

SUMMARY

Personal scandal. Intimacy in contemporary Polish prose

The aim of this thesis is to explore the individualised aspects of creating and reading texts, as well as the notions related thereto: intimacy and affective reading. The exploration is set in the context of a scandal, a covert overlap of the personal and the public in the literary sphere. The term “personal scandal” refers to the texts which make the reader experience strong emotions, be they good or bad, thereby causing an emotional response through facing the reader with the intimacy of the text and causing a cathartic or denial-inducing shock. These texts are concerned with experiences such as grieving, miscarriage, illness or giving birth. The phenomenon described in the thesis is presented as a result of historical-literary transformations in Polish culture and literature; these were the result of the events of 1989, and the context related thereto. If looking for particular contributors to the phenomenon, one could point to the literary journal “Brulion”, Polish critical art and the social changes that were caused by the development of capitalism, progressing cultural narcissism and the removal of certain notions from the social discourse (e.g., death, illness and any indicators of individual’s weakness).

The thesis specifies the social context in which Polish literature is created nowadays, pointing towards the symptoms of the growing socio-cultural autism that is marked by general lack of compassion, loss of empathy and self-interest, with subsequent denial of the issues that could be indicative of weakness, suffering and death, all of which are no longer subjects of public debate. The work endeavours to redefine the notions that can be considered scandalous in literature, discussing ideas that constitute a source of outrage and shock for a contemporary man as they expose the truth about weaknesses and mortality of a human being. The poetic features of such scandal are also examined, based on particular formal experiments; it is, however, noted that at times, the designated subject of prose can have significant impact on the receiver at its own right. Furthermore, the thesis emphasises the importance of intimacy as an affective situation that is created within a text, as well as the effect that this affective situation might have on the reader; when engaging with the text, the reader may intimately experience their own emotions, which may change their outlook on the reality. On this basis, the thesis assesses the value and uniqueness of the discussed works, both in the literary and in the social sense. By the same token, it proves how important such works are: by tackling key issues, they are universally and socially relevant, despite being

based on the personal experiences of their authors. Their innovativeness and artistic value, as well as the relevance of the topics they undertake are therefore approached as the “benefits of literature” in the broadest meaning possible.

The first chapter of the thesis analyses the particular aspects of postmodern culture that constitute the discussed phenomenon. Each of the categories utilised in the thesis carries a lot of theoretical and substantive potential; it is thus necessary to determine the way in which they should be understood so as to use them to the greatest extent. The author’s understanding of a scandal is also presented, alongside the brief history of shifts in the understanding of what it means to be scandalous. Differences are discussed between private, personal and intimate scandals, with the categories of shame and kitsch being brought up. To provide further context, the concepts of the Fatigue Society and maximising achievements are contrasted with the concept of New Sincerity found in American prose, as well as with Hans-Joachim Maaz’s Theory of Emotional Blockage rooted in the post-socialist society of the German Democratic Republic. Then, the thesis presents the difficulties with classifying the discussed literary works based on their genre, referring to the autofiction formula of Arkadiusz Żychliński. To conclude this part, the act of reading of a “scandalously personal” text is presented, constituting a disturbing encounter that may release the reader’s affective emancipatory potential. The conclusion does also show that the situation in which engaging with a text causes rage and denial might constitute the act of self-defence against the powerful emotions evoked.

The further part of the thesis is devoted to the analysis of literary works that are the most interesting and representative examples of the discussed phenomenon and at the same time hold high artistic value. Importantly, these texts were not written so as to cause a scandal; in the case of these selected works, the outrage resulting from reading them is an outcome that is not elicited on purpose. The second chapter presents death as the greatest scandal of human existence, which is viewed through the literary accounts of losing a loved one. Further subchapters are dedicated to the following works: *Umarł Mi* [He Died on Me] by Inga Iwasiów, *Kochałam, kiedy odeszła* [I Loved, When She Departed] by Anna Augustyniak, *Bezmatkowi* [Motherlessness] by Mira Marcinów, *Grochów* by Andrzej Stasiuk and *Dlaczego nie zabiłem mojego ojca i jak bardzo tego żałuję* [How I Didn't Kill My Father and How Much I Regret It] by Mateusz Pakuła. Third chapter focuses on the notion of motherhood as an experience that transcends borders, with pregnancy and birth presented in *Powlekać rosnące* [Enveloping That Which Grows] by Joanna Mueller and miscarriage presented in *Obsoletki* [The Obsolete Ones] by Justyna Bargielska; these texts represent the

bodily and intimate experiences that are analysed as social taboo and therefore avoided in public discourse, being deemed too shameful or personal.

The conclusions present Rita Felski's discussion on the relationship between the text and the reader. Her conclusions are used to review the components of this thesis.