

# Alina Siomkajło

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"Portrety i szkice literackie", Artur Hutnikiewicz, Warszawa [etc.] 1976 : [recenzja]

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Artur Hutnikiewicz, **Portrety i szkice literackie (Literary Portraits and Studies)**, Państwowe Wydawnictwo Naukowe, Warszawa – Poznań – Toruń 1976. Series: Prace Wydziału Filologiczno-Filozoficznego Towarzystwa Naukowego w Toruniu (Studies of the Philological and Philosophical Department of the Learned Society of Toruń).

Artur Hutnikiewicz's book is as multifarious in themes and subjects it discusses as diverse are the scholarly and didactic activities of its author. It contains 17 studies, covering literary phenomena and problems from the turn of the 19th century till the recent times, and falling into four distinct thematic groups: 1) Sienkiewicz's contemporary, non-historical novels (the study "O współczesnych powieściach Sienkiewicza" – On modern novels of S.); 2) reception of the Young Poland movement (the studies: "Upadek i odrodzenie Młodej Polski" – The Collapse and Revival of Young Poland; "Stanisław Przybyszewski. Legenda i rzeczywistość" – St. Przybyszewski: The Legend and the Facts); 3) literary revolution in Poland after 1918 (the studies: "Osobowość Żeromskiego" – Żeromski's Personality; "Problematyka form kompozycyjnych w sztuce pisarskiej Żeromskiego" – Formal Problems of Composition in Żeromski's Literary Art; "Żeromski – Lechoń"; "Żeromski – wczoraj i dziś" – Żeromski – Yesterday and Today; "Literatura i teatr w okresie II Niepodległości" – Literature and the Theatre 1918 – 1939; "Życie i śmierć poety. O twórczości Jana Lechońia" – The Life and Death of a Poet: On the Work of Jan Lechoń; "Dziennik Lechońia" – Lechoń's *Journal*; "Pierwsza i druga młodość Wierzyńskiego" – on Wierzyński's poetry; "O poezji Tuwima" – On Tuwim's Poetry; "Stefan Grabiński i jego niesamowita opowieść" – Stefan Grabiński and His Thrill-Story; "Nad dziełem Marii Dąbrowskiej" – On Maria Dąbrowska's Work); 4) modern literary experiments (the studies: "O »niezrozumiałości« i osamotnieniu poezji współczesnej" – On the "Unintelligibility" and Alienation of Modern Poetry; "Struktura liryki współczesnej" – The Structure of Contemporary Lyrical Poetry; "Przeobrażenia strukturalne dwudziestowiecznej prozy narracyjnej" – Structural Transformations in the 20th-Century Narrative Fiction).

The essay devoted to Henryk Sienkiewicz is meant as a revision of the prevalent view on Sienkiewicz as an excellent author of historical novels only. Hutnikiewicz demonstrates in his analysis that

in the collective judgement as well as in literary criticism Sienkiewicz's historical work has been reduced to such inadequate, though stereotyped and persistent labels like "an institution of national education," "the quintessence of the genius of the race" and the like. Accordingly, his literary achievements in the psychological novel and the novel of manners have been overlooked and—consequently—his creative abilities and their range viewed inadequately, which has resulted in a simplified and incomplete picture of the writer in the collective consciousness. Hutnikiewicz bases his revision on a new way of interpreting Sienkiewicz's novels that leads him to the opinion that *Bez dogmatu* (*Without Dogma*) and *Rodzina Polanieckich* (*The Polanieckis*) are to be considered not only as works that enriched Polish literature with exquisite pictures of manners and introduced characters who are psychologically true, but also as "two supreme love novels" (p. 22). With these works Sienkiewicz revolutionized the idyllic convention of the novel; showing the brutal realism of private life meant a step towards the modern novel as we know it.

The next two studies reconstruct the "posthumous" history of the Young Poland movement, the first ("Upadek i odrodzenie Młodej Polski") dealing with the posterity's perception of the trend and its manifestations, the second ("Stanisław Przybyszewski. Legenda i rzeczywistość") focusing on the artistic personality of the writer regarded as the most characteristic figure of the epoch.

Symptomatic of the attitude—generally rather a reserved one—towards the Young Poland in the period 1918–1939 are polemical clashes of Kucharski and Boy, who both witnessed in their prime the modernism in its full bloom and who represented antagonistic views of two artistic centres: Lvov and Cracow. "Even before 1914 Lvov had become a center of the growing opposition to the heritage of the increasingly epigonic Cracow modernism" (p. 26). Various surveys of this heritage were also influenced by Stanisław Brzozowski and his *Legenda Młodej Polski* (*The Legend of Young Poland*). Main attacks were directed against the nirvanic and futile life and the asocial and aristocratic aestheticism of the Young Poland; what was criticized was not only the modernist manners but also literature of the period, whose principal fault was seen in its being not free from its historical conditioning. As a cultural and artistic formation the Young Poland began to collapse early and its decline had started even before the

movement actually came to its end; yet completely condemned it was only in the years 1948–1955. After 1956, however, there is a sudden “revival” of the Young Poland and the rapid surge of interest in the epoch manifests in numerous editions of modernists’ works as well as in many studies concerning the period.

Hutnikiewicz views the role of Young Poland as that of a significant link in the literary evolution, with which literature, after a period when it had primarily had its social duties, found new ways and possibilities opened before it.

The first in the gallery of literary “portraits” is a biographical and psychological portrait of Stanisław Przybyszewski who initiated the modernist movement in Poland. Having shown Przybyszewski in both his legend that was a distorted picture of the man as well as the writer, and in the light of actual truth which refutes the popular “knowledge” of this writer, Hutnikiewicz concludes:

Przybyszewski restored the sense of freedom and dignity to Polish literature. By making it deal with problems of the universal significance he led it out from its narrow engrossment in Polish national misery, made it deeper and more human, widened the horizons of its reflection. He anticipated the psychological passion, so characteristic of our age, discovering before Freud [...] the demonic element of the subconscious (p. 53–54).

“Osobowość Żeromskiego,” the first from the series of studies devoted to Żeromski, and a kind of introduction to it, pertains in a way to the previously discussed connections of the period 1918–1939 with the Young Poland, insofar as Żeromski was Przybyszewski’s contemporary. Although he is fully aware that his results can only be hypothetical, the author’s commitment is a psychological analysis of the complex personality of Żeromski, marked by:

[...] overwhelming pessimism, continual hesitation between the extremities and opposites of good and evil, of negation and affirmation, emotional extremism and discordance, moral maximalism, ecstatic patriotism and fervent sense of social duty (p. 68–69).

This psychic structure is seen by Hutnikiewicz as conditioned also by its external biographical determinants. The correlation of psychological features of the writer with the characteristics of his literary works leads the author to a conclusion that suffering (in the sense of struggling with the accumulated hardships of life) has its nature- and culture-forming values, since it broadens the range

of feelings and experiences, and thus conduces to the forming of sensibility and abilities—in this case of the unique lyrical talent of the writer.

How Żeromski was perceived by the generation which matured after 1918, in the independent Poland, is the subject of the study “Żeromski – Lechoń,” where Żeromski’s position in the cultural and literary consciousness of contemporary Poles is measured in terms of the relationship between these two decidedly different individualities. Hutnikiewicz bases his reconstruction here on *Memoirs* and *Journals* of Lechoń, for whom Żeromski appears to have been a living tradition of the Romantic Poland.

For both his contemporaries and the posterity Żeromski was a controversial figure, which makes him all the more interesting for a critic, especially so since even today he is still felt to be of vital interest and his problems still topical in a sense. Hutnikiewicz gathers evidence of the popularity and influence of the novelist from over a half a century in his article “Żeromski – wczoraj i dziś.”

The series of monographic studies on Żeromski is followed by a group of essays less analytic in character, and covering a wider range of subjects.

In the first of these Hutnikiewicz discusses literature and theatre of the period 1918–1939 (“Literatura i teatr w okresie II Niepodległości”). After 1918 literature in Poland, now an independent country again, was released from its patriotic and social duties and could become an art, free and open to the variety of life. Consequently, it became open also to all formal experiments, which is especially evident in poetry of the period, with its two predominant, and oppositional to each other, trends: the one represented by the Skamander group, the other by the vanguard movement. Narrative fiction, giving up its utilitarian role, undergoes the process of its Europeanization, assimilating universal and existential problems, the dominating trend being that of psychologism. Thematic diversity is here accompanied by structural experiments, too. The appearance of variety shows, cabarets and cinema which began to rival the theatre accounts for the relative regress of the theatre and drama in the independent Poland; poets and prose writers only incidentally turn to drama. Especially flourishing are such genres as feuilleton, reportage and essay, as well as literary criticism. While discussing general literary

trends and phenomena. Hutnikiewicz also systematically surveys individual writers, their works and programmes.

In subsequent essays the author deals with the chief representatives of the Skamander group, devoting two of them to Lechoń ("Życie i śmierć poety. O twórczości Jana Lechonia" and "Dziennik Lechonia"). In these he reconstructs both the poet's biography and the literary circles he was associated with. Lechoń's voluminous *Journals*, written from 1949 to 1956, is analyzed as a polythematic literary genre, but also as a source of information about the poet, his views and opinions, as a self-portrait of an uncommon, tragically unhappy man.

Poetry of another poet of the group, Kazimierz Wierzyński, together with its biographical background is the subject of the essay "Pierwsza i druga młodość Wierzyńskiego." Hutnikiewicz points to the poems collected in the volumes *Wiosna i wino* (*Springtime and Wine*) and *Laur olimpijski* (*The Olympian Laurels*) as striking perhaps the most joyful and gay notes in Polish poetry, while next collections of the poet's verse, *Wróble na dachu* (*Sparrows on the Roof*), *Wielka Niedźwiedzica* (*Ursa Major*), *Pamiętnik miłości* (*Journal of Love*), *Rozmowa z puszczą* (*Talk with the Forest*), *Pieśni fantastyczne* (*Fantastic Songs*), *Gorzki urodzaj* (*The Bitter Crop*), testify to a change in the mood of Wierzyński's lyrical poetry. With *Wolność tragiczna* (*Tragic Freedom*) and *Kurhany* (*Barrows*) the way to the Polish Academy of Literature was opened to the poet. Then came six volumes of war poetry written "in exile," to be followed by six years of complete silence and another surge of creative power, manifested in *Korzec maku* (*A Bushel of Poppy*), *Siedem podków* (*Seven Horseshoes*), *Tkanka ziemi* (*The Tissue of the Earth*), *Kufer na plecach* (*With the Trunk on My Back*) and *Czarny polonez* (*The Black Polonaise*).

The work of the third outstanding poet of the Skamander group, Julian Tuwim, today falling into oblivion, is critically examined in the article "O poezji Tuwima." His poetry—aintellectual, impulsive and vital, consciously opposing the moody aspirations of the modernism—raised "the modern city to the rank of a lyrical subject matter" (p. 210).

Quite a distinct and rather isolated phenomenon in the literature of the period 1918–1939 is Stefan Grabiński with his "thrill story." Underlying Grabiński's fantastic works is an "illusive literary dream,"

his individual conception of reality, his belief in "the absolute, creative supremacy of thought over matter" (p. 217), Hutnikiewicz traces also ideological inspirations of such collections of stories as *Z wyjątków* (*Fragments*), *W pomrokach wiary* (*In the Darkness of Faith*), *Na wzgórzu róż* (*On the Hill of Roses*), and especially of *Demon ruchu* (*The Demon of Movement*)—a revelation in Polish fantastic literature. "Grabiński is in Poland a classic and master of the thrill story"—concludes the author (p. 225).

The picture of Polish prose in the years 1918–1939 is completed with the study on Maria Dąbrowska's work. It would seem that against the background of experiments in the novel of the time, Dąbrowska's *Noce i dnie* (*Nights and Days*)—as well as her other works—should appear as traditional and hence anachronic. And yet it is still successful with its readers. The author points to the "refined" simplicity of the language of the novel, which makes the reader focus his attention on the immediate level of the presented world, notwithstanding some metaphysical extension of this world, as accounting for the success of the work. Dąbrowska proved her talent by the truth and reality of the wide historical panorama of life in Poland. The special appeal of *Noce i dnie* is the treatment of the love motif, the insight into the child psychology, analysis of characters and of social and political processes.

The last three essays included in the book, because of the similarity of subjects and their treatment, might be considered as constituting a certain whole. The author's use of the terms "contemporary" and "modern" is sometimes misleading, especially in generalizations, since—suggestive as they are of our time—they are actually used in reference to the period 1918–1939, already historical.

The main thesis of the first essay, "O «niezrozumiałości» i osamotnieniu poezji współczesnej," which in itself might be treated as a kind of theoretical introduction to the other two, is that new trends in poetry of recent times are formed in opposition to the expressive and moody Romantic and Neo-Romantic poetry. Hutnikiewicz notes that despite the unintelligibility and social alienation of modern poetry there is fervent activity in the field, both creative and theoretical, and this situation can be observed throughout the world, and not only in Poland. According to the author two main trends may be distinguished in modern poetry: the alogic, somnam-

bulistic, hallucinatory poetry, the sources of which are to be sought in the 17th-century poetry as well as in surrealism, and the “pure poetry” – detached from the real existence of man, poetry “of language which gives up its communicative function to become a value in itself” (p. 249), poetry of impersonal constructional and formal ingenuity. Such a situation Hutnikiewicz qualifies as symptomatic of a crisis.

The structure of modern lyrical poetry is in Hutnikiewicz’s opinion (the essay “Struktura liryki współczesnej”) a consequence of chaos and destruction characteristic of the 20th-century culture and civilization; to the shaken order of the world art reacts with strengthening its own order. The distinctive traits of this poetry are economy, rigorism and colloquialism—as in Różewicz’s case, and essentiality—as in Ważyk’s case, for instance.

Finally, in the essay on the structural transformations of the 20th-century narrative fiction the author attempts at demonstrating that the crisis of conventional plot structures is only apparent. In his outline of the evolution of these structures from the 19th-century novel to the fiction of 1918–1939 he seems to argue that every new stage in the evolution of a literary genre appears to be a crisis in relation to the already existing habits.

Sum. by *Alina Siomkajło*

Transl. by *Maria-Bożenna Fedewicz*

**Andrzej Lam, *Z teorii i praktyki awangardyzmu (The Theory and Practice of Avant-gardism)*, Warszawa 1976, pp. 126. Series: Rozprawy Uniwersytetu Warszawskiego.**

In his book entitled *The Polish Poetic Avant-garde and Its Programme in the Years 1917–1923* Andrzej Lam described the initial period in Polish avant-garde poetry—the origins and interplay of changing tendencies. He stressed the fact that it was the theoretical concepts of symbolism which prepared the way for the later break-through in poetry. The book only dealt with the problem up to the year 1923, when Peiper’s ideas were gaining widespread popularity and when it