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Literary celebrity. Studies in the sociology and economy of literature

The primary objective of the doctoral thesis is to analyse and interpret the phenomenon of celebrity authors in the contemporary culture with the use of a self-developed theoretical frame reflecting the impact of mutual, complex relations between culture, economy, media and the audience on the new circumstances of literary production. At its most fundamental level, the research aims at explaining the influence of the phenomenon of celebrity writers on transformation of the author's function, understanding of literature and the writer's connection with his/her work, social circulation of works and constructing meanings. Another objective is to identify broader consequences of the appearance of strongly influential writers in the literary arena and revision of the dominant model of sociology of literary life. The authors analysed fall outside the traditional division into autonomy and heteronomy, into high art and popular art, as they smoothly move between a number of fields, gathering both the cultural and the economic capital. Finally, the research seeks to clarify how differing and seemingly opposing currencies, logics and values operate in the literary output of authors with a strong presence and how this changes the conditions of accumulation of recognition and prestige. In other words, a new model of literary production is proposed, based on a novel map of relations between fields and forms of capital, new rules of the game and a transformed *illusio* of the cultural practice, different than those described by Pierre Bourdieu. In a broader context, the project focuses on the development of a new model of sociology of production, consumption and dissemination of literature, with research inquiries, the range of the phenomena analysed and methodology seeking to explain the latest, most acute problems connected with literature's operation in the network society and culture of late capitalism.

Underpinning the research is the recognition that in the last 20 years, the Polish industry has been subjected to intense development, with marketing, growingly complex promotional strategies, increasing competition for all kinds of capital and legitimisation as significant determinants of the functioning of the literary culture, reception, production climate, representation of writings and writers and, finally, the process of creation of cultural value regimes. Literary criticism after 1989 suggests that literary production is moving away from the autonomous model, which is interpreted as the market logic's domination over literature. This narrative, devoted to commercialisation of literary creation, is very popular. The research, however, is pursued in the opposite direction. The central question here is what

literature stars and relations between different kinds of capital, fields and agents conditioning and conditioned by famous authors can tell us about the contemporary literary field and the space of possible of literature, writers, the audience and other agents.

The project clarifies that literature is not a battlefield for art and money, but a complex system, with a wide range of stakes, currencies, dispositions and values introduced by different institutional and individual agents (from writers, critics, readers and booksellers, through literary awards, to festivals). All participants in the system effect transactions on specific kinds of capital (cultural, media, economic, journalistic), all of which are prone to exchange and conversion. This is my understanding of participation in the literary culture, which in the project is presented in relational terms, expanding the economic balance onto all material and symbolic goods. These cultural agents, however, do not have such transparently defined motivations as assumed by Pierre Bourdieu in his model of the literary field, as they fight for complex stakes and their success depends on their ability to gather all kinds of capital. Adoption of an expanded economy of literary production and consumption enables analysis of star authors beyond the rigid categories of high art and mass culture. Celebrity authors are much more than mere market products or sums of promotional effects, as their production and circulation are affected equally by the cultural capital and by prestige.

In light of the above, it is an indirect objective of the research to describe transformations in the macrostructure, that is relations between the economy, culture, media and the society, which legitimises aesthetic ideologies and regimes of values. I describe also changes within habitus of cultural agents and literary *illusio*. The *illusio* has changed, because the search for autonomy in the refusal to participate in transactions between art, media, the market and consumers no longer leads to a higher position in the 'proper' hierarchy. The writer's rejection to participate in media events, or other tactics of immediate resistance used thereby, will either prove insignificant or will pay off many times over, in media and economic capital, as there is no escape from the whirl of promotion. Based on the myth of pure art and autonomous artists, the *illusio* is no longer the source of cultural prestige or legitimation, but has turned into an dishonest trick, with the stakes and objectives becoming more and more complicated and with new changes to the rules of the game, which are now based on ambiguous and more positive strategies of engagement and conversions of different forms of capital into cultural prestige. These transactions are maintained by the collectively produced faith that the game is not all about money. Celebrity authors subjected to my analysis are the most advanced devices to be used to negotiate, gather and convert all types of capital and manage cultural prestige. Thus, one of the project's objective is to provide a description of these mechanisms.

The research is focused on analyses of the contemporary field of literary production and the author as its major agent assuming that, firstly, the phenomenon of writers' popularity is by no means marginal and isolated, but structural in nature, and results from the system of objective relations between all literary agents. Secondly, the phenomenon of literary fame particularly clearly exhibits the complex relationship of literature and writers with all kinds of fields and kinds of capital which are paradigmatic for the functioning of the entire contemporary literary industry. Star authors, with a strongly marked presence in the social imagination, converge problems of the latest literature relative to its strong links to the media and economy like a lens. Celebrity writers, like Masłowska, Witkowski, Pilch, Szymborska, Twardoch or Dehnel, trigger the most complex relations in the contemporary network literary culture and initiate the greatest number of transactions between all fields and forms of capital, serving as keys to understanding the contemporary literary industry as a whole.

It needs to be emphasised that star authors are unique and significantly differ from celebrity figures from the world of music or film. The latter historically operate in the sphere of performance, under a distinct influence of commercialisation of cultural production. In literary production, autonomy-based values have a particularly strong effect, making star authors scandalous *par excellence*: they combine fields and forms of capital that should be mutually supplanting, whilst negotiating and putting to test the literary *illusio*. Created as a result of skilful collecting of dominant forms of capital of both fields, they are the products of neither the market nor art. Going further, they do not make a typical example of historical middlebrow culture either, denying its conditional oppositions and combining popularity, prestige, economic capital and recognition. Cultural capital's susceptibility to exchange into other currencies and backward transactions are typical features of celebrity authors, which distinguishes them from stars operating in historical mass culture and from writers who, despite the popularity, do not function as imagined identities and do not enjoy cultural prestige or recognition. To us, literary celebrities are represented by Twardoch or Pilch, but not by authors of bestsellers in genre literature or celebrities of mass media.

The doctoral thesis combines a number of grand problems of literary studies, by touching upon issues that have been previously ignored by the Polish studies. The research aims at clarifying phenomena and processes that are crucial to understanding the functioning of literature and writers in the most recent culture. I pursue answers to questions about who the author is, what role he/she plays in the literary culture and production of late capitalism and what celebrity author has to do with the wider contemporary phenomenon of identity and visibility as forms of capital.