

# Editorial



In the eighth issue of the *Czytanie Literatary* journal, we are discussing problems located – for various reasons and in various manners – on the fringes of modern literary studies.

Firstly, we have collected answers – obviously formulated in an indirect way – to the question about the status of the essay. We intuitively sensed that it could be the case that the discussions regarding the clearly marginal genre might have reached a dead end. There is always the risk of making the notion obscure as researchers tend to apply it to texts which are not uniform in terms of their genres. It is also possible to enclose it within excessively narrow theme-based, formal, cultural, racial, or gender frames, or in solidified formulations which have almost nothing in common with their literary versions. All this can lead to a false belief in the exclusive nature of the essay as well as to the alleged inclination towards traditionalism and conservative values. Therefore, one should refer to the remarks of Professor Roma Sendyka, a specialist in this subject matter, and discuss the essay while considering that which is usually rejected in the process of homogenising its definition. The essay itself – and this is one of its many conflicting properties – strives to break the seals of excessively coherent and monolithic systems; it is based on pieces of knowledge of unclear statuses and it remains the medium of that particular mode of cognition.<sup>1</sup> The authors whose contributions have been gathered for this issue share similar intuitive reflections. They tend to follow the practice of the bottom-up introduction of theories, discussing various incarnations of the genre while refraining from premature verifications as to whether the texts they discuss meet some specific genealogical criteria.

Thus, Dobrawa Lisak-Gębala offers an exhaustive overview of essays written since 2000, focusing on those which raised topics which have been marginalised to date. The Wrocław-based researcher proposes a coherent classification of those, arguing that in the light of the present-day decreasing formalities and expanding genre-based formulations which she has noticed, one should not try and find proof of the debasement of the genre. She included *Kontener* by Marek Bieńczyk among the examples

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<sup>1</sup> R. Sendyka, *Nowoczesny esej. Studium historycznej świadomości gatunku*, Kraków 2006, pp. 299–309.

of formally-innovative texts. The same text is also the focus of the interpretative article by Agnieszka Czyżak. Here, she discusses the personal dimension of narrative as a raging element which is gradually overtaking the ever-expanding areas of the writer's works, which, as Czyżak indicates, do not translate into the poetics of confession *sensu stricto*. This is because a particular feature of the writer's works involves various mediating artistic devices, which consist of self-creation and encrypting the multi-dimensional *self*, which at the same time prevents the access to the very process of introspection. Przemysław Kaliszuk points to other and much earlier struggles with the form of the essay when he reads *Bez autorytetu* by Stanisław Rosiek and Stefan Chwin. He reconstructs these authors' assumptions and conceptions, and identifies in their book the instances of a strive for transcending the paradigm of the modernist essay.

The group of phenomena which lack the proper discussion in the Polish context includes essays that approach the topics of Shoah and Polish anti-Semitism. Such conclusions have been indicated in the study by Marta Tomczok, who reflects on one of the earliest texts by Jan Tomasz Gross, one of the most controversial Polish essayists. She analyses the consecutive editions of *Ten jest z ojczyzny mojej..., ale go nie lubię* and – by using as a context the works by Jan Błoński and Roman Zimand – she ponders the question about how the form of the essay frames the mode of thinking and expression about the Polish-Jewish relations. The problem of difficult memories resonates in the article by Paweł Tomczok; this contribution is devoted to the potential of the essayistic transmission of knowledge about genocide in works by Martin Pollack, an author who struggled with his family's story of involvement with Nazism. Tomczok questions the potency and, mostly, the effectiveness of the Austrian writer's strategy of applying the metaphor of contamination. Then, in turn, the article by Magdalena Koch tackles emancipation issues, though with a different focus – she discusses the specificity of the feminist essay by Svetlana Slapšak, a Serbian author. Her discussion not only indicates a major gap in the domestic reception of the literature in the Serbian language, but it could also constitute a refreshing stimulus for the discussion of the Polish variants of the related writings.

The issue herein also includes works devoted to one of the 'queen' topics of the essay, i.e. plastic arts. Magdalena Śniedziewska elaborates on the series of texts by Gustaw Herling-Grudziński which – in line with the author's genealogical classification – are defined as "medallions" and consist of discussions of four renowned 17th-century painters. Then, Agata Szulc-Woźniak discusses the essays by Joanna Pollakówna, indicating how the experience of the reception of a work of art translates into the form of a text devoted to it. The contribution by Jerzy Borowczyk offers a somewhat different mode of consideration. This author proposes an original reading of Józef Czapski's essays juxtaposed with the essays by Marta Piwińska, tracing in them reflections (thematically not related to one another) on the experiences of work, giving up, and revelation, at the same time confirming the conviction that one always discusses the form of the essay just by using it. The resulting overview of notions is supplemented by the polemic discussion of

the 2017 anthology of the Polish literary essay, released in the National Library series and edited by Jan Tomkowski. Katarzyna Kuczyńska-Koschany, the author of the critical text, disputes not only with the concept and selection of texts proposed in the edition, but also with the very underlying concept of creating a model collection of essays as being antithetical to the specificity of the genre. At the same time, the researcher outlines her own understanding of the form.

The second problem and theme cluster in the issue herein consists of articles written after the '100 years of the Pikador – Poetry, Tradition, Poetics' seminar, which was organised by the Department of European Traditions Studies, Institute of Polish Philology, Adam Mickiewicz University in Poznań, and held on 29th November, 2018, i.e. precisely on the anniversary of the launch of the famous art café, known mainly for the fact that it consolidated the poets of the Skamander group. However, direct literary testimonies to Pikador's operations are just as interesting. Thus, Joanna Maleszyńska discusses the *Mochanicki* poem by Jan Lechoń, wondering about the possible reasons why such a patriotically exalted text was chosen, since it clearly did not match the self-ironic comedy nature of the new venue. As the researcher indicates, it might have been that the paradox reflected the tension present at that breakthrough period. The text itself, if read contextually, reveals additional strata of meaning. Agata Szulc-Woźniak discusses Maria Morska, an eccentric reciter and a muse of various poets, who also performed during the opening night at the café. By interpreting works by Antoni Słonimski and Jarosław Iwaszkiewicz, the researcher re-discovers the enigmatic artist with a magnetic personality. Eliza Kaćka, then, has indicated a telling event in the history of the group's café by reconstructing the dispute which unravelled around the staging of the Pikador's satirical nativity play in January 1923. It triggered an anti-Semitic attack by Adolf Nowczyński, a rightist commentator, to which Słonimski responded with a cutting pamphlet. The researcher does not stop at a mere reconstruction of the polemic; instead, she discusses the complexity which had existed in the community and which the dispute revealed.

A separate group of texts within this issue consists of studies of the works by female poets who orbited the Skamander group, namely Irena Tuwim (whose journal début of 1916 has been discussed by Katarzyna Kuczyńska-Koschany) and Zuzanna Ginczanka (Karolina Olech's and Karolina Król's articles about her offer an interesting duet, i.e. while the former one focuses on Ginczanka's satirical works associated with her presence in the Warsaw community, the latter one extracts from her lyrical poems the traces of the longing for natural landscapes, which expressed a distance towards the Skamandrite idiom). A compelling preliminary study of the reception of Skamandrites is offered by Piotr Mitzner, who discusses the literary preferences of Józef Czapski, who was sceptical of the Pikador artists during the interwar period, but when he was developing an anthology of the Polish war-time poetry in 1942, he did include poems by authors who belonged to that circle. All these case studies are complemented with an overview article by Joanna Roszak, which is devoted to Julian Tuwim's poetry

being used in the practices of the Polish language, literature, and cultural education as well as pro-peace education. She proposes a reading of the poems by the author of *Kwiaty polskie* within the perspective of mindfulness.

Finally, as we have done before, we include in this issue of *Czytanie Literatary* articles devoted to noteworthy events from the history of Łódź literary life: Dorota Samborska-Kukuć discusses Włodzimierz Kirchner, a priest, an apostate, a social activist, and – most of all – the author of the controversial brochure titled *Challenging Poverty in Batuty*, which was viewed negatively by its critics not so much due to the social diagnoses that it included, but, rather, owing to its mistrustful approach to those in need as well as an aesthetics-based superiority-riddled evaluative tone, which, in turn, could offer a good springboard for a discussion of class discrimination. The *Confiteor* work by Antoni Szandlerowski, the symbolism of which is discussed by Bartosz Ejzak, seems to potentially contain a different kind of controversy. It is a specific contribution as it offers an account of an existential tragedy – a posthumously released collection of love letters exchanged between a priest and a married woman, a converted Jew. Next, Alicja Krawczyk discusses the origin story and the manifesto of ‘Meteor’, the first Łódź-based literary group.

The issue concludes in three conversations about reading (and translating) literature: an interview with Magdalena Heydel (conducted by Karolina Król) about Stanisław Barańczak’s mode of translation; an interview with Marek Bieńczyk (conducted by Olga Żymnikowska) about Milan Kundera’s prose and the accompanying essay by the researcher devoted to the Czech writer; and, finally, a record of a conversation between Francesco Cataluccio, Andrzej Franaszek, and Krystyna Pietrych with regard to Zbigniew Herbert’s travels, especially those to the south of Europe. In that final conversation, e.g. in the recollection of the already dying author of *Epilog Burzy* still planning a trip to Venice, a suggestion is offered as to the next issue of the journal – it is going to be devoted to the representations of Venice in the European culture.

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