

Hermeneutics of Admiration

Paweł Dziel

ORCID: 0000-0002-3814-438X

John D. Caputo, describing his hermeneutics as cold, abandons faith in the senses. It is hermeneutics that has lost its innocence; it is no longer the activity of the subject, but what haunts him and forces him to interpret at the least expected moment. However, this imperative does not guarantee any clear answer. There is no secret (which is actually the only secret)¹. The hermeneutic approach proposed by Adrian Gleń in the book *Andrzej Stasiuk. Istnienie*² [Andrzej Stasiuk. Existence] distances itself from such radical solutions, maintaining a strong conviction that the process of dealing with a work of literature allows the reader to get closer to the secret, or to even reach it.

Gleń consistently explores the hermeneutic tradition in literary studies. As early as his post-doctoral book, *“W tej latarni...”. Późna twórczość Mirona Białoszewskiego w perspektywie hermeneutycznej* [“In this lighthouse...”. Late works by Miron Białoszewski from the hermeneutic perspective] (2004) he focuses on Martin Heidegger’s philosophy. The monograph *Bycie – słowo – człowiek. Inspiracje heideggerowskie w literaturze* [Being – word – man. Heidegger inspirations in literature] (2007), where he includes not only theoretical-literary considerations, but also critical practice, is another manifestation of this approach (focusing mainly on poetry by Tymoteusz Karpowicz, Miron Białoszewski and Czesław Miłosz). In *Istnienie i literatura (notatnik hermeneuty)* [Existence and literature. A hermeneutist’s notebook] (2010) he proposes the term “personalistic hermeneutics” to describe his type of literary criticism. He continues in *Do-prawdy? Studia i szkice o polskiej literaturze najnowszej* [Oh really? Studies and sketches in contemporary Polish literature] (2012), in which he combines critical-literary discourse with a fascination for the analyzed works. *“Marzenie, które czyni poetą...”. Autentyczność i empatia w dziele literackim Juliana Kornhausera* [“Dream, that makes one a poet...”. Authenticity and empathy in the works by Julian Kornhauser] is an attempt at defining the ethical and metaphysical dimension of Kornhauser’s poetry, largely referring to such categories as engagement and authenticity. In *Czułość. Studia i eseje o literaturze najnowszej* [Tenderness. Studies and essays on contemporary literature]

¹ Michał Januszkiewicz, *W-koło hermeneutyki literackiej* [A-round literary hermeneutics] (Warszawa: PWN, 2007), 133-134.

² Adrian Gleń, *Andrzej Stasiuk. Istnienie* (Łódź: Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Łódzkiego, 2019).

(2014) Gleń employs his preferred model of literary criticism, characterized by openness to “foreign” language. “*Wiernie, choć własnym językiem...*” *Rzecz o krytyce literackiej Juliana Kornhausera* [“Faithfully, although in own language...” On Julian Kornhauser’s literary criticism] (2015) is a study in the so-called “empathetic criticism” of Kornhauser’s works. When characterizing Gleń’s work one should bear in mind that he has published several volumes of poetry.

The book about Andrzej Stasiuk is unique among Gleń’s academic achievements. Written in a personal (or even intimate) tone, it is a bold realization of what he claims the duties of literary scholars are. Such a formula was surely facilitated by the concept of the series by Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Łódzkiego “Projekt: egzystencja i literatura” [Project: existence and literature], as a part of which the book was published. Biography, identity, experience – these are the major categories for discussing literature used in the concept. The academic board overseeing the series (Marzena Woźniak-Łabieniec, Przemysław Dakowicz and Arkadiusz Morawiec) not only sees works of literature as “existential projects”, but also – significantly – as the very process of studying literature. Hence, attempts at writing self, registering own experiences (cultural, political, historical, as well as corporal, sensual, spiritual), and the very process of studying literature – all constituting present-day literary scholars – are highlighted in the series in the context of reception of a literary text³. Moreover, the series offers academic books for laymen, hence a lot of care has been given to making sure that they are approachable, avoiding specialist terms, traditional academic style, and highly theoretical discussions⁴. Taking advantage of this methodological “loosening”, Gleń resigns from the form of a traditional study, which analyzes the whole body of work of a given author, instead focusing only on those texts which he probably finds personal⁵.

The book consists of four chapters, each with an intriguing title: 1) *Auto-bio-grafia* [Auto-biography], 2) *Bycie* [Being], 3) *Niebycie* [Nonbeing], 4) *Bycie Re-Aktywacja* [Being Re-Activated]. In the first chapter, he decisively cuts himself off from analyzing Stasiuk’s works in terms of

³ Additional information on the series can be found on the website of Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Łódzkiego. See “Projekt: Egzystencja i Literatura”, <https://wydawnictwo.uni.lodz.pl/serie/seria/projekt-egzystencja-i-literatura/> (date of access: 10.01.2021).

⁴ See a discussion with authors from the series “Projekt: Egzystencja i Literatura”: Anna Legeżyńska, Tomasz Garbol and Adrian Gleń during 17. Opolska Jesień Literacka. “*Życie i literatura: Hartwig, Miłosz, Stasiuk*” [Life and literature: Hartwig, Miłosz, Stasiuk], <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NwKQmPMU2BQ&t=1501s> (date of access: 10.01.2021). Titles of the books from the series (seven so far) are also noteworthy; each book describes the works it analyzes with one word: Agnieszka Kałowska, *Witkacy. Etyka* [Ethics] (2016), Marzena Woźniak-Łabieniec, *Jarosław Marek Rymkiewicz. Metafizyka* [Metaphysics] (2017), Maciej Urbanowski, *Stanisław Brzozowski. Nowoczesność* [Modernity] (2017), Anna Legeżyńska, *Julia Hartwig. Wdzięczność* [Gratefulness] (2017), Tomasz Garbol, *Czesław Miłosz. Los* [Fate] (2018), Agnieszka Kramkowska-Dąbrowska, *Janusz Krasiński. Świadcstwo* [Testimony] (2020). To describe the whole interpretative concept with one word is not easy; it imposes a concise, perhaps even aphoristic way of formulating thoughts. Gleń reveals that he was originally going to entitle the book *Żeby bardziej być* [In order to be more], and the main reason why he did not was, in fact, this editing concept. See Gleń, *Andrzej Stasiuk. Istnienie*, 14-15. The vibrant cover designs by Katarzyna Turkowska, which correspond with the contents of the books, also deserve a comment. The photographs of authors are diverse color-wise, with a characteristic graphic element – a dot signaling an interpretative perspective: in the case of Andrzej Stasiuk (like in Jarosław Marek Rymkiewicz and Stanisław Brzozowski) an eye is distinguished in this way (Witkacy – lips, Julia Hartwig – an earring). Thus the design creatively complements research theses.

⁵ As a result, the book does not cover such important works as *Biały kruk* [Rarity] (1995), *Opowieści galicyjskie* [Stories from Galicia] (1995), *Dziewięć* [Nine] (1999) or *Dojczland* (2007). However, first and foremost Gleń omits Stasiuk’s official debut, *Mury Hebronu* [Walls of Hebron] (1992), which for many critics is in fact crucial for understanding Andrzej Stasiuk’s writing strategy. Moreover, Gleń mentions neither Stasiuk’s early poetic works, nor plays. It should also be mentioned that Gleń does not include a clearly autobiographical book *Jak zostałem pisarzem (próba autobiografii intelektualnej)* [How I became a writer (an attempt at an intellectual autobiography)] (1998), nor an extensive interview conducted by Dorota Wodecka *Życie to jednak strata jest* [Life is actually a loss] (2015). This is not an accusation – I would only like to clearly stress that Gleń’s choices are highly subjective.

such methodological orientations as postcolonialism, ethical criticism, geopoetics or cultural literary theory (depreciating them as “fashionable”). He also questions the validity of applying the strategy of an autobiographical reception (rather narrowly understood) to Stasiuk’s prose. He claims that “the narrative truth” of Stasiuk’s works should be seen as “testaments of individual sensitivity and worldview, testaments which clearly belong to the narrative art, in which myth and phantasm belong to the basic instrumentarium”⁶.

Chapter 2, *Bycie*, is organized according to the “East” category. Gleń largely refers to the 2014 book on Stasiuk with the same title, trying to define the empathetic and ethical vision of the writer. On the one hand, according to Gleń, the East as presented by Stasiuk from the geo-historical perspective is “a huge metonymy of our fear, an archetypical picture of submission and terror”⁷. On the other, Gleń claims that the East is an “arche-rule of Stasiuk’s thinking, the source of personal and separate experience of reality”⁸. At the same time Gleń self-identifies in those perceptions, experiencing longing for a lost rule of being; he thus highlights a very personal dimension of the metaphor: “Hence I see the *East* as a complement, a journey to the fundamentals of seeing oneself and reality. This is why I go even lower, taking «yellow» roads, I choose paths which I would like to lead me across Central Europe, known from *Jadąc do Babadag* [Going to Babadag], and only then to the *East*, imperceptibly to all customs officers”⁹.

In the same (and the most extensive) chapter, Gleń discusses the issue of life, important in Stasiuk, presenting it as the major metaphor of existence. He also juxtaposes numerous references to religion and metaphysical issues. However, first and foremost he incorporates key elements of Heidegger’s philosophy into his interpretative process: criticism of the Western model of thinking, threats posed by technology detaching us from the natural order, attachment to land, using tools, fear of death and loss.

Niebycie offers an analysis of the 2012 collection of short stories *Grochów*, whose major theme is the death of the narrator’s loved ones (grandmother, friend, author), as well as a dog¹⁰. Referring to Heidegger’s works, Gleń discusses the mechanism of denial, “talking over” the inevitable death. In Stasiuk, thinking about the past, movement, storytelling are common ways of denying the sense of an ending. However, contrary to Heidegger, Gleń decides to strongly accentuate the fact that Stasiuk’s protagonists take the side of life, existing at any cost; he stresses the strong protest against death and decline.

⁶ Gleń, *Andrzej Stasiuk. Istnienie*, 31.

⁷ Gleń, 54.

⁸ Gleń.

⁹ Gleń, 56-57.

¹⁰ Gleń writes: “A dog’s presence is still required, even this ‘cooling body’ participates in the heat flow, which constitutes a symptom of existence”, Gleń, 149. He analyzed the issue of ‘animal existence’ in Stasiuk’s prose. The following passage is also noteworthy: “In the East a combination of the human and the animalistic reveals itself, faces grown into the world like a perennial plant, rooted deeply and independently into places from which they cannot be detached, places which are impossible to imagine without them. In the face of this nothingness, of history monsters, of matter falling apart, people become as if being more. Existing together, inside, poor and humble, strong with the wisdom of land”, Gleń, 74. Gleń’s conclusions promisingly correspond with attempts at a non-anthropocentric reading of Martin Heidegger. Among others, *Radykalny nonantropocentryzm. Martin Heidegger i ekologia głęboka* [Radical nonanthropocentrism. Martin Heidegger and deep ecology] (Warszawa: Wydawnictwa Uniwersytetu Warszawskiego, Rzeszów: Wyższa Szkoła Informatyki i Zarządzania, 2018) is noteworthy.

The final chapter, *Bycie Re-Aktywacja*, continues the discussion of the issues raised in previous chapters. Gleń clearly displays his philosophical inclinations, discussing such categories as authenticity, lingering, nothingness, emptiness. The ontological state of lingering in Stasiuk's works defined as "motionlessness", as well as observations regarding the relations between existing and memory, deserve attention. Remarks related to Stasiuk's photographic sensitivity, which constitutes a kind of bridge between what is and what used to be, are interesting: "Just like literature stores images, photographs never stop mediating in this movement from «back in the day» to «now». Every visual sign able to turn on an image at the basis of past experience guarantees un-forgetting"¹¹. Gleń is trying to prove that in Stasiuk a sensual image precedes any cognition, and the filter of photographic (but also pictorial) images guarantees depth and genuineness of existence, constituting a peculiar private myth related to the effort to preserve the material.

First, I would like to refer to issues related to autobiographism. Gleń strongly favors reading Stasiuk's prose "without any biographical compulsion". What does that actually mean? According to Gleń, Stasiuk's narrative, with its vividly shaped "I", is deprived of unambiguous identification. Hence, such categories as "experience" and "encounter" are important – although they originate in individual (authentic) experience, they are not exhausted by it. In this case the source experience rather indicates a metaphysical generalization, being in general; it is unrelated to autobiographical forms which refer to concrete testaments. For Gleń, an autobiographical reception is suspicious, uncertain. He proposes seeing the authenticity¹² of Stasiuk's writing on the basis of a writing convention alone, and of the authentication strategies used by the author¹³. He claims that "there is not a greedy or flirtatious author's ego that demands followers, but a tender and sylleptic 'I', which – by moving away and suspending the issue of identifying itself with the author, does not kill him off, thus legitimizing its stories and reflections from a life falling apart, which we believe to be authentic for this very reason"¹⁴ in the center of Stasiuk's narrative. Unfortunately, Gleń does not develop this significant observation regarding the syllepticity of a literary text, cutting his views on autobiographism at the most interesting moment.

¹¹Gleń, *Andrzej Stasiuk. Istnienie*, 181. The term "un-forgetting" – significant for understanding Gleń's argumentation, unobvious, and culturally specific – should be commented upon. It was first used probably by Cyprian Kamil Norwid in the poem *A Dorio ad Phrygium* (1872), and later popularized by Hubert Orłowski. It is a process similar to *anamnesis*, i.e. referring to memories hidden from a protagonist. However, "un-forgetting" is not about inborn contents (like in Plato's theory of cognition): it about acquired ones. As opposed to collecting medical history, i.e. medical anamnesis, it is not a result of a subject-"external" diagnosis – it is a result of individual work. Associated also with the Christian Eucharist, anamnesis is "making a memento", i.e. commemorating known objects, while "un-forgetting" is extracting what is unknown to the protagonist themselves. The phenomenon cannot be related to the process of "remembering", i.e. restoring what a protagonist knows to have once existed in their memory; "un-forgetting" refers to forgotten areas of memory. Hence, it can be said that the moment of remembering that something is forgotten is the beginning of the "un-forgetting" process. See Przemysław Czaplinski, Kornelia Kończal, "Odpominanie" [Un-forgetting], in *Modi memorandi. Leksykon kultury pamięci* [A lexicon of memory culture], edited by Magdalena Saryusz-Wolska, Robert Traba, in cooperation with Joanna Kalicka (Warszawa: Wydawnictwo Naukowe Scholar, 2014), 301.

¹²Extending the "authenticity" category – so important for Gleń (and used in his other works) – to accommodate for Olga Szmidt's conclusions, would be interesting; in her studies in authenticity in the 21st-century culture, Szmidt decided to focus on the works by such philosophers as Jean-Jacques Rousseau, Henry David Thoreau or Marshall Berman, rather than on Charles Taylor, Theodor Adorn, Martin Heidegger or Søren Kierkegaard. See Olga Szmidt, *Autentyczność: stan krytyczny. Problem autentyczności w kulturze XXI wieku* [Authenticity: a critical state. The problem of authenticity in the culture of the 21st century] (Kraków: Universitas, 2019).

¹³Gleń, *Andrzej Stasiuk. Istnienie*, 42-47.

¹⁴Gleń, 50.

In this context, objections raised by Piotr Sobolczyk in his review of Gleń's book on Miron Białoszewski¹⁵ remain valid. He points out that by rejecting the autobiographical method, Gleń actually perceives it very narrowly, mostly in relation to *Autobiographical Pact* by Philippe Lejeune. Sobolczyk signals the need to consider other, more recent autobiographical methodologies by referring to the "sylleptic" concept of agency proposed by Ryszard Nycz, and more precisely to the sylleptic "I" trope in a text¹⁶. According to Nycz, the sylleptic "I" functions in two different ways at the same time – both as genuine, empirical, authentic, and fabricated, textual, fictional-narrative¹⁷. Elżbieta Winiecka concludes: "Maintaining a homogenous, and thus one-dimensional perspective is practically impossible in literature, which by definition introduces a discrepancy between the expressing, the expressed, and the textual «I». Creating a suggestion of this textual-experiential homogeneity is the goal of an author who puts himself in the center of described events"¹⁸. Adrian Gleń, by combining Stasiuk's narrative with the sylleptic "I", actually places this work in the center of the methodological discussion on autobiographism.

Moreover, Piotr Sobolczyk implies that the clear autobiographism-hermeneutics opposition is unfounded – both from the perspective of Schleiermacher, and much later, twentieth-century concepts. Gleń highlights the eclectic, "absorbing" character of hermeneutics; for example, the influence of the autobiographical method on the development of Paul Ricoeur's thought¹⁹. Thus Gleń, by discrediting "biographical compulsions" so decisively, at the same time disassembles the significant role played by studies in biographism in the process of forming hermeneutic methodology²⁰.

Issues regarding autobiographism are also related to another important topic in the book – Gleń's approach to critical literary discourse. In the prologue he writes:

¹⁵Adrian Gleń, „W tej latarni...”. *Późna twórczość Mirona Białoszewskiego w perspektywie hermeneutycznej* (Opole: Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Opolskiego, 2004).

¹⁶Piotr Sobolczyk, "Hermeneutyka tak, ale jaka?" [Hermeneutics, but what kind?], *Teksty Drugie* 1/2 (2006): 152-153.

¹⁷Ryszard Nycz, *Język modernizmu. Prolegomena historycznoliterackie* [Language of modernism. Historical-literary studies considerations] (Toruń: Wydawnictwo Naukowe Uniwersytetu Mikołaja Kopernika, 2013), 114.

¹⁸Elżbieta Winiecka, "O sylleptyczności tekstu literackiego" [On the syllepticity of a literary text], *Pamiętnik Literacki* 4 (2004): 146.

¹⁹Sobolczyk, "Hermeneutyka tak, ale jaka?": 154. Paul Ricoeur's struggles with studies in autobiography have been analyzed in detail by Zofia Mitosek. See Zofia Mitosek, "Hermeneuta i autobiografia" [Hermeneutics and autobiography], *Teksty Drugie* 3 (2002): 137-151.

²⁰Anna Legeżyńska has recently refreshed this issue in the context of the development of Polish literary studies. See Anna Legeżyńska, "'Wystarczy mocno i wytrwale zastanawiać się nad jednym życiem...'. Biografistyka jako hermeneutyczne wyzwanie", [It suffices to deeply and persistently consider one life...'. Biography as a hermeneutic challenge], *Teksty Drugie* 1 (2019): 13-27. Wilhelm Dilthey, a key figure in the hermeneutic tradition, should be mentioned here. The concept of analyzing biographies of individuals played an important role in the shaping of his "philosophy of life". For Dilthey, letters, documents, and literary works by distinguished individuals constituted an opportunity for making the products of their spiritual life objective, and hence for learning man's capabilities. However, Dilthey gradually extended the scope of objectivization of human life, focusing on studying history and reflection on historical processes. The hermeneutic character of seeking knowledge about man made Dilthey perceive historical manifestations of human existence as written texts, because he assumed that human products express human life, and as such provide an insight into his business. A hermeneutic understanding of Dilthey's concept allows one to go beyond individual limitations; however, in principle the ultimate results – i.e. learning about man as a whole – are not achieved, for these are the principles of metaphysics (rejected by Dilthey). Dilthey sees man from the perspective of action, not contemplation. In such a conceptualization, understanding is always limited. See Włodzimierz Lorenc, *Hermeneutyczne koncepcje człowieka 2. Dilthey, Misch, Bollnow* [Hermeneutic concepts of man 2] (Warszawa: Wydawnictwo Naukowe "Scholar", 2008), 78-85. At the same time it should be noted that Dilthey's philosophy is not refined, because – as his students stressed – he frequently changed his opinions, which means that the same statements can have different meanings depending on the context. See Włodzimierz Lorenc, *Filozofia hermeneutyczna. Inspiracje, klasycy, radykalizacje* [Hermeneutic philosophy. Inspirations, classics, radicalizations] (Warszawa: Wydawnictwa Uniwersytetu Warszawskiego, 2019), 61.

A critic praising literature may seem ambiguous or even fake. He mostly risks: losing trust (if he has deserved any), resignation from his own “expertise” (to which the Latin *criticere* both refers and obliges this dying profession). His awe inspires negative associations, a skeptical half-smile, and at best – disbelief. Before, he was hiding behind a screen of “objectivity” or “specialist outlook”. Now, he is standing naked, and this nakedness momentarily inspires embarrassment with suspiciousness: isn’t it the same person who passed judgments and arguments, carefully selecting his words, who constantly interpreted, stubbornly arguing that it is here, not elsewhere, where the heart of a given work beats, greedily holding on to his legitimization of the only discoverer of literature’s secrets, passing punishments with awe-inspiring aloofness and distinction? And now he claims to have uncovered himself, took off his coat of conventions, suddenly authentic and genuine?²¹

Gleń is unafraid to admit his fascination with Stasiuk’s works – in fact, he intentionally stresses his gratitude to the author. As a result, he does not observe any major influence of Jean-Paul Sartre, Samuel Beckett, Stanisław Grzesiuk, Marek Hłasko or Edward Stachura on Stasiuk’s prose²². According to Gleń, Stasiuk writes with “literary emphasis unmatched by contemporary authors, operating with a completely original phrase”²³. Thus, instead of identifying Stasiuk’s obvious inspirations, he clearly prefers to mention “literary allies”. He writes with great conviction: “Stasiuk should be necessarily placed among authors like Schulz, Miłosz, Szczepański or Białoszewski, for example – who are on the side of the crippled, broken, repressed, excluded, beyond expression. And in those terms his vision is deeply humanistic, empathetic and ethical – simply, and on an elementary level”²⁴. Elsewhere Gleń confesses: “Yes, Stasiuk’s philosophical-literary visions are probably somewhere between the metaphysical liturgy of Schulz and Miłosz, Gombrowicz’s mocking comedy show, and Haupt’s mild nostalgia”²⁵. Well, to me this is an exaggeration.

Moreover, Gleń does not mind too much that Stasiuk repeats the same metaphors, indecently similar travelogues, and even trivializes the philosophical concepts he refers to. Gleń’s reading of Stasiuk’s works is full of solemnity and – as Gleń himself puts it – trust in the author. He only highlights the originality and authenticity of the discussed works: “Who knows, perhaps Andrzej Stasiuk indeed is among the best authors – the most tender, the most observant – in the contemporary Polish prose? Guardian of being, who writes walking hand in hand with death, out of and against which his prose grows”²⁶.

Admiration for Stasiuk’s writing also results in intransigence, even a certain ruthlessness for other critics’ opinions: “Piotr Majewski distinguishes himself with a large dose of methodological ignorance. Regardless of the character of literary presentation, he does not hesitate to conclude that Stasiuk’s prose belongs completely to the generalizing ethnic discourse,

²¹Gleń, *Andrzej Stasiuk. Istnienie*, 10-11.

²²Only in one place does Adrian Gleń refer to the work of Elżbiera Dutka, who comments in a footnote that Stasiuk was occasionally described as, among others, an heir to the legends of Marek Hłasko and Edward Stachura. See Elżbieta Dutka, “‘Słowiańskie on the road’ – o Europie ‘zwanej Środkową’ w prozie Andrzeja Stasiuka” [‘Slavic on the road’ – on Europe ‘known as Central’ in Andrzej Stasiuk’s prose], *Fraza* 4 (2007): 170. –

²³Gleń, *Andrzej Stasiuk. Istnienie*, 24.

²⁴Gleń, 52.

²⁵Gleń, 95.

²⁶Gleń, 14.

based on stereotyping the other (...)”²⁷. Elsewhere he comments: “The conclusion of Starszewski’s text reveals that its author wants to prove that his own methodology is accurate – at any cost. In the concluding remarks to his interesting study he used petrified formulae which constitute the ideological fundament of postcolonial thought, completely ignoring whether it is consistent with literary testaments”²⁸. Thus, Gleń clearly distances himself from postcolonial thought, presenting Stasiuk’s travels to the East as “experiencing a deep sense of being inside reality”²⁹ (as opposed to the vastly neurotic, unauthentic existence of Westerners).

Surely Georges Poulet’s “identifying criticism” is an important source of inspiration for Gleń. A representative of the Geneva School, under the great influence of Proust’s³⁰ theories, Poulet claims that a critic’s greatest challenge is to give an account of his own admiration. According to Poulet, a critic should compose a text that would be a spiritual copy of the work he analyzes – which is possible only when a complete transfer of one mind into another has taken place³¹. I believe that Poulet’s concept leads Gleń to pastiche³². This is how Gleń describes his own trip to “the writer’s land”:

Somewhere near Zborovo tyre valves started to tap, and so I had to stop to pour oil in my tired, worn out lanos. Perhaps I was supposed to come here and experience this perfect freedom? Is this the *genius loci* of this land?

And so I was sitting and smoking. Until they appeared – a Gypsy family with countless kids. They were walking through the middle of a side street (near a shop where you can pay in PLN – supposedly the only place where there is someone willing to carry our currency across the border), loud and self-centered as usual.

And then the old Jewish cemetery. A kind man from Slovakia encouraged me to open the main gate... with a kick. I was hesitant for a moment. But I also wanted to say my foreign Kaddish for the broken and overgrown – as usual, as everywhere – matzevahs, impossible to read.

²⁷Gleń, 34. He refers to theses from Piotr Majewski, “Przeglądanie się w Cyganie: obraz Innego w prozie Andrzeja Stasiuka” [Looking at oneself in a Gypsy: the picture of the Other in Andrzej Stasiuk’s prose], *Sprawy Narodowościowe* 32 (2008): 151-63.

²⁸Gleń, *Andrzej Stasiuk. Istnienie*, 38. Here Gleń polemizes with Dariusz Skórczewski, “Kompleks(y) środkowego Europejczyka” [Complex(es) of a Central European], *Opcje* 2 (2008): 10-11.

²⁹Gleń, *Andrzej Stasiuk. Istnienie*, 39.

³⁰See Georges Poulet, “Self-identifying criticism”, translated into Polish by Judyta Zbińska-Mościcka, in *Szkoła Genewska w krytyce. Antologia* [The Geneva School in criticism. Anthology], selection by Henryk Chudaki et al., foreword by Maciej Żurowski (Warszawa: PWN, 1998), 164-169. Adrian Gleń, referring to Heidegger’s rule of “listening to a literary work” in his book devoted to the works of Julian Kornhauser clearly stressed that the postulate of empathetic criticism of the Geneva School is also an inseparable part of hermeneutic criticism. See Adrian Gleń, „*Marzenie, które czyni poetą*”... *Autentyczność i empatia w dziele literackim Juliana Kornhausera* (Kraków: Universitas, 2013), 169.

³¹Georges Poulet, “Krytyka identyfikująca się”, 159.

³²Pastiche is related to various evaluations – from reluctance, through neutrality, to fascination. The emotions which it stirs largely depend on how it is defined and what functions are ascribed to it; it can be treated as a genre, a type of styling, or an aesthetic category. See Artur Hellich, “Jak rozpoznać pastisz (i odróżnić go od parodii)?” [How to recognize pastiche (and distinguish it from parody)?], *Zagadnienia Rodzajów Literackich* 2 (2014): 28. For Poulet, pastiche is not the end point of a “critical act”; such an “accepted gesture”, i.e. imitation of a writer’s style, is not proper criticism. He writes that identifying with a text puts us in an unusual world, where everything is new and at the same time provides a sense of authenticity. “Making a pastiche of an author is imitating what is trivial and what is crucial”. Georges Poulet, “Krytyka identyfikująca się”, 166-167. Hence, for Poulet finding a way to original places is the key. Referring to “thematic criticism” of Marcel Proust, he stresses the significance of “improvised memory”, which allows to remember “common topics”, and ignore “secondary effects”. See Georges Poulet, “Krytyka identyfikująca się”, 167-169.

The moment of uncontrolled joy of the Gypsy family, and the eternal arrangement of stone traces of silent memory. It is hard to find a better embrace, a wrestling match between what is and what used to be³³.

Seeing so many characteristics of the author's style may be surprising. We can see Stasiuk multiplied, or maybe rather condensed, which – to my mind – gives an unintentionally comical effect³⁴. This affects the reception of this text. Gleń is inconsistent and quite surprising. He suddenly moves from a somewhat literary, and – what should be highlighted – personal autobiographical register, i.e., attempts at penetrating into Stasiuk's prose, to academic discourse: specialist terms, references to other scholars, bitter disputes. Suddenly tenderness transforms into academic evaluation. This practice is well expressed by the title of a page-long summary of the discussion: *Wejście i wyjście. I wejście* [Entrance and exit. And entrance]. And this is how it feels – like being invited to a very intimate world only to be formally asked to leave, and then showered with more confidences. Surprise, consternation... In the end, I was confused; I had the impression that Gleń is open, sensitive, direct, and at the same time harsh in his judgments and despotic. The summary is in fact a several-sentence long comment on an extensive quotation from *Jadąc do Babadag*:

Yes, because genuine death must imitate life. – This sentence by Stasiuk has to conclude this book.

This is how I imagined it already a long time ago.

And it IS like that³⁵.

So much dominance in such a short utterance: genuine, must, it is like that... This fascination with Stasiuk's prose makes Gleń possessive, categorical in his judgments and conclusions. Admiration inspires Gleń to "write with Stasiuk" in a fragmentary way, to imitate his style, construct a certain narrative community with him³⁶. As I have already mentioned, the perspective from which Gleń

³³Gleń, *Andrzej Stasiuk. Istnienie*, 5-6.

³⁴Such an effect obviously throws off the hermeneutic mode of reading and refers to the conflict regarding the character of postmodernism described by Ryszard Nycz, i.e. the scope of influence of two means of creating an artistic form: parody and pastiche. See Ryszard Nycz, *Tekstowy świat. Poststrukturalizm a wiedza o literaturze* [Textual world. Poststructuralism and knowledge of literature] (Warszawa: IBL, 1993), 184-188.

³⁵Gleń, *Andrzej Stasiuk. Istnienie*, 201.

³⁶Richard Rorty's (importantly, a philosopher who critically refers to Heidegger's hermeneutic concept from the perspective of neopragmatism) concept is another interesting way of practicing literary criticism under the influence of fascination with the works analyzed. In his essay "Pragmatist career", arguing with the distinction between usage and interpretation introduced by Umberto Eco, Rorty argues that a text provides stimuli thanks to which the reader (and hence a critic) can convince oneself and others to say what they wanted to say about that text from the very beginning. Richard Rorty, "Kariera pragmatysty", translated into Polish by Tomasz Biedroń, in Umberto Eco, *Interpretation and Overinterpretation* (Kraków: Wydawnictwo Znak, 1996), 102. Rorty thus questions this model of literary criticism, referring to the metaphor of "internal integrity of a text" proposed by Eco. According to Rorty, a literary work cannot say what it wants to say. Why am I referring to this polemic of Rorty with Umberto Eco, who is entangled in the hermeneutic circle? Because that essay discusses the category of fascination, which is crucial for Gleń. Rorty claims that fascination (and conviction) are determined by the needs and aims of those who are fascinated. Thus the distinction between usage and interpretation is replaced with many various "usages" that readers (critics) make of a text. However, to me the conclusion of the essay, where Rorty presents another opposition, is the most interesting part: a methodological and inspired reading of texts. A methodical criticism is deprived of authentic engagement. Such a mode of reading does not change the accepted aims. Inspired criticism results from an encounter with an author, protagonist, plot, or verse. It influences a critic's self-image. A text does not change a critic by changing their goals regarding people, objects, texts encountered later in life. However, it does not have much to do with striving for distinguishing between reality and appearances. See Richard Rorty, "Kariera pragmatysty", 96-107.

analyzes Stasiuk's prose is largely determined by issues discussed by Martin Heidegger. And in this context, I believe that Gleń's language is significant³⁷. I think that the academic character of the book which I have already contrasted with repeating a sentence from Stasiuk is also inconsistent. In many places academic discourse changes its character and becomes exceptionally metaphorical, which can be read as references – intentional or unintentional – to Stasiuk's style (and his followers)³⁸.

Additionally, Gleń's practice of using hyphens for constructing new terms can be associated with Heidegger's language. Some examples include: "in-and-visibility", "doing-nothing", "writing-towards-life", "re-activation", "existing-now". Such practices may be both justified and necessary (especially in the hermeneutic tradition). However, used immoderately, they lose their power, and as a result – seem redundant³⁹. These neologisms, complex linguistic constructions do not build up tension while uncovering fresh semantic areas for the reader – they only clearly indicate the source of inspiration. Like a charm, they transfer the reader near the source⁴⁰.

However, I would like to stress that I have no intention of focusing on this certain inconsistency in the stylistic layer of the book. What I find more important is to point out methodological difficulties and challenges related to attempts at self-identifying criticism, as well as implementing Heidegger's philosophy in literary studies. I simply believe that the analysis of the book's language facilitates a discussion of many of the key issues raised by Gleń.

³⁷By attaching so much weight to the linguistic layer of Gleń's book, I accommodate for his methodological inclinations. Martin Heidegger is surely a philosopher who made language the basic problem of hermeneutics. (At the same time, we should not forget about the evolution of his thought regarding the issue of language – after the so-called turn, he went significantly beyond the hermeneutic position). Heidegger connected language with his concept of cognition, arguing that human existence, being-in-the-world that would go beyond language, is impossible. It should be stressed that Heidegger's position was significant for the development of hermeneutics, especially for Hans-Georg Gadamer, who argued that we do not control language – we belong to it. Hence, according to Gadamer, a genuine conversation takes place when we "engage" in it, when it leads us, and not when we "conduct" it. For Gadamer the hermeneutic turn in philosophy thus does not equal a linguistic turn. See Michał Januszkiewicz, *W poszukiwaniu sensu. Phronesis i hermeneutyka* [In search of sense. Phronesis and hermeneutics] (Poznań: Wydawnictwo Naukowe UAM, 2016), 86-91.

³⁸Contrary to the principles of the series "Projekt: Egzystencja i Literatura", the book *Andrzej Stasiuk. Istnienie* is in fact not approachable. In its linguistic layer as many as three stylistic solutions can be found: traditional academic discourse divided by rather hermeneutic passages referring to Heidegger's philosophical language and clear attempts at recreating Stasiuk's poetics which distinguishes itself with its autobiographical character. At times one may even wonder whether Poulet's concept of "spiritual copies" in various places in Gleń's work refer to one and the other "world of mind". However, instead of arbitrarily resolving this issue, I would rather refer to Heidegger's significant conclusions connected to the issue of "metaphorization" of academic discourse: it is possible to strive for (authentic) language via two (neighboring) ways: thinking and poetizing. The former is characteristic of philosophers, and poetizing – for poets, of course. However, in Heidegger thinking avoids metaphysical, logical, and academic categories, thus approaching poetry. Such "poetizing thinking" does not mean arbitrariness – "accuracy" is understood non-metaphysically, and becomes "unthinkable" from the perspective of science. See Michał Januszkiewicz, *W-koło hermeneutyki literackiej* (Warszawa: PWN, 2007), 45. However, one can wonder whether the language of Gleń's book was influenced by the fact that Gleń himself is a poet, and thus the "poetizing way" may constitute an attractive direction for expressing contents which escape a typical academic discourse. However, I do not wish to resolve that issue. By the way, such a combination of critical-literary and poetic language was meant to be the subject of Gleń's analysis in his book on Julian Kornhauser. However, he resigned from such an approach, instead "trusting" Kornhauser, who (as a critic) warned against treating poetry and criticism by the same author in a complementary way. See Gleń, „*Marzenie, które czyni poetą*”... *Autentyczność i empatia w dziele literackim Juliana Kornhausera*, 35-37.

³⁹Marek Bernacki's book on Czesław Miłosz: Marek Bernacki, *Tropienie Miłosza. Hermeneutyczna „bio-grafia” Poety* (Kraków: Universitas, 2019) is a good example showing that it is possible to conduct a consistent hermeneutic analysis without abusing this linguistic mannerism.

⁴⁰Gleń frequently uses brackets according to the same principle. This is unsurprising – constructing neologisms in such a way is extremely popular in today's humanistic discourse, perhaps even exploited.

Gleń typically approaches Heidegger's poetic style when he highlights the need of transcendence in Stasiuk's works, transgressing the sensual and empirical:

Discretion as the reverse of certainty, which breeds only noise and chaos (after all, *discretio* opposes *discrepatio* – 'asynchronous sound', 'original incompatibility'), opening the space of what cannot be subjected to methodological explication. We should listen to the discrete in a text – evoking a metaphysical perspective – the most. Earnestly, mostly using empathy. It is the unclear, uncertain in a text that makes one think. The un-clear where I can see a piece of reality which does not want to stay within its limits, when I see the cognitive helplessness of the speaking subject, admitting that his language gives up faced with mystery, that the mystery is and remains some conveyor belt for his travels, writing, and understanding, or that networks of images born from their pressure do not exhaust themselves only in what they are trying to represent with more or less success. Something like this especially forces the reader to pause and answer⁴¹.

Krzysztof Michalski highlights the religious aspect of *Being and Time*, pointing out its "Biblical style" (following Erich Auerbach)⁴². According to some scholars, Heidegger's works resemble myths, poetry, or religious meditation, rather than traditional philosophical discourse. For example, Walter Strolz defines him as a meditative thinker. John D. Caputo and Otto Pöggeler stress the presence of mystical elements in Heidegger's works. Attempts at connecting his concepts with Asian philosophical tradition should also be noted⁴³. Hence, I have an impression that references to Heidegger's style allow Gleń to highlight "a huge charge of metaphysics and religiousness" in Stasiuk's prose⁴⁴.

I believe that as early as his official debut – a collection of short stories entitled *Mury Hebronu* [Walls of Hebron] (1992) – religious issues can be observed⁴⁵. On the most basic level they take the form of Biblical references, but there are also references to Eastern religious tradition (although much rarer). In Stasiuk, connecting religion with a counter-cultural fascination with spirituality is justified⁴⁶. It should also be stressed that Stasiuk's protagonist clearly displays disdain for institutional religion.

I can see many motifs referring to mysticism in Stasiuk's prose, such as the phenomenon of stopping, questioning time, and protagonists participating in a peculiar, eternal "now", or

⁴¹Gleń, *Andrzej Stasiuk. Istnienie*, 72.

⁴²Krzysztof Michalski, *Heidegger i filozofia współczesna* [Heidegger and modern philosophy] (Warszawa: Państwowy Instytut Wydawniczy, 1978), 46-48.

⁴³Cezary Woźniak, *Heidegger. Da/Augenblick* (Kraków: Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Jagiellońskiego, 2020), 20.

⁴⁴Gleń, *Andrzej Stasiuk. Istnienie*, 61.

⁴⁵Many of my observations regarding religious references in Stasiuk's works can also be found in: Paweł Dziel, "Inspiracje religijne w pisarstwie Andrzeja Stasiuka" [Religious inspirations in Andrzej Stasiuk's writing], in *Literatura i wiara* [Literature and faith], edited by Andrzej Sulikowski (Szczecin: Wydawnictwo Print Group, 2009).

⁴⁶See Ursula Baatz, "Mistyka hipisowska" [Hippy mysticism], in *Leksykon mistyki* [Lexicon of mysticism], edited by Peter Dinzelsbacher, translated into Polish by Bogusław Widła (Warszawa: Verbinum, 2002), 204-205. What I mean is a phenomenon often defined as "hippy mysticism", although this term does not exhaust the counter-cultural issues I signaled. I write more extensively about it in the paper: Paweł Dziel, "Święte miejsca w twórczości Andrzeja Stasiuka oraz Jacka Podsiadły" [Holy places in the works by Andrzej Stasiuk and Jacek Podsiadły], in *Święte miejsca w literaturze* [Holy places in literature], edited by Zbigniew Chojnowski, Anna Rzymka, Beata Tarnowska (Olsztyn: Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Warmińsko-Mazurskiego, 2009).

a strong, even illuminating feeling that the surrounding reality is only an illusion⁴⁷. And Gleń pays attention to that, writing about Stasiuk's being on the road in the following way: "A trip to the East is like a mystical experience of wreaking havoc, devastation"⁴⁸. Similarly to many mystics, Stasiuk's protagonists' language is full of comparisons and metaphors. One could say that if the author tries to show something unimaginable, he reaches for literary tools typical for poets⁴⁹. The belief that it is possible to experience something unimaginable via the senses is at the core of mystical language. This belief makes it seem absurd and internally inconsistent for people who do not experience similar states⁵⁰. The accumulation of metaphors in Stasiuk reminds one of theoretical proposals connecting literature to mysticism, mostly indicating the possibility of nonconceptual cognition – the source of poetic language⁵¹.

Frequent descriptions indicating impermanence, the transience of existence, force Stasiuk's protagonists to seek the unchangeable. And it seems that for him light is the only phenomenon that would not be subject to destruction. Gleń devotes a lot of attention to this issue, rigorously analyzing various aspects of the phenomenon: "In Stasiuk's writing the sense-creating potency depends not only on the dialectics of light (metaphor of sense) and darkness (symbol of nothingness) – which would be in line with the eternal tradition and hermeneutics – but also (and this, in fact, is what I would most like to focus on) on various «levels of concentration» of light, its intensity or angles, as well as circumstances in which light is registered in this prose"⁵².

For Gleń the constant presence of the resurrection motif⁵³ is an important argument in favor of perceiving Stasiuk as a religious author. This issue is closely connected to the previous motif of describing the world. Gleń discusses the protagonist's waiting for the "perpetual light", which "will coagulate into a flame able to overexpose everything, turn into ashes, and – transformed in this way – lift it to immortality"⁵⁴. However, Gleń far more often presents light in Stasiuk's prose as a memory stimulant⁵⁵. Memory, which "forces us to constantly revive, it serves the wish of presence, which seems even stronger than religious orders and dogmas regulating the work of an eschatological imagination"⁵⁶. After all, Stasiuk writes that "no idea of resurrection has ever come to my mind, other than memory – this bastard of time that has

⁴⁷See Dziel, "Inspiracje religijne w pisarstwie Andrzeja Stasiuka".

⁴⁸Gleń, *Andrzej Stasiuk. Istnienie*, 67.

⁴⁹Mieczysław Orski, *Autokreacje i mitologie (zwięzły opis spraw literatury lat 90.)* [Self-creations and mythologies (a concise description of literary matters in the 1990s)] (Wrocław: OKIS, 1997), 52.

⁵⁰Leszek Kołakowski, *Jeśli Boga nie ma... O Bogu, Diabie, Grzechu i innych zmartwieniach tak zwanej filozofii religii* [If there is no God... On God, Devil, Sin and other concerns of the so-called philosophy of religion] (Kraków: Wydawnictwo Znak, 1988), 126.

⁵¹Stefan Sawicki, *Wartość – sacrum – Norwid. Studia i szkice aksjologiczno-literackie* [Value – sacrum – Norwid. Axiological-literary studies and sketches] (Lublin: Redakcja Wydawnictw Katolickiego Uniwersytetu Lubelskiego, 1994), 100.

⁵²Gleń, *Andrzej Stasiuk. Istnienie*, 85.

⁵³Gleń, 173.

⁵⁴Gleń, 104.

⁵⁵I think that Stasiuk's works are dominated by the motif of the physical (lux) world, related to the Aristotelian tradition – a natural, sensible phenomenon, rather than the spiritual, divine world (lumen). See Kris Van Heuckelom, "Patrząc w promień od ziemi odbity". *Wizualność w poezji Czesława Miłosza* ["Looking into a ray reflected by earth". *Visuality in the works by Czesław Miłosz*] (Warszawa: Fundacja „Centrum Międzynarodowych Badań Polonistycznych, IBL PAN, 2004), 12-13.

⁵⁶Gleń, *Andrzej Stasiuk. Istnienie*, 106.

never been controlled by anyone⁵⁷. Hence Gleń's observations in which he paradoxically combines the resurrection motif with absence, disappearance of the world, seem significant to me. This is how he analyzes the experience of resurrection of Maria Amalia Mniszech from the Brühl family, whose church vault (actually, the sarcophagus sculpture) is frequently visited by the narrator in *Dukla*. Gleń's observation – "Reality is freed from light, sight, it is subject only to those senses whose functioning is dictated by imagination"⁵⁸ – is crucial. It is memory and imagination that guard against annihilation in Stasiuk's prose.

So, can Stasiuk be treated as a religious author? I think not. In Stasiuk, references to the *sacrum* are mostly related to playing with motifs rather than reflecting upon faith. Gleń seems to share this opinion, for he stresses that Stasiuk does not write about any "salvation or deification wish"⁵⁹. Gleń is thus more inclined towards treating Stasiuk as an existentialist "tracing the intersection of being and nothingness, looking for any similarities between religious visions to own experiences and ideas founded upon it"⁶⁰.

However, I agree with Gleń, especially regarding what is fundamental in his work – Stasiuk remains on the side of life, of existing. This is how Gleń clearly distances himself from Heidegger⁶¹, for whom awareness of death is the key, desirable moment, "opening existence to its «most own» possibility of being"⁶². Gleń writes: "In Stasiuk's work death does not constitute – in any way or aspect – a phenomenon that would be able to move human predispositions. Experiencing death does not open absolute freedom and does not reinforce the abilities and capabilities of man experiencing being close to death, or the phenomenon of own mortality in any special way"⁶³.

It is first and foremost Stasiuk's experience of a journey – which, according to Gleń, is the closest to the figure of a wanderer – that seems to stimulate both memory and imagination. Gleń admits: "Reminding, unreminding – which arrange themselves into a literary reconstruction of being-now and the pre-eternity hidden in it – is in general the stake of any travelogue"⁶⁴.

⁵⁷Andrzej Stasiuk, *Dukla* (Gładyszów: Wydawnictwo Czarne, 1999), 91.

⁵⁸Gleń, *Andrzej Stasiuk. Istnienie*, 98.

⁵⁹Gleń, 107.

⁶⁰Gleń, 173.

⁶¹I would also like to signal that Gleń enters into a dialogue with Heidegger's arguments in another area, going significantly beyond the scope of his concept. Clearly "trusting" Stasiuk, in a way accepting his "manner", he contrasts Heidegger's theses regarding objects (tool, craft, workshop metaphors) with Stasiuk's perspective, which indicates an attachment to objects and machines, a sort of respect for them. According to Gleń, Heidegger's reflection regarding objects is cold, it implies a functional order, closing the understanding of objects within the notion of "handiness" or "reliability". Hence Gleń distances himself from Bjørnar Olsen's views (who saw Heidegger as a precursor of today's "turn towards objects"). See Gleń, 109-127.

⁶²In *Being and Time* Heidegger concludes: "Death *lays claim* to it [Dasein] as an *individual* Dasein. The non-relational character of death, as understood in anticipation, individualizes Dasein down to itself. This individualizing is a way in which the 'there' is disclosed for existence. It makes manifest that all Being-alongside the things with which we concern ourselves, and all Being-with-Others, will fail us when our ownmost potentiality-for-Being is the issue. Dasein can be *authentically itself* only if it makes this possible for itself of its own accord". Martin Heidegger, *Bycie i czas*, translation into Polish Bogdan Baran (Warszawa: PWN, 2007), 331-332. English version: p. 304, translated into English by John Macquarrie and Edward Robinson (San Francisco: Harper 1962).

⁶³Gleń, *Andrzej Stasiuk. Istnienie*, 152-153.

⁶⁴Gleń, 178.

And he continues: “elementary experience of opening the fact of own existence takes place – importantly and significantly in Heidegger – in experiencing surprise, weirdness, or even the secret of *existentiae*, which is most severely, most intensively experienced while traveling”⁶⁵.

What fascinates Gleń so much is Stasiuk’s “life-travel-writing”. Anna Legeżyńska implies that constructing someone else’s biography requires salvaging the individuality of experiencing an encounter with the Other. According to Legeżyńska, such an encounter facilitates admiration for the writer’s personality: “imagination, empathy, and fascination create a hermeneutic modal frame of the biographical text, whose aim – apart a pragmatic gain – is to solidify the individuality of one’s fate”⁶⁶. For Gleń, Stasiuk’s “lifewriting” is decisively something more than just a text. What is fictional in this prose seems to be combined with the veristic and creates – as Anna Pekaniec put it – “a peculiar mode of shaping experience”⁶⁷.

Adrian Gleń tries to recreate Stasiuk’s defense of existence. It is especially clear in the autobiographic-pastiche parts of his work devoted to travelling. Perhaps this need should be connected to the phenomenon which Ryszard Nycz dubbed personal literary studies. Does Gleń’s language not express the need to reject the opposition of affect and intellect, experience and understanding, proposed by Nycz? Nycz writes: “We understand what a text is about if we experience it; we can experience it if it reactivates us and changes our learned cognitive structures”⁶⁸. Gleń gives an account of the process of experiencing Stasiuk’s mystery of roaming. He confesses: “This is what travelogues are for: they extend existence”⁶⁹.

I have to admit that Gleń’s book stirred strong emotions in me. On the one hand, I was irritated with his principled theses and uncritical approach to Stasiuk. I was annoyed with the imposing, inconsistent pastiche. On the other hand, I enjoyed analyses referring to experiencing existence and the painful rejection of passing away. Gleń’s work reminded me of what once fascinated me in Stasiuk, and what was overwhelmed by the disappointment stemming from predictable effusions, metaphors exploited numerous times, shallow and often unfounded references to philosophy.

⁶⁵Gleń, 167.

⁶⁶Legeżyńska, “‘Wystarczy mocno i wytrwale zastanawiać się nad jednym życiem...’ Biografistyka jako hermeneutyczne wyzwanie”: 26.

⁶⁷Anna Pekaniec, “Autobiografia i epistolografia w perspektywie kulturowej teorii literatury” [Autobiography and epistolography from the perspective of cultural literary theory], in *Literatura polska i perspektywy nowej humanistyki* [Polish literature and new humanities perspective], edited by Romuald Cudak, Karolina Pospiszil (Katowice: Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Śląskiego, 2018), 263.

⁶⁸Ryszard Nycz, “Tekstowe doświadczenia” [Textual experiences], *Teksty Drugie* 1-2 (2010): 12. Nycz, referring to Martin Heidegger’s *On the Way To Language*, claims that “experience which comes to the fore (articulation, writing) in literature, and then activates itself through reading, is of a ‘whole-psychophysical’ character ([...] simultaneously: corporal-sensual, social-cultural, notion-linguistic), co-topical (as a kind of paradoxical, mutually related ‘passive activity’ of the experiencing and the experienced); and transformative (in terms of objects and the subject). [...] In this perspective, the notion of experimental poetics would refer to both a description of a specific variant of prototypical “plot” of an experience happening, and the specific character of the process of experience-related referentiality, running along a trajectory similar to a Möbius strip (from external reference through its “topical” internalization, to the new, evoked externalization of index relationship with reality)”. Ryszard Nycz, *Poetyka doświadczenia. Teoria - nowoczesność - literatura* [Poetics of experience. Theory - modernity - literature] (Warszawa: IBL PAN, 2012), 141-143.

⁶⁹Gleń, *Andrzej Stasiuk. Istnienie*, 107.

To my mind, Stasiuk's protagonist is most convincing when he gives up his metaphysical armor and does not deal with great names, historical events, or eschatology. Journalistic writing is not Stasiuk's element; he is much closer to authenticity – so desired by Gleń – when he expresses the moment of surprise with random events, everyday details, the common presence of people, animals, objects, as well as light, time, and space in passages resembling poetic prose. He is not trying to reconstruct this experience with philosophical or religious associations – he gives an account of experiencing materiality. Then only existence, so highlighted by Gleń, matters. Presence – or its lack: deep longing for existence. In such places Stasiuk's stylistic devices are fresh, truly unique, at times even piercing. I copy such miniatures for my personal use, to read them separately from the whole. Like poems.

translated by Paulina Zagórska

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KEYWORDS

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ABSTRACT:

This essay discusses Adrian Gleń's book *Andrzej Stasiuk. Istnienie*, which refers to the hermeneutical tradition in literary studies. The perspective from which Gleń analyzes Stasiuk's prose is largely determined by Martin Heidegger's philosophy, as well as postulates of "self-identifying criticism" by Georges Pulet of the Geneva School. The essay presents a broader context for issues related to autobiographism, polemizing with Gleń's interpretation "without biographical intrusions". Additionally, methodological issues related to literary criticism under the influence of fascination with the analyzed works are discussed. The essay focuses on literary studies practices which explore the category of experience.

SELF-IDENTIFYING

autobiographism

*Andrzej Stasiuk***Martin Heidegger****NOTE ON THE AUTHOR:**

Paweł Dziel – PhD candidate at Faculty of Humanities, University of Szczecin. He is working on a PhD dissertation on Barbara Skarga’s journalistic writing. Author of academic papers and critical sketches on contemporary Polish literature. He has published, among others, in “Pogranicza” and “Autobiografie”. His main research interests concern journalistic writing, autobiographism, and relations between philosophy and literature. |