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Doctoral dissertation ABSTRACT:

Avant-garde projects of film-like literature in 1918–1939: Jan Brzękowski and Józef Czechowicz

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The analysis of avant-garde film-like prose from the interwar period in Poland presented in this dissertation covers texts which were created as a result of conscious adoption of film imagination, which served as a stimulus to reformulate ‘literariness’ on the plane of thinking in the language of moving pictures. The approach to the subject proposed in the dissertation provides a clear depiction of such phenomena, which may seem vague in the context of how cinematography impacts the world of art. The emphasis is placed on the aspect of the intentionality of these literary activities, which took the form of projects: of a new literary language (formulated in the context of the modernist crisis of representation), new construction schemes, new ways of presenting the setting of a novel and shaping the space-time relationships, and – perhaps most importantly – a new subjectivity in its specifically changeable and complicated form of existence.

The term ‘projects’ with regard to the analysed texts refers to: 1) the writers’ attempts at designing innovative forms of novels: stylistically simplified, but formally and semantically wide-ranging; 2) the active nature of these attempts, which (despite numerous shared characteristics) were not intended to create a uniform genre model but served as individual concepts of ‘a genre in motion’; 3) the projects of particularly active readers – dynamising the relationship between the writer and the addressee and expanding the readers’ visual, imaginative, and interpretation potential; 4) the willingness to go beyond traditional literary conventions through pioneering projects, which actually anticipated the direction of post-war literature development.

The decision to compare Jan Brzękowski and Józef Czechowicz results primarily from the potential of the juxtaposition of their prose projects and their original theoretical and aesthetic models: liberated imagination and creative imagination. These two individual dimensions of artistic imagination seem to exist in a constantly renewed dialogue with modern imagination, avant-garde imagination, and – above all – film imagination. As particularly accentuated in the dissertation, the individual trait of film imagination is clearly visible in Brzękowski’s and Czechowicz’s oeuvre as well as in their creative approach connected with the characteristics of the creative process and the relationship they wished to create with the reader-viewer.

In the dissertation, imagination as a dynamic and multidimensional aesthetic model (presented here as theoretical and typological constructs created to facilitate the analysis) is considered as a notion which corresponds best with the film-like experiments on prose, thus allowing

the analysis to embrace a wider range of themes: literature and film from a comparative, intersemiotic, historical, and cultural perspective.

Cinema-stories by Czechowicz and Brzękowski – experimental forms which were not inspired by specific films but by the existence and impact of cinema as an art phenomenon – are characterised in the dissertation on the basis of the features of film imagination. These features have been identified by combining two perspectives: 1) historical (reconstruction of the aesthetic consciousness in cinematography in 1918–1939, based on a critical analysis of film thought; 2) intersemiotic – presenting the typically ‘film’ traits in reference to the typically ‘literary’ traits. Both methods have yielded similar results; i.e., they have helped identify the dynamic features of film imagination, which are inherent in cinematography as a whole: in the characteristics of film material, the creative process, and the manner in which films function in social and cultural space. Consequently, the combination of the features presented in a specific historical and cultural context has become a suggestive image: not as a static model of prose but as the direction of its transformations. Another important method of studying the texts is the analysis of the ways in which Brzękowski’s and Czechowicz’s works reveal the general principles of organising film imagery, which shape the structure of cinema-stories to a great extent.

The works which are the focus of the analysis — Jan Brzękowski’s novels: *Psychoanalitik w podróży* (Psychoanalyst on a Journey, 1929), *Bankructwo profesora Muellera* (Professor Mueller’s Bankruptcy, 1931), and *24 kochanków Perdity Loost* (24 Lovers of Perdita Loost, created in 1939, published in 1961); and Józef Czechowicz’s ‘synoptic novels’: *Koła Archimedesy* (Archimedes’ Circles 1937), „*Sektanci*” albo „*Matka*” (Cultists or Mother, 1937), and *Wagon nr 16773* (Carriage no. 16773, 1938) — are presented in the context of the two writers’ oeuvre. Moreover, they refer to two notions, complex and inherently contradictory: avant-garde and modernism. Thanks to this perspective, the analysed cinema-stories can be described as specifically genres in motion, built on the antinomies of: 1) common programmes – individual implementations; 2) convention – invention; 3) free and experimenting imagination – imagination strictly determined by construction; 4) mass, egalitarian creation – innovative, elite creation; 5) literature focused on the present (in rhythm with modernity) – pioneering literature (which can be fully understood and appreciated only from a future perspective).

Another crucial subject of the analysis is the striving towards ‘a new objectivism’, shared by Brzękowski and Czechowicz. It was manifested in their narratives – in their oscillation between ‘full subjectification’ (Brzękowski) and ‘total desubjectification’ (Czechowicz), so typical of films. What both projects had in common was the attempt to go beyond unidimensional subjectivism (understood as direct expression of feelings by an individual) and objectivism (understood as a static, unchanging point of view): by means of worldbuilding, based on a multitude of perspectives, changing over time and in space; and the simultaneous exposition of individual worldviews, based on life experiences.

The ample and multidimensional contexts are explored and developed through the analysis of the cinematic, film-like prose by Brzękowski and Czechowicz. The focal point of the dissertation is the heterogenous nature of cinema-stories: literary phenomena which escape clear, genealogical taxonomies and reflect film imagination in a twofold manner: 1) in its creative potential of renewing means of expression; 2) in its captivating power imposing certain – conventionalised by cinematography – images, motifs, and genre patterns.