

Rolą krytyki nie jest
opiniodawstwo — wynoszenie
jednych i strącanie w niebyt
innych książek.

Rolą historii literatury nie jest opowiadanie, jak to było naprawdę

— wszak konstruuje ona
jedynie modele i przybliżenia
przeszłości po to, abyśmy z tej
ostatniej mogli wyprowadzić
własną genealogię. Kluczowe
zadanie obu dziedzin polega
za to na nieustającym
problematyzowaniu utworów,
opinii i sądów; na dociekaniu,
dlaczego opowiedzieliśmy się
lub opowiadamy właśnie za tą
idea, wartością, koncepcją.

Prawo krytyki

Krzysztof Uniłowski

Prawo krytyki

O nowoczesnym i ponowoczesnym
pojmowaniu literatury

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Summary

The subject of this book is the author's conception of literary criticism depicted in the first part of the volume. The author tries to reconstruct a subconscious voice of literary criticism which he defines as unreasonable, inconclusive, biased and reliant on personal opinions. The literary criticism is unreasonable because it is based on exemplars. A criticism of the criticism is thus required in order to create a distinctive object, establish rules, define who is the speaker. It is inconclusive because all critical opinions are immediate, partial, influenced by a specific and limited context of formulating. Therefore, the author rejects Stanley Fish's concept of interpretative communities and Richard Rorty's idea of solidarity.

The criticism is depicted as a place of exchange. This agora is not only confrontation or dispute but also a play that entails fun. This is the reason why the criticism is childlike. An explanation of text (or reality) is not a proper stake of the critical game. It is rather a moment of reading completion prolonged in order to delay the conclusion.

The postmodern literature involving the modes of irony and pastiche is represented as requiring particular invention of the reader. Pastiche — conceived as a “small differences” or “minimal innovation” within the aesthetic system — requires a reading which is aimed at finding the differences between the imitating text and the outdated model it recalls. Referring to the series of Andrzej Skrendo's (b. 1970) featured articles entitled *Postmodernism now* (2003–2006), the author advances a thesis concerning the original lineage of postmodern tendencies in contemporary Polish literature as he derives them from the reaction to the decline of modernistic ideals of socialism. The spectacular breakdown of socialistic modernity caused the writer to keep any ideological projects at an ironic distance resulting from the belief that our language is already somebody else's language and that the dreams of creating our own language are only a utopistic project of modernistic culture.

In the second part of the book literary conceptions of the chosen writers creating the standard of Polish modern literature are depicted. In a chapter concerning Stanisław Brzozowski

(1878–1911) — a literary critic and philosopher — the messianic character of his discourse is described. From this perspective literary criticism is perceived as a supplement of contemporary art (and thus of life as well). In this way contemporaneity becomes modernity perceived as a perspective, an individual projection of time being actualized. At the same time, the modern version of messianism as a project of the humanity's self-salvation that is being realized through working assumes the subject's incompleteness — a guarantee that the machinery is on the move.

In his analysis of Czesław Miłosz's (1911–2004) early poem *Dialog* (vol. *Trzy zimy, Three Winters*, 1937), the author points at ambiguous attitude of the poet who, on the one hand, demands that poetry should go beyond the horizon of topicality but on the other, he accuses poetry of aesthetization and a betrayal of human community. Because of the fact that proper stake of poetry is reality existing beyond language, Miłosz opposes to avant-garde totally involved in the temporariness of language. The poet reactivates the hieratic formula of poetic language instead, in order to establish, by means of this language, the "exterior" reality that is beyond words. In the poet's essays specific programme of the poetry renovation and of clearing the poetry of mumbling and unclear contemporary speech can be found. This classicist project contains explicit aristocratic motive connected with the ban on "stammering" in literature, which is the one of the clearest "highly modernistic" conceptions in Polish literature in 20th century.

On the other hand, Witold Gombrowicz (1904–1969), Teodor Parnicki (1908–1988) and Tadeusz Różewicz (b. 1921) provide various examples of making the highly-modernistic code shattered. Gombrowicz brakes a unity of the subject and his work by radicalizing the convention of romantic irony. The author discusses the ending of *Ferdydurke* (1937) and confront it with Fridrich Schegel's esthetics in order to underline that in this last reckoning Gombrowicz creates a caricature of the romantic creator and that beyond this caricature there is no subject left at all.

Różewicz's literature is represented by two poems from a late volume *Zawsze fragment. Recycling* (1998) (*There is Always a Fragment. Recycling*) that represent contemporaneity as a domain of unified pop culture. Domination of this culture makes poetry an anachronistic language that is late and

outdated. The poet is left with ironic travesty of the language of media, which is supposed to unmask the crucial for mass communication endeavours to unify reiterations and novelties in the constant news rotation.

The vast literary output of Teodor Parnicki is represented in the book by two novels thematically connected with each other. A large prologue to the second part of *Twarz księżycyca* (*The Face of the Moon*, 1961) shows a mechanism of a complicated bureaucratic-counterintelligence in Byzantium in the middle of the 5th century. The task of agents (recruited among employed rhetoricians) is to make a most precise reports, however, as Tomasz Burek, a critic, has noticed, they do not follow the course of events. Referring to that remark, the author claims that a dynamic relation between an event and a word in Parnicki's novel is similiar to a "source difference" typical of a language of deconstruction. Reality, "ungraspable and unembreaceable", is marked with stereotypical female features, taking on a condition of an unapproaching object of desire. At the same time, it is being constatly disciplined by *écriture masculine*, an institutionalised discourse of a patriarchal culture while a monstrous SCHOLA AGENTORUM from Parnicki's novel may successfully be considered a hyperbole of such a discourse. However, Maximianus, the main protagonist of the novel, choose another discourse which is confronted with a Nitzschean principle of *vita femina*.

Zabij Kleopatę (1968) (*Kill Cleopatra*) is Parnicki's breakthrough novel in which a formula of historical novel changes into metafiction and the characters become aware that they are fictious figures: they debate on their textual names and consider the dependence on their writer. It does not mean, however, that the historical subject matter disappears. The author reconstructs the references to Byzantine as it was in the 5th century and he underlines that they are significant for the interpretation of the text. Nevertheless, the metaliterary plots make the author revise Stefan Szymutko's statement about the primacy being over the text because, according to the author, there is no historical being that would precede the text. Every historical plot or case turn out to be textual from the very beginning because it is connected with somebody's intention and interests, which transforms the critical reflection upon the history into the uneding sequence of interpretive sentences.

The third part of the book is devoted to Polish postmodern fiction. Firstly, the author applies Robert Scholes' notion of fabulation to the newest fiction (e.g. Andrzej Tużiak, Krzysztof Bielecki, Adam Ubertowski). The author juxtaposes fabulations with works of allegoric character (Stefan Chwin, Olga Tokarczuk, Jerzy Pilch, Magdalena Tulli), the latter being appreciated by the critics. The difference between the two types of fiction is that in the case of allegories, the affirmative element prevails over the critical one, which explains the nostalgic references to the accepted and estimable fiction formulas from the past. In contrast, fabulations are connected to the mode of story telling that cuts into the traditionally accepted rules of literary communication. This is why they tend to be judged as devoid of moral and artistic values. Reading them demands acceptance for a literary formula that placed itself beyond the order of values and the economy of effort.

In the 20th-century-90s, postmodern fiction was being confronted mainly with Polish Heimat-literature. Nevertheless, the author discusses the well-known works of Paweł Huelle (*Weiser Dawidek*, 1987) and Andrzej Stasiuk (*Opowieści galicyjskie*, 1995) and he traces the postmodern qualities there as well. The writers do not reconstruct the others' stories but make them up taking advantage from the repertoire of literary gimmicks and conventions. The stake of the game is creating a local mythology as well as a reconciliation with the described place and with those who occupied it before us but — and this is the postmodern trace — the projected identity is being plainly derived from the narrative practices. In this case the narrative generates rather than expresses the collective or individual identity.

Among the writers who have made their debuts in the recent period Mariusz Sieniewicz (b. 1972) and Michał Witkowski (b. 1975) are distinguished by the author. He thoroughly discusses the critical reception of Sieniewicz' breakthrough novel *Czwarte niebo* (2003) (*The Fourth Heaven*) that has been found a flagship of a new form of the engaged literature. The presentation of this book entangled many commentators in contradiction between the literary and the thematic innovative, and divided them into those who claim that the exuberant literariness weakens the novel's message, and those holding that the literary quality saves it from ideological explicitness. Dariusz Nowacki, whose review in *Gazeta Wyborcza* set the tone for the critical debate, takes a rather ambiguous stand on the matter of engagement. His opinions treat the "engagement" as an object, present it as a mode of reading that helps a young

writer's novel function successfully in the mass communication. The author also debates with Igor Stokfiżewski's *Zwrot polityczny* (*The Political Turn*, 2009) — a book which presents the engaged literature as a critical defeat of postmodernism. Another Mariusz Sieniewicz's book *Miasto szklanych słoni* (2010) (*A City of Glass Elephants*, 2010) is discussed in the fourth part of the book.

Michał Witkowski's novel *Barbara Radziwiłłówna z Jaworzna-Szczakowej* (2007) is compared with earlier novel *Apogeu* (1982) written by Józef Łoziński. The two works are similar in poetics and style. Both of them concern a story told by a main character whose narration involves many language styles that result in an interesting hybrid. In Łoziński's novel the turn of the 1970's in Poland is presented as a state of degradation of Promethean revolutionary idea and with it — modernity. Its main characters are educated plebeians, young thinkers who can't find themselves in any language style. As a consequence, their speech becomes autonomic and begins to imitate a caricatural version of literary expressions. In Michał Witkowski's novel the main character is a plebeian who talks about his illegal business dealings in the time of political change in Poland. He uses a discourse that is a mixture of various styles and ideologies and — unlike Łoziński's protagonist — he does not long for the truth but he practices stylistical mimicry in order to escape two regimes: post-socialism and late capitalism. Witkowski's novel appears as an apology of vagueness, identity games and communication plays affirming everything that from Łoziński's perspective seemed an apocalypse of modernity. Another Michał Witkowski's book, *Margot* (2009), is discussed in the fourth part of the book.

The author states that in the first decade of the 21st century another tendency appeared in Polish literary life. In reference to the cultural past, literature is contrasted with what is new: satellite television, computer games, the worship of celebrities. But since literature as such is a medium and is received in the same way, the technique, in fact, justifies the new forms of pop culture. This phenomenon is at the service of the new bourgeois literature. The article of Jacek Dukaj *Lament miłośnika cegieł* (*The Lover of Book-bricks Lamentation*) has served as a manifesto demanding the old-fashioned literature. The article was received with approval and somewhat predicted the success of Jacek Dehnel's novel *Lala* (2006). The author analyzes Dehnel's fiction and points that the writer ironically and ambiguously demonstrates the way in which he imitates old-fashioned literature

and symbolic capital. This issue, however, escapes the attention of a reader and critic who are enchanted with the young author writing early modern prose in the style of 19th and 20th century.

The fourth part of the book consists of brief representations of books and articles illustrating the previously characterized tendencies (Heimat-literature, engaged literature and the literature imitating the highly-modernistic patterns) which, according to the author, constitute different trends of Polish postmodernism. In the end, the author draws attention to pop culture depicting it as a crucial context to the contemporary literature. In 2010 the Polish translator of *Beowulf*, Robert Stiller, provided the edition of Anglo-Saxon poem with the considerable introduction and comments in which he convinced the reader of actuality of the early-medieval poem and its call for fighting with everything that is primitive, monstrous and vulgar. Stiller was inducing that it is a duty of contemporary reader to fight — along with the old hero — with "contemporary grendels" among whom Stiller saw also John Gardner — the author of the novel *Grendel* (1971), a "postmodern" travesty of poem. Regarding to Gardner's novel and, most of all, to pop cultural achievements constituting an attempt to revise the poem in a critical way (the "suite" of Marillion rock group, Robert Zemeckis' movie), the author reminds that in contemporary (pop) culture the rehabilitation of hitherto excommunicated heroes is proceeding. Conversely to what the Polish translator suggests, the liking of contemporary readers and viewers are directed towards the monster. We look differently at the history and tradition of culture remembering about the victims — bastards of history — the excluded and excommunicated "grendels". Perhaps nowadays they seem to be more familiar than the old heroes.

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Prawo krytyki.
O nowoczesnym i ponowoczesnym pojmowaniu literatury

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„Nie, nie łudzę się, że zabawa i gra mogą nas uratować. Cała sztuka jednak w tym, aby próbować (...) wykraczać poza czas i poza miejsce z góry dla zabawy i gry wyznaczone, aby odnajdować literaturę (element fikcyjny, narracyjny, retoryczny, figuratywny itp.) poza wydzieloną dla niej sferą. I aby literaturę traktować z powagą wymaganą od uczestnika zabawy czy gry, którą (na dziecinny sposób) uznajemy za wartą zaangażowania”.

(fragment książki)

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