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# “Risky Forays into Border Lands”: *Bez autorytetu* by Stefan Chwin and Stanisław Rosiek, and the Depleting Modernity

## 1.

The critical book, which is the most common definition of *Bez autorytetu* by Stefan Chwin and Stanisław Rosiek<sup>1</sup>, has not been discussed in many studies<sup>2</sup>. Usually, the text was analysed within the broader perspective of a debate on the condition of Polish literature in the second half of the 20th century, particularly in the context of the reality of politicised culture and the formation of the alternative cultural and social circulation<sup>3</sup>. The time of

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<sup>1</sup> S. Chwin, S. Rosiek, *Bez autorytetu*, Gdańsk 1981, hereinafter BA and page number [Unless indicated otherwise, quotations in English were translated from Polish].

<sup>2</sup> The most interesting of all the studies was a polemic written in 1981, yet printed in 1984. I am referring to the study by Andrzej Urbański titled *Gra o świadomość, czyli spóźniona glosa do krytyki lat siedemdziesiątych*, “Alm. Lit. Iskier” 1984, issue 1. Other: L. Bugajski, *Filologowie w rozterce*, “Kultura” 1981, issue 42; T. Nyczek, *Nowa prywatność krytyki*, “Literatura” 1981, issue 36; K. Krasuski, *Bez autorytetu, ale odpowiedzialnie*, “Odra” 1982, issue 7/8; A. Ogrodowczyk, *Terapia krytyki*, “Miesięcznik Literacki” 1982, issue 10; J. Sochoń, *Dopiero zaczynamy*, “Akcent” 1982, issue 4; A. Nowak, *Granice niezależności*, “Poezja” 1984, issue 3; K. Dybciak, *Programoburcy i programotwórczy ostatniego ćwierćwiecza (2)*, “Literatura” 1981, issue 50, p. 12.

<sup>3</sup> P. Czapliński, P. Sliwiński, *Literatura polska 1976-1998. Przewodnik po prozie i poezji*, Kraków 1999, pp. 37-38, 42-44, 145-146. A different perspective was proposed by Dorota Kozicka, who indicated the issue of the continuity of meta-critical reflection in the post-WWII decades. *Bez autorytetu* signalled a certain oversaturation with the discussions of the goals and objectives of criticism. D. Kozicka, *Krytyk w PRL-u. O kilku problemach w badaniach nad krytyką powojenną*, [in:] *PRL – świat (nie)przedstawiony*, eds. A. Czyżak, J. Galant, M. Jaworski, Poznań 2010.

its publication (1981) basically prevented any broader and direct – i.e. not burdened by the need to engage in games with censorship – analyses of the proposed theses as well as the indicated observations and diagnoses developed by the Gdańsk-based critics.

Literary historians lost from their sights not only the issue of subjecting the concepts of which Chwin and Rosiek's discourse was woven to in-depth analysis<sup>4</sup>, but also – what is equally important – the issue of the tool itself through which those concepts have been formulated. The book, as it has been conventionally assumed, functions as an interesting element of the landscape of that era and, essentially, its value is purely that of an antique<sup>5</sup>. The marginal nature of *Bez autorytetu* is puzzling after all. The publication was not re-issued (it was actually typical of texts from that era which were considered manifestos, e.g. a similar situation concerned *Świat nie przedstawiony* by Kornhauser and Zagajewski). It is used in fragments to a limited extent – in selections of Polish 20th-century essays and in anthologies of literary criticism there is only a mere excerpt which does not fully indicate the formal and problem-based complexity of the essay collection of the Gdańsk-based critics, though, actually, the basic stimulus of the meta-critical intention is clearly visible<sup>6</sup>. This situation could be considered as the outcome of a gradual loss of interest in the topics which were central in Chwin and Rosiek's critical reflection, which would mean that their analyses, postulates, and concepts were merely by-products of the literary situation which existed at that time and, therefore, already when initiated they were sentenced to being strictly time-limited. It is possible that the indicated marginal character had a deeper dimension and was a result of not overtly expressed observations regarding the meaning and status of meta-literary texts (critical and meta-critical) at the end of the 20th century, i.e. in the reality of fully fledged modernity. Somewhat contrary to their own overtly

<sup>4</sup> It seems that the first literary history analysis of *Bez autorytetu* was conducted by Marek Zaleski (*Przygody myśli krytycznoliterackiej*, [in:] *Sporne sprawy polskiej literatury współczesnej*, eds. A. Brodzka, L. Burska, Warsaw 1998). In discussing the course of the changes in self-reflection of the literary criticism of the 1970s and 1980s, he indicated the major conditions of critical activities: the institutionalisation of criticism and the saturation of critical discourse with the procedures of literary science. Chwin and Rosiek's argumentation could have become a major element of a broader debate on the condition of critical writings as a special mode of evaluation of literature, a debate which returned in a somewhat altered form after 1989.

<sup>5</sup> The importance of Stefan Chwin and Stanisław Rosiek's position in the context of uncovering the map of the changes in literary criticism at the turn of the century was consistently indicated by Dorota Kozicka, who raised the issue that their book did not trigger a debate to the extent as the new wave manifestos did, the project of which cast a new light on the 20th-century changes of the critical discourse in Poland. D. Kozicka, *Krytyczne (nie)porządki. Studia o współczesnej krytyce literackiej w Polsce*, Kraków 2012.

<sup>6</sup> "Kartografowie dziwnych podróży". *Wypiski z polskiej krytyki literackiej XX wieku*, editing and introduction by M. Wyka, K. Biedrzycki, J. Fazan, D. Kozicka, M. Urbanowski, J. Zach, Kraków 2004, pp. 120-130. When summarising the major Polish essays of the final decades of the 20th century, Jan Tomkowski consistently omitted texts which feature the trademarks of literary criticism (cf. J. Tomkowski, *Dwie dekady z esejem*, [in:] *Sporne sprawy polskiej literatury współczesnej*, eds. A. Brodzka, L. Burska, Warsaw 1998); moreover, this mode of defining the nature of the essay as a literary issue and thus constructing a particular hierarchy and a canon of the Polish literary essay was continued in the collection titled *Polski esej literacki. Antologia*, editing and introduction by J. Tomkowski, Wrocław 2018.

expressed ambitions of overcoming the world-view crisis of literary criticism and the introduction of new practices of critical writing, Chwin and Rosiek conducted a pragmatic record of the impossibility of such a transformation which would be imposed by the belief (declared in spite of impossibility) in the "logos of modernity"<sup>7</sup>.

## 2.

Chwin and Rosiek's essay is a whole divided into separate parts which can essentially be read as self-sufficient studies, yet only when considered within the whole collection do they form a broader story on the condition of criticism and the options of meta-literary writing (including about the essay as a form of meta-literary reflection). The tension between the separateness of an individual voice and the multi-voice complementarity of the whole determines – as one factor – the contradictions and the specific internal dialogic character of *Bez autorytetu*, which features refrain-like repetitions. There occurs a recurrence of notions, reflections, problems, and ascertainments in individual texts as independent in terms of their original wholes and as dialogically set-up elements of the entirety. Thanks to this conceptual and stylistic property, the aim of the work declared by the critics becomes problematised (the risk of "forays into literary border lands" increases) and – which, in my opinion, is just as important – this is where the fissure or ambivalence exists, which caused the already mentioned marginality of the entire project. The attempts at universalising that which is currently happening in criticism and in literature uncover the contradictions in the processes of the fully fledged ('over-mature') modernity of the culture of that period. The striving for a reconciliation of qualities such as idiomaticity, personality, and individuality on the one hand, and universality, generalisation, and collectiveness on the other is no longer possible within the framework of a non-discrepant critical manifesto or within the space of the practice of criticism which would be supposed to fulfil such a manifesto; such oppositions prove increasingly problematic.

I believe that the form used by the authors of *Bez autorytetu* constituted the necessary mechanism of conceptualisation of the difficulties of building a satisfactory language of literary description, as well as a means for indicating the problematic situation of literature as an institution grounded in modern reality. Because of this, the discourse of the critics illustrated a more serious problem of the exhaustion of previous options for writing about literature and, in turn, it revealed the questionable status of literature itself, which ceased to occupy a privileged position among other social practices. The crisis of literary criticism, which Chwin and Rosiek described and somewhat tried to fix, was a symptom of these exact processes which have been gradually transforming the literature-centric culture of fully fledged modernism, which – as one might assume – has progressed in parallel with socio-political transformations and was obscured by them.

<sup>7</sup> L. Burska, *Awangarda i inne złudzenia. O pokoleniu '68 w Polsce*, Gdańsk 2012, p. 271.

A major issue for explaining the mode of reflection developed in *Bez autorytetu* is the reconstruction of the manner of understanding the essay and essayistic nature. The authors answered the “what is the essay?” question several times in a peculiar manner, somewhat as a side remark to the main problem area, considering an essayistic text as a major tool for articulating the observations in which they were interested. The trademarks of genological awareness – or, rather, the awareness of the formal qualities of the essay as a mode of thinking and writing – appeared several times and they always constituted a major element of the argumentation.

### 3.

The understanding and definition of the essay is rooted in modernity<sup>8</sup> – the critics emphasised its formal specificity, they appreciated its heterogenic nature, and admired its complexity. Therefore, the essay in their analysis is a line of thinking and a style of the expression and definition (virtually idiomatic and thus avoided) of a personal world view; a personal distance towards extra-personal notions. At the same time, the essay – contrasted with the report – enables one to avoid unilateral evaluations or judgements as well as rigid (and devoid of complexity) interpretations of own experience (both regarding texts and discursive everydayness) of the Self of a writer (or of a speaker – the essay could, therefore, be also an oral tool). Thus, Stefan Chwin wrote in a part titled “Przestrzeń zdrady”:

**Unfitness for the essay**, as that is what this is all about, unfitness not only for a certain style of thinking but also a style of expression, a style of expressing personal attitudes to notions, so emphatically present in criticism, stems from the fact that the modern culture of public expression is to a major extent a **culture of report**. (...) the “report”, i.e. a special type of concision, a certain rigidity of style, a type of mitigated emotionality, or even the application of typical intonational rhetorisms combined with a special solidaristic sentimentalism, is commonly considered the model form of the emergence of a person in public life. (BA, p. 123)

Other values of the essay that are desirable according to the critic include, first of all, the ability to develop a reflective view of reality by stimulating and triggering the critical subjectivity of a writer, and, secondly, the ability to construct a holistic vision. The essay stimulates cognitive processes. It establishes them, clarifies them, and, finally, makes them independent of a priori judgements forcing the Self to face independently the chaotic space of discourses and ideologies which organise the everyday reality. In another chapter, titled “Socjologia milczenia”, the critic argued that:

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<sup>8</sup> R. Sendyka, *Nowoczesny esej. Studium historycznej świadomości gatunku*, Kraków 2006, pp. 299-308.

Consciousness which cannot find nourishment in domestic works, turns to translations – that has always been the case in similar situations, and that is the case now. There readers seek out the language which they cannot find here. I am thinking about the huge sales success of the series with the infinity sign, which offered the works by renowned authors of world essay, and the recent fascination with Spanish and Ibero-American literature. Those facts seem completely unrelated at first glance. Their genres are different, as are their styles and problem issues. And yet they are an expression of the same, still unsatisfied, hunger. I am referring to the philosophical hunger, the hunger for reflection boldly encompassing the entirety of the world, which seeks answers to basic questions, which cannot be properly satisfied with Polish literature. It is the language of the essay – intellectually comprehensive and yet saturated with emotion, specific and stimulating for the imagination, metaphorical and open – that offers a valuable promise. It is clearly aligned with contemporary sensitivity, and it evokes trust by not trying to hide its pedigree, teaching how to individually seek out the truth. (BA, pp. 189-190)

The essay is supposed to provide language – the tools for critical thinking, which can enable one to escape the automatic processes of dominant conceptualisations within the applicable academic, literary, philosophical, and political paradigms. The essay might enable people – the moment of doubt in the fragment quoted below seems significant to me – to express their individual experiences which have not yet been “colonised” by the dehumanising discourses of the Self aggressively ousting them. Chwin argued for the need for the essay as a kind of an uncertain remedy in the difficult conditions of everyday existence in the part titled “Rany wewnątrzne. Trzy fragmenty o kolonizacji doświadczenia”:

To descend further, under the surface, to seize the **colonisation of experience**, the hidden erosion of its symbolic foundation, but mainly to expose the yet uncolonised areas of existence, the rebellious forms of persistence which avoid external pressures, which cannot be enclosed with the rigid limits of the common anthropological hypothesis. A fascinating and extremely difficult aim: we do not know the language in which a discussion on experience could be truly conducted, it might be the language of the essay, which combines poetic confessions and the psychological and sociological reflection on the limits of customs and internal life, or it might be the new psychological novel, which will depict the not yet discovered mental processes. Surely, that requires the discovery of a genre, literature is going to face a trial of form and cognition – it is necessary to take the risk of breaking a genre, and, what is even more important and much more inconvenient, overcoming own competence. (...) The political psychoanalysis of experience – that could be the name of that horizon of literary cognition – has not yet been developed. How is it possible in poetry, in the essay, in the novel? (BA, pp. 237-238)

The observations regarding the ability of the essay as to the expression of existential and spiritual experience, as well as concerning the problems of literature and literary criticism, are not formulated exclusively within the manifesto/intervention mode. Chwin and Rosiek changed theoretical remarks into practical solutions within their own critical project.

#### 4.

The key figure which organises the conceptual zone and the problem area, and which determines the mode of writing, is contradiction. It manifests as an opposition, paradox, aporia; it is subject to reflective perception and it functions in a text at the stylistic level<sup>9</sup>. Chwin and Rosiek traced contradictions by means of analysing the mechanisms of the inner workings of literary criticism, deconstructing the hidden rules of evaluation, and creating proposals alternative in relation to the existing discourses of critical writing.

Another important mechanism which initiates discursive activities throughout the volume is critical dialogueness – usually present as a strategy of intertextual writing<sup>10</sup> as well as a synonym of an attitude shaped by the hermeneutic philosophy and the philosophy of dialogue<sup>11</sup> (which, in fact, was declared by the authors in individual essays). The act of grasping, identifying, and describing the various contradictions which determine literature and the 20th-century literariness (especially in the decades after the Second World War), and the resulting consequences for literary criticism writing, as well as the following critical reflection focused on those contradictions were all supposed to occur through a dialogue, a dialogic motion progressing in various directions, resonating in various – often mutually exclusive or seemingly opposing – problem areas.

The structure of the volume was planned with meticulous precision. It combines the accuracy of an academic delimitation of the discussed problems with the openness of the stylistics of literary criticism, which utilises suggestive metaphors and ‘controversial’ slogans. Individual parts and the essays they include centre around a pre-defined set of issues, which, to varying degrees, emerge in every text: the intertwining relations of language, literature, reality, and the cognitive and ethical disposition of a human being formed by the transformations of modern times. The progression of consecutive parts is managed by a reflective/problem-focused rhythm, which defines the special nature of the entire project: an austere analysis of the existing situation of literary criticism (as well as an analysis of the condition of literature) bearing the features of a literary science study combines with a kind of a framework manifesto, which refers to both criticism and literature, invented as a ‘corrective manifesto’. The analysis indicates four basic problem areas located in individual parts: “O ukrytych normach” [“On the

<sup>9</sup> Cf. T. Nyczek, *op. cit.*

<sup>10</sup> Thus, the authors came close to the key – almost ontological – quality of the essay, namely the practice of quoting, of establishing oneself through intertexts. Cf. M.P. Markowski, *Cztery uwagi o eseju*, [in:] *Polski esej. Studia*, ed. M. Wyka, Kraków 1991, pp. 173-174.

<sup>11</sup> J. Sochoń, *op. cit.*, pp. 139, 141.

hidden norms"] concerns the conditions of critical writing; "O rytuałach" ["On rituals"] discusses the aims and functions of literary criticism; "O milczeniu" ["On remaining silent"] defines the tools of criticism and the material of literature, i.e. the functioning of language in the existing cultural and social context; finally, "O spustoszeniu" ["On devastation"] constitutes a portrait of the existing reality and a diagnosis of the place of a human being, and it defines the role of literature and the tasks of criticism in thus defined landscape of the era. Significantly enough, in consecutive texts, the share of the 'manifesto-forming' element gradually increases. The conceptualisation of the formula for escaping the deadlock becomes more emphatic in the final sections – simple calculations indicate an interesting regularity: the introduction consists of two texts ("Punkty oparcia", "Fikcjotwórcy"), parts I and II also include two texts each, while there are four texts in part III and five texts in part IV. The organisation, captured in the title formulations of consecutive parts and in the titles of individual essays, is deliberate and as such it indicates a certain analytical and interpretative discipline, which is masked and revealed at the level of titles.

The procedure of reconstructing the current state of literary criticism and literature – and the designing of their possible shapes – progresses from a detailed definition of conditions, through outlining the aims and defining the tools, to an exhaustive description of themes (each part constitutes a specific stage of the procedure). Moreover, that precision is amplified by a formal device that is specific to the academic discourse: the authors used notes in order to identify quoted texts, fix them clearly within the context of a literary-criticism debate, place them within the framework of a specific academic discipline, and properly expand the argumentation without disturbing its main course. They wove the essay, usually observing the rules which they themselves had imposed, i.e. to curb the dialogue in which they entered with various texts (regardless of the texts' origins), which protected them against the accusation of arbitrariness or non-verifiable impressiveness, generalisations, and the use of clichés.

This sort of discipline existed side by side with an opposite, somewhat 'anarchistic' drive: 1) the academic, at first glance, inclination to construct bibliographic references and extensions or supplements outside the core course of the discussion, is not consistent throughout and sometimes it even amplifies the personal quality of reflection (note 4 in the text "Mowa niczyja" by Stanisław Rosiek); 2) the impersonal and objective tone seems suspicious (it exists, e.g., in the title formula of *Bez autorytetu*) and should be replaced whenever possible by a personal tone, a clearly defined personal instance of the writer – this was, in fact, argued by Chwin and Rosiek regarding the critical discourse (personal and private, since existential nature of a text and a critical comment ensures accord); 3) the typographic solutions in the initial sections – i.e. the introduction "Punkty oparcia" and "Fikcjotwórcy", and then in part I essay 1 ("Pewność i wahanie"), as well as in fragments of "Fikcjotwórcy 2" and "Fikcjotwórcy 3" – use italics, which indicates stylistic and conceptual diversity: a personal confession and self-reflection offer an insight into the act of writing, they are stories on the formation

of convictions and concepts which shall develop the notional architecture of the remaining essays; they are the meta-critical stage of extracting and formulating personal convictions, an intensively experienced self-analysis with emphatic course. Due to this particular reason one commentator defined the mode of writing of the authors of *Bez autorytetu* as a kind of critical prose coming close to literature<sup>12</sup>. Allow me to add that, considering the volume's narrative nature, such an analogy seems justified.

The loosening of methodological discipline – verging on academic doctrinism – occurs through the application of ambiguous notions<sup>13</sup> (or by resorting to saturating own discourse with notions with visible pedigree of a specific branch or discipline) and references to various orders of knowledge in a somewhat amateurish form; the authors referenced certain concepts and lines of thinking about the issues in which they were interested, yet they used them as stimuli for their own discursive machine. They ensured the clarification of the original context of the notions and concepts they had initiated, and then included them within the mode of reference or modification in the area of their narrative.

The literary science precision is stripped of the doctrinistic ossification, one that is typical – according to Chwin and Rosiek – of the structuralist school, the main sin of which was the removal of the human dimension from a literary text and the monolithic nature of the methodology paralyzing other interpretative opportunities<sup>14</sup>. A kind of transgression against the academic nature<sup>15</sup> – including against structuralism and, more broadly, against the strict path of objective and impersonal literary science interpretation by grotesquely emphasised alleged objectivity – comes in the form of removing author references and placing them only in the table of contents. The authorial stigma is revealed through the careful reading of the essays, i.e. when one can notice the stylistic differences and the resulting conceptual shifts regarding other essays (Chwin focused on developing the manifesto and universalisation – which can be seen in his inclination to formulate more general philosophical/reflective observations, while Rosiek was more critically and analytically focused, especially in deconstructing the critical discourse from the stylistic and socio-literary side). Identification is possible, though impeded, thanks to the self-critical remarks regarding own texts – particularly in the case of Rosiek's essays there are relations which refer to other original texts. The problem is that such an investigation (I shall omit

<sup>12</sup> A. Urbański, *Gra o świadomość*, *op. cit.*, p. 85.

<sup>13</sup> Being one of few polemicists, Leszek Bugajski argued that the theoretical machinery applied with finesse by Chwin and Rosiek was used by them to reinvent the wheel and, as a result, all of the initiated theories are an unnecessary burden. Cf. L. Bugajski, *op. cit.*

<sup>14</sup> Cf. M. Zaleski, *Przygody myśli krytycznoliterackiej*, pp. 214-215, 227-229.

<sup>15</sup> From Leszek Bugajski's perspective, Chwin and Rosiek's basic problem was the saturation of their own discourse with philological apparatus. In this sense, the rise against literary science, to which they referred, did not occur. It is not critics but philologists who complicate and confuse the intuitively working writing of literary criticism. For Bugajski, critical practice related to theory was something different; in fact, pragmatic indifference towards attempts at the meta-critical constructing (or reconstructing) of the procedures of evaluation and their hidden premises seems symptomatic. Cf. L. Bugajski, *op. cit.*



the authorial references in the table of contents) would be a bibliographic tracking of library traces of the current literary criticism.

The saturation with 'temporariness' constitutes yet another non-academic, and non-essayistic, element. Every text is marked with a date (month and year) and the arguments are interlaced with references, indications, and allusions to life at that time; moreover, the authors emphasised the historicity of their writing, stressing the current moment. They created tension between interventionality with commentary qualities and its critical transgression by means of analyses of broader contexts of the currentness of literary circulation; initiating a further temporal perspective – which spurred the referenced literary-criticism texts, manifestos, and paradigms – and formulating their own critical alternative reflections regarding the existing system of forces which determine critical writing. The currentness – which from today's perspective seems excessively journalistic, which is why Chwin and Rosiek's project tipped towards currentness – is necessary and, I believe, ineffaceable if the whole 'corrective' project was supposed to be formed and if that special form of critical writing proposed by the authors was supposed to be possible. The dialectic condition of the mode of writing through critical identification of the era by means of being rooted in its reality (that currentness) seems to be another dimension of dialogicality, as well as a clear manifestation of contradictions with which the discourse of *Bez autorytetu* is bursting.

## 5.

Chwin and Rosiek observed the contemporary literary situation in such a way to initiate as many contexts surrounding and outside literature as possible, e.g. by common or similar notions used in literary reflection (be it theoretical, critical, or historical) and in related domains (in the sociology of literature or in linguistics) or somewhat related (in philosophy, psychoanalysis, or sociology). These notions are, to name only those most often used in the essays: language, speech, reality, truth, experience, word, consciousness, world view, dialogue, criticism, discourse, the society, and authenticity. Such a broad approach devoid of orthodoxy enabled various intriguing decisions which placed the issue of literary criticism in the network of non-obvious relations and conditions (the authors of *Bez autorytetu* usually discovered that which is associated with habitus, distinction, and field), and averts the threat of stylistic monotony caused by the critical-essayistic 'I' closing itself in the area of the formal properties of a single discourse, a strictly defined mode of writing (such a situation would not foster dialogueness – so important for Chwin and Rosiek's entire project – as a mode of thinking, developing the reflection, or as a stylistic property). "Forays into border lands" are "risky" as they entail the realisation of losing from one's field of view the specificity of that which is literary, but at the same time these forays are necessary due to the ineffaceability of the extra-literary context of literary and meta-literary expressions. Chwin and Rosiek drew far-reaching conclusions from the trivial statement that literature does not operate in a vacuum;

they abandoned an isolated view of a literary text as a self-sufficient whole owing to their academic experiences (disappointment in structuralism and expert reading in general) and the observations of the workings of the machine which evaluates, in their view, the procedures of literary criticism.

The relationship between language, ethics, and axiology in the discourse of *Bez autorytetu* attributes individual essays – and, mostly, the whole – with a utopian air<sup>16</sup> while producing a taint of scepticism. Why is the notion of language so important, almost key, within the discursive structure of *Bez autorytetu*? Not to mention that it is a flickering and paradoxical notion, which stands out in the context of the entire volume through the fact that it incessantly gains and loses focus. Language analysis enables that which critics have termed the “psychoanalysis of political experience” (BA, p. 238). The privileged position within the procedure is occupied by a search of truth, i.e. the personal expression founded in authentic interpersonal relations as a quality prior to literature; to be more precise, reading is an interpersonal relationship in which a reader (critic) and the author are engaged. A literary text is supposed to be a meeting place through language – the medium of experiences. The striving for authenticity remains deep in the narratives of critics – it is sometimes expressed directly as genuine language, not adulterated language, an ethical attitude, the truth of speech, etc. It also has an influence at the level of stylistic solutions (personal tone, a visible Self instead of an impersonal form or an undefined ‘I’, the poetics of confession, and self-reflection).

Reality is marked by incoherence, a painful fissure which becomes evident only when critical reflection concerns language, speaking, and communication, and the patterns of conceptualisation of extra-linguistic exterior they establish. The piercing sense of the imbalance has the clear form of a modernist crisis of expression resulting from the identification of the ambivalent relationship between words and objects. This modernist blemish becomes evident several times throughout *Bez autorytetu*, though the book also includes a subtle distance which enables one to see in these observations a critical reaction to the paralysing nostalgia for the expressiveness of modernists.

That which is general appears within the area of public dialogue devoid of the personal stigma, ossified in depersonalised words, dead and monumental, while that which is personal degenerates in struggles of ideas sealed off from life which are important for the entire community. There is not language which could combine both zones. One which could become a space for authentic creation of ideas. (BA, p. 125)

The dream of the adequacy of language in relation to experiences is, clearly, partly quasi-anonymous; a reaction to the rhetoric of official public life. At the same time, the striving for authenticity is sometimes perceived as ideological fiction and a utopian dream.

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<sup>16</sup> Cf. P. Czapliński, P. Śliwiński, *Literatura polska 1976-1998*, pp. 145-146; P. Czapliński, *Powrót centrali. Literatura w nowej rzeczywistości*, Kraków 2007, pp. 171-178, L. Bugajski, *op. cit.*

Thus, following the narrow path **between** no one's speech and schizophrenic speech, the words of strangers and shattered words, I can say once **more**: we do not possess such a language. It is no one's speech. What remains is silence or the hopeless (?) search for own words. (...) In this text (...) I intended only to wrap a preliminary web of metaphors and suppositions around the existing (not for me) no one's speech – the source of foreignness. The outcome of that, no I know that, will always be partial at best. Is it even possible: "to utter foreignness in speech?" (BA, p. 148-149)

Finally, when language functions in the discourse of *Bez autorytetu* in the sense of a separate idiom – a separate personal language – there emerges the aporia between the need for unconstrained expression of the Self of a specific language user (a system which ensures communication of a community) and the need to guarantee basic communication within a community. The vision of a compelling language system which removes the personal quality of the speaker comes close to the crisis vision of the depersonalisation and unification of the individual. The critics faced an unsolvable dilemma (unsolvable from the point of view of modernity): for the price of communication with others, 'I' will not express itself; thus, it will not establish its own subjectivity and identity. Eventually, in both cases – i.e. an idiom and a "person with properties" and the anonymous being within a communication community – the highly desirable truth, authenticity, and uniqueness will not become established within language.

In order to avoid violating the generally applicable linguistic ritual, i.e. violating the universal social order (who would willingly choose banishment), we speak with the words of others. (...) Passiveness, defence, instantaneous yielding to the words of others and the resulting pragmatic acceptance of other people's world quickly leads speakers to an acute conflict between **that which is expressed** and **that which is kept silent**. (...) We continue to realise that we probably will never muster the courage to become one person by **repeating** the same **word** everywhere. (...) We ourselves, constantly being someone else, become more and more no one, "a person without properties." (BA, pp. 168-169)

Chwin and Rosiek's essays are marked by the striving for unconstrained speaking, a longing for authentic speech which was prior to authority (the extra-individual determinants which define styles, rhetorics, narratives, and ideologies), which blocks any free linguistic operations and communicational freedom. Language proves to be that concept which due to its own ambiguity and ability to trigger its own meanings depending on the context enables one to emphasise the multi-lateral relations of literature, and to show literariness as the outcome of the influence of various factors. Language is a material as well as a tool for communicating and thinking, the natural cognitive medium and conceptual laboratory; an abstract set of rules, hierarchies, and dichotomies, and an instrument for establishing basic interpersonal relations and building relations with the world.

The title signals this desire, yet it is also an expression of a certain conceptual problem. What kind of a declaration hides under the title formulation? The answer is as obvious as it is inadequate. It seems a reference to Barańczak's "ethics without authority" or, more broadly, to the principles included in new-wave slogans, yet that is a seeming parallel<sup>17</sup>. In fact, the critics argued that:

Suspicion is an unreliable path: it also turns against itself; it covers not only the world but it also undermines own foundations. A cursed circle of negation. Distance. Irony which kills itself. (BA, p. 212)

Then, in another place – by criticising the manifesto slogans and poetic strategies – they partly uncovered their own problematic position of critics struggling with a lexicon of the notions of modern literature:

That is why the breaking of allegory, the exposing of that which is hidden, can be a painful wake-up call at most. It basically changes nothing. From an illusion of meaning it tosses into void. From a pretence of order into chaos. Grotesque, irony, parody, realistic unmasking, criticism of language – all that is not enough. Those are mere defensive strategies. (BA, p. 215)

The fact of abandoning a self-portrait is an expression of distance towards the problems of literature's engagement in the criticism of social practices, mainly the official rituals of the collective life. The title deficiency is understood twofold: 1) the abandonment of a priori assumptions, the undermining of authority as a convenient alibi which relieves readers (or critics) of the duty to conduct an in-depth dialogue-focused reading, authority as a synonym of unwarranted oppression towards a text and a consent for a lack of self-critical reflection; 2) the need to develop self-aware critical attitudes (sometimes transforming into the procedures of reading), which would consider the uniqueness of a text as the meeting of equal personalities of the author and a critic. The need to abandon authority results from the fact of noticing a certain regularity in how literature functions. The institutionalisation of the literary circulation produces experts whose job is to read literature: critics, historians, and theoreticians, who somewhat monopolise specialist knowledge and transform it into purveyors of truth, theories, diagnoses, generalisations, and paradigms. The refusal to follow authority is a refusal to recognise the need to trust such an expert system, though essentially there is no escaping it<sup>18</sup>.

<sup>17</sup> Perhaps Leszek Kołakowski's "ethics without a code" would be a more justified context. Cf. L. Kołakowski, *Kultura i fetysze. Zbiór rozpraw*, Warsaw 1967, first printed as: *Etyka bez kodeksu*, "Twórczość" 1962, issue 7.

<sup>18</sup> In this context, one should ask whether Chwin and Rosiek completely abandoned the legitimisation of their discourse by authority figures. For example, Kazimierz Wyka, Jerzy Kwiatkowski, and Jacek Łukasiewicz were subjected to deep critical analyses; their outputs were the focus of reflection. Then, Mochnacki, Brzozowski, and Irzykowski appeared as patrons. Modern critics and creators of manifestos, especially the new-wave ones, were treated incredulously: books and essays by Barańczak, Zagajewski, and Kornhauser were the objects

## 6.

*Bez autorytetu*, stretched between various genres and types of expressions, became, as its authors wrote in the introduction, a series of "risky forays into the border lands" of literature. The texts by the Gdańsk-based critics fulfilled the typical of the essay strategy of combining contradictory threads which cannot be reconciled within a single mode of writing. In the case of a manifesto, it is about a critical reflection regarding modernity, an academic precision of analysing literature free of the subjectivity of literary criticism, though, at the same time, about considering the relationship between the readers and a literary text.

Chwin and Rosiek's discourse fluctuated between an academic paper, a literary-criticism text, and a commentary, while the 'essayisticness' competing with 'academicity' constitute – in *Bez autorytetu* – a key opposition, around which the process of formulating conclusions and ideas, stating hypotheses, and constructing arguments was organised. This special opposition, actually criticised by contemporary (few) commentators<sup>19</sup> (they demanded either 'normal' literary criticism or pure academic discourse), signalled how problematic the thinking about meta-literary (critical, academic, or manifesto/theoretical) languages is, not only within the categories of mutually-exclusive alternatives, but also as tools which could be fully integrated.

I believe that *Bez autorytetu* is a record of a certain turning point in how the strategies of meta-literary writing are understood. The authors made attempts to break the limits of how the essay was understood as a genre (or the strategies of writing) founded in the modern sensitivity pestered by ever new crises, which longs for grandness<sup>20</sup>. *Bez autorytetu* – as a specific essay of modernity in the process of being exhausted, though not exhausted completely – could be a way of emphasising the doubts as to whether the modernist *status quo* should be maintained. This was phrased acutely in the introduction by Stefan Chwin:

We knew (...) that literature was no longer an act of bull leaping, that there were no books at which one could erupt with the flames of outrage, that there were no books which brought some grand news. There were better and worse books, but one thing was certain: that there were no important

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of polemic. A similar fate applied to other literary-criticism narratives, which established ad hoc formulas, e.g. the 'new privacy', a trend in the 1970s. Basically, the only positive references concerned the critical texts by Jan Błoński and Tomasz Burek.

<sup>19</sup> Cf. J. Sochoń, *op. cit.*, p. 139.

<sup>20</sup> The moment of turn in the conceptual zone – within the sphere of thinking about the relations between literature and literary orders, which results in methodological changes – was captured by Andrzej Urbański when he was formulating his objections to Chwin and Rosiek: "Everything is reading: of texts, people, relations" (A. Urbański, *op. cit.*, p. 87). The critic could not accept that basically 'pantextual' vision of reality, which transformed into the object of constant interpretation, which actually did seem to be a kind of conceptual possibility to the authors of *Bez autorytetu*, yet it was never expressed anywhere in the book. Nonetheless, Urbański's observation was also triggered by the 'hermeneutics of suspicions', in which everyone who was engaged in the 20th-century literature and culture has been trained.

books which would shatter the foundations of our ethos, which would take the ground from under our feet, which would threaten the world. (BA, pp. 15-16)

The attempt to restore literature's power through a critical revitalisation of criticism in *Bez autorytetu* is immersed in the shadow of certain ambiguity. If a statement on a work of art (in this case – literature) is supposed to be a work of art in itself (it then acquired 'essayistic' qualities)<sup>21</sup>, then *Bez autorytetu* is problematic twofold. First of all, it more eagerly criticises literary criticism and the general literary context than literature itself, thus making statements about a work of art (so it would be meta-critical); secondly, it approaches its own universalisation of reflection in an ambivalent manner (by emphasising its currentness and rooting in a specific moment in time), and it abandons the artistic form or the heterogenic literariness specific to the essay. This triggers a doubt about whether *Bez autorytetu*, fixated on modernist role models, is a modern essay, or perhaps its internal tensions are so powerful that they lead to a formation of a genre which would be closer to the post-modern essay<sup>22</sup>. It seems that it is key to pose the question about truth as the fundamental purpose of writing<sup>23</sup>.

Chwin and Rosiek's essay combined various elements specific not only to domains related to literature, but also domains typical of extra-literary discourses, in order to try and avoid the temptation of expressing the Truth or seeking some Universal Rules to the benefit of individual experience (eventually they did not manage to avoid that temptation, or escaped it only for a moment). For this reason, unlike in the case of the canonical essayistic works of Polish modernity<sup>24</sup>, *Bez autorytetu* was somewhat doomed for 'locality', for a gradual – possibly somewhat journalistic – loss of currentness. The fact of including temporariness, the special kind of self-placement in the centre and yet at the fringes of the main debates of the era, seems to be a price necessary to pay in order to be able to formulate reservations

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<sup>21</sup> M. P. Markowski, *Czy możliwa jest poetyka eseju?*, [in:] *Poetyka bez granic*, eds. W. Bolecki, W. Tomasik, Warsaw 1995, p. 117.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 116-118. Vide B. Choińska, *Esej jako następstwo pesymizmu teoriopoznawczego*, "Słupskie Studia Filozoficzne" 2007, issue 6, pp. 64-65.

<sup>23</sup> Another dichotomy seems interesting in this perspective, namely the one proposed by Lyotard: the essay would be, within all the paradoxical nature of this statement, post-modernist, while a fragment, having a Romantic provenance, modernist (J.F. Lyotard, *Odpowiedź na pytanie: co to jest postmodernizm?*, transl. M.P. Markowski, [in:] *Postmodernizm. Antologia przekładów*, editing, selection and foreword by R. Nycz, Kraków 1997, pp. 58-61). What was important to Chwin and Rosiek was the tradition of the grand engaged criticism established in the writings of Maurycy Mochnacki. As academics, they both ran the orbit of Romantic focus, which is why their essayistic volume could be viewed as a cracked fragment of post-Romantic modernism, which reformulated itself into a text close to the essay (if, of course, one was to keep to Lyotard's premise). The issue of those relations is so complex that, basically, the essay by Chwin and Rosiek – or, actually, the essayistic form, which celebrated contradictions and which was amateurish yet professional – could be considered as the application of Romantic irony promoted by Friedrich Schlegel. I mention all this to indicate the problematic nature of the concept of the French philosopher, though it was certainly an intriguing thought.

<sup>24</sup> Cf. A.S. Kowalczyk, *Kryzys świadomości europejskiej w esejistyce polskiej lat 1945-1977* (*Vincenz – Stempowski – Miłosz*), Warsaw 1990.

towards the ossifying modernity. However, as I imagine, it would be excessive to classify the text by Chwin and Rosiek as a post-modern essay. This is because, on the one hand, the declarations regarding the need for stability within the domain of axiological and cognitive criteria or the tirades against the inauthenticity of language situate *Bez autorytetu* clearly within the domain of modernist traditions of longing for grandness. On the other, however, the indications of noticing a situation of the exhaustion of the modern culture and tiredness with the existing models of literariness suggest that the essayistic volume by Chwin and Rosiek suffers from an interesting ailment of a discrepancy between diagnoses and theoretical-manifesto formulas.

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## SUMMARY

The article concerns a critical book by Stefan Chwin and Stanisław Rosiek, titled *Bez autorytetu*, which is treated as an example of the process of a certain turn in the Polish modern literature of the end of the 20th century. The author discusses the basic assumptions of critical concepts and indicates the questionable places of the problem structure emerging from those assumptions. In so doing, he treats *Bez autorytetu* as a form of a modern essay which developed in the conditions of mature modernism, which was reflected in the various attempts at transcending modernistic conditions, both formal and conceptual.

## Keywords

modernity, essay, literary criticism

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