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Narrations about Freedom



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NARRATIONS ABOUT FREEDOM

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Tomasz Bocheński\*

## Freedom and secretiveness, in late modernism

In contemporary Polish, there often appears the trivial mistake: “in another optics,” or, even worse, “to change the optics of seeing.” That fallacy sounds like breaking a lens or crushing glasses, yet I wish to make that mistake, I wish to prove another way of seeing. I wrote “seeing”, but, in fact, what I meant was “non-seeing”, “shutting my eyelids”, and “pretend and real blindness.” I have already fallen into contradictions, from which no paradox can retrieve me, though I have prepared several paradoxes in my defence. For a second, the glare of a paradox beautifully lights up the darkness. What I mean, though, is darkness viewed in permanent light. Had I started with the following invitation: “I wish to explain the problem of secretiveness in contemporary culture,” I would had acted against my internal defiance towards the mechanisms of writing, I would had broken the principle which I wish to present in ill light – the principle of general explaining. Therefore, I shall write about light, explaining, and transparency transitioning freely from metaphor to notions, from a person to a shadow, and from openness to secretiveness. I am actually not driven by an objection to openness, rather by my laughter caused by openness which demands the right to become the whole world. That laughter arrives from a clearly realised darkness. A shadow and secretiveness are two metaphors which I feel as the manifestations of darkness in the life of an individual. The “manifestations of darkness” formula sounds like a quotation from Novalis, or from the gnostic Miłosz, and refers to the currently disdained metaphysics. Surely I will not avoid that label, though I am referring to darkness and lightness tailored by obvious views. I apply the metaphor of darkness to the area unidentified by man: things unidentified in the past, unforeseen in the future, unilluminated in the individual, unread in the cosmos and the cosmic existence of humanity, and unknown within the matter of the cosmos itself – one could list many more dark and black things. However, for me the darkest of all seems not the darkness of the unknown but the time which precedes existence, and occurs afterwards. The flash of existence lights up the darkness of endless time – that is

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one of the maxims that come to my mind. Yet no maxims are needed. It will suffice to compare our persistence and that of a cobblestone, or to slowly descend the tree of evolution to the form of primeval life, or to take up the theories of the beginning of the universe, and experience a work of art. Yes, that will suffice to find measure between darkness and lightness, that will suffice to laugh at the common openness and transparency. But why are openness and transparency so murky?

In the era of revealing and transparency, it is difficult to keep a secret. Mystery became exceptionally valuable and exceptionally cheap. What I mean is the selling price. People value those secrets which can be sold, and devalue others for which the demand is low. It is difficult not to succumb to profit, and sell hidden content. When we consider the significance of a secret traditionally, and when we understand the price literally, we avoid a sale of secrets. Today, it is often the case that secrets once valued extremely high, are incredibly difficult to sell. Not only to sell, but also to share or even reveal. I am referring to artistic and spiritual forms, which also, once revealed, remain impenetrable for some, not secrets of exact sciences, which were valued only once, i.e. at the time of sale. I focus only on the hidden meanings of modernist culture, which, possibly, are also the terminal values of modernism. Let us say that I treat secretiveness as the sign of the end of that trend. I similarly interpret the fact of discounting secrets. In such an intellectual project, it would be difficult not to use notions which present the play between a secret and revealing, as the dialectics of secret knowledge and the knowledge of a blasphemer, esoterica and exoterica, initiation and surface, eliteness and egalitarianism. The lexicon of modernism suggests many terms, which translate into or quote religious terms. Out of that extensive collection, I choose non-obvious terms, though generally understood and used in their metaphorical meanings: secretiveness and shadow. I associate those terms with the understanding of internal freedom. I do not introduce the third value, so obvious in the era of revealing, i.e. "silence", though I shall also discuss silence, which is afraid to or does not want to speak. I am rather interested in the "eloquent silence"<sup>1</sup>, or even talkative silence or talking about silence. That paradoxical revealing is interesting not only then when it reveals a secret, but also when it wishes to maintain it, concealed. On which side does the literary scientist who studies secrets stand? On the side of general transparency or on the side of keeping a secret hidden? I believe that the modern researcher gradually transitions to the side of devaluing it. Initially, they introduce readers into the secrets of a work, later once more reveal secrets which had previously been discussed by the writers themselves, and finally begin selling literary meanings as one sells slogans, articles and gossip. I am interested in

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<sup>1</sup> T. Merton, *Zapiski współwinnego widza*, trans. Z. Ławrynowicz and M. Maciołek, Dom Wydawniczy Rebis, Poznań 1994, p. 311. [English version: Merton, T. *Conjectures of a Guilty Bystander*, New York 1966].

the reflection from before today's world of common devaluing, or, more precisely, in artistic freedom, not yet screened, not yet sold, but already sensing a common pressure to reveal and sell. I would like to focus on the philosophy of secretiveness, and the methodology of secretiveness, if you will. In the essays of mature modernism, I seek deliberations on the topic of secretive being. What I actually mean is the secret yet without metaphysics; secret, creative and possible independent existence, and such thought. I should also add to that a clear thought on secretiveness. Yes, I seek clear secretiveness in the times of murky transparency.

Humour and irony, so common in modernist literature, deprive a secret of its eschatological meaning focussing on a secret that shall not be revealed by the Supreme Being on the Final Day. Therefore, the shadow comes from the refusal of light, and from a lack of hope for the final healing of the world and man. It is not the cool shade offering respite, but a shadow dragged behind oneself. Saint Thomas Aquinas called that cognitive darkening *angustia*, i.e. pain and frustration due to an inability to transcend certain limitations.<sup>2</sup> In short, there is a fundamental difference between the shadow of faith, and the shadow of modern doubt, between a secret in relation to the sensed mystery, and a secret in relation to cosmic solitude. There is also a difference between silence strengthened by faith, and silence triggered by a fear of triviality. However, one needs only to utter the words "triviality" or "profanation", to find a link between the secret of faith, and secretiveness in modernist literature. I can hear that kinship, though unclear, when I read Thomas Merton's remarks on the power of Saint Thomas Aquinas: "There is in St. Thomas more than the dry light of the classroom and the businesslike proving of theses. His understanding, which is clear as day, owes much also to the "night spirit" which communes with what he did not know (...) He is not all talk, not a scholastic machine for grinding out answers. Though he was a prodigious teacher and writer, the force of his words comes from his silence and his respect in the presence of what could never be said." He protected himself against turning into a writing machine for explaining the secrets of the faith, into a scholastic machine. He was also protected by the spirit of the night, dark by definition, known from the writings of Pseudo-Dionysius. But what should we call the modern machine for explaining? And what secrets does a modernist writer want to hide from common transparency?

W.G. Sebald in his deliberations on a play entitled *Kaspar* by Peter Handke, quickly fell into sarcasm regarding the modern pressure for naming things. He referred to that necessity as the "colonial empire of the spirit."<sup>3</sup> It resembles Musil's ironic comparison of knowledge to parsimony and scrimping, i.e. to "internal

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<sup>2</sup> Ibid., p. 294.

<sup>3</sup> W.G. Sebald, *Campo Santo*, trans. M. Łukasiewicz, Wydawnictwo WAB, Warsaw 2014, p. 69. [English version: Sebald W.G. *Campo Santo*. New York 2005].

capitalism.” Kaspar was colonised, enlightened and terrorised, i.e. taught. The educational machine worked on transforming him into a citizen. Apparently Sebald easily turned the meaning of educational work. Kaspar found himself in “new and excessively bright surroundings.” He treated explaining and naming as part of himself, as an internalised obtrusive voice, as if it was his “own individual madness.”<sup>4</sup> From that conclusion there is but one step to comparing the grammar of an utterance to torture devices, and naming to dissection. Sebald also recalled the well-known concretisation of the dissection machine from *In the Penal Colony* by Franz Kafka. And then he stops us in the reading using an aphorism, which he recorded in an electronic modern style: “But what is taken from the living substance of the individual in the long process of his training to become an articulate, moral human being adheres to the linguistic machine until in the end the parts become interchangeable in function.”<sup>5</sup> Isn’t that a beautiful and terrifying transformation? A metamorphosis which should be dreaded according to writers from Čapek and Kafka, through Witkacy and Schulz, to Różewicz and Ionesco. Sebald did not emanate fear, but rather a contention of mechanisation, of a common dissection. In his essay, the writer imperceptibly identified with Kaspar, and began to consider himself as a victim of lightness. Only the times changed, and Kafka’s machine was perfected. Sebald referenced a statement by Lars Gustafson, who believed that in relation to machines we can comprehend our simulated lives, our lives as linguistic machines. I wrote “our” to avoid the well-known mistake, when a person writing about common decadence herself/himself avoids degeneration. It is, of course, not only about the meeting between a writer and the linguistic machine, but also the linguistic machine within the writer. When Sebald depicted the modern individual, he also depicted himself, at least the unwanted and alien self: “A human being, then, is a Stymphalian creature of metal screws and springs, blanking widespread patterns made of communication sheet metal, and language, apparatus which has gone out of control, and begins to lead a menacing life of its own.”<sup>6</sup> In that beautiful description of a mechanised being, what is surprising is the reference to the Hercules myth. Is it possible that people wound up with prattle resembled the Stymphalian birds, which often killed humans and animals with whole clouds of bronze arrows? In the myth, the swamp birds had beaks and wings made of that alloy. Travellers had to protect their bodies under sophisticated armour, since such metal beaks could pierce many metal breastplates. Hercules used some magic rattle to scare away flocks of them and shoot them down. Maybe that is a way to deal with prattle, and mechanical speakers? To use a barrel organ, a voice recorder, or a prayer wheel? In the myth, some Stymphalian beings

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<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid., p. 71.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid.

escaped alive to multiply elsewhere, and to poison with their faeces other fields away from the swamps. In Sebald's essay, there is no encouragement for heroic deeds. Kaspar submits to lightness, and begins to imagine himself according to the mechanisms of communication, or rather not Kaspar but, as Sebald wrote, Kaspars as the mechanised language produced identities similar to each other. The name Kaspar is given to several "copies". Not everything is entirely proper with those copies or blanks, maybe because education began so late? Maybe that is why Kaspar nostalgically reminisced about times before he spoke a dead language? When his rebellion had not been broken yet? Actually only regression, to use Schulz's term, offers hope for freedom. Kaspar draws from an unclear, unilluminated by the word, uneducated zone, hope for himself, and from that zone Sebald derived free creativity. An experience not yet named using any available and imposing words also reveals the meaning of common openness. Repeated common words are mere "dead abridgement of the whole," as Cassirer stated in the conclusion of the essay. In his final sentence, Sebald inscribed a hope of the time of modernism – on the possibility of saving art: "Literature can transcend this dilemma (of a language as a dead abridgement of existence – TB) only by keeping faith with unsocial, banned language, and by learning to use the opaque images of broken rebellion as a means of communication."

In a book entitled *Vie secrète*, Pascal Quignard described the mystery of love and desire, and found for his topic analogies which amplified the significance of leaving people and leaving one's time. Many modernist artists sought forms of protecting and creating themselves away from the public pedagogy, forms which would be different from the common formation of individuals. Those private exercises of the spirit were not as threatened as they are today because never before had so many languages illuminated an individual. In an aphorism formed in Nietzsche's style, Quignard offered the following syllogism: "To have a soul means to have a secret. Conclusion. Few people have souls."<sup>7</sup> Nonetheless, it is an enthymeme, while omitting the premise which I would state as follows: most people allow others to browse them, or, slightly differently, in Quignard's manner: few people protect their secrets. That syllogism resonates with sarcasm, visible also in other statements of the writer: "The most contemptible is the man who cannot leave the place of his birth, and cut the strings in which he was entangled in the first years of his life by the fear of obedience: to the family, group, and silent impulses."

Fascination gives way to desideration.

"An aristocrat freezing in front of a portrait of his ancestor. A master chef avoiding hot spices – they are pathetic."<sup>8</sup> Where did that sarcasm come from?

<sup>7</sup> P. Quignard, *Życie sekretne*, trans. K. Rutkowski, Vesper, Poznan 2006, p. 76. [English version translated from Polish].

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 172.

From the need to break the bonds which are extremely durable? Paedagogia is doing better in the West every day, even Eros has been taught well? In fact, Quignard referred indirectly to Bataille and his concept of eroticism as a zone of creative existence. For Quignard, Eros, asocial at its beginnings, thus becomes in maturity, restoring the individual obscurity, loss, temporariness, and a complicated relationship with matter and mother. The images and premonitions of the French writer, so close to those of Schulz, refer to speaking which ought to be extracted from bodily matter. That voice incessantly deafened by the prattle of the world, and vocalised by the languages of others, wishes to enter the zones which have not yet been displayed or uttered. Behold the spaces of internal freedom, spaces of recognising oneself. No wonder then that Quignard sought the voice and the touch of his mother before she began to speak the pedagogic voice. That journey outside time and society resulted in literature which refers to shadows, not a discourse which is turned by cognition into a bromide, i.e. makes it part of a common useful surveillance. It is widely known that the author of *Vie secrète* referred to music, a zone in which the culture of the West has always defended itself against obtrusive words: “Good musicians extract sounds from the most ancient quarters of our bodies (from resonators: the abdomen, the uteral cave, the place of previous residence).”<sup>9</sup> It seems that Quignard saw a relationship between the modern explanation and the Christian concept of morality, as if the modern mind illuminating existence constituted a continuation of the zone of the state and science – the Christian concept of sin and salvation. In the history of thought, he found Tertulian with his phrase “you need to hide even in paradise” to conclude “I do not understand why Tertulian’s thesis has not found any continuators.”<sup>10</sup> A dark issue that there exists a relationship between the concept of divine omnipresence, an enlightenment mind screening everything, and a modern impersonal alliance between the state and global marketing. That is why Quignard referred to Tertulian’s abandoned formula to justify his unclear conscience as an individual secretly recognising the creative significance of Eros. His apophthegmatas refer to a secret which carries the burden of the original sin. “In Eden, the first woman could not have existed without a secret,” he wrote supporting the concealed not the omnipresent conscience. The screening view dispossesses the subject of his existential being, and offers him defenceless to social play. Fortunately, Quignard did not focus on the monsters of transparency, indifferently archaic or post-modern, but on protecting a secret because the protection of the creative particular one always happens within a particular existence, not within a public debate when many voices and discourses are vocalised. Whatever the situation might be, social voices will still find a path towards our discussion of ourselves. Thus Quignard

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<sup>9</sup> Ibid., p. 68.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid., p. 79.

subjected the principle to a spiritual or rather erotic independence: “The secret: escape that which is verbal, what is social. Not to escape that which is sexual, which is mortal.”<sup>11</sup>

Or maybe that is not a question of freedom but temperament? – I am starting to doubt Quignard’s authoritative words. Is it the temperament, the erotic fire that orders the writer to hide from the community? Maybe that was the reason why he spoke in a dark laconic form, and had no patience for a systematic argument? Those doubts were suggested to me by Merton, who considered Tertulian’s words from the treatise on patience. Merton valued that treatise since Tertulian was extremely impatient. Therefore, the treatise bears the signs of an overcome force, actually a force not completely overcome in writing. Tertulian’s aphorisms are the marks of vehemence turned into stone. Yet the stone is alive. Impatience hidden in a style full of life. Quignard does not believe in the value of metaphysical discipline, or in the value of sharing with others. He is a loner and an individualist, while he could be just a loner. That has been the feature of many modernists – mistrust for the world. Could that mistrust of an individualist stem from distrust in the value of the secrets being revealed? A secret also becomes an individual matter?! Behold a surprising hypothesis: for modernism, a secret is a form of a public confession. A modernist writer at the same time encrypts and decrypts a confiteor as long as they believe in “absolution” through literature. A widespread revealing bestows upon an individual separate existence a mass dimension, and trivialises the value of a literary confession. To protect a secret means to confer with one’s own fate, to talk mechanically means to agree to blurring individual features. Thus is the secret, historically limited, individual, virtually intransmittable. The result of the literary discipline of a loner afraid of transparency and devaluation.

The modern story of secret freedom begins with the start of modernity, and defines one of the most important trends in modernism. That beginning was perfectly expressed by the titles of the two parts of Baudelaire’s diaries: *Dzienniki poufne* (Secret Diaries) and *Moje serce obnażone* (My Heart Laid Bare). And the two trials of Flaubert and Baudelaire for offending public morality, and the pornographic pleasure of a man who denounced both artists – those hidden masturbations of a good Christian. The accuser condemned mysteries – concealed by him and revealed by the writers, because he wanted to express his submission to socially accepted moral norms and state order. Their, the informer’s and the writers’, secrets differed considerably as the accuser could not imagine the fact that pornography expressed the same affinity to screening everything as the one displayed by a modern state. Literature protects eroticism against the kitsch of pornography, and other usurpations of rationality and politicisation. The word

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<sup>11</sup> Ibid., p. 80.

“protects” hides various meanings. I shall reveal two: an artist protects themselves from the common persuasions, protects their secrets to find visions, which for a moment will become the property of the readers experiencing independence during the reading. In French thought, that co-existence of a secret and a vision was presented by Jean-Noël Vuarnet in: *Le Philosophe-artiste*. In his analysis, Vuarnet referred to “three central figures of modernity”, as defined by Nietzsche, i.e.: the prophet, the scholar, and the leader.<sup>12</sup> As is widely known, those figures, which in contemporary times “show a uniform underneath their shirts”, Nietzsche juxtaposed with an artist, i.e. someone who while being occupied with creating new values, does not care about “herd celebrations.” Of course he juxtaposed himself, with all his affinities for a uniform, science, and prophecies. Vuarnet described a philosopher who performed exorcisms on himself to extract from within the unwanted forms of modern civilisation. Vuarnet verified the value of the transformation of a philosopher who becomes an artist/philosopher in the times contemporary for us, in the age of technocratic prophecies, and, if you will, in the age of technocratic transparency. He was anxious about the similarity between Nietzsche’s artist/philosopher and a “creator/economist/engineer, like Speer or Keynes.”<sup>13</sup> Who are those creators? “Those creators made man and ideology as the objects of their treatments and experiments. They do not need paper or ink – the instruments they prefer include information, propaganda, functional archetypes, and stereotypes. Synthesisers and manipulators of ideology, promoters and producers of circumstantial truths, those prophets do not even need to utter their prophecies, they fulfil them. Technocracy does not want ideologists but teachers who could cope without a doctrine, and pose as “objective” sources of all evaluations, treated no longer as evaluations, but only as the consequences of rational management.”<sup>14</sup> Nietzsche’s paradox consisted of a prophecy which comes true against it, i.e. based on a false prophet, whose rule should not be fulfilled. Vuarnet exposed the paradox of Nietzsche’s creation, and of the creations of other creators, one expressed as: “everyone for themselves,” which supposes the depriving of the reasons of those who proceed those (creators). In that lesson, one must add the hidden premise, which transforms the creative reading in repeating and stereotypisation. The abandonment of a hidden work on oneself evoked by a reading occurs in the name of common abandonment of work on one’s own identity, on the protection of one’s own otherness, on developing one’s own shadow. A modern reader wishes to browse a book, and transform into a set of bromides prescribed by some commonly known discourse. They similarly cope with their shadow. They screen it with the zeal of a technocrat, a psychologist, a judge,

<sup>12</sup> J.-N. Vuarnet, *Filozof-artysta*, trans. K. Matuszewski, słowo/obraz terytoria, Gdansk 2000, p. 151. [English version translated from Polish].

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 155.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 155, 156.

a moralist, a priest, a teacher, etc. They replace Nietzsche's instruction "be, if you can, the source of your evaluations"<sup>15</sup> with a more convenient formula "let others evaluate themselves, so we can evaluate them." One basic question deserves an answer: what place within the modern technocratic system does an artist/philosopher who avoids ruling occupy? Vuarnet bitterly answered that the system needs such an artist, it needs "thinkers and theoreticians of their own desires" "to make the system if not fully assimilable, then at least possible: rose-coloured."<sup>16</sup> The French philosopher's answer belongs to the well-known tradition of understanding modernity, which is close to me as well. Understanding modernism as a trend, which transforms the severely inhabitable reality created by the mind into a place available for living. Vuarnet is bothered by the utilitarian nature of art activity, which nonetheless supports technocratic goals. That is why he concluded his deliberations with an image of liberation: "It remains a dream of one or several utopias, which would place themselves outside the silent cynicism of administrators, and outside the discourse of doubling theoreticians."<sup>17</sup> Vuarnet experiences strongly the penetration of the hidden separate zone of visions and thought by public conventionalised discourses. He is so much concerned with the use of thought in the inhuman impersonal process, that he finds little joy in cultivating the shadow, secretiveness, and in practising self-recognition. He is anxious when internal freedom becomes part of a publicly practised positive freedom, which could have such a name only in typologies since he understands public freedom as freedom to fulfil goals which deny the rights of an individual who fulfils them. It is actually the seeming fulfilment of goals, or rather fulfilments, by common goals argued and offered by marketing or political persuasions, that transforms political freedom into public captivity, which calls itself fulfilment or success. Therefore, the artist/philosopher is afraid of being used as a means of soothing mental captivity, while his art shall be transformed into a bromide. What bromide? For example, one that screams: "private narrative", "controversial message", "scandalising image", etc. Vuarnet fears a common right to transparency, according to which a deep shadow must become a shadow which is transparent, comprehensible, and useful.

When we illuminate the hidden, we lose a basic part of internal freedom, which stems from the secret. I do not wish to state that freedom and the secret are, essentially, the same, and that anyone who does not explain a secret salvages their freedom. I am only arguing that the creative work on oneself occurs away from the expressed, rhetoricised, discoursified, and anticipated. How much a culture loses when it is screened by an enlightened mind one can feel when one considers

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<sup>15</sup> Ibid., p. 157.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid., p. 176.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid., p. 177.

the West from the perspective of the culture of the shadow – from the perspective of traditional Japanese culture. In *In Praise of Shadows*, Tanizaki Junichiro mentioned many pleasures which one loses in the bright light, from the emotion upon seeing rice in a lacquerware bowl, through raindrops one listens to in the toilet, to ghosts which are not transparent. The Japanese writer was terrified by the European seeking of filth, in full light, and the obsession to mark out borders between pure and impure, an obsession which has also been shared by the Japanese. Europeans expelled from their secrets to the streets and the agora remove in public places and discussions any instances of those from their bodies, homes, and minds. As a result they submit to the present and contemporary times, or actually the obsession of the future, which at some point shall screen everything. Junichiro also defined a shadowy perfect place for Europeans: The light from the pale white paper, powerless to dispel the heavy darkness of the alcove, is instead repelled by the darkness, creating a world of confusion where dark and light are indistinguishable. Have not you yourselves sensed a difference in the light that suffuses such a room, a rare tranquillity not found in ordinary light? Have you never felt a sort of fear in the face of the ageless, a fear that in that room you might lose all consciousness of the passage of time, that untold years might pass and upon emerging you should find you had grown old and grey?<sup>18</sup> The fear of eternity captivates the people of the West so much that they construct their surroundings to be transparent, and devoid of any shadows. They eat that way, they hygienise sex that way, they clean death that way in order to deprive themselves of the right to a mystery. Michel Maffesoli, a French sociologist and anthropologist, saw in those inclinations manifestations of an Apolline spirit, which wanted to bring to Europe boredom, abstraction, and manipulation. Maffesoli argued that the intellectual whole is currently decaying, and we are entering an era of “a brittle community, fragmented society, tribal community turning the sediment of various particular interests new modes of thinking of the attitude to the natural and social world.”<sup>19</sup> That optimist argues that “we stand on the fringe of the shadow, we return to an existential chiaroscuro.”<sup>20</sup> We stopped seeking God, we are stopping seeking secular divinity in the State, the Institution or the Politics, and we are starting to seek divinity within, in the tribal turbulence, or in the rhythm of the world.<sup>21</sup> That is the attitude Maffesoli wishes to seek also in contemporary

<sup>18</sup> T. Junichiro, *Pochwała cienia*, trans. H. Lipszyc, in: *Estetyka japońska. Antologia*, vol. 3: *Estetyka życia i piękno umierania*, Krystyna Wilkoszewska (ed.), Universitas, Krakow 2005, p. 92. [English version: Junichiro, T., *In Praise of Shadows*. Leete's Island Books, Inc. Stony Creek 1977].

<sup>19</sup> M. Maffesoli, *Rytm życia. Wariacje na temat świata wyobraźni ponowoczesnej*, trans. A. Karpowicz, Zakład Wydawniczy „Nomos”, Krakow 2012, p. 103. [English version translated from Polish].

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 102.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 108.

science, which sometimes is still cognition striving for total explanation. He thus wrote about science entangled in modern myths: "There exists science without love, for which one does not pay either with one's existence or even pain." Two lines further on he added a few more epithets: "cool, official scientific knowledge, pretentious and vain."<sup>22</sup>

The hidden internal freedom, which creates art or science, sucks many terms into the shadow: primitiveness, Dionysiousness, eroticism, precognition, intuition, pre-existence, silence... Thus I listed the names of modern spiritual exercises, modernist practices for deepening the shadow. Sebald escaped from the modern verbal machine into the zone of regression. Vuarnet does not deceive himself in thinking that artistic practices can oppose technocracy. He sees shelter somewhere in the far archipelagos of thought. Quignard focussed on his secret script similar to that of the others hidden in their niches. Maffesoli believes that in public life there exist many new practices which bring us closer to creative existence, on the fringes of the shadow, while Tanizaki felt that European poetics of lightness can deprive him of everything that he considered close and his own. As the bard said in a poem entitled *Wędrówka z cieniem*:

Thus we console each other  
Walking down long streets...  
I'm dragging a shadow, the shadow's dragging me,  
Puddles glisten underneath our feet.<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>22</sup> Ibid., p. 106.

<sup>23</sup> J. Kaczmarek, *Antologia poezji*, Wydawnictwo DEMART, Warsaw 2012, p. 66. [English version translated from Polish].

Tomasz Bocheński

**Freedom and secretiveness, in late modernism**

(Summary)

The text considers two metaphors describing creative freedom in modern society: secretiveness and shadow. In the shadow, creative individuals protect themselves against the ubiquitous need to explain and screen life. The text proves that contemporary literature (Sebald, Quinard) and essay (Vuarnet, Maffesoli) search inspiration in secretiveness and shadow while at the same time they see a threat to art in the mechanism of explanation.

Keywords: secretiveness, shadow, individual freedom, modern literature

Tobiasz Adam Bocheński\*

## Freedom in community or freedom in solitude? Remarks on republicanism and liberalism

Every human being possesses an intuitive, deeply rooted notion of freedom, which they refer to when discussing the notion. It is natural, since freedom, being an axiologically marked term, has accompanied human reflection from time immemorial: the free people of Israel, the contemplations of Buddha, free Greeks and Romans, etc. The fundamental nature of the theme, and the richness and diversity of associated matter further complicate the discussion. That requires one to conduct an arbitrary classification, and to define, if only a fairly general, methodological framework in order not to become lost in the labyrinth of freedoms.

The search for the answers to such questions as: “What is freedom? How should one understand it?” has throughout the ages occupied theologians, philosophers, historians, jurists, artists of all sorts, as well as many other universal minds. Resembling polymaths, their ambition was to reach an objective truth, which could constitute a firm basis for the understanding of the world. Amongst the concepts developed through the years, there exist myriads of interrelated mutually and internally contradictory ideas. For some, that might be a proof of the feebleness of Western culture; for others, an indication of its strength resulting from its fertility and discursiveness. Clearly, there exists a deep diversity of forms and contents hiding behind the façade of a single word: freedom. We know the grand interpretations of it, as a subjective experience expressed in the sensing of one’s existence.<sup>1</sup> Such a type of experiencing was described by Antoine de Saint-Exupéry in *Night Flight*, when being exposed to two expanses, he could in silence gaze into *himself*<sup>2</sup>. Already in this example it becomes evident that the existentialism-inclined 20<sup>th</sup>-century reflection referred to ancient problems

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<sup>1</sup> Vide T. Gadacz, *Historia filozofii XX wieku. Nurty. Tom 2: neokantyzm, filozofia egzystencji, filozofia dialogu*, Znak, Krakow 2009, pp. 363–375; E. Mounier, *Wprowadzenie do egzystencjalizmów*, trans. E. Krasnowolska, Znak, Krakow 1964.

<sup>2</sup> Vide A. de Saint-Exupéry, “Nocny lot” in: *Pocztą na południe. Nocny lot*, trans. A. Olędzka-Frybieszowa, M. Czapska, S. Stempowski, PIW, Warsaw 1977, pp. 121–189.

by describing them using a new language from a different perspective. Yet the essence of the notion remains the same: man, i.e. a being limited and liberated through his mind in contact with *apeiron*. That, however, is only one of the many reflections of the emotional experience of freedom. Did not Henryk Elzenberg, toiling with strenuous self-disciplines with existence, thus express his spiritual independence, subjectivity, and separateness? In short: freedom?<sup>3</sup> At the time when he was developing his philosophical journal, Andrzej Bobkowski managed to describe his experience of freedom viewed from a bicycle, and from the edge of a Paris table bent under the weight of piles of books.<sup>4</sup> Elzenberg was still creating his intellectual testament when Czesław Miłosz fled towards freedom in the, still controversial even today, Taqiya cloak<sup>5</sup>, while Herbert was constructing his fortress of spiritual aristocracy. All the mentioned intellectuals directly or indirectly struggled with freedom trying to understand and tame it. It is nearly a cliché to conclude that the reading of each of them offers enriching food for thought. Yet that banal statement is necessary to realise that within the zone which applies to every individual experience, the above-mentioned output is priceless, but at the same time it has no ambition to transcend outside the zone of description or sensation. That deficiency constitutes neither a flaw nor an advantage; it is the immanent characteristic of the presented form and content of the experience of reality.

A considerably different nature applies to political and legal philosophy, the essence of which lies in its particular claim for reality, the aim of which is to ensure its revolutionary or evolutionary change, or to preserve the existing state. One characteristic of such a reflection is the search for axiological solutions which could serve the institutionalisation of various human pursuits within the public sphere. Yet freedom has always constituted the object of a conflict both at the layer of its definition and within the sphere of practice it implies. Since the Greek philosophers there have been battles waged in the pages of various treatises over the shape and the extent of freedom. At this point one must consider why, from amongst such important disputes as the one between Saint Thomas Aquinas and Augustine of Hippo, Protestants and Catholics, the adherents of absolutism and the eulogists of limited rule, Enlightenment reformers and revolutionaries standing against the first conservatives, liberals and socialists, or anarchists and socialist democrats. As the focus of my reflection I chose the relationship between republicanism and liberalism present at the level of defining freedom.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> Vide H. Elzenberg, *Kłopot z istnieniem. Aforyzmy w porządku czasu*, Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Mikołaja Kopernika, Toruń 2002.

<sup>4</sup> Zob. A. Bobkowski, *Szkice piórkciem*, Towarzystwo Opieki nad Archiwum Instytutu Literackiego w Paryżu, Warsaw 2011.

<sup>5</sup> Vide Cz. Miłosz, *Zniewolony umysł*, Instytut Literacki, Paris 1980.

<sup>6</sup> This issue constitutes an area of interest of researchers due to the revival of republican thought, and an attempt to adapt it to the reality of liberal democracy (vide M. Gajek, *W stronę*

Both streams of political and legal reflection consider freedom as a central value, but, at the same time, they display different approaches to it, which for ages have competed for supremacy. Both intellectual traditions considerably shaped the political and social reality of continental Europe and the English-speaking world, and despite the fundamental differences separating them, they dialectically complement each other. The synergy was not overlooked by some thinkers, who tried to reconcile contradictory categories; hence the non-accidental name of the American republican party, the demands of which express the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup>-century spirit of liberalism. Both streams were particularly interrelated in the 17<sup>th</sup> and the 18<sup>th</sup> c. when republicanism, being a mature intellectual movement, experienced its second rebirth, while the basic categories of liberalism were only forming. At that time, some Dutch, English, and French authors discussed the issue of freedom from the liberal and republican perspective, which stimulated the change of existing political, cultural, and legal paradigms. Yet the alliance between the two traditions did not last long, as the already mature Enlightenment and the 19<sup>th</sup> c. forgot about or modified republicanism, which in the new form was presented to the world during the French Revolution, and they made liberalism the most popular mode of thinking about politics and law.

Republicanism constitutes a stream of political and legal philosophy the roots of which reach antiquity. Despite the numerous disputes regarding the diagnosis of its origins, one must conclude that the first concrete study, republican in nature, was offered by Aristotle in *Politics*<sup>7</sup>. He introduced the now classical assumption on the social nature of man, who is to fully fulfil his pursuits within a community of man. That was also the starting point for the arguments of republican thinkers on the need for mutual cooperation between citizens focussed on the care for the community, which was supposed to constitute an expression of natural human predispositions. The reflections of Alexander the Great were further enriched by Roman authors: Cicero, Titus Livius, and Sallust. The mentioned authors created the core republican literature, which was read and analysed in the Renaissance in Italian cities (Florence and Venice in particular), 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup>-century Netherlands,

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*republikańskiego liberalizmu. Kategoria cnót liberalnych we współczesnej amerykańskiej myśli politycznej*, OMP, Kraków–Warsaw 2016; B. Brugger, *Republican Theory in Political Thought. Virtuous or Virtual?*, MacMillan Press Ltd, London 1999; S.D. Collins, *Aristotle and the Rediscovery of Citizenship*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 2006; R. Dagger, *Civic Virtues. Rights, Citizenship, and Republican Liberalism*, Oxford University Press, Oxford 1997), as well as in consideration of historical syncretic projects which combined the categories of those two intellectuals streams (vide D. Armitage, A. Himy, Q. Skinner (ed.), *Milton and Republicanism*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 1995; N. Bobbio, M. Viroli, *The Idea of the Republic*, Polity Press, Cambridge 2003; Q. Skinner, B. Stráth, *States & Citizens. History, Theory, Prospects*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 2003).

<sup>7</sup> Vide D. Pietrzyk-Reeves, *Ład Rzeczypospolitej. Polska myśl polityczna XVI wieku a klasyczna tradycja republikańska*, Księgarnia Akademicka, Krakow 2012, pp. 7–164.

England, and the First Polish Republic. That republicanism, which is the focus of my study, is defined as classical contrary to modern republicanism, the main quality of which is anti-monarchism.<sup>8</sup> One must assume after Pietrzyk-Reeves that classical republicanism is based on two pillars: the view of the state as a teleological political community which constitutes a common good of all the citizens, and the view of politics as the creation and maintenance of political order based on law and justness, i.e. bearing the name of a fair order. A characteristic quality of that approach is the absence of the individual perspective and the fact of emphasising a communal nature.<sup>9</sup> A republican will assign importance to a community understood as a political body realising care for a common good, i.e. she/he will not consider it within the categories of the sum of individual benefits, rather as a self-contained value independent of those. That assumption results in the conviction about the duties of every citizen to care for the community, which is expressed in the active creation of that which is generally beneficial to all. When considering that perspective, one recognises the principle of equality as the duty of every member of a community is to participate in the creation and ensuring of the common good, which in itself is egalitarian as it spans over all citizens in equal measure – not allowing the establishment of any privileges or special concessions. Therefore, republican thinkers revered the Greek procedure of ostracism highly, the essence of which they saw in the ousting from common space any individuals threatening the existing order, even if they could have possessed great virtues. Yet it was not the grandness, in the spirit of Thomas Carlyle's philosophy, that, according to republicans, was admirable, but the communal nature. Thus, the described paradigm was closer to the well-known legend by Aristotle about the counsel Periander gave the tyrant of Miletus Thrasybulus *to cut the tallest ears, which indicated that one must always cut off the principal citizens*.<sup>10</sup> Everything, though, depended on how one defined the term *principal citizens*. Periander suggested that Thrasybulus remove those individuals who could endanger his despotic rule. For a republican to *cut off the principal citizens* meant a mechanism for removing exceptionally talented individuals who, due to exorbitant passions and ambition, could lead to a subversion of the order, and replacing it with tyranny or another captive system. Thus we arrived at the issue of freedom.

For the republican tradition, freedom was one of the main values. It was described on two complementary strata: the state and community, and the individual. The former was reflected in the stipulation to establish and maintain free order. It was a result of the implementation of all republican assumptions of a political and legal nature, which were to lead to the existence of a free system. The

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<sup>8</sup> D. Pierzyk-Reeves, *Lad Rzeczypospolitej...*, p. 9.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>10</sup> Arystoteles, *Polityka*, trans. L. Piotrowicz, PWN, Warsaw 2008, p. 157.

sine qua non of the fulfilment of freedom within that stratum was the principle of equal justice under law, of the rule of law, of a sovereign people, of the priority of the common interest over individual interests, etc. Individually viewed republican freedom possessed a participatory nature. Man could define himself as free when he was a citizen, i.e. when he was entitled to participate in the state's political life. Thus defined freedom, Benjamin Constant, a French liberal thinker who lived at the turn of the 19<sup>th</sup> c., called ancient.<sup>11</sup> In his opinion freedom in antiquity was not realised within the private zone, and it was actually separated from it. The fact of being free meant active participation in the creation, and the application of law, passing judgments, and voicing opinions during public meetings. Therefore, it was "freedom to", i.e. a free man was a citizen who became free through his own political activeness. The characters from the pages of *History of Rome* by Titus Livius could shout in unison: we are free because we have the right to care for the common good!

That would cause fear in a liberal, who saw the source of freedom in other streams of thought. Liberalism cannot boast a Virgilian pedigree, even though it refers to individualistic categories developed by sophists, Epicureans, and Stoics. Its history began in the 17<sup>th</sup> c. when, under the influence of the school of the laws of nature (notable representatives of which included Grotius, Pufendorf, Hobbs, and Spinoza), as well as Protestant articles, there formed its first foundations in opposition to the proponents of monarchic absolutism.<sup>12</sup> John Locke, an English Empiricist, is considered the author of the first organised and mature liberal concept; when in *Two Treatises of Government* he presented his basic philosophical assumptions, he triggered the most influential ideological stream which has remained the leading stream since the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> c.<sup>13</sup> Even though one would be accurate to associate liberalism with a reflection which considers freedom as the foundation of all public relations, one should not reduce it only to the special manner of defining the notion, and to the superior role assigned to it in relation to other values. Just as in the case of republicanism, liberalism is based on a range of philosophical assumptions, which are supposed to bring people's freedom in a society. To achieve that, it refers to the concept of an individual as the subject of natural laws and rights, an individual who possesses axiological priority in relation to the state or the society. Liberalism is based on the anthropological individualistic perspective which precludes the priority of the common good over the good of an individual. Thus the liberals' emphasising the limited nature of

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<sup>11</sup> B. Constant, "O wolności starożytnych i nowożytnych", trans. Z. Kosno, *Arka* 1992, issue 42, pp. 243–254.

<sup>12</sup> Vide Z. Rau, *Liberalizm. Zarys myśli politycznej XIX i XX wieku*, Fundacja Aletheia, Warsaw 2000, pp. 9–15.

<sup>13</sup> Vide Z. Rau, *Wstęp*, in: John Locke, *Dwa traktaty o rządzie*, trans. Z. Rau, PWN, Warsaw 1992, pp. CVII–CVIII.

government, the origin of which they traced back to the individual. A government had to, according to them, be bound by law for it not to endanger the rights of the citizens, which could be broken through a state's pressure existing only based on a voluntary acceptance of the government. Often, liberals have referred to the concept of a social contract, thus deriving the competences to govern as well as the requisition for obedience towards the government from an individual's consent.<sup>14</sup> In order to limit a governing power which they associated with a threat, they stipulated the introduction of a division into governing bodies and the institutions of the right of revolution, which in time transformed into the concept of civil disobedience.

All the quoted categories and safeguards were supposed to ensure an individual's freedom. Liberalism did not deprecate the obligation to participate in governing nor did it negate the importance of the public sphere for the society. Its main assumption was the reversal of the philosophical and political order. For liberals, the zone of freedom is a space of unconstrained, i.e. free of any external interventions (e.g. of the state), activity, the limits of which would be damage or harm caused to another individual. Thus liberalism defined a definition of freedom different from the republican one; one which is often called a negative freedom, a freedom "from". According to a liberal, man can only be free when her/his zone of governance and decision-making will not be violated by factors external in relation to it, e.g. the actions of a government, taxes, legislation, etc. Obviously that does not mean the absolutisation of the spheres of freedom and property. It applies to internal interventions which transcend the framework of a legal order (natural and positive), which threatens the system of the above-mentioned institutional safeguards.

The difference between the republican and the liberal understandings of freedom can be illustrated with a simple example: a liberal going on holiday would say: I feel free from work; a republican giving up his holiday would say: I am free because I can work.

By employing the presented ideal models, which in a general manner characterise republicanism and liberalism, one can arrive at several important questions, answers to which carry serious consequences for political and social life. One of those, which is particularly significant for the issue of freedom, was studied in the 19<sup>th</sup> c. by Alexis de Tocqueville. The French thinker considered individualism which constituted one of the axiological foundations of liberalism.<sup>15</sup> He noted that in a democratic system, individuals who become interested in the sphere of private egoisms lose interest in the course of public affairs. That lack of care

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<sup>14</sup> Vide Z. Rau, M. Chmieliński, *Umowa społeczna i jej krytycy w myśli politycznej i prawnej*, Wydawnictwo Naukowe Scholar, Warsaw 2010, pp. 7–32.

<sup>15</sup> Vide M. Tracz-Tryniecki, *Myśl polityczna i prawna Alexisa de Tocqueville*, Księgarnia Akademicka, Krakow 2009.

for the extra-individual sphere leads, according to Tocqueville, to governance by a majority, which transforms into the despotism of equality because socially alienated individuals interested only in their own benefit are helpless in the face of the omnipotence of democratic rule.<sup>16</sup> The ascertainment of the French aristocrat touched the sensitive tension between liberalism and republicanism, i.e. the balance between the qualitative and quantitative engagement of an individual in public affairs. Tocqueville emphasised the significance of the mutual relationship between the individual and public affairs indicating that individualism may lead to a decline of freedom.

The debate regarding the superiority of the republican vision of freedom over the liberal vision and vice versa has remained one of the fundamental problems of political and legal philosophy. Not surprisingly, it has not been conclusive. Yet in the situation of the slow but gradual revival of the republican discourse, e.g. in the works of Philip Pettit,<sup>17</sup> when liberalism is still a lively idea-based force, the question about the two types of freedom remains valid.

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<sup>16</sup> Z. Rau, *Liberalizm...*, pp. 62–65.

<sup>17</sup> P. Pettit, *Republicanism. A Theory of Freedom and Government*, Oxford University Press, Oxford 2002.

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Tobiasz Adam Bocheński

**Freedom in community or freedom in solitude?  
Remarks on republicanism and liberalism**

(Summary)

A political thought is an area of legitimate contribution of competitive ideas. Liberalism is often considered as one of the most significant and influential paradigm of our times. The common acceptance of liberal conception of negative liberty can be acknowledged as a proof of this tendency. At the same time clearly visible is the renaissance of republicanism and the conception of active participation in governance. The liberal and republican assumptions have similar roots but different social practices. The aim of this paper is to examine in contrast liberal and republican conceptions of freedom. The author discusses main categories of both political traditions: state, commonwealth, common good, citizen, individualism, law, limited power and freedom itself. The author attempts to compare republicanism and liberalism as the competitive political paradigms to show the dilemmas of modern states and societies where there is no common consensus referring to definition of liberty.

Keywords: republicanism, liberalism, freedom, common good, commonwealth, political thought, politics, political philosophy, history of ideas, individualism

Paweł Sobczak\*

## **Intellectual limitation of freedom? The issues of *libertas* in the nationalistic reception of Italian fascism in the Second Polish Republic (based on the examples of journalistic publications)**

The seizure of power in Italy by the National Fascist Party aroused understandable interest in Central European countries.<sup>1</sup> The phenomenon of the emergence of a completely new state in terms of its system had to draw people's attention, while the "fascist model (...) was spreading throughout Europe due to the sole fact of its existence in the Apennine Peninsula."<sup>2</sup> The efficiency of fascism was certainly inspirational for Polish politicians. The structure of Camp of Great Poland (OWP), established in December 1926, gathering anti-Sanation right wingers, resembled the Italian model (the organisation was governed by the Great Council, modelled after the *Gran Consiglio Fascista* operating in Italy<sup>3</sup>). Similarly, the May coup d'état compellingly brought to mind the *March on Rome* from four years earlier, though unlike the latter it resulted in several hundred fatalities. However, the interest in Italian fascism was not only shared by politicians and army officials. In the 1920s and 1930s, there appeared many texts positively evaluating the ideology and the political system of Mussolini (or, at least, some of its elements<sup>4</sup>). The pro-fascist discourse was expressed in political treatises as

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<sup>1</sup> The birth and the development of fascism was discussed in detail by Emilio Gentile in a book entitled *Początki ideologii faszystowskiej (1918–1925)*, trans. T. Wituch, Wydawnictwa Uniwersytetu Warszawskiego, Warsaw 2011.

<sup>2</sup> J.W. Borejsza, *Rzym a wspólnota faszystowska*, Książka i Wiedza, Warsaw 1981, p. 27. [English version translated from Polish].

<sup>3</sup> S. Rudnicki, *Obóz Narodowo-Radykalny. Geneza i działalność*, Spółdzielnia Wydawnicza „Czytelnik”, Warsaw 1985, p. 26. One of the more important symbols of the Youth Branch of OWP was the greeting in the form of a Roman salute.

<sup>4</sup> Jerzy W. Borejsza emphasised that “in the Poland of the interwar period, fascism was praised in dozens of brochures and books” (J.W. Borejsza, *Mussolini był pierwszy...*, Czytelnik, Warsaw 1989, p. 182). Jacek Bartyzel noted that only in *Gazeta Warszawska* within the period from October 1922

well as in columns, and foreign reports (as well as poems) written almost up to the end of the interwar period. For the purposes of this article, I limit myself to writing mainly about journalistic texts by the representatives of the national right (National Democracy (ND), young nationals, and Sanation right) reflecting on the socio-political and cultural themes. They began appearing in the mid-1920s since, as noted by Maciej Marszał, “the periodisation of the Polish interpretations of Italian fascism can be divided into two periods: the first until 1926, a time of thoughtless comments formulated by politicians and journalists who often, under the influence of the current politics of Benito Mussolini, offered explanations convenient for their groups; the second one after 1926, a time of mature analyses (...), which carried scientific value.”<sup>5</sup>

Monika Bednarczuk aptly noted that “despite a thesis promoted by the left, particularly after 1945, on the collective aversion to that political trend in the Polish interwar period, a considerable number of people saw desirable values in fascism.”<sup>6</sup> Mainly people ideologically associated with the national right considered fascism with interest and sympathy. The new phenomenon, transcending existing political divisions, was interpreted in various ways. Very often, though, particularly in the 1920s, rightists viewed fascism as an effective means to repair, reconciling the interest of employees and big capital, and restoring (distorted in the final years of the Giolittian system) the socio-political order (Mussolini as a “rock which breaks the swollen waves of the Bolshevik torrent”<sup>7</sup>). The conservative vision of fascism was supported by the events from the first years of the rule of *Duce*, who was able to find accord between the king and the pope (the Lateran Treaty of 1929 establishing Catholicism as the official religion in Italy).<sup>8</sup> Władysław Jabłonowski, an ND activist and a correspondent of *Gazeta*

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to March 1923, there were published sixty articles favourably disposed to fascism (“Faszyzm” in: *Encyklopedia białych plam*, vol. 6, Polskie Wydawnictwo Encyklopedyczne, Radom 2001, p. 85).

<sup>5</sup> M. Marszał, “Polskie elity wobec włoskiego faszyzmu 1922–1939”, *Annales Universitatis Mariae Curie-Skłodowska. Sectio G, Ius* 2011, issue 58, pp. 121–122. [English version translated from Polish]. Also starting with 1926, there began to emerge (small and actually devoid of any political significance) groups referring to Italian fascism, e.g. Stronictwo Faszystów Polskich (cf. a book by Olgierd Grott, *Faszyści i narodowi socjaliści w Polsce*, Zakład Wydawniczy Nomos, Krakow 2007).

<sup>6</sup> M. Bednarczuk, “Metafory faszyzmu (o polskich konceptualizacjach włoskiej doktryny)”, *Przegląd Humanistyczny* 2011, issue 1, p. 18. [English version translated from Polish].

<sup>7</sup> R. Skirmunt, “Mussolini i Multiplikamini”, *Słowo* 1927, issue 190. As cited in: M. Marszał, op. cit., p. 125. [English version translated from Polish]. Bogumił Grott argued that “fascism was treated as a type of a roller which could crush the threats of the forces adverse to the Polish national interest, without sufficient understanding of its creative role” (B. Grott, *Dylematy polskiego nacjonalizmu. Powrót do tradycji czy przebudowa narodowego ducha*, Wydawnictwo Von Borowiecky, Warsaw 2014, p. 40 [English version translated from Polish]).

<sup>8</sup> The first programme *Fasci Italiani di Combattimento* of 1919 announced in Milan’s Piazza San Sepolcro was saturated with leftist radicalism. It heralded, e.g. the removal of monarchy

*Warszawska* (and the translator of *Mowy Mussoliniego*<sup>9</sup>), could, therefore, in 1926 with complete conviction state that “fascism awoke and aroused in the nation its better instincts and emotions: love for the homeland, pride in religious faith, familial feeling, the ability to sacrifice oneself, the love for work and social order, the realisation of the need for discipline and hierarchy, and, finally, state pride.”<sup>10</sup> That conservative dream was contrasted with the vision of a revolution, according to which the fascist revolt became a radical gesture of shattering the existing world, and the futuristic destruction of that which was old, outworn, and rotten<sup>11</sup> (its main exponent was Artur Maria Swinarski, the author of a collection entitled *Eja! Eja! Alala!* – a frenetic ode sung “for you, Benito and Gabriele!”<sup>12</sup>) Both views regarding the essence of fascism could coexist due to, as noted by Jerzy W. Borejsza, people’s deficient understanding of the matter where “under the notion of ‘fascist Italy’ people applied their own various delusions and dreams, often far from the Italian reality.”<sup>13</sup>

Fascist Italy did not constitute a direct threat to independent Poland, while the respect for the culture and the lack of knowledge of Italian imperialism did not support such cautiousness as Polish intellectuals usually applied in relation to Germany. The lack of direct contact with the state of the *Duce* meant no increased sensitivity for the issues of authoritarianism, and the limiting of freedom and civic freedoms in Italy, which after 1926 were becoming increasingly severe (the special acts passed upon a series of assassination attempts on Mussolini, a radical limiting of the right to assembly, the dissolution of workers’ unions and replacing them with syndicates, outlawing all political parties except *Partito Nazionale Fascista*, and the introduction of a new non-democratic election system

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and the confiscation of church property, as well as changes improving the situation of labourers (cf. R. Eatwell, *Faszycyzm. Historia*, trans. T. Oljasz, Dom Wydawniczy Rebis, Poznan 1999, p. 88). The establishing of *Partito Nazionale Fascista* coincided with the departure from the socialist ideas of *Fasci*, expressed in the programme from San Sepolcro and in *The Charter of Carnaro* by d’Annunzio. Right before the *March on Rome*, Mussolini announced that he recognised the need for the continued existence of the monarchy.

<sup>9</sup> *Mowy Mussoliniego*, trans. W. Jabłonowski, nakł. „Myśli Narodowej”, Warsaw 1927. [English version translated from Polish].

<sup>10</sup> W. Jabłonowski, *Amica Italia. Rzecz o faszycyzmie. Wrażenia i rozważania*, Księgarnia Świętego Wojciecha, Poznan 1926. As cited in: J.W. Borejsza, *Mussolini był pierwszy...*, p. 188. [English version translated from Polish].

<sup>11</sup> Cf. M. Bednarczuk, op. cit., pp. 26–27.

<sup>12</sup> A.M. Swinarski, “W prawo zwrot!” in: idem, *Eja! Eja! Alala!*, Instytut Wydawniczy „Arena”, Warsaw 1926. As cited in: M. Bednarczuk, op. cit., p. 25. [English version translated from Polish]. In time, the Polish reception of fascism began to “gradually suppress the role of d’Annunzio, and the futuristic roots of fascism turning instead towards the apotheosis of a more realistic, yielding in relation to tradition, and a closer to the Polish traditions *Duce*” (J.W. Borejsza, *Mussolini był pierwszy...*, p. 30).

<sup>13</sup> J.W. Borejsza, *Rzym a wspólnota faszystowska*, p. 27. [English version translated from Polish].

in 1928<sup>14</sup>). The limiting of personal freedom resulted directly from the fascist approach to the state-individual relationship. It was the state, personifying the national spirit (as per neo-Hegelian actualistic philosophy of Giovanni Gentile) that was considered the source and the subject of political power.<sup>15</sup> In the social hierarchy constructed by fascist ideologists, the masses were placed at the very bottom while the state (basically its ruling elite with *Duce* at the helm), being the “only authentic expresser of the transcendent will of the spirit of the Italian nation”<sup>16</sup>, received the right to directly and deeply influence the personal lives of the citizens. The task of an individual, subject to fascist teachings, was to actively submit oneself to the state, associating oneself with the “political actualisation of the spirit” of the nation<sup>17</sup>, and, finally, the identification of one’s own freedom as identification with the state. Therefore, within that idealistic construct of the Italian *democrazia par eccellenza* (where “the expression of the realisation of the political will of ‘the few’ or even ‘the One’ (...) was fulfilled in the consciousness and the will of ‘all’”<sup>18</sup>) there was no place for a liberally understood personal freedom outside the scope of state rule<sup>19</sup> (though reality rarely reflected theoretical models, and military and church groups did not succumb to extensive fascistisation<sup>20</sup>). The liberal idea of leaving the citizens the broadest individual freedom, and limiting state law activities to the minimum was completely alien to fascist ideologies. Freedom was interpreted by Gentile and Mussolini as a duty, while its scope and character had to be strictly limited by the state.<sup>21</sup> It is worth consider-

<sup>14</sup> Cf. W. Kozub-Ciembroniewicz, *Doktryna i system władzy Włoch faszystowskich na tle porównawczym*, Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Jagiellońskiego, Kraków 2010, p. 46.

<sup>15</sup> W. Kozub-Ciembroniewicz, op. cit., p. 45. [English version translated from Polish]. In 1919, a nationalist politician Alfredo Rocco (later the minister of justice in Mussolini’s government) wrote about “the absolute supremacy of the state, which is the organised form of the nation” – cited in: J. Sondel-Cedarmas, *Nacjonalizm włoski. Geneza i ewolucja doktryny politycznej (1896–1923)*, Księgarnia Akademicka, Kraków 2013, p. 53.

<sup>16</sup> W. Kozub-Ciembroniewicz, op. cit., p. 45.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 105–107.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 113.

<sup>19</sup> The liberal view of the state presumed, e.g. the subjective approach to the individual, a limiting and a division of political power, the social legitimisation of the authorities, a voluntary organisation of the state and the society, and the right of the ruled to oppose the state when their rights are not being respected (“Liberalizm” in: *Doktryny polityczne XIX i XX wieku*, K. Chojnicka and W. Kozub-Ciembroniewicz (eds.), Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Jagiellońskiego, Kraków 2000, p. 14).

<sup>20</sup> The elements of idea-based pluralism visible in fascist Italy were discussed by Roger Easwell, op. cit., pp. 131–132.

<sup>21</sup> As early as 1927 Antoni Peretiakowicz, a lawyer and a philosopher of law, noted that the fascist state offered the individual freedom only if it was compliant with the interest and the goals of the state. Thus freedom became not a principle and a goal (as in liberal concepts), but a method and a means (A. Peretiakowicz, *Państwo faszystowskie: bilans rządów pięcioletnich*, Dom Książki Polskiej, Warsaw 1927. As cited in: *Amica Italia. Polscy prawnicy wobec włoskiego faszyzmu 1922–1939. Wybór pism*, M. Marszał (ed.), Księgarnia Akademicka, Kraków 2004, pp. 99–100).

ing whether and to what extent the problem of limiting freedom (mainly political, understood as a “zone in which man can act without any obstacles introduced by others”<sup>22</sup>, but also creative freedom) was significant for the Polish sympathisers of fascism. Whether the process of limiting civil liberties was accepted without any reservations, or whether people accepted it as the necessary price that was worth paying in the face of other values associated with fascism? In search of respective answers, I shall consider several important texts which focussed on or referred to Italian fascism, and which co-created its nationalist reception in the Second Polish Republic.

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One of the first instances of profound interest in the political changes in Italy was a book by Władysław Jabłonowski entitled *Amica Italia*, published in 1926. According to Maciej Marszał, the text “reflected the essence of the Polish fascination with Benito Mussolini, and his socio-political views.”<sup>23</sup> Jabłonowski interpreted the fascist revolution as “curbing parliamentary wantonness,” which

cured Italian parliamentarism, enabling the latter to fulfil its own activities without introducing continuous confusion in state life (...), and defined that form of parliamentarism which it should assume, that which it should fulfil if it wanted to be a truly useful factor in the state and the nation<sup>24</sup>

Therefore, fascism was to help cure the ills of political life in Italy by restoring the parliament to its rightful place – “an auxiliary institution (...), efficiently cooperating with the government, and not continuously developing intrigues

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Thus the author noted the “almost complete removal of political freedom” (ibid., p. 112), while retaining considerable economic freedoms.

<sup>22</sup> I. Berlin, “Dwie koncepcje wolności”, trans. D. Grinberg in: idem, *Dwie koncepcje wolności i inne eseje*, J. Jedlicki (ed.), trans. H. Bartosiewicz et al., Res Publica, Warsaw 1991, p. 114. [English version translated from Polish]. Within the space of freedom, “the individual (...) possesses, or should possess, complete freedom and existing and acting according to their own will without the interference of others” (ibid., p. 114). Compulsion is understood by the philosopher as “an intentional interfering of others into my activities. One can talk about the lack of freedom or political liberties only when others prevent me from fulfilling my goals” (ibid., p. 115).

<sup>23</sup> M. Marszał, op. cit., p. 9. As noted by Anna Lew “the fascist doctrine appeared to Jabłonowski as a patriotic national restoration movement, as well as a special method for ensuring the victory of the national idea” (A. Lew, “Fascynacja czy akceptacja? Włoski faszyzm w poglądach Władysława Jabłonkowskiego”, in: *Narodowa Demokracja XIX–XXI wiek. Dzieje ruchu politycznego*, vol. 1: *Koncepcje-ludzie*, T. Sikorski, A. Wątor (eds.), Wydawnictwo Adam Marszałek, Toruń 2012, p. 326).

<sup>24</sup> W. Jabłonowski, op. cit. in: *Amica Italia*, M. Marszał (ed.), Kraków 2004, p. 1.

against it.”<sup>25</sup> Several times the author condemned the “worshippers of the parliament” who absolutised its previous role. He also stressed Mussolini’s ruthless fight against Masonry, which by putting itself above its own state destroyed the freedom of the individual.<sup>26</sup> The Polish foreign correspondent viewed fascism as a “new national order”<sup>27</sup>, the formation of a state which “can only be national, while any other adjectives annexed to it (...) negate its essence.”<sup>28</sup> Those pursuits were hardly aimed against the freedom of the citizens as fascism was, in fact, as Giovanni Gentile argued, “the optimal form of democracy”<sup>29</sup>, which reconciles the interest and the pursuits of the nation with actual liberties:

(...) Mussolini is, in fact, a better *democrat* than ex officio democrats (...). He is more honest a liberal than sworn liberals as he does not slavishly kneel before the rather denounced god of abstract freedoms (...), he rather strives to ensure the same actual freedoms, such as freedom of the press, possession, conscience, etc., for all, without which societies do not progress, and become dependant on others in material and spiritual terms<sup>30</sup>

The theses posed by Jabłonowski, which offered an enthusiastic approval of Mussolini’s political reforms, confirmed that in the mid-1920s, there was a clearly visible departure among the nationalists from democratic traditions, which once enabled parties to gain the support of rural and urban classes. Zygmunt Wasilewski, an ND journalist and critic<sup>31</sup>, stated bitterly: “we were engaged with all seriousness (maybe too long and too exclusively) in politics, lawfulness, constitutionalism, and parliamentarism” while the Bolshevik “Asia is laughing that someone is expecting a fight on the foundation of parliamentarism.”<sup>32</sup> In the face of a new threat, “the masters of the parliamentary tactics, the doctrinaires of democracy, the technicians of political opportunism will make no difference here”<sup>33</sup>, and Italians were the first to realise that. Therefore, rightist communities, among which

<sup>25</sup> It is noteworthy that Jabłonowski’s book had been published two years before the electoral system was changed, which reduced the Italian parliament to the role of a façade of the previous institution.

<sup>26</sup> W. Jabłonowski, op. cit. in: *Amica Italia*, pp. 3–4.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 4.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 10.

<sup>29</sup> Cf. W. Kozub-Ciembroniewicz, op. cit., p. 52.

<sup>30</sup> W. Jabłonowski, op. cit. in: *Amica Italia*, p. 14.

<sup>31</sup> The interwar evolution of Wasilewski’s views in terms of culture was discussed by Eugenia Prokop-Janiec, *Literatura i nacjonalizm. Twórczość krytyczna Zygmunta Wasilewskiego*, Universitas, Krakow 2004, pp. 334–350.

<sup>32</sup> Z. Wasilewski, “O uzgodnienie terenu”, *Mysł Narodowa* 1927, issue 17, p. 301. [English version translated from Polish].

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 302.

the concept of the rule of the nationalist elite was becoming increasingly popular, observed with considerable interest fascist Italy<sup>34</sup>, from time to time publicly expressing their support for Mussolini's policy (Władysław Kozub-Ciembroniewicz stressed that the establishing of OWP "created in Poland the conditions for the reception of the ideological and political principles of Italian fascism"<sup>35</sup>). The assassination attempt on *Duce* in April 1926 impelled the parliamentary board of the Club of the Christian-National Party (Klub Stronnictwa Chrześcijańsko-Narodowego) to draw a resolution in which Italy was defined as "the chief protector of the civilisation, and social and political peace in Europe"<sup>36</sup>, while National Democrats established strong contacts with the Italian fascist movement.<sup>37</sup> Roman Dmowski, the leader of ND, visited Rome in the spring of 1926<sup>38</sup>, and a few months later he issued a letter to the nationalistic writer and politician Enrico Corradini<sup>39</sup> (in French). In the letter, a copy of which was sent to Mussolini, Dmowski unequivocally indicated Mussolini's Italy and the fascist structure of the society as an inspiration, and a model to be emulated in his own political activities ("I am certain that my country will be one of the first ones which in terms of their internal organisation shall follow your lead"<sup>40</sup>).

However, it soon became evident that "after 1926, Rome valued its relations with the ruling party higher than those with National Democracy, and the organisations which stemmed from it."<sup>41</sup> In the ND community, there become pronounced

<sup>34</sup> Bogumił Grott assessed that the fascist system functioning in Italy "was considered by the national party as the first ever case of fulfilling the principle of the rule of the 'national elite', and thus was initially evaluated positively" (B. Grott, op. cit., p. 154).

<sup>35</sup> W. Kozub-Ciembroniewicz, op. cit., p. 214.

<sup>36</sup> J.W. Borejsza, *Mussolini był pierwszy...*, p. 175. [English version translated from Polish].

<sup>37</sup> It was Jacek Bartyzel's opinion that the leading ND politicians "derived their knowledge on the essence and the goals of fascism from their Italian friends, nationalists (...); that was also the source of their conviction that fascism was only a more dynamic form and manifestation of the pursuits of traditional nationalism; that resulted (...) in a general sense of a unity of goals and values with Italian fascism" (*Faszizm*, p. 85).

<sup>38</sup> Also in 1926, Dmowski published in *Gazeta Warszawska* a series of articles devoted to Italian fascism.

<sup>39</sup> Enrico Corradini was the creator of the first Italian nationalist periodical, the *Il Regno*, the first issue of which appeared in 1903. In 1910, he established *Associazione Nazionale Italiana*; he was also one of the initiators of the merger of that organisation with *Partito Nazionale Fascista* (1923). Upon Mussolini's rise to power, he was appointed a lifetime senator. His major work, *L'unità e la potenza delle nazioni* [Unity and Power of the Nation], was published in Polish (*Jedność i potęga narodu*) in 1937 (six years after his death). His biography and views were discussed by Joanna Sondel-Cedermas, op. cit., pp. 167–193.

<sup>40</sup> As cited in: J.W. Borejsza, *Mussolini był pierwszy...*, p. 179. In his articles, Dmowski stressed, though, the special nature of the political methods of fascism, which were specifically Italian, and as such could not be emulated by Poles (cf. W. Kozub-Ciembroniewicz, op. cit., p. 216).

<sup>41</sup> J.W. Borejsza, *Mussolini był pierwszy...*, p. 190. It seems prudent to note, though, a complete lack of Poles' engagement in any activities promoting *international fascism* (the CAUR organisation,

a dissonance towards Italian fascism, particularly in relation to the possibility of transferring it onto the Polish reality. Roman Rybarski, a valued economist (as well as a politician), though considering Mussolini as a “grand educator of the nation”<sup>42</sup>, indicated in 1926 that “fascism is not a universal trend, in such a sense as liberalism or socialism were, which had one model, which was to be applied in China and Poland alike.” Therefore, the emulation of the Italian solutions could only be possible “when one becomes convinced that only such a solution is the result of the actual needs of our national economy.”<sup>43</sup> Several years later, though not referring to fascism directly, Rybarski warned against “a national police state”, which while proclaiming the omnipotence of the state “takes away independence and private life from everything that remained between the individual and the state.”<sup>44</sup> Such a method of fighting individual rights would lead to “society’s atomisation, i.e. to that which is the stepping stone for liberalism (...)”<sup>45</sup> Instead, the *national state* promoted in press articles should replace the liberal individualism through bottom-up organised institutions (local self-governments, associations, religious associations, etc.) understood as “an expression of national life, and the source of the solid power of the state.” The violation of individual freedom should not lead to equalling the “power of the state” with the “power of the government”

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and the international congress in Montreux), which propagated the universal nature of the fascist doctrine, and the cooperation of organisations from specific countries.

<sup>42</sup> R. Rybarski, “O dyktaturach”, *Myśl Narodowa* 1927, issue 21, p. 382. [English version translated from Polish].

<sup>43</sup> Ibid., “Polityka gospodarcza faszyzmu”, *Gazeta Warszawska Poranna* 1926, issue 190. As cited in: *Amica Italia*, p. 58. That thought resurfaced in ND articles several times; ten years later, Henryk Eysymontt (a proponent of the view that a monarchy is “the fullest form of a national state”) noted: “We are always far too impressed by foreign matters, and as a result we now have too much uncritical enthusiasm for a fascist or Nazi form of national state. That sometimes offers the convenient conviction that thus Germans or Italians have already done the job for us, while we can without any significant intellectual effort transfer to us foreign patterns. While in fact we need to consider the things at our own discretion, without forgetting that those countries shaped the national state according to their conditions, while we need to do it according to ours” (H. Eysymontt, “O ideał ustroju. Polemika z powodu artykułu ‘Monarchia czy państwo narodowe’”, *Myśl Narodowa* 1936, issue 19, p. 292 [English version translated from Polish]).

<sup>44</sup> R. Rybarski, “O państwie policyjnym”, *Myśl Narodowa* 1933, issue 20, p. 274. [English version translated from Polish]. Ryszard Piestrzyński was similarly critical in his evaluation, from the nationalist point of view, of the transformation of the absolutist system into an omnipotent police state: “Police systems cannot stand next to them any social forces, independent in their scope. They need to subjugate them (...) Police systems also destroy human character. They wish to rule through fear, through absolute bereavement of humans of their own thoughts and views on the fate of the country, which leads to depriving them of their sense of responsibility, and readiness to defend national interests. While the intention of nationalism is to develop a natural sense of responsibility for the country in the entire nation, and develop a healthy social system” (R. Piestrzyński, “Państwo absolutystyczne i jego zwyrodnienie”, *Myśl Narodowa* 1933, issue 13, p. 163 [English version translated from Polish]).

<sup>45</sup> R. Rybarski, “O państwie policyjnym”, p. 274. [English version translated from Polish].

(and that was exactly what happened in Italy). Rybarski's train of thought could be concluded in the statement that

A criticism of liberalism does not automatically lead to a situation where every system which rises from the rubble of a liberal state should be considered an expression of a national system. (...) If one sees in the idea of the rights of an individual an assumption which is contrary to the foundation of the national trend, then also the life of a police state can assume forms which remain in evident contradiction to that trend.<sup>46</sup>

From the early-1930s, the ND community began to approach Italian fascism with increasing distance.<sup>47</sup> They criticised Hegelian absolutisation of the state, excessive collectivism, and they already noticed the discrepancies and the conflicts between the state pursuing omnipotence and the Church.<sup>48</sup> Dmowski himself, though recognising the achievements of fascism as a national movement<sup>49</sup>, viewed with aversion the excessive militarisation of the politics in Italy, which resulted in a blind submission to the leader, and a decline of any free political thought.<sup>50</sup> At the end of the interwar period, National Democrats already noted the “deterioration of fascism, and the demise of Mussolini's greatness”<sup>51</sup>, seeking ideological suggestions rather in the conservative authoritarianism of Salazar and Franco (more aligned with the Catholic traditionalism of the ND youth). Italian fascism

<sup>46</sup> Ibid., p. 273.

<sup>47</sup> Yet there were many exceptions. In 1937, Władysław Jabłonowski wrote about the “generous and heroic spirit, which first tore Italy out of the void of Bolshevik atrocity, and then introduced order and discipline in all areas of national life, awoke zeal for work, improved the country's material and moral condition, and prepared it for grand tasks and purposes” (W. Jabłonowski, “Italia żyjąca”, *Myśl Narodowa* 1937, issue 19, p. 292). He described Mussolini as “the one (...) who by strengthening the powers of the nation, and putting grand goals for it to achieve, tore it from the mediocrity of existence, and helped it raise its head proudly.” (ibid.)

<sup>48</sup> Olgierd Grott noted that ND politicians “only at the brink of the 1930s, managed to notice that the system of Italian fascism, and its doctrine are not actually based on Catholic principles, while the state remains in clear opposition to the Catholic Church” (O. Grott, op. cit., pp. 260–261).

<sup>49</sup> Dmowski emphasised that Italian fascism was “an honest attempt at building a solid future for the homeland, it went to great lengths to oust the factors of moral and religious decay from national life” (R. Dmowski, “Hitleryzm jako ruch narodowy” in: A.S. Kotowski, *Narodowa Demokracja wobec nazizmu i Trzeciej Rzeszy*, Wydawnictwo Adam Marszałek, Toruń 2007, p. 165).

<sup>50</sup> R. Dmowski, “Militaryzacja polityki”, *Gazeta Warszawska* 1934, issue 247, 249, 250, 252–254.

<sup>51</sup> K. S. Frycz, “Na widowni”, *Myśl Narodowa* 1939, issue 18, p. 265. The author saw the cause of the negative evolution of Mussolini's policy in the socialist intellectual formation of Mussolini, as a result of which “in its profoundness fascism as a doctrine was not actually an important and based on the historic tradition emanation of the spirit of the Italian nation, rather an Italian-conceived adaptation of the socialist teachings of Marx for the national purposes (...) Fascism was often dualistic, and when nonetheless it did not decide to clearly and emphatically stand with Rome and the Church, the uncompromising and completely anti-Roman and anti-Catholic Nazism gained a spiritual advantage over it” (ibid.)

was studied with more interest by young national communities, usually ideologically congenial to the ABC National Radical Camp (Obóz Narodowo-Radykalny ABC).<sup>52</sup> Young nationalists, usually critical of ND politicians, like the latter earlier, treated fascism as an inspiration, and a point of reference in their own thinking.<sup>53</sup> Jan Korolec did, in fact, in 1935 write that Italian fascism “was not able to reconcile the need to introduce order and the preservation of the freedom of an individual, which was the foundation of its creation. Fascism, being a proponent of the omnipotence of the state, cannot ensure people as much freedom as they need to be creative.”<sup>54</sup> However, Alfred Łaszowski, a journalist and a literary critic of *Prosto z mostu*, condemned the attitude of the “weepy humanitarians”, who perceived total systems in a one-sided manner:

The role of dogma is played in a given case by a bromide. We all know it by heart: Totalism, i.e. prison, torment and torture, totalism destroys individual freedom. Capitalists terrorise the working class to be able to retain power (...) A bat, that is the symbol of fascism, reaction, ignorance, and backwardness. The place where blood-thirsty ruffians rule is where the civilisation reaches its end, and the artist dies, or writes following the instruction of the regime. Try to express a doubt – they will drown you in their shouts, they will quote, and the list of the forty martyrs shall live again in the memory.<sup>55</sup>

Łaszowski argued that violence, cruelty, and limiting one’s freedom does not exhaust the notion of totalism, “which is, obviously, quite extensive and

<sup>52</sup> In Maciej Urbanowski’s opinion “fascism, particularly in its Italian version, evoked intense though not uncritical interest among young nationalists” (M. Urbanowski, “Prosto z mostu” in: idem, *Oczyszczenie: szkice o literaturze polskiej XX wieku*, Wydawnictwo Arcana, Krakow 2002, p. 73).

<sup>53</sup> The journalists of *Prosto z mostu* postulated the rejection of the minimalist passive approach to reality, they contrasted voluntarism with the contemplative approach, while they intended to substitute pragmatism with intellectual idealism (“Only in action can we see the essence of things. Deeds are the proper cognitive acts, conditioning reality, and assigning it a direction for its development,” argued Alfred Łaszowski, “Analiza łoż krokodylich”, *Prosto z mostu* 1937, issue 47, p. 2). That attitude displayed a visible inspiration of the neo-idealistic philosophy of Giovanni Gentile, who rejected the “abstract and intellectual” philosophy, and propagated that expressed through deeds (cf. *Doktryny polityczne...*, p. 346). The journalists had an ambivalent approach to fascism itself: on the one hand, they emphasised their common principles, on the other, they expressed a conviction of the need for improving the fascist ideas, mainly through assigning them a Catholic character (“the totality of the Catholic idea, represented by the future Poland, carries national freedom based on a unity of the approach to God, and the realisation of God’s order on Earth”) (S. Piasecki, “Trzy morza a nie jedno”, *Prosto z mostu* 1939, issue 17, p. 1 [English version translated from Polish]).

<sup>54</sup> J. Korolec, “Czy słowo zakłęcia będzie wypowiedziane po polsku”, *Prosto z mostu* 1935, issue 3, p. 4.

<sup>55</sup> A. Łaszowski, “Analiza łoż krokodylich”, *Prosto z mostu* 1937, issue 45, p. 1. [English version translated from Polish].

complex”<sup>56</sup> (“If fascism was one big slaughter house and a torture chamber, it would not have been able to organise the collective mind in such a degree as it is doing now”<sup>57</sup>). He also claimed that “the acts of cruelty go hand in hand with historic deeds,” while “the image of carnage obscured for the liberals a more profound meaning of the existence of total systems.”<sup>58</sup> Łaszowski’s interpretation was based on the underlying conviction that “a system founded on detriment can create positive values, even though any detriment evokes a condemning and opposing reaction.”<sup>59</sup> Thus the journalist realistically assumed that the violence of the state against an individual “constitutes a necessary and inevitable evil” (“A politician knows that it has never been any different. Either we hurt others, or others strike us as hard as they can”<sup>60</sup>).

Thus the issue “to whom the violence applies, and what does it prevent, what does it compensate for in total systems”<sup>61</sup> became of key importance for an evaluation of the political system of a country. In the late-1930s, violence increasingly turned against Jews corresponding to the anti-Semite convictions of young nationalists<sup>62</sup>, and confirming Jan Rembieliński’s view that “nationalism in Europe, only because it is a national movement, by definition must liquidate yids (...)”<sup>63</sup> The turn of Italian fascists towards racism and anti-Semitism (made in the late-1930s) was regarded highly.<sup>64</sup> *La doctrina del fascismo* (initially an entry in *Enciclopedia Italiana*, whose authorship was ascribed to Mussolini<sup>65</sup>) published in 1932, was still free of any anti-Semite taint, while *Duce* himself in an interview by Emil Ludwig argued that “national pride does not need the racial insanity...

<sup>56</sup> Ibid.

<sup>57</sup> A. Łaszowski, “Analiza łez krokodylich”, *Prosto z mostu* 1937, issue 47, p. 2. [English version translated from Polish].

<sup>58</sup> That idea Łaszowski seemed to explain in the further part of his text: “Totalism fights pluralistic concepts. It wants to derive all phenomena from a single superior principle. It integrates, unifies, combines, and binds the nation using violence and power. It accentuates similarities while ousting differences. The dominance of structural tendencies over atomistic ones should be considered as the proper fabric of those movements. Fascism stemmed from indeterminism. Its whole practice proves that a strong individual is not determined by the set of objective conditions, that power itself releases, transforms, and creates” (ibid., p. 2).

<sup>59</sup> Ibid., “Analiza łez krokodylich”, *Prosto z mostu* 1937, issue 45, p. 1.

<sup>60</sup> Ibid., p. 2.

<sup>61</sup> Ibid.

<sup>62</sup> Cf. M. Domagalska, *Antysemityzm dla inteligencji? Kwestia żydowska w publicystyce Adolfa Nowaczyńskiego na łamach „Myśli Narodowej” (1921–1934) i „Prosto z mostu” (1935–1939) (na tle porównawczym)*, Żydowski Instytut Historyczny, Warsaw 2004, pp. 103–130.

<sup>63</sup> J. Rembieliński, “Na widowni”, *Myśl Narodowa* 1934, issue 1, p. 11. [English version translated from Polish].

<sup>64</sup> Roger Eatwell explained Mussolini’s turn towards anti-Semitism as an attempt to find a new “factor for regenerating fascist radicalism” (R. Eatwell, op. cit., p. 134).

<sup>65</sup> Probably Giovanni Gentile was the actual author.

There is no anti-Semitism in Italy.”<sup>66</sup> It was only in 1938 that the *Manifesto of Race* was published; it included, e.g. theses on the Arian nature of Italy, and the existence of the “pure Italian race”, and it proposed a policy of racial separatism in the name of defending European characteristics of Italians.<sup>67</sup> The introduction of racial acts, over fifteen years after the *March on Rome*, was usually interpreted as a proof of the subjugation of Italy to the ideological and political influences of the Third Reich. However, Karol Zbyszewski argued that

Mussolini as an ingenious man never liked Jews, he had been fighting them for a long time, Yids who worked in culture would find a note on their desk in the morning: your resignation has been approved!, and the caretaker would lead them down the kitchen stairs and out the door. It is only in our country that education, literature, and civilisation cannot do without Jews. According to *certain factors*, of course.<sup>68</sup>

That mode of thinking suggested that the Jews living in Italy were not entitled to civil liberties. The national state and its leader were the sovereign, which was why *fighting* Jews justified with the need to fulfil Italian national interests did not arouse any public opposition.

In the late-1930s, the issue of freedom of literature and culture in totalitarian countries, in the fascist Italy in particular, became widely debated. Alfred Łaszowski argued that “today, totalism releases such energy which proves that the relationship of the artist with a given state can possess all the characteristics of creative freedom,” whereas

emphasising the discrepancies between the state and writers is beneficial to Jews. They work to develop the rift, that is the essence of their destructive role. An artist rooted in a familial foundation will not feel the need to express any matters which could undermine the sense of its existence. Even negation and criticism fall in line with the objective interests of a country.<sup>69</sup>

<sup>66</sup> As cited in: *Doktryny polityczne...*, p. 356. One of the most prominent figures of PNF was, at that time, Ettore Ovazza, the son of a Jewish banker.

<sup>67</sup> W. Kozub-Ciembroniewicz, op. cit., p. 161. It is noteworthy that the manifesto did not proclaim an official hierarchic ordering of the races; individual races were supposed to be different from one another, yet neither better or worse.

<sup>68</sup> K. Zbyszewski, “Ryżową szcztoką. Blok zdrowego sensu”, *Prosto z mostu* 1938, issue 39, p. 8. Also Adolf Nowaczyński considered as one of the “thousand lies and offences” cast against the fascist Italy the conviction that “the severe anti-Hebrew trend, that second-hand, that emulation of the last two years to impress Berlin, that it has never been foreshadowed, that it is mocking and parroting Germans” (A. Nowaczyński, “Ofensywa. Sempre avanti”, *Prosto z mostu* 1939, issue 10, p. 8)

<sup>69</sup> A. Łaszowski, “Analiza łez krokodylich”, *Prosto z mostu* 1937, issue 47, p. 2.

The issue was discussed in more detail by a collaborator of *Prosto z mostu*, Adolf Nowaczyński. The author of *Skotopaski sowizdrzalskie* had already often evaluated Italian fascism positively in texts published in *Myśl Narodowa*, ascribing it with a “ruthless yet systematic [pursuit] (...) of increasing the morality of the entirety of life in all its areas”<sup>70</sup>, care about women’s dignity, and healthy morals amongst the youth. In the late-1930s, Nowaczyński proved that under Mussolini’s rule artistic creativity did not vanish, as it was suggested in the texts of many Polish journalists (or, in fact, “compositions (...) of youngsters muttered exactly according to the instructions of Semite teachers and tricksters”<sup>71</sup>). In fact, it was the contrary: some areas of the arts (such as music, opera, and sculpture) blossomed extensively, and in that view fascist Italy could constitute an unequalled role model for Poland. The writer called any opposing statements as “insolent and vile” lies propagated by Jews who “slander Italy” in order to take revenge on the recently introduced anti-Semite repression:

Therefore, a lie flowing along the waves of “poisonous Jewish gases” is the bromide that under “dictatorship” the life of Art, Literature, and Theatre dwindles and dies. Architecture, Sculpture and Music entered together with Mussolini into an era of a new Renaissance. Less so with Poetry, Novels, and Drama. Yet the pulse of life and creative dynamics are still at a high level, and for us... unachievable in terms of their dynamics.<sup>72</sup>

Nowaczyński also stressed the clearly visible propagation and democratisation of culture (mainly thanks to the *Opera Nazionale Dopolavoro* organisation), thanks to which a common phenomenon were “operas in market squares, popular concerts amongst ruins where labourers listened together with their wives (“art literally became domesticated, it went out to the working class, and it became the basic component of everyday life of the entire peoples of physical workers”<sup>73</sup>). In the cultural life of Italy, the writer saw a free exchange of thoughts, “life, temperament, fervour, fire”, and “fertility, love, and freshness.” He failed to notice, though, the restraining of creative freedom, and its subjugation to the interest of the fascist regime. Therefore, he proclaimed his Italophilia supplementing his

<sup>70</sup> A. Nowaczyński, “Ofensywa. Caliban zabił Ariela”, *Myśl Narodowa* 1930, issue 45, p. 715. [English version translated from Polish]. The columnist praised extensively *Duce’s* care for the high level of morality of his nation: “Mussolini applies the greatest care to the morals and the sexual lives of adolescents. In schools, there is a ban, violators of which are punished severely, on using obscene and vulgar language, as well as cursing and insults. There is also a ban on using filthy speech in army barracks.” (ibid.)

<sup>71</sup> A. Nowaczyński, “Ofensywa. Sempre avanti”, p. 8.

<sup>72</sup> Ibid.

<sup>73</sup> Ibid.

peculiar Francophobia: “Everything we have ever taken from Italy was positive and constructive. While anything we take from Paris today is well-perfumed manure.”<sup>74</sup>

It must be noted, though, that Nowaczyński’s play entitled *Cezar i człowiek*, written several months prior, presented the problems of the relationship of culture and dictatorship somewhat differently. The story of the 1937 work was set in Rome at the turn of the 16<sup>th</sup> c. (yet some historical elements were altered rather freely), and it centred around a surprising concept of the love between Lucrezia Borgia and Nicolas Copernicus. The Polish “stargazer” was presented therein as a personification of the freedom of the human spirit attempting to discover the truths about the world and cosmos freely and uninhibitedly (“In fact, human spirit is endless, while the human mind pursues mysteries, therefore ad astra! ad astra! it will strive until it discovers what is hidden”<sup>75</sup>). Copernicus’s antagonist was Cesare Borgia, whose political intention was to conquer and unite Italy under his rule (so that there is “one duce”, not a hundred), while the means towards that goal: terror and brutal violence. Prince Borgia was presented as an uncompromising proponent of the strong rule of an exceptional individual willing to subjugate everything and everyone (“Now you see for yourselves! Give the nation a little slack, and this is what happens. One person is capable of keeping it all in check. Either libertas or discipline, either auctoritas or what: The Orsinis, uproar, trouble, rebellion, ‘homo homini lupus’...”<sup>76</sup>) Copernicus’s intellectual independence and personal courage became in those conditions the reason for issuing a death sentence on the astronomer. Saving himself in a dramatic escape, Copernicus managed to be triumphant: a few years later Man was celebrated in Ferrara, while the once omnipotent Emperor died a shameful death. Nowaczyński’s historical fantasy was (both by his contemporaries and years later) read in the context of the political situation of the second half of the 1930s as an illustration of the “threat to grand spiritual values carried by tyranny, criminal political rapacity, and brutal military rule”, and, rather surprising considering the writer’s creative biography, “a warning against fascism.”<sup>77</sup> In a review of a staging of the play at Teatr Nowy, Antoni Słonimski argued:

Nowaczyński’s new play is quite an extraordinary event (...) The propagator of nationalistic, fascist and anti-Semite slogans could easily live off of his long-term activities. There came the time when Nowaczyński’s ideology has finally received its rather universal triumph (...) But Nowaczyński is an artist. Not only the perverseness

<sup>74</sup> Ibid.

<sup>75</sup> A. Nowaczyński, *Cezar i człowiek*, Gebethner i Wolff, Warsaw 1937, p. 128. [English version translated from Polish].

<sup>76</sup> Ibid., p. 202.

<sup>77</sup> J. Kwiatkowski, *Dwudziestolecie międzywojenne*, Wydawnictwo Naukowe PWN, Warsaw 2000, p. 429.

of a pamphleteer, but a more profound thing: his artistic instinct suddenly tossed him against the victorious wave of the incoming barbarity. (...) Nowaczyński juxtaposed the *raison d'être*, brutality, and violence with humanity and the Promethean want of knowledge, which cannot be blocked either by the crimes of the tyrant or the stake of the inquisitor.<sup>78</sup>

Słonimski noted that the “lofty ideology” of the play contradicted the many years of the journalistic work of the author of *Góry z piasku*. For him, *Cezar i człowiek* mainly confirmed his own conviction of the “impossibility of reconciling fascism with the most important element of art always devoted to the notion of humanity.”<sup>79</sup> That was why he was willing to treat with increased understanding the linguistic and narrative failings of the playwright; considering the ideological reading of the text, it was of a lesser significance that “in reality a Lucrezia Borgia would not take any notice of a Copernicus.”<sup>80</sup>

The attitude of Jerzy Waldorff in the late-1930s did not evoke similar remarks and comments. The music reviewer and a journalist of *Kurier Poranny*, and a collaborator of *Prosto z mostu* (where he published an interview with Leon Degrelle, the leader of the Belgian fascist organisation *Christus Rex*), in the summer of 1937 travelled to Italy. He shared his experiences of his visit in fascist Italy in a series of articles published in Stanisław Piasecki’s weekly, and later collected in a book entitled *Sztuka pod dyktaturą* (it was published at the beginning of 1939, after Waldorff had left *Prosto z mostu*)<sup>81</sup>. The starting point for the story of the culture of contemporary Italy was the introduction of a vital division into Italian and German fascisms. Waldorff emphasised (also quoting Martinetti, whom he visited during his visit in Italy) the completely different approach of both dictators to the arts and artists. While Hitler strictly condemned the avant-garde and crippled any free artistic criticism, Mussolini did not display any animosity towards modern culture. On the contrary, *Duce* remembered that it was avant-garde artists that paved the way for the new political system (“The fascist revolution has been the only case in history when (...) art prepared the revolution”<sup>82</sup>). Therefore, he left creators considerable freedom for their actions provided that they formally

<sup>78</sup> As [Antoni Słonimski], “Sztuki o Koperniku i Villonie”, *Wiadomości Literackie* 1937, issue 26, p. 5 [English version translated from Polish].

<sup>79</sup> Ibid.

<sup>80</sup> Ibid.

<sup>81</sup> The image of Italian culture as presented in Waldorff’s book was analysed at length by Arkadiusz Meller, “‘Sztuka pod dyktaturą’ Jerzego Waldorffa – szkic o relacjach między faszyzmem a kulturą na przykładzie Włoch Benito Mussoliniego”, *Historia i Polityka* 2009/2010, issue 2/3, pp. 105–121. The text is available online: *Akademicka Platforma Czasopism* [online], <http://apcz.pl/czasopisma/index.php/HiP/article/view/HiP.2010.007/1357> (accessed on 10.02.2016).

<sup>82</sup> J. Waldorff, “Sztuka pod dyktaturą. D’Annunzio – Marinetti”, *Prosto z mostu* 1937, issue 55, p. 3. [English version translated from Polish]

accepted the fascist system.<sup>83</sup> Without interfering with any matters of aesthetics (“Duce’s wisdom consists of not considering himself too wise, and not making statements on aesthetics. “That is for artists to decide”<sup>84</sup>), the authorities had a goal of efficiently organising the cultural life and its institutions. The wide-scale state patronage astonished Waldorff (“I had never expected your government to assume (...) a position which cannot be referred to any longer as ‘supporting’, rather as ‘cultural armament’ of Italy”<sup>85</sup>). He also admired, something Nowaczyński also appreciated, the promotion of culture among the broad masses of the Italian society (“Labourers and peasants are listening to Sophocles, Euripides, and Aeschylus, experiencing the most profound emotions”<sup>86</sup>). What he witnessed together with the meetings with Italian artists and notables (Waldorff was received by the minister of propaganda, and he was escorted by three officials<sup>87</sup>) convinced him that the common visions and opinions echoed by the liberal elites of Warsaw were completely false: “At Ziemiańska, it is not befitting to criticise the scheming of American capitalists, but it is obligatory to preach nonsense about the dreadful tyranny of Mussolini, even if one does not know what that tyranny was to consist of. It is totalism, so there must be tyranny. End of story!”<sup>88</sup>

Jerzy Waldorff understood that in order to develop, art needs freedom. He thought that the fascist state guaranteed that essential portion of creative liberty.

<sup>83</sup> Alfred Jesionowski, who reviewed Waldorff’s book in *Prosto z mostu*, argued that even the limitations (of political nature) posed for creators by the regime could be utilised to benefit Italian literature: One could add here that such an extensive limitation regarding the social reality requires true creators who possess God-given talent, to apply much more effort, and be more original than writers for whom all themes are accessible, who thus almost exclusively delve into the bleak reality of everyday life, they cannot exit the tight circle surrounding their world of minor things, and thus in their psychological analyses they resort to distortions and artificiality, which will never reach mass consumers, and will remain only a peculiarity for a small group of literary enthusiasts” (A. Jesionowski, “Zbrojenie kulturalne Italii”, *Prosto z mostu* 1938, issue 10, p. 7).

<sup>84</sup> J. Waldorff, “Sztuka pod dyktaturą. Rzeźba włoska”, *Prosto z mostu* 1938, issue 6, p. 3. [English version translated from Polish].

<sup>85</sup> Idem, “Sztuka pod dyktaturą. Caffè Greco”, *Prosto z mostu* 1938, issue 14, p. 2. [English version translated from Polish]. Waldorff was often critical about the cultural policy of the Polish government, e.g. when writing about his sculptor friend, he noted that he was “a scholarship recipient of the Polish government, so he has enough money not starve to death, yet too little to live” (idem, “Sztuka pod dyktaturą. Rzeźba włoska”, p. 3).

<sup>86</sup> Idem, “Sztuka pod dyktaturą. Teatr włoski”, *Prosto z mostu* 1938, issue 17, p. 3. [English version translated from Polish]. Alfredo Casella, quoted extensively by Waldorff, assured: “Artists throughout Europe complain that people have lost their desire for art, and that they continue to depart from art. In Italy it was the same thing. But fascism instead of whining said to itself: if you don’t want art, then we’ll come with it to you!” (idem, “Sztuka pod dyktaturą. Muzyka”, *Prosto z mostu* 1937, issue 57/58, p. 12).

<sup>87</sup> M. Urbanek, *Waldorff. Ostatni baron Peerelu*, Wydawnictwo Iskry, Warsaw 2008, p. 61. [English version translated from Polish].

<sup>88</sup> J. Waldorff, “Sztuka pod dyktaturą. Architektura”, *Prosto z mostu* 1938, issue 8, p. 2. [English version translated from Polish].

He noticed, though, that the omnipotence of the state in the area of organising cultural life, and the lack of ability to act outside the official state structures may negatively affect the development of artists' talents. The identified deficiencies of Italian culture (e.g. the low level of poetic compositions) did not, though, considerably influence the general reading of the text, which presented fascist Italy as a country which valued art and literature highly, cared for its development, and did not impose on the creators a rigid ideological girdle. Mussolini's government did not repress artists unfavourably disposed towards fascism, or was even magnanimous towards them:

Even before leaving the country, Toscanini was known for his anti-fascist views, everyone knew about it. He did not want to conduct Giovinezza's hymn, so he did not do it – no one forced him otherwise. (...) But after the concert and regular ovations, when the conductor was stepping into the street, a few thugs lunged at him, and slapped him. Obviously, those were some scallywags operating on their own inspiration. Their actions were widely condemned. Yet, mortally offended, Toscanini left the country, and has been twice as abusive of fascism, and does not want to come back. But he could! Duce still considers him such a great artist that now, quite recently, our conductor demanded for a festival in Austria three soloists, contracted in Italy – he personally ordered the termination of their contracts, so that they could satisfy the fantasy of Toscanini, the relentless opposer of fascism. That is the reality of the pressures exerted by the government.<sup>89</sup>

The author of *Sztuka pod dyktaturą* also justified the existence of censorship, the aim of which was to ensure that literature “strode the paths defined by fascism.”<sup>90</sup> The writer's admiration for the conditions created for artists by *Duce* was sometimes so enthusiastic that, as Mariusz Urbanek wrote, “had Waldorff's description not been so serious, one could consider it a satire.”<sup>91</sup> The text did, in fact, sometimes include some menacing tones related to the problem of the opponents of the system still operating in some places:

Today, (...) the honest Italian oppositionist could only be a person who would honestly dare to say that he knows a person who in identical conditions would do more than Mussolini. In that sense, there is no opposition. Naturally, there are in Italy people who fight fascism regardless, yet let us agree that that is not the opposition, simply the enemies of the nation who ought to be fought as ruthlessly as possible.<sup>92</sup>

In fact, Waldorff saw some limitations of freedom, yet he seemed to think that they were justified by the nature and the extent of the transformations in Italy.

<sup>89</sup> Idem, “Sztuka pod dyktaturą. Muzyka”, p. 12. [English version translated from Polish].

<sup>90</sup> As cited in: M. Urbanek, op. cit., p. 66.

<sup>91</sup> Ibid., p. 65.

<sup>92</sup> J. Waldorff, “Sztuka pod dyktaturą”, *Prosto z mostu* 1937, issue 54, p. 1.

A painter met in a Rome café said: “I as well would prefer in Italy an atmosphere of complete freedom, just like in France. Yet not every country can afford it, and when it comes to a choice: egoistic liberalism or a strong homeland, what should I choose?”<sup>93</sup> The answer to the question also seemed obvious to the author of the report.

Among the nationalistic authors who wrote approvingly of fascism, the highest attention to the problem of legitimacy of the limitations of civil liberties was applied by Ferdynand Goetel, an acclaimed novelist, former chairman of the PEN Club, and a member of the Polish Academy of Literature. In political terms, Goetel was associated with the Sanation camp, while his play entitled *Samuel Zborowski*, published in 1929, was read as an explicit support for Piłsudski’s activities. It indicated the threats originating from excess civil liberties, which can lead a country to anarchy; he expressed, in Maciej Urbanowski’s opinion, “a postulate for a strong state and government, but also an opposition to the abuse of freedom by individuals.”<sup>94</sup> A type of a continuation of that matter was offered in a treatise entitled *Pod znakiem faszyzmu*<sup>95</sup>, which constituted probably the most significant text promoting the establishment in Poland of a fascist system<sup>96</sup>. Goetel’s ideological programme was evidently inspired by Italian fascism, admired for “the superb iron-clad unprecedented in world history organisation of the entire society”<sup>97</sup>, which it managed to use in relation to the civilisational level of Italy. The writer viewed fascism as a kind of “bloodless revolution” performed “without a sea of blood, without cruelty and execution (...) without a row of gallows from which citizens would hang, without paralysing the entire economic and social machine.”<sup>98</sup> The author of *Kar-Chat* argued that “whoever considers vio-

<sup>93</sup> Idem, “Sztuka pod dykturą. Caffè Greco”, p. 2

<sup>94</sup> M. Urbanowski, “Wolność tragiczna? Wolność polityczna w literaturze II RP” in: idem, *Od Brzozowskiego do Herberta. Studia o ideach literatury polskiej XX wieku*, Wydawnictwo LTW, Warsaw 2013, p. 118.

<sup>95</sup> I discussed this text extensively in one of the chapters of my book entitled *Polscy pisarze wobec faszyzmu*, Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Łódzkiego, Łódź 2015.

<sup>96</sup> As the earliest proposal of that type developed on a large scale one should consider the brochure entitled *Jak ja wyobrażam sobie faszyzm polski* by fr. Zbigniew Łuczycki. It represented a traditionalist trend (anti-liberal and anti-leftist, as well as anti-Semite), and treated fascism as a means of strengthening Polish Catholicism, and traditional values: “(...) ‘Instaurare omnia in Christo’, is a slogan, the goal, method, and the scope of work of Polish and Catholic Fascism – it is an act, the Statute of Fascism for all its respectable dealings based on intelligence, honesty, justice, and love for our ideals, sanctitude, and the national and religious achievements” (Z. Łuczycki, *Jak ja wyobrażam sobie faszyzm polski*, Drukarnia „Ziemiańska”, Lublin 1926, p. 13 [English version translated from Polish]). Cf. also remarks by Bogumił Grott, op. cit., pp. 39–40.

<sup>97</sup> F. Goetel, *Dzieła wybrane*, vol. 5: *Pisma polityczne. „Pod znakiem faszyzmu” oraz szkice rozproszone 1921–1955*, M. Urbanowski (ed.), Wydawnictwo Arcana, Kraków 2006, p. 51. [English version translated from Polish].

<sup>98</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 118.

lence without internal shame, he has surely lost any sense of humanity”<sup>99</sup>, yet he defended the right to use compulsion – even though temporary<sup>100</sup> – by the fascist state (thus also by the future Polish state). But he knew well how much Poles were attached to their sense of freedom:

A certain characteristic cult of strength and the admiration of power inclines us to favour the principle of strong government based on respect for authority. At the same time, though, we do not wish to agree to anything which would diminish our rights and liberties. And, most of all, we are sensitive to compulsion. Not through violence! Everything through internal conviction! Actually, it should be said that the sense of personal and civil liberty would be a wonderful feature of Poles if it were accompanied a similarly high sense of civil duty. Yet the circle of dutifulness which characterises (...) the societies of France and England, in Poland is fragile and thin, and breaks under the slightest pressure of insatiable jobbery<sup>101</sup>.

Goetel emphasised the Polish national nature formed in special historical circumstances, and how it differed, disadvantageously, from the nature of Western societies:

Have those who are so willing to blind us with the enlightened West ever considered how much compulsion is included in the French, English or Scandinavian morality – compulsion achieved in the heavy, long, and hard lessons offered by history? Civil liberties in those countries are countered with moral dutifulness included in virtues unknown amongst us, such as: appropriateness, reliability, honest conduct in business or interpersonal relations, diligence, and the sense of hierarchy!<sup>102</sup>

The Polish sense of freedom and liberty has never been countered by civil virtues. Goetel seemed to suggest that those positively evaluated features could be introduced by fascism which, in fact, “limited people’s liberty in deciding about themselves, but it also deprived them of the ability to decide about the liberty of others.”<sup>103</sup> For the author of *Z dnia na dzień*, a much more vital problem seemed the abuse of freedom by citizens than its limiting by the state. Additionally, democratic freedom, by offering everyone equal opportunities, results in

<sup>99</sup> Ibid., p. 120.

<sup>100</sup> “The course of events in fascist states also indicates a continuous process of tempering acute methods of compulsion” (ibid., p. 120); “While the only argument in support of the legitimacy of violence can only be that eventually it becomes unnecessary” (ibid.).

<sup>101</sup> Ibid., pp. 120–121.

<sup>102</sup> Ibid., p. 122.

<sup>103</sup> Ibid., p. 127.

a victory of the “cunning and the greedy”<sup>104</sup>, while it encumbers ordinary people “with the burden of civilisational concerns (...) without offering them any uniform directions as to how to solve them.”<sup>105</sup> In that approach, fascism becomes a type of “escape from freedom”, which, in excess, proves detrimental both for the individual, and the entire society. A significant weakness of democracy has always been its intention to impose “on the masses truths and doctrines invented in the laboratories of social activists.” Instead, “fascism (...) reached for the truths of the masses, and approached them as its own. The truths of the masses were simpler, more modest, maybe more brutal (...) But they were also more honest, natural, and more human.”<sup>106</sup>

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The nationalistic reception of Italian fascism, though abundant quantitatively, was usually rather superficial. As Bogumił Grott noted, National Democratic articles of that period were marked with a “complete lack of reflection (...) on the doctrine foundations of the system, which in their centre included the concept of the state, so also the problem of its rule in relation to external factors.”<sup>107</sup> That observation could be extrapolated onto the entirety of the nationalist press articles of the interwar period, which was not necessarily marked by considerable insightfulness in their interpretations of Italian reality. The fascist doctrine was often considered superficially, without the proper appreciation for the significance of the concept of a totalitarian state, which constituted the core of Mussolini’s and Gentile’s idea. The discussions of the limiting of civil liberties introduced by fascists were also burdened with similar weaknesses, and probably no nationalist interested in fascism found strength to approach it as systematically as Karol Ludwik Koniński, the author of a several-volume-long study devoted to the legitimacy of the application of compulsion by the state.<sup>108</sup> That observation did not mean, however, that nationalistic journalists neglected that topic.

The material presented herein indicates that the issue of freedom in a fascist system was interpreted in nationalistic press articles according to several different methods:

<sup>104</sup> Ibid.

<sup>105</sup> Ibid., p. 126.

<sup>106</sup> Ibid., p. 127.

<sup>107</sup> B. Grott, op. cit., p. 155.

<sup>108</sup> Koniński, though it would be difficult to define him as a liberal journalist, expressed a conviction, so close to the classics of English liberal thought, that the state must ensure its citizens “a legally warranted circle of liberties, security, and dignity; a circle which no one can break without becoming subject to punishment” (K.L. Koniński, “Humanizm, godność, demokracja” in: idem, *Pisma polityczne*, M. Urbanowski (ed.), Wydawnictwo Arkana, Krakow 2014, p. 466. Originally printed in: *Zwrot* 1937, issue 21).

1. ND journalists rejected the concepts of liberal freedom, neither did they support totalitarianism, though they usually did not express any firm opposition towards violence. They seemed to be inclined towards the anti-liberal concept of the “intellectual limitation of freedom” in the name of introducing social order, yet they feared a degenerated shape of authoritarianism in the form of a *police state* imposing excessive collectivism.

2. Karol Zbyszewski and Adolf Nowaczyński were clearly favourably disposed to anti-liberal repressions directed against undesired groups (mainly Jews). They argued that in a national state only the representatives of the dominant nation are entitled to political and creative freedom, while the rights of minorities should be limited as much as possible. The implementation of such a policy by fascists was accepted by many, who wanted to transfer similar solutions to Poland.

3. For some authors (mainly Goetel, also Łaszowski), limiting freedom appeared as a price which was worth paying (and should be paid) considering the positive values associated with fascism (the strengthening of the state, social mobilisation, and the adjustment of the national character of Poles). That issue was presented as a decreasing inconvenient cost, which would diminish as the fascist system became more liberal. Such a conviction seemed edging on the absolutist position which stated that it is possible and necessary to calculate the actual cost worth incurring in the name of the abstract future happiness.

4. The final interpretative model indicated that fascism did not, in fact, limit freedom, or the limitations were insignificant, not really severe, and basically socially beneficial. Such an attitude was shared by Jerzy Waldorff, the author of *Sztuki pod dyktaturą*, who referred in his observations mainly to the freedom of artistic expression. He focussed less on the problem of political freedom; Waldorff's admiration for the civilisational achievements of fascist Italy (such as draining the Pontine Marshes) did not leave much space for any reflection on that problem. Władysław Jabłonowski also wrote about “significant freedoms”, of which, unlike the abstract ones, not actually desired by citizens, there is in Italy “much more (...) than in the so-called democratic states, where the charming freedom tree was plucked of all its leaves, and is drying out hopelessly.”<sup>109</sup>

It should be noted, though, that the most radical praise of fascist freedom was expressed not in a press article but in a poetic work. Artur Maria Swinarski's frenetic poetry called for the creation of a new culture on the rubble of the old world, giving the youth<sup>110</sup>, personified by “boys in black shirts”, the right to freely express their creative freedom:

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<sup>109</sup> W. Jabłonowski, *Italia żyjąca*, p. 294.

<sup>110</sup> Swinarski's vision corresponded to the fascist perception of youth considered as an exceptional and privileged period of one's life. The issue was discussed by Piotr Podemski in a book entitled *Giovinazza. Młodość i mit młodości w faszystowskich Włoszech*, Wydawnictwo DiG, Warsaw 2010.

Gentlemen! Why, when today the sun is fainting and smouldering,  
 Why do you pore over Schiller's skull and parchment?  
 Each of you is a creator! All your hearts neigh like colts  
 And each of us has a pair of hands.  
 Let us build our own Capitol and our own Forum,  
 Let us build from iron and mind an eternal ode –  
 There are so many forms in rocks waiting to be born,  
 While hands and hammers are young!<sup>111</sup>

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<sup>111</sup> A.M. Swinarski, “Giovinezza” in: idem, *Eja! Eja! Alala!...* As cited in: *Estetyka dyskursu nacjonalistycznego w Polsce 1926–1939*, U. Schmid (ed.), Wydawnictwo Naukowe Scholar, Warsaw 2014, p. 281. [English version translated from Polish].

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Paweł Sobczak

**Intellectual limitation of freedom? The issues of *libertas* in the nationalistic reception of Italian fascism in the Second Polish Republic**

(Summary)

The limiting of personal freedom in interwar Italy resulted directly from the fascist approach to the state-individual relationship. The idea of leaving the citizens the broadest individual freedom, and limiting state law activities to the minimum was completely alien to fascist ideologies. The goal of the article was to consider how the problem of freedom in a fascist state was treated by right-wing supporters of that ideology in Poland. For the analysis, I use, e.g. the journalism of W. Jabłonkowski (*Amica Italia*), R. Rybarski (articles published in *Myśl Narodowa*), A. Łaszowski (*Analiza łez krokodylich*), K. Zbyszewski (a column series *Ryżową szczotką*), A. Nowaczyński (*Sempre avanti*), J. Waldorff (*Sztuka pod dykturą*), and F. Goetel (*Pod znakiem faszyzmu*). As the interpretative context, I also used the poetry of A.M. Swinarski, and a play by Nowaczyński entitled *Cezar i człowiek*.

Keywords: fascism, nationalism, ideology, freedom, interwar period

Sara Kurowska\*

## Freedom of self-discreditation. On Witkacy's letters to his wife

Could Witkacy's letters be entitled, using the words from Edgar Allan Poe's *Marginalia*, "My Heart Laid Bare"? According to Poe, to write a book which would fulfil the promise in the title was impossible: "Paper would cringe and burn at the very first contact with the heated pen."<sup>1</sup> Baudelaire was the first to decide to fulfil that promise. Did he make a pact with the devil to write a book about himself? "Alas, should it even be published, J.J. Rousseau's *The Confessions* will seem bland,"<sup>2</sup> thus dreamt Baudelaire, who intended to publish *Mon couer mis à nu* as his opus magnum. Unfortunately, he only managed to write fragments of it.

Those fragments published under the title *Dzienniki poufne* included a comparison of literature to the Bull-Leaping Fresco. Michel Leiris, who over fifty years later than Baudelaire decided to accept the challenge offered by Poe, thus explained the comparison:

To reveal and expose some emotional and sexual obsessions, to confess publicly to one's most shameful flaws, vile tricks, or deficiencies – that is the means used by the author to introduce into a work of literature at least a shadow of the bull's horn.<sup>3</sup>

In *Dzienniki poufne*, the theme of Bull-Leaping appeared in the ironic comments on the journalist Girardin who said about himself that it was customary for him to "take the bull by the horns." As Baudelaire noted: "Girardin thinks (...) that a bull has its horns on its arse. He mistakes the tail for the horns."<sup>4</sup> In fact,

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<sup>1</sup> Ch. Baudelaire, *Sztuka romantyczna. Dzienniki poufne*, trans. A. Kijowski, Spółdzielnia Wydawnicza „Czytelnik”, Warsaw 1971, p. 249. [English version translated from Polish].

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

<sup>3</sup> M. Leiris, *Wiek męski wraz z rozprawką literatury a tauromachia*, trans. T., J. Błońscy, Państwowy Instytut Wydawniczy, Warsaw 1972, p. 8. [English version translated from Polish].

<sup>4</sup> Ch. Baudelaire, op. cit., p. 271.

Baudelaire himself took the bull by its horns, as, of course, the bull can be understood as society. On the one hand, Baudelaire tried to adjust to the conditions imposed by society: “he applied to the Academy, and does everything he can to succeed, visiting and writing to renowned figures of the literary world; at the same time, he intends to become the director of the Odéon theatre, and then receive the Legion of Honour.”<sup>5</sup> On the other, he wished to write something, which would prove the impossibility of adjusting. Baudelaire’s gesture did not, however, seem dandyish. The artist wished to amaze the urban society, to fence himself from it through exceptionality. “I wish to show my fellow humans the truth of man in the whole truth of his nature; and I shall be that man. I alone,”<sup>6</sup> he wrote. That was rather the gesture of the first modern writer, for whom the pressure of social order became unbearable. By uncovering the contradictions in his own mind, he wanted to remind people that man is, in his essence, mad, crazy, and hilarious.

Through the metaphor of a garden, Gombrowicz expressed basically the same thing which Poe described as the “bare heart”. The famous sentences of *Dziennik* read as follows:

My spring spurts in a garden, at the gate of which there is an angel with a fiery sword. I cannot enter. I am never going to get inside. I am doomed to eternally orbiting the place where my truest enchantment glows. I cannot because... those springs spurt shame like a fountain! Yet the internal imperative: come as close as possible to the source of your shame!<sup>7</sup>

And yet Gombrowicz also made a pact with the devil, who showed him a side door to the garden. Yet *Dziennik* was not it: As Jerzy Jarzębski stated, we are somewhat misled ‘by the autobiographic pact’, which the author seems to be (...) making by choosing the form of a journal.”<sup>8</sup> Indeed, according to Lejeune’s idea, “the fact of the inclusion of the same name on the cover and in the text, and the first person form of expression”<sup>9</sup> indicates the conclusion of an autobiographic pact, which in turn entails a referential pact, which “can be summed up in the formula ‘I promise to say the whole truth and nothing but the truth.’”<sup>10</sup> Gombrowicz did state in *Dziennik*: “this Satan of mine, here, is a creature made of accidents

<sup>5</sup> Ibid., p. 250.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid., p. 249.

<sup>7</sup> W. Gombrowicz, *Dzienniki 1957–1961*, Wydawnictwo Literackie, Kraków–Wrocław, p. 110. [English version translated from Polish].

<sup>8</sup> J. Jarzębski, *Podglądanie Gombrowicza*, Wydawnictwo Literackie, Kraków 2000, p. 182. [English version translated from Polish].

<sup>9</sup> M. Czermińska, *Autobiografia i powieść czyli pisarz i jego postacie*, Wydawnictwo Morskie, Gdansk 1987, p. 11.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid.

and waste (...), like the barking of a dog, a parrot, no answer, paper, Tigre... (...)"<sup>11</sup> so one could assume that he presented himself through various authentic random *waste* from his life. However, as Jerzy Jarzębski argued:

Gombrowicz's *Dziennik* serves more a creative than a reporting function (...) [The author] basically creates himself the protagonist. That is why the narration of *Dziennik* also aims at the future, i.e. towards that future moment when there will form a finished reasonable structure, which the author tries to create.<sup>12</sup>

Therefore, Gombrowicz, similarly to Witkacy, wished to control random events, and instead of himself, he offered only some fabricated construct. "A writer (...) who overtly confessed that he wanted to be liked, had no place in the brutal striptease,"<sup>13</sup> concluded Jan Błoński. The most brutal of all stripteases was, of course, Gombrowicz's unfabricated secret journal, i.e. *Kronos*.

In Polish literature, even after 1945, regardless of the popularity of publishing journals, writers were rarely willing to perform such a feat as Baudelaire's. It comes as no surprise that an interwar artist, who wrote his most important journal in letters, did not want to turn his life into *Mon couer mis à nu* – another novel in instalments, and warned his wife: "(...) I cannot write about this because I do not wish to burn my letters. And if they fall into anyone's hands after I die, I shall be discredited (and you as well) (...)"<sup>14</sup> Jadwiga, of course, complied with the request to burn the letters, and thus the paper couple, so to speak since they communicated mainly via post, established a special kind of a correspondence pact.

Warily, Witkacy reminded his wife every now and again about the agreement: "just remember, that my matters are only and exclusively for you to know."<sup>15</sup> Some postcards were brandished with an amusing stamp: "do not read. For my wife only,"<sup>16</sup> or in another version: "only for my wife. Not someone else's."<sup>17</sup> Let me add that the stamp could only be considered as amusing as it would be doubtful that Witkacy was warning some "other wife"

<sup>11</sup> W. Gombrowicz, op. cit., p. 305.

<sup>12</sup> J. Jarzębski, op. cit., p. 182.

<sup>13</sup> J. Błoński, *Forma, śmiech i rzeczy ostateczne. Studia o Gombrowiczu*, Towarzystwo Autorów i Wydawców Prac Naukowych Universitas, Krakow 2003, p. 120. [English version translated from Polish].

<sup>14</sup> S.I. Witkiewicz, *Ldź (1923–1927)*, Państwowy Instytut Wydawniczy, Warsaw 2005, p. 58. [English version translated from Polish].

<sup>15</sup> Idem, *Ldź (1928–1931)*, Państwowy Instytut Wydawniczy, Warsaw 2007, p. 257. [English version translated from Polish].

<sup>16</sup> Idem, *Ldź (1932–1935)*, Państwowy Instytut Wydawniczy, Warsaw 2010, p. 278. [English version translated from Polish].

<sup>17</sup> Ibid., p. 274.

against reading his letter. He did, in fact, state that “he is even less surprised by gossiping women since he himself displayed huge interest in gossip (...)”<sup>18</sup> Just in case, though, none of the *stamped* postcards included any intimate details.

In a letter to his wife dated 1 October 1928, Witkacy wrote:

I am terrified that you burn all (!! ) attachments. I included in them all class 1 specimens!! Asz’s letter, the Strążyński card, and Reynel’s envelopes (and cards). That was a terrible and unexpected blow. Who could have anticipated that and stipulated against it? Awful.<sup>19</sup>

Jadwiga evidently did not react, as in the following letter Witkacy inquired impatiently: “tell me if you have already burnt the priceless museum pieces.”<sup>20</sup> How is it possible that Witkacy, director of a superb theatre of life, could have expected that his wife, who by no means was a demonic woman, rather “a good reliable person from a proper family, and very well brought up”<sup>21</sup> would perform before him a theatre of letter burning?

The title *My Heart Laid Bare* could also be assigned to the diary which Witkacy wrote during his visit to Russia. In *Wojna Witkacego...*, Krzysztof Dubiński exposed Witkacy’s not exactly Romantic-heroic but rather cowardly heart. In his letters, Witkacy ordered his wife to keep his diary locked in a cabinet.<sup>22</sup> He had more luck with his diary, which burnt during the Warsaw Uprising, than with his letters.

Why was the artist so afraid or even terrified of his letters being read by someone other than Jadwiga? Micińska and Degler stopped at Witkacy’s own explanation: “to poke around in an author *à propos* his work is indiscreet, inappropriate, and dishonourable.”<sup>23</sup> At the same time, they did not consider their interest in the author’s private life as “poking around.” Rather as “brushing”<sup>24</sup> his person of a layer of dirty legend and gossip. While, in fact, such arguments as indiscreetness, inappropriateness, or dishonourable conduct do not justify anything, one should rather make them the starting point and inquire: why was Witkacy such a fierce opponent of biographism?

<sup>18</sup> S. Okołowicz, “Nieznana kobieta w życiu Witkacego. Listy Stanisława Ignacego Witkiewicza do Marii Zarotyńskiej” in: A. Żakiewicz (ed.), *Materiały sesji poświęconej Stanisławowi Ignacemu Witkiewiczowi w 60. rocznicę śmierci*, Słupsk 1999, p. 249.

<sup>19</sup> S.I. Witkiewicz, *Ldź (1928–1931)*, p. 35.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 36.

<sup>21</sup> *Idem*, *Ldź (1936–1939)*, Państwowy Instytut Wydawniczy, Warsaw 2012, p. 287. [English version translated from Polish].

<sup>22</sup> *Idem*, *Ldź (1932–1935)*, p. 278. [English version translated from Polish].

<sup>23</sup> *Idem*, *Pożegnanie jesieni*, Wydawnictwo Zielona Sowa, Krakow 2010, p. 9.

<sup>24</sup> A. Micińska, *Istnienie poszczególne: Stanisław Ignacy Witkiewicz*, Wydawnictwo Dolnośląskie, Wrocław 2003, p. 269. [English version translated from Polish].

In an article “Dalszy ciąg o wstrętnym pojęciu niezrozumiałstwa”, instead of “master critics” Witkacy wrote “bastard critics”, and raved in a letter to his wife: “terrible verification – whether Zofia is not careful, or whether she is not doing it”<sup>25</sup>, and on top of that he cannot exact from *Przegląd Wieczorny* a correction, so he complained to his wife again: “for 2 weeks 4 people in Poland can remember that I called them bastards.”<sup>26</sup> One could joke that like as in the Freudian slip, Witkacy expressed that which was hidden. Just like the fierce struggle with Dada and futurism, the struggle with *biographism* also derives from a fear, in that respect a fear of a contemporary critic who crawls into a work of art, and performs increasingly more extensive analyses. The background for Witkacy's anti-biographic attitude was modernism's multiplying instances of obscuring a work of art with its creator, a legend, or a bromide. Witkacy tried at all costs to defend the concept of an immanent work, enclosed in its formal structure.

The conflict between a biography and a work of art is part of something much more serious, something which Witkacy understood as a tension between metaphysics and contemporary culture with all its prosaic and common character. Art, he argued, is supposed to resemble savouring the refined formal taste, not just a brutal cramming with life's matter.

Within the Pure Form (Czysta Forma) concept, Witkacy tried to suppress life's matter. He passed it over in silence as being unimportant, yet necessary; necessary because man is not a *deus artifex*, the perfect constructor capable of creating solely with his logos. He also included as works of art thoughts, feelings, and visions, everything to which Witkacy referred concisely and contemptuously as “guts”. Why guts? One could venture an analogy. Man shall not achieve intoxicating spiritual heights without previously delivering their gut nutrients. As Márai concluded: man is man, a spiritual being, “not only through the heart and mind, but also through the stomach and intestines.”<sup>27</sup> Pure Form art also seemed not free from ingestive issues. The mystery of Existence must, unfortunately, pass through the gut filled with low, filthy life's content, only to emerge in a Pure Form work of art upon intellectual operations which reduce that which is redundant. Thus content undergoes “angelisation” into a Pure Form work.

Pure art is created by spiritual aristocracy, schizoids as Witkacy used to call them using Ernst Kretschmer's terminology. They possess an innate aversion to guts, “always cocooned in some spiritual wadding.”<sup>28</sup> That is why they avoid

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<sup>25</sup> S.I. Witkiewicz, *Ldź (1923–1927)*, p. 154.

<sup>26</sup> Idem, *Ldź (1923–1927)*, p. 162.

<sup>27</sup> S. Márai, *Księga ziół*, trans. F. Netz, Spółdzielnia Wydawnicza „Czytelnik”, Warsaw 2011, p. 68. [English version translated from Polish].

<sup>28</sup> S.I. Witkiewicz, *Narkotyki. Niemyte dusze*, Państwowy Instytut Wydawniczy, Warsaw 1993, p. 163.

“rancorous geniality and exuberance of pyknics”<sup>29</sup>, i.e. those who are their opposites. Witkacy summarised Kretschmer’s work in *Niemyte dusze* to prove that it is worth using. What was the most interesting, though, was the autobiographic remark placed on the side:

The book [Körperbauund Charakter] (...) has made a formal revolution inside me (...) opening before me (being a leptosom-schizotypic, I can almost say: “a former” – as I have pykniced since them) unforeboded horizons.<sup>30</sup>

Witkacy included the short comment in brackets as being marginal, while, in fact, it seems more important than the summary of the work, which even then was considered as a non-academic simplification, as he openly mentioned his fundamental spiritual transformation. That public confession could be supplemented with the words from the *Foreword to Narkotyki*:

Currently, I am a relatively cheerful individual of medium age, who in none of his grand exploits can dream, and only wishes to, for better or for worse, end this life, in which despite his failures and mishaps he regrets nothing. We’ll see what life brings next. I must only note that this *little work* shall possess a highly personal, i.e. somewhat posthumous nature.<sup>31</sup>

Witkacy, of course, was ironic about his “tragic situation.” When stating that Marceli, Izydor, and Rustalka washed everyday using Brother Sennewaldt’s brushes, he added:

there were more and more of those then. That was spurred by a book on drugs by S.I. Witkiewicz, the only work by the author which he deigned to advertise for the benefit of all.<sup>32</sup>

When Witkacy, the creator of Pure Form, wrote about himself that his “little work” is a “highly personal” volume, i.e. gutless, he expressed the highest possible irony. One could say that Witkacy became the embodiment of Baudelaire’s vision:

One evening, a man, who stole from fate a few hours of delight, engrossed in the pleasure of digesting, having forgotten, as much as it is possible, about the past, sat-

<sup>29</sup> Ibid., p. 163.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid., p. 154.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid., p. 8.

<sup>32</sup> Idem, *Jedynie wyjście*, Państwowy Instytut Wydawniczy, Warsaw 1993, p. 110. [English version translated from Polish].

isified with the present, and indifferent to the future, intoxicated with his peace and dandyism, proud that he has not stooped so low as those which he sees as he passes them, with his sight fixed on the smoke from his cigar, says to himself: "What do I care what those creatures burdened with conscience strive for?"<sup>33</sup>

Was it really the case, as suggested by Micińska, that *Narkotyki* and *Nie-myte dusze* were written by an artist who "understood himself in relation to society"<sup>34</sup>? I believe that rather by a catastrophist who became indifferent to the catastrophe, who still hoped that he was capable of a more noble mode of digesting life's content.

Can one specify the time of Witkacy's transformation into a pyknic? Kretschmer's theory was presented in 1936 by a pykniced artist but he came into contact with it as a schizoid artist. The book could have made its way to Witkacy's hands in 1921 at the earliest, straight from the Berlin printers. In any way, he probably read it before 1925 as it was in the mid-1920s that the spiritual aristocrat began to pyknic. He "betrayed", as noted by Micińska<sup>35</sup>, high art, and hiding under the cloak of a short affair with the novel, which in his view was a low form of art, he immersed in life's content. His clear aversion to the guts in the early theoretical papers turned into ambivalence in his novels.

In the foreword to *Pożegnanie jesieni*, Witkacy established a novel pact with the readers without any, it would seem, analogy in literature. Let us record that pact as yet another example of Witkacy's rules and regulations:

"Rules and Regulations of the Novel Company" 'S.I. Witkiewicz'<sup>36</sup>

1. The company made a reservation stating that it did not consider the novels it produced as works of art as a novel as such did not meet the principles of Pure Form, i.e. the dominance of formal elements over life's content.

2. Therefore, what has already been stated herein, the company reserves the right to include in a novel any and all elements regardless of the laws of composition, from an unpsychological row to something which could verge on a philosophical or social treatise.<sup>37</sup>

3. Any association of life's content with autobiographical elements is absolutely prohibited. We emphasise this section the most as

<sup>33</sup> Ch. Baudelaire, op. cit., p. 268.

<sup>34</sup> A. Micińska, *Istnienie poszczególne...*, p. 206. [English version translated from Polish].

<sup>35</sup> Cf. Ibid., p. 172.

<sup>36</sup> The analogy seems even more justified as Witkacy did not consider novels, just like portraits, as works of art.

<sup>37</sup> S.I. Witkiewicz, *Nienasywienie*, Wydawnictwo Marek Derewiecki, Kęty 2013, p. 7. [English version translated from Polish].

it is most difficult to prevent<sup>38</sup> a reader from poking around an author *à propos his work*<sup>39</sup>.

4. Any divergence from the provisions of the above section is allowed only in situations when the company shall brand a given remark in a novel with a stamp with their surname.

5. Please read the rules and regulations carefully. Without any executive powers, it counts on the sensitivity and good will of the readers regarding the adherence to the provisions. The fact of reading and agreeing with the rules and regulations shall be deemed equivalent to concluding an agreement. Any and all discussions regarding the rules and regulations are inadmissible.<sup>40</sup>

Let us consider what Witkacy actually said when concluding such a pact. Also note how he fulfilled it in practice.

Since novels are not Pure Form, that means that they are filthy and gutty. Furthermore, that they consist of the uncleaned necessary life content marginalised by Witkacy, or, if one was to expand that analogy even further, autobiographic content. Witkacy was well aware of the dangers resulting from a prying reader, who cannot notice the difference between life's content and autobiographic elements. That was why he hastily constructed consecutive subsections of the pact warning the readers against trying to find an autobiography in his novel. In the foreword to *Nienasycenie*, he engaged in polemics with critics, e.g. Karol Irzykowski, who reproached Witkacy for establishing his previous novel too much on personal experience. Witkacy was outraged: "how dare those gentlemen presume such things"<sup>41</sup>? He even concluded: "it is even more peculiar that not even one fact in *Pożegnanie jesieni* corresponds to reality."<sup>42</sup> And yet *Pożegnanie jesieni*, though having various distortions, possessed a strong presence of the element of similarity, i.e. that which Lejeune referred to as "the extra-textual point of reference, which is the prototype, or even better, a model for the subject of an expression."<sup>43</sup> In *Powieści Witkacego. Sztuka i mistyfikacja*, Bocheński wrote about the analogy between the suicides of Zosia Osłabędzka and Jadwiga Janczewska. Both "occurred in the 'sublime' scenery of a mountain valley, both women killed themselves with shots from their partners' revolvers"<sup>44</sup>, while the suicides of the women evoked "suicidal attacks" in their partners:

<sup>38</sup> Cf. Idem, *O czystej formie i inne pisma o sztuce*, Państwowy Instytut Wydawniczy, Warsaw 2003, p. 29.

<sup>39</sup> Cf. Idem, *Pożegnanie jesieni*, p. 9.

<sup>40</sup> Cf. Idem, *O czystej formie...*, p. 30.

<sup>41</sup> Idem, *Nienasycenie*, p. 9.

<sup>42</sup> Ibid., p. 10.

<sup>43</sup> M. Czermińska, op. cit., p. 12.

<sup>44</sup> T. Bocheński, *Powieści Witkacego. Sztuka i mistyfikacja*, Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Łódzkiego, Łódź 1995, p. 89. [English version translated from Polish].

Atanazy's visit to the tropics, and Witkiewicz's participation in Malinowski's ethnological journey to Australia, regardless of all the differences, were a kind of a remedy for aching souls. One should also note the baffling similarity between the visit to the country in the midst of the novelistic revolution, and Witkiewicz's return from Australia to Russia upon learning about the outbreak of WWI.<sup>45</sup>

One could say that Witkacy's play in revealing and concealing had a fundamental significance. Bocheński argued that Witkacy simultaneously played out "two theatres, which cannot be separated – the theatre of the peculiarity of existence, and the theatre of banal reality."<sup>46</sup> Using various side doors, "the actor can easily transit from one scene to another."<sup>47</sup> Without going into detail about Witkacy's tactics of public self-creation, I only wish to indicate some similarities it shared with the previously mentioned tactics of finding "side doors to the garden" posited by Gombrowicz. Witkacy even used the similar metaphor of a garden. In a letter to Jadwiga, he defined writing *Pożegnanie jesieni* as "making my way through a thicket of my own psychophysiology."<sup>48</sup> Therefore, maybe it was not only the "status of his physiology" that he meant when on 3 June 1925 he wrote to his wife: "(...) you cannot imagine what awful ghastliness I need to remove. I let the garden overgrow, and now I've been weeding it for hours."<sup>49</sup>

In the case of Witkacy, similarly to Gombrowicz, that which is hidden is actually an act of revealing oneself. Witkacy relentlessly, mainly in novels, revealed himself indirectly in order not to reveal he was a gutter. He concluded with his readers a novel pact, which was to protect him from the readers searching for him there where he was actually hiding. And yet the pact had the opposite result to the intended one. "I have the impression that I am an exception in this instance – I have never read anything like this about anyone else,"<sup>50</sup> complained Witkacy when "caught" by the critics in *Pożegnanie jesieni* for his privacy, and attempting to conclude a more efficient pact in the foreword to *Nienasyccenie*. He began with digressions regarding the novel only to blare involuntarily a moment later his chant on the demise of art, which everyone knows so well, and which he interrupted himself because, alas, his intention was to prevent the artist from declining into biography: "I shall not fight for general principles with individual critics (...) – I wish to limit myself to only one problem: the relationship between an author's

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<sup>45</sup> Ibid.

<sup>46</sup> Idem, "Dwa teatry Witkacego", *Napis. Pismo poświęcone literaturze okolicznościowej* 2012, Seria XVIII, p. 209.

<sup>47</sup> Ibid.

<sup>48</sup> S.I. Witkiewicz, *Ldź (1923–1927)*, p. 85.

<sup>49</sup> Ibid., p. 55.

<sup>50</sup> Idem, *Nienasyccenie*, p. 9.

private life and his work.”<sup>51</sup> And yet the following pact also proved unsuccessful, and Witkacy continued to “hear in the judgements of the critics one single evaluation, divided into specific roles, an opinion expressed by the father regarding *622 upadków Bunga*, that the novel is terribly personal. To desire art, but to write a biography – that seemed for Witkacy a ‘hellish surprise’”<sup>52</sup>.

The situation was different in non-literary material. There Witkacy would very often make himself the protagonist, thus concluding an autobiographic or referential pact. Bocheński argued that by talking about himself directly, the artist revealed from his intimacy that which fitted his image of an artist – “he changed, censored, deformed”<sup>53</sup>, making himself a type of deceptive figure in a public theatre. He offered the audience which tried to crawl into his works and his private life not himself, but some invented construct. Yet he acts not only in front of them: “in his deformation of the world, his own deformation to such an extent to conceal the knowledge of himself was of great importance.”<sup>54</sup>

That is why one cannot agree with Micińska, who argued about Witkacy’s correspondence with his wife that: “‘tis the only (...) ‘novel behind a novel’ of its kind, one more still of Witkacy’s ‘sack novels’ – in that instance an autobiographic psychological novel.”<sup>55</sup> It rather seems that the letters revealed the autobiographic nature of Witkacy’s novels, and as a result: he undermined all pacts which he had concluded with his readers.

Witkacy had been developing matrimonial plans ever since his youth. Why would he want to marry since being an anti-traditionalist he hated “sentimental kitsch”<sup>56</sup>? In a letter of 20 January 1923, he inquired of Bronisław Malinowski which of the two candidates he should choose: the pretty blond or the intelligent Jewish girl. In the following letter of 10 March, his boyhood friend found out that Witkacy had already chosen, but neither of the previously presented candidates. He thus wrote of his fiancée, Jadwiga nee Unrug:

(...) she is not v. pretty, yet v. nice. She doesn’t love me one bit, and she’s not even attracted to me. But that’s beside the point. She doesn’t possess any material goods, but she understands what fantasy in life and outside of it means.<sup>57</sup>

<sup>51</sup> Ibid., p. 8.

<sup>52</sup> T. Bocheński, *O pożądaniu u Witkacego*, an article made available to me by its author, will be included in a volume being prepared for printing after a conference in Słupsk *Witkacy 2014. Co jeszcze jest do odkrycia?*

<sup>53</sup> Ibid.

<sup>54</sup> Ibid.

<sup>55</sup> A. Micińska, *Istnienie poszczególne...*, p. 271.

<sup>56</sup> T. Bocheński, *Dwa teatry Witkacego*, p. 212.

<sup>57</sup> S.I. Witkiewicz, *Listy I*, Państwowy Instytut Wydawniczy, Warsaw 2013, p. 672–673. [English version translated from Polish].

It is difficult to agree with Degler's opinion that "for both it was simply a marriage of convenience."<sup>58</sup> On the contrary, it was rather supposed to be part of Witkacy's fantastic theatre of existence. At the very moment of contracting it, the artist was performing as if in a theatre of Pure Form. He neglected the conditions which determine the actions of individuals contracting marriage: emotional, material, and, finally, for him the most trivial, procreational conditions. It is worth remembering Witkacy's comedy of engagement told by the fiancée herself:

The first words that Staś uttered were: "Would you like to become my wife," and upon receiving my consent, he was extremely thankful, and immediately asked me how important was it for me to have children, because he would prefer not to have them for fear that they would not be satisfactory since both of us are, to some extent, degenerates. I consented to that proposal as well.<sup>59</sup>

That reason was also included in *Pożegnanie jesieni*. In the "farewell" letter to her husband, Zosia wrote: "you will not have a degenerate son, because I'm taking him with me"<sup>60</sup>, while the husband, despite his overwhelming remorse caused by the death of his wife, felt a relief for the might-have-been fatherhood.

The theory to which Witkacy referred was, of course, one of determinism. When explaining Witkacy's aversion to fatherhood, Degler made it the starting point, but he also expanded it considerably. He referenced the artist's childhood experiences associated with the affair between his father and Dembowska, and stated: "who knows whether the fear of a similar story repeated in his marriage, which influenced the mind of a child, did not become the reason for his abandonment of fatherhood."<sup>61</sup> The phrase "a similar story could have repeated itself" subtly expressed the supposition that since Witkiewicz the father betrayed his wife, then Witkiewicz the son and Witkiewicz the grandson would be similar monsters. However, the researcher treated the deterministic theory more seriously than Witkacy, who obviously knew about Mendelian inheritance, which undermined it. Yet it was not the Mendelian inheritance that seemed the most important, rather the fact that Witkacy drew egotistic pleasure from being a decadent. Moreover, it was rather others, not him, who were degenerated. Even when he noticed his progressing demise from schizoid to a pyknic, he retained the awareness of an artist who can talk about the end of art, i.e. the end of individuals, the end of the world, endlessly.

<sup>58</sup> J. Degler, *Witkacego portret wielokrotny. Szkice i materiały do biografii (1918–1939)*, Państwowy Instytut Wydawniczy, Warsaw 2014, p. 164.

<sup>59</sup> S.I. Witkiewicz, *Ldź (1936–1939)*, p. 560.

<sup>60</sup> Idem, *Pożegnanie jesieni*, p. 309.

<sup>61</sup> J. Degler, *Witkacego portret wielokrotny...*, p. 222.

Therefore, if it was the “matter” of fatherhood, a different justification seems more believable. In *Jedynę wyjście*, he expressed it as follows:

He completely forgot who he was, that he can have a child – while, in fact, that terrified him the most, the sense of extreme responsibility for the fate of an unknown creature in such dangerous times<sup>62</sup>.

He wrote the same in a letter to his wife: “I am actually glad that we do not have children. In today’s world, to bring up a son is a hellish task.”<sup>63</sup>

Though Witkacy distanced himself from the deterministic theory, he treated his catastrophic theory quite seriously. He believed that through mind-based order he could construct historical order. The result is, obviously, extremely negative: the further he was from the Renaissance, the more terrible each epoch seemed to him.

When Jadwiga became pregnant, she had to, pursuant to the agreement concluded during the engagement, as noted by Degler, “undergo the procedure.”<sup>64</sup> Such a pristine expression did not reflect the truth about abortion in the interwar period, on which Boy-Żeleński wrote in *Piekło kobiet* as procuring abortion using a crochet hook. Witkacy himself didn’t use a euphemism. On the day of the operation, he wrote to his wife:

For the success of your operation, it has already been 4 days since I last smoked, and I feel much better for it. I’m awaiting news from you impatiently. I am curious about your experience of the anaesthesia. Apparently, there are no great pains, and that comforts me. (...) No news from the *front* as I have left my case for witnesses *à discrétion* to solve it for good (...). Maybe they are carving you open, and scraping at the moment. Good Lord, what I would give to see it!!!<sup>65</sup>

Did the artist express in those words concern for his wife’s situation, as was suggested by Degler? Rather the opposite. Witkacy, who himself sent Jadwiga to the operating table, was not concerned but excited. One could say that he was vicariously, through the midwife’s hooks, torturing Jadwiga. But the torture should probably be expressed through metonymy: it was not Witkacy that tortured Jadwiga, it was his powerful theoretical mind that was doing it. A mind which through his wife’s carnality fulfilled its theory regarding giving birth to children, i.e. *de facto* according to his artificial theory he shaped the grey matter of reality. And he also tried to manage art. The remark about not smoking was, in

<sup>62</sup> S.I. Witkiewicz, *Jedynę wyjście*, p. 35.

<sup>63</sup> Idem, *Ldż (1932–1935)*, p. 226.

<sup>64</sup> J. Degler, *Witkacego portret wielokrotny...*, p. 222.

<sup>65</sup> S.I. Witkiewicz, *Ldż (1923–1927)*, pp. 77–78.

fact, a gesture of theatricalisation of the creative process known from Witkacy's paintings: toying with various psychoactive substances, and half-seriously observing their influence on his art. Therefore, the artist's not smoking was just like trying to find the appropriate artistic form of expression. He regretted that he could not apply his clear mind devoid of nicotine to see how on the operating table they were carving his wife open. Therefore, it seems justified to compare abortion to a work of art. And if so, then to a female act in particular. What I mean, though, is not the conventionalised genre, but *L'Origine du monde* by Gustave Courbet.

Courbet's painting evoked such extreme emotions that for the major part of the 20<sup>th</sup> c. it was not displayed publicly. Why if such acts have been made since antiquity? Thierry Savatier argued that in the case of Courbet's painting, one does not actually view an act in the sense as it has been defined by culture. The breaking of the convention was emphasised by the painter by *reducing* a woman to a certain fragment – he omitted her head. According to Savatier, Courbet's intention was:

the presentation of that which has previously been missing from the female act, to present a full-blooded woman, meaning... nothing more or less than her vitals!<sup>66</sup> (...) through the topic and the framing, the painting immediately seems a symbol of creative freedom, released from all moral limitations or, more precisely, all limitations of "moralising morality". (...) According to all sorts of censors, *L'Origine du monde* has no right to be considered a work of art. It remains *that thing*, in other words: a work, in any case, surely "pornographic".<sup>67</sup>

When Witkacy was creating his act in his imagination, it was as if his wife stopped existing for him, she lost her face. Similarly to Courbet, he only saw the very frame of the female procreative organs. Contrary to Courbet's painting, Witkacy's act could bear the name *The End of the World*, as the artist, due to his catastrophic vision, did not want to give the world the creative element of himself. The act of annihilation of a being became for him a private act of creation, a theatre of cruelty, and a transgression into the artistic zone. The peculiar combination of eroticism and death seemed to be extremely attractive for Witkacy. It was further amplified by the news of an *honorary matter* with Karol Stryjeński. He expressed the apparent shift from a matter of honour to the fact that at the very moment they might be cutting his wife open through deep synchronicity. Consider that Witkacy thought he himself was one step away from dying, that he was going to

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<sup>66</sup> T. Savatier, *Początek świata. Historia obrazu Gustave'a Courbета*, trans. K. Belaid, słowo/obraz terytoria, Gdansk 2015, p. 13. [English version translated from Polish].

<sup>67</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 11–12.

duel Stryjeński “till first blood”<sup>68</sup>, and at the same time, in his imagination, he saw an act, which actually consisted of spilling blood, and killing his offspring.

Witkacy left a trace of enthrallment in the peculiar synchronicity between eroticism and death in *Nienasycenie*. When Genezyp finds out that his father died at six in the morning, he tried to recall what he was doing at that time:

What was I doing at six! Oh, oh – it was her who showed me that combination with the legs then! How obscene! And he at the same time. “At the same time” – falling, he could not satiate with that word. Now the “found out” death of father amplified retrospectively the already deadly pleasure of touching those legs, so badly, inexorably beautiful and indecent, four hours prior – and at the background of simultaneity, and not even current, but recollective, rather notional and abstract.<sup>69</sup>

That synchronicity could be further amplified. The night when the old Kapen died, was the first night Zypcio spent with the duchess, with whom his father had had an affair.

Witkacy, similarly to Genezyp, was amazed at the exceptional nature of the moment. That feeling was born out of the framing of various random elements, thus an incarnation of Pure Form in life. Incarnation seems the right word in the context as it indicates the source of Pure Form. Something that Witkacy wanted to see as a pure intellectual experience, in reality comes from the depths of the gut. A somewhat similar ironic turn of events applied to Duchamp. As everyone knows, he wanted to remit painting to be governed by intellect, and it was actually Courbet whom he blamed for “giving the art of the 19<sup>th</sup> c. a solely ‘retinal’ trend”<sup>70</sup>. Paradoxically, *L’Origine du monde* became a direct inspiration for *Étant donnés*, a work on which Duchamp worked secretly during the final twenty years of his life.

When in the letter to his wife, Witkacy used the term “rznąć” (carve open), he, of course, did not only mean the fact of cutting her with a scalpel. [The word “rznąć” has two meanings in Polish: (i) *informal* to cut, and (ii) to fuck someone] Already Baudelaire in his *Dzienniki pofne* wrote that:

the act of making love bears similarity to torture or a surgical operation.<sup>71</sup> That thought, though, could be expanded rather bitterly. Even if both lovers desire each other, one of them will always be calmer, and less wild than the other. Either he or she will be the operator, i.e. the butcher; the other being the object; the victim.<sup>72</sup>

<sup>68</sup> The term used in the title of a book by J. Rawicz: *Do pierwszej krwi*, Warsaw 1974.

<sup>69</sup> S.I. Witkiewicz, *Nienasycenie*, pp. 155–156.

<sup>70</sup> C. Tomkins, *Duchamp. Biografia*, trans. I. Chlewińska, Zysk i S-ka Wydawnictwo, Poznan 1996, p. 421. [English version translated from Polish].

<sup>71</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 261.

<sup>72</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 254.

As it is commonly known, in his youth, Witkacy was tortured sexually by Irena Solska who often betrayed him. From a combination of personal experiences, and a fascination with Mirbeau's novel, he created on canvas his own *Torture Garden*. It would be difficult not to have the impression that in his marriage with Jadwiga, it was Witkacy that was the butcher. "You seem to think that if you give me freedom, I will screw whores in your bed,"<sup>73</sup> he wrote to her in one of his letters. As we know, Jadwiga did not share her husband's amazement in the fullness of the moment during the abortion. In time, though, the ambivalent language of sex became an element of a correspondence pact which bound them.

In the foreword to *Pożegnanie jesieni*, the artist also included low language in the novel pact:

Ever since Berent printed the word "son of a bitch" (...), and Boy a sentence which included the phrase "screw like wild asses" (...), I believe that you can sometimes stop feeling embarrassed, as long as it is worth it on another level.<sup>74</sup>

Of course we all know on what level that was. If Witkacy used the phrase "be worth it", that in no way applied to the economic register. He wrote directly about that which was supposed to be worth it in one of his polemical articles:

Here I absolutely demand the writer to tear me *par force* using his particular means, those which he uses for himself, from this reality in which I live, and show me the world anew within the levels of its metaphysical mystery and beauty. The author can, by the way, abuse me in all terrible ways provided he pays me on a different level: (...) he can even toss me into the sump of life provided that he will bathe me afterwards using some metaphysical fluid, and pull me up onto some unknown peak, the view from which shall make up for the horrors of the lows, amplifying the beauty of the dread of peak phenomena (...)<sup>75</sup>

From Witkacy's letters to his wife we know that when he was writing *Pożegnanie jesieni*, he was testing the peculiar recipe of Stroniewicz. The physician ordered him sexual abstinence explaining that "everything resides in the balls."<sup>76</sup> Witkacy, who had already expressed his rebellion against spawning children, began to understand the creative process through a literal analogy to procreating. In that sense one could include him in the previously-mentioned group of the "metaphorical". In an interview with Damaso Alonso, Rita Malú supposedly

<sup>73</sup> S.I. Witkiewicz, *Ldź (1928–1931)*, p. 188.

<sup>74</sup> Idem, *Pożegnanie jesieni*, p. 7.

<sup>75</sup> Idem, *Pisma krytyczne i publicystyczne*, Państwowy Instytut Wydawniczy, Warsaw 2015, p. 388. [English version translated from Polish]

<sup>76</sup> Idem, *Ldź (1923–1927)*, p. 101.

stated: “you, men, have your balls filled with angels.”<sup>77</sup> According to Vila-Matas, the author of *Literatura przenośna*, “that sentence leads us to the precise seminal trend of that potential energy, which was the core of shandism.”<sup>78</sup>

In Witkacy’s reports on the work on *Pożegnanie jesieni* he offered his wife, there appeared another word which emitted an ambivalent sexual tone. On 26 July 1926 he wrote:

(...) I’ve gone on a craze, and I’m striking terrible things: homococo of Atanazy with Łohoyski. (...) I think (though slightly) that when I botch this novel, there will open a new horizon of stage arts of a new type in front of me, one which I sense in my metaphysical sleeve (...)<sup>79</sup>

Less than a month later, he reported to his wife:

(...) I’m so tired I’m almost unconscious, yet I must strike on. I’m nearing the end, and maybe tomorrow I will complete the notepad. Since my arrival from Lviv, I have written over 80 pages of the wildest things. I’m sending all my sexual energy into that manuscript. But I’m afraid of overdoing it. What will Steinberg say!<sup>80</sup>

Apparently Witkacy, who in the 1920s began pyknicing, was deluding himself that he could pay for high metaphysical experiences with things which were low. And yet one could notice a fundamental difference between the linguistic lows inscribed in the correspondence pact, and that which existed based on the novel pact. In the case of literary works, Witkacy tried to justify “vulgarity” not only to his readers, but also to his wife and himself. Yet his entire correspondence with Jadwiga only proved that he utilised the low constantly, and he did not conceal it underneath metaphysics. He often described the condition of his “spirit” through frenzied, almost spewing carnality. So, one could read in Witkacy’s letters that he was “breaking into chunks”<sup>81</sup> due to his impatience and inability to express that which he wanted to express, that “the gut is rising to his throat”<sup>82</sup>, or that “everything is escaping through the sides.”<sup>83</sup> In one of his letters, he compared himself to a urinal, into which anyone can pee until his ear breaks off.<sup>84</sup> He also found

<sup>77</sup> E. Vila-Matas, *Krótką historią literatury przenośnej*, trans. J. Karasek, Wydawnictwo Literackie MUZA SA, Warsaw 2007, p. 103. [English version translated from Polish].

<sup>78</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 103.

<sup>79</sup> S.I. Witkiewicz, *Ldż (1923–1927)*, pp. 104–105.

<sup>80</sup> *Idem*, *Ldż (1923–1927)*, p. 117.

<sup>81</sup> *Idem*, *Ldż (1928–1931)*, p. 89.

<sup>82</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 154.

<sup>83</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 144.

<sup>84</sup> *Idem*, *Ldż (1932–1935)*, p. 128.

joy in creating carnal charades, e.g. Benis – penis<sup>85</sup>, genitals – genietals.<sup>86</sup> As a result, the charades, which were always considered a low kind of joke, became jokes touching the very bottom of earthly existence. As everyone knows, Witkacy officially fought against “jokers”. Bocheński posited that each remark about them “ends in a reference to an image of carnality, as Witkacy juxtaposed the French lightness with carnival explicitness.”<sup>87</sup> And yet the artist would like:

(...) to find for humour a place within the modernist hierarchy of values (...) He also wanted to find a justified place, though marginal for an artist – jester within the hierarchy of artistic attitudes. (...) Thus Witkacy experienced the basic problem of post-Enlightenment art: the problem with accepting the carnival tradition. He perceived the lewd, ludic, earthly, and anarchising laughter as a foreign and destructive element (...)<sup>88</sup>

Micińska argued that Witkacy's letters were art as he was an artist *par excellence*, and he turned everything into art. “One could only ask about the significance of his specific achievements (...)<sup>89</sup> If one considers the significance of the letters, they should be classified as metaphorical literature – light and devoid of any “relevance” understood in modernist terms. Though being so different from Dadaists and surrealists, who intentionally nurtured randomness, involuntarily, specifically in his letters to his wife, Witkacy also created “metaphorical literature.”

The very material of a letter is already random. Witkacy, according to Degler:

(...) rarely used letter paper. He usually utilised that which he had at his disposal at a given moment. Thus he wrote on some scraps, torn off sheets, on the back side of his manuscript or typescript, on official letters, bills, laundry receipts, cards from the calendar, as well as (...) on the back of letters addressed to him (...)<sup>90</sup>

Therefore, Witkacy's “letter-writing”<sup>91</sup> was, in fact, a form of “recycling”<sup>92</sup>. One could notice some similarities with Schwitters, who used “the waste of the civilisation discovered at random, (...) items which indicated destruction and

<sup>85</sup> Idem, (1936–1939), p. 15.

<sup>86</sup> Idem, *Ldż* (1932–1935), p. 89.

<sup>87</sup> T. Bocheński, *Czarny humor w twórczości Witkacego, Gombrowicza, Schulza. Lata trzydzieste*, Towarzystwo Autorów i Wydawców Prac Naukowych Universitas, Krakow 2005, p. 42.

<sup>88</sup> Ibid., p. 56.

<sup>89</sup> A. Micińska, *Istnienie poszczególne...*, pp. 168–269.

<sup>90</sup> J. Degler, *Witkacego portret wielokrotny...*, p. 314. [English version translated from Polish].

<sup>91</sup> A term used by J. Degler in *Witkacego portret wielokrotny...*, pp. 311, 312, 558.

<sup>92</sup> T. Bocheński, *Dwa teatry Witkacego*, p. 212.

decay.”<sup>93</sup> Collecting was then, of course, becoming a fashion among surrealists and Dadaists. Yet Schwitters created his major work, *Merzbau*, on the margins of official works. As Hans Richter once noted, the column was actually “a composition of various grooves”.<sup>94</sup> Schwitters filled them with special edgings of existence – that which is unimportant and private. “It was not any old sculpture, but a living changing every day documentary image of Schwitters himself as well as his friends.”<sup>95</sup> The work had one particular flaw: it was not mobile. To his despair, Schwitters left it in 1937 as prey to the German bombs, and he “never forgave the Nazis for destroying his opus magnum (...), a work with which he identified more than with any other of his creations.”<sup>96</sup> Unlike Schwitters, Witkacy did not treat that which was degenerated and marginal as something deeply significant. He knew that art degenerates, so he countered that degeneration with his pure art. Yet on the side, in unofficial circulation, he allowed himself to create degenerated art.

“The character and the script of his handwriting indicate that (...) he wrote hurriedly, fervently, without any major consideration for any correctness of his style,” argued Degler. The spontaneity of letters bears something of the surrealist method of psychological automatism – it reveals ‘the actual functioning of thoughts’ (...) that which is real, authentic, and honest<sup>97</sup>. The analogy between letters and the concept of a sack-novel, referenced by Micińska, seems accurate as Witkacy did, in fact, put his confessions to his wife into one sack. Thus the letters are filled with random series of associations. For example, from begging Jadwiga not to leave him, Witkacy transitioned to informing her that he had sprained his leg for the second time, only to remark that “there ain’t no snow”.<sup>98</sup>

To reveal that which is real, authentic, and honest, one must become free of the control of the great censor – the mind. In his *Dziennik poufny*, Baudelaire concluded that “the more man practices fine arts, the less he screws. The division into the spirit and boorishness is becoming increasing evident.”<sup>99</sup> Such a division is present in Witkacy’s correspondence. Apart from private letters, he also wrote, from the heights of his spirit, philosophical letters, “entire treatises, dissertations, and polemics, which he exchanged with the major philosophers of his time: Hans Cornelius, Roman Ingarden, Jan Leszczyński, Tadeusz Kotarbiński, Władysław

<sup>93</sup> H. Richter, *Dadaizm. Sztuka i antysztuka*, trans. J. Buras, Wydawnictwa Artystyczne i Filmowe, Warsaw 1983, p. 22. [English version translated from Polish].

<sup>94</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 254.

<sup>95</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 254.

<sup>96</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 256.

<sup>97</sup> K. Janicka, *Światopogląd surrealizmu. Jego założenia i konsekwencje dla teorii i twórczości i teorii sztuki*, Wydawnictwa Artystyczne i Filmowe, Warsaw 1985, p. 178. [English version translated from Polish].

<sup>98</sup> S.I. Witkiewicz, *Ldż (1923–1927)*, p. 214.

<sup>99</sup> Ch. Baudelaire, op. cit., p. 291.

Tatarkiewicz, et al.”<sup>100</sup>. With a polemic with some philosopher in mind, Witkacy stated in a letter to his wife: “you have no idea what kind of an answer I banged out to him to that. What a shame I don't have a secretary who would copy my letters.”<sup>101</sup> A secretary should, therefore, censor that which is low, carnal, and copy that which is lofty, and which is a construct of the mind. Because Witkacy should survive as a work of art, not as man.

In one of his letters, the artist explained, though not to his wife, rather to himself, why he deliberated on what he had eaten for dinner, and on the texture of his faeces – i.e. on that which according to his category falls under “1<sup>st</sup> cl[ass] real issues”<sup>102</sup>: “because, philosophically speaking, many interesting facts, but none for you, Ninek.”<sup>103</sup> Jadwiga reminisced that Witkacy incessantly accused her of no interest in philosophy. So he criticised his wife just like he did the rest of society. In an interview for the Krakow-based daily *Głos Narodu*, he complained about the audience, which “is less and less capable of understanding something that transcends railway-action romantic stories.”<sup>104</sup> In other words, the audience was less and less capable of experiencing transgressive metaphysical emotions, and was content with remaining in the slime of commonness. Witkacy rebuked clown-writers who corrupted art, and in turn the society. He displayed the typical attitude of a Westerner, which, according to Maffesoli, consisted of criticising. Criticising “is a keyword summarising an approach to the world, specific for the *ego* of an individual dominating nature, specific for a rational predator, who tries to change, construct, and analyse everything.”<sup>105</sup> However, when the artist did not have to save the world, he immersed himself in life's content on the margin of that which was official. As Jadwiga reminisced:

(...) Staś would eagerly read travel books (...), various vies romances, even detective novels. (...) whenever a daily paper published a novel in instalments, we would read it together, having a lot of joy in such a – usually poor read; e.g. it was *Iwonka* by J. German. When I was away from Zakopane, (...) Staś would send me in the letters the instalments of such novels with his remarks – that was wonderfully amusing.<sup>106</sup>

In the summer of 1931, he expressed admiration at a novel by an English writer Rufus Frederick King: “(...) are you keeping King's novel? If so, that' excellent,

<sup>100</sup> A. Micińska, *Istnienie poszczególne...*, p. 269.

<sup>101</sup> S.I. Witkiewicz, *Ldź (1932–1935)*, p. 222.

<sup>102</sup> Idem, *Ldź (1923–1927)*, p. 20.

<sup>103</sup> Idem, *Ldź (1936–1939)*, p. 269.

<sup>104</sup> Idem, *Ldź (1928–1931)*, p. 299.

<sup>105</sup> M. Maffesoli, *Rytm życia. Wariacje na temat świata wyobraźni ponowoczesnej*, trans. A. Karpowicz, Zakład Wydawniczy Nomos, Krakow 2012, p. 36. [English version translated from Polish].

<sup>106</sup> J. Witkiewiczowa, *Wspomnienia o Stanisławie Ignacym Witkiewiczu* in: S.I. Witkiewicz, *Ldź (1936–1939)*, p. 600.

because it's good,"<sup>107</sup> he wrote to his wife on 11 August 1931. Two weeks later he inquired: "How did you like King's novel?"<sup>108</sup> Jadwiga was apparently more critical about the book than her husband. In response to a suggestion about the simplicity of some solutions used by the author of the crime story, Witkacy did admit: "as for King, it is absolutely just, but that is the flaw of all crime novels that they are deficient in such a way,"<sup>109</sup> yet it did not in any way decrease his reading enthusiasm. Already in the following sentence he added: "immediately send back the whole King."<sup>110</sup> In a letter of 22 March 1937, he confessed to his wife to reading for pleasure as if he was confessing some spiritual crime against intellectual work: "I haven't even started working on philosophy, and I'm reading with great pleasure a novel by Benoit, and some crime story by Hume."<sup>111</sup> He immediately found something to redeem himself with: "I have the right after that visit to W."<sup>112</sup> So was Witkacy really lamenting the fact that he could not engage with his wife in a discussion of a philosophical nature? Rather with joy of communicating with her through that which is low: low art, and low carnality. His wife was a person thanks to whom he could touch the filthy reality without any metaphysical "interest".

The editors of Witkacy's letters, who together managed to overcome the seven circles of editorial hell<sup>113</sup>, confessed to Witkacy trying to soothe the indubitable suffering of his soul. It is difficult to trust Micińska's assumption that Witkacy could have changed his mind from beyond, and ensured the survival of his letters. In any way, as the researcher stated:

today, we are the fortunate heirs to a document, which not only does not discredit the author, but even the contrary: it constitutes one of the most fascinating works of literature of that epoch, if not the most fascinating work of the author of *Szewcy* and *Nienasycenie*.<sup>114</sup>

Degler expressed a similar position:

(...) Witkacy's entire correspondence, his letters to his wife in particular, were undoubtedly his great, though unintentional, work (...) Who knows whether upon being published in its entirety, it will not overshadow his output...<sup>115</sup>

<sup>107</sup> S.I. Witkiewicz, *Ldź (1928–1931)*, p. 237.

<sup>108</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 246.

<sup>109</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 267.

<sup>110</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>111</sup> *Idem*, *Ldź (1936–1939)*, p. 102.

<sup>112</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>113</sup> Phrase used by A. Micińska, v. J. Degler: "‘Piekło edytora’, czyli o listach Witkacego do żony", *Przestrzenie teorii* 2010, issue 14. [English version translated from Polish].

<sup>114</sup> S.I. Witkiewicz, *Ldź (1923–1928)*, p. 449.

<sup>115</sup> J. Degler, *Witkacego portret wielokrotny...*, p. 333.

Interestingly enough, though Micińska and Degler were inclined to consider Witkacy's letters as his greatest work, they had a dilemma whether to publish them in their entirety. As Degler stated:

we had considered removing some of the letters or omitting certain fragments, e.g. the one in which Witkacy complained that in the forest a horse-fly bit his vitals, and he begged Nina to come and soothe his pain.<sup>116</sup> We decided we will not censor anything.<sup>117</sup>

The idea with the censorship proved the instrumental approach towards correspondence. Micińska and Degler wanted to see in the letters mainly those elements, which deconstructed Witkacy's negative legend, while they ousted others, just like Witkacy did, to the fringes. Yet censoring the history of an uncensoring mind would not even be possible!

By liberating himself from the influence of the censor, Witkacy did not, however, feel such pleasure as Dadaists or surrealists. When he "betrayed" Pure Form, he felt remorse, and constantly tried to justify his "betrayals".

Surrealists and Dadaists not only fostered randomness in their art. In life, they sought involuntary peculiarity, which would confirm that existence has a similar structure as their creative imagination, and their avant-garde artistic concepts, "magie circonstancielle" in particular. Adam Ważyk wrote that

in the surrealists' vision, the world is full of randomness in the first instance; we do not know the second one, the world in its entirety is repulsive, but it does include some tempting things – strange encounters and travels (...) Exceptional phenomena with an after taste of wonder hide within the entire matter of everyday life, just like in Apollinaire's works, where wonder, considered based on either of its meanings, has always had a low nature.<sup>118</sup>

Witkacy rather used his "grey matter" for processing "grey reality". In life, just like in art, he planned to use chance. In the memories of various persons, he existed as the director of a fantastic theatre of existence. According to Płomiński, Witkacy:

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<sup>116</sup> A. Augustyn, J. Degler, "Oszalej i wyjdź za mnie" in: [http://www.wysokieobcasy.pl/wysokie-obcasy/1,96856,9865307,Witkacy\\_\\_oszalej\\_i\\_wyjdz\\_za\\_mnie.html?disableRedirects=true](http://www.wysokieobcasy.pl/wysokie-obcasy/1,96856,9865307,Witkacy__oszalej_i_wyjdz_za_mnie.html?disableRedirects=true) (accessed on 12.12.2015).

<sup>117</sup> A. Augustyn, J. Degler, "75 lat po śmierci Witkacego. Kim był naprawdę?", *Gazeta Wyborcza*, 13.09.2014, [http://wyborcza.pl/magazyn/1,140736,16633912,75\\_lat\\_po\\_smierci\\_Witkacego\\_\\_Kim\\_byl\\_naprawde\\_.html?disableRedirects=true](http://wyborcza.pl/magazyn/1,140736,16633912,75_lat_po_smierci_Witkacego__Kim_byl_naprawde_.html?disableRedirects=true) (accessed on 12.12.2015).

<sup>118</sup> A. Ważyk, *Surrealizm. Teoria i praktyka literacka. Antologia*, trans. A. Ważyk, Czytelnik, Warsaw 1976, pp. 16–17. [English version translated from Polish].

often constructed unbelievable scenes, in which he assigned his friends or close acquaintances strange roles, he invented and planned social encounters catching with uncontrollable satisfaction punchlines unthinkable in a natural mode of life, and allowed experiencing internal delight; he possessed a truly Shakespearean imagination, and he bent the rigid material of life to its vivid frolics.<sup>119</sup>

The *social meetings* arranged by him were artistic compositions displaying the highest levels of disharmony. Thus for Witkacy, the most successful ones were the meeting of Ingarden with a sports personality “who tapped the renowned scientist on his knee (...), and bladdering without any reservations ‘You’re talking rubbish’”<sup>120</sup>, or of Nadezdha Drucka, with a philosophy researcher, and a prostitute. Surely when arranging those meetings, he experienced pleasure as the director of Pure Form, who connected various random elements into one whole.

When, however, random events happened to Witkacy, he was terrified; a fact which was best proved by his superstitiousness. In a letter to Bronisław Malinowski of 1914, he listed sixteen synchronicities, which condensed into a superstition regarding the hour twenty to ten, which carried a fatalistic significance in his life. He also believed that the number seven and a nine of hearts brought him bad luck. In his letters to his wife, he often expressed his superstitiousness, and one *unfortunate* synchronicity troubled him the most. On 04 April 1937 he wrote: “there appeared the Mysterious Cobbler from my dreams and reality – together 20 to 10, the 9 of hearts constituted a bull’s sequence of bad omens.”<sup>121</sup> In the following letter, he explained in more detail: “here goes: 20 to 10 (2 Mar), 9 of hearts (3 Mar), Bundykowa grabbed the hand of Dieu du ventre. Death of Karol S[zymanowski]. The demolition of the house of Ślimak. The appearance of the Mysterious Cobbler. That’s enough. What’s next?”<sup>122</sup> He calculated: “until 2 May this terrible period will last, and I have escaped the Mysterious Cobbler twice in a row in the street, which could have a terrible rebound.”<sup>123</sup> Meeting the Mysterious Cobbler was the unluckiest element of that exceptionally unfortunate, in Witkacy’s view, synchronicity. Though it is not difficult for one to imagine what an impression it would make on surrealists. Suffice to mention Breton’s *Nadja*, a work the composition of which is dominated by random and rare encounters. The story is set in Paris, in the streets of which almost each day around noon he meets Nadja. Breton presented that synchronicity as the intervention of wonder in

<sup>119</sup> Stanisław Ignacy Witkiewicz: *człowiek i twórca. Księga pamiątkowa*, T. Kotarbiński, J. Płomieński (ed.), Państwowy Instytut Wydawniczy, Warsaw 1957 p. 194. [English version translated from Polish].

<sup>120</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 201.

<sup>121</sup> S.I. Witkiewicz, *Ldź (1936–1939)*, pp. 107–108.

<sup>122</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 108.

<sup>123</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 119.

reality. It was the contrary for Witkacy: he was afraid of that which happened, and which, basically, was a reflection of the Mystery of Existence. Bocheński in an article *Drogi do Tajemnicy*<sup>124</sup> discussed Witkacy's methods of evoking it. Those included: the previously-mentioned intensity of experiences, solitary mountain hikes, or conditions of great exhaustion. Those methods resulted from the modernist conviction about the necessity to prepare oneself for transgressive experiences through tormenting one's carnality. Yet Witkacy increased his control over evoking the Mystery to such an extent that it became ridiculous. As Andrzej Gass reminisced:

in Ewa Dzieduszycka's dairies (...), there are remarks about Witkacy as an extremely gifted organiser of spiritism meetings. Only through bad luck he was once caught manipulating the strings he used to evoke various *otherworldly* signals.<sup>125</sup>

Thus, wonder had for Witkacy, unlike for Dadaists or surrealists, an *elevated* and not *low* nature. Noticing that he was not high enough above that which was earthly, the artist wrote to his wife: "I need to break away from reality."<sup>126</sup> In another instance, he informed her: "I'm constructing myself into another dimension."<sup>127</sup> When he came to the conclusion that he could not *pull* his life *up* to "a little higher level"<sup>128</sup>, he considered it finished.

One of the methods of elevating oneself to spiritual heights was isolation from the lows innate in other people. On 16 October 1923, he informed his wife: "I'm implementing total isolation"<sup>129</sup>, on 20 April 1926, he wrote: "I'm isolating myself as much as I can."<sup>130</sup> Of course, one could doubt that, as in the following sentence he added: "but I went with the Rytards and Miskuper to the Albertis."<sup>131</sup> He repeated his pledge on 3 March 1927: "people are terrible beasts. I'm isolating myself even further."<sup>132</sup> On 6 February 1929: "I'm beginning to fend people off with a spiked mask."<sup>133</sup> On 2 August 1929: "human stupidity is so huge that only a mask, and isolation can help to live."<sup>134</sup> One element of the isolation from the external world were red rings hung on the door barring

<sup>124</sup> T. Bocheński, *Witkacy i reszta świata*, Wydawnictwo Officyna, Łódź 2010, pp. 49–50. [English version translated from Polish].

<sup>125</sup> A. Gass, "Spotkanie z duchem", *Sztuka* 1985, issue 2/3 [English version translated from Polish].

<sup>126</sup> S.I. Witkiewicz, *Ldź (1928–1931)*, p. 153.

<sup>127</sup> Idem, *Ldź (1932–1935)*, p. 146.

<sup>128</sup> Idem, *Ldź (1936–1939)*, p. 141.

<sup>129</sup> Idem, *Ldź (1923–1927)*, p. 34.

<sup>130</sup> Ibid., p. 89.

<sup>131</sup> Ibid.

<sup>132</sup> Ibid., pp. 88–89.

<sup>133</sup> Idem, *Ldź (1932–1935)*, p. 61.

<sup>134</sup> Ibid., p. 125.

anyone from entering the artist's room. Witkacy himself considered them as a "defence system": "I'm hardly seeing anyone. The red ring on the wardrobe protects against visits."<sup>135</sup>

The system did not always prove successful, though. The external world sometimes literally broke into Witkacy's spiritual enclave. The artist, outraged, informed his wife: "today, having disregarded the [red] ring, Malczewska tore into my place, and told me uncanny things about her quarrels with Dominik."<sup>136</sup> In another letter, he wrote: "it's v. difficult and boring in the world even though the weather's nice. Each moment of my life is a titanic struggle with the flooding filth. And nothing pleasant comes from anywhere. Is it worth living in such a condition?"<sup>137</sup> Witkacy's being-in-the-world tactics consisting of an incessant struggle with *filth* included a certain contradiction. He did not notice that when he did not allow reality to reach him, nothing could "come" to him.

Nonetheless, his letters to his wife were, most of all, a record of his struggle with himself. They could be read as an unrelenting attempt at creating some "invariant". In *Nienasylenie*, the author instructed his protagonist:

"(...) how can you construct yourself in such circumstances?" thought Genezyp not understanding that precisely that constructing should be independent of all conditions, it should be an "invariant".<sup>138</sup>

Witkacy, in fact, wanted not only to create Pure Form works, but also to conduct self-creation according to his principle, as if to transform into one of the characters from his plays. The term self-create resonates with the high modernist tone – of a conviction that one can create oneself using intellectual powers, and in turn liberate oneself from everything which is irrational and random, i.e. impure, gutty, low, and earthly. Throughout his output, Witkacy struggled with "dwindling reality"<sup>139</sup>, while in his letters: with his own "dwindling": "I will start working tomorrow so as not to dwindle,"<sup>140</sup> he informed Jadwiga in one of his letters. Dwindling was one of the metaphors of the lack of internal organisation introduced by intellect.<sup>141</sup> When Witkacy managed to assign his life intellectual organisation, he sometimes used the metaphor of a bull or buffalo, e.g.:

<sup>135</sup> Ibid., p. 94.

<sup>136</sup> Ibid., p. 124.

<sup>137</sup> Idem, *Ldż (1923–1927)*, p. 74.

<sup>138</sup> Idem, *Nienasylenie*, p. 179.

<sup>139</sup> T. Bocheński, *Witkacy – ciało*, A multi-media project of the Institute of Literary Research entitled *Sensualność w kulturze polskiej*, <http://www.sensualnosc.ibl.waw.pl/pl/articles/witkacy-cialo-183/> (accessed on: 10.11.2015).

<sup>140</sup> S.I. Witkiewicz, *Ldż (1932–1935)*, p. 258.

<sup>141</sup> Ibid.

“I’ve been working all day like a buffalo”<sup>142</sup>, or: “my bull state, the hell with it, continues.”<sup>143</sup>

Genezyp knew that self-creation consists of becoming independent of that which is external. Witkacy knew that, but that knowledge proved insufficient: “it is doubtful whether I will be able to create the 3<sup>rd</sup> epoch. Unfortunately, that depends on external conditions, not only on the system of navel-liver powers.”<sup>144</sup> By tracing the letters, one could notice that the most pronounced crisis of the modern subject that wished to create himself was the break-up with Czesława Oknińska-Korzeniowska in 1938.

Stefan Okołowicz in an article entitled *Nieznana kobieta w życiu Witkacego* noted that the origins of the break-up with Czesia lay in Witkiewicz’s theatre of existence, in a drama listed under various names: *Afera z fryzjerem* [Scandal with the Barber], *Afera Pinno* [Pinno Scandal], or *Dossier Pinno* [Pinno Dossier]. It, of course, referred to his affair with Maria Zarotyńska, which he started in 1936. Witkacy did not play his drama out only in the private theatre. It was irrelevant that he created it out of filthy intimacy since he “angelised” those elements into a wonderful art of Pure Form. Alfred Łaszkowski, who interviewed Witkacy, reminisced that at the end the artist glanced at his watch anxiously and said:

(...) I stopped shaving by myself some time ago. I go every day to put my neck under the blade of a man from whom I stole a fiancée. If only he put the razor a bit deeper, I would be gone in five minutes. An obvious thing: he has a terrible desire to do that, and I’m watching it in the mirror as that intent grows, and I’m experiencing a unique satisfaction, one which is the highest and cannot be substituted by anything. (...) But as I tighten my relationship with his darling, the razor strokes become increasingly dynamic. Remember this as any moment now I might drop dead with a slit throat in an air of perfect orchestration of the mechanics of an accident.<sup>145</sup>

Okołowicz noted that gradually the ‘Pinno Scandal’ began to transform into the so-called ‘Marysia problem’.<sup>146</sup> The Pure Form drama seemed to continue to lose its form, and change back into a regular life drama. The final fall into life occurred when Witkacy parted with Czesia in mid-March 1938. About the significance of that break-up among a series of many break-ups, Witkacy learnt when Czesia sent back to him an 80-kilogram package of everything she had ever received from him. The situation seemed more complex, though, than it was presented by Okołowicz, i.e. that the “Marysia problem” led to the parting with

<sup>142</sup> Ibid., p. 263.

<sup>143</sup> Idem, *Ldż (1935–1939)*, p. 102.

<sup>144</sup> Idem, *Ldż (1923–1927)*, p. 55.

<sup>145</sup> S. Okołowicz, op. cit., p. 255.

<sup>146</sup> Ibid., p. 257.

Czesia, while the parting with Czesia caused a depression, which resulted in the artist's suicide the following year. In a letter to his wife, Witkacy concluded: "it's not only the fact of my losing her, but this has revealed my entire internal misery"<sup>147</sup>. When he wrote: "something snapped inside me with that 80-kilogram package"<sup>148</sup>, he precisely meant his internal structure, which he tried using his mind to create as an invariant. The innocent "Pinno scandal", from which he created the Pure Form theatre, started to slip out of the control of his mind. "'Marysia problem' the so-called," he wrote to his wife on 9 February 1938, "is something completely irrational, and I'm absolutely fed up with it too. I would like to start a N. L. [New Life], but I lack the foundation i n m e."<sup>149</sup> Despite his efforts, two months later the situation remained the same: "my condition is not good, as I still do not have in me any general foundation for fighting this terrible blow to my mug (...)"<sup>150</sup> Similar, though less serious, self-creative breakdowns had already afflicted Witkacy earlier due to his break-ups with Czesia. In 1931, Witkacy complained to Jadwiga:

oh well – it seems she has broken up with me for good. Then *à propos* that (...) I need to reconstruct myself from the bottom and the inside, (...) I need to find me some invariant, which would enable me to halt everything. (...) I am not an artist, and it's difficult for me to become one – that is the worst. When I was that, I suffered through even the worst things basing on it. Now I don't have that foundation.<sup>151</sup>

The gesture of not considering himself an artist was, of course, only a statement. Witkacy did not express his conviction, but his fear that he had stopped being one who could sense the cosmic reflection of the invariability of existence.

Nietzsche argued that "to create one's own mind means to create one's own language, and to let the limits of our mind be defined by a language left behind by other human beings."<sup>152</sup> The fact that Witkacy experienced the "inherited" language as being limiting was posited by Magdalena Nowotny-Szybistowa in a book entitled *Osobliwości leksykalne w języku Stanisława Ignacego Witkiewicza*. She wrote that:

a strong conviction of the wearing out of the components of the existing culture, including the elements of the language, was a starting point for his semantic opera-

<sup>147</sup> S.I. Witkiewicz, *Ldź (1936–1939)*, pp. 219–223.

<sup>148</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 223.

<sup>149</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 188.

<sup>150</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 229.

<sup>151</sup> S.I. Witkiewicz, *Ldź (1928–1932)*, p. 271.

<sup>152</sup> As cited in: R. Rorty, *Przygodność, ironia i solidarność*, trans. W.J. Popowski, Wydawnictwo Spacja, Warsaw 1996, p. 51. [English version translated from Polish]

tions. Witkacy was convinced that by accepting the linguistic inheritance, we are condemned to automatic and passive use of those elements (...) When building a work of literature, one must be aware of the fact that one builds it from culturally drained units. One must also prevent those automatic reactions as they make any authentic literary creation impossible. (...) The use of old elements must be done in such a way as to indicate the distance between the creator and the material they are using. In other words, one can use some traditional components, yet that must be done in stylistic quotation marks to mark an author's attitude to the semantic load known to them.<sup>153</sup>

Upon analysing the words which Witkacy most often placed between inverted commas, Magdalena Nowotny-Szybistowa concluded that they belonged to the colloquial register of Polish, i.e.:

they reflected the tendency of the contemporary culture in its mass and hateful, according to Witkacy, version, remaining in line with the style of the cinema, newspapers, and the radio. (...) by fighting against such words, the author expressed his opposition to the standardisation of the language in the name of individuality.<sup>154</sup>

Linguistic standardisation was also, according to Witkacy, combated by the philosophical discourse, with which in the 1930s the artist increasingly often substituted the language of art. It was actually through philosophy that he tried to handle the "Marysia problem": "tomorrow I'm starting with logic with full force. I need to overcome this hysteria,"<sup>155</sup> he declared in one of his letters. Despite those efforts, Witkacy's biography more and more resembled a story in a romantic novel. After parting with Czesia, he wrote to his wife: "but here there's something else that I 'cannot live without' her, as they say in novels – I cannot see anything in front of me without her. What should I do? I will try to vanquish myself, provided there will be no make up – but that will be terribly difficult."<sup>156</sup> In another letter, he wrote: "on my part the break up with Cz[esia], katzenjammer, and thousands of reasons. Thank you very much for your letter, which lifted me 'in my distress'."<sup>157</sup> Using the quotation marks, according to Nowotny-Szybistowa's proposal, which expresses metalinguistic detachment, as if Witkacy tried to defend himself from the trivialised language of romantic literature, in which he absolutely did not wish to speak. He tried to avert his fall from a modern subject into a social object, and his prayers for an invariant in the letters to his wife intensified.

<sup>153</sup> M. Nowotny-Szybistowa, *Osobliwości leksykalne w języku Stanisława Ignacego Witkiewicza*, Zakład Narodowy im. Ossolińskich, Wrocław 1973, p. 12

<sup>154</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 19.

<sup>155</sup> S.I. Witkiewicz, *Ldż (1936–1939)*, p. 159.

<sup>156</sup> *Idem*, *Ldż (1932–1935)*, p. 253.

<sup>157</sup> *Idem*, *Ldż (1936–1939)*, p. 207.

Quoting Rimbaud's famous words: "I is another"<sup>158</sup>, one could say that Witkacy fought *the other* inside him. And yet the sentimental conventional other spoke in crisis situations through the modern subject as a model of authenticity.

Witkacy's wife remained his only invariant. His supplication expressed in a letter to his wife: *Hold me if you can*<sup>159</sup>, I understand literally – the artist wished to find support in the spiritual bond between him and his wife in the situation of a loss of his internal intellectual structure. "I read your letter with tears in my eyes, that was how much your kindness moved me, but if someone really saw my condition, he would not be surprised by anything, and would allow me total freedom of action."<sup>160</sup> Freedom which Witkacy, enclosed inside a melodrama structure, had already lost.

Sometimes, Witkacy, being bored with his biography, which he could not elevate to the level of Pure Form, span wild plans of detaching from it. "Everything bores me terribly, and I don't know if I won't leave for the tropics,"<sup>161</sup> he stated in one of his letters. Those plans entailed his desire to experience *illinx* – "stupefaction caused by depending on fate."<sup>162</sup> Breton mentioned what role that element played in Duchamp's life: "I saw (...) him doing astounding things: he flips a coin and says: 'heads – I'm leaving for America tonight, tails – I'm staying in Paris.'"<sup>163</sup> Witkacy's idea should be considered, though, as completely virtual as his defining feature, as indicated by his biography, was his complete "irrelocationness". "I'm very tired with the life of a wanderer, and I'm dreaming of home,"<sup>164</sup> he wrote to his wife from Królewska Huta. When staying in Krakow, he complained: "I wish to experience the peace of Zakopane very much."<sup>165</sup> For Witkacy, a solitary mountain hike was a feat. Though he considered it as one of the paths for experiencing the Mystery of Existence, he rarely chose to do that. That was indicated in a letter, in which he stressed that he hiked in the mountains alone as something extraordinary:

Yesterday, I went on a v. strange solitary hike.<sup>166</sup> (...) I woke up, and I went to Głog[owski] through Ant[ałówka] set for Czerw[one] Wierchy. And that pillock had a headache. So I went to Stachurska, but her leg hurt. So I took a dump in the forest

<sup>158</sup> A. Rimbaud, *Korespondencja Artura Rimbaud*, trans. J. Hartwig, A. Międzyrzecki, Spółdzielnia Wydawnicza „Czytelnik”, Warsaw 1970. [English version translated from Polish].

<sup>159</sup> S.I. Witkiewicz, *Ldź (1936–1939)*, p. 223.

<sup>160</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 238.

<sup>161</sup> *Idem*, *Ldź (1932–1935)*, p. 30.

<sup>162</sup> R. Caillois, *Gry i ludzie*, trans. A. Tatarkiewicz, M. Żurowska, Oficyna Wydawnicza Volumen, Warsaw 1997, p. 71.

<sup>163</sup> C. Tomkins, *op. cit.*, p. 227.

<sup>164</sup> S.I. Witkiewicz, *Ldź (1932–1935)*, p. 142.

<sup>165</sup> *Idem*, *Ldź (1936–1939)*, p. 190.

<sup>166</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 69.

near the road to Białe, and I went alone. It rained several times, but I had my wind-breaker, and it was wonderful.<sup>167</sup>

The combination of taking a dump and feeling wonderful said a lot about the adult Witkacy. In time, his paths towards the Mystery were replaced by “the hellish shitty-farty adventures.”<sup>168</sup> For Witkacy, becoming a “Portrait Company” or a “Novel Company” was a decline. How much had the decline intensified when in 1932 Witkacy became, as he informed his wife in a letter, of course, a “shit Factory.”<sup>169</sup> Being a “shit Factory”, he produced works even lower than novels or portraits, e.g. *Krytyka stosunków klozetowych na Anatłówcze w „wolnym” wierszu wyrażoną*<sup>170</sup>. Instead of new methods of processing reality, enabling him to construct a new “epoch of life”, Witkacy invented “new methods of dump-taking”<sup>171</sup>, and soon his life transitioned into “a terrible epoch of red shit.”<sup>172</sup> Previously, he focussed on “weighing” in a work of art pure and impure elements; the “shit Factory” focussed on calculating the percentage share of shitheads among its friends.<sup>173</sup> “I am surrounded by a mob of enemies,”<sup>174</sup> concluded Witkacy noticing the masters and the servants: “all = one shit.”<sup>175</sup> Yet he himself proved to be the biggest “shithead”. The struggle against the filth flooding in from everywhere must have seemed for Witkacy nonsensical after he had discovered endless deposits of filth in himself: “I’m shitting so terribly that if one collected it, it would form a pyramid of shit not much better than the Pyramid of Cheops, despite some looseness. I’m simply turning into a Baghdad-Antałówka pipeline. I don’t understand where it is coming from, as I’m not [eating] that much, actually.”<sup>176</sup> The spiritual aristocrat could not come to terms with his final demise. The struggle with shit was another chapter of the mock-heroic treatise recorded in his letters to his wife, in which “the titan fights against the triviality of the remainder of spirituality.”<sup>177</sup> The chapter concluded in an image of a half-washed titan with shit-stained linen pants.<sup>178</sup> That was also the image of an artist who tried to be

<sup>167</sup> Ibid., p. 70.

<sup>168</sup> Idem, *Ldź (1932–1935)*, p. 21.

<sup>169</sup> Ibid., p. 13.

<sup>170</sup> *Poza rzeczy-wistością – wistość tych rzeczy jest nie z świata tego. Stanisława Ignacego Witkiewicza wiersze i rysunki*, selection A. Micińska, U. Kenar, Wydawnictwo Literackie, Kraków 1977, pp. 112–113.

<sup>171</sup> S.I. Witkiewicz, *Ldź (1936–1939)*, p. 146.

<sup>172</sup> Ibid., p. 203.

<sup>173</sup> Ibid., p. 122.

<sup>174</sup> Ibid., p. 272.

<sup>175</sup> Ibid.

<sup>176</sup> Ibid., p. 195.

<sup>177</sup> T. Bocheński, *Dwa teatry Witkacego*, p. 208.

<sup>178</sup> S.I. Witkiewicz, *Ldź (1936–1939)*, p. 160.

modern yet involuntarily was anti-modern as it is commonly known that between the development of art, and the development of hygiene, there is a strong interrelation, in which dirt is a type of resistance against modernity. According to Marshall Berman, the elements of anti-modernity in modernism, i.e. an art which strived for originality and innovation, were of utmost importance. Witkacy, an artist from the provinces, who wished to become an artist fitting modern West European art, and who tailored his theory of Pure Form to that, did not express his anti-modernist opposition directly. It was reflected in creating forms discredited from the point of view of modernist art, and in Witkacy's theory – low, carnal, trivial, and autobiographic forms. Thus in his letters to his wife, Witkacy found a peculiar area of freedom – freedom of self-discreditation.

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Sara Kurowska

### **Freedom of self-discreditation. On Witkacy's letters to his wife**

(Summary)

„If these letters are to be found by someone after my death, I will be brought into disrepute (...)” – wrote Witkacy to Jadwiga and he reminded his wife of destroying all the letters she receives from him. The question what and why could put the artist in disgrace seems fundamental and not so simple as one could assume. In order to find answer to this question I analyze letters in reference to Witkacy's theory of Pure Form. According to Marshall Berman, the elements of anti-modernity in modernism, i.e. an art which strived for originality and innovation, were of utmost importance because due to them the artist keeps his identity. Witkacy, an artist from the provinces, who wished to become an artist fitting modern West European art, and who tailored his theory of Pure Form to that, did not express his anti-modernist resistance directly. His resistance is visible in creating low, carnal, trivial and autobiographic forms – brought into disrepute from

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the point of view of modernist art and Witkacy's own theory. Thus in his letters to his wife, Witkacy found a peculiar area of freedom – freedom of self-discreditation. Although he constantly blamed Jadwiga for lack of interest in philosophy, he was glad to communicate with her via the low art and low carnality.

Keywords: Witkacy's letters to his wife, Pure Form, carnality, innards, low art, self-discreditation, correspondence, autobiographic, novel pact



Monika Szyszka vel Syska\*

## Creator's freedom. Schulz's late projects

“We have lived for too long under the terror of the matchless perfection of the Demiurge,” my father said. “For too long the perfection of his handiwork has paralysed our own creative instinct. We don't wish to compete with him. We have no ambition to emulate him. We wish to be creators in our own, lower sphere; we want to have the privilege of creation, we want creative delights, we want – in one word – Demiurgy.”

B. Schulz, *Treatise on Tailors' Dummies or the Second Book of Genesis*

The Habsburg empire was coming to an end, and the arsenal of creative models in that grand culture was diminishing. The demise spurred a debate on what culture is a creative culture, and what should the nature of the new Book of Genesis be like. The question about the birth of the new culture constituted the core of modernist literature, which discussed the usefulness and durability of its previous solutions, and which wanted to continue creating regardless of the dissolution of the form. It could seem that the creative one is the state culture, which is alive, i.e.: produces new citizen-friendly solutions, propagates artistic freedom, and turns to current issues. Culture also needs a state which exists on the map of the world. Furthermore, it seems that art feeds on the diversity of the material: be it historical, social, or ethnic. The k.k. monarchy did the impossible. It created from its grave. It created from its decay. It created its own myth, a myth of secured, happy, multi-national, multi-ethnic identity, based, according to Claudio Magris<sup>1</sup>, on a multi-cultural nature, bureaucratism and... hedonism. In his best known essay, Magris thus defined the form of creation:

The term myth, which in itself indicates the distortion and deformation of reality resulting from the urge to extract from it the alleged fundamental truth, an assumed

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<sup>1</sup> C. Magris, “Mit habsburski w literaturze austriackiej moderny”, in: idem, *O demokracji, pamięci i Europie Środkowej*, selected and trans. J. Ugniewska, Międzynarodowe Centrum Kultury, Krakow 2016, p. 24. [English version translated from Polish].

meta-historic core capable of summarising in its essence, takes in the case a special meaning. The Habsburg myth is not a regular process of the transfiguration of the real world, any proper literary activity, but it is a complete substitution of the historic and social reality with another one, fictional and delusive, it is a sublimation of a specific society, and its transfer to a picturesque, safe, and organised world of tales.<sup>2</sup>

However, further in his argumentation, the author made a reservation that creators who gave the drive to the myth prosperity did not operate in their descriptions of the Monarchy, only its stylistic attractive potential, which they used for mass production of idealised abstract images. Magris also said that Musil or Roth often presented a more in-depth and ironic study of that reality. He took the liberty of making a generalisation calling the writers from the circle of the Habsburg culture “the prisoners to the transfiguration of the Danube world”<sup>3</sup>, which had first been mythologised several decades before the establishing the dual monarchy. In 1806, Francis II turned from emperor of the Holy Roman Empire of the German Nation to Francis I, the emperor of Austria. Magris in *The Habsburg myth* did not strive to present a *real* image of Austria-Hungary, he did not say, like Stefan Zweig in *Świat wczorajszy*, “it was like that”. He actually focussed on the phenomenon of mythisation, in which writers of Jewish descent participated, who were brought up to a certain vision of that mythical world, yet they ceaselessly tried to create their own mythologies.

*Habsburg* authors mythologised the world, which had just passed. A day after the fall of the monarchy, they released work describing the special character of the country of law, order, and administration. A myth feeding on nostalgia, melancholia<sup>4</sup>, and a fetishised memory created the image of *Austria Felix* – a land of harmony and happiness. It did not distort reality, yet it allowed each story to create generalising structures, i.e. cultural diagnoses. That task was raised by literature, and in it: e.g. Joseph Roth, Robert Musil, Alfred Kubin, Gustav Meyrink, and, finally, Bruno Schulz. They wrote about a culture which noticed its own creative inefficiency, about a culture experiencing the civilisational crisis, thus unable to petrify and organise the inflowing modernisations. The undeniable end of monarchy, the trauma of WWI, and the impending spectre of another war foreshadowed by an economic crisis, national conflicts, totalitarianisms, and an apocalyptic mood proved, in fact, creative.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., p. 16.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

<sup>4</sup> Interestingly enough, Freud consistently refused melancholia any creative powers. Only mourning “performed” in his analysis any “work”, Vide S. Freud, “Żałoba i melancholia”, in: idem, *Psychologia nieświadomości*, transl. Robert Reszke, Wydawnictwo KR, Warsaw 2009, pp. 148–149.

Schulz, the involuntary child of the Habsburg culture, wrote with a disbelief in grand stories. He did not trust the official languages editing the text of the handbook on modernity for modern people. He was interested in the outdated, yet unused, potential and private narratives. It was thanks to them that he joined the stream of uncertain, doubting, and blasphemous stories. How long had it been spun before him? And does it not offer the fullest, according to the author of *Treatise on Tailors' Dummies*, reflection of the phenomenon of existence? A story which protects one's individualism, and in the case of Schulz, who was afraid of his own consciousness being transformed, fences one from the world, and promotes elite creativity. In the programme text of Jakub's cosmology, Schulz doubted gnostically, and asked about the place of creation within the world of Habsburg Demiurge, a reality considered as alien, incomprehensible, and incomplete. In a story of a changing nature, Schulz said with conviction that modernity does not remember an experience, already distant and outdated, which helped create the cultural form of communication, and create language. Culture, then, does not remember the source of a metaphor which it uses, which is why it cannot describe itself, while everything that is new, it senses everything as artificial, colonising tradition, and imposing its own political-scientific-psychological discourse. Before Schulz, the reality was tested by Austrian-Hungarian creators. To the set of achievements of writers propagating trust in the language and words, talking about the need for recreation and regeneration of meaning, Schulz added a reflection on the remote rural areas of the k.k. Monarchy, which having applied the strategy of modernisation through copying, condemned itself to mindlessly reproducing grand stories. Reproducing while adding mistakes.<sup>5</sup> Upon reading *The Other Side*, *The Golem*, and Roth's novel, Schulz built his own creative imagination. In *The Street of Crocodiles*, *Sanatorium Under the Sign of the Hourglass*, and in the stories *The Republic of Dreams* and *A Homeland*, Schulz considered the demiurgic trait of a world limited to Franz Joseph I, and the strategy of existence in the world of a creative individual, the strategy of derivative demiurgy. The methods of the Creator described by the listed creators remained around temporal motifs: can one turn back time, return to a state of an undegenerated culture from before the decadence, and can one return to the speech of myths? Schulz added his own question: can one finally mature to their immaturity if one identifies the violent acceleration of things and time? Who could do that? According to Schulz: only the Demiurge himself.

As Magris noted, the disintegration of the Monarchy proved creative. It inspired at least three literary images of the demise raising the topic of creation

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<sup>5</sup> "He did not understand, Lieutenant Trotta, that rough peasant lads with noble hearts really existed, and that many things that really exist in the world were copied and put in bad books; they were bad copies, that's all." Vide J. Roth, *Marsz Radetzky'ego*, trans. W. Kragen, Wydawnictwo Literackie, Krakow 1995, p. 296. [English version: Roth, Joseph. *The Radetzky March*. Granta Publications. Kindle Edition].

in the post-Habsburg epoch. Any discussion should begin with an analysis of the suggestive image of the end of the Empire known from Roth's *The Radetzky March*. Then, when "on the ruin" a repeat creation will be possible, one must refer to a work emphasising the need for the restitution and regeneration of elemental meanings, to *The Golem* by Gustav Meyrink. I shall interpret also the self-creative devices applied by Schulz, which had much in common with the often omitted aspect of its presence in the literary world – a visible *shift*, which occurred in the sphere of the creative strategy, more and more inclined onto the *global nature* of artistic projects. As the final link of the description of the demiurgy of Habsburg reality, I consider the idea common for Schulz and Kubin for a regressive utopia, the creation of a new yet strangely familiar world.

What was the Habsburg world like? It was ending. Slowly yet consistently it shook in its foundations, it was falling apart, and dying, but its definitive end was not coming. That demise *in instalments* inspired creators to consider the essence of creation, bring to life reality and beings, and to postulate a self-renewal process. People talked then about the remedies, and myths renewing culture critically or as being beautiful: about the notion of *unity in variety*, *small homelands*, order, welfare state, the office-administration reality, or the other side of reality: the mighty traditions of the nations forming Austria-Hungary spanning several centuries. However, most interesting was the patchwork fragmented structure of the k.k. world, peculiar to artificial creations formed by the few for the masses. Basically, everyone saw the inauthenticity and stagnancy of the culture which had been ossifying for centuries, so both royalists and nationalists became open to the topics associated with nature, tribality, and savagery. When people saw the façade-like nature of art, modern anthropology was born, which promoted, appreciated by Schulz, a project of the return to authentic experiencing, naming, as well as creating culture. Roth wrote about the bureaucritism, the class divisions and the clarity of the world, and the formal dimension of demiurgy. Meyrink approached the darker sides of creation indicating the age-old, particularly intense in the latter half of the 19<sup>th</sup> c., esotericism of the epoch.

In the times when forgetting seemed to be, by default, substituted by modernist oblivion, when the entire narration-based world was passing, monarchies and grand families were passing, people started to consider the phenomenon of creation and the Creator.

Everything that grew took long to grow; and everything that ended took a long time to be forgotten. Everything that existed left behind traces of itself, and people then lived by their memories, just as we nowadays live by our capacity to forget, quickly and comprehensively.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> Ibid., p. 125.

Roth described Austria before “the grand war”<sup>7</sup> in *The Radetzky March* through the qualities on which all creation depends. By indicating the order and the time of creation, the author expressed a conviction of the epoch on the significance of grand, strong and irrefutable models, which were the point of reference for all new creations. Those models were catalogued by memory, and they filled modern forms of existence. Attachment of the Habsburg epoch to memory provoked questions on the presence of a subject in the world, about whether “we can actually be present, since we are strongly bound with that which is gone.”<sup>8</sup> Count Chojnicki opposed:

‘Because the Fatherland no longer exists.’

‘I’m afraid I don’t understand!’

‘I thought you mightn’t understand!’ said Chojnicki. ‘The fact is we’re all dead!’

(...)

‘Of course, taken literally,’ Chojnicki replied, ‘it still exists. We still have an army’ – he nodded at the Lieutenant – ‘and we have an officialdom’ – with a nod back at the District Commissioner. ‘But it’s falling apart as we speak. As we speak, it’s falling apart, it’s already fallen apart! An old man with not long to go, a head cold could finish him off, he keeps his throne by the simple miracle that he’s still able to sit on it. But how much longer, how much longer? The age doesn’t was us anymore!’<sup>9</sup>

Torpor and falsehood. Those were the markers of times which, according to the Count, could be defined using the metaphor of a morgue, or a wax museum, so popular in the rural areas of the Monarchy. We participate in events which guarantee the liveliness of a country, yet we ourselves are not alive. We reproduce, yet we do not create.

In no time, the platoon were on their feet in front of him, formed up into two ranks, and it struck him suddenly, and probably for the first time in his military career, that these men with their drilled precision were dead parts of dead machines that didn’t produce anything.<sup>10</sup>

The ceremonial drill of parades, marches, and anniversaries responded with the illusion of vitality to the prophecy of the demise of Habsburg strength.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid.

<sup>8</sup> A. Jamrozikowa, “Elektroniczny hegemon obrazu czy bliskość bios w naszej sztuce?” in: eadem, *Rewizje – kontynuacje. Sztuka i estetyka w czasach transformacji*, Wydawnictwo Fundacji Humaniora, Poznan 1996, p. 101.

<sup>9</sup> J. Roth, op. cit., pp. 180–181.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid., p. 231.

No, the world wasn't doomed, whatever Chojnicki said, you could see with your own eyes how alive it was! The inhabitants of this city, cheerful subjects of His Apostolic Majesty, members virtually of his household, thronged the entire Ringstrasse.<sup>11</sup>

Another principle, which, if observed, guaranteed a successful show, was the care in replaying individual points in the plan of celebrations. The reading of perfectly known sheet music was supposed to confirm anew, and legitimise the meaning of the melody being played.

All their public concerts – they took place under the veranda of the District Commissioner – began with the Radetzky March. Although it was so familiar to all the members of the band that they could have played it in their sleep without a conductor, still the bandleader insisted on reading every note from the score. And, every Sunday, as though he was rehearsing the Radetzky March for the first time, in military and musicianly conscientiousness Nechwaj raised his head, his baton and his gaze and aimed all three simultaneously at whichever part of the circle around him most needed his commands. The bitter drums rolled, the sweet flutes warbled, and the winsome cymbals pealed. A pleasant and musing smile came to the faces of the listeners, and the blood quickened in their legs. Even as they stood still, they had the feeling they were marching. Young girls parted their lips and stopped breathing. Mature men looked at the ground and remembered their manoeuvres. Old women sat in the park some distance away, and wobbled their little grey heads. It was summer.<sup>12</sup>

The task was completed, and once again the collective illusion captivated the audience. The fate of such actions was, however, uncertain. They had to be repeated on a regular basis, even if there was an air of impending catastrophe. A catastrophe which came suddenly during the celebrations of the local regiment. The celebrations, which had been planned long in advance, and prepared in the minutest detail, were interrupted by the news of the assassination of Archduke Franz Ferdinand. Initially, the festivities continued as if nothing had happened. The organisers did organising miracles to prevent panic, and unnecessary excitement until the news was confirmed. When the news spread, immediately national antagonisms came to voice (in the unofficial languages of the Monarchy). Hungarian officers offended the late successor to the throne overtly delighted in the unavoidable end of the Habsburgs grandeur. Only second-lieutenant von Trotta, grandson of a hero from Solferino, protested fervently threatening: “The next man to say a word against the departed,” the Lieutenant resumed, “I will personally

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<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 216.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 26–27.

shoot down!"<sup>13</sup> To protect the sovereign was in Carl Joseph's blood. His grandfather saved the Emperor's life, he made his mark in history, and became part of the Habsburg myth. The ancestor transformed into an individual inconvenient for the Monarchy, engaging in a fight not only against the enemy of the Emperor, but also with the enemy of individuality, with the official historical discourse. The hero desired to participate in creation! He opposed the version of the Solferino events, which made its way to school handbooks, and he strove to remove his nobilitated name from the complete mythologised story. The last von Trotta, when uttering the memorable sentence, operated automatically. Being prisoner to the family story, always marked with the heroism of his grandfather, he himself could never become an outstanding individual. He was featureless, colourless, he did not know who he was, which was why he so easily agreed to perform any of the roles he was offered: of a son, student, soldier, or even a reduced in rank farm hand. As a child of the Habsburg era should be, he had much difficulty in coping with change, with any shifts within the existing conventions.

Now, even with a different rank and a new roster, how could one possibly alter his accepted form, calculated to last for the whole of a soldier's life, and introduce into the standard sentences unusual communications of circumstances to which one had still to grow accustomed oneself, and whose full import one was yet to grasp?<sup>14</sup>

Carl Joseph engaged in heroism fitting his times, i.e. remaining with declarations only. Roth wanted to actively defend his homeland. As a student at the Faculty of Philology of Vienna University, he enlisted with Józef Wittlin whom he met there. He was sent to the front, and he later fought with words working in the press corps. When WWI as well as his emigration to France ended, Roth supported the restitution of the monarchy, and the ascension to the throne of Otto von Habsburg (the son of the last emperor of Austria-Hungary). Immediately before the outbreak of WWII, Roth saw in that concept Austria's protection against Anschluss. He even travelled to Vienna to meet with chancellor Schuschnigg, and discuss the matter of national security. The meeting did not come to effect. Roth died in the last stage of his alcohol dependency on the eve of September 1939. Thus Wittlin wrote about Roth's passing away:

Roth rather belonged to the species of Isaiahs, who can see from afar the impending Apocalypse, and warn against it. God chooses such prophets on the eve of a catastrophe.

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<sup>13</sup> Ibid., p. 333.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid., p. 10.

Apart from the byname *prophet*: Roth gained others as well. For some he was the *scribe* of the Habsburg era. Stefan Zweig read his novels as eulogies celebrating the Monarchy, not viewing Roth as a *critic*. The author of *The Radetzky March* would probably consider himself a *witness*, whose beliefs sanctioned the true nature of the account, as well as its protagonists.

In the novel, the Commissioner examined the Emperor, and confirmed his existence only when he received the favour of an audience, which was supposed to save the honour of the von Trotta family. The meeting between the Emperor and one who believed in him was a meeting of two matrices: the Mother (Latin *mater*) of the nations, and the Mother of Carl Joseph.

Their white whiskers, their narrow, sloping shoulders, their matching height and build, gave each of them the impression of confronting his own mirror image. One of them thought he had changed into a district commissioner. And the Emperor thought he was standing in front of his own mirror image.<sup>15</sup>

One conditioned the veracity of the other. Their fates, intertwined for long, revealed at the time of the meeting the power of their relationship. The story, which was personified by the Emperor, inspired the existence of the narrator, the Commissioner. In Roth's novel, the process went further as he associated the body of history with the narration. Thus there occurred a meeting of mirror images: the commissioner modelling the perfect mythical ruler, as symbolised by Franz Joseph I, and the Emperor, who referred to the same myth, for decades additionally noticing his reflection in the nation. Not always, though, the meeting of two worlds happens so peacefully. It was more often the case that two parties forced to meet felt a significant discomfort; one imposing on the other, trying to liken it to itself.

He slapped Demant on the shoulder, as if to help him regain his natural posture. Actually, he had a bit of a soft spot for the regimental doctor. But by gum, thunderation, the fellow was so unmilitary! If only he'd been a little bit more soldiery, one wouldn't have to look out for him quite so much!<sup>16</sup>

Doctor Demant did not possess military manners or attitude. Though having sympathy for the doctor, soldiers felt awkward in the company of a man from outside their order, feeling a natural need for imposing rules on him.

Rudolf from Schulz's *Spring* also confirmed the existence of the emperor. As proof, he presented the marker, and a detailed description of the ruler. Rudolf

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<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 313.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 82.

refused Franz Joseph I any humanity. For him, the Emperor was only a sign: "His narrow eyes, dull like buttons embedded in triangular deltas of wrinkles, were not human eyes."<sup>17</sup> Roth's opinion of the emperor's eyes was milder, yet surprisingly similar: "His hard and bright eyes had been looking confusedly into a confused distance for many years."<sup>18</sup> Schulz's and Roth's views of the Emperor transcended each other. For Schulz, he seemed as a pure bureaucratic action that paralyzes individuality, spontaneity, and improvisation (creativity).

(...) Franz Joseph squared the world like paper, regulated its course with the help of patents, held it within procedural bounds, and insured it against derailment into things unforeseen, adventurous, or simply unpredictable.<sup>19</sup>

Roth rather described the solitude and the apparent alienation of Franz Joseph, who ruled thanks to a once accelerated temporal machine, and who simply became bored of administrating. Ruling stopped meaning creation, it came closer to "the pragmatism of boredom."<sup>20</sup> "Many things seem to point to the fact that Franz Joseph was in reality a powerful (...) ruler, and, at the same time, a very "sad demiurge."<sup>22</sup>

The creators from the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> c. translated their interest in individualism to spiritual practice. The subjects of Franz Joseph apart from the Emperor's cult also practised the new blasphemous creationist cults. At that time, the collective imagination was possessed by gnosticism, occultism, and tarot. In New York, Helena Blawatska established the Theosophical Society (Towarzystwo Teozoficzne). In London, there was established the Hermetic Order of the Golden Dawn, members of which included Aleister Crowley, W.B. Yeats, and other enthusiasts of esotericism. Gustav Meyrink established the theosophical society *Zum blauen Stern* (Under the Blue Star). Hugely popular were the lectures of dr. Rudolf Steiner, the creator of anthroposophy, during which he discussed with unwavering enthusiasm with his many students various embodiments of beings. Franz Kafka, who participated in the meetings with Steiner, described in *Diaries* the rhetoric and the devotional nature of the doctor's presentations<sup>23</sup>. That *tradition* was started (at

<sup>17</sup> B. Schulz, *Wiosna*, p. 186. [English version: Schulz, B. *The Fictions of Bruno Schulz*. Picador].

<sup>18</sup> J. Roth, *op. cit.*, p. 240.

<sup>19</sup> B. Schulz, *Wiosna*, p. 187.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 186.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>23</sup> Kafka wrote about Steiner's lecture in his diary on 26 March 1911: "Rhetoric effect: Comfortable discussion of the objections of opponents (...) That rhetoric effect corresponds, in fact, to the imperative of the devotional mood. Continual looking at the palm of the extended hand." On 28 March 1911, he added: "Dr. Steiner is very much taken up with his absent disciples. At the lecture the dead press so about him. Hunger for knowledge? But do they really need it? Apparently.

the turn of the 17<sup>th</sup> c.) by another Father of Nations, the eccentric Rudolf II, whose many interests and obsessions included the hermetic philosophy, Satanism, occultism, cabala, and astronomy (in his court, there was a place for Johannes Kepler). He was also an avid alchemist, and the legend of his experiments inhabited the imagination of the gentry even in the times of Franz Joseph. Count Chojnicki from Roth's novel considered himself the continuator of the search for the philosopher's stone or gold. In the times of Rudolf II, Prague was seized by ontological, not political, matters. In Germany, there was the extremely emphatic, strongly integrating, Hasidic movement and the *Sefer Hasidim (Book of the Pious)* initiated in the 12<sup>th</sup> c. by Samuel of Speyer and his son Yehuda of Speyer, later developed and codified by Eleazar of Worms, which propagated asceticism, altruism, and distance to the world. Right next to the theoretical considerations on the essence of the Hasidic attitude, Eleazar of Worms presented<sup>24</sup> the principles of letter magic, which enables one to animate artificial man. The meditation on *Sefer Yetzirah* was supposed to only serve the intellectual skimming the creative power of the Creator. As a result of Rudolf II's hatred for the clergy, persecutions fell on Catholic priests and rabbis alternately. The history of those persecutions wrote the contemporary version of the story of the Golem, which, being one of the most vivid Yudaistic myths talking mainly about the beauty of intellectual creation, in time turned into a story of the limits and the ridiculousness of the acts of the Demiurge.

Modernist artists were closer to the private forms of demiurgy than a belief in grand stories. Schulz associated individualism with modesty, or more broadly: with art marginalised by elitarianism. By comparing his own thought on mythological stories so special for one's identity with their artistic executions in the works by Thomas Mann, Schulz wrote about Witkacy: "(...) I tried on a smaller scale to find my own history, my own mythical lineage."<sup>25</sup> Schulz thus marked also his own strategy of artistic conduct, which I shall consistently refer to as *the project*, considering the timorous and subtle nature of the creator's doings in his own case<sup>26</sup>, and the specificity of the world he created, which was specific for its:

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Sleeps two hours. Ever since someone once cut off his electric light he has always had a candle with him. He stood very close to Christ. (...) He is, perhaps, not the greatest contemporary psychic scholar, but he alone has been assigned the task of uniting theosophy and science. And that is why he knows everything, too. Once a botanist came to his native village, a great master of the occult. He enlightened him. That I would look up to Dr. Steiner was interpreted to me by the lady as the beginning of recollection. Vide F. Kafka, *Dzienniki 1910–1923. Część pierwsza*, trans. J. Werter, Puls, Londyn 1993, pp. 51–58. [English version: Kafka, F. *The Diaries of Franz Kafka 1910–1913*. Secker & Warbur, London 1948].

<sup>24</sup> For example in *Sode razaja*.

<sup>25</sup> Vide B. Schulz, *Do S.I. Witkiewicza*, KL, p. 103. [English version translated from Polish]. First printed in: *Tygodnik Ilustrowany* 1935, issue 17.

<sup>26</sup> "(...) am I entitled to be content, is the Schulz case worth continuing, or further actions." Vide *Do Andrzeja Pleśniewicza*, KL, p. 115.

fragmentary and potential nature. He publicly wrote to Witkacy, yet mainly about the distancing towards the languages of modernity, the inauthentic culture, and fathers who, possibly, do not need to be killed, rather forgotten to create art which is dark and cool, art which "operates in the pre-moral depths."<sup>27</sup>

At the time when people doubted the possibility of pure primal creation, they began to consider the available methods of re-creation, repeat creation, which were supposed to restore faith in creativity which touches basic meanings. The continuation of the criticism of the actions of Franz Joseph formulated the assumption:

If that authoritarian old man threw all his prestige on the scales, one could do nothing but give up all one's aspirations and longings, manage as well as one could in the only possible world – that is, a world without illusions and romanticism – and forget.<sup>28</sup>

The bureaucratized and extremely uncreative reality forced a *reprogramming* of the mode of operation of an individual focussed on defending individualism. One of the proposals for defending oneself was: to forget. However, "(...) what does it mean to forget?"<sup>29</sup> What did the mechanism of anamnesis, according to Schulz, consist of, and what end did it serve?

(...) total regression (...), retreats into oneself, journeys to the roots. This is how we branch out into anamnesis and are shaken by underground subcutaneous shivers.<sup>30</sup>

Plato's idea of reminding oneself of the once recognised was interpreted by Schulz as delving into the world of one's own subconscious. In *Timaeus*, Socrates accused Solon and his contemporaries of being oblivious and ignorant, through which qualities the modern people were convinced of the exceptional and unique nature of their times.<sup>31</sup> *Phaedo*, on the other hand, focussed on explaining the process of recalling the content of the pre-existential period of our lives.

<sup>27</sup> Vide B. Schulz, *List do S.I. Witkiewicza*, p. 102.

<sup>28</sup> B. Schulz, *Wiosna*, p. 156.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 172.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 169.

<sup>31</sup> Vide Plato, "Timaeus", in: *The Dialogues of Plato*, vol. II, trans. W. Wytwicki, Unia Wydawnicza Verum, Kęty 1999, 23 B. "And whatever happened either in your country or in ours, or in any other region of which we are informed – if there were any actions noble or great or in any other way remarkable, they have all been written down by us of old, and are preserved in our temples. (...) and so you have to begin all over again like children, and know nothing of what happened in ancient times, either among us or among yourselves. As for those genealogies of yours which you just now recounted to us, Solon, they are no better than the tales of children. In the first place you remember a single deluge only, but there were many previous ones."

But if the knowledge which we acquired before birth was lost by us at birth, and if afterwards by the use of the senses we recovered what we previously knew, will not the process which we call learning be a recovering of the knowledge which is natural to us, and may not this be rightly termed recollection? Very true.<sup>32</sup>

The dialogue did not decide about the significance of that content for spiritual and intellectual human development. Schulz, unlike Plato, offered an evaluation of “those messages”, placing particular emphasis on the need for one’s recollection of those. Meyrink similarly built the story of *The Golem* on the “transmigration of the spirit” of Athanasius Pernath, who experienced the strangeness of existence exactly through the lack of knowledge of his own provenance, or more precisely through amnesia which inflicted him due to a severe illness he had passed through.

I realised that the mainspring of all my thoughts and actions lay hidden in another, forgotten existence, and that I would never be able to uncover it. I am a cutting that has been grafted onto another stem, a branch sprouting from an alien stock. Even if I were to succeed in forcing my way into that locked ‘room’, would that not just mean I would once again fall prey to the ghosts that have been locked away in it?<sup>33</sup>

Meyrink referred to the myth of Golem, and said that one should forget to find out who she/he was. The story of Golem was told by the Babylonian Talmud in the late Middle Ages. Yet the idea of Golem had already been raised by the *Book of Genesis* dated 3<sup>rd</sup> c. AD, which talked about the power of God’s creation through words and writings. The version of the story closest to Meyrink was the 16<sup>th</sup>-century legend of a rabbi who animated an artificial man made of clay. The animation was done using a spell written on a piece of paper, and placed in the mouth of the figure, which began to grow, and became obedient to the instructions of its master, working and protecting the Jewish community from persecution. Yet it rebelled against its creator, and it had to be neutralised. The metaphor of a dummy, an effigy, a mannequin, or a wax figure<sup>34</sup>, extremely popular in modernist literature, was intended to evoke dread in the new man devoid of feelings, and undergoing increasing technicalisation. In Meyrink’s novel, insensitive modern people were replaced with Golem. The characters hiding in the ghetto or living in gutters and inns personified all the features of the Jewish

<sup>32</sup> Plato, “Phaedo”, in: op. cit., 75 D.

<sup>33</sup> G. Meyrink, *Golem*, trans. A. Lange, Wydawnictwo Vesper, Czerwonak 2014, p. 67. [English version: Meyrink, G. *The Golem*, trans. M. Mitchell, Dedalus 2010].

<sup>34</sup> Vide B. Schulz, *Ulica Krokodyli*, OP, p. 83. Meyrink even wrote a compilation of short stories entitled *Waxworks* (1908).

community placed within the mystical tradition. Golem evokes menace appearing every thirty years in Prague. It identified with the psychological essence of the individuals it meets uncertain of their spirituality; it assumed their figure, and took them on a journey towards self-recognition. It thus met Athanasius Pernath, and his "clean slate". The underground Prague labyrinth was the perfect place for starting the journey deep into one's own subconscious. As well as to avoid the image of the hated city.

Meyrink hated Prague. He left it for ever when a bank he had established lost its credibility after he had been faced with resistance on the part of bureaucracy, which led to his being accused of embezzlement. Meyrink also fed on aversion to the system, for which a search for the truth was alien, while administrative procedure was dear. He ended up in prison, and he did not regain his previous position. He travelled Europe. He moved to Vienna establishing cooperation with the Munich-based periodical *Simplicissimus*, for which he translated, and wrote stories. He entered the circle of artists. He met many writers and plastic artists: Stefan Zweig, Max Brod, Max Klinger, and Alfred Kubin, with whom he wanted to cooperate to illustrate *The Golem*. However, the work on the novel was protracted. Meyrink, a seasoned author of short stories yet not of novels, had trouble structuring the work, which included too many plots and characters. Therefore, Kubin decided to use the already finished illustrations in his work entitled *The Other Side*. Golem was eventually illustrated by a Prague artist Hugo Steiner-Prag.

Master Pernath began his path to self-recognition with a mysterious meeting, as a result of which he came into possession of the *Book of Ibbur*. Being a specialist, he was to fix the initial included in the book, a significant initial: *J* is, in fact, the first letter of the name of God. Thus the protagonist's fate was marked from the start with the need to refer to a deity. The self-creation process, started by amnesia, the defence mechanism of memory, cannot be considered as a fully autonomous process. Another system of signs to which the protagonist's ego was supposed to refer was the symbolism of the cards of tarot<sup>35</sup> – Athanasius found, according to tarot interpreters, a card with the image of the Fool again associated with the first, though the first letter of the Hebrew alphabet that time, the letter *aleph*. That card was supposed to indicate Pernath's rebirth as an individual. Another theory, about the fact of finding that spiritual wanderer, rather indicated the card of the Magician, associated with the search of self-awareness. In finding the card, Athanasius would thus symbolically begin work on himself. The protagonist also came across a card with the image of the Hanged Man, the harbinger of imminent death, but also the duality of the spirit of an individual informed about the need to seek harmony.

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<sup>35</sup> In Schulz's works, there appeared, e.g. a "spring horoscope", vide B, Schulz, *Spring*, p. 143.

Athanasius read the signs he was offered, yet he needed a guide through their world. He met Hillel Shemaiah, who displayed an in-depth knowledge of Talmud and cabala. He told him about the rewards awaiting the investigator, the reader of signs, which are offered to him by the world considered as a book. That reward is the individualisation of the spirit, the perfect ego, and self-consciousness ensuring protection in the modern world. At some stage of Athanasius's spiritual education, Hillel, as a defender of the mystical tradition of Judaism, had to start the discussion on the sense in Pernath's participation in the "mystery of the book":

Do you think there is no rhyme or reason why our Jewish books are written in consonants alone? Each reader has to find for himself the secret vowels that go with them and which reveal a meaning that is for him alone; the living word should not wither into dead dogma.<sup>36</sup>

Hillel wanted to assure his disciple about the animating role of reading and renewing the senses included in the Book. The despondency afflicting Athanasius the neophyte was a foreshadowing of the despondency of the epoch, one of which Schulz became the spokesman. Was each language of the provinces which strived to talk about reality not exactly the "dead dogma" for the author of *Treatise on Tailors' Dummies*? Schulz did not believe in the exegesis of the meanings included in the new Book of Genesis. An exegesis which does not stop with the provincial understanding and acceptance of modernism will not protect, according to Schulz, the individual from the cruelty of the world, totalitarianism, and the impending catastrophe of WWII. Just like Kafka, Schulz did not see any rescue in the new languages discussing modernity, neither did he see it in Judaism, and the language of religion. He would rather perish than talk modernity.

Schulz's prose is interpreted through the teachings of Isaac Luria<sup>37</sup>, and his theory of the *tikkun* process – the need to find and merge into a whole the fragments of broken dishes, so that they could return to their place specified by God. The mending of the world is the chief meaning of the *Aleinu* prayer, which is said to mark each of the three parts of the day. "Tikkun olam", words uttered by a worshipper, refer to the mystical goal of the Jewish community, i.e. to perfect the world through the Kingdom of the Almighty. The mission, on which Jews have embarked, began, though, together with its executors, secularising in the 19<sup>th</sup> c., while in the 20<sup>th</sup> c. it was rather focussed on the need to mend the world based on the ongoing changes within the social and political movements. Thus the group

<sup>36</sup> G. Meyrink, op. cit., pp. 140–141.

<sup>37</sup> The mystical interpretations of Schulz's prose along with the discussions by Władysław Panas unfortunately omitted the reflection on the history of philosophy of the author of *Treatise on Tailors' Dummies*. Vide W. Panas, *Księga Blasku. Traktat o kabale w prozie Brunona Schulza*, Towarzystwo Naukowe Katolickiego Uniwersytetu Lubelskiego, Lublin 1997.

of the most engaged communists, socialists, economists, and politicians, came to include Jews, who departed from the original programme of their mission, which mainly served the development of the spirit and morality in God's Name.

Schulz enveloped the story of creation and art in the metaphor of demiurgy. He was interested in the grand creative power, thanks to which any project could immediately and outstandingly be fulfilled *ex nihilo*. He was fascinated by the immediate availability, and endless potential, which were shared by unknown creative forces distant from the world.<sup>38</sup> Schulz's demiurgy should be derived from several sources. Undoubtedly, he referred to Plato's tradition of talking about creation. According to Plato, a world made according to the model of an idea is the work of a craftsman-worker (Greek *demiurgos*). By creating, the Creator guards the order of creation – necessity decides about the formation of the world (Greek *ananke*), the creation of man is possible only after the formation of immortal beings, i.e. gods while mortals are created through the necessity to maintain order within the ladder of beings.<sup>39</sup> Schulz's demiurgy was derived by Jerzy Jarzębski<sup>40</sup> exactly from Plato by writing about *God* and *creator*. Jarzębski, the author of the introduction to an edition of Schulz's works by Biblioteka Narodowa, has had a huge impact on such an understanding of the term.<sup>41</sup> Notes to that edition explained *demiurgy* with the safeguard of enabling the readers to choose a specific method of interpretation of the entire *Treatise on Tailors' Dummies*. The "method of interpretation" of the reflections on the essence included in *Treatise...* should be surely influenced by the vocabulary of Schulz's notion. The father is, in fact, referred to as the *Heresiarch*, while his doctrine as *k.k.-nish*.<sup>42</sup> The reference to

<sup>38</sup> While analysing Schulz's attitude towards reality, Jan Kurowicki wrote of "(...) distancing from everyday matters, yet not in the trivial sense: as life's indifference to it. Rather in a deeper sense: in the distancing from it, escape from the laws of its mythology". Vide J. Kurowicki, *Normalność jako sen idioty. Wykłady o kulturowych i filozoficznych kontekstach literatury współczesnej*, Wydawnictwo Wyższej Szkoły Pedagogicznej im. T. Kotarbińskiego, Zielona Góra 1994, p. 91.

<sup>39</sup> The order of creation was discussed in the dialogue: *Timaeus*. Vide Plato, *Dialogi*, vol. II... XIII, 41, BCD, pp. 690–691. "All these the creator first set in order, and out of them he constructed the universe, which was a single animal comprehending in itself all other animals, mortal and immortal. Now of the divine, he himself was the creator, but the creation of the mortal he committed to his offspring. And they, imitating him, received from him the immortal principle of the soul; and around this they proceeded to fashion a mortal body, and made it to be the vehicle of the soul, and constructed within the body a soul of another nature which was mortal, subject to terrible and irresistible affections." Vide *Ibid.*, XXXI, 69, CD, p. 722.

<sup>40</sup> J. Jarzębski, "Czasoprzestrzeń mitu i marzenia w prozie Brunona Schulza", in: *Powieść jako autokreacja*, Wydawnictwo Literackie, Wrocław 1984, p. 215. vide *Traktat o manekinach*, note 2, p. 37.

<sup>41</sup> The issue was also noted by A. Kalin, vide *idem*, "'Księga heretycka' – Schulzowski model kultury literackiej", in: *W ulamkach zwierciadła... Bruno Schulz w 110 rocznicę urodzin i 60 rocznicę śmierci*, ed. Władysław Panas, Małgorzata Kitowska-Łysiak, Towarzystwo Naukowe Katolickiego Uniwersytetu Lubelskiego, Lublin 2003, note 25, p. 301.

<sup>42</sup> B. Schulz, *Manekiny*, OP, p. 34.

gnostic heresy seemed justified. It was first referred to, as a side remark to his reflections, by Artur Sandauer<sup>43</sup>. Later the thesis on the gnostic dimension of the Father's demiurgy was expanded by Arkadiusz Kalin<sup>44</sup>. Gnosis as a philosophical and religious view became the highest heresy in the history of Judaism and Christianity. It talked about the creation of the world in a blasphemously dual manner. It challenged (through Ptolemy) the authenticity of the Old Testament, and the God described therein. It accused him of demiurgy, creative incapacity, it questioned the act of creation, and it saw in it a god of cruelty, a newly recognised god, an ungod. It sought the true god outside the zone of naming. It sought the god of ideas, not matter.

Demiurge, that grand master and artist, made matter invisible, made it disappear under the surface of life.<sup>45</sup>

In gnosis, the formation of matter depends on Archons, the creators of world. They assume the role of the Old Testament God, securing the creation of living beings. Matter was, in fact,

(...) the most passive and the most defenceless essence in the cosmos. (...) All attempts at organising matter are transient and temporary, easy to reverse and to dissolve.<sup>46</sup>

Was that the reason why the gnostic story of creation needed the notion of demiurgy? Why did it need a suggestion of power, which would take up the kneading of that which is compliant? However, such a *task* does not correspond to the gnostic principle of openness to cognition as gnosticism

(...) unlike the quickly solidifying in dogmatism, "totalitarian" and monopolistic forms of "Christianity" (Jewish, Greek and Roman Christianity) also in its Christian version remained true to the spirit of revelation, without degenerating into the letter, and retained its pluralistic, freedom focussed, and tolerant nature.<sup>47</sup>

Due to its availability, gnostic cognition occurs not only thanks to a divine initiative and revelation, but it can also be achieved through spiritual training. It enables one to maintain spiritual individualism and a bond with the world of

<sup>43</sup> A. Sandauer, "Bóg, Szatan, Mesjasz i...?" in: *Pisma zebrane*, vol. II, p. 292.

<sup>44</sup> A. Kalin, dz. cyt., pp. 299–316.

<sup>45</sup> B. Schulz, *Traktat...*, OP, p. 38.

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 35.

<sup>47</sup> J. Prokopiuk, "Hymn o Perle'. W świetle gnozy", in: idem, *Ścieżki wtajemniczenia. Gnosis aeterna*, Wydawnictwo tCHU, Warsaw 2000, p. 28 [English version translated from Polish].

spirit, protecting one against disarrangement, and excessive immersion in the world of unstable matter. It leads towards salvation, while its essence consists of rebellion and opposition to evil (gnosticism asks repeatedly: *Unde malum?*), and imperfection. Yet *gnosis* is particularly inclined to accept the role of people who are bright, gifted, who shall be granted the exclusive type of cognition told using the dark flashing language of myth, and coming from the depths of internal experience. Gnosticism of the Iranian type (typology by Hans Jonas<sup>48</sup>), most exploited in Mani's doctrine, to which *gnosis* is often reduced, tells the myth of the creation of the world as a struggle between the good God and the evil Demiurge. It is an extremely dualistic myth, which tells of a fight, and a repeat separation of Lightness and Darkness. It is worth adding that there also exists a Syrian-Egyptian gnosticism, Monistic in nature, which has been continued in the Christian Valentinianism.

Did *gnosis* become the primary philosophy in Schulz's works? Did it enable the creation of a coherent image of the world? On the contrary. Schulz's demiurge remained at the service of a fragment and individuality aware of its own elitism and marginality.

Our creatures will not be the heroes of romances in many volumes. Their roles will be short, concise; their characters – without a background. Sometimes, for one gesture, for one word alone, we shall make the effort to bring them to life.<sup>49</sup>

Schulz's strategy of self-creation indicated, though, that he did not wish to remain a fringe blasphemer. His presence in the Polish literary world was not just a fleeting moment. Upon publishing the first volume of his stories, Schulz found himself at a point where his previous fringe works were presented for the public to see, and for other writers to comment upon. That, it would seem, is the dream of each writer: to be commented upon! Schulz himself did write that: "I need a companion."<sup>50</sup> Schulz appreciated (also due to the security aspect) a partnership-base relation, affectionate, full of understanding for his creative sensitivity, and for the language of his stories. He, himself being his "most affectionate" reader<sup>51</sup>, was afraid of being *seized* by the language of others. He did not remit any attempts to protect<sup>52</sup> himself, and to protect his writings. He discussed that matter in his letters (usually intended for publication)

<sup>48</sup> H. Jonas, *The Gnostic Religion*, Beacon Press, Boston 1958.

<sup>49</sup> *Traktat...*, p. 37.

<sup>50</sup> B. Schulz, *Do Tadeusza i Zofii Brezów*, KL, p. 48.

<sup>51</sup> And reviewers, vide M. Bartosik, *Bruno Schulz jako krytyk*, Towarzystwo Autorów i Wydawców Prac Naukowych Universitas, Krakow 2000.

<sup>52</sup> Just like "Schulz in a subtle yet consistent way defended the independence of his texts, and the individuality of his own reflections on the issue of writing (...)", the significance of those activities were discussed by Tomasz Bocheński, vide T. Bocheński, *Czarny humor w twórczości Witkacego, Gombrowicza, Schulza*, Towarzystwo Autorów i Wydawców Prac Naukowych Universitas, Krakow 2005, pp. 141–150.

with many greats of the world of literature. His most important interlocutors included, in fact, Witkacy and Gombrowicz<sup>53</sup>, with whom he argued about the importance of privacy, and marginality in artistic work. He chose his interlocutors, congenial interlocutors<sup>54</sup>, carefully and precisely. Schulz was filled with “small feminine projects<sup>55</sup>”, ideas which defined the development of his writings. His plans demanded fulfilment, while his ideas required implementation.

“The Demiurgus had valuable and interesting creative recipes at his disposal.”<sup>56</sup> Therefore, he did not create from nothing, he used *recipes*: overheard in the language of modernity, science, and authorities. Though, as it turned out, the recipes were completely legal, moral, and compliant with the official principles of creation. Schulz would rather use “certain illegal methods, a whole host of illicit and heretic methods,”<sup>57</sup> which corresponded to his creative philosophy independent of the discourse of the authorities. It was precisely “thanks to them that he created the multitude of types renewing through their own power.”<sup>58</sup> Schulz’s private rebellion did not separate the writer from the world of paid holidays, sanatorium stays, awards, and titles. Schulz, often resentful about his unsuccessful personal ventures, complained to his friend: “Facts and actions speak louder than intentions, while intentions, unfounded in facts, do not deserve anyone’s trust.”<sup>59</sup> Being a master of the epistolary art, he also wrote to the school authorities for a paid leave – unsuccessfully until 1936. Three years after the publication and the indubitable artistic success of *The Street of Crocodiles*, he was granted, though he did not possess the required education, the title of secondary school professor, and thus six months (January–June) of paid leave, which Schulz devoted to writing works, which he intended to include in the second volume of his stories. In 1936, he also became active in literary journals writing reviews, studies, and the first versions of his new stories for *Wiadomości Literackie*, *Pion*, *Skamander*, *Tygodnik Ilustrowany*, and in *Studio* he conducted a controversial and widely

<sup>53</sup> The Schulz–Witkacy, Schulz–Gombrowicz relations were discussed by Włodzimierz Bolecki, vide W. Bolecki, “Witkacy–Schulz, Schulz–Witkacy (Wariacje interpretacyjne)”, in: *Czytanie Schulza. Materiały międzynarodowej sesji naukowej Bruno Schulz – w stulecie urodzin i w pięćdziesięciolecie śmierci Instytut Filologii Polskiej Uniwersytetu Jagiellońskiego, Kraków, 8–10 czerwca 1992 roku*, Jerzy Jarzębski (ed.), Oficyna Naukowa i Literacka T.I.C, Kraków 1994.

<sup>54</sup> Vide J. Ficowski, “W poszukiwaniu partnera kongenialnego” in: *Czytanie Schulza...* Vide: B. Schulz, *Do Tadeusza i Zofii Brezów*, KL, p. 48. “I need closeness of a kindred spirit. I need some warranty of the internal world, the existence of which I have postulated. To continuously keep it on my own faith, bear it against everything through the strength of my defiance – it resembles the toil and torment of Atlas.”

<sup>55</sup> B. Schulz, *Ojczyzna*, OP, p. 379 [English version translated from Polish].

<sup>56</sup> Idem, *Traktat*, p. 36.

<sup>57</sup> Ibid.

<sup>58</sup> Ibid.

<sup>59</sup> B. Schulz, *Do Andrzeja Pleśniewicza*, p. 115.

commented upon public exchange of letters with Witold Gombrowicz. Schulz was also planning at that time to marry Józefina Szelińska.

Those several months of 1936 were filled with events which gave Schulz, or so it appeared, hope for a European career. The author tried at that time, together with his devoted colleagues, to publish *The Street of Crocodiles* abroad. His *global projects* started to suffer more and more from the political situation in the Europe of developing ideologies. Despite the spectre of the impending war, Schulz decided to set off on a series of foreign visits. He first made a short, only three-day-long (yet unconfirmed in any documents), trip to Sweden. Afterwards, he sent an *exposé* to Italian publishers, in which he included his discussion of *The Street of Crocodiles*.<sup>60</sup> He tried to establish contact with Thomas Mann (with whom, according to Jerzy Ficowski, he exchanged letters<sup>61</sup>), by sending him his story entitled *Die Heimkehr*. Regarding the lost story, there even formed a rumour that Mann stole Schulz's text, and included it in *Doctor Faustus. Die Heimkehr (Return Home)*. The story written by Schulz originally in German (probably completed in October 1937) was supposed to draw the attention of readers abroad. The text was first sent to Izydor Berman, the German translator of Józef Wittlin, and later an attempt was made to deliver it to Thomas Mann himself, who could contribute to its publication on the German market. Unfortunately, any further fate of the story remains unknown. The next copy of the story was supposed to be sent east, to the Moscow-based *Indoizdat* publishing house

<sup>60</sup> Prior to that, he tried to deliver *The Street of Crocodiles* to another German writer Joseph Roth, yet an unfinished translation of the story made the attempt futile.

<sup>61</sup> Maxim Biller was inspired by that "epistolary situation" – *Im Kopf von Bruno Schulz* made a literary exploitation of Schulz's attempt to contact Mann, spurred by the appearance in Drohobycz of Mann's doppelgänger, who through a behaviour dissimilar to the behaviour (imagined by Schulz) of the real "Doctor Mann" announced the writing of a novel on the Jewish pogrom in Drohobycz – the history of a community, on which Schulz could not/would not write. In his psychologisation of the character of Schulz, Biller went even further than Agata Tuszyńska in *Naręczona Schulza*. He was more successful in it, probably due to his liberal approach to biographical information, a play with associations, the use of well-known pieces of information from the writer's legend contrasted with a completely fictional visit of Thomas Mann to Drohobycz. If the visit was fake, the story about Schulz was fake as well. Or maybe it was just another of Biller's provocations? The two books referred to herein indicated, on the one hand, the power of Schulz's reception, and, on the other, the fictional capacity of the still unstudied facts from his biography. Vide M. Biller, *W głowie Brunona Schulza*, trans. M. Mirońska, Dom Wydawniczy PWN, Warsaw 2014, vide also A. Tuszyńska, *Naręczona Schulza*, Wydawnictwo Literackie, Krakow 2015. Biller's Schulz thinks in German, is withdrawn, and notices the deficiency of provincial works. "Too long have they lived in isolation, without any contact with the world, the provincial existence made them fearful, unhinged, and excessively curious. They plan a one-day visit to the Uncle several months in advance, and before one of them goes to the capital, he puts his matters in order with Reynisz the notary. (...) I know (...) what I'm talking about as I'm just like them." Vide M. Biller, op. cit., p. 40. [English version translated from Polish].

The text was lost, yet it still speaks to us, though we do not know its content. It discussed Schulz's attempt to *globalise* his output. Jacek Scholz attempted, impossible in its assumptions, a *reconstruction*<sup>62</sup> of the now unknown story by analysing the text of one of the last stories published by Schulz, i.e. *The Homeland*<sup>63</sup>. The researcher put forward a bold hypothesis regarding the virtually organic relationship between both texts. The interesting analysis of topographic indications present in the texts, and the detailed description of the story itself detracts, though, somewhat from the core issue, i.e. the meanings included in the text. The part regarding the language of the work did, in fact, focus on the topic of the history of urban families, and their specificity. Could Schulz have striven towards such a style, and that type of writing? Such a meaning of the referred to analysis can only be presumed from Scholz's text. In fact, the author did not notice Schulz's emerging concept of urban history with the notion of the Return at its core included in the story. Scholz's reflections on the "homeland abroad" paradox (being a reference to the special situation of the inhabitants of the Monarchy, who should, and theoretically could, feel at home everywhere<sup>64</sup>) ought to be supplemented with a motif characteristic of writers of Jewish descent of the "return to the home country", which was present in, e.g. Roth's *Hotel Savoy*. Bloomfield, an American, son of a Jewish factory owner, came to his father's country to, like every year, visit his grave. He did not want to open new factories – he got to the country to pay tribute to the former, not the new. The visitor from America stated: "I am an eastern Jew, and we have always had our homeland where our graves lay,"<sup>65</sup> though he added: "My son will be a complete American, because I will be buried there."<sup>66</sup> Schulz in *The Homeland* combined one of his main concepts, i.e. the concept of anamnesis, of the "artificial extension of childhood<sup>67</sup>", of the return to the source of metaphor, with a new and emerging concept of *urban mythology*, probably modelled on Mann's ideas, considering the meanings present in the universal and monumental mythical stories. Schulz did not believe, though, in the possibility of telling the urban mythology. He discussed Mann with his major interlocutors: Witkacy, Debora Vogel, and Anna Płockier:

<sup>62</sup> J. Scholz, "Oryginał czy przekład? Zagadka tekstu Brunona Schulza 'Ojczyzna'", in: *W ulamkach zwierciadła... Bruno Schulz w 110. rocznicę urodzin i 60. rocznicę śmierci*, A. Podgórska (ed.), Towarzystwo Naukowe Katolickiego Uniwersytetu Lubelskiego, Lublin 2003, pp. 173–183.

<sup>63</sup> First printed in *Sygnaly* 1938, issue 59.

<sup>64</sup> J. Scholz wrote about that reality which was "(...) so regular and stable because it enabled one to immerse oneself in thoughts and return." And he continued: "But return where?" That question exposed Scholz's incomprehension of Schulz's concept of the return to childhood times. Vide J. Scholz, op. cit., p. 177.

<sup>65</sup> J. Roth, *Hotel Savoy*, trans. S. Berman, Państwowy Instytut Wydawniczy, Warsaw 1959, p. 132.

<sup>66</sup> Ibid.

<sup>67</sup> B. Schulz, *Do Andrzeja Pleśniewicza*, p. 113. [English version translated from Polish].

In Mann's works, those included Biblical stories, the ancient myths of Babylonia and Egypt. I tried on a smaller scale to find my own private mythology, my own "histories", my own mythical lineage.<sup>68</sup>

Jacek Scholz asked whether Schulz: "could had written a text departing so far in terms of the style, language, and the mode of expression from his earlier works."<sup>69</sup> Alas, he could! He did write to Mann and the German burgher. Linguistic simplifications, urban reality, metaphors, and the storytelling potential were kept in check. The text seemed like a new urban novel emulating *Buddenbrooks*.<sup>70</sup>

His work on the new mode of writing coincided with problems in his personal and professional life. After definitively parting with his fiancée, and publishing a collection of stories, i.e. *Sanatorium Under the Sign of the Hourglass*<sup>71</sup>, which did not meet his initial expectations, sensing a real threat from Western neighbours, he had visible problems with writing. *Projekt Zagranica* (Foreign Countries Project), which was progressing with much difficulty, eventually failed altogether.<sup>72</sup> However, Schulz was awarded the Gold Laurel of the Polish Academy of Literature, and there were also attempts at translating *The Street of Crocodiles* (the case was "monitored" by Joseph Roth, who first opposed A. Grunbaum's translation of *August*, and later, unfortunately to no avail, tried to offer the job to Saul Fryszman). In 1939, supported by Gombrowicz, he once again tried to interest Italian publishers in Schulz's prose. Finally in 1938, already after the *Anschluss* of Austria, in the middle of the summer period, i.e. right in the heart of the Paris slack season, Schulz set off for the capital of France. He went to Paris at the suggestion of Debora Vogel, and his Łódź friends: a painter Natan Spiegel, and a pianist Maria Chasin; he met up with the latter's brother, Georg Rosenberg in Paris. Schulz was even offered a chance to exhibit his drawings in the autumn. However, he could not afford the obligatory immediate advance payment of 1,600

<sup>68</sup> B. Schulz, *Do Stanisława Ignacego Witkiewicza*, p. 103.

<sup>69</sup> J. Scholz, op. cit., p. 183.

<sup>70</sup> It was with that book that the Polish reception of Mann began; Stanisław Brzozowski admired it as early as 1904 in *Głos*.

<sup>71</sup> He complained about *Sanatorium*, he wrote that the works were written earlier (some even before the texts included in *The Street of Crocodiles*). In a letter to Tadeusz Breza of 1936, he wrote: "My fragments which you have read, were written on the spot, once, I took them out now as a type of my *paralipomena*. Your praise is unjustified. Those are rather poor works. And he went on: I wrote only a bigger short story, about 60 print pages. I intend to print it in some journal, and later publish it together with my other short stories in a separate volume. I am not satisfied with it. I am already starting to long for a new style. I cannot conclude several short stories." Vide B. Schulz, *Do Tadeusza Brezy*, KL, p. 54. [English version translated from Polish].

<sup>72</sup> The story *The Homeland* referred directly to them – it can be considered as an ironic comment to the situation in Schulz's personal life. The protagonist managed to end up abroad "too late; not as a victor, but as a wreck", vide B. Schulz, *Ojczyzna*, p. 372.

francs for the organisation of the event. He did not meet any new artists, apart from a few previous acquaintances, and out of all the Paris attractions he only visited a cabaret<sup>73</sup> and the museums which were opened at that time. Once again he was too late...

Schulz turned that delay into the basic principle governing the utopian world of *Sanatorium Under the Sign of the Hourglass*, a work considerably inspired by a book by Alfred Kubin entitled *The Other Side*:

“The whole secret of the operation,” he added, ready to demonstrate its mechanism on his fingers, “is that we have to put back the clock. Here we are always late by a certain interval of time of which we cannot define the length. The whole thing is a matter of simple relativity. Here your father’s death, the death that has already struck him in your country, has not occurred yet.”<sup>74</sup>

Schulz used the delay to present the creative capabilities of the world, which remained loosely related to time<sup>75</sup>, miraculously independent of the cruel modernity. Kubin presented his regressive utopia mainly as the perfect, in terms of its assumptions, creation of the ingenious individual – Patera. In *Sanatorium*, Schulz actually described the demonic Doctor Gotard, who “restored [Jakub] to the world of the living”, yet it was nothing like the portrait included in *The Other Side*, thus the conclusion: the presence of only the doctor in the story was a result of the need to indicate the subject responsible for creation. Patera was the ruler and the creator of the perfect state, which spanned some uncharted remote sections of Asia. To “furnish” Pearl, the capital of the country, he chose only belongings, old yet necessary things, marked by crime. “Patera feels an extraordinarily strong aversion to all kinds of progress”<sup>76</sup>, he also makes sure progress does not reach his creation, dividing Pearl from the rest of the world with a tall wall.<sup>77</sup> When writing about the *material* preferences of his Demiurge, Schulz indicated

<sup>73</sup> Of course, there had to be some allusions to Schulz’s “inclinations”. A description of the visit to the *Casanova* cabaret: “He asked me timidly whether he can strike the shoulder of a woman at the neighbouring table, who obviously had nothing against that. He was moved by the fact of touching her. I understood then that he was a slave to his fantasies, and that he was not a happy man” as cited in: J. Ficowski, *Regiony wielkiej herezji*, Fundacja „Pogranicze”, Sejny 2002, p. 81. [English version translated from Polish].

<sup>74</sup> B. Schulz, *Sanatorium pod Klepsydrą*, OP, p. 254.

<sup>75</sup> Cf. *Ibid.*, p. 262: “The compulsive readiness to account for the passage of time, the scrupulous penny-wise habit of reporting on the used-up hours – the pride and ambition of our economic system – are forsaken. Those cardinal virtues, which in the past one never dared to question, have long ago been abandoned.”

<sup>76</sup> A. Kubin, *Po tamtej stronie*, trans. A.M. Linke, Znak, Krakow 2008, p. 11. [English version: Kubin, Alfred. *The Other Side*. Dedalus Limited. Kindle Edition].

<sup>77</sup> Upon seeing a wall, the wife of the protagonist concluded: “I’ll never get out of here again.” Vide *ibid.*, p. 41.

the contrast with the mutual inclination, between the creative unit and the recreative one, as which he considered the tribe of the contemporary people:

The Demiurge was in love with consumable, superb, and complicated materials; we shall give priority to trash. We are simply entranced and enchanted by the cheapness, shabbiness, and inferiority of material.<sup>78</sup>

On the one hand, by describing the utopias he created, he indicated concrete things as the necessary material of all states, even the utopian ones, on the other, he emphasised the distance between his regressive concepts from the standard ideas compliant with the latest trends in state creation drawn from totalitarian ideologies:

A dream's claim for becoming a concrete matter. A dream includes some type of a hunger for reality, some claim, which obliges reality, grows unnoticed into liability and demand, in a debt note, which demands to be repaid.<sup>79</sup>

While other cities developed into economics, grew into statistical figures, into numbers – our city descended into essentiality.<sup>80</sup>

In his project, Schulz drew inspiration from the republican system. Everyone in his story had their share in the formation of the republic of dreams, spelled in small caps, not even possessing a proprietary name. The mother rented a coach, the father “made a signal”<sup>81</sup>, there were also needed some companions. Schulz often talked about escaping the city, he wrote: Spring evokes in me the urge to set off on a two-person wander, some second-school camping.<sup>82</sup> With the help of his colleagues, the protagonist of *Republika* wished to “(...) constitute new and independent laws, introduce a new hierarchy of measures and values<sup>83</sup>”, which would be founded in the principle of “poetry and adventure, endless fascinations and surprises.”<sup>84</sup> Such futile statements were followed by a quick and decisive “transfer” of power, or rather the initiative to the Blue-eyed, who appeared in the republic of dreams as the main dreamer, its originator, designer, and executor, who considered nature to have priority in “organising” the world:

<sup>78</sup> B. Schulz, *Traktat...*, p. 37.

<sup>79</sup> Idem, *Republika marzeń*, OP, p. 347. [English version translated from Polish]. *Republika marzeń*, first printed in *Tygodnik Ilustrowany* 1936, issue 29 – uncollected work, not included in any collection.

<sup>80</sup> Idem, *Sanatorium...*, p. 326.

<sup>81</sup> Idem, *Republika...*, p. 328.

<sup>82</sup> Idem, *Do Andrzeja Pleśniewicza*, p. 114.

<sup>83</sup> Idem, *Republika...*, p. 329.

<sup>84</sup> Ibid.

Blue-eyed is not an architect, rather a director. The director of landscapes and cosmic scenes. His high craft consists of his ability to grasp the intentions of nature, and to read its secret aspirations. Because nature is full of potential architecture, designs, and constructions.<sup>85</sup>

His eyes were incredibly blue, not made for looking, rather for endless blueing in dreams. He said that when he arrived at the place I am referring to, at the anonymous, pristine and no one's country – he could immediately smell poetry and adventure, he saw in the air ready-made shapes and phantoms of a myth suspended above the area. He found in the atmosphere reformed shapes of that idea, plans, façades, and boards. He heard a calling, an internal voice, like Noah, when he received his orders and instructions. He was visited by the spirit of the idea lost in the atmosphere. He proclaimed the republic of dreams, a sovereign land of poetry.<sup>86</sup>

In comparison, Patera's eyes "weren't eyes at all, they resembled two bright, shiny metal discs gleaming like two small moons. They were fixed onto me without any expression, or life."<sup>87</sup>

Blue-eyed even earned a separate entry in *Słownik Schulzowski*<sup>88</sup>, in which he was considered as the most mysterious character in Schulz's stories. The fact that he was supposedly inspired by Jerzy Reitman, the founder of the sanatorium in Korostów n. Skole, described by Schulz to Romana Halpern<sup>89</sup>, ought to be supplemented by the naturally imposing literary inspiration of the author of *Republika marzeń*, i.e. the Blue-eyed people from Kubin's novel. Those were wise men residing in the suburbs of Pearl. Withdrawn, indifferent, and living in agreement with nature, possessing some mysterious profound knowledge on existence. They shared a strange bond with Patera, due to the incongruity of those old men with the organisation of the state. It was suspected that Patera, an alleged demiurge, was only a puppet in the hands of that community:

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<sup>85</sup> Ibid., p. 332. The name Blue-eyed was created through contradiction. Schulz noticed that Polish *enjoys* such contradictions, similarly to double negations.

<sup>86</sup> Ibid., pp. 347–348.

<sup>87</sup> A. Kubin, op. cit., p. 104.

<sup>88</sup> Vide the "Błękitnooki" [Blue-eyed] entry by Jerzy Jarzębski, in: *Słownik Schulzowski*, pp. 51–52.

<sup>89</sup> A few miles from Drohobycz, there is a very beautiful sanatorium for convalescents, where a dreamer created an asylum for people "suffering from the soul". (...) there is a beautiful completely desolate mountain slope overgrown with a park of several thousand roses and a field of carnations. There is a hotel fitted in the style of Hutsuls and Empir or Beidermeier, a very nice main hall, a dining room, something like a forest lodge, and a Polish manor. (...) Its own electrical hub, own post office, in short: a fortress in a mountain retreat. Ibidem., *Do Romany Halpern*, KL, p. 161. [English version translated from Polish]

The mystery of Patera was never solved. Perhaps the blue-eyed tribe were the real masters and used magic powers to galvanise a lifeless dummy into life, so creating and destroying the Dream Realm as they thought fit.<sup>90</sup>

Patera seemed a demiurge exactly through the fact of the endless marking of his presence in every aspect regarding the way Pearl operated. It was him, similarly to k.k. officials, who governed the administration, just like officials in ancient Greek states (e.g. in the Achean League), belonging to the body of 10 demiurges. Bureaucracy in Pearl resembled the notorious Habsburg reality well-known to Kubin.

'To receive an invitation to an audience you need, apart from your certificates of birth, baptism and marriage, your father's school-leaving certificate and your mother's confirmation of vaccination. In room 16, down the corridor on the left, you must give details of your financial situation, education and any decorations you have been awarded. A character reference for your father-in-law is desirable but not absolutely essential.<sup>91</sup>

Even more importantly, Patera governed the inhabitants' minds – when the bonds between the ruler and his subjects became loose, there occurred the so-called clap, a special resetting of the revolutionary and unlawful considerations of Pearleans.

But there are many – oh, how many! – who are not always willing to submit; new arrivals in particular try to kick against the pricks. Whenever that inner resistance against our immutable fate grows too strong, the Brainstorm comes and everyone suffers. Today was such a day.<sup>92</sup>

Paradoxically, Pearl also required its inhabitants to offer a strong representation of their individualism, though framed in the only possible forms of existence known from the k.k. monarchy:

And that's what counted in the Dream Realm, *to make a show of being something*, anything, even a rogue or a pickpocket or whatever.<sup>93</sup>

The idea of the state, assigned to Patera, also proposed the absolutely modern rule over plant and animal life. Pearl's nature was touched with xeromorphism.

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<sup>90</sup> A. Kubin, op. cit., p. 229.

<sup>91</sup> Ibid., p. 61.

<sup>92</sup> Ibid., pp. 88–89.

<sup>93</sup> Ibid., p. 56.

The pervasive greyness, and existence without properties enabled one to break that world.

It was a mystery where all this teeming multitude of animals came from. They were now the true masters of the city and clearly they knew it. In bed I could hear running and a clatter of hooves, as if I were in a large metropolis. Camels and wild asses wandered through the streets; it was dangerous to tease them.

In contrast to this abundance of animals, plant life disappeared more and more. Everything was nibbled and crushed, and there was no new growth. The avenues of limes along the Embankment and out towards the cemetery consisted of nothing more than bare trunks. The earth was steaming, as if it intended to spew out even more creatures. Small holes gave off warm, sickly-smelling fumes. The nights were wreathed in a strange half-light that blurred all the contours.<sup>94</sup>

The quoted description offers the most precise example of Schulz's inspiration by Kubin. The area of the Sanatorium from Schulz's story, similarly to Pearl, was inhabited by numerous dogs, and plants considered only as

I have already mentioned the black vegetation of the region. A certain kind of black fern deserves special mention: enormous bunches of it in vases are in the windows of every apartment here, and every public place. The fern is almost the symbol of mourning, the town's funeral crest.<sup>95</sup>

Packs of black dogs are often seen in the vicinity of the Sanatorium. Of all shapes and sizes, they run at dusk along the roads and paths, engrossed in their own affairs, silent, tense, and alert.<sup>96</sup>

Patera does not, however, rule everything. He is not the perfect ruler or, even less so, the perfect Creator, as in the process of creation things keep "eluding" him. It seems that he does not maintain the order of creation, the postulated ladder of beings<sup>97</sup>, the order of the actions of the demiurge described by Plato in *Timaeus*. Patera does not use the help of Archons. Or maybe he himself is only

<sup>94</sup> Ibid., p. 165.

<sup>95</sup> B. Schulz, *Sanatorium...*, p. 266.

<sup>96</sup> Ibid., p. 270.

<sup>97</sup> God the creator creates gods. Why does the Creator want the creation of humans: for the purposes of order, actually. To exhaust the scope of the term "living being." It consists of immortal and mortal beings. And since immortal ones already exist, the mortal need be created. The creator of the world has a problem with that because his own children need be immortal, and only the grandchildren or the creations of the children may be mortal. That is why he turns to his children calling them for help. He himself will give humans an immortal element – the mind; stars shall give them the mortal part. Vide Plato, "Timaeus", in: *The Dialogues of Plato*, vol. II, trans. W. Wytwicki, Unia Wydawnicza Verum, Kęty 1999, XIII, 41, BCD, pp. 690–691.

an Archon? And maybe that is why he does not predict the impending rebellion, the invasion of modernity, which appeared one day in the figure of a well-built American by the name of Hercules Bell.

I will never forget my first sight of him. In the doorway there appeared a man in his early forties, short and with massive shoulders. His features seemed to be a combination of bull and eagle, and everything was just slightly asymmetrical: a hook nose pushed to one side, a pronounced chin and a high, narrow, very angular forehead gave his head a kind of twisted recklessness. His black hair was thinning on top. He was wearing tails. He passed our table with short, springy steps.<sup>98</sup>

Bell's image remains in line with his modern behaviour, with the lack of attachment to conventions, and with the challenging of the honorary code. His religion is capitalism. His arrival, enabling the arrival of modernity, caused political unrest in the Dream Realm, which, on the narrations of the past, succumbed to an imminent destruction, just like the Austria-Hungary Monarchy.

He was yet another American in the works of writers in the Habsburg culture. In *Hotel Savoy*, governed by the mysterious director Kaleguropulos (who turned out to be a lift-boy), Roth described the expectations of the city and hotel – defined by Roth as a “layered cemetery”<sup>99</sup> at Bloomfield:

They expect Bloomfield everywhere: In the orphanage a chimney crashes down. No one puts it up again because every year Bloomfield gives something to the orphanage. Sick Jews do not go to the doctor because Bloomfield will be coming to pay the bill. There has been a subsidence at the cemetery, two merchants' shops have been burnt to the ground, they stand in the lane with their rolls of goods and it does not occur to them to have the shops put up again, otherwise what would they have to take up with Bloomfield?<sup>100</sup>

Yet Łódź inhabitants will never learn that creation depends on them. A contrary situation applied to the protagonist of *The Other Side*, who gradually became disillusioned with the greatness of Pearl, Patera, and even the American, who only personified strength and not wisdom, which was peculiar to the Blue-eyed

<sup>98</sup> A. Kubin, op. cit., p. 137.

<sup>99</sup> “The hotel no longer appealed to me: neither the stifling laundry, nor the gruesomely benevolent lift-boy nor the three floors of prisoners. This Hotel Savoy was like the world. Brilliant light shone out from it and splendour glittered from its seven storeys, but poverty made its home in its high places, and those who lived on high were in the depths, buried in airy graves, and the graves were in layers above the comfortable rooms of the well-nourished guests sitting down below, untroubled by the flimsy coffins overhead. I belong to those who are buried on high.” Vide J. Roth, *Hotel Savoy*, p. 38. [English version: Roth, J., *Hotel Savoy*, New York 2003]

<sup>100</sup> Ibid., p. 105.

people. "A world that was not always living had to be created piece by piece, and it was a continual process,<sup>101</sup>" said the resigned protagonist. Patera, in fact, as any of the demiurges described in this chapter, "(...) has had no monopoly of creation."<sup>102</sup> His dealings were always considered as ambiguous and two-fold. "The demiurge is a hybrid,<sup>103</sup>" thus concludes *The Other Side*. That ending, just like the name of the capital of the Dream Realm referred to the founding myth of gnosticism, to the *Hymn of the Pearl*, which was included in the apocryphal *Acts of Thomas*. The authorship of the *Hymn* has been assigned to Bardaisan, condemned by Christians for voicing views which denied the Resurrection. The *Hymn*, which utilised the dual understanding of the nature of Christ typical for Manichaeism, described the journey of the Emissary in order to regain the pearl. The entire journey led to understanding oneself and integrating with the potentially lost fragments of ourselves (the Regent, the Emissary's brother, remained throughout the latter's long journey with his parents at home, at the end of the work withdrawing, symbolically merging into one with his returning brother).

The demiurges of Roth, Kubin, Meyrink, and Schulz were metaphors for the creation of the passing world. The authors noticed the agony of a great culture. They were inspired by the state of decay. They described the Creator through his creations: the clumsy copies of outdated or modern ideas. The ruler cannot govern one of the most important aspects of creation: time. Any manipulation of time, either turning it back or restitution prove an illusion as big as the myth – they are only possible in mythical reality. Regardless of any actions aimed at stopping the inflow of modernising processes, modernity wins against utopia, and intrudes unnoticed everywhere regression has been postulated. Then there occurs a demise of the world styled to resemble a myth, and the triumph of modernity. Writers who believed in the possibility of escaping modernity, and the rescue of individuality were aware of the limitations of their actions – they agreed to escape into privacy, into the creation of their own mythologies, and transferring them onto paper.

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<sup>101</sup> A. Kubin, op. cit., p. 128.

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Monika Szyszka vel Syska

### **Creator’s freedom. Schulz’s late projects**

(Summary)

The article discusses the idea of creation coined by authors descended from the same, Austro-Hungarian cultural field, by: Bruno Schulz, Joseph Roth and Gustav Meyrink. Austro-Hungarian Monarchy created its own mythology based on nostalgia for the World, which was consigning to the dark recesses of history. The authors, conscious of inefficiency of contemporary culture, used the idea of Demiurge to show one of possible creating ideas.

Keywords: Austro-Hungarian Empire, Bruno Schulz, creation, crisis Demiurge, education, exegesis, gnosis, culture, Modernity, myth

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## **Totalitarianisms as systems of lawlessness (Miłosz's remarks)**

“Starting from unlimited freedom,  
I conclude with unlimited despotism.”  
(Fyodor Dostoevsky, *Demons*)

### **Gnostic freedom**

Miłosz's remarks on freedom have a biographical foundation. Already in his youth in Vilnius, the most important dimension of the experience of freedom for him was existence. Miłosz was not interested in the nation's liberty. In his poetry and articles, he wrote with the fervour of a revolutionary, yet the rebellion against social and economic inequality was for him just an ersatz for contesting specific existences. In “List do obrońców kultury”, published in *Po prostu* in 1936, he expressed his scepticism towards the Marxist project of mending the world: “Had I opposed the system because I felt solidarity with the mass of the defective, I would be lying.”<sup>1</sup> Young Miłosz was, in fact, rebelliously opposing the timeless markers of the human place in the world. Being overcome with the desire for existence without any limitations, and driven by his longing for infinitude, he craved a superhuman state, and since the human condition cannot achieve in earthly existence a godly superhuman nature, his freedom-focussed *yes* correlated with the exorbitant Prime – as reflected in his poetry and essays – transitioned into an eschatological *no* against the world enveloped in apocalyptic visions of the final extermination. The imperative of total freedom transitioned logically into a total rebellion – as extreme *yes* changes into absolute *no* because

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<sup>1</sup> Cz. Miłosz, “List do obrońców kultury”, in idem, *Przygody młodego umysłu. Publicystyka i proza 1931–1939*, A. Stawiarska (ed.), Znak, Krakow 2003, pp. 151–152. [English version translated from Polish].

on the reverse side of freedom, as Camus posited, there is rebellion.<sup>2</sup> We can call that rebellious and vengeful freedom gnostic. It evokes the most extreme metaphysical contestation. It far exceeds in its radical nature the versions of rebellion defined by Albert Camus in *The Rebel*. If the sons of Prometheus and Cain turn against evil Gods, they are, in fact, for them, Rulers of the world worth saving – worth the fire of progress and supposed justice. Only the rebellion shown by Byron did not fit Camus's typology, as for Cain in the mystery play of the English Romantic the Earth is not worth life but extermination. His claims against God as the cosmic botcher are gnostic (Marcionistic) and Manichaeistic. Among Slavs, the fullest presentation of Byronic folly was presented by, close in that respect to Miłosz, Fyodor Dostoevsky. A similar freedom from the entanglement of Earthly existence, and the resulting rebellion were shared by the persona of the poetry, prose, and essays of the Nobel Prize winner. His autobiographical *Three Winters*, and his pre-WWII essays were a record of his desire for freedom from any bodily or material limitations as being temporal and mortal, searches for freedom from interpersonal relations due to their limiting nature. Escapism and contempt for community as a biologised mass are characteristic of Miłosz's statements. That aversion is inevitable when freedom demands existence outside earthly time and space, when *yes* applies only to the existence of the Prime: on another Earth and under a different sky.

### Breakaway freedom

Gnostic freedom creates a division between the hell of the world and the heaven of the after-world. That anti-worldly separation was considered by, e.g. Dostoevsky, Nikolai Berdyaev, and Bogumił Jasinowski as the algorithm of the Russian vision of the world and man. Miłosz discovered it in himself as the *Eastern* particle.<sup>3</sup> Through it he possessed a sense of kinship with eastern cultists and religious thinkers. The eastern cult dualism imposes a vision of the world as a valley of death ruled by Satan, the Prince of This World. He defined an image of

<sup>2</sup> Vide: A. Camus, "Człowiek zbuntowany", in idem, *Eseje*, selection and trans. J. Guze, Państwowy Instytut Wydawniczy, Warsaw 1971, p. 265. At the foundation of metaphysical rebellion, according to Camus, lies the total yes in the name of which the rebel says no to the whole world and the human fate anticipated in it: "The metaphysical rebel rises to demand unity for the broken world. (...) By protesting against the human condition, against that which remains unfinished by death and broken by evil, the metaphysical rebellion is a justified demand of a joyful unity against the suffering of life and death." (ibid., p. 278). [English version translated from Polish]. Miłosz considered gnostic contestation demands as unfounded. That turn resulted in the crisis of his gnostic individualism.

<sup>3</sup> Cz. Miłosz, *Rodzinną Europą*, Czytelnik, Warsaw 1990, p. 149.

man as a soul bound by the body and matter. That duality is also eschatological. It bears apocalyptic longing – a desire for the end of the evil world. That was why Berdyaev considered Russians as naturally apocalyptic souls and, in relation to that terminal temperament, nihilistic towards worldliness. Miłosz accepted that diagnosis. In *Native Realm* (1958) particularly he emphasised that the anti-worldliness of the gnostic dualism towards worldliness implies nihilism. He offered examples that the fallen world is not worth engaging in for a dualist, fulfilling positive postulates, and sacrifice in defence of the socially accepted axiological order. The experienced good does not deserve any gratitude from a nihilist. It vanishes in the void of insatiation. Miłosz, similarly to Albert Camus, stressed that that nihilism was religious, not atheistic. He posited, mainly after Jasinowski and Berdyaev, possibly under the influence of *The Russian Idea* (1946), that Russian nihilism was apocalyptic, or, even more precisely, that it was a nihilism of gnostic eschatology.

### Redemptive freedom

It is worth noticing that gnostic freedom is a freedom of extremely individualistic religiosity: one which despises the world, and longs for its end. That freedom does not want to have anything to do with religious orthodoxy, or any form of a collective cult. It discovers an unknown God, foreign to others. It considers that discovery as being redemptive. Thus, the freedom is a freedom of self-redemption. A dualist cannot lose it, because they would lose redemption. Because their freedom is the freedom to redeem themselves, they would have to abandon their belief in self-redemption to depart from gnostic freedom. Since the essence of their belief is obstinate, i.e. belief in the self by the self being redeemed, they remain just as obstinate by their absolute freedom as a guarantee of the choice of gnosis. Religious free-thinking opens a follower to heretic beliefs and religious ideas. Through that openness, the gnostic individualist finds redemption through a reinterpretation of faith. It is based on dark theophany, discovering that existence is wrong as it is ruled by an evil demiurge. The Good God has nothing in common with the demiurge's creation. He remains in an acosmic space as *deus otiosus*. The extreme nature of religious individualism appears precisely in a dualist's openness to heretical ideas as the components of redemptive *gnosis*. A significant feature of Miłosz's religiosity was his common inclusion of Slavic syncretism – adopting the heretical ideas of the religion of gnosis.

### Gnostic freedom as fate

In gnostic freedom, the power of the contestation of worldliness is the power of one's desire for a world not as it is, but as it should be. Freedom which says *yes* to the world it desires, demands immortality in contrast to that which is mortal, it is a desire of the timelessness contrary to that which is temporal, it is fuelled by the unifying desire for self-redemption contrary to wasting life in everyday loitering, finally, it is a desire for godliness contrary to the status of Eve's exiles on the wretched Earth. That is the essence of the predominance of gnostic freedom. Motivated by the desire for immortality, accessing timelessness, belief in self-redemption, and godliness, it becomes fate. It is the freedom of galley slaves to existential sensitivity. It is constantly lurking. It is intended. The act of realising it is like revealing predestination. It is a burden and a curse which, as in the case of Miłosz, the galley slave sometimes tries to escape through abandoning the desires for immortality, timelessness, self-redemption, and godliness. Gnostic freedom discovers it is a slave to selfishness, which makes it subject to usurpation, and the supporting operations of a speculative mind. It realises that it is the subject of a contrived self-redemption. It is a freedom of the necessary, i.e. involuntary taking redemption into *one's own hands*. The religious individualist discovers that they are slaves to their religious wilfulness. Its strength lies in one's selfishly ensuring one's eternal life. It is a freedom of a personality subject to solipsism all the way to egolatriy. They realise that the freedom is the freedom of a demigod on Earth, and that is their tragedy as they discover that their freedom is hostage to the image their demigodness.

The tragedy of having realised the temptations of anthropotheism was discussed in Miłosz's essays before WWII, and it remained a persevering theme in his later collections of essays, novels, and poetry.

### The freedom-necessity opposition

The division between the world and the after-world prime (the gnostic Pleroma) means a separation, and a transition to a binary opposition system of two dimensions: the realm of worldly necessities and escapist freedom. Bogumił Jasinowski, after Nikolai Berdyaev who authored *Dostoevsky: An Interpretation*, wrote "the sense of the division into reality and perfection, or even a type of delight in internal contradiction and psychological disharmony", and considered "the psychological disposition, specific for the Russian nature" as the most impor-

tant<sup>4</sup>. A specialist on Russia, he stressed the enormity of the Slavic ideal: “We need to add a word or two of explanation in relation to the thesis of the duality of the after-world perfection, and worldliness within the mental history of Byzantium, and later Russia. That duality, as discussed above, is contrary to freedom or necessity, contrary to individual consciousness, immortal and godly, and the society-state bond, bad and necessary.”<sup>5</sup>

The enormously inbred (and thus split) will of a dualist, who wishes to control only themselves – not the will of God, state, society, the obligations of tradition and customs – inevitably and painfully enters into conflict with that which is not theirs. That which is not their own seems necessary. In the gnostic experience of freedom, that which is necessary is not only incidental, but mostly it is associated with the timeless flaws of the body and matter. Gnostic freedom manifests its opposition towards their decay, stench, senility, atrophy, ergo: mortalisation. That freedom is also irritated by such obligations (necessities) of the body as: satisfying hunger, thirst, need of warmth, and, most of all, sexual drive. The experience of gnostic freedom expressed in Miłosz's works was peculiar for its consideration of the everyday needs of primitive man as an unbearable thrall.

Because an anti-worldly dualist enters into conflict with those needs, they even more so experience their power, which they considered a sign of superhuman tyranny. Thus split, they radiate the experience of the necessity onto the figure of the Creator as a tyrant, an evil demiurge. Given to existence, they are for gnostic freedom an insult, and a source of permanent dissension. Unbound in its struggle with the necessities of the body and matter, it achieves the antipodes of contestation. The sensory body is the enemy of a gnostic, and leads to a division with the spirit as a body of drives taking freedom onto a lead of necessity. It evokes disgust because it is a prison for freedom. It would be difficult to imagine a more extreme duality of the spirit and the body than that in the gnostic experience of freedom in the shackles of innate rules. Therefore, the whole nature seems to a gnostic dualist as demiurgic, subject to a material cycle of birth, copulation, and death.

The principle gnostic freedom discovered in nature is the eternal devouring of beings. As proof of the demiurgic character of nature, that freedom delights in the image of nature as carnage. Therefore, when a gnostic dualist finds for their world-view structure an anti-naturalist ideology, they become a fanatic. The belief in the new order is their belief in themselves. They will rather die than abandon it. When they hold the means of state-sanctioned enforcement, they will unleash terror, and will develop a world of planned and mechanical extermination unknown to nature. They become what they had fought.

<sup>4</sup> B. Jasinowski, *Wschodnie chrześcijaństwo a Rosja. Na tle rozbioru pierwiastków cywilizacyjnych Wschodu i Zachodu*, Instytut Naukowo-Badawczy Europy Wschodniej, Vilnius 1933, p. 4. [English version translated from Polish].

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 7.

### Crisis of gnostic freedom

The division between exorbitant freedom, and life's necessities leads to a crisis of gnostic consciousness. In Miłosz's autobiographical creations, it was a crisis of gnostic voluntarism. It was most visible before WWII in the essays *O milczeniu*, *Zejście na ziemię*, *Radość i poezja*, *Dystans spojrzenia*<sup>6</sup>. They were filled with anxiety resulting from Miłosz's realisation of the temptations of gnostic freedom as wilfulness. Their author already understood that the power of gnostic freedom is destructive. When nihilistically turned against the world, it destroys the worldly life of its carrier. That apocalyptic freedom is, in relation to worldliness, capable of wilfulness's extravagance. Social ideology is not a remedy to its existential whims. In *Zejście na ziemię* (1938), the author stated the fiasco of the transition from gnostic freedom under the banner of Marxist historic necessities. He demanded freedom to develop from the position of calling for godliness against passing and death, but he already understood the folly of a terrific contestation of the world. He discovered the barrenness of the earth presented to man who does not want to mend the world, but rather strives for final redemption from it. He understood that the freedom to escape *from* the world is an invertive freedom, turning into its opposite of acquiescence towards the ideology of life's necessities. The author reported on his realisation that the result of the inability to immanently reconcile mortality with the body and matter is associated with aversion, disgust, and resentment towards reality. Therefore, he declared in his psychological plan the intent to restrain his megalopsychological rebelliousness. In his metaphysical plan, he declared his coming to terms with mortality, with the "Eve's exile" condition, declaring his ability to accept the conditions of existence as given for earthly self-fulfilment. In his imagination, he passed the gates of death like Faustus as it is a trial of hell releasing him from the pestering fear of mortal life. "Descends to the bottom of hell on Earth, and travels those circles of fire flickering like the furnaces of Westphalia, untouched by the flames."<sup>7</sup> In an essay *Radość i poezja* (1939), he considered becoming accustomed to death and evil as a condition for becoming accustomed to life, i.e. a condition on which one's ability to accept the limitations of existence depends. It is a condition for the ability to suppress the gnostic contestation of the world – to prevent the freedom *from*, and its transition into freedom *to*. The author of the pre-WWII essays, having identified an existential thorn, or husk of dualism between man and his life, no longer wanted to deaden its pricking with a substitute political rebellion. He wished to solve that problem there where it had been born, i.e. within the ex-

<sup>6</sup> Vide: Cz. Miłosz, *Przygody młodego umysłu...*

<sup>7</sup> Cz. Miłosz, "Radość i poezja", in: idem, *Przygody młodego umysłu...*, p. 281.

istential plan by raising himself for accepting its elemental data. He rejected the domain of political necessities in the name of freedom measured by the awareness of the folly of wilfulness – in the name of positive existential freedom. He understood that positive freedom requires an agora, yet it does not have to be a forum for political activity. It can be apolitical art and culture. They did not require the artist to conceal the marks of godliness, and, at the same time, enabled him to pay tribute to necessity, though not for the price of adapting freedom to the requirements for accepting collective ideologies.

Since existential thorns include: a multitude of realities thwarting the fulfilment of the desire for the Unity, the diffusion of the destructive imperative of the Entirety, and the confusing of the defiling spirit of Purity of the subject consciousness, one must acquire an ability to adapt the order to the *I* of the Only, the Entire, and the Pure the trials not – *I* of chaos *here* and *now*, which threatens with multitude, diffusion, confusion, but enables one to be victorious in that trial, and continue to regain the verified: Unity, Entirety, Purity – check *être* (eternal) within the crucible of *devenir* (variable).

### **Obduracy of the antinomy of freedom and necessity**

Miłosz's pre-WWII attempts at reconciling freedom and necessity were of a declarative nature. The destructive wilfulness sought a bridle for itself. The concocted affirmation of necessity was of a temporary nature. It consisted of a rational pragmatism, which, however, did not neutralise outbursts of gnostic freedom. It offered hope of a unity of contradictory elements (*coincidentia oppositorum*). Before WWII, the issue of freedom and necessity became the tragedy of the *I* of the Only. The poet developed his imperative of sensible acceptance of necessity. In eroticism, as opposed to ascetism, he sometimes was a libertine – a fickle indulgence for the body as the nest of drives that cannot be curtailed. In his relationship with Jarosław Iwaszkiewicz, the master of the craft, there existed a visible submissiveness in their letters – years later referred to by Miłosz himself as *kolanopokłonność* [knee-bowing]. In war-time reality, that pragmatism, bursting as a result of the history revealing the demiurgic terror, transformed into the cynicism of professing the necessity of Hegel and Engels. He needed the aegis of a simplified anti-personal doctrine. Influenced by Tadeusz Kroński, Miłosz readily considered that freedom was realised necessity. He combined Darwinism with the philosophy of history under the banner of historic necessities creating an original biological philosophy of history. Through a Hegelian initiation, he found himself in opposition to the resistance, and to the totalitarian authorities after WWII, as that which exists is intelligent, and intelligence is shared only by that

which has the power to exist, and becomes victorious. Miłosz, having discovered the necessity to subject his will to the rules of nature in order to establish bearable relations with reality, transferred that rationalism about history – considered in the light of Hegelianism as a set of processes both inevitable and intelligent. However, just like Marxism before WWII, in the years after WWII, particularly after emigrating in 1951, he was fighting Hegelianism as an ideology legitimising Soviet colonialism. In the following decades of his American exile, he rejected Hegelianism not as much within its historical dimension, as in the existential and metaphysical plan as a school of legitimising the necessity of scientism making Earth a materialistic Ulro.

### Totalitarian wilfulness

Free will within the folly of wilfulness remained the central focus of Miłosz's consideration of the roots of totalitarianism. Before WWII, the discord between freedom and worldly necessities became his view of the European mind in the age of quasi-religious ideologies. His biographical experiences brought the poet a conviction of the danger of captivity as a result of escaping from freedom both when a human being strives *for* the world, as they may succumb to the pernicious submissiveness towards the institutions of the totalitarian state, and when they escape *from* the world, as that may be forced and destructive escapism – resulting from their inability to consider related existences as their own. Nihilism coupled with cynicism can, in that instance, suggest far-reaching compromises with the necessity to cause historic evil – for example, to justify the necessity of terror. Miłosz was desperate to find a remedy for the scandals of gnostic wilfulness, yet his alliances with social and historic necessities (“New Faiths”) proved to be inefficient attempts at overcoming the escapist *from*. Due to his problems with freedom, he became a thorough analyst of it. He shaped his searches in the form of literary works. He considered them as laboratory studies, and himself as a research tool. Just like Romantics, he treated his biography according to the principle of *pars pro toto*. He considered how freedom led in the 20<sup>th</sup> c. to the folly of wilfulness as a method of looking into himself. He analysed the sicknesses of freedom in the West from a greater distance. Its eastern distortions were as close to him as his own shirt.

The criticism of the denigrations of freedom in the West conducted by Miłosz was close to that of Mickiewicz within the aspect of secularisation of beliefs and religious ideas. The Polish Romantic, e.g. in *Księgi narodu polskiego i pielgrzymstwa polskiego*, related freedom to monotheism, and captivity to secular polytheism. He argued that in modern Europe, the role of God was played by the calves

of secular values. He considered that polytheism to be modern neo-paganism. He thought that it led towards substituting God with God-man. Miłosz noticed that the Darwinian principle of the fight for existence between the stronger and the weaker had become a dogma considered as a modern fetish within European thought. It served as a basis for decreeing the confrontational nature of human reality, and elevated the will to fight to the top of all values. Miłosz concluded that the contamination of Darwinism with the national ideology fertilised Nazism, while the Enlightenment's anthropology of the naturally good man gave rise to communism. Even before WWII, he sought intellectual foundation for the etiologies of totalitarianisms. In an essay entitled *Dystans spojrzenia* (1939), he considered naturalistic monism and Enlightenment humanism as their roots: "Theoreticians, closely examining those murky waters of 20<sup>th</sup> century consciousness, are pessimists, and they're entitled to that. Some see the causes of evil in the detachment of ethics from its metaphysical basis, within the legacy of positivism and naturalism, attempting to reduce the phenomenon of the spirit to the category of time-space phenomena, and thus to negate the difference between human and animal nature (Kozak, Chévalier). Others in an excessively bright humanism..."<sup>8</sup>

The author of *Legenda nowoczesności*, written during an occupation night, argued that capitalism gave Europeans a new form of individualism. It subordinated their innovativeness to the lust for money. Having been seduced by its power, they stopped living according to a will subject to God's will. They subjected their freedom to mercantile goals. Miłosz considered that will for wealth as the modern equivalent of megalomania. Free-market democracy proved, according to the essayist, its incubator. He considered that megalomania as the blind will to magnify a unitary being and communities at the cost of others. In the capitalist law of absolute competition distorted in colonialism, he saw the kernel of the ideology of racial domination. In his eyes, capitalism associated market freedom with the will for financial power. In essence, capitalism legalised the right to fight for one's existence. Balzac's achievement was that he indicated the legalisation of the principle of the survival of the fittest, according to which the stronger individuals devour the weaker ones. The author of the essay *Legenda miasta potwora*<sup>9</sup> (1942) valued Balzac mainly for his bold analogy of the natural world and the world of economics.

According to Miłosz, Stendhal in *The Red and the Black* presented that same process of the cult of will for power in the capitalist struggle for existence in the form of the god of career. That modern deity lured Julian Sorel to the expanse of permissivism. He associated freedom with the will for achieving social rank –

<sup>8</sup> Cz. Miłosz, "Dystans spojrzenia", in: idem, *Przygody młodego umysłu...*, pp. 292–293. [English version translated from Polish].

<sup>9</sup> Vide: Cz. Miłosz, "Legenda miasta potwora", in idem, *Legenda nowoczesności*, Wydawnictwo Literackie, Krakow 1996, p. 18.

regardless whether within a church (black) or military (red) hierarchy. “However, both Stendhal’s and the readers’ sympathies lie with the protagonist.”<sup>10</sup> That sympathy was considered by Miłosz as an expression of western nihilism. In his eyes, the fetishisation of money and career detached European rationalism from ethics. Without it, the rationalism of social Darwinism became dangerously irrational. The essayist’s argument was: where the mind falls asleep, there the demons of capitalist and colonial voluntarism awake. The will of the European eventually detached from religion as the axiological foundation. That European irrationalism of the liberated will, born from pragmatism, reached its peak in the work by Andre Gide entitled *The Vatican Cellars*. Miłosz devoted an essay to the transition from the European will to total wilfulness with the telling title *Zupełne wyzwolenie* [Total liberation] (1942 ?). The actions of the protagonist in Gide’s novel were framed within the categories of necessity and freedom: “Lafcadio threw an old man he did not know out of a speeding train – he had no goal there, the crime will not benefit him in any way. He did that to find out whether ‘act gratuit’ was possible, i.e. an act independent of any determinants, the higher proof of man’s absolute freedom. (...) All those instances consisted of idolisation of will, and all the cases were founded on the obsession of necessity. (...) Suppressed resentment exploded in a rebellion against necessity, seeking at least an illusion of freedom.”<sup>11</sup> In the essays *Legenda woli* (1942 ?) and *Zupełne wyzwolenie*, he argued that in philosophy, wilfulness had been sanctioned in the writings of Frederick Nietzsche. Considering his interest in the philosophy of Arthur Schopenhauer, which he expressed in an essay entitled *Religijność Zdziechowskiego* (1943), one ought to note that Miłosz regarded as his own view the fact that the will which exists in nature and human history of one being to dominate other beings had led the philosopher to dark pessimism. Schopenhauer considered that will as a burden difficult to carry. His position towards human nature was critical rather than affirmative. He postulated man should remain self-critical towards blind will, not self-affirmative. Zdziechowski, who offered lectures on Schopenhauer’s philosophy and discussed it in *Pesymizm, romantyzm a podstawy chrześcijaństwa*, regarded blind will as an equivalent of a gnostic demiurge. Miłosz, familiar with the theses of the author of the study *The World As Will and Representation*, considered the inversion of the notion of blind will as the essence of Nietzsche’s philosophical revolution. He presented the philosopher as the one who nullified the *blind* predicate to be substituted with power. Thus, he definitely liberated will from the harness of Christian axiology. After Nietzsche: “thus is the procedure of ‘strong man’: prove to herself/himself her/his own freedom, own unlimited ability. Human deeds are determined through a chain of causes. I remain under the burden of the fatal nature of

<sup>10</sup> Cz. Miłosz, “Legenda woli”, in idem, *Legendy nowoczesności...*, p. 43.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid.

the social machine, yet I – I am free, and I can do that for which I can find courage, overcoming my smallness, fear, and emotion.”<sup>12</sup> Miłosz presented Nietzsche as an opposer of Christian traditions inspired by Darwinism, who bereaved will of any moral inhibitions. He adored will for its power. He also brought to heights of sacred axioms the principle of self-affirmation of the instinctive side of human personality. He agreed with Lev Shestov, who juxtaposed Nietzsche with Dostoevsky as the prophet of the coming totalitarianisms in the work *Dostojewski i Nietzsche. Filozofia tragedii*. According to Miłosz, “Nietzsche, by calling: ‘*Pereat veritas, fiat vita*’ – may the truth perish, may there be life – cast a spell, which explained almost the entire intellectual ferment of the last century.”<sup>13</sup> By rejecting the criterion of the truth, the German philosopher proclaimed a new voluntarism to Europe and the world: who cares whether it is blind, if it is the will of superhuman power. He disdained the truth, which in turn ousted European freedom to the antipodes of Nazi madness. During his French exile, Miłosz agreed with Camus in that Nietzscheanism was a sign of the malady of the European mind, and an important root of the race totalitarianism. For the Polish poet, it was obvious as he considered that Darwinism was the common denominator of the philosophy and ideology of Nazism – the enforcement of blind will of superhumans to dominate sub-humans.

### Philosophy of wilfulness

When in America, Miłosz focussed on Dostoevsky, and found in him a prophet, who offered the most insightful vision of the outcomes of the European degeneration of freedom into wilfulness, who saw in the Western and Eastern wilfulness a degeneration of freedom leading to totalitarianisms. He focussed on that issue in a paper *Dostojewski a zachodnia wyobraźnia religijna* included in the *Ziemia Ulro* collection. There, he presented Dostoevsky as a prophet, who foretold the deviation of freedom as a result of the capturing of minds with false notions. That prophet of the time of contempt considered the idea of elevating man to replace God as the most dangerous of all. Miłosz stressed that for the great Russian writer, it had been a spew of the mad path of humanity, i.e. the diffusion throughout Europe of the Enlightenment idea of human self-affirmation of naturally good man. He noted in an essay entitled *Legenda wyspy* that the Rousseauistic idea of good will and the naturally good man became the foundation the anthropology of Auschwitz. That served as the foundation for the development

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<sup>12</sup> Ibid., p. 42.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid., p. 50.

of the idea of anthropotheism defined by Ludwig Feuerbach in *The Lectures on the Essence of Religion*, which gave man Godly prerogatives. As a result, Christian eschatology was replaced by secular eschatology, i.e. socialist and nationalistic projects for building heaven on earth. That was why both for Berdyaev and Miłosz *The Grand Inquisitor* in *The Brothers Karamazov* was a brilliant work. Miłosz's statements on the legend collected in the volume *Rosja. Widzenia transoceaniczne*<sup>14</sup> indicated the influence of Berdyaev on the mind of the Polish poet. The legend... was also for him a prophetic foreshadowing of the delivering to the emperor that which is the emperor's and that which is god's. It was a prophecy on the human abandonment of freedom for the certainty of earthly joy. It foreshadowed ideological "New Faiths." It prophesied an escape from freedom towards fanaticism triggered by the notions of a glorious worldly future.

According to Miłosz, Darwinism became the breeding ground for those notions, while fanaticism was a result of considering the findings of Darwinism as universal – binding both in the natural world and in human communities. Considering them as binding within history implied the error of accepting the *homo homini lupus* principle, i.e. the opportunistic affirmation of wolf-like rules of survival, and, eventually, the admiration of the wilfulness of races exterminating other races considered deficient, ergo: unworthy of existence. Freedom at the folly of the blind will for power became, according to Miłosz, in the German totalitarianism a wilfulness for killing, carnage, and extermination. It became the sacred will, motivated through eugenics, of the master race, for which it was befitting to destroy the useless sub-humans in order to gain Lebensraum (living space).

Miłosz found the essence of the distortion of freedom in the German totalitarianism in the falseness of the *pro naturam* self-affirmation. Similarly to Dostoevsky, he saw in it the kernel of the dethroning of man-God by God-man, who elevated the savagery of human nature to the level of godliness. The time of war gave the poet the conviction that an ideology which draws inspiration from the spirit of Darwinian principles, i.e. draws its banner from the earth's Spirit, inevitably brings to the world the carnage of the Spirit of history – the spirit of nations and classes. From that stemmed Miłosz's postulate of opening one's eyes to Darwinism so that freedom remained *contra naturam* – aware of what dark powers it offers its *veto*, so that man could fulfil themselves in accordance with their controlled nature, while their freedom controlled their personal darkness, not for the darkness to rule and destroy their freedom. Miłosz's essay entitled *Legenda wyspy* indicated that Darwinism is necessary in human cognition, so that people do not remain in the clutches of earthly powers. The awareness of the power of Darwinian laws is necessary to remain independent of them. It facilitates wilful-

<sup>14</sup> Vide: Cz. Miłosz, *Rosja. Widzenia transoceaniczne*, vol. I, *Dostojewski – nasz współczesny*, B. Toruńczyk (ed.), Fundacja „Zeszytów Literackich”, Warsaw 2010.

ness, as it helps man realise what powers of nature they summon in themselves as its part. One such power is the instinctive treatment of space as a realm of ideological purity. His war-time essays (*Legenda wyspy*) proved that it was the common unawareness of the immanent nature of the deadly powers of nature and human nature that led to the deformations of naturalistic monism in politics. The joyful celebrations of the discoveries of the principles of willpower constituted, according to Miłosz, the culmination of the captivity of the West European mind. "It may be the case that that version of life's devotees proved the most dangerous for the West."<sup>15</sup> In that context, he emphasised in his later essays and poems Charles Darwin's objections towards evolutionism as a devilish theory. He argued that the biologist realised the world-view dangers of Darwinism. According to Miłosz, an intellectual aberration impelled millions of Germans to escape from freedom to the ideology of the race of a totalitarian state as Nazism appealed to their natural drives and instincts. It infested Germans with an affirmation of that ideology. It defined for worldly life devotees a goal to capture Lebensraum for themselves. Therefore, Nazism turned Germans into the joyful media of dark Darwinism. Extreme wilfulness gave them captivity within the thrall of deadly laws, to which they became obedient servants as Nazism did not leave them anything with which to defend themselves against the natural rules of selection and annihilation. To conclude: the initial assumption of Miłosz's essays was a conviction that freedom cognitively opened to the influence of primitive laws of nature shall remain freedom, provided that it is *contra naturam* in relation to them.

### Cultural foundation of Darwinism

Miłosz's war-time essays indicated that German totalitarianism was a wilfulness organised against freedom. It was founded in European individualism. The degeneration of wilfulness consisted of the mind's dismissal of moral and rational inhibitions under the influence of natural monism. Miłosz saw the essence of the German scandal in the subjection of politics to emotion, primal inspiration, and pagan mythology. He saw the beginning of Nazism in the concept of irrational freedom – following intuition, feeling, emotion, and political exaltation. Therefore, in his war-time essays, Miłosz remained disinclined even to Bergson's intuition as he was convinced that the opening of the will to the suggestions of all types of irrationalism opened in Germany the gates for the insane ideology.

The German madness led to a mutation of the urban ethos. By spurning the truth, as everyone has such a truth, according to Nietzsche, as they need for their

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<sup>15</sup> Cz. Miłosz, *Legenda woli...*, p. 52.

life goals, Germans derailed the ethos grounded in the Protestant foundation. They chose the banner of science interpreted within the spirit of extermination based on the race criterion. According to the essayist, an extreme version of individualism was the subjection of the will of Germans to the ethos of racial war. It required them to sacrifice European rationalism together with Christian traditions. It was negated through the unification of the Romantic will with Darwinian laws of the survival of the fittest – considered as intelligent. Thus, the god of Germans was considered the granter of homicidal laws. Inspired by the laws of nature, they grew to believe that He was with them, especially when they were killing. The extermination of the weak became for them an experience of freedom unified with the laws of god's nature. Miłosz's analysis indicated that Nazism (inspired by Darwinism) elevated killing to the top of religious exaltation. In that mental condition, Germans experienced killing as an act of unity with the god of nature. An important cause of their mania was the urge to transcend death, as the discoverers of Darwinistic revelations deserved, in their eyes, to be the medium of god's laws. Once unified with the immortal god, they fell into a sense of already sharing immortality here: on Earth. The ethos of extermination proved for them an ethos of self-extermination.

### **Gnostic freedom in the ages of secularisation**

Miłosz got to know communist totalitarianism by being its proponent. Though he rarely returned after WWII to Germans possessed by Nazism, the phenomenon of the fall of freedom into wilfulness of the Eastern type became the main focus in his works, and continued to interest him throughout his later life. It was expressed most fully during his exile in France and America. Communism, similarly to Nazism, was for Miłosz a result of secularisation. However, he did notice differences in the process of the secularisation of the Orthodox Church. His knowledge of Russia enabled the poet to capture the differences between German and Russian wilfulness. Both forms were, in fact, examples of extreme sicknesses of freedom, yet their origins had been different. The differences of the religious movements had a decisive influence on the differences of the intellectual captivities in the Nazi and Soviet totalitarianisms.

Dualism remained at the centre of Miłosz's consideration of Eastern freedom. He carefully traced Eastern cults as he considered Russians as the successors of a gnostic and Manichean understanding of good and evil. He argued that in gnostic and Manichean (Bogomilian) cults, the opposition between the spirit and the body, the ideal and reality, and the over-world and the world reached the extreme level particular to Russians. He found dualism as a model for analys-

ing Russian culture in Jasinowski's work entitled *Wschodnie chrześcijaństwo a Rosja* (1933). That model had already been used by Berdyaev in a work entitled *Dostoevsky: An Interpretation* (1923). Jasinowski, however, in a breakthrough discovery, concluded that it was a gnostic-Manichean dualism. Berdyaev applied that gnostic-Manichean model of dualism to the fullest only in his work entitled *The Russian Idea* (1946). However, he did not quote Jasinowski, but Adolf Harnack. In the remarks, he offered a single sentence of commentary on the concept of the German religious scholar: "Harnack asserts that there is among the Russians a disposition to Marcionism."<sup>16</sup> Berdyaev considered that statement to be true. Miłosz, being prepared through the lectures of Marian Zdziechowski, shared the view of Jasinowski, which he considered accurate throughout his life. In relation to Russia, he considered as true the statement: "an isolated formation of individual consciousness, which displays a character formally less concise, and less coherent than in the West (sometimes applicable even to the dualistic division), while in terms of its contents, it is transcendently-contemplatively aimed at the after world, and diverted from worldliness, which is negatively and pessimistically disposed to socio-political bonds, to the entire worldly reality in fact. The gnostic-Manichean dualism of good and evil transforms easily into another opposition pair: into the antithesis of the individual 'I', which adores freedom and is diverted from the earthly and evil in its fabric reality, and the reality based on 'the ruler of this world', i.e. Satan or his state, thus, eventually, in the State of generalness."<sup>17</sup> In cultism, and the saturation of the Orthodox Church with dualistic elements, Miłosz saw, after Jasinowski and Berdyaev, the answer to the question on the origins in the Eastern mentality of the gap between the zones of earthly necessities and freedoms. And why Eastern freedom is *implicite* anti-worldly. In fact, all agreed that the "gnostic-Manichean dualism formed as a prelude to the dualism of ideals and reality, freedom and compulsion."<sup>18</sup> Miłosz shared Jasinowski's conviction that: "One could, in fact, talk about (as German Romantic philosophy did) the antithesis of freedom and necessity as the basic stream of general human history,"<sup>19</sup> but he also thought that the dilemma possessed a strictly Slavic nature. In the East (the poet was his own example that it applied not only to Russia), freedom turned, principally, against the evil world, itself become its own reverse, i.e. wilfulness. Justyna Kurczak offered the following summary of the concept of the birth of Eastern civic freedom, and Eastern wilfulness in her work entitled *Wschodnie chrześcijaństwo a Rosja*: "While in modern times in Western culture, there occurred an evolution the axis of which was the liberation of 'man

<sup>16</sup> M. Berdyaev, *Rosyjska idea...*, p. 270. [Berdyaev, M. *The Russian Idea*. New York 1948].

<sup>17</sup> B. Jasinowski, op. cit., p. 5.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid., p. 7.

and citizen,' the emancipation of the individual, in Russian culture there consolidated, according to Jasinowski, the gnostic negation of the worldly order by the individual, for whom collective life is filled with evil, whereas the perfect order can symbolise both the autocrat and the collective. He had a very strong sense of the division into the ideal and reality, into the individual absolute freedom 'out of this world' and the acceptance of the society-state reality characterised by extreme omnipotence and compulsion."<sup>20</sup>

In Miłosz's analyses, as he remained under the influence of Jasinowski, dualism was a model of mental structure, without which it is not possible to explain the nihilistic character of Russian freedom. The apocalyptic anti-worldliness of the Russian mentality (the religion of dualism) fertilised its nihilism being expressed in the disdain for nature, for the values of the earthly material and spiritual culture, for law and economics, and most of all for morality in politics and social life. Nikolai Beryaev, who influenced Jasinowski, found that mental state in the following passage of *The Diary* from the 1840s by Aleksandr Nikitenko: "a pathetic sight of our contemporary society. There are neither any lofty pursuits, nor lawfulness, simplicity, or fair morals, in short: nothing which would indicate a healthy, natural and energetic development of moral forces... The deprivation of the society is so high that the notions of honour and justice are considered either as weaknesses or a manifestation of Romantic exaltation... Our education is pure falseness... Why should we care about gaining knowledge when our life and society are hostile towards grand ideas and truths, when any attempts at fulfilling any thought of justice, good, and common benefit is met with persecution and stigmatisation as if they were crimes?"<sup>21</sup> As one can see, the systems in Russia change, but Russia shall remain the same as long as the state of things described by Nikitenko continues. Following Berdyaev, Jasinowski assumed that "In public life in Russia, extreme maximalism evokes polar attitudes: rebellious or filled with endless humility, verging on self-annihilation."<sup>22</sup> Miłosz was discovering that eternal Russia. He discovered its relic religiosity as being constitutive. He considered the rule of the tzars and communism as the guises of autocracy. He considered the duality of exorbitant intentions, and opposite necessary actions as the essence of the Russian mentality, genetically explaining its political fate. The chronic conflict between ideas and deeds within the practices of social and political life, the illusionary façade nature of the state and its institutions – that is the proper social system of Russia, the condition of its fabric, and the actual reality.

<sup>20</sup> J. Kurczak, "Rosyjski komunizm w perspektywie polskiej myśli filozoficznej", in: M. Broda, J. Kurczak, P. Waingertner, *Komunizm w Rosji i jego polskie interpretacje*, Wydawnictwo Ibidem, Lodz 2006, p. 44. [English version translated from Polish].

<sup>21</sup> As cited in: M. Berdyaev, *Rosyjska idea*, trans. J.C. – S.W., Stowarzyszenie Kulturalne Fron-da, Warsaw 1999, p. 78.

<sup>22</sup> J. Kurczak, op. cit., p. 45.

That mental state is the true enemy of Russians. It builds their self-destructive civilisation. Russians, the born anti-worldly dualists, apart from some exceptions unaware of the state, build that system together with the authorities.

The model of the dualistic analysis was also considered accurate in the late-20<sup>th</sup> c. by Boris Uspensky and Yuri Lotman, within the diagnostics of the states of social psychology in Russia, as it explained the etiology of the Russian mentality as gnostic freedom fertilising nihilism described, e.g. by Nikitin. Therefore, it is noteworthy that Berdyaev discovered the adequacy of the model under the influence of Dostoevsky in the initial decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> c., when he analysed the Russian dualism in relation to the anti-worldly nature of nihilism motivated through the will for apocalypse restoring like apocatastasis a different Earth under a different sky: "The antinomial polarity of the Russian soul combines nihilism with religious pursuit of the end of the world, to a new revelation, a new Earth, and a new sky. Russian nihilism is polluted with Russian apocalypticism. That type of spiritual disposition considerably hinders the work of the nation, the creation of the values of culture, and it is not conducive to any spiritual discipline. That was the focus of Konstantin Leontiev when he said that a Russian can be a saint, but he can never be a man of honour. Honour entails moral mediocrity, a bourgeois virtue which is not interesting for apocalypticism and nihilists. That quality proved fatal for the Russian nation as saints include only the chosen few, while the majority is doomed to a life without sanctity. Only a few achieve the higher spiritual life, while the majority of people prove to have a below average cultural life."<sup>23</sup>

Miłosz, following that train of thought on Russia in *Native Realm*, considered the Russians' approach to truth significant. He noted that the lenient approach to facts in social life was characteristic of the Eastern culture. For example, according to dualistic convictions, our statements on facts are defective truths. Those polluted earthly truths cannot access the Truth: The truth of truths. Alain Besançon noted that in Russia, *Pravda* signifies not only truth, but also justice and obedience towards God, who is the primary source of truth and justice. *Istina* signifies positive actual truth, one which appears in front of one's eyes, and is verifiable. *Istina* is something less dignified than *pravda*. The distortions of the prophetic truth, *istina*, are of no major significance as over it there shines *pravda* as the sanctuary. That enables Russians to lie honestly, wholeheartedly (which is often noticed by foreigners).<sup>24</sup> The dualism of the earthly *istina* and the heavenly Truth entails the typical Eastern practical conclusion: in everyday life, it is not worth pursuing truth as either way it is always only a partial truth, i.e. a partial

<sup>23</sup> M. Berdyaev, *Światopogląd Dostojewskiego...*, p. 11.

<sup>24</sup> A. Besançon, *Święta Ruś*, trans. Ł. Maślanka, Fundacja Świętego Mikołaja Redakcja „Teologii Politycznej”, Warsaw 2012, p. 36.

lie. A lie does not deserve to be condemned as it is necessitated by the earthly deficiency. According to Miłosz, the fact that Russians abandoned the position of seekers of truth is not surprising as it is obvious in earthly reality. It is forced by specific existences. Therefore, earthly necessities evoke hatred, but that hatred, Miłosz continued, constituted only an alibi for nihilism. Precisely that suppressed idiosyncrasy is its birthplace. The mother of that nihilism is hatred for the earthly deficiency of existence, while its father is the Eastern fatalism which states that the world lies in evil. It results in an unlimited tolerance for the necessary evil. And thus, Miłosz's analyses uncovered the main conflict of the Russian soul: the hate of evil thwarting the adequacy of life, and the admiration of the necessary evil, which enables one to nurture that hatred of life and the world. The maintenance of that anti-worldly ambivalence is aided by the opportunistic subjection of freedom to the necessities of lies and evil, as those are the necessities of earthly life. Only in the Heavenly Kingdom can we stand in truth and goodness, while the lamb shall lie aside the lion. Because we live in the earthly hell, any pursuit of truth and goodness is insane. Only an *idiot* can pursue them. The same applies, according to Jasinowski, to freedom, equality, fraternity, law, justice, beauty, and love. The exorbitant nature of Eastern idealism makes them inaccessible within the earthly horizon. After Berdyaev and Jasinowski, Miłosz assumed as his own a view that "In relation to culture, almost all Russians are nihilists. Culture does not solve the problem of the end; emerging from the worldly process, culture amplifies mediocrity. Russian boys (Dostoevsky's favourite expression) focus on solving the ultimate problems of the world, the problem of God and immortality, or the organisation of humanity according to a new pattern; it appears to atheists, socialists, and anarchists as an obstacle in their pursuit of the end of the world. Russians contrast the leap towards eschatology with the historic and cultural work of the people of Europe. Thus the animosity towards form, the formal principle in law, state, morality, art, philosophy, and religion. A Russian is disgusted by the formalism of European culture, it is foreign to him. A Russian is only characterised by slight formal skills. Form brings measure, it retains within certain limits, it establishes borders, and amplifies within mediocrity. The apocalyptic and nihilistic rebellion destroys all forms, cancels all limitations, and drops all inhibitions."<sup>25</sup> That explains the Russian passiveness towards worldly matters. In Miłosz's analyses, the indolence of Russians towards worldly material and spiritual culture had gnostic-Manichean origins, and was related to the anti-worldly type of eschatology (apocalypitics according to Berdyaev). Simply the fatalistic awareness of earthly necessities justified Russians' humble enduring captivity, inequality, submission, lawlessness, harm, all which is despicable, contempt, and hatred, as they stem from innate evil. They are even desired, as they confirm the

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<sup>25</sup> M. Berdyaev, *Światopogląd Dostojewskiego...*, p. 11.

Manichean position according to which the world lies in evil. That satisfaction, justifying fatalism and gnostic freedom, is the essence of the perversion of Eastern anti-worldliness. The mental dualism enables most Russians to delight in the evidence of the futility of rebellion, as the world is not a good place to live in, which is why there is no point in regretting the wasting of it. Miłosz's Russians delight in anti-worldly inflammation, i.e. rebellious fatalism. When there occurs an eruption in the form of a revolution or a war, it is extremely destructive for the fundamentally evil world, and, at the same time, it is self-destructive.

After Berdyaev, Miłosz identified that Russian ambivalence of the Eastern realisation of evil in Dostoevsky: whoever lies, spreads terror, rapes, and kills, they sin, but experience the sinfulness of the world and their nature in their own experience. Having been afflicted by evil, in decline, one is closer to God. The nihilistic freedom of Russians possesses the anti-worldly justification of religious gnosis. That is why Russian freedom easily becomes a wilfulness of rejecting orthodox norms, social values, collective life norms, and the permanent goods of material and spiritual culture. The wantonness of destruction is a manifestation of that freedom. The Russian freedom is, according to Miłosz, gnostic, i.e. correlated with evil. Germans unified in the Darwinism-adoring Nazism, overtly included God in their collective. Russian communists officially rejected him, but by destroying the world of the Evil, indirectly referred to God, i.e. in the communist doctrine and practice there existed a religious dimension of gnosis.

Russian wilfulness laced with gnostic-Manichean fatalism strikes the individual to the bottom of captivity, yet at the bottom of the totalitarian hell, through closeness to Satan, it enables one to recognise God. That was one of the reasons why communists severely treated in Gulags usually did not betray or curse Stalin. At the foundation of profound fatalism, the wilful cruelty of the authorities also appears as their charisma. It enables one to recognise the power of God in their titanic nature. The cruelty of the Authorities and the subject is, essentially, a measure of mythical unity. The Russian fatalism, as discussed by Miłosz, offered a sacral basis for the unity of the cruel leader, the power institutions of the totalitarian state, and the subjects. The traditions of wilfulness produce in Russians a natural inclination to submitting to totalitarian systems. In fact, in Miłosz's eyes, the model of Russia's political system was a cult unified in professing the necessity of wilful evil. Communist totalitarianism had a legitimacy of cultist mentality. Secularisation, as foreseen by Dostoevsky, resulted in Russians taking the apocalypse in their own hands, under the pretext of building a heaven on earth. Their freedom degenerating into wilfulness became their hard captivity in the grind of life's necessities of evil. Michał Heller and Aleksander Niekricz in a chapter entitled *Z królestwa konieczności do królestwa wolności (1918–1920)*, presented the Russian revolution as the intelligentsia standing up to the Russian state being the "kingdom of necessity." They presented the revolutionary zeal as a passion for

destroying the old order. They saw its motivation in the utopian dream of a “kingdom of freedom.” They emphasised the prophetic words by Engels that “Nations boast of having performed a revolution always discovered too late that they did not realise what actually happened. That the revolution which had just occurred, was nothing like the revolution its originators desired.”<sup>26</sup> Russian researchers found the appearance of the “Spirit of destruction” – the wantonness of war-time terror – most unexpected.

### Dostoevsky on freedom

Miłosz’s remarks regarding freedom included Dostoevsky’s main division. According to the latter, Western self-affirmation is Pelagianistic. By rejecting the evil of human nature, Pelagianism made man blind to personal evil. Man, unable to perceive his own original evil (the evil of human nature) is devoid of self-criticism. His self-affirmation is selfish, it is basically a form of adoring one’s naturally good self. Due to a lack of self-criticism, one does not see that the affirmation world-view is, in essence, a rejection of the consideration of selfishness as sinful. Such men make evil as a bee makes honey, yet cannot see it in themselves. Therefore, the strategy of self-affirmation is a form of cognitive indolence. Man’s establishing himself in the moral comfort of good disposition entails the price in the impairment which excludes any actual self-assessment. Self-affirmation is a form of utopia. A utopian is happy, yet their pragmatic *episteme* keeps them in a cloud of illusion.

Eastern self-affirmation, contrary to its Western counterpart, does not cherish nature and man as its part. On the contrary, it is an anti-worldly affirmation, a recognition of despising nature as it views the body and matter as devilish. According to Miłosz, rebellion against the world in the name of discovered laws of nature is different from a rebellion against the world as it is, because it cannot include an order which could be recognised. Therefore, the only thing which can be recognised is destruction. The Russian self-affirmation derives from a contestation of the laws of nature. Gnostic contestation, by transitioning into its opposite, is the reason why a Russian eventually affirms himself as an adorer and originator of life’s evil. Thus, the self-affirmation spreads to personal evil, and it also affirms the evil of this world. Miłosz’s Russians take pride in their readiness to oust the earthly oppressions of life, yet, forced to act within the earthly reality, they also take pride in their cruelty, aware of the necessity. That mental affliction,

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<sup>26</sup> M. Heller, A. Niekricz, *Utopia u władzy. Historia Związku Radzieckiego od narodzin do wielkości 1917–1939*, trans. A. Mietkowski, Wydawnictwo Zysk i S-ka, Poznan 2016, pp. 85–86.

according to Justyna Kurczak, was seized upon by Jasinowski: "The principle: all or nothing, valid in Russia, precludes any consensual attitudes and evaluations, and actually leads to negating reality."<sup>27</sup>

In the age of secularisation, Russian dualists adore the opposition of the *this* and *that* world. They absolve their *notthisness* (rejection of the world) in the name of self-redemption through destroying the old order. By reducing the world to the *tabula rasa* condition. Therefore, one could note that the German destructiveness was pro-worldly in the sense that it was laced with trust in this world – how dysfunctional and self-destructive the *New Faith* was is a different matter. The Russian destructiveness, then, was essentially anti-worldly, as it was the eruption of the power of anti-worldly dualism accumulated on the basis of cultist religiosity. The peak in the development of both totalitarianisms was the establishment of the God-man: the builder of the system of extermination and self-extermination.

### Remarks on freedom

The experience of two totalitarianisms helped Miłosz recognise that freedom is *opus contra naturam*. It opposes ideologies inspired by Darwinism. Anthropocentrism, or anthropocentrism emulating the Man-God model, removes the temptation to flee from freedom into the ideology of extermination and self-extermination, into the structures of a state organising the unifying rituals of death. On the other hand, freedom, unwilling to succumb to the laws of dark Darwinism, cannot succumb to the temptation of gnostic-Manichean escapism as its anti-worldliness leads to wilful destruction of the completely evil world. Through the indolence in the act of making earth subject, the freedom simply changes into killing wilfulness. Rebellious against the evil world, against the thrall of natural laws, it itself becomes the medium of wilful evil, and in turn falls into limitless captivity.

The tragedy of freedom in the era of secularisation recorded in Miłosz's essays consisted of placing it within the field of binary stress between the extreme of Nazi wilfulness and the extreme of communist wilfulness. Having been deprived of the foundation of religion, it became lost in *New Faiths*. It became lost in ideology on the basis of naturalist monism or on the basis of a radical dualism of cultist provenance as "The religious roots of Russian maximalism do not prevent it from becoming the carrier of secular utopia."<sup>28</sup> Those extremes were its Scylla and Charybdis. The Charybdis of freedom is to make nature and its laws an oracle

<sup>27</sup> J. Kurczak, op. cit., p. 45.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid.

offering sufficient guidelines for the human world. That freedom leads to absorption of the transcendent dimension by the immanence – until losing the model of God-humanity. On the other hand, freedom led astray within cultist transcendence becomes lost in disdain for demiurgic immanence. Once secularised, it holds the world in disdain. That is the Scylla of wilfulness – of escapism (*from*) or a destructive turn against immanence (*to*). The essence of the derailing of European freedom is the escape into the structure of a totalitarian state motivated with hard-line will of its racial redemption or the will for destructive redemption from the evil world fulfilled under the pretext of ensuring the happiness of a chosen class.

Nazism and communism taught Miłosz that freedom is the tragedy of contradictions. Its dynamics create internal opposition. It is possible when man as the *opus contra naturam* fulfils himself exactly through those *pro naturam* values. That is its *coincidentia oppositorum*. In other words: a free person is that who elevates their humanity above Darwinist nature, and from the position of that transgression turns towards the world to, within the corporal and material framework of specific existences, anthropocentrically transform that world or transform it anthropocentrically based on the Man-God model. Berdyaev read from Dostoevsky that “Man exists thanks to a higher nature than his nature.”<sup>29</sup> Miłosz did not reject secular humanism, though he often expressed doubts whether it is possible to use it as the basis for freedom in the age of totalitarian faiths. His anthropocentrism was Christian, and yet open to non-orthodox visions placing Man within the centre of the cosmos: for example Adam Kadmon from cabala.

### Stone-solid world of scientism

During the American period, Miłosz called the world of physical-biological necessities the land of Ulro. In *Vision from San Francisco Bay*, he concluded that reality will increasingly often appear as a system of necessities. He anticipated an areligiously or religiously motivated contestation of its stone-solid laws. That meant humanity’s past entering the ruts of neo-Manicheistic anti-worldliness. Freedom remained threatened by the temptations of destructive wilfulness. Due to the progress of scientism, it is difficult to breach the stone-solid firmament of the world. In *The Land of Ulro*, he argued that it would be the transcendent development of the scientific image of the world, i.e. a combination of the deep image of the cosmos of modern astrophysics, and the evolutionism with the religious visions of creationism or a religious syncretism which would consider the visions of gnostic-Manichean religion. That was the way for freedom to escape

<sup>29</sup> M. Berdyaev, *Światopogląd Dostojewskiego...*, p. 42.

the prison of the *Euclidean mind*. According to Berdyaev, Dostoevsky considered that scientific mind of three physical dimensions as “detached from the eternal Meaning”,<sup>30</sup> and unable to grasp the irrational mystery of freedom of falling into the evil of wilfulness. Due to that mind “it is not possible to accept God who created so terrifying, and horrible a world.”<sup>31</sup>

In Miłosz's notion of freedom, its openness to infinity is irreducible. According to the author of *The Land of Ulro*, the world of physics, devoid of a window onto the metaphysical dimension, is for freedom a hell of submission within the mathematical shackles of the laws of matter. That leads to metaphysical disinheritance and closing in immanence. That applies to opening Infinity for freedom, where the former does not bear any anti-worldly dualism, but rather inspires the affirmation of the world. Within the penal system of the mind of rationalism and empiricism, the religion of God-humanity is the gateway to freedom, which is not subject to determinism. It negates the stone-solid heaven. Miłosz, certain of historic irrationalism, was inclined towards its metaphysical form. That irrationalism of faith in a miracle was the only way to break away from the block of determinism. In that sense, the necessities of faith as freedom in Ulro. The Man-God model transcends the reductionism characteristic of naturalistic monism, and negates the sense in redeeming oneself from the world through escapism or destruction. It is a model of freedom verified through the ability to redeem the world, not of escapist redemption from the oppression of earthly life. The mature Miłosz was convinced that a remedy for the madness of wilfulness inspired by the Spirit of the earth, and by the Spirit of anti-worldly dualism is the acceptance of the beauty of Creation, at the same time opposing its dark cruelty. The price of freedom is the need to tolerate the contradictory state of admiring the beauty of the world in combination with sympathy for the pain immanently present in it.

### Freedom and demise

Being influenced by Dostoevsky, Miłosz argued that in a world which does not wish to be totalitarian, there should be a place for the demise of wilfulness, as without the possibility of freedom deteriorating into wilfulness, there emerges an order of violence. Miłosz assumed as his own a statement by Berdyaev reading Dostoevsky: “Man feels an indestructible need for irrationality, mad freedom, and suffering. Man, contrary to common belief, does not pursue comfort. In his wilfulness, man prefers suffering. He opposes the rational order of life. Freedom

<sup>30</sup> Vide: M. Berdyaev, *Światopogląd Dostojewskiego...*, p. 11.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid.

is not, however, the rule of mind over the impulses of soul, freedom itself is irrational and insane, and it leads to breaking the lines set forth for man. That type of endless freedom tires man, and leads to his ruin. Yet man values that torment and that ruin... which leads man to the final limits of bifurcation.<sup>32</sup> That applies to the bifurcation into the zone of necessities which reality demands to be respected, and the anti-worldly wilfulness. The analysis of *Notes from Underground* led Miłosz to the conclusion that the order of totalitarian captivity is entrenched when it deprives an individual of the ability to choose the chaos of wilfulness. That condition changes man into a cog within a machine regulated through violence. Miłosz assumed Berdyaev's reading based on which "Dostoevsky recognised the polarity of the divine and devilish principles, the violent clash of light and darkness within the depths of being." He knew that "God and the devil fight deep inside the human spirit. Evil has a spiritual nature. The battlefield between God and the devil remains deep inside human nature."<sup>33</sup> The social system which considers the demise of freedom into wilfulness respects the ontic foundation of the world, i.e. the fact of "a violent clash of light and darkness within the depths of being."<sup>34</sup> He gives man the right to choose: "Man's path leads either to God-man and within that path man finds his ruin, or to Man-God and within that path finds his redemption and the final development of his personality"<sup>35</sup> through the freedom of experience, "in which upon immersing in darkness, new light appears"<sup>36</sup> as "The experience of evil can enrich human personality. However, it should be understood in the following manner. The enriching factor is not as much evil itself as that spiritual power which awakes to overcome evil."<sup>37</sup> Miłosz, who wrote "What comes from my evil – that only is true,"<sup>38</sup> agreeing with Ryszard Przybylski, stressed that the possibility of choosing between good and evil is according to Dostoevsky the limit of Christian freedom. Since God and the devil fight within man's soul, that means that the pre-fabric of human existence is psychomachia. Psychomachia permits the victory of the devil, the demise of freedom into wilfulness. A system which excludes the fallen is totalitarian because it does not permit psychomachia, because without permitting psychomachia *ex definitione* it destroys freedom. Berdyaev and Miłosz read in Dostoevsky that "Man ought to pass through freedom"<sup>39</sup> though "its path runs through darkness, through void, through bifurcation, and through tragedy. (...) That is where man errs being tempted by

<sup>32</sup> Ibid., p. 28.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid., p. 32.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid., p. 31.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid., p. 34.

<sup>37</sup> M. Berdyaev, *Rosyjska idea...*, p. 132.

<sup>38</sup> Cz. Miłosz, "The Master", in idem, *Selected Poems*, Wydawnictwo Literackie, Krakow 1996, p. 148.

<sup>39</sup> M. Berdyaev, *Światopogląd Dostojewskiego...*, p. 11.

illusionary promises, false light which leads to even greater darkness. (...) That is the path of experience, a fiery path, a path of experimental cognition of good and evil.<sup>40</sup> Of course, leaving space for wilfulness did not mean lawlessness in Dostoevsky or Miłosz. Lawlessness which destroys responsibility is the enemy of freedom. Man has the right to experience demise, but not without consequences.

Miłosz argued that man will achieve through his development *coniunctio oppositorum*, will become as *opus contra naturam: pro naturam*, his freedom will be saved.

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<sup>40</sup> Ibid., p. 40.

Zbigniew Kaźmierczyk

**Totalitarianisms as systems of lawlessness (Miłosz's remarks)**

(Summary)

The article accounts for the gnostic individualism in Miłosz's records. It shows that its essence is not freedom, but self-will. It argues that its premises are existential. Among them we can find the fundamental data of existence: the passage of time, death, growing old of the body, the decomposition of matter, experiencing biological drives as violence and the laws of nature and history as necessity. If existence is experienced that way it bears self-will. The author argues that Miłosz fell into a crisis of gnostic self-will as he realized it leads to the inner split between the evil world and the ideal super-world. He was also aware that this duality implies the aversion to the earthly life and nihilism.

The author shows that the experience of self-will served as a tool in the Nobel laureate's writings to study totalitarianisms. From this perspective Nazism seems to be the self-will inspired by Darwinism, while Communism – the quintessence of Enlightenment idealism. As a result of the deviation of freedom the Nazi Germany and the Bolshevik Russia became the mine of genocide.

Keywords: humanism, Darwinism, freedom and necessity, self-will, totalitarianism, genocide

Michał Głuszak\*

## The multi-faceted nature of freedom in the life and works of Czesław Miłosz

### 1.

Let me begin according to Horace's maxim *ab ovo*. Andrzej Franaszek, Miłosz's biographer, indicated<sup>1</sup> that the first act of rebellion and self-awareness in the poet's life was the decision to leave the boy scouts. At that moment, Czesław Miłosz was only fourteen or fifteen. It could seem to be nothing important. A trifle. An insignificant detail. A small sheet of paper torn out of a big book of biography. And yet the situation seems to me very intriguing, having almost a symbolic significance. Miłosz himself returned to it at various stages of his life. In a letter to Jarosław Iwaszkiewicz of 22 April 1932<sup>2</sup>, he wrote that "he was sick to the stomach when submitting to the scout discipline." Then in 1979, in an interview with Aleksander Fiut, he mentioned that at some point scouting began to overwhelm him as he was not able to find any justification in it. Wearing a uniform, singing songs, acquiring new skills, and in the background a pestering question: "why?", "what is this for?" The teenager demanded meaning!

Upon leaving the boy scouts, young Miłosz changed. It was visible in his school file. Mid-way through school, the once calm pupil started to become defiant, and there was a note recorded in his student grade book: "Troublemaker, taking part in brawls in the hallways and in-class."<sup>3</sup> At that time, Miłosz was engaged in a conflict with prefect fr. Leopold Chomski. What an exceptional character that was! A priest treating his vocation extremely seriously: zealous preacher, proponent of the view of the evil nature of humans, fighting all

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<sup>1</sup> A. Franaszek, *Miłosz. Biografia*, Wydawnictwo Znak, Krakow 2011, pp. 69–70.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 70.

<sup>3</sup> A. Zawada, *Miłosz*, Wydawnictwo Dolnośląskie, Wrocław 1996, p. 27.

manifestations of sin. He perfectly matched the turbulent atmosphere of the interwar period. In terms of his fundamental approach, if not fanaticism, the story told in *Native Realm* seems representative to me:

Once, during the break, one of us made a diagram of an electric battery and wiring on the blackboard to explain a problem in physics. Hamster happened to be passing by in the hall and he opened the door unexpectedly, as he liked to do. One glance at the chalked circles and ellipses was enough to bring one of his darkest blushes to his face and send him running to the principal's office, where he reported that the boys had made a drawing on the blackboard of sexual organs.<sup>4</sup>

The conflict with fr. Chomski referred to imponderabilia. The catechist wanted to control the religious and spiritual lives of his pupils. Their religious practices and participation in the sacrament of confession was supposed to be confirmed with a document, which provoked opposition and rebellion in Miłosz, who insolently and ostentatiously disregarded the priest's ideas. He would also often provoke Chomski with his inconvenient questions regarding the dogmas of the Catholic Church. It should be mentioned that despite his dispute with the prefect, Miłosz did not turn away from religion, or avoid metaphysical questions. Discouraged by fr. Chomski's attitude and the policy of the Church at that time, he engaged in his own studies. He passionately read *Confessions* by Augustine of Hippo, and *The Varieties of Religious Experience* by William James. He defined his feelings at that time in *Native Realm*:

Taking part in rituals along with apes humiliated me. Religion was a sacred thing; how could their God be mine at the same time? What right had they to adore him? "But when thou prayest, go into thy room and, closing thy door, pray to thy Father in secret." In the face of clearly inferior creatures, it would be better to proclaim oneself an atheist in order to remove oneself from the circles of the unworthy. Religion, insofar as it was a social convention and constraint, ought to be destroyed. In my battle with Hamster, it is apparent that the best and the worst motives converged. A taste for independence, a loathing for all hypocrisy, a defense of freedom of conscience joined with intellectual arrogance, an obsession with purity, and the conviction that I understood more than anybody else.<sup>5</sup>

Therefore, the search for freedom has both a positive and a negative side as it can lead to intellectual independence, to maturity, but also to a sense of supe-

<sup>4</sup> Cz. Miłosz, *Rodzinna Europa*, Czytelnik, Warsaw 1990, pp. 76–77. [English version: Miłosz, *Cz. Native Realm*. London 1981].

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 86.

riority or hatred of Others. Freedom carrying goodness, beauty, and truth, and freedom spreading alienation, nihilism, and hatred. Miłosz realised that rather quickly.

An antithesis of Hamster was the Latin teacher Adolf Rózek, a leftist intelligent, rationalist, and a socialist, who propagated the apotheosis of mind and classic temperance. Thus the pupils of the Vilnius-based King Sigismund II Augustus Secondary School were witnesses to the basic philosophical and political discourse of those times. Many years later, Miłosz compared the conflict between the teachers to the endless debate between Naphta and Settembrini, the characters of *The Magic Mountain* by Thomas Mann. He became Hans Castrop, who under the influence of both debaters, chose his own intellectual path. Once again *Native Realm* should be quoted:

The mere presence of such a Naphta and such a Settembrini gave us an option. My rebellion against the priest weighted the scale in favor of the Latinist. But my religious crisis was not a final thing; it did not end in a clear “yes” or “no”, so that when I entered the university it was not at all something I had behind me. Which does not mean it was any less acute. I was striving to build intellectual bridges between two dissociated entities. such an endeavor was, in general, alien to my schoolmates, who considered religion a separate sphere, subject to the rules of convention. My intensity won me the position among them of a Jew among *goyim*.<sup>6</sup>

Therefore, Miłosz avoided any extremes, or simple answers, he did not wish to be labelled in any way, or assigned to some specific world-view group. That remained characteristic of him, though with varying consistency and intensity, for the rest of his life. So far, I have written about the momentous decision of the teenage Miłosz when he terminated his affair with the boy scouts. And on the significance of the questions posed then: “why?”, “what is this for?” Now, the thesis must be supplemented. I believe it was a breakthrough moment in his biography because as those questions are asked, one discovers personal freedom, understood somewhat along with Kant, as compliance of that which one thinks with that which one does. Thus a person’s own “I” is being constituted. There still lay a long way in front of the youngster, yet the kernel had already been sown. In fact, only then true adventures of the mind began. From the very first act of rebellion against the scouting discipline, to Chomski’s and Rózek’s lessons. That shaped Miłosz. Without that Vilnius, without the special originality of that environment, without the specificity of those times, there would not be Czesław Miłosz as we know him, and his views on freedom. Without that foundation, one cannot understand the path the poet chose in Warsaw, Paris, California, and Krakow. A trifle.

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<sup>6</sup> Ibid., p. 81.

An insignificant detail. A small sheet of paper torn out of a big book of biography. Or maybe it is the case that human life consists of trifles, details, and small pieces of paper.

## 2.

The 1960s was an intoxicating period in the history of the United States. The emancipation of various minorities, the creation of the hippie movement, and the student rebellions. Czesław Miłosz, who was, in fact, a political animal full of polemical passion, could not remain indifferent to what was happening. Particularly since he found himself right in the eye of the storm. Already in 1964 in Berkeley, there was held a portentous protest against the discrimination of the black population.<sup>7</sup> What was Miłosz's view on all that? The Berkeley events were often discussed in his correspondence with Jerzy Giedroyc. In a letter of 14 December 1964<sup>8</sup>, the editor of the Paris-based *Kultura* thus wrote to Miłosz:

Dear Czesław,

Zygmunt showed me your letter with the description of the events at your university. Quite terrifying. I don't know what I should admire more: the stupidity of your editor, the perfect communist work, or your, i.e. professors', helplessness. Putting aside the danger of communist penetration, which can constitute a very dangerous subversion (...)

Giedroyc is certain: the rebellion of the long-haired students is something very dangerous, and it has been certainly incited by the East. Miłosz's answer is surprising:

To talk about communist influence is, actually, to walk past the matter, the rebellion is, in essence, anarchistic, aimed against technocracy, an impersonal machine, exactly like Situationistes in Paris, with whose writings I would suggest you familiarise yourself. 99 per cent of the student mass is driven by ethical reactions, that is the special American form, in support of justice, they do not care about communists at all, Marxism is not getting a foothold (...) Though there sometimes appear some similarities regardless of the differences. Wat was terrified when seeing, in his words,

<sup>7</sup> A. Franaszek, op. cit., p. 606..

<sup>8</sup> J. Giedroyc, Cz. Miłosz, *Listy 1964–1972*, Czytelnik, Warsaw 2011, pp. 66–68. [English version translated from Polish].

the hysterical Żydowice, the figures, which we knew from our memory-those, as he said-which later occupied positions in the UB [Security Office – J.W.]. But maybe you will understand using this example why I'm increasingly immersing myself in the local topics, and I'm less and less occupied by Eastern Europe, because the processes important for the human kind occur here (...) These youths are sarcastic, yet astonishingly idealistic, craving for warmth, which is absent in the life of a social machine, and producing that warmth, having their own rituals resembling the Bohemian community of the 19<sup>th</sup> c. (...) <sup>9</sup>

The letter indicates that the author of *The Captive Mind* seemed, to some extent, to sympathise with student movements, and certainly tried to understand their origins. He considered them to be driven by ethical norms, not opportunism, which was praiseworthy. He absolutely rejected the thesis of a communist incitement of the rebellion. He saw that the protesters were the children of the wonderful American dream, raised in a free market country, which had been the dream of many. Unfortunately, the generation of the young rebels was disappointed in their homeland. They were estranged within the background of a technocratic society focussed on accruing more and more wealth. Yet some danger existed. Miłosz referred to Wat, who remembered the ideological communist activists, often of Jewish descent. Those subtle intellectuals, tender lovers, usually terribly wounded by fate, often haunted by various demons from history, later put on UB uniforms, and became degenerates possessed by mad ideologies. So every rebel, every revolutionary, is a potential candidate for a totalitarian – concluded Miłosz. An old truth, yet one which is often omitted. In that sense, the students on strike could also be a danger. Miłosz was surely aware of the fact that he was witnessing something extremely important, something which could have had widespread spiritual consequences and changed the civilisation. He was rather inclined to think for the better, yet he did allow the chance that for the worse.

The year 1966 brought about new protests, that time against the war in Vietnam. Miłosz decided to support the protesters. He was the only member of the faculty to support the strike. He cancelled his classes, and he defended the students, which with some pride he reported to Aleksander Wat in a letter of 5 December 1966.

Three years later the situation changed considerably. With consecutive rebellions, there appeared flower children and the dream of "Free Love". The university campus was also filled with students fascinated with Castro, Stalin, and Mao. Riots, interrupting classes, removing professors from university buildings, and fires became part of everyday reality. There were also fires in libraries, which

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<sup>9</sup> Ibid., p. 69.

inevitably brings to mind Germany in the 1930s. Law enforcement forces intervened on a regular basis. In a letter to Giedroyc of 20 January 1969<sup>10</sup>, Miłosz wrote:

From the point of view of Czechoslovakia or Poland, or Russia, the youth here are simply shameless, because they do not know what pressure and terror are. Actually they are the spoiled children of bourgeoisie. But the reasons are serious – they stem from basic nihilism, into which the so-called West has been sinking since the war – that could not have passed without bearing any fruit. E.g. universities are completely defenceless against the model of calculated provocations with the goal of utterly paralysing them, as police actions draw students to the side of the rebels – while universities are extremely important centres of that nervous system (...) It seems that for those people hindsight will be 20/20 in 20 years' time, but what are young Czechs or Russians for whom hindsight is already 20/20 to say about that (...)

The old understanding had disappeared. Protesting students, for some time already had seemed not as those who are driven by an “ethical reaction”, but as dangerous devils, “spoiled children of bourgeoisie.” The writer with his private commitments, and his political-analytic intuition, had to face the problem, and a series of other maladies affecting America. Those struggles resulted in a book-essay entitled *Visions from San Francisco Bay*<sup>11</sup>, which was written during the period of the most heated strikes. On 11 March 1969, Miłosz sent Giedroyc the typescript.

### 3.

One of the best known slogans of the sexual revolution was “Free Love”. One must reject the oppressive tradition, and liberate oneself from the thrall of all responsibilities and control. According to the prophets of the new faith, nothing should limit a truly free person. On the pages of *Visions from San Francisco Bay* Miłosz noted that “Free Love” was, in fact, a form of captivity:

The anti-utopias of our century (Zamyatin, Huxley, Orwell) depicted societies under total control where the absence of freedom is called freedom. In such societies, the rulers make sure to deliver the ruled decent entertainment preventing intellectual anxiety. Sexual games serve that function best. It brings glory to the authors of those books that Eros operates in them as a subversive force, which by the rulers is understood perfectly: sex is anti-erotic, and not only benign, but it successfully prevents

<sup>10</sup> Ibid., p. 204–206.

<sup>11</sup> Cz. Miłosz, *Widzenia nad Zatoką San Francisco*, Wydawnictwo Literackie, Krakow 1989.

the appearance of passion bringing together not bodies, people and engaging both carnality and spirituality. The protagonist enters a dangerous path when he is awoken by love. Only then captivity which had been concealed, and accepted by everyone, is revealed to him as captivity.<sup>12</sup>

Miłosz understood love as a force operating on two levels: physical and spiritual. One which offers much, but which also requires much. Only such love gives people dignity, encourages them to brave deeds, and to fight for freedom against totalitarian systems. People who subordinate their lives only and exclusively to pleasure are, essentially, prisoners, and potential casualties of various political systems. The latter are ready to use even sexuality, i.e. one of the most intimate sides of life given to people. Sex as commodity, and the source of objectification of people! It is outstanding that Miłosz wrote this in a country considered the model democracy! Therefore, the cynical and cunning captivity of an individual is not the domain of feudal, Nazist or communism states, but also of a capitalist one. Captivity in capitalism can even be more dangerous as it is more difficult to notice. In fact, there are no, at least nowhere in sight, censorship, or agents of special forces. But there is advertising (which was also often the focus of the deliberations of the author of *Visions*), and there is the rat race. In 1968, Miłosz wrote a poem entitled *Higher Arguments in Favour of Discipline Derived from the Speech Before the Council of the Universal State in 2068*<sup>13</sup>. One fragment is particularly worth quoting:

We call for discipline not expecting applause.  
 Because we do not need their cheers.  
 Loyal citizens can enjoy our protection  
 And we demand nothing in exchange, except obedience.  
 Nevertheless, much evidence inclines us  
 To express the hope that people correctly assess  
 How much the rightness of the line we take  
 Differs from their irrational suppositions and desires.  
 We can say boldly that we, and no one else,  
 Rescued them from a waste of contradictory opinions,  
 Where what is true does not have full weight  
 For equal weight is given to untruth.  
 We led them from that place, from that wasteland  
 Where each of them, alone in his own ignorance,  
 Meditated on the sense and nonsense of the world.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid., p. 89.

<sup>13</sup> Cz. Miłosz, *Wiersze wszystkie*, Wydawnictwo Znak, Krakow 2011, pp. 590–591. [English version: Miłosz Cz. *The Collected Poems*. New York 1988].

Freedom for them meant nakedness of women,  
 And their bread had no taste: the bakeries were full of it.  
 Under the name of Art they favored the antics of their boredom  
 And a daily terror of passing time.  
 We, and on one else, discovered the Law of Blackout,  
 Being aware that a mind left to itself  
 Reached out for the ultimate, not on its scale. (...)

That was a vision of the world in 100 years' time. The notion of states has probably faded away. Everything has become centralised, there is only one common state governed by some Council. The speaking official discusses in short the perfect citizen: they are to be loyal and far from any reflection, and in turn shall receive help and care. That included deep irony. In fact, the word citizen means a member of the society of a given state having specific rights and obligations reserved by a constitution. A citizen, in principle, must be free. A citizen, in principle, must be aware. Having returned from the United States, Cyprian Kamil Norwid liked to sign documents as Citizen. Especially documents regarding social projects and stipulations.<sup>14</sup> The citizens of the Universal State, then, are completely captive: just is what state authorities propagate, everything else is reduced to the role of a mistake, or an erroneous assumption. Therefore, in the Brave New World, there is no place for a person's own world-view. At the same time, the rulers of the Universal State are convinced that they have ensured the world's salvation. The following words are, in fact, uttered: "We led them from that place, from that wasteland/ Where each of them, alone in his own ignorance,/ Meditated on the sense and nonsense of the world." Well, any totalitarian has in their twisted supposition, the feeling that they are the saviour of humanity... Though this quote requires some more consideration, i.e. what is it actually about? From what moment in history was humanity supposed to be saved? What enabled the members of the Council to seize power? It seems to me that the answer is hidden in the following two lines: "Freedom for them meant nakedness of women,/ And their bread had no taste: the bakeries were full of it." Miłosz depicted the world after the sexual revolution. Excess consumption of food leads to poisoning... Sex became so widely available that both its magic and metaphysics vanished, as physics according to the author of *The Land of Ulro*, may edge on metaphysics. Most of Miłosz's uplifting poems, e.g. *Notatnik: Nad brzegiem Lemanu*, constituted commendations of existence, attempts at tearing the essence of existence from commonness, the reality in those poems is somewhat transcended, while in the utopian world of "Free Love", sex had been stripped of its magic, and metaphysical inclinations overthrown by consumerism, the cult of carnality, and egoism.

<sup>14</sup> Z. Trojanowiczowa, *Romantyzm. Od poetyki do polityki*, Universitas, Krakow 2010, pp. 49–58.

Miłosz seems to be telling us that in such a state, the society could not have endured, and it didn't. It sank in chaos, in a state of absolute vapidness. Then, there came the founders of the Council, and they simply took over the power which lay in the street. The demoralised society was not able to defend against them. Actually, it is possible that it even might not feel a need to do so. It is possible that the representative of the Council was right. In societies immersed in a state of permanent crisis, anyone who tries to introduce some order can become a hero worthy of undying gratitude. Most totalitarianisms started that way.

#### 4.

Almost concurrently with the events at American universities, Czesław Miłosz was working on his science-fiction novel entitled *The Mountains of the Parnassus*.<sup>15</sup> According to Agnieszka Kosińska, he started working on it in 1967. He would then abandon and return to it many times. The peak of his work on it occurred in the years 1970–1971. It seems that Miłosz had high hopes of the novel because he often mentioned it in his correspondence with Jerzy Giedroyc. In a letter of 11 December 1970<sup>16</sup>, he wrote:

Since I cannot “express myself” in an essay, I’m toiling on with this novel, the story of which takes place at the end of the 21<sup>st</sup> c. It is a cutting novel, though maybe closer to the style of Witkacy or Orwell (...)

A few months later, Miłosz eventually gave up on writing *The Mountains of Parnassus*. In May 1972, he sent his typescript to Giedroyc. The editor of *Kultura* did not like the book. Miłosz accepted that with humility, but he made sure the typescript returned to him. The book was eventually published in 2012 by the *Krytyka Polityczna* journal.

It depicts the world at the end of the 21<sup>st</sup> c. It is governed by the Astronauts’ Union, which influences all associations and community organisations, including opposition bodies. It also controls thoughts, and even has a go at genetic experiments. People can travel between planets almost at the speed of light. Religion is gone, reflection is gone, and interpersonal relationships are gone. The notion of art has also lost its value. Efraim, one of the characters, establishes the Parnassus commune, which is to be a place offering rescue, restoring freedom and dignity, everything that is high and good.

<sup>15</sup> Cz. Miłosz, *Góry Parnasu*, Wydawnictwo Krytyki Politycznej, Warsaw 2012.

<sup>16</sup> J. Giedroyc, Cz. Miłosz, op. cit., pp. 420–422.

The reception of *The Mountains of Parnassus* was not unequivocal. Agata Bielik-Robson<sup>17</sup> considered the book close to gnosis, reactionary and mistaken. Miłosz did not understand, and he did not want to understand what happened in America in the 1960s. She scathingly noted that some of the passages could have been authored by an extreme-right politician. Eventually, the researcher expressed her outrage at the fact that her community could even have published it. Wojciech Orliński<sup>18</sup> criticised the poorly constructed patchwork story, yet he admitted that some of Miłosz's ideas and insights were extremely interesting because they remained current. The critic was mainly thinking about Miłosz's vision of art's downfall consisting of the demise of the very notion, and the overabundance of creators who consider themselves artists, and the over-production of creations which are considered works of art. I am more inclined to Orliński's position. I read *The Mountains of Parnassus* as a reflection of its author's observations at a certain point in his life, and at some point in the history of the United States, as well as a supplement to *Visions from San Francisco Bay* and the poems *Higher Arguments in Favour of Discipline Derived from the Speech Before the Council of the Universal State in 2068* and *Incantation*. Somewhat with a pinch of salt, solely subjectively, maybe even demagogically, I treat it as a series, and I read them together.

## 5.

Towards the end of his life, Miłosz often said that the biggest problem of contemporary civilisation is the atrophy of religious imagination. He would repeat André Malraux's maxim that "The 21<sup>st</sup> century will be religious or it will not be at all." He was of the opinion that Eastern Europe liberated from the Soviet thrall should choose its own new unique path, not mindlessly imitate everything that comes from the West. His statement of 1993 made during a debate in the *Tygodnik Powszechny*<sup>19</sup> weekly was particularly significant. Miłosz said:

I believed that upon defeating communism, our countries will publish literature and art different from the Western ones. When in 1989 in an interview for *Res Publica* I warned against the wave of filth coming towards us from the West, because having had so many experiences we should possess some hierarchy of matters which are

<sup>17</sup> <http://www.krytykapolityczna.pl/felietony/20130319/mala-gnostycka-pielgrzymka> (accessed on 15.02.2015).

<sup>18</sup> [http://wyborcza.pl/1,75475,13503325,\\_Gory\\_Parnasu\\_\\_\\_Milosz\\_w\\_butach\\_Lema.html](http://wyborcza.pl/1,75475,13503325,_Gory_Parnasu___Milosz_w_butach_Lema.html) (accessed on 15.02.2015).

<sup>19</sup> Cz. Miłosz, *Rozmowy polskie 1979–1998*, Wydawnictwo Znak, Krakow 2011, pp. 358–359.

important and those which are not, I was told the following: “Do you want to turn us into a museum?” But my desire was real, and it surely indicated extensive deposits of Romanticism (...)

## 6.

Before he died, Czesław Miłosz wrote in 2003 a poem entitled *Normalization*<sup>20</sup>:

This happened long ago, before the onset  
of universal genetic correctness.

Boys and girls would stand naked before mirrors  
studying the defects of their structure.

Nose too long, ears like burdocks,  
sunken chin just like a mongoloid.

Breasts too small, too large, lopsided shoulders,  
penis too short, hips too broad or else too narrow.

And just an inch or two taller!

Such was the house they inhabited for life.

Hiding, feigning, concealing defects.

But somehow they still had to find a partner.

Following incomprehensible tastes – airy creatures  
paired with potbellies, skin and bones enamored of salt pork.

They had a saying then: “Even monsters  
have their mates.” So perhaps they learned to tolerate their partners’  
flaws, trusting that theirs would be forgiven in turn.

Now every genetic error meets with such  
disgust that crowds might spit on them and stone them.

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<sup>20</sup> Cz. Miłosz, *Wiersze...*, pp. 1333–1334. [English version: Miłosz, Cz. *Collected Poems 1931–1987*].

As happened in the city of K., where the town council  
voted to exile a girl

so thickset and squat  
that no stylish dress could ever suit her,

But let's not yearn for the days of prenormalization.  
Just think of the torments, the anxieties, the sweat,  
the wiles needed to entice, in spite of all.  
[2003].

The poem was commented upon by the author himself: "It is part of my operation *sympathy*. People are wretched..."<sup>21</sup> Miłosz sympathised. Empathy, which turns a person into a poet. In that case, it consisted of focussing on people afflicted by nature with ugliness and disability. Appearances deprived them of their chances for happiness and love. Such people, of course, had it tougher, but they had never had it as tough as in contemporary times, stated the poet. In the times after normalisation, no error or defect can be forgiven. The word normalisation was once used in the context of things or rights. Never towards people. Currently, though, humanity has become subject to it as well. Everyone should be young, beautiful, healthy, and all smiles. In the past, "even monsters had their mates." Now, each defect decreases a person's worth. And all that in the times of the greatest freedom and tolerance. Interestingly enough, in that same year in Poland, there was published the well-known and controversial book by the French writer Michel Houellebecq entitled *Atomised*, in which the characters—the children of the sexual revolution—cannot find the meaning of life. It is uncertain whether Miłosz read Houellebecq. Agnieszka Kosińska, his secretary, who recorded all of the poet's readings in *Miłosz w Krakowie*, did not mention it. Miłosz probably did not know the works of the French author, yet he noticed the same problem.

## 7.

But can the emergence of the counter-culture of the 1960s be blamed for all the calamities of the contemporary world? I believe that judgement is too definitive, and formed too fundamentally. In 1992, Miłosz wrote a poem entitled *To*

<sup>21</sup> A. Kosińska, *Miłosz w Krakowie*, Wydawnictwo Znak, Krakow 2015, p. 55.

*Allen Ginsberg*<sup>22</sup>. Ginsberg was an American poet, and the bard of the moral revolution. Yet Miłosz the poet was full of sympathy and fondness:

Allen, you good man, great poet of the murderous century, who  
persisting in folly attained wisdom.

I confess to you, my life was not as I would have liked it to be.

And now, when it has passed, is lying like a discarded tire by the road.

It was no different from the life of millions against which you rebelled  
in the name of poetry and of an omnipresent God.

It was submitted to customs in full awareness that they are absurd, to the  
necessity of getting up in the morning and going to work. (...)

(...) And your journalistic clichés, your beard and beads and your dress of a  
rebel of another epoch are forgiven. (...)

(...) I envy your courage of absolute defiance, words inflamed, the fierce  
maledictions of a prophet. (...)

(...) Accept this tribute from me, who was so different, yet in the same  
unnamed service. (...)

For lack of a better term letting it pass as the practice of composing verses.

In that poem, the author of *The Captive Mind* admitted that despite the various differences regarding their world-views and ways of life, they both served the same unnamed yet known truth. And that is what matters most! As, all in all, any and all discrepancies are secondary. That does not mean that the differences could disappear. Miłosz did not wear a hippie outfit, nor did he submit a comprehensive self-criticism. He persisted with his views and aesthetics, yet what was more important was the already mentioned known truth. What kind of truth was that? Yet Miłosz attempted to name the unknown, which he did in the final line. According to him the truth they served was “the practice of composing verses.” I would call it more broadly: accepting on one’s shoulders a certain duty, as seriously considered poetry and art in general carry with them various

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<sup>22</sup> Cz. Miłosz, *Wiersze...*, p. 1072. [English version: Miłosz, Cz. *New and Collected Poems: 1931–2001*].

duties. Miłosz did treat poetry extremely seriously, probably more than any other matter. Poetry was the reason why the critic of civilisation, with time more and more inclined to religiosity, could make the special tribute to the poet of the moral revolution. Could someone who considered counter-culture as pure evil be able to write such a tribute? I do not believe so; it would be deeply dishonest. The task of constructing an unequivocal opinion is further hindered by a 1970s note included in *Miłosz's ABC's*<sup>23</sup>:

Sierraville became the location of my and Carol's adventure. It takes bad luck for a car to break down right there, and we didn't really know how to handle it. Then, a hippie, clearly, judging by his appearance, we met in a store, was very kind to ask us into his commune a few miles away-if we could slowly reach it despite the fault in the engine. They would fix the car there.

We found ourselves in a land of tenderness. No one was in a hurry there, no one spoke in a raised voice (...) In their mutual relations, and in how they approached us, you could sense complete tolerance and ease. How it all progressed later on there, one could only guess, but I found admirable the little community, in which neither men nor women tried to impress one another, assuming some attitudes and pulling faces: the absolute opposite of Gombrowicz's theatre.

So for a moment Miłosz found himself in a hippie commune, and that experience was not traumatic. On the contrary, it gave him the basis for writing a witty note. On the one hand, stern criticism at the turn of the 1970s. On the other, a lot of kind words written towards the end of his life. How can one reconcile those? What was Miłosz's attitude towards revolutionary movements? Several answers could certainly be offered. I am inclined to the one stating that there were three stages in the poet's life. During the first one, in the mid-1960s, Miłosz was a cautious optimist. In the second, at the turn of the 1970s, he was terrified by the surrounding world, and he rolled out great weapons against it in the form of several important texts. In the third one, in the final decade of his life, Miłosz mellowed, and became more detached. He remained a consistent critic of civilisation, he continued to seek the third way between socialism and capitalism, yet he started weighing his judgements. Technocracy and dehumanisation possess many Founding Fathers and Continuator Sons. To blame the hippies and "Free Love" for everything would be too easy a path, unworthy of a wise man. Critical words remained to be voiced, of course. In *Sarajewo*<sup>24</sup>, which is an accusation against contemporary politicians, often those originating from the generation of 1968:

<sup>23</sup> Cz. Miłosz, *Abecadło*, Wydawnictwo Literackie, Krakow 1997, pp. 222–224. [English version translated from Polish].

<sup>24</sup> Cz. Miłosz, *Wiersze...*, p. 1086. [English version translated from Polish].

It is now that we could use a revolution, but those  
who once were fervent now lie cold.

When the country being killed and raped requested help from Europe,  
in which they believed, they scrambled.

When their statesmen choose villainy, there is

no voice which would name it for what it is.

False was the revolt of the youth attempting

to renew the Earth, and that generation sentenced  
itself to that judgement.

Therefore, Miłosz remained a severe critic of the revolution, yet not a total critic. He noticed its wicked as well as its good side, e.g. the increasing emancipation of women, and a somewhat fresh view on some issues. Therefore, while maintaining his subjective nature, he allowed himself to pay tribute to Ginsberg, and the anonymous hippies from Sierraville, as he appreciated good intentions, and mainly authenticity. The world is not, of course, black and white. Miłosz once said in an interview:

Yes. I am a person full of contradictions – and I'm not denying that. I translated the French philosopher Simone Weil, who zealously defended contradictions, so I am not trying to pretend that my world-view has a coherent and uniform character.<sup>25</sup>

The author of *Visions from San Francisco Bay*, who in his secondary school years carefully observed the conflict between fr. Chomik and the latinist Rózek, declared sympathy towards antinomy. That shows how important a lesson he learnt from his superb and colourful teachers. Yes, every real intellectual experience becomes inscribed in one's memory, and glows giving strength and inspiration for later life. *Ab ovo usque ad mala*.

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Michał Głuszak

**The multi-faceted nature of freedom in the life and works of Czesław Miłosz**

(Summary)

The article discusses the issue of freedom in the work of Czesław Miłosz. This problem is analyzed in relation to prose, poetry, essay writing, journalism, as well as numerous interviews that Miłosz gave throughout his whole life. The author of the article is particularly interested in Miłosz's attitude to the sexual revolution of 1968, which he observed as a professor at Berkley. The poet was not an indifferent witness to this event. He often referred to it, often returned to it, as the author shows, not without ambivalence.

Keywords: Miłosz, freedom, poetry, prose, essay, sexual revolution

Józef Maria Ruszar\*

## Freedom and possession in the letters of Andrzej Bobkowski

The title of my study, which utilises the pungent vocabulary of the author of *Szkice piórkciem*, uses the so-called *male manner* to refer to the existential issue which was fundamental for Bobkowski, i.e. one's retention of one's freedom founded on material independence, and achieved through one's own work. In one of his letters, he noted: "At any time of the day I can look into a mirror [...] and say: *you haven't become a fuck-up one bit*."<sup>1</sup> Which constitutes a statement, a life's motto, and an economic programme all in one. As a result, the writer's *idea fixe* consisted of a change from the status of a political emigre to the situation of an economic migrant, or at least that was the conclusion drawn by Andrzej Stanisław Kowalczyk<sup>2</sup>, against which one cannot argue with the reservation that it does not mean in any way that he lost his right or even his duty to remain politically engaged in the struggle for Poland's freedom.

Any arrangements with communism or any other totalitarian system were out of the question, though the allowed methods of writers' influence on readers in the captive Poland evolved in the writer's mind, and in the 1940s, Bobkowski published in the *Tygodnik Powszechny* weekly and in other domestic periodicals, but he did not publish after the introduction of Socialist realism. Also the existence of censorship after the so-called *thaw* of 1956 was the reason why Bobkowski did not agree for domestic reprints, which, actually, was the cause of his conflict with Giedroyc as Maison-Laffitte was of the opinion that any opportunity to cross the Iron Curtain was beneficial to the struggle to break the communist monopoly in Poland. Interestingly enough, in his argument, the writer emphasised not only the

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<sup>1</sup> A fragment of a letter to W. Jekiel dated 10 Dec 1948, a representative of the Contemporary Literature Club (Klub Literatury Współczesnej) established by the students of Polish studies at the University of Warsaw (as cited in "Wstęp" by A.S. Kowalczyk to: *Andrzej Bobkowski – Aniela Mieczysławska. Listy 1951–1961*, Biblioteka „Więzi”, Warsaw 2010, p. 19). [English version translated from Polish].

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 19.

political subjugation due to the fact of becoming dependant on the decisions of the communist authorities, but also the attempt at, on the one hand, making emigre writers dependent economically, and, on the other, exerting financial pressure on them. That mode of thinking in which freedom was closely related to its economic guarantees understood as financial independence was probably the most distinctive mental characteristic of Bobkowski. I shall attempt to trace it using several examples.

### **Against the concept of Romantic emigration**

The status of a writer, which defines his particular situation, must be the first basic ascertainment or a starting point for a discussion. Such a starting point in the case of Bobkowski was the fact of his being an emigre, and an emigre writer. Contrary to what they may seem, those terms are not clear, and must be made more precise as, apparently, the author of *Szkice piórkiem* himself made the issue both more precise and complicated.

The notion of a “Cosmopole” (Kosmopolak) proposed by Bobkowski, and its divergence from the classic role of emigration, has been discussed thoroughly in professional literature, so only to recapitulate let me state that it creates a somewhat ironic situation because formally the so-called soldier emigration after WWII was dominated by the notion of steadfast political emigration, yet in practice it was impossible to fulfil it. Thousands of former Polish Armed Forces soldiers in the West were forced to become economic migrants because after a very short period of hope for WWII, to maintain any military units in battle-ready condition was out of the question.

Therefore, against the statement that the essence of political emigration was the active disputing of the post-WWII *status quo*, life forced assimilation in the country of emigration, not an existence rooted in a future of a dreamt up motherland which in some way, e.g. through an armed confrontation between the West and the East, would regain independence. A missionary life could only be indulged in by very few people, more precisely: creative individuals, i.e. writers, journalists in emigre journals, the few people engaged in cultural projects, and a small group of professional politicians gathered in emigre organisations or around the Government of the Republic of Poland in exile. The rest could only fulfil the political or material support function for the emigration elite. Thus, the dispute between Bobkowski and the dominant emigration ideology only applied to the mode of existence of that elite, not the emigrants en masse as most of them – like the author of *Z dziennika podróży* – took up work in the countries of emigration.

But Bobkowski was a writer, and his concept applied to the mode of life of an emigration artist or intellectual. At the same time, Tymon Terlecki, whose opinion could be considered as binding, wrote that “emigration is essentially [...] Romantic, idealistic. Emigration reaches outside the existing reality, and aspires to another reality.”<sup>3</sup> Such a split reality, where at the level of a political evaluation of the situation it was absolutely justified, could not possibly be accepted by Bobkowski at the level of his personal life’s strategy as he believed that only the personal achievements of a Cosmopole, i.e. a Pole who grew into the community to which he emigrated, would matter for the evaluation of an individual accomplished life, but it would also strengthen the political power of emigration as a whole.

However, both the concept and the perfect notion of life stemmed not only from his “anarchistic inclinations” and “life’s grit” views, but also from a certain vision of freedom which according to Bobkowski was an illusion or self-deception if it was not founded in economic independence. Material security guaranteed freedom, as well as autonomy from the favour of English-American allies, which I shall discuss later on. In that sense, the Cosmopole was a citizen of the world who did not become a burden for the country of emigration but a valuable citizen, and if, additionally, he was a talented individual, e.g. an artist, then – like Chopin or Conrad – he could support the so-called Polish cause with his success because, paradoxically, the fact of placing “universal issues” and not “the Polish cause” in the forefront, gave a Polish emigre artist an opportunity to become successful, or even to have some influence on public opinion.<sup>4</sup>

Considering the fact that the term Cosmopole is not always understood based on its entire content, it is worth noting that when Bobkowski defined himself, and summed up his achievements towards to the end of his life, he also stressed his influence on the indigenous people:

Therefore, *per saldo*, this is, *per saldo*, a very happy Man writing to you. I even sometimes get to feel like Sobieski at Vienna. I handled everything, I built a new life out of nothing here, a free life, full of freedom, I acquired people’s respect, I have already raised an entire crowd of young people for whom the notion of “Polish community” is not a set of empty sounds. They learnt about it through me as much as it was possible. Somewhere, some time, it might come in handy.<sup>5</sup>

<sup>3</sup> T. Terlecki, “Emigracja walki”, *Wiadomości* 1946, issue 2, as cited in: A.S. Kowalczyk, “Wstęp”, p. 19.

<sup>4</sup> That concept was presented emphatically in an article entitled “Biografia wielkiego Kosmopolaka”, *Kultura* 1960, issue 9/155; <http://static.kulturaparyska.com/attachments/cb/b0/4389fdd1ef03ab9dd13faf07db8cccde93451e83.pdf#page=11> (accessed on 28.11.2015).

<sup>5</sup> A. Bobkowski, *Listy do Jerzego Turowicza 1947–1960*, M. Urbanowski (ed.), Biblioteka „Więzi”, Warsaw 2013, p. 112. [English version translated from Polish].

The fact that those words were written by a person facing impending and expected death was important. It is also noteworthy that the letter was addressed to Jerzy Turowicz, at that time editor-in-chief of *Tygodnik Powszechny*, while some expressions resembled the famous confession of St. Paul, which begins with: “I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith” (2 Timothy 4:7; Holy Bible, New International Version®, NIV® Copyright ©1973, 1978, 1984, 2011 by Biblica, Inc.)

At this point it is worth noting that both the *explicite* expressed opinions as the provided examples of the implemented attitude of the Cosmopole (Conrad as a particular model) emphasise not only economic independence but also its ingraining in the world in which he lived in exile. Bobkowski believed that Terlecki’s formulation, with which he entered into a polemic, was a schizophrenic model, which also remained in conflict with life, thus being demoralising.<sup>6</sup> No wonder, then, that in his letters to Giedroyc, and to other addressees, he so often described the process of his growing into the local community: “I am growing roots here, a thousand problems essential to me, philistine in nature, seem to you [...] meaningless [...] But I, [...] despite everything, am trying to return myself to that NORMAL LIFE, which throughout the years I managed to forget [...]”<sup>7</sup>.

As I have already mentioned, that opposition is not obvious, and I will have to return to it at some point because a thus understood normality/emigration opposition did not apply, of course, to the crowds of former soldiers of the Polish II Corps, and other Polish armed units. Those soldiers usually acted similarly to Bobkowski, i.e. adjusted to living in England or the United States by going to work or establishing their own little business ventures, or even big companies. If Bobkowski’s situation was slightly different, it was because in Guatemala he struggled alone for his existence, away from any communities of emigres. Therefore, the objection towards anti-normality basically applied to – so to speak – “professional emigres”, about whom in the quoted letter he stated that they lived in an atmosphere of “eternal uncertainty”, like the members of a “travelling circus troupe.”<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> The argument about the demoralising aspect of thus understood notion of emigration, and Bobkowski’s opposition towards two realities were indicated by A.S. Kowalczyk (idem, “Wstęp”, p. 20.).

<sup>7</sup> J. Giedroyc, A. Bobkowski, *Listy 1946–1961*, Czytelnik, Warsaw 1997, Letter 63.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid.

### Being an independent writer

The concept of a Cosmopole's identity was influenced by another vision of one's independence as a writer. And even though those two notions cannot be divided completely, for the sake of the clarity of the study they must be discussed separately. Bobkowski valued those writers who drew the material for their works from the so-called life, i.e. their personal experience. Not accidentally Conrad was for him an icon of grand literature and a perfect model, obviously not in the sense of some direct influence he exerted on Bobkowski's works, but due to his weaving the fabric of his novels based on personal experiences, and professional knowledge.<sup>9</sup> Therefore, Conrad's works were not some stylistic ventures but a study of a deliberate existence. Bobkowski offered a very similar summary of his views in a letter to his mother Stanisława Bobkowska: "Too much is happening right now, there is too much emphasis on non-thinking only to toy with form. And yet people desire thoughts – kind and warm."<sup>10</sup> A characteristic feature of his works, as well as his views on them, was the obligation on contemporary writers to possess expertise.<sup>11</sup>

In fact, Bobkowski clearly possessed a documentary talent, and it is no wonder that his greatest literary achievements included two journal volumes (*Szkice piórkiem* and *Z dziennika podróży*), and letters. Both constitute transitional or hybrid forms, difficult to classify in terms of their genre because both the letters and the records of the author of *Z dziennika modelarza* are, essentially, a combination of a report and an essay, regardless of any genre classification. One could assume that had Bobkowski become a journalist, he would have occupied a place somewhere between Wańkiewicz and Kapuściński. The talent of the writer/documentalist was not developed further because he did not decide to pursue it professionally, and remained an amateur writer who preferred other sources of income.

That decision stemmed both from his lack of confidence in his novelistic talent, and his fear of losing his independence. He feared financial dependency, not entirely without reason. Both his intellectual independence, and his pamphlet style (visible mainly in his letters) clearly indicate that he would have had a seri-

<sup>9</sup> Only the stories in *Coco de Oro* indicate his inspiration from Conrad. It is absent from Bobkowski's greatest achievements, i.e. documentary forms, stemming from journalist and diaristic literature: *Szkice piórkiem*, and from *Z dziennika podróży*.

<sup>10</sup> From a letter of 29 June 1947, I am quoting after "Wstęp" by A.S. Kowalczyk to: *Andrzej Bobkowski – Aniela Mieczysławska...*, p. 34 (the quoted letter can be found in the Archive of the Maisons-Laffitte Literary Institute, and it was not included in the collection of letters he exchanged with his mother: A. Bobkowski, *Listy z Gwatemali do matki*, E. Jurczyszyn (ed.), Twój Styl, Warsaw 2008).

<sup>11</sup> A. Bobkowski, *Listy do Jerzego Turowicza 1947–1960*, M. Urbanowski (ed.), Biblioteka „Więzi”, Warsaw 2013, pp. 59–61.

ous problem with emigre readers – much bigger than the previously-mentioned Melchior Wańkowicz, who was highly praised for his grand report on the Battle of Monte Cassino, and, in turn, the more violently rejected due to his collection of essays and columns entitled *Kundlizm*. Bobkowski's controversial articles published in *Kultura*, and his critical attitude towards certain manifestations of emigre life seemed to indicate that his biting remarks caused him many enemies. Finally, one more argument, rather fundamental, I must add, one against taking up a job as a journalist and a reporter: too small publishing market. The few and economically feeble Polish emigre periodicals were not encouraging for engaging in this profession.

The infrequent nature of his writings was a price for not being subjected to community censorship, and the favour of cultural and political foundations. Such an attitude was absolutely incomprehensible for someone who valued the author's works, and wanted to offer him appropriate conditions for his creative work.<sup>12</sup> Unfortunately, the letters of Aniela Mieczysławska have not survived, and we only possess the argumentation of Bobkowski, though it clearly shows that he had to fight the community that admired him, and who desperately wanted to delight him with creative grants. In fact, his acquaintance with Mieczysławska began with the New York emigration activist trying to, at Giedroyc's request, shove the scholarship of an American foundation down the writers throat, and him opposing it firmly. Let us leave for a moment the issue of Bobkowski's strategy as an employee, for whom such a type of aid would distort his careful plan of creating his own little business with model planes, as that is another matter. Let us focus on the freedom-themed rhetoric of the author of *Z dziennika modelarza*:

When I decided to leave Europe, some of the major reasons which drove me to it were the urge to sever myself from exactly that constant living off such funding, from the funding hopscotch, which was surely lurking around me [...] sitting on

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<sup>12</sup> In my most recent letter, as well as in earlier ones, I indicated that I did not want any help. Maybe they did not understand me, either way two months ago I stated that categorically. I am afraid, though, that they, driven only by great amity towards me, and maybe somewhat alarmed by some indications of neurasthenia on my part, decided to nonetheless *rescue* and violate me. But that is absolutely impossible. I do not want any help now, and if I was ever given it, I would never be able to accept it. I hope that you, a woman, i.e. a grounded being and not someone with their head in the clouds, will understand my intentions. When I decided to leave Europe, some of the major reasons which drove me to it were the urge to sever myself from exactly that constant living off such funding, from the funding hopscotch, which was surely lurking around me because they would simply not let me leave for some job (I may be flattering myself but that is what I think) where I would had wasted my talent and opportunities. I am not overestimating my talent. There is certainly something inside me, and I feel that I possess literary capabilities. I am simply stating that without the contortions of false modesty. Despite that, I do not enjoy sitting on funding, and I perceive it as a form of constraint (*Andrzej Bobkowski – Aniela Mieczysławska...*, pp. 39–40).

funding, and I perceive it as a form of constraint. A man sitting on any funding is always a bit kept.<sup>13</sup>

But he mainly ensured he did not become dependent on his own or foreign communities because he knew the degree of dependency of Wańkiewicz and the effect of a termination of a subscription to *Kultura* by an offended portion of the emigration community. He thus wrote to Aniela Mieczysławska: “Either way I don’t give a rat’s ass whether someone feels offended or not, since 1939 I have constantly had to make sure not to offend some foreigners, first the French, then the domestic rabble, and now the Americans. Because they give.”<sup>14</sup> In the mentioned letter, full of anger towards the emigrant community, who were not able to support ageing renowned Polish writers, Bobkowski emphasised that it was also the reason why he did not want to take money from the Americans, that thus he could honestly and without being embarrassed write about them well or even with admiration.

Bobkowski’s vitalism was yet another reason why writing was not amongst his main pursuits. Also in that sense he was not a professional writer, i.e. writing for him was the most important thing without which he would had not been able to live: “For me, art and literature are one thing, and life, munchies, wonderful life, excellent life most of all. For me life itself is the greatest of all arts, and the thing most worth every effort.”<sup>15</sup> He was completely devoid of any writer’s ambitions; thus his rejection of the offer of membership of the Polish Writers’ Union in Exile.<sup>16</sup> Neither was he tempted by the opportunity for professional writing by landing a job at some periodical: “I must be completely immersed in life, and, in general, I can only write when I am able to stop writing,” was his response to an offer of collaboration with the *Odrodzenie* weekly.<sup>17</sup> His vitalism, and contempt for exaggerated intellectualism, his almost legendary aversion to any ideas and ideologies, and, in turn, artists favouring art over existence and abstraction over concreteness, caused severe criticism by various writers and intellectuals. In response to the publication of his letters (after his death), he was accused of fascism<sup>18</sup>, etc.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid., p. 40.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid., p. 82.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid., p. 114.

<sup>16</sup> A. Bobkowski, *Listy do Tymona Terleckiego 1956–1961*, N. Taylor-Terlecka (ed.), Biblioteka „Więzi”, Warsaw 2006, p. 69.

<sup>17</sup> A letter of 1947 to his mother; as cited in “Wstęp” by A.S. Kowalczyk, op. cit., p. 34 (this letter as well can be found in the Archive of the Maisons-Laffitte Literary Institute, and it was not included in the collection of letters he exchanged with his mother: A. Bobkowski, *Listy z Gwatemali...*).

<sup>18</sup> Such suggestions can be found in, e.g. Miłosz’s remarks (Cz. Miłosz, “Uwagi do uwag Gombrowicza”, *Kultura* 1962, issue 12, p. 124; as cited in: K. Ćwikliński, “Furor scribendii albo O pamfletowym charakterze listów Andrzeja Bobkowskiego” in: A. Bobkowski, *Listy do różnych adresatów*, K. Ćwikliński (ed.), Arcana, Krakow 2013, pp. 7–8.

### Europe corroded with totalitarianism

One of the major reasons for leaving France was the lack of freedom, the decline of the former republican spirit. The current state of things was tragic: “this whole Europe is utter decay,”<sup>19</sup> Bobkowski summed up everything shortly, while in other instances he offered more precise arguments, e.g. mocking the intellectual influence of the left in the economy.

I have returned to my professional focus: economics. I’m currently studying a collection of articles by all the famous economists entitled *L’économie dirigée en regime collectiviste*. In the meantime, we are experiencing its outcomes first-hand,<sup>20</sup>

Bobkowski told his mother in February 1946. Descriptions of the results of implementing the elements of socialist economics by the socialist-leaning French governments can be found in his notes entitled *Z dziennika podróży*. Why did he like South America, and more precisely his new motherland, so much? Because, due to the US intervention, collectivism was not victorious there, and because it lacked an omnipotent state. Unlike in France where at every turn the citizens are monitored, in Guatemala people live without constant supervision:

When I was leaving Europe I swore to myself that I will not stand in a line, that I will not elbow my way, and that if I died, it would not be in a crowd nor holding social insurance. Here, when there are more people on the bus, I never push forward – I wait. I shut my Guatemalan ID card in a steel box, I tossed away the key, and for the past three years I have been living without a single piece of paper on me.<sup>21</sup>

The true dramatic tone of that confession is revealed to a reader when one realises that the author of the letter described in it the state of things in December 1951. The lack of the need to stand in lines, and most of all the ability to move around without a passport or an ID as a proof of freedom was referred to in the letters to Mieczysławska at least thrice during the years of their contact by mail; in 1960 Bobkowski wrote that throughout the 12 years he spent in Guatemala no one had ever required him to present his papers.<sup>22</sup> Bobkowski’s beloved France in particular became in his eyes a semi-totalitarian country of idlers who traded their personal freedom for a social package, while the entire Marshall Plan was a mistake because it supported a nationalised and inefficient economy:

<sup>19</sup> *Andrzej Bobkowski – Aniela Mieczysławska...*, p. 54.

<sup>20</sup> A. Bobkowski, *Listy z Gwatemali...*, p. 18.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 47.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 158 and 164.

To pump millions into the nationalised production wastefulness of France is truly starting to verge on a lack of common sense. And to shovel huge sums to make sure everyone there kindly grins at the Americans. Work for them, fight for them – everything only because that's where those cathedrals and some paintings are. Screw them!<sup>23</sup>

He expressed a similar attitude towards the idea of emigre Poles to pressure the Americans to include Poland in the Marshall Plan as well. Why? Because the financing of a “surrealist economy of semi-intelligent doctrinaires”<sup>24</sup> is an idiocy, not “Poland’s *raison d’être*.” At this point, one should note that it was the opinion of a person who studied economics, not just a political opponent of communism. His letters to his mother include an argument against the core of the socialist doctrine, which did not take human nature into consideration:

I’m getting slightly dizzy reading those domestic periodicals. It is all pure surrealism what is going on in our country. How can anyone seeing at every turn proof of the utter uselessness, the total failure of the system known as *socialism*, discuss at the same time its superiority in relation to other systems, and believe that everything can be different in it. So, the Catholic Church has not produced more than one saint a year and is somewhere short of two thousand of them, but those great theoreticians of Marxism would like to manufacture saints by their millions, people to stop stealing, start working efficiently, to be more *social*, etc. That is terrifying because it comes dangerously close to a mental asylum. In THIS system people HAVE TO steal, people have to be egoists and devils because this system solves nothing and it never will.<sup>25</sup>

Further, somewhat by the way, he remarked that 40 years of communism in Russia had proved the exceptional richness of the country and... the constant help of the “declining capitalism”, which prevented the Soviet economy from dying a natural death. That opinion was expressed in 1957, i.e. many years before the downfall of the USSR. Bobkowski believed that bribery, abuses of power, and stealing constituted the core of the system, which is why he was amused by the “combat bribery” projects, of which he read in the PRL press.<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>23</sup> Ibid., p. 55. A similar remark in: A. Bobkowski, *Listy do Jerzego Turowicza...*, p. 45.

<sup>24</sup> *Andrzej Bobkowski – Aniela Mieczysławska...*, p. 107.

<sup>25</sup> A. Bobkowski, *Listy z Gwatemali...*, pp. 208–209.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid., p. 211.

## Growing into Guatemala

As I have already mentioned, the writer's *idée fixe* of his independence and freedom led to a change from the status of a political exile to the situation of an economic migrant. That occurred not by accident, but through an intended strategy. His vitality or love for normal life (whatever that could mean exactly) also inclined him to become rooted in the local community. That was evident not only at a time when Guatemala was sliding towards communism and Bobkowski was ready to wield a gun to fend off the armed workers' guard plundering wealthier houses<sup>27</sup>, but he also indicated his fascination for his new-found motherland in his letters. When young people from Poland asked him about his emotional conflict using the typical image of an emigre's torn heart, he responded ruthlessly: "not to rave echoing the three bards [...] because my body and heart are in Guatemala, and only my head is a bit in Poland."<sup>28</sup> He wrote similarly in a letter to Jerzy Turowicz, shortly before he died: "Today I understand that you can love some foreign land, and without any detriment to your soul you can have two motherlands."<sup>29</sup>

His letters to various addressees (and Bobkowski was an avid letter writer), and also his excellent report entitled *Z notatek modelarza*, are full of praise for Central America and the United States. There can be no doubt that the author not only accepted his fellow citizens, and he was fascinated with the American mentality, but also that he considered the great continent discovered by Columbus as a wonderland, if not a paradise. Obviously, even paradise, as we know, was penetrated by a snake, so the mental and moral shortcomings of the descendants of conquistadors were viewed with understanding yet without immediate remission, particularly when it applied to assiduity (an objection rather characteristic for the mentality of a writer who was a workaholic).<sup>30</sup> Without going into detail,

<sup>27</sup> "The recent events here were very interesting. I would have so much to tell you. I still sleep with my Colt by my bed, while two nights before in a bamboo forest by my house they were encircling two communists for an hour, and sprayed machine gun fire, just like I am doing now on my typewriter. But they overcame them. I literally feel now more free and happier than after the liberation of Paris. That was already a tight knot, it smelled of American Korea or Indochina" (*Andrzej Bobkowski – Aniela Mieczysławska...*, p. 60). A similar description in: *Z dziennika modelarza*.

<sup>28</sup> *Andrzej Bobkowski – Aniela Mieczysławska...*, p. 107.

<sup>29</sup> A. Bobkowski, *Listy do Jerzego Turowicza...*, p. 108. That statement has been disputed by some researchers, e.g. Michał Kopczyk wrote sternly: "Guatemala which he chose as his final destination, and the final stage in a series of his life's ruptures, had never become his motherland, it had never gained the status of the personal centre of his world" (M. Kopczyk, *Obecność innego. Studia z literatury współczesnej*, Wydawnictwo Naukowe Akademii Techniczno-Humanistycznej, Bielsko-Biała 2013, p. 41).

<sup>30</sup> A. Bobkowski, "Z notatnika modelarza" in: idem, *Z dziennika podróży*, Biblioteka „Więzi”, Warsaw 2013, pp. 143–144.

let us conclude emphatically that when compared to the old arrogant Europe, the western hemisphere proved excellent and was worthy of fervent love.

Regardless of how much Bobkowski was posing in his letters when he swore he did not miss Poland, that in Guatemala he had become financially successful, or that he valued life more than the fate and prestige of a writer, the issue of economic independence seems the most important, and was treated with mortal seriousness. A proof of that was his rejection of the offers to relocate to New York or Munich. In the case of the former, the temptation came from Kazimierz Wierzyński, and it included pay of 600 dollars, while in the case of the latter it included a well-paid job in the Free Europe.

While a return to Europe seemed less attractive due to the writer's disappointment in his home continent, the offer to live in the United States he admired so much could have been fascinating for him. Why, then, did he refuse, and his closest friends could hardly understand his attitude? In his letters to his mother, he clearly explained his position: "I had to explain to him [Wierzyński] at length that you cannot reject easily the freedom and independence for which you fought so hard."<sup>31</sup> As he rejected the offer to work at Radio Free Europe, he shared with his mother his observations regarding the lack of understanding for his position: "I am increasingly terrified in realising that people no longer understand what it means when I say that 'I want to be free'."<sup>32</sup> He reminded her how important personal independence, gained with great effort, was for him: "And between you and me, I am more proud of those ten years 'of not giving in' and of this tiny shop than of all of my scribblings."<sup>33</sup>

Though the final two sentences one ought to consider as a rhetorical device as, contrary to what he stated, Bobkowski admired a writer's fame, it would be difficult to ignore the pride in the achieved economic success, and the acquisition of financial independence. His letters to his mother led to yet another trace of his love for the new country of residence: his fascination with the nature in Guatemala. But that is another issue.

### Bourgeois virtues

Freedom understood as economic independence was an idea which Andrzej Bobkowski justified in different ways, and the range of his arguments was not small. One of those was the typical anti-communist attitude. Communism for

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<sup>31</sup> A. Bobkowski, *Listy z Gwatemali...*, p. 214.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 214.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 215.

the author of *Coco de Oro* had two disgusting intrinsic dimensions: the political-police dependency which led to moral decay, and the economic quality of slavery. Both elements of the system amplified each other.<sup>34</sup>

One of his initial letters to Turowicz includes a mention of the joy resulting from the fact that he “shook off” his previous life in Europe, and, at the same time, that some people did not understand that fact. Among those he included Jarosław Iwaszkiewicz, who consoled him: “And to think that such a person like yourself has to carve some pinwheels.” When quoting the sentence to Turowicz, Bobkowski reported his biting response: “I’d rather carve this than pretend to be an idiot.”<sup>35</sup> [The Polish “strugać” (carve, e.g. in wood) can be used in a colloquial phrase “strugać głupka” which means “pretend to be an idiot”] That statement reveals its dramatic nature when one considers how much young Bobkowski admired Iwaszkiewicz.<sup>36</sup>

Yet communism for Bobkowski was merely an extreme case. It was the old Europe that proved unworthy of its identity, and that was why the writer sought happiness in various corners of the world. He paid for it with a lot of effort, and considerable sacrifice, but he knew the price, and did not hesitate to pay it. I believe he expressed it most poignantly in a letter to his uncle of 4 January 1940, i.e. only a few months prior to arriving in Guatemala:

Dear Beloved Uncle!

It has been six months since I last wrote to you. It has been that long because I lacked both the time and money. That “miserable” 36 cents it costs to send the lightest letter by air mail for us means 5 pounds of sugar or 36 buns, or 4 pounds of potatoes, or 3 pounds of rice, or 3 packs of good cigarettes, or a pound of the best coffee, or a basket of vegetables and fruit, or many more things. Unfortunately, our wages have been such that even 5 cents are a major position, let alone 36. So do not be angry with me. We have limited ourselves to the most necessary letters; I to my mum, Basia to

<sup>34</sup> In that respect, his remarks regarding the stages of implementing communism in Guatemala are interesting (A. Bobkowski, *Z notatnika modelarza*, pp. 142–172.).

<sup>35</sup> A. Bobkowski, *Listy do Jerzego Turowicza*, p. 48.

<sup>36</sup> A fundamental change occurred after the Szczecin Congress of 1949 during which the so-called Socialist realism was announced. In a letter to Giedroyc, he wrote: “Iwaszkiewicz’s a total cunt—at least from what I’m getting from *Tygodnik Powszechny*. I haven’t written to him in eighteen months. Last Christmas, I sent him a card with best wishes, but he did not reply. Probably for the best.” (J. Giedroyc, A. Bobkowski, *Listy...*, p. 180). He thus responded to Iwaszkiewicz: “Do not pity me. What am I supposed to do? Write? I know I’ll never write anything grand. Do you think that sitting in some office would have been better? Yuck – I hate offices. I am, the emblem of Guatemala – their bird, quetzal. There are only stuffed specimens because live ones held in a cage die within days. And I’m not keen on kicking the bucket, and being stuffed so that I could be viewed” (A. Bobkowski, „*Tobie zapisuję Europę*”. *Listy do Jarosława Iwaszkiewicza*, Jan Zieliński (ed.), Biblioteka „Więzi”, Warsaw 2009, p. 75.).

her mum and to Jaś in Paris, however rare it would be. But we still haven't regretted a thing. On the contrary. Ever occupied, tired, not able to afford anything *extra*, we congratulate each other on that decision almost every evening. What can I tell you? Freedom is what I value the most, and recently even in Paris I had begun to feel like in a cage. In fact, I won't go into more detail because you might be able to read what I think about it in one of the coming issues of *Kultura*.<sup>37</sup>

His high praise of personal independence, which, of course, is not a free condition, was written in a social situation when the community of Polish political emigrants applied censorship in relation to the Paris-based *Kultura*, thus punishing it for disloyal articles, including Bobkowski's texts. The sales of the periodical were discontinued by emigrant vendors in London, which outraged the writer, who compared the situation to Bierut's Poland. Yet according to Bobkowski, communism was only a special case of a consent for political slavery, of which he also accused the Western society. That was one of the arguments in favour of his departure. In the previously mentioned letter to his uncle, he wrote:

Europe mainly stands for its people. And – what a pity – their quality has been deteriorating at a disquieting pace. Europeans are turning into *pacotilles*, pillocks, losing all the qualities which once determined their superiority: entrepreneurship, drive for reasonable risk, the ability to apply individual judgement, and sensible defiance. On the contrary: they have become obedient to the State and foreign States. Today, they stand patiently in lines, carefully fill out dozens of forms, and masturbate with passive criticism and intellect as a substitute for life.<sup>38</sup>

The most derisive passages in that description applied to France, once the symbol of civic rights, revolutionary pride, and... assiduity. Bobkowski's shattered faith in the France of old was described probably the most emphatically at the level of the work ethos:

one of my labourer friends, an Italian, became naturalised. He went to the foreman to inform him about it. The foreman congratulated him, and said: "I hope that even

<sup>37</sup> A. Bobkowski, *Listy do Aleksandra Bobkowskiego 1940–1961*, J. Podolska (ed.), Biblioteka „Więzi”, Warsaw 2013, p. 46–47. Bobkowski often made detailed remarks about the cost of living, sometimes in the context of whether he could afford something, e.g. sending a letter. He similarly justified his limited correspondence with Iwaszkiewicz: "I will have to fit on this single page because each gram of a letter costs something, and we are still not earning anything. Here, not only 36 cents (price of a letter), but even a mere 5 cents is a sum which can buy you many things" (A. Bobkowski, „*Tobie zapisuję Europę*”, p. 63).

<sup>38</sup> A. Bobkowski, "Na tyłach" in: idem, *Coco de Oro*, Instytut Literacki Kultura – Instytut Książki, Paris–Krakow 2015, p. 75.

though you are French, you will continue to work like an Italian.” And he said it absolutely seriously. That encapsulates everything, the entire France.<sup>39</sup>

Also not by accident one of Bobkowski's cardinal charges against Europe (with France being its symbol) was contempt for labour and creative technical inventiveness. Bobkowski considered that a betrayal of the civilisational attitude of the old Europe, and juxtaposed it with the attitude of Americans. As always in his writings, the charge was formulated in a polemical manner, and based on a specific example:

We mock Americans that they are *stupid*, that they cannot *understand* us, etc. I can't blame them. Ask yourself whether the people who eradicated mosquitoes from the entire zone of the Panama Canal can understand people who could not exterminate those insects even in Juan les Pins, and, at the same time, take such great pride in their culture?<sup>40</sup>

Having thus set the background, he continued to praise the benefits of air conditioning, or the ability to sleep with opened windows without a mosquito net since they had dealt with that infestation. The quoted letter indicates not only the way of viewing the world based on the criteria of the approach towards civilisation, with particular consideration for technical advances and thriftiness, but also says much about the writer's complex self-creative game, where in evaluating his correspondents, he adjusted the roles he played to specific people, yet retained certain constant features of the image he was building. According to Michał Kopczyk:

Being aware of the significance of the game, and the rules that govern it, Bobkowski used the opportunity fighting for his image as a writer, his importance, creating himself from scratch, forging his fate as an emigre settled in a distant land into a situation of a fulfilled man, who, at the same time, was aware of his significance, and his place in the world. Bobkowski fulfilled that strategy both in his correspondence with grand and prominent figures contemporary to him, and with those less known.<sup>41</sup>

It would be difficult to deny the self-creative need in letter writing, particularly in the case of the sense of manly brawn or the incessant emphasising of his – actually limited – success; yet it did not apply much to *Z dziennika modelarza*, mainly to that part of the journal which included his praises of American capital-

<sup>39</sup> A. Bobkowski, „*Tobie zapisuję Europę*”, p. 32.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 65.

<sup>41</sup> M. Kopczyk, *Obecność innego. Studia z literatury współczesnej*, Bielsko-Biała 2013, p. 37.

ism, more specifically: his fascination with the business culture. The praises were absolutely unbiased. They applied not only to the opposition towards the fear that the technical civilisation “is killing poetry”, because, according to the writer, it is not technology that threatens literature, rather the coldness of the heart.<sup>42</sup>

Bobkowski mainly found pleasure in describing how hard-working, professional, and mindful of the customer small companies, often family concerns were, those which cherished high product quality, and did not succumb to the temptation of easy, though one-time only, profit, rather the contrary: focussed on long-term and honest business based on mutual trust. That was what business relations with a company from New York<sup>43</sup> and from Chicago<sup>44</sup> looked like. Yet Bobkowski was probably most impressed with two things: the limitation of red-tape, and free business advice. Americans were hard-pressed to adjust to Guatemalan forms for imported goods. But they perfectly understood the essence of their trade activities, and suggested to their partner that he should ensure service for his products, which would make him unrivalled in his area.

His US observations enabled Bobkowski the economist to formulate one of the most interesting opinions on communism. It is exceptionally incisive, and its accuracy is astonishing considering the times, when it seemed that the system possessed an intellectual edge: “Despite all its pretences and theories of dynamism, communism dreams of halting development, of petrification; its dream is to count the spokes in an immobile wheel.”<sup>45</sup> That acute metaphor by an avid cyclist came to being based on his observations of the dynamism of American entrepreneurship. At the same time, it clearly vindicated the decision not only not to return to post-WWII Poland, but not even to Europe.

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<sup>42</sup> A. Bobkowski, *Z notatnika modelarza*, p. 179.

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 181–182.

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Józef Maria Ruszar

### Freedom and possession in the letters of Andrzej Bobkowski

(Summary)

For Bobkowski, to maintain personal freedom based on material independence achieved through his own work was a fundamental existential issue. Freedom and financial independence were: a declaration, a life's motto and an economic programme. The writer's concept was, eventually, reduced to a change of his status as a political exile to the situation of an economic migrant who also supported Poland's freedom.

Keywords: Andrzej Bobkowski, The New Economic Criticism, Freedom

John Bates\*

## Parables of Un-freedom: Novels about the Spanish Inquisition in post-1956 People's Poland<sup>1</sup>

Można opowiadać miliony anegdot o tym, w jaki sposób obchodzono cenzurę.<sup>2</sup>  
[We could tell millions of tales about evading censorship.]

The use of historical events and writings from the medieval and classical pasts to form the basis of new fictions about contemporary society is a phenomenon noted by Annabel Patterson in the Introduction to her revised edition of *Censorship and Interpretation* (1991). Mid-sixteenth-century English writers' rediscovery of 'a classical system of rhetorical ingenuity', an 'Aesopian language' became the 'medium of a quiet but sustained critique of their government.'<sup>3</sup> In many respects this was a recurrent feature, one that could and did occur within all repressive political systems from the ancient world through Tsarist Russia, where the term 'Aesopian language' acquired specific currency,<sup>4</sup> to the countries of Eastern Europe that found themselves under Soviet domination after the Second World War. The Aesopian strategy of '[t]elling a story which appears to have nothing to do with present political concerns and leaving it to the readers (viewers, theatre-goers) to make connections that are apparently hidden from the censor'<sup>5</sup> often informed literary forays into the distant past. Tropes of heresy and resistance to tyrannical rule provided abundant analogies

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<sup>2</sup> W. Władyka, "Zabijanie słów. O cenzurze w PRL", *Biuletyn Instytutu Pamięci Narodowej*, 2004, issue 2, p. 7.

<sup>3</sup> A. Patterson, *Censorship and Interpretation. The Conditions of Writing and Reading in Early Modern England*, The University of Wisconsin Press, Madison, Wisconsin 1991 [1984], p. 19.

<sup>4</sup> See Robert Justin Goldstein's entry on 'Aesopian Writing', in: *Censorship. A World Encyclopedia*, D. Jones (ed.), Fitzroy Dearborn Press, London–Chicago 2001, pp. 16–17.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 16.

with more contemporary forms of dissent. The style and degree of suppression of unorthodox beliefs and behaviour might change yet the principles behind it remained the same.

Traditional approaches stressing the duping of the censor have increasingly given way to more nuanced analyses of the relationship between the author and his/her various readers (who included censors). In 1973, the emigre writer Witold Wirpsza provided an analysis of a then-recent article in the Workers' Party's monthly *Nowe Drogi*, which led him to use the term 'Party Chinese ('chińczyzna partyjna')' as a way to define the article's deliberately oblique response to young writers' calls for the right to depict contemporary reality in a realistic fashion.<sup>6</sup> Describing these strategies somewhat provocatively as manifestations of 'Aesopian language' inscribed the leadership into practices traditionally associated with those subject to the operations of, rather than being the agents exercising, political power.<sup>7</sup> Wirpsza's broader, if unstated, implication that meaning is negotiated between the discrete players – be they representatives of political authority (politicians, censors), receivers (critics, readerships) and senders (writers, critics) – allows for a more subtle view of the (literary) communication process than that permitted by simple binary oppositions. While the authorities' or censors' aspirations to control meaning, or conversely to ascribe liberal tendencies to their activities, cannot be denied, it establishes them as one of the main agents in the process. Moreover, it cannot be gainsaid that censors were aware of subversive readings, hence the existence of potentially dissenting texts within official circulation suggests they were conditionally accepted.

The extent to which such works were tolerated, and the reasons for this, is one of the larger, possibly ultimately unanswerable questions of the present article. Aesopian writing had been a significant feature of vernacular Polish literature since the late Middle Ages but the experience of foreign occupation in the years 1795–1918 caused domestic Polish literature to elaborate the strategy to a much greater degree. Within an increasing literate and better culturally educated post-war Poland, the number of readers, including official censors, capable of grasp-

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<sup>6</sup> PZPR KC WK AAN LVI – 1333 (1973) Wydział Kultury KC PZPR 1973. Document 27 of this file is a six-page resume of Wirpsza's piece 'Cenzor jest zawsze mordercą – Beznadziejna sytuacja intelektualistów polskich', which appeared in *Deutsche Zeitung – Christ und Welt*, 15 June 1973, pp. 4–5.

<sup>7</sup> This suggests a somewhat more complex communicative situation than that suggested in the most recent Anglophone take on Aesopian language: 'in this shift from an "official" to an Aesopic discourse, there is thus a double alteration of reality at work: while the powers-that-be manipulate reality to serve their own ends and to obstruct it from being seen, understood and potentially changed, critical thinkers "veil" it in Aesopic devices to expose the second alteration.' G. Reifarth and P. Morrissey, "Aesopic Voices: A Foreword", in: *Aesopic Voices. Reframing Truth through Concealed Ways of Presentation in the 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> Centuries*, Cambridge Scholars Publishing, Newcastle upon Tyne 2011, pp. 1–12 (p. 3).

ing the principles of Aesopian language expanded rapidly. Furthermore, as if in recognition of the fact, by the 1970s university lecturers were providing crash training courses in the history of Polish literature for censorship employees.<sup>8</sup> To some extent grasping the principles of Aesopian language could lead to its being seen everywhere and certainly a key part of the literary censor's activity lay in testing this assumption to the point of absurdity. The readability of such texts, their potential subversiveness may be said then to be further obscured by the censor's actions. After 1956 particularly, relatively few texts were banned unconditionally and those works perceived as Aesopian could play the role of a social safety-valve, tolerated as a relatively uncostly and politically expedient form of sanctioned dissent.

In this article, 'Aesopian writing' is related closely to the genre of the historical novel. Jerome De Groot, albeit without reference to Aesopian strategies, has emphasized the genre's particular suitability as a vehicle for subversion: 'A historical novel is always a slightly more inflected form than most other types of fiction,'<sup>9</sup> one which also tends to work in collusion with its audience.<sup>10</sup> He goes on to note the intrinsically subversive nature of certain of its manifestations, specifically where such works set out to challenge history. In such cases the role of the historical novel as a disruptive genre comes to the fore, representing 'a series of interventions which have sought to destabilise cultural hegemonies and challenge normalities.'<sup>11</sup> If we see such 'cultural hegemonies' and 'normalities' with their concomitant narratives as officially generated in People's Poland, the extent to which post-war Polish historical fictions may be seen to fulfil these terms merits some attention.

The ultimate focus of this chapter accordingly falls on the composition and critical reception of three communist-era Polish historical novels portraying the Spanish Inquisition of the late fifteenth century. These works – Jerzy Andrzejewski's *Ciemności kryją ziemię* (*And Darkness Covered the Earth*, aka *The Inquisitors*, 1957), Julian Strykowski's *Przybysz z Narbony* (*The Stranger from Narbonne*, 1978) and Józef Cepik's *Torquemada* (1986) – enable a closer examination of the functions of the historical novel with prominent Inquisition tropes within communist-era discourse. Patterson stresses the 'importance of an exact chronology in determining what any given text was likely to mean to its audience at the time of its appearance,'<sup>12</sup> which informs my approach here. The dates of publication and the works' respective socio-political and cultural contexts are

<sup>8</sup> Comment by Professor Jakub Lichański (September 1997). See also P. Misiór, *Ja, Tomasz Strzyżewski. O cenzurze i cenzorach*, Léon Bonnet & Co., Krakow 1997, pp. 60–61.

<sup>9</sup> J. de Groot, *The Historical Novel*, Routledge, London and New York 2010, p. 4.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 6.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 139.

<sup>12</sup> A. Patterson, *op. cit.*, p. 55.

crucial to the analysis of their potential use by readers. Invariably the political, rather than aesthetic, dimensions of these works and their reception will take precedence in the analysis. At the outset, however, this chapter seeks to locate these works within the artistic practices and cultural-political discourse of the period with an emphasis on the institutional constraints that find expression in the censors' information about the subterfuges to which authors resorted in their attempts to deceive.

### **Institutional Censorship and Literary Allusion in Post-War Poland**

The principle of limiting the political resonance of historical works broadly informed their interpretation by censors throughout the post-war period. In the immediate aftermath of World War Two the use of such strategies was particularly identified with Catholic authors and journalists. The ambiguities which the practices generated caused censors initially to hesitate when excising these references during the period of notional multi-party democracy (1945–47), as Director Kowalczyk's briefing at the second national conference of censorship offices in January 1946 indicates:

The use of analogies. Writing about something that doesn't concern us, or about someone else: the Hungarian elections or the victory of the Catholics in France, but in such a way as to induce the suggestion that it could apply to our area. [...] analogy is the second method employed by Catholic columnists. [...] And finally a new genre, equally effective, which is a style based on specific allegories, characterised by their being taken from the Gospels, often with references to certain biblical stories...

[Posługiwani[e] się analogią. Pisze się niby o czymś co nas nie dotyczy, o kimś co jest pisane o kimś innym: o wyborach na Węgrzech i zwycięstwie katolików we Francji i tak się pisze, że się wzbudza sugestię, którą można zastosować do naszego terenu. [...] posługiwanie się analogią należy do drugiego środka, którym się publicystyka katolicka posługuje [...] Wreszcie nowy rodzaj, rodzaj również skuteczny, to jest t.zw. styl zbudowany na pewnych alegoriach, który się charakteryzuje tym, że jest brany z ewangelii, nieraz są odnośniki do pewnych biblijnych historii...]<sup>13</sup>

After 1947, with the demise of the independent political opposition, censors proved less squeamish. Analogies between the persecution of the early Christians under Rome and the situation of Catholics in the Marxist regime were

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<sup>13</sup> GUKP, 421 tom II, Odprawy krajowe 1946 r., pp. 40–41.

rigorously controlled with plays that offended on this count being removed from the repertoire.<sup>14</sup>

These restrictions came to apply also to introductions to literary works (and critics' reviews). Mention of a work's broader political relevance, and especially its contemporary resonance for readers, led to the removal of Zbigniew Herbert's play *The Philosopher's Cave*, which examined Socrates' final imprisonment, from his collection *Dramaty (Dramas)* in 1967. According to censorship officials, 'these "events" are only a backdrop for the author's own reflections on philosophical matters – life, death – but above all on political issues such as power and the rule of law, etc. The main stratum of the play is the drama of a wise, outstanding individual entangled in the eternal conflict with power, which is mindless and tyrannical. [Ale owe "wydarzenia" są tylko kanwą, na której autor snuje rozważania na tematy filozoficzne – życia, śmierci – i przede wszystkim – polityczne – jak zagadnienia władzy, praworządności itp. Główną warstwą sztuki jest dramat człowieka mądrego, wybitnego uwikłanego w odwieczny konflikt z władzą – bezmyślną, tyrańską.]'<sup>15</sup> Here the intractable problem from the censor's perspective was the author's own indications as to how the work should be read,<sup>16</sup> which defied censorship working practices.

The formalisation of censorship strategies towards suspect texts achieved its definitive formulation in a number of documents from the late 1970s and early 1980s. The index for the January 1980 edition of the censor's Monthly Instructional Materials includes as item 10 'The Interpretation of Texts,' clarifying the censorship office's concern as follows: 'The proper interpretation of texts whose social or political meaning is deliberately concealed by authors with the aid of allegories or other stylistic and linguistic devices.'<sup>17</sup> The related material given as an example of such concealment is a poem by M. Kraiński in the Gdansk student monthly, *Punkt*. Although ostensibly dealing with the French Revolution, the poem's implications could be extended to the present Polish political regime. The team of censors discussing the poem conclude that, 'in spite of the hermeticity of the language, the author's intention is clear and most of those

<sup>14</sup> Specific materials relating to this matter can be found in the state archives in Poznan under: Zespół Wojewódzki Urząd Kontroli Prasy, Publikacji i Widowisk w Poznaniu, 249 "Recenzje oraz ingerencje dotyczące widowisk i sztuk teatralnych 1945–1954".

<sup>15</sup> Przeglądy ingerencji i przeoczeń w publikacjach periodycznych, nieperiodycznych, drukach ulotnych I, II, III kwartał 1967 r., pp. 140–141.

<sup>16</sup> 'Where it touches upon the question of power the play is full of allusions to the present day and would be interpreted in that way, especially since the author in his prologue emphasizes the allusive nature of the work and guides the reader's attention in that direction. [Sztuka we fragmentach dotyczących problemu władzy, pełna aluzji do współczesności i byłaby odczytywana w związku ze współczesnością, zwłaszcza, że autor już w prologu podkreśla jej aluzyjność i zwraca w tym kierunku uwagę odbiorcy.]' Ibid., p. 141.

<sup>17</sup> GUKP, 1538, Informacje instruktażowe miesięczne 1980, pp. 48–49.

participating in the discussion interpreted the poem as an attempt to show that revolutionary power becomes distorted and ends up on the “rubbish tip” (Wydaje się, że intencja autora mimo hermetyczności języka – jest czytelna i większość uczestniczących w dyskusji ją odczytała, jako próbę wykazania, że władza rewolucyjna ulega deformacjom, kończy na “śmietniku”.)’ Moreover, neither the difficult nature of the text nor its niche audience provide an alibi automatically justifying its ‘release’ into the public domain: the undesirability of the text’s message remains the paramount concern. This seemingly authoritative position is then qualified significantly by an admission of deviations from the norm, albeit in special circumstances: ‘It is worth noting that sometimes *consciously* – on exceptional grounds and for precisely defined reasons – a text that evokes the censor’s reservations is released. This is done *consciously*, sometimes even deliberately, but with the knowledge and agreement of the Main Office’s directors. [Warto zauważyć, że czasem *świadomie* – na zasadzie wyjątku, ze względu na ściślej określone powody – zwalniany jest tekst budzący zastrzeżenia. Jest to jednak czynione *świadomie*, czasem nawet celowo, ale za wiedzą i zgodą kierownictwa Urzędu.]’<sup>18</sup>

The key term in the censorship team’s assessment of Kraiński’s piece is ‘intention’. Throughout the whole post-war period, the censorship office tended to presume writers guilty of a desire to subvert the system. Intentionality has subsequently assumed a crucial position in Polish scholars’ thinking about Aesopian texts,<sup>19</sup> posing the question of whether it is possible to distinguish what is ‘purely artistic creation’ from ‘a strategy designed to combat censorship’.<sup>20</sup> The ontological status of the artistic utterance is here at stake with the consequence that texts may be identified as Aesopian, where their authors possessed no such intention. The audience response may therefore constitute a profoundly reductive reading of the work, marginalising elements that do not conform to the expected political subtext.<sup>21</sup>

<sup>18</sup> Ibid., p. 49.

<sup>19</sup> See J. Smulski, „Jak niewyraźalne staje się wyraźalne? O języku ezopowym w prozie polskiej lat pięćdziesiątych”, in: *Literatura wobec niewyraźalnego*, W. Bolecki and E. Kuźma (eds.), PAN, Warsaw 1998, pp. 145–164; and Kamila Budrowska’s overview of the debates in *Literatura i pisarze wobec cenzury PRL 1948–1958*, Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu w Białymstoku, Białystok 2009, pp. 240–246.

<sup>20</sup> K. Budrowska, op. cit., p. 241.

<sup>21</sup> Bogusław Sulikowski has used Polish audience responses to Miloš Forman’s film version of *One Flew over the Cuckoo’s Nest* to demonstrate precisely this point. He argues that the key idea for the Polish audience was that of the ‘institution as totalitarian state’, which completely overshadowed both the psychiatric elements as well as the psychological motivation of those who upheld the ward’s repressive regime. “Ten przeklęty język ezopowy...”, in: *Piśmiennictwo – systemy kontroli – obiegi alternatywne*, tom II, J. Kostecki and A. Brodzka (eds.), Biblioteka Narodowa, Warsaw 1992, pp. 265–284 (pp. 280–81).

Annabel Patterson's concept of 'functional ambiguity' is helpful here: as she notes, 'authors who build ambiguity into their works have no control over what happens to them later.'<sup>22</sup> It neatly side-steps the theoretical impasse into which these deliberations can rapidly lead and liberates us from the need to ascribe a work's meaning to either the author or his/her audience. The focus of the present article then falls upon the ways in which subversive meanings may be activated both by the text's formulations and the audience's reception. For my purposes here the audience reception is provided by contemporary reviews of the three works.

### Historical Fiction, "Heretical" Thinkers and the Regime

Truly effective censorship nonetheless required positive promotion of the regime's desired models. This was most visible under Socialist Realism (1949–55), when a marked official preference for literary works dealing with the rapid industrialization and socio-political transformation of Polish society marginalized historical works, except insofar as they could demonstrate the historical rightness of the Party's political line. The major literary cycle of this period, Antoni Gołubiew's series of novels about Bolesław Chrobry, the first king of Poland (992–1026), challenged official *mores* and was accordingly systematically denigrated in censorship reports.<sup>23</sup> Here the correct interpretation of the past, particularly to explain the creation of People's Poland as the ultimate development of Polish statehood with special emphasis placed on justifying the new post-war borders, informed censorship critiques of Gołubiew's work. In the absence of broader public support the communists were keen to establish a cultural and intellectual canon, which advanced those writers and thinkers they regarded as progressive.<sup>24</sup> The Stalinist regime therefore expended greater efforts on translating and disseminating the works of renowned Polish radicals from the late medieval period onwards.

One dimension of this activity was a communist state-sponsored international project in Hussite studies,<sup>25</sup> to which Polish scholars made a substantial

<sup>22</sup> A. Patterson, *op. cit.*, p. 18.

<sup>23</sup> Its non-Marxist exposition of Polish history was rigorously criticized in the censors' reviews. See my "Cenzura wobec problemu niemieckiego w literaturze", in: *Presja i ekspresja: Zjazd Szczeciński i Socrealizm*, D. Dąbrowska and P. Michałowski (eds.), Wydawnictwo Naukowe Uniwersytetu Szczecińskiego, Szczecin 2002, pp. 79–92.

<sup>24</sup> Zbigniew Romek's discussion of the debate surrounding the definition of 'progressive' among Polish historians from the later 1940s indicates its problematic status. *Cenzura a nauka historyczna w Polsce 1944–1970*, Wydawnictwo Neriton, Warsaw 2010, pp. 165–172.

<sup>25</sup> See *Mezinárodní ohlas Husitsví*, J. Maček (ed.), Nakl. Československé akademie věd, Prague 1958.

contribution, the effect of which appears to have been grossly to exaggerate the scale of the phenomenon in late medieval Poland.<sup>26</sup> The popularization of the work of the Polish Jacobin Hugo Kołłątaj (1755–1810) and the publication of the collected works of Andrzej Frycz Modrzewski (1503–72) in a vernacular translation, which were major achievements for Polish publishers in this period, constituted a central plank of this policy. Modrzewski also received literary treatment in Anna Kowalska's *Wójt Wolborski* (1954, and its second part *Ad Astrea*, published in 1956), the discussion of which in censorship files demonstrates the problems of the historical novel as a vehicle for transmitting ideologically desired content. Invariably the complexity of the period's portrayal impeded the work's readability for a mass audience.<sup>27</sup> This could sometimes lead to a work's not being published,<sup>28</sup> since it would fail to achieve its ideological purpose, but the need for a broadly politically acceptable version of the great Renaissance thinker's life seems to have outweighed these drawbacks.<sup>29</sup>

Even during the Stalinist era, as Jerzy Smulski has argued, the existence of Aesopian historical works may be detected.<sup>30</sup> Two prominent examples he analyses are Hanna Malewska's short stories addressing the situation of intellectuals in the Tudor period (*Sir Thomas More odmawia*, 1951, and *Koniec Cramnera*, 1956) and Bogusław Sujkowski's novel *Liście koka* (*Leaves of Cocoa*, 1954), set during the Spanish conquest of sixteenth-century Peru, which will be considered at greater length below. These works about tyranny in a distant time and place granted censors and the political authorities an alibi should they fail to appreciate possible subversive readings: in other words functional ambiguity provided reasonable doubt.

After 1956, this repertoire of strategies acquired greater sophistication with the foregrounding of the Catholic Church – invariably seen as a force of reaction and hence at the opposite end of the political spectrum from the Communist Party – especially in its most censorious form (the medieval Inquisition), as a parallel to the repressive apparatus of the Stalinist regime. Leszek Kołakowski's numerous

<sup>26</sup> P. Kras, *Husyci w piętnastowiecznej Polsce*, Towarzystwo Naukowe KUL, Lublin 1998, pp. 26–27.

<sup>27</sup> The excessive degree of historical knowledge which the author seemed to require of the reader made it unintelligible for the average reader in the view of the first censor. GUKP 386, PIW 1954, p. 21.

<sup>28</sup> As the second report proposed: *ibid.*, pp. 23–25. This censor also noted the author's over-deference to the impact of Western influences on Frycz's thought.

<sup>29</sup> The final, post-publication review reiterated the earlier criticisms while acknowledging the novel's ideologically correct interpretation of class relations between the lesser nobility and magnates: 'ukazano w niej słusznie obóz postępu walczący bohatercko przeciwko szlachecko-magnackiej oligarchii [the progressive camp is shown rightly in its heroic struggle against the magnate oligarchy].' *Ibid.*, p. 29.

<sup>30</sup> "Jak niewyraźalne staje się wyraźalne?", pp. 147–152.

essays on a reformed state socialism during the ‘Thaw’ period, and particularly his highly influential ‘Kapłan i błazen (The Priest and Jester)’,<sup>31</sup> examined contemporary Marxism precisely in terms of its ‘theological’ outlook, that is the justification of present human sacrifice in expectation of future goods (the utopian social order).<sup>32</sup> The conclusions of Zbigniew Herbert’s essays on the suppression of the Templar Order and the thirteenth-century crusade against the Albigensians in his volume *Barbarzyńca w ogrodzie (Barbarian in the Garden, 1962)* suggested the more general contemporary relevance of specific historical examples. As he states at the end of ‘Obrona Templariuszy (Defence of the Templars)’: ‘The methods used in the struggle against the Templars have entered the repertoire of power. For that reason we cannot leave this distant affair to the archivists’ pale fingers. [Metody użyte we walce z Templariuszami weszły do repertuaru władzy. Dlatego nie możemy tej odległej afery pozostawić bladym palcom archiwistów.]’<sup>33</sup> Notably there is no geographical reference here to People’s Poland, let alone to any of the communist states, which prompts several more general reflections about the use of such tropes.

Apart from their specificity, and the individual status of the writer employing them,<sup>34</sup> the format and place of publication also played a part in determining their acceptability.<sup>35</sup> The limits that the censorship office imposed on the use of the metaphor of the Catholic Church in relation to the Party, even at a relatively liberal juncture, can be seen in a report dated 10 February 1958. The article ‘Życie Galilei [Life of Galileo]’ was confiscated from the twenty-fourth number of the magazine *Nowe Sygnały* because of its ‘very transparent allusions to the current situation in the Party [skonfiskowano artykuł o bardzo przejrzystych aluzjach do obecnej sytuacji w partii]’.<sup>36</sup> The discussion between Cardinal Barberini, later Pope Urban VIII, and Galileo, takes up the subject of the free exchange of ideas.

<sup>31</sup> Its full Polish title is “Rozważania o teologicznym dziedzictwie współczesnego myślenia (Reflections on the Theological Legacy of Contemporary Thought).” The English translation can be found in *Towards a Marxist Humanism. Essays on the Left Today by Leszek Kołakowski*, trans. J. Zielonko Peel, Grove Press Inc., New York 1968, pp. 9–37.

<sup>32</sup> ‘In its modernized version it (theodicy – JB) concerns the rationalism of history, the question whether the individual’s misfortunes and suffering have meaning and justification within a universal historical rationality.’ “The Priest and the Jester”, p. 12.

<sup>33</sup> “Obrona Templariuszy (Defence of the Templars)”, *Barbarzyńca w ogrodzie*, Czytelnik, Warsaw 1964, p. 215.

<sup>34</sup> Kołakowski may have enjoyed a certain official credit due to his work criticizing Catholicism in the early 1950s.

<sup>35</sup> “Kapłan i błazen” was first published in the literary monthly *Twórczość*, whose profile became increasingly *avantgarde*.

<sup>36</sup> GUKP 656, “Przeglądy ingerencji – przeglądy przeoczeń 1958–1959 (159/1)”, *Przegląd inżynierii* Nr 2/58, p. 11.

Barberini: We understand the need and necessity of a broad creative discussion but only up to the moment when an encyclical is published. Then the discussion should be broken off. That, my son, is and must be the Church's position.

Galileo: But do you not consider this, Your Eminence, to be a position harmful to the Church itself? Certain previous experiences would seem to indicate that it is...

Barberini: I know what you mean but cannot agree with you. Have no doubt, Galileo, that I appreciate the danger of the Inquisition, which I condemn like you and of which I am ashamed as a Christian. But discipline and obedience in God's Church do not have to be synonymous with the reign of the Inquisition, which – I believe – we will finally manage to rein in and suppress. [...]. The greatest good is Church unity but this we shall definitely not preserve if we agree to endless discussions of matters upon which the Holy Office has already pronounced its judgment based on Holy Scripture and Christ's teachings – obviously freely adapted to real life and brought closer to the common people.

[Barberini: Rozumiemy dobrze potrzebę i konieczność szerokiej, twórczej dyskusji, ale tylko do czasu ogłoszenia encykliki. Potem dyskusja powinna być przerwana. Takie jest, mój synu, i takie musi być stanowisko Kościoła.

Galileo: Czy nie sądzi pan, Eminencjo, że jest to stanowisko szkodliwe przede wszystkim dla Kościoła samego? Pewne doświadczenia zdawałyby się może na to wskazywać...

Barberini: Wiem, co pan ma na myśli, ale nie mogę się z panem zgodzić. Nie wątpi pan, Galileuszu, że doceniam niebezpieczeństwo Inkwizycji, którą potępiam jak i pan i której wstydzę się jako chrześcijanin. Ale karność i posłuszeństwo w Kościele Bożym nie muszą być jednoznaczne z panowaniem Inkwizycji, którą – jak mniemam zdołamy wreszcie okiełzać i ukrócić. [...] Dobrem najwyższym jest jedność Kościoła a tej nie ocalimy na pewno, jeśli zgodzimy się na roztrząsanie w nieskończoność zagadnień o których Święte Oficjum wydało już swój wyrok w oparciu o Pismo Święte i naukę Chrystusową – oczywiście twórczo zastosowaną do życia i zbliżoną do gminu.]<sup>37</sup>

The implicit connection between the Holy Office and the Party leadership, apart from the similarly irrevocable nature of their utterances, is suggested by the use of contemporary party phraseology, a usage which is evidently anachronistic in the sixteenth-century context. This deliberate use of anachronism fulfils Michael Riffaterre's definition of 'ungrammaticality' in respect of forcing the reader to shift from the mimetic to the metaphorical plane of interpretation.<sup>38</sup> (In many

<sup>37</sup> Ibid., pp. 11–12.

<sup>38</sup> 'To discover the significance at last, the reader must surmount the mimesis hurdle [...] The reader's acceptance of the mimesis sets up the grammar as the background from which the ungrammaticalities will thrust themselves forward as stumbling blocks, to be understood eventually on a second level.' M. Riffaterre, *Semiotics of Poetry*, Methuen and Co. Ltd, London 1978, p. 6.

respects, Polish readers – as I argue below – were constitutionally attuned to receiving such ungrammaticalities.) The specific phrase that helps to trigger contemporary associations is ‘potrzeba (...) szerokiej, twórczej dyskusji [need for (...) a wide-ranging, creative discussion],’ a staple cliché of Thaw-era party discourse. The exact contemporary counterpart of the Inquisition is not entirely clear, although the socially and intellectually repressive functions it performs suggest both the secret police and the censorship apparatus, whose collaboration proved crucial to suppression of the political opposition in the late 1940s. Barberini’s counterpart may be the enlightened members of the party leadership who sought to engage with intellectuals in a more open manner, appealing to the latter’s sense of responsibility for current developments.<sup>39</sup> The particular problem appears to be two-fold: firstly, the place of publication (periodicals tended to have a larger production run than standard literary works) and secondly the nature of the work itself, which consists entirely of a set of exchanges without any mediating context – and hence fails to offer any plausible deniability in terms of variant readings. Its ‘functional ambiguity’ is thereby severely impaired.

By the end of the 1960s, the criteria applied to works passed by the censorship office in the ‘Thaw’ period underwent major revisions. The censorship office’s earlier approach seemed increasingly too liberal, as the Head of the Department of Non-Periodical Publications made clear in a report from January 1969:

All books that are being reissued, and which were inspected in the years 1956–1960, are also being subjected to renewed inspection. This is due to the fact that current criteria and demands differ from the criteria that applied then. Practice shows that in many of these reissued items we have had to carry out political interventions.

[Również ponownej kontroli poddawane są wszystkie książki wznawiane, a które były kontrolowane w latach 1956–1960. Jest to spowodowane okolicznością, że kryteria i wymogi obecne różnią się od kryteriów obowiązujących w tamtych latach. Praktyka wskazuje, że w wielu wznawianych pozycjach, musieliśmy dokonywać politycznych ingerencji.]<sup>40</sup>

This document indicates a significant policy shift. The literature of the Thaw period was now deemed politically suspect in a far more explicit manner and the fact of its previous publication could not be construed as providing a precedent for republication.

<sup>39</sup> The Hungarian crisis of November 1956 is a case in point where journalists, in the absence of a fully functioning censorship, were effectively asked to self-censor or exercise self-restraint in their reporting.

<sup>40</sup> PZPR KC w Warszawie, Wydział Kultury II, 1354 AAN, 859, 1967–1969, “Sprawozdanie z działalności w 1968 r.,” p. 3.

Dissatisfaction with Aesopian strategies, which is part of the problem here, was also expressed by writers of the younger generation who directly criticized the techniques adopted by Andrzejewski and Herbert among others. Its classic exposition came in Adam Zagajewski and Julian Kornhauser's *Świat nieprzedstawiony* (*Unrepresented World*, 1974) but their general case in favour of 'mówienie wprost (straight-talking)' receives confirmation from a representative voice in the previously cited Wirpsza article:

Our language is a system of analogies and allegories, an abstract language which excludes the description of the conditions of our existence. And precisely the fact that this type of culture remains silent about the fundamental, basic problems, means that as a result suspicion falls on honest people. If a culture excludes from its sphere the basic problems, everything becomes suspect.

[Nasz język jest systemem analogii i alegorii, językiem abstrakcyjnym, który wykluczył opisywanie warunków naszej egzystencji. I właśnie fakt, że tego rodzaju kultura przemilcza zasadnicze, podstawowe problemy, sprawia, że w wyniku tego pada podejrzenie na uczciwych ludzi. Jeśli dana kultura wyklucza ze swej sfery podstawowe problemy, wszystko staje się podejrzane.]<sup>41</sup>

Although this idealistic comment typifies a particular historical moment – it predates the rise of the 'second circulation' of underground publication in 1976 which would make its diagnosis largely redundant – it captures the pathology to which the Polish literary culture and readership were prone. On the one hand the speaker suggests the incommensurability of past, often foreign examples to the Polish present day – a perception which applies equally to the nineteenth-century experience of the partitioning powers' censorship regimes. (Zbigniew Kubikowski, in a posthumously published series of articles on post-war prose, utilized the metaphor of the 'glass wall' to describe this distance between Polish literature and its native audience's historical experience.)<sup>42</sup> Conversely, the abnormal situation – in which key questions cannot be addressed – encourages inveterate subversive reading strategies irrespective of the author's ('innocent people') or even the text's intentions. The key word in the young poet's critique is 'przemilcza' ('remains silent about'), which evokes related terms like 'niedomówienie' or 'niedopowiedzenie' ('elliptical statement' but more literally 'unsaidness' or 'incomplete utterance') as responses in the face of an ideological censorship which pretended to the status of a 'logocracy', as Arlen Blyum has termed it.<sup>43</sup> Despite

<sup>41</sup> PZPR KC WK AAN LVI – 1333 (1973) Wydział Kultury KC PZPR 1973. Document 27, p. 3.

<sup>42</sup> "Szkłany mur", *Odra* 1983–84.

<sup>43</sup> 'Its purpose [ideological censorship – JB] was to force people to have the exclusively "correct" ideas about the world, to form the man equipped with the one and only true *Weltanschauung*.

the implicit desire for ‘straight-talking’, the younger generation proved as adept at employing strategies of circumlocution as the older. The remainder of the present chapter will examine the prevalence of these strategies in relation to a number of literary works presenting the same historical ‘costume’ of the Spanish Inquisition, albeit to different effect and with variant purposes. To what degree and how do the authors articulate the broader issues of Polish experience of oppression? The question is then one of the extent to which these issues are discussed in the public sphere that is not merely the domain of propaganda.

Central to this approach is the focus on the concept of ‘silence’ (‘milczenie’). In his study of Andrzejewski’s *Ciemności*, Jürgen Schreiber approaches the novel ultimately through an examination of its keywords, which help to take his analysis beyond the novel’s immediate context and questions of its adequacy in relation to contemporary Polish experience.<sup>44</sup> A notable and surprising absentee among these keywords – given its prevalence in the novel and applicability to the operating practices of the medieval Inquisition and communist rule alike – is the term ‘silence’. Following Wendy Brown, I will problematize use of the term: silence is considered as a ‘political value, a means of preserving certain practices and dimensions of existence from regulatory power, from normative violence’.<sup>45</sup> Likewise the silences of Andrzejewski’s and the other novelists’ characters – I will argue – do not always constitute acts of absolute subjugation to dominant authority.

### ‘[Every]body expects the Spanish Inquisition...’: Three Portrayals of the Inquisition in late Fifteenth-Century Spain

The use of Iberian and Latin-American historical contexts as models for exploring the Polish socio-political condition in prose can be traced back to at least the late Partitions. In his preface to his 1902 novel *Upiory* (*Phantoms*), Walery Przyborowski provided a key to the work, explaining *inter alia* that medieval Bilbao should be read as Warsaw during the 1863 uprising, that the famous Warsaw

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The Soviet state came to be dominated not so much by an ideocracy as by a logocracy – the power of words. [...] what mattered was to write and say the necessary words, to maintain some form of ideological decorum.’ A. Blyum, *A Self-Administered Poison. The System and Functions of Soviet Censorship*, trans. by IP Foote, University Humanities Research Centre, University of Oxford, Legenda Special Lecture Series 5, 2003, p. 10.

<sup>44</sup> J. Schreiber, *Jerzy Andrzejewski’s Roman “Ciemności kryją ziemię” und die Darstellung der spanischen Inquisition in Werken der fiktionalen Literatur*, Verlag Otto Sagner, München 1981, pp. 121–159.

<sup>45</sup> W. Brown, “Freedom’s Silences”, in: *Censorship and Silencing. Practices of Cultural Regulation*, Robert C. Post (ed.), The Getty Institute for the History of Art and the Humanities, Los Angeles CA 1998, pp. 313–327 (p. 314).

street Krakowskie Przedmieścia (literally ‘Cracow Suburbs’) had been recast as Madrid Suburbs, while the hero’s name Bona Fide represented a calque of the real-life (Stanisław) Traugutt, the leader of the Polish insurrection.<sup>46</sup> A more typically covert approach to the use of the Latin-American context emerges from Bogusław Sujkowski’s *Liście koka* (*Cocoa Leaves*, 1954). Its external form – the unmasking of the evils of Spanish colonization of the Inca empire – caused its first censor, a certain Tomczak, to view it in simplistic Marxist terms:

Its value lies above all in the fact that it acquaints the [Polish] reader with the problem of colonialism in its embryonic form, it unmasks the world of hypocrisy and duplicity of those colonizers, provides a highly accurate attack and condemnation of ownership as injustice and exploitation.

[Wartość jej polega przede wszystkim na tym, iż zapoznaje ona czytelnika z problemem kolonialnym w jego zarodkowej formie, demaskuje świat obłudy i kłamstwa ówczesnych kolonizatorów i ich spadkobierców współczesnych imperialistów, godzi bardzo trafnie i potępia prawo własności, jako prawo krzywdy i wyzysku.]<sup>47</sup>

The ideologically problematic conception of the Inca state, whose very organization was responsible for its collapse, caused Tomczak to qualify his initial praise of the work’s ‘historical truth’. In that state, ‘each individual was controlled by [the state], had no will or power to direct his own fate, since everything was governed by orders from above [każda jednostka była nim kierowana, nie posiadała woli ani mocy pokierowania swym losem, gdyż wszystkim rządził rozkaz z góry].<sup>48</sup> The implications of this analysis – its applicability to the communist system – remained unexplored by Tomczak and his superior Lassoń, who granted permission for the book to be typeset in September 1953. A second review, dated February 1954, indicates that these implications were subsequently appreciated and may have delayed the book’s eventual appearance.<sup>49</sup> Certainly

<sup>46</sup> The oddity of Przyborowski’s practice lies in the fact that he reveals his ingenuity thereby exposing its redundancy in the Austrian context and also, given Russian censors’ sensitivity to works published in the other partitions, ensuring that his work will not be published in the most immediately relevant sector.

<sup>47</sup> GUKP 375 (31/35), p. 604.

<sup>48</sup> GUKP 375 (31/35), p. 607.

<sup>49</sup> Five months is a considerable delay between the initial censorship report and release of the book. The second censor, noted that ‘sieć urzędników państwowych kontroluje i reguluje każdy, najmniejszy odcinek życia poddanych [...] każdy mieszkaniec państwa “Inków” wykonuje swą pracę na rozkaz urzędnika [...] bez rozkazu nie wolno zaczynać siewów ani zbiorów, przenieść się do innej wsi, zmieniać pracę’ [a network of state functionaries controls and regulates every little segment of the subjects’ lives [...] each inhabitant of the Inca state carries out his work at the functionaries’ command [...] without such a command crops cannot be sown or harvested, and nobody can move to another village or change their place of work.]. GUKP, 375 (31/36), pp. 170–1.

the absence of any press reviews of the novel either in its first or second edition – a fact noted by Jerzy Smulski<sup>50</sup> – suggests that the political authorities may have preferred to suppress public awareness of the novel and hence discussion of its potentially subversive nature.

The three novels by Andrzejewski, Strykowski and Cepik appeared in the more liberal publishing environment that developed from 1956.<sup>51</sup> Although linked by the trope of the Inquisition, each novel provides a different narrative focus with implications for the novel's interpretations. *Ciemności kryją ziemię* (1957) foregrounds the relationship between the novice monk Diego and Torquemada with the transformation of Diego's stance from one of opposition into the Grand Inquisitor's acolyte and successor. The novel functions as a master text in the Polish post-war context, providing a key point of reference for the two later novels discussed here. The cultural and political liberalization then dominating public life not only enabled the novel's publication but also a fuller critical discussion.<sup>52</sup> Stylized sporadically as a medieval chronicle, its use of contemporary phraseology alerted readers to the relevance of the action for recent history.

Torquemada's call for vigilance from his subordinates, for instance, invokes a major propaganda slogan of the Stalin era: 'But we must be vigilant, brethren, we must not sleep while the enemy in our midst is awake. [Bądźmy jednak czujni i nie śpijmy wówczas, kiedy nie śpi nieprzyjaciół przebywający wśród nas].'<sup>53</sup> The capacity of the inquisitorial system to explain the world contributes decisively to Diego's conversion to its cause: 'The lucid and universal character of the laws of Inquisition, which subordinated every detail to a monolithic, all-embracing concept, aroused respect and admiration in the young friar, but the consequences of these laws still troubled his conscience. [Przejrzystość oraz powszechny charakter tych praw, porządkujących szczegóły istnienia w jednolitą i wszystko wyjaśniającą całość, budziły w młodym braciszku podziw i szacunek, natomiast skutki ich oddziaływania wciąż się mu wydawały sprzeczne z odruchami jego sumienia.]'<sup>54</sup> The presentation of Diego's intellectual enslavement bears resemblance to certain

<sup>50</sup> J. Smulski, op. cit., p. 148. He also raises the question of its intended Aesopian character, qualifying it as a work that can be read rather as a 'political commentary', pp. 147–48.

<sup>51</sup> References to *Ciemności* are to the first edition (PIW, Warsaw 1957) with Konrad Syrop's English translation, entitled *The Inquisitors* (Weidenfeld and Nicolson, London 1960), being employed; for *Przybysz*, references are to the third edition (Wydawnictwo Literackie, Krakow 1993); *Torquemada*'s first edition (Wydawnictwo Poznańskie, Poznań 1986) is used.

<sup>52</sup> Testimony to the exceptional nature of the moment is the fact that the novel was not published again (and then for the last time in communist Poland) until 1973 when it appeared with two other works under the generic title of *Three Novels (Trzy powieści)*.

<sup>53</sup> J. Andrzejewski, *The Inquisitors*, p. 14; idem, *Ciemności...*, p. 16.

<sup>54</sup> J. Andrzejewski, *The Inquisitors*, pp. 51–52; idem, *Ciemności...*, pp. 55–56.

real-life admissions of intellectual submission to Stalinist ideology:<sup>55</sup> the later oppositionist Jacek Kuroń summed up the appeal of Marxist philosophy as lying precisely in its exposition of the world, its major failing being its inability to provide guidance on how to behave ethically.<sup>56</sup> Finally the concept of continual revolution, of Stalinist terror as a self-perpetuating system, informs Torquemada's definition of the rationale behind inquisitorial power to Diego:

One day if we run out of culprits, we shall have to create more. We need them so that crimes can be seen to be publicly humiliated and punished all the time. (...) Our power, my son, is based on universal fear. With the exception of a handful who are obedient from choice, everybody must be so afraid that no one is capable even of imagining an existence free of fear.<sup>57</sup>

[Gdyby pewnego dnia zabrakło winnych, musielibyśmy ich stworzyć, ponieważ są nam potrzebni, aby nieustannie, o każdej godzinie występki były publicznie poniżane i karane. (...) Konieczność naszej władzy, mój synu, od tego przede wszystkim zależy, aby strach, wyjąwszy garstkę posłusznych z dobrej woli, stał się powszechnym, tak wypełniając wszystkie dziedziny życia, by nikt już sobie nie mógł wyobrazić istnienia bez lęku.]<sup>58</sup>

The ritualistic and exemplary punishment of miscreants can be related as a general principle to the Stalinist showtrials of the early 1950s. Critics tended to take these analogies, and hence the overriding relevance of the novel to recent Polish history, for granted,<sup>59</sup> articulating the parallels openly. Their occasional more or less transparent reference to Orwell's unconditionally banned *1984*, implicitly assuming that readers would recognize their point, is extraordinary within post-war public discourse.<sup>60</sup> This stemmed at least partly from the perceived

<sup>55</sup> Diego's thinking echoes Czesław Miłosz's *Zniewolony umysł* (*The Captive Mind*, 1953), the classic account of this subjugation.

<sup>56</sup> 'It offered a young person the chance to order the world as he wanted. [...] what seemed to us gigantic progress, which we saw taking place before our very eyes, was at the same time creating a cultural desert. Now this new culture we were creating doesn't answer the question how you should live. It tells people how to act.' J. Rupnik, *The Other Europe*, Part 1. Channel 4. (1987).

<sup>57</sup> J. Andrzejewski, *The Inquisitors*, p. 47.

<sup>58</sup> Idem, *Ciemności...*, p. 51.

<sup>59</sup> An anonymous comment stated that the novel employed 'historical costumes and decorations of the 15<sup>th</sup> century'. *Twórczość* 1957, 10–11, p. 2. Stefan Durski even more curtly that 'the novel should be read from the contemporary perspective', *Polityka*, 10–17 June 1957, p. 7; Roman Zimand considered that 'we are dealing here with allusions, not with a direct accusation of Stalinism', *Nowa Kultura*, 25 August 1957, p. 6.

<sup>60</sup> Durski declared that the Inquisition acted like the Ministry of Truth in Orwell's 'well-known novel' (*ibid.*), while Henryk Bereza described Torquemada as both 'Caligula and [...] O'Brien', *Nowa Kultura*, 13 October 1957, pp. 8–9.

inadequacy of the psychological characterization.<sup>61</sup> Without entirely disputing these interpretations, others prioritized instead the novel's high literary genealogy (Dostoevskii and Romantic models) – the direct subordination of literature to political contingency presumably being uncomfortably close to practices under Socialist Realist doctrine.<sup>62</sup> This degree of open discussion proved short-lived, however, as the party restored more stringent controls in the cultural sphere,<sup>63</sup> although the novel itself remained part of the critical discourse.

In his review of Strykowski's novel, Tadeusz Nyczek establishes *Ciemności* from the outset as a key reference point, seeing Andrzejewski's work as foregrounding 'the social and political mechanism which transforms a private way of viewing the world into the threat of fanatical collective rightness [mechanizm społeczno-polityczny przekształcający prywatne widzenie świata w groźbę fanatyzmu racji zbiorowych]', in contrast to the Romantic vision of resistance dealt with in *Przybysz* '[mamy do czynienia z romantyczną wizją oporu.]'<sup>64</sup> The use of the abstruse 'social and political mechanism ...' indicates the scale of public retrenchment undertaken since the Thaw, when the socialist system ('Stalinism') could be named directly. Paradoxically, even the existence of an independent underground publishing network from 1976 (the 'second circulation [drugi obieg]') helped these circumlocutions to continue. Underground reviewers, like their public counterparts, often refrained from making explicit the subversive potential of works circulating above ground, deliberately casting their implications in the most general terms.<sup>65</sup> Nyczek's apparently throw-away comment regarding the novel's epigraph – 'It's no accident that the novel is dedicated to the Insurgents of the Warsaw Ghetto, and, perhaps, to all insurgents everywhere. [Nieprzypadkowo zadedykowana jest "Powstańcom Getta Warszawskiego". I bodaj wszystkim innym powstańcom.]' – is typical in its radical though obliquely phrased extension

<sup>61</sup> Bereza comments that most did not note in Diego 'the more or less profound disintegration of the human being [nie dostrzegano u niego mniej lub więcej głębokiej dezintegracji człowieka' (H. Bereza, op. cit., p. 8), thereby attributing a greater degree of credibility to his portrayal. The famous staging at Łódź's Teatr Nowy in 1957 was generally deemed to obviate this criticism.

<sup>62</sup> R. Przybylski, *Polityka*, 30 October – 5 November 1957, p. 5; A. Kijowski, op. cit., p. 148. In critical discourse, this was usually phrased as the 'autonomous status [autonomiczność] of literature'.

<sup>63</sup> See the above-mentioned GUKP report of January 1969 (pp. 10–11). Tomasz Burek classed the novel as one of the forgotten works of the 'thaw' period in "Zapomniana literatura polskiego Października", in: idem, *Żadnych marzeń*, Polonia, London 1986. Andrzejewski's own increasingly oppositionist stance and defiance of public norms (publishing in emigration under his own name, for instance) throughout the 1960s undoubtedly also played a major role in official caution towards his work.

<sup>64</sup> T. Nyczek, *Echo Krakowa*, 29 May 1977, p. 4.

<sup>65</sup> This type of restraint is also evinced by Loseff in *The Beneficence of Censorship* as well as the discussants in Farrell and Dewhirst's seminal *The Soviet Censorship* (1973), who largely limit their discussion to classic texts.

of the novel's range of meanings.<sup>66</sup> Thus primed,<sup>67</sup> the readership would apply the novel's terms in the first instance to Polish society.<sup>68</sup>

The endangered community and the varied reactions of its inhabitants to the Inquisition's threat lend themselves to analogy with Polish experience on several levels. The very use of the trope of a besieged community (the *barrio*) arguably invokes this perception, with the declaration that 'we are a small nation [jesteśmy małym narodem] (132)' being one of those 'ungrammaticalities' that invariably prompted reflections on the Poles' own status.<sup>69</sup> In the absence of full statehood, Polish nineteenth-century discourse foregrounded national allegiance as the measure of identity; these terms tended to be updated to the current context as Janusz Tazbir's confiscated 1978 essay 'Dzieło literackie jako źródło współczesne [The Literary Work as a Contemporary Source]' articulates in exemplary fashion. Here the latter-day connotations of the pejorative 'małe państewko [little state]', applied to the post-Napoleonic solution of the Congress Kingdom of Poland, are teased out.<sup>70</sup> Polish nineteenth-century experience offers then a critical perspective upon the post-war state and specifically social responses to oppression. The focus on Eli, the titular stranger who arrives in the *barrio* to organise communal resistance to the Inquisition, from this viewpoint invokes the Romantic insurrectionary option and links the *barrio*'s discussions to opposition discourse on resistance within late 1970s Poland.<sup>71</sup> Eli's exchange with Don Enrique about the Inquisition's *modus operandi* – its attempts to divide the community against itself – thus has more immediate relevance to late 1970s' than to previous contexts: 'The Inquisition instills fear, while the Inquisitor spreads slander via his spies. It's been a tried and tested weapon for centuries [Inkwizycja rzuca strach, a inkwizytor poprzez swoich szpiegów oszczerstwa. To wypróbowana broń. Od

<sup>66</sup> T. Nyczek, op. cit., p. 4.

<sup>67</sup> Irena Furnal's review is a masterpiece of insinuation, repeatedly directing the reader away from the literal level: 'Strykowski's word is burdened with an excess of meanings [...] it allows him to juggle freely with literary conventions, props, and to play a game with the reader.' *Miesięcznik Literacki* 1979, issue 1, pp. 128–130 (p. 130).

<sup>68</sup> Compare Stanisław Barańczak's review for the underground journal *Zapis* which concludes: 'Only one thing is certain [...]: whatever the outcome of this struggle between good and evil waged in the dark, taking part determines our humanity – it is our human duty.' *Zapis* 1979, issue 9, pp. 155–158 (p. 158).

<sup>69</sup> A classic locus of the Poland-Israel analogy is the eighth sermon of the Jesuit polemicist Piotr Skarga's *Kazania sejmowe (Sermons to the Sejm, 1597)*, later taken up and expanded by the Romantics in exile. See <http://staropolska.pl/ang/renaissance/skarga.php3> (accessed on 11.10.2012).

<sup>70</sup> GUKP, 1342, Informacje miesięczne o dokonanych ingerencjach 1978 r. Informacja No. 7, p. 263.

<sup>71</sup> Helena Zatorska in her review entitled "Heroizm bez złudzeń [Heroism without Illusions]" notes '*The Stranger from Narbonne* grew out of precisely this trend [of enthusiasm – JB] in Polish Romanticism which has lasted, as we know, deep into the twentieth century and is even more relevant today than it has ever been.' *Twórczość* 1978, issue 10, pp. 109–114 (p. 111).

wieków].<sup>72</sup> The question of the best response to the Inquisition's onslaught oscillates between the options, which taxed Polish oppositionists, of Romantic revolt, or more precisely terrorist acts symbolized by the plot to assassinate the Inquisitor, and a gradualist political realism that threatened to blend into mere quietism.<sup>73</sup> The rise of Solidarity, as Szaruga comments, resolved these dilemmas in a compromise unforeseeable during the late Gierek era.<sup>74</sup>

Critics played down the novel's status as mere 'costume drama', making a clear distinction from the treatment accorded to Andrzejewski's *Ciemności*.<sup>75</sup> The greater degree of contextual detail and various screens employed in the novel and by reviewers shielded against straightforward identification of the community with Poland circa 1978 or the Inquisition with the Party. Strykowski's dedication rather deflected readers' attention to a (from the official perspective) less problematic parallel for the action – a rising against Nazi power (unlike the 1944 general uprising launched by non-communists) whose commemoration was state sanctioned.<sup>76</sup> The Muslim presence in Spain, which has no clear counterpart within late 70s' Poland, and was therefore ignored by reviewers, in fact corresponds functionally to the Poles' status vis-a-vis the Jews during wartime, and may be viewed as reinforcing the dedication's misdirection. While the conventional Polish-Jewish parallel seemingly ascribes disproportionate threat to the 1970s' context, the common factor is a struggle phrased (in a perennially Polish manner) not so much in terms of politics as ethics, the defence of human dignity.

The focus upon the Grand Inquisitor in Cepik's *Torquemada* (1986) positions the novel in a direct relationship to Andrzejewski's *Ciemności*. Its comprehensive, factually-grounded account of the system Torquemada built prompted some of its mostly left-wing reviewers, however, to decry the earlier work's fictionality.<sup>77</sup> Metaphorical readings of Cepik's novel tended to concentrate on parallels with the Nazis – the Inquisition's obsession with *limpieza de sangre* invoking their

<sup>72</sup> J. Strykowski, *Przybysz...*, p. 216.

<sup>73</sup> Adam Michnik's foreword to Jacek Bocheński's book on 1970s' Italian terrorism highlights the terrorist option as topical within Polish underground discourse, *Krwawe specjalty włoskie*, Biblioteka Gazety Wyborczej, Warsaw 2009, pp. 11–12. See also L. Szaruga, *Wobec totalitaryzmu. Kostium kościelny w polskiej prozie. Wobec cenzury*, Ottonianum, Szczecin 1994, pp. 31–36.

<sup>74</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 35.

<sup>75</sup> See Szaruga's analysis of Jan Pieszczachowicz's review. *Ibid.*, pp. 33–35. Barańczak comments 'obviously, the whole world of the novel can by no means be reduced to a historical costume. The proportion of specific, historical and cultural factors determining the characters' behaviour is too great.' S. Barańczak, *op. cit.*, p. 158.

<sup>76</sup> Technically a screen according to Loseff's definition: *On the Beneficence of Censorship. Aesopian Language in Modern Russian Literature*, Verlag Otto Sagner, Munich 1984, pp. 50–52.

<sup>77</sup> Stanisław Zieliński's asserts that Cepik's portrayal of Torquemada's fascination with terror and power is more probable than Andrzejewski's doubt-ridden figure. *Nowe Książki* 1987, issue 2, pp. 69–71 (p. 69).

racial policies<sup>78</sup> – with the Soviet system being invoked solely in terms of the Stalinist cult.<sup>79</sup> The latter assumption had considerable support in the novel, first in the possibility of equating Torquemada with Stalin: ‘He treated doubt in his judgments and infallibility as doubt in the idea with which he identified. He was the idea. [Powątpienie w jego sądy i jego nieomylność traktował jako wątplenie w ideę. Utożsamiał się z nią. On był ideą].’<sup>80</sup> References to future historical justification are redolent of the rationalization of monumental communist crimes: ‘Great aims require superhuman sacrifices, whose value and necessity will be judged by the future. History will show we were right. [Wielkie cele wymagają nadludzkich ofiar, których wartość i potrzebę oceni przyszłość. – Historia przyzna nam rację.]’<sup>81</sup> The use of terror as the basic procedure for establishing social control, which Torquemada justifies to Queen Isabella, was common to secret police practices in both regimes, though the element of public punishment recalls Stalinist show trials: ‘Naturally we will need stakes, but the essential punishment will be fear. I shall infect everyone with fear and then they will all obey you, my daughter. [Naturalnie stopy będą potrzebne. Ale karą istotną będzie strach. Porażę strachem wszystkich, a wtedy wszyscy będą Ci posłuszni, córko.]’<sup>82</sup>

That there were only official press responses to Cepik’s novel, and that these operate largely within the parameters established for *Ciemności*,<sup>83</sup> generates further reflections on the circumstances of its reception. A number of the reviews altogether eliminate any metaphorical dimension, emphasizing the novel’s factual basis. By pointing up the continuation of the Inquisition into the nineteenth century and the Church’s failure to denounce its activities, they return the Inquisition to the religious domain.<sup>84</sup> From this perspective the absence of reviews from beyond the official spectrum may be read not merely as the trope’s redundancy in a situation where a highly developed underground network enabled far more direct criticism of the political system. The absence of Catholic press reviews also may rather indicate that, in the highly polarized socio-political situation before *glasnost*, the novel was regarded as an official work that promoted the party’s outlook.

<sup>78</sup> G. Kozera, “Wielki Inkwizytor”, *Słowo Ludu*, 22 May 1987, p. 5; K. Masłoń, *Życie Warszawy*, 27–28 July 1987, p. 5.

<sup>79</sup> Teresa Zaniewska refers to the ‘personality cult’ as one manifestation of later Inquisitions. *Gazeta Współczesna*, 10 July 1987, p. 6.

<sup>80</sup> J. Cepik, *Torquemada*, p. 170.

<sup>81</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 225.

<sup>82</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 22.

<sup>83</sup> Zaniewska is an obvious exception, when her comparison of Cepik’s work with *Ciemności* leads her to conclude that she would ‘also grant a historiosophical dimension’ to the former and asserts that ‘the book will certainly remain relevant to the present situation.’ T. Zaniewska, *op. cit.*, p. 5.

<sup>84</sup> Respectively, S. Zieliński, *op. cit.*, p. 70, and W. Jamrozik, “Opowieść o Wielkim Inkwizytorze”, *Głos Wielkopolski*, 25–26 April 1987, p. 5.

The power of the Church caused the party concern throughout the whole post-war period; by the 1980s these anxieties centred on the potent combination of Romantic-inflected public defiance and religious fundamentalism. Tadeusz Drewnowski, a party member enjoying broad political respect, obliquely (though transparently) raised this eventuality in his speech at the XXI Writers' Congress in December 1980, when he said, 'By exploiting national complexes and frustrations, not to mention the authorities' ineptitude, it [a significant part of the opposition] escalates the social mood as if we were heading into a new Warsaw Uprising or the return of Chomeini. [Wykorzystując kompleksy i frustracje narodowe, nie wspominając o niezręcznościach władzy, eskaluje ona nastroje, niczym przed nowym Powstaniem Warszawskim, czy przed powrotem Chomeiniego.]'<sup>85</sup> The resuscitation of Romantic behavioural models allied to a reflexive Catholicism,<sup>86</sup> which appeared to threaten the state authorities with total exclusion from any role in social dialogue, proved to be a constant refrain in contemporary official discourse.<sup>87</sup>

Ironically, then, by the mid-1980s, it was precisely the party that feared being silenced. Silencing dissent from and resistance to the official version had been equally intrinsic to both its and the Inquisition's operations. In Andrzejewski's and Cepik's narratives, the Inquisition achieves the psychological and moral disintegration of its victims precisely through silencing. The protocol of Lorenzo Perez's interrogation in *Ciemności* illustrates the success of inquisitorial methods:<sup>88</sup> his initial resistance, marked by the repeated recording of his silence ('milczał [does not reply]') in response to Torquemada's questions and assertions gives way on the second day to a ready acceptance of the Grand Inquisitor's version, which is underlined by his denunciation of 'several score' of fellow-conspirators.<sup>89</sup> In *Torquemada* the release of torture victims in 1492 is described as embodying the principle of silence imposed by the Inquisition both on the victims themselves and potential rebels: 'They were a mute warning to the rebellious [...] mute because those cripples were not allowed to tell what they had endured during torture, and would not confide even to their closest family out of fear that they would again find themselves in prison. [Były to nieme ostrzeżenia dla niepokornych [...] nieme, bo owym kalekim nie wolno było mówić, co przeżyli na torturach, nie zwierali się z tego nawet najbliższym w trwodze, że znowu znajdują się w więzieniach.]'<sup>90</sup>

<sup>85</sup> XXI Walny Zjazd ZLP 28–29 XII 1980. 11.723. Tom I: 28 grudnia 1980, p. 164.

<sup>86</sup> As one colleague – then a student – put it, 'we would leave the Church and join a demo against the regime.' This practice was purely tactical.

<sup>87</sup> Jerzy Ładyka's article "Literatura i polityka" in the Party's theoretical monthly provides an exemplary exposition of these anxieties, *Nowe Drogi* 1985, issue 7, pp. 154–162.

<sup>88</sup> J. Andrzejewski, *Ciemności...*, pp. 118–134; idem, *The Inquisitors*, pp. 108–123.

<sup>89</sup> J. Andrzejewski, *Ciemności...*, p. 132; idem, *The Inquisitors*, p. 122.

<sup>90</sup> J. Cepik, *Torquemada*, pp. 278–279.

By contrast, Strykowski's narrative emphasizes resistance to the Inquisition's discourse.<sup>91</sup> Miguel Taronga, who refuses to implicate others, even when faced by his own imminent execution at the stake, presents the most acute example. His final exchange with the Inquisitor demonstrates his principled denial of the Inquisition's version.<sup>92</sup> In contrast to the other novels, human solidarity remains possible. Eli's cry of support to Miguel in his final agony represents an act of both humanity and defiance against the Inquisition's power: 'Eli was convulsed by a mute sob. "Miguel, peace be with you, Jew!" he shouted with all his might. Miguel opened his eyes, raised them to the heavens whence the voice came. God himself desired to bring him relief. [Elim wstrząsnął głuchy szloch. 'Miguel, pokój z tobą, Żydzie!' krzyknął ze wszystkich sił. / Miguel otworzył oczy. Podniósł je do nieba. Stamtąd przyszedł głos. Bóg sam chciał mu ulżyć.]'<sup>93</sup> The breaking of silence here by Eli and, following his arrest for this act, in his later dispute with the Inquisitor San Martin in prison, enables the articulation of the significance of the Jews' silence: 'But in your disputation it is not rightness that prevails but might. That's how it was at Tortosa. Force took precedence over proof. Each proof was destroyed as if it were blasphemy. A person whose life is in danger has sealed lips. A dispute can take place only between equals... [Ale w waszej dyspucie wygrywa nie słuszność, ale siła. Tak było w Tortosie. Nad dowodami panowała przemoc. Każdy dowód był niszczoney jako bluźnierstwo. Zagrożony ma zamknięte usta. Dysputa może być tylko między równymi.]'<sup>94</sup> Initially, Eli insists merely upon the illegality of his arrest, as a foreign Jew not subject to Spanish Church law. His refusal to respond therefore reflects Brown's assertion that 'silence [...] can also function as resistance to regulatory discourse.'<sup>95</sup> In replying to San Martin he seeks to subvert the automatic assumption of the Inquisitional discourse's power. In both instances his defiance seems to mark that 'shocking outspokenness', to which – as Bourdieu asserts – structural censorship condemns the 'occupants of dominated positions'.<sup>96</sup> Eli is not, of course, compelled to accept the subordinate status of one whose silence can be construed as

<sup>91</sup> Strykowski's research in Spanish archives was funded by the Franco regime. He noted in conversation with Piotr Szewc that the protocols of the interrogations he found in the cathedral in Las Palmas were almost identical in terms of the questions and responses. The fact that nobody confessed their guilt, despite facing certain execution, seems pertinent to *Przybysz*'s narrative. P. Szewc, *Ocalony na wschodzie. Z Julianem Strykowski rozmawia Piotr Szewc*, Les Editions Noir sur Blanc, Montricher, Suisse 1991, p. 270.

<sup>92</sup> J. Strykowski, *Przybysz...*, p. 110.

<sup>93</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 119.

<sup>94</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 129.

<sup>95</sup> W. Brown, *op. cit.*, p. 318.

<sup>96</sup> P. Bourdieu, "Censorship and the Imposition of Form", in: *Language and Symbolic Power*, ed. and introduced J.B. Thompson; trans. G. Raymond and M. Adamson, Polity Press, Cambridge 2003, p. 138.

resistance: he has the option to leave.<sup>97</sup> For the Jews in the *barrio*, determined to remain, such silence is compromised, being merely (as Brown attests) ‘a defense in the context of domination, a strategy for negotiating domination, rather than a sign of emancipation from it.’<sup>98</sup>

In all three cases, silence is inscribed into the text. Its integral nature suggests a comparable significance to the principle of historically contingent screen and marker that typify Aesopian works. These texts and their characters perform silence. Within a logocracy this performance may hold incalculable value since, in accordance with Macherey’s dictum, ‘speech eventually has nothing more to tell us: we investigate the silence, for it is the silence that is doing the speaking.’<sup>99</sup>

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<sup>97</sup> Functionally, to resituate the novel in the context of 1970s’ Poland opposition, Eli’s gestures mirror some parts of the opposition movement who sought to act as though they lived in a free/normal society. See, for instance, the practice of publishing the real names and addresses of editors and writers associated with the underground journal *Zapis*, which amounted to a declaration of the legality of their activity.

<sup>98</sup> W. Brown, op. cit., p. 324.

<sup>99</sup> P. Macherey, *A Theory of Literary Production*, trans. G. Wall, Routledge, London and New York 2006, p. 96.

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John Bates

**Parables of Un-freedom: Novels about the Spanish Inquisition in post-1956  
People's Poland<sup>100</sup>**

(Summary)

The article examines three post-1956 novels ostensibly about the Spanish Inquisition's activities in Spain at the end of the fifteenth century: Jerzy Andrzejewski's *Ciemności kryją ziemię* (The Inquisitors, 1957), Julian Strykowski's *Przybysz z Narbony* (1978), and Jozef Cepik's *Torquemada* (1986). These works are placed in a number of broader contexts: the uses of the historical novel in Poland; post-war Polish censorship discourse about the use of historical analogy to address current social and political problems, a practice which the political authorities sought to restrict; the contemporary critical reception where reviews of each novel are seen as articulating the novels' fundamental concerns albeit subject to the same censorship restrictions; and ultimately the long-established tradition of Aesopian writing within Polish literature. The analysis demonstrates the expansion of the space for critical public expression particularly in the Thaw years of 1956-57, and its contraction over time up to the mid-1970s. The rise of an independent publishing network at that point paradoxically both facilitates a more open discussion of the potential meanings of literary texts but equally has to observe censorship proprieties to avoid exposing officially published authors to political sanctions. With the growth of underground publishing, the Spanish Inquisition theme gradually declines in relevance, reflected by the critical marginalisation of Cepik's novel. Ultimately, the article positions the trend within Macherey's theory of significant silences within literary works, which permits a refinement of the historically contingent screen and marker that have typically defined Aesopian works. The article presents, with their English translations, hitherto unpublished documents from the Polish Party and Censorship archives, including examples of work confiscated by the censors.

Keywords: Censorship, Inquisition, Poland, medieval, Spain, control, silence, the Thaw, independent publishing, underground, historical novel, Polish literature, Aesopian

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Katarzyna Smyczek\*

## Irony, self-mockery, and ironic turns of events. Marian Załucki's satirical performances

Marian Załucki was a well-known artist on the Polish comedy scene. He was the co-creator of many radio and television shows, e.g. *Podwieczorek przy mikrofonie*, *Zgaduj-zgadula*, *Poznajmy się*. He performed original monologues in Krakow's Teatr Satyryków, Warsaw's Teatr Syren and Buffo theatre, and in the comedy groups *Wagabunda*, *Dudek*, and *U Lopka*. He collaborated with *Przekrój*, *Szpilki*, and *Życie Literackie* periodicals. Załucki's collections of poetry were published in high volumes.

It would seem that despite the fact that Załucki played an important role in the cultural life of the PRL<sup>1</sup>, in today's literary and historical space he is a somewhat forgotten figure. Texts devoted to the comedian mainly consist of memoirs of his friends, and comedians who collaborated with him. Ludwik Jerzy Kern was the main and an invaluable promoter of Załucki's output. Apart from a 2012 study entitled *Z mej poetyckiej natury. wiersze i fraszki Mariana Załuckiego*<sup>2</sup> by Józef Duk, there have been no other attempts at analysing the poet's texts.

\* \* \*

Marian Załucki witnessed and experienced the repression of two major totalitarian regimes of the 20<sup>th</sup> c. He was born on 5 May 1920 in Kolomyia in Eastern Borderlands. He participated in the September Campaign and fought in the battle of Mława. Upon the capitulation of Warsaw, he was placed in a Stalag. In December 1939, he managed to escape the POW camp, and reach the Soviet-occupied Lviv, where he remained until the end of the war to finally relocate to Krakow with the first repatriation wave.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Commonly used abbreviation of the People's Republic of Poland.

<sup>2</sup> J.A. Duk, *Z mej poetyckiej natury. wiersze i fraszki Mariana Załuckiego*, Wydawnictwo Astra, Lodz 2016.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 5–6.

In 1945, he lived in a tenement house at 22 Krupnicza St.<sup>4</sup> Unfortunately, the Krakow branch of the Writers' Union was seeking a new seat at that time. It was decided that the most appropriate location for the people of letters was that particular tenement house.<sup>5</sup> The writers decided unanimously – or rather, as reminisced by Ryszard Marek Groński<sup>6</sup>, led by one of them, i.e. Adam Ważyk – that in the “writers' kolkhoz” there is no place for citizens who do not belong to the collective. Thus Załucki was excluded from the writers' union even before being accepted into it.<sup>7</sup>

It is unclear whether the eviction from the flat in Krupnicza St. induced him to start a writing career<sup>8</sup>, but the comedian debuted that very year performing on the comedy stage, and publishing several satirical poems in *Przekrój*. He published his first collection of poetry 9 years later when writers were still bound by the guidelines of Socialist realism.

Załucki rather avoided “mainstream issues”<sup>9</sup>, yet the problematic patronage of the workers' party prevented creators from achieving complete political neutrality. Being a forced co-organiser of the reconstruction of the souls of Poles, through an assignment of that peculiar patron of the arts, he wrote a few satirical poems. An indication of their propaganda applicability could be the fact that they were included in the monumental *Antologia satyry polskiej 1944–1955* published in 1955 by PIW.

The tasks of the “new” satire defined by literary journals did not leave writers too much freedom<sup>10</sup>. Authors could not always decide what would become the topic of a work, and writing commissioned by officers, who eagerly fulfilled the recommendations of the party, became in the 1950s the main literary practice<sup>11</sup>. That fact was humorously parodied by Marian Załucki in a poem entitled *Sen satyryka*:

The phone woke me up early...  
Who's there? I asked.  
This is the editorial office!

<sup>4</sup> R.M. Groński, *O nim jako ulubieńcu publiczności* (In celebration of the release of a record with Marian Załucki's poems, 2003), in: <http://zalucki.net/wspomnienia/48-o-nim-jako-ulubienecu-publicznosci> (accessed on 13.10.2017).

<sup>5</sup> Ibid.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid.

<sup>7</sup> L.J. Kern, “Marian Załucki”, in: *Moje Abecadłowo*, Wydawnictwo Literackie, Krakow 2003, pp. 210–211.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid.

<sup>9</sup> R.M. Groński, op. cit.

<sup>10</sup> K. Alichnowicz, “*Miejsce dla kpiarza*” satyra w latach 1948–1955, Universitas, Krakow 2006, p. 142.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid., p. 143.

We require an epigram. A short one.

Alas:

S - t - o - c - k - t - a - k - i - n - g! (...)

Damn it! Drop the jokes!

Do you have an epigram?

I do, of course.

But... not a - p - p - r - a - i - s - e - d!

\*

Oh – you sometimes fantasise like that

Or imagine at night in your dreams,

That you became a sales point of

MHD<sup>12</sup>...<sup>13</sup>

Significantly enough, the poem appeared in the 1954 *Przejażdżki wierszem* collection, which also included reprinted Socialist realist satires written by Załucki and commissioned by party officials. The ironic tone of the dialogue with the official could induce one to doubt the poet's engagement in the ideological class struggle. By utilising metaphor and ambiguity, play on words and parody, Załucki indicated the absurdity of the new order.

The division line between *the sacred* and *the profane* was the place for a mocker, i.e. between that which was allowed and that which was banned. The poet was not an obvious oppositionist, yet neither did he clearly supported the authorities, which he proved many times by refusing to cooperate with the PRL's Security Service (SB).<sup>14</sup>

In *Puszka z Pandorą*, Ryszard Marek Groński described Załucki's tragic situation:

Let us get to the core of it. Now, (...) it was decided in the department of creative intelligentsia that it was necessary to acquire an informer. Someone approached the oblivious comedian. He offered to hold regular meetings. Simple, nothing special:

<sup>12</sup> MHD – Miejski Handel Detaliczny (Urban Retail Trade); a company established in 1948 pursuant to a Regulation of the Minister of Internal Trade. Its activities consisted of the retail trade of food stuffs and hardware. Direct supervision over the activities of the shops of the MHD chain was maintained by local authorities which in turn were supervised by the Ministry (vide Regulation of the Minister of Internal Trade of 27 May 1950, M.P.1950.A-68.811). The aim of the state's economic policy at that time was to limit the activities of private entrepreneurs. The restructuring of trade resulted in immense difficulties in acquiring everyday items as the liquidated private shops were not replaced with a sufficient number of state-owned facilities (vide <http://muzhp.pl/e/1730/bitwa-o-handel>).

<sup>13</sup> M. Załucki, "Sen satyryka", in: idem, *Przejażdżki wierszem*, Czytelnik, Warsaw 1954, p. 9. [English version translated from Polish]

<sup>14</sup> R.M. Groński, *Puszka z Pandorą*, Polska Oficyna Wydawnicza „BGW”, Lodz 1991, p. 163.

what is being said, what is going on, who came up with what while drunk...

The recruitment seemed easy. And suddenly—vexation. The young comedian refused. He was given time to reconsider. Yet he once again said: no. They mentioned by the way that they could get a ban on his publications, they could recommend seizure of his lump sum, finally, they could direct the case in such a way as to throw him out of the Writers' Union. And then, without a licence to perform a freelance job, he would become a parasite. And as a parasite he would not be able to live in Krakow (...) So if he wanted to condemn his family to a life of poverty and neglect, then go ahead: refuse the hand offered by the authorities.

The *family* argument was chosen well: the comedian was old-fashioned, homely, attached to his wife, and he adored his two little daughters. So the bottom line was that, through an exception, they would once again give him time to reconsider. But he could not even divulge a word of what was going on. Because otherwise...<sup>15</sup>

Harassment resulted in the comedian's nervous breakdown.<sup>16</sup> He was referred to a hospital and was a patient of Antoni Kępiński<sup>17</sup>, one of the most renowned Polish psychiatrists. The doctor's status was supposed to shield Załucki from UB harassment. It turned out, however, that the serious threat to the poet's health posed no obstacle for the secret police officers:

Having regained some strength, he had to go for the talk once more. After it, he attempted to commit suicide. Having been saved, he received a visit still at the hospital. Not only did he refuse (how many times had he done it by then), but he also shouted at the officer clad in a white smock. A nurse came. The UB officer had to flee like hell. The Security Service decided to wait for the patient to get better. Then a surprise once again. Before he got better, he escaped from the hospital, and went to Warsaw. Everyone has some last resort. For the black-mailed poet, it was his colleague from school. A boy from Kolomyia, because that was the name of their town. Now the boy was the secretary of the State Council.<sup>18</sup>

<sup>15</sup> Ibid.

<sup>16</sup> In an article entitled "Moje kresy. Kołomyjski mistrz humoru", Stanisław S. Nicieja stated that his nervous breakdown was just malingering. Yet it is difficult to believe that the mental health of Marian Załucki was so strong that threats to his family and friends did not influence the poet's general health, and that he had to pretend his anxieties.

Vide <http://www.nto.pl/apps/pbcs.dll/article?AID=/20131228/REPORTAZ/131229714>, (accessed on 13.10.2017).

<sup>17</sup> Antoni Kępiński, a Polish psychiatrist and philosopher, the forerunner of group and individual psychotherapy in Poland; he participated in a programme of treating former Auschwitz internees; his major texts included: *Refleksje oświęcimskie* (1968), *Rytm życia* (1972), *Melancholia* (1974), *Lęk* (1977), *Poznanie chorego* (1978); (vide *Słownik psychologów polskich*, E. Kosnarewicz, et al. (eds.), Instytut Psychologii UAM, Poznan 1992, p. 112).

<sup>18</sup> R.M. Groński, op. cit., p. 164.

Henryk Holder, the person mentioned above, was the director of the Legal Office of the Chancellery of the State Council in Bolesław Bierut's government. Immediately after WWII, Załucki's benefactor was the accuser in the trials of the members of the anti-communist underground. Accepting help from a person associated with repressive authorities could be read as morally ambiguous, but it was Holder's intervention with the UB management that released the poet from the need to choose between the life of a martyr and a label of a snitch.

Załucki's dramatic biography was reflected in his satirical output. Both on stage and in his poems, he created the character of a shy loser involuntarily sliding through life, a common citizen, one of many. The speaking persona in Załucki's works is both brave and cowardly. Lacking physical strength in an encounter with an omnipotent opponent, he could only win through the power of his mind. Satire directed against the authorities reached their weaknesses, extracted everything that somehow made them inferior as an opponent, smaller than it would seem. The hostility which for some reason could not emerge otherwise, could do so through jokes.

The poet concealed the criticism of the people's rule under the mask of self-mockery, which became his trademark. The author anticipated the accusation of a political betrayal of the ideals of the workers' party—how can one refuse a citizen his right to mock himself? By belittling himself, he mitigated and, at the same time, amplified his ironic stabs. A seemingly insignificant remark uttered using special stress can be more successful in drawing people's attention to the speaker's opinion than if it was expressed directly.

A negation of the literal meaning can lead to false reading of the intention of an expression. The *risk of misunderstanding* is part and parcel of ironic practices.<sup>19</sup> Therefore, the poet felt obliged to act on the stage in *Obrona autoironii* [Defence of self-mockery]:

Oh, you cruel audience!  
 Oh, you –  
 who expect me to offer you  
 the flesh and blood  
 of Innocent Ministers  
 and their Sacred Wives –  
 go to hell!  
*Oh, excusez-moi (...)*  
 Alas, dear young people,  
 I always rush at myself  
 with my mouth,

<sup>19</sup> Ibid.

and down!  
 I know –  
 maybe I deserve it?  
 Maybe I will be the minister of culture?  
 Do not mock, then – please –  
 my self-mockery,  
 when I taunt myself,  
 when I myself use against me  
 my own weapon...  
 Oh, well – I like it  
 bold!<sup>20</sup>

Załucki proved that the edge of satire was like a boomerang: once thrown it came back to him but on its way back it nicked the intended people. The poet and the scoffer. Załucki provided a perverse defence of party VIPs. He justified their absence in his works in a rather absurd way: one of the dignitaries was supposed to appear in a poem, but he had a toothache, while the poet saved the rest for a rainy day. It was a long-term work plan: the bigger fish lay as a deposit in a drawer, waiting to be used if there were no better topics to choose from.

The poet achieved the comic effect by lexical charades – he toyed with lexical polysemy (ministers are saved for thriftiness), and paired (or combined in trios) in rhyming lexemes from completely different stylistic areas: *żon – won – pardon* (wives – go to hell – excusez-moi). Through an accumulation of short lines, and masculine rhymes, the words are stressed, which further amplifies the satirical meaning of that seeming praise. The term *sacred wives* brings to mind the idiom of a *sacred cow*, which is used in Polish to refer to a person who considers herself/himself (or is considered by others) as not subject to criticism, regardless of the acts she/he engages in or refrains from engaging in. Those humorous textual *cracks* constituted a signal that the poet applied irony, and the defence of important figures was necessary.

In the 1956 period of political thaw, real socialism lost its status as the leading idea of artistic output. Utilising his greater freedom, Załucki took the liberty – or, in that context, it would be more appropriate to state that he was “given the liberty” – to utter slightly bolder statements, but he continued to utilise the poetics of Socialist realism ironically distorting it, as e.g. in the poems which offered a mocking defence of the ideals of the October Revolution, which he wrote during his trips beyond the Iron Curtain, of which the poet made quite a few... Załucki set off on his first international “tour” for the Polish commu-

<sup>20</sup> M. Załucki, “Obrona autoironii”, in: idem, *A nie mówilem?*, Iskry, Warsaw 1961, pp. 7–9. [English version translated from Polish].

nity in America in 1958. He travelled throughout his stage career. In 1965, he performed together with the “Wagabunda” comedy troupe for Polish emigres in London. The comedian’s monologue made a particular impression on Marian Hemar:

(...) I would give first place to Marian Załucki. I was so proud to watch one more Lviv child, and listen to his neat, precise, and extremely amusing little poems. Such phenomena like Załucki are the crown jewels of the classic comedy show, which loves everything that is young, creative, and original. You can tell how much perfecting those little poems took, how their author polished and ground them, how much talent, craft, and joy he put into them; he seeks good rhymes, not being satisfied with the terse punchline, he creates situation/poems, sketch/poems, in which humour is graded per variants, and the consequences of surrealist logic, the grotesque is ever present, all the way to the absurd, It seems to me that Załucki is mainly a humourist who sees the world from its hilarious side, not a comedian who perceives the world from the side of fairness. His poems profit much from the fact that the author found his own style of delivery which he has not borrowed from anyone, nor does he mimic anyone. To fit it, he writes his poems, and turns them into absolutely amusing hits, (...) he would be the star of any comedy troupe, surely a stunner of the old *Qui Pro Quo*<sup>21</sup>.

Załucki’s association with *Qui Pro Quo* was his love for the aesthetics of pure nonsense. Laughter usually accompanies the discovery of phenomena divergent from the standard. The juxtaposition of absurd situations which became the norm in Poland after 1945 and those which exist within non-people’s democracies, and considering the former, following the mocking device *à rebours*, as a generally applicable norm, is used for uncovering the absurd elements<sup>22</sup> of the PRL’s reality. In a rather humorous way, Załucki matched the tradition of an educational journey. The persona of the creative activities was a constant failure, and even the Iron Curtain did not offer him a haven from his wretched fate. His story was inextricably linked (if not bound) with the motherland. His countrymen colonised every corner of the Earth and a piece of Mars, which is why coming into contact with a foreign culture had proved impossible for the traveller. He had no time for extensive studies of himself as everywhere he went he met Poles willing to confess to him. He brought the following conclusions from one of his foreign trips:

<sup>21</sup> M. Hemar, *Awantury w rodzinie*, Wydawnictwo LTW, Łomianki 2008, p. 304. [English version translated from Polish].

<sup>22</sup> B. Dziemidok, *O komizmie. Od Arystotelesa do dzisiaj*, Monika Bokinieć (ed.), Słowo / obraz terytoria, Gdansk 2011, p. 131. [English version translated from Polish].

Terrible,  
 how small the Earth is...  
 There are Poles everywhere...  
 Humbly...  
 Because that's the Polish trademark:  
 during war – they're on all fronts,  
 during peace – they're in the backhouse.<sup>23</sup>

Even though Poles are revolutionaries, and whatever their weapons would be, they win on all fronts, in the capitalist rat race they are defenceless. Thank god – rhetorically, of course – for socialism. His travels were his opportunity to learn about Eastern and Western philosophies. The superiority of the former is indubitable. The inhabitants of western Europe do not appreciate martyrology, and they have been sabotaging the emancipation of the working class. For the protagonist, travelling meant mainly inconvenience, cruel necessity, and a punishment comparable to the exile from *paradise*. Even if Hell did not stand a chance when compared to the socialist *world of the upside-down*. When Załucki, following Dante, travelled the netherworld, he met a tormented countryman:

And even in Hell:  
 a little devil – a bellboy,  
 Lucifer's protégé...  
 Talked to me: sure he's Polish.  
 And that nostalgia is devouring him...  
 "I cried a lot of tears (he said),  
 when I went past the gate...  
 Because here – you see – it is hell, too,  
 but it's not the same..."<sup>24</sup>

Poles can adapt even to pandemonic conditions, and have a decent life there, thanks to their skills of contriving, and protection. In fact, as Załucki commented ironically, they learnt the art of survival in a country which made Hell seem more like a sin bin than a place of eternal ordeal of the souls of the condemned. In the socialist cosmos, all desires, even those nutritional, could be sinful and socially detrimental, which was why the citizens of the People's Republic could only dream about "nothing":

<sup>23</sup> M. Załucki, "Polacy wszędzie", in: idem, *Czy lubi pani Załuckiego?*, Iskry, Warsaw 1967, p. 188. [English version translated from Polish].

<sup>24</sup> M. Załucki, *Polacy wszędzie...*, p. 188.

Take that which isn't.  
 Add salt and caraway,  
 then mix with that which  
 is currently not on the market.  
 Mix long and well –  
 stop when you get bored  
 and sprinkle with that  
 which we absolutely cannot afford.  
 You can either fry it or bake,  
 or singe on a grill,  
 pouring over with that  
 of which you are not even allowed to dream!  
 Everyone here eats that –  
 there's enough for everyone,  
 that is the secret  
 of the Polish economic miracle.<sup>25</sup>

The recipe for the Polish economic miracle was published in 1974 in the *Przepraszam, żartowałem* collection. Unfortunately, the failure's fate, which became Załucki's way of his artistic life, did not leave the poet even after his death. Less than six years later, *Przepis po polsku* was printed without crediting him. The poem became extremely popular during the August strikes in the north of Poland. It was published in issue 4 of the *Solidarność* Strike Information Bulletin with a note:

The poems were brought in by anonymous authors. We shall include more in the following issues of *Solidarność*.<sup>26</sup>

The person who delivered the poem to the strikers surely did not possess its printed version because the version published in the Bulletin differed from the original in several places.<sup>27</sup> That proves the considerable popularity if not

<sup>25</sup> M. Załucki, *Przepis po polsku*, in: idem, *Kpiny i kpinki*, L.J. Kern (ed.), Wydawnictwo Literackie, Krakow 1985, p. 336. [English version translated from Polish].

<sup>26</sup> Strajkowy Biuletyn Informacyjny "Solidarność", 25 August 1980, issue 4, [http://www.wszechnica.solidarnosc.org.pl/?page\\_id=724](http://www.wszechnica.solidarnosc.org.pl/?page_id=724) (accessed on 13.10.2017).

<sup>27</sup> *Przepis po polsku*, Strajkowy Biuletyn Informacyjny "Solidarność", 25 August 1980, issue 4. [English version translated from Polish].

Take this which isn't  
 Add salt and caraway  
 then mix with that which  
 is currently not on the market

of Załucki himself then of his works, which were repeated by people as anonymous jokes.

Załucki, sympathising with the working class, displaying his original irony, commented upon everyday problems, which resulted from the party's wasteful governance of the country:

What kind of life is it  
 somewhere there in prosperity,  
 where everything works perfectly?  
 Where people can buy whatever they desire,  
 simply at a shop...  
 Like a fool!  
 Where when faced with brimming shop counters and displays  
 there is no joy in a kilogram of lemons!<sup>28</sup>

Comedy shows have always been a space for defying strict morality, and unwavering rigid social order; comedy show humour, particularly in Wilhelm's Germany, was a way of avoiding strict censorship, and the only place where political satire was practised. Comedy scripts often referring to current social problems had to fall under special surveillance of the PRL's censors. Though the objectives of the *new* satire in the 1950s was clearly defined, they became blurred in the following decades.

Shows which mocked the actions of the authorities were cancelled, and any remarks on the economic situation were censored. The authorities made sure that the Western living standard and economy did not seem better<sup>29</sup>. A Warsaw censor allowed the publication of the text of *Ulica dowcip* in a 1970 collection entitled

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Mix long and well  
 stop when you get bored  
 and sprinkle with that  
 which we absolutely cannot afford

You can bake it or fry  
 or singe on a grill  
 pouring over with that  
 of which you are not even allowed to dream

Everyone here eats that  
 there's enough for everyone  
 that is the secret  
 of the Polish economic miracle.

<sup>28</sup> M. Załucki, "Ulica dowcip", in: *ibid.*, *Kpiny...* p. 274 [English version translated from Polish].

<sup>29</sup> M. Fik, "Kilkanaście miesięcy z życia cenzury 1970–1971", *Dialog* 1992, issue 8, p. 139.

*Komu do śmiechu* published by Wydawnictwo Iskry, but he decided that it could not include Załucki's other poem entitled *Wykřęty historyczne*, as it featured "excessive criticism"<sup>30</sup>.

The poems *Ulica Dowcip* and *Przepis po polsku* were written in 1967. The comedian tried presenting them on a television show *23 minuty z Załuckim*. The State Archive in Gdansk includes a document by the Chief Bureau for Control of Press, Publications, and Performances with an overview of the major interventions in the television show from February and March of 1967. Censors' notes indicate that in the script submitted for verification only two works were challenged: *Ulica Dowcip* and *Przepis po polsku*<sup>31</sup>. The decision received a laconic justification: "due to the huge audience"<sup>32</sup>.

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My academic duty should require me to make a reservation that it might prove very possible that in the rather non-aggressive forms of comicality preferred by Marian Załucki I found a bit more than they actually include. However, I would like to remind you that "to read more than the author wrote is the constant function of a reader, maintaining the illusion of an eternally renewing richness of old literature."<sup>33</sup> Comical works constitute a special proof of past times.<sup>34</sup> It is necessary to engage in more detailed studies of satire and comedy shows, which were an important aspect of the cultural life of the People's Republic of Poland. Comicality utilised by Socialist realist comedians for maintaining discipline within the working class became in the following decades, paradoxically, a space of freedom. Marian Załucki's personal attitude—the party-nominated "engineer of souls"—towards the new system of governance was best expressed in a poem entitled *Do celników*:

You peer into my chests and cases  
While I'm smuggling socialism out in my arse<sup>35</sup>

Significantly enough, the work has never been published. Załucki recited it only among his most trusted friends.<sup>36</sup>

<sup>30</sup> Ibid.

<sup>31</sup> APG, Team 1214, file ref. no. 190, col. 13.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid.

<sup>33</sup> J. Stempowski, "Pan Jowialski i jego spadkobiercy", in: idem, *Eseje dla Kassandry*, Słowo / obraz terytoria, Gdansk 2005, p. 214.

<sup>34</sup> B. Dziemidok, op. cit., p. 163.

<sup>35</sup> L.J. Kern., op. cit., p. 214.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid, p. 213.

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Katarzyna Smyczek

### Irony, self-mockery, and ironic turns of events. Marian Załucki’s satirical performances

(Summary)

The article offers an analysis of the works of Marian Załucki (a Polish comedian, poet, children’s literature writer, and author of books: *Przejażdżki wierszem*, *Uszczypnij muzu, Oj-czyste kpiny!*, *A nie mówilem?*, *Niespokojna czaszka*, *Przepraszam żartowałem*, *Czy lubi pani Załuckiego?*), and constitutes an attempt at presenting the specificity of the comedy scene in the PRL.

Keywords: Załucki Marian, satire, comedy show, censorship in the People’s Republic of Poland, Borderlands

Jakub Dąbrowski\*

## **A few remarks on the mechanisms of censorship in the PRL<sup>1</sup> and the Third Republic of Poland**

On 6 June 1990, an act which terminated the Chief Control Bureau for Press, Publications and Performances (hereinafter GUKPPiW) came into force.<sup>2</sup> One could say that it symbolically marked the final act in the dismantling of the totalitarian system, yet in society's eyes it has never acquired the status of an event which deserves commemorating during state anniversary celebrations, conferences, or symposia. It seems prudent to shortly discuss the reasons for that as I am of the opinion that they are connected with another important issue: I believe that the termination of GUKPPiW was not some radical rupture; I would rather propose that certain mechanisms of censorship (i.e. the complex system of factors influencing social communication) have continued to exist.

It seems that the dissolving of GUKPPiW did not make any considerable impression on the minds of Poles due to several reasons. First of all, it occurred at a time when, due to *faits accomplis*, the Bureau and its district branches had lost almost any control over social communication. Basically since the Round Table Talks (6 Feb – 4 Apr 1989), there had been a rapid and spontaneous bottom-up rebellion against institutional censorship: books, magazines, leaflets, and posters were independently printed and distributed regardless of the formal supervision of GUKPPiW; the distribution of VHS cassettes and the organisation of performances was also becoming uncontrolled. A significant factor in that process was the legalisation in late-1988 of private business activity.<sup>3</sup> Also the attitudes of officials were inconsistent; some tried continuing their supervisory tasks, others – aware of the fact that their role had ended – only pretended to be performing their duties; that was the case, e.g. with Dariusz Fikus's book entitled *Foksal 81*, when

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<sup>1</sup> Commonly used abbreviation of the People's Republic of Poland.

<sup>2</sup> Act of 11 April 1990 on the repealing of the act on the control of publications and performances, removing the units of the control and on the change of the Press Law act (J. of L. of 7 May 1990).

<sup>3</sup> More on the activities of GUKPPiW and its district branches in 1989–1990, vide K Kamińska, "Koniec cenzury w PRL (1989–1990)", *Studia Medioznawcze* 2014, issue 3(58), pp. 113–132.

in September 1989 Poznan censors tried to introduce as few changes as possible, and transfer the supervisory tasks onto law enforcement authorities, somewhat *converting* preventive censorship to – only potential by then – repressive censorship.<sup>4</sup> The confusion intensified even further due to the policy of Tadeusz Mazowiecki's government, which formed on 12 September 1989, and which kept delaying the termination of GUKPPiW. Officially Mazowiecki's cabinet feared anti-Soviet provocations, yet retaining institutional supervision over the press, radio and television certainly facilitated the control of a country which was torn by a considerable crisis. At the same time, the statements of Deputy Secretary of State Jerzy Ciemniewski from January 1990 indicated that the years of captivity had twisted society's understanding of how in a democracy the social sphere should operate.<sup>5</sup>

At this point the second issue becomes evident, i.e. the special perception of the issue of freedom of speech in Poland. It seems that even the left and liberal post-Solidarity elite (i.e., theoretically, the most open people) considered (and, to some extent, continue to consider) freedom of expression as something of secondary importance, which is strictly regulated through the so-called harm principle, and which is severable. I shall discuss both issues briefly. According to its classical liberal understanding, the harm principle means that any freedom ought to be limited by the state if the use thereof violates justifiable interests of other entities. However, in contemporary liberal democracies, a preferential treatment of the harm principle is considered problematic; also bear in mind that for it to function, it is necessary to define what is considered harmful, what those justifiable interests might be, and what constitutes the basis for defining them.<sup>6</sup> In Poland, due

<sup>4</sup> Z. Bosacki, "Nowa rola cenzury", *Gazeta Wyborcza* 21.09.1989.

<sup>5</sup> On 29 May 1989, based on the Round Table agreements, the authorities restored the more lenient version of the Publications and Performances Act of 31 July 1981 (J. of L. of 1981 No. 20 Item 99, and J. of L. of 1989 No. 34 Item 189). Ciemniewski presented on behalf of the government the planned changes to the act in force. Based on the project, upon printing the first two copies of a magazine, the publisher would be supposed to deliver them to the prosecutor's office, which in turn could suspend its distribution, and refer the matter to the court within 12 hours. Ciemniewski justified that solution with the need to "protect the state against press crimes" (L. Falandysz, "Prokurator cenzorem", *Gazeta Wyborcza*, 22.01.1990). In doing so, he referred to the invasive pre-WWII press law, i.e. a solution typical of authoritarian systems of power.

<sup>6</sup> In liberal theories it is stressed that increased protection of freedom of expression is necessary for the proper functioning of democracy and self-governance – in a democratic state, it is the citizens who should possess full access to information which could influence the choices made within the process of collective decision-making (the so-called notion of democratic self-governance). At the same time, researchers indicate that in democratic societies, the level of that protection in relation to public matters ought to be increased (while the harm principle ought to be "suspended") when compared to, e.g. the level of protection of statements leading to "private" defamation. Vide W. Sadurski, "Prawo do wolności słowa w państwie demokratycznym (zagadnienia teoretyczne)", *Państwo i Prawo* 1992, issue 10, p. 8.

to historical reasons, the social and political understanding of reality has been for many centuries subjected to binary pressures, totalising relations, if you will, e.g. the nation – partitioning powers, freedom – totalitarianism, the people – the state apparatus, Polish Catholicism – the Others, duties regarding the Motherland – detached aestheticism, collective good – the individual. That is why the features of the dominant attitude include attachment to grand narratives, Catholic values, historic myths, and strong identities, which must be defended at all cost. What is missing is a post-Enlightenment democratic tradition for which that which is constructive are pluralistic social divisions, antagonisms, critical thinking, and debating pre-established templates of one's existence<sup>7</sup>

The results can be found in, e.g. law, and art. One could say that in relation to the judicial regulations of freedom of speech, the 1990 division line is mainly symbolic because what is important is which actual values have filled the notion of liberal democracy grafted from the West, with its human rights guaranteed in a constitution, and specific legal solutions (therefore, the law is understood not as an independent regulator of social relations, but rather as a product of those, strengthening them in return). The number of regulations in the penal code (hereinafter k.k.) which normalise the area of discourse is considerable (e.g. Art. 133, Art. 135(2), 137, 196, 202, 212, 216, 226, 256, 257), some of which possess PRL provenance, while many of which are considered by law scholars as controversial, and remain contrary to the case-law of the European Court for Human Rights in Strasbourg (ECHR).<sup>8</sup> Polish lawmakers seem to value esteem, including the esteem of state officials, religious beliefs, and state symbols more than the free flow of ideas. The judgements of the Constitutional Tribunal (hereinafter TK) rather seem to confirm those conservative tendencies.<sup>9</sup> Similar phenomena of *mutatis*

<sup>7</sup> More on the problems of Polish modernity, vide, e.g. J. Sowa, *Inna Rzeczpospolita jest możliwa. Widma przeszłości, wizje przyszłości*, Wydawnictwo: W.A.B., Warsaw 2015; P. Czapliński, *Resztki nowoczesności*, Wydawnictwo Literackie, Krakow 2011.

<sup>8</sup> A criticism of the regulations limiting freedom of expression within the penal code, vide, e.g.: W. Mojski, "Prawnkarne ograniczenia wolności wypowiedzi w polskim porządku prawnym. Analiza wybranych przepisów", *Studia Iuridica Lublinensia* 2009, issue 12, pp. 177–196; W. Sadurski, "Wolność prasy w systemie praw człowieka (Wybrane zagadnienia)", in: *Obywatel – jego wolności i prawa. Zbiór studiów przygotowanych z okazji 10-lecia urzędu Rzecznika Praw Obywatelskich*, Biuro Rzecznika Praw Obywatelskich, Warsaw 1998, pp. 133–156. In ECHR case-law it has been stressed that, e.g. the dignity of politicians ought to be protected less rigorously than the dignity of ordinary citizens (vide, e.g. Lingens vs. Slovakia, judgment of 8 July 1986, petition 9815/82; Castellás vs. Spain, judgment of 23 April 1992, petition 11798/85; Colombani vs. France, judgment of 25 June 2002, petition 51279/99), while in Poland the feudal tradition of increased protection of the personal rights of state officials has been maintained.

<sup>9</sup> Vide, e.g. judgments of TK: of 30 October 2006, file ref. no. P10/06 confirming the constitutional compliance of Art. 212(1) and (2) of k.k.; of 6 July 2011, file ref. no. P12/09 confirming the constitutional compliance of Art. 135(2) of k.k., and of 6 October 2016, file ref. no. SK 54/13 conforming the constitutional compliance of Art. 196 of k.k. The attitude of Poles to post-Enlight-

*mutandis* can be identified in the area of art. Polish artistic traditions clearly lack any emphatic critical, contestation, or transgression streams. When after 1989 there occurred a natural erosion of the homogeneous division according to two narratives: of the communist state, and the patriotic-independence movement, some artists tried shaking off the pathetic atmosphere of the 1980s, and began contesting that which in life and art was commonly considered natural: neutral, irrefutable, and obvious. That led to ideological conflicts, or even cultural wars, in which the left-liberal elite supported traditional values; instead of protecting the right to artistic provocation, they moralised, or, in more emphatic instances, they condemned and invalidated specific artistic projects.<sup>10</sup> At the same time, there is a visible diversification of evaluations depending on the type of media and of art, which might indicate a special kind of severability of the notion of freedom. One could even talk about a special *paragone*, i.e. a comparison defining the hierarchy of the importance of arts. A position within the *paragone* translates into acceptance or rejection of possible transgressions; the more a given area is valued, the higher the acceptance of a violation, and *vice versa*.<sup>11</sup> Art historians stress that when compared to literature, theatre, music, and film, visual arts in Poland have never been highly esteemed. As noted by Piotr Piotrowski, an art historian: within critical reflection and media discourse, they were rather condemned to maintaining the traditions of Grand Topics à la Jan Matejko, or modernist values with first and foremost the autonomy of the form<sup>12</sup>.

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enment notions of liberal democracy, and a democratic state under the rule of law is yet another issue. The events following the elections in 2015 have indicated that they do not consider them as bearing fundamental significance.

<sup>10</sup> Evidence for that is offered by the articles published in the left-liberal *Gazeta Wyborcza* daily, particularly those published in the 1990s and at the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> c.; more on that and on cultural wars, vide J. Dąbrowski, *Cenzura w sztuce polskiej po 1989 roku*, vol. 2 *Artyści, sztuka i polityka*, Fundacja Kultura Miejsca, Warsaw 2014.

<sup>11</sup> A good example are the disquisitions of Fr. Andrzej Draguła, who compared Krystyna Janda's play entitled *Porozmawiajmy o życiu i śmierci* to *Pasja* by Dorota Nieznalska (*Bluźnierstwo. Między grzechem a przestępstwem*, Towarzystwo „Więź”, Warsaw 2013 pp. 99–102). A polemic with his views: J. Dąbrowski, “Recenzja książki Andrzeja Draguły: ‘Bluźnierstwo. Między grzechem a przestępstwem’”, *Studia Litteraria Historica* 2014/2015, issue 3/4, pp. 42–53.

<sup>12</sup> Piotr Piotrowski often emphasised the feebleness of the traditions of the Enlightenment in Poland, cultural conservatism, the lack of Dada traditions, and the inferior position of visual arts excluding 19<sup>th</sup>-century historical paintings, vide, e.g. P. Piotrowski, “Pazurami i dziobem w obronie demokracji”, *Artmix* 20.03.2007, <http://www.obieg.pl/artmix/1729>; idem, *Znaczenia modernizmu. W stronę historii sztuki polskiej po 1945 roku*, Dom Wydawniczy Rebis, Poznan 1999, p. 222 etc.; idem, *Agorafilia. Sztuka i demokracja w postkomunistycznej Europie*, Dom Wydawniczy Rebis, Poznan 2010, pp. 263–287; idem, *Sztuka według polityki. Od Melancholii do Pasji*, Universitas, Poznan 2007, pp. 149–150, 204, 214–217, 227–244. The inferior position of plastic arts in Poland is historically rooted, and has been stressed since the 16<sup>th</sup> c. by Łukasz Górnicki (the famous passage: “Poles won't find art nor any discussion of it useful”), more on the subject, vide also: J. Klaczko, *Sztuka polska*, [s.n.], Paris 1858; K. Pomian, “W błysku reklam, w świetle laserów”, *Gazeta Wyborcza*, 20.03.2004.

Yet the spontaneous decomposition of institutional censorship, and a rather thoughtless acceptance by the society and its elite of the assumption that the formal termination of GUKPPiW was not only a necessary, but also a sufficient condition to ensure the democratic standards of freedom of the flow of ideas, constitute only a part of the issue in which I am interested. Within the juridical and symbolic dimensions, the change was, of course, significant. No longer was anyone required to submit their material to formal verification prior to its distribution, yet did that really mean a leap from captivity to freedom? To answer that question one should not only consider that which is obvious, i.e. what the changes that occurred were, but also approach the problem in reverse (as if in Foucault's *renversment*), and study that which remained. I have already mentioned the long history of the dispersed power relations which for decades or even centuries have been shaping society's view of the world, and, at the same time, which have informally defined the limits of freedom of expression. They emerged fully, and became analysable only after 1989 as in the People's Republic the problems of state power and freedom were mainly considered in relation to the abuses of the totalitarian state. The constancy of certain mechanisms which shaped social communication would be similarly significant in the discussed context. In other words, let us ask whether in the discursive reality within which GUKPPiW existed, and in the discursive reality without the Bureau, there were any points where those two intersected.

In every society, in every political system, there always exist forces and mechanisms which in a more or less formal way, in a precedent or subsequent manner exclude from the public sphere certain types of expression. The rather common conviction that in the PRL there existed a struggle between society (mainly journalists, scholars, and artists) and state officials who at the censors' HQ in Mysia St. cut out from their texts and works of literature improper fragments is a myth. Communist censorship was not, as we have grown to perceive it, a case-based preventive control of the flow of ideas but a complex and continuous system of relations which shaped desired social actions.<sup>13</sup> Social communication was entwined in a network of relations within which all interested parties were responsible for the final shape of a message, and, at the same time, everyone monitored everyone else – starting with the Moscow-dependant PZPR's top echelon<sup>14</sup>, through authors, printers, distributors, vendors, and ending with GUKPPiW and its district branch

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<sup>13</sup> More on the subject, vide, e.g. Z. Romek, "System cenzury w PRL" and T. Strzyżewski, "Wstęp", in: T. Strzyżewski, *Wielka Księga Cenzury PRL w dokumentach*, Prohibita, Warsaw 2015, pp. 9–56; M. Łętowski, *Gdy łyliśmy ustrój i godziliśmy w sojusz...*, Wydawnictwo KUL, Lublin 2010, pp. 41–46; B. Gogol, *Fabryka fałszywych tekstów. Z działalności Wojewódzkiego Urzędu Kontroli Prasy, Publikacji i Widowisk w Gdańsku w latach 1945–1958*, Neriton, Warsaw 2012, pp. 44–50.

<sup>14</sup> PZPR – Polska Zjednoczona Partia Robotnicza (The Polish United Workers' Party) was the communist, totalitarian party which governed Poland from 1948 to 1989.

offices. PZPR's leaders were responsible for the coherence of the message; party secretaries were to be consulted by censors when the latter were not certain how to act in a specific case. According to the press law, any and all pieces of information were subject to the special "truth clause", i.e. one could utilise freedom of speech but only when it led to a true presentation of phenomena while ensuring the fulfilment of the interests of society and the socialist state, and the information to be provided was supposed to strengthen the constitutional system of the PRL.<sup>15</sup> The provisions of the press law stipulated criminal liability for publishing unpermitted press releases or not registering copying equipment, evading the obligation to submit a publication for verification, and non-observance of any bans on its distribution. Criticism of the system was allowed, but only if it was, as the slogan went, constructive and responsible, i.e. resulting from one's care for the People's state, not a desire to condemn it. That limited permissivism was dictated by specific political goals, sometimes forced by domestic social and political tensions. Even censors conducting preventative control of the flow of ideas were verified within the repressive system, i.e. published material they had approved was verified on an on-going basis, which was called secondary censorship. The so-called oversights could influence their status at work, and, in extreme cases, could result in criminal liability. At the same time, the term *censorship* was meticulously hidden from sight. Any reference to it was absent from the name of GUKPPIW, while its employees were referred to as *counsellors*. Some censorship duties were distributed among other offices and institutions which were not associated with censorship, e.g. the Customs Office, the Chief Management of Publishing Houses (Naczelny Zarząd Wydawnictw), or the Chief Council of Television Film Programmes (Naczelna Rada Programów Filmowych Telewizji).<sup>16</sup>

The work system of GUKPPIW's counsellors was carefully developed and discreet. According to the guidelines, the interventions were supposed to be as minor and rare as possible, yet directing the meaning of a text towards the desired direction. Strzyżewski emphasised that the number of those had been gradually falling since the 1960s. Within the 19 months spent at the Krakow branch of GUKPPIW, he intervened 8–10 times in press releases, and his interventions consisted of removing fragments related to economic or military secrets (e.g. the production capacity of industrial plants).<sup>17</sup> Though no extensive research in the topic exists, a similar phenomenon could also be identified in the visual arts. The letters

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<sup>15</sup> Vide, e.g. Art. 1 of the Press Law Act of 26 January 1984 (J. of L. 1984 No. 5 Item 24): "Press shall utilise [...] freedom of speech and print, [...] strengthen the constitutional political system of the People's Republic of Poland, in particular: shall disseminate information and express opinions in support of socialist social relations [...] Art. 6(1) [...] Press [...] aims to deliver a true presentation of the phenomena being discussed observing the interests of the society, and the socialist state [...]"

<sup>16</sup> More on the subject Z. Romek, *System...*

<sup>17</sup> T. Strzyżewski, op. cit.

exchanged between the management of Bunkier Sztuki Gallery in Krakow and the local branch of GUKPPiW (1977–1990 period) regarding permits for organising exhibitions, prints of invitations and posters, and catalogue texts retained in the archive of Bunkier Sztuki do not include any traces of censorship interventions, not to mention any instances of challenging entire texts or exhibition ideas.<sup>18</sup> That was a result of the strategy utilised in the communist system of control of the flow of ideas and thoughts which, according to Zbigniew Romek, was based on the so-called delegation of censorship duties.<sup>19</sup> In other words, the intention was to make sure that counsellors received only material which did not require any corrections. Therefore, they made sure to cooperate with institutions and discuss in time with appropriate people what was and what was not allowed. What is significant, though, is that the actions of counsellors were the final, but not necessarily the most important, element of the operations of the system of censorship. The stick was one method, while the carrot was the other: interesting, prestigious and lucrative positions, access to sources of financing, permits and concessions for specific activities, access to supplies from state-owned monopolies, and foreign trips were reserved for those who displayed potential for cooperation with the authorities.<sup>20</sup> Stanisław Barańczak thus described the situation: “it is common for literature to subdue and gag itself. A peculiar sight: a victim putting the gag into his own mouth even though it appears as if no one forced him to do it. That image only becomes clear if one knows that the seemingly voluntary act results from a compulsion more complicated than pure physical violence, compulsion which utilises fear, pusillanimity, the desire to further one’s career or gain privileges, or simply the necessity to earn money. The whole system of terror, lures, deceptions, and sophistic rationalisations ensures that a writer gags himself.”<sup>21</sup>

<sup>18</sup> I wish to thank Magdalena Ziółkowska, the manager of Bunkier Sztuki Gallery in Krakow, for granting me access to the institution’s archive.

<sup>19</sup> Z. Romek, *System...* Romek stressed that “the surviving censorship files [...] indicate that the Bureau fulfilled its task of ‘delegating censorship duties’ well. There are few deletions present in surviving typescripts, and where there are some, they are minor corrections.” Idem, *Cenzura a nauka historyczna w Polsce 1944–1970*, Wydawnictwo Neriton – Instytut Historii PAN, Warsaw 2010, p. 70. [English version translated from Polish].

<sup>20</sup> Zbigniew Romek described a situation from 1965 when the Central Committee of PZPR expressed its discontent with “the Chief Editorial Office [of the State Academic Publishing House – note by JD] not securing a completely appropriate academic policy of our party in the publishing house.” As a result, editorial teams and the heads of the publishing house’s divisions were replaced with people who ensured the desired ideological direction. Research in the West was available only to those who not only met factual criteria, but also political requirements defined by the party: *Cenzura...*, pp. 69, 94–103. The informal extra-legal pressure (mainly of an economic nature) exerted by communists on journalists, artists, directors, scholars, etc., and the related moral dilemmas are the leitmotif of Leopold Tyrmand’s *Dziennik 1954*.

<sup>21</sup> S. Barańczak, *Knebel i słowo. O literaturze krajowej w latach siedemdziesiątych*, Niezależna Oficyna Wydawnicza NOWA, Warsaw 1980, pp. 2–3. [English version translated from Polish].

Barańczak described the situation which existed among writers, yet the problem of conformity was also stressed by Polish art historians: from the 1980s visual artists, basically passive towards the regime, were tamed by it. Exhibitions, symposia, en plein air, allotment of workshops, positions at universities, special shops with art supplies, and the ability to exhibit or even sell works abroad sufficed to subdue the Polish art world. After the thaw period and the rejection of the doctrine of Socialist realism (1956), the authorities allowed plastic artists to engage in formal experiments as long as their works did not raise political issues. Artists could, of course, justify to themselves the choice of the modernist autonomy of form as a rebellious attitude traversing the ideologised reality, but that “rebellion” was, in reality, used by communists to consolidate and increase the credibility of the regime; it was supposed to prove the modern, open and westernist nature of the post-totalitarian state.<sup>22</sup>

Therefore, institutional censorship only ensured the coordination of the coherence of messages produced by self-censoring culture outlets: representatives of the media, scholars, writers, and artists. One could say that the most important feature of communist censorship was the principle stating that “good censorship is one which cannot be seen” (or in a more emphatic version: “is no longer necessary”). That applied not only to hiding the existence of institutional control from society, but most of all to delegating censorship duties, which resulted in, as Michel Foucault could have said, culture outlets’ self-gagging (*assujettissement*).<sup>23</sup> The authorities applied that principle through establishing and maintaining co-

<sup>22</sup> One indication of the passivity of the plastic arts community could be the protests against the changes to the Constitution of the PRL planned by Edward Gierek in 1975. When compared to the engagement of the literary and academic communities, what was puzzling was the lack of any anti-communist acts devised by plastic artists, as well as a lack of their support for existing initiatives. The so-called *Letter of 59* submitted to the Sejm on 5 December 1975 was not signed by a single plastic artist. It was only on 21 January 1976 that E. Lipski sent to the Marshal of the Sejm a supplementary list of people, which included B. Zbrożyna, H. Błachnio and H. Rudzka-Cybisowa. The so-called *Letter of 14* of 21 January 1976 was not signed by a single plastic artist. The so-called *Letter of 101* sent to the Sejm on 31 January 1976 by J. Andrzejewski with a protest against the limitations to freedom of speech planned in the Constitution was signed by J. Sempoliński and again by H. Błachnio and B. Zbrożyna; the letter’s signatories who belonged to the plastic arts community also included M. and J. Boguckis. In the letter with the protest against the changes to the Constitution of the PRL signed by 25 intellectuals, and sent in January to the Sejm’s Constitutional Commission, plastic artists were represented by K. Maślanka-Braun and B. Pniewska-Krasińska (non-dated letter). The contents and signatories of the letters: *Kultura* 1976, issue 1–2, and 1976, issue 3.

More on the strategy of the authorities of the PRL in relation to the community of plastic artists, and the conformity of the latter, vide e.g.: P. Piotrowski, *Dekada: o syndromie lat siedemdziesiątych, kulturze artystycznej, krytyce, sztuce – wybiórczo i subiektywnie*, Obserwator, Poznań 1991; idem, *Awangarda w cieniu Jalty. Sztuka w Europie Środkowo-Wschodniej w latach 1945–1989*, Dom Wydawniczy Rebis, Poznań 2005, pp. 309–315.

<sup>23</sup> M. Foucault, *Nadzorować i karać. Narodziny więzienia*, Aletheia, Warsaw 2009, pp. 196–198.

operation with them, which was amplified by the widely promoted system of rewards, the system of repression lurking in the background, and (only as the final stage) verification of the results. The aim was to feed society with manipulated material in order to shape its awareness according to the regime's needs. Due to those activities, certain aspects of life became unimaginable, thus they could not become the object of reflection and desire. Also the conformity of culture outlets was meant to eventually evolve towards complete internalisation of the solely just ideology, and desired attitudes.

Despite formal guarantees of freedom of expression, and a formal ban on the existence of institutional preventive censorship, democratic states feature an on-going struggle for the symbolic rule and, in turn, the exclusion of various ideologies, world-views, levels of knowledge, and messages from the sphere of discourse. Of course, that also has applied to Poland since 1989. Even the liberal rhetoric regarding the termination of censorship, so dominant in the Third Polish Republic, or the placement of censorship only within legal bans of the subsequent nature can support the thesis because that voids the informal non-obvious mechanisms which form the sphere of discourse. For many years Polish humanist studies lacked critical studies of censorship, i.e. going beyond the concept which stated that its source lay in some seat of power, which on an exception basis executed case-based interventions within the continuum of the free public sphere. The basis for a re-assessment of traditional assumptions as being too narrow, and basically obscuring the core of the problem was offered by the theories by Pierre Bourdieu and Michel Foucault. Both French scholars radically reformulated the notion of power, which also resulted in a radical change in the understanding of censorship.<sup>24</sup> Thus, researchers stressed that censorship is not actually reflected in the control or bans originating from a state institution but, first of all, it is a result of dispersed relations of non-personal power within a society; secondly, just like that power, it operates overtly and covertly yet continuously, and emerges from everywhere, and, thirdly, it not as much bans as produces reality, the Truth and the Subject.<sup>25</sup> Based on such assumptions the term censorship becomes current

<sup>24</sup> Vide, e.g. P. Bourdieu, *Language and Symbolic Power*, Harvard University Press, Cambridge – Mass. 1992; idem, H. Haacke, *Free Exchange*, Polity Press, Cambridge 1995; P. Bourdieu, *O telewizji. Panowanie dziennikarstwa*, trans. K. Sztandar-Sztanderska, A. Ziołkowska, Wydawnictwo Naukowe PWN, Warsaw 2009; M. Foucault, *Nadzorować...*; idem, *Historia seksualności*, vol. 1 *Wola wiedzy*, trans. B. Banasiak, T. Komendant, K. Matuszewski, słowo/obraz terytoria, Gdansk 2010.

<sup>25</sup> More on the subject, vide e.g.: R. Burt, "Introduction. The 'New' Censorship", in: *Administration of Aesthetics*, R. Burt (ed.), University of Minnesota Press, Minneapolis – London 1994; R.C. Post, "Censorship and Silencing", in: *Censorship and Silencing: Practices of Cultural Regulation*, R.C. Post (ed.), The Getty Research Institute for the History of Art and Humanities, Los Angeles 1998; M. Holquist, "Corrupt Originals: *The Paradox of Censorship*", "PMLA", 109:1 (1994); J. Butler, *Excitable Speech: A Politics of the Performative*, Routledge, New York – London 1997.

also in relation to the less formalised mechanisms of shaping the sphere of discourse within systems of liberal democracy.

Since 1989, within the areas of culture and art alone one could indicate hundreds of examples of censorship or attempted censorship.<sup>26</sup> Their analysis indicates that even though institutional control over the sphere of discourse was lifted in 1990, many informal relations of power (influencing what we think, say, create, and view) have remained. One of the lead examples is the age-old dominance of the Catholic world-view, and the resulting understanding of social relations (the roles of women and marriage, same-sex relationships, sexual education, abortion, contraception, protection of religious feelings, the secular nature of the state, the notions of morality, normality, freedom, or even the notion of art)<sup>27</sup>, though, evidently, there has existed a gradual reconfiguring of the gagging relations of power (e.g. the introduction into public debate of feminist and gay emancipation stipulations, or the progressing secularisation of the society – phenomena which during the PRL seemed suspended). One could also discuss continuity in regard to certain specific mechanisms shaping the discourse; evolution only applies to their intensity, and the related rhetoric. The process of delegating censorship duties, and the principle of “good censorship is one which cannot be seen/is no longer necessary” remain valid. In their application, there are still used such stimuli as *sanctions* and *rewards* of various provenances, though usually of an economic nature.<sup>28</sup> Let us examine the phenomena using examples.

In March 2015, Jacek Jaśkowiak, who had recently been elected president of Poznan as a candidate of Civic Platform, and who, prior to the election, appeared as an opponent of the conservative cultural policy of his predecessor Ryszard Grobelny, caused considerable confusion among his constituents. He stated that he sent a letter to Poznan’s archbishop Stanisław Gądecki to urge him to prevent the illegal placement of a Statue of Christ in Adam Mickiewicz Square planned by the committee for the reconstruction of the Monument of Gratitude of the Sacred Heart of Jesus Christ. He also made a similar request, i.e. to avoid any controversial spectacles during the soon to come 1050<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Baptism of Poland, with Michał Merczyński, the director of the Malta Festival Poznan. “Let us refrain from doing something which is only intended to cause a row,” con-

<sup>26</sup> Vide “Spis wypadków cenzorskich 1989–2010” in: J. Dąbrowski, *Cenzura...*, pp. 690–736.

<sup>27</sup> Out of over 250 recorded interventions in freedom of art within the period 1989–2010, 35% were justified with religious reasons, and 45% with moral reasons, the majority of which referred to Catholic morality as their point of reference: J. Dąbrowski and A. Demenko, *Cenzura w sztuce polskiej. Aspekty prawne*, vol. 2, Fundacja Kultura Miejsca, Warsaw 2014, p. 34.

<sup>28</sup> As noted by Svetlana Mintcheva, a researcher of the issue of censorship in democratic systems: *The ultimate dream of censorship is to do away with the censor*, vide “The Censor within”, in: *Censoring Culture. Contemporary Threats to Free Expression*, R. Atkins, S. Mintcheva (eds.), The New Press, New York 2006, p. 299.

cluded Jaškowiak.<sup>29</sup> In his statement, Jaškowiak referred, on the one hand, to the conflict regarding the monument of Gratitude of the Sacred Heart of Jesus Christ, which, according to some, should be restored in its original form and placed in Adam Mickiewicz square it having been demolished in 1939 by the Nazis<sup>30</sup>, and, on the other, to the spectacle entitled *Golgota Picnic* from June 2014, which was cancelled by director Merczyński pressured by conservative politicians, associations, and the football fans of Lech Poznań.<sup>31</sup>

Formally speaking, Jaškowiak's statement lacks any threat of censorship, or of sanctions; it only includes a conciliatory (seemingly) symmetrically distributed appeal to the representatives of both ideological sides to refrain from provoking any social conflicts. Yet the resulting situation raises the question: how Jaškowiak's suggestion was supposed to be interpreted by the director of Malta Festival Poznań when 50% of its budget (nearly 3 million PLN) came from local government funding. In reality, the inclusion of spectacles which would contradict the president's intentions could result in the termination of the acclaimed event, while a cut in funding would be viewed by society as even more justified since the artists had been warned against "causing a row" (the number of informal sanctions on the part of the city's authorities could be much higher because without the authorities' good will the organisation of such a big festival is virtually impossible). In order to mitigate possible horizontal disputes, Jaškowiak shifted the problem vertically one level upwards – (through the wallets) to the minds of the festival's organisers and artists. In doing so, the authorities not so much intended to block the propagation of undesired content as to induce a self-gagging blockage of ideas, and any plans for propagating those (thus, there existed a type of delegation of censorship duties). Furthermore, bear in mind that even if the organisers of the festival and artists had acted against the will of the president, there would still have come the penal code to the rescue, Art. 196 of k.k. in particular, which criminalises instances of offending religious feelings. Regardless of the outcome of a resulting case, the fact of becoming a suspect or even a defendant is a considerable inconvenience, which could be considered as a sanction.

A somewhat different strategy of delegating censorship duties was applied by Piotr Gliński, the Minister of Culture and National Heritage in the government of the Law and Justice party, when through his subordinate officer from the Financial Department of the Ministry he wrote a letter to the Marshal of Lower Silesia Province regarding a morally controversial spectacle entitled "Smierć

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<sup>29</sup> T. Cylka, S. Lipoński, "Jaškowiak chce spokoju w 2016 r.", *Gazeta Wyborcza* Poznań, 21.03.2015.

<sup>30</sup> Vide <http://www.pomnikwdziecznosci.pl/> (accessed: 20.03.2017).

<sup>31</sup> More on the subject, vide *Piknik Golgota Polska. Sztuka – religia – demokracja*, A. Adamiecka-Sitek, I. Kurz (eds.), Wydawnictwo Krytyki Politycznej, Warsaw 2015.

i dziewczyna.” The play, based on Elfriede Jelinek’s texts, was to be staged by Polski Theatre in Wrocław. The final section of the letter dated 20 November 2015 ran as follows:

MKiDN [Ministry of Culture and National Heritage] does not intend to intervene in freedom of artistic expression. Nor does it intend to pursue the introduction of any forms of censorship. However, the activities of an institution which receives public, including central government, funding, cannot violate norms commonly applicable within our society. [...] Therefore, the Minister of Culture and National Heritage expects Mr. Marshal to immediately order the suspension of the preparations for the première in the announced form which violates the generally accepted principles of social relations.<sup>32</sup>

In fact, the letter included an assurance that there is no such thing as censorship, which was followed by strict conditions. The officer clearly stated: “the theatre cannot”, “the minister expects the marshal to immediately order the suspension.” Nonetheless, the minister appears in it as a tolerant person by stressing twice that “the issue applies to an institution which receives public funding”, which enables an *a contrario* conclusion that the violation of “generally accepted principles of social relations” in art cannot occur when funded with tax money, but it can occur when funded from private sources. Since the introduction in Poland of a neo-liberal economic system *argumenta ad “taxum”* in disputes regarding art have appeared frequently, and there are specific reasons for that. The hypostatic figure of an ordinary taxpayer who is forced to pay for obscene/blasphemous/offensive art, first of all, suggests that there exists a universal model of social taste which defines what can be and what is not befitting to be financed through public funding. Secondly, that relates an emotional usually religion-based attack to the rational sphere of financial choices, which also helps gain the support of non-believers who do not care much about art or who are attached to its traditional paradigms. Considering the complexity of many contemporary works of art, and the poor education in terms of reading it prevalent in Poland, highlighting economic considerations is an efficient method of ousting controversial works from the public sphere. And thirdly, due to the economic argument, a censor stops being a censor (stops being visible). That is because she/he dissolves within the abstract mass of taxpayers, and just as abstract a notion of common good, and because her/his argument, in terms of its message, is permissive (“one can exhibit the works by Garcia, Jelinek, Nieznalska, etc.”) – the problem, of course, lies in its conditional nature (“but not using my tax money”). Based on previous experience it seems clear

<sup>32</sup> W. Mrozek, “Jak zabić świetny teatr”, *Gazeta Wyborcza*, 24.08.2016. Polish Theatre in Wrocław is financed through subject and purpose subsidies from the central budget, and the budgets of local government entities. Its financial reports are approved by the Management of Lower Silesia Province.

that private sponsors indicated as alternative sources of financing are unwilling to support controversial, transgressive, and avant-garde (i.e. non-canonised within the process of state education) art projects as usually they possess a niche nature, which means that in terms of marketing they do not guarantee a return on investment. If they, however, exceed the small circle of viewers, that is usually due to a media scandal, which can negatively influence the image of the sponsor (which is also measured based on specific market value). As noted by Naomi Klein, the image-based policies of corporations possess officially strong legalistic and pro-family nature, which means that potential private sponsors will rather dissociate themselves from works of art which violate “norms commonly applicable within our society.”<sup>33</sup> The opponents of transgressive art are perfectly aware of the fact that in reality creators have very few options, and without state patronage they will not cope – that is a typical example of delegating censorship duties which consists of making people associated with culture choose: either to act in line with the expectations of the authorities, or withdraw from their preferred artistic activities. Officially, there is no censor there, and yet one knows that some areas of art will become severely limited or will cease to exist altogether as a result of self-censorship, i.e. that form of censorship which is the most difficult to objectify, and the most treacherous.

After 1989 one could indicate many similar examples of delegating censorship duties; some mechanisms of limiting freedom of expression correspond to those which had been present in the communist regime. Though there is no final supervisor in the form of GUKPPiW, the system still works so that inconvenient expressions are excluded permanently. Not legal sanctions but a meditated distribution of economic and symbolic privileges (positions, subsidies, grants, assignments, publishing or staging options, etc.) is the most efficient method; thus desired behaviour is rewarded, and undesired behaviour is condemned, while the receivers themselves decide what is more beneficial to them.<sup>34</sup> Bear in mind that what has also remained is the dispersed relations of power which for generations have shaped the minds and attitudes of Poles. I believe that the analysis of the issues related to censorship before and after 6 June 1990 (or, more broadly, before

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<sup>33</sup> Strategies of corporate sales, vide N. Klein, *No Logo*, trans. M. Halaba, H. Jankowska, K. Makaruk, Wydawnictwo MUZA S.A., Izabelin 2004, pp. 90–95, 183–186, 202–205. Private sponsors can easily turn from benefactors to enemies (that applied in the case of the legal blackmail used in 1997 by Lego towards Zbigniew Libera and his work *Lego. Concentration Camp*); they can terminate the cooperation (as was done in 2003 by AMS and Cityboard Media in relation to the project entitled *Niech nas zobacz* by Karolina Breguła), or censor a work (as was done by AMS with Katarzyna Kozyra’s project entitled *Więzy krwi*).

<sup>34</sup> E.g. after charges were pressed against Dorota Nieznalska in 2002 for offending religious feelings of others with her installation entitled *Pasja*, for several years the artist was not offered a single exhibition in any valued Polish exhibition centre. Institutions, fearing repercussions on the part of politicians, were afraid to cooperate with her.

and after 1989), not within the categories of a termination but as a kind of a continuum, could help better understand the nuances of the functioning of the sphere of discourse in the PRL. At the same time that approach enables one to diagnose in a more nuanced and critical manner the issue of freedom of expression in today's Poland.

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Jakub Dąbrowski

**A few remarks on the mechanisms of censorship in the PRL<sup>35</sup>  
and the Third Republic of Poland**

(Summary)

The purpose of the paper is to discuss the mechanism of censorship before and after 1990 when the mission of the communist Chief Control Bureau for Press, Publications and Performances (GUKPPiW) was terminated. Communist censorship was not, as we have grown to perceive it, a case-based preventive control of the flow of ideas but a complex and continuous system of relations which shaped desired social actions. Institutional censorship only ensured the coherence of messages produced by self-censoring culture outlets: representatives of the media, scholars, writers, and artists. In my opinion the abolition of GUKPPiW was not some radical rupture, it seems that some of the mechanisms of censorship have a rather permanent nature, regardless of the political system. Moreover, even though institutional control over the discursive sphere was lifted, many informal relations of power have remained untouched. These dispersed power relations have been shaping Polish society's view of the world for centuries deciding what is good or bad, nice or ugly, decent or indecent, Polish or non-Polish, and last but not least – expressible or inexpressible.

Keywords: censorship in communist countries, censorship in democratic states, freedom of expression

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<sup>35</sup> Commonly used abbreviation of the People's Republic of Poland.

Agnieszka Czyżak\*

## 21<sup>st</sup> Century prose and freedom – from the issues of proza śródka

Since the early-1990s, the problem of how to define freedom has been raised by various groups of opinion-makers, historians, philosophers, and sociologists forced to diagnose the new political situation. In 1993, fr. Józef Tischner published his famous book entitled *Nieszczęsny dar wolności* [The Unfortunate Gift of Freedom], the main topic of which was the unexpected yet nationwide “fear of freedom”, and the inability to use and implement it.<sup>1</sup> During a series of meetings held at the same time, under the general name *Rozmowy w Castel Gandolfo* [Castel Gandolfo Talks], there were held discussions between European thinkers, who tried to identify and name the nature of the changes happening in nations and societies entering a new path of self-determination. The interlocutors mainly provided many warnings against simplifying the problem. For example, Ralph Dahrendorf concluded, fully convinced: “Any definition of freedom which is based on what people do, not only on what they are allowed to do, is risky, leads us astray, and constitutes an invitation for tyrants.”<sup>2</sup> Ronald Dworkin in an article entitled *Wolność, równość, wspólnota* argued: “respect for freedom and equality, at least within the most convincing definitions of those virtues, is incorporated into the respect for a community, it is an element of the community bond.”<sup>3</sup>

In the People’s Republic of Poland, freedom, particularly in its common understanding, was usually defined as the reverse of the condition shared both by the community, and its individual constituents operating within the imposed political system. Models of the vision of freedom have been sought after in the past or areas geographically distant. The freedom of action, choice, and thought, mythicised

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<sup>1</sup> Vide J. Tischner, *Nieszczęsny dar wolności*, Znak, Krakow 1993.

<sup>2</sup> R. Dahrendorf, “Wolność a więzi społeczne. Uwagi o strukturze pewnej argumentacji”, trans. A. Kopacki, in: *Spoleczeństwo liberalne. Rozmowy w Castel Gandolfo*, K. Michalski (ed.), Znak, Krakow 1996, p. 16 (first printed in Stuttgart 1993). [English version translated from Polish].

<sup>3</sup> R. Dworkin, “Wolność, równość, wspólnota”, trans. A. Pawelec, in: *Spoleczeństwo liberalne...*, p. 78. [English version translated from Polish].

in all possible manners, seemed an unattainable dream of the Grand Change, an opening – transformation of reality. It permeated into popular culture: the lyrics of the cult song by Chłopcy z Placu Broni<sup>4</sup>: “Wolność kocham i rozumiem / Wolności oddać nie umiem” [Freedom, I love and understand it / Freedom, I cannot part with it] appeared to be a message equally honest and compensatory in nature: both in terms of the long-term lack of it, and the sudden yet unexpected emerging unease of its appearance. The popular culture of the turn of the 1990s, in its various versions and manifestations, stored the memory about a time of irrefutable certainties, and easily aroused emotions.

## I

The political breakthrough of 1989 initially offered a hope for implementing previously rarely specified dreams into the reality of community life. Freedom in its collective dimension became, initially, an obvious literary topic, yet soon, not as a myth but as a group of social practices, it was subjected to increasingly critical consideration. No wonder, then, that the centre of gravity of artistic searches began to shift towards exploring the problems associated with freedom within its personal dimension. After less than a decade had passed, the authors of the first guide to the literature of the time of the transformation thus described the recent past, having a short perspective:

Therefore, the breakthrough was happening inside and around us – in the changing attitudes: to respected figures, the society, the authorities, the government, the market, and freedom, which connected those perspectives, which is key for today’s situation, and which constitutes the foundation of any discussion of identity. Freedom occurred in literature, which did not necessarily mean a blissful time without pressures and limitations.<sup>5</sup>

The principles of marketisation of the area of art began to rapidly influence the transformations within social communication. The rapid development of the mass culture, the popularity of works which mainly offered entertainment, and the popularity of the translations of world literature works of various magnitudes

<sup>4</sup> *Kocham wolność*, lyrics and music by B. Łyszkiewicz. Rock songs from the turn of the 1990s raising the topic of freedom became rooted into the collective memory as an important component co-forming the air of regaining freedom. No wonder, then, that twenty-five years later they became the soundtrack for a film bringing back those events: *Walesa. Man of hope*, directed by A. Wajda.

<sup>5</sup> P. Czaplinski, P. Śliwiński, *Literatura polska 1976–98. Przewodnik po prozie i poezji*, Wydawnictwo Literackie, Krakow 1999, pp. 215–216. [English version translated from Polish].

helped both creators and researchers or critics realise that the ongoing changes determine not only creative processes, but mostly receptive strategies.

The market success of a work of literature verified its author's technique, the acuteness of their choice (focussed on the current needs of the audience) of a topic, yet it also depended on extra-literary mechanisms of promotion, trends, and distribution. Krzysztof Uniłowski stated that a large portion of the literature of the 1990s featured: "an inertive approach to selected conventions, displaying technique skills, and care for a rapport with readers."<sup>6</sup> The establishing of contact with the audience within the areas of various communication realms became a condition necessary to become successful in the market. Prose offering a sensation of coming into contact with literature of higher artistic intent, yet focussed mainly on establishing a real, and as wide as possible, rapport with the literary audience, was termed *prose of the centre* ("proza śródka"). Uniłowski emphasised that within it:

the areas of archtextual references are not created by popular prose genres, but conventions associated by readers with "ambitious" literature. In other words, *prose of the centre* appeals to the solidified in the wide social consciousness vision of literature of the highest kind, its poetics, problems, and, finally, the role of literature and writers.<sup>7</sup>

*Prose of the centre* began to somewhat replace the literature of high artistic ambition offering the illusion of participation in the culture without testing the receiver, and their cognitive competences. The conventions noticeable in it were defined by the stereotypical common view of modern literature, emulated and reproduced in its simplified reflection.

The more broadly known texts assigned to that category occupied higher levels of the pyramid, which consisted of numerous works belonging to popular and entertainment literature, while exploiting similar themes. The topicality of the themes raised remained one of the conditions of their popularity among readers, while the provocation strategy became a tamed and accepted mode of drawing attention to a text and its author. Freedom of speech, having been guaranteed with the lifting of censorship, acquired an additional communicational dimension: it enabled one to raise themes indicated by temporary trends using even the most drastic means, including linguistic, violating social habits and moral taboos.

Within thus functioning reception, there might occur appropriations and a type of "lowering", thus taming, within the reading processes of works actually subversively designed. A representative example of that strategy was *Lubiewo* by

<sup>6</sup> K. Uniłowski, "Proza śródka' lat dziewięćdziesiątych, czyli stereotypy literatury nowoczesnej", in: *Stereotypy w literaturze (i tuż obok)*, W. Bolecki, G. Gazda (eds.), Wydawnictwo IBL, Warsaw 2003, pp. 262–263. [English version translated from Polish].

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 263.

Michał Witkowski, a novel transcending the horizons of readers' expectations, yet absorbed even by the popular circulation as a kind of moral peculiarity – somewhat disturbing, yet, basically, “harmless”. Andrzej Skrendo indicated that possibility of a double reception. By arguing that in *Lubiewo* there occurred a kind of restitution of the sacred, as without it any violations, transgressions, dressing up, and metamorphoses would prove impossible, he stated in the summary of his deliberations:

If one forgets about that restitution, one can see in *Lubiewo* nothing more than a collection of exotic anecdotes. If we remember about it, we will see the whole ambiguity – suppressed desire, and living off that suppression, no one's fault, and a dominating punishment, a fear of loneliness and the joy of becoming liberated.<sup>8</sup>

Witkowski's following works, carrying a decreased subversive load, more and more matched the main stream of *prose of the centre*, which was accompanied by the author's spectacular, camp gestures used for promoting them. That may change, though, of course, it does not have to, with the release of the latest novel entitled *Fynf und cwancyś*, which can be considered as an intentional return to the stylistics and message of *Lubiewo* performed in the altered and quickly changing conditions of collective communication.

## II

The contention of socially imposed limitations was the distinctive feature of the writings of many authors who debuted after 1989. An obvious result of that was that, in their works, they explored in various manners the topic of individual freedom. The literature which in the 1990s demysticised or even destructed the mythologies which formed around the notion of community freedom, in the 21<sup>st</sup> c. set its study focus on personal freedom, the civilisation transformation-based threats and visions of limitations founded on the new definitions of the freedoms of an individual. The freedom of an individual was mainly studied within the area of interpersonal contacts, the ability to establish contacts with the Other.

At the beginning of the new millennium, Przemysław Czapliński in a book entitled *Efekt bierności* argued that literature which leaves communicational capital in an unspoiled condition, and only draws from it as if from a collection

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<sup>8</sup> A. Skrendo, “Miejsce ujawnienia”, *Pogranicza* 2005, issue 1, p. 15. [English version translated from Polish]. Skrendo concluded: “*Lubiewo* is explained through that which is not there, and it talks about a need for that about which it remains silent. It is, so to speak, a place of discovering the need to conceal, i.e. the need for taboo. It reveals the rarely known part of reality, and it shows us new places in the world of literature.”

of ready-made formulas, produces, not without the receivers' consent, an effect of passiveness, similar to that produced by mass culture. By not intending to change the habits of the audience, the authors use templates thus making them understand that "common means of communication – our stereotypes, prejudices, linguistic clichés, including fictional patterns, which we carry in our heads – do not require any expansion or refreshing."<sup>9</sup> Thus form simplified reflections of particularly significant problems – e.g. being responsible for other people – and often against the noble intentions of authors.

The topic of individual freedom limited by external circumstances often assumes the conventional, i.e. generally understood and accepted, shape of a story on the "cruelty" of fate. One such example was the famed novel by Dorota Terakowska entitled *Poczwarka*, which raised the topic of limiting freedom caused by illness and disability – a limitation on the individual afflicted with a disability, but also one which determines the fate of their loved ones forced, against they will, to care for the sick. When attempting to reach the world of the experiences of a young girl born with a severe form of Down's syndrome, Terakowska also depicted mainly the extent of the destruction to her parents' lives. The father limited his contact with his loved ones, hiding in the space of professional work restrictively separated from the zone of family life, while the mother made the "worst and yet the only [decision] she could have made: she isolated Myszka from the world in order to spare her pain and disappointment, while sparing herself shame and despair."<sup>10</sup>

The child's death must have proved for them a true liberation, while their "reward" for the years of voluntary withdrawal from the external world was later giving birth to a child not burdened by the hereditary disease. Czapliński concluded: "Against her best intentions, Terakowska sacrificed *Poczwarka* on the altar of normality – for parents who have a normal child could pretend to be mature."<sup>11</sup> It should be added that in that story, there was a reflexively objectionable vision of heaven – one of the most shocking, as the invented after world also has a ghetto for the disabled, a special zone, in which they can all stay together without disturbing the peace of the souls not afflicted by disability. Disability, in fact, proved to be a taint transferred there, against the principles of mercy, from the time of corporal existence on Earth.

In another famous novel of that time, i.e. *Heroina*, the author Tomasz Piątek created a world where not only family ties but all interpersonal ties had disappeared giving way to an individually fulfilled project of achieving happiness. In

<sup>9</sup> P. Czapliński, *Efekt bierności. Literatura w czasie normalnym*, Wydawnictwo Literackie, Krakow 2004, p. 10. [English version translated from Polish].

<sup>10</sup> D. Terakowska, *Poczwarka*, Wydawnictwo Literackie, Krakow 2003, p. 279. [English version translated from Polish].

<sup>11</sup> P. Czapliński, *Efekt bierności...*, p. 92.

the reality marked by decay, devoid of any alternative projects for fulfilment and success, the title heroine proves the only way for achieving happiness. Despite their destructive power, drugs remain in the novel the only way to put up screens to hide from the reality of everyday existence. One of the characters states directly: “People think that if they have a wife and kids, everything will be OK. But when they get the wife and kids, it turns out that it’s not OK. And then they understand that actually they never wanted a family. They only wanted everything to be OK.”<sup>12</sup>

Thus freedom proves to be mainly one’s ability to escape from the world and one’s obligations towards others – freedom wasted in pursuit of chemically delivered and momentary happiness, eventually leading to self-destruction. Piątek’s début, his uncompromising diagnosis of contemporary times clearly surpassing his later works, was cautiously removed from a wider field of view, and placed in a niche of so-called “drug-related literature”, popular mainly amongst teenage readers.

A similar fate befell Olga Tokarczuk’s novel entitled *Prowadź swój próg przez kości umarłych* (Drive Your Plough Over the Bones of the Dead), which became popular among teenage, though not exclusively, animal lovers, and for ardent protectors of animal rights. The story of Janina who set out on a ruthless fight against animal murder became, also due to the novel’s genre convention, a niche story on the one hand, and, on the other, one which offers a special sense of compensation for the readers convinced of the undue marginalisation of the problem. Before reaching for extreme measures, the protagonist tried to reach the people surrounding her through speeches with an apocalyptic tone: “The world is a prison full of suffering constructed in such a way that one needs to inflict pain on others to survive.”<sup>13</sup> Yet her crusade was bound to fail from the start – the people surrounding her remained deaf to her words, which drove her to cross all lines.

Since the 19<sup>th</sup> c. the conventions of crime and action prose have been used within high literature as a convenient device to convey the most complicated discursive content. At the same time, the morality play-style nature of each story (including crime stories) about the struggle between good and evil enables one to engage within its framework in a polemic with the rules of socially accepted orders. Since *The Name of the Rose* by Umberto Eco, prose with more ambitious aims using action patterns has also indicated a conscious engagement in an intertextual play – usually at a level which does not hinder one’s satisfaction in

<sup>12</sup> T. Piątek, *Heroina*, Czarne, Wołowiec 2002, p. 79. [English version translated from Polish].

<sup>13</sup> O. Tokarczuk, *Prowadź swój plug przez kości umarłych*, Wydawnictwo Literackie, Krakow 2009, p. 131. [English version translated from Polish]. Earlier, Janina indicated another type of individual imprisonment: “The entire complex human psyche formed to prevent Humans from understanding what they actually see. For the truth to reach them, entwined in illusions, and empty talk.”

reading. It was similar in the case of a theatre staging of the novel by the Poznan-based Teatr Polski<sup>14</sup> – the director did try to extract its subversive content, while the actors tried to shout them out with gusto, yet on the whole it drew viewers through its attractive packaging, i.e. an exceptionally rich and special-effects-filled visual side.

The example of Tokarczuk's novel indicated how the freedom of uttering the most provocative theses clashes with the freedom of social reception, which defines its own extra-artistic hierarchies. Novel fiction touches upon invariably controversial problems, while the audience defuses the explosive load by ousting the presented attitude towards the zone of harmless oddities. Works considered as *prose of the centre* remain, nonetheless, a proof of not only the changes occurring in communication circulations, but also of the main problems sensitive at a given moment for the community for which they were written. In 1994, Piotr Śliwiński argued:

High art today, having exhausted, as it is rather generally considered, the deposits of the belief in its own mission and future necessary for further development, stoops to mass culture. Thus we ourselves gain the right to seek inspiration in trivial literature, including of older times. Therefore, the question whether the concerns of an epoch related to, e.g. the philosophy of history, can become expressed in a trivial form, is no longer as shocking a misunderstanding as it once was. That is because concern is expressed in different languages, while philosophy and psychology rather reveal themselves, accidentally and wilfully granted to a work of literature, than allow for them to be systematically planned and found in it.<sup>15</sup>

Therefore, from that point of view as well it would be difficult to define the limits of *prose of the centre* – the clarity of displaying philosophical consideration of the human condition in the contemporary world seems a somewhat added value in relation to writers' intentions, and one which is not always clear for the ordinary reader – usually included in interpretational reconstructions performed by literary critics and researchers.

Scandal and moral provocation as a domesticated device which draws the audience craving for emphatic experiences can also be viewed in various dimensions. Obscenity, one of the emanations and models of which for the author of *Simulacra and Simulation* was pornography, was defined by him as a set of projects of renouncing distance, rejecting play, and resigning to seduction propagating itself in

<sup>14</sup> O. Tokarczuk, *Pomórnik. Kryminal ekologiczny*, directed and adapted for staging by Emilia Sadowska, premièred: 11.09.2010.

<sup>15</sup> P. Śliwiński, *Tadeusz Dołęga-Mostowicz*, Rebis, Poznan 1994, pp. 166–168. [English version translated from Polish].

contemporary communicational circulations. When writing about shattered communicational principles, about being lost, or even the decline of previous principles of dialogue, Jean Baudrillard concluded that today communication has been replaced by an immediate and direct transfer of data.<sup>16</sup> Baudrillard also emphasised the need to defend against the generally accepted obscenity (in all its more or less defined forms) appropriating an ever growing number of media areas.<sup>17</sup> In a world sliding towards total obscenity, irony proves “the final form of seduction”: a category often unnoticed or omitted by receivers, which remains a peculiar “alibi” of creators. The use of irony could thus be considered an indication of a higher creative self-awareness, and a signal of one’s readiness for accepting more difficult artistic challenges. The intensity of the signals of moral provocation, increasingly difficult in the reality of declining taboos, remains a simple utilisation of the strategy of provocation for marketing purposes, while ironic interferences in that strategy could constitute a defence against its domesticated, pervasive form in the media and on the internet.

### III

The emergence and the rapid development of virtual communication space was a phenomenon to which literature (and art) had to respond, trying to reach the core of the changes. In a similarly accelerated manner, it was necessary to identify the transformations of interpersonal relations.

At the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> c., Ryszard K. Przybylski argued:

The increasing availability of the internet, and the expanding utility of the Web lead to promoting new forms of social communication, which creates a considerable disturbance in the hierarchies which had applied in this scope. Yet it mainly combines qualities which seemed irreconcilable within the previously applicable norms, i.e. the drive for freedom and captivity, once suspected in consumption.<sup>18</sup>

Furthermore, the general consent to new forms of addictions and subordination caused their severity to be removed from view. A perverse and ironic proof of those changes, and a critical diagnosis of those was offered in *Kurator* by

<sup>16</sup> J. Baurillard, *Słowa-klucze*, trans. S. Królak, Sic!, Warsaw 2008, p. 28. [English version translated from Polish].

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 30.

<sup>18</sup> R.K. Przybylski, “Media i ich wpływ na świadomość literacką po 1989”, in: *Transformacja w kulturze i literaturze polskiej*, B. Bakula (ed.), Bonami, Poznan 2007, p. 146. [English version translated from Polish].

Zbigniew Kruszyński, an obscene tale aimed against the degenerations in interpersonal relations, which are born and which mutate in the new communicational conditions. The freedom offered by the virtual space appeared in the novel mainly a pretence, and a dangerous illusion.

*Kurator* is sometimes considered as a somewhat boring story on fringe areas of social life, in fact, it was sometimes advertised as a voice on sponsorship/prostitution, an allegedly generally accepted phenomenon, which is no longer outrageous, and not even distasteful. But maybe it ought to be read as a variation on the topic of the possibilities opening in front of today's Humbert Humbert, a distant descendant of the protagonist of *Lolita* by Nabokov<sup>19</sup>, in the world of virtual communication. *Kurator* could also be included in a series of stories on the contemporary versions of "loneliness on the web", and beside it. Mainly, though, it is a story on the emergence of new areas of consumption, and on the unexpected manifestations of the laws of demand and supply. The protagonist, and, at the same time, the ever-identified with the narrator of the story, thus described his everyday common actions upon having his morning coffee: "So I went to websites marked as: sponsorship. They were increasingly bigger and more avaricious. Everyone demanded gratuity, raising the rates."<sup>20</sup>

The degree of acceptance of virtually established relations, which are momentary and expire without a trace, and the unabashed certainty of the protagonist that everything can be found and bought on the web (the only issue being the price), was supposed to make him a model member of the internet community from the start. Nicolas Bourriaud in a study entitled *Estetyka relacyjna* wrote:

we discover that we are bare, and exploited by the electronic media, amusement parks, organised cohabitation areas, exuberant development of compatible social formats [...] That which cannot be commercialised, must disappear. Soon you will not be able to maintain interpersonal relationships outside that commercial dimension.<sup>21</sup>

Even though that diagnosis echoes a tone of anxiety or fear for the future, the protagonist of *Kurator* seems to be in that respect devoid of any doubts, hesitation, and indecision. The possibility of establishing contacts on the internet was the reason why there appeared a procession of women in the life of a divorced fifty-year-old. *Kurator* is not, however, their collective portrait, rather, similarly to Nabokov's work, a portrait of a man watching them, evaluating his casual partners according to their attractiveness, usefulness, ease of use, i.e. the quickest in consuming the contents of the sexual offer.

<sup>19</sup> Vide V. Nabokov, *Lolita*, trans. R. Stiller, Państwowy Instytut Wydawniczy, Warsaw 1991.

<sup>20</sup> Z. Kruszyński, *Kurator*, W.A.B., Warsaw 2014, p. 6. [English version translated from Polish].

<sup>21</sup> N. Bourriaud, *Estetyka relacyjna*, trans. Ł. Biłkowski, MOCAK, Krakow 2012, p. 35. [English version translated from Polish].

The types of the contacts being established, the course of each meeting, and the trite chats devoid of any emotions reveal the vapidness of his actions. Then the obscene details of random acts presented with ironic detachment reveal the superficiality of the incidentally established relations. They do not help to build erotic tension. Their goal is to hinder the possibility of any pornographic concretisation. That is confirmed in the presentation of each of the paid one-time contacts outlined in the novel. It took the relationship with Marta, a high school graduate he met in the same internet manner, a character who appears at the end of the book, to seemingly lead to a change of the situation, and opening of a new chapter in the life of the protagonist. Everything, however, was, in fact, a repetition of previous arrangements. What did change was only the attitude of “the curator”, unexpectedly capable of feeding off illusions, and using them to conceal the inconvenient truth.

Unexpectedly, including for himself, the protagonist became similar to Aschenbach from Mann’s variation on old age and death<sup>22</sup> (they are, in fact, of the same age), to his two extremely different incarnations: a rationalist capable of observing the world from a distance, and a man dazed by his recent infatuation, heading for the end, devoid of any instincts of self-preservation. Shivering with cold, the protagonist spends hours posing nude in order for Marta to fill her portfolio with works necessary to become accepted for university. While undergoing a similar experience to those during his previous contacts with partners met on the web (including a blackmail attempt), he cannot afford the necessary detachment, or notice their core. The change of the point of view could not, obviously, influence a change of the status of the relationship between the protagonist and the graduate, the self-appointed “curator” and the paid “protégé”.

He died alone leaving behind outdated classifieds, and a few fading unwanted memories. Yet prior to committing suicide, he tried to look into Marta’s face for the last time. He saw the face of a stranger, like hundreds of others previously browsed in the photographs of internet classifieds. Similar to numerous faces, which coupled with nude photos promoted the commercial offer. As Giorgio Agamben argued when writing about contemporary changes in viewing nakedness: “The face, now an accomplice of nudity—as it looks into the lens or winks at the spectator—lets the absence of secret be seen; it expresses only a letting-be-seen, a pure exhibition.”<sup>23</sup> When viewing such exhibitions, while scouring through the mass of images posted on the internet, he treated the photographs not as a trace of subjective existence, but, usually faked, retouched, and imitated, signs of the quality of the services being offered.

<sup>22</sup> Vide T. Mann, *Śmierć w Wenecji*, trans. Leopold Staff, Wydawnictwo Dolnośląskie, Wrocław 1996.

<sup>23</sup> G. Agamben, *Nagość*, trans. K. Żaboklicki, W.A.B., Warsaw 2010, p. 98. [English version: Agamben G. *Nudities*, Stanford University Press: California, p. 89].

The story of “the curator” is not, though, a record of the erotic adventures of a lonely fifty-year-old. It becomes for the reader a test of their own acceptance of the changes occurring in how people establish, build, and maintain interpersonal relations. In the early-1980s, Jerzy Ziomek as if predicting the contemporary virtual forms of eroticism and *voyeurism*, thus concluded his study entitled *Pornografia i obscenum*: “A ritual can be orgiastic. Yet even the wildest ritual can never become pornography due to the actual participation of everyone. A ritual is not pornographic, but the viewing of a ritual from a secure location may be.”<sup>24</sup>

That statement could be transformed today into a series of questions. What today becomes a ritual – and whether the virtual scene of interpersonal contacts has a dimension of ritualistic space? Whether online presence can acquire the nature of the participation of everyone? In fact, to what extent would that be an “actual” participation? And finally: are there still any secure locations for observing it? Kruszyński in *Kurator* tried to answer some of them without turning the answers into a unidimensional diagnosis. Instead of a scandalous and thus attractive story on sponsorship, the readers were offered a pessimistic vision of the contemporary pretences of freedom, a depressing the truth about the human condition. Yet another novel of *prose of the centre* thus became yet another warning against the abuse of freedom resulting from misunderstanding its essence, and yet another indication of the destructive force of civilisational changes damaging the foundations of its understanding.

The category of *prose of the centre* acquiring along the development of the latest literature increasingly emphatic theoretical markers has been used for defining the modes of functioning of individual works and not the entire output of the writers indicated in specific interpretations. It particularly coincides with the considerations of the contemporary role of literature, and its status within social communicational circulations. It mainly proves the durability of the conviction on the community dimension of literary works. The desire for literature to remain something more than literature, to reach the biggest group of receivers, and to be able to influence the shape of collective life is actually fulfilled today most emphatically in works categorised as *prose of the centre*, and maybe their generally accepted presence in publishing offers extends the existence of the slowly fading, and less important “text-based world”.

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<sup>24</sup> J. Ziomek, “Pornografia i obscenum”, in: idem, *Rzeczy komiczne*, Wydawnictwo „Poznańskich Studiów Polonistycznych”, Poznan 2000, p. 188. [English version translated from Polish].

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Agnieszka Czyżak

## 21<sup>st</sup> Century prose and freedom – from the issues of proza środka

(Summary)

The main aim of the article is a consideration the problems connected with this part of contemporary literature which is called “proza środka” (“prose of the middle”). 21<sup>st</sup> century novels treated as the examples of this phenomenon (e.g. *Lubiewo* written by Michał Witkowski, *Poczwarka* by Dorota Terakowska, *Kurator* by Zbigniew Kruszyński) and their reception prove that new political situation after 1989 changes the rules of common literary perception. The readers expectations support origination of textes which are ambitious, attractive but also easy to assimilation. The main theme of that part of prose is freedom, especially freedom of the individual.

Keywords: contemporary prose, 21<sup>st</sup> century literature, freedom, 1989 year’s turn

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## Freedom as vulgarity in the poetry of *débuting* poets at the watershed moment of 1989

In the PRL's poetry, prose, and drama, as well as in cinema and songs, there were almost no vulgarisms present. In that respect, the art of the entire 45-year period seems a time of great prudery. The PRL's culture and art, despite many allusions to folk topics or stylisations drawn from popular culture, was part of the high circulation, somewhat based on the principles of the applicable doctrine. In fact, that was a symptomatic paradox: the state, which referred to itself as a "people's republic", considering all its projects clearly directed *pro populo*, e.g. moderating social promotion, combating illiteracy, collectivisation of the countryside, nationalisation of industry, the fight for trade, etc., existed within an extremely elitist paradigm, which was reflected also in a communicative fork. Thus immersed in official circulation PRL could not and did not intend to teach the working nation of the cities and villages foul, obscene, blasphemous words – in fact, no form of ill lexis whatsoever. The borderline were euphemisms: all the instances of *psiakrew* [damn], *cholera* [bugger], or even euphemistic litotes: *cholewka* [little damn] and *kurka* [shoot], all the way until the parodies of low speech such as the famous Bareja's *motyla noga* [butterfly's leg].

Another paradox was the fact that stronger words or those actually vulgar started appearing in the post-WWII culture of Poland only, and actually rather late, in the translations of foreign books or in the voice-overs of films from behind the Iron Curtain. Today, it is difficult to decide whether that was part of an ideological plan to indicate that the foul West spoke in foul language, or a type of shame of the ethical and aesthetic didactics of socialism. Nonetheless, it was not a trivial problem as linguistic transgressions were often the triggers of contestation or revolutionary moods. Polish futurists, including communising Tuwim, were not frugal in their lexical choices, thus taking revenge on the hated bourgeois reality through, as Stanisław Barańczak excellently defined it, a revenge on language. Therefore, it was a substitute, an image-based revenge, which, by

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the way, for ages has been validated with the well-known topos of *in effigie*. Its tradition dates back to antiquity; it was particularly eagerly used in Roman satire and lampoon works. It might be possible that the excessive representation of thick talk in old Polish works by Calvinist poets led by the unrivalled Rej was also an expression of a negation of the dominant doctrine, and the practice of Catholicism, not just a sign of moral freedom, and naturalness of linguistic conduct of the masters of farm and literary houses.

Let us, however, return from that long journey. The PRL did not speak beautifully. The language of labourers did not even reach the standard depicted by Marek Hłasko in *Baza Sokółowska* or *Pierwszy dzień w chmurach*. Anyone who had ever heard the soundscape of a construction site, a factory or a military unit, must have noticed that. Nor was beautiful speech something practised by educated people in the post-WWII state, artists in particular. While in the first, proletariat (to define it based on class), circulation one must today rely on self-reflective memory, the intelligentsia left many relics of its linguistic rites in the form of autobiographies, recollections about stars, collections of anecdotes, etc. Even such subtle women as Kalina Jędrusik or Beata Tyszkiewicz delivered during the intermissions in their stage performances or on film sets transgressions of thick army talk, if you will. That remained in clear contrast to the image of the characters they created: ethereal lovers, aristocratic ladies, true embodiments of immaculate elegance and top manners. Their fellow directors, the likes of Kazimierz Dejmek or Kazimierz Kutz could be excused based on their tension-filled working conditions, but in their case as well the regular recipient of art could have expected some moderation – the former was, in fact, the model party theatre entrepreneur, while the latter represented Silesia with its ethos and proper upbringing.

Why, then, did artists, the admired and often considered as model judges of elegance, curse so pungently while acting in or directing national or regional classics? Was it a manifestation of freedom – at least from linguistic duty? An element of their lifestyles? Or maybe quite the opposite: an ideological, though not official, validation of the main role they played: of the working intelligent? No one would say that it had always been like that in the discussed groups. If one compared the anecdotes left by Igor Śmiałowski to those in which Gustaw Holoubek held court as their narrator or protagonist, one would immediately notice a striking change in the style. Humour remained, obviously, punchlines were always hilarious, but the level of the vocabulary used plummeted. Some might say that actresses thus fulfilled their emancipatory ambitions, somewhat resembling women-soldiers or women-labourers they indicated that they were just as tough as their masculine surroundings. Others could add that the fact of adopting the language of the lowest classes constituted a sign of a dramatic attempt at defending their threatened professional position in the new social context. That is fairly doubtful. Though the words uttered by Kalina Jędrusik to a theatre fireman who informed her about

the need to put out her cigarette while on stage: “fuck off, fireman” could, if one tried hard enough, be considered as a result of class courage (but to prove it, it would require the intellectual qualifications of Stanisław Dygat), Gustaw Holoubek’s master/plebeian retort to Jan Himilbach’s call: “intelligents, get the fuck out of here” in the café of Czytelnik: “I don’t know about you, Ladies and Gentlemen, but I’m getting the fuck out of here” solidified the status of the demiurge of reality rather than a defender of the lost cause.

That which they did not have the opportunity to hear from the backstage of domestic art, the recipients of imported popular culture in the PRL could hear in American films, in which from underneath the smooth voice-over there crept out various *fucks* and *shits*. Not immediately, of course, even after the thaw which ended Socialist realism. One had to wait out the period of morally just and linguistically proper westerns to finally immerse oneself in the soundsphere of gangster films. The same applied to music: Elvis Presley had not started to curse in song, but the Rolling Stones had, while their punk rock successors went all out in the matter, with their curses even deserving muting in English-speaking countries by record labels. Polish fans of the Sex Pistols probably approved of their language and were certainly excited about the combination of social rebellion with a linguistic revolt. Well, in domestic productions of the Socialist realism, i.e. dud and painfully smoothed out, pop culture, only SS men and other villains in Nazi uniforms cursed. Provided that, of course, they were not Soviet undercover agents, like Agent J-23. Hans Kloss did not swear, even the more pungent lines assigned to him, upon careful examination of all the episodes (once it became possible thanks to home video recordings), proved mere legends. Similarly, to draw from a different tale, to the alleged ending of one of the episodes of *Miś z okienka*.

Neither did the tank squad from the popular television series *Cztery pancerni i pies* nor Red Army soldiers from hundreds of films, with which both teenagers and adults were tormented, swear. That was strange in the light of the stories of the still living witnesses of WWII, but the audience accepted that extremely refined film and inter-nationalistic convention. People who travelled the tourist and trade friendship train to the USSR, the buyers of illegal recordings of the performances of Vladimir Vysotsky or the listeners to Alexander Galich’s broadcasts on Radio Liberty, had a firm opinion on that. Some liberty at taming obscene language was also ensured by the intelligentsia’s playing on words, e.g. the famous “gra półsłówka” (spoonerisms), which was already known in Poland in the inter-war period (Julian Tuwim), and which was perfected in terms of its transgressive limits, in fact in line with its English provenance, at universities (Stanisław Barańczak). The switching of the first syllables in words had always been amusing: from the tame pre-WWII phrases like: “grała babka w salopie” (upon switching: “grandma shits while galloping”) or “pradziadek przy saniach” (“grandpa

shits by the ladies”), through those rooted in Stalinist lexis, such as: “stój Halina” (“Stalin’s dick”) or “pokój hutnika” (“penitent’s dick”), to those clearly related to later decades, such as the one which referred to the cycling Peace Race: “pikująca Szozda” (“shocking cunt”). In fact, to explain the essence of spoonerisms, one could always seek less blasphemous examples, e.g. “domki w Słupsku” (“straws in the arse”), “słynna praczka” (“free-flowing diarrhoea”), or the almost neutral within anatomical nomenclature “tenis w porcie” (“penis in cake”).

There were also various phonetic stylisations related to the sounding of foreign languages: requiring French displaced accent (“trę dupą o trotuar” or “lej na mur”), necessitating the combination of Japanese lexemes (“na chuj mi ta chata”, “macha jajami jako tako”, “kiła jaja mu harata”), or begging the monosyllabic Chinese scansion (“pękl chuj”, known in the civil version as “pękl tynk”). There had even appeared some, absolutely unexpected in terms of their location, yet justified with the nationalities of dictators: Stalin and Ceaușescu allusions to the sound of Georgian (“kał ma na wardze”) or Romanian (“srał na deskę”). Finally, also jargon stylisations in which consecutive words formed tabooed vulgar formations. That sophisticated scatologia was supplemented by much less fanciful jokes, usually told by men among men, the racy aphorisms assigned to Boy or Sztudynger, indecent quotes allegedly or actually borrowed from course literary traditions, or pornographic enumerations emulating children’s counting-out rhymes. This study cannot serve as a justification of their low nature, which is why in their case no examples shall be provided. Then again, a separate question is what actually justified them then. Was it the nature of human communication? The eternal need to swear due to pain, fear, or resistance? The inclination rooted in the human mind to break the taboo? The pathological pleasure in coprolalia?

The stepping stone for that should be literature, or actually a specific moment in its Polish history, which is why it is time to tilt the spotlight that way. A turning point in Poland in the approach of writers to the language of impudence was undoubtedly the release of *Ulysses* by James Joyce. Actually, it was the final, shocking through its slatternly vocabulary monologue of Molly Bloom. There is no sufficient space in this article to interpret it or offer an intellectual discussion of it; That has been done many times before in the most recognised literary studies. What was symptomatic was the delayed reception of the pre-WWII scandalising work by the Irish author in the post-WWII Poland of the age of the late and unwaveringly morally conservative Gomułka. Truth be told, *Ulysses* was read by a handful of those who purchased the legendary blue copy. Usually, people were content with reading only the final monologue by the protagonist awoken by her husband. That revealed yet another feature of the PRL’s erudition, i.e. its fragmentary nature. The initial pages of Proust with his integral madelaine, and the final, probably less boring, but more linguistically challenging, fragments of

Joyce. From Mann: only the titles and the names of the characters. Out of mercy, let us remain with the author of the fortunes and the peregrinations of the contemporary Odysseus. Surely the solid wall of the text which had to be faced by the Polish readers of *Ulysses* was not pulled down intellectually, but the very ascertainment that one can write in that manner and it is befitting, that an acclaimed work of which people learn at school and university, could include similar strange passages, albeit rapidly flowing down the rush and changing current of the stream of consciousness, was shocking.

That which James Joyce did not manage to do was done a few years later through a book which was also delayed in Poland, yet at least not released posthumously, by Henry Miller, who offered a much less linguistically complicated, much more expressive in terms of the story, much more pungent in terms of the descriptions, message for a less sophisticated perception. His prose, especially that which was read for the millions of listeners of the *Lato z radiem* show, could not had gone unnoticed through the Polish literary market. Just like the whole wave of translations of American belles lettres by Anna Kołyszko, equally skilled as the original authors. Yet it was Miller who was the key to the imagination and the linguistic courage of Polish authors of the political watershed period. He himself defined the language of *Tropic of Capricorn* as an insult to the seven fundamental values and symbols of culture: Art, God, Humanity, Destiny, Time, Love, and Beauty. Such an insult was certainly craved by a considerable group of debuting writers of the initial stage of the Polish transformation – in literature, song, and film, as well as in theatre, and the plastic arts. Focussing on the first three domains, and only listing: Andrzej Stasiuk in stories (*Mury Hebronu*), Kazik Staszewski in song (*Spalam się*), Władysław Pasikowski in film (*Kroll, Psy*).

Interestingly enough, that scatologic characteristic also appeared in poetry, mainly due to the début book of Marcin Świetlicki (the *Zimne kraje* collection), and his stage performances of his lyrics (a record *Ogród koncentracyjny*). That spirit also permeated the first anthologies of the emerging generation (*Przyszli barbarzyńcy*, *Po Wojaczku 2*, *Macie swoich poetów*). It would be difficult to decide which of the above-listed ideological and aesthetic backgrounds were in that case the most important. Maybe rock, possibly the already mentioned literature, which should encompass the prose and the poems of Anthony Burgess, William Burroughs, Jack Kerouac, and Charles Bukowski. Contrary to what is most often indicated as their inspiration, neither New York nor Liverpool poets took delight in curses. The linguistic revolt stemmed from a slightly different atmosphere. The texts of theatre stars of the last decade of the 20<sup>th</sup> c. in Poland could be a good reference: Werner Schwab (*Mariedl/Antiklima(x)*), Mark Ravenhill (*Fucking and Shopping*) or Sarah Kane (*Blasted*). The terms *toilet* or *faecal drama* somewhat reserved for the works of the Austrian scandal-maker could be transplanted onto

a big part of the young poetry of the transformation period, because nasty language and nasty reality seemed in all the works equally their existential essence, an actual vision of the world not subject to falseness.

The cesspool of words and representations fulfilled a similar function to Artaud's plague: one must go through it to become cleansed. Actually, it was a cesspool made of words, because language appeared in that case as the highest guarantee of existence. Language understood as a landfill of the old culture, a pile of waste, a gigantic dump, where the beastly mindless human tribe scours. It replaced hell in the good old aesthetics of the classics because hell had ceased to exist, or rather: the hell of today has only become a striking mask of the evil wild man, while Schwab or Kane, who was younger than him but who died in similarly tragic circumstances, also wanted to show us the evil beast. In poetry, that translated into the convention of *In-yer-face theatre*: to write while having one's head immersed in a pool of waste; selecting lexis tainted with foul physiology; a veristic record of the experiences of the body; post-symbolic attributes of things and characters. In Schwab's works, a woman anointed all things and members of her family with lard in order to paste the household reality together, a man masturbates to drain deadly liquids from his body and "not to besmear the world with fatherhood." An act of violence, including its verbal type, becomes the last line of communication because in it people meet at least for a moment in a ritual of reverse love, i.e. hatred. The ascertainment of that anti-aesthetics and the essentially heroic ethics is grim: there is no opportunity for cleansing, there is no *catharsis*. Just as there is no avoiding the trap of one's own body, i.e.: oneself.

Therefore, the poetics is dominated by *antyclimax*, a figure which consists of thwarting the high fork of poetry through the introduction of the elements of boorishness and vulgarity. The stylistic contrast between apologia and irony, anti-gradation falling into banality or, perfectly described by Alexander Pope, *bathos*, i.e. the opposite of pathos tossed into ridiculousness, could just as well be the poetics of the world in a serious or buffo tone. Much depends on the modal frame, and the context. One thing is certain: obscenity clad in the robes of a satyricon, as discussed by the Enlightenment author, is easier to accept in aesthetic terms than the brutal blasphemy of the Austrian "defilers of the nest" of the late-20<sup>th</sup> c., devoid of any pretence of a joke (because it was not only Schwab, also his older fellow writers: Thomas Bernhardt and Elfriede Jelinek). That aesthetic has appeared in Polish poetry after the political turning point exceptionally often. It has continued to experience its unfinished initiations, it results from the oppression of the literary traditions, but also from the current ideological or social oppressions. From the ancient priapeia (indecent epigrams on the walls of a temple), through the mediaeval *fabliaux* (obscene fair comics on a board), all the way to modern kinaidologia (anonymous pornographic songs in stage performances and comedy

shows), not much has changed. Contemporary culture is mainly oppressed by pop culture, so any reactions to it are fostered by pop cultural images and props: popular films, television series, computer games, media events, or the non-virtual crackling reality itself. In the anti-collage composed of them, there occur reductions and humiliations of decorum, which the ancients used to call *tapeinosis* and *humilitas*.

Therefore, vulgarity is a form of protest against the existing reality: the official language of first and second-circulation poetry, with its grandeur, celebration, bombastic framing, and contours. It is used for opening the literary “cardboard door” in order to vent the stench left by those fake and disgraced poems, in terms of their lexis and imagery. Opening, of course, by kicking in the door, in a vandalic act of the desperation of brutalists, and new wild poetries. It was also – as indicated at the beginning of the study – revenge *in effigie* on the old and new elites, on the political, economic, social, literary, and, not to be omitted, publishing establishment. A revenge, the style of which resembled the most obscene acts of the expressionistic or futuristic avant-garde, simply transformed by new experiences, stronger, more pungent, and more distasteful. Poets in the *don't-sit-by-me mood* ordered to “fuck off” those who were willing to do that, and shouted at the water in the kettle, hopefully only to it, “boil, bitch, boil” (Marcin Świetlicki), delivered using Joyce’s phrase “a kick in the arse for Maciek Chełmicki” (Dariusz Foks), asked “where do we come from? who we are? who will blow us?” (Cezary Domarus), hoping, though, that Agent Scully will give them the “blow job of the century” (Dariusz Foks), dreamt “dreams sweet like hell” (Marcin Baran), because, unlike the representatives of older generations, they did not see “a fuck’s worth of ideals” (Marcin Baran, Marcin Sendecki, Marcin Świetlicki).

Freedom—from preventive censorship, ethos-based duties, and high traditions—appeared after 1989 in some of its début incarnations as vulgarity. There was more of it, worse in literary terms, artistically useless, and sometimes completely talentless. It faded quickly under the pens of truly exceptional writers because vulgarisms proved to be in poetry a commodity with an exceptionally short shelf life. They lost their attribute of an intriguing novum. It was quickly taken up by the language of the young street, apartment block complexes, and stadiums or music/lyrics phenomena such as rap. Also the creators of comedy shows and films capitalised on its course strong current. Poetry has retained a few clichés and labels which drive the authors of old mad. This time, though, a mood expressed in literary Polish.

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Piotr Łuszczykiewicz

### Freedom as vulgarity in the poetry of debuting poets at the watershed moment of 1989

(Summary)

The article is dedicated to artistic vulgarity as a form of freedom of art manifesto. The author explains that using obscene and drastic language which breaks social taboos (particularly sexual ones), has often been caused by the need for artistic freedom. This phenomenon can be observed especially in the so-called communist era (1944–1989) but most importantly in the period of political system's transformation after 1989. By the example of literature, film, theatre and broadly defined popular culture the author analyzes this process, paying special attention to various 'traps' in the usage of vulgar language and artistic expressions, as well as the ultimate high art's retreat from that strategy.

Keywords: vulgarity, obscenity, freedom, transformation, Polish literature and culture of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

Krzysztof Gajda\*

## **Profanity in songs. Seeking the limits of freedom of speech, and the reproduction and sanctioning of contemporary linguistic tendencies**

Colloquial language, as the basic tool of social communication, seems particularly sensitive to various transformations in community life. Its specificity is its naturally democratic nature as it is subjected to various pressures from the surroundings (the language of the media, widely considered culture, education, and the family), it is a source of change in the official language participating in the constant game of socio-linguistic influences. One problem in seeking the limits of freedom of speech is the propagation of vulgarisms, which in the Polish language of the last few decades have occupied an excessively high position. Linguists consider a specific historical period as one of the breakthrough moments:

The years 1980–1981 saw the development of a new language, which was widely used by the youth. The language was saturated with profanity. The language, or rather the youth slang, reflected the civilisational and moral transformations which occurred in Poland in the late-1970s and throughout the following decade. That language, perceived and understood as a mirror of the youth's subconscious, was dramatically different from the common language of Poles. That vocabulary led its life in the so-called third circulation, ousted to the fringes or outside any official kind of Polish language, though it reflected many unrests, not only that of the youth. (...) The development of brutalisms and profanity were, to some extent, influenced by the increased brutality of the community and moral life in Poland (foul, vulgar language), and there also reappeared terms known from Newspeak (plurality, subjectivity, etc.) The increased brutality of everyday morality resulted in the youth increasingly often using so-called dynamites, i.e. words beginning with *k*, *p*, *ch*.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> M. Jędrzejewski, *Młodzież a subkultura*, Wydawnictwo Akademickie "Żak", Warsaw 1999, p. 227. [English version translated from Polish].

One could probably seek various socio-political events which influenced the “increased brutality of the community and moral life in Poland.” However, I would like to focus on another aspect: the mutual relationship between colloquial language and the lexical layer of songs as an area of popular egalitarian culture, i.e. participating in that struggle of linguistic influence.

### *Literary and humorous songs*

In a study *Słowo w piosence. Poetyka współczesnej piosenki estradowej*, Anna Barańczak indicated one of the features of the lexical layer of the commercial Polish songs of the 1960s and 70s, i.e. from before the historical moment specified above:

And finally, there is one more limitation, this one of a stylistic-sentimental nature (...) It consists of eliminating from a text lexical units originating from “low” style levels: any vulgar, jargon or pungent expressions, or even only marked with excessive “anti-aesthetic” expressiveness (of course the tendency does not apply to humorous songs, as well as *literary* songs or songs styled to resemble folk songs).<sup>2</sup>

Based on the above statement, first of all: popular songs (commercial, stage performed) at least from the beginning of the 1980s corresponded with Orwell’s vision of the world where language offered limited opportunities for expressing negative feelings; secondly, paradoxically, it was the version of culture considered higher, the literary culture, as well as the more artistically sublime genre of songs, which sanctioned profanity as a means of expression, using it more boldly than the commercial genres. Linguistics have, in fact, emphasised the significance of literature for the expressiveness of everyday language.<sup>3</sup> Should one recall the most pungent examples offered by Andrzej Bursa or Rafał Wojaczek, one notices how far literature exceeded in that area the appropriate and tempered poetics of stage song. Literary proof of linguistic brutality can also be found in poetry after 13 December 1981. When discussing the language of martial law

<sup>2</sup> A. Barańczak, *Słowo w piosence*, Zakład Narodowy im. Ossolińskich, Wrocław 1983, p. 78. [English version translated from Polish].

<sup>3</sup> Władysław Lubaś posited even at the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> c. that the literary tradition was the main reason for increased use of the common version of the Polish language in public communication. Referring to Dąbrowska, Białoszevska, Różewicz, and Myśliwski he argued that they influenced the normative sanctioning of colloquial language in some genres of public communication. Vide W. Lubaś, “Rola słownictwa potocznego w polszczyźnie ostatniego dziesięciolecia”, in: *Słownictwo współczesnej polszczyzny w okresie przemian*, J. Mazur (ed.), Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Marii Curie-Skłodowskiej, Lublin 2000, pp. 59–68.

poetry, in a chapter entitled “Tolerowanie wulgaryzmów” (Tolerating profanity), Dobrochna Dabert offered the following diagnosis:

A more drastic form of isolating oneself from Newspeak was the use of profanity. That constituted a challenge to the sanctimonious language of the authorities. The use of words with a high expressive load aided the release of accumulated negative emotions directed against the authorities and the system. Obscenities did not appear only in anonymous street poetry; *high* poetry did not avoid them, though it used them much more rarely and only as intentional expressive means.<sup>4</sup>

Evidently, profanity is sometimes considered as a manifestation of the objection to existing reality, and a form of community rebellion by disrupting applicable norms, and breaking linguistic taboos. It served a similar function in some songs in the early-1980s, being justified precisely by the historic situation, as an element of linguistic separation from the artificial official character. Andrzej Garczarek was a representative of *the literary song*. His lyrical ballads about various facets of life could not avoid roughness of language or descriptions of the dark sides of reality. His literary-linguistic manner did not require him, though, to use expressions considered vulgar. And yet he was the author of a song which became a hit in the 1980s; not in the media sense, but rather in terms of its folk message as an output propagated within the community: in dorm rooms, student club rooms, and during singing at hikers’ shelters or bonfires. I am referring to the song *Przyjaciół nikt nie będzie mi wybierał*, which, while carrying non-conformist content, utilised a violently expressed statement:

|  |  |
|--|--|
| przyjaciół nikt nie będzie mi wybierał | no one will choose my friends                            |
| wrogów poszukam sobie sam.             | I’ll find my own enemies.                                |
| dlatego <i>kurwa mać</i> bez przerwy   | why, <i>the fuck</i> , all the time                      |
| poucza ktoś w co wierzyć mam...?       | does someone tell me what to believe in...? <sup>5</sup> |

The song was written in 1981, i.e. during the *Carnival of Solidarity*. It was a time when a limiting of the influence of censorship enabled a more unconstrained expression of one’s emotions and feelings towards the officially created reality. The biggest meeting of *disobedient* song artists was held during Przegląd Piosenki Prawdziwej (True Song Festival) at the Gdansk Olivia Arena in August 1981. Andrzej Garczarek was warmly received, while Jacek Zwoźniak received

<sup>4</sup> D. Dabert, *Zbuntowane wiersze. O języku stanu wojennego*, Wydawnictwo WiS, Poznan 1998, p. 108. [English version translated from Polish].

<sup>5</sup> A. Garczarek, *Grafiki, Biblioteka bardów* (series), Twój Styl, Warsaw 1999, p. 56. [English version translated from Polish].

ovations for *Piosenka na wszelki wypadek*, where the following fragment was received particularly enthusiastically:

|  |  |
|--|--|
| <p>I nie trzeba obstawiać się wojskiem,<br/>Bo bez sensu dziś taka robota,<br/>Lecz w tę <b>dupę</b> wypiętą na Polskę<br/>Kopa dać, choćby była czerwona!</p> | <p>And you don't need to surround yourself<br/>with soldiers,<br/>Because it's pointless today,<br/>But that <b>arse</b> which doesn't give a shit<br/>about Poland<br/>Kick it, even if it's red!<sup>6</sup></p> |
|--|--|

The author received the main prize: the Golden Gag at the festival; it was the peak of the *Carnival of Solidarity*.

One author who never had any problems with censorship, as he never submitted his lyrics for approval, was Jan Krzysztof Kelus. The language of his songs was, already in the 1970s, much different from the principles of stage song, considering his completely different communication situation. Regardless of the potential opportunities an author who explored the far reaches of colloquial speech, free from the limitations of censorship had, even his lyrics were not saturated with profanity. However, there was one rather symptomatic case: In *Przed nami było wielu (czyli Cohen po polsku)*, there is a confession amplified with intertextuality:

|   |   |
|---|---|
| <p>A może będziesz wolał<br/>gdy wrócisz już z powrotem<br/>śpiewać o nieznanym<br/>spotkanej w „Chelsea Hotel”<br/>„o wszystkich co przed nami<br/>na chwilę przed rozłąką<br/>kochali się w hotelach<br/>kochali się na łąkach...”<br/>... a potem ktoś odchodził<br/>choć przedtem się kochali<br/>a ciebie, <b>kurwa</b>, zawsze<br/>zwyczajnie zabierali</p> | <p>Or maybe you will rather<br/>when you come back again<br/>sing to a stranger<br/>met at the Chelsea Hotel<br/>“about all who before us<br/>a moment before parting<br/>made love in hotels<br/>made love in meadows...”<br/>... and then someone leaves<br/>though they made love before<br/>and you, <b>fuck me</b>, they<br/>took away like that</p> |
|---|---|

The entire text was a dispute founded on authenticity with the translations of Leonard Cohen's songs by Maciej Zembaty, the biggest promoter, and the most popular translator and performed of the Polish versions. The idyllic

<sup>6</sup> Lyrics based on an audio recording *Zakazane piosenki*. I Przegląd Piosenki Prawdziwej 20–22.08.1981. [English version translated from Polish]. Interestingly enough, in its internet version, the lyrics have a repeated final line in the form: Kick it, even if it's gold!; vide [http://www.tekstowo.pl/piosenka\\_jacek\\_zwo\\_niak\\_na\\_wszelki\\_wypadek.html](http://www.tekstowo.pl/piosenka_jacek_zwo_niak_na_wszelki_wypadek.html) (accessed on: 13.12.2017).

description from the first part of the quoted fragment, with the inserted quotation from Zembaty's version, was confronted with the description of political oppression due to which art and the language of creative output could not be free from the most basic emotions in the face of injustice. The song in its printed version received a telling note: Białołęka, July 1982, i.e. it was an artistic testimony to the situation of being interned, and the related emotions. An emphatic signal of the distorted community relations was the curse included in the penultimate line, which shattered the artificiality of the pathos of previous fragments of the lyrics.

The final case in the area of artistic song applies to Jacek Kaczmarski. The author of over 650 songs, he virtually never used profanity in his official works; his model of song writing and performing required him to avoid low levels of the language. The individual cases resulted from quoting other people's statements, and do not deserve any further consideration. It is noteworthy that throughout a significant part of his career, Kaczmarski remained outside the influence of the PRL's (People's Republic of Poland's) censorship, and surely there were no institutional limitations that would have prevented him from exploring thus understood linguistic freedom. There was, however, an example of the Bard's intentional violation of norms on an unofficial tape cassette recorded during a private concert, which was later published, with the artist's consent, in the form of a second (or maybe even third) circulation cassette tape. The title song *Pijany poeta* from the cassette tape did not introduce any obscene content. However, the joke told by Kaczmarski after the song, did indeed:

Czy mogę Państwu zadać zagadkę?  
Ależ oczywiście, prosimy. Dlaczego  
w piździe nie ma krzeseł? Jest pełna  
konsternacji cisza... Jak to dła-  
czego? Żeby chuj stał. I jeżeli towarzy-  
stwo się śmieje, to znaczy, że można  
się bawić dalej. Jeśli towarzystwo się  
nie śmieje, to należy się spakować  
i wyjść. Więc piosenka *Pijany poeta*  
działa na tej samej zasadzie.

Can I offer you a riddle? Yes, of course.  
Why are there no chairs in a cunt? Silence  
full of confusion... Isn't it obvious? So  
the prick has to stand. And if the gather-  
ing is laughing, that means the party can  
continue. If the gathering is not laughing,  
it's time to pack up and exit. So the song  
*Pijany poeta* works the same way.<sup>7</sup>

Kaczmarski, perceived in the 1980s as the nation's consciousness, the Bard of Solidarity, thus tried to crack the plinth on which his countrymen had already placed him.

<sup>7</sup> Text based on a tape cassette: J. Kaczmarski, *Pijany poeta*, Kaston 052. [English version translated from Polish].

Those were, however, all cases from artistic areas which could be defined as literary or comedy song, i.e. considerably detached from the principles of the stage.

### Document of new social circumstances

The situation changes when one considers youth and rock music in its different variants. Rock songs, which at least partly used stage rules and then emphatically rejected the previously applicable limitations, began to grow in popularity in the 1980s. One reason for this breakthrough was its social engagement, meaning it responded to the need to describe the reality of young people, diagnose their fears, and to express their rebellion (even if simulated in the case of strictly commercial projects). In the brief introduction to *Album polskiego rocka*, the brochure's editors wrote:

[About Polish rock lyrics] one can say that they filled the void left by satire, or even artistic song, and they became, in a sense, a document of new social circumstances. We refer to not only lyrics by professionals, but also those crazy young artists, in whose works sometimes excellent ideas competed with low quality scribbles and a lack of writing skills.<sup>8</sup>

Many other opinions share that tone, e.g. the one included in the insert to a punk rock song collection:

Punk rock is formed rather of subcultural hymns than hits. It's a type of a rebellion. It is a manifestation of frustrations or a calculated provocation. Or both simultaneously. It is a style which is intended to irritate. It is ostentatious simplicity and ugliness of sound. And shouting out the ugly truths about our beautiful world. Or that which appears to be those.<sup>9</sup>

That context for the phenomenon offers it the status of a linguistic document of the epoch, and enables one to seek significant linguistic features in rock lyrics after 1980. Halina Zgólkowa shared a similar approach when she was developing the material collected and discussed in an article entitled *Językowy obraz pokolenia, czyli o języku tekstów rockowych*. The acclaimed Poznan-based language researcher noted a specific characteristic. It was:

<sup>8</sup> M. Sart and M. Wiernik, *Album polskiego rocka*, Pomorze, Bydgoszcz 1987, p. 6. [English version translated from Polish].

<sup>9</sup> W. Królikowski, [text in a record booklet] *22 Polish Punk Classics*, SON 23. [English version translated from Polish].

the programme-based approximation (or even association) of rock lyrics with the everyday language of rock fans. Let us (...) quote W. Chelstowski: “Those people use the same language with which they communicate, and with which those for whom they sing communicate.” In fact, it is necessary to indicate the mutual flux of linguistic phenomena between the rock and the colloquial versions of the language of that generation. Through those processes, *rock Polish*, constituting a reflection of colloquial Polish, acquires a significance which is much greater than one could have expected if one considered it only a linguistic tool used for a specialised circle of people. Therefore, the language revealed in rock lyrics can be considered as probably the most accurate reflection of the language of the generation.<sup>10</sup>

The article was published in 1989, and it offered the perfect division enabling one to view the achievements of rockers after a decade of strong presence in public life, and on the eve of major social changes which were only just achieving momentum.

Before that, though, it is worth mentioning one more article by Halina Zgółkowska from 1988 entitled “*Miny na pokaz, czyny za grosz...*” *O tekstach polskiego rocka*<sup>11</sup>. There she noted the general tendency among rock musicians to use colloquial vocabulary, jargon, or even vulgarisms (rarely substituted with euphemisms). Based on a linguistic overview, she identified two key reasons for such a situation:

The metaphors used therein were not too sophisticated, but they consistently focussed on two meanings: (1) the vexatious everyday lives of Poles in the crisis of the 1980s, and (2) the restored anti-aesthetic poetics and aesthetics (so vivid after the 1956 crisis).<sup>12</sup>

The example quoted by the linguist must seem curious from today’s perspective (HZ’s italics). They constituted the violation of previous norms which, until Polish rock boomed, defined the limits of acceptability of the low style and common speech in songs:

<sup>10</sup> H. Zgółkowska, “Językowy obraz pokolenia, czyli o języku tekstów rockowych”, *Polonistyka* 1989, issue 6, p. 448. [English version translated from Polish].

<sup>11</sup> H. Zgółkowska, “‘Miny na pokaz, czyny za grosz...’ O tekstach polskiego rocka”, in: *Język zwierciadłem kultury, czyli nasza codzienna polszczyzna*, collective work edited by H. Zgółkowska, Wydawnictwo Poznańskie, Poznań 1988, pp. 69–83. [English version translated from Polish]. The book also included other interesting texts on the topic being discussed, e.g. H. Zgółkowska, K. Szymoniak, „*Słowa chore od słów*” – *czyli polscy rockmani o języku*, pp. 84–97, H. Zgółkowska, K. Szymoniak, *Prowokacja czyli o nazwach polskich zespołów rockowych*, pp. 98–109. To offer a summary would exceed the modest frame posited for this text, however, they constituted material I consider an invaluable basis for assessing the condition of the language (lyrics) of the epoch.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 76.

“I po *tylkach* batem bije nas” [so whips our *asses*], “Już was w swoje *szpony dopadł szmal*” [Cash has got you in its *claws*], “Nie trzeba było znów z *gaci robić fraka*” [You shouldn’t have *made a tailcoat out of pants*], “Zawodowi *macherzy* od losu” [Fate *professionals*], “W oczy patrzy mi twarz, że aż w *mordę dać*” [A face looks into my eyes, so much that I should *punch it*], “Jakoś ze mną *przebiedować*” [*Weather it with me*], “Już z *ogonków* wycofały się...” [They backed away from the *lines...*], “Nie ma jak *szpan*” [There’s nothing better than *swagger*], “znów wodę zamknął *cieć* z gwary miejskiej” [the water was shut off again by the *caretaker* from the urban hustle], “Nikt nam nie *podskoczy*” [No one can *stand up to us*], “Łapię kilka *dych*” [I catch a couple of *dozen*], “Słyszę wyraźnie *faceta* głos” [I can clearly hear the *dude’s* voice], “*Kumpel* radio zniósł” [My *buddy* carried the radio down], “wiatr tarmosi nasze *ciuchy*” [The wind tousles our *rags*], “Ty to zawsze masz *fart!*” [You’re always *lucky!*], “Ciągnie forszę *lachmyta*” [He makes a lot of cash, that *shmuck*], “Wyciągasz ostatniego *peta*” [You take out the last *fag*], “By nie wyrósł wam bandyta albo *świr*” [So that you do not raise a criminal or a *wacko*], “Nie pomogą tu żadne *ba-jery*” [No *tricks* will help here], “*na oko margines*” [*Gutter in my eye*], “nie wiem *co grane* – może *lewy business*” [I don’t know what is going on – maybe some *phoney business*], “*Spokojnie, człowiek – bez nerw i nie pękaj*” [*Cool, man – chill and don’t give in*], “*Że to wszystko blaga // Że to wszystko pic*” [That it’s just a *bluff* / That it’s all *puffery*], etc.<sup>13</sup>

However, the researcher also documented the particularly pungent expressions with comments:

And finally the most disputable commonness, i.e. vulgar and euphemistic expressions and phrases, e.g.: “Znów do wina // *Bieży świnia pod nosem kurwa mać*” [To wine again // *The pig runs mumbling fuck this*], “Nie mogę wstać ani spać // *Ani siku zrobić*” [I can’t get up or fall asleep // *Or take a leak*], “jednak w końcu wciąż wystaje nam // *wielkie gole de // gole de!*” [but we are still showing // *a big naked a..., naked a...*], “nazwałem siebie *sukinsynem*” [I called myself a *son of a bitch*], “takie *wulgarne i zblazowane*” [so *vulgar and jaded*], “*stęchłą chcicą* od nich czuć” [they reek of *stale want*], “W małych mózgach tylko *chuć*” [In small brains there is only *sexual desire*], “Mówią *psychiczny*, o mnie mówią” [*Crazy* they say, they say about me], “Czuję dłoń, która pieści // *Okolice gdzie mam wstyd*” [I feel a hand caressing // *There where my shame lies*], “Ręce nieruchomo ujęte są w *biały płaszcz* // *Co rękawy w supel z tyłu ma*” [Hands motionless bound by a *white coat* // *Which has its sleeves tied behind*], “Hej, spragnione *supersamce*” [Hey, you eager *supermales*].<sup>14</sup>

<sup>13</sup> Ibid., p. 74.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid., p. 75.

Today's readers accustomed to quite different linguistic freedom may rub their eyes in amazement at what expressions were considered as violating previous norms. Those examples came from official publications, which is why the emotional amplitude expressed in the language was not subject to such exaggerations as in uncensored cases. Those were, in fact, the first to break previous linguistic norms, with new communication objectives which songs had begun to fulfil.

Zgółkowa later investigated texts which had not been officially published. That study resulted in the previously mentioned article *Językowy obraz pokoleń, czyli o języku tekstów rockowych*. When defining the selection of the material, the linguist wrote [my emphasis]:

All the used lyrics were taken from the archives of the Jarocin rock festivals of 1984–1987. Those were unpublished texts (some would have probably had considerable problems with censorship due to moral considerations). The study material was taken from fewer than 900 lyrics of various lengths. Should one compare this corpus of lyrics with the *official* ones (published in youth magazines, broadcast on radio shows, and in the form of records propagated officially), one would clearly notice a distinct difference between the categories. That difference also applies to the linguistic layer, particularly the lexis, and is expressed in, e.g. the level of saturation of lyrics with obscenity, the presence of syntax-phraseology templates, and finally the frequency of the presence of structures violating the norms of correctness.<sup>15</sup>

Therefore, the perception applied to unpublished works which remained outside the official language, though which aspired to it due to the form in which it was provided. Zgółkowa noted:

Amateurs who wrote the lyrics collected in the Jarocin archive clearly favoured strong linguistic accents. Those strong words were mainly vulgarisms. In some lyrics, their accumulation reached the limits of receivers' immunisation or indifference as vulgarisms which are used often lose their power to shock, they become tamed and assimilated. The examples are not exceedingly interesting since it is simply an index of gutter words appropriated from there, and transferred to quasi-literary texts. Here are said words with their context: "dajcie ognia *kurwy*" [give some hell, *bitches*], "Ty stara *kurwo* giń //ty Burek *sraj* jej w *ryj*" [die, you old *whore* // go on, Burek, *shit* in her *gob*], "ogień pali, dym zacina, stare babsko w *gacie sra*" [flames burst, smoke rises, the old hag is *shitting* in her pants], "nie jestem faszystą ani *skurwysynem*" [I'm neither a fascist nor a *son of a bitch*], "wyje w kłębach dymu rozchełstana *zdzira*" [undressed *whore* is screaming in clouds of smoke],

<sup>15</sup> H. Zgółkowa, "Językowy obraz...", p. 443. [English version translated from Polish].

“wchodzących w ten *syf*” [those entering this *crap*], “idzie *szmata* ulicą // myśli że jest dziewicą” [a *slut* walks down the street // thinking she’s a virgin], “niech się wszyscy ode mnie *odpierdolą*” [may everyone *piss off*], “nie dłub we mnie ty *skurwielu*” [don’t pick on me, you *fucker*], etc.<sup>16</sup>

Therefore, the linguist concluded that it would be futile to seek linguistic originality while words taken from slang remain unchanged and not enriched. Thus, one could say that the freedom utilised by young artists does not offer the desired linguistic effects, leads to backward use of existing means, and not attesting to one’s artistic development. However, that applies to a certain subcultural circle.

Therefore, the above summary indicates which differences existed between regular linguistic practices outside the reach of censorship and those which were allowed into the mainstream media and culture of the PRL. In a situation where obscenity had only begun to appear in the public space (e.g. in films: from the cinema of moral concern to the *07 zgłoś się* television series), still constituting a form of provocation, obscenity formulated from the stage had an undertone of disagreement with censorship, provocation, and a rejection of the applicable norms. Considering the themes of the lyrics, and the air of authenticity, which was the basis for understanding, the linguistic naturalism required one to utilise such means of expression.

In *Język subkultury punków*, Marcin Lewandowski wrote:

The language of punks is generally considered a variation saturated with obscenity. That thesis could undoubtedly be confirmed by a brief analysis of the semantic and lexical groups. In almost all of them, there were expressions which violated a linguistic taboo, which were used to express emotions towards someone or something. Punks’ lexical repertoire included both words considered indecent regardless of their semantic characteristics or the contexts in which they appear (e.g. *pierdolić* [to fuck], *kurwa* [whore], *chuj* [dick]), and words which are tabooed only in specific meanings which usually refer to parts of body or physiology (e.g. *heblować* [to fuck], *rznąć* [to fuck hard], *drut* [dick]).<sup>17</sup>

The author went on to find the reasons for the common presence of obscenity in the language of that social group. He mainly identified the intentional violation of a linguistic taboo as a manifestation of a moral-stylistic provocation, contestation of language against the existing norms and values, and a sign of the times. He proceeded to emphasise the complex nature of the meanings of vulgar expressions,

<sup>16</sup> Ibid., p. 445.

<sup>17</sup> M. Lewandowski, *Język subkultury punków*, Wydawnictwo “Poznańskie Studia Polonistyczne”, Poznań 2007, p. 87.

inferring a representation of a wide range of feelings (“on the one hand: aggression, hatred, rage, rebellion, fright, resignation, disillusionment, and, on the other: amazement, joy, astonishment, and excitement”) from their homonymous nature. “It is, therefore, incorrect to consider the use of vulgarisms solely as an attempt to express only negative feelings,” concluded Lewandowski, as much in reference to the language of the punk subculture, as to the contemporary language in general. In fact, a similar intention has been shared by rappers, who for several decades now have participated in the culture between unofficial and mainstream media.

### **This is our culture**

The important change resulting from the cultural reassessments of the turn of 1990 nullified old norms and introduced its own principles of communication. From today’s perspective, it is clearly visible how the availability of the means of the distribution of culture enjoyed by the new generation has altered things irreversibly. One outcome of the opening of mainstream media to new trends was the permeation of the once subcultural norms into general circulation. An excess of experiences was ensured by a crash course on post-modernism, which had already been well-established in the West, and entered Poland with an impetus in the 1990s. While trying to consider all the social and cultural factors which influenced the expansion of obscenity after 1989, one needs to remember about the liquidation of GUKPiW (Chief Control Bureau for Press, Publications and Performances), which was formally dissolved in April 1990, but from the summer of 1989 had fulfilled virtually none of its censorship functions. Throughout the decades of protecting the system, censorship also shaped moral norms. Therefore, it was natural that once liberated from its oppression, people began to test the limits of the available linguistic possibilities.

For society, the 1990s were a period of cultural shock, and particularly distinct reassessments which played out within the realm of popular culture. The times I am referring to saw the release of Władysław Pasikowski’s blockbusters, first *Kroll* and then *Psy*. The films, with their plots depicting a watershed period, and the sickness within the post-communist special police, used linguistic vulgarisation as one of the major elements for constructing their reality. The following is a fragment of a typical review from the Gdansk film festival in 1992, which discussed the impression the film made on the reviewer:

The language which the people in film use is deficient and foul. I will probably not hear so many words beginning with *ch*, *k*, and *p* within the next three months as I did in the festival theatres within the last week, though I do not shun away

from contact with the grey areas of reality. In the already famed *Psy*, all dialogues could be written using a single verb and a single feminine noun. The Polish record remains safe.<sup>18</sup>

From today's perspective, the evaluation seems somewhat unidimensional, particularly if one considers the potential the dialogues of the film offered language users to absorb a multitude of so-called *cult quotes* (*kultowy tekst* – the term is being ousted by the term *winged words*), which were not just limited to vulgar expressions. In truth, though, films have become an important element of both recording and sanctioning new linguistic norms, which have in a completely unhindered way gained their place within society. The acceptance of the models coming from across the ocean (the entertainment-based approach to brutality and violence, with the support of linguistic material, making reality more probable and attractive) as the dominant culture has only amplified the general tendencies in the Polish culture of the turn of the 21<sup>st</sup> c.

### **Punk's Not Dead**

It seems that in the case of the above-mentioned process, the subcultural youth community has had a key significance. Stemming from the achievements of the counterculture, standing against the existing trends, they exerted the greatest influence on the shaping of the sensitivity associated with contesting all existing norms. It was also the basis for the formation of the linguistic habits of the later elite: artists from various areas (musicians, writers, poets, actors, film makers, journalists, and, finally, television and radio chief editors, etc.) A considerable group of people who gained a voice after 1989 have defined their roots precisely within the space contesting the official culture circulation and favouring diverse independent scenes, together with their subcultural bases. Language had to fall as one of the victims of such a revolution.

It did not, of course, mean that the new cultural elites of the early Third Polish Republic came solely from communities which abused vulgarisms. The issue lies in the fact of the shift of moral norms, the approach to taboo in language with the inevitable generation change. That revolution first happened in the widely considered underground community, later, along with the new social order, it gradually found its place within the space of the official culture. For the generation which entered a reality liberated of any censorship limitations, carrying a morality de-

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<sup>18</sup> As cited in: H. Wiśniewska, "Co począć z wulgaryzmami", in: *Polonistyka* 1994, issue 2 (312), p. 82. [English version translated from Polish].

veloped in various subcultures, it was a natural space of linguistic and cultural freedom, which was utilised to the fullest.<sup>19</sup>

Within the culture of the 1990s, Marcin Świetlicki has become known as an artist who skilfully combined the roles of a poet and a lyric writer, and a rock artist (the term *singer* somehow does not fit here). Due to the qualities of his poetry and the popularity he gained thanks to stage performances, for many years he was the representative of the poetry of the new time, a generation which entered official literature after 1989, in the role of a rebellious thirty-year-old. An air of scandal was amplified by the popularity of *Nieprzysiadalność*, a work in which one particular phrase was the most absorbing:

Ja to pierdołę, dziś jestem w nastroju  
nieprzysiadalnym.

Fuck this, today I'm in a  
don't-sit-by-me mood.<sup>20</sup>

And even though the poet himself stressed that obscenity was not a means of expression often used by him, it is worth remembering the axiological shifts due to which today's criteria require one to treat as vulgar speech an extensive collection of lexis, which not that long ago was located in lower registers. Świetlicki also capitalised on the popularity he gained as a representative of the new language in poetry after 1989. It was in that poetic formation that the tendencies for linguistic *barbarity* appeared, while a poem by Zbigniew Sajnog entitled *Flupy z pizdy*, which through its terseness and original obscenity constituted an easily

<sup>19</sup> It is not the intention of this study to reflect on the vulgarisation of the language. However, in the works of linguists of all decades, one could notice a continuing consideration and concern for the gradually progressing devaluation of moral norms. I am referring to articles which cannot be summarised in this text, but which constitute a fascinating read on the recording of social changes reflected in the language, e.g.: M. Kita, "Ekspansja potoczności", *Prace Językoznawcze* 19, Studia polonistyczne, A. Kowalska, A. Wilkoń (eds.), Katowice 1991, *Prace Naukowe Uniwersytetu Śląskiego* 1178, pp. 83–90; J. Kowalikowa, "Znaczenie i funkcja wyrazów tzw. brzydkich we współczesnej polszczyźnie mówionej" (pp. 107–114), and M. Schabowska, "Funkcje elementów potocznych we współczesnym języku oficjalnym" (pp. 67–72), in: *Współczesna polszczyzna mówiona w odmianie opracowanej (oficjalnej)*, Z. Kurzowa and W. Śliwiński (eds.), Universitas, Krakow 1994; H. Wiśniewska, "Co począć..." pp. 82–86; W. Lubaś, "Rola słownictwa potocznego w polszczyźnie ostatniego dziesięciolecia" (pp. 59–68) and J. Mazur, M. Rzeszutko, "Słownictwo 'NIE' jako przykład agresji i wulgaryzacji języka we współczesnej polszczyźnie" (pp. 149–160), in: *Słownictwo współczesnej polszczyzny w okresie przemian*, J. Mazur (ed.), Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Marii Curie-Skłodowskiej, Lublin 2000; "Życzliwość i agresja w języku i kulturze." *Język a kultura*, vol. 17. Wrocław, 343 pp.; M. Grochowski, *Słownik polskich przekleństw i wulgaryzmów*, Wydawnictwo Naukowe PWN, Warsaw 2008, 240 pp. Interesting literary science analyses regarding the relationships between the language of literature and social reality which provide insight into the matters discussed herein were offered in, e.g.: S. Barańczak, "Zemsta na słowie. O 'Balu w operze' Juliana Tuwima", *Zeszyty Literackie* 1983, issue 4, pp. 95–111; E. Balcerzan, "Brzydkie słowa w literaturze pięknej", *Nurt* 1966, issue 4, pp. 34–35.

<sup>20</sup> M. Świetlicki, *Wiersze*, EMG, Krakow 2011, p. 159. [English version translated from Polish].

repeatable example of the tendencies present in literature after the transformation, has become a literary legend:

|                            |  |
|----------------------------|--|
| mam flupy – usłyszałem     | I've got dingles – I heard               |
| od dziewczyny i myślę: co? | from a girl and I'm like: what?          |
| – co? – pytam              | – what? – I asked                        |
| – no, leci mi z pizdy      | – well, my cunt is leaking <sup>21</sup> |

Literature and culture alone sanctioned the language which was used increasingly often by the representatives of various social groups.

### Kazik

One of the major music artists of the last thirty years who treated obscenity as a means of expression like any other (if not privileged), is Kazik Staszewski.<sup>22</sup> Who knows if it was not him who guided the genre towards its present freedom in using obscenity – when viewing the wide perspective of the entirety of communication. Probably the first song which became popular despite its poignant vulgarity included in the chorus was *Jeszcze Polska*, which spewed critical images of the Poland of the early-1990s. One chorus line is most noteworthy:

What have you, fuckers, done with this land

The entire song is an overwhelming image of the reality of Poland in the first half of the 1990s, which, against people's expectations, did not become a land of universal happiness, while the quoted phrase applied, of course, to politicians. In an overflow of colloquialisms, obscenity is a natural and justified element of the thus presented world.<sup>23</sup>

Kazik used obscenity as a legitimate means of expression, and one could say that he did not approach using it with any particular emotional load. It is an element of common language, and being that, it is located within a linguistic communication which co-forms the lyrics. What was noteworthy was the increase in the frequency of use of obscenity in the lyrics of his solo albums from the 1990s. Considering his four solo albums – *Spalam się* (1991), *Spalaj się* (1993), *Oddale-*

<sup>21</sup> Z. Sajnog, "Flupy z pizdy", *Brulion* 1991, issue 16. [English version translated from Polish].

<sup>22</sup> The quotes of Kazik Staszewski's works were taken from respective CD booklets; infrequently, the audio version was compared with official publications or lyrics available on the internet.

<sup>23</sup> More than two decades later, Kazik himself euphemistically referred to his own words singing in *Plamy na słońcu: Twenty years later after that song / What have you done and similar laments*.

*nie* (1995) and *12 groszy* (1997), which also due to their musical conventions pre-supposed the use of obscenity, one could see how the author's inclination towards using vulgarity grew within the initial years of the final decade of the 20<sup>th</sup> c.:

***Spalam się (1991):***

Dopiero w jej mieszkaniu, ***nosz kurwa mać***

Gdy ona do mieszkania swego szła wolnym krokiem

Jacyś leszcze ***obili mi ryja*** pod jej blokiem  
(Dziewczyny)

***Spalam się (1991):***

It was only in her flat, ***oh fuck me***

When she proceeded slowly to her flat

That some losers ***beat me up*** at her block of flats

(Girls)

Coście ***skurwysyny*** uczynili z ta krainą (...)

Cała jego ciężka praca, wszystko było ***chują warte***

(Jeszcze Polska)

What have you, ***fuckers***, done with this land

(...)

All his hard work, everything was worth ***a dick***

(Jeszcze Polska)

***Spalaj się (1993):***

Po co tu przychodzą, ***do kurwy nędzy***,  
nic tu po nich

(Na mojej ulicy)

***Spalaj się (1993):***

Why do they come here, ***the fuck***,  
there's nothing for them here

(Na mojej ulicy)

***Oddalenie (1995):***

Jeden z nich był jednak na coś ***strasznie wkurwiony***

(Błagam was)

***Oddalenie (1995):***

One of them was really ***pissed off***

(Błagam was)

Jako biały miał w tej celi ***totalnie przejebane***

***Ruchali go w dupę*** Murzyni nad ranem

(...)

Nie puścił was burmistrz, ***kurwa***,  
nawet pod schody!

(Komisariat 63)

Being white in that cell he was ***really fucked***

***They screwed him in the ass*** Niggers in the morning

(...)

The mayor did not let you, ***fuck***, even by the stairs!

(Komisariat 63)

W ciągłym mroku chlupie ***jebana hołota***

(Nie lubię już Polski)

In constant darkness the ***fucking trash*** squelches

(Nie lubię już Polski)

**12 groszy (1997):**

Dalej jazda do roboty, **jebane nieroby**  
(...)

Co to za wegetarianin, co **wpierdala**  
schabowe?

(...)

Jak powstają moje teksty, gdy mnie  
ktoś tak spyta

**Zakurwię z laczka** i poprawię z kopyta  
(12 Groszy)

Dzielnicy koło bramy **opierdala**  
podkomendnych

(...)

Niższy stopniem **opierdala** innych,  
mniejszych

(...)

Na obraz jaśnie pana **kurwa nasrała**  
(...)

Przy niedzieli przy stole, hej, **o ja pierdołę**

Dlaczego oddaliśmy się tym **świniom**  
w niewolę

(Mój los)

Jak Pamela **jebana** niepowiększana  
(...)

“**Skurwysyny**, ja bym ich **zajebał**  
Gdybym rewolwer tylko miał”

(...)

Ale **chuj**. A do tego wszystkiego  
Słysząc **leb** żony sąsiada tłuczonej  
przez niego

(Spowiedź Święta)

Chcemy być tacy, jak chłopcy z ferajny  
**Zajebisty** film, fajny

(...)

O, **kurwa!** | 4x

(O, Kuchwa)

**12 groszy (1997):**

Go on, get a job, **you fucking loafers**  
(...)

What kind of a vegetarian is he that  
**fucking gobbles** pork chops?

(...)

How my lyrics are made, when someone  
asks me that

**I fuck them up with my shoe** and add  
a kick

(12 Groszy)

The flatfoot by the door **is giving**  
**a fucking talking to** to his subordinates

(...)

The one with a lower rank **is giving**  
**a fucking talking to** to others, lower  
still

(...)

On the master's picture, **a fucker shat**

(...)

On Sunday at the table, what, **oh fuck me**  
Why did we become slaves to them **pigs**

(Mój los)

Like **fucking** Pamela without a boob job  
(...)

“The **sons of bitches**, I would **fucking**  
kill them all

If I had a gun”

(...)

All is **fucked**. And on top of that  
You can hear the neighbour's wife's  
head being smashed by him

(Spowiedź Święta)

We want to be like real goodfellas  
Abso-**fucking**-lutely great film, cool

(...)

Oh, **fuck!** | 4x

(O, Kuchwa)

|   |  |
|---|--|
| Jak bardzo <i>skurwisz się</i> , by sprzedać<br>swą muzykę?<br>(Jak bardzo możesz zmienić<br>się, by sprzedać swą muzykę) | How big a <i>shit</i> are you ready to become<br>to sell your music?<br>(Jak bardzo możesz zmienić<br>się, by sprzedać swą muzykę)                           |
| Idę spać, a to, <i>do kurwy nędzy</i> , nie o to<br>przecież chodzi<br>(Nie ma towaru w mieście)                          | I go to bed, and that, <i>fuck me</i> , was not<br>really the point<br>(Nie ma towaru w mieście)   |
| Gdyby było inaczej, to by było<br><i>przebane</i><br>(L.O.V.E.)   | If it had been any other way, it would all<br>be <i>fucked</i><br>(L.O.V.E.)   |
| I są miejsca <i>zajebiste</i> , i takie gdzie <i>kila</i><br>To znaczy <i>syf</i> . O tym mówiłem<br>(Idę tam, gdzie idę) | There are <i>fucking</i> great places, and those<br>which are <i>shit</i><br>I mean <i>crap</i> . That's what I was talking<br>about<br>(Idę tam, gdzie idę) |

Obscenity exists as an element of the language which describes the presented world. That shows vulgarisms have become commonplace in everyday language, and there they also appear as one of the linguistic means used for describing reality. The title song from the *12 groszy* album was in the top three of the Polish Radio Three hit list for 15 consecutive weeks, including 6 weeks in total in first place. Kazik's hit was also voted *The Song of the last 25 Years* in the *25 Years of Liberty* survey organised by the *Świat się kręci* show. The winners in other categories included Wojciech Kilar, Marek Koterski, Adam Małysz, Jerzy Owsiak, and John Paul II.<sup>24</sup>

When a vulgarism becomes so common, its functions become supportive for the linguistic context of a song. Therefore, particularly noteworthy are the situations when a vulgarism draws the attention fulfilling a chorus function. In my opinion, that is the case in the chorus of DD:

|  |  |
|--|--|
| <i>Będziesz wisiał Müller, ty kurwo<br/>jebana,</i><br>za to że DD się błąka po obcych krajach | <i>You'll hang Müller, you fucking cunt,</i><br>because DD wanders through foreign<br>states |
|--|--|

<sup>24</sup> Vide <http://wpolityce.pl/media/199000-wybrano-polaka-piosenke-film-i-tworce-25-lecia-wolnosc> (accessed on: 23.12.2017).

The direct vulgar reference to another person, in combination with a punishable threat, constitutes a special type of linguistic aggression. Additional meaning should be sought in the phonetic version. The name *Müller*, anonymous based on its homonymic nature, articulated in the song sounds like *Miller*, which in turn was the surname of the prime minister of the Republic of Poland, whose presence could be justifiable for social reasons, considering the origins of the work. When referring to the main protagonist, Kazik span a long story. Only the initial and final fragments indicate the author's emotional attitude towards the protagonist:

It is a real person, our fan Didi. We met in the 1990s when Kult were signing records in Empik in Nowy Świat. It lasted four or five hours, and to get a good place, you had to come several hours before. He was always one of the first to come (...) Didi was a contractor. His company was growing, but he lost two important tenders, and he went bankrupt. His family fell apart. He left for Spain. He had a car accident after which he took stock of his life. He stopped drinking, and he started to get back into shape. Currently, he lives in Tenerife, and he is starting a new business. He is a charming smart dude; he is likeable, even my grandchildren love him. Another case of someone who is a good professional, but didn't have the conditions to develop here, and had to set off into the world.<sup>25</sup>

However, the author introduced signals which might indicate that the statements by the poetic persona ought to be considered as the voice of another figure, as if his statements were only the poetics of the role. The rather trite statements:

|  |  |
|--|--|
| Taki dobry chłopak a tuła się po świecie         | Such a good boy, yet he wanders the world              |
| Taki dobry chłopak swego kąta własnego nie ma    | Such a good boy, yet he doesn't have a room of his own |
| To nie w porządku...                             | That is not right...                                   |
| Taki dobry hombre musi tułać się po świecie      | Such a good hombre, has to wander the world            |
| Taki dobry chłopak tęskni w dalekich stronach... | Such a good boy longs for distant lands...             |

seem like a regular nagging of a figure with rather low linguistic competences, and the related limitations in expressing emotions. And yet there is a kind of a game between the senders, as if the performer and the author used a mask of poetics, i.e. by assuming the form of a simpleton, the author tries to say something personal. That game, difficult to settle, may indicate how songs are prone to various interpretations.

<sup>25</sup> K. Staszewski, *Idę tam, gdzie idę. Autobiografia*, interviewed by R. Księżyk, Kosmos Kosmos, Warsaw 2015, pp. 332–333. [English version translated from Polish].

## Grabaż

One of the model representatives of the generation of the transformation era<sup>26</sup> was Krzysztof Grabowski (aka Grabaż, the leader of Pidżama Porno, though the drummer and the author of the lyrics of Dezerter with the same name would also fit the above description). From the start of his career, he was fascinated with the anti-aesthetic trends in song-writing; he actively engaged in the lives of various subcultures; he violated many linguistic taboos within the stage song aesthetic. In his works over the years, there were several dozen songs in total which included obscenity in various functions.<sup>27</sup> Here are some examples (in-depth analyses would require broader contexts, but the following quotes were intended mainly to emphasise the frequency, viewing the artistic functions below based on selected examples):

**Kurwy** i faszyci są w niebie  
Wszelkie zło się przez zło zbawiło  
*Józef K.* (1984)

**Whores** and fascists are in heaven  
All evil was redeemed by evil  
*Józef K.* (1984)

Przelecieć się nago po Placu Czerwonym  
Pokazać **gołą dupę** Stanom Zjedno-  
czonym  
*Gdy strumyk płynie z wolna*  
(1984)

Run naked across Red Square  
Show your **bare ass** to the United States  
*Gdy strumyk płynie z wolna*  
(1984)

Mister, you can **fuck** my sister  
She is really pretty girl  
**Fucking in the church** (1989)

Mister, you can **fuck** my sister  
She is really pretty girl  
**Fucking in the church** (1989)

Codziennosc zaklęta w kwadraty  
Figury geometryczne  
Te same czerwone ryje w południe  
Sireny fabryczne  
*Codziennosc* (1989)

Everydayness enclosed in squares  
Geometric shapes  
The same red gobs at noon  
Factory sirens  
*Codziennosc* (1989)

<sup>26</sup> A term derived from Edward Balcerzan's work was used for the title in a philological discussion by Piotr Łuszczkiewicz with the meaningful title: *Piosenka w poezji pokolenia ery transformacji*, Poznan 2010. Due to a shift of the emphasis towards strictly poetic works, Krzysztof Grabowski was almost completely omitted.

<sup>27</sup> Quotations from Grabaż's works were taken from the book edition of his output (K. „Grabaż” Grabowski, *Wiersze, Lampa i Iskra Boża*, Warsaw 2008), and in the case of more recent works, from respective CD booklets.

Pobożne Poznańskie mieszczyki  
**rzygające** po tłustych golonkach  
 Dramatyczne aktorki jak deski  
 w śnieżnobiałych koronkach  
*Świńska procesja* (1988)

Reverent Poznan townswomen **puking**  
 with greasy pork knuckles  
 Dramatic actresses like carrot sticks in  
 snow-white lace  
*Świńska procesja* (1988)

I zaznamy jeszcze nieba w naszych  
**mordach**  
 A gdy to się nam nie uda  
 Wtedy **wpierdolimy** orła z godła  
*Strzelaj lub emigruj, czyli  
 pieśń głodnego robaka* (1988)

And we shall taste heaven still in our  
**mugs**  
 And if we don't succeed  
 Then we'll throw the **fucking** eagle  
 from its nest  
*Strzelaj lub emigruj, czyli  
 pieśń głodnego robaka* (1988)

Czasem uśmiecham się przez sen,  
 a gdy sen przychodzi zaraz  
 Śni mi się monstualna **pizda** żarłoczna  
 jak kosiara  
*Film o końcu świata* (1988–89)

I sometimes smile in my sleep, and  
 when I fall asleep right away  
 I dream about a humongous **cunt** esuri-  
 ent like a lawnmower  
*Film o końcu świata* (1988–89)

Stary świat ogłosił krach,  
 permanentnie kona  
 Kiedy **dziwka** rewolucja przytuli go do  
 swego łona  
*Permanentna rewolucja* (1989)

The old world has announced a crash, it  
 is dying continuously  
 When the revolution **slut** holds it against  
 her bosom  
*Permanentna rewolucja* (1989)

Możesz jeszcze uratować siebie  
 Nim zostaniesz zdalnie sterowaną  
**dziwką**  
 (...)  
 Macie **tępe mordy** i wydaje się wam,  
 że Możecie zmieniać świat środkowym  
 palcem  
 (...)  
 Gdy objasz **mordę** komuś  
 W oczach masz coś z durnia i coś  
 z Huna  
 (...)  
**Szajs, beznadziejny szajs**  
*Kilka zdań o Hitlerjudend*  
 (1989)

You can still save yourself  
 Before you become a remote controlled  
**slut**  
 (...)  
 You've got **dumb mugs** and you think that  
 You can change the world with your  
 middle finger  
 (...)  
 When you punch someone in the **puss**  
 In your eyes, there's something of an ass  
 and something of a barbarian  
 (...)  
**Crap, hopeless crap**  
*Kilka zdań o Hitlerjudend*  
 (1989)

- Oto nasze lekarstwo – nowy cudowny lek  
 Oto nasze lekarstwo – najpierw **pierdolnij** się w łeb  
*Awangarda jazz i podziemie*  
 (1990)
- This is our medicine – a new wonderful drug  
 This is our medicine – first **hit** your stupid nut  
*Awangarda jazz i podziemie*  
 (1990)
- Z gardeł za **haftem leci haft i cuchną** przepecone futra  
*Bal u Senatora 93* (1993)
- From their throats they **hurl incessantly and** those sweaty furs **reek**  
*Bal u Senatora 93* (1993)
- Jesteś **dupkiem**, chociaż nosisz dredy  
*Złodziej zapalniczek* (1995)
- You're an **asshole**, though you carry dreadlocks  
*Złodziej zapalniczek* (1995)
- Całkiem spokojnie jem kolację  
 Wcale nie chce mi się **rzygać**  
*Coca coca hera hera* (1995)
- I eat my supper quite calmly  
 I don't feel like **puking**, not at all  
*Coca coca hera hera* (1995)
- Chory bałagan, nic się nie zgadza:  
 żadna **kurwa** i żadna **mać**  
*Gorzka* (1998)
- Sick mess, nothing's right: no **holy** and no **shit**  
*Gorzka* (1998)
- Wściekła Mariola, najbardziej krzywe nogi świata na ulicy **pizd**  
*Wściekła Mariola* (1996)
- Furious Mariola, the most crooked legs in the world in **cunt** street  
*Wściekła Mariola* (1996)
- Jestem **poжебany** punkowiec, cwaniak mentalny  
 Szyderca i głupawiec, ściemniacz seksualny  
 Moja silna wola – pierwsza lepsza **kurew** – puszcza się i łajdaczy  
*Styropian* (1995–96)
- I'm a **fucked up** punk, a mental hustler  
 A scoffer and an idiot, sexual fibber  
 My strong will – any given **whore** – puts out and carouses  
*Styropian* (1995–96)
- Żyję tylko po to, by **napierdalać** warszawiaków  
 Prawie każdy z Warszawy jest na głowie swej kulawy  
 A najbardziej komercyjny jest pies policyjny  
*Marchef w butonierce* (2001)
- I live only to **fuck up** Varsovians  
 Almost everyone from Warsaw is crippled in their heads  
 And the most commercial of them all is the police dog  
*Marchef w butonierce* (2001)

|  |   |
|--|---|
| Swastyki w twojej głowie gorsze niż te<br>na ścianach<br>To fatalna iluzja<br><b>Gówniana</b> fatamorgana<br><i>Pryszcze</i> (2001)  | Swastikas in your head are worse than<br>those on the walls<br>That awful illusion<br><b>Shitty</b> mirage<br><i>Pryszcze</i> (2001)  |
| Czarną szosą w czarną noc <b>popierdala</b><br>czarna wołga<br>Maluję czarne serca na czarnych<br>czołgach<br><i>Paint It Black</i> (2001)   | Down a pitch black road during a pitch<br>black night <b>speeds</b> a pitch black Volga<br>They paint black hearts on black tanks<br><i>Paint It Black</i> (2001)   |
| Ja mam nabitą faję<br>W głowie mam cygański <b>zajeb</b><br><i>Cygański zajeb</i> (2003)   | I have my pipe prepped<br>In my head, there's a gypsy <b>craze</b><br><i>Cygański zajeb</i> (2003)  |
| Tam gdzie <b>kurwy</b> , grzyby i krasnale<br>Na szklankach i na firankach<br><i>List do Che</i> (2001)  | There where <b>whores</b> , mushrooms and<br>dwarfs<br>On the trails and drapery<br><i>List do Che</i> (2001)   |
| Same <b>chujowe</b> słowa jak przeżeniony<br>towar<br>Same chore słowa, po których puchnie<br>głowa<br>(...)<br>Poniżej pasa – twa sztuczka nieczysta<br>To do lisiej <b>pipki</b> z tutejszego<br>„Aktivista”<br><i>Bułgarskie Centrum Hujozy</i><br>(2004) | Only <b>shitty</b> words like fake stuff<br>Only sick words which make your head<br>swell<br>(...)<br>Below the waist – your dirty trick<br>It's for the foxy <b>pussy</b> from the local<br>‘Aktivist’<br><i>Bułgarskie Centrum Hujozy</i><br>(2004) |
| Wiesz że nie mam dokąd już stąd<br><b>Spierdalać</b><br><b>Spierdalać</b><br><b>Spierdalać</b><br><b>Spierdalać</b><br><i>Pogrzeb Króla</i> (2005)   | You know I have nowhere to<br><b>Piss off</b><br><b>Piss off</b><br><b>Piss off</b><br><b>Piss off</b><br><i>Pogrzeb Króla</i> (2005)   |

|  |   |
|--|---|
| <p>Jestem jak jaskółka co wiosnę zgubiła<br/>I znów zima za <b>dupę</b> mnie trzyma<br/>(...)<br/>Dostałem w <b>ryj</b> fajką pokoju<br/><i>Chory na wszystko</i> (2010)</p>   | <p>I'm like a swallow that lost spring<br/>And once again winter holds my <b>arse</b><br/>tight<br/>(...)<br/>I got hit on the <b>mug</b> with the ceremonial<br/>pipe<br/><i>Chory na wszystko</i> (2010)</p>  |
| <p>Za stara do wojska, <b>brudny ryj</b><br/>z wąsem<br/><i>Łąka</i> (2008)</p>  | <p>Too old for the army, <b>dirty mug</b> with<br/>a tache<br/><i>Łąka</i> (2008)</p>   |
| <p>Czyszciciele warg zajęczych odkurzają<br/>mnie z pajęczyn<br/>Więc się ich pytam, <b>kurwa</b>, co jest?<br/>(...)<br/>Kto z tego napięcia<br/><b>pierdolnie</b> ze szczęścia?<br/>Żyję w kraju, w którym wszyscy chcą<br/>mnie zrobić w <b>chuja!</b><br/><i>Żyję w kraju</i> (2010)</p> | <p>Cleaners of hare lips remove the<br/>cobwebs off me<br/>So I ask them, what the <b>fuck</b>?<br/>(...)<br/>Who out of this tension<br/>shall <b>fuck up</b> of joy?<br/>I live in a country where everyone wants<br/>to <b>screw me over!</b><br/><i>Żyję w kraju</i> (2010)</p> |

The above examples indicate that Grabowski rather consistently used vulgarisms throughout his creative period – regardless of whether he operated within the independent scene or approached the mainstream, as has been the case in recent years. With such a saturation, is it clear that obscenity, just like in everyday language, has found a legitimate place in songs, maybe not mainstream and massively popular songs, but still, songs the popularity of which exceeds considerably the framework of the niche independent scene.

That set also helps one realise that thus considered vulgarisms may be endowed with various functions, depending on the communication situation the poetic persona creates. In some cases that applies to the poetics of the role, where the language defines the character and reveals his/her primitive nature (*Strzelaj lub emigruj, czyli pieśń głodnego robaka, Marchef w butonierce*). A similar motivation can be found in the song *Styropian*, where the set of self-accusations embellished with vulgarisms brings to mind the ironic use of various accusations formulated against the artist by his former fans disappointed in him.

Most often, though, vulgarisms are simple elements of expressions, they merge into the background and the language, without remaining the focus of one's attention (*I znów zima za dupę mnie trzyma...*, *Tam gdzie kurwy, grzyby i krasnale...*, *Nim zostaniesz zdalnie sterowaną dziwką, Czarną szosą w czarną noc*

*popierdala czarna wolga*, etc.) That is a proof of the linguistic freedom which enables such stylistic choices.

A special case is the emphasising of vulgarisms by placing them in the chorus or other significant locations within a song, which focuses the message around a specific expression. That is the case in such songs as: *Bułgarskie Centrum Hujzozy*, *Cygański zajeb* (the titles), *Film o końcu świata*, *Pogrzeb Króla*. In the final case, that consisted of multiple repetitions of the word “spierdalać” [to piss off] with dynamic music in the background, in the finale of a song, which is a surrealist impression of Poland after the death of John Paul II.

A special role should be reserved for the song closing the above list, i.e. *Żyję w kraju*, where a significant part of the message is focussed on emphatic vulgarisms. Grabowski's reflection made from the point of view of an artist aware of the need to make decisions regarding the planned (which does not mean it is always fulfilled) fate of a song:

It was more or less like this: there were a couple of people who listened to the initial partial versions of the songs. Everyone said that it was a shame that the song had such words. Because it could had been a dead certain hit, but everyone knew that you could not make a single out of it. And I said: “No fucking way.” Even if I would have to stand up to everyone like a dick, it will be a single, the first song. I once again stood up to everyone and I said: “if that's your decision, then screw you.” And I realised we were pumping a lot of money into it by simply posting it on the internet. But then, surprise, surprise, radio stations started playing it. And the song started to function.<sup>28</sup>

In a concise manner, Grabaż defined the mechanism which often constitutes the first step towards creating a hit. In the case of a song so saturated with obscenity which offered an attractive music layer, the decision to release a single (i.e. a potential hit for radio stations) was risky, though, as it turned out, not doomed to fail. The phenomenon of self-censorship impels one to start working out what will be most beneficial, yet the final outcome remains unknown. The single sent to radio stations included a few versions, including the so-called single version and the censored single version, where the vulgarisms were suppressed with overlapping

<sup>28</sup> K. Grabaż Grabowski, K. Gajda, *Auto-bio-Grabaż*, In *Rock*, Poznan 2010, p. 528. [English version translated from Polish]. Being the artist's interviewer and the person responsible for the final linguistic shape of the quoted interview, I wish to indicate the use of vulgarisms also in the official communication, i.e. the published biographic notes. The interview was conducted from start to finish as a narrative intended for publication, though it was intentionally shaped to exceed the rigid limitations of its official nature. When editing the oral statements for the purposes of a printed text, together with the protagonist of the story we made the unanimous decision to retain the vulgarisms as legitimate elements of the private style of the speaker, and his natural linguistic expression.

sounds. The stations used the latter most often, which does not cancel the role of obscenity in creating the attractiveness of a message. The outcome was the first place for two weeks on the Polish Radio Three show's hit list, which can still be used as one of the indicators of a song's popularity. The song remained around the first ten on the list for over 10 weeks .

In reference to the above-mentioned examples, one should consider the interesting case of the album *!TO!* of 2012. Recorded as a particularly anticipated album after the success of *Dodekafonia* and its hallmark hit (*Żyję w kraju*), *!TO!* quite distinctly removed vulgarisms. Grabaż abandoned the characteristic depressive atmosphere, which formed the special undertone to the previous album. Even though it included songs extremely similar in terms of their themes to some songs from *Dodekafonia* (*Bloody Poland*, *Bankrut*, *I Can't Get No Gratification*, *Jesteście gorsi niż wasi starzy*, *Dreadlock Queen*), a different distribution of the emphasis (e.g. the opening and the closing of the album with two songs lighter in terms of their music and lyrics) resulted in the album being considered as much lighter than the previous one. It seems that such was also the artistic intention of Grabowski himself, which aligned with the visual layer of the promotional efforts: unlike in the case of *Dodekafonia*, which was accompanied by a photo shoot with a very aggressive character, in the case of *TO*, the band appeared in light tones, they were all smiles, and changed in relation to their previous image. Such a message was also reflected in its tamed language. As an example, consider the beginning of the most politically engaged song with an aggressive title: *Bloody Poland*:

|  |   |
|--|---|
| Specyficzny to kraj – <i>o, ja piernicze</i> – | It's a peculiar country – <i>well I'll be</i> – |
| Gdzie najlepiej sprzedają się znicze           | Where what sells best are grave lanterns        |

Considering the earlier character of Grabaż's works, in the first line one could have expected a much more pungent expression, while the task of emphasising in the rhyme position the term "grave lanterns" surely would not pose any problems for such a seasoned author, had he wanted to do it. It was his intention to apply a euphemism, because that's what the expression "well I'll be" is. One would be hard pressed to find any vulgarisms in the remaining songs, even though they offered various levels of intensity on social themes.

### Kukiz

In December 2015, Paweł Kukiz, a Polish deputy, posted this to his Facebook profile: "And as a 'good night', I dedicate this to the defenders of 'democracy'." He attached to it a video clip of the song *Virus sLd*, which he recorded in 2004

as the leader of the band Piersi. The entire song is consistently maintained in the convention of a curse<sup>29</sup>, consider the lyrics:

|   |   |
|---|---|
| Jak ja was kurwy nienawidzę<br>I jak ja wami kurwy gardzę<br>Jak ja się za was kurwy wstydzę<br>Gdy za granicę czasem zajrzę  | Oh, how I hate you, you fuckers<br>And how I despise you, you fuckers<br>Oh, how I'm ashamed of you, you fuckers<br>When I pop abroad         |
| Jak ja się wami kurwy brzydę<br>Jak ja was dobrze kurwy znam<br>Jak ja się bardzo ludziom dziwię<br>Którzy wybrali taki chłam | Oh, how I'm disgusted by you, you fuckers<br>Oh, how well I know you, you fuckers<br>Oh, how I'm surprised by people<br>Who elected such crap |
| To wszystko czego się dotkniecie<br>Od razu obracacie w pył<br>Szarańcza przy was to jest bajka<br>Bo cały kraj już zgnił     | Everything you touch<br>You turn into dust<br>Locusts are fairy tale creatures compared<br>to you<br>Because the whole country is rotten      |
| Rozpasłe mordy, krzywe ryje<br>Kurestwo wszędzie tam gdzie wy<br>Jak ja was kurwy nienawidzę<br>Jak do was bym z kałacha bił  | Fat mugs, ugly yaps<br>Fuckedness everywhere you are<br>Oh, how I hate you, you fuckers<br>How I would spray you from an AK-47                |
| A nawet jak wam plunąć w twarz<br>To wy mówicie że deszcz pada<br>Jebana wasza partia mać<br>Co mi ojczyznę okrada            | And even if someone spits in your face<br>You say it's raining<br>Your whole fucking party<br>That robs my homeland                           |
| Nadejdzie kiedyś taki czas<br>Za wszystko kurwy zapłacicie<br>W helikoptery wsadzę was<br>I nigdy już tu nie wrócicie         | There will be a time<br>You will pay for everything<br>I'll put you on helicopters<br>And you'll never come back <sup>30</sup>                |

Those who expressed outrage at the post mainly focussed on the change of the social position from which the former musician sent his messages. Being

<sup>29</sup> The convention brings to mind the famous martial law poem by an anonymous author entitled *Bluzgi* (aimed at Gen. Jaruzelski), popularised thanks to a performance by Emilian Kamiński at Teatr Domowy, and propagated on second circulation cassette tapes.

<sup>30</sup> As quoted in [http://www.tekstowo.pl/piosenka.pawel\\_kukiz,virus\\_sld.html](http://www.tekstowo.pl/piosenka.pawel_kukiz,virus_sld.html) (accessed on: 13.12.2017.) [English version translated from Polish].

a deputy, he should be bound by different moral standards than a punk rock musician. However, there was also another important characteristic: the fact of directing vulgar speech at a specific figure, social group, or a community. Originally, according to its title, the song was designed against the governing party at that time; years later, it was used as a weapon against the manifestations of the Committee for the Defence of Democracy (KOD). Such a directional use of obscenity seems more aggressive, and in violation of social norms, rather than just a cultural threat to the abstract notion of language.

### Spięty

Based on the previously discussed examples, one will see that in recent decades, obscenity in songs has been the main carrier of aggression, and negative and contestational content indicating the negative attitude towards the existing social order.

An example of a more complex game with obscenity is offered by the works of Hubert Spięty Dobaczewski, the leader and the author of the lyrics of Lao Che.<sup>31</sup> Even though in individual songs obscenity is not placed as the main focus, it draws one's attention to the author's output, and it is a constantly present element of linguistic reality. Spięty uses vulgarisms regularly, though they are intertwined within an unclear and ambiguous context of playing with conventions (musical, linguistic, and cultural). In his works, words often surprise each other, and that also applies to indecent expressions.

*Powstanie Warszawskie* was the album that helped the band become popular. The artist must have been aware of the fact that in such cultural circumstances vulgar expressions may prove particularly controversial, which is why he used them thoughtfully, though boldly. The linguistic image of the whole was influenced by the deconstruction of the language of the period through various collages, which also introduced extensive vulgarity drawn from various linguistic sources.

The album's opening song *Przed burzą* seems entirely put together from quotations, and fragments of reality. By introducing theatricality, it reproduces the atmosphere among the partisan forces within the final moments prior to "W" Hour (an intentional disruption of such a simple placement in time is an inclusion from a song from the 1980s). These are the fragments of the language one could find there:

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<sup>31</sup> The quotations from Dobaczewski's works came from the booklets of respective CDs.

Wolność ja kocham i rozumiem,  
 wolności to ja oddać nie umiem.  
 A kajdany mi dzwonią, gdy cień Gapy  
 nad głową,  
 Czas, by powstać i rachunki wyrównać  
 krzywd,  
 Nazistowskiego by ducha *wypierdolić*,  
 “Mamidła z wąsikiem” marionetki,  
 Nie wyjdzie stąd żywa *psia-jucha*  
*parszywa*  
 ... *kurwa Wasza Faszystowska Mać*.

Freedom I love and understand,  
 freedom, I cannot give up.  
 And the shackles jangle when the  
 shadow of the Nazi Eagle's overhead,  
 It's time to rise up and settle the scores,  
 To *fuck* the Nazi spirit,  
 “The mirage with a tache” of the puppet,  
 Will not leave this place alive that *lousy*  
*dog shit*  
 ... *kurwa Wasza Faszystowska Mać*.

The mixing of quotes from various cultural levels resulted in a clash of poetic pathos with the hilariously archaised soldier talk. The theatricality (through the use of a radio show convention) conducted in a post-modernist collage version utilising samples and various musical styles, engulfed the entire album, which is why the moderately used vulgarisms constitute an element of continuously independent speech which dissipates the opportunities for defining the text's sender. Considering the album's historic nature, the singer/performer of the songs is intentionally more of an actor playing various roles than the author's alter ego. Thus, he also distanced himself from any vulgar expressions, treating the entire message as someone else's words, though specifically his own. The vulgarisms, then, were selected in such a way as not to shock, and to correspond to the linguistic culture of the epoch, subject to brutalisation by the unique situation of the eye of the storm of the war. Therefore, they assume not as much an expressive function as a parody or, more broadly, comical function co-creating the cultural confusion in which *Powstanie Warszawskie* plays out:

*Gar gówna tym gównoryjom i prztyczek w nos,*  
 rykoszet *rozpieprzył* zbożówki termos,  
 pale papieros papieros papieros papieros  
 los los los barykado nasza Polsko  
 mała!  
 Idź Pod Prąd!  
 Na barykadzie, na Rejtana, jeden,  
 drugi będzie *w portki rznąć*,  
*w portki rznąć*,  
*w portki rznąć*!  
 Żaden to wstyd, wszak wszyscyśmy  
 tutaj wiarą dusz.  
 Polka na RKM i granaty...

*A pot of shit for those shit-eaters and a snap on the nose,*  
 A ricochet *fucked up* a flask with vodka,  
 I'm having a smoke a smoke a smoke  
 a smoke a smoke,  
 fate fate fate our little barricade Poland!  
 Go Against The Current!  
 To the barricade, as Rejtan did, one, two  
 will *shit his pants*,  
*shit his pants*,  
*shit his pants*!  
 There's no shame in that, we all are here  
 a legion of souls.  
 A Polish girl to the chatterbox and grenades...

The communication chaos filtered through the sensitivity of contemporary man, and the multi-code nature of the genre with the use of the potential offered by the music layer of a song was present in *Zrzuty*. The following are fragments of the song, which are to indicate the linguistic mosaic, with the highlighted final vulgarism:

...halo, halo tu Londyn...

(...)

Nie nasza rzecz, nasza rzecz naszą  
robić rzecz.

Ferfluchten polnischen, polnischen  
Partizanen, banditen, banditen.

(...)

Halo, halo, tutaj Londyn, tutaj Londyn  
Ona czarna, a on blondyn, a on blondyn

(...)

Myślę sobie, zważ robaczku w czym  
się moczysz,

Trach, pif, paf, bum i do Bozi i do  
Bozi

[“Bardzo pilne, bardzo tajne. Do  
prezydenta Rzeczypospolitej Polskiej,  
wysła Łubieński, początek...”]

(...)

Słuchaj Londyn, nam nie trzeba audycji,  
My żądamy amunicji!

(...)

Jak tam u was? – jest spokojnie jak na  
wojnie,

**tu pierdolnie, tam pierdolnie** i znów  
spokojnie.

Yes, yes, yes!

All right, haha!

... copy, copy, this is London speaking...

(...)

That’s not our thing, our thing is to do  
our thing.

Ferfluchten polnischen, polnischen  
Partizanen, banditen, banditen.

(...)

Copy, copy, this is London speaking, this  
is London

She’s black, he’s blonde, he’s blonde

(...)

I think to myself, consider, little maggot,  
what you’re soaking in,

Crack, bang, bang, bam, and meet the  
Lord, and meet the Lord

[ “Very urgent, very urgent. To the  
president of the Republic  
of Poland, from Łubieński, beginning...”]

(...)

Listen, London, we do not need radio  
shows,

We demand ammo!

(...)

How are things? – it’s peaceful like  
during a war,

**a bitch of a blast here, a bitch of a blast  
there**, and the rest is quiet.

Yes, yes, yes!

All right, haha!

In the audio version, the articulation, due to the distribution of stresses, brings the meter close to chanting. The inclusions from other languages resemble the circumstances of a radio watch, where various frequencies, shows, and messages blend. It comes as no surprise that such a narration includes both a short soldier's exchange of thoughts and a humorous one. Considering the tragic nature of the historic context inscribed in the whole album, such inclusions together with the English expressions concluding that quote offer bitter irony, and not an instance of a mindless game.

On the *Gospel* album, the mechanism of lowering the style to one which is excessively common has a holistic form strongly associated with the intention of violating the zone of the sacred. In a diverse way based on a multi-code nature, the album raised the issue of the Man – God relationship. Expressions verging on being vulgar, and those actually vulgar, become elements of such a strategy, though it does not possess the characteristics of a confrontational provocation.

Bo ja myślałem, że tu będzie inaczej,  
A tu jest tak-o! **do dupy** raczej,  
Jeśli masz w tym frajdę, aby rzeczy  
gmatwać,  
To mi teraz za tę moją krzywdę zapłać!  
Bóg zapłać!!!  
(Bóg zapłać)

Because I thought, it'd be different here,  
And here it's like this! rather **crappy**,  
If you find joy in complicating things,  
So pay me now for my loss!  
Praise be to the Lord!!!  
(Praise)

Bo wiesz, miałem ambicje stworzyć  
rezolutną rasę.  
A wyście to tak po ludzku **spartolili**.  
Jestem piekielnie sfrustrowany...  
(Hydropieklówstąpienie)

Because, you know, I had an ambition  
to create a resolute race.  
And you **buggered** it in your human way.  
I'm frustrated as hell...  
(Hydropieklówstąpienie)

In the second example, there is a euphemism, but if one realises that it came from God's monologue to Noah, the commonness assumes the characteristics of (humorous) vulgarity.

Spięty's first and only solo album entitled *Antyszanty* offered an area for free stylistic experimentation, which, among other things, consisted of the language, including vulgarisms, though there as well they were justified with a constant game between the sender: the artist – performer – author – and various characters, which could be assumed thanks to the poetics of the role. By utilising the achievements of comedy and stage songs, Dobaczewski assumed the roles of characters for whom such a language could be justified. In many cases, he verges on coarse obscenity:

Mori, mori czorno mori, mori memento.  
Od wszystkiego się odwrócić może  
i *spierdolamento*?

Roboty tu dla ciebie może nie być,  
*fuck off polish scum*.

A gdybyś tak może *odpieprzyć* ode  
mnie się chciał?

Może i stuknięty był, ale motor igła –  
zdrowy,

Może czasem warto mieć ambicje,  
co by być *chujowym*?

(Morże)

Mele kalikimaka jak tak powiesz  
komu,

Kulas w trawie *kupę* mija, ululany *luj*  
trafia do domu.

(...)

Mele kalikimaka! Żeby się panu z tą  
dużą blondyną ułożyło,

Żeby pani ta kiecka tak nie piła,

Żeby wam dzieciaki nie pi...

Żeby ludzie się kochali, a nie  
*napierdalali*.

(Kalikimaka)

O! kontradmirały, bosmany, majtki,  
Porwany żagiel lata jak portowej  
*dziwce* majtki

(Trafiony / zatopiony)

Ahoj!

Nie ma to jak gorąca *cipka* i jeden  
głębszy.

(Opuszczone porty)

Nie wiesz ty – czy wieszcz ja, czy  
*ciota*?

Melduję posłusznie – *idiota*.

A był raz kapitan, się silił na

Mori, mori czorno mori, mori memento.  
Turn back on everything maybe and  
*pissoffamento*?

There may be no work for you here,  
*fuck off Polish scum*.

And if you could *fuck off* kindly?

It might had been crashed, but the  
engine's top notch – sound,

Maybe sometimes it's worth having  
the ambition to *be a dick*?

(Morże)

Mele kalikimaka when you say to  
someone,

Leg misses the crap in the grass, the  
sleeping bum finds his home.

(...)

Mele kalikimaka! Hope you get along  
with that blonde,

Hope your dress gets looser,

Hope your kids don't pis...

Hope people start loving each other not  
*fucking up*.

(Kalikimaka)

Oh! Counter admirals, boatswains,  
deckhands,

The torn sail billows like a port *whore's*  
pants

(Trafiony / zatopiony)

Ahoj!

There's nothing like a hot pussy and  
a shot.

(Opuszczone porty)

Don't you know – whether I'm a bard or  
a queer?

On your command – an *idiot*.

There was once a captain, he tried hard

dydaktykę,  
 Jak *pizdnął* w molo, nabrał wody  
 i spalił elektrykę.  
 (Dworujże)

to instil good teaching,  
 When he struck the *fucking* pier, he  
 took on water and fused the wiring.  
 (Dworujże)

Płyniemy, płyniemy z Jokohamy,  
 Kotwę rzucamy i *szczamy* w bramy  
 (Łódź wariatów)

We are sailing, we are sailing for  
 Yokohama,  
 We're dropping the anchor and *pissing*  
 in the passages  
 (Łódź wariatów)

Łej–hej, chłopcze do rej, / Puszczaj  
*fiuta* – wciągaj buta.  
 (...)  
 Rzekła maszynowni znajoma szprech-  
 -rura,  
 Że mnie z kosą chce ożenić jedna *suka*  
*bura*,  
 Ale jak chłop nie je miętki, nie gamoń,  
*nie pizda*,  
 To na przemijanie chłop takowy  
 gwizda.  
 (Bajka o śmierci)

Hard, hard, boy, to the yard, / Let go of  
 your *prick* – pull on your shoe.  
 (...)  
 The friendly voicepipe said to the  
 engine room,  
 That some *dun bitch* wants to introduce  
 me to her blade,  
 But when a man doesn't eat the catnip,  
 he's not a loser or a *cunt*,  
 That man doesn't give a shit about pass-  
 ing.  
 (Bajka o śmierci)

Even there, there are natural contexts, which enable artistic justification of the vile speech. The language of *Antyszanty*, rocked like a pirate ship, creates a particular environment for various peculiarities, where vulgarisms constitute an element of folk nature, and the low provenance of the seaman genre. Indecent words are also a form of fulfilling the postulate of being *anti-genre*. Shanties in their codified form rather bring to mind decent lyrics, while excess use of vulgar expressions constitutes a disruption of the original communication situation. Thus understood, vulgarisms also support the parodist function of the entire material.

In “Na końcu języka” from the *Soundtrack* album, there plays out a competition between vulgarisms and euphemisms:

Są słowa, co je chłopaczyna na murze  
 maluje,  
 Że *policja jest brzydka*, a Ala  
*w siusiaka całuje*.  
 (...)  
 Rzeknie kto: oczy ci wydrapię,

There are words that a boy paints on  
 a wall,  
 That *the police are bad*, and Ala *kisses*  
*on the willy*.  
 (...)  
 Someone might say: I'll scratch your

***boś jest skurwysynem!***

To wciąż nie potrafię poprosić, by  
zamienił słowo z czynem.

(Na końcu języka)

eyes out, ***'cause you're a son of a bitch!***

And I still can't ask him to turn his  
words into action.

(Na końcu języka)

Such a punchline is the result of broader meta-linguistic considerations devoted to the ability to express one's own thoughts and emotions using words. The essence of those works is the constant confronting of our linguistic experience with added meanings, which sometimes leads to rebellious devices. A linguistic provocation leads to drastic operations, which violate the principle of good taste. In "Jestem psem", there is a passage:

Jestem psem,

***Suka matka ma*** kryta championem.

(Jestem psem)

I'm a dog,

***The bitch mother of mine*** mated with  
a champ.

(Jestem psem)

When out of context, that passage should arouse outrage. If one, however, realises that it is closely related to the anthropomorphisation of the speaking persona, i.e. a dog, the initial reaction subsides and is replaced by a natural linguistic experience, which says that a bitch is a female dog, and it does not need to evoke any negative associations entailed by the vulgarising usage, though, of course, the artist's intention was to stimulate the receiver's sensitivity.

The *Dzieciom* album displays consideration for a particular understanding of the rules of decorum. Despite its title (For Children), it was developed for adults. However, since its author utilised narration styled to mimic children's culture, the album fluctuated between the two areas. Spięty, having often proven that he knows the low and the very low speech very well, on that occasion decided to use such an expression, which every toddler would be able to use intentionally or unwittingly.

Dzięki za radę Dżinie,

Na nic ona zda się.

***Pakuj dupę*** w lampę,

***Skąpy grubasie.***

(Dżin)

Thanks for your advice, Genie,

It's worthless anyhow.

***Put your arse back*** in the lamp,

You cheap fatso.

(Dżin)

That is an instance of an intentional disruption of the levels of communication: the tale of a mysterious spirit, usually enveloped in an air of mystery and the related loftiness, is confronted with colloquial language, not obscene, yet vulgar. In "Wojenka", the same expression is compared with a not-so-distant archaism, which pacifies emotions:

Żołnierz na froncie gnije w okopie,  
żona pisze: brzuch duży i mały  
kopie...

Myśli żołnierz – *w dupie z wami  
i waszymi wojnami.*

(...)

Gdyby do nas przyszła,  
*żeby ją zaraza ściśła,*

(Wojenka)

The soldier rots in a trench on the front,  
the wife writes: belly's big and the boy  
is kicking...

The soldier thinks – *the fuck with you  
and your wars.*

(...)

If it came to us,  
*plague on her,*

(Wojenka)

That expression, apparently considered as absolutely benign in the selected narration, appeared a few more times throughout the album:

Wył do księżycy wydłubując z *dupy*  
śrut.

(...)

*www.dupka* jak rzepka chrupka  
(Z kamerą wśród zwierząt buszujących  
w sieci)

He howled to the moon picking pellets  
from his *arse*.

(...)

*www.arse* crunchy as a turnip  
(Z kamerą wśród zwierząt buszujących  
w sieci)

Sometimes there appear euphemisms, which are to additionally confirm the author's awareness of the communicative principles:

Niemoc goni niemoc, ale pomiędzy:  
Wszystkie kolory tęczy *do urwy  
nędzy.*

(Errata)

Powerlessness on top of powerlessness,  
yet between:

All the colours of the rainbow, *uck me.*

(Errata)

Na dole wśród smoły,  
*Niezdaluchy i pierdoły,*  
Na górze Jezusy  
I ich lizusy.

(Tu)

Below in the tar,  
*Failures and berks.*  
Jesuses above  
And their toadies.

(Tu)

I wszyscy myśleli, że to Echo grało,  
A Echo *w ciula grało*, igrało i lgało.  
(...)

Miś który nie jest misiem typu  
*D.U.P.A.*

[Bajka o Misiu (tom I)]

And everyone thought that Echo played,  
While Echo *fucked around*, toyed and  
lied.

(...)

A bear not of the *A.R.S.E.* type.

[Bajka o Misiu (tom I)]

As indicated through the example of *Spięty*, obscenity can also be the focus of linguistic games. Those, in turn, in a much broader sense, in the olden days (before 1980), were available almost exclusively in more sublime forms of songs, e.g. literary and stage songs, or sung poetry. The saturation with vulgar expressions, and the freedom of using them and utilising their flexibility in works intended for official publication and public appearances, have become generation trademarks carried forward from the experiences of the new Poland.

### Euphemism

In reference to the above examples, one could become convinced that contemporary songs which utilise modern music forms, and which aspire to describing reality within the textual layer, cannot exist without the use of vulgarisms.

Contrary to such a thesis would be the rich output of Pablopavo<sup>32</sup>, who, while exploring various areas of colloquial speech, manages to use a language almost entirely free of vulgarisms. Expressions such as in “Ośmiu” are rare in his works:

I tylko czasem w knajpie, gdzie  
 robiłem za silnego  
 jakiś frajerski, niedopity typ  
 okazywał się w dodatku niedobity  
 „Ej, Mistrzu! To jesteś *kurwa* ty?”  
 (...)  
 Liczę ich dokładnie, jak wtedy  
 w Jaworznie sędzia  
 kiedy zza rogu wychodzi jeszcze sześć  
 mord  
 Może to i lepiej? Sprawa jasna, choć  
 ciemno  
 “Ruszaj, *skurwysynu!* Kozaczyłeś?  
 To chodź!

And only sometimes at a bar where  
 I worked as the bouncer  
 some drunk berk  
 proved to also be not kicked enough  
 “Hey, Champ! Is that,  *fucking*, you?”  
 (...)  
 I’m counting them carefully, like that  
 time the judge in Jaworzno  
 when from around the corner six more  
 mugs came out  
 Maybe that’s even better? The case’s  
 clear, though it’s dark  
 “Move, you *son of a bitch!* You think  
 you’re a tough guy? Come on then!”

Clearly from the context, they exist as independent speech, as an element of aggressive speech prior to a fight.

The fact of avoiding linguistic rudeness has even become the focus of an amusing play on words in “Telehon”. By using an oniric convention for presenting

<sup>32</sup> The quotations from Pablopavo’s works came from the booklets of respective CDs.

life's smaller or bigger inconveniences requiring mending, the song also includes such a fragment of an idealised world:

|  |  |
|--|--|
| Tu internauci i interniści są <i>za...</i><br><i>...bardzo mili</i> , jeśli chcesz trochę<br>chamstwa<br>musisz naprawdę się wysilić | Here internet users and internists are <i>fu...</i><br><i>...ndamentally too polite</i> , if you want<br>some rudeness<br>you must really try hard |
|--|--|

Abandoning a vulgar rhyme and replacing it with a euphemism is also an element of that idealised world. In earlier parts of the lyrics, there appears another metalinguistic reflection stemming from a combination of differently understood aspects of language and personality:

|   |  |
|---|--|
| W tym śnie o wiele mniej klnę<br>Nie zawodzę ludzi, którym mówię<br>„Kocham Cię”<br>(...)<br>Między wyrazami nie powtarzam „e”! | In the dream, I swear much less<br>I do not let down those to whom I say<br>‘I love you’<br>(...)<br>I do not insert ‘er’ between each word! |
|---|--|

Euphemisms in songs, particularly in view of the considerable over-representation of vulgarisms, deserve a separate study. They deserve consideration at least due to the fact that their diversity and linguistic innovation (when compared to previous achievements in songs) should constitute another proof of the progressive nature of the language of the genre – the search for various means of distancing oneself from profane speech.

### What can you do with obscenity

In *Co począć z wulgaryzmami?* [What can you do with obscenity?] in the mid-1990s, Halina Wiśniewska diagnosed the expansive nature of vulgarisms in Polish, which were transcending the borderlines set by the level of one's education, their profession, sex, and age. She wrote:

Evidently, the presence of vulgarisms has ceased to be a characteristic differentiating the groups of users of Polish. They have permeated into various social strata from the bottom to the top and sideways; they have expanded onto all age and professional groups unifying Poles verbally, sadly in a negative manner.<sup>33</sup>

<sup>33</sup> H. Wiśniewska, op. cit., p. 83. [English version translated from Polish].

The increasing level of obscenity in the language is a fact which can be observed every day in social life, including in the media. It is a result of the complex cultural processes of recent decades, out of which I was able to consider only a few herein. Songs, being a particularly egalitarian area of culture, have clearly recorded those tendencies, probably supporting them by sanctioning pejorative linguistic habits. Today, vulgarisms, over 25 years after liberating the language from the care of censorship, are widely present in songs, which a large number of Poles consider important, good, and wise. That stylistic device helps express, and shapes the manner of expressing, one's emotions, and describe reality, and it is also a manifestation of the generation's fear of loftiness. It has become the focus of various strategies, in some cases it enables one to associate the speaking persona of a song with the performer, and, to the contrary, in others it enables one to remove oneself through the speech of others. The latter operations require trust in the receiver's communication competences, as they must decode meanings resulting from the linguistic attributes of the speaking (singing) persona, identify irony and the distance, a result of the differences between an author's proprietary dominant style, and the persona created by her/him. In such roles, vulgarisms often become an active ingredient of humour. The fact that the noticeable vulgarisation of the language also leads to intentional artistic decisions on euphemising the message is an undoubtedly positive phenomenon.

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Krzysztof Gajda

**Profanity in songs. Seeking the limits of freedom of speech, and the reproduction and sanctioning of contemporary linguistic tendencies**

(Summary)

The article is showing the presence of vulgar expressions in song lyrics. This is a clear testimony to the changes in the customs and language of culture of recent decades. The paradox is that the development of negative phenomena can contribute to events naturally valued positively, such as expanding the sphere of freedom together with the birth of “Solidarity” or the abolition of the censorship institution with the transformation after 1989. Vulgarism today, after more than a quarter of a century since the release of language from the “care” of censorship, is intensively present in songs that many Poles find important. This stylistic device helps to express and shapes the expressed emotions, describe reality, and it is a manifestation of the generational fear of the sublime. The text discusses the songs of authors such as: Andrzej Garczarek, Jacek Kaczmarski, Kazik Staszewski, Krzysztof Grabowski (Grabaż), Marcin Świetlicki, Hubert Dobaczewski (Spięty), Paweł Sołtys (Pablopavo).

Keywords: profanity, vulgarism, song, rock, punk, political transformation, euphemism

Paulina Pająk\*

## **Moments of liberty. (Self-)censorship Games in the Essays of Virginia Woolf**

Pre-Raphaelite profile, subtle facial features, contemplative gaze – that has been the common image of the young Virginia Woolf (1882–1941), the famous modernist writer. This photograph was taken in 1902 by George Charles Beresford and it constitutes one of the most often referenced portraits of the writer.



The *classic* portrait of Virginia Woolf, author: George C. Beresford, July 1902,  
(source: *Virginia Woolf* © National Portrait Gallery, London).

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In 1910, there appeared another image which presented her in a slightly different light. It was a photograph of Woolf during the so-called Dreadnought hoax, when six intellectuals took in the British Navy.



The *subversive* portrait of Virginia Woolf (seated, on the far left) during the so-called Dreadnought hoax, author: Lafayette Ltd, 7 February 1910,

(source: *The Dreadnought Hoax* © National Portrait Gallery, London).

The plotters inspected the battleship HMS Dreadnought, which spurred the arms race prior to WWI. Civilians posed as the prince of Abyssinia and his suite, which is why their disguise consisted of blackened faces, fake beards, long robes, and turbans. The fake Abyssinians vocally admired each and every feat of arms technology; they looked up, smacked their lips, and often interjected “bunga, bunga.” The honest English considered that as a manifestation of somewhat exotic vessel parametrisation, which is why upon their inspection, the wags stepped off unhindered. On the same day, Horace Cole, the plot’s designer, informed the press about the incident. Public opinion effervesced: reactions oscillated from outrage to amusement.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> H. Lee, *Virginia Woolf*, Random House, New York 1999, pp. 278–283 and Q. Bell, *Virginia Woolf. Biografia*, trans. M. Laverigne, Wydawnictwo Książkowe Twój Styl, Warsaw 2004, pp. 215–221.

Contemporary critics commonly emphasise the extensive implications of the Dreadnought hoax – they only differ regarding its interpretation. Danell Jones considered it as a pacifist parody, which constituted a symbolic threat to the meticulously prepared *Theatre of War*:

As embarrassing as the joke might have been, the Admiralty recognized that the real threat was not six sham Abyssinians touring a warship [...]. The real threat was to the navy's image: a single, forty-five minute performance by a group of amateurs was upstaging years of careful and expensive naval theatre.<sup>2</sup>

In the farcical feat Kathy Phillips saw an expression of solidarity with the inhabitants of the colonies and a mockery of racism.<sup>3</sup> However, Jean E. Kennard seemed to be closer to the plotters' intentions; she interpreted the prank of a group of friends as a subversive camp game mocking militarism and the relations of power. There the scorned and exploited inhabitants of the colonies appeared on Her Majesty's Ship as the Black Majesty and his suite, and the British army paid them the utmost respect.<sup>4</sup> That anecdote showed that in the times when British artists were fighting for freedom of expression, one could criticise the Empire's colonialism and militarism without having to dread any negative consequences. Of course, provided that the criticism was offered in the form of a prank, and its sting was hidden in ambiguity.

Virginia Woolf was the only woman among the conspirators; in her prose works, she experimented with provocations similarly mocking as the Dreadnought hoax, and just as meticulously concealed. Similarly to other writers who wished to voice their opinions in the contemporary social and political debates, she also felt the petrifying effect of the show-trials of writers and their works accused of *obscenity*. Woolf's essays showed that she absolutely mastered the poetics of ambiguity, and the ability to entice her readers into a game in which the meaning is the highest prize, though the works were not free of painful self-censorship.

The aim of this article is to present three liberty-focussed streams in Virginia Woolf's essays: women's emancipation, tolerance for people of different psycho-sexual orientation, and pacifism, as well as the areas of (self-)censorship included therein. Another important topic is the essay as a strategy applied by Woolf to *avoid* repressive censorship, and an intentional expansion of the limits of liberties important for her.

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<sup>2</sup> D. Jones, "The Dreadnought Hoax And The Theatres Of War", *Literature & History* 2013, issue 22.1, pp. 80–94.

<sup>3</sup> K.J. Phillips, *Virginia Woolf Against Empire*, University of Tennessee Press, Knoxville 1994, pp. 248–250.

<sup>4</sup> J.E. Kennard, "Power and Sexual Ambiguity: The *Dreadnought Hoax*, *The Voyage Out*, *Mrs Dalloway* and *Orlando*", *Journal of Modern Literature* 1996, issue 20.2, pp. 149–164.

Her essay works consist of two extensive, over-150-page-long essays *A Room of One's Own* (Polish ed. 1997) and *Three Guineas* (Polish ed. 2002) and over 700 short essay forms – a small portion of which were translated into Polish and released in the following collections: *Pochyła wieża* (1977) and *Chwile istnienia: eseje autobiograficzne* (2005). In November 2015, Karakter publishing house released a selection of essays prepared by Roma Sendyka and Magda Heydel, one of the best translators of Woolf's works. For the purposes of the analyses presented herein, I used the four-volume issue of *Collected essays*, which was edited by Leonard Woolf. If possible, the quoted fragments were included based on published Polish translations (if, however, there exist various Polish translations of a text, I selected a translation closest to the original). However, due to the fact that many essays by Woolf have not been translated into Polish yet, the author decided to include her own translations of their fragments (marked in footnotes as "own translation P.P.") – surely not perfect, yet faithful to the original.

### In the shadow of repressive censorship

Why were the matters of intellectual freedom and freedom of speech so important for Virginia Woolf? Her engagement in their defence says a lot both about the writer and the situation in the United Kingdom at that time. The paradox where the more freedoms are guaranteed, the less often we perceive them, was perfectly summarised by Zygmunt Bauman:

"You can say what you wish. This is a free country" We use and hear this expression too often to pause and think of its meaning; we take it as obvious [...] In a sense, freedom is like the air we breathe. We don't ask what this air is, we do not spend time discussing it, arguing about it, thinking of it. That is, unless we are in a crowded, stuffy room and find breathing difficult.<sup>5</sup>

Artists, including modernists, associated the United Kingdom more with Bauman's *stuffy room* than with a land of freedom, as the ruling politicians willingly called it. As WWI ended, the *Defense of the Realm Act* was withdrawn, which in reality meant a return to 19<sup>th</sup>-century laws, and the 1857 *Obscene Publication Act* most of all<sup>6</sup>. On it's basis, each citizen who witnessed the act of selling

<sup>5</sup> Z. Bauman, *Wolność*, trans. J. Tokarska-Bakir, Znak, Krakow, Fundacja im. Stefana Batoro, Warsaw 1995, p. 5. [English version: Bauman, Zygmunt. *Freedom*. Milton Keynes: Open University Press].

<sup>6</sup> J. Green, N.J. Karolides, "Hicklin Rule, the", in: eidem, *Encyclopedia of Censorship*, Facts On File, New York 2005, p. 232.

the so-called *obscene* material had the right to file a complaint with a court, which in turn would decide whether to order a search of the book collections of the seller. Thus, it was a form of repressive censorship based on content control of works already published.<sup>7</sup>

In a monograph entitled *British Modernism and Censorship*, Celia Marshik described numerous instances of seizures of acclaimed Modernist works by censors. For example, *Ulysses* by James Joyce was first published in instalments in the American journal *The Little Review*, and in 1922 it was published in its entirety in France. In the United Kingdom, it was considered as obscene, though censors did not manage to read it, and based their evaluations on the final monologue of Molly Bloom, whom they considered “a vulgar illiterate.” Based on an 1876 *Customs Consolidation Act*, the book could not even be imported to the United Kingdom. Moreover, censors were meticulous about ensuring that Joyce’s works did not become British literary mainstream. When the literary scientist F.R. Leavis wanted to discuss *Ulysses* at the University of Cambridge, his lectures were taken away from him. Therefore, Joyce’s ironic commentary on summing up the unifying nature of censorship was not surprising: “a great movement [...] initiated by Puritans, English Imperialists, Irish Republicans, Catholics – what an alliance! I ought to be given the Nobel prize for peace!”<sup>8</sup> Joyce’s most renowned book was finally released in the United Kingdom in 1936. Novels by many other authors, including D.H. Lawrence, had to overcome similar obstacles.<sup>9</sup>

In the interwar period, there were also held show-trials of writers, which were the echoes of the trial of Oscar Wilde, though they usually did not lead to such drastic punishments (the writer was convicted of homosexuality and sentenced to two years of hard labour). In that time, it was more common to put on trial novels and not their authors, who were often refused even the right to present their case during the investigations into their outputs. That was the fate of Radclyffe Hall – it was the publisher who was put on trial, regarding her novel entitled *Well of Loneliness*, which described the romantic relationship between two women. In 1929, the book was banned from circulation in the United Kingdom, yet it became popular in other countries. In Poland, it was published in 1933 as *Źródło samotności* (Source of Loneliness) with a foreword by Irena Krzywicka, who argued that:

<sup>7</sup> J. Green, N.J. Karolides, *Obscene Publication Act (1857)*, *ibid.*, pp. 403–404.

<sup>8</sup> Katherine Mullin quoted Joyce’s ironic comment included in a letter to Carlo Linati regarding the fact that the crusade against his book unified antagonised communities. K. Mullin, *James Joyce, Sexuality and Social Purity*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 2003, p. 84.

<sup>9</sup> C. Marshik, *British Modernism and Censorship*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 2006, pp. 157–161.

Love, true love is the greatest moral trial for a heart [...] The novel, confiscated in England, *immoral* in the common understanding of the word, promotes the sanctity of feelings and all sublime reactions it evokes in human hearts.<sup>10</sup>

Court documents prove that Hall's novel was met with such strong opposition because she presented non-heteronormative characters as likeable persons engaged in their patriotic duty during the Great War. Hall's trial shocked the community of forward-thinking London writers. Virginia Woolf and Edward Morgan Forster issued an open letter in her case, in which they ironically indicated both the hypocrisy of the censors, and the *chilling effect* resulting from their repressive actions against literary works:

A novelist may not wish to treat any of the subjects mentioned above but the sense that they are prohibited or prohibitable, that there is a taboo-list, will work on him and will make him alert and cautious instead of surrendering himself to his creative impulses. And he will tend to cling to subjects that are officially acceptable, such as murder and adultery, and to shun anything original lest it bring him into forbidden areas.<sup>11</sup>

The letter soon received an *answer* of sorts: in February 1929, another novel was seized by censors. Funnily enough, it was a book entitled *Sleeveless Errand* by Norah James, which offered a critical portrait of the moral freedom which arose after WWI<sup>12</sup>.

### Liberty of the essay *flâneuse*

Thus, unsurprisingly, in Woolf's works, written in the times when according to the law anyone could become a censor, every now and again there appeared visions of the world as if from Foucault's interpretations of *Panopticon* by Jeremy Bentham<sup>13</sup>. The "ideal" prison invented by the utilitarian/philosopher was based on the "see without being seen" principle:

Hence the major effect of the Panopticon: to induce in the inmate a state of conscious and permanent visibility that assures the automatic functioning of power. [...] the

<sup>10</sup> I. Krzywicka, *Introduction*, in: R. Hall, *Źródło samotności*, Towarzystwo Wydawnicze Rój, Warsaw 1933, p. XI. [English version translated from Polish].

<sup>11</sup> E.M. Forster, V. Woolf, "Letter to the Nation and Athenaeum", in: J. Winning, *The Pilgrimage of Dorothy Richardson*, University of Wisconsin Press, Madison 2000, pp. 111–112.

<sup>12</sup> C. Marshik, *op. cit.*, pp. 84–85.

<sup>13</sup> Cf. also Z. Bauman, *op. cit.*, pp. 16–20.

inmate must never know whether he is being looked at at any one moment; but he must be sure that he may always be so.<sup>14</sup>

Therefore, one could assume that the censored *panopticism* favoured self-censorship, particularly its public type. According to the division proposed by Philip Cook and Conrad Heilmann, there exist two types of self-censorship: public self-censorship, which applies to the wide range of overt reactions towards institutional censorship, and private self-censorship, which applies to concealing attitudes, on which official censorship has not declared its position or it is not significant.<sup>15</sup> The spread of repressive censorship in the interwar United Kingdom was the reason why Woolf's works included various traces of public self-censorship, where institutional norms of censorship were, for the purposes of a specific publication, internalised by the subject.

The censorship *panopticism* is best visible in the essay entitled *A Room of One's Own* – the *flâneuse* narrator guides us through a space where the omnipresent censor can hide behind a red curtain or even under the table cloths in the dresser while the traces of his limiting activities remain in the text in the form of ellipses and ambiguity dressed in allusive comments. Then in short essay forms, the process of self-censorship usually remained underneath the surface of a text, hidden under a thick varnish of consecutive versions of an essay. The writer avoided censorship disguising her politically and socially engaged texts in mystifications: that was fostered by the nature of the essay.

In her programme text *The Modern Essay*, she listed the features of a personal essay most important for her. The first item was a coherent though multifaceted vision enveloping the readers like a curtain “[...] it must be a curtain that shuts us in, not out.”<sup>16</sup> It had its sources not in escapism but a principle “[...] believed in with conviction or seen with precision and thus compelling words to its shape.”<sup>17</sup> At the same time, according to the author of *A Room of One's Own*, being true to a principle does not require dogmatism; essayists are protected from its traps thanks to their critical sense of observation and the ability to assume different points of view.

A personal essay is not, of course, possible without, as Woolf put it, “conscious and pure” introduction of the author's personality into the text. Therefore, how does the *self* or the *I* emerge in a text? She considered as a model the

<sup>14</sup> M. Foucault, *Nadzorować i karać. Narodziny więzienia*, trans. T. Komendant, Wydawnictwo Fundacja Aletheia, Warsaw 1998, pp. 241–242. [English version: Foucault, Michel. *Discipline and Punishment: The Birth of the Prison*. New York 1995].

<sup>15</sup> P. Cook, C. Heilmann, “Censorship and two types of self-censorship”, *LSE Choice Group Working Paper* 2002, vol. 6, no. 2, pp. 1–25.

<sup>16</sup> V. Woolf, *Collected Essays*, Hogarth Press, London 1967, vol. 2, p. 51.

<sup>17</sup> Cf. V. Woolf, *Collected Essays...*, vol. 2, p. 50.

works of Max Beerbohm<sup>18</sup>, who wrote in such a way that “[...] we do not know whether there is any relation between Max the essayist and Mr. Beerbohm the man. We only know that the spirit of personality permeates every word that he writes.”<sup>19</sup>

As Roma Sendyka emphasised, an analysis of Woolf’s essays leads in terms of text personalisation to the following conclusions:

The presence of the first person persona was not desired if it meant an exotic subordination of everything to a single point of view, if it introduced the *I* devoid of any doubt, perfectly sure of its limits, thus fundamentally non-essayistic.<sup>20</sup>

Therefore, essays by Woolf feature the inclusive form of *we*, which builds an agreement between the author and *common readers*, for whom she intended her works. Then, in longer essay forms such as *A Room of One’s Own* or *Three Guineas*, Woolf constructed female narrators endowed with certain characteristics, and yet different from her – as Wendell V. Harris summarised it: “Woolf’s creation of a persona helps create an appreciation of Woolf’s mind.”<sup>21</sup>

A *Personal essay* in an obvious way seemed almost purpose created for the writer’s intellectual studies. As Janusz Sławiński wrote:

Actually an essayist’s imagination rather feeds on inappropriateness and unfairness. In their wanderings, they choose paths distant from the well-worn motorways of intellectual life (literary, political, academic); they value the wandering itself the most, not the drive towards standard goals.<sup>22</sup>

The essayistic *in-between*, the programmed fragmented nature marked with the name of drafts, the courage to have doubts, accented by emphasising one’s own lack of knowledge – as in the essay entitled *Professions for Women*, in which she reflected upon who a woman is and her response was “I don’t know” – were for Woolf an expression of intellectual freedom. The essayistic nature served

<sup>18</sup> Max Beerbohm (1872–1956) – a British essayist, parodist and caricaturist, known for his apt criticism of imperialism presented in the excellent caricatures of typical John Bull or Rudyard Kipling.

<sup>19</sup> V. Woolf, *Collected Essays...*, vol. 2, p. 45.

<sup>20</sup> R. Sendyka, *Nowoczesny esej: studium historycznej świadomości gatunku*, Towarzystwo Autorów i Wydawców Prac Naukowych Universitas, Krakow 2006, p. 257. [English version translated from Polish].

<sup>21</sup> W.V. Harris, “Reflections on the Peculiar Status of the Personal Essay”, *College English* 1996, vol. 58, no. 8, p. 942.

<sup>22</sup> J. Sławiński, “Ośmiotekst eseistyczny”, in: idem, *Teksty i teksty*, Towarzystwo Autorów i Wydawców Prac Naukowych Universitas, Krakow 2000, p. 254. [English version translated from Polish].

a similar function as the one captured by Teresa Bruś in an analysis of the works by Walter Benjamin<sup>23</sup> and Wystan Hugh Auden<sup>24</sup>:

Essaying is a reflective and responsive process of looking back and looking again, observing and seeing with no logical or rhetorical design but with room for being dilatory and not quite familiar with the terrain.<sup>25</sup>

That freedom was reflected in the formula of a journey not free of obstacles, which Woolf used as the framework for *A Room of One's Own*. But the particular tone of *flâneuse* is also visible in her many short essay forms – they possess a clearly kinaesthetic and spatial nature (e.g. *Night Walk*, *Street Haunting: A London Adventure*, *Rambling Round Evelyn*, and *Thoughts on Peace in an Air Raid*)<sup>26</sup>. A year after Hall's trial, in the acclaimed *A Room of One's Own*, the writer stated: "Lock up your libraries [...]; but there is not gate, no lock, no bolt, that you can set upon the freedom of my mind."<sup>27</sup>

That *freedom of my mind* was the goal of the unceasing game between the writer and moral censorship of the epoch, and the similarly sinister (self-)censorship. Thanks to the essayistic experimental space she could study, question, and expand the limits of personal freedom, freedom of expression, and intellectual searching. Thus Woolf restored the once lost women's portion of literary mainstream, though at that time the academic echelon deliberated on the natural intellectual inferiority of women. She demanded the right to love, which led Wilde and Hall in front of the court. She warned about Nazism growing in strength. Therefore, according to the programme assumptions of *The Modern Essay*, Woolf wrote about the freedoms in which she believed deeply, and she could grasp them with exceptional precision, at the same time without leaving the essayistic state of *in-between*.

<sup>23</sup> Walter Benjamin (1892–1940) – a philosopher, theologian, theoretician of culture, translator, literary critic and essayist.

<sup>24</sup> Wystan Hugh Auden (1907–1973) – a renowned English poet and playwright. In the 1930s, young leftist poets (including: C. Day Lewis, L. MacNeice and S. Spender) remained under such an influence of the poet, that they were collectively referred to as the *Auden Generation*.

<sup>25</sup> Cf. T. Bruś, "Essaying in Autobiography: Wystan Hugh Auden's and Walter Benjamin's Faces", *Biography: An Interdisciplinary Quarterly*, 2010, vol. 33.2, p. 334.

<sup>26</sup> In the case of essays translated into Polish, I quote their Polish titles.

<sup>27</sup> V. Woolf, *A Room of One's Own & The Voyage Out*, Wordsworth Classics, Ware 2012, p. 81.

### Liberty: a women's question

Woolf's most acclaimed text on the so-called women's question – i.e. raising the issues of women's rights and their situation within the society – was the extensive essay entitled *A Room of One's Own*. The text has provoked lively debates ever since: it served as an inspiration and was disputed by renowned contemporary female writers, including Doris Lessing (*To Room Nineteen*) and Alice Walker (*In Search of Our Mothers' Gardens: Womanist Prose*).

The essay stemmed from two enthusiastically received lectures which Woolf delivered in 1928 for female students of Newnham College and Girton College, the first two female colleges at Cambridge University. The leading theme of both her speeches was *Women and Literature*, which is why they included scintillating analyses of works by Jane Austen, George Eliot, and Anne, Charlotte and Emily Brontë. According to the assumptions of *The Modern Essay*, the text was saturated with the writer's personality, and her peculiar sense of humour. Quentin Bell, Woolf's nephew, stressed in her biography that *A Room of One's Own* reminded him like no other of the manner in which she used to talk with her friends. Regardless of the *literary pretext* of the lectures, the essay mostly focussed on the matters of women's rights, in particular the right to privacy, financial independence, access to education, and the ability to engage in a professional career.

However, before Woolf presented her views on the women's question, she first constructed a meticulous camouflage: statements regarding the emancipation of women were introduced as if *fiction* or *lies*, while misogynistic positions were perversely assigned the brand of truths. This is an example of a safety setting, using which she established the rules of the game with the readers, and which enabled her to fool the censors:

At any rate, when a subject is highly controversial—and any question about sex is that—one cannot hope to tell the truth. One can only show how one came to hold whatever opinion one does hold. One can only give one's audience the chance of drawing their own conclusions as they observe the limitations, the prejudices, the idiosyncrasies of the speaker. Fiction here is likely to contain more truth than fact. Lies will flow from my lips, but there may perhaps be some truth mixed up with them; it is for you to seek out this truth and to decide whether any part of it is worth keeping. If not, you will of course throw the whole of it into the waste-paper basket and forget all about it.<sup>28</sup>

<sup>28</sup> V. Woolf, *A Room of One's Own*..., pp. 29–30.

Woolf emphasised the fictional status of both the identity of the narrator of the text and the described universities in a similar perverse manner:

I need not say that what I am about to describe has no existence; Oxbridge is an invention; so is Fernham; 'I' is only a convenient term for somebody who has no real being.<sup>29</sup>

In fact, a careful reading of the essay enables one to notice that the writer endowed the narrator with many of her features, Oxbridge corresponds to Cambridge, while Fernham to its female colleges.

Woolf rebutted the objection which was popular at that time that women's artistic talent cannot match that of men's as the majority of renowned authors were male. She argued that as long as the common woman – note that she entitled the collection of essays *The Common Reader* twice – does not possess the same rights held by the common man, exceptional women will have considerable difficulty in becoming successful, including in the area of literature. The main two rights were, according to her, one's own room and a modest income enabling one to live independently.

The author of *Orlando* indicated a range of limitations faced by women who tried to create works of literature. The emphatic illustration of her theses was the fictional character of Judith, Shakespeare's sister, who took her life because, unlike her famous brother, she could not join a theatre troupe or develop her talent – at that time, an actress was such an exceptional sight that for Elizabethans she was nothing short of a dancing dog. As the writer stressed, her contemporary times were not free of similar convictions: Samuel Johnson compared female preachers to dancing dogs, while in 1928 that was the common denomination for female composers. That metaphor resurfaced rather unexpectedly in the third chapter of *A Room of One's Own*, in a poignant satirical portrait of a twisted principle of ownership which lay at the basis of misogyny and colonialism:

[Women] [...] will pass a tombstone or a signpost without feeling an irresistible desire to cut their names on it, as Alf, Bert or Chas. must do in obedience to their instinct, which murmurs if it sees a fine woman go by, or even a dog, *Ce chien est à moi*. And, of course, it may not be a dog, I thought, remembering Parliament Square, the Sièges Allée and other avenues; it may be a piece of land or a man with curly black hair.<sup>30</sup>

That fragment indicates how Woolf reversed and mocked the misogynous metaphor. The most characteristic feature of *A Room of One's Own* is the intellectual freedom reflected in the kinaesthetic dimension of the text. The *flâneuse* narrator

<sup>29</sup> Ibid., p. 30.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid., p. 67.

remains in constant motion crossing extensive areas. Soon, however, one sees that her freedom is the freedom of an outcast or an outsider. In Oxbridge she faced new obstacles: she could not stroll on the lawn because that was an area reserved only for students and professors; she could not visit the library without male *custody*, so it came as no surprise that she passed by the university chapel without even trying to enter, only imagining how she would be thrown out of it as well. Censorship and a lack of women's equal access to education were depicted in a series of closed spaces, which the narrator could not enter.

Even though *A Room of One's Own* offers the most comprehensive summary of Woolf's feminist postulates, her whole essayistic output is filled with references to the so-called women's question. Among her over 700 short essays only a few do not include observations on the subject. One could identify in those four thematic areas: (1) women's rights, (2) *background* female characters, (3) mainstream literature written by women, (4) analyses of the output of outstanding writers in terms of representations of women (or a lack of such). The first area is represented by such essays as: *Professions for Women, Why?* and *Memories of a Working Women's Guild*. Another device typical of Woolf was to present *background* female characters, particularly lesser known women professing in science and literature, such as Jane Harrison (1850–1928), an outstanding researcher of ancient Greece (*The Intellectual Status of Women*), Lucy Baxter (1837–1902), an art critic (*The Countess of Pembroke's Arcadia*), and Edith Birkhead (1889–1951), a literary scientist, author of a pioneering work on Gothic literature (*Gothic Romance*). A particularly interesting device was focalisation used by Woolf in, e.g. an essay entitled *Reflections at Sheffield Place*, in which the character of the historian Edward Gibbon (1737–1794) was presented from the point of view of three women: Maria, Hester Gibson and Aunt Kitty. An interesting story, from the point of view of contemporary affirmative research into women's writings, was in Woolf's essays the restoration or introduction to the literary mainstream of grand works authored by women – protagonists of such texts as: *Women and Fiction, Aurora Leigh, George Eliot, Jane Eyre and Wuthering Heights, Jane Austen* and *Four Figures*. Woolf's reflections on representations of women in the works of renowned prose writers as presented in the essays: *Joseph Conrad, The Novels of Thomas Hardy* or *Henry James* also prove extremely valid.

### Liberty: love without a name

A somewhat sidelined area in Woolf's liberty-related considerations was the issue of tolerance for persons of different psycho-sexual orientations. Nonetheless, in *A Room of One's Own* that issue occupied a significant place: on the one

hand, due to the growing pressure of moral censorship after Hall's trial, and for personal reasons on the other. Many of her friends from the Bloomsbury group were non-heteronormative, such as Lytton Stretchey, the painter Duncan Grant or the economist Maynard Keynes, to name but a few. For the Cambridge lectures, Woolf came in the company of Vita Sackville-West, a writer, aristocrat, and sapphist, as women who loved other women were commonly referred to at that time. The writer was so fascinated with her friend's personality that she wrote her fictional biography: the novel *Orlando*, often called the "the most beautiful love letter" in British literature.

In the essay *A Room of One's Own*, Woolf made a claim in an exceptionally careful manner for the right to love which led Wilde and Hall in front of the court. Fearing censorship, she considered each sentence in such a way for its ambiguity and ironic reading to protect her against any possible accusations. The *chilling effect* of the writers' trials is indicated in the text through ellipses, i.e. instances of pauses, silence, but also (self-)censorship Woolf administered herself. Several times there appeared a series of questions regarding freedom of expression, and the presence of a censor in the courtroom – in the following fragment it was Charles Biron, who prohibited the propagation of *The Well of Loneliness*. The writer thus built an anticipation full of tension:

And, determined to do my duty by her as reader if she would do her duty by me as writer, I turned the page and read ... I am sorry to break off so abruptly. Are there no men present? Do you promise me that behind that red curtain over there the figure of Sir Charles Biron is not concealed? We are all women you assure me? Then I may tell you that the very next words I read were these – 'Chloe liked Olivia...' Do not start. Do not blush. Let us admit in the privacy of our own society that these things sometimes happen. Sometimes women do like women.<sup>31</sup>

The famous phrase "Chloe liked Olivia..." is, in fact, nothing more than just a declaration of fondness. And yet when quoted in the context of a man who forbade the selling of Hall's book, it provided impetus for ironic mocking of censorship. Whether due to the fact that the topic of love between people of the same sex was considered as forbidden, one could still write that a woman liked another woman. The hyperbolised reaction of the audience, who upon hearing that simple and insignificant phrase was supposed to rise and blush, was also mocked.

But the mockery of the *chilling effect* of Hall's trial was also Woolf's attempt at taming her own anxieties regarding the fact of raising the topic of *the love without a name*. When the writer returned to Chloe and Olivia for the second time, she could not describe their relationship without some self-censorship. The

<sup>31</sup> Ibid., pp. 85–86.

manuscript of the first version of the essay was branded by the author with the following side note:

*'Chloe liked Olivia; they shared a –' [the words came at] the bottom of the page; the pages had stuck; while fumbling to open them there flashed into my mind the inevitable policeman; the summons; the order to attend the court; the dreary waiting; the Magistrate coming in with a little bow; the glass of water; the counsel for the prosecution; for the defence; the verdict; this book is called obscene; & flames rising, perhaps on Tower Hill, as they consumed [that] masses of print paper.'*<sup>32</sup>

Thus, in the final version, one will learn that the women shared not their *lives* or a *house*, but a laboratory, while one of them was married. The narration was tempered and limited to a story which could be told without exposing oneself to censorship:

*'Chloe liked Olivia. They shared a laboratory together....'* I read on and discovered that these two young women were engaged in mincing liver, which is, it seems, a cure for pernicious anaemia; although one of them was married and had—I think I am right in stating—two small children.<sup>33</sup>

The writer one more time referred to the issue of love between women and Hall's trial in the final chapter of the essay:

The truth is, I often like women. I like their unconventionality. I like their completeness. I like their anonymity. I like—but I must not run on in this way. That cupboard there—you say it holds clean table-napkins only; but what if Sir Archibald Bodkin were concealed among them? Let me then adopt a sterner tone. Have I, in the preceding words, conveyed to you sufficiently the warnings and reprobation of mankind? [...] I have indicated what Napoleon once thought of you and what Mussolini thinks now. [...] I have referred to Professor X and given prominence to his statement that women are intellectually, morally and physically inferior to men.<sup>34</sup>

In that instance, the censor reference applied to Archibald Bodkin (1862–1957), the main prosecutor in Hall's trial, who considered the fact of presenting people of different orientation in a positive way as her main trespass, while for the

<sup>32</sup> Cf. S.M. Squier, "Invisible Assistants or Lab Partners? Female Modernism and the Culture(s) of Modern Science", in: *Rereading Modernism: New Directions in Feminist Criticism*, L. Rado (ed.), Garland Press, New York 1994, p. 310: "A handwritten note by Woolf at the bottom of the page explains the concerns that prevented her from continuing with the passage:"

<sup>33</sup> V. Woolf, *A Room of One's Own...*, pp. 86–87.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 106.

book, in which the most graphic scene was one with a kiss, he demanded a ban on its publication. Woolf concluded her essay in a framing device: there returned the figure of the incredible narrator, whose final message to female readers constituted the writer's credo *à rebours*.

### Freedom from dictatorship and war

No other essay by Woolf was so unfavourably received by the critics as the extensive publication of 1938 entitled *Three Guineas*. The enthusiastic reaction of the readers somewhat attenuated for the unpleasant experiences associated with the negative comments of people close to her, reflected well in the condescending tone of Quentin Bell: "It is a result of an exceptionally odd mind, and, as I believe, a very odd state of it."<sup>35</sup> Contemporarily, however, it is considered as one of the most interesting texts by Woolf, in which she spoke, to use Carol Gilligan's term, "in her own voice."

The tripartite epistolary narration of *Three Guineas* has a polyphonic character. The starting point is the letter of a pacifist vexed by the question "How to prevent war?"; he asks the narrator to help him, also financially, in his cause. The narrator tried to convince him that guaranteeing equal rights for all is a path leading to lasting peace. The menace of war intruded the text from time to time interrupting the reflections with a heart-breaking image: a photograph of destroyed houses and dead people.

Both in terms of narration and the themes, Woolf in *Three Guineas* abandoned the previously used strategies of *evading* censorship, and, disregarding her friends' fears, also seldom applied self-censorship. The polyphonic nature of the text was already an expression of opposition towards censorship, which enforced a single acceptable narration. Teresa Winterhalter posited even that:

[...] throughout the essay, Woolf scrutinizes the totalitarian stance of the fascist leader and equates this position with the first-person singular position of a conventional essayist.<sup>36</sup>

Moreover, the writer directly indicated the function of stylistic devices, which previously only signalled censorship to the readers:

<sup>35</sup> Q. Bell, *Virginia Woolf. Biografia...*, p. 523.

<sup>36</sup> T. Winterhalter, "'What Else Can I Do But Write?' Discursive Disruption and the Ethics of Style in Virginia Woolf's *Three Guineas*", *Hypatia* 2003, vol. 18, issue 4, p. 237.

What then can be the nature of the fear that still makes concealment necessary between educated people and reduces our boasted freedom to a farce?... Again there are three dots; again they represent a gulf—of silence this time, of silence inspired by fear.<sup>37</sup>

Woolf proceeded to find the source of the fear which becomes the reason for self-censorship. And she found it in the gradual limiting of the rights of specific groups of people, mainly women, but also Jews and democrats who were the *new women*. That was why equality in terms of women's access to education and labour were for her one of the guarantees of peace. As Maggie Humm emphasised: "Those individual liberties, according to Woolf, are completely inter-dependent. Fascism develops in the private patriarchal home."<sup>38</sup> The previously referenced image of destroyed houses and dead people was juxtaposed with the image of Fascism:

His eyes are glazed; his eyes glare. His body, which is braced in an unnatural position, is tightly cased in a uniform. Upon the breast of that uniform are sewn several medals and other mystic symbols. His hand is upon a sword. He is called in German and Italian Führer or Duce; in our own language Tyrant or Dictator. And behind him lie ruined houses and dead bodies—men, women and children.<sup>39</sup>

The portrait of the dictator referred to the 1935 book entitled *Quack, quack* by her husband Leonard Woolf – a sagacious study of Fascism from the public perspective. The narration in *Three Guineas* constantly travels between the private and the public spheres showing their inter-dependency and blurry borders. The only path for women who wish to prevent war is the Outsider Association, while according to Woolf's definition "[...] they would be helped, you will agree, by their position as outsiders, that freedom from unreal loyalties, that freedom from interested motives which are at present assured them by the State [...]"<sup>40</sup> Therefore, it was an attitude of voluntarily waiving any public honours, which in turn require one to waive one's freedom of expression; it was protection of one's privacy from onlookers, and, finally, it was life in accordance with oneself. The aim of the Outsider Association was, in fact, to demand respect for the dignity of all people: "[...] to the respect in their persons of the great principles of Justice and Equality and Liberty."<sup>41</sup>

<sup>37</sup> V. Woolf, *A Room of One's Own and Three Guineas*, introduction H. Lee, Vintage Random House, London 2001, p. 218.

<sup>38</sup> M. Humm, "Memory, Photography, and Modernism: The 'dead bodies and ruined houses' of Virginia Woolf's *Three Guineas*", *Signs* 2003, vol. 28, no. 2, p. 649.

<sup>39</sup> V. Woolf, *A Room of One's Own and Three Guineas...*, p. 240.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 211.

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 241.

In *Three Guineas* one will seldom find the light irony and the excellent parody scenes so typical of the essays of the author of *A Room of One's Own*, though those certainly include the descriptions of the ceremonial outfits of soldiers, judges, and the members of the academia, suggestive of the Dreadnought hoax. In 1938, when Europe was sinking into darkness, it was increasingly difficult to find laughter, which according to Woolf had the power to save our liberty and humanity:

There is nothing, indeed, so difficult as laughter, but no quality is more valuable. It is a knife that both prunes and trains and gives symmetry and sincerity to our acts and to the spoken and the written word.<sup>42</sup>

### Final remarks

What is surprising in Woolf's essays is the scale and the audacity of her intellectual searches – several decades ago she originally approached topics which have remained controversial ever since. Moreover, she did that in a time of increased repressive censorship and growing totalitarianisms – some had to pay even the highest price for freedom. In fact, Woolf was included in the *Sonderfahndungsbuch G.B.* list (also referred to as the *Black Book*), next to prime ministers: Winston Churchill, Neville Chamberlain and Ignacy Paderewski. The persons listed in the *Black Book* were considered by the Nazis as the enemies of the Third Reich, and were supposed to be arrested first during the planned invasion of the United Kingdom<sup>43</sup>.

Could anyone consider the writer's attention in avoiding any possible consequences of repressive censorship in such circumstances as self-censorship, even its public type? Or maybe as (self-)censorship with a dominant role of that which she managed to communicate regardless of censorship? Doris Lessing was more inclined towards the latter interpretation; when referring to the influence Woolf had on her and other female writers, she emphasised it was mostly about "[...] her existence, bravery, sense of humour, the ability to view women's position without bitterness."<sup>44</sup>

<sup>42</sup> V. Woolf, *The Value of Laughter*, in: eadem, *The Essays of Virginia Woolf*, vol. I, ed. A. McNeillie, Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, San Diego 1986, vol. I, p. 60.

<sup>43</sup> Die Sonderfahndungsliste G.B.: [the Black Book], Imperial War Museum, <http://www.iwm.org.uk/collections/item/publication/17293>, (accessed on: 15.12.2015).

<sup>44</sup> D. Lessing, *Wstęp* in: V. Woolf, *Siedem szkiców*, D. Bradshaw (ed.), trans. M. Lavergne, Wydawnictwo Prószyński i S-ka, Warsaw 2009, p. 13. [English version translated from Polish].

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Paulina Pająk

### **Moments of liberty. (Self-)censorship Games in the Essays of Virginia Woolf**

(Summary)

What is surprising in Virginia Woolf’s essays is the scale and the audacity of her intellectual searches – in the time of increased repressive censorship and growing totalitarianisms, she approached the themes of freedom which have remained controversial ever since. The article presents the essayistic nature as a strategy applied by Woolf in her *personal essays* to avoid censorship, and intentionally expand the limits of freedoms important to her. The author offers an outline of the mechanism of repressive censorship and the chilling effect it worked in the interwar United Kingdom based on the examples of suspensions of outstanding modernist works and show-trials of writers. She presents three areas of study of freedom in Woolf’s essays: women’s emancipation, tolerance towards non-heteronormative persons, and pacifism, as well as the areas of private and public (self-)censorship which existed therein.

Keywords: Virginia Woolf, liberty, censorship, self-censorship, personal essay, women’s emancipation, non-heteronormativity, pacifism.



Tomasz Wójcik\*

## Two freedoms. (Poetic) fragments of Michel Houellebecq

### 1.

Even in France, Michel Houellebecq's poetry remains overshadowed by his prose works, which have been widely received and usually valued highly. That is even more true in Poland. Yet the French writer authored several poetry collections published rather regularly, mainly in the 1990s. Those included *La Pour-suite du bonheur* (1991), *Le Sens du combat* (1996), *Renaissance* (1999), and *Configuration du dernier rivage* (2013). Since 2000, his poetry has been published in several selected and collected editions.

The hierarchy of genres in Houellebecq's writings, the centre of which is defined by novels, seems unalterable (those need to be supplemented with essays). But poetry (let me add that Houellebecq debuted as a poet) constitutes an important complement to his prose and essays. Significant both in terms of their themes (the same matters and motives reappear in them incessantly, or even obsessively), and problems (they express similar diagnoses of the structure of the world, and condition of contemporary times). Those reasons alone, i.e. the faint presence in Poland, and a significant consonance with the novels and essays, suffice to apply more careful attention to the poetry of the French author.

Immediately, I need to abandon some directions in the readings of Houellebecq's poems. I shall not focus on analysing their, actually worth analysing, poetics: one which is surprisingly traditional, which finds strong foundation in the classicist model fundamental for the French poetic tradition. Yet, one must at least note that the writer's poetic volumes are proof of his search for a "more capacious form" – as they include fragments written in prose, e.g. thoughts and remarks. His early collection entitled *Rester vivant, méthode* (1991) is sometimes listed as essays, sometimes poetry. Neither shall I, as that would require a different and

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separate study, conduct a direct comparison of Houellebecq's poems with his essays. Finally, I ought to make a reservation that this will not be a philological study, rather, putting it shortly, a philosophical-sociological one. In that sense, I shall consider the French author's poetry as a complete world-view expression.

Yet what is the object of this expression divided into individual poems? What notions co-create it, and are of key importance in it/ for it? Undoubtedly one of those is the notion of freedom. And to that notion – its usage and significance in Houellebecq's poetry, in its fragments structured using connected and unconnected speech – I shall devote my further consideration.

## 2.

In one such fragment, opening the *Rester vivant, méthode* collection, Houellebecq recorded the following thought:

If the world consists of suffering, it is so because in its essence, it is free. Suffering constitutes the unavoidable result of a free play of the elements of a system. We should know about that and say that. (p. 12)<sup>1</sup>

That thought should be considered as the foundation of the writer's poetic searches circling around the notion of freedom. On the one hand, what stands out is its radicalism, on the other, its openness to various interpretations. The radicalism consists of a complete equalling or even association of freedom and suffering. Freedom understood as an ontological or structural essence of existence creates favourable conditions for suffering – it appears to be its source. Even more so – according to Houellebecq they are virtually the same. Such an association, as indicated by his prose, can be referred to various areas, and dimensions of existence.

Thus, what is uncovered first is its ontological-metaphysical perspective. The French author has not called it so directly, yet through the general character of his consideration, he has allowed such an interpretation. According to it, the structure of existence is filled with freedom. As I understand it, all deterministic thinking constitutes only an attempt at rationalising, and organising “the world”, which in its origin and, let me reiterate, essence is a free “world”. Yet free also means (the word appears many times in Houellebecq's poems) hollow, i.e. devoid of any measures and rules, norms and principles. A human being tossed into such a world

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<sup>1</sup> All quotations from Michel Houellebecq's poetry come from the following edition: *Poesie*, Editions J'ai lu, Paris 2010. I am quoting in my own translation into Polish. [English version translated from Polish]. The numbers in brackets after quotations refer to that edition.

remains completely lonely, without any, metaphysically sanctioned, signs, directives, and references. Such thinking surely entails the tradition of existentialism in terms of its original and canonic form. I consider the original form according to the stipulations by Arthur Schopenhauer (the philosopher was quoted directly, and as a confession, in one of the poems), while the canonic form according to the 20<sup>th</sup>-century existentialism. The glossary of notions used by Houellebecq, in which freedom and suffering occupy an important place, refers to those particular sources of philosophical inspiration.

Then the “free play of the elements of the system” may refer to the physical-nature world – particularly when its word “parties” becomes translated – as in the title of one of the French writer’s novels – as “particles”. Yet it can also refer to the human, social world. According to Houellebecq’s views, those worlds seem to be governed by analogical or even identical laws and rules. Therefore, his poems include such an emphatic presence of animalistic metaphors, and so often there appear comparisons equalling man and animal (for example, and especially, to a dog).

### 3.

At this point, there emerges another, not philosophical but social, dimension of Houellebecq’s poetry. The philosopher becomes a sociologist, who tries to face the condition of the contemporary civilisation founded on liberal thinking, or even the dogma of liberalism – to study, describe, and evaluate it.

What does that poetically depicted civilisation look like in the poems of the French author? The principle of free exchange seems to be its basic principle, similarly to Jean Baudrillard’s considerations. What, then, is the object of that exchange? Mainly human bodies, which undergo it in social space. That is why in so many of Houellebecq’s poems the metaphor of that exchange becomes various forms and instances of pornography (stores and magazines, theatres and films), sex tourism in particular. They often include descriptions of holiday clubs in exotic countries, in which the freedom of changing bodies, and the provision of mutual sexual services assume a particularly emphatic shape, metaphorical and displaying verismo.

But the exchange cannot, of course, in any way satisfy the need for love. Thus so many poems by Houellebecq constitute variations on loneliness. Often that is reflected in the loneliness of an inhabitant of a big city (often a flâneur strolling the streets of Paris). Other poems directly express and confirm – as expressed in one of the works by Tadeusz Różewicz – the conviction that the contemporary erotic pieces can only be evidence of the need for love, a description of a lack of it.

Therefore, the social space recorded in the poems of the French writer constitutes a space of “human beings” (that is one of Houellebecq’s marked terms) circulating inside it, and their bodies, which enter exchange relations with each other. That space is, at the same time, materially very particular and casual. It is a world of modern skyscrapers (Paris’s La Defense borough, with its iconic GAN skyscraper, being its symbolic manifestation), hypermarkets, Paris metro, and TGV trains, as well as the previously mentioned holiday clubs and hotels.

The “free play of the elements of the system”, which continues in that world, is not, however, in any way approachable. Its social and spiritual outcomes do not only include estrangement and loneliness. Houellebecq sees the consequences of thus understood freedom much more radically. In a fragment of his poem, he thus defined them:

The society in which you live is poised to destroy you. (...) Indifference shall be its weapon. (p. 28)

And he added:

You cannot allow yourselves to accept the same attitude. Go on the attack! (p. 28)

At that moment the sociologist turns into a moralist who formulates directions on how to operate, and act within the space of freedom, which, in fact, proves a space of indifference, and condemns people to loneliness. He expressed them, for example, in a radically and unequivocally sounding sentence: “You must hate freedom as much as you can.” (p. 29)

That type of moralising assumed in some poems of Houellebecq’s works a distinctly political tone. One of such, entitled *Ostatni bastion przeciwko liberalizmowi*, in its rhetoric sounds at times almost like a programme or a slogan of a political party:

We reject liberal ideology because it cannot deliver any meaning, or mode of reconciling the individual with others within a community which could be consider human (...) Trust individual drive, that is what they keep telling you everywhere (...) To that, I have only one answer (...) That the individual, I’m talking about a human, is a small, both cruel and miserable animal, And that it’s futile to trust it, if it is not (...) limited (...) by the rigorous rules of inviolable morality, Which, of course, is no random manifestation (...) of liberal ideology. (p. 78–79)

I will not endeavour to discuss that project within political categories. I shall only state that the quoted words can, and actually do, sound strange and disturbing. Yet, of course, they do not mean that Houellebecq transitioned into an anti-

democratic stance, that he opposes emancipation processes, or, even less so, that he supports any form of authoritarianism. It is the project of a philosopher/poet, a sociologist/poet, and a moralist-poet, not a politician. A project which can, however, particularly from the point of view of liberalism which fetishises freedom, seem peculiar or even menacing in terms of its intentions.

#### 4.

Therefore, the notion of freedom, which is key for Houellebecq's poetic works, reveals its two main meanings: an ontological one and a sociological one. On the one hand, the French author proposes a concept of the structure of existence based on freedom (together with other consequences of that fact, among which suffering bears particular significance). On the other, that role of Houellebecq seems incomparably more widely discussed both in France and in Poland. He formulates an insightful and critical diagnosis of the contemporary liberal society composing a (poetic) morality play worthy of the turn of the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

But, the core of Houellebecq's thinking, the indicated meanings of the notion of freedom cannot be divided exactly. That is the case for at least two reasons. First of all, because the ontological concept of existence conditions a social diagnosis (e.g. when the human world is described and interpreted within natural categories). Secondly, because in both cases freedom ceases to be an obvious, unquestionable, and undisputed value, and, paradoxically, in a similar manner it reveals its other, ambiguous, third dimension.

If, as deemed by Houellebecq, the world (including the social world) is a space of freedom, then (I am once again using his term) "human beings" put it to improper use. According to Martin Heidegger, freedom is the essence of the truth. Because only (as I understand that thought) in the light of freedom, can one see the truth, as freedom is its *sine qua non*. The French writer would surely agree with that statement. Yet the truth about the contemporary liberal society, which is revealed in the light of its freedom, is a dark and catastrophic truth as the "free play of the elements of the system", their circulation, and exchange result in suffering in various forms: loneliness, estrangement, and, finally, the sense of lack of meaning.

That is the case because meaning seems to only reside in discussions, it only flickers in dialogue. "We are a discussion", as Friedrich Holderlin wrote in a draft of his unfinished poem. Between human "nomads" and "molecules" (Houellebecq's terms), which form a whole, known as society, there is no such discussion, and there never can be one. It was replaced by an exchange of not even words,

between which meaning is born, but naked bodies of “both cruel and miserable animals.” Thus it was replaced, according to the laws of nature, by a “social Blitzkrieg” (p. 162), a “dog fight” (p. 179).

Therefore, Houellebecq eventually defined such a freedom as another, delusive and deceptive, “name for emptiness” (p. 282). And he recommended a thorough rethinking of it – a rethinking of the meanings, and the significance of one of the fundamental notions of the modern European culture. Yet before he himself set onto that task, he radically reversed the signs of values assigned to him by culture. He violated and questioned the freedom myth. He used for it irony and sarcasm, as those are the only means available to a poet. He discussed the social space as a numb space, an emptiness devoid of any discussions, in which there occur motions of “human beings” reduced to bodies, and compared to animals, in which there occurs an exchange and a struggle between them. He identified, as the final result of freedom, a decline of any “human form” (p. 284). He supported it, which, in fact, is a very French gesture when discussing “form”. One cannot assign that “form” to freedom considered ontologically. However, it is demanded, as Michel Houellebecq reminds us incessantly, by freedom in a social understanding. For the time being, though, as he states similarly emphatically in his works, we live in a convenient, yet empty, house of liberalism.

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Tomasz Wójcik

### **Two freedoms. (Poetic) fragments of Michel Houellebecq**

(Summary)

This article discusses the poetry of Michel Houellebecq. Its reading as a world-view statement is defined by its key notion of freedom. The thus specified reading enables one to identify various meanings of the notion included in the poems of the French writer: the philosophical and the social meanings.

Keywords: Michel Houellebecq, poetry, freedom

Kamila Kamińska-Chełminiak\*

## Central Office of Press Control/ Main Control Office of Press, Publication and Performances – background, audit scope and staff

The Main Control Office of Press, Publication and Performances was originally under the name of the Central Office of Press Control (hereinafter: the COPC) by the order of the minister of public security – Stanisław Radkiewicz, on 19 January 1945 in Warsaw. The COCP was subject to the Ministry of Public Security. After the fall of the Warsaw Uprising, on 3 November 1944, based on the order of Nikolai Bułganin, the representative of the Soviet Government in PKWN, two so-called Soviet advisers came to Poland, the officers of the Soviet GŁAWLIT (the Main Office of Protection of State Secret and Press) – Piotr Gładin and Kazimierz Jarmuż, who had to organise the institution of censorship based on the Soviet model<sup>1</sup>. Jakub Berman told about the Soviet consultants in an interview with Teresa Torańska, he called them “quite cunning and shrewd, after all, they were from the security forces, sensitive to any kind of frauds [made by the Polish Communists]”<sup>2</sup>. In turn, Józef Światło said, in an interview with Zbigniew Błażyński, they were assigned – in the context of the creation of the office of security, but it can be assumed that a similar situation took place in the structures of propaganda and censorship – “to all the major resorts (sometimes even at the provincial levels)”<sup>3</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup> T.M. Gorajewa, *Blickrig v Polszu*, in: *Iskljuczit' wsiakije upominanija... Oczerki istorii sovietskoj cenzury*, Moscow 1995, pp. 108–111.

<sup>2</sup> T. Torańska, *Oni*, Warsaw 1990, p. 75.

<sup>3</sup> Z. Błażyński, *Mówi Józef Światło: Za kulisami bezpieki i partii 1944–1955*, Warsaw 2003, p. 10.

### Soviet advisers from GŁAWLIT

After the meeting with Jakub Berman, on 5 January 1945, agents were recruited to the Press Control Offices. Berman came out with a proposal to appoint as a director of the institution, an employee of the Polish Embassy in Moscow, who would watch over the proper line of ideology of a new facility, but eventually it was decided that the function would be taken by Leon Rzendowski, a member of PPR; before the war, he was an engineer agronomist, without experience in the work of the censorship, who was charged with the organization of the institution under the supervision of Soviet advisers of GŁAWLIT. Rzendowski, at the time of the nomination, was the chief of the department of agriculture at PKWN<sup>4</sup>. In the COCP, a chief and three censors worked. Since 20 January 1945, all central Polish newspapers began to be controlled. At the turn of February and March 1945, GŁAWLIT employees reported in the headquarters about significant merits of “a young Polish censorship, which without looking at the deficiencies and not enough experienced, implemented Bolshevik style of work, of fraternal Soviet censorship”<sup>5</sup>.

Censors from the Military Censorship of the HQ of the Polish Army were delegated to work in the COCP<sup>6</sup>. The COCP was to serve the party management of PPR. The establishment was not publicly announced.

The COCP was not the only office responsible for the censorship and propaganda at that time. It is worth mentioning that the law on the establishment of the Polish Committee of National Liberation of 21 July 1944, established the Resort of Information and Propaganda, which was liquidated in 1947. The tasks of the resort were the issues of daily papers, periodical publications, press agencies, information and telegraph, radio, film production and cinematography, issues of informative publications and propaganda as well as mass propaganda in the country and abroad, and “other issues unless they are dedicated to the scope of activities of other resorts”. In practice, the competence of MIiP covered with the scope of the activities of a number of other resorts and institutions, inter alia the Resort of Art and Culture, the Resort of Education and CBKP/GUKPPiW.

By the power of digression, one should also mention that the structure of the Resort of Public Security (since 1 December 1944 MPS) included the Censorship Department established on 1 September 1944, which dealt with the censorship of correspondence, though PKWN issued a decree to introduce the war censor-

<sup>4</sup> At the same time, established on 18 July 1944, Resort of Information and Propaganda, created during a meeting of the Management Board of the Union of the Polish Patriots and delegates from National Council, M. Ciećwierz, *Polityka prasowa 1944–1948*, Warsaw 1989, p. 31. See also: *Pierwszy cenzor Polski Ludowej*, „Rzeczpospolita” 1994, 16–17 VII.

<sup>5</sup> T.M. Gorjaeva, *Blickrig v Polszu...*, p. 291.

<sup>6</sup> *Główny Urząd Kontroli Prasy 1945–1949*, oprac. D. Nałęcz, Warsaw 1994, p. 27.

ship on 28 December 1944. On 15 January 1946, the Censorship Department was transformed into the Main Censorship Office, and then on 2 December 1946, the correspondence per-lustration was taken by B Office, and since 15 December 1947, VII Office of II Department<sup>7</sup>.

Although the COCP was established in January, its field facilities started operations, due to organizational and technical reasons, a few weeks later. E.g. WBKP in Kielce started operation on 9 March 1945, in Kraków on 16 February, in Rzeszów on 1 April.

### Recruitment process

Until 15 November 1945 (then was transformed into GUKPPiW), the COCP was subjected to the minister of public safety, Stanisław Radkiewicz, therefore, the natural source of recruitment involved officers of the Security Office, who, as stated by Piotr Kołakowski in the monograph devoted to the activities of NKVD and GRU on the Polish land during World War II, were recruited from three sources: intelligence and subversive groups trained by NKVD, the Polish Army in the Soviet Union and members of the People's Army. The decisive role in the security structures was played by people trained in the Soviet Union, particularly during the courses in Kuibyshev<sup>8</sup>. Since the beginning of the Resort of Public Security (the time of the transformation of PKWN in the Provisional Government, on 31 December 1944, one changed its name to the Ministry of Public Security) was under the strict control of the Soviet security authorities. Orders of the SO, as Kołakowski writes, were dependent on and closely linked to exposures of NKGB, NKVD and "Smersh" counterespionage. The Soviet delegates and advisers operated at every level of the Resort of Public Safety and had a decisive influence on all political and social issues.<sup>9</sup>

SO officers were not suitable to operate in such a specific industry. They were recruited from the lowest levels of the society. The security unit involved usually bandits who previously often collaborated in Germany. Their qualifications to work in the Security raised doubts even of Radkiewicz.<sup>10</sup>

Objections to the censors recruited from the SO were raised by the chief of WBKP in Łódź during the briefing in June 1945. "Practice shows that censorship must be installed by the headquarters and province directly, and not to take people

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<sup>7</sup> G. Majchrzak, „Wojenna” cenzura, „Biuletyn Instytutu Pamięci Narodowej” 2004, no 2, p. 50. See also: *Aparat bezpieczeństwa w Polsce. Kadra kierownicza 1944–1956*, vol. I, ed. by K. Szwagrzyk, Warsaw 2005, p. 30.

<sup>8</sup> P. Kołakowski, *NKWD i GRU na ziemiach polskich 1939–1945*, Warsaw 2002, p. 277.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 283.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 284.

from the Safety. Hence, the conclusion is that, in my opinion, we should recruit people with higher education from the office. Good will is not enough here, a man must represent a high level”.<sup>11</sup> The quoted chief was forced, about which he also spoke during the briefing, to dismiss a significant group: “We were forced to change 50% of the censorship unit in a month. These people we sent to the SO, and we recruited people of the Democratic Party and the Writers Association. In this way, instead of people ruthlessly honest and dedicated, we received people with higher education”.<sup>12</sup>

### **No people willing to work in the censorship**

A major problem influencing on the operation of provincial, municipal and county Control Offices of Press was the lack of people willing to practice as a censor. The directors of provincial control offices addressed this problem to PPR, but, according to the words of one of the chiefs “[...] those recommended were mostly young high school students, and even a woman, who has been a censor before the war, applied”.<sup>13</sup> “We have no-one to rely on in the counties and municipal offices, said during the briefing in 1948 the director of one of the provincial control office, because people are captured by the ministries, political parties, industry. People go there, because it is a financial promotion for them”.<sup>14</sup>

Censors went to the COCP themselves (e.g. based on recommendations), or had previously worked in the structures of information and propaganda, from where they moved to newly created offices of censorship. One of the censors, mentioning its origins, wrote that before the war it had met “[...] on the road of life, communists. It understood the great truth of socialism”, “the ideology of the communist party became the gospel for it”. “At the same time, it began operating with its father, who was a member of PPR during the occupation, and a brother, an employee of the SO after the liberation” – described its story in the Bulletin of Information and Instructions, an internal document of censors.<sup>15</sup>

The first censors were captured according to the following criteria: acceptance of post-Yalta reality, willingness to work, reading skills, relative knowledge of literature and the Polish press.

If the above criteria were met, age was not important. One of female censor mentioned that she had become a censor at the age of 17, and while working in the

<sup>11</sup> *Główny Urząd Kontroli Prasy 1945–1949...*, p. 62.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>13</sup> AAN, GUKPPiW, Sekretariat Prezesa. Odprawy krajowe 4–5.06.1948, Ref. No. 421, vol. III, p. 47.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 49.

<sup>15</sup> AAN, GUKPPiW, Biuletyn Informacyjno-Instrukcyjny 1955, No 1 (37), p. 1–2, Ref. No. 420.

office, she graduated and got to college (to be more precisely, the Evening University of Marxism-Leninism). Another of female censor, by mentioning in 1955 her beginnings in the profession, wrote: “[...] we, young people, like me, who came to the office at the age of 20, we have every right and duty to say that the office grew us up. The Office, i.e. people working there, people bound by love and enthusiasm to our thankless, tedious and inefficient work”.<sup>16</sup>

A breakthrough in the selection of personnel occurred in 1948. One began to deeply analyse CVs of censors admitted to work. The Director of GUKPPiW, Antoni Bida, said in 1949, during the national briefing, that the current employees selection was unreliable. “If CVs were reviewed, Bida claimed, that was rather a formality. They were rarely checked. [...] I note that this does not mean the introduction of the atmosphere of man-hunting or mistrust. That would be harmful. But you just have to know who to work with and do it discreetly and robustly”.<sup>17</sup>

Newly hired employees, during a number of years of work in censorship, were provided with various trainings to improve professional and ideological qualifications. They began studying at the Central School of Planning and Statistics, since 1952, on the Evening University of Marxism-Leninism, some, e.g. from the financial departments, were provided with the Higher Courses Accounting of Budget at the Presidium of the Council of Ministers.

Although self-study lasted for quite a long time, there are examples showing that, in the Main Office of Press, Publications and Performances, one could develop its career and be promoted from the position of a cleaner to an overseer of the Secret Registry or a political censor *par excellence*, which confirms the assertion, how much manpower was not enough in the post-war period.<sup>18</sup>

### Establishment of GUKPPiW

On 15 November 1945, the COCP was transformed by the resolution of the Council of Ministers into the Main Office of Control of Press, Publications and Performances and was subjected to supervision by the Presidium of the Council of Ministers (although in practice it was still subject to Jakub Berman, who, at the same time, was responsible for MBP).<sup>19</sup> Exclusion of GUKPPiW from MBP and the affiliation at the Presidium of the Council of Ministers was to offset security offices from significant influence on the most important press decisions. The changed position of the office was also to prevent from associating GUKPPiW with terror.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid., p. 14.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid., p. 89.

<sup>18</sup> AAN, GUKPPiW, Biuletyn Informacyjno-Instruktażowy 1955, No 1 (37), p. 52, Ref. No. 420.

<sup>19</sup> *Główny Urząd Kontroli Prasy 1945–1949...*, p. 17.

Tadeusz Zabłudowski was appointed as the Director of GUKPPiW. He was a pre-war communist, sent to the post by PPR, when leaving the position of the chief editor of “Głos Ludu”, a press unit of PPR.

The legal frame was provided for censorship by the Decree of 5 July 1946, signed by the President of the National Council of Bolesław Bierut and the Prime Minister Edward Osóbka Morawski. The decree was repealed on 31 July 1981, after the adoption by the Parliament of the Law the act on the control of publications and performances.

The whole decree covered half a page of a manuscript. The tasks of GUKPPiW were formed rather imprecisely and vaguely, which left officials considerable space for free interpretation of individual records.

The tasks of GUKPPiW included supervision over press, publications and performances in order to prevent from:

- a) threatening the political system of the Polish State,
- b) disclosure of state secrets,
- c) violation of the international relations of the Polish State,
- d) violation of the law and good manners,
- e) misleading the public by providing messages incompatible with reality.<sup>20</sup>

The general records of the act provided the possibility of any interpretation, particularly in the case of the last paragraph. Although the decree did not imply that GUKPPiW would be responsible for granting concessions for the issuance of press, in practice this operation came within the scope of the tasks of the office. The decree had no real importance towards the implemented rules of establishing and complying with the law by the communists. From the point of view of an average censor, ideological trainings and instructional publications, determining whether the material threatens the interests of the state, which were used in a daily work, had more important meaning than the legal basis for the activities of the office. A major role is also played by intuition and political knowledge as well as insight allowing to independently determine the content of “reactionary and hostile, under the old categories of thinking about the new reality”.<sup>21</sup>

The control covered: magazines, brochures, books, libraries, theatres, cinemas, radio networks, exhibitions, museums, printing houses, and exactly the same entities that had been controlled by MiiP. The contacts between the control offices of press and other ministries responsible for information, art and education were not always correct. For example, in Kielce, the chief of WBKP, during the briefing in 1945, stated that contacts between WBKP, the Ministry of Culture and Art and the Ministry of Information and Propaganda were cool: “Hostility to-

<sup>20</sup> Dz.U. 1946 No 34, issue 210.

<sup>21</sup> AAN, GUKPPiW, Sekretariat Prezesa. Odprawy krajowe 2–25.05.1945, Ref. No. 421, issue I, p. 8.

wards us from these offices revealed in slandering us in private conversations”.<sup>22</sup> In addition, the Ministry of Culture and Art, without consultation with the office, issued permits for “[...] extremely pornographic or chauvinistic performances”.<sup>23</sup> Cooperation with the Ministry of Culture and Art also included preventive monitoring of libraries. WBK in Kielce appointed a committee, which included representatives of art and culture, information and propaganda, the Management Board of Education, representatives of the Public Library and the representative of the control office at the local level. In some counties, the commission consisted of representatives of PPR, PPS, SD or SL. The books “of an anti-democratic nature” were withdrawn from libraries.<sup>24</sup>

In turn, the Ministry of Public Security, at which the COCP was affiliated, usually assisted the employees of the and organisational issues, e.g. arranging offices, by providing radios and weapons (the employees controlled distant sites at night, and a number of them had not even bicycles). Although, the scale of this assistance varied depending on the region.

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Although Manifesto of PKWN guaranteed the citizens freedom of press, at the same time, it stated that civil liberties could not serve the enemies of democracy. It was officially declared, as persuaded by Jakub Berman, during the congress of delegates from provinces and municipal control offices in May 1945, that “[...] we want to have free press, independent press, press denouncing the opening views, but press with pure intentions”, it *de facto* had to become a tool in the hands of political decision makers. Already in “Lublin” Poland, the foundations for the Soviet model of press control were laid, which according to W. I. Lenin, should be “collective agitator, organizer and educator”. According to Andrzej Paczkowski, a smooth transition from the post-war relative pluralism of press to the second stage, so the Stalinist period, indicates that it was not a revolution, but evolution. In the first years after the takeover of power by the communists, the press system was characterized by some degree of pluralism. Some PSL papers were published, the Jewish press existed, in which not all papers accepted the communist policy, the Catholic Church and the Catholic environments had their own press, while PPR wanted even then to create the impression of the independence of press on it, the best example of which was Borejsza and his great project – Cooperative Publishing “Czytelnik”.<sup>25</sup>

<sup>22</sup> AAN, GUKPPIW, Sekretariat Prezesa. Odprawy krajowe 2–25.05.1945, Ref. No 421, vol. I, p. 21.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid., p. 22.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid.

<sup>25</sup> J. Perkal (A. Paczkowski), *Polityczna historia prasy w Polsce 1944–1984*, in: *40 lat władzy komunistycznej w Polsce*, London 1986, p. 158.

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### Central Office of Press Control/ Main Control Office of Press, Publication and Performances – background, audit scope and staff

(Summary)

The aim of the article was to present the circumstances of the establishment and the scope of activities of the Central Office for Control of the Press, which was transformed into Main Office for Control of the Press, Publications, and Public Performances in November 1945. The article is an attempt at answering the following questions: who were the first censors? From what communities/professional groups did they come? According to what criteria were the censors selected shortly after the founding of the Center? How did the so-called Soviet advisors influence the process of the emergence of institutional censorship in the Polish territory during World War II?

Keywords: Central Office of Press Control, Main Control Office of Press, Publication and Performances; GŁAWLIT; Censorship in PRL



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