³ Ibidem 58.

Texts and the Body

longer necessary” notes Małgorzata Baranowska.¹⁴ Perhaps, then, Szymborska’s position is closer to Kristeva’s rejection of the dichotomy of the masculine and the feminine as metaphysical?¹⁵ The creation of a model that cannot be categorized by the existing dichotomous discourse of patriarchal society is one of the most interesting features of Szymborska’s femininity. As a result, constructing hierarchies that ignore the existing order, looking at the world through the categories of the domestic and the private that for centuries have been believed to be the domain of women is, in Szymborska’s poetry, associated neither with something inferior nor with a struggle; instead it is a non-antagonizing deconstruction of the stereotypes that daily glorify the male tradition.

Szymborska’s poetic persona is not determined by the juxtaposition of woman against man, it is, first and foremost, a human being that does not yield to the division running along the lines of sex and gender. In fact, humanity in Szymborska’s poetry is defined through the obvious, by distinguishing from the “other.” Otherness emphasizes differences but can also transform into a norm, as for instance in “The Onion” from *A Large Number*:

the onion, now that’s something else
its innards don’t exist
nothing but pure onionhood
fills this devout onionist¹⁶

(NCP 166)

The very notion of “people” is dichotomous – including that and the other, the stereotypical product of culture and the ordinary, living man, as in “Wrong Number” where great men in the paintings

Above it all, in scarlet robes or nude
they view nocturnal fuss as simply rude
...
And if some silly man calling from town
refuses to give up, put the receiver down,
though he’s got the wrong number? He lives, so he errs.

(NCP 113)

The differences can be biological (natural) but also artificial, created by men, often for our convenience and peace of mind.

To preserve our peace of mind, animals die
more shallowly: they aren’t deceased, they’re dead.

¹⁴ Baranowska, M. “Szymborska i Świrszczyńska...” 8.

¹⁵ Kristeva, J. “Women’s Time.” *Feminist Reader: Essays in Gender and the Politics of Literary Criticism*. Belsey, C. and Moore, J. Blackwell: 1997. 201-217.

¹⁶ Further quotations from Szymborska’s poems based on *Poems: New and Collected 1957-1997*. Trans. Stanisław Barańczak and Clare Cavanagh. Mariner Books: 1998, further indicated as [NCP, page number. Quotations from *Monologue of a Dog*. Trans. Stanisław Barańczak and Clare Cavanagh Houghton Mifflin Harcourt: 2007 further indicated as [M, page number] (AW)

Karwowska Female Perspective in Szymborska's Poetry...

They leave behind, we'd like to think, less feeling and less world,
departing, we supposed, from a stage less tragic
(“Seen From Above” NCP 151)

Looking at the man from a distance enhances the (biological) homogeneity of his species, disregarding the (cultural) differences of gender. Szymborska's female “I” is human to the same degree that any “other” – that is man. And indeed, man is not positioned in the center of the world in Szymborska's poetry, but as the “other” and the categories that he created are just but one type of several categories. What lies at the center is not a woman, contrary to what one might expect from the logic of patriarchal dichotomy, but a single human being “of its temporarily human kind.” What matters here is precisely separateness and individuality. Szymborska emphasizes in “Among The Multitudes”

I didn't get a choice either
but I can't complain
I could have been someone
much less separate.
Someone from an anthill, shoal, or buzzing swarm
(NCP 267)

Always and above all human, an individual being, Szymborska's speaker is almost never male¹⁷, although it can be – and quite often is – female. In its non-gendered form it is a person or a being (the feminine [of “person” and “being” in Polish] is rather telling here), aware of its past lives even though – as she says in “Speech At The Lost and Found”:

I'm not even sure exactly where I left my claws,
who's got my fur coat, who's living in my shell
(NCP 127)

There is no difference of sexes above – the past forms of verbs indicate both male and female gender – describing the human being in “No End Of Fun” Szymborska ironically speaks of him who “only just whittled with his hand né fin/ a flint, a rocket ship.” The division takes place elsewhere. Although not explicitly, Szymborska's poems seem to suggest that we owe the process of evolution and gradually becoming human to actions that are (in the colloquial, figurative sense) typical of women rather than men, actions such as jumping out of our skin, losing our minds, turning a blind eye, waving our hand, or shrugging our shoulders. In other words, we have become and remain human not because of what is masculine, great and heroic; not because of what is rational (male) but because of what is hysterical (female.) It is coincidence – by the way, one of the key notions in Szymborska – and not deliberate, scientifically knowable processes that provides the best and the most complete explanation of history and humanity. This implicit but very clearly implied, boldly feminist and yet seemingly obvious description

¹⁷ I can think of one poem (“Relacja ze szpitala” from *Sto pociech*) where Szymborska uses the masculine singular forms. Szymborska did not include the poem in her exhaustive selection *Widok z ziarnkiem piasku* (1996).

Texts and the Body

of the world seen from the perspective of female, “domestic” wisdom is characteristic of Szymborska’s poetry. Let us return again to Grażyna Borkowska:

The originality of Szymborska’s poetry, at least at first glance, is determined by the specific location of the speaking voice. It amazes and astounds as it comes from unexpected places – from the corner of a room, from behind the scenes, from a museum showcase, gutters of a city, from a dream and from deep waters. Szymborska’s poetry is a modest gloss on the margins of the great book of the world, the sixth act of a play, a reverse of a painting.¹⁸

In other words, it is a voice coming from places marginalized by the patriarchal tradition, from places symbolically assigned to women. And, perhaps paradoxically, it turns out to provide a perspective more interesting than the symbolic positioning of the man in the “center.”

Asking the question “Where is she?” Hélène Cixous invokes several oppositions:

Activity/passivity,
Sun/Moon,
Culture/Nature,
Day/Night,

Father/Mother,
Head/heart,
Intelligible/sensitive,
Logos/Pathos

... Always the same metaphor: we follow it, it transports us, in all of its forms, wherever a discourse is organized... By dual, hierarchized oppositions. Superior / Inferior.¹⁹

Szymborska’s woman does not feel inferiority resulting from the adoption of the male symbolic order, nor does she want to swap places with the man, rejecting the idea of his superiority. Thus, she does not negate her place or the juxtaposition of metaphors, she negates – or at least questions – the hierarchical element of the pairings in question. As a result, the female speaker in Szymborska’s work refers to men ironically.

This adult male. This person on earth.
Ten billion nerve cells. Ten pints of blood
pumped by ten ounces of heart.
This object took three billion years to emerge.

(“A Film From The Sixties” 94)

Irony in Szymborska’s poems is directed at men to such a degree, that whenever the poet speaks ironically of humans in general, not only does she use the male noun form “man” [człowiek] but also her imagery reveals a seemingly male individual.

¹⁸ Borkowska, G. “Szymborska ex-centryczna...” 51.

¹⁹ Cixous, H. “Sorties’: Out and Out: Attack/Ways Out/Forays.” *Feminist Reader: Essays in Gender and the Politics of Literary Criticism*. Belsey, C. and Moore, J., eds., Blackwell: 1997. 91.

Karwowska Female Perspective in Szymborska's Poetry...

with that ring in his nose, with that toga, that sweater
He's no end of fun, for all you say.
Poor little beggar.
A human, if we ever saw one.

(No End Of Fun NCP 107)

Here is an image of man seen from the domestic perspective.

Tomorrow he'll give a lecture
on homeostasis in megagalactic cosmonautics.
For now, though, he has curled up and gone to sleep.

(Going Home NCP 123)

Female irony (as this is the kind found in Szymborska's poetry) is born between the sphere of home and the sphere of demands that man must face in the outside world. These include status and professional success but can also exceed their limits, as in "Smiles" where masculinity is associated not with pity but with amusement resulting from the posturing displayed for the public.

And that's why statesmen have to smile.
Their pearly whites mean they're still full of cheer.
The game's complex, the goal's far out of reach,
the outcomes's still unclear – once in a while,
we need a friendly, gleaming set of teeth.

(NCP 153)

What is public and high (i.e., masculine) is therefore also simply laughable. One cannot disagree with the playful (but also true) observation that "dentistry turned to diplomatic skill/ promises us a Golden Age tomorrow." In other words, the world of men cannot be taken very seriously.

It is not to be underestimated either, as it exerts influence upon entire humanity – the model of masculinity includes, after all, also heroic deeds that are paid for by the woman who – as in "Pieta" – becomes something of an exhibit in the museum dedicated to the greatness of man. Szymborska does not question the core of masculinity or heroism that is a natural consequence of being a man, especially in the patriotically-oriented Polish tradition. She expects her readers to be familiar with the latter, to understand its rules and at the same time she presents it from the surprising perspective of the everyday of existence. For instance, in "In Broad Daylight" from *The People on The Bridge*, a heroic death is used to emphasize the general lack of understanding of the uniqueness of the miracle that is our usual, daily life.

Sometimes someone would
yell from the doorway: "Mr. Baczynski, phone call for you" –
and there would be nothing strange about that
being him, about him standing up, straightening his sweater,
and slowly moving towards the door.

At this sight no one would
stop talking, no one would

Texts and the Body

freeze in mid-gesture, mid-breath
because this commonplace event would
be treated – such a pity –
as a commonplace event.

(NCP 192-193)

For Szyborska, life is a commonplace but also – as in the poem “Museum” – a presence of feelings and the ability to err, as in “Wrong Number” – “He lives, so he errs.” Life is everything that the patriarchal tradition puts on the side of the irrational, in other words, on the side of that which represents the woman. Even if, as it is in “Museum,” struggle becomes synonymous with battle, it is simply a race against the dress

The crown has outlasted the head.
The hand has lost out to the glove.
The right shoe has defeated the foot.

As for me, I am still alive, you see.
The battle with my dress still rages on.

(NCP 30)

When the speaker clearly identifies with the woman, irony is replaced with “good-natured pity.” This is not the only difference between the way Szyborska refers to man in general and man in its female form. As man, the speaker is primarily a biological entity. As a woman, the speaker not only remembers the previous stages of her biological development, but is also aware of the cultural determinants of her existence. As beautiful Helen, she visits Troy, she understands Lot’s wife, or becomes Cassandra. She remembers the characters that created her as a cultural stereotype, in other words, characters that she “used to be” as a cultural construct, she understands them enough to enter the role of a female character from the past. In “Landscape,” already painted as the woman “under the ash tree,” she says

I don’t know the games of the heart.
I’ve never seen my children’s father naked.
I don’t see the crabbed and blotted draft
that hides behind the Song of Songs.
What I want to say comes in ready-made phrases.
I never use despair, since it isn’t really mine,
only given to me for safekeeping.

(NCP 70)

The female speaker of Szyborska’s poems remembers also the characters that the poet herself used to be, for example in childhood. She can look at them from a distance and treat as the “other,” for example in “Laughter.”

The little girl I was--
I know her, of course.
I have a few snapshots

Karwowska Female Perspective in Szymborska's Poetry...

from her brief life.
I feel good-natured pity
for a couple of little poems.
I remember a few events.

(NCP 73)

In "A Memory", from *Chwila* [Moment], the poet's most recent volume, looking at herself from the past is at the same time a reflection on the relationships between women representing different generations, conditioned by their relationships with men.

I thought: I'll call you,
tell you, don't come just yet,
they're predicting rain for days.

Only Agnieszka, a widow,
met the lovely girl with a smile.

(M 43)

While a description of "her old self" is a relatively common theme in Szymborska's work, one similar in tone to the sentimentally-ironic attitude to other "future women" – for instance, the thirteen year olds ("A Moment in Troy") or little girls ("A Little Girl Tugs at the Tablecloth") – Szymborska's work does not look at the woman as the "other." The abovementioned "A Memory" is an exception here, perhaps also a foreshadowing of something new in Szymborska's poetry. The tone, however, that women can use to talk about a potential rival or simply any unacceptable "other" [woman], could be heard already in much earlier poems, even if it is employed most superbly in "Hatred" (*The End and The Beginning*): "See how efficient it still is,/ how it keeps itself in shape" sounds almost like a snippet from a somewhat malicious conversation. Malice and gossip attributed to women by the patriarchal stereotype are not typical of the tone of the female speaker in Szymborska's poems and they never appear when other women are discussed. They are simply a voice, a literary device, another game that reveals and ridicules the patriarchal attitude to women.

Szymborska's characteristic tone of good will irony towards the "others" develops not from the acceptance of "external" or "existing" stereotypes but is an extension of the way she talks about herself as she "used to be." The poet employs it not only in her relations with people but also with several elements of the surrounding world, including the existing and the surrounding modernity.

It'd be better if you went back
where you came from

I don't owe you nothing,
I'm just an ordinary woman
who only knows
when to betray
another's secret

(NPC 74)

Texts and the Body

Describing herself as “an ordinary woman,” she stresses – in a paradoxically obvious manner – her presence on the margins of the “high” modes of culture. At the same time, it is difficult to define the notion of an “ordinary woman” in Szyborska’s poetry. A woman is, after all, a constant volatility, someone who “must be a variety,” as in “Portrait of a Woman”:

Naive, but gives the best advice.
Weak, but takes on anything.
A screw loose and tough as nails.
Curls up with Jaspers or *Ladies’ Home Journal*.
Can’t figure out this bolt and builds a bridge.
Young, young as ever, still looking young.
(NCP 161)

A woman is also someone whose body is subject to fashion and who is subjected to the current stereotypes of beauty. In “Rubens’ Women” (from *Salt*), noticing the absence of the “skinny sisters,” Szyborska writes:

The thirteenth century would have given them golden halos.
The twentieth silver screens.
The seventeenth, alas, holds nothing for the unvoluptuous.

For even the sky bulges here
with pudgy angles and a chubby god
(NCP 47)

In the poem above, the woman and her role are a function of the image of the body, and the female body is subjected to the same categories of aesthetic appraisal as art is. A commentary on such perception of the female body has a lot in common with feminism, except in Szyborska it is not a phenomenon judged only negatively since in art it also concerns godly – in other words – most honored characters. Precisely this kind of commentary – noticing the issues raised by feminism and (not) solving them in a (non) conventional way is fairly typical of Szyborska.

Another typical feature of her work is the focus on what does not exist, which in itself is no surprise as, according to Lacan, “the woman does not exist.”²⁰ There is nothing unusual about the fact that in the world of a “non-existing woman,” things that did not happen matter as much as those that did. Szyborska’s “The Railroad Station” about the “nonarrival in the city of N.” is a good example here. Also, the opening of “***” – “Nothingness changed radically also for me” [Nicość przenicowała się także i dla mnie] – is worth mentioning in this context. The non-existence spreads further – into the non-existence of singular realization of stereotypes. Thus, the family from “Family Album” consists of people that refuse to yield to stereotypes, and when a sentimental stereotype does appear, years later, in Szyborska’s description of a photograph, it will be in “Hitler’s First Photograph” (*The People On The Bridge*). The stereotype does not

²⁰ See: *The Feminine Sexuality*. London: 1982.

Karwowska Female Perspective in Szymborska's Poetry...

allow to see or describe reality, and often actually opposes common sense. "True love" – writes the poet – "couldn't populate the planet in a million years,/ it comes along so rarely." What is important for our existence is not the stereotype used to describe reality but reality itself. Similarly, Szymborska's speaker recollects love in "Love At First Sight" as "something [that] was and wasn't there between us,/ something went on and went away." And it is not the stereotype of eternal first love that makes it so important but rather the fact that it is gone forever

Yet just exactly as it is,
it does what the others still can't manage:
unremembered,
not even seen in dreams,
it introduces me to death.

(M 47)

Interestingly, this play of stereotypes reappears especially in Szymborska's poems about love where she practically abandons the existing, patriarchal tradition of female poetry. In her early work, love is actually a lack of love, an impossibility of meeting the ideal

I am too close for him to dream of me.
I don't flutter over him, don't flee him
beneath the roots of trees. I am too close.
The caught fish doesn't sing with my voice.

(NCP 55)

In her later poems love is expressed not with grand words, not through the extraordinary but precisely through the miracle of everyday:

And it just so happened that I am with you
and I really don't see anything
ordinary about it

(****) *Wszelki wypadek* (1972)

In other words, love is a privilege of youth, a stereotypical emotional torrent but rather a quiet coexistence with another man, a mature emotion of a mature person. In her love poems, Szymborska reaches for the pronoun "you" which – in contrast to "us" – allows to maintain one's own self, the "I", to stress the "separateness" and the respect for the "I" of the beloved and at the same time – unlike the pronoun "he" – does not put the addressee in the position of the "other." The lyrical "you" appeared relatively late in Szymborska's poems, and is, in fact, expressed fully only in the poems written after the death of the loved one.

I survived you by enough,
and only by enough,
to contemplate from afar.

(NCP 241)

The woman's voice in Szymborska's poems is not a battle shout or a submissive whisper. It is a voice of a woman who feels – as an individual but also culturally – equal to man (if

Texts and the Body

this division should remain in force), and as a result, does not need to fight for anything, nor yield to anyone. It is a voice of a woman who knows that even if history belongs to heroes, “after every war / someone has to tidy up.” (“The End And The Beginning”). A voice belonging to someone who – perhaps paradoxically – growing out of the very patriotic Polish culture, instead of agitating for the creation of another veterans’ organization, allows the patriotism of the ancestors to be forgotten.

Those who knew
what this was all about
must make way for those
who know little
And less than that

(NCP 229)

And, which is probably most typical of women, it is the voice of someone who does not have to actually change reality, who can simply – as a non-existent entity – not participate in it, just as women did not participate, for centuries, in the creation of descriptive categories of the world they live in while all that was left to them, apart from adaptation, was a quiet, peaceful dissent. That and, naturally, caring for the continuity of everyday life while male heroes were leaving to fulfill more important social and historical roles. This is probably one of the reasons why it is so difficult to capture and describe the essence of self-assured femininity, awarded eventually, with the Nobel Prize in literature.

Translation: Anna Warso

Anna NASIŁOWSKA

Women in the Poetry of Czesław Miłosz

As a critic, Czesław Miłosz has shown remarkable openness to feminism. Contrary to the beliefs popular in the literary circles, he embraced the poetry of Anna Świrszczyńska and talking about her experience of corporeality used different criteria of value than the ones presented in *The Land of Urlo*. He also discussed Świrszczyńska's poetry in his lectures collected in *The Witness of Poetry* and his short essay about her life and work, "W stronę kobiet," [Toward Women] opened the 1993 feminist issue of *Teksty Drugie*. It was, perhaps, the strong presence of feminism at American universities that contributed to Miłosz's particular sensitivity to subjects often unspoken of, or even openly neglected. Miłosz regards with suspicion Mickiewicz's presentations of Telimena, convinced that the ridiculousness of the character hides a large dose of male hypocrisy.

He also views himself with suspicion. In "A Short Digression on Woman as a Representative of Nature" from *Visions from San Francisco Bay*, the poet speaks against "old-fashioned anti-feminism" of the turn of the century. He associates it with a period of adolescence and a particular kind of wound that needs to be healed by the adult. Resentment towards gender remains, however, deeply rooted in the individual psyche and in culture.

It is the same resentment that resurfaces in Miłosz's work, despite his interest in feminism which in itself is rather superficial (as he does not exhibit familiarity with feminist readings) and frequently ironic. *Provinces* contains a poem titled "One" [Them] dedicated to "feminists."¹ Its tone is polemical, or perhaps ironic. The poem presents characters of

¹ Whenever possible I provide translations of Miłosz's poems published in *New and Collected Poems: 1931-2001*. Trans. Robert Hass, Ecco: 2003. Where a canonical translation proved unavailable, I provide my own (working) translation. (AW)

passive, ordinary wives, the “caretakers of socks and pants,” patiently suffering the “grand ideas” and “faith in the genius.” While feminists tend to perceive such women as victims of violence unaware of their patriarchal dependency, the poet suggests something different: they exhibit passive resistance and know more about life than one might think.

In the work of Czesław Miłosz, images of women and love are inscribed into a double optic: different values are associated with women as part of a love relationship and different with women in general, seen only fleetingly or recalled as imaginary characters, a creation of the mind. Both the former and the latter are, first and foremost, phantasms of the poet’s mind. Those constituting part of a love relationship are viewed in positive terms. His attitude to the latter, i.e. to his own projections, is often characterized by ambivalence and uncertainty regarding the real meaning and value. The purpose of my essay is to present and discuss the phantasms, or images of women born in the poets’ mind – with the exception of the figures of mother and wife. Mother is a powerful archetype, not necessarily tied directly to other images of femininity. Also the figure of the wife, appearing in the farewell poem published in *Tygodnik Powszechny*, occupies a clearly separate place, one conditioned by the biography and character of a particular individual. For my part, I am mostly interested in the poet’s imagination, in re-creating the web of meanings tied to “femininity” rather than the relation to the biographical experience.

Freud believes the experience of ambivalence to be inseparable from serious commitment. Sometimes, strong attraction is compensated with the reflex of aversion and the tormented Ego is torn between opposite poles of the same relationship. Love and hostility go hand in hand, harmoniously maintaining tension. It is repression that may be dangerous, i.e. the moment when one of the sides of the conflicts is hidden. Miłosz presents both sides in his work. His ambivalence does not have the nature of a deep, personal complex. It has also a distinctly cultural character.

Amore sacro

From the times of *il dolce stil nuovo*, in other words, almost from the beginnings of the European culture as that which emerged after the fall of Rome to barbarism, poetry has associated holiness with resignation from fulfillment, as well as with chastity and spiritual worship. The image of love presented, for example, by Denis de Rougemont² seems to confirm that our culture perpetuates the ambivalence of “lowly” sex and “high” feeling inscribed in the social scenarios of the experience of love.

In Miłosz’s work, love often appears in its sexual dimension and only there it is accompanied by the sacral aspect. Miłosz does not write traditional love verse: he never composed a poem expressing love nor a lover’s confession, a classical erotic or a farewell

² *Love in the Western World*. Trans. to Polish by L. Eustachiewicz. Warszawa: 1968, 1999. See also classical texts on love by: K. Starczewska. *Wzory miłości w kulturze Zachodu*. Warszawa: 1975; J. Kristeva, *Histoires d’amour*, Paryż: 1983; O. Paz. *The Double Flame: Love and Eroticism*. Trans. to Polish by P. Fornelski, Kraków: 1996; R. Barthes. *A Lover’s Discourse: Fragments*. Trans. to Polish by M. Bieńczyk. Warszawa: 1999.

poem; he never wrote about longing for an absent or lost beloved. Nor did he ever try to embody the Romantic lover, or Tristan or Don Juan. In fact, it seems that Miłosz was highly influenced by the Western sexual revolution: his interest in the subject was clearly greatest in the 60s, although he had approached the issue already several times before. His is, thus, a vision of liberated love and joyful sex.

Further, Miłosz's poetry does not have the function of "attracting" the beloved: there is no foreplay in it, no overcoming of resistance, and in general, the history of love itself is absent. What is recurrent is the memory of sex. "She" bears different names and, from the very beginning, their literary character indicates that the names are, in fact, pseudonyms, such as for instance in "Annalena." "I liked your velvet yoni, Annalena" – Jan Kott believes this particular verse to be one of the boldest recollections of eros in Polish poetry.³ The past, despite its indelible intensity of experience, somewhat neutralizes the boldness of Miłosz's expression: "I liked" says the speaker of the poem, instead of "like." Telling stories from the past is one of the principles governing Miłosz's erotic imagery.

However, one will not find nostalgic reminiscences of loss in his work, but rather, a repeated discovery of the same moment, even if it happened a long time ago, in the distant youth in Vilnius, as for instance in "Example." Miłosz's erotic memories do not grow old, or become vague – exempt from the universal law of aging, they retain their intensity. Time exerts no destructive influence upon them, as they belong, from the onset, to a different order of reality, they are a reflection of a better existence.

Descriptions of such moments do not have to be based on personal memories, those are often intentionally blurred. Sometimes the poet creates a man and woman from scratch but the distance between him and the introduced characters does not lessen the intensity of the experience.

"The Garden of Earthly Delights: Paradise"

I am these two, twofold. I ate from the Tree
Of Knowledge. I was expelled by the archangel's sword.
At night I sensed her pulse. Her mortality.
And we have searched for the real place ever since.

(403-404)

Perspective changes quickly in this short passage: from a divine gaze embracing the couple to the experience of man who achieves unity with woman, and finds a sense of existential truth. The lovers are surrounded by the memory of Paradise and carnal love brings understanding of one's own and the partner's fate as human beings.

³ Kott, J. "Objęcie ziemi." *Poznawanie Miłosza 2. Część pierwsza*. Fiut, A. (ed.) Kraków: 2000. 124. "Womanhood is referred to with a Sanskrit word from *Kamasutra* in this bold recollection of eros, one of the boldest in Polish poetry. There is a dark 'o' in the sacral *yoni*, similar to the one in Polish 'noc' [night] and 'dno' [bottom]." The name of Annalena appears in the novel by Oskar Miłosz, where it is given to the sensual protagonist, Clarissa Annalena.

Texts and the Body

It is difficult to identify “her” in Miłosz’s work. She is not branded by separateness or otherness. Several different persons hide behind the names but there is only one woman, universal and mythical. Man transcends his “self.” Man and woman become one. Their fate is shared and so is the utopia of “the real place.” Even lovers themselves feel it approach. Jan Kott notes that what they experience is a renewed sense of *arche*. Similarly, elsewhere:

“After Paradise”

How perfect
All things are. Now, for the two of you
Waking up in a royal bed by a garret window.
For a man and a woman. For one plant divided
Into masculine and feminine which longed for each other.
Yes, this is my gift to you. Above ashes
On a bitter, bitter earth.

(407)

Complementing each other, femininity and masculinity create one whole. This particular myth shares the most with the hermeneutic tradition and the context of Plato’s androgyny is also strongly pronounced.⁴ But cultural references are not of key importance here, it is the intensity of sensation that comes to the fore. In moments like that, physical experiences become spiritual the division between the physical and the spiritual is abolished in “the real place”. A new dimension reveals itself.

This type of sexual relationship is free from the sense of sin. In *The Issa Valley*, moments spent with Onuté appear so distinctive that they are taken out of daily life, subject to moral assessment and judgments. They are separate from reality

And this is how It was performed: Onuté would lie flat on her back, pull him toward her, and squeeze him with her knees. And they stayed that way, as the sun rolled across the sky, and he knew that all the time she was waiting, waiting for him to touch her, and it made him feel *sweet* all over. Yet this was not just any girl, but Onuté, and nothing could have prevailed on him to confess their secret. (44-45)

The passage quoted above is followed in the book by the description of a sense of lightness that Thomas experiences after taking Communion. The boy feels privileged and ready to receive the Guest knowing that only by becoming one flesh and being seized by Sacrum can the highest level of the sublime be reached. These two neighboring pas-

⁴ Those motifs were interpreted and discussed already by Aleksander Fiut in *Moment wieczny. O poezji Czesława Miłosza*, in the chapter “We władzy Erosa” (the “Androgyny” part.) I do not discuss their potential development in my essay, as I do not discuss others that had been already commented on by Fiut (wherever I agree with him.) My essay in its current form is greatly indebted to Fiut and the discussions held during the Miłosz session, despite the fact that shared conclusions were not reached at the time. Regardless, they helped me greatly to formulate in a more precise manner several issues that had apparently previously been unclear.

sages could be possible interpreted as an analogy, not yet expressed fully. But in Miłosz's introduction to his translation of "Song of Songs," one finds not an analogy between but an identification of sacrum and love:

I think the Song touches upon the greatest mystery, analogy between sexual union of man and woman and the relationship of man with God. A statement like this might sound strange to our ear, but religious poetry, whether in India or – to chose a nearer place – of the Spanish mystics, assumes this truth to be self-evident. The Song has bound those two loves together earlier than the Greek philosophy that ascribed to Eros the role of the initiator. (26)

Ecstatic moments have a cleansing power, they are a reflection of the "other existence," an overcoming of *principium individuationis* and its renewal at the same time. The "self" loses nothing but instead opens up, participating in an ecstatic, pure and original symbiotic unity. In his classical essay "Epifanie Miłosza," [Miłosz's epiphanies] Jan Błoński notes that "erotic current often appears in [Miłosz's] epiphanies and raw sexuality often comes to the surface of the poem (for example, in 'Ode To A Bird')"⁵ Eros stands for energy – sexual, sacral and poetic.

The transition between the everyday and that extraordinary moment is a mystery not to be explained. What rituals should be performed to experience It? Nobody knows. There is no *ars amandi*, no rite, the boundary between the sacred and the profane cannot be crossed with the help of known techniques. And the participants of the experience are equally puzzling. Onuté from *The Issa Valley* is not clearly outlined as a character, she is given only a few attributes and a genealogy, has no personality, does not push forward the plot of the novel that in itself is somewhat enigmatic. Women in the quoted poems are not real people but transformed participants of the joint festivity of existence. Irena, from "Example" (from *It*) is not an exception either, she is a concrete person but an extraordinary one. Age and experience cleansed her from lowly feelings and irrational emotions of the world. She has become a model of Stoic wisdom.

Femininity and fetishes

All women of this earth are different. And they are a multitude, to the point when they are even viewed as a colorful, diverse crowd. In *The Separate Notebooks*, Miłosz writes: "A dark Academy. Assembled are instructress in corsets, grammarians of petticoats, poets of unmentionables with lace. The curriculum includes feeling the touch of silk against the skin, listening to the rustles of a dress, raising the chin when the aigrette on the hat sways." (375) In the passage above, attributes of femininity appear with more clarity than actual persons who are not even there, there are only petticoats, eyelashes, falling straps. Their purpose is clear – they are signs that attract men. Filina, a lady of rather loose morals, sings:

⁵ After: Błoński, J. *Miłosz, jak świat*. Kraków: 1998. 60. See: Błoński, J. "Epifanie Miłosza." *Poznanwanie Miłosza*. Kwiatkowski, J. (ed.) Kraków: 1985. 205-206.

Texts and the Body

*My shoes are made of a mouse's cunt
And so are the gloves I got from my aunt*

(347)

Freud interprets shoes and gloves as symbols of female sex. Miłosz mentions also “frou-frou skirts” and “undergarments not very clean” – those are the signs of Filina in a poem about her. Those are her synecdoches, just as her walking before the mirror, her admiring of her own reflection, her waiting for the carriage. Portraying the woman through the cultural attributes of fashion and symbols of elegance is a recurrent way of looking at the “her” in Miłosz’s poetry, her presence almost entirely made of cultural signs that signify attributes of gender. The most external attributes, too, ones that transmit the signal of readiness to the opposite sex. The woman lures the man with her special signs (her metonymies) which are fashion dependant and change with time.

Miłosz reaches here for firmly established imagery of female sexuality but those stereotypes are not solely used by men. In Pawlikowska-Jaskorzewska, the phantasms of femininity are very similar: the woman is largely made of fans, furs, seductive looks. Miłosz’s “The Hooks Of A Corset” from *Unattainable Earth* contains a long quotation from Janina Puttkamer Żółkowska’s memoir *Inne czasy, inni ludzie* [Different Times, Different People] (with a complete bibliographical note), describing Aunt Isia who wore Viennese dresses, modest but rustling and sensual, and was fond of the artifice Yong Poland’s poetic style (“white peacocks”). Using such signs, the woman can view herself as attractive and Miłosz admires Filina standing alone in front of the mirror. He embraces her coquetry, her autoeroticism.

A Freudian scholar is likely to interpret reception of femininity through its attributes as fetishism grounded in equipping the woman with substitute objects compensating the absence of penis. This would also imply – in a Freudian reading – a symbolic masculinization of woman. Such an interpretation raises obvious objections until we realize that it is only a metaphor revealing not a diagnosis of a deviation but a recognition of a universal mechanism regulating communication in the sphere of sexuality. A Lacanian scholar would phrase it in a more complex manner, upholding the recognition of fetishism as a phallic strategy that is a constant element of sexual relation of woman and man the triggering of which depends on the reading of the signs of coquetry used (often unconsciously) by the woman that for the man constitute a promise. Paweł Dybel comments: “Only then can a spark fly between the woman and the man, only then can the desire of the subject commence”⁶ There is one more philosophical conclusion of even greater significance here, a conclusion to be discovered once resistance to psychoanalytical terminology has been overcome. The relationship in question takes place in the field that Lacan that refers to as *objet petit a* and concerns certain phantasms that do not encompass the entire female identity, indeed, they are simply a reflection of the male imagination. Thus, one should not expect a relation of that kind to disclose any

⁶ Dybel, P. “Refleksje wokół diagramu różnicy seksualnej Jacques’a Lacana.” *Krytyka feministyczna. Siostra teorii i historii literatury*. Borkowska, G. and Sikorska L. (eds.) Warszawa: 2000. 37.

“truth,” lead to a deep understanding or reveal two separate identities to each other. This relation simply does not contain a “real space.”

The moral framing is of importance as well. Revealing the strategy of eroticization, Miłosz ignores firmly established and culturally ambiguous moral judgments of the mechanisms surrounding female beauty. In the Polish tradition, in the moral code of the upper classes, and in literature of morality “priming and preening” is viewed as an expression of vanity (as proclaimed by the Catholic moral norm) that results in corruption (although, admittedly, it is difficult to establish a relation without coquetry). This is why, upon seeing Telimena subtly “enhancing” her beauty, Tadeusz panics: “Dear God, rouged!” The mirror reflects the devil. A woman applying rouge and lipstick in front of the mirror ought to feel shame. Zosia, unlike Telimena, is an “innocent beauty,” a woman that is coquettish, but unknowingly.

In Miłosz work, “priming and preening” is viewed in positive terms. In one of the late poems, “Voyeur” (*This*), “panties with lace” become one of the major arguments for the fact the world is a place to be admired. The male subject in Miłosz does not change with age, remaining a young man. Femininity attracts him luring primarily his gaze – every textbook of human sexuality confirms that men are more sensitive to visual stimuli than women, while feminist writers suggest that the gaze (resulting in objectification) is an element of the patriarchal strategy. What the vision of femininity contains is simply a male phantasm where elements of dress are an erotic signal, an encouragement and a promise of a chance to enter a relationship with the man who looks. A contemplation of corsetry details is a sign of erotic potential.

Here as well, as in Miłosz’s erotic-epiphanic poems, contemplation is tied mostly to the past, not just personal past but, primarily, the imaginary and distant one. Moments in question are always drawn from sensual imagination of the subject, sometimes with the help of additional medium, such as a painting, in other words, the painter’s vision. This is also how the Venetian courtesans teasing a peacock make their appearance, through a reference to a painting by Carpaccio’s (I am not discussing this theme in more depth, as it has been exhausted by A. Fiut). Several other visions of women in *This* are ekphrastic, as noted by Jan Błoński in his essay from *Tygodnik Powszechny*, where Błoński attributes to Miłosz an intention to create a catalogue of typical female roles. This, however, seems not to be the case, as none of the women is a mother, for instance.

Art is an important intermediary for Miłosz. A painting offers the potential of distance and style: distance is a prerequisite for aesthetic perception and style refers us to a particular point in time when the painting was conceived, enriching the vision with distinct features of a past historical moment and, as the result, enhancing distance even further. And so Klimt’s Judith becomes a goddess of those dying in the trenches of the Great War, seen as a poisoned embodiment of the dying monarchy while her splendor heralds decline. Similarly, Edward Hopper’s woman in a red petticoat is not as much herself, as an arbitrary quintessence of career-drive, fast travel and American way of life. Believed to be a precursor of pop-art, Hopper painted bar interiors and hotel rooms, placing in them lonely figures with empty eyes. Miłosz describes the woman from Hopper’s painting as a “businesswoman,” while Błoński adds that she is “devoid of her femininity:

Texts and the Body

devoid of her calling, doomed to a salesman fate.” She does retain the typically feminine set of luring signs: her petticoat is red and her hair – flawless. Except, she does not ask existential questions, instead, she is unconsciously carried by the fast current of life. The latter is as disturbing as the sexually provocative formula of the 20th century: discard the unnecessary, it is mass culture and money that make the world go round.

Filina (with her Goethean pedigree) also belongs to the past and finds company among other Miłosz’s women, for instance those from the entirely non-Villonian “Skarga dam minionego czasu” [Complaint of the ladies of the past]. The antiquity of the women’s dresses takes away their literalness, revealing purely human motivation behind their reverence for the attributes of fashion: a persistent fight against passing, vulnerability to time, and a desire to restore whatever is left of the past. Miłosz aestheticizes the feminine ability to make use of style. The presence of the body is just a faint, barely readable trace here. Woman is revealed as an artist of her own, capable of selecting the most ephemeral aesthetic testimony and of shaping, from this ephemeral material, her portrait reflecting the male phantasm.

Amore profano

The artificial character of constructed femininity, its model made of lace and silk, is not suspended in a void but connected to the body which reveals itself even when it is covered. This connection is also a source of ambivalence. On the one hand, there is attraction, aesthetic acceptance of the subtle language of style employed by femininity, on the other hand – biology, desire and the body itself. In *A Treatise on Poetry*, Angels of Art Nouveau are presented in a highly ambiguous situation

In the dark WC’s of their parents’ homes
Meditating on the link between sex and the soul
(111)

The theme of the chamber pot returns obsessively: it is an object whose sole function is to retain bodily secretions, retain the *trace* of the body. Chamber pot is a mandatory element of a future wife – suffices to look at the entomologist’s beloved in “Diary of A Naturalist”:

She was an unreasonable creature of the fairer sex.
She chose her Earth of tulle and gauze,
Of boudoir mirrors that were easily cracked,
Of faience chamberpots that leave only one ear
To the excavator’s shovel.

(287)

It is a secret vessel. We call it a *vessel*, even though the committee of “poets of unmentionables with lace” has already declared it a “faience chamberpot” (375). It is also an element of the 19th century femininity, from a time when all physiological functions of the body needed to be hidden shamefully while the difficulty to reconcile them with the “façade” exaggerated them grotesquely, introducing a strongly obscene tone and fueling

the anal obsession. The sleds are ready, waiting, and women, already dressed up, take the last chance to use the vessel. Ladies in velveteen skirts,

giggles above a railing, pigtails askew,
sittings on chamberpots upstairs
when the sledge jingles under the columns of the porch
just before the moustachioed ones in wolf fur enter.
Female humanity,
children's snot, legs spread apart,
snarled hair, the milk boiling over,
stench, shit frozen into clods.
And those centuries,
conceiving in the herring smell of the middle of the night
instead of playing something like a game of chess
or dancing an intellectual ballet.

(218)

The quoted passage opens with a cultural attribute (skirts), followed by biology revealing itself behind it. Secretary obsession spreads: gradually, the image fills with naturalistic details that evoke the speaker's aversion and embarrassment. Those culminate in disgust towards procreation. And that is the other, darker side of femininity – its inevitable relationship with nature, with triviality, with matters practical and prosaic. Everything that is “natural” or bodily about woman, may also arouse disgust. The poem's suggestion to change the method of conception is, naturally, somewhat auto-ironic, it is unclear, too, which of the speaking voices makes it.

Here is how *The Issa Valley* – a novel about, among others, the frictions between Catholic upbringing and truths of life – speaks about bodily needs: “we are angels [and] we surrender to temptations of the flesh against our wills, without our consent” (188), or so claims Father Monkiewicz, a priest who easily pronounces absolution in exchange for a (repeatedly broken) promise of self-betterment. All of the above is said in the context of Barbarka's attempts to get married to Romuald, and this is how the narrator comments upon a scene where she changes an infant's diaper: “We are given to live on the border of the human and the bestial, and it is good so.”

But sometimes quite the opposite is true. Human being is a contradiction in itself and wants improve but nature pushes it to deeds that are far from glorious. It is not, cannot be an angel.

A coelentera, all pulsating flesh, animal-flower,
All fire, made up of falling bodies joined by the black pin of sex.

(230)

Obviously, the pin of sex must black.

This is where Miłosz's poetry clearly reflects the complexity and ambiguity of the Christian tradition. In *Song of Songs*, woman and man seek each other out and there is no contradiction between several levels of possible interpretation (literal, symbolic, allegorical). Lovers of the *Song of Songs* are an archetype of seekers of the “real place,”

free from the sense of shame and guilt. Catholicism, however, is dominated by the fear of “lust.” New Testament teaches that “everyone who looks at a woman with lust for her has already committed adultery with her in his heart” (Matthew 2:28). St Augustine derives lust from the original sin; carnal love existed in Paradise, but there was no lust in it that after the Fall robbed man of full control over his will.⁷

The idea that “we surrender to temptations of the flesh against our wills, without our consent” is, thus, a rigorous, Augustinian interpretation of the sin of the body. It also implies that the will is spiritual whereas lust belongs to the world of bestial instincts.

Miłosz’s world is organized hierarchically, with human nature placed at the base upon which rise higher levels of consciousness, culminating in the superhuman, angelic level bordering on the sacrum. Sex is often a stepping down on the ladder of being, it involves giving oneself back to nature. There is no primal holiness of the animal from the animistic beliefs, no holiness of nature and fertility typical of matriarchal beliefs. It is a worldview with several Christian themes deeply ingrained, a worldview with a clear boundary between the sacred and the profane, between man and the lower beings. Sex (as a part of nature, an element of material world) belongs to the profane. At least in theory, as our experiences place sexuality alternatively on the side of the sacred and on the side of the profane. The sacred side is devoid of lust. Interestingly, descriptions of epiphanic moments seem to imply that lust had already been satisfied, a mystical union of elements takes place, the female and the male subject have a sense of “openness” or closeness to the Truth. *Principium individuationis* disappears, but as if “from above,” from the side of the sacrum. When the same starts at the opposite end, man and woman are positioned in the rank of representatives of a species, ruled by lust, controlled not by their own will but by instinct. “Zmieniał się język” [Language has changed] mentions a dark force:

And the force melting men and women
Into Shakespearian beast with a double back
Remains a dark affair.

The difference between the search for the “real place” and succumbing to lust is difficult to determine as it seems to depend solely on the approach: one from the inside of the lovers’ experience, or one from a distance – revealing pathetic multitudes of mating “Shakespearian beasts.” One could deem this difference inessential and easy to overcome but it is quite the opposite. The drama it unleashes is a true one, indelible from the Christian tradition. And only someone very naïve would make accusations of inconsistency here. It is not a realm governed by rational logic; phantasmal images of gender are inscribed in a cycle of drives, traumas, unconscious desires, repressions and cultural taboos. Images of women also represent several levels of psyche.

The metonymic construction of femininity outlined earlier in the essay, the phantasmal image of woman as a “hanger for fetishes” where the body is present only as a faint

⁷ See: St. Augustine, *City of God*. Trans. to Polish by father W. Kubicki, with an introduction by father J. Salij. Kęty: 1998. 525. A. Fiut wrote on Miłosz’s attitude to nature in “Romans z naturą.” *Moment wieczny. O poezji Czesława Miłosza*. 55-85.

trace, is a clear attempt to neutralize the conflict. One could interpret it as a typical sublimation, an attempt at moving the relation to opposite sex outside the most significant conflict resulting from corporeality – our relation with the matter. Movement towards the past also involves sublimation. The same could be said about making sexuality subject of art. Thus, we can speak of several overlapping mechanisms of sublimation in Miłosz. Sublimation is also a prerequisite for talking about sex – the issue at stake oscillates, in fact, between disclosure of the essence of things and protection of what is most private. Literary names such as Thais, Belinda, Annalena are another signal of the strategy of sublimation. The only missing element is the classical aesthetic sublimation that in the European culture produced numerous methods to idealize the beauty of the beloved, especially her facial features.

At this point, several different issues resurface and overlap, and among them, the inexpressibility of the body. What is cultural, is inscribed in the web of mutual references; meanings are made as a result of their relations to other meaning. Meanwhile, what is natural, of itself requires no expression; on the contrary, there are numerous forces (such as taboo or the threat of vulgarity) that prevent naming, and the sense is not determined. Thus, eroticism reveals itself as a relation of culture developing in contact with nature and not as something simply natural.

One of the distinct characteristics of Miłosz’s worldview is a distrust for nature resulting in difficulties in his relation to women. On the one hand, we have a clear “culturalization” of eroticism, even a blurring of its relation to the body, and on the other, insecurity or even aversion in the relation to the body. In Miłosz’s autobiographical essay “Catholic Education” (*Native Realm*) a Catholic prefect simply assumes that “nature is an abode of evil” (78). Nature is viewed as the source of repeated human failures, sins that cannot be eradicated or cleansed. The Manichaean poison includes also the dream of leaving behind tormenting ambivalence and unambiguously defining all that was created as a realm of Evil: i.e., Matter.

This results in an ambivalent relationship to one’s own body as well:

Confess, you have hated your body,
 Loving it with unrequited love. It has not fulfilled
 Your high expectations. As if you were chained to
 Some little animal in perpetual unrest,
 Or worse, to a madman, and a Slavic one at that.

(321)

Lust, the lowly sphere of drives, cannot be erased and thus a nagging suspicion returns that perhaps this is the base upon which rests the entire mighty construction of existence, including social existence. There is a claim in “Three Talks About Civilization” that the “State would fall” without the “hairy pleasures proper to the flesh” (203). Without them no one would be fit for the barracks and humanity, transformed Arcadian shepherds, would instead busy itself with being moved by the loves of Amyntas while nibbling chocolates in a theater. Love in form of lusty Eros, of pagan Amor, of sensual pleasures, amoral and unpredictable as nature, reveals itself as the basis for the existence of the human

Texts and the Body

world. It is also the cause of misery, bringing about the indelible drama of humanity: imprisonment within sex – this, at least, is the interpretation of fertility presented in “Sentences,” a poem neighboring on “Three Talks About Civilization” (206). During its stay in the realm of Platonic ideas, the soul is sexless, angelic. St Augustine believes that the “disease of lust” was unknown in Paradise (its original Latin name – *libido* – might be worth recalling here). The first parents obeyed the command to “multiply” but while at it, they used their will and retained their peace of mind. It may have even been a form of “intellectual ballet.” Nonetheless, St. Augustine was not a visionary and does not confirm it. Later, as a result of pride, human condition deteriorated and the world was drowned in sin. One could, therefore, hypothesize about a world where the drama of sex is resolved, a world before the Fall or a world redeemed. Miłosz, following Swedenborg, offers his own interpretation of *Genesis* regarding the creation of woman:

And Eve, why is she taken from Adam's rib?
-Because the rib is close to the heart

(416)

The world before the miracle (and the disaster) of *apocatastasis* teems with ambiguity. Man is torn, tormented by ignorance and uncertainty. One of the voices of “I Sleep A Lot” states that “women have only one, Catholic, soul,” while men have two but those words can hardly be taken seriously, as they are uttered to a Medicine Man dancing his magical dance and entering a trance (207). “Two souls” may just as well refer to a higher power as to the lack of harmony and the existential flaw.

Often, however, it seems that it is women who carry the mystery within. It is rooted in sex, hidden beneath the skirt. Barely covered with beads, the dancer of “Dwaj w Rzymie” appears to incarnate the mystery of life. The theme of mesmerizing power of female sex often reappears in Miłosz. In “Voyeur,” the last poem of *This*, curiosity regarding the “small, furry, untameable animal” concludes deliberations on looking at the world and the hunger for visual stimuli evoked by the presence of women. All of this embroiled with philosophy, grammar, poetics, mathematics, even theology. Unquenchable desire becomes the life’s driving force. Miłosz is consistent in the repetition of certain words and images: the trivial word “ass” appeared as early as in “Songs Of Adrian Zieliński”:

The round ass of a girl passing by
Is a planet carved by sunlight's hand

(70)

This is juxtaposed with a vision of an almost cosmic phenomenon watched by the lonely observers. “Asses” return several years later: “I see their legs in miniskirts... their buttocks and thighs, reminding that “we are made so, half from disinterested contemplation, half from appetite” (679). Desire does not evoke aversion or sense of guilt, it is fully accepted, although it undermines the possibility to base the interpretation of the world on a single truth. Miłosz believes the relationships between men and women to be governed by the law of universal gravitation, but it is hard to say whether the latter is mutual. The woman in this relation is indescribable and there is no attempt to introduce her as a person.

In Miłosz's poetry, woman is *looked at* by the man. She is discovered by his sight. It is a special kind of gaze in which the object of the gaze is not indifferent or strange. The chase after reality may end in a passionate discovery, unity of the subject and the object. We can never know whether gravitation is mutual. The accessories of coquetry and the gestures allow to assume that it is. Erotic fulfillment provides a moment of certainty that the difference of sex is not an impassable barrier.

Erotic pleasure

Analysis presented so far could, perhaps, lead to a conclusion that there simply are no women in Miłosz's poetry, only phantasms. There is no ground here to formulate an answer to the Lacanian question whether the woman exists at all, in other words, whether there exists a separate female identity and how it is supposed to be expressed in the text. It is certainly possible to portray the relation of man and woman as an interpersonal relation. In Miłosz, however, we are presented with a world seen from the perspective of the male subject – one who constructs phantasms, images of the mind that he sees as charged with erotically stimulating potential. The subject does not have to confront them with real, existing people, as modernist poetry is a space of the speaker's utterance and experience.

Women as real persons do exist, nonetheless, and they do not resemble the girl that that Leśmian's twelve brothers dreamt about. (The myth of Pygmalion exemplifies yet another myth of man similarly in love with his own phantasms.) In Miłosz's work, women do not always emerge as a determined, personal identity but they are given existential autonomy. It is difficult to say who hides behind the luring signals, and this usually is not of key importance. There is a crowd of women (passing, recollected) but rarely a "somebody." In Miłosz's poems women rarely manifest their will, they do not talk, one simply sees them, contemplates their set of luring attributes which is erotically stimulating but does not transform into a targeted desire. Pleasure is hedonistic, drawn from delicate erotic arousal, not aimed at the experience of ecstasy. It is difficult to distinguish faces from the crowd (more difficult than other bodyparts). Observing a crowd of women is a recurrent phantasmal situation in Miłosz and what repeatedly returns there is, first and foremost, the experience of the self as an erotic subject. Julia Kristeva claims that in the psychoanalytical perspective, narcissism and idealization are necessary components of love. In Miłosz, love is not part of the situation in question, there is only the element of narcissism.

It has been pointed out to me in a discussion that I ignore "Esse," a poem exhibiting a clear and disinterested aesthetic fascination with the beauty of a girl encountered in the Parisian subway. Yes, Miłosz's *Personal Anthology* does contain a prose poem that the poet refers to in the commentary as a "short love poem." In this case, though, things are not as clear as they seem. In this particular poem, a typically aesthetic sublimation taking the form of a presentation of a "perfect, ideal beauty" is not only of secondary importance, but decidedly overshadowed by other forms. And that is for the best, from a feminist perspective. The artificial ideal of feminine beauty is considered to be one of patriarchal mechanisms that impose on women, treated as objects, impossible demands

and transform them into commodities of determined visual value. Consequently, the (supposedly purely aesthetic) adoration of beauty is believed to often hide male hypocrisy, absent from Miłosz's poem.⁸

One could argue, however, in more depth about the interpretation of "Esse." Is it really a "love poem"? The speaker does not stop at admiring the beautiful face, he wants to "absorb" it, which indicates a need for ownership (with regards to more than just face). The impossibility to absorb it becomes a drama of incomplete cognition. However, the speaker does not take any steps to prevent the beauty from disappearing, does not investigate her identity and what the face represents is of no importance, not to mention the fact that there is no attempt to establish a love relationship. The "face," unstopped, gets off at Raspail.

Miłosz, admiring the urban crowd, does not hide the fact that there is a decidedly erotic aspect to the act, even though he avoids focusing on it. He redirects his attention elsewhere. And this transfer of focus towards reflection (metaphysical, existential, epistemological) is a recurrent movement in several of his poems. Even "Annalena" contains a double gesture of redirecting focus, or shifting sexual energy, towards a more general reflection. In fact, one can hardly view "Annalena" as an erotic, it opens with eroticism that is later blurred, neutralized. Miłosz clearly avoids presentations of eroticism as a demarcated, separate and exclusive ground contained by the cycle of agitation and fulfillment, or as arousal of passion directed at a particular person (with its typical continuation in form of impossibility of fulfillment, experience of hope or loss, possibly also disappointment.)

Eros combines an epistemological reflection, fascination with the world, and metaphysics. Eros opens and initiates. It does not create obligation nor does it promise direct fulfillment. Naturally, transference is a Freudian term but it is not a gesture of escape here but rather of broadening or generalization, and as a result, leads to the conclusion that our relation to the world, desire for knowledge and hunger for experience as well as lust (also for sights, things, new experiences) is always driven by the same kind of energy – that of Eros. Consequently, being in the world implies a never-ending drama of unfulfillment or the impossibility of satisfaction.

In "When the Moon," the variety of women passing by astounds, stimulating and provoking an existential reflection. There appears hope, presented in the form of an ambiguous hypothesis, a hope to extract the male relationship with women from the low, carnal sphere, and move it towards the metaphysical:

When the moon rises and women in flowery dresses are strolling,
I am struck by their eyes, eyelashes, and the whole arrangement of
the world.
It seems to me that from such a strong mutual attraction
The ultimate truth should issue at last.

(222)

⁸ "Beauty" in Humm, M. *The Dictionary of Feminist Theory*. Trans. by Umińska, B. and Mikos, J. Warszawa: 1993.

It “should” but so far has not. It is a dream of a transformed world. Longing for a “different life” triggers the return of the theme of Adam and Eve.⁹ In Paradise, the ultimate truth was at hand and people did not suffer because of their dual nature.

Here, on earth, everything changed. Sex as a spectacle of the body, embroiled in the matter and marked by lust, often awakens a sense of embarrassment. One dreams, thus, of seeing the world more directly, not deformed, perhaps even not split into vulvae:

And yet we were so like one another
With all our misery of penises and vaginas
(515)

The unfortunate “vagina” in question refers to the female representatives of human species, but the appealing *yoni* belongs solely to Annalena. Man (as such) was dragged into the ridiculous and pathetic theater of sex. The vagina-difference is unsurmountable, hiding no *evig weibliche* that certain kinds of “strong men” consider to be the essence of femininity. Desire is a mystery but it is tied to the state of “this world” – one separated from God, transformed after the original sin, touched by the consequences of the Fall. God’s intention, as far as we can judge, was different. In *The Land of Urlo* Swedenborg, the author of *Delitie Sapientia de Amore Conjuga*, is portrayed as one of those who had the courage to speak of a “better” world. Swedenborg interprets the relationship of man and woman, Adam and Eve allegorically, as a figure for the relation of love and wisdom, of Christ and Church, but not only that. It is also part of the myth of love from the beginning of humanity, love that creates and constitutes the world. Those ideals of perfection, supplemented with esotericism, appear in the work of Oscar Miłosz. Czesław Miłosz refers to them repeatedly in his essays, sometimes in his poetry, but does not develop them; they are an element that fits his system but one that is borrowed, always cited with a reference to someone else’s vision. The world of Miłosz’s imagination consists of elements that are much more earthly, much more verifiable.

Anima

There is one more image of woman in Miłosz’s poetry – that of a friend and confidante, represented, for example, by Anna Kamińska, too good “to learn the wiles of art,” admired for her wisdom and her gift of true love. Characteristically, female friends appear in Miłosz’s poetry while his essays give testimony to intellectual friendships with men. Their complicated history and ideological temperature are revealed mostly in the letters and essays. Poetry engages deeper layers of psyche and this is where the feminine figures make appearance.

In *The Land of Urlo*, Miłosz describes himself as having a very strong Ego, one that mutes the voice of the Unconscious: “I would say that my female anima was hard put to make me acknowledge her as my own” (183). His self-assessment, uttered in

⁹ As the theme of Paradise is rather exhaustively discussed by A. Fiut in *Moment...* pp. 170-171, I will not do it in my essay. See also: Cz. Miłosz “Paradise,” “Adam and Eve,” “Gardener.”

a conditional form, (“I would say that”) is very astute. In “Ars Poetica?” the place traditionally assigned to the Muse as an incarnation of the female Unconscious, is instead given to “spirits” that choose the poets for their instrument (241).¹⁰ Usually, a relation to deeper layers of the Unconscious does not reveal itself directly, while the “strong ego” speaks intuitively.

Anna from “The Song” (1934) is the earliest female medium, a spiritual one; talking to the choir she represents distance from the world while the choir – attachment to it. The use of female mask liberates intuition, allowing the barely foreseen senses to speak. Anna, however, has no typical features of a female archetype with its ties to earth and water, she is more of a female soul of the poet who experiences the desire for an “angelic” state. The earth is represented by the lover in another poem from more or less the same period, “Ty silna noc” [You are powerful night]. Here, as well, the speaker “foresees” future fate (and is wrong about it). Overcoming the early catastrophism involved abandoning the style where meanings are not explicitly controlled by the intellect, where they are an unconscious game.

Anima appears infrequently in mature Miłosz, but is not completely absent. It wears literary names such as Hermance or Berenike. The first one, from “Three Talks On Civilization” is the addressee of the monologue. Her name was chosen randomly and does not refer to any historical figure, says Miłosz in the commentary to the poem.¹¹ Hermance is a timeless and all-understanding medium. Her attention and ability to cross the historical dimension triggers a reflection on what is happening behind the scenes of humanity’s development. Berenike from “The Rite” resembles Hermance. Her name in “Persons” (immediately following “The Rite”) is a lover’s pseudonym but in “The Rite” she is not an object of desire, but a medium for deeper levels of consciousness, and an ideal listener, an emphatic and wise partner in a dialogue on the need of holding off judgments of people based on their complicated fate, and on the ways of worshipping God. She asks the male speaker about the fate of doubters and the last stanza, containing the answer, can be attributed both to the speaker and to Berenike. However, the decision “who speaks” is irrelevant, as they are perfectly spiritually compatible. The gender difference not only is not a barrier, it is a sign of emphatic openness to the speakers to each other. There are other women in Miłosz’s poetry, also in his early work, who embody that emphatic “you.” Recalled from distant past, the characters of courtesans (Venetian courtesans in “No more,” Filina) do evoke not contempt or condemnation but tenderness and understanding for their existence marked by passing and human frailty. If they are to be regarded as the spirit of the world, it is not an evil spirit.

References to Simone Weil play a particularly important role in Miłosz’s essays. He returns to her work also in poetry, and Weil is not a singular case. *This* contains a poem titled “What I Learned from Jeanne Hersch,” a catalogue of twelve principles that are of crucial importance and constitute a kind of private catechism of an intellectual who is

¹⁰ I discuss this in more detail in “Muza współczesna.” *Persona liryczna*. Warszawa: 2000. 241-241.

¹¹ *Wiersze*. [Poems] Kraków: 1993. Vol. 1. 149.

critical but not entirely stripped of faith in reason, decency and sense. The very existence of female philosophers used to be negated by misogynists convinced of the inability of women to engage in a serious reflection. Miłosz not only “admits the existence” of women philosophers, he is very open to their thought, regarding them not as authorities (as the role would involve a patriarchal notion of domination of one truth) but as perfect partners in an intellectual exchange.

Thus, we have come a full circle, perhaps even a hermeneutic one. From the mysticism of sex, through the trauma in relation to gender, toward the hope of overcoming the difference. From Paradise, through the earthly plane – marked by dualism (of soul and matter and the dualism of sex), towards a future transformation that will heal the tear. In Miłosz, none of the meanings is permanently tied to the woman, they are inter-related and attributing any of them permanently to the notion of “femininity” would be a simplification. Some can be viewed as favorable, other as a testimony of aversion towards women. All have a centuries-long tradition. What is important, is that the hermeneutic circle entails a constant circulation. One must also note that the arrangement of particular meanings and the mutual relations of symbols are unique in Miłosz. It is a “small circle,” where symbolic meanings of femininity connected to Earth and motherhood are clearly marginalized. His religious thought, too, has few references to the typically Polish Catholicism, strongly marked by the matriarchal cult of Virgin Mary. Such perception of femininity is rather frequent in the western culture and typical of the modern civilization. Women, as well, sometimes view the sphere of fertility as dark and are wary of motherhood – especially as they see it as a social degradation, a career obstacle.¹²

Symbolically, the archetype of woman in Miłosz’s work refers to certain aspects of Eve. One should emphasize, though, that it is a thoroughly reinterpreted symbol and only selected of its alleged meanings are chosen. It is not the Eve forever burdened with sin, fallen, more accessible to the forces of evil than to man. Nor is it the Great Mother of Mankind, but rather Eve who retained a certain reflection of Paradise. It is an ideal partner for a strong man, focused on him (and not, for instance, on a child), open to sex and intellectual debate. In Miłosz’s poetry, constitutive elements of the archetype of mother are not a part of the phantasm of woman.

Female characters are also particularly tied to the fragility of existence and its fleeting character. When the male speaker evokes the projection of, for example, Filina, her attention to the details of her dress arouse a feeling of tenderness and understanding for the human fate, a particular sensitivity to that which is transient. The evoked figures of courtesans decidedly contradict our cultural tradition, especially its religious models. The very choice of the word – “courtesan” – is not without significance importance, all other descriptions (such as “whore” or “mistress,” or worse) are strongly degrading, despite referring to more or less the same. However, in ancient Greece, courtesans led

¹² Some aspect of those complexes captured in the context of America in the 70s are discussed by Adrienne Rich in *Of Woman Born: Motherhood as an Experience and Institution*. Trans. to Polish by J. Mizielińska. Warszawa: 2000.

largely independent lives, as opposed to the lawful wives of Greek citizens; they were well educated and could be partners in an intellectual debate. They are also believed to be co-founders of the love letter as a form. Greek wives were treated instrumentally, as producers of progeny. Lack of education and indifference to culture thought to contribute to the wife's matronly dignity.¹³ Men who sought the company of women found it outside families, at the same time ruling out in advance the possibility of a courtesan becoming a wife. The barrier of class and social standing was insurmountable.

Christianity introduced different values. Although Christ promised the kingdom of heaven to the fallen women, they were mostly viewed as condemnable, as those who spread immorality and evoke terror as a result of their greatest fall. Some of the Desert Fathers cried upon seeing them.¹⁴ Miłosz does not directly refer to the Greek tradition, however, his heavenly Eve does have the attributes of Aphrodite Kallipygos ("the one with beautiful buttocks") and Venus.

It is difficult to imagine a theological system that would be more directed against woman than Manichaeism. It inevitably results in a call to reject everything that is related to matter. Under such circumstances, love relationships had to take special forms, such as those postulated by the aesthetic ideals courtly love. Octavio Paz notes that the birth of Provençal poetry coincided with the development of the Cathar heresy in the same area.¹⁵ However, Miłosz's thought on women is not burdened with the "Manichean poison," or at least no more than the entirety of modern European culture is. One could say that relation to women moderates the temptation to establish a radical dualism of spirit and matter, as it would have to result in a radical asceticism.

Naturally, this is not feminism. Feminism involves thinking "from the perspective of the woman," a perspective where the woman is a subject (of a text or social action). Miłosz's women are silent for the most part. But there is no obsession of ownership, power and domination in his work. Instead, there is a religious hope of overcoming the antagonism of sex as the difficulty to communicate is – perhaps – a consequence of the original sin.

Translation: Anna Warso

¹³ See: Ganszyniec, R. *Polskie listy miłosne dawnych czasów*. Lviv: 1925.

¹⁴ See: Borkowska, M. *Twarze Ojców Pustyni*, Kraków: 2001; Ostrowska, D. "Wizerunek kobiety w pismach Ojców Kościoła". *Od kobiety do mężczyzny i z powrotem*. Brach-Czajna, J. (ed.) Białystok: 1997. 53-75.

¹⁵ O. Paz. *Double...* 102.

German RITZ

Gender Studies Today: Building Theory, Traveling Theory

In the 18th century, as is well-known, European literature becomes one of the means to build the nation and national identity in Europe, but the poetics of stylistic epochs still remain international, crossing national boundaries. National literary studies have always watched and are still watching over the interpretations of the international quota of their own literature and culture. The international turn in theoretical discourse, dating at least to the 1960s, has perhaps obscured that state of affairs but has not disrupted it, since literary studies successfully continue to perform their national mission, usually at the outskirts or outside literary theory. Theory itself, as we are reminded by postcolonial studies, is not politically neutral, even if it wants to appear to be so. Traveling usually from west to east, in a longer perspective it proves to be an effective instrument of interpretive and cultural hegemony, which perpetuates the former imperial structures of thought, even if apparently we live in post-imperial times.

This strong generalization is necessary in order to assess the national and supra-national implications of the fact that theories travel, also in gender studies, which are of interest to us here.

Gender studies, which have developed from political feminism of the 1950s and 1960s, and from the parallel emancipatory movements of sexual minorities, never renounced their social and political grounding, but in the 1970s and 1980s camouflaged it under the complex theoretical structure, quite characteristic of this theoretical current. Gender studies, even if formulated at the time of flourishing postmodernism, belong to the project of the enlightenment and, as Marxist literary studies did before, strongly connect literature to the function of representation. Yet since they are inscribed in poststructuralism and its conception of literature, this implication gets revealed only in a roundabout

manner. At the same time, as the example of gender studies makes clear, the autonomy of literature, so cherished by formalism and structuralism, has long been undermined through the decentralization of literature, for example, by eliminating the author, and subjective opinions tend to be smuggled under the cover of complex constructions of depth psychology and cultural theory.

Gender studies and interest groups

Gender studies have taken root at western European and American universities as a result of the politics of equal rights and were closely related to political feminism. In middle and eastern Europe they were part of the great social and political transformations of *perestroika* and the collapse of real socialism after 1989. The ties to political feminism are even stronger here than in the west. In Poland, different generations participated in the discussion about gender and the predominance of women in the humanities created favorable conditions for gender studies to develop. Thanks to the older generation, older affiliations were reactivated, particularly those with French feminist thought originating with Simone de Beauvoir. In the 1990s, gender studies have again become the subject of discussion, occasionally very heated, but thanks to the participation of the abovementioned variety of generations, and association with a variety of fields, the discussion succeeded in integrating the community and prevented the danger of a simplistic import of foreign theory. The symbol and guarantor of the movement was Maria Janion.

Western studies of eastern Europe quickly found a partner for their own research in the feminist movement and gender studies. Gender studies have thus been established early on in a network of international contacts. At the same time, foreign research on the Polish history of gender was exposed, if unconsciously, to the danger of political instrumentality, because gender studies, even if they merely try to uncover the history of gender, always start from the ideal of gender equality and equal rights irrespective of gender and sexual orientation. Like all political utopias, the ideal of gender equality is never independent of the historical conditions and interests, but represents the interests of those who advocate utopia. In the aggravated political and social debate under the PiS government, such foreign contributions on the subject of gender occasionally revealed colonial features and had qualities of a political lesson given to a politically “oppressed” country. This phenomenon was most pronounced in the reaction to the repressions of sexual minorities, particularly of homosexuals.

Attempts to “enlighten” another nation can easily turn into their opposite, a danger which should be known full well to a foreign Polish literature scholar who probably began his Polish education from the lesson about partitions when, as is well known, the “faulty” Polish political system was abolished in the name of the enlightened categories of the law and state. Gender can be used as a political category only from inside; from the outside we have to stick to the purely descriptive if we do not want to give in to national hetero-stereotypes and unwittingly perpetuate old colonial models. Academic research, as we well know, has never been really immune to imperialist and nationalist thinking, on the contrary, it produced universal justifications for all kinds of particular interests.

Gender as a risky analytical category

For foreign literary scholars, and not only for them, gender is a risky or even dangerous category, for it may easily lead to abuses. There are several reasons for that situation that need to be briefly discussed. What I am referring to here is not so much the category itself as its use: in research the category of gender is usually separated from its historical context.

The first general reason for this is related to gender studies as a whole. The history of gender is easily mixed up with the history of sexual emancipation, as a consequence of acquiring a teleological character. Academics gladly consider sexual emancipation a universal good, always already possessed and thus not requiring reflection and exempt from academic control. It would seem that we know what liberated sexuality that destroys faulty gender relations really is, and we are supported in this unquestioned knowledge by the liberal research community. Such false assumption may obviously carry the danger of authoritativeness and ontological tendencies. And it is not only the well-intentioned student writing that errs in this matter, because we may encounter such assumptions, if obscured, also in works of “mature” writers.

The second reason is related to methodological practice. From the 1990s, the point of reference for gender studies is no longer the construction of the modern, liberated “I,” drawn from various emancipatory movements, but the – by then canonized – texts from Foucault and Lacan to Barthes and Kristeva. After shifting toward poststructuralism, in the late 1960s and especially in the 1970s, French structuralism did not create a method of text analysis – a task undertaken by the Slavic structuralism shaped by formalism – but offered instead a complicated set of ideas in the realm of philosophy of culture. Those ideas – especially in works whose subject was love – could serve also as something akin to life philosophy or life truths; in the 1980s and 1990s, taking the form of cult texts of postmodernism, they were an inspiration for whole book collections, as Nietzsche used to be at the beginning of the century. Post-feminism of the 1990s adds the works of Judith Butler to the canon of French authors. The irony detectable in those comments is not intended as a criticism of French and American sources, but of their reception, which filters much of what has been a form of thinking into a thought content. Poststructuralism has one surprising feature in common with Marxism, namely both work with frequent and long quotations and care less for developing and qualifying an argument. Theses drawn from the authoritative French and American sources, always rather complex, constitute not a departure point but, more often than not, the point of arrival in the writer’s own thinking, as a result of which the national and historical differences disappear under the cosmopolitan coating.

Looking for the historical dimension of the category of gender

Polish gender studies, which from the 1990s had been established as a branch of literary studies have long outgrown their pioneering stage and do not require foreign support, if they ever needed such support at all. Their own networks and collaboration

with Polish foreign literature studies, particularly with the departments of English, guarantee international contacts and exchange, especially in the field of theoretical discourse. In the meantime questions about gender more and more deeply and broadly affect Polish history of culture and literature. The parallel existence of the politically still very important women's and homosexual emancipatory movements and the tendencies of (variously defined) post-feminism and the elusive queer studies make the Polish situation not unlike that of western European countries. There are still gaps in gender studies, but one cannot talk of a systemic neglect. Yet gender is (both here and there) also a category which, like a number of concepts of poststructuralism and postmodernism, shows signs of exhaustion, acute exhaustion, in fact. The American neoconservative movement, which after 2000 has come to co-define the spiritual climate around the world, certainly has not engendered an interest in gender perspectives.

Is gender a dead academic category today? Surely not, where it accompanies political emancipation. On the "neutral" academic grounds the category demands, today more than before, an integration into broader contexts. It is not enough any more to simply unearth the repressed or concealed constructions of gender and to analyze cultural processes with reference to the mechanisms of repression, not because such mechanisms are no longer present, but because knowledge about them has become saturated and the myth of emancipation has lost its urgency. One of the most important contexts supplementing the category of gender is the category of the nation. Already in ancient times the *polis* represented itself with gender categories, and in modernity the history of gender and nation building are closely intertwined. Only – and this makes for an important difference – the nation building process and the giant cultural apparatus which supports it, are always overt, while the implemented gender order remains hidden. The relation between gender and the nation is complex and multilayered. Great national myths are gendered. Into the historical myth images of gender introduce the quality of what is unsaid and enrich the myth with the surplus of ambiguity. But the process of nation building not only relies on the images of gendered constructions but is based on the gender order itself. Quite predictably, the relation between gender and nation sanctions the existing gender relations and, what is more, feeds on the shifts in the representation of the assigned roles. For example, a woman, especially a bourgeois woman, is given a central role in the culture of language, which, as is well known, is an important factor in 19th century nation building: that is, against the broadly disseminated image of "muteness" or lack of her own language, so emphatically presented by the realist novel. In 19th century Poland, due to the loss of national sovereignty and uneven modernization, the field of nation – gender relations is richly cast and the image of the woman, at least that belonging to the nobility on which the nation is based, is surprisingly modern, especially in comparison with western Europe.

If one compares three Polish versions of the motif of *Finis Poloniae*: Smuglewicz's *Kościuszek ratujący Polskę przed grobem*, Matejko's *Rok 1863 – Polonia*, and Malczewski's *Finis Poloniae*, one discovers that the female figures are represented in different styles, but the national symbolic that they are meant to convey is always the same. One is immediately struck by the external position of the central female figure in relation to men.

She is above all a woman as such, when they (grouped around her and lively gesticulating) represent only history, lost history. Malczewski, who poeticizes and aestheticizes the patriotic theme, reveals its hidden gender message. Femininity escapes the position in the center of the painting ascribed to her by the semiotics of patriotism, and not so much frames the patriotically brooding artist in the center, as towers over him. The embodiment of gender in those three paintings could also be described as a process by which the woman as the sign of the nation acquires independence, loses the quality of the national symbol, and expresses her own female sovereignty instead. Obviously, the national interpretation denied this ambivalence in reading the images of gender, an ambivalence that is crucial to us today. Malczewski returns it to us poetically, in a version loaded with eroticism.

In the complicated Polish process of nation building, not only the figure of the woman but also that of a man undergoes a peculiar gender shift. The transformation of the romantic Gustaw into Konrad, the national hero of *Dziady, part III*, is an example of a genesis of the I as if independent of the gender system, a narcissistic birth out of himself after Gustaw's romantic failure in his encounter with a woman. Soon after, with the maximum power of the romantic word, the Great Improvisation will show us that this narcissistically created ego will immediately be defeated in the encounter with the Other. Despite this self-destruction, the total transformation of the I still retains its fascinating power for Polish identity, also because of its romantic form.

As both those examples demonstrate, the relationship between gender and nation is never simple. On the one hand, a gender reading deconstructs patriotic iconography, on the other, the emancipatory significance of gender construction is relativized in the context of the nation. In the relation between gender and the nation, however, what is important is not only deconstruction, but above all the historicization of both terms which tend to exclude each other in reception. The independent Polish woman in the series of paintings from Smuglewicz to Malczewski is not merely the result of the clash of the gender and national imaginary, but also the effect of the Polish order of gender relations, which in the 19th century, is incomparable to the European one.

The mutual influence of gender and nation not only defines the images of identification, as in historical myths, but above all makes itself visible in the crossing of borders between the nations. We already mentioned the permeation of national heterostereotypes and images of gender. Modern desire, which always touches the limits of the I, likes to take on the form of crossing national and ethnic borders. The sexual Other needs the images of the ethnic Other. In the 19th century, particularly the Ukraine is the space of Polish phantasmatic projections.

The Ukrainian romantic school created a whole arsenal of images that could be of use for that purpose, Sienkiewicz tinted them with a national hue, and Galician and Eastern Borderland literature continued this tradition almost until the end of the 20th century. A Polish-German comparison would be interesting here. The German image of a beautiful Polish woman, enriched by Thomas Mann with a male equivalent and successfully introduced to world literature, remains flat and stereotypical in comparison with the Polish images of the Ukraine. The main difference lies in the historical

dimension: projections of desire and phantasms explode in contact with history. The Polish phantasmatic Cossack, like the western European Mazepa, is not only the figure of desire but always also a historical adversary. In Polish images of desire, the Cossack plays multiple roles. He triangulates with the Polish desire for the beautiful Ukrainian woman: a classic representation of the motif is to be found in Goszczyński's *Zamek kaniowski*, or like Bohun in Sienkiewicz is himself an ambiguous object and the subject of desire in the Polish-Ukrainian triangle. A complicated constellation of desire is very characteristic here; its favorite form is the triangle. These relations established above the ethnic boundary not only disturb gender identity, especially male, but usually also subvert the national political order. It would be a mistake to read the Ukrainian images of desire, from Malczewski, through Słowacki and especially Sienkiewicz, to Iwaszkiewicz or Odojewski as (barely audible) sexual declarations, such as the homosexual declaration in Iwaszkiewicz, as it would be a mistake to exclude the ambivalences of the love theme in national and patriotic interpretations. These are two sides of the same coin.

By broadening the category of gender with the category of the nation we have crossed over (on the level of theory) from gender studies to postcolonial studies. Postcolonial studies are not a lifeboat for the aging gender studies; theoretical discourses of both those academic traditions are too similar and grow out of the same impulses of French poststructuralism. To historicize and contextualize gender studies is not to multiply theoretical discourses but to demand more rigorous historical research. Today's gender analysis, after the faze of multiplying the common theoretical discourse *ad infinitum*, will become interesting again if it moves beyond the application of familiar theories to the national phenomenon and, armed with theoretical tools, will go in search of historical facts outside canonical literature. Aging theory is not interesting any more; what is interesting is the unknown history.

Translation: Krystyna Mazur

Wojciech ŚMIEJA

From Ideology of the Body to Ideologized Carnality: Sports and Literature in 1918-1939 (selected examples)

Here, naked youths, tanned and lithe, climbed in black underpants onto a tower with five levels and leapt from various heights into the dead arm of the River Dunajec, deep at this point – some head first, others feet first, which seemed strangest to me. Boats, canoes, swimming, nudity – everything that used to be the preserve of beaches on foreign coasts today just happens, amid life, among townspeople out for a walk.¹

The above description comes from Zofia Nałkowska's 1935 *Diaries*. The writer's recollection brings together almost all the aspects of the issue that I would like to discuss: the male body, the cult of physical fitness, and the novelty of sports in bourgeois life. In another extract from *Diaries*, Nałkowska connects the "sportification" of reality and the cult of the body with the political sphere: "Teatime discussion on the Radio. Fear of where this is all leading. Today's leaders like brawn, good cheer and optimism" (Nałkowska 1988 58). Her fear became more concrete when the reflection led towards Fascist Italy, where the "demonism of flesh and blood," and "red biology" were an element of political manipulation, the basis of its decorum and a narcotic stirring up the masses:

The cry of the orator is utterly bestial, and one can make out the words "Vittoria," "eroi," "giustizia." In the breaks the chorus responds – the joyful holler of the rabble. One hears without believing. From this comes naked dread, the demonism of flesh and blood, some red biology, bedlam. Yet there is no doubt that this bedlam is simulated. (28)

The emotions of the crowd are guided, bodies disciplined, the bedlam controlled, the muscle imposed, the ecstasy channelled, and sports are publicized – how far we are from

¹ Nałkowska, Zofia, *Dzienniki*, vol. 4: 1935-1939, part 2, ed. and intro. Hanna Kirchner. Warszawa: Czytelnik, 1988: 20.

Julian Tuwim's famous *Spring – a Dithyramb* from 1918, in which carnality was a joy in itself, indulging the body was a kind of ideology, and the biological and anarchic amorality of the crowd was an object of the poet's fearful fascination: Włodzimierz Maciąg writes that "The poetic power of *Spring* is produced in the violent collision of degrading emotions – contempt, disgust, distaste at the cruelty of the crowd – with uplifting emotions – admiration, rapture, glorification; yet both sequences concern the same phenomena, the same people, the same behaviors."²

All – yours! With your hips, your thighs, dash!
Let the dance of indecent excitement go! It matters not!
O, how I praise you, crowd, with exalted words
And you, Spring, that a criminal is begotten!³

The human body is a subject that is neglected by gender studies in Poland, and I consider the means of its conceptualization in 1920s and 1930s literature to be particularly interesting. In the 1920s, Jan Lechoń, one of those who – to quote a poem by Antoni Słonimski – "cast off the coat of Conrad," showed readers a burly, young, muscled body, rounded biceps and solid shoulders. At first it was not clear what to do with this body. In the first decade of independent Poland, the liberated male body and male carnality became an ideology in themselves. Newly discovered as an object of literary description, cultural representation, education through sports, rest, but also work, they became an important component of the avant-garde poetics of the time. Rather soon, though, the delight at its possibilities would be replaced by fear at its political appropriation, the first signs of which appeared in 1923 in the work of Tadeusz Peiper. By the 1930s, these concerns had become widespread. In the second decade of the interwar years, the *ideology of the body* gave way to *ideologized carnality*, which aroused the fear of the liberal elites which it consigned to the margins. This was because the model male body incarnated (if you will excuse the pun) the ominous tendencies of the Fascistization of politics and the popularizing of culture. The figure of the writer, the man of letters who in the 1920s very frequently gave a self-description, in keeping with the dominant model of male carnality, as strong, physically fit, sporty, replaced the figure of someone weak, physically fragile, standing on the sidelines of change, and outside of the main current of culture.⁴ Weakness would be a feature that was not only class-based, but also racial, in this case concerning the Poles as a nation. In

² Maciąg, Włodzimierz, *Nasz wiek XX. Przewodnie idee literatury polskiej 1918-1980*. Wrocław: Zakład Narodowy im. Ossolińskich, 1992: 18.

³ Tuwim, Julian, "Spring – a Dithyramb" (translated here by Ben Koschalka).

⁴ Cf. The texts of Gałczyński, e.g. "Wciąż uciekamy" ["We are still running"], in which the poem's collective intellectual protagonist is on the side of atrophy and dying (Gałczyński, Konstanty Ildefons, "Wciąż Uciekamy" in: idem, *Poezje*. Warszawa: Alga, 1979: 345) or "the generational *credo* of the 'Zagary' poetic group" – Miłosz's poem "Wam" ["To You"], in which the young revolutionary heroes belong to a "cursed generation," and, despite the appearance of strength, are "already falling" (see Bereś, Stanisław, *Ostatnia wileńska plejada. Szkice o poezji kręgu Żagarów*. Warszawa: PEN, 1990: 47).

Antoni Sobański's description of the German race, the conviction that young Germans represented a stronger race is striking, better personifying the modern corporeal model of manhood than their Polish peers:

The reason for the simply excellent physical state of this German youth, enduring poverty and inaction for so many years, must remain a mystery. Sports, the cult of the body, sun and water – all this exists in Poland too. And yet, when, the day after my return from Germany, I saw a parade of the Polish military preparation, and compared these lads with their German peers, despite myself the thought occurred to me to wonder whether at the time of Grunwald the physical condition of our races was the same. And if so, then what wins? I imagine that the German youth is by heredity burdened with health and the effects of a higher level of life. Clearly, almost two decades of poverty cannot destroy this heritage.⁵

The columnist's concern was shared by the ruling authorities – a consistent objective of the policy of the Second Republic was to improve the physical condition of its citizens. The independent country used all available resources to make up for the deficiencies left after the partitions. The authorities were keen to promote physical activity among citizens as widely as possible, and this intensified in the 1930s – in 1932 there were 5259 active sporting clubs, with 289,500 members, numbers which by 1938 had increased to 8,188 clubs with 469,500 people active in them.⁶ Physical education was closely linked to military preparation, with the Sokół (“Hawk”) Sport Society and Strzelec (“Shooter”) Marksmen's Association striving to create the model “citizen soldier.” The statute of the latter organization (whose strength was shown by its half a million members in 1938) states that the overriding objective was to “arouse and strengthen among members the national spirit, discipline, moral courage and physical fitness, as well as to spread military knowledge.” “Shooting” education was characterized by: the cult of the leader (Józef Piłsudski, and later Edward Rydz-Śmigły), militarism, and anticommunism.⁷ These societies, shooting associations and sporting corporations provide a background against which we can explore the subject of the conceptualization of sport and the carnal ideal of manhood in literature.

Yet before the model image of the male body could be subjected to ideological pressures from various sides, it would appear as a new subject in 1920s avant-garde literature. All poetics of the time – from the moderate group Skamander, via anarchic futurism to the extremely experimental Krakow Avant-garde – made of the image of the sporty male body a symbol of a new era, a new lifestyle. The “Mańifesto concerning imediate futurization of life” declared, let us recall, that “We rejekt umbrellas, hats, bowlerz, we will walc with uncovered head. Bare necks. We need every one to get as

⁵ Sobański, Antoni, *Cywil w Berlinie*, ed. Tomasz Szarota. Warszawa: Sic!, 2006: 53.

⁶ Jastrzębski, Włodzimierz, *Historia kultury fizycznej*, Bydgoszcz: Wyd. Akademii Bydgoskiej, 2005: 73.

⁷ Szymańczak, Z. and J. Hildebrant, “Wychowanie obronne młodzieży przez organizacje społeczne w systemie pozamilitarnym II Rzeczypospolitej”, in: Kubiak, Stanisław, *Polska odrodzona w 1918 roku*. Bydgoszcz: Wyd. Uczelniane WSP, 1990: 220.

much tan as possible.”⁸ This postulate was realized in the social reality by Aleksander Wat in a rather unrefined form: Anatol Stern carried the naked poet in a wheelbarrow through the streets of Warsaw.⁹ The body and carnality at this time were spread between biologism (visible, for example, in the quoted words of the manifesto) and machinism, perhaps best expressed by Bruno Jasiński in *Polish Futurism (A Summary)*: “Art should lift a machine to the level of the ideal of erotic humanity.”¹⁰

In Kazimierz Wierzyński’s “sporting” poems from the volume *Laur Olimpijski* [“Olympic Laurel”], the sportsman’s body is generally described either as a mechanism or in terms of animal carnality. In 1927, when the volume was written, neither way of depicting shocked to the extent that they had at the time of *Picador* and the first futurist manifestos. Having become “familiar,” they could harmonise with the neo-classical form of the poem. Their “lexicalization” in the poetic lexicon of the time is perhaps best shown by the poem “Paddock i Porritt” [“Paddock and Porritt”], in which Wierzyński compares two sporting styles, the mechanistic and the biologistic:

One rolls from side to side like a rattling tank
The other blown by the breeze glides a little, like a wave...
One is a machine in a rush, alive, strong and young
The other is speed itself, the law of motion, nature.¹¹

Perhaps due to the convention of competition, Wierzyński’s volume expresses the hope and expectations that are linked with the revived idea of Olympianism and the popularization of sports. As readers we are especially struck by the frequency with which the adjective “new” occurs. In the keynote opening poem “Defilada atletów” [“Athletes’ parade”], “newness” functions in a “them” and “us” opposition. “We” – a collective lyrical subject – renews the face of the earth: “We surrounded the earth with a new panorama / And to its new beat we give a step” (Wierzyński 1981 115). This face will be different, better: “Our song joins peoples and forges them strong.” So sports are at the same time a pacifist activity and, importantly, a supranational one. Several years after the end of

⁸ Bruno Jasiński “Mańifest w sprawie natyhmiastowej futuryzacji życia,” in: Jasiński, Zbigniew and Helena Zaworska (ed.), *Antologia polskiego futuryzmu i nowej sztuki*. Warszawa: Zakład Narodowy im. Ossolińskich, 1978: 10.

⁹ Jasiński, Zbigniew “Introduction” to: Jasiński and Zaworska 1978: LIX.

¹⁰ Jasiński, Bruno, “Futuryzm polski (bilans),” in: Jasiński and Zaworska 1978: 51. The fascination with the mechanisation of corporeality fits into the aesthetic canons of European futurism. George L. Mosse claims referring in particular to German culture- that its post-war universality grew on the basis of technicisation of the wartime experience. Cf. Mosse, George L., *Nationalism and Sexuality. Respectability and Abnormal Sexuality in Modern Europe*. New York: Howard Fertig, 1985: 124. Perhaps it was this experience of war, in which people were only a supplement to the machine, that contributed to the revaluing of the mechanisation of corporeality: it became weal and threatened by the double-edged sword of Jasiński’s *Nogi Izoldy Morgan* [“The Legs of Izolda Morgan”].

¹¹ Wierzyński, Kazimierz, *Poezja*, ed. Michał Sprusiński. Kraków: WL, 1981: 119.

the Great War, this no doubt rang especially loud and true. We do not know who “they” are and what ideology they confess, but in practice the reader fills this unspecified place with an image of those to blame for the outbreak of war.

Our song knows not your raptures and words,
Another standard called us and lay on our heads,
We are famed for inspiration, muscles and space,
And hearts which a marathon endure.

Now, in the post-war era, the time of the radio, aeroplane, women’s emancipation and jazz bands, the person too would be important – his arrival is signalled by the poem “Panie na start” [“Ladies get set”] (123). Bestiality and biologism were no longer treated as a civilizational threat or a certain kind of “tumbling” from the human pedestal – on the contrary, they were the aim of sporting efforts: the text “Bieg na przelaj” [“Cross-country race”] is concluded with the exclamation: “What a marvellous herd!/ Demi-gods! Demi-people! Animals!” Bestiality and divinity are combined not in opposition, but in their sameness: the demigod, just like an animal, is beyond human morality. Bestiality in terms of the “sporting classicism” of Wierzyński’s poem therefore means the heroization of the body, which in this (natural)¹² state demonstrates culture’s lack of authenticity and is a sign of the true essence of humanity.¹³

An extremely interesting work in *Olympic Laurel* is “Match Footballowy” [“Football Match”], in which the poet speaks with admiration of the enthusiasm of crowds for soccer: “Here a secret meaning binds and enthusiasm bonds/ A million people lounging in the great audience... And show me now – where, in which theaters/ a million spectators will fire with such a mighty voice.” The tone is enthusiastic, and the juxtaposition of sports as mass entertainment with elite theatre attributes negative associations to the latter: the European culture inherited from previous eras is worthless. Although the poem does not spell this out, the context of the era makes the reason obvious: it was compromised on the fields of the Great War (apart from the theatre, this is represented by the openly militaristic connotations of “standards”). Yet the same poem uses – and this provides great dissonance against the background of the volume’s pacifist meaning – a series

¹² However, the naturalness has an overtly conventional character. The way in which Wierzyński represents the male body is surprisingly close to the Fascist aesthetic, with which it shares a classical inspiration: “the male body, if presented publicly, had to be carefully prepared – so hairless, smooth and tanned skin. The strength and potency of the man were supposed to be represented by cool, rather unerotic poses: the ‘Arian’ should be defined by ‘silent greatness.’” (Maiwald, Stefan and Gerd Mischler, *Seksualność w cieniu swastyki. Świat intymny człowieka w polityce Trzeciej Rzeszy* [Original: *Sexualität unter dem Hakenkreuz*] (Polish trans. Ryszard Wojnakowski). Warszawa: Trio, 2003: 84).

¹³ Cf. Mosse 1985: 64. The convention of bestiality can also be realised in terms of grotesqueness – the human-as-animal body is then uncontrolled, greedy, dirty and clumsy. So grotesquely bestial are those resisting the ideology of the body in inter-war pacifist literature (Remarque’s *All Quiet on the Western Front* was published two years after Wierzyński’s volume, in 1929).

of very military comparisons and epithets. These are the expression of the underlying anxieties which would be manifested two years later by Władysław Broniewski (more of which later). The ball in the poem is a “missile,” “sent as if from the barrel of a mortar,” “jumping from city to city.” Perhaps it is the very confrontational nature of this team sport that is the cause of its undying popularity – yet this is the only text in *Olympic Laurel* in which the audience appear.

In “Olympic Laurel,” the author as speaker is discretely put to one side, and we can say little about it: standing on the sidelines, it seems to admire the sporting spectacle, sporty bodies and feverish crowds. But in 1920s poetry, self-creations of the personas of lyric poems are frequent: in them, the poets are often sportsmen, record holders, or strongmen. The picture is supposed to be monumental, like in Anatol Stern’s “Nagi człowiek w śródmieściu” [“Naked Man in the City Centre”]. The poem’s protagonist, and at the same time its speaker, roams naked around town (“slender body,” “hard leathery soles”) until “beautifully I fancied/ to become a statue brown, having climbed the plinth// And look from high at the gleaming windows/ Of cafes, spewed out from time to time by the crowds.”¹⁴

From the outset, sport as a factor shaping the ideal of male carnality had a rival – work. “Sporting bodies” were criticized from left-wing and proletarian positions. Broniewski, for example, in his poem “Lekka atletyka” [“Athletics”] from the volume *Troska i pieśń* [“Care and Song”], described sports as a means for the landed classes to produce cannon fodder. In all its perfection, the sportsman’s body is a lethal tool. The speaker addressed sportsmen in an entirely different way from that of “Olympic Laurel,” pacifist, uncritical and fascinated with carnality:

Winners of decathlons,
Sprinters at the finish –
You’ll get live ammunition,
You’ll get sharp bayonets.

You must be courageous,
You wear the uniform
Of Europe in crisis and baloney,
Unemployment and dictators¹⁵

¹⁴ In: Jarosiński and Zaworska 1978: 207. The biographical poem “We czterech” [“The Four of Us”] in Józef Czechowicz’s debut volume is a similar testimony to the sense of power. The poet describes his literary friendship with Waclaw Gralewski and Konrad Bielski, who (along with Czechowicz’s brother Stanisław) are compared to the four horsemen of the apocalypse, and at the same time sportsmen. The poetic career is presented here as no more and no less than an athletics meeting: “There are four of us at the start / There are four of us at the golden line of the comet / ... there are four of us aiming for the finish / First!” (Czechowicz, Józef, “We czterech,” in: idem, *Wybór poezji*, ed. Tadeusz Kłak. Warszawa: Zakład Narodowy im. Ossolińskich, 1985: 14).

¹⁵ Broniewski, Władysław, “Lekka atletyka,” in: idem, *Wiersze zebrane*. Warszawa: PIW, 1956: 102-103.

This poem, essentially an appeal meant to raise sportsmen's class awareness, ends in a call to "turn the bayonets round – against the governments!" for their military and physical fitness to become a tool in the class struggle.

A similar risk in forming the new person through sports are perceived by Tadeusz Peiper, who in his renowned 1923 manifesto "Tędy" ["This Way"] criticises futurism for its radicalism, claiming that the apotheosizing of the gymnastic step, one of Marinetti's famous postulates, inexorably led to fascism.¹⁶ Although "the gymnastic step was able to be a salutary reaction to lunatism, which around the year 1900 dominated literature [...], to be a slogan of health, masculinity, agreement with life: it was able to be a call for a new person,"¹⁷ according to Peiper it led to the "trivialization and vulgarization of life" (Peiper 1979 104). In spite of such poems as "Football," in which the image of a bird in flight overlaps with the image of a flying ball (297), the Krakow avant-garde places physical labor before the shaping ideal of male carnality: as Peiper's poem "Z Górnego Śląska" ["From Upper Silesia"] proclaims, the "walls [from workers'] muscles" are the object of admiration of the avant-gardists.

At least in towns and cities, sports in the 1930s became a significant element of social life. The appearance of this phenomenon itself, as well as of the model of carnality that it produced, occupied literature and literary journalism. Their reactions were very different.

On the face of things, it is a simple task to depict sports in lyric poetry. But one critic shows caution:

It is hard to enclose the heroism of the sporting battle, the beauty of disinterested effort, mastering one's weakness, the splendour of the battle and competition in stadiums, on tracks, jumps...in the metaphorical formula of a poem...rhetoric replaces the dynamic.¹⁸

It is therefore no surprise that attempts to make a lyric record of sporting toils are not especially common. The topos of sports is much more frequently the basis of a metaphor, a symbol of "modernity," than an intrinsic subject of lyric poetry. An example of such a text is Konstanty Ildefons Gałczyński's 1931 poem "Každy wiek ma swoje sporty" ("Every age has its sports"). In it, the poet forms a versified *exemplum vitae*, achieving comic effect by placing the eternal theme of didactic literature, which divides life into specific periods, together with types of activity accorded to them, alongside the triviality of the contents (a child's "squatting" on a potty) and a modern staffage of sporting disciplines attributed to the successive stages of life, including "Swedish gymnastics," "squats," "open-air games," "cross-country" and "match." The enumeration finishes in the last stanza "'pole vault' to eternity" (Gałczyński 1979: 189).¹⁹

¹⁶ Peiper's text was written at the time of the socio-political revolution in Italy.

¹⁷ Peiper, Tadeusz, "Tędy," in: idem, *Pisma wybrane*, ed. Stanisław Jaworski, Wrocław 1979: 103.

¹⁸ Marx, Jan, *Grupa poetycka "Kwadruga"*. Warszawa: LSW, 1983: 193.

¹⁹ In another of Gałczyński's texts ("Concert" from 1926), we encounter the comparison "the stars in the sky are spinning like a velodrome."

A lyric poet who followed in Wierzyński's footsteps and surrendered to his admiration for sport was Stefan Flukowski. Although in his work he did not avoid the threat mentioned by Jan Marx, i.e. use of "rhetoric," his series of Olympic poems from the volume *Dębem rosnę* ["I Grow into an Oak"] (1936) is an interesting attempt to combine a literal and metaphorical nature in presenting sporting themes. In "Ofiarowanie" [Sacrifice], which takes the form of an extended apostrophe, we find the collective recipient of the lyrical confessions of a member of the avant-garde group Kwadryga. This means sportsmen, to whom homage should be paid: "So those of you who are the fastest runners in the world,/ tireless in hurling, and the furthest jumpers/ to you, thrice to you!!!"²⁰

Flukowski's volume has three parts. Notably, the first is titled "Piechota" ["Infantry"] and is a monumental, almost epic, but bloody picture of war. In the poems included here we watch uniformized human masses, divisions and regiments moving along dusty roads. Following these images of explicitly catastrophic provenience, there comes the three-part "javelin cycle," comprising the poems "Obraz oszczepu" ["Image of a Javelin"], "Wojna" ["War"] and "Olimpiada" ["Olympiad"]. Sports (and very specifically the javelin throw) are universalized here as the experience of history and of human nature. In the titular "Image of a Javelin," we read: "None of us asked then,/ In the years of naïve youth,/ why the javelin holds in the clenched fist/ and where the ash missile will reach" (Flukowski 1936 35). Two interpretations are legitimate: "the years of naïve youth" might be childhood years (the javelin is then a boy's toy which gives rise to a soldier), or the times of primitive humanity (the javelin then becoming a weapon-tool in the hands of the hominid, in which perhaps the whole future of mankind is cursed). The javelin thrown in the poem falls "on the red field of war," but it might also fall "on the ellipse of the stadium," where "the Olympiad is closing us/ in harvest time, in the long and peaceful time of summer" (36). Note that, whereas for Wierzyński sports satisfied a human need for competition and almost in some evolutionary order replaced war, which belonged to the past, for Flukowski both pursuits, sporting or martial, are equal. The next two poems of the cycle, "War" and "Olympiad," provide a poetic (somewhat diffuse) exemplification of the two possibilities mentioned. This architecture of the cycle seems to contain the suggestion that sports can be a pacifist substitute for war, but it is not, as Wierzyński suggested a decade earlier, an evolutionally later creation; perhaps it is only ethically higher. The use of this rhetorically worn-out topos in 1936 (Berlin Olympics) should be treated as in keeping with the current of common moods, which, on the one hand, clearly divide sporting and political-military competition, but on the other hand, put Olympic fitness into the ideological framework of nationalistic concepts²¹ – after all, the same year, Antoni Słonimski wrote about the Berlin Olympics and its repercussions in the radio and press as follows:

The very idea of the Olympics has been falsified. Sports conceived in this way do not bring nations together, but rears antagonisms and hatreds. Freedom and noble rivalry in physical exercise is changed ever more clearly into some pre-war manoeuvres mobilizing the passion

²⁰ Flukowski, Stefan, *Dębem rosnę*. Warszawa: Towarzystwo Wydawnicze, 1936: 43.

²¹ The connection between the parts of the cycle – "Infantry," "Image of a Javelin" and "Olympiad" – remains open to interpretation.

of the crows. We read ridicule of Czechoslovakia for “bringing up the rear,” and reports from the Olympics have adopted the terminology of war reports. The ambitions of the nation have been put at the end of Martyna’s shoe. The radio blared all day about what our fellows are doing, how they are “giving a hiding,” “walloping,” until it finally fell into an ashamed silence when it turned out that Berlin is our sporting “Waterloo”...The lie of the Olympics sent doves to all the corners of the world and crowned the most dangerous militarism in the world with an olive branch.²²

The next group of poems from *I Grow into an Oak*, simply titled “Wiersze Olimpijskie” [“Olympic Poems”], comprises the texts “Ofiarowanie” [“Sacrifice”], Memorjał Alfreda Freyer” [“Memorial to Alfred Freyer”], “Start Pływaków” [“Start of the Swimming Race”], “100 metrów dowolnym” [“100 Meter Freestyle”], and “Kort” [“Court”]. Here, sports are a peculiar experience subjected to poetic rhetoric according to, speaking in general terms, the rules designated by Wierzyński.

The year 1933 saw the publication of Jan Parandowski’s *Dysk olimpijski* [“Olympic Discus”], which presents the Games in a similar way to Flukowski. The novel, which claimed third prize in the literary competition accompanying the Berlin Olympics, is above all an apotheosis and evocation of Antiquity. Its action unfolds in 476 BC at the first Olympics following the end of the Hellenic wars, during which two main protagonists, Ikkos and Sotion, compete. Yet Parandowski’s erudite display does not exhaust the book’s semantic potential. Its absolutely contemporary meanings were expounded by Stanisław Piasecki in a review in *ABC*, a newspaper attached to the National Radical Camp party.

In the unprecedented development of the Olympic Games, still healthy and pure...being a symbol of physical and spiritual fitness...already the first signs of the changes bringing decline to the Olympiads and Greece have appeared. The process which from Greek palaestrae and gymnasia would lead to the famous school of gladiators in Alexandria has already begun... The same process that took place in Greece over the course of centuries is taking place in the modern world over decades.²³

The process which Piasecki was referring to, and which follows Parandowski in building his fears, was the disappearance of noble amateurism and the Greek ideal of *kalokagathia* and emergence in their place of professionalized sports, incorporated in the mechanisms of ludic culture and – as Parandowski showed in the epilogue to his novel – toxic: “in 1896 the First Olympiad of the modern era was opened. The spirit of Greek agonistics started its second life, to repeat in it all the old virtues and mistakes.”²⁴

²² Słonimski, Antoni, “Chore zdrowie fizyczne – czego Owens nie przeskoczy – nie gołębie, lecz Kruki,” in: idem, *Kroniki tygodniowe, 1927-1939*, ed. Władysław Kopaliński. Warszawa: PIW, 1956: 487.

²³ Piasecki, Stanisław, “Ikkos i Sotion,” *ABC Literacko-Artystyczne* 1933 no. 108, cited in: Piasecki, Stanisław, *Prosto z mostu. Wybór publicystyki literackiej*, ed. Maciej Urbanowski. Kraków: Arcana, 2003.

²⁴ Parandowski, Jan, “Dysk olimpijski,” in: idem, *Dziela wybrane*, vol. 1, Warszawa: Czytelnik, 1957: 445.

If we can permit ourselves to make a generalization, it is that prose writers have considerably more space to demonstrate what they can do, since particularly in the 1930s sports were becoming a fairly common element of the world represented in the novel. Particularly popular in this respect, mainly thanks to Jarosław Iwaszkiewicz and Witold Gombrowicz, was tennis (Słonimski was another great tennis lover). Sports in *Ferdydurke*, *Possessed*, *Zmowa Mężczyzn* ["Conspiracy of Men"], *Pasje błędmierskie* ["Błędmiersz Passions"] and even Roman Dmowski's *Dziedzictwo* ["Heritage"] are something that young people do. This may seem obvious, but we should note that this "sporty lifestyle" is not a neutral attribute of youth, but with the new attitude to the body represents an expression of the emancipation of young people, their rebellion against the socio-cultural conditions they were left with, and even – as was the case at the turn of the 20th century in Germany – their detachment with cultural continuity. The best example of this, albeit a grotesque one, is the conflict of Professor Pimko with the "modern schoolgirl" in *Ferdydurke*. But there are more examples – just think of Iwaszkiewicz's 1929 story entitled *Przyjaciele* ["Friends"]. In it, the amoral "sporty" Achilles Korecki has a romance, and at the same time an ideological battle, with the passeistic aesthete Wiesław Wolff, who commits suicide, but leaves his fortune to his younger colleague. Standing over his patron's corpse, Korecki contemplates where he could build a tennis court.²⁵

"New corporeality" (German Ritz's term), emerges in the face of the European culture compromised in the trenches of the First World War as an exceptionally attractive proposal. In *Conspiracy of Men*, written in the second half of the 1920s, "new corporeality is above all a symbol of the new time or new person, but not of sublimation. The sports grounds near Kielce bring together a new society no longer divided by class."²⁶ The novel's fascination with the body reaches its apogee in a scene in which one of the young protagonists, Janek Szmit, presents his body to his paralyzed mother:

Look at my muscles, mother. Do you see? Here and here...And the chest? Oh! And my legs, mother, look as I stretch them – one, two, one, two, just like strings, forward, to the side, back...! Oh! You see, mother, what kind of son you have.

At this sight, Mrs Szmit crosses herself in horror: "'You have no shame,' she repeated."²⁷ The contrast of the figure of the sporty son and the paralyzed mother is duplicated here by the contrast of Janek's "shameless" exhibitionism with the traditionally defensive gesture of Mrs Szmit's crossing herself. According to Ritz, the fascination with male corporeality (which is not shared by the main protagonist, Władzio Sawicki, thus

²⁵ The exceptional character of the conflict of "young" with "old" in the 1930s is emphasised especially strongly in right-wing discourse, e.g. in Bolesław Piasecki's manifesto pamphlets: *Duch czasów nowych a Ruch Młodych* (Warszawa 1935) and *Przełom Narodowy. Zasady Programu Narodowo-Radykalnego* (Warszawa 1937).

²⁶ Ritz, German, *Jarosław Iwaszkiewicz. Pogranicza nowoczesności* (trans. Andrzej Kopacki), Kraków: Universitas, 1999: 157.

²⁷ Iwaszkiewicz, Jarosław, *Zmowa mężczyzn*. Warszawa: Czytelnik, 1975: 94.

automatically putting him outside the male community²⁸) planted within the conflict of the old with the new:

is not displayed in the staffage of the avant-garde or pre-Fascist fascination with the young “corporeal” person, and does not have such references to an era that material from the mid-1920s might throw up – for this fascination with the body is not manifested radically enough. Its reference to the era ultimately only has a metaphorical character. The ahistoricity of the new corporeality is an expression of the ahistorical condition of the new, normalizing Polish society almost ten years after attaining independence. (Ritz 1999)

Interestingly, the Swiss scholar argues that in *Pasje błędmierskie* [“Błędmiers Passions”], written a decade later, there is a characteristic evolution of attitudes to the body: “Amoral corporeality becomes [in *Passions*] a catastrophic image of society on the eve of the Holocaust” (163). The underrated work that *Błędmiers Passions* is locates corporeality and sports in an area that we are already familiar with – that of the conflict of the new with the old – but also refers them to such questions as changes in European culture, nationalism, and crisis of values. The intrigue is played out around the presentation of the procession of the Passion, which is supposed to attract tourists to the titular Błędmiers and make a new Oberammergau out of it. This idea is pushed through by Władysław Kanicki, a young Warsaw poet and absolute career type. This idea provokes ambivalent reactions in the town: on the one hand, people are enticed by the vision of easy earnings, but on the other hand, the fear arises that the ancient local tradition will lose its authenticity and turn into a “tourist attraction” for visitors.²⁹ Kunicki’s most stubborn opponent is the 24 year old Otton Krobowski. When we meet him at the theatre, he is “clumsy in a dark blue, quite simple suit. Clumsy – meaning that he moved as if he were naked, which after all looks very bad.”³⁰ He is linked to his main adversary, Kanicki, by a belief in the “decline of the West,” although the conclusions that they draw are diametrically different:

And also the thought of the death of European culture hung on to him (Kanicki). However, in this respect he could not count on Otton’s sympathy:

“What do you think?” he asked, “Are we the last?”

“What do you mean, the last?” said Otton with a smile, “A new race is growing.

Fine strapping lads.”

“Yes, physical strength, that’s known. And the head?”

Otton reddened, not knowing how to express his thought.

“Heads think better now too, more healthily, with no fog. Without looking in the mirror.”

(Iwaszkiewicz 1976 47)

²⁸ Cf. Śmieja, Wojciech, “Dlaczego Pana powieść nie jest homoseksualna?” “Zmowa mężczyzn” Jarosława Iwaszkiewicza – próba lektury, in: idem, *Literatura, której nie ma. Szkice o polskiej literaturze homoseksualnej*. Kraków: Universitas, 2010: 37-60.

²⁹ The problem of loss of authenticity under the pressure of the greedy attractions of tourist-consumers represented in the book is a good 40 years ahead of Baudrillard in analysing this phenomenon!

³⁰ Iwaszkiewicz, Jarosław, *Pasje błędmierskie*. Warszawa: Czytelnik, 1976: 41.

Texts and the Body

Otton Krobowski shares the Fascist conviction that “new” can appear only as a restitution of the mystically understood “great age”:

“The biggest vermin of our culture,” in his fervor, Otton said each word twice, “are all those who interfere in the matters that take place between a man and a man or a man and the land. This is innate, primal, peasant culture, and every touch from an urban hand thwarts, squanders and ruins it.” (51)

Characteristic in Krobowski’s statement is the phrase about the “urban hand” that will destroy “peasant culture,” since it belongs to the *loci communes* of nationalist and Fascist thinking. As George L. Mosse claims,

From the nineteenth century on, the guardians of nationalism and respectability felt menaced by the big city, the apparent center of an artificial and restless age. Such cities were thought to destroy man’s rootedness...It was further said that the extremes of luxury and poverty to be found in cities favored the practice of sexual deviance...The dark and secret recesses deep within the “jungle of cities” were usually considered breeding grounds of homosexuality and masturbation [both practices were mortally threatening to the fabric of the nation]. The village or small town close to nature possessed no dark bowels within which vice could flourish. It symbolized those eternal values that stood outside the rush of time. Here the nation and manliness were at home; here one could still recall the healthy, happy past. The city was home to outsiders – Jews, criminals, the insane, homosexuals – while to countryside was the home of the native on his soil. (Mosse 1985 32)

The revival of old values and protection of what remains from them (the Passion) is linked to the disciplining of the body, which in this way (this is the paradox of the thought represented by Krobowski) is to return to a natural state, in accordance with the premises of the “new corporeality.”

Modernity...now seemed a threat for stability. The normal–abnormal dualism so far interpreted in medical and aesthetic terms acquired a new dimension – naturalness contrasted with artificiality, the organic contrasted with the stunted.

(70 (retranslation from Polish))

Disconcerted by Krobowski’s conservatism, Kanicki reminds him that he is a “sportsman,” and so should not (consistently) have respect for tradition and the great “golden age.” Krobowski corrects him, specifying that “Sports for me means nothing. Only physical education exists for me” (Iwaszkiewicz 1976 51).³¹ The distinction Otton makes is significant, as sports are entertainment for the masses, whereas he understands “physical education” rather in terms of elite asceticism, which had no shortage of proponents in the inter-war period. From here, they could have been a moral renaissance or at least, in more pessimistic terms, an adjournment of moral decline.

³¹ This physical education also lacks authenticity, as Otton, when put to domestic work, to his own surprise is “awkward and clumsy,” and “his figure, which he thought was full of strength, turns out to be “powerless faced with the simplest farm work” (Iwaszkiewicz 1976: 130).

As one advances in life, one realises more and more that the majority of men – and of women – are incapable of any other effort than that strictly imposed on them as a reaction to external compulsion. And for that reason, the few individuals we have come across who are capable of a spontaneous and joyous effort stand out isolated, monumentalized, so to speak, in our experience. These are the select men, the nobles, the only ones who are active and not merely reactive, for whom life is a perpetual striving, an incessant course of training. Training = *askesis*. These are the ascetics.³²

Iwaszkiewicz seems to be saying that if the future of European culture is to belong to the amoral Kanicki, who kills his own son in the course of events, and the fanatical Krobowski, then catastrophe awaits. The representatives of the “new corporeality” also include another protagonist, Ansgar (Anek) Zamoyłło. The son of a great writer, Tadeusz Zamoyłło (who in the novel represents the departing grand tradition of modernism), is a rising star of Polish tennis and in his father’s eyes “the true specimen of this anonymous generation. Handsome, calm, unremarkable, an excellent tennis player, runner, sportsman – nothing more” (Iwaszkiewicz 1976 61). During a disagreeable discussion with Otton Krobowski, in whom he discerns fanatical traits,³³ old Zamoyłło tries to tone down the disagreement by asking about Anek, who is living in Warsaw: “Yet Otton was hostile in his disposition to tennis as a sport of the wealthy, and in fact, he said that he ‘hated sport’, and was interested only in physical education” (74). This distinction, so important for Krobowski, from old Zamoyłło’s point of view has not the slightest meaning: “This all seemed fierce, vague and impolite to Zamoyłło. ‘They’re all the same, these youngsters,’ he said to himself.”

In the eyes of his father or Otto, then, Anek is an immature, flippant hero. The reader might get the impression that Ansgar is, alongside the cynical Kanicki and the fanatical Krobowski, a character who augurs equally little hope for escape from the crisis, a young hedonist. Yet this image will be shattered, and the opinion about Anek the sportsman must be nuanced. Leaving for his last journey,³⁴ Tadeusz Zamoyłło happens upon a tennis match between Anek and the Dane Jacobsen. The attention of the egotistical writer is caught by the fact that such a large audience has come to watch what is for him an entirely uninteresting sporting spectacle. Perhaps his pride is wounded, especially as he is plagued by quandaries regarding the value of his own work. Zamoyłło the writer seems to lose hearts and minds to Zamoyłło the dashing tennis player (Iwaszkiewicz 1976 218). There is a rather heated discussion between father and son, during which old Zamoyłło, and with him the reader, have the opportunity to see that Anek is not as superficial and carefree a person as it might seem, and his passion in life – sports – means the same to him as literature does to his father. The essence of life proves unchanging – only the outer robes donned by each generation and era change.

³² Ortega y Gasset, José, *The Revolt of the Masses*. New York: W.W. Norton & Co., 1994: 65.

³³ This observation, important as it is, is repeated after the attack on the “Garage of the Passion” organised by Otton: “He could become a dangerous person.” (Iwaszkiewicz 1976: 200).

³⁴ Also inauthentic, as it is styled on Tolstoy’s famous journey.

Texts and the Body

Because you, your generation, always think that our anxiety should be expressed in writing poems and painting pictures. For you there is no salvation outside of art. Father, it has never occurred to you that I play tennis out of anxiety... And that is why you would think that I am doing something extremely trivial, lousy, if I told you that I want to join the Merchant Navy School. Right? Right? Father, in a moment you'll think that this is betrayal of the name, family, your situation and the poetry, poetry that you have always talked so much about. But this is the purest poetry, just in another form. No, it's not poetry – just anxiety, it is anxiety, fear. That it is dark there! (ibid. 239)

The “poetry of tennis” about which Anek speaks so convincingly demonstrates that *Passions* is the 20th-century work that was perhaps the most serious in presenting the dilemmas of “new corporeality,” and it is here that the image or role of sports and the sporty body against the background of contemporary culture is presented most broadly. The understanding of the essence of sports and ready relinquishment of the invalid claims of “high culture” expressed by Iwaszkiewicz are a voice that is as melancholy as it was isolated at the time. To avoid giving a distorted picture, we should stress that the “elite” understanding of sports described above does not mean that Iwaszkiewicz was uncritical of sports as meaningless mass entertainment. Anek, after all, is a rather elite character – it is no accident that he is the son of a great writer: albeit in an altered form, he continues to carry forward the spiritual legacy of culture.³⁵ The other side of the coin is less noble. After the fiasco of the presentation of “the Passion,” the Błędomierz authorities organise a sporting competition, which is “meant almost to seal the reassurance of the Błędomierz community and show the reconciliation of all its classes with common loves and interests” (210). In the eyes of old Zamoyłło, the competition is plebeian, trivial, “keeping the rabble happy,” and for a thinking person “unbearable” (213-214). “Why are they not screaming? Why do they not flee with great fear?,” asks the old man, finding no answers. The antonyms and problems represented by the characters in the novel therefore remain unsolved, and the perspectives that appear on the event horizon are rather gloomy.

Numerous ideological paradoxes emerge: sports or “physical education,” mass or elite, team sports or individual competition, developing the sense of competition or cooperation.³⁶ Roman Dmowski and Ferdynand Goetel, who represent a similar style of thinking but different generations, opt for different solutions. The former, deriving from 19th-century tradition, is a proponent of elitism, while the latter, a child of the

³⁵ The problems of the artist, duration and changes in form, and durability of works constitutes an important part of the book's ideological issues. See e.g. the conversation of Tadeusz Zamoyłło and Otton Krobowski on the “mystery of the Passion” (ibid., 70-75).

³⁶ “These dilemmas have been with European societies since the time of Friedrich Jahn, the Prussian founder of gymnastics: “Jahn's definition of gymnastics was all-encompassing. It took in not only fencing but also swimming, dancing, skating, riding, and the martial arts. These are athletics as opposed to team sports, an important distinction. The male body had to be sculpted in order to approach the male ideal, and here team sports were thought to be useless. Such sports, moreover, meant competition, but patriotism required solidarity.” (Mosse, George L., *The Image of Man. The Creation of Modern Masculinity*. New York-Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996: 44)

“revolt of the masses” era, perceives in his book *Pod znakiem faszyzmu* [“Under the Banner of Fascism”] the possibility of involvement through sports of wide ranks of society. It is no coincidence that the protagonist of Dmowski’s novel, Zygmunt Twardowski, is a mountain climber – in the national, pre-Fascist economy of meanings, climbing holds an honorable place. As Mosse writes of the wave of German Alpine films,

Mountain climbing was a sport in which the human body could measure itself against the “immutable,” take “a little eternity” with itself. Virgin peaks, crystal-clear water and air, pure white glaciers symbolized renaissance in the face of the German defeat, economic chaos and revolution. Although Alpine films do not openly contain a nationalist message, their implications are obvious: a strong, valiant and morally pure strong nation can be reborn.

(Mosse 1985 129 (retranslation from Polish))

When Zygmunt returned home “from abroad,” in accordance with the unwritten rules of the right-wing vision, he compared this mystical feeling with his climbs:

He remembered his Alpine excursions. They had refreshed him, developed his physical strength, even built a spiritual panache – but this was something different. Here he had the sense that he had found something that had been missing: this was the feeling that a plant must have when rain falls after a drought, a fish when it is thrown back into the water, a captured animal when it escapes from captivity into the forest, a highlander when he returns to his mountains from the city.³⁷

It is interesting that Witkacy, who could hardly be suspected of having a nationalist bent, to a degree shares Dmowski’s sporting views. For him, sports could favor “physical revival,” but he lamented that this was not the case since at the time it was listed among the plagues of the “Fordian” civilization. The author of *Insatiability*, approaching the theses of Słonimski’s columns, would emphasise the “stupefying,” light aspect of sports:

stupefied by alcohol and tobacco, the individual...must, in order to relax, look for diversions that are even more stupefying than his work, and he has them in abundance...and the best of them: sports, which if a rein were only kept on it, and it were not inflated to the ridiculous dimensions of a kind of priesthood, could at least be good for physical revival, without its own stupidity destroying all the interests of young and healthy people.³⁸

Similarly, Witkacy too would not like the sporty model of modern corporeality, to which he would refer, describing the bodily changes undergone as a result of military drills, by Genezjap Kapen, the protagonist of *Insatiability*:

Military drills were turning that boy’s body into something truly marvellous – no exaggeration...He was not a troglodyte of the square-in-the-shoulders, lean-in-the-hips-and-trim-in-the-gut jock type. This mass of organs formed a hermaphroditic synthesis of masculinity and femininity bordering on maximal harmony, not devoid of animal power.³⁹

³⁷ Wybranowski, Kazimierz (Roman Dmowski), *Dziedzictwo*. Wrocław: Nortom, 2003: 42.

³⁸ Witkiewicz, Stanisław Ignacy, *Narkotyki. Niemyte dusze*, ed. Anna Micińska. Warszawa: PIW, 1979: 177-178.

³⁹ Witkiewicz, Stanisław Ignacy, *Nienasylenie*. Warszawa: PIW, 1992: 288-289.

Witkacy would also put the question of sports in terms that we are already familiar with, of the contention between young and old. In a discussion in the salon of Princess Irena Vsevolodovna, the young Marquis di Scampi hears from his father, “You people in the F.O. treat everything as a sport: you trivialise life’s seriousness.” Note that the accusation does not concern sports in a strict sense: Scampi means rather that sports are “frivolous,” that it is “pretend life,” “pretend war,” that the most one has to lose and gain is abstract points, and everything that sports represent as such is transferred by young people to the whole of life, to all its domains. This results in a loss of “metaphysical sense.” The young man’s response is as honest as it is unpretentious: “Of course life must be treated as a jolly sport today... The state can be defended the way you defend a goal in a football game.” (Witkiewicz 1992 140) Sports acquire gravity by being ascribed to an ideological framework – the popularity of the Fascist ideology supported by physical education which so pleased Ferdynand Goetel,⁴⁰ was perceived entirely differently by Antoni Słonimski, for whom “everything that we today call sports at the time [in the author’s youth] bore the contemptuous name of truancy and hooliganism” (“Ogród saski” [“Saxon Garden”], Słonimski 1956 411), and now was popularized by mass culture and prepared and annexed in this way by militaristic ideology. In his column *Chore zdrowie fizyczne* [“Sick physical health”], quoted above, the author writes:

The lie of the Olympics is cynical, because those who provide money for all kinds of centres of physical education, and encourage advertisement of sports, are not interested in the nation’s physical health, but in its value as a material of death.
(487)

Yet several years earlier, around the time when Kazimierz Wierzyński was delighting in the universality and cosmopolitan nature of the religion of sports, Słonimski wrote sneeringly of the cultural situation: “Young people do not have the time or inclination to glance at a book. The press do everything they can to set the sporting mindlessness of the young generation in motion.” (“Boy walczy nie tylko o bibliotekę Boya” 87). For Słonimski, as with Witkacy, sports are a harmful, mindnumbing phenomenon, and the mindnumbed, sporty individual is an “athletic bull” (“Kogo zaprosić – książki dla jubilatów – snobizm urzędniczy – hrabskie patałachy,” *ibid.* 53), a “child or sportsman” (“Proszę o dzwonek,” *ibid.* 101), constituting excellent material for ideological, Fascist molding.

Sports, which are treated somewhat instrumentally in *Ferdydurke* as a synonym of “modernity,” is an important constructive element of the world of another of Gombrowicz’s novels, *Possessed*. It is hard to judge to what extent this happened for opportunistic reasons (after all, it was the author’s intention for the novel to meet rather simple tastes, for which sports are, of course, very attractive), and to what degree he wanted to use the

⁴⁰ In his essay published before the war *Pod znakiem faszyzmu* (“Under the Banner of Fascism”) (Warszawa 1939), Ferdynand Goetel perceived a positive phenomenon in the concentration of youth around the National Democracy movement and Fascist organisations. His book presents Fascism as an ideological choice that Poland should take in a given social, economic and geopolitical situation, and the youth as that – fresh, uncorrupted and uncompromising – force that might manage this.

medium of sports to speak about his constant fascination with the mixing of the bodily with the social. As with other novels of the time, in *Ferdydurke* too the sport of the young is an opposing value to the culture of the old. The young bodies of Leszczuk (Walczak) and Maja (Maya) are always sporty, while the old ones are grotesque (the holidaymaking ladies staying at the Ochołowski's manor) or utterly decrepit (Prince Holszański, Professor Skoliński); to the former are attributed open spaces (tennis court, forest, city), and to the others closed and musty ones (the gloomy castle). According to Ewa Graczyk, the existence of the court is one of the things that allows Gombrowicz to make the important gesture of "invalidation of the past, according it inferior significance."⁴¹ Leszczuk's sporting career follows the model pattern: young, talented, but poor, he becomes a helper at the court, and here his ability is discovered, and he becomes a coach, all the time with his boyish dream of an international tennis career.⁴² This schematic model in the bodily and social space leads the previous hierarchies to catastrophe. In the 19th-century world of stable social hierarchies, their existence was written on the body of the individual. Yet the present time disturbed the previous order (sporting career), which translated into the impossibility of categorizing the "new corporeality" and the perceptual anxiety of observers (in the novel this means the representatives of the old order: Councillor Szymczak, Professor Skoliński):

"Who could that be," thought the councillor [about Leszczuk], "He's carrying two racquets, so perhaps the son of some citizen from these parts? Hm, but his hands are calloused, with badly kept nails, as if from manual work. Come to think of it, his hair's not that well groomed and his voice is rather common. Proletariat, then? No, the proletariat wouldn't have ears and eyes like that. But his mouth and chin are almost peasant...and there's something suspicious about him as a whole, a certain mixture. (6)

The conservative looks are confused, but the same Leszczuk, watched on court from far, through the crowd, personifies the emotions associated with him: "amazement, hope, praise, rapture, dreams" (257) It is tempting to interpret this by saying that Leszczuk and his sporty body express the desire of the crowd connected with social advance, smashing the oppressive and ever more dysfunctional structures of society.

Leszczuk's body is all the more disconcerting as it uncovers the vulgarity of Maja, the young lady from a good home (cf. 38). Thanks to sports it has been liberated, at least partly, from its proletarian fate, but this same sport exhibits the body of the girl, which according to the people of Połyka is vulgarized in comparison with the corporeality of Leszczuk. All the characters, including Leszczuk and Maja, perceive this worrying analogy of bodies crossing class, monetary, social, educational and cultural barriers. Fortunately, Maja soon discovers the alarming similarity to the working-class man that her coach

⁴¹ Graczyk, Ewa, "Strona Myślowy w 'Opętanych' Witolda Gombrowicza," in: *Ciało. Pleć. Literatura. Prace ofiarowane Profesorowi Germanowi Ritzowi w pięćdziesiątą rocznicę urodzin*, ed. Magdalena Hornung, Marcin Jędrzejczak, Tadeusz Korsak. Warszawa: Wiedza Powszechna, 2001: 310.

⁴² Gombrowicz, Witold, *Opętani*. Kraków: WL, 1994: 18-119 [Engl. version: *Possessed. The Secret of Myslotch* (trans. from French by J.A. Underwood), London and Boston: Marion Boyars, 1982].

is provides her with an unexpected sense of freedom: “As long as I was plain old Miss Ochołowska I couldn’t allow myself what a young lady ... similar to Leszczuk might” (80).

The young protagonists are a mystery to themselves: Leszczuk does not understand why he stole Maja’s letter (46) while Maja runs away from home to “understand the way she really is” (154). Concerned by their own corporeality and not understanding it, they are left to each other – there is no help from any cultural code to which they might ascribe their experience. The young lady seeking to find her feet and her fiancé Cholowacki prove to be hopelessly naïve in valuing works of art; the Proletarian *arriviste* has no clue about what they are worth. The aesthetic dumbness of the young people is not an intrinsic phenomenon; in the context of the novel’s plot and the construction of the characters it constitutes a signal of the wider problem that is the alienation of young people from the world of values respected in the society in which they live. The breaking from the suffocating tradition and social convention, which must in sum be treated as a positive phenomenon, has side effects: the ethical uncertainty of the protagonists, psychological upset, and anxiety towards the unknown.

The conventional happy ending relieves all antagonisms: “taxi drivers and ladies on market stalls,”⁴³ the recipients of the novel, must have been satisfied: the safe old order is preserved, but not without change, as the new one has been inscribed in it. The old castle, with its priceless collection of art, will be saved, the youngsters will not surrender to bad temptations, and – we can assume from what Maja says – will cross the social barriers that divide them.

Let us summarize our discussion: the 1920s uncovered for literature the importance and “vividness” of male corporeality, which then lost its 19th-century transparency. The 1930s were a time when bodies experienced “the pressure of collective ideologies,”⁴⁴ and as a result the boundaries between “correct” and “incorrect” corporeality were sharpened.⁴⁵ Sports in the 1930s were the cause of fear for two reasons. The first was its being harnessed in the mechanisms of mass culture, whose danger was perceived by writers.⁴⁶ The second, much more serious one, without doubt closer and in a way resulting from the first, was the exploitation of the attractiveness of sports, physical education and “new corporeality” by politics, with a particular emphasis on Fascist movements and the right wing in general, to attract *en masse* young people, who were almost, in the conditions of the time, outside of the existing social structures.

Translation: Benjamin Koschalka

⁴³ Cf. Jarzębski, Jerzy, “Jawne i ukryte tajemnice ‘powieści dla kucharek,’” afterword to: *ibid.*: 357.

⁴⁴ Włodzimierz Maciąg’s term (*Nasz wiek XX*: 147).

⁴⁵ I have not been concerned with tracing this process here; however, it seems to be an interesting research problem.

⁴⁶ The next research postulate assumes the need for a comprehensive study of literary attitudes regarding the invasion of mass culture, a new hierarchy of phenomena assumed by it, new ways of distributing contents and a new configuration of aesthetic values. Sport treated fragmentarily is only one of the elements of this new reality.

Mateusz SKUCHA

A Manly Artefact and a Mysterious Poet. Around Queer Theory

In 1894, the readers of *Ateneum*, a highly regarded opinion-forming monthly for many years headed by Piotr Chmielowski, were able to read a poem entitled “Posąg” (“Statue”).

1. The statue naked, a marvel
Like an echo of Greek dreams,
In the phantasmal fog it shone
And into rapture I sank.¹
2. On a raised hill,
On a granite base,
It stood before a dazzled gaze
Free from any cares.
3. Today, when I squint my eyes
It gleams before the eyes of the soul
My little cherub sweet;
Longing swells in my breast.
4. O! Let me close to you,
Wrap my arms around;
In the lifeless marble
Let a burning heart beat;
5. With parched lips
Let me throw ardour into your bosom
And admired by the earth
Let me bring you to life.

¹ Translator’s note: as with the other poems cited later, rhyme has been sacrificed for the sake of accuracy. The original verses use an ABAB rhyme scheme.

Texts and the Body

6. Your radiant whiteness
Divinely shaped contours
Gleam like a priceless pearl
In nature's ocean;
7. And I humbly kneel
And stretch out my arms
As if to an evening rose
The flower's trembling crown.
8. If once I held you
To this breast full of desire
From the breast would spurt song
Like a hot lava spring.
9. And the world perhaps once
A song of happiness would hear
And – remembering Eden –
For a moment it would breathe joy too.
10. Ha! Do my eyes not deceive?
At my humble pleas
Your divine temple bows,
Some tremors have shaken you;
11. Through your body of stone
It seems there are tangles of nerves,
Some ardent life
Beats in your being;
12. With your marble arm
You summon to your bosom
My breast caught aflame,
Longing for your charm.
13. My miracle! Fulfilment
Of the artist's greatest dreams!
I fly at your call
Ideal pristine!
14. Air! Air! My chest bursts...
O mercy! Could it die
Whose happiness, for beauty
Is to embrace to its bosom?
15. Here I am. – Come to me,
With your embrace return my strength!
What is this? On this column
Stone of an unfeeling lump
16. Still the same, unchanging
In its heavenly beauty
Stands the stone statue
In Olympian cheer.
17. And this temple that came alive?
A glimmer of colour and movement?
Did I make it myself,
Implore it in my soul?

18. The despair of the breast burns me
But the sleep will no longer come
It will linger on
And resound in my song.
 19. Pain, tears or inspiration,
 Its raptures or turmoil –
 I am bared by suffering,
 And I shall tell the world.
20. Yes, when the world was wild
The song was first to go down
Eurydice's seer wept
And from the tears a song was shed.
 21. And here the myth of Orpheus
 Goes on being told:
 You wish a new hymn to create
 First you must wound the bard.²

I would like to use “Statue” as a starting point for presenting several reading strategies which are, to put matters in general terms, “sensitive to gender,” for showing how certain poststructuralist theoretical discourses (concerning gender and sexuality) work in their encounter with the literary text, and what interpretations this encounter can produce. I would like, though, to start by presenting a simulation of reading that is not sensitive to gender, meaning that in which the gendered marking of a text is not taken into account and exhibited – which does not mean that this marking does not exist. Reading that avoids categories of gender and initiates contextual reading allows us not only to point to the philosophical tropes of the text, but also to see how reading sensitive to gender can influence interpretation and complement it.

Non-gender-sensitive reading

The title of the poem alone suggests that ekphrasis will be at work: i.e., that it will be a text about an artistic object. Using the distinction proposed by Sophie Bertho and presented by Michał Paweł Markowski, we can say that “Statue” is an example of the variety of ekphrasis that is based mainly on narrativisation, since “in widening the field of description by unrepresented events, it refers the interest of the spectator/reader outside of the picture.”³ In this poem, the lyrical situation is based to a large extent on playing with oppositions, for example: the vertical opposition that appears in the second stanza (the statue is on top, on the granite base), temporal opposition (past/present) from the third stanza, and others: dead/living, observer/observed, work of art/not work of art. “Unrepresented events” are what the speaker undertakes with the aim of removing distance. This can be seen most clearly in the opposition that is crucial to the text: that of the real world and the ideal world. The speaker, who belongs to the true world, says: “My miracle! Fulfilment/ Of the

² *Ateneum*, 1894, vol. 1: 89-91.

³ Markowski, Michał Paweł. “Ekphrasis. Uwagi bibliograficzne z dołączeniem krótkiego komentarza,” *Pamiętnik Literacki* (1999a): 2.

artist's greatest dreams!/ Ideal pristine!" The statue belongs to the world of ideas, is perfect beauty, the ideal artistic object. The protagonist of the poem desires to realize an idea, allow it to become embodied, to exist in his world. He desires this manifestation because at first he believes that creation is possible only thanks to the smoothing of distance: "If once I held you/ To this breast full of desire,/ From the breast would spurt song." This shows that the source of the writing is fulfilment of desires, realization of ideas. And indeed, at a certain point the statue comes to life. The singer is filled with joy at the satisfaction of his desire and the possibility of closeness. This results in the ecstasy presented by stanza 14: "Air! Air! My chest bursts.../ O mercy! Could it die/ Whose happiness, for beauty/ Is to embrace to its bosom?" And yet he soon realizes that this was not something coming to life, but an illusion of it. Because with art it is always a creation of some kind that takes place, rather than coming to life, a phantasm and not a real object. And because this is the case, fulfilment is impossible. The speaker desires manifestation, but what he gets is a mere substitute. This is where the self-referential reflection concealed in the text surfaces. It turns out that the source of the creation is unfulfillment. "Statue" is therefore a record of the process of realizing that at the origin of writing lies unfulfillment, lacking, and also suffering and a wound. This is most evident in the final stanzas, in which one critic found a postulate of "Promethean" poetry, "profoundly felt and suffered." It is from this "wounded song of the bard" that poetry takes its beginning, from his tears that the "song was shed" in which his despair resounds. This distance, which consigns the speaker to lacking and longing for the ideal, is the true source of creativity. Beauty is perfect and worthy of desire when it is unattainable. Ideal beauty always remains in the world of ideas, which is why desire is never satisfied and it is this lack of fulfillment that gives rise to art.

This evident Platonic characteristic in thinking about creation, with the fundamental, strong distinction into art and not art, the spiritual and the material, ideal objects and real objects, is characteristic of modernist literature as a whole. This is shown, for instance, by the following excerpt from Thomas Mann's *Death in Venice*, which came several years after "Statue":

What discipline, what precision of thought was conveyed by that tall, youthfully perfect physique! Yet the austere and pure will...to bring the godlike statue to light – was it not known to him, familiar to him as an artist? Was it not at work in him when, chiselling with sober passion at the marble block of language, he released the slender form he had beheld in his mind and would present to the world as an effigy and mirror of spiritual beauty? A model and mirror! His eyes embraced that noble figure...and in rising ecstasy he felt he was gazing on Beauty itself, on Form as a thought of God, on the one and pure perfection which dwells in the spirit and of which a human image and likeness had here been lightly and graciously set up for him to worship...Cupid, indeed, does as mathematicians do, when they show dull-witted children tangible images of the pure Forms: so too the love god, in order to make things visible, loves to use the shapes and colours of young men, turning them into instruments of recollection by adorning them with all the reflected splendour of Beauty, so that the sight of them will truly set us on fire with pain and hope.⁴

⁴ Mann, Thomas. *Death in Venice, Tonio Kröger and Other Writings* (trans. Frederick A. Lubich). New York: Continuum, 1999: 133.

This aging artist is Gustav von Aschenbach, enraptured by Tadzio's beautiful body. For him, the boy constitutes the embodiment of perfect – and therefore unattainable – beauty. This is why the writer will only look, observe, follow the object of his desires, but never take the step of removing the distance and pursuing a direct relationship. His love remains ideal, spiritual, non-carnal. It is a love which – like Plato's spiritual Eros – will mean a desire to commune with Beauty in itself. And without the existence of such love, cognition of the idea would be impossible. It is worth emphasising that Aschenbach, observing Tadzio and realizing that he is doomed to distance from his object of desire, starts to write:

What he craved...was to work on it in Tadzio's presence, to take the boy's physique for a model as he wrote, to let his style follow the lineaments of this body which he saw as divine, and to carry its body on high into the spiritual world [...]. Never had he felt the joy of the word more sweetly, never had he known so clearly that Eros dwells in language, as during those perilously precious hours in which...he used Tadzio's beauty as a model for his brief essay. (Mann 1999: 135)

Similarly, in the poem "Statue," the distance between the artist-singer and the object of desire-statue is clearly underlined. And it is this distance and unfulfilment that is the source of the writing. The difference here is that the artist desires the impossible, overcoming this distance. Furthermore, he desires the embodiment of perfect beauty and a direct, carnal relationship. This observation opens a space for the second reading strategy, one sensitive to gender.

Gender-sensitive reading

In the most general terms, a gender-sensitive reading strategy places the main emphasis on a text's gender meanings. It therefore seeks an answer to the question of the author's gender identity shown by the text, as well as the protagonists' gender conditioning. With "Statue" we can venture the thesis that its homoerotic potential is evident and unarguable. Of course, it is not an erotic work in the strict sense – although it could be regarded as one. It is rather a text about the desire triggered in a male persona by the male "body" of a statue. In other words, it is an example of ekphrasis in which the male protagonist of the poem is enraptured by the beautiful male "body" of the statue. The artist, recalling a Greek statue, speaks of the beauty of the sculpture and of his rhapsody evoked by its sight. From the outset, the description takes on the features of a love monologue, imbued with eroticism and desire of erotic fulfillment. The gender of the speaking "I," as well as the "gender" of the object of desire, are clearly signalled here. The reader is left in no doubt that this is essentially a description of the rapture evoked by the body of one man on another. The subject is fascination with carnality, desire of contact with this body. The speaker wishes to bring the statue to life, experience him in all his carnality in its gender and erotic meanings.

From a reading perspective, this extremely expressive homoeroticism is "weakened" and "undermined" by the fact that the reader is continually mindful that the object of

Texts and the Body

adoration is a marble statue, an artefact, an artistic creation. To put it metaphorically, the accusation of sodomy is distanced by the ekphrasis used in the text.⁵ On the other hand, in “Statue” – as narrativist ekphrasis – the observer-observed relation is clearly exhibited. The marble statue becomes a body-to-watch, body-to-admire, and finally body-to-desire. But the speaker, recalling and longing, changes into a gaze – the gaze of the watcher, admirer, and above all, desirer.

As a digression, we might add that in Young Polish poetry there is a similar lyrical situation in Kazimierz Przerwa-Tetmajer’s poem “Dyskobol” (“Discus Thrower”):

A crowd of spectators. Calmly he fixes on the finish –
Straightens, strains his arms
Raises his head, digs his feet in, his legs taut,
In his hand a round disc – the first of the swordsmen to rise.

One more moment – he swings the disc, before hitting –
Left arm moves, hips, turns, contracts,
On his right leg all his weight is placed –
He throws – and a fresh laurel on his temple will come.

On his marble, naked, slender body,
Rubbed with oil, golden, gleaming
Falls the radiant, smiling Greek sun.

He bends – the disc in his steel fingers gripped by ticks –
Women’s hearts in their white breasts skip a beat,
And go aquiver at the divine sweet thighs.⁶

The speaker – probably one of the spectators – describes the body of the Greek sportsman in minute detail. S/he is sensitive to every movement of this body, every tensing of a muscle. The athlete is reduced to his corporeality alone. His body becomes an artefact, an object not only of description, but also of rapture. The beautiful male body begins to become a text, speak textually, or rather the text begins to exist carnally, exhibiting the male body to the interpretation of the spectators.

The third stanza, in particular, expresses the tension of erotic fascination. Just as in “Statue,” the naked, sporty, oiled body of the discus thrower, gleaming in the southern sun, becomes a body-to-watch, body-to-admire, and finally body-to-desire. The speaker meanwhile, the spectator, once again turns into a gaze.

And it is this relationship between the object of description and the desiring subject that is often seen as crucial for a homotext. As German Ritz writes:

In homosexual desire a man receives a body, but this is not an artistic representation of the former *virtus* or another social function of the man, but rather a sexual body. However, he only receives a desired body when the desirer becomes entirely a gaze... This absolute, still

⁵ An obvious association here is Winckelmann’s famous (homoerotic) description of the beauty of the Apollo Belvedere’s torso.

⁶ Przerwa-Tetmajer, Kazimierz. “Dyskobol,” *Poezje*. Warszawa: PIW, 1980: 388.

uninstrumentalised corporeality demands aestheticisation, and reaches for the classical ideal of beauty.⁷

The exceptional role of the gaze in homoerotic texts has also been highlighted by Robert Cieślak:

The particular way of looking at the picture of the “Other,” the skilful extraction of the components that make the subject into the object of inspiration from its construction, makes us pay attention to the specific type of sensitivity of the eye ascribed to the subject of the lyric statement – the specific visual observation and its orientation, which allows the intention of the poetic text to be interpreted as a homoerotic text.⁸

This therefore means constituting the image of the body-to-watch in such a way as the spectator is inspired, the desirer renounces his own identity and becomes only a gaze. A gaze marked by gender, eroticism, desire, and moreover, a gaze that is entirely governed by the logic of desire. The subject of the homoerotic text goes beyond the boundaries of its own identity, entering the space of the identity of his phantasm, becoming an element of this phantasmal identity of its own object of desire, entirely dependent on it. This is why the “representation of a body always says more about the construction of the sexuality of the gazing subject than that of the observed object.”⁹ The identity of the subject deposited in a homoerotic gaze is expressed in the phantasmal image of the body (and in the carnal, sexual identity) of the object of desire. Desire always says more about the desired than the desirer.

The role of this phantasm is worthy of note. It is detailed by Krystyna Kłosińska:

The phantasm represents a particular reality which distances us from perceptual reality. The subject imagines, and succumbs to illusion. But this illusion...is stable, persistent and subordinate to one's own logic: for the subject this is the reality of his desire.¹⁰

From this angle, a beautiful, desired body takes on the characteristics of the lyric persona's homoerotic projection since, as Jacek Kochanowski writes, homoeroticism is thinkable

⁷ Ritz, German, “Między histerią a masochizmem. Utopijne koncepcje ciała mężczyzny” (trans. Krystyna Krzemieniowa), in: Gosk, Hanna (ed.), *Codzienne, przedmiotowe, cielesne. Języki nowej wrażliwości w literaturze polskiej XX wieku*. Izabelin: Świat Literacki, 2002a: 152.

⁸ Cieślak, Robert, “Cielesne gry wzrokowe. Estetyczne aspekty tematu homoerotycznego w poezji polskiej XX wieku,” in: Borkowska, Grażyna and Liliana Sikorska (ed.), *Krytyka feministyczna. Siostra teorii i historii literatury*. Warszawa: Wydawnictwo IBL PAN, 2000: 318. See also idem, “Pragnienie Innego. Język pożądania we współczesnej poezji polskiej,” in: Hornung, Magdalena, Marcin Jędrzejczak and Tadeusz Korsak (ed.), *Ciało, płęć. Literatura*. Warszawa: Wiedza Powszechna, 2001.

⁹ Ritz, German, “Literatura w labiryncie pożądania. Homoseksualność a literatura polska” (trans. Andrzej Kopacki), in: idem, *Nie w labiryncie pożądania. Gender i płęć w literaturze polskiej od romantyzmu do postmodernizmu*. Warszawa: Wiedza Powszechna, 2002b: 56.

¹⁰ Kłosińska, Krystyna, *Fantazmaty. Grabiński – Prus – Zapolska*. Katowice: Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Śląskiego, 2004: 18.

and expressible only in relation with a phantasm.¹¹ However, when we reverse this formula, it turns out that a gaze is only possible thanks to a phantasm, and as such belongs to it. Furthermore, the identity of the gazer is destabilized, becoming an identity on the edge. Threatened by non-being, it attempts to defend itself, paradoxically searching for an escape by maintaining distance. It is a gaze which will never change into a touch. As Ritz writes, “The desired person is watched, but does not constitute an element of the interaction” (Ritz 2002a: 152). The speaker remains a longing artist, desiring the marble body gleaming in the sun. The text remains just an example of ekphrasis. Incidentally, the aestheticization of the object of desire, its being given the characteristics of an artefact, is what points to and underpins this distance and impossibility of interaction.

Returning to *Death in Venice*, I would like to note that Aschenbach too is only a gaze, governed entirely by the logic of desire. His decision to remain in the city overrun by epidemic, by which he condemns himself to death, can be interpreted as a renunciation of his own subjectivity and own identity in favour of the object of desire.

Let us gather together what has so far been said about the poem: 1) the described body is given the status of artefact, so the male body undergoes aestheticisation, ascribed to the image of the – apparently meaningless, unmarked homosexually – Greek sculpture; 2) the speaker becomes only a look, a gaze, governed solely by the logic of desire; 3) this Greek sculpture is a phantasm of the speaker, a visualisation of his desires; 4) interaction is impossible, because the man’s body is a statuesque body, unembodiable, and homoerotic desire, as Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick writes, is inexpressible in heteronormative language.

“Statue” can be treated as a story of a homoerotic interaction. The text is therefore a lyric description of the attempts made by a man (the “I”) to bring to life a desired male body, and as a consequence, the expression in homoerotic language of male relationality. For this reason, the lyric “you” is the marble sculpture. The statuesque male body becomes the recipient of a love monologue, the amorous request of the speaker. The protagonist, the desirer, is therefore both the gaze and speech. It is in his speech – which is a love spell meant to turn the statue into a living body – that the whole homoerotic potential of the poem is deposited. The singer dreams of just once being able to hold the animated statue to his breast. At a certain moment the sculpture comes to life, bows his temple to him, and summons him with a longing arm. The desiring man is filled with inexpressible happiness. Yet a moment later it turns out that there has been no coming to life, but only a trick of colours and the light. In despair, he asks, “Did I make it myself,/ Implore it in my soul?” It is at this point that the phantasmal character of the situation becomes clear. Interaction is something impossible, inexpressible in heteronormative language.¹² A response based in love to homoerotic speaking is possible only in relation

¹¹ On the role of the phantasm and the constitution of gay or phantasmal identity see Kochanowski, Jacek, *Fantazmat zróżNICowany. Socjologiczne studium przemian tożsamości gejów*. Kraków: Universitas, 2004.

¹² This is expertly discussed by Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick in *Epistemology of the Closet* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990).

to a phantasm. Homosexual looking and speech, meanwhile, is possible only under the mask of ekphrasis.

“Statue” provides a relatively representative example of modernist homosexual literature – sometimes described as pre-emancipatory homosexual literature. This is a kind of literary statement in which the homosexual identity of the narrator (or speaker) is concealed in the text (terms used include “unspeakable desire”) and comes to light only during a specific reading strategy (with its source in gay studies). The most frequently discussed writers in this context include Wilde, Proust, Gide, Iwazskiewicz, Gombrowicz, and Andrzejewski. However, the standard-bearing research texts for this interpretational position are the works of German Ritz, who states:

The starting premise of the homosexual text is not the author’s biography, but the gender construction of the author in the text, which for various reasons does not have to coincide with the construction of the private biography, although it can be motivated by it. A text becomes homosexual... only when differently structured sexuality actively becomes a part of the texture of the text. (Ritz 2002b: 54)

The starting point is therefore the assumption that there is a strong, stable (albeit not necessarily apparent and exhibited) homosexual identity, one characteristic of a certain group: people with a similar, “male” gender, who desire people of the same sex and have a common experience of oppression. Meanwhile, critics are interested in how this common, stable identity is masked, concealed in the text. A classic and much discussed example of this is *Death in Venice*, about which Ritz writes the following:

That which goes unsaid comes... with two (secret) signs: reading of Plato’s *Symposium* and the encounter of Eros and Thanatos... *Symposium* is for the initiated reader always a double-sided text: an apology for homosexual love and a sublimation of Eros as a force serving the attainment of perfection and beauty. In the culture of modernism, in the first vigorous attempt to “speak the unspeakable,” the homosexual Eros is usually conceived as death.¹³

I will just add as an aside that in emancipatory and post-emancipatory (also known as “gay”) literature, the homosexual identity of the author in a text (and also the identity of protagonists) is openly demonstrated and affirmed. We can mention here such writers as White and Burroughs, and in Poland Pankowski, Musiał, and recently, Witkowski and Żurawiecki, as well as the theoretical works of Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick.

Sexuality-sensitive reading

Up to this point in the interpretation, I have consistently passed over the issue of the author of the text, one that is after all important for gay criticism. I must stress that it is of course not the case that every gay person who is also a writer always creates homoerotic texts and his biography is a crucial interpretive key; neither must every homoerotic text necessarily be written by a gay person. However, the author’s biography – even traces of it – does provide an interesting and often useful interpretive context.

¹³ Ritz, German, *Jarosław Iwazskiewicz. Pogranicza nowoczesności* (trans. Andrzej Kopacki). Kraków: Universitas, 1999: 98.

“Statue” is signed with the pseudonym “Adam M-ski,” which did not present too many problems to people at the time, as it seemed easy to decipher as “Adam Mańkowski.” This poet was born in 1847 and died in 1911, belonged to the generation of the antipositivist turn, and was valued mostly as a translator, and only secondly as a poet. Critics stressed in particular his connection to the French Parnassians. Mańkowski prepared one volume of poetry for print (*Przebrzmiałe akordy* / “Past notes”), but no collection of his texts was ever published. Instead, his oeuvre remains dispersed in magazines, especially *Ateneum*, *Prawdzie* and *Tygodnik Ilustrowany*. Among those who rated him highly were Zenon Przesmycki and Antoni Lange, with whom he was a regular correspondent. Yet (probably) only Piotr Chmielowski was privy to Mańkowski’s greatest secret. And this greatest secret was not the poet’s homosexuality...

For the person behind the pseudonym “Adam M-ski” was never “Adam Mańkowski,” but none other than Zofia Trzszczkowska (Mańkowski’s de facto daughter). Throughout her life, Trzszczkowska remained in the margins of literary life, contacting publishers and editors only by letter. Even in private correspondence (such as with Przesmycki) she remained “Adam.” In numerous poetry anthologies, her name was also given as Mańkowski.¹⁴ We should emphasize, though, that this transgenderism was solely a literary project, and did not have such a significant influence on her private and family life as with another poetess of Young Poland, Maria Komornicka. At the age of just 17, Zofia married Waclaw Trzszczkowski. Since her husband was an officer in the Tsarist army, she spent many years in Russia, and in 1877, dressed in a male soldier’s uniform, she went to the Turkish war. From 1889, the couple lived in their family’s home town of Dorohowica. Initially, Zofia tried to conform to the role of “wife” and “Eastern Marches woman” imposed on her by stereotypes and social conventions. However, her letters show that she was not a happy wife, and felt lonely and unfulfilled. She often mentions that her early poems were destroyed by “friendly hands” – doubtless those of her husband.¹⁵

¹⁴ E.g. Jan Kasprowicz’s *Album współczesnych poetów polskich 1863–1898* from 1899, or Kazimierz Królikowski’s *Antologia współczesnych poetów polskich* from 1908.

¹⁵ For more on Zofia Trzszczkowska see: Chojnicka-Skawińska, Wanda, “Adam M-ski (1847–1911),” in: Wyka, Kazimierz, Artur Hutnikiewicz, and Mirosława Puchalska, *Obrazy literatury polskiej. Literatura okresu Młodej Polski*, vol. 1. Warszawa: PWN, 1968; A. Baranowska “Ja się nie skarzę” (Zofia Trzszczkowska), in: idem, *Kraj modernistycznego cierpienia*. Warszawa: PIW, 1981; Olech, Barbara, “Samotność i Kresy. Wokół biografii i twórczości Adama M-skiego (Zofii z Mańkowskich Trzszczkowskiej),” in: Feliksiak, Elżbieta and Elżbieta Sidoruk (ed.), *Wilno i ziemia Mickiewiczowskiej pamięci. Materiały III Międzynarodowej Konferencji w Białymstoku, 9–12 X 1998, w trzech tomach*, vol. II: *W kręgu literatury i sztuki*. Białystok: Towarzystwo Literackie, 2000; Olech, Barbara, “Zmistyfikowana tożsamość Adama M-skiego (Zofii Trzszczkowskiej),” in: Wiśniewska, Lidia (ed.), *Tożsamość i rozdwojenie. Rekonesans*, Bydgoszcz: Wydawnictwo Akademii Bydgoskiej, 2002; Legutko, Grażyna, “Maska i twarz. Rzecz o autokreacji Zofii Trzszczkowskiej,” in: Stępnik, Krzysztof and Monika Gabrys (ed.), *Kresowianki. Krąg pisarek heroicznych*. Lublin: Wydawnictwo UMCS, 2006; Skucha, Mateusz, *Jako cień byłam i jak cień odchodzę. Poetyckie maskarady Zofii Trzszczkowskiej* [forthcoming].

Trzszczkowska is today counted among the female poets of Young Poland, her works placed alongside those of Komornicka, Ostrowska, Wolska, Zawistowska, and Grossek-Korycka. As a result of this position, her texts are of course read as “women’s lyric poetry.”¹⁶ Yet there is no doubt that she was treated by her contemporaries as simply a poet and translator (rather than a female one), concealed behind the pseudonym “Adam M-ski.”

There is now one problem with which we must deal: does this news – that the author of “Statue” was a woman – change something in our earlier interpretation? Theoretically, it should not. After all, we were talking about the persona or speaker of the poem, meaning the character coming out of the text, rather than from the author’s true biography. This is a speaker who is a homosexual man and is dependent on his fascination with the visualization of another man’s body, and therefore, becomes only a gaze and speech, and it is in this gaze and speech that his subjectivity is realized. Finally, we were talking about a speaker who does a series of things to mask and “soften” the homoerotic potential of the text. The starting point of our reading was therefore the same as that of the readers of *Ateneum* in 1894: i.e., the author of the poem is a man.

And yet... knowing about the “true sex” of the author changes our approach to the text. I suspect that “Statue” in part loses its homoerotic load and its authenticity. Its foundation ceases to be the – previously tacitly assumed – homosexual desire of the actual author. The reader now basically has two ways out of this situation: 1.) a “gay reading” – with Derrida’s famous *il n’y a pas de hors-texte*, one can comment on the poem in categories of homoeroticism, looking for a homosexual subtext and ways of masking homoerotic desire, remembering at the same time that it was a female poet who constructed the male homosexual speaker. This is (more or less) the type of reading which I presented above. 2.) A “feminist reading: the starting point here is the biography of the author (unknown to her contemporary readers). Yet the reading itself would have to concentrate on the heterosexual desire masked by male authorship and the male lyric “I.” It would prove that the actual speaker of “Statue” is a woman who desires the body of a man, but must assume a male identity, since – as French postfeminists headed by Irigaray and Cixous have written – female *jouissance* is inexpressible in phallogocentric language. Such an interpretation of the poem could of course be equally fascinating and valid.

However, I have doubts as to whether I really have to choose one of these paths and at the same time reject the other: whether I really have to assume such a reading strategy, and not another. Perhaps there is a third way? Note that both of the above assumptions (“gay reading” and “feminist reading”) concern the constitution of the speaker (homosexual or female respectively). The direction of the reading is therefore dependent on the recognition of the “I” persona. Incidentally, such a recognition is elementary for both feminist and gay criticism. Both reading strategies attempt to describe the strong identity (female or homosexual) attached to the text. They are interested in how this identity comes to be incorporated, and then uncovered or demonstrated.

¹⁶ For example Jerzy Świąch in his unpublished 1968 doctoral thesis entitled *Twórczość poetycka Zofii Trzszczkowskiej (Adama M-skiego)*.

Texts and the Body

In “Statue,” the speaker’s identity is weak, unstable, unspecified and shifting. Our ideas about it need to be supported by our extratextual assumptions. It is an identity that is always moving, constantly on the edge – floating between man and woman, woman and man, from homosexual to heterosexual desire, heterosexual to homosexual desire. An identity that escapes all classifications. As I said above, it is an identity dependent on the subject of the desire.

In such a situation – when the problem of gender, and subsequently the problem of the desire (hetero- or homosexual, generated by determining this gender identity) moves away from centre stage – “Statue” becomes a text about rapture in itself. Utter and all-encompassing carnal rapture beyond any binary opposition of gender. Rapture in which the identity of the enraptured person ceases to exist, is washed away, becoming rapture alone. And finally, the rapture that can be aroused by a beautiful, sexual, male body. After all, one of the sensational things about the poem is that what is being watched and desired is a man reduced to his carnality.

In addition, this is erotic rapture, full of desire. That is why this is also a text about desire of a male body, wishing for closeness and touch. Wanting to touch therefore means wanting a carnal response, relationality. This is therefore a desire, as the poem says, that is a desire of another desire. The attempts to bring the Greek sculpture to life conceal a wish to attain an answer, a will to be desired. And the stake in this game of desires is high, because “it is Wanting that allows a person to say ‘I’¹⁷ and thus contributes to the constitution of the identity. “Wanting another want, we want recognition of ourselves. It is thanks to the recognition from others that we will ultimately be able to say I, which means that I am constructed from information given in return reflected from other wanting. In other words: I attain my identity thanks to the recognition of others” (Markowski 1999b). In trying to bring the statue of the man to life, the protagonist of the poem is essentially looking for his/her own identity, own I. An I which desires male desire, an erotic requited touch. And it is in this moment that all the tragedy contained in the poem emerges: the sculpture remains a lifeless stone. No requited desire exists. Touch is impossible. The I who desires the male body – irrespective of whether this is a heterosexual female I or a male homosexual I – is impossible, cannot exist in the textual space. In other words, both the heterosexual female *jouissance* and the homosexual male *jouissance* are inexpressible in the phallogocentric, heteronormative language, as the man as body, as sexual object is unthinkable in this language. This is why the unattainable body of the statue remains an unattainable body of a statue. The speaker remains an erotic, enraptured gaze.

This third interpretive path, which I have been following since a certain point, and which allowed me to read “Statue” as a text about crossing the boundaries of subjectivity, about rapture and desire, is a queer reading strategy. To generalize, queer studies has two sources: gender studies and gay studies. In order to understand the essence of

¹⁷ Markowski, Michał Paweł, *Dyskurs i pragnienie*, introduction to: Barthes, Roland, *Fragments of discourse of love* [A Lover’s Discourse: Fragments] (trans. Marek Bieńczyk). Warszawa: KR, 1999b: 12.

queer theory, then, we need first of all to ask about its relations with these two fields. In gender studies the overriding problem is the gender difference, whereas in queer studies it is the sexual difference that becomes the most important matter. To be more specific, we should say that the gender difference is based mostly on the performativity of the genders, the imitation of gender models, striving for the (unattainable) gender ideal. This leads to the study, contesting and deconstruction of the male-female, men-women oppositions. The sexual difference, meanwhile, is always relational, assuming the existence of an Other, and connected to desire. This is why the main opposition (undermined, destabilized here) is the heterosexuality-homosexuality opposition. We must remember, however, that these conclusions are rather a question of which problems are accented more in a given moment: male-female oppositions and the deconstruction of gender norms (gender studies) or the hetero-homo opposition and deconstruction of sexual norms (queer studies).

If we consider the difference between gay studies and queer studies, the simplest point to make is that in the former case, scholars are especially interested in how the sexual difference refers to male gender identity, while queer studies theorists study – as stated earlier – the sexual difference per se, detached from gender. At the basis of gay studies, then, is the connection between gender and sexuality, where the key role is played by the heterosexuality-homosexuality distinction. As a result of this, a description of identity common to a certain group appears. We therefore speak here of essentialism: “some kind” of essence exists, the foundation common to the whole group. This essence is the identity which is common (i.e. “group”), cohesive and stable. In the case of queer theory, meanwhile, there is no specific group, because this theory is about deconstructions of the (fundamental to gay studies) hetero-homo opposition. In other words, in queer theory there is no model of a common and stable identity conditioned by the choice of object of desire, since queer theory problematizes and places in doubt homosexual identity. This is why the following is said about constructivism: everything (including gender, identity, the body, sexuality) is a socio-cultural construct which – as it is constructed – can also be deconstructed.

Two theorists were particularly important in the development of queer theory: Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick and Judith Butler. In *Gender Trouble*, Butler raises the status of the very term “queer” to the level of a concept of discourse defining identity, showing that queer does not force through any specific identity, but rather only criticizes all normative identities, demonstrating the internal instability of gender identities. As its starting point, queer theory therefore questions the existence of stable (gender) identities, at the same time emphasizing the movement of these identities, escape from the power of discourse and avoiding restricting categories. This is therefore a theory of non-identity concepts, or (more strongly) anti-identity ones.

In addition, to draw from the ideas of Michel Foucault,¹⁸ queer theorists aim to destabilize the meaning of such words as “femininity,” “masculinity,” “homosexuality,” and

¹⁸ A particularly popular issue among queer theorists is that of the subjugation of the individual, i.e. very generally, the creation in the individual of such an I whose

“heterosexuality.” By showing their functioning in the social discourse as constructs, they prove that these are a source of violence.

One of the most interesting queer theorists is Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick and her *Epistemology of the Closet* (1990). The “closet” in question is a symbolic representation of the situation in which gays and lesbians find themselves, imprisoned and enclosed. Marginalized people who wish to come out of the closet and function in the space outside of it have available to them only the categories (mostly linguistic ones) of those from “outside” the closet. Yet these categories are oppressive to them, since they were developed by the system (social discourse), which – to employ these same categories – pushed them into the closet. Therefore, as Joanna Mizielińska writes, scholars dealing in queer theory

Proposed that identity categories be scrapped owing to their instability and exclusive character. According to them, the dominant discourse always assumes and is based on the existence of a margin [...], while the social production of identity is always recompensed by the logic of exclusions, creation of hierarchies and normalisation.¹⁹

Returning to literature and reading strategies, we can say that gay critics are interested in a strong, stable homosexual identity that is part of – and is often masked in – the text of culture. Queer criticism, meanwhile, attempts to grasp in texts that weak identity, non-identity, that is in eternal motion. To summarize, I would like to cite five quotations that illustrate how different theoretical positions concerning queer are today. Diana Fuss: queer theory examines the mutual links “of identification and desire, of sexual difference and sexual differences, of heterosexuality and homosexuality, and, finally, of inside and out.”²⁰ Alexander Doty: “‘queer’ would be reserved for those films and popular culture texts, spectator positions, pleasures and readings that articulate spaces outside normative straight understanding of gender and sexuality.”²¹ David Halperin: “queer is by definition *whatever* is at odds with the normal, the legitimate, the dominant. *There is nothing in particular to which it necessarily refers.* It is an identity without an essence.”²² Jacek Kochanowski: “queer theory can only be post-theory (as a reflection not aspiring to any complete description) and at the same time anti-theory (as a reflection striving for destabilisation of ‘scientific’ gender and sexual theories).”²³ Inga Iwasiów: for queer theory, “more important is the disturbance than the result itself. The movement is more

constituent basis is the internalisation of the norm, thanks to which normative identities arise – with the norm working almost from within – susceptible to the effects of the power of discourse (see Kochanowski 2004).

¹⁹ Mizielińska, Joanna, “Poza kategoriami. Kilka uwag na temat queer theory,” *Furia Pierwsza* 2000 no. 7: 9.

²⁰ Fuss, Diana, *Inside/Out*. New York: Routledge, 1991: 8.

²¹ Doty, Alexander, *Making Things Perfectly Queer: Interpreting Mass Culture*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1993: 223.

²² Halperin, David. *Saint Foucault: Towards a Gay Hagiography*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997: 62.

²³ Kochanowski, Jacek, *Bardzo skromna zachęta do teorii queer*, www.republika.pl/queer.

important than the identity.” This is because queer is a discourse, movement going beyond, an explosion of the movable limits of experience.²⁴ For queer, what is important is breaking, crossing, deconstructing those qualities that are connected with gender, sexuality, and desire.²⁵

To conclude, I would like to add that the three reading simulations I have presented are not mutually exclusive, but rather complement one another. They are more a question of emphasizing and extracting certain contents hidden in a text than an attempt to make sharp and distinct divisions and classifications, which in the postmodern reality were long ago placed in doubt.

Translation: Benjamin Koschalka

²⁴ Iwasiów, Inga, “Gender, tożsamość, stereotypy,” *Ruch Literacki*. 2002 no. 6: 553.

²⁵ I write more on this subject in the article “Gender. Queer. Literatura” (*Ruch Literacki*, 2005, issue 6).

Dariusz ŚNIEŻKO

How Did the Old Polish Body Read? Somatic Experiences of Reading

Allen Ginsberg once said that poetry is words arranged in a way that sends shivers down our spines. This is of course not how literary studies might define poetry, but a colloquial way of recognizing it by the way it works on us, its characteristic symptoms. Or, one might even say, diagnosis – as the term “symptom” refers to medical discourse. So there are texts that sends shivers down our spines, but also others (or sometimes the same ones) that make our hair stand up on end, make us laugh, cry, yawn, feel nauseous, bring a flush to our cheeks, or induce erotic excitement. Each of these reactions is an instinctive one, and so, although triggered by the work of the mind, it is not subject to its control, or is only with the greatest difficulty. In allowing the act of reading, the body reads in its own way, which is not always particularly refined and not, as particularly authors in the past were given to believe, honest. In doing this it makes its own demands, such as for basic comfort and lighting, and suggests preferences – as in the well-known academic adage *plenus venter non studet libenter* – as well as imposing restrictions by rationing periods of attention and focus, which even Benedictine diligence found itself unable to prolong infinitely.

The body, which tends to be ignored in literary reports on reading, seeking above all to be spiritual sittings, sometimes comes up in phraseology – such as when we read something “in one breath” or when, conversely, the travails of sitting for too long in one place reading leave us with a numbed rear (to put it euphemistically). Drowsiness or freshness, satiety or hunger, along with other categories of this type, establish a link between reading and fundamental bodily needs, independent of any reading activity that the body engages in. The body provides the effort that reading requires, but it can also experience relaxation itself during the reading.

One might suggest that its cooperation and reactions are, roughly speaking, dependent on three factors (apologies for the crudeness of this divide): the source, the carrier and the circumstances. This, at least, is the conclusion that can be drawn not so much from psycho-physiological diagnoses of reading – an area that is not my major object of interest – as literary (in a very broad sense) reports and descriptions. This includes testimonies and declarations that are affected, snobbish, amplified or parodic, or in some other way related to conventions seen as attractive or binding. Some reactions recorded in literature go no further than the repertoire of everyday experience, while others are reliant on the previous metaphorisation of the reading act itself. We believe Stanislas Hosius when he says that Statius' *The Silvae* can bring on fatigue and yawning, but are less inclined to believe Waclaw Potocki's assertion that reading inferior poems can cause someone to vomit; it is obvious, though, that this motif is a variation of the topos that is the metaphor of the book as food.

Shivers down our spines, laughter, tears, physical symptoms of fear or excitement, sleeplessness or sleepiness, reflexes of aversion, fatigue (with a longer text) or disgust – these are some of the most typical effects of the *source*. Of course, these comprise the whole of the communicative situation, in the sense that its effects also depend on the context and the relationship linking the sender with the recipient. As for the *carrier*, the most characteristic effects would depend, firstly, on its type: different things are required from the body for unfurling a scroll, leafing through a codex, or deciphering a stone inscription or wax tablet (for example, covered in a green coating for the comfort of the eyes) or a digital file – which in some respects, incidentally, resembles an ancient scroll, but unrolled “vertically.” Carriers have their durability, smell, weight, dimensions and – most importantly for the eye – a degree of legibility. Codices will always remember their physical encounters with readers, especially those in love. As Erasmus of Rotterdam wrote:

Those who love books do not leave them untouched on their bookshelves but take them in their hands day and night so that they become used, dirty and covered with notes, and of various kinds; stained; those who prefer to see the marks of the mistakes scratched out by them than a mistaken but good-looking text.¹

The influence and type of *circumstances* of our relations with books comprise the most troublesome material for any typology. The time that it is necessary or worth investing in reading – both the amount and the time of day – have been easy to stereotype in literary terms. *Otium* and *negotium*, especially institutional obligation to read (in schools or monasteries), individual or collective reading, aloud or silent, at home, a library or on travels, while or before eating (this had a certain significance for Old Polish authors) in a sitting, lying, standing or kneeling position, with natural or artificial light – these are just some of the demands that external circumstances, so to speak, place on the spine, fingers and eyes. In addition, there are the determinants of the organism itself: in particular age, health, and eyesight. It would not be hard to name many more. For

¹ Quoted in Gruchała, Janusz S., *Iucunda familia librorum. Humanisci renesansowi w świecie książki*. Kraków: Universitas, 2002: 172.

example, *acedia*, the serious, Christian form of melancholy described by St Nilus (*De octo spiritibus malitiae*), did not help the afflicted person's concentration when reading:

Bothered by anxiety but soon falls asleep; or rubs his face with both hands, straightens his fingers and, putting the book down, looks at the wall; returning to the book, he skims several lines, muttering the end of each word he reads; at the same time he fills his head with some idle sums, counts the pages in his notebook; and, gathering hatred for the letters and beautiful illustrations before his eyes, he closes the book and puts it under his head; then falling into a short and light sleep, from which he is woken by a feeling of a sudden and great hunger.²

One might imagine that it would be especially these last two aspects of reading – the carrier and the circumstances – that would make up the subject of a book called *The Alchemy of Reading*, which at least in part constitutes a symmetrical equivalent to Jan Parandowski's *The Alchemy of the Word*, devoted to the conditions – sometimes typical, sometimes peculiar – of effective and pleasant contact with a book. Some people are especially sensitive to its smell, others to the type of paper and binding; for some, poetry is only palatable at night, and a newspaper only over breakfast. An interesting 16th-century peculiarity was a special library machine resembling a mill wheel and dispensing a succession of books, designed by Agostino Ramelli for readers whose movement was restricted by illness (*La diverse et artificiose machine del Capitano Agostino Ramelli*, Paris 1588).

The three aspects of somatic reading named above do of course meet in every reading venture. Some effects – for example, magical ones – may have had an especially distinct need for not only an appropriate source, but a carrier and circumstances as well. To quote Rabelais' ironic words, reading St Margaret brought relief to women in confinement. When the passion was read to the lunatic protagonist of the 16th-century history of Francesco Spiera, he writhed around on his bed and roared like a lion, begging them to stop.³ Finally, as *Gesta Romanorum* testifies, an appropriate writing (even unread) can take away the desire to love, as long as it is put under the sheets in advance.⁴

At the same time, then, reading can become a bodily need, as one can become addicted to it. This was how Petrarch wrote of his supposedly entirely physical hunger for books – with enthusiasm and exaltation; Franciszek Karpiński too wrote with bitterness of the ruinous reading habit. This kind of writers' self-creation corresponded to the metaphors, popular among humanists, of consuming, or even devouring books. Cicero described Cato as *helluo librorum*, a devourer of books; a similar description was used

² Quoted in: M. Bieńczyk, *Melancholia. O tych, co nigdy nie odnajdą straty*. Warszawa: Sic!, 2000: 97-98.

³ Murzynowski, Stanisław, "Historyja żaloszna a straszliwa o Franciszku Spierze" oraz "Ortografija polska," ed. Janusz Małek and Franciszek Peplowski. Olsztyn: Pojezierze, 1974: 93.

⁴ *Gesta Romanorum. Historie rzymskie*, Polish version Paweł Hertz. Warszawa: Iskry, 2001: 185 [English edition: *Gesta Romanorum. A Record of Auncient Histories*, ed. Richard Robinson, 1630].

for Andrzej Krzycki by Stanislaus Hosius (Stanisław Hozjusz),⁵ whose biographers wrote the same about him – in his youth, his father is said to have hidden books from him out of concern for his son's health.⁶ Even if such statements were imbued with emphasis, this was no accidental trope. Since addiction to the written word was seen as being purely spiritual in nature, it can be presented and described only by using paramedical language, as if reading provided particular endorphins of “happiness hormones,” the lack of which causes withdrawal symptoms as well known to lovers of chocolate as to those who “cannot see a world without books.” Petrarch maintained that he preferred to pore over books throughout the night than to sleep and rest; apparently, when doctors took his books away from him, he started having migraines and fevers (Gruchała 2002: 138-139); the Pole Piotr Tomicki, addled with illness and fatigue in his old age, ignored the advice of physicians, who forbade reading (Bieńkowska 62).

One might expect that these tropes would lead to the pleasures and delights of the text as a category of research and reading experience. Roland Barthes declared that “[t]he text gives me bliss,”⁷ but, as Mikołaj Rej wrote, Poles too have a language of their own, and “Reading is a great pleasure.”⁸ And as usual, he went on to unfurl a tempting vision to the honest man:

Is it not a delight to be able to read, having lain down beneath a pretty little tree among manifold beautiful and fragrant flowers or in winter on your pretty and blissful bed, so that you can speak with those wise old men, with those manifold philosophers, from whom you will find the great consolation of your old age, in which you will find a lesson for every matter you contemplate? (Rej 2003)

More than once, Rej encouraged constructive, useful reading, but this delight, which in the writer's language means no more than ordinary pleasure, is not so much the endowment of a good text as a value resulting from a favorable coincidence of reading factors, as well (or above all) as physiological needs. This means lying with a book, and the notes in the margin are the icing on the cake: “From reading comes an old person's delight.” The implied delight of reading in place of the lost delight of the embrace or hunting, the pleasure of lying around forced by age, called the “solace of old age” by Rej himself, are not a goal; they certainly lack that element of disinterested joy contained in the French word *jouissance*. They are just a lure, a sweetener making it easier to swallow the bland medicine of constructive reading, pointing the simplest way to the Lord.

It is easy to ascribe this example to the Old Polish topos of life as the four seasons – which is also characteristic of Rej. Winter as old age and winter the season offer similar

⁵ Hozjusz, Stanisław [Stanislaus Hosius], “Pochwała Filipa Kallimacha, męża doświadczonego [...],” in: idem, *Poezje*, intro. Władysław Odyniec (trans. Anna Kamieńska). Olsztyn: Pojezierze, 1980: 6-7.

⁶ Bieńkowska, Barbara, *Staropolski świat księzek*. Wrocław: Ossolineum, 1976: 62.

⁷ Barthes, Roland, *The Pleasure of the Text* (trans. Richard Miller). New York: Farrar, Strauss and Giroux, 1975: 34.

⁸ Rej, Mikołaj, *Żywoć człowieka poczwiwego*, ed. Julian Krzyżanowski, vol. 2, Wrocław–Warszawa: Zakład Narodowy im. Ossolińskich, De Agostini Polska, 2003: 599.

diversions. According to Old Polish authors such as Andrzej Zbylitowski, reading and drinking allowed one to fill the surfeit of time in the winter.⁹ As the 17th-century encyclopedist Jakub Kazimierz Haur wrote, “[f]or the reading of the library, so necessary, winter will be suitable with its long night which there is no way of sleeping through.”¹⁰ So sitting up late at night, reading and reading because one can only sleep so much – this was the difference that effectively safeguarded landowning readers from becoming addicted to their modest libraries.¹¹ Even if such things did happen, it was to “fashionable” ladies of leisure, as Haur called them, passionate readers, day and night, of secular and not spiritual literature – so satisfying the body, almost demanding their portion of romances and gossip (Kowalski 2000). In the catalogue of gentlemen’s pursuits, “amusement with books” held an inferior position, and among the ladies representing worldly delights in the work of Hieronim Morsztyn, one would not find the Maid of Reading. “At what do ignoramus men play?,” asked Waclaw Potocki, answering:

They drink; cards and draughts in turn they play
Feed their dogs and refuse knowledge of school
The other, come from the threshing floor, though through glasses
With nothing else, the old man reads the calendar.¹²

Similar verdicts were delivered by, for example, Sebastian Petrycy from Pilzno, and Wespazjan Kochowski.

There is little doubt that, whereas for most contemporary readers the reading act seems to be an entirely internalized non-bodily communication with the text (or its author), in the 16th and 17th centuries reading – intensive, often repeated and annotated – was a practice that was to a considerably higher degree conscious of its own physicality. This was even linked to the tradition of rhetorical gesticulation and old anatomical knowledge (the so-called “hands” in the margins were supposed to indicate important points in a text, and at the same time “hold” it, meaning help to understand it).¹³ On the other hand, it does not appear that our ancestors attached any special attention to the corporeal circumstances and effects of reading – Old Polish material, judging from sample views, proves to be less than modest in this regard; we can say the same, albeit to a lesser

⁹ Zbylitowski, Andrzej, “Wieśniak,” in: *Staropolska poezja ziemiańska. Antologia*, ed. Janusz S. Gruchała and Stanisław Grzeszczuk. Warszawa: PIW, 1988: 173–174.

¹⁰ Haur, Jakub Kazimierz, *Skład albo skarbiec znakomitych sekretów oekonomijej ziemiańskiej*. Kraków, 1693: 166.

¹¹ See Kowalski, Piotr, *Theatrum świata wszystkiego i poćwiwy gospodarz. O wizji świata pewnego siedemnastowiecznego pisarza ziemiańskiego*. Kraków: Wydawnictwo UJ, 2000: 90–96.

¹² Potocki, Waclaw “Odjemek herbów szlacheckich,” in: idem, *Dziela, vol. 3: Moralia i inne utwory z lat 1688–1696*, intro. Barbara Otwinowska, ed. Leszek Kukulski. Warszawa: PIW, 1987: 480.

¹³ Sherman, William H., “Toward a History of the Manicule,” in: Myers, Robin, Michael Harris and Giles Mandelbrote (ed.), *Owners, Annotators, and the Signs of Reading*, New Castle, DE and London: Oak Knoll Press & The British Library, 2005: 23–26, 35–36.

extent, about European (15th and 16th century) reflections on the physiology of readers' perceptions (Gruchała 2002: 173). An internet database which compiles reports from British readers' experiences (from 1450-1945)¹⁴ has not yet made its collection available, since the number of records remains too low. It is also noteworthy that books, which are so readily anthropomorphized in the topos motif of parting with the author,¹⁵ have usually been presented as non-bodily friends or solely spiritual progeny. Incidentally, in Old Polish forewords and dedications the word "book" itself usually referred to the message, rather than the object.¹⁶

It is not surprising, then, that most surviving mentions concern the effects of the source itself, and thus speak of the reactions triggered by, for example, works of comedy or love. These testimonies, so few and far between, could at least point to the Horatian reflection on the desired link between representation and reaction: like triggers like, tears lead to tears, laughter elicits laughter. "Love lured by love rules," as the imitator of Horace, Łukasz Opaliński, put it.¹⁷ This group also includes the popular historiographical topos, deriving from Salustius, according to which the acts of one's ancestors bring to readers a kind of physical arousal of similar advantages. A different group of testimonies (from Andrzej Krzycki to, let's say, Waclaw Potocki) document the physical effects of communing with what we would today call a graphomaniacal book. These are dominated by scatological depictions. We must also consider here cases of unintended laughter or sleep which graphomaniacal solemnity leads to. Both collections of examples use physiological motifs with the aim of discrediting the text or its author, and as such they should be viewed not so much as a record of reading experiences as, above all, valuing amplifications. An even more modest group is that of testimonies on the somatic consequences resulting from the description of the carrier and the circumstances accompanying the reading.

"Did the Sarmatians even have a body?," asked Tadeusz Chrzanowski in a well-known essay. He then warned, "The answer is not easy, since there are few sources on this subject, and the evidence of such existence is not irrefutable."¹⁸ On the one hand, developing the views of Hippocrates and Galen, the medical discourse based on the analogy between the micro- and macrocosmos assumed a holistic approach to physical

¹⁴ Hammond, Mary, "The Reading Experience Database 1450-1945 (RED)," in: Myers, Harris and Mandelbrote 2005).

¹⁵ See Maleszyński, Dariusz C., *Człowiek w tekście. Formy istnienia według literatury staropolskiej*. Poznań: Wydawnictwo Naukowe UAM, 2002 (chapter "Książki, które mówią").

¹⁶ Bienkowska, Barbara, "Polscy pisarze i uczeni XVI-XVII wieku wobec problematyki książki, in: Grzeszczuk, Stanisław and Alodia Kawecka-Gryczowa (eds), *Dawna książka i kultura. Materiały międzynarodowej sesji naukowej z okazji pięćsetlecia sztuki drukarskiej w Polsce*. Wrocław: Zakład Narodowy im. Ossolińskich, 1975: 309.

¹⁷ Opaliński, Łukasz, "Poeta nowy," in: idem, *Poeta nowy. Coś nowego*. Kraków: Universitas, 2003: 9.

¹⁸ Chrzanowski, Tadeusz, "Ciało sarmackie," in: idem, *Wędrowki po Sarmacji Europejskiej. Eseje o sztuce i kulturze staropolskiej*. Kraków: Znak, 1988: 224.

and psychological human nature.¹⁹ The proportions of humours conditioned the type of temperament, physiognomy and predisposition to illness; here there was also room for the beginnings of the bibliotherapy that is developing so intensively today. Therefore, among the numerous remedies for melancholy, that most fashionable affliction of the age, we find – alongside wine, riding, letting of black bile and incision of haemorrhoids – cheerful reading. François Rabelais, a physician by training, was only half-joking when he claimed that his books brought considerable relief to those with the pox and gout, as well as other sick and tormented people who did not happen to have the author, the doctor, at their beck and call.²⁰ The baroque polymath Jakub Kazimierz Haur also recommended to melancholics to “read and listen to something diverting.”²¹

There is no need to add that the reverse also holds, and an excess of reading can be harmful, since as Ecclesiastes warned (in Marcin Bielski’s Polish translation), “Long reading is hard work for the body.”²² It is true, concluded Andrzej Glaber of Kobylin, the author of a Renaissance medical handbook, that nature gave man two cushions on his rear, to make lengthy sitting more tolerable,²³ but this comfort did not safeguard against more threatening consequences. The same author warns against reading after lunch, and against excessive reading in general, because this stops natural warmth from moving down to the stomach to aid digestion,

and so it feeds, left in freshness and being abandoned, rots and turns in the bad and indigestible damp, from which various illnesses come. This is why people who spend much time sitting with books are rarely fat, but commonly pale or still sick, and this is due to bad digestion of food, with which they harm themselves by sitting long; this is how we know that he who has a fat belly does not learn much (unless he has it by nature) (Glaber 1893: 108-109).

This stereotype of exhausting reading was later maintained by Szymon Maricius from Pilzno, who argued that “The work of scholars, especially professors, is no lighter than any other work, because (as all physicians agree) it harms the health and brings serious illnesses, damages strength and brings on old age.”²⁴ Polydorus Vergilius’ work *De*

¹⁹ See Jaeger, Werner, *Paideia: the Ideals of Greek Culture: In Search of the Divine Centre* (trans. Gilbert Highet). Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1986 (chapter: “Greek Medicine as Paideia”).

²⁰ Rabelais, François, *Gargantua and Pantagruel* (trans. Thomas Urquhart, Peter Antony Motteux). Warszawa: Hollywood, FL: Simon & Brown, 2013: 184, 206.

²¹ See Partyka, Joanna, “Humor w encyklopedii J. K. Haura,” in: Karpiński, Adam, Estera Lasocińska and Mirosława Hanusiewicz (ed.), *Śmiech i łzy w kulturze staropolskiej*. Warszawa: Wydawnictwo IBL PAN, 2003: 115.

²² Bielski, Marcin, *Kronika, to jest historia świata [...]*. Kraków, 1564: k. 82 [*New International Version of the Bible*: “much study wears the body” – Ecclesiastes 12:12].

²³ Andrzej z Kobylina, *Gadki o składności członków człowieczych z Arystotelesa i też innych mędrców wybrane*. 1535. Kraków: wyd. J. Rostański, 1893: 61

²⁴ Szymon Maricius z Pilzna, “O szkołach czyli akademiach ksiąg dwoje,” in: *Wybór pism pedagogicznych Polski doby Odrodzenia*, ed. Józef Skoczek. Wrocław: Zakład Narodowy im. Ossolińskich, 1956: 168.

inventoribus rerum libri tres (Paris 1505) shows a woodcut depicting a scholar at work in a rather unsterotypical pose: in a gesture of discouragement, leaning away from his desk on which a closed book lies, he wipes his tired face with a handkerchief.²⁵ We also know from Cervantes that the brain of his masterpiece's hero ran dry from intemperate consumption of knightly romances, and similarly in Charles Sorel we may find the motif of the extravagant shepherd whose head has been fuddled by romances.²⁶ Furthermore, as Leo Spitzer showed, in the language of the era we should speak here of humoral pathology resulting from quantitative abuse.²⁷

Yet, on the other hand, of course, the body, in line with the devil and the world, was one of the anti-heroes of religious and parenetic writing, often consigned to the corner not only by ascetic authors, but also by those who – at least it would seem – cared so much about its comfort, such as Rej. This was at the root of the hierarchy of instinctive reactions, including reading ones. Valued highest were tears, or rather their gift, because crying, especially out of remorse or penance (Mary Magdalene being the best example) was an act in which the body condemned itself, so to speak.

It was another matter with laughter, especially the spontaneous, unbridled variety, in which the unruly body, slipping out of the control of the higher parts of the soul, conducted a kind of self-affirmation, defending itself from damaging humours. The spleen was responsible for laughter, since, as the inestimable Glaber noted, “in it is the place of melancholy, which creates sorrow, thus when to the spleen comes joy, the opposite thing to sorrow, it is moved so that it must shake: opposite things always struggle with each other” (Glaber 1893 59). Yet this same impulse is close to insanity, with which it is contrasted, and somebody inclined to laugh at anything not only has an impressive spleen, but “is so thick in reason and food, straightforward, vain and unstable, soon faithful, not mysterious, but slow to serve.” And in contrast, people who are reserved with their laughter are attentive, level-headed and of sound reason (though mean and mistrustful) (152). It was therefore understood that the medieval monastic rules subjected laughter to strict regulation.²⁸ Humanism, returning dignity to laughter after Aristotle (On the Parts of Animals, Book III, 10), for whom the human was the only animal capable of this reflex, did not eschew the idea of the uncontrolled autonomy of

²⁵ Reproduction in: Bienkowska, Barbara, *Staropolski Świat ksiązek*. Wrocław: Zakład Narodowy im. Ossolińskich, 1976: 66.

²⁶ Sorel, Charles, *Przygody Francjona. Opowieść ucieszna* (trans. Joanna Arnold), ed. Krzysztof Choiński. Warszawa: Czytelnik, 1986, p. 226 [English ed.: *A Critical Edition of “The Comical History of Francion,”* ed. Daniel A. Gajda (trans. John Wright). Chicago: Spectrum Press, 2005].

²⁷ Auerbach, Erich, “Zaczarowana Dulcinea,” in: idem, *Mimesis. Rzeczywistość przedstawiona w literaturze Zachodu* (trans. and intro Zbigniew Babicki), intro to 2nd ed. Michał P. Markowski. Warszawa: Prószyński i S-ka, 2004: 341 [English ed.: “The Enchanted Dulcinea,” in: *Mimesis: The Representation of Reality in Western Literature* (trans. Willard R. Trask). Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2003.]

²⁸ Curtius, Ernst Robert, *European Literature and the Latin Middle Ages* (trans. Willard R. Trask). Princeton, NJ; Princeton University Press, 1990: 420.

laughter. As Antonio Riccoboni wrote in his treatise on the comedy, laughter is a physical expression of joy which comes from the loosening of the soul. “One sees how the chest, mouth, veins, face, eyes are conquered by the picture of merry thing, which takes control over the strength encompassing the spiritual inner.”²⁹ Similarly, the Pole Górnicki used the same psycho-physiology of laughter as a rather mysterious thing, stressing the sovereignty it has that cannot be reined in; “[b]ut what is laughter, where does it hide, since it is quick to shake free, so that a man, no matter how much he wants to cannot stop it, so whence does it come, that it enters one’s face, your eyes, mouth, veins, sides, as if one were about to explode, let Democritus dispute it.”³⁰ The respected variants of poetry were subject to the kingdom of the soul. Leonardo Salviati, an author of Renaissance poetry, maintained that the otherwise noble medicine, which caters for healing the body, remained behind poetry, which cares for the mind; he wrote that “[m]edicine requires very frequent manual fulfillment of unworthy services, while the poetic art is far from all carnal activity and works only on the strength of the mind itself.” And of course he meant serious, high poetry. This, as one might expect, led to the lower rank of comic works; not only because of their inferior protagonists and simple style, but also on account of the addressee of the intended effects, because this was not the spirit, nor the mind, but the body, with its reflexes and proportion of elements: after all, a humorous text is one that – etymologically speaking – corresponds with the humours and the body fluids and restores them to the right proportions.

Those works that were written for relaxation satisfied the function, in broad terms, of *delectare*, invoking the *ethos* (calm emotions), while more solemn books (the *movere* function) appealed to the *pathos* (excited and violent emotions). A surfeit of the latter, accumulated as a result of too intensive reading, rather like fatigue from excessive intellectual effort could be cured by an appropriate dose of entertainment applied in an epigram or interlude to reduce the risk of succumbing to melancholy. In the Polish Renaissance, this was often cited as a merit of ludic genres, especially in Mikołaj Rej’s self-commentary.³¹ He argued:

Do you not know that when the pitiful mood moves you,
The wise man writes that bones and blood run dry.
For if always alone people were to sit
Only thinking, without jokes, they would go quite mad.³²

²⁹ Riccoboni, Antonio, “O dziele komediowym – na podstawie nauk Arystotelesa,” in: Sarnowska-Temierusz, Elżbieta (ed. and intro.), *Poetyka okresu renesansu. Antologia*, Wrocław: Zakład Narodowy im. Ossolińskich, 1982: 392.

³⁰ Górnicki, Łukasz, *Dworzanin polski*, ed. Roman Pollak. Wrocław: Zakład Narodowy im. Ossolińskich, 1954: 199.

³¹ See Otwinowska, Barbara, “Afekty,” entry in: Michałowska, Teresa (ed.), with Barbara Otwinowska, Elżbieta Sarnowska-Temierusz, *Słownik literatury staropolskiej*. Wrocław: Zakład Narodowy im. Ossolińskich, 1998: 15.

³² Rej, Mikołaj, “Ku temu, co czyż będzie ty fraszki,” in: *Mala Muza od Reja do Leca. Antologia epigramatyki polskiej*, ed. Alina Siomkajło. Warszawa, PIW: 1986: 15.

Therefore, although the theory of temperaments was equally effectively (and based on the same conceptual system) explained by sadness and merriment, theoretical reflection linked an emphatic and witty style especially with sensual impressions; in some statements by poets themselves too, the differentiation between the spirit and the body coincided with the opposition between serious art and literature as entertainment. This difference was discussed by Waclaw Potocki in an epigram titled in this very way, *Rożnica* (“Difference”):

Amusing indeed is a joke given in verse;
But I have the most reverence:
That body, this soul pleases with its wit.
Yet to lively jokes, passing that, hurries
Especially when it is better to laugh than cry,
Though better to enter the house with tears than laughter.³³

He also repeated in his next work that epigrams “please the body, but bother the soul” (*Większy gust ludzie mają w fraszkach niż w rzeczach nabożnych!* “More taste people have in epigrams than in religious things”), as well as rebuking his readers for preferring to refresh the body with laughter than the soul with sighs (*Na poważne wiersze do czytelnika!* “For serious verses to the reader”). It therefore seems that this “carnality” of the epigrams was not exhibited by accident. And, as the poet’s other statements show, his friends in the nobility demanded poems from him like medicine (*Do przyjaciela, posyłając księgę wierszów!* “To a friend, sending a book of poems”), “for melancholy in the head of amusement” (*Każda rzecz ma swój czas!* “Each thing has its time”), or even a sleeping pill to finally calm down the young and demanding wife (*Słuchanie wierszów sen przywodzi!* “Listening to poems brings sleep”). Interestingly, this soporific quality of poems is not seen as a flaw; it was said that good poems bring sleep, although the author himself did not find satisfaction in this (*Do śpiącego, słuchając wierszów!* “To the sleeping one listening to poems”).

What, then, did the Old Polish body read? What did it demand? Merry epigrams, shaking melancholy out of the spleen, applied like medicine or, for the healthy, served as an appetizer. The well-known medieval metaphor of words and books as sustenance and reading as consumption is tinged almost by metonymic reality in reference to ludic literature. When Potocki said on more than one occasion that one must set about reading epigrams with a suitable predisposition, just as one must have a ready stomach for eating, he was sticking to a metaphor (expanded into a comparison here). Yet we do feel this when we shorten the distance between the theme and the carrier. But when were these epigrams read to guests? Before lunch, to kill time until the capon arrived, said Potocki (in more than one example), and in any case some needed convincing that “Better this than a game of cards or draughts.”³⁴ This motif also appears in Hiacynt

³³ Potocki, Waclaw, *Dziela*, vol. 1: *Transakcja wojny chocimskiej i inne utwory z lat 1669–1680*, intro. Barbara Otwinowska, ed. Leszek Kukulski. Warszawa: PIW, 1987: 385.

³⁴ Nowohracki na Krempaku, Cadasyłan, “Sakwy [...],” in: *Antologia literatury sowizdrzalskiej XVI i XVII wieku*, ed. Stanisław Grzeszczuk. Wrocław: Zakład Narodowy im. Ossolińskich, 1985: 327.

Texts and the Body

Przetocki's work, in the culinary composition *Pustny obiad albo zabaweczka* ("Lenten lunch or toy"):

Brother, what are you whistling, walking by before lunch,
Drying your tongue in vain and clearing your throat,
Read these simple verses; you will not yearn,
Until lunch arrives from the kitchen ready on the table.³⁵

Nocturnal winter readings, lying with a book in one's old age, school obligations, the university research that is so unkind to professorial bodies, chasing away melancholy, or finally mundane preprandial refreshment on epigrams – in each of these readerly occupations we can perceive some kind of necessity, regardless of whether the book is troubling or helpful. If we are to believe the humanists, they followed Horace in reading day and night, but this was supposed to be a kind of noble addiction, so again some kind of determination. This is both a small fraction of what can be said (and has been said) about the relationship of past culture with books and a rather specific approach. If we ask the Old Polish body about reading, it proves to have rather few words. When it does speak up, this is especially to express its own limitations.

Translation: Benjamin Koschalka

³⁵ Przetocki, Hiacynt, "Do starego i młodego czytelnika," in: idem, *Postny obiad albo zabaweczka*, ed. Sylwia Cegieta et al., acad. ed. Jan Malicki and Agnieszka Tułowicka. Katowice: Biblioteka Śląska, 2005.

Piotr SOBOLCZYK

Miron Białoszewski's hermetic pornographies

One of the so called “great themes” in literature – or at least the literature of the West – that appears in Białoszewski's work is the theme of love.¹ Scholars never really paid too much attention to this particular fact. Perhaps they were assuming that there is no point in talking about something that is not there, or that there are other, far more significant, themes to be touched upon. Then again, perhaps there was a fear of being misdirected and fooled by the results of reconstructing the remnants of “love discourse” in Miron Białoszewski's work. Misdirection would consequently lead into the dangerous realm of literary “margins” – namely, the homoerotic. The author freely moved among numerous myths of his own culture, oftentimes assuming an outsider position. It was an interesting position to take, since it allowed for recognition of elements of a “common world,” and simultaneously allowed for the extraction of new meanings.

The question of the love theme becomes even more intriguing, since that was the one with which young poet started his writing career. One of earliest known works of Białoszewski is the expressionistic in spirit (resembling in style Kasprowicz's Hymns) poem *Jerozolima* (Jerusalem), about the tragedy of the ghetto, dating back to 1943.² There is also a poem entitled *Sherzo h-moll* from 1945, which was written in a similar style and which talks about musical elations. The remaining three poems are date back to 1946 and are considered works in erotics. In all of three, the addressee is not present physically, but recalled from depths of memory. The word “longing” is often repeated and the atmosphere recalls the aesthetic spirit of Young Poland. We can take the poem entitled *You – Longing*, as an example:

¹ See Rougemont, D., *Les Mythes de l'Amour* (1972).

² Published in the *Poetry* magazine, vol.12 in 1985, 3-4.

Texts and the Body

Evening is full of white soil
And black sky
And now I know
 through the trees
extending their rimed fingers
of branches
that you endure in me

Over the dome of bushes
Covered with snow
I raise your face

I begin to understand on this night
starless
that I need to make Your voice
sound above the wind

I lower my head,
To touch a vision of your hands with my hair.
Do you know I'm cold,
That I miss – those hands
And before my lips change them into touch,
Space will remain
The longing³

A lonesome walk in winter weather, inducing a reflective mood and the sensation of lacking, call the “loving” one to recreate the “beloved”: “that I need to make Your voice,” however it is not creation, but rather re-creation, since: “you endure in me,” or, in other words, “I carry you inside me.” Maybe that is why he can “raise your face.” Let us pay attention to the fact that this time, differently from the rest of the poem, the possessive pronoun is written in a lower case. This could suggest that “your face” is the face of a loving one, who “gave himself away” to the “beloved”. A “starless night” could mean a night without predictions, without “guides” – as if future of the relationship was unclear, as if the “loving” one was to be left only with the space filled with “longing.” One could say that time, in a rather cynical way, revised this thought of the twenty four years old poet. In his later works, space is usually completely “different from longing,” even though he did not write about how he “changes lover’s hands with his lips into touch.” Similarly, the natural scenery and motif of a long walks appears in a poem with incipit that exclaims, So what if... :

So what if astral kernels
Will spill at dusk?
Day – or night
It’s only brilliance – or the dark
Nothing more

³ Published in the *Poetry* magazine, vol.9 in 1987.

In grey sidewalks
Like in ash's heap
I know Your's step by step
But they are too deep
 For me to uncover

I don't know what to do
My legs are made of stone
And hands are so idle
That waves of hot air
Put me in a motionless vertigo

And if ask the vastness of the skies
Have I?
Green eyes of stars will answer:
 Nobody⁴

The motif of the stars corresponds with the previous poem, where we observed their absence. On the other hand, their presence here seems to be indifferent. This turns out to be a sign of inconsistency on the part of the poet, since in the punch line of the poem “stars rule over his faith,” paraphrasing the famous poem by Tadeusz Miciński, who was most likely read by young Białoszewski himself at the time. These stars, their presence, and green light (why green?) underlines the missing “beloved,” his absence. Most likely, the described walk takes place along the same paths of many walks lovers enjoyed together before. It is like walking over one's own footsteps, hence the sidewalk turning into “ash” – traditionally considered to be “a symbol of the passing of everything that is earthly, of death and decomposing matter.” In the Christian tradition, which was not alien to Białoszewski, but in his later works thoroughly reinterpreted, it is a symbol of humility, penance and penitence.⁵ “Ash” stands for the corpse of the “beloved,” who cannot be “unearthed.” Somewhere in the background there is a fire smoldering, perhaps it is a symbol of love that has burned something, or burned out itself. We observe far more original scenery than in the last poem, dated July of 1946. With an unsteady hand, the poet underlined the word “evening,” next to the date:

This path that used to
But memory of snow, as if a life passed away
Now – under warmth swell
Where dirt and ice, abundance of weeds.

One, but two alien grounds: alive-dead,
Only the same rubble compressed into ash
-into horizon;
westbound the milky way of lanterns
and the red sea observing above them,

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Biedermann, H. *Knaur's Encyclopedia of Symbols*, entry: ash, 1989.

Texts and the Body

I walk, eternally, even when – I don't know,
I sense your eyes, even with a different thought.
Come out to meet me by the green ruins,
on the edge of light,
while aurora... later we can miss each other by an inch⁶.

It is the scenery of a devastated city, its ruins and rubble. They are not important, however, since they have been subdued to the image of a “ruined” relationship. In ways similar to the previous poem, we are witnessing the death of the “beloved” – “as if a life passed away” – and we take part in a walk on a path that was traversed (possibly together) in the past. The second verse seems to be an allegorical statement about the reasons for separation. It is hyperbolic in character, because in order to express its judgement about the differences between the two lovers it utilizes the cosmology of two planets, the Milky Way and the “red sea.” However, it is probably the first time his readers actually encounter these types of hyperbolic-cultural metaphors, which often appear in *Revolutions of Things*; metaphors which include: “Leonards of faces,” “harmonicas of Noah,” “Don Quixote of lampshades,” “Homers of golden fleeces,” etc. The reality observed by Białoszewski starts to demand sublimation – in this case in the form of a line of lanterns and their glow – but since the entire poem displays a sublime character, there is no surprise effect, no hyperbolizing of reality that might be known from a debut volume. Comparing early poems with his later works, one can observe that the need to sublimate, sanctify, evolve, or even mythologize reality remains, but the object, mood and, consequently, style changes. Young Poland is replaced by the “avant-garde,” and whatever was sentimental is no longer valued.

Let us remember that the debut volume of Białoszewski's poems was edited and composed by Artur Sandauer, who, counting backwards from the date of the release, knew him for over two years and had a profound and “living” influence on his development. They met at the right time. Białoszewski himself recalled that in 1952 he finally rejected his former style and started writing “like he really wanted.” His first truly satisfying poems were *The Gray Eminence of Wonder* (Szara eminencja zachwytu) and *Green: And So It Is* (Zielony: więc jest) marking two trends present in the *Revolutions*: the sublimation of objects and a certain philosophical current. The poetry of sublimation was headed in this particular direction. In his first poems, sublimation was practically equal with emphasis, and the later sanctification of dusted places saved from the war, somewhere in the countryside, began to be followed only by shifting this gaze – often in the form of a litany – to objects. However, or “by the way,” something happens: this YOU, a close human being, disappears “in the meantime.” If we have a man in *Revolutions of Things*, it is a man observed from a distance and usually with a large dose of irony. It is a Madonna on a merry-go-round, a lady and peasant laying down in the bushes, drunk “shepherds” in a pub-shed. These are images, little vignettes. One possible explanation could be found in Sandauer's (collaborating with Przyboś) willingness to revive the avant-garde as an antidote to socialist realism. He wanted Białoszewski to be “reistic, anti-sentimental”

⁶ “Poetry”, vol.9, 1987.

and "dehumanized" as much as possible, following the concept of Ortega y Gasset.⁷ But a biographical explanation is also possible. Until 1951, Białoszewski was employed by "Youth's World" magazine, from which he was subsequently fired by order of the Department of Security (Pol. UB – Urząd Bezpieczeństwa) and imprisoned. Krystyna Garwolińska-Błaszczkowska, the poet's friend at the time, recalled:

he was fired from "Youth's World" by the order of the Department of Security. [...] For a short period of time he was also imprisoned. Supposedly, an additional reason for firing him were homosexual tendencies of a boy scout's magazine employee. The entire scene was set in motion by the visit of a young man in the editorial office, who mysteriously called him out for "a coffee."⁸

Other friends suggested that the denunciation was filed by false friends of the poet. After that unfortunate experience, he could not find employment and it seems that he suffered from depression. He spent most of his time at home and since he was starving, he would lay in bed for hours and smoke in order to endure the hunger. It is very likely that his imagination retracted from people and became directed at objects. They start to look different when you lie down for hours and contemplate the aesthetic value of objects, instead of their utilitarian function. When lying down and in darkness – Białoszewski usually slept during the day and stayed awake during the night – one's perspective shifts and objects, for example, may seem larger than they really are. It is a hypothesis that proves, or is proven by, the phenomenal concept of Jerzy Kwiatkowski on the transformation of aboulia into liturgy.⁹ Human kind, humanity – because it is humanity and not a "man," that appears in the *Revolutions of Things* – is located below the poet in his apartment. Its world is strange and alien and fascinating.¹⁰

Similar in this regard is *A Ballad of Going Down to the Store* (Ballad o zejściu do sklepu – trans. Czesław Miłosz), where going out to the city evokes incredible astonishment in the poet, particularly when meeting people who walk, pass each other, make

⁷ Gasset, J. Ortega y, *The Dehumanization of art and Ideas about the Novel*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1968.

⁸ *Miron. Memories of a Poet (Miron. Wspomnienia o poecie)*, edited by H. Kirchner, Warsaw: Tenten, 1996. 122. About his experience of being imprisoned Białoszewski never spoke directly. However, I believe that he addresses it in the following passage from *Rozkurz*: "Whenever I am down and under and I battle my conscious self to remain a straight face, my subconscious begins its merciless reign in the realm of my dreams. It synthesizes all into tortures, blackmail and, finally, into the uprising. The uprising always awaits me." (Białoszewski, M. *Collected Works (Utwory zebrane)* (from now on in footnotes as UZ), vol. 8: *Rozkurz*, Warsaw: 1998. 130) He performs a peculiar "archeology of dreams," going deeper – and into more traumatic – experiences in an order of reversed chronology.

⁹ Kwiatkowski, J. "Aboulia and Liturgy" (Abulia i Liturgia), in his *Keys to Imagination (Klucze do wyobraźni)* Cracow: Wydawnictwo Literackie, 1973. 158–205.

¹⁰ See: *Szare pytanie* w poinczie: "Jakiż blask / zaćmił mi okno? // Co tam słyhać / dziś / w dole miasta?// Który to dzień stworzenia świata / i jakich ludzi?" (Utwory Zebrane, volume 1: *Obroty rzeczy. Rachunek zaściankowy. Mylne wzruszenia. Było i było*, PIW, Warszawa 1987. 108.

noises with their bags and talk. This kind of astonishment can appear only in somebody who hasn't observed such things for a long time. He addresses people with a different experience than his own: "Regret! / That you did not see / how people walk, / regret!"¹¹ Why should anyone, this unspoken You, regret? Because this addressee does not walk the streets at all? Not really. The unspoken "You" is organized as a network of "friends of friends," and in this case the subject does not have any "friends," which allows him to see people as representatives of a different species, as well as because going down the stairs ("ah, imagine only, / by the stairs") did not become for them an act of magic, a ritual of passage – it was devoid of all transgressive character. It is an ironic reference to the myth of descending into hell. That is why, in the punch line, the opportunity to come back turns out to be a miracle: "And indeed, / indeed / I returned." There is a metaphorical shift of perspective here. The floor of the apartment becomes a ground floor (even though it is elevated). Anything that is below is considered to be hell. This poem is one of the last in the volume and could possibly be announcing coming back and going out to people, which we witness in *Examination of Whims* (Rachunek zachciankowy).¹²

There are passages in the *Revolutions of Things* that stand out compared to more general tendencies. However, one needs to remember that the "otherness" was "neutralized" in various instances of the reception of Białoszewski's work. The poem *Autobiography* (Autobiografia) opens the entire series entitled *Self-portraits* (Autoportrety). What we are witnessing is a description of an anxiety attack triggered by the thought of leaving the apartment. Let us look closer at the first line: "Who is so sadly shuddering on my eyelids?"¹³ It starts with a recollection of some "You", as longing as it was in very first poems (*Autobiography* was written in 1952). The tone and the stylistics of the poem are similar, and even some words are repeated: "and it is wise to throw away this pot full of ashes." At the very beginning, there is a confession and doubt is expressed: "Why should I croak / with lamentations / hung on a string / of what I'd wish / but can't?... / Why tussle / in my heart's thick bushes?"¹⁴ Sighs, ashes, and tears – all of this is connected with the heart and impossibility. This is the opening of the poem. We should also pay attention to the fact that in the image of "heart's thick bush" there is an allusion to *The Silver Dream of Salomea*, and thereby to the poetics of Romanticism. When writing about this poem, Kwiatkowski talks about intellectual courage in expressing these feelings, which have been absent since the period of Young Poland. However, courage does not lie in Białoszewski's return and reference to the practices of Young Poland, because in Kwiatkowski's mind Young Poland approached this state

¹¹ Ibid. 120.

¹² This is part of a conversation with Zbigniew Taranienko: "ZT: The theme of first volumes were objects, experiences and language. / MB: And immediately people in the second one." (Interview "Respect for Every Detail" ("Szacunek dla każdego drobiazgu") in Taranienko, Z. *Conversations with Writers (Rozmowy z pisarzami)*, Warsaw: Wiedza Powszechna, 1986. 401.

¹³ UZ, vol. 1, 97.

¹⁴ Ibid.

pompously, while in Białoszewski's work we find ridicule and grotesque.¹⁵ But is that right? I happen to disagree. I believe that Białoszewski not only doubts the sense of thinking about the hurtful string "of what I'd wish / but can't..." but also points to his willingness to say more about something else, but he simply can't. This is so because of the content, as with the form. "Croaking" does not stand for entering the space of the grotesque and distance, but rather resignation. Kwiatkowski attempts to defend the poet against accusations of sentimentalism. Until this moment, this accusation is not in the center of the discourse where restraint, or even "shame for feelings" are considered to be more artistic than their expression. Kwiatkowski's reading of Wojacek could be further proof for this thesis. In *Autobiography*, early, sentimental and erotic poetics collide and, with the reader as a witness, transform into the "mature" *Revolutions of Things*, which brings about solitude, amongst other things. It is a vision-like "walk around the city," but without any recollections of love. What else is Kwiatkowski, and other commentators following him, seeing in this particular poem? He observes a dynamic vision of the city that brings to mind futurism and surrealism in painting, elements of expressionistic imagery and catastrophic associations. In short, these were elements drawn from different avant-garde movements. Perhaps that was the reason why Sandauer chose this poem. One can see elements of emotionality in the poem *We, the Starfish (My rozgwiadzy)* that remains practically without comment. There is longing, which was central – along with awe – the feeling of Białoszewski's early poetry, although it may appear to be masked. But the method of expressing it is already different and closer to the technique in Polish that is called "ekwiwalentyzacja," which means presenting an image, which is equivalent to an emotion. In non-sentimental poetics, "You" appears also in *Lyrics of the Sleeping (Liryka śpiącego)*¹⁶. Yet again, as I have written in a different place,¹⁷ this particular poem was easy to disregard as an erotic through the conviction that this "You," in reality, was an "I" that cracks in half and splits into two aspects – one that lies on the bed and the other that hovers above it. There is also an alternative: one could claim that "mine, laying on the bottom" means *le moi profond*, that the power of being, "everything-but-you," is actually an inability to be oneself, especially while dreaming, as it is the time when one cannot control oneself. Finally, it could mean that words "overt" and "conscious" address the state in which "I" is only "I" and their contradictions – "covert" and "unconscious" – address the state in which "You" starts to leak from "I." Why, however, could this not be an "erotic You"? Only because it is openly male?¹⁸ Blurring of the distinction between

¹⁵ Kwiatkowski, J. *Aboulia and Liturgy*.

¹⁶ UZ, vol.1, 91.

¹⁷ In the essay entitled "Dream of Miron Białoszewski," which I presented during a conference dedicated to oneiricism and fables in Łódź, 2003 (in print), my remarks were about the rarely discussed and rarely re-printed poem entitled *Dream (Sen)* – an openly homoerotic confession addressed to a tragically deceased lover.

¹⁸ On a similar, two-tracked basis one could also read the poem *To NN*** (Do NN***)* as an epistemological treatise.

lovers of the same sex, especially during sleep, as well as sensation of “close separation,” all belongs to homoerotic mythology. Obviously, readers in 1956 would never assume anything of that sort. Even if a hint of “suspicion” might emerge, it would most likely be rationalized by the inherent “censorship of conventions”: “no, that would never be published” – and that is precisely the kind of mentality that got the poem published.

It was apparently explained to Białoszewski – or he understood on his own – that for aesthetic reasons he could not write about love in sentimental tones, while because of the “public sense of decency” he could not, as Luis Cernuda, the Spanish poet, once wrote, “reveal the truth about his true love.” But already in 1931, Cernuda broke his own rule.¹⁹ However, this only represents one possible way. Federico García Lorca never spoke directly in his *Sonnets of Dark Love*. This “dark love” can be exclaimed only through a clasped throat (with the metaphor of a “shadow in the throat”). Cocteau, in his published poems, used feminine gender forms, which was a popular tendency. Białoszewski made an original move, but not until his *Mistaken Affections* (*Mylne wzruszenie*). He did not go in the direction of modernistic spiritualization and coding. On the contrary, he decided to see how it would be possible to speak openly and directly. His effort was to not speak about the act of loving itself, or who you love, or how much, etc., but to present the love in question as naturally as possible – as the everyday existence of two men. In *Minder?* So many years, and that he/she is! and that you could see him/her! (*Opiekunka? Tyle lat że ktoś taki, taka jest! i że się go, ją zobaczyło!*) from the volume *Was and Was* (*Było i było*) we observe a walk “on Nowy Świat / with Adaś,” during which there is an emotional moment triggered by the lady tending flowers. It may sound a little “gay,” but when reading the poem it is easy to miss that bit entirely. Especially since – as it is with Białoszewski – “emotional moments” are always already “mistaken,” or ironic. Białoszewski discovered that one can write about something in full seriousness and make it clear for a circle of “insiders,” but keep it vague and obscure for people limited by social conventions. And so, the walk is just a walk of two men, a walk of two “friends without subtexts.” But there is also a more profound thought hidden behind all of this: Białoszewski turns around the literary tradition in which love was usually sublimated within the literary work, hyperbolized, mystified and mystical. Very rarely would one present it as a “mutual co-habitation.” As we have seen, in the beginning, Białoszewski was faithful to the convention of sublimation. If I am right in assuming that at one point he realized that he cannot write in this fashion anymore, being an ironist he decided to assume a point of view “from aside,” creating a niche for himself. But apart from all the seriousness, despite sentimental elements, there is a hint of irony – and I do not know how intentional it is. We can observe it in the poem *From the journal of an admirer* (*Z dziennika – miłośnika*):

¹⁹ Cernuda, L. *Un río, un Amor. Los Placeres Prohibidos*, edited by D. Harris, Madrid: 1999. 95. In the translation of my authorship it will appear in the magazine “Fraza,” along with an essay *Reality and Desire of Luis Cernuda (Rzeczywistość i pożądanie Luisa Cernudy)*.

Sobolczyk Miron Białoszewski's hermetic pornographies

After going out for a walk in,
way back, Buraków,
way now, Zatrasię (-what a name! – she says
...the One, when I told her – the name -
when she was still alive
-zade? – I ask – comes?
to mind?...
 of course! – and she was
very decent)
so I go back
longing
after the apartment
you
I say:
let me change water in the ashtray -
I change, too long, you drop,
you spill
 enough now enough! -
I apologize:
I didn't know
got inspired again in the bathroom,
water, radio, you call:
 come! Koterbska...
I go, she signs, we don't listen,
you say:
I wasn't going to be angry
yes?? good, I was worried...²⁰

A “vignette of a married life” is what one could call this scene. There is an argument in the background and one of the partners leaves the house. He then comes back and tries to make amends. Finally, there is reconciliation. Personally, I always sense compassion in this poem, but there is something ironic in there as well: a certain “banality of love” and the reconciliation accompanied by Koterbska’s song (interestingly, this is probably the only time Białoszewski mentions music other than classical!) – but the tension seems purposeful. Maybe it is designed to draw attention to the fact that a record of the “regular” being together, those “love scenes,” seem ridiculous from the outside, even though to the interested parties they are completely serious. It is a testing ground for Białoszewski’s “talking straight” and it turns out that, in accord with his assumption, not many people realized what he was really saying. At least the reception of his poems seems to confirm this story. Scholars working with *Was and Was* mainly wondered about narrational and speech elements. They suspected that the poet is eavesdropping, overhearing maimed speech, hence subject matter is secondary to the form, or even fully irrelevant.²¹ What

²⁰ UZ, vol.1, 380.

²¹ Obviously, apart from Sandauer, readers like Sławiński, or Barańczak must have known very well what the poems were about, but preferred to stay silent. Perhaps they did so because they did not consider it important, to protect the poet, or in the name of the

Texts and the Body

were (are?) the conditions that needed to be met, in order for one to become an “insider”? They were fairly simple: one needed to be well versed in Białoszewski’s work and know his linguistic imagination, and know that THIS could be mentioned. Respectively, one needed not to be ashamed of noticing THAT and be able to add some interpretation, saying what was omitted.

Similar stories appear in later books, including a series of poems entitled *Poems for Le. So.* (Wiersze dla Le. So.) – for example, about how they cook rice together. Or different stories from *Denunciations of Reality* (Donosy Rzeczywistości), about the openly feminine redeptorist Albertynek, or about the visit of a priest in a shared apartment of Białoszewski and Leszek Soliński, or finally a hilarious story from *Hums, Mucks, Pullings* (Szumy, zlepy, ciągi) about the arrival of Soliński’s relative, Mara Paluska, from the United States, before whom an effort of masking and hiding and pretending to be only friends is meticulously staged. One will find plenty of similar stories in Białoszewski’s work. I will present a short anthology of quotes taken out from *Denunciations*. One remark we need to make, however, is an acknowledgement that there will be no “return to innocence” and that a phrase “taken out of context” is undoubtedly helpful when revealing “pornographic” meanings. And so, everyone will be forced to reassess whether one found those meanings when reading *Denunciations* before:

”Misio is from nobility. Noble man. Cause he’s got a canal running through his ass.”

Leon about the Dutchmen²²

During those natters about painting, Le. So. would look meaningfully at Jaś. He thought he sensed something. And Jaś gave him a wink. But when Le. told Lu., Lu. said it didn’t mean anything²³.

”They run and knock on the door. Can’t do nothing, but open, serve tea, coffee. All they would do is sit on their trunks and smoke cigarettes. And I need to paint! I need to look after my own ass.”²⁴

”Such huge asses” Le. would say. He said that his own ass had gotten too big, unnecessarily so. Small. Shoes with bootlegs, up to middle of the calf, with some fur. This quasi-leather. He stands in front of the mirror. Turns around and asks me: “Am I pretty?,” “In this sky?,” adding “I still can go out there, right?” [...] He will put on a sweater, or a transparent top – one that

purity of so-called academic discourse. Other critics might have been unaware. It was Sławiński and Barańczak, in reality, who in their analysis of language mechanisms showed for the first time, also to others, how to approach the works. They managed to transform sentences full of mumbling into announcements. They revealed, to put things jokingly, rules of recurrence, when deriving sense from those written recordings. They have, in a sense, made those kinds of reading possible.

²² UZ, vol.4, *Denunciations of Reality*, 54 (prose *Leon*). Comment concerns Henek Proeme, partner of Leszek Soliński and later his legal husband.

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ Ibid. 93 (prose *Blockade [Blokada]*). Statement by Le.

highlights, or a moon-glasses, or a lapel-less blazer with a file folder under his arm. Once, he put on a soutane.²⁵

I asked Włodek: "Undress and get in bed?" And he responded, all upset: "What's wrong with you? Want to turn me into a doll?" And so I asked him kindly and said: "...or you will regret – crime of passion."²⁶

I believe that in the case of Białoszewski's prose, but also going even further back to his poems like *Was and Was*, we can speak of a fusion of two elements, of which only one has been properly recognized. It was a fusion of recordings of everyday rambling – seemingly random, but in reality closely controlled – in which observations of what is real, what really happened are highly dramatized, given elements of cabaret and, finally, camp.²⁷ But his control, his "subjectival dictate" over "reality," Białoszewski decided to hide carefully, leaving few tracks. In other words, he staged an autobiographical pact, according to which readers were less likely to pay attention to his retracted subjectivity. This opens possibilities with interesting consequences: in the case of "catching" Białoszewski during something "strange", let us say something perceived as vulgar, he would excuse himself by pointing to blurred subjectivity and a dictate of reality. This reality, both powerful and demonic, is created as something resembling nature, particularly as understood by de Sade: all crime, perversion and so on are the natural, because they appear in nature, while "all we say, all we try to order, and decide over is as far from perfection and its prospect and is as inferior to Nature as the rights of the community of blind men are to our rights."²⁸ Based on this perspective, everything could have happened in Białoszewski's prose – but somehow it does not. There emerges a question of why, for example, he never describes sexual intercourse, although it undeniably occurs in reality. Why does he speak in a coded manner about erotics, etc.? If we decide to follow the version of reality that is so eagerly proposed by Białoszewski – of reality's unquestioned reign – it tells us to support a philosophical view called "realism," according to which there exists the possibil-

²⁵ Ibid. 94. On page 100 Miron tells a story of how he got "rid" of Marek, whom he lets inside the house only from time to time: "He's falls for money. And I need."

²⁶ Ibid. 115 (prose *Rusin in an Alcove* [*Rusin we wnęce*]).

²⁷ Therefore, I am opposed to Henryk Berezka and his views in the review of *Denunciations*. A story that Białoszewski wrote over the span of so many years was created under the dictate of reality, or life, or live speech that he listened to carefully and used himself. This dictate is opposed by subjectival right of choice, subjectival willingness to record and subjectival way of recording. However, these are subjectivities that are unimportant, if the rules of dictate are accepted and if we cannot step away from it, or if it represents a superior subjectivity that has a right to absolute respect, if only it decides to record (*Związki myślowe* (2), in *Związki naturalne*, LSW, Warszawa 1978, 191. G. Ritz remarked on the possibility of such reading. (*Solidarność a seksualny outsider*, trans. M. Łukasiewicz, in *Niść w labiryncie pożądania. Gender i płęć w literaturze polskiej od romantyzmu do postmodernizmu*, trans. B. Drąg, A. Kopaćki, M. Łukasiewicz, Wiedza Powszechna, Warszawa 2002. 236. (From Polish JP)

²⁸ Sade D.A.F. de, *Powiedzieć wszystko*, B. Banasiak, M. Bratuń, K. Matuszewski, eds. Trans. Wydawnictwo Łódzkie, Łódź 1991, 296. (From Polish translation JP)

ity of an objective record of Reality, and language has no influence over it whatsoever. Many critics followed this view, because their outlook was likewise realistic. It is not my philosophy, and personally I do not believe that it was held by Białoszewski. If indeed it was, why would he experiment with speech? In this sense, it is language that sets the parameters for perceiving reality. The record of reality, seeking maximum convergence with the psychological reality of language, is supposed to be a proposition-confession for the reader discovering reality which is perceived in that way. As a consequence, this manner of speaking about “indecencies” (Białoszewski liked this word), which is not a kind of complete disregard, or full freedom of (self)expression must be understood as a sign of a certain worldview. Not (yet?) “sublimating” and not (already?) “emancipated.” German Ritz writes:

Anything that is private, when operating within literature targeting the public sphere, will assume aesthetic and political function. One of its great masters will be Miron Białoszewski. His work is a perfect example of something private that can work without any form of previous confession. Privacy is merely a “non-discursive” way of looking at the outside world. Nobody else in Poland put so much effort into hiding his or her homosexuality as did Białoszewski. Privacy of this sort – without loquacious intimacy – will become, after 1956, the most important context of Polish literature.²⁹

Apart from that one instance, he does not mention Białoszewski anymore. In order to answer why, one would need to conduct much broader discourse analysis of his book. In short, Ritz displays certain assumptions concerning “homosexual literature,” one claim being that it expresses (or is supposed to express) desire. Although desire does appear here and there in Białoszewski’s work, it features far less prominently than in works of others. Ritz elaborates two main models of homosexual literature – modern and post-modern – one being aestheticizing and disguising and the other emancipating, respectively. Białoszewski does not fit either of the two. Ritz has almost foreseen this in the quoted excerpt, but was unable to read properly. Białoszewski is too much of the “other” among “others” to function as a representative of a certain tendency. He is not vivid enough, hence he disappears. But he found yet another way to talk about “this thing.” Artur Sandauer pointed it out when he wrote: “It is fortunate that in the poems reeking of tasteful indecency, sloppiness of language disguises controversial content.”³⁰ This particular issue was not discussed anyway. Sandauer relied on Sartre’s analysis of Genet’s worldview and it is a far less coincidental reference than one could assume. The scholar, however, understands it quite personally. In his mind, it is Białoszewski, whom he himself created, acting like an outlaw who was let into the artistic salon. He barges in, robes it, plays a trick on his Pygmalion and negates everything of which Sandauer used to approve: “Just like Genet, who performs dirty pranks in response to the world’s coquetry, he [Białoszewski – trans.] declares his “otherness” in response to approaches of

²⁹ G. Ritz *Literatura w labiryncie pożądania. Homoseksualność a literatura polska*, trans. A. Kopacki, in *Niż w labiryncie...*, 61. (From Polish translation JP)

³⁰ Sandauer, A. *Junk Poetry*, 200.

the world of art by writing *Mistaken Affections*.³¹ On top of that, there is a fear of being named, of being labeled “as” (in case of Genet, calling him a thief will only push him to steal more). Personally, I would be inclined to see Sartre’s mechanism from slightly different perspective. Białoszewski seems to be acting like a young, belligerent child: “you will not let me play like I want – I cannot write erotics for boys and express my feelings – well, let me show you then, let’s see if you’ll catch this!” And it is precisely about this willingness on “their” part to shape him, threatening to eliminate him from the game and, at the same time, giving praise for recording the vernacular, or hermetic message that frustrates Białoszewski (like in this very definite statement: “they want something from my writing / and I keep catching them by the words.”)³² He prepares a little “surprise.” Beginning with *Mistaken Affections*, there appear several poems, the content of which is more or less obscene. “If I cannot write about feelings as a homosexual, maybe hard-to-decode obscenities will be better” – he seems to be thinking. It looks like Sandauer had similar reflections apropos the poem entitled *Open the window to responsibility* (Otworzyć okno na odpowiedzialność) from the volume *Mistaken Affections*. This is how I would perceive Genet’s transgression in action, so thoroughly examined by Sartre.³³ *Mistaken Affections* closes with four poems about “mistaken erotic affections.” In *Hepyent* (1) “erotic” means “love”, similar to *Zmwartwieńsiulpet* (even though it speaks about life together as not entirely satisfactory: “although I share with you much / not too much”), but it is all written in language that is completely private, child-like almost. In *Hepyent* (2), which Sandauer talked about, the “erotic” element starts to turn into the direction of the obscene:

stop poking around in the bathroom
lay down on the couch
I’m waiting for your loving
“do we have some paste left?”
“Yes”
“And mbest?”
“psrest”
“and loving? not expected
so much today, unless... you know,
ho ho³⁴

We are witnessing an exchange about ablutions preceding intercourse. One of the partners is in the bathroom where he is “poking.” We need to understand, however, that with Białoszewski this word carries a double meaning. He is “poking around” in his rectum,

³¹ Ibid., 200.

³² UZ vol.1, 167.

³³ See *Ses désirs sexuels seront comme sa vie elle-mêmes des fantômes. Quel quesitleurobj et, ils sont condamnés d’avance; il lui est originellement d é f e n d u de désirer*” and passim. J. P. Sartre, *Saint Genet. Comédien et martyr*, in: *Ouvres complètes de Jean Genet*, Paris: 1952, 83.

³⁴ UZ, vol. 1, 319.

Texts and the Body

of course. “Paste,” which he asks about, is probably some lubricant, possibly vaseline. After that, the poem stops communicating. What could possibly “mbest” be? Is this some kind of appliance? Or maybe drastically abbreviated, English, “I’m best”? But why would Białoszewski switch to a foreign language? Does “psrest” mean “pst” (as in “shush!” – be quiet!) and “rest” – is it again an instance of introducing an English word, telling the partner to rest and not be so “stressed”? It would explain why “loving” never takes place, after all. The last lines indicate that there was something that day that obstructed entire process. Yet, “unless” suggests that not everything is lost. A similarly scatological story entitled *Lesiu*, I have seen can be found in *Denunciations*. Let me quote it in its entirety:

“Lesiu, I have seen, I have recognized”

“What have you recognized?”

“Stool big as kalach. That’s how I knew. Found them in the attic. Zdzisio Gania from the seventh grade messed up. He kissed my hand and I said: “Zdzisio, clean after yourself, this one thing you do for me” Like barns, big as barns they were.

“And how are you supposed to know?”

“Read Forell.”

Pstrążyńska was on her way to the morning mass:

“What has he done! What has he done!”

“What has he done?”

“There will be a case in court against him.”

“Why? Tell now, for God’s sake, I will learn anyway.”

“They will be trying him.”

“For what?”

“For sexualism.”

Mrs. Jadwiga said one more thing; about her nephew:

Telegram from my sister: “God help us all, do something, help – sexualism with onanism.” I know how to deal with that. To the party! Korczynianka is a hell of a girl!, I say: “Pin a flower to his lapel, take him, make him dance!”

In the morning I go to him at quarter to seven: “wake up, now, gymnastics, cold water!” Forell writes: “no idleness, no sleeping in – it all encourages tendencies. Do not let him go swimming with the boys by the shore.”

“Did it help?”

“They sent him away. He was working in the woods, cutting trees. Died recently. Inheritance came by the mail. This money is not for me, but for my sister.”³⁵

The story has no clearly outlined background, but it seems that it takes place in the countryside. Maybe “Lesio” is Leszek Soliński, which would place the story somewhere

Texts and the Body

concerned with somebody else?”
I wanted to explain that I know,
that one is cracked.
Only when leaving, I looked:
one was light, one was dark
(brown) (by accident),
But I forgot I wear these,
because I lack --³⁷

If Białoszewski comes seeking “advice” in regards to somebody he had “on the couch” for a few years, then Professor Palankin is most likely a sexologist. This somebody may be too ashamed to come and visit Palankin himself. Finally, we learn that this person is “cracked.” It is a vague word. Staying faithful to Palankin’s statements that he treats illnesses of both spirit and the body one can narrow its meaning to a “psychological crack,” or a bodily one – ripping of the rectum or tearing of a bridle. The doctor seems to treat the subject as a “suspect,” although he knows, most likely, about subject’s tendencies. He notices mismatched shoes, which are supposed to stand for psychological “disorder,” or could even be (in Pierce’s terminology) a kind of “index” pointing to a homosexual as somebody, who is inherently “mismatched.” They are also unable to communicate over the meaning of the word “soma.” In India, the word stands for the god of the Vedic pantheon and, at the same time, a plant and a potion that grants immortality. Squeezing the juices out of this plant is seen as a metaphor for sexual intercourse. In the 8th hymn of Rigveda it is said that drinking “soma” increases one’s sexual potential.³⁸ Maybe Białoszewski tries to initiate conversation about sexually related themes, going slightly around, but poorly estimates doctor Palankin’s erudition, who recognizes only the Latin meaning of the word. I also wonder if the name is real – it feels as if Białoszewski used “Palankin,” because it sounds very similar to “palant (jerk)” in Polish. Another explanation is that Białoszewski makes a reference to the sacral erotics (which is dominant in India, particularly in the cult of Siva), and speaks about sublimated eroticism, while Palankin assesses his eroticism as purely “medical.” The form in which the poet decided to present this part is purposefully sloppy and creates a gap that makes it very hermetic. Knowledge of “Indian soma” does not belong to a pool of common knowledge in Poland, and certainly was not part of it in the sixties. As a result, this gap could be a guideline leading to “hermetic obscenities.” It is a poem about the hardships of communicating, and possibly about the conviction of superiority (“moral” superiority?) of the doctor toward his patients. In earlier works by Białoszewski such depictions of doctors are fairly typical (for example, in *Communal* establishing of doctor’s personality).

In his late works, in *AAAmerica*, he decides to talk openly about “pornography,” at the same time introducing the word in the easiest form to define – as a genre of film or a magazine. “Porn magazines for eight or ten dollars. It seems like it’s not that much for

³⁷ Ibid., 355.

³⁸ See Eliade, M. Eliade *Histoire des croyances et les idées religieuses*, vol.1

stuff like that.”³⁹ This is what he notes after his first walk around New York City. After a while, once he starts recognizing names of the streets, he observes:

I come back to the room at Nuns' place on the seventh floor, I lay down my porn, Chinese cookies, bananas, oranges and I say to myself:

“what a wonderful gifts, wonderful gifts.”

Upon me going out again, I hide the porn magazines beneath the shelf with an extra blanket – who would want to look there, which maid?⁴⁰

“Porn” is treated here as a “capitalist luxury,”⁴¹ just like the exotic (extremely exotic for Białoszewski in those days) fruits. But the introduction of these themes does not perform the function of “informing the Polish reader about elements of life in the United States.” In his obsessive talk about porn, there is no more perverse lightness of the subject, there is no more nodding at the reader, or playing little games with him – or simply the game has changed. There are no more confessions, like “I watch porn and I get excited.” Even description of the movie in the theater is cold:

I went to see a male-female porn. Movies. ... Every once in a while film stops. There's a lady going out on the stage, carrying a couch. She dances, undresses and bends. Men comes out on the stage, takes of his pants and they start screwing on the couch – this and that, all in a little circle of light. They fake orgasm at the end. ... There are cinemas for men alone, too. They have “Male” written on the door. You go in and sit down, too. ... From time to time someone stands up and goes backstage. It turns out it's a relief salon. ... I also went to the “Male” cinema with a revue show. You clap after every performance. And this is how wonderfully I have passed my evening.⁴²

There is no sign of double meaning here: “I go to see a male-female porn,” and after that to the “male” cinema – a gay establishment. Many will say that true freedom is only attained by Białoszewski with his *Journal* (*Dziennik*), that he himself did not allow to be published before the year 2010. I do not agree with this claim, but time will tell.

Translation: Jan Pytalski

³⁹ UZ, vol. 9: *Male i większe prozy opublikowane po 1980 roku*, p. 223.

⁴⁰ Ibid. 230-1

⁴¹ In *Cabaret Kici Koci*, in the sketch entitled *Converters*, one of the protagonists asks about “pornuses,” as if they were a rarity.

⁴² UZ, vol. 9, 232.

Piotr OCZKO

Why I Do Not Want to Write about Old-Polish Male-bedders: A Contribution to the “Archeology” of Gay Studies in Poland

Honi soit qui mal y pense

Feminist researchers tracing the signs of creativity and activity of women in past centuries often metaphorically refer to their predecessors as mothers, grandmothers, and great-grandmothers. Wanting to write about homosexuality in historical Poland, I encounter from the start a terminological dilemma. What would I call the potential heroes of my article, those “Old Polish gays,” my “ancestors”? After all, they cannot be fathers to me for the very use of this term would legitimize patriarchal discourse. Anyway, more often than not they have probably left no offspring. Perhaps I should provocatively address them as aunts and uncles?

In *Christianity, Social Tolerance, and Homosexuality: Gay People in Western Europe from the Beginning of the Christian Era to the Fourteenth Century*,¹ John Boswell writes about the complex problem of terminology, arguing, however, for the use of the terms “lesbian” and “gay” even in reference to past epochs. Yet I will not follow that suggestion, because, especially in Poland, those are usually affirmative terms and one of the definitions of a gay man describes him as a homosexual who accepts and affirms his psychosexual identity. So I cannot write about lesbians and gays when referring to the times of oppression and repression. Old Polish did offer an assortment of different terms describing homosexuality, but since their use would legitimize the oppression, I will

¹ John Boswell, *Christianity, Social Tolerance, and Homosexuality: Gay People in Western Europe from the Beginning of the Christian Era to the Fourteenth Century*, University of Chicago Press, 2005.

speak of homosexuals² or homosexual persons without even attempting to demystify the Old Polish *samcołożnik* [a male species who beds with other males, a “male-bedder”] to parallel the English “queer” or the German *Schwul*. For emancipatory reasons I will also use the Polish term *homoseksualność* [“homosexuality”] and not *homoseksualizm* [“homosexuality,” a term that does exist in the Polish vocabulary], because after all no one speaks of *seksualizm* and *heteroseksualizm* but about *heteroseksualność* and *seksualność*.

So what terms were used in the olden days? Historical texts use *samcołożnicy* [male-bedders] (in the translation of the *New Testament* by Leopolda, also in Gdaczusz); *plugawcy* [filthy ones]; (*psotliwi*) *sodomczycy* [(mischievous) sodomites], *sodomici*, *sodomieści*; *gomorczykowie* [“gomorrhans”]; *mężołożnicy* [those who bed with men]; *gamraci nieczyści* [unclean lovers]; *niewieściuchowie* [effeminates]. Homosexuality itself is called *paziolubstwo* [page-loving]; *mężczyńska psota* [male mischief]; *turecki niewstyd* [Turkish shamelessness]; *mężczyzny z mężczyzną brzydliwie bawienie się* [hideous play of man with man]; *paskudny wschodni narów* [filthy Eastern vice]; *sodomia* [sodomy]; *grzech sodomski* [the sin of sodomy]; *psota sodomska* [the mischief of sodomy], though it is difficult to tell what the last terms mean, as sodomy was the term used also in reference to anal intercourse with women and intercourse with animals – Old Polish “bestiality.”

Accounts about homosexual persons in Poland up until the 19th century unfortunately refer almost exclusively to men, thus confirming the fact of the double invisibility of lesbians both as women and as representatives of a minority. Zbigniew Kuchowicz draws an absurd conclusion: “Lesbian love did not find any adherents.”³ Most likely women were, as they are today, less visible and more discreet, less noticeable than men. One of the very few references is made to Elżbieta Petrosolinówna, the sister-senior in a Calvinist community in Chmielnik, who was accused of lesbian contacts and demanded to be burned at the stake in an attempt to lead to the closing of the Protestant church.⁴ On the other hand, the old press not only addressed such practices among men and women in Turkey, thus giving the Ottoman enemy bad PR, but also proposed death penalties for Polish “maidens joined in the Sodomite fashion.” Why would there be demands for penalties if such cases did not exist?

The “list” of Old Polish accounts of homosexuality mentioned in this article comes from the works related to Old Polish customs and erotic forms I found available; I did not undertake my own archival research in this field, and anyway such a task would require a whole research team. I draw primarily on the work by Zbigniew Kuchowicz

² The terms “homosexuality” and “homosexual” date back to the 19th century and since they are burdened with a variety of moral, medical, and psychological connotations characteristic of the epoch, they do seem to be anachronistic.

³ Zbigniew Kuchowicz, *Obyczaje staropolskie XVII-XVIII wieku*, Wydawnictwo Łódzkie, Łódź, 1975, 302.

⁴ Attacks on Petrosolinówna can also be explained by the fact that she belonged to the community of elders and therefore usurped a “male” position on the society. Patriarchal culture usually ignores the issue of social otherness and departure from the norms by women who have no power, but stigmatizes and punishes severely all such divergence in the case of the men in power.

(*Obyczaje staropolskie*, the chapter “Życie alkowiane,” and *Człowiek polskiego baroku*, the chapter “Czarny erotyzm”), and by Janusz Tazbir (“Dewiacje obyczajowe”).⁵ Already the quoted titles betray the attitude of the authors to the subject of homosexuality, which is usually referred to in their work as a deviation, perversion, degeneration, pathology, and pederasty (it is worth pointing out that the last term has an exceptionally pejorative and offensive meaning in contemporary Polish), while the almost simultaneously described phenomenon of the harems of girls and whores kept by the magnates does not inspire such pejorative associations in the authors, or does not inspire pejorative associations at all. What is more, homosexuality is often mentioned together with bestiality, sadism, masochism, incest, pedophilia, group sex, exhibitionism, transvestism, and masturbation, categories which are clearly kept separate by contemporary sexology. No wonder that in Kuchowicz’s *Miłość staropolska*⁶ [Love in Old Poland] published in 1982 homosexuality is mentioned in one sentence only. One need not search through *Staropolska miłość* [Old Polish Love] by Alojzy Sajkowski (1981) either. If even today the majority of the Polish society denies lesbians and gays the right to love, how could the situation be different 25 years ago in relation to “male-bedders”?

In old Poland the accusation of homosexual tendencies (real or imagined) was a weapon against ideological and political enemies, not necessarily live ones. The chronicler Długosz suggested the “page-loving” tendency of Władysław Warneńczyk (the punishment for it was to be the lost battle of Warna),⁷ and Bolesław Śmiały. Later, similar comments were made about Władysław IV Waza, Michał Korybut Wiśniowiecki, and Prince Jakub Sobieski, who “loved men to death.” Pamphlets mocked Sobieski claiming that his fortune will be “inherited by boys, by Wolscy, Kochanowscy, and Wyhowscy.” Henryk Waleza was also too effeminate for Polish tastes and enjoyed the same type of commentary (he had pierced ears, wore perfume, dressed elaborately, and was surrounded by a crowd of sweethearts with painted faces – *mignons*, whom “he did not spare abominable Italian practices”⁸).

⁵ Zbigniew Kuchowicz, *Obyczaje staropolskie*...; and, by the same author, *Człowiek polskiego baroku*, Wydawnictwo Łódzkie, Łódź, 1992; Janusz Tazbir, “Dewiacje obyczajowe” in his *Studia nad kulturą staropolską, Selected Works*, vol. 4, ed. S. Grzybowski, Universitas, Cracow, 2001. To preserve the clarity of argument in my article I do not provide references to Old Polish texts and documents; the reader may find the bibliographical data in the abovementioned works. All quotations, unless marked otherwise, are from the above works.

⁶ Zbigniew Kuchowicz, *Miłość Staropolska, Wzory—uczuciowość—obyczaje erotyczne XVI–XVIII wieku*, Wydawnictwo Łódzkie, Łódź, 1982.

⁷ Echoes of this report can be heard in Niemcewicz’s *Śpiewy historyczne*: “Nie dał się zdrożnym chuciom powodować,/ Lecz, wzięwszy silną dłońią rządu wodze,/ Umiał panować” [He did not allow the unclean desires to control him,/ But, ruling with a strong hand,/ He knew how to govern.]

⁸ S. Grzybowski, *Henryk Walezy*, Zakład Narodowy im. Ossolińskich, Wrocław, 1980, 9. Tazbir, *Henryk Walezy*, in: *Poczet królów i książąt polskich*, ed. A. Garlicki, Czytelnik, Warszawa, 1978, 348–9.

Catholic journalists attributed a weakness for men to Calvin, and Protestants attributed the same to Popes: to John XIII (“he was a dirty epicure, adulterer, fornicator, and sodomite”), to Alexander VI (“he was a fornicator and a profligate and lecherous sodomite, and a brother to the devils”), and also to Pius V and Julius III. Monks and priests were referred to as “sodomites and gomorrhites.” For Stanisław Orzechowski, *romanizare* meant the same as *gomorrhizare et sodomizare*. Catechism books and handbooks for priests advised them to ask about relations with men during confession (it is interesting why, if, as claimed by the journalists of those times and repeated after them by today’s historians, this tendency was to be all but absent in Poland?). Also, the protestant clergymen warned: “sodomy is a filthy disgrace...which angels flee, on seeing which devils close their eyes, and which men with men breed.”

A Calvinist author of sermons, Paweł Gilowski, wrote, however, that “some rich landowners keep young boys for that purpose,” and Waclaw Potocki reported with outrage in *Ogród fraszek*:

Przypatrz się, jako grzeszą mężczyźni szkaradzie,
Zazdrozczą na oborze bykom, koniom w stadzie;
Wymyślają potrawy, proszki, mocne soki,
Mało im białej płci, paskudzą otroki,
Przeciw naturze rozum przywodząc, aż zgroza.

[Look how men sin hideously,/ They envy bulls in the barn and horses in the herd;/ They devise dishes, powders, strong juices,/ the fairer sex is not enough for them, they defile the servants,/ Fearfully bending reason against nature.]

Also, representatives of other religions, particularly Islam, have been accused of “sodomy.” Reports had it that the Turkish Sultan, “the student of the Muhammeds and successor to the throne,” apart from 300 concubines had the same number of “lovely boys for the purpose of the same ugly carnality.” The description of *The Turkish Monarchy* by Paul Ricaut, a member of the British Parliament, published in Polish in 1678, claimed that “Plato’s science of love found its place and followers in Turkish schools,” and criticized the practice of “the cursed and filthy addiction to sodomite profanity.” *Liber generationis plebeanorum* by Walerian Nekand Trepka, known later as *Liber Chamorum*, or the book of boors, which constitutes an extensive register of fake nobility and a collection of Old Polish gossip, also records that one Piotr Krzysztoporski had relations with his servant “*in posticum*, the Turkish way, and gave him the Venus’s curse.”

Slightly more is known about the private lives of the magnates. According to the chronicler Marcin Matuszewicz, Prince Janusz Aleksander Sanguszko of Dubno, a Lithuanian nobleman, “kept men for amorous purposes” (his wife, the beautiful Konstancja Denhoff, a heiress to a great fortune, returned to her parents “without receiving any marital proof from her husband except for one good morning at dawn and one good night in the evening”), and donated the town of Koźmin and seventeen villages to his lover, Karol Szydłowski. In the words of Father Kitowicz,

The object of his passions was some spirited youth, upon whom he bestowed almost all of his treasures: the youth ruled his heart, stripped him of his riches, his jewels and all else the youth

found to his liking. Nothing would stop this favorite from such plunder except for the fear that his luck may end for it is built on shaky foundations. But although he fell out of favor, he left with all the bounty. So anyone who found himself thus favored swiftly used his luck for as long as the favor was with him. Many of those favorites became recognized citizens and men of means. Only one Kazimierz Chyliński met the opposite fate: stripped of all his gains and shackled, he was sent to the Gdańsk prison where he did his penance for twelve years.⁹

The abduction and imprisonment of Chyliński was in fact the doing of the prince's father, who thus fruitlessly attempted to persuade his son to return to his wife and "harness his profligacy." The young prince, locked up in a room and threatened with a whipping, had to give his father "command in writing over the Dubno garrison and over the whole estate" and then the latter "invited Chyliński and did with him what is stated above." After this incident, until his father's death, Sanguszko

did not have an open and costly favorite as he did before he was threatened, only secret ones. But after his father's death he had them again, keeping them as he did the earlier ones, because his taste blinded him; with the exception of the tribunal whom he did not show his favorite, left in Dubno.¹⁰

One may infer, therefore, that Sanguszko had no trouble flaunting his lovers, even when holding public positions. Also Jerzy Marcin Lubomirski "had an eye for a little Cossack... paid him well, even made him rich; finally found a way to raise him to the noble status, for there was nothing one couldn't buy from Poniatowski."

There are much fewer reports concerning the lower classes. An exceptional case is described by Jan Kracik and Michał Rożek in *Hultaje, złoczyńcy, wszetecznicze w dawnym Krakowie*:

In 1561 Wojciech from Poznań who for ten years "wore woman's clothes" faced the court in Kazimierz. He had married Sebastian Słodownik in Cracow and lived with him for two years in Poznań. There he allowed Sebastian to be with a woman and lived with a woman himself. When he returned to Cracow, he got married in Kazimierz again, this time with Wawrzyniec Włoszek. In public opinion he was considered a woman. For crimes against nature he was burned.¹¹

Already this short description demonstrates how difficult and useless it would be to assign Wojciech from Poznań to modern categories: homosexual, bisexual, transsexual, transvestite? And what is one to think about Sebastian Słodownik and Wawrzyniec Włoszek who agreed to these, after all sacramental, unions?

In a recently published book by Małgorzata Pilaszek, *Procesy o czary w Polsce w wiekach XVI-XVIII*, I also found an interesting passage:

⁹ J. Kitowicz, *Pamiętniki czyli Historia Polska*, ed. and introduction P. Matuszewska, commentary Z. Lewinówna, PIW, Warsaw, 2005, 63-4.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 64-5.

¹¹ Jan Kracik, Michał Rożek, *Hultaje, złoczyńcy, wszetecznicze w dawnym Krakowie. O marginesie społecznym XVI-VIII w.*, Wydawnictwo Literackie, Kraków-Wrocław, 1986, 173.

It is not often that court books described magic related to homosexual love. Such practices were undertaken by one Lenkowa, who washed the young Stanisław Skrzypczak three times in herbs making his master, Mikołaj Turkowiecki, fall deeply in love with him. Turkowiecki's life with his wife then fell apart and he began to hate his mother-in-law. He demanded therefore that the magic be withdrawn, so that he could live without the boy again (1608).¹²

Magdeburg Law was merciless to homosexual persons:

If anyone is found to have business against nature with an animal, or man with man, those are to be sentenced to death and according to custom burned with fire, without any compassion, for it is an ignominious and disgraceful sin and is to be punished.

The basis for discriminating against homosexuality was obviously provided by the Bible, especially the description of the destruction of Sodom (as a matter of fact linked to the phenomenon of homosexuality only in late Judaism, in the writings of Philo). Contemporary exegetes, however, entirely depart from such an interpretation.¹³ Those who called upon the authority of the Scripture entirely ignored the words of David which perhaps contain a reference to love between men and which are often paraphrased in medieval homoerotic poetry:

I am distressed for thee, my brother Jonathan:
very pleasant hast thou been unto me:
thy love to me was wonderful,
passing the love of women.

(2 Samuel 1, 26)¹⁴

We can find this much (or this little) information on Old Polish “deviations” in available scholarship. Kuchowicz notices additionally that accounts of Old Polish homosexuality “should not be demonized” because “one gets the sense that this perversion was truly rare and inspired authentic, with time growing, aversion.”¹⁵ He subsequently refers to Father Kitowicz who writes with disgust about the customs of the Cossacks from Zaporishian Sich, thus drawing on the Sarmatian tradition of juxtaposing Poland with the wild East and the corrupt West. Finally, as a confirmation of his hypotheses, Kuchowicz refers to the 18th century opinion of a German doctor, Kausch: “As far as pederasty is concerned, which is so popular with Poland's neighbors, one has to say to the credit of Poles that it is quite unknown here and almost as strongly despised as in England.”¹⁶

¹² Małgorzata Pilaszek, *Procesy o czary w Polsce w wiekach XVI-XVIII*, Universitas, Cracow, 2008, 411.

¹³ A discussion of homosexuality in Old and New Testament, with suggestions for further reading, may be found in John Boswell, *Christianity, Social Tolerance, and Homosexuality...*, 95-159; in R.P. Woods OP, *On Love that Dared not Speak Its Name*, Montgomery Hide, 1970; Daniel A. Helminiak, *What the Bible Really Says about Homosexuality*, 2000.

¹⁴ [The author quotes the passage in several other translations into Polish, trans.]

¹⁵ Z. Kuchowicz, *Człowiek polskiego baroku*, 320.

¹⁶ Ibid.

Another traveler reported that in Poland “sodomy, which in the neighboring states is quite frequently practiced, they do not know and find repulsive, which is praiseworthy.” One can hardly resist the feeling that echoes of Old Polish “sexual xenophobia” can be heard also in today’s texts by right-wing journalists.

These are strange theses considering the fact that homosexual orientation is calculated to pertain to 2-7 percent of human population and this number does not change, irrespective the place, epoch, and existing social norms. 2-7 percent of homosexual people: to realize what that number entails it is worth realizing that in Old Poland the nobility is estimated at 10 percent... In the years 1566-1620 the tribunal of the Inquisition in Barcelona, Valencia, and Saragossa passed judgment on 371 persons suspected of homosexual contacts; 53 were burned at the stake.¹⁷ In The Netherlands in the years 1730-1732, at the turn of the Enlightenment era, numerous, widely branched out “associations” of homosexual persons were discovered, who socialized together, visited each other, and engaged in lively correspondence.¹⁸ One should not, however, apply contemporary standards to The Netherlands of those times, which were predominantly Calvinist. 300 men were sentenced to jail and around 70 to tortures and death. But if such men were to be found in The Netherlands, most likely there were some also in Poland, even if less visible, less self-aware, and less well-organized and, paradoxically, much luckier because of all of the above. Most likely the infrequency of the occurrence of homosexuality in Poland means only that it had been rarely mentioned in sources.

The image of homosexual persons produced by the research on Old Poland customs is obviously very dark, with sources in court registers, sermons and slanderous pamphlets, lamentations of moralists, and police files. It is an image of criminals, moral degenerates, and sinners. It could not be otherwise, but to speculate on the basis of these sources about the accuracy and comprehensiveness of that image would be like – and I am using the parallel fully aware of its implications – determining the shape of male-female relations in Old Poland on the basis of several reports about “meretricious whores,” and information that “the Venus’s curse was brought to Poland by one woman from Rome who frequented the church fair.”

There are many things that I can only infer, but those fantasies are hardly optimistic. Thus I imagine, or reconstruct (aware full well that what I am producing is “literature”) the stories of boys forced by threats and whippings into marriage; of mocked village freaks; of bitter old bachelors over the glass of spirits and, even more, the husbands evading their marital duties and frigid wives; family quarrels and women’s tears. I see unruly girl-tomboys insisting on riding the horse the man’s way; eyes hidden behind the fan, which do not look at voivodes and pantlers; nuns, who long and passionately contemplate the image of some female saint. And also tears streaming down his cheeks when the study in the Jesuit or Piarist seminar came to an end and it was time to part

¹⁷ See eg. D. Łukaszewicz, “Niemieckie psy” i “polskie świnię” oraz inne eseje z historii kultury, Ureus, Gdynia, 1997, 205.

¹⁸ See eg. S. Schama, *The Embarrassment of Riches: An Interpretation of Dutch Culture in the Golden Age*, Collins, London, 1987, 601-6.

with HIM. The studies of homosexuality of past epochs discuss “homosexual behaviors” or, even worse, “acts of sodomy,”¹⁹ thus depriving those who demonstrate “homosexual behaviors” of all individuality. What is consistently forgotten (or consciously denied) is that homosexuality is not just sexual desire but also (and perhaps above all) psychological and emotional attachment. I fantasize about being able to look at their fate from a different perspective. For I do not believe that because they lived in a different epoch and had a different (un)awareness of their sexual identity, they could not fall in love and love, however sentimental that may sound. I absolutely do not want to project my perception of contemporary gays and lesbians onto historical data or apply the ahistorical category of “sexual orientation” to historical figures, I only wish to return to their “acts” and behaviors the right to love which traditional Polish scientific discourse ignores or calls a deviation or perversion.

Of course, such “acts” and “sodomite practices” did occur, as they do today (according to Kinsey’s report, almost 40 percent of men and 20 percent of women had homosexual experiences in their adult lives), according to the rule that people sometimes derive satisfaction from intercourse itself without necessarily considering the sex of the partner. I can hardly agree with the thesis proposed by Foucault that only in the 19th century the homosexual acquired an identity and that “homosexuality appears as one of the forms of sexuality when it was transposed from the practice of sodomy onto a kind of interior androgyny, a hermaphroditism of the soul. The sodomite had been a temporary aberration; the homosexual was now a species.”²⁰ For what Foucault has in mind is a social identity and a separate medical classification of the homosexual²¹ and not a psychological and emotional character.

But even in the past doubtlessly there existed individuals aware of their difference, their oddity, their alternative psychosexual orientation, who were not indifferent to whom they “copulate” with. Perhaps they did not always have the language to name that difference, but surely they had intuition which led them to forbidden and secluded places where they could meet “their own,” and which also explained the faster heartbeat and their difference in spirit. Wanting to define themselves, they could only refer to the Biblical David, to Plato, to Hadrian and Antinous, to the Ganymede myth and to other “damned

¹⁹ R. Shephard, “Sexual Rumours in English Politics: the Case of Elizabeth I and James I,” in: *Desire and Discipline: Sex and Sexuality in the Pre-Modern West*, ed. J. Murray, K. Eisenblichler, University of Toronto Press, Toronto-Buffalo, 1996.

²⁰ Foucault, Michel, *History of Sexuality: Volume I*, trans. Robert Hurley, NY: Pantheon, 1978, 43.

²¹ “[T]he condition of the buttocks, a relaxed sphincter, an anus shaped like a funnel or adapted to accommodate an object the shape and size of a penis – those were the unmistakable signs belonging to the recently identified species. Similarly ‘a twisted mouth’ along with ‘very short teeth and thick, curled, deformed lips’ indicated familiarity with the practice of fellatio. In short, the pederast was a new kind of monster, an animal.” in: *History of Private Life, Volume IV: From the Fires of Revolution to the Great War*, ed. Michelle Perrot, trans. Arthur Goldhammer, Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1994, 640.

Greeks” (very much present in old homoerotic literature), provided, of course, that they had a proper education. They could also write about shepherds, about fraternity on the battlefield (homosocial relations are often a repressed representation of homosexuality), or imitate heterosexual models (as many contemporary gays do).

In *Figuring Sex between Men from Shakespeare to Rochester*, Paul Hammond describes for example the story of two 17th century scholars, Sir John Finch and Sir Thomas Baines, inseparable since they shared a room at Christ’s College in Cambridge, accepted and considered a couple by their families (which is documented by the surviving correspondence), and also memorialized by a common statue (which alludes to graveyard sculptures of married couples), where Henry More has written: “Cor erat unum, unaq. anima” (“they were of one heart and one soul”).²² In 1681, Finch wrote to Baines:

‘Tis now thirty-six years since I began the happinesse of a uninterrupted friendship which the world never did equal, nor I believe will ever parallel . . . Of the twenty-six years wee spent together since we first left England wee never bin separated two moneths from each other unless it were in the exercising some act of kindnesse.²³

But let us return to Old Poland. If no one would dream of using terms such as “heterosexual behavior” or “proof of acts of copulation” in reference to *Listy do Marysieńki* [King Jan Sobieski’s letters to his beloved], or to Zygmunt August following Barbara’s coffin on foot from Cracow to Vilnius,²⁴ why should I apply a different measure and doubt the hearts of two young lords gone hunting and riding together stirrup by stirrup; or the embracing harvesters, who have dropped their scythes and lain under a tree; or maidenly letters hidden in a chest’s drawer in the alcove; or kissed ribbons from “her” braid; or the secret exchange of glances at the tavern which leads to a hasty kiss around the corner. . . I would like to know more about Janusz Aleksander Sanguszko and Karol Szydłowski who “possessed his heart”; about Chyliński jailed in the Gdańsk prison (and whether Sanguszko suffered after his loss); about Jerzy Marcin Lubomirski and his little Cossack for whom he purchased nobility from the king. . .

These imagined stories of mine probably usually ended badly, for they had to end badly. What is more, I will probably never read about them. For their protagonists had neither the means nor the language to express their feelings; they could not write about their love as did Ludwika Biebrzyńska, torn by the equally forbidden, for incestuous, passion: “I cannot destroy my love, nor do I want to. Oh, he knows how to speak to my heart, how to master it and tear it away from everything else!”²⁵ They could not protest like the girl sent by her mother to the monastery:

²² Paul Hammond, *Figuring Sex between Men from Shakespeare to Rochester*, Oxford University Press, 2002, 29-32.

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ Numerous and moving examples of Old Polish feelings and passions, of mesalliances inspired by love – obviously heterosexual – may be found in Z. Kuchowicz’s *Staropolska Miłość* (chapter “Rola serca i charakteru”).

²⁵ This is how she described her feelings to her own nephew. Ibid., 269.

Wnidę na chór, spojrzę na dół, ujrzę miłego,
A dajże mi, mocny Boże, skoczyć do niego.

[I'll climb the choir, look down, see my beloved,
Oh let me, strong God, jump to join him.]²⁶

Repressed, excluded, they were not only deprived of the right to love, but also of the means and language to speak about it.

The only, quite improbable, trace, is the strange legend about two Polish knights living on Madeira, one of whom was identified as Warneńczyk who survived on the battlefield and who, as Długosz claims, was the lover of “male pleasures and disgraceful passions” and who supposedly spent the night before battle with his page. The story could serve as material for the 19th century Polish historical writer Antoni Kremer, brother of Antonia Domańska, nee Kremer, author of *Paziowie króla Zygmunta*, *Kryśia bezimienna*, and *Historia żółtej cizemki* – if only he existed, like Shakespeare’s sister.

“The common feature of contemporary gender and gay studies seems to be discovering in old texts the confirmation of contemporary sensibility, which sometimes leads even to the negation (or, perhaps, neglect) of the historical context of these texts and to finding there answers to questions about contemporary gay identity,”²⁷ writes Piotr Urbański in “Zakazana przyjaźń,” an article which is in fact a philological critique of *gender studies*. The author mentions also the work of Bruce R. Smith, whose political aim is “the creation of a gay community in both a contemporary and a historical sense.”²⁸ I do not understand why I should not do that, nor search through old writings for the “proto-gay tradition,” to use Stewart’s term,²⁹ those minute and faint traces which build a fragile bridge between my sensibility and experience and the experience of the “Old Polish homosexual persons.” This is not even history, it is more of an archeology, a patient seeking of my traces in the layers of culture as a researcher digging in the ground suddenly notices a layer of a different color and realizes that a wooden pole was buried there. If old love poetry is often treated without a second thought as a record of authentic experience and feeling, why is it that when the so-called “male friendship” occasionally appears in literature, ex-cathedra arguments appear from all sides that the reference is no more than an imitation of the ancients, a literary emanation, spiritual friendship, commonality of souls, Platonic idea, a convention. Critics discuss the identity of Laura, Kasia, and Anusia but reject *a priori* the subtle discourse

²⁶ Cz. Hernas, *W kalinowym lesie*, vol. 2, *Antologia polskiej pieśni ludowej ze zbiorów polskich XVIII w.*, PIW, Warszawa, 1965, 24.

²⁷ Piotr Urbański, “Zakazana przyjaźń w poezji nowołacińskiej,” in *Ciało pleć literatura. Prace ofiarowane profesorowi Germanowi Ritzowi w pięćdziesiątą rocznicę urodzin*, Wiedza Powszechna, Warsaw, 2001, 554-5.

²⁸ Bruce R. Smith, *Homosexual Desire in Shakespeare’s England: A Cultural Poetics*, University of Chicago Press, Chicago-London, 1991, 27.

²⁹ A. Stewart, *Close Readers, Humanism and Sodomy in Early Modern England*, Princeton University Press, Princeton-New Jersey, 1997.

Texts and the Body

of desire appearing between the lines in the letters and poetry of the humanists: for example, Erasmus of Rotterdam.³⁰

Here is another example, taken from English literature, for lack of Polish sources:

Place doeth not sunder, or divide
Our hearts, but makes them more wide.
Our passions, which before did lie in prison,
Now abroad doe file.
The breadth of place
Gives fancie space,
And sets our soules at liberty.

And all the Winde twixt us and Thee
Is but a puffing Agonie
Of sighs and Blasts which doe expire
From the vast depth of our Desire
And this is Winde
Of such a kinde
As onely blows, not cooles the fire.³¹

These are lines from a poem by Nicholas Oldisworth (1611-1645) “To His Friend beyond the Sea,” dedicated to Richard Bacon, with whom the author went to school in Westminster and then separated: Oldisworth studied in Oxford and Bacon in Cambridge, to then move to Douai and die there at the age of 18. In the work of Oldisworth a dozen or so poems are dedicated to Bacon: touching in their awkwardness, describing longing, and praising the bodily and spiritual qualities of his friend. In the preserved manuscript, one page contains only the title of a poem that was never written: “On the Death of his Deare Friend Mr. Richard Bacon.” The rest of the page is empty, as if the author hopelessly tried and failed to address the subject. As Hammond observes, in the lines quoted above, the physical separation between men is perceived as the liberation of their souls which are thus to achieve spiritual union; yet then he asks: “But is ‘spiritual’ the right word?”³² Would the word “spirituality,” I ask, even cross our minds had the addressee of Oldisworth’s poem was, for example, Miss Elisabeth Bacon?

What is more, the spiritual communion, the theory of emulation, and “Greek models” are usually called upon to discredit a homosexual reading when we are dealing with the description of a relationship between an older man and a younger one. Are the – so frequent in patriarchal culture – relationships between older men and younger women any less heterosexual because of the age difference? In Plato we even find a distinction between men desiring other men and those desiring boys. And the term “boy” may in fact be misleading. A contemporary gay man will not hesitate to use it in reference to his fifty-year-old partner; Saint Elred used the term to refer to his lover of his own age (he

³⁰ See for example *Medieval Latin Poems of Male Love and Friendship*, trans. T. Stehling, Garland Pub., New York – London, 1984.

³¹ Quoted after: Hammond, *Figuring Sex between Men...*, 33.

³² Ibid.

even referred to him as “son”!); Marbod, Bishop of Rennes referred to himself in this way in the letter to his lover.³³

Old sources and research based on those sources uses terms such as “homosexual behaviors” and “acts of sodomy” dictated by the official ideological attitude of the epoch in which they were written. We would look in vain for descriptions of feelings, but that does not mean that those feelings did not exist! In western Europe, the feelings even found fitting descriptions. To the skeptics I dedicate the words from Christopher Marlowe’s *Edward II* (1594) – in the opening lines of the play Gaveston is reading the letter from the king:

My father is deceased. Come, Gaveston,
And share the kingdom with thy dearest friend!
Ah! words that make me surfeit with delight:
What greater bliss can hap to Gaveston
Than live and be the favourite of a king!
Sweet prince, I come! these, these thy amorous lines
Might have enforced me to have swam from France,
And, like Leander gasped upon the sand,
So thou wouldst smile, and take me in thine arms.³⁴

The only example of Old Polish literature I know describing a homosexual (perhaps?) experience is the song by Andrzej Krzyczki *Ad Dantisceum de amore suo*:

Heu mihi, quam miser est parili qui fervet amore
Et tamen hic fructu semper amoris eget,
Sed miseri sortem superat qui solus amabit
Et sua spernuntur munera, forma, preces.
Perditus, infelix horumque miserrimus ille est,
Qui tacet et tacito cogitur igne mori.
Ultima sors haec est nostri, Dantisce, furoris,
Nam taceo et tacito cogor in igne mori.³⁵

[Woe to me, how wretched is the one who loves with equal love/ But lacks the fruit of love/ Yet more wretched he who loves alone/ And spurned are his gifts, his pleas and form./ But lost, cursed and more wretched/ Is he who is silent and dying in silent fire./ This last fate, Dantisce, is that of my folly,/ For I am silent and dying in silent fire.]

Here is how Piotr Urbański speculates about the meaning of the above lines:

Could the reference to the fruitless (childless) – even if required – love be related to the weakness for boys ascribed to the future primate? This confession is preceded by a passage which

³³ See J. Boswell, *Christianity, Sexual Tolerance, and Homosexuality...*, 39-41. See Boswell for more examples and bibliographical data.

³⁴ Christopher Marlowe, *Edward II*, CreateSpace Independent Publishing Platform, 2009, 11.

³⁵ Quoted after: I. Lewandowski, *Antologia poezji łacińskiej w Polsce, Renesans*, Wydawnictwo Naukowe UAM, Poznań, 1996, 128. I am not referring to Krzyczki’s other homoerotic Latin poems because of their uncertain authorship.

Texts and the Body

seems a paraphrase of the famous anacreontic verse devoted to the suffering due to unrequited love (l. 3-4), next there appears a mention of an even greater suffering, about love which has to remain hidden, unarticulated, which dare not speak its name.³⁶

I found two poems which invite a queer/gay reading in “*Płodny jest świat występku.*” *Antologia libertyńskiej poezji erotycznej XVIII wieku.* These are, however, of a very different register. The first of the poems is an anonymous complaint: “Uskarżanie się wydane za mąż damy a w swoim żądaniu omylonym, czyli Desperacja” [A Complaint by a Lady Given Away in Marriage, or Desperation]:

Ej, jakże się nie frasować, kiedym oszukana.
Dopiero widzę, co to w mym mężu za odmiana:
Nic nie umie, nic nie ruszy, leży jak przy gnoju.
Aż on widzę armafrodyt. Baba w męskim stroju.
Parobeczek od przęślicy. Darmo mnie nim zwiedli;
Dziurę dziurą chcą zatkać, nie kata-ż bo zjedli.
Poszłam ci ja po niewoli od ojca za niego;
Będę krzyzczyć, będę wołać niech mi co poradzą,
Albo z dobrym moderunkiem chłopca mi dodadzą.

[Ay, how am I not to fret, when I've been deceived./ Only now I see that my husband is different/ Doesn't know anything, doesn't do anything, lies next to me as if next to a pile of manure/ Then I see he's a hermaphrodite. A lady in man's clothing./ A servant for the spinning wheel/ They want to stop a hole with a hole/ My father made me marry him against my will/ I will scream, I will call, I will plead, maybe they will help me/ Or give me another boy who's better endowed.]³⁷

Was this “hermaphrodite” an effeminate, impotent man or was he really a biological hermaphrodite? Or perhaps he was not “endowed” well enough to satisfy the woman's appetite? Or is this simply a roundabout way of saying that the man preferred his own sex? Similar doubts arise after reading “*Trafność spowiednika*” [“The Confessor's Apt Guess”] by Marcin Molski (1752-1822). A young man confesses that he has sinned with a girl, but “languorous with drink he can't remember from which end.” The priest asks:

“Powiedz mi tylko, jeśli wielką rozkosz czułeś,
Gdy tym jadem piekielnym duszę twoją trułeś?”
“Pierwszy raz, ojczy, na moje sumienie,
Tak wielkie zmysłem czułem poruszenie.”
Tu karmelita właśnie jakby ożył,
“Ach, już wiem! – rzecze – z tyłuś ją chędożył.”

[“Tell me only if you felt great delight,/ When you were poisoning your soul with that venom?”/ “It is the first time, to my conscience, father,/ that I felt such rapture of my senses.”/ At that moment the Carmelite became very animated,/ “Oh, I know now, you had her from the back.”]³⁸

³⁶ P. Urbański, “Zakazana przyjaźń...,” 559.

³⁷ “*Płodny jest świat występku.*” *Antologia libertyńskiej poezji erotycznej XVIII wieku*, ed. W. Nawrocki, Wydawnictwo WSP w Kielcach, Piotrków Trybunalski. 1996, 27.

³⁸ *Ibid.* 60.

An inquisitive reader could ask: why does the confessor become so animated all of a sudden? And wherefrom his knowledge of the pleasures drawn from a non-missionary position? In the same anthology references appear to Sodomy, but those are an allusion to sin against a broadly understood Sixth Commandment.³⁹ If the world is “heavy with sin” is that sin almost exclusively heterosexual? Neither will we find descriptions of the male body in Old Polish literature. If men are shown it is in the role of the knight-hero (*virtus*) or – very often –parading their crudeness and vulgarity: “Służyły wiernie, póki pański długi / kuś porzebował ich pilnej usługi” [They served loyally as long as the master’s long/ cock needed their urgent service”]⁴⁰; Trembecki, an example of Enlightenment, describes a “knight-fornicator” who had “a curly hair up his ass.”⁴¹ I will spare the Reader more drastic examples. For contrast I will again quote Oldisworth writing about Bacon:

Tell us, ô tell us, yee that had the grace
So pure an Angel daily to embrace,
Tell us the Heav’nlynesse of those Delights
Wherewith hee fed your Heerings, & your Sights.⁴²

One could quote hundreds of similar examples from the western cultural sphere, suffice it to reach for any of a number of thematic anthologies.⁴³

How many of such texts, however, did not survive because they were resolutely destroyed, and even more so, how many were never written because of self-censorship? How many of those were disguised by the authors themselves and how many were falsified later? In the English translation of Cornelius Nepos the sentence: “Laudi in Creta ducitur adulescentulis quam plurimos habuisse amatores” (“On Crete it is considered laudable for a young man to have many [male] lovers”) was conveyed as: “On Crete it is considered laudable when young men engage in many romances.” It is worth recalling that in the literature of the Middle Ages Alcibiades was usually represented as Socrates’ female companion; the son of Michelangelo’s nephew changed the pronoun’s in Michelangelo’s poems; and even in the 20th century Hafez’s ghazals were transcribed in a heterosexual fashion.⁴⁴ One could quote many such examples.

I would like to mention a category with is entirely unscientific and subjective, but which has an enormous impact on the strategies of homosexual reading of old texts: namely, intuition and instinct that I like to call a “textual gaydar.”⁴⁵ I believe that a gay reader may

³⁹ Ibid., 164, “Skarga na księży do J.W. księdza biskupa Sierakowskiego.

⁴⁰ J.A.Morsztyn, *Paszport kurwom z Zamościa*. The poem is about the fate of girls from the harem of Jan “Sobiepan” Zamoyski after the dignitary’s wedding.

⁴¹ S. Trembecki, “Oda do Priapa,” quoted after: *Płodny jest świat w występku...*, 69.

⁴² Quoted after: P. Hammond, *Figuring Sex between Men...*, 34.

⁴³ See for example: *The Penguin Book of Homosexual Verse*, ed. S. Coote, A. Lane, London, 1983.

⁴⁴ See J. Boswell, *Christianity, Sexual Tolerance, and Homosexuality...*, 29-31.

⁴⁵ The combination of the words “gay” and “radar” is used in the lesbian and gay community to refer to the intuitive ability to identify lesbians and gays.

have the ability to sense textual tensions and be able to remove textual masks, to reveal passages written in invisible ink, to read between the lines,⁴⁶ be sensitive to traces of his own experience, though wrong decodings and overinterpretation are a genuine risk here. I'm afraid that a heterosexual reader cannot fully notice those details, subtleties, and tensions; he simply lacks the experience of oppression and the experience of hiding his sexuality known so well by lesbians and gays, lacks the sensitivity to sexual codes and secret signs hidden in the texts. Usually he also does not know that manifestations of extreme aggression toward homosexuality often conceal the writer's own repressed and hidden desires.

Obviously this type of intuition cannot serve as an interpretative tool,⁴⁷ but it can be an important indication where to search, where to dig deeper, if not always. Many old texts play with the reader, vacillating between explicit statement and mere suggestion, engaging with instability of meanings, all of which strategies may serve as a safe way of expressing homosexual desire. One can see it clearly in Shakespeare's sonnet XX:

Till Nature, as she wrought thee, fell a-doting,
And by addition me of thee defeated,
By adding one thing to my purpose nothing.
But since she prick'd thee out for women's pleasure,
Mine be thy love and thy love's use their treasure.⁴⁸

Apparently all is clear: the "one thing" added by nature is to the speaker's "purpose nothing." The interpretation becomes more complicated, however, when we realize that in Elizabethan English "nothing" was also a colloquial term for female genitalia.⁴⁹ In this sense the "one thing added" which nature endowed the young man with, or penis, would serve the subject the same purpose as female organs (producing pleasure). Is this a wink to the reader? A concept? The problem is that literary allusions and rhetorical figures will in no way translate into the image of historical and social reality. They will not tell us what the non-literary motivation behind the sonnets was, nor whether Oldisworth was in love with Bacon. German Ritz's repeatedly voiced the postulate that we study the poetics of homosexual texts and the construction of their authors on the basis of the works themselves,⁵⁰ with the omission of the writers' biographies and of the genesis of

⁴⁶ A whole register of camouflaged expressions of homosexual desire is quoted by B. Smith in *Homosexual Desire...* Many examples are also quoted by P. Hammond in *Figuring Sex between Men...*, 5-61.

⁴⁷ An example of a particularly controversial reading of an Old Polish text is the idea by Marian Pankowski (a writer sensitive to homosexual matters) to treat Jan Kochanowski's "Gadka" as "a portrait of a male homosexual's body" (!), when the real solution to the puzzle is "musket." See M. Pankowski, "Polska poezja nieokrzesana (próba określenia zjawiska)," *Teksty*, 1978, no 4(40), 45.

⁴⁸ William Shakespeare, *Complete Works*, Henry Pordes, London, 1983, 1201.

⁴⁹ After P. Hammond, *Figuring Sex between Men...*, 16; see also the following edition of Shakespeare's sonnets: *Shakespeare's Sonnets*, ed. K. Duncan-Jones, London, 1997, 151.

⁵⁰ German Ritz, *Niś w labiryntyce pożądania*, trans. B. Drąg, A. Kopacki, M. Łukaszewicz, Wiedza Powszechna, Warsaw, 2002, 54.

their works, is of little help to me, for the archeology of gay studies is interested primarily in what Ritz wants to exclude.

Writing the history of homosexuality based on old texts often means groping in the dark. There exists a slight possibility, however, that the meager “cannon” of Old Polish homosexual behaviors sketched out at the beginning of this article is highly incomplete. And anyway, old history of homosexuality is above all a history of silence or speaking with somebody else’s voice. Then again, perhaps the scholars of Old Polish culture, beginning with Brückner and ending with Tazbir did not search carefully enough, did not attend to the texts with a queer sensitivity (because they could not, would not, or did not know how). In the end, they only found the most blatant things and threw them in the category of “black erotics and deviation”: “the man had relations with him ‘*in posticum*, and gave him the Venus’s curse *in postico*.” In no way do I want to question the authority of the brilliant scholars whose work I continue to draw on as a student of old culture, but I want to suggest that it is worth looking from a different historical and ideological perspective at the phenomena they are describing.

Another obstacle in such research is the fact that specialists in old literature and culture often tend to be conservative, patriarchal, and deeply traditionalist in their views and consequently show a much greater tendency toward homophobia. There are exceptions, of course. I personally know scholars of Old Polish culture who are lesbian and gay, and the level of openness, tolerance, and sensitivity to the problem of homosexuality among many of my Old Polish scholar friends could be the source of envy to many a poststructuralist. The writing of old epochs is, however, deeply rooted in religion and as such often interests individuals who find in it a reflection of their own, often orthodox, opinions and philosophy.⁵¹

It has been said often enough that in the contemporary Polish right-wing nationalist discourse, the place of the pre-war Jew is taken by lesbians and gays. This way of thinking is deeply rooted in history. As Boswell observes,

the fate of Jews and gay people has been almost identical throughout European history, from early Christian hostility to extermination in concentration camps... the same periods of European history which could not make room for Jewish distinctiveness reacted violently against sexual nonconformity; the same countries which insisted on religious uniformity imposed majority standards of sexual conduct.⁵²

There is one difference, however; in the case of homosexual persons, there are,

no gay grandparents who remember the pogroms, no gay exile literature, to remind the living of the fate of the dead, no liturgical commemorations of times of crisis and suffering. *Relatively*

⁵¹ Recently attempts have been made to look at Old Polish culture from a different perspective, for example: D. Śnieżko, “Jak czytało staropolskie ciało. Somatyczne doświadczenia lektury,” *Teksty Drugie*, 2006, no 6 (102); and M. Wilk, “Camp w literaturze staropolskiej,” Kampania. *Zjawisko campu we współczesnej kulturze*, ed. P. Oczko, Wydawnictwo Krytyki Politycznej, Warszawa, 2008.

⁵² J. Boswell, *Christianity, Sexual Tolerance, and Homosexuality...*, 15-6.

Texts and the Body

*few gay people today are aware of the great variety of positions in which time has placed their kind, and in previous societies almost none seem to have had such awareness.*⁵³

The history of (the traces of) homosexual persons in Poland, or even more modestly, the history of their representation, is still waiting to be researched and written.⁵⁴ We are still waiting for the history of groups who were marginalized, repressed, oppressed, and excluded from the dominant discourse (history from below).⁵⁵ I will not be surprised to hear I am advocating “writing history from the back” (after all, in Poland we have already heard the use of the term “menstrual literature”); and I will not be surprised to hear nothing. Excellent texts on the subject exist elsewhere in the world,⁵⁶ and those could serve us as a model. While this gap is slowly being filled in relation to 19th century and contemporary Polish culture,⁵⁷ the Old Polish period is still *terra incognita*. Obviously, this is a project that would require more than one researcher: one would need to perform a queer re-reading of letters, journals, court documents, folk sources, and home chronicles of the nobility. One would also need to look at ways in which homosexuality was inscribed in the general – if not uniform and historically varied – models of Old Polish affect, in the crude knightly sensuality and sexuality, and in historical conceptions of gender roles in Poland.⁵⁸ This is the naïve research proposal I wish to make here and to declare my willingness to participate in it.

Translation: Krystyna Mazur

⁵³ Ibid., 17., italics mine.

⁵⁴ Only one laconic text is available on this subject: a few pages long essay by A. Selerowicz, “Leksykon kochających inaczej. Fakty, daty, zjawiska,” *Softpress*, Poznań, 1994, 13-18.

⁵⁵ I am paraphrasing Ewa Domańska’s “Historiografia insurekcyjna,” *Literatura na świecie*, 2008, no 1-2, 360.

⁵⁶ I will mention but a few: J. Boswell, *Same-Sex Unions in Pre-Modern Europe*, Villard Books, New York 1994; G. Hekma, *Homoseksualiteit in Nederland van 1730 tot de moderne tijd*, Meulenhoff, Amsterdam 2004; *The Pursuit of Sodomy. Male Homosexuality in Renaissance and Enlightenment Europe*, ed. by G. Kent, G. Hekma, Harrington, Park Press, New York, 1989; A. Bray, *Homosexuality in Renaissance England*, Columbia University Press, New York, 1995; *Hidden From History*, ed. by M.B. Duberman, M. Vicinus, G. Chauncey, New American Library, New York 1989. A comprehensive bibliography may be found at: <http://www.fordham.edu/halsall/pwh/gayhistbib.html>

⁵⁷ See for example, K. Tomasik, *Homobiografie. Pisarki i pisarze polscy XIX I XX wieku*, Wydawnictwo Krytyki Politycznej, Warszawa, 2008.

⁵⁸ See, for example, the quoted works by Z. Kuchowicz; T. Chrzanowski, “Ciało sarmackie,” *Teksty*, 1997, no 2; A. Wolan, “Sarmacki eros,” *Dziś. Przegląd społeczny*. 1993, no 8; W. Nawrocki, “Libertyńska prowokacja moralna: poezja ostrych kodów erotycznych, in: *Płodny jest świat występku...*, 7-24.

Łukasz PAWŁOWSKI

Purity, Dirt, and the Chaos of Revolution: On the Two Parts of *Przedwiośnie*¹

Houses of glass and cesspools

In the two most important novels written after the independence, Stefan Żeromski's *Przedwiośnie* and Andrzej Strug's *Pokolenie Marka Świdry*, and in numerous other works of the period,² the protagonist always returns or makes his way with difficulty to Poland from the East. This version of the Odysseus topos³ had a special importance, I believe: the power to structure the nascent Polish state. The return constitutes the crossing of the border and consequently reassures its presence, and consolidates the vision of the new state as clearly separated from revolutionary barbarity. The direction of the journey, invariably from the East, points to the most important Other in relation to whom, or against whom, collective identity constitutes itself.⁴

¹ This article is a modified version of "Czystość, brud i granice. O konstruowaniu rzeczywistości społecznej w *Przedwiośniu*," awaiting publication in a volume of essays from the conference *Dwudziestolecie 1918–1939: odkrycia – fascynacje – zaprzeczenia* at the Polish Department, University of Warsaw, November 18–19, 2008.

² Especially by Jerzy Bandrowski (for example, *Przez jasne wrota*, Wydawnictwo Polskie, Lwów, 1920); Ferdynand Ossendowski (for example *Przez kraj ludzi, bogów i zwierząt*, Gebethner i Wolff, Warsaw, 1923); see also the novel by Andrzej Strug, *Mogiła nieznanego żołnierza* (Ignis, Poznań, 1922). I am referring only to a fraction of texts in which this pattern is visible.

³ J. Kwiatkowski, *Dwudziestolecie międzywojenne*, PWN, Warsaw, 2003, 213–4.

⁴ I am making a tentative assumption, which I will develop in the course of the argument. The first movement in the formation of a new individual or collective identity depends on drawing boundaries, on differentiating the I (us) from the not-I (not-us).

Contemporary anthropology alerts us to one of the aspects of shaping the symbolic boundary. In the works of Mary Douglas and Julia Kristeva (who draws inspiration from some of the aspects of Douglas' work) the division of the inside and the outside is based on the opposition between purity and pollution. In short, in the analysis of cultures offered by Douglas and Kristeva, purity is synonymous with the ordered world, while dirt signifies amorphousness, decay, and chaos; the latter situates itself at the outskirts of "our" reality, which is in the process of being created, or has already been tamed and is continually threatened by the invasion of the impure.⁵

Prose written in the first period after independence leaves no doubt which side the powers of entropy reside on. The revolution in the memoirs of Zofia Kossak-Szczuczka, *Pożoga*, also stains the heritage of the Polish landowning elites of eastern Poland, the so-called *Kresy*, which is suggestively emphasized by the images of devastated and polluted manors, with excrement covering the floors. In *Pożoga*, the turning of the mansions into outhouses has a symbolic meaning: it is a way in which one "shows contempt for the place" and its former owners.⁶ The unfulfilled vision of the entry of the Polish troops into her native Wołyń, on the other hand, is enveloped in an aura of luminosity: "Oh, for that moment! We will dress our children in white and for the first time this year will take them to church. I wish I could also wear white for that moment."⁷

A very similar contrasting juxtaposition of images shapes the meaning of the first part of *Przedwiośnie*, which, as the scholars of this work by Żeromski suspect, was written on the basis of reports by repatriates from the South of the former tsarist

This process is based on dichotomization and, consequently, a selection of one significant Other, who becomes the source of negative identification. The stronger the shared emotions inspired by the Other are, the greater his ability to homogenize the new community. See M. Jarymowicz, "Tożsamość jako efekt rozpoznawania się wśród obcych," in: *Tożsamość a odmiennność kulturowa*, ed. P. Boski, M. Jarymowicz, H. Malewska-Peyre, Wydawnictwo Instytutu Psychologii PAN, Warsaw, 1992.

⁵ I am using works key to the anthropology of (im)purity: M. Douglas, *Purity and Danger: An Analysis of Concepts of Pollution and Taboo*, Taylor, 2002; J. Kristeva, *Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection*, Columbia University Press, 1982. I do not care for an orthodox application of Kristeva's and Douglas' theory in the reading of *Przedwiośnie*. I only draw inspiration from their work. A theoretical approach which refers to the symbolic meaning of impurity is used in historical-literary analysis by: M. Sugiera, "Leworęczna i wilkołak. 'Inny' w dramatach Lubkiewicz-Urbanowicz," *Teksty Drugie*, 1999, no 5; K. Kłosińska, *Fantazmaty: Grabiński, Prus, Zapolska*, Wydawnictwo UŚ, Katowice, 2004; in art criticism by: P. Leszkowicz, *Helen Chadwick: ikonografia podmiotowości*, Aureus, Cracow, 2001; M. Bakke, *Ciało otwarte: filozoficzne reinterpretacje kulturowych wizji cielesności*, Wydawnictwo Naukowe Instytutu Filozofii UAM, Poznań, 2000; and in historical-social anthropology by: J. Frydman, O. Löfgren, *Narodziny człowieka kulturalnego. Studium z antropologii historycznej szwedzkiej klasy średniej*, trans. G. Sokół, Wydawnictwo Marek Derewecki, Kęty, 2007.

⁶ Z. Kossak-Szczuczka, *Pożoga, Wspomnienia z Wołynia 1917-1919*, Księgarnia Św. Jacka, Katowice, 1990, 155.

⁷ Ibid., 282.

empire.⁸ In the account of the events in Baku, descriptions which bring to mind impurity are very strongly marked. The image of the bodies of people murdered during the Armenian-Tartar massacre, brought to the enormous collective graves becomes an ironic conclusion to the momentous events of the revolution. The beginning of the Bolshevik terror forces Cezary and his father, the former tsarist clerk, to meet in the most secluded places, by the sewer outlets. In *Przedwiośnie*, revolution has its intense smell: “the fetor” of decomposing bodies, the stench of excrement “which took one’s breath away,” the air in the trains carrying refugees “close and rancid” like “stupefying gasses,” and even “the stench of the poorly treated [sheep]skins” (71, 80, 117).⁹ Staring at the ships departing with the emigrants from the Black Sea port, Baryka speaks of the “open maw” of the decks and “the excrement of Russia” (42). If one gives a slightly broader significance to this image one could say that Baku, marked with bodily decay, becomes a synecdoche for the entire Empire taken over by the revolution.

This vision is juxtaposed with the dream of Poland with houses made of glass. The distinctive feature of the future Polish modern political system is to be cleanliness, which acquires its most perfect form, transparency, in the tale of the half-mad Seweryn Baryka.

Travel to Poland, when Seweryn Baryka engages in his fantastic visions, opens another possibility of interpreting the problem which is central to my reading. As the narrator, the chronicler of the journey, notes, the father who awaited the repatriate train for weeks in Kharkov “had repeated attacks of sickness” and “had to lie in a cubby hole under some stairs where he was allowed to rest during the day” (105). This allusion to the legend of Saint Alexius lends hagiographic character to the description of Seweryn Baryka (Cezary’s mother is represented in a similar manner). Subtle allusions to the religious sphere appear also at other moments of the journey: the narrator uses the term “the two travelers”; he calls Seweryn Baryka, dying on the repatriate train, “a pilgrim who himself had had to abandon his own distant destination” (113, 120). The allegorical representation of travel, which lends it the significance of a pilgrimage, implies a symbolic purity in the aim of the journey.¹⁰ Juxtaposed with the sacred, whiter-than-snow, idea of the homeland of the journeying exiles, bolshevism from the first part of the novel is but the dark power of chaos. Numerous contemporary writers and thinkers have associated communism with demonic powers.¹¹

Żeromski would surely agree with Marian Zdziechowski’s thesis expressed in his work from the 1930s that (what he saw as) the satanic quality of the Bolshevik ideology is related to its power to objectify, to reduce the world to undifferentiated matter.¹²

⁸ Z.J. Adamczyk, *Przedwiośnie. Prawda i legenda*. Oficyna Wydawnicza GiP, Poznań, 2001, 51.

⁹ S. Żeromski, *The Coming of Spring*, trans. Bill Johnston, CEU Press, 2007.

¹⁰ A. Wieczorkiewicz, *Wędrowcy fikcyjnych światów. Pielgrzym, rycerz, włóczęga, słowo/obraz/terytoria*, Gdańsk, 1996; especially “Wprowadzenie” and first chapter, “Alegoryczne peregrynacje.”

¹¹ E. Pogonowska, “Armia Antychrysta,” in: *Dziki Biesy. Wizja Rosji Sowieckiej w antybolszewickiej poezji polskiej lat 1917–1932*, Wydawnictwo UMCS, Lublin, 2002.

¹² M. Zdziechowski, “Widmo przyszłości,” in his: *Wybór Pism*, ed. M. Zaczyński, Znak, Cracow, 1993; discussion of the text: E. Pogonowska, *Armia Antychrysta*, 139.

The crossing of the Polish border must lead to disillusionment. Disappointed by the view of the mud-flooded eastern town, Baryka repeats with disenchantment: “where on earth are your houses of glass” (126). Similar images appear in the later parts of the text. Terrible dirt exudes from the descriptions of “peasant pariahs” in the Chłodek farm, and from the Jewish “trash heaps, gutters, and sewers” at Nalewki. Dirt shown in the reality of the new Poland in a naturalist way, in its literal dimension, provokes the question about the symbolic meaning of impurity, not only for establishing boundaries, but also for establishing the inner order of the new state.

In Mary Douglas’ theory, the opposition between purity and impurity performs the role of a super-guard of the social structure, creating a simplified code of fundamental rules of community living.¹³ Pure or repulsive, accepted or ruthlessly condemned, respect or disrespect for the rules which often signifies the breaking of a taboo: along these lines the norms defining a given society become morally sanctioned and acquire the status of absolute commands and prohibitions. The introduction of super-rules is in fact proof of the weakness of the rules. The tendency toward the absolute rules is characteristic of societies without a crystallized, stable order.¹⁴ And to fortify the grounds of social life with rituals or ideas of purity and pollution may suggest that those very grounds are threatened.

The title of the third part of Żeromski’s novel is an expression of the phantasms tormenting the new collectivity.¹⁵ “The Wind from the East” ignores the commands and prohibitions of absolute borders. Imperceptibly it penetrates the interior of the new state, bringing with it the miasma of the deteriorating Empire and the germs of its decomposition. The metaphors of the revolution popular at the beginning of the period between the wars (the wind or contagious disease) emphasize its transgressive role. Perhaps, however, the chaos of upheaval was present in the new state from the start as the force of the original lack of differentiation preceding and conditioning the possibility of establishing new cultural forms. The new state emerges thanks to the ferment of History, which brought down three great empires, and most likely has not disappeared with their demise.

Between 1918-1923, a wave of demonstrations and strikes erupted in Poland. Their escalation led to the bloody riots in Cracow in November 1923. It is difficult to find clear echoes of those events in the prose of the first half of the 1920s. The experience of the world threatened by social upheaval, in which “kitchens and pantries change into arsenals of live bombs,”¹⁶ penetrates into literature as an undefined anxiety. It is present in the lyrical prose of Jarosław Iwaszkiewicz, although the melancholy aura of foggy Warsaw in *Hilary, syn buchaltera*, seems to euphemistically subdue, muffle, the

¹³ M. Douglas, *Purity and Danger*; the chapter “Internal Lines” is devoted to this topic.

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ I am interested here only in the title metaphor which was popular and resonant at the time. For comments about the elusiveness and phantasmatic character of the images of the stranger see: E. Pogonowska, “Armia Antychrysta,” 132.

¹⁶ K.H. Rostworowski, *Antychryst. Tragedia w 3 aktach*, Wydawnictwo Polskie, Lviv, 1925, 101.

revolutionary anxieties, making them present only in the form of vague allusion.¹⁷ In Władysław Reymont's novel *Bunt zwierząt* [Animal Mutiny], which attempts to give the real sense of threat a universalizing form of the parable, outlines of typical Polish realities emerge. The manor against which the animals rise, the symbol of the power of the nobility, clearly resembles a landowner's mansion.¹⁸ The power of the social fear animates also the phantasms of the bloody peasant uprising and the anti-national myth of Jakub Szela.¹⁹

The first part of *Przedwiośnie* points to the most important mechanisms of constructing the new collective identity. The creation of the symbolic border determines the sense of "Szkłane domy." This border, however, does not protect from internal danger. The impure, the tainted with chaos, may be revealed anywhere, violating the rules which regulate reality and disrupting the cohesion of novelistic narration. In *Przedwiośnie*, this impurity is present where it would be least expected.

"Nawłóć," or anxiety

The war of 1920 is represented in Żeromski's novel by a mere few episodes, maintained in the "deadly" style of reports from the front. In the second part of the text, the author moves the action to a landowner's manor located on the periphery of great events. The significance of this move in a novel which attempts to represent the most important problems of the reality of the early 1920s remains unclear. "Nawłóć" escapes a coherent reading and its historical and historical-literary interpretation is marked by ambivalence. Among the most important of those difficulties²⁰ are: the fact that the presence of this, most impressive, section of the novel is not justified by the novel's compositional logic and the fact that the praise of the beauty of life on the land is cou-

¹⁷ Such an allusion is contained, for example, in one of the descriptions of the cityscape: "All of Warsaw in the fog, in the fog. The fall draping itself despairingly on the great homesteads, the roaming of the crowds in the brown confinement with no expansion of any horizon, *those uneasy dreams of the black human masses* [emphasis mine, Ł.P.] wandering down Nowy Świat, Długa, Nalewki, Chmielna, and Marszałkowska. The anxiety of pale lamps when the fog drowns them and the only exit toward the broken bridge. A dead-end road." (J. Iwaszkiewicz, *Hilary syn buchaltera*, Czytelnik, Warsaw, 1975, 16; first edition in 1923. [trans, KM])

¹⁸ "The missus ran in from her rooms, the young master came with a rifle, the young mistress with dolls in her hands, and two red dachshunds appeared wriggling like snakes." (W. Reymont, *Bunt*, Fronda, Warszawa, 2004, 10; first edition 1924. [trans. KM]) The description seems stereotypical, using images strongly embedded in the Polish imagination.

¹⁹ That is the case also in the works by Żeromski, for example *Turoń. Dramat w trzech aktach* (J. Mortkowicz, Warsaw, 1923).

²⁰ Two most popular critical texts related to the novel, both of which had several editions, emphasize these difficulties: Artur Hutnikiewicz's *Przedwiośnie Stefana Żeromskiego* (Państwowe Zakłady Wydawnictw Szkolnych, Warsaw, 1971) and Henryk Markiewicz's "*Przedwiośnie*" *Stefana Żeromskiego* (Czytelnik, Warsaw, 1965).

pled with a sharp critique of the landed gentry (the Old Polish word “nawłóć” means “a weed,” the fact which is frequently emphasized by post-1945 readers of the novel).

“Nawłóć” also does not fit the formula of the realistic novel if, in the case of *Przedwiośnie*, we establish the reality of the beginning of the 1920s as the criterion. As Artur Hutnikiewicz argues, the existence of the Nawłóć arcadia, a land of plenty, was improbable at the time. As he further demonstrates, Żeromski must have taken the image of the world of the landed gentry from his memories of the time when he worked as a tutor at the manors in Szulmierz, Oleśnica, and Łysowo.²¹ Żeromski’s private mythology is strongly connected to the national mythology. The world of manorial Nawłóć is a conscious reference to Soplicowo, the archetypical model of Polishness.²² The 20th century copy of the 19th century Soplicowo, however, refuses to faithfully imitate the original. A play with convention and its ironic overstatement is very perceptible in “Nawłóć.” The scene from *Pan Tadeusz* when Tadeusz sees Zosia wearing the morning, informal attire, so full of subtle eroticism, in Żeromski’s work turns into a description of Cezary “enjoying the sight of this young beauty in her undress” as “she lifted up her already diminutive little nightshirt” (170).

Such parodic repetition, which situates a traditional model in an updated context familiar to the author, suggests a historical reading of that model.²³ Irony in the second part of *Przedwiośnie* seems to have double significance. To begin with, it gives some of the characters a subtly reflective character, an awareness of their role²⁴, so that they are no longer the naïve inhabitants of this sanctuary of instinctual Polishness.²⁵ Then, as it brackets or undermines the idyllic image of the world of Nawłóć, it opens the text to what is different in this world, perhaps unconsciously revealed. My analysis below is an attempt to develop those two interpretive clues.

²¹ A. Hutnikiewicz, *Przedwiośnie Stefana Żeromskiego*, 47-8.

²² Such references in the text are very explicit (“Cezary Baryka was interrupted in his reverie like Tadeusz Soplica after his arrival in the country.” 169) Heryk Markiewicz closely attends to the Nawłóć-Soplicowo parallel (“*Przedwiośnie*” *Stefana Żeromskiego*, 12-14).

²³ Obviously I am aware of the ironical, historical and stylized quality which permeates also Mickiewicz’s description of the culture of Polish gentry. Yet in *Pan Tadeusz* those qualities are signaled much more subtly and appear not to violate the essential core of the world of Soplicowo.

²⁴ One could speculate, for example, whether the always silent Maciejunio is really the faithful masters’ servant, the master of ceremonies modeled on Wojski, or whether he only performs such a character. For example, in one of the scenes we see him in the hat of the French *maitre de hotel*, which would suggest that the kindly Maciejunio is no stranger to the awareness of stylization, mask, and role.

²⁵ Dariusz Gawin writes about the “instinctual Polishness” of Nawłóć in one of the latest interpretations of the novel (“Polska, wieczny romans Żeromskiego” in: *Polska, wieczny romans*, Wydawnictwo DANTE, Cracow, 2005, 117). If the phrase was not used ironically, it would be difficult to agree with it.

The end of the long-lasting paradigm of the culture of the nobility is first recognized in *Pan Tadeusz*, whose author concludes the descriptions of characters and customs with the epithet “the last.” Mickiewicz’s epos, however, still describes the world which inspires ontological trust. In Soplicowo everything is still in its place. A similar conviction in “Nawłóć” stated *expressis verbis* – “Here, everything was in its place, well established and safely safeguarded” (156) – suggests only empty stylization. In *Przedwiośnie*, the world of noble arcadia lacks the static and unchangeable form which lends *Pan Tadeusz* its epic majesty. Instead, the world may be symbolically represented with the horses’ gallop. The dynamic scenes of riding the britzka, the cabriolet, and on horseback, take up many pages of the novel. Drawing on the youthful memories of the author, the narrator does not want to lag behind the characters in their ecstatic experience of the world. An autobiographical confession finds its way into the novel: “What words can describe the joy of healthy young people being taken by devilish strong horses to a ball of the Polish gentry!” (245).

As important, or even more important, than the scenes of wild rides are the descriptions of spectacular falls. Already Baryka’s arrival in Nawłóć is marked by the overturning of the equipage: “its wheels spun convulsively, while the travelers were ejected as if from a slingshot” (144). A sudden dash of the horses urged with a whip makes the priest and Karusia fall off the bench in a britzka: “In a synchronized movement she and the priest had tumbled from the swinging seat straight into the empty back of the britzka,” Miss Karolina exposing her underwear in the process (198). In both descriptions the narrator strongly emphasizes the moment of the throwing off balance, the displacement of the characters. The “spasmodic” motion of the slowing down wheels of the equipage seems to disrupt the anecdotal character of the account, suddenly introducing a dramatic and menacing tone. The descriptions of the falls may suggest that the experience of the instability and uncertainty of the world constitutes the other side of the ebullient life of the Nawłóć arcadia. It appears that the grand presentation of the lives of the gentry takes place on a wobbly stage which does not offer a sense of stability and is continually threatened with disillusionment and exposure of what should remain hidden.

In Nawłóć one encounters many characters dispossessed of their social role and the cultural form related to it, in other words, displaced. Father Anastazy croons frivolous French songs and fondly reminisces about his visit to Paris. At the ball in Odolany he parades around in a priestly “skirt” instead of a “full-length cassock” (244). Since he returned from the army, Jędrek the stable-boy came down with lordliness. In each gesture, in his tone of voice and smile, he imitates the young master Hipolit. Imitation, one may assume, is here not a sign of servile admiration. Such reading would ignore the sphere of the newly awoken aspirations of the stable-boy who, upon returning from his service with the officers, has outgrown the role assigned to him in Nawłóć. Fond of repeating words used by people from the higher spheres, such as “relatively,” “perchance,” and “utterly,” Jędrek (even if not fully consciously) posits lordliness as a type of knowledge or art one can master. The ultimate consequence of such a way of thinking would be a total denaturalization of the hierarchical social order of Nawłóć

Texts and the Body

traditionally based on birth into the position of privilege. Jędrzek's comic behavior is, as Baryka foresees, very dangerous, for it carries a subversive revolutionary potential.

The premonition of the tragedy of the Nawłóć manor torments Cezary with obsessive nightmarish visions. They appear in the text as interior monologues:

When will the abominable day come when this Jędrzek will find the courage and the strength to grab the young master by the throat and smash him in the gob, alternatively in the mug? Is he capable of letting in the poor of the surrounding villages so they can finally see what's in there, what there is in that drawing room, in the middle of the old manor house that's more inaccessible and mysterious to the crowd than the church in Nawłóć?" (176-7)

They are visible also in the catastrophic speeches made in alcoholic stupor:

He put his arm around Hipolit in a drunken embrace and whispered earnestly in his ear:

"Be on your guard, my friend! Keep your eyes open! For that silver cigarette case of yours alone, for the sake of a few silver spoons, those same people, believe me, the same people, Maciejunio and Wojciunio, Szymek and Walek, and even that Józio –Józio! – they'll drag you out into the garden and cut your head off with an ax." (156)

Those images return at the moments when the protagonist is separated from the world: in deep thought or alcoholic stupor, when the commonsense perception of reality is impaired. They have a ghostly quality of a waking dream in which well-known people, familiar objects and spaces reveal a new and different nature. Baryka's bad premonitions resemble hallucinations, if we understand them, after Julia Kristeva, as obscure signs of something hiding under the cover of apparently "quiet symbolism."²⁶

It is worth posing the question, then, which symbolic order is disrupted by the disturbing phantasms: that of the subject or that of the surrounding world? To put it in other terms, is Cezary's memory, his psyche wounded by the cruelty of the revolution the only source of the disturbing images? Perhaps the newcomer, marked by the traumatic experiences is in fact able to see the deadly danger which really exists in the idyllic world of Nawłóć? The former of these interpretations seems entirely obvious; the latter not so untenable. Two hypotheses may support the latter reading.

If, as Arnold van Gennep argues in *Rites of Passage*, the primary aim of the rituals related to hospitality is to destroy the stranger's "evil eye" (perhaps capable of seeing the undesirable aspects of reality), then one has to admit that this goal was not achieved in Nawłóć.²⁷ In Mickiewicz's epos, "kin or stranger, he that stayed awhile/ Within the Judge's house quickly acquired/ The customs that the very place inspired."²⁸ The situation with Baryka is the exact opposite: when he is leaving, he seems as strange and inscrutable to the inhabitants of the manor house as when he first arrived. The world of the Nawłóć arcadia contains a fundamental lack, it cannot evoke the atmosphere of

²⁶ Julia Kristeva, *The Powers of Horror*.

²⁷ A. van Gennep, *Rites of Passage*, University Of Chicago Press; Reprint edition, 1961, 27.

²⁸ A. Mickiewicz, *Pan Tadeusz*, trans. Kenneth R. Mackenzie, Hippocrene Books, New York, 2000, 14.

Soplicowo; in the spring of independence, Nawłóć cannot find space for the strange, half-Russified countryman in the realm of the apparently instinctual Polishness, nor annul his bad premonitions. We cannot claim, then, that those are merely the sign of the protagonist's obsession.

The inhabitants of the manor seem to treat the strangeness of the guest with gentle tolerance. They regard his "bolshevism" – the radical slogans he promotes, the desire to know about the real lives of the working people – as a type of Tolstoyan or communist "blague," which, in the light of social relations of Nawłóć, seems not only exotic but also absurd. As Hipolit says when cautioning his friend about the desire to realize his social ideals among the servants of the "state of Nawłóć": "Here you can do anything you fancy, but only on condition that you don't make yourself look ridiculous" (214). The behavior of the same Hipolit Wielowiejski at the end of the *Odolany* ball, however, is no longer so full of the patronizing arrogance and betrays a deep complex in relation to the guest who is now considered the representative of the new forces born out of the revolution: "He despises us. I know it, and there is nothing more to be said. He refuses to drink with us because we're bourgeois and he's a big Bolshevik" (265).

The phrases "big Bolshevik" and "he despises us" juxtaposed with the negative term borrowed from the Bolshevik propaganda, "we're bourgeois," which implies the detested departing class of land owners, seem to reveal Hipolit's feeling of inferiority in relation to the visitor from revolutionary Russia. It is as if the heir to the Nawłóć fortune felt the pressure of the forces of History, which transform him and the class of people like him (Hipolit's outburst of anger verging on aggression immediately gets transferred onto his brother Anastazy) into a pernicious anachronism. One suspects that the bad premonitions affected not only the stranger who witnessed the revolution but also others in Nawłóć. Yet only Baryka voices them openly.

What is the social order of Nawłóć, then? I believe it is a cultural cliché, which attempts to hide the vehement present of the beginning of the 1920s. The Soplicowo of Nawłóć is an impure myth, or, to use a very contemporary term, a perforated myth. Through the cracks and gaps of this world based on the unstable, moving ground, enters chaos, signifying the element of History, which is also present here. Authors of articles and books on the novel have pointed out the fact that Nawłóć has a second bottom. They have written on the dark feelings which hide under the surface of the apparent idyll, about the summery world and its underlying annihilation and uncertainty.²⁹ A radical change in the context of interpretation of *Przedwiośnie* would allow to develop these suggestions further.

In his book on the British artist, photographer and author of installations, *Helen Chadwick: ikonografia podmiotowości*, drawing inspiration from the work of Julia Kristeva, Paweł Leszkowicz comments on the fragility of the boundary dividing the symbolic order, or the world of human life and action, from the semiotic, or the sphere

²⁹ The first of those terms is used by Z. J. Adamczyk in *Przedwiośnie Stefana Żeromskiego w świetle dyskusji i polemik z 1925 roku*, WSP, Kielce, 1988, 52; the second by D. Gawin, *Polska wieczny romans...*, 124.

of primary, uncontrolled drives. In his suggestive interpretations, among others, of the work "Chocolate," Leszkowicz points to "the dark modality of the subject and reality"; he defines the semiotic with the metaphor of "the sensual lining of the world which constitutes both the ground and the reverse of the symbolic order and the visibility related to it."³⁰ The author is particularly interested in the fluidity or permeability of the boundary between "the amorphous interior" and "the normative exterior," the moments of rupture of the symbolic structure, when it opens to the irrational and the sensual.³¹

We can find such moments also in "Nawłóć." Paradoxically, the more the author emphasizes the symbolic, culturally fixed character of the Nawłóć Soplicowo, the more it undergoes a semiotization. The repressed chaos, the babble of history, rise to the surface of the text and mark it with inscriptions, attacking the icons and signs most powerfully fixed in national mythology. The scene of feeding poultry, famous from Mickiewicz's epos, in "Nawłóć" becomes a mad attack of "the poultry soviet"; the stately polonaise, in *Pan Tadeusz* a symbol of distinction and stability of a cultural form, is replaced at the ball in *Odolany* with the Cossack's wild "Russki dance" (166, 264). The banquets which should unify end in stammering, drunken cacophony.

Little is left also of Mickiewicz's simple "Let us love one other," if we apply this entreaty to the love relationships of the characters. Although the problem of eroticism in *Przedwiośnie* is not the concern of this essay, it is worth pointing out, that, similar to History, eroticism is inseparable from the powers of destruction. The inseparably conjoined instincts of death and desire³² pulsate under the cover of narration stylized to sound antiquated.³³ Their escalation may be found in the scene of Karolina's death, who is poisoned by a rival. Seen and touched by Cezary, the body of the beautiful girl transforms from the erotic to the traumatic. It begins to arouse terror, and, as the narrator's description suggests, disgust.

After Karolina's death, an unsurpassable border of hostile estrangement is created between the "strange visitor" (321) and the manor inhabitants. Baryka has to leave the world of Nawłóć and his stay at the Chłodek farm is but an episode, a stop on his way back.

"Nawłóć" is not anachronistic in relation to the other parts of the novel. Apparently only the context of the beginning of the 1920s can give the story about a visit to a landowners' manor the right, suggestive inflection. "Nawłóć" is a record of the fragility and uncertainty of the world after (the seemingly distant) revolution. The instability and chaos, the author seems to argue, are hidden even in what is most lasting and solid in the archetypal haven of Polishness.

³⁰ Paweł Leszkowicz, *Helen Chadwick*, 188.

³¹ *Ibid.* 133-8; a paraphrase of a passage from page 137.

³² Henryk Markiewicz wrote about "the tangle of elemental and brutal passions" in the world of Nawłóć (*"Przedwiośnie"* *Stefana Żeromskiego*, 14).

³³ It is worth pointing out the footnote to the reader, but also other fragments of the text whose blatant eroticism is barely hidden by the poetic fig leaf, as in the abovementioned memory of Laura's secret tryst with Baryka at the ball in *Odolany*.

Such interpretative thesis provokes several questions. My reading of the two parts of the novel inspired by the anthropology of impurity is intended as an opening of space for reflection on Żeromski's work and, more broadly, on the relation between social life and literature at the beginning of the 1920s.³⁴

The discovery of the strangeness within oneself is connected in Kristeva's theory to the repression of the abject: the dark semiotic sphere of subjectivity is marked by disgust and removed outside the frame of the order of the I or Us which thus constitutes itself.³⁵ Here I can only remark that in the third part of the novel the revolution is represented by a legible figure, that of Lulek, the communist. The narrator does everything in his power to make this sympathizer of world revolt as hideous as possible to the reader, to place him outside the border or to move him beyond the boundary of social acceptance.

If the ordering and purifying of the symbolic space of the new state was related to repressing the revolutionary abject, it is worth asking about the consequences of this mechanism for the shaping of the vision of the social world in newly independent Poland. How does establishing bolshevism as the outer border of the (un)acceptable and (im)permissible in the "welcoming discourse" of the new state translate into the character of the inner social norms and prohibitions?³⁶ What gets removed together with the revolutionary abject from the new interpretation of reality? What is considered

³⁴ Apart from the canonical novels of 1918-1925—*Przedwojnie*, *Pokolenie Marka Świdry*, *Generał Barcz* by Juliusz Kaden-Bandrowski and *Romans Teresy Hennert* by Zofia Nałkowska, the less well-known prose is interesting in this context. The novel by Piotr Choynowski, *Dom w śródmieściu* (Gebethner and Wolf, Warsaw, 1923) and Zbigniew Bartkiewicz's collection of short stories and fictionalized sketches about the everyday lives in the first years of new Poland (*Wyzwolenie*, Księgarnia Św. Wojciecha, Poznań, 1925). The influence of the political differences of the time on the ways of perceiving reality is well defined in the novels by Józef Weyssenhoff (*Cudno i ziemia cudzeńska*, "Biblioteka Polska," Warsaw, 1921; *Noc i świt*, "Biblioteka Polska," Warsaw, 1925) who represents the position of the national democrats and, on the other hand, in the novel by Stefania Tatarówna, a socialist from the Polish Socialist Party (*Przeciw losowi*, Księgarnia J. Czarnieckiego, Cracow, 1930; the novel was written in mid-1920s, but was only published in 1930). It would be also interesting to look at the beginning of new Poland from a perspective other than the anti-Bolshevik one; this is offered by the communist Lucjan Rudnicki in his short story collection *Republika demokratyczna* (Książka, Warsaw, 1921). These titles are obviously merely selected examples from a much broader literary legacy from that period.

³⁵ J. Kristeva, *The Powers of Horror*, especially the chapters "Approaching Abjection" and "... Qui Tollis Peccata Mundi." One of the literary-historical uses of the theory is Małgorzata Sugiera's work devoted to the play *Wijuny* by Teresa Lubkiewicz-Urbanowicz, which focuses on "the gesture of removing outside the stranger who in fact is inside the subject" ("Leworęczna i wilkołak...", esp. 151-5).

³⁶ Małgorzata Jacyno introduces the idea of "the welcoming discourse" which "establishes the borders of the new order and rules of participation in that order" in her book *Iluzje codzienności. O teorii socjologicznej Pierr'a Bourdieau*, Wydawnictwo IFiS PAN, Warsaw, 1997, 63.

Texts and the Body

the idiom of Bolshevik discourse? One could also reflect on whether the literature of the time does or does not recognize the dangerous, socially underprivileged section of the society as capable of starting a revolution; and whether its representation of reality involves the dynamic of social change or the lack of such dynamic. I believe the problems signaled above carry interesting interpretive potential.

Translation: Krystyna Mazur

Jeannette SLABY

Stereotypes of Maternity in Prose Works of Anna Nasifowska and Manuela Gretkowska

Research on stereotypes proves how important they are for comprehension of the world and communication with it, keeping in mind that stereotypes should not be the only source of cognition, “Stereotype precedes using the mind; it is a form of perception which imposes a certain character on our senses before they reach our mind.”¹ Psychology explains this phenomenon from two different perspectives. On the one hand, conventional thinking saves us from making an intellectual effort. It integrates us with the group and helps us obtain general appreciation. On the other hand, stereotyping also means the unconditional imposition of one behaviour and activity pattern on a particular community. As a result, one needs to conform to generally functioning matrices in fear of being “a stranger/the other”: “their [stereotypes] presence is validated by the community which uses them to clearly mark the borders of their own and the others’ identity, even for the price of considerable simplification.”²

A stereotype is, therefore, a type of a cognitive net defining the dynamics of the relation between the community and the individual; it also helps people categorize and conceptualize the world, including their own emotions and beliefs.³

Literature that perpetuates stereotypes is not bad literature. It rather refers to the common (even if it’s certainly erroneous) view and reception of images firmly embed-

¹ W. Lippmann *Public Opinion*, after: D. Piontek “Stereotype: Genesis, Features, Functions,” [in:] *Among Myths and Stereotypes*, ed. K. Borowczyk, P. Pewelczyk, Poznań/Toruń 1993. 21.

² B. Tokarz. “Creator – Stereotype – Profiling: i.e., Alternative Literary Reality,” *Przestrzeń Teorii* 2003 no 2. 23.

³ Ibid. 23-34.

ded in the social consciousness. Stereotypes order our world and effectively, they make it seem better known or familiar, and so it seems safer. According to Zofia Mitosek, the relation between stereotype and literature is based on three rules: stabilization, creation, and decipherization.⁴ The first of them – stabilization – means that a stereotype we come across will not question anything. It will summarize and describe for the reader his own knowledge about a given subject. Due to lack of the objective distance, a recipient of a given work will not have any doubts. Moreover, stereotype stabilization will preserve their conviction that the world from their books does not differ from the real world: “It is how it is.” This phenomenon is most often encountered in popular readings of mass culture: criminal novels, Harlequin romances, etc.

Another possibility of stereotype’s existence in literature is its creation. According to Kamila Budrowska, however, it has not taken place yet in Polish literature since 1989. It is uncertain whether it will happen at all. As Mitosek explains, creation of a stereotype means “adapting literary images in descriptions of experiences that are close to the reader” and that it concerns a situation of “identification of the recipient with fictional characters.”⁵ Put simply, it means that the reader would use the “I am Mrs. Bovary” formula, only replacing the name of Flaubert’s heroine with names of subsequent characters from his or her books.

The last method to note existence of stereotypes in literature is its decipherization. This term covers all activities of the author aimed at ridiculing and pointing to it a given stereotype which results in exhibiting the very moment of schematic thinking creation. This theory underlines probably the most important feature of stereotype in literature: its participation in literary communication. In this sense, stereotypes can be treated as “units that locate themselves not only inside or outside the act of communication, but also in the sphere of presupposed meanings: i.e., assumed to be known and which – being components of the recipient’s knowledge – condition the positive influence of the very utterance.”⁶

Since Zofia Mitosek’s publication, it has not been clarified whether stereotype is or is not a literary category. It is the least risky to follow Bożena Tokarz’s definition and treat it as a borderline phenomenon in the humanities, similarly to myth or topos.⁷ Stereotype in literature could also be considered a figure of thought which underlines its proximity to rhetorical activities. This means that stereotypes often take various forms: linguistic – sayings, idioms; literary – in the form of themes, plots, styles; and iconic – presenting culture related behaviour or finally, in the sphere of rituals (*sacrum*) and customs (*profanum*).⁸

⁴ Z. Mitosek *Literature and Stereotypes*, Zakład Narodowy im. Ossolińskich, Wrocław 1974. 174-190.

⁵ Ibid. 180-181.

⁶ G. Grochowski. “Stereotypes – Communication – Literature,” *Przestrzeń Teorii* 2003 no 2. 68.

⁷ B. Tokarz *Creator – Stereotype...22*.

⁸ Ibid., 25.

Stereotypes of maternity and attempts to challenge them

In every culture there is a stereotype of maternity: i.e., a group of commonplace views on the mother's role, her rights and duties. This image often changes as it is shaped by a political (war) or social (women's emancipation) situation. It is impossible to speak about maternity without the social context in which the mother exists by means of her ability to reproduce. Here, stereotypes linked with her maternity are formed around one rule: the child is most important.

This thought is already present in the first sentence of one's biography, "I was born on..." ("Urodziłam się dnia..."). Bogusława Budrowska writes that the active form used here [in Polish – przyp. tłum.] indicates complete independence of the child at its birth – the child is introduced as an active subject of the event⁹. The structure obviously depends on a given language's grammar. In English, the form "I was born" indicates a certain passiveness of the child, although the mother is not mentioned either.¹⁰

Another stereotype places the future mother in a position of a person who is adult enough to handle difficulties related with maternity. From the biological point of view, any girl who has already had a period can become a mother, although the physiological and hormonal readiness often does not coincide with mental maturity. It seems, however, that in its stereotypical, common meaning, nature does not need spiritual preparation, an acceptable boundary – such as the age limit – in order to become a mother. Nature formulates and applies its own rules. Paradoxically, pregnancy of a nine-year-old girl will not be perceived as a part of the natural urge of life and omnipresent nature that forced the girl to reproduction.

The age of a mother who gives birth to her first child is also crucial after the age of 35, when the risk of afterbirth complications is higher. The mother needs to be aware of the fact that maternity will entirely remodel the life she has led so far. This awareness is called the maternal instinct.

From the perspective of today's research, the problem of the maternal instinct seems to be resolved. In her analysis of social and cultural approach to this problem in France, Elisabeth Badinter pointed to the fact that the myth of maternity was constructed considerably late – the starting date set to the 1762 publication of Jean Jacques Rousseau's *Emile*.¹¹ On the other hand, Sally Macintyre claims that any evidence of the maternal instinct is rooted in the animal world (the very term "instinct" in most cases refers to natural, animal behaviour: for instance, the hunting instinct).¹² Anna Nasiłowska noticed a paradox in perceiving this issue from the perspective of one's social status:

⁹ Cf. B. Budrowska *Maternity as a Turning Point in a Woman's Life*, Wrocław 2000. 379.

¹⁰ Formerly, there existed a form "Born out of...", which indicated the subject of the delivery – the mother. Today, this form is not used with regards to birth and maternity. It functions in a sense of "creating, conceiving" but in reference to inanimate nouns: "A thought conceived by..." Cf. *Polish Language Dictionary, Vol. 3*, ed. M. Szymczak, Warsaw 1999. 992.

¹¹ Ibid. 20-21.

¹² Ibid. 19-20.

married women have or should have the maternal instinct, while women who are not married are not even the subject of such supposition and it is not well seen if a single woman tries to have a baby.¹³ According to yet another stereotype connected with maternity, the sense of having children depends on the legitimate relationship between the parents. The order seems obvious: first a wedding, then a child. Long-time childless married couples are frequently the subject of cross-questioning about their offspring. Others seem to accept information about infertility of the partners more easily than their decision about not having children.

The reverse order of the above activities is also acceptable: first pregnancy, then marriage. The image of a pregnant bride – less and less socially stigmatized – emphasizes the earlier discussed scheme: for the child's good. Manuela Gretkowska and Piotr Pietucha go through this scenario. Once they learn they will be parents, Piotr quickly reacts, "Let's get married" and when Manuela asks what for, the answer is, "For you to feel more secure, people get married when there is a baby" (P 34).¹⁴

Widespread opinions on maternity depict the mother figure as an angel-like personification of patience and good. Every normal and true mother must be an angel and love her child unconditionally. If she has a job and so she gets a helper, she should naturally be full of remorse. The essence of the mother-angel is to sacrifice herself for the sake of a new life. Budrowska writes,

The role of a mother in our culture is very narrowly defined. In terms of emotions, a mother needs to have and express only positive emotions toward her child. She must sacrifice herself, ignore her needs and feel happy about it – therefore, be "a masochist." In terms of her activities, she must focus on bringing up her child and resign from or modify the path of her career.¹⁵

We are witnessing transformation of behaviour patterns and mother-child-father relations. The social role of a woman has changed irreversibly. "She is usually well educated, she snatched her job not without a difficulty and the recessive market does not encourage her to interrupt her education and career."¹⁶

Stereotypes of the mother's passiveness, the need of her being physically and mentally mature and her angel-like character are an unchanging set of basic clichés used in thinking about maternity in the discussed literary works. In Anna Nasiłowska's *Domino* and *A Book of the Beginning*,¹⁷ and in Manuela Gretkowska's *Polka* there also emerge other stereotypes of maternity which are worth looking at with more scrutiny.

¹³ A. Nasiłowska, "Nature as a Source of Suffering," *Teksty Drugie* 1993 no 4/6. 189.

¹⁴ M. Gretkowska *Polka*, Warsaw 2002. Quotations localized with "P."

¹⁵ B. Budrowska *Maternity*...382.

¹⁶ E. Winnicka *How to Bring Up a Child during One Weekend?*, "Polityka" 2004, no 6 (2438). 3.

¹⁷ A. Nasiłowska *Domino. Treatise on Birth*. Warsaw 1995; ed. *A Book of the Beginning*, Warsaw 2002. Quotations will be localized in the text after the following abbreviations: "D" and "KP."

Stereotype I:

Maternity is normal

Polka's narrator is pregnant for the first time. Uncertain of what will happen, she keeps looking for others' advice and penetrating various sources of knowledge. In her search of signs that would prove normality of her state, Manuela Gretkowska comes across stereotypes of thinking about a nine-month unity of the mother and the child, hidden under "good advice" and helpful procedures. First, the author turns with her questions to her closest person – Pola's father who already has had two children. "Every pregnancy is different," the experienced father refutes accusations of not having realized earlier that Manuela was pregnant. The future mother keeps on searching. She buys appropriate literature: French magazines devoted to pregnancy and two books, a Swedish one entitled *Jag är gravid (I'm pregnant)* and a Polish manual *Pregnancy: 40 Subsequent Weeks*. What could one learn from them? French magazines tell women to eat seven vegetables per day and claim that "pregnant women attract mosquitoes with their higher body temperature." Apart from that, they maintain that allegedly, "specific substances" were found in the air exhaled by pregnant women. Gretkowska comments on it, "I thought so: psychosis, schizophrenia. Voila, in schizophrenic patients' breath they detected butane" (P 70).

These are examples that may even make a young mother laugh, but when a woman confronts with ill omens during the prenatal examination, she might not be able to handle it:

I check my clever book *Pregnancy: 40 Subsequent Weeks*. What next? The child is healthy...not at all. Good results of prenatal examination do not guarantee good health of the mother and the child. Week by week, the book enlists all possible issues before we past the ninth month: lyme disease, vein thrombosis, (green) meconium, fibronectin, thalassaemia. The selection is wider than the choice of names in a calendar...I throw the scary guide into the fridge where I store my old unread books. (P 122).

The image of pregnancy emerging from the handbooks read by the author is terrifying. The notion of normality is a combination of the pathology of pregnancy and the pre-pregnancy state. All that is between these two extremes should be called normal but, as Manuela Gretkowska notices, is not considered so. Hence, if the child does not kick twenty times per day (and if it did kick that often, we also should consult a doctor), it is necessary to visit a specialist. Moreover, enlightening books contain a lot of superstitions women decide not to fight with. Fear related with the child's health seems too much to overcome. Absurd beliefs make a pregnant woman feel that she's under constant surveillance, mainly imposed by handbooks clearly enforcing objectivization of both pregnancy and the mother. Gretkowska will see herself as normal only when she puts on two kilograms and the child, who has not been kicking yet (because, as Pietucha asserts, it simply likes Manuela), and finally replies with a kick in her stomach.

Bogusława Budrowska writes that such manuals promote the persuasive strategy: "Advice, recommendations, permissions and bans which fill up the text...require that the addressee subordinates and confides her behaviour to a better-informed

authority.”¹⁸ These expressions are the reason why mothers feel increasingly incompetent and ignorant. Their knowledge is depreciated. Handbooks scare women with consequences if they do not absorb provided information. A future mother is treated like a child, purposefully embarrassed by means of writing about “obvious things.” In Anna Nasiłowska’s *Domino*, we may observe the following situation: “A young mother reads an American breast-feeding manual. She finds out that pleasure of breast-feeding may lead to an orgasm and the success solely depends on her motivation” (D 105).¹⁹ Having read the advice, she:

spends hours pulling out concave and already chapped nipples, even at night she massages her lumpy breasts. She has fever, milk stagnation starts. The child turns its head away from the breast. She is in despair: But I want it so much! she repeats. So she blames her subconscious for a silent revolt against her own will and persistently looks for the gates to the underground. She would move hell but she doesn’t know where to find its doors. (D 105-6)

In her description of the above incident, Nasiłowska avoids using first-person narration, as if she was afraid of being condemned or accused of not being strong-willed or not making enough effort. At the same time, she is distanced from the activities of which she became a participant. The author unveils the process of objectivization of a mother who subordinates to all kinds of recommendations. In attempt to follow – at any price – commandments of the guides that know better, a woman not only loses contact with her baby but, above all, such “good” mother abuses herself: physically and mentally. Not only the recommended activities are a source of pain, but she also has an impression that she is a bad mother who cannot take care of her offspring. The author of *Cities* suggests that a woman can be rescued from such lynch if she is aware of this manipulation:

I do the same thing, but I know what to think about it. This persuasion is directed to people who believe in success and unshaken happiness... They consider nature a good mother keenly fulfilling their every wish. It seems better than civilization whose faults concern them on a daily basis. This is yet another act of idealization in history. (D 106)

The last sentence – “This is yet another act of idealization in history” – is developed in Anna Nasiłowska’s text: “The ideal is hard to stand.” Therefore, *Domino* looks like a work that will decipher “natural” maternity and related stereotypes.

The author of *Polka* reacts in a similar way. Acquainted with numerous superstitions, she loses patience and – following the example of the learnt “prescriptions for pregnant women” – constructs her own list of pregnancy words of wisdom:

- 1 A pregnant woman is successful in everything (but first of all, in giving birth).
- 2 A person who refuses to help a pregnant woman or lies to her, will have bad luck. In a more accurate version: the plague of mice. (My mum says this is 100% true).

¹⁸ B. Budrowska, *Maternity...* 251-252.

¹⁹ All quotations come from *Domino: Treatise on Birth* and *A Book of the Beginning* in one edition: A. Nasiłowska *A Book of the Beginning*, Warsaw 2002. (page number are indicated in brackets).

Slaby Stereotypes of Maternity in Prose Works ...

- 3 Standing on tiptoes and lifting hands over the head by women in late pregnancy may stifle the child with the umbilical cord (I don't believe it, but I don't do it due to the superstition no 4, which seems even more absurd, but...)
- 5 In China, it is not allowed to sweep under a pregnant woman's bed. (P 285)

In the above example, it is possible to see the difference between the two authors, one that could be replaced by the opposition: irony/pathos. Gretkowska deliberately provokes tension between literal meanings of words and meanings expressed indirectly. Peculiar, semantic-logical constructions reveal her desire to keep the distance toward the situation she has found herself in. Turning her fear of losing the baby after the prenatal test into a joke is a method to survive difficult moments awaiting the test's results.

Pathetic expressions in *Domino* serve as a means of building a distance toward intimate experiences that entirely engage the young mother and her family. The writer, however, is conscious of the fact that she notes down flashes of experiences hitherto rarely found in literature. She constantly underlines their significance and power. The picture of breastfeeding shows that it is the most important activity in a given moment – nothing else counts.

“Hell,” “despair,” “revolt,” “gates to the underground” – these words describe feelings of the mother who tries to move the reader by emphasizing that ordinary breastfeeding may evoke a lot of emotions. Further in this article, we will see that the woman in Nasiłowska's prose also uses cultural images of maternity to obtain support in the field which for years has been inaccessible to a mother and a child.

The stereotype of pregnancy as a natural process is developed by the incessantly maintained conviction that a woman – due to major involvement of her body and physiology in “continuing the human race” – will immediately recognize this experience and, what is more, she will always know how to feel and what to do. Gretkowska does not agree with such interpretation of sexual and social roles. She also escapes the unambiguous classification of herself as a woman who knows:

I stand in front of the mirror: shinbones, ribs, a bulb. Pregnancy as a crowning achievement of womanhood (an abdomen?). I don't feel more womanly at all. A man: someone I'm not, for sure. A woman: someone whom I will not be, for sure. Despite ripping breasts with purple nipples, stretch marks which will certainly emerge like ritual scars resulting from the femininity initiation. One day after the birthday. (P 96)

The author confesses that there is “an obvious mystery” in the experience of maternity which is not revealed to her just because of her sex. In *Polka* she quotes her conversation with a Hungarian publisher of *Tarot*. János asks Manuela:

- How does it feel to carry another person in you. This must be amazing, I wouldn't be able to get used to it...
- Do you think I can? I don't understand it either. I sometimes feel it, but I don't understand it. It doesn't matter that I'm a woman and this should be natural, padded with hormones. You could just as well be pregnant and I would ask you how it is.
- The obviousness of the mystery is terrifying.
- Scary it is.

Texts and the Body

“The obviousness of the mystery” is a key notion for “the normality” of pregnancy. Facing this obviousness, Manuela Gretkowska tries to rely on the others’ experiences (not only women). She also discovers that pregnancy is a phenomenon going far beyond sex and social roles. It is mystical and illuminating. Bringing it down to earth and calling it “normal” is appropriate as far as it is also multiplied by experiences of all women who already gave birth and their partners. Obviously, pregnancy is not exclusive to the women in *Polka*, it is neither coincidental. It is a “destined” activity which, paradoxically, cannot be depicted in a manual like *40 Days: Pregnancy Week by Week*:

The ordinary nature of a miracle (of conception) is the cunning of the supernatural. It functions in such a way that a spectacle of a protruding belly is not sensational at all. A child growing under one’s heart, kicking the liver – nothing more banal, everyday pregnancy. But indescribable. An almost invisible cell, turning into an embryo, and now eight-month-old Polka. I sometimes catch hold of the ankle of her ejected leg. Relic. What does it matter that you can touch it if you can’t comprehend it. It’s impossible to understand. *Noli me tangere* after the miracle of the Resurrection and *noli me tangere* with a thought only, the miracle of a child creation. (P 289)

And again, paradoxically, it is Manuela Gretkowska’s pregnancy diary that was perceived by critics as an example of a book showing “normality” of pregnancy: “There is putting on weight, pissing, puking, pregnant sex, but also love, counting centimetres of the foetus, listening, waiting for the child’s kicks and the mystery of a new life. Everything in consent with feelings and experiences of an average woman in this state.”²⁰

Nevertheless, the notion of “normality” replaced by the notion of “being average” indicates that within the experience of pregnancy – between pathology and the state of not being pregnant – there is something else that can also be “normal.” In her review of *Polka*, Kinga Dunin is surprised why this ordinarily described normality is so shocking?

In *Domino*, the experience of pregnancy as a physiological process which engages a woman’s body, is perceived in a fairly stereotypical manner. However, the main character of the novel speaks about the difficulties on the way to such subordination for the sake of the baby. A pregnant woman, says Nasiłowska, has to unite with everyday life which goes around the nine-month circle.²¹ And subordination and totality of the experience of maternity is not a question of a woman’s choice:

When I hear about the right of free choice, I’m a bit embarrassed. Yes, the choice, this little field, a fragment where truth on short legs stamps and minces. Three steps right, three steps left. Obviously, I prefer the choice...out of helplessness....The choice? It’s laughable. It’s as if one wanted to fence a cloud gliding in the sky. Or to tie water with a string. I haven’t chosen her to be my daughter. Fine. These things are too serious to let them depend on good will. The one who says yes, will also say no. I have not been asked for an opinion – whether I want it. It was me who asked: can I? Am I allowed? Is it her? Is it so? (D 92)

²⁰ K. Dunin. “Pretty Polka,” *Res Publica Nowa* 2001 no 8. 103.

²¹ Cf. K. Budrowska. “Treatise on Maternity,” *Przegląd Artystyczno-Literacki* 2001 no 4. 83.

On the other hand, the author defends the experience of maternity from being accused of depriving the mother of her subjectivity – this is simply how it has to be. Unchangeably and unceasingly – women will bear children, whether they want it or not. This is why this fragment corresponds with the view of Manuela Gretkowska's who is at first scared with the “mystery,” but after a short while she starts to understand its essence:

In most cases, fucking doesn't lead to pregnancy. There must be a mysterious consent of the universe to emergence of anything new... Cosmic landing in my uterus could take place much earlier or never. It has been calculated by the universe, the stars that circulate and arrange in horoscopes. What coincidence, necessity and free will have to do with it? (P 48)

It is visible that both mothers interpret the state of being pregnant as an act which happened somewhat beyond their consciousness and without their consent. It was decided by something (fate, destiny, the universe) or someone else (the Absolute Being, God). Something else wished a new human being to come to the world. In this view, a woman treats herself as a medium, not a driving force. Consequently, to decipher the stereotype which maintains subjectivity of a woman's consent to maternity means to simply notice this fact. Everything else seems to be a coincidence. Perhaps, this results from astonishment with the news about pregnancy. Both women did not try to have a baby. They only accepted what had already happened.

Stereotype II:

Maternity as reproduction of a matrix

The previously discussed idea of pregnancy as a normal process is developed by a stereotype treating maternity as “reproduction of a matrix.” Here, the meaning of “normality” gets expanded. It is normal that every woman should give birth to a child (every “normal” woman) and, additionally, she has to be aware of the relationship between her sex, generation she belongs to and her state as well as a characteristic feature of pregnancy, namely the replication of a certain pattern. This means that a pregnant woman should get rid of her individuality for the sake of the “common good”: the child.

For maternity is a phenomenon which involves the entire society. This stereotype reminds a woman that getting pregnant and giving birth to a child does not make her the first or the last one who could do that. Such classification of the future mother and inscription of her experience into the range of other women's experiences demonstrates the maternal community.

“Reproduction of a matrix” scared Manuela Gretkowska, the writer who tries to avoid categorizations, the most. “I will give birth to a child just like so many women and females before me” (P 35), says the future mother. There is no contentment in this sentence. At least for now. There is ambivalence. Gretkowska simply doesn't know, what it means to give birth, just like so many women and “females” before her.

A similar sentence, although in a different tone, will be uttered by the author of *Polka* during delivery. At that very moment, the words spoken out in the context of pain have a different meaning: “The miracle of birth – an ordinary replication of the matrix.

Texts and the Body

A new life comes easily and it's easy to destroy it" (P 338). The author experiences the omnipresent nature "capable of tormenting someone to death." She is struck with fear of her own death which could happen in the moment of giving life.

Anna Nasiłowska understands "replication of a matrix" in a different manner. The birth of the *Domino* narrator's daughter make her notice women – by now, silent heroes of civilization: "Today, I went into the crowd, between people. It's unbelievable, there were so many of them and each of them had a mother. These numerous mothers gave birth, fed and taught those helpless creatures the human speech" (D 94). Every mother, also the author of these words, becomes a figure blessed through the act of childbirth. And a simple stroll in the city becomes an illumination.

Anna Nasiłowska notices yet another sense of "civilization of mothers."²² She is more and more certain that this unceasing unity with the child and with other mothers indirectly serves as a means of alienating women from the social life. The writer made an observation that the stories about matriarchal countries where women's well being was the greatest value, are often evoked in order to isolate mothers, create a cosy corner where they could enjoy their intimacy and not bore others with their stories about children. Surprisingly, this is the place Manuela Gretkowska dreams about:

A room of scents, good food (for a child), a room with ultrasonography where you could see the baby...Meetings with a psychologist, doctor, conversations with other club members.... Who will understand and support (push, push harder!) a pregnant woman better than another lady in this crazy state. (P 74-5)

The main character in *Domino* knows that the very fact of being a mother is alienating for a woman. A mother and her child become members of another tribe "which secretly, behind the properly locked doors, performs its bodily rituals" (D 94). These rituals are not dangerous. Sucking, rattling and swinging experienced by every human being, in this case work against the mother and the newborn child. Both of them are banished from culture also by means of language as their community cannot be described by any convenient grammatical form. This is because "nature cannot be closed in words."²³ However, as Bogusława Kaniewska adds, "There is a difference between experiencing and attesting nature."²⁴

Nasiłowska's character continuously fights with imprecision of words – this is why, among others, her daughters don't have names ("My daughter doesn't have a name. She doesn't need it, she is called mine. I want it to remain this way" (D 104)). In *Domino*, the baby girl is called "New-born." What becomes important is to evoke a question of capability or inability to utter and feel "inflexibility" of the language inscribed in the narrative: "When I try to talk about it, I keep stumbling. I can express it only in my thoughts. What? This. That It. There. In thoughts which in writing look like helpless, mumbling speech of a child who doesn't know pronouns and points with its finger" (D 96).

²² K. Ruta-Rutkowska. "Questions about *Conditio Feminae*," *Fraza* 1999 no 4. 137.

²³ B. Kaniewska. "Not Only a Yellow Shirt," *Czas Kultury* 1996 no 1. 88.

²⁴ Ibid.

The mother in *A Book of the Beginning* reports on her dream about the flood of words. Her husband sees the narrator's symbolic distrust toward words. He claims that one Word created the world – other words are not able to do that. An incidentally mentioned name would not make a human being. This is why *A Book of the Beginning* seems, on the one hand, a continuum of the “distrust” toward words that we face in *Domino*. On the other hand, the narrator allows a difference between words and the Word. Only this difference seems true. Paradoxically, the encounter with the experience of maternity becomes a challenge for a mother who professionally deals with the interpretation of cultural phenomena.

The inability to express these emotions contributes to the question: why is it so? It is not enough to say that “nature is inexpressible, like nothing else.” It is necessary to discover mechanisms causing this state of affairs. And mechanisms are rooted in the language identified with violence. There is a way for a mother and a child to find themselves in the world that is unprepared for their arrival. The world needs to be created from scratch.

This is why the characters of books about the birth of the author's daughters are called Adam and Eve, while one of the sentences from *Domino* says: “In the beginning was the Child. Naked” (D 115). Realizing the need to “de-define” the world brings consolation, gives strength to start all over again, without unnecessary falsehood and illusions. It makes one realize the life force and consent to its mysteriousness and inexplicability. “Well, I had to be as little as my daughter once. Here, oceans of oblivion – returned to me – are lying in front of me, the oceans I have sailed and I'm still sailing. She is a letter about my past. I'm reading it with certain difficulty because it is written with a raw alphabet” (D 123-124).

Krystyna Ruta-Rutkowska claims that the paradise is where the New-born is. Each of us experienced it in the act of birth. Such interpretation of the maternal community is not disheartening to women. Instead, it presents a fresh outlook on the natural life cycle with consideration of the subjectivity of the maternal experience.

Stereotype III:

Maternity is public

A view that maternity is a public experience stems from the conviction that the child everyone's good, whereas the mother is an institution which serves to sustain the good in the best possible state. The pattern of such approach to a pregnant woman is illustrated by an incident in a swimming-pool in which Manuela Gretkowska participated.

I walk out of the cabin in my one-piece swimsuit with almost knee-long legs, the style of Francis Joseph. The bath-keeper knowingly taps me on my belly:

– Baby?

... You don't tap strange people, you don't caress other people's children. The few centimeters of my protruding belly became public. (P 151)

In her article published in *Res Publica Nova*, Justyna Bednarek includes the following story: one day, having noticed the visible pregnancy of the author, a caretaker in

the kindergarten seized her belly and said, "Someone has put on weight!"²⁵ Bednarek explains that a woman with a belly stops being an individual Gretkowska-the-writer or Bednarek-the-ublicist, but she becomes a public good – a pregnant woman. The bath-keeper described by Gretkowska and the caretaker quoted in the above fragment are women who probably are mothers themselves. This fact gives them permission to touch other women's bellies. It is related with pregnancy as a different state also in the perspective of one's sexual identity. A woman/-other loses an aspect of her identity which usually makes her a sexual being in the eyes of others, "When someone says the word 'regnant' every second man and every third woman thinks: she slept with a man. Some might even add: with another man."²⁶

A future mother carries the clear evidence of having had a sexual intercourse and, as we know, sex is a cultural taboo. Adrienne Rich noticed that all over the world both pregnancy and childbirth evoke intense emotions, and consequently, a woman is never looked at with indifference, "She may be considered a proof of her husband's activeness, a threat to embryos and men, and particularly exposed to impure powers or other damaging influences; she is received with embarrassment; she is respected as blessed with healing powers."²⁷

Every increasingly sustained superstition evokes an unnecessary fright. The main character in *A Book of the Beginning* is forced to stay longer in the hospital due to the complicated delivery and *vacuum*.²⁸ She meets mothers who already gave birth and others who are experiencing it for the first time. One of these women lost a baby, another dreamed of having a daughter but has just had the fourth son. The mothers' hospital ward is also frequently visited by "girls from the pathology." The author of *Cities* comes across various women, but there is no artificial hierarchy between them. They are united in the experience rather than take opposite stances. Only once a nurse turned to Nasiłowska saying, "So skinny but she would feed triplets," but she relieved the writer's body by helping her learn how to pump milk.

To Anna Nasiłowska, breastfeeding is a situation that she almost requests to make public. According to her, it's a phenomenon which goes beyond simply appeasing hunger. Both in *Domino* and *A Book of the Beginning*, breastfeeding becomes a form of the deepest intimacy between the mother and the child. By asking about the sense of food-sharing, the author tries to locate it in culture, in the public sphere as she under-

²⁵ J. Bednarek "To Be a Pregnant Woman," *Res Publica Nowa* 1997 no 9. 26.

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ A. Rich. *Of Woman Born: Motherhood as Experience and Institution*. New York, London, 1976.

²⁸ In her private correspondence, Anna Nasiłowska writes, "My daughter was tied with her umbilical cord, suddenly her pulse got weaker. The midwife realized that, she said nothing and called doctor. There was a change of shift, other doctors came, with no gowns on yet. In the corner of my eye, I saw my blood spurt on a tie and a ironed shift of an elegant young doctor. Vacuum looked a bit like this rubber tool to unclog basins. It is sucked on the baby's head and pulled. Whatever, it was dangerous, but ended up well." Mails written on May 12, 2004 to the author of this article, Jeannette Słaby.

stands its importance for future interpersonal relations.²⁹ This unusual process marks the mother and the child with their own attachment to each other, “My breasts belong to her. She also owned my belly” (D 92). The described situation does not subjectivize the woman but rather indicates that lending her body to the child can be understood the other way around – as consciously challenging the stereotype of the unconditional subordination to physiology.

Breastfeeding, learning how to pump milk and dealing with one’s own unpredictable impulses constitute a large part of *Domino*. An increasing number of publications touching on this experience adds to deciphering yet another thinking pattern. Kamila Budrowska thinks that this is why the mother’s body is limited to breasts: in order to overcome embarrassment and inhibitions, which are the reasons why literature had not known such descriptions before.³⁰ In this sense, the presentation of removing the excess of milk from a woman’s breast is representational:

At home, I still couldn’t pump all the excessive milk on time, I worked with a special breast pump, a towel, in the warm shower, with my hand, with my both hands, increasingly tired, eventually I sat on the bath tub. To avoid soaking a still fresh wound, I put an improvised, silly throne made of a bucket placed upside down, I also sat on it provisionally, on one, healthier side of my body and pressed both breasts simultaneously, through the first pain up to the boundary when you say: stop! (D 110)

The above scene vividly shows how breasts – considered to be an important erotic symbol in culture – become more and more desexualized. Their sexuality is described by Desmond Morris who claims that the shape of breasts imitates circularity of buttocks.³¹ It is the other way around in Anna Nasiłowska’s works. The author rejects the stereotyping of breastfeeding and women’s breasts as sexually stigmatized. Desexualization does not mean that breastfeeding should be qualified as an asexual activity. Women’s breasts are given back their basic function – without any sexual connotations, shame, or embarrassment. However, the author is not satisfied with only flagging the need to reject a cultural ballast which restrains the woman by not allowing her to feed her baby in public.

Anna Nasiłowska summons well-known images of breastfeeding which seem false to her. She desires to lay bare and ridicule them. Among others, she goes back to the 15th century work by Jean Foquet presenting Madonna with a perfectly semi-circular naked breast. The woman recalls her perception of the painting – the ideal contour of the breast associated with an almost hairless head of Madonna. This view had a different meaning to her. It’s unnatural and untrue, “A semicircle is too hard. A child would not be able to seize the tightened nipple with its mouth” (D 107).

The narrator in *Domino* also recalls a fountain in Bologne depicting Neptune’s female companions whose breasts spout water. Comprehending the milk-to-water (also

²⁹ It is D.W. Winnicott’s theory claiming that the relation between a mother and a child during breastfeeding translates further onto the relation of the child with other people. After: K. Budrowska *Treatise...* 89.

³⁰ K. Budrowska *Treatise...* 89.

³¹ D. Morris. *Intimate Behavior*. trans. P. Pretkiel, Warsaw 1998. 53.

symbolic) transformation, Nasiłowska wonders whether this sculpture could be placed in one of the Polish cities? She answers this question herself, first evoking the image of the Polish Mother.

Our siren has never fed anybody, she's holding a shield and an ominous sword in her hands... Our Madonnas, buttoned up to their necks, in a few layers of heavy dresses, are holding calmly a well fed and well-dressed baby in their hands. They must have fed them earlier, before entering the stage. If they had showed a naked breast, the faithful would have got inappropriate thoughts during prayers. (D 111)

The above situation proves that there are two kinds of breasts in the unconscious of culture – immaculate lactiferous glands which provoke “bad thoughts”³² and objects of sexual fascination. The former can be openly observed everywhere.

In her article written for “Cosmopolitan,” Manuela Gretkowska formulates yet another definition of “public” maternity. The concept is based on women – actors, writers, rock singers, and now also mothers – appearing in lifestyle magazines; on revealing their private lives to readers and selling their intimate experiences to the media and the masses. By giving the article the following title: “Public Phantom Pregnancy,” Gretkowska protested against such activities, “There is something dishonest in this reciprocal game. On the one hand, seeking sensation, on the other hand, exhibitionism saying: watch out, I'm reproducing!”³³ Perhaps, the writer purposefully did not mention profits from publication of photos or news, while a magazine and curious readers benefit from it, and future mothers also benefit from it (financially). The media demand for controversial women with “a human face” is as high as the range of experiences they sell. Let us take a photo session featuring Justyna Steczkowska at her father's grave (who, *nota bene*, had been dead for a few years already) or similar events that are far from being tasteful.

What interests Gretkowska in the artificial evocation of public emotions is not the salary for revealing one's secrets or the reasons why an artist or a public figure takes the above mentioned actions. The author of *Tarot* perceives making privacy public as an identity problem of an artist and a woman who treats pregnancy as one of her masks, “She runs the stage half-naked, with strong make-up. She pretends to be an angel, an alien or a punk bitch. She makes up nicknames, identity.”³⁴

The quoted article was written in 1999 and it begins with the writer's indication of her considerable astonishment at the news in the press that she would give birth to triplets. Admitting to be a media “mas(s)-cot,” Gretkowska did not realize how binding her words would be. Two years later, her real pregnancy becomes an event equally important as pregnancy of Demi Moore or the earlier mentioned Justyna Steczkowska. And what does Gretkowska do? When she is asked for an interview, the main topic of which would probably be her pregnancy, she gets offended by the interviewer's statement, “What do

³² See I. Iwasiów. “Language of Birth,” *Arkusz* 1996 no 7. 7.

³³ The article has been reprinted in *Silikon*. See M. Gretkowska *Silikon*, Warsaw 2002. 100.

³⁴ Ibid.

you mean: about what? So independent and scandalizing...and now the baby...that's a life breakthrough" (P 235), calling the above actions "pregnant pornography." On the other hand, in *Polka* the readers follow Gretkowska's preparations for the photo session in "Viva" magazine, during which the writer tells *visagistes* about her pregnancy, while asking them for discretion. In this context, her pregnancy is also public due to her own popularity and definitely turns public once the author selling the rights to publish *Polka*:

I'm selling the book and the baby, beginning with the first letter, the embryo. What will she think one day, reading all these prenatal memories? I haggle about the royalty rate. Silver coins got green, they are convertible to dollars. The publisher is strangely concessive. After I leave, I check the royalty rate for the last book – the same as for *Polka*, and I thought I had demanded an enormous amount of money. (P 201)

Dariusz Nowacki noticed that, despite her stable private life, Manuela Gretkowska is attractive to the media as the Gretkowska, formerly a scandalizing figure, whose new book *Polka* – being the expression of the "little stabilization and familiarity" – would be a bestseller. It is thus an example of "transformation of a famous troublemaker into a housewife."³⁵ At the same time, the "FA-art" critic is curious whether the author will find herself in this new public space with a new "mug." She points to this transformation herself, when she writes, "New life, new apartment, new mug."

Stereotype IV:

Asexual mother

Another template of thinking about maternity is a theory of asexual processes, which capture a woman's body and by the act of appropriating it, destroy its attributes. Therefore, a pregnant woman should consent to subordination of her body to a child. This means she is excluded yet again, or even deprived of her right to derive sexual satisfaction during pregnancy and continue to feel desired. Corinne Chaponnière signals a difference between an "empty" body and a "full" body:

A maternal body agglomerates the horror of fullness which is an obstacle for desire. On the other hand, a young girl's body remains "empty," "meaningless," disposed of, to be fulfilled with a man's glances. "Meaningless" bodies, a body without marks conditions desire.³⁶

The stereotype of an asexual mother evokes a conviction that a woman's body is vertically divided into the saint upper body and the material and physical bottom. The character of Wanda Melcer's *Swastika and Child*, terrified by her "crazy different" state, recalled that a pregnant woman should not be seen in the streets to avoid people's opinion that

³⁵ D. Nowacki. "New Building, Old Foundations," *Twórczości* 2001 no 12. 116.

³⁶ K. Kłosińska. "Female signature," [in:] *Literature of Young Poland: Between the 19th and the 20th Century*, eds. E. Paczoska, J. Sztachelska, Białystok 1998. 150-190. After: K. Budrowska *Woman and Stereotypes: Image of the Woman in the Polish Prose after 1989*, Białystok 2000. 69.

Texts and the Body

she performs “such vulgar activities”³⁷. Similar words can be found in *A Book of the Beginning*. The author mentions that, right before the birth of her third daughter, she kept hiding her state under a black coat as “she was afraid that they would discover my pagan ritual and shout: she spreads scandal with her body!” (KP 55). Embarrassment and shame are triggered by pregnancy’s sexual connotations. It is a sign of a still valid taboo concerning the act of making one’s intimate experiences public.³⁸

An asexual mother is also a woman who – as a “full” body – does not indulge in physical love. Sex only serves procreation. Therefore, a woman/mother has to be sexually passive and consciously avoid bodily pleasures “for the sake of the baby.”

This rule is not respected in the pregnancy diary. At the very beginning of *Polka* we may observe breaking the stereotype of sexual abstinence during pregnancy and refuting the myth of an asexual mother who, additionally, is a shameless person, “Sex during pregnancy! It’s getting more comfortable in the standing position, from behind. Should I buy fucking crazy high heels? Pietuszka wouldn’t have to get down to my level. Climbing a stool is too disarmingly childish. Definitely high heels, *sursum corda* and protruding buttocks” (P 134-135).

Love between two people, which results in giving life to a baby in a few months, is not sinful. There is nothing wrong with the future parents still wanting to enjoy the intimacy between them. In view of the upcoming changes in their lives, this might be the only asylum of safety for them.

The stereotype of the asexual mother is inevitably linked with the category of beauty which needs to be redefined in the context of pregnant women. Following the ideal of a slim and perfectly shaped body, future mothers treat maternity as necessary evil, because pregnancy is perceived as destruction of the body and annihilation of the woman’s former “I.” Perhaps, it is the fear of change that is the reason why a mirror is often an element of a future mother’s house:

I peeped in the mirror, not just “looked in it” – the one in the bathroom is too small – but I peeped at my belly. I got ashamed: here is my face, normal, and below, cut with the mirror, there is my second half. As if patched with a picture from pregnancy magazines, photos of models and actresses posing naked with their maternal bellies. (P 181)

and further,

I can’t believe what I see in the mirror: puffy eyes and bulbous cheeks, changed into a fairly normal face with the help of make-up... Out of the swollen puffball there emerges a Woman. Not out of grey clay but out of kaolin clay of ground face powder and rouge. (P 253)

Changes that Manuela’s body undergoes exceed her expectations. Pregnancy becomes punishment, a woman is guilty of her own suffering. In the course of time, the artist starts to be disturbed by her own looks of a mother in late pregnancy, “I take off my clothes before going to bed. I’ve taken off everything. But there is something left, a bit heavy,

³⁷ W. Melcer, *Swastika and Child*, Warsaw 1934. 22.

³⁸ Cf. A. Rich, *Of Woman Born*.

not mine. I would be glad to take off the belly too” (P 112). The following sentence most explicitly describes the woman’s opinion on physical changes accompanying pregnancy, “I don’t have a physiological talent to be pregnant. This is too much, this ‘bellied’ half-a-metre belly. I wish I could lay down with an inscription ‘I’m in late pregnancy: I’m getting floppy.” (P 271)

Expressions used by the author such as “this is too much,” “unshapely gut,” “curvature of the stomach went past the critical level” or “potbelly” assign a negative value to this experience. The comparison of pregnancy to an illness presented in *Polka* classifies maternity in an unequivocal manner, “Pregnancy is not an illness, pregnancy is not an illness, I keep repeating it to myself. I have problems standing (my legs hurt), sitting (ribs rub against the stomach), lying (the stomach moves to the throat). What is left is walking” (P 323).

The woman also experiences deformation of her body and identity during delivery. She literally and metaphorically “falls into pieces.” Right after the delivery, Nasiłowska’s character asks, “And me, am I beautiful now, among the bloody shreds, in shambles?” The cultural understanding of attractiveness must be redefined so that a woman at the childbirth could be perceived as beautiful. It is difficult as there have always been certain aesthetic patterns inculcated in the mother and her relatives.

Anna Nasiłowska’s *Domino* is an example of stereotypical separation of attractiveness and maternity which reveals negation of the mother’s own body marked with pregnancy and the birth of her daughter. Monika Bekke has an interesting view on attractiveness as she notices that splitting beauty from the maternal body is a kind of escape from nature associated with excess, abundance, physiology, “We exchanged the nose of an animal to a human eye which is selective; it sees one thing and omits another... It most eagerly omits the horror of nature, namely the dangerous woman-nature. Whereas beauty gives an eye a pleasurable illusion of the intellectual control over nature.”³⁹

The author of *Cities* draws a clear line for beauty in her life – what she calls beautiful is everything that was before:

What happened? Before there was vanity and coquetry, only now I experience exile and I need clothes to cover nakedness. It’s me, this loose bag, painful breasts and soft, shapeless belly, like the first mother on earth freshly formed out of clay... This is only a body transformed into idle, charmless, fragmented meat. (D 98-99)

The author of *Women and Stereotypes* talks about the fear of castration presented in *Domino*.⁴⁰ Nasiłowska says, “I have been devastated. I’m paying for life with my body” (Ks 26). The mother agrees with the separation of the sexual and maternal body and notices, “A film on TV. A woman is taking a shower. A man is looking lustily. I turn back and leave. My breast hurts. Exhaustion, astonishment. Distaste. Rubbish” (D 116).

³⁹ M. Bakke. *Open Body: Philosophical Reinterpretations of Cultural Visions of Physicality*, Poznań 2000, 108.

⁴⁰ K. Budrowska. *Treatise*... 84.

Texts and the Body

It is hard for the character to consent to sexual nature of the act of maternity, because she is an attentive observer of culture, while her distrust does not help regard maternity as *sacrum* at all. The body turns out to be an obstacle. Yes, the mother speaks about desire aroused by her breasts full of milk, but this is a hungry baby's craving.

The appreciation of the maternal body comes together with the birth of another, third daughter, described in *A Book of the Beginning*. At that moment, the woman starts to understand that it is necessary to change the definition of "physical attractiveness" in order to include in it the experience of her body destruction:

I have long fought with a grudge I had toward the body. Also toward my own body...my own body at the first place. Is this suspicious warmth supposed to be me? This squelch inside of me? This slush? Impossible, I thought. The body is an animal which is first cruelly trained, then slain. No other way. What is more pitiful than being weak in view of one's own (running) blood? Or this evil chill caused by the need of preparing animal meat to be used in the kitchen. Or disgust caused by smells. I wanted to reject it. The word and the light are bloodless and how powerful they are! (K 62-63)

The author underlines the importance of words that can deprive young mothers not only of their beauty but also of their right to be called human beings:

Our language is not good. It's stiff as a board. It can't achieve transparency. What is worst, it constantly separates...It calls differently the soul and the body. And I was in need of the Word coming from the body...I suspect that the most beautiful and bright sentences are in fact gibberish. Only stylized. At least at the front. So I say, "I don't know, but I am. Please, leave it without a comment." (Ks 79)

I will get back to the notion of the revolt against the language and lack of convenient forms to name the reality a pregnant woman comes across. In the meantime, what seems interesting to deciphering of the myth about the asexual mother in *A Book of the Beginning* is disagreement to inability of expressing certain experiences and the need – repeated after *Domino* – to change the language which would sound from the very depth of experiences.⁴¹

In *Domino*, the author quotes a conversation of a couple about the placenta. The man who participated in the delivery, tells his wife that the placenta is "a type of membrane, a whitish bag, huge, empty stomach interspersed with veins. There are shreds of something red" (D 99). The young dad is embarrassed neither with the view of his wife's organs nor about talking about it. On the contrary, it is the woman who wants to forget about it as soon as possible. By forgetting, she wants to be awakened from the dream, from remembering about "the baby formed out of her own entrails, out of meat." Here, the motif of the mirror comes back. However, the mother – earlier being the mirror of her man – "stopped reflecting for now," she became transparent and her own interior can be seen through her.

In *A Book of the Beginning*, the mother needs more time to get familiar with her new body. It also takes her longer to regain faith – which is the final message of

⁴¹ Cf. K. Rodowska. "Wild Animal' Trap," *Fraza* 1996 no 11. 174.

the book – in the possibility to be attractive again, despite the inability to go back to the body shape she had before pregnancy. The woman does not call herself attractive but she indirectly becomes so. This happens because she knows that out of her “vulgar” body her daughter was created, “Anima, as white as snow.” Although there is still anger at the words, the feeling of beauty, which is born with every new life, has been retrieved.

Hereby, my matter has been truly trans-sub-stan-tia-ted on earth. I'm afraid of these words but this is what truly had place. It didn't make me anyhow better. Maybe physically worse because devastated. This will heal with time. Most probably this way: the same, identical but different and reproduced. (K 63)

The example of the stereotype of the asexual mother shows the discrepancy between both writers. Manuela Gretkowska's diary covers almost the entire period of pregnancy and ends with the birth of Pola and the story begins earlier than in Anna Nasiłowska's works, therefore it touches on a different problem. Gretkowska explains that (luckily) pregnancy is a process that has its resolution. And the woman-mother does not always has to experience – besides the feeling of the physical destruction – a more serious trauma resulting in the loss of control over her own “I.”

Nasiłowska is also interested in analysing maternity as a process leading to the disintegration of the “I.” Ewa, the character in *Domino*, can hardly consent to the separation of the sexually desired body and the maternal one. Nevertheless, she tries to appreciate the role of a mother she plays, and acts against existing cultural patterns which impose such division. The disintegration of the mother's personality goes through her body and reaches her mind which makes her see herself as two people – the one from before pregnancy and the other after the childbirth.

The integration of the woman who is physically attractive and the asexual mother happens slowly. It accompanies the awareness of having given life to beautiful and good children. This is how Anna Nasiłowska restores the woman's peace of mind and simultaneously brings her back to culture. As a mother, she is accepted again because some other beauty canons apply to her. A still valid question is whether realizing one's own attractiveness (by means of giving birth to a beautiful daughter) is not just an indirect method of bringing a woman back to culture and whether it does not seem like another attempt to expiate “performing vulgar activities” during pregnancy and delivery.

In the above selected works, the writers' attitude toward maternity oscillates between stabilization and decipherization on the basis of almost encyclopedic examples of stereotypes present in literature. Moreover, both authors often unconsciously stabilize stereotypes instead of challenging them. Anna Nasiłowska does so, on the one hand, when she describes the need of legitimatizing public breastfeeding, on the other hand, through depicting the asexual mother who is not reconciled with the separation of the attractive body from the maternal one, and for whom the only compensation for the loss of good looks and frame of mind is supposed to be the knowledge that she gave birth to a healthy child.

Texts and the Body

Breaking stereotypes is perhaps coincidental and unconscious, as a result of “a deep analysis of the birth phenomenon.”⁴² We cannot deny that the authors are aware of that and consider all this a coincidence. It is important, however, to notice that the problem of maternity belongs to the sphere in which many other various discourses encounter. Attempts to speak about maternity mean the necessity to answer all questions, dispel all doubts. That is why, most probably, some of the stereotypes got confirmed by the two authors, while others, the more interesting ones, have been broken.

Translation: Marta Skotnicka

Wojciech KUDYBA

The Bareness of a Clergyman: Priestly Poetry as a Minority Discourse?

Are models of reading, or even certain types of reader's sensibility common to contemporary currents of literary studies, useful for research on texts which remain in graspable relation to religion? Today's works devoted to the question of *sacrum* in literature have always progressed due to research tools developed by following methodological currents. Semiotics, thematic critiques, and hermeneutics gradually opened new and interesting areas of reflection over sacral elements present in different layers of literary work.¹ However, is research that draws on the *instrumentarium* of post-colonial criticism and is inspired by sensitivity towards all "otherness" – characteristic of gender studies, for instance – able to bring equally significant and convincing cognitive results with religious literary works? Without giving a definite or final answer to the question, I would like to present one example of reading of a religious text that employs such postmodern sensitivity toward various "minority discourses." The subject of my study is a poem by father Janusz Stanisław Pasierb which is entitled "Écorché." I believe that certain layers of meaning of this poem can be revealed with the use of notions taken from the interpretative currents mentioned above. The categories and notions I have in mind in particular are: "otherness," "alienness," and "oppression." I also believe that certain models that encourage heavy usage of biblical and theological references in reading, especially in the analysis of religious works, disables conducive interpretations and

¹ An encompassing overview of older methods of research on the sacred (*sacrum*) in literature can be found in the article by S. Sawicki "Sacrum in Literature" in *Sacrum in Literature*, 13-26, J. Gotfryd, M. Jasińska-Wojtkowska, S. Sawicki, eds., Lublin: Towarzystwo Naukowe KUL, 1983.

Texts and the Body

leads to misunderstandings. However, let us start with a calm and, to the extent possible, bias-free first reading of the poem in question:

See my beauty
how banal are your ordinary skins
smooth wrinkled fat or chapped
see how naked muscles play
red with violet's blues
how tendons shine with blessed candle's yellow

this is bareness

with bony chaff sand or ash
one can cut and fester for examination's sake
play strings of pain
no reflex will be hidden from you
indignity of spasms pathetic shudder
it is all for you

fleeting resemblance to normal men
will bring you courage in time of hesitation

In the very center of this mysterious poem, there lies the image of a man who is uncovered in a very specific way – the image of someone given away to the gaze of others, opened completely to others. The French term, *écorché* (peeled of skin, hurt, irritated, scratched), is used in the history of art to describe a model that is skinless, and hence, reveals its musculature. As can be found in an art dictionary, *écorché* was a kind of artistic exercise, the results of which were used for painting or sculpture modeling.² The presence of expert terminology and references to various works of art suggests that the poem was by a man who was, first and foremost, an art historian employing a form of ekphrasis that refers to a particular work of art and becomes the verbal equivalent of painted or sculptural achievement. It therefore might be tempting to seek intertextual connections between Pasierb's text and paintings such as Mathias Grünewald's *Crucifixion* from the altar in Isenheim, or various iconographic representations of Saint Bartholomew.³ But the poem itself, devoid of any clear signs of relating to existing works of art, likewise encourages a degree of restraint. The structure of its statement also suggests caution. Description remains the crucial element of ekphrasis, while Pasierb's poem is a lyrical monologue. In the very center of his work, there is a lyrical "I." It is this lyrical "I" that grasps one's attention and, due to its emotions or "through" them in a certain way, one observes other elements of the world created by the poem. The lyrical "Is" specific existential status determines the shape and emotional temperature of the statement. Let us remember:

² See Kornell, M. "Écorché" in *The Dictionary of Art*, Turner, J. ed. Grove, New York: 1996. 706.

³ Ewa Sykuła writes more comprehensively about painterly contexts employed by the poet in *Passion According to Pasierb*, Lublin: Wydawnictwo KUL, 2005, 106-7.

the protagonist of the poem is somebody open, marked by a wound, which reveals him or herself to others. The poem is a lyrical monologue spoken from “inside the wound.”

How should one interpret this key metaphor in the poem under discussion? What constitutes this terrifying *écorché*, experienced by the person speaking in the poem? We do not know and we will never know what caused the wounds. The text never explains. Lyrical monologue points rather to the effects of wounding and reveals the social dimensions of the wound. It turns out that the painful tear is taking place not only inside of the consciousness of the lyrical “I,” but also, or maybe even primarily, within the bounds of its relations with others. The protagonist is marked with the wound. His first discovery is a discovery of otherness that separates the wounded body from common and banal skins that bear no signs of having been cut. Through the wound it recognizes not only its existential separateness among people – the simple fact of not belonging to a community – but also realizes the hardships of being with others. The wound completely changes the dynamics of interpersonal relations and makes them much more problematic. It transforms its bearer into somebody from the outside, somebody “completely different.” What is more, it is because of the wound that others are able to come “from the outside” and become foreign. The tear seems to make easy identification impossible. It divides the world between “me” and “them,” setting boundaries between a person and a community.

Being wounded becomes a symbol of a certain mode of existence that is against society. It does not end the interpersonal relations of the protagonist, but changes their character by adding a dramatic dimension. The wounded hero discovers his or her own otherness, distance and alienation those surrounding, at the same time becoming aware of the fact that the tear gives him away to an unfavorable world. It might seem that the discovery of one’s “otherness” would lead to retreating, escaping from hostile reality. However, things are different in the world created by the poet. The poem attempts to convince us that the wound is not an attempt to search for a hiding place, but to the contrary: it is an inevitable revelation. The fact that the wound is directed to “aliens” is at its very core. *Écorché* seems to be a metaphor for being-against-others. It is otherness sentenced to endure their gaze and touch – and that is why the lyrical subject’s statement is so ambivalent. Apostrophes directed to the community could be read as attempts to establish contact, as a form of invitation to the meeting. “See” – this and similar calls sound like direct encouragement for establishing a relation. In a later part of the poem there is a mention of touch, which allows us to assume that the hero encourages closeness – invites us to an honest and meaningful meeting. However, the entire monologue is underwritten by irony, the bitter realization that a true meeting with “others” is impossible.

The same kind of irony can be discovered in a passage describing bareness. The exclamation, “this is bareness,” means that the person speaking rejects everything that in a natural way fends off the world, defends us against “others.” In one of the lines we read “it is all for you.” The hero of the poem consciously decides on the most drastic existential form of giving himself/herself away. The fact that we are dealing with a complete, radical and to some degree drastic revealing is confirmed by the specific character of bareness that we encounter in the poem. It is not about the vulgar nakedness of human flesh, but

about something much more. It is about revealing something that is buried much deeper – it is about peeling away everything that is superficial and exposing one's interior. As a deeply moving and naturalistic portrait of a skinned body, which brings the contest between *Apollo and Marsyas* to Herbert's mind, it reveals the dramatic dimension of our being against others. The entire poem seems to be saturated by a bitter realization that even a radical opening to others does not necessarily lead to a similar opening on their part or ultimately end with dialogue.

The author of the poem reminds us that, firstly, a harmed and wounded human being directs his or her entire self outward trying to get attention, and that worries force interaction and encourage meeting. But what kind of meeting is at stake here? Personalists and philosophers of dialogue talk about the meeting as mutual sharing and openness. The phenomenon of bareness, a peculiar existential giving away of oneself to others is interpreted by those thinkers as a readiness for a special kind interpersonal exchange.

In his poem entitled "Robe," Pasierb wrote that bareness is a kind of "mating robe." It is a sign of openness towards another person, of having trust in those we love. It is hard to state, however, that the interpersonal space sketched in "Écorché" is one dedicated to love. We learn about it by observing, among other things, the motif of touch. Let us recall that Lévinas, when analyzing the mutual discovery of oneself in the Other, and vice versa, precisely during a meeting, and describing the experience of affirmation of closeness – referred to the previously mentioned sense of touch. He wrote about the act of a caress. In Pasierb's poem, touch has very little to do with affirmation. It seems as if it were, similar to the gaze, a tool of pain. According to philosophers remaining within the circle of Pasierb's interest, during an actual meeting our fellow man's gaze confirms, hidden from the world, our personal value and enables "the absorption of shame through love."⁴ The gaze of the Other, on the contrary, objectifies and deprives one of value and increases the sensation of shame and humiliation. The Other – foreign or alien – looks at us as if he was looking at an object and as if he were touching an object. This is the kind of awareness that lies hidden behind bitter words of the lyrical subject whose body is open "for examination's sake." The Other makes the protagonist experience shame and pain more pronounced than ever before. Maybe the poem's hero wants to protect his or her personal value, but likewise experiences being "given away" and realizes the "indignity" and "pathetic" character of his or her openness, feeling humiliated and helpless. From that suggestion, it is only a short step to the analysis on interpersonal relations performed by Jean-Paul Sartre. Similarly to their appearance in the works of the author of *L'être et le néant*, the poem in question takes fellow humans as a kind of embodiment of hell. They respond to our openness with the gaze that abuses and interferes with our internal integrity, takes away sense of our dignity, endangers intimacy

⁴ This term comes from a work, well known to Pasierb, by K. Wojtyła entitled *Love and Responsibility*, Cracow: 1962. 163. See also the analysis of the phenomenon of love and shame in works familiar to the poet, such as: Sawicki, F. *Philosophy of Love*, Poznań: Naczelny Instytut Akcji Katolickiej, 1934 or *Phenomenology of Shyness*, Wrocław: Wydawnictwo Wrocławskiej Księgarni Archidiecezjalnej, 1986., Sheler, M. *The Nature of Sympathy*, translated by Peter Heath. New York: Archon Books, 1970. and Tischner, J. *The Philosophy of Drama: Introduction*, Cracow: Znaka, 1998. 72-3.

and individuality, and sentences the hero to an unending suffering.⁵ Otherness that could be an invitation to a dialogue and personal meeting becomes a source of oppression in the world created by our poet.

The poem by the poet-priest could be read as a particular, poetic tale of violence. All of the representations of community projected by the lyrical "I" have an oppressive character. One could have the impression that the community, to which the person speaking in the text directs his or her words, is ignorant of the ways of communicating with the world, other than domination and cruelty. The norm established for the relations with the hero does not involve mercy or sympathy, but rather harshness symbolized by sand, ash, and bony chaff. If members of this anonymous community address the protagonist, they do so solely to inflict pain – to cut and fester, and "play strings of pain." The text itself allows us to recreate some of the mechanisms of social oppression. The "other" is stigmatized and humiliated first, and then is labeled as "alien," "abnormal," to be finally excluded from the community of men. The entire poem is saturated with a terrible irony against the world in which community works according to similar rules.

But exactly what kind of oppression is the poem speaking about? The strongly pronounced motif of bareness places the poem in line with a text by Ryszard Krynicki, entitled "Naked, I Woke Up Waiting in Line for Bread." The bareness and helplessness of the hero of this new wave poem seems to be a metaphor of oppression that had its source in the totalitarian regime of its time. At the very least, Krynicki's text allows itself to be placed in some social context. It is different with Pasierb. His message becomes generalized and separated from political circumstances. It is hard to ignore the interpretative track left by the author himself. In one of his essays, he performed an explication of his poem. He proposed an interpretation, one of many possible and not necessarily the best. It is nevertheless worthwhile to recall:

We, people of the Church, do not hide and we are visible to everyone who wants to see us. We are exposed to the gaze of the public. Jesus Christ dies naked, exposed to the gaping crowd. We cannot hide, everyone can see our agony, indignity of spasms, pathetic shudder. We are exposed, we repeat ritualized gestures that offend us and give us away to shameless glares, mockery and cruelty. The righteous in their thinking are with us when convenient, but in reality we are alone, accompanied only by him.⁶

Fragments of "Écorché" have been equipped in the above quoted essay with context that allows us to read the poem in its entirety as a work about "otherness" of people of faith and oppression that they undergo. Pasierb seems to suggest that faith does not grant peace or a feeling of safety. What is more, it does not grant a sense of community. It is solitude. Faith is the constant risk of humiliation, derision and cruelty, and the Church – seen from

⁵ In particular, we are interested in the analysis of the phenomenon of the "gaze" as discussed in the already mentioned *L'être et le néant* (Paris, 1979, 309-16) Sartre's concept is discussed in great detail by Kamptis, P. in the book *Sartre und die Frage nach dem Anderen. Eine Sociolontologische Untersuchung*, Wien-München: Oldenbourg, 1975. 96-155.

⁶ Pasierb, J.S. *Skrzyżowanie dróg* (*The Crossing*) Pelplin: Wydawnictwo Diecezjalne, 1994. 75.

a similar perspective – does not provide any safe haven. Believers have nowhere to go in order to hide from violence, and the poet's essay tries to convince us of religion's heroism. It sketches a particular theology of faith, where the idea of mimicking Christ in his bareness and helplessness against the crowd becomes central to the whole undertaking. The extension of this line of thinking can be found in Pasierb's comments about the "otherness" of priests. In an essay entitled *Ksiądz istota nieznaną* ("The Priest: The Unknown Being") we read: "If anti-clericalism is understood not as resisting the clergy, but as hatred directed at priests, it is just another face of racism. It is a price that people who wear soutane pay for their otherness."⁷ Is the poem in question therefore a work about the otherness of "people in soutanes" – laughed at, exposed to humiliation and helplessly facing anti-clerical oppression? Although contexts hinted at by the author are important, it seems that the possible meanings of the poem are far broader. I would like to observe in Pasierb's poem a universal model of the "circumstance of oppression," which remains generalized and far from any concreteness. The text provokes many questions that cannot be fully answered. One of them, however, is particularly urgent and concerned with the peculiar dependence between the subject of the poem and the oppressive community that he or she addresses. How then ought we to read "Écorché"? Is it a response to actual and real oppression? Or perhaps the oppressive community is merely a projection in the poem? Maybe it is the protagonist, tormented by the feeling of otherness, alienation and guilt, who projects the oppressive community that turns against him or her? As is the case with many poems, "Écorché" likewise hovers like a fog that obscures straightforward interpretation.

That is why the already existing interpretations of the poem are even more surprising. In her book entitled *Poeta czasu otwartego. O wierszach ks. Janusza Stanisława Pasierba (A Poet of Open Time: On the Poems of Father Janusz Stanisław Pasierb)* Aleksandra Pethe focuses her attention on the speaking subject of the poem. She states her thesis, claiming that the "subject speaking in the poem is an anti-type of the mythological Marsyas"⁸ only to later search for proofs showing that the lyrical hero of the poem is none other than Jesus Christ. In various different parts of the poem, the author of the essay observes references to the Bible. She interprets the words "see my beauty" as an allusion to the Book of Lamentations, where one can read: "Behold, and see if there be any sorrow like unto my sorrow" (Lam 1:12). According to Pethe, the motifs of chaff and sand are biblical symbols of passing, cleansing and death. She sees the passage about "playing strings of pain" as a reference to words of Thomas from the Gospel of John: "Unless I see in his hands the mark of the nails, and put my finger into the place from the nails, and put my hands into his side, there is no way I will believe." (John 20:24). The line "this is bareness" is considered by the scholar "to have the status of an interpretative key,"⁹ since it is a paraphrase of Pilate's "Behold the Man," hence pointing directly to Jesus Christ as the

⁷ Pasierb, J.S. *Światło i sól (Light and Salt)*, Paris: Éditions du Dialogue, 1983. 275.

⁸ Pethe, A. *Poeta czasu otwartego. O wierszach ks. Janusza Stanisława Pasierba (Poet of the Open Time – On the Poems of Father Janusz Stanisław Pasierb)*, Katowice: Biblioteka Śląska, 2000. 190.

⁹ Ibid. 191.

protagonist of the poem. In the end, Pasierb's poem in Pethe's interpretation becomes a well-known "poetic formula of the lonesome Christ ECCE HOMO¹⁰" – a manifestation of Jesus' experience in a "state of agony."¹¹

In her comprehensive analysis of "Écorché," Ewa Sykuła distances herself from some of Pethe's statements.¹² She underlines the fact that it is difficult to anchor Pasierb's text in the context of the Marsyas myth, since "there is no interpretative suggestion in the poem that would point in that direction."¹³ Sykuła finds Pethe's observations concerning chaff, sand, and ash to be excessive. What is truly valuable about Sykuła's work is the broad background of her interpretation. She meticulously reconstructs contexts from history of art, compares the poem with other statements of the author and impresses readers with her erudition. Similarly to Pethe, she believes that "it is important to reconstruct the lyrical subject first, because that is where the interpretative key seems to be located."¹⁴ In a similar fashion, she refers to the Bible in order to justify a tormented Jesus Christ as the protagonist. In the end, Pasierb's poem in Sykuła's interpretation becomes an "accusation of art, and what logically follows, of all culture of careless and inadequate approaches to Christ, especially during his torment and death."¹⁵

Both of the aforementioned readings of Pasierb's poem seem misguided to me. I believe that the message of the poem remains much more general – far more than any of the two scholars would like to admit. The search for the answer to the question of who is the real hero of the poem must lead to misunderstandings, since the poem is constructed in a way that allows for the situation of being skinned to become a metaphor for the existential situation of anyone. Both scholars proposed a similar model of reading "Écorché." Against the intentions of the author himself (who never published this poem in his volume of *Religious Poems*), as well as against the text itself (which lacks any clear, sacral character) they have approached Pasierb's work as a religious text. This conviction, however, made them engulf the poem in biblical contexts, and it ultimately misguided by them. Does every encouragement to look at "naked muscles" have to be seen as an allusion to the Book of Isaiah, and every mention of "playing strings of pain" imply a reminiscence of the meeting between the unfaithful Thomas and Christ? Does the line "this is bareness" sound in a way that excludes any speaker other than Jesus Christ? It seems as if both scholars operated by using a set "preconceptions," that replaced a thorough reading of the poem itself. Instead of interpretation, we have been presented with a peculiar over-interpretation of Pasierb's text.

Translation: Jan Pytalski

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ Ibid. 192.

¹² See Sykuła, E. *Pasja według Pasierba (Passion According to Pasierb)*. Lublin: Wydawnictwo KUL, 2004. 103-128.

¹³ Ibid. 105.

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ Ibid. 120.

Katarzyna NADANA

How to Be a Queen

The appreciation reviewers express for the exceptional talent of the author of *Paw Królowej* by Dorota Masłowska¹ is usually accompanied by a more or less discreetly expressed disappointment with the book's content. Reviewers suggest (the exception is the review by Marek Zaleski in *Tygodnik Powszechny*) that the book does not offer cognitive enrichment because its representation of the world does not propose anything new. They believe the novel treats about the life of pop stars, describing the mechanisms of career-making, and unmasks the protagonists who are revealed to be poor not only in spirit but also often literally short on money. Such dual reception – undisguised admiration for the language, on the one hand, and disappointment with the book's content, apparently too obvious or banal, on the other, sometimes, however, is the fate of books which are brilliant but still awaiting proper interpretation.

Bożena Umińska appreciated the book enough to compare it to prose by Jelinek (*Przekrój* 2005 no 28). It would seem that the well-known author of reviews thus pays her tribute. Quite the contrary. Her review contains such observations as the following: "Ideas good enough for Austrians will not work for us, Poles." Umińska suggests that Masłowska avoids any positive engagement, "so that no one would think she is a socialist or a feminist thus making her potentially the object of mockery; the negative perception of reality characteristic for Jelinek, however, would surely not get laughed at." Umińska also speaks of Masłowska as a "juvenile malcontent."

The comparison between Masłowska and Jelinek is quite compelling. They use language in a similar way. And it is not the matter of the excellent literary workshop but of a certain conception of language which is much more complex in *Paw królowej*

¹ Dorota Masłowska, *Paw królowej*, Lampa i Iskra Boża, Warsaw, 2005.

than it is in *Wojna polsko-ruska*.² The grotesque language of *Wojna* aims at representing a thug as a social type. This crippled language is his only language and the limits of that language are the limits of his brutal world. The critics decided that *Paw królowej* is based on a similar sociological concept, only this time telling about the privileged sections of society. Such reading is to be supported by the choice of protagonists: Stanisław Retro, a singer of fading fame; his manager, Szymon Rybaczko; and several female characters, such as Anna Przesik, Retro's girlfriend; Sandra, Rybaczko's wife; and the ecstatically ugly Patrycja Pitz, whose existential situation is described in the first chapter with "hip-hop rage":

Hej złamasie, to do ciebie mówię, ciebie o to pytam. Co zrobisz, gdyby to do ciebie przyszła tak cholernie brzydka, przyniosła swe ciało jak turystyczna konserwa, oczami wywracała i chciała cię poderwać, to co, co wtedy zrobisz, przecież nie jesteś zły, tylko jesteś dobry, a jeżeli to właśnie Chrystus do ciebie podchodzi w kostiumie Patrycji i chce to z tobą robić? Pomyśl o tym. (9)

[Hey you, dickhead, yeah, you, I'm talking to you, I'm asking you. What would you do if she came to you, so fucking ugly, brought her body like a can of cat food, rolled her eyes and tried to put the moves on you, so what would you do, you're not bad, you're good, and what if it is Christ himself come to you dressed as Patrycja and wanting to do it with you? Think about it.]

Using what seems like direct speech Masłowska represents the inner life of her characters and the way they attribute meaning to events. Their inner language turns out to be a tangle of phrases borrowed from various language games in which they participate. The characters are parodies of traditionally understood subjectivity defined as the ability to own one's speech: a subject is the one who is conscious of the sense of his or her own utterances. Masłowska's characters are essentially flat because they are reduced to a language which, as in theories of poststructuralism, speaks them. They seem to be puppets, thinking and acting only insofar as they are permitted by the mechanized language which delimits their world. Similarly to Jelinek, Masłowska sometimes breaks up language into its elementary parts and subsequently puts those together according to patterns which produce the effect of objectification. She uses, for example, nouns derived from verbs and passive voice in place of active verbal forms. The character of Stanisław Retro is such a caricature of subjectivity; in his speech we recognize phrases coming from a variety of discourses. I could quote endlessly. I will mention only the excellent scenes of Retro's fights with his successive girlfriends; the description of riding the bus with "the plebeians"; and the ruminations on the possible consequences of murdering Rybaczko:

Zresztą to zabicie nie do końca mu wydało się moralne. Potem po sądach korowody to mało, ale zemsta karmy, to okropne, okropne mu się po prostu wydało, jak się ma czuć taka osoba zabijana? Na pewno niefajnie...I jak to nieładnie będzie o nim świadczyć, każdy skrytykuje go internauta: uważam, że przez Stanisława Retro menedżera swego zamordowanie to czyn niemoralny! Uważam, że Stanisław Retro nie jest żadnym artystą, lecz zwykłym pedałem i nekrofagiem! (112)

² Dorota Masłowska, *Wojna polsko-ruska pod flagą biało-czerwoną*, Lamp i Iskra Boża, Warsaw, 2005.

Texts and the Body

[Anyway, the killing didn't seem quite morally right. Later the hassle in the courts, that's bad enough, but the karma, that seemed most awful, how is such a person supposed to feel when being killed? Uncool, that's for sure... And it would put him in such a bad light, each and every blogger will criticize: I believe that the murder of his manager by Stanisław Retro is an immoral deed! I believe that Stanisław Retro is no artist, but a plain faggot and scavenger.]

The effect of the clash between inner speech and its real sense, perceptible to the reader, serves the aim of exposure and it is because of this effect that, contrary to Umińska's claims, the novel is in fact analytical and critical. For example, Rybaczko never takes care of his child who is several months old. We can infer that from his tactics during the "minor" misunderstandings with his wife:

"No Sandra przypilnuj ją, zobacz jak płacze!" – krzyczy do Sandry. "No zrób coś, chyba jesteś chyba jej matką," ale ona oczywiście że nie słyszy udaje, na gapienie się w dal zawody urzęda między sobą samą, okej, nie ma sprawy, pilotem podgłośnił do wartości ekstremalnych i słucha uważnie. (125)

["C'mon Sandra, why don't you mind her, see how she's crying!" – he yells to Sandra. "Do something, damn it, you're her mother," but of course she doesn't hear, pretends not to, does the stare-into-the-void contest with herself, okay, screw it, he hits the extreme values with the remote, and listens attentively.]

The real significance of this scene escapes the protagonist who fails to recognize the reasons for his wife's frustration that deepens from one month to the next. The dreams and self-perception of the characters in *Paw królowej* are illusions which separate them from the real significance of the events in their lives. The schematic, female "waiting for love" clashes with male sexual desire as the world of *Paw królowej* is reduced to trivial physiology. Women are victims of systemic violence (expressed in Retra's case also as physical violence), but so aggressive and ruthless themselves in pursuing their goals that they do not inspire pity. Violence manifest in language is the condition of social acceptance in this world. This is why even Patrycja, predestined for the role of the victim becomes repulsive when the usual roles in her life are reversed and all of a sudden she can address her "admirer."

Rybaczko, a specialist in manipulating the media, decides to launch the career of this transgressively ugly girl, inspired by the media response to the death of the Pope. Patrycja will probably be a success, as the promotion mechanisms will succeed even in marketing her ugliness and launching her in the media. This will be achieved with the "Christian message" she will carry, addressed primarily to the so-called "John Paul generation" currently recognized as the potential new mass consumer. As he promotes Patrycja, Rybaczko also wants to give a chance to Masłowska whom he chooses to be the author of Patrycja's songs. Placing a request under the text he has written himself, he explains:

właściwie to nic by pani specjalnie pisać nie musiała, ale żeby była to właśnie pani ważne, szkielek tekstu jest gotowy prawie, najwyżej rymy pani dopisze jakieś, bo to hip hop jest taki... fabularnie jest sytuacja, że brzydka dziewczyna, rozumie pani, przez wszystkich pomiatana... w tle Polska

Ce, trudne realia, kapitalizm...ogólna rzeczywistości przepychanka, no na pewno wie pani, jak to tam lirycznie przedstawiać, trochę przekleństw, bo to ma być manifest prawdy. (147)

[Actually, you wouldn't need to write anything really, but it's important that it has to be you, the draft of the text is basically ready, you can just add some rhymes and stuff, for this is a kind of hip-hop thing...the story situation is that there is this ugly girl, you get it, everybody pushes her around...backwoods Poland in the background, difficult realities, capitalism...gritty reality, you will know how to make that stuff lyrical and all, with some curse words, because this is to be a manifesto of truth.]

Rybaczko places the request with Masłowska for a text which we essentially already have read. This circular narration faces the reader with the disturbing question whether we should not place the entire book in quotation marks as Rybaczko's text. And if we place those quotations in yet more quotations, Masłowska's book will reveal a second bottom and will force us to consider the significance of her "unclear" authorship.

Consequently, we have to read "Patrycja's song" as play with hip-hop conventions on the level of language and world view as well as on the level of "the author's reflections" it contains, which will then become a parody of all "reflections" one could formulate in this language, and not just an expression of a "juvenile malcontent" as Umińska would have it. The many self-reflexive elements of the novel mostly escaped critical notice. This self-reflexivity does not concern, as it used to in the 20th century avant-garde novel, the creative process, but the mechanisms of the book's promotion and reception, and, among others, the creation of the book's "author," in a situation when it is systemically impossible to own one's language. Rybaczko, the king of the media, knows full well whom to target with Patrycja's song and why he needs Masłowska:

telefonu [szuka] do jakiejś osoby znanej, ale umiarkowanie, żeby wszystko niszowości miało znamię, w alternatywnych klimatach było utrzymane, względem kultury oficjalnej marginalne, aby trafić również do tych wszystkich punków i vegetarian różnyh zbuntowanyh, do różnyh tych lasek zjełczałyh...one z Pitz na pewno będą się identyfikowały, cosmoświnie do gazem depilacji, jeszcze tylko nazwisko odpowiednie znaleźć, które by to wszystko firmowało...a ta Masłowska jakaś...teraz o sławie przebrzmiałej, która właśnie ze względu na to może okazać się tania, poza tym autentyczna taka, w bloku mieszkała, zna realia społeczne i socjalne. (146)

[he's looking for] a phone number to someone well-known, but not too well-known, to keep everything low profile, to keep it in the alternative climate, marginal in relation to the mainstream culture, to get also to all those punks and vegetarian troublemakers, all those wilted hoes...who would surely identify with Pitz, cosmofoes with gas hair removal, he only needs the right name to front the whole thing...and there's this Masłowska...of now passing fame, so she may be cheaper, but still so authentic, she lived in the projects and knows the social realities first hand.]

The "author" is merely the tool of the system here, and her name serves as the marker of authenticity of the homogenized content intended to reach the homogenized audience. Self-reflexivity is related also to the problem of reception, or to the functioning of the text and its author in culture, understood as a network of discourses of various

Texts and the Body

media: from the press which shapes public opinion, through magazines which create fashion and stars, to advertising and internet forums. The book is doomed to a reception determined by the patterns set by the different discourses. Among those, there is the right-wing press:

Należy tłumaczeniu na inne języki tej książki ewentualnemu zapobiec, ponieważ postawy bohaterów zdradzają niski moralny poziom, co w złym świetle na Zachodzie stawia Polskę i powszechnie kulturowane tu wartości. Tę piosenkę celowo wypromowali Żydzi i masoni, zamiast wypromować pisarzy bardziej zdolnych, takich jak Stanisław Lem, Bruno Schultz i Witold Gombrowicz. (119)

[The potential translation of this book into other languages should be prevented, because the attitudes of the protagonists betray poor moral standing, which puts Poland in a bad light in the West, together with the values generally cultivated here. This song was purposely promoted by the Jews and the Masons, instead of promoting writers who are more talented, such as Stanisław Lem, Bruno Schultz, and Witold Gombrowicz.]

There is also the Catholic humanism of the reviewers from *Tygodnik Powszechny* or *Gazeta Wyborcza*:

człowiekowi drugiemu dobre słowo dać, a nie że wciąż tylko kurwa i jej najlepsza koleżanka mać to jedyne co do powiedzenia innym masz, powiedz to MC Doris, banału się boisz, słów dobrych, o co ci dziewczyno chodzi, czy optymistycznie raz spojrzeć aż tak boli, czy optymistycznie raz spojrzeć ci szkodzi? (33)

[Have a kind word to give to another, not just the usual motherfucker, is that all you have to say to your brother, say it to MC Doris, are you afraid it would be lame, are you afraid of a kind word to say, what is it with you girl, can't you be more optimistic, afraid to be more optimistic?]

There are ads and tales about stars from women's magazines:

Do napisania książki została wybrana autorka piękna i bardzo wysoka, tak aby ta książka mogła czytelnika bardzo ciekawić i interesować. Otwory w ciele autorki sklejonno klejem Lancome do w ciele otworów. Dzięki temu nie menstruuje ona, nie poci się i nie oddaje mocz, co czyni tę książkę jeszcze bardziej zrozumiałą i interesującą. W ręce trzyma gumowy noworodek "My baby" 153 złote. Kup go i bądź jak ona. (97)

[A beautiful and very tall writer was selected to write [the novel], so that the book would interest and entertain the reader a lot. The holes in the writer's body were glued with Lancome glue for the body holes. Thanks to that she does not menstruate, sweat, or urinate, which makes the book even more understandable and likeable. In her hand she holds a rubber newborn, "My Baby," 153 zlotys. Buy it and be like her.]

The space of culture is not the space of conversation and interpretation of meaning, but the space for mercantile exploitation of the author and of his social exclusion. (This is how we need to understand the absurd passage showing Masłowska as a "public enemy" who spends her nights punching holes in a grapefruit, an activity that had already been described in *Fakt.*) Media culture is thus shown as the space of alienation. Masłowska uses the play with the objectified receiver, represented by the media engaged in com-

mentary and promotion, as a strategy of opposition against the omnipresent discourse of mass culture (which, it is worth remembering, erases the opposition between high and low culture, a phenomenon exemplified by cultured Rybaczko who differs significantly from the thug businessman Silny).

Masłowska often employs the grotesque effects produced by the clash between ideological discourse and the “naked” reality. For example, the tragic ending of Patrycja’s song, where she is run over by the tram and where “the ambulance takes [her] to heaven in a black bag” (28) seems grotesque enough. There is also a passage which beautifully parodies discourse of motherhood exploited by the media:

“w ciąży cierpiałam na wątrobową choleostazę,” mówi piosenkarka znana, “...objawiało się to swędzeniem całego ciała...tak było, ale...wszystko już rozumiałam. Kiedyś posiadałam złe cechy charakteru, teraz ich nie posiadam.” “Na uzależnienie od kokainy cierpiałam...to był błąd ale teraz już wszystko rozumiałam...na Bemowie mamy piękne 75 metrów mieszkanie... Kiedyś kokainę ćpałam, ale teraz wydaje się dużo większe, bo wyburzyliśmy ściany.” (14)

[“When I was pregnant I suffered from choleostatic liver disease,” says a famous singer, “...the symptom was the itching of the body all over...I had it, but...but now I understand everything. Once I used to possess bad character flaws, now I don’t possess them any more.” “I used to suffer from cocaine addiction once...and that was a mistake, but now I understand everything... Now we have this beautiful apartment in Bemovo, 75 square meters...I used to snort cocaine once, but now it seems much larger when we tore down the walls.”]

Masłowska’s linguistic play depends on the operations of clashing and overlapping stock phrases and clichés, in order to reveal the strangeness and lifelessness of language. The book’s hip-hop rhythms, however, effect a magnetic pull on the reader so that we breathlessly read and cannot tear ourselves away from the reading. Thus despite its ugliness and the ugliness of the world it represents, the language of the book is disturbingly lively, captivating, and poetic. The reason for this is the live presence of the book’s author, who attempts to break through language conventions, an invisible but palpable presence behind the tectonic shifts revealed on the surface of the text in the form of grotesque. The real subject of the book is, then, writing under the conditions of media language. The stake is the autonomy of the author, but also his intimacy, guarded against the network of language relations which uproot one from one’s own experience.

Masłowska is also one of the characters of her novel. We find out, for example, that she moved into a bad neighborhood, Praga, and rides a bike with no logo. These are signs of the conscious refusal of the markers of social prestige. She has a small child. She allows the voice of the mainstream culture to tell about her experiences. According to that voice, she has become “a housewife who trudges around her house dragging along the abdomen of the vacuum cleaner” (the word cluster suggests a woman annihilated as a person and dominated by her reproductive function). In this scenario, her fate as an author has been sealed: “Kuczok Wojciech gives a reading in Silesian Kielbasa, and she stays at home, at home. Hey, people, put down this shit, those knives, she has never written another book again!” (135). These words hide the author from view, but also point to “Masłowska” as their distributor, about whom

Texts and the Body

we find out, primarily, that she has mastered the skill of evading discourses which would like to trap her and simultaneously disown her of her language. Masłowska is not what the language pattern prepared for her as a woman, then mother, would have her be; different from what the language of those around her would fabricate her as. Her book is also different. It follows in the steps of the linguistic and philosophical discoveries of *Ferdydurke*.

Translation: Krystyna Mazur

Authors' Biographical Notes

Anna Nasiłowska, professor works at the Institute of Literary Research of the Polish Academy of Sciences, member of the research group Literature and Gender. Editor of the academic journal *Teksty Drugie*. Published numerous academic works as well as prose. Most recently she published a biography of Maria Pawlikowska-Jasnorzewska (2010), a selection of writings of Stefania Zahorska (with her introduction) (2010) and an autobiographical novel entitled *Konik, szabelka* (2011)

Zdzisław Łapiński, Professor in the Institute of Literary Research of the Polish Academy of Sciences. Interested in 20th century literature and literary theory. His published works include *Norwid* (1971, 1984); *Ja, Ferdydurke* (1985, 1997); *Gombrowicz i krytycy* (1984); numerous articles devoted to the oeuvre of Julian Przyboś, Miron Białoszewski, Czesław Miłosz and Witold Gombrowicz, editor of *Teksty Drugie*. Co-editor of the *Słownik realizmu socjalistycznego* (2004). Recently edited *Bakakaj i inne opowiadania*, a volume of *Collected Writings* of Witold Gombrowicz (2007) and is currently working on a collection of poems by Czesław Miłosz for the series of Biblioteka Narodowa.

Bożena Karwowska an Associate Professor in the Department of Central, Eastern and Northern European Studies at the University of British Columbia. Her interests include representation of women in Slavic literatures and feminist approaches to literature and culture. She publishes articles in *Teksty Drugie*, *Canadian Slavonic Papers*, *Przegląd Humanistyczny* and others. She is the author of a *Recepcja krytyczna Czesława Miłosza and Josifa Brodskiego w krajach języka angielskiego* (Wydawnictwo IBL PAN) and *Ciało, Seksualność, Obozy Zagady* (Universitas) as well as a co-editor of a volume (*Nie)obecność. Pominięcia i przemilczenia w narracjach XX wieku* (Elipsa, 2008).

German Ritz is a professor of Slavic Literatures at Universität Zürich. His main field of interest is Polish literature of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. His books include: *The Polish Prose of 1956-1976: Model-lierung einer Entwicklung* (1990); *Jaroslav Iwaszkiewicz: Ein Grenzgänger der Moderne* (1996); and *Thread in the Labyrinth of Desire: Gender and Sex in Polish Literature from Romanticism to Post-modernism*. His interests cover: gender in literature, literary influences and intertextuality, and translation studies. He has published articles in German and Polish journals, festschrifts and article collections. His current projects include Juliusz Slowacki, and Polish Romanticism – the canon and difference.

Wojciech Śmieja PhD, lectures at the gender studies of the University of Warsaw. He is mostly interested in gender and queer theory, history of homosexuality, literary theory. Author of *Literatura, której nie ma. Szkice o polskiej "literaturze homoseksualnej"* (2010). Published numerous articles in "Pamiętnik Literacki", "Teksty Drugie", "Przestrzenie Teorii", and others. His reportages are published by "Polityka" and "Nowa Europa Wschodnia".

Mateusz Skucha PhD, assistant professor in the Polish Studies Department of the Jagiellonian University, His dissertation was entitled *Męskość i kobiecość w późnym piarstwie Józefa Ignacego Kraszewskiego*. He lectures on "Theories of Manhood" at Gender Studies in the Institute of Visual Arts of the Jagiellonian University.

Dariusz Śnieżko PhD assistant professor in the Literary Theory Division of the Polish Studies Department of the University of Szczecin. Interested in thematology, historical poetics and the historical narratives. Recently published *Mit wieku złotego w literaturze polskiego renesansu. Wzory – warianty – zastosowania* (1996), *Mikołaj Sęp Szarzyński* (1996).

Piotr Sobolczyk PhD assistant professor in the Historical Poetics Division of the Institute of Literary Research of the Polish Academy of Sciences, member of a research group "Gender and Literature." Author of *Tadeusza Micińskiego podróż do Hiszpanii* (2005), writer and poet, author of three poetry volumes and two books of prose, translator.

Piotr Oczko PhD, assistant professor at the Jagiellonian University. His academic interests cover above all literature and culture of the Dutch-speaking countries; old Polish, English, and German literature; tragedy and the tragic in European literature up to the seventeenth century; medieval drama; literature and the question of evil; New Historicism; national identity and stereotypes; art history: seventeenth-century genre Dutch painting, functional arts and crafts of the seventeenth and nineteenth centuries, old Dutch pottery – especially tiles, emblem books; and gay and lesbian studies. He published among others *Miotła i krzyż. Kultura sprzątnania w dawnej Holandii, albo historia pewnej obsesji* (2013), *Homoseksualność staropolska* (2012) and *Życie i śmierć doktora Fausta, złego czarnoksiężnika, w literaturze angielskiej od wieku XVI po romantyzm* (2010).

Authors' Biographical Notes

Łukasz Pawłowski PhD assistant professor in the Division of the Anthropological Questions of Literature in the Polish Studies Department of the University of Warsaw. His dissertation was devoted to the constructions of social reality in the 2nd Republic of Poland in the interwar prose writings. He published among others in “Przegląd Humanistyczny” and volumes *Teraźniejszość i pamięć przeszłości* (2006) and *(Nie)obecności pominięcia i przemilczenia w narracjach XX wieku* (2008).

Jeannette Słaby PhD, her dissertation entitled *Hominem imitantia. Modernistyczna antropologia podmiotu w polskiej prozie międzywojennej* (2010) was devoted to the motives of doll, mannequin and man-machine as the figures of modernism subjectivity in crisis. Published in “Polonistyka”, “Podteksty”, “Refleksje”, as well as in volume *Gender w weekend* (2006).

Wojciech Kudyba professor at the Cardinal Stefan Wyszyński University in Warsaw. Poet and literary historian and critic. Interested mostly in contemporary poetry. Author of *Aby mowę chrześcijańską odtworzyć na nowo...*. *Norwida mówienie o Bogu* (2000), *Rana, która przyzywa Boga. O twórczości poetyckiej Janusza St. Pasierny* (2006), *Wiersze wobec innego. Zbiór esejów* (2012). Published his essays and literary works in numerous periodicals and academic journals.

Katarzyna Nadana, PhD, member of the research group “Gender and Literature” in the Institute of Literary Research of the Polish Academy of Sciences, literary historian and critic, lecturer. Interested in women’s relationships in the light of gender theory, and memoirs and journals. Author of *Problem religii w polskich dziennikach intymnych Stanisław Brzozowski, Karol Ludwik Koniński, Henryk Elzenberg* (2012). Published her articles in *Znak*, *Res Publica Nowa*, *Kresy*, “*Teksty Drugie*” among others. Member of the editorial board of *Bez Dogmatu* journal.

Other Special Issues:



Anthropology in Literary Studies

Holocaust in Literary and Cultural Studies

Czesław Miłosz and the Polish School of Poetry