

**TRANSFER**

RECEPTION STUDIES

**IX**

## Transfer. Reception Studies

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# TRANSFER

## RECEPTION STUDIES

### IX

*THE LITERATURE (OF THE) "NOW."  
INTERVENTIONS, TRENDS AND REVISIONS*

EDITED BY  
ANNA MAJKIEWICZ AND MICHAŁ KISIEL



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## Editors' Note / Od redaktorów

### 1 Now, But When?

Literature is first and foremost rooted in a living experience of reading and writing; why is it, then, becoming gradually more and more difficult to establish what contemporary literature or contemporary literary criticism stands for? Although the neoliberal utopia of the “end of history” has hardly enacted a definite closure to the history of ideas, the heritage of postmodernist sensitivity, be it praised or contested, has established a point of no return, which makes it impossible for any genuine critique to be hastily satisfied with exhaustive cartographies or definite periodisations. In fact, as we are more than ever aware of discursive practices of power – which permeate through literary awards, literary capitals, literary canons, and literary markets – we notice how our sense of “being here” and “being now”, or our very understanding of “contemporaneity”, become confused.

And yet, it is even more difficult to abandon the totalised concepts that pinpoint the current moment in literary history. In the third decade of the 21st century, the humanities are vivid in devising new codes to react creatively and critically to technological, and political revolutions, ravaging the sense of complacency widely adopted in Western consumerist culture. They are also, however, reorienting themselves in an era whose challenges are largely unprecedented, and yet seem to stage the return of the repressed or repetition of history. Is the “same old story” of the 21st century still a farce? Or, perhaps it is already a tragedy. Time will tell, one might say, once again transporting us from the elusive “now” to a yet undetermined future.

Our globalised and cosmopolitan society, informed by a progressing digital revolution, is transforming the ways in which knowledge, ideas, and conventions are spread, reworked, (re-)contextualised, and even recycled. Regardless of these complexities, it is impossible to look at contemporary literature as a dissolving concept: after all, the question of the reader’s response

and reception is still central to understanding literature and literariness. New literary output vitally comments upon burning issues, many of which might have lacked proper representations hitherto. Similarly, the articles collected in this volume, instead of proposing a new genealogy of contemporaneity, analyse how 21st century novels, poems and plays create diverse codes and new languages to grasp and name our rapidly changing and deeply challenging reality. These contributions have been grouped into three sections: *interventions*, *trends* and *revisions*.

*Interventions* comprises innovative and cutting-edge contributions: approaches that either contest the *status quo* or offer their own pioneering readings. Adam REGIEWICZ revisits mediaeval culture and mediaeval studies in order to recognise three leading tendencies in approaches to the past, treating it as a product of a phantasm, discourse, and translation. As Regiewicz shows, such a map makes it possible to tighten the relations between bygone and contemporary cultures, and to reorient reception studies within the broader field of comparative literary studies. Adrian GLEŃ emphasises the need for comparatist perspectives as well and the importance of literary classics; in particular, Gleń traces Hölderlin's relevance and reception in 21st century Polish poetry. Anna KISIEL and Bartosz STOPEL refrain from reconnecting with the past in favour of searching for new dynamic means of analysis in the present. KISIEL discusses the psychoanalytical implications of *doppelgänger* figures in Deborah Levy's *August Blue* in the context of the duality, if not the ambiguity, of everyday experience during the Covid-19 pandemic. As she notes, Levy uses the pandemic context not only to give justice to stories of the global crisis, but also to produce a space in which it allows personal crises to be encoded and decoded. STOPEL is not so much interested in contemporary content, as in a contemporary form. As he shows, cognitivist readings of flash-fiction might show how this genre relies on under-narration and fragmentation, while overall narrative reductionism largely challenges the reader's response. In the context of Paweł Huelle's untimely passing, the actual burning "now" of Polish literature, Dariusz NOWACKI proposes to reconsider Huelle's takes on contemporaneity, tradition, and the past. Nowacki's reading explores the intricacies of Huelle's prose, in which nostalgia becomes a counterpart of postmodernist aesthetics, while the author's yearning for universality reinscribes his works in non-fictional reality and history. The section concludes with Anna Bednarczyk's theorisation of adaptive translation. BEDNARCZYK discusses the interplay of translation and reception, or mistranslation and "misreception," to demonstrate how conscious and unconscious interferences participate in the creation and distortion of meaning.

*Trends* collects systematic solutions, as well as both well-established and new methodological perspectives. Joanna WAROŃSKA-GEŚIARZ explores how the influence of Romanticism, be it through its incorporation, adaptation, or rejection, is transformed in modern Polish drama and theatre. Edyta MANASTERSKA-WIĄCEK focuses on gender in translation with the utmost attention paid to the practical challenges and difficulties that this grammatical category might provoke with regard to shifts of denotative and connotative dimensions of meaning. Translation and reception studies are discussed further by Anna MACH, who analyses intersemiotic translation in the case of popular culture. Mach discusses the case of *The Dresden Dolls' Coin Operated Boy*, whose translation arguably has to rely on not only musical or lyrical layers, but also visual and performative ones, as the latter remain significant vehicles for aesthetic convention. The section ends with contributions by Magdalena BEDNORZ and Maciej NAWROCKI, who discuss the reception of game narratives and interactive entertainment as an interplay of old and new media. BEDNORZ is interested in the reception and revision of the classical romances within digital entertainment, based on her reading of *Dragon Age: Origins*, while NAWROCKI focuses on *Baldur's Gate III* in order to explore the re-implementation of tabletop role playing game categories within the CRPG genre and the way they transform the player's engagement.

*Revisions* includes close studies of the past, retrieving its relevance and significance in contemporary cultural and literary contexts. Elżbieta HURNIK uses psychogeography and biographical criticism to reread memoirs of artists connected to Vienna as the artifacts of material, spiritual, and intellectual culture at the turn of the century. Ewa BARTOS discusses Łukasz Barys' poetic *oeuvre* and the way in which it represents nature-cultures; Bartos is predominantly interested in the way the Romantic tradition of understanding nature is both adopted and contested in Barys' works. Aleksandra BUDREWICZ focuses on a Victorian writer, Maria Corelli, on the centenary of her death, tracing her influence and reception in Polish fiction and non-fiction writing. Magdalena BĄK also, in this case quite literally, explores the reception of 19th century culture. Bąk investigates intertextual links between literary works and travel writings, and comments upon travellers' inclination to incorporate classical masterpieces into their accounts. Katarzyna JANUS' contribution includes three translations of Benedict Schwalbe's poems. The reception of these Renaissance texts in Poland is discussed with a special emphasis put on their theological and apocryphal implications; moreover, the intersemiotic aspects of these poems are analysed. Finally, Andrew C. ROUSE discusses the case of Árpád Lówy (László Réthy) and emphasises the need for critical reception and translation of his poetry. Rouse's presentation of this largely forgotten *oeuvre* is accompanied by a selection of

Lówy's/RÉTHY's poems. The volume ends with Anna JANEK's review of Michał Chudoliński's *Mroczny Rycerz Gotham. Szkice z kultury popularnej* and Agata MIRECKA's report covering a project entitled *Współczesny dramat i teatr w przestrzeni niemieckojęzycznej i w kontekście europejskim* [Contemporary Theatre and Drama in German in the European Context], which concluded with a conference, *Spielräume des Humanen: Gegenwärtiges Drama und Theater für nachhaltige Zukunft* (Kraków, October, 3-5, 2024). Its title symbolically manifests an essential aim of the humanities today: *The Place of Humanum: Contemporary Drama and Theatre for the Sustainable Future*.

And now...

Michał Kisiel and Anna Majkiewicz  
Częstochowa, November 2024

## 2 Jeśli nie teraz, to kiedy?

Literatura to przede wszystkim żywe doświadczenie pisania oraz lektury. A jednak coraz trudniej jest określać, czym jest literatura lub krytyka literacka dzisiaj. Mimo że neoliberalna utopia „końca historii” nie domknęła definitywnie historii idei, to już postmodernistyczna wrażliwość i jej dziedzictwo, niezależnie czy je odrzucamy, czy też nie, doprowadziły do swojego przekroczenia Rubikonu. I tak żaden rzetelny gest krytyczny nie może pospiesznie zadowolić się już wyczerpującymi kartografiami czy dookreślonymi periodyzacjami. Co więcej, coraz bardziej świadomi tego, w jakim stopniu praktyki władzy są zapośredniczone przez dyskurs – a zatem przenikają także nagrody, kapitały, kanony czy rynki literackie – możemy zauważyć, w jaki sposób nasze poczucie „bycia tu” oraz „bycia teraz”, nasze rozumienie „współczesności”, ulega rozproszeniu.

Jednocześnie równie wymagające jest porzucenie totalizujących koncepcji, zdolnych do określenia obecnego momentu w historii literatury. W trzeciej dekadzie XXI wieku humanistyka dynamicznie wytwarza coraz to nowsze kody, które pozwalają jej twórczo i krytycznie reagować na zachodzące w świecie rewolucje technologiczne i polityczne. Te zaś nie pozwalają krytyce przejąć perspektywy beczynności i samozadowolenia, tak dominującej w kulturze konsumenckiej krajów Zachodu. Ta sama humanistyka, co więcej, podejmuje trud określenia się także w sytuacji społeczno-kulturowej, której wyzwania, choć wydają się być bez precedensu, przywołują na myśl powrót wypartego lub powtórkę historii. Czy jednak wiek XXI powtórzy się jako farsa? Czy, być może, jako tragedia? „Czas pokaże”, można by powiedzieć, choć i ten gest pozbawi nas zakorzenienia w ulotnym „teraz” na rzecz jeszcze niedookreślonej przyszłości.

W obliczu cyfrowej rewolucji, którą nasze zglobalizowane oraz skosmopolityzowane społeczeństwo przechodzi od pewnego czasu, trudno nie zauważyć transformacji zachodzącej w obrębie praktyk dzielenia, pracowania, (re-)kontekstualizacji oraz „recyclingu” wiedzy, idei oraz konwencji. Mimo to, w perspektywie powyższych zawłości, niemożliwe okazuje się sprowadzenie literatury współczesnej jedynie do rozpluwającego się konceptu. Doświadczenie osobistej lektury przecież wciąż pozostaje kluczowym elementem determinującym to, czym jest literatura oraz literackość. Teksty literatury najnowszej twórczo mierzą się z palącymi problemami współczesności, z których wiele – choćby katastrofy naturalne, rzeczywistość (po) pandemii, lęki niesione przez rozwój nowoczesnych technologii czy struktury pamięci i traumy – nie było dotychczas właściwie reprezentowanych. Podobnie artykuły zebrane w niniejszym numerze, choć nie proponują spójnej, nowej genealogii współczesności, to podejmują się analiz tego, jak powieści, wiersze i sztuki powstałe w XXI wieku wytwarzają nowe „języki” zdolne do uchwycenia i nazwania prędko zmieniającej się rzeczywistości i wyzwania, które nam rzuca. Te artykuły podzieliliśmy na trzy kategorie: interwencje, trendy i rewizje.

*Interwencje* obejmują rozwiązania innowacyjne i nieszablonowe: to pionierskie interpretacje, ale i kontrinterpretacje kontestujące *status quo*, czy to w przestrzeni pola literatury, czy też literaturoznawstwa. Adam REGIEWICZ powraca do kultury średniowiecznej i refleksji mediewistycznej, rozpoznając w nich trzy wiodące tendencje w myśleniu o przeszłości: produkt fantazmatu, dyskursu bądź przekładu. Jak pokazuje, podział ten pozwala zacieśnić relacje między kulturami współczesnymi a tymi minionymi, a także przedefiniować badania nad recepcją w szerszym polu badań komparatystycznych. Adrian GLEŃ również podkreśla wagę perspektywy komparatystycznej, kierując uwagę na rolę klasyków. W szczególności, Glenia ciekawi recepcja Hölderlina w polskiej poezji XXI wieku. Anna KISIEL i Bartosz STOPEL porzucają związki z przeszłością na rzecz poszukiwań nowych sposobów myślenia o dynamicznej terażniejszości. KISIEL zwraca uwagę na psychoanalityczne implikacje figury sobowtóra w *August Blue* Deborah Levy w kontekście pęknięcia, czy nawet niedookreśloności, codziennego doświadczenia w czasie pandemii COVID-19. Jak zauważa autorka, Levy nie tylko odwołuje się do kontekstu pandemicznego jako współczesnego punktu odniesienia w narracjach o globalnym kryzysie, ale także używa go jako przestrzeni, w której odkodowaniu i zakodowaniu ulegają kryzysy osobiste. STOPEL większą wagę przywiązuje do współczesnej formy. Kognitywistyczna lektura *flash fiction* pozwala zauważyć, do jakiego stopnia gatunek ten polega na nie-do-narracji oraz fragmentacji, artystyczny redukcjonizm

wymaga zaś rewizji odbioru czytelniczego. Odwołując się do „teraz” współczesnej literatury polskiej, Dariusz NOWACKI wraca do niedawno zmarłego Pawła Huellego w celu przeanalizowania jego sposobów myślenia o współczesności, przeszłości i tradycji. Nowacki pokazuje, jak proza Huellego włącza nostalgię w postmodernistyczną estetykę, pragnienie zaś pisarza uniwersalizacji treści jego dzieł wpisuje je w określony moment historyczno-kulturowy. Sekcję domyka artykuł Anny BEDNARCZYK. Badaczka pokazuje, jak przecięcia przekładu i recepcji, a także błędy w obu tych polach, reorganizują świadome i nieświadome „pęknięcia” w tworzeniu (ale i zaburzeniu) struktur znaczeniowych.

*Trendy* wskazują ścieżkę usystematyzowanych innowacji, ale też mapowania tego, co „teraz” – współczesnych metodologii, obecnych tendencji oraz konwencji. W tym dziale Joanna WAROŃSKA-GEŚSIARZ bada wpływ estetyki romantyzmu – jej zawłaszczenia, modyfikacje i odrzucenie – w obrębie najnowszych polskich dzieł dramatycznych i teatralnych. Edyta MANASTERSKA-WIĄCEK skupia uwagę na rodzaju gramatycznym, *genderze*, by opisać wyzwania oraz trudności, jakie rodzi on dla praktyki tłumaczeniowej, a także przesunięcia, jakie wywołuje na poziomie konotacji oraz denotacji. Wątki przekładu oraz recepcji kontynuuje Anna MACH w intersemiotycznym studium piosenki *Coin Operated Boy* zespołu The Dresden Dolls. Jak zauważa badaczka, tłumaczenie tego tekstu nie może ograniczać się jedynie do warstwy tekstowej i muzycznej, ale musi także uwzględnić wizualne oraz performatywne uwarunkowania utworu, które stają się istotnymi nośnikami konwencji estetycznej. Sekcję domykają artykuły Magdaleny BEDNORZ oraz Macieja NAWROCKIEGO, komentujących recepcję narracji cyfrowych oraz rozrywki interaktywnej na przecięciu starych i nowych mediów. BEDNORZ podejmuje się lektury recepcji oraz rewizji klasycznego romansu w obrębie rozrywki cyfrowej na podstawie *Dragon Age: Origins*. NAWROCKI natomiast wskazuje na znaczenie tradycyjnych elementów gier RPG oraz ich implementacji w gatunku CRPG na podstawie *Baldur's Gate III*, pokazując, w jaki sposób przekształcają one doświadczenie i zaangażowanie osoby grającej.

*Rewizje* obejmują praktyki współczesnienia: to próby spojrzenia na przeszłe tendencje i perspektywy ze współczesnego punktu widzenia. Elżbieta HURNIK sięga do krytyki biograficznej i psychogeograficznej w swojej lekturze pamiętników artystów związanych z Wiedniem, które stają się artefaktami materialnej, duchowej oraz intelektualnej kultury na przełomie wieków. Ewa BARTOS podejmuje się analizy poetyki Łukasza Barysa oraz reprezentacji naturo-kultur, które z niej wynikają. Lektura Bartos zwraca szczególną uwagę na to, w jaki sposób romantyczny sposób myślenia o naturze zostaje przejęty, ale i podważony, w wierszach Barysa. Aleksandra BUDREWICZ pisze o Marii Corelli w setną rocznicę jej śmierci, a także o wpły-

wie i recepcji tej wiktoriańskiej pisarki w obrębie literatury polskiej. Magdalena BAŃK bada recepcję XIX-wiecznej kultury, zwracając szczególną uwagę na powiązania między klasykami literatury a tekstami podróżniczymi i zastanawiając się nad znaczeniem dzieł literackich dla wyobraźni i estetyki podróżniczej. Katarzyna JANUS prezentuje przekłady trzech wybranych wierszy Benedicta Schwalbego. Autorka omawia polską recepcję tekstów renesansowego poety, ze szczególnym uwzględnieniem ich teologicznych i apokryficznych wątków, a także ich wymiaru intersemiotycznego. Andrew C. ROUSE omawia zaś przypadek Árpáda Lówy'ego (László Réthy'ego), podkreślając wagę tego autora, którą badacze nad recepcją oraz przekładem muszą jeszcze dostrzec. Portret pióra Rouse'a, tego w znacznej mierze zapomnianego pisarstwa, jest uzupełniony o wybór tekstów Lówy'ego / Réthy'ego w przekładzie. Tom domyka recenzja Anny JANEK książki Michała Chudolińskiego *Mroczny Rycerz Gotham. Szkice z kultury popularnej* oraz sprawozdanie autorstwa Agaty MIRECKIEJ z realizacji projektu „Współczesny dramat i teatr w przestrzeni niemieckojęzycznej i w kontekście europejskim” i z odbytej w jego ramach międzynarodowej konferencji naukowej „Spielräume des Humanen: Gegenwärtiges Drama und Theater für nachhaltige Zukunft” (Kraków, 3–5.10.2024), której tytuł niemal symbolicznie manifestuje nadrzędny cel badań w naukach humanistycznych: „Miejsce Humanum: współczesny dramat i teatr dla zrównoważonej przyszłości”.

A teraz...

Michał Kisiel i Anna Majkiewicz  
Częstochowa, listopad 2024



# I

## INTERVENTIONS

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## Mediaevalism as an Example of Reception Studies

**Abstract:** The construction of statements about the past is to a large extent a reconstruction of how the past is imagined. Past culture is not given to contemporaries except through a relic or trace, while discourse or narrative produced is an imagistic activity. Using the example of contemporary trends in mediaevalist research, this article shows three clear tendencies in the way the past is treated: as a phantasm, a translated text and a discursive element. All these mechanisms are inscribed in cultural comparativism, which can be understood as a model of 'reading' past culture (through) and (into) contemporary culture. Mediaevalism is understood here as a representation of a supra-historical and transcultural comparative study. Such an approach makes it possible to prove that the study of reception is in fact an activity in the spirit of cultural comparativism.

**Keywords:** reception studies, mediaevalism, hermeneutics of trace, imagology, discourse.

When the acclaimed film *The Passion of Christ*, directed by Mel Gibson, entered cinemas in 2004, critics and audiences alike marvelled at the incredible authenticity of the story depicted. It was said that the film respected the historical side, taking care to show the Jerusalem of two thousand years ago and the Stations of the Cross as they probably looked. The use of Aramaic in the dialogue and of Latin in its Middle Eastern, slightly vulgarised form, as well as the literal adherence to the Gospel text, reconstructing the events of the Passion, were appreciated. What was emphasised was the extraordinary attention paid to detail, which was supposed to prove the realism and cred-

ibility of the story. Historians had no doubt that the director had benefited from archaeological findings and knowledge of the local culture. Critics repeatedly claimed that the director relied not only on the Gospel accounts, but also on the findings of pathologists studying the so-called Shroud of Turin and other sources of scientific-historical knowledge. The audience reacted in a similar way, whose most frequent comment after watching the film was that “this is how it must have been”.<sup>1</sup>

Almost twenty years later, Ridley Scott’s latest spectacle devoted to the legend of Napoleon, the French emperor, was released. Known for his unorthodox approach to history, the director, who interprets historical facts in a way that is convenient for himself for the purposes of his films, was immediately met with huge criticism from historians. If audiences reacted to the film as typical entertainment, seeing it above all as a well-told story, academics criticised the film maker extremely harshly. They accused him of a lack of any reference to facts and of a casual depiction of historical events. Evidence of this imaginativeness in Scott’s work was said to be the scant number of consultants (just two), whom the director himself reportedly did not listen to anyway. The director’s response to such accusations was a statement made on the BBC: “Were you there? Ah, you weren’t. So how do you know?”.

Both examples of the reactions are the obverse and reverse of the same coin. It is about the perception of the past, which throughout the generations has primarily been a set of beliefs or perceptions about it. This was very aptly and emphatically expressed by Gerhard Lubich at the meeting “Middle Ages: digital and virtual – objects, practices, reflections” at Ruhr University, who stated that the only things that are available to us today from that time are stones and manuscripts – the rest is narrative. In the context of mediaevalist research, Professor Lubich’s sentence sounds ostentatious, but it, by no means, closes the research perspective.<sup>2</sup> One can take these words as a stimulus to reflect on contemporary trends in the study of the past. After all, isn’t Lubich right to say that we only have traces?

## Trace and Imagination

The category of trace, described in the context of hermeneutics by Barbara Skarga, makes it possible to define this phenomenon on the borderline

<sup>1</sup> Tomasz Królak, and Joanna Operacz, “*Pasja*” Gibsona – opinie po nieoficjalnym pokazie [Gibson’s “Passion” – Reviews after Unofficial Screening], 7.02.2004, accessed January 9, 2024, <https://www.ekai.pl/pasja-gibsona-opinie-po-nieoficjalnym-pokazie/>.

<sup>2</sup> The audiovisual recording of the speech of 23.10.2023 can be found on the Youtube platform: Gerhard Lubich, “Middle Ages: digital and virtual – Objects, Practices, Reflections,” Ruhr University, accessed January 9, 2024, <https://youtu.be/7QdAekOMbUg>.

between ontology and imagology. A trace exists in a specific space and time. As a sign, it has its own semantic and signifying value, and at the same time it refers to what is not there.

Ślad odsyła do przeszłości, do tego, co było, ale już nie jest, przynajmniej tu i teraz. To znak fenomenu z przeszłości, czegoś, co się wydarzyło, minęło, pozostawiło jednak swoją pieczęć mniej lub bardziej wyraźną, taką właśnie, jak skorupy wykopywane przez archeologa, służące za dowód istnienia tej czy innej kultury.<sup>3</sup>

[A trace refers to the past, to what was but is no longer, at least here and now. It is the sign of a phenomenon from the past, something that has happened, has passed, but has left its stamp more or less distinct, just like the shells excavated by the archaeologist, serving as proof of the existence of this or that culture.]

These are those manuscripts or stones in the form of ruins, cathedrals, castles that we have today. Ruins, charred remains or even reasonably well-preserved remains of former times are not a mirror image of the past, but only something that resembles a footprint reflected in the sand. This footprint tells us as much about the presence as about the absence<sup>4</sup>. As Barbara Skarga writes: “Między śladem i tym, co ślad zostawiło, tkwi napięcie niejednoznaczności i niedoskonałego wskazania, większej lub mniejszej odpowiedniości, dystans nieraz tak odległy, że szyfr kryjący się w śladzie nie pozwala się odczytać”<sup>5</sup> [Between the trace and that which left the trace lies the tension of an ambiguous and imperfect indication, of greater or lesser appropriateness, a distance sometimes so far away that the cipher hidden in the trace does not allow itself to be read]. The trace should therefore be understood as an interpretative category that is easily attributed to semiotic analysis.

Charles Sanders Peirce, writing about the three correlates of the sign, points to the important role of the interpretant. Peirce calls this the third

<sup>3</sup> Barbara Skarga, *Ślad i obecność* [Trace and Presence] (Warszawa: Wydawnictwo Naukowe PWN, 2002), 29–30.

<sup>4</sup> See: “Interesują mnie nie zwykle używane w odniesieniu do przeszłości określenia: obecna (*present*) i nieobecna (*absent*), ale pojęcia drugorzędne, a zatem przeszłość, która jest *non-absent* [*non-absent past*] (przeszłość, która nie jest nieobecna, tzn. której nieobecność się jawi) czy też *non-present* [*non-present past*] (przeszłość, która jest nie-obecna, tzn. której obecność się nie jawi). Pojęcia te, chciałabym przy tym widzieć, nie jako opozycyjne, ale jako konkurujące ze sobą.” [I am interested not in the terms usually used to refer to the past: *present* and *absent*, but in secondary terms, and thus in a past that is *non-absent* [*non-absent past*] (a past that is not absent, i.e. whose absence appears) or *non-present* [*non-present past*] (a past that is non-present, i.e. whose presence does not appear). These concepts, I would like to see in doing so, not as oppositional, but as competing with each other]. Ewa Domańska, “Archeontologia martwego ciała. (Kontemplacyjne podejście do przeszłości)” [Towards an Archeontology of the Dead Body. (A Contemplative Approach to the Past)], *Er(r)go*, no. 3 (2001): 52.

<sup>5</sup> Skarga, *Ślad i obecność*, 31.

element of the sign, alongside the signifiant (representative) and signifié (object). In this view, the space between the signifier (the present) and what the signified has left behind (the past) becomes part of mediation. Mediation is an interpretive category that negotiates meanings. The category of the interpretant, therefore, determines the role that the sign is supposed to play for something or someone at a given time. Thus, mediation is always political, for it ascribes the intuitive cognition of a trace to symbolic values, formed at a given historical moment and for a given community. Any reconstruction of a trace is fundamentally an ideological activity.

As the centuries-old tradition of reading the past, or should we say using the past to interpret the present, shows, the present appropriates the past in order to describe itself. Therefore, as Marek Zaleski notes:

[...] obraz przeszłości dostępnej w naszym o niej wyobrażeniu i jego intensywność, to zawsze mniej aniżeli przecucie naszej o niej pamięci, cząstkowej i spowitej kirem zapomnienia. Nasza pamięć z kolei, poddana władzy, jaką sprawuje nad nią nasza terażniejszość, jest zawsze uboższa od przeszłości, danej intuicyjnie w nieprzekładalnych na obrazy pomyśleniach o niej.<sup>6</sup>

[...] the image of the past available in our perception of it, and its intensity, is always less than the premonition of our memory of it, partial and shrouded in the cire of oblivion. Our memory, on the other hand, subject to the power exercised over it by our present, is always poorer than the past, given intuitively in thoughts about it that cannot be translated into images.]

Under the guise of a cult of the past, there hides a cult of the present.

Such an interpretative category is mediaevalism, which Leslie Workman – one of the initiators of this field of research on Anglo-Saxon soil – has defined as the phenomenon of constructing the shape of the Middle Ages under the influence of the perceptions of the viewer, that is, on the basis of his or her reading and cultural experiences.<sup>7</sup> Mediaevalism is not so much about a contemporary reference to mediaeval beliefs, practices or aesthetics (style)<sup>8</sup> as it is about a cultural imaginary on the basis of which a belief in the Middle Ages is constructed. Such an imaginary consists of certain properties or characteristics attributed to a culture on the basis of contemporary judgments or opinions about antiquity. John Simmons writes straightforwardly that mediaevalism is treated as a discourse (about the discourse itself more

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<sup>6</sup> Marek Zaleski, *Formy pamięci* [Forms of Memory] (Gdańsk: Słowo/obraz/terytoria, 2004), 12–13.

<sup>7</sup> Leslie Workman's position is presented in the work on the reception of his research in the volume: *Medievalism in the Modern World. Essays in Honour of Leslie Workman*, eds. Richard Utz, and Tom Shippey (Turnhout: Brepols 1998).

<sup>8</sup> "Medievalism," in Collins English Dictionary, accessed January 9, 2024, <https://www.collinsdictionary.com/dictionary/english/medievalism>.

later) used to shape, contest and comment on other times.<sup>9</sup> Thus, mediaevalism reminds us of its imagological construction, emphasising the pictorial, and thus mental, ephemeral, without clearly delimited boundaries, image of the Middle Ages.

Imagology as a research method is based on the category of interpretive community within which the imaginary is created. Paraphrasing Jan Błuszkowski's statement about the stereotype,<sup>10</sup> one could say that each cultural community constructs its own specific ways of imagining the past. These tend to be similar, analogous and typical. They arise from individual diverse afterimages of it.<sup>11</sup> They look for 'common places' that define a shared imaginary for the whole group. What cements the shared imaginary of a culture is the language and its products, such as literature and, more recently, journalism and the language of the media, including the audiovisual. The images produced and perpetuated in this way, supported by cultural traditions, play a key role in shaping mentalities – and thus ideas about the past – in this case the Middle Ages. At the same time, it is worth noting that the further one moves away from the Middle Ages, the more powerfully its symbolic value affects the cultural audience. Nowadays, it is no longer possible to speak of semiotic concreteness, but only of its interpretation in the key offered by a given moment of reading together with the entire methodological apparatus or language.

In order to better understand the assumptions of this text, it is worth referring to research published in 2009 on the presence of the 'civitas diaboli' motif and the image of the mediaeval inquisitor in Polish post-war literature.<sup>12</sup> On the basis of an analysis of several novels (*Tylko Beatrycze* by Teodor Parnicki, *Ciemności kryją ziemię* by Jerzy Andrzejewski, *Msza za miasto Arras* by Andrzej Szczypiorski, the Hussites trilogy by Andrzej Sapkowski and the tetralogy on wizard Witelon by Witold Jablonski), it was shown that

<sup>9</sup> John Simmons, "Christopher Middleton on Elizabethan Medievalism," in *Medievalism in the Modern World. Essays in Honour of Leslie Workman*, 44.

<sup>10</sup> Jan Błuszkowski, *Stereotypy a tożsamość narodowa* [Stereotypes and National Identity] (Warszawa: Dom Wydawniczy Elipsa, 2005), 16.

<sup>11</sup> Lidia Wiśniewska writes that imagology tends towards an attitude that implies a reliance on the principle of *coincidentia oppositorum*. See: Lidia Wiśniewska, "Konstruktywistyczny wymiar komparatystyki" [The Constructivist Dimension of Comparativism], in *Komparatystyka i konteksty. Komparatystyka między Mickiewiczem a dniem dzisiejszym II* [Comparatistics and Contexts. Comparatistics between Mickiewicz and Today II], ed. Lidia Wiśniewska (Bydgoszcz: Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Kazimierza Wielkiego, 2012), 26.

<sup>12</sup> Adam Regiewicz, *Ślady obecności średniowiecznego wizerunku inkwizytora i „civitas diaboli” w polskiej literaturze fantasy po roku 1989* [Traces of the Presence of the Medieval Image of the Inquisitor and 'Civitas Diaboli' in Polish Fantasy Literature after 1989] (Zabrze-Racibórz: Wydawnictwo Scriba, 2009).

the historical trace of records of inquisition trials left in ecclesiastical and historical writings became a carrier of symbolic meanings for contemporary communication, namely, worldview, cultural and even political. In some cases it was a metaphor for the present, in others it served as a synecdoche, calling on the reader to fill in the blanks with his or her imagination, and finally the trace was a gesture of irony that reverses the order and becomes a tool for critical evaluation. The last case in particular, because of its popularity, fairly wide readership and its treatment of the Middle Ages as a prop room from which the necessary costumes are taken out, is extremely important. The irony used there led to a confrontation between modern man, brought up in a rationalist and liberal spirit, and the mediaeval worldview in which the story was immersed. It is readily apparent that the clash between these two cultural objects will not fall in favour of the Middle Ages. However, it is not the conclusion itself that is important here, but the mechanism. For the authors discussed in that study accomplish what is the essence of imagology: they confront a communally shaped idea of antiquity.

In view of the above conclusions, one might ask, is it only literature that measures itself against the emerging imaginaries in the encounter of cultures? Perhaps it is worth tracing some narratives of cultural comparativism, which conducts an intercultural and ahistorical dialogue of cultures, juxtaposing often historically and spatially distant regions such as modernity and the Middle Ages in mediaevalism.<sup>13</sup> In the following steps, I would like to look at three phenomena present in mediaeval studies: phantasm, translation and discourse.

## Phantasm

The mental image of the past (in this case the Middle Ages), shaped above all by the imaginings of the members of the interpretative community – the cultural group – makes it possible to define mediaevalism as a kind of phantasm. Maria Janion, researching the phantasm in Romantic literature, drew attention to the affinity of this phantasm with the phenomenon of fantasy, so strongly affecting Romantic man.<sup>14</sup> Fantasy is not so much falsehood or illu-

<sup>13</sup> Adam Regiewicz, “Średniowieczność w perspektywie komparatystycznej” [The Middle Ages in Comparative Perspective], in *Mity i motywy w perspektywie komparatystycznej. Komparatystyka między Mickiewiczem a dniem dzisiejszym III* [Myths and Motifs in Comparative Perspective. Comparatistics between Mickiewicz and Today III], ed. Lidia Wiśniewska (Bydgoszcz: Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Kazimierza Wielkiego, 2013), 59–112.

<sup>14</sup> Maria Janion, *Projekt krytyki fantazmatycznej. Szkice o egzystencjach ludzi i duchów* [The Project of Phantasmatic Criticism. Sketches on the Existences of Humans and Ghosts] (Warszawa: PEN, 1991), 7.

sion, but imagination, which takes over the perception of reality. Janion points out that Romanticism undermined the classicist understanding of tradition, reduced to a reservoir of souvenirs, finding it too limiting. Instead, Romanticism proposed a mythicising approach, offering the possibility of a broader, symbolic, interpretation. Horace Walpole, commenting on his Gothic novel *The Castle of Otranto*, written at the end of the 18th century and considered the beginning of the new Romantic genre, wrote: "I allowed myself to be ruled by unfettered imagination, uncontrolled visions and passions. I wrote against the rules, the critics and the philosophers".<sup>15</sup> In this way, the past ceased to be held hostage to dates and events and became part of a narrative – a story. Moreover, Samuel Taylor Coleridge, the English poet considered a precursor of Romanticism and known for introducing fantastical themes into his poems, commented that it is fantasy that allows the element of direct cognition to be transformed into an image.<sup>16</sup>

The image of the past is left in the hands of the imagination, which imposes on humans a view of the situation in which they find themselves. The phantasm is a kind of filter, formed under the influence of strong inner convictions (these fantasies arising under the influence of a certain state of mind and the cultural context of the era), through which one looks at the past. One could say that the phantasm plays the role of a mask or costume behind which are hidden the needs or desires of modern man, who looks at the past, projecting it according to his or her expectations. The phantasm is thus a projection of contemporaneity onto the past. A projection that is not so much overt, but precisely latent, or even unconscious, in the Freudian sense of the term.

If we apply the assumptions of phantasm to mediaevalism, it turns out that it is tailored precisely to the idea of the imaginative construction of the Middle Ages. Mediaevalism, as Maciej Michalski notes, is not only a reproductive process, but also a creative one, and this in a dual sense: the construction of references to the Middle Ages and the construction of the Middle Ages itself.<sup>17</sup> Mediaevalism is therefore not so much about the possibility of merely recreating the past as it is about re-constructing it according to the spirit of the times. From this approach stems the strongly interpretative character of mediaevalism, taken as a phantasm. This character changes de-

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<sup>15</sup> Cited by Janion, *Projekt krytyki fantazmatycznej. Szkice o egzystencjach ludzi i duchów*, 8.

<sup>16</sup> "Fantasy in Coleridge Poetry," in *Jud's Creative Writing Medley. Artwork, Haiku, Poetry, Stories, Novels, Literary Essays & Thesis*, accessed January 11, 2024, <https://judsjottings.wordpress.com/essays/fantasy-in-coleridges-poetry/>.

<sup>17</sup> Maciej Michalski, "Wokół definicji mediewalizmu" [Around the Definition of Medievalism], *Sobótka*, no. 1 (2011): 86.

pending on the mental construction of the era or cultural group in question. The Enlightenment will look at the past – this particular mediaeval past – in a different way, and Romanticism, Modernism or even our contemporary postmodernism will look at it in a different way. In each period the Middle Ages operate with a different phantasm, adapted to the cultural matrix of its time,<sup>18</sup> therefore on the one hand images of the “dark Middle Ages” created by Renaissance and Enlightenment cultural narratives are used, on the other hand a heroic and at the same time magical Middle Ages as a result of a Romantic myth (Maria Janion writes that “the Middle Ages for us is the Middle Ages plus the Romantic myth of the Middle Ages”<sup>19</sup>) or the Middle Ages of the vagantes or carnivalesque, which were so much exposed at the end of the 19th century by the culture of Modernism. Nowadays, the Middle Ages are read in a kind of contrast to modernity and today’s understanding of reality,<sup>20</sup> they are understood as completely incompatible with the rules of social life and modern culture (more primitive, natural, sensual or even barbaric<sup>21</sup>), from which very often extreme conclusions are drawn and judgements are constructed that lead to a boundless fascination or an unreflective rejection of everything associated with the Middle Ages.

This perspective can be shown using two phenomena present in the research narrative. The first can be identified as a reflection built around the motif of the witch and the mediaeval accusations of *malefici*. The theme first appears in Romantic texts, thanks to the famous book *The Witch* by Jules Michelet. As seen by this historian, whose work analyses the conceptualised forms of the presence of the Evil One and its functions, subjecting them to cultural interpretation, the witch fits into the Romantic myth of rejection. Michelet operates with categories typical of Romanticism: inverted aesthetics (evil is beautiful), ethics (truth need not be evil), social order (the individual has more value than the whole), constructing a completely different image of the witch as young, feminine, sensual and beautiful.<sup>22</sup> These very

<sup>18</sup> I wrote about this in the book: Adam Regiewicz, *Mediewalizm wobec zjawisk audiowizualnych i nowych mediów* [Medievalism in Relation to Audiovisual Phenomena and New Media] (Warszawa: DiG, 2014), 21–22.

<sup>19</sup> Maria Janion, “Studia o romantycznych ideach. Estetyka i natura” [Studies in Romantic Ideas. Aesthetics and Nature], in Maria Janion, *Prace wybrane, vol. 4, Romantyzm i jego media* [Selected Works, vol. 4, Romanticism and its Media] (Kraków: Universitas, 2001), 13.

<sup>20</sup> Stuard Y. McDougal, *Ezra Pound and the Troubadour Tradition* (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1974).

<sup>21</sup> Colin N. Manlove, “Flight to Alepo: T. H. Whites 'The Once and Future King',” *Mosaic. A Journal for the Comparative Study of Literature and Ideas* 10, no. 2 (1977): 67.

<sup>22</sup> Cf. Foreword by Jules Michelet ‘On Benefits’: “‘Czarownice wyobrażamy sobie jako straszliwe wiedźmy Makbeta. Ale okrutne procesy dowodzą czegoś wręcz przeciwnego. Wiele czarownic zginęło właśnie dlatego, że były młode i piękne” [We imagine witches as Mac-

attributes are, according to Michelet, the reason for the accusation of women, who are suddenly perceived as a threat caused by fear, jealousy, bitterness resulting from rejection, etc. Michelet consistently argues that the myth of the witch is the product of a hateful theology, which appears as an overarching worldview construct, and human corruption. Because of human weaknesses, these very causes are able to formulate false accusations. Thus, we are dealing with issues typical of Romanticism: resistance to the imposing world-view construct, the attitude of rebellion, the cult of the individual – the person who rises above mediocrity, and emotions which, as in Shakespeare, determine human fate.

Michelet's thinking proved to be extremely fertile, as it became a staple of feminist ideas based on the myth of the witch. One of the first women to fight for women's rights, Matilda Joslyn Gage, echoes Michelet's key findings, incorporating them into the struggle for equality.<sup>23</sup> This witch tropes of feminism seem extremely relevant, as the image of the witch as a sign of struggle against the oppressive model of patriarchal culture has been shaped in the spirit of contemporary feminist criticism. An expression of just such an understanding of the mediaeval image of the witch in the context of the contemporary model of knowledge can be found in by Mona Chollet's book *Sorcières: La puissance invaincue des femmes*.

Chollet refers to the cultural image of the witch as an unmarried woman or water, having no offspring, standing out in appearance (both in terms of extraordinary beauty and old age or ugliness) from the majority of society, having knowledge of female physiology (a witch is one who knows), financially independent, not respecting the rules of moral life accepted by the general public, etc. The author of the monograph presents the witch not only in the perspective of past 'witch hunts', but also of contemporary manifestations of discrimination that manifest themselves today at the level of cultural practices or language. Chollet says explicitly at one point that the witch is not so much a victim of the old times as of the new, contemporary times. Why? Because the witch, as a cultural figure, "ucieleśnia [...] kobietę wyzwoloną od wszelkiej dominacji, od wszelkich ograniczeń, stanowi ideał, do którego na-

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beth's terrible witches. But the cruel trials prove the opposite. Many witches were killed precisely because they were young and beautiful]. Jules Michelet, *Czarownica*, trans. Maria Kaliska (PULS, London 1993), 16.

<sup>23</sup> In her 1893 book *Woman, Church and State*, Matilda Joslyn Gage argued for the primacy and superiority of matriarchy over patriarchy, which was to be demonstrated by the practice of witchcraft as an implementation of the priestly fertility cult (including the cult of Diana or the cult of Ishtar). Matilda J. Gage, *Woman, Church and State: a Historical Account of the Status of Woman through the Christian Ages, with Reminiscences of the Matriarchate* (Aberdeen: Sky Carrier Press, 1998 [1893]).

leży dążyć, wskazuje nam drogę”<sup>24</sup> [embodies the woman liberated from all domination, from all constraints, constitutes an ideal to be pursued, shows us the way]. Consequently, Chollet treats witchcraft as a gesture of disenchantment of a collective consciousness, developed by male symbols and models of knowledge. Thus, she understands being a witch as a process of releasing the unquestionable, the arbitrary, the doctrinal, seeing in this figure a postmodern principle for the discursivisation of the world and its narratives. And just as Michelet uses the phenomenon of the witch to expose the archetype of primordial rebellion against traditional society, Mollet, as a child of the postmodern belief in tolerance and pluralism, sees in the figure of the witch an example of the heterogeneity of culture.

Another example of the phantasm analysed here, through which the past is read, may be the metaphor of the outlaw used by Zygmunt Bauman. In the mediaeval tradition, banishment was a social instrument aimed at removing individuals who did not respect the commonly accepted rules of life, and a legal instrument aimed at punishing individuals who violated the order of collective life by committing crimes. Banishment was an institutional solution, that is, it was part of the code of written law.<sup>25</sup> Bauman uses the mediaeval concept of the outlaw to describe the state of contemporary exclusion of people who remain on the margins of social life due to their inability or unwillingness to participate in consumption.<sup>26</sup> The Polish sociologist thus uses the normative phenomenon to explain the ostracism faced by poor people who cannot participate in the ritual of shopping. He attributes to the new ‘strangers’ or ‘vagabonds’, as Bauman calls them, characteristics typical of outlaws, pointing to similar practices applied to such people: separating them from the healthy fabric of a society that purchases goods, excluding them from the zone of consumption by constructing appropriate cordons guarded by the security of shopping centres or shops, etc.

The examples cited make two things clear. First, reflection on the past is always a construction of its imaginary. And this happens through the contemporary filter that we apply to the past along with the cultural narrative. Secondly, the study of antiquity ceases to refer to hard semiotic concreteness in the form of these “cathedral stones” or castles or manuscripts, but moves

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<sup>24</sup> Polish translation: Mona Chollet, *Czarownice: niezwykła siła kobiet*, trans. Sławomir Królak (Kraków: Wydawnictwo Karakter 2019), 9. Original: Mona Chollet, *Sorcières: La puissance invaincue des femmes* (Paris: Zones, 2018).

<sup>25</sup> Hanna Zaremska, *Banici w średniowiecznej Europie* [Outlaws in Medieval Europe] (Warszawa: Semper, 1993), 8.

<sup>26</sup> Zygmunt Bauman, *Ponowoczesność jako źródło cierpienia* (Warszawa: SIC!, 2000), 11–23. Original: Zygmunt Bauman, *Postmodernity and its Discontents* (New York: New York University Press 1997).

towards a symbolic model that is as much the domain of ideology as of the imaginary. It is difficult, therefore, not to see that the mediaevalist study understood in this way is heavily immersed in imagology, that is, the approach ascribed to cultural comparativism. About it Hugo Dyserinck wrote: Imagological comparatistics seeks above all to grasp each form of the disclosure of *images* and the manner in which they are produced and interact.<sup>27</sup> Isn't this precisely what the cited examples were about? Thus, cultural *images* – mediaeval and post-modern, ancient and modern, *images* that are provided to the modern reader as much by literature as by the texts of media culture – juxtaposed against each other are the basis of comparative action.

## Translation

The juxtaposition of temporally distant cultural areas, viewed as separate entities, raises the question of translation as a method of understanding the 'past' today. As the example of the phantasm has shown, the past operates primarily with *images*, which are the basis for thinking about the past as an imagined category. Thus, in attempting to apply this imaginary category to contemporary thinking about the world, one would have to treat the past as a concrete imaginary community,<sup>28</sup> operating within specific boundaries, using a single language, and stimulated by fairly clearly delineated political goals and cultural practices. In this way, the reading of the past by the present would resemble the principle of translation from one language to another.

If one were to try to reread the earlier examples of reading mediaeval phenomena through the prism of the present, one would find that we are dealing with precisely the kind of translation that, as Lawrence Venuti notes, always has an ideological dimension.<sup>29</sup> This is because every translation releases a kind of surplus of meaning that includes categories of values, beliefs or representations incorporated into the historical circumstances and social positions of the target culture. This is what we observed when analysing the figure of the witch and the outlaw inscribed in contemporary worldview discourse.

<sup>27</sup> Cf. Hugo Dyserinck, *Komparatistik: eine Einführung* (Bonn: Bouvier, 1991), 131.

<sup>28</sup> Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (London–New York: Verso, 1991), 6.

<sup>29</sup> Cited by Lawrence Venuti, "Przekład, wspólnota, utopia" (*Translation, Community, Utopia*), trans. Magda Heydel, in *Współczesne teorie przekładu. Antologia* [Contemporary Theories of Translation. An Anthology], eds. Piotr Bukowski, and Magda Heydel (Kraków: Wydawnictwo Znak, 2009), 288. Original: Lawrence Venuti, "Translation, community, utopia," in *The Translation Studies Reader*, ed. Lawrence Venuti (London–New York: Routledge, 2000), 468–488.

The examples presented above show quite clearly that the key strategy of defining the past by the present is the formula of adapting what is foreign. The classical cognitive mechanism is obviously at work here, which always compares what is new (even if it is old) with what is available and understandable now. For, ultimately, it is all about understanding. In this attitude is reflected the hermeneutic attitude, according to which translation is neither about sameness nor literalism, but about re-performance. Translation is not based on the transposition of words, but on the utterance of the state of affairs to which a phenomenon refers by means of the meanings closest to that phenomenon. According to this assumption, translation is an activity of mediation rather than an activity of restoration or reconstruction of meaning.<sup>30</sup> Indeed, the success of translation depends on whether a comprehensible and convincing sense is formed on the basis of the processed meanings.

Another aspect of translation is highlighted by postcolonial discourse, which sees a tension between foreign and native language in the strategy of translation. It can be understood in the context discussed here as a tension between the language of the past and the language of the present. The foreign language does not superimpose itself on the mother tongue like a mere palimpsest, but transforms it, writes Abdelkebir Khatibi.<sup>31</sup> That is to say, in translation one can see inculcated cultural systems that move with the language into the translated space. Let us follow a few examples to illustrate the above.

One of the popular notions used in contemporary discourse on popular culture, particularly audiovisualised culture, is the concept of the 'bible pauperum'. In the Middle Ages, the *Biblia Pauperum* was primarily a technique used by preachers to memorise homiletical content relating to the truths of faith by means of concrete exemplars.<sup>32</sup> To this end, scenes drawn from the pages of the Gospels or the Old Testament were accompanied by rather figurative examples to help convey the theological content. In this way, a structure (outline) was developed that included a Christocentric representation with simultaneous reference to the Old Testament. In order to make the parallels more memorable, iconographic elements began to be placed alongside biblical passages, which over time gained more space on the pages of these

<sup>30</sup> Fritz Paepcke, "Rozumienie a przekład" [Understanding and Translation], trans. Grzegorz Sowiński, in *Współczesne teorie przekładu. Antologia*, 342.

<sup>31</sup> Abdelkebir Khatibi, "Diglossia," in *Algeria in Others' Languages*. Cited by S. Ungar, "Pisanie językami". *Rozważania o dziele tłumaczonym (Writing in Tongues: Thoughts on the Work of Translation)*, trans. Agnieszka Pokojska, in *Niewspółmierność. Perspektywy nowoczesnej komparatystyki. Antologia* [Incommensurability: Perspectives of Modern Comparative Studies. Anthology], ed. Tomasz Bilczewski (Kraków: Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Jagiellońskiego, 2010), 544.

<sup>32</sup> Ryszard Knapieński, "Biblia Pauperum. Rzecz o dialogu słowa i obrazu" [Biblia Pauperum. The Dialogue of Word and Image], *Science*, no. 4 (2004): 133–164.

codices than the text itself. This popularity of illustrated codices meant that the concept of the *Biblia Pauperum* also came to refer to other iconic messages, for example paintings, stained glass, and illuminator art with non-biblical themes.

It seems that it is this somewhat looser translation of the phenomenon that has become the basis for explaining the contemporary tendency in popular culture to visualise content. The civilisational paradigm shift associated with the transition from print culture to image culture, brought about by the presence of cinema, television, computer and mobile screens, demanded a description of the phenomenon. The analogy between mediaeval and contemporary culture was noted quite quickly. Umberto Eco, in his essay *The New Middle Ages*, wrote that, as in the Middle Ages, the elite today uses a written text and an alphabetic mentality, while lower culture (popular or folk) operates with pictorial solutions.<sup>33</sup> In a similar sense, Monika Sznajderman uses the concept of the “bible pauperum” while describing the phenomena of audiovisual culture, video culture and pop culture, writing that “Wideo [to] obrazkowa i jednocześnie bliska oralności, współczesna a przecież zaskakująco archaiczna *Biblia pauperum* dzisiejszego człowieka”<sup>34</sup> [Video [is] a pictorial and at the same time close to orality, contemporary and yet surprisingly archaic *bible pauperum* of today’s man].

The mechanism of transferring meaning with a foreign term to a phenomenon from another time and attempting to identify and define a concept by means of another, distant term together with the entire cultural context, also works in the other direction. If an attempt is made to define contemporary cultural phenomena by means of the ‘bible pauperum’, the concept of the ‘mediaeval comic’ used in the mediaevalist narrative shows the opposite direction of action. Shaped at the end of the nineteenth century and experiencing the apogee of its popularity in the twentieth century, the comic strip, as a form of dual-coded expression combining image and word, became a way of describing mediaeval manuscripts, such as Etienne Harding’s Bible or the Canterbury Psalter. This translation of the phenomena of the mediaeval art of editing is brought to you by the French National Library, which in 2001 hosted an exhibition entitled. ‘La BD avant la BD’ (The comic *before the comic*).<sup>35</sup> The material on the exhibition’s website focused on discussing ex-

<sup>33</sup> Umberto Eco, “Nowe średniowiecze” [The New Middle Ages], trans. Piotr Salwa, in Umberto Eco, *Semiologia życia codziennego* (orig. *Semiologia quotidiana*) (Warszawa: Czytelnik, 1996), 96.

<sup>34</sup> Monika Sznajderman, *Współczesna Biblia Pauperum. Szkice o wideo i kulturze popularnej* [The Modern Pauperum Bible. Sketches on Video and Popular Culture] (Kraków: Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Jagiellońskiego, 1998), 12.

<sup>35</sup> The exhibition was available at <http://expositions.bnf.fr/bdavbd/anglais/expo/recit/index.htm>. Nowadays, a reception of this, found on the National Museum website, can be

amples of mediaeval bicode manuscripts, using the notion of ‘comics’ and the framing shots typical of this media form, namely strips, frames and extradiegetic narrative. The pictorial narrative present in the manuscripts, due to its polymediality, is meant to resemble the structural framework of the comic medium popular in the last century – it is as much about the narrative arrangement of the content, unfolding in strips, as it is about the relationship of word and image in frames, whose coexistence is both a compositional and a sense-making element. It therefore does not concern mere illustration and the servile role of the iconosphere vis-à-vis the text, but rather the reciprocal determination of meanings, as is the case in comics.

One could speak of a similar translation strategy by referring to the reliance of the reflections of contemporary cultural studies on carnival metaphors. The carnival is used to explain the role of media culture as the main provider of entertainment. It is no coincidence that the cover of the Polish edition of the book *To Amuse Ourselves to Death* by the American philosopher and media critic Neil Postman features a reproduction of Francisco Goya’s painting *Funeral of a Sardine*. Reminiscent of mediaeval masquerades, the painting by the Romantic era painter depicts the tradition of carnival processions leading up to Lent. Like the Feast of Donkeys or the Fools’ Parade, it is accompanied by a mood of madness, chaos and degeneration. Postman thus relates the era of show-business and media entertainment to a perpetual carnival, available to the viewer around the clock.<sup>36</sup> As in the mediaeval procession, so on the screen, the reality depicted is an inversion of the social order, it is a time for putting on masks and colourful costumes that have nothing to do with reality. Anyway, the metaphor of carnivalisation used here appears extremely often as a commentary on contemporary phenomena. It is used to interpret the ludic dimension of popular culture in the light of the old (read: mediaeval) tradition of the “world in reverse” or precisely the carnival.<sup>37</sup> Examples could be multiplied.<sup>38</sup>

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found in a report by one online reader: *Magazyn Kultury Popularnej Esensja*, accessed January 13, 2024, <https://esensja.pl/komiks/publicystyka/tekst.html?id=19562>.

<sup>36</sup> Neil Postman, *Zabawić się na śmierć: dyskurs publiczny w epoce show-businessu*, trans. Lech Niedzielski (Warszawa: Muza, 2002), 125–144. Original: Neil Postman, *Amusing Ourselves to Death: Public Discourse in the Age of Show Business* (London: Penguin Books, 1985).

<sup>37</sup> A review of such positions can be found in a number of collective studies, e.g. *Teoria karnewalizacji. Konteksty i interpretacje* [Carnivalisation Theory. Contexts and Interpretations], eds. Andrzej Stoff, and Anna Skubaczewska-Pniewska (Toruń: Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Mikołaja Kopernika 2000); *Ludyczny wymiar kultury* [The Ludic Dimension of Culture], eds. Jan Grad, and Hanna Mamzer (Poznań: Wydawnictwo UAM, 2004); monographic issue devoted to carnival *Polska Sztuka Ludowa. Konteksty*, no. 3–4 (2002).

<sup>38</sup> I wrote about this in Adam Regiewicz, “Komparatystyka i czytanie dawności. Medievalizm jako zjawisko translacyjne” [Comparatistics and the Reading of Antiquity. Medievalism as a Translational Phenomenon], *Rocznik komparatystyczny*, no. 7 (2016): 75–90.

The practice evoked here is therefore about seeking to understand, to situate a given phenomenon in the context of past experiences – culturally described, defined, though distant from the present. The translation technique used here intuitively seeks analogy or affinity, and therefore proximity, between the meaning structures of the past and the present, letting the contemporary reader of culture know that there is a clear correlation between the past and the present. The translation of past culture would thus consist in a process of incorporating it into contemporary space by means of language, using concepts that refer to familiar structures to explain new phenomena. Once again, then, the study of the past becomes a process of interpretation, and this is always subject to variables: it is part of an ongoing discourse.

## Discourse

In his definition of mediaevalism, already quoted, John Simmons writes that the phenomenon of making the past present in the present is a kind of discourse, used to shape, contest and comment on other times. In the context of the reflections presented here, which could be called postmodern or neo-mediaevalist,<sup>39</sup> discourse seems to be one of the most important approaches. First and foremost, because discourse reveals the communicative positioning and orientation of the times from the perspective of which the past is commented on, situating it in a specific social and cultural context, in a social dialogue. Discourse thus is a story – the speech of a community that constitutes identity, that gives meaning to the collective.

Therefore, as Michel Foucault notes, discourse is an ideological speech in a broad sense. This is because every discourse is given a certain value, a moral measure. Discourse is total speech because it takes into account the various aspects of the individual and social situation of individuals and groups, a speech anchored historically and socially, and as such allows the individual to activate his critically commenting role.<sup>40</sup> The extremely popular thesis of the ‘new Middle Ages’, uttered several times over the last century by, among others, Nikolai Berdyaev<sup>41</sup> and Umberto Eco,<sup>42</sup> could be placed in this perspective.

<sup>39</sup> Postmodern mediaevalism is a kind of self-reflexive interpretation of how to reconstruct the Middle Ages in the present.

<sup>40</sup> Cf. Mieczysław Dąbrowski, *Komparatystyka dyskursu. Dyskurs komparatystyki* [Discourse Comparatistics. The Discourse of Comparatistics] (Warszawa: Dom Wydawniczy Elipsa, 2009), 19.

<sup>41</sup> Mikołaj Berdyaev, *Nowe Średniowiecze. Los człowieka we współczesnym świecie* [The New Middle Ages. The Fate of Man in the Modern World], trans. Henryk Paprocki (Warszawa: Fundacja “Aletheia” 2003).

<sup>42</sup> Umberto Eco, “The Return of the Middle Ages,” in Umberto Eco, *Travels in Hyperreality, Harcourt*, trans. William Weaver (San Diego–New York–London: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1986).

This concept is based on the conviction that there is an analogy to be drawn between unifying tendencies in contemporary culture – the current globalisation, understood as a process of dissemination of many (not necessarily coherent) patterns, behaviours, norms and values on a universal scale, creating an interconnected network covering all planes of life: existential and social, and expressed through mechanisms of economisation and technicalisation – and mediaeval universalism. This interpretation strongly evokes the conviction that the Middle Ages and the present share a civilisational model based on unification, behind which then stood Christianisation and today consumerism and globalisation.

The Soviet philosopher Berdyaev had expressed a similar thesis almost a century earlier, drawing attention to the very moment of crisis of values: then Roman and today humanist and materialist ones. He wrote that the transition to the new Middle Ages, as once the transition from the Roman Empire to the Middle Ages, is accompanied by the decay of old societies and the imperceptible emergence of new ones. The old, well-established, formed social and cultural cosmos is today being shattered by chaotic and barbaric forces. As then, a new world, expressed by spiritual needs, appears behind them. In the fourth and fifth centuries it was widespread Christianisation, in the twentieth century it was a new faith, which for the Soviet philosopher was to be communism. Berdyaev's approach is typical of the geopolitical discourse of the time (1930s).

Umberto Eco behaves in a similar way when, in analysing socio-political phenomena, he argues for parallels between the mediaeval rule of local feudal lords and the contemporary system of tensions between local authority and state administration. In his famous essay *The Return to the Middle Ages*, the Italian mediaevalist sees a number of parallels between mediaeval and modern rules of social and technical life. He speaks of a similar feeling of civilisational fear, of a sense of danger, of a convergence of cultural trends that try to combine popular (low) and high culture by means of iconicity (images), but also of a tendency to constantly update without caring for the original sources, which seems to be extremely evident in recent decades, especially in terms of new media and technology. Besides, for Eco, the latter (technology) is evidence of a *sense of the* constant reliving of the New Middle Ages. At one point he writes explicitly: "We are still living under the banner of mediaeval technology".<sup>43</sup>

Both Berdyaev's and Eco's statements should be seen precisely as part of the discourse through which the present is commented on. The past, as presented by both scholars, is necessary insofar as it becomes for them a tool of

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<sup>43</sup> Eco, *The Return of the Middle Ages*, 64–65.

cultural diagnosis. By means of the discourse used, certain contents of the past are redistributed, selected and at the same time controlled, indicating desirable and undesirable phenomena. Secondly, and seemingly more importantly, discourse is a kind of commentary that completes the places left unsaid in the primary text – in this case, the past. By reading the Middle Ages with their times, Berdyaev and Eco introduce a contemporary code into the image of the past, superimposing a contemporary language on the old speech.

The study of antiquity thus turns out to be a strictly comparatist activity, which I understand as a kind of thinking. The comparatist mechanism cuts itself off from ready-made solutions, elaborated models or closed objects.<sup>44</sup> When looking at the past, the strategies of translation or discourse adopted, as well as imagological research, indicate the lack of sharp boundaries that make the past and the present similar to the cultural bubbles Charles Bernheimer once referred to in his report.<sup>45</sup> Both the past, captured within certain boundaries and made accessible by selected cultural texts, and the present – nowadays so much discursivised – form a moving, fluid space of intersecting cultural (worldview, ideological) fixations. After all, both the cultural past under study and the researcher him/herself are immersed in symbolic orders, discourses, value systems, habitus and patterns [expressed] through their language.<sup>46</sup> Researching antiquity we are moving in the realms of interpretation, we superimpose our understanding on the stones and manuscripts left behind, trying to match their phenomenological presence with the state of knowledge we have – and knowledge, as we know, is always an expression of some kind of power, and thus remains political. As a result, every activity in *reception studies* is undertaken within the framework of imagology in the broadest sense – the study of the imaginaries that a community produces.

The other observation concerns the way in which this pastness reaches us. The metaphors of translation or discourse discussed above emphatically demonstrate that the construction of an image of the past is subject to the dictates of language. And whether it is the image that expresses itself through language or language that works for the culturally emerging imaginary, *reception studies* is largely based on rhetoric. Whether we are talking

<sup>44</sup> Tadeusz Sławek, *Żaglowiec, czyli przeciw swojskości. Wybór esejów* [The Sailing Ship or Against Familiarity. A Selection of Essays] (Katowice: Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Śląskiego, 2006), 171.

<sup>45</sup> Charles Bernheimer, *Wstęp. Lęki przed porównaniem (The Anxieties of Comparison)*, trans. Piotr Sobolczyk, in *Niewspółmierność. Perspektywy nowoczesnej komparatystyki. Antologia*, 129.

<sup>46</sup> Cf. Siegfried J. Schmidt, *Literaturoznawstwo jako projekt interdyscyplinarny* [Literary Studies as an Interdisciplinary Project], trans. Bogdan Balicki, *Teksty Drugie*, no. 4 (2010): 154.

about the 'Dark Middle Ages' or the 'New Middle Ages', depending on the worldview adopted at the time that influences the discourse surrounding the chosen antiquity, the reading itself is produced on the basis of the language employed. This, in turn, always has a Dictionary at its disposal that reflects the popular judgements or beliefs of the moment. What is not in the Dictionary does not exist in the discourse. What seems interesting in this perspective, therefore, is the way in which the language of research, the tools created through the metaphors used, allow us to read antiquity today.

All this makes it possible to locate the study of the reception of past culture in the space of cultural comparativism, which is not so much concerned with the grammar of similarity as with the elaboration of a *tertium comparationis*, which, by juxtaposing the past and the present, "bada sieć relacji, nie widząc i nie chcąc widzieć «początków» i «końców»"<sup>47</sup> [explores a network of relations, without seeing or wanting to see 'beginnings' and 'ends'].

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<sup>47</sup> Zbigniew Kadłubek, *Święta Medea. W stronę komparatystyki pozasłownej* [Sacred Medea. Towards a Non-literal Comparatistics] (Katowice: Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Śląskiego, 2010), 180.

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## Medievalizm jako przykład *reception studies*

**Abstrakt:** Budowanie wypowiedzi na temat przeszłości jest w dużej mierze odtwarzaniem wyobrażenia o niej. Dawna kultura nie jest współcześnie dana inaczej jak poprzez relikw lub ślad, wytwarzany zaś dyskurs lub narracja są działaniem imagologicznym. Na przykładzie współczesnych kierunków badań mediewistycznych artykuł pokazuje trzy wyraźne tendencje w sposobie traktowania przeszłości – jako fantazmatu, tekstu tłumaczonego oraz elementu dyskursywnego. Wszystkie te mechanizmy wpisane są w komparatystykę kulturową, którą można rozumieć jako model „czytania” kultury dawnej przez kulturę współczesną. Medievalizm jest tu rozumiany jako reprezentacja ponadhistorycznego oraz transkulturowego badania porównawczego. Takie ujęcie pozwala dowiedzieć, że badanie recepcji jest w rzeczywistości działaniem w duchu komparatystyki kulturowej.

**Słowa kluczowe:** reception studies, średniowieczność, hermeneutyka śladu, imagologia, dyskurs.

## Der Mediävalismus als Beispiel für die Rezeptionsforschung

**Abstract:** Die Konstruktion von Aussagen über die Vergangenheit ist zu einem großen Teil eine Rekonstruktion des Imaginären der Vergangenheit. Die vergangene Kultur wird den Zeitgenossen nur durch ein Relikt oder eine Spur vermittelt, während der Diskurs oder die Erzählung eine imagologische Tätigkeit ist. Am Beispiel zeitgenössischer Trends in der mediävalistischen Forschung zeigt der Artikel drei klare Tendenzen, wie die Vergangenheit als Phantasma, übersetzter Text und diskursives Element behandelt wird. All diese Mechanismen sind der Kulturkomparatistik eingeschrieben, der als ein Modell des „Lesens“ vergangener Kultur (durch) und (in) die zeitgenössische Kultur verstanden werden kann. Der Mediävalismus wird hier als Vertreter von überhistorischen und transkulturellen vergleichenden Studien verstanden. Mit einem solchen Ansatz lässt sich nachweisen, dass die Rezeptionsforschung tatsächlich eine Tätigkeit im Sinne der Kulturkomparatistik ist.

**Schlüsselwörter:** Rezeptionsforschung, Mediävalismus, Hermeneutik der Spur, Imagologie, Diskurs.





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## On Strategies for Making Friedrich Hölderlin Present in Polish Contemporary Poetry. Contribution to Receptive Studies (Prolegomena to an Overview Research)

**Abstract:** This article is an attempt to initially identify the presence of Friedrich Hölderlin's work and biography in contemporary Polish poetry, thus it is a contribution to the exploration of the essence of receptive research. In this research the author collects and groups poetic works in which the figure of Hölderlin appears in terms of how these texts present him. It focuses mainly on two strategies for making Hölderlin's presence felt present: narration from an external perspective and gaining insight into his way of thinking, the work his imagination and the possibility of articulating his consciousness through language.

**Keywords:** receptive studies, work and biography of Friedrich Hölderlin, strategies of presence in poetry, Polish contemporary poetry.

### 1 The Poetic Reception of Hölderlin. Introductory Remarks

The reception of Hölderlin's work in Poland is a monograph still waiting to be written, the Warsaw-based literary scholar Tomasz Wójcik states in an interview with Andrzej Lewicki.<sup>1</sup> It is impossible not to agree with him. On

<sup>1</sup> "Hölderlin poetów polskich" (wybrane zapisy rozmowy). Z Tomaszem Wójcikiem rozmawia Andrzej Lewicki" ["Hölderlin of Polish Poets" (Selected Transcripts of the Conversa-

the one hand, the time is ripe for such a work, given the numerous translations of Hölderlin's poetry, prose and correspondence into Polish, which we owe to such eminent translators as Mieczysław Jastrun, Andrzej Lam, Bernard Antochewicz and Antoni Libera, articles by Polish Germanists (initiated by two extensive notes by Zdzisław Żygulski<sup>2</sup> and Wilhelm Szewczyk<sup>3</sup>), essays and, finally, poetic testimonies to the vitality of both the legacy and the legend of the author of *Hyperion*. On the other, this material demands a comprehensive and multifaceted study, thus far surpassing the framework of a single article.<sup>4</sup> If, therefore, I decide to take the risk of initially exploring this vast territory (a risk I take with great humility), it is only because it is an area that in the context of preliminary proceedings has the value of an autonomous research topic, the elaboration of which may then serve for further inquiry.

I am interested in the presence of Hölderlin's work, thought, biography and legend in poems by Polish poets. This is a specific kind of reception (poetic work wrapped around the poetry of a specific author), the theory of which – despite the excellent books that constitute individual case studies, I am thinking in particular of the recently reissued texts by Katarzyna Kuczyńska-Koschany, *Rilke poetów polskich* [Rilke of Polish Poets], and Magdalena Heydel, *Obecność T.S. Eliota w literaturze polskiej* [The Presence of T.S. Eliot in Polish Literature] – still remains to be written.

The notion that such poetic reception has a special value against the background of the general picture of receptive studies devoted to the work of a given poet probably does not require special proof (especially if we take into account the necessity of transferring literary matter to a different linguistic and cultural area). The poetic image, after all, has the power of a singular, idiomatic testimony to the interference of the poet's biography, which may be subject to environmental or historical conditions, but is arguably, in the first place, an expression of the idiosyncratic relationship established between the poet-ancestor / hero / partner and the other creator, who transposes the letter of the work and the letter of the patron's spirit into the space of his world, vision and language. Therefore, it is difficult to find a better relationship, that is, one that indicates the deep intimacy of the dialoguing poet

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tion). Tomasz Wójcik Interviewed by Andrzej Lewicki"], *Teologia Polityczna co Tydzień*, no. 375, accessed May 8, 2024, <https://teologiapolityczna.pl/h%C3%B6lderlin-poetow-polskich-wybrane-zapisy-rozmowy-wywiad-z-tomaszem-Wójcikiem>.

<sup>2</sup> Zdzisław Żygulski, "O Hölderlinie" [On Hölderlin], *Neophilological Quarterly*, no. 4 (1971): 417–426.

<sup>3</sup> Wilhelm Szewczyk, "Hölderlin," *Literary Life*, no. 41 (1971): 8.

<sup>4</sup> So far, moreover, only current reports of "current reading of Hölderlin in Polish", so to speak, have been made (see, for example, Katarzyna Kuczyńska-Koschany, "Hölderlin czytany dzisiaj" [Hölderlin Read Today], *Polonistyka*, no. 6 (2003): 329–333.

with his or her predecessor, than the very one that involves transposing the bios and logos of the latter into the realm of an expression which is not actually subject to prior conditioning and formatting. Furthermore, this expression is a testimony of most often a specific fascination with someone whose person and work plays the role of an important persona, allowing him or her to express himself or herself, his or her idea of the phenomenon of poetry, his or her attitude towards the world, or the shape of the latter. Probably, it would be difficult to outline the boundaries of such a presentation, as well as to cross out a typology of the presence of one poet in the work of another.

In her account of Polish poets' vision of Rilke, Kuczyńska-Koschany adopts a personalistic perspective. Yes, she points to certain generations that read Rilke according to a certain generational pattern (for example, in the case of the New Wave poets, the image of the author of *Malte* was heavily filtered through the prism of the values that the members of the "Now" group, in particular, insisted on – truth, authenticity and timeliness of poetry), but the perspective that seems to be of paramount importance to Kuczyńska-Koschany is the one in which the inter-subjective dialogue becomes visible above all.

Chronologia to porządek niejako naturalny, który zaświadcza o nieprzerwanej obecności refleksji nad dziełem i życiem Rilkego w Polsce [...]; porządek taki nie musi się jednak wiązać z oglądem *par excellence* historycznoliterackim, a ponieważ interesują mnie raczej osoby, aspekt historycznoliteracki zaś jedynie w pewnej mierze, świadomie i celowo, [...] ów porządek zakłócam.<sup>5</sup>

[Chronology is a natural order, so to speak, which attests to the uninterrupted presence of reflection on Rilke's work and life in Poland [...]; such an order, however, does not necessarily involve a historical-literary view *par excellence*, and since I am interested rather in persons, and the historical-literary aspect only to a certain extent, consciously and deliberately, [...] this order I disrupt.]

What is clear is that a literary study of Hölderlin's presence in Polish poetic reception – it is probably not necessary to conduct a thorough study of this, and intuitive hypotheses will be legitimate signposts – can focus on key strands that function as certain kinds of formants of the Hölderlin's cultural and literary modus operandi. The general outline of the "handling of Hölderlin" that we face in the case of such a reception is expressed succinctly by Wójcik, who speaks of two main currents of

[...] dialogu polskich pisarzy z Hölderlinem. Pierwszy oznacza czytanie i komentowanie konkretnych wierszy (zwykle ich fragmentów). Drugi polega na dialogu z jego biografią traktowaną i interpretowaną jako tekst kultury. Nietrudno odgadnąć, że

<sup>5</sup> Katarzyna Kuczyńska-Koschany, *Rilke poetów polskich* [Rilke of Polish Poets] (Toruń: Wydawnictwo UMK, 2017), 15.

szczególnie intrygującym i niepokojącym fragmentem życia Hölderlina był okres późny, naznaczony ciemnością choroby – rozumiany w sposób symboliczny czy metaforyczny czas zamieszkiwania poety w tybindzkiej wieży.<sup>6</sup>

[Polish writers' dialogue with Hölderlin. The first means reading and commenting on specific poems (usually fragments of them). The second involves a dialogue with his biography treated and interpreted as a cultural text. It is not difficult to guess that a particularly intriguing and disturbing part of Hölderlin's life was the late period, marked by the darkness of illness – understood symbolically or metaphorically as the time of the poet's residence in the Tübingen tower.]

Even a cursory reading of the poems of Polish poets, in which Hölderlin and his work play a key role and allows – let us first mention the second of the currents of “Hölderlin's writing” – a simple synthesis to be drawn (of course, please do not misunderstand me, I do not mean that such a simplification settles the matter – on the contrary – this is only how to outline certain pillars of Hölderlin's presence on the ground of Polish poetic reception). Hölderlin personifies: 1) one of the first prophets recognising the causes of the coming crisis of European civilisation, the source of which springs from the progressive secularisation and the excessive primacy of rationalism, drawing the famous metaphors of “futile time” and “Night of the World”, in which only the poet stores the voice of the “fugitive gods”; 2) the rejected patriot, wanderer, Odysseus, who seeks a name for Germanness in the models of ancient Greece;<sup>7</sup> 3) as much a platonic as an unhappy lover, who grad-

<sup>6</sup> ““Hölderlin poetów polskich” (wybrane zapisy rozmowy). Z Tomaszem Wójcikiem rozmawia Andrzej Lewicki.” Undoubtedly, the most inspiring moment from Hölderlin's biography is the one in which the poet – perhaps, however, to some extent “consciously”, which marks the space of mystery that stimulates the imagination and inquiries of Polish commentators and essayists – plunges into the life of a demented ascetic (see, for example, Wojciech I. Strugała, “Hölderlin w wieży albo Tybinga i wiersze” [Hölderlin in the Tower or Tübingen and Poems], *Wiadomości kulturalne*, no. 6 (1996): 13; Wojciech Dudzik, “Wieża Hölderlina” [Hölderlin's Tower], *Twórczość*, no. 3 (1998): 77–85.

<sup>7</sup> Using figures of reversal (e.g., irony), the French philosopher Philippe Lacou-Labarthe has a rather perverse argument against the background of the previous exegesis of the sources of Hölderlin's melancholy arising from a sense of loss of the axiological horizon of his homeland. He believes that for Hölderlin Greece is “tym, co nie do naśladowania. Nie wskutek nadmiernej wielkości, lecz wskutek braku właściwości. Będzie tym obłądnym zagrożeniem: [...] kulturą nieustannie wykazującą swą niedostępność [...]. Będzie tragicznością [...], jeśli prawdą jest, że tragiczność rozpoczyna się wraz z zanikiem wzorców i obróceniem w ruinę tego, co możliwe do naśladowania” [that which is not to be imitated. Not as a result of its excessive grandeur, but as a result of its lack of qualities. It will be that maddening threat: [...] a culture constantly demonstrating its inaccessibility [...]. It will be a tragedy [...] if it is true that tragedy begins with the disappearance of patterns and the turning into ruin of what is imitable]. Philippe Lacou-Labarthe, “Hölderlin i Grecy” [Hölderlin and the Greeks], trans. Andrzej Serafin, *Kronos*, no. 4 (2011): 159; cf. Jacques Tamin-

ually sinks first into melancholy and then into the depths of madness (spending the last few decades of his life virtually in seclusion, during which he is cared for by the carpenter Zimmer), which is seen as, on the one hand, the price for his fidelity to “high thought”, and on the other, as an act of defence against a world that is disintegrating and sliding into increasing darkness. Such a general picture of the Hölderlin legend, I will repeat once again, is only an outline that needs to be clarified, filled in by means of analyses that will concern the specific formulations we encounter in the poems, which are kinds of poetic sketches for a portrait of him.

The need to describe the functionality of these images constitutes another issue – who is Hölderlin in the worlds of Polish poets, what is the attitude of individual artists to certain aspects of the life (choices, decisions, views, gestures) of a German poet, which can probably be derived only when one thoroughly penetrates the entire genesis of this presence, and this, it should be admitted, is philological work requiring time and perseverance.

## 2 Heidegger without the Influence of...

Two decades separate the publication of the first poem I know of dedicated to Hölderlin, written by Włodzimierz Słobodnik (titled simply *Hölderlin*, from the 1956 volume *Mowa codzienna* [Everyday Speech])<sup>8</sup> and the first publication of a Polish translation of Martin Heidegger’s essay on Hölderlin’s work.<sup>9</sup> It is worth noting that most of the Polish poetic reception of Hölderlin is created without any connection with Heidegger’s interpretation, which is actually taken seriously mainly by Tadeusz Różewicz, in whose oeuvre we can find the most traces of the interference of Hölderlin’s biography.<sup>10</sup>

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iaux, “Nostalgia za Grecją u zarania niemieckiego klasycyzmu” [Nostalgia for Greece at the Dawn of German Classicism], trans. Andrzej Serafin, *Kronos*, no. 4 (2011): 161–163.

<sup>8</sup> Tomasz Wójcik is therefore somewhat mistaken when he says: “Mieczysława Jastruna można rzeczywiście uznać za prekursora tej recepcji. [...] Chodzi o wiersz *Hölderlin* pochodzący z tomu *Strefa owoców* wydanego w 1964 roku” [Mieczysław Jastrun can indeed be considered a forerunner of this reception. [...] The poem in question is the poem *Hölderlin* from the volume *Strefa owoców* published in 1964]. “‘Hölderlin poetów polskich’ (wybrane zapisy rozmowy). Z Tomaszem Wójcikiem rozmawia Andrzej Lewicki.” In fact, however, it is only from this year that there is a revival, and in the second half of the 1960s and in the 1970s there would be a whole series of works touching on the mystery of Hölderlin’s life and writing.

<sup>9</sup> I refer to the first critical commentary: Aleksander Rogalski, “Heidegger i Hölderlin,” *Poezja*, no. 7/8 (1976).

<sup>10</sup> Projecting the shape of such a future monograph (*Hölderlin polskich poetów*), Wójcik has no doubt that the main character of such a story would be Tadeusz Różewicz. “Gdybyśmy

Interestingly, the awakening of the philosophical reception of Heidegger's writings,<sup>11</sup> dedicated to Hölderlin, has not contributed to interest in the person and work of the poet himself. Różewicz was perhaps the only one who undertook a "critical-poetic study" of the problem of Heidegger's interpretation of Hölderlin's words. The point has been well synthesised by Wójcik:

Te ostatnie dialogują z konkretnymi zdaniem / wersami Hölderlina, które wydobyl Martin Heidegger w szkicu *Hölderlin i istota poezji*, nazywając je "kluczowymi wypowiedziami" poety. Różewicz odwołuje się do tych właśnie wypowiedzi i próbuje je reinterpretować na miarę okoliczności (drugiej połowy) XX wieku. Są to wiersze stosunkowo późne. [...] Różewicz przywołuje różne wypowiedzi Hölderlina, w tym te najbardziej znane i ważne. Tytuł wiersza *To jednak co trwa* ustanowione jest przez poetów stanowi nawiązanie do wersu zamykającego utwór *Wspomnienie*. Jego bohaterem nie jest jednak Hölderlin, lecz Adam Mickiewicz. Wiersz *Der Tod ist ein Meister aus Deutschland* – którego bohaterem jest Paul Celan – otwiera fraza zaczerpnięta z elegii *Chleb i wino*: I cóż po poecie w czasie marnym? W jakim znaczeniu Różewicz używa tej frazy? Radykalnie ją reinterpretuje, a reinterpretuując podejmuje polemikę z Martinem Heideggerem, który w szkicu *Cóż po poecie?* sformułował tezę, że Hölderlin diagnozuje czas, do którego my także jeszcze przynależymy – do epoki nieobecności bogów, ciemności świata, nocy dziejów. W puencie wiersza pisze jednoznacznie o „czasie który nastał / po czasie marnym”. Kwestionuje w ten sposób myśl niemieckiego filozofa o naszej przynależności do „czasu marnego”: nie należymy już do tamtej epoki, która minęła i jest zamknięta. Jej istotą był brak bogów, było niesta-

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nawet ograniczyli się do statystyki wierszy, co jest oczywiście kryterium złudnym, może w ogóle fałszywym, to w tej mierze Różewicz wyraźnie przoduje. Kilkunastu polskich poetów poświęciło Hölderlinowi pojedyncze wiersze. Różewicz jest autorem całej sekwencji wierszy, które odwołują się do biografii niemieckiego poety i podejmują rozmowę z jego twórczością" [If we were to limit ourselves to the statistics of poems, which is of course an illusory criterion, perhaps a false one altogether, Różewicz clearly leads the way in this regard. A dozen Polish poets have dedicated single poems to Hölderlin. Różewicz is the author of a whole sequence of poems that refer to Hölderlin's biography and enter into conversation with his work]. "Hölderlin poetów polskich" (wybrane zapisy rozmowy). Z Tomaszem Wójcikiem rozmawia Andrzej Lewicki." For this obvious reason, I exclude the case of Różewicz's Hölderlin from the present discussion, as addressing this issue would far exceed the scope of a single article. Nor will I deal with the extensive poem: Wit Jaworski, "Hegel i Hölderlin," in Wit Jaworski, *Czerwony motocykl* [Red Motorcycle] (Warszawa: PIW 1980), 65–73, the perception and description of which must be linked to a deep historical and philosophical knowledge of the era of German Romanticism in particular.

<sup>11</sup> Here the following editions should be mentioned in turn: "Przyczynki do filozofii" [Contributions to Philosophy] (trans. Bogdan Baran, 1996), the 20th volume of *Principia* (1998) bringing translations of Heidegger's lectures on Hölderlin's subsequent works, and the publication of a volume of *Objaśnienia do poezji Hölderlina* [Explanations to Hölderlin's Poetry] (trans. Sława Lisiecka, 2004). Of the later initiatives, one should certainly remember the monographic issue (*Orpheus / Hölderlin*) of the journal *Kronos* or the online edition of *Teologia Polityczna co Tydzień* (no. 375), from which I quote an interview with Tomasz Wójcik.

wiennictwo bogów. Istotą naszej epoki jest odchodzenie czynnie obecność poetów – jednym z nich jest oczywiście Celan. Nie chodzi, rzecz jasna, o poezję, lecz o to, że odchodzenie poetów jest znakiem głębokich procesów kulturowych – symptomem duchowej kondycji świata. Po świecie bez bogów nastaje świat bez poetów – spustoszony, wyjąłowiony, pozbawiony gruntu czy fundamentu, osuwający się w czeluść, przepaść i nicość. Konstrukcja świata bez poetów jest w istocie wielką metaforą i katastroficzną diagnozą.<sup>12</sup>

[The latter dialogue with specific sentences/verses of Hölderlin, which Martin Heidegger brought out in his sketch *Hölderlin and the Essence of Poetry*, calling them “key statements” of the poet. Różewicz refers to these very statements and attempts to reinterpret them to suit the circumstances of the (second half of) 20th century. These are relatively late poems. [...] Różewicz invokes various statements by Hölderlin, including the most famous and important ones. However, the title of the poem *That Which Lasts is Established by Poets* is a reference to the closing line of the work *Memoir*. Its protagonist, however, is not Hölderlin, but Adam Mickiewicz. The poem *Der Tod ist ein Meister aus Deutschland* – whose protagonist is Paul Celan – opens with a phrase taken from the elegy *Bread and Wine*: And what after a poet in a time of waste? In what sense does Różewicz use this phrase? He radically reinterprets it, and by reinterpreting it he enters into a polemic with Martin Heidegger, who in the sketch *What after the poet?* formulated the thesis that Hölderlin is diagnosing the time to which we, too, still belong – the era of the absence of the gods, the darkness of the world, the night of history. At the climax of the poem, he writes unequivocally about: “the time that has come / after the languishing time.” In this way, he questions Heidegger’s idea of our belonging to the “futile time”: we no longer belong to that era, which has passed and is closed. Its essence was the absence of gods, was the non-appearance of gods. The essence of our era is the passing away of the presence of poets – one of whom is, of course, Celan. It is not, of course, about poetry, but about the fact that the departure of poets is a sign of deep cultural processes – a symptom of the spiritual condition of the world. A world without gods is followed by a world without poets – desolate, barren, without ground or foundation, slipping into the depths, abyss and nothingness. The construction of a world without poets is in fact a great metaphor and a catastrophic diagnosis.]

Różewicz’s vision, moreover, will appear to be highly inconsistent, after all, the motif of the (gradual) disappearing of poetry, his distancing from it himself can be perceived as a gesture of disbelief and perhaps even a retreat from the position of poet in a poor time (or after it).<sup>13</sup>

I might add at this point only that it is worth returning to these poems once again in the context of philological analyses of Heideggerian interpretations of Hölderlin’s poems, which we became acquainted with already nearly two decades ago through excellent Polish translations by great ex-

<sup>12</sup> “‘Hölderlin poetów polskich’ (wybrane zapisy rozmowy). Z Tomaszem Wójcikiem rozmawia Andrzej Lewicki.”

<sup>13</sup> Cf. Jacek Gutorow, *Znikanie* [Disappearance], in Tadeusz Różewicz, *Znikanie. Wybór wierszy* [Disappearance. A Selection of Poems] (Wrocław: Biuro Literackie 2015), 78–80.

perts on Heidegger's work and idiom (Sława Lisiecka or Janusz Mizera). So, for example, let us try to trace an exemplary Heideggerian interpretation, his "way of thinking with Hölderlin". Let us choose one of the five key phrases that Heidegger points out (in the lecture *Hölderlin i istota poezji* [Hölderlin and the Essence of Poetry]) from among Hölderlin's poems. The purpose of the text, as we remember, is to show the essence of poetry: this is why the philosopher sets next to each other the five guiding maxims, which, in that order, constitute the "right" way. I am interested in the relationship that prevails between the maxim-fragment and the whole of Hölderlin's text.

Thesis II reads, "Therefore the most dangerous of goods, speech, is given to man... to testify what he is...".<sup>14</sup> The entire piece, on the other hand, goes like this:

**W lesie...**

O, szlachetna zwierzyño...

Lecz w chatach mieszka człowiek i skrywa się  
szatą wstydliwą, wszelako istotniejsze,  
ważniejsze też jest, aby zachował ducha, jak  
kapłanka boski płomień, którym jest wola i wyższa  
moc błędzenia i spełniania, bogom podobnemu, oraz  
z dóbr najgroźniejsze, język, dany został  
człowiekowi, aby tworząc, burząc, ginąc  
i powracając do wiecznie żywej, do mistrzyni  
i Matki, świadczył, kim jest, że odziedziczył

po niej, nauczył się od niej tego,  
co najbardziej boskie – wszystko ożywiającej Miłości<sup>15</sup>

**[In the forest...]**

Oh, noble animal....

But in the huts lives a man who hides himself  
A robe of shame, of any significance,  
It is also more important to keep the spirit as  
priestess of the divine flame, which is the will and higher

<sup>14</sup> This is where the footnote comes in. The polyprophe that appears in Lisiecka's translated edition does not correspond to the meaning ascribed to it in the editorial notation. Its introduction is misleading: we can understand it to mean that in Hölderlin's original text there is a suspension of the voice at this point, a pause. Meanwhile, nothing could be further from the truth, for instead of an ellipsis there should be a sign (such as: [...]) communicating that a part has been removed from the poetic text in the quotation (see Martin Heidegger, *Objaśnienia do poezji Hölderlina* [Explanations of Hölderlin's Poetry], trans. Sława Lisiecka (Warszawa: Wydawnictwo KR 2004), 33.

<sup>15</sup> I quote this poem from: Friedrich Hölderlin, *Wiersze wybrane* [Selected Poems], trans. Bernard Antochewicz (Wrocław: Ossolineum 1982), 64.

The power to err and fulfil, gods alike, and  
of goods the most dangerous, language, was given to  
Man to create, demolish, perish  
And returning to the everlasting, to the mistress and  
Mother, testified to who he is, that he inherited  
After her, he learned from her,  
what is most divine – all enlivening Love.]

In his interpretation, Heidegger emphasises the connection between language and man and the attestation of the latter's belonging to Nature, *physis* (Mother) by means of the former – conceived as the highest good granting man a distinguished place in being and enabling him to protect the events of history.<sup>16</sup> At this point, the philosopher cuts off, no longer speaking of the idea that man as a listening/speaking *Da-sein*, having learnt “that which is most divine” – ascends into the In-between, like his guide – a demi-god or a poet – and approaches [holiness] as the principle granting *physis*. For it is not holiness, which we have deliberately bracketed above as the guiding word, extracted by Heidegger from Hölderlin's song, but love: that is the principle granting Being in this poem.

What should one make of Love? What about Love? Heidegger is silent about Love. However he is aware that his protecting word cannot lay claim to the “rightness”, correctness or accuracy of the re-constructed sense (for that is not the point either), it is perhaps worth realising that what is equally important is not what is taken up, developed and brought to knowledge in this interpretation, but what is left out and abandoned!

Heidegger, of course, does not aim to abolish the differences between the work of the poet and the philosopher (rather, to bring them closer together in the sense in which both “work” for the sake of being), nor is the detachment of the poetic text from its parent, historical context – against which Aleksander Rogalski strongly protested – an immediate goal here.<sup>17</sup> It is also difficult to judge whether indeed the Heideggerian interpretation is tainted by apriorism<sup>18</sup> (it is being said, in agreement with some passages from Heidegger's own texts, that Rogalski's late philosophy... is strictly due to the process of listening to Hölderlin's word), but the fact is undeniable that Heidegger's “way of thinking” is shrouded in fragments extracted from Hölderlin's text. And perhaps it is a good thing that Heidegger's writings were not widely known to the Polish poets who confronted the work, person and myth of Hölderlin... But let this judgment remain a loose opinion only, left without a further comment.<sup>19</sup>

<sup>16</sup> See Heidegger, *Objaśnienia do poezji Hölderlina*, 36–38.

<sup>17</sup> See Rogalski, *Heidegger i Hölderlin*, 117.

<sup>18</sup> See Rogalski, *Heidegger i Hölderlin*, 117.

<sup>19</sup> Besides, historical-philosophical inquiries made in recent years expose other negative aspects of Heidegger's relationship with the poetry of Hölderlin, who “stał się dla niego [Hei-

### 3. Hölderlin's Dialogical and Representational Strategies in Selected Polish Poems

- The search I made for the purpose of this study allowed me to establish a corpus of texts defining the poetic reception of Hölderlin's work and person. In my analyses I consider the following works (listed in chronological order):
- Włodzimierz Słobodnik, "Hölderlin," in Włodzimierz Słobodnik, *Mowa codzienna* (Warszawa: PIW, 1956), 62–63. {3.1.}
- Aleksander Wat, "Hölderlin" (from the volume *Ciemne świedziło. Wiersze z lat 1963-1967*, Paris 1968), in Aleksander Wat, *Wiersze śródziemnomorskie. Ciemne świedziło* (Gdańsk: słowo/obraz terytoria, 2008), 150–152. {3.2.}
- Stanisław Grochowiak, "Hölderlin," *Kultura* (Warszawa), no. 33 (1968): 1 (later in the volume *Nie było lata* (1969)). {3.1.}
- Julian Kornhauser, "Hölderlin" (from the volume *Nastanie święto i dla leniuchów*, Warszawa 1972), in Julian Kornhauser, *Wiersze zebrane* (Poznań: WBPiCAK, 2016), 30. {3.2.}
- Mieczysław Jastrun, "Hölderlin" (from the volume *Strefa owoców*), in Mieczysław Jastrun, *Poezje zebrane* (Warszawa: Czytelnik, 1975), 634–635. {3.1.}
- Krzysztof Boczkowski, "Hölderlin," in Krzysztof Boczkowski, *Otwarte usta losu* (Warszawa: ISKRY, 1975), 43. {3.2.}
- Julia Hartwig, "Hölderlin" (from the volume *Vigil*, Warszawa 1978), in Julia Hartwig, *Wybór wierszy* (Kraków: Wydawnictwo a5, 2010), 79–80. {3.1.}
- Arnold Słucki, "Hölderlin," in Arnold Słucki, *Biografia anioła* (Warszawa: PIW, 1982), 81. {3.2.}
- Zbigniew Szamański, "Iść za mistrzem Hölderlinem," in Zbigniew Szamański, *Światło, które chronię. Wiersze i poematy* (Gdańsk: Wydawnictwo Morskie, 1982), 103. {3.1.}
- Krzysztof Boczkowski, "Do Hölderlina," *Miesięcznik Literacki*, no. 12 (1986): 16. {3.1.}

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deggera – A.G.] przewodnikiem w głąb niemieckości, bycia i języka. [...] Hölderlin poprowadził Heideggera w głąb filozofii. [...] bardzo ryzykowne było to przewodnictwo. Nie tylko bowiem trudno dziś ocalić gest czynienia z narodu *Dasein*, czyli miejsca dostępu do bycia, ale także trudno utrzymać przekonanie, że zamieszkiwanie języka może być rzetelną filozofią" [became for him [Heidegger – A.G.] a guide into the depths of Germanness, being and language. [...] Hölderlin led Heidegger into the depths of philosophy. [...] very risky was this guidance. For not only is it difficult today to salvage the gesture of making the nation *Dasein*, that is, a place of access to being, but it is also difficult to maintain the conviction that the inhabitation of language can be a reliable philosophy]. Łukasz Kołoczek, "Ryzyko czytania Hölderlina – przypadek Heideggera" [The Risk of Reading Hölderlin – the Case of Heidegger], *Teologia Polityczna Co Tydzień*, no. 375, accessed May 8, 2024, <https://teologiapolityczna.pl/lukasz-koloczek-ryzyko-czytania-h%C3%B6lderlina-przypadek-heideggera-1>); cf. Zdzisław Dziedzicki, "O wpływie Hölderlina na Heideggera" [On Hölderlin's Influence on Heidegger], *Kierunki*, no. 32 (1980): 6.

Leopold Lewin, "Wieża Hölderlina," in Leopold Lewin, *Postanie do wnuka* (Warszawa: PIW, 1985), 14–15. {3.1.}

Jacek Podsiadło, *Friedrich Hölderlin pisze a potem drze na strzepy list do Georga Wilhelma Friedricha Hegla* (originally printed in *brulion* 1996, no. 1), in Jacek Podsiadło, *Wiersze zebrane* (Warszawa: Lampa and Iskra Boża 1998, vol. 2), 208–209.<sup>20</sup> {3.2.}

In spite of this strenuous search, however, I have not been able to find several other works, which should be mentioned in order for the picture of this reception to be complete (I do not elaborate on the initials of the names due to the impossibility of determining them)<sup>21</sup>: Z. Dolecki, "A' la Hölderlin," *Kierunki*, no. 47, (1966): 12; T. Rzepa, "Motyw z Hölderlina," *Życie Literackie*, no. 44 (1982): 3; J. M. Warszawski, "Hölderlin," *Nadodrze*, no. 8 (1982): 9; G. Kościński, "Hölderlin," *Odgłosy*, no. 52/53 (1983): 8; K. Derdowski, "Hölderlin," in K. Derdowski, *Czasowo nie ma wieczności* (Lublin: Wydawnictwo Lubelskie 1985); L. Lament, "List od Hölderlina," *Radar*, no. 5 (1986): 14; L. Lament, "Żegnaj Hölderlinie," *Życie Literackie*, no. 8 (1986): 9; Z. Mirska, "Hölderlin," *Trybuna Wałbrzyska*, no. 43 (1987): 6; A. Potrykus, "Hölderlin," in A. Potrykus, *Ten, który kocha* (Gdańsk: ABKiS "Alma-Art," 1987).

### 3.1 External Narrative Strategy

In this model, the poem's speaking subject creates the impression of being close to Hölderlin's affairs and characters, although he himself is not (usually) given a voice. In this type of presentation, we are looking from the outside at the poet's situation, which allows both autonomy of representation and expressiveness of a particular interpretation of episodes from Hölderlin's life. It is also noticeable that in such a case there is greater freedom in shaping the sequence of events, reporting them from different points of view (participants in the last stage of Hölderlin's life in the Tübingen tower, such as the carpenter Zimmer or his wife).

In a description made from the perspective of an external subject trying to find out the sources of Hölderlin's madness, Włodzimierz Słobodnik, the

<sup>20</sup> I give full bibliographic details here also for purely practical reasons, so as not to multiply footnotes in subsequent parts of the article. The references to the works mentioned here I will no longer include below other than in italics and quotation marks. I indicate in brackets to which strategy of lyrical representation I classify a given work.

<sup>21</sup> In addition, it can be inferred from the laconic information contained in PBL's card collections that the following volumes of poems also contain works entirely devoted to the person and work of Hölderlin: Bernard Antochewicz, *Wzór Pascala* (Wrocław: Ossolineum 1971); Kazimierz Nowosielski, *Miejsce na brzegu* (Gdańsk: Wydawnictwo Morskie 1975); Selim Chazbijewicz, *Czarodziejski róg chłopca* (Gdańsk: Wydawnictwo Morskie 1980); Bernard Antochewicz, *Czuły agregat* (Wrocław: Ossolineum 1982).

author of what is probably the first work (on the ground of Polish poetry) in which Hölderlin is made the protagonist of a poem, focuses on the poet's existential situation at the end of his life. It is reminiscent, so well described by Heidegger, of the position of being Between, in which the Poet resides, constantly travelling, like Hermes, between Heaven and the Mortals, to whom in his song he reports, as we remember from the poem *Jak w dniu świątecznym...* [How on a festive day...] "ukryty niebiański Dar" [a hidden heavenly Gift].<sup>22</sup> Meanwhile, however, in Słobodnik's poem, this being in-between is the source of the poet's mental suffering, who is unable to accept the dissonance that arises from the dramatic difference between the idea (of the harmony of nature, the communication of Earth and Heaven) and its realisation (or, indeed, its failure to be realised) "in the languishing time". It is

Rozbrat pomiędzy światłością a mrokiem,  
Rozbrat pomiędzy pieśnią a szarzyzną  
Posiał trujące ziarna obłąkania.

[A breakdown between light and darkness,  
A breakdown between song and grey  
He sowed the poisonous seeds of insanity.]

Stanisław Grochowiak, on the other hand, depicts the relationship between Hölderlin and the carpenter Zimmer, whose figures are strongly contrasted (it is difficult not to see in this gesture a procedure that allows Grochowiak the characteristic feature of contrasting the sphere of corporeality – hard, concrete, certain – and the spiritual sphere: frail, split, ephemeral – which is characteristic of his practice, suffice it to mention his famous *Don Quixote*). The basic question that guides the lyrical narrative is supported by the conviction that it is the body that provides the main support for the uncertain spirit: "What will the provincial carpenter do,/ To make the angel closer to heaven?" It is on Zimmer's shoulders that the burden of responsibility rests, so that he who "in the tower dwelt unborn" remains on the side of life, so that he is still able to wonder at the "birds of the dove's morning".

<sup>22</sup> In Heidegger's interpretation, recall that the Poet residing in the Between constitutes truth as an event in which Earth and Heaven are brought into union. The utterance of this "raison d'être of Being" is possible from the centre of the Quadrilateral – that is, the very so-called sphere of the Between, the "place" reserved for the one who dares to enter the Nearness of Being. The one who says, allows the truth of Being (unconcealment) to manifest itself, is the poet – standing guard (guarding) and bearing witness to this truth to the Mortals, to whom he himself also belongs. Thus, being a poet constitutes a certain ontologically distinguished modus of being Mortal, the poet being situated Between humans and gods (see, e.g., Martin Heidegger, "Czy istnieje na Ziemi jakaś miara?" [Is There Any Measure on Earth?], trans. Janusz Mizera, *Principia*, vol. XX (1998): 143).

In Grochowiak's *Hölderlin*, there is an attempt at a lyrical narrative that aims to present as comprehensively as possible a picture of Hölderlin's seclusion under the watchful eye of the carpenter Zimmer, whose work he watches with tender interest, attributing to the "good-hearted carpenter / The soul of Daedalus and the forest". The faithful caretaker of the deranged artist, surrounding him with care and guaranteeing his safety, is more than that in a poem by Jastrun; he has insight into Hölderlin's secret history, and speculates on the reasons for his illness:

„Nikomu nie robił nic złego” —  
Opowiadał stary stolarz Zimmer.  
„To nie dlatego – mówił – że poznał tę damę  
Z Frankfurtu, to było dawno, trzydzieści lat temu...”.

[“He didn't do anything wrong to anyone –”  
The old carpenter Zimmer told the story.  
“It's not because,” he said, “he met this lady  
From Frankfurt, it was a long time ago, thirty years ago...”.]

His voice is joined by the account of the subject, who also rejects the hypothesis that the death of Sussette Gontard (Diotima) is the source of the poet's mental anguish:

To nie dlatego. Dawno już umarła Diotima  
I lato stoi w malwach, i słonecznik  
Idzie codzienną drogą za słońcem, sosna  
Na wzgórzu odrealnia się w suchym powietrzu.

[That's not why. Diotima has long since died  
And summer stands in mallows, and sunflowers  
He walks the daily path following the sun, pine tree  
On the hill it becomes unreal in the dry air.]

Jastrun follows the modernist interpretation (the Rilkean line of interpreting Hölderlin's vision), evoking through chthonic metaphors – which, of course, opens associations with Eliot's recognitions of *The Waste Land* – the image of a time when the seed (symbolising perhaps the foreshadowing of future communication between the worlds of Celestials and Earthlings, contained in the poet's words) “refuses to come to the surface // From a dark sleep, for there it is destined to lie”. Thus, the vision of metaphysical fullness is already only a song of the past, and in order to realise it one must immerse the mind in the river, which will flow “backwards towards the sources”.

The prosopopoeia treatment admittedly opens Julia Hartwig's text; we can hear words of greeting that come from the mouth of Scardanelli rather than Hölderlin (“Your highness will allow your princely majesty deigns to enter”), and we guess that the time of the schizophrenic audience that the

poet, plunged into illness, initiated in his imaginarium is underway. After the initial two lines, the subject of the work is revealed, narrating the course of the imaginary visits ("From the top of the wooden staircase from the threshold of the attic// he greets his spectators in a deep bow") and patiently explaining the vicissitudes of the mad writer's fate, which led him to seclusion in the Tübingen tower.

Hartwig is interested in the moment when "The carpenter blows out the lamp and retreats into the depths of the workshop" and "The sick man retreats to his pigeonhole". Then the narrative perspectives are mixed. We hear Hölderlin's words of despair ("My beloved died of scarlet fever or perhaps of bitterness"), which are combined with an attempt, spoken in the conditional mode, by the poem's subject to penetrate into the intertwined history of the poet and the workings of his mind. For Hartwig, Hölderlin's decisive, sealing affliction turns out to be lost love, because of which he chooses the role of *homo viator* ("How many miles did he walk then from her to her / from the pastor to his mother from his mother to Tübingen / from Tübingen to Schiller and the fiery Novalis / and finally to those rhythmic days in the attic"). However, there is no solace, the existence driven in seclusion consists of masochistic-melancholic re-creation, to which  *nolens volens*  the poet devotes himself, and an attempt to regain the absolute. In its restitution, a confusion of realities occurs, so that we no longer actually know whether the "mighty pillar of light"<sup>23</sup> that appears at the end of the night is a sign of the summoned Transcendent or a projection of a mind plunged into illness. Every night in the protagonist's mind there is a silent imaginative performance, invisible to any eye, ending the same way each time, when the exhausted poet "stiff with cold is dragged to bed in the morning/ by carpenter Zimmer".

Zbigniew Szamański situates the subject of his poem in an interesting way, making him someone like a shaman who, in an act of trance, moves through time and space –

Wejść w ciemny tunel okopcony językami sadzy  
Gdzie ciemność taka gęsta i rude pochodnie  
Iść za mistrzem Hölderlinem po warstwie popiołu

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<sup>23</sup> Lumenal epiphanies, as we remember, are one of the most important metaphorical procedures serving both to explain illuminative states and metaphors of God's presence (Andrzej Lam often translated the divine name appearing on the pages of Hölderlin's poetry as "Shining One" – this is the case, for example, in the translation of the famous hymn *Jak w dniu świętecznym...* [As on a Festive Day...] – see Friedrich Hölderlin, *Poezje*, trans. and ed. Andrzej Lam (Warszawa: PIW 1998), 115. This has been written about most extensively and precisely by Maurice Blanchot, "Święte słowo Hölderlina" [Hölderlin's Sacred Word], trans. Piotr Herbich, *Kronos*, no. 4 (2011): 135–137.

[Enter a dark tunnel trenched with tongues of soot  
Where darkness so thick and red torches  
To follow master Hölderlin over a layer of ash]

– to second the deceased poet on his journey (somewhat reminiscent of Orpheus' descent for Eurydice: "And Diotima's footsteps// Follow me as silently as the falling of leaves") towards his deceased beloved. This phantasmagorical (the status of the world through which the subject wanders after the Master is unclear) expedition is full of dangers, the subject, who accompanies the poet, eventually gets stuck in a tight tunnel, "from where there is no way out". The beautiful, metaphorical climax ("Even to the blind, your profile slips from under your fingers") brings a dramatic solution – a high price is paid for attempting to regain the lost beloved: the subject, together with his Master, gets bogged down in the literary world, and the return seems impossible. The story of Hölderlin's love relationship with his Diotima here becomes a kind of pretext for reflecting on the meaningfulness of repeating someone else's fate.

*Wieża Hölderlina* [Hölderlin's Tower], written by Leopold Lewin, is an example of a text that appears to be a discursive verse-by-verse answer to the question as to the sources of the poet's mental illness. Leaving aside critical literary evaluations, it should be said, however, that this is one of the weakest works in which the figure of Hölderlin appears; the text offends with its literalism and secondary recognition. Hölderlin is presented as a deeply experienced and wronged idealist, who desires nothing more than to find his asylum, to isolate himself from what hurts him:

Mury tej wieży rosły od dzieciństwa,  
By trudniej było przeniknąć grotom  
Zawiści,  
Nienawiści,  
Mściwości.

Tak trudno dotrzeć do człowieka,  
A więc uciekać,  
Uciekać,  
Uciekać!  
W głąb ziem niemieckich,  
Pod Szwajcarii śniegi,  
Po rozżagwioną rewolucją Francję,  
W Poezję –

Wszystkie ucieczki daremne.

Więc mury wieży rosły coraz wyżej,  
By coraz trudniej było dotrzeć do niej.

[The walls of this tower have been growing since childhood,  
To make it harder for grottos to penetrate  
Envy,  
Hate,  
Vindictiveness.

It is so difficult to reach a person,  
So run away,  
Run,  
Run away!  
Deep into German lands,  
Under Switzerland snows,  
Up to France heated by the revolution,  
Into Poetry -.

All escapes in vain.

So the walls of the tower grew higher and higher,  
To make it more and more difficult to reach it.]

In another poem by Krzysztof Boczkowski, Hölderlin is made (this is perhaps the only poem that uses this procedure) the textual addressee of the poem, addressed by the one who coaxes, shares the idea of a world from which the gods have fled, and the last of them “died two thousand years ago / in darkness on the cross”. The subject makes himself an accomplice in the cause of eviscerating the shadow of transcendence, and introduces Hölderlin, who steals this trace and gives it to the mortal, but suffers the punishment of insanity for his courage, and his suffering will not end “until the day of doom” (the association with Prometheus appears here). But as long as the poet’s word endures, and others carry it on, hope also endures.

### 3.2 The Empathy Strategy and Prosopopoeia Procedure

It seems that a more interesting phenomenon, and one that gives better results (at least looking at the thing from the point of view of the aesthetics of the poetic text), is the attempt to make Hölderlin’s character present, making him the speaking subject of the poem by means of the procedure of prosopopoeia (this figure is used, by the way, very often as an element of stories about the dead<sup>24</sup>). This peculiar act of empathy, of course, is only an inter-

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<sup>24</sup> See, for example, Marta Tomczok, *Czyja dzisiaj jest Zagłada. Retoryka – ideologia – popkultura* [Whose Holocaust is Today. Rhetoric – Ideology – Pop Culture] (Olsztyn: UWM Publishing House 2017), 54. Susan Gubar – citing Wiesel’s famous words about how, since we often do not know the resting places of Holocaust victims, it is incumbent on the living to be their cemeteries – writes that imitating “nieobecnego podmiotu lirycznego albo personifikacja – prozopopeja – pozwala [...] poszukującym języka, który oddałby grozę tych wydarzeń, mówić w wierszu głosem ofiar, za nie, z nimi, o nich. Znaczenie umożliwiającego

pretive reconstruction bringing an attempt to imitate Hölderlin's way of thinking and articulation. Of particular interest seem to be those works in which the poets undertake to de-create the trait of schizophrenic language in which the perception of certain aspects of reality experienced by Hölderlin could take place.

The procedure of empathising with Hölderlin, whom Aleksander Wat makes the subject, a kind of prosopopoeia, is evident from the first lyrical scene, in which the poet addresses Diotima, at a moment, as we can guess, preceding a conscious (*sic!*) decision to seclude himself and plunge himself into madness. In an exquisitely dramatised moment, Wat's Hölderlin plucks the strings of a harpsichord until only two main strings remain ("on one – YES I will play, on the other I will play NO"), on which he will perform a farewell concert for himself, his schizoid *alter ego* (Scardanelli) and his beloved, as much absent as imaginary Diotima, because "there are no, there are no heavens in the carpenter's house" and "the allurements of this world have long since been digested". In his monologue, Hölderlin rejects the reality that the night (of the world) penetrates even the rhyme, so there is really nothing left for the poet in a dreary world in which it is impossible to find any rationale.

It would seem, on the surface, that Hölderlin's succinct internal monologue, voiced by Julian Kornhauser, which conforms – so to speak – to the convention of stream of consciousness (loosening of the rules of logic, a sequence of associations far from rational, ellipticality, "breaks" between individual units of poetic imagery), is evidence of a state of madness, which the speaker of the poem evidently desires (the quotation from Hölderlin's poem emphasises the anticipation of the decisive moment).

Of course, the choice of such a lyrical strategy is perfectly in line with the interest in the achievements of the avant-gardes of the interwar period, so characteristic of the early phase of Kornhauser's writing (especially the oneiricity and irrationality, after all, easily combined with Hölderlin's situation of madness, there were traces of Kornhauser's fascination with Surrealism and Dadaism).<sup>25</sup> The final vision, however, in which the wooden Christ – as

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to narzędzia literackiego było zbyt długo ignorowane lub umniejszanie" [the absent lyrical subject or personification – prosopopoeia – allows [...] those seeking a language that conveys the horror of these events to speak in verse in the voice of the victims, for them, with them, about them. The importance of the literary tool that makes this possible has been ignored or downplayed for too long]. Susan Gubar, "Prozopopeja a poezja Zagłady w języku angielskim. Sylvia Plath i jej współcześni" [Prosopopoeia and the Poetry of the Holocaust in English. Sylvia Plath and Her Contemporaries], trans. Katarzyna Bojarska, in *Reprezentacje Holokaustu* [Representations of the Holocaust], selection and eds. Jerzy Jarniewicz, and Marcin Szuster (Kraków-Warszawa: Instytut Książki 2014), 189.

<sup>25</sup> See, for example, Jakub Kornhauser, *Awangarda. Strajki, zakłócenia, deformacje* [Avantgarde. Strikes, Disruptions, Deformations] (Kraków: Wydawnictwo UJ 2017), 63–68.

the poem's Hölderlin says – "gives me arrows,/ rooster feathers", and the poet himself reports on the continuation of the action: "I strain my bow, the desert, Bethlehem, blood, once more, I reverse the signs of the zodiac" – may indicate a certain transmutation of Hölderlin's main idea of the expectation of the fugitive gods.

Boczkowski's Hölderlin (a poem from the volume *Otwarte usta losu* [Open Mouth of Fate]), on the other hand, is found in the fullness of his mental powers, imperiously lonely he weaves a reflection addressed "only to the clouds/ drifting stones of space". In it he expresses his longing for brief moments of happiness "in the dark forest on the banks of the Neckar", when nature seemed an orderly whole, capable of awe, the only meaningful response man owed to this world. In this succinct picture, the Hölderlin is an agnostic philosopher who wails over the lost harmony; now that he sees "the cruelty of animals and the indifference of trees", he cannot find justification for the presence of evil and suffering in the world. The metaphysical scandal of nature makes the vision of the classical order, which still lasted as a trace left by the fugitive gods in the world, crumble. We can guess that the result of this lapidary consideration precedes the hour of the final decision to move away from the affairs of this reality and into the space of an imaginarium that is as idealistic as it is insane.

In a short lyrical monologue, full of startling, bold metaphors and unsettling visions ("e.g., the cosmic wolf" being an "sanitizer of darkness"), which admittedly betray the hallmarks of schizophrenic speech, Słucki's Hölderlin nevertheless remains in living contact with reality.<sup>26</sup> The reader guesses that the words are spoken by Słucki's imagined Hölderlin, for they are key ontological questions, albeit spoken in idiosyncratic language, which are nevertheless addressed directly to reality itself, through which the poem's protagonist wishes to establish contact with the lost realm of transcendence. And, surprisingly (!), he succeeds in this endeavour. Although he does not receive an answer from the trees as to why they come into the world, why their mortality is not embarrassing to them, the intensity of enquiring and listening<sup>27</sup>

<sup>26</sup> However, contrary to Leo Navratil's recognition, the madness of the poet in Słucki's poem does not consist in breaking contact with the real world (in favour of extreme solipsism), it does not gradually become merely "a fog and a vague idea." Leo Navratil, "Schizophrenia i mowa" [Schizophrenia and Speech], trans. Anna Pajek, *Magazyn literacko-artystyczny*, no. 3 (1986): 71.

<sup>27</sup> It is difficult to judge whether this is in Słucki's poem an echo of the Heideggerian interpretation, which emphasises the primacy of listening and enquiry as modalities whose lessons are received particularly strongly, precisely from reading Hölderlin's hymns and elegies. See Martin Heidegger, "Przygotowanie do słuchania słowa poezji" [Preparation for Listening to the Word of Poetry], trans. Janusz Mizera, *Principia*, vol. XX (1998): 129–130.

leads to a discovery that allows the poet to relieve the sense of alienation to the world, which, in all, becomes “credible/ speaks in signs/ and slowly acquires the qualities of God’s reason”. And the poet concludes by expressing the hope that the one-time clarity of mind that led him to this illumination will allow him to see in reality something like a system that could be remembered and stored in the rachitic mind.

In Jacek Podsiadło’s poem, Hölderlin also speaks – or rather, writes – a letter to Hegel, reporting to the addressee on his own decision to move away from the world, choosing silence. The complaint discreetly expressed to the (unknown) Creator, however, is filled with discreet irony, the poet moves away from the world with dignity, for he has been deprived, without knowing why, of “all enlivening love”.

To dobrze. Odrobina miłości, o jaką błagałem,  
została mi dana, jak woda w dziurawym kubku,  
jak garść plew na dłoni, z której zmywa je wiatr.

[That’s a good thing. A little love I was begging for,  
was given to me, like water in a hole in a cup,  
Like a handful of chaff on the palm of your hand, from which the wind washes them  
away.]

However, his gesture does not come from the loftiness of pride, there is no bitterness in it, rather a melancholy sadness and a statement as if straight out of Różewicz’s poem \*\*\* *czas na mnie...* [\*\*\* time for me...], in which a mother responds to a son plunged into despair: “this is all life”. With similar, sad, dark wisdom says Podsiadło’s Hölderlin, coming to terms with his fate:

to, że jestem sam, jeden, ostatecznie oddzielny, na zawsze odosobniony,  
nie sprawia mi już bólu. Uwalniająca samotność.  
Bo przecież należę do Pana, przynajmniej jako *res nullius*.

[is that I am alone, one, ultimately separate, forever isolated,  
no longer causes me pain. Liberating loneliness.  
Because, after all, I belong to the Lord, at least as *res nullius*.]

Although Hölderlin writes his letter at an unspecified moment, we can guess that it is a “moment” preceding his decision, made entirely consciously, without a shadow of morbidity, to part with the world.

It is hard not to get the impression that Hölderlin writes, thinks and feels on behalf of Podsiadło himself, for whom the problem of being on the road to self-authenticity has become the main artistic idea, not to mention a kind of existential obsession. The Wrocław critic Karol Maliszewski called Podsiadło simply “wiecznym tułaczem, piewcą Wolności i bardem Drogi”<sup>28</sup> [an

<sup>28</sup> Karol Maliszewski, “Niepoczytalne notatki, od nieufności do afirmacji” [Unsound Notes, from Distrust to Affirmation], in Karol Maliszewski, *Nasi klasycyści, nasi barbarzyńcy*.

eternal wanderer, a singer of Freedom and a bard of the Way]. At almost the same time, Anna Legeżyńska echoed Maliszewski, writing that Podsiadło:

łączy doświadczenia poety-trampa (np. Stachury czy amerykańskich bitników) z realistycznymi donosami późno-peerełowskiej rzeczywistości (niczym Białoszewski) i [...] Różewiczowskim typem wrażliwości postkatastroficzej. Wszystko to wypowiada [...] zindywidualizowanym, metaforyczno-reporterskim idiomem poety poszukującego sojuszu między Konkretem a Metafizyką.<sup>29</sup>

[combines the experience of a poet-tramp (e.g., Stachura or the American beatniks) with realistic denunciations of late-PRL reality (like Białoszewski) and [...] a Różewicz type of post-catastrophic sensibility. All this he utters [...] with the individualised, metaphorical-reporting idiom of a poet seeking an alliance between the Concrete and the Metaphysical.]

It is very possible, then, that making Hölderlin a poet who unequivocally sides with solitude, with silence, in order to preserve his own authenticity is motivated in part by a desire to make him one more spokesman for his own cause.

*Translated by Anna Wylężałek and David Lilley*

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<sup>29</sup> Anna Legeżyńska, "Wiersze do plecaka," *Polonistyka*, no. 8 (1998): 566.

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## O strategiach uobecniania Friedricha Hölderlina w polskiej poezji współczesnej. Przyczynek do studiów receptywnych (prolegomena do większej całości)

**Abstrakt:** Artykuł stanowi próbę wstępnego rozpoznania tematu obecności dzieła i biografii Friedricha Hölderlina w przestrzeni polskiej poezji współczesnej (tym samym tekst jest przyczynkiem do refleksji nad istotą badań receptywnych). Autor gromadzi i grupuje utwory poetyckie, w których występuje postać Hölderlina, według sposobów jego prezentacji. Koncentruje się głównie na dwóch strategiach uobecniania: narracji z perspektywy zewnętrznej oraz zabiegu polegającym na próbie wczucia się w sposób myślenia, pracę wyobraźni i możliwości językowej artykulacji świadomości autora *Hyperiona*.

**Słowa kluczowe:** studia receptywne, dzieło i biografia Friedricha Hölderlina, strategie uobecniania w poezji, współczesna poezja polska.

## Über Strategien der Vergegenwärtigung Friedrich Hölderlins in der polnischen Gegenwartsdichtung. Ein Beitrag zur Rezeptionsforschung (Prolegomena zu einem Gesamtbild)

**Abstract:** Der Artikel ist der Versuch einer ersten Annäherung an das Thema der Präsenz von Friedrich Hölderlins Werk und Biographie im Raum der polnischen Gegenwartsdichtung (der Text ist somit ein Beitrag zur Reflexion über das Essenzielle der rezeptiven Studien). Der Autor sammelt und gruppiert poetische Werke, in denen die Figur Hölderlins auftaucht, nach ihren Darstellungsmodi. Er konzentriert sich vor allem auf zwei Strategien, ihn präsent zu machen: die Erzählung aus einer Außenperspektive und das Verfahren, sich in die Denkweise, die Vorstellungsarbeit und die Möglichkeiten der sprachlichen Artikulation des Bewusstseins Hölderlins einzufühlen.

**Schlüsselwörter:** Rezeptionsforschung, Werk und Biographie Friedrich Hölderlins, Strategien der Vergegenwärtigung in der Dichtung, polnische Gegenwartsdichtung.





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## Snapshots of the Pandemic. Vulnerable Humanity in Deborah Levy's *August Blue*

**Abstract:** This article aims to address the apparent duality of Deborah Levy's literary take on the COVID-19 landscape in her latest novel, *August Blue* (2023). It demonstrates how fragility and the crisis of humanity and of the protagonist are depicted through the lens of the global event of the pandemic. The methodology combines photography theory, with a special emphasis on Roland Barthes's and Susan Sontag's diagnoses, and Freudian-Lacanian psychoanalysis supplemented with Bracha L. Ettinger's theory of the matrix. This approach makes it possible to capture Levy's photographic portrayals of post-lockdown society – people who are still afraid, but also weary and disappointed – and the complexity of the protagonist's struggle with her past, her conflicting emotions, and a mysterious double who haunts her across the Europe of the early 2020s.

**Keywords:** Deborah Levy, COVID-19, literature and the pandemic, literature and crisis, *doppelgänger*.

I let the stars enter my body and realized I had become porous. Everything that I was had started to unravel. I was living precariously in my own body [...]. The stars and the Seine were inside me. I was living in a very strange way, but I knew there were people in the world who were also living like this.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Deborah Levy, *August Blue* (Dublin: Hamish Hamilton, 2023), 96–97.

## Fragility and Crisis

Deborah Levy's latest novel, *August Blue* (2023), is a close study of fragility and crisis. Its protagonist, Elsa M. Anderson, is a world-famous pianist in her thirties, who walked off the stage mid-performance in the Golden Hall in Vienna; we meet her a month later, in Athens, where she thinks she has seen her *doppelgänger*. Elsa finds herself unable to deal with her past, with her career and inspiration, and with her conflicting emotions. Levy, however, ventures beyond the personal crisis; set in the post-lockdown – yet not post-pandemic – Europe, the book depicts society after the initial shock: still afraid, but also weary and disappointed. The descriptions of the COVID-19 pandemic hit uncannily close to home: we observe people wearing two masks in a way that lets them drink iced coffee through straws, children who cannot stand their parents working from home, and millennials whose “identity is so fragile it depends on a flat white to keep it together”,<sup>2</sup> to name a few examples. The aim of this article is to treat the pandemic as an interpretative key to *August Blue* and to investigate how the social crisis develops along the protagonist's personal struggle.

*August Blue* explores some of Levy's signature motifs. At its centre we have a protagonist in crisis – here, it is a young woman, which is common in Levy's prose.<sup>3</sup> The novel provides us with a cosmopolitan setting – Greece, England, France, Italy – for an intimate story.<sup>4</sup> This story features absent or insufficient parent-figures, (childhood) trauma and return of the repressed, and a sense of displacement.<sup>5</sup> Importantly, we can also observe a tension be-

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<sup>2</sup> Levy, *August Blue*, 75.

<sup>3</sup> See, for instance, Deborah Levy, *Billy & Girl* (London: Bloomsbury, 2012), featuring a teenage girl; and Deborah Levy, *Hot Milk* (London: Penguin Books, 2017), featuring a woman in her mid-twenties. For a study of the interplay of illness and monstrosity in the portrayal of *Hot Milk's* protagonist, see: Anna Kisiel, “Monstrosity – Illness – Wound: Uncanny Interconnections in Deborah Levy's *Hot Milk*,” *ER(R)GO: Theory – Literature – Culture*, no. 47 (2023): 199–214, <https://journals.us.edu.pl/index.php/ERRGO/article/view/14934>.

<sup>4</sup> For novels set in sites of historical significance, such as London and Berlin, see: Deborah Levy, *Beautiful Mutants*, in *Early Levy* (London: Penguin Books, 2014); and Deborah Levy, *The Man Who Saw Everything* (London: Hamish Hamilton, 2019). For novels set in holiday locations, see: Deborah Levy, *The Unloved* (London: Penguin Books, 2014); Deborah Levy, *Swimming Home* (High Wycombe: And Other Stories, 2011); and Levy, *Hot Milk*.

<sup>5</sup> These three motifs are often related. See, for instance, Levy, *Beautiful Mutants*; Levy, *Billy & Girl*; Levy, *Swimming Home*; Levy, *Hot Milk*; and Levy, *The Man Who Saw Everything*. For a study of childhood traumas and a sense of displacement of the protagonist of *Swimming Home*, see: Anna Kisiel, “Bezdomność i wiedza. O ranach dzieciństwa w *Płynąc do domu* Deborah Levy” [Homelessness and Knowledge. On Childhood Wounds in *Swimming Home* by Deborah Levy], *Rana: Literatura – Doświadczenie – Tożsamość*, no. 1 (5) (2022): 1–18,

tween the protagonist's indeliberate metamorphosis and conscious attempt at reinvention.<sup>6</sup>

Levy's "wistful, fabular new novel"<sup>7</sup> offers us a combination of contemporary and universal themes. Starting with the contemporary ones, first, it portrays millennials with their generational quirks; special attention in this regard is paid to the protagonist and her friend Rajesh. Second, patriarchy and toxic masculinity are depicted as part of the western cultural landscape. Third, *August Blue* features members of the LGBTQ+ community and discusses – albeit perfunctorily – the issue of gender identity. Finally, it is set during the COVID-19 pandemic, which is highly period-specific as this crisis seems to have defined humanity at the beginning of the third decade of the 21st century. At the same time, this theme also fits into the long-standing tradition of (post-)plague literature. Similarly, the *doppelgänger*, Elsa's "gothic double looking over her shoulder",<sup>8</sup> is another universal theme found in Levy's novel. The last two themes – the plague and the double – along with that of fragile (millennial?) identity will be of key importance to this paper.

This article aims to address the apparent duality of Levy's take on the pandemic and to demonstrate how fragility and the crisis of humanity and of the protagonist are depicted through the lens of this global event. The methodology I propose also follows the logic of duality. An approach grounded upon photography theory, with a special emphasis on Roland Barthes's and Susan Sontag's diagnoses, will be employed to capture Levy's portrayals of post-lockdown society. These, as I argue, are photographic; they are constructed as literary "snapshots" – brief, casual, decontextualised, and highly visual. As we move on to the more intimate account of the protagonist's crisis, the methodology will be based on Freudian-Lacanian psychoanalysis, including Sigmund Freud's and Jacques Lacan's conceptualisations of duplicity (the uncanny and the *doppelgänger*, and the mirror stage and otherness, respectively). Classical psychoanalysis will be supplemented with

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<https://journals.us.edu.pl/index.php/rana/article/view/13239> [in Polish]. For a study of home(liness), belonging, and identity in Levy's prose, see: Robert Kusek, "Niesamowite dziecko' Europy Środkowej. Deborah Levy i oduczanie się 'swojności'" [Central Europe's "Eerie child": Deborah Levy and unlearning "the homely"], *Teksty Drugie*, no. 5 (2021): 113–130, DOI: 10.18318/td.2021.5.7 [in Polish].

<sup>6</sup> See, especially, Levy, *Hot Milk*.

<sup>7</sup> Olivia Laing, "August Blue by Deborah Levy Review – Double Trouble in Greece," *The Guardian*, 24.04.2023, <https://www.theguardian.com/books/2023/apr/24/august-blue-by-deborah-levy-review-double-trouble-in-greece>.

<sup>8</sup> Noah Berlatsky, "A Doppelgänger Personifies Broadly Painted Possibilities in Deborah Levy's *August Blue*," *The Observer*, 31.05.2023, <https://observer.com/2023/05/deborah-levys-august-blue-book-review/>.

selected notions of Bracha L. Ettinger's feminist psychoanalysis, namely, her suggestion to introduce mother phantasies into the psychoanalytic canon, and her theorisation of fragility, informed by her notion of the matrix – the prenatal signifier of originary, feminine, non-Oedipal, non-phallic difference, rooted in encounter instead of separation.<sup>9</sup> These will allow me to grasp the complexity of Elsa's predicament.

## Snapshots of the Pandemic

*August Blue* exploits a striking paradox of the pandemic landscape. On the one hand, nature seems to be regaining strength. Levy, in the words of her characters, mentions results of reduced human activity, such as increased water clarity<sup>10</sup> and unexpected appearances of animals; we read, for instance, that “during the various lockdowns the whole world was busy *re-wilding* itself. Wasn't there a herd of giraffes rampaging through Kilburn, North-west London? And what about the ostriches on Peckham Common?”<sup>11</sup> On the other hand, even if this act of “rewilding” was commonly observed during the peak of the pandemic, people's impact on their surroundings was by no means nullified then. The condition of the streets of London is described as follows: “There were also clinical masks, blue, black, pink, lying discarded by lamp posts and the locked-up bicycles. [...] The masks were soaked through with *spit* and *snot*”.<sup>12</sup> The garbage flooding the city comprises the most emblematic item of the pandemic. That which is supposed to keep individuals and communities healthy, reduce the risk of contagion, and improve hygiene standards might instead evoke the imagery of the abject. Julia Kristeva portrays abjection as

[a] massive and sudden emergence of uncanniness, which, familiar as it might have been in an opaque and forgotten life, now harries me as radically separate, loathsome. Not me. Not that. But not nothing, either. A “something” that I do not recognize as a thing. [...] Loathing an item of food, a piece of filth, waste, or dung. [...] The repugnance, the retching that thrusts me to the side and turns me away from defilement, sewage, and muck.<sup>13</sup>

<sup>9</sup> For a comprehensive study of Ettinger's notion of the matrix and its position with regard to Freudian-Lacanian psychoanalytic paradigms, see: Griselda Pollock, “Introduction. Femininity: Aporia or Sexual Difference?,” in Bracha L. Ettinger, *The Matrixial Borderspace*, ed. Brian Massumi (Minneapolis–London: University of Minnesota Press, 2006), 12–21.

<sup>10</sup> Levy, *August Blue*, 41.

<sup>11</sup> Levy, *August Blue*, 122–123. Emphasis mine.

<sup>12</sup> Levy, *August Blue*, 71–72. Emphasis mine.

<sup>13</sup> Julia Kristeva, *Powers of Horror. An Essay on Abjection*, trans. Leon S. Roudiez (New York: Columbia University Press, 1982), 2.

In a similar vein, expected cleanliness and sanitation give way to precarity and revulsion when one faces the overwhelming mass of used masks, containing bodily fluids of other people. What is also worth noting is that the references to the natural world are human-centred here; after all, the clean sea makes it easier for the protagonist to harvest sea urchins whilst the animals engaged in the “rewilding” are zoo escapees.

In the novel, people find themselves affected by the pandemic in various ways. Levy puts it bluntly: “[E]veryone looked dazed and battered”.<sup>14</sup> The aura of being tired is related to not only illness itself, but also restrictions and lifestyle changes. The sense of weariness becomes more localised when family issues are concerned. One of the characters in the book is Marcus, a teenager who identifies as nonbinary, which their parents either are not aware of or do not accept. Marcus struggles with the fact that their overbearing father works from home, inadvertently reducing the safe space of the teenager.<sup>15</sup> Moving on, when it comes to people having precarious jobs, during the pandemic they seem to have become noticed. The protagonist reports her conversation with a woman providing additional cleaning services in the time of the lockdown: “There were wealthy people telling her how the pandemic had made everyone aware how people like her were truly valuable. It had never occurred to her, she said, that she wasn’t valuable”.<sup>16</sup> The woman’s account shows that she is fully conscious of – and discontented with – undertones of this kind of attention. The fact that her work and her value are recognised only because of the circumstances the “wealthy people” have found themselves in is indeed symptomatic of class dynamics in the modern world. Another leitmotif of life during the pandemic is that of small rituals. Some of *August Blue*’s characters notice how they have fallen into certain habits, which were intended to keep them sane, but at times turned out to be detrimental. Simultaneously, we might also witness a desperate longing for the seemingly unimportant rituals of the past. Rajesh, for one, has developed an unhealthy relationship with food. We learn that during the pandemic he consumed excessive amounts of it, and that “[h]is big moments in the major lockdown were cooking the evening meal and eating it in the bath”.<sup>17</sup> Overeating has affected Rajesh’s weight, appearance, confidence, and self-perception. Interestingly, Rajesh also makes a confession about pre-pandemic rituals he lacks most, identifying his craving for them as rather pathetic. We read:

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<sup>14</sup> Levy, *August Blue*, 82.

<sup>15</sup> See: Levy, *August Blue*, 51, 56.

<sup>16</sup> Levy, *August Blue*, 132.

<sup>17</sup> Levy, *August Blue*, 74.

[W]hat I really missed in the lockdowns was buying a coffee. Sipping a flat white. If my identity is so fragile it depends on a flat white to keep it together, I can't see the point of those years I've spent reading difficult theory and philosophy. Capitalism sold a flat white to me as if it were a cup of freedom.<sup>18</sup>

The superficiality and mundaneness of purchasing a coffee testifies to the newfound, uncalled-for vulnerability of Rajesh and, perhaps more broadly, of the generation he represents. A man in his thirties, he seems to embody a common stereotype of a confused, immature millennial, who, separated from his routines, loses a sense of stable identity. What these brief portraits of people in the times of the pandemic strike us with is their bluntness – if not banality – and yet they appear to be disturbingly familiar.

A related issue is that of end-of-the-world narratives, which combine fatalism with detachment. Rajesh's contribution turns out to be invaluable here as he announces that humanity is on the verge of extinction due to such seemingly dissimilar problems as inflation and rising sea levels.<sup>19</sup> The protagonist, however, realises that Rajesh and his peers are not the first ones to have such apocalyptic anxieties; we read: "Some days he thought it was the end of the world, but haven't generations before us always thought that?"<sup>20</sup> This intuition testifies to a larger truth: that the COVID-19-oriented narratives of the end are by no means unique. They do not provide us with a new language or perspective on the world, and they seem special to us because we witness and experience the changes firsthand. It is by the end of the book that the most comprehensive prognosis, made by Elsa, can be found. She argues:

[W]hatever happened next in the world, we would still rub conditioner into our hair after we washed it and comb it through to the ends, we would soften our lips with rose, strawberry and cherry scented balm, and though we would be interested to see a wolf perched on a lonely mountain, we liked our household animals to betray their savage nature and live with us in our reality, which was not theirs. They would lie in our laps and let us stroke them through waves of virus, wars, drought and floods and we would try not to transmit our fear to them.<sup>21</sup>

Indeed, while the impact of the pandemic on people's lives is undeniable, it is perhaps less dramatic than expected. On one occasion, after she receives the COVID-19 vaccine and misidentifies its side-effects as symptoms of the actual virus, Elsa herself becomes genuinely worried about her condition. It is then that she "prepare[s] to become breathless, and die".<sup>22</sup> On an everyday

<sup>18</sup> Levy, *August Blue*, 75.

<sup>19</sup> Levy, *August Blue*, 154.

<sup>20</sup> Levy, *August Blue*, 76–77.

<sup>21</sup> Levy, *August Blue*, 244.

<sup>22</sup> Levy, *August Blue*, 133. Simultaneously, Elsa's fear resonates with Achille Mbembe's observation on the COVID-19 pandemic: "It is one thing to worry about the death of others in

basis, however, the tiny things, the routines and habits, the minute components of our everyday existence, do not change that significantly, and they will remain so, regardless of the current apocalypse.

Those who refuse to abide by imposed regulations form a separate category in the novel. Let us begin with rogue mask wearers. Elsa describes a couple she saw using masks in an unorthodox manner: they were “wearing transparent plastic visors under which they wore not one but two clinical masks. They were sipping iced coffee through straws and they had pierced their masks to get the straws into their mouths”.<sup>23</sup> On another occasion, the protagonist mentions her agent, who tried to convince her that, in terms of hygiene and protection against germs, a more traditional combination of soap and water is superior to a hand sanitiser “as if he’d had a medical training”.<sup>24</sup> The list of people who feel they know better than specialists also features denialists – people who decided against wearing masks and openly voiced their discontent.<sup>25</sup> What the above depictions share is a sense of hastiness and detachment. While these people are not described in a judgemental way, we do not learn about their motivations; in fact, it is only their existence that is somewhat confirmed here.

All the above descriptions of post-lockdown society are in their nature photographic. We are provided with “snapshots” of reality, instalments of the Barthesian “That-has-been”.<sup>26</sup> Barthes explicates “That-has-been,” or “Photography’s *noeme*,” as follows:

[I]n Photography I can never deny that *the thing has been there*. There is a superimposition here: of reality and of the past. [...] [W]hat I see has been here, in this place which extends between infinity and the subject (*operator* or *spectator*); it has been here, and yet immediately separated; it has been absolutely, irrefutably present, and yet already deferred.<sup>27</sup>

“That-has-been” becomes the guiding principle of Levy’s portrayals of the pandemic. First, they document the everyday reality of this period – its prevalent landscapes, images, people, and anxieties. Hardly a realist novel, *Au-*

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a distant land and quite another to suddenly become aware of one’s own putrescence, to be forced to live intimately with one’s own death, contemplating it as a real possibility.” Achille Mbembe, “The Universal Right to Breathe,” trans. Carolyn Shread, *Critical Inquiry* 47 (Winter 2021): S58.

<sup>23</sup> Levy, *August Blue*, 26.

<sup>24</sup> Levy, *August Blue*, 30.

<sup>25</sup> Levy, *August Blue*, 72.

<sup>26</sup> Roland Barthes, *Camera Lucida. Reflections on Photography*, trans. Richard Howard (New York: Hill and Wang, 2010), 77.

<sup>27</sup> Barthes, *Camera Lucida*, 76–77. Emphasis original.

*gust Blue* explores the absurd<sup>28</sup>; however, when tackling the pandemic, it seems to “satisfy [...] our obsession with realism”,<sup>29</sup> just like photography does according to André Bazin. Second, the focus is often placed on the visual aspect of these moments – the way they appear to a bystander. As Edward Weston argues, the camera offers “a means of looking deeply into the nature of things, and presenting [...] subjects in terms of their basic reality”;<sup>30</sup> in a similar vein, Levy’s descriptions tend to be brief, but they strike us with precision and clarity. Finally, in most of these cases there is no deeper insight into the circumstances of the people depicted or the contexts of the given situations. Due to that, “that-has-been” becomes the only “truth” available to us, the readers, a truth verifiable by our own experiences and memories of the early 2020s.

At the same time, we already seem to be desensitised by the abundance of images of the pandemic. While discussing war photographs, Susan Sontag famously proclaims that “[i]mages anesthetize. An event known through photographs certainly becomes more real than it would have been if one had never seen the photographs [...]. But after repeated exposure to images it also becomes less real”.<sup>31</sup> In *August Blue*, no pandemic-related atrocities comparable to the photographs of the war are depicted; still, the images flooding the narrative structure of the novel might resemble the media coverage of the pandemic, which seems to have made us even more indifferent. Some of the characters depicted here also seem so; Rajesh, for instance, says dispassionately that “[i]t’s very soothing to play [the clarinet – A.K.] when people are dying in your street”.<sup>32</sup> The number of references to the pandemic in the book certainly does not aim at shock value; rather, it helps capture the dissonance of a specific timeframe.

### Elsa’s Shadows

These literary snapshots of the pandemic may also be interpreted as *doppelgängers* of everyday life. They bear a close resemblance to what we all witnessed in the early 2020s. Historical circumstances become relatable here, as if appealing to the arguable universality of the experience. However,

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<sup>28</sup> See, for instance, a passage about four llamas in the back of a car in Paris: Levy, *August Blue*, 152–153.

<sup>29</sup> André Bazin, “The Ontology of the Photographic Image,” in *Classic Essays on Photography*, ed. Alan Trachtenberg (New Haven: Leete’s Island Books, 1980), 240.

<sup>30</sup> Edward Weston, “Seeing Photographically,” in *Classic Essays on Photography*, 174.

<sup>31</sup> Susan Sontag, *On Photography* (London: Penguin Books, 2019), 21.

<sup>32</sup> Levy, *August Blue*, 74.

what we seem to be lacking is a sense of depth that would reach beyond the mere actuality of these depictions, or their “that-has-been” value. Elsa M. Anderson also faces her *doppelgänger* – a mysterious woman who comes to stand for everything that the protagonist desires and yet remains oddly similar to her. What is the role of the COVID-19 pandemic in the protagonist’s narrative? In contrast to the above examples, when we focus on Elsa’s account, we are provided with a more precise and intimate study of crisis.<sup>33</sup>

Elsa’s first encounter with her double is already marked by the pandemic. The protagonist does not see the other woman’s face as she wears a blue clinical mask;<sup>34</sup> she is accompanied by an older man, possibly in his eighties, which makes Elsa think about Arthur Goldstein, her adoptive father. The mysterious woman buys the mechanical dancing horses that Elsa also wishes to have. Thus, they share the same desire, but there are, indeed, more correspondences between them: they are of similar age, wear almost identical clothes, and have an older father-figure companion who does not have a penchant for such mundane items as toys. At the time of the encounter, the other woman seems to be energetic, in contrast to the man, but also – to the protagonist herself. As she walks away, she loses her felt trilby hat, which the protagonist decides to keep, perhaps to exchange it for the horses if the women happen to meet again.<sup>35</sup> During the encounter, Elsa immediately identifies the woman as her *doppelgänger*: “My startling thought at that moment was that she and I were the same person. She was me and I was her. Perhaps she was a little more than I was”.<sup>36</sup> According to Freud, the notion

<sup>33</sup> However, this is not always the case. An example of a “snapshot,” rather than a more detailed study of the impact of the pandemic, is a scene when Bella, her long-standing friend, kisses her spontaneously on the cheek. This act reveals Elsa’s intimacy issues; she reacts as follows: “To touch my cheek with her lips was quite a dangerous thing to do. I had lost track of where we were in the various waves of the virus. The big lockdowns were over, but everyone was still afraid.” Levy, *August Blue*, 14. Hesitation towards a basic gesture of intimacy coming from a close friend is only seemingly awkward, given the aura of the early stages of the pandemic, when people lived with the knowledge that anyone could be a carrier, even unknowingly, as at its early stage the disease has no symptoms, but is contagious nevertheless. In the passage Elsa distances herself – she refers to the collective “we” and “everyone” – because it puts an emphasis on an anxiety that is shared by greater numbers of people. This universality, thus, legitimises her uneasiness with her friend’s public display of affection.

<sup>34</sup> Later on, in London, the woman also wears a mask; she takes it off to breathe, but this does not lead to any recognition of sameness; her face is not commented upon. See: Levy, *August Blue*, 69.

<sup>35</sup> See: Levy, *August Blue*, 2–8.

<sup>36</sup> Levy, *August Blue*, 4.

of the double is connected to *Unheimlich*, the uncanny,<sup>37</sup> which, interestingly, is “secretly familiar”.<sup>38</sup> To be more precise, the uncanny disturbs us not because it is unknown to us, but because it used to be known and then was repressed; it “ought to have remained hidden but has come to light”,<sup>39</sup> becoming, as Bracha L. Ettinger writes, “the anxiety of *homely strangeness*”.<sup>40</sup> What seems to have come to light when Elsa sees her double buying the horses is a childhood memory of her first piano, originally belonging to her birth mother, that was pulled to Elsa’s foster-parents’ home by horses – but this is something Elsa comes to realise months later.<sup>41</sup> Both the sense of lack and the recognition of the double, occasioned by the pandemic-related restrictions, accompany – if not drive – the protagonist throughout the novel.

The two women’s relationship develops as a result of not only their further encounters, but also Elsa’s obsessive thoughts about her *doppelgänger*. Elsa starts to hear her double’s voice inside her head and has spectral conversations with her; the protagonist admits to herself that she is the source of all these reflections, but maintains the conversation regardless.<sup>42</sup> It is through this duplicated voice that Elsa is able to learn her deeper fears and anxieties; it is also thanks to these conversations that she “feel[s] less alone”.<sup>43</sup> Elsa sees the woman again in London; she notices a striking contrast between them then, which leads her to doubt their connection. This encounter is the reverse of their first meeting in Athens. As the protagonist engages in another fictional conversation with the woman, she notices that she sounds apathetic and lifeless; she sums it up bluntly: “Perhaps she wasn’t my double after all. She had no energy in her body”.<sup>44</sup> Later, in Paris, they actually interact – the woman throws her cigar in Elsa’s glass and runs away<sup>45</sup>; Elsa finds her provocative, confident, “[s]elf-composed”,<sup>46</sup> and as surprised by the encounter as she is. Then the protagonist aspires to emulate her: “I was walking as she had walked. With purpose and composure. [...] An im-

<sup>37</sup> See: Sigmund Freud, “The ‘Uncanny’,” in Sigmund Freud, *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, Vol. 17: *An Infantile Neurosis and Other Works (1917–1919)*, trans. James Strachey in collaboration with Anna Freud (London: Vintage Books, The Hogarth Press, and the Institute of Psychoanalysis, 2001), 234.

<sup>38</sup> Freud, “The ‘Uncanny’,” 245.

<sup>39</sup> Freud, “The ‘Uncanny’,” 241.

<sup>40</sup> Bracha L. Ettinger, “Fragilization and Resistance,” *Studies in the Maternal* 1, no. 2 (2009): 2, <https://doi.org/10.16995/sim.141>. Emphasis mine.

<sup>41</sup> Levy, *August Blue*, 220–221.

<sup>42</sup> Levy, *August Blue*, 32, *passim*.

<sup>43</sup> Levy, *August Blue*, 32.

<sup>44</sup> Levy, *August Blue*, 72.

<sup>45</sup> Levy, *August Blue*, 110–112.

<sup>46</sup> Levy, *August Blue*, 111.

personation of self-composure".<sup>47</sup> Inspired by her double, she also begins to compose music:

There were weeks when I played fragments of my score through the night, which is when I felt most in communion with the woman who had bought the horses. I projected myself into her and she became music. The air was electric between us as we transmitted our feelings to each other across three countries. When she emerged from the shadows of my imagination into minims and quavers, it was almost like being in love.<sup>48</sup>

These behaviours and the way Elsa describes them connote Lacan's theorisation of the mirror stage. This key moment of infantile subjectivity formation is based on the infant's narcissistic fascination with the idealised image it observes in the looking glass: the gestalt.<sup>49</sup> The infant identifies with its image, which gives it a promise of wholeness and a sense of motivation, but the very same act is also inextricably linked with alienation, misrecognition, and duplicity.<sup>50</sup> "*Thou art that*",<sup>51</sup> in a sense, introduces the image of the double to human subjectivity. In a similar fashion, Elsa identifies with her *doppelgänger*. She tries to mirror the behaviour of the other woman as she is enthralled by her clear-headedness and poise; Elsa's double also motivates her to be creative. This fascination turns into affection, but it is – first and foremost – inherently narcissistic; Elsa falls in love with her ideal-I and strives to transform into this superior version of herself.<sup>52</sup> What is more, as Freud remarks, the notion of the double is grounded upon not only physical resemblance and identification with someone else, but also "mental processes leaping from one of these characters to another – by what we should call telepathy –, so that the one possesses knowledge, feelings and experience in common with the other".<sup>53</sup> In the case of Elsa's *doppelgänger*, she embodies all three qualities. First, the two women look alike; second, Elsa chooses to identify with the woman; and, third, the protagonist believes they exchange thoughts and feelings as if telepathically.

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<sup>47</sup> Levy, *August Blue*, 114.

<sup>48</sup> Levy, *August Blue*, 174.

<sup>49</sup> Jacques Lacan, "The Mirror Stage as Formative of the *I* Function as Revealed in Psychoanalytic Experience," in Jacques Lacan, *Écrits. The First Complete Edition in English*, trans. Bruce Fink in collaboration with Héloïse Fink and Russel Grigg (New York–London: W. W. Norton & Company, 2006), 76.

<sup>50</sup> See: Lacan, "The Mirror Stage," 75–81.

<sup>51</sup> Lacan, "The Mirror Stage," 81. Emphasis original.

<sup>52</sup> See also the key study on the *doppelgänger* in the context of narcissism: Otto Rank, "Narcissism and the Double," in Otto Rank, *The Double: A Psychoanalytic Study*, trans. and ed. Harry Tucher, Jr. (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1971), 69–86.

<sup>53</sup> Freud, "The 'Uncanny'," 234.

By the end of the book, the two women finally talk. The double tells Elsa that they could not have met in London and that the elderly man is her father; she also suggests that Arthur and her father are the same person, venturing to claim: "I have been walking him around for you".<sup>54</sup> Elsa gives the woman her hat back as she receives the mechanical horses. Elsa wonders: "If she was my double and I was hers, was it true that she was knowing, I was unknowing, she was sane, I was crazy, she was wise, I was foolish?"<sup>55</sup> As she looks the woman in the eyes, she realises, though, that she might have imagined more than was actually there. The other woman notices it and concludes: "We should never overestimate a person's strength just because it suits us to do so".<sup>56</sup> The ending is ambiguous. Elsa admits: "[O]n the night of that concert in Vienna, I had ceased to inhabit Rachmaninov's sadness, and dared for a moment to live in *our* own".<sup>57</sup> It is difficult to decide who the "our" refers to here and whether – in the context of the whole novel – the double actually exists or is merely a figment of Elsa's troubled psyche. Levy leaves it to the reader to decide. In his review, M John Harrison argues: "Who's real and who is not? Neither. Both. They're a dialogue pursued inside each other's heads, a mutual analysis of how long Elsa's breakdown has taken to develop, how slow-burning were the resentments and confusions that led to it."<sup>58</sup> Elsa's *doppelgänger* inhabits both planes of otherness that Lacan theorises: the "other which is the ego, or more precisely its image",<sup>59</sup> and the Other as "fundamental alterity",<sup>60</sup> from which one is severed "by the wall of language"<sup>61</sup> – the Other as a discourse. For the majority of the narrative, Elsa develops a phantasy about her double; she enters into an imaginary relationship with her and converses with her in her head, but the double's responses mirror her own thoughts and feelings. She chooses to see her double through the prism of sameness, and the shadow-image that she produces makes it possible for Elsa to learn something about her own issues. As they finally begin to have an actual conversation, Elsa's expectations regarding their un-

<sup>54</sup> Levy, *August Blue*, 237.

<sup>55</sup> Levy, *August Blue*, 243–244.

<sup>56</sup> Levy, *August Blue*, 246.

<sup>57</sup> Levy, *August Blue*, 246. Emphasis mine.

<sup>58</sup> M John Harrison, "August Blue by Deborah Levy Review – How to Construct a Self," *The Guardian*, 27.04.2023, <https://www.theguardian.com/books/2023/apr/27/august-blue-by-deborah-levy-review-how-to-construct-a-self>.

<sup>59</sup> Jacques Lacan, "Introduction of the Big Other," in Jacques Lacan, *The Seminar of Jacques Lacan. Book II: The Ego in Freud's Theory and in the Technique of Psychoanalysis, 1954–1955*, ed. Jacques-Alain Miller, trans. Sylvana Tomaselli (New York–London: W. W. Norton & Company, 1991), 236.

<sup>60</sup> Lacan, "Introduction of the Big Other," 236.

<sup>61</sup> Lacan, "Introduction of the Big Other," 244.

canny similarity begin to crumble; she comes to realise that they are separate entities and that she must have exaggerated their “communion”. Elsa’s imaginary-to-symbolic *doppelgänger* – whose identification as such is facilitated by the pandemic – becomes a means to work through her personal issues. The *doppelgänger* becomes a return of the repressed in a form that is strange and un-homely, yet tolerable for the protagonist.

In his review, Harrison rightly observes that “[w]hile Elsa and Elsa drive the narrative, it’s Arthur and the adoption papers that drive the plot”.<sup>62</sup> The theme of parent-figures in *August Blue* deserves a separate study; however, it is the pandemic that makes questions about Elsa’s biological mother re-surface with great intensity. The pandemic becomes a pretext to reflect on their – forever unfulfilled – relationship. When in London, Elsa sees Tracey Emin’s installation at St Pancras International station, *I Want My Time With You* (2018), and Paul Day’s bronze sculpture of a couple in an embrace, *The Meeting Place* (2007). This juxtaposition makes her wonder:

[I]t seemed to me that at any moment, reality could flip. Floods and droughts and wars would see us carrying our mattresses and blankets to the train station, maybe with one small object for luck. *If it was the end of the world, would my birth mother want to find me?* I gazed at the bronze statue and tried to work out if the embrace was a hello or a goodbye.<sup>63</sup>

Elsa’s apocalyptic thoughts bring her back to her mother, who put her up for adoption when she was an infant. Her anonymous mother is a literary embodiment of Ettinger’s category of a *ready-made mother-monster* figure. Ettinger observes that, in a clinical situation, the analyst tends to employ the *ready-made mother-monster* figure as a universal cause for the patient’s suffering; she notes that this practice testifies to a hiatus in psychoanalysis and proposes an alternative approach, which recognises *three primal mother phantasies*. One of them is the *fantasy of the abandoning mother*.<sup>64</sup> In her daughter’s eyes, Elsa’s mother is indeed a monstrous absentee. She remains a mystery throughout the novel, and Elsa never learns exactly why she surrendered her parental rights. The protagonist has oneiric flashbacks about her and discovers that Arthur knew her, which is why he found and adopted

<sup>62</sup> Harrison, “*August Blue* by Deborah Levy Review.”

<sup>63</sup> Levy, *August Blue*, 84. Emphasis mine.

<sup>64</sup> Bracha L. Ettinger, “From Proto-ethical Compassion to Responsibility: Besideneess and the Three *Primal Mother-phantasies* of Not-enoughness, Devouring and Abandonment,” *Athena*, no. 2 (2006): 106. The other two phantasies Ettinger identifies are *not-enoughness* and *devouring*. See: Ettinger, “From Proto-ethical Compassion to Responsibility,” 100–135; Bracha L. Ettinger, “Demeter–Persephone Complex, Entangled Aerials of the Psyche, and Sylvia Plath,” *English Studies in Canada* 40, no. 1 (2014): 123–154, DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1353/esc.2014.0010>.

Elsa when she was little. In this passage, Elsa tries to make her mother's absence conditional. She asks herself what would need to happen for her mother to return and ventures to contemplate whether the apocalypse would be a sufficient reason to her to do so. This remains unanswered as Elsa and her mother never meet.

What Elsa learns as events around her and emotions within her unfold is to recognise and affirm her porosity and precarity. When in Paris, she has an unexpected experience of vulnerability:

I let the stars enter my body and realized I had become porous. Everything that I was had started to unravel. I was living precariously in my own body; that is to say, I had not fallen into who I was, or who I was becoming. What I wanted for myself was a new composition. I had let the woman who bought the horses enter me, too. [...] The stars and the Seine were inside me. I was living in a very strange way, but I knew there were people in the world who were also living like this. Someone in Tokyo or Eritrea or New York or Denmark at this very moment was living life precariously, too. This mood, with its ambience of low-level panic and hyper-alert connections to everything, would have its double or echo.<sup>65</sup>

Suddenly aware that her way of living is by no means unique, Elsa establishes a spectral relationship with other people experiencing a similar kind of precarity. The theme of the double returns here in a modified form; now, the protagonist is convinced that she is not the only person experiencing the, supposedly pandemic-induced, state of mind characterised by disquietude and interconnectedness, perhaps even *transcorporeality*, to use Stacy Alaimo's term.<sup>66</sup> Elsa's description of her mood also resonates with Ettinger's matrixial take on intimacy with otherness, and her notions of *self-fragilisation* and resistance. The matrixial potentiality operates on "openness of the I and non-I to the Self, to the Other and to the Cosmos".<sup>67</sup> This openness, as theorised by Ettinger, reaches beyond mere empathy, and instead relies on compassionate self-fragilisation, within which "the subject encounters the other, and realizes its vulnerability while resisting its own tendency to turn the other into an object and to return to its own paranoid abjectivity and narcissistic passive-aggressivity".<sup>68</sup> Self-fragilisation is then based on, on the one hand, extreme intimacy and shareability with the Other, and, on the other, a refusal to give in to objectification and abjection, (passive) aggression, separation, and narcissism – all of which are part of the subjectivity-formation paradigms of Freudian-Lacanian psychoanalysis. In the matrixial psychoan-

<sup>65</sup> Levy, *August Blue*, 96–97.

<sup>66</sup> See: Stacy Alaimo, *Exposed: Environmental Politics and Pleasures in Posthuman Times* (Minneapolis–London: University of Minnesota Press, 2016).

<sup>67</sup> Ettinger, "Fragilization and Resistance," 11.

<sup>68</sup> Ettinger, "Fragilization and Resistance," 4.

alytic paradigm, instead, “*resistance* is a working for, not against: a re-working for trust, again and again”.<sup>69</sup> Ettinger specifies:

In what I call proto-ethical resistance, I and non-I have to withdraw from their individual selves as they withdraw from the cultural-social surrounding. The individual subject is there in all its specificity, but it self-fragilizes itself, not to a given community, but in order to join different strings between several human entities, between some I(s) and some non-I(s) on a shareable level of infra-selves that transgresses its community.<sup>70</sup>

Elsa experiences a similar subjectivising encounter. As she ceases to focus solely on her individual experience and “become[s] porous”,<sup>71</sup> she opens herself to radical Otherness, beyond the human community (indeed, she even welcomes “[t]he stars and the Seine” inside her body). Such openness renders the protagonist extremely fragile, but it also makes her realise vulnerability beyond her (mostly narcissistic) self. She becomes attentive and open to, as Ettinger calls it, “affective transmission of feel-knowledge”.<sup>72</sup> Her intense interconnectedness, porosity, and fragility can be recognised as forms of affirmative resistance: resistance for the sake of togetherness.

## Vulnerable Humanity

The way in which the reality of the pandemic blurs the familiar with the unfamiliar and the everyday with the deeply strange provides a possibility of introspection into the hard-wired anxieties of Deborah Levy’s characters. The interplay of global concerns and personal traumas, in which they become mutually translated, offers a cartography that allows us to recognise, or at least sense, seemingly remote and concealed layers of the characters’ psyches. Yet, as we investigate Levy’s literary-photographic depictions of post-lockdown European society, we cannot fail to notice that they present a privileged and local viewpoint. The protagonist and narrator of the novel is not in direct danger – she is relatively young and healthy; this applies to

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<sup>69</sup> Ettinger, “Fragilization and Resistance,” 19. Emphasis mine.

<sup>70</sup> Ettinger, “Fragilization and Resistance,” 9.

<sup>71</sup> The notion of porosity is tackled by Nancy Tuana, who, when discussing plastic pollution, argues that “[t]he boundaries between our flesh and the flesh of the world we are of and in is porous. While that porosity is what allows us to flourish—as we breathe in the oxygen we need to survive and metabolize the nutrients out of which our flesh emerges—this porosity often does not discriminate against that which can kill us.” Nancy Tuana, “Viscous Porosity: Witnessing Katrina,” in *Material Feminisms*, eds. Stacy Alaimo, and Susan Hekman (Bloomington–Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 2008), 198.

<sup>72</sup> Ettinger, “Fragilization and Resistance,” 22.

her friend Rajesh as well. Except for the side-effects of the vaccine, mentioned previously, Elsa does not feel ill or at risk. Moreover, Elsa's – and probably Rajesh's – relatives or close ones have not suffered or died as a result of COVID-19; people purportedly dying in their street do not seem to concern Levy's characters. Still, *August Blue* provides an account that readers may find relatable, albeit without the tragic outcomes of the pandemic – it is, after all, a collection of snapshots, aimed at an anaesthetised addressee. This non-unified form testifies to the random, hasty, and often unexpected reactions to the pandemic; these, notably, manifest subjective splits into various selves in the age of COVID-19 that encapsulate the inherent strangeness of this state of exception and personal reactions to it. That said, the *doppelgänger* might serve as a useful figure capable of tracing anxiety, loss, and change in the times of the pandemic. In the light of these remarks, the society depicted functions as a mirror to us, post-lockdown readers. Still, perhaps more importantly from the perspective of the novel itself, at times it is a mirror to Elsa: to her own weariness, confusion, and precarity. In the case of Elsa, however, the very realisation of her own precarity empowers her. The protagonist learns not only to open herself up to otherness, but also to accept her inherent duplicity and sense of lack related to the absence of the maternal figure. As part of vulnerable humanity, Elsa acknowledges her porousness and owns her blues.

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## **Kadry pandemii. Krucha ludzkość w *August Blue* Deborah Levy**

**Abstrakt:** Niniejszy artykuł traktuje o dwojakim sposobie, w jaki Deborah Levy opisuje krajobraz ukształtowany przez pandemię COVID-19 w swojej najnowszej powieści *August Blue* (2023). Analizowane są w nim tropy kruchości i kryzysu: zarówno ludzkości, jak i tych właściwych głównej bohaterce, obserwowanych w kontekście światowej pandemii. Zastosowana w artykule metodologia łączy elementy teorii fotografii, ze szczególnym naciskiem na tezy Rolanda Barthes'a i Susan Sontag, oraz psychoanalizy Freudowsko-Lacanowskiej, poszerzonej o teorię macierzy proponowaną przez Brachę L. Ettinger. Tak poprowadzona lektura pozwala nam uchwycić fotograficzne portrety społeczeństwa po lockdownie, a zatem ludzi, którzy, choć dalej nękani przez dawne lęki, są teraz przeważnie znużeni i rozczarowani. W dalszej części eseju autorka omawia oraz analizuje zmagania głównej bohaterki z przeszłością, sprzecznymi emocjami i tajemniczą sobowtórką, która zdaje się ją nachodzić – a nawet prześladować – w różnych krajach Europy w trzeciej dekadzie XXI wieku.

**Słowa kluczowe:** Deborah Levy, COVID-19, literatura i pandemia, literatura i kryzys, sobowtór.

## Die Bilder der Pandemie. Zerbrechliche Menschlichkeit in *August Blue* von Deborah Levy

**Abstract:** Dieser Beitrag befasst sich mit der doppelten Art und Weise, in der Deborah Levy die von der COVID-19-Pandemie geprägte Landschaft in ihrem jüngsten Roman *August Blue* (2023) beschreibt. Er analysiert die Tropen der Zerbrechlichkeit und der Krise: sowohl die der Menschheit als auch die der Hauptfigur, wie sie im Kontext einer globalen Pandemie beobachtet wird. Die in diesem Beitrag angewandte Methodik vereint Elemente der Fototheorie, mit besonderem Schwerpunkt auf den Thesen von Roland Barthes und Susan Sontag, und der freudianisch-lakanischen Psychoanalyse, erweitert durch die Matrixtheorie von Bracha L. Etinger. Auf diese Weise ermöglicht die Lektüre das fotografische Porträt einer Gesellschaft nach dem Lockdown, d.h. von Menschen, die zwar weiterhin von den Ängsten der Vergangenheit geplagt sind, aber nun meist müde und enttäuscht wirken. Im weiteren erörtert und analysiert die Autorin den Kampf der Hauptfigur mit ihrer Vergangenheit, ihren widersprüchlichen Gefühlen und einer mysteriösen Doppelgängerin, die sie in verschiedenen europäischen Ländern im dritten Jahrzehnt des 21. Jahrhunderts zu verfolgen scheint.

**Schlüsselwörter:** Deborah Levy, COVID-19, Literatur und Pandemie, Literatur und Krise, Doppelgänger.





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## Engaging Readers Cognitively and Affectively in Flash Fiction

**Abstract:** This article sets out to explore flash fiction, understood as very short forms of prose narrative and taking it to be a mode of writing that only properly developed in recent decades, although not without prominent antecedents going back through centuries of literary history. It addresses the issues of defining flash fiction, as well as its formal features, outlining their typical structures as well as speculating on how flash fiction may engage readers in its own characteristic ways. I argue that while retaining the basics of narrative requirements, such as representing events and being able to generate mental representations of storyworlds, flash fictions chiefly relies on undernarration and fragmentation, narrating in insufficient detail. This requires readers, despite flash fiction's brevity, to be constantly cognitively challenged, as well as to experience highly condensed and intense epistemic narrative emotions.

**Keywords:** flash fiction, very short narratives, reader response, cognition, emotion, cognitive narratology.

One of the literary forms that clearly seems to be more widespread nowadays than in the past and which has gathered significant recognition in the twenty-first century is the ultra-short narrative. What I mean by this is a plethora of rather brief narrative forms that encompass anything that seems to be a relatively unified narrative where the word count is below 2000 or 1500 words, depending on specific definitions. These could range from the Hemingwayan six-word stories, through 280-characters (twittera-

ture), dribble (50 words), microfiction (up to 100 words) and flash fiction covering the upper limits of the 1500-2000 wordcount. There could be infinitely more internal divisions here, as some of these genres are defined by arbitrarily set word-limits, but there is a number of formal and functional characteristics that these forms share and which are more essential than the specific number of words or characters.

In what follows I want to scrutinise these essential formal features of very short narratives and explain them in terms of the mechanics of reader engagement. There is a number of strategies that these forms use in order to engage readers' cognition and emotion in their own peculiar way and I intend to outline them. First, I will talk about the antecedents of flash fiction, then outline what I see as their core formal features and mechanics of reader engagement, and finally I will analyse a prize-winning flash fiction narrative to spell out my points in more detail.

The number of types of short narratives already listed above may suggest I will address them separately or that different conclusions may result from exploring their styles. I will, however, focus on the commonalities of these forms, thus for my purposes it will suffice to address them collectively and only differentiate when highly necessary. Still, it is important to note that there is no uniform terminology to refer to very short forms collectively. Numerous terms in use include microfiction, minifiction, nanofiction, sudden fiction, flash fiction, quick fiction, smoke-long fiction, postcard fiction, short short story, very short story, etc. For the sake of this paper I will refer to all the forms typically included under the 2000 or 1500 wordcount as flash fiction, but as argued later in the paper, the wordcount criterion is necessary, but not sufficient to call a given narrative a work of flash fiction.

## History and Contexts

Even though flash fiction understood as a distinct genre has only become widespread in the twenty-first century, and the first use of the term dates only as recently as 1992,<sup>1</sup> there is a number of esteemed precursors to the genre. In fact, one may think of micronarratives accompanying humanity from its dawn: ancient fables and biblical parables, myths and legends, Anglo-Saxon riddles or Zen koans, but also forms as trivial as jokes. One could

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<sup>1</sup> Sandra Arnold, "Do it in a Flash: an Essay on the History and Definition of Flash Fiction," accessed March 14, 2024, <https://theshortstory.co.uk/do-it-in-a-flash-an-essay-on-the-history-and-definition-of-flash-fiction-by-sandra-arnold>.

add the medieval fabliau, nouvelle and lai,<sup>2</sup> and there are other examples throughout the ages, though, until recently, mostly are fairly rare compared to other linguistic artifacts and their connection to flash fiction proper may vary.

One significant step in the direction of the development of flash fiction is of course the emergence of the short story. As the genre was growing rapidly throughout the nineteenth century, one could find occasional examples of very short narratives within it in authors as diverse as Poe, Bierce, O. Henry, Chopin and others. Poe is also important here as a theoretician of the short form whose views have some bearing on understanding and differentiating between flash fiction and other short narrative forms. I believe, following Poe, there are reasons more important than relative brevity that point to classifying flash fiction as a sub-genre of a short story which nevertheless differs from the former by employing partly different mechanics of reader engagement. They may be intuitively obvious, but it is important to clarify them in detail, so as to understand how flash fiction is different from a number of other works that can be counted as short narratives.

Poe's famous discussion in his "The Philosophy of Composition" is at the heart of short story theorising<sup>3</sup> and I believe it is also crucial in elucidating some of the tenets of flash fiction. Moreover, his central claims prove to be particularly important in my discussion, as he sees specific means of engaging readers emotionally and cognitively, rather than strictly formal qualities on their own, as paramount for the short story. In other words, his definition is functional and reception-oriented. Simply put, Poe argues that the difference between short stories and novels is not so much that of length, but that of a different type of aesthetic effect: a sense of unity and totality one experiences when reading a complete work during a single sitting. Reading novels is necessarily interrupted which leads to different type of reader response, involving necessarily a more scattered or dispersed sense of intended effects. One could think of flash fiction's relation to short story as analogous. It shares some properties with it, and by extension, with novels, and with all narratives, but overall, it prioritises a different kind of effect or reader engagement.

One could further expand on the sense of unity and totality associated with short stories, adding the tendency towards a greater sense of focus, be

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<sup>2</sup> Marc Botha, "Microfiction," in *The Cambridge Companion to the English Short Story*, ed. Ann-Marie Einhaus (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016), 201–220, DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1017/CCO9781316018866.016>.

<sup>3</sup> Spyros Kiosses, "Towards A Poetics of Narrative Brevity: Short Story, Microfiction, Flash Fiction," *International Journal on Studies in English Language and Literature (IJSELL)*, vol. 9, no. 1 (January 2021): 9–18, DOI: <https://doi.org/10.20431/2347-3134.0901002>.

it on characters, events or themes, albeit with a reduced scope, a greater symbolic significance attributed to individual objects, characters or events and a striving towards the intensity of the desired effects required by the brevity of the short story.<sup>4</sup> Correspondingly, if the core epistemic emotions associated with narratives are suspense, curiosity and surprise,<sup>5</sup> then the condensed form of a short story tends to emphasise their operations with a sense of immediacy.

The above surely captures the shared defining features of short stories broadly understood and those of flash fiction, but is yet insufficient in explaining what makes the latter distinct formally and functionally. The distinction can appear particularly muddled when taking into consideration the twentieth century short story developments from modernism through minimalism to post-modernism and beyond. For example, a number of proto-minimalist works by Hemingway would also qualify as exemplary flash fiction, from his roughly 750-word “A Very Short Story” to the six-word-story frequently attributed to him, “For sale: baby shoes, never worn.” In the second half of the twentieth century one can find very short narrative forms in oeuvres of writers as diverse as Carver, Borges, Calvino, Robbe-Grillet, Wolff, Bukowski and others,<sup>6</sup> before flash fiction became recognised and established as a separate genre.

Taking into account the fuzzy edges between short stories and flash fiction, one could perhaps argue that the difference between them is merely that of an institutionally-based labelling. After all, it is only after the term was established in relevant publications, such as Norton anthologies,<sup>7</sup> or academic articles, literary journals<sup>8</sup> and awards<sup>9</sup> that flash fiction gained its independence, and without them, its separate existence would certainly be put to question.

In addition, the twenty-first century resurgence of flash fiction tends to be linked to the proliferation of digital media, and social media in particular.

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<sup>4</sup> Kiosses, “Towards A Poetics...,” 12.

<sup>5</sup> Patrick Colm Hogan, *Literature and Emotion* (New York: Routledge, 2018), 132–153.

<sup>6</sup> See Botha’s “Microfiction” for a detailed overview.

<sup>7</sup> For example: *Flash Fiction America*, eds. James Thomas, Sherrie Flick, and John Dufresne (New York: W.W. Norton & Co., 2023).

<sup>8</sup> There are dozens of online and print magazines devoted solely to flash fiction. Making a list would be impracticable here, especially considering that flash fiction also gets to be published in magazines that are not exclusively devoted to it.

<sup>9</sup> The website Reedsy lists over eighty writing contests, most of which are cyclical and which are either solely devoted to flash fiction or accept it as submissions. More than a dozen offer prizes ranging between a \$1000 and \$3500, accessed March 14, 2024, [https://blog.reedsy.com/writing-contests/flash-fiction/?sorted%5Bcol%5D=prize\\_numeric](https://blog.reedsy.com/writing-contests/flash-fiction/?sorted%5Bcol%5D=prize_numeric).

Such ties cannot be overlooked, as some of the affordances of social media, such as length limitation or the rapidity and fleetingness of communication seem to be directly correlated with the central qualities of flash fiction. In this sense, flash fiction as a separate mode would simply be the product of social media affordances along with the general material conditions of its content creation and consumption within the dynamic and highly competitive attention economy of modern capitalism, such as dwindling attention spans, overstimulation, high content selectivity and the need for a stimulus to get its consumer hooked immediately. It would, then, be a prose form apt for a world where “attention has become ‘a highly perishable commodity’”.<sup>10</sup>

Perhaps it is tempting to see flash fiction through the lens of such a minimalistic explanation and it is clear that the proliferation of micronarratives goes hand in hand with the emergence of social media. There surely is a link between the media affordances, attention economy and the formal qualities of flash fiction, but still, it seems to me that new media affordances can perhaps promote and disseminate such forms and generally be correlated with them, but it would not do justice to reduce them to the material conditions of content consumption.

Not only does flash fiction predate social media, but also many narrative forms perpetuated by modern social media platforms would never count as flash fiction. Finally, the internet age has also witnessed the emergence of twitterature’s polar opposites – the meganovel, the sprawling transmedia worlds of modern fiction franchises or the endless fan-fiction works which require extraordinary amounts of deep attention to be consumed in their entirety, eluding any simple reduction of either media affordances or the reception/consumption practices that modern cultural conditions may evoke.

Likewise, I believe the institutional recognition of flash fiction has only solidified a mode of writing that had already earned its independence owing to the distinct functional qualities of its form. Flash fiction obviously shares a family resemblance with short stories and other works of prose, which entails a degree of basic functional similarity with respect to the cognitive and emotional engagement of narratives. Still, there is a set of formal characteristics of flash fiction that result in it encouraging some forms of narrative engagement much more than would be the case in other narrative forms. I turn to a discussion of them in the next section.

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<sup>10</sup> Sibylle Baumbach, “The Economy of Attention and the Novel,” in *New Approaches to the Twenty-First-Century Anglophone Novel*, eds. Sibylle Baumbach, and Birgit Neumann (London–New York–Shanghai: Palgrave Macmillan, Cham, 2019): 42, DOI: [https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-32598-5\\_3](https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-32598-5_3).

## Forms and Functions

Earlier I mentioned that not all very short narrative forms count as flash fiction and given that the seemingly defining feature of that mode of writing is its brevity, it would be instructive to explain why. There seems to be a broad consensus and an intuitive recognition that faux-Hemingway's baby shoes story is an example of flash fiction, whereas "my cat jumped on a window sill" is not, whether I attempt to label it as twitterature or submit it to a flash fiction competition or not. Still, the latter would count as a rudimentary narrative for many,<sup>11</sup> as it represents a single event, that is a change in a state of affairs. Even with a more stringent definition of a narrative requiring two events, the story "my cat jumped on a window sill and knocked down a flowerpot" would not qualify as flash fiction. In other words, brevity itself, just like fulfilling the minimal requirements to be called a narrative is not enough to be labelled flash fiction.

What about slightly more elaborate and complex narrative sequences that one comes across in other media that tend to be called micronarratives? In his early work on narrative structure in video games, Henry Jenkins mentions how the elaborate, interactive fictional worlds of video games display a plentitude of micronarratives that were only used on a smaller scale in narratives in older media.<sup>12</sup> In his account, micronarratives would be any small-scale causal sequences of events with a setup, development and resolution that serve a tangential role to the main storyline. His cinematic example is the Odessa stairs sequence from Eisenstein's *Battleship Potemkin* (1925), where spectators are exposed to tiny narrative threads involving specific characters on the stairs, as with the famous baby carriage sequence. In video games, he rightly claims, micronarratives like that abound, as players are able to continually see multiple characters performing actions, partaking in conversations or interacting with various minor characters and other non-playables going about their daily business. Games that offer that experience take full advantage of the media-specific affordances to build a lively and engaging storyworld. However, neither the Odessa stairs sequence, nor my ac-costing and chasing random characters and wondering about their reactions while playing an open-world video game would count as flash fiction, and this is not merely trivially due to media-specific differences.

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<sup>11</sup> H. Porter Abbott, *The Cambridge Introduction to Narrative*, 2nd ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008): 13–27.

<sup>12</sup> Henry Jenkins, "Game Design as Narrative Architecture," *Computer* vol. 44, no. 3 (2004): 118–130.

To reiterate the central question posed earlier, what makes the following six-word narratives flash fiction as opposed to other examples quoted?

“Apple?” “No.” “Taste!” “ADAM?” Oh God. (David Lodge)

“Megan’s baby: John’s surname, Jim’s eyes.” (Simon Armitage)

“The Earth? We ate it yesterday.” (Yann Martel)

“Longed for him. Got him. Shit.” (Margaret Atwood)<sup>13</sup>

First, the traditional requirements of short stories as formulated by Poe and other early theorists are met here, but they are not met in the narration of a cat jumping on a window sill mentioned above or in an ordinary everyday recounting of how one’s holiday or shopping for groceries went. Specifically, the unity and totality should not be understood in a superficial sense of causal continuity or mimetic realism – the six-word narratives are highly fragmented and incomplete, as they only allude to a handful of narrative events, but they are enough to create the impression of a work that is thematically and aesthetically coherent. In other words, the sense of aesthetic totality and unity of the story represented, along with discourse manipulations that aim at managing the core narrative emotions of suspense, curiosity or surprise, are well met in the six-word examples above.

One could further elaborate on the first point, by expanding on the notion of tellability that originated in the studies of oral and conversational storytelling<sup>14</sup> and which hints at a story’s capacity for being context-relevant or simply worthwhile telling. The purposes of telling many micronarratives would typically be purely informational or social, whereas flash fiction, as a type of artistic narrative, would always strive to be rewarding in itself in the context of attending to it as a reader for its own sake without other tellability contexts.

Second, what makes flash fiction stories distinct from other micronarratives is their ability to evoke their own independent storyworlds.<sup>15</sup> Obviously, flash fiction is not documentary and it does not aim at faithfully representing reality, but what makes reporting everyday events, telling made-up stories about cats, prose poetry, and cinematic or video-game micronarratives different is their inability to mobilise separate storyworlds. Cognitive

<sup>13</sup> Bente Lucht, “Flash Fiction: Literary fast food or a metamodern (sub) genre with potential,” in *2nd Human and Social Sciences at the Common Conference* (2014), 223.

<sup>14</sup> William Labov, and Joshua Waletzky, “Narrative Analysis: Oral Versions of Personal Experience,” in *Essays on Verbal and Visual Art*, ed. June Helm (Seattle: U of Washington P, 1967), 12–44.

<sup>15</sup> Shelley Roche-Jacques, “Flash Fiction as a Distinct Literary Form: Some Thoughts on Time, Space, and Context,” *New Writing* 21, no. 2 (2024): 171–89, DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1080/14790726.2023.2293767>.

narratology has long established that a narrative is essentially only a set of cues for readers to construct more elaborate mental representations of entire storyworlds.<sup>16</sup> In the examples that do not qualify as flash fiction, all stories are ostensibly set as marginal with respect to the storyworlds that already exist, either fictional or those pretending to be the real world in which the teller is centrally involved. All the flash fiction examples, on the other hand, in spite of their brevity, establish their own storyworlds.

Third, the extreme brevity of flash fiction combined with the requirement of unity and totality results in narrative forms whose essential features include “fragmentation, rupture and indeterminacy of identity and experience, of their perception and narrative (re)presentation”.<sup>17</sup> In other words, flash fiction by necessity can only represent a tiny fraction of the storyworld it alludes to, yet it does this so as to ensure readers of the richness of the world in question. This marks what in narrative theory tends to be called undernarration, or when a story is “not narrated in sufficient detail”.<sup>18</sup> Put differently, flash fiction narratives are not just brief, they also have to be constructed so as to create an impression that the storyworld they are narrating is fairly complex, puzzling or otherwise interesting, and they only have to allow readers to briefly peek into it, leaving a plentitude of details underreported.

To use a simple illustration, most mainstream action films tend to overnarrate sequences such as car chases or fight scenes, devoting unusual amounts of space to represent them in detail. At the same time, character psychology in such films is not so much undernarrated as minimal in the actual storyworld. Such films do not underreport character complexity – their characters are simply flat. However, it is entirely possible to allude to a complex storyworld design with an intricate backstory, emplotment connections and character depth in action film using a scant amount of narration. Thus, a film such as *Mad Max: Fury Road* (2009) undernarrates its narrative complexity of elaborate and tangled post-apocalyptic scenarios and social organisations, ideologies and cults, as well as character motivations and development, all of which are clearly alluded to in an extremely scarce way, but enough for the viewers to generate coherent and intriguing mental representations of the storyworld amidst the film’s car chase frenzy. That the storyworlds of pseudo-Hemingway’s baby shoes or Martell’s the Earth are un-

<sup>16</sup> David Herman. “Narrative Ways of Worldmaking,” in *Narratology in the Age of Cross-Disciplinary Narrative Research*, eds. Sandra Heinen, and Roy Sommer (Berlin–New York: De Gruyter, 2009), 71–87, DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1515/9783110222432.71>.

<sup>17</sup> Kiosses, “Towards a Poetics...,” 14.

<sup>18</sup> Gerald Prince, “The Undernarrated and the Overnarrated,” *Style* 57, no. 2 (2023): 133, <https://muse.jhu.edu/article/901161>.

dernarrated is clear. They hint at a complex and intriguing content of that world, but only scarcely represent it.

When it comes to longer works of flash fiction, it is evident that they undernarrate most of the storyworld while drawing attention to one chosen aspect of it, which is then represented in a more fine-grained manner. To use a term that entered literary studies and narratology from cognitive semantics, flash fiction has a very unusual use of granularity – the detailedness of the description of an aspect of the storyworld.<sup>19</sup> Most of the represented world is highly limited in scope and coarse-grained, undernarrated. However, a few aspects of it remain fine-grained, foregrounded and put in the spotlight for readers' attention. This marks a high level of deviation from standard everyday perception and cognition of the world we experience where such differences in the perception of various aspects of the world are highly uncommon.

By extensively relying on undernarration, flash fiction then opts for high cognitive engagement of readers who are encouraged to fill in narrative gaps, establish patterns and connections and remain active while constructing mental representations of the storyworlds. Their cognitive capacity is further stretched when the storyworlds are made of an unusual mixture of coarse- and fine-grained content that deviate from everyday experience of the world. In the final section of this article, I will analyse an award-winning flash fiction narrative demonstrating how the genre's typical formal features discussed so far may engage readers cognitively and affectively in elaborate meaning-making operations and solving cognitive challenges. I will generally follow in the footsteps of early reception theory as represented by Iser,<sup>20</sup> focusing on the gaps and indeterminacies and the operations of an implied reader generated by the text. However, I will use it as it tends to be developed via more recent work in the tradition of cognitive narratology and literary studies as in the sources quoted earlier, tracing more specific cognitive and affective ways of reader engagement.

### ***Taylor Swift***

The story I chose is the winner of the 2015 Donald Barthelme Prize for Short Prose, one of the top awards for flash fiction, organised by the Gulf Coast literary magazine, which accepts submissions of works of up to five

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<sup>19</sup> Cf. Leonard Talmy, *Toward a Cognitive Semantics* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2000).

<sup>20</sup> Cf. Wolfgang Iser, *The Act of Reading: A Theory of Aesthetic Response* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins UP: 1976).

hundred words: *Taylor Swift* by Hugh Behm-Steinberg.<sup>21</sup> I believe the story is exemplary of flash fiction in a number of ways and definitely meets all of the flash fiction criteria outlined earlier. At the same time, of course, flash fiction is a rather broad category, and there is a number of stylistic features pertinent to this story only that are not easily projected on to others.

As explained by Steve Almond, a judge of that year's award, he was concerned that the consumer-celebrity culture theme of the story may be too banal or transient, but he was mesmerised by what he thinks is reminiscent of Barthelme's short story writing: "it casts a spell. It extradites us to a realm of strange wonders and incantatory rhythms,"<sup>22</sup> labelling it a Barthelme-like fairy-tale or parable.

As expected, the information about the storyworld is scant. Readers may infer that the story is set in a cyberpunkish world that is either alternative reality or futuristic: cloning exists and clones are easily obtainable commodities one can buy with one click and get delivered to one's home. The only clones we know about, however, are clones of the billionaire superstar pop-singer Taylor Swift that all of the story's characters (two, that is) have at home as companions, lovers, servants and entertainers, etc. The clones apparently come in various forms, as one of the centrally important ones is a clone with wings that practises her nightingale routine and dreams of being noticed and loved one day by the original Taylor Swift.

The above is roughly all we have and it is evident that the world of the story is undernarrated, as there is a strong sense that it only alludes to the socio-economic complexities of what seem to be existential nightmares of a late-capitalist consumerist cyberpunk dystopia. The narrator, however, never points directly to any economic or social realities. They are merely broached and scattered throughout the story as when the first sentence mentions swiping the phone and ordering clones, or when, in the last one, the winged clone's dreams of meeting the real Taylor Swift in her New York City tower. Whatever the rough sketches of the storyworld imply, they require the readers to continually adjust and update their schemas in a non-linear way and merge the scattered crumbs into a coherent picture mostly by means of bottom-up processing of schema formation.

Unusually not just for flash fiction, but for any kind of narrative, the story is told in the second person, which is seen both as historically problematic

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<sup>21</sup> Hugh Behm-Steinberg, "Taylor Swift," *Gulf Coast: A Journal of Literature and Fine Arts*, 28.2 (Summer/Fall 2016), accessed March 14, 2024, <https://gulfcoastmag.org/journal/28.2/2015-barthelme-prize-winner-taylor-swift/>.

<sup>22</sup> Steve Almond, Introduction to "Taylor Swift," *Gulf Coast: A Journal of Literature and Fine Arts*, 28.2 (Summer/Fall 2016), accessed March 14, 2024, <https://gulfcoastmag.org/journal/28.2/2015-barthelme-prize-winner-taylor-swift/>.

to conceptualise for narrative theory, but also slightly confusing and potentially uncomfortable for readers, not just because its rarity, but because it is composed of opposing effects of distancing and proximity/participation.<sup>23</sup> Adding to this unusual voice is a protagonist that is unnamed, unaged and ungendered. We only know that they are in love with their neighbour, Tina, of which we learn towards the end and that they order their clones as part of a scheming strategy to win her affection.

Even the story's opening sentence indicates the undernarrated complexity and density of the actual storyworld along with a skillful manipulation of narrative emotions:

You're in love; it's great, you swipe on your phone and order: the next day a Taylor Swift clone shows up at your house.

One can see how readers are forced to change their cognitive schemas and bodies of expectations about possible developments and meaning with almost every phrase. The transitions from being in love, through swiping and buying, to having Taylor Swift clones arriving on the following day is extremely unusual, indicating an intense dynamic of epistemic narrative emotions of anticipation and surprise at work. The working of curiosity, another central narrative emotion, is clearly heightened in the story, too, from the very beginning, making readers ask narrative macro- and micro-questions about who or what the object of love is, and what ordering and Swift's clones have to do with it. The first paragraph ends with another mysterious claim that the protagonist hates Taylor Swift, but it is unclear whether they always did or only started at that point or what exactly the motivation behind that feeling is.

The progression of the story partially answers some of these questions, but only with a significant delay. For example, it is revealed towards the end of the story that the protagonist is in love with Tina, but many of these questions remain unanswered, forcing the reader to simultaneously make a number of projections into the story development and regarding character motivations, some of which are not fully addressed. At any rate, readers have to rapidly move back and forth across the text to link elements separated by significant ellipses and manage a large number of dangling narrative threads and hypotheses about characters and events.

Speaking of gaps and omissions, one can distinguish a number of categories here and they all showcase a high degree of undernarration. There are obviously gaps in the causal event progression. We never know the specifics of the love story, or how clones were invented and are manufactured. We

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<sup>23</sup> Magdalena Rembowska-Płuciennik, "O narracji w drugiej osobie – enaktywnie" [On Narrating in the Second Person – Enactively], *Teksty drugie*, no. 2 (2022): 62, DOI: <https://doi.org/10.18318/td.2022.2.4>.

know almost nothing about character interactions. The central plot sequence in the story is when the protagonist notices that their neighbour has a number of Swift clones and decides to vigorously train and physically exert their own as part of a plan that is not revealed at that point. Later, the protagonist organises a Taylor Swift party with her neighbour during which it is revealed that the plan was to use her clones to assault her friend's clones in what is apparently a fit of jealousy and an attempt to win her neighbour. Seemingly, the plan is cancelled as the protagonist realises their deep feelings for Tina which somehow end up being reciprocated and the two disappear behind the closed doors of Tina's room. Only some of the events are mentioned in that progression, and when they are mentioned, their nature and significance is only partly revealed.

The character psychology and motivation remain equally cryptic, pointing to another area of gaps and ellipses. On the one hand, the narration seems to be internally focalised with respect to the protagonist, yet the information we get about their mental state is highly selective and rudimentary. However, along the principles of undernarration, readers can recognise the actual complexity of motivation and psychology, as the narrator hints at conflicting desires, thoughts, plans and emotions of the protagonist navigating the realities of the consumerist late-capitalist cyberpunk dystopia.

Towards the end of the story, the focalisation and the scope of the narrator's perspective changes dramatically. After the protagonist and Tina go to the latter's room, we never hear about them anymore. Instead, the narrator switches towards a new focaliser along with obtaining what seems to be a more omniscient perspective: the winged Taylor Swift clone on a perch performing their nightingale routine and dreaming about love, recognition and fame. Such a switch is another move that generates surprise, curiosity and confusion, along with some degree of cognitive challenge necessitated by abrupt disposing of the main characters and storylines and establishing new focalisers towards a story's end.

Another important stylistic feature of the story is its slightly New Weird aesthetic, in which strange and surprising information is revealed but in a casual way, as if it was ordinary. This is perhaps the peculiarity of this story, but in more general terms it could be projected on to flash fiction in general: it is yet another technique of intensifying epistemic narrative emotions of anticipation, suspense, surprise and curiosity which manifests itself in this particular example in a style which bafflingly naturalises out-of-the-ordinary or strange events. Neither the narrator nor the characters are surprised by a winged Taylor Swift clone or that you can buy one online. The characters casually engage in sex, marijuana smoking and are essentially slavedrivers of the clones, but they still live with their mothers and have to

do household chores and ask for an allowance. All of that is surely a flabbergasting mixture, especially when undernarrated. In this case, undernarration leads to a peculiar presentation of weirdness, as if it is natural and ordinary.

## Conclusion

Behm-Steinberg's *Taylor Swift* perfectly illustrates the defining features of flash fiction listed in the second section of this article. In spite of its fragmentation, it does maintain a sense of aesthetic and thematic unity. It enables readers to generate storyworlds on the basis of the scant input of narrative cues. Undernarration is its chief strategy of relaying information with respect to the scope, density and granularity of the storyworld. All this results in a type of reader engagement which emphasises intense and dynamic manipulation of the epistemic narrative emotions, such as curiosity, surprise, anticipation or suspense. In relation to this, undernarration forces readers to ceaselessly stretch their cognitive capacities, as their cognitive schemas, inference-making, gap-filling and expectations are constantly reshaped with almost every phrase in an endless labour of cognitive challenge.

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## **Zaangażowanie poznawcze i afektywne czytelników w *flash fiction***

**Abstrakt:** Artykuł podejmuje próbę eksploracji *flash fiction* rozumianej jako mikronarracje, uznając ją za sposób pisania, który rozwinął się właściwie dopiero w ostatnich dziesięcioleciach, choć niepozbowiony jest znaczących poprzedników sięgających wielu wieków historii literatury. W artykule poruszono kwestie definiowania i cech formalnych *flash fiction*, zary-

sowując typowe struktury, a także spekulując, w jaki sposób *flash fiction* może angażować czytelnika w charakterystyczny sposób. Autor wychodzi z założenia, że zachowując podstawowe wymagania narracyjne (reprezentowanie wydarzeń i możliwość generowania mentalnych reprezentacji światów opowieści), *flash fiction* opiera się głównie na niedopowiedzeniu i fragmentacji, czyli narracji z niewystarczającą szczegółowością. Wymaga to od czytelników, pomimo zwięzłości tekstów *flash fiction*, przewycięzania ciągłych wyzwań poznawczych, a także doświadczania wysoce skondensowanych i intensywnych epistemicznych emocji narracyjnych.

**Słowa kluczowe:** *flash fiction*, mikronarracje, recepcja czytelnika, poznanie, emocje, narratologia kognitywna.

## **Kognitive und affektive Einbeziehung von Lesern in *Flash Fiction***

**Abstract:** Der Beitrag beschäftigt sich mit der Erforschung von Flash-Fiction, verstanden als Mikroerzählung, und betrachtet sie als eine Schreibweise, die sich erst in den letzten Jahrzehnten richtig entwickelt hat, wenn auch nicht ohne prominente Vorläufer, die bis in die Jahrhunderte der Literaturgeschichte zurückreichen. Es wird weiterhin auf die Definition und die formalen Merkmale von Flash-Fiction, sowie ihre typischen Strukturen eingegangen, sowie darüber spekuliert, wie Flash-Fiction einen Leser auf seine eigene, charakteristische Weise fesseln kann. Es wird behauptet, dass Flash-Fiktionen zwar die Grundlagen erzählerischer Anforderungen beibehalten, wie etwa die Darstellung von Ereignissen und die Fähigkeit, mentale Darstellungen von Handlungswelten zu erzeugen, sich jedoch hauptsächlich auf Untererzählung und Fragmentierung stützen und nicht ausreichend detailliert erzählen. Dies erfordert, dass der Leser trotz der Kürze der Flash-Fiction ständig kognitiv herausgefordert wird und hochverdichtete und intensive epistemische Erzählgefühle erlebt.

**Schlüsselwörter:** Flash-Fiction, Mikroerzählung, Leserreaktion, Kognition, Emotion, kognitive Narratologie.





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## Paweł Huelle's Troubles with Contemporaneity

**Abstract:** The purpose of this article is to present Paweł Huelle's attitude towards contemporaneity, as well as to give an account of his literary traditionalism. The starting point of the considerations are comments on nostalgia as aesthetics and Huelle's literary practice. The author shows how the writer avoided contemporary themes in his prose and to what consequences led the fact that in some works, as if in spite of himself, he addressed the current reality. The second part of the article considers the possibility of placing Huelle's prose, especially two of his novels (*Castorp* and *Śpiewaj ogrody* [*Sing the Gardens*]), in a postmodern context, as well as the possibility of looking at this writer's nostalgic works in a different way. The discussion closes with comments on the way in which Huelle evokes motifs and works belonging to high culture.

**Keywords:** Paweł Huelle, Polish prose, contemporaneity, nostalgia.

### Introduction

The writing of the Gdańsk-based author Paweł Huelle (1957–2023) is a complex phenomenon that is still intellectually appealing. In this article I want to focus on just two interrelated dimensions of this it, namely on Huelle's literary traditionalism and his attitude to modernity.<sup>1</sup> I limit my

<sup>1</sup> Paweł Huelle did not shy away from self-commentaries – those recorded mainly in press interviews run into the hundreds. Added to this is the enormity of non-literary statements scattered in the literary and daily press; the only compact publication that brings together

recognition to the artistic prose signed with Huelle's name, so I do not consider his output as a poet, playwright, screenwriter, essayist and publicist, although I will occasionally refer to literary views he expressed in a discursive manner.

I make no secret of the fact that I have a personal reason to address the issue of Huelle's literary conservatism.<sup>2</sup> I accompanied this body of writing as a literary critic, commenting on the publication of all the books of this prematurely deceased writer, from the first to the last. On many occasions I referred not so much to the literary traditionalism manifested by Huelle, as to – and this is a more categorical term – the anachronism of his prose, using colloquial lexis acceptable in the language of criticism, for example “old-fashionedness”, “out-of-date”, and “retro.” I further argued that he struggled to engage with contemporary topics, and that his attempts to comment on and evaluate our “here and now” (e.g., social life in Poland in the era of political transformation) generally ended in failure.

Since we are now dealing with a completed body of work, and four years will soon have passed since the publication of Huelle's last book, it is worth, I believe, enquiring into these provisional and ad hoc diagnoses, to verify them to some extent, and consider today whether there is another way to look at the same thing, that is, at this literary traditionalism (or anachronism). What needs to be discussed, therefore, is literary issues considered in the context of the transformations of contemporary Polish prose, seen against the background of broader literary phenomena and cultural processes. In this approach, it would be more appropriate to speak not of modernity, but of modernity and its limits and relationship to postmodernity. As for the second issue – the writer's attitude towards modernity understood socially – I do not think any major revisions should be expected. After all, Huelle's position has been fixed in his novels and short stories; at most, one can look for some deeper or non-obvious justifications for his beliefs.

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a small part of Huelle's discursive texts remains a collection of literary columns and mini-series *Ulica Świętego Ducha i inne historie* [The Street of the Holy Spirit and Other Stories] (Kraków: Znak, 2016), which is an expanded version of the earlier volume *Inne historie* [Other Stories] (Gdańsk: słowo/obraz terytoria, 1999).

<sup>2</sup> I do not refer here to specific bibliographic sources, limiting myself to stating that they can be found in perhaps the most complete compilation of subject and object literature on P. Huelle's literary activity; the study was conducted by the Provincial and Municipal Public Library in Gdańsk and is available at the following link: <http://old2.wbpg.org.pl/slowniklista.php?pisarz=5>.

## Why Did Paweł Huelle Dislike the Present Day?

As early as his debut novel, Huelle took a notable stance that essentially defined the permanent character of his writing. This attitude should be recognised as radically nostalgic. It is worth recalling that the final phrases of *Weiser Dawidek* (1987, *Who was David Weiser?* 1991), which belong to the final passage in which the narrator addresses himself, read:

[...] pomyślisz, że wszystko, co oglądały twoje oczy, i wszystko, czego dotyczyły twoje ręce, dawno już rozsypało się w proch. Patrzeć będziesz przed siebie tępy, nieruchomym spojrzeniem, nie słysząc już wody ani wiatru, który targać będzie twoje zlepięne włosy.<sup>3</sup>

[...] you'll think how everything that came within your view, and everything that lay within your touch, has long ago crumbled to dust. You'll stare ahead of you, with a fixed and vacant gaze, no longer hearing the water, or the wind that will start to ruffle your matted hair.<sup>4</sup>

A few years later – already in the form of a self-commentary – the writer explicitly referred to this finale, suggesting that it should be seen not only as the essence of his literary programme, but also, in a generalisation, as the foundation of writing as such. He declared:

Myślę, że mechanizmem literatury jest nostalgia, tęsknota, wszystko jedno za czym... Nostalgia, wywołana obrazami przywoływanymi z pamięci, z różnych jej pokładów, przekłada się na literaturę. [...] W tym sensie jest to powieść [*Weiser Dawidek* – przyp. D.N.] o dojmującym poczuciu nieuchronności przemijalności świata.<sup>5</sup>

[I think that the mechanism of literature is nostalgia, longing, everything for which... Nostalgia, evoked by images recalled from memory, from various layers of it, is translated into literature. [...] In this sense, it is a novel [*Weiser Dawidek* – note D.N.] with a nagging sense of the inevitability of the transience of the world.]

The past world is gone (“crumbled into dust”), while the current world is an area affected by multifaceted negativity, marked by a sense of emptiness and absurdity, disappointing in every way, basically unacceptable. So says the nostalgic. I do not want to get entangled in a consideration of nostalgia as an attitude towards reality, which is also a particular way of experiencing it,

<sup>3</sup> Paweł Huelle, *Weiser Dawidek*, (Gdańsk: Wydawnictwo Morskie, 1987), 215.

<sup>4</sup> Paweł Huelle, *Who was David Weiser?*, trans. Antonia Lloyd-Jones (London: Bloomsbury, 1995, first published Berkshire: Cox & Wyman Ltd, 1991), 215.

<sup>5</sup> “Dzieciństwo po Jałcie. Z Pawłem Huelle, Wojciechem Koniecznym, Pawłem Zbierskim i Stefanem Chwinem rozmawia Krystyna Chwin” [Childhood after Yalta. With Paweł Huelle, Wojciech Konieczny, Paweł Zbierski and Stefan Chwin, Krystyna Chwin Talks], *Tytuł*, no. 3 (1991): 3. Quoted according to the edition: *Rozmowy "Tytułu,"* ed. Krystyna Chwin (Gdańsk: Zarząd Główny Zrzeszenia Kaszubsko-Pomorskiego, 1996), 100.

taking as a warning the words of an expert on this issue: “Nostalgia umieszcza ideał w przeszłości i jest to jedyna rzecz pewna, jaką można o niej powiedzieć”<sup>6</sup> [Nostalgia places the ideal in the past, and this is the only certain thing that can be said about it]. Although I want to avoid detailed enquiries into nostalgia, which, incidentally, are not needed here, three observations seem to be necessary.

First of all, Paweł Huelle has never changed his attitude towards nostalgia, invariably taking the position that his literature stems precisely from the despair of the past, from the longing for an irretrievably lost world, order and meaning; a longing that here and there turns into a lament. Thus, one would have to declare – the conclusion is all too obvious – that the programmatic nostalgic dislikes the present, consciously fencing himself or herself off from the acute immediacy of time, as it were, by definition; since he or she is a declared nostalgic, he or she probably cannot take a different position. Secondly, Huelle’s nostalgic orientation was not isolated. Marek Zaleski, just cited, was convinced that in the late 1980s and early 1990s nostalgia had become an ideological stance and an almost dominant aesthetic, and a later monographer of this issue, Przemysław Czapliński, writing about the Polish prose of the 1990s, reported on the disturbing scale of the phenomenon (he referred to many writing practices marked by nostalgia, taking nearly twenty prose writers active in the last decade of the 20th century as the subject of his detailed analyses of novels and short stories).<sup>7</sup> Thirdly, and finally, at the very end of the 1990s, an important turn was revealed in terms of the approach to nostalgic forms of prose writing. While in the first (*Formy pamięci*) of the two studies cited here, literary nostalgia is valorised positively, generally linked to the aesthetics of the sublime, championed by Jean-François Lyotard, in the second monograph (*Wzniosłe tęsknoty*) it is considered in a highly critical manner, most often presented as an evasion or capitulation; writers not only fail to take up the challenges coming from the present, but also evade designing the future, Czapliński argues.

In order not to stray too far from Paweł Huelle’s literary creations, and thus from the question of his attitude to the present day, it is worth recalling

<sup>6</sup> Marek Zaleski, *Formy pamięci. O przedstawianiu przeszłości w polskiej literaturze współczesnej* [Forms of Memory. On Representing the Past in Polish Contemporary Literature] (Warszawa: Wydawnictwo IBL PAN, 1996), 11.

<sup>7</sup> Przemysław Czapliński, *Wzniosłe tęsknoty. Nostalgie w prozie lat dziewięćdziesiątych* [Sublime Longings. Nostalgias in the Prose of the 1990s] (Kraków: Wydawnictwo Literackie, 2001). In this study the author refers, among other things, to two collections of short stories by Paweł Huelle: *Opowiadania na czas przeprowadzki* [Stories for the Time of Removal] (London: Puls Publications, 1991) oraz *Pierwsza miłość i inne opowiadania* [First Love and Other Stories] (London: Puls Publications, 1996).

elementary facts. Thus, the action of the novel *Who was David Weiser?* takes place in two time periods, namely in the second half of the 1950s of the last century, when we observe the events involving the title character, and twenty years later, when the narrator and, more broadly, the "host" of the story (Paweł Heller), who is already a mature man, conducts a private "investigation" into the mysterious disappearance of a childhood friend. As he undertakes this "investigation", he also reflects on loss, absence, the transience of the world, and the impossibility of communicating with what has passed.

In the next two books by Huelle (collections of short stories indicated in note 7), the situation repeats itself: the writer turns to the past, captured – as in the case of a nostalgic – as "paradise lost". In most of the works – the exceptions are indeed few and far between – at the centre of the story is a child protagonist (a boy of about ten years old), who tells about affairs – his own and his family's – taking place somewhere in the late 1960s and early 1970s. It is significant that even where we are dealing with current reality, the narrator-hero's gaze is also directed toward past affairs. This is the case in the story *In Dublin's fair city...* (earlier volume), where reflections revolving around the fate of the protagonist's grandfather are incorporated into the account of his stay in contemporary Dublin. This rule, i.e. a smooth transition from the current world to the more or less distant past, is even more evident in the short story *Ulica Polanki* [Polanki Street] (a later volume). This overtly autobiographical story deals with Paweł Huelle's presence at President Lech Wałęsa's birthday party in 1995.<sup>8</sup> The writer has doubts about whether to attend the party, but eventually decides to do so, because family memory has preserved the fact that his grandparents used to attend balls hosted by Ignacy Mościcki, the pre-war president of Poland. Huelle's protagonist feels deeply disappointed by the reception at Wałęsa's house (located precisely on the eponymous street), has no mercy for the participants of the meeting, especially the representatives of the new political elite constituted after 1989, and does not feel comfortable there, so he sets in motion numerous fantasies – whether about his ancestors, or about peo-

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<sup>8</sup> The autobiographical protagonist sees himself as a private person, perhaps even as an outsider: "Czegoż mógł chcieć ode mnie, pod koniec września 1995 roku, prezydent Lech Wałęsa? Urzędy, o które nie zabiegałem, dawno zostały już rozdane, koncesje przydzielone, hierarchia zasług w boju o niepodległość na wieki ustalona [...] O cóż więc mogło chodzić?" [What could President Lech Walesa want from me, at the end of September 1995? The offices I did not seek had long since been handed out, concessions assigned, the hierarchy of merit in the battle for independence forever established [...] So what could it have been about?]. Paweł Huelle, *Ulica Polanki* [Polanki Street], in Paweł Huelle, *Pierwsza miłość i inne opowiadania* [First Love and Other Stories] (Gdańsk: Tower Press, 2000), 90.

ple and events related to a place important to him (Gdańsk's Polanki Street appears repeatedly in his prose).

The motif of escaping from the current reality, from a world that brings only disappointments and causes frustration that is difficult to overcome, is best seen in the novel for which lovers of Huelle's prose enchanted by *Who was David Weiser?*, had to wait for a full 14 years – *Mercedes-Benz. Z listów do Hrabala* (*Mercedes-Benz. From Letters to Hrabal*). Here, again, the overtly autobiographical narrator-hero (Paweł) is taking a driving lesson, talking to and flirting with his instructor (Miss Ciwle). Paul confronts his story about a trivial experience, which is, after all, the acquisition of a driving license, with the content of a short story by Bohumil Hrabal *Večerní kurs* [Evening Driving Lesson] (Polish: *Wieczorna lekcja jazdy*, trans. Andrzej Czycibor-Piotrowski, or *Wieczorna jazda*, trans. Mirosław Śmigielski) and at the same time “converses” with the Czech writer, evoking a large corpus of his works. He does this as if he is blending his own speech into the prose of the Czech master, whom he admires in an unconscious way. In addition, he makes abundant use of family history, evoking the lifestyles of interwar Poland (typical, of course, of the privileged strata) – here the cult of a car manufacturer (Mercedes-Benz cars) occupies a prominent place.

I am interested in what he has to say about the present day, after all, he has his practical driving lessons on the streets of Gdańsk in the 1990s.

The story begins with a roadside confrontation. The student's car goes out in the middle of an intersection, all hell breaks loose:

[...] kierowcy innych aut biegli do nas [...] żeby na tym małym fiacie wyładować całą swoją złość za zatłoczone drogi, niewyremontowane mosty, podwyżki cen benzyny i wszystko to, co dotknęło ich tak niedługo po upadku komunizmu [...].<sup>9</sup>

because the drivers of other cars blocked by the tram and the truck had also left their vehicles and run up to us now, to shower us in all their anger about traffic jams, broken bridges, rising petrol prices and everything else affecting them since the recent collapse of communism [...].<sup>10</sup>

To all intents and purposes, all the “quotes from reality” are of the same nature – they are fiery complaints about an ill-mannered world full of social selfishness, unkindness and, above all, injustice (here woven into *Mercedes...* the story of a prominent Gdańsk doctor – a crook and degenerate). Huelle has shown – not for the first time, after all – how to deal with the present day, for which there is not a single good word. As one critic perceptively noted: “Paweł zaczyna opowiadać, aby się osłonić przed wstrętną, agre-

<sup>9</sup> Paweł Huelle, *Mercedes-Benz. Z listów do Hrabala* (Kraków: Znak, 2001), 8.

<sup>10</sup> Paweł Huelle, *Mercedes-Benz: from Letters to Hrabal*, trans. Antonia Lloyd-Jones (London: Serpent's Tail, 2005), 2–3.

sywną, brutalną, napierającą zewsząd rzeczywistością”<sup>11</sup> [Paul begins to tell stories in order to shield himself from the awful, aggressive, brutal reality pushing in from everywhere]. A special role fell to Hrabal's prose admired by the narrator-hero; this prose is conceived on the pages of this novel as the unsurpassed art of storytelling, or rather, elaborate, meandering, digression-filled storytelling (in the commentaries devoted to *Mercedes...* this figure located inside the text, i.e. Paweł, was called a “storyteller”, the Polish incarnation of the Czech “pabitel”).

The most important thing seems to be that in his second novel Huelle transforms the nostalgic discourse to which he has so far been faithful. This time he is not concerned with the apotheosis and elevation of a world that has passed – I mean here the pre-war Arcadia, the most visible sign of which was the ownership and use of luxury German cars by Paul's ancestors. The salvation of the nostalgic, who feels extremely ill at ease in the current world, comes from the side of the story itself as a sophisticated creative activity, entangled in a dense intertextual network (not only Hrabal's prose is involved here), courting the reader especially on the stylistic level (*Mercedes...* is filled with elaborate sentences stretching sometimes for several pages, the language of this novel is extremely ornate and sophisticated). This was best put by Krzysztof Uniłowski, just cited, who, writing about Huelle's 2001 novel, made a generalisation valuable for these considerations about Polish prose of the late 1990s and early 2000s:

[...] współczesna proza czuje świadomy bądź podświadomy lęk przed współczesnością jako czymś, o czym opowiadać nie potrafi lub o czym w ogóle opowiadać się nie da. Jej wycieczki w przeszłość, jej kreowanie światów czerpiących siłę z przeciwstawiania się współczesności, jeśli podszyte są jakąś tęsknotą, to wyłącznie tęsknotą za opowieścią. Prawdziwą Arkadią, jedynym azylem dzisiejszej literatury byłaby zatem... sama literatura, skądinąd znękana własną bezradnością wobec świata.<sup>12</sup>

[contemporary prose feels a conscious or subconscious fear of contemporaneity as something it cannot tell or it is impossible to tell. Its excursions into the past, its creation of worlds that derive their strength from opposing contemporaneity, if they are lined with any longing, it is only a longing for a story. The true Arcadia, the only asylum of today's literature would therefore be... literature itself, otherwise jaded by its own helplessness in the face of the world.]

Considering the issue that interests me (Huelle's troubles with contemporaneity), it is fair to declare that his next novel *Ostatnia wieczerza* (*The Last*

<sup>11</sup> Krzysztof Uniłowski, “Nie będzie uczeń nad mistrza...” [No Pupil Shall Be above the Master], in Krzysztof Uniłowski, *Kup pan książkę! Szkice i recenzje* [Buy a Book! Sketches and Reviews] (Katowice: FA-art, 2008), 125.

<sup>12</sup> Uniłowski, “Nie będzie uczeń nad mistrza...,” 127.

*Supper*),<sup>13</sup> published six years later (2007), was perhaps a breakthrough. In what sense? First of all, the fact that after the publication of this novel the writer parted with contemporary subject matter (a few exceptions will be noted in a moment); one can guess that at that time – in 2007 – he finally understood that commenting and assessing social reality simply did not work for him, lead to numerous misunderstandings and threatened his authority as a writer.

I will not reconstruct the plot of *The Last Supper* at this point; instead I shall remind the reader that the action of the novel takes place just as much in contemporary Gdańsk as in a Gdańsk that has been moved several years into the future. Futuristic motifs are few, basically limited to the “prophecy” that soon there will be mosques built en masse in Poland, and that tensions between jihad and Mcworld, to refer to the title of Benjamin R. Barber’s famous book, will become increasingly vexing. The issue of Islam taking a hold – as in Central and Eastern Europe – is needed by the writer as an argument in the novel’s debate on religion (enquiries into the religiosity of contemporary Poles form one of the novel’s major themes). However, the most important element in the considerations undertaken here is that Huelle used the poetics of a venomous pamphlet: everything that irritated him in the current world was shown in a caricatured way, especially in relation to people around the writer, with whom he was in conflict (*The Last Supper* is a novel with a key; almost every novel figure corresponds to a real character).

This is an unusual, to put it mildly, approach to the present day. The literary statement becomes an opportunity to settle personal scores; the frustrated subject comes to the fore, the pettiness of the writer himself is revealed, and the scope of what he does not like about current reality is enormous. Huelle’s malignancy extends not only to Gdańsk artists, whom he portrays as hucksters and degenerates, but above all to the political elite ruling Poland in the first years of the 21st century. The writer does not deny himself journalistic insertions, ad hoc assaults on representatives of either the Gdańsk or national establishment. Expressing his political anger more as a citizen than as a widely known artist, he uses digressions thrown into the main plot and even gives journalistic footnotes placed at the bottom of the page.<sup>14</sup> Even if one were to come to the conclusion that the narrator, speak-

<sup>13</sup> Paweł Huelle, *The Last Supper*, trans. Antonia Lloyd-Jones (London: Serpent’s Tail 2008).

<sup>14</sup> One of these footnotes reads as follows: “Sformułowania w rodzaju ‘spieprzaj, dziadu’ czy ‘bura suko’, wprowadzone do obiegu przez najwyższych rangą polityków, zadziałały inflacyjnie: odtąd nawet uczeń podstawówki mógł rzucić nauczycielce w twarz: ‘spieprzaj, dziadówko’ lub ‘kłamiesz jak bura suka’ bez żadnej sankcji, skoro cytował jedynie pana prezydenta czy ministra spraw wewnętrznych. Tego, zaiste, w państwie wcześniej nie notowano” [Phrases like ‘fuck off, grandpa’ or ‘you lie like a bitch’, introduced into circulation

ing on behalf of the writer, has good reasons for expressing his dissatisfaction with the way social and political relations have turned out in Poland, the form in which this was expressed cannot be called sophisticated.

Huelle's last two novels (*Castorp* and *Śpiewaj ogrody*, there will be more about them) separated him from modernity, which – there are many indications of this – he neither understood nor could accept, which was a source of suffering for him, caused frustration, which he was literarily unable to control. When he returns to contemporary themes in several short stories from a later period – the collections *Opowieści chłodnego morza* (*Cold Sea Stories*) and *Talita* – he either captures them in manners familiar from *Mercedes-Benz* or shifts toward the uncanny. A good illustration of the former strategy and also the method of imagery is the short story *Doktor Czeg* (*Doctor Cheng*). Here, after a long absence from the country, a former resident of this city (he was in exile in the United States) appears in contemporary Gdańsk. What does he see, looking at the modern city, when he goes beyond the reasonably well-maintained main streets? What does he think about as he flips through today's newspapers? It is worth giving a slightly longer excerpt:

Przywitały go rozpadające się garaże, przepełnione śmietniki, rachityczne ogródki i zatłuszczone tynki. Z bram i podwórek wyziewał ten sam, wieczny zapach pijackich szczyń, naftaliny, chwastów, nigdy nieobeschniętych kałuż, warzywnej zupy, petów i kocich wesel. Zdecydowanie więcej było natomiast samochodów i psich kup. Zamiast sentymentalnych westchnień – których, prawdę mówiąc, trochę się w tym miejscu spodziewał – odczuł narastającą niechęć. [...] usiadł w barze i pił wódkę, przeglądając gazety. Zirytowali go politycy: nawet dziecko kłamałoby z większym wdziękiem niż ci panowie oskarżający się nawzajem. Przypominali pijanych, spoconych tragarzy, wrywających sobie walizkę jednego pasażera na jakimś prowincjonalnym, źle oświetlonym, dawno zamkniętym dworcu.<sup>15</sup>

He was greeted by crumbling garages, rubbish bins full to overflowing, sickly little gardens and peeling plaster. From gateways, courtyards and toolsheds yawned the same, eternal odour of drunkards' piss, mothballs, weeds, puddles that never dry up, vegetable soup, fag ends and feline nuptials. On the other hand, there were definitely more cars and dog mess. Instead of sentimental sighs, a few of which he had been expecting in this place, he felt rising disgust. He did not take a single photo, and when he returned to the boarding house by taxi, instead of heading off on his afternoon

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by top politicians, have had an inflationary effect: henceforth, even a primary school pupil could yell at their teacher: 'fuck off, grandpa' or 'you lie like a bitch' without any sanction, since he was only quoting the President or the Minister of the Interior. This, indeed, was not recorded in the state before]. Paweł Huelle, *Ostatnia wieczerza* (Kraków: Znak, 2007), 113. The president mentioned in this quote is Lech Kaczyński, and the minister is Ludwik Dorn; the politicians' appalling expressions, widely reported by the media, are from November 2002 and March 2006, respectively.

<sup>15</sup> Paweł Huelle, *Doktor Czeg*, in Paweł Huelle, *Opowieści chłodnego morza* (Kraków: Znak, 2008), 102.

walk along the sea, he sat down in a bar and drank vodka, while browsing the papers. The politicians annoyed him: a child could have told lies with more charm than these gentlemen, casting aspersions at one another. They were like drunken, sweaty porters, competing to snatch the suitcase of the only passenger at a badly lit, provincial station, long after hours.<sup>16</sup>

The rule in Polish discussions of new, i.e. currently published literature is that the mere taking up of contemporary themes is a bonus, especially when the reviewers have before them a freshly published work by a recognised and respected writer – such as Paweł Huelle. Therefore, the observation of one reviewer commenting on *Talita* is not at all surprising. In his opinion, from the fact that the works collected in this volume are framed by stories set in the present day, it follows that “Huelle daje w ten sposób odpór tym spośród krytyków, którzy zarzucają mu pewien tradycjonalizm czy anachroniczność, i dowodzi, że interesuje go również nasze ‘tu i teraz’”<sup>17</sup> [Huelle thus provides a rebuff to those critics who accuse him of a certain traditionalism or anachronism, and proves that he is also interested in our ‘here and now’]. The point is that Huelle is interested in our “here and now” framed in a special way, marked – as I have already hinted – by incredulity.<sup>18</sup>

Returning, then, to *Talita’s* frame, the longer and also title story that opens this volume is plotted around a ritual of mourning still found in the countryside today. In Huelle’s case, it is a Kashubian village (a short distance from Gdańsk), where an all-night vigil is being held over an open coffin in which lies a little girl (Bernadette, who drowned in the river). Family and local residents sing appropriate mourning songs, say prayers, and the ritual is called the “empty night”. It is not about the fact that, as we read, – “dawniej śmierć była przy rodzinie, teraz w rękach pogrzebowych firm”<sup>19</sup> [formerly death was by the side of the family, now it is in the hands of the funeral directors] and that the opportunity comes to save this archaic custom of the “empty night” from oblivion by giving it a literary elaboration. It concerns the set of events that accompany the depiction of the “empty night” ritual, starting with the appearance of a mysterious visitor in the dead girl’s house

<sup>16</sup> Paweł Huelle, *Doctor Cheng*, in Paweł Huelle, *Cold Sea Stories*, trans. Antonia Lloyd-Jones (Manchester: Comma, 2012), 95.

<sup>17</sup> Karol Alichnowicz, “Ogród o rozwidlających się ścieżkach” [A Garden of Forking Paths], *Akcent*, no. 3 (2021): 101.

<sup>18</sup> Not necessarily in the sense imposed by Sigmund Freud and which has long been in the language of the humanities. So not, to use the original word, *das Unheimliche*, but rather pop-cultural “bizarreness,” which, thanks to Olga Tokarczuk’s prose volume *Opowiadania bizardne* (Kraków: Wydawnictwo Literackie, 2018), has made quite a career in Polish discourse on literature.

<sup>19</sup> Huelle, “Talita,” in Paweł Huelle, *Talita* (Kraków: Znak, 2020), 9.

– neither a monk nor a pilgrim, undoubtedly a person not from this world, a figure that cannot be fully explained within the realist discourse used by the writer. The key figure is, of course, the resurrection of the innocent Bernadette – in dialogue, of course, with the biblical story of the resurrection from the dead of Jairus' daughter; more than just the title of the story comes from the Aramaic phrase from the Gospel of St. Mark, "Talitha kum" ("Little girl, I say to you, arise!"). Did the miracle of the resurrection happen, or is it rather only a fantasy of Mary, the main character in *Talita*, a woman struggling with depression, distraught over more than just the tragic death of her niece?

In turn, the closing story of the collection, based on a simple anecdote, *Cadyk* [Tzadik], concerns a miracle involving the fact that a wish uttered over the grave of Israel Baal Shem Tov, the founder of Hasidism in the 18th century, came true. The writer made the protagonists of the story two Poles who, due to a car breakdown, were stranded for several days in Mezhibuzh in Ukraine – one of them insisted on visiting the ohel of the famous tzadik erected in the area, and was rewarded for his persistence. Superstitions are not to be taken lightly, Huelle tells us.

This part of the consideration does not, I think, require a separate summary. The answer to the question as to why Paweł Huelle disliked modernity, in a way, comes to mind by itself.

### A Postmodernist in Spite of Himself?

In the excellently received *Who Was David Weiser?*, a novel instantly recognised as a literary revelation, a flaw was detected. Well, the plot or rather "conceptual" (I mean the writing concept) dependencies of *Who Was David Weiser?* were traced to Günter Grass's micro-story *The Cat and the Mouse* (Polish edition 1963). When asked about this in interviews, the writer argued that he is not an imitator, but a continuator, that he does not imitate Grass's prose, but conducts a subtle, sophisticated dialogue with it. He explained: "książki mogą ze sobą rozmawiać. Idea wielkiej biblioteki – trochę jak u Borgesa – to jeden z moich pomysłów na pisanie"<sup>20</sup> [books can talk to each other. The idea of a great library – a bit like Borges – is one of my ideas for writing]. The fact that this issue became uncomfortable for the writer, and that he had to explain these affinities or dependencies, shows that at that time (the late 1980s and early 1990s) the modernist idea of originality as

<sup>20</sup> "Jestem tradycjonalistą. Z Pawłem Huelle rozmawia Natalia Adaszyńska" [I Am a Traditionalist. Paweł Huelle Is Interviewed by Natalia Adaszyńska], *Teatr*, no. 9 (1993): 46.

a requirement for artists of words, remained in force (a phenomenal novel must be an original novel).

The difference between *Who Was David Weiser* somehow depending on Grass's story and Huelle's later adulterous works is that in *Mercedes...* and *Castorp* these dependencies are ostentatiously brought to the fore. Using the terminology we are accustomed to when describing Hollywood cinema, the first of these novels can be said to be a spin-off anchored by Bohumil Hrabal's short story, and the second to be a prequel to Thomas Mann's masterpiece. It is fair to add that starting with *Mercedes...* both the writer and his publisher invariably used the neat and rhetorically-bearing formula of "paying homage" (to Hrabal or Mann). According to this formula, then, Huelle's adulterous novel was neither a manifestation of imitation, nor a continuation effect, nor a pastiche, but something, as they tried to suggest, much nobler and more momentous: a tribute to writers of the past.

Tracing the connections between specific texts is among the activities customarily undertaken by interpreters. Meanwhile, I would like to redirect attention to a higher level: convention and literary consciousness; to enquire into the astonishing "everlastingness" of Huelle's prose, moving on to the issue that is most important to me, namely, the unobvious anachronism of this writing practice. Przemysław Czapliński noted:

U schyłku lat osiemdziesiątych i na początku lat dziewięćdziesiątych dominująca praktyka wytwarzania literatury polegała na symulowaniu nawiązań do – wyraźnych i łatwo rozpoznawalnych – tekstów literackich z tradycji wysokiego modernizmu. Książki stawały się więc płaszczyzną, która stwarzała iluzje głębi [...].<sup>21</sup>

[In the late 1980s and early 1990s, the dominant practice of producing literature was to simulate references to – explicit and easily recognisable – literary texts from the tradition of high modernism. Books thus became a platform that created illusions of depth [...].]

This simulation of links with the "tradition of high modernism" and "creating the illusion of depth" – as a supra-individual literary tendency, of which Huelle was a representative – did not cease with the end of the 20th century. For here, with regard to a group of novels (titles are not necessary for us here) published in the first years of the 21st century, Krzysztof Uniłowski formulated the following observation:

Mamy oto zjawisko wyrastające z ukrytego przekonania, że skoro pewna formuła literacka znakomicie sprawdziła się w przeszłości, to nadal będzie pozostawała pro-

<sup>21</sup> Przemysław Czapliński, *Polska do wymiany. Późna nowoczesność i nasze wielkie narracje* [Poland to Exchange. Late Modernity and Our Grand Narratives] (Warszawa: Wydawnictwo W.A.B., 2009), 346. Emphasis mine.

duktywna, tym bardziej, że kultywowanie dawnych wzorów może być rozumiane jako wyraz dezaprobaty dla stanu dzisiejszej kultury. Rzecz jednak w tym, że ów swoisty literacki konserwatyzm pozostaje bezradny wobec nieaprobowanych przez siebie zjawisk. Nie proponuje niczego oprócz odmowy przyjęcia ich do wiadomości. Heroizmu w tym niewiele, sporo za to wygodnictwa.<sup>22</sup>

[Here we have a phenomenon growing out of the implicit conviction that since a certain literary formula has excelled in the past, it will continue to remain productive, especially since the cultivation of old patterns can be understood as an expression of disapproval at the state of today's culture. The point, however, is that this peculiar literary conservatism remains helpless in the face of the phenomena it disapproves of. It offers nothing but a refusal to acknowledge them. There is little heroism in this, but instead a lot of convenience.]

I would add that Uniłowski is concerned with the same thing – the literary traditions of high modernism and their – as “old models” – cultivation. The problem was, and still is, that these imitative-simulative practices are noted only by perceptive literary scholars dealing with contemporary Polish prose. The wider reading public does not see them; moreover, the artistic qualities that are the fruit of these practices are rated extremely highly. To give at least one example here, I will point to the opinion of a reviewer of the portal “Onet”, delighted with the novel *Śpiewaj ogrody*, who opens her commentary with a telling sentence: “Najnowsza książka Pawła Huellego jest przykładem doskonałego wypełnienia zadania literatury”<sup>23</sup> [Paweł Huelle's latest book is an example of a perfect fulfilment of the task of literature]. What the reviewer means is that the writer invites us into – let us use excerpts from two consecutive tasks – a “mysterious garden” and “brilliantly” leads us through its “thicket”; as a result – “we are captivated”. I do not mean emphatic metaphors (“mysterious garden”, “thicket”), my attention was caught by the conviction in this review that *Śpiewaj ogrody* is a novel that perfectly meets the reader's expectations; its “perfection” lies in the fact that it fulfils, and even exceeds, a certain aesthetic ideal. This is not an isolated incident – more experienced literary critics have commented in the same vein on Huelle's last novel.<sup>24</sup>

Standing on the ground of a pragmatic as much as a consumerist approach to literature, one could say that it is not particularly important, or

<sup>22</sup> Uniłowski, *Modernizm kontratakuje*, in Uniłowski, *Kup pan książkę!*, 120.

<sup>23</sup> Marianna Janicka, “Recenzja “Śpiewaj ogrody” Pawła Huelle” [Review of “Śpiewaj ogrody” by Paweł Huelle], <https://kultura.onet.pl/recenzje/recenzja-spiewaj-ogrody-pawel-huelle/m278nqj>.

<sup>24</sup> See, for example, the enthusiastic comments by Andrzej Franaszek, “Flet szczurołapa. Huelle i jego księga” [The Rat Flute: Huelle and His Book], *Tygodnik Powszechny*, no. 1 (2014); and Bogdan Rogatka “Odsłony pamięci” [Unveiled Memory], *Nowa Dekada Krakowska*, no. 3–4 (2014).

perhaps not important at all, whether the anachronistic and imitative (simulative) character of a given piece of writing has been noted. Since readers feel satisfied, in the process of reading, they become convinced that they are communing with literature of the highest order, perhaps the matter is not worth shaking up? I think it is indeed worth it.

In an interview, Huelle noted:

Żyjemy w rzeczywistości postmodernistycznej. Istnieje wielość równoległych światów. Nie rządzi nami jedna idea ani jedna estetyka. Nie ma wyższych ani niższych cywilizacji. Wszystko wygląda inaczej niż myśleli nasi przodkowie. Otóż w tej sytuacji bardzo trudno jest żądać od pisarza, aby zajmował się akurat tą, a nie inną sprawą, sferą, dziedziną. Każdy robi to, co wydaje się mu najważniejsze.<sup>25</sup>

[We live in a postmodern reality. There is a multiplicity of parallel worlds. We are not ruled by one idea or one aesthetic. There are no higher or lower civilisations. Everything looks different from what our ancestors thought. Well, in this situation it is very difficult to demand that a writer deal with precisely this and not another issue, sphere or field. Everyone does what seems most important to him.]

Huelle says that the aesthetics he has chosen for himself are part of a larger set of poetics, conventions or, to put it most bluntly, ideas for practising literature, all of which function – in reference to the writer’s words – “in postmodern reality”. So his prose, described as traditionalist and/or anachronistic, is part of this package, which brings to mind one of the more imaginative accounts of the relationship between modernist and postmodernist literary formations.<sup>26</sup> I have in mind Ryszard Nycz’s suggestive observation of “modernism as an inclusion of postmodernism”. In this sense, Paweł Huelle is a postmodernist in spite of himself, a writer functioning in a world that is no longer “ruled by one idea or one aesthetic”, and we used to call this multifiform, pluralised and democratised situation (the condition of literature) postmodernism. Moreover, today we can make a correction in looking at the nostalgia and the writing practices developed on its grounds.

If one were to come to trust Svetlana Boym as the author of *The Future of Nostalgia*, Huelle’s longing for a lost world, his reference to past social orders and aesthetic regimes need not be seen at all as a rebellion against modernity. As Boym persuades the reader: “nostalgia is not “antimodern”; it is not necessarily opposed to modernity but coeval with it. Nostalgia and pro-

<sup>25</sup> “Bo są góry. Z Pawłem Huellem rozmawia Janusz Wróblewski” [Because There Are Mountains. Paweł Huelle Is Interviewed by Janusz Wróblewski], *Polityka*, no. 3 (2002): 48.

<sup>26</sup> Ryszard Nycz, *Języki modernizmu. Prolegomena historycznoliterackie* [Languages of Modernism. Historical and Literary Prolegomena] (Toruń: Wydawnictwo Naukowe Uniwersytetu Mikołaja Kopernika 2013), 44 ff.

gress are like Jekyll and Hyde: doubles and mirror images of one another".<sup>27</sup> The retrospective orientation, Boym says, can even be seen as prospective,<sup>28</sup> so the anachronism (here of Huelle's writing) falls under the guise of not being self-evident. Which more perceptive readers of Huelle's later prose were aware of. This can be seen especially in reactions to *Talita*.<sup>29</sup> One reviewer, in connection with this volume of prose, noted that one can "derive from Huelle's short stories a (somewhat perverse) pleasure that we can rarely afford: to enjoy a perfectly guided narrative that openly defies the order of modernity." Reading Huelle's old-fashioned, non-futuristic prose gives pleasure – it is worth emphasising – "somewhat perverse", but also unique, exclusive, and rare in our world. Thus, it can be said that we are dealing here with something akin to a game of marked cards, only that the participants in this game (the writer and his recipient) are fully aware of it. Of course, not all "players", in fact, only a few. I shall now explain what I mean.

In 2004, Huelle announced *Castorp*, a novel that originated from a brief mention made by Thomas Mann about a character from *The Magic Mountain* (when Hans Castorp arrived in Davos, he had completed two years of engineering studies at Gdańsk Polytechnic Institute). Thus, Huelle created a striking fantasy of the Danzig years of the newcomer from Hamburg, entangled him in a love infatuation, even in a criminal intrigue, brilliantly – as in many of his earlier and later books – reconstructed the old Danzig, which was then – at the beginning of the 20th century – part of the German East and characterised German-Polish relations and so on (one could talk at length about *Castorp's* cognitive qualities).<sup>30</sup> However, from the perspective of the considerations undertaken here, the most interesting thing is that Huelle's novel can be successfully read without a knowledge of Mann's masterpiece. It is not just that one can derive reading satisfaction by accompanying the adventures of the title character, and thus read this novel as a historical narrative with a dominant romance-crime theme, addressed to a wide audience. It is more to the point that Huelle in *Castorp* – contrary to the "dialogicality" he affirmatively embraces – "does not talk" to *The Magic Mountain*, does not polemicise with the views or ideas contained in this novel, does not parody it, does not transform it in any way at all, with his

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<sup>27</sup> Svetlana Boym, "Nostalgia and Its Discontents," *The Hedgehog Review*, vol. 9, no. 2 (2007): 7–18, <https://hedgehogreview.com/issues/the-uses-of-the-past/articles/nostalgia-and-its-discontents>.

<sup>28</sup> Cf. Boym, "Nostalgia and Its Discontents," 8.

<sup>29</sup> Maciej Libich, "Zagraj to jeszcze raz" [Play it again], *Dwutygodnik*, no. 9 (2020), <https://www.dwutygodnik.com/artypkyl/9148-zagraj-to-jeszcze-raz.html>.

<sup>30</sup> This was pointed out by Michał Głowiński, "Nad Castorpem" [Over Castorp], *Przegląd Polityczny*, no. 70 (2005).

own writing needs in mind. Of course, the more discerning reader, equipped with no small amount of literary competence, will compare the current novel to the one published eighty years earlier, looking for differences, similarities or analogies (e.g. ones concerning the characters; here, say, the character of Kławdia Chauchat against her counterpart, Wanda Pilecka).

The case of *Castorp* shows the limitations when it comes to “symulowanie nawiązań do tekstów literackich z tradycji wysokiego modernizmu” [simulating references to literary texts from the tradition of high modernism] (Czapliński’s formulation). After all, Huelle is by no means concerned with discussing the fundamental problems of European humanism or equally serious issues; this is the ambition of Thomas Mann, not Paweł Huelle. Moreover, it is worth noting how the signs (emblems) of high culture function in his novel. For whenever motifs appear on the pages of this work, with which a modern reader might have some trouble, very often, in one way or another (usually in a narrative commentary), they are explained to him or her.<sup>31</sup> A good example is provided by one of the last scenes of Chapter XII, when the protagonist, “Hans Castorp stood in the middle of the frozen river at the very heart of the city and saw three suns, gradually appearing from behind the clouds, one beside another, not on top of each other”.<sup>32</sup> The motif of three suns could be troublesome to interpret, were it not for the fact that a few lines earlier we read “the saddest of the twenty-four most beautiful songs in the world began its prelude”,<sup>33</sup> and Schubert’s name occurs as many as three times within the paragraph from which I took the excerpt. Although the name of this composer’s collection of songs is not mentioned in the text (we have a harsh winter, so this “riddle” is also easy to solve), the principle by which the writer reveals various sources – literary or musical – remains the same. I mention this to emphasise once again that when reading Huelle’s prose, it is not at all necessary to have the cultural capital we used to associate with classical education or familiarity with the domain of high culture.

The writer probably had no illusions about the cultural competence of his readers. If it had been otherwise, his most erudite novel, *Śpiewaj ogrody*, would probably have taken a different shape. In this work we can see Huelle’s favourite figure in the foreground – a boy to whom adults explain the world. I guess one can make the assumption that we, the readers of *Śpiewaj ogrody*, are that child. Therefore, among other things, we learn why the names of one of the characters (Ernst Theodor) preceding his name (Hoff-

<sup>31</sup> Cf. Paweł Huelle, *Castorp* (Gdańsk: słowo/obraz terytoria, 2004), 200.

<sup>32</sup> Paweł Huelle, *Castorp*, trans. Antonia Lloyd-Jones (London: Serpent's Tail, 2007), 234.

<sup>33</sup> Huelle, *Castorp*, 234

mann) are allusive,<sup>34</sup> what the content of the legend of the flautist from Hameln is, created by Richard Wagner, why Hoffman's favourite sentence was a phrase taken from a poem by Rainer Maria Rilke (*Singe die Gärtner*, the Polish translation of these words gave the novel its title),<sup>35</sup> and, in general, who Rilke was and what his most important works are. Greta, Hoffmann's widow, is one of those German women who were not forced to leave Gdańsk after 1945. The aforementioned boy befriends her, and she introduces him to the richness of German culture, especially music, teaching him how to distinguish between Schuman and Schubert, telling him about the pre-war Wagner Festivals held in nearby Sopot and other matters, which are always within the field of high matters.

### Repetition of Repetition (Instead of Summary)

It should not be forgotten that on an overarching level in *Śpiewaj ogrody*, as in many of Huelle's other works, there is a figure that we can successfully identify with the writer – he is an adult, tired of life, probably also a bitter man who resorts to literary sorcery to find solace, to communicate once again with his fantasy about the future, assuring us, of course, that the basis of this fantasy is his memories. Furthermore, these are memories that are constantly being reinvented. After all, it is not insignificant that *Śpiewaj ogrody* took its name from an expansion of an old Huelle short story (*Przeprowadzka* [The Removal] from the volume z tomu *Opowiadania na czas przeprowadzki* [Stories for a Time of Removal]). In a child protagonist who absorbs adult matters (e.g., the literary culture of high modernism and the musical culture before the modernist turn in classical music), one can see not only a figure subjected to intensive and arguably more effective education – it is also a figure conceived therapeutically.

In *Mercedes-Benz* – which has already been mentioned – Huelle's autobiographical storyteller immerses himself in the storytelling element and stylistic beauty of Hrabal's prose, in the unsurpassed, in his opinion, literature of the author of *Postřižiny* (*Cutting It Short*), he seeks refuge; the literary worlds of the Czech writer become, so to speak, helpful in existence. *Castorp* can also be interpreted in this perspective: the spirit of Mann's story or the very undertaking of reconstructing the reality of the early 20th century can have (I am not at all saying that they certainly do) a therapeutic dimension. The assumption that the writer has become a part of the world created in

<sup>34</sup> See Huelle, *Śpiewaj ogrody*, 256–257.

<sup>35</sup> See Huelle, *Śpiewaj ogrody*, 226–227.

*Castorp* is perhaps not overly audacious. Of course, it would be wrong to be naïve, after all, we have known for a long time that the gestures in question here are planted on an illusion described, for example, by Frederic Jameson.<sup>36</sup> We know from him that postmodern nostalgia is caused by an inability to deal with both the present and history. With the latter, in the sense that we do not recall the past, Jameson instructs us, but only its simulacrum transformations, disjointed images and uncertain constructs of a fuzzy, sometimes pop-cultural, origin.

The motto with which the writer labelled *Castorp* is a repetition from *Repetition*,<sup>37</sup> which Huelle probably intended to cancel the problem of... repetition. Does the repetition of repetition abolish the oppositions: contemporaneity – non-contemporaneity, modernity – anti-modernity, repetition – novum? I am not sure of the answer, but undoubtedly in such a perspective – perverse, marked by paradox – one can also consider Paweł Huelle's writing.

*Translated by Anna Wyleżątek and David Lilley*

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<sup>36</sup> See Frederic Jameson, *Postmodernism, or The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism* (London–New York: Verso, 2008).

<sup>37</sup> "Właśnie dlatego, że było, powtórzenie staje się nowością" [Precisely because it has been, repetition becomes novelty]. Søren Kierkegaard, *Powtórzenie. Próba psychologii eksperymentalnej przez Constantina Constantiusa* [Repetition. A Rehearsal of Experimental Psychology by Constantin Constantius], trans. Bronisław Świdorski, in Søren Kierkegaard, *Powtórzenie. Przedmowy* [Repetition. Prefaces] (Warszawa: Wydawnictwo W.A.B., 2000), 39.

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## Pawła Huellego kłopoty ze współczesnością

**Abstrakt:** Celem artykułu jest przedstawienie stosunku Pawła Huellego do współczesności, a także zdanie sprawy z jego pisarskiego tradycjonalizmu. Punktem wyjścia rozważań są uwagi na temat nostalgii jako estetyki i praktyki literackiej Huellego. Autor pokazuje, w jaki sposób pisarz unikał tematyki współczesnej w swojej prozie i do jakich skutków doprowadziło to, że w niektórych dziełach, niejako wbrew sobie, zajął się aktualną rzeczywistością. W drugiej części artykułu rozważana jest możliwość umieszczenia prozy Huellego, zwłaszcza dwu jego powieści (*Castorp* oraz *Śpiewaj ogrody*), w kontekście postmodernistycznym, a także możliwość innego spojrzenia na twórczość nostalgiczną tego pisarza. Rozważania zamykają uwagi na temat sposobu przywoływania przez Huellego motywów i dzieł należących do kultury wysokiej.

**Słowa kluczowe:** Paweł Huelle, proza polska, współczesność, nostalgia.

## Paweł Huelles Probleme mit der Gegenwart

**Abstract:** Ziel dieses Beitrags ist es, Paweł Huelles Einstellung zur Gegenwart darzustellen und sein traditionalistisches Schreiben zu erläutern. Ausgangspunkt der Überlegungen sind Kommentare zur Nostalgie als ästhetische und literarische Praxis Huelles. Der Autor zeigt, wie der Schriftsteller zeitgenössische Themen in seiner Prosa vermied und zu welchen Konsequenzen dies führte, wenn er sich in einigen Werken wie „gegen sich selbst“ mit der aktuellen Realität auseinandersetzte. Im zweiten Teil des Beitrags wird versucht, Huelles Prosa, insbesondere zwei seiner Romane (*Castorp* und *Śpiewaj ogrody*), in einen postmodernen Kontext zu stellen, sowie aus einer anderen Sicht das nostalgische Werk dieses Schriftstellers zu betrachten. Abschließend wird auf Huelles Bezüge auf Motive und Werke der Hochkultur eingegangen.

**Schlüsselwörter:** Paweł Huelle, polnische Prosa, Gegenwart, Nostalgie.



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## Reception, or What? Adaptive Translation in the Context of Politics (Between Citation and Plagiarism)

**Abstract:** This article is devoted to the issue of reception in the context of the audiences of an original and a translation. The research was based on the differentiation of perception treated as perceiving and reception defined as receiving with understanding, along with the consequences of reception in another culture and the possible influence of a given text on the culture of translation. For the analysis, a comparative method was adopted, while relying on the assumptions of the polysystemic concept of translation. In turn, in order to illustrate the various problems related to the reception of translation, the study is illustrated with examples of audience reception, depending on various factors, primarily ones of worldview and political ones, but also resulting from linguistic and cultural differences. All of them were analysed in the context of the use of quotations, the introduction of various types of “borrowings” into the text of a translation, and even plagiarism. This concerned the verbal, musical and graphic levels. Thus, it was possible not only to demonstrate the multiplicity of factors affecting the reception of a text, but also to indicate the variety of changes in its reception by the recipients of the translation. The examples cited also proved the possibility of deliberate falsification of its reception, as well as mistaken associations evoked in the consciousness of the recipient of a translation.

In addition, the analysis carried out proved that the reception of a given text depends on the perception of the recipient. It concludes by dividing reception into conscious and unconscious, as well as translation which is faithful to the original, and false translation, which can be falsified consciously. It was also found that translational changes often depend on the translator: his or her intentions, worldview and his or her chosen purpose.

**Keywords:** translation, reception, perception, text, music.

## 1 What Does the Dictionary Say about Reception?

In the 1985 *Słownik Języka Polskiego* [Dictionary of the Polish Language], the first meaning of the word reception (in Polish *repcja*)<sup>1</sup> turns out to be the name of the office (place) in a hotel or travel agency where guests are received. The second meaning of the word is described as literary and accompanied by the explanation: “formal, ceremonial reception of guests, a gala reception”.<sup>2</sup> Only the third meaning of the word “reception” refers to the adoption or assimilation of, for example, views and customs, including foreign patterns or literary genres.<sup>3</sup> The entry “reception” in the *Słownik Wyrazów Obcych*<sup>4</sup> [Dictionary of Foreign Words], as well as in many other similar publications, is similarly presented. Although slight changes can be observed in them, for example, in the *Leksykon*<sup>5</sup> [Lexicon], published in 1972, in addition to office and gala reception, classified as obsolete, there is still the meaning of “accepting something, assimilating”, but explained in a legal context as the adoption of a foreign system or source of law. These changes only slightly affect how dictionary readers understand this word.

On the other hand, it should be noted that in the literary dimension, the meaning of the word “reception” appears primarily as an individual entry in dictionaries of literary terms. For example, in the *Dictionary...* by Stanisław Sierotwiński one can find the entry “reception of a literary work” defined as: “Odbiór dzieła jako zjawisko indywidualne (percepcja) a zwłaszcza jako zjawisko społeczne, tj. poczytność, przyjęcie przez krytykę, oddziaływanie dzieła, m. in. wpływ na późniejszych twórców”<sup>6</sup> [The reception of a work as an individual phenomenon (perception) and especially as a social phenomenon, i.e. readership, reception by critics, the impact of the work, among other things, the influence on later authors].

It is clear that the term “reception”, regardless of the explanation, always refers to the reception of anyone or anything. It is also worth noting the equivocation of reception and perception that appears in the last of these dictionaries. The entry referring to the latter reads:

<sup>1</sup> *Słownik Języka Polskiego* [Dictionary of the Polish Language], ed. Mieczysław Szymczak (PWN, Warszawa 1985), vol. III R-Ż, 28.

<sup>2</sup> *Słownik Języka Polskiego* [Dictionary of the Polish Language], 28.

<sup>3</sup> Embossing mine – A.B.

<sup>4</sup> *Słownik Wyrazów Obcych PWN* [Dictionary of Foreign Words PWN], ed. Jan Tokarski (Warszawa: PWN, 1971), 629.

<sup>5</sup> See, for example, *Leksykon PWN* [PWN Lexicon], ed. Adam Karwowski (Warszawa: PWN, 1972), 984.

<sup>6</sup> *Słownik terminów literackich* [Dictionary of Literary Terms], ed. Stanisław Sierotwiński (Kraków: WSP w Krakowie, 1960), 106.

Poznanie dzieła literackiego. Proces przyswajania sobie treści dzieła literackiego w odróżnieniu od poznawania innych tworców piśmiennictwa (np. naukowych) polega nie tylko na rozumieniu pojęciowym i wyobraźniowej rekonstrukcji przedstawień (konkretyzacji), lecz również na przeżyciu estetycznym. *Por.* Receptja dzieła literackiego.<sup>7</sup>

[Cognition of a literary work. The process of assimilating the content of a literary work, unlike cognition of other literary creations (e.g., scientific), involves not only conceptual understanding and imaginative reconstruction of representations (concretization), but also aesthetic experience. *Cf.* Reception of a literary work.]

In my opinion, such an equivocation is not the best move, since these definitions suggest that reception is perception with special attention paid to the social impact of the work on different audiences (critic, reader-reader, other creators), and perception is basically the same thing, since it is explained not by contrasting reception, but in relation to non-literary texts, hence the attention to aesthetic experience. Nevertheless, the reception by critics and, above all, the influence on later authors, which is assumed by the definition of reception of a literary work, must also involve this type of experience.

In the context of translation, it should be noted that these terms should not be treated synonymously. For what is different is cognition equal to perception, that is, hearing or seeing something, which in my view is perception, and reception related to understanding, which, I believe, characterises reception. I include understanding in this definition because it is difficult to receive the information contained in a text without understanding it. In that case, we will be dealing with false reading, which means false understanding. So, if we are talking about the process of translation, then the reception of a translation involves, on the one hand, the ability to read with understanding (which is required of the translator), and on the other hand, his or her adaptation of the translated text in such a way that the potential recipient can read the translated text and understand the information, meanings and subtext contained in it. In most cases, this means the information and semantics of the original text, but sometimes it involves the meanings introduced into the target text by the translator, which is also possible and depends on the dominant features, goals and translation strategies chosen by the translator. Abstracting from the literary work, such a definition of reception can be adopted for any translated text. I also assume that it falls within the definition of translation proposed at one time by Olgierd Wojtasiewicz,<sup>8</sup> who

<sup>7</sup> *Słownik terminów literackich...*, 86.

<sup>8</sup> Olgierd Wojtasiewicz, *Wstęp do teorii tłumaczenia* [Introduction to Translation Theory] (Wrocław: Ossolineum 1957), 27.

postulated the need for the similarity of the original and the translation in the dimension of associations, because without their understanding it is impossible to read a text.

On the other hand, I agree with a suggestion made by Anna Jarmuszkiewicz,<sup>9</sup> who, reflecting on the essence of the reception of a literary work, after considering several different concepts, comes to the conclusion that we can talk about reception when:

[...] nowy tekst zostaje przyjęty do danej wspólnoty interpretacyjnej i staje się swoistym kluczem, wytrychem, strategią interpretacyjną we wspólnocie. [...] kiedy czytanie dzieła danego autora [...] dostarcza narzędzi do pisania i czytania innych tekstów.<sup>10</sup>

[a new text is adopted into a given interpretive community and becomes a kind of key, a keypad, an interpretive strategy in the community. [...] when reading the work of a particular author [...] provides tools for writing and reading other texts.]

It would seem that such an important term from the point of view of literary analysis and sociological research should find its “official (dictionary) explanation”, yet this is absolutely not the case. In some dictionaries it does not appear at all, even if they explain entries in the field of literary studies. An example is, for instance, the *Słownik terminów literackich* [Dictionary of Literary Terms], published online, in which the entries appear consecutively: “review”; “refrain”; “renaissance”; “reportage”; “rhetoric”; “literary genre”, but “reception” is missing from it.<sup>11</sup>

Moreover, such an entry is also missing from dictionaries of translation terminology. It can be found neither in Urszula Dąbska-Prokop’s *Mała encyklopedia przekładoznawstwa*<sup>12</sup> [Little Encyclopedia of Translation Studies], nor in the later *Nowa encyklopedia przekładoznawstwa* [New Encyclopedia

<sup>9</sup> See, for example: Anna Jarmuszkiewicz, “Recepcja literacka – jak może być rozumiana we współczesnym literaturoznawstwie?” [Literary Reception – How Can It Be Understood in Contemporary Literary Studies?], *Pamiętnik Literacki*, no.1 (2019): 140–148; Anna Jarmuszkiewicz, *Retoryka kulturowa jako model recepcji i interpretacji* [Cultural Rhetoric as a Model of Reception and Interpretation], in *Prze(d)śdądy. O czytaniu kultury* [On Reading Culture], eds. Julian Czurko, and Michał Wróblewski (Łódź: Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Łódzkiego, 2014), 31–41.

<sup>10</sup> Jarmuszkiewicz, “Recepcja literacka – jak może być rozumiana we współczesnym literaturoznawstwie?,” 148.

<sup>11</sup> *Słownik terminów literackich* [Dictionary of Literary Terms] (Wydawnictwa Edukacyjne WIKING, 2005–2008), accessed March 28, 2024, [http://www.wiking.edu.pl/article.php?subject=\]E%Azyk%20Polski&id=583](http://www.wiking.edu.pl/article.php?subject=]E%Azyk%20Polski&id=583).

<sup>12</sup> *Mała encyklopedia przekładoznawstwa* [Little Encyclopedia of Translation Studies], ed. Urszula Dąbska-Prokop (Częstochowa: Educator, 2000).

of Translation Studies] under the same editorship,<sup>13</sup> nor even in the most recent study of this type, namely in the *Słownik polskiej terminologii przekładoznawczej* [Dictionary of Polish Translation Terminology] published in 2019.<sup>14</sup>

And yet the field of research relating to the issue of translation reception is extremely broad. For it concerns reception as how it is received by critics of the work of a foreign (foreign-language) author, as well as the assimilation of a given work to the target audience, and, therefore, the method of translation. Here one would have to answer the question concerning for whom and for what purpose a particular text, of a particular author, is translated. The scope of the phenomenon I am interested in also includes the issue of the translator's understanding of the text and its recipient, the popularity and acceptability of the translation in the target culture and its possible impact on the target literary system. In doing so, one cannot overlook adequacy, treated by me as the functional adequacy of the information, emotions, and the transmission of aesthetic values contained in both texts. All this depends on the translator's understanding of the original text, and then the understanding of its message by the recipient of the original. I will not enter here into a discussion of the differences in reception, and therefore in the understanding of a text, for example, in the case of translators and recipients coming from different historical eras or social strata. This would further complicate the considerations presented.

On the other hand, it should be noted that regardless of the lack of dictionary definitions, some scholars attempt to answer the question of reception in the context of translation. Let me mention here, for example, such diverse works as Marta Skwara's texts addressing the issue of reception in connection with intertextuality and a series of translations,<sup>15</sup> Małgorzata Gaszyńska-Magiera and Zuzanna Kołodziejewska's book on the reception in Po-

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<sup>13</sup> *Nowa encyklopedia przekładoznawstwa* [New Encyclopedia of Translation Studies], ed. Urszula Dąbska-Prokop (Kielce: Wyższa Szkoła Umiejętności im. Stanisława Staszica w Kielcach, 2010).

<sup>14</sup> *Słownik polskiej terminologii przekładoznawczej* [Dictionary of Polish Translation Terminology], eds. Łukasz Bogucki, Joanna Dybiec-Gajer, Maria Piotrowska, and Teresa Tomaszewicz (Kraków: Księgarnia Akademicka, 2019).

<sup>15</sup> See Marta Skwara, "Recepcja twórcy obcego jako 'stare' i 'nowe' zagadnienie komparatystyczne" [Reception of a Foreign Artist as an 'Old' and 'New' Comparatist Issue], in *Komparatystyka dzisiaj* [Comparatistics Today], vol. 1: *Problemy teoretyczne* [Theoretical Problems], eds. Ewa Szczęsna, and Edward Kasperski (Kraków: Universitas, 2010), 146–159; Marta Skwara, *Polskie serie recepcyjne wierszy Walta Whitmana. Monografia wraz z antologią przekładów* [Polish Reception Series of Walt Whitman's Poems. A Monograph with an Anthology of Translations] (Kraków: Universitas, 2014).

land of translations of Ibero-American literature between 1945 and 2005,<sup>16</sup> Anna Choma-Suwała's monograph on the reception of Ukrainian poetry in Lublin literary circles in the interwar period<sup>17</sup> and the issues of the journal *Recepcja. Transfer. Translation*.<sup>18</sup> It is also worth pointing out that degree courses in modern languages include modules that raise the topic of reception and translation, an example of which is the course on the reception of translation in the target environment taught by Magdalena Kizeweter.<sup>19</sup>

The above examples support the thesis of the need to separate perception: perceiving and reception: receiving with understanding. They also show the diversity of research in translation studies on reception, which varies because of the research material, both linguistic and cultural, including the historical aspect, but also because of the recipient, which can be the translator, the critic, the publisher and the reader of the translation. They also undertake specific research, such as Paweł Jędrzejko, who wonders what representatives of different cultures do and do not laugh at.<sup>20</sup>

## 2 A Handful of Examples

It is the specific studies that follow that I find most interesting because they best show the problems that the translator should solve. They also clearly prove not only the differences in reception, but also the impossibility of obtaining a similar reading of an original text and a translation. In some cases this is due to cultural differences, in others to falsifications deliberately

<sup>16</sup> Małgorzata Gaszyńska-Magiera, and Zuzanna Kołodziejska, *Recepcja przekładów literatury iberoamerykańskiej w Polsce w latach 1945–2005 z perspektywy komunikacji międzykulturowej* [The Reception of Translations of Ibero-American Literature in Poland 1945–2005 from the Perspective of Intercultural Communication] (Kraków: Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Jagiellońskiego, 2011).

<sup>17</sup> Anna Choma-Suwała, *Recepcja poezji ukraińskiej przez pisarzy lubelskiego środowiska literackiego w okresie międzywojennym: próby interpretacji* [The Reception of Ukrainian Poetry by Writers of the Lublin Literary Milieu in the Interwar Period: Attempts at Interpretation] (Lublin: Wydawnictwo UMCS, 2019).

<sup>18</sup> *Reception. Transfer. Translation*, ed. Jan Koźbiał (Warszawa: Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Warszawskiego).

<sup>19</sup> See the subject syllabus "Recepcja przekładu w środowisku docelowym" [Reception of Translation in the Target Environment] taught to students at the UW Institute of English Studies by Magdalena Kizeweter, accessed March 28, 2024, [https://informatorects.uw.edu.pl/pl/courses/view?prz\\_kod=3301-JS2813](https://informatorects.uw.edu.pl/pl/courses/view?prz_kod=3301-JS2813).

<sup>20</sup> Paweł Jędrzejko, *Wspólnota śmiechu a „myślenie kolonizujące” – czyli z czego nie śmieją się Anglicy* [The Community of Laughter versus "Colonizing Thinking" – or what the English don't laugh at], in *Komizm a przekład* [Comism and Translation], ed. Piotr Fast (Katowice: Wydawnictwo Naukowe Śląsk, 1997), 78–97.

introduced by translators. Therefore, I will offer below some examples illustrating the problem and confirming this thesis.

The first example is the political use of a well-known text (saying, literary character), which in a Polish viewer may evoke a completely different association. It concerns a term used against Russians which I have heard several times recently on Ukrainian internet channels. This is the name Шариков [Sharikov], associated with the protagonist of Mikhail Bulgakov's short story *Собачье сердце* [Heart of a Dog].<sup>21</sup> Sharikov is a dog surgically transformed into a human, or rather into a human-like creature, who, while retaining his dog-like nature, takes on all the worst traits of the Soviet proletariat and becomes a model representative of this new society. Sharikov is thus a derogatory term. However, if one were to translate the words of Ukrainian journalists into any language, the connotation may remain unintelligible. Furthermore, a Polish viewer may mistakenly associate Sharikov with the friendly dog, Sharik (Szarik), from the TV film series *Czterech pancernych i pies* [Four Tankists and a Dog]. The perception will therefore not be satisfactory, and may even be false.

This is not to ignore the plot of Bulgakov's 1925 short story and could not publish because the censors forbade it, considering it to be critical of the reality of the USSR, which was not acceptable. The reception of officials thus prevented the publication of a text they considered undesirable. It was not until 1968 that the story was published, by two Western magazines at the same time.<sup>22</sup>

A slightly different example of a connection to politics might be the falsification of a quote in translation. I will quote some words from Natalia Podolskaya's Russian translation of Janusz Korczak's *Król Maciuś Pierwszy*: "Передаю тебе свою корону и свой ум, потому что корона без разума - кусок золота, который может принести большой вред людям".<sup>23</sup> The literal translation into Polish is: "Daję ci swoją koronę i swój rozum, ponieważ korona bez rozumu jest tylko kawałkiem złota" [I give you my crown and my reason, because a crown without reason is just a piece of gold]. However, in Korczak's original text we find something different here. The dying king, turning to his son says: "Maciusiu, mistrz ceremonii oddał ci moją koronę,

<sup>21</sup> Михаил Буглаков [Mikhail Bulgakov], *Собачье сердце* [Heart of a Dog], manuscript, 1925.

<sup>22</sup> They were published in London in Alek Flegon's journal *Student* and in Frankfurt in the journal *Grani*.

<sup>23</sup> Януш Корчак [Janusz Korczak], *Король Матиуш Первый* [King Matt the First], trans. Наталья Подольская [Natalya Podolskaya], 1972, accessed March, 28, 2024, <https://www.litres.ru/book/yanush-korchak/korol-matiush-pervyy-korol-matiush-na-neobitaemom-ostrove-68495633/chitat-onlayn/page-2/>.

a ja ci daję – mój rozum”<sup>24</sup> (“Matt, the master of ceremonies has given you my crown, and now I will give you my intelligence”<sup>25</sup>). Thus, words that didacticise the king’s statement were put into the mouth of the Polish writer. And it is in this form that it functions in Russian internet space as a quote from Korczak. A Russian reader of Podolskaya’s translation will probably recognise that the Polish writer was thus trying to achieve a didactic effect, common in literary texts intended for children.

I am not mentioning other changes, characteristic of translations produced in the USSR, from which, for example, religious elements disappeared (including from Podolskaya’s translation) because these types of falsifications were often enforced by an ideologised censorship negatively oriented towards any manifestation of a religious worldview. In the case of the statement I cited above, we are rather dealing with the effort, mentioned earlier, to instil correct, or rather expected, moral attitudes in young readers, because they were desired by the translators, though possibly also by certain factors (such as the authorities).

Here, by the way, it is worth mentioning a similar situation concerning the translation of songs. It is well known that when “translating” them into another language, it is common to replace one text with another. This is usually considered normal, since in the case of a song the most important thing is to preserve the melodic line. Nevertheless, the replacement of the text affects the reception of the song, its acceptance. It can also affect the subsequent fate of such a translated song, as evidenced, for example, by the worldwide career of the Russian romance *Дорогой длинною* [Dorogoj dlinnoju] (*By the Long Road*),<sup>26</sup> which in a translation by Eugene Raskin under the name *Those Were the Days*<sup>27</sup> has become so popular that the recipient often forgets its origin and the original authors. Undoubtedly, the obliteration of all associations with Russian culture has contributed to this, including the deprivation in the musical arrangement of crucial references to the so-called

<sup>24</sup> Janusz Korczak, *Król Maciuś Pierwszy* (Warszawa: Towarzystwo Wydawnicze w Warszawie, 1923), 34.

<sup>25</sup> Janusz Korczak, *King Matt the First*, transl. Richard Lourie, introduction by Bruno Bettelheim (New York: Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 1986), 33.

<sup>26</sup> Константин Подревский [Konstantin Podrevsky] (lyrics), Борис Фомин [Boris Fomin] (music), *Дорогой длинною*, [Dorogoj dlinnoju], 1924, accessed March 28, 2024, [https://ru.wikipedia.org/wiki/%D0%94%D0%BE%D1%80%D0%BE%D0%B3%D0%BE%D0%B9\\_%D0%B4%D0%BB%D0%B8%D0%BD%D0%BD%D0%BE%D1%8E](https://ru.wikipedia.org/wiki/%D0%94%D0%BE%D1%80%D0%BE%D0%B3%D0%BE%D0%B9_%D0%B4%D0%BB%D0%B8%D0%BD%D0%BD%D0%BE%D1%8E).

<sup>27</sup> The popularisation of the song with Ruskin’s lyrics was aided by Mary Hopkin’s performance of it. See: accessed March 28, 2024, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jnxTT7XXMPA>.

Russian Gypsy romance.<sup>28</sup> It is necessary to note, on the one hand, the differences in the reception of the song by the recipients of the original and the translation, if only in connection with the different associations that the two verbal and musical texts evoke, and, on the other hand, the worldwide career of the translation, including the impact on other cultures within which the song began to function as part of their socio-cultural polysystems. At one time, for example, fans of a Turkish soccer club appeared on the Internet singing it with altered words. Shaggy, in turn, introduced an English-language variant of its refrain into one of his songs (also as a refrain).<sup>29</sup> Like the title (*Those Were the Days*), this introduced additional associations into the Jamaican rapper's song, namely a paratextual reference to Ruskin's text rather than the Russian original. There are also noticeable changes in the musical arrangement, which, however, I will not discuss here.

On the other hand, returning to the causes of the political (ideological) deformation of a text and, consequently, its reception, it is worth noting their presence in the case of spoken-music works as well. On the one hand, it is appropriate to mention here translations that transform songs to serve a different ideology, on the other hand, transformations that may be aimed at obscuring the true origin of a song. It can be considered that in both cases we are dealing with a kind of plagiarism, at least on the musical level.

An example of the first adulteration can be found in the new 'Soviet' words to old Russian songs, as well as foreign songs, which change their ideological overtones. In this case, many videos illustrating these changes can be found on the internet. Some of these transformations invoke the name of the original author. This is the case, for example, with the Polish socialist song *Warszawianka 1905*.<sup>30</sup> According to tradition, the author of its Russian text was Gleb Kryzhanovsky. Disregarding minor semantic shifts that do not affect its reception, only one line was removed from Kryzhanovsky's translation: "Marsz, marsz, Warszawo!" [March, march Warsaw!], replaced by the words "Марш, марш, вперёд, рабочий народ" [March, march forward,

<sup>28</sup> Russian Gypsy Romance is one of the genres of Russian romance, and its name does not specify the nationality of the author or performer, but primarily the manner of performance.

<sup>29</sup> Shaggy, *Those Days*, (feat Nash), accessed March 28, 2024, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ysRKPgGBR1o>.

<sup>30</sup> Waław Święcicki (lyrics), Józef Pławiński (music), *Warszawianka 1905*, 1879, accessed March 28, 2024, [https://pl.wikipedia.org/wiki/Warszawianka\\_1905](https://pl.wikipedia.org/wiki/Warszawianka_1905). I do not discuss here Polish variants of the song or the composer's musical inspirations. I will only note that it was first published in the magazine "Proletariat" in 1883, and was given the title by which it is known in 1905.

working people].<sup>31</sup> The change also applies to the title of the Russian version, which is known as *Варшавянка* (*Varshavianka*), i.e. without a specific date, allowing the Polish recipient to distinguish the song from *Warszawianka 1831*. However, a seemingly minor change reducing Polish connotations changes the optics of the recipient of the translation compared to the Polish recipient. For it becomes a song with a purely revolutionary dimension and, in some sense, international, because it blurs the national character. However, in this case, all Russian sources give the name of the Polish author of the text and write about the translation.

As I have already mentioned, the authors of new song lyrics do not always “admit” to using someone else’s work. This also often applies to music. In such cases, not only the name of the author of the original spoken text, but also that of the music disappears from recordings and publications. Only Russian poets and composers who introduce the work in question into the polysystem relating to the target culture are listed as authors, and the true authorship of the work in question is scrupulously concealed. There are many reasons for this, but there is no doubt that the reception of the original and translated versions in the two cultures tends to differ, even if there are no ideological changes in the “translation”. There are many descriptions of such “alterations” circulating on the internet, often proving that the “translator” has committed plagiarism. In some cases, it is fair to conclude that the comments are valid, others are questionable.

A very well-known Russian war song *Священная война* [Holy War], also known under the title *Вставай, страна огромная* [Rise, vast country], was written in 1941 after Nazi Germany invaded the USSR and was said to have been written by Aleksandr Alexandrov (music) and Vasily Lebedev-Kumach (words). Nevertheless, it turns out that the song was already known in 1919 under the title *Повстань, народе мій* [Rise, my people]<sup>32</sup> and was sung by the insurgent troops of the Ukrainian People’s Republic.<sup>33</sup> It must be admitted that the musical texts of the two songs do not differ in principle. If, on the

<sup>31</sup> See *Варшавянка...* [Varshavianka], Russian words: Глеб Кржижановский [Gleb Krzhizhanovsky], accessed March 28, 2024, <https://ru.wikipedia.org/wiki/%D0%92%D0%B0%D1%80%D1%88%D0%B0%D0%B2%D1%8F%D0%BD%D0%BA%D0%B0>.

<sup>32</sup> Василий Лебедев-Кумач [Vasily Lebedev-Kumach] (lyrics), Александр Александров [Alexandr Alexandrov] (music), *Священная война* [The Sacred War], 1941, accessed March 28, 2024, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IrIE0NsAZQI>.

<sup>33</sup> See, e.g., *Повстань, народе мій* [Rise, my people], author nn, March of the Insurgents of the Ukrainian People’s Republic, 1919, accessed March 28, 2024, <https://www.google.com/search?client=firefox-b-e&q=%D0%9F%D0%BE%D0%B2%D1%81%D1%82%D0%B0%D0%BD%D1%8C+%D0%BD%D0%B0%D1%80%D0%BE%D0%B4%D0%B5+%D0%BC%D1%96%D0%B9#fpstate=ive&ip=1&vld=cid:860243ba,vid:bFvH4XPRWzw,st:0>.

other hand, the verbal layer is considered, it turns out that Lebedev-Kumach is indeed the author of the Russian words, not the translation. However, in both texts it is possible to notice a similarity resulting probably from similar emotions (fighting the enemy) which is expressed, for example, in the words: “Ось день війни народної” [A day of national war has come] in the Ukrainian text and “Идет война народная” [A national war is coming] in the Russian one, or the following four lines, in which words about a deadly battle, a holy war or a horde of enemies to be defeated appear:

<i>Священная война</i> ( <i>Вставай, страна огромная</i> )	<i>Literal translation into Polish</i> <i>Święta wojna (Ruszej, ogromny kraju)</i>	<i>Literal translation into English</i> <i>Holy war ( move forward, vast country)</i>
<i>Вставай, страна огромная, Вставай на смертный бой</i> <i>С фашистской силой темною, С проклятою ордой.</i> [...] <i>Идет война народная, Священная война!</i>	<i>Ruszej, ogromny kraju, Ruszej na śmiertelną walkę</i> <i>Z ciemną siłą faszystowską, Z przeklętą ordą.</i> [...] <i>Nadszedł dzień wojny narodowej, Świętej wojny!</i>	<i>Move forward, huge country</i> <i>Set off for a deadly battle</i> <i>With the dark fascist power</i> <i>With the cursed horde.</i> [...] <i>The day of national war has arrived</i> <i>Of holy war!</i>
<i>Повстань, народе мій</i>	<i>Powstań, mój ludu</i>	<i>Rise, my people</i>
<i>Повстань!</i> <i>Повстань, народе мій!</i> [...] <i>За Україну в смертний бій.</i> <i>Свята війна горить!</i> <i>Ми йдемо в бій з ворожими Полками орд чужих.</i>	<i>Повстаń!</i> <i>Повстаń, mój narodzie!</i> [...] <i>Za Ukrainę na śmiertelną walkę.</i> <i>Płonie święta wojna!</i> <i>Idziemy na bój z wrogimi Półkami obcych ord.</i>	<i>Rise!</i> <i>Rise, my people!</i> [...] <i>For Ukraine to a deadly battle.</i> <i>The Holy war is on fire!</i> <i>We go to a battle with the hostile, foreign hordes</i>

Interestingly, there is also a Ukrainian translation of the Russian song *Священная война – Вставай, країно гордая* [Rise, proud land], authored by Mykola Bazhan, which corresponds to the text of the Russian song.

It should be noted, however, that unlike the Russian variant, which is a song calling on the people to defend their country (the USSR), the Ukrainian original from 1919 is a song of the national liberation uprising against Russia. Hence the words about a free Ukraine, for which the insurgents are fighting, and the liberation of the homeland from Moscow’s bondage and from under the yoke of the Kremlin:

<i>Повстань, народе мій</i>	<i>Literal translation into Polish</i>	<i>Literal translation into English</i>
<i>Не нам неволя й панщина І не для нас тюрма! Не хочемо <b>московщини</b> <b>Кремлівського ярма!</b><sup>34</sup></i>	<i>Nie dla nas niewola i pańszczyzna I nie dla nas więzienie! Nie chcemy <b>moskiewszczyzny</b> <b>Kremlowskiego jarzma!</b></i>	<i>Not for us slavery and serfdom And not for us prison! We do not want the <b>Moscowism</b> Of the <b>Kremlin's yoke!</b></i>

Furthermore, a new rendition of the Ukrainian song has recently emerged, in which two verses in Russian have been added to the 1919 text, changing the text of the Russian version by replacing “fascist force” with “rashist force” (rashism – Russian fascism) and by introducing **Putin’s horde** in place of the **cursed horde**:

<i>Повстань, народе мій</i>	<i>Literal translation into Polish</i>	<i>Literal translation into English</i>
<i>Вставай, страна огромная, Вставай на смертный бой С <b>рашистской силой тем- ною,</b> И с <b>путинской ордой!</b><sup>35</sup></i>	<i>Ruszaj, ogromny kraju, Ruszaj na śmiertelną walkę Z <b>ciemną siłą raszystowską,</b> I z <b>putinowską ordą.</b></i>	<i>Move forward, vast country Set off for a deadly battle With the <b>dark rashist</b> <b>power</b> And with <b>Putin's horde.</b></i>

The reception of the songs in question is certainly different, because regardless of the mapping of the musical plane and the similarity of genre (patriotic song), and even the use of the same references (fighting the enemy, compared to the horde, a holy national war), in the reworking there is a clear change in the poetic image. It is worth noting in passing that while in the Russian song the name “orda” [horde] recalls the Tartar-Mongol invasions and compares the fascist armies to them, in the Ukrainian original the Russian troops are compared to the horde.

Differences in the reception of the original and translation are not necessarily the result of ideological differences, nor do they necessarily depend on political considerations. For example, a hugely popular song written in Russia by Fanny Gordon *Pod samowarem* (*У самовара*) [At the samovar], to which Polish words were written in 1933 by Andrzej Włast, introduced other authors into the Russian cultural space, despite the fact that the Russian version of the text was written by the composer, who was asked to do so. However, records that were released in the USSR consistently omitted Gordon’s name. On the recording of Leonid Utišov’s performance, originally only the name of the composer of the musical arrangement – Simon Kagan –

<sup>34</sup> *Повстань, народе мій* [Rise, my people].

<sup>35</sup> *Повстань, народе мій* [Rise, my people].

appeared, and later Lebedev-Kumach (words) and Leonid Diderichs (musical arrangement) began to be listed, which could suggest the anonymity of the music. The Polish and Russian texts differ little, and, moreover, even the Polish original contains Russian elements, such as the samovar and the name Masha. Yet, for many years, the Russian listener perceived the song as Russian,<sup>36</sup> written to anonymous music, and not as a translation. In this situation, listeners may even have considered the Polish original to be a translation.

An example of undoubted musical plagiarism is, however, *Марш весёлых ребят* (*March Of Cheerful Guys*) from the 1934 Soviet film *Веселые ребята*<sup>37</sup> (pl. *Świat się śmieje*; engl. *Jolly Fellows*<sup>38</sup>), directed by Grigory Aleksandrov. The march was supposedly written by Isaac Dunayevsky (music) and Lebedev-Kumach (words). However, the musical motif was “borrowed” from the Mexican folk melody *La Adelita*,<sup>39</sup> written during the Mexican revolution of 1910–1920. Nevertheless, in recent years, probably under the influence of information on the internet regarding Soviet composers’ use of other people’s melodies, Wikipedia included details of Dunayevsky’s borrowing of one musical phrase, although both in the film and on discs of music from the film such information is missing. Moreover, listening to the Mexican song, we find that it is not just one phrase, but at least the melody of the refrain. Furthermore, the popular Russian song that this *March* became... inspired Edward Szymański to write a Polish march *Zdobywczym krokiem...* [With a conquering step...].<sup>40</sup> In this case, all publications and recordings were supplied with the names of the Russian composer and the author of the Polish lyrics. Thus, there is no question of plagiarism. Doubts relate only to how I understand the song, which I will try to demonstrate using the three versions mentioned above as examples. The musical prototype, as I have already mentioned, is a Mexican revolutionary song, the words of which are dedicated to a woman who fought in that revolution. The words of the song speak of the love of one

<sup>36</sup> In 1979, Fanny Gordon’s authorship was officially recognised.

<sup>37</sup> Василий Лебедев-Кумач [Vasily Lebedev-Kumach] (lyrics), Исаак Дунаевский [Isaac Dunayevsky] (music), *Марш весёлых ребят* [*March Of Cheerful Guys*], accessed March 28, 2024, [https://www.google.com/search?client=firefox-b-e&sca\\_esv=62807fa8b11614b1&xsrf=ACQVn09VboXCL6V5obXHxgDscrfyj5z49g:1711912100726&q=%D0%92%D0%B5%D1%81%D0%B5%D0%BB%D1%8B%D0%B5+%D1%80%D0%B5%D0%B1%D1%8F%D1%82%D0%B0+%D0%BC%D0%B0%D1%80%D1%88&tbm=vid&source=lnms&prmd=vinbz&sa=X&ved=2ahUKEwjI35nFmZ-FAXVYJxAIHV\\_uBfoQ0pQJegQIDRAB&biw=1920&bih=947&dpr=1#fpstate=ive&vld=cid:edbfd21c,vid:fiSSxMKBuRQ,st:0](https://www.google.com/search?client=firefox-b-e&sca_esv=62807fa8b11614b1&xsrf=ACQVn09VboXCL6V5obXHxgDscrfyj5z49g:1711912100726&q=%D0%92%D0%B5%D1%81%D0%B5%D0%BB%D1%8B%D0%B5+%D1%80%D0%B5%D0%B1%D1%8F%D1%82%D0%B0+%D0%BC%D0%B0%D1%80%D1%88&tbm=vid&source=lnms&prmd=vinbz&sa=X&ved=2ahUKEwjI35nFmZ-FAXVYJxAIHV_uBfoQ0pQJegQIDRAB&biw=1920&bih=947&dpr=1#fpstate=ive&vld=cid:edbfd21c,vid:fiSSxMKBuRQ,st:0).

<sup>38</sup> Also translated as *Happy-Go-Lucky Guys*, *Moscow Laughs* and *Jazz Comedy*.

<sup>39</sup> *La Adelita*, accessed March 28, 2024, <https://www.google.com/search?client=firefox-b-e&q=La+Adelita#fpstate=ive&ip=1&vld=cid:60b28c62,vid:hlGtOv-QEQQ,st:0>.

<sup>40</sup> Isaac Dunayevsky, and Edward Szymański, *Zdobywczym krokiem...*, accessed March 28, 2024, [https://staremelodie.pl/piosenka/3506/Zdobywczym\\_krokiem](https://staremelodie.pl/piosenka/3506/Zdobywczym_krokiem).

of the soldiers of the revolution for the beautiful Adelita. It is possible that he is referring to Adela Velarde Pérez called Adelita, who fought in the revolutionary troops from 1915 and organised a group of women (*soldaderas*), who were primarily intended to care for the wounded, but also fought with weapons in hand.



Adela Velarde Pérez<sup>41</sup>

The march popularised through Alexandrov's film does not refer to the revolution; it is a song accompanying a musical shepherd who sings about how good it is to sing, how a song helps life, making city and village life joyful. The march is also heard in the finale of the film, and it must be said that elements appear that are typical of ideologised Soviet patriotic songs. Two stanzas are worth noting. One mentions defending the motherland in case the enemy attacks it. The other one contains words about komsomolts – the young stewards of our planet:

<i>Веселые ребята</i>	<i>Literal translation into Polish</i>	<i>Literal translation into English</i>
<i>Шагай вперед, комсомольское племя, Шути и пой, чтоб улыбки цвели. Мы покоряем пространство и время, Мы – молодые хозяева земли.</i>	<i>Ruszaj naprzód <b>plemię komsomolskie</b>, Żartuj i śpiewaj, niech zakwitają uśmiechy. Zwyciężymy przestrzeń i czas, My jesteśmy <b>młodymi gospodarzami ziemi</b>.</i>	<i>Move forward <b>komsomol tribe</b>, Joke and sing, let the smiles bloom. We will conquer space and time, We are the <b>young stewards of the earth</b>.</i>

<sup>41</sup> Adela Velarde Pérez (Adelita), accessed March 28, 2024, [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Adela\\_Velarde\\_P%C3%A9rez](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Adela_Velarde_P%C3%A9rez).

It is possible that these are the elements of the text that essentially turned the joyful song in the Polish version into a revolutionary march. There is no longer any place in it for the joy of life, because, even if it is mentioned, this joy comes from the revolutionary struggle, there is only a common, workers' struggle. I will quote a few verses of this song:

W pierwszym szeregu walczących roboczych mas,  
w blasku pożarów witamy nasz dzień.

W bój nas powiodą zwycięstwo i młodość  
przez rewolucję o wolność wszystkich ziem.

[...]

my pokażemy, jak szczęście budować w krąg,  
mieć w oczach radość, na ustach jasny śpiew.<sup>42</sup>

[In the first row of the struggling working masses,

In the glow of the fires we greet our day.

Into battle victory and youth will lead us

By revolution for the freedom of all lands.

[...]

We will show how to build happiness all around,  
Have joy in the eyes, bright singing on the lips.]

*Adelita*, the march from the Soviet film and the Polish revolutionary song were all received differently. All three songs are linked by a musical motif – the plagiarism of part of the melodic line in *Марш веселых ребят* (*March of Cheerful Guys*) and its repetition in the Polish version, but with Dunayevsky's name as the composer. They are also linked by elements of the text related to the revolution: *Adelita* is a revolutionary song, Komsomol references and patriotism are introduced into *March...*, *Zdobywczym krokiem...* [With a Conquering Step...] refers to communist ideology, and, moreover, by introducing Dunayevsky's name, it suggests that it is a translation from a Russian text. The Mexican viewer associates the familiar song not only with revolutionary times, but also with a specific historical figure and women who fought during the revolution. The Russian viewer associates the *March...* with a musical comedy, with the character of the actor Leonid Utiosov (playing the role of the shepherd), and less often with ideology, since references to the Komsomol appear, as I mentioned, only in the finale and are not suggested by any film scene. For the Polish viewer, the march with Szymański's lyrics is not associated with the film, but only with communist propaganda.

To conclude this topic, one more Polish "translation" must be mentioned, namely the Polish variant of *Adelita* sung by the band "Duet Karo".<sup>43</sup> This version, probably in the band's own verbal arrangement, can be heard on the album *Duet Karo – Śląskie Szlagry*, and the words offered to the Polish listener

<sup>42</sup> Isaac Dunayevsky, and Edward Szymański, *Zdobywczym krokiem...*

<sup>43</sup> *Duet Karo – Śląskie Szlagry* [Duo Karo – Silesian Hits], accessed March 28, 2024, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ajp4TRHbFts>.

are completely different from the Mexican original. First of all, the revolution has disappeared from them. Additionally, nowhere (including the album) is the Polish listener informed about the origin of the song. Only the title, love for a beautiful girl and the melodic line remain from the original, despite noticeable changes in the arrangement, such as giving the musical dimension the character of a party song closer to the pop style. Below I cite two stanzas, each from this song, as well as the authentic Spanish version, along with a translation, leaving the reader to answer the question of the reception of *La Adelita* and *Adelita*:

Hej Adelito, czy jeszcze pamiętasz,  
Jak swoim tańcem rozniecałaś czar?  
Słynęłaś gwiazdą w wielkim modnym świecie,  
I w wielbicielach rozpałałaś żar.

Hej Adelito, budząca pragnienia,  
powita blaskiem mknęłaś lekko niczym dym,  
Skradałaś wszystkie gorące spojrzenia,  
Pieszcząc powabnie ciało tańcem swym.<sup>44</sup>

[Hey, Adelita, do you still remember,  
How you cast a spell with your dancing?  
You were famous as a star in the big fashion world,  
And you kindled embers in your admirers.

Hey, Adelita, awakening desires,  
The welcome glow flashed lightly like smoke,  
You stole all the hot looks,  
Caressing the body alluringly with your dance.]

<i>La Adelita</i>	<i>Literal translation into Polish</i>	<i>Literal translation into English</i>
<i>En lo alto de la abrupta serranía acampado se encontraba un regimiento // y una moza que valiente los seguía // locamente enamorada del sargento.//</i>	<i>Wysoko w surowym paśmie górkim // obozował pułk // i dziewczyna, która dzielnie za nimi podążała // szaleńczo zakochana w sierżancie.//</i>	<i>High in the rugged mountain range // there camped a regiment // and a girl who bravely fol- lowed them // madly in love with the ser- geant //.</i>
<i>Popular entre la tropa era Ade- lita // la mujer que el sargento idola- traba // que ademas de ser valiente era bonita // que hasta el mismo coronel la respetaba.<sup>45</sup></i>	<i>Popularna wśród żołnierzy była Adelita // kobieta, którą sierżant ubó- stwia // że oprócz tego, że była od- ważna, była piękna // Że nawet sam pułkownik ją szanował.</i>	<i>Popular among the soldiers was Adelita //. a woman whom the sergeant idolized //. That in addition to being brave, she was beautiful //. That even the colonel himself respected her.</i>

<sup>44</sup> Karo, *Adelita*, accessed March 28, 2024, <http://teledyski.info/teksty/?m=2&a=karo&p=adelita>.

<sup>45</sup> *La Adelita*, accessed March 28, 2024, [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/La\\_Adelita](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/La_Adelita).

This is not the only case of covering up the ideological overtones of an original in translation. An example of this is the melody of the 1962 Russian song *Пусть всегда будет солнце* (*May There Always Be Sunshine*)<sup>46</sup> by Lev Oshanin and Arkady Ostrovsky, which was sung by the Swedish band “Hootenanny Singers” in 1964 under the title *Gabrielle*. Later *Gabrielle* was recorded in translations into six different languages.<sup>47</sup> It speaks of love for the title character, rather than the desire for peace, as in the Russian original. I think that these linguistic versions of the song can be considered plagiarism, since not only did the name of the Russian author of the text – Oshanin – not appear on the recording discs, which is understandable if the original words are fully replaced by others, but also the name of the composer of the music – Ostrovsky – is missing. Instead, Stig Rossner and Bengt Thomas were indicated as the composers of the whole song. The back cover does mention a reworking of a Russian hit, but it does not specify which one. It should be noted, however, that the USSR only signed the Copyright Convention in 1973, and on various websites, including Swedish Wikipedia, the entry now reads Arkady Ostrovsky – Thomas, Rossner.<sup>48</sup>

Returning to the issue of reception, it must be acknowledged that an anti-war song is received differently from a love song, a song that we consider a variation on an anonymous Russian song is received differently from a case of plagiarism, which, in my opinion, is evidenced by the absence of even the name of the composer on the album. A translation or adaptation is received in yet another way, as in cases where the names of the original authors are provided, even if the words have been replaced by others.

As far as reception is concerned, it is also worth noting that it changes depending on the times, the political situation and the purpose of revisiting a given text. I mentioned earlier the problems Bulgakov’s short story had with the Soviet censors, yet *Пусть всегда будет солнце* (*May There Always Be Sunshine*) mentioned above has now been banned in the Russian Federa-

<sup>46</sup> Лев Ошанин [Oshanin Lev] (lyrics), Аркадий Островский [Ostrovsky Arkady] (music), *Пусть всегда будет солнце* (*May There Always Be Sunshine*), 1962, accessed March 28, 2024, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=paxlqGUxlfw>.

<sup>47</sup> Rossner Stig, and Thomas Bengt, *Gabrielle*, accessed March, 28, 2024, [https://www.google.com/search?client=firefox-b-e&sca\\_esv=e2dc8174cd1c459c&sxsrf=AC-QVn0-pMGe5EiRkLyuy\\_EcDx\\_hOEKPW-Q:1711957673462&q=Gabrielle+Hootenanny+Singers&tbm=vid&source=inms&prmd=ivnbz&sa=X&ved=2ahUKEwj45\\_ynw6CFaxVnR\\_EDHd4cBCEQ0pQJegQICxAB&biw=1920&bih=947&dpr=1#fpstate=ive&vld=cid:14fa4af5,vid:0x0-qllq068U,st:0](https://www.google.com/search?client=firefox-b-e&sca_esv=e2dc8174cd1c459c&sxsrf=AC-QVn0-pMGe5EiRkLyuy_EcDx_hOEKPW-Q:1711957673462&q=Gabrielle+Hootenanny+Singers&tbm=vid&source=inms&prmd=ivnbz&sa=X&ved=2ahUKEwj45_ynw6CFaxVnR_EDHd4cBCEQ0pQJegQICxAB&biw=1920&bih=947&dpr=1#fpstate=ive&vld=cid:14fa4af5,vid:0x0-qllq068U,st:0).

<sup>48</sup> *Gabrielle*, accessed March, 28, 2024, [https://sv.wikipedia.org/wiki/The\\_Northern\\_Lights\\_-\\_Gabrielle](https://sv.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Northern_Lights_-_Gabrielle).

tion, where it is considered disparaging of the country's army.<sup>49</sup> This is confirmed by a court ruling against Alexei Makarov, who, on 3<sup>rd</sup> July, 2022, took to the street holding a piece of paper with a quote from the song in question and was charged with discrediting the Armed Forces of the Russian Federation. Professor Tatiana Novikova was also convicted because on one of her websites she quoted the lines "May there always be sunshine! May there always be the sky!" ("Zawsze niech będzie słońce! Zawsze niech będzie niebo!"); she had previously been fired from her university job for her anti-war statements.<sup>50</sup>

A final example relating to the issue of war in Ukraine, and thus to the influence of politics on reception, is a painting by Oleh Shuplak [Oleg Shupliak] entitled *ДЕ ТИ?*<sup>51</sup> In the painting, we can see a destroyed theatre, which probably stands on the bank of a lake or river. Next to it there are painted the remains of trees, probably on fire, as fire is falling on them and the building from the sky. This building is reflected in the water, but here it is intact, not destroyed, the trees are green – they are Christmas trees, and children are playing in front of the theatre. In this situation, the inscription *ДЕ ТИ?* that appears above the theatre building is no longer read literally: *WHERE ARE YOU?* (ukr. *ДЕ* means *where*, and *ТИ* – *you*), but in a (metaphorical) connection as *CHILDREN (ДЕТИ)*. The whole image imposes an unmistakable association with the Russian-bombed theatre in Mariupol, where children were hiding, and in front of which *CHILDREN (ДЕТИ)* is written in large letters. For a viewer who knows Ukrainian and is familiar with this fact

<sup>49</sup> Ульяна Южанинова [Yuzhaninova Ulyana], *Суд оштрафовал жителя Перми на 30 тысяч рублей за цитату из детской песни* [The court ordered a Perm resident to pay 30,000 rubles for quoting from a pesni children's song], accessed March 28, 2024, <https://59.ru/text/incidents/2022/06/18/71420555/>. The information was originally published in the online magazine *Звезда* [Zvezda], which was blocked on the territory of the Russian Federation on the basis of the order of the General Prosecutor's Office of the Russian Federation № 37-31-2022/Тре6273-22 dated 09.03.2022.

<sup>50</sup> Андрей Маслов [Maslov, Andrey], *Белгородские полицейские составили восемь протоколов за дискредитацию российских военных* [Belgorod police officers wrote eight protocols to discredit the Russian army], *Fonar.TV*, 4.07.2022, accessed March 28, 2024, <https://www.rosbalt.ru/news/2022-07-04/v-belgorode-professora-filologa-budut-sudit-za-frazy-pust-vsegda-budet-solntse-pust-vsegda-budet-nebo-i-antivoennye-frazy-4949110>; Дана Минор [Dana Minor], *Я получила тяжёлую весть о гибели своего племянника* [I received the sad news of the death of my nephew/niece], *Fonar.TV*, 19.07.2022, accessed March 28, 2024, <https://fonar.tv/article/2022/07/19/ya-poluchila-tyazheluyu-vest-o-gibeli-svoego-plemyannika-kak-eks-prepodavatela-sudili-za-diskreditiruyuschie-voennyh-komentarii>.

<sup>51</sup> Олег Шупляк [Shupliak, Oleg], *ДЕ ТИ?* [WHERE ARE YOU?], 31.07. 2023, accessed March 28, 2024, <https://www.facebook.com/shupliakart/>.

from recent history, the message is obvious. What happens, however, if you translate the title into Polish? Firstly, not everyone remembers the Mariupol tragedy, even though the information appeared in Polish public media. Secondly, the translation into Polish of the wordplay introduced in Shuplak's painting is not at all obvious, because: a) in Polish we do not ask the question *gdzie ty?* [where you], but *gdzie jesteś* [where are you]; b) the word *dzieci* [children] does not include the interrogative *gdzie* [where]. My translation suggestion is to use a graphic differentiation of letters with the simultaneous division of the word *dzieci* [children], namely gDZIECI. This does not guarantee the identity of the message and reception, but allows one to guess it, and certainly draws attention to the ambiguity and the metaphorical nature of the title, forcing the viewer to think about the meaning of the whole, including the image.

However, changes in reception do not always relate to the political situation, so I would like to mention another translation problem. While recently translating a short story by Vyacheslav Medvid<sup>52</sup> from Ukrainian into Polish, I came across the word *жезла* [zhezla], which does not exist in that language, although there is a word *жезл* [zhezl], which can mean "rod", "sceptre", "mace" or "staff". It could not be used because this "zezla" [zhezl] is supposedly lying on a gas stove, and therefore I associated it with a rod. However, the main character looks into the "zhezla" and sees *зашерхлиў хуз*, i.e. *dried "huz"* – another non-existent word. Nevertheless, the latter word is usually spelt slightly differently *хус* [hus] and means "coffee grounds". So I reasoned that since coffee was mentioned earlier in the text, there were probably dried grounds in the "huz". In this situation, in my opinion, it became a pot for brewing coffee called a *jezvah* in Turkish. The name was distorted by the Surzhyk-speaking<sup>53</sup> heroine, as were the grounds. A "detective" search for the idiolect of the protagonist was needed for a correct reading by the translator and to elicit the desired reception by readers in the target culture.

Concluding, let me give you one last example, concerning the translation of regionalisms into standard Polish. I recently received a meme from one of my colleagues asking for a translation of a text containing vocabulary typical of Łódź into standard Polish.<sup>54</sup> The meme can be found on a website, where Czarek Stankiewicz is stated as its creator (also the creator of the montage

<sup>52</sup> В'ячеслав Медвідь [Medvid, Vyacheslav], *Аделька й Адам* [Adelka and Adam], accessed March 28, 2024, <https://litgazeta.com.ua/articles/adelka-j-adam/>.

<sup>53</sup> Surzhyk – Ukrainian–Russian pidgin.

<sup>54</sup> See: Czarek Stankiewicz, accessed March 28, 2024, [https://www.facebook.com/zaznaj-lodzi/photos/a.151760808710824/216086355611602/?type=3&paipv=0&eav=Afb-Kc4\\_bgTnCHU6-PgYyWpNomFPkE6GVIfhGRDR6BhIB1YyGP0l-yjbTRNsT3\\_9z2k&\\_rdr](https://www.facebook.com/zaznaj-lodzi/photos/a.151760808710824/216086355611602/?type=3&paipv=0&eav=Afb-Kc4_bgTnCHU6-PgYyWpNomFPkE6GVIfhGRDR6BhIB1YyGP0l-yjbTRNsT3_9z2k&_rdr).

with a photo). As I am a native of Łódź, I present below the “Łódź” fragment of the original text and its translation:

<i>Text in “Łódź language”</i>	<i>Literal translation into Polish</i>	<i>Literal translation into English</i>
<p>– Powiedz coś jak łodzianin – Kupując migawkę na krańcównice, pomimo galanteo lajpa, dojrzałem w chynchach angielkę w foliówce.</p>	<p>– Powiedz coś jak łodzianin – Kupując bilet miesięczny na ostatnim przystanku, mimo że miałem pod okiem ogromny siniak (podbite oko) dojrzałem w krzakach (zaroślach) bułkę paryską w torebce foliowej (jednorazowej).</p>	<p>– Say something like someone from Łódź – When I was buying a monthly ticket at the last stop, although I had a huge bruise under my eye (a black eye), I saw in the bushes (the undergrowth) a Parisian bun in a (disposable) plastic bag.</p>

Such statements can be multiplied, and can also include other “regional languages” that may not be understood without translation.

### 3 Conclusion

From my point of view, as a translation researcher, it seems important to look for a way to bring the perception of the recipient of the translation closer to the perception of the recipient of the original, because only similarity of perception can ensure similarity of reception. In other words, the reception of a given text depends on the perception of the recipient. If we perceive differently, we also understand differently, i.e. our associations, interpretations and emotions will be different. This is one side of reception. The other refers to the reception of a text belonging to the source culture in the target culture, its acceptance, possible popularisation and influence on the development of the receiving culture. Therefore, it is worth paying attention to the goal that the translator is aiming for, since this is connected to the issue of interaction, for example, of the translated literature and the target socio-cultural polysystem. Along with the question of the purpose of translation, there is also the question of the dominance of the translator, which is always subjective.

It is also possible to speak both of a narrow understanding of reception, when only comprehension (reading and interpretation) is mentioned, and of its broad perception, when we speak of the reception of a given text in another culture, its influence, and even its adoption by another literary system, even if plagiarism is involved. It is possible, finally, to study the reception by the critic, translator and audience separately, while taking into account the socio-cultural situation, including known historical facts.

Differences in reception are also pointed out by the creators of plagiArts,<sup>55</sup> claiming that in a different environment and at different times the same works sound different and are received differently. It was in this way, drawing attention to an alternative reader reception, that German Lukomnikov [Herman Lukomnikov]<sup>56</sup> explained the existence of his plagiArts.

In the considerations presented here I have tried to show the different types of reception of a given text in the language and, above all, in the culture of translation. Hence both cases of using well-known statements or literary characters with specific associations (e.g., Sharikov) for political purposes, including the possibility of both conscious and unconscious falsification of the recipient's associations. In the first case, an example is the false quotation from the book by Janusz Korczak, in the second the association of Sharikov with Sharik from *Four Tankists and a Dog*. Also indicated were associations added through plagiarism, or possibly by replacing one text with another, as in the case of Shaggy using the English version of a Russian song. In addition, considering the political context, I pointed out differences in reception depending precisely on the political situation, as in the case of lawsuits for quoting an anti-war song. Finally, in addition to the differences in reader reception of the original, the translator and the recipient of the translation, I noted problems associated with the translator's approximation of the latter's meaning of an utterance, regardless of whether it is an interlingual translation, which is evident in the case of the monologue conducted by the heroine of the story in Surzhyk, and intralingual translation, which I showed using the example of the "Łódź meme".

In my opinion, in addition to conscious and unconscious interference in the reception by readers, it is possible, especially in the case of translation, to distinguish between reception faithful to the original and false reception, which does not have to be intentional, including conscious falsification. It should also be recognised that translator-induced changes on the level of reception often depend on the translator's intentions and his or her worldview, but also on the influence that censorship and/or the standards of the era have on the translator. On the other hand, it is worth noting the problems associated with the linguistic side of the text, which can limit the translator's work and interfere with a faithful reading (understanding) of the statement, but at the same time forces him or her to activate creativity and engage in creative actions.

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<sup>55</sup> PlagiArt I understand as artistic plagiarism.

<sup>56</sup> Герман Лукомников [Herman Lukomnikov], "Минимализм: найди несколько отличий [Minimalism – find some differences]", *Новое литературное обозрение* [Novoye litereturnoye obozryeniye], no. 23 (1997): 329–330.

Finally, it must be acknowledged that even in the case of differences in reception, a given text may prove not only acceptable, but also popular in another culture, such as song rearrangements. I hope I have managed to illustrate and demonstrate all this. And yet the question of reception still remains open.

*Translated by Anna Wylężałek and David Lilley*

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## Illustrations

Adela Velarde Pérez (Adelita). [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Adela\\_Velarde\\_P%C3%A9rez](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Adela_Velarde_P%C3%A9rez).

## Recepcja, czyli co? Przekład adaptacyjny w kontekście polityki (między cytatem a plagiatem)

**Abstrakt:** Artykuł poświęcony jest zagadnieniu recepcji w kontekście odbiorców oryginału i przekładu. Badania oparto na zróżnicowaniu percepcji traktowanej jako postrzeganie oraz recepcji definiowanej jako przyjmowanie ze zrozumieniem wraz z konsekwencjami dotyczącymi przyjęcia w innej kulturze oraz ewentualnego wpływu danego tekstu na kulturę tłumaczenia. Dla analizy przyjęto metodę porównawczą, bazując przy tym na założeniach polisystemowej koncepcji przekładu. Z kolei dla zobrazowania różnych – związanych z recepcją przekładu – problemów przytoczono przykłady recepcji zależnej od czynników przede wszystkim światopoglądowych i politycznych, ale także tych wynikających z różnic językowych i kulturowych. Analizie poddano wykorzystanie cytatów, wprowadzenie do tekstu przekładu różnego rodzaju „zapożyczeń”, a nawet dokonanie plagiatu – na płaszczyźnie werbalnej, muzycznej i graficznej. Dzięki temu udało się nie tylko wykazać wielość czynników wpływających na recepcję tekstu, ale także ujawnić różnorodność sposobów jego odbioru w kulturze docelowej. Przytoczone przykłady wskazały też możliwości świadomego fałszowania procesu odbioru, jak również omyłkowych skojarzeń wywoływanych w świadomości odbiorcy przekładu.

Ponadto analiza dowiodła, że przyjęcie (odbiór) danego tekstu zależy od postrzegania go przez odbiorcę. W zakończeniu przeprowadzono podział recepcji na świadomą i nieświadomą, a także adekwatną do oryginału oraz fałszywą, która może być fałszowana świadomie. Stwierdzono również, że zmiany translatorskie często zależą od tłumacza: jego intencji, światopoglądu i wybranego przez niego celu.

**Słowa kluczowe:** przekład, recepcja, percepcja, tekst, muzyka.

## Rezeption – oder was? Adaptive Übersetzung im Kontext der Politik (zwischen Zitation und Plagiat)

**Abstract:** In diesem Artikel wird die Frage der Rezeption in Bezug auf Ausgangs- und Zielrezipienten untersucht. Die Untersuchung basiert auf der Differenzierung von Perzeption, die als Wahrnehmung behandelt wird, und Rezeption, die als verständnisvolles Empfangen und Konsequenzen der Rezeption in der Zielkultur bzw. möglicher Einfluss eines bestimmten Textes auf die Zielkultur definiert wird. Für die Analyse wird eine vergleichende Methode gewählt, die auf dem polysystemischen Konzept der Übersetzung beruht. Zur Veranschaulichung der Rezeptionsproblematik werden Textbeispiele gewählt, deren Rezeption von weltanschaulichen und politischen Faktoren abhängt, oder auch auf sprachliche und kulturelle Unterschiede zurückzuführen ist. Analysiert wird die Verwendung von Zitaten, sowie verschiedene Arten von „Entlehnung“ im Zieltext und sogar Plagiaten auf der verbalen, musikalischen und grafischen Ebene. Damit wird nicht nur die Vielzahl der Faktoren, die die Rezeption des Textes beeinflussen, sondern auch unterschiedliche Rezeptionsweisen durch Zielrezipienten aufgezeigt. Die angeführten Beispiele belegten auch die Möglichkeit einer bewussten Verfälschung der Rezeption sowie von irrtümlichen Assoziationen, die bei Zielrezipienten ausgelöst werden können.

Darüber hinaus wird betont, dass die Rezeption eines bestimmten Textes von der individuellen Wahrnehmung abhängt. Abschließend wird die Rezeption in bewusste und unbewusste Rezeption sowie in eine dem Original angemessene Rezeption und eine falsche Rezeption, die bewusst verfälscht werden kann, unterteilt. Zum Schluss wird hervorgehoben, dass die Veränderungen in der Übersetzung oft auf den Übersetzer: seine Absicht, seine Weltsicht und sein gewähltes Ziel zurückzuführen sind.

**Schlüsselwörter:** Übersetzung, Rezeption, Wahrnehmung, Text, Musik.



## **II**

### **TRENDS**

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## Contemporary Fears. Plays that Received Awards in 2023 Drama Competition “Contact Zones” against the Tradition of Romanticism

**Abstract:** This article presents an analysis of three plays that received awards in the 2023 *Contact Zones* playwriting competition organised by the Wrocław Maria and Edmund Wierciński Contemporary Theatre and the City of Wrocław. These were Ignacy Karpowicz’s *Rozmowy mijane* [Passing Conversations] (the main prize), Zenon Fajfer’s *Uwolnienie* [Release] and Małgorzata Sikorska-Miszczuk’s *Dziennik szatu i chciwości* [Diary of Frenzy and Greed] (which received two out of four prizes, which are the equivalent of the honourable mention). These works differ in how they depict the world, the form of the message, how they construct and objectify anxiety, but also in terms of the game played with the tradition of Romanticism, an epoch of special importance in Polish culture and remembered in many ways in 2022, which the Polish Parliament designated the Year of Polish Romanticism.

Thus, these works feature characters of unclear ontological status, ghosts, phantoms and wraiths (*Dziennik szatu i chciwości*, *Rozmowy mijane*), drawing attention to the uncanny and phenomena that elude human reason, quotations from Romantic works and various allusions. The Romantic context is not always recorded in these plays. Then they are kinds of geological memories of the dramas, reservoirs of specific themes and ways of expressing them, and specific models of the depicted world. Scenic situations are created or the protagonist is constructed as lonely, unhappy, and looking for love and a purpose in life.

The anxieties of the characters are revealed through typical techniques: the frightening closed room (*Dziennik szatu i chciwości*), the characters’ confinement in some space (*Uwolnienie*), their escape from the world and people (*Dziennik szatu i chciwości*), the experience of emptiness (*Uwolnienie*), the search for a purpose in life and the desire to define oneself

(*Rozmowy mijane*). The way the characters are shown and constructed, as well as the world depicted, encourage us to ask questions about the condition of modernity, and, furthermore, in juxtaposition with Romanticism.

**Keywords:** contemporary Polish drama, Romantic heritage, fears and anxieties in plays, *Contact Zones* drama competition.

The year 2020 seems to have marked one of the caesuras in the history of the world, as everyone regardless of where they live experienced the effects of the pandemic. The sense of uncertainty and rapid economic deterioration led to the release of near-basic fears, hidden under the ideology of consumption, regarding the lives and safety of loved ones. Thus, faith in the capabilities of man, science and medicine was shaken. This state of uncertainty was compounded by the media in Poland (increasingly clearly populist), the war in Ukraine, and the financial and energy crisis. If we add to this the cultural crisis that has been going on for many years, with researchers invalidating successive grand narratives and declaring the “death” of particular figures in it, it should come as no surprise that fear and uncertainty have become a marker of modernity. Interestingly, by creating characters and showing their situation in the world, the authors readily turn to motifs and solutions familiar from the Romantic era, especially its dark current.<sup>1</sup> According to Edward Kasperski, after all, one of the achievements of Romanticism was the discovery and depiction of the “dialectic of anxiety”, which has been used by subsequent generations.<sup>2</sup> Contemporary artists use pastiche and parody, evoke fragments of old works, build a mood of horror and the uncanny, reach for images of catastrophe, and populate their worlds with

<sup>1</sup> See Jarosław Ławski, “Co to jest czarny romantyzm?” [What is Dark Romanticism?], in Jarosław Ławski, *Bo na tym świecie Śmierć. Studia o czarnym romantyzmie* [Because in this World Death. Studies on Dark Romanticism] (Gdańsk: słowo/ obraz/ terytoria 2008), 7–36; Dorota Dobrzyńska, *Czarny romantyzm we współczesnej literaturze popularnej. Wybrane zagadnienia* [Dark Romanticism in Contemporary Popular Literature. Selected Issues] (Warszawa: Instytut Slawistyki PAN 2020); Kamil Barski, “Korzenie lęku. Katastroficzna historiozofia romantyzmu jako źródło kategorii grozy w literaturze epoki” [Roots of Fear. The Catastrophic Historiosophy of Romanticism as a Source of the Category of Horror in the Literature of the Epoch], *Ruch Literacki* 1, 376 (2023): 63–83; “Wstęp” [Introduction], in *Romantyzm w literaturze i kulturze po 1989 roku. Mapowanie recepcji* [Romanticism in Literature and Culture after 1989. Mapping Reception], eds. Danuta Zawadzka, Krzysztof Andruczyk, Magdalena Dudzińska, and Monika Justyna Roman (Sejny: Fundacja Pogranicze 2019), 6–13.

<sup>2</sup> Edward Kasperski, “Literatura i lęk. W kręgu poetyki, estetyki i antropologii” [Literature and Anxiety. In the Circle of Poetics, Aesthetics and Anthropology], in *Przestrzenie lęku. Lęk w kulturze i sztuce XIX–XX wieku* [Spaces of Anxiety. Anxiety in Culture and Art of the XIX–XX Century], eds. Dariusz K. Sikorski, and Tadeusz Sucharski (Słupsk: Wydawnictwo Pomorskiej Akademii Pedagogicznej w Słupsku 2006), 15.

wraiths, werewolves or night terrors, thus starting a dialogue with tradition.<sup>3</sup> For the legacy of Romanticism turns out to be very diverse, and it cannot be limited to the current of creating or consolidating national identity “around the spiritual values of the collective, such as the homeland, independence, freedom of the nation or national solidarity”.<sup>4</sup> It is also, among other things, a reservoir of loners, “gallerists of sensitivity”,<sup>5</sup> who measure themselves against the unexpected, and often the unconscious (along with a disembodied model), quotations or genre allusions.

For this analysis, I have selected three plays that received awards in the 2023 playwriting contest *Strefy kontaktu*<sup>6</sup> [Contact Zones], organised by the Maria and Edmund Wierciński Contemporary Theatre in Wrocław and the City of Wrocław. They are *Rozmowy mijane* [Passing Conversations] by Ignacy Karpowicz (main prize), *Uwolnienie* [Release] by Zenon Fajfer and *Dziennik szata i chciwości* [Diary of Frenzy and Greed] by Małgorzata Sikorska-Miszczuk (which received two out of four prizes, which are the equivalent of the honourable mention). Of these authors, Sikorska-Miszczuk – a playwright, dramatist and screenwriter – is most strongly associated with drama and theatre, as well as Fajfer, but he is mentioned primarily as a representative of concrete poetry, which exposes the visual aspects of texts. Fajfer has already worked with theatre, and his plays have been successfully staged in Poland and abroad.<sup>7</sup> It is *Uwolnienie* that was selected for perfor-

<sup>3</sup> See, among others, Grzegorz Uzdański, *Wypiór* (Warszawa: Wydawnictwo Filtry 2021); on this topic, Michał Gliński, “Romantyzm – widmowy czy wampiryczny? Paradygmat romantyczny jako przykład współczesnej literatury na przykładzie «Wypioru» Grzegorza Uzdańskiego” [Romanticism – Spectral or Vampiric? The Romantic Paradigm as an Example of Modern Literature on the Example of Grzegorz Uzdański’s “Wypiór”], *Ruch Literacki* 1, 376 (2023): 125–138.

<sup>4</sup> Maria Janion, “Zmierzch paradygmatu” [Decline of the Paradigm], in Maria Janion, *Czy będziesz wiedział, co przeżyłeś* [Will You Know what You Experienced?] (Warszawa: Wydawnictwo Sic! 1996), 9.

<sup>5</sup> This term is used by Maria Janion to define misfits and hypersensitive people, those who perceive the world and current events a little differently; Cf. *Galernicy wrażliwości* [Galley Slaves of Sensitivity], eds. Maria Janion, and Stanisław Rosiek (Gdańsk: Wydawnictwo Morskie 1981).

<sup>6</sup> The drama competition *Contact Zone* has existed as a biennial since 2015. Its concept and programmatic assumptions refer to the achievements of Tadeusz Różewicz (his search for a new form/format of drama), Helmut Kajzar (exploration of the form of the theatrical encounter and theatrical conventions) and Krzysztof Zarębski, Kajzar’s colleague and one of the first performers in Poland – the creator of the term “contact zone” and its meaning, a concept defined as an effort to change human beings. The competition does not have an open format. The organisers extend their invitation to authors not exclusively associated with dramatic works.

<sup>7</sup> These include *Pieta* (directed by Zenon Fajfer, 2006, 2017) and *Odlot* [Departure] (directed by Anna Augustynowicz, 2021). Of course, it is worth noting that the author gained his first directing experience in 1996.

mance at the Wrocław Contemporary Theatre. The dramas selected present different ways in which the Romantic tradition is exploited, from imitation (perhaps not fully realised) to parody. The authors reach for quotations from Romantic works, evoke recognisable themes, use the model of the depicted world and the model of the hero developed in the 19th century. As for the authors I'm interested in, it was only Karpowicz that had played intertextual games with the era before, including, among the others, *Balladyny i romance* (2010) which is a "treatise on Romanticism".<sup>8</sup> Interestingly, the action of the plays mostly takes place in the evening and at night, and the stories shown hardly refer to the context of the collective/group (they refer to the stories of individuals, families or show a group of random people). Thus, it will probably not be an abuse to speak of a privatised or "deheroised history".<sup>9</sup> The main characters experience the incomprehensibility of the world around them, so they find it dangerous and illogical. Two works also deal with the theme of death.<sup>10</sup>

It is worth noting that the year 2022, by the decision of the Polish Parliament, was designated the Year of Polish Romanticism.<sup>11</sup> Thus, it was a time when the heritage of the era and its creators were recalled in many ways. In the works selected for analysis, some of the references to Romanticism are circumstantial, i.e. the authors reach for themes, such as madness or the lack of general values, which in Polish literature were shaped by the Romantic

<sup>8</sup> Justyna Sobolewska, "Rozmowa z Ignacym Karpowiczem, pisarzem karkołomnym" [A Conversation with Ignacy Karpowicz, a Difficult Writer], *Polityka* 44 (2010), accessed July 20, 2024, <https://www.polityka.pl/tygodnikpolityka/kultura/1509914,1,rozmowa-z-ignacym-karpowiczem-pisarzem-karkolomnym.read>.

<sup>9</sup> Ławski, "Co to jest czarny romantyzm?", 13: "Panowanie nocy obejmuje w czarnym romantyzmie dziedzinę podmiotową w momencie aktu twórczego, lecz także ten najwyższy wymiar świata, jakim jest Historia. Dzieła czarnoromantyczne ukazują zazwyczaj historię zdeheroizowaną, bezcelową i zapokalizowaną. W nurcie schyłkowym [...] jest to historia poddana władzy szatana i śmierci, czasem z pewnym odcieniem dążeń rewolucyjnych" [In Dark Romanticism, the reign of the night encompasses the subjective domain at the moment of the creative act, as well as the higher dimension of the world which is history. Dark Romantic works typically show a deheroised, aimless and apocalyptic history. In the declining current [...] this is a story subordinated to the power of Satan and death, sometimes with a certain shade of revolutionary aspirations].

<sup>10</sup> See Agata Bielik-Robson, *Na drugim brzegu nihilizmu. Filozofia współczesna w poszukiwaniu nowego podmiotu* [On the Other Side of Nihilism: Contemporary Philosophy in Search of a New Subject] (Warszawa: Wydawnictwo Instytutu Filozofii i Socjologii PAN 1997), 61–63.

<sup>11</sup> In the Year of Polish Romanticism, many cultural events were organised in Poland and abroad; see, among texts, *Podsumowanie Roku Romantyzmu Polskiego i prezentacja projektu muzycznego „Jednego serca”* [Summary of the Year of Polish Romanticism and Presentation of the Musical Project "One Heart"], accessed May 31, 2023, <https://www.gov.pl/web/kultura/podsumowanie-roku-romantyzmu-polskiego-i-prezentacja-projektu-muzycznego-jednego-serca>.

tradition. And even if after 1989, as Janion<sup>12</sup> decreed, this is no longer the dominant discourse, it is still one of the important points of reference, as evidenced by works published today. At most, instead of one paradigm, today we have “many romanticisms”.<sup>13</sup>

Many years ago, Kasperski<sup>14</sup> pointed out that every cultural formation tries to tackle anxiety and fear, basic affects experienced in relations with the world and in interpersonal relations.<sup>15</sup> Spaces are designated for the spontaneous expression of fear, as well as rules and ways of suppressing these emotions. Furthermore, tools and formulae for relieving tension, kinds of “anti-anxiety agents”, are sought, although at the same time a culture can fuel fear in order to justify its existence in society,<sup>16</sup> and even reap benefits, which Adam Regiewicz wrote about in his analysis of the *fear industry*.<sup>17</sup>

There are different types of anxiety, which seem to form its layers, as one commentator and researcher of Antoni Kępiński’s theory wrote: biological anxiety, resulting from the mortality of the individual and the species, disintegration anxiety, social anxiety and moral anxiety.<sup>18</sup> They are universal in nature, so they are experienced by the representatives of all generations. The ways in which fear and anxiety are shown, like other affects, and the practices of relieving them (in the form of gestures or behaviours) become a kind of cultural heritage. They record the experiences of their predecessors, but also shape subsequent generations. Art, including theatre, serves as such a conduit and at the same time a machine that produces further images and situations.<sup>19</sup> In addition, showing fearful situations, depicting loss or feelings of lack remind us of the fragility and randomness of human existence, or try to bring oblivion to the unwanted and inconvenient.

<sup>12</sup> Janion, “Zmierzch paradygmatu,” 9.

<sup>13</sup> Arkadiusz Bałajewski, *Obecność romantyzmu* [The Presence of Romanticism] (Lublin: Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Marii Curie-Skłodowskiej 2015), 13.

<sup>14</sup> Kasperski, “Literatura i lęk. W kręgu poetyki, estetyki i antropologii,” 20–21.

<sup>15</sup> Dariusz S. Sikorski, and Tadeusz Sucharski, “Dlaczego niepokój” [Why Anxiety?], in *Przestrzenie lęku. Lęk w kulturze i sztuce XIX–XX wieku*, 5.

<sup>16</sup> Kasperski, “Literatura i lęk. W kręgu poetyki, estetyki i antropologii,” 20–21.

<sup>17</sup> Adam Regiewicz, “Cywilizacja strachu, czyli Nowe Średniowiecze” [The Civilisation of Fear, or the New Middle Ages], in *Anatomia strachu. Strach, lęk i ich oblicza we współczesnej kulturze* [Anatomy of Fear. Fear, Anxiety, and Their Faces in Contemporary Culture], eds. Bogusława Bodzioch-Bryła, and Lilianna Dorak-Wojakowska (Kraków: Wydawnictwo Naukowe Akademii Ignatianum in Kraków 2017), 468–471.

<sup>18</sup> See Jan Ceklarz, “Warstwowość lęku według Antoniego Kępińskiego” [Layering of Fear According to Antoni Kępiński], in *Anatomia strachu. Strach, lęk i ich oblicza we współczesnej kulturze*, 65–77.

<sup>19</sup> Małgorzata Jarmułowicz, “Teatralne oblicza lęku” [Theatrical Faces of Anxiety], in *Przestrzenie lęku. Lęk w kulturze i sztuce XIX–XX wieku*, 195, 197.

In the dramas analysed, I was interested in both the fears of individuals caused by various aspects of everyday life, and in experiencing the awesomeness of a world that eludes comprehension. The works show situations of anxiety, record the behaviour and mental state of the characters, and sometimes show their causes. Reality here appears to be hostile, mysterious and threatening, and the status of the fear-inducing object is often unclear and undefined. In my readings, I also traced Romantic influences, overt references or allusions, including to the way of talking about the world created in the 19th century and the model of the hero, the (over)sensitive loner, sometimes seeking community at all costs, hungry for love and action.

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*Dziennik szata i chciwości* [Diary of Frenzy and Greed] by Małgorzata Sikorska-Miszczuk shows the relationship between 'crazy' Ruta and greedy Bartek, the new and ruthless manager of a privatised tenement house in Warsaw. She occupies the apartment left by her parents, is a lonely librarian of indeterminate age and appearance and she is thirsty for love, so at times she is particularly sensitive to the men she meets, but also clumsy towards them. He, on the other hand, is portrayed as an 'invader', a descendant of hungry peasants dreaming of a change in social status, which sounds a bit anachronistic, rather reminiscent of social revolutions and the emancipation of the oppressed classes, while professionally he appears as the heir of the Jews murdered during World War II whose property was nationalised. The tenement is one part of this legacy. However, we do not know the circumstances sanctioning Bartek's representation of the dead. It is worth noting that we are not sure whether Bartek is really a ruthless 'tenement sweeper' or perhaps Ruta is adding stories to the facts that have occurred. Most of the action takes place at night, and dreams and imaginings are mixed with real scenes. Even the characters encourage the reader to consider the conventions of the drama. There are not only real characters, namely Ruta, Bartek, Nina, but also Fate, the Skeleton Crowd, the Warsaw Darkness Crowd (in the sequel, the Darkness Crowd) and those listed in one line: Casper, Melchior and Balthazar, the "magicians of life and death", seeming to function as cultural allusions or allegorical figures. Unreal dramatis personae appear in the dreams or visions of both characters. The convention of the unreal is sustained by the occurrence of inter-titles, which in the theatre can, for example, be displayed on a screen to emphasise the ordering of the story being played out according to the concept of the narrative leader – Fate. It is, after all, the author, as one scene, named with a meaningful title, convinces us: *Los prokrastynuje jak każdy z nas, ale wreszcie bierze się do roboty* [Fate procrastinates like every one of us, but finally gets to work]

nates like everyone else, but it finally gets down to business]. It is not only the driving force, the creator of the story, but also one of the characters observed by the viewer. Perhaps its relationship with the other characters explains to some extent the construction of the world presented.

The first scenes take place in an undefined space, in some dramatic “no-where”. First Ruta appears to complete the story of her life as read from a book by Fate. The dominant third person singular suggests that this is a story about someone else. It feels like a Bertolt Brecht play, when the actor does not want to identify with the character being played, but treats it as an opportunity to rethink the present. The relationship between Ruta and Fate is not equal. The woman is limited to following its/his instructions: she reads, answers questions, falls silent when necessary, and finally leaves. In the context of Ruta’s final death, “with closed eyes and closed mouth” (Sikorska-Miszczuk, 6), this scene can be considered a kind of closure of the woman’s life, some kind of biographical addition or an attempt to put the story in order. Bartek’s relationship with Fate is somewhat different. The man does not enter into dialogue, but is subject to Fate’s observations and comments.

The story goes beyond the biographies of the characters, especially when Fate defines Poland and the Poles. According to it/him, it is a land of hunger, whose inhabitants “had and have so little” (Sikorska-Miszczuk, 4)<sup>20</sup> that they have been possessed by the need to own things and the relentless pursuit of a goal. Fate asks questions that perhaps the viewer should take up and make them the starting point for a deeper analysis:

Ludzie musieliby spojrzeć w lustro i powiedzieć: nie mamy współczucia dla innych, nie mamy czasu dla innych i zdarza się, że jesteśmy bezlitośni. A w następnym zdaniu: tacy jesteśmy. Musieliby zapytać: jak to się stało, że tacy jesteśmy? Musieliby poczuć współczucie dla siebie. Wtedy jest szansa, że poczuliby współczucie, które zaczęłoby się rozprzestrzeniać. Może pojawiłaby się myśl: czemu żyjemy w tak strasznym kraju? Co możemy zrobić, żeby tak nie było? Ale to nie jest możliwe. (Sikorska-Miszczuk, 4)

[People would have to look in the mirror and say: we have no compassion for others, we have no time for others and we happen to be merciless. And in the next sentence: this is how we are. They would have to ask: how come we are like this? They would have to feel compassion for themselves. Then there is a chance that they would feel compassion, which would begin to spread. Maybe the thought would arise: why do we live in such a terrible country? What can we do to make it not so? But this is not possible.]

<sup>20</sup> Małgorzata Sikorska-Miszczuk, *Dziennik szata i chciwości* [Diary of Frenzy and Greed], [https://strefykontaktu.pl/files/docs/sikorskaxmiszczuk\\_dzienni.pdf](https://strefykontaktu.pl/files/docs/sikorskaxmiszczuk_dzienni.pdf), accessed May 26, 2023. I give the page numbers of the file posted on the contest page in brackets.

Even the beginning of the drama exposes the uncanny and can arouse fear in the viewer. In the work we recognise motifs associated with the poetics of horror: a closed room with a tap from which blood drips (Sikorska-Miszczyk, 15), called the “terrible room”, unreal events: a procession of skeletons of hungry villagers, pretenders to prosperity and improvement of social status, mysterious voices emerging from the darkness, talking animals (“wilk grzywiasty” /the maned wolf) and objects (windows). The conversation with the maned wolf (referring to the story of Little Red Riding Hood) centres around Ruta’s future “whining”, which can be seen as a foreshadowing of suffering or a somewhat perverse sexual act, when the wolf becomes the personification of the animal instincts inherent in humans, (in this case, in a man).

Certainly, Ruta is a disturbed individual, having problems with building relationships and experiencing various fears. The protagonist is not interested in the world, which is probably why after the death of her father she transformed her apartment into a shelter from reality. So she installed a massive door, secured by several locks, installed blinds and hung curtains in the windows. All this to make her feel safe. Any intrusion into her life and violation of her habits causes great nervousness. One such situation ends with the statement: “out of fear I am close to madness” (Sikorska-Miszczyk, 7). Meanwhile, the story in the drama begins with a construction crew breaking down a door. This is a sign of a change in the tenement’s owner, but also heralds the end of Ruta’s previous life, which many would consider vegetation.

The centre of the heroine’s apartment is this “terrible” or “forbidden room”. And although we do not learn anything more detailed about it, the opening of this door by Bartek marks a turning point in Ruta’s life. In this way, the Crowd is released from the Darkness. It is also in this space that Bartek and Nina, a woman of unclear status who appears as a whore in the piece, have sex.

Subsequent scenes in the drama confront Ruta with general and personal problems: the reprivatisation of tenements, disturbances in the ecosystem (a lost elephant and an encounter with Darek from the eco-patrol), disturbances in the emotional sphere (a stone as an allegory of her heart), fear of the destruction of her private world and fear of the dead. There is another recorded fear in the urban space of Warsaw – the memory of the demolished city (there is no term “former Jewish property” in the drama). Fate’s description of the city ends with a rhetorical question, a suggestion of possible revenge or an expression of fear of reparations: “Fortunately, this landscape is unreal. The levels of time, shuffled, are drowning in darkness. But what happens if a w o r d or w o r d s open a portal to the present?” (“Na szczęście ten krajobraz jest nierealny. Poziomy czasu, przemieszane, toną w ciemno-

ściach. Co jednak się stanie, jeśli jakieś słowo lub słowa otworzą portal do teraźniejszości?”, Sikorska-Miszczuk, 13).

The characters in the drama speak directly about feeling anxiety and fear, and the atmosphere of anxiety is further heightened by a fragment of a folk song, known both in the Polish and German lands, which supplemented Gottfried August Bürger’s translation of *Leonora* by Antoni Edward Odyniec, a friend of Adam Mickiewicz from the Philaret period. It was this song that was to inspire Bürger to write the ballad *Lenora* (the title appears in the play), which influenced the development of European Romanticism:

Księżyc świeci, martwiec leci,  
sukienczka szach, szach, szach,  
panieneczko czy nie strach?  
Szach, szach, szach  
Szach, szach, szach

[The moon shines, the dead one flies,  
Her dress goes swish, swish, swish,  
Young maiden, are you not afraid?  
Swish, swish, swish,  
Swish, swish, swish.]

These words appear three times in the drama. They are uttered successively: by Ruta at the beginning of the play (Sikorska-Miszczuk, 3), by the Crowd from Darkness in a Terrible Room (Sikorska-Miszczuk, 22), here the passage is supplemented by subsequent stanzas, and once more in the finale after the heroine’s suicidal leap (Sikorska-Miszczuk, 34). In the Polish version, the accumulation of sibilant and fricative consonants heightens the mood of eeriness and somehow foreshadows a catastrophe. Ruta, like Lenora, can hear or sense the approaching misfortune.

In addition to evoking the German ballad and building a mood of horror in the drama, we can also point to other ways of referring to the legacy of Romanticism. Allusions to Romanticism also occur in the drama at other levels. The dead play a significant role in the lives of the characters, functioning both as wraiths, demanding sacrifices, and as ancestors, defining the existence of the protagonists. The “frenzy” of the title can be seen as a consequence of the encounter with the mysterious, while the “greed” can be seen as pressure from the dead to get even, as did once the imperative of patriotism, also revealing a “vampiric” face (part III of *Dziady*, engl. *Forefathers’ Eve*). It is also the question that arises in the margins, what Warsaw is like and what the people who inhabit it are like. Finally, it is the construction of the main character: hypersensitive, well-read, exposed to the premeditated wounding of Bartek, who devises further tortures for her, only to force her to leave the apartment; his actions lead the woman to suicide.

*Dziennik szata i chciwości* [Diary of Frenzy and Greed] was constructed on the principle of association and repetition. The most significant phrases grow in meaning in subsequent scenes. This is how an allegory is created about contemporary Poland, culturally still strongly centred around the dead and the legacy of the ancestors, who not only bequeathed to their successors the space/homeland, along with phantasms, but almost literally intervene in the biographies of individuals.

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Zenon Fajfer's *Uwolnienie* [Release] is a text with an unusual form, based on a perversely used topos of the theatre world, and which is also perhaps some kind of biblical reminiscence or reference to Eastern philosophy (a veil hiding what is most essential). This motif is exposed by both the layout of the drama and the first scenes. In the header of all the pages is the word "KURTYNA" [CURTAIN], written in large capital letters. Below it, there are several columns of text separated by lines, which resemble the folds of a curtain (their number changes as the plot unfolds). These are like channels of communication in the space depicted. Both the lines of individuals and stage directions will appear in them. For the reader, the curtain becomes a kind of screen. Perhaps, the proper context for this situation is Plato's cave.

The placement of the stage directions in the first of the columns signals the equality of the dramatic subject with the others. The empty space between the lines makes the silence and the passage of time more apparent, while at the same time heightening the distinctiveness of the individual voices and creating some form of solitude in the crowd. As in concrete poetry, a vocal or stage performance will require a decision as to the order in which these lines are spoken (whether we read "in channels" or across from left to right).

The initial stage directions confirm the fact that we are in a theatre decorated quite traditionally: "*ostatni dzwonek, światła zmrużone, scenę zasłania ciężka purpurowa kurtyna; po upływie kilku minut zniecierpliwione głosy na widowni*" [the final bell rings, the lights are dimmed, the stage is covered by a heavy purple curtain; after a few minutes, impatient voices in the audience] (Fajfer, 1; column 1 of 5).<sup>21</sup>

<sup>21</sup> Zenon Fajfer, *Uwolnienie* [Release], [https://strefykontaktu.pl/files/docs/fajfer\\_uwolnienie.pdf](https://strefykontaktu.pl/files/docs/fajfer_uwolnienie.pdf), accessed May 26, 2023. I give the page numbers of the file posted on the contest organisers' website in parentheses. I quote only the text, without spatial layout; after the page number I give the number of the column in which the words appear, and the current number of columns on the page.

The prolonged waiting for the actual performance attempts to acclimatise the audience (there are adults and children, women and men, as well as foreigners) of an indeterminate number. The audience have masks on their faces, an apparent reference to the COVID-19 pandemic, and outside one can hear planes flying overhead, evoking the context of the war in Ukraine, although it has not been named. The characters come up with various hypotheses: maybe it is a “self-serving spectacle” or maybe “the system crashed”. Such alternatives: something has broken or the audience is the actor, were written in the channels at the extreme ends, 1 and 5 (Fajfer, 4). In the following scenes, the audience wonders about the play’s title and cast, suggesting that it is a “mousetrap” or the somewhat ambiguous “Czekając na wielkie G” [Waiting for the Big G] (Fajfer, 10; columns 1 and 2 of 5), which refer to Shakespeare’s *Hamlet* and Beckett’s *Waiting for Godot*, respectively. They talk about avant-garde art, playing on the emotions of the audience, dividing the audience into real spectators and provocateurs who want to cause a riot or perhaps are actors drawing unsuspecting people into the plot. There are also comments about being in the middle of events, the effect of goggles, immersion, and finally attempts to interpret the event by pointing out metaphorical (or allegorical) meanings – one curtain is associated by someone with a guillotine, so another adds information about a stray bullet (Fajfer, 11). Audiences have different levels of knowledge about theatre, so the quote from Shakespeare: “All the world’s a stage, And all the men and women merely players” (*As you like it*) can serve as a slogan and response for the initiated (Fajfer, 81). Spoken phrases allude to current social events (e.g., the politically marked “reassumption”) and the colloquial way of speaking, shaped by the Internet and advertising.

As I pointed out above, the lines initially appear in five channels, five vertical tunnels, although the author does not resolve how many characters there are. We do not know their names and surnames, we focus only on the spoken words. The lines are usually not addressed to any particular addressee, but to everyone, even if they do not lead to interaction. It is often only a comment, an externalisation of emotions, a remark spoken aloud, as if “on the page” (a part). It is worth noting, however, that the act of saying anything in public transforms the audience into a participant in the drama, and the curtain/page space creates a *quasi-conversation*. After all, characters can respond to the words they hear, or employ a number of consensus-building practices, such as a meaningful tone of voice or appropriate pace of speech. Sometimes the order of the fold/tunnel is disrupted (Fajfer, 44), as if the silence allows the materiality of the curtain and its movements to be perceived.

Viewers bring different levels of sense-making and sign-reading competence, but some basic ontological questions arise (mainly in the first channel): “Jest tam kto? Za tą zimną, głuchą kotarą?” [Who’s there? Behind that cold, deaf curtain?] (Fajfer, 13; 1 of 5), “To kim my właściwie w tej całej intrydze jesteśmy?” [Then who are we actually in all this intrigue?] (Fajfer, 30; 1 of 3), repeated again: “kim my właściwie wszyscy jesteśmy?” [who are we all actually?] (Fajfer, 76; 1 of 2) and finally: “Ile to wszystko może jeszcze potrwać?” [How much longer can all this go on?] (Fajfer, 99; 2 of 2). For the most part, these are rhetorical questions, perhaps also aimed at the spectator. The first one introduced is followed by the following comment, although it is difficult to discern the speaker’s intention: “Aż ciarki przechodzą... Całe życie można przeżyć i nie zadać tak głębokiego pytania” [It sends shivers down your spine... You can live your whole life and not ask such a profound question] (Fajfer, 13; 2 of 5).

Stage directions in drama function as demarcation markers. After each line of the dramatic subject, the situation in the theatre changes slightly. The conversations gradually cease to be about the unrehearsed performance and the rather unusual situation, but centre around the personal stories of individual spectators. This is accompanied by a reduction in the number of channels/folds and a simultaneous increase in the font of the text. We have the impression that the observer is getting closer to the characters. Thanks to this procedure, we discover the existing relationships between the viewers (their conversations refer to matters from the pre-action, well known to their interlocutors), but also the strangers being familiarised, uncertainties being overcome and some kind of cooperation being built. Some want to fill the waiting time with themselves and present their skills or qualities to others. There are also local occurrences, such as bickering or quarrelling. Someone wants to smoke a cigarette, some woman goes into labour. The desire to leave, however, leads to the realisation that the hall is closed, which intensifies the mood of horror.

On two occasions the conversation in the audience is interrupted by the entrance of new characters. The second time a sedan chair is brought in, in which, as we read in the stage directions, there is perhaps a “High Representative of Artificial Intelligence” (“Wysoki Przedstawiciel Sztucznej Inteligencji”) (Fajfer, 88; 2 of 3). They are privileged spectators, so their entrance and exit is a separate spectacle that takes place with the lights on.

The arrangement of the folds disappears during the utterance of monologues and the establishment of an acquaintance between a man and a woman, which alludes to a typical situation of flirtation (the arrangement of the text on the page shows the emotional closeness of the characters to each other). Love, closeness is, after all, one way of warding off existential

anxieties. The man's monologue, which is a rhyming protest against the clamour that fills the world, is also a search for silence within oneself, against disturbing inner voices. The woman, on the other hand, talks about her theatrical childhood experiences and her not-so-successful life. It is their fears and anxieties that we get to know most thoroughly. The characters speak not only of the fear of a relationship with another person, but also of emptiness, the equal of that after death. The flirtation then turns into a language game of adding words according to a fixed order. The game ends when the partner is unable to find a word beginning with the last letter of the previous word. The dramatic subject calls this activity "word spilling" ("przesypywanie słów") (Fajfer, 143). Here there is no more content, there is only a conative function. Interestingly, the characters do not desire victory, but rather the continuation of the game situation, so they must cooperate. For this reason, the woman, for example, changes the word "słoń" [elephant] to "słońce" [sun] (Fajfer, 131). When the subject moves away a bit and the tunnels/folds reappear, it turns out that these are the only voices in the theatre. The others have already gone behind the curtain. This is the only way out.

The subsequent scenes expose more and more clearly the allegorical nature of the events depicted and the absurdity of existence in this "invisible masquerade" ("niewidzialna maskarada") (Fajfer, 59, 1 of 2) and "perverse tussle" ("perwersyjna ciuciubabka") (Fajfer, 54, 1 of 2). The final passage behind the curtain is explained by stage directions arranged in two columns, although this time the reading order is familiar. First, one has to read the column on the left, then the one on the right. The dramatic subject does not reveal what is behind the curtain, but emphasises that fear is one of the creative factors:

(co znajduje się po drugiej stronie zasłony  
jedynie sami Inscenizatorzy wiedzą –  
co komu wyobraźnia podpowie, lęk albo pragnienie) (Fajfer, 144)

[(which is on the other side of the veil  
only the Stagers themselves know –  
What the imagination prompts, fear or desire)]

The sequel is already an *Epilogue & Prologue* that foreshadow Act II, which will take place behind the curtain (so some Act II exists?). There is both a reference to Stanisław Wyspiański, and a somewhat clownish or perhaps more Gombrowicz-like poem: "This is the end of my services/ to others belongs act two" ("Na tym kończą się moje usługi/ do innych należy akt drugi") (Fajfer, 144; 2 of 2).

The drama *Uwolnienie* makes anxiety one of the cornerstones of the world presented. The author uses the motif of confinement in a windowless

room, a model solution that intensifies this emotion. The irrationality of the situation, its incomprehensibility also transfers the fear to the viewer, who receives no additional information or solution to the puzzle being built.

The situation reveals a number of universal fears: fear of loneliness, incomprehensibility of the world, death and passing. The realist convention gradually transforms into allegory, and the motif of the world of theatre allows us to reflect on the existential situation of man, when life is shown as a certain stage, preparation or waiting for the sequel. The drama is at times ostentatiously hypertextual and suggests Maurice Maeterlinck's *The Blind*, in addition to the examples already indicated. Compared to the Maeterlinck's play from the late 19th century, the viewer's uncertainty is much more extensive. Although the work does not evoke Romantic motifs, it does not contain allusions to artists or their works. Instead, it creates an atmosphere of eeriness and uncertainty of cognition built through the senses and uses the poetics of a fragment<sup>22</sup> (enough to recall the most significant representations of Romantic drama, Adam Mickiewicz's *Dziady (Forefathers' Eve)* or Juliusz Słowacki's *Kordian*, the latter with a significant subtitle *Część pierwsza trylogii: Spisek koronacyjny* [Part One of the Trilogy: The Coronation Conspiracy]). The play offers an interesting point of view. The characters are presumably turned with their backs to the viewer/reader and stare at the curtain, trying to find some sense of their situation. This is reminiscent of the paintings of Caspar David Friedrich, an artist of the Romantic era, and perhaps his most famous canvas *The Wanderer on the Sea of Fog*. Fajfer's anonymous figures "seem to challenge infinity",<sup>23</sup> becoming an allegory of human fate. This is a world threatened and marked by death.

The author uses a specific way of building a relationship between the viewer of the text, the character, and the curtain, which in the play, at most, acts as a frame for the world of illusion and is therefore not an object worth special attention. The characters in Fajfer's drama, taken out of their normal situation – one usually comes to the theatre to watch a performance or some kind of performance – make the viewer think about his or her existential situation.

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In *Rozmowy mijane* [Conversations Passed], Ignacy Karpowicz, who has already played games with Romanticism, presents an evening and a night in

<sup>22</sup> Anna Kurska, *Romantyczny fragment* [Romantic Fragment] (Wrocław: Zakład Narodowy im. Ossolińskich 1989).

<sup>23</sup> Gerard Legrand, *Sztuka romantyzmu* [The Art of Romanticism], trans. Igor Waleńczak ([Warszawa]: HPS: Rzeczpospolita, [2007]), 54; chapt. "Sztuka wielkości," 41–71.

the lives of high school girls from a humanities subjects class. The girls swear, get drunk, take various intoxicants and dream of having sex while a stripper (a linguistics student) accidentally shows up in their apartment dressed as a priest (however, there is a Priest in the plot, which perpetuates the theatricality of the situation). It is a world filled with evil and violence, as in the current of brutalism. The play reminds us that violence is “an inherent alternative to fear” (“nieodłączna alternatywa lęku”).<sup>24</sup> The characters are too young to have experienced any kind of calamity in life. Their families seem to live quite prosperous lives, so the anxiety they feel is more a result of feeling some senselessness of the world and lack of value. The behaviour and talk of adults (parents or the ‘unreliable ethics lady’) intensifies in them the desire to rebel or reject such a world. Could it be that they are experiencing “swallow anxiety” (“jaskółczy niepokój”) familiar from Słowacki’s drama? Instead of travelling to foreign countries (although themes similar to those in Słowacki’s *Kordian* appear in their conversations: love, money, society and even religion) they engage in an ilinx type of behaviour, based on intoxication, bewilderment and the need to test the limits and capabilities of their bodies.

The drama mentions the fear of loneliness (Eve’s decision to marry), and from the information about Janek’s exorcism in Częstochowa, we can also sense some fear of incomprehensible/unacceptable behaviour (his sister, Emilia, does not know whether the reason for the exorcism is her brother’s preaching of communism or his sexual orientation). Satan appears in a statement made by Mother 2. However, he is probably not so much the cause of evil in the world, but rather an excuse by adults to cover their guilt and helplessness in the face of unfolding events. Also, possession in the depicted world seems to be synonymous with incomprehensible behaviour.

As in *Dziennik szatu i chciwości* [Diary of Frenzy and Greed], the characters include non-real characters: The Ghost, reciting excerpts from Part I of Mickiewicz’s *Dziady* (*Forefathers’ Eve*), the Chorus of Boys (also recalling Part I of *Dziady*, a passage on Mickiewicz’s *Romantyczność* [Romanticism], and parodying a passage from Dante’s *Divine Comedy*) and the Chorus of Girls. The Phantoms do not only repeat passages of the literary canon, but also create silly rhymes, which suit the mood of the heroines. Besides, the Ghost interacts with the girls: together with Ewelina he reflects on the situation of the contemporary peers of Romantic heroines including Karusia

<sup>24</sup> Katarzyna Sawicka, “Nie ma takiego lęku, który nadałby sens życiu – kondycja ponowoczesna w świetle twórczości Sarah Kane” [There Is no Such Thing as Anxiety to Give Meaning to Life – the Postmodern Condition in Light of Sarah Kane’s Work], in *Przestrzenie lęku. Lęk w kulturze i sztuce XIX–XX wieku*, 191.

from *Romantyczność* (from the volume *Ballads and Romances*); with Emilia he reflects on the patterns of male behaviour, primarily the attitude of patriotism; with Ewa he discusses God and the situation of the family. The ghost is old-fashioned; he does not understand modernity and is scorned by the prevailing customs. Ewa calls him a “pseudo mortician” (“pseudo umarłakiem”) and an “antecedent of fucking hypocrisy” (“antykwarem jebanej hipokryzji”) (Karpowicz, 36),<sup>25</sup> and he, in turn, sums up the whole situation: “Bóg źle mówiony, Ojczyzna nie lepsza, honor pochowany z przodkami” [God badly spoken, Homeland no better, honour buried with ancestors] (Karpowicz, 40), thereby appealing to the core values of past eras.

In the finale, we observe violent behaviour and the sexual act of the parents, which intensifies the horror of the world. In the stage directions we read that it is “human pandemonium” (“ludzkie pandemonium”) (Karpowicz, 40). The final line is spoken by Mother 2. Just after the sexual intercourse, she reads a fragment of a poem by Yurii Andrukhovych *Ukraina to kraina baroku?* [Ukraine is a land of baroque?] from a newspaper:

Wszystko na świecie tym można z ruiny  
Podnieść, rzecz jasna, oprócz krwi rozlanej.  
Napisz mi, czy żywi wszyscy, czy zdrowi,  
Czy anioły latają nad Dunajem,  
Czy krwi wystarcza, czy pada we Lwowie. (Karpowicz, 41)

[From ruin everything in this world can be  
Raised, of course, in addition to the blood spilt.  
Write to me if all are alive healthy,  
Do angels fly over the Danube,  
Is there enough blood or is it raining in Lviv.]

In the context of the drama that has just ended, this quotation sounds foreign. This is because it reminds us of the values that either do not exist or have been effectively marginalised in the world depicted. It draws attention to the existence of world other than that just shown. Equally foreign-sounding are the fragments of Romantic works, which we involuntarily compare with the statements of the characters. We also reflect on the image of love, the human condition, based on the behaviour of teenage girls and their families, but also on the structure of the world, in both eras. The Ghost parodies the incantation uttered by the Chorus in Part II of *Dziady* (*Forefathers' Eve*), preserving the metre and fragments of the original (“wszędzie”, “to będzie” [everywhere; it will be]), but at the same time introduces a number of se-

<sup>25</sup> Ignacy Karpowicz, *Rozmowy mijane* [Passing Conversations], [https://strefykontaktu.pl/files/docs/karpowicz\\_rozmowy\\_mijane.pdf](https://strefykontaktu.pl/files/docs/karpowicz_rozmowy_mijane.pdf), accessed May 26, 2023. The page numbers of the file posted on the contest page are in parentheses.

mantic oppositions: brightness contrasted with darkness, silence replaced with nakedness (although the words are united by the principle of alliteration):

Póki jasno, goło wszędzie,  
 Uciekajmy, cóż to będzie!  
 Bezceństwa i sprośności,  
 Na podołku niewinności.  
 (Karpowicz, 35–36)

[As long as it's bright, bare everywhere,  
 Let's run away, what will it be!  
 Desecration and bawdiness,  
 On the underbelly of innocence.]

This quotation, which refers to a ritual almost fundamental to Polish culture, explains the presence of the Priest in the world depicted in a rather perverse way. It is a false successor to the Guślarz or some celebrant who would help the Spirit return to the afterlife, or perhaps Gustaw-Konrad's interlocutor. In the absence of such a progenitor, the Ghost also appears in Scene 4, although he is not mentioned in the opening stage directions. Perhaps we can only hear a voice-over. Is it, then, an abandoned Spirit? Trapped in reality? This confusion of the worlds and spheres (real and surreal), the lack of clearly defined boundaries and conventions, including the behaviour of the ghosts, contribute to the grotesqueness of the world. Romanticism here is not only an object of parody, but probably also a dream of some kind of design/construction explaining the world and man.

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The contemporary plays selected for this analysis differ in the way they create the world they depict, the form of their message, the way they construct and objectify fear, but also in the game they undertake with Romanticism, an era of particular importance in Polish culture. Thus, the works feature characters of unclear ontological status, ghosts, phantoms and wraiths (*Dziennik szaleńcy i chciwości; Rozmowy mijane*) [Diary of Frenzy and Greed; Passing Conversations], which draw attention to the uncanny and those that elude human reason, quotations and allusions, as well as loners, (over)sensitive, queer people who do not understand the existing world. The Romantic context does not always exist in these works directly through a recognisable title or literary hero. Sometimes, the intertextual relationship begins as a result of the choice of an appropriately framed theme, a model of the depicted world, stage situations or the construction of the protagonist – lonely, unhappy, looking for love and the purpose of life. The similarity of the situa-

tion then allows the audience to add a Romantic context to the plays. At other times, the work refers to a situation familiar from the drama and theatre of Polish Romanticism, the ritual of forefathers, when the ancestors of the protagonists are evoked (or appear independently), the dead who once inhabited the spaces presented, and fictional characters, but ones that have been present in the communal imaginarium for centuries.

The works encourage one to reflect on the condition of modern times. Current issues: the privatisation of tenements in Warsaw (*Dziennik ształu i chciwości*), the COVID-19 pandemic (*Uwolnienie*), Russia's aggression against Ukraine (*Uwolnienie; Rozmowy mijane*), and they create universal themes: the condition of the family, the meaning of love (*Dziennik ształu i chciwości; Rozmowy mijane*), the impact of the dead on the lives of the characters (*Dziennik ształu i chciwości; Rozmowy mijane*).

The characters' fears are revealed through typical techniques: a scary locked room (*Dziennik ształu i chciwości*), the characters' confinement to some space (*Uwolnienie*), their escape from the world and people (*Dziennik ształu i chciwości*), and their experience of emptiness (*Uwolnienie*). These plays encourage reflection on the causes of anxiety situations, record the behaviour and mental state of the characters and show the destructive power of anxiety in interpersonal relationships.

The characters of the plays in question are lonely and isolated, as if parcelled out in particular spaces, and often defenceless against ghosts, appearing very often in a group – as choruses, which perhaps alludes, among other things, to the history of the drama, and perhaps also to the cathartic power of the theatrical performance. Such an arrangement: the individual against the group, however, intensifies loneliness, and perhaps even reveals the randomness of the existence of the hero equipped with Romantic qualities. Momentary empathy, some quasi-ritual, only appears in these dramas on one occasion when a game is watched together (with alcohol and in front of the TV; *Dziennik ształu i chciwości*, or in the case of a nightly libation (*Rozmowy mijane*) or a shared experience of the uncanny (*Uwolnienie*). The contemporary anxieties, the way the characters are shown and constructed, and the world depicted encourage us to enquire as to the condition of modernity, and, furthermore, in juxtaposition to Romanticism.

The analyses that have been carried out do not allow us to put forward theses either on the contemporary use of the Romantic legacy, or on the construction of a new paradigm, i.e. a model that represents the quintessence of Romanticism for contemporaries. We do not find here a criticism of the era, even in Karpovich's case, but rather a search for ways to depict an insecure and fearful human being in contact with the Other. Familiar motifs and even parodied fragments of works (sometimes it is a memorised passage that, de-

spite processing, does not allow us to forget its origin),<sup>26</sup> paradoxically reinforce the conviction that it is possible to understand the situation presented, already familiar, after all, to users of a given literary solution, as well as researchers and their interpretations. For this reason, perhaps, they somewhat weaken the reality of the extreme situation (death, the dissolution of values) experienced by the characters.

*Translated by Anna Wylężałek and David Lilley*

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<sup>26</sup> Bagłajewski, *Obecność romantyzmu*, 16.

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## **Lęki współczesne. Sztuki nagrodzone w 2023 roku w konkursie dramaturgicznym „Strefy kontaktu” wobec tradycji romantyzmu**

**Abstrakt:** W artykule przedstawiono analizę trzech sztuk nagrodzonych w 2023 roku w konkursie dramaturgicznym „Strefy kontaktu” zorganizowanym przez Wrocławski Teatr Współczesny im. Marii i Edmunda Wiercińskich we Wrocławiu oraz Miasto Wrocław. Były to: *Rozmowy mijane* Ignacego Karpowicza (nagroda główna), *Uwolnienie* Zenona Fajfera oraz *Dziennik szatu i chciwości* Małgorzaty Sikorskiej-Miszczuk (dwa z czterech równorzędnych wyróżnień).

Utwory różnią się sposobem kreowania świata przedstawionego, formą przekazu, sposobem konstruowania i obiektywizacji lęku, ale również grą prowadzoną z tradycją romantyzmu, epoką o szczególnym znaczeniu w polskiej kulturze i przypominaną na wiele sposobów w 2022 roku, który został ustanowiony przez Sejm RP Rokiem Romantyzmu Polskiego.

W utworach pojawiają się więc postacie o niejasnym statusie ontologicznym, duchy, zjawy i upiory (*Dziennik szatu i chciwości*, *Rozmowy mijane*), zwracające uwagę na to, co niesamowite i wymykające się ludzkiemu rozumowi, cytaty dzieł romantycznych i rozmaite aluzje. Kontekst romantyczny nie zawsze jest zapisany w utworze. Stanowi on wówczas swego rodzaju pamięć genologiczną dramatu, rezerwuar określonych tematów, sposobów ich wyrażania, określony model świata przedstawionego, tworzenia sytuacji scenicznych czy konstruowania bohatera – samotnego, nieszczęśliwego, poszukującego miłości i celu życia.

Lęki bohaterów są ujawniane za pomocą typowych technik: zamknięty straszny pokój (*Dziennik szatu i chciwości*), zamknięcie bohaterów w jakiejś przestrzeni (*Uwolnienie*), ich ucieczka przed światem i ludźmi (*Dziennik szatu i chciwości*), doświadczanie pustki (*Uwolnienie*), poszukiwanie celu życia i chęć dookreślenia siebie (*Rozmowy mijane*). Sposób pokazania i skonstruowania postaci oraz świat przedstawiony zachęcają, by zadać pytanie o kondycję współczesności, również w zestawieniu z romantyzmem.

**Słowa kluczowe:** polski dramat współczesny, dziedzictwo romantyczne, lęki i obawy w sztukach teatralnych, konkurs dramaturgiczny „Strefy kontaktu”.

## **Zeitgenössische Ängste. Im Dramawettbewerb "Contact Zones" 2023 ausgezeichnete Stücke in Spannungsfeld der romantischen Tradition**

**Abstract:** Im Beitrag werden drei 2023 im Dramawettbewerb *Kontaktzonen*, der vom Wrocławski Teatr Współczesny namens Maria und Edmund Wierciński und der Stadt Wrocław veranstaltet wurde, ausgezeichnete Theaterstücke: Ignacy Karpowicz's *Rozmowy mijane* [Vo-

rübergehende Gespräche] (Hauptpreis), Zenon Fajfers *Uwolnienie* [Loslassen] und Małgorzata Sikorska-Miszczuks *Dziennik szatu i chciwości* [Tagebuch der Raserei und Gier] (zwei der vier gleichwertigen Auszeichnungen) analysiert.

Die Werke unterscheiden sich in der Art und Weise, wie sie die dargestellte Welt erschaffen, in der Form ihrer Botschaft, in der Konstruktion und Objektivisierung der Angst und auch in dem Spiel, das sie mit der Tradition der Romantik treiben, einer Epoche, die in der polnischen Kultur von besonderer Bedeutung ist und an die im Jahr 2022, das vom Sejm der Republik Polen zum Jahr der polnischen Romantik erklärt wurde, auf vielfältige Weise erinnert wird.

So finden sich in den Werken Figuren mit unklarem ontologischem Status, Geister, Phantome und Gespenster (*Dziennik szatu i chciwości*, *Rozmowy mijane*) fokussieren auf das Unheimliche und darauf, was sich der menschlichen Vernunft entzieht, und auch Zitate aus romantischen Werken und verschiedene Anspielungen darauf. Der romantische Kontext ist nicht immer direkt in das Werk eingeschrieben. Manchmal geschieht es durch eine intertextuelle Beziehung (Thema, Modells der dargestellten Welt, Bühnensituation oder der Konstruktion des einsamen, unglücklichen, auf der Suche nach Liebe und dem Sinn des Lebens bleibenden Protagonisten). Andersmal bezieht sich das Stück auf eine Situation, die aus dem Drama und dem Theater der polnischen Romantik bekannt ist, auf das Ritual der Großeltern, wenn die Vorfahren der Helden beschworen werden (oder unabhängig davon erscheinen), auf die Toten, die einst die gezeigten Räume bewohnten, und auf fiktive Figuren, die jedoch seit Jahrhunderten im kollektiven Imaginarium präsent sind.

Die Ängste der Protagonisten werden durch typische Techniken offenbart: einen verschlossenen, unheimlichen Raum (*Dziennik szatu i chciwości*), das Eingesperrtsein der Figuren in einem bestimmten Raum (*Uwolnienie*), ihre Flucht vor der Welt und den Menschen (*Dziennik szatu i chciwości*), das Erleben von Leere (*Uwolnienie*), die Suche nach einem Lebenssinn und der Wunsch, sich selbst zu definieren (*Rozmowy mijane*). Die Tatsache, wie die Figuren gezeigt und konstruiert werden, sowie die dargestellte Welt regen dazu an, Fragen über den Zustand der Moderne zu stellen, auch in Gegenüberstellung mit der Romantik.

**Schlüsselwörter:** polnisches modernes Drama, das Erbe der Romantik, Ängste und Befürchtungen in Theaterstücken, Dramawettbewerb *Kontaktzonen*.



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## Is the Russian *Luna* the Same as Polish *Księżyc*? Sense and Nonsense in Translation and Reception of Grammatical Gender

**Abstract:** The purpose of this article is to investigate the importance of grammatical gender in conveying meaning and what difficulties this grammatical category can cause for translators. For the purpose of the study, a fairy tale was created in Russian, the axis of which is grammatical gender, which affects the meaning of the text. Interestingly, all nouns of a given gender in the original correspond in the translation to equivalents that are relevant to the story but are of a different gender. The change of gender modifies the message of the fairy tale, and inconsistency in its use disrupts the meaning of the story. In order to see what consequences the decisions made by the translators have on the reader's reception, three translations produced by students of Russian Studies were subjected to audience evaluation. As a result of this experiment, it was found that grammatical gender determines the physical and psychological characteristics of the characters and their behaviour, contributes to the creation of the world depicted, affects the reception of the text, and is thus a category that cannot be used unreflectively.

**Keywords:** grammatical gender in translation, translation for children, gender in translation, Polish, Russian.

### Introduction

It would seem that difficulties with the correct use of grammatical gender, especially cases of inconsistency in this regard, apply only to foreign lan-

guage acquisition. However, it is interesting whether it can be an obstacle in the process of translation. As Jolanta Lubocha-Kruglik rightly states, the beginning of the translator's problems can begin within the confines of their own language. In order to be translated, some language games, where non-obvious connotations arising from gender associations play a role, must be correctly understood in the original.<sup>1</sup> But can grammatical gender turn out to be a problem serious enough to decisively affect the quality of translation? The dissimilarity of grammatical systems can be, as Lubocha-Kruglik points out, a challenge for the translator. If – to use familiar examples – death is a masculine noun in German – *der Tod* – how is one to translate the title of the song “Death is a woman”?<sup>2</sup> And if in the title of a volume of poems by Boris Pasternak, the feminine noun *жизнь/zhizn'* ('life') becomes a sister (*Сестра моя – жизнь/Sestra moja – zhizn'*) (My sister, life),<sup>3</sup> should sister remain in the Polish translation as well? The problem here is that in Russian 'life' can easily be personified as a sister because in Russian both nouns are feminine, while in Polish *życie* ('life') is neuter.<sup>4</sup> Thus, in Polish the neuter

<sup>1</sup> Cf. Jolanta Lubocha-Kruglik “Co nam przeszkadza w tłumaczeniu, czyli jeszcze o barierach w przekładzie” [What Hinders Us in Translation: More on Barriers to Translation], in *Prze-strzenie przekładu* [Spaces of Translation], eds. Jolanta Lubocha-Kruglik, and Oksana Małyśa (Katowice: Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Śląskiego, 2016), 16–18.

<sup>2</sup> A song by the band Bracia.

<sup>3</sup> 1917 edition.

<sup>4</sup> The genre systems of Polish and East Slavic languages have become the subject of numerous analyses. See, for example, Alla Kravchuk, “Gramatyczna kategoria rodzaju w języku polskim i ukraińskim: paralele i kontrasty a glottodydaktyka” [The Grammatical Category of Gender in Polish and Ukrainian: Parallels and Contrasts and Glottodidactics], *Rozprawy Komisji Językowej Łódzkiego Towarzystwa Naukowego* [Proceedings of the Language Commission of the Łódź Scientific Society], vol. LVIII (2012): 151–167; Marian Jurkowski, “Rodzaj gramatyczny rzeczowników obcego pochodzenia w języku polskim i ukraińskim” [Grammatical Type of Nouns of Foreign Origin in Polish and Ukrainian], *Prace Filologiczne*, vol. XLII (1997): 81–90; Edyta Pałuszyńska, “Kategoria rodzaju gramatycznego w systemie językowym, dyskursie i glottodydaktyce” [The Category of Grammatical Genus in the Linguistic System, Discourse and Glottodidactics], *Acta Universitatis Lodziensis. Kształcenie Polonistyczne Cudzoziemców*, vol. 26, eds. Grażyna Zarzycka, Beata Grochala, and Iwona Dembowska-Wosik (2019): 413–423, <https://doi.org/10.18778/0860-6587.26.28>; Alina Kępińska, *Kształtowanie się polskiej kategorii męsko-niemęskoosobowości* [Shaping of the Polish Category of Masculine and Non-masculine Personhood] (Warszawa: Wydział Polonistyki Uniwersytetu Warszawskiego, 2006); Hanna Komorowska, *Metodyka nauczania języków obcych* [Methodology of Teaching Foreign Languages] (Warszawa: Fraszka Edukacyjna, 2005). On the generic equivalence and non-equivalence between Polish and Russian in model terms, see Tatiana Kwiatkowska, “Gramatyczna kategoria rodzaju dla zapożyczeń w języku polskim: paralele i różnice” [The Grammatical Category of Genus for Loanwords in Polish: Parallels and Differences], *Acta Polono-Ruthenica* 19 (2014): 217–229.

gender *życie* does not evoke any associations with either a sister or a brother.<sup>5</sup> It is worth adding that in Czech, on the other hand, it is a masculine noun – *život*.

We should restate a following question, originally posed by Tatiana Kwiatkowska; do we associate genus only with formal criteria of particular categories or extralinguistic reality in general?<sup>6</sup> The problem assumes particular importance in the case of fables, fairy tales, many children's poems and fantasy works, in which objects, plants, animals and other elements of nature, abstract concepts or celestial bodies are subjected to vivification and anthropomorphisation, and consequently given masculine or feminine gender and gendered characteristics attributed to genders. Given the widespread differing understandings of masculinity and femininity, gender changes in translation can significantly impact the content and tone of such texts.

The purpose of this article is to explore the following questions:

- What difficulties does the translator encounter in translating a Russian text into Polish that differs significantly in terms of gender in the original language and the target language?

<sup>5</sup> Both Polish and Russian are languages in which the category of grammatical gender plays an important role. It is assigned to every noun, and is reflected in adjectives, pronouns and the past forms of verbs. See Anna Dąbrowska, Urszula Dobosz, and Małgorzata Pasięka, *Co warto wiedzieć. Poradnik metodyczny dla nauczycieli języka polskiego jako obcego na Wschodzie* [What You Need to Know. A Methodical Guide for Teachers of Polish as a Foreign Language in the East] (Warszawa: Ośrodek Rozwoju Edukacji, 2010); Wiesław T. Stefańczyk, *Kategoria rodzaju i przypadku polskiego rzeczownika. Próba synchronicznej analizy morfologicznej* [The Category of Genus and Case of a Polish Noun. An Attempt at Synchronic Morphological Analysis] (Kraków: Wydawnictwo UJ, 2007); Zofia Zaron, *Aspekty funkcjonalne polskiej kategorii rodzaju. Charakterystyka fleksyjna* [Functional Aspects of the Polish Genus Category. Flexion Characteristics] (Warszawa–Puńsk: Wydawnictwo “Auśra”, 2004). Undoubtedly, an important difference between Polish and Russian is also the functioning of plural forms, which is more complex in Polish. This division is a traditional view. About more recent classifications, in which, for example, the basis of the division is the dependent cases of the complement and the accusative. In Russian, the gender of plural nouns – except for the genderless *pluralia tantum* – is determined according to their gender in the singular. See Anna Seretny, and Wiesław T. Stefańczyk, “Współczesne ujęcia kategorii rodzaju gramatycznego w polszczyźnie a praktyka (glotto)dydaktyczna – wprowadzenie” [Contemporary Approaches to the Category of Grammatical Genus in Polish and (Glotto)didactic Practice – an Introduction], *Postscriptum Polonistyczne* 1 (19) (2017): 72–85; Wiesław T. Stefańczyk, “Rodzaj gramatyczny w polszczyźnie i w językach wschodniosłowiańskich. Rozważania na marginesie biernika” [Grammatical Genus in Polish and East Slavic Languages. Considerations on the Margin of the Passive], *Acta Universitatis Lodzianensis. Kształcenie Polonistyczne Cudzoziemców* 28 (2021): 105–116.

<sup>6</sup> Kwiatkowska, “Gramatyczna kategoria rodzaju dla zapożyczeń w języku polskim: paralele i różnice,” 217.

- How do the translator's decisions affect the meaning of the texts?
- What consequences do the translation decisions made have on the reader's reception and evaluation of the translation quality?

The fable created for the purpose of this article will serve as the research material.

## Discussion of the Fable, Translation Versions and Survey Results

A survey was conducted to find out participants' opinions regarding three Polish translations of a fable about the Moon originally written in Russian<sup>7</sup> (Version 1, Version 2, Version 3), produced by male and female students of Russian Studies. As Wiesław T. Stefańczyk argues, “[m]imo bliskości genetycznej i typologicznej istnieje wiele zasadniczych różnic między polszczyzną a językami wschodniosłowiańskimi” [in spite of typological and genological proximity, Polish language and East Slavic languages exhibit numerous differences].<sup>8</sup>

The original fable I invented about the Moon is a text whose characters are of feminine gender, chosen not by chance and which perform a key function in the story. The Moon is a noun of this very gender in Russian, while the corresponding Polish word is masculine (*Луна* / *luna* and *księżyc*). Below the original Russian text is given, followed, for the benefit of readers who do not know Russian, by a relatively literal translation into English. In this translation the gender of all the relevant nouns, as well as adjectives and past-tense verb forms that agree with them, are given in brackets.

Here is the fairy tale:

### Сказка о Луне

Давным-давно, в вышине небесной, жила **Луна**. **Она вращалась** вокруг Земли, светя ночным светом и наблюдая за всем, что происходило на планете. Но с течением времени Луне стало скучно. Она устала быть одинокой в своем небесном королевстве.

Однажды Луна **решила**, что пора что-то менять. Тогда **она надела красивое**, голубое платье. Потом **приготовила** своё волшебное волокно и **начала** наносить на лицо макияж. **Покрасила** свои длинные ресницы и полные губы.

<sup>7</sup> There were four translations in the experiment, one of which was produced by an artificial intelligence. I have omitted issues related to its quality vis-à-vis those produced by humans due to the space constraints of this article.

<sup>8</sup> Wiesław T. Stefańczyk, “Rodzaj gramatyczny w polszczyźnie i w językach wschodniosłowiańskich. Rozważania na marginesie biernika,” 112.

**Ведь она была женщиной!** Когда Луна закончила, заглянула в зеркало и улыбнулась. Теперь её лицо было настоящим произведением искусства.

Луна решила спуститься на Землю и найти себе подруг. Медленно она опустилась с небесных высот и приземлилась на берег моря. Первыми, кто заметил её приход, были изящная треска, ловкая сельдь и зубастая акула. Луна рассказала им о своей жизни на небесах, о том, как ей не хватает настоящих подруг. Однако все подруги решили, что Луне было бы трудно жить в море. Тогда на пляже появилась морская черепаха, которая предложила Луне свою дружбу. Вскоре к этой веселой группе присоединились белая крыса и райская птица, которая даже начала танцевать под светом Луны. К игре присоединились также рыбки, плескаясь и кружась в воде, словно подружки на свадьбе. В группу веселых девочек хотел присоединиться даже дождевой червячок. Подруги сказали, что хотя он и не девочка, он может проводить время вместе с ними.

Так Луна нашла не только друзей, но и узнала, что её свет способен разнообразить и веселить жизнь на Земле. С тех пор каждую ночь она спускается, чтобы встречаться со своими подругами и подарить им свой волшебный свет.

#### Tale about the Moon (*fem.*)

Once upon a time, in the highest heavens there lived the **Moon** (*fem.*). She revolved (*fem.*) around the Earth, shining her nocturnal light and watching what happened on the planet. But as time went by the Moon grew tired and bored of being alone in her celestial kingdom.

One day the Moon **decided** (*fem.*) that it was time to change something. So she **put on** (*fem.*) a beautiful blue dress. Then she **prepared** (*fem.*) her magical fibre and **began** (*fem.*) to put make-up on her face. She **painted** (*fem.*) her long eyelashes and full lips. After all, she **was** (*fem.*) a **woman!** When the **Moon** (*fem.*) **had finished** (*fem.*), she **looked** (*fem.*) in the mirror and **smiled** (*fem.*). Now her face was a real work of art.

The Moon (*fem.*) **decided** (*fem.*) to descend to Earth and find herself some (female) **friends**. She slowly **descended** (*fem.*) from the heavenly heights and **landed** (*fem.*) on the seashore. The first to notice her arrival were a **graceful** (*fem.*) **cod** (*fem.*), an **agile** (*fem.*) **herring** (*fem.*) and a **toothy** (*fem.*) **shark** (*fem.*). The Moon (*fem.*) **told** (*fem.*) them about her life in the heavens and about how she did not have enough (female) **friends**. However, all her (female) **friends** decided that it would be difficult for the Moon (*fem.*) to live in the sea. Then a **turtle** (*fem.*) appeared (*fem.*) on the beach, who **offered** (*fem.*) the Moon her friendship. Soon a **white** (*fem.*) **rat** (*fem.*) joined this merry group, and then a **bird of paradise** (*fem.*), who even **started** (*fem.*) to dance by the light of the Moon (*fem.*). Some little fish also joined the dancing, splashing and swirling in the water, like bridesmaids at a wedding. An **earthworm** (*mas.*) even **wanted** (*mas.*) to join the group of merry girls. The (female) friends said that even though **he** was (*mas.*) not a girl, **he** could spend the time together with them.

So the **Moon** (*fem.*) found not only **friends**, but she also **realised** (*fem.*) that her light was capable of diversifying and brightening up life on Earth. Since then she has come down every night to meet her (female) friends and give them her magic light.

Bored with her lonely life in the heavenly skies, the heroine descends to Earth to find friends. Before doing so, she puts on beautiful make-up and a blue dress. These actions appear in the text to emphasise the typical behaviour of the Moon's gender. The search for friends takes place among creatures representing the same gender as the main character. Thus, various fish appear (a cod, a herring, a shark), several land animals (a sea turtle, a white mouse, a bird of paradise), all feminine in Russian. A worm (*дождевой червячок/dozhdyevoy chervyachok*) wants to join the group of playful women, who, despite his different gender, meets with the favour of the female friends and is invited to play together. The tale was structured in such a way that it contains (with the exception of one) female characters whose grammatical gender is also feminine, whereas their Polish equivalents are of masculine gender, to see how male and female Polish students of Russian studies would cope with its translation.

As can be seen from the above synopsis of the fable, it is a short story about loneliness, the search for friendship, and how important friendship is for everyone, regardless of their place in the world, and that with mutual kindness, tolerance and understanding, very different people can become friends.

A group of 19 male and female students<sup>9</sup> were given the task of translating a fairy tale. From the translations obtained, I selected three, which I submitted to 31 other students.<sup>10</sup> The young male and female translators were asked to evaluate the quality of their translations of the fable by pointing out the advantages and disadvantages of each version with a clear instruction to focus on the characters appearing in the fable. This was not only a prompt for male and female participants in the study, but also an indication not to focus on other areas that could be evaluated. The male and female students were further asked to rank the versions from the one they liked the most to the one they liked the least, and give reasons for their choice. Each text represented a different idea regarding the fable's message.

In the following section of the study, I will present the three selected translations, which differ significantly from each other, and discuss the ways in which they were translated and the ratings indicated in the opinions. In each case, the Polish translation is given, followed by an English translation including indications of the genders of the relevant nouns in Polish, as well

<sup>9</sup> I discuss the problems associated with this task in another article. The students represented the Maria Curie-Skłodowska University in Lublin, the University of the National Education Commission in Kraków, and the University of Lodz (I would like to express my gratitude to Dr Marcin Dziwisz and Prof. Anna Bednarczyk for their help).

<sup>10</sup> Students at the University of Silesia in Katowice; I would like to express my gratitude to Prof. Oksana Małysa for her help in conducting the survey.

as the adjectives and verbs that agree with them. Note that in the first version, while *Księżyc* ('moon') is masculine, the translator personifies it as feminine.

### Version 1

Dawno, dawno temu, na niebie, **żył Księżyc**. **Krażyła** wokół Ziemi, świecąc nocnym światłem i obserwując wszystko, co działo się na planecie. Ale z biegiem czasu **Księżycowi** się to znudziło. **Zmęczyła** się samotnością w swoim niebiańskim królestwie.

Pewnego dnia **Księżyc zdecydowała**, że pora coś zmienić. **Założyła** piękną, niebieską sukienkę. Następnie **przygotowała** swoje magiczne włókno i **zaczęła** nakładać na twarz makijaż. **Pomalowała** swoje długie rzęsy i pełne usta. W końcu **była kobietą!** Kiedy **Księżyc skończył**, **spojrzała** w lustro i **uśmiechnęła się**. teraz jej twarz była prawdziwym dziełem sztuki.

**Księżyc postanowiła** zejść na ziemię i znaleźć **przyjaciółki**. Powoli **opadła** z niebiańskich wysokości i **wylądowała** na brzegu morza. Pierwszym, kto zauważył jej przybycie, był **pełen wdzięku dorsz**, **zwinny śledź** i **zębaty rekin**. **Księżyc opowiedziała** im o swoim życiu na niebie, o tym, jak brakuje jej prawdziwych przyjaciół. Jednak wszyscy przyjaciele uznali, że **Księżyc nie będzie mogła** żyć w morzu. Wtedy na plaży pojawił się **żółw morski** i **zaferował Księżycowi** swoją przyjaźń. Wkrótce do tej radosnej grupy dołączył **biały szczur** i **rajski ptak**, który nawet **zaczął** tańczyć w świetle Księżycy. Ryby również włączyły się do zabawy, pluskając się i wirując w wodzie jak druhny na weselu. Nawet **dżdżownica chciała** dołączyć do **grona wesołych dziewczyn**. Znajomi powiedzieli, że chociaż **nie jest dziewczynką**, to może spędzić z nimi czas.

W ten sposób **Księżyc** nie tylko **znalazła** przyjaciół, ale także **dowiedziała się**, że jej światło może urozmaicać i bawić życie na Ziemi. Od tego czasu co wieczór przychodzi spotkać się z przyjaciółmi, by dać im swoje magiczne światło.

[Once upon a time, long ago, in the sky, **lived** (*mas.*) the **Moon** (*mas.*). **She orbited** (*fem.*) the Earth, shining her nocturnal light and observing everything that was happening on the planet. But as time passed, the **Moon** (*mas.*) got bored with this. **She grew tired** (*fem.*) of being alone in her celestial kingdom.

One day the **Moon** (*mas.*) **decided** (*fem.*) it was time to change something. **She put on** (*fem.*) a beautiful blue dress. Then **she prepared** (*fem.*) her magic fibre and **began** (*fem.*) applying makeup to her face. **She painted** (*fem.*) her long eyelashes and full lips. After all, **she was** (*fem.*) **a woman!** When the **Moon** (*mas.*) **finished** (*mas.*), **she looked** (*fem.*) in the mirror and **smiled** (*fem.*). Now **her** face was a real work of art.

**The Moon** (*mas.*) **decided** (*fem.*) to come down to earth and find some (female) **friends** (*non-mas. pers. pl.*). **She** slowly **descended** (*fem.*) from the heavenly heights and **landed** (*fem.*) on the seashore. The first to notice her arrival were a **graceful** (*mas.*) **cod** (*mas.*), an **agile** (*mas.*) **herring** (*mas.*) and a **toothy** (*mas.*) **shark** (*mas.*). The **Moon** (*mas.*) **told** (*fem.*) them about her life in the sky, and how she lacked **real friends** (*mas. pers. pl.*). However, **all** (*mas. pers. pl.*) the **friends** (*mas. pers. pl.*) **decided** (*mas. pers. pl.*) that the **Moon** (*mas.*) **would** (*fem.*) **not be able** to live in the sea. Then a **turtle** (*mas.*) **appeared** (*mas.*) on the beach and **offered** (*mas.*) the **Moon** (*mas.*) his friendship. Soon the happy group was joined by a **white** (*mas.*) **rat** (*mas.*) and a **bird of paradise** (*mas.*), which even **began** (*mas.*) to dance in the moon-

light. Some fish also joined in the fun, splashing and twirling in the water like bridesmaids at a wedding. Even an **earthworm** (*fem.*) **wanted** (*fem.*) **to** join the **merry girls** (*non-mas. pers. pl.*). Her friends said that although it **was not a girl**, it could spend time with them.<sup>11</sup>

In this way the **Moon** (*mas.*) not only **found** (*fem.*) some friends, but also **learnt** (*fem.*) that her light could make life on Earth more interesting and entertaining. Since then, she has come to meet her friends every evening to give them her magical light.]

In an earlier paragraph, I used the phrase “a different idea regarding the fable’s message”. An idea seems to be sadly lacking in this translation. Rather, the author’s choices are governed by chance, and the fairy tale completely fails to convey the idea of the original. The lack of consistency in grammatical type puts readers in a rather uncomfortable situation at the beginning of the text – the ambiguity regarding who the hero/heroine of the fairy tale is: the *moon* (*mas.*) *lived* (*fem.*), orbiting the *Earth* (*fem.*). It quickly turns out that it is a woman, although after putting on a dress the *Moon finished* (*mas.*) and – unexpectedly – *looked* (*fem.*) *in the mirror*. The female friends she looks for – and not, crucially, *przyjaciele* (‘friends’: this masculine personal plural form is also used for a group of mixed gender) – are, as it turns out, a graceful codfish, an agile herring and a toothy shark, all of which are of masculine gender in Polish and, as such, have little in common with female characters, as do the masculine nouns turtle, white rat and bird of paradise. In this heterogeneous world, *even an earthworm* (*fem.*) suddenly appears, who *wanted* (*fem.*) *to join the ranks of cheerful girls*. However, the text does not mention such a group, and it is unclear why, in relation to the female protagonist, the word *nawet* (‘even’) is used.

The fairy tale was referred to by the participants and participants of the study. Among the advantages of this translation were noted:

- it preserved elements of the plot,
- simple language,
- it renders the mood of the fable.

Male and female respondents listed many more disadvantages of this unsuccessful translation:

- confusion of the reader by inconsistent use of gender,
- absurd, illogical introduction of the earthworm,
- illegibility, incomprehensibility,
- inconsistency,
- excessive literalism,
- incorrect Polish,
- the feminine gender of the heroine conflicts with the content of the work,

<sup>11</sup> Because of the pro-drop nature of Polish and the grammar of indirect speech, in the Polish text the gender of the earthworm is not marked in this sentence.

- chaos,
- referring to the moon as a woman.

Comments about the lack of logic and consistency appeared in no fewer than 25 surveys. Violation of grammatical consistency was therefore considered the biggest flaw in the text. Male and female students emphasised the lack of logic, some in rather harsh terms. The violation of grammatical rules affected the transmission of meaning. The fable is not about a girl looking for female friends, and the image of carefree women splashing in the water and playing on the beach, who include one male friend in their fun, is not what is presented to the reader. Despite the preservation of the sequence of sentences that constitute the original text, this translation gives the impression of chaos and ambiguity.

### Version 2

Dawno, dawno temu, w obłokach **żył Księżyc**. Krążąc wokół ziemi **świecił** swoim nocnym blaskiem, z zaciekawieniem obserwując wydarzenia na planecie. Jednak po pewnym czasie zaczęło mu się nudzić. **Miał** dość samotności na swoim niebieskim królestwie.

Pewnego razu **postanowił** to zmienić. **Ubrał** na siebie<sup>12</sup> elegancki, niebieski płaszcz, a następnie **przygotował** magiczną piankę i **postanowił** się ogolić. **Jego** twarz była teraz gładka i przystojnie wyglądająca. W końcu **poczuł się jak mężczyzna!** Na koniec **spojrzał** w lustro i szczerze się **uśmiechnął** do **samego** siebie. **Jego** twarz przedstawiała istne dzieło sztuki!

**Księżyc postanowił** zejść na Ziemię i znaleźć **przyjaciół**. Powoli **opuścił się** z niebios, trafiając na brzeg morza. Pierwszymi, którzy zauważyli jego przybycie, byli **pełen elegancji dorsz, przebiegły śledź i zębaty rekin**. **Księżyc opowiedział** im o swoim życiu w niebie i o tym, jak brakuje mu prawdziwych **przyjaciół**. Wszyscy jednak doszli do wniosku, że ciężko **mu** będzie żyć w morzu. Wtedy na plaży **pojawił się żółw morski** i zaoferował mu swoją przyjaźń. Wkrótce do tej wesołej grupy **dołączył biały szczur i rajski ptak, którzy zaczęli** nawet tańczyć w świetle księżycy. Ryby również dołączyły do zabawy, pluskając się i wirując. **Bawili się** jak na weselu! Nawet **dżdżownica chciała** dołączyć do wesołej grupy. Nie mieli nic przeciwko wspólnej zabawie, nie zważając na to, że **dżdżownica jest dziewczyną**.

Tak właśnie **Księżyc odnalazł** nie tylko **przyjaciół**, ale **zdołał** rozbawić i urozmaicić życie na Ziemi. Od tej pory, każdego wieczoru schodzi na Ziemię na spotkanie, aby podarować im swój magiczny blask.

[Once upon a time, in the clouds there **lived (mas.) the Moon (mas.)**. Circling the earth, **he shone** with his nocturnal glow, curiously observing events on the planet. However, after a while he became bored. **He was fed up** with the loneliness on his celestial kingdom.

Once, **he decided (mas.)** to change that. **He put** on an elegant blue coat, then **prepared (mas.)** a magic foam and **decided (mas.)** to shave. **His** face was now smooth and handsome looking. **He** finally felt like a **man!** Finally, **he looked (mas.)**

<sup>12</sup> *Ubrał na siebie* [put on himself] is incorrect Polish, but this error has not been corrected.

in the mirror and **smiled** (*mas.*) sincerely at **himself**. **His** face presented a veritable work of art!

**The Moon decided** (*mas.*) to descend to Earth and find **friends** (*mas. pers. pl.*). **He** slowly **descended** (*mas.*) from the heavens, ending up on the seashore. The first to notice his arrival were a **cod** (*mas.*), **full** (*mas.*) **of elegance**, a **cunning** (*mas.*) **herring** (*mas.*) and a **toothy** (*mas.*) **shark** (*mas.*). The **Moon** (*mas.*) **told** (*mas.*) them about his life in the heavens and how he lacked **true** (*mas. pers. pl.*) **friends** (*mas. pers. pl.*). However, they all came to the conclusion that it would be hard for **him** to live in the sea. Then a **turtle** (*mas.*) **appeared** (*mas.*) on the beach and offered him his friendship. Soon the merry group was joined by a **white** (*mas.*) **rat** (*mas.*) and **bird of paradise** (*mas.*), **who** (*mas.*) even **began** (*mas.*) dance in the moonlight. Some fish also joined in the fun, splashing and twirling. **They** (*mas. pers. pl.*) **were having fun** (*mas. pers. pl.*) like at a wedding! Even an **earthworm** (*fem.*) **wanted** (*fem.*) to join the merry group. They did not mind playing together, not minding that the **earthworm** (*fem.*) **was** (*mas.*) **a girl**.

This is how **the Moon** (*mas.*) not only **found** (*mas.*) **friends** (*mas. pers. pl.*), but **managed** (*mas.*) to amuse and diversify life on Earth. Since then, every evening he has come down to Earth for a meeting to give them his magical brilliance.]

By using the Polish equivalent (*księżyc*, which is masculine) of the Russian noun *луна* (*luna*), which means 'moon', the fable is transported into a world of male characters. The translator therefore adjusts the main character's behaviour to the Moon's gender. Thus, the Moon puts on not a blue dress, but a blue coat, does not put on make-up, but shaves his face and looks handsome. On Earth, he looks for friends and finds them. They are a cod full of elegance, a cunning herring, a toothy shark, a turtle, a white rat and a bird of paradise, i.e. the same characters whose gender in Version 1 of the fable was illogical, conflicting with the search for female friends. Here, however, their presence is justified and consistent with the meaning of the fable. Similarly, the fact that *even an earthworm*, which is feminine, wants to *join the merry group*, which is made up of boys, is apt and does not surprise readers. Consequently, a thoughtful change of the grammatical gender of heroine to hero was sufficient, and essentially similar solutions to those in Version 1 resulted in a completely different message.

And how did the survey participants comment on these solutions?

Advantages:

- swapping the hero's gender while preserving the sense of the fairy tale,
- the name of the hero is adapted to the gender,
- the introduction of an earthworm, the grammatical gender of which harmonises with the content of the fable,
- creativity of translation,
- consistency of the text,
- simple and accessible language,
- ingenuity of the translator.

Disadvantages:

- departure from the original, great interference with the plot,
- changing the sense of the original,<sup>13</sup>
- different gender of the main character,
- changed the character of the protagonist.

In the responses collected, the same feature of the fable appears once as a disadvantage and once as an advantage of the text (the gender of the protagonist), which indicates the divergence of evaluations and proves the subjectivity of individual perception. Male and female participants in the study emphasised both the stylistic features of the fable and the logic of the message. They appreciated the creativity and ingenuity of the translator. The remark about the “changed character of the protagonist” is important, because, despite the consistency in terms of gender of the translation in relation to the original, the consequence of such a choice and placing the narrative in a male-dominated world is the different shaping of perceptions about the characters. Here we have a man bored with life and seeking companionship, and only one woman among a group of men; compare this to how it would be if it were about a woman and her friends joyfully and carefreely having fun, with a single man joining them. What is striking in the world of this fable is the image of male figures merrily dancing, splashing and twirling, which in our heterosexual culture raises rather homosexual associations, quite different in the case of a group of women having fun. In other words, this new meaning was added to this translation, thus distorting the meaning of the original.

### Version 3

Dawno, dawno temu wysoko na niebie żyła planeta, zwana satelitą – był to **Księżyc** o imieniu **Luna**. **Obracała się ona** wokół Ziemi, świecąc nocnym światłem i obserwując wszystko to, co działo się na tej planecie. Lecz z biegiem czasu **Luna zaczęła** się nudzić. **Była** już **zmęczona** samotnością w swoim niebiańskim królestwie.

Pewnego razu **Luna zdecydowała**, że nadszedł czas na zmiany. Na początek **założyła piękną, niebieską suknię**. Potem **przygotowała** swoje magiczne włókno i **zaczęła nanosić makijaż** na twarz. **Pomalowała swoje długie rzęsy i pełne usta**. Przecież **była kobietą!** Kiedy **Luna skończyła**, **spojrzała** w lustro i się **uśmiechnęła**. Teraz jej twarz była prawdziwym dziełem sztuki.

**Luna zdecydowała** zejść na Ziemię i znaleźć sobie przyjaciółki. Powoli **spuszczała się** z przestrzeni nieba i końcu **wylądowała** na brzegu morza. Pierwszymi, kto zauważył jej przyjście, były: **elegancka makrela, zwinna flądra i zębata orka**. **Luna opowiadała** im o swoim życiu na niebie i o tym, jak jej brakuje prawdziwych **przyjaciółek**. Jednak wszystkie **przyjaciółki zdecydowały**, że **Lunie** byłoby trudno

<sup>13</sup> A pilot survey conducted before the study included the phrase: *I associate guys dancing together with gay men.*

mieszkać w morzu. I wtedy na plaży **pojawiła się morska żółwica**, która **zaoferowała Lunie** przyjaźń. Niedługo do tej wesołej grupy **dołączyła biała mysz i rajska ptaszyna, która zaczęła tańczyć w świetle Luny**. Do zabawy dołączyły również **rybki**, które **pluskały się i wirowały** w wodzie jak **przyjaciółki** na weselu. Do grupy **wesołych dziewczyn chciał** również dołączyć **deszczowy robaczek. Przyjaciółki powiedziały**, że mimo że **nie jest dziewczynką**, to i tak może spędzać czas na razem z nimi.

W taki sposób **Luna** nie tylko **znalazła przyjaciółki**, ale również **dowiedziała się**, że *jej* światło jest w stanie urozmaicić i przy tym rozweselić życie na Ziemi. Od tego czasu co noc schodzi na Ziemię, żeby spotkać się ze swoimi **przyjaciółkami** i podarować im swój magiczny blask.

[Once upon a time, high in the sky, there lived a planet called a satellite – it was a **moon** (*mas.*) named **Luna** (*fem.*). **She revolved** (*fem.*) around the Earth, shining her night light and observing everything that happened on the planet. But as time passed, Luna **began** (*fem.*) to get bored. **She was** (*fem.*) **tired** (*fem.*) of being alone in her celestial kingdom.

Once, **Luna decided** (*fem.*) it was time for a change. To begin with, **she put on** (*fem.*) a **beautiful** (*fem.*) **blue** (*fem.*) **gown** (*fem.*). Then **she prepared** (*fem.*) her magic fibre and **started** (*fem.*) applying makeup (*mas.*) to **her** face. **She painted** (*fem.*) **her** long eyelashes and full lips. After all, **she was** (*fem.*) a **woman** (*fem.*)! When **Luna finished** (*fem.*), **she looked** (*fem.*) in the mirror and **smiled** (*fem.*). Now **her** face was a real work of art.

**Luna decided** (*fem.*) to come down to Earth and find some friends. **She** slowly **descended** (*fem.*) from the sky space and finally **landed** (*fem.*) on the seashore. The first to notice her arrival were **an elegant** (*fem.*) **mackerel** (*fem.*), **an agile** (*fem.*) **flounder** (*fem.*) and a **toothy** (*fem.*) **orca** (*fem.*). **Luna told** (*fem.*) them about her life in the sky and how **she** lacked any real (female) **friends**. However, all the (female) **friends decided** (*non-mas. pers. pl.*) that it would be difficult for **Luna** to live in the sea. And then a **turtle** (*fem.*) **appeared** (*fem.*) on the beach and **offered** (*fem.*) **Luna** friendship. Soon the merry group **was joined** (*fem.*) by a **white** (*fem.*) **mouse** (*fem.*) and a **bird of paradise** (*fem.*), **who** (*fem.*) **began** (*fem.*) to dance in **Luna's** light. Some **fish** (*non-mas. pers. pl.*) also joined (*non-mas. pers. pl.*) the fun, **they** (*non-mas. pers. pl.*) **splashed** (*non-mas. pers. pl.*) and **twirled** (*non-mas. pers. pl.*) in the water like (female) **friends** at a wedding. An **earthworm** (*mas.*) also **wanted** (*mas.*) to join the group of merry **girls**. The (female) **friends said** (*non-mas. pers. pl.*) that even though (he) was not a **girl**, (he) could still hang out with them.<sup>14</sup>

That's how **Luna** not only **found** (*fem.*) (female) **friends**, but also **learnt** (*fem.*) that **her** light was able to make life on Earth more interesting and cheerful at the same time. Since then, every night she has descended to Earth to meet her (female) **friends** and give them her magical glow.]

In the earlier version, there was a consistency within the direct equivalents of the chosen characters. The above suggestion is to retain the gender of the original characters and their grammatical gender. The heroine is, as in the

<sup>14</sup> Because of the pro-drop nature of Polish and the grammar of indirect speech, in the Polish the gender of the earthworm is not marked in this sentence.

initial text, Luna, who, tired of loneliness, one day made up her face and put on a blue dress, found friends – an elegant mackerel, an agile flounder, a toothy orca, a she-sea turtle, a white mouse and a bird of paradise, all of which are feminine in Polish. The group of girls lets an *e a r t h w o r m* join in the fun, even though it is not a girl, since in this Polish translation the masculine form *deszczowy robaczek* is used, instead of the feminine *dżdżownica* which appears in the other translations. Animals of completely different species appear, for each of them corresponds to the gender of the character from the initial text. Despite the switch of nouns, everything is coherent, sensible and thoughtful.

And what is the evaluation of female students? The following advantages have been highlighted:

- creativity,
- lightness of the message,
- naturalness,
- the name Luna, which means moon, or preservation of the name,
- the consistent conversion of all characters to female,
- the introduction of the worm as a character of a different gender is consistent with the plot,
- it renders the mood of the fairy tale,
- lyricality,
- comprehensibility,
- preservation of the sense of the original text.

Disadvantages:

- Luna is an obsolete form in the Polish language,
- the characters introduced are completely different from the original ones.

Of all the translations included in the study, there was not one that enjoyed greater appreciation than the above. Among the comments there was even the phrase: *I love this translation!* It is clear that sustaining the story of the fable – about a bored girl looking for friends to spend time together – required some lexical and gender modifications. Swapping characters to reflect their gender most often appealed to the evaluators. The femininity of the depicted world is related to the reader's reception. The feminine world is associated with lightness, delicacy, which affect a similar impression in the reception of the entire text, with lyricism and naturalness emphasised in the comments. Significantly, such qualities appeared only in the case of this one translation. The preservation of the sense of the original text was appreciated. Criticism included the replacement of the original characters with others and that the name Luna is obsolete.<sup>15</sup>

<sup>15</sup> In the translations collected throughout the experiment, in one of the proposals, the forms *Pan* and *Pani* (which correspond approximately to English Mr and Miss/Mrs) appeared next

In the second task, respondents were asked to rank the translations according to which they liked best. 18 people unequivocally indicated Version 3 as the best, while ten people preferred Version 2. Two votes indicated that both versions were equally good. Translation 1 was overwhelmingly considered to be the poorest. The opinions expressed are confirmed by the advantages given above, which are most numerous in the case of Version 3, and the disadvantages most numerous with regard to Version 1.

Let us consider the two translations that gained the most votes in terms of conveying the meaning of the fable. If we consider that it is about loneliness, which is overcome by friendship with others, then no doubt both Version 2 and Version 3 express such a meaning. However, in the first case it is about male friendship, in the second female friendship, which usually differ in form. As research shows, for female friendships, frequent, close contact and long, frank conversations, emotional bonding and mental support are important. Men, on the other hand, do not need such closeness but value joint activities with competitive elements, such as playing sports, going to training sessions, watching matches or computer games.<sup>16</sup> Dancing on the beach in the moonlight certainly deviates from stereotypical male behaviour in our culture (unless under the influence of intoxicants), and is much more suited to women, whose dance processions are common in folk games, for example. Undoubtedly, Version 3 has the advantage in this regard, capturing the sense of the story much better than Version 2, as was reflected in the opinions of the respondents.

## Conclusions

The survey undeniably proves that grammatical gender is an extremely important category in translation, especially when the source and target languages differ in this respect, as is sometimes the case in Russian and Polish. This is evidenced by the difficulties described in this article in rendering the meanings of Russian fables in Polish. The unsuccessful translation (Version 1) used in the study is one of many examples of such mishaps in the material collected, which I do not present in full due to the limitations of the article's length. In these cases, the translators showed a misunderstanding of the idea of the original and the paramount importance of giving fairy tale characters a gender consistent with grammatical gender. In the same way that the

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to each of the character's names, which made it possible to easily convey the feminine and, where required by the text, the masculine gender. This idea should be considered justifiable.

<sup>16</sup> Adrianna Lipiarz, "Różnice w przyjaźni między kobietami a mężczyznami" [Differences in Friendship between Men and Women], *EUPHIRE*, January, 10, 2022, <https://euphire.pl/artykul/kobiece-i-meska-przyjazn-czym-sie-roznia/>.

translator of Version 1 did not understand this, the underestimation of the role of grammatical gender and its impact on the meaning and reception of the text is evident in evaluations of the translation in which the participants criticised even the changing of animal species. This prompts the conclusion that this category should not be ignored in the translation process.

It is clear that systemic differences *a priori* force the use of words in translation whose gender is not the same as in the original. However, it happens that it is in this category that associations related to the nature of gender are embedded. Once again, let us return to the image of the playful female friends and compare it with that of the playful male friends. Let us include in our imagination one boy in the group of playful girls and one girl in the group of playful men. And further – the image of frolicking women and frolicking men. Are these images the same? And when does gender begin to rule the logic of the text? We can see negligence in this regard. One translation has become – purely through the unreflective use of gender-specific nouns and often other mismatched parts of speech – completely illogical and ungrammatical. Thus, it happens that grammatical gender – as in the fairy tale under consideration – becomes the dominant, most important value, which the author plays with in the text, and the failure to sustain this game distorts its meaning, leading to nonsense and destroying its coherence.

In conclusion, grammatical gender in a literary text and in its translation:

- can become dominant,
- determines the physical and mental characteristics of characters and their behaviour,
- creates the world presented,
- affects the reception of the text,
- is a category that cannot be used unreflectively.

It should be noted that grammatical gender is only relevant in the case of the gender of anthropomorphised characters. The most important issue in the translation of the text that forms the focus of this study is to choose between two options:

- Should we be guided to leave the original gender of the main character, as was the case in Version 3 – at the expense of replacing some nouns with others?
- Should one go by the grammatical gender of the nouns in the target language, at the expense of changing the gender of the main character, as in Version 2?

The preference for Version 3 shows that the majority of female respondents considered the preservation of gender, and thus the meaning of the fairy tale, to be more important than grammatical consistency with the original.

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## Czy rosyjska *luna* to polski *księżyc*? Sensy i nonsensy w przekładzie i recepcji rodzaju gramatycznego

**Abstrakt:** Celem niniejszego artykułu jest zbadanie, jakie znaczenie ma rodzaj gramatyczny w przekazywaniu znaczeń oraz jakich trudności ta kategoria gramatyczna może przysporzyć tłumaczom. Na potrzeby badania została stworzona w języku rosyjskim bajka, której osią jest rodzaj gramatyczny wpływający na sens tekstu. Co ciekawe, wszystkim istotnym w bajce rzeczownikom danego rodzaju w oryginale odpowiadają ekwiwalenty innego rodzaju w przekładzie. Zamiana rodzaju modyfikuje przekaz płynący z bajki, niekonsekwencja w jego użyciu burzy wymowę opowiadania. Celem sprawdzenia, jakie konsekwencje dla recepcji czytelniczek mają podjęte przez tłumaczy decyzje, ocenie odbiorców poddano trzy tłumaczenia wykonane przez studentów rusycystyki. W wyniku tego eksperymentu stwierdzono, że rodzaj gramatyczny decyduje o fizycznych i psychicznych cechach postaci i ich zachowaniach, kreuje świat przedstawiony, wpływa na recepcję tekstu oraz jest kategorią, której nie można używać bezrefleksyjnie.

**Słowa kluczowe:** rodzaj gramatyczny w przekładzie, przekład dla dzieci, gender w przekładzie, język polski, język rosyjski.

## Ist die russische *luna* der polnische *księżyc*? Sinn und Unsinn bei der Übersetzung und Rezeption des grammatischen Genus

**Abstract:** Ziel dieses Beitrags ist es zu untersuchen, welche Rolle das grammatische Genus bei der Übertragung spielen kann und welche Schwierigkeiten es für Übersetzer darstellt. Für die Studie wurde ein Märchen in der russischen Sprache erstellt, in dem das grammatikalische Genus bedeutungsträchtige und sinntragende Inhalte erhielt. Interessanterweise entsprachen alle Substantive eines bestimmten Genus im Märchen den Äquivalenten eines anderen Genus in der Übersetzung. Der Wechsel des Genus verändert die Botschaft des Märchens bzw. entstellt den Sinn des Textes. Um herauszufinden, wie sich die Entscheidungen von Übersetzern auf die Rezeption auswirken, wurden drei von Studenten der Russistik angefertigte Übersetzungen einer Publikumsbewertung unterzogen. Dieses Experiment bestätigt, dass das grammatikalische Genus die physischen und psychologischen Eigenschaften der Figuren und ihr Verhalten bestimmt, die dargestellte Welt schafft, die Rezeption des Textes stark beeinflusst und zu einer reflexionserfordernden Kategorie gehört.

**Schlüsselwörter:** grammatikalisches Genus in der Übersetzung, Übersetzung für Kinder, Geschlecht in der Übersetzung, Russisch, Polnisch.





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## The Role of Intersemiotic Elements in Song Translation: A Case Study of *Coin-Operated Boy*, Performed by The Dresden Dolls\*

**Abstract:** This paper analyses the role of intersemiotic elements in song translation, using the Polish translation of *Coin-Operated Boy* by The Dresden Dolls as an example. The purpose is to present the process of reconstructing the meaning of a song using the non-verbal semiotic codes of the music, the performative layer, the visual aspects and the cultural context. Such multimodal carriers of meaning seem of particular importance in alternative music. This is certainly true in the case of punk cabaret, a genre that utilises the idiosyncratic aesthetics of the neo-Victorian style, circus, burlesque, and cabaret, where the performative level seems no less important than the lyrics and the music. The textual layer of the song under discussion finds its counterpart in the music and the official video clip. The paper presents how these elements direct the translator towards the chosen linguistic solutions.

**Keywords:** song translation, intersemiotic, punk cabaret, The Dresden Dolls, Amanda Palmer.

### Introduction

The aim of this paper is to analyse the role of intersemiotic, non-verbal elements in contemporary song translation, using as an example the Polish

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translation of the song *Coin-Operated Boy*<sup>1</sup> performed by the punk-cabaret band The Dresden Dolls.<sup>2</sup> Its main hypothesis is that the extratextual elements of a song, such as the music, performance, visual aspects of the video clip, variations introduced during live concerts, and the broader cultural context of genre conventions, all contribute to the overall meaning and style of the song, and may inform the translator in the process of creating the target text.

The song is understood here, as is the predominant approach in contemporary song translation studies, as a work comprising several semiotic codes. Klaus Kaindl calls popular music a “mediated multiple text” of a plurisemiotic nature.<sup>3</sup> Johan Franzon defines the song as “a piece of music and lyrics [...] designed for a singing performance”,<sup>4</sup> thus underlining its triform character, encompassing the text, the music, and the (actual or potential) performance. This last sphere seems of particular relevance in the case of The Dresden Dolls’ work, which, as discussed below, is marked by a specific theatricality and distinct performative style. It is worth adding a fourth level here, namely, that of context, understood as external elements of the “situational information”<sup>5</sup> surrounding the song. No song, be it in translation or not, ever exists in a cultural vacuum, and such factors as cultural conventions, recipients’ expectations, and ideologies may also contribute to its understanding.

Additional intersemiotic material is available in the case of songs which, like *Coin-Operated Boy*, are accompanied by a video clip. Kaindl underlines the functional interrelation of all the semiotic codes in a video, where “the visual aspect is interlinked not only with the musical but also with the verbal code”.<sup>6</sup> Thus, a video becomes a supplementary reference point for a translator.

Considering this plurisemiotic nature of any song, especially when supplemented with a video clip, it becomes evident that song translation ex-

<sup>1</sup> Amanda Palmer (lyrics, music), “Coin-Operated Boy,” *The Dresden Dolls*, 8ft. Records, 2003, CD.

<sup>2</sup> Anna Mach, “Au-tomatyczny pan” (translation of Palmer 2003), 2022 (unpublished manuscript).

<sup>3</sup> Klaus Kaindl, “The plurisemiotics of pop song translation: words, music, voice and image,” in *Song and Significance: Virtues and Vices of Vocal Translation*, ed. Dinda L. Gorrée (Amsterdam-New York: Rodopi, 2005), 241, 244, [https://doi.org/10.1163/9789401201544\\_009](https://doi.org/10.1163/9789401201544_009).

<sup>4</sup> Johan Franzon, “Choices in Song Translation. Singability in Print, Subtitles and Sung Performance,” *The Translator*, vol. 14 no. 2 (2008): 376, <https://doi.org/10.1080/13556509.2008.10799263>.

<sup>5</sup> Annjo K. Greenall et al., “Making a case for a descriptive-explanatory approach to song translation research: Concepts, trends and models,” in *Song Translation. Lyrics in Contexts*, eds. Johan Franzon, Annjo K. Greenall, Sigmund Kvam, and Anastasia Parianou (Berlin: Frank & Timme, 2021), 18.

<sup>6</sup> Kaindl, “The plurisemiotics of pop song translation: words, music, voice and image,” 252.

ceeds the framework of typical interlingual translation in Roman Jakobson's classification.<sup>7</sup> Using terminology proposed by Marta Kaźmierczak, it may be considered an act of interlingual translation in the process of which other semiotic layers should be taken into account.<sup>8</sup> This paper is meant precisely as a case study of how these semiotic layers are indeed taken into account in translational practice.

Every singable song translation is, obviously, governed by the overarching aim of making the target lyrics fit the music, of "the attainment of musico-verbal unity between the text and the composition".<sup>9</sup> Thus, the entirety of the original music, with its melody and metre, forms the main, most general intersemiotic factor affecting the process and product of song translation. However, rather than analysing the overall conformity of the target text to the music of *Coin-Operated Boy*, the considerations in this paper focus instead on selected translational decisions which have been deemed particularly interesting from the intersemiotic perspective.

I should also add that this paper is intended to constitute a descriptive-explanatory study<sup>10</sup> of the processes taking place during the translation, of their rationale, and of their purposes. I believe that this approach offers the most potential in song translation studies (not to mention that a prescriptive approach when discussing one's own translation risks fostering inappropriate complacency). To quote Šebnem Susam-Sarajeva, the questions that this paper attempts to answer are "What kind of translation strategies, choices and decisions are adopted? And most importantly, why?".<sup>11</sup> In other words: what kind of specific translational choices were inspired by the intersemiotic elements, why, and how?

## The Dresden Dolls and Their 'Brechtian Punk Cabaret'

The Dresden Dolls are a duo hailing originally from Boston, consisting of Amanda Palmer (singer, songwriter, pianist) and Brian Viglione (drummer).

<sup>7</sup> Roman Jakobson, "On Linguistic Aspects of Translation," in *The Translation Studies Reader*, ed. Lawrence Venuti (London: Routledge, 2000), 114.

<sup>8</sup> Marta Kaźmierczak, "From Intersemiotic Translation to Intersemiotic Aspects of Translation," *Przekładaniec* (Special issue 2018): 26, <https://doi.org/10.4467/16891864ePC.18.009.9831>.

<sup>9</sup> Franzon, "Choices in Song Translation. Singability in Print, Subtitles and Sung Performance," 375.

<sup>10</sup> For more on this term see Greenall et al., "Making a case for a descriptive-explanatory approach to song translation research: Concepts, trends and models," 28–33.

<sup>11</sup> Šebnem Susam-Sarajeva, "Translation and Music: Changing Perspectives, Frameworks and Significance," *The Translator* 14, no. 2 (2008): 195, <https://doi.org/10.1080/13556509.2008.10799255>.

The band formed in 2000, issued three studio albums, and was active until 2008, when it split following the growth of Palmer's solo career. Nonetheless, the band members remained on friendly terms and have given numerous live shows since 2008, with the recent reunion in 2022 resulting in extensive touring around the United States and in plans for a new album.<sup>12</sup>

It was Palmer who coined the term 'Brechtian punk cabaret' to describe the band's music. Although her intention was simply to avoid being labelled 'goth',<sup>13</sup> this expression seems to aptly capture the key elements of The Dresden Dolls' musical and performative qualities. The punk element is reflected in the group's musical intensity and a certain rawness of sound, with dynamic, oftentimes aggressive vocals and drum solos. The references to Weimar-era cabaret may be traced, in turn, in the theatricality of the performance, and a penchant for a certain alienating artificiality. Furthermore, the ironic distance and the omnipresent streak of black humour hail back to both those sources of inspiration.<sup>14</sup>

Besides that, the band's idiosyncratic aesthetics include references to the circus and the burlesque, with white mime makeup, Palmer clad in corsets and black-and-white striped stockings, and Viglione in a bowler hat. This funfair atmosphere is further enhanced during their live shows, which are usually accompanied by the so-called Dresden Dolls Brigade: an impromptu ensemble of burlesque dancers, circus artists, fire eaters, magicians, and other performers. Altogether, this builds the ambience of an immersive art experience, far exceeding the usual format of a live concert.<sup>15</sup> Such a strong stress on performative aspects suggests that extratextual factors may play a particularly important role in the semantics of the duo's songs, as will be analysed for the case of *Coin-Operated Boy*.

### ***Coin-Operated Boy* and Its Semiotic Levels**

*Coin-Operated Boy* appeared on The Dresden Dolls' first, self-titled album and remains one of the band's most popular songs, performed live to this

<sup>12</sup> Amanda Palmer, "The State of All Things: End of Year Edition 2023" [blog entry], December 31, 2023, *Patreon*, <https://www.patreon.com/posts/state-of-all-end-94946056>.

<sup>13</sup> Debbie Speer, "The Dresden Dolls," *Pollstar.com*, April 3, 2006, <https://www.pollstar.com/article/the-dresden-dolls-50517>.

<sup>14</sup> For more on the characterisation of punk cabaret see Anna Mach, "What Is Punk Cabaret? An Attempt to Define and Exemplify the Phenomenon," *Zagadnienia rodzajów literackich* 4 (2020): 151–166, <https://doi.org/10.26485/ZRL/2020/63.4/10>.

<sup>15</sup> Cf. Ryan McKittrick, "Ryan McKittrick introduces The Dresden Dolls," *American Repertory Theater ARTicles*, vol. 5 i.2bc (December, 2006), <https://americanrepertorytheater.org/media/articles-vol-5-i-2bc-living-dolls/>.

day, with its easily recognisable opening piano riff cheered by the audience.<sup>16</sup> The lyrics form a first-person narrative by a female protagonist, ostensibly praising her artificial, “coin-operated” boyfriend, allowing her to enjoy a romantic relationship without having to endure all the complications of real life. Soon, it becomes evident that the narrator is in fact afraid of intimacy, and that the exultation over the automatic partner is a thinly-veiled complaint about her actual loneliness and inability to maintain an authentic relationship.

The musical layer illustrates the lyrics: the accompaniment on drums and electric piano seems as mechanical as the eponymous boyfriend. The repetitive tune resembles that of a barrel-organ or a music box, with a strong musical stress forcing certain modifications in the vocal delivery of the lyrics (such as displacements in the word stress or words interrupted by a musical pause). As will be discussed later, the rhythmic pattern is broken at several crucial points, creating an impression of a faltering barrel organ or a broken record, in line with a shift in tone, from ecstatic to sombre, in the lyrics.

Similar iconicity may be noticed in the official video.<sup>17</sup> The band members are cast as the protagonists of the song, with Palmer in the role of the singing narrator, praising her coin-operated boy, and Viglione as the said automaton at its most charming and courteous. The visuals closely follow the lyrics, providing illustration to Palmer’s vocals. Yet the aesthetics of a kitschy, candy-coloured bucolic, with frilly costumes and artificial lighting, as well as the exaggerated theatricality of the performance, make one wary of taking the verbal message at face value; something is obviously too good to be true. And indeed, one of the key lyrical and musical twists, discussed in greater detail later in this paper, comes with a metatextual bridge describing the singing persona’s plight. The real world abruptly enters the sphere of fantasies, in the lyrics and music, but also in the video.

For the sake of accuracy, it should be noted here that the video includes a modified version of the song, with shortened lyrics, omitting one full stanza (lines 13–16; the full source and target texts are included in Appendix 1) and, less crucially, a repetition in lines 24–25. Wherever deemed necessary, the discrepancies between the two versions are covered below.

The three above-mentioned semiotic layers of *Coin-Operated Boy* can also be supplemented by another, external one – that of contextualising it

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<sup>16</sup> Cf. The Dresden Dolls, “Coin-Operated Boy” (live in Berkeley 2024), accessed March 14, 2024, *YouTube*, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=G7Ovi6Rc-aQ>.

<sup>17</sup> Amanda Palmer (lyrics, music), and Michael Pope (dir.), “Coin-Operated Boy” (performed by The Dresden Dolls; official video), 2004, accessed March 12, 2024, *IMVDb*, <https://imvdb.com/video/the-dresden-dolls/coin-operated-boy>.

within the wider scope of cultural tradition. Here, the references to old-style cabaret seem quite evident, especially in the visual image of the artists. Palmer, with her arched, artificial eyebrows, dark-red lipstick, and risqué outfit of a satin corset and striped stockings, and Viglione, in a tuxedo and a bowler hat (which he, as an ultimate – if coin-operated – gentleman, keeps on even in bed), unfurl their protagonists' melodrama in retro interiors. The music follows this convention with its somewhat old-fashioned main piano tune and Palmer's vocals, unusually mellow and stylised in comparison to her typical raw singing style.

As can be seen from this very brief outline of the semiotic codes, the semantics of *Coin-Operated Boy* is not limited to the level of lyrics only. The song translator may rely on numerous multimodal elements while working on the target text. Below is an outline of the particular translational choices resulting from such extratextual elements: musical, visual, performative, and contextual.

### **(In)congruous Enjambment: Translation and Musical Metre**

Usually in the craft of song-translation, the crucial element of the song is its 'catchphrase', or the most noticeable expression, which usually appears in the title. Indeed, in the case of this song this is the phrase "coin-operated boy", and the first challenge in producing a functional translation is to find a metrically suitable equivalent for it. It is worth noting that the musical metre dictates a pause between each "coin" and "operated", thus imposing a very prominent enjambment in numerous positions in the lyrics.

Enjambment, while an expressive stylistic tool in poetry, poses certain risks in songwriting and, consequently, in song translation. A musical pause dividing a semantically linked phrase – or, even more so, a single word – may disrupt the reception of the lyrics. As Ronnie Apter and Mark Herman put it, "when verbal and musical structures conflict, the effect is much stronger than caused by enjambment in spoken verse".<sup>18</sup> Additionally, unlike a poem, which in modern times is meant predominantly for reading, a song is delivered "line by line" and the audience is unable to find out the content of the next line until it is actually performed. An enjambment may therefore obliterate the sense of the lyrics, and in some cases even cause an unintentional humorous effect.<sup>19</sup> It could, therefore, be tempting to avoid it in translation.

<sup>18</sup> Ronnie Apter, and Mark Herman, *Translating for Singing: The Theory and Craft of Translating Lyrics* (London: Bloomsbury, 2016), 198.

<sup>19</sup> For examples see Marta Kaźmierczak, "Przekład meliczny" [Song Translation], in *Sensualność w literaturze polskiej. Przedstawienia zmysłów człowieka w języku, piśmiennictwie i sztuce*

Yet, and here I am quoting Apter and Herman again, “if the clash of musical and verbal is a significant feature of the work, translators should preserve it”.<sup>20</sup> Indeed, the strong stress on the first syllable, followed by a pause which interrupts the compound adjective “coin-operated”, can be seen as such a “significant feature” of the song. Its effect is musical iconicity, where the music (and the resulting shift in the delivery of lyrics) emphasises the mechanical, and at times faltering, nature of the eponymous character. This impression is deepened by the strong *staccato* of Palmer’s piano, in rhythmic unison with Viglione’s drums.<sup>21</sup>

Following the cue of the music, not only does my translation maintain the enjambment, it even deepens it by replacing the original catchphrase with the expression *automatyczny pan* (‘automatic mister’ or ‘gentleman’, as discussed later), with an enjambment appearing mid-word: *au- / tomatyczny* (it may be added that the initial, stressed syllable *au* is also an onomatopoeic word denoting a cry of pain in Polish, which – depending on the vocal interpretation – may allow a potential performer to use it with either humorous or dramatic results). The same idea of amplifying the effect of the enjambment is used in the case of a similarly accentuated phrase “with a pretty coin / operated voice” (lines 76–77), replaced with *nie zadaje e- / mocjonalnych ran* (‘doesn’t inflict emotional wounds’), with a pause again appearing mid-word. The assumed effect is to disturb the natural verbal stress pattern for the sake of strengthening the aural impression of automatonlike music.

Usually, such a translational decision would seem out of place, but here it is introduced as the deliberate choice of an irregular linguistic means that amplifies the effect created in the source material by “the clash of musical and verbal”. Thus, the target text was shaped not only by the source lyrics, but by the intersemiotic element of music.

## **A Broken Record, a Broken Heart: Looped Sequences and Their Translation**

As already hinted, not everything in the – ostensibly perfect – relationship with the coin-operated boy seems to be going smoothly. The discord is signalled largely on the non-verbal level. Quite early in the song,<sup>22</sup> and in its

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*od średniowiecza do współczesności* [Sensuality in Polish Literature. Representations of the Human Senses in Language, Writing and Art from the Middle Ages to the Present Day], ed. ed. Włodzimierz Bolecki (Warszawa: Instytut Badań Literackich PAN, 2012/2015).

<sup>20</sup> Apter, and Herman, *Translating for Singing*, 207.

<sup>21</sup> Cf. Palmer (lyrics, music), and “Coin-Operated Boy,” 2:14–2:24.

<sup>22</sup> Palmer (lyrics, music), “Coin-Operated Boy,” 1:24–1:33.

video,<sup>23</sup> the music, the vocals, and the image are styled to appear somehow disrupted, and the same short fragment is repeated several times, as if the record and the film reel were broken. The music and vocal line sound unnaturally interrupted, which is coordinated with the image, where cleverly applied cuts form an impression of the dancing couple repeating the same movement over and over again, as if stuck in an indecisive moment of their relationship.

What is symptomatic is the fragment of the lyrics that becomes looped. The “glitch” appears near the end of line 22, which reads “And I’ll never let him go”, and continues until the end of line 23 (“And I’ll never be alone”). As a result, the repeated phrase forms a contradictory statement: “Go! / And I’ll never be alone”, as if the singing persona were torn between two opposing desires: that of welcoming a partner into her life in order to avoid loneliness and that of getting rid of him to avoid any serious attachment. This is much clearer in the album version, in which – unlike in the shorter rendition accompanying the video clip – this fragment is preceded by a stanza where the female protagonist indirectly admits that her “coin-operated boy” is a make-believe partner and that she spends her nights crying (lines 15–16). As a result, the looped part with its contradiction becomes a pivotal moment, allowing the recipient to understand that this song is at least as sad as it is funny, and that what is broken here is not only the record, but also the heroine’s heart.

As a result of this combined musical and visual effect of the loop, maintaining the contradiction between the last word of line 22 and the statement in line 23 may infuse the target text with a similar semantic value. In my translation, the chosen phrasing of these lines is: *Nigdy mu nie powiem “Precz”! / I nie będę sama już* (‘I will never tell him “Go away!” / And I won’t be alone anymore’). Placing the word *precz* (in this context: ‘go away’ or ‘be gone’) in the final position of line 22 allows for a similar contradictory effect in the repeated phrase. Without the plurisemiotic signals on the musical and visual level, the crucial character of the original “go” at the end of line 22 could easily be overlooked. Yet again, the translational choice is crucially informed by the intersemiotic elements.

### **The Colours of Reality and Fantasy: Visual and Aural Signals of Emotions**

As already briefly mentioned, one of the key turning points in the song’s musical and visual code comes with the bridge (lines 36–63), which consti-

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<sup>23</sup> Palmer (lyrics, music), and Pope (dir.), “Coin-Operated Boy,” 0:57–1:06.

tutes about one-third of the song<sup>24</sup> and of the video.<sup>25</sup> In the video clip, it begins with the colour palette suddenly changing from vivid, candy hues to black-and-white. Palmer's face, without the theatrical makeup from just seconds ago, fills almost the whole frame. She is pressing her hands to the eyes, as if exhausted or disappointed. The mood of her vocals also changes – from playful and flirtatious to more and more desperate. Viglione, now in a casual outfit of shorts and a T-shirt instead of a fanciful tuxedo or silk pyjamas, is shown angrily leaving the room, as if he were the actual boyfriend whose demeanour was the reason for conjuring up the coin-operated one. The music gradually becomes grim and raw, the gleeful signature automatonlike tune is replaced by a wall of noise of almost punk-rock character.

All this builds an audiovisual illustration of the protagonist's emotional turmoil when faced with the embittered realisation of the trials and tribulations that occur in real-life relationships, those "complications galore" of love. At the end of the bridge, however, the colours gradually become saturated again, with the final line "[I want a] coin-operated boy" (line 63) bringing back the vibrant colour palette and the main piano theme. The heroine is safely cocooned in her glossy "plastic fantasy" again.

On the level of lyrics, this section of the song is introduced by a metatextual comment: "this bridge was written / to make you feel smittener [sic]" (lines 36–37). The singing persona then shows her actual face, that of "a girl getting bitterer" who tests her partner's patience by rejecting him and still half-wishing him to stay by her side (lines 44–51). The sobering effect of the text is, as described above, noticeably strengthened on the intersemiotic level. My rendition of the target text was clearly affected by this multimodal amplification. This can be illustrated by the Polish version of lines 44–47, where the original phrase "Will you persist / even after I bet you / a billion dollars / that I'll never love you" becomes *czy się nie poddasz / gdy wprost w twarz ci krzyknę, / że nigdy przenigdy / nie będę cię kochać* ('will you not give up if I yell right into your face that I will never ever love you'). The element of yelling something right into the interlocutor's face or the amplified "never ever" (*nigdy przenigdy*) do not appear here for the sake of rhyme or rhythm; their use stems directly from the strong emotional load of the music and image rather than from the source lyrics. Again, it is the non-verbal semiotic code that influences the translational choices.

<sup>24</sup> Palmer (lyrics, music), "Coin-Operated Boy," 1:38–3:14.

<sup>25</sup> Palmer (lyrics, music), and Pope (dir.), "Coin-Operated Boy," 1:11–2:28.

## Boy, Man, or Mister: Translation and the Genre Convention

This section aims to present how song translators may rely on multi-modal factors which are external to the song itself. In this case, such a factor is the cultural context and the genre convention to which both the original and the translation refer.

As already indicated, the target text uses the phrase *automatyczny pan* in place of the titular “coin-operated boy”. While the word *automatyczny* (‘automatic’) does not seem to require any comment, the term *pan* may prove more problematic. This expression does not have a single equivalent in English. Polish-English dictionaries render it as ‘gentleman’, ‘master’, ‘lord’, or ‘mister’, depending on the context.<sup>26</sup> A more precise definition may be gleaned from the Polish dictionary, where its two main meanings are ‘a man’ and ‘an official polite form used to address a man or to refer to him’.<sup>27</sup> As explained by Mikołaj Gliński for the sake of English speakers, “*pan* (and its feminine version *pani*) is the most important element of the Polish honorific system. Used in addressing people, and variously translated into English as ‘sir’, ‘mister’, or sometimes simply ‘you’, *pan* remains one of the most characteristic words in the Polish language”.<sup>28</sup> Summing up, *pan* is undoubtedly more formal than ‘boy’ or even ‘man’. Why, then, did it find its way into this translation? The simple answer could be that it is a one-syllable word, allowing the translation to maintain the original masculine rhyming pattern in numerous positions in the song. However, I would like to argue that the main rationale lies elsewhere, namely, in the genre convention of the target culture.

As already discussed above, *Coin-Operated Boy* includes numerous allusions to retro cabaret, particularly in the video clip: from the ornamental lettering of the opening titles, decorated with a sprig of morning glory like a schoolgirl’s diary, through costumes and interior design, to the musical and vocal styling. This element is less evident in the lyrics: there are only slight signals of old-fashioned sentimentalism, as in lines 11–12 (“Who could ever, ever ask for more? / Love without complications galore”). Consequently, most of the vintage aesthetic is discernible on the non-verbal semiotic level. This is not to claim that the song consistently maintains the cabaret ambience and that it constitutes a pastiche – it could rather be described as an

<sup>26</sup> Cf. *Cambridge Dictionary*, [entry:] *pan*, accessed March 25, 2024, <https://dictionary.cambridge.org/pl/>.

<sup>27</sup> *Słownik języka polskiego PWN*, [entry:] *pan*, accessed March 25, 2024, <https://sjp.pwn.pl> [trans. – A.M.].

<sup>28</sup> Mikołaj Gliński, “Pan – Poland Word by Word,” *Culture.pl*, last updated March 26, 2024, <https://culture.pl/en/article/pan-poland-word-by-word>.

intertextual “wink” at the recipients, suggesting a certain game with the genre convention.

My idea behind using the word *pan* to describe the source-text “boy” follows the same idea; it is meant as a reference to old-fashioned cabaret with its “ladies” and “gentlemen”. Examples of using the formal address *pan* and *pani* instead of a simple *ty* (‘you’) in Polish cabaret (and similar) songs abound. To name just a few: “Czy pani tańczy twista”<sup>29</sup> (‘Do you dance the twist, madame’; all translations in this section A.M.), “Już kąpiesz się nie dla mnie”<sup>30</sup> (‘You know longer bathe for me’) (with its phrase *wiem, że czeka, aż wyschniesz, już inny pan* – ‘I know another gentleman is waiting for you to dry’), “Nie pożałuje pan”<sup>31</sup> (‘You won’t regret it, sir’), “Jesienny pan”<sup>32</sup> (‘An autumnal gentleman’), and “Ja dla pana czasu nie mam”<sup>33</sup> (‘I don’t have time for you, mister’). As may be noted, many of these songs were written by Jeremi Przybora and Jerzy Wasowski, the creators and hosts of *Kabaret Starszych Panów*<sup>34</sup> (‘The Elderly Gentlemen’s Cabaret’), a Polish cabaret revue of immense fame and cultural influence, an obvious reference point for the Polish cabaret song.

The target text follows the stylistics of using *pan* (or its feminine equivalent, *pani*) to refer to the eponymous protagonist, but also to other persons. In lines 36–37, the narrator states: *teraz gram przejście o pani po przejściach* (‘I am now playing a bridge about a lady with a past’; the pun here is on the word *przejście*, which may mean both ‘a musical bridge’ and ‘a past, difficult experience’). Line 66 mentions *panów z krwi i kości nie chcę znać* (‘gentlemen of flesh and blood I don’t wish to know’) and in lines 69–70 the narrator claims that the eponymous character ‘may not have known many other ladies’ (*nie znał może zbyt wielu innych pań*). The only passage of the target

<sup>29</sup> Andrzej Tylczyński (lyrics), and Wojciech Piętowski (music), “Czy pani tańczy twista” (performed by Violetta Villas and Tadeusz Woźniakowski), Violetta Villas & Tadeusz Woźniakowski, *Czy pani tańczy twista* (Pronit, 1962), EP.

<sup>30</sup> Jeremi Przybora (lyrics), and Jerzy Wasowski (music), “Już kąpiesz się nie dla mnie” (performed by Kalina Jędrusik and Wiesław Michnikowski), *Kabaret Starszych Panów, Piosenki wybrane* (Polskie Nagrania Muza, 1962), LP.

<sup>31</sup> Jeremi Przybora (lyrics), and Jerzy Wasowski (music), “Nie pożałuje pan” (performed by Kalina Jędrusik). *Kabaret Starszych Panów, Wizyta starszych panów* (Polskie Nagrania Muza, 1970), LP.

<sup>32</sup> Wojciech Młynarski (lyrics), and Roman Orłow (music), “Jesienny pan” (performed by Krystyna Konarska), Krystyna Konarska, *Jesienny Pan* (Polskie Nagrania Muza, 1963), single.

<sup>33</sup> Jeremi Przybora (lyrics), and Jerzy Wasowski (music), “Ja dla pana czasu nie mam” (performed by Hanna Banaszak), in Hanna Banaszak, *Hanna Banaszak* (Frisco Sound, 1991), CD.

<sup>34</sup> Note the presence of *pan* again, in the cabaret’s name.

text where the singing persona changes the form of address to simple, informal 'you' (*ty*) is the bridge (lines 40–51). As already discussed above, in that part the gaudy façade of the “plastic fantasy” crumbles and the hardships of real life become transiently visible, making the use of *pan* too fanciful and inappropriate.

## Live and Uncut: the Role of Concert Variants in Translation

Towards the end of the video clip, we can see a somewhat confusing scene.<sup>35</sup> The heroine, played by Palmer, claims that she “can even take him [her artificial boyfriend] in the bath” (line 67), ostensibly advertising his waterproof qualities. Indeed, we see the couple in the bathroom, with Viglione holding a rubber duck and wearing an exaggerated pink shower cap (on top of his bowler hat, of course). Yet something in the image seems disturbing: Palmer, with a large bath brush in her hand, approaches Viglione and makes a movement suggesting poking him from behind. We see the coin-operated boy's surprised grimace and hear a squeak of the duck toy. A sexual innuendo is evident, although nothing suggests it on the textual level. Nothing, that is to say, if we only refer to the studio version of the song.

Things are quite different during live performances. It turns out that the line in question is a polite, self-censored replacement of another, far more explicit version, performed regularly during live shows by The Dresden Dolls or by Palmer playing solo. That line goes: “I can even fuck him in the ass”.<sup>36</sup> The gesture made with the bath brush suddenly makes more sense.

The translator may of course choose to ignore this variation in the lyrics, focussing on the studio version only. Nonetheless, it should not be overlooked that the live version enriches the punk-cabaret nature of the song. The switch of the traditional male-female sexual roles may be viewed as a signal of a general reversal of established hierarchies, forming an instance of carnivalisation in the sense described by Mikhail Bakhtin.<sup>37</sup> It can be

<sup>35</sup> Palmer (lyrics, music), and Pope (dir.), “Coin-Operated Boy,” 2:50–2:55.

<sup>36</sup> Cf. The Dresden Dolls, “Coin-Operated Boy” (live in Sydney 2012), accessed March 26, 2024, *YouTube*, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7EYvLNsdChI>, 5:45; The Dresden Dolls, “Coin-Operated Boy” (live in Woodstock 2022), accessed March 26, 2024, *YouTube*, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2h1YRBiqsC4>, 7:29; The Dresden Dolls, “Coin-Operated Boy” (live in Berkeley 2024), accessed March 14, 2024, *YouTube*, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=G7Ovi6Rc-aQ>, 4:55; Amanda Palmer, “Coin-Operated Boy” (live in Zurich 2012), accessed March 26, 2024, *YouTube*, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6P2nVplGdDg>, 5:47.

<sup>37</sup> Cf. Mikhail Bakhtin, *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics*, trans. and ed. Caryl Emerson (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1999), 122–137.

added that the carnivalistic feature of this line is also manifest in its focus on the bodily “lower stratum”.<sup>38</sup> This strengthens the subversive potential of the song and fits into the larger image of punk cabaret.<sup>39</sup>

For these reasons, my translation provides for a slight variation to be sung live, if chosen by potential performers. The line *mogę nawet go do wanny brać* (‘I can even take him to the bathtub’; line 67) becomes *mogę nawet go od tyłu brać* (‘I can even take him from behind’; line 67a). This phrase, colloquial and rather explicit, albeit without any profanities equivalent to those present in the source live version, is coherent with the image in the video and retains the original idea of the lyrics. Such a reference to the performative level and to the variableness of renditions by the artist is another example of how intersemiotic elements may direct the translator.

## Conclusions

The purpose of this paper was to verify the hypothesis that the intersemiotic, non-verbal layers of a song play a substantial role in reconstructing style and meaning in the process of song translation. As presented, all semiotic levels prove relevant in this song. Automatonlike music invites non-standard linguistic solutions such as bold enjambments, and its dissonant fragments suggest moments of heightened intensity, where the contradictory emotions of the protagonist are at play. The two strongly contrasted aesthetic styles of the video disclose the deeper meaning of the lyrics, clearly indicating which elements belong to reality, and which to the world of fantasy. Cabaret-like styling on all semiotic levels invites a translator to include references to similar genre conventions in the target culture, and performative aspects of live renditions encourage a search for variant solutions in the translation. It should also be mentioned that these semiotic codes do not exist in separation from one another, but form an interrelated web of meanings and cultural references, mutually amplifying and contextualising their semantic value.

Song translation studies are no longer, as was the case merely one or two decades ago, an underrepresented area of translation studies. Within this subfield, more and more research is being conducted in the descriptive line on the authorial role of a translator, the position of translated songs within

<sup>38</sup> Cf. Mikhail Bakhtin, *Rabelais and His World*, trans. Hélène Iswolsky (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1984), 368–436.

<sup>39</sup> For more on the role of carnivalisation in this genre see Mach “What Is Punk Cabaret? An Attempt to Define and Exemplify the Phenomenon,” 157–158.

the target culture, and the multitude of cultural references involved in the process of translation. With this paper I hope to contribute to further development of this fascinating domain.

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## Appendix 1: *Coin-Operated Boy*: lyrics and translation

Line no.	<i>Coin-Operated Boy</i> (lyrics and music by Amanda Palmer, performed by The Dresden Dolls, transcription Anna Mach based on the album version, parts marked [] are absent from the video-clip version)	"Au-tomatyczny pan" (translated by Anna Mach)
1	Coin-operated boy	Au-tomatyczny pan
2	Sitting on the shelf	Odłożoną w kąt
3	He is just a toy	Tę zabawkę mam,
4	But I turn him on	Lecz gdy włączam „Start”
5	And he comes to life	On zaczyna czuć
6	Automatic joy	Sztucznych uczuć żar
7	That is why I want	Po to właśnie jest
8	A coin-operated boy	Mój au-tomatyczny pan
9	Made of plastic and elastic	Narzeczony na żetony
10	He is rugged and long-lasting	Dość solidnie jest zrobiony
11	Who could ever, ever ask for more?	Czegóż jeszcze więcej można chcieć?
12	Love without complications galore	Mogę tulić go i głupstwa pleść
13	[Many shapes and weights to choose from	[Rozmiar ręcznie sterowany
14	I will never leave my bedroom	Już nie ruszę się z sypialni

Line no.	<i>Coin-Operated Boy</i> (lyrics and music by Amanda Palmer, performed by The Dresden Dolls, transcription Anna Mach based on the album version, parts marked [] are absent from the video-clip version)	“Au-tomatyczny pan” (translated by Anna Mach)
15	I will never cry at night again	Dosyć mam samotnych łez co noc
16	Wrap my arms around him and pretend]	Włączę go na maksymalną moc]
17	Coin-operated boy	Au-tomatyczny pan
18	All the other real	W porównaniu z nim
19	Ones that I destroy	Inni są bez szans
20	Cannot hold a candle	Zbyt ich łatwo skrzywdzić
21	To my new boy and I'll	I dlatego nigdy
22	Never let him go	Mu nie powiem „Precz!”
23	And I'll never be alone	I nie będę sama już
24	[And I'll never let him go	[Nigdy mu nie powiem „Precz!”
25	And I'll never be alone]	I nie będę sama już]
26	Go!	Precz!
27	And I'll never be alone	I nie będę sama już
28	Go!	Precz!
29	And I'll never be alone	I nie będę sama już
30	Go!	Precz!
31	And I'll never be alone	I nie będę sama już
32	Go!	Precz!
33	And I'll never be alone	I nie będę sama już
34	Not with my	Bo jest mój
35	Coin-operated boy	Au-tomatyczny pan
36	This bridge was written	Teraz gram przejście
37	To make you feel smittener	O pani po przejściach
38	With my sad picture	Bo miłość już w cenie
39	Of girl getting bitterer	Ma rozgoryczenie
40	Can you extract me	Czy ty mnie ocalisz
41	From my plastic fantasy?	Od marzeń z plastiku?
42	I didn't think so	Już chyba nie wierzę
43	But I'm still convincible	A jednak się łudzę
44	[Will you persist	I czy się nie poddasz
45	Even after I bet you	Gdy wprost w twarz ci krzyknę
46	A billion dollars	Że nigdy przynigdy
47	That I'll never love you?	Nie będę cię kochać?
48	And] will you persist	I czy się nie poddasz
49	Even after I kiss you	Nawet kiedy oznajmię
50	Good-bye for the last time	Że właśnie odchodzę
51	Will you keep on trying?	Czy będziesz próbować?

Line no.	<i>Coin-Operated Boy</i> (lyrics and music by Amanda Palmer, performed by The Dresden Dolls, transcription Anna Mach based on the album version, parts marked [] are absent from the video-clip version)	"Au-tomatyczny pan" (translated by Anna Mach)
52	To prove it	Ja muszę
53	I'm dying	To wiedzieć
54	To lose it	Choć nie chcę
55	I'm losing	Choć tracę
56	My confidence	Odwagę, i
57	I want it × 4 [× 3]	Po to jest
58	I want you × 8 [× 3]	Po to on
59	I want a × 3 [× 3]	Po to mi
60	I	Po
61	Want	To
62	A	Mi
63	Coin-operated boy	Au-tomatyczny pan
64	And if I had a star to wish on	Choćbym miała trzy życzenia
65	For my life I can't imagine	Już go nigdy nie wymienię
66	Any flesh and blood would be his match	Panów z krwi i kości nie chcę znać
67	I can even take him in the bath	Mogę nawet go do wanny brać
67a	[LIVE: I can even fuck him in the ass]	[LIVE: Mogę nawet go od tyłu brać]
68	Coin-operated boy	Au-tomatyczny pan
69	He may not be real	Nie znał może zbyt
70	Experienced with girls	Wielu innych pań
71	But I know he feels	Ale dobrze wie
72	Like a boy should feel	Jak zrozumieć mnie
73	Isn't that the point?	Żadnych kłamstw i gier
74	That is why I want	Po to właśnie jest
75	A coin-operated boy	Mój au-tomatyczny pan
76	With a pretty coin-	Nie zadaje e-
77	-operated voice	-mocjonalnych ran
78	Saying that he loves me	Mówi że mnie kocha
79	That he's thinking of me	Że beze mnie szlocha
80	Straight and to the point	Żadnych gier i kłamstw
81	That is why I want	Po to właśnie jest
82	A coin-operated boy	Mój au-tomatyczny pan

## Rola elementów intersemiotycznych w tłumaczeniu piosenki – na przykładzie *Coin-Operated Boy* zespołu The Dresden Dolls

**Abstrakt:** Artykuł prezentuje rolę elementów intersemiotycznych w tłumaczeniu piosenki na przykładzie utworu *Coin-Operated Boy* zespołu The Dresden Dolls w polskim przekładzie autorki. Jego celem jest rekonstrukcja znaczeń w oparciu o pozawerbalne kody semiotyczne: muzykę, wykonanie, warstwę wizualną i kontekst kulturowy. Multimodalne nośniki znaczenia wydają się szczególnie istotne w muzyce alternatywnej. Dotyczy to nurtu *punk cabaret* posługującego się specyficzną estetyką neowiktoriańską, cyrkową, burleskową i kabaretową, w której poziom wykonawczy jest równie istotny, jak tekst i muzyka. Warstwa tekstowa omawianego utworu znajduje uzupełnienie w muzyce i oficjalnym wideoklipie. W artykule przedstawiono, w jaki sposób te elementy kierują tłumacza w stronę określonych wyborów językowych.

**Słowa kluczowe:** tłumaczenie piosenki, intersemiotyczny, *punk cabaret*, The Dresden Dolls, Amanda Palmer.

## Die Rolle intersemiotischer Elemente in der Liederübersetzung am Beispiel von The Dresden Dolls' *Coin-Operated Boy*

**Abstract:** Im Beitrag wird die Rolle intersemiotischer Elemente in der Liederübersetzung am Beispiel der polnischen Übersetzung von *Coin-Operated Boy* von der Band The Dresden Dolls erörtert. Anhand außertextueller semiotischer Codes wie Musik, Performance, visuelle Aspekte und kultureller Kontext wird der Prozess der Bedeutungsrekonstruktion dargestellt. Die multimedialen Bedeutungsträger spielen in der alternativen Musik eine besondere Rolle. Dies trifft auf Punk Cabaret zu – jenes Musikgenre, das sich einer spezifischen neoviktorianischen, zirzensischen, possenhaften und Kabarett-Ästhetik bedient, wobei der performative Aspekt genauso wichtig wie der Text und Musik ist. Das besprochene Lied wird durch die Musik und einen Videoclip ergänzt. Im Beitrag wird untersucht, wie diese Bestandteile bestimmte Übersetzungslösungen beeinflussen.

**Schlüsselwörter:** Liederübersetzung, intersemiotisch, Punk Cabaret, The Dresden Dolls, Amanda Palmer.





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## Adventuring for Digital Love. On the Readoption of Quest-romance in the Romantic Subplots of *Dragon Age: Origins*

**Abstract:** This paper presents a brief examination of the intersections between the literary tradition of quest-romance and digital entertainment. It discusses the readoption of this tradition into the romantic subplots of a fantasy digital role-playing game, *Dragon Age: Origins*. Grounded in theoretical literary approaches concerning the convention of quest-romance and its historical transformations, especially the introspective turn that can be traced to Romanicism, as well as quest-romance's cultural influences on popular romance narratives, the exploration addresses four in-game romances available to the player, with specific focus on their relationship to the main heroic plot, and their intrinsic structure based on constant challenges and eventual rewards. The analysis allows one to conclude that the romantic subplots of *Dragon Age: Origins* not only draw on the literary tradition of quest-romance, but they also engage medium-specific means of expression to accommodate its structural and thematic aspects to the reality of the procedural\*, ludic medium of the digital game.

**Keywords:** digital games, love studies, quest-romance, romance narratives.

\* Procedurality of games is understood in the present paper as their quality of crafting representations of processes based on rule-based systems.

## Introduction

*Dragon Age: Origins*, a digital game developed by the Canadian studio BioWare in 2009, follows the popular pattern of single-player fantasy role-playing games that combine romantic subplots with a heroic storyline. It undertakes the story of a fantastic adventure, in which the player-character (from now on referred to as the PC) is cast into a whirlwind of events which assign them the responsibility of fighting monsters and saving the world. At the start of the game, the player creates the PC, whose role they assume for the rest of the game; the PC's class and race can be customised to fit the preferred playstyle (they can be a mage, a rogue, or a warrior, as well as an elf, a dwarf, or a human). During the game, the PC traverses a fantastic world, presented from a third-person perspective, and during these travels they perform tasks and fight enemies, primarily through the strategic use of skills, presented as selectable options in the game interface. They can be assisted by pre-determined non-player characters, whom the player can control during combat, but does not influence outside of it; the characters are designed as narratively autonomous from the player, and they often react to the PC's choices within the game. Importantly, *Origins* allows the PC to form a romantic bond with one of these characters. These relationships not only develop against the backdrop of the heroic main plot, but are also often intertwined with it, as the events at large resonate with the specific backstories and preferences of the romanceable<sup>1</sup> characters. That is to say, plot-related events trigger responses and judgments from these characters, generate context for private talks, and even prompt them to ask the PC to perform specific tasks for them. Such tasks become an integral part of the in-game romances – they serve as a show of effort on the part of the PC, and this effort, if performed according to a given romanced character's wishes correctly, allows for a gradual progression of the relationship. Thematically, the tasks often require the PC to help the romanced character deal with past traumas or overcome personal issues, which are further explored in the content of the dialogue. As a result, the privacy of emotional closeness and the actions of heroic adventuring become closely intermingled within the romantic subplots of the game.

The tension between the romantic and the heroic in fantasy role-playing games has not gone unnoticed within the field of game studies. Notably, Leonid Moyzhes refers to it in his study of the “ghettoisation” of love in another

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<sup>1</sup> Understood as possible in romance, as not all the characters introduced in the game can enter a romantic relationship with the PC.

game of the Dragon Age franchise.<sup>2</sup> While noticing the relational character of heroic adventures and romantic content, Moyzhes claims that there is a tendency to divide the two to achieve a certain rhetorical effect, as games time the bulk of love-related content to fit within moments of respite between adventures, following the common Western cultural association of love with a source of comfort.<sup>3</sup> In this paper, however, I would like to present an alternative interpretation of the interconnections between the two thematic areas. Namely, I argue that heroic activities serve as an integral part of heroic subplots, which in turn apply structures characteristic of heroic plots in their presentation of love and courtship, mirroring the heroic storyline on a more thematically intimate level. Furthermore, I explore how, in doing so, *Origins'* in-game romances draw heavily on the literary and cultural tradition of quest-romance and its transformations, particularly in Anglo-Saxon literature.<sup>4</sup>

This article, then, draws on the methodological perspective of literary-oriented game studies, specifically those that study game fictions not outside of, but in reference to the unique means of expression available to digital games, and which focus on the narrative potential of games as powerful mediators of stories.<sup>5</sup> The particular considerations in this paper aim to illustrate the tension between the digital game and a well-established literary tradition, and to therefore trace the potential games have for the recirculation of cultural themes as well as for their novel, contemporary, ludic re-arrangements and re-interpretations.

*Origins* serves as a compelling case study for such considerations. On the one hand, it employs fantasy genre trappings, which draw on mediaeval aesthetics, inviting connections to historical literary romance narratives, such as chivalric romances. On the other, the game exemplifies a broader pattern in fantasy role-playing games, specifically those made by *BioWare*. *Origins* follows the premise of including romantic content in a heroic fantasy game as established by the earlier titles of the studio, most notably by *Baldur's*

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<sup>2</sup> Leonid Moyzhes, "Love Without Consequences. Ideology of Romance Representation in Video Games. Case Study of Dragon Age: Inquisition," in *Love and Electronic Affection*, ed. L.D. Grace (CRC Press, 2020), 157–177.

<sup>3</sup> Moyzhes, "Love Without Consequences," 175.

<sup>4</sup> The subject matter of this paper was inspired by Tomasz Z. Majkowski's review of my PhD thesis, and as such is supplementary to one of the chapters of the thesis, whose theoretical considerations it partially re-states. See: Magdalena Bednorz, *Courtly Love in Digital Games: The Rhetoric of Emotional Labor in Selected Interactive Narratives* (Katowice: Repository of University of Silesia, 2023).

<sup>5</sup> See, for instance: Janet Murray, *Hamlet on the Holodeck: The Future of Narrative in Cyberspace* (Free Press, 2016), E-book edition.

*Gate II: Shadows of Amn*, in which the player character could also romance several of their companions.<sup>6</sup> Moreover, this design choice not only remains present in the newer games created by the company, but it very nearly defines their brand, as *BioWare* is often regarded as the studio which sets the standards for romance in the role-playing genre.<sup>7</sup> This analysis of *Origins*, then, contributes to the discussion on the broader design trend by shedding light on a specific stage in its evolution.

### ***Dragon Age: Origins* – Game Quests, Quest-romance and Fantasy Heroics**

It seems appropriate to start such a consideration of the intersections of quest-romance and in-game romances by briefly defining the connection between the broader literary tradition and games. In order to do so, it is crucial to examine the concept of the quest as it relates to digital entertainment, particularly to the genre of fantasy role-playing games to which *Dragon Age: Origins* belongs, and to consider how it is rooted in the cultural tradition of quest narratives.

Firstly, within gameplay, the term relates to a unit of gaming activity, a specific task which a playable, player-controlled figure needs to complete in order to progress in the game. Often such tasks involve moving between two or more places within the world presented in the game and facing a challenge during the journey or by its end. These challenges may involve, for instance, fighting adversaries, gathering resources, and searching for or delivering objects. The definitions of quests provided by game scholars emphasise challenge and resulting gameplay progression as dimensions inherent to those tasks. Espen Aarseth discusses questing as the crucial element of the structure of adventure games, and describes it accordingly: “[t]he player-avatar must move through a landscape in order to fulfill a goal while mastering a series of challenges”.<sup>8</sup> Calvin Ashmore and Michael Nitsche claim that “[q]uests consist [...] of several recurrent properties, such as the objective, the task, and success or failure conditions,” while “as a device, the quest transcends game genres, and can be thought of as a means for structuring

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<sup>6</sup> BioWare, *Baldur's Gate II: Shadows of Amn* (Black Isle Studios, 2009).

<sup>7</sup> See, for instance: Heidi McDonald, “NPC Romance as a Safer Space: BioWare and Healthier Identity Tourism,” *Well Played*, vol. 1, no. 4 (2012): 23–40.

<sup>8</sup> Espen Aarseth, “Beyond the Frontier: Quest Games as Post-Narrative Discourse,” in *Narrative Across Media*, ed. Marie-Laure Ryan (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2004), 368.

play within a virtual environment".<sup>9</sup> Jeff Howard expresses a similar sentiment in his book on quest design – he defines quests as means of structuring and directing game narrative and gameplay activity.<sup>10</sup> In view of these definitions, then, the term “quest” may be used to encompass even the simplest tasks and challenges within games whose primary theme is adventuring and whose structure relies on performing such tasks. In other words, quests can be considered a means to communicate adventuring themes through gameplay poetics.

Importantly, even while discussing quests with an emphasis on their gameplay function, researchers address the broader cultural tradition from which questing in games derives. Howard’s aforementioned book, *Quests: Design, Theory, and History in Games and Narratives*, provides a good example. He argues that game quests, understood as an element of gameplay and story structure, fit within a broader cultural definition of the quest as a long, arduous search for something, and thus reference a broader literary tradition of heroic quest narratives.<sup>11</sup> Howard is primarily interested in how in-game quests adopt the basic template of stories which involve a hero venturing forth on a journey, overcoming internal struggle and external challenges, and returning victorious but transformed by the experience – which is consistent with the definition of the cultural tradition of quest-romance as provided by literary scholars. Northrop Frye, perhaps the most prominent scholar of romance, defines the genre as follows: “the essential element of plot in romance is adventure, which means that romance is naturally a sequential and processional form [and] an endless form in which a central character [...] goes through one adventure after another”.<sup>12</sup> He adds: “the complete form of the romance is clearly the successful quest, and such a completed form has three main stages: the stage of the perilous journey and the preliminary minor adventures; the crucial struggle, usually some kind of battle in which either the hero or his foe, or both, must die; and the exaltation of the hero”.<sup>13</sup> The echoes of quest-romance, so defined, are present in games, because, according to Howard’s perspective, a similar template is ap-

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<sup>9</sup> Calvin Ashmore and Michael Nitsche, “The Quest in a Generated World,” in *Proceedings of the 2007 DiGRA International Conference: Situated Play*, vol. 4 (DiGRA Digital Library, 2007), 504.

<sup>10</sup> Jeff Howard, *Quests: Design, Theory, and History in Games and Narratives* (Wellesley: A K Peters, Ltd., 2008), xi.

<sup>11</sup> Howard, “Quests,” 1–28.

<sup>12</sup> Northrop Frye, *Anatomy of Criticism: Four Essays* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1971), 186.

<sup>13</sup> Frye, *Anatomy of Criticism*, 187.

plicable to in-game quest structures, making them a bridge between literary tradition and procedural expression.<sup>14</sup>

Howard's work seems applicable to one genre of games in particular, as his understanding of the quest heavily relies on the heroic epics, such as *The Odyssey*, and mediaeval romances, such as *The Quest for the Holy Grail* and *Parzival*, often serving as the most culturally recognisable implementations of quest narratives, the references to which are commonly employed within the questing tradition of fantasy role-playing games.<sup>15</sup> This is further supported by the research of Eddo Stern, who, although he does not reference quests specifically, discusses the narrative structures and game design of massively multiplayer online games, and the inspirations they draw from mediaeval motifs, especially when employing fantasy genre trappings.<sup>16</sup> Such an employment of questing themes and structures is quite prominent in *Origins*. As a role-playing game set in the fantasy world of Thedas, it presents the story of the Grey Wardens, an order of legendary warriors tasked with fighting creatures called the darkspawn. At its core, the game encourages the player to engage with a heroic adventuring plot and with a gameplay structured around moving through game space while facing and overcoming challenges. As previously explained, at the beginning of the game, the player creates the PC, whose role they then assume, as they control them throughout the game in gameplay tasks, movement, and dialogue options. The PC, narratively, fits into the role of a questing hero, who is recruited to join the Wardens early in the game and who, when a battle against the darkspawn wipes out most of the order soon thereafter, is tasked with gathering allies to stop the upcoming darkspawn invasion. Like sir Galahad they undertake a perilous journey with a near-impossible task, like Odysseus they are continuously subjected to tests of skill and cunning. Their role in the main plot, therefore, fits with that of the archetypical hero in quest-romance, according to Frye's definition, mentioned previously. That reference is strengthened by the poetics of gameplay. As the PC traverses the space of a fantastic world, they battle monsters, gather allies, and develop their skills. The challenges they face are employed in gameplay through rules of combat, puzzles, and even approval calculations in dialogue structures. The journey is depicted through spatial progression on the game map and takes place as the player guides the character through their environment. The rewards for

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<sup>14</sup> Howard, "Quests," 1.

<sup>15</sup> Howard, "Quests," xi–xii.

<sup>16</sup> Eddo Stern, "A Touch of Medieval: Narrative, Magic and Computer Technology in Massively Multiplayer Computer Role-Playing Games," in *Computer Games and Digital Cultures Conference Proceedings*, ed. Frans Mäyrä (Tampere: Tampere University Press, 2002), 257–276.

the performance of tasks within the ongoing struggle involve, for instance, useful items and experience points. These points translate to character progression based on a levelling system, which allows for the PC to gain new talents and skills. In their adventures, they face choices, the sum of which shapes the final outcome of the game – which cannot be, outside of failure in combat, lost, but can have, in turn, several different endings. In other words, *Origins* fits into the previously discussed pattern of the reinterpretation of quest-romance tradition within fantasy role-playing games, as its quest structures not only reference the broader cultural pattern of fantastic heroic adventuring, but they also direct player engagement through the use of medium-specific poetics in communicating themes associated with cultural depictions of heroic adventuring, such as journey, challenge, and reward.

### ***Dragon Age: Origins'* Romantic Subplots – the Intimacy of Quest-romance**

As the PC of *Dragon Age: Origins* traverses the fantastic world on their heroic adventures, they can simultaneously form and develop relationships with their travelling companions. There are several predetermined non-player characters (NPCs) who can join and assist the PC and, out of those, four are “romanceable”, which means the game offers the opportunity to explore a romantic relationship with them. The initiation of a romance happens through specific dialogue lines, if picked. The selection of possible romances is determined by the PC’s gender – two NPCs are bisexual, and two heterosexual. The romances happen mainly through dialogue structures within in-game talks with characters, consisting primarily of NPC lines to which the PC must respond by choosing from a set of options. These can determine the NPC’s overall impression of the PC, as the selected dialogue lines are evaluated through an approval system. Points of approval can be gained or lost when a specific dialogue option is picked, based on the preferences of a particular evaluating NPC; the NPC’s reaction is predetermined by the game and assigned to a given dialogue line. The net total of these approval points determines a given character’s disposition towards the PC. Maintaining high approval with a specific character allows for the romantic subplot to progress, without ending prematurely. Several romances can be pursued at the same time, although if the progression of two or more goes far enough, the characters will ask the PC to choose between them, following the traditional patterns of monogamy in popular romance narratives. The narrative structure of the romantic subplots also fits within the larger patterns of ro-

mance narratives, as it prioritises slow progression throughout the game (the approval points accumulate gradually), and does not allow for casual relationships – each of the narratives emphasises eventual deep love and devotion. In turn, the implementation of dialogue choices and approval system causes a feedback loop, in which the favour of a lover serves as a reward for a correctly performed action. This seems to echo the association of love as a reward present in traditional quest narratives.<sup>17</sup> Similarly, a closer examination of in-game romances allows several further areas of overlap between their content and the structure of narratives in the quest-romance tradition to be discerned.

Firstly, the overarching adventuring plot serves as an integral context against which the romantic relationship between the characters develops. All four romanceable characters in *Origins* have personal stakes in the unfolding of the events of the main adventure. Alistair, a soft-hearted, armour-clad warrior and the only other remaining Warden, eventually confesses to being the bastard son of a late king, which renders him one of the possible heirs to the throne and a key character in the game's main political intrigue. Morrigan, the rather inconsiderate daughter of an ominous ancient witch, is not only personally tasked by her mother with helping the PC after saving them and Alistair at the early stages of the game, but she also hopes to accompany them during the final confrontation, with the intention of performing a black magic ritual for personal gain. Leliana, an unassuming ex-spy and now-cloistered sister, claims to have religious visions, which have prompted her to help the PC, while, at the same time, travelling with them provides her with a degree of protection from her past adversaries. Similarly, Zevran, a flirty elven assassin, finds safety from his associates in the PC's party, which he joins after a failed assassination attempt on behalf of the game's main antagonist. In all four cases, then, the events of the main adventure bring the characters together, provide them with the motivation to stay so, and direct the unfolding of each romance. The link between the heroics and the relationship dynamics is emphasised further in gameplay terms by the employment of the approval system. As the PC ventures on quests and makes decisions within them – such as how to resolve a political conflict or whose side to take between factions – their companions react, and similarly to the aforementioned case of dialogue choices, the romanceable characters' evaluations of the PC's actions translate into awarding or retracting points of approval. The romantic progression, then, is inherently related to the heroics performed during the game, as the structuring of choices translates directly into the status of the relationship. Heroic adventure thus becomes an inte-

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<sup>17</sup> Frye, *Anatomy of Criticism*, 189.

gral element of courtship, as the progression in the romance both accompanies the progression in the main plotline and is determined by the PC's actions and choices within it.

Secondly, in-game quests, understood as tasks and units of gaming activity, are integrated within the structure of the romances. Within the game, the PC performs specific tasks; these tasks usually involve facing opponents in combat, resolving conflict through dialogue, and exploring areas of the game map. These tasks – deemed 'quests' – divide both gameplay and the game narrative into smaller units, while at the same time their completion awards the PC with rewards, such as useful items, new narrative possibilities, or experience points used further to develop their skills. Several quests involve the romanceable characters. Each of the characters either asks the PC to perform a task for them, or triggers such a task through their very presence in the party. Notably, while these tasks are not unique to the romance, and can happen outside the romantic context, they heavily influence its outcome and are crucial for the romantic progression. For instance, Morrigan's quest involves a confrontation with her murderous mother. Morrigan, after realising her mother intends to kill her, asks the PC to travel to her home and challenge her mother, which potentially results in a difficult combat encounter with a dragon. The quest, then, directly mirrors the classic structure of traversal, challenge, and exaltation of the hero mentioned above, especially since upon their successful return the PC is rewarded with Morrigan's appreciation both in dialogue and approval points. In contrast, Alistair, plagued by familial abandonment issues, asks the PC to accompany him during a visit with his estranged sister. While the quest that follows is not particularly lengthy or grueling, it does require game space to be traversed and support to be provided, especially as the sister does not want to reconcile. As there are several moments in which the PC can gain or lose Alistair's approval through the dialogue choices, the quest follows the same pattern of journey and challenge as Morrigan's, but the challenge concerns emotional support and skill in addressing his issues correctly, rather than literal combat. Leliana, similarly, needs help in confronting her past mentor, which turns into a lesson in self-acceptance. In turn, Zevran's quest presents a break from the general convention, since it is triggered in the form of his previous associate's attempt to assassinate the PC, the events of which are determined by Zevran's approval score. Nonetheless, in each case the events of the personal quest determine the potential future of the romance as a whole, because the PC's choices determine the character's approval, and in some cases even prevent the very possibility of continuing the romantic subplot. Additionally, all of these quests require some degree of effort to be performed by the PC both

in the story and through gameplay, since they involve combat or dialogue choice calculations. Moreover, the difficulty of the challenge is communicated through gameplay, as either the difficulty of a combat encounter or the necessity to navigate dialogue choices. Thus, questing becomes an integral part of the romantic subplot, as well as a means of courtship, and the challenges it involves serve as a way for the PC to prove themselves to their chosen paramour. In addition, these trials of love function as elements of the gameplay; they are communicated to the audience with the support of gameplay poetics, enhancing the emphasis on the challenging nature of forming and developing the romantic relationship. The use of quests in romantic content, then, along with the relationship between the romantic subplots and overarching heroic narrative, clearly references the tradition of quest-romance narratives, borrowing from them aesthetically and structurally, while at the same time accommodating the theme to the realities of the medium.

### ***Dragon Age: Origins'* Romantic Subplots – the Emotional Challenge of Quest-romance**

While quests as such comprise only a small part of *Origins'* romantic subplots, these subplots are fundamentally concerned with the themes of challenge, progression and transformation, characteristic of the quest-romance tradition; the evidence thereof can be found upon closer inspection of the dialogue content and structures. The talks with the romanced NPCs concern, primarily, the emotional turmoil and traumas of the romanced characters, which the PC must address by choosing one of several dialogue options. Alistair, for instance, traumatised by the repeated loss of friends and family, needs the PC to show unwavering support and provide him with comfort. Morrigan's harsh, almost unfeeling nature requires the PC to be both respectful of her attitude and insistent on building attachment, leading to her placing her trust in them. Leliana, torn between her religious beliefs and fascination with brutal spy-work, needs the PC to help her determine what path to follow. Zevran, initially unwilling to forge any meaningful connection, presents an exercise in gradually forming a deep attachment and overcoming trust issues; his romantic dialogue consists of minor displays of empathy towards the PC, for instance by gifting them things he might have mentioned in passing. Not only, then, do the romance dialogues require the PC to follow the patterns fitting the individual needs of a given character, but in doing so they also engage the themes of processual change through introspection and reassurance, and contextualise them as a calculation of gain and loss against

the approval system. Thus, they encode love as a series of challenges, primarily emotional and empathetic ones, which the PC must successfully navigate to prove their worth to their lover, and which (if undertaken successfully) lead to eventual transformation, mutual character development, and exaltation in consummated love – mirroring the heroic adventure themes, as outlined by Frye, in the more private, emotional sphere.

While quest-romance has always engaged with the themes of love, especially while presenting it as the motivator for the hardship of the adventure and its final reward,<sup>18</sup> such a close intersection of the inner, psychological and emotional dimensions with the structure of the quest-romance in the romantic subplots of *Origins* is reminiscent of a specific reformulation of this literary form – namely, the internally-oriented iteration of quest-romance traceable to the literary conventions of Romanticism. To specify: literary scholars notice a certain shift in how English Romantic and post-Romantic literature, when evoking the themes and traditions of quest-romance, uses them to address more internal, psychological journeys of self-discovery and self-actualisation. For instance, Harold Bloom, while discussing English Romanticism in terms of a revival of romance, discerns the following pattern of Romantic poetry: “[t]he poet takes the patterns of quest-romance and transposes them into his own imaginative life.”<sup>19</sup> Bloom continues by describing this tendency in psychoanalytically inspired terms as the internalisation of quest-romance, in which the journey is oriented internally, into the self, of which he finds examples in the works of Blake, Keats, Shelley and Wordsworth. Fredric Jameson observes a similar change in the Romantic tradition, but attributes this reappropriation and deviation from the traditional structure to social transformation and changing sensibilities.<sup>20</sup> Jameson discusses the degree of secularisation and demystification of the traditional magical elements of romance, as well as the resulting interest in the psychological aspects, including the rationalisation and internalisation of the hero’s struggles.<sup>21</sup> Notably, the Romantic alteration of quest-romance inspires Catherine Gimelli Martin, who, developing this discussion further, demonstrates the “persistence” of quest-romance in reference to the proto-Romantic senti-

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<sup>18</sup> Frye mentions the figure of the bride, saved during the quest and won as its reward, giving, for instance, the Sleeping Beauty and Brunhilde as examples; Frye, *Anatomy of Criticism*, 193.

<sup>19</sup> Harold Bloom, “The Internalization of Quest-Romance,” in Harold Bloom, *The Ringers in the Tower. Studies in Romantic Tradition* (Chicago-London: University of Chicago Press, 1971), 15.

<sup>20</sup> Fredric Jameson, *The Political Unconscious. Narrative as a Socially Symbolic Act* (London, New York: Routledge Classics, 2002), 115–117.

<sup>21</sup> Jameson, *The Political Unconscious*, 118–120.

mental novel, discussing the case of Samuel Richardson's *Pamela*.<sup>22</sup> In doing so, she demonstrates fundamental analogies between the patterns of the novel and quest-romance structures and themes, as she argues that Richardson's novel includes motifs such as allegorical search, virtue rewarded, and social and individual redemption through sacrifice, as well as a chain of events structurally referencing that of quest-romance narratives.<sup>23</sup> However, she also affirms the transformed character of these motifs, adjusted to the gender identities of the characters and the socio-emotional conflict of the novel.<sup>24</sup> Thus, Martin both pronounces the influence of quest-romance on the *de facto* prototypical popular romance novel,<sup>25</sup> linking the modern genre with the broader romantic tradition, and emphasises the crucial transformations of the form. Pamela Regis presents a similar argument, as in her seminal study on the characteristics and history of the popular romance novel she identifies its roots in the broader romance genre.<sup>26</sup> When she lists common, core elements of the contemporary popular romance novel, they include the trials and barriers that the lovers have to overcome to be together, a sacrifice, the eventual overcoming of the previous troubles, and even eventual transformation through the healing and redemptive power of love,<sup>27</sup> thus loosely following the adventuring quest-romance structure in reference to the romantic relationship. Initially, Regis provides *Pride and Prejudice* as the illustration – with societal expectations, familial transgressions and personal miscommunication constituting barriers and resulting trials for Elizabeth and Darcy<sup>28</sup> – but frames these structural elements as core to the entire genre of the romance novel. Importantly, Regis notices a historical shift within popular romance narratives themselves, especially in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. She addresses the internalisation of the conflict between the hero and the heroine, whose struggles become increasingly entrenched in their personal and emotional troubles and differences, rather than societal causes.<sup>29</sup> This internalisation does not, however, change the core structure of the romantic narrative. Much as in the case of the proto-Romantic

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<sup>22</sup> Catherine Gimelli Martin, "On the Persistence of Quest-Romance in the Romantic Genre: The Strange Case of Pamela," *Poetics Today* 12, no. 1 (1991): 87–109.

<sup>23</sup> Martin, "On the Persistence," 102–104.

<sup>24</sup> Martin, "On the Persistence," 104–105.

<sup>25</sup> As indicated by Pamela Regis in her study of the contemporary romantic form (see: Pamela Regis, *A Natural History of the Romance Novel* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2007), 63–74.)

<sup>26</sup> Regis, *A Natural History of the Romance Novel*, 19–22.

<sup>27</sup> Regis, *A Natural History of the Romance Novel*, 30–45.

<sup>28</sup> Regis, *A Natural History of the Romance Novel*, 31–38.

<sup>29</sup> Regis, *A Natural History of the Romance Novel*, 110–111.

rendition of quest-romance, the transformed narratives remain mostly faithful to the structure of their original genre, but present a more internally-oriented, affective and individualistic rendition of its themes. In doing so, they refer to the traditional structural patterns of romance, but adopt them in the depictions of the intimate and emotional trials and tribulations of the lovers' courtship.

In light of this tradition, it seems feasible to argue that the very structure of the romantic subplots in *Origins* – with their focus on overcoming internal challenges through ongoing emotional struggle, on the hero(ine) proving themselves as trustworthy to the chosen paramour, and on the psychological and emotional transformation – fits well within the post-Romantic and popular-romantic renditions of quest-romance, although no purposeful references are drawn within the game. Alistair's personal quest, mentioned previously, is a good example. Throughout the short questline, Alistair establishes his reliance on the PC's presence and his expectation that they will take charge and guide him through the experience of meeting his sister. For instance, when asked if he would rather meet Goldanna on his own, Alistair quickly explains that he is too nervous and refuses to go alone. It is possible to argue, then, that Alistair tasks the PC with the responsibility of shouldering his distress and providing comfort, thus translating the challenge of the quest into an exercise in emotional management. That management is further contextualised as an act of service in supporting Alistair, as the relationship between him and the PC is strengthened afterwards. Moreover, the quest leads to Alistair's personal transformation, because the confrontation with his sister leaves him disillusioned enough to address his naivety, which becomes the theme of several subsequent conversations.

Thus, the reappropriation of the themes of quest-romance in the particular case of *Origins'* romances concerns the journey through the psychological and emotional barriers, overcoming challenges rooted in a traumatic past, and emerging victorious in love – as Alistair overcomes grief and creates a new family, Morrigan opens herself up to trust another person, Leliana accepts her past through the PC's guidance, and Zevran allows himself to feel true attachment, all while the PC is rewarded with their affection and devotion. *Origins'* romantic subplots, then, seem to follow the post-Romantic tradition of adopting and reappropriating the convention of quest-romance in stories of intimate love, whose conflict stems from the internal turmoil of the characters. This turmoil is, moreover, adjusted to gameplay poetics, as it is encoded in dialogue-based calculations of approval, rendering the emotional, psychological quest gamified. Such gamification contributes to the overall interpretation of romantic love as gained through a gradual, transformative process, a series of challenges, in which love serves as a reward

for making an effort for the beloved. It also encourages audience involvement, as the player is asked to evaluate dialogue options and in picking them interacts with the quest-romance patterns as they actively shape the outcome of the romance story. In doing so, *Origins* loosely and seemingly unknowingly readopts the already transformed post-Romantic version of quest-romance. It does this in order to explore the struggles and challenges of love, while the game's purposeful heroic, adventuring background, as well as the procedural, gameplay-based employment of the relevant themes, seems to strengthen that connection and cultural association. Furthermore, it engages the audience in the reproduction of the patterns of quest-romance within the romantic content, as the players interact with dialogue choices.

## Conclusion

Questing for love manifests itself in *Dragon Age: Origins* in several ways. As the player character of *Origins* traverses the game world on a journey to save the world and slay the monsters, they do so together with their chosen beloved, who both helps them on their quests and judges their actions. The very possibility of romance between adventuring companions already combines closely the romantic with the heroic within the game. As the PC ventures forth to slay the monster, confront the estranged sister or a scorned lover, that tight link between questing and courting becomes even tighter. As these actions become contextualised within the romantic subplot, whose main focus is on continued empathy, understanding, and support, the task-quests themselves become an integral element of that emotional struggle. And, as that emotional support in itself is presented as a struggle, both in terms of thematic presentation and the procedural conditions of the loss and gain of approval in dialogue structures, the romance in itself inherently becomes a quest into the emotions and psychology of the lovers, whose final reward is the healing transformation of the world, the PC, and their paramour, when they reach emotional peace while establishing a relationship.

While to claim that the romances in *Origins* fully implement traditional quest-romance structures would be an overstatement, the thematic and structural implementations described above allow one to claim that the romantic subplots readopt elements of the previously transformed, romanticised tradition of communicating stories of the search and struggle for love, achieved through a series of challenges and proofs of devotion. Moreover, the procedural means of expression participate in this adoption of quest-romance references to the realities of the digital and ludic medium. The division of in-game activity into questlines with clear objectives helps establish

the adventuring character of the game and guides player engagement to face and overcome heroic challenges. The combat system, puzzles, and even the meandering character of the various game maps, all encode the difficulty of these challenges through gameplay-based means of expression. Finally, most relevant to the romances, the poetics of choice and the employment of approval calculations within dialogue structures add the degree of difficulty which mirrors the heroic challenges in the romantic conversations. Notably, the inwardly-oriented, psychological and emotional aspects of such a quest for love are also presented through the use of gameplay mechanics, including a choice system and its rewards. The psychological struggle of and for love, the internal conflict that must be overcome for the lovers to unite, becomes gamified as it is encoded in the rules of the romance. The resulting interpretation of love as an arduous, gradual process and a result of emotional efforts is thus reinforced through the interactive, goal-oriented, and progression-based nature of the game, while the audience engages with the references to the quest-romance tradition on the level of both story and gameplay, participating in the reproduction of these themes and structures in the process of play.

In doing so, *Origins* does not only engage with the established literary tradition, but it also adjusts it – or rather, in the case of the romantic subplots, its existing post-Romantic re-working – to both contemporary sensitivities and novel storytelling practices. The gamified, ludic and procedural version of internalised quest-romance for love illustrates how the old and the new can entwine in the digital forms of storytelling, and how the medium of digital games re-arranges the established traditions in appropriating them. As a result, *Origins* serves as an example of the circulation of the established literary themes in more novel storytelling outlets as well as their constant re-interpretations within (in this case love-related) cultural landscapes.

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## **Poszukiwanie cyfrowej miłości. O wykorzystaniu tradycji romansu poszukiwań w wątkach romantycznych w *Dragon Age: Origins***

**Abstrakt:** Niniejszy artykuł przedstawia krótką analizę punktów przecięcia między literacką tradycją romansu poszukiwań a rozrywką cyfrową. Omówiono wykorzystanie tejże tradycji w wątkach romansowych w fabularnej grze cyfrowej *Dragon Age: Origins*. Wychodząc od literaturoznawczych ujęć konwencji romansu poszukiwań i jego historycznych przemian, zwłaszcza introspektywnego zwrotu wywodzącego się z romantyzmu, a także jego wpływów na popularne narracje romansowe, analizie poddano cztery romanse dostępne w grze,

a w szczególności: ich związek z głównym wątkiem przygodowym oraz ich wewnętrzną strukturę opartą na niustannych wyzwaniach i nagrodach. Przeprowadzona analiza prowadzi do wniosku, że wątki romansowe w *Dragon Age: Origins* nie tylko czerpią z literackiej tradycji romansu poszukiwań, ale również, aby dostosować jego strukturalne i tematyczne aspekty do proceduralnego ludycznego charakteru gry cyfrowej, angażują specyficzne dla medium gier środki wyrazu.

**Słowa kluczowe:** gry cyfrowe, *love studies*, romans poszukiwań, narracje romansowe.

## **Die Suche nach der digitalen Liebe. Über die Wiederaufnahme der Tradition der Quest-Romantik in romantischen Motiven in *Dragon Age: Origins***

**Abstract:** In diesem Beitrag wird eine kurze Untersuchung der Überschneidungen zwischen der literarischen Tradition der Quest-Romantik und der digitalen Unterhaltung dargestellt. Er erörtert die Wiederaufnahme dieser Tradition in die romantischen Nebenhandlungen eines digitalen Fantasy-Rollenspiels, *Dragon Age: Origins*. Auf der Grundlage literaturtheoretischer Ansätze zur Konvention der Quest-Romanze und ihrer historischen Veränderungen, insbesondere der introspektiven Wendung, die auf die Romantik zurückgeht, sowie der kulturellen Einflüsse der Quest-Romanze auf populäre romantische Erzählungen, befasst sich der Beitrag mit vier Romanzen, die dem Spieler im Spiel zur Verfügung stehen, mit besonderem Augenmerk auf ihre Beziehung zur heroischen Haupthandlung und ihre inhärente Struktur, die auf ständigen Herausforderungen und möglichen Belohnungen beruht. Die Analyse lässt den Schluss zu, dass die Romantikmotive in *Dragon Age: Origins* nicht nur auf die literarische Tradition der Quest-Romantik zurückgreifen, sondern auch medienspezifische Ausdrucksmittel einsetzen, damit ihre strukturellen und thematischen Aspekte an die Realität des prozessualen, spielerischen Mediums eines digitalen Spiels angepasst werden.

**Schlüsselwörter:** digitale Spiele, *love studies*, Romanze, Quest-Romantik.





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## Digital Narrator as a Game Master. The Case of *Baldur's Gate III*

**Abstract:** This article is a preliminary exploratory analysis of the narrator in *Baldur's Gate III* seen as a digital simulation of an analogue game master (GM). As the reception of *Baldur's Gate* series has always been closely linked to its analogue predecessor, *Dungeons & Dragons*, the main context of the analysis is theoretical reflections concerning tabletop role-playing games (TRPG), especially in relation to digital ones. The analysis covers not only a close reading of some of the in-game utterances, but also the commentary of Amelia Tyler, the actress lending her voice to the narrator. The author argues that while all installments of the series attempted to re-create certain experiences characteristic of TRPG sessions through the digital medium, one of key differences between *Baldur's Gate III* and its predecessors is that it features a complex, voiced narration, designed according to real-life GMs.

**Keywords:** role-playing games, *Baldur's Gate*, narrator.

*Baldur's Gate III* (Larian Studios, 2023) is, without doubt, one of the most successful productions of its time.<sup>1</sup> And although it is a third installment of a very recognisable series that has garnered a cult following over the years

<sup>1</sup> On *Metacritic* (the most popular review aggregator for video games) it holds a "Universal Acclaim" rating with the score of 96 % from aggregated user and critic reviews. It also earned five "Game of the Year" awards from the most important events: the Golden Joystick Awards, The Game Awards, the D.I.C.E. Awards, the GDC Awards and the British Academy Games Awards.

– if there was a canon of computer role-playing games *Baldur's Gate* (BioWare, 1998) and *Baldur's Gate II: Shadows of Amn* (BioWare, 2000) would have to be included – its success should probably be considered somewhat independently of its predecessors. This does not mean that the most recent part of the series has nothing in common with the first two games; conversely, all three titles share many features, both on the narrative and mechanical planes. However, the sheer quarter-of-a-century time gap between them has to be taken into account, as *Baldur's Gate III* is neither a direct continuation nor a simple reboot that serves as a vehicle for nostalgia; it is rather a complex remodelling of a traditional ludic convention within the computer role-playing games (CRPG) genre that has resonated with at least two generations of players.

*Baldur's Gate* games developed by BioWare were set in the fantasy world of *Forgotten Realms*, one of the most popular and prolific campaign settings for the *Dungeons & Dragons* (1974) tabletop role-playing game (TRPG), which in turn became the main inspiration for the games' mechanics. This was not the first time that Gary Gygax's groundbreaking system had been translated into the digital medium, but it is because of *Baldur's Gate* that the year 1998 could arguably be named as "the second renaissance of *Dungeons & Dragons* games".<sup>2</sup> Contemporary reviewers, most of whom were rather enthusiastic, often noted the similarities between the gameplay experience and the real life tabletop sessions as well as the close adaptation of the *Advanced Dungeons & Dragons 2<sup>nd</sup> Edition* (1989) rules. For example, in 1999, Cindy Yans of *Computer Games Magazine* wrote:

[W]e were not prepared for the ultimate payoff that is *Baldur's Gate*. While not perfect in every way, this game captures the spirit of *AD&D*; better than any of its predecessors and is as good as it gets in the RPG genre. Welcome to the next generation of role-playing. [...] Probably the ultimate highlight of *Baldur's Gate* is its stalwart adherence to the *AD&D*; ruleset. Although the truest of true Pen and Paper enthusiasts will find places in which the game strays from the Gygax Codex, it is still the most faithful rendition we've seen that does not sport a human GM and dice. From character creation rolls to spellcasting restrictions, it's all there.<sup>3</sup>

I find this quote representative of the general sentiment expressed towards the *Baldur's Gate* series regardless of any given installment – one of its con-

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<sup>2</sup> Michael J. Tresca, *The Evolution of Fantasy Role-Playing Games* (Jefferson: McFarland & Company, 2011), 144.

<sup>3</sup> Cindy Yans, "Baldur's Gate. *AD&D*; as good as it gets without pencils", *Computer Games Magazine*, January 26, 1999, original address: [http://cdmag.com/articles/017/046/baldurs\\_gate\\_review.html](http://cdmag.com/articles/017/046/baldurs_gate_review.html), accessed through Wayback Machine: [https://web.archive.org/web/20050204225850/http://cdmag.com/articles/017/046/baldurs\\_gate\\_review.html](https://web.archive.org/web/20050204225850/http://cdmag.com/articles/017/046/baldurs_gate_review.html).

stitutive qualities is that it transfers select elements of the analogue TRPG genre onto the digital CRPG one.

It is, of course, a matter of scale; TRPGs (and *D&D* in particular) have had a visible, lasting and formative influence on narrative video games that can be traced back as early as the 1970s,<sup>4</sup> but only some of the digital productions (including all of the *Baldur's Gate* titles) deliberately underline this influence in order to simulate various aspects of tabletop gaming. One might add that in such a context the *Forgotten Realms'* storyworld<sup>5</sup> seems – at least at this point in the history of the fantasy genre – to be of secondary importance as it is a capacious yet very conventional vehicle for narratives. What imbues the series with its appeal or its crucial characteristics is the mechanical and tonal affinity to a more general experience of TRPG play. That said, although *Baldur's Gate* games could be considered to some extent as simulations of analogue role-playing, they should not be perceived as some creative attempts to seamlessly merge the TRPG and CRPG ludic genres.<sup>6</sup> Jennifer Grouling Cover provided a rather clear and convincing distinction between the two which comes down to an important difference between interactivity and agency.<sup>7</sup> To put it simply: the most common question coming from the Game Master (GM) in any TRPG is an open “what do you do?”, which provides players with a strong sense of agency, whereas in CRPGs players are inevitably offered a limited number of preset courses of action, so the (implied) question there would rather be a determined “what do you choose?”.

The series *Baldur's Gate* is not in any way exempt from said distinction, but if we do agree that CRPG and TRPG are in fact different genres, then these games can be tentatively analyzed as exhibiting traits of ludic syncretism while remaining entirely within the CRPG genre. Having established this hypothesis, it becomes significantly easier to grasp the key differences between

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<sup>4</sup> Cf. Douglas Schules, Jon Peterson, and Martin Picard, “Single-Player Computer Role-Playing Games,” in *Role-Playing Game Studies. Transmedia Foundations*, eds. José P. Zagal, and Sebastian Deterding (New York: Routledge, 2017), 107–129.

<sup>5</sup> I understand storyworld as defined by Marie-Laure Ryan: “a dynamic model of evolving situations, and its representation in the recipient’s mind is a simulation of the changes that are caused by the events of the plot”. Marie-Laure Ryan, “Story/worlds/media. Tuning the instruments of a media-conscious narratology,” in *Storyworlds across media. Toward a media-conscious narratology*, eds. Marie-Laure Ryan, and Jan-Noël Thon (Lincoln and London: University of Nebraska Press, 2014), 33.

<sup>6</sup> A ludic genre is a genre of game dependent on the rules and the type of gameplay (i. e. identified regardless of its theme or functional aspect), cf. Maria B. Garda, *Interaktywne fantasy. Gatunek w grach cyfrowych* (Łódź: Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Łódzkiego, 2016), 26.

<sup>7</sup> Cf. Jennifer Grouling Cover, *The Creation of Narrative in Tabletop Role-Playing Games* (Jefferson and London: McFarland & Company, 2010), 46.

the earlier BioWare titles and the most recent one from Larian Studios. And so, I would argue that the quality of the syncretic experience of play in the first two games depended on creative solutions quite different from those employed in *Baldur's Gate III*. The first installments focused chiefly on an innovative and ultimately successful application of AD&D mechanics to the language of digital games, as highlighted in contemporary reviews, but in the process of their development many other aspects of analogue role-playing included later in *Baldur's Gate III* were omitted, either because of the technical limitations or a different creative vision. One of these aspects is the complex and voiced second-person narration, the focal point of this article.

The presence of the narrator in *Baldur's Gate III* is noticeable from the very beginning of gameplay and it provides a constant interpretative frame for the player's actions. Every player's story in the game starts the same: after two short cutscenes, the playable character (PC) is shown exiting some kind of hibernation pod on a burning and malfunctioning flying vessel controlled (now less so) by the nefarious race of mind flayers. This is when the narrator speaks for the first time; her opening lines can serve as a good example of the mode in which she communicates with the player:

The blood in your head thrums and pounds. The pounding blood obscures who you are. An overwhelming loss of memory. How you ended up amidst these hellish flames is just as hidden. You have nothing in your skull, besides your name and a headache. But you are in danger.

Probably the first thing that needs to be addressed is that it instantly becomes clear that because of the use of second person this is not a traditional, seemingly transparent epic narration. It is, however, a well-established storytelling device in interactive fiction and various ludic genres, including TRPGs. Because of its wide use, the practice has been a point of interest for many scholars,<sup>8</sup> so the catalogue of functions it may theoretically have does not need to be elaborated on in the context of this analysis. But what has to be pointed out is that in this case the second-person narration is one of the strategies enabling the developers to closely mimic certain types of GM utterances during TRPG sessions.

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<sup>8</sup> These relationships were examined quite early into the history of digital game studies, e. g. by Espen Aarseth (cf. Espen Aarseth, *Cybertext. Perspectives on Ergodic Literature* (Baltimore and London: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1997), 97–129), and quite often the interpretations include the interactive fiction genre; cf. Alice Bell and Astrid Ensslin, "«I know what it was. You know what it was»: Second-Person Narrative in Hypertext Fiction," *Narrative* 3, vol. 19 (October 2011): 311–329; a multitude of academic and non-academic perspectives on the subject was presented in a collective work edited by Pat Harrigan and Noah Wardrip-Fruin. Cf. *Second Person: Role-Playing and Story in Games and Playable Media*, eds. Pat Harrigan, and Noah Wardrip-Fruin (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2007).

A session of analogue role-playing is a mostly unscripted social event featuring at least two actors, where a lot of communication takes place. Things are said in-game and off-game; conversations can refer to real-world situations, the game system, fictional events that are either parts of the plot or pieces of the lore, and many other things. Perhaps most utterances come from the GM who is responsible, among other things, for narrating the adventure, explaining the fictional world to the other players, informing them of their successes and failures and, generally speaking, reacting to the situation at hand. The narrator in *Baldur's Gate III*, on the other hand, is a limited artistic creation, so naturally she cannot perform all of these activities. Instead, her utterances are exclusively contained within the frame of what Grouling Cover calls the “narrative speech” – a mode of communication serving to establish the actual textual world, located close to the high end of narrativity spectrum (as opposed to, for example, off-game remarks exhibiting a low level of narrativity).<sup>9</sup>

When performed by the GM, the narrative speech in TRPGs primarily utilises the second person and present tense in order to “give the players a sense of temporal immersion”,<sup>10</sup> and it is safe to assume that in the case of *Baldur's Gate III* the developers’ motives were the same. The “you” spoken to by the narrator is the “you” currently in the gameworld – the critically endangered, terrified “you” with a throbbing headache and severe amnesia, not the “you” sitting more or less comfortably in front of the screen. The abundant use of such a method of communication with the players encourages them – to use Daniel Vella’s terminology – to embrace the “internal perspective of the ludic-subject, which [...] leads, when inhabited by the player, to the enactment of a ludic subject as a first-personal, lived experience of being-in-the gameworld”.<sup>11</sup> Clearly, the language used in the narrator’s lines supports this function – even in this passage one can see that she speaks in dynamic, mostly simple sentences, containing many epithets and non-neutral verbs, aimed at efficiently conveying the desired emotional states. In short, the narrator helps the player conceptualise and specify their PC’s point of view. This alone is a significant difference between *Baldur's Gate III* and its predecessors – although they had a voiced narrator speaking from the second-person perspective, he could be heard much less often, to the point of being practically absent through most of the gameplay. This does not mean,

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<sup>9</sup> Cf. Grouling Cover, *The Creation of Narrative in Tabletop Role-Playing Games*, 94.

<sup>10</sup> Grouling Cover, *The Creation of Narrative in Tabletop Role-Playing Games*, 103.

<sup>11</sup> Daniel Vella, *The Ludic Subject and the Ludic Self: Analyzing the I-in-the-Gameworld* (PhD thesis), (Copenhagen: IT University, 2015), 309, [https://pure.itu.dk/ws/portalfiles/portal/83014954/Dissertation\\_Daniel\\_Vella.pdf](https://pure.itu.dk/ws/portalfiles/portal/83014954/Dissertation_Daniel_Vella.pdf).

of course, that he was unnoticeable or even forgettable, although he played a quite different role, either providing somewhat static introductions to the consecutive chapters<sup>12</sup> or automatically addressing the mechanical side of the game in a thinly veiled manner (e. g. “You must gather your party before venturing forth”). Although the introductions mentioned above could vary to a certain degree in regard to the individual players’ choices, they can hardly be compared to the improvised in-game utterances of a typical GM, who speaks much more often, acknowledging practically every action of a PC almost simultaneously to it being performed.

I find the last difference particularly important in the context of this analysis, as it highlights a crucial strategy undertaken in *Baldur’s Gate III* and at the same deeply rooted in the TRPG experience – the simultaneous adaptation of language and content of the narrative to the current style of play. Perhaps a good illustration of this creative solution is the encounter with Timber, one of the squirrels in the Druid’s Grove from the first act. If the PC does not possess the ability to talk to animals and Timber cannot speak for herself, the scene is almost entirely narrated without dialogue (there might be some inserts coming from the PC’s companions). Once the party enters the encounter area, the squirrel throws herself onto the PC’s feet, biting furiously. “The squirrel lunges at your foot and bites it,” says the narrator, while the game gives the player three courses of action. Apart from leaving, they can either try to kick the animal right away – which, if successful, always ends in her death – or to study its behavior in order to establish the root of the apparent conflict. Should the player kill Timber instantly, the narrator quips dryly: “You claim victory over the squirrel, though you’re not sure why you were fighting to begin with”. However, if the player chooses to take a closer look at the squirrel, the narrator explains: “You follow the squirrel’s gaze to a pair of clumsy, ugly feet. Your own, on *her* territory. Looking around, «her territory» extends from one end of the grove to another”. Afterwards, the player must make another choice regarding the encounter – the PC can kick the squirrel anyway or, for example, warn the creature with a click of the tongue, to which the narrator remarks: “She studies you for a moment before twitching her ears. Compromise. After a final squeak of warning – break the rules and there will be trouble – she scurries away”. There are some more variants of this short sequence in which the narrator will react in a different way. Just to exemplify one more – if at the beginning

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<sup>12</sup> A good example of these would be the so called “Dream sequences” from the original *Baldur’s Gate* or different endings in *Baldur’s Gate II*. They resemble quite closely the pre-written introductions or epilogues to an adventure or a whole campaign included in a textbook, prepared to be read aloud by the GM.

of the game the player chooses the Dark Urge origin (which, in short, gives the PC sometimes uncontrollable impulses to cause murderous violence), the encounter will start with a distinct narrative: "This squirrel might be the single most adorable creature you can recall in all your stunted memory! It would be ever so twee if it were climbing a tree!" Unfortunately for Timber, if a Dark Urge character cannot speak with animals, they will punt her automatically, and while the whole party gazes at the creature's bloody remains, the narrator states mysteriously: "You stare at the body before you. You have no idea what just happened".

This short, marginal encounter shows how the concept of the narrator works in *Baldur's Gate III*. First of all, most narrated CRPGs, the earlier *Baldur's Gate* games included, would not have the narrator comment on such a minute episode, whereas during a TRPG session it would have to be somehow acknowledged. Secondly, depending on the player's choices, this narrator will change accordingly – different players will be provided with different information, their narratives' foci will concern different aspects of virtual reality and their narrators will use different tones and styles. A player interested in understanding the squirrel will hear a narrator providing significantly more information and using free indirect speech that for a brief moment puts the spotlight on Timber; a player prone to cause absurd violence and gleeful carnage will be rewarded by their narrator with a short, sarcastic acknowledgement of their style of play; a player following the complex, eerie and horror-like path of Dark Urge will instead get a short insight into their PC's torrentuous and twisted psyche. Therefore, just like the player's actions shape the fictional world, the narrator's utterances complete the way in which said fictional world is perceived by the player. To use an example from the encounter described above: a casual killing of Timber will not prompt the narrator to elaborate on the squirrel's perspective, as the choice itself implies the player's or the PC's will to disregard that aspect of the story during this particular gameplay. Such dynamics between the player's actions and the narrative is quite similar to that which characterises TRPG sessions, during which the GM has to take into account the decisions made by the party not only on the eventual level (the *fabula*), but also on the presentational one.

As was said before, *Baldur's Gate III* is a digital game and therefore it does not bestow upon the players the same sense of agency as TRPGs do. A good GM is supposed to constantly negotiate the course of a scenario, even in the most drastic cases; in her study *Agency and Authority In Role-Playing "Texts"*, Jennifer Hammer describes various instances of GMs' behaviour in situations where players actively dismantled their planned courses of action, which

sometimes required an impromptu reconceptualisation of entire adventures<sup>13</sup>. Technological and generic qualities of a finite playable artifact – a term coined by Olli Tapio-Leino<sup>14</sup> – like CRPG obviously cannot allow for the same degree of improvisation and player freedom. A digital game will always put considerable restraints on the player and, to some extent, “resist her project of playing”.<sup>15</sup> Interestingly enough, tabletop GMs also possess significant capacity of resistance to their players’ ideas and actions, being ultimately able to decide the fate of PCs or even to end a session. Therefore, such construction of the digital narrator as described can be viewed as a simulation of a real-life GM or, in Hammer’s terms, a “secondary author” who provides the player with both agency and authoritative rules or resolutions.

It seems that the crucial creative decision that made this process of simulation successful was endowing the narrator with a distinct human voice, that of Amelia Tyler. Her taking a part in the project became the reason for a considerable increase in her popularity,<sup>16</sup> as the game’s narrator was met with a particularly warm reception by many fans. Consequently, she gave some interviews about the process of bringing the *Baldur’s Gate III* narrator to life – one of those could be particularly insightful in regard to this analysis, because in it Tyler states:

[t]here are very distinct styles of narration depending on the choices you make. And it’s all my voice, [...] but in different moods because we wanted it to feel like this is your narrator. [...] I wanted it to be non-judgmental, and the kind of DM<sup>17</sup> who would be perfect around a table no matter what kind of player you are. [...] We had 16 different read styles by the end depending on your choices and your character. [...] You play however you want to play. That’s why it’s so cool we’ve got the versatility in the narrator because not everyone is going to sit around a *D&D* table and get along. You’re not always going to have a DM that you gel with or gets your style of play. So I get to be that no matter what.<sup>18</sup>

The impressive number of styles in which the narrative can be presented and the emphasis Tyler places on the player’s freedom can serve as a rein-

<sup>13</sup> Cf. Jennifer Hammer, “Agency and Authority In Role-Playing “Texts”,” in *A New Literacies Sampler*, eds. Michele Knobel, and Colin Lankshear (New York et al.: Peter Lang, 2007), 67–94.

<sup>14</sup> Cf. Olli Tapio-Leino, “Death Loop as a Feature,” *Game Studies* 12, vol. 2 (December 2012), [https://gamestudies.org/1202/articles/death\\_loop\\_as\\_a\\_feature](https://gamestudies.org/1202/articles/death_loop_as_a_feature).

<sup>15</sup> Olli Tapio-Leino, “Death Loop as a Feature.”

<sup>16</sup> It is worth noting that her most famous role from before *Baldur’s Gate III* was Malady, a character from the previous big production of Larian Studios, *Divinity: Original Sin II* (2017) – also a narrated CRPG.

<sup>17</sup> DM is an abbreviation of “Dungeon Master”, the *D&D*’s equivalent of the game master.

<sup>18</sup> Amelia Tyler, “Amelia Tyler On Being A Dungeon Master For Millions In *Baldur’s Gate III*,” interview by Jade King, *The Gamer*, September 5, 2023, <https://www.thegamer.com/baldurs-gate-3-amelia-tyler-narrator-interview/>.

forcement of points made here earlier. It becomes clear that the narrator is not a creation inspired primarily by the conventions of literature or digital games; it is, principally, a digital rendering of an analogue game master. Furthermore, through versatility and a plenitude of acknowledgeable choices the developers wanted to give the player an impression of having a GM tailored to their needs.

There is, however, something more in the interview quoted above that needs to be addressed. This is the way in which Tyler describes her own position within the process of production and within countless gameplay. The actress speaks of herself as both a part of the developing team (she uses “we” when talking about creative solutions) and a perfect GM for each and every player (“I get to be that no matter what”). Throughout the entire interview Tyler accentuates that she is a TRPG player herself and as such, she invites the *Baldur’s Gate III* players to metaphorically sit at her table for a unique experience, personalised to a degree where it feels like a session with an imaginary friend:

[W]e want it to feel like it’s not another person challenging the player, it’s their voice. I’ve been a voice in their heads their entire life, and I know how they think and am totally on board with whatever choices they make. Apart from when they roll ones, in which case I’ll rip the piss out of them mercilessly.

Obviously, there is a lot of jocular exaggeration in these words, but they inevitably raise important questions about the design of narration in CRPGs. It seems that giving the narrator a voice belonging to a real person helps the players to interpret the game within a different frame – not only as a “temporally immersive” adventure in a fictional world, but also as an equally immersive simulation of another ludic form. As a result, *Baldur’s Gate III* can be seen as a fulfillment of a dream of living through a great fantasy-themed escapade as well as a dream of experiencing the perfect TRPG session (that is, one that does not involve any risks of social incompatibility). To this end, Amelia Tyler plays a double role in the game, as she is simultaneously a disembodied omniscient narrator of the story and an alternate version of herself who becomes the player’s GM.

In the context of acting, it is worth noting that TRPG is a genre that relies heavily on theatricality,<sup>19</sup> albeit with a limited spectrum of the means of expression, as players sitting at a table mostly modulate their voices, gesticu-

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<sup>19</sup> For example, an interesting interpretation of *D&D* as a ludic genre inspired by tragedy was written by Brian McKenzie, cf. Brian McKenzie, “Murders on the Stage, Tortures, Woundings, and the Like: *Dungeons & Dragons* Adventures as Tragedy,” *Analog Game Studies* 2, vol. 11 (December 2023), <https://analoggamestudies.org/2023/12/murders-on-the-stage-tortures-woundings-and-the-like-dungeons-dragons-adventures-as-tragedy/>.

late with their upper body or change their facial expressions, with only the voice modulation being basically indispensable. Therefore, the decision to voice the narration fully meant introducing to *Baldur's Gate III* one of the key sensual experiences of analogue role-playing and, as a consequence, bringing the CRPG production one step closer to its tabletop counterpart. The fact that the narration is acted (not only written) can be considered meaningful as it links the real-world Amelia Tyler to the narrator – as a GM – just as the real-life player is linked to their PC, which further highlights the game's TRPG roots. I think it interesting that the exposition of voice actors after *Baldur's Gate III* release seems to be a conscious and methodic marketing strategy: Amelia Tyler's interviews and compilations of her outtakes<sup>20</sup> are just a modest part of officially available media content related to the game and involving various members of the cast. One of the most popular segments of this content is the footage of the voice actors engaged in actual tabletop sessions of *Dungeons & Dragons* while playing the characters they lend their voice to in the game,<sup>21</sup> providing the fans with an impression that their digital companions are indeed real TRPG PCs, played – in the dual sense of the verb “to play” – by real people.

One should also take into account the more primary and sensual function of voiced dialogue, since, as Karen Collins observes, sounds in digital games “help to represent and reinforce a sense of location in terms of cultural, physical, social or historical environments,” which becomes particularly important during long gameplays when the “audio plays a crucial role in helping the player [...] to situate him- or herself in such a massive setting, reducing confusion and frustration”.<sup>22</sup> This anchor-like function of sound matches described role of the narrator very well, because the player is more likely to identify her as their friendly guide through the fictional world and as a constant part of the otherwise rapidly changing experience. On the other hand, the player is perpetually reminded of the ludic convention on which the game is based and thus is encouraged to broaden their interpretative framework to include the reality outside of the storyworld of *Forgotten Realms*.

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<sup>20</sup> Cf. Amelia Tyler, “Baldur's Gate III – Narrator outtakes #1,” June 13, 2023, YouTube, 2:19, [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0YG0Fd63\\_70](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0YG0Fd63_70) (and following).

<sup>21</sup> Cf. High Rollers DnD, “Baldur's Gate 3 Cast play D&D #1 | High Rollers Presents: Shadows of Athkatla,” September 22, 2023, YouTube, 2:46:07, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jeJKnofNBNS> (and following); Dungeons & Dragons, “An Astarion and Karlach Adventure: Love is a Legendary Action | D&D Baldur's Gate,” August 6, 2024, 2:00:45, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Cn7XLBykzEU>.

<sup>22</sup> Karen Collins, *Game Sound. An Introduction to the History, Theory and Practice of Video Game Music and Sound Design* (Cambridge and London: The MIT Press, 2008), 132.

Through associating the narrator with the figure of GM, the player can view their engagement with the game from an external perspective. Just as being addressed as the PC through the narration in the second person promotes a subjective stance in conceptualising the player's engagement, localising the ludic conventions according to which the narration was devised simultaneously inspires an objective view of the "in-game «I»".<sup>23</sup> In other words, at the same time the player can see him- or herself as engaged both in a TRPG simulation and in a fantasy adventure. It needs to be acknowledged that this article should be seen as an invitation to an academic discussion about *Baldur's Gate III* which hopefully will take place soon, as the source material is very complex and ripe for research.<sup>24</sup> Perhaps another theoretical lens that could be fruitfully applied to this game is Tomasz Z. Majkowski's concept of game-novels, employing the technique of *heteroglossia* as described by Mikhail Bakhtin.<sup>25</sup> According to Majkowski, the game-novel genre's constitutive characteristic is that it tries to picture the world in its complexity and totality through including various perspectives within the same language. Taking a closer look at the narrator of *Baldur's Gate III* could serve as a starting point for an interpretation of the game as a metapoetic (metaludic?) game-novel, exploring themes typical of fantasy worlds and at the same time providing the player with an interesting commentary on ludic conventions, fictionality and conditions of gameplay. Furthermore, if *Baldur's Gate III* can be seen as a departure from literary conventions in favour of the TRPG storytelling mode (especially in the context of previous installments of the series), such an approach could shed some light on the complicated relationship between interactive fiction and traditional literary narrative.

On a more specific note, I found it interesting that even though BioWare's *Baldur's Gate* installments share a lot with the recent production of Larian Studios, these games seem to cater to players with fairly different expectations or at least seem to emphasise different aspects of role-playing. The two earlier titles present themselves primarily as digital platforms facilitating role-playing with friends (in the case of the multiplayer mode), automatising the intricate mechanics or simply allowing for a *D&D* adventure to be played by a single player. *Baldur's Gate III*, on the other hand, focuses on simulating and/or facilitating more than the TRPG's mechanics, as it aims to reproduce

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<sup>23</sup> Cf. D. Vella, *The Ludic Subject and the Ludic Self: Analyzing the I-in-the-Gameworld*, 309. See also Vella's interpretation of the narrator from the game *Bastion* (351–355).

<sup>24</sup> I would like to thank my fellow game scholars and dear friends, Magdalena Bednorz, Marta Błaszowska-Nawrocka, Magdalena Cielecka, Mateusz Felczak and Justyna Janik, who consulted me on this paper and provided me with many possible paths for further investigation.

<sup>25</sup> Cf. Tomasz Z. Majkowski, *Języki gropowieści. Studia o różnojęzyczności gier cyfrowych* (Kraków: Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Jagiellońskiego, 2019).

*the feeling* of an analogue session. It virtually substitutes other potentially autonomous players – GM included – with their idealised digital counterparts, who are seemingly (but not really, given the limitations of the medium) ready to accept whatever style of play the game’s owner prefers. The developers are aware that for many people playful engagement with artificial beings is a safer (and preferred) alternative to a real sit-down with someone that they might “not gel with”, to put it in Tyler’s terms. This interpretation could probably be supported by further investigation not only into the design of other characters, but also into the game’s interface, which often brings forward some aspects of the TRPG genre that were deliberately hidden from the player’s sight or graphically marginalised in the earlier installments; probably the most evident example of this would be rolling the animated dice during the encounters in *Baldur’s Gate III*. And although there is much more to consider in regard to this comparison, the narrator’s design may possibly prove to be a crucial shift in the future of the CRPG genre.

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## **Cyfrowy narrator jako mistrz gry. Przypadek *Baldur's Gate III***

**Abstrakt:** Artykuł stanowi wstępną, rozpoznawczą analizę narratorki w *Baldur's Gate III* jako cyfrowej symulacji analogowej mistrzyni gry (MG). Ze względu na to, że recepcja całej serii *Baldur's Gate* od zawsze była silnie powiązana z jej analogową poprzedniczką, *Dungeon's & Dragons*, istotnym tłem analizy są refleksje teoretyczne dotyczące analogowych gier *role-playing* (TRPG), zwłaszcza w kontekście gier cyfrowych. Analiza odnosi się nie tylko do wypowiedzi zawartych w samej grze, ale także do komentarzy Amelii Tyler – aktorki, która użyła swego głosu narratorce. Autor zauważa, że choć wszystkie części serii starały się odtworzyć pewne doświadczenia charakterystyczne dla sesji TRPG, główną różnicą pomiędzy *Baldur's Gate III* a jej poprzedniczkami jest to, że występuje w niej złożona, udźwiękowiona narracja, stworzona na wzór wypowiedzi prawdziwych MG.

**Słowa kluczowe:** gry *role-playing*, *Baldur's Gate*, narrator.

## **Der digitale Erzähler als Spielleiter. Der Fall von *Baldur's Gate III***

**Abstract:** Der Beitrag ist eine erste, explorative Analyse der Erzählerin in *Baldur's Gate III* als digitale Simulation des analogen Spielleiters (MG). Da die Rezeption der *Baldur's Gate*-Reihe insgesamt immer stark mit dem analogen Vorgänger *Dungeon's & Dragons* verbunden war, bilden theoretische Überlegungen zu analogen Rollenspielen (TRPGs), insbesondere im Kontext digitaler Spiele, einen wichtigen Hintergrund für die Analyse. Die Diskussion bezieht sich nicht nur auf die Aussagen im Spiel selbst, sondern auch auf die Kommentare von Amelia Tyler, der Schauspielerin, die dem Erzähler ihre Stimme lieh. Der Autor stellt fest, dass zwar alle Teile der Serie versucht haben, einige der für eine TRPG-Sitzung charakteristischen Erfahrungen nachzubilden, der Hauptunterschied zwischen *Baldur's Gate III* und seinen Vorgängern jedoch darin besteht, dass es eine komplexe, audio-visualisierte Erzählung bietet, die die Sprache echter MGs nachahmt.

**Schlüsselwörter:** Rollenspiele, *Baldur's Gate*, Erzähler.

# **III**

## **REVISIONS**

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## The World That No Longer Exists. On the Memoirs of Otto Friedlaender, Stefan Zweig and Tadeusz Boy-Żeleński\*

**Abstract:** This article focuses on the memoirs of writers connected with Vienna in their youth, namely Stefan Zweig and Otto Friedlaender, as well as Tadeusz Boy-Żeleński, who is associated with Cracow. The considerations are based on references to the findings of geopoetics, the problem of place and autobiography. The writers' memoirs deal with the turn of the 19th and 20th centuries, covering various aspects of the social life of the time, material and spiritual culture and established customs. The memoirists also record changes in artistic life, introduce literary groups and circles and well-known figures of the time. They are both observers and participants in the life of the turn of the century, and their accounts are treated as memoirs, sketches, reports and autobiographies.

**Keywords:** autobiography, turn of the 19th and 20th centuries, Vienna, Cracow, space.

The return to the years of one's childhood and youth is an important topic in literature and one of the markers of autobiography, which opens up a wide range of problems and introduces readers to genres, worldviews and

\* This text is an expanded version of an article "Wczorajszy świat Tadeusza Żeleńskiego-Boya i Stefana Zweiga," submitted to a post-conference volume devoted to Tadeusz Boy-Żeleński's work: *Klasyk mimo woli. W 150. rocznicę urodzin Tadeusza Żeleńskiego-Boya* [A Classic Despite His Will. On the 150th Birth Anniversary of Tadeusz Żeleński-Boy] (Seria: Krytyka XX i XXI wieku), forthcoming, Kraków: TAIWPN "Universitas," 2025.

aesthetic issues. Writers invoke the past world in literary works, diaries and memoirs, not only to reconstruct the route of their own lives, but also to recreate the climate of the times in which they grew up, matured and formed artistically. In this sketch, I refer to selected authors who represent the memoir trend in Austrian and Polish literature in the first half of the 20th century, namely Stefan Zweig, Otto Friedlaender, who were associated with Vienna in their youth, and Tadeusz Boy-Żeleński, who lived in Cracow before the First World War. Their early years coincided with the end of the 19th and beginning of the 20th century, a period of time when Europe was undergoing significant changes in its political, moral and social life, and at the same time a variety of aesthetic currents were born, which resulted in a wealth of developments in literature and art. Friedlaender, Zweig and Boy-Żeleński are the authors of memoirs of their youth, which are also treated as a kind of autobiography. The analogies between the books of these writers are prompted by the observations contained in them of the world in which they are rooted – the place in which they lived, society and artistic circles – which sometimes unexpectedly converge, although each of the authors' modes of writing are expressions of their individual artistic personalities.

In memoirs, which reconstruct the events of the past, we are dealing with the activation of memory, and this category is presented as paramount in the narrative.<sup>1</sup> At the centre of attention of memoirs are various areas of space, mainly urban, which, alongside ways of experiencing space, are depicted by the writers; the tools for studying them are suggested by geopoetics. Place is an important factor in the formation of a writer's personality and, as these memoirs prove, an area to which he or she constantly returns.<sup>2</sup> Małgorzata Czermińska writes that the 'autobiographical place' influences the subject, who reconstructs this place and shapes his or her identity. These are important issues, especially when comparing the culturally distinct spaces that emerge from the autobiographical records that are the subject of the attention of this sketch.

In Austrian writing, there is a clear nostalgic current, based on exposing a vision of the lost past that is associated with the final chapter of Austro-

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<sup>1</sup> Cf. Elżbieta Rybicka, "Geopoetyka (o mieście, przestrzeni i miejscu we współczesnych teoriach i praktykach kulturowych)" [Geopoetics (on the City, Space and Place in Contemporary Cultural Theories and Practice)], in *Kulturowa teoria literatury. Główne pojęcia i problemy* [Cultural Theory of Literature. Main Concepts and Problems], eds. Michał Paweł Markowski, and Ryszard Nycz (Kraków: Universitas, 2006), 479.

<sup>2</sup> Małgorzata Czermińska, "Tożsamość kształtowana w pamięci miejsca" [Identity Shaped in the Memory of Place], in *Kulturowa historia literatury, Cultural History of Literature*, eds. Anna Łebkowska, and Włodzimierz Bolecki (Warszawa: Instytut Badań Literackich PAN, 2015), 146–160.

Hungarian history, when the imperial monarchy (a dualistic state from 1867), with its elaborate political and administrative structure<sup>3</sup>, was in decline. A prominent representative of this trend in literature was Joseph Roth, the creator of mythicist prose.<sup>4</sup> The material and spiritual culture of Vienna, which was the centre of European aestheticism at the turn of the century, its topography and traces of centuries-old history, are also an area that is observed in various studies of the city's past, in anthologies, albums, selections of texts by publicists, writers and columnists, which are united by a common place – Vienna. Among such works there is a collection of works and memoirs (excerpts) by selected writers, starting with Adalbert Stifter, published in 1991, which depicts the atmosphere of old Vienna; it bears a title referring to Zweig's book – *Wien von gestern*.<sup>5</sup> The memoirs here cover both the centre and the outskirts of the city, for example Grinzing, Dornbach and Simmering. Some areas of the city have lived to see separate monographs, such as Hernals – a district gradually changing its character from rural to industrial and mainly inhabited by workers at the turn of the century.<sup>6</sup> Changes in the landscape of Vienna are also reflected in albums, for example, a publication devoted to the Währing district; the surviving photographs reflect the character and history of the former suburb with rich traditions, which over time gained the status of an affluent district of the city.<sup>7</sup> The processes taking place in Vienna were the result of general civilisational changes in Europe and the world; the Habsburg capital was subject to them like other European cities, but the different socio-cultural and political conditions of each of these centres influenced variations within the material and spiritual culture, as well as the formation of the identity of the participants of social and cultural life.

Vienna is the place where Stefan Zweig, who was born there in 1881 into the family of a wealthy Jewish industrialist, both spent his youth and formed his cultural identity. He studied art history, philosophy, German and Romance studies; in 1904 he earned a doctorate in philosophy from the Uni-

<sup>3</sup> Stanisław Grodziski, *Franciszek Józef I* [Francis Joseph I] (Wrocław-Warszawa-Kraków: Zakład Narodowy imienia Ossolińskich - Wydawnictwo, 1983), 100–102.

<sup>4</sup> Stefan H. Kaszyński, "Joseph Roth (1894-1939)," in Stefan H. Kaszyński, *Krótką historią literatury austriackiej* [A Short History of Austrian Literature] (Poznań: Wydawnictwo Naukowe Uniwersytetu Adama Mickiewicza w Poznaniu, 2012), 185. See also in this publication: "Od literatury w Austrii do literatury austriackiej. Przedmowa" [Preface. From Literature in Austria to Austrian Literature], 9–30.

<sup>5</sup> *Wien von gestern. Ein literarischer Streifzug durch die Kaiserstadt*, collected and narrated by Heinz Gerstinger (Wien: J&V Edition, 1991), 9–190.

<sup>6</sup> Maria Kinz, *Damals in Hernals...* (Wien: Dachs Verlag 1993), 5–8, 26.

<sup>7</sup> *Währing 1880-1930. Album*, eds. Helfried Seemann, and Christian Lunzer (Wien: Verlag für Photographie, 1996), non-paginated.

versity of Vienna on the basis of a thesis on Hippolytus Taine. He travelled extensively in Europe (Belgium, France, England, Italy and Spain) and went on expeditions to other continents (Africa, Central and North America and India). After the outbreak of war, he worked at the Ministry of War, at the press desk. In 1917 he went to Switzerland for two years, and upon his return he settled in Salzburg. After Hitler occupied Austria, he emigrated to England, in 1940 to the USA and the following year to Brazil. The political situation in Europe caused Zweig to become deeply depressed; in 1942 he and his wife committed suicide in Petrópolis near Rio de Janeiro<sup>8</sup>.

During his youth, Zweig participated in the cultural and artistic life of Vienna; in his later years he became a well-known author of novellas and novels, as well as a close observer of political and social life, anxiously following developments in Germany, Austria, and Europe. His memoirs *Die Welt von gestern. Erinnerungen eines Europäers* were published posthumously in 1944 in Stockholm, by an émigré publishing house.<sup>9</sup> This book, as Stefan H. Kaszyński points out, is largely (almost half) devoted to the time before World War I; in it the writer recreates facts from his private biography and situates them against the background of public life at the end of the Habsburg monarchy, presented in a nostalgic manner.<sup>10</sup> Zweig's memoirs are considered an autobiography, as well as a literary "testament" of the writer, with which, as Marek Zybura writes, "he bade farewell to the former cosmopolitan Europe of universal cultural values, buried under the rubble of the nationalist cataclysms of both world wars".<sup>11</sup>

In Zweig's life, a turning point was the incorporation of Austria into the Reich in March 1938. It marked a caesura in cultural life; many intellectuals

<sup>8</sup> Maciej Ganczar, "Literatura emigracyjna po 1938," in Maciej Ganczar, *Historia literatury austriackiej* [History of Austrian Literature] (Warszawa: Wydawnictwo Naukowe PWN, 2016), 254–255; Stefan H. Kaszyński, "Psychoanaliza – Stefan Zweig (1881–1942)" [Psychoanalysis – Stefan Zweig (1881–1942)], in Stefan H. Kaszyński, *Krótką historia literatury austriackiej* [A Brief History of Austrian Literature], 208–210; *Deutsche Literatur in Schlaglichtern*, eds. Bernd Balzer, Volker Mertens, in collaboration with other contributors and editors of Meyers Lexikon (Mannheim-Wien-Zürich: Meyers Lexikonverlag, 1990), 420, 423, 428.

<sup>9</sup> Stefan H. Kaszyński, *Krótką historia literatury austriackiej*, 211. In this encyclopaedic German study, the word *gestern* [yesterday] contained in the title of the memoirs is capitalised (*Die Welt von Gestern*), which reinforces the meaning of past time. See *Hauptwerke der österreichischen Literatur. Einzeldarstellungen und Interpretationen*, ed. and essay by Ernst Fischer (München: Kindler Verlag, 1997), 467, 646.

<sup>10</sup> Stefan H. Kaszyński, *Krótką historia literatury austriackiej*, 211.

<sup>11</sup> Marek Zybura, [entry:] "Zweig Stefan," in *Pisarze niemieckojęzyczni XX wieku. Leksykon encyklopedyczny PWN* [German-language Writers of the 20th Century. PWN Encyclopedic Lexicon], ed. Marek Zybura (Warszawa-Wrocław: Wydawnictwo Naukowe PWN, 1996), 350.

left the country at that time, not only because of where they came from, as Stefan H. Kaszyński writes, but also “as a sign of protest against Nazi practices”. In addition to Zweig, those in exile included Robert Musil, Hermann Broch, Franz Werfel, Joseph Roth and Franz Theodor Csokor.<sup>12</sup> Otto Friedlaender, the author of a memoir about turn-of-the-century Vienna metaphorically entitled *Letzter Glanz der Märchenstadt. Bilder aus dem Wiener Leben um die Jahrhundertwende 1890-1914*, also refers to this date. Friedlaender confesses at the outset that he wrote down his memoirs shortly before the outbreak of and during World War II (December 1938 – August 1942), in order to revisit the Vienna of his youth amid the darkness of war and record a bygone era.<sup>13</sup> The past in the memoirs of both writers is presented nostalgically, and at the same time with a certain dose of subtle irony, characteristic of Austrian authors. Zweig described the state as “Die Welt der Sicherheit”, everything seemed permanent, and the state guarded this permanence; at the same time, he stressed that the prevailing belief at the time that one could protect oneself from bad luck was illusory and dangerous.<sup>14</sup> In his book, Otto Friedlaender wanted to return to the old Austria, to its daily life, customs, customary life – the way he remembered them, without embellishing or distorting anything. He asserts this in the *Vorrede*, describing his book as “eine Reportage über eine vergangene, in Vergessenheit versinkende Zeit.”<sup>15</sup>

In his memoirs Tadeusz Boy-Żeleński recalls the years of his youth, which he spent in Cracow, a city located in the Habsburg monarchy, but these conditions rarely become the focus of attention, penetrating rather in the form of details of Cracow life scattered in sketches. He was born in 1874 in Warsaw<sup>16</sup> into a family with artistic traditions; he was the son of a composer and a writer. He graduated from the Jagiellonian University with a degree in medicine and worked as a doctor for some time, while participating in the artistic life of turn-of-the-century Cracow. He made his debut as the author

<sup>12</sup> Stefan H. Kaszyński, *Literatura austriacka dwudziestego wieku* [Austrian Literature of the 20th Century], in *Pisarze niemieckojęzyczni XX wieku. Leksykon encyklopedyczny PWN*, XIV.

<sup>13</sup> Otto Friedlaender, “Vorrede,” in Otto Friedlaender, *Letzter Glanz der Märchenstadt. Bilder aus dem Wiener Leben um die Jahrhundertwende 1890-1914* (Wien: Ring Verlag, APA), non-paginated [8].

<sup>14</sup> Stefan Zweig, *Wczorajszy świat* [The World of Yesterday], trans. Maria Wiśłowska (Warszawa: Państwowy Instytut Wydawniczy, 1958), 12–14.

<sup>15</sup> Otto Friedlaender, *Vorrede*.

<sup>16</sup> Andrzej Z. Makowiecki, [entry:] “Żeleński Tadeusz, pseud. Boy,” in *Literatura polska. Przewodnik encyklopedyczny* [Polish Literature. An Encyclopedic Guide], vol. 2, ed. Julian Krzyżanowski, from 1976 Czesław Hernas, et al. (Warszawa: Państwowe Wydawnictwo Naukowe, 1985), 696–697.

of sonnets that conformed to modernist poetics and had satirical cabaret lyrics. After being mobilised, he was employed as a railway doctor until the end of the war; only after the war did he devote himself entirely to literary work, and during the interwar period he gained fame as a literary and theatre critic, publicist and translator. His fate was sealed in the first years of the Second World War in Lviv, where he died in 1941.

A few years older than Zweig, Boy-Żeleński published his notes on Cracow and the bohemian community, to which he belonged as a young man, in the pages of the magazines *Kurier Poranny* and *Tygodnik Ilustrowany* between 1930 and 1931. They were published in a separate edition of *Znaszli ten kraj?... (Cyganeria krakowska)*, comprising a series of 17 sketches (Warszawa 1931). Andrzej Z. Makowiecki, writing about Boy-Żeleński's memoirs, emphasised the colourfulness of the description in depicting the artistic life of Cracow at the turn of the 19th century, the bohemianism of Stanisław Przybyszewski, the literary and painting circles centred around the *Zielony Balonik* cabaret, and pointed out the features of poetics based on sentiment and humour. The writer witnessed and participated in the events described, quoted anecdotes, and created portraits of well-known figures such as Henryk Sienkiewicz, Stanisław Wyspiański, Witold Noskowski, Stanisław Tarnowski and others.<sup>17</sup> Each sketch bears a title, usually metaphorical, indicating the subject matter taken up in it or the figure presented, for example, *Jan Apolinary*<sup>18</sup> (the reference is to a famous confectionery shop, which was founded by Jan Apolinary Michalik). When writing down his memoirs, Boy-Żeleński was already a mature author, summarising the last stage of his life, important in his private biography.<sup>19</sup> In some sketches, the author clearly indicates the need to return to the past and record figures, events and institutions, for example in the memoir dedicated to the conservative daily newspaper *Czas*, which was strongly 'intertwined' with the writer's life. Boy-Żeleński's returns to the past are, first and foremost, returns to the flowering of cultural life, in which he was a participant, and the images of old Cracow become the backdrop against which these changes take place. He metaphorically refers to them in one of his sketches as "the wind over Cracow"; he calls his writing an essay, while at the same time jokingly admitting to a 'propensity for storytelling'.<sup>20</sup> The sources of his nostalgic attitude bring

<sup>17</sup> Andrzej Z. Makowiecki, [entry:] "Znaszli ten kraj?... (Cyganeria artystyczna)," in *Literatura polska. Przewodnik encyklopedyczny*, vol. 2, 690.

<sup>18</sup> Tadeusz Żeleński (Boy), "Jan Apolinary," in Tadeusz Żeleński (Boy), *Znaszli ten kraj?... I inne wspomnienia* (Kraków: Wydawnictwo Literackie, 1962), 131.

<sup>19</sup> Tadeusz Żeleński (Boy), "Zakrystia," in Żeleński (Boy), *Znaszli ten kraj?... I inne wspomnienia*, 34.

<sup>20</sup> Tadeusz Żeleński (Boy), "Wiatr nad Krakowem" [Wind over Kraków], in Żeleński (Boy), *Znaszli ten kraj?... I inne wspomnienia*, 64.

the memoirs closer to Zweig's account; Friedlaender appears as an observer rather than a participant in past life, although he knows it well.

Zweig, Friedlaender and Boy-Żeleński grew up and matured in politically and socially different centres. After all, between the 'wealthy capital of the monarchy', as Tomasz Weiss writes in his book about the *Zielony Balonik* cabaret, and 'poor Cracow' there was a gulf;<sup>21</sup> these differences are confirmed by the rich literature on the social and national structure of the two cities, statistics and population.<sup>22</sup> Writers took part in the cultural life that developed exuberantly in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, as well as later, in the interwar period. Zweig and Boy-Żeleński were fascinated by French literature. In his youth, Zweig translated poems by Charles Baudelaire, Paul Verlaine and Émile Verhaeren,<sup>23</sup> a Belgian poet who wrote in French, a Parnassian and a Symbolist. Boy-Żeleński's ties with France, his several trips to France and, above all, his immense translation work are known from various sources. Dominika Niedźwiedź, writing about the writer's travels to France, states that during the 38 years of his adult life (1900-1938) Boy-Żeleński visited France almost ten times.<sup>24</sup> Agata Zawiszewska recalls that he considered both popularising French literature and translating an important task, and points to Boy-Żeleński's statements about the beginnings of his fascination with French works.<sup>25</sup>

From the memoir records of the writers under discussion, images of the past from several decades ago emerge. Authors associated with Vienna present a solid foundation of the social life of the time, on which customs, fashion, forms of ritual and beliefs were based. Friedlaender arranged his own memoirs into three books, putting them in thematic order. In the first book ("I. Buch"), he depicts the landscape of old Vienna and the prevailing tranquillity, unhurried lifestyle, which differentiates the city from other bustling European metropolises (like Paris), describes the streets, the Ring, the fa-

<sup>21</sup> Tomasz Weiss, *Legenda i prawda Zielonego Balonika* [Legend and Truth of the Green Balloon] (Kraków: Wydawnictwo Literackie, 1976), 24–26.

<sup>22</sup> Cf. Michael John, Albert Lichtblau, *Schmelztiegel Wien einst und jetzt. Zur Geschichte und Gegenwart von Zuwanderung und Minderheiten*, with an introduction by Erich Zöllner (Wien-Köln-Weimar: Böhlau, 1993).

<sup>23</sup> Ganczar, "Literatura emigracyjna po 1938," 254.

<sup>24</sup> Dominika Niedźwiedź, "Autokreacje" [Autocreations], in Dominika Niedźwiedź, *Jak Tadeusz Żeleński stworzył Boya. Strategie, Autokreacje, Wizerunki* [How Tadeusz Żeleński Created Boy. Strategies, Self-Creations, Images] (Kraków: Wydawnictwo Księgarnia Akademicka, 2022), 166.

<sup>25</sup> Agata Zawiszewska, "Le plaisir du text po polsku. O języku krytyki literackiej Tadeusza Żeleńskiego-Boya. Biada literaturze, gdy przestaje budzić namiętność," [Le plaisir du text in Polish. On the Language of Literary Criticism by Tadeusz Żeleński-Boy. Woe to Literature when it Ceases to Arouse Passion], *Literacje*, no. 3, (2013): 35.

acades of the houses, and emphasises the multinational character of the city. He presents the imperial royal residence and portrays the emperor, whose lifestyle and work, habits and behaviour are observed by the entire city. Several pages are taken up with a description of Corpus Christi, which the author calls the most beautiful holiday of the year; the following pages deal with the principles that guided the Emperor's rule ("Regierungsmaximen") and present a collective portrait of Viennese people. The second book ("II. Buch") is devoted to the social structure of Vienna; the author discusses issues such as states, classes, larger and smaller national and religious groups in turn. The third book ("III Buch") consists of descriptions of Viennese life: customs, the Viennese dialect, women and the fashion of the time, domestic servants, family life and love life, rest and travel of Viennese people, social life, balls, cafés, spiritual life, diseases, rites of death and burial.<sup>26</sup>

The range of issues covered is impressive; the writer tried to cover attentively all aspects of life at the time, and did so with language full of humour and melancholy at the same time. He weaves anecdotes and statements by well-known figures into his account, for example the words of Clement Metternich referring to the national character of the capital: "Wien gehört noch zu Europa, aber auf der Landstraße fängt Asien an".<sup>27</sup> The nostalgic attitude towards the past is clearly drawn here, and is reinforced by the way the narrative is presented. Friedlaender's language draws attention with its artistic expressiveness and characteristic syntactic formation. The author uses expressive means, thanks to which he recreates the topography of Vienna in an almost painterly manner, while at the same time giving his account poetic qualities. The style of the story proper to him is evidenced by the first three paragraphs, which begin with the sentences: "Wien ist eine stille Stadt", "Wien ist eine alte Stadt", "Wien ist eine Märchenstadt [...]".<sup>28</sup>

Stefan Zweig bases his vision of the past on the belief that old Austria provided the conditions through which human desires and expectations could be fulfilled. The writer recalls the motto of life at that time, which perhaps worked best in Vienna: "das Leben geniessen"; it was served by venues and centres of social life that were famous throughout Europe. On the model of this motto, an analogous one was introduced: "Leben und leben lassen", which was adopted by all social strata.<sup>29</sup> Zweig focuses on the ways in which different communities coexist, the customs and ceremonies that unite them, and attitudes towards the past and present. He characterises the love of mu-

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<sup>26</sup> Cf. Friedlaender, *Letzter Glanz der Märchenstadt...*, 11–345.

<sup>27</sup> Friedlaender, *Letzter Glanz der Märchenstadt...*, 12.

<sup>28</sup> Friedlaender, *Letzter Glanz der Märchenstadt...*, 11–12.

<sup>29</sup> Zweig, *Świat wczorajszy*, 39.

sic and theatre as having their roots in the Baroque *joie de vivre* that characterised Vienna after the Turkish danger was averted. He notes with reverence the names and events associated with musical traditions, such as Beethoven playing at the home of Count Lichnowsky, Haydn being hosted by the Esterházy family (a family of Hungarian origin), or the premiere of Haydn's "The Creation" within the walls of the old University of Vienna.<sup>30</sup> What emerges from such records is the topography of Vienna, in which places associated with culture (residences, buildings, cultural institutions, for example, the Burgtheater) played an important role, as well as establishments that offered their regulars good wine, beer, cakes and pies. The capital is a city that creates the conditions for a carefree and pleasure-filled existence, and its residents are gourmets who enjoy life.

Tadeusz Boy-Żeleński creates images of old Cracow, its location, community, political and economic situation and monuments on the basis of vivid comparisons and metaphors, vivid descriptions and wittily formulated diagnoses of social life. In one of his sketches, he describes late 19th century Cracow as perhaps the only 'aristocratic settlement' in Europe at that time, which he justifies by the feudal traditions of Austria, the rural nature of the country, and the lack of industry and commerce in the city.<sup>31</sup> In addition to the aristocracy separating themselves from the residents of poor Cracow by staying in their palaces and clubs, there was a bourgeoisie, which was conservative and lived "in the Biedermeier style", as well as the lower classes.<sup>32</sup> Boy-Żeleński recreates the topography of Cracow (the Market Square, the churches, the Planty), by using vivid images; he compares the city's traditions and customs with Paris and Lviv, and points out significant differences between them, to conclude that Cracow is a 'peculiar creature', a city living with the memory of its cultural past.<sup>33</sup> In the style of a storyteller, he wittily and vividly demonstrates that in the old Cracow there was a struggle between the walls and the people living there, there was a constant confrontation between the inhabitants and tradition fixed in stone, restraining the development of modern forms of social life. This argument and the concluding question about the possibility of existence in a city where the walls lurk in the lives of residents,<sup>34</sup> has a clearly defined purpose: to present the activi-

<sup>30</sup> Zweig, *Świat wczorajszy*, 26–27.

<sup>31</sup> Żeleński (Boy), "Pański Kraków" [Your Cracow], in Żeleński (Boy), *Znaszli ten kraj?... I inne wspomnienia*, 23.

<sup>32</sup> Żeleński (Boy), "Prawy brzeg Wisły" [Right Bank of the Vistula], in Żeleński (Boy), *Znaszli ten kraj?... I inne wspomnienia*, 9–10.

<sup>33</sup> Żeleński (Boy), "Prawy brzeg Wisły," in Żeleński (Boy), *Znaszli ten kraj?... I inne wspomnienia*, 8–9.

<sup>34</sup> Żeleński (Boy), "Mury i ludzie" [Walls and People], in Żeleński (Boy), *Znaszli ten kraj?... I inne wspomnienia*, 15, 21.

ties of the cabaret *Zielony Balonik* as a way of freeing themselves from the domination of walls and the burden of tradition.

Against the backdrop of Cracow rooted in history and living in the past, the writer presents the beginnings of a new cultural formation, which was Young Poland – theatrical, literary, musical and artistic; the city transformed into an area of new art. Tracing Boy-Żeleński's relationship with Young Poland, Andrzej Z. Makowiecki distinguishes three stages: the first is his direct participation in the life of Cracow's bohemians, the second stage is marked by the return in his memoirs to the 'country of his youth', both in part of *Ludzie żywi* (in the sketches on Przybyszewski) and in the book *Znaszli ten kraj* [You Know This Country], and the third becomes an attempt to give a historical and literary account of a bygone era. Makowiecki emphasises the "anecdotal and myth-making character"<sup>35</sup> of the memoirs, thus indicating an important distinguishing feature of them. At the same time, he notes the lack of a clearly reconstructed social background, economic conditions, politics or issues concerning aesthetic struggles.<sup>36</sup>

Reading the memoirs of these diarists proves that they became primarily chroniclers of the moral and cultural life of the time. They depicted the love of all ceremonies and celebrations, developed perhaps throughout the monarchy and the cult of public spectacles into which church and court ceremonies were transformed. Friedlaender, as I noted earlier, wrote about the grandiose, lavish Corpus Christi processions, referring to the holiday as "der Hofball Gottes" (in reference to "Hofball des Kaisers").<sup>37</sup> Zweig, too, noted the Viennese predilection for festivities, for theatricality in public life, and thus for processions on Corpus Christi Day, military revues, and court orchestra performances that combined colour, sound and music.<sup>38</sup> Tadeusz Boy-Żeleński claimed that in Cracow the cult of all festivities was developed like nowhere else and played a very large role in the life of the urban community. Even the seasons of the year were determined by rituals: visiting graves, May Day services, Corpus Christi, the fun associated with the "lajkonik", garlands, shepherdess and other festivities, through which a sense of decorum developed. The rituals in Cracow were also, as the writer emphasised, patriotic in nature; the city became the scene of national celebrations.<sup>39</sup>

<sup>35</sup> Andrzej Z. Makowiecki, "Boy a Młoda Polska" [Boy a Young Poland], in Andrzej Z. Makowiecki, *Wokół modernizmu. Szkice* [Around Modernism. Sketches] (Warszawa: Państwowy Instytut Wydawniczy, 1985), [33].

<sup>36</sup> Makowiecki, "Boy a Młoda Polska," [46].

<sup>37</sup> Friedlaender, "Fronleichnam," in Friedlaender, *Letzter Glanz der Märchenstadt....*, 35.

<sup>38</sup> Zweig, *Świat wczorajszy*, 31–32.

<sup>39</sup> Żeleński (Boy), "Prawy brzeg Wisły," in Żeleński (Boy), *Znaszli ten kraj?... I inne wspomnienia*, 11–12.

The authors of the memoirs also devote attention to an important aspect of the collective life of the time, which was the customs related to the organisation of funerals, which were surrounded by worship and characterised by splendour. The funeral ceremony was particularly elaborated during the reign of Maria Theresa, who transformed her mourning after the death of her spouse, Francis Stephan (in 1765), into a kind of spectacle for the court entourage and subjects.<sup>40</sup> Claudio Magris (in his book *Donau*) recalls the words of Alfred Polgar: “Sterben und sterben lassen”, referring to the motto “Leben und leben lassen”, which lead the author to reflect on life and death, to consider Viennese cemeteries such as Sankt Marx-Friedhof or Friedhof der Namenlosen, where the corpses of people fished from the Danube were buried.<sup>41</sup> As Hilde Schmölzer demonstrates, in the Viennese tradition death occupies a special place, it is a kind of art; the author traces this theme in history, in the Baroque tradition, in funerals celebrated by the Habsburgs, in burial services, and in descriptions of epidemics (“Der schwarze Tod”).<sup>42</sup>

Life and death complement each other, and the equalisation of all in the face of death is a motif that has run through European literature, culture, and iconography for centuries. It is firmly rooted in Austrian culture, as also evidenced by memoirs. Stefan Zweig writes about how Viennese people had the desire to have a dignified funeral (“schöne Leiche”) after death, with a procession and pomp; it became a spectacle for the living.<sup>43</sup> An elaborate description of the customs surrounding funerals and the associated requiem is included in Friedlaender’s memoirs. As early as the introduction, the author introduces a vivid comparison based on the obituary formula; he writes that in March 1938 the remnants of old Austria left “nach langem Leiden”, and Vienna began to resemble the apartment of the deceased, which was occupied by strangers.<sup>44</sup> In the third book, the subject he discusses is the illnesses of the Viennese, which were, above all, perpetuated by the customs of the time, the ways in which the sick were treated by those around them; he does this by means of dialogues between patients, doctors, and family members introduced into the memoirs. Focusing on death, which the Viennese wish to plan as a great celebration while still alive, the author notes the finer details of the funeral rites and links them to deeply rooted traditions and attitudes

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<sup>40</sup> William M. Johnston, *Österreichische Kultur- und Geistesgeschichte. Gesellschaft und Ideen im Donauraum 1848 bis 1938* (Wien-Köln-Weimar: Böhlau Verlag, 1992), 176.

<sup>41</sup> Claudio Magris, *Donau. Biographie eines Flusses*, trans. Heinz Georg Held (Wien: Zsolnay Verlag, 1988), 223.

<sup>42</sup> Hilde Schmölzer, *A schöne Leich. Der Wiener und sein Tod*, mit Illustrationen aus dem Wiener Bestattungsmuseum (Wien: Verlag Kremayr & Scheriau, 1980), 7–159.

<sup>43</sup> Zweig, *Świat wczorajszy*, 31–32.

<sup>44</sup> Friedlaender, *Vorrede*.

in the Viennese community; he believes that he who does not love life does not revere death either.<sup>45</sup>

Zygmunt Nowakowski wrote vividly and humorously about Cracow funerals and the place they occupied in the life of the city in his memoirs written in exile. He stressed that they were part of life and even established the order of the day; Cracow lived with funerals and lived from them.<sup>46</sup> Boy-Żeleński, writing about Cracow, recreates first of all its specific aura, resulting from its location, its proximity to the lazily flowing river, its confinement within the ancient walls, which caused an 'infection' of sadness, translating into a 'subdued' life, an existence without surprises and opportunities for change.<sup>47</sup> These ways of description are significant in developing reflections on the changes that took place in the city at the turn of the century. The writer constructs many accounts of Cracow's cultural life and art on the basis of vivid opposites, pictorial contrasts, highlighting the differences between what was found and new impulses and directions in art and cultural life. He wrote about Wyspiański, who was a pupil of Jan Matejko and in a sense a continuator of his historical school, and who soon found his own artistic path and introduced new means of expression, noting the transformations taking place within Matejko's and Wyspiański's models: from the "pride-blooded" faces of magnates to the anaemic girls coming from the basements.<sup>48</sup>

From the pen of Stefan Zweig emerges the rich cultural life of Vienna at the turn of the 20th century; the cult (for centuries present in Viennese culture) of the dramatic arts and the artist intensifies at that time. The pride of the city was the Burgtheater, and actors such as Josef Kainz, widely known and loved by Viennese audiences, court artists and opera singers were known and recognised on the street by every passer-by.<sup>49</sup> Zweig identified himself with the representatives of the new tendencies in literature, with the group of writers of "Young Vienna", which included Arthur Schnitzler, Richard Beer-Hofmann, Peter Altenberg and Hugo von Hofmannsthal; the writer stressed that through subtle artistic means they caused Austrian culture to acquire a European character<sup>50</sup> for the first time. The author draws attention to the contribution of Jews to the creation of Vienna's culture.

<sup>45</sup> Cf. Friedlaender, "Krankheiten," "Der Tod", in Friedlaender, *Letzter Glanz der Märchenstadt...*, 325–345.

<sup>46</sup> Zygmunt Nowakowski, *Mój Kraków i inne wspomnienia* [My Cracow and Other Recollections] (Warszawa: Oficyna Wydawnicza Interim, 1994), 61–63.

<sup>47</sup> Żeleński (Boy), "Prawy brzeg Wisły," 9.

<sup>48</sup> Żeleński (Boy), "Pański Kraków," 33.

<sup>49</sup> Zweig, *Świat wczorajszy*, 28, 208–211.

<sup>50</sup> Zweig, *Świat wczorajszy*, 62–64.

These included the writers mentioned, as well as composers such as Goldmark, Mahler and Schönberg, visual artists, architects and journalists.<sup>51</sup>

The memoirs mention the café, which was a meeting place for artists and was one of the most important cultural institutions at the turn of the century. The café had a long history, dating back to the end of the 17th century, but the peak of its popularity was in the second half of the 19th century.<sup>52</sup> Cafés sprang up everywhere in the world, including the larger and smaller cities in the Austro-Hungarian area, but Zweig believed that Viennese establishments could not be compared with any other. They were accessible to everyone, created an environment for the regulars to learn about the world through magazines, and strengthened bonds between people. The writer calls the cafés a “democratic club”, where one could read Viennese magazines over coffee, as well as German, French, English and other magazines from different parts of the world, get news about people and events, discuss issues with other regulars and thus develop intellectually.<sup>53</sup> Friedlaender spreads before the reader a detail-saturated picture of Viennese establishments, their regulars and prevailing customs. He convincingly and at the same time humorously proves that the café is in Vienna what the Agora is in Greece; it is “das Laster” of the Viennese, because few alcoholics and morphine addicts live in the city, but there are many thousands of “Kaffeehaussüchtige”.<sup>54</sup>

Cracow’s coffeehouses played a similar role to that of Viennese establishments or those springing up in other regions of the monarchy; they were an environment that fostered the development of culture, the search for artistic inspiration and the consolidation of social ties. In his memoirs Tadeusz Boy-Żeleński depicts the various establishments (“Rosenstock”, Schmidt, “Paon” and others) and the character and regulars of each of them. Newspaper readers, loners feeling the absence of their own authentic lives and people who discussed literature, painting and philosophy, all came to the café, which offered daily and weekly newspapers in various languages. The writer calls the cafés “forges of the intellect” and “schools of dialectics”, which he compares to the Athenian ones; he also notes that their regulars were not only philosophers and writers, but also ordinary officials.<sup>55</sup> The phenomenon that was

<sup>51</sup> Zweig, *Świat wczorajszy*, 35–37.

<sup>52</sup> Cf. *Wien und seine Kaffehäuser. Ein literarischer Streifzug durch die berühmtesten Cafés der Donaumetropole*, ed. Petra Neumann (München: Wilhelm Heyne Verlag, 1997), 7–362.

<sup>53</sup> Zweig, *Świat wczorajszy*, 55–56.

<sup>54</sup> Friedlaender, “Kaffeehaus,” in Friedlaender, *Letzter Glanz der Märchenstadt...*, 316, 314.

<sup>55</sup> Żeleński (Boy), “Kuznie intelektu” [Forges of the Intellect], in Żeleński (Boy), *Znaszli ten kraj?... I inne wspomnienia*, 122–130, quoted 122–123; see also Żeleński (Boy), “Jan Apolinary,” 131–140.

the café at the turn of the century also gives an idea of the place of women in society at the time. Viennese establishments were open to men; women, mainly from the artistic community, went there rarely. Otto Friedlaender believed that because women started to attend cafés, the charm (“Zauber”) of the establishment disappeared.<sup>56</sup> Cracow cafés are compared by Boy-Żeleński to a monastery, because one can find only men in them, immersed in piles of newspapers.<sup>57</sup>

Each of these memoirists reveals his own attitude towards the city where he spent the years of his youth, his attitude towards the past, tradition, the system of values in force at the time, and aesthetic canons. Compiling the memoirs of writers associated with the culture of different nationalities, who witnessed and participated in the events depicted, it is important to remember their different pedigrees, their identification with particular social and peer groups, and their ways of belonging to the world of culture. Zweig was born, artistically shaped and spent a good part of his life in the city, which he saw as a place that enabled different lifestyles and creative activities. At the same time, as Stefan H. Kaszyński states, the writer is a broad-minded intellectual, writing more about representatives of European culture than about Austrian and German authors, which is probably why he gave his book the subtitle *Erinnerungen eines Europäers*.<sup>58</sup>

The First World War put an end to the Empire; the world in which Zweig and Friedlaender were rooted ceased to exist. The outbreak of the war, Zweig recalls, was greeted by young Austrians as a chance for a change in a life that ran on a fixed course and offered no chance for change; so they set out for the front as if it were a romantic male adventure.<sup>59</sup> However, after the war ended, Austria was reduced to the size of a small state. Thus, during the First Republic, the recent past was treated as a paradise lost, and the “empty place” left by the multinational state began to be filled by a mythologised past, a “prolongierte Monarchie”<sup>60</sup> came into existence. Tadeusz Boy-Żeleński began his work and participated in the cultural life of Cracow at a time when Poland did not have its own statehood. Recalling the dates of the creation of the cabaret *Zielony Balonik* and its end (1905–1912), which are simultaneously the dates of the outbreak of the Russian Revolution and the Balkan War, he searches for a deeper meaning in this coincidence. In 1905, the mood that led to important events and to Poland’s regaining of

<sup>56</sup> Friedlaender, “Kaffeehaus,” 317.

<sup>57</sup> Żeleński (Boy), “Kuznie intelektu,” in Żeleński (Boy), *Znaszli ten kraj?... I inne wspomnienia*, 122.

<sup>58</sup> Kaszyński, “Psychoanalysis – Stefan Zweig (1881–1942),” 211.

<sup>59</sup> Zweig, *Świat wczorajszy*, 274–275.

<sup>60</sup> Milan Dubrović, *Veruntreute Geschichte* (Wien—Hamburg: Paul Zsolnay Verlag, 1985), 25.

freedom prevailed; perhaps, as the writer ponders, the cabaret's activities, based on carefree games, rejected the relics of the time of captivity and heralded freedom.<sup>61</sup>

It is impossible to read these memoirs without considering their historical context, which is an important frame of reference for the entire cultural formation and worldviews of the writers. The memoirs of Zweig, Friedlaender and Boy-Żeleński, called autobiographies, reportages, sketches, and works close to novels, record a world that has passed and which the writers describe and bid farewell to with reverence. However, these are farewells to different realities: a different vision appears from the perspective of *finis Austriae*, and another in the final chapter of the history of Cracow, then still part of the monarchy.

Translated by Anna Wylężałek and David Lilley

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<sup>61</sup> Żeleński (Boy), "Wielki Kraków" [Great Cracow], in Żeleński (Boy), *Znaszli ten kraj?... I inne wspomnienia*, 159.

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## **Świat, którego już nie ma. O wspomnieniach Otto Friedlaendera, Stefana Zweiga i Tadeusza Boya-Żeleńskiego**

**Abstrakt:** Przedmiotem uwagi badawczej w artykule są wspomnienia pisarzy związanych w młodości z Wiedniem: Stefana Zweiga i Otto Friedlaendera oraz Tadeusza Boya-Żeleńskiego związanego z Krakowem. Rozważania prowadzone są w oparciu o odwołania do ustaleń geopoetyki, problematyki miejsca, autobiografii. Wspomnienia pisarzy dotyczą przełomu XIX i XX wieku, obejmują różne aspekty ówczesnego życia społecznego i towarzyskiego, kultury materialnej i duchowej, utrwalonych zwyczajów. Pamiętnikarze rejestrują także zmiany zachodzące w życiu artystycznym, przedstawiają grupy i środowiska literackie oraz znane postaci tego czasu. Są jednocześnie obserwatorami i uczestnikami życia przełomu wieków, a ich relacje traktowane są jako wspomnienia, szkice, reportaże, autobiografie.

**Słowa kluczowe:** autobiografizm, przełom XIX i XX wieku, Wiedeń, Kraków, przestrzeń.

## **Eine Welt, die es nicht mehr gibt. Über die Memoiren von Otto Friedlaender, Stefan Zweig und Tadeusz Boy-Żeleński**

**Abstract:** Gegenstand der Forschung in diesem Artikel sind die Memoiren von Schriftstellern, die in ihrer Jugend mit Wien verbunden waren: Stefan Zweig und Otto Friedlaender, sowie Tadeusz Boy-Żeleński, der mit Krakau verbunden war. Die Überlegungen stützen sich auf die Erkenntnisse der Geopoetik, das Problem des Ortes und die Autobiographie. Die Memoiren der Autoren beziehen sich auf die Wende vom 19. zum 20. Jahrhundert, sie behandeln verschiedene Aspekte des gesellschaftlichen Lebens jener Zeit, der materiellen und geistigen Kultur, der gängigen Bräuche. Die Memoirenschreiber halten auch die Veränderungen im künstlerischen Leben fest, stellen literarische Gruppen und Kreise sowie bekannte Persönlichkeiten der Zeit vor. Sie sind gleichzeitig Beobachter und Teilnehmer am Leben der Jahrhundertwende, und ihre Berichte werden als Memoiren, Skizzen, Berichte und Autobiographien behandelt.

**Schlüsselwörter:** Autobiographie, Jahrhundertwende, Wien, Krakau, Raum, Geopoetik.





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## The World and Death: On *Wysokie słońce* by Łukasz Barys

**Abstract:** Critics emphasise and Łukasz Barys himself points out that the tradition of nature-centric Romanticism is central to his work. This interpretation of poems from Barys's debut collection *Wysokie słońce* [High Sun] allows us to trace how the poet renews the Romantic tradition in his work. He creates ecologically and socially engaged poetry, in which man shares his fate with nature. Death affects everyone; not only people deserve to be remembered. The Romantic paradigm of remembering the dead is re-read by Barys as a call to pay equal respect to humans, animals and plants. He thus takes a fresh look at the Romantic pattern of memory and closeness to the dead.

**Keywords:** Łukasz Barys, ecological sensitivity, Romanticism, death, poetry.

Łukasz Barys is one of the writers of recent years who has been most frequently awarded<sup>1</sup> and praised for innovation.<sup>2</sup> Wojciech Szot has called

<sup>1</sup> Łukasz Barys received the Złoty Środek Poezji Festival Award for *Wysokie słońce* [High Sun] (2020) and an Honourable Mention in the Second National Literary Book Contest “Nowy dokument tekstowy” in the lyric category. In 2021 he was awarded the *Polityka* Passport Award for *Kości, które nosisz w kieszeni* [The Bones You Carry in Your Pocket]. He is a laureate of several competitions, including the Leopold Tyrmand competition, the Siegfried Lenz International Competition, and the second Tadeusz Różewicz Drama Award competition.

<sup>2</sup> See Kinga Sabak, *Bieda, która ogranicza i nie pozwala myśleć o przyszłości. Jest tylko beznaziejne „tu i teraz”* [Poverty That Limits and Does not Let You Think about the Future. There is only the Hopeless “Here and Now”], *Newsweek*, September 10, 2021, accessed

him a prodigy of Polish literature, since whatever he touches, turns into awards,<sup>3</sup> while Dariusz Nowacki suggests that “Kto tak zaczyna, ma szansę zająć wysoko”<sup>4</sup> [anyone who starts out like this has a chance of going far].

Barys made his debut in 2020 with *Wysokie słońce* [High Sun], a volume of poetry that brings together all the issues of interest to Barys. On the other hand *Kości, które nosisz w kieszeni*<sup>5</sup> and *Jeśli przecięto cię na pół*<sup>6</sup> are novels in which the writer develops and deepens the themes taken up in his own poetry. Piotr Sadzik explains:

[...] proza nie jest dla niego wyłącznym terenem działania, Barys debiutował tomem wierszy *Wysokie słońce*. Obydwie te ścieżki twórczości zszywa w tym wypadku ścieg powracających obrazów i motywów: krąg rodzinny, podatność życia na zranienie czy po prostu obsesja śmierci, z której wykiełkowuje bogactwo nieoczekiwanych tautycznych figur.<sup>7</sup>

[[...] prose is not the exclusive terrain of activity for him, Barys debuted with a volume of poems called *High Sun*. The two paths of creativity are stitched together in this case by a stitch of recurring images and motifs: the family circle, the vulnerability of life to injury or simply the obsession with death, from which sprouts a wealth of unexpected tautic/Thanatos' figures.]

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April 22, 2024, <https://www.newsweek.pl/kultura/kinga-sabak-recenzuje-ksiazke-kosci-ktore-nosisz-w-kieszeni-lukasza-barysa/wf9kk9p>; Agnieszka Nęcka-Czapska, “Półka literacka 2021” [Literary Bookshelf 2021], *Postscriptum Polonistyczne*, no. 1 (2022), [https://cejsh.icm.edu.pl/cejsh/element/bwmeta1.element.ojs-doi-10\\_31261\\_PS\\_P\\_2022\\_29\\_05](https://cejsh.icm.edu.pl/cejsh/element/bwmeta1.element.ojs-doi-10_31261_PS_P_2022_29_05); Justyna Sobolewska, “Elegia dla bidoków” [An Elegy for the Poor], *Polityka*, August 31, 2021, accessed April 22, 2024, <https://www.polityka.pl/tygodnikpolityka/kultura/ksiazki/2132220,1,recenzja-ksiazki-lukasz-barys-kosci-ktore-nosisz-w-kieszeni.read>.

<sup>3</sup> Wojciech Szot, “Cudowny młodzieniec polskiej literatury. Czegokolwiek dotknie, zamienia to w nagrody” [The Prodigy of Polish literature. Whatever He Touches, He Turns It into Awards], *Gazeta Wyborcza*, November 21, 2023, accessed April 20, 2024, <https://wyborcza.pl/7,75517,30424336,rozewicz-dla-barysa.html>. After Łukasz Barys received the Polityka Passport, the media emphasised that he is, after Dorota Masłowska, the youngest winner of this competition to date. Critics writing about Barys’s work often point out the generational distinctiveness of this writer, who was born in 1997 in Pabianice.

<sup>4</sup> Dariusz Nowacki, “Kto tak zaczyna, ma szansę zająć wysoko. Ta książka to znakomity debiut” [Anyone Who Starts Like This Has a Chance of Going Far. This Book Is an Excellent Debut], *Gazeta Wyborcza*, August 31, 2021, accessed April 20, 2024, <https://wyborcza.pl/ksiazki/7,154165,27483492,kosci-ktore-nosisz-w-kieszeni-lukasza-barysa-smierc-krzepi.html>.

<sup>5</sup> See Łukasz Barys, *Kości, które nosisz w kieszeni* [The Bones You Carry in Your Pocket] (Warszawa: Wydawnictwo Cyranka, 2021).

<sup>6</sup> See Łukasz Barys, *Jeśli przecięto cię na pół* [If You’ve Been Cut in Half] (Warszawa: Wydawnictwo Cyranka, 2022).

<sup>7</sup> Piotr Sadzik, “Kości języka” [The Bones of the Language], *Dwutygodnik*, accessed April 23, 2024, <https://www.dwutygodnik.com/artukul/9665-kosci-jezyka.html>.

Commenting on the publication of *Jeśli przecięto cię na pół* [If You've Been Cut in Half], Dariusz Nowacki wondered whether Barys's second novel would achieve success among readers comparable to his debut novel; he had his doubts because the author:

[...] powtórzył koncept znany z debiutanckiego utworu [...] Nadrzędna idea pozostała ta sama: trzeba postawić na sojusz żywych i umarłych, bo obcowanie z martwymi jest jedyną szansą na ucieczkę z parszywego, źle urządzonego świata.<sup>8</sup>

[...] repeated a concept known from his debut work [...] The overriding idea remained the same: you have to bet on the alliance of the living and the dead, because communing with the dead is the only chance to escape from the mangy, ill-mannered world.]

Tadeusz Różewicz has stated that the most valuable thing in all his work is “uporczywe przerabianie, powtarzanie, wracanie do tej samej materii”<sup>9</sup> [the persistent reworking, the repetition of returning to the same matter]. Nowacki is concerned not with the thematic repetition, but with the subject matter of the novel, which he doubts will be attractive to readers. Barys consistently focuses on describing poverty, the economic and environmental crisis, death and impossible dreams. Adam Woźniak, writing about *Kości, które nosisz w kieszeni* [The Bones You Carry in Your Pocket], states that “lektura raczej boli, niż bawi, [...] obrazy poszukiwań przyjaźni na mętnym pograniczu życia i śmierci bywają bardziej przygnębiające niż sceny z – równie beznadziejnej – codzienności nastolatków”<sup>10</sup> [the reading hurts rather than entertains, [...] the images of the search for friendship on the tenuous borderline between life and death are sometimes more depressing than scenes from the – equally hopeless – everyday life of teenagers]. *Jeśli przecięto cię na pół*, according to the reviewer, is a novel with an ending that could therefore be read as a paraphrase of Maria Janion's call, which would now read: ‘to modernity – yes, but together with our dead’ (orig. “o zakończeniu, które można by więc czytać jako parafrazę wezwania Marii Janion, które brzmiałoby teraz: «do nowoczesności – tak, ale razem z naszymi umarłymi»”<sup>11</sup>). Jadwiga Piskorska comments similarly on Barys's prose:

<sup>8</sup> Dariusz Nowacki, “Życie przecięte na pół. Obcowanie z umarłymi to jedyna droga ucieczki od świata” [Life Cut in Half. Communing with the Dead Is the only Way to Escape from the World], *Gazeta Wyborcza*, October 18, 2022, accessed April 24, 2024, <https://wyborcza.pl/7,75517,29037073,poszedl-za-ciosem.html>.

<sup>9</sup> Tadeusz Różewicz, *Matka odchodzi* (Wydawnictwo Dolnośląskie, Wrocław 2001), 88. Cf. English: Tadeusz Różewicz, *Mother Departs*, trans. Barbara Bogoczek, with Introduction by Tony Howard (London: Stork Press, 2013).

<sup>10</sup> Adam Woźniak, “Sekcja zwłok” [The Post-Mortem], *Dwutygodnik. Strona kultury*, accessed April 24, 2024, <https://www.dwutygodnik.com/arttykul/10370-sekcja-zwlok.html>.

<sup>11</sup> Woźniak, “Sekcja zwłok.”

Pisanie o drugiej powieści Łukasza Barysa przyszło mi z zaskakującym trudem [...]. Ostatecznie świat umarłych, razem z upiorną szkołą urządzoną w opuszczonym dworcu, wypada dużo bardziej „ludzko” niż rzeczywistość żywego człowieka. Jest to pod wieloma względami świadomy zabieg, który staje się przyczynkiem do (o dziwo) wciąż aktualnego dialogu polskiej literatury współczesnej z pośmiertnym trwaniem paradygmatu romantycznego. Barys zdaje się przyłączać do grona zwolenników postulowanej przez Marię Janion egzystencjalnej formy romantyzmu – stawiając ją w zdecydowanej opozycji do jego narodowo-ojczyźnianej postaci.<sup>12</sup>

[Writing about Łukasz Barys's second novel came to me with surprising difficulty [...]. In the end, the world of the dead, along with the ghostly school set up in an abandoned mansion, comes off much more “human” than the reality of the living. In many ways, this is a conscious effort, which becomes a contribution to the (surprisingly) ever-present dialogue between Polish contemporary literature and the posthumous persistence of the Romantic paradigm. Barys seems to join the ranks of supporters of the existential form of Romanticism postulated by Maria Janion – placing it in stark opposition to its national-war form.]

It is not only critics that point to the Romantic tradition as important to the writer, but the author himself does so in interviews: “Pisząc *Kości, które nośisz w kieszeni*, starałem się łączyć bliski mi romantyczny sposób myślenia o świecie ze społeczną wrażliwością na krzywdę”<sup>13</sup> [While writing *The bones you carry in your pocket*, I tried to combine the Romantic way of thinking about the world, which is close to me, with a social sensitivity to injustice]. In the interview, when asked about his favourite childhood reading, the poet mentions Adam Mickiewicz's *Dziady*, part II (*Forefathers' Eve*).<sup>14</sup> Speaking to Mateusz Roesler, he states that he continuously returns to Romanticism, which is altered in different ways.<sup>15</sup> For the writer, more important than the dramas of a more patriotic nature exploited by “right-wing discourse” is the social diction of Romanticism. The second part of *Dziady*, according to Barys, touches on issues related to class injustice and proves incredibly topical today.<sup>16</sup> Difficult for some readers to read and describe, the “posthumous per-

<sup>12</sup> Jadwiga Piskorska, “Jeśli przecięto cię na pół. Upiorne tropy resentmentu” [“If You've Been Cut in Half”. Spooky tropes of resentment], *Kwartalnik Kulturalny Nowy Napis*, April 27, 2023, accessed April 28, 2024, <https://nowynapis.eu/tygodnik/nr-200/artukul/jesli-przecieto-cie-na-pol-upiorne-tropy-resentymentu>.

<sup>13</sup> Mateusz Roesler, “Łukasz Barys. Spod znaku wesołego romantyzmu” [Łukasz Barys. From under the Sign of Cheerful Romanticism], *Pismo. Magazyn opinii*, Mai 4, 2022, accessed April 23, 2024, <https://magazynpismo.pl/kultura/apteczka/Łukasz-barys-spod-znaku-wesołego-romantyzmu/>.

<sup>14</sup> Cf. Marta Mach, “Łukasz Barys. ‘Pabianice mnie jeszcze trzymają’” [Łukasz Barys. “Pabianice Still Has a Hold on Me”], *Zwykłe życie*, accessed April 25, 2024, <https://zwyklezycie.pl/2022/01/Łukasz-barys-pabianice-mnie-jeszcze-trzymaja/>.

<sup>15</sup> Cf. Mach, “Łukasz Barys. ‘Pabianice mnie jeszcze trzymają’.”

<sup>16</sup> Cf. Roesler, “Łukasz Barys. Spod znaku wesołego romantyzmu.”

sistence of the Romantic paradigm”<sup>17</sup> involves the creation of politically and socially engaged art.<sup>18</sup> This attitude resembles Maria Janion’s way of thinking about the Romantic paradigm and grows out of it, but also differs significantly from it. In a 1995 conversation with Zbigniew Bendyktowicz and Czesław Robotycki, Maria Janion described contemporary culture and its relationship to Romantic ideas, recalling a lecture by Ireneusz Opacki, who:

[...] mówił, że właściwie wszystkie idee romantyczne upadły, wszystkie po kolei; pokazywał, jak one były żywe w poezji dwudziestolecia, u Wierzyńskiego chociażby, i w idei wolności tragicznej, i w czasie wojny. Ale teraz nie ma śladu po tym. Tylko – mówił – jedno zostało: groby, groby w kulturze polskiej. [...] kultura polska to kultura żałoby, odnawianej uroczyste raz do roku, i tutaj miał rację Mickiewicz kiedy pisał we francuskiej przedmowie do *Dziadów*, że łączność między widzialnym a niewidzialnym światem, żyjącymi a tymi którzy umarli jest istotnym rysem kultury polskiej.<sup>19</sup>

[...] said that virtually all Romantic ideas have collapsed, one after the other; he showed how they were alive in the poetry of the twentieth century, in Wierzyński, for example, and in the idea of tragic freedom, and during the war. But now there is no trace of it. Only, he said, one thing remains: graves, graves in Polish culture. [...]

<sup>17</sup> Piskorska, “Jeśli przecięto cię na pół. Upiorne tropy.”

<sup>18</sup> Marcin Belza takes a different view of Barys’s political involvement seeing it as a realisation of fashionable themes: “Bieda, trudne dzieciństwo, nieheteronormatywność, życie na prowincji... W debiucie Barysa modne tematy tak gęsto wypełniają książkę, że robi się to nieznośne. Do tego językowe wyrafinowanie przykrywa w nim niedostatki narracji. [...] Tak się złożyło, że obie prozy czytałem jedna po drugiej i miałem nieodparte wrażenie obcowania z jedną książką, z czego nie czynię żadnego zarzutu, rzecz jasna. [...] Co więcej, debiut prozatorski Barysa w całości ulepiony jest z obowiązującego, politycznie poprawnego dyskursu dotyczącego nośnych tematów [...]” [Poverty, a difficult childhood, non-heteronormativity, life in the provinces... In Barys’s debut, fashionable topics fill the book so densely that it becomes unbearable. On top of that, linguistic sophistication covers up the shortcomings of the narrative in it. [...] It so happened that I read both prose books one after the other and had the irresistible impression of interacting with one book, of which I make no reproach, of course. [...] What’ is more, Barys’ prose debut is formed entirely from an obligatory, politically correct discourse touching on load-bearing topics [...]]. Marcin Belza, “Nieznosna gęstość memów. O powieściach “Kości, które nosisz w kieszeni” i “Jeśli przecięto cię na pół” Łukasza Barysa (Debiuty i po-debiuty)” [The Unbearable Density of Memes. On the Novels “The Bones You Carry in Your Pocket” and “If You’ve Been Cut in Half” by Łukasz Barys (Debuts and Post-debuts)], *Kultura Liberalna*, no. 735 (2023), accessed April 25, 2024, <https://kulturaliberalna.pl/2023/04/18/marcin-belza-recenzja-lukasz-barys-jesli-przecieto-cie-kosci-debiuty-podebiuty/>.

<sup>19</sup> “Najwyższym szczęściem dzieci ziemi jest jedynie osobowość.” Z Profesor Marią Janion rozmawiają Zbigniew Benedyktowicz i Czesław Robotycki” [“The Highest Happiness of the Children of the Earth is Only Personality.” Zbigniew Benedyktowicz and Czesław Robotycki in Conversation with Professor Maria Janion], *Polska Sztuka Ludowa – Konteksty*, vol. 49, no. 3–4 (1995): 14.

Polish culture is a culture of mourning, solemnly renewed once a year, and here Mickiewicz was right when he wrote in the French preface to *Dziady* that the connection between the visible and invisible world, the living and those who have died, is an essential feature of Polish culture.]

Barys's works are socially engaged and in his work he begins to play with the naturocentric Romantic tradition.<sup>20</sup> He looks at inanimate matter; just like the Romantics he is fascinated by death. Unlike the Romantics, he does not treat man as a unique being; he shows the integrity of man with the world. In the poem *Muszka* [A Fly], the poet describes a "dog" who:

Ma ropę pod oczkami. Zdrapiesz?  
Nie drap. Przecież nie mówi się „nie płacz”,  
bo to smutek pogłębia.

(*Muszka*, WS, 15)<sup>21</sup>

[Has pus under his eyes. Will you scratch?  
Don't scratch. After all, one doesn't say "don't cry",  
Because it makes the sadness worse.]

The pus in the eye is a physiological secretion of the tear glands; drawing attention to it brings the associations with pain and crying. A dog, like a human, according to Barys, is a suffering and emotional being. The phrases "don't scratch" and "don't cry" can be interpreted as an example of the coincidence of the fate of the animal and the human. The verse "Każde z nas ma serce jak zgnieciona puszka. // Każde z nas ma czarne oczko i ropę wokół" (*Muszka*, WS, 15) [Each of us has a heart like a crushed can. // Each of us has a black eye and pus all around] emphasises interspecies similarities. Man is inseparable from nature:

lecz u mnie pieska puszcza wolno:  
są ciecзки, są do lasu wycieczki. Są małe, duże śmierci  
i są pewne analogie:

<sup>20</sup> "Nie wyobrażam sobie swojego pisania bez wątków społecznych, zaangażowania w symboliczną walkę o istnienie ludzi spoza głównych dyskursów. W literaturze interesuje mnie to, co dotyka kwestii prywatnych i społecznych zarazem, związanych z intymnością cielesną, z psychicznym odbiorem bohaterów przez siebie samych i otoczenie" [I can't imagine my writing without social themes, involvement in the symbolic struggle for the existence of people outside the main discourses. What interests me in literature is that which touches on private and social issues at the same time, related to bodily intimacy, to the psychic perception of characters by themselves and those around them]. Tymoteusz Milas, "Prowincja nie wyklucza. Łukasz Barys" [Province Does not Exclude. Łukasz Barys], *Miejmiejsce*, November 14, 2022, accessed April 25, 2024, <http://miejmiejsce.com/sztuka/prowincja-nie-wyklucza-lukasz-barys/>.

<sup>21</sup> The poetic works quoted are from the collection: Łukasz Barys, *Wysokie słońce* [High Sun] (Łódź–Kraków: Biblioteka Literacka Kwartalnika "Nowy Napis", 2020). In round brackets I give the title of the poem, WS, page number.

pieski to dzieci, dzieci to babcie, babcie to mrówki,  
 mrówki to świnki, świnki to pszczołki, pszczołki to  
 Syryjczycy, Syryjczycy to sosny.

(*Muszka*, WS, 15–16)

[but at my place I let the dog run free:  
 there are menstruations, there are trips to the forest. There are small, large deaths  
 and there are some analogies:

doggies are children, children are grandmothers, grandmothers are ants,  
 ants are piggies, piggies are bees, bees are  
 Syrians, Syrians are pine trees.]

The poet creates an analogy between animal and human life; “big deaths” and “little deaths” are no different. The enumeration in which “doggies”, “children”, “grandmothers”, “ants”, “piggies” form a group of beings similar to each other can be seen as a joke. The diminutive forms of words give them lightness and introduce an idyllic mood, the inclusion of the word “Syrians” in the string of words changes the perception of the whole. The lightness of the diminutive contrasts with the associations carried by the word “Syrians”, which brings to mind a long-standing armed conflict that has claimed many victims. The analogy between the animal, plant and human worlds serves to undermine the validity of the anthropocentric view of reality. Bees and trees suffer and die just like humans, their fate is no less important. The Polish word *Muszka* means ‘bowtie’, but it is also a common name for an insect of the order of flies. Fruit flies are insects that are considered pests. By naming an animal a *fly* in the poem, the poet draws attention to the man’s dismissive attitude towards animals. The animal’s existence is as worthy of commemoration as that of humans:

Pod sosną Muszkę zakopię. Zamieszkać w środku,  
 podniosę szosę, fundamenty domu, płytę grobu.

Taka chora, taka miękka. Uznałem, że będzie pierwsza,  
 ale uchwiała się. Już od dawna nie szczeka. Na grillu  
 oddam jej mięsko. To wszystko tak prędko.

(*Muszka*, WS, 15–16)

[Under the pine tree I will bury the *Muszka*/Fly. I will live inside,  
 I will raise the road, the foundations of the house, a tombstone.

So sickly, so soft. I decided that she would be the first,  
 But she survived. She has not barked for a long time. At the barbecue  
 I'll give her the meat. It's all so fast.]

Death comes “swiftly” and is natural to all species. The bitch, who was one of the weaker ones in the litter, lived as a human companion. The lyrical hero, after the bitch’s death, declares that he will “live inside” the grave that

he will build for the four-legged friend. This is a surprising renewal of the Romantic paradigm:

Do Europy – tak, ale razem z naszymi umarłymi. Projekt kultury wyrastającej ze słowiańskiego obrzędu dziadów uznaje za nadrzędną ideę łączności żywych z umarłymi. Mickiewicz był przekonany, że ta idea wyznacza podstawowy sposób istnienia naszej kultury. Takiej – ponadnarodowej, ponadetnicznej i ponad poszczególnymi religiami wspólnoty istnieć nie przerwa śmierć, nie może jej zniszczyć historia, tak często będąca procesem zapomnienia. Odnawiany powtarzany rytuał dziadów to wieczny czas życiodajnej żałoby. U nas zwłaszcza żałoby po tych, którzy padli w walce o wolność lub byli prześladowani przez zaborców i okupantów.<sup>22</sup>

[To Europe – yes, but together with our dead. The project of a culture that grows out of the Slavic ritual of the forefathers recognises as paramount the idea of connection between the living and the dead. Mickiewicz was convinced that this idea determines the basic mode of existence of our culture. Such a – supra-national, supra-ethnic and supra-religious – community of existence is not interrupted by death, and cannot be destroyed by history, which is so often a process of forgetting. The renewed repeated ritual of the grandfathers is an eternal time of life-giving mourning. In our country, this mourning is especially for those who fell in the struggle for freedom or were persecuted by partitioners and occupiers.]

For Barys, the community of which Janion wrote has a broader framework, it is trans-genre. The “ritual of the forefathers” involves not only people, but also flora and fauna. “Raising the road, the foundations of the house, the tombstone /slab of the grave” can be interpreted as a declaration by the author, who wants to remodel the way people think about animals. The lyrical hero of Łukasz Barys's poems looks at the matter in its process of decomposition and dying, noting that human death is no different from animal death.

The piece *Pętla* [The Loop], which opens the volume *Wysokie słońce*, is a multifaceted poem. In the foreground of the statement there is a winter landscape, a frozen pond and “białe ryby / w wodzie” [white fish/ in the water] (*Pętla*, WS, 9). The first stanza of the lyric is descriptive and idyllic, and does not announce a sudden change in the way the story is told. This change occurs in the second stanza, in which the viewer's attention is directed to the language<sup>23</sup>:

<sup>22</sup> Maria Janion, *Niesamowita słowiańszczyzna. Fantazmaty literatury* [Uncanny Slavs. Phantasms of Literature] (Kraków: Wydawnictwo Literackie, 2022), 32.

<sup>23</sup> Linguistic tradition and play with language are among the most frequently noted and praised elements of Łukasz Barys's work. Tomasz Cieślak wrote that Barys “wyraźnie rozpina swoją oryginalną wypowiedź poetycką badaniem tego, co można zrobić z językiem (i co język z nami robi), a próbami oddania aury młodzieńczych fascynacji i inicjacji” [clearly stretches his original poetic expression between exploring what can be done with language (and what language does to us) and attempts to convey the aura of youthful fascination and initiation]. Tomasz Cieślak, “Pozorna moc zdrobnień” [The Appar-

Teraz świeci słońce, wschodzę na taflę,  
 Sprawdzam wytrzymałość słów:  
 Sunę wzdłuż, naciskam i patrzę:  
 W czerni ulatnia się trochę ciśnienia, to ze mnie.  
 Lena stoi na mostku, więc sięgam po bryłkę,

przed którą można oglądać słońce.  
 Promienie rozpadną się, stopią w światło,  
 ryby zamienią w brzuszki,  
 ale pływać będą jak lilie: pobieram lilie

albo zapamiętam obraz, nieważne,  
 nasi bliscy są tacy oddaleni, obcy i zimni.  
 To, co im mówię, zawiesza się i powraca  
 jako odbłask. Pieskowi wzrok się zawiesza na rybce –  
 rybce pyszczek zawiesza się jak system.

(*Pętla* [The Loop], WS, 9)

[Now the sun is shining, I'm rising on the face of the water,  
 I test the strength of the words:  
 I glide along, I press and look:  
 Into the blackness escapes some pressure, it's from me.  
 Lena is standing on the bridge, so I reach for a nugget,

Through which you can watch the sun.  
 The rays will disintegrate, melt into light,  
 the fish will turn into bellies,  
 but they will swim like lilies: I will pick up the lilies

Or I will remember the image, it doesn't matter,  
 our loved ones are so distant, foreign and cold.  
 What I say to them halts and returns  
 as a glare. The dog's gaze halts on the fish –  
 the fish's muzzle halts as a system.]

The first line of the second stanza – “Teraz świeci słońce, wschodzę na taflę // Sprawdzam wytrzymałość słów” [Now the sun is shining // I'm rising on the face of the water] (*Pętla*, WS, 9) directs the reader's attention to the frozen pond that the lyrical hero is stepping onto, but the very second line of

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ent Power of Diminutives], *Kalejdoskop*, no. 1 (2021): 68. Adam Partyka noted that in *Wysokie słońce* “serie obrazów przywoływanych w wierszach skonstruowane są raczej w oparciu o awangardową zasadę jukstapozycji i dezautomatyzacji odbioru, niż w myśl postulatu ponowoczesnej nieciągłości, fragmentacji i destrukcji znaczeń” [the series of images evoked in the poems is constructed on the basis of the avant-garde principle of yuxtaposition and deautomatisation of reception, rather than in accordance with the post-modern postulate of discontinuity, fragmentation and destruction of meanings]. Adam Partyka, “Pod taflą lodu (recenzja *Wysokiego słońca* Łukasza Barysa)” [Under the sheet of ice (review of *Wysokie słońce* by Łukasz Barys)], accessed April 23, 2024, <https://ston-erpolski.pl/pod-tafla-lodu-recenzja-wysokiego-slonca-lukasza-barysa/>.

the piece confuses the viewer. The lyrical hero does not test the strength of the ice, but “wyrzymałość słów: / Sunie wzdłuż, naciska patrzy” [the strength of the words: / Glides along, presses and looks] (*Pętla*, WS, 9). The examination of the frozen surface turns into looking deep into the psyche of the lyrical hero. The words “w czerni ulatnia się trochę ciśnienia, to ze mnie” [into the blackness escapes some pressure, it’s from me] directly refer to the feelings and emotions of the pond gazer. The “nugget”, which appears in the next verse of the poem, can be associated with a transparent piece of ice serving as a substitute for an optical device. The ice, which resembles a crystal in its structure, refracts light. A person looking through the “nugget” will see a different image than with the naked eye. The play on words “promienie rozpadną się, stopią światło” [rays will disintegrate, melt the light] can refer to the melting frozen snow, as well as to the change in perception that will occur when looking through the ice. The poet plays with associations, deconstructing reality. The de-realism of the landscape serves to show the connection between the living and the dead, to find traces of the presence of one’s dead loved ones in the world:

Istotnie, wypuszczono nas w system,  
lecz o nim wcale nie opowiedziano:  
śmierć urosła nam w oczku lodem –  
Lena leży na lodzie, zagląda w toń:

wśród białych ryb widzi babcię,  
która zawiesza się i obraca na biały brzuch,  
obraca na biały brzuch i zawiesza  
z braku powietrza w systemie.

Wiercę dziurkę.  
Skąd mam wiertło?

(*Pętla*, SW 9–10)

[Indeed, we were released into the system,  
but we haven’t been told about it at all:  
death has grown ice in our eye –  
Lena lies on the ice, looks into the depths:

among the white fish she sees a grandmother,  
who hangs up and turns on her white belly,  
turns on her white belly and suspends herself  
for the lack of air in the system.

I am drilling a hole.  
Where did I get the drill from?]

The memory of “our loved ones” “returns like a glare” in the nature observed. Barys creates an analogy between the human and animal worlds. When fish die, they float to the surface of the water with their bellies to the

water's surface; in the lyric, "babcia [...] zawiesza się i obraca na brzuch" [the grandmother [...] suspends herself and turns on her belly], thus she resembles a fish dying from lack of oxygen. "The system" is the world and the rules of life and death that govern it, rules that "have not been told at all". Since no narrative has been created to describe what the experience of death is, the lack of knowledge about it makes it a problem. The words "śmierć urosła nam w oczku lodem" [death grew in our pond of ice] are ambiguous, they refer to a real place – a pond that has frozen – but they can also be interpreted as referring to a person who is terrified by the vision of death. "Oczko" is a diminutive form of the word *oko* ("eye"), which is a symbol of the soul. The death of the grandmother in the lyric is caused by "a lack of air in the system". The action of "drilling a hole", which ends the poem, symbolises the lyrical hero's opposition to the "system" – to the rules that construct our reality. The rhetorical question, "skąd mam wiertło?" [where did I get the drill from?], is the poet's turn to metaphysics and a consideration of issues inexplicable by reason. The title – *Pętla* – is associated with both the gallows and repetition, cyclicity. Death is repetitive, its arrival determines the cycles of human life and the entire planet – it has the greatest influence on the shape of the "system" that is life. Tomasz Cieślak, writing about *Wysokie słońce*, points to *Pętla* as the most important work for understanding the entire volume:

[...] za metaforę całości. To opowieść o oczku wodnym i uwięzionych w nim pod lodem rybkach. To obraz nas: „wpuszczonych w system” i nieświadomych jego mechanizmu. To świat trwania i śmierci zarazem. Jesteśmy w tej pętli bez wyjścia, widać nas jak w soczewce. Banalnych, trochę śmiesznych. Poszukując sposobów wyrażenia kondycji współczesnego człowieka [...].<sup>24</sup>

[...] for a metaphor of the whole. It is a story about a pond and the fish trapped in it under the ice. It's a picture of us: "let into the system" and unaware of its mechanism. It is a world of duration and death at the same time. We are in this loop with no way out, you can see us as in a lens. Banal, a little ridiculous. Looking for ways to express the condition of modern man [...]

The critic is right in stating that in this lyric Barys has included his poetic credo, but I think that the "drill" that the lyrical hero queries in the ending of *Pętla* means an attempt to break the impasse in which the man finds himself. While talking to Mateusz Roesler, he declared:

Cieszę się, że narracje uwrażliwiające na dyskryminację systemową pojawiają się coraz częściej w mediach głównego nurtu. I że tyle osób sięga po książki przybliżające historię z pozamiejskiego punktu widzenia.<sup>25</sup>

<sup>24</sup> Cieślak, "Pozorna moc zdrobnień," 68.

<sup>25</sup> Roesler, "Łukasz Barys. Spod znaku wesołego romantyzmu."

[I'm glad that narratives sensitising people to systemic discrimination are appearing more and more in the mainstream media. And that so many people are reaching for books that approach history from a non-urban point of view.]

It would probably be no exaggeration to say that Barys's stance draws on Romantic naturocentric models. As Maria Janson writes:

Antropologia romantyczna jest antropologią całkowicie nowożytną, ale przede wszystkim dlatego, że zakwestionowała paradygmat myślenia oświeceniowego, które było ufundowane na uwielbieniu uniwersalności rozumu. Tej uniwersalności romantyzm przeciwstawił konkretną jednostkę. Najczęściej jest to jednostka cierpiąca. Cierpienie to kluczowe pojęcie w antropologii romantycznej. [...] historia w romantyzmie jest traktowana jako coś bardzo konkretnego, to nie jest już uniwersalistyczna przestrzeń, w której porusza się abstrakcyjna ludzkość. Chociaż romantyzm mówi także o ludzkości, ale idzie mu przede wszystkim o konkretnego, historycznego człowieka, który uczestniczy w dziejach.<sup>26</sup>

[Romantic anthropology is a thoroughly modern anthropology, but primarily because it challenged the paradigm of Enlightenment thinking, which was founded on the glorification of the universality of reason. This universality was opposed by Romanticism to the concrete individual. Most often, it is the individual who suffers. Suffering is a key concept in Romantic anthropology. [...] history in Romanticism is treated as something very concrete, it is no longer a universalistic space in which abstract humanity moves. Although Romanticism also talks about humanity, it is concerned primarily with concrete, historical man who participates in history.]

Romantic anthropology differs from Barys's way of thinking in that the writer sensitises the reader not only to the fate of the individual, but the suffering of every organism is also important to him. Monika Brągiel, discussing *Wysokie słońce*, rightly notes that:

[w]spółczesność, w której przychodzi nam, podobnie jak podmiotowi, definiować dorosłe już relacje, pełna jest zniekształconych opowieści. Seriale, historie w gazetach, treści w Internecie – wszystko rozplywa się w powietrzu, trudno nie widzieć, jak te sfery przenikają do realnego życia. Ono z kolei pełne jest niepotrzebnych elementów, śmieci, plastiku; jest też rozpedzone, i znów musimy sobie przypomnieć, że w system zostaliśmy wpuszczeni [...].<sup>27</sup>

<sup>26</sup> Maria Janion, "Rozmowy na koniec wieku. O duszy" [Conversation for the End of the Century. On the soul], in Maria Janion, *Do Europy – tak ale razem z naszymi umarłymi* [To Europe – Yes, but Together With Our Dead], afterword by Jacek Leociak (Warszawa: Wydawnictwo Krytyki Politycznej), 224.

<sup>27</sup> Monika Brągiel, "Próbowałam zetrzeć słońce, lecz wisiało za wysoko". O debiutanckim tomie Łukasza Barysa, ["I Tried to Wipe out the Sun, But It Was Hanging too High." On the Debut Volume of Łukasz Barys], *Kwartalnik Kulturalny Nowy Napis*, November 26, 2023, accessed April 28, 2024, [https://nowynapis.eu/tygodnik/nr-77/arttykul/probowalem-zetrzec-slonce-lecz-wisialo-za-wysoko-o-debiutanckim-tomie?fbclid=IwAR1iXDwFvLcOh-xpz6lYj81vgDwtDu3RxBNDXBG-Oy1uXa3psU6oisY6iU\\_aem\\_AftoNzZeDRGtYHUKLgDgny6ZkeBTe0HsGCi53YgVx4hKhzAUx8XzQcIAV\\_ZFFsZSF69qKccqg00IFLIQClBy2Nb](https://nowynapis.eu/tygodnik/nr-77/arttykul/probowalem-zetrzec-slonce-lecz-wisialo-za-wysoko-o-debiutanckim-tomie?fbclid=IwAR1iXDwFvLcOh-xpz6lYj81vgDwtDu3RxBNDXBG-Oy1uXa3psU6oisY6iU_aem_AftoNzZeDRGtYHUKLgDgny6ZkeBTe0HsGCi53YgVx4hKhzAUx8XzQcIAV_ZFFsZSF69qKccqg00IFLIQClBy2Nb).

[the modern age, in which we, like the subject, come to define adult relationships now, is full of distorted stories. Serials, stories in newspapers, the Internet – everything melts into the air, and it's hard not to see how these spheres infiltrate real life. It, in turn, is full of unnecessary elements, garbage, plastic; it is also unleashed, and again we have to remind ourselves that we have been let into the system [...]]

Barys creates ecologically engaged poetry in which man shares his fate with nature. “Brak włącznika, / nadmiar laleczek” [No switch, / an excess of dolls] – the first line of *Rozłączenia* [Disconnection] (SW, 22) – forces the reader to rethink his or her subjectivity. People are born, dolls only move if we use batteries, and yet dolls resemble people. “Morze plastiku / porąbane rączki i nóżki” [A sea of plastic/ chopped up arms and legs] (*Rozłączenia*, SW, 22) – these words can just as easily concretise to the reader as an image of a dismembered human body as a broken doll. In the lyric, Barys states: “Brak włącznika, / warkocze i buciki, // kosteczki króliczków, kosteczki nutrii” [No switch, / braids and shoes, // bunnies’ ankles, nutria’s ankles] (*Rozłączenia*, SW, 22), making the viewer aware of how little the elements of the world around humans differ from each other:

Siadam w okolicach oczka  
kładałem Barbie na wodzie.

Siadło wokół odbite miasto,  
wieżowce, samolociki i chrząszcze.

Siadłeś kostką w kostkę,  
dostałeś, kaszel, sine palce, martwa ławica  
oskubała cię ze skórek, wszystko stało się rozłączone.

Kładłaś babcię na plecach,  
kładał się po kątach tlen.

Wodziła wodą za tobą,  
aż wyrzuciła z siebie kawałek miasta,

zielone wieżowce i chrząszcze  
(takie do ciebie podobne).

(*Rozłączenie*, SW, 22–23)

[I sit down near the pond  
I put the Barbie on the water.

The reflected city sat around,  
Skyscrapers, airplanes and beetles.

You sat ankle to ankle,  
you got, coughing, blue fingers, dead shoal  
plucked you from your skins, everything became disconnected.

You laid your grandmother on her back,  
oxygen laid on the corners.

She lead through the water behind you,  
 until she threw a piece of the city out of herself,  
 green skyscrapers and beetles  
 (so similar to you).]

The water reflects the image and distorts it. Only when one turns one's gaze to the surrounding space does one see the similarities between plastic dismembered lacquer, animal and human bones. In the body of the sick woman "everything became disconnected," the disease "plucked her from her skins". Paradoxically, the process of dying becomes the beginning of human coexistence in death with other entities. After death, "green skyscrapers and beetles" are "similar" to us. The fate of humans is inextricably linked to the planet on which they live. Stanisław Łubieński, writing about the ecological crisis he observed using Poland as an example, noted.

[...] od dwóch lat diagnozuję u siebie chorobę, którą nazywam nerwicą ekologiczną. Tak jak wielu mieszkańców planety noszę w sobie poczucie winy, że codziennie przykładam rękę do zagłady naszego świata. Próbuję zmienić swój tryb życia, swoje przyzwyczajenia, a jednocześnie mam poczucie, że to wszystko na nic.<sup>28</sup>

[...] for the past two years I have been diagnosing myself with a disease I call ecological neurosis. Like many of the planet's inhabitants, I carry the guilt that every day I am putting my hand to the destruction of our world. I am trying to change my lifestyle, my habits, and at the same time I have the feeling that it is all for nothing.]

Łukasz Barys consciously surrenders to "this disease", looking sensitively, through poetry at the world surrounding man:

Modlę się na górcie i z górki, o pszczoły i deszcze,  
 zboże i sosnę, modlę się o starego,  
 bo rozsypał się w proch,  
 zamieszkał w jabłuszku, *którego nie obierze*  
*żadna dłoń*, nawet Parkinson.

Formy ucieczki są różne, a forma ocalenia  
 mieści się w skórcie: wolałbym taki świat,  
 pszczołki i drzewa, niewiele ponad

ziemię. Wolałbym taki sad, ale skąd go wymodlić,  
 skąd go wziąć? Wziąć odpowiedzialność za losy,  
 gdy idą w miliony, czy za lasy, gdy idą w popioły?

(*Znowu na wsi*, WS, 41–42)

[I pray on and off the hill, for bees and rains,  
 grain and a pine tree, I pray for the old man,  
 because he has crumbled into dust,

<sup>28</sup> Stanisław Łubieński, "Nerwica ekologiczna" [Ecological Neurosis], in Stanisław Łubieński, *Książka o śmieciach* [A Book on Rubbish] (Warszawa: Wydawnictwo Agora, 2020), 227.

He has taken up residence in an apple *that no hand will peel*, not even Parkinson.

The forms of escape are different, and the form of rescue fits into the skin: I would prefer such a world, bees and trees, not much above

the earth. I would prefer such an orchard, but where can I pray for one, where to get it from? Take responsibility for fates, when they run into the millions, or for the forests when they turn to ashes?]

For the lyrical hero, the “form of salvation” (not only ecological), but also existential forms of escape from illness and death are tantamount to the unconditional realisation that we are part of nature. Seeing the trace of the dead father in the fruit is a “form of salvation”. The world can potentially resemble an “orchard” in which man is a part of a greater whole. The rhetorical question concerning the responsibility for the fate of humans and the comparison with the fate of trees draws the viewer’s attention to the problem of the human use of natural resources.<sup>29</sup> The phrase is, perhaps, a reference to Mickiewicz’s *Great Improvisation (Wielka Improwizacja)* and the poet-beast suffering for millions. Łukasz Barys is a socially engaged artist, he is interested not only in the fate of animals, but also in socially excluded people. *Wysokie słońce* is a poetic volume in which he reveals his ethical stance.

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<sup>29</sup> It will be interesting to see how critics react to the social and environmental engagement evident in Barys’s works. Adam Partyka found that “nie wszystkie «zaangażowane» momenty wypadają u Barysa tak zgrabnie. [...] Drażni też nieco ów mistyczno-posthumanistyczny ton, który ma chyba tematyzować obecny w przepracowywanej konwencji imperatyw bliskości z ziemią (stąd wszystkie porzeczki, śliwki i czereśnie; zamieszkiwanie w gniazdach, mandarynkach i jabłuszkach; stąd «ziemia uniwersalna, dla ludzi i dżdżownic» – *Drobne*). Występuje on jednak w niej jakimś nadmiarze, co skłania do wniosku, że nie chodzi tu tylko o stylizację. Trudno powiedzieć, czemu takie organicystyczne inklinacje miałyby służyć w tomie, który wyznacza sobie przecież znacznie ambitniejsze cele – kiedy po raz kolejny mowa o skrawaniu skórki, o ciele, ranach i języku, na myśl zaczyna przychodzić porównanie ze zdecydowanie mniej udanymi idiomami poetyckimi spod znaku ogólnie pojętej «wrażliwości»” [not all the ‘engaged’ moments come off so gracefully in Barys. [...] Also somewhat irritating is this mystical-posthumanist tone, which is probably meant to thematise the imperative of closeness to the earth present in the reworked convention (hence all the currants, plums and cherries; dwelling in nests, tangerines and apples; hence “universal earth, for humans and earthworms” – *Drobne* [Petty]). However, it occurs in a sort of excess, which leads one to conclude that it is not just a matter of stylisation. It’s hard to say what such organicist inclinations would serve in a volume that, after all, sets for itself much more ambitious goals – when once again there is talk of skin slicing, of flesh, wounds and language, a comparison with decidedly less successful poetic idioms from under the sign of “sensitivity” in general comes to mind]. Adam Partyka, “Pod taflą lodu (recenzja “Wysokiego słońca” Łukasza Barysa).” Piotr Sadzik writes on *The bones you carry in your pocket* in a similar vein. See Sadzik, “Kości języka.”

By loosening the syntax, mixing discourses, he creates non-obvious associative connections intended to sensitise the reader and to jolt him or her out of his or her traditional ways of thinking about the world. In the introduction to the first issue of a periodical devoted to the symbolism of the wound, Joanna Kisiel and Monika Ładoń write:

Etyczny imperatyw literatury nakazuje mierzyć się z raną istnienia, dotykać ran historii. Chwile szczęścia i dobrostanu doskonale radzą sobie bez słów, nie potrzebują opowieści, zdolne wypełnić się sobą bez reszty. Inaczej niż rana. Jej jątrząca dotkliwość domaga się świadectwa i pamięci, zmusza do poszukiwania/budowania sensu, wzywa do odpowiedzialności także w obliczu absurdu. Tożsamościowa narracja nie może się powieść bez odniesienia do zranień, humanistyczna możliwość poznania i terapii zależy najpewniej od znalezienia dla nich miejsca w opowieści.<sup>30</sup>

[The ethical imperative of literature is to face the wound of existence, to touch the wounds of history. Moments of happiness and well-being perfectly cope without words, do not need a story, capable of filling themselves completely. Unlike the wound. Its stinging severity demands witness and remembrance, forces one to seek/build meaning, and also calls for responsibility in the face of absurdity. An identity narrative cannot succeed without reference to wounds, the humanistic possibility of cognition and therapy depends most surely on finding a place for them in the story.]

Łukasz Barys in *Wysokie słońce* looks at death, illness, poverty and illusory dreams, shifting the boundary of suffering from the person onto the whole world. Unlike the Romantics, he treats nature and human beings as equals; this does not serve the sole purpose of showing the hero's internal experiences or national obligations. Describing the influence of the Romantic worldview on the development of ecocriticism, Anna Barcz notes:

[...] polski romantyzm, mimo swoistych, kunsztownych opisów przyrody, wydaje się daleki od ekokrytycznych odczytań ze względu na podporządkowanie poetyki przyrodniczej dążeniom narodowowyzwoleńczym [...]. Choć wydaje i przeplatanie się historii ludzkiej z naturalną może mieć ekokrytyczne reperkusje. Wydaje się, że w głównym nurcie tekstów polskiego romantyzmu dominuje doświadczenie świata poprzez autoprojekcję, odczytywanie przyrody w charakterze Księgi Natury – jako systemu znaków i symboli do zinterpretowania, a mimo to co sami romantycy zaszczyli w świadomości późniejszych pisarzy i poetów pytanie, na czym polega ów związek – związek przyrody z historią, jakie miejsce zajmuje przyroda w pamięci.<sup>31</sup>

[...] Polish Romanticism, despite its distinctive artful depictions of nature, seems to be a long way from ecocritical interpretations because of the subordination of its nature-focused poetics to the aims of the national liberation movement. [...] The in-

<sup>30</sup> Joanna Kisiel, and Monika Ładoń, "Do rany przyłóż" [To The Wound], *Rana. Literatura – Doświadczenie – Tożsamość*, no. 1 (2020): 9.

<sup>31</sup> Anna Barcz, *Realizm ekologiczny. Od ekokrytyki do zookrytyki w literaturze polskiej* [Ecological Realism. From Ecocriticism to Zookriticism in Polish Literature] (Katowice: Wydawnictwo Naukowe Śląsk, 2016), 49.

tertwinning of human history with natural history may have ecocritical repercussions. It seems that in the texts of main-stream Polish Romanticism, experience of the world through self-projection dominates, through interpreting nature as the Book of Nature – as a system of signs and symbols to be interpreted, but nevertheless the same Romanticists injected into the consciousness of later writers and poets the question as to what this link consists in – the link between nature and history, and what place nature occupies in the memory.]

For Barys, nature is not a symbol of Polishness<sup>32</sup> or an element that allows the lyrical hero to be defined more precisely. Both plants and animals co-exist with man, and shape and influence his fate.

Parlament wprowadził nową ustawę:  
 mogliśmy coś ukraść  
 sobie samym, piłą, siekierą  
 albo nożem, od samego świtu  
 (Ustawa, WS, 52)

[Parliament passed a new law:  
 we could steal  
 for ourselves, with a saw, and axe,  
 or a knife, from the very break of dawn.]

Thanks to the laws he has created for himself, man tries to justify the need to destroy and kill. The benefit of such actions is doubtful because we steal “from ourselves” (Ustawa, SW, 52). Elizabeth DeLoughrey, describing the anthropocenic turn in research in the humanities, draws attention to the awareness of ecological catastrophes. She writes that the perspective of a quick and sudden destruction speaks more strongly to humans:

[...] to think critically about the ways in which attention to spectacular ecocatastrophes such as tsunamis or the explosive force of nuclear weapons may detract attention from the “slow violence” [...] or *longue durée* of environmental change [...]. As such, a turn to nonspectacular ecological violence would entail engaging different modes of temporality such as more-than-human models of history and deep time. Importantly, this would demand diverse hermeneutics, which is to say new modes of reading and interpreting signs.<sup>33</sup>

The new sensitivity, which DeLoughrey writes about as if it were a project, is emphasised in Barys’s poetry. The subject of the poem *W przyszłościowym kierunku* [In a future-orientated direction] observes:

<sup>32</sup> See Jacek Kolbuszewski, “Słowo wstępne” [Introductory Word], in *Literatura i przyroda. Antologia* [Literature and Nature. Anthology], ed. and introduction by Jacek Kolbuszewski (Katowice: Książnica, 2000), 31.

<sup>33</sup> Elizabeth DeLoughrey, “Ordinary Futures: Interspecies Worldings in the Anthropocene,” in *Global Ecologies and the Environmental Humanities*, eds. Elizabeth DeLoughrey, Jill Didur, and Anthony Carrigan (New York–London: Routledge, 2015), 353.

Upał sprawił nam drżenie szklanki,  
pomidorów, wiewiórek. Znalazłem wróbla w trawie.

Nauczę go latać, skoro sam nie potrafię?  
Nauczy mnie nieba, skoro skwierczą mu łapki?

(*W przyszłościowym kierunku* [In a future-orientated direction], WS, 48)

[The heat made us tremble, the glass,  
the tomatoes, the squirrels. I found a sparrow in the grass.

Will I teach it to fly, since I can't do it myself?  
Will it teach me the sky, since its feet are sizzling?]

For Barys, “Our dead”, whom Maria Janion writes about, are the whole globe with all its inhabitants. The earth’s slow death is happening almost incidentally, the rising temperature is making the whole world tremble. The suffering of the sparrow is juxtaposed in the poem with man’s impotence, for whom the ability to fly remains inaccessible. Flight refers to dreams, the sacred, sublimity. For the heroes of Łukasz Barys’s poems, both human and non-human, the world presents itself as heading towards a slow demise. In *Kości, które nosisz w kieszeni* and *Jeśli przecięto cię na pół*, the analogy between human suffering and the pain felt by the whole planet is articulated even more clearly.

*Translated by Anna Wyleżątek and David Lilley*

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## Świat i śmierć. O *Wysokim słońcu* Łukasza Barysa

**Abstrakt:** Twórczość poetycka Łukasza Barysa, wpisując się w tradycję naturocentrycznego romantyzmu, podejmuje z nim dialog i przeciwstawia mu współczesną ekologiczną wrażliwość. Wiersze z debiutanckiego zbioru *Wysokie słońce* wpisują się w nurt nowoczesnej poezji zaangażowanej ekologicznie i społecznie. Człowiek dzieli swój los z przyrodą, a śmierć ludzi, zwierząt i roślin zasługuje na tę samą pamięć. Romantyczny paradygmat pamięci o zmarłych zostaje przez poetę odczytany na nowo jako wezwanie do oddania szacunku każdemu bytowi.

**Słowa kluczowe:** Łukasz Barys, empatia, ekologia, romantyzm, śmierć, poezja.

## **Die Welt und der Tod. Über *Wysokie słońce* von Łukasz Barys**

**Abstract:** Das poetische Werk von Łukasz Barys steht zwar in der Tradition der naturzentrierten Romantik, tritt aber in einen Dialog mit ihr und stellt ihr eine zeitgenössische ökologische Sensibilität gegenüber. Die Gedichte aus seinem Debütband *Wysokie słońce* [Hohe Sonne] sind Teil der Strömung der modernen ökologisch und sozial engagierten Lyrik. Der Mensch teilt sein Schicksal mit der Natur, und der Tod von Menschen, Tieren und Pflanzen verdient das gleiche Gedenken. Das romantische Paradigma des Totengedenkens wird vom Dichter neu gelesen als Aufruf, jedem Wesen Respekt zu zollen.

**Schlüsselwörter:** Łukasz Barys, Empathie, Ökologie, Romantik, Tod, Poesie.





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## Marie Corelli in Poland. On the Centenary of Her Death

**Abstract:** This article discusses the Polish reception of the Victorian writer, Maria Corelli. Polish literary criticism and translations are examined to demonstrate the scope of Corelli's presence in Polish literature, culture and the Polish press. Corelli's absence from the women's press is highlighted. The article includes a chronological list of her translations in Poland. The centenary of Corelli's death is a good opportunity to recall her Polish reception.

**Keywords:** Maria Corelli, Polish reception, Polish translations, Polish literary criticism.

Mary Mackay (1855–1924), publishing under the pseudonym Marie Corelli, was one of the most widely-read English authors of the late Victorian era. However, her immense popularity did not translate into high ratings for the artistry of her works.<sup>1</sup> These contradictions were well illustrated by Mariusz Misztal, who stated that Queen Victoria was very fond of Corelli's writings. Still, her daughter had a completely different opinion of the writer's value.<sup>2</sup> The dichotomy of the royal family's assessments reflects Corelli's po-

<sup>1</sup> Thomas F.G. Coates, Robert Stanley Warren Bell, *Marie Corelli: The Writer and The Woman* (Philadelphia: George Jacobs & Company 1903), 16.

<sup>2</sup> Mariusz Misztal, "Literackie fascynacje królowej Wiktorii" [The literary fascinations of Queen Victoria], *Prace Komisji Neofilologicznej PAU X* (2011): 51–52.

sition in her contemporary literary world. On the one hand, She was the “idol of the crowds”.<sup>3</sup> On the other hand, it must be acknowledged that Herbert George Wells was probably right when he said: “No one will learn English to read Maria Corelli in the original”.<sup>4</sup> Analogous contrasting assessments of the author of *A Romance of Two Worlds* can be found in Polish criticism. Where some saw the “originality of novelistic ideas,” others could only discern “nonsensical ranting”. Interestingly, in recent years, English-language literary studies have revisited Corelli as an example of a popular culture author with an unduly neglected literary biography. The centenary of the writer’s death is an excellent opportunity to reassess her Polish reception.

### Literary Reception

Research on the presence of Corelli in Poland inscribes itself into the general issue of comparative literature,<sup>5</sup> with particular attention given to literary reception, generally perceived as a promising research area.<sup>6</sup> Jerzy Madejski calls for a widening of perspectives and including other disciplines in the reception area.<sup>7</sup> Its leading theoreticians are Wolfgang Iser, Hans Robert Jauss, Robert C. Holub, and Stanley Fish. Holub points out that German and American scholars highlight the necessity of including the implied reader in research.<sup>8</sup> A literary work is perceived as a collaboration between the author, the reader, the culture and the language.<sup>9</sup> Recent American con-

<sup>3</sup> Frank Harris, *W pogoni za pełnią życia* [My Life and My Loves], trans. Stefan Pomian, introduction by Paweł Hulka-Laskowski (Warszawa: Towarzystwo Wydawnicze “Rój”, 1937), 253. Cf. Teresa Ransom, *The Mysterious Miss Corelli: Queen of Victorian Bestsellers* (Stroud: Sutton 1999).

<sup>4</sup> Herbert George Wells, *Wizje przyszłości czyli o wpływie rozwoju wiedzy i mechaniki na życie i myśl ludzką* (*Anticipations of the Reaction of Mechanical and Scientific Progress upon Human Life and Thought*, 1901), trans. Jan Kleczyński (Warszawa: Gebethner i Wolff, 1904), 126.

<sup>5</sup> Henry Remak, “Comparative Literature, Its Definition and Function,” in *Comparative Literature: Method and Perspective*, eds. Newton P. Stallknecht, and Horst Frenz (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press 1961), 4.

<sup>6</sup> Katarzyna Chmielewska, “Ukryte założenia i aporie teorii recepcji” [Hidden Assumptions and Aporias of Reception Theory], *Pamiętnik Literacki* 4 (2001): 5.

<sup>7</sup> Jerzy Madejski, “Recepcja literatury: przedmiot, zakresy, cele badań” [Reception of Literature: Subject Matter, Scopes, objectives of Research], in *Sporne i bezsporne problemy współczesnej wiedzy o literaturze* [Contentious and Uncontested Problems of Contemporary Literary Knowledge], eds. Włodzimierz Bolecki, and Ryszard Nycz (Warszawa: IBL PAN 2002), 2.

<sup>8</sup> Robert C. Holub, “Trends in Literary Theory: The American Reception of Reception Theory,” *The German Quarterly* 55, no. 1 (1982): 80–96.

<sup>9</sup> Patrick Sullivan, “Reception Moments,’ Modern Literary Theory, and the Teaching of Literature,” *Journal of Adolescent & Adult Literacy* 45, no. 7 (2002): 568.

cepts perceive literary reception in the broader context of (and make a connection with) cultural studies.<sup>10</sup> Indeed, special attention is devoted to the reader/recipient. Scholars perceive him/her as the “virtual recipient”, who can decipher the literary text fully and correctly or the “implied recipient”, who is created on the basis of particular texts.<sup>11</sup> Studies on the presence of a foreign writer in Poland demonstrate the importance of such research and its promising outcomes.<sup>12</sup> The perception of Corelli’s work is a progression, a widening circle of the recipients of culture – from elite to egalitarian.

## Translations

Edmund Naganowski’s prediction that, because of their sensitive religious subject matter, Polish readers would have to wait many years for Polish translations of Corelli’s novels did not come true.<sup>13</sup> Translations of Corelli’s novels in Poland focus on a few years at the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. They were printed as books, stories in instalments in the press, and free weekly supplements to magazines, which were published as separate books after being condensed. The number of Polish titles signed with the name Marie/Maria/Marya Corelli does not correspond to the number of novels by the author that were translated, as some translations were printed under different second or third titles. Translation work was already under way from 1894.<sup>14</sup> Here is a chronological list of translations:

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- <sup>10</sup> Patrocínio Schweickart, “Understanding an Other: Reading as a Receptive Form of Communicative Action,” in *New Directions in American Reception Studies*, eds. Philip Goldstein, and James L. Machor (Oxford: Oxford University Press 2008) 3–22; Jack Bratich, “Activating the Multitude: Audience Powers and Cultural Studies,” in *New Directions in American Reception Studies*, eds. Philip Goldstein, and James L. Machor (Oxford: Oxford University Press 2008), 33–56.
- <sup>11</sup> Chmielewska, “Ukryte założenia i aporie teorii recepcji,” 9–10. Cf. P. Widdowson, *Hardy in History. A Study in Literary Sociology* (London–New York: Routledge (1989).
- <sup>12</sup> Cf. Mirosława Ziaja-Buchholtz, *Reflections of the Master: The Reception of Henry James in Poland (1877–2000)* (Toruń: Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Mikołaja Kopernika 2002); Marta Skwara, “Polski Whitman”. *O funkcjonowaniu poety obcego w kulturze narodowej* [‘Polish Whitman.’ On the Functioning of a Foreign Poet in National Culture] (Kraków: Universitas 2010).
- <sup>13</sup> Edmund Naganowski, “Poetka neo-chryścianizmu w Anglii Maria Corelli” [The poet of Neo-Christianism in England Maria Corelli], *Biblioteka Warszawska* 4 (1894): 47.
- <sup>14</sup> Anon a, “Z literatury,” *Kurier Warszawski* 329 (1894), 2. “Maria Corelli’s English novels have already found a translator into Polish in the person of Mrs M. W.”. The code name refers to Maria Wentzl (1859– 1931), translator, daughter of the historian Józef K. Plebański, from 1883 wife of Adolf, owner of Kraśnicza Wola.

- *Troski szatana* [The Sorrows of Satan], translated by M. Dz. [Maria Dzierżanowska], by the editors of *Tygodnik Ilustrowany*, printed by Emil Skiwski, Warszawa 1896; next edition (no translator's name), Warszawa: Biblioteka Romansów i Powieści, 1927.
- *Romans dwóch światów* [A Romance of two Worlds], translated by Maria Wentzl, vol. 1–2, Warszawa: T. Paprocki, 1897.
- *Bez Boga* [The Mighty Atom], translated by Eugenia Żmijewska, *Słowo*, no. 212–248, 242–252 (1897).
- *Księżna Ziska. Z tajemnic bytu pozagrobowego* [The Duchess of Ziska. The Problem of a Wicked Soul], translated by Cecylia Niewiadomska, Warszawa 1897; second edition: Warszawa, Alfa-Wero, 1994.
- *Morderca* [The Murder of Delicia], translated by C. Niewiadomska, a weekly addition to *Tygodnik Ilustrowany* 1897, a separate edition: Warszawa: Gebethner i Wolff, 1897.
- *Zabójca Delicji* [The Murder of Delicia], translated by Maria Finklówna, *Gazeta Narodowa*, no. 1–50, 52–55 (1898).
- *Zdradziecka miłość pięknego gwardzisty* [The Murder of Delicia], anonymous translation from the English, Warszawa, 1927.
- *Boy. Szkic powieściowy* [Boy. A Sketch], translated by E. Żmijewska, an issue added to *Słowo* (1900), separate translation: Warszawa: printed by Noskowski, 1900.
- *Doczesna potęga* [The Temporal Power. A Study in Supremacy], translated by C. Niewiadomska, a weekly issue added to *Tygodnik Ilustrowany* (1903); separate translation published as *Doczesna potęga*, Warszawa: Towarzystwo akcyjne S. Orgelbranda, 1903.
- *Bez czego żyć nie można* [The Mighty Atom], translated by Wanda Tomaszewska, *Rekord: Świat Kobiety*, no. 13 (1924), no. 21 (1925).

It is known that a translation of Corelli's famous novel *Barabbas* was undertaken in Warszawa,<sup>15</sup> but the Polish translation did not appear. *Troski szatana*, published in 1927, is a copy of the 1896 edition. *Zdradziecka miłość pięknego gwardzisty* is a slightly rewritten version of *Morderca*, translated by Cecylia Niewiadomska, who died in 1925 (she was the sister of Eligiusz Niewiadomski, the assassin of the Polish President Gabriel Narutowicz). The translations of *The Mighty Atom* by Żmijewska and Tomaszewska differ significantly. The publishers' decisions to print Corelli's translations between 1924 and 1927 were probably due to the occasional reappearance of interest in the writer (press publications after her death and news stories in connection with the screen adaptation of *The Sorrows of Satan*). None of the critics

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<sup>15</sup> Edmund Naganowski, "Gawędy londyńskie" [London Storytelling], *Gazeta Lwowska* 8 (1895): 2.

pointed out that *Troski szatana* (*The Sorrows of Satan*) and *Zdradziecka miłość pięknego gwardzisty* (1927) are repetitions of earlier translations, while *Bez czego żyć nie można* was previously published as *Bez Boga* [Without God], which leads to the conclusion that the earlier versions had been quickly forgotten (the first translators – Niewiadomska and Żmijewska – had already died. The periodicals that published these translations had large circulations; the catalogues of public reading rooms printed at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century contain these titles. The above indicates that Corelli had a certain presence on the Polish book market, but she failed to conquer the Polish reader. Her reception in Poland was short-lived and rather superficial.

The translations of Corelli's books were not particularly popular with buyers – this is the conclusion that emerges from analyses of overpriced titles (some of which languished in bookshops for several years<sup>16</sup>). Decisions to print some translations were probably accidental – *Gazeta Narodowa*, which came out in Lviv, decided to publish *Zabójca Delicji* in Finklówna's translation from January 1898 onwards; the inhabitants of Galicia under Austrian rule did not have easy access to Warsaw publications (the Russian partition), but the book version of this supplement was available in Krakow bookstores as early as March 1898.<sup>17</sup> All the renditions into Polish were undertaken by female translators. While a feminist background has been a contributing factor, a more plausible hypothesis is that there was a significant numerical preponderance of female translators of bestselling books in the late 19<sup>th</sup>-century Poland.

The most common translation was *The Mighty Atom*. In 1870s Poland, it was a voice against positivist scientism, as is evident from the dedication addressed to “progressives”<sup>18</sup> (Corelli 1899). This dedication had become obsolete by 1924 and was dropped in the new translation, but the idea of the novel took on a new sense of warning against Bolshevik atheism. *The murder of Delicia* was translated a number of times. It was a conventional melodrama about a noble writer and her despicable husband against the background of the upper classes' gossipy lives and the dishonest world of journalism. It was a gentle psychological version of feminism.<sup>19</sup> The Polish reader

<sup>16</sup> For example, *Romance of Two Worlds*, published in 1897, was still available for purchase at a reduced price in 1912 (*Kurier Polski*, no. 58 (1910): 5; *Kurier Polski*, no. 76 (1912): 4).

<sup>17</sup> Anon b, “Księgarnia G. Gebethnera i Spółki w Krakowie poleca,” *Nowa Reforma* 72 (1898): 4.

<sup>18</sup> Maria Corelli, *The Mighty Atom* (London: Hutchinson and Co 1899): “To those self-styled progressivists who by precept and example assist The Infamous Case of Education without Religion and who, by promoting the idea, borrowed from French Atheism, of denying the children what? in board-schools and elsewhere, The Knowledge and Love of God, as the true Foundation of Noble living, are guilty of a Worse Crime than Murder”.

<sup>19</sup> Elaine Showalter, *A literature of their own: British women writers from Charlotte Brontë to Doris Lessing* (Princeton: Princeton University Press 1999), 226.

could learn about exotic lands, customs, as well as alien and inaccessible beliefs from translations of Corelli. Like other novelists of the late Victorian era – Mary E. Braddon or Humphry Ward – she was the star of the season. These literary stars shone brightly but briefly. Given the number of Polish translations of their works, it must be acknowledged that female authors from England had some merit in pushing French literature out of Polish soil in favour of Anglo-Saxon authors.<sup>20</sup> At the same time, Corelli's influence on Polish literature was minimal, at least as measured by the frequency of allusions, associations, or comparisons.

### Voices of Criticism

Almost all Polish translators of Corelli's novels were professionals, some with serious writing and translation credits to their names (Żmijewska had an impressive record of approximately a hundred translations under her belt). Given that this was a famous author whose works were rendered into dozens of languages immediately after printing, one might have expected critics to address the question of the excellence of the translations. However, nothing of the sort occurred. Critics repeatedly commented on the art of translation, sometimes arguing for years. Still, the focus of their attention was on works in verse or drama (for example, M. Wentzl was the author of an exhaustive and expert study of the English translation of Adam Mickiewicz's *Pan Tadeusz*, a famous Polish Romantic poem<sup>21</sup>). Only in exceptional cases, as with the celebrated works of Charles Dickens, did the reviews notice the art of the translator itself in the novels. Consequently, Opinions on the artistry of Corelli's Polish translations are unknown.

What is surprising (in the context of the anti-masculinity attributed to the author and her association with suffragettes<sup>22</sup>) is Corelli's absence from the women's press (a few minor mentions in the weekly magazine for women *Bluszcz*,<sup>23</sup> the failure to note the death of the famous writer, while

<sup>20</sup> Adolf Nowaczyński, "Kronika literacka" [Literary Chronicle], in *Kalendarz literacki* (Warszawa: Drukarnia Polska 1917), 91.

<sup>21</sup> Maria Wentzl, "Master Thaddeus, or the last Forey in Lithuania by Adam Mickiewicz, a Historical Epic Poem in XII books, trans. from original by Maude Ashurst Biggs, with a Preface by W.R. Morfill, M. A. and Notes by the translator and Edmund Naganowski. London 1885," *Biblioteka Warszawska* 1 (177) (1886): 120–127.

<sup>22</sup> Eugenia Żmijewska, "Trzecia Duma i "sprawa kobieca"" [Third Pride and the 'women's cause'], *Słowo* 60 (1908): 3.

<sup>23</sup> Anon c, "Kronika działalności kobiecej" [Chronicle of women's activities], *Bluszcz* 16 (1892): 127; S., "List z Anglii" [Letter from England], *Bluszcz* 2 (1897): 16; Anatol Krzyżanowski [Natalia Korwin Szymanowska], "Kobieta angielska, jej cele i dążenia" [The English woman, her goals and aspirations], *Bluszcz* 37 (1898): 294.

the exceptions included a posthumous translation of *The Mighty Atom* in *Świat Kobiety*, a short posthumous sketch in the women's supplement of the periodical *Postęp*.<sup>24</sup> Some interest in Corelli's oeuvre, limited to the first phase of reception, was shown by the democratic-left press (*Przegląd Tygodniowy*; *Prawda*). Her recognition and popularity in Poland were cemented by conservative periodicals and dailies (*Biblioteka Warszawska*; *Słowo*; *Gazeta Lwowska*; *Gazeta Polska*) or even conservative-clerical ones (*Przegląd Katolicki*; *Przegląd Polski*). However, here, too, we observe a paradox – the duplicate titles first praised Corelli, then sharply criticised her from the position of religious dogmatism.

If we consider reviews as a form of reception,<sup>25</sup> we should discuss the extent to which Polish reviewers evaluated Corelli's novels in the Polish press. These texts fall into two groups: those based on readings of the original English texts were more extensive, more profound, and more appreciative of her talent, and those based on readings of the translations, which tended to be more trivial and stereotypical, sometimes condemning the ideology of the novels. The originals in Poland (they were also available in public reading rooms) were rarely consulted. For example Anna Lisicka who wrote an extensive review of *The Murder of Delicia* to show accentuated the nobility and hardworking nature of a female heroine from the novel contrasted with male brutality and immorality. One of the characters, Carlyeon – in the critic's opinion – was a "moral murderer of Delicia." Lisicka saw a flaw in the novel's artistry in that the heroine launches into long tirades against...., even though the psychological truth should steer her towards experiencing despair. Still, she did not hide her fascination with "the lovely novel".<sup>26</sup>

The reviews of Polish press correspondents from Great Britain, such as Edmund Naganowski, Mściśław Edgar Nekanda-Trepka, Maciej Wierziński, and Leon Winiarski, were more insightful because they summarised the voices of English criticism. According to Wierziński, Corelli's *Barabbas* was the best English novel since Rudyard Kipling's debut.<sup>27</sup> The critic, however, gradually lost interest in Corelli's fiction/work writing because of its incomprehensible mysticism and "neo-Christianism"; he placed Robert L. Steven-

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<sup>24</sup> Anon d, "Rozmaitości. Marie Corelli" [Variety. Marie Corelli], *Gazeta dla Kobiet: dodatek „Postępu”* 22 (1924): 4.

<sup>25</sup> Douglas Barbour, "Re: Viewing: Giving and Receiving in Canadian Poetry, or The role of reviewing in the reception of poetry in English Canada in the 20th century," in *Problems of literary reception/ Problèmes de réception littéraire*, eds. Edward Dickinson Blodgett, and Anthony George Purdy (Alberta: University of Alberta 1988), 55.

<sup>26</sup> Anna Lisicka, "The Murder of Delicia, by Marie Corelli," *Przegląd Polski* 4, 10 (1898): 162.

<sup>27</sup> Maciej Wierziński, "Z beletrystyki angielskiej" [From English Fiction], *Przegląd Tygodniowy* 18 (1894): 209.

son much higher.<sup>28</sup> Another critic, Edgar M. Nekanda-Trepka, did not value Corelli and consistently wrote of her as a celebrity of one season.<sup>29</sup> He had a low opinion of the intellectual level of her novels (the naïve ideas of social reform in *Temporal Tower* being an example). The critic also accused them of “insulting attacks” on the Pope and marvelled at the English reading such “trivia”; moreover, he wrote ironically about the autobiographical basis of the ideal of the female writer in *The Murder of Delicia*.<sup>30</sup> Trepka was clearly prejudiced against the author, thus echoing the reluctant voices of London criticism. In Leon Winiarski’s article *British Literature. A different attitude can be observed in Maria Corelli: A Romance of Two Worlds*. As a publicist who had published a series of papers on contemporary English literature in *Prawda*, he was well-versed in both the cultural phenomena of importance and the transitory fashions that reflected the current moods and emotions of the crowds. He subjected *A Romance of Two Worlds*, *The Soul of Lilith*, *Barabbas*, and *The Sorrows of Satan* to a combined analysis. He concluded that Corelli represented “a bold and restless mind”.<sup>31</sup> In his opinion, Corelli’s creation of Satan is innovative:

Her Satan, despite his fall, does not stop dreaming of reconciling with God, who has spurned him, seeing that the worm of envy towards man has hatched in his heart. But despite this, Satan is still in love with God and hates man all the more. He is torn apart by two conflicting feelings: harming people and reconciling himself to God. Contradictory because the latter cannot materialise precisely because of the presence of the former. But such is the usual logic of human passions.<sup>32</sup>

In Corelli’s attempts to rehabilitate Satan and Judas, the critic saw the author’s Christian struggle against materialism and moral corruption. On the sidelines of reflections on the novel’s hflaws, Winiarski interjected remarks on music and dance as potential virtues of her works<sup>33</sup> and mocked her theory of electricity, creating the human soul as something absurd.

<sup>28</sup> Maciej Wierzbński, “Z literatury angielskiej” [From English Literature], *Przegląd Tygodniowy* 48 (1896): 541.

<sup>29</sup> Edgar Nekanda-Trepka, “Z beletrystyki Zachodu. III. Robert Ludwik Stevenson i jego utwory z dziedziny powieściopisarstwa, krytyki, podróżnictwa etc.” [From the Fiction of the West. III. Robert Ludwik Stevenson and His Works of Novelism, Criticism, Travel etc.], *Ateneum* 4, 10 (1892): 13.

<sup>30</sup> Edgar Trepka, “Listy z Londynu” [Letter from London], *Kurier Warszawski* 335 (1902): 2–3.

<sup>31</sup> Leon Winiarski, “Literatura angielska. Maria Corelli: *A Romance of two Worlds. Barabbas. The Sorrows of Satan*,” *Prawda* 28 (1897): 333.

<sup>32</sup> Winiarski, “Literatura angielska. Maria Corelli: *A Romance of two Worlds. Barabbas. The Sorrows of Satan*,” 333. All translations from Polish are mine [A.B.].

<sup>33</sup> Winiarski, “Literatura angielska. Maria Corelli: *A Romance of two Worlds. Barabbas. The Sorrows of Satan*,” 334.

The most significant credit for informing Polish readers about Corelli's novels goes to Naganowski. He wrote about her frequently in periodicals and dailies in the Warsaw and Lviv press. Therefore, his voice reached a broad audience. Naganowski encouraged translations of the works in question and had a reputation as a true expert, so Democrats and conservatives alike reckoned with his opinions. He introduced Corelli into Polish literary thought with the label of neo-Christianism. On the basis of several works (*Ardath*, *A Romance of Two Worlds*, *The Soul of Lilith*, *Barabbas*), he described the author's attitude to the problem of "the relation of creation to the Creator".<sup>34</sup> He argued that Corelli's novels have unusual forms and personal effusions. The author claimed that Corelli is an ardent Catholic, who is critical of religious tradition; someone who reads the Bible while also studying spiritualism and Buddhism. The protagonists of her works have an excellent knowledge of philosophy. Naganowski summarises the plots of the novels in detail, and he adds some quotations from the novel in his translation. In *Ardath*, he highlights an experiment proving the non-existence of a boundary between psyche and matter. After the death of the body, there occurs a merging of the mind with the intelligent human self and a return to God. Naganowski argues that Zygmunt Krasiński (a famous Polish Romantic poet) preached similar views, so he does not doubt the sincerity of Corelli's religious feelings, claiming that she "places faith in the deity of Christ as the first condition for perfecting man's spirituality".<sup>35</sup> The writer's neo-Christianism is based on two assumptions: electricity as the "divine presence" of all existence (the theme of *A Romance of Two Worlds*) and the theory of human pre-existence on earth and re-existence in the future. He believes that the following moral teaching flows from this:

Our ego in the present life is the result of the ethical imperfection of our ego from the previous existence; it is, at the same time, the cause of our being in the next period. [...] Our end will be either fusion with the fire of God's presence or annihilation. The more perfect man becomes, the more clearly the flame of God is revealed in him.<sup>36</sup>

Although Naganowski wrote sceptically about the intellectual arguments of the new movement and even made fun of its attempts to rationalise religious experience, he valued Neo-Christianism's attempts to "unite all Christian denominations in a church of the One".<sup>37</sup> Information on a parallel neo-Christianism developing in France exposed its links with the "nervous age"

<sup>34</sup> Naganowski, "Poetka neo-chrystianizmu w Anglii Maria Corelli," 44.

<sup>35</sup> Naganowski, "Poetka neo-chrystianizmu w Anglii Maria Corelli," 60.

<sup>36</sup> Naganowski, "Poetka neo-chrystianizmu w Anglii Maria Corelli," 60.

<sup>37</sup> Edmund Naganowski, "Neochrześcijanizm i katolicyzm w Anglii" [Neo-Christianism and Catholicism in England], *Kurier Warszawski* 248 (1894): 4.

and the role of the “religious mood” in experiencing the world.<sup>38</sup> Corelli can be considered a link in the crisis of Catholicism that emerged as so-called Catholic Modernism at the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Naganowski often recalled his impressions of Corelli’s novels, but his criticism of the author grew over time. He regretted, for example, the time wasted on reading *Cameo*, which he regarded as a collection of unpleasant statements and the writer’s complaints about unfair criticisms of her work critics.<sup>39</sup> He was irritated by some of the cruder expressions of the author’s popularity, such as the carnivalesque burning at the stake of a puppet representing the hero of *The Sorrow of Satan*<sup>40</sup> and the description of a chariot with Rimanez sitting in it.<sup>41</sup> To him, *The Romance of Two Worlds* was “religious faith in electricity” and reduced the writer’s ambitions to scandalous descriptions of the upper classes and high royalties.<sup>42</sup> Some years later, he found Corelli’s divagations in *Temporal Power* incredibly naïve and argued that by attempting to combine Catholicism with occultism and Buddhism, the writer had become an enemy of Christian tradition and science:

And since she stood and always stands based on an exclusively feminine notion of general human love, with a loss of faith in any religious seriousness, she embraced the doctrinaire extremes of demagogy in all directions of human endeavour and dreams.<sup>43</sup>

The Polish Catholic press was consistently critical of Corelli. The translation of *Romance of Two Worlds* became an occasion for the attack on the “mon-

<sup>38</sup> Maria Paprocka, “Nerwowa religia” [Nervous Religion], *Niwa* 14 (1895): 316–317.

<sup>39</sup> Edmund Naganowski, “Gawędy londyńskie” [London Storytelling], *Gazeta Lwowska* 182, (1896a): 4.

<sup>40</sup> Edmund Naganowski, “Londyn, d. 15 listopada (Błazeństwa ulicy)” [London, 15 November (Street Clowning)], *Gazeta Narodowa* 326 (1896b): 1.

<sup>41</sup> Edmund Naganowski, “Gawędy londyńskie” [London Storytelling], *Gazeta Lwowska* 265 (1896c): 4.

<sup>42</sup> Edmund Naganowski, “Listki londyńskie. Londyn 29-go grudnia” [London Letters. London 29th December], *Gazeta Polska* 4 (1897): 1

<sup>43</sup> Edmund Naganowski, “Najnowsza powieść Marii Corelli” [Maria Corelli’s Latest Novel], *Gazeta Polska* 258 (1902): 2. Naganowski elaborated on these thoughts a year later, adding criticisms of the anti-Jesuit writer’s “monomania”: Edmund Naganowski, “Felieton literacki (“The Temporal Power” by Marie Corelli),” *Gazeta Narodowa* 83 (1903): 3. The advice to rulers formulated by Corelli in *The Temporal Power* was in time considered to be a statement addressed to King Edward – J.B., “Rządy króla Edwarda” [The Reign of King Edward], *Dziennik Kijowski*, no. 111 (1910): 1. Naganowski’s dismissive opinion was not shared by politically active students in Lviv, who purchased her translation for the library. See *Sprawozdanie Czytelni Akademickiej we Lwowie za rok administracyjny 1903/4* [Report of the Academic Reading Room in Lviv for the Administrative Year 1903/4] (Lwów: Drukarnia “Słowa Polskiego” 1904), 121.

strous doctrine” of electricity; under the guise of occultism, the writer introduces “electric pantheism”. Ignacy Charszewski claimed that Corelli writes, “in a Catholic package, under a Catholic label, smuggles a forbidden commodity across the Catholic border”.<sup>44</sup> The literary review became a warning against religious heresy. On the other hand, *The Duchess of Ziska*, in the Polish translation, which allegedly fights / challenges materialism and atheism, in fact smuggles Anglicanism into Catholic Polish souls.<sup>45</sup> Both reviews end with unambiguous warnings to female translators of Corelli into Polish. Perhaps this is why the translation of *Barabbas* was never completed. “The Catholic Review” was a militant journal – in the same year of 1898, it came out strongly against Bishop Karol Niedziałkowski on the issue of confessional secrecy.

The translation of *Doczesna potęga* marked the end of Corelli’s reception in Poland. This reception was, in fact, limited to the Russian and Austrian annexed territories and not read in Poznań (in the Prussian partition) since there, even as late as 1909, the author was still being presented as a celebrity of English literature who had “not yet been translated into Polish”.<sup>46</sup> Literary journals did not announce posthumous publications in 1924; some dailies, however, did.<sup>47</sup> The film adaptation of *The Sorrows of Satan*, directed by David W. Griffith, failed to enhance the popularity of the novel itself or its author, although there were one-sentence mentions in the press.<sup>48</sup> Corelli’s views on religion and the women’s question quickly alienated Polish readers, and these were the main reasons why the author was forgotten. She was too radical in her views on religion and too traditional in her attitude to the

<sup>44</sup> Ignacy Charszewski, “Sic itur ad astra!,” *Przegląd Katolicki* 24 (1898a): 381 (the whole text was published in numbers 23 and 24 of the journal).

<sup>45</sup> Ignacy Charszewski, “Droższa przyprawa aniżeli potrawa” [More Expensive a Spice Than a Dish], *Przegląd Katolicki* 31 (1898): 488–489. Even after the publication of *Barabbas*, Polish critics assumed that the author exemplified a “strangely deep and undoubtedly sincere faith in Christ, the Son of God and Redeemer of the world”. See J.B., “Londyn, 20 kwietnia” [London, 20 April], *Dziennik Polski*, no. 114 (1894): 1. An identical expression was used by Naganowski (Naganowski, “Londyn, 17 kwietnia” [London, 17 April], *Kurier Warszawski*, no. 110 (1894): 3). Apparently, it was a quotation or paraphrase of an article from the British press, as it also appeared in a slightly modified form in other Polish dailies (“Nowe powieści angielskie” [New English Novels], *Gazeta Lwowska*, no. 97 (1894): 4).

<sup>46</sup> S., “Romantyzm w nowszej powieści angielskiej” [Romanticism in the Newer English Novel], *Literatura i Sztuka: dodatek do Dziennika Poznańskiego* 15 (1909): 233.

<sup>47</sup> Anon e, *Kurier Polski* 115 (1924): 8; anon f, *Kurier Wieczorny* 101 (1924): 4; anon g *Przegląd Wieczorny* 102 (1924): 4.

<sup>48</sup> Anon h, “Kronika filmowa krajowa i zagraniczna” [National and International Newsreel], *Comoedia*, no. 26 (1926): 4; anon i, “Zza ekranu (Kronika filmowa)” [From Behind the Screen (Newsreel)], *Kurier Warszawski*, nr 16 (1927): 7. The film was played in Polish cinemas in 1928, but it failed to attract critical interest.

problems of feminism. After the Great War, her work was not revisited; journalists sometimes used the disparaging term “a well-known novelist, the English Helena Mniszek”,<sup>49</sup> while literary critics classified her among the literati of *minorum gentium*. Considered an academic textbook, *Wielka literatura powszechna* [Great World Literature] no longer mentions her.<sup>50</sup> Later, literary historians only occasionally referred to Corelli. Juliusz Kleiner recalled Karol H. Rostworowski’s attempt to rehabilitate Judas as an interpretative parallel for Judas Iscariot.<sup>51</sup> Joanna Gniady’s study devoted to Corelli’s descriptions of unusual mental states in *Wormwood* provided a new interpretative impetus.<sup>52</sup> Perhaps the comparative perspective is the right place for assessing an author who died a century ago.

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<sup>49</sup> Anon j, “G.B. Shaw o strojach kobiecych, przemówienie pisarza na konferencji w sprawie przytułków” [G.B. Shaw on Women's Clothing, Writer's Speech at Conference on Shelters], *Kurier Poranny* 144 (1927): 7. Helena Mniszkówna (1878–1943) was a Polish author of keenly read romances of aristocratic life and a symbol of bad taste.

<sup>50</sup> Władysław Tarnawski, “Literatura angielska” [English Literature], in *Wielka literatura powszechna, Tom trzeci. Literatury celtyckie i germańskie, kraje bałtyckie – literatura węgierska* [Great Universal Literature, Volume Three. Celtic and Germanic Literatures, Baltics – Hungarian Literature], ed. Stanisław Lam (Warszawa: Trzaska – Evert – Michalski, 1932), 67–242.

<sup>51</sup> Juliusz Kleiner, “Judasz Rostworowskiego a Judasz M. Corelli” [Rostworowski's Judas versus M. Corelli's Judas], *Tygodnik Powszechny* 50 (1948): 2. This idea was later on recalled by Plisiecka (cf. Danuta Plisiecka, “Judasz w dramatach Karola H. Rostworowskiego i Marcela Pagnola” [Judas in the Dramas of Charles H. Rostworowski and Marcel Pagnol], *Roczniki Humanistyczne* vol. XXXIV, 54 (1986): 54)

<sup>52</sup> Joanny Gniady, “Pozwólcie i być szalonym, szalonym w szaleństwie absyntu”. Gaston Beauvais i jego mentalny zamęt w ‘Wormwood’ Marie Corelli” [‘Let and be mad, mad in the madness of absinthe.’ Gaston Beauvais and his mental confusion in Marie Corelli's ‘Wormwood’], in *Zjawisko szaleństwa w kulturze* [The Phenomenon of Madness in Culture], eds. Maciej Kopyciński, Marta Kasprowicz, and Sławomir Drelich (Toruń: Wydawnictwo Naukowe UMK, 2010), 143–154.

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## Marie Corelli w Polsce. W setną rocznicę jej śmierci

**Abstrakt:** Artykułu poświęcony jest polskiej recepcji pisarki wiktoriańskiej Marii Corelli. Przeanalizowano polską krytykę literacką i przekłady, aby pokazać zakres obecności angielskiej pisarki w polskiej literaturze, kulturze i prasie. Podkreślono nieobecność Corelli w prasie kobiecej. Artykuł zawiera chronologiczną listę jej przekładów w Polsce. Stulecie śmierci Corellii jest okazją do przypomnienia jej polskiej recepcji.

**Słowa kluczowe:** Maria Corelli, recepcja w Polsce, tłumaczenie na język polski, polska krytyka literacka.

## Marie Corelli in Polen. Zum hundertsten Jahrestag ihres Todes

**Abstract:** Das Thema des Beitrags ist die polnische Rezeption der viktorianischen Schriftstellerin Maria Corelli. Polnische Literaturkritik und Übersetzungen werden untersucht, um den Umfang von Corellis Präsenz in der polnischen Literatur, Kultur und der polnischen Presse aufzuzeigen. Die Abwesenheit Corellis in der Frauenpresse wird hervorgehoben. Der Beitrag enthält eine chronologische Liste ihrer Übersetzungen ins Polnische. Der hundertste Jahrestag von Corellis Tod ist eine Gelegenheit, an ihre polnische Rezeption zu erinnern.

**Schlüsselwörter:** Maria Corelli, polnische Rezeption, polnische Übersetzung, polnische Literaturkritik.



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## Travels with Masterpieces. Reception of Literary Works in Nineteenth-Century Travel Writing

**Abstract:** Reading and travelling were two of the very important human experiences in the first half of the nineteenth century. The connection is very close because literature serves as a source of knowledge about how each traveller should behave and emotionally react to the surrounding world and how they should respond to the adventures that may happen while travelling. Nineteenth-century travel accounts are filled with quotations from literary texts of various kinds. This can be observed in travel-writing texts created by well-educated authors and in tourist guides intended for the average tourist. The aim of this article is to analyse selected examples of why and how literary masterpieces were used in nineteenth-century travel writing.

**Keywords:** travel writing, guides, tourist's gaze, literature, reception.

Reading was a very special type of experience in the first half of the nineteenth century. It was regarded not only as an intellectual or aesthetic experience, but also – or even above all – as an existential one. For Romantic writers, reading virtually became a synonymous with life. What they painfully perceived was a dissonance between reality and literature, but when forced to choose, they tried to find their real “I” among the pages of great master-

pieces and not in the surrounding world.<sup>1</sup> Literature provides one with potential ways to unravel the concealed phenomena of the universe imperceptible to the senses; it also enables readers to escape the often disappointing reality, moving them to a brand-new world inspired by the stories described by writers.<sup>2</sup>

Travelling was an activity equally important to reading – not only in the age of Romanticism but throughout the entire nineteenth century.<sup>3</sup> Travel appears to be essentially distinct from reading as it should be primarily rooted in direct experience and gaining knowledge about the world through personal contact rather than through a text. It offers a kind of cognition grounded in empiricism, not based on a theory that can be learned from books. However, the connection between reading and travelling is much closer than one may think. This is so not only because nineteenth-century travellers hit the road already equipped with certain “read-in-books” knowledge about the places they were going to. The connection is also so close because it is literature that serves as a source of knowledge about how each traveller should behave and emotionally react to the world around and how they should respond to the adventures that may happen while travelling. Yet, each tourist in the nineteenth century, especially a Romantic one, dreamt about experiencing exactly the same feelings and adventures as those of the characters described in books; therefore, they aimed at discovering the type of sensitivity that was the most desirable in the epoch as the one most frequently presented in literary works.<sup>4</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Marta Piwińska, *Złe wychowanie. Fragmenty romantycznej biografii* [Bad Parenting. Fragments of a Romantic Biography] (Warszawa: PIW, 1981), 71.

<sup>2</sup> Maria Janion, “Marzący: jest tam, gdzie go nie ma, a nie ma go tu, gdzie jest” [Dreaming: It Is There Where It Is not, and It Is not Here Where It Is], in *Prace wybrane, tom 3* [Selected Works, Vol. 3] (Kraków: Universitas, 2001), 185–221.

<sup>3</sup> This was determined by many factors: the Grand Tour tradition, which is still vivid and continued – with minor changes – by the elites; the introduction of railway journeys, see: Wolfgang Schivelbusch, *The Railway Journey: The Industrialisation of Time and Space in the Nineteenth Century* (Oakland: University of California Press, 2014) and the first travel agency, which lead to the popularisation and democratisation of travelling, slowly transforming it into (mass) tourism, see: Dominik Ziarkowski, *Przewodniki turystyczne i ich znaczenie dla popularyzacji ustaleń polskiej historiografii artystycznej do końca XIX wieku* [Tourist Guides and Their Importance for Popularising the Results of Polish Art Historiography up to the End of the 19th Century] (Kraków: Wydawnictwo Księgarnia Akademicka, 2021). Finally, political events caused large-scale migrations and it must be remembered that even the most extreme exile experience did not always exclude the perspective of a traveller, see: Stanisław Burkot, *Polskie podróżopisarstwo romantyczne* [Polish Romantic Travel Writing] (Warszawa: PWN, 1988).

<sup>4</sup> As Christopher W. Thompson observes, “[...] one should accept that like all travellers, Romantics naturally wished to see the highlights of each country and failed, like every tourist,

Nineteenth-century travel accounts are filled with quotations from literary texts and various kinds of allusions to the act of reading. This can be observed in travel-writing texts created by well-educated authors and addressed to educated readers as well as in tourist guides intended for an average tourist.<sup>5</sup> The authors refer not only to the literary works that represent the places they visited, but also, more generally, to the literature they loved. Even if the literary works in question did not contain descriptions of any tourist experience, they were used to create a desired emotional attitude that was necessary for the reader to respond appropriately to the monuments or landscapes described. Obviously, literary works used in such a way lost their original meaning – they were fragmented because the tension between the quoted passage and the situation of a traveller quoting it was more important than the connection between the quoted words and the original meaning. This resulted in a specific parallel interpretation of many European masterpieces of nineteenth-century travel writing, where many literary works – or at least parts of them – gained new and, to some extent, alternative interpretations. In this article I would like to focus on selected examples of such “other lives of masterpieces” that are recorded in nineteenth-century travel accounts.

Author-travellers often quote texts in foreign languages to create local colour. Therefore, one can, for example, rightfully assume that memories from Italy will be adorned with quotations from Petrarch’s poems and an account from Portugal will include quotations from *Os Lusíadas* by Camões. Referring to the text in a foreign language – even if the probability that the reader speaks this language is as low as it must have been in the case of Portuguese in 19<sup>th</sup> century Europe – mirrors one of the most characteristic features of travelling: constant movement between different places and cultures, but also languages.<sup>6</sup> Introducing “local” literary works in their original languages creates a text that not only describes the tourist experience, but also imitates it.

Quotations and literary allusions are often used to enrich imaging and make the place that is being described to a reader seem familiar. William Beckford used this strategy in his work *Italy With Sketches of Spain and Portugal*. Referring to his stay in Venice, the author notes:

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to have a unique experience,” Christopher W. Thompson, *French Romantic Travel Writing. Chateaubriand to Nerval* (Oxford, New York: Oxford University Press, 2012), 70.

<sup>5</sup> Barbara Schaff, “John Murray’s ‘Handbooks to Italy’: Making Tourism Literary,” in *Literary Tourism and Nineteenth-Century Culture*, ed. Nicola Watson (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), 106.

<sup>6</sup> *Travel Narratives in Translation 1750–1830: Nationalism, Ideology, Gender*, eds. Alison Martin, and Susan Pickford (New York: Routledge, 2012), 1–2.

In the evening I rowed out as usual

“On the clear hyaline, the glassy sea”,

To observe the effect of sunset on the tufted gardens of the Guidecca, and to contemplate the distant Euganean hills, once the happiest region of Italy, where wandering nations enjoyed the simplicity of a pastoral life....<sup>7</sup>

It seems that the line from Milton’s *Paradise Lost* is quoted here with a purely aesthetic aim: to enrich the presentation of the landscape admired by the rowing man. It draws the reader’s attention to the water surface that appears as the mirror glass, which actually forms an important element of Romantic landscape creation. Importantly, this line is originally a part of the description of God’s creation of the Earth. In the original text, however, this small line is not privileged; instead, it seems to be only one of the elements emphasising the greatness of God’s mighty gesture.

The reason why Beckford decided to quote this particular line might have been that this was the only one which somehow matched the essentially different situation that he wanted to present. Nonetheless, thanks to this quotation, the author’s delight as a tourist with the image of Venice becomes more sublime. It is regarded as something more than just visiting Venice while describing it as an act of creation; instead of providing a mere imitation, it has a touch of creative originality. While not explicitly stated, this literary strategy transforms the act of describing the world in a travel account into creative reimagining rather than a plain imitation of reality.

In a very similar way, Beckford uses a quotation from Milton’s *Il Penseroso*, which appears when he describes his meeting with a woman in an Italian province. She makes a great impression on the traveller: “Her look was more human, and she seemed of a superior race to the inhabitants of the surrounding valleys”.<sup>8</sup> While reporting their conversation, the author comments:

All the while I spoke she looked at me with such a melancholy earnestness that I asked the cause, and began again to imagine myself in some fatal habitation, Where more is meant than meets the ear....<sup>9</sup>

<sup>7</sup> William Beckford, *Italy with Sketches of Spain and Portugal, vol. 1* (London: Richard Bentley, 1834), 136. Beckford’s book was published in the nineteenth century, but it contains letters and memories from a journey that took place in the eighteenth century. I have decided to analyse this example here as I believe it emphasises the connection between the Enlightenment’s tradition of the Grand Tour and its Romantic continuation. Though the nineteenth century brought about new conditions, motivations, and types of travel (which have already been mentioned), the great cultural voyage was still popular at that time, and the importance of the act of reading and literary references in travel-writing texts is a visible sign of the continuation of this phenomenon.

<sup>8</sup> Beckford, *Italy With Sketches of Spain and Portugal*, 264.

<sup>9</sup> Beckford, *Italy With Sketches of Spain and Portugal*, 265–266.

This quotation is justified by the subject matter – the unusual aura that the woman unfolds is associated with the melancholy depicted in Milton’s poem. Similarly to the previous example, this quotation is meant to describe the travel experiences in a way that goes beyond simple imitation, account, or report. Instead, it creates an image of places and people that bears visible traces of the author’s own sensitivity and erudition, and literature is an essential element of the image in question. First, it serves as a source of inspiration, facilitating communication with the reader by providing useful clichés. Second, it gives credibility to the author’s vision by proving it is not a subjective, purely individual creation, but a part of a broadly accepted “behaviour score”.<sup>10</sup>

In *Journal of a Few Months Residence in Portugal and Glimpses of the South of Spain*, Dorothy Wordsworth Quillinan quotes a longer fragment of her father William Wordsworth’s poem:

Having to cross the river d’Ave, we rather overshot our mark, and having thus missed the proper passage, we were obliged to take to a narrow stone footway by a mill (stepping-stones, as the Cumbrians would say) —

“Stone matched with stone  
In studied symmetry, with interspace  
For the clear waters to pursue their race  
Without restraint.”

A nightingale in some copse on the bank was singing gallantly, as if he took the quavering of the water-wheel for a challenge. It was necessary to dismount here, and lead our horses carefully over. Mr. — had done so with his, and had returned for mine. J—’s white horse was committed to the care of Mr. H—, who had not guided him three steps before he contrived to let him slip into the river. What a splash and consternation! Mr. H— however, at some risk of being pulled in overhead and ears himself, fished the horse out again without damage. We heard so many nightingales along this pleasant water, that we called it Nightingale River, which was almost a translation of its real name, Rio d’Ave (Bird River).<sup>11</sup>

The river crossing described here also includes contemplation of this scene’s special setting. It contains both the admiration for the songs of the nightingales and the already mentioned fragment of the Romantic poem. That short text concludes with a philosophical reflection on time that goes by so quickly (“Thinking how fast time runs, life’s end how near!”), but such reflection is missing in the account of the journey. However, the art of description re-

<sup>10</sup> Jacek Kolbuszewski, “Górskie przewodniki (Uwagi o współczesności i tradycji gatunku)” [Mountain Guides (Notes on the Modernity and Tradition of the Genre)], *Litteraria*, vol. 13, (1981): 145–144.

<sup>11</sup> Dorothy Wordsworth, *Journal of a Few Months Residence in Portugal and Glimpses of the South of Spain*, vol. 1 (London: Edward Moxon, 1847), 189–190.

vealed in the original poem is effectively used by Dorothy Wordsworth. Stepping Stones is a picturesque property located by the River Duddon in the Lake District. The short fragment quoted above describes only the stone path, where each block fits tightly with another, which also happens to be a characteristic feature of the path that Dorothy and her companions used in Portugal while crossing the Rio d'Ave. However, in referring to the famous Romantic poem, which contributes to the literary "mythology" of the Lake District, the author achieves yet another goal: the fragment of the Portuguese landscape is placed on the imaginative Romantic map of Europe.<sup>12</sup> The imagination-based map, overlaid on to the physical map of the continent, is a mental construct created thanks to combining and completing the real landscape with cultural content provided by literature. This is precisely the process that we can observe in the passage quoted from Dorothy Wordsworth's journal.

All these examples share the same feature: they are based on a certain reduction. Well-known works of European literature appear in travel-writing texts as a constellation of quotes – arbitrarily decontextualised fragments – to serve purely pragmatic purposes such as enriching imagery, creating a specific mood, or simply making the narrative more interesting. However, the overall context, although it becomes faded due to different strategies, such as missing attribution of the quotes, is not completely eliminated. One must remember that intertextual interaction in this case includes literary masterpieces, and it seems wise to assume that the works themselves as well as their authorship were well known – or at least recognizable – to the readers of the first half of the nineteenth century. Words of the important Others that became part of a traveller's own narrative<sup>13</sup> prove that the traveller met all the expectations important in their epoch as described by the greatest old and contemporary masters. It was irrelevant that the works cited did not concern the places that had been visited; what the authors in fact referred to was not a particular description of a specific place but the very pattern of creating a poetic description or a model reaction to the phenomena of the world. This concept combines repetition and originality: by repeating the best European examples and feeling exactly what the most famous Europeans authors had felt, the travellers created their own and – at least to a certain extent – individual visions of the places they visited.

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<sup>12</sup> See: Edward W. Said, *Orientalism* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1978).

<sup>13</sup> Which may be yet another argument for placing the "intertextual turn" in the age of Romanticism, see: Stanisław Balbus, *Między stylami* [Between the Styles] (Kraków: Universitas, 1996), 160.

The strategy analysed here lasted longer than Romanticism itself as it was extremely popular throughout the entire nineteenth century. Moreover, since the Romantics read the texts of all their predecessors, while the following generations read mainly the Romantics,<sup>14</sup> it is not surprising that references to Romantic literature often held a special position in travel-writing texts in the second half of the nineteenth century as well. The strategy of referring to different works of literature is even more visible in travel accounts from distant or less known countries, situated off the beaten track and therefore deprived of their own literary “mythology”. The authors of such accounts tended to refer to famous literary works which did not describe the places they visited and used them effectively to create their own visions of a certain place in the world, inscribing it into the imaginary map. For example, in the book *Travel and Talk 1885-93-95. My Hundred Thousand Miles of Travel Through America, Canada, Australia, New Zealand, Tasmania, Ceylon and the Paradise of the Pacific*, H. R. Haweis notices:

You can call the ocean ‘Pacific’ or ‘Atlantic’, one ends with ‘antic’ and the other rhymes with ‘sick’, and there is precious little on the score of comfort to choose between them, with the exception of air, and the Pacific air is incomparably soft and mild, but as for the tropics and a sea of glass, ‘a painted ship upon a painted ocean’, and that sort of thing, it exists chiefly in the pages of the ‘Ancient Mariner’.<sup>15</sup>

Passages describing sea journeys were conventional elements of all travel-writing texts in the nineteenth century and they appeared whenever it was justified by the route. The sea landscape was also extremely popular among author-travellers, and it was often created on the basis of popular literary clichés. In the fragment quoted above, the author – not without a sense of humor – refers to the associations evoked by the ending of the word “Pacific” and the rhyme with the word “Atlantic.” What summarises these associations and the reflections on the mild Pacific air is a quotation from *The Rime of the Ancient Mariner*. The way this quotation is introduced and interpreted requires a commentary. “A painted ship upon a painted ocean” contradicts the “real” sea landscape. The last sentence of the passage quoted above recalls the already mentioned meaningful contradiction between literary images and the reality experienced while travelling. In this example, these two spheres are clearly separated: what exists in literature cannot be confirmed

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<sup>14</sup> I paraphrase here the words of Marta Piwińska, who notices that the Romantics used to read classical writers, while the generations that came after them only referred to the Romantics, see: Piwińska, *Złe wychowanie. Fragmenty romantycznej biografii*, 69.

<sup>15</sup> Hugh Reginald Haweis, *Travel and Talk 1885-93-95. My Hundred Thousand Miles of Travel through America, Canada, Australia, New Zealand, Tasmania, Ceylon and the Paradise of the Pacific*, vol. 2 (London: Chatto&Windus, 1897), 79.

by exact perception. Paraphrasing Haweis, one may say that “a painted ship upon a painted ocean” is not a ship that sails across any existing sea or ocean. However, in the famous Coleridge ballad, this line has a completely different meaning. The epithet “painted” is given to the ship and the ocean only because they are motionless.<sup>16</sup> The horrifying calmness of the sea that immobilised the ship is part of the punishment to the sailor who has committed a terrible crime: he killed an albatross. Thus, it is a sinister line as it reveals the petrifying truth about the cursed journey whose story is presented in Coleridge’s ballad. Although the line is deprived of its original context and combined with a completely new one, by referring to the famous ballad, Haweis places his own text among the works of maritime literature and manages to add “his ocean” to the imaginary map of the world.

Many interesting examples of how great Romantic literature can be used by travel-writing authors are found in Adolf Pawiński’s study *Portugalia. Listy z podróży* [Portugal: Letters From a Journey]. The Polish author consciously alludes to the texts that originally referred to completely different parts of Europe in order to depict the Portuguese landscape. While admiring the panorama of Lisbon, he recalls a passage from Zygmunt Krasiński’s poem *Przedświt*:

Nabijaną światłem drogą  
 Łódka moja zwolna płynie.  
 Jakże lubo, jakże błogo  
 Na szafirów tych głębinie!  
 Za jeziora przezrociami  
 Majaczeją wzgórze, skały,  
 I ty ze mną, i my sami  
 I tak piękny świat ten cały!<sup>17</sup>

[My boat slowly sails a way  
 Which is filled with light.  
 How great, how serene it is  
 To float on the sapphire wave!  
 Behind the lake’s transparency  
 Hills and rocks loom,  
 And you are with me, we are alone  
 And the whole world is so beautiful]

The landscape described by Krasiński has nothing to do with Lisbon or with Portugal either. It was inspired by the beauty of Lake Como in Italy and its subject is far more sophisticated than a simple attempt to create an artistic

<sup>16</sup> Samuel Taylor Coleridge, “The Rime of the Ancient Mariner,” in *English Romantic Poets*, ed. Jonathan Bate (New York–London–Toronto: Alfred A. Knopf, 2022), 229.

<sup>17</sup> Zygmunt Krasiński, *Przedświt*, lines 89–96; English transl. by M.B.

representation of nature. It combines reminiscences of Krasiński's love affair with Delfina Potocka on the one hand and the messianic concept on the other. However, all these important senses do not appear in Pawiński's interpretation, as the only reason why he recalls the poem is that he seems to be seduced by how Krasiński creates the space which stretches between heaven and earth, entangled in the subtle game of mirror images. It is easy to notice that the panorama of Lisbon is very different from the image created by Krasiński in his poem. However, it is not the resemblance of the views that matters, but the approach towards the landscape which Pawiński seems to share with the Romantic poet. It must be added that Pawiński, who generally loved Portugal, was not impressed by its capital city. He did not particularly enjoy either its narrow streets or the remains of the Arabic architecture and buildings à la Pombal. The only view that he admired was a panoramic one: the city observed from a distance enabled the creation of a picture that followed Romantic rules. One reason why Pawiński was able to recognize and interpret Lisbon's panorama as beautiful could be his glorious with Romantic clichés and his ability to use them effectively.<sup>18</sup>

In his *Letters*, Pawiński also refers to Lord Byron's famous work *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage*. It was probably the most important nineteenth-century literary work that shaped Portugal's – and, above all, Sintra's – reputation in the eyes of various foreign travellers. Byron adored Sintra and compared it to the Garden of Eden, establishing a virtually obligatory way for his many followers to regard and describe Sintra. Pawiński remains faithful to this tradition:

Wyręcę się tu krótkimi, ale pięknymi słowy Byrona, który w *Childe Haroldzie* opiewał pełną krasę i wdzięku Cintrę, nazywając ją sławnym edenem. Pamiętam początek:

Lo! Cintra's intervene Eden intervenes,  
In variegated maze of mount and glen.  
Ah me! What hand can pencil guide or pen,  
To follow half on which the eye dilates.

Czyżaż ręka, powtórzę z poetą, mogłaby kierować penzlem lub piórem, aby iść w ślad za wzrokiem, oczarowanym na każdym kroku?

[I will make use of a brief and beautiful description by Byron, who in *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage* praises the beautiful and graceful Sintra, calling it a famous Eden. I remember the beginning:

<sup>18</sup> I write more about the way in which Pawiński uses Krasiński's "Przedświt" in my chapter "Krasiński w Portugalii," in *Krasiński: żywioły kultury, żywioły natury. Studia* [Krasiński: Elements of Culture, Elements of Nature. Studies], eds. Małgorzata Burzka-Janik, and Jarosław Ławski (Białystok: Temida 2, 2019), 355–363.

Lo! Cintra's glorious Eden intervenes,  
 In variegated maze of mount and glen.  
 Ah me! What hand can pencil guide or pen,  
 To follow half on which the eye dilates.

Whose hand, let me repeat after the poet, could guide a paintbrush or a pen to follow  
 the eye delighted at every turn?]<sup>19</sup>

This passage reveals not only the admiration of Sintra's beauty, but also the feeling of inconsistency between its literary (artistic) representation and the view itself. Thus, the important Romantic dilemma of inexpressibility reappears here too; after all, as Mickiewicz notices, language lies to the voice and the voice lies to thought<sup>20</sup>. In this case, however, the dilemma assumes a "tourist" version, posing the following question: does an appropriate description of the world experienced while travelling exist at all? Author-travellers seem to solve this problem by referring to the literary clichés that enable them to perceive and then describe places and landscapes in a certain, widely accepted and desired way. In the example analysed above, Pawiński does not even use Byron's text to create his own in a similar manner. He goes one step further and replaces his own description with the quotation excerpted from *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage*.<sup>21</sup>

As has already been mentioned, literary works were also often quoted in tourist guides to enrich information concerning different places recommended for a visit, and to make readers familiar with the appropriate "behaviour score". In the nineteenth century, the information found in tourist guides was not limited to the practical issues necessary for organising a trip; they also contained many literary quotations. A case in point is, for instance, *A Handbook for Travellers in Greece* published by John Murray. In the introduction, while discussing the history of Greece, the author introduces information about Klephts. They are presented as the bulwark of freedom, insurgents who defend the good cause, because

to be a Klepht in Greece under the old Turkish régime was no more considered a disgrace than to be a pirate in the days of Homer, to be an outlaw in the time of

<sup>19</sup> Adolf Pawiński, *Portugalia*, 195.

<sup>20</sup> Zofia Mitosek, "Język kłamie? Raz jeszcze o Mickiewiczu" [Does Language Lie? Once More about Mickiewicz], in Zofia Mitosek, *Mimesis. Zjawisko i problem* [Mimesis. The Phenomenon and the Problem] (Warszawa: Wydawnictwo Naukowe PWN, 1997), 209.

<sup>21</sup> I discuss this example, albeit with a slightly different conclusion, in my chapter "Polak w podróży. Adolfa Pawińskiego opisanie Portugalii" [A Pole on the Move. Adolf Pawiński's Description of Portugal], in Magdalena Bąk, and Lidia Romaniszyn-Ziomek, "Gdzie ziemia się kończy, a morze zaczyna". *Szkice polsko-portugalskie* ["Where the Land Ends and the Sea Begins". Polish-Portuguese Sketches] (Katowice: Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Śląskiego, 2016), 111–112.

Robin Hood or a 'gentleman-cateran' in the Highlands of Scotland a hundred and fifty years ago.<sup>22</sup>

Greeks eagerly fighting for freedom are presented as heroes, which should not be surprising if one remembers the Romantic sublimation of their efforts.<sup>23</sup> To emphasize their noble nature, as well as to strengthen the parallel between their tragic fate and the fate of noble renegades – so popular and respected in the literature of the epoch – Walter Scott's *The Lady of the Lake* is recalled:

Pent in the fortress of the North,  
Think'st thou we will not sally forth  
To spoil the spoiler as we may,  
And from the robber rend the prey?<sup>24</sup>

These lines are originally a part of a speech given by the leader of the Scottish highlanders, who reveals his pride and his need for independence. Though they refer to completely different circumstances and are spoken in an entirely different setting, their meaning seems universal. Referring to *The Lady of the Lake* is a way to help readers, especially English ones, understand the intricacies of Greek history and interpret them according to Romantic patterns.

There are many more examples of using quotations from and allusions to literature in nineteenth-century travel writing, and surveying all of them is beyond the scope of this article. Still, even the few examples analysed here reveal certain general tendencies. First, quoting fragments of literary works in travel-writing texts displays the tension between personal experience and erudition – in other words, between knowledge gained through a direct act of cognition and knowledge resulting from reading.<sup>25</sup> Literary works – often well-known masterpieces forming a specific literary canon of the epoch – were quoted as short passages or recalled in pieces. The process of their fragmentation was usually accompanied by a certain reduction: ideas less useful for travellers were omitted. For instance, the location of the scenes recalled or details of the plot might turn out unimportant. The reason why a particular quotation was used could be its general idea about the fate of humanity or a visible pattern of creating an artistic representation of a landscape. Literature was recalled in travel-writing texts in a more utilitarian sense: there was no intention to interpret it in depth; instead, it served as an

<sup>22</sup> *A Handbook for Travellers in Greece* (London: John Murray, 1854), 29.

<sup>23</sup> Maria Kalinowska, *Grecja romantyków. Studia nad obrazem Grecji w literaturze romantycznej* [Greece of the Romantics. Studies on the Image of Greece in Romantic Literature] (Toruń: Wydawnictwo UMK, 1994).

<sup>24</sup> *A Handbook for Travellers in Greece*, 30.

<sup>25</sup> Anna Wieczorkiewicz, *Apetyt turysty. O doświadczaniu świata w podróży* [Tourist Appetite. On Experiencing the World While Travelling] (Kraków: Universitas, 2008), 257–318.

inspiration for improving descriptive skills in order to “translate” the phenomena experienced while travelling into a text. This is why certain literary works were received in an alternative way in the nineteenth century. On the one hand, their privileged position as masterpieces was confirmed. On the other hand, this type of “use” enabled readers to discover the elements that traditional or critical reading failed to notice or regarded as less important.<sup>26</sup> Owing to such a reading, *Paradise Lost* can reveal its landscape-forming potential, while *The Rime of the Ancient Mariner* might be regarded as a poem emphasising a hiatus between the world and its artistic representation.

Tracing the literary incrustations in travel-writing texts is a fascinating task as it helps one understand the importance of reading and travelling both in the culture and the everyday life of the nineteenth century. Textual representation – and interpretation – of the world is not merely an addition to existing reality but forms its essence. Experience that matters must be written down, yet that would not be possible without previous readings. The abundance of travel-writing texts in the nineteenth century seems to confirm the inseparable bond between experiencing and writing. Moreover, the fact that quotations of literary texts were used so often by author-travellers seems to acknowledge that the act of reading was essential for shaping the skills of perceiving and interpreting the world and its phenomena encountered during voyages.

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<sup>26</sup> The reception of literary works in travel accounts might also confirm the general character of this type of writing, whose immanent feature is appreciation of the element that used to be underestimated, shifting to the centre what used to occupy the periphery, see: Julia Kuehn, and Paul Smethurst, “Introduction,” in *New Directions in Travel Writing Studies*, eds. Julia Kuehn, and Paul Smethurst (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015), 1.

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## **Podróże z arcydziełami. Recepcja literatury pięknej w dziewiętnastowiecznych relacjach z podróży**

**Abstrakt:** W pierwszej połowie XIX wieku czytanie i podróżowanie należały do najbardziej istotnych ludzkich doświadczeń. Związek pomiędzy nimi był tak ścisły także dlatego, że to właśnie literatura dostarczała w tym czasie informacji na temat, jak podróżny powinien się zachowywać i jak powinien emocjonalnie reagować na otaczający go świat i przygody, które mogą go spotkać w drodze. Dziewiętnastowieczne relacje z podróży są przepełnione cytatami z różnego rodzaju tekstów literackich. Dotyczy to zarówno relacji spisywanych przez wykształcone elity, jak i przewodników adresowanych do przeciętnego turysty. Celem niniejszego artykułu jest przeanalizowanie wybranych przypadków użycia arcydzieł literackich w dziewiętnastowiecznych relacjach z podróży oraz określenie powodów i sposobów ich wykorzystania.

**Słowa kluczowe:** podróżopisarstwo, przewodniki, spojrzenie turysty, literatura, recepcja.

## **Reisen mit den Meisterwerken. Die Rezeption der schöngestigen Literatur in Reiseberichten des 19. Jahrhunderts**

**Abstract:** In der ersten Hälfte des 19. Jahrhunderts gehörten Lesen und Reisen zu den wichtigsten menschlichen Erfahrungen. Ihre Verbindung ist so eng, weil die Literatur dieser Zeit auch darüber informierte, wie man sich als Reisender zu verhalten hatte und wie man emotional auf die jeweilige Umgebung und die Abenteuer, die man unterwegs erlebte, reagieren sollte. Die Reiseberichte aus dem 19. Jahrhundert sind voll von Zitaten aus unterschiedlichen literarischen Texten. Dies gilt sowohl für Berichte, die von gebildeten Eliten verfasst wurden, als auch für Reiseführer, die sich an durchschnittliche Touristen richteten. Das Ziel dieses Artikels ist es, ein paar Fälle der Verwendung literarischer Meisterwerke in Reiseberichten des 19. Jahrhunderts zu analysieren, um die Gründe und Methoden ihres Einsatzes aufzuzeigen.

**Schlüsselwörter:** Reiseberichte, Reiseführer, Touristenperspektive, Literatur, Rezeption.



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## Poems by Benedict Schwalbe (ca. 1460–1521) on the Annunciation to Anna and Joachim, the Immaculate Conception and the Birth of Mary. Translation and Explication

**Abstract:** This study presents a translation into Polish of three works by a Renaissance monk Benedict Schwalbe from the book *Epitome in divae parthenices Mariae historiam*. The figure of the now-forgotten author of the Renaissance era is brought closer, attention is drawn to the fact that Renaissance editions were also popular in Poland, and the works of Chelidonius that accompanied a series of passion engravings by the Nuremberg engraver were published in Kraków printing houses. The apocryphal themes, outlined in the poems, and theological issues require explanations, so the poems are accompanied by commentaries necessary for reading. The poems and engravings reflect the creators' contemporary Catholic version of Mary's story, which gained recognition among Catholics at the Council of Trent.

As in the Renaissance edition, in this article Albrecht Dürer's engravings are considered important and attractive. The release of the paintings along with Chelidonius's poems prove the intersemiotic dimension of the prints of the Renaissance era.

**Keywords:** Benedict Schwalbe (Chelidonius), Albrecht Dürer, Renaissance poetry, Life of Mary, woodcut.

The purpose of this study is to recall the figure of a Renaissance monk Benedict Schwalbe, known as Chelidonius, translate, and explain the cultural contexts of three works by him from the collection *Epitome in divae parthe-*

*nices Mariae historiam*. The poems, published together with cycles of prints by the Nuremberg engraver Albrecht Dürer, have not been translated into Polish yet, although Renaissance editions of them were also popular in Poland, and Chelidonius's works that accompanied a series of passion engravings by Dürer were published in Kraków printing houses. The mode of argument employs strategies of cultural literary theory, including intertextuality and literary explication.

### The Author and His Work

Benedict Schwalbe, whose name (Chelidon, Hirundo) means swallow or bird in the classical languages Latin and Greek, was born in Nuremberg around 1460. This Renaissance poet, a Benedictine monk, with the nickname Lover of the Muses (*Musophilus*)<sup>1</sup> is almost completely forgotten today. The nickname *Musophilus* serves as a clue regarding the cultural background of its creator, rooted in ancient tradition. It refers to *mania Muson*, the source of poetic inspiration,<sup>2</sup> which was very widespread during the Renaissance, especially among literary theorists who gathered around the Florentine Academy, and which in Platonic theory took the name of creative frenzy. The name Chelidonius is preserved on the title pages of the poems that he wrote. He received his Renaissance education in his birthplace. For Nuremberg was the centre of monastic humanism, and there, in the monastery of St. Egidius, Benedict Schwalbe stayed from about 1485 until 1514, when he moved to Vienna, to the Scottish Monastery, where he served as abbot from 1518 to 1521. There he was declared court poet to Emperor Maximilian, as reported in an epitaph dedicated to another, more acclaimed Renaissance artist, Konrad Celtis.<sup>3</sup> Of the poems that came from Schwalbe's pen, two cycles are the best known, namely one on the passion of Christ *Passio Salvatoris*<sup>4</sup> and the other on the life of Mary *Epitome in divae parthenices Mariae historiam*.<sup>5</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Such an epithet appears on the title pages. See, for example, *Passio Iesu Christi Salvatoris mundi vario carminum genere [...] doctissime descripta* (Cracoviae: Scharfenberger, 1536).

<sup>2</sup> Elżbieta Sarnowska-Temierusz, *Przeszłość poetyki: od Platona do Giambattisty Vica* [The Past of Poetics: From Plato to Giambattista Vic] (Warszawa: PWN, 1995), *passim*.

<sup>3</sup> Franz Posset, *A Graecian, Christian Poet, and Playwright: Benedictus Chelidonius, Monk of Nuremberg, Abbot of the Schottenstift, in Renaissance Monks: Monastic Humanism in Six Biographical Sketches* (Boston: Brill, 2005), 65.

<sup>4</sup> *Passio Iesu Christi Salvatoris mu[n]di vario carminu[m] genere / F[ratris] Benedicti Chelidonii Musophili doctissime descripta* (Impressum Cracoviae: per Florianum [Unglerium] et Volfgangum De Paffenhofen [Lern], 1514).

<sup>5</sup> *Epitome in divae parthenices Mariae historiam ab Alberto Durero Norico per figuras digestam cum versibus annexis Chelidonii* (Nürnberg: Hölzel, 1511).

A collection of works by various authors, selected by Chelidonium, who took up the theme of Christ's passion, also occupies an important position in Chelidonium's legacy.<sup>6</sup> All three books are decorated with artefacts by Albrecht Dürer. The first is a series of woodcuts called the *Little Passion*, the second is the *Life of Mary*, and the anthology is illustrated with coloured woodcuts of the *Large Passion* series, so named because of the larger size of the blocks compared to the *Little Passion*.<sup>7</sup> In both the *Epitome* and the *Passio Iesu Christi Salvatoris mundi vario Carminum genere [...] doctissime descripta*, Chelidonium's texts are accompanied by Dürer's engravings. They are a complement, the word coexists with the image, but priority belongs to the graphics. In the anthology, as indicated by the title: *Passio Salvatoris domini nostri Iesu ex Hieronymo Paduano. Dominico Mancino. Sedulio. et Baptista Mantuano per fratrem Chelidonium collecta cum figuris Alberti Dureri Norici Pictoris* the order changes: the pictorial illuminations complement the literary message. Today, however, we can put forward the thesis that it was the Dürer's fame as a great Nuremberg Renaissance artist, draughtsman, painter and printmaker that contributed to the existence and persistence in the literary tradition of the poet Benedict Schwalbe's works. It should be noted that the texts and prints about the life of Mary reflect the contemporary artists' Catholic version of the story, which gained the approval of Catholics at the Council of Trent. This "catholicity" of the book was considered at odds with the affection that Albrecht Dürer expressed for Martin Luther.<sup>8</sup> During the years of the Reformation, the popularity of the *Life of Mary* gradually waned. The book was not reprinted after the 1511 edition.

The reason why it is worth recalling the figure of Chelidonium is the fact of his popularity in 16th-century Poland. This is evidenced by the editions of his works in Kraków printing houses. *Passio Iesu Christi* was published in Kraków in 1514 in the outhouse of Florian Ungler, in 1523 by Hieronim Vietor, and in 1536 in the outhouse of Maciej Szarfenberg. Another edition was produced in 1640 by the Kraków printing house of Marcin Filipowski.<sup>9</sup> Al-

<sup>6</sup> *Passio Salvatoris domini nostril Iesu ex Hieronymo Paduano. Dominico Mancino. Sedulio. Et Baptista Mantuano per fratrem Chelidonium collecta cum figuris Alberti Dureri Norici Pictoris* (Nürnberg: Hölzel, 1511). This book is decorated with colourful miniatures by Albrecht Dürer.

<sup>7</sup> Erwin Panofsky, *Albrecht Dürer*, vol. 1 (London: Humphrey Milford, 1945, Oxford University Press), 51.

<sup>8</sup> Franz Posset, *A Graecian, Christian Poet, and Playwright: Benedictus Chelidonium, Monk of Nuremberg, Abbot of the Schottenstift*, in *Renaissance Monks: Monastic Humanism in Six Biographical Sketches* (Boston: Brill, 2005), 91.

<sup>9</sup> Estreicher Karol, *Bibliografia polska*, volume of the General Collection:14, volume of the Series III (Kraków: Drukarnia Uniwersytetu Jagiellońskiego, 1986), 152, 153.

brecht Dürer's influence on the formation of the religious imagination is also not without significance in the history of Polish culture. Suffice it to mention the first printed Polish book,<sup>10</sup> namely *Żywot Pana Jezusa Krysta* by Balthazar Opec. Although the woodcuts appearing there are not by Albrecht Dürer, they were created under his tutelage. Their creators are considered the most talented of his pupils, namely Hans Leonard Schäufelein, Hans Baldung called Grien and another, but so far it has not been determined who he was, although the names Wolf Traut, Hans Suess von Kulmbach are mentioned.<sup>11</sup> There are numerous works of art whose authors drew inspiration from Chelodinius's artistic updates.<sup>12</sup> These were not always well-known artists; more often provincial craftsmen, whose influence, especially on folk piety, is very significant. The wooden relief from Szydłowiec *The Homage of the Three Kings*, inspired by one of Dürer's engravings, will serve as an example.<sup>13</sup> Furthermore, the creators of Erasmus Ciołek's *Missal* and *Pontifical* drew on Albrecht Dürer's *Life of Mary* and *Little Passion* woodcut series.<sup>14</sup> There is also a contemporary Polish edition of *The Life of Mary* in book form. It was published in 1985 by Wydawnictwa Artystyczne i Filmowe.

<sup>10</sup> Today it is recognised as the *Żywot Pana Jezusa Krysta, Stworzyciela i Zbawiciela rodzaju ludzkiego wedle ewangelist świętych z rozmyślanim nabożnym doktorów Pisma Świętego krotko zebrany* [Life of Lord Jesus Christ, Creator and Saviour of Mankind According to the Evangelists of the Saints with Devotional Meditation by Doctors of the Holy Scriptures Briefly Collected]. Earlier, in 1514, an edition of Biernat of Lublin's *Raj duszny (Paradise of the Soul)* was said to have been produced in Ungler's outhouse. However, the oldest of the surviving books is an edition of *Hortulus* from 1533. See Ludwik Bernacki, *Pierwsza książka polska. Studium bibliograficzne* [The First Polish Book. Bibliographic Study] (Lvov: Ossolineum, 1918), 193.

<sup>11</sup> Katarzyna Krzak-Weiss, "Wyposażenie graficzne *Żywota Pana Jezusa Krysta Baltazara Opeca*" [Graphic Equipment of the *Żywot Pana Jezusa Krysta Balthazar Opec*], in *Żywot Pana Jezusa Krysta, Stworzyciela i Zbawiciela rodzaju ludzkiego wedle ewangelist świętych z rozmyślanim nabożnym doktorów Pisma Świętego krotko zebrany* (1522), facsimile, eds. Wiesław Wydra, and Rafał Wójcik (Poznań: Wydawnictwo UAM, 2014), XCVIII.

<sup>12</sup> Michał Walicki, "Inspiracje graficzne polskiego malarstwa na przełomie XV i XVI wieku" [Graphic Inspirations of Polish Painting at the Turn of the 15th and 16th Centuries], in *Rocznik Muzeum Narodowego w Warszawie* (1962): 397.

<sup>13</sup> Michał Walicki, "Nieznana płaskorzeźba z Szydłowca. (Przyczynek do dziejów stosunku grafiki i rzeźby w Polsce XVI w.)" [Unknown Relief from Szydłowiec. (A Contribution to the History of the Relationship of Graphic Art and Sculpture in Poland in the XVI Century)], in *Rocznik Muzeum Narodowego w Warszawie* (1934–35): 382.

<sup>14</sup> Jacek Tomaszewski, *Oprawa książkowa w Polsce 1450–1600. Studium tegumentologiczno-ikonograficzne studium* [Bookbinding in Poland 1450–1600. A Tegumentological and Iconographic Study] (Warszawa: Polski Instytut Studiów nad Sztuką Świata, 2017), 46.

## Coexistence of Word and Image

Obrazy przemawiały do czytelnika, silniej niż tekst – trafiając do jego wyobraźni w sposób bardziej bezpośredni, zapadały mu w pamięć o wiele łatwiej i głębiej. Szczególnie, jeśli wybrane sceny przedstawione były tak, iż widz czuł się ich uczestnikiem.<sup>15</sup>

[The images appealed to the reader, more strongly than the text – reaching his imagination in a more direct way, they sank into his memory much more easily and deeply. Especially if the selected scenes were presented in such a way that the viewer felt like a participant.]

These words allow us to define the function of book decoration, enriched during the Renaissance with images obtained through reproduction techniques. Emil Mâle points out, on the one hand, the degree of dependence of the artist-craftsman on theological thought, and on the other hand, the role of the creator as one who explains the world, the laws that govern it, the truths of faith, in a way that is accessible to all.<sup>16</sup> Although they had a subservient function, the presence of graphic arts with religious themes, like painting or other representational arts, paradoxically had not only an aesthetic dimension, since they also fostered contemplation – the essence of the liberal arts. Moreover, they also meant that those who were not educated enough to understand anything written could participate in that contemplation. The synod of Arras in 1025 was unequivocal on this subject. In the fourteenth chapter entitled *De imagine Salvatoris in Cruce*, the synod's participants make the following statement about the importance of images.<sup>17</sup> "Illiterati quod per scripturam non possunt intueri hoc per quaedam picturae lineamenta contemplantur". The status of the creator, his popularity, the environment in which he lived, his intellectual formation – all this could have

<sup>15</sup> Katarzyna Krzak-Weiss, "Wyposażenie graficzne Żywota Pana Jezusa Krysta Baltazara Opeca," in *Żywot Pana Jezusa Krysta, Stworzyciela i Zbawiciela rodzaju ludzkiego wedle ewangelistów świętych z rozmyślaniami nabożnymi doktorów Pisma Świętego krotko zebrany*, XCIII.

<sup>16</sup> Emil Mâle, *L'art religieux du XIII au XVIII siècle* (Paris: Librairie Armand Colin, 1945), 151; Aron Guriewicz, *Kategorie kultury średniowiecznej* [Categories of Mediaeval Culture] (Warszawa: PIW, 1976), 41.

<sup>17</sup> Relevant passage in a broader context: "Simpliciores quippe in ecclesia et illiterati quod per scripturam non possunt intueri hoc per quaedam picturae lineamenta contemplantur id est Christum in ea humilitate, qua pro nobis pati et mori voluit, dum hanc speciem venerantur, Christum in cruce ascendentem, Christum in cruce passum, Christum in cruce morientem, Christum solum, non opus manuum hominum adorant, no enim truncus ligneus adoratur, sed per illam visibilem imaginem mens interior hominis excitatur, in qua Christi passio et mors pro nobis susceptam quam in membrane cordis inscribitur, ut in se unusquisque recognoscat, quanta suo Redemptori debeat, dum videlicet iuxta Salvatoris sententiam, quae postulat imago Caesaris, redduntur Caesari, et quae Dei, Deo." (Mansi, 454sq).

influenced the rendering of the priority of the image over the word, and it was then that the image complemented the message. This was the case with the *Life of Mary*, a series of woodcuts by Albrecht Dürer. The relationship of these two fields of human creativity – poetry and visual arts – was devoted to numerous theoretical reflections of artists of the Renaissance period, according to which the goal of the artist's activity is to bring the truth of nature closer, to enable the viewer to attain knowledge, which is the real destiny of man, knowledge that can be achieved through contemplation. Theorists draw on the ancient reflection on the status of art. It is worth recalling some of the very numerous thoughts on the ontic structure of the work of art and presenting them on a timeline. In the *Nicomachean Ethics* we read: "Now all Art has to do with production, and contrivance, and seeing how any of those things may be produced which may either be or not be, and the origination of which rests with the maker and not with the thing made".<sup>18</sup> In *Metaphysics*, the words are cast: "[...] but from art proceed the things of which the form is in the soul of the artist."<sup>19</sup> Horace with his *dictum: ut pictura poesis*<sup>20</sup> linked the word and image, and Leonardo da Vinci indicated how words can be rendered by image:

Mimo że byłbyś [poeto] w stanie opowiedzieć lub dokładnie opisać widziane kształty, to malarz tak je namaluje, że wydawać się będą żywymi, a stosując światło i cień, nada on wyraz ludzkiej twarzy. Czego ty za pomocą pióra uczynić nie możesz, malarz pędzlem osiągnie.<sup>21</sup>

[Although you [the poet] would be able to tell or accurately describe the shapes you can see, the painter will paint them in such a way that they will seem alive, and by using light and shadow, he will give expression to the human face. What you with a pen cannot do, the painter with a brush will achieve.]

<sup>18</sup> Aristotle, *The Nicomachean Ethics of Aristotle*, Book 6, Chap. 4, trans. Drummond Percy Chase (London: Dent, 1915), 134. Online: <https://www.gutenberg.org/files/8438/8438-h/8438-h.htm>; <https://archive.org/details/nicomacheanethic00arisoft/page/n7/mode/2up>. St. Augustine makes a similar statement on the disposition of the creator in *The Immortality of IV, 5*, in *The Immortality of the Soul; The Magnitude of the Soul; On Music; The Advantage of Believing the Soul*: "It is evident, however, not only that art is in the mind of the artist, but also that it cannot be but in his mind, and inseparable from it. For, if art is separated from the mind, it will be either outside the mind, or nowhere". St. Augustine, *The Immortality of the Soul; On Faith in Things Unseen (The Fathers of the Church, Volume 4)*, trans. Ludwig Schopp (New York: Cima, 1947), 22 [15–50].

<sup>19</sup> Aristotle, *Metaphysics*, VII, 1032b, trans. William David Ross, online: <https://classics.mit.edu/Aristotle/metaphysics.mb.txt>.

<sup>20</sup> Horace, *De arte poetica*, v. 361.

<sup>21</sup> Leonardo da Vinci, *Szkice i zapiski*, ed. Hanna Suh, trans. Beata Brózda (Warszawa: Parragon, 2006), 12.

The artist, updating his or her vision whether using a spatial form, or in an image or word, fills it through the creative act with his or her experience, expression and emotions. And, when it comes to a sacred work, also by faith. A similar kind of emotion is expected from the potential viewer.<sup>22</sup> Dürer expresses this thought as follows:

Żaden chrześcijanin nie zostanie przez malowidło lub figurę pociągnięty do bałwochwalczej wiary [...]. Ten, kto chciałby modlić się do obrazu, do drzewa lub kamienia, musiałby istotnie być nierozumnym człowiekiem. Dlatego obraz przynosi więcej zbudowania, niż utrapienia, jeśli tylko wykonany jest z godnością, znajomością sztuki i dobrze.<sup>23</sup>

[No Christian will be drawn to idolatrous faith by a painting or statue [...]. He, who would pray to an image, a tree or a stone, would indeed have to be an unintelligent man. Therefore, an image brings more edification than affliction, if only it is made with dignity, knowledge of art and well.]

Chelidonium's lyrical narratives can be classified as ekphrasis.<sup>24</sup> We use the term *ekphrasis* here in its etymological and genealogical sense: *ekphrazein*, the verb from which *ekphrasis* is derived, translated as "description", has the meanings "to express", "to tell" or "to embellish".<sup>25</sup> In rhetoric it is identified with the figure called "*hypotiposis*" (Greek), "*evidential*" (Latin).<sup>26</sup> It is, according to the definition of Hermogenes of Tarsus, a descriptive utterance, characterised by the vividness of the representation of things, and which makes the matter evident in order to make it clearer.<sup>27</sup> Of course, Chelidonium's poems are ekphrases of visual works. The poem was written in ele-

<sup>22</sup> Maria Kinga Strzelecka, "Teologia Sztuki Sakralnej," *Studia Theologica Varsaviensia*, 6, no. 2 (1968): 51–67.

<sup>23</sup> *Pouczenie o mierzeniu cyrklem i linią* (1525). Cited after: Jan Białostocki, *Dürer* (Warszawa: Ruch 1970), 70.

<sup>24</sup> On the tradition of genre in antiquity, see Bernhard F. Scholz, *Pictures into Words. Theoretical and Descriptive Approaches to Ekphrasis*, ed. Valerie Robillard, Els Jongeneel (Amsterdam: Vu University Press, 1998), 74; Remigiusz Popowski, "Starożytny przewodnik po neapolitańskiej pinakotece" [Ancient Guide to the Neapolitan Pinacoteca], [wstęp do:] [introduction to:] *Filostrat Starszy, „Obrazy”* [Philostratus the Elder, "Images"], trans. Remigiusz Popowski (Warszawa: Prószyński i S-ka, 2004), 33; Remigiusz Popowski, "Retoryka w późno antycznych opisach dzieł sztuki" [Rhetoric in Late Antique Descriptions of Works of Art], in *Retoryka antyczna i jej dziedzictwo* [Antique Rhetoric and Its Legacy], ed. Jerzy Axer (Warszawa: Aletheia, 1996), 50–64.

<sup>25</sup> *Słownik grecko-polski*, v. 1, ed. Oktawiusz Jurewicz (Warszawa: PWN, 2000), 284.

<sup>26</sup> Albert Gorzkowski, "Ut pictura verba.... Zagadnienie unaocznienia w retoryce starożytnej i wczesno nowożytnej" [Ut pictura verba... The Issue of Visualisation in Ancient and Early Modern Rhetoric], *Pamiętnik Literacki* 2 (2001): 37.

<sup>27</sup> Cf. *Hermogenis Progyrnasmata*, cited by Heinrich Lausberg, *Retoryka literacka. Podstawy wiedzy o literaturze* [Literary Rhetoric. Fundamentals of Literary Knowledge], trans. and compil. Albert Gorzkowski (Kraków– Bydgoszcz: Homini 2002), 361.

giac distich, a rigorous metrical form, “accommodating” complaints, including those framed in the form of an internal monologue, reflections, but also allowing for the weaving of stories.<sup>28</sup> With regard to connected speech, it has become accepted in our contemporary literary theory to call descriptive works of art ekphrastic or iconic poetry, incorporating rhetorical prosopopoeia into the description that characterises this genre of speech.<sup>29</sup>

In the layer of invention that follows Dürer’s painting, Chelidonium’s narrative draws on the New Testament apocrypha. The Fathers of the Church were aware of the power of the influence of apocryphal literature, which they used to approximate the truths proclaimed in the Bible. Through legends, artistic visions and concrete images, apocryphal stories made dogmas easier to believe.<sup>30</sup> Besides, the New Testament does not contain the whole message about Jesus. Church-controlled knowledge made available in liturgy and catechesis was supplemented with elements of local folklore, legends and mythology. Thanks to the oral tradition, theological works were created which were, as Marek Starowieyski writes, “wyrazem pierwotnej teologii chrześcijańskiej, zazwyczaj judeochrześcijańskiej, czasami (ale nie zawsze!) nieortodoksyjnej, jeszcze nie przepuszczonej przez sito myśli greckiej i nieuporządkowanej przy pomocy ścisłych terminów teologicznych”<sup>31</sup> [an expression of the original Christian theology, usually Judeo-Christian, sometimes (but not always!) unorthodox, not yet passed through the sieves of Greek thought and not yet organised with strict theological terms]. However much the gospels and apostolic works provide insight into the environment of Jesus’ life and mission, they are almost silent about Mary. To this extent, therefore, the Marian apocrypha recorded these “blank pages”, satisfying ordinary human curiosity. Chelidonium’s works, thanks to their coexistence with Dürer’s engravings, were most likely intended to arouse the imagination, cause aesthetic and religious emotion, and ultimately strengthen faith.

Chelidonium’s poetic tales most likely drew profusely on the apocryphal *Book of the Birth of Saint Mary*. However, this short work, especially the

<sup>28</sup> Representative of this form of expression are Ovid’s elegiac works, especially *Tristia*, *Epistulae ex Ponto*, *Heroides*.

<sup>29</sup> Rozalia Słodczyk, “Powrót do ekfrazy. Próba systematyzacji oraz propozycja typologii” [Return to Ekphrasis. An Attempt at Systematisation and a Proposal of Typology], *Teksty Drugie* 5 (2018): 354.

<sup>30</sup> Aleksander E. Naumow, *Apokryfy w systemie literatury cerkiewnosłowiańskiej* [Apocrypha in the System of Orthodox Slavic Literature] (Wrocław: Ossolineum, 1976), 77.

<sup>31</sup> Marek Starowieyski, “Wstęp” [Introduction], in *Apokryfy Nowego Testamentu. Ewangelie apokryficzne, cz. 1. Fragmenty, Narodziny i dzieciństwo Maryi i Jezusa* [Apocrypha of the New Testament. Apocryphal Gospels, part 1. Fragments, Birth and Childhood of Mary and Jesus] (Kraków: WAM, 2003), 34.

chapters devoted to the time before the Annunciation of Mary, is dependent on the *Protoevangelium of James* and the *Gospel of Pseudo-Matthew*.<sup>32</sup> The anonymous author of the *Protoevangelium of James* writes a biography of Mary, beginning with the naming of her parents, through her birth, the Annunciation, Christmas, the adoration of the Magi, and her escape from Herod. The work was very popular in the East; there are about 140 manuscripts written down from the fourth to the sixteenth century in Greek.<sup>33</sup> In the Latin version, the text did not appear until 1552. Therefore, it can be presumed that our author used the two aforementioned apocrypha, which functioned during the early Renaissance written in Latin. It cannot be ruled out that the direct source was the *Liber de nativitate Mariae*, a more polished, more literary work, presenting elegant Latin in contrast to the crude language of the *Gospel of Pseudo-Matthew*,<sup>34</sup> transmitted by James de Voragine in the *Golden Legend* and present in the official Dominican lectionary.<sup>35</sup> What is significant about both Latin apocrypha about Mary's life that were popular at the time of Dürer and Chelidonius's activity is the theses contained in the texts about Mary's role in the story of salvation: Her unquestionable virginity *ante, in* and *post partum*, while showing the beauty of human motherhood and her formation resulting in the achievement of the ideal of a monastic life. Theology has gained a Mariological feature in these apocrypha.

## Ekfrazy Chelidoniusa

Anioł ukazał się Joachimowi przebywającemu na wsi i nakazał wybiec na spotkanie żonie ku Złotej bramie

Dlaczego posępna Anna, samotna wraca do domu?  
 Małżeńskimi więzami i łożem czczym zawiedziona?  
 Joachim bowiem wykpiony od mieszczan i z miasta ucieka,  
 By wpośród swoich pasterzy, gdzie woli, żywot swój pędzić.  
 Od paplaniny ludzi i dostojników świątyni,  
 przebywanie w przyrodzie wolał w swym upokorzeniu.  
 A przecież ów był bogaczem pasącym trzody po niwach,  
 mniej cenił sprawy publiczne od wiejskich zadań wśród zwierząt.  
 Posiadłość ziemską uprawia w niesławie czas swój spędzając,  
 samotnie kryje się na wsi. Ten smutku jest powód dla żony.  
 I spojrział Bóg z wysokości na ów niegodny los starca,

<sup>32</sup> Texts of the apocrypha treating the life of Mary with the study in the collection: *Apokryfy Nowego Testamentu. Ewangelie apokryficzne*, part 1, 266–341.

<sup>33</sup> *Apokryfy Nowego Testamentu. Ewangelie apokryficzne*, 267.

<sup>34</sup> *Apokryfy Nowego Testamentu. Ewangelie apokryficzne*, 292.

<sup>35</sup> *Apokryfy Nowego Testamentu. Ewangelie apokryficzne*, 331.

i spojrzął Bóg z nieboskłonu na Anny skrzętne ofiary.  
 I służę jaśniejącego wysłał ze swojej siedziby  
 z błyszczącymi skrzydłami, by słowa te przyniósł mężowi:  
 „Oto zwiastuję koniec twoim łzom na wygnaniu.  
 Na rozkaz Boga powstań i wracaj do domu swojego,  
 by żonę swą Annę pocieszyć, przyszlą matkę potomstwa,  
 kobiety i świętej rodzicielki Chrystusa.  
 Tę porodzoną nazwijcie Maryją, od gwiazdy morza,  
 Świat wszak dla siebie będzie Maryję za gwiazdę uważał”.  
 Wcześniej przyniósł anioł polecenia te same  
 Annie i wypatrywać powrotu męża nakazał,  
 i żeby do Jeruzolimy podążyła ku bramie,  
 Która zwana jest Złotą, by usta w niej męża ujrzała.<sup>36</sup>

### [Chelidonium's ekphrases

The angel appeared to Joachim staying in the countryside and ordered him to run out towards the Golden Gate to meet his wife

Why does the gloomy Anna, alone, return home?  
 Disappointed by the bonds of marriage and an empty bed?  
 For Joachim is mocked by the townsfolk and flees the city,  
 amidst his shepherds, where he prefers to live.  
 From the chatter of people and dignitaries of the temple,  
 staying in nature he preferred in his humiliation.  
 And yet once he was a rich man grazing his flocks on the plains,  
 he valued public affairs less than rural tasks among animals.  
 He cultivates his landed estate in disrepute by whiling his time,  
 Alone he hides in the countryside. This is the reason of his sadness for his wife.  
 And God looked down from on high on this unworthy fate of the old man,  
 And God looked down from the sky on Anna's humble offerings.  
 And sent the shining servant from his seat  
 with shining wings to bring the words to her husband:  
 "Behold, I herald the end of your tears in exile.  
 At God's command, arise and return to your home,

<sup>36</sup> *Angelus Joachim ruri commorati apparet et ad auream portam coniugio ccurrere monet:*  
 Unde suos lugens repetivit sola penates/ vani iam taedas Anna perosa thori. / Nam  
 Joachim fugiens cives delusus et urbem/ Pastores inter maluit esse suos/ Fabula quam  
 vulgo, magnatibus esseque templi./ Naturamque sibi criminis esse loco./ Ille quidem dives  
 erat admentarius agri/ Atque gregum, ruri posthabet ergo forum./ Rus colitatque suum  
 ducens inglorius aevum/ Soli vagus moesta coniuge rure latet./ At deus indignam senis  
 hanc prospexit ab alto/ Fortunam atque Annae sedula vota polo./ Aula deque sua famulum  
 stellantibus alis/ Misit fulgentem qui ferat ista viro./ Exilio lacrimisque tuis et nuncio finem.  
 / Surge, iubente Deo tecta revise tua,/ Consortem solare Annam matremque futuram/  
 Feminaeque prolis Christiparaeque sacrae./ Hanc Mariam vocitat e maris de sidere nam-  
 tam./ Quippe sibi stellam mundus habebit eam./ Attulerat mandata cadem prius angelus  
 Annae/ Atque virum reducem iusserat exciperet/ Et peteret Solymam, quae dicitur au-  
 ream portam/ Qua visura sui coniugis ora foret.

To comfort thy wife Anna, the future mother of thy offspring,  
the woman and the holy parent of Christ.  
Call the newborn one Mary, from the star of the sea,  
After all, the world will consider Mary a star for itself.”  
Earlier, the angel brought the same instructions  
to Anna and ordered her to look out for the return of her husband,  
And that she should go to Jerusalem towards the gate,  
Which is called Gold, so that she would see her husband’s mouth in it.]



Fig.1 The angel appeared to Joachim (A3r)

<https://books.google.pl/books?id=RV0E0sFSQH0C&printsec=frontcover&hl=pl#v=onepage&q&f=false>

The first of the works we consider convincingly illustrates the drama of childlessness of Anna and Joachim, considered a lack of grace and a curse. The burden of infamy caused the separation which was intended to protect the spouses from malice, gossip, exclusion. Honesty, religiosity and work resulting in wealth turns out to be nothing in the face of God’s disfavour. However, there is no rebellion in the attitude of Anna and Joachim; there is the acceptance of fate, humility and trust. The reader is made to think of the biblical dramas of Abraham or Job. Here, too, trust is rewarded. The Annunciation to Joachim, as this event is depicted in the painting, is similar in its iconic layer to another Annunciation of Mary, already known at this point in the narrative. Chelidonius’s text completes the picture with a description of the mental state of the two spouses, information about the annunciation of Anna, and enlivens the narrative by introducing, on the principles of prosopopoeia,

the angel's words about God's plans for the Incarnation. The author faithfully follows the chronology of events presented in the apocrypha. However, he also incorporates into his apocryphal story a motif known from another tradition. The angel heralding Anna and Joachim does not explain the meaning of the name the daughter is to receive: Star of the Sea. The phonetic coincidence of the Latin version of the name Maria and the noun *mare, maris* gave the opportunity for an anonymous mediaeval author to create one of the more famous hymns for the Annunciation with the incipit *Ave Maris Stella*,<sup>37</sup> incorporated into the liturgy of the breviary, celebrating Mary as the one who shows the safe way. St. Bernard of Clairvaux wrote in his homily for the feast of the Annunciation: "Gdy zerwą się wichry pokus, gdy wpadniesz na rafy nieszczęść, spójrz na gwiazdę, wzywaj Maryję"<sup>38</sup> [When the winds of temptation break, when you run into reefs of misfortune, look to the star, call upon Mary]. Besides the "hymnic" *stella*, Chelidonium also gives an expression from the humanistic reservoir: *sidus* with a somewhat broader, also figurative meaning of direction, fate, destiny, glory and adornment.<sup>39</sup> It turns out that the early Renaissance poet Baptista Mantuanus (Johannes Spagnolo 1447–1515) wrote about the Mary to-be-born in the same way: "Misit olympiaca celerem de sede ministrum:/ Qui dedit hanc mandata uno tua tecta revise/ Consorte solare aegram moestosque penates./ Anna tibi laetos partus prolemque datura est./ Foemineam: magno sanctus dabis omine natae: Fatidicum ductumque maris de sidere nomen./ Et Mariam dices: Annae mandata minister/ Attulit haec eadem."<sup>40</sup> The similarities in terms of lexis to Mantuan's *Parthenices* are not coincidental. One can venture to say that Chelidonium summarised his predecessor's longer poem, while retaining the Renaissance style of its delivery, rooted in antiquity. It is still worth signalling the use of the word "ora" in the first work presented, the penultimate word in the poem. The plural indicates a meaning related to speech, to words. However, the form of the verb *video* appears. Perhaps, then, it is not unreasonable to hypothesise that it refers to the mouth, and metrical considerations favoured the plural. The meaning would allude to the iconographically established kiss at the Golden Gate, a motif particularly significant in the tradition of the Immaculate Conception. In Western culture, the

<sup>37</sup> *Analecta hymnica aevi medi*, v. 51, ed. Clemens Blume (Leipzig: O. R. Reisland, 1908), 140–142.

<sup>38</sup> Dorothea Forstner, *Świat symboliki chrześcijańskiej* [The World of Christian Symbolism] (Warszawa: Pax, 1990), 104.

<sup>39</sup> *Słownik łacińsko-polski*, ed. Marian Plezia, vol. 5 (Warszawa: PWN, 2007), 144.

<sup>40</sup> Mantuanus, *Parthenice prima, sive Mariana*. Ed: Caesar de Nappis. Add: *Commendatio Parthenices. Apologeticon. Ad beatam Virginem votum post febrim acerrimam* (Bononiae: Caesar de Nappis, 1488), f.e 3r.

best-known image depicting this moment is Giotto di Bondone's fresco from the Scrovegni Chapel in Padua, a place certainly familiar to Chelidonium.

### **Anna objęła pod Złotą bramą Joachima i poczęła Maryję**

Przybyli do wskazanej bramy zwanej Złotą,  
każde ze świadomością spełniania się pragnień.  
Anna wpada od razu w małżonka objęcia.  
Wespół cieszą się darem niezwykłego dziecka.  
Z wieści przesłanej z nieba poznali, że córka  
ich będzie matką tego, którego czcigodność  
wiadoma jest od wieków, trwa i istnieć będzie,  
i że on w płaszcz cielesny doczesny ubrany  
ród ludzki z hańby grzechów swych ojców oczyści.  
Nie budzi wątpliwości, by tak godna córka  
która dokona rzeczy w czasie nadzwyczajnych  
wolna od skazy mglistej na samym obliczu,  
była noszona w matki ciele uświęconym.  
By pokolenia przyszłe modlitwą, kadzidłem  
chwałyły tę boginię mianem matki zwaną,  
której cześć daleko aż tak sięgać będzie,  
gdzie tylko okrąg świata rzymskiego dochodzi,  
by tam była klejnotem, sławą, pięknem jego.  
Na myśl więc o potomnych przyszłości się cieszą,  
Tak jasnej, i zarazem z danym urodzajem.  
W progi święte przybytku wchodzą nieprzerwanie,  
Wiekuistemu Bogu ślubują w obrzędach.  
Potomstwa pewni do ojczyzny ku Nazaret  
śpieszą. Anna poczęła Maryję przeczystą.<sup>41</sup>

### **[Anna embraced Joachim at the Golden Gate and conceived Mary]**

They arrived at the designated gate called the Golden Gate,  
each with the awareness of the fulfilment of desires.  
Anna falls immediately into her husband's embrace.  
Together they enjoy the gift of an unusual child.

<sup>41</sup> Venit ad ostensae quae dicitur aurea portae/ Introitum, voti compos veterque sui./ Mox et in amplexus ruit Anna beata mariti./ Amboque exultant prolis honore novae./ Quam fore reginam terra coeloque potentem/Norant ex misso coelitus alloquio./ Ilius et matrem fore natam, cuius ab aequo/ Inclyta maiestas exstitit, est et erit./ Qui mortale genus mortali indutus amictu/ Foedatum patriis sordibus ablueret./ Non igitur dubii titulo quin filia tanto/ Producenda modis haec foret in solitis./ Ae vigenisque ipsis concreto libera nevo,/ Matris in exulto Ventre ferenda foret./ Quin et progenies venturae hanc nomine matris/ Implorature sint prece, thure, deam./ Extensumque iri quam late extenditur orbis/ Romanus famam, stemma, decusque suum./ Exultant igitur de posteritate nepotum/ Tam clara simul et fertilitate data./ Continuoque sacri repetentes limina templi/ magno persolvunt orgia vota Deo./ Inde lares patrios certi deplorere visunt/ Nazaret ac Mariam concipit Anna piam.

From the tidings sent from heaven, they recognised that the daughter of  
 theirs will be the mother of the one whose venerability  
 has been known for centuries, continues and will continue to exist,  
 and that he, clothed in the temporal cloak of flesh  
 will cleanse the human race from the disgrace of the sins of their fathers.  
 There is no doubt that such a worthy daughter

who will accomplish things in extraordinary times  
 free from the taint of mist on the very face,  
 was carried in her mother's sanctified body.  
 So that future generations with prayer and incense  
 shall praise this goddess called mother,  
 whose reverence will go as far,  
 as the circle of the Roman world reaches,  
 so that there she would be the jewel, the fame, the beauty of him.  
 So at the thought of posterity's future they rejoice,  
 so bright, and at the same time with the bounty given.  
 They enter the holy thresholds of the tabernacle uninterrupted,  
 to the eternal God they vow in rituals.  
 Sure of offspring, to the homeland, towards Nazareth  
 they hasten. Anna conceived Mary the pure one.]



Fig. 2 Anna embraced Joachim at the Golden Gate and conceived Mary (A4r)  
<https://books.google.pl/books?id=RV0E0sFSQH0C&printsec=frontcover&hl=pl#v=onepage&q&f=false>

Looking at Dürer's engraving, one could entitle the meeting at the Golden Gate *Pietas*. It is from this word that passion-themed depictions in art – *pietas* – acquired their name. For in *pietas* one can find love, gratitude, re-

spect, tenderness and empathy. It is a variety of love perhaps most similar to that which is rendered in Greek by the word *agape*. Amid the hustle and bustle of the city, one of the characters accompanying the couple watches the embrace with evident emotion. Chelidonium adds the rest in verse. The second piece is a continuation of the apocryphal story. However, the dominant feature of the narrative is the immaculate conception. Proclaimed as dogma in the 19th century, it was widely discussed at the time the work was written.<sup>42</sup> In the *Protoevangelium of James*, which is less accessible due to its Greek notation, although it cannot be ruled out that Chelidonium knew it as well, there is a passage where the presence of a message about the immaculate conception can be presumed: “Joachimie, Joachimie, wysłuchał Pan Bóg twoją modlitwę. Zstąp stąd! Oto bowiem żona twoja Anna poczęła w swoim łonie”<sup>43</sup> [Joachim, Joachim, the Lord God has heard your prayer. Come down from here! For behold, thy wife Anna has conceived in her womb].” In the *Gospel of Pseudo-Matthew* and the *Book of the Life of Mary*, we do not find a clear advocacy “for”.<sup>44</sup> Hence, in the poem, there comes the proof of this truth, intended to be believed, by way of *sui generis* deduction: since this woman is supposed to be the mother of God, the adornment of the world, she undoubtedly originates from the sanctified body of her parent. This “proving” was perhaps helped by reading the popular *Vita rithmica beatae Virginis et Salvatoris*, where the following words are cast: “Ecce tu concipies et paries infantem/ a viro tuo, nam deus te faciet pregnantem.”<sup>45</sup> Apocryphal, miraculous themes were expanded in this 8030-verse life of Mary. It was certainly a fascinating, creator-inspired read.

**Niebiańska Maryja przychodzi na świat z długo bezpłodnych rodziców –  
Joachima i Anny**

Już księżyc gorliwy świat pochylony rozświetlił  
po raz dziewiąty. On to matki od płodu uwalnia.  
Zebrały się młode kobiety, przy położnicy przysiadły,  
zanoszą modły w niebiosa, by szczęśliwa gwiazda sprzyjała,

<sup>42</sup> Jan Fijałek, “Nasza nauka krakowska o Niepokalanym Poczęciu NP. Maryi w wiekach średnich” [Our Cracow Teaching on the Immaculate Conception of NP. Maryi in the Middle Ages], *Przegląd Polski*, vol. IV (1900): 432. Opposing recognition was, for example, Bernard of Clairvoix, see *Epistola CLXXIV Ad Canonicos Lugdunenses de conceptione S. Mariae*, vol I, 1, 38: “Conceptionis festum novum esse, Nullo niti legitimo fundamento: caeterum non fuisse in situendum in consulta sede apostolica, cui sententiam suam subjicit.”

<sup>43</sup> *Apokryfy Nowego Testamentu. Ewangelie apokryficzne*, 271.

<sup>44</sup> Paweł Rabczyński, “Święta Anna w apokryfach Nowego Testamentu” [Saint Anne in the New Testament Apocrypha], *VOX PATRUM* 79 (2021): 372. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.31743/vp.12339>.

<sup>45</sup> *Vita beate virginis Marie et Salvatoris rhythmica...*, 18 (Rev. I), v. 298–299.

życząc matce dobrego rodzenia, i by parki nic długo przędyły.  
 I wnet niezwykła córka szczęśliwym zrzędzeniem losu  
 dla nieba na świat wydana, zeszała w królestwo smutku.  
 Wtedy niebianie dziękczynne pieśni śpiewali dziecięciu  
 nowemu. Z rozgwieżdżonego nieba śpiew się rozchodził:  
 „Witaj, największa z niebian, coś z rodu jest królewskiego,  
 dziewczyno godna, by z ciebie kiedyś Bóg wziął ciało śmiertelne.  
 Ty, za sprawą której ludzie ze świata śmierci  
 przeniesieni zostaną do siedzib niebieskich. Bądź zdrowa!”  
 Nie ośmieliła się matka objąć, uściskać, gdy ssała  
 z mlekodajnej piersi słodki pokarm, bo w tej dziewczynce  
 było piękno nie ludzkie, śmiertelne, ale boski bił blask oblicza.  
 Myśli, słowa tkwiły w bezruchu tych, co piękność ową ujrzeli.  
 Wyciągnęła rączki ku matce, zakwiliła wdzięcznie ku ojcu,  
 ku obojgu tymczasem skierowała słodkie swe liczka.  
 Z godziny na godzinę rosła cnota w niebiańskim umyśle,  
 I dawała tak wielka latorośl wielką dla swoich nadzieję.<sup>46</sup>

#### [Heavenly Mary is born of long barren parents Joachim and Anna

Already the eager moon has illuminated the slanted world  
 for the ninth time. He is the one who frees mothers from foetuses.  
 Young women gathered, by the midwife squatted,  
 they cast prayers to the heavens for a lucky star to favour,  
 wishing the mother a good birth, so that the Parcae spun a long thread.  
 And soon an extraordinary daughter by a happy twist of fate  
 for heaven into the world, descended into the realm of sorrow.  
 Then the heavenly people sang songs of thanksgiving to the child.  
 From the starry sky, the singing went on:  
 “Hail, the greatest of the heavens, something of royal lineage,  
 A girl worthy that from you, God should one day take a mortal body.  
 You, through whom people from the world of death  
 will be transferred to the seats of heaven. Be well!”  
 Did not the mother dare to embrace, to hug her while she suckled  
 From the milky breast sweet food, because in this girl

<sup>46</sup> *Iam luna obliquum novies lustraverat orbem,/ Partu quae matres officiosa levat./  
 Convenere nurus, circum fusaeque iacenti,/ Optarunt matri mite puerperium/ Foetum  
 subque auras orabant sidere fausto/ Prodire et parcas capere pensa diu./ Mox nova pro-  
 genes foelicibus edita fati/ In luctus regum decidi torta polo./ Tum proli paeana novae  
 cecinere canorum/ Divi et stelligero venit ab axemelos./ Maxima caelicolum salve, morta-  
 lia de te/ Olim sumpturo digna puella Deo./ Sedibus aetheris, proavo cum filia regum/  
 Illatura homines mortis ab orbe, vale./ Sugentem dulces lactanti ab pectore succos/  
 Stringere complex non erat ausa parens./ Nunc nec mortalis decor, aut hymanus in illa,  
 Sed divines erat virgine frontis honor./ Suspensasque hominum mente satque ora tene-  
 bat/ Cernentum vultus indolis eximiae./ Brachia nunc matri, nunc parvula murmura patri/  
 Praebibat dulces nunc et utrique genas./ Coelestisque animo virtus crescebat in horas/  
 Spemque sius magnam tanta propago dabat.*

there was beauty not human, mortal, but divine radiance shone in her face.  
 Thoughts, words were stuck in the stillness of those who saw this beauty.  
 She stretched out her arms towards her mother, and whirled gratefully towards her  
 father,  
 Towards both of them, meanwhile, she turned her sweet countenance.  
 Virtue grew hour by hour in the heavenly mind,  
 And gave such great hope for her own.]



Fig. 3 Heavenly Mary is born of long barren parents Joachim and Anna (A5r)  
<https://books.google.pl/books?id=RV0E0sFSQH0C&printsec=frontcover&hl=pl#v=onepage&q&f=false>

The first part of the piece is a description of a Dürer engraving. It faithfully describes a cheerful genre scene where women, in a gesture of solidarity with the midwife, accompany her at an important moment in her life. The scene seems to be filled with bustle, the noise of conversations, the shouts of children, and the reverberation of prayers from behind the curtain separating the woman in labour. Mysteriousness or mysticism is added by a hovering angel, emerging from a cloud, although the place of the event is the interior of the house. The poet is silent about the angel, because from the sixth verse the narrative is already about the time after the happy birth. Chelidonius describes this moment with a commentary in which we can sense a *locus theologicus*: the realm of sorrow, in contrast to the heavenly homeland, seems to bring the already newborn Mary into the Paschal mystery. This is also demonstrated by the words of greeting from the heavenly beings, which foretell the girl's participation in the story of salvation, anticipating

the moment of the Annunciation. The pathos of angelic choruses from the starry sky is juxtaposed with the joyful prose of parenthood, which includes tenderness, admiration, caressing, and maternal breastfeeding. Particularly eloquent and very human is the fear of causing pain to a fragile being in its pristine beauty.

The birth of Mary was not given much space by the authors of the apocrypha. Here we can certainly exclude from the poem's inventive sources the *Protoevangelium of James*. For there appears the information about the premature birth of Anna, in the seventh month, which was supposed to be a sign of the exaltation of Mary's mother.<sup>47</sup> In the dependent accounts of the *Gospel of Pseudo-Matthew* and the *Book of the Life of Mary*, the theme of premature birth does not exist. The nine-fold "celebration" of the moon illuminating the earth and counting down the time for a pregnant woman, from a literary point of view a very successful periphrasis of the period of pregnancy, was created under the obvious influence of a similar passage in the *Parthenice*. Themoon – Luna took the place of Latonia in Chelidonius: "Et iam signiferi novies lustraverat orbem / Lucida matures solvens Latonia partus. / Conuenere nurus circumfusaeque iacenti / Mite puerperium matri dextroque rogabant / Sidere vitales foetum prodire sub auras".<sup>48</sup>

The latter of the works presented in this study, infused with the means of poetic imagery, is characterised by greater literary qualities compared to the previous two.

## Recapitulation

The edition of Albrecht Dürer's engravings *The Life of Mary* with accompanying poems by Chelidonius is one of the more valuable exhibits acquired by the Museum of the Archdiocese of Warsaw. The old book opened to the page of the Annunciation arouses the curiosity of visitors to the exhibition. The Latin text, an integral part of the work, probably remains mysterious to everyone. This is because it is in Renaissance Latin, which even at the time when Benedict Schwalbe wrote his works was understood only by a few educated humanists. Antique reminiscences, complex syntax and intertextual interlocking – all this on the one hand makes the poems attractive, and, on the other, limits their accessibility. It is also necessary to signal the perspective of the creator, the relationship of his poem to the work of Mantuan's

<sup>47</sup> Rabczyński, "Święta Anna w apokryfach Nowego Testamentu," 367.

<sup>48</sup> Mantuanus, *Parthenice prima, sive Mariana*. Ed: Caesar de Nappis. Add: *Commendatio Parthenices. Apologeticon. Ad beatam Virginem votum post febrim acerrimam*, f.c7r.

*Parthenice* in the context of Renaissance theory on *imitation* and *aemulatio*.<sup>49</sup> It is possible that the form of the poems was also influenced by a reading of the popular *Vita beate virginis Mariae et Salvatoris rithmica*. Clear inspirations, as far as the first of the texts is concerned, although excluding literal quotations, result in non-obvious lexical combinations and complex syntax, which poses a certain challenge for the translator, especially if the latter wants to convey style and not just content. An attempt is made in this sketch to render the text “*verbis ad nostrum consuetudinem aptis, in quibus non verbum pro verbo necesse habui reddere, sed genus omne verborum vim que servavi. Non enim ea me adnumerare lectori putavi oportere, sed tamquam appendere.*”<sup>50</sup> These words of Cicero, cited in the first person, should be taken here as the wish of the author of the translations presented in this study. It is possible to juxtapose Arpinata’s reflection with the contemporary opinion of Czesław Miłosz to indicate the ongoing dialogue with the tradition regarding the art of translation: “*Lepiej jest zastąpić potężną lampę skromną świecą, niż lampą, która wygląda zupełnie tak samo, tylko nie świeci*”<sup>51</sup> [It is better to replace a powerful lamp with a modest candle, than with a lamp that looks quite the same, only it does not shine]. The translation of the three poems included in the sketch is not literal, but the work was guided by the pursuit of fidelity to the message. Care was taken to ensure that Chelidonium “speaking” in Polish would trigger the auditory imagination of the virtual viewer. This is because a Latin poem is a metrically ordered elegiac distich, which results in a specific phonetic quality when vocalised. In the translation, the versification system took the form of a tonic poem, characterised by metrical consistency, but leaving freedom in word choice. Apocryphal themes and theological issues outlined in the poems required explanations, so the poems were provided with the necessary comments for reading.

As in the Renaissance edition, Albrecht Dürer’s engravings, whose availability in print along with Chelidonium’s poems is a representative example not only of the importance attached to the aesthetics of early books, but also of the value of the coexistence of word and image complementing each other, were considered important and attractive in this article. Chelidonium’s po-

<sup>49</sup> Agnieszka Fulińska, “Renesansowa aemulatio: alegacja czy intertekstualność?” [Renaissance Aemulatio: Allegation or Intertextuality?], *Teksty Drugie* 4 (1997): 5–15; Michał Głowiński, “O intertekstualności” [On Intertextuality], *Pamiętnik Literacki*, no. 4 (1986): 90–91.

<sup>50</sup> Marcus Tullius Cicero, *De inventione. De optimo genere oratorum. Topica* (London: Harvard University Press, 1949), 364.

<sup>51</sup> Czesław Miłosz, “O przekładach” [On Translations], in *Pisarze polscy o sztuce przekładu 1440–2005. Antologia* [Polish Writers on the Art of Translation 1440–2005. Anthology], eds. Edward Balcerzan, and Ewa Rajewska (Poznań: Wydawnictwo Poznańskie, 2007), 201.

ems about Mary, written in humanistic Latin, most likely helped sell Dürer's paintings, and his fame must have fostered the reception of Chelidonius. This article may encourage further readings of Chelidonius's work, as well as the study of the intersemiotic dimension of texts of the Renaissance era.

*Translated by Anna Wyleżątek and David Lilley*

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## **Wiersze Benedykta Schwalbego (ok. 1460–1521) o zwiastowaniu Annie i Joachimowi, Niepokalanym Poczęciu oraz narodzeniu Maryi. Przekład i eksplikacja**

**Abstrakt:** W niniejszym studium zaprezentowano przekład na język polski trzech utworów renesansowego mnicha Benedykta Schwalbego ze zbioru *Epitome in divae parthenices Mariae historiam*. Przybliżono także postać – dziś zapomnianego – twórcy doby renesansu. Zwrócono uwagę na fakt, że renesansowe edycje cieszyły się popularnością także w Polsce, a utwory

Chelidoniusa były wydawane w krakowskich oficynach. Apokryficzne wątki, zarysowane w wierszach, oraz kwestie teologiczne wymagały objaśnień, dlatego też wiersze zostały opatrzone niezbędnymi do lektury komentarzami. Poezje i grafiki odzwierciedlają współczesną twórcom katolicką wersję historii Maryi, która zyskała uznanie katolików podczas soboru trydenckiego.

Jak w renesansowej edycji, tak w prezentowanym artykule za ważne i atrakcyjne zostały uznane ryciny Albrechta Dürera. Udostępnienie obrazów wraz z wierszami Chelidoniusa do wodzi intersemiotycznego wymiaru druków doby renesansu.

**Słowa kluczowe:** Benedykt Schwalbe (Chelidonius), Albrecht Dürer, poezja renesansowa, życie Marii, drzeworyt.

## **Gedichte von Benedikt Schwalbe (um 1460–1521) über die Verkündigung an Anna und Joachim, die Unbefleckte Empfängnis und die Geburt Mariens. Übersetzung und Erläuterung**

**Abstract:** Diese Studie präsentiert eine polnische Übersetzung dreier Werke des Renaissance-Mönchs Benedykt Schwalbe aus der Sammlung *Epitome in divae parthenices Mariae historiam*. Die Figur des heute vergessenen Autors der Renaissance wird vorgestellt. Es wird darauf hingewiesen, dass Renaissance-Editionen auch in Polen beliebt waren und dass Chelidonius' Werke, die einer Serie von Passionsstichen des Nürnberger Kupferstechers beigelegt waren, in Krakauer Verlagen veröffentlicht wurden. Apokryphe Themen, die in den Gedichten behandelt werden, und theologische Fragen bedurften der Erläuterung, weshalb die Gedichte mit den notwendigen Kommentaren zum Lesen versehen wurden. Die Gedichte und Kupferstiche spiegeln die zeitgenössische katholische Version der Geschichte Marias wider, die auf dem Konzil von Trient unter den Katholiken Anerkennung fand.

Wie in der Renaissance-Ausgabe werden auch im vorliegenden Artikel die Stiche von Albrecht Dürer als wichtig und anziehend angesehen. Die Veröffentlichung der Gemälde zusammen mit Chelidonius' Gedichten zeigt die intersemiotische Dimension der Drucke der Renaissancezeit.

**Schlüsselwörter:** Benedikt Schwalbe (Chelidonius), Albrecht Dürer, Renaissancedichtung, Marienleben, Holzschnitt.



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## The Near-the-Knuckle Verse of Árpád Lőwy in English Translation

**Abstract:** This article concerns the author's personal and professional experiences with translating Árpád Lőwy's works into English. It carefully reconstructs the biographical and historical circumstances of the translator's interest in Lőwy's poetry, and discusses dilemmas inspired by the idiosyncrasies of the poems themselves, whose poignant, ambiguous, and nearly pornographic idiom might be initially seen as untranslatable. Moreover, the text includes some of the challenges implicit in translating Lőwy's works.

**Keywords:** László Réthy, Árpád Lőwy, poetry translation, pornography, Academy of Sciences, Gita Horváth, poignancy, innuendo, anatomy, folksong.

László Réthy (1851–1914) was a learned member of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences and curator of the Hungarian National Museum's numismatic collection. He was an ethnographer, archaeologist and towards the end of his life a contributor, out of 877 editorial staff, to the great early twentieth-century Hungarian equivalent of Encyclopaedia Britannica, the *Révai nagy lexikona* (1911–1935).

But under the pseudonym Árpád Lőwy he was the creator of wicked verses raging from the downright tasteless to the deliciously earthy. Depending upon the stance of the reader, they remain today open to accusations of pornographic, obscene content; some (though fewer) attain a purer eroticism. Perhaps it is befitting that among those attending the launch in

Budapest of *Permissive Piggery*, the present writer's volume of English translations of the selected verse of Lőwy, was a retired Hungarian professor of English and one-time Minister of Education, accepting the invitation because "I love smutty poems!"<sup>1</sup> The launch mainly comprised readings of selected items, first in the original Hungarian by another, much-published faculty member of Budapest's ELTE University and then in English by the translator – another academic, this time of Pécs University as well as performing folk singer. If you don't like smut, then Lőwy is not for you. But then probably neither is Shakespeare, and although Lőwy doesn't aspire to the dizzy heights of Shakespearean literature, Shakespeare does sink to the depths, as is periodically witnessed as the Bard is banned and bowdlerised.

When I am not translating or writing, I am a performer of folk songs. As I approach my seventieth year, I remember my student years spent mostly in the folk clubs in and around Exeter, the university and cathedral county seat of Devon. The Jolly Porter was particularly well attended at a time when the folksong club movement was at its most vibrant. Its resident singers included a four-piece male vocal group, Isca Fayre, whose repertoire included a song by the title *Both Sexes*.<sup>2</sup> The final lines of Verse 6 run "So Man with his wife is united, Yet man is the top of the tree," sung derisively but in the best of humour by the many representatives of the Fair Sex present. The song can be found among the manuscripts of the Victorian country parson and polymath Sabine Baring-Gould, later published in 1905 as *Songs of the West*. But it appears far earlier, in the American *The Echo; or Columbian Songster*, published in 1800. The song is about how God creates Eve for Adam out of his rib:

Old Adam was cast into slumber,  
A rib taken out of his side,  
And when he awoke, he with wonder  
Beheld a most beautiful bride;

With transport he gazed upon her,  
His happiness now was complete,  
He prais'd the most bountiful donor,  
Who thus had provided a mate.

She was not taken out of his head,  
To rule and triumph over man,  
Nor was taken out of heel;  
To be rul'd and trampled upon:

<sup>1</sup> It would be tasteless of me to identify the gentleman!

<sup>2</sup> Isca Fayre, *Then around Me Young and Old* Candle Records, CAN 761, 1976. Vinyl. Track 6. The song is 728 in the Roud Index: <https://archives.vwml.org/songs/RoudFS/S500295>.

But she was taken out of his side,  
 His equal companion to be,  
 And this they both were united  
 And man is the top of the tree.<sup>3</sup>

The equality of the sexes is seemingly achieved until “man” is, after all, placed above woman at the top of the tree. If in the 1800 printed version “man” may be seen to mean “species”, rather than “gender”, by the time the song was sung in the 1970s folk club, it is certain from the lusty voices raised with some frequency in this popular, oft-performed song that it is the gender meaning that has survived. In today’s age of political and social correctness, the song may not find favour. Yet it displays at heart an almost reverential attitude toward Woman quite at odds with that of Original Sin. The same reverence toward Woman can be found throughout the poetic genre of Lówy, albeit skewed – after all, this is essentially pornographic literature. It is not, however, the kind of tasteless and entirely chauvinistic writing to be found in the explicit later Victorian series, more or less coeval with the works of Lówy, *The Pearl: A Magazine of Facetiae and Voluptuous Reading*, published in eighteen issues between July 1879 and December 1880 at a deliberately prohibitive price (£25) and small run (150 copies). By comparison, Lówy’s verse was read out to select friends in a fairly close circle:

Réthy chose his dearest friends from a circle of mainly social scientists, artists and influential politicians, the most distinguished of the intellectual elite, who were regular visitors to *Büzértanya*<sup>4</sup>, the home of Lajos Thallóczy in Vienna. Lówy’s poems were mostly composed for and performed in front of the often boisterous murmurings he organised here.<sup>5</sup>

In an email to the present author, the scholar and actor Ferenc Takács refers to the frequenters of *Büzértanya* as “the semi-clandestine Büzér (“Stinker”) Circle, Lówy’s farto-masonic sect.”<sup>6</sup> The entry for Lajos Thallóczy in Veritas, the website of the Hungarian Institute and Archives for Historical Research, has to say of the *Büzértanya* that it was something of a sanctuary as well as a weekly club for professional Hungarian males (their host was a bachelor) living apart from their loved ones for longer or shorter periods. Members, who had to pay their dues, were exclusively drawn from the ranks

<sup>3</sup> *The echo; or, Columbian songster: Being a large collection of the most celebrated, modern poetical writings, of different authors* Brookfield (Massachusetts), Merriam, E. 1800. SONG XXXVIII, 43–44, <https://archive.org/details/echoorcolumbians00merr/page/42/mode/2up>.

<sup>4</sup> Stinkers’ Cottage!

<sup>5</sup> Császtvay, Tünde, “A pornográf Lówy,” in 2000: Irodalmi és Társadalmi havi lap. 2006, július-augusztus. No page numbers, <https://ketezer.hu/2013/10/2006-julius-augusztus/>. My translation.

<sup>6</sup> Takács Ferenc, Email text, of May 25, 2024.

of his close friends and confidantes. Here they were given licence, or encouraged, to let their hair down: typically, behaviour was rowdy, language more than colourful, all accompanied by audible farts, ostensibly as an aid to digestion. It was here that Lówy found an audience: his audiences lapped up his obscene and erotic poems, read by the poet himself.<sup>7</sup>

László Réthy is described in *Constructing Race on the Borders of Europe*<sup>8</sup> as an “ethnographer and poet”. Although his pseudonym is given here, the nature of his poetic output is not referred to, but only that he was editor of the journal *Ethnographia* (1890–1922).

### László Réthy, the Man

The story goes that a special meeting was held by the Academy members, specifically to discuss how to silence the unknown author of the salacious verse. The loudest, most indignant of the voices was that of none other than László Réthy. This almost certainly apocryphal story – given that, unlike the graffiti artist Banksy, it is quite clear that a significant if privileged number of the initiated knew exactly that the ethnographer and all-round (if flawed) polyhistor and the versifier were one and the same person. They could hardly be unaware, given his entertaining live readings at the *Büzértanya* and elsewhere. That said, today awareness of the poetic output of Lówy remains confined to aficionados, many of whom will be unaware of the other side of the coin: the academic, gloriously living at a moment in history preceding the necessity of meticulously citing, supporting or destroying the findings of one’s predecessors.

However, few if any would have been aware of the fact that the man was a manic depressive. Császtvay writes,

His life was full of sadness: after a brief marriage his wife fell ill, and they could hardly live together for ten years. He was afflicted with material problems throughout his life. His little boy died in his arms at the age of eighteen months. In his final years, as transpires in a letter to a close friend, he struggled with bouts of manic depression and persecution mania.<sup>9</sup>

<sup>7</sup> Précised from the Hungarian original, see Judit Hammerstein, “Egy külön történéssz, Thallóczy Lajos vázlatos portréja” [An unusual historian: a thumbnail portrait of Lajos Thalloczy], *VERITAS Történetkutató Intézet és Levéltár*, <https://veritasintezet.hu/hu/mindennapi-tortenelem/7569-egy-kulonc-tortenesz-thalloczy-lajos-vazlatos-portreja>.

<sup>8</sup> *Constructing Race on the Borders of Europe*, eds. Marsha Morton, and Barbara Larson (London, Bloomsbury, 2021), 155.

<sup>9</sup> Császtvay, “A pornográf Lówy.”

The lengthy letter in question, now preserved among the National Széchenyi Library's manuscripts, was to Dr Hampel József, curator of the Hungarian National Museum's Collection of Medals and Antiquities (1909-1911), a post which he himself had held. In it, he describes his condition graphically:

I am sick, and have been for two whole years... I suffer from depression and persecution mania, a condition that gets worse day by day. A damned maggot worms into my brain and I am racked with terrible pain. Fate has dealt oversensitivity and delusions that I have no strength to combat. Images flicker wildly before my eyes, bright, fiery, dark and terrible, fast as a cinematograph, and these images keep moving even in my dreams, hardly allowing me any rest. I spend sleepless nights on my bed, my brain is forever invaded with the thought that once, long ago, when I was young and inexperienced, I committed a formal error as I stepped into the Museum, for which I had to and continue to suffer. And in my imagination the weight of this error grew to such a degree that it became a mountain that I cannot shift from its place.<sup>10</sup>

Like many another man gifted with the ability to amuse others, in this case under the guise of a pseudonym, Réthy/Lówy the academic/versifier himself suffered from sad disorders that prevented him from lightening his own life burden.

### On Lówy's Works

Few that now enjoy the near-the-knuckle verses of Lówy will be aware of the tragic life of their maker, and there has always been a strong argument that separates the person and the artist. I myself recollect being reprimanded as a student for trying to gain cheap points by referring to A.E. Housman as Alfred Edward, my tutor telling me that had the poet wished for his entire name to be known, he would have published as such. In brief, that I had no right to invade his personal space by using names properly given him by his parents but not shared by the poet with his readership. So let us cast aside the mental maladies of the man and concentrate upon the poems themselves and then the task of translating them.

It is typical of many an art form that has an obvious message that there is another, concealed except for the initiated. In the dramatic arts, this can be witnessed (or not!) across the centuries: the slapstick of the miracle plays domesticized the Christian message just as effective as modern subliminal advertising; Shakespeare enjoyed full houses throughout his career: an estimated "between fifteen and twenty per cent of Londoners regularly went to the theatre in Shakespeare's time. Some went frequently – once, twice, even

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<sup>10</sup> Cited in Császtvay, "A pornográf Lówy," my translation.

oftener, each week.”<sup>11</sup> To sustain this popularity, the part of Shakespeare’s oeuvre that today is studied by academics would have had to be supplemented by “pure” entertainment to be enjoyed by the wider public. (Which is not to say that academics have been lacking in appreciation of the slapstick and even bawdier aspects of Renaissance stage entertainment. It was the humourless puritans (note the small “p”!) who, then just as now, would have attempted to prevent plays from being staged. Shakespeare enjoyed the royal patronage of both Elizabeth I and James I. The Puritans (note big “P”) would eventually succeed in briefly banning the theatre altogether, and ever since there have been periods and places that have banned, bowdlerised, truncated and tut-tutted his works. Even now, a quarter of the way through the twenty-first century, when in the same breath one vociferates about the right to free expression but denies women the right to manage their own bodies, we are living in a time of political correctness – the accuracy of the commonly accepted adjective is debatable, but PC has entered the common tongue – when the decision to sing a ribald song or, in this case, to publish an article in an academic journal about a long-dead author of what to some is considered pornographic poetry, complete with translated examples, cannot be taken lightly.

To return briefly to the Bard, Steven Spielberg, the Shakespeare of the film world, has been just as creative in providing entertainments that appeal to several levels, including the bawdy. I remember a past colleague and dear friend, the late Steve Starkey, who pioneered the teaching of film studies in a Hungarian university English department, pointing out that in an early Batman film the eponymous hero encountered and overcame his villain through each of the four Elizabethan elements of earth, air, fire and water. Unless you attended a film course (or regularly spent beer evenings with Steve) you would never know that this superhero, under the guiding hand of a master producer, took the genre way past its limits as an early comic strip. When Hungarian TV secured the rights to showing the Monty Python series, it was considered necessary to precede each episode with a short explanatory introduction. Sadly, these very much played down the anti-establishment political import of the series, preferring to emphasize the British tradition of radio and televised absurd humour.

All this is rather a circuitous route to saying that the poetry of Lówy, whilst seen to many of his fans as no more than enjoyable “smut”, also has running through it a thread of serious comment that transcends the pornographic content. And while some of the items are no more than bravura in the rhymester’s art, short-lived poetic ephemera, other pieces have stood the test of time not only on the ribald level, but at deeper strata.

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<sup>11</sup> Samuel Holroyd Burton, *Shakespeare’s Life and Stage* (Edinburgh, Chambers 1989), 191.

To date, *Permissive Piggery* has been aired twice to Hungarians, once in the southern university city of Pécs and once in the capital, Budapest. On each occasion the translator was joined by a Hungarian academic, and the items chosen to be read in the original and the translation were selected on the basis of both “cleverness” and enduring social relevance and even poignancy. The event took place over sixty minutes, divided into the readings themselves and some introductory remarks. The time constraint for an oral reading will be adequate when deciding upon which items to accompany the present text with. Certain of my favourites, I fear, lose their power outside the bilingual Hungarian-English context. Such a one is “A Hunnish Girl in Riga – on the Occasion of my Journey to Russia”, the story of how a pretty Hungarian chambermaid works her way through a host of towns (43 in total) in Greater Hungary, many of which have to be supplied with English rhymes until:

Thence overland  
 To Cracow, whence a year ago  
 To Riga she'd been called to go.  
 “This tale has seen nor pen nor ink,  
 It all was written on her chink.”

At which the strict meter is broken up with a postscript:

Should I read this verse in female company, the last couplet is modified as follows:  
 No tall tale this, It all was writ  
 Within the maiden's service permit.

(On hearing this version, a celebrated actress blurted out,  
 “That's some permit she must have had?!”)

The construction is typical of several of the poems, in which the main bulk is free of anything more than innuendo. Here only at the very end does the sole direct reference to the female anatomy (“chink”) hit the audience who, initiated as they often were, would have been waiting for the “dirty language” to turn up throughout.

## Translating Lówy

I fully confess that, like many another translator, I have taken no exam and no certificate adorns my wall. Instead, I have several shelves of books that bear my hand, among them a wealth of children's literature, modern dramas, art and social history books, a couple of film subtitles and *werk*, a recording of my English translation of Hungarian songs, and even a letter from the Vatican praising my translation of a play featuring the Chief Rabbi and Pope of Rome at the time of the Second World War. When approached

by the academic staff of the Hungarian National Museum, they know that I am likely to accept an entire book if there are a few lines of verse included. *The Square Around Forest*, a delightful book for children by the Hungarian author Lázár Ervin, demanded the invention of non-existent English words that mirrored the non-existent Hungarian words of the original. And even after four decades away from England, I always have a book of Telegraph cryptic crosswords on the loo. As I have always been fortunate in having a full-time university job, I have managed to avoid translating purely for income: my golden rule is only to accept translation work that I would enjoy reading if I were not the translator. Luckily, this includes restaurant menus (which cost the client a slap-up meal!), wine lists and viticultural news (which occasionally reward with a Christmas hamper) and festival itineraries (which make it unnecessary to go to the festival itself!). My friend Tamás Pintér says that translating literature and art is a good way to die poor young. Luckily, these are areas which the translator-bot will be proficient at last of all.

In the particular case of Lőwy, the previous paragraph in itself gives away the fact that I am not averse to a bit of near-the-knuckle, knockabout humour. Otherwise I would be unable to approach the man at all. I have a similar taste in my folk-singing repertoire, and suspect that some of the songs which I brought with me to Hungary in the late 1970s, then popular in British folk clubs, have now faded away from the home repertoire. I make no excuses – or there would be no use in sharing the poet at all.

However, it is vital when translating his work to operate at a variety of levels. Forgetting the smut, first of all Lőwy was a poet of his time, with strict rhyme and meter. If the translations are to be successful, they have to observe this, especially as his genre would inevitably sink into tired anatomical references should we go along the (also accepted) route of literal rather than literary translation. And so, of course, a Lőwy translation is *not* literal/mirror, as it is the piece as a whole that has to be conveyed. However, due to the nature of his works, the punctuated peaks of his poems must also contain a similar weighting: pee is not the same as piss, poo is not equal to crap, a cunt is not a chink, and so on.

Lőwy is poignant: how could he not be, and such spiritual pain? But his poetry follows the path of much humour – when a subject is too tragic to be a tragedy, make it a joke. In “Juvenile Scientists”, Lőwy contrasts youth with age, deriding the former until ruining the fact that with wisdom comes impotence. He is political: when I discovered his poem “Protekción”, I could only laugh, as this was one of the earliest words I had learnt in Hungarian, almost a century later. Lőwy entertained in the Viennese home of Lajos Thallóczy, a major player in the Dual Monarchy who had the ear of Emperor Franz Jo-

séph (he died in a railway accident returning from the emperor's funeral). His piece, "Material Cycle", relates the complex metamorphosis of a tramp's defaecation over a hedge into the centrepiece of a Habsburg meal. An only partly successful translator's bravura can be found at the end of the poem, as a rhyme and scansion have to be found for the dynasty. It would have been simpler to omit the Lotharing part, but the ungainly solution is, I believe, in itself worthy of Lőwyesque humour, especially as it provides the opportunity for some "g" alliterations. And that's always satisfying for the translator when handed on a platter!

And the beef which lately grazed with glee  
Entered the Habsburg-Lotharing dynasty.  
Tomorrow it metamorphs anew,  
Its complex passage but a poo.

At the same time, it is best that the translator is familiar with the period in dual-monarchy history. It was not all that long since the 1848-49 bid for independence had been crushed, and even the youngest among the frequenters of Thallóczy's private, all-male Viennese soirées at the celebrated *büzértanya*.

### About the Editor of the 1989 Edition

There are various people to whom I must acknowledge thanks for introducing me to Lőwy's poetry. First of all there is the young lady, a student of mine who a quarter of a century ago took pity upon me as I laboured over my PhD and decided to give me a copy of the 1989 edition of his selected poetic works, *Disznólkodni szabad*. Off and on, I tried out translating the poems in no particular order and with to particular end. Gradually, the completed items mounted up and by the time retirement and COVID arrived, almost the entire volume was complete. It seemed a shame not to take on the remaining few. It gradually became logical to take on private publication of the pieces. But what format? And did I need permission from the editor? And who was the editor? And what had become of the publisher, Orient könyvek?

Being in the lucky situation of having a savvy son, we discovered that the publishing house had basically entered and left existence with the Lőwy book, but that the editor and the illustrator were one and the same person, the lovely Gita Horváth, herself a talented writer who after a brief period in the limelight had essentially suffered a decades-long silence as first the socialist and then the new regime made life impossible. That notwithstanding, Gita *néni*, who shares her little apartment with a small dog in the Castle District of Budapest, is a lady of radiant disposition and in her mid-eighties still

a very attractive woman. Her “Poppy” series of tastefully courting and copulating flowers she distinguishes sharply from her pencil drawings for the Lówy volume, as bawdy as the texts themselves. With characteristic selflessness Gita gave permission to the present translator to use exactly the same illustrations for the English volume as for the original 1989 Hungarian selection. I cannot thank her enough. The English volume contains all of the poems included in the 1989 edition. However, at Gita Horváth’s request, it does not contain various little introductions to the poems, which she admitted were her own and not the poet’s. In one other respect the two volumes differ. I could not resist writing my own introductory piece of Lówyesque. And so I include it here for the reader’s delectation:<sup>12</sup>

#### TRANSLATOR’S DEDICATION

This is my personal acknowledgment  
 To anyone who’s moved by pussy’s scent  
 Or gets a spurious – or a serious – trip  
 From blowing, farting, or plain letting rip.  
 My English version’s humbly dedicated  
 To anyone who’s ever masturbated  
 Or otherwise ejaculated,  
 Put differently, I give my heartfelt thanks  
 To anyone who screws, or sucks, or wanks,  
 My dears! Peruse the pages of this book -  
 What better way to generate a f.....?

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<sup>12</sup> I am deeply grateful to the Hungarian scholar Gyöző Ferencz, who for the fee of a complimentary copy took on the task of translating my Dedication for use at the Pécs and Budapest book launches.

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## Wersy Árpáda Lówy'ego na granicy nieprzyzwoitości w tłumaczeniu na język angielski

**Abstrakt:** Niniejszy tekst poświęcony jest osobistym i zawodowym doświadczeniom Andrew C. Rouse'a związanym z tłumaczeniem dzieł Árpáda Lówy'ego na język angielski. Rouse starannie rekonstruuje biograficzne i historyczne okoliczności zainteresowania poezją Lówy'ego i omawia dylematy inspirowane idiosynkrazją samych wierszy, których przejmujący, niejednoznaczny i niemal pornograficzny język może być początkowo postrzegany jako nieprzetłumaczalny. Ponadto tekst zawiera wstępną eksplorację niektórych wyzwań związanych z tłumaczeniem dzieł Lówy'ego.

**Słowa kluczowe:** Réthy, Lówy, przekład poezji, pornografia, Akademia Nauk, Gita Horváth, powaga, insynuacja, anatomia, piosenka ludowa.

## Grenzwertige Verse von Árpád Lówy in der englischen Übersetzung

**Abstract:** Dieser Text ist den persönlichen und beruflichen Erfahrungen von Andrew C. Rouse bei der Übersetzung von Árpád Lówys Werken ins Englische gewidmet. Rouse rekonstruiert sorgfältig die biografischen und historischen Umstände des Interesses des Übersetzers an Lówys Lyrik und erörtert die Dilemmata, die sich aus der Idiosynkrasie der Gedichte selbst ergeben, deren ergreifende, mehrdeutige und fast pornografische Sprache zunächst als unübersetzbar erscheinen mag. Darüber hinaus erörtert der Text einige der Herausforderungen, die mit der Übersetzung Lówys Werke verbunden sind.

**Schlüsselwörter:** Réthy, Lówy, Gedichtübersetzung, Pornographie, Akademie der Wissenschaften, Gita Horváth, Seriösität, Andeutung, Anatomie, Volkslied.





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## Árpád Lőwy's *Permissive Piggery (Disznólkodni szabad)* Translated by Andrew C. ROUSE

**Abstract:** The appendix includes a selection of poems by László Réthy, who published his works under a penname Árpád Lőwy. These texts complete Andrew C. Rouse's presentation of Réthy's/ Lőwy's poetics published in this volume. Andrew C. Rouse is also a translator of these poems.

**Keywords:** László Réthy, Árpád Lőwy, poetry translation, pornography.

### BY THE ATLANTIC OCEAN<sup>1</sup>

Late one Lisbon afternoon in May  
Walking down by the great Tajo Bay  
Slowly the town disappeared - and the craft  
Like bobbing seagulls waited for the dark,  
Their tired sails wound around the boom,  
Wander into the calm port in the gloom.

What ambience! The dusk, the scene, and I  
Rushing to reach the sea - I have to hurry  
That ere the sun sinks below its watery grave

### AZ ATLANTI ÓCEÁNNÁL<sup>2</sup>

Lisszabonban május egy délutánján  
A Tajo nagy öblénél járdogálván  
Lassanként eltűnt a város. - És a bárkák,  
Mint kicsiny sirályok, az alkonyt várják,  
Hogy fáradt vitorlájukat bevonva  
A révbe térjenek be nyugalomba.

Bájos a kép. Alkonyi hangulat s én  
Sietek tengert érni, - igyekeztvén,  
Hogy mire a nap hullámsírba térne,

<sup>1</sup> Árpád Lőwy, *Permissive Piggery*, trans. Andrew C. Rouse (Spechel Egyesület, 2022).

<sup>2</sup> Árpád Lőwy, *Disznólkodni szabad*, [https://grin.hu/mindburp/selyempa-pir/dtp.atomki.hu/\\_ecsed/Lowy/Lowy-1.html#01](https://grin.hu/mindburp/selyempa-pir/dtp.atomki.hu/_ecsed/Lowy/Lowy-1.html#01).

I may wish it farewell by the ocean wave.  
At once - behold! - I reach the ocean's edge,  
And see the sky dye purple from my ledge.

The sun has sunk midway below the waves  
The surface all bestitched with its rays  
And I, above the deep, on my cliff's rim  
Feast my eyes to take the sea's beauty in.  
"Wonderful Europe!" I cry out in my bliss  
And, aiming at the ocean, take my piss.

## PROTECTION

Oh, blessed be our Hungarian homeland!  
Where bounty's cast about with either hand  
No-one asks whether you're Jew, Slav or Hun  
So long as you've a little protect-i-on.

Idiotic ox, or blockhead youth  
Should you wish, you can enter the Ministry of Truth  
Receive a title, rank, great wealth and station  
- Of course, if you've got the right protection.

You want to be a scholar? to represent the nation?  
Steward, shopkeeper, clerk or policeman?  
No questions asked of where you stand in the queue -  
Your protector will take care of that for you.

But there's a place, my boy, where no protection  
Can help - if you can't reach erection,  
If your rod can't raise itself on high  
You can go and kiss your protective ass goodbye.

- note:

Reform society? Why the cry of anger?  
A thing far better to re-form your dangler!

## DUEL - AMERICAN-STYLE

*Comment:*

*the poem is a prime example of, that there is  
no limit to Lőwy (in)utterance*

Two dandies on a damsel doted  
Pretty, wealthy, oh, but proud

"Twas thus her answer dilly-dallied  
- So that these rivals roared aloud

Let fate decide between us, at thee!  
You take the white, the black will I

And so it happened, and the news  
Took wing, and everywhere did fly

The sweet cashier girl, lovely Nina  
Stared unbelieving, goggle-eyed

And asked the one, "What does this mean,  
To pull the black one or the white?"

Búcsúzzam tőle jókor odaérve.  
Egyszerre csak - ím! - a tengernél valék,  
Narancspiros és bíbor-lila az ég.

A nap már félig lebukva a vízbe.  
A víztükör sugárszállal beszegve.  
Én a mélység felett, egy szikla peremén,  
Szemem legeltetem a tenger szépségén.  
S "Élj csodás Európa!" - így kiáltva,  
Belepeselek a nagy Óceánba.

## PROTEKCIÓ

Áldott egy kis ország ez a Magyarország.  
Minden, ami jó van, itt két kézzel osztják.  
Nem nézik, hogy mi vagy, magyar, zsidó vagy tót,  
Boldogulsz, hogyha van egy kis protekciód.

Légy bármi nagy ökör, tökkelütött lamasz,  
Kapsz hivatalt, olyat, amilyet csak akarsz.  
Címet, ordót, rangot, s zsebvégánivalót,  
Persze akkor, ha van hozzá protekciód.

Tudós akarsz lenni? Vagy tán képviselő?  
Főispán, trafikos, pandúr vagy közjegyző?  
Nem kérdik, mit tudsz, mit nem - nem nézik sorod,  
Eligázit mindent itt a protektorod.

Csak egy hely van, ahol a szép szó nem használ:  
Hogyha baszni akarsz és faszod nem áll.  
Ha nem tudja farkad, hol a direkció,  
Szart sem ér ottan már a jó protekció.

- megjegyzés:

*ki kéne végre valamit találni!  
tán a farkat kéne megreformálni!*

## AMERIKAI PÁRBAJ

*Megjegyzés:*

*a vers ékes példája annak, hogy nincs határa  
Lőwy szóki(nem)mondásának*

Két gavallér egy nőt imádott,  
Ki szép volt, gazdag és hiú,

Választása hát késve késett.  
- Így szólt a két elszánt fiú:

A sors döntsön most köztünk: rajta!  
Húzzunk fehérret-feketét!

Úgy is történt, s a párbaaj híre  
Szárnyra kelt, terjedt szerte-szét.

Kasszírkiasszony, szép Ninuska,  
Nagyra nyitotta szemét,

Egy úrtól kérdi meg, hogy "Mi az?  
Húzni fehérret-feketét?"

"The one who pulls the white will win,  
The other stays left on the shelf

One Jack may clasp his Jill-to-be  
- the other can jack off himself.

### JUBILEE

Her ladyship being sixty today  
The dignitaries will hold a ball  
To demonstrate their great affection  
And how she's conquered each and all.

There'll be a toast, speeches and verses read  
And other vanities expounded,  
How with knowledge, and with tact  
And depth of wisdom she's surrounded.

I'm not going. I refuse to pay  
That much for a supper, to be blunt  
For that much, instead of licking ass  
I can eat some really classy cunt.

### MEDICHORALE

1<sup>st</sup> farce

Oh, how unhappy is the mother  
Whose son becomes a poor bootmaker  
She'll never know what time of day  
When to the paste-bowl he'll fall prey.

2<sup>nd</sup> farce

Oh, how unhappy is the mother  
Whose son should take the trade of doctor.  
For day and night he has to pass his  
Fingers up old dragons' asses.

3<sup>rd</sup> farce

Gathering up his saw and scissors  
He has to slice up guts and livers  
Sewing up the slits and fissures  
He doesn't always count his tweezers.

4<sup>th</sup> farce

Limping limp-penissed in the dark,  
He weary drags his piece of pork.  
Ho! Here a winning, waiting wife  
Brings back his abject jack to life.

Moral:

We know our life has well been spent  
If we can raise our instrument.  
When mare can stretch the stallion's girth  
There is no lovelier sight on earth!

### OLD CLOCKS IN THE MUSEUM

A clock on the shelf that ticked its last  
At the turn of the century, covered in dust,  
Its hands forever at twelve o'clock,  
The chime of death, the end... stopped.

Hogy, ki fehérét húz, - az a győztes,  
S menyasszonyát öleli át,

Ki feketét húz, az a vesztes,  
És meglövi - saját magát...

### JUBILEUM

Öméltósága hatvan éves,  
S a tisztviselők estélyt adnak,  
Tüntető kifejezéséül  
A szeretetnek és hódoltnak.

Lesz tószit, album, alkalmi vers - s más  
Egyéb, ami hűn feltünteteti,  
Hogy tudása és tapintata,  
S bölcsessége mily sok neki.

Én nem megyek. - Egy vacsoráért  
Nyolc forintot én most nem adok;  
Hisz ennyi pénzért én nem segget,  
Hanem piccsát is nyalhatok...

### KARDAL A DOKTOROKRÓL

1-ső struflí

Boldogtalan az az anya,  
Kinek fia csizmadia.  
Mert nem tudja, mely órába  
Esik a csirízes tálba.

2-ik struflí

Boldogtalan az az anya,  
Kinek doktor lett a fia.  
Mert az éjjel-nappal járkál  
Vénasszony seggibe vájkáál.

3-ik struflí

Hast metsz sokszor nagy sietve,  
Fűrészt s ollót összeszedve.  
Csípeszt rak be harminckettőt,  
S bent hagy néha egyet-kettőt.

4-ik struflí

S este, mint a kutya fasza,  
Fáradtan botorkál haza.  
Ám, ha otthon várja nője,  
Menten feláll lankadt löcse.

Morál:

Az életben nagy momentum,  
Ha a fark jó instrumentum  
Csődört, ha a kanca állja,  
Nincs annál szebb földi pálya.

### ÖREG ÓRÁK A MÚZEUMBAN

Egy öreg óra a polc tetején,  
Megrokkant a múlt század elején:  
Mutatója tizenkettőn megállt,  
Ez jelenti a véget, a halált.

Our cocks are clocks too. As they grow  
They tell us the time and watch it go,  
Ticking for half of our life, till our pricks  
Chime at twelve, but strike at six.

### MATERIAL CYCLE

A journeyman in the noonday heat,  
Stopped by to beg a bite to eat.  
His appetite was good, it seems  
As he devoured both bread and beans.  
Merrily wending on his way  
O'er plain and meadow, hill and brae,  
He then lets fly some H2S  
(more popularly, sewer gas).  
And then – of this I make no secret -  
Over a ditch's edge he did squat.  
That processed from what he had dined  
(which we call "shit") he left behind.  
He wandered onward, yet the "produce" stays,  
Warmed by the sun's celestial rays.  
The rain then lends life-giving sprays:  
Into the soil it then decays.  
And in its place, wafting in the breeze,  
Scented grasses entice the bees.  
Then came a calf. As usual, spotted,  
which munched up the lot.  
At length, the calf becoming cow  
Was freighted to Vienna now,  
And three days more, a week at most,  
Transformed into some Archduke's roast  
And the beef which lately grazed with glee  
Entered the Habsburg-Lotharing dynasty.  
Tomorrow it metamorphs anew,  
Its complex passage but a poo.

### JUVENILE SCIENTISTS

*Comment:*

*The poem gives an accurate picture of, why it is not appreciated in our country – intelligence*

Unripe youth, teenagers all  
For you I hold but little store,  
Somehow you've slipped by all they taught  
And now you think you know it all.

Your knowledge but a thimbleful,  
Your brains were left behind at school,  
You merely fuck like a cock-sparrow –  
Your raison d'être is just that narrow

You are a nothingness, young man  
A vacuous cavern for a brain!

How different the older man,  
Maturer, like an ageing wine.  
– Perspective, savvy, character:  
The adult male's entirely other.

A mi farkunk is óra: aminő  
Tájékozta, hogy mennyi az idő.  
Bejártunk vele egy életutat,  
Tizenkettőt ütött, és hatot mutat.

### AZ ANYAG KÖRFORGALMA

A falu végén egy vándorlegény  
Betért egy házba ebéd idején.  
S jóízűen ette meg, amit kapott:  
Kenyeret és hozzá egy tál babot.  
Vígán indult tovább, s amint megyen,  
Síkon, mezőn, ösvényen és hegyen,  
(H2S)-eket eregetett,  
Népszerűsítve ezt a képletet.  
Egyszer aztán - hisz nincs benne titok -,  
Egy árok szélén lekuporodott.  
S otthagya, mit feldolgozott a "gép",  
Mit szarnak hív a közönséges nép.  
Ő tovább ment, a "termék" ott maradt,  
S a nap hintett rá arany sugarat.  
Majd az eső ontotta permetét,  
S a szar az anyaföldbe oszlott szét.  
Helyén pedig illatos fű fakadt,  
Csalva magához pillét, bogarat.  
És jött egy boci. Tarka volt, amint  
Illik - s a füvet ő ette meg mind.  
A bociból valódi marha lett,  
S vasúton Bécsbe hosszú utat tett.  
Egy hét se telt el, s ott szerepelt már,  
Mint "roastbeef" egy főherceg asztalán.  
S a marhából, mely minap még legelt,  
Habsburg-Lotharing-i alkatrészt lett.  
Holnap már újra megváltozik mind:  
A cifraságból szar lesz majd megint.

### KAMASZ TUDÓSOK

*Megjegyzés:*

*A vers arról pontos képet ad, miért nem becsülik hazánkban – az intelligenciát*

Éretlen ifjak, kamaszok,  
Rátok de keveset adok.  
Megúsztatok az iskolát,  
S azt hiszitek, ez a világ.

Tudástok egy gyűszűbe fér.  
S eszetek? - orrotokig ér.  
Csak basztok, mint a kanveréb,  
Égész lényetek nem egyéb.

Ifjú ember, de semmi vagy!  
Milyen üres egy ilyen agy!...

Milyen más ám a férfi kor!  
Megérett, mint a régi bor.  
- Világnézet, jellem, tudás,  
a férfikorban egészen más.

We know! And knowing, proud are we  
To know what was, is, and shall be!  
The heavens above, the earth below,  
What course of life we undergo.

All things that man has fashioned, we  
Can feel, and understand, and see,  
All the male species is yet to make  
We know – but can no longer fuck...

Tudunk! - mily büszke tudat ez!  
Tudjuk, mi volt, mi van, mi lesz!  
Tudjuk, hogy lesz az ég, s a föld,  
S a történet mi medret tört!

Mindazt, mit ember alkotott,  
Érezzük, látjuk, értjük most.  
S mit még alkot e faj, e nem!  
Mindent tudunk! - csak baszni nem...

### ***Permissive Piggery (Disznólkodni szabad)*** **Árpáda Lőwy'ego w przekładzie Andrew C. Rouse'a**

**Abstrakt:** Apendyks zawiera wybór wierszy węgierskiego poety László Réthy'ego, publikującego pod pseudonimem artystycznym Árpád Lőwy. Stanowią one uzupełnienie artykułu Andrew C. Rouse'a, *The Near-the-Knuckle Verse of Árpád Lőwy in English Translation*. Autorem przekładów jest Andrew C. Rouse.

**Słowa kluczowe:** László Réthy, Árpád Lőwy, przekład poezji, pornografia.

### ***Permissive Schweinehaltung (Disznólkodni szabad)*** **von Árpád Lőwy übersetzt von Andrew C. Rouse**

**Abstract:** Der Anhang enthält eine Auswahl von Gedichten des ungarischen Dichters László Réthy, der unter dem Künstlerpseudonym Árpád Lőwy veröffentlicht. Sie ergänzen den Artikel von Andrew C. Rouse, *The Near-the-Knuckle Verse of Árpád Lőwy in English Translation*. Andrew C. Rouse ist der Autor der Übersetzung ins Englische.

**Schlüsselwörter:** László Réthy, Árpád Lőwy, Gedichtübersetzung, Pornographie.



**IV**  
**REVIEW AND REPORT**

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## Gazing into an Abyss... [Review of:] Michał Chudoliński, *Mroczny Rycerz Gotham. Szkice z kultury popularnej* (Kraków: TAIWPN Universitas, 2023, pp. 381)

**Abstract:** This review concerns Michał Chudoliński's book *Mroczny Rycerz Gotham. Szkice z kultury popularnej* [The Dark Knight of Gotham. Sketches from Popular Culture], which was published in 2023 by the TAIWPN Universitas publishing house. The publication is a monographic study of the universe centred around the character of Batman. The reviewer assesses the way in which the author has achieved the research objectives, brings the research methodology of the transmedia texts analysed closer, paying particular attention to the innovative treatment of the problem of deviance in the context of comic characters.

**Keywords:** Batman, universe, Dark Knight, deviance, Chudoliński.

He who fights with monsters might take  
care lest he thereby become a monster.  
And if you gaze for long into an abyss, the  
abyss gazes also into you

Friedrich Wilhelm Nietzsche,  
*Beyond Good and Evil*

The TAIWPN Universitas publishing house recently published Michał Chudoliński's book *Mroczny Rycerz Gotham. Szkice z kultury popularnej* [The Dark Knight of Gotham. Sketches from Popular Culture]. This is a noteworthy

item for at least several reasons. For the first time on the Polish market there has appeared a monographic study of the universe centred around the character of Batman, the titular Dark Knight of Gotham. Which in itself is already a highly ambitious undertaking, since it requires the researcher to be familiar with many cultural texts from different media that deal with the adventures of Batman, although they always constitute a new, original variation on his fate. It seems that in this wealth of adaptation forms only true lovers, die-hard fans of the Man-Bat can orient themselves. And undoubtedly the author of this publication belongs to this group, as the cover suggests. On its wing, next to the description of the author there is a drawing by Łukasz Jagielski, depicting Michał Chudoliński in the style of comic book characters. The right-hand side of the author's face hides under a Batman mask; the other leaves no doubt as to whom we are dealing with. The face cut in half metaphorically illustrates the duality of the author's role. On the one hand, there is fan worship, the temptation of the pleasure in impersonating Batman, to put on his mask for at least a moment and have fun. After all, popular culture is supposed to provide reading pleasure. However, the purpose of the research and its nature require a distance to be maintained, which becomes a guarantor of scientific objectivity. I think this is how this coquettish gesture of the author towards the reader can be interpreted. Chudoliński – like Bruce Wayne – balances between two worlds, the private and professional spheres, on the border of scientific and popular science reading, revealing and veiling his reading preferences. But not to worry, *Mroczny Rycerz Gotham. Szkice z kultury popularnej* [The Dark Knight of Gotham. Sketches from Popular Culture] is a collection of essays in which both comic books and films are subjected to in-depth interpretation, conducted with the use of apparatus from philological and cultural studies.

As I have already mentioned, cartoonists, screenwriters, editors, producers and directors who base their work on the character of Batman are not bound by the conventions of the series, which would dictate that the continuity of storylines be maintained, i.e. that each realisation of the Dark Knight's adventures constitute a separate, independent work. Paweł Bohuszewicz points out that this creative freedom is not limited either by genealogical qualifications (by shooting *The Dark Knight*, Nolan transgresses the rigid framework of superhero cinema towards political cinema), or by the medium in which it is told (by creating *Arkham Asylum* Morrison and McKean transgress the framework of comic books towards *graphic novels*), or by belonging to so-called popular culture.<sup>1</sup> With Umberto Eco's insights in

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<sup>1</sup> Original: "nie ograniczają ani kwalifikacje geneologiczne (kręcąc *Mrocznego Rycerza*, Nolan przekracza sztywne ramy kina superbohaterskiego w kierunku kina politycznego), ani medium, w którym zostaje opowiedziana (tworząc *Arkham Asylum* Morrison i McKean prze-

mind,<sup>2</sup> made in the now classic *Superman w literaturze masowej. Powieść popularna: między retoryką a ideologią* [Superman in Mass Literature. The Popular Novel: Between Rhetoric and Ideology], it is not difficult to see that the comic books of Miller, Nolan, Morrison and McKean are as popular as they are highly artistic.

Accordingly, the twenty-seventh issue of "Detective Comics" from 1939, in which Batman made his debut in the story *The Case of the Chemical Syndicate*, functions as a praxetext, source material, or, as Adam Regiewicz hints, inspiration providing an opportunity to tell an interesting story.<sup>3</sup> For more than eighty years, artists have been reaching for the character of Batman, the alter ego of millionaire Bruce Wayne, and trying to tell his adventures in their own way, according to the requirements of a given medium. And Batman is everywhere: in cinema, animation, computer and board games.

Michał Chudoliński reflects on the phenomenon of this character: What is it that means that the archetypes portrayed in Batman-related media have such a strong impact on successive generations of pop culture consumers?<sup>4</sup> Referring to the most important texts of Batman mythology in the spheres of comic books and film, he tries to find an answer to this question. To do so, he analyses the most important Batman stories, as he explains, viewed and read through the prism of a Western mind steeped in psychoanalysis, especially the theories of Sigmund Freud and Carl Gustav Jung.<sup>5</sup>

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kraczącą ramy komiksu w kierunku *graphic novel*), ani przynależność do tzw. kultury popularnej." Paweł Bohuszewicz, "Uczłowieczanie superbohaterów we współczesnej kulturze popularnej" [The Humanization of Superheroes in Contemporary Popular Culture], in *Mit – Literatura – Tajemnica. Fantastyczność i cudowność* [Myth – Literature – Mystery. Fantasticality and Marvelousness], eds. Waldemar Gruszczynski, Tomasz Ratajczak, and Bogdan Trocha (Zielona Góra: Uniwersytet Zielonogórski 2013), 74.

<sup>2</sup> Eco wrote that the pleasure of narrative, as we have come to know, comes from the repetition of what is already known: the cyclical repetition that takes place both within a single literary work and in a whole series of works, in a series of cross-references from novel to novel. Adherence to this rule is the very essence of the popular novel and can in no way be considered a defect in it. See Umberto Eco, *Superman w literaturze masowej. Powieść popularna: między retoryką a ideologią* [Superman in Mass Literature. The Popular Novel: between Rhetoric and Ideology], trans. Joanna Ugniewska (Kraków: Znak 2008), 95–96.

<sup>3</sup> Adam Regiewicz, *Literatura i media. Korespondencja sztuk* [Literature and Media. Correspondence of the Arts] (Częstochowa: Wydawnictwo Naukowe im. Stanisława Podobińskiego UJD, 2023), 164.

<sup>4</sup> Original: "Co sprawia, że archetypy ukazane w mediach związanych z Batmanem tak mocno oddziałują na kolejne pokolenia konsumentów popkultury?" Michał Chudoliński, *Mroczny Rycerz Gotham. Szkice z kultury popularnej* [Gotham's Dark Knight. Sketches from Popular Culture] (Kraków: TAIWPN Universitas, 2023), 11.

<sup>5</sup> Cf. Chudoliński, *Mroczny Rycerz Gotham. Szkice z kultury popularnej*, 11.

It should be added that the collection in question is the fruit of Michał Chudoliński's work as a film and comic critic. And, although the material collected consists of expanded versions of the author's texts, previously published in various magazines – thanks to the clearly defined research objectives, the methodology adopted and consistently conducted interpretations – the book constitutes a coherent whole. The author systematises knowledge about Batman in the humanities (sociology, psychology, philosophy), meticulously notes the state of academic research related to the Batman universe, referring to both Polish and English-language texts. Particularly noteworthy, however, is Janina Scarlet's willingness to introduce the viewer to psychotherapeutic practices, proving that texts about superheroes can be effectively used to treat trauma and post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD).

The book consists of seven chapters, accompanied by an *Introduction*, in which the author defines the purpose of his research, justifies his motives and reveals the texts that have been an important inspiration for him. In addition, he presents himself as a man immersed in the world of comic characters, which have largely shaped his sensibility.

Chapter one *Narodziny legendy* [Birth of a Legend] outlines the circumstances of Batman's creation. The author draws attention to the relationship between Bob Kane and Bill Finger, insisting that Finger's creative contribution to the Batman character be duly honoured. Chudoliński takes an anecdotal look at the controversy surrounding the birth of the legend. Bob Kane, who is credited as the creator of Batman, is portrayed as a shrewd celebrity, minding his own business and taking advantage of the work of ghost-writers, including Finger, an extremely talented, but lifeless cartoonist. This duo – two Jews sharing a similar fate, the former with a talent for business and the latter with a talent for drawing – seemed to be an ideal arrangement. Unfortunately, Kane, as Chudoliński notes, consistently included an unambiguous caption in the footer of his increasingly popular and recognisable comics: "Batmana stworzył Bob Kane"<sup>6</sup> [Batman was created by Bob Kane]. Of course, it is difficult not to acknowledge Kane's contribution to the development of the character, the problem being that at the meeting with the editor of Detective Comics, during which the new hero was introduced, Kane went alone and did not say a word about Finger and his ideas, which he was so eager to use. Bill Finger agreed to become a ghost-writer; he created anonymously. And although he was one of one of the best screenwriters of the Golden Age of American comics<sup>7</sup> (1938–1956), he passed away in poverty, abandoned by everyone. To this day, Chudoliński says, for those interested

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<sup>6</sup> Chudoliński, *Mroczny Rycerz Gotham. Szkice z kultury popularnej*, 28.

<sup>7</sup> Chudoliński, *Mroczny Rycerz Gotham. Szkice z kultury popularnej*, 32.

in comics, Finger's character is a symbol of the misfortunes of creators who do not care about copyright. Ironically, the Batman story was created in the shadow of a fraud....

The second chapter *Wprowadzenie do batmitologii. Dzieje medialne i znaczenie Batmana w kulturze popularnej* [Introduction to Batmythology. The Media History and Significance of Batman in Popular Culture] is an attempt to reconstruct the history of Batman considered in the context of changing mores, various political and economic aspects, additionally taking into account the changing aesthetic needs of the audience as a result of media development. Chudoliński takes a close look at the various iterations and realisations conceptualising the Batman character. He reveals the mechanisms that govern the universe, which make it grow at a rapid pace and seize more and more new areas. The path followed by Batman and which is transferred from comic book pages into the world of transmedia leads through the first comic books influenced by pop-art aesthetics, to the TV series broadcast in colour by the American channel ABC in the 1960s (with Adam West in the title role), Burton's and Schumacher's films and the Batman '66 series created at a high artistic level by Jeff Parker, up to Frank Miller's *magnum opus* – according to Chudoliński – the best Batman story. *The return of the Dark Knight* started a fad for graphic novels that attracted the attention of older audiences.

In the second chapter, the author also accounts for the damaging publications of psychiatrist Fredric Wertham, who, on the basis of his medical experience, tried to prove to the public that stories about superheroes deprave young people, are a source of violence and the cause of pathological behaviour. And they even promote homosexuality, as exemplified by Batman's relationship with Robin.<sup>8</sup> Some of these stereotypical beliefs are still in place today. Wertham's abuses and misinterpretations eventually led to "a media crusade against comic books in America, through which the market was censored".<sup>9</sup> The 1950s saw the establishment of the Comics Code,<sup>10</sup> which would

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<sup>8</sup> Wojciech Lewandowski wrote about this in a publication also referred to by Michał Chudoliński. See Wojciech Lewandowski, "Opowieści z cenzorskiej krypty. Komiksowa panika lat pięćdziesiątych dwudziestego wieku na przykładzie "Tales from the Crypt"" [Tales from the Censor's Crypt. Comic Panic of the 1950s of the Twentieth Century on the Example of "Tales from the Crypt"], in *Groza i postgroza*, eds. Ksenia Olkusz, and Barbara Szymczak-Maciejczyk (Kraków: Ośrodek Badawczy Facta Ficta, 2018), 246–247.

<sup>9</sup> Chudoliński, *Mroczny Rycerz Gotham. Szkice z kultury popularnej*, 46.

<sup>10</sup> On August 17, 1954, the Association of Comic Book Magazine Publishers (Stowarzyszenie Wydawców Magazynów Komiksowych) was founded, which established the Comic Code Authority responsible for making recommendations on the compliance of comic books with the Association's recognized Comic Code. See Wojciech Lewandowski, "Opowieści z cenzorskiej krypty. Komiksowa panika lat pięćdziesiątych dwudziestego wieku na przykładzie "Tales from the Crypt"," 249.

significantly affect the fate of Batman, making him a character straight out of *science fiction* cinema. This is the time of the implementation of bizarre ideas and crazy stories; it will suffice to mention, following Chudoliński, such creations as 'batmałpa' (Bat-monkey) and 'batdziecko' (Bat-baby). However, had it not been for this "period of shame", perhaps Batman would have ceased to exist. The author puts forward the thesis that the 1950s and 1960s were a point of reference for subsequent creators and contributed later to the formation of the ideal archetype of the Dark Knight.<sup>11</sup>

The subject of the third chapter *Żart, który się ziścił. Zabójczy żart wczoraj i dziś* [The Joke That Came True. The Killing Joke of Yesterday and Today] is the story of the Joker, an instalment of Alan Moore and Brian Bolland's cult story. Interpreting The Killing Joke of 1987, the researcher reflects on the theme of freedom. Batman and the Joker represent two different understandings of freedom. Both experienced a tragedy that had a colossal impact on their lives. However, their reaction to the traumatic event was already quite different. The comparative analysis outlined in this chapter is bolstered by the texts of Jean Baudrillard and is an interesting character study. Chudoliński asks the age-old question: where does evil come from? And surprisingly, he looks for the answer in the Joker. He gives a voice to a madman who is convinced that all it takes is "one bad day"<sup>12</sup> for a man who until now was regarded as honest enough (such as Commissioner Gordon) to transform into a villain. In light of this theory, the line separating Batman from the Joker is no longer so clear. Perhaps, that is why in the final scene of the comic Batman laughs at the Joker's absurd joke....

It is no coincidence that the fourth chapter *W stronę psychoterapii* [Towards Psychotherapy] is devoted to a graphic novel by Grant Morrison and Dave McKean, *Arkham Asylum: A Serious House on Serious Ground*, published in 1989. Characterised by a neurotic, dreamlike, and often surreal atmosphere, the story deals with the fears of the Dark Knight. From beneath Batman's costume emerges a frightened boy, who still has the image of a bandit shooting at his parents before his eyes. Bruce will do anything to ensure that the Crime Alley tragedy never happens again, but what motivates him to act, what allows him to transform into Batman – the guardian of Gotham – at the same time every night there is the threat of falling into madness. Chudoliński aptly recalls Batman's conversation with Commissioner Gordon in this context:

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<sup>11</sup> Cf. Chudoliński, *Mroczny Rycerz Gotham. Szkice z kultury popularnej*, 48.

<sup>12</sup> Chudoliński, *Mroczny Rycerz Gotham. Szkice z kultury popularnej*, 79.

I'm afraid. I'm afraid that the Joker is right about me. Sometimes ... I doubt the rationality of my actions. And I'm afraid that if I cross the walls of Arkham... that when I go inside and the door slams behind me, it will be like going home.<sup>13</sup>

Ja się boję. Boję, że Joker ma co do mnie rację. Czasami... powątpiewam w racjonalność swoich działań. I boję się, że jeśli przekroczę mury Arkham..., że kiedy wejdę do środka i zatrzasną się za mną drzwi, to będzie jak powrót do domu.<sup>14</sup>

From this point, the psychological analysis of the character begins. Morrison leads Batman to confront his own shadow,<sup>15</sup> trusting that only in this way will he avoid psychological degradation. Batman, forced by the Joker to intervene in a hospital for the insane, must face his fears and confront his guilt.

Chudoliński takes a close look at the formation of Batman's psychological consciousness, looks into the dark recesses of his psyche, and finally sees in the superhero the archetype of modern man. The historical and literary context slowly gives way to the psychological and sociological optics adopted later in the book. Quoting excerpts from the works of Travis Langley and Janina Scarlet, the author draws attention to the whole current of psychotherapy using pop culture. This thread will be developed in Chapter 6 *Psychologia versus Batman* [Psychology versus Batman], which precedes the sketch *Batman – manifestacja postmodernizmu* [Batman – A Manifestation of Postmodernism].

According to Chudoliński, in order to be able to understand the modern Batman it is necessary to look at his relationship with postmodernism, which he does in Chapter 5. In this aspect, the theme of the metropolis is taken up. Gotham City is a place that drives its inhabitants crazy,<sup>16</sup> it is a space of carnival masquerade, demonic clowns and creatures straight from the mediaeval bestiary.<sup>17</sup> The city's pastiche-based architecture reveals a postmodern

<sup>13</sup> Grand Morrison, *Full Script and Notes*, in Grand Morrison, and Dave McKean, *Arkham Asylum. A Serious House on a Serious Earth – 15th Anniversary Edition* (New York: DC Comics, 2004), 136. Quoted in Chudoliński, *Mroczny Rycerz Gotham. Szkice z kultury popularnej*, 111.

<sup>14</sup> Grand Morrison, and Dave McKean, *Poważny dom na poważnej ziemi*, trans. Jarosław Grzędowicz, and Tomasz Sidorkiewicz (Warszawa: Egmont Polska, 2015), non-paginated [24].

<sup>15</sup> This is a reference to the archetype of the shadow. In Carl Gustav Jung's theory, the shadow represents the unknown, dark side of the human personality, which, if neglected by the conscious *Ego*, can lead to destructive behaviour. C.G. Jung writes: "Everyone carries a shadow, and the less it is embodied in the individual's conscious life, the blacker and denser it is." Carl Gustav Jung, *Psychology and Religion*, trans. Richard Francis Carrington Hull (New Haven-London: Yale University Press 1992), 93.

<sup>16</sup> Chudoliński, *Mroczny Rycerz Gotham. Szkice z kultury popularnej*, 144.

<sup>17</sup> Original: "karnawałowej maskarady, demonicznych klaunów oraz stworzeń rodem ze średniowiecznego bestiariuum." Justyna Hanna Budzik, *Gotham City: niesamowite czy realne?* [Gotham City: Uncanny or Real?], *ArtPapier*, 1.01.2009, accessed February 10, 2024, <http://artpapier.com/index.php?page=artykul&wydanie=74&artykul=1725>.

playing with convention. Gotham can be fairy-tale, expressionistic, surreal, combining gothic elements with the aesthetics of noir detective stories, but it always serves to show the complexity of the human psyche, after all, the city's residents are people with identity problems who love dressing up and crazy entertainment.

From this catalogue of characters, various images of deviancy emerge, to which the remainder of the book is devoted. The purpose of the research – carried out in chapters 6 and 7 – is to analyse the occurrence of deviancy in the characters appearing in the Batman film,<sup>18</sup> and more specifically, to try to find answers to the three hypotheses set forth regarding the type of deviancy manifested by specific characters (including Batman), the genesis of their deviance and how firmly the film's characters are rooted in modern Western civilisation.<sup>19</sup> The author introduces the reader to the problem of deviance, explains in detail the concept of deviance and describes its specific forms (positive, negative, primary and secondary deviance), thereby laying the theoretical foundation for the subsequent analysis of selected fictional figures. He uses methodology from the fields of psychology, philosophy and sociology. Referring to the writings of Claude Lévi-Strauss, he reminds us of the importance of the mask, which not only serves to cover and conceal, but also to reveal and unmask specific intentions and meanings.<sup>20</sup> In addition, it reaches back to the category of stigma, as described by Erving Goffman.<sup>21</sup> Thorsten Sellin's concept of cultural conflict and Howard S. Becker's typology of deviant behaviour, also become interesting points of reference. It is impossible to list here all the research tools that Chudoliński reaches for. The methodological chapter impresses the reader with its breadth and richness of the material cited.

The seventh chapter *Obraz dewiacji w filmowym uniwersum Batmana* [The Image of Deviancy in the Batman Film Universe] is a set of analyses of several selected characters from the universe, including Batman and his nemesis – the Joker, the schizophrenic Harvey Dent, Catwoman walking her paths, the queer Penguin, the Riddler, Poison Ivy and the Scarecrow. The catalogue of anti-heroes – villains, serial killers, psychopaths, nihilists – forms a wide spectrum of various deviations.

In the *Conclusion*, the author summarises his analysis, refers to the latest Matt Reeves film and once again, with some resentment, leans into the Bat-

<sup>18</sup> Chudoliński, *Mroczny Rycerz Gotham. Szkice z kultury popularnej*, 140.

<sup>19</sup> Chudoliński, *Mroczny Rycerz Gotham. Szkice z kultury popularnej*, 140.

<sup>20</sup> Claude Lévi-Strauss, "Rozdwojenie i maskarada" [Dissonance and Masquerade], trans. Krzysztof Pomian, in *Maski* [Masks], vol. 1, eds. Maria Janion, and Stanisław Rosiek (Gdańsk: Wydawnictwo Morskie, 1986), 78.

<sup>21</sup> Chudoliński, *Mroczny Rycerz Gotham. Szkice z kultury popularnej*, 161.

man phenomenon. The book closes with a glossary of characters covering over seventy pages to help the reader better orient him/herself in the world of Batman characters.

In summary, *Mroczny Rycerz Gotham. Szkice z kultury popularnej* is a collection of interesting, context-rich analyses and interpretations, bringing the reader closer to the character of Batman. A careful study of the transmedia stories that made Batman an icon of American pop culture allowed the researcher to uncover the mechanisms that govern the comic book universe and learn about the strategies according to which the image of the Dark Knight has changed. Chudoliński looks at the Batman character in the face of World War II, against the background of social and moral changes, in the context of President Ronald Reagan's policies and in the era of political correctness. He concludes that:

[z] Batmanem można zrobić wszystko, w każdej konwencji artystycznej oraz fabularnej. Sęk w tym, że przy tylu interpretacjach zatracą się gdzieś esencja tej postaci – człowieka ślącego światło w sercu ciemności, dającego nadzieję ludziom żyjącym w beznadziejnej sytuacji, potrafiącego przemieszczać się w sferze egzystencjalnego nihilizmu i posiadającego twardy kręgosłup moralny, dowodzącego, że zawsze można podnieść się z tego, co nas przytłoczyło – i żyć na własnych zasadach.<sup>22</sup>

[with Batman you can do anything, in any artistic convention and in any storyline. The snag is that with so many interpretations the essence of this character is lost somewhere – a man who sends light into the heart of darkness, who gives hope to people living in a hopeless situation, who is able to move in the realm of existential nihilism and who has a firm moral backbone, proving that it is always possible to rise from what has overwhelmed us – and live on our own terms.]

Reading Chudoliński's book makes the reader realise how powerful the universe centred around Batman is. The number of adaptation texts, realised in various media forms, is striking. And the transformations of the character visible in recent productions, plunging Batman further and further into darkness and self-destruction, arouse bitterness. According to the author, cultural vandalism will also reach the Batman character. In the face of progressive discourse – which leads to the erasure of content considered obsolete (so-called *cancel culture*), because it does not fit in with the prevailing ideological tendencies – Michał Chudoliński's position seems invaluable. And, while it is true that “for everyone Batman is what they imagine him to be”, I am grateful for this book which has brought me closer to the Batman imagined by Michał Chudoliński. At the same time, I trust that Batman, gazing into the abyss, has nothing to fear... After all, Nietzsche may have been wrong.

*Translated by Anna Wylężałek and David Lilley*

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<sup>22</sup> Chudoliński, *Mroczny Rycerz Gotham. Szkice z kultury popularnej*, 256.

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### Spoglądając w otchłań...

**[Recenzja:] Michał Chudoliński, *Mroczny Rycerz Gotham. Szkice z kultury popularnej* (Kraków: TAIWPN Universitas, 2023, ss. 381)**

**Abstrakt:** Recenzja dotyczy książki Michała Chudolińskiego *Mroczny Rycerz Gotham. Szkice z kultury popularnej*, która ukazała się w 2023 roku nakładem wydawnictwa TAIWPN Universitas. Publikacja stanowi monograficzne opracowanie uniwersum skupionego wokół postaci

Batmana. Recenzentka ocenia sposób realizacji wyznaczonych przez autora celów badawczych, przybliża metodologię badań analizowanych tekstów transmedialnych, zwracając szczególną uwagę na nowatorskie ujęcie problemu dewiacji w kontekście komiksowych postaci.

**Słowa kluczowe:** Batman, uniwersum, Mroczny Rycerz, dewiacja, Chudoliński.

### **In einen Abgrund blicken...**

**[Review of:] Michał Chudoliński, *Mroczny Rycerz Gotham. Szkice z kultury popularnej* (Kraków: TAIWPN Universitas, 2023, 381 S.)**

**Abstract:** Rezensiert wird die Monographie von Michał Chudolińskis Buch *Mroczny Rycerz Gotham. Szkice z kultury popularnej* [Der Dunkle Ritter Gotham. Skizzen über die Populärkultur], die im Jahr 2023 vom Verlag TAIWPN Universitas (Kraków) veröffentlicht wurde. Es handelt sich um eine monografische Studie über das Universum rund um die Figur des Batman. Es wird hier die Art und Weise bewertet, wie Chudoliński seine Forschungsziele verfolgt, sowie die Forschungsmethodik der analysierten transmedialen Texte nähergebracht, wobei das besondere Augenmerk auf den innovativen Ansatz zur Entartung der Comicfiguren gerichtet wird.

**Schlüsselwörter:** Batman, Universum, Der Dunkle Ritter, Entartung, Chudoliński.





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**Contemporary Drama and Theatre in German-speaking Countries in a European Context. Report on the Project and the International Academic Conference *Spaces of Humanity: Contemporary Drama and Theatre for a Sustainable Future – Spielräume des Humanen: Gegenwärtiges Drama und Theater für nachhaltige Zukunft* (Kraków, 3<sup>rd</sup> – 5<sup>th</sup> October, 2024)**

**Abstract:** This text presents the findings of an international interdisciplinary research project conducted at the Institute of Neophilology of the University of the Commission of National Education in Kraków, Poland. The project addresses contemporary issues pertinent to the understanding of German-language drama and theatre within a European context. Specific focus is placed on the matters discussed at the academic conference held in October 2024, which addressed the topic of human beings/humanity (humanum) in contemporary literary drama and theatre in the context of the issue of sustainability.

**Keywords:** drama, theatre, scientific project, Poland, conference, networking.

“A theory can be pseudo-science, even if it is very plausible and everybody believes it, and it can have scientific value, even if it is not believable and nobody believes it. A theory can be of the highest scientific value, even if nobody understands it, let alone believes it.”<sup>1</sup> Imre Lakatos also claimed that when writing a history of internal transformations in science it is essential to take an objectivist stance. However individuals gain a certain understanding of the essence of the social structure they live in, there will always exist a discrepancy between the structure and functioning of society, and their distorted reflection in the minds of individuals.<sup>2</sup>

This space between the structure and functioning of society or individuals, and how this functioning is reflected, in this case a theatrical reflection, has become the basis for deliberations and academic analysis, ultimately leading to a research project, whose core it forms together with the literary text. The latter is, in a sense, a forum where all types of social dependencies and phenomena that characterise interpersonal relationships are presented; the same can be said of its realisation on stage, which is a platform on which the director can present his or her subjective interpretation of the text.

A number of independent research projects initiated by employees of the Department of German-language Literature at the University of the National Education Commission in Kraków (UKEN) gave rise to a desire to pool expertise and use it as a basis for joint research. Thus a thematically broad series of symposia came about, each of which discusses one central topic, opens up new avenues in other fields of scholarship and stimulates discussion. These symposia have taken place almost every year since 2014, apart from a non-productive period during the COVID pandemic. The papers and outcomes of the conferences are presented in multi-author volumes, which were initially published in the renowned series *Interdisciplinary Studies in Performance* edited by Mirosław Kocur, and since 2021 they have been published by Brill.<sup>3</sup>

As a result of ongoing work and research on individual topics, the project leaders (Prof. Martin Langner and Prof. Agata Mirecka) decided to start a book series published by Brill in Paderborn, Germany, with the title *Drama*

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<sup>1</sup> Alan F. Chalmers, *Czym jest to, co zwiemy nauką?*, trans. Adam Chmielewski (Wrocław: Wydawnictwo Siedmioróg, 1997), 158.

<sup>2</sup> Chalmers, *Czym jest to, co zwiemy nauką?*, 159.

<sup>3</sup> Cf. *Tendenzen der zeitgenössischen Dramatik*, eds. Paul Martin Langner, and Agata Mirecka (Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang Edition, 2015); *Raumformen in der Gegenwartsdramatik*, eds. Paul Martin Langner, and Agata Mirecka (Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang Edition, 2017); *Zur Funktion und Bedeutung des Chors im zeitgenössischen Drama und Theater*, eds. Paul Martin Langner, and Joanna Gospodarczyk (Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang Edition, 2019).

*Between the Text and Stage (Drama zwischen Text und Bühne)*. The co-editor of the series was Dr Marta Famula, at that time a research assistant at Paderborn University and at present director of Bamberg Puppet Theatre. Marta Famula was involved in the project from the very beginning, taking an active part in all the conferences and expressing her opinion on many matters. The editorial board of the book series consists of respected professors from Poland and Germany, which is an honour for the series editors and means they have significant support.<sup>4</sup>

The scholars working on the project *Studies on contemporary drama and theatre in German-speaking countries and a European context (Forschungen zum Drama und Theater der Gegenwart im deutschsprachigen Raum und europäischen Kontext)* have allowed themselves a broad field which encompasses diverse topics and points to the interdisciplinary nature of the research undertaken. At the same time they use new methodological principles from various disciplines. Apart from theatre specialists and Germanists, those who take part in the discussions include comparatists, journalists, teachers, anthropologists, philosophers, sociologists and historians. This conception of the projects enriches discussions and joint academic endeavours, and also attempts to combine diverse points of view, while not denying the contradictions between them. Those involved in the project have followed this conceptual idea from the very beginning.

The project began in 2014 with an interdisciplinary academic conference on the topic *Creations in German dramatology in recent decades (Kreationen des deutschen Dramas in letzten Jahrzehnten)*, which took place in Kościelisko in the Polish Tatra Mountains and brought together scholars from Poland, Germany and Russia. The next conferences took place in 2015 with the topic *Dimensions of the present in contemporary drama (Raumdimensionen in der zeitgenössischen Dramatik)*, in 2016: *Repetitions in contemporary dramatic literature (Wiederholungen in der dramatischen Literatur der Gegenwart)*, in 2017: *On the function and significance of the chorus in contemporary drama and theatre (Zur Funktion und Bedeutung des Chors im zeitgenössischen Drama und Theater)*, in 2018: *The return of catharsis? (Wiederkehr der Katharsis?)*, in 2020: *Crisis in contemporary drama (Krise im Drama der Gegenwart)*, in 2023: *Futurity in contemporary drama and theatre (Zukünftigkeit im zeitgenössischen Drama und Theater)* and in 2024: *Spaces*

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<sup>4</sup> Editorial board of the series *Drama zwischen Text und Bühne* (Paderborn: Brill): Mateusz Borowski (Jagiellonian University in Kraków), Aleksandra Budrewicz (University of the National Education Commission in Kraków), Norbert Otto Eke (Paderborn University), Joanna Jabłkowska (University of Lodz), Friedemann Kreuder (Johannes Gutenberg University of Mainz), Franziska Schößler (Trier University).

*of humanity: contemporary drama and theatre for a sustainable future* (*Spielräume des Humanen: Gegenwärtiges Drama und Theater für nachhaltige Zukunft*). This latter conference brought together numerous academics from Poland, Germany, Russia, Austria and Switzerland, including Prof. Carola Hilmes from Goethe University Frankfurt, Prof. Friedemann Kreuder from Johannes Gutenberg University of Mainz, Prof. Klaus Steinke from the University of Erlangen-Nuremberg, Prof. Monika Tokarzewska from Nicolaus Copernicus University in Toruń, Prof. Karol Sauerland from the University of Warsaw, Prof. Artur Pełka from the University of Łódź, Prof. Zbigniew Feliszewski from the University of Silesia in Katowice, as well as many others.

According to one of the creators of the project, Prof. Martin Langner, research on contemporary theatre from an academic perspective means “re-reading” what has already passed. Time is an explicit measure of the theatre, the ephemerality of the moment and its reconstruction become the essence and subject matter of academic research. If the present is a moment after which that which is written down belongs to the past, and that which is said disappears the moment it is said, then reconstructing what has just been lost is not inventorying, but a re-enactment of time, which demands an analytical juggling of factors, conditions and interactions. The result is a kind of retrospective view of what the present has just helped to reconstruct. Addressing the backlog associated with this does not require social, historical or mental arguments to be forgotten, but rather for them to be placated, explained and condensed. Visualising means stabilising the ephemeral, and thus reclaiming the past, which continually influences the present. Investigating this interaction from the perspective of contemporary theatre and drama is one of the essential aims of this project.<sup>5</sup>

Recently, an element of the project described here has been an international interdisciplinary conference with the title *Spaces of Humanity: Contemporary Drama and Theatre for a Sustainable Future* (*Spielräume des Humanen: Gegenwärtiges Drama und Theater für nachhaltige Zukunft*). It took place between 3<sup>rd</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> October 2024 in Kraków in the main building of the University of the Commission of National Education (UKEN). The organiser of the conference was the German department within the Institute of Nephilology, in collaboration with many research centres in Poland and abroad.

The purpose of the conference was to analyse the so-called human element in contemporary drama and theatre in the context of the challenges associated with shaping a sustainable future. The discussions focused on such topics as humanism, posthumanism, ecology and the role of the theatre in reflecting upon contemporary social and cultural issues.

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<sup>5</sup> Prof. Paul Martin Langner in 2018, in a report after four years' work on the project.

The theme of the conference was especially topical from an academic point of view because posthumanism is at present a key issue in the contemporary humanities, particularly in the context of technological changes, inter-species relationships, ideological influences and ecological issues. In drama and theatre, ecology is explored more and more often as a means of building environmental awareness and promoting actions for sustainable development. The interdisciplinary nature of the research, which combines areas such as literary studies, theatre studies, ecology and philosophy, is a response to the needs of contemporary humanities, which require a combination of various perspectives. At the same time, reflecting on humanism in the face of global challenges, such as migration, climate change, the alienation of the individual, and questioning rights which derive from Christianity, are currently some of the most important topics, not only in academic debates.

The proceedings lasted for three days and delegates had the opportunity to listen to exceptional papers and take part in inspiring discussions. The conference was opened by Prof. Andrzej Kuropatnicki (UKEN), the dean of the Faculty of Humanities, and Dr Piotr Majcher, the deputy director of the Institute of Neophilology for German philology. The keynote speech was given by Prof. Andreas Enghart (Ludwig Maximilian University of Munich) and the title was *Compassion for Gaia? Posthumanist Figurations in the Theatre and the Theatrical Text in the Context of Current Research on the Emotions (Mitleid mit Gaia? Posthumanistische Figurationen in Theater und Theatertext vor dem Hintergrund aktueller Emotionsforschung)*. The speech raised as yet unresolved issues regarding the possibilities and limits of representations of Gaia or quasi-objects in (performative) theatre and theatrical texts. The focal point is created by the emotions, which are figurations of what we call Gaia as understood by Bruno Latour, James Lovelock and Lynn Margulis. Andreas Enghart is a renowned specialist in the field of contemporary drama and theatre, and his research focuses on topics such as the analysis of posthumanism, the ecology of the emotions and theatrical narratives. As the keynote speaker he set the tone of the whole conference, pointing out new directions for contemporary theatre research and underscoring the significance of an interdisciplinary approach to theatre and drama. Prof. Karol Sauerland (University of Warsaw) gave a paper on Tadeusz Kantor's Theatre of Death, discussing the spaces of humanism in this form of theatre. The term Theatre of Death relates to a unique vision of the theatre, whose central motif is death, transience and confrontation with the inevitable end, without omitting the role of the individual, elements of history, memory and trauma. Transgenerational landscapes of the memory in the context of the drama *Środula. Maus's Landscape (Środula. Krajobraz Mause)* by Romuald Brzyk formed the subject matter of a paper given by Prof. Zbigniew Feliszewski

(University of Silesia in Katowice). On the other hand, Prof. Artur Pełka (University of Łódź) referred in his presentation to theatrical textophony, in which he put forward some reflections on the topic of multilingual sonority and musicality in contemporary drama.

According to Dr David Krych (University of Music and Performing Arts, Vienna), the “post-humanist era”, or the overcoming of quasi-human domination, can be perceived as an exclusive narrative, especially in a theatrical and theatrical-historical context. During the conference he raised essential issues, posing the questions: What narrative and understanding of theatre and the theatrical person does the concept of posthumanism convey? Which theatre and which historical forms of theatre are left unaddressed in the concept of humanism? And consequently, how do they thwart this narrative of overcoming? What concept and what terminology can offer an alternative to such an exclusive understanding? The extent of what is human in theatre shows up the inseparability of what is non-human in such a way that the blind spot in theatrical discourse, which operates from the hegemonic present, becomes obvious.

The human condition in specific texts was the topic of the papers given by both Dr Julia Lind (Johannes Gutenberg University of Mainz) and Prof. Agata Mirecka (UKEN). Dr Julia Lind analysed the spaces of the human condition (humanum) in Jon Fosse’s works, while Prof. Agata Mirecka (UKEN) described the dystopian vision of the future and the role of human beings in it, using Marius von Mayenburg’s drama *Mars* as an example.

Dr Joanna Gospodarczyk (University of the National Education Commission in Kraków) discussed the dynamics between animality and humanism in the plays of Caren Jeß, while the paper given by Prof. Anna Majkiewicz (Jan Długosz University in Częstochowa) was devoted to an analysis of the most recent dramas of Elfriede Jelinek, which show the relationship between human beings and nature (*That which is Human between the Sun, Air and Ash in the Most Recent Dramas of Elfriede Jelinek (Das Menschliche zwischen Sonne, Luft und Asche in neuesten Dramatexten Elfriede Jelineks)*).

The last presentation was an analysis by Prof. Paul Martin Langner (at that time from the University of the National Education Commission in Kraków, currently at the Silesian University in Opava, Czech Republic) *Fractures between Singular Humanities (Brüche zwischen singulären Humanitäten)*.

To conclude the conference, Dr Felix Lempp from the University of Bern in Switzerland made a brief speech, joining the participants of the conference via the internet. He referred to the main idea behind the project *Research on contemporary drama and theatre (Forschungen zum gegenwärtigen Drama und Theater)* and invited delegates to the next conference connected to this project which he will organise and is to take place at the Uni-

versity of Bern in spring 2026, the theme of which will be *The sacred in contemporary drama and theatre (Sakralität im gegenwärtigen Drama und Theater)*.

The conference was a perfect opportunity to exchange views and to bring the academic community working on contemporary theatre and literature together. Contemporary theatre and drama also have the potential to shape ecological awareness, emphasising the need for a more sustained approach both to human beings' relationship with nature and other species and to other aspects in the context of contemporary civilisational challenges. Posthumanism, which is well known, has opened up new perspectives in research in the humanities, paying attention to the relationships between human beings, technology and the environment, not to mention the experiences of past generations, history and its influence on the future.

The interdisciplinary nature of the research that the project has inspired is crucial in the context of developing an understanding and finding new perspectives, not only for contemporary social problems, but also ecological ones, which are also a topic of current literary dramas in Poland and Germany. This is because theatre and drama remain a unique place to reflect on humanism and posthumanism, combining art with philosophy and the social sciences.

During the conference, researchers were encouraged to continue their exploration of topics associated with issues of humanity (*humanum*) for sustained development in the theatre, and also to initiate projects that undertake the challenges connected to this. The organisation of subsequent interdisciplinary conferences on drama and theatre was recommended, which will allow the further development of collaboration between scholars from various disciplines who gather around the specific issues mentioned during the proceedings. The conference organisers expressed their sincere thanks to the speakers and participants who contributed to the success of the event. Special thanks were extended to the Consul of the Federal Republic of Germany in Kraków for their organisational support and hospitality at Villa Decjusz, and whose presence provided an opportunity for further discussions and to establish new academic contacts. Papers from the conference will be published in the form of a multi-author volume, and also in German by a renowned academic publishing house.

Prof. Paul Martin Langner and Prof. Agata Mirecka are specialists in German-language literature who have been collaborating since 2005 and working on drama since 2014. Prof. Agata Mirecka is a literature researcher and a certified German translator, while Prof. Paul Martin Langner is a literary researcher, President of the Friedrich Hebbel Association in Wesselburen, Germany, as well as professor at the Silesian University in Opava. They have

co-edited many academic books and articles which analyse current trends in German-language drama and contemporary theatre. Furthermore, Agata Mirecka is a member of the working group Dramaturgia and Post-Docs, which are part of Gesellschaft für Theaterwissenschaft in Germany; this attests to her active involvement in the international research community. Their joint publications and research projects contribute to deepening knowledge of contemporary German-language drama, and their broad academic connections provide a foundation to bring further planned academic projects to fruition.

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**Współczesny dramat i teatr w krajach  
niemieckojęzycznych w kontekście europejskim.  
Sprawozdanie z projektu i międzynarodowej konferencji  
naukowej *Przestrzenie Humanum: Dramat i teatr  
współczesny dla zrównoważonej przyszłości*  
(Kraków, 3–5 października 2024)**

**Abstrakt:** Tekst stanowi przedstawienie międzynarodowego interdyscyplinarnego projektu badawczego realizowanego w Instytucie Neofilologii Uniwersytetu Komisji Edukacji Narodowej w Krakowie, podejmującego aktualne kwestie istotne dla poznania i zrozumienia aspektów współczesnego dramatu i teatru tworzonego w przestrzeni niemieckojęzycznej, a traktowanego w kontekście europejskim. Szczególna uwaga zostaje poświęcona kwestiom poruszanym podczas obrad na mającej miejsce w październiku 2024 roku konferencji naukowej na temat człowieka/człowieczeństwa (*humanum*) we współczesnych dramatach literackich i sztukach teatralnych w kontekście zagadnienia zrównoważonego rozwoju.

**Słowa kluczowe:** dramat, teatr, projekt naukowy, Polska, konferencja, sieć współpracy.

**Gegenwärtiges Drama und Theater  
im deutschsprachigen Raum und europäischen Kontext.  
Bericht über das Projekt und die internationale  
wissenschaftliche Konferenz *Spielräume des Humanen:  
Gegenwärtiges Drama und Theater für nachhaltige Zukunft*  
(Kraków, 3.-5. Oktober 2024)**

**Abstract:** Der folgende Text präsentiert ein internationales, interdisziplinäres Forschungsprojekt, welches am Institut für Neophilologie der Universität der Kommission für Nationale Bildung in Krakau (Polen) durchgeführt wird. Im Rahmen des Projekts werden aktuelle Fragen behandelt, die für die Kenntnis und das Verständnis von Aspekten des zeitgenössischen Dramas und Theaters von Bedeutung sind, welche im deutschsprachigen Raum entstanden sind und in einem europäischen Kontext betrachtet werden. Im Rahmen der wissenschaftlichen Tagung im Oktober 2024 wurden Fragestellungen erörtert, die sich mit dem Thema Menschlichkeit/Humanität (Humanum) im zeitgenössischen literarischen Drama und Theater in Bezug auf die Frage der nachhaltigen Zukunft befassten.

**Schlüsselwörter:** Drama, Theater, wissenschaftliches Projekt, Polen, Konferenz, Vernetzung.





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