

“Should they be remembered?”

The Reception of Pre-War Left-Wing Literary Criticism in Poland as the Production of Ignorance

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In *Rozmyte Tradycje* [Blurred traditions], originally published in 1984 and later reprinted as the introduction to the book *Żadnych marzeń* [No dreams], Tomasz Burek explained why left-wing or “sociological” literary criticism that had emerged in Poland before WW2 was not discussed during high school Polish lessons in the early 1950s:

We were wading through Plekhanov and Stalin [...] we had no idea that a better left-wing tradition existed, and we knew even less about less vulgar applications of the sociological method in literary criticism and studies. We did not know Brzozowski, Bruno-Bronowicz, Fik, or Stawar. Some representatives of this intellectual trend were briefly mentioned in our textbooks; those references were, however, very general, cautious, and at times critical [...].¹

The works of “the representatives of this intellectual trend,” such as Stanisław Brzozowski, Ignacy Fik, Andrzej Stawar, and Julian Brun-Bronowicz, constituted for Burek a “better tradition,” that is an antidote to the vulgar sociology of Plekhanov and Stalin. Pre-WW2 left-wing criticism thus provided a historical background which helped one see the limitations of contemporary criticism which relied on *the* official interpretation of Marx’s writings.

¹ Tomasz Burek, “Rozmyte tradycje” [Blurred traditions], in Tomasz Burek: *Żadnych marzeń* [No dreams], 1st edition (London: Polonia, 1987), 11.

It is worth noting that Burek does not list left-wing critics who could prove useful for the anti-communist intellectual in the 1980s. He refers to drastically different, sometimes sharply conflicting, ideological positions of the twentieth century left. He discusses such "problematic" figures as Stanisław Brzozowski and Julian Brun-Bronowicz – the latter, among other things, was the author of *Stefana Żeromskiego tragedia pomyłek* [Stefan Żeromski's tragedy of errors]² which was criticized by the communist authorities for its "national-Bolshevik tendencies" – alongside Andrzej Stawar. And Stawar was a fierce critic of both Brzozowski³ and Brun-Bronowicz.⁴ In the mid-1930s, he fell out with the Communist Party of Poland (KPP), and after WW2 his books were banned from publication from 1949 to 1955. According to Burek, Stanisław Brzozowski, Julian Brun-Bronowicz, and Andrzej Stawar gave rise to one of the "blurred traditions." This tradition was blurred not only as a result of, as the critic writes, "the dramatic trajectories of contemporary history," but also as a result of the distorting effects of institutions and mechanisms that "by their very nature keep tradition alive [...], select and implement values, cultivate the art of memory."⁵ For the purposes of this article, I propose to call the distorting actions of institutions supposedly concerned with protecting and cultivating knowledge about the past (including literary studies), the production of ignorance. In doing so, I draw on agnotology, which "explores the cultural mechanisms of producing, transmitting, and reinforcing both knowledge and ignorance" about cultural reality.⁶

Of course, in the early 1950s, pre-war left-wing literary criticism had a peculiar status not only in high schools – Burek uses the example of high school Polish lessons to draw attention to the intricacies of the post-war cultural policy. One example of the distorting actions of cultural institutions, which explains why intellectuals of Burek's generation "had no [...] idea that a better [...] tradition existed,"⁷ is the second volume in the series *Materiały do dziejów postępowej publicystyki* [Materials for the history of progressive journalism] edited by Jadwiga Czachowska. Published in 1952 by The Institute of Literary Research of the Polish Academy of Sciences, the book was a critical collection of selected articles from the magazine *Sygnali* [Signals], which was one of the leading periodicals of the left-wing Polish intelligentsia in Lviv in the 1930s.⁸ *Sygnali* was published (with a short break) for six years, making it one

² Jarosław Tomasiewicz, "Prorok narodowej rewolucji" [The prophet of a national revolution], *Nowy Obywatel*, 8 Nov. 2013, <https://nowyobywatel.pl/2013/11/08/prorok-narodowej-rewolucji-2/>.

³ Paweł Rams, "Andrzeja Stawara Brzozowskiego portret podwójny" [Andrzej Stawar's double portrait of Brzozowski], *Teksty Drugie* 5 (2017): 246–263.

⁴ Andrzej Stawar, "Pomyłki «Przedwiośnia» (Z powodu książki J. Bronowicza «Stefana Żeromskiego tragedia pomyłek»)" [Errors of 'The Coming Spring' (J. Bronowicz's book 'Stefana Żeromskiego tragedia pomyłek')], *Dźwignia* 1 (1927): 27–40.

⁵ Burek, "Rozmyte tradycje", 10.

⁶ Łukasz Żurek, "Między niewiedzą a filologią" [Between ignorance and philology], in Łukasz Żurek: *Filologia lokalna – lokalność filologa: praktyki literacko-naukowe Stefana Szymbutki* [Local philology – the locality of the philologist: Literary and scholarly practices of Stefan Szymbutko] (Warsaw: Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Warszawskiego, 2022), 13. On agnotology, see, for example, Robert Proctor, "Agnotology. A Missing Term to Describe the Cultural Production of Ignorance (and Its Study)", in: *Agnotology: The Making and Unmaking of Ignorance*, ed. Londa Schiebinger (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2008).

⁷ Burek, "Rozmyte tradycje", 11.

⁸ Jadwiga Czachowska, *Sygnali: 1933–1939* [Signals: 1933–1939] (Wrocław: Wydawnictwo Zakładu Narodowego im. Ossolińskich, 1952). The first volume edited by Czachowska and Ewa Korzeniowska was not approved for print. It was devoted to the magazine *Nowe Widnokręgi* [New horizons] published in the years 1941–1946. Alicja Szałagan, "Cenzura PRL-owska we wspomnieniach profesor Jadwigi Czachowskiej" [Censorship in the Polish People's Republic in the memories of Professor Jadwiga Czachowska], *Sztuka Edycji* 1 (2015): 91.

of the longest-running left-wing cultural magazines of the 1930s. Given the above, the anthology edited by Czachowska is surprisingly short. It is also surprising that instead of a complete list of articles published in *Sygnaty*, the anthology contained only a “list of the most important texts,” and how “importance” was defined in this context seemed somewhat vague. It is hard not to notice that the texts that were left out were ideologically “problematic” (for example, anything by or about Brzozowski). Years later, in a conversation with Alicja Szałagan, Czachowska recalled that both the anthology and the list of articles published in *Sygnaty* were severely shortened – without consultations – by Samuel Sandler, the secretary of the Institute. A similar fate befell subsequent volumes in the series, devoted to the magazines *Po prostu* [Frankly speaking] and *Oblicze dnia* [The face of the day].⁹

Left-wing literary criticism of the Interwar Period, divided and outspoken, had one common denominator, namely its attitude towards “capitalism, fascism, anti-Semitism [...]” but “everything else was subject to discussion.”¹⁰ The new authorities could not really “use” it to advance their new post-WW2 cultural policies. The left-wing yet non-partisan *Sygnaty* did not fit into the vision of Marxist literary criticism supported by cultural institutions in the early 1950s. Less liberal periodicals such as *Dźwignia* [Lever] and *Miesięcznik Literacki* [Literary monthly] did not fit into it either; they were too much involved in discussions about concepts and phenomena considered outdated after WW2. The problematic nature of pre-war left-wing literary criticism is evidenced by the fact that Czachowska deposited a practically complete typescript of her anthology of texts from *Dźwignia* and *Miesięcznik Literacki* and a complete list of articles published in both magazines in the archive of the Department of Contemporary Literature Documentation at The Institute of Literary Research of the Polish Academy of Sciences.¹¹ The death of some left-wing critics (including Jan Hempel, Henryk Drzewiecki and Stanisław Ryszard Stande) during the Stalinist purges in the USSR also did not help in preserving their literary and journalistic achievements.¹² It is no coincidence that the editors of *Kuźnica* [Wrought] stated in the editorial to the first issue: “[w]e grow out of the same soil out of which the Polish Enlightenment and Jacobinism of Kołłątaj and Staszic, Jezierski and

⁹ Szałagan 90–91. I write more about the history of the anthology and the list of articles published in *Sygnaty* in the article “Znalezione i odkryte. O Bibliografii zawartości pism «Dźwignia» (1927–1928) i «Miesięcznik Literacki» (1929–1931)” [Found and discovered. The list of articles published in “Dźwignia” (1927–1928) and “Miesięcznik Literacki” (1929–1931)], *Praktyka Teoretyczna* 3 (2023): 293–299.

¹⁰ Kazimierz Koźniewski, „Nie ma spokoju na lewicy” [No rest on the left], *Polityka* 8 (1975): 15. It is possible that this characterization of pre-war left-wing criticism obscures more than it clarifies.

¹¹ See: Jadwiga Czachowska, “Bibliografia zawartości pism «Dźwignia» (1927–1928) i «Miesięcznik Literacki» (1929–1931)” [The list of articles published in “Dźwignia” (1927–1928) and “Miesięcznik Literacki” (1929–1931)], *Praktyka Teoretyczna* 3 (2023): 237–291.

¹² Unlike Hempel, Drzewiecki, and Stande, Fik was killed by the Gestapo in a mass execution in November 1942. Fik’s literary criticism began to be popularized right after the war, among other reasons, because his death could be used in a left-wing martyrological narrative. See, among others, Ignacy Fik, *Rodowód społeczny literatury polskiej* [The social origins of Polish literature], 2nd edition, (Kraków: Czytelnik, 1946); [Anonim], “Ignacy Fik - człowiek zapomniany” [Ignacy Fik - a forgotten man], *Echo Krakowa* 227 (1946): 7; Józef Sieradzki, “«Za prawdę muszę być gotów oddać Życie»” [‘I must be ready to die for the truth’], *Odrodzenie* 43 (1946): 1–2; Ignacy Fik, “Światopogląd recenzencki” [Reviewer’s worldview], *Odra* 1–2 (1948): 3. On Fik’s activities during the German occupation, see: Marian Stępień, “Ignacy Fik”, in: Marian Stępień, *Kontury w mroku* [Contours in the dark], 1st edition (Katowice: WW Oficyna Wydawnicza, 2007), 104–148.

Jasiński grew 150 years ago.”¹³ On the one hand, the aim was to show that the tradition of progressive intelligentsia is an important part of Polish culture, worth recalling and developing after WW2. On the other hand, by referring to the very broad category of “radical Polish thought,” *Kuźnica* also wished to avoid having to react to the context that was chronologically the closest, that is the left-wing literary criticism of the 1920s and the 1930s. Among the “critics who played a fundamental role in the development of radical Polish thought”¹⁴ listed in the editorial, only Tadeusz Boy-Żeleński was active in the Interwar Period and his relations with left-wing literary critics were very complicated.¹⁵

Considering the problematic nature of pre-war left-wing criticism for post-war cultural policy, it is not surprising that when in 1946 Kazimierz Budzyk reprinted two preserved interpretative treatises by the literary theoretician Dawid Hopensztand¹⁶ – a member of the Warsaw Circle of Polish Philologists at Józef Piłsudski University and the Communist Party of Poland (KPP) – in *Stylistyka teoretyczna w Polsce* [Theoretical stylistics in Poland] as examples of pre-war “sociological stylistics,” he did not mention the connections between Hopensztand’s analytical “scholarly” articles and his pre-war literary criticism and journalistic writings in *Lewar* [Siphon] and *Dziennik Popularny* [Popular Daily] in the introduction to the anthology. It is also not surprising that Melania Kierczyńska ignored her pre-war literary criticism in her infamous 1951 book *Spór o realizm* (Dispute on realism) – a collection of critical essays from the years 1946–1950. Kierczyńska, who before WW2 used the name “Cukier” or “Zucker”, co-founded a circle of Marxist critics affiliated with the Communist Party of Poland (KPP) in the 1930s. And, as the biographical dictionary *Współcześni polscy pisarze i badacze literatury* [Contemporary Polish writers and literary scholars] succinctly informs, she “[p]ublished articles and reviews in left-wing journals associated with the Communist Party of Poland (KPP).”¹⁷ What articles? We do not know.¹⁸

¹³The editorial board of *Kuźnica*, “[Słowo wstępne]” [The editorial], *Kuźnica: pismo społeczno-literackie* 1 (1945): 1. It is also significant that the first issue of the magazine published a fragment of Waław Nałkowski’s critique of *Legenda Młodej Polski*. On the adaptation of Nałkowski’s ideas by *Kuźnica* see: Andrzej Mencwel, “Forpocztą i sumienie” [The avantgarde and conscience], in: Andrzej Mencwel, *Etos lewicy: esej o narodzinach kulturalizmu polskiego* [The ethos of the left: An essay on the birth of Polish culturalism] (Warsaw: Wydawnictwo Krytyki Politycznej, 2009), 28.

¹⁴The editorial board of *Kuźnica*, “[Słowo wstępne]”.

¹⁵A summary of the disputes between socialists and communists and Boy may be found in: Joanna Krajewska, “Ignacy Fik, Irena Krzywicka: socjalizm a feminizm” [Ignacy Fik, Irena Krzywicka: Socialism and feminism], in: Joanna Krajewska, *Spór o literaturę kobiecą w Dwudziestolecie międzywojennym* [The dispute over women’s literature in the interwar period] (Poznań: Wydawnictwo Nauka i Innowacje, 2014), 324.

¹⁶Dawid Hopensztand, “Mowa pozornie zależna w kontekście «Czarnych skrzydeł»” [Free indirect speech in the context of ‘Czarne Skrzydła’], in: *Stylistyka teoretyczna w Polsce* [Theoretical Stylistics in Poland], ed. Kazimierz Budzyk (Warsaw, Łódź: Książka, 1946); Dawid Hopensztand, „«Satyry» Krasickiego” [Krasicki’s ‘Satires’], in: *Stylistyka teoretyczna w Polsce*, ed. Kazimierz Budzyk (Warsaw, Łódź: Książka, 1946). Danuta Ulicka writes about Hopensztand in detail in: Danuta Ulicka, „«Archiwum» i archiwum” [‘Archive’ and archive], *Teksty Drugie* 4 (2017): 273–302.

¹⁷*Współcześni polscy pisarze i badacze literatury: słownik biobibliograficzny* [Contemporary Polish writers and literary scholars: Biographical dictionary], ed. Jadwiga Czachowska, Alicja Szałagan, vol. 4 (Warsaw: Wydawnictwa Szkolne i Pedagogiczne, 1996), 115.

¹⁸Żanna Kormanowa recalls that the critic had been writing for *Lewar* since the autumn of 1933. Żanna Kormanowa, „Melania Kierczyńska (1888–1962)”, in: *Zapiskane w pamięci: o Melanii Kierczyńskiej wspomnienia i szkice* [Recorded in memory: Memories and essays], ed. Olga Kierczyńska (Warsaw: Czytelnik, 1981), 31. According to Wat, Kierczyńska also published in *Miesięcznik Literacki*, but Czachowska’s bibliography does not confirm this, see: Aleksander Wat, *Mój wiek: pamiętnik mówiony*, ed. Lidia Ciołkoszowa, vol. 1 (London: Polonia Book Fund, 1977), 154. The book has been translated into English: Aleksander Wat, *My Century. The Odyssey of a Polish Intellectual*, trans. Richard Lourie (New York: New York Review of Books, 1988).

Stalin's death, Khrushchev's speech on the cult of personality, and the liberalization of the cultural policy of the Polish United Workers' Party as a result of these events created favorable conditions for reincorporating the works of the most important pre-war left-wing critics into the Polish humanities. In 1957, Stawar, who was then allowed to publish again, published the collection *Szkice literackie* [Literary essays], in which (apart from several texts written after WW2) he reprinted 14 articles and reviews from the years 1924–1938. However, even a cursory review of issues of *Nowa Kultura* [New culture], *Dźwignia*, *Miesięcznik Literacki*, and *Wiadomości Literackie* [Literary news] shows that the critic published much more in the 20th century and that *Szkice literackie* is by no means a representative selection of his pre-war literary criticism.¹⁹ In 1958, Brun-Bronowicz's book about Żeromski was re-published.²⁰ In 1961, Ignacy Fik's *Wybór pism krytycznych* [Selected critical writings]²¹ was published. Two years later, in 1963, Stanisław Baczyński's *Pisma krytyczne* [Critical writings] was published.²² The second volume of *Teoria badań literackich* [Theory of literary studies] edited by Henryk Markiewicz in 1960, containing reprints of Stande's *O krytykę marksistowską* [Marxist criticism], Stawar's *O pojmowanie literatury* [Understanding literature], and Fik's *Charakter społeczny literatury* [The social character of literature], did not really expand the knowledge of pre-war left-wing criticism, but rather canonized, "anthologized" a certain part of it (the texts by Stawar and Fik reprinted in the anthology had already been published after WW2).²³ All in all, the number of publications was not great.

Later in *Rozmyte tradycje*, Burek treats pre-war left-wing literary criticism as part of "great critical traditions, formed in the nineteenth century:" the tradition of literary criticism "understood as interpretation (exposure – decipherment – unmasking) of social reality."²⁴ Burek himself, of course, felt it necessary to continue the "Great Discussion" initiated by this tradition, as evidenced by such parts of *Żadnych marzeń* as *Zapomniana literatura polskiego Października* [The forgotten literature of the Polish October] and a much earlier essay *1905, nie 1918* [1905, not 1918].²⁵ At least as late as in the mid-1980s, the critic still needed pre-war left-wing literary criticism for something, as did Andrzej Mencwel, who in his book *Etos lewicy* [The ethos of the left], written between 1985 and 1987, referred to the overlooked or distorted tradition of left-

¹⁹Of course, Stawar's publications from the years 1934–1936, critical of the Soviet Union and inspired by the Trotskyist critique of Stalin's "Bonapartism" and the bureaucratization of the Soviet state, could not be published in 1957, see: *Pisma ostatnie Andrzeja Stawara* [Andrzej Stawar's last writings] (Paris: Instytut Literacki, 1961).

²⁰Julian Brun, *Stefana Żeromskiego tragedia pomyłek* (Warsaw: Spółdzielnia Wydawniczo-Handlowa Książka i Wiedza, 1958).

²¹Ignacy Fik, *Wybór pism krytycznych* [Selected critical writings], ed. Andrzej Chruszczyński (Warsaw: Książka i Wiedza, 1961).

²²Stanisław Baczyński, *Pisma krytyczne* [Critical writings], ed. Andrzej Kijowski (Warsaw: Państwowy Instytut Wydawniczy, 1963). In addition to Fik, Baczyński, and Stawar, it is also worth mentioning a selection of critical essays by Lech Piwowar, rather loosely associated with the pre-war literary left, see: Lech Piwowar, *Sztuka na gorąco: szkice literackie* [Hot art: Literary essays], ed. Tadeusz Kłak (Katowice: Wydawnictwo Śląsk, 1987).

²³*Polska krytyka literacka 1918–1939* [Polish literary criticism] also "canonized" certain texts and authors, including Brun-Bronowicz's treatise on Żeromski and articles by Stawar, Fik, and Baczyński, some of which had been already published in the "post-Thaw" anthologies (*Polska krytyka literacka, 1919–1939: materiały* [Polish literary criticism, 1919–1939: Materials], ed. Jan Zygmunt Jakubowski, 1st edition [Warsaw: Państwowe Wydawnictwo Naukowe, 1966]). On the role that the anthology may play in perpetuating popular beliefs about a given trend in the humanities, see: Danuta Ulicka, "Siła antologii" [The power of the anthology], in: *Wiek teorii: sto lat nowoczesnego literaturoznawstwa polskiego* [The age of theory: A hundred years of modern Polish Literary studies], ed. Danuta Ulicka, vol. 2: *Antologia* (part 1) (Warsaw: Wydawnictwo IBL PAN, 2020), 7–25.

²⁴Burek, "Rozmyte tradycje", 15.

²⁵Tomasz Burek, "1905, nie 1918" [1905, not 1918], in: *Tomasz Burek Dalej aktualne* [Still relevant], 1st edition (Warsaw: Czytelnik, 1973).

wing thinkers and activists from the turn of the nineteenth and the twentieth centuries.

Contemporary literary criticism, or more broadly contemporary literary studies, clearly does not need Fik, Stawar or Baczyński, passively producing (and reproducing) ignorance about left-wing literary criticism popularized during the Polish People's Republic. A connection with at least some part of pre-war left-wing literary criticism – similar to that found in Burek's *Rozmyte tradycje* – was not established either in the 1990s or today. In the works on the history of Polish literature of the interwar period published after 1989, one could also find references to pre-war left-wing criticism that were "general, cautious, and at times critical," similarly to the ones read by Burek in the early 1950s.²⁶ The only novelty in the literature on the subject was the narrowing of the canon of texts associated with the pre-war literary left, which had been stabilized in the 1960s and the 1970s and had not been problematized, verified, or expanded since, to a maximum of four figures (Fik, Stawar, Stande, Baczyński). Pre-war left-wing literary criticism also did not play a role in the discussions on the political nature of literature and poetry and engaged criticism in the first decades of the 21st century,²⁷ even as a "negative tradition" used for polemical purposes. Socialist realist criticism was referenced in this context instead. It was much more effective as a symbol of the disastrous effects of the "politicization" of literary studies.²⁸

Left-wing literary criticism was discussed in anthologies²⁹ or articles devoted to the aesthetic views of the most important critics,³⁰ but it was never analyzed in specialist monographs.³¹ Thus, Marian

²⁶Burek, "Rozmyte tradycje". See, for example, Jerzy Kwiatkowski, *Literatura Dwudziestolecia* [Literature of the interwar period] (Warsaw: IBL PAN, 1990); Lesław Eustachiewicz, *Dwudziestolecie 1919–1939* [The interwar period 1919–1939], 2nd revised edition (Warsaw: Wydawnictwa Szkolne i Pedagogiczne, 1990); Anna Nasiłowska, *Trzydziestolecie 1914–1944* [Thirty years from 1914 to 1944] (Warsaw: Wydawnictwo Naukowe PWN, 1995); Dariusz Skórczewski, *Spory o krytykę literacką w Dwudziestoleciu międzywojennym* [Disputes over literary criticism in the interwar period] (Kraków: Universitas, 2002).

²⁷One exception to this rule, which nevertheless proves that the rule exists, is the introduction to Dawid Kujawa's book in which among the three ways of "situating the poet [and, one may assume, also the critic – Ł.Ż.] in social life," Kujawa mentions the "old left-wing tradition" of raising the class consciousness of workers. Kujawa is, however, critical of that tradition. Dawid Kujawa, *Pocałunki ludu: poezja i krytyka po roku 2000* [Kisses of the people: Poetry and criticism after 2000] (Kraków: Korporacja Ha!art, 2021), 24. "Left-wing tradition" is old, thus not worthy of scholarly attention.

²⁸"[...] [Maja] Staśko meticulously imitates the style and finesse of the arguments of Melania Kierczyńska, the author of *Spór o Realizm* from 1951, and I congratulate her for carrying the torch of Stalinist socialist realism in the darkness of 'fake news' democracy." Marcin Sendek, "W tym numerze nie pisze się..." [In this issue we do not write about...], *Książki. Magazyn do czytania* [Books. A magazine for reading] 1 (2017): [the digital archive of *Gazeta Wyborcza*].

²⁹For example, Andrzej Werner, "Krytyka marksistowska" [Marxist critique], in: *Literatura polska: 1918–1975* [Polish literature: 1918–1975], ed. Alina Brodzka, Halina Zaworska, Stefan Żółkiewski, vol. 1 (Warsaw: Wiedza Powszechna, 1991), 208–220; Tomasz Burek, "Krytyka literacka i «duch dziejów»" [Literary criticism and Zeitgeist], in: *Literatura polska: 1918–1975*, ed. Alina Brodzka, Halina Zaworska, Stefan Żółkiewski, vol. 2 (Warsaw: Wiedza Powszechna, 1993), 264–342; Michał Mrugański, "Marxism in Poland", in: *Central and Eastern European Literary Theory and the West*, ed. Michał Mrugański, Schamma Schahadat, Irina Wutsdorff (Berlin, Boston: De Gruyter, 2022), 486–504.

³⁰For example, Antonina Sebesta, "Ideologiczne determinanty kultury w twórczości Andrzeja Stawara" [Ideological determinants of culture in the works of Andrzej Stawar], in: *Polska lewica w XX wieku: historia – ludzie – idee* [The Polish Left in the 20th century: History – people – ideas], ed. Tadeusz Ślęzak, Michał Śliwa (Kraków: Wydawnictwo Naukowe Akademii Pedagogicznej, 2004); Wojciech Kajtoch, "Stanisława Baczyńskiego teoria kryminału" [Stanisław Baczyński's theory of crime fiction], *Acta Universitatis Wratislaviensis. Literatura i Kultura Popularna* 25 (2019); Marian Stepień, "Obowiązek i prawo oceny: (o Stanisławie Baczyńskim)" [The duty and right to judge: (about Stanisław Baczyński)], *Zdanie* 3/4 (2015): 83–93; Krajewska.

³¹One exception is the complete and comprehensive monograph of The Polish Socialist Party's (PPS) magazine *Robotnik* [Worker], see: Oskar Czarnik, *Ideowe i artystyczne wybory "Robotnika" w latach 1918–1939* [The ideological and artistic choices of "Robotnik" in the years 1918–1939] (Warsaw: Biblioteka Narodowa, 1996). It is also worth mentioning the anthology devoted to the ephemeral magazine *Europa* [Europe], edited by Stanisław Baczyński, see: *Europa 1929–1930: antologia* [Europe 1929–1930: An anthology], ed. Andrzej Stanisław Kowalczyk (Warsaw: Ministerstwo Spraw Zagranicznych, 2012).

Stępień's 1974 monograph entitled *Ze stanowiska lewicy: studium jednego z nurtów polskiej krytyki literackiej lat 1919–1939* [From the position of the left: A study of one of the trends in Polish literary criticism in the years 1919–1939] is still considered *the* book on pre-war left-wing literary criticism.³² Despite its indisputable merits, which include, above all, the fact that it gave us access to a huge number of articles published in the interwar press, it is impossible not to agree with the reviews which point out that Stępień's monograph is "[...] a reliable collection of critical essays" which was nevertheless "poorly organized."³³ Underneath all the quotes and names, "the contours of the whole are blurred, the problem is blurred."³⁴ It is also problematic that left-wing literary criticism is treated in Stępień's book as an independent entity, with no connections to other critical trends of the era other than Soviet Marxism. It is not confronted with its ideological enemy, i.e. Polish right-wing criticism.³⁵ Reading the book today, we realize that Stępień does not mention some pre-war critics because it was not allowed by the censorship. These include, among others, Isaac Deutscher who wrote reviews for *Nasz Przegląd* (Our review), *Nowy Dziennik* [New daily], and *Nowy Przegląd* [New review] and also collaborated with *Miesięcznik Literacki*, in which he polemicized with Stawar on Marxist criticism,³⁶ and Józef Łobodowski, the editor of the ephemeral, left-wing *Barykady* [Barricades] (1932–1933) and *Dźwigary* [Girders] (1934–1935).

Instead of reassessing the facts, interpretations, and distinctions found in Stępień's monograph or presenting the reader with a comprehensive reconstruction of the views of individual critics associated with the socialist or communist left, after 1989 literary scholars focused either on the reception of right-wing criticism³⁷ or on left-wing critics' political activism. The abolition of state censorship and gaining access to previously unknown archival materials

³²Marian Stępień, *Ze stanowiska lewicy: studium jednego z nurtów polskiej krytyki literackiej lat 1919–1939* [From the position of the left: A study of one of the trends in Polish literary criticism in the years 1919–1939] (Kraków: Wydawnictwo Literackie, 1974). Stępień's much later book, *Polska Lewica Literacka* [Polish literary left] from 1985, essentially repeats the findings of the earlier monograph.

³³Anna Gorenkowa, „Lewicowa krytyka dwudziestolecia” [Left-wing literary criticism of the interwar period], *Literatura* 35 (1974): 11.

³⁴Krystyna Sierocka, „W oczekiwaniu na ciąg dalszy” [Waiting for the next chapter], *Nowe Książki* 2 (1975): 44–45.

³⁵Witold Nawrocki, „Lewica polska a literatura” [The Polish left and literature], *Trybuna Ludu* 286 (1974): 8. Dezydery Barłowski tries to fill this gap in his article „«Faszystowska kołtuneria» versus «kacyki z międzynarodówki». Rzecz o kilku lewicowo-prawicowych sporach wokół polskiej powieści nacjonalistycznej dwudziestolecia międzywojennego” [‘Fascist philistinism’ versus ‘Internationalist caciques’. A story about several disputes between the left and the right over Polish nationalist novels in the interwar period], *Praktyka Teoretyczna* 3 (2023): 109–126.

³⁶Isaac Deutscher, „O historyczne pojmowanie literatury” [The historical understanding of literature], *Miesięcznik Literacki* 12 (1930): 543–547.

³⁷Maciej Urbanowski, *Nacjonalistyczna krytyka literacka: próba rekonstrukcji i opisu nurtu w II Rzeczypospolitej* [Nationalist literary criticism: An attempt to reconstruct and describe the trend in the Second Polish Republic], 1st edition (Kraków: Wydawnictwo ARCANA, 1997); Maciej Urbanowski, *Prawą stroną literatury polskiej: szkice i portrety* [The right side of Polish literature: Essays and portraits], 2nd revised and extended edition (Łomianki: Wydawnictwo LTW, 2015). It was passively assumed that the basic problem with the reception of pre-war criticism in the Polish People's Republic was the “asymmetry of research on the revolutionary trend and the ‘conservative’ trend [...]”, which resulted, among other things, in the fact that in *Obraz literatury polskiej XIX i XX wieku* [Polish literature of the 19th and 20th century] only 4 pages were devoted to Catholic and National Democrat periodicals, and 42 pages to left-wing periodicals (Krzysztof Dybciak, “Refleksje o dwudziestowiecznej krytyce literackiej” [Reflections on twentieth-century literary criticism], in: *Wiedza o literaturze i edukacja: księga referatów Zjazdu Polonistów*, Warszawa 1995 [Literary knowledge and education: Proceedings of the Congress of Polish Studies Scholars, Warsaw 1995], ed. Teresa Michałowska, Zbigniew Goliński, Zbigniew Jarosiński (Warsaw: IBL PAN, 1996), 486).

was of much help in this process. Thus, "communist influences" in pre-war literary circles³⁸ or individual left-wing critics' involvement (most often Stawar's) in pre-war and post-war communist movements were studied.³⁹ Scholars primarily focused on the critics associated with the Communist Workers' Party of Poland / the Communist Party of Poland (KPP), since the pre-war communist movement was seen as a harbinger of the post-war political order. As one might assume, Aleksander Wat's *Mój wiek/ My Century* played a significant role in shaping the reception of left-wing literary criticism. Specifically, in the first volume, Wat talks about *Miesięcznik Literacki* which he edited.⁴⁰ Praising, among other things, articles which described the realities of life of the rural and urban working class in the Second Polish Republic, Wat nevertheless paints a decidedly negative picture of the communist wing of left-wing literary criticism. According to Wat, *Miesięcznik Literacki* was subordinated to party interests, short-sighted, sectarian, anti-intellectual, and at the same time over-intellectualized. Above all, the political and social rhetoric of the magazine was supposed to foreshadow the rhetoric of the Stalinist era:

As for the journalism in *The Literary Monthly*, it was on a fairly high level. And it may have been more sensible than what the Marxist and communist wrote in Poland during the time of Stalinism. Many of those people had of course been inspired by *The Literary Monthly*. Whether they had been inspired by it or not, they discovered it anew and used it as a model. Now their work strikes me as more simplistic than *The Literary Monthly's*.⁴¹

Wat's memories, reinforced by the post-transformation anti-communist discourse,⁴² define the production of ignorance about the pre-war left-wing literary criticism after 1989. How

³⁸ For example, Andrzej Chojnowski, "Wpływy komunistyczne na Uniwersytecie Warszawskim w latach 1918–1939" [Communist influence at the University of Warsaw in 1918–1939], in: *Komuniści w międzywojennej Warszawie* [Communists in Warsaw in the 1920s and the 1930s], ed. Elżbieta Kowalczyk (Warsaw: Instytut Pamięci Narodowej, 2014); Konrad Rokicki, "Wpływy komunistyczne w warszawskim środowisku literackim w okresie międzywojennym" [Communist influences in Warsaw literary circles in the interwar period], in: *Komuniści w międzywojennej Warszawie*, ed. Elżbieta Kowalczyk (Warsaw: Instytut Pamięci Narodowej, 2014).

³⁹ Tadeusz Drewnowski, "Ostatni autentyczny marksista" [The last true Marxist], in: Tadeusz Drewnowski, *Porachunki z XX wiekiem: szkice i rozprawy literackie* [Coming to terms with the 20th century: Literary sketches and essays] (Kraków: Universitas, 2006); Antonina Sebesta, "Publicystyka sowietologiczna Andrzeja Stawara" [Andrzej Stawar's sovietological journalism], *Rocznik Naukowo-Dydaktyczny. Prace Ekonomiczno-Społeczne* 8 (1997); Piotr Kendzior, "Zjawisko stalinizmu w perspektywie krytyki komunistycznej: casus Andrzeja Stawara i pisma «Pod Prąd» (1934–1936)" [The phenomenon of Stalinism in the perspective of communist criticism: The case of Andrzej Stawar and the magazine 'Pod Prąd' (1934–1936)], in: *Komuniści w II Rzeczypospolitej: ludzie, struktury, działalność* [Communists in the Second Polish Republic: People, structures, activities], ed. Marcin Bułko, Mariusz Krzysztofiński (Rzeszów: Instytut Pamięci Narodowej – Komisja Ścigania Zbrodni przeciwko Narodowi Polskiemu, 2015). In addition, it is worth mentioning Stępień's book *Kontury w mroku*, which sheds light on, among others, the biographies of Hempel, Fik, and Karol Kuryluk (also an active literary critic before WW2), Marian Stępień, *Kontury w mroku*, 1st edition (Katowice: WW Oficyna Wydawnicza, 2007).

⁴⁰ Wat, 1: 164–179. The first "legal" edition of the book was published in Poland in 1990, while in the 1980s it was distributed by the underground press.

⁴¹ Wat, 57. Marci Shore concurs, see Marci Shore, *Caviar and Ashes: A Warsaw Generation's Life and Death in Marxism, 1918–1968* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2008), 370.

⁴² On anti-communism in Poland after 1989, see, among others, Agnieszka Mroziak, "Anti-Communism: It's High Time to Diagnose and Counteract", *Praktyka Teoretyczna* 1 (2019): 178–184; Katarzyna Chmielewska, "Marksizm ante portas!" [Marxism ante portas!], in: *Literatura i socjalizm* [Literature and socialism], ed. Katarzyna Chmielewska, Dorota Krawczyńska, Grzegorz Wołowicz (Warsaw: Fundacja Akademia Humanistyczna, IBL PAN, 2012).

does this process work? Let us take a look at Dariusz Skórczewski's *Spory o krytykę literacką w dwudziestoleciu międzywojennym* [Disputes over literary criticism in the interwar period]. In the chapter on the styles of criticism, right after the discussion of the pre-war far right, we find the following quote: "Ideology was also annexed by literary criticism in Marxist criticism."⁴³ In a footnote, Skórczewski refers to a chapter from the monograph *Literatura polska 1918–1975* [Polish literature 1918–1975] and notes that he defines "Marxist criticism" as "the most radical faction of left-wing criticism, with a clearly defined ideological orientation."⁴⁴ He does not expand on this remark any further. He does not present the views of less radical "factions" of the literary left. Neither does he explain why only "radicals" are defined by their "ideological orientation." He does not specify why "ideology," and "literary criticism" should be discussed separately. Apparently, in his opinion, these issues do not require explanation, just like the concept of "Marxist criticism" itself, which suggests that pre-war left-wing critics were inspired by – unspecified, ahistorical – "historical materialism," "dialectical materialism," or simply "Marxism."

According to Skórczewski, "Marxist critics" and right-wing critics were similar, insofar as both published few theoretical meta-critical essays. To prove his point, Skórczewski refers to the texts of Stande and Stawar which in his opinion were the only essays devoted to the methodology of "Marxist criticism" written in the Interwar Period. Skórczewski does not mention, however, the meta-critical polemical essays of Hempel, Stande, and Deutscher written in response to Stawar's articles.⁴⁵ Neither does he acknowledge the latter's response to Karol Irzykowski's *Piła marksistyczna* [Marxist tyrant].⁴⁶ Skórczewski also does not mention the meta-critical texts by Jerzy Borejsza, Leon Kaltenbergh, Paweł Hoffman, and Izidor Berman, which did not employ the sharp rhetoric of *Miesięcznik Literacki* but also contributed to the discussion on "Marxist criticism."⁴⁷ Skórczewski, for reasons that are not entirely clear,

⁴³Dariusz Skórczewski, "O style i kierunki oddziaływania" [About styles and directions of influence], in: Dariusz Skórczewski, *Spory o krytykę literacką w Dwudziestoleciu międzywojennym* (Kraków: Universitas, 2002), 151.

⁴⁴Skórczewski, "O style i kierunki oddziaływania", 151.

⁴⁵Jan Hempel, "O marksistowską krytykę literacką" [Marxist literary criticism], *Miesięcznik Literacki* 11 (1930): 491–495; Stanisław Ryszard Stande, "O marksistowskie pojmowanie literatury" [The Marxist understanding of literature], *Miesięcznik Literacki* 12 (1930): 535–542; Stanisław Ryszard Stande, "Eklektycyzm czy dialektyka?" [Eclecticism or dialectics?], *Miesięcznik Literacki* 15 (1931): 670–675; Deutscher.

⁴⁶Karol Irzykowski, "Piła marksistyczna" [Marxist tyrant], in: Karol Irzykowski, *Stoń wśród porcelany. Studia nad nowszą myślą literacką w Polsce* [Bull in a china shop: Studies on new literary thought in Poland] (Warsaw: Towarzystwo Wydawnicze Rój, 1934); Andrzej Stawar, "W lamusie idealizmu" [In the lehmhaus of idealism], *Miesięcznik Literacki* 4 (1930): 169–178.

⁴⁷Jerzy Borejsza, "O prawo do krytyki" [The right to critique], *Epoka* 16 (1939): 12–14; Jerzy Borejsza, "W sprawie «socjologizmu» w krytyce literackiej" [On "sociologism" in literary criticism], *Wiedza i Życie* 6 (1939): 418–422; Leon Kaltenbergh, "Socjologia literacka" [Literary sociology], *Sygnaly* 21 (1936); Michał Jordan (Paweł Hoffman), "Krytyka literacka, która boi się prawdy" [Literary criticism that is afraid of the truth], *Epoka* 15 (1938); Izidor Berman, "Krytyka czystej formy" [A critique of pure form], *Sygnaly* 63 (1939): 2. Kaltenbergh's text was recently discussed in the online literary magazine *Mały Format* [Small format] by Paweł Bem, see Leon Kaltenbergh, "Socjologia literacka [komentarzem historycznym opatrzył Paweł Bem]" [Literary sociology [with a historical commentary by Paweł Bem]], *Mały Format*, 6 July 2022, <http://malyformat.com/2022/07/socjologia-literacka/>. Katarzyna Trzeciak writes, among others, about Berman's text, "Nierozumiały eksperyment czy społeczna interwencja? Konceptualizowanie literackiej awangardy na łamach lwowskich «Sygnałów»" [Incomprehensible experiment or social intervention? Conceptualizing the literary avant-garde in the Lviv magazine *Sygnaly*], *Praktyka Teoretyczna* 3 (2023): 87–108.

does not consider Fik a Marxist, and therefore does not consider the introductory chapter of *Rodowód społeczny literatury polskiej* [The social origins of Polish literature] a meta-critical essay. He also ignores *Światopogląd recenzencki* [Reviewer's worldview]. A truly bizarre text by Marian Naszkowski⁴⁸ – with whom, which Skórczewski also does not mention, Kaltenbergh argued – is discussed in an earlier chapter as an example of the "most vulgar form" of Marxist literary analysis,⁴⁹ but it is still not considered a meta-critical essay. Regardless of one's opinion concerning Naszkowski's text, it is an important contribution to the debate on the methodology of Marxist criticism.

Why do we find such omissions and simplifications in this otherwise brilliant monograph? I think that Skórczewski is more interested in confirming what he believes we already "know," what is not subject to discussion or reevaluation, namely that the pre-war left and right both used literature and literary criticism for ideological purposes. All contemporary studies I have listed show that Polish literary scholars share beliefs about what was written in pre-war left-wing literary journals, and they do not complicate or expand this image. They do not do it because they think it is not worth it. And they believe that it is not worth it because, after all, they all "know" what was written in those magazines. In accordance with the prevailing *doxa*, which defines the contemporary production of ignorance about pre-war left-wing literary criticism, we all "know" that the reviews, articles, and interpretative essays published in, among others, *Miesięcznik Literacki*, *Dźwignia*, *Lewar*, *Sygnaly*, *Nowa Kultura*, *Nasz Wyraz* [Our expression] or *Lewy Tor* [Left track], are prime examples of the ideologization of literature, vulgar sociology, sectarianism, and emerging socialist realist criticism. The following excerpt from a review of Marci Shore's *Caviar and Ashes* is a testament to such widely held opinions:

Who [...] is still interested today [...] in the history of Marxist libels that left-wing writers directed at one another – first in literary journals, then in denunciations submitted to the NKVD, and in self-criticism sessions at party meetings? Who, apart from Andrzej Mencwel and graduate students of Polish studies, still remembers Stawar and Stande? Who can still explain the fundamental differences between their artistic programs? Should they be remembered?⁵⁰

Konstanty Gebert equates the debates held in pre-war literary journals with denunciations written in the Soviet Union and self-criticism sessions held in the Polish People's Republic in the 1950s and thus demonstrates that the critical writings of Stawar and Stande are important for him only as an example of how the ideological foundations for the post-war cultural and political hegemony of communism were laid. The "fundamental differences"

⁴⁸Marian Naszkowski, „Zadania współczesnej krytyki literackiej” [Tasks of contemporary literary criticism], *Sygnaly* 13 (1934).

⁴⁹Dariusz Skórczewski, „O własną tożsamość, czyli między «ars» i «scientia»” [One's identity, or between „ars” and „scientia”], in: Dariusz Skórczewski, *Spory o krytykę literacką w Dwudziestoleciu międzywojennym* (Kraków: Universitas, 2002), 127.

⁵⁰Dawid Warszawski [Konstanty Gebert], „Futuryści w kompanii karabinów” [Futurists and rifles], *Gazeta Wyborcza* 105 (2006): 24.

between the aesthetic programs of both critics are interesting to Mencwel and the “graduate students of Polish studies,” that is, Gebert seems to suggest, they are not interesting at all. Of course, Gebert is not a historian of literature, so his review of Shore’s book should be assessed less harshly than the unreliable fragments of Skórczewski’s monograph. Nevertheless, we are talking about a review published in a popular daily newspaper, which also contributes to the perpetuation of clichés and half-truths.

Although Shore should not be blamed for the simplifications present in the reception of her book, it is worth taking a closer look at *Caviar and Ashes* in the context of the production of ignorance about pre-war left-wing literary criticism. Primarily because when the book was published in Poland, for a brief moment pre-war left-wing literary criticism (or at least its most radical, communist representatives) became the *topic* of Polish literary life.⁵¹

As the subtitle suggests, *Caviar and Ashes* tells the story of “A Warsaw Generation’s Life and Death in Marxism.” The theme of the entire book is Marxism seen as a “seductive force” and its appeal for the twentieth-century European intelligentsia.⁵² Shore emphasizes that, unlike Tony Judt’s *Past Imperfect: French Intellectuals, 1944–1956*, which she believes to be an example of moralizing historiography, she has “greater empathy for those about whom [she] write[s]” and is not interested in judging anyone.⁵³ She states in the introduction that

[...] perhaps in the end this book’s central contribution to our understanding of Marxism lies in this, in the exploration of Marxism as a lived experience, its messiness [...]. Rather than delineate a paradigm, I have tried to understand what it meant to live Marxism as a European, an East European, a Jewish intellectual in the twentieth century.⁵⁴

The focus on “a lived experience” in all its “messiness” means that historical details play a crucial role in *Caviar and Ashes*. In the words of Hans Ulrich Gumbrecht, the goal is “[t]o make at least some readers forget, during the reading process, that they are *not* living in”⁵⁵ the

⁵¹The Polish translation of Shore’s book was reviewed in literary and cultural magazines as well as historical journals: Marek Zaleski, „Dzieci nowoczesności” [The children of modernity], *Literatura na Świecie* 9-10 (2009): 388–396; Paweł Śpiwak, „Pokolenie roku 1900” [The 1900 generation], *Literatura na Świecie* 9-10 (2009): 397–401; David Ost, „To, co osobiste i polityczne w międzywojennej Polsce” [The Personal and the political in Interwar Poland], *Res Publica Nowa* 5 (2009): 152–159; Rafał Stobiecki, [Kawior i popiół – recenzja] [Caviar and Ashes - review], *Dzieje Najnowsze* 4 (2009): 172–176; Feliks Netz, „Oczarowanie i rozczarowanie” [Enchantment and disenchantment], *Śląsk* 9 (2009): 73; Jerzy Kraszewski, *Przegląd Socjalistyczny* 3 (2009): 121–126. *Caviar and Ashes* also attracted the attention of the right-wing press: Marek Jan Chodakiewicz, „Apologia i moralna ślepotą” [Apologia and moral blindness], *Najwyższy Czas!* 15-16 (2009): XLV–XLVIII; Bohdan Urbankowski, „Skazani na tango z Mołotowem” [Doomed to tango with Molotov], *Gazeta Polska* 31 (2009): 22–24.

⁵²Shore, *Caviar and Ashes*, 8.

⁵³Shore, *Caviar and Ashes*, 7.

⁵⁴Shore, *Caviar and Ashes*, 6.

⁵⁵Hans Ulrich Gumbrecht, *In 1926: Living on the Edge of Time* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1997), X. In the introduction to her book, Shore emphasizes that she is “grateful [to Gumbrecht] for the notion of the quereinschießendes Detail, a detail, perhaps ‘excessive,’ that hits obliquely” (Shore, *Caviar and Ashes*, 6). The connection with *In 1926* is also indicated by the original subtitle: *A Warsaw Generation’s Life and Death in Marxism, 1918–1968* (emphasis mine). It is also worth remembering that Gumbrecht was a member of the doctoral committee at Stanford University that evaluated Shore’s Ph.D. project, which was later published as *Caviar and Ashes*.

Second Polish Republic or in the Polish People's Republic under Stalinism. Shore explained in an interview with Justyna Sobolewska:

I wanted to achieve what is called a suspension of belief in literature, that is, I wanted to make the reader dive into the past. To make this possible, all had to be recreated in detail, including tastes, sounds, coffee, vodka, cigarettes.⁵⁶

Caviar and Ashes was hailed for the author's empathetic and understanding attitude towards her characters (by both Polish and English reviewers). Shore did not employ "[...] primitive, anti-communist stereotypes"⁵⁷ and showed a lot of respect "for seemingly unnecessary historical details."⁵⁸ However, Shore's methodological assumptions also have their negative consequences. The central theme of the book is Marxism as a generational experience (Shore from the very beginning consciously presents it as a soteriological narrative of conversion, disappointment, and repentance)⁵⁹ and as such the individual literary and critical disputes in which the people described in *Caviar and Ashes* were engaged are in fact of little importance as disputes. They become important only as signs of ideological growth, characteristic of the generational experience of Marxism. Shore thus constantly reminds the reader of the fact that at one of the parties Deutscher sat Ola Watowa⁶⁰ on his lap, but, as David Ost has noted, "[she] avoids discussing Marxist debates in which her characters were engaged [...]"⁶¹ As a result, *Caviar and Ashes*, a great read as it may be, does not really allow us to learn anything important about pre-war left-wing literary criticism.

Shore's attitude towards historical material often results in distorting or ignoring what was actually written in the essays of left-wing critics. This is the case with Witold Wandurski.⁶² According to Shore, in his article about the Workers' Theater in Łódź published in *Nowa Kultura*, Wandurski "[o]n one hand [...] acknowledged the theatrical collective's artistic gaps and weaknesses; on the other hand he glorified these gaps and weaknesses as evidence of proletarian authenticity."⁶³ However, the article itself describes how director Tadeusz Leszczyc tried to help the workers-turned-actors overcome their formal shortcomings, so that his version of Gerhart Hauptmann's *Weavers*, Wandurski emphasizes, would not glorify the "shortcomings and imperfections" of the petty-bourgeois theatre.⁶⁴

⁵⁶Marci Shore, "Poparzeni ogniem rewolucji – rozmowę przeprowadziła Justyna Sobolewska" [Burned by the fire of revolution – interview by Justyna Sobolewska], *Polityka* 20 (2009) [the digital archive of *Polityka*].

⁵⁷Kraszewski, 121. In her review of *Caviar and Ashes*, Irena Grudzińska-Gross emphasized that Shore's non-judgmental way of writing about the past is an antidote to the dominant Polish lustration discourse. The book was published the year President Lech Kaczyński signed an amendment to the so-called lustration act. Irena Grudzińska-Gross, *The Polish Review* 2 (2006): 230–232.

⁵⁸Warszawski.

⁵⁹Shore, *Caviar and Ashes*, 6.

⁶⁰Throughout the book she returns to this excess detail four times, see Shore, *Caviar and Ashes*, 109, 329, 369, 372.

⁶¹Ost, 153. Ost seemed to approve of this attitude.

⁶²For reasons that are not entirely clear, Shore consistently writes about Wandurski's literary criticism in terms of "megalomania," "graphomania," and emphasizes that his texts are too long. Shore, *Caviar and ashes*, 35, 45, 99.

⁶³Shore, *Caviar and ashes*, 35.

⁶⁴Witold Wandurski, "Scena Robotnicza w Łodzi" [The Workers' Theater in Łódź], *Nowa Kultura* 4 (1923): 107.

What Shore writes about the article *Upodobania estetyczne proletariatu* [The aesthetic preferences of the proletariat] is equally unfair. In her opinion, the article patronizes the proletariat and shows blind faith in historical determinism.⁶⁵ The problem is that Wandurski's article is devoted to the aesthetic education of the proletariat or, to be more precise, lack thereof. It discusses how material conditions determine the working classes' access to culture. Wandurski writes about illiteracy, the poor condition of provincial theaters, and the excessively high prices of cinema tickets. The scathing criticism is not aimed at workers, "who have neither time nor money to engage with New Art" but at the leaders of the workers' movement, who, Wandurski argues, "strangely agree with the opinions of the petty bourgeoisie and even censors" when it comes to avant-garde trends in art.⁶⁶ Wandurski writes about historical determinism, which Shore points out, but in the context of the "mutual understanding" between workers and the artistic avant-garde: "[...] in the West and in the East it has already happened. It will happen here too because such is the historical necessity."⁶⁷ Regardless of how we assess the historical accuracy of this observation and the hope for an alliance between workers and intellectuals behind it, Wandurski actually writes about something completely different than what Shore claims. Shore seems to be interested in painting a convincing portrait of a hardline communist who relies on the doctrine and not on reality. A book free from primitive anti-communist stereotypes is not the same as a book free from anti-communist stereotypes.

Any research on left-wing literary criticism in the Interwar Period must start by recognizing how and why it was (or is) considered *not* to be a valuable subject of study for a literary scholar. The history of the reception of left-wing literary criticism in Poland, seen as the production of ignorance, shows that both in the 1950s and in the 1990s left-wing texts and critics did not "fit in" with current cultural policies. The problematic nature of left-wing literary criticism in the Interwar Period stemmed first from the fact that it was improperly or insufficiently Marxist; any references to some of those critics were censored. In turn, since the 1990s, this tradition has proved inconvenient because of its connections with Marxism and the broadly defined intellectual tradition of the Polish left. At the same time, it was after 1989 that emphasis was placed either on the political involvement of left-wing literary criticism or – as was the case with Shore's book – on the biographies of the "enchanted and the disenchanted," thus marginalizing their literary and critical work. Focusing attention on the (political, private, political and private...) biographies of critics inadvertently suggests that it is these biographies, and not specific views on literary criticism, literature, and the place of the poet/writer in social reality, that are currently

⁶⁵Shore, *Caviar and Ashes*, 35-36.

⁶⁶Witold Wandurski, "Upodobania estetyczne proletariatu" [The aesthetic preferences of the proletariat], *Nowa Kultura* 6 (1923): 177.

⁶⁷Wandurski, 178.

worth researching.⁶⁸ To put it briefly, we remember that Hempel and Stande died in the Soviet Union but we do not remember what they had to say in their dispute with Stawar.

The mere observation that, despite the changing cultural and political contexts, there was no place for left-wing literary criticism of the Interwar Period in Polish literary studies allows me to answer the question posed in the title of the article. Should they be remembered? Yes. The next step must be to consider whether, in the present day, pre-war left-wing literary criticism may also constitute a "better tradition"⁶⁹ for anyone.

translated by Małgorzata Olsza

⁶⁸Agnieszka Mroziak writes about a similar process – albeit one marked by gender differences – in the context of studying female Polish communist activists. Often, the excessive focus on the personal results in the marginalization of "women's views on political, social, and cultural issues, which are not personal statements." Agnieszka Mroziak, „Zamiast zakończenia. Czy prawdziwe historie komunistek zostaną kiedyś napisane?” [In lieu of an ending: Will the true stories of communist women ever be written?], in: Agnieszka Mroziak, *Architektki PRL-u. Komunistki, literatura i emancypacja kobiet w powojennej Polsce* [Female architects of the Polish People's Republic: Communists, literature, and women's emancipation in post-war Poland] (Warsaw: IBL PAN, 2022): 453.

⁶⁹Burek, „Rozmyte tradycje”, 16.

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KEYWORDS

Andrzej Stawar

AGNOTOLOGY

Marxist criticism

ABSTRACT:

The article discusses the reception of pre-war left-wing literary criticism in Poland from the perspective of the “production of ignorance,” inspired by agnotology (sociology of ignorance). The author focuses on the connections between the post-war and the current official cultural policy, noticing gaps, silences, and omissions in the reception of the most important works of left-wing criticism. He also reflects on how specific ways of constructing historical narratives (re)produce ignorance about pre-war left-wing literary criticism in Poland.

Ignacy Fik

*pre-war left-wing
literary criticism*

Marci Shore

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