

# “Everything is Worth Describing:”\*

## The Case of Jacek Baczak

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\* “*Wszystko jest warte opisania*” .  
Interview by Mirosław Dzień,  
“*Kwartalnik Artystyczny*” 1996, No 1,  
p. 58. Translation mine, PZ.

Jacek Baczak’s words “Everything is worth describing” can be treated almost like his policy statement. It appeared in both the contents and the title of one of his first long interviews, given after he published his debut *Zapiski z nocnych dyżurów*<sup>1</sup>. Baczak first published the book using his own modest resources in 1994. However, it soon lost its private, intimate status, as in 1995, Znak published an extended edition with a foreword by Jan Błoński and containing the drawings by the author. In 1996, Baczak received the Kościelski Foundation Award for it. 25 years have passed since the book was first published, yet time has not affected its significance. Moreover, it seems time has only confirmed the relevance of this originally modest book.

Watching – seeing – describing

In the interview, Baczak confessed:

The experience of describing draws in (...). But it is not just about writing, but rather about watching, seeing. I often stop reading (...) *Martwa natura z wędzidłem* by Herbert and other books, which I like to reread, and I think about how they saw it, where this or that vision came from... Those people, events, rooms, details... Perhaps love is the key word here? (...) I think that everything deserves to be described, everything is worth describing. Because everything is worth something, has its value – even in the eschatological sense – because it was created and redeemed. Because it exists<sup>2</sup>.

<sup>1</sup> In this paper I use the second edition by Wydawnictwo Znak. J. Baczak, *Zapiski z nocnych dyżurów*, epilogue by Jan Błoński, Kraków 1997. All the quotes come from this edition, with page number given after each one. Henceforth shortened version of the title. All translations into English by PZ.

<sup>2</sup> “*Wszystko jest warte opisania*”..., p. 62.

These words clearly define Baczak's self-awareness, revealing the origins of his creative inspirations and fascinations. The definite repetition of the sentence "everything deserves to be described", "everything is worth describing" is probably amongst the most crucial interpretative leads. "To describe everything" is to describe the beginning and the end, something that happened in between, and what has been marginalized. It also means describing something that others are unwilling or afraid to describe; to go beyond the world's boundaries, which have been consistently omitted before, to take a closer look at the realities and existences which can be found there, and to see them wisely and mindfully, so that ultimately one has to subject oneself to the need to describe them.

The clear difference between "watching" and "seeing" is the second lead here. Baczak began his search from painting, which for him was a crucial experience. Mindfulness, understood as the need to scrutinize the world, the other, and oneself, was the basic disposition of the author. This mindfulness stems from the awareness that all important things require us to stop, pay attention, understand, and reflect upon them. Mindfulness guarantees the passage from the registering "watching" to the self-aware "seeing", subsequently allowing one to describe and capture existence and being.

In Baczak, next to this first perspective defined by the order of "watching – seeing – describing", there is another, defined by the words "existing", "creating", "redeeming", "eschatology". They all form a coherent sequence introduced by the first, superior word: love. Baczak seems to be asking himself and us: "Perhaps love is the key word here?". This question only seems to sound provocatively naïve. In fact, Baczak refers to a very basic issue: an attitude to the world and others which has its source in the love understood most deeply as Agape<sup>3</sup>. A relation to the world and other people can be saturated with emphatic closeness and kindness only in such a perspective. They become the imperative, forcing us to be mindful of others. They create a space for coexisting and co-understanding, which remains significant also from the eschatological perspective. Even more so, they are confirmed and reinforced in this perspective.

"This experience devastated me, it changed my way of thinking"<sup>4</sup>

Baczak, deeply believing in the value of describing everything that exists and what has been "created and redeemed" takes on the challenge of describing also those things which others are unwilling or afraid to describe. He enters the world of hospices, which is absent from culture, unsaid, marginalized to the sphere of inexistence<sup>5</sup>. "(...) a world which contemporaneity removes from our sight, it is disgusted by it, and does not want to know it"<sup>6</sup>. He takes on the

<sup>3</sup> This connection between empathy and Agape was also indicated by A. Łebkowska, *Empatia. O literackich narracjach przełomu XX i XXI wieku*, Kraków 2008, p. 52.

<sup>4</sup> T. Drzycimska, *Jacek Baczak*. The text is completed by an interview with Baczak.. "Dzielnice Magazine", 9.04.2014 DzielniceWrocławia.pl, date of access:17.01.2020

<sup>5</sup> See Hanna Serkowska, *Zapiski z (przechodności) bezradności, Autobiografia. Literatura. Kultura. Media 2 (7) (2016): 115-123*. DOI: 10.18276/au.2016.2.7-08. Serkowska returns to *Zapiski...* and Baczak in the book *Co z tą starością? O starości i chorobie w europejskiej literaturze i filmie*, Toruń 2018.

<sup>6</sup> *Twarze, twarze, twarze...*, "Konteksty" 1996, No 1-2, p.158.

sphere of exclusion, suffering, slow passing away and death. Every day, he touches the end; he faces other people's death. He decides to remain in a painfully locked world and to accompany the dying. He confronts the naïve youthful illusion of endless life with a tangible presence of evanescence and death, poignant desolation of the world. Having experienced this and bearing the weight of confrontation he gives up to "the unbearable compulsion to share this experience"<sup>7</sup>, the compulsion to describe.

The first duty of those who are close to people passing away is to accompany them. This company gives hospices sense and it is the point of working there. However, later on, this difficult company is also connected to the coercion to face one's vision of life and to verify childish illusions. After all, Baczak appears in a hospice as a young man seeking his own way, and as an artist. This duality of his role is "uneraseable". It leaves a clear trace in his sensitivity, providing him with languages for coping and describing the hospice world available at the starting point; it is a world of magnified strangeness. Thus, his description cannot be constructed from ready-made matrices, schemes, tested and familiar languages. The description must be constructed from the simplest, translucent, ascetic elements. It has to be poignantly credible; it has to serve. It has to touch.

## To describe the beauty of exhaustion

In Baczak, it was painting that inspired a fascination in the human physicality and the beauty of a perfect, harmonious, sensual body. He created "awed by the human body, especially the face"<sup>8</sup>.

I drew hundreds of sketches, nudes, semi-nudes. I remembered long hours spent in the studio, when the light illuminated my models' torsos. I copied drawings from anatomical albums. I slowly opened myself to the silent beauty of the hand, neck, shoulders, not to mention the whole universe of the face. In drawing of the muscular shoulders and delicate female backs, expressive faces and sinewy hands – I found some sensual pleasure. I was reduced to awe and focus. (p.43)

Before, he was completely absorbed in the "silent beauty", experiencing constant "awe and focus", and thus unable to bear the hospice confrontation with bodies that were suffering, damaged, helpless. Until then, such bodies were to him unfamiliar, "non-translucent, losing their obviousness and unnoticability"<sup>9</sup>, "bodies sick, suffering, maturing, aging, branded"<sup>10</sup>. They were bodies that were different, painfully unfamiliar, scary, perhaps even inspiring momentary fear and disgust; Bodies that were damaged, used-up, infirm, paralyzed. However, they still required care, attention, and delicateness.

<sup>7</sup> "Wszystko jest warte opisania"..., p. 62.

<sup>8</sup> T. Drzycimska, *Jacek Baczak*...

<sup>9</sup> A. Łebkowska, *Somatopoetyka*, in: *Kulturowa teoria literatury 2. Poetyki, problematyki, interpretacje*, ed.. R. Nycza i T. Walas, Kraków 2012, p.119. The author compares the most important issues regarding somatopoetics and points out to the relations between the translucent and non-translucent body. The translucent body is "obvious and thus unnoticeable, and as a result: not worth describing or representing" [translation mine, PZ]. The non-translucent body loses its obviousness and unnoticability. This is what happens in Baczak.

<sup>10</sup>Ibidem, p. 120.

And now I looked at different bodies. Bodies that constituted a separate book of genesis. A separate book of experiencing beauty.

Old bodies, leaning towards the ground. Weak bodies, pale, shrunken, twisted, full of scars and scratches.

Dry, covered by skin that was soft to the touch like a sheet of paper, yet full of thousands of wrinkles and folds. Bodies that were typically thin, boney, with clearly visible veins, which cracked whenever an injection had to be made or blood drawn. Leaving behind dark, livid stains.

I looked at bodies which sometimes scared me with their damages and deformations.

There was disgust in me<sup>11</sup>, which was fading away with my getting used to it. Eventually I saw a completely different kind of beauty in them. The beauty of helplessness and satiation.

Exhaustion. (pp. 43-44)

This transition from the fascination with the beauty of harmony and perfection to familiarizing, and then deeply, ultimately accepting the beauty of exhaustion reveals the difficult road that Baczak took in an unusual way. For a description is never unpunished: it reveals not only the things that are described, but also the person who describes them. It unmasks his heedlessness, superficiality, and his schematic way of thinking. However, it also uncovers his sensitivity, emphatic care, mindfulness, and warmth. This is what happens in Baczak. We find details which attract attention in the cracks of kind descriptions and longer pieces of description scattered across the text.<sup>12</sup> They reveal not only the close glance, painting-like attention to detail<sup>13</sup>, but also – or perhaps first of all – common human mindfulness, kind empathy, taking a closer look at another person, focusing on them<sup>14</sup>. We can see “a prick by a splinter of co-suffering”<sup>15</sup>. The problem is that it is not enough to stop at an ascetic description of “clearly visible veins, which cracked”. They need to be described in a somewhat further, deeper way. They have to be seen also from the perspective of “dark, livid stains”, which are left after an injection has to be made or blood drawn. But this requires stopping, time, being with the other, and attentively accompanying them. The stopping and closeness are also necessary to feel bodies which are “[d]ry, covered by skin that was soft to the touch like a sheet of paper, yet full of thousands of wrinkles and folds” (p. 43). The details captured in this description are possible to register only when watching becomes seeing, and an accidental brush becomes a kind touch. This is when even a short conversation becomes something “creating the world” (s.56):

<sup>11</sup>This quote inspired the title of the book on Baczak – P. Czaplinski, “Była we mnie odraza”, in *Mikrologi ze śmiercią. Motywy tanatyczne we współczesnej literaturze polskiej*, Poznań 2001, pp. 187- 194.

<sup>12</sup>See J. Sławiński, *O opisie*, w: tegoż, *Próby teoretycznoliterackie*, Warszawa 1992, p. 195 for a typology of descriptions.

<sup>13</sup>Ibidem, p. 212. Sławiński writes: painter, scholar, tourist, are “professionals in methodical observation, hence their perception of the surrounding world explains well all the detailed descriptions” [translation mine, PZ].

<sup>14</sup>Baczak was aware of this and stressed this fact: “One of the forms of attention is also kindness. It is a form of leaning in, focusing. It was really necessary in that place. (...) I learned kindness towards other people.” J. Baczak, A. Karoń-Ostrowska, *Byłem dobrym salowym*, “Więź” 1999, No 2, p. 92.

<sup>15</sup>“Wszystko jest warte opisania”..., p. 60.

A woman, Ania, had been here for fourteen years, paralyzed, with amputated legs. Unable to turn on her own. Her body was literally flattened and spilled because of lying all the time. She had been looking at a wall and a window of the same room. (...)

And yet she had known every day what day of the week and what month it was. And whenever I answered her question about the weather outside – she stopped talking, closed her eyes, or was smiling shyly.

Perhaps she was remembering the falling snow, the smell of smoke from a bonfire in fall, or pools of warm rain.

And I would put away my broom to the corner, peel some tangerines for her, trying to tell her what was happening outside. About the strong smell of the ground and naked, dark trees.

Wasn't this creating the world? (p. 56)

These forms of being with another person, open to closeness and kindness, create a space for co-being and co-understanding which stem from even the narrowest cracks of the text - a space which encourages one to describe people who face baring, experiencing the devouring sense of physical and mental devastation.

The first and the most basic language that Baczak uses to describe the people who are under his care is the body language. The body is predominantly the sign of human transience. Everything that happens to it inevitably takes it to the deadly defragmentation. Ania is paralyzed, with amputated legs. Unable to turn on her own, her body was literally flattened and spilled because of lying all the time (p.56). Władziu has “twisted legs and a bedsore on his side the size of two palms. Living spots of meat (...) where the skin does not grow back” (p.76). “There was something striking about Jaś’s appearance. Right behind his left ear the surface of this head was discontinued. He had a huge indentation which his thick hair could not cover” (p. 76). Baczak’s man is “without a shadow of a doubt a *somaticus*”<sup>16</sup>, presented in “a suffering and dying physicality: with tears, sweat, blood, and excrements”<sup>17</sup>, described in a physicality experienced through pain and infirmity. It is also a *homo patiens* – a person for whom paralyzes, paresis, and amputations write a painful history of life and set new limits for the desperately shrinking space for existence. It is a person described by a language of deformations and physical disabilities, which become stigmatizing signatures of their being.

## Describing c(C)ountenance

In the context of such a clear identification of suffering and deformed bodies, the scarce presence of facial expressions in *Zapiski...* is surprising. They are rare and limited to several

<sup>16</sup>D. Czaja, *Twarze, twarze, twarze...*, p. 158. This opens the broad perspective of somatopoetics. A. Łebkowska, *Somatopoetyka – afekty – wyobrażenia. Literatura XX i XXI wieku*, Kraków 2019. In this context, especially the part *Ciało i zmysły*.

<sup>17</sup>D. Czaja, *Twarze, twarze, twarze...*

hardly repeated elements: a paralysis that causes a grimace, a trickle of food from a paralyzed mouth, or the childish naivety in the constantly confused eyes of the patients. Eugeniusz's face stands out in this context; on the one hand, it is similar to others due to its paralysis, and on the other, it is painfully different because of the sense of an ending, which the grimace cannot hide.

Eugeniusz was brought on my shift. And it was also on my shift, some weeks later, that he passed away. I fed him, I changed his diaper, I shaved him. He was paralyzed from waist down (...). He ate very slowly and would choke on his food. He choked violently and spat on everything around him. A part of his face was paralyzed, hence there was a trickle of food coming from the left corner of his mouth. He was relatively very young, not even in his forties. (...)

I remembered his eyes, they stood out from the rest. (...) In case of many patients their eyes resembled children's eyes, as if they were constantly asking about something, unsure. Gienek had eyes of someone who knew where he was and who realized the gravity of his state. Perhaps this was the reason why they attracted attention, clear and sad. There was suffering in them, fatigue from constant pain, or simply general fatigue. Those were the eyes of someone who had had enough, but was unable to do anything but wait (p. 26-27).

This meeting with another person, who was suffering horribly and aware of his own passing away, is based on the most deeply understood close company. Directness is the call and key to it, and "only meeting someone face to face is direct"<sup>18</sup>:

(...) access to the face is immediately ethical. (...) What a face is in a specific way boils down to perception, despite the fact that a relations with a face can be dominated by it.

Firstly there is only rightness of the face, its right and helpless exposure. The skin on the face is the most naked, the most exposed. It is the most naked, but also modest in this nakedness. Also, the most exposed: for there is some basic poverty in the face (...). The face is exposed, endangered (...)<sup>19</sup>.

Entering the space of the indirectness of "a face to face meeting" opens access to the most deeply ethical, sensitive to "its right and helpless exposure". Eugeniusz's face is a face of a man who "knew where he was and who realized his state" (p. 27), "someone who had had enough, but was unable to do anything but wait" (p. 27). His understanding face exposes this awareness and displays it in public in a moving way. One can only accompany him in this waiting, and later give this heroic passing away the simplest testament.

The faces of hospice patients are also faces of people who live in the shadow of death – they showcase the valleys of past tragedies, lines of desires that burnt out a long time ago, traces of past harms and scares of abandonment. These faces want you to stop and remember, "becoming an epiphany", enduring "seemingly irreversible borders between what is physical and spiritual"<sup>20</sup>.

<sup>18</sup>E. Lévinas, *Całość i nieskończoność. Esej o zewnętrznosci*, translated by M. Kowalska, Warszawa 1998, p. 43.

<sup>19</sup>E. Lévinas, *Etyka i nieskończony. Rozmowy z Philipp`em Nemo*, translated by B. Opolska-Kokoszka, Kraków 1991, p.50.

<sup>20</sup>D. Czaja, *Twarze, twarze, twarze...*

I was a cleaner and a barber. Shaving had a hidden taste of getting to know someone. Standing in front of unshaven faces of old men, I rediscovered them. The razor blade removed the foam, and then I could see the familiar wrinkles and lines. I could see carved mountains and valleys from close-up. A rugged landscape of experiences, which each time turned out to be new and painful. It became an obvious sign of resignation, acceptance. I always shaved them at the end of my shift, slowly, telling jokes and talking. And yet shaving sometimes became a holy ritual. Dealing with their faces, gradually and unclearly I realized that I was dealing with something holy. With time, those faces all blended into one in my memory, which perhaps became the face of that rule, maybe the rule of time. It accommodated so many meanings, that it became a silent, overwhelming presence.

I was living in front of the Countenance.(p.83)

## To describe death

Writing about *Zapiski...*, Dariusz Czaja stressed that “[t]hey have the value of a testament. They are a record of initiation into dying and death. Into a sick, dying, dead body”<sup>21</sup>. Hospice patients carry death in them in the most moving way possible, and they experience the imminence of death in life in the most tangible way. For them, it ceases to be a distant foreshadowing of the slowly approaching end:

(...) I heard someone vomiting violently. I sprang to my feet and opened the door. I stepped back, horrified. She was sitting motionlessly, leaning forward. Her walking stick was next to her, in a pool of thick, clotted blood. The whole floor, her bathing robe, hands and face were covered in dark red blood. She was dead. We washed her. I took her body into my arms and carried her to bed. Then I washed her blood off the floor with a cellucotton rug, as well as the tiles, the walking stick, and the toilet.

I couldn't do it. It was a violent stroke, an internal organ broke. The only thing I remembered was a grey head that fell forward, helpless hands, a pulled-up nightshirt which uncovered her knees. And the red floor, with the walking stick and broken, thick glasses in the pool of blood.(p.36)

He was getting weaker and weaker (...) I saw fear in his unnaturally gleaming eyes. (...) The fear was starting to step aside, substituted by exhaustion. His heavy, uneven breath stopped in the morning, while it was still dark outside. We took the body to the morgue by noon. I saw someone who had realized he was dying. I saw his fear.

It was all over his body, stinking with sweat.

There was nothing majestic about it.

I tried to be quiet when someone discussed death. I wanted to remain silent.(pp. 36-37)

<sup>21</sup>Ibidem.

This confession about the need to remain silent about death is confirmed by the way in which Baczak describes it. He talks about it in the simplest ways, translucent, ascetic. He removes and disassembles everything that would be a redundant embellishment, a literary game, everything that would redirect the reader's attention from the most significant thing.

## To describe the bodies of the dead

Baczak talks mostly about all those who are dying and have died. They are in the center of the world that he describes.

They would often pass away at dawn. They left behind cold, stiff bodies, which we would take to the morgue in the morning. Bodies that made me feel guilty, to which I often talked while washing them in the morgue. But I also felt their presence. I tied jaws, closed eyelids, covered those often smoothed faces with white sheets. I dressed them in trousers, buttoned their shirts on their chests, from which sometimes the remaining air would escape with a tiny noise. I wrapped those bodies until they started to resemble parcels ready to be thrown into the mouth of the earth in the grand, endless transformation.(p. 11)

When they pass away, the living, feeling human being goes beyond the limits of physicality. The line between "what is alive, and what is dead (body-corpse); between what is human and what is non-human"<sup>22</sup>.

I opened the morgue door and closed it behind me. The buzz of dozens of flies, the swearing of a jock and the smell of the decomposing body kept me there.

I stretched shoes in the heels so that we could put them on their feet. I helped cut a jacket into two parts and stretch it on both shoulders. We dressed the body on the surface, but not fully. It was impossible to do it well. Some parts of the body became semi-liquid. A warm-colored liquid would pour out of the face whenever we moved the body. Stefan's body had been lying there for a long time, it was over thirty degrees outside, the men from the funeral parlor arrived too late. (...)

Stefan had ceased to be someone. He became something. (...) Looking at that slightly moving face, which was no longer a face, I could feel it clearly and strongly.(p.18-19)

Traces of the not so distant being a person, being "someone" disappear from the dead person's body. The body loses its subjectivity and becomes unfamiliar, scary. It transforms into "rotting matter", "garbage", "waste":

The rotting, lifeless body becomes complete garbage, a transitional mass, an ambiguous element between what is animalistic and what is inorganic, an inseparable other side to humanity, whose life mixes with what is symbolic: a dead body is a fundamental waste. A soulless body, non-body,

<sup>22</sup>A.Łebkowska, *Jak ucieleśnić ciało: o jednym z dylematów somatopoetyki*, "Teksty Drugie" 2011, No 4, pp. 21-22.



ambiguous matter (...), a body is a waste, transitional matter, a mixture, but also the opposite of the spiritual, the nonmaterial, the divine law<sup>23</sup>.

A dead body – as seen by God, and not from a scientific perspective – is the source of ultimate disgust. It is death devastating life. It is something thrown-up, and you cannot set free from it, you cannot defend yourself against it<sup>24</sup>.

Baczak is evidently torn in his way of seeing and describing the dead. He flounders between two extremes, as if he were subject to “the ambivalence of death”<sup>25</sup>. He constructs elaborate descriptions of evening meetings with the dead in the morgue. It seems that he wants to believe that a dead body is not just “rotting matter”, but “a presence that refers to absence”<sup>26</sup>, “a symbol of loss”<sup>27</sup>. This is the only possible perspective from which to read his stories of evening visits to the morgue and the words whispered there. This is the only way we could believe his words “I kept feeling that I was with someone” (p. 47).

I turned on the lights and closed the door behind me. (...) I lifted the sheet or the pillowcase from the face. I kept feeling that I was with someone. I talked to a motionless man or woman, I apologized, I whispered some words. And I would also draw. (...) I preferred to talk to them quietly, calling them by their names. As if they were asleep. (pp. 47- 48)

Baczak, familiar with the helplessness and insufficiency of words, decides to use another language. He eventually finds it in post-mortem portraits, which for him are “another form of a conversation, an attempt at expressing something which was too big for words”<sup>28</sup>. That is where he looks for preserving the memory, recording traces left by the dead.

## To describe fleeting things

The world of hospice patients is a limited, shrunk world. It is limited and closed first by the hospice walls, then by the thin walls of the rooms inside, and ultimately by beds and bedside tables. That world is completed by small, everyday things and objects, which co-create the painful spectacle of illusion of normal existence, thus becoming a counterbalance for dying, devastation and decomposition.

I forgot that dying is as common as becoming. Without this dark half, the destructive part, the decomposition, the shrinking, our world would not be what it is. I used to live without thinking about it, doing things that had to be done. I bought cigarettes, fruit juices, cookies and candy, salty sticks, cream, some good sausage for them. I would take old, broken alarm clocks for repair and then bring them back. I would visit rooms, talk, repair rosaries and turn on radios in search

<sup>23</sup>J. Kristeva, *Potęga obrzydzenia. Esej o wstręcie*, translated by M. Falski, Kraków 2007, p. 103.

<sup>24</sup>Ibidem, p. 10.

<sup>25</sup>L.-V.Thomas, *Trup. Od biologii do antropologii*, Łódź 1991, p. 73.

<sup>26</sup>Ibidem, p.43.

<sup>27</sup>Ibidem, p.44.

<sup>28</sup>T. Drzycimska, *Jacek Baczak...*

for a mass. (...) I would tidy shelves, water the plants, clear ashtrays, arrange holy pictures against plant pots. (pp. 40-41)

This world of things coexisted symbiotically with the world of their owners. It accepted their slow rhythm of existence, and gradually, the slow rhythm of passing away.

The women were delirious, talking to themselves, closer and closer to the end. Objects seemed to decay from the inside with spots of gray mold, nets of cracks, ash twitching in the air. In the icy wind. (p.13)

The death of the patients annulled these worlds of things. Thus, not only people died, but also their bodies. The world of objects, so precious to them, passed away with them. The death of a person meant annulment of redundant, unwanted objects. The story of their passing away was thus completed by the ritual of post-mortem tidying-up, removing traces of the world which irreversibly ceased to exist.

They died suddenly and silently, like candles that were blown out. I would clean the bed, then the shelf, taking some leftovers, praying books, candy wrappers, holy pictures, one shoe, a comb – and when the family did not want those things, I would take them to the basement and watch the boiler consume all those things, which said so much about them. (p.11)

This description – short, concise, based on a dry list – is the simplest way of saying goodbye to an ending, individual world. It is an expression of helplessness in the face of an ending, translucent in its ascetic simplicity.

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This is how Stanisław Rosiek opened the edited volume *Wymiary śmierci*, a collection of thanatological texts:

Enough has been said and written about death. One needs genuinely unusual ways to add something new to this discourse. We have experienced a devaluation of words concerning death. (...)

There are only the dead, and they are worth (and necessary) to talk about. But also about the living, who appear alongside the dead (...). Only about this. The rest (...) is typically empty jabbering, which is unbearable especially when it is dressed in a sophisticated style. The more beautiful, the worse. (...) The less style, the better. In the face of eschatology, one should pace themselves. One should speak little and plainly"<sup>29</sup>.

Baczak kept this restraint in the face of death with meticulous care. In the simplest way possible, he accompanied the dying, and he maintained this simplicity also for describing his experiences.

translated by Paulina Zagórska

<sup>29</sup>S.Rosiek, *Słowo wstępne*, in: *Wymiary śmierci*, edited and preface by S.Rosiek, Gdańsk 2010, p.5.

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# KEYWORDS

*Jacek Baczak*

20<sup>th</sup> century Polish literature

*death in literature*

20<sup>TH</sup> CENTURY POLISH PROSE

SOMATOPOETICS

*body in literature*

## ABSTRACT:

*Zapiski z nocnych dyżurów* by Jacek Baczak is devoted to the world of hospices, which is generally absent from the world of multiplied presence. Baczak tries to describe it, to express the suffering of this place through words, slowly passing away, and death. His description cannot refer to ready-made matrices, schemes or tested and familiar languages. His description is thus constructed from the simples, the most translucent, ascetic elements. Thanks to this, it becomes poignantly genuine and serving. While restrained in the face of death, it is also moving.

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