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Title of the dissertation: Emancipation, representation, convention: Polish postwar literature through the lens of traumatic realism

In my dissertation, I argue that category of realism – overshadowed in 20th-century theoretical discourse by two main cultural formations, modernism and postmodernism – may prove to be a beneficial perspective to apprehend and reinterpret Polish postwar literature grappling with the experience of the WW2 and the Holocaust, represented by survivors and eyewitnesses of the Shoah as well as their descendants.

Protean and dialectic nature of realism – that may be understood as a specific literary and artistic formation, aesthetic category, poetics of historically changing qualities, finally strategy of criticism and mode of reception – determines both its inherent ambiguity and resilience, as well as susceptibility to new interpretations and formulations. I start (Chapter 1), therefore, with the remarks on the “unfinished project of realism”; I investigate reasons and circumstances of crisis of this category and aesthetics in 20th-century Western theory and literature. I also emphasize its recurrent nature and track its numerous returns, especially the last one – in the context of memory, trauma and autobiography “booms” in the recent decades. In this context, I am particularly inspired by the concept of traumatic realism, elaborated in art history by Hal Foster (1996) and literary studies by Michael Rothberg (2000). I try, however, to situate these propositions in a wider perspective of other 20th-century theories of realism, especially those confronting realism with an experience of modernity (Lukács, Alter, Rancière); ones interpreting realism as self-conscious and experimental artistic practice preoccupied with the problem of representation (Beaumont, Brecht, Robbe-Grillet, White); and conceptions emphasizing its emancipatory and political potential (Auerbach, Jameson, Villanueva). Significance of realism for reflection on Polish literature is, moreover, supported by enduring and recurrent presence of this category in Polish postwar literary theory.

My goal is, therefore, to reinterpret traumatic realism – represented, employed and created by Polish literature preoccupied with efforts to convey traumatic experience in the most truthful, authentic or performatively affecting way – from three main angles. Firstly, I am interested in traumatic realism as correlated with a specific historic moment,

introducing to the mainstream culture a new experience, before not articulated, and therefore having a potential of emancipation. Secondly, as a mode of literary expression without stable aesthetic features, yet especially concerned with limits and perils of representation. Thirdly, as a literary and artistic practice particularly susceptible to schematization and becoming an obsolete convention.

Thereafter, I focus on literary works that represent, in my interpretation, Polish traumatic realism in three aforementioned perspectives: emancipation, representation and convention. In chapter 2, my case study is work of Krystyna Żywulska (1914-1993), born Sonia Landau, author of memoirs, songs and satires. Żywulska, pre-war communist according to herself, survived Auschwitz in a disguise of a member of ethnically Polish, catholic and conservative intelligentsia and as such wrote her first memoir, *I Survived Auschwitz* (1946). Only in 1963, she published another book, a peculiar “coming-out”: *Empty Water*, in which she described her life before Auschwitz, namely, in the Warsaw ghetto and on the “Aryan side” of the city. Therefore, I analyze *I Survived Auschwitz* through the prism of *Empty Water*, looking for specific textual markers of survivor’s testimony delivered under, beside and through a “correct” Polish war-time autobiography. Żywulska’s method is to depict parallel Jewish lives – lives painfully similar to her own, yet different, since she survives thanks to her camouflage.

In Chapter 3, I consider emancipatory potential of acts of Jewish coming-outs in Polish contemporary literature, namely in works of Ewa Kuryluk, Magdalena Tulli, Bożena Keff and Agata Tuszyńska, all representatives of second generation after the Holocaust. My goal is, firstly, to reinterpret terms of second generation and postmemory, coined in the Western theory, in Polish context. For descendant of Holocaust survivors who stayed in Poland after the war, not only parents’ unspoken memory but also their very experience of March 1968 and compulsion to hiding and concealing identity were essential.

Consequently, I turn to traumatic realism as a mode of grappling with problems of representation. In chapter 4, I analyze literary practice of Miron Białoszewski who often explicitly refer to himself as a realist. I am interested in perception of his works in literary criticism who tried diligently to interpret his experimental works as realistic and his own formulations of realism. Most importantly, I focus on Białoszewski’s groundbreaking *A Memoir of the Warsaw Uprising* (1971), a manifesto of his traumatic-realistic poetics, and examine the abiding presence of war trauma in his later works, seemingly focused on portraying – in innovatory ways – mundane experience of the everyday life.

My another case (Chapter 5) are three books published in crucial for my argument historical moments, which attempted to scrutinize language contaminated by the Shoah. First is Nachman Blumental's *Słowa niewinne* [Innocent words] from 1947, analyzing the language of Nazi occupation, ghetto and camps that permanently influence Polish (and Yiddish); second – Michał Głowiński's *Marcowe gadanie* [March parlor], written in 1971, in which the author analyzes language of anti-Semitic March 1968 propaganda that was highly influenced by Nazi imagery; third – book *Zamiast procesu* [Instead of a trial] by Magdalena Tulli and Sergiusz Kowalski from 2002, which focuses on hate speech in Polish public sphere after publication of *Neighbors* by Jan Tomasz Gross. I juxtapose them with the poetry of Tadeusz Różewicz, and his poem from 1998, *recycling*. I show how the poet employs poetics of citation, recycling newspapers' reports and language infected with the war experience in order to show persistence of the Holocaust in basic structures of today reality and ways of expression.

I end my dissertation with an essay on representations of Central-European landscape as a space of past trauma in Polish and world literature, art and film. I reinterpret Rosalind Krauss's concept of the *picturesque* as a basic category in perception of a landscape in order to propose the *traumatic* as an epistemological and ethical lens through which Central-European landscapes are perceived and represented. This last chapter probes again the aporia between “realness” or “authenticity” and “conventionality” of traumatic realism and possibility to convey past trauma by means of literature and art in general.