

# Romanticism as a “Travelling” Notion of Literary Criticism. Discourse about Poetry after 1956

Sonia Nowacka

ORCID: 0000-0002-0112-5847

## 1. Literary-historical categories in literary criticism

In the history of twentieth-century literary criticism there is a clear (maybe even ritualistic) regularity in terms of returning to some discussions to notions which are seemingly outdated, incapacious, insufficient. The discussion about classicism and romanticism taking place in completely different social, political, and artistic conditions from the origi-

nal nineteenth-century dispute, is one such example of a ritual. Many significant semantic changes, relocations and shifts within historical-literary notions which originally referred to nineteenth-century literary phenomena have resulted from this trend, leading to diluting their proper meaning. Literary criticism has thus temporarily recontextualized these notions, giving them new meaning depending on current attempts at establishing dominance in the literary field. In this paper I would like to consider this phenomenon, which constituted the basis of manifestos initiating important discussions stemming from political transformations in the second half of the 20th century. Following 1956, the dispute about vision and equalization initiated by Jerzy Kwiatkowski's text, published during a political thaw in "Życie Literackie" [Literary life] in 1958, was an important discussion about the shape of the poetic field in the new political reality. The text was one of the first significant attempts at organizing the literary field in a new social and political reality, using the opposition of romanticism and classicism in order to set the axis of the discussion (*contraria*) and to name, characterize, organize or appreciate (or disavow) current literary phenomena. Several factors contributed to that special (over)presence of this opposition in post-war Poland, such as the party's politics and attempts at seizing the "romantic legacy"<sup>1</sup> (especially its national version<sup>2</sup>), atmosphere of a return to romanticist revisions of the interwar period, which constituted an important point of reference<sup>3</sup>, or new historical-philosophical programs which comprised new attempts at characterizing traditions

<sup>1</sup> See Anna Artwińska, *Poeta w służbie polityki. O Mickiewiczu w PRL i Goethem w NRD* [A poet in the service of politics. On Mickiewicz in People's Poland and Goethe in GDR] (Poznań: Wydawnictwo Poznańskie, 2009).

<sup>2</sup> It should be stressed that even until the end of the 19th century the cult of romanticism was strengthened and inspired a lot of interest. As explained by Andrzej Waśko who presented the views of Ignacy Matuszewski and Zygmunt Wasilewski on the romanticist legacy of modernism: "They both assumed that romanticist poetry – especially Mickiewicz's and Słowacki's – was absolutely crucial for Polish culture from the turn of the 20th century. This idea was common at the time – since we are talking about the peak of their cult started by Mickiewicz's funeral at Wawel in 1890, and continued by erecting his statues in Warsaw and Cracow (1898), as well as a new wave of fascination with Słowacki in Young Poland – and the two critics elaborated on it and justified it in original, yet different ways. Matuszewski dubbed modernism *neoromanticism*, treating the two terms synonymously (Andrzej Waśko, "Sztuka i czyn. Dwie modernistyczne interpretacje romantyzmu – Ignacy Matuszewski i Zygmunt Wasilewski" [Art and act. Two modernist interpretations of romanticism – Ignacy Matuszewski and Zygmunt Wasilewski], in: *Wizje romantyzmu w literaturze i publicystyce polskiej* [Visions of romanticism in Polish literature and journalism], edited by Maciej Urbanowski, Andrzej Waśko [Kraków: Wydawnictwo Księgarnia Akademicka, 2020]). More pronounced attempts at revision started to emerge in early 20th century. The question about romanticism was oftentimes political, related to constructing historical narratives. As Maciej Urbanowski observed, "before 1914 it was the political and literary right that dominated among anti-romanticists, especially in France, but also in Poland – this was no longer the case following 1918, in the Second Polish Republic" (Maciej Urbanowski, "Antyromantyczne rewizje w dwudziestoleciu międzywojennym: Miller, Boy, Gombrowicz" [Anti-romanticist revisions in the interwar period: Miller, Boy, Gombrowicz], in: *Wizje romantyzmu w literaturze i publicystyce polskiej* [Visions of romanticism in Polish literature and journalism], 64). Pointing out to the history of assimilating various elements of romanticist traditions in Polish poetry, Urbanowski stresses that early 20th-century revisions aimed "not at rejecting romanticism as such, «liquidating» it, but at revision in its etymological sense, i.e. «looking again», with additional meanings/intentions: «examinations», «inquiries»" (Urbanowski, 65).

<sup>3</sup> In 1958 Andrzej Stawar stated that romanticism was "a social religion" in the interwar period, a foundation for education, and that it permeated customs. It was conceptualized as a political force for education. Polemics with romanticism sometimes meant polemics with the Sanation government and its dominating discourse (Urbanowski, 68). Revisiting interwar disputes was still common, especially that those reevaluations had a varied character and were made from different artistic positions (among others postmodernist, Skamander, generation 1910), as well as ideological and political (Urbanowski, 67).

of romanticism<sup>4</sup> and classicism<sup>5</sup> in Polish culture. Almost a decade later Stanisław Barańczak based his program on the dichotomy of classicism and romanticism, publishing *Nieufni i zadufani* [The distrustful and the conceited] (his poetic program, first published in 1967) which he incorporated in a collection of essays published under the same title in 1971<sup>6</sup>. Just as Kwiatkowski used the notion of “vision”, Barańczak employed “distrust” for defining the characteristics of contemporary romanticism. That division returned yet again soon after the 1989 political transformation in attempts at a critical-literary organization of post-1989 poetic phenomena in Poland. In 1995 Karol Maliszewski published a program paper *Nasi klasycyści, nasi brabarzyńcy* [Our classicists, our barbarians], consciously renewing the century-long dispute and proposing – one more time – a simplified, dichotomized typology of poetic phenomena, this time opposing classicists with poets-barbarians. This is how the romanticist tradition returns in the second half of the 20th century as “visionary” poetry (Kwiatkowski), poetic “distrust” (Barańczak), or “barbarianism” (Maliszewski), treated synonymously in regard to loosely understood romanticism. What is significant, critics who decided to reuse these categories as critical-literary ones consciously refer to earlier manifestos in which they were employed – Barańczak rejects Kwiatkowski’s perspective, proposing his own classification, whereas Maliszewski refers to Barańczak’s manifesto in terms of structure and notions (barbarism as “distrust”), at the same time applying new meaning to the classicism-romanticism dichotomy. Interestingly, romanticism is presented as the positive tradition, whereas negative phenomena are labeled as “classicist” in all manifestos highlighting that dichotomy via historical-literary categories.

It is thus impossible to establish constant, accepted meanings for those two notions, which would always refer to specific aesthetic and ideological systems – it is not my goal either, since

<sup>4</sup> Academic discourse was also significant. In 1970s several important books were published, such as *Legenda romantyczna i szydery* [Romanticist legend and taunters] (Marta Piwińska, *Legenda romantyczna i szydery* [Warszawa: Państwowy Instytut Wydawniczy, 1973]), or Maria Janion’s theses about romanticist imagination and romanticism as a paradigm of contemporary culture, outlined e.g. in her 1975 *Gorączka romantyczna* [Romanticist fever]. Romanticism appears not only in theoretical, philosophical, and historical works, but it is also declared in poetic programs, e.g. a neoromantic program by Konfederacja Nowego Romantyzmu [Confederation of New Romanticism], which inspired harsh criticism both from contemporary poetic groups and from literary historians (Leszek Szaruga, *Literatura i życie. Ważniejsze wątki dyskusji literackich 1939-1989* [Literature and life. Key issues in literary discussions] [Lublin: Wydawnictwo UMCS, 2001], 118).

<sup>5</sup> These dichotomies are simultaneously considered by authors of neoclassicism programs (Jarosław Marek Rymkiewicz, *Czym jest klasycyzm: Manifesty poetyckie* [What is classicism: Poetic manifestos] [Warszawa: Państwowy instytut Wydawniczy, 1967]), and later in many texts by Przybylski, e.g. *To jest klasycyzm* [This is classicism] (Warszawa: Czytelnik, 1978); *Orientacja Poetycka Hybrydy* [Hybrid Poetic Orientation] was another declaratively classicist option, criticized by Barańczak.

<sup>6</sup> Stanisław Barańczak, “Nieufni i zadufani. Rzecz o walce romantyków z klasykami w poezji najmłodszej” [The distrustful and the conceited. On the dispute between romanticists and classicists in modern poetry], *Nurt* 10 (1967). Among others, Marzena Woźniak-Łabieniec wrote about his project: “However, Barańczak does not try to participate in the fight for imagination, which was already dying out at the time. He applies his own evaluative meanings to those terms. He opposes the dogmatic classicism of *Orientacja Poetycka Hybrydy* with linguism, i.e. dialectic romanticism. Linguism allows to unmask language, it reveals «objective contradictions within it, its ambivalence, which concerns not only meanings, but also consequences in terms of worldview». Dialectic romanticism unmasks «antinomies of the existing order of things from the perspective of their potential synthesis». Marzena Woźniak-Łabieniec, “Lekcja Barańczaka. *Nieufni i zadufani* po latach” [Barańczak’s lesson. *Nieufni i zadufani* revisited], *Acta Universitatis Lodzianensis* 13 (2010): 333.

the proper meaning of those two categories can be read only by analyzing the context in which they appear every time. In spite of structural similarities between manifestos based on the classicism-romanticism dichotomy (to which I will return later in this text), there are significant differences on the program level often reflecting critics' individual approaches, not limited to expressing postulates about poetry – a politically unconscious collection of expressed (open inexplicitly) assumptions, and actions for a given agenda.

Considering the complexity of contexts in which the two notions functioned throughout the history of literary criticism (especially poetry), I am going to analyze three texts which display a systematic character of this critical-literary debate, as well as key solutions regarding rhetorical strategies used in order to dominate or achieve a visible position in poetry.

Among others, Michał Głowiński, Kazimierz Wyka (to whom Kwiatkowski referred to as his "only comrade in arms"<sup>7</sup>), Julian Przyboś, Bohdan Drozdowski, Włodzimierz Maciąg, Tadeusz Różewicz and Jan Brzękowski wrote in answer to Kwiatkowski's text. Agata Stankowska saw his appreciation of lyrical imagination as "a synecdoche of social freedom", i.e., seeking new space for poetry, in the imagination lyrics trend. The need and attempt to find new forms of expression and content were noticed (and appreciated, also by such critics as Głowiński or Maciąg) in texts which argued with Kwiatkowski<sup>8</sup>.

The opposition of classicism and romanticism in Kwiatkowski's text is recontextualized; in the discussion initiated by Kwiatkowski it functions as a dichotomy relating to tensions within the avant-garde and the traditions it shaped in Poland. Both romanticist and classicist poetics are described as tensions between the Kraków avant-garde and the Second avant-garde. Kwiatkowski understands the titular vision as imagination, oneiric poetics, which would be most similar to expressionism or surrealism. The "equalization" situated on the classicist line is a remnant of the Kraków Avant-garde, which needs to be rejected. Kwiatkowski refers to Peiper's pre-war manifestos, and finally he attacks Przyboś (literally writing that this attack against him is *de facto* a fight for people's hearts, bitterly and ironically summarizing that this is not the way to the future). So how does Kwiatkowski incorporate the two notions into his discussion? The whole paper is organized by one quote from Peiper's *Poezja jako budowa* [Poetry as construction] from the book of poems *Nowe Usta* [New Lips]:

<sup>7</sup> Agata Stankowska, "Wizja przeciw równaniu". *Wokół popaździernikowego sporu o wyobraźnię twórczą* ["Vision against equalization". On the post-October dispute over creative imagination] (Poznań: Wydawnictwo Poznańskiego Towarzystwa Przyjaciół Nauk, 2013), 130. Military metaphors are among the most interesting characteristics of Kwiatkowski's discussion. See Sonia Nowacka, "Hiperbola, metafora, amplifikacja. Strategie retoryczne manifestów krytycznoliterackich na przykładzie artykułu Wizja przeciw równaniu Jerzego Kwiatkowskiego" [Hyperbole, metaphor, amplification. Rhetorical strategies of critical-literary manifestos on the example of Jerzy Kwiatkowski's paper Vision against equalization (in press)].

<sup>8</sup> Stankowska also notices a certain originality of Kwiatkowski's program, writing that "«Aesthetics of freed vision», unlike any other aesthetics at the time (i.e. 1958) parallel to poetic dictions («poetic morality», «appeal to tradition», «linguistic poetry»), may have constituted an artistic equivalent of transformations in social consciousness" (Stankowska, 11–29).

Writing about similarities between contemporary new poetry and classicism, Tadeusz Peiper employs a negative definition of this similarity: “There is no doubt that those who creatively oppose romanticism thus approach certain classicist stances, for romanticism opposed classicism, and there must be a similarity between two opposites of the same idea”.

This is how the second antagonist of the dispute is outlined: romanticism. Using Julian Krzyżanowski’s theory of exchange of literary trends and his graph based on two alternating sinusoids, correlatively going up and down – it is clear that the sinusoid of classicism, in this case: avant-garde and post-avant-garde – is on the same level at the moment as it was when Peiper’s anti-romanticist manifesto was written. The difference is that back then the line started to go up, and today – the line starts to go down. The peak has already been reached. Everything indicates that new romanticism should enter the realm of poetry. Is it emerging? Is it already here?<sup>9</sup>

Stankowska, considering the role of this manifesto in literature following the Gomułka political thaw, concluded that it had a significant strategic meaning for renewing the discussion about the inter-war avant-garde, at the same time observing that the decision to revisit the dispute between “romanticism” and “classicism” was a symbolic departure from socialist realism’s poetics.

Announcing *de nomine* a new stage of the fight between romanticists and classicists, Kwiatkowski *de facto* renews the dispute between the followers of constructivist and the followers of surreal variants of creationism, known from the interwar period, in a new historical and aesthetic context. Kwiatkowski sees the latter as the best antidote to socialist realism’s reductions<sup>10</sup>.

Thus, Kwiatkowski actually uses the whole rhetorical machine and renewed dispute for expressing his own political, ideological postulates, for discussing possible alternatives to socialist aesthetics.

As has been said, Wyka agreed with Kwiatkowski’s basic conclusions, although he criticized him for using Krzyżanowski’s sinusoid, instead proposing “spiral movement”, referring to texts by Karol Irzykowski, and (earlier) Jean-Baptiste Vico. However, Kwiatkowski seems to be convinced of this tradition of thinking about literary trends. In the fourth part of his text (out of five) he refers to Maurycy Mochnacki, stating that they are still up to date, based on “the rule of alternating literary trends, assuming the existence of a dialectal law of thesis and antithesis in history of art”<sup>11</sup>. The belief in such dialecticality of trends and developments was characteristic for Kwiatkowski’s text, however, the notion of dialectics in the context of romanticism was later used also by Barańczak, slightly redirecting his understanding of the two notions towards his own vision of literature.

<sup>9</sup> Stankowska, 73–74.

<sup>10</sup> Stankowska, 51.

<sup>11</sup> Stankowska, 88.

### 3. Romanticism as distrust

Barańczak used these notions in a similar way in 1967, which was both when he debuted as a poet and published his program paper *Nieufni i zadufani*<sup>12</sup>. Barańczak rejected Kwiatkowski’s interpretation of romanticist and classicist traditions *expressis verbis*, claiming that:

Kwiatkowski’s concessions for naïve (anarchic) romanticism clash with rather narrowly understood positivist proposals of the present book, which are limited to “dialectic romanticism”<sup>13</sup>.

In order to reject poetics which were earlier written over romanticism and classicism, Barańczak needs to nuance his understanding even further. He also refers to the sinusoid in intellectual and aesthetic trends, but he does not argue with the concept of alternating trends – he only observes that the pace of these alternations becomes faster in the 20th century:

Trustfulness. It is a ghostly symptom of classicizing (understood in a certain way) of 1960s young poetry, conceptualizing its wave of classicist trends in literature, which come in cycles<sup>14</sup>.

Barańczak elaborates on this in a footnote:

[...] I need to stress in advance that the basic understanding does not overlap with, or rather has little to do with how R. Przybylski, J.M. Rymkewicz and others understand this word. I would classify Zbigniew Herbert, whom Przybylski considers to be among major representatives of classicism in Polish poetry, as a typical dialectic romanticist (due to such characteristics as cognitive skepticism, irony, or a critical approach to tradition)<sup>15</sup>.

This passage reveals several issues: the fluidity of what is hidden behind the discussed notions, and the “distrust” category, crucial for Barańczak, which he identifies with dialectic

<sup>12</sup>See Dariusz Pawelec, “Spór nie tylko o poezję. O narodzinach świadomości pokoleniowej Nowej Fali” [A dispute about more than poetry. On the emergence of New Wave’s generational consciousness], in: *Powinna być nieufnością? Nowofalowy spór o poezję* [It should be distrust. New wave dispute about poetry], edited by Sylwia Panek (Poznań: Wydawnictwo Poznańskiego Towarzystwa Przyjaciół Nauk, 2020), 13-54; Dariusz Pawelec, *Poezja Stanisława Barańczaka. Reguły i konteksty* [Stanisław Barańczak’s poetry. Rules and contexts] (Katowice: „Śląsk”, 1992).

<sup>13</sup>Stanisław Barańczak, *Nieufni i zadufani: romantyzm i klasycyzm w młodej poezji lat sześćdziesiątych* (Wrocław: Zakład Narodowy im. Ossolińskich – Wydawnictwo, 1971), 12–13.

<sup>14</sup>Barańczak, *Nieufni i zadufani*, 13.

<sup>15</sup>Barańczak, *Nieufni i zadufani*, 13.

romanticism<sup>16</sup>. Barańczak tries to show that romanticism is erroneously associated with sentimentalism, that it contains dialectical thinking, distrust (for the subject of poetry, for reality), which is why – among other things – Barańczak sees linguistic poetry as dialectic. Eventually Barańczak details his own classification of trends, distinguishing two versions of classicism and romanticism each:

1. Dogmatic classicism, which takes idealizing order as reality (thanks to referring to e.g., metaphysics, seen as a specific literary period, like in classicism),
2. Skeptical or “huge” classicism, consciously imposing idealizing order on reality, as a postulate rather than a factual situation,
3. Anarchic (naïve) romanticism, which peters out in unmasking contradictions, accepting chaos as a necessary state of literary and non-literary reality,
4. Dialectic romanticism, unmasking antinomies of existing order of things from the perspective of their possible synthesis.

Let us be clear: the present book first of all accepts the indisputable superiority of classical over naïve skepticism, and secondly – of dialectic romanticism over skeptical classicism. And it is dialectic romanticism – as a specific form of cognitive thinking – that will be treated as the main positive protagonist of this book<sup>17</sup>.

Barańczak tries to legitimize his position with historiosophy – he shows that “dialectic romanticism” is not only inevitable, but also correct, and undermining that postulate equals negating the sense of literature in general. He uses a moralizing tone:

It is at this moment when we must not forget that literature teaches a specific way of thinking, that it impacts non-literary reality. If we agree about that – and if someone did not, they would deny literature its *raison d'être* – we also need to notice a bigger value of literature that teaches critical thinking, which is not subjugated by mass hypnoses, equally considering all contradictory arguments<sup>18</sup>.

<sup>16</sup> The way Barańczak understood dialectics is a separate, yet noteworthy issue – positioning his notion apparatus within the Marxist system was an ambiguous decision. As Andrzej Skrendo observed: “Barańczak admits to his Marxism in only one of his books, the first one – in *Nieufni i zadufani*, where Marxism constitutes the supply base for “dialectic romanticism”. Forming this concept, Barańczak doubtlessly wanted to set a trap for those who favored the official cultural politics of People’s Poland: if you are dialecticians – he told them – you will also use dialectics against yourselves. Which, of course, was impossible” (Andrzej Skrendo, “Stanisław Barańczak: widma poezji” [Stanisław Barańczak: specters of poetry], *Teksty Drugie 2* [2014]: 297). Later Barańczak distanced himself from Marxism, which he mostly associated with the politics of People’s Poland’s government. However, on the stage of creating the concept of “dialectic romanticism” it is clear that Barańczak was not interested in Marxist dialectics – he treated it only as another rhetorical tool, which did not point out to the intellectual context of poetry postulated by him, but rather (implicitly) constituted a tool for criticizing the order of power. Thus it could be said that in terms of rhetoric there is a difference between what Barańczak suggests, and what he ultimately puts into practice.

<sup>17</sup> Barańczak, *Nieufni i zadufani*, 19.

<sup>18</sup> Barańczak, *Nieufni i zadufani*, 19.

Barańczak uses sophism, persuasive context, deliberately using *petition principi*; he also uses *antisagoge* for showing not only hypothetical situations, but also their negative moral consequences (“and if someone did not, they would deny literature its *raison d’être*). The style is also noteworthy – cool, seemingly objective, academic, and at the same time clearly focused on persuasion and proving that the author is right (also morally). In spite of many similarities to Kwiatkowski’s text, Barańczak’s argumentation is based on different arguments – for both authors the stake is political, but in Barańczak’s text it has a directly axiological, extratextual dimension. Ultimately Barańczak appreciates didactic literature, which is also ethical as it shapes specific attitudes towards the extraliterary world. It is not about a struggle between different poetics, but about writers’ attitudes to the government and political situation, which can be seen clearly in the subchapter suggestively entitled *Piekło łatwizny* [No-brainer hell]. When describing the structures of a literary field, he uses metaphors based on irony, antagonism, and exaggeration (*amplification*). For Barańczak, all “facilitations” which act “on behalf of any interest, except for the well understood interest of literature and society, constitute hell and its circles”<sup>19</sup>.

Thus, Barańczak talks about a socio-literary situation, and especially institutional publishing pathways and cooperation between authors and the government, rather than just about poetics. Then he boldly states that being an outsider is often the only way not to lose respect for oneself. According to Barańczak, acceptance of “existing order” leads to schlock and the downfall of literature. Continuing the metaphor on which he based a part of his discussion, he presents subsequent circles of “No-brainer hell”, finally stating that:

No-brainers inspire gullibility. They cause atrophy of vigilant thinking, shape a young poet’s worldview and style in the spirit of passively accepting the world and everything that they are asked to believe in<sup>20</sup>.

It is stated repeatedly throughout the whole text that literature teaches or educates society. It is also significant that Barańczak focuses on the extraliterary world far more than Kwiatkowski did, understanding “distrust” as a tool which is only partially political, a tool for shaping specific, critical attitudes; this notion carries a postulate of oppositional resistance against the government. This is the criterion which Barańczak uses for determining poetics, and he motivates it directly with the social factor:

[...] it is obvious that literature needs to create or co-create certain myths of a “higher order”, integrating all social groups with such values as internationalism, humanistic anthropocentrism, social ethics, specific political ideology and vision of culture. However, the point is that classicism creating such “huge myths” is unable to do it convincingly, if conditions of a specific historical moment make it impossible. And I daresay that such conditions exist at the moment; it is at this very moment that we cannot forget that literature TEACHES a certain way of thinking<sup>21</sup>.

<sup>19</sup>Barańczak, *Nieufni i zadufani*, 34.

<sup>20</sup>Barańczak, *Nieufni i zadufani*, 39.

<sup>21</sup>Barańczak, *Nieufni i zadufani*, 17.



Following the first publication of his program in 1967, Barańczak expressed the same ideas in later publications and speeches, e.g., in his 1970 manifesto *Parę przypuszczeń na temat poezji współczesnej* [Several assumptions about modern poetry] where he declared that poetry “should be distrust”.

Just as Kwiatkowski's text resulted from social loosening following the 1956 political thaw, Barańczak's program texts correlated with the events of the late 1960s and early 1970s. The next analyzed manifesto also emerged in the context of socio-political events and debates about post-transformation poetry.

#### 4. Romanticism as barbarism

The motif of dichotomy in literature and presenting romanticism as a positive tradition continued to appear in the critical-literary discourse after the 1989 political transformation, in debates surrounding “bruLion” [note-paper] poetry.

What is important is that Karol Maliszewski's text referring to this dichotomy is significantly convergent with and similar to the construction of Barańczak's text. Maliszewski details (also visually, in the form of paragraphs with a list of characteristics which comprise each category) how he conceptualizes classicism and romanticism (in this case, barbarian poetics), pointing out to similarities (however, he is not as focused on morality as Barańczak), referring to the distrust category (although he understands it differently from Barańczak):

Classicizing: Yes (to this world), moderation, trustfulness, “primacy of forms”, faith in history (including history of literature), antirealism and objectivism, primacy of “old age”: finding oneself in culturally attested forms, obvious authorities, “tradition suggests”, illusion of striving towards perfection (following a model), highlighting commonality, i.e. evolution of a timeless community, balance based on legit values, watching being (descriptiveness), pulchritude, rhythmism, and lightening anthropological horizon: metaphysically positive. Faith in encore-reality, based on mediated data. Linguistic passeism – treating language as a medium preserving timelessly-symbolic consistency.

Barbarising: No (to this world), no moderation, distrust, “primacy of content”, conviction that history (including history of literature) is fiction – it is a history of different expressions, subsequent confessions, presentation of various entities, beings; realism and sensualism, primacy of freshness and newness (discoveries), ambiguous authorities, exposing individuality, present, participating in being (testimony), despair accompanying seeking for and testing values, turpism, crippled rhythm, distrustful rhyme (or at least far or incomplete)<sup>22</sup>.

<sup>22</sup>Karol Maliszewski, “Nasi klasycyści, nasi barbarzyńcy” [Our classicists, our barbarians], in: *Barbarzyńcy, klasycyści i inni. Spory o młodą poezję w latach 90.* [Barbarians, classicists, and others. Disputes about young poetry in 1990s], edited by Marcin Jaworski (Poznań: Wydawnictwo Poznańskiego Towarzystwa Przyjaciół Nauk, 2018), 170.

Of course, repeating the division of literature using those two categories is conscious; Maliszewski explains his choice with problems with defining and "complexity of postmodern world":

I believe that handy tools which come in pairs such as romanticism-classicism, classicism-realism, avant-garde-classicism, etc. have lost their semantic expressiveness, because the liveliest matter of modern poetry is a tangled mixture which does not subjugate to rigorous positioning in such characterized "places" of interpretation, poles of dichotomy<sup>23</sup>.

On the one hand he points out to the ineffectiveness of the categories he selected, and on the other – he reaches for a discursive mechanism well known to criticism. Also, the *credo* from the last paragraph refers to another program text by Barańczak, a continuation of *Nieufni i zadufani* entitled *Parę przypuszczeń na temat poezji współczesnej* (1970).

Maliszewski:

#### **Credo**

I prefer barbarians. They are closer to bloodstream. And they do not need much to be happy. A bit of despair in a country with no rules. They watch questions related to solidarity through thick windows of bookshops, smeared with bird shit<sup>24</sup>.

Barańczak:

1. It should be distrust.
  
6. This is where it needs to start. From distrust, which will pave the way for what we all need. I mean – this is nothing new, agreed, but we have almost forgotten what we should care about – I mean, of course, the truth<sup>25</sup>.

Thanks to the seemingly similar structural basis of the two manifestos the program differences become clearer. Maliszewski expresses his *credo* in a personal way (strong "I", personal, first-person narration), stressing privacy, expressing every-day life, experience, individuality, freedom of expression. Even though Barańczak also uses first-person narration, he directly addresses some undefined community, a collective subject (first person plural), probably fellow citizens. His words resemble an appeal – he diagnoses a problem (crisis of values, truth, acceptance of existing order) and offers a solution, i.e., poetry serving ethics, poetics of distrust (which he calls dialectic romanticism).

<sup>23</sup>Maliszewski, 163.

<sup>24</sup>Maliszewski, 176.

<sup>25</sup>Stanisław Barańczak, *Etyka i poetyka* [Ethics and poetics] (Kraków: Znak, 2009), 394.

Maliszewski understands his positive (romanticist) program as a resignation from engagement, disenchantment with previous literary programs (including Barańczak's). And so instead of communality, there is individual experience ("in a country with no rules"), instead of society – individuals with their individuality, instead of the truth category – "despair accompanying seeking for and testing values".

What is also interesting is that just as Barańczak criticized Kwiatkowski's program in the 1960s, Maliszewski criticizes Barańczak in the final lines of his text ("They watch questions related to solidarity through thick windows of bookshops, smeared with bird shit"). Maliszewski consciously takes advantage of Barańczak's notions for the purpose of his own program, at the same time taking them over on a higher level – not just the dichotomized poetic field, but also Barańczak's category of distrust. One could say that even though indeed the program postulates underwent development, revisions and transformations in the second half of the 20th century, critical tools and gestures are unusually schematic. Romanticism and classicism functioned more as metaphors of poetic field clear for other critics, a rhetorically productive figure, yet at the same time leading to discussions which arbitrarily simplified the situation in this field.

## 5. Later career of notions

Have new tools for description emerged? In my opinion that discussion, although it had a rhetorical character *ad hoc*, and despite the fact that there are (justified) doubts regarding its contradictions-based argumentation, which stimulated the debate (at the same time raising the status of described poetry due to showing new phenomena in a broader perspective of a historical-literary process), proved unproductive in the long run – or it may even seem almost inevitable (Maliszewski's *casus*), necessary.

Although these categories still functioned in the discourse after 2000 (e.g., classicism in program declarations of poets such as Wencel and Klejnocki), there has been no major debate which would creatively engage the discussed notions; moreover, there are hardly any critics who treat this attitude seriously (after all, even Maliszewski stressed that he took up the topic even though those categories were insufficient). One could even say that so far, the importance of that historical-literary dichotomy has lost its (nonetheless impressive) impetus, and those categories have become unclear and blurred on the one hand, and on the other – obvious to such an extent that it is impossible to use them for an effective debate about new poetic phenomena. Of course, those notions never left the dictionaries of critics and poets dictionary – they are still in use, but Maliszewski's seems to be the last major program declaration in which they were supposed to reevaluate the situation of modern literature. Instead, references to the "incomprehensible poetry" category or issues related to representation or autonomy of a given work are more common. However, it is clear – especially in recent discussions – that the organizing character (which relies on historical-literary categories) is less important than ontology of a work of art (issues of autonomy, politics), the metacritical character (theoretical discussion) – i.e., referring to issues of choice and ontology of literature, and finally the theoretical (or anti-theoretical) dispute about styles of literature and critical attitude to a given

work. Additionally, the character of both criticism and critical debate has changed since 1990s – some critics are no longer interested in classifications and programs, resigning from extensive papers and reviews in favor of recommendations of books advertised by publishers (such reviews are for consumers, not readers). The traditional, professionalized critical-literary discourse (which exists in modern literary press and academic publications), which remains close to academia, resigns from classifying literature in terms of historical categories, turning towards analyses of smaller parts of the literary field or metacriticism<sup>26</sup>. On the one hand capitalist commodification of literature (and literary discourse) is not indifferent to criticism, and on the other – categories, evaluations and notions are affected by theoretical systems rooted in modern humanities. Although there have been no new, significant continuations within the romanticists/classicists dispute category since 2000, those notions are still used in artistic criticism and programs; interestingly, classicism seems to be referred to more often and willingly<sup>27</sup> (both by non-ironically declared “classicists” such as Przemysław Dakowicz, and by young authors who creatively use some elements of classicism, such as Radosław Jurczak)<sup>28</sup>. However, an analysis of the paths those notions took through poetry criticism of the second half of the 20th century shows the mechanism behind literary criticism, a certain critical-literary determinism resulting from its rhetoric, the *ad hoc* character and conflict between different concepts, which result from attempts at establishing dominance in the literary field, especially at critical moments which are accompanied by a sense that some epoch is ending (social, artistic, historical), and so new, dominating forms of poetic expressions should be codified, described, and established within them.

translated by Paulina Zagórska

<sup>26</sup>Professionalized critical-literary discourse is not indifferent to tools offered by modern humanities, so it is not surprising that instead of historical-literary categories, post-humanistic, post-secular, or eco-critical categories which are used for classifications. However, this shift from philology and literary traditions has consequences which deserve to be discussed in a separate paper.

<sup>27</sup>This would mean that it is difficult to find poets who are openly “non-normative”, whereas program neoclassicism typically contains romanticist historical ideas and postulates. Analyses of the history of usage of those notions reveal an interesting regularity – classicism in poetry functions independently of the “romanticism” category (in a way containing it within itself), whereas literary criticism uses both notions in a dichotomy, typically presenting the romanticist tradition as the positive one. However, due to a clear tendency to decentralize literary phenomena instead of centralizing and polarizing them, this dichotomy seems to be no longer productive and is clearly being superseded by new humanities discourses. See Andrzej Kaliszewski, *Nostalgia stylu: neoklasycyzm liryki polskiej XX wieku w krytyce, badaniach i poetykach immanentnych (w kontekście tradycji poetologicznej klasycyzmu)* [Style nostalgia: neoclassicism is Polish poetry in 20th century in criticism, studies and immanent poetics (in the context of classicist poetological tradition)] (Kraków: Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Jagiellońskiego, 2007).

<sup>28</sup>For a critical analysis of modern classicism, see e.g. Zbigniew Jazienicki, “Gorset starego oposa” [Corset of an old opossum], *Wizje*, 12.01.2020, <https://magazynwizje.pl/aktualnik/jazienicki-dakowicz/>. Jakub Skurtys referred to the inspiration with Miłosz’s diction and classicism postulated by Jurczak in his review of *Zakłady Holenderskie* [Dutch books] (Jakub Skurtys, “Przyszłość jest chmurą, przeszłość jest chwytem” [The future is a cloud, the past is a catch], *biBLioteka* [2020], <https://www.biuroliterackie.pl/biblioteka/recenzje/przyszlosc-jest-chmura-przyszlosc-jest-chwytem/>).

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# KEYWORDS

## VISIONS AND EQUALIZATION

*dialectic romanticism*

**ABSTRACT:**

The paper analyzes various ways of using historical-literary notions employed *ad hoc* by literary criticism in subsequent discourses over the second half of the 20th century. Three critical program texts which initiated debates about the role of poetry and dominating poetics after 1956 are analyzed. Similarities in terms of structures and strategies of poetry critics who referred to the romanticism/classicism dichotomy are identified, at the same time revealing significant program differences expressed using the same notions.

*post-1989 poetry*

## classicists and barbarians

### literary criticism

**NOTE ON THE AUTHOR:**

Sonia Nowacka (1994) – PhD candidate at Doctoral College of Faculty of Philology, University of Wrocław. Her research interests include poetry of 20th and 21st centuries, as well as rhetorical aspects of disputes of literary critics. She is currently working on her PhD dissertation under prof. Joanna Orska, about post-1956 critical-literary strategies. |