

No Critique.

The Pleasure of Reading and Literary Criticism in Poland

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(...) we might remind ourselves that criticism is as inevitable as breathing, and that we should be none the worse for articulating what passes in our minds when we read a book and feel an emotion about it, for criticizing our own minds in their work of criticism.

T.S. Eliot, *Tradition and individual talent*

“The pleasure of the text: like Bacon’s simulator, it can say: *never apologize, never explain.*”¹

“In place of a hermeneutics, we need an erotics of art.”²

“If you read to merely understand you should be condemned for blasphemy. You read to experience – it is a deeper, more comprehensive type of understanding.”³

¹ Roland Barthes, *The pleasure of the text*, trans. Richard Miller (New York: Hill and Wang, 1975), 3.

² Susan Sontag, “Against interpretation”, in: *Against interpretation and other essays* (New York: Dell, 1969), 10.

³ Olga Tokarczuk, *Czuły narrator* [Tender narrator] (Kraków: Wydawnictwo Literackie, 2020), 104.

I deliberately start by quoting Roland Barthes, Susan Sontag, and Olga Tokarczuk, that is writers and critics who have never or have only marginally engaged in literary criticism. Of course, they have written critical or metacritical texts but, importantly, they often criticize in them professional critics who tend to instrumentalize or judge texts too harshly; they also often criticize sophisticated and unemotional academics who rely on philosophical and theoretical texts, showing little understanding for what they read. If we were to draw a diagram illustrating the number of more or less expressive references to the category of readerly pleasure, it would turn out that they may be most often found in essays, impressions, ephemeral sketches and notes, and, last but not least, in texts whose authors praise literature as experience and argue that sharing their reading experiences with the reader is an important form of literary criticism. In his reviews, Karol Maliszewski refers to emotions more than, for example, Henryk Bereza; respectively, Bereza refers to emotions more in the (draft) reviews of books published posthumously in *Wypiski ostatnie* [Final comments] than in his “proper criticism” published in professional journals.⁴

In this article, I will investigate the category of readerly pleasure (and its variants) in Polish literary criticism. I reconstruct two theories of reading that since the 1960s have become important, if not the most important, points of reference in the perception (and reproduction) of the category of readerly pleasure in Poland, namely those by Roland Barthes and Jan Błoński. Although both theories, often understood in an intuitive way, may appear to be similar, the purpose of this article is not to point out the similarities and differences in the reading practices of both authors but rather to discuss two *a l t e r n a t i v e* traditions that have a profound, yet almost undefinable, impact on contemporary literary criticism. I will not discuss the meaning of the titular category for Polish affective criticism – it is a broad topic that should be discussed in a separate essay. Of course, I am aware that some interpretative essays by, among others, Katarzyna Bojarska, Agnieszka Daukszy, Monika Glosowitz or Ryszard Nycz, that is authors (the list is not complete) whose research may be considered representative of the affective turn in Poland, cannot be clearly distinguished from the wider corpus of literary criticism texts. Therefore, I decided not to comment on the works of literary critics who focus on affective research, mainly because Polish affective research rarely refers to Barthes’s concept of readerly pleasure. Łukasz Żurek notes:

[...] in numerous reconstructions of its [affective research – K.P.] genealogy, no one mentions Roland Barthes’s famous essay *From Work to Text* from 1971. Perhaps it is because this is a classic text, too closely related to poststructuralism – a school from which affective research wants to distance itself. Barthes still enjoys some popularity, but he is cited almost exclusively as the author who coined the terms *punctum* and *neutre*. And no one refers to *Text* (the one that is capitalized) (*The Pleasure of the Text*, which names the key emotion in its title, is also not mentioned).⁵

⁴ Cf. Henryk Bereza, *Wypiski ostatnie. 2004–2012* [Final comments: 2004–2012] vol. 1–2 (Warsaw: Państwowy Instytut Wydawniczy, 2020).

⁵ Łukasz Żurek, “Autonomia znaczenia, nie afektu. Nicholas Brown o dziele sztuki, formie towarowej oraz interpretacji” [Autonomy of meaning, not affect. Nicholas Brown on a work of art, the commodity form and interpretation], paper delivered at the online symposium “Rhetoric of affects V. Affect in theoretical-literary discourse” 30 Nov. 2020. I quote the electronic version of the paper, courtesy of the author.

Regardless of why Barthes's work is not discussed by Polish "affective" literary critics, the reluctance to refer to the category of pleasure should come as no surprise. In *The Pleasure of the Text*, published in 1973, which, together with the essay "From Work to Text," was one of the milestones in the development of his concept of reading, dating back to 1957 and *Mythologies* and culminating in 1977 in *A Lover's Discourse: Fragments*, Barthes wrote:

If I agree to judge a text according to pleasure, I cannot go on to say: this one is good, that bad. No awards, no "critique," for this always implies a tactical aim, a social usage, and frequently an extenuating image-reservoir. I cannot apportion, image that the text is perfectible, ready to enter into a play of normative predicates: it is too much *this*, not enough that; the text (...) can wring from me only this judgment, in no way adjectival: *that's it!* And further still: *that's it for me!*⁶

Indexes in books of literary criticism show that Barthes's name appears in them mostly in the context of readerly pleasure/bliss, especially as regards the justification of subjective judgments. It is as if revealing an emotional approach to the text required each time legitimation in the form of invoking one of the greats of postmodern philosophy. Perhaps this is because Barthes argues that if we enjoy what we read, we are unable to think critically: "No awards, no 'critique.'" Reading for pleasure is for him a practice that resembles erotic pleasure or ritual ecstasy, and not hermeneutics. And wasn't Barthes's famous manifesto meant to be just that – a ritual, a flirtation, a sacrificial offering? The pleasure of not so much reading as of *t e x t*?⁷ It comes as no surprise that pleasure as an affect experienced by a person who professionally analyzes literature was meant to be hidden and considered shameful. Jan Błoński and, three decades later, Michał Paweł Markowski⁸ opposed this trend. The question of pleasure became the subject of debate at the turn of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries.

The quoted passage, although rhetorically efficient, is far from precise, even in Barthes's emotional universe. It is hardly surprising; after all, *The Pleasure of the Text* is composed of fragments, often incompatible passages; it is a manifesto of "emotional" writing – *écriture*. And yet the author of *Mythologies* makes a significant distinction in his works, which allows us to place him in the greater context of French post-war philosophy and critics such as Jacques Lacan, Georges Bataille and Julia Kristeva. Referring to psychoanalysis, Barthes distinguishes between "pleasure" (*plaisir*) and "bliss" (*jouissance*); the latter, for Lacan, concerned primarily transgressive experiences (and therefore exceeded the principle of pleasure; Lacan wrote that "jouissance is suffering"⁹) and, generally speaking, it was not subject to subjective control.¹⁰

⁶ Barthes, *The Pleasure of the Text*, 13.

⁷ Barthes, *The Pleasure of the Text*, 9–11. For more on the understanding of the term "Text" in Barthes's philosophy, see: Roland Barthes, "From Work to Text", in: *The Rustle of Language*, trans. Richard Howard (New York: Hill and Wang, 1986), 56–64. "The difference is as follows: the work is a fragment of substance, it occupies a portion of the spaces of books (for example, in a library). The Text is a methodological field. The opposition may recall (though not reproduce term for term) a distinction proposed by Lacan: "reality" is shown [*se montre*], the "real" is proved [*se demontre*] (...). the Text is experienced only in an activity, in a production" (p. 56–57)

⁸ Cf.: Jan Błoński, "Wstęp" [Introduction], in idem: *Romans z tekstem* [Love affair with the text] (Kraków: Wydawnictwo Literackie, 1981); Michał Paweł Markowski, "Pochwała subiektywizmu" [In praise of subjectivism], *Europa* 84 (2005).

⁹ Jacques Lacan, *The Seminar. Book vii. The Ethics of Psychoanalysis, 1959–60*, translated with notes by Dennis Porter (London: Routledge, 1992), 184.

¹⁰ See: Dylan Evans, *An Introductory Dictionary of Lacanian Psychoanalysis* (London: Routledge, 1996), 93–94; David Macey, *Lacan in Contexts* (London: Verso, 1998), 200–205.

The pleasure (*plaisir*) of reading may be subject to discursivization, insofar as one asks themselves and the text critical questions, even the most basic ones, such as: “Why do I like what I like?” Barthes does it in many of his texts. For example, in *Sade, Fourier, Loyola* published in French in 1971, he analyzes the Marquis de Sade’s works and in order to name the structure of *The 120 days of Sodom*, he formulates a precise semi-semiotic and semi-formalistic concept of “a grammar of sites and operations,” which he calls the pornogram.¹¹ Respectively, in his 1971 essay “From Work to Text,” Barthes argued that Text (written with a capital letter) “is not coexistence of meaning, but passage, traversal; hence, it depends not on an interpretation, however liberal, but on an explosion, on dissemination,” which means that it is dynamic and its essence has not been codified in the form of “meaning;”¹² “it can be Text only in its difference (which does not mean its individuality); its reading is semelfactive (which renders any inductive-deductive science of texts illusory: no ‘grammar’ of the text).”¹³ It seems unlikely that, within the framework of Barthes’s understanding of meaning, he could consider *The 120 days of Sodom* a work with a “codified” stable meaning, both in terms of the meaning of the work itself and its cultural significance. This (terminological?) inaccuracy perhaps stems from referring to an earlier observation or an in-depth reflection on the meaning of a literary work, or its unique form, which, according to Barthes, Text is. In *The Pleasure of the Text*, one can also find quasi-theoretical reflections. In one such fragment, Barthes argues that “breaks” and “collisions” are universal principles which govern how literature affects the reader:

Sade: the pleasure of reading him clearly proceeds from certain breaks (or certain collisions); antipathetic codes (the noble and the trivial, for example) come into contact; pompous and ridiculous neologisms are created; pornographic messages are embodied in sentences so pure they might be used as grammatical models. As textual theory has it: the language is redistributed. Now, *such redistribution is always achieved by cutting*. Two edges are created: an obedient, conformist, plagiarizing edge (the language is to copied in its canonical state, as it has been established by schooling, good usage, literature, culture), and *another edge*, mobile, blank (ready to assume any contours), which is never anything but the site of its effect: the place where the death of language is glimpsed. These two edges, *the compromise they bring about*, are necessary. Neither culture nor its destruction is erotic; it is the seam between them, the fault, the flaw, which becomes so.¹⁴

Other scholars share this sentiment. In Poland, similar observations were made by, for example, Adam Ważyk, who argued that juxtaposition, the emanation of creative delineation and the blurring of the “edges,” determines whether a given work belongs to the canon of 20th-century art and whether it is a source of readerly pleasure.¹⁵ Ważyk usually defined the

¹¹Roland Barthes, *Sade, Fourier, Loyola*, trans. Richard Miller (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1976), 35–158.

¹²See: Barthes, “From Work to Text”, 59.

¹³Barthes, “From Work to Text”, 60.

¹⁴Barthes, *The Pleasure of the Text*, 5–6.

¹⁵Adam Ważyk, *Eseje literackie* [Literary essays] (Warsaw: Państwowy Instytut Wydawniczy, 1982), 277.

latter as an adventure, as a surprise or a revelation; Edward Balcerzan also wrote about this experience in *Przygody człowieka książkowego* [The Adventures of a Book Man], a manifesto praising literature.¹⁶ It should be added that the feeling that one unravels a mystery, comes into contact with the unknown, is often recalled in critical texts which try to capture the essence of readerly pleasure. It is true for Ważyk and Balcerzan, as well as, for example, Tadeusz Żeleński (Boy), Kazimierz Wyka, Jan Błoński, Maria Janion, Henryk Berezka, Karol Maliszewski, Krzysztof Uniłowski, Dariusz Nowacki, Marek Bieńczyk and the aforementioned Olga Tokarczuk.

Contrary to the Lacanian understanding of *jouissance*, Barthesian bliss is not a state of inertia. Barthes explains that readerly pleasure (must and will) mean that the reader loses an important point of reference in the text, which is crucial in hermeneutics. However, the reader is not (solely) responsible for this loss of control – the text, its semantics, structure, coherence, openness, and above all its “subversiveness” or “difference,” also play(s) a role in the process:

(...) the Text does not stop at (good) literature; it cannot be caught up in a hierarchy, or even in a simple distribution of genres. What constitutes it is on the contrary (or precisely) its force of subversion with regard to the old classifications.¹⁷

The division into *plaisir* and *jouissance* gives rise to another distinction: readerly texts and writerly texts (or texts that are re-written in the process of reading). The first category comprises works that require understanding: following the clues, exploring meanings, and verifying one’s judgments by questioning their accuracy. Such a reading may be a source of satisfaction that comes from solving a puzzle. Writerly texts, in turn, are works which involve both readerly ecstasy and agency, insofar as the reader compulsively adds meanings to the text: this form of reading indeed prevails after “the death of the author.”¹⁸ Writerly texts, according to Barthes, are texts with an open structure or texts that are hermetic and elusive and yet, enjoyable, for example, insofar as emphasis is put on sophisticated language (style, composition, prosody, imagery, and the like).¹⁹ Barthes, in (one of his many) definitions, argues that Text written with a capital letter is a prototype of a writerly text and work, by contrast, is a readerly text:

The text is approached and experienced in relation to the sign. The work closes upon a signified. We can attribute two modes of signification to this signified: either it is claimed to be apparent, and

¹⁶Edward Balcerzan, *Przygody człowieka książkowego (ogólne i szczególne)* [(The General and Specific) Adventures of a Book Man] (Warsaw: Wydawnictwo PEN, 1990), 104.

¹⁷Barthes, “From Work to Text”, 58.

¹⁸Łukasz Żurek commented on it in the context of Nicholas Brown’s *Autonomy. The Social Ontology of Art. Under Capitalism* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2019). See: Żurek.

¹⁹Naturally, Polish critics have also praised “unreadable” works. At the beginning of the 21st century, among others, Tymoteusz Karpowicz, Andrzej Sosnowski and Adam Wiedemann fell victim to such interpretative practices. See: Karol Poręba, “Podsumowanie. Wstęp do Karpowicza” [Summary. Introduction to Karpowicz], *Czasopismo Zakładu Narodowego im. Ossolińskich* vol. 32 (2021); Marta Koronkiewicz, *I jest moc odległego życia w tej elegii. Uwagi o wierszach Andrzeja Sosnowskiego* [The force of a distant life is in this elegy. Notes on Andrzej Sosnowski’s poems] (Wrocław: Fundacja na Rzecz Kultury i Edukacji im. Tymoteusza Karpowicza, 2019); Rafał Grupiński, Izolda Kiec, *Niebawem spadnie błoto czyli Kilka uwag o literaturze nieprzyjemnej* [Soon mud will fall, or a few remarks on unpleasant literature] (Poznań: Obserwator 1997).

the work is then the object of a science of the letter, which is philology; or else this signified is said to be secret and final, and must be sought for, and then the work depends upon a hermeneutics, an interpretation (Marxist, psychoanalytic, thematic, etc.); in short, the work itself functions as a general sign, and it is natural that it should represent an institutional category of the civilization of the Sign. The Text, on the contrary, practices the infinite postponement of the signified, the Text is dilatory; its field is that of the signifier; the signifier must not be imagined as “the first part of the meaning,” its material vestibule, but rather, on the contrary, as its *aftermath*; similarly, the signifier’s *infinitude* does not refer to some notion of the ineffable (of an unnamable signified) but to a notion of play (...).²⁰

The fundamental difference between Barthes’s modes of reception lies, therefore, in the intensity of the experience and the inversion of the cause-and-effect relationship. Readerly texts reward the reader during and after interpretation; the reader experiences pleasure. Writerly texts inspire the reader to commit an ecstatic “rape of the text,” which, seemingly, makes them feel in control of it; the reader experiences bliss.

“Not admirers but rapists are usually more celebrated,” Błoński wrote in his essay “Romans z Tekstem” [Love affair with the text],²¹ which was first published in 1974,²² that is only a year after the publication of *The Pleasure of the Text* by Éditions de Seuil.²³ While the metaphor used by Błoński is uncomfortable, the history of Polish literary criticism in the last thirty years clearly shows that rhetorical dexterity and skillful exploitation of middle-class snobbery may mask the shortcomings of interpretation; and for Błoński interpretation was a tender and insightful communion with the text.²⁴

Although I consider Barthes’s *The Pleasure of the Text* a book that is of little use in literary criticism, like his other texts devoted to the pleasure of reading, I outlined the most important theses put forward by the French philosopher in order to (apart from the reasons already indicated) emphasize the difference which, I believe, allows us to reevaluate the category of affect in literary criticism (even considering all the similarities between Barthes’s and Błoński’s theories). This difference lies, as was the case with readerly and writerly texts discussed above, in the understanding of the cause-and-effect relationship. For Błoński, but the same is also true for the majority of Polish critics I have cited earlier, admiration precedes interpretation, and even legitimizes it. It was clear for Jerzy Stempowski. And years later it was clear for

²⁰Barthes, “From Work to Text”, 58–59.

²¹Błoński, “Wstęp” 20.

²²Jan Błoński, “Romans z tekstem” [Love affair with the text], *Teksty. Teoria literatury, krytyka, interpretacja* 3 (1974): 1–8.

²³It begs the question as to whether Błoński could have known Barthes’s latest book at the time. Of course, he must have read Barthes’s earlier works but in “Romans z tekstem” there is no trace of *The Pleasure of the Text*.

²⁴In this context, it is not surprising that the concept of immersion has become so important a category in the study of literature, film, TV series as well as video and board games. Cf., e.g., Tokarczuk, 93–113.

Jerzy Sosnowski who said: “Write only when you feel you have to.”²⁵ Of course, the opinion shared by both authors, that reading and reviewing bad books is a waste of time and that the lack of interest from a literary press or other media is a clear sign as to the value of a given book, may appear radical. And yet Błoński actually shares with us a very simple observation: to interpret and review a literary work, you need affect, either positive or negative. Indifference, to a certain extent projected by Barthes in the case of the reception of readerly texts and contrasted with the strong emotions (“explosion,” “dissemination”) that writerly texts arouse, is not, Błoński argues, a sufficient impulse to start a love affair with the text, which for him was closely associated with the process of reliable interpretation.²⁶

Błoński begins his famous essay by praising Paul Celan’s poem: he is in awe of unique poetic images, mystery, and seemingly well-known yet unusual motifs, such as the figure of the king which Błoński associated with God; the critic praises the captivating melic rhythm.²⁷ Only later is the following ritualistic, somewhat ethereal, sentence uttered: “Now I know I must explore it. Before my eye turns to nothingness [...] – it must turn to the poem, it must explore its mystery.”²⁸ It is worth noting, however, that *Romans z tekstem* is not an apology of “incomprehensible poetry.” Błoński tries to distinguish between desirable and undesirable experimentation, “the rubble of weirdness which one does not even want to think about” and “the banality that muddies the mind.”²⁹ As such, he creates not only a manifesto of readerly pleasure and subjectivism but also explicates his own axiology and lays the foundations of his critical and literary project. Błoński’s sketches, essays, and reviews are truly subjective, and the act of taking notes goes hand in hand with the reading process. The aesthetic experience initiates the process of interpretation and understanding, which is an attempt at entering into a dialogue with the author who, according to Błoński and contrary to Barthes, never dies and exists mainly in the text; respectively, the real author becomes for Błoński a text to be read. It can be seen, for example, in the preserved fragments of his diary.³⁰ The declarations made in the manifesto *Romans z tekstem* were earnest: Błoński’s writings are filled with erotic imagery and passion. And this passion is based on the principle of reciprocity and dialogue. Thus, Błoński’s critical literary method may be defined as a meeting or, referring to Ważyk and Balcerzan, as an adventure.

²⁵Jarosław Klejnocki, Jerzy Sosnowski, *Chwilowe zawieszenie broni. O twórczości tzw. pokolenia “bruLionu” (1986–1996)* [Temporary ceasefire. The works of the so-called ‘bruLion’ generation (1986-1996)] (Warsaw: Sic!, 1996), 154.

²⁶Błoński, “Wstęp”.

²⁷Consult the works of Henri Meschonnic and Adam Dziadek (the latter translated Barthes’s works into Polish). See: Adam Dziadek, *Rytm i podmiot w liryce Jarosława Iwaszkiewicza i Aleksandra Wata* [Rhythm and subject in Jarosław Iwaszkiewicz’s and Aleksander Wat’s poetry] (Katowice: Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Śląskiego, 1999); Adam Dziadek, *Projekt krytyki somatycznej* [Somatic Criticism Project] (Warsaw: Wydawnictwo Instytutu Badań Literackich, 2014).

²⁸Błoński, “Wstęp”, 6.

²⁹Błoński, “Wstęp”, 7.

³⁰See, e.g., Jan Błoński, *Błoński przekorny. Dzienniki, wywiady* [Unruly Błoński: Journals, interviews], edited by Marian Zaczyński (Kraków: Znak, 2011), 101–106. For more on the subject see: Krzysztof Biedrzycki, “Doczytywanie Błońskiego: krytyk intymny (O książkach Jana Błońskiego *Gospodarstwo krytyka. Pisma rozproszone* i *Błoński przekorny. Dzienniki. Wywiady* w wyborze i opracowaniu Mariana Zaczyńskiego)” [Reading Błoński: An intimate critic (Jan Błoński’s Books *Gospodarstwo krytyka. Pisma rozproszone* and *Błoński przekorny. Dzienniki. Wywiady* edited by Marian Zaczyński)], *Wielogłos. Pismo Wydziału Polonistyki UJ 1* (2011): 165–166. In this context, it should be noted that Błoński was not particularly interested in authorial intent, although he discussed and questioned the meanings he interpreted.

The example of Błoński may seem blatant and in this sense isolated, but if we read, for example, Stanisław Barańczak's quasi-journalistic popularizing sketches in *Przed i po* [Before and after], and especially fragments in which the author reveals his (different) feelings and experiences concerning books, poems or even their fragments, we can see that as a critic he disliked bombast and boast, that he was suspicious of the classicist diction; he found that referring to the Romantic tradition was too easy; as a reader, he did not like poetry which addressed the general public from the general perspective. He rejected universal, unambiguous, arrogant, paternalistic judgments. Respectively, he valued a feel for language and realism in poetry; he was attracted to the concise and the concrete; he valued the variety of tropes and “suspending” notions in-between two extremes. Above all, he enjoyed texts which awakened and inspired curiosity, openness, and independent thinking.³¹ This is probably why, having rejected to some extent the notions of mass or popular culture, Barańczak proposed that they should be replaced with different names, in keeping with the values listed above, namely the categories of “incapacitating culture” and its (praised and celebrated) opposite.³²

I intentionally use terms such as “manifesto” and “project” in the context of books and works that praise the pleasure of reading. Although literary criticism is never entirely objective, the interpreter's emotional response to a literary work, whether positive or negative, almost always, as I tried to show in my discussion of Błoński and (for example) Barańczak, demonstrates individual aesthetic preferences.³³ A significant exception to this rule, worthy of exploring in a separate article,³⁴ are texts that could be read as a kind of a hoax, that is texts which refer to the axiological framework of a commodity, for example, based on a centric language subjugated to market needs, i.e., the needs of the middle-class reader who aspires to becoming the intellectual/elite reader. Such judgments may often be found, for example, in reviews published in popular weeklies, on the radio, on television and in other mainstream media, as well as in more and more popular culture and lifestyle magazines.

Contemporary critical discussion about literature and its tasks wants to distance itself from universalizing and communicating gestures.³⁵ Perhaps that is why, instead of constructing

³¹Stanisław Barańczak, *Przed i po. Szkice o poezji krajowej przełomu lat siedemdziesiątych i osiemdziesiątych* [Before and after: Essays on Polish poetry at the turn of the 1970s and the 1980s] (London: Aneks, 1988). See also: Balcerzan, 132.

³²See: Stanisław Barańczak, *Odbiorca ubezwłasnowolniony. Teksty o kulturze masowej i popularnej* [Recipient incapacitated: Essays on mass and popular culture], ed. Adam Poprawa (Wrocław: Wydawnictwo Ossolineum, 2017).

³³Interestingly, it is difficult to find similar critical projects (unless they are purely theoretical and literary) in the works associated with the affective turn in Poland.

³⁴In Poland, a great contribution to such a study could be, for example, Łukasz Żurek's paper cited earlier (see: Żurek; Brown).

³⁵See, e.g., Dawid Kujawa, “Czułość i nieczułość w jednym stały domu. Odpowiedź Pawłowi Kaczmarskiemu” [Sensitivity and insensitivity: A response to Paweł Kaczmarski], *Mały Format* 1–3 (2021), <http://malyformat.com/2021/04/kujawa-kaczmarski-polemika/>.

critical literary projects, critics often resort to *ad hoc* subjectivism. Perhaps they should shamelessly show how they “flirt” with texts, why they do it and what, in their opinion, the result is. Perhaps, contrary to the maxim “De gustibus non est disputandum,” critics should discuss manifestos thus created. Tracking experiential traces in critical texts allows us to map critics’ beliefs about the role of literature and its place in social reality. It also allows us to notice the more or less deliberate, or conscious, personal and contingent nature of individual critical gestures and voices.

translated by Małgorzata Olsza

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KEYWORDS

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ABSTRACT:

The article is devoted to the category of readerly pleasure and its variants in Polish critical and literary discourse. The author discusses the category of readerly pleasure developed by Roland Barthes, primarily in his famous essays “From Work to Text” and The Pleasure of the Text; he also reconstructs Jan Błoński’s views expressed in the programmatic essay *Romans z tekstem* [Love affair with the text]. The author argues that since the 1960s these approaches have become default points of reference in the perception of the category of pleasure in Polish literary criticism, even though they are often understood in an intuitive way.

Roland Barthes

THE PLEASURE OF READING

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