

Mise en abyme – –Anti-realism? On the Example of One Poem by Tomasz Pułka*

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Artur Sandauer investigated the relationship between *mise en abyme* and realism already in his papers devoted to meta-reflection: *Konstruktywny nihilizm, O ewolucji sztuki narracyjnej XX wieku* and *Samobójstwo Mitrydatesa*¹, although he did it indirectly. Despite the seemingly antithetic trends, out which one “expresses itself through the presence of a comment on writing the literary work in question, and thus filling the contents of that literary work with the issue of writing”², and the other one defines “any pursuit within literature and fine arts for presenting everyday human existence in its historical environment, respecting everything that is considered to be the laws governing reality”³, some noticeable interdependency can be found between them. They result from both the process of literary transformations – Sandauer sees *mise en abyme* as a consequence of a crisis of realism of a sort – and the common field of interests: the relationship between literary work and the external world.

¹ All the papers come from the edited volume *Liryka i logika. Wybór pism krytycznych*, Warsaw 1969.

² E.Szary-Matywiecka, *Autotematyzm*, [in:] *Słownik literatury polskiej XX wieku*, edited by A. Brodzka, Wrocław 1992, p. 54

³ See *Realizm*, [in:] *Słownik terminów literackich*, edited by M. Głowiński, T. Kostkiewiczowa, A. Okopień-Sławińska, J. Sławiński, 5th edition, Wrocław 2008, p. 462.

According to the author of *Liryka i logika*, artistic trends such as realism or *mise en abyme*⁴ which have been developing since the 19th century are a result of the slow withering of art. The process starts at the beginning of the modern era, when artistic activity loses its ceremonial character, ceasing to be an integral element of reality⁵. The modern specification leads to a peculiar split of the world: ethics, aesthetics, and epistemology become separate fields, which cannot be merged together again. Thus the subject is deprived of the unity of cognition, or the indirectness of the contact with the world. The longing for the lost innocence results in firstly (among other things), ideas of an aesthetic revolution, which would try to establish a new binder for the split consciousness in the form of art, and later – the emergence of realist poetics, which would try to give its artistic products the air of reality, thus recovering for it its cognitive role and the power of judgment.

However, there are also opposing actions which emerge simultaneously, stemming from the realization of irreversible loss, as well as a growing crisis of faith in the epistemological abilities of the subject. Even romantic irony thus becomes a symptom of the transformations, as it reveals the presence of the author or narrator in a given literary work and thus undermines its “realness”, unmasking its conventional character and dependence on the creator⁶. At the same time such trends as symbolism point our attention to the multidimensional character of reality itself, noticing the hidden depth of experience, and testing the ways of reaching the spaces which escape rational cognition, or are beyond its reach⁷. This is when a man’s adventure begins; the man who has rejected „all the events suggested by the external world and imagination”⁸, shifting the focus from the perceived to perceiving and its originator. The mistrust towards the abilities and chances for mapping the world, which is related to exhausted classical ideas, leads – in its radical version – to the conviction that the only describable space is either the internal life of the subject (in other words – the subject’s psyche; this version is originally in favor of the modern idea of a self-conscious individual, which of course later would be frequently deconstructed, among others by Sigmund Freud), or the autonomous space of a work of art.

However, Sandauer’s idea of the double-track evolution of narrative art, drawing two separate paths from realism – psychologism and *mise en abyme*⁹ – requires a comment. It would seem that the above-mentioned trends are connected by something more than a common source, which Sandauer considers to be either a crisis of the realist poetics or exhausting it. Meta-reflective works are focused on the creative subject (who thematizes his own artistic activity, or himself as the creator), or on the created object – an artifact of art. The first path – although obviously different from psychologism – seems to connect it to *mise en abyme* in a way, which focuses on only one aspect of the psyche or emotions of the subject (those

⁴ I use this term solely for aesthetic purposes.

⁵ See A. Sandauer, *Samobójstwo Mitrydatesa*, p. 347.

⁶ *Ibidem*, p. 348 onwards.

⁷ Interpretation of „symbolic” *mise en abyme* – non-explicit, to a great extent based on poetic metaphors – was undertaken by Andrzej Niewiadomski in his book *Światy z jawnych słów i kwiatów ukrytych: o refleksji metapoetyckiej w nowoczesnej poezji polskiej*, Lublin 2010.

⁸ Andrzej Niewiadomski, *Konstruktywny nihilizm*, p. 37.

⁹ Andrzej Niewiadomski, *O ewolucji sztuki narracyjnej XX wieku*.

related to the creative activity), and which is extremely significant in art. Although usually the meta-reflection focused on the literary work itself (or alternatively, on the conditions in which it was created) is considered to be the right one, we should also pay attention to the fact that the extent of application of *mise en abyme* depends on the way of understanding literature, as well as the preferred methodology.

Thus structuralism – which was the dominating methodology in studies into *mise en abyme* – focused mostly on the literary work treated as a specific system of self-reflexive symbols. However, for example in the light of the performativity theory or research into emotion-alism, it seems to be equally reasonable to underline the presence of the creative subject. Hence *mise en abyme* and psychologism – both problematizing the form of the subject and seeking new formal solutions in the face of the lack of external benchmarks – seem to be peculiarly related.

In “traditional” *mise en abyme* – as defined in the 20th century by structuralist-semiotic schools, and supported by the modernist ideas of creative authorship and the character of the work of art – the idea of form was crucial: creativity ceases to be the search for or adjusting the aesthetic shape to meanings which one wants to convey, instead becoming an experiment with the sense-generating means of transition. It was not without a reason that the characteristic nomenclature appeared already in Sandauer’s studies, who notices that „the issue [of Paul Valéry’s work – A.W.] is included not as much in the content as in the structure of the literary work”¹⁰. Włodzimierz Bolecki has also written about it, connecting the phenomenon with the birth of modernism: “<<the new art>> was not supposed to begin – like before – with adding form to a subject, but vice versa. Form has become its initial element, through the shaping of which the object emerged”¹¹. Thus redirecting the attention from the external world coincides with the crisis of ideas regarding the abilities to map the reality in art and the chances for its cognition in general. In a scenario in which this externality no longer provides meaning which would be possible to be forged into some literary shape¹², either the artist’s individuality becomes significant (and next – his or her psyche in general), or the autotelic characteristics of a closed, finite work of art.

This is of course an extremely simplified history of meta-reflection, which includes only some of the contexts: for it is obvious that *mise en abyme* also possesses other realizations and has been applied for various reasons – for example the avant-garde has used it for proving the “anti-metaphysical” construction of a given work, corresponding with the idea of the artist as *homo faber*. However, this shows that realism and *mise en abyme* are – perhaps paradoxically – mutually inextricably related. From the developmental and chronological perspective one can see *mise en abyme* as a natural consequence or a counterpoint of realist poetics – after working through a certain idea regarding art a new trend emerged, based on the proven or unmasked by a given trend atonies and inabilities. Thus it is possible to see *mise en abyme* as polemics with earlier ideas regarding literature – clearly meta-reflexive *nouveau roman* can indeed be

¹⁰ Andrzej Niewiadomski, *Konstruktywny nihilizm*, p. 37.

¹¹ W. Bolecki, *Modernizm w literaturze polskiej XX w. (rekonesans)*, [in:] „Teksty Drugie” 2002, No 4, p. 31.

¹² Of course the modernist linguistic insufficiency occurs here.

seen as a discussion with the realist novel¹³. However, regardless of the optics, realism and *mise en abyme* prove to be different conceptualizations of the same problems: referentialism as well as the cognitive abilities and the abilities of art, which are conducted within the artistic struggles with modernity.

Although they have different denotations – often the whole historical-literary period is referred to as realism, and it creates a clear trend with characteristic artistic means, whereas meta-reflection is a rather stable, though differently applied literary theme – they are connected by the fact that both define certain poetics¹⁴ characterized with clear ideological and philosophical implications. Thus, although they can be somewhat contrary, they can be presented as different methods of conceptualizing one of the key problems of artistic production of several past centuries: relations with reality. The issue can also be approached more radically – as long as one accepts the artistic space as the only one that is cognitively approachable for itself, and the form of the work of art as a peculiar, autonomous microcosm, *mise en abyme* becomes only a certain version of realism. For it talks about the only referentialism available for artistic production – the one directed inwards, the activity which is happening right now, the tools of one's own work or the field of functioning of the artifacts. However, it is a strictly modernist¹⁵ conviction, and so – although it sheds some interesting light on the relationships between the discussed trends – it does not seem to be relevant to the contemporary literary works or the concepts of the work of art and its creator.

Realism and *mise en abyme* are also divided by the extent of their occurrence; realism is almost exclusively associated with 19th-century prose, whereas *mise en abyme* – observable mostly today – is also present in poetry. According to *Słownik terminów literackich*, “realism generally applies to feature genres, whereas its effect on poetry is of secondary importance”¹⁶. As a trend which “developed between romanticism and naturalism” realism is first of all, a broad trend, encompassing all the fields of art – even if only indirectly, and secondly, a peculiar dialectical counterbalance to the already present romantic irony. In such a conceptualization contemporary poetry could also be classified as realist, however, this would be a chronological definition (in the same way as romantic poetry, or Young Polish poetry), which would not problematize the contents or the style. The already mentioned understanding of realism as “pursuit within literature and fine arts for presenting the everyday human existence in its historical environment, respecting everything that is considered to be laws governing reality” it has little in common with the increasingly more lyrical poetry, yet again it becomes a counterpoint to the simmering referentialism crisis¹⁷ – for both tendencies date back to circa mid-19th century. Whereas “in a very general

¹³Realizm, [in:] *Słownik terminów literackich*, p. 462.

¹⁴Sandauer writes about *mise en abyme* poetics, applying the term to the Polish humanities. See *Samobójstwo Mitrydatesa*, p. 372 onwards.

¹⁵Of course it is continued in postmodernism, although it stems from different premises there and is connected to different ideas of a creator or a work of art.

¹⁶Ibidem.

¹⁷Especially if one pays attention to splitting up poetics from within, which is done by Gustave Flaubert, typically when describing the fantasies of his protagonists.

meaning it means ‘the cognitive abilities of art’ – and then it is strictly connected to the poetic *mise en abyme*¹⁸.

The meta-reflectivity of works of art often stems from questions concerning epistemology and its limits. In its most radical version it suggests that art is only able to attempt at its own products¹⁹. For the search for “the essence of poetry” may prove to be a variation of an ontological reflection in general (does the essence of literature exist – and how?), which in turn leads to the basic issue of realism – what can be understood, and how? what is approachable for us and what is it like? Potential answers to these questions are conveyed through the means which are adequate for the conceptualization of this reality: thus if there is an optimistic, rational conviction regarding its intelligibility and objectivity, it will be recorded with the clearest, simplest language possible. However, if one believes in its profoundness and the existence of hidden spaces – it is possible to use a symbol suggesting the existence of meanings which are empirically unavailable. The character of realist style may prove to be simply an analogon of ideas regarding non-literary reality – a set of tools and methods which mimic the postulated character of the external world. The dynamic character of realism is then determined by the changing visions and conditions of reality, which extend and modify the denotation of a concept depending on general knowledge, research paradigm, artistic production – or even the noticeable *Stimmung* of the period.

Obviously it is a very broad understanding of realism and which dilutes its historical-literary boundaries, nevertheless in such a – significantly extended – perspective it clearly merges also with lyric, although this is a far more complicated issue. For originally realism was strongly associated with lyric – as Henryk Markiewicz wrote, “the close relationship between poetry and philosophical reflection was the reason for transplanting, almost simultaneously, the concepts of <<realism>> and <idealism>> on the literary ground”²⁰ [translation mine, P.Z.]. However, at the same time it was noticed that the “realistic” trend in the art of word significantly differs from “idealistic” trends, which focus on the subjective “I” of the author²¹, and “realist poetry” refers rather to the descriptive or historical output. Thus realism seems to be impossible to reconcile with the contemporary dominant model of lyric poetry, focused on the individual perspective rather than on the objective object of cognition. However, it would seem that in the light of transformations in mentality which doubtlessly have taken place since mid-19th century, formulating cognitive abilities – also in the lyric version – is not justifiable any more. If we reserve the term “reality” only for this objectively (which was rather inter-subjective from the contemporary perspective) cognizable experience, the issue seems to be obvious – indeed, lyricism focuses on subjective experiences. Nevertheless humanities (in relations to, for example, the affective turn) notices that the expanse of emotions and subjective sensations is by no means any less “realistic” than the material world.

¹⁸It is also worth highlighting that before realism became an aesthetic term, it had gone a long way – from medieval scholasticism, through the Enlightenment theories which claimed that the subject of cognition is objective, to „sensible attitudes”, see H. Markiewicz, *Realizm*, [in:] *Słownik literatury polskiej XIX wieku*, edited by J. Bachórz i A. Kowalczykova, Wrocław 1991, p. 816.

¹⁹Postmodernism honed such ideas, as it suggested that works of art functioned only within their own, closed circle.

²⁰H. Markiewicz, p. 816.

²¹Ibidem.

It is also worth noticing that even the extremely “subjectified” lyricism operates through the means of a language, which is beyond any doubt an intersubjective communication tool. From the textual perspective even the objective material world is involved with various discourses anyway, which foreclose the direct cognition – according to (among others) hermeneutics of suspicions, innocence is only a delusion and a rhetorical game. Art cannot simply mimic “that what is,” because there is no objective reality: there are mechanisms of power hidden behind experience, power which we can see through the prism of available tools and dictionaries, from perspectives which are imposed and modified in accordance with the interests of oppressors. Getting tangled up in arguments between humanities and analytical philosophy goes far beyond the scope of the present paper – however, it is worth noticing that modern philosophical research goes back to the discussions concerning the character of reality, going as far as ironic convictions that “everything that exists, exists”²², as well as speculations associated with Quentin Meillassoux²³.

Secondly then – the issue of the means of transition remains a problem. The term “realist poetry” has been applied to works characterized by little hermeticity, describing parts of “concrete” reality (e.g. specific historical events) with lyric language. However, 20th-century theories have already shown that all poetry is based on a metaphor of a kind, and expecting it to be understandable, simple and direct means defying its fundamental characteristics, which, interestingly, has been a frequent proposal in arguments resembling criticism of socialist realism²⁴. Metaphoricalness does not deny its close relationship with reality in any way: for modern linguistics proves that we think metaphorically also in our everyday life, although admittedly the difficulty level and the character of poetic metaphors are very different from what we use in our everyday speech²⁵.

Looking at a metaphor from the perspective of its “inopijność”²⁶ – for if every metaphor should be treated as a means for making up for some noticeable language deficiencies, as well as a definition of a certain element of the experienced world which so far has not been named, one may conclude that metaphors carry a huge cognitive potential, which means that so does poetry. According to Kazimierz Stępnik, a metaphor creates opportunities for cognition²⁷. Although this may provoke a renewal of the modernist discussion concerning whether this way separate, autonomous poetic worlds are created, as well it may induce considerations regarding the possible attitude of those worlds to commonly understood reality (for example in the textual perspective – if everything is a text, why not accept the “real” existence of linguistic space?). In a way it does create a bridge between “unreal” poetry, operating through an aesthetic, difficult language, and often referring to abstract issues, and the external world.

²²W.V.O. Quine, *On what there is*, [in:] *From a logical point of view. 9 logico-philosophical essays*. Harvard University Press, 1980.

²³See *Après la finitude. Essai sur la nécessité de la contingence*, A. Badiou, 2006.

²⁴See J. Gutorow, *O poezji niezrozumiałej*, [in:] „Tygodnik Powszechny” 2000, No 35.

²⁵See for example G. Lakoff, M. Johnsen, *Metaphors we live by*, Chicago 2003.

²⁶A term coined by Bolesław Leśmian. It means that there is a lack of an adequate word to define something, which causes a semantic shift in another word which is supposed to make up for the missing term [translator’s note]

²⁷See K. Stępnik, *Filozofia metafory*, Lublin 1988, p. 33 onwards.

In *mise en abyme* works the problem of the character of the object of cognition is however simpler to such an extent that getting to know the work of art itself or an analysis of one's own psyche or artistic activity seem to be among the least questionable "real" references for poetry. Due to performative or somatic theories it is no longer possible to ignore the author, who ceases to be a certain textual role, becoming a material and an affective entity. Of course a lot depends here on the adopted perspective – different methodologies vary in conceptualizing the character of literature and the processes of its spreading and receiving. Nevertheless, artistic activity, understood as a set of artifacts, exist empirically and inter-subjectively together with the author, and thus – some reality is being named. Of course the question remains how those concepts will be presented: lyricism has many styles, and hermeticity is not a determinant of poetic speech²⁸. It is worth highlighting here again the correspondence between the definition or notion of reality and attempts at mapping it in literature. If we believe in clarity, comprehensibility and knowability of the world, it is reflected in artistic means; but when we believe in its fundamental unknowability, difficulties with understanding, explaining and interpreting, this may result in a complicated, unclear literary language. What would happen in a situation when reality is inexplicable and defies cognitive habits? Would a language that in a way mimics the features which are ascribed to it be more congruent?

The most radical example here would be of course the phenomenon of trauma: is it right to argue for any way of discussing someone else's suffering or extreme situations, or creating logical, coherent narratives about tragic events? This problem has been undertaken by post-Holocaust studies, which in a way considered the value of a testimony, as well as an ethical evaluation of an aesthetic representation of the Holocaust²⁹. One may however ask a question from a completely different perspective: what about the Internet and the new media, as well as the non-virtual reality, which has already been significantly affected by technologizing? What about the modern over-stimulation, dispersion, or the aesthetics of buzz? They are doubtlessly a part of reality, even if this reality is virtual. Cybernetics also remodels the whole ontology of a work of art and the concepts of authorship and subjectivity, forcing us to consider the "confinement" and autonomy of hypertext or performative works, which do not have the only one, final, and fixed form, and which are created no longer due to an individual's artistic creation, but through dedicated programs. The change in the character of "reality" in the face of the advancing technologization (as well as marketization or globalization) is widely discussed in the latest poetry – similar topics can be found in the works by Konrad Góra, Maciej Taranek, Katarzyna Fetlińska or Radosław Jurczak

In relation to the changing ideas of reality one can ask questions about the realism of various artistic products, rather using them to test and extend the definition than covering the extent which was commonly accepted several decades ago. Literature itself should also be given a voice, as it provides interesting examples illustrating the practical dimension of the relationships between *mise en abyme* and realism. This happens, for example, in the poems

²⁸It should be noted that even contemporary incomprehensible poetry is (in)comprehensible only for someone – hermeticism is not an absolute value. See J. Gutorow.

²⁹See for example A. Ubertowska, *Świadectwo – trauma – głos. Literackie reprezentacje Holokaustu*, Cracow 2007 (especially Chapter IV – *W kręgu „mowy przemieszczonej”*. *Trauma. Tożsamość, narracja*).

by the late Tomasz Pułka, a representative of the contemporary incomprehensible poetry. The poet often used the theme of the new media, considering the role of the language in a technologized world, also using glitch aesthetic and re-writing strategies. The famous “incomprehensibility” of his poetry can be to some extent seen exactly as a result of overstimulating and trapping the subject in sign systems, programs, and various cultural texts, in which individuals find it increasingly more difficult to pull themselves together and to communicate – thus they are left with juggling with words and wearing a trickster mask³⁰. There are also more serious works to be found in Pułka’s poetry, works that problematize this negative dimension of the experienced reality, and the *mise en abyme* poems may prove to be of invaluable help in interpreting all of Pułka’s work. Meta-reflexive contexts of his works offer an unexpected help in interpreting, as well as a starting point: in the face of unclear references of a given work – one thing remains obvious. It is its own space, or simply art’s space.

The poem *Kochana Liryko* opens the 2012 book of poems *Cennik*. This poem can become not only a perfect example of the already discussed relationships between *mise en abyme* and realism; it also shows how our way of thinking about *mise en abyme* and the sense of literary realism in the face of various transformations, to which our reality – including the whole humanities – is subjected. As we read:

Gdybyś zdjęła powinności i wymyła nerwy
 obserwując drżenie między akcentami
 – tu zęby trafiają na grudkę krajobrazu –
 łykanymi na czczo z okruchami lustra,
 mogłabyś wyznaczyć się do odpowiedzi i
 udzielić mi pytań, jakie tobą stawiam,
 gdy chcę lekceważyć zamiast być przed
 czasem, gdy na siebie czekam.³¹

[If you took off the duties and cleaned the nerves
 while watching the tremor between accents
 – here the teeth hit upon a clump of landscape –
 swallowed on an empty stomach with mirror crumbs,
 you could designate yourself for the answer and
 give me some questions, which I ask using you,
 when I want to ignore instead of being ahead of
 time, when I am waiting for myself.]³²

³⁰The same attitude can be found also in other poets from the young generation, for example in the already mentioned Radosław Jurczak. However, Pułka is both interesting and changeable – although Jurczak, his junior, consistently merges humor with seriousness, his poetry is not characterized by everyday reality, simplicity and complete lack of ironic detachment, which can be observed in Pułka’s poetry.

³¹*Wybieganie z rajcu. 2006-2012*, edited by J. Mueller and K. Sztafa, Stronie Śląskie 2017, p. 181.

³²Translated by PZ.

Even the title proves that a huge change has taken place in the *mise en abyme* way of thinking. A poem about poetry no longer needs to be entitled *ars poetica*, nor be a normative, systematic lecture of one's views on the essence of literature. In the case of the poem quoted above, we are dealing rather with a record of the emotional attitude of the creative subject towards art. This affective dimension of meta-reflection also shows new contexts for autonomy, which is associated with *mise en abyme*: although usually it was associated with the fight for the independence of art from reality, releasing it from all the external duties and postulated autotelism, the newest poetry often regains through it the space for the subject.

In the poem this happens through the atmosphere of intimacy which is introduced through the similarity of the title to a love letter, but also through the clearly stressed creative "I". Thus lyricism is no longer something abstract but, firstly, something to which the subject has a personal attitude and with which he or she has an emotional relationship, and secondly, it is no longer subordinate to the author-creator, gaining its own, separate subjectivity already with the opening personification. Thus the poem gains a clear ethical dimension: all the products with which we interact are no longer subordinate to us (here lyricism is not "mine", i.e. – "belonging to me"), but they engage in an interesting mutual relationship with us. The artist, although still seen as someone who creates (as opposed to, for example, codifying in the role of Barthes's Scriptor, or programing in relation to cybernetic contexts of Pułka's poetry), is nevertheless no longer a modernist creator, revealing his brilliant individuality.

The whole poem refers precisely to this personified literary model. There is thus no rule to "take the duties" off lyricism and "clean its nerves": this can be done only by lyricism itself – thus it has a choice, which is suggested by the conditional. Literature becomes here something partially independent from the author, although it is still tightly connected to it: it would seem that this is no longer a power relationship, but a relationship of a different kind. For first and foremost poetry has no duties – it has its own subjective self-agency and independence, which provide it with the possibility to resist the author's intentions and external consequences. The proposal to "clean the nerves" also suggests that contemporary lyricism can give up on the historical concepts regarding poetry, thus dissociating itself from high registers and grandeur, advising to calm it down – or, according to another interpretation of that verse, granting it with a therapeutic dimension (for it is possible to "clean [one's own] nerves" as well as someone else's: the author's or the recipient). Hence literature loses its sacral character, instead gaining some autonomy, which allows the recipient to have an intimate, personal relationship with it. Thus "the tremor between accents" gains more importance. It seems to be a signal for the presence of the subject in a text which is somewhat independent from him. For accents are a way of putting stress on something by the speaker: tremor suggests a specific, psychosomatic reaction of the person creating/reading on the text (for example agitation, aggravation). It turns out that art's influence on the subject – which both creates it and consumes it – is more important than any other commitments of art.

However, what is interesting is that those „tremors“ of the subject are the link between literature with other elements of reality. "A clump of landscape" can be understood as postulating the mapping of the external world by realist poetics: creative work merges with what

is transcendental in relation to it through the recipient (of poetry). This poem expresses the impossibility of any subsequent belief in a complete reference – capturing with the words of reality or total cognition. However, what is left of this reality are clumps: there is thus no doubt that it is possible to include at least some elements of the external world in poetry. In the subsequent verses those clumps are mixed with “mirror crumbs”. A mirror is first of all, a fixed metaphor of artistic media: it connotes any forms of expression or prisms through which we can access the conveyed meanings³³. Thereby Pułka points our attention to the inherent element of the aesthetic transformation of the content in literature: it is unable to convey the content without artistic processing, and what is more – this is not its task. A mirror is nevertheless also associated with mimetic theories – the desire for art to faithfully mimic reality. Only crumbs are left of those ideas; the poem does not represent the belief in the possibility of accessing reality through words or copying it with artistic means. On the other hand, neither does it express any regret because of the failure of possible attempts. The fact that the above-mentioned realist and mimetic ideas are practices in a fragmentary way is accepted here: for even if poetry does not include landscape (which is likely a synecdoche of experience in general), it will include its crumb – hence the mirror appears only in crumbs.

However, it is precisely the chewing of those lumps and crumbs that evokes the above-mentioned tremor of the subject – their emotional or somatic reaction to contact with a recognizable, tangible element of reality. Thus poetry is far more realist here – it should be highlighted again that the poem discusses the relationship with reality precisely in the field of lyric poetry, which is being eradicated from realist poetics – as long as it refers to something of significance to the recipient, relates to their experience, or as long it problematizes their relationship with the outside world. Connecting with something that is non-artistic, without a medium i.e. a person who creates or consumes, is impossible. Consequently, we talk about realism in lyric poetry only when the process of reading together with the produced and interpreted meanings of literature – in some way – correspond to the experienced reality, when – in some way – they define it. We should also pay attention to the purely physical vision of consuming literature that the poem offers: uttering words is associated with biting or swallowing, and so reading (or writing) is no longer a sacralized activity, instead becoming something mundane, simple, even nourishing, useful.

Questions regarding poetry’s self-reference and autonomy return in the next part of the poem. Lyric poetry is responsible for the self-agency in answering questions – no external concept or subject’s power is able to force it to accept any tasks or beliefs. Thus literature is seen as a partially independent entity: one can interpret this vision in different ways, but it seems that it is not about the return of modernist essential ideas, which would force to see artistic creation as an element of some other, autonomous reality, to which the subject has not found access yet. However, this may suggest that artistic creation is never either fully dependent on the author, or fully separate from him or her. The first possible interpretation may again refer to ethics: as Emmanuel Lévinas taught, ethical contact with any element of

³³See M.H. Abrams, *The Mirror and the Lamp: Romantic Theory and the Critical Tradition*, 1953, especially Chapter II).

reality is impossible if it is denied its own, unique subjectivity³⁴. For the relationship with poetry not to be a relationship of power, but – for example – Derridean anti-hierarchical, democratic friendship³⁵, lyric poetry must possess at least partial autonomy. The other way to understanding the personification in the poem is fixed in the context of *mise en abyme*. For “lyric poetry” is impossible to describe in one poem: it consists of a plethora of beliefs, applications, theories or conventions. A single meta-reflexive poem is unable to express the “essence” of literature, as it remains a stasis of many ideas and works, both modern and past. Individual poems can then only suggest the direction for activity of literature-as-a-whole.

However, if lyric poetry designated itself – for its “decision” is not dependent on the activity of one author, but rather on the whole writing community, culture, intellectuality, tradition, social, economic, political conditions – for the answer, it could finally give some questions, which the subject asks using it. For first of all – it would gain cognitive abilities, even those on a micro-scale: it would be able to provide knowledge or experiences necessary for at least one subject, that is – the author. In the face of integrated modernist ideas those would no longer be questions regarding absolute cognition or approaching reality understood in one way or another. Lyric poetry would mostly be applied to individual cognition, providing the individual with explanations regarding the world experienced by him or her, as well as their own personality.

For we are not dealing with a modern, self-aware and purely rational subject here, but rather with a person who has psycho-physical reactions and “is waiting for himself” – he only creates himself and tries to understand himself. This “waiting for oneself” is then completely different from Cartesian concepts, for it suggests that constructing one’s own subjectivity is a constant process, whereas creating often subconsciously evokes the contents which are unclear to ourselves prior to their codification. Artistic creation and the subsequent consumption of literature are then helpful in the process of gaining (self)knowledge: when the subject “ignores instead of being ahead of time”, it takes a subordinate position towards literature – (self)cognition does not take place prior to the creative process, but after it. Writing is then a situation of noticing (to some extent – subconsciously) potential problems and reflections, which can be solved only later – as long as poetry designates itself for answering to them, and thus as long as it contains what the unaware subject is looking for in the dark.

³⁴See *Totalité et infini. Essai sur l'extériorité*, 1961.

³⁵See *Politiques de l'amitié*, Paris, Galilée, 1994

Lyric poetry does not give answers here – it asks questions. This means that when it is created and read it makes individuals aware of the questions which require interpretative efforts or a detailed reflection. Thus the problem of insufficiency returns here: poetry does not offer ready-made solutions, it only creates conditions for cognition; it proves to be that what makes us aware of the existence of the questions which have not been asked yet, which only through the process of codification and reading will be noticed as baffling, intriguing issues. It also excuses the “obscurity” of Tomasz Pułka’s lyric poetry – for how can it be clear and understandable when it is only a tool for learning about the world which remains unclear and obscure?

translated by Małgorzata Olsza

KEYWORDS

TOMASZ PUŁKA

Polish modern poetry

ABSTRACT:

The paper is an attempt at drawing the relationships between realism and *mise en abyme*. Starting with Artur Sandauer's concept, who understood the development of *mise en abyme* poetics as a result of the demise of realist ideas, the text discusses the connections that take place between those seemingly contradictory tendencies in the history of literature, referring to philosophy and linguistics. The proposed theses are supported by an interpretation of the poem "Kochana liryko" by Tomasz Pułka which shows how modern Polish poetry positions itself against the possibility to experience reality in art and the very definition of art.

realism

mise en abyme

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