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## SOME ASPECTS OF CHANGING ATTITUDES TOWARDS MASS CULTURE AND POPULAR LITERATURE WHICH A TEACHER SHOULD KNOW<sup>\*\*</sup>

### INTRODUCTION

We live faster nowadays than it was in the seventies, the eighties and even the nineties of the twentieth century but it does not necessarily mean that we live better. Families had more time to gather in order to gossip, to tell the family stories which had been told a hundred times before, sing songs and to celebrate important events. The people who were interested in high culture could admire the works of highbrow culture without any distractions. In the present-day society of consumers, we are bombarded by the offerings of cultural events and attractions which are easy to “consume” and forget. Fortunately, the demand for highbrow culture and narration is still high. The lack of time has changed the way we read or listen (e-books, audio books) but the popularity of series of novels, film series, TV series or sagas proves that we still long for story-telling. Mass culture plays more and more important role in a consumer society. The beginnings of mass culture are connected, as we can read in Strinati, with industrialization and urbanization. Dominic Strinati in his work *An Introduction to Theories of Popular Culture* analyzes mass culture and popular culture from different perspectives, for example Marxist, feminist, Frankfurt School, etc. Popular literature is a part of popular culture. Strinati claims that the social meaning of popular culture in the modern era can be identified with the idea of mass culture. The discussion of mass culture started with the popularization of mass media, increasing commercialization of culture and widening of the sphere of free time (Strinati, 1998, p. 15).

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## SOME DEFINITIONS OF MASS CULTURE

Dominic Strinati gives the definition of mass culture as a popular culture made by mass industrial techniques and sold to the mass public for profits. The atomization and anonymity of the masses which are liable to manipulation were intensified by industrialization and urbanization. The mass market for mass media was created by industrialization and urbanization and mass media deliver different forms of mass culture. The spread of mass culture was supported by mass production and the mass market. Strinati differentiates the products of a mass culture which are standard and created according to the same patterns from the art because the aesthetic complication of real art, its creativity, experiments and intellectual challenges are not accessible for technologies creating mass culture (the anodyne and standard formulas of mass culture can appeal to everyone).

Strinati also discusses the perception of the public by mass culture. The public is perceived, as he claims, as a mass of passive consumers easily manipulated by mass media, obedient to appeals to buy mass articles created by mass culture. They are also defenceless against the false pleasure of mass consumption and open to commercial exploitation (which is the motive of mass culture) (Strinati, 1998, p. 22, 23). Strinati cites MacDonald who says that mass culture is low and trivial and invalidates deep, real dramas as well as simple, spontaneous pleasures. MacDonald adds that the masses demand cultural products which are trivial and comfortable (MacDonald, 1957, in Strinati, 1998, p. 24).

Analyzing the phenomenon of mass culture, Strinati refers to Theodor Adorno's ideas. Theodor Adorno of the Frankfurt School contributed to better understanding of culture dealing with the ideas of modern capitalism (especially the ideas of false needs and cultural industry) and he (being a musician, a composer and a master of the avangarde) analysed popular music. As we can read in Strinati, popular music served Adorno as an illustration of the power of cultural industry and the degree of mass alienation in capitalist society. Adorno sees popular music produced by the cultural industry as being dominated by standardization and pseudo-individualization. Standardization is revealed in the essential similarities of popular songs. The apparent individualization means the apparent novelty and originality of the song. Adorno says that popular songs are becoming more and more similar and their parts, stanzas and refrains are replaceable and this process is hidden by apparent individualization. Songs seem to be different from one another due to the apparent individualization. (Adorno, 1991, in Strinati, 1998, p. 60, 61).

Strinati claims that it is relatively easy to identify America as the homeland of mass culture. The reason for this easy identification is the fact that mass culture is the result of the mass production and consumption of cultural goods and because so many products of mass culture come from America, it is perceived as a threat (Strinati, 1998, p. 30). Strinati cites Hebdige who says that Orwell and Hoggart were rep-

representatives of the negative (towards Americanization) consensus. Hebdige claims that they both were interested in maintaining the structure of working-class life in the face of the postwar flood of television, high salaries and consumerism (Hebdige, 1988, in Strinati, 1998, p. 34). Among the advocates of Americanization who presented the contrary opinions to Orwell's and Hoggart's Strinati mentions Worpole and refers to Worpole's researches. Worpole's conclusions were surprising. He talked with members of the working class about their past and for many of them (as he says "surprisingly many") the only books they read were copies of American detective and crime fiction. Worpole in his research presents the hypothesis that in the 1930s and 1940s American detective and crime fiction was more realistic and adequate to working-class life, closer to their living conditions and the way they behaved and communicate with other people. In the literature written for and by English higher and middle classes one could not find such close cultural realities (Worpole, 1983, in Strinati, 1998, p. 37, 38). Worpole finds positive aspects of reading American fiction by people from working class in the thirties and the forties of the twentieth century.

Hebdige also claims that young workers do not consume imaginary America passively and without reflection. He observes that by using the imagination, styles, and dictionary of American popular culture they resist to the higher and middle-class culture and it is for them a spiritual defence against own subordination (Hebdige, 1988, in Strinati, 1998, p. 40). Opinions on mass culture varied and still vary, some researchers see in mass culture the sign of democratization, for the others, it is a threat.

The readers interested in mass culture can find detailed studies of the history and typical aspects of this phenomenon in Antonina Kłoskowska's work *Kultura masowa: krytyka i obrona*. Kłoskowska presents the idea of mass culture as referring to the phenomena of the contemporary transmission of identical or analogous contents. The contents come from small numbers of sources to huge masses of receivers. The idea is connected with homogeneous forms of playful, entertaining activity of huge human masses (Kłoskowska, 1980, p. 95).

There are two basic criteria characterizing mass culture realized by mass media: the criterion of quantity and the criterion of standardization. The homogeneity and standardization of an object are assumed by mass transfer (Kłoskowska, 1980, p. 96, 97). Kłoskowska adds that mass culture is characterized by formalization and commoditization of the means of transfer (Kłoskowska, 1980, p. 99). The cultural phenomenon characterized by the criteria of quantity, standardization, communication, formalization, and organization originates only in the specific conditions. These conditions are the development of the other branches of culture included in the scope of the direct and symbolic culture and societies of a particular type (Kłoskowska, 1980, p. 100). Kłoskowska connects the origin of mass culture with industrial and urban societies, the societies from which mass culture originates are often called mass societies (Kłoskowska, 1980, p. 101). As the preconditions of the quantitative increase of society and the birth of mass culture, Kłoskowska mentions industrialization and

urbanisation (Kłoskowska, 1980, p. 103). Kłoskowska emphasizes the role of free time which in industrialized societies, in spite of their differences, is the privilege of the masses not only one privileged social class (Kłoskowska, 1980, p. 161).

Kłoskowska sees the role of art in mass culture in offering supplementary experiences which the public is deprived of in reality and it is a substitution for real experiences, social connections, and contacts. In her view, the connection between the realization of these functions of mass culture and its other functions: entertainment, information, and education exists (Kłoskowska, 1980, p. 365).

The typical motifs of mass culture mentioned by Kłoskowska are the motif of violence as an element of dramatic plot and human interest (series of family stories on the radio and “soap operas” on TV, readers’ confessions in the press) (Kłoskowska, 1980, p. 367). The typical phenomena in mass culture presented by Kłoskowska are: love, betrayal, fighting, jealousy, the want of happiness and resignation which are trivialized and made shallow; the drama of doubts and of moral choice is avoided, you can find the mixture of sensation and the reportage in mass culture. Neither realistic pictures of life nor exaggeration are avoided (Kłoskowska, 1980, p. 376).

The survey of opinions on, definitions of and theories connected with mass culture and presented by Kłoskowska concentrates on interesting approaches to this phenomenon. One of them is Edgar Morin’s idea. Morin analyzed mass culture in connection with the role of imagination which is understood by him as the specific and necessary level of human life. According to Morin, the double function of mass culture is identification and projection. In the process of identification, a receiver adopts the models popularized by mass culture and identifies himself/herself with the characters and situations of the popular arts. Projection, according to Morin, means breaking up with oneself and moving entirely into the world of imagination (Morin, 1956; in Kłoskowska, 1980, p. 378). Morin claims that everyday life as the subject of mass culture must be idealized and intensified and that is the reason why it rises above the level of everyday life (Morin, 1956, in Kłoskowska, 1980, p. 379). Kłoskowska compares H. Lefebvre’s analysis with Morin’s above statement. The analyses are close because Lefebvre sees the mass culture function in the ceaseless production of pictures serving to deform the real picture of everyday life. He sees mass culture as the mirror in which ugliness becomes beauty, emptiness becomes fulfilment and misery becomes greatness. Mass culture is the answer to a real, social need – the need to release oneself from the everyday life and work alienation. The other functions of mass culture are filling up leisure time and providing a release from tension (Lefebvre, 1958, 1961, in Kłoskowska, 1980, p. 379-380). Gramsci’s interpretation of popular literature is close to Lefebvre’s ideas, as we can read in Kłoskowska. Gramsci describes an episodic novel as a drug easing the feeling of pain, an “artificial paradise.” It is a source of dreams which compensate for the dullness of the real life of the reader coming from the lower middle-class intelligentsia (Gramsci dealt with the specific Italian situation of the period between wars) (Gramsci, 1961, in Kłoskowska, 1980, p. 381). Kłoskowska’s, Morin’s, MacDonald’s assumptions re-

ferring to the future of mass culture were moderately optimistic. As we can read in Kłoskowska, in the circles of practical activities there is a wide need for good second-rate literature and art and this category is parallel to the category of average level culture (MacDonald's Midcult) (MacDonald, 1960, in Kłoskowska, 1980, p. 85). Kłoskowska optimistically assumed that by the way of making everything similar, the uniform higher culture will penetrate mass culture. According to Edgar Morin's, optimistic diagnosis the lowest level of mass culture is still rising and this process is the quality of the "new course" of mass culture (Morin, 1956, in Kłoskowska, 1980, p. 394). At present, the lack of time is one of the main problems of working members of consumer societies and it often enforces superficial and fast perception of culture (even popular culture). Culture demands time but some assumptions proved to be true (growing popularity of opera as the example of high culture becoming more popular and other exchanges in cultural circulation).

## DIFFERENT WAYS OF ANALYSING POPULAR LITERATURE

The common knowledge explains what popular literature is. The readers of this type of literature find the most popular titles on the lists of bestsellers. It brings relaxation, happiness or fear (for the fans of crime stories and thrillers). These simple explanations can be given by average literature fans but real structures and problems revealed by or hidden in the works of popular literature are definitely more serious. The researches and analyses of popular literature deal with structures, topics, the sociological and psychological role of popular literature, the place of popular literature in cultural circulation and blurred limits between popular and highbrow literature. In the frames of this article, it is possible to present only a few approaches to popular literature.

Umberto Eco presents the analysis of the structures of the popular novel (using as examples episodic novels) and the presence of a superman in literature in his work *Il superuomo di massa* (1978) (Eco, 1996). Comparing Theodor Adorno's analyses of popular music with Eco's considerations on popular novel one can find some similarities. Theodor Adorno described popular music as being standardized and apparently individualized (Adorno, 1991, in Strinati, 1998, p. 61). Eco characterizes a popular novel as using many cataloged tricks which may be systematized. Characters in popular novels are prefabricated, the easier to accept and be well-liked since they are better known Eco also adds that they are free from psychological subtleties like characters from fairy tales.

Eco mentions other qualities of popular novels which are: the style of a popular novel use the solutions already accepted – they deliver the reader the satisfaction coming from recognizing already known objects, continuous iterations cause in a reader a regressive pleasure of the return to what he/she expected. A popular novel reduces the creative solutions of former literature to clichés, degenerating them (Eco,

1996, p. 18, 19). In his analysis Eco differentiates the popular novel from the problem novel, presenting essential qualities of both types of novels. The qualities of the popular novel are: the popular novel fulfills the expectations of the public, even if it is “democratic”; the “populist” novel stays first of all “popular” because it is demagogic. In the popular novel the fight between good and evil is always decided and in each case in favor of the good while the problem novel suggests an equivocal solution. The aspiration of popular novels is to console the reader while the problem novel puts the reader in a state of conflict with himself/herself. Eco finds the line of division here and all the rest can be and often is shared (Eco, 1996, p. 18, 19). Three phases in the development of the episodic novel as an example of popular, “democratic” novel are presented by Eco. Eco gives a detailed analysis of Eugène Sue’s *The Mysteries of Paris* and of the episodic novel *I Beati Paoli* by Luigi Natoli which was printed in *Il Giornale di Sicilia* from 1909 to 1910 in his book *Il superuomo di massa*. In the analysis of *I Beati Paoli* Eco presents the three phases of the development of popular novel: romantic-heroic, middle-class, neoheroic. The first period was romantic-heroic, it started in the 1830s with the flourishing of the *feuilleton* and the appearance of a new public including the lower middle class, craftsmen and workers. The second phase is a middle-class period. It encompassed the last decades of the nineteenth century and its representatives were Montépin, Richepin, Rochebourg and an Italian writer Carolina Invernizio. The characters typical for the first and for the second period are different. The main character in the first period is the avenger of the oppressed while in the second phase it is the typical man who defeats his enemies (in spite of setbacks). The third period is the neoheroic period. As we can read in Eco, it started in the first years of the twentieth century and introduced antisocial characters, exceptional creatures. These characters (for example Arsène Lupin or Fantomas) are not going to take revenge for the oppressed but realize their own, egoistic plan of getting power (Eco, 1996, p. 99).

Eco’s interest in popular literature refers to the structures he wants to discover analyzing Ian Fleming’s series of novels and short stories with James Bond. Eco claims that the typical qualities of Fleming’s novels are the opposition of characters and values, game situations and intrigue like a chess game. They are constructed on the ground of stable oppositions. These oppositions make possible a limited number of changes and interactions. Eco isolates fourteen pairs of characters and values, some of them are: Bond – M, Bond – the villain, the villain – the Woman, the Woman – Bond, the Free World – the Soviet Union, Great Britain – non-AngloSaxon countries, Duty – Sacrifice, Love – Death, Improvisation – Planning, Loyalty – Disloyalty (Eco, 1996, p. 188, 189). Names and surnames of the characters, according to Eco, are mythical. They reveal the personality of the character at the beginning with no possibility of evolution or change. Eco presents some examples: Le Chiffre, Red, Grant, Oddjob, Auric Goldfinger, No, Hugo Drax, Solitaire, Tiffany Case, Honeychile, Pussy Galore, Domino, KissySuzuki (Eco, 1996, p. 217). In Strinati’s opinion,

Eco wants to discover the unalterable rules governing the narrative structure of these novels. These rules guarantee their mass success and attractiveness for the more limited circle of the public having to practice in literature. Eco's study is probably the best-known example of applying structuralist methods to popular culture forms, as we can read in Strinati (Strinati, 1998, p. 88).

Strinati adds that the schema presented by Eco is unalterable and each novel must include all above elements or movements, it is important for the narrative structure of the novel and it secures its success. Eco presents a wide range of variants in which the basic elements appear (Strinati, 1998, p. 89). Bennett and Woollacott references to Eco's analysis are critical, they claim that Eco understands the genre as a structure of relatively stable text conventions, for them the genre is rather a social and textual collection of culturally discriminated expectations, orientations, and values. These expectations, orientations, and values circulate between producers and consumers and undergo changes over time (Bennett, Woollacott, 1987, in Strinati, 1998, p. 92). While some scholars try to find the unalterable rules in popular literature, the others concentrate on exchanges between different literary circulations.

As we can read in Kuźma, the co-dependence of the high and popular literature is a particular example of intertextuality. Two types of intertextuality mentioned by Kuźma are intertextuality within one literary circulation and intertextuality between circulations, for example when the high-brow work refers to popular literature and vice versa. The work from one literary circulation can be transferred to another circulation (e.g. Carroll's *Alice Adventures in Wonderland* moved from popular to high-brow circulation) and it is the separate phenomenon. Polish high art literature in the 19<sup>th</sup> century and the 20<sup>th</sup> century took from popular literature (among other genres and forms) the usual patterns and stereotypes of crime stories, horror and mystery novels and fantasy novels. Kuźma gives the examples of the opposite processes when high art literature transferred some genres to popular literature: the crime story was created by Edgar A. Poe, the western by James Cooper (Kuźma, 1997, p. 218-220).

The present trends in popular literature and popular culture are analyzed in the collection of articles written by Polish scholars *Mody w kulturze i literaturze popularnej* (Buryła et al., 2011). Teachers cannot ignore the phenomenon of popular culture because it is the important part of young people's lives.

## POPULAR CULTURE IN EDUCATION

Professor Suchodolski claims that the youth beyond school are often preoccupied with their own intellectual, moral, cultural and artistic problems. It is necessary to make the school communication with the life of the environment easier. Suchodolski adds that when there is no perspective, education becomes boring, worthless conformity and when there is no the present-day reality, education loses its roots (Sucho-

dolski,; in Banach, 2011, p. 140). Teachers should understand cultural issues which are essential for young people in their lives outside schools because better understanding means a trust which in the times of great instability is difficult to achieve.

Sowa refers to Giffin who claims that when trust increases, some other variables also have the tendency to increase – some of them are: the realistic evaluation of the others' motives, the acceptance of the variety of other people's behaviours, freedom in having different opinions from the opinion of the group (Giffin, Sowa, 2011, p. 245). It is essential for teachers to know the structures, topics of popular culture and literature because popular culture is the constant element of everyday life and one of the most important topics which young people are preoccupied with and referring to professor Suchodolski again, without the present-day reality, education loses its roots (Suchodolski, in Banach, 2011, p. 140).

Melosik claims that "postmodernization" of societies means the crisis of totality and the pluralism of fragments, the crisis of linear system and multiplication of differences. The other qualities typical of "postmodernization" of societies and mentioned by Melosik are: the crisis of centrality and margins becoming widespread (Melosik, 2010, p. 133). Because of the richness and pluralism of the present-day culture whatever theory or idea cannot be treated as having the grounds for claiming a right to be recognized as universal (its analyses and systems of values) (Melosik, 2010, p. 134). Popular culture functioned outside pedagogics in the past and was seen as being not serious and immature. Melosik says that ignoring popular culture means ignoring the youth and as a result pedagogics is ignored by the youth. Melosik sees a popular culture and mass media as the essential plane of pedagogical activity (Melosik, 2010, p. 135).

The present-day youth live in the world dominated by mass media and mass media become the main source of the individual's life experiences (as a result of this process the "culture of simulation" appears in which it is almost impossible to differentiate "the real reality" from mass media reality – this phenomenon is often described as "hyperreality") (Melosik, 2010, p. 135). Melosik adds that the present-day young people are concentrated on trivial, everyday matters, they avoid difficult topics. For adults, it seems that young people see the world superficially and it is difficult for them to understand what the sense of the identity of the youth is, as we can read in Melosik (Melosik, 2010, p. 138). The term of the global teenager refers to the studies which show that the young people from the city middle class (independently from the country or from the continent) can be characterized by the similar identity and the similar lifestyle (Melosik, 2010, p. 140).

We do not exist in the social isolation, popular culture is the essential part of everyday life of the whole society. Teachers, researchers of this cultural area should analyse the best ways of using the elements of popular culture in education to encourage young people to become interested in serious cultural issues.

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## SOME ASPECTS OF CHANGING ATTITUDES TOWARDS MASS CULTURE AND POPULAR LITERATURE WHICH A TEACHER SHOULD KNOW

**Keywords:** mass culture, popular literature, intertextuality, the literary circulation, the plane of pedagogical activity, a global teenager, popular culture

**Abstract:** In the present article the author makes the survey of some works written by recognized researchers and presenting different approaches to the mass culture phenomenon and to popular literature phenomenon to prove (in the final part of the article) that popular culture as the element of young people's everyday life cannot be ignored by teachers (with reference to Z. Melosik's work).

## WYBRANE ASPEKTY ZMIENIAJĄCYCH SIĘ NASTAWIEŃ DO KULTURY MASOWEJ I LITERATURY POPULARNE, KTÓRE NAUCZYCIEL ZNAĆ POWINIEN

**Słowa kluczowe:** kultura masowa, literatura popularna, intertekstualizm, obieg literacki, płaszczyzna działania pedagogicznego, globalny nastolatek, kultura popularna

**Streszczenie:** W niniejszym artykule autorka dokonuje przeglądu kilku prac uznanych badaczy, prezentujących różne podejścia do zjawiska kultury masowej i literatury popularnej, aby w części końcowej udowodnić, że kultura popularna jako element życia codziennego młodych ludzi nie może być ignorowana przez nauczycieli (w odniesieniu do pracy Z. Melosika).