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**Walls and ceilings
in literature and culture**

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The wall of silence surrounding literature and remembrance: Varlam Shalamov's *Artificial Limbs, Etc.* as a metaphor of the soviet empire

The camp solitary confinement block was old and decrepit. It looked as if a wall might fall down, the whole block crumble, and the beams collapse, if you just knocked against a wooden cell wall. But the solitary confinement block wasn't going to fall, and the seven cell blocks went on doing their job. Of course, any word spoken loudly would be heard in the neighbouring cell. But those who were imprisoned there were afraid of being punished.[1]

The citizens of the USSR always feared punishment – sometimes more, sometimes less. They did not complain. They made sure not to displease the authorities. They kept silent. During the years of the Great Purge, people did not talk to each other in raised voices; they spoke quietly about insignificant matters and without giving any names. In public transport, on the underground, and in Moscow's streets you could not hear any conversations. Silence was pervasive.[2] Some of the still free poets, e.g. Anna Akhmatova, burnt their poems so that they cannot fall into the hands of investigators, while imprisoned writers, e.g. Shalamov, were sentenced to be forgotten.[3]

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1 W. Szałamow, "Protezy", [in:] *Opowiadania kołymskie*, vol. II, trans. J. Baczyński, Wydawnictwo AT-EXT, Gdańsk 1991, pp. 249–251. [English version: V. Shalamov, *Komyla Tales*, NYRB Classics, 2018.]

2 Vide: O. Figes, *Szepty. Życie w stalinowskiej Rosji*, trans. Wł. Jeżewski, Wydawnictwo Magnum, Warszawa 2008, pp. 215–266.

3 Vide: D. Szkoła, "Zakładniczka historii", [in:] *Zmiany, metamorfozy, rewolucje*, M. Czapiga, K. Konarska (eds.), Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Wrocławskiego, Wrocław 2018, pp. 25–35.

I will not lie: Varlam Shalamov is one my favourite writers and I value his works highly. It is difficult for me to remain objective when it comes to his output. When I read him, I become immersed in an account of an autobiographical testimony, somewhat appropriating for myself (as a reader) the reality seen through his eyes and the recollections from the world of Kolyma.

Despite the harshness of the form – and an unwillingness to shock with strong emotional scenes or to moralise – the author of *Kolyma Tales* offered a faithful description of a world outside the 'human' world, one which was almost impossible to describe due to its inherent moral void, level of violence, and fear of the authorities. Kolyma remains in the book an ice-covered hell on Earth; closed Gulag space surrounded by a barbed wire fence; a void of death where no – not even the most basic – ethical principles survive, and the very mention of them seems inappropriate. Apart from being left to slowly die, its prisoners were sentenced to be forgotten, to stop existing, and the social recollections should retain a single mention of their existence. That sentence also applied to their biographies and their recollections about a world outside the wires of the Gulag zone, and about their loved ones, whom the authorities forced to renounce as the "enemies of the state"; with whom they had been before they were arrested and sent to Kolyma.

Resistance seemed futile. The carefully planned system of captivity did not allow for any rebellious movements against the state. Even loudly spoken words were banned. You had to keep quiet. Death itself was not the worst thing that could happen. Often it was a relief. What was the worst was captivity, and physical and mental suffering turning people into mindless flesh. When reading *Kolyma Tales* and the biography of Varlam Shalamov – a student of literature studies and a writer arrested and sent in the 1920s to the Solovetsky Islands for writing about freedom – it comes as no surprise that the word 'soul' was forgotten in Kolyma. What counted there was survival, sometimes even at any price. It would be difficult to find a prisoner who would have enough courage and spiritual power to oppose the deprivation. That was depicted perfectly by Shalamov in his short story titled *Artificial Limbs, Etc.*

The value of literature is its ability to enable people to convey through words – and consolidate in the social memory – the testimonies, thoughts, and feelings in a way which is inaccessible for other art forms. Literature of an autobiographical character acquires a special significance in the world of the bloody and tragic events of the 20th century, i.e. the Holocaust, the Second World War, the realities of the Nazi and Soviet totalitarianisms, death camps, and forced labour. Those are the recollections of experienced trauma which shatters identity, and of existential experiences of a borderline nature, of which Shalamov – a witness to the epoch – felt an obligation to talk.

According to Magdalena Marszałek, a testimony

> is a form of communication which consists of an account of past events offered by their participant (as an onlooker, actor or victim), i.e. referring to personal memory. In its basic meaning, a testimony, being an autobiographical confirmed description of a past event ("I was there"), also constitutes an element of everyday communication based on trust in the other person's words. (...) The theory of the testimony which has been developing since the 1980s – as part of the studies into the Holocaust and its aftermath – also defined a new form of an account which emerged as a result of the 20th-century systems of terror and genocide.[4]

Literature, mostly autobiographical, can be treated as a medium of remembrance, as one of its carriers and the object of cultural memory, which is vital for groups and entire societies.[5]

The 1980s in particular, filled with recollective literature and related to the transformations of the culture of remembrance, elevated the importance of literature as a form of testimony.[6]

In the case of Varlam Shalamov's output, autobiographical works are also culturally significant not only considering their topics covering areas important for social memory, but even the very autobiographical pact understood as a culturally significant convention of writing and reading, enabling people to retain and recall personal narratives of the experienced world reconstructed in recollected images.[7] In addition to that, Shalamov was a moral witness, i.e. – according to the culture of remembrance – someone who himself experienced trauma not as an onlooker but as a participant of dramatic events. As a survivor, he "testifies for those who perished, in a sense giving them a chance to speak."[8] What is also important is the need to have someone other who takes the testimony of a victim and feels the obligation to inform others about the experienced dramatic trauma. Such narratives continue to circle around tragic experiences, establishing a framework of remembrance and a part of the process of coping with trauma. This experience – "fundamentally inexpressible, impossible to represent" – is, at the same time, as

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4 M. Marszałek, "Świadectwo", [in:] *Modi memorandi. Leksykon kultury pamięci*, Wydawnictwo Naukowe Scholar, Warsaw 2014, p. 473. [Unless indicated otherwise, quotations in English were translated from Polish.]

5 Vide: K. Trybuś, "Literatura", [in:] *Modi memorandi…*, pp. 205–210.

6 Vide M. Marszałek, "Autobiografia", [in:] *Modi memorandi…*, p. 57.

7 I discussed autobiographical literature and its relationships with autobiographical memory in detail in: *Pomiędzy pamięcią autobiograficzną a zbiorową. Polska Ludowa i stan wojenny w narracjach łódzkich nauczycieli*, Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Łódzkiego, Łódź 2016, pp. 72–82.

8 M. Marszałek, "Świadectwo", [in:] *Modi memorandi…*, p. 475.

Assmann described it (1999), "a stabiliser of memory" and "the ally of testimony driving the speaking."[9] When reading *Kolyma Tales*, one infers that somewhere in the background of the narrative there is a sense of an obligation to talk (i.e. to offer testimony), which accompanied the author. This was probably, I believe, the reason for the writer's particular mode of narrative, i.e. in the simplest form and with the choice of the simplest stylistic devices, giving an impression of simplicity – if not a lack of emotions – in depicting the Kolyma reality.

Finally, *Kolyma Tales* constitutes

> most of all a testimony. And V. Shalamov was a «privileged» witness as he observed the birth of the Gulag empire serving his sentence at the 4th Department of SLON – Soviet Special Gulags, at the Vishera Gulag, where at the construction site of the foundations of the Soviet industry, at communism's first construction sites the state first experimented with the operation of the new Gulag system, a grand experiment of deprivation of the human soul, later expanded to cover the whole country.[10]

Shalamov's style was economical, dry even, devoid of any sophisticated linguistic devices. When compared to his mode of narrative, Tadeusz Borowski's Auschwitz short stories seem almost Baroque in style. In my opinion, Gustaw Herling-Grudziński's style of writing was the closest to Shalamov's style. It was Herling-Grudziński who added his own short story to *Kolyma Tales*, one titled *Piętno. Ostatnie opowiadanie kołymskie* [*Stigma: The Final Kolyma Story*], in which he proposed his imagined vision of Shalamov's death and burial. It stated that:

> A young man stepped in front of a circle of people. He approached the coffin, lifted a candle which flickered in his eyes, and he spoke in a resonant voice: «Kolyma etched its words on each face, it has left its mark, it carved out additional wrinkles, it has impressed an eternal stigma, an indelible, ineffaceable stigma!» That was a passage from a short story by the Grand Writer entitled Cisza (...) The future biographer of the Grand Writer is surely going to commend the choice of the farewell passage made by the young man. It is a unique instance in the author's output who, as everyone knows, avoided unnecessary words and was wary of exclamations.[11]

This was what Varlam Shalamov was famous for – that ability to write in a seemingly dispassionate and cool manner about a time, events, and things which were extremely inhuman, terrible, and not conveyable experiences of that trauma.

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9   Ibid., p. 476.

10   M. Heller, "Przedmowa do pierwszego wydania rosyjskiego", [in:] W. Szałamow, pp. VIII–IX.

11   G. Herling-Grudziński, "Piętno. Ostatnie opowiadanie kołymskie", [in:] W. Szałamow, pp. 275–276.

Probably it would not be possible to write *Kolyma Tales* in any other way. How could you write about the reality of hell? The freezing hell of Kolyma's mines, cold like the second ring of infernal torment in Jacek Kaczmarski's song.[12] The Kolyma as seen and described by Shalamov was an underground infernal world: "Even after reading the first few short stories, you want to say: its hell, the final stage of hell. Even Shalamov wrote himself: «I was coming back from hell» (*The Train*). It seems that there could not be anything worse than hell."[13] With one exception, i.e. that in Kolyma the punishment was not a triumph of justice but, rather, of lawlessness, and it concerned not sinners but people who were innocent.

The short story titled *Artificial Limbs, Etc.* contains the entire terrifying and raw beauty of Varlam Shalamov's prose. There are, of course, internees, GULAG prisoners and their supervisors, and camp guards, i.e. NKVD officers. Victims and tormentors, so different and yet similar citizens of the USSR (prisoners deprived of their rights versus guards who still have theirs), a country of lawlessness applied in line with the communist law. A huge country with the world's biggest camp system of forced labour and death. A country of people's democracy surrounded by walls, barbed wire, vigilantly guarded borders, and with a several-million-strong army of the system of coercion and repression. Anne Applebaum thus described the guards of camp zones, forced to join the system of repression after the Second World War: "Nor could they easily leave (of the guard duty at Gulags – M.K.). Many had been deprived of their documents – passports, residence permits, military service certificates. Without them they were unable to leave the camps, let alone search for new jobs. Between 300 and 400 every year committed suicide. (...) Others simply degenerated."[14]

In the discussed short story, the citizens of the Soviet Union – stripped of their civil rights and sentenced based on the infamous Art. 58 – were incarcerated at one of the GULAG camps in the far north of the USSR. Sent to solitary confinement to serve an additional penalty, i.e. a prison within a prison, they were subjected to an inspection procedure. They had to give up their prosthetic limbs one by one. Among the prisoners being readied for another show trial, there were only enemies of the people sentenced for crimes against the Soviet state. There was a snitch

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[12] In a fragment of a well-known song by Jacek Kaczmarski *Epitafium Dla Włodzimierza Wysockiego* [*Epitaph for Vladimir Vysotsky*], the second circle of hell was the GULAG reality:
Those sent! Those sent!
Marked, condemned, and sold!
What are you doing in the mines of hell
Wading in mud, trampling ice!
Is death once again sending free people
Under the knout!?

[13] M. Heller, *op. cit.*, p. IX.

[14] A. Applebaum, *Gułag*, trans. J. Urbański, Świat Książki, Warsaw 2005, p. 259. [English version: A. Applebaum, *Gulag: A History of the Soviet Camps*, Doubleday, New York 2003.]

among them as well as an old communist, a veteran of the civil war, a former member of Budyonny's forces. He was not going to willingly give up his prosthetic arm and he struggled with the guards. There was a deaf prison doctor, also a prisoner, an old man freely giving up his ear trumpet. The next one was a representative of the extinct (or rather exterminated) class of Russian gentry, who lost his leg at the front of the First World War. He gave up his prosthetic leg and, jumping on the other, entered a solitary cell on his own. Finally, a brigade leader and a prisoner had to give his glass eye:

> While they were recording Grisha's eye, the chief of the solitary block suddenly became merry and couldn't stop giggling.
> «So, one man gives me an arm, another a leg, another an ear, another his back, and this one his eye. We'll collect a complete body. And how about you?» He carefully looked over my naked body.
> «What are you going to hand over? Your soul?»
> «No,» I said. «I won't let you have my soul.»[15]

I believe one could view this fragment as a description of the failed experiment to create the new Soviet human being who – like the mythical Golem – could not exist without a soul. But communism did not allow anyone to believe in the existence of the soul while trying hard to create an ersatz soul, as aptly indicated by Aleksander Wat.

It is possible that Shalamov saw the soul still rattling around inside the starved, the tormented, and the humiliated body of the internee as a kind of a prosthetic devoid of internal strength and resistance due to the harm that was being inflicted.

The guards were the oppressors of the prisoners, tormenting the "enemies of the people", at the orders of the camp chief putting them into solitary, stripping them naked and taking away their prosthetics along with their clothes. Yet the masters of the prisoners' life and death were also the inhabitants of Kolyma. It did not matter that they chose to serve the communist regime, since they were forced to remain at the camp and, possibly, just like the prisoners, they would never leave it. They too spent their lives locked up in the far north. *Artificial Limbs, Etc.* offers an image of the camp, naturally, with barbed wire, turrets, guards, the *bosses* having absolute power over the *zeks*. All of them – both the guards and the prisoners – were locked in a communist paradise, unable to escape, as if behind a tall wall. In fact, even 'free' citizens of the USSR faced the danger of being locked. As was Shalamov, sentenced to remain in the USSR until his dying days. Nothing changed once he emerged outside the walls of the prison and the camp zone, when he was no longer in solitary. He was still inside a bigger prison, as this was the way the

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15   W. Szałamow, *Protezy...*, p. 251.

USSR was perceived by a mass of ordinary citizens. For him, that larger prison was even worse and more difficult to endure as not only did he realise the physical and mental isolation, but he was also aware of the fact of the existence of the wall of silence and obliviousness surrounding the victims, i.e. the witnesses of the tragedy of Gulags.

Before finding themselves behind the prison walls and camp wires, both the guards and the prisoners in *Artificial Limbs, Etc.* were the inhabitants of cities and villages of a country tightly wrapped with a wall preventing them from stepping outside it. Mind you, apart from the actual wall, there was still the mental wall erected due to the changes in people's identities and attitudes, and the changes to the values, standards, and the culture which existed in the Soviet State. Those changes applied to both the guards and the prisoners. This is why I believe it is necessary to pay particular attention to the fact that *Artificial Limbs, Etc.* features the word 'soul'.

It is used only once – clearly and emphatically – as a metaphor of freedom throughout Shalamov's output.[16] The author avoided moralising, the evaluations of the actions of prisoners and their supervisors, the roles of tormentors and victims, or the impact of the communist system dreadfully deforming the soul. This very short, only three-page-long short story was the only one in which the author used the word referring to the existential condition of an individual facing a borderline situation of utter humiliation, stripping them of their last pieces of freedom. Yet 'soul' in the short story is not complete freedom as that was not possible in the Stalinist state. Rather, it was autonomy. This is also why I believe that Shalamov acted purposefully in using that word and giving his short story the title *Artificial Limbs, Etc.*

Prison and camp wires were not the only kinds of walls erected by communism. There was still the barrier established around memory; autobiographical memory in the case of Shalamov and other writers, such as Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn, who wrote about the labour camps in the USSR, which was expressed in recollective literature, in its autobiographical variant. Apart from silence – because to speak the truth about Gulags was punishable by imprisonment (the infamous article on anti-Soviet agitation) – Shalamov's life and works also include a clearly visible wall of preventive censorship, typical of totalitarian systems. This was the reason why *Kolyma Tales* was published in the West and the writer was harassed for the collection until his death in 1982. Fortunately, also in this case the walls fell, though they lasted at least as long as the USSR persevered.

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16 The word 'soul' also appeared in Shalamov's other short stories, e.g.: *Carpenters*, *Quiet*, *Dry Rations*. Yet in those, it does not take on such a key importance as in *Artificial Limbs, Etc*. Shalamov told the tragedy of a prisoner, a pastor forgetting the names of the Apostles under the influence of his terrible experiences at the Gulag in the short story titled *The Apostle Paul*.

When compared to Shalamov's prose, the existential musings of Kierkegaard, Sartre, or Camus seem dull. His short story could be read in different ways. One could see in it a metaphor of the Soviet empire, which was built on fear, harm, and violence. The Gulag solitary confinement was prison within a prison, an internal camp intended for internees who – according to the bosses – dared to commit crimes in violation of the camp rules and regulations or who were supposed to be the subjects of investigations. It seemed as it was going to fall apart as it was old and carelessly built. Nothing of that sort. It persevered and no one dared to verify its structural integrity. The solitary confinement was actually a huge country surrounded by barbed wire with people securely locked inside and humiliated by the state. People behind the wires felt fear; they were afraid of punishment for louder whispers, which could be heard by other inmates or even the supervisors. Actually, the supervisors themselves were also prisoners; they had more privileges, but they could not leave the Gulag as well. From the grand medium-security camp, citizens could at any moment end up in the internal zone, i.e. the labour camp. Thus, it was better to keep quiet and not say anything; keeping quiet would not save them from state violence or fear, but it would help them endure.

The short story is also a metaphor of overwhelming terrible captivity by Stalinism experienced by Soviet citizens, as well as those inhabiting the satellite states of the socialist bloc, resembling a Stalinist solitary confinement. Hence, probably, the title: *Artificial Limbs, Etc*. The soul which the protagonist refuses to surrender is basically nothing more than a prosthetic of the soul deprived and murdered by the inhumane system of the Soviet totalitarianism. In fact, the Soviet human, created through the *perekovka of the soul*, was only a prosthetic of humanity. In Stalinist Russia, no one could have a free soul, especially not the prisoners of the Kolyma Gulag. The rulers of the Soviet State striving for communism acted per the rule: let us deprive people of that which makes them something more than an animal satisfying their instincts and we will turn them into slaves who do not realise they had been enslaved. Let us deprive them of their identity, religion, values, and the will for moral resistance, and we will create a prosthetic of humanity – a prosthetic of the soul.

> The human in such a situation," according to Paweł Śpiewak reflecting on the memory of communist, "is no longer able to refer to things, and most of all the know themselves. Between «him/her» and «himself/herself», not to mention other people and images of the world, there exists a chasm. Not being able to refer and describe himself/herself, they are left with self-definitions suggested only by their instincts and passions which lead them, govern them, and determine them. They thus become man of hunger, and yearning for sex and sleep. They only wish to satiate those hunger-ridden creatures. They are reduced to experiencing pain and moments of happiness. All spiritual sensations are no more. They can be controlled and ruled by allowing them to live, sleep and eat. They are mere biology and physiognomy

controlled from the outside which on top of that, being driven by fear of death and extermination, refers to the world using mathematicised rules, against any facts.[17]

Aleksander Wat spoke in a similar vein when he referred to the totalitarian extraction of the soul as a reduction of the human by taking away the human ability to reflect on oneself and on the surrounding world:

> The essence of Stalinism is the poisoning of the internal human being in man to reduce him, like those tiny heads made by head hunters, those tiny dried heads, and then so that it completely not so much rots in man, as communists are afraid of internal decay, but rather crumble into dust. (...) To introduce the communist ten commandments into the soul it is necessary to murder the internal man.[18]

That *re-forging of the soul* enabled the shattering of family and social bonds, setting children against their parents or wives against their husbands. Social structures – even the smallest ones, e.g. the family – remained under strict monitoring of the system of rule and terror. In the totalitarian world, an act of denunciation (even against one's loved ones) was a virtue, while an act of trusting others was a mistake which resulted in internment at a labour camp or prison. This is why Varlam Shalamov never trusted any of his fellow inmates enough to discuss with them the topics banned by the authorities. Even he experienced the wall of solitude which communism erected around the citizens of the USSR. When serving his first sentence at Butyrka prison, he understood that the attitude of alienation and internal immigration would help him endure: "Here, it became possible to understand once and for all and to feel with the entire body, entire soul, that solitude is the optimal human condition."[19] In fact, even the end of the Gulag internment was not the end of the hell of the writer's life in the Soviet Union. The wall of solitude and the lack of trust between people caused by communism persisted, forever etched into the reality of the USSR: "After leaving the Gulag, Shalamov lost his family. His daughter did not want to know him, she renounced him. His wife got a divorce. The Gulag had its extension in the society even without the barbed wire."[20]

Somewhat naturally, *Kolyma Tales*, both in the sphere of content and form, constitutes a polemic with The Gulag Archipelago. It seems that Solzhenitsyn

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17 P. Śpiewak, *Pamięć po komunizmie*, Wydawnictwo słowo/obraz terytoria, Gdańsk 2005, p. 14.

18 A. Wat, *Mój wiek. Pamiętnik mówiony. Rozmowy prowadził i wstępem opatrzył Czesław Miłosz*, part 1, Czytelnik, Warsaw 1990, p. 241.

19 W. Szałamow, *Wiszera. Antypowieść*, trans. J. Baczyński, Czytelnik, Warsaw 2000, p. 6.

20 G. Herling-Grudziński, P. Sinnatti, A. Raffetto, "Zapamiętane, opowiedziane. Rozmowa o Szałamowie", trans. J. Ugniewska, [in:] W. Szałamow, *Wiszera...*, p. 256.

believed in the "Russian soul", while Shalamov remained an atheist, and for him any form of moralising or philosophical debates was strange. Varlam Shalamov

> emphatically rejected didacticism or moralising in art while accusing 19th-century Russian writers of «each and every one of them acting as a teacher while the strictly literary objective and discoveries have been since Belinsky considered as things of a secondary importance». (...) A polemic with Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn was inevitable and it did occur. For Shalamov, Gulag was hell (its ninth circle) destroying internees physically and morally, while for the author of The First Circle, certainly closer in his thinking to the concepts by Fyodor Dostoevsky and Lev Tolstoy, it was a test of character from which internees could emerge victorious (e.g. thanks to faith). The total overwhelming pessimism clashed in that case with metaphysical and utopian optimism.[21]

Attempts at celebrating the Russian soul can be found in, e.g., *One Day in the Life of Ivan Denisovich*, while Shalamov indicated the "borderline beyond which all souls fall apart (...) He showed that suffering does not enrich people (Dostoevsky's argument), rather makes them indifferent, and the line between victims and oppressors becomes blurred (…)."[22] In the discussed dispute over the soul (not only Russian), it is Shalamov who seems to be right. After years spent no longer in a labour camp but out of prison, life in the Soviet Union seems to have added the plot of the final Kolyma Tale. By the end of his life, the writer was relocated to an old people's home, where his patterns of behaviour which he had developed in Kolyma – and which were described in the already mentioned short story by Gustaw Herling-Grudziński – surfaced. A medical commission determined it was necessary to relocate Shalamov to a psychiatric hospital, where he eventually died of pneumonia in 1982. As Tadeusz Klimowicz wrote: "His final moments were witnessed by a «sitter» (a person collaborating with the NKVD and later with KGB – M.K.), who accompanied him since the beginning of his stay at the *psihushka*."[23] While he was still alive, the Soviet state erected around the writer a wall and retained it after his death, sentencing his greatest work, i.e. *Kolyma Tales*, to be completely forgotten. Surely, the death of the disloyal witness to the history of Kolyma's Gulag hell pleased the Soviet authorities. Apparently, literature can come close to reality in a tragic and unimaginably true manner. George Orwell fought in the Spanish Civil War, viewing the front-line cruelty from up close. He also witnessed how the revolution devoured its own children and the armed conflict between anarchists and Stalinists. The highest priest of the

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[21] T. Klimowicz, *Przewodnik po współczesnej literaturze rosyjskiej i jej okolicach (1917–1996)*, Towarzystwo Przyjaciół Polonistyki Wrocławskiej, Wrocław 1996, p. 663.

[22] T. Klimowicz, *op. cit.*, p. 663.

[23] Ibid., p. 664.

New Faith[24] could not stand apostates and heretics amongst the revolutionary forces. The order to purge their midst of anarchists and Trotskyists, enacted by NKVD agents, was a major cause of the failure of the republicans. That might have been one of the reasons why Arthur Blair, a volunteer in the POUM forces, became a prophet of total surveillance of the Stalinist model of the state. World without higher feelings or morality, built by totalitarian ideology, was discussed by O'Brien, a member of the Inner Party, the brain-washed protagonist of *Nineteen Eighty-Four*:

> Power is in inflicting pain and humiliation. Power is in tearing human minds to pieces and putting them together again in new shapes of your own choosing. Do you begin to see, then, what kind of world we are creating? (...) A world of fear and treachery and torment, a world of trampling and being trampled upon, a world which will grow not less but more merciless as it refines itself. (...) In our world there will be no emotions except fear, rage, triumph, and self-abasement. Everything else we shall destroy – everything.[25]

Any higher emotions must be reduced as they interfere with the proper functioning of the citizens of a totalitarian state.

To rule people, fear and absolute control over their bodies and minds is not enough. It is also necessary to rule the past which exists in recollections and recorded documents. This was why Shalamov was forced to condemn his own work, which he had published abroad. Books and documents can be easily destroyed or changed so that they are in line with the current version of the truth. That was the task fulfilled by the protagonist of Orwell's novel – his task was to correct the errors in the records of past events. Yet it is much harder to change the recollections of a witness to a tragedy, those which are stored in individual memory, especially if they are glaringly contrary to the official state-enforced version of the past and its interpretation.

Jacques Le Goff noted: "To make themselves the master of memory and forgetfulness is one of the great preoccupations of the classes, groups, and individuals who have dominated and continue to dominate historical societies. The things forgotten or not mentioned by history reveal these mechanisms for the manipulation of collective memory."[26] Totalitarian societies easily yield to the temptation of manipulating memory.

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24 I used this term after Czesław Miłosz, vide idem.: *Zniewolony umysł*, Wydawnictwo Literackie, Krakow 1999.

25 G. Orwell, *Rok 1984*, trans. T. Mirkowicz, Państwowy Instytut Wydawniczy, Warsaw 1998, p. 184. [English version: G. Orwell, *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, (p. 364), Kindle Edition]

26 J. Le Goff, *Historia i pamięć*, trans. A. Gronowska, J. Stryjczyk, Wydawnictwa Uniwersytetu Warszawskiego, Warsaw 2007, p. 104. [English version: J. Le Goff, *History and memory*, Columbia University Press, New York 1992.]

Mind you, communism as a political system featured

the abolishing of any democratic freedoms, persecutions of religions and the clergy, forced collectivisation, «building of socialism» not paying any attention to economic conditions with all the consequences of that – all those elements triggered social tensions which were countered with widespread terror. (…) Destruction in the name of construction; hatred towards people considered enemies, who were stripped of any human qualities (rats, nits, pigs, dogs, stinking carcass, vultures), who were trampled down in the name of «humanism»; lies in the name of «truth» of which the party was the sole purveyor; captivity in the name of social and national liberation; totalitarian dictatorship in the name of «true democracy» – all that created the forged image of the world which has not been completely corrected until this very day.[27]

Revolutions and revolutionary social changes not only shatter the walls of prisons, e.g. Bastille, but they also erect new ones, replacing truth with lies. Revolutions require an enemy, hence walls between social groups, cultures, and entire societies (the us–them dichotomy, the figure of the enemy). According to the Marxist ideology, the inevitable development of the class struggle was the reason why the communist revolution eventually found enemies in the citizens of the state created by the Soviet authorities. By erecting walls, revolutions create social memory anew, expunging from its scope entire areas and replacing them with completely new ones. Changes apply to dates of past events considered important along with their interpretations, symbols, and the language and its references which we use to describe the past. Some events are forgotten, while others are introduced into the canon of social memory. Changes apply to normative models and cultural traditions, and even names of cities and months. Changes in the memory which applies to the past of a community, introduced by the authorities, "depend on the changes in school history or literature curricula, changes of street names, toppling some monuments and erecting new ones, and the creation of new works of literature or films (…) which interpret the past differently."[28] Thus, the authorities erect walls not only around literature, but also around memory.

Maurice Halbwachs noted that in order to maintain a sense of social generational continuity, identification with a community – as well as to retain common collective identity – it is necessary to apply the process of forgetting and correcting memory:

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27 K. Kersten, "Wstęp do polskiego wydania", [in:] St. Courtois, N. Werth, et al., *Czarna księga komunizmu*, Prószyński i S-ka, Warsaw 1999, p. 11.

28 M. Golka, *Pamięć społeczna i jej implanty*, Wydawnictwo Naukowe Scholar, Warsaw 2009, p. 123.

Society from time to time obligates people not just to reproduce in thought previous events of their lives, but also to tough them up, to shorten them, or to complete them so that, however convinced we are that our memories are exact, we give them a prestige that reality did not possess.[29]

When reconstructing their past, groups which form a society alter it. This is inevitable, like the passage of time, like acid slowly eating through a society's frameworks of memory. These are not invariable, though they are much more durable than the recollections of individuals of small groups:

The frameworks of memory exist both within the passage of time and outside it. External to the passage of time, they communicate a bit of their stability and generality to the images and concrete recollections of which they are made. But these frameworks are in part captivated by the course of time. They are like those wood-floats that descend along a waterway so slowly that one can easily move from one to the other, but which nevertheless are not immobile and go forward.[30]

In the name of maintaining its collective identity and social continuity of generations, a society demands the sacrifice of recollections which do not fit the collective memory. It is the group that has the advantage over an individual as a society yields measures for recreating memory. At this point – which once again directs us towards the authorities as a form of domination over an individual – there emerges a danger of manipulating the content of social and cultural memory.

The authorities eagerly utilise ideology and institutions which enable them to maintain their supremacy. This points towards the sphere of politics of memory. Social memory subjected to manipulation is nothing other than images of the past delimited by a wall, permitted and approved by the authorities. Outside it, there lies the land of oblivion.

Paul Ricoeur associated manipulated memory with forgetting and ideology: "everything that compounds the fragility of identity also proves to be an opportunit for the manipulation of memory, mainly through ideology."[31] Abuses of memory are also abuses of forgetting, which selectively approaches narratives. A particular temptation to manipulate memory applies to the memory of communities and groups, to their collective identities:

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29 M. Halbwachs, *Społeczne ramy pamięci*, trans. M. Król, Wydawnictwo Naukowe PWN, Warsaw 2008, p. 171. [English version: M. Halbwachs, *On Collective Memory*, University of Chicago Press, Chicago 1992.]

30 Ibid., p. 421.

31 P. Ricoeur, *Pamięć, historia, zapomnienie*, trans. J. Margański, Universitas, Kraków 2007, p. 590. [English version: P. Ricoeur, *Memory, history forgetting*, University of Chicago Press, Chicago 2004.]

the prime danger (...) lies in the handling of authorized, imposed, celebrated, commemorated history – of official history. The resource of narrative then becomes the trap, when higher powers take over this emplotment and impose a canonical narrative by means of intimidation or seduction, fear or flattery. A devious form of forgetting is at work here, resulting from stripping the social actors of their original power to recount their actions themselves.[32]

Ricoeur indicated that the fact of removing the right and ability to a narrative about oneself and the world – so also about our past and the past of our community – cannot occur without our participation. This is clear in the case of "forgetting through avoidance (*fuite*), the expression of bad faith and its strategy of evasion motivated by an obscure will not to inform oneself, not to investigate (...) by a wanting-not-to-know."[33] We wish to remember neither the pain of the victims nor our complicity. This is an active form of forgetfulness. Avoidance as a form and strategy of remaining oblivious, according to Ricoeur, entails the same kind of responsibility as intentional negation of memory. One should at least try to learn the truth about the past (or tell it as a witness), which differs from the official version of the narrative imposed by the authorities. One should not be surprised by the lapses in the memories of the oppressors, as Shalamov indicated in his short story titled *The Procurator of Judea*. Therefore, one should pay even more attention to the wall of silence erected by the Soviet state around the autobiographical recollections of former internees. In the case of Varlam Shalamov and his greatest work, the forced forgetting became the writer's personal tragedy, being a huge blow for the truth both about the trauma of Kolyma Gulags and about the Soviet system breaking spirits and stripping individuals of their freedom.

Artificial Limbs, Etc. raised an important existential problem of the opposition to the taking-away of memory and the remnants of freedom in a captive world, the rejection of a materialist philosophy used by the constructors of communist walls for creating a world of totalitarianism which enslaved individuals and for transforming that individual into a slave without a soul. It is about the refusal to accept the walls erected around the recollections of a witness to trauma, and around literature as a medium for communicating autobiographical memory.

When reading Shalamov's short story, I had the thought about resistance, born of despair, towards the fact of stripping people off the last pieces of their freedom in a situation of extreme humiliation exacted by the communist Stalinist system. A thought about rebelling against the totalitarian oppression was doomed to fail from the very beginning, which the protagonist of Varlam Shalamov's prose knows. It is about a thought about the unique role of literature understood as a remedy

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[32]   Ibid., pp. 590–591.
[33]   Ibid., p. 591.

for captivity and the fact of taking away the right to talk about the recollections of experienced trauma. About truth. A thought about *the soul* as a metaphor of everything which people cannot give up if they wish to retain at least a morsel of freedom. I was not the only one who read *Artificial Limbs, Etc.* this way. This is what Gustaw Herling-Grudziński, another witness to the terrible events of the 20th century, wrote about it:

> I remember a beautiful short story *Artificial Limbs, Etc.* One day at the camp, functionaries confiscate from the internees all their prosthetics, wooden legs and hands, steel corsets, fake teeth, etc. When the time comes for Shalamov, the soldier who was supposed to collect them asked him: «And how about you? Your soul?» Shalamov answered: «I won't let you have my soul.» That is a terribly categorical statement. That was the end of the very concise short story. And that was extremely telling. (...) Shalamov talked to his own soul and the souls of others through literature. Thus, he defended a certain virtue, i.e. humanity, which was inside him, and he did that in an intense form.[34]

Relatively few Gulag internees participated in the struggle against the communist system, the system of Gulags, and the system of distorting memory in which Varlam Shalamov was engaged by remembering and giving his testimony: "Obviously, people who did not survive did not write. Those who were mentally or physically damaged by their camp experiences did not write either."[35]

The trauma of the experienced nightmare and a fear of it returning was the reason why the victims of Gulag were reluctant to testify. This was why all that some of them wanted to do was to forget about the Gulag: "Cowed and silenced, the majority of Stalin's victims stoically suppressed traumatic memories and emotions. «A human being survives by his ability to forget,» wrote Varlam Shalamov in *Kolyma Tales*. People who had suffered terribly did not talk about their lives. They very rarely cried."[36]

Fear was the reason why people remained vigilant and kept quiet as no one knew how long the thaw period which began with the famous speech by Khrushchev would last. Even at its peak in the 1960s – when Stalin's remains were removed from the Lenin Mausoleum and when Kaganovich, Molotov, and Malenkov were removed from the party – the state retained its totalitarian traits. No one commemorated the millions murdered, no one officially apologised to those victimised, and there was no redress. The thaw ended when Brezhnev came to power; he once again hailed Stalin as the grand chief and aggravated the Party's approach

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34 G. Herling-Grudziński, P. Sinnatti, A. Raffetto, *op. cit.*, p. 271.

35 A. Applebaum, *op. cit.*, p. 328.

36 O. Figes, *op. cit.*, p. 514. [English version: O. Figes, *The Whisperers*, Picador, New York 2008]

towards dissidents who demanded their right to memory and truth. Fear accompanied the victims of Gulags until their dying days.[37]

This is why the attitudes of the dissidents who – like Varlam Shalamov – fought for the right to remember is even more impressive.

In the penultimate stanza of *Epitafium dla Włodzimierza Wysockiego*, Jacek Kaczmarski sang:

I pojąłem co chcą ze mną zrobić tu!	And I understood what they want to do to me!
I za gardło porywa mnie strach!	And fear grasps my throat!
Koń mój zniknął, a wy, siedmiu kręgów tłum,	My horse is gone, and you, the crowd of the seven circles,
Macie w uszach i w oczach piach!	Have sand in your ears and eyes!
Po mnie nikt nie wyciągnie okrutnych rąk,	No one will reach for me with their cruel hands,
Mnie nie będą katować i strzyc!	No one will torment me or shave my head!
Dla mnie mają tu jeszcze ósmy krąg!	For me they have an eighth circle!
Ósmy krąg, w którym nie ma już nic.	The eighth circle where there is nothing no more.

In the eighth circle of the Soviet empire there are no disobedient writers or literature, nor is there a soul. No one remembers about them. What is left is emptiness and the void of forgetfulness, which is a true hell for an artist. There is a silent and blind crowd of slaves. The only hope is to retain one's recollections and to pass them onto others. This is the role of poets of the permafrost and of Gulag internees, such as Varlam Shalamov. There was a reason why Jacek Kaczmarski concluded his song about Vladimir Vysotsky in the following stanza:

Pamiętajcie wy o mnie co sił! Co sił!	Remember me with all your strength! With all your strength!
Choć przemknąłem przed wami jak cień!	Though I passed in front of you like a shadow!
Palcie w łaźni, aż kamień się zmieni w pył -	Burn at the baths, until the stones turn to dust -
Przecież wrócę, gdy zacznie się dzień!	I will return when the day starts!

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[37] Orlando Figes wrote about this in *The Whisperers...* in a chapter devoted to the recollections of camp trauma and the further fortunes of the victims of Gulags. Vide: idem., *op. cit.*, pp. 506–555.

Fortunately, forgetfulness – being the result of distorted memory, fake past, and a kind of totalitarian politics of memory – did pass along with totalitarianism. And so, the memory of the witness to the hell of Kolyma – and his literary narrative, his testimony – survived the night of the Soviet empire.

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Marcin Kępiński

Mur milczenia, mur zamknięcia, mur wokół pamięci i literatury. *Protezy* Warłama Szałamowa jako metafora sowieckiego imperium

Streszczenie

Literatura o charakterze autobiograficznym nabiera szczególnego znaczenia w świecie krwawych i tragicznych wydarzeń XX wieku, Holokaustu, drugiej wojny światowej, rzeczywistości totalitaryzmów hitlerowskiego i sowieckiego, obozów śmierci i przymusowej pracy. To pamięć doznanej traumy, dezintegrującej tożsamość, doświadczeń egzystencjalnych o charakterze granicznym, o których autor – świadek epoki – czuje przymus mówienia.

Antropologiczna analiza opowiadania Warłama Szałamowa *Protezy* pozwala na uchwycenie roli pamięci oraz świadectwa autobiograficznego jako swoistego kulturowego i literackiego antidotum na milczenie oraz pamięć zafałszowaną przez totalitaryzm sowiecki.

Autor *Opowiadań kołymskich* wiernie przedstawia świat będący poza nawiasem świata „ludzkiego", prawie niemożliwy do opowiedzenia, ze względu na obecną w nim moralną nicość, przemoc i strach przed władzą. Władzą, która nakazuje zapomnieć o zbrodni, ofiarach i katach.

Słowa kluczowe: literatura, świadectwo, pamięć, zapomnienie, totalitaryzm, łagry

The wall of silence surrounding literature and remembrance: Varlam Shalamov's *Artificial Limbs, Etc.* as a metaphor of the soviet empire

S u m m a r y

Literature of an autobiographical character acquires a special significance in the world of the bloody tragic events of the 20th century, i.e. the Holocaust, the Second World War, the realities of the Nazi and Soviet totalitarianisms, death camps, and forced labour. Those are the recollections of experienced trauma which shatters identity, and of existential experiences of a borderline nature, of which Shalamov, a witness to the epoch, felt an obligation to talk.

An anthropological analysis of Varlam Shalamov's short story titled *Artificial Limbs, Etc.* enables one to grasp the role of memory and autobiographical testimony as a kind of cultural and literary antidote to silence and memory distorted by the Soviet totalitarianism.

The author of *Kolyma Tales* offered a faithful description of a world outside the 'human' world, one which was almost impossible to describe due to its inherent moral void, level of violence, and fear of the authorities who made people forget about the crimes, victims, and oppressors.

Keywords: literature, testimony, memory, forgetfulness, totalitarianism, GULAG

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To break "the Black Wall". The motif of fear in plays by Henri-René Lenormand

But in hospitals no sleep
on spring beds
and on soft pillows
for the sick.
They only shouted, called,
coughed and cursed:
"Where are the doctors?!
Where are the towels, spittoons,
tooth picks and attendants?!
We're getting worse every minute!
And we don't want to die,
but dress neatly,
tie green ties —
we don't want bandages or cotton wool!
W e p r o t e s t !
And their calls become quieter,
until they died at night.

K.I. Gałczyński

Introduction

When the First World War ended, in France there existed an atmosphere as if *belle époque* was going to reappear. An average French person was occupied with their fitness, fighting more or less successfully with the indications of their ageing; they

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took care of their finances; they visited boulevard theatres where they could relax after a hard day's work. Nonetheless, in that period of apparent happiness, there was a sharp increase in the number of patients visiting psychiatrists. Many argued, like Doctor Haeckel did[1], that the epoch would be recorded in history as a time of a pandemic of anxiety disorders. André Gide seemed to adore that uneasiness, while Anatol France considered those devoid of anxiety as being boring, irritating even.[2] There were many writers who in their plays raised the topic of the syndrome of depression[3], which characterised an individual lost in the industrial dehumanised world. Jean Sarment, Stève Passeur, and even Sacha Guitry – known for his comedy works – all created characters from the perspective of mental illnesses, depicting them as figures who ached. Henri-René Lenormand (1882–1951) was the most prolific playwright who raised the topic in France, which should not come as any surprise as throughout his life he carried existential unrest within him. It was him who – inspired by August Strindberg's theatre – studied the mysteries of the human soul. The mystery of internal life and attempts to penetrate it led many characters in his works to the edge of nervous breakdowns and, consequently, to committing suicide. Similarly to the author of *The Father*, the French playwright placed emphasis on the subjective and psychotic dimension of the presented world available to readers/viewers through the delusions of the distraught protagonists. The task of studying several plays by this once popular author seems interesting considering the in-depth psychological analysis of the characters thatis typical of his works. He presented his characters as closed, isolated from the rest of the world, and suffocating in claustrophobic rooms under mansard roofs. Apart from physical walls, in Lenormand's works there is also the invisible to the eye yet pervading "black wall", in front of which a human being stands completely defenceless and mentally broken, trying to find in it even the slightest crack that would enable them to escape the delusional world.

Time Is a Dream

Le Temps est un songe [*Time Is a Dream*] (1919) is probably Lenormand's first text in which he described depression from which the protagonist suffered. The play's protagonist is Nico van Eyden, who returns to Utrecht after spending many years in Java to meet with his sister (Riemke) and his former sweetheart (Romée). The play begins with a situation in which the latter one has a vision while strolling past a pond: she sees the head of the protagonist who is drowning in the water. Yet in the

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1   J.-P. Bichet, *Étude sur l'anxiété*, Amédée Legrand, 1929, p. 18. [Unless indicated otherwise, quotations in English were translated from Polish.]

2   Ibid., p. 19.

3   Daniel-Rops, *Notre inquiétude. Essais: louange de l'inquiétude – sur une génération nouvelle – positions devant l'inquiétude*, Perrin & Cie, Paris 1927.

next scene, the man is completely fine and debates joyfully with other inhabitants of a house enveloped in a thick and menacing fog. Romée confesses to Riemke about her, she assumes, delusion. From that moment on, both women torture themselves, wondering whether one of them saw in that chocking scene a future to come. The whole story does actually lead to the suicide of the protagonist. Lenormand intentionally began his play from the end, though his purpose was not guided by purely formal pursuits. He presented a character who could not find his place in a civilisation cherishing intelligence and "mathematical logic" – hence the loose structure of the play, which consisted of images in a not necessarily chronological order. Thus, the playwright created oneiric poetics, so typical for his later plays.

The Western world is symbolised in the play by all the laws which blur and distort reality with their deceptive logic, while the distant Java constitutes a reference to the Orient, which rejects mental speculation, thus incarnating intuition and unbridled vital power. Nico felt happy on the island, because he was free there from the omnipotent rationalism (constant dwelling on things and tiring musings); he was able to live life to the fullest, but as soon as he steps into the territory of the European civilisation, he immediately feels threatened and uneasy. He then starts to ponder, delving deep into his nature while realising that the words which he uses mean nothing and yet they cause human anguish. While being away from the big world, he was not occupied by the passage of time, but in Europe he starts obsessing about it: "Yesterday, today, tomorrow... those are just words... words which exist only in our narrow brains, outside them there is no past or future... there is only the endless present."[4] Nico suffers, because his rational nature has awoken (which he hates dearly) and it cannot peer through the mystery of humanity or the surrounding world; actually, everything becomes, as Strindberg would say, an illusion, a nightmare[5]: "We can never know that which our eyes see, which our ears hear, which passes through our brains... Everything is a spectre and reflections of spectres."[6]

When being cut off from the reality, the protagonist faces the mysterious "black wall", also represented in art as a thickening fog which closes his path to the world. On that distant island, he experienced a non-verbalised symbiosis with nature (he did not feel the need to understand his bliss), while in his home city, Utrecht, he feels alien (he cannot move freely and everything is a mystery to him), as if torn away from the world. He experiences the painful separation from his surroundings, yet the more he thinks about it, the more the chasm between him and his surroundings grows. He becomes, in a sense, a prisoner of his own mind.

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4   H.-R. Lenormand, *Le Temps est un songe*, Théâtre Complet 8, Albin Michel, 1935, p. 213.

5   A. Strindberg, *Ur Ockulta Dagboken*, Stockholm, Bonnier, 1963, p. 59; cf. G. Vogelweith, *Le personnage et ses métamorphoses dans le théâtre de Strindberg*, thèse, Université de Paris IV, 1971, p. 570.

6   H.-R. Lenormand, *Le Temps...*, p. 214.

A Mediaeval man. Just as the people who define some religious systems, he, too, lives as if on three levels: Earth's, Heaven's, and Hell's. Psychoanalysts enclosed that three-dimensional world within the limits of human psyche. Thus, they isolated it from the rest of the world. Humans have been locked inside themselves against the universal natural principle of connection between the life's system with the environment. *Id* became hell, *super ego* became heaven, and *ego* became earth.[7]

Though Nico debates much in the play with the other characters, those instances are seemingly dialogues as the protagonist talks, de facto, with himself; only he exists and the other characters are as if chips off of his tormented soul; the protagonist actually concludes when talking to Romée: "We do not exist... you are, I am... I am alone."[8] He repeats that in a conversation with Ms Beunke, too: "I know, of course, that even though you are here, you don't really exist."[9] He is the enemy of rationalism. He rejects the whole Western heritage. He knows far too well that everything is an illusion, and yet he stubbornly debates the ontological issues which pester his mind. He lives in his constantly shrinking and limited world, losing his personality more and more. Therefore, one perceives the presented reality through the eyes of a human being suffering from depression. This world is deformed and closed, and the protagonist suffocates in that atmosphere of the North, which is ruthlessly invaded by the fog. When discussing Lenormand's play, Paul Surer aptly noted that "man pestered by fate is witness to the gradual disintegration of his personality and will (...) seeing death as the only cure for his torment."[10]

The Failures

Le Ratés [*The Failures*] is one of the most autobiographical of Lenormand's plays. He started writing it already in 1910, yet it took him a decade to complete it, as if he needed time and courage to present on stage his relationship with Maria Kalff (1874–1959), a Dutch actress. His intention was not, however, to accurately reproduce the tough moments they experienced together, but, rather, he used those events as a pretext to recall a period of a painful mental and creative crisis which befell him in his tumultuous life. The play's protagonists are nameless: He, a mediocre writer with great ambitions, and She, an actress who every now and then plays in second-rate theatres. They both set off on a *tour*, which from the very start proves a true ordeal. The woman does not receive any leading roles despite having

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7   A. Kępiński, *Lęk*, Państwowy Zakład Wydawnictw Lekarskich, Warsaw 1977, p. 52.

8   H.-R. Lenormand, *Le Temps...*, p. 199.

9   Ibid., p. 233.

10   P. Surer, *Współczesny teatr francuski*, trans. K.A. Jeżewski, Państwowy Instytut Wydawniczy, Warsaw 1977, p. 94.

forever dreamt of a major career; the man accompanies her with the belief that through that journey he will find an artistic spark which will enable him to finally bounce off of the bottom of misery. However, neither of the dreams becomes fulfilled; on the contrary, the protagonists sink deeper into their tragic fate. In this station drama, the audience takes part in a slow yet inevitable moral and physical downfall of two wretches who *cum grano salis* foreshadow Samuel Beckett's tramps. They could have been saved from the impending catastrophe by true love which still existed between them, yet their financial problems forced them to have the woman acquire money by resorting to prostitution. The man even encourages her to do that, even though he cannot stand the thought that his beloved could fall into the arms of another man. Filled with jealousy and despair, the failed writer kills his lover and then takes his own life. Their *tour* ends and the curtain drops.

In trying to offer a moving image of humanity "without properties", to paraphrase Robert Musil, Lenormand quite deliberately placed his protagonists in a "Maeterlinckian termite nest", dark and dirty, where the insects inhabiting it moved like "in a cell or a grave."[11] The protagonists move from one place to another, like insects, without a destination. Their route resembles a true *via crucis*, marked with stations, at which they nest in repulsive rooms under mansard roofs. What is striking is the limited space od places where poor people live, as if they were trapped in some dark dungeons. Lenormand did not wish to only emphasise their damaged social status as the places, which he accurately referenced, are also supposed to reflect their depressive state of mind. Even though they seem to be soulless puppets controlled by some rampant and mindless force, "humanity's trash", as they might have termed themselves (they define themselves even worse in the play), they ponder and they sense their existence painfully. During a rest before continuing, they endlessly debate the point of their journey which is a symbol of their hopeless life. They obsess about their fate – and, in time, it starts to resemble "prattling" – as if words themselves were supposed to fill the void of their hard life. The man seems to realise that their situation has no good solution when he concludes in an emotional tone: "We are not achieving anything... We are not getting anywhere! The earth rotates and it knows nothing about people! No one knows that we're here! So why would you want to become someone?"[12] And yet they press on as if still hoping that they will manage in some miraculous way to break the "black wall" of bitterness. Yet it is difficult to escape a psychotic space while fighting the relentlessly progressing decrease of life's dynamics. Thus, the protagonists, instead of supporting each other's spirits in their misery, maltreat each other even more, as if psychopathically trying to find pleasure in tormenting one another. The woman actually says: "Maybe happiness is born out of suffering."[13]

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11   M. Maeterlinck, *La vie des termites*, Charpentier/Fasquelle, 1926, p. 226.

12   H.-R. Lenormand, *Les Ratés*, Théâtre Complet 1, Édition Albin Michel, 1921, p. 125.

13   Ibid., p. 44.

Lenormand created characters immersed deep in sorrow. In doing so, he tried to present a world depicted through the eyes of those who are hurting (the task was easier as he was able to pour into the pages of the play his own melancholic states), which is why he made sure he created a claustrophobic atmosphere, in which its "human scraps" nested like in a mound. The inability to unload own "creative tendencies" often leads, according to specialists in the "illnesses of the soul", not only to frustration, but also to a neurotic drop in one's mood, since "in a depressed mood space becomes closed. Any plan for activity encounters resistance, fulfilment seems unattainable, and even minor issues grow to become major problems. In depression, a person has the impression of being at the bottom of a deep well surrounded by steep walls and not being able to escape."[14] Those "steep walls" continue to narrow down the living space of the protagonists, driving them to the edge of a complete nervous breakdown and to death rupturing the painful course of suffering.

The staging of the play by Georges Pitoëff Kamerny in Geneva at the Théâtre des Arts (1920) was quite a treat for the director. He discovered the play's deep meaning and through staging techniques he presented that which could not have been expressed directly in dialogue, because, as he argued, "the main task of a director is to bring forward a play, and in it a thought, an idea, that which is not expressed or not expressible through words."[15] Therefore, the Russian director extracted the main idea – a *Grundmotiv*, as a German would say – by bringing forward in his made-up dispositive construct an atmosphere of tight and closed spaces. Thus, according to him, one can best reproduce on stage the psychotic world in which the protagonists trudged through subterranean labyrinths towards an inevitable catastrophe. His two-level structure (he applied a similar one nine years later when staging Ferdinand Bruckner's *Criminals*) not only enabled actors to perform simultaneously, but it also defined clear borders between the so-called normal (real) world and the internal (psychotic) world, with the latter one constantly shrinking in stinking and tiny spaces as the melancholy of the protagonists grew. Actors had to learn how to perform on a small surface and, similarly to 'naturalists', they had to experience on their own how the walls which limited their movements also determined the psychology of the protagonists tormented by their suffering. In that limited space, they excellently played the tragic condition of Lenormand's protagonists. In fact, the playwright thanked the director for presenting on stage the "existential terror"[16] hiding in the dialogues.

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14 A. Kępiński, *Melancholia*, Państwowy Zakład Wydawnictw Lekarskich, Warsaw 1974, p. 50.

15 K. Braun, *Wielka Reforma Teatru w Europie, ludzie-idee-zdarzenia*, Wydawnictwo: Zakład Narodowy Imienia Ossolińskich, 1984, p. 158.

16 H.-R. Lenormand, *Les Pitoëff, souvenirs*, Odette Lieutier, 1943, p. 48.

Coward

Many years later, the French playwright returned to his past fears, which most certainly had never stopped pestering him. In 1926, he published *Le Lâche*, intending to reckon with his past. The topic of the place referred to the time of the First World War when Lenormand, afraid that he might be sent to the front, simulated tuberculosis and found refuge in a sanatorium in neutral Switzerland. As Lenormand admitted, he felt alienated in the cosmopolitan world filled with the "terribly sick", who received treatments in Davos. He not only felt alien, but he was also torn by remorse that he was benefiting from peace while his homeland was fighting with its eternal enemy.[17] When writing his play, he did not expect absolution; he only wished to present a moving stage of a melancholic, whom he was. The play presents a young painter who, similarly to the author, seeks refuge in the Swiss Alps from the Great War raging in the old continent. He arrives at the spa as a patient and from his very first replies one can sense his fear that someone might realise that he is faking. He is afraid of death, yet he does not seem a common coward[18] as he suffers from a neurosis which keeps reminding him about the passage of time, and he wishes to devote the time he has left to his art.[19] In the following scenes (images), readers/viewers follow a slow deterioration of the protagonist's mental state as he shuts himself inside his world, from which it is difficult to escape. It was not only due to factual reasons that Lenormand located the play in a remote place surrounded by mountains; they were also supposed to symbolise walls behind which seemingly normal life goes on. With his nerves in tatters, Jacques senses danger everywhere. It seems to him that the people he meets are constantly alluding to his cowardice. He himself feels alone and defenceless; in this context, mountain tops do not appear to be geographical decorations, but they reflect the protagonist's internal experiences. He feels like in a prison, unable to escape, and all the characters staying at the health centre seem to him to be like some soulless mummies moving their lips and smiling suspiciously. The young painter's world compresses. It is no longer the mountains that push him away from liberation, but, rather, the unreal surroundings becomes a ghastly and never-ending nightmare. The more Jacques tries to escape the very thought of death, the more he is reminded by everyone around him about it. The patients obsessively talk about death lurking around the corner; all guests are, in fact, depicted if not as "living corpses" then at least as convicts awaiting the moment when they will draw their final breath. After some girl dies, one character concludes in the protagonist's presence: "The light scent of corpse has been emanating from her for the past few months already. The flowers brought into the room did not help.

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[17] Ibid., p. 287.
[18] P. Surer, "Études sur le théâtre français: Henri-René Lenormand", *Information littéraire*, September–October 1953, p. 135.
[19] G. Royde-Smith, "The Coward", Londres, *The Outlook*, vol. 58, 31 July 1926, p. 107.

After fifteen minutes you could already smell the peculiar scent."[20] He considers every word as a direct threat to his life. Yet his caution does not protect him against co-operating with a German spy; he would do anything to be left alone. Fearing death, he eventually understands that, paradoxically, it is only death that can be his true salvation. His fear was associated with his wait, yet when the final hour comes, the anxiety disappears as if without any tangible reason. What comes is peace and a sense of relief that the nightmare of living in fear is finally over.

Certainly, one could conclude that Jacques is a clinical case of a paranoid (delusional) person as in his world people stop being people and their only intention is to destroy the one who suffers. Similarly to the previously mentioned works, this whole play unfolds inside the protagonist. This is because the readers/audience perceive the people whom the protagonist meets on his way through his tormented soul. They are, therefore, deformed, and they are constantly plotting against him. In order to avoid being uncovered, Jacques wears a mask and he has to conceal his true feelings. He cannot allow others to notice that he is afraid of the patients, so he plays the role of a bed-ridden patient. Even though he fits well in his role, the fear he feels never leaves him. Surely, just as he wears a mask, others also protect their secrets behind the pretences of some mortal maladies from which they allegedly suffer. "The mask is often the source of fear of people, we fear people in masks as we cannot know what might be hiding underneath, we do not trust such people (...) it seems to us that under a mask there lurks a hostile attitude."[21] This is why Jacques shuts himself in his made-up world, not allowing his surroundings to come close, and he separates himself from everyone with an invisible wall which does not, however, give him the peace he desires. From the point of view of psychiatry, he appears to be a psychasthenic and paranoid individual. This psychopathic condition was best described by Antoni Kępiński:

> Fear causes the intensification of an egocentric structure of the world. Under the influence of fear people feel alone facing the surrounding world; everything around them leads to destruction and annihilation. The world to them is hostile, not benevolent. And they feel like a hunted animal and traps await them at every corner. They cannot come close to anyone as they do not know whether a specific person will not prove their enemy. People around them keep thinking how to harass and destroy them; thus, they become the central figure of the world. Fear reduces the perspective of our vision of the surrounding world. Normally it forms a complex network of relations with the environment – some people are closer, other more distant; some are friendly, other neutral or hostile. In fear, the surrounding world presses on us, it wants to destroy us, there is only the Self and the world hostile to me.[22]

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20 H.-R. Lemormand, "Le Lâche", *La Petite Illustration*, 13 February 1926, p. 4.

21 A. Kępiński, *Psychopatie*, Sagittarius, 1992, p. 126.

22 Ibid., pp. 126–127.

The alienation of the protagonist from the "objective reality" was also reproduced in the play's staging by Georges Pitoëff, which was held on 1st December, 1925, in Théâtre des Arts. The scenery resembled "cubist pictionary", because the Russian director, actually following the directions of the playwright himself, filled the scene with geometric figures: rectangles, circles, ellipses, and, mostly, triangles. Those "spiritual triangles"[23], clearly referring to Kandinsky's theory, were supposed to emphasise the world of the suffering protagonist who separates himself from the hostile external world following the expressionist style.[24] The entire dispositive scenery reflected the claustrophobic atmosphere. Lenormand himself stressed in the stage directions that room interiors should be devoid of any windows.[25] That was the scenery of a scene which was dominated by two triangles which created Jacques' unreal world. The contrast between the whiteness of the mountains and the darkness of the interior occupied by the artist emphasised even more the dissonance between the man's obsession and the real world located on the other invisible side of the mountain ranges. The trapezoids and circles produced a sense of isolation from the world of the living. Probably the most striking of the scenes developed by Pitoëff for Lenormand's play was the ball from the seventh image, in which the persons dancing tango resembled terrible spectres[26]; the entire scene expressed the nightmarish experiences of the protagonist, who is not able to wake up from his bad dream. Only death could bring an end to the suffering.

Conclusion

In the imagination of ancient Greeks, Pegasus, the winged horse, was supposed to be born from the blood of the youngest of the three Gorgons, the one which symbolised fear. That beautiful metaphor represented people's vision of poetry and the suffering through which it is born. Creative work was similarly viewed by Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, who considered dread as the best part of the humanity. Jarosław Iwaszkiewicz followed a similar line of thinking; he argued that "there is no art without the fear of life or fear of death."[27] Undoubtedly, all of Lenormand's personal fears also were the reason why he undertook a writing career, writing plays in particular. It was for him not only a means of literary expression but also a form of therapy, which was, in fact, noted by various critics. The theatre of the

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23 W. Kandyński, *O duchowości w sztuce*, trans. S. Fijałkowski, Państwowa Galeria Sztuki w Łodzi, 1996, pp. 37–41.

24 J. de Jomaron, "Henri-René Lenormand mis en scène par Georges Pitoëff", [in:] *Les Voies de la création théâtrale*, tome VII, Éditions du C.N.R.S., 1979, p. 329.

25 H.-R. Lenormand, *Le Lâche*, p. 17.

26 H.-R. Lenormand, *Les Pitoëff...*, pp. 128–129.

27 J. Mitarski, "Demonologia lęku. Niektóre formy ekspresji i symboliki lęku w dziejach kultury", [in:] A. Kępiński, *Lęk*, pp. 353–360.

author of *Les Mangeurs de Rêves* was considered "morbid, associated not so much with psychology as with psychiatry."[28] In the discussed works, the French playwright diagnosed cases of melancholia and, despite seemingly retaining objectivity in the manner of presenting reality, he described a psychotic world perceived through the eyes of his suffering characters. Thus, he put emphasis on the release of internal subconscious obsessions which lead to deformations of the external reality. A common fog or mountain tops become unrealistic, because to the sick protagonist they seem as the borders of his distorted world. The same process of making them unrealistic applies to the narrow rooms under mansard roofs, where posers are cooped up; they become walls which limit them not only in physical terms, but also enclose them in their own delusions. All the characters feel the sultriness and strangeness of the world, and, thus, having reached the edge of despair, they hit an invisible "black wall" of depression, which they cannot break. When describing the suffering of the 'modern human being', Lenormand expressed his pessimism, placing his characters in situations without a way out. Any attempt at escaping was doomed to fail, and their only form of liberation was to commit suicide.

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28 P. Surer, *op. cit.*, p. 98.

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Tomasz Kaczmarek

Przebić „czarną ścianę", czyli motyw lęku w dramatach Henri-René Lenormanda

S t r e s z c z e n i e

Henri-RenéLenormand odnowił teatr wyznaczając mu jako domenę tajniki duszy ludzkiej. We wszystkich swych sztukach dążył do wyjaśnienia tajemnicy życia wewnętrznego, do rozwikłania zagadki, jaką jest człowiek dla samego siebie. Dramaturgia była więc dla autora Wariatki z niebios nie tylko środkiem ekspresji literackiej, ale i swego rodzaju terapią, pozwalającą mu zwalczyć depresję. W niniejszym artykule przywołano trzy dramaty: *Czas jest snem*, *Wykolejeńcy*, *Tchórz*, w których Francuz diagnozuje przypadki melancholii, opisując świat psychotyczny z perspektywy cierpiących postaci. Ukazuje on swoich bohaterów w zamknięciu, odizolowanych od reszty świata, duszących się w klaustrofobicznych mansardach, które symbolizują ich nadwerężony stan psychiczny. Poza tymi ścianami fizycznymi istnieje też w utworach Lenormanda niewidzialna dla oka, choć wszechobecna „czarna ściana", przed którą staje zupełnie bezbronny, załamany psychicznie człowiek, szukający w niej chociażby najmniejszej szczeliny umożliwiającej mu wydostanie się na zewnątrz z urojonego świata.

Słowa kluczowe: „czarna ściana", depresja, niepokój, lęk, dramat, Henri-René Lenormand

To break "the Black Wall". The motif of fear in plays by Henri-René Lenormand

S u m m a r y

Henri-René Lenormand refreshed theatre, defining a new domain for it: the mysteries of the human soul. In all of his plays, he strived to explain the secret of internal life, as well as to solve the mystery that people are to themselves. Therefore, dramaturgy was for the author of *La Folle du Ciel* not only a means of literary expression, but also a kind of therapy, enabling him to combat his depression. In this article, three plays are discussed: *Le Temps est un songe*, *Les Ratés*, and *Le Lâche*, in which the French playwright diagnosed cases of melancholia by describing the psychotic world from the perspectives of the suffering protagonists. He presented them in closure, isolated from the rest of the world, suffocating in claustrophobic rooms under mansard roofs which symbolised their strained mental conditions. Apart from physical walls, in Lenormand's works there is also the invisible to the eye yet pervasive "black wall", in front of which a human being stands completely defenceless and mentally broken, trying to find in it even the slightest crack enabling them to escape the delusional world.

Keywords: "black wall", depression, anxiety, fear, play, Henri-René Lenormand

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The brickwork, walls and ceilings of Havana: Representations of space in Pedro Juan Gutiérrez's Novel *Nothing to Do*

Initial remarks

One could venture a thesis, though that would be a major simplification, that for many Polish readers the first association with Cuba they have is the image of a holiday paradise, like the one served in tourist brochures – sandy beaches, palm trees bathed in sunlight with perfectly blue sea in the background, Havana's colonial architecture, old American cars, fervent rhythms, slender bodies, and rum... And all that experienced in between consecutive dips in the pool of a luxurious hotel. A smaller group might also imagine cigars, bearded revolutionaries led by Fidel Castro, and the American embargo – an image which in the minds of many may, however, be just as 'exotic' as the postcard-worthy scenes from the hot Caribbean.

Somewhat contrary to this stereotypical image of Cuba, I intend to familiarise Polish readers with a completely different depiction of the Cuban reality – one devoid of any attempts at idealising it. I consider this task to be more important as by being a researcher of Latin American literature I know that many readers do not even realise that in Poland they have access to works of literature which could offer them a broader view of what Latin America is, and in this specific case: what Cuba was by the end of the 20th century. I shall discuss *Nothing to Do* (*Nada que*

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hacer) by Pedro Juan Gutiérrez, a novel included in the author's 1998 *Dirty Havana Trilogy* (*Trilogía sucia de La Habana*). The Polish edition of the book, translated by Piotr Fornelski, was released in 2004.[1]

As one might assume, the Revolution has been a fixed point of reference for Cuban literature after 1959 regardless of where it was written (on the island or outside it) or of the political inclinations of its authors (pro- or anti-revolution). However, despite the common presumption that anything associated with Cuba must be ideologically marked, I shall ignore this context for the purposes of this article, limiting myself only to a few clarifications which I consider essential for understanding the issues discussed in this article. It should not be diffciult as despite the fact that the first-person narrative in *Nothing to Do* attracts readers with autobiographical references – the protagonist/narrator shares with his creator not only his profession (a journalist), but also names (Pedro Juan) and the year of birth (1950) – Pedro Juan Gutiérrez avoided any references to politics in the novel. Rather, his intention was to dissect the Cuban society of 1995, transforming into novel material that which he knew from his own experience – the everyday lives of Havanans.

It is also clear that the depicted reality is often shocking, and the mode of its presentation – dispassionate, sometimes vulgar – only amplifies that impression. It is noteworthy that Pedro Juan Gutiérrez is considered one of the leading authors of the Latin American dirty realism (*realismo sucio*)[2], which has a tendency to feature autobiographical accounts and political indifference combined with a selected and significant historic event which an author would only mention, as the starting point for the story. Other elements included: the aesthetics of violence, authenticity understood as a meticulous depiction of the least important elements of everyday reality as well as the use of colloquial language, and the motif of fighting hunger where the attempts to satisfy it do not leave any space for other desires.[3]

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1   P.J. Gutiérrez, *Brudna Trylogia o Hawanie*, trans. P. Fornelski, Zysk i S-ka Wydawnictwo, Poznań 2004. Since all the fragments of the novel quoted in this study came from that edition of the book, in order to avoid unnecessary footnotes further in the article I shall only indicate the page number where a particular fragment can be found.

2   Please note that *dirty realism* is a controversial notion among the researchers of Latin American literature due to its blurriness and, in turn, excessive diversity of writers whose works are defined using it. There are those who argue that it is a marketing device ensuring a higher level of sales of books labelled this way rather than a literary criticism category (A. Birkenmaier, "El realismo sucio en América Latina. Reflexiones a partir de Pedro Juan Gutiérrez", *Miradas. Revista del audiovisual* 2004, issue 6, http://www.pedrojuangutierrez.com/ensayos_ensayos_anke%20birkenmaier.htm (accessed on: 27.02.2019).

3   E.L. Portela, "Con hambre y sin dinero", *Crítica* 2003, issue 98, pp. 61–80.

That historic event, which serves as the backdrop for the novel, was the economic crisis which Cuba suffered due to the dissolution of the USSR in 1991 and the resulting dissolution of the COMERCON. The crisis reached its peak in 1993, causing a complete collapse of the quality of life of Cubans due to a sharp increase in the level of poverty and social inequality. In 1993–1996, there were attempts at implementing moderate reforms focused on market development, yet they were halted; they were resumed as late as 2003.[4]

In this context, it should come as no surprise that the search for modes of earning money to be able to buy something to eat, the search for food which in crisis-ridden Havana was in short supply, and going out to have a drink or something to eat when the chance arises, apart from sex, are the main forms of physical activity of the novel's protagonist, requiring him to constantly move around. In fact, he is convinced that only by being on the move can he protect himself against utter stagnation: "So I need to continue to go forward. Forward if I don't want to die." (173)

It might seem that in the case of a novel which mainly astounds/stupefies/shocks readers with the narrator's/author's exhibitionism (it is not without a reason that Pedro Juan Gutiérrez's works are compared to those by Charles Bukowski), the space in which the story unfolds is not one of the most important elements of the created world. And, indeed, the descriptions of space in *Nothing to Do* are almost non-existent. Nonetheless, I wish to devote this article to this particular issue. For me, the starting point is Michel de Certeau's argument that, just like in the case of language which consists of acts of speaking, the city is established through moving.[5] In other words: "Though such space as a street is organised and permanent, spaces exist only thanks to movements and speeds. They are activated by entanglements of movements occurring in them. Therefore, space is created."[6] Therefore, the goal of the article is to analyse the space which Pedro Juan creates in his wanders around Havana, adjusting the movements of his body to the moving mass of other bodies. Apparently, it is a space riddled with walls, in which walls and ceilings, sometimes falling apart and other times invisible, acquire a deeper metaphorical meaning. The theoretical foundation of my study consists of the references to the sensory literary geography as framed by Elżbieta Rybicka, of Zygmunt Bauman's and John Urry's reflections on mobility, and of the discussion of the mode of creating the literary space by Javier del Prado Biezma, a Spanish literary scholar.

4 C. Mesa-Lago, "Problemas sociales y económicos en Cuba durante la crisis y la recuperación", *Revista de la CEPAL* 2005, issue 86, p. 183.

5 M. de Certeau, *Wynaleźć codzienność*, trans. K. Thiel-Jańczuk, Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Jagiellońskiego, Kraków 2008, p. 74.

6 J. Urry, *Socjologia mobilności*, trans. J. Stawiński, Wydawnictwo Naukowe PWN, Warsaw 2009, p. 81.

The sweet and bitter image of Cuba/Havana in literature

The importance of the category of space for the Latin American novel has been indicated several times, and it was emphasised in an extremely emphatic manner by Carlos Fuentes, a Mexican, one of the major writers on the continent. He basically stated that the Latin American novel was *described* by writers who had seemed to thus approach the tradition of the literature of the Europeans who came to America in the 16th century and became enchanted by the tropical landscape.[7]

It is worth noting, though, that the mode of depiction of space in the novel has rarely assumed the features of idealisation – from the descriptions of hostile nature in the so-called *novela telúrica* (the novel of the land) to the depressing vision of grand cities in the Argentinian *novela urbana* (the urban novel). The gradual liberation since the mid-20th century of the Latin American novel from the limitations of the documentary function imposed on it over several centuries, and from the realism used by the function in a servile capacity, has led to the emergence of a phenomenon which Carlos Fuentes called a liberation through the imagination of the literary spaces parallel to the real space.[8] The vision of those spaces remained, however, mostly negative (vide the doomed Macondo, the location of the story of the best known 20th-century Latin American novel, one titled *One Hundred Years of Solitude* by Gabriel García Márquez).

In the essay titled *The City of Columns* and devoted to Havana's architecture, a Cuban writer Alejo Carpentier quoted Alexander von Humboldt, who thus described the capital of Cuba in the early-19th century:

> The view of Havana when seen from the harbor is one of the most pleasant picturesque sights on the equinoctial coastline north of the equator. The city, celebrated by travellers from all nations, lacks the luxuriant growth of the banks of the Guayaquil River or the savage majesty of the rocky coasts of Rio de Janeiro, both ports in the southern hemisphere. But Havana has a poise that, in our climes, beautifies the landscape of cultured nature. Here the majesty of vegetal forms is mixed with the organic vigor that characterizes the Torrid Zone. When beckoned by such charming impressions, the European visitor forgets the danger lurking in the heart of the populous cities of the Antilles. He attempts to understand the diverse elements of a vast landscape, contemplating the fortresses crowning the rocks east of Havana harbor (an interior lake) surrounded by villages, haciendas, and palm trees rising to prdigious heights; this city, half hidden by a jungle of masts and ships' sails.[9]

7   C. Fuentes, "La nueva novela hispanoamericana (selección)", [in:] *Los novelistas como críticos*, N. Klahn, W.H. Corral (eds.), Tierra Firme, México 1991, p. 76.

8   C. Fuentes, *La gran novela latinoamericana*, Alfaguara, Madrid 2011, p. 295.

9   A. Carpentier, "Miasto kolumn", [in:] idem., *Przedtakty i wariacje*, trans. J. Petry-Mroczkowska, Wydawnictwo Literackie, Kraków 1982, pp. 64–65 [English version: A. Carpentier, "The City

And even though Carpentier admitted two pages further that the German traveller complained about the poor layout of Havana's boroughs, he somewhat excused his complaining with his ignorance of the "great wisdom" of Caribbean builders, dictated by "primordial necessity – the tropical necessity of playing hide-and-seek with the sun, snatching surfaces, extricating shadows (...) an ingenious multiplication of *esquinas de fraile*."[10]

What is important, though, is that the quoted words of Humboldt seem to fore-shadow a dichotomy which shall forever enter the image of Cuba, and which was perfectly concisely expressed in 1947 by Nicolás Guillén, a Cuban poet, in one of his poems: "My homeland is sweet on the outside, / and very bitter on the inside."[11] At this point, I should note that for Guillermo Cabrera Infante, one of the best known 20th-century Cuban writers, Havana was the poetic miniature of Cuba, its metaphor.[12]

Instances of admiration of Havana, "truly beautiful in the sun", when viewed from the outside, i.e. sea-ward and visiting perspective, can also be found in the novel titled *To Have and Have Not* (1937) by Ernest Hemingway.[13] This feeling was also expressed by Joseph Hergesheimer in *San Cristóbal de La Habana* (1920) when he described the premonition of a traveller as he approached Havana at dawn, view-ing the "sparkling green of the island emerging from the sea"[14] – a conviction that what he was about to see would have particular importance for him. Guillermo Cabrera Infante summarised the way Havana influenced foreigners by referring to the words of Virgilio Piñera, a Cuban writer and playwright:

> Havana is like a stimulant. At least that is something on which travellers who came here one after another since the beginning of the 17th century agreed. In what sense is it a stimulant? Well, in a very sensual way – in a frenetic dance of all five senses. Havana lets you taste, see, hear, touch and smell it.[15]

By juxtaposing Cuba's external sweetness with its internal bitterness, Nicolás Guillén referred to the history of the island, the natural resources and climate of which triggered the attention of the Spanish, and later Americans, which resulted

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of Columns", [in:] *Baroque New Worlds: Representation, Transculturation, Counterconquest*, Parkinson Zamora L., Kaup M. (eds.), Duke University Press, Durham 2010.

[10] Ibid., p. 65.

[11] My own translation of a fragment of the poem *Mi patria es dulce por fuera* (vide N. Guillén, *Obra poética 2 t.*, Ed. Letras Cubanas, La Habana 1995) [English version translated from Polish.]

[12] G. Cabrera Infante, "Infamia dla wymarłej Hawany", [in:] idem., *Mea Kuba*, trans. M. Małkowski, Philip Wilson, Warsaw 2004, p. 100.

[13] E. Hemingway, *Mieć i nie mieć*, trans. K. Tarnowska, Czytelnik, Warsaw 1968, p. 9.

[14] As quoted in G. Cabrera Infante, *op. cit.*, p. 96.

[15] Ibid., p. 97.

in the transformation of that heaven on Earth into a hell for social groups which fell victim to exploitation. The poet, a supporter of the Revolution, surely did not expect that after 1959, i.e. when Fidel Castro came to power, the bitter aftertaste would only become more intensive.

In a 1988 essay titled *Infamia dla wymarłej Hawany*, Guillermo Cabrera Infante quoted a Spanish reporter who thus summarised his interview with Oscar Fernández Melle, the mayor of Cuba's capital holding his office by appointment of Castro's regime in 1976–1986: "A stroll down various streets and squares of Havana proves that revolutionary justice had a terrible impact on one of the most beautiful cities in the world" whose only fault was that it was in "1959 probably one of the most developed cities in Latin America."[16]

At the same time, Castro's government made every effort to sell to foreigners, quite literally, the image of Havana as an exotic and alluring place. For Guillermo Cabrera Infante, a born and bred Havanan (even despite the many years he spent abroad, where he eventually died), such actions were loathsome.

> The old Havana in colour photographs looks like some glittered whore. There could be no sadder an end than turning the city in something laconic, a city which used to be expressive, talkative even, which used to be called La Talkana, and it was the homeland of Talkanans. Now it is inhabited by Laconicans, and Havana has become a spectre city intended for narrow-minded tourists. Its beauty no longer lies in its vitality but rather in some colourful feathers of a stuffed bird – a parrot.[17]

The topos of an island has existed in literature for centuries, its constitutive features being isolation from the rest of the world with the expanse ("a wall") of the ocean; a miniature world. The idea grew that it should be viewed as heaven on Earth/a lost paradise on the one hand, and a space 'marked' with atavisms, i.e. encouraging all kinds of 'civilisation' projects on the other. One should not forget that the mode of presentation of a space, location or landscape is always matched by a specific point of view. In other words, their representation has its own poetics, which is particularly important when there emerges, like in the case of Cuba's history, imperialist interests and politics, which erect the walls of divisions between groups and individuals in relation to the authorities.[18] The relationship between geography, the authorities, and representation is what clearly explains the dual, i.e. sweet and bitter, image of Cuba/Havana in literature, depending on whose experience it reflects and who assigns meaning to it, i.e. the dominant group or the dominated group.

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[16] Ibid., p. 99.

[17] Ibid., p. 100.

[18] E. Baldwin, B. Longhurst, S. McCracken, M. Ogborn, G. Smith, *Wstęp do kulturoznawstwa*, trans. M. Kaczyński, J. Łoziński, T. Rosiński, Zysk i S-ka Wydawnictwo, Poznań 2004, p. 167.

These issues, the extent of which is vast, remain mostly outside the focus of this article. However, I would like to indicate that that which seems to be connecting all the quoted fragments of texts depicting Cuba/Havana – regardless of whether they were written by foreigners or Cubans – is the mode of 'experiencing' the place. This comes down to the use of terminology borrowed from Elżbieta Rybicka, "the literary articulation of the sensory perception of space"[19] (vide quotation from a text by Virgilio Piñera). This sensory perception is also present in *Nothing to Do* and it will constitute a major point of reference for my discussion of the symbolic meaning of space created in the novel.

Public space – the walls of Havana

As Elżbieta Rybicka noted, "the special landscape formations (mountains, seas, deserts, valleys, lakes, etc.), and regions and places connect (...) with particular and identifiable sensory perceptions, which can form the territorial identities of areas."[20] And even though, as she stressed, "the human *sensorium* activates as a whole", which means that we experience locations with all our senses at once, "the literary sensory topographies can be subjugated using individual senses: hearing, taste, smell, sight, and touch."[21]

When describing in *San Cristóbal de La Habana* the capital of Cuba, Joseph Hergesheimer indicated mainly its "voice": "approaching in staccato, clearly, because (...) it never became silent, turning at night into not much different and not less intense noise."[22] Alejo Carpentier, a Cuban, confirmed that feature of Cuban streets in *The City of Columns*:

> The Cuban street was always animated and garrolous, with its town criers, officious peddlers, candy sellers announced by bells bigger than the fruit stand itself, the fruit carts with their headdresses made of palm fronds like a Palm Sunday procession, the hawkers of everything known to man.[23]

That image of Havana, "where everything was boiling, a crowd, a buzz"[24], contrasted with that depicted by Pedro Juan Gutiérrez's protagonist/narrator. The sound landscape typical of literary representations of the Cuban capital is replaced by a vision of Havana resembling, as indicated in the novel, "an area devastated by

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19 E. Rybicka, *Geopoetyka. Przestrzeń i miejsce we współczesnych teoriach i praktykach literackich*, Universitas, Kraków 2014, p. 244.

20 Ibid., p. 248.

21 Ibid., p. 249.

22 As quoted in G. Cabrera Infante, *op. cit.*, p. 96.

23 A. Carpentier, *op. cit.*, p. 69.

24 G. Cabrera Infante, *op. cit.*, p. 96.

a calamity" (215): "I slowly walked through the city. On Saturdays, there are few buses in Havana. Basically, there are none. It's best not to care. Not to care that (...) there is not enough food, that buses do not run, that there is no work. It's better that way." (134)

What is significant is that in his journey through the desolate city, the protagonist of *Nothing to Do* encounters only a couple of (narrow-minded? – vide quotation from a text by Guillermo Cabrera Infante) tourists.

> Fat, huge, spongy, ugly, white, red, flaking, out of this world. That was what they looked like. (...) Both got dressed as if it was autumn in some cool city on a fjord. They were sweaty, bewildered and constantly looking around. They carefully read a guidebook and then viewed a historic ship and historic planes under historic trees. They understood nothing. The guy looked at me. (...) He could not stop staring at me (135).

That scene evokes associations with the thoughts of Guillermo Cabrera Infante regarding the album *La Habana*, published in Havana in 1986, which included photographs of the city taken by Manuel Méndez Guerrero.

> (...) what would happen if someone came and photographed Madrid, Barcelona or Sevilla and if they took photographs of Las Ramblas and Paseo de Garcia, or Gran Via, or the solitary tower in Girona and no one would be there, not in the streets, or in the alleys, or the gateways, or behind fences – not a single hand on a splendid knocker – no one to see, not a single soul? As if cities became deserted. Because there is (in the album) not a single urban portrait with those who co-create the city alongside the buildings, i.e. its inhabitants. We would probably think about some calamity, the outcomes of some biological warfare, a bombardment with neutrino bombs. Or maybe about some Mediaeval city decimated by the plague. No one would, of course, think that the city turned into a museum. Havana, according to *La Habana*, in the photographs by Manuel Méndez is a collection of palaces, small palaces, buildings, houses, and streets between which there is no one (apart from an inconspicuous female model even more emphatically stressing solitude) because, simply put, no one lives there any more.[25]

On Saturday afternoons, Pedro Juan Gutiérrez's Havana is empty. In the city dominated by extreme poverty, all the sellers and shoppers vanished from the streets; all people vanished from the streets. Even the foreign tourist seems surprised by the presence of another person in the street – of a Cuban, a Havanan; he looks at him the way one looks at exhibits in a museum... or a specimen in a zoo.

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[25] Ibid., p. 95.

Actually, Pedro Juan tries to use this situation and attempts to sell him for dollars some useless coins with the image of *Che* Guevara. Of course, it is most convenient to interpret the protagonist's behaviour as triggered by the intention to make profit off the foreigner's naivety; to make the basic money, because in that level of poverty no one even thinks about earning something on the side. If, however, one assumes – following Elżbieta Rybicka's argument – that within the literary frame the silence of space "is a void left by former life, a trace of absence"[26], one can also notice in that (desperate?) gesture of the protagonist a need to interrupt the painful, because it dominates the surroundings, torpor; a need to break the silence – an attempt which irritates the tourist. (Is it shattering the sterile and museum-like vision of Havana which he formed when viewing *La Habana*?)

The cracks in the invisible wall which separates the Havana of the propaganda albums and tourists from the Havana of Havanans appear at night when the latter ones fill the streets in search of an escape (alcohol, sex) from their everyday life spent vegetating.

As John Urry aptly noted, there are places which "particularly invite strolling and possessing the place" – "one feels invited into its nooks and crannies, or one's eye is drawn along its grand vistas."[27] Certainly Malecón – Havana's sea-side promenade, which spans from the San Salvador de la Punta castle in Old Havana all the way to the Almendares River which separates Vedado (an elegant borough and an administrative centre) from Miramar (a residential borough) – seems to have everything which is necessary to be one of those places. Yet it appears that the Havana seen in 1995 'from the inside' deviates considerably from the idealistic image of Havana's coast, which in the first decades of the 20th century was propagated by foreigners viewing it across the sea.

> (…) we went to Malecón. There was a bunch of people. The humid July heat had everyone getting out of their lairs and seeking the cool of the sea, and at the same time having some fun and listening to music. Almost the whole Malecón was swamped in darkness and full of loud music. Actually, not really music but rather a terrifying cacophony of sounds coming from every direction. The sea was completely motionless, and the air was still. Not a single gust. Nothing. Only sticky heat, crowds of people, darkness and the stench of overflowing cesspools (184).

In Gutiérrez's text, the noise of Havana's streets at night (vide the quotation from Hergesheimer) is replaced by loud music, a terrible cacophony of sounds. The accumulation of references to other unpleasant sensory perceptions – of touch (wet

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26 E. Rybicka, *op. cit.*, p. 251.

27 J. Urry, *op. cit.*, p. 81. [English version: J. Urry, *Sociology Beyond Societies: Mobilities for the Twenty-First Century*, Routledge, London 2000.]

and sticky heat, still air) and of smell (the stench of overflowing cesspools) – from which one can hardly escape as they are universal, in combination with the widespread darkness, creates a rather overwhelming image of a boulevard, breaking off with the concept of a place favourable for careless strolling 'outside of time' – stepping into brightly lit shops, cafés, and restaurants, an ecstasy resulting from the fact that one allows themselves to be carried by the crowd.[28]

When reporting on his night out in Malecón, the narrator/protagonist of *Nothing to Do* reveals how, in the face of crisis, Havanans "manipulate" the plan of their city, developing their "own «tactical» ways of walking and conversing" within its scope.[29]

> We were sitting with my Mexican Yank in the arcade of Deauville Hotel and we were drinking beer one after the other. In downtown Havana, it is unsafe to sit outside on a Sunday afternoon and drink beer with a fat, reddish and very white guy. That sixty-year-old guy must have a load of cash. A whole pack crowded around us baring their teeth as they smelled money. So, they caught our scent and attacked. First, children started asking for coins. Then, obstinate whores appeared. Their pimps offered us rum, cigarettes and aphrodisiacs. All that smuggled and super cheap. While doing that, everyone tried to tell us their story. Poverty destroyed everything and everyone, from the inside. The stage of socialism and «don't bite the hand that feeds» ended. Now, there was a different rule: «Every man's for himself.» The hell with compassion and such non-sense. (183)

The image of the impoverished crowd pressing on Pedro Juan and his companion from every direction – a crowd whose main goal was to gain some money (through prostitution, theft, or begging) to simply survive another day – is, in my opinion, only amplified by the sense of being overwhelmed and suffocating gradually. It seems that Gutiérrez changed in his novel the connotations of elements within the inside/outside opposition. Paradoxically, this fact of staying in enclosed spaces – as opposed to staying on the promenade – offers the opportunity to breathe freely, to take in a breath of fresh air.

> We stepped into a pizzeria by the hotel Saint John. Clear bright premises, few people, air-conditioned. Man, it was calm! You paid in dollars though, actually, not so much, but certainly it was not accessible for the mob ready to stab you for ten bucks. We ordered two pizzas with ham and beer. We took a deep breath and smiled. I like breathing fresh, dry, nicely smelling air. Then I have a sense of luxury, comfort and

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28 Ibid., p. 82.

29 In this instance, I am using the terminology which Bulent Diken used to describe the behaviour of Turkish immigrants living in the Danish city of Aarhus (as quoted in J. Urry, *op. cit.*, p. 81).

general bliss. You are in a place with air-conditioning and you feel light and life-giving neutrons getting into your lungs. All protons stay outside with the humid heat, noise and mindless crowds. There are no crowds here. There are few people, everyone is dressed well, chubby and speaking in lowered voices (187).

As John Urry noted (after Michel de Certau), unlike in the case of tactics of walking which "consist of the seizing of opportunities that arise through time", and which "serve to constitute lived space and are improvisational and unpredictable" (vide obtrusive attempts to gain money in Malecón, where all that should flourish is social life), strategies of walking "involve disciplining and regimentation, based upon notions of what are proper activities and ways of walking within and through particular spaces."[30] The perfect example of such strategies in Gutiérrez's novel are those which result from one's knowledge of the division of Malecón (and Havana) into zones of influence of specific social groups, as if delimited from one another with the walls of sexual and racial prejudice:

The section of Malecón which begins with Maceo park is the exclusive territory of fags and lesbians. A gay 100-meter stretch. *Free love.* Further, towards Vedado, everything changes. Gays are the borderline between the dangerous zone of black power and the relative calm in Vedado, which seems alien to that chaos. But that's not true. The plague has spread everywhere. After all, we're all inhabitants in some way. In Vedado, anxiety lurks underneath. Dig a bit and it explodes with the same ferocity as everywhere else (186–187).

Additionally, the existence of places such as the above-mentioned Deauville Hotel (the only hotel for tourists in Centro Habana, located on the coastal promenade) and the restaurants of the hotel called Saint John's (where you can pay only in dollars) clearly indicates that movement around the Cuban capital is intermediated by the relations of power. It is them that erect 'walls', i.e. they decide where and when social groups can move.

An interesting point of reference is offered by a remark by Zygmunt Bauman regarding the modern city. According to the sociologist, one of its most typical elements is the so-called architecture of fear, which takes the form of, e.g., monitored residential complexes, with boom gates, guards, and CCTV at every gate. Bauman thus defined its tasks: "Heavily armoured trenches and bunkers intended to (...) keep them [strangers] away and bar their entry."[31] *Nothing to Do* helps one realise that in the case of the crisis-ridden Cuban society walls emerging from poverty are

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30 Ibid., pp. 80–81.

31 Z. Bauman, *Płynne życie*, trans. S. Kasprzysiak, Wydawnictwo Literackie, Kraków 2007, p. 116. [English version: Z. Bauman, *Liquid Life*, Polity Press, Cambridge 2005.]

just as effective as walls built of stone; poverty understood as "depriving of material goods and physical inconveniences", as well as "inability to use that «which life has to offer»"[32] (vide the privilege to eat pizza with ham in an air-conditioned establishment). In this instance, there occurs a reversal of the function of the elements of yet another opposition: us versus them. The more or less visible "walls", "moats", and "palisades" do not protect – as they traditionally used to in cities – the inhabitants of Havana from foreigners/newcomers but, rather, newcomers/tourists from Havanans. As Bauman explained: "A tourist encounters natives for a short time, and their contact is superficial. (...) He did pay in advance for his freedom from moral duties (…)."[33] Moreover, tourists are not bound by the "social maps" devised by the inhabitants of a place (those only apply to natives); they can assign own meanings, seek in them opportunities for experiencing adventures, consider only that which they like as the space which they visit is for them soft and pliable.

And if that "pliability" of space in which they remain was that which differentiated a tourist from a vagabond, "for whom [in turn] the «hardness» of reality is not questionable as everywhere he is he must earn a living, i.e. «submit to necessities», and he can only avoid unpleasant things if he resorts to escaping"[34], Gutiérrez's Havanans have much in them of vagabonds.

At this point it is worth mentioning that when he wrote about the tourist and the vagabond as the metaphors of postmodern life, Zygmunt Bauman noted that despite what those notions suggest in their original meanings, "one can be (and often is) a tourist and a vagabond without ever travelling physically far"[35], one does not even have to move at all. In other words, despite that movement at the core of Bauman's concept, it can be considered in terms of its potential, a degree of mobility, the right to choose a place where one wishes to remain.

For Cubans "bound by local relations"[36] (island, regime, lack of money) who cannot freely move and are thus forced to accept begrudgingly every change occurring where they live/vegetate, their actual living space shrinks and closes quickly. During the day, many inhabitants of Havana do leave it, yet they do not venture far beyond the city limits. During a crisis debilitating the country, when

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32 Z. Bauman, "Bycie ubogim w społeczeństwie konsumpcyjnym", [in:] *Bauman o popkulturze. Wypisy*, M. Halawa, P. Wróbel (eds.), Wydawnictwa Akademickie i Profesjonalne, Warsaw 2008, pp. 295–296.

33 Z. Bauman, *Etyka ponowoczesna*, trans. J. Bauman, J. Tokarska-Bakir, Wydawnictwo Naukowe PWN, Warsaw 1996, p. 329.

34 Ibid., p. 328.

35 Z. Bauman, *Ponowoczesność jako źródło cierpień*, Wydawnictwo Sic!, Warsaw 2000, p. 150 [English version: Z Bauman, *Postmodernity and its Discontents*, Polity Press, Cambridge 1997].

36 I am using an expression borrowed from Z. Bauman, "Mobilni i niemobilni w społeczeństwie konsumpcyjnym", [in:] *Bauman o popkulturze. Wypisy*, M. Halawa, P. Wróbel (eds.), Wydawnictwa Akademickie i Profesjonalne, Warsaw 2008, p. 291.

the government which used to do anything to control everything now left all its citizens to fend for themselves, in order not to die of hunger they need to go to the countryside in search of food, any excess of which they later sell – illegally, since this is forbidden.

> The train left a few minutes past six. Hungry and tired, I slept the night in the dark, dirty and urine-drenched cart. It was crowded. Many people were returning to Havana with hens, pigs and bananas. With bags full of rice and other provisions. Only me like some utter fool were carrying nothing. Damn it, whenever I thought about that, I felt like slamming by head on the wall. I must have been looking the wrong way. I could have found something: lemons, oranges, anything to at least make up for the ticket. There, we were released into a jungle. We were driven out with a kick in the ass (145–146).

One could venture a conclusion that by shuttling between Havana and the countryside, Pedro Juan and thousands like him only seemingly displayed an ability to move; actually, they were not moving anywhere, and the motion was rather caused by the earth on which they lived and which kept "moving away from under their feet."[37] The stench of overflowing cesspools in Malecón, the urine-drenched train carts, darkness, the pressing crowd, the hustle... – always the same unyieldingly sticky and claustrophobic surroundings. As Bauman noted, unlike in the case of the inhabitants of the first world who – while being able to cover any distance without delay and in no time – keep living in time, "in the second world [the world of the non-mobiles] people live in space: languid, extensible, inviolable; a space which binds time and takes away their ability to control it"[38]; a space from which no one can escape.

Private space – the walls and ceilings of everyday existence

In *Nothing to Do*, what is divided and limited is not only space in the public sphere, but also the private one – with the difference that while in the case of the former one the walls are completely real though often invisible and conventional, the latter one is, quite literally, a series of "stuffy, dark and terribly dirty rooms in sordid and half-ruined tenements." (166)

One needs to remember that one of the main goals of the Revolution was to eliminate the class structure of the Cuban society. To achieve this, already in the initial years the authorities nationalised, expropriated, and confiscated private

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37 Ibid., p. 290.
38 Ibid., p. 292.

property, seizing it for the state.[39] As a result, there formed a space for various instances of negligence, and the economic crisis of the early years of the 1990s ruined the residential sphere. In his novel, Pedro Juan Gutiérrez did not avoid this issue.

> The lift is not working again, and it's completely dark in the stairwell. Everyone keeps stealing light bulbs, vandalising the lift, and building more and more illegal mezzanines and storage rooms to somehow fit. This whole building of ours will some day collapse. I can't stand this misery anymore. Between the fourth and fifth floor those idiots of ours shitted on the stairs. That stench of fresh shit is truly unbearable. (...) Our house used to be an elegant eight-storey building with two Boston-style façades, one from San Lázaro, the other from Malecón and the sea. Today, it looks like an aristocrat who has gone to the dogs.
> (...) our naive residents' council wants to close the gate to finally have peace on the stairs. But the problem is that the whole building is falling apart. Literally, not figuratively. It stands right on the sea and it crumbles due to the wind and salt spray. There is no one to repair it (216–217).

The image of Gutiérrez's house has little to do with stopping, remaining, feeling calm, being content, being in one's own place, which are all things that Martin Heidegger listed as the basic elements of this place and which differentiate it from the public space.[40] It is quite the opposite:

> The stench of shit and urine coming from the toilet was truly unbearable. After four days without water in a house with two hundred residents and in that heat a person can really go mad (...) I closed the door to the flat and walked out to stand a bit in the street (164–165).

What certainly draws one's attention in both of the quoted descriptions is the writer's references to smells, which in the case of *Nothing to Do* transform into, as Elżbieta Rybicka would call them, "a dominant feature of the literary representation" of space, or even into Gutiérrez's "authorial signature."[41]

The "shitty" "cubbyholes" (both words are used in the novel), where it is difficult to breathe because of the exhalations poisoning the air, become similar to, in my opinion, cages. I associate them with traps, the walls of which move inwards, overwhelming the individuals living inside. And even though Pedro Juan confesses at some point

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[39]   M. Fernández Pérez, "La igualdad como fundamento y propósito de la justicia social y del desarrollo en Cuba", *Cuba posible*, 25.10.2017, https://cubaposible.com/igualdad-justicia-social-del-desarrollo-cuba/ (accessed on: 19.12.2018).

[40]   J. Urry, *op. cit.*, p. 184.

[41]   E. Rybicka, *op. cit.*, p. 249.

that he likes to sit by the door in closed rooms, because "when something happens, you can leave immediately" (150), it is actually impossible to run away from the stench as it is volatile and dynamic, and it "attacks" from every side; moreover, it pours out of houses into streets (the stench of overflowing cesspools). It floods the entire island (urine-drenched carts). (Is the sea the ultimate natural limit of its spread?)

As Rybicka stressed, the sensory literary geography assumes that every "sensory experience carries additional meanings; it is not only a passive reception by the senses, but also a source of information and meanings."[42] Therefore, allow me to venture a thesis that in Pedro Juan Gutiérrez's novel the stench becomes a literary articulation of the (claustrophobic?) sensation of suffocation experienced by Havanans/Cubans. In this context, it seems interesting that references to unpleasant olfactory perceptions often emerge (surprisingly?) also in Zygmunt Bauman's texts when he wrote about the factors stratifying the modern society. For instance, he noted that: "There exists [in the society] «apartheid à rebours»: some can afford to leave the dirty and stinky areas leave there those who cannot afford to relocate."[43]

The scholar argued that when the doors are closed shut from the inside, every house becomes a prison.[44] And I would add: for Cubans deprived of the freedom to choose their life paths, the crisis-ridden homeland is also a prison.

The ever-prolonging interruptions in power and water supply, and food and medicine shortages make the fact of staying at home basically unbearable for many inhabitants of Cuba. "They can't just like that forget about people. This whole house is falling apart. There is no water, no gas, no food, nothing. What does that mean? How long are we supposed to live like this?" (175) one of Pedro Juan's former neighbours asked, one who in the past (which, in my opinion, is meaningful) was a functionary of Castro's regime.

No wonder that in such circumstances many Cubans dream about leaving their house/island. Some actually do abandon it. Zygmunt Bauman explained that in the imagination of a wanderer, be it a tourist or a vagabond, fuelled by longing, a house is a "retreat from the hurly-burly where one could shelter, where one could be unambiguously, unproblematically chez soi – draw the curtains, close the eyes and plug the ears to new sensations, shut the door to new adventures."[45] What is interesting to me is that in the analysed novel, those dreams about a home always somehow also connect with access to fresh air. Zulema, one of Pedro Juan's lovers, who lives hoping that the father of her child will bring her to Miami – a resident of "a tiny room, four by four meters", "a disgusting hovel" the only "small window" of which overlooks "a corridor which stinks of dog shit, where all the time neighbours yell,

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42 E. Rybicka, *op. cit.*, p. 248.

43 Z. Bauman, "Mobilni...", p. 289.

44 Z. Bauman, *Ponowoczesność...*, p. 148.

45 Ibid., p. 148.

argue and fight" (207) – talks about her nephew who lives in Sweden and "has [there] his own house with an electric extractor of smells in the kitchen" (196). Robertico, who came to Havana from Germany on holiday to spend a few days with his family, in a "stinking rattrap without water filled with a heavy, humid and suffocating heat" (166), brings with him many packages and cardboard boxes and inside them, listed first by the narrator, a fan (actually useless as the power is out).

Unfortunately, for most Havanans, the crumbling walls and ceilings define the only possible space of residence. They have nowhere to go as they will not be accepted anywhere. As is usually the case with emigrants and refugees, to once again quote Zygmunt Bauman,

> (…) there pile [in front of them] ever higher walls of immigration control, rules of permanent stay, the policies of «clean streets» and «zero tolerance». Moats separating them from their longed-for places and their dreamt salvation deepen, and all bridges prove to be drawbridges at the first attempt to cross them. (…) they travel stealthily, often illegally, and it is not rare for them to pay for a place in the crowded third class of a stinking ship unfit for sea travel more than what those first ones pay for the gold-leaf luxury of the «business class.»"[46]

And sometimes it is also the case that even if they manage to make their way into the "nice, bright and clean" (196) world, they cannot live there as its "expanse bewilders [them]", while they "need one small space which they would be able to grasp." (215) It turns out that life in a dirty and stinky "cage" makes a permanent mark on the minds of many people.

> Carlitos, the child of chaos, telephoned his mother and his brother every day. He cried. He could not sleep at night. He was not able to live in that Miami. He was totally not happy with his *American dream*. He spent a fortune on telephone bills, and he could not muster the will or power to do anything. He simply couldn't. He carried inside him the entire despair of chaos. His heart was as if closed behind iron bars. (159)

Over the city – the space of personal freedom

Pedro Juan (as one of the few if not the only one) does not think about escaping Cuba: "People think [he concluded] that only someone brave can float a truck inner tube to Miami. Someone like that is not brave. They are simply suicidal." (207) Even though he, too, is overwhelmed with the reality, he makes every effort to survive:

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46   Z. Bauman, "Mobilni…", p. 293.

People now are dirty, hungry, tattered and no one wants to talk. Everyone has just one problem: how to get some food and money to survive.

(...) But I'm still keeping my spirit up. That's good. You cannot lose hope. When you don't have it, soon you'll be worm food. I put the spiny lobster in the fridge, I poured myself a glass of water with sugar and I went to sleep. I was terribly tired. (225)

For him, a method for surviving – in physical as well as spiritual terms, strenuous, day by day – becomes, in my opinion, the complete acceptance of his fate as a vagabond, a person who can "plan the route for today or tomorrow at the most", for whom "it is only important not to lose his ability to move, and it is also important to extract from every stop as much benefit as he can."[47]

Contrary to how it is with pilgrims who always move in a straight line, the routes of vagabonds twist and turn; and the more limited the space through which they can move is (vide the remark on Cubans being bound with their local bonds), the more entangled these routes are. It is interesting that the route which formed as Pedro Juan wanders through Havana is defined not only by horizontal motion but also by motion within the vertical axis; many times in the novel there is talk of the need to ascend or descend stairs ["I barely managed to climb that eighth floor of mine" (146); "I descended down on foot. The lift had been out of order for years. Twelve floors" (175); "Those ten floors without a lift are really hard" (195)]. I am convinced that the space which opens in front of the protagonist/narrator of *Nothing to Do* after ascending those many floors is not meaningless for the interpretation of Gutiérrez's novel.

When discussing the topic of creating space in literature, Javier del Prado Biezma has indicated that it suggests the character of a relationship between the authorial *Self* and the material reality represented by this space.[48] In doing that, the Spanish researcher established a series of significant oppositions which help define this character: natural space versus social space, private space versus public space, imagined space versus real space, vertically developed space versus horizontally developed space, space constructed of soft matter versus space constructed of hard matter. Clearly, in the case of the novel analysed in this article, it is always dominated by the latter element of each opposition.

Therefore, the Havana in *Nothing to Do* is a metaphor of oppression, captivity of an individual – a space which the inhabitants of the city would like to dominate; which they would like to rule, but they cannot. Not only its streets, but also its flats prevent them from forgetting about the status of individuals in the Cuban social

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47 Z. Bauman, *Dwa szkice o moralności ponowoczesnej*, Instytut Kultury, Warsaw 1994, p. 28.

48 J. del Prado Biezma, *Análisis e interpretación de la novela. Cinco modos de leer un texto narrativo*, Editorial Síntesis, Madrid 2000, p. 41.

hierarchy. According to Zygmunt Bauman, time has no authority over excessively real space which limits the non-mobile inhabitants of the world.[49] Indeed, when reading Gutiérrez's novel, one might have the impression that movement conveyed by the swift narrative is unhealthy and unnecessarily accelerated as, in fact, the only thing that Havanans do is to linger down the streets of the city day after day in their emaciated bodies. Stinking and dark hallways and stairwells, stuffy and small flats where "when it rains (...) pieces of the ceiling fall on his heads", buildings which "will go to shit any moment" (173) – they all reflect the spirits of the people who inhabit them.

> (...) that well-developed instinct of self-preservation is one of the faces of poverty [Pedro Juan argued]. But poverty has also other faces. Probably the most visible one is meanness and a somewhat narrowing of the spirit. You become a pathetic, greedy and conniving character. Your only concern is to survive. The hell with nobleness, solidarity, kindness, and pacifism. (161)

And this touches upon the core issue. Even though the rooms in which Pedro Juan lives here and there are the same dingy cubbyholes as all other flats presented in *Nothing to Do*, 'his' rooms possess a certain discerning feature: they are located on the roofs of buildings. This has, of course, its drawbacks as "the roof is made of eternit, so [it's] like in an oven" (217), but the advantage is a terrace, and in it sometimes a breeze and always an excellent view: of the city, the sea...

According to Javier del Prado Biezma, the symbolic reach of the literary representation of the natural landscape is likely to constitute a counterbalance for the image of the city; it is a space of an escape from the reality, a metaphor of the *Self*, freedom, and even God.[50] Then, when one combines it with the height which symbolises dreams escaping upwards, there emerges the effect of a release from material weight. These assumptions are actually reflected in the analysed novel:

> I lived at that time in an extension on a flat roof of a high-rise near Malecón. On the twelfth floor and some sixty meters above the street. I liked to sit on the very edge of the roof dangling my legs in the air. It was simple. All you had to do was jump off of the roof onto the eaves: a beautiful eaves supported by stone gargoyles shaped as griffins and birds-of-paradise. That building of ours was old, very strong and in a Boston style, yet it was deteriorating rapidly. It was being vandalised by all those people cooped up in it somewhat trying to survive.
> (...) So in the evening I jumped off onto the eaves and sat with my legs dangling over the street. I enjoyed the coolness and watched the city deep in darkness. Those were

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49   Z. Bauman, "Mobilni...", p. 292.

50   J. del Prado Biezma, *op. cit.*, p. 41.

fantastic moments. I dreamt of jumping off, flying like a bird and feeling the freest person alive.

(...) It was a beautiful moon-lit night, a full moon, blue sky, smooth still sea, and almost deserted Malacón. I remained on that eaves like a bat, ecstatic, suspended above a void and not thinking about anything. It is wonderful to hang in the air when from the sea a cool June breeze blows towards you, and it is almost complete silence around. Then, you really don't think about anything. I can think about nothing because I feel weightless, I flow, I permeate into myself and I desire nothing. I am alone with myself. It is a true miracle among all those storms and catastrophes. A miracle happening inside me. (178)

Being "crushed by shit" (160) and "stuck in shit" (209), Pedro Juan finds the last stronghold of his freedom in a roof-top terrace or, actually, outside it, i.e. on its eaves where the view of open space is not obscured by any brickwork or wall. This surrounding is so personal that the fact of him just being there enables him to communicate with the intimate dimension of himself. Only there, in solitude, can he become himself: his internal conflict between matter and spirit subsides, a conflict which normally causes him to feel "torn", "split into pieces" (140), like the city through which he travels.

Unfortunately, a careful analysis of the description of the views stretching in front of his eyes from the terrace indicates that the sense of freedom in the space "above the city" is deceptive.

At first glance, the first description is dominated by rather pleasant sensory perceptions, both visual and auditory ones.

I poured myself a glass of rum and I sat on the terrace. The sea is completely smooth, and the setting sun paints the fort in El Morro golden. A huge and empty tanker is setting off from the port. I can see three sailors doing something on the bow. They are collecting some things. I can hear a delicate hum of machines. The ship is so huge and moves so slowly that I can almost feel the vibrations of its metal plates. It is green-and-red all around and it moves away quickly. It disappears in the late evening fog. A guy dressed all white stands on the third deck. He leans out over the railing and watches the beautiful golden city. I, too, am watching the green-and-red ship which is moving further away and dissolves in the fog (127–128).

That seemingly innocent image hides something disturbing; even more so as the motif appears several times throughout the novel: in Gutiérrez's text, the sea is always "smooth like a tabletop" (217). If one adds to this an almost permanent water shortage in Havana, the first association one has is a standstill, a lack of flow. In one of his poems, the already mentioned Nicolás Guillén referred to blood as

a "huge sea, / which washes overs all beaches"[51], thus referring to the role the ocean has played in Cuba's history, i.e. of a channel which brought to the island all the elements which shaped its culture. In *Nothing to Do*, the Caribbean Sea – "still" (189) when viewed from the terrace or Malecón, yet rough and dangerous when trying to cross it in a boat (217) – transforms for Cubans into an impenetrable barrier. The huge and empty ship, traditionally a literary symbol of freedom, is close yet inaccessible when entering the port; the expanse of the open sea towards which it moves disappears, just as it does, into the fog. This description could not be much farther from the image of "a forest of sails and rigging", mentioned by Alexander von Humboldt enchanted by the view of Havana's port. The contrast between the only passenger on the ship, dressed white and admiring the city bathed in the light of the setting sun – and the emaciated Pedro Juan watching him from the terrace of a dilapidated and dirty Havana high-rise – requires one to think about moats which cannot be levelled, about isolation, desolation, and a lack of perspectives.

The second description seems to offer arguments confirming this interpretation:

> From my place at the top, you can see the whole city deep in darkness. There is no wind, so still black thick smoke hangs over the stacks of the Tallapiedra power plant. The stench of ammonia fills the city silvered by the full moon glistening over that heavy and stinky cloud. There is almost no movement in the streets, a car drives through Malecón from time to time. There is silence everywhere, and calmness, and all you can hear is hollow drumming in the distance. I like this place. I can watch from it the silver sea which spreads all the way to the horizon. But I finally can't stand that ammonia smoke. I go back into the flat and close the door. It's still hot. The heat won't subside until the morning. I only leave a small window from the south side opened. From there you can also see the whole city, dark and quiet suffocating below in the silver light of the moon. It looks as if it was bombarded and abandoned. It is falling apart more and more, but it is beautiful, this damn city, where I loved so much and hated just as much. (218–219)

It seems that the omnipresent stink reaches even the roof of the twelve-storey building, forcing Pedro Juan – just as one would herd an animal into a cage – to return to his flat. This might be surprising considering the fact that, as John Urry noted, high-rises erected at the end of the 19th century in Chicago were built with the specific intention to isolate their inhabitants from the stench inseparably associated with the meat industry in that case, while enabled them to view the whole city from above.[52] This leads me to the conclusion that if the terrace is the last place

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51   Own translation of a fragment of the poem *Poema con niños* (vide N. Guillén, *Obra poética* 2 t., Ed. Letras Cubanas, La Habana 1995) [English version translated from Polish.]

52   J. Urry, *op. cit.*, p. 136.

where the "horizon of own imagination [is] the only limit of freedom"[53] of the protagonist, then the suffocating smoke from the power plant would be a metaphor of the fear of the Cuban regime of losing its rule over individuals: "There above [– as Pedro Juan commented in another place in the novel –], everyone is terrified that some tiny area of personal freedom may suddenly expand and cover the sphere of ideology." (169)

Conclusion

In the 1986 essay titled *Semiology and the Urban*, Roland Barthes wrote that contrary to panoramic or functional studies, individual and personal interpretations of cities are those which distance themselves from the official meanings as only someone who truly travels the streets can appropriate some fragments of the urban text to later update them based on their own subjective view.[54] In other words, Barthes identified and added value to those visions of urban space in which "a glance, physical contact and the experience of an inhabitant of a city introduce dialogic interferences, (…) in a very permanent manner modifying and complementing the semantic load of the original signs."[55]

Nothing to Do by Pedro Juan Gutiérrez meets, in my opinion, all the requirements to be one of such visions. First of all, Pedro Juan, the novel's narrator/protagonist, who can be considered the author's literary alter ego, does not describe Havana from the perspective of an outside observer, but, rather, by being its inhabitant who moves through its streets, who co-creates its space. He fulfils, in my opinion, a dual role. On the one hand, as I have indicated several times, he is Bauman's vagabond, yet, on the other, considering his perception of the world and the level of awareness, he resembles, at least in terms of his attitude, the figure a 19th-century *flâneur*, an urban stroller: "The *flâneur* both seeks the essence of a place while at the same time consuming it. (…) scrutinising, detective work and dreaming set the *flâneur* apart from the rush-hour crowd."[56] Secondly, the autobiographical element of the novel[57] enables one to read it within a category based

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53   Z. Bauman, *Dwa szkice…*, p. 22.

54   R. Barthes, "Semiology and the Urban", [in:] *The City and the Sign: An Introduction to Semiotics*, M. Gottdiener, A. Ph. Lagopoulus (eds.), Columbia University Press, New York 1986, p. 95.

55   Own translation into Polish [and from Polish into English] of a fragment of an article by L. Guerro, "Género y cartografías significantes en los imaginarios urbanos de la novela latino-americana", [in:] *Más allá de la ciudad letrada: crónicas y espacios urbanos*, Boris Muñoz, S. Spitta (eds.), Instituto Internacional de Literatura Iberoamericana, Pittsburgh 2003, p. 287.

56   J. Urry, *op. cit.*, p. 82.

57   Anke Birkenmaier even mentioned a special kind of a play of identity happening between the novel's author and its protagonist. By styling his own biography to emphasise how similar it was to that of the protagonist, Gutiérrez seemed to intend to convince readers that he was

on the experiences of everyday life of the creator of the chronicle. And thus, Pedro Juan/Pedro Juan Gutiérrez seems an individual pushed to the social margin of the city who lives there, and, at the same time, a chronicler of that life.[58]

Therefore, *Nothing to Do* is a chronicle which *lives* in Havana, as well as a critical discourse about it. José Antonio Masoliver Ródenas saw in Gutiérrez's novel a politically neutral proof of demise[59]; that would be, in my opinion, the demise of the city, but also of the Cuban society. And even though the writer did not argue in his work openly in favour of any ideology, I recognised in the novel a criticism of the system at the level of the creation of the city's literary space.

When discussing the challenges of sociology for the 21st century, John Urry stressed the need to develop for it a new programme which would study the "diverse mobilities of peoples, objects, images, information and wastes; and the complex interdependencies and social consequences of, those diverse mobilities."[60] In Havana at the turn of the 21st century, as Pedro Juan Gutiérrez saw it, constant moving may have been the main kind of activity of the inhabitants of the city, but it surely had nothing to do with the mobility discussed by Urry – the one which crosses social borders in completely new space-time structures. On the contrary, it occurs within strictly defined and limited structures which undergo minor modifications – ones based on the tactics of walking employed by Havanans, yet clearly enforced by the Castro regime. For the purposes of this article, I termed those structures (sometimes invisible but still very tangible) as 'walls'. If public space were in the context of the analysed novel (and, in fact, not only this particular context) a metaphor of that which is social, the private space of a house would symbolise the individual sphere, a sphere of an individual's life's perspectives – more and more limited in the case of Cubans. In my article, I termed that lack of perspectives as walls and ceilings (which are falling apart). It is inside the space defined by all those walls and ceilings that the battle for survival takes place. The more conscious individuals, like Pedro Juan, still engage in a struggle for dignity, yet for the rest it is lost from the start.

I need to point out that the key role in shaping space in Pedro Juan Gutiérrez's novel is fulfilled by, in my opinion, references to olfactory perceptions which, in principle, rather "do not fit [clearly] the Western aesthetic theory."[61] Gutiérrez,

the protagonist's *doppelgänger* (A. Birkenmaier, *op. cit.*) Also José Antonio Masoliver Ródenas indicated the laconic nature of the information included in the author's biosketch on the book [vide J.A. Masoliver Ródenas, "Oficio: revolcador de mierda", *Revista de Libros*, 1.08.1999, https://www.revistadelibros.com/articulos/trilogia-sucia-de-la-habana-de-pedro-juan-gutierrez (accessed on: 18.12.2018)].

58 E. Whitfield, "Autobiografía sucia: The Body Impolitic of *Trilogía sucia de La Habana*", *Revista de Estudios Hispánicos* 2002, issue 36.2, pp. 329–353.

59 J.A. Masoliver Ródenas, *op. cit.*

60 J. Urry, *op. cit.*, p. 11.

61 Ibid., p. 138.

however, was perfectly aware of the symbolic load carried by them. First of all, which is clear in Zygmunt Bauman's arguments, the 'stigma' of smell is the basic criterion of social stratification, erecting walls of social divisions. Secondly, the stench, which can penetrate every part of space, accurately represents something from which there is no escaping, so it also connotes the sense of helplessness and suffocation (similar to the walls of a prison cell). On top of that, references to smell – which enables, like no other sense, a completely non-intermediated perception of the surrounding world – appeals to an experience-based community, which is understandable to every reader regardless of whether they are Cubans or people who know nothing about Cuba.

Still musty water, captivity, immobilisation, stench. Decomposition and death. A stuffed parrot (vide quotation from the text by Cabrera Infante), a dead city. Are "cities like dream [not] built of desires and fears, even if the thread of their speech is concealed, rules are absurd, perspectives are illusive, and everything hides another one inside?"[62]

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62 The quotation from a text by Italo Calvin is the motto with which Gutiérrez opened *Nothing to Do.*

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Ewelina Szymoniak

Mury, ściany i sufity Hawany Reprezentacja przestrzeni w powieści Pedra Juana Gutiérreza *Nic do roboty*

Streszczenie

Ameryka Łacińska jest kontynentem, na którym stawiano i burzono przez wieki niezliczone mury podziałów etnicznych, klasowych, politycznych. Społeczeństwem, które boleśnie doświadczyło tego, czym one są, czym jest izolacja, są Kubańczycy, dla których rajska niegdyś wyspa stała się klatką. Celem artykułu jest ukazanie sposobu, w jaki sposób kreuje literacką przestrzeń Hawany, przedstawiając codzienne życie jej mieszkańców, pisarz należący do pierwszego pokolenia Kubańczyków dorastających w rewolucyjnej rzeczywistości – Pedro Juan Gutiérrez. W powieści *Nic do roboty* [*Nada que hacer*] (1998), niewidzialne, lecz doskonale namacalne mury dzielące Hawanę na strefy wpływów różnych grup społecznych, rozpadające się ściany i sufity mieszkań nie są jedynie dowodem wszechobecnej biedy, ale zdają się stanowić również metaforę relacji władzy w obrębie społeczeństwa i jego stanu ducha. Z drugiej strony, autor pokazuje, w jaki sposób świadoma jednostka próbuje wybudować wokół siebie intelektualny mur, który odgrodziłby ją od pozbawiającej woli działania nicości. Analiza oparta została o koncepcje mobilności socjologów Zygmunta Baumana i Johna Urry'ego, szkic Elżbiety Rybickiej dotyczący sensorycznej geografii literackiej oraz rozważania Javiera del Prado Biezmy o sposobach przedstawiania przestrzeni w literaturze.

Słowa kluczowe: przestrzeń, literatura, włóczęga, krajobraz zapachowy, opresja, Hawana, Gutiérrez

The brickwork, walls and ceilings of Havana: Representations of space in Pedro Juan Gutiérrez's Novel *Nothing to Do*

S u m m a r y

Latin America is a continent where for centuries various walls of ethnic, class, and political divisions were erected and demolished. Cubans, for whom the once paradise island became a cage, are a society which painfully experienced what those walls are as well as what isolation is. The aim of the article was to discuss the way in which Pedro Juan Gutiérrez, a writer who belongs to the first generation of Cubans who grew up in the Revolutionary reality, creates the literary space of Havana by depicting the every-day lives of its inhabitants. In the novel titled *Nothing to Do* [*Nada que hacer*] (1998), the invisible yet terribly tangible walls dividing Havana into zones of influence of various social groups, and the disintegrating walls and ceilings of flats are not the only proof of the universal poverty – they also seem to constitute a metaphor of the relations of power within the society and of the condition of its spirit. Furthermore, the author indicates how a conscious individual tries to build around themselves an intellectual wall which could separate them from the void which deprives one of the will to act. The analysis was based on the concept of mobility by Zygmunt Bauman and John Urry, on a study by Elżbieta Rybicka regarding the sensory literary geography, and on a discussion by Javier del Prado Biezma of the methods for presenting space in literature.

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Brickwork and the wall as metaphors in Carlo Emilio Gadda's fiction

Carlo Emilio Gadda is one of the most outstanding Italian writers of the 20th century. From the beginning of his career, he was considered an eccentric due to his Baroque style and his merciless exposition of the volatility and superficiality of social relations. He was born in Milan in 1893 in an impoverished burgher family with intellectual traditions. He was raised in the patriotic spirit of Lombardy's Enlightenment and Romanticism. He experienced a profound crisis related to the breakout of the First World War, in which he participated as a volunteer to the Alpini corps. He completed technical studies and started working as an electrical engineer at various locations in Italy, Europe, and South America.[1] When he made his literary début, he had been an adult for some time already and his world view had already formed; his philosophy of literature was based on careful and personal interpretations of Leibniz, Spinoza, and Kant, and his life's experiences were reflected in his works. Gadda started as a literary historian and a critic when in 1927 he published in the *Solaria* literary journal the essay titled "Apologia manzoniana", which was devoted to Alessandro Manzoni, the most outstanding writer of the Italian Romanticism. He débuted as a fiction writer with a collection of short stories titled *Madonna dei filosofi*, published in 1931.[2] Originally affiliated with the *Solaria* journal, he quickly found his own extremely original means of expression, which made him an exceptional writer in the Italian literary scene. The fixed elements of his texts were autobiographical motifs related to inter-family relations – especially to his mother – and social relations, the traumatic experiences of the First World War, and his travels, particularly his visit to Argentina. He was underestimated during the initial period

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1   G.C. Ferretti, *Il ritratto di Gadda*, Laterza 1987, pp. 3–11.
2   A. Seroni, *Carlo E. Gadda*, La Nuova Italia Editrice, Firenze 1973, pp. 5–7.

of his writing career – he was considered an oddball with an eccentric style. It took the following generation of writers to recognise in him their originator and master.[3] He was an intellectual loner to whom no definitions matched and who did not belong to any literary school.[4] The language of literature became the main focus of his expressionist experiments; it was owing to this that Gadda was able to expose these elements of reality which he considered the focus of his literary criticism: the fake burgher relations, the chaos of reality, and intellectual mediocrity. Gadda's original writing style was a combination of styles and registers[5], which combined sophisticated forms with jargon or dialect forms, archaisms and neologisms, and terms borrowed from various areas of science (philosophy, mathematics, biology, geology, medicine, technical sciences, etc.) Obviously, such a language did not serve the purpose of describing reality but, rather, it became a tool for interpreting and critiquing it, as well as a cognitive tool. For Gadda the reality – the material reality in particular – was always the starting point and pretext for exposing and critiquing deeper relations at all levels of existence. The world of objects was presented in Gadda's prose through his favourite and most commonly used rhetorical devices, i.e. enumerations and accumulations. Thus, there formed a special kind of an "accumulation rhetoric of the catalogue."[6] The technique of a record applied by Gadda was supposed to organise and catalogue the chaotic reality in order to extract from the depth inside it all possible relations connecting individual components of the material world. The description of that "super-reality"[7] included even the minutest material items through which – in a somewhat reverse narrative perspective, i.e. from the object to the subject – he developed the identities of his person-characters.[8]

One major element of the material reality he described was architecture, which was also a common source of the author's literary inspiration. Mysterious gardens, castle towers, and old houses were topical motifs in Gadda's fiction. His characters moved within those spaces, and by indicating this the characters acquired specific

3   Alberto Arbasino argued: "(…) the twenty-year-olds of the 1950s discovered that in our modern literature he occupies the «central» position. (…) The people of letter of the 1930s and 40s stubbornly considered him an outsider, «an eccentric… who picked up literature late», a «humourist» who was extremely wearisome and «jabberish» (…) Cf. A. Arbasino, "Inżynier w granatowym garniturze", trans. H. Kralowa, *Literatura na świecie*, issue 1-2/2013 [498–499], p. 112.

4   J. Szymanowska, "Proza okresu międzywojennego", [in:] *Historia literatury włoskiej XX wieku*, J. Ugniewska (ed.), Wydawnictwo Naukowe PWN, Warsaw 2001, p. 142.

5   Alberto Arbasino referred to his "extremely weird style". Cf. A. Arbasino, *op. cit.*, p. 113.

6   C. Verbaro, *La cognizione della pluralità. Letteratura e conoscenza in Carlo Emilio Gadda*, Le Lettere, Firenze 2005, p. 120.

7   F. Bertoni, *La verità sospetta. Gadda e l'invenzione della realtà*, Einaudi, Torino 2001, pp. 141–142.

8   Cf. E. Guaraldo, "Il realismo di Gadda", [in:] idem. *In cerca del mattino: il senso della nascita in letteratura*, Franco Angeli Editore, Milan 2004, p. 217.

meanings. Yet, in Gadda's fiction it was actually space and objects that became the true characters of his narratives.

The brickwork and walls of villas, condos, labourers' flats, rural manors, and towering stone fencings often possess dual meanings and roles: they separate one from the world and protect them against the chaos of the world, or are the products of the despised by the writer burgher culture, the marks of its members' undoubted richness and bad taste. This was why they became the focus of his criticism.

For Gadda, architecture was also a point of reference when he developed his original comparisons and metaphors, the goal of which was to transcend the classical forms of expression. It was that constant search for the effect of stylistic transgression and not fidelity in reproducing the reality that constituted the writer's main driving force:

> Gadda not so much named things and objects as he surprised them as they developed and proved their temporary existence. One could say that the insurmountable mistrust in "utilitarian language", to any form of "utility", lies at the foundation of the exuberant world of metaphors of his pages.[9]

Therefore, his affinity to rhetoric and devices such as extended metaphor or the already mentioned catalogue and enumeration stemmed from Gadda's deeper, deliberate writing project developed over many years. Indeed, Gadda's works were based on an extremely accurately defined philosophical system, in which the basic notion was the notion of a system. He presented the reality as a system of mutual relations and not entirely realised relations between the minutest elements. Gadda discussed even the most abstract notions of his philosophy using architectural metaphors:

> I feel close to the thought about reality built of a network of mutually dependant system. Such a reality is like a city, and the city is built of houses, and the houses are built of walls, and a wall consists of bricks, and bricks of fragments, i.e. bits. Thus, a bit constitutes a part present in itself, in a brick and in a wall, in a house and in a city.[10]

At another place in the same essay, one titled *Meditazione milanese*[11] [*Milan Musings*], the writer specified – using the same architectural reference – that reality

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9   G.C. Roscioni, *Dysharmonia przedustanowiona*, trans. A. Kreisberg, [in:] *Literatura na świecie*, op. cit., p. 125.

10   C.E. Gadda, "Meditazione milanese", [in:] idem., *Scritti vari e postumi*, Garzanti, Milan 1993, p. 752.

11   *Meditazione milanese* is an essay with a philosophical and literary theory focus, which Gadda wrote in 1928, but it was published in 1974, already after his death. So far it has not been translated into Polish – the quotations were translated by the author [nor was it translated

was nothing other than an amalgam (*grumo*) or a combination (*convergenza*) of complicated mutual relations. The applied image of a building, i.e. a house, stressed the fact that the existence of any object was derived from its causality and purposefulness:

> The house is not a house (a postal parcel): it is rather an amalgam or a combination of complicated relations derived from the function of residence, rest, writing – from the financial capabilities to build it (it is a node of economical capabilities) – from the fact of no earthquake occurring – from the combination of solidifying lime, iron, bricks, applying the appropriate technology, etc. etc. (...)[12]

By referring in his texts to architectural elements, Gadda always treated them as tangible items consisting of parts, i.e. subject to particular, almost academic analysis. This analysis is sometimes the focus of a detailed description, yet its function is not limited to only pure *mimesis*. It is also not about simple narrative pauses which extend and complement diegesis but, rather, about an impression of 'petrification', i.e. a complete static condition of the presented world. One example of such a spatial amplification can be found in the first part of the author's 1936 novel, titled *La cognizione del dolore* [*Recognising Pain*]. Apart from other elements which depict the location where the action takes place, there is also an extensive description of the Pastrufazio urban developments. The third-person narrative enumerates all the types of overblown burgher houses:

> Villas, villas! tiny – eight bedrooms, a kitchen, two bathrooms; princely – forty rooms, an extensive terrace overlooking the lake, a panoramic view of Serruchon, a garden, an orchard, a garage, a guardhouse, tennis, drinking water, cesspool over seven hundred hectolitres (...) villas! tiny villas! excessive huge villas, lonely small villas, double villas, houses resembling villas, rustic villas, villa rustics (...)[13]

Further in the description, the narrator focuses on details of those "most striking products of technology", which are even more emphatic in their ugliness. He thus mentions "roofs covered with drain pipes, and drain pipes full of acute angles resembling some terrible northern glacial triangles." Other houses in the neighbourhood display "pretences of Swiss chalets" despite the fact that they are constantly "simmering in the American heat covering this land." Other "small villas" are decorated with

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into English, for that matter; this is why quotations in English were translated from the Polish translation].

[12] C.E. Gadda, *Meditazione...*, p. 666.

[13] C.E. Gadda, *Poznawanie cierpienia*, trans. H. Kralowa, Państwowy Instytut Wydawniczy, Warsaw 1980, pp. 24–25.

"quasi-Sienna or Pastrufazio/Norman pinnacles." Others still boast of their "various cupolas and pinnacles in the Russian or quasi-Russian style", somewhat resembling "up-side-down radishes or onions" covered with often polychromed tiles, "and thus resembling the scales of a carnival reptile, yellow-and-blue."[14]

In the next part of the description, the narrator ironically doubts the functional value of cutting-edge technical solutions applied in the structures. These improvements are supposed to constitute the key notion of the "20th-century style", which was nothing else than a fusion of all other architectural styles, which are also carefully enumerated. The 20th-century style is, therefore, distinguishable owing to its "exceptionally functional stairs made of pink marble, that it's worth breaking your leg," or dormers "like I have never seen before, as if real portholes on a ship," or, finally, owing to "outhouses unimaginable for someone who has never been inside them, they are so rational."[15]

An overview of architectural kitsch becomes the starting point for a special kind of sociological analysis of the society as well as of its criticism. That criticism is directed at the owners of the carefully enumerated residences. Considering the similarity between the location where the action takes place – i.e. the fictional South American Maradagal – and the pre-WWII Italy, one could state with considerable certainty that at that point Gadda offered an insightful and quite clearly critical assessment of the condition of the Italian society during the fascist period.[16] Among the owners of the bigger villas, he mentioned both a manufacturer of motorcycle seats and a bankrupt silkworm farmer, a "freshly repainted" count, and a "faded" marquis. The story's narrator criticises the class of the newly rich, who made their fortunes on shady financial operations during the war and who now flaunt their wealth, yet not being able to obscure with it their lack of taste, education, and refinement.

A very similar description and a social analysis can also be found in Gadda's second novel, titled *Quer pasticciaccio brutto de via Merulana* [*That Disgusting Minger from via Marulana*]. The internal focalisation applied in the narrative enables an interpretation of the state of things as viewed 'from the inside' and presenting the opinions of 'regular inhabitants' regarding the new riches of those who are commonly referred to as "sharks". Also in this case, the most visible manifestation of wealth comes in the form of the owners' houses. The novel's protagonists live on Via Merulana, which for Rome's populace has become a symbol of wealth acquired through not entirely transparent means during the recent war:

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14   C.E. Gadda, *Poznawanie...* , p. 25.

15   Ibid., p. 26.

16   Already in the mid-1920s, to quote his initial narrative texts, Gadda stated that his aim was to present the society within the broadest possible perspective. Cf. C.E Gadda, "Racconto Italiano di ignoto del Novecento", [in:] idem., *Scritti vari...*, p. 414.

(...) in this house at number 219 only wealthy people resided; there were also some noblemen, but mostly new, dabbling in trade. Those, who until recently have been called sharks. The the crowd called the house itself the ducat house. Because it was entirely, all the way to the roof, stuffed with gold.

What is also striking in this description of space is the level of detail:

Inside, two sides, A and B, six levels per side, and twelve residences, two on each floor. But it was side A third floor that was most honoured as it was there that the Balduccis lived, masters as I've ever seen one, opposite there lived a countess, also on a bag of cash, a widow, Mrs Menacacci, in her case wherever you would put your hand gold fell out, pearls, diamonds, and all other valuable. And whole grands flew out like butterflies. 'Cause to keep them in a bank that's unsafe, a fire could easily devour them. You'd be better off with a chest of drawers with a double bed.[17]

The use of dialectic stylisation in the description introduced readers into the world of Rome's proletariat after the First World War, along with their opinions and interpretation of the world. However, the common description features the typical polyphony as alongside the dominant voice of the people one can also hear the burgher voice of countess Menegazzi, one of the tenants of the "dukat house" ("You'd be better off...") The level of detail in the description of the building also has a narrative-based justification: it is soon going to become a crime scene (theft and murder).

Architectural elements in Gadda's fiction sometimes carry an exclusively digressive meaning. It is particularly the case in short-prose attempts, in which a description of a building becomes only the starting point for spinning stories of a different kind. For example, in the short story titled *La chiesa antica*[18], a reference to Rome's Santa Maria in Trastevere basilica becomes a pretext for telling the story of Pope Innocent II, while in *L'antica basilica*[19] the description of space emphasises the elements of architecture both within a global perspective (a square, a colonnade, a church) and an individual perspective (Corinthian capitals, tympanums, panoplia, and bucraniums). Each of the described material elements hides many centuries of genological and historical traditions of the place, as well as the work of its constructors. Thus, through detailed descriptions of the material reality, Gadda

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17 C.E. Gadda, "To ohydne pasztecisko z ulicy Merulana", trans. A. Wasilewska [in:] *Literatura na świecie*, p. 10.

18 C.E. Gadda, "La chiesa antica", [in:] idem., *Romanzi e racconti*, vol. 1., Garzanti, Milan 1994, pp. 247–254.

19 C.E. Gadda, "L'antica basilica", [in:] idem., *Romanzi e racconti*, vol. 1, op. cit., pp. 41–42. The text has not been translated into Polish. The quotations were translated by the author [and then from Polish into English].

fulfilled his initial intention to offer a comprehensive and systemic framing of the world through literature. Reflection on the past which materialises through the grandness of architectural monuments inclines the narrator to engage in "melancholic meditations" on the essence of beauty. Through a series of exclamations filled with admiration, he appreciates even the structural material applied in the buildings, the bright sparkling marble (*i chiari, i fulgidi marmi*), directly addressing his readers: "Why don't we admire those valuable decorations of Lombardy lands?"[20] Utilising that same admiration-filled tone, Gadda's other text, a short note from his visit in Liguria (*Sogno ligure*[21]) describes the majesty of a former Baroque temple with its "noble Genoan walls", "celebratory stucco", and the "unequalled windows" full of "blinding splendour."[22] In the same short story, the magnificence of the monuments of Lombardy and Liguria is combined with the developments of "other cities and lands." There, wooden temples are covered with zinc trapezoidal sheet metal, resembling warehouses or port docks. The majestic walls of former temples are compared to futuristic 'basilical' modern domes of railway hangars. Gadda seemed to be against modern architectural solutions which, for him, were a symbol of poor taste and the erosion of beauty. In this regard, the juxtaposition of modern times and the past was a testimony to the author's deeper thought. In reality, Gadda polarised time in all his texts. The past was glorified as a moment of forever lost happiness, while the "now" entailed negative connotations.[23] The temporal polarisation was closely associated with the polarisation of space. The real world experienced *in praesentia*, i.e. here and now, is a space of the enemy presented using dark colours, enclosed spaces, or boundless emptiness. In this context, there appear abandoned houses surrounded by dark cypress paths, which become home to spectres, as in the case of the short story titled *La gazza ladra* or *Un inchino rispettoso*. On the other extreme from those negatively marked spaces, there appears a "world of dreamed buildings", i.e. an idealised distant and sunny landscape, now inaccessible as it exists only in the recollections of the characters.[24]

Gadda's novels and short stories are often constructed around the voice of a first- or third-person narrator with internal focalisation, who by indicating elements of space expresses their attitude towards the world. Also at this level there appears a clear dichotomy between the external world – i.e. aggressive, chaotic, and dull – and personal space, i.e. home, the basic role of which is to protect the "I"

20 C.E. Gadda, *L'antica…*, p. 41.

21 C.E. Gadda, "Sogno ligure", [in:] idem., *Romanzi e racconti*, vol. 1, op. cit., pp. 44–45.

22 C.E. Gadda, *Sogno…*, p. 44.

23 Cf. J. Gajda, *Il mondo doloroso nella narrativa di Carlo Emilio Gadda*, Uniwersytet Śląski, Katowice 2002, pp. 60–67.

24 Cf. J. Janusz, "Le sfumature del sottinteso nella narrativa di Carlo Emilio Gadda", *Romanica Silesiana*, 2006, issue 1, p. 100.

against the aggression of the external world. This motif is distinctly marked in *La cognizione del dolore*: Gonzalo reproaches his mother for allowing the sanctity of their home to be "defiled" by the presence of strangers. A home is mainly a place where a resident should feel safe in every respect. Its walls should fulfil the function of "insulators", enabling one to escape the aggressive external world: "A house should keep one safe and protected", guard "focus" when faced with the "erosion of the modern world."[25] In the short story titled *La casa*[26], Gadda described – with a considerable amount of self-irony – the perfect house. It should be located on one of Rome's hills, even if risking a court action by the potential neighbour, the countess, who could complain about losing the panorama of the eternal city being obscured by the new building. Erected for functionality and ensuring every amenity, it should constitute a safe haven protecting the owner against the prying gazes of neighbours and the unsolicited visits by pushy relatives. According to the autobiographic narrator, today's houses do not fulfil their basic functions. In yet another fragment, the first-person narrator criticises both new construction materials (reinforced concrete and CMUs) and the sizes of multi-level urban "phalanstères"[27], in which whole families are cramped. He carefully enumerates the inconveniences caused by the modern "housing revolution", in particular the lack of consideration of thermal conditions as houses built with CMUs overheat in summer and are under-heated in winter. Yet the biggest flaw is their promiscuity and a lack of sound-proofing. For this reason, the narrator has to endure unsolicited sounds:

> I can hear the basic social unit, that is an Italian family, 128 times. Active life, I can hear it, sitting and standing, life in slippers and on high heels, the clacking of high heels, and clogs, lyrical and fisharmonious life, and life expressing own opinion and entering family disputes; the physiological and pathological life, unexpected lack of discipline and the reality of the inevitable.[28]

Just as a house can become a caricature of itself, so can a wall – which normally separates and protects – stop fulfilling its function. The motif of a wall which cannot prevent entry because it is "low, falling apart, without those pieces of bottles on the top usually boasted by its more diligent friends" – which can be easily conquered in a single leap and is with its very appearance offensive "for a more proper

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25 C.E. Gadda, "La nostra casa si trasforma: e l'inquilino la deve subire", [in:] idem., *Verso la certosa*, Adelphi Edizioni, Milan 2013, p. 123.

26 C.E. Gadda, "La casa", [in:] idem., *Romanzi e racconti*, vol. 1, op. cit., pp. 1107–1132.

27 Gadda defined that block of flats as a 'falansterio', i.e. a phalanstère. Apart from referring to Fourrier's utopian socialism, the noun carries in Italian a pejorative meaning, unlike the more neutral '*palazzo*' or '*casermone*'.

28 C.E. Gadda, *La casa si trasforma...*, p. 124. Translation by the author.

sense of ownership"[29] – appears in short stories and in the novel titled *La cognizione del dolore*. While in the humorous short story titled *La gazza ladra*, a useless short wall surrounding the villa of Mrs Campanini became the possible contributor to the theft of a diamond bracelet of the wealthy owner, in *La cognizione del dolore* the motif of a wall "stunted and undeveloped and on top of that missing the ritual bottle shards on the top"[30] appeared in a more serious context. A grand solitary villa inhabited by an old Signora and Gonzalo, her son, is surrounded by a short stone fence. Its poor condition enables a burglary, during which the owner becomes severely injured. The villa's wall became rather a 'symbol' than an actual means of protection of the property. It is, in fact, its flaw that Gonzalo himself indicated as he complained that the "hunched wall" did not protect his private abode.

Apart from their denotative and descriptive (or digressive even) significance, those architectural elements also carry symbolic functions. They signify the protagonist's strive to isolate himself as he is terrified by the chaos and aggression of his surroundings. In the case of young characters limited by social convention and rigid etiquette, the hated walls of their houses become an image of oppression and limitation. In some works, these walls, having been damaged as the time went by, become the sign of the total failure of petite bourgeois values as well as a sad recollection of past wealth.

At the macro level, the symbol of the house appears exceptionally often in Gadda's works. The writer often chose the insides of houses as the locations where the action of his short stories and novels took place – houses, villas, and houses with rooms for rent sometimes became, at least to some extent, the characters of the narratives. The motif of the family house is also the outer frame of the novel titled *La cognizione del dolore*, where it assumes ambivalent or clearly negative connotations. In an emotional description of the Signora's home space which opens the second part of the work, readers find an image of a lonely mother trying the find refuge from a storm in an empty house. The clearly defined opposition divides the space of the building into two polar zones: the high zone taken by the storm as well as the mother's zone, low, located under the stairs, where Signora tries to no avail to hide from the storm and her own sad recollections from her past life. However, unlike in the case of Jurij Lotman's classical concept[31], the spatial model in Gadda's novel includes neither a safe nor a good space despite being based on the up–down opposition; the "up" of the villa, which Signora leaves during the storm descending to the closet, is an aggressive space taken over by the raging element.

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29 C.E. Gadda, "Sroka złodziejka", [in:] idem., *Pożar na ulicy Keplera*, trans. H. Kralowa, Państwowy Instytut Wydawniczy, Warsaw 1974, pp. 190, 193.

30 C.E. Gadda, *Poznawanie…*, p. 150.

31 Cf. J.M. Lotman, "Problem przestrzeni artystycznej", trans. Jerzy Faryno, *Pamiętnik Literacki*, 1976, LXVII, col. 1, p. 214.

Then, the "down" – that "nook of the house" where the helpless woman tries to find shelter – is a place of "utter solitude", a "motionless trap of the black scorpion."[32] For Signora – one of the two protagonists of the novel – the family villa constituted in the past the purpose of her life being the sign of social status, family prosperity, prestige, and happiness. It was the place where she raised her sons, where she felt like a mother and wife, and where her life seemed to her to be based on a steadfast financial and moral foundations. Therefore, the family house becomes the symbol of social status maintained regardless of the price, despite her actual financial standing:

> The mother (...) since the bricklayers started their work here in '99 – a hot flash of youth – has started to sense almost like a piece of her existence, that serpent's triumph possessing "own villa, a triumph over her rivals from Keltike, who did not believe that was possible (villas for the penniless Pirobutirros).[33]

Those are the objections Gonzalo raised towards his mother as the only thing he remembers from his childhood is sacrifices and poverty caused by his parents' decision that it was necessary to retain the excessively expensive property. Gonzalo also exists within the same space of his house. Yet for him that place has never been a sign of happiness, prestige, or safety. When he was a boy, Gonzalo never shared his parents' pride in owning such a lavish house.[34] For him, it rather became a symbol of painful memories, and adult Gonzalo often reproached his mother for the fact that his parents cared more about the condition of the house and its fitting than about the needs of their children. Thus, the villa in Pastrufazio becomes in the novel a symbol of one of the most severely criticised vices of burgher Italy: the unbridled desire to own. A house becomes a "Villa", or even a "Villa – Idea", a "reflection and a mode of Living", the "holy boil on the neck of the Beast of Living"[35], to which the whole family existence is ancillary. This is because the desire to maintain the illusion of one's own wealth was socially considered as a useful duty: "This is (...) the social function of a Hidalgo, and even more so of a marquis, whose name is listed in the register of Maradagal catast as the owner of the villa in Serruchon (…)."[36]

The location where the novel's action takes place is viewed differently by each character. Signora lives through her recollections of past happiness and prosper-

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[32] C.E. Gadda, *Poznawanie…*, p. 113.

[33] Ibid., p. 124.

[34] Among all the modes of describing a family house used throughout literature, Gadda chose the one which presents it as an object of negation and severe criticism. Cf. M. Czermińska, "Dom w autobiografii i powieści o dzieciństwie", [in:] M. Głowiński, A. Okopień-Sławińska (eds.), *Przestrzeń i literatura*, PWN, Warsaw 1978, pp. 229–252.

[35] C.E. Gadda, *Poznawanie…*, p. 144.

[36] Ibid., p. 145.

ity, and the present is for her a cruel time during which the once happy space is "unnecessary" as it does not fulfil its basic function: to offer protection and security. After a whole life of hard work, she is left with useless walls and the copper of empty pots in a huge kitchen which no one needs. The once pulsating with life house now consists of such rooms; that "kitchen without fire" and "rooms without voices."[37] Once a place of happiness and a symbol of the social status, now it is for Signora a sign of loneliness, memories of lost life, and a place of suffering.

The motif of a family house and an abandoned villa appears several more times in some of Gadda's lesser texts. The short story titled *Una buona nutrizione* also unfolds in an "old villa on a hill, or actually a rural house", with rooms for rent. It is surrounded by cypress trees which protect the house on the outside. Throughout the description, as in the case of the Pirobutirros' villa in *La cognizione del dolore*, the narrator stresses the uselessness of the rooms, their randomness, emptiness, and the level of damage: a stable without a single horse, an empty caretaker house, "expensive wall with rusty drains". The whole description gives the impression of a "merciful collection of rattraps" of walls and roofs.[38] The short story titled *Un inchino rispettoso*[39] also includes the motif of a solitary house surrounded by a "thick guard of cypress trees", which is supposed to become a scene of a crime committed on its old lonely owner.

The symbol of a family house also appears in the short story titled *San Giorgio in casa Brocchi*. Its story is set in 1928 and the Brocchis are one of the respectable Milan aristocratic families. The title *House* [at least in the Polish version of the title] refers not so much to the splendid family abode as to the position occupied by the family in the small world of the Milan aristocracy. To maintain the tradition of the "two-hundred-year-old name of the Brocchis", the family should have become, despite its complete degeneration, a carrier of principles, morality, diligence, and devotion. Countess Brocchi, the mother of the family, is the guardian of those values; she exercises particular care to ensuring the righteousness and moral purity of Luigi, her son:

> She found comfort in the thought that the Brocchi house has always responded with utmost severity to the "spread of deprivation by locking its doors fast. (...) It seemed to her that through every hectare of the degenerated lands there crawled towards the house opportunities and encounters to launch a cunning attack on the spirit and the age-long virtues of the Brocchis.[40]

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37 C.E. Gadda, *Poznawanie...*, p. 112.

38 C.E. Gadda, "Dobre odżywianie", [in:] *Pożar na ulicy Keplera*, p. 132.

39 C.E. Gadda, "Un inchino rispettoso" [in:] idem., *Romanzi e racconti*, vol. 2, Garzanti Milano 1994, pp. 817–821.

40 C.E. Gadda, "Dzień świętego Jerzego w domu Brocchich", [in:] idem., *Pożar na ulicy Keplera*, pp. 27–28.

"The Brocchi house" is a metonymy signifying a whole series of complex rituals which family members must obey, especially Luigi, the family's final member and its hope for the future. According to the author's intentions, the short story was supposed to constitute an anti-burgher satire[41], and the youthful character of Luigi is restrained in his natural development by some obscure petty Catholic/burgher conventions, of which "the Brocchi house" is an age-long and unmodifiable sign.

In Carlo Emilio Gadda's prose, the brickwork and the wall are both clearly topical motifs which are part of the author's extensive writing project, the goal of which was to depict and catalogue the entire material reality. These elements appear as parts of a bigger whole: a safe house and a private impenetrable space, but also as a symbol of limitations, petite bourgeois conventions, and a place of suffering and sacrifice. In utilising architectural elements, Gadda indicated the minutest of details and functions building the whole. Those are often mere pretext for a deeper sociological analysis and a digressive expansion or a developed pause, which produces the effect – extremely characteristic of Gadda's works – of a breaking-up of the narrative structure, which remains unfinished and fragmented. By utilising architectural references such as a brickwork or a wall, Gadda made them part of a complex system of metaphorical relations through which he attempted to bridle the chaotic reality.

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41   In a letter to a friend, Gadda wrote: "The novella (…) is a satire on the conservative and moralising burgher obsessions of a certain Milan family." C.E. Gadda, *A un amico fraterno. Lettere a Bonaventura Tecchi 1920–1963*, Garzanti, Milan 1984, p. 92.

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Joanna Janusz

Mur i ściana jako metafora w prozie Carla Emilia Gaddy

Streszczenie

Artykuł poddaje analizie motywy topiczne muru, ściany i domu w utworach jednego z największych prozaików włoskich dwudziestego wieku, Carla Emilia Gaddy. Motywy te częścią szerokiego projektu pisarskiego autora, którego celem było zobrazowanie i skatalogowanie całej materialnej rzeczywistości. Elementy te pojawiają się jako części większej całości: bezpiecznego domu i prywatnej nieprzekraczalnej przestrzeni, ale także jako symbol ograniczeń, drobnomieszczańskich konwenansów czy też miejsce cierpienia i wyrzeczeń. W posługiwaniu się elementami architektonicznymi Gadda zwraca uwagę na najdrobniejsze szczegóły i funkcje budujące całość. Sięgając po odniesienia architektoniczne takie jak mur i dom, Gadda czyni je częściami skomplikowanego systemu relacji metaforycznych, poprzez które pisarz podejmuje próbę ujarzmienia chaotycznej rzeczywistości.

Mury i ściany willi, apartamentów, robotniczych mieszkań, wiejskich dworków, a także wyniosłe kamienne ogrodzenia często mają dwojakie znaczenie i rolę: oddzielają od świata i chronią przed jego chaosem lub też są wytworami znienawidzonej przez pisarza drobnomieszczańskiej kultury, znakami jej wątpliwego bogactwa i złego gustu i dlatego stają się obiektem krytyki. W niektórych utworach stają się symbolem pragnienia samoizolacji bohatera. Na poziomie struktury narracyjnej motywy muru i ściany stają się pretekstem do rozwinięcia dygresyjnego czy też rozbudowanej pauzy, co w rezultacie daje efekt rozbicia diegezy, która pozostaje niedokończona i fragmentaryczna.

Słowa kluczowe: mur, ściana, dom, przestrzeń, literatura włoska XX wieku, Carlo Emilio Gadda

Brickwork and the wall as metaphors in Carlo Emilio Gadda's fiction

S u m m a r y

The article analyses the topical motifs of the brickwork, the wall, and the house in the works of Carlo Emilio Gadda, one of the greatest Italian writers of the 20th century. These motifs were part of the writer's broader writing project, the aim of which was to depict and catalogue the entire material reality. These elements appear as parts of a bigger whole: a safe house and a private impenetrable space, but also as a symbol of limitations, petite bourgeois conventions, and a place of suffering and sacrifice. In utilising architectural elements, Gadda indicated the minutest of details and functions that constitute the whole. By utilising architectural references such as a brickwork or a wall, Gadda made them part of a complex system of metaphorical relations through which he attempted to bridle the chaotic reality.

The brickwork and walls of villas, condos, labourers' flats, rural manors, and towering stone fencings often possessed dual meanings and roles: they separate one from the world and protect them against the chaos of the world, or are the products of the burgher culture – despised by the writer – as well as the marks of its undoubted richness and bad taste. This was why they became the focus of his criticism. In some of his works, they become a symbol of a character's desire to isolate themselves from the world. At the level of the narrative structure, the motifs of the brickwork and the wall become a pretext for a digressive expanding or a developed pause, which, in turn, produces an effect of a breaking-up of a diegesis, which remains unfinished and fragmented.

Keywords: brickwork, wall, space, 20th-century Italian literature, Carlo Emilio Gadda

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Surrounded by a wall: The hermetic language of the Polish community of video gamers.[1] Do Poles know the language of Polish gamers? The results of a survey-based study

"Currently in Poland there are no linguistic studies regarding such phenomena related to PC games as, e.g. (...) communication within games, mainly in online games, the special use of language when describing the interactions between a gamer and the world of a game, or the emergence of game-specific vocabulary."[2]

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[1] I created the expression *gracz wideo* ['video gamer'] – which I had not encountered in academic or popular science literatures or in fiction – for the purpose of referring to the entire group of gamers, i.e. people who play video games regardless of the platform they use. The expression *gracz wideo* combines the extents of the existing and stable terms of *gracz konsolowy* ['console gamer'] (a gamer who plays games on a game console/various game console. Such gamers usually possess several consoles. A console is an "electronic multimedia device enabling a person to play video games, and, in the case of some models, listen to music, watch films, and browse the internet" (www.sjp.pwn.pl/slowniki/konsoli.html, accessed on: 6 Apr 2017) and *gracz komputerowy* ['computer gamer'] (a gamer who plays on a computer), and, additionally, it emphasises not so much the hardware being used for gaming but, rather, the kind of games (differing from, e.g., board games or card games). The subordinate/attributive segment ('video') constitutes a specification of the object of activity. It already exists in combinations such as: 'video games', 'video camera' [i.e. *kamera wideo*, the Polish term for a 'camcorder'], and 'video cassette' [*kaseta wideo*, the Polish term for a 'VHS']. I discussed this in more detail in the article titled "Soniaki, hardkorowcy i casuale, czyli o leksyce w komunikacji graczy konsolowych" (Kielce 2016).

[2] K. Gądek, "Metodologiczne podstawy opisu języka graczy komputerowych", [in:] *Biblioteka Lingvariów. Język z różnych stron widziany*, A. Czelakowska, M. Skarżyński (eds.), Kraków 2009.

The quoted fragment was written by Kamila Gądek over nine years ago, yet it remains valid even today. That text encouraged me to examine the language of the community of video gamers (mainly their lexis) more closely, and to check whether the metaphorical "walls" – which in this context I understand as a separation/isolation of the gamers' lexis from the general Polish language – still stand.

I searched for academic studies on this topic, i.e. the lexis of the gamers' community. What I found was only short fragments (in various articles and chapters of books) intended as explanations of a dozen, several dozen or, rarely, several hundred lexemes used in that community, which, considering the extent of the phenomenon of gaming, constituted only a fraction of the lexical resources. It is, simply, surprising that the area had not been the subject of a comprehensive examination. What is, then, the state of research into the vocabulary of gamers?

Apart from texts by Kamila Gądek (the opening quotation of this article came from her work), small/introductory studies into the lexis of gamers can be found in several other works. In the article titled "Elementy socjolektu graczy komputerowych"[3] ["The Elements of the Sociolect of PC Gamers"], the author focused on defining the language of the online community of PC gamers; she studied its lexis and syntax. In the article titled "Komunikacja w świecie gier komputerowych"[4] ["Communication in the World of PC Games"], the authors discussed the structure and the rules of how a gamer talks to a machine and an *avatar*[5], how a game creator speaks to gamers, how gamers talk to game creators, as well as of the dialogue between gamers. They also quoted and explained a dozen or so terms associated with games. In the article titled "Nazwy własne a lokalizacja gier elektronicznych fantasy – o potrzebie przekładu oraz wybranych tendencjach w tłumaczeniu gier anglojęzycznych na rynek polski i niemiecki"[6] ["Proper Names and the Localisation of Electronic Fantasy Games: On the Need for Translations and Selected Tendencies in the Translations of English-Language Games for the Polish and German Markets"], Krzysztof Inglot discussed the process of translating various proper names into Polish, e.g. names of characters, including monsters, and game titles.

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3 D. Urbańska-Galanciak, "Elementy socjolektu graczy komputerowych", [in:] *Język@multimedia*, A. Dytman-Stasieńko, J. Stasieńko (eds.), Wrocław 2005.

4 D. Chmielewska-Łuczak, T. Smejlis, "Komunikacja w świecie gier komputerowych", [in:] *Język@ multimedia*, A. Dytman-Stasieńko, J. Stasieńko (eds.), Wrocław 2005.

5 An avatar is "is a character a gamer shapes" (ibid., p. 327).

6 K. Inglot, "Nazwy własne a lokalizacja gier elektronicznych fantasy – o potrzebie przekładu oraz wybranych tendencjach w tłumaczeniu gier anglojęzycznych na rynek polski i niemiecki", *Homo Ludens* 1(5)/2013, Poznań.

Apart from articles, there are also three books which are noteworthy[7]: *Wirtualny plac zabaw. Gry sieciowe i przemiany kultury współczesnej*[8] by Mirosław Filiciak, *Fabularyzowane gry komputerowe w przestrzeni humanistycznej*[9] by Rafał Kochanowicz, and *Homo players. Strategie odbioru gier komputerowych*[10] by Dominika Urbańska-Galanciak. The author of the first one devoted a chapter ("Komunikacja werbalna – mechanizmy komunikacyjne oraz slang graczy" ["Verbal communication: Communicational Mechanisms and Gamers' Slang"]) to explaining several dozen terms, mainly abbreviations used by the users of the online game *EverQuest*.[11] The author of the second book has indicated that gamers' lexis quickly evolves and transforms, and, as a result, new terms emerge while older ones are abandoned.

As a conclusion of the overview of books, I must mention that the most extensive study of the topic (i.e. the language of Polish video gamers) which I managed to find is the thirty-page-long chapter "Języka cyberrozrywki" ["The Language of Cyberentertainment"] from Domika Urbańska-Galanciak's work titled *Homo players. Strategie odbioru gier komputerowych*. In the chapter, the author included three sub-chapters: "Komputerowo mediatyzowana komunikacja" ["Computer-Mediated Communication"], "Tendencje rozszerzające – język jako czynnik wyodrębniający zbiorowość" ["Expanding Tendencies: Language as a Factor Defining a Community"], and "Tendencje upraszczające – język jako środek jednoczenia wspólnoty" ["Simplifying Tendencies: Language as a Means of Unifying a Community"]. In the first sub-chapter, Urbańska-Galanciak approached the question about the place of language within a social group; for this purpose, she quoted Edward Sapir, who noted that social groups bound by a common interest "tend to develop peculiarities of speech which have the symbolic function of somehow distinguishing the group from the larger group."[12] The author also stressed the fact that "some of the words which originally formed in the language of gamers is transferred, often by themselves, to the colloquial language and used in other

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[7] There are, of course, more books which describe the community of video gamers (e.g. *Gry wideo. Zarys poetyki* by Piotr Kubiński (Kraków 2016), and *Game cultures: computer games as new media* by John Dovey and Helen W. Kennedy (Kraków 2011)), yet those failed to include a detailed definition of the lexis of the video gamers' community.

[8] M. Filiciak, *Wirtualny plac zabaw. Gry sieciowe i przemiany kultury współczesnej*, Warsaw 2006.

[9] R. Kochanowicz, *Fabularyzowane gry komputerowe w przestrzeni humanistycznej*, Poznań 2012.

[10] D. Urbańska-Galanciak, *Homo players. Strategie odbioru gier komputerowych*, Warsaw 2009.

[11] An RPG (*role-playing game*) online game. A gamer controls a character they have created. They develop the character, thus being able to defeat ever stronger opponents. The game was created in 1999.

[12] E. Sapir, *Kultura, język, osobowość*, trans. B. Stanosz, R. Zimand, PIW, Warsaw 1978, pp. 33–49; as quoted in: D. Urbańska-Galanciak, *op. cit.*, p. 107. [English version: E. Sapir, *Culture, Language and Personality*, University of California Press, Berkeley 1964.]

circumstances."[13] In the second sub-chapter ("Tendencje rozszerzające – język jako czynnik wyodrębniający zbiorowość"), Urbańska-Galanciak concluded that "the language of cyberentertainment is (…) a hermetic language accessible only for people with considerable knowledge of the world of virtual fun."[14] I cannot agree with that statement as more and more people are engaging in games and, naturally, the language is losing its hermetic nature. These people constantly communicate with each other, which is why terms which had originally been reserved exclusively for the gamers' community are no longer so exclusive (which was also confirmed in the results of my survey-based study which I shall present later in this article), and the metaphorical 'wall' is gradually being brought down. The author wrote the book nine years ago. At that time, games were certainly a less common mode of spending one's free time, and the lexis was more exclusive. In that sub-chapter, she also offered a rudimentary specification of the gamers' lexis. She identified groups such as borrowings, neologisms, and abbreviations, and she listed several examples of lexemes which matched them. In the final sub-chapter ("Tendencje upraszczające – język jako środek jednoczenia wspólnoty"), the researcher wrote that "a sociolect not only separates a community which uses it, but it also unifies individuals who use it."[15] Further in the study, she analysed gamers' selected utterances from the 'Gry-Online' internet forum.[16]

In my discussion of the subject literature I devoted most attention to this study as that thirty-page-long chapter written by a culture researcher constituted the most extensive (published) study of gamers' lexis.

As for online studies, one should note *Słownik gracza* [*A Gamer's Dictionary*], which is available at www.gry-online.pl/slownik-gracza.asp. The dictionary's definitions "apply to words/phrases used both in articles published at the gry-online.pl information portal, and in conversations on our message board." It is a dictionary developed by gamers and for gamers. In a simple manner it explains notions which exist in the gamers' language. The entire dictionary holds only 365 entries, which, to my knowledge, constitutes a fraction of the entire plethora of the specialised lexis of the gamers' community.

To sum up, there are few items in academic literature devoted to the lexis or, more broadly, language of video gamers. Having analysed it, I decided to check – by means of a survey – whether the lexis specific for the gamers' community (selected from the above-discussed book and online studies) is known to random respondents and whether it permeates into the modern Polish language and, if so, to what extent.

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[13] D. Urbańska-Galanciak, *op. cit.*, p. 113.

[14] Ibid., p. 115.

[15] Ibid., p. 125.

[16] The forum can be found at: www.gry-online.pl/S008.asp, accessed on: 11.06.2017.

To this purpose, I developed a survey consisting of eight questions (included at the end of the article). I decided not to limit the age of respondents or assign preference to either sex as my goal was to study the "living Polish language" spoken by Poles, not to study the relationship between the number of lexemes known to 20-year-old men and to 40-year-old women. I developed the survey in two variants: online and hard copy. With regard to the former one, I conducted the study mainly using the Facebook social platform; upon completing the survey, respondents were asked to share it with their Facebook friends. I used the hard copy of the survey mainly within the space of the University of Lodz.

In total, 271 people participated in the survey, aged 13–44, though the majority of the respondents were aged 19, 20, 21, and 22. The age distribution is indicated in the following diagram.
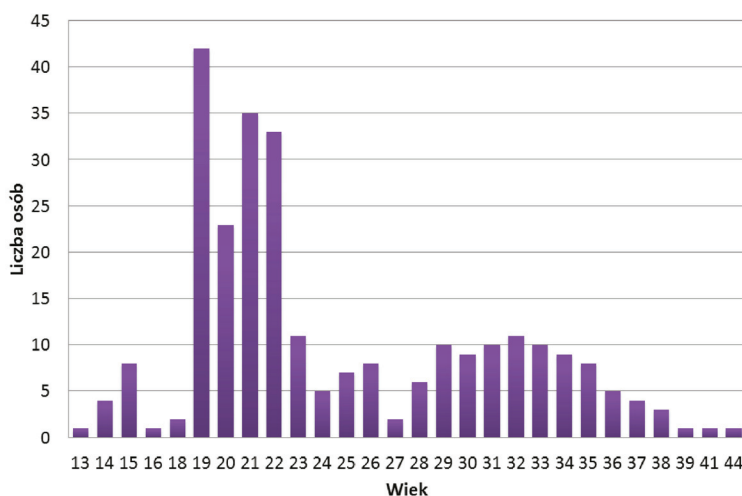
Diagram 1. Gamers' age.

Source: own study

Apart from the question about age, I also asked the respondents to specify how much time they spent on playing various video games (including on mobile devices).
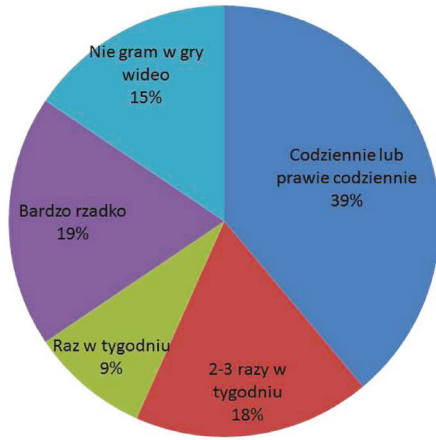
Diagram 2. Time spent playing video games
Source: own study

The diagram clearly indicates that the majority of the respondents did play video games. The group constituted 85% of all the respondents. The remaining 15% was not interested in such a form of spending their leisure time.

The final question intended for defining the respondent group was: What video game periodicals do you read? In the suggested answers I included only Polish periodicals as I was studying the popularity of Polish gamers' lexis. Answers to the question were as follows:
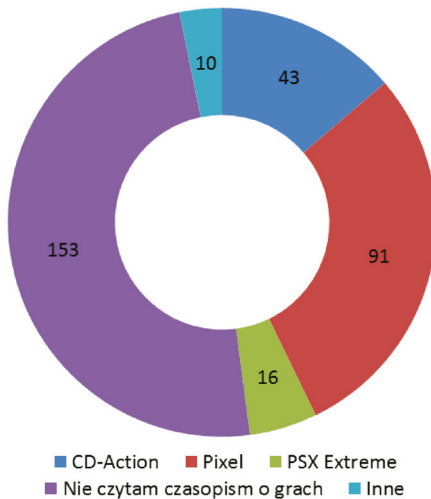
Diagram 3. Readership of video game periodicals
Source: own study

In this case, I decided not to provide percentage-based results as when I analysed the surveys it turned out there were instances when a respondent indicated reading more than one periodical. Thus, a percentage-based diagram would not be viable in this case.

As many as 153 out of the 271 respondents did not read any periodicals related to video games. Among those who read such periodicals, a dominant position was occupied by the *Pixel*, which was indicated as known and read by 91 people; next was the *CD-Action*, with 43 people admitting reading it, and only 16 respondents admitting reading the *PSX Extreme*. Under the option *Other*, the respondents indicated mainly foreign titles, e.g. *Retro Gamer* (3 people), *EDGE* (3 people), *Gamer. mag* (3 people), and online periodicals (1 person).

Next, the survey included open-ended questions. I selected the lexical material which I used to develop this part of the survey in such a way that it should reflect the most extensive array of gamers' lexical items. Therefore, I included lexemes adapted (or created) by the gamers' community relatively long ago (e.g. *bug* [a bug] or *pirat* [a pirate]), as well as relatively new ones, which formed along the development and the diffusion of Internet access (e.g. *streamować* [to stream]).

Furthermore, I included more specialist lexical items derived from the domain of computer science (e.g. *emulator* [an emulator]), and items commonly known to gamers (not just IT specialists), e.g. 'gameplay'. In order to ensure the survey's diversity, I also included abbreviations and acronyms, and phrases. In the case of abbreviations and acronyms, I chose those which are often used in exchanges between gamers and their friends who are not gamers via various communicators (e.g. THX). I also added abbreviations more closely related to the world of games, i.e. names of gaming hardware. I chose the names of modern consoles (e.g. PS3) and of those which were popular a decade or so ago (e.g. PSX). This way I intended to check whether the respondents knew not only the names of new consoles, but also the older ones, and older gaming hardware in general. I chose phrases in such a way so that the terms used in them would more (*grać na iXie* ['to play the X']) or less (*gra chodzi* ['the game runs']) be associated with the gamers' community.

The first of the open-ended questions required respondents to define the indicated words. I selected the lexemes to be defined from specialist literature and video-gaming periodicals (e.g. the *PSX Etreme* and the *CD-Action*). The numbers of correctly defined lexemes are indicated in the following diagram:
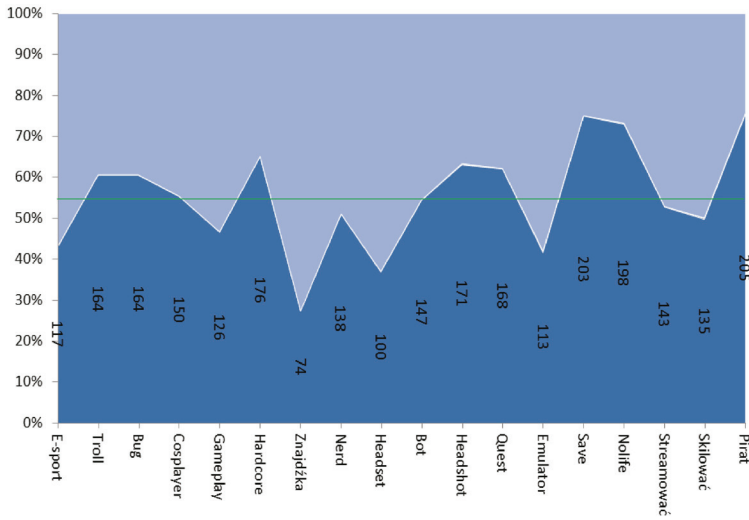
Diagram 4. Knowledge of the lexis used by the community of Polish video gamers

Source: own study

The diagram indicates the number of correct answers (navy blue) compared to incorrect definitions (light blue). For example, the lexeme 'nerd' was adequately defined by 138 people, while 133 people defined it incorrectly or not at all (271 of all the respondents). The green line indicates the percentage of all correct answers, 55.2% in this case. This means that on average one respondent was able to correctly define over a half of all indicated words. I determined whether a definition was correct based on my own proficiency as a gamer as well as through websites devoted to this pastime. Whenever I discuss a lexeme, I shall indicate my model definition in a footnote. The respondents have various meanings for some of the words which I inquired into, which was why I assumed that if a person indicated only one meaning, I would accept the answer. Below, I shall present the definitions of individual lexemes proposed by respondents. I shall provide the percentages of correct answers and the model definitions of individual words which I used for assessing the correctness of the respondents' answers. Finally, I will provide a short summary and analysis of the most interesting definitions out of those that the respondents proposed.

E-sports[17]

Examples of accepted definitions	Examples of not accepted definitions
• professional video game competitions (professional = with training, sponsors, competitions with cash prizes) • a term for a group of games for which special ranking and tournament structures have been developed. Those are games in which gamers gain proficiency to achieve better results in direct confrontations with other gamers. Even though most online games meet those criteria, the term e-sports is reserved only for those which define themselves that way. • electronic sport – competitions of gamers in a specific game.	• when you play games associated with sports, e.g. using kinect • online sports • video games related to sports

Percentage of correct definitions: 43.2%

The prefix 'e' often appears in various modern expressions, e.g. *e-mail*, *e-paper*, and *e-cigarette*. The term *e-sports* has developed in a similar manner; the respondents had no major problems with defining it if they decided to attempt this. Slightly over 43% of the respondents provided correct answers; the rest usually left the field blank, i.e. did not attempt to define the term.

Troll[18]

Examples of accepted definitions	Examples of not accepted definitions
• a person who pesters other gamers by, e.g. adding mods in GTA V in which on a selected gamer a naked guy may appear • a person who tries to stir with their statements a rush of negative comments, cause a war among users • a person intentionally inciting others to engage in futile debates and become angry at each other	• an asshole • an idiot • someone who laughs ironically (can be the object or originator)

Percentage of correct definitions: 60.5%

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[17] Model definition: „Electronic sport. A non-Olympic discipline which consists of teams or individuals competing in video games" (http://www.gry-online.pl/slownik-gracza-pojecie.asp?ID=318, accessed on: 12.06.2017).

[18] Model definition: a troll, someone who engages in trolling. Trolling is "an anti-social behaviour typical for message boards and other locations on the internet where discussions are held…" (www.pl.wikipedia.org/wiki/Trollowanie, accessed on: 12.06.2017).

Not every 'asshole', 'idiot' or 'someone who laughs ironically' is a *troll*, which was why I considered those answers incorrect. The phenomenon of trolling is quite common both online and in games, hence the high number of correct answers.

Bug[19]

Examples of accepted definitions	Examples of not accepted definitions
• an error in a game • an error in the software (historically: the first computers were susceptible to vermin which caused circuits to short) • an Error in an application, game or an operating system which can interfere with the usage of a computer/console/software	• to block • to block an account

Percentage of correct definitions: 60.5%

Those respondents who defined *bug* as "the blocking of something, e.g. an account", probably mistook the lexeme for *ban* [a ban], i.e. "the blocking of an undesired interlocutor from accessing a chat room"[20], which somewhat resembles – e.g. in terms of its length – the word about which I inquired (*ban – bug*).

Cosplayer[21]

Examples of accepted definitions	Examples of not accepted definitions
• someone who dresses up as a game/ comic book character • a game nut who dresses up as a game character • a person whose one of the most favourite modes of indicating their affection for a film/book/game/comic book, etc. is to dress up as a its character.	• a person recreating a game's reality

Percentage of correct definitions: 55.4%

The analysed surveys included several instances of answers similar to those which I inserted in the "not accepted definitions" column. I considered them

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19   Model definition: "an error in a game. Usually a programming omission, less often an error at the design stage, resulting in an improper operation of a game in certain circumstances" (http://www.gry-online.pl/slownik-gracza-pojecie.asp?ID=17, accessed on: 12.06.2017).

20   http://sjp.pwn.pl/slowniki/ban.html, accessed on: 12.06.2017.

21   Model definition: "a person usually aged 15–20 who dresses up and wears make-up to resemble a fictional character, usually from Japanese anime or popular and trendy games" (http://www.miejski.pl/slowo-cosplayer, accessed on: 12.06.2017).

incorrect as they were not accurate enough. An example of that would be the word *larpowiec* (a person who engages in LARPs, i.e. improvised theatre where people dress up as, e.g., fantasy characters, and play out a story), but not a *cosplayer*.

Gameplay[22]

Examples of accepted definitions	Examples of not accepted definitions
• a film presenting how a game is played • a playing of a game/ a recording of the game (as opposed to: the intro clip/game promotional video) • a) a record of the actual playing and some pre-rendered cinematics; b) playability; :) ... golden... etc. :) that is the result of: rules of the game, graphic design, sound and satisfaction in playing	• joint playing with users • a gamer • a film version of a game

Percentage of correct definitions: 46.5%

This difficult to define word caused the respondents many problems. They mistook *gameplay* for *gameplayer* (a 'gamer') or with *multiplayer*, i.e. "joint playing with other users"; there was even an answer that a *gameplay* is "the film version of a game." The last respondent probably had in mind the second meaning of the unclear lexeme, i.e. "a kind of a video clip in which someone shows how they complete a game." I considered that answer as insufficiently accurate, which was why I decided it was incorrect.

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[22] Model definition: 'gameplay' has two meanings. First of all, it is a video clip in which someone shows how they complete a game. Often in such video clips viewers cannot see the gamer, only hear their commentary. Secondly, it is an element of most games, i.e. the way gamers interact with a game. Together with the story line and the graphic design, the element forms a game (own definition).

Hardcore[23]

Examples of accepted definitions	Examples of not accepted definitions
• something extremely difficult • something difficult, a slaughter or massacre. "the highest level of difficulty is an extreme hardcore which you cannot finish." Or "you can enter a shop, slash people with a chain-saw – in a narrow aisle that's true hardcore" • 1. something difficult, requiring effort or short reaction time. 2. An avid gamer, holder of those qualities the opposite – a casual, a gamer who has been playing for a long time, who can play demanding games	

Percentage of correct definitions: 64.9%

Those respondents who knew the word *hardcore*, which can be defined in various ways, defined it correctly, while those who did not know it left the space blank, which is why there are no examples of not accepted definitions.

Znajdźka[24]

Examples of accepted definitions	Examples of not accepted definitions
• a minor object or a collectible hidden by the creators of a game in a strange place within the game • hidden objects to be found in games • a collectible found in a game, often giving gamers a bonus	• an object found in a game • a dropped item • a thing collected in a game, an object • a loot • browser • those are items found in games

Percentage of correct definitions: 27.3%

Only 74 people defined the word correctly. It was the lowest number of correct answers throughout the survey. Not every "object found in a game" is a *znajdźka*; regular objects in games are called *itemy* [items]. Also *drop*, i.e. "a kind of a prize

[23]   Model definition: "a colloquial term for extraordinary and extreme situations which cause extremely intensive impressions. In video games, the term *hardcore* usually applies to exceptionally exciting or extremely difficult moments, which require gamers to possess considerable skills, remain constantly focussed, and, sometimes, to be lucky" (http://www.gry-online.pl/slownik-gracza-pojecie.asp?ID=105, accessed on: 12.06.2017).

[24]   Model definition: "a virtual object in a video game which on its own does not hold any major value for a gamer but after collecting an entire series, a gamer may gain an attractive prize. A *znajdźka* [a collectible] is usually cunningly hidden in levels, and as a result a search for it takes much time and requires extensive knowledge about a game's world" (http://www.gry-online.pl/slownik-gracza-pojecie.asp?ID=342, accessed on: 13.06.2017).

– an object which one acquires after defeating an opponent" and *loot*, i.e. "a kind of a prize – an object which you acquire upon completing a mission in a game", are something else than the notion about which I inquired in the survey. A very interesting issue in terms of word formation was indicated by the answer stating that a *znajdźka* is a "browser". Unfortunately, that answer was incorrect as the word does not entail that meaning either in the gamers' community or in general Polish, yet it constituted a certainly very creative neo-semanticism, a substitute for the word *wyszukiwarka* [a browser], which would emphasise the fact that if one searches for something, they are surely going to find it.

Nerd[25]

Examples of accepted definitions	Examples of not accepted definitions
• a pejorative designation of a person who plays video games, who knows their ways with computers/games. Often a person who is not very social. • a person who displays a somewhat pathological interest in a topic, usually having extensive knowledge in it • a stereotype of a person whose main interests include computers and cutting-edge technology.	• a geek • a loser • a withdrawn swot • a learned person • a person who is obtrusive • a synonym of a no life • a wise person

Percentage of correct definitions: 50.9%

Some of the respondents who attempted to define the word erroneously associated a *nerd* (definition further in the article) with a *geek*, i.e. "a term assigned to a person who has extended knowledge and skills in a specific field." *Geek* is a term considerably less severe than *nerd*. Also, a *nolife* (definition further in the article) was treated by some respondents as a synonym of a *nerd*, which is, of course, incorrect. Also, not all '*inteligenci*' [plural form of Polish *inteligent*], 'losers' and 'swots' are *nerds*.

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25 Model definition: "a term borrowed from English indicating a person who is passionate about science, IT, video games, etc., often at the expense of being maladjusted to social life, their inability to maintain social relations, or their neglect of their appearance" (http://www.miejski. pl/slowo-Nerd, accessed on: 13.06.2017).

Headset[26]

Examples of accepted definitions	Examples of not accepted definitions
• headphones with a microphone • a mobile phone headset • a 'loudspeaking' set (what a stupid name)	• headphones • a microphone

Headset is a combination of headphones and a microphone. Separately, these devices cannot be referred to as a *headset*.

Bot[27]

Examples of accepted definitions	Examples of not accepted definitions
• an AI pretending a human gamer • a script used to simulate repetitive activities in multiplayer games • a programme simulating a person (either in a game or in other software environments)	• an under-skilled gamer • they block someone • a person who is not good at playing

Percentage of correct definitions: 54.2%

Similar to the *bug* lexeme, this word was also mistaken by some respondents with the word *ban*. Others made a mistake and instead of defining the word *bot*, they assigned the definition of a *noob*, i.e. "a beginner player", who is also an "under-skilled player" and "a person who is not good at playing."

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[26] Model definition: a device used for communicating, e.g. in online video games. It is a combination of headphones and a microphone (own definition).

[27] Model definition: "In video games, the term bot has several meanings:
a programme simulating real gamers in online FPS games; usually used as a training element or a supplement to a team if too few living gamers can play;
a programme replacing a gamer in aiming and shooting in online FPS games;
a programme conducing certain actions by a gamer's character automatically in MMORPGs (e.g. fighting monsters, training to gain skills, collecting gold and items)" (http://www.gry-on-line.pl/slownik-gracza-pojecie.asp?ID=20, accessed on: 13.06.2017).

Headshot[28]

Examples of accepted definitions	Examples of not accepted definitions
• a shot to the head • literally "a shot to the head"; a hit to an opponent's head (usually in shooters with a first-person perspective), usually associated with the resulting killing of the opponent, gaining points • a shot in the noddle	• it is an attack by a character which knocks others out with a single blow • a shot

Percentage of correct definitions: 63.1%

One respondent explained why he used in Polish the lexeme *headshot* instead of "a shot to the head": "I use it because it's too long in Polish." Often when making the decision to use a term borrowed from English instead of its Polish counterpart, the point is to economise, i.e. a person wants to convey the same content using the minimum number of words/syllables/sounds.

Some of the answers were excessively general as not every "shot in a game" can be termed a *headshot*; most of them are normal *shoty* [shots].

Quest[29]

Examples of accepted definitions	Examples of not accepted definitions
• in other words a task (basically in RPGs – both physical and computer) • a task. There is exp. for a task EXPing is important • a mission	• a guest • it is a guest, a person who hasn't signed in

Percentage of correct definitions: 62%

In this case, the errors were caused by negligence as there is only a single letter difference between the English lexemes *quest* and *guest*.

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28 Model definition: "1. Headshot (the act of eliminating an opponent with a single shot (to the head). This word is used in FPS games (e.g. Counter Strike, Call of Duty, etc.); 2. The word *headshot* can also be used when you hit someone with a ball (or a different object) on the head" (http://www.miejski.pl/slowo-Headshot, accessed on: 13.06.2017).

29 Model definition: "a mission, a task. A fragment of the story line which requires a character (or a group of characters) controlled by a gamer to complete a challenge" (http://www.gry-online.pl/slownik-gracza-pojecie.asp?ID=199, accessed on: 13.06.2017).

Emulator[30]

Examples of accepted definitions	Examples of not accepted definitions
• a tool simulating software from a different hardware platform • a programme 'imitating' another hardware/computer; e.g. to run a game/programme unavailable for a device (e.g. because the device was withdrawn from production many years ago) • software for simulating another operating system – used for running games from other platforms (usually old ones)	• games, e.g. for running a farm, driving a car • a programme used for downloading files illegally • a device imitating some feelings • e.g. taste • an ingredient which can be found in soft drinks

Percentage of correct definitions: 41.7%

In this case, those respondents who provided incorrect answers mistook an *emulator* for an *emulgator*, i.e. "a chemical compound" or a game genre, i.e. a *simulator* – "an imitation of reality, e.g. a flight simulator".

Save

Examples of accepted definitions	Examples of not accepted definitions
• a saved moment in a game • a record of a game • "*zasejwuj*" instead of "*zapisz*" (both) to save *imperative*. what a shame that you cannot save your life and load it later :(	

Percentage of correct definitions: 74.9%

In this case, the respondents either provided correct definitions or left the space blank. Considering the number of correct answers, the former reaction dominated.

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[30] Model definition: "software which enables one to run an application on a computer or an operating system for which it was not originally intended" (http://www.gry-online.pl/slownik-gracza-pojecie.asp?ID=48, accessed on: 13.06.2017).

Nolife[31]

Examples of accepted definitions	Examples of not accepted definitions
• a person who apart from the activity X (e.g. games) does nothing • an extreme gamer, a person who develops their hobby such as gaming at the expense of the lack of any personal life • a person who does nothing else but sits 24/7 and plays games	• = nerd • someone who engages in games • a noob • the same as nerd • a professional gamer

Percentage of correct definitions: 73.1%

Here, a very similar situation occurred to that with the definition of a *nerd*, i.e. for many the words are synonymous. For some, the word *nolife* is also synonymous with the word *noob*. Mind you, not all people who "engage in games" or who are "professional gamers" can be called nolifes.

Streamować[32]

Examples of accepted definitions	Examples of not accepted definitions
• to send a video from one's own monitor live online] • broadcast of a video over the internet (e.g. broadcast of a gameplay); derived from a data stream, which means that data does not have to complete for someone to replay images (while sacrificing the quality) • to send via the internet one's gameplay, e.g. via YouTube	• a single game, many gamers, each on individual • computers. The events occur in one game, to play something online at the same time • to download something • to buy on steam • to play games on the steam platform

Percentage of correct definitions: 52.8%

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[31] Model definition: "a person who spends a lot of time in front of the computer usually gaming. They do not have (or have little) friends and colleagues outside the internet" (http://www.miejski.pl/slowo-No+Lifer, accessed on: 13.06.2017).

[32] Model definition: "the word streaming has at least two meanings in reference to games. We talk about game streaming in the case of such services as Gaikai or Onlive which enable gamers to play games installed on a remote server which sends current game data to us. But we also talk about streaming if someone simply sends via the internet images and their gameplay – with optional commentary or additional video from their webcam. It can be viewed using a special internet service" (http://polygamia.pl/Polygamia/1,96455,13530333,Streaming___ogladanie_zamiast_grania_czy_zaczatek.html?bo=1, accessed on: 13.06.2017).

What is noteworthy is the incorrect answers such as "to buy on steam" or "to play games on the steam platform". The respondents associated the lexeme *streamować* [to stream] with the name of the Internet game platform *Steam*. The sound and graphic similarity of the first part of the word is evident. This indicates that the Steam game platform is quite popular among the respondents.

Skillować[33]

Examples of accepted definitions	Examples of not accepted definitions
• to increase skills • to develop the skills of a character in an RPG or similar games (e.g. iack,n'slash) in order to eliminate more demanding opponents, in MMORPGs the main goal of a game which is the reason why those games are basically pointless as it is impossible to achieve any ultimate goal. • to hone skills	• to download • to kill (i.e. an action in process; imperfect form) • to kill (i.e. the perfect tense) • someone who trains

Percentage of correct definitions: 49.8%

The respondents often provided incorrect answers, indicating that *skillować* means "*zabijać*" [to kill *imperf.*] or "*zabić*" [to kill *perf.*] Those mistakes were probably caused by the fact that the lexeme *skillować* includes the component "kill".

Pirat[34]

Examples of accepted definitions	Examples of not accepted definitions
• an illegal copy of a game • a game acquired outside the official distribution channels • an illegally copied copy of a video game • a game bought illegally	

Percentage of correct definitions: 75.6%

When compared to all the above-discussed words, the lexeme *pirat* received the highest number of correct definitions; this might be due to the fact that it has been used in Polish for quite a long time now.

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[33] Model definition: to gain new skills in a game or develop those already acquired (own definition).

[34] Model definition: "A colloquial term used for people who engage in prohibited copying of music, films, and software (including video games), propagating such illegal copies, and using them" (http://www.gry-online.pl/slownik-gracza-pojecie.asp?ID=177, accessed on: 13.06.2017). Often the term *pirat* [a 'pirate'] is also used to denote illegally-acquired software, e.g. a pirated game is colloquially termed *pirat*.

In the next part of the survey, I asked respondents to expand the abbreviations and acronyms that are popular on the Internet and among gamers. I am presenting the results in the following diagram.
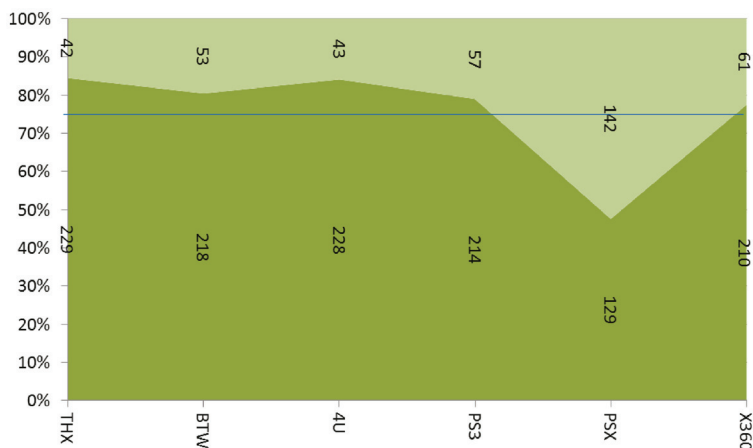
Diagram 5. Abbreviations and acronyms used in the community of Polish video gamers
Source: own study

The respondents coped very well with this part of the survey, as clearly indicated by the number of correct answers (75.5%), which I indicated in the diagram with a blue line. The light green area indicates the incorrect answers, while the dark green colour indicates the correct answers. The abbreviation THX received the highest number of correct answers, while PSX featured the lowest number. I considered as correct the clarifications of abbreviations and acronyms indicated by respondents regardless of whether they were indicated in English or Polish (if those were not abbreviations of proper names which exist only in English). The abbreviations and acronyms were expanded as:

THX was 'thanks – thank you' or various variants of the Polish '*dziękuję*' e.g. '*dzięki*'.
BTW was 'by the way' or the Polish '*a tak przy okazji*', '*swoją drogą*'.
4U was 'for you' or '*dla ciebie*'.
PS3 was 'Playstation 3', PSX was 'Playstation' (I also accepted the variant Playstation X[35]), and X360 was 'Xbox 360'. Those are names of game consoles.

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35 It is "a 2003 Sony device which contained the insides of PlayStation 2 to function as a console – apart from that it had quite a few other multimedia functions (...) Additionally, we had such technological innovations as composite IN and a 160 or 250 GB hard drive (...) on which you could record television shows! Therefore, PSX was the first true combination of a console and

In many of the filled out surveys, I noticed that the respondents who were correctly defining the abbreviation of PS3, when they were defining PSX they stated that it was "Playstation X"; it is unclear whether that was an intentional reference to a specific hardware (a combination of Playstation 2 and a recorded) or whether they noticed an analogy between the two abbreviations and since PS3 expands to Playstation 3 then PSX must have meant Playstation X.

In the final open-ended question, I asked respondents to explain three expressions: "*gra chodzi*", "*wersja na PieCa*", and "*grać na iXie*".
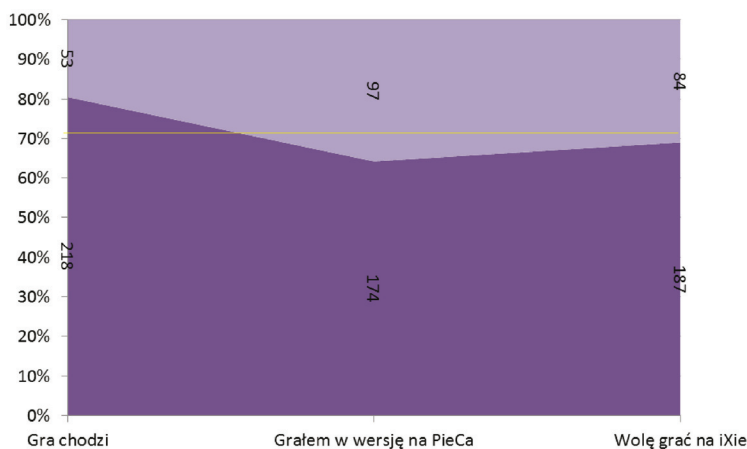
Diagram 6. Expressions

Source: own study

Correct answers constituted 71.2% of the total. The easiest to explain was the expression "*gra chodzi*", while the most difficult was that a game was released in a version for "*PieCa*". In the case of the former expression, the most common correct answers stated that "*gra działa*" [a game works] or "*uruchamia się*" [it starts]. In the case of the latter expression, the dominant answer was: "*na PC*" [for PC], "*na komputer osobisty*" [for personal computer], and "*na komputer stacjonarny*" [for desktop computer]. Finally, the expression "*wolę grać na iXie*" was explained by the respondents as "*wolę grać na xboxie*" [I prefer playing Xbox] (with various spelling variants, e.g. "*na x-boxie*" or "*na xboksie*").

The last part of the survey consisted of two summarising closed questions.

The first one was: "How often do you use the terms specified in questions 4–6?" The results were the following:

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a   DVR   (https://gamedot.pl/news,na-xbox-one-nagrasz-programy-z-tv-ale-to-nie-pierwsza-konsola-ktora-to-potrafi, accessed on: 14.06.2017).
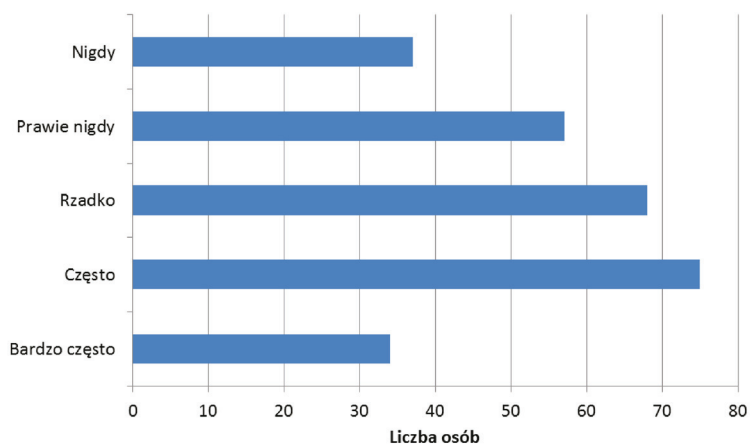
Diagram 7. Frequency of term usage
Source: own study

The second one: "How often do you hear your colleagues using the terms speci-fied in questions 4–6?" Diagram 8 presents a summary of the results:
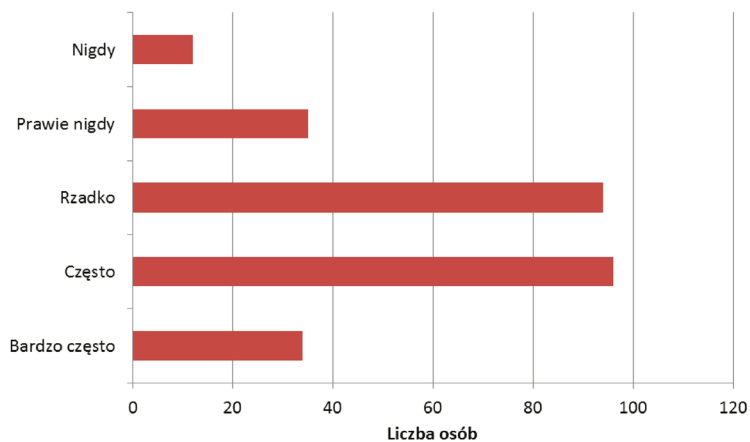
Diagram 8. Frequency of term usage (by colleagues)
Source: own study

The following diagram is a combination of Diagrams 7 and 8:
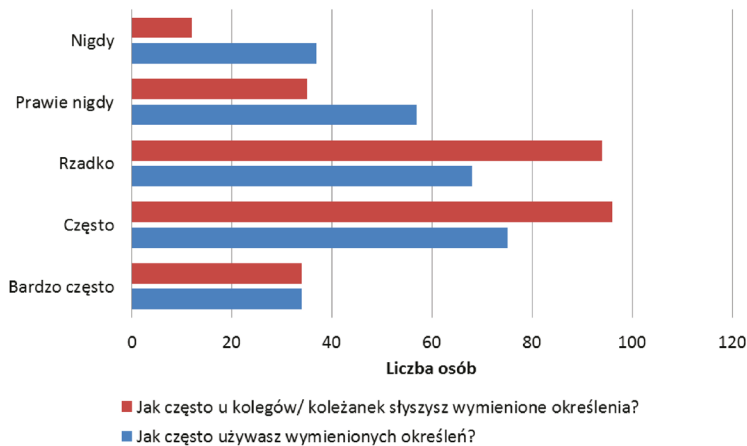
Diagram 9. Frequency of term usage (summarised)
Source: own study

I summarised these diagrams to indicate that the respondents heard the terms associated with the gamers' community from their acquaintances more often than they used them themselves. A total of 95.6% of the respondents stated that they heard them in their colleagues' speech specialist gamers' lexis, while 86.3% stated that they themselves used them more or less often. Only 37 people (13.7%) had never used them, and 12 (4.4%) had not heard their colleagues use them.

Finally, to complement the presentation of the study results, one should examine the surveys filled out by persons who stressed that they did not play video games. I called that group "non-gamers" and in the remainder of the article I shall apply this term. I shall compare the results acquired in the case of non-gamers with those acquired from all the respondents (referring to those as total results).

There were 41 individuals who declared that they never played video games, and this was also the number of surveys I analysed. The resulting data is included in the following table:

Diagram 11. Abbrevia ions and acronyms used in the community of Polish video gamers (non-gamers' group)
Source: own study
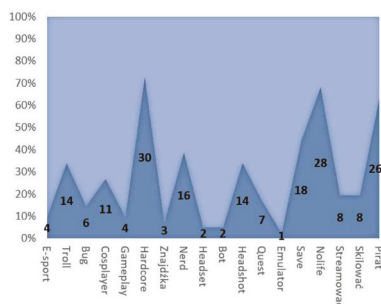
Diagram 10. Knowledge of the lexis used by & in the community of Polish video gamers (non-gamers' group)
Source: own study
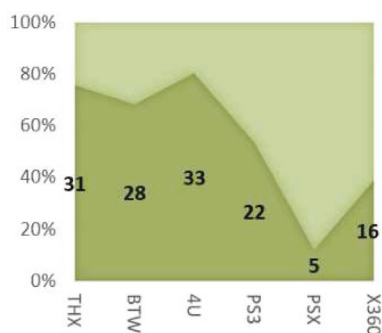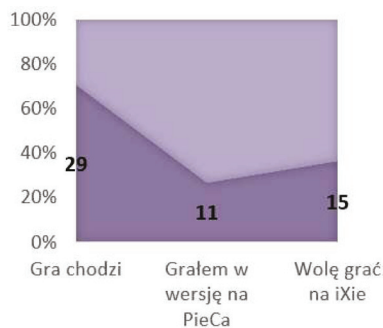
Diagram 12. Expressions (non-gamers' group)
Source: own study

When comparing the total results and those acquired only for non-gamers, one can clearly see that in the case of the latter ones the identifiability of lexemes was much lower and thus the number of correct answers was also lower. On average, a single respondent correctly identified every fourth word (27% of all respondents). When comparing the number of correct definitions of individual lexemes used by the gamers' community, one can clearly see that almost always the knowledge of these was lower in the case of the non-gamers' group. One deviation applied to the lexeme *hardcore*, which in the total analysis was correctly defined by nearly 65% respondents, while in the group of non-gamers it was correctly defined by 73% respondents.

The level of 50% of correct definitions was also exceeded by explanations of the words *nolife* (correctly defined by 68% of non-gamers), and *pirat* (63% correct definitions), yet high results in the case of these lexemes also applied to the entire study (nolife – 73%, pirat – 76%).

Then, non-gamers were almost completely unfamiliar with the lexeme *emulator*. It was defined correctly by only one person, which might be surprising considering the total results. In this case, it was defined correctly 113 times (41%) so it was not a word which was known to the smallest number of respondents. Only one non-gamer (2% of the total results) was able to provide a correct definition of the lexeme. The words *headset* and *bot* also ranked low – only two people managed to define them correctly. Additionally, it was rather surprising that *znajdźka*, a clearly Polish word, did not rank last among the non-gamers as it did in the case of a total analysis of the surveys; it ranked 15th (out of 18 in total).

Considering the results of the knowledge of abbreviations and acronyms, non-gamers had as much difficulty with properly expanding the abbreviation PSX as all other respondents, i.e. only 5 people managed to do that. The explanations of other abbreviations and acronyms were also problematic. The respondents coped best with deciphering the full name of *PS3*, i.e. a modern game console. When analysing all the expanded versions of the abbreviations and acronyms, the average respondent provided correct definitions of every other instance (55%).

In the case of the three expressions, the task of defining them for non-gamers was much easier than the task of defining lexemes, but more difficult than expanding abbreviations as in this case a single respondent displayed knowledge of 47% expressions.

The results of non-gamers indicate that the group recognised much fewer lexemes than people who played video games. The fact of coming into contact with games, even to a minor extent, considerably increased their understanding of the analysed lexemes. The most popular lexeme among non-gamers was *hardkor* [a polonised version of *hardcore*]. The widespread awareness of the lexeme could be explained by the fact that it was used in a very popular YouTube clip titled '*Jestem hardcorem*' ['I'm a hardcore']. It used to be very popular and now it could be referred to as a cult piece among various subcultures. The studied group displayed a complete lack of knowledge of the word *emulator*. That was surely due to the fact that the knowledge of the lexeme was useful only to those who used "programmes «imitating» other devices/computers" and non-gamers did not need that programme as they were not interested in this form of leisure. In the case of *hardkor*, the matter was somewhat different as it could be used in various situations (e.g. to describe a difficult situation or to refer to a person who performs something extremely difficult), hence its higher level of familiarity.

When I was analysing the group's familiarity with abbreviations and acronyms, it became evident that these respondents knew those words which could also be used in communication which applied to topics not necessarily associated with games. Their utility stemmed from the fact that they were shorter and, thus, more economical. In terms of the abbreviated names of consoles, it became clear that many non-gamers knew the names of new consoles (*PSX*, *XBOX360*) as they could be purchased in supermarkets, meaning their names were visible to the respondents

while, e.g., doing daily shopping, and they became consolidated in their memory, hence their identifiability. Then, the abbreviated name of an older device, i.e. Play-Station (*PSX*) was not so common as the console was no longer available.

When analysing the results of the respondents' familiarity with expressions, I noticed that both non-gamers and gamers displayed similar levels of familiarity.

When summarising the results of the entire survey, it must be stated that most respondents knew the terminology specific to the gamers' community. This conclusion could be drawn from the analysis of the definitions of individual lexemes (question 4), where over 55% of the provided answers were correct. The respondents coped even better with explaining expressions (questions 6). In this case, ≈71% answers were correct. The most correct answers were provided in response to question 5, i.e. when they were requested to expand abbreviations and acronyms. In this case, 75% of answers were correct.

Does this mean that the terminology specific to the gamers' community is known to randomly inquired respondents? The answer is yes, at least to the 271 random respondents I inquired.

What, then, is the level of familiarity with the terminology? Based on the survey, I have to conclude that it is considerable.

Is gamers' lexis permeating into modern Polish? This question can be answered using the answers to the final two questions of the survey (7 and 8), which indicated that as many as around 86% respondents used some lexemes specific to gamers in their communication, while around 96% heard them every day when talking to their colleagues.

Not so long ago, the community of Polish gamers and its lexis was reserved exclusively for a small group of video game aficionados. In Poland, gaming was a niche, so there were few gamers. They detached from the rest of the society and engaged in their hobby. Therefore, there emerged a kind of a wall separating gamers from the rest of the society. In that isolated setting, terminology specific to the community emerged. The core of the group included young people; actually, even today this is the stereotype – that video games are for children. Yet in time, those people became older, got jobs, and started families. Subsequently, the hermetic wall was not there anymore as those people transferred into general Polish (be it in professional or personal relations) the lexemes they used in the gaming community in which they grew up. There is, however, a considerable portion of the society which did not grow up in those times and this is where I see the role of linguists who should explain the unintelligible for a part of the society terminology of the gamers' community, which, as the study indicated, is gradually becoming familiar.[36]

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[36] For the purposes of this article, two other papers proved essential: "O języku młodego Internetu" (A. Wileczek, *Zeszyty Prasoznawcze*, 3–4, W. Pisarek (ed.), Kraków 2011, pp. 82–99), and "O opozycji *hardcore/casual*" (P. Grabarczyk, *Homo Ludens* 7(1), Poznań 2015, pp. 89–109).

SURVEY

1. Your age: ....

2. How often do you play video games (computer games, console games of "mobile" games, e.g. in a mobile telephone)? Select one answer.
☐ Every day or almost every day
☐ 2–3 times a week
☐ Once a week
☐ Very rarely
☐ I don't play video games

3. What are the video game periodicals that you read? (you can indicate more than one)
☐ CD-Action
☐ Pixel
☐ PSX Extreme
☐ I don't read gaming periodicals
☐ Other (specify) ....

4. Please provide a short definition of the following words (example usage will be appreciated):
e-sport ....
troll ....
bug ....
cosplayer ....
gameplay ....
hardcore ....
znajdźka ....
nerd ....
headset ....
bot ....
headshot ....
quest ....
emulator ....
save ....
nolife ....
streamować ....
skillować ....
pirat ....

5. Please expand the following abbreviations

TXT ....
PS3 ....
BTW ....
PSX ....
4U ....
X360 ....

6. What do the bold elements mean?

Gra **chodzi** ....
I was playing the **PieCa** version ....
I prefer playing on **iXie** ....

7. How often do you use the terms specified in questions 4–6?

☐ Very often
☐ Often
☐ Rarely
☐ Almost never
☐ Never

8. How often do you hear your colleagues using the terms specified in questions 4–6?

☐ Very often
☐ Often
☐ Rarely
☐ Almost never
☐ Never

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Rafał Maćkowiak

Otoczony murem, hermetyczny język środowiska polskich graczy wideo? Czy język środowiska polskich graczy jest znany Polakom? – wyniki badań ankietowych

Streszczenie

Branża gier wideo to w dzisiejszych czasach jedna z najszybciej rozwijających się gałęzi przemysłu rozrywkowego. Korporacje takie jak: Microsoft, Sony czy Nintendo inwestują coraz większe środki pieniężne w produkcję sprzętu do gier (np. komputerów, konsol, tabletów) oraz w produkcję gier na różne platformy.

Niewątpliwie powstał i prężnie się rozwija duży zbiór słownictwa, który ze względu na coraz bardziej spójną grupę użytkowników zmierza w kierunku wytworzenia socjolektu. Do tej pory językoznawcy nie przyjrzeli się dokładnie leksyce graczy z tego względu konieczne jest jej zbadanie, zważywszy na ogrom zjawiska i wielkość środowiska graczy.

Gracze wideo stanowią bardzo dużą grupę. Warto tutaj podkreślić, że środowisko graczy, więc także i leksyka charakterystyczna dla tego środowiska, nie istnieje w izolacji. Leksyka używana przez nich coraz częściej przedostaje się poza pierwotne środowisko, np. do innych mediów czy języka potocznego.

Autor przeprowadził ankietę i postanowił sprawdzić, czy leksyka graczy wideo jest znana wśród przypadkowych respondentów. W artykule zaprezentowane są wyniki ankiety.

Słowa kluczowe: Gry wideo, leksyka, współczesna polszczyzna, socjolekt, ankieta

Surrounded by a wall: The hermetic language of the Polish community of video gamers
Do Poles know the language of Polish gamers?
The results of a survey-based study

S u m m a r y

The video game industry is today one of the most rapidly developing branches of the entertainment industry. Such corporations as Microsoft, Sony and Nintendo are increasing their investment engagement in the manufacture of gaming hardware (e.g. computers, consoles, and tablets), and in game development for various platforms.

There has developed and continues to expand an extensive terminology which due to the increasing consolidation of the user base is progressing towards producing a sociolect. Linguists have not yet examined the lexis of gamers which is why it must be studied considering the extent of the phenomenon and the sheer size of the gamer community.

Video gamers form a large group. At this point it must be stressed that the gamer community and the lexis specific for it does not exist in isolation. The lexis used by gamers continues to permeate outside the community, e.g. to other media or the colloquial language.

The author of this article conducted a survey to check whether the lexis of video gamers is known to random respondents. This article presents the results of the survey.

Keywords: Video games, lexis, modern Polish language, sociolect, survey

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Diagrams

Diagram 1.

Number of people		
	Age	

Diagram 2.

	I don't play video games	
Very rarely		Every day or almost every day
Once a week	2–3 times a week	

Diagram 3.

I don't read gaming periodicals   Other

Diagram 6.

Game runs	I played the PC version	I prefer on X

Diagram 7.

Never	
Almost never	
Rarely	
Often	
Very often	
	Number of people

Diagram 8.

see above

Diagram 9.

Never	
Almost never	
Rarely	
Often	
Very often	
	Number of people
How often do you hear your colleagues using the indicated terms?	
How often do you use the indicated terms?	

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The limits of magic: A study in breaking through barriers in fantasy fiction

Magic accompanies modern humans from birth to adolescence, and often throughout their lives. The age-long desire to understand and control the surrounding world has been an immanent feature of our civilisation. The desire to transcend that which is known, to make a step forward – which began with the utilisation of a stone as a tool millions of years ago – has become the driving force of growth, the pinnacle of which was Neil Armstrong setting foot on the Moon. In the common perception, magic today is no longer associated with science or development but, rather, with fairy tales and various kinds of fortune-tellers and horoscopes. The word *magic* in expressions such as *the magic of Christmas* – or *magical* meaning *exceptional beauty* – both carry a rather pejorative meaning as something unreal, something meant for children, something for naive people who believe in newspaper horoscopes and fortunes told by TV soothsayers. Yet, the period of childhood leaves in adults a certain fondness for magic, i.e. the ability to make real that which our knowledge rejects and considers impossible. That fondness, carefully nurtured in the sphere of literature, did not disappear with the emergence of the age of reason. On the contrary, after the rationalism of the Enlightenment there came the time for romantic folklore and related beliefs. That which seemed dead to the proverbial sage came to life and has even gained respect. The beyond, magic, and characters yielding superhuman powers were not ousted into oblivion, not for the lack of trying. Various kinds of extraordinary stories – e.g. the story of the monster created by Doctor Frankenstein or the story of Dracula and other terrible creatures hiding in some castle ruins, inaccessible swamps, or unexplored jungles – captivated the imagination of the people of the era of progress, arguing that we

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still do not know everything and that our power is not universal. Even Sherlock Holmes, the famous detective, despite using rational investigative methods, had in him something of a magical character, i.e. superhuman skills of deduction and associating of facts. Where, then – even though our knowledge continues to expand – does the undying belief in magic and search for magical lands in escapist literature, film, and games come from? Bruno Bettelheim associated the magical sphere with the childhood need for safety, a place where a child becomes, in their own perception, the centre of the universe, surrounded by magical creatures watching over them.[1] Whether the desire is realised or not, every person strives to guarantee their own safety, so they somehow verge on that magical sphere inherited from their ancestors and recalled from their childhoods. Therefore, one should not be surprised by the popularity of fantasy literature, sometimes referred to as "fairy tales for adults"[2], and which was defined by Stanisław Lem as a newer version of the fairy tale.[3] Literature after the golden age of science fiction – which was the expression of the fascination with technological innovations, the development of science, and human achievements in the study of the cosmos – offered readers to turn away from the rigid framework of rationalism and logic, and move towards the not entirely understood[4], mysterious, and understated sphere of magic.

What is magic, then? As I have already mentioned, most people end their adventure with magic when they step out of their childhoods and lose interest in fairies, dragons, and spells.[5] The magic which readers know from fairy tales is – for the lack of broader descriptions or explanations – hard to define. A child, as Bettelheim argued, does not need rational statements[6] explaining e.g. what enabled the wizard

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1   Vide: B. Bettelheim, *Cudowne i pożyteczne. O znaczeniach i wartościach baśni*, vol. I, trans. D. Danek, Państwowy Instytut Wydawniczy, Warsaw 1985, pp. 110–114. Bettelheim ascribed similar desires to ancient cultures, e.g. ancient Egyptians. Deities or care beings appear in basically every religion.

2   Vide, e.g.: K. Kaczor, *Geralt, czarownice i wampir. Recykling kulturowy Andrzeja Sapkowskiego*, Wydawnictwo słowo/obraz/terytoria, Gdańsk 2006, p. 117.

3   S. Lem, *Fantastyka i futurologia*, vol. 1, Kraków 1973, p. 95. The term 'fantasy' was not common at that time and the genre was not defined. In English-speaking countries, there existed the phrase 'sword and sorcery', yet it did not cover the entirety of the phenomenon known today as 'fantasy'.

4   Interestingly enough, the existence of magic in fantasy fiction was considered by some critics as a factor devaluing the genre. Vide the polemic between Dukaj and Dębek: J. Dukaj, "Filozofia fantasy I i II", *Nowa Fantastyka* 1997, issue 8(179) and issue 9(180); and P. Dębek, "Magia fantasy", *Nowa Fantastyka* 1998, issue 3.

5   I intentionally avoided the issue of religious rites similar to magic as the question of the mutual relations between those spheres goes beyond the regular understanding of magic as an element of the world of culture intended as entertainment, which is the focus of this article.

6   Vide: B. Bettelheim, *op. cit.*, pp. 103–105.

in *Puss in Boots*[7] to turn into a lion, or why the protagonist can speak. For a child, it is something completely natural that a magical cat can do that, just as the magical mirror in which Snow White's stepmother views her reflection can. A child does not realise that magic has its limits, nor where it comes from, and a child does not need this knowledge either for enjoying the reading or receiving the content. Neither are adult readers of fairy tales able to infer anything more; we never learn where magical animals, wizards, and magic wands come from. It is not clear how big their power is and what they can and cannot do. Clearly, all magic in fairy tales has a unifying quality: by means of it one can break through barriers and achieve things impossible for regular humans. Owing to magic beans, Jack reaches a land high in the sky, Cinderella in her magical disguise attends a ball where she meets a prince, Aladdin flies a carpet, the magical table sets itself and is filled with food, seven-league boots enable one to travel quickly, and the Golden Duck gives money to a pauper. The protagonists receive things which in real life would be beyond their reach. This can be an extraordinary ability as well as a thing not available to them not due to human physical limitations, but because of their status, as in the case of Cinderella or the pauper in *The Tale of the Golden Duck*. What is the situation in fantasy fiction?

For fantasy fiction, magic is one of the immanent genre-defining elements.[8] It appears in the genre's first works: in Robert E. Howard's short stories about Conan and in J.R.R. Tolkien's novels. In both cases, despite it being a major component of the world depicted in them, readers learn little about its internal workings. In *The Lord of the Rings*, magic came from the creator of the world and it is possessed by some beings, i.e. the Ainur who fulfil a role similar to that of angels in the Judeo-Christian tradition.

> The Ainur were great spirits and each was given a mighty voice so that he could sing before Ilúvatar for His pleasure. (...) This was what the tales call the Music of the Ainur, in which great themes were made as individual spirits sought supremacy or harmony according to their nature. Some proved greater than others; some were powerful in goodness, some in evil; yet in the end, though the battle of sound was terrible, the Music was great and beautiful. From this harmony and strife Ilúvatar created a vision that was a globed light in the Void. With a word and the Flame Imperishable He then made Eä, the "World that Is".[9]

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7 A folk tale published by, e.g., Giovanni Francesco Straparola, or Charles Perrault.

8 Even though Andrzej Sapkowski in his compendium on fantasy fiction did not write about magic as a feature specific to this genre, the set of readings he indicated seems to prove the above assumption. Vide: A. Sapkowski, *Rękopis znaleziony w smoczej jaskini*, SuperNowa, Warszawa 2001, pp. 9–12. Vide: N. Leman, "Science fiction", [in:] *Słownik rodzajów i gatunków literackich*, G. Gazda, S. Tynecka-Makowska (eds.), Universitas, Kraków 2006.

9 D. Day, *Bestiariusz tolkienowski*, trans. R. Giedrojć, J.Z. Lichański, J. Kokot, Zysk i S-ka, Poznań 1996, p. 20. [English version: D. Day, *A Tolkien Bestiary*, Random House, New York 2001.]

Therefore, magic is part of creation and every being endowed with it by the crea-tor has its share in creation. Readers can only infer that the magical powers of those of the Ainur who descended onto Eä are limited to the domain of which they sang in the act of creation. Hence, Gandalf is the guardian of fire: "I am servant of the Secret Fire, wielder of the flame of Anor. You cannot pass. The dark fire will not avail you, flame of Udûn. Go back to the Shadow!"[10] the wizard said to Balrog, his enemy, in the battle scene on the bridge in Moria. Deducing further, one might con-clude that the flame of Anor represents the light and positive aspects of fire – fire as light illuminating darkness, a source of warmth, fire warming food, and a bonfire gathering people and creating a community. Then, the fire of Udûn is responsible for the destructive power of fire. Further fortunes of the characters prove that the powers of both beings were in such a state of equilibrium that their fight concluded in their deaths.[11] Gandalf's powers are limited only to the domain of fire. The ability to communicate with animals and other magical beings is an immanent quality of all Ainur, just like the ability to predict events[12] and the immortality of their spirit form. Some of the magical abilities were transferred during the act of creation onto races inhabiting Eä – Elrond, an elf, has the ability to heal; Galadriel, the queen of elves, can read the minds of humans, elves, dwarves, and hobbits, and influence them. She also holds a magical artefact, i.e. a mirror which can show scenes from the past, the present, and the future. Yet the mirror cannot be controlled; it shows what it wishes to. Elves, similarly to the Ainur and unlike dwarves, humans, and hobbits, are immortal. The death of their corporeal form means the return of their spirits to a land beyond, created especially for them, where if their corporeal forms die, they will await the end of the world. Other races do not possess such magical abilities unless they are endowed with those by an Ainur, as was the case with the nine Fallen Kings, who were turned into Ringwraiths.

In Howard's short stories about Conan the Barbarian[13], magic exists as an element of the presented world and – apart from the short stories titled *A Witch Shall Be Born*[14]

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[10]   J.R.R. Tolkien, *Władca Pierścieni*, trans. M. Skibniewska, Atlantis SC, Warsaw 1992, p. 226. [English version: J.R.R. Tolkien, *The Lord of the Rings*, Harper Collins, London 2001.]

[11]   More precisely: when the lives of their corporeal forms end on Eä. Gandalf was sent again to finish the task with which he was entrusted, and to complete the fate inscribed in the Music of the Ainur.

[12]   That power, which could be treated as magic, probably resulted from their presence during the creation of the world and singing its fate. Yet only the creator knows everything. No one knows whether the corporeal form of the Ainur present on Eä retains all the recollections from existence prior to the descent.

[13]   In this analysis, I have considered only Howard's texts about Conan and I omitted the numer-ous works by various later authors of the franchise.

[14]   R.E. Howard, "Narodzi się wiedźma", [in:] idem., *Conan z Cimmerii*, Wydawnictwo ALFA, War-saw 1988.

and *The Frost-Giant's Daughter*[15] – it does not play any major role. It only constitutes an embellishment, the local feature of the barbarian world. Magic, without any explanation and not necessary for the story line, appears, just like in fairy tales, as something which is obvious for readers as an element of the presented world, adding variety to it and being a factor which differentiates it from the world outside the text. Apart from increasing the attractiveness of a text, its presence does not convey through the text any additional message or subtext.

What is magic like in the trademark work of the Polish fantasy fiction? Already in the first short story in the *Witcher* series[16] by Andrzej Sapkowski, readers get to know Visenna, a sorceress and mother of Geralt, the series' protagonist. From that moment on, the Witcher's fortunes connect and intertwine with magic constantly. Geralt himself was partly altered by magic, owing to which he now possesses special abilities, e.g. superhuman speed, the ability to see in the dark, the ability to amplify his strength, endurance, reaction speed, and other qualities available through the use of elixirs which are deadly for regular humans; increased pace of regeneration, and lowered sensitivity to pain. I am, however, getting ahead of myself. The Witcher's world is a place originally inhabited by gnomes and dwarves. Later, through magic, elves arrived in the land and it was probably them who brought or awoke magic in this world as there are no indications of gnome or dwarf wizards, nor are there in the whole series any representatives of those races who practice magic. Hundreds of years later there occurred an unspecified event of alignment of spheres and gates between different worlds opened offering passage for other beings, mainly humans[17] but also various monsters, e.g. vampires and ghouls. People discovered magic and started sending their children to learn from elvish sorcerers, the Aen Saevherne or the so-called elven sages. However, not all can do magic – as it turns out, it is an extremely rare skill and its source is not entirely defined. Magical abilities predispose those who possess them to find themselves among the elite of the new world, i.e. on the same level as the aristocracy and priests are, right below monarchs. Therefore, usually the fact of being a sorcerer or a sorceress entails not only the fact of possessing extraordinary abilities, but also being

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[15] R.E. Howard, "Córa lodowego olbrzyma", [in:] idem., *Conan z Cimmerii*, Wydawnictwo ALFA, Warsaw 1988.

[16] A. Sapkowski, "Droga, z której się nie wraca", [in:] idem., *Coś się kończy, coś się zaczyna*, Super-Nowa, Warsaw 2001.

[17] People came from a world which could be defined as 'ours' in the Middle Ages, which is indicated by the usage of Latin as the language of diplomacy, and some of the proper names which often are used for intertextual games with readers, e.g. giving the name of Franklin to a halfling who tried to catch a bolt of lightning in a bottle. Vide: A. Sapkowski, *Czas pogardy*, SuperNowa, Warsaw 1995, pp. 97–98. More on this subject can be found in: K. Kaczor, *Geralt, czarownice i wampir...*, and E. Żukowska, *Mitologie Andrzeja Sapkowskiego*, Gdański Klub Fantastyki, Gdańsk 2011.

ranked at the top of the social ladder and having the ability to accrue wealth from providing services to the wealthiest of the world, and charging enormous payments on those. If you add longevity, never-fading beauty (improved through magic[18]), absolute health (magical immunity to all illnesses[19]), the fact of having an actual influence on rulers and the fate of the world, and other privileges – e.g. the ability to travel almost unrestricted around the world owing to the ability to create magic portals – the magic profession seems to be a dream. However, wealth, power, beauty, and health must come at a price. From the very beginning of their magic careers, candidates[20] for members of the magic community must be aware of the possible consequences that fate might throw at them.[21] The first and one of the most important disadvantages of being a sorcerer/sorceress is the complete loss of one's bonds with their family. The academy, which they do not leave for many years, becomes for the students their only home, a home devoid of warmth or feelings. After completing the training, the graduates are changed so much that they do not seek contact with their families, becoming complete strangers to them. Owing to their longevity, they outlive their parents and siblings by many years.[22] Growing up separated from one's family and the world outside the walls of the academy results in raising individuals devoid of feelings and empathy, who are egotistic and focused only on gaining benefits for themselves or their magic community. Relationships between sorcerers/sorceresses are mainly concentrated around satisfying their sexual drives without any emotional bonds. This is how Vilgefortz, a sorcerer, described his first lover, a sorceress: "I left her. Because she was promiscuous, arrogant, malicious, callous and cold."[23] His sentiment was not uncommon. Many times throughout the novels, similar opinions are voiced about sorceresses. In his ballads, Dandelion

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[18] The beauty of sorceresses and the refined presence of sorcerers was associated with the prestige of the profession and the fact of belonging to an elite caste. This is why all flaws in one's appearance were magically removed already during the education at the academy. Thus, e.g. Yennefer, as Geralt guessed correctly, was a hunchback when she was a child. Vide: A. Sapkowski, "Ostatnie życzenie", [in:] idem., *Ostatnie życzenie*, SuperNowa, Warsaw 1998, pp. 273–274.

[19] There were some exceptions. For example, Triss Merigold is not able to heal herself using magic, because she is allergic to it.

[20] Most of the details regarding the magic academy and the magic folk in general apply to women. Only through analogy one can assume that in most cases the same applies to men.

[21] In most cases, candidates for the magic academy are taken away from their parents as children and they have no say about their own fates.

[22] When the story of the series unfolds, Yennefer is around ninety years old (while looking like a twenty-five-year-old), and Hen Gedymdeith, the oldest of the living mages, is one of those who were as children given away to elves for education immediately after humans had landed in this world, which means he must be at least several hundred years old.

[23] A. Sapkowski, *Czas pogardy*, pp. 142–143.

compared Yennefer's heart to a block of ice. The sorceress is the protagonist of the short story titled *A Shard of Ice*[24]; the character is a reference to Hans Christian Andersen's Snow Queen. The relationship of Geralt and Yennefer is astounding; it often seems to be bringing more pain than happiness and yet, against all odd, it endures. Their relationship is surprising for another reason as well: witchers undergo a mutation which is supposed to deprive them of feelings so that these cannot distract them in combat. Considering their original conditions and the magical alternations they both underwent, their affection is unique and theoretically impossible. At this point it must be stated that their fates have been bound by a spell cast by a genie in the short story titled *The Last Wish*.[25] The novel lacks a literary answer to the question about whether their love is true and whether it is natural or a mere outcome of strong magic. Readers cannot be certain as to whether they managed to break a barrier, i.e. whether nature triumphed over artificially created conditions.[26] A hint in this matter might be offered by their attitude towards Ciri, who after the loss of her family became their assumed daughter. Even before meeting the girl, Yennefer displayed a desire unusual for a sorceress, which was to reverse the transformations she had been subjected to during her magic training, and regain her fertility. In the short story titled *The Bounds of Reason*[27], the sorceress admits that she desires the skin of the unique golden dragon not for profit but to pay with it for regaining her fertility. When faced with her inability to have a child of her own, the fact of being a mother to Ciri enables Yennefer to fulfil her biggest dream. The sorceress is ready, just like the Witcher, to sacrifice anything to find her assumed daughter. That fact seems to prove that the love between Yennefer and Geralt is true. Magic can do much, but to restore the ability to become pregnant – supposedly natural for every woman – is beyond anything even the most talented mages can do.

Most sorceresses, just like Yennefer, cannot have children, but none of the others regrets it; their egotistic attitudes exclude the possibility of having any progeny to which they would have to devote time and feelings, which they do not possess. Visenna, Geralt's mother, gave him up to the witchers' school and never cared for his fortunes. The fluke meeting between the sorceress and Geralt when she is summoned to heal a wounded witcher ends in the son once again being abandoned by his mother. She completes her medical duties and leaves, not waiting for the patient to regain consciousness. She avoids the inconvenient questions which he might ask

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24 A. Sapkowski, "Okruch lodu", [in:] idem., *Miecz przeznaczenia*, SuperNowa, Warsaw 1998.

25 A. Sapkowski,, "Ostatnie życzenie", [in:] idem., *Ostatnie życzenie*, SuperNowa, Warsaw 1998.

26 This question was answered by the creators of the video game titled *The Witcher 3: Wild Hunt* (*The Witcher 3: Wild Hunt*, CD Projekt RED, Poland 2016). If a player decides to free Geralt and Yennefer of the love spell cast by the genie, their love survives the trial. The fairy-tale aspect, i.e. the triumph of love, outweighs in this instance the anti-fairy-tale convention of fantasy fiction.

27 Sapkowski A., "Granica możliwości", [in:] idem., *Miecz przeznaczenia*, SuperNowa, Warsaw 1998.

and the possible objections she might hear.[28] That lack of interest in her own child is also a result of how sorceresses are brought up – i.e. in isolation from their families[29] – and of their loss of their maternal instincts. They gain much through magic, yet they lose the ability to fulfil their humanity, i.e. the ability to create life. Women who hold magical abilities and who have never been sent to the academy, and sorceresses who, like Visenna, have retained their fertility, often give birth to catatonic types or morons whose uncontrolled magical abilities destroy their minds. Such cases are so common that mages themselves have postulated a requirement of unconditional sterilisation[30], as if nature wanted to punish mages for violating the barriers it established, for transgressing the limits it intended for humans.

Apart from emotional problems, mages also face barriers which they encounter in the society. This particularly applies to women whose position in the patriarchal society is low due to their sex. Katarzyna Kaczor argued that:

> Upon demystifying the stereotypes created by the Christian culture, women regain through their association with nature the title of the Knowers. (…)
> Yet the demystification of the stereotype of the witch can also occur if one realises that the Western culture is the actual creator of the monster known as the witch, a culture in which female druids, priests, ancient goddesses and heroines served as the prototypes of all kinds of witches. Based on that realisation, the prototypes of fairy-tale fairies and sorceresses regain their original image of the Sages[31]

Despite the author's argument, not all aspects of that liberation from under the rule of the stereotype are socially acceptable. While female druids, priests, or even female village healers acting as midwives and providing first aid did regain their once lost position within the society – and their role of the wise and the knowing is accepted – the situation is somewhat different in the case of sorceresses.

Their unchanging beauty, wealth, skills, and their ability to do 'miracles' using magic become the source of jealousy among all those who lack such abilities; jealousy combined with frustration as one's own fate often leads to hatred cunningly fuelled by male priests. In a scene of a trial of a challenged girl unjustly accused by a priest of performing dark magic, at a refugee camp on the Chotla River, the

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28 During that encounter, Geralt remains under the influence of elixirs, the side effect of which are hallucinations. Neither the protagonist nor the readers can be sure as to whether the sorceress healing the witcher is, in fact, his mother. Possibly, those hallucinations were the result of his subconscious desire to find his mother and ask her why she had abandoned him.

29 Upbringing itself might be only one of the reasons. Even though it is clear that candidates for witchers undergo mutations, in the case of sorceresses it is not clear what changes they are required undergo when applying for the academy.

30 Vide: A. Sapkowski, *Krew elfów*, SuperNowa, Warsaw 1994, p. 244.

31 K. Kaczor, *Geralt, czarownice i wampir...*, p. 82.

attitude of most priests towards mages becomes evident. A priest delivers a sexist sermon in which he indicates women as the sources of evil, and proceeds to politics and accuses sorceresses (emphasising their sex) of plotting against the rulers. The motif of women as the source of all evil is a reference to the Judeo-Christian myth in which Eve is accused of the sin because of which people were banned from the garden of Eden, as well as to a time when Christians burnt witches at the stake[32] for their alleged conniving with the devil. The priest abuses the prestige of his profession to convince simple villagers about his position.

> "Since the dawn of time woman has been the root of all evil! The tool of Chaos, the accomplice in a conspiracy against the world and the human race! Woman is governed only by carnal lust! That is why she so willingly serves demons, in order to slake her insatiable urges and her unnatural wantonness!"
> (…)
> "And of what, if not female witchery, are our current calamities and misfortunes the result?" the priest continued to yell. "For no one else but the sorceresses betrayed the kings on the Isle of Thanedd and concocted the assassination of the King of Redania! Indeed, no one else but the elven witch of Dol Blathanna is sending Squirrels after us! Now you see to what evil the familiarity with sorceresses has led us! And the tolerance of their vile practices! Turning a blind eye to their wilfulness, their impudent hubris, their wealth!"[33]

The above statement concerns political events. It includes keywords which reveal the true reasons behind the priests' hatred towards sorceresses, i.e. "wilfulness", "carnal lust", and "wealth". Unlike other women, sorceresses can decide about their own fates, but – as advisers to monarchs – they also have an influence on the fates of kingdoms, so wealth in this context also means power. Their independence from men and the freedom of sexual life are for priests a thorn in the side as they expect them to behave like Penelope, i.e. faithfully waiting at home for her husband who, unlike her, was allowed by the morality of his time to engage in momentary love affairs in his journeys and even to produce children out of wedlock. Therefore, it was not magic that was the main reason of the animosity, but the liberation from under the rule of men. However, magic cannot be treated only as a pretext of the hostile attitude of the priests as it was magic that enabled women to gain independence in the first place. Independence which they emphasise at every step:

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32 The girl is supposed to be punished for her magic by being burnt at the stake.

33 A. Sapkowski, *Chrzest ognia*, SuperNowa, Warsaw 1997, pp. 155–156. [English version: A. Sapkowski, *Baptism of Fire*, Gollancz, London 2014.] The thread of the animosity between priests and mages was further developed in the video game *The Witcher 3: Wild Hunt*, op. cit., where mages are persecuted by Radovid V King of Redania and the followers of the Eternal Fire.

> Beautiful, long, loose hair was a rarity, an indication of a woman's position, her status, the sign of a free woman, a woman who belonged to herself. The sign of an unusual woman – because "normal" married women hid theirs beneath a caul or a coif. Women of high birth, including queens, curled their hair and styled it. Warriors cut it short. Only druids and magicians – and whores – wore their hair naturally so as to emphasise their independence and freedom.[34]

That flaunting of one's own independence is a natural defensive mechanism in a world dominated by men. This is why the priest's tirade included one more keyword: "hubris". Yet in this case the priest was quite right. Hubris resulting from the fact of having power, knowledge, and wealth unavailable to most people leads mages to a conviction that they are superior. And this, in turn, leads to a conviction that mages as the elite of the world are predestined to rule and enjoy impunity regardless of their actions. The sorceresses establish a secret lodge, the aim of which is to rule the world. Many mages are psychopaths. They create monsters which kill people, they experiment on them, they trigger wars to "limit" population growth and "eliminate" weaker individuals; they treat everyone else as mindless toys which have no feelings and which they use only to reach the goals defined by magic. They themselves are devoid of any feelings and they cannot understand the rest of the humankind. The benefits of having their wonderful abilities dwindle when compared to the threat of great power being yielded by people who cannot comprehend the meaning of life or its essence.

When discussing magic, one cannot omit a novel of the new genre of science fantasy, i.e. *Pan Lodowego Ogrodu* by Jarosław Grzędowicz, as magic plays a major role in it. In the not too distant future, humans on Earth discover a planet inhabited by intelligent humanoids whose development is at the stage of the early Middle Ages (prior to the invention of gun powder). A characteristic quality of the planet is that all electronic and mechanical devices brought to it from Earth quickly stop working and no scientific attempt at explaining this phenomenon offers any useful results. Scientists discover that, most probably, it is caused by a mysterious agent, which they refer to as "M", derived from the word "magic" – a word which they, being rationalists, refuse to use. Surprisingly, despite their objections, they very quickly become proficient in using magic, unlike Vuko Drakkainen, the novel's protagonist, a ranger/rescuer, whose mission is to evacuate the scientists off the planet. For a long time, Drakkainen cannot master even the basics of "magic-making"; just like the indigenous people, he tries – and fails – to find any rules governing this supernatural, in his opinion, power. Through observation and deduction, Drakkainen eventually arrives at the most important conclusion: magic cannot work in contradiction with the laws of nature. It does not work like some

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34   A. Sapkowski, *Krew elfów...*, p. 52. [English version: A. Sapkowski, *Blood of Elves*, Orbit, New York 2009.]

fairy-tale spells. "And whatever it is, it does not react to simple verbal commands like «open sesame.»"[35] To magically produce food, it is necessary to

> transform something from the surroundings, from plants and animals, but here you need to imagine that whole process at the molecular level. Essentially possible yet terribly hard. You would end up with a toxic semi-raw kielbasa covered in fur.[36]

Therefore, it is not possible to make childhood dreams a reality and fly on a dragon:

> The wyvern rapidly smashes wings, like a swan, thrusting that wilted one in a convulsive sad motion, but even it was properly developed, it would not be able to carry the dragon. It probably weighs a ton. A ton of flesh and bone. Even if it was filled with pure helium, it would not fly. The wings, if it would be able to stretch them out, would have a span of some fifteen metres. Maybe it would be able to glide for a bit, though I doubt it.[37]
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> (Dragons) Are physiologically impossible. That is why they die. Magic brings them to life and maintains that process creating that which a sorcerer wants. But they still die. Because his dragons come from fairy tales. They are fictional, they cannot work. Hence his spell is something artificial and has its limitations. He can order matter to transform a child into a dwarf, but it will not survive. Because its heart has the structure of a human heart and it has human muscles, because human metabolism is too slow to maintain life in a body which weighs two hundred grams, because human lungs are not efficient enough, the blood is too thick and so on. Such a human would have to have the internal organs of a mouse.[38]

What proves key to uncovering the mystery of magic is to visualise the activities which are to be performed using magic. Magic is mindless; it cannot interpret the wishes of the magician. It can only follow step-by-step instructions – like a computer doing everything exactly as it was programmed to do by a human. Indeed, Drakkainen manages to reach the gods worshipped on the planet, who prove to be beings who belong to a technologically advanced civilisation. The "gods" have long lost their physical form and now float in the atmosphere as information permeating the planet. The "magic" created by them is nothing else than "mnemonically controlled nano-vectors" which, like tiny disposable robots, are able to perform instructions given in one's mind.

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[35] J. Grzędowicz, *Pan Lodowego Ogrodu*, vol. III, Fabryka Słów, Lublin 2009, p. 292.

[36] Ibid., p. 294. Interestingly enough, there is some resemblance to the *Witcher* series – there, too, magicians cannot conjure up a tasty meal, i.e. create something which any housewife can do (without magic!)

[37] J. Grzędowicz, *Pan Lodowego Ogrodu*, vol. II, Fabryka Słów, Lublin 2007, p. 133.

[38] Ibid., pp. 143–144.

They are not much bigger than particles, but they operate together, like a swarm. And there are billions of them. They are able to lift a mountain if there is enough of them. Any one can cut something, merge something, relocate something or set fire to something. This way it will be easier for you to learn it than by thinking in terms of a fog, mysticism or magic.[39]

The whole magic turns out to be nothing more than advanced technology. The illusion of its supernatural properties is the result of the ignorance of the natives. A similar situation would have been if a 12th-century blacksmith had been showed a television; he would surely assume that people magically locked in a box were performing a show. The mechanics of this "magic" also explains why Earth scientists became proficient in its inner workings so quickly; they simply had knowledge of physical, chemical, and biological processes which enabled them to control the nano-vectors in a predictable manner.

Therefore, the word 'magical' seems adequate in the figurative sense regarding a technology which quickly – and through nano-vectors not visible to the naked eye – can do "miracles", e.g. heal the unhealable or create something from, seemingly, nothing. Owing to such 'magic', a wizard/scientist can cross the barrier (obviously within the limits of the laws of nature) of that which previously seemed impossible. Yet the laws of physics or biology are the only limitations enforced by the "magic". Unlimited power over matter, it turns out, is detrimental to those who came to yield it. From his conversations with the "gods", Drakkainen learns that this lack of any barriers had led to the fall of their civilisation. No details were revealed to him, yet one might infer that the holders of the extraordinary technology that was able to do almost anything (including gaining immortality by changing their corporeal form into pure information) destroyed their world[40] and lost the sense of their existence. They have lost that which constituted the foundation of their humanity.[41]

If you can do whatever you want from almost nothing, why would you develop? Why do anything? You can have normal things without any effort, and you can do extraordinary things at such a scale and they can be so wild that they pose a threat. (…)
A logical outcome of the development of the technology. Of continued development. Something from nothing. Anything from anything else. That's inevitable. Magic? All technology is magic. Everything depends on your point of reference.[42]

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[39]   J. Grzędowicz, *Pan Lodowego Ogrodu*, vol. III, Fabryka Słów, Lublin 2009, pp. 143–144.

[40]   Unlimited power to create also gives unlimited power to destroy.

[41]   It was a civilisation similar to ours, which is why the word "humanity" can be considered appropriate here.

[42]   J. Grzędowicz, *Pan Lodowego Ogrodu*, vol. IV, Fabryka Słów, Lublin 2012, pp. 834–835.

The "gods" lost their own lives because of the development of their technology. Now they live someone else's lives.

"And who are you? Who are you, Crow Shadow?"

"Me? I'm a fool. Mentally and emotionally underdeveloped. I get bored with everyday affairs of adults. I'm to dumb for that. That's why I miss the material world where you have a body, where there are only two sexes, where you need to eat to survive, and in order to eat you need to find and prepare food. Where people have simple needs and joys. Physical. Those are matters for imbeciles, but only such things make me happy. So, I descend among people and have some fun. I play."

(...)

"People there, they hurt, they die, they love..."

"That is why I like that. It is authentic. Passionate. I want that, too."

Crow Shadow explains the reason for the existence of Midgard[43] – it is the entertainment for the "gods", the only sense of existence, an ersatz of life which has no meaning for the all-powerful. They feast on other people's lives, human emotions, their desires, failures, and successes. The world of Midgard is for them like a book, a television series or a game; they view it from the safe position of their immaterial form. Only it can let them out of their golden cage and enable them to feel, evoke trepidation in them, cause desire – so much so that from time to time they decide to intervene. That atavistic whimsy is the only thing which maintains the will to continue existing in the all-powerful. They are like the viewers of a television saga, or avid video gamers, for whom the only thing that counts is that which they see on their screens. Just like gamers, they do not really eat, they do not love, they do not hate, and they do not live. And when they die, they can always return to their last saved location and try again. The "gods" have learnt from their failure and they do not allow the world to develop, which is why no complex device works on the planet. And when the world starts to develop too quickly in terms of technology, it is reset like a video game to the starting condition. All that to protect the people living in Midgard from the inevitable catastrophe awaiting at the end of unconstrained development.

Another argument indicating the dangers of magic is the activities of Earth's scientists in Midgard. Among the four who survived, three proved mad or psychotic, treating the inhabitants of the planet as a means of acquiring absolute power over the world and introducing their own order. They create distopias in which people are reduced to something less than slaves; they become a faceless mass used for turning the sick visions of their "gods" into reality. Only one scientist uses magic to defend himself from the others, but even he transforms the island subject

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43 This was the name given to the planet by the scientists as one of the planet's peoples resembled Vikings.

to him into a tourist heritage park; yet it must be said that he does not force anyone to become part of his world.

Magic in the novels by Andrzej Sapkowski and Jarosław Grzędowicz have different sources (forces of nature versus technology) and it differs in terms of its application. Yet there are some similarities in terms of the consequences borne by those who use it. Magic cannot give people the most important things – fertility in Yennefer's case, i.e. that which is supposedly natural for regular women. It destroys the sphere of emotions. The life of a mage becomes shallow and the sense of existence becomes undermined. It contradicts nature and inevitably leads to destruction. Even if the mechanics of magic is subject to the laws of nature, magic still often leads one to losing their humanity. The benefit of yielding magic powers is an illusion – mages in the Witcher's world gain power, social stature, and wealth, but they often fall into madness, just as Earth scientists on Midgard did. The power of magic is like atomic power; it can satisfy the material needs of humans, but there is a danger that, when in the wrong hands, it might lead to total destruction. Magic is too powerful a tool to be yielded by a person with an unstable mind and questionable morality. Magic is a threat to an entire civilisation. It is noteworthy that in the novel by Grzędowicz there appears the premise for creating a catastrophic vision of a terrestrial society enslaved by magic/technology, and with its efforts leading towards self-annihilation, just like the civilisation of the "gods" on the planet Midgard.[44] In following this argumentation, is magic a means of breaking barriers, shattering glass ceilings, and rupturing walls? It most certainly is, yet one needs to be careful that fulfilling their dreams should not become a curse.

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44 A similar motif also appears in Grzędowicz' latest sci-fi novel, vide: J. Grzędowicz, *Hel³*, Fabryka Słów, Lublin/Warsaw 2017.

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Mateusz Poradecki

Granice magii — szkic o przełamywaniu barier w fantastyce

S t r e s z c z e n i e

Artykuł to próba analizy magii w utworach Andrzeja Sapkowskiego (cykl o *Wiedźminie*) i Jarosława Grzędowicza (*Pan Lodowego Ogrodu*) pod względem jej możliwości, ograniczeń i społecznych konsekwencji jej stosowania. Magia jest gatunkotwórczym elementem literatury fantasy, lecz z większości dzieł np. *Władcy Pierścienia* Tolkiena czy cyklu o Conanie Roberta E. Howarda czytelnik nie

dowiaduje się o niej więcej niż z baśni. Dopiero w znacznie późniejszych utworach Sapkowskiego i Grzędowicza magia zostaje dokładniej opisana. U Sapkowskiego jest naturalną siłą przyrody, którą studiują i rozwijają członkowie akademii. U Grzędowicza to wysoko zaawansowana technologia, mylona z czarami przez pozostających na etapie niskiego rozwoju mieszkańców planety Midgaard. Magia to próba przekroczenia barier, narzuconych przez prawa przyrody, ale także barier społecznych. Niekontrolowany jej rozwój może prowadzić do samozagłady cywilizacji.

Słowa kluczowe: magia, bariery społeczne, fantasy, science-fiction, funkcja magii w literaturze

The limits of magic: A study in breaking through barriers in fantasy fiction

S u m m a r y

The article analyses the theme of magic in the works of Andrzej Sapkowski (the *Witcher* series) and Jarosław Grzędowicz (*Pan Lodowego Ogrodu*) in terms of their potential, limitations, and the social consequences of using them. Magic is a genre-forming element of fantasy fiction, yet in most works – e.g. Tolkien's *The Lord of the Rings* or Robert E. Howard's Conan series – readers do not learn about it more than they do from fairy tales. Magic is subject to extensive descriptions much later, i.e. in the works by Sapkowski and Grzędowicz. In Sapkowski's texts, it is a natural force of nature, which is studied and developed by the members of an academy. In Grzędowicz's novel, it is a highly advanced technology, often mistaken for spells by the fairly undeveloped inhabitants of the planet Midgard. Magic is an attempt at breaking through barriers enforced by the laws of nature as well as social barriers. An uncontrolled development may lead to the self-annihilation of an entire civilisation.

Keywords: magic, social barriers, fantasy, science fiction, function of magic in literature

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"Who of us has never traced light over these walls"?: The archaeology of Stanisław Grochowiak's poems

The close relationship between Stanisław Grochowiak's poetry and fine arts reminds one about the things hidden behind words, or the **pretextuality** of objects. A pragmatic approach to the pervasive manifestations of material culture makes them inconspicuous – less so in poems, which carefully weigh every word, and more so in everyday life; their presence only becomes evident in 'crisis' situations, i.e. when they malfunction, when they are moved, or when they perish. The personal approach to objects – ontologically unstable as they are tangible yet almost transparent in habitual usage – has long been absent from the humanistic discourse. It now has its proponents, who speak on its behalf, yet its emancipation – i.e. its separation from people and its gaining autonomy – is still uncertain. Since it is impossible to suspend the human perception of the world, "the discourse of objects will always be inserted into our human discourse, into our needs and expectations."[1] The researchers of the 'material turn' have been developing an alternative to the anti-materialistic concepts of culture, in which the "solid physicality of the world" is reduced to the "subject of discourse, or to a «phenomenon» subjectively experienced by an object."[2] As Bjørnar Olsen indicated, even in archaeology – a domain which continues to be the closest to objects – material culture traditionally fulfilled the function of "a hallway to the

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1 E. Domańska, "Humanistyka nie-antropocentryczna a studia nad rzeczami", *Kultura Współczesna* 2008, issue 3, p. 13. [Unless indicated otherwise, quotations in English were translated from Polish]

2 B. Olsen, "Kultura materialna po tekście", trans. P. Stachura, [in:] *Teoria wiedzy o przeszłości na tle współczesnej humanistyki*, E. Domańska (ed.), Wydawnictwo Poznańskie, Poznań 2010, pp. 563–564.

true non-material culture"[3]; it constituted a pretext for reconstructions of its underlying principles, or for spinning narratives on civilisational processes which caused its forming. I shall leave aside the project of non-anthropocentric humanities. Grochowiak's poetry remains within the orbit of the subjective treatment of objects. By moving 'along' the wall through the poems titled "Płonąca żyrafa", "Malarstwo", "Zejście", and "Ars Poetica", one will not be able to find objects as they are. Nonetheless, one might reach the results of a poetic study of the personality and agency of 'extra-human factors'. One cannot free walls from text as they are inscribed in a poem as way points, and as way points they are perceived by poetic personas; yet one will see in them the mediators of actions, thoughts, and experiences. I shall apply Grochowiak's archaeological reading to Bruno Latour's exercise: "Specific tricks have to be invented to *make them* (objects – H. H.) *talk*, that is, to offer descriptions of themselves, to produce *scripts* of what they are making other – humans or non-humans – do."[4] This task is difficult as (verbal) artefacts mediated by prose have little in common with the empirically available referents.[5] Let us assume, then, that the walls are ontologically real – within the universe of individual poems.

"Płonąca żyrafa" ["A Burning Giraffe"] exists in the pre-university education interpretative canon as an ekphrasis of Salvador Dali's famous work. Even this course book banality should stimulate readers' imaginations and put them not only in front of the surrealist painting or a projection of a scene in which Grochowiak, the supposed speaking person of the poem, studies the surrealist vision, but also in front of a wall. Unlike modern consumers of culture – who have access to virtual museums and digital copies of a vast majority of art works of all time – Grochowiak viewed the painting not through the cybernetic void but in a material, tangibly present form. The poet never saw the original; he did, however, possess a reproduction of Dali's masterpiece.[6] One could use this fact and venture a 'materialisation' of poetic reflection, i.e. move with the poem to the space of an art gallery or a room in which a copy of the painting is present. Before doing that, please consider the fact that Grochowiak's poems were presented, just as traditional framed painting, on the walls within the Adam Mickiewicz Museum of Literature in Warsaw twice.[7] "Płonąca żyrafa" – as a gallery exhibition of the same title – has

3   Ibid., p. 568.

4   B. Latour, "Przedmioty także posiadają sprawczość", trans. A. Derra, [in:] *Teoria wiedzy o przeszłości na tle współczesnej humanistyki*, pp. 549–550. [English version: B. Latour, *Reassembling the Social: An Introduction to Actor-Network-Theory*, Oxford University Press, Oxford 2005].

5   I shall leave this issue aside, recommending further discussion. Vide M. Heidegger, *Pytanie o rzecz. Przyczynek do Kantowskiej nauki o zasadach transcendentalnych*, trans. J. Mizera, Wydawnictwo KR, Warsaw 2001.

6   M. Grześczak, "Staszek zapamiętany, cząstki elementarne", [in:] *Dusza czyśćcowa. Wspomnienia o Stanisławie Grochowiaku*, collected and edited by A. Romaniuk, PIW, Warsaw 2010, pp. 92–93.

7   In 1986–1987 (*Stanisław Grochowiak*) and in 2016–2017 (*"Rozbieranie Grochowiaka". Pokaz rękopisów i rysunków ze zbiorów Muzeum Literatury w 40. rocznicę śmierci Poety*).

a potentially dual representation: a plastic arts representation and a literary one. Both 'versions' appeared within the exhibition domain, which mediated in their reception.

A gallery wall is not neutral, neither is a museum. They both constitute territories into which the presented works are fitted, basically inscribed. Every exhibition applies its own rhetoric, it structures viewers' perception as the distribution of works indicates their importance, chronology, and ideological backgrounds.[8] The structure of a poetic collection is similar – there, too, the progression of works defines the dramatic flow of reception; the contexts of neighbouring poems extract the significance of the central work; there form polyptychs, nooks and crannies, corridors of titles in which readers can find their own niches. Yet, their ritual adventures with the collection, often in an unrealised manner – assuming that they read the poems one by one, as if following "the direction of viewing" – reproduce the route devised by the poet/curator. The semantic empire of a museum or a poem collection appropriates individual works. They demand individuality, an individual approach which would parenthesise the voices of other works. Extracted from the multitude, a work that is special for an individual takes a place in their private spiritual sanctuary.

Once placed within this contextual frame, Grochowiak's "Płonąca żyrafa" reveals a previously unknown face. Most of all, that placement requires readers to trace the instances which affix the poem to the material environment. "The poor structure of human fear,"[9] a line in the first strophoid, does not have to refer one to the anthropomorphic figure in the foreground from Dali's painting, nor does it need to concern the giraffe burning in the background. It raises the association with the structure which is formed in notional and physical terms by the space enclosed within walls, i.e. a museum or a room. The anthropomorphising "poor" epithet reveals a merciful attitude towards human spaces, which are supposed to stabilise existential or cultural identities. Those places offer the pretence of durability and safety; they fulfil the function of storages of humanistic and sociological values; they develop against the fears related to the passage of time, impermanence of artefacts and the human body, and they can subversively contain the unnerving creation of self-awareness, e.g. Dali's painting or its reproduction. The "giraffe oozing smoke so slowly" seems, in this case, a circumlocution of the title of

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8   "The more aesthetic art is, the easier it is to apply the desired context to it (...). For those specific reasons works of art become elements of planned arrangements; exhibition or museum halls are not only filled with works waiting to be discovered, but their arrangement, the devised route and the meaning conveyed by the architecture are all a system of meaning." M. Popczyk, "Wstęp", [in:] *Muzeum Sztuki. Antologia*, M. Popczyk (ed.), TAiWPN Universitas, Kraków 2005, p. 24. To learn more about the "jostling" of paintings on the wall, vide B. O'Doherty, "Uwagi o przestrzeni galerii", [in:] ibid., pp. 454, 464.

9   All fragments of Stanisław Grochowiak's poems are quoted from the National Library edition: S. Grochowiak, *Wybór poezji*, J. Łukasiewicz (ed.), BN I 296, Wydawnictwo Ossolineum, Wrocław 2000.

the painting, which was placed in a "poor structure", "saving man", i.e. a museum/ room. Yet, instead of obscuring and furnishing the space, it produces a flaw; it constitutes a semantic crack in the storage of works of art and an anarchic damage to the phantasm of a coherent and stable identity.

The second strophoid includes the passage: "Something from that wall of aspirin and sweat." According to Jacek Łukasiewicz, this paradoxical heteromorphic line would be the poetic equivalent of the "shabby structure" of visual works which draw from the Dada tradition,[10] while Anna Filipowicz argued that it resembled a recipe for a peculiar *papier-mâché*.[11] From the wall's perspective, there might not be so much of art, creative matter, or poetic alchemy. If Grochowiak's "Płonąca żyrafa" is not a simple ekphrasis but, rather, an alter ego of Dali's painting, it utilises a method of articulation related to it – one which employs not only the array of painting means, but also an oneiric conceptualisation. The structure of the poem, the words spilled from the poetic persona's sensory gut, and the obtrusively recurring expression "Yes/That's something" all resemble, in fact, the surrealist technique of automatic writing, in which "the (some)thing" hidden deeply in a human being flashes on the surface through words, namely a mark of association.

It seems that the phrase "Something from that wall" could be a response to Bruno Latour's invitation to seek objects which defy cognition and intermediation through speech[12]; in fact, the indefinite pronoun ("something") and the deictic pronoun ("that") cancel each other out, blurring rather than sharpening the image. "Something from that wall" could also be a periphrastic metonymy of a painting viewed during a creative delirium, which becomes perceptively confused with the somatic feverish states of the poetic persona (aspirin and sweat). What is important, though, is not only the supposed image, but the wall itself, an object which is familiar yet foreign (the more time one spends considering it), and which through extended viewing begins to sparkle optical illusions. The wall is only itself as long as human vision slides over it mindlessly. If, however, one looks at that ordinary surface with more inquisitiveness, it appears to be a text, though one apparently recorded in a foreign language, the ideograms of which require anamnestic study. That surface – usually not occupying people's minds as it normally limits the material field of view and delimits enclosed space – becomes the palimpsest of everyday obtrusive observations, as is the case with the almost falling asleep narrator of Marcel Proust's novel, as in Georges Perec's work:

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10 J. Łukasiewicz, *Grochowiak i obrazy*, Wydawnictwo UW, Wrocław 2002, p. 12.

11 "The material for that «structure» includes objects and substances taken directly out of the repository of everyday life – a mixture of plaster («something from that wall») and aspirin powder mixed using the sweaty binder," A. Filipowicz, *Sztuka mięsa. Somatyczne oblicza poezji*, Wydawnictwo słowo/obraz terytoria, Gdańsk 2013, p. 121.

12 Vide E. Domańska, *op. cit.*, p. 10.

You count and you organise the cracks in the ceiling. The conjunction of shadows and stains, and the variations of adjustment and orientation of your gaze, produce effortlessly, slowly, dozens of nasty shapes, fragile coalitions that you are able to grasp only for a fleeting second, fixing them on a name (...)[13]

The ephemeral associations give meaning not only to the writing method of *écriture automatique*, but also to the plastic arts technique of frottage, discovered for surrealism by Max Ernst and consisting of pencil-copying of mysterious textures of walls, floors, bark, fabric... This paper recording of the "dream of matter", i.e. the abstract arabesques of holes, cracks, dents, and bumps – offers a "meditation/hallucination" potential, provoking the eye to seek out figurative signs and marks, the shapes of which would reveal the hidden inclinations of the imagination.[14] Perhaps this is the extra-utilitarian agency of objects! Is it possible that Dali saw his "Burning Giraffe" on a wall while daydreaming? Did Grochowiak notice the meaning of his anti-giraffe looming on the plane of the ceiling?

The figure of the wall brought to the foreground directs attention to allusions to an enclosed space which resembles a room – that could be a vision of a skull as a bell tower ("What tooth tolls in your empty skull") or, based on the same line, a head which constitutes a projection of the flat of human existence, cluttered with visions, thoughts, recollections, and anxiety. There also appears an outline of the body as a construction:

Coś co nas czeka	Something that awaits us
Użyteczne i groźne	Useful and menacing
Jak noga	Like a leg
Jak serce	Like the heart
Jak brzuch i pogrzebacz	Like the stomach and a poker

The enumerated elements define the somatic and prosthetic (poker as support) structure of a human being. The line "The dark grave of human sky" seems to be the crowning of this vision. If one considers that the "human sky" indicates the centres of exclusive humanity – i.e. the stomach, the head, and (at a different level) a museum – then the "grave" is their opposite, i.e. potential death, the annihilation of the 'institutions' in which a human being places their hopes and which constitute the prosthetics of their naked existence or cultural identity.

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[13] G. Perec, *Człowiek, który śpi*, trans. A. Wasilewska, Wydawnictwo Lokator, Kraków 2011, pp. 49–50. [English version: G. Perec, *Things: A Story of the Sixties and A Man Asleep*, David R. Godine, Jaffrey 1990.]

[14] "Know thyself! By turning frottage into an irrational key to equally alogical contents of his own inside, Ernst stood half-way between psychoanalysis and magic," J. Gondowicz, *Trans-Autentyk. Nie-czyste formy Brunona Schulza*, PIW, Warsaw 2014, p. 125.

The final consequence of the encounter with the wall is a reinterpretation of the "flesh" strophoids of "Płonąca żyrafa":

Bo życie	Because life
Znaczy:	Means:
Kupować mięso Ćwiartować mięso	Buying meat Cutting meat
Zabijać mięso Uwielbiać mięso	Killing meat Loving meat
Zapładniać mięso Przeklinać mięso	Fertilising meat Cursing meat
Nauczać mięso i grzebać mięso	Teaching meat and burying meat
I robić z mięsa I myśleć z mięsem	And make out of meat And thinking
I w imię mięsa Na przekór mięsu	with meat
Dla jutra mięsa Dla zguby mięsa	And in the name of meat Against
Szczególnie szczególnie w obronie	meat
mięsa	For meat's tomorrow For meat's det-
	riment
	Especially especially in defence of
	meat

The required cognitive effort consists of rejecting the graphic vision of meat and reading the word declined throughout the two strophoids as a common term of *substance*, *content*, and *meaning*. That procedure seems abstract yet feasible. Grochowiak thought similarly when he wrote about the metaphor – which he referred to as a "flash for the eyes" – that it can be an "interesting structuring of meanings of words into images which we perceive through the eyes of our souls."[15] That which the eye cannot grasp is perceived by the imagination: thus, one sees the 'poor' structure which cannot be itself in its own matter, because *homo symbolicus* demands references from it, transforming material space into a space of references: a museum/room. Those premises are filled with live "meat", i.e. content, yet not only notional (rhetoric), but also fundamentally material (exhibits, items, tokens, devices, pieces of furniture), which serves pragmatic needs and 'higher level' needs. The phenomenon-based consideration exposes the discursive manipulation with the references of the products of culture, which are treated as commodity, fodder, fetish, propaganda tools, and the focus of adoration or protest. The walls of a museum or the walls of the mind (the skull) enclose a slaughterhouse where the constantly reworked content becomes eventually worn down, burning with the meaning torn out of it.

May the poem titled "Malarstwo", dedicated to Jerzy Stajuda, serve as an argument in the debate about whether it is possible to remove the human element from

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15 S. Grochowiak, "Jedno spojrzenie", *Poezja* 1986, issue 10/11, p. 61.

the discussions of the material identity of objects.[16] According to Marek Karwala, the poem got into polemics with the works of the representatives of neo-figurative art, who intended to liberate common objects from any literary content and lift the varnish off of textuality from them.[17] The initial strophoids of the poem ironically report on the poetic persona's attitude towards that stream:

Jest teraz moda w malarstwie mówić	There is now a trend in painting to say
Zrobiłem obraz	I did a painting
To jest ładny kawał	That's a nice joke
Ściany lub muru albo rzecz wycięta	Walls or brickwork, or an object cut out
Z jakichś zbytecznych zielonych parkanów	From some unnecessary green fences

Polish artists who belonged to the neo-figurative art movement proposed a non-artistic approach to their own production, calling it "doing painting", and the objects presented on canvas (e.g. by Grzegorz Moryciński and Barbara Szubińska) were supposed to suffice as the entire content.[18] The carelessness of those authors regarding the symbolic outcomes of their work mocked in the poem exposes the intention behind the modern project of non-anthropocentric humanities: presenting objects as they are, in their realities. A similar intent applied to the principles of Tadeusz Kantor's "poor object" and "lower rank object"; the point was to tear objects from their functional contexts in order to expose their object nature saturated with reality.[19] It would seem that "doing paintings" – or an assemblage made of worn everyday objects, some useless remains, and ownerless fragments of walls – does actually restore the objects' non-human identity. This is why the poem's poetic persona says: "I, too, agree to this." Yet, his consent is only virtual as it is followed by an acquiescent justification: "These are only layers/Of broken walls," and the final enjambment of the strophoid crushes: "Of broken walls/With a purple trunk." The literary metaphor of a recipient of art does consider the intentions of creators; it exposes the futility of their concepts to offer the audience literal images, specific items which do not require interpretation. The following lines prove that language and the artefacts presented under the banner of art are immersed in an a priori mode in the symbolic order, which cannot be lifted even by a straight-forward neutral description:

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16 Vide "Rzeczy. Rekonesans antropologiczny (dyskusja)", *Kultura Współczesna* 2008, issue 3, pp. 73–90.

17 M. Karwala, "Słowo i obraz w poezji Stanisława Grochowiaka", *Annales Academiae Paedagogicae Cracoviensis. Studia Historicolitteraria III* 2003, folia 15, p. 197.

18 Ibid.

19 Ewa Domańska considered Kantor's approach as an example of non-anthropocentric practices, *op. cit.*, pp. 19–20.

I ja się godzę	I too agree to that
To sztachety płotów	Those rails of fences
Deseczki trumien	The boards of coffins
Grobowców tapety	The wallpapers of tombs

Short descriptions which could constitute dull titles for ready-mades become – in poetry – referents to anthropological topics (fence, coffin, and tomb). These descriptive equivalents of a "no name" caption involuntarily pretend to carry the status of a title. Neither words stop at their lexical meanings – i.e. on their silent forms – nor fragments of objects do. Viewers accustomed to the textual nature of objects of plastic arts – suspicious when it comes to "literal" messages – are still going to attempt to 'read' them. The remains of objects stripped of their functionalities are interesting for the imagination due to their individual biographies[20] (even the very selection by artists determines their uniqueness and the personality of works of art, i.e. objects which are not only aesthetic, but also meaningful). And these are, after all, related to human biographies.

W ścianach z purpury	In walls of purple
Mieszkał przecież starzec	There lived an old man
O spuchniętej nodze	With a swollen leg
W ścianach z żółcienia	In walls of yellow
Miotała się złość	There tossed the anger
Nierozprawiczonej do śmierci brunetki	Of a non-devirgined till her death brunette
W ścianach szpitalnych białych do zachwytu	In hospital walls, delightedly white
Stał człowiek nagi ze strachu przed bombą	There stood a man naked for fear of a bomb

A similar 'reconstruction' of life can be found in "Malte" by Rainer Maria Rilke, where the protagonist (at this stage a *flâneur* wandering the streets of Paris) views the remains of the internal wall of a demolished building – with traces of wallpaper, flooring, and with hardly an admirable ornament of a toilet pipe:

But the most unforgettable were the walls themselves. The tenacious life of these rooms had not let itself be stamped out. It was still there, it hung on the remaining

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20 Vide E. Domańska, "Problem rzeczy we współczesnej archeologii", [in:] *Rzeczy i ludzie. Humanistyka wobec materialności*, J. Kowalewski, W. Piasek (eds.), Olsztyn 2008, Wydawnictwo Instytutu Filozofii UWM, pp. 41–43.

mails, it stood on the hand's breadth of floor that was left, if had shriveled into the stubs of the corners, where there was still a little bit of interior space. One could see it in the paint that had slowly, year after year, transformed this space: blue into moldy green, green into gray, and yellow into an old, stale white that putrefying. (…) And from these walls that had been blue, green, and yellow, framed by the trusses of the destroyed inner walls, the air of these lives stood out, the tenacious, sluggish, moldy air that no wind had yet dispersed. There remained the noons and the illnesses and the exhalations of the smoke of years, and the sweat that breaks out in the armpits and makes clothes heavy, and the bad breath of mouths and the oily smell of yeasty feet. In it remained the sharpness of urine and the burning of soot and gray potato odor and the heavy, smooth stink of rancid fat. The sweet, long smell of neglected infants was in it, and the odor of fear from children going off to school, and the sultriness from the beds of pubescent boys.[21]

Houses gutted and stripped to bare walls shamelessly display the "physiognomy" of their structures; those splanchnic-exhibitionist dilapidated residential spaces become – for the most careful of viewers – the most important of logs which contain the soul of the atmosphere of secretion and excretion of the human body. The anthropologically-focused poetic persona of Grochowiak's poem also sees the proof of life sickness in the remains of matter; snapshots of individual stories are composed of a symbolic backdrop of the walls, the colours[22] of which bring to mind the dampness which conditions Hippocratic temperaments, and of a flat as in a photograph of figure, barely defined by any features: age and ailments (an old man with a swollen leg), sex, hair colour, and a psychiatric complex (a non-devirginated brunette), or the object of fear (a bomb). "In walls of purple," red paint resembles blood (*sanguis*) and, as a result, the colour of the room seems to trap the old man in a cage of the somatic experience of his sickness. "In walls of yellow," the colour of the sun – the bright over-presence of which in van Gogh's paintings was sometimes viewed by critics as a symptom of his mental disorders[23] – amplifies the feverish tension in the room's occupant. Then, the white scene, basically a photograph taken in a museum of modern art (and yet in a hospital) – a naked man as if standing at the order of death, reduced by fear to an anonymous figure, is

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21 R.M. Rilke, *Malte. Pamiętniki Malte-Lauridsa Brigge*, trans. W. Hulewicz, introduction M. Jastrun, 2nd edition, Czytelnik, Warsaw, 1979, pp. 52–53. [English version: R.M. Rilke, *The Notebooks of Malte Laurids Brigge*, Dalkey Archive, 2008] Similar descriptions of the ruins of houses are so common in Polish and international literature that one could devote an entire book to them.

22 Cf. P. Łuszczykiewicz, *Książę erotyku. O poezji miłosnej Stanisława Grochowiaka*, Oficyna Wydawnicza Latona, Warsaw 1995, pp. 32–34.

23 M. Rzepińska, *Historia koloru w dziejach malarstwa europejskiego*, Wydawnictwo Literackie, Krakow 1983, pp. 519–520.

actually a philosophical category, a *homo sacer*. The fragment of the wall demands understanding and contemplation, which uncovers a document of an archaeological[24] and biographical[25] value:

Malarstwo wasze	Your painting
[………………]	[………………]
Zostanie w czasie	Will become in time
Ogromną pompeją	A huge pompeii
Gdzie ludzie milczą	Where people keep silent
Jak w popiele dzwony	Like bells in ash

Therefore, it is not the objects that are silent – people's stories, whose walls were the witnesses, only waiting to receive a breath of life. Grochowiak's poetic persona does not prompt anything either to biographies, or objects, or even people; "Malarstwo" is a story of mutual agency of human and extra-human factors: an artist extracts an object from a multitude of trash which he (involuntarily?) elevates to the level of art; and the object, in turn, provokes the recipient to read its object/human identity.

In the poem titled "Zejście", walls define the area of secular *sacrum*, the mine of ego:

Byle do wiosny	All's going to be better in spring
A wiosna?	And spring?
Gdzie ona?	Where is it?
Więc schodzę w siebie po kamien	So I descent into myself on stone steps
Byle do wiosny	All's going to be better in spring
A wiosna?	And spring?
Gdzie ona?	Where is it?
Więc schodzę w siebie po	So I descent into myself on stone
kamiennych stopniach	steps

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[24] Przemysław Czapliński saw the poem's meaning differently; for him, "Malarstwo" was mainly a pretext for the question about the durability of art. Vide P. Czapliński, "Śmierć albo o znikaniu", [in:] *Lektury Grochowiaka*, T. Mizerkiewicz, A. Stankowska (eds.), Wydawnictwo Poznańskie Studia Polonistyczne, Poznań 1999, p. 188.

[25] A wall – once again as a token of Home – is like that for the poetic persona of *Spojrzenia* by Różewicz, who keeps watch in front of it.

Ze soplem w dłoni jak z mieczem lub
lampą
Której nie zgaszą
Podmuchy tych pustek

Kto z nas nie schodzi w kopalnie
dzieciństwa?
Kto z nas nie błądzi światłem po tych
ścianach
Gdzie w czarnych rzeźbach węgla
kamiennego
Pełno odcisków
Paproci
I zwierząt

Tu ptak wiosenny – z której wiosny?
– zastygł
Tu pocałunek – nieśmiały czy
grzeszny?
Tu własna postać
Rozpięta w podskoku
Do czarnej wiśni na węgielnym
drzewie

Byle do wiosny
Więc dalej w pokłady
Na dno dzieciństwa gdzie nagle – za
rogiem
Jest tylko echo
I szum nietoperzy
Jakby ktoś miotał kule czarnej wełny
With an icicle in my hand like

a sword or a lamp
Which cannot be put out
By the gusts of these voids

Who of us has never descended the
mines of childhood?
Who of us has never traced light over
these walls
Where in the black sculptures of
black coal
Full of impressions
Of ferns
And animals

Here, a spring bird – from which
spring? – solidified
Here, a kiss – coy or sinful?
Here, own figure
Stretched in a leap
To a black cherry on a coal tree

All's going to be better in spring
So off we go, to the beds
To the bottom of childhood when
suddenly – around the corner
There is only echo
And the hum of bats
As if someone hurled balls of black
wool

The poem should be quoted as a whole as the wall of the archetype mine becomes in it the canvas of an expansive archaeological narrative, tracing the sources of own and universal stories inscribed on the walls of existence, as well as a record of psychosomatic introspections. The (self-)probing of the poetic persona hibernated in wait for spring also fulfils the script of a childhood experience, which corresponds to the concept of oneiric home, i.e. a pattern of human psyche ("I descent into myself on stone steps"). Gaston Bachelard once wrote:

If alone, in reverie, at a home which carries the marks of depth, we descend narrow dark stairs winding sharply about a stone pillar, we soon feel that **it is descent into the past**. (...) To descend in reverie into the world of depths (...) – that means to both descend into ourselves."[26]

Traces of memories have been immortalised in coal, a stone-like organic material. If one remembers that coal is the chemical building block of all living organisms, they are going to notice the ambiguity of the mine to which the poetic persona ventures – it carries the trademarks of a rock recess and the gut depths of the human body. Therefore, Grochowiak's poetic persona can be imagined as the explorer of beds of a prehistoric cave, of own memories and of identity imprinted in the body. The first one extracts from the darkness of oblivion the fossils of organic life (plants and animals). The second one penetrates one's own biography, trying to reconstruct the chronology and the context of the images imprinted in it, i.e. of a bird, a kiss, and a leap. Finally, the third one fulfils a journey to the somatic basis of one's own existence; it chooses a path of regression to the bottom of childhood, a projection of an empty womb, outside of which there is only the lack of the human being – non-existence or pre-existence. The psychosomatic walls of human existence carry the biological (pre)history of animate creatures, among which a human being is only one possibility of evolution. At the same time, the poem elevates the rank of a fleeting moment – seemingly meaningless moments which do, however, become stored in the unconscious (psycho-corporeal[27]) in order to be able to speak during an oneiric referential journey. The material of the somatic walls does not appear to be a prison of the soul; to the contrary – a personally (though this is not an evaluative adjective) considered human body annexing and consolidating existential experiences constituting the truest *liber vitae*. The archaeology of "Zejście" offers a pretext for yet another story, i.e. one about what objects mean to us, what we say about them, and what truths about us they reveal. A cherry appears in the poem. A cherry with which, mind you, Jolanta Brach-Czaina's *Szczeliny istnienia* begins. That small fruit reveals its phenomenological uniqueness: "Shiny. Ripe. Filled with juice. The skin is tight and sparky. Bright red. Thick brown. Unnerving mirrors of blackness."[28] It constitutes something existentially concrete, which encourages one

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26 G. Bachelard, "Dom rodzinny i dom oniryczny", [in:] idem., *Wyobraźnia poetycka. Wybór pism*, trans. H. Chudak, A. Tatarkiewicz, selection H. Chudak, foreword J. Błoński, PIW, Warsaw 1975, pp. 326–327.

27 Psychoanalysis is, in fact, a philosophy of "thinking through the body" – vide M. Bakke, *Ciało otwarte. Filozoficzne reinterpretacje kulturowych wizji cielesności*, Wydawnictwo Naukowe Instytutu Filozofii UAM, Poznań 2000, p. 15. For a commentary regarding the continuity of the psyche, vide: J.-L. Nancy, *Corpus*, trans. M. Kwietniewska, Wydawnictwo słowo/obraz terytoria, Gdańsk 2002.

28 J. Brach-Czaina, *Szczeliny istnienia*, Wydawnictwo eFKa, Kraków 1999, p. 8.

to uncover the sensory mysteries of existence, and it convinces one that the thought about the existence of an item[29] "breaks the silence of existence and appeals to our understanding."[30] There is also a tree; moreover, a coal tree. Even if one was to omit its archetypal connotations[31], it still conveys a stabilising identity of the role it plays in the world of human material culture.

Finally, I shall say a few words about "Ars poetica". Within this poem one can easily recognise the metaphor of an occupied room endowed with personality, a room of poetic art:

Oto wiesz na pewno: za twoją kotarą
Jest tylko ściana, nie ma Poloniuszy

Here is surely a poem: behind your curtain
There is only a wall, there is no Polonius

The vision of enclosure, a prison, and stagnation gives way to the metaphor of a safe refuge, which evokes trust in the stoic durability of the poetic world of values inhabited by the persona and their objects (tools of creative work). As Olsen argued:

> Things are normally in place, at least enough for them to make our existence predictable and secure. When we wake up tomorrow, the bed, room, and house are still there. So are our private belongings (...) They constitute our incontestable acquisition. We do not wake up to a completely new world every morning, having to start all over again from scratch.[32]

Thus, an object is the culture-forming node which collects, connects, and endures while intertwining in itself the qualities of time and space.[33] A wander down the route of the wall through Grochowiak's poems resembles a journey in time – not because it leads through archaeology, art history, and the layering of ahistorical universal biographies towards the nooks of the recollections of the origins. It also presents, within a linear order (from 'poor structures' to 'only the wall'), the evolution of poetic illuminations, fears, imagination-based fixations, moving towards a consoling stabilisation which is guaranteed by an object – the wall.

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[29] Brach-Czaina focused on objects endowed with agency as these draw people's attention. "Items are beings which have lost their anonymity," ibid., pp. 12–13.

[30] Ibid., p. 8.

[31] Vide G. Bachelard, *op. cit.*, pp. 320–321.

[32] B. Olsen, *W obronie rzeczy. Archeologia i ontologia przedmiotów*, trans. B. Shallcross, IBL PAN, Warsaw 2013, p. 242.

[33] B. Olsen, *Kultura materialna po tekście*, p. 588.

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„Kto z nas nie błądzi światłem po tych ścianach", czyli archeologia wierszy Stanisława Grochowiaka

Streszczenie

W prozaicznej ścianie, transparentnym elemencie scenerii życia, wiersze Stanisława Grochowiaka pozwalają odkryć konkret egzystencjalny, materię obdarzoną niesamowitym potencjałem hipnagogicznym, kronikę „przedmiotowości". Ściana w imaginarium poety stanowi zarówno obiekt empiryczny, jak i fenomen, wykraczający poza ontologię materii, co warunkuje jej semantyczną płynność: raz przypomina antropologiczny dokument (miejsce inskrypcji kulturowej/biograficznej), kiedy indziej – substrat surrealistycznej wizji lub tworzywo artefaktu; może jawić się granicą strefy psychicznego komfortu bądź unaoczniać wewnątrzcielesną płaszczyznę, którą – niczym ściany prehistorycznych jaskiń – pokrywają archetypowe obrazy z epoki dzieciństwa (ludzkości). Szkic ten, zainspirowany kontekstami z pola historii sztuki, psychoanalizy oraz zwrotu ku rzeczom, jest próbą rozpoznania znaczeń koncentrujących się „na ścianie" w utworach: „Płonąca żyrafa", „Malarstwo", „Zejście" i „Ars Poetica".

Słowa kluczowe: zwrot ku rzeczom, konkret egzystencjalny, inskrypcja

"Who of us has never traced light over these walls"?: The archaeology of Stanisław Grochowiak's poems

Summary

Through a simple wall, a transparent element of everyday life, Stanisław Grochowiak's poems enable one to uncover the existential concrete element, matter endowed with an amazing hypnagogic potential, a chronicle of 'objectness'. In the poet's imagined world, the wall constitutes both an empirical item and a phenomenon, which transcends the ontology of matter, which determines its semantic fluidity: at one point it resembles an anthropological document (a place of cultural/biographical inscription) only to, a moment later, resemble the basis for surrealist visions or the material of an artifact. The wall seems to be the limit of the zone of mental comfort or, e.g., expose the in-body plane, which, like the walls of pre-historic caves, is covered with archetypal images from (the) childhood (of humanity). This study, based on contexts in art history, psychoanalysis, and a material turn, is an attempt at identifying the references which focus "on the wall" in the following works: "Płonąca żyrafa", "Malarstwo", "Zejście", and "Ars Poetica".

Keywords: material turn, existential concrete element, inscription, Stanislaw Grochowiak