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Extravagance and Reportage as Forms of Creation and Understanding. An Academic Frottage

Abstract

In this editorial introduction to the issue, the author and editor of the journal “Zagadnienia Rodzajów Literackich. Formy kultury i teorii” tries to use several concepts to deal with eleven texts gathered in the issue. The main theoretical problem arises because the issue is not focused on a particular subject. Instead, the author of the introduction claims that most articles can be described using a concept of extravagance and the other ones — applying a concept of reportage. All writings in this editorial are described metaphorically as frottage and parergon. The first article is characterized using a generic concept of extravaganza and eccentrics. The second article is a description of the uses magic and modern enchantment as understood by Max Weber, the third — rococo and militancy. The fourth article is about translating on the margins, the fifth on multilingual postcolonial translation, the sixth on post-human analysis of national myths. The second part of the issue is more devoted to reportage in the context of gonzo journalism and storytelling and quality research, as well as crypto philosophy. The final point is about understanding as a passerby. Frottage and parergon are the most crucial theoretical concepts used in this editorial introduction. In the humanities, such concepts can be seen as political through and through.

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Frottage and parergon. Introduction to introductory writing

It would be a mistake to look at the texts of the current issue of the journal ZRL that the reader holds in front of him as inferior to those volumes produced as a response to the Call For Papers in special issues. All the texts collected in this volume were also selected from among the many submitted, and they all fulfill the main mission of our journal, focused on the literary and cultural forms, on the genres, kinds, forms of culture and theories. Although they were not a response to this year's CFP, they did respond to our main call contained in the mission of our journal. Therefore, we should not treat these texts as something subordinate or accessory, the fourth issue has the same status as the other issues.

Therefore, they are not 'parerga' (from Greek), that is, small writings of an author, or a by-product of someone else's writing activity (see Derrida 1987). They are not the Kantian Third Critique (1790; eng. 2009), which is a relegation of something not fitting in theoretical and/or practical reason. They are not meta-physics in the works of Aristotle... They are also not a paralipomena, texts supplementing and adding to published dissertations, initially omitted, or added later. The current issue is not an appendix or addendum.

However, the texts in question are necessarily various texts, like ten walks into the theoretical woods.

It is worth noting that nowadays, in the era of digital publications and the dominance of short forms, such entire issues of journals are becoming more and more conventional. People often use single articles, even short quotes in social media such as twitter. However, our editorial team does not intend to give up — despite the obvious pragmatism of scientific practices — from paying attention to the details of the composition of larger wholes. Because those larger entities, such as monographic editions of entire issues of journals focused on a single topic, or book monographs, are still a determinant of the value of an academic approach in the field of humanities. In this sense, we remain fairly conservative in the belief that the ability of the human mind to create larger wholes, such as long narratives, is greatly enhanced by cultural activities but also by the humanities themselves.

Therefore, this issue of our journal, essentially non-monographic, will also be provided with an editorial introduction, which will be a kind of theoretical frottage, depending on the submitted academic articles, but at the same time being an independent statement and a specific Derridian or Kantian parergon.

We live in extraordinary times also when it comes to the development of academic reflection or the development of the idea of the university or the humanities (see Nussbaum 2016). In order to respond to pandemic challenges, the first issue of our journal in 2021 was devoted to the issues of crisis and catastrophe (see Czapla, Gärdenfors, Hintz, Jackelén, Marcinkowska, Vermeulen 2021; Barcz, Płuciennik 2021). Thus, we opened ourselves to the very topicality. And yet universal. Crisis and catastrophe in the code of Western culture is often the end; we started our publication cycle from crisis and catastrophe. We are, therefore, deconstructive in that the genesis and the apocalypse is connected here. In this, we were condemned to contingency in a sense, but this contingency has just become our frame that determines the order. Our eccentricity, avant-garde and marginality, some attribution to topicality have become the beginning of regularity, the standard, the body of the text.

As Editors of the journal based in Poland since 1958, we have always been on the margins of Western civilization, the journal has always served as a meeting place for academic people from, mainly Eastern Europe, but also from all over the world. We should remember that Łódź in which our editorial team is based was always a multicultural city. We are on the boundaries.

If we wanted to juxtapose the keywords of this volume, the image would be very chaotic: extravaganza, Bernard Shaw, eccentricity, paradox, satire, Victorian, Dickens, performance, magic, narrative, Rococo, anacreontic, John Thelwall, Adam Mickiewicz, Anna Iwaszkiewiczowa, Marcel Proust, Joseph Conrad, novel, translation Luzo-African literature, orality, postcolonialism, translation, culture, literary reportage, Polish book market, publishing house — Czarne, Maciej Zaremba Bielawski, Charlie LeDuff, radio, radio documentary, dialogue, meeting, narrative identity, philosophical essay, philosophical portrait, painterly concept, fugue, modernity, Bolesław Miciński, posthumanism, Polish contemporary literature, fantasy, critical theory, materialism.

However, even from a cursory look, we should be struck by the presence of the Polish and — more broadly — postcolonial — margins of the so-called Western culture on the one hand, and on the other hand — we should consider the presence of theoretically marginal, parergonal concepts of the modernity such as extravaganza, eccentricity, performance, magic, Rococo, anacreontism, translation, orality, reportages, dialogue, fugue, posthumanism and fantasy.

So, regardless of the fact that we did not announce the main theme, the main theme emerges by itself, outlines itself... but of course, it is not the Logos; it is rather the Difference. It seems that the old deconstructive notions can still be used to look at all the various areas of humanistic reflection that the reader keeps in front of his/her/its eyes when looking at this diverse issue. We refer to deconstruction still longing for some constructions based on rational academic reflection.

Extravaganza and eccentrics

Mark Sokolyansky, a professor emeritus from Odessa and Lübeck, an English scholar and Slavist at the same time, our longtime member of the advisory board, writes in this issue a very interesting and up-to-date article on Political Extravaganza As A Dramatic Genre. This article from the subtitle of Bernard Shaw's play *The Apple Cart* tries to theorize a genre that has always been a literary and cultural eccentricity. Extravaganza as the word derives

from the Italian 'stravaganza' which means, approximately, 'influenced by extravagance'. According to Cuddon (1994), in the 20th century, the nearest cultural genre to an extravaganza is a revue. It fits the so-called late capitalism (see Brook Miller 2006). The article focuses on historical and literary definitions of this genre, although the subject of the play itself, as well as its title, deserve attention due to their extraordinary topicality. The threats to democracy, breaks of a constitution, the criticism of democracy, the rise to power of authoritarian personalities, malfunctioning democracies, the game of significant capital, the game of appearances in the broadly understood media, the era of post-truth and fake news are all very topical and pressing topics. What used to be "political extravagance" to Shaw is kind of becoming mainstream. As Christopher Wixson writes in his introduction:

Set in the future, his play *The Apple Cart* uses a constitutional crisis (a king charged by ministers with exceeding his granted powers) as the context for an extended conversation about politics and especially the efficacy of a democracy run by a wealthy elite. The play flirts with the idea that a proper version of autocratic rule is a desirable by-product of the inevitable collapse of mismanaged, inefficient democracy. (Wixson 2020)

It is also interesting that the first performance of *The Apple Cart* took place in Warsaw with the title *Wielki kram* [ex. English 'big stall'] in 1929 under Arnold Szyfman at the "Teatr Polski" with the participation of the legendary actor Kazimierz Junosza Stempowski. Moreover, this very play was offered by this theatre "to warm up" on New Year's Eve in 1929. It is perhaps worthy to notice that in December 1929, there were already some signs of the Great Crisis in the economy in Poland. This Polish element in the culture around theatre and dramatic arts resulting from the criticism of democracy and the cult of great leaders requires special attention, the more so as there are more and more elements analogous between our present-day and the early 1930s. Although on the other hand, of course, nothing happens twice, nowadays in 2021, a political extravagance was the attack on the Capitol on January 6 and a performance by, for example, the Shaman QAnon. It is worth emphasizing that our author, in his article on *The Apple Cart*, pays special attention to eccentricity, also aesthetic as a signal of political satire. In this context, one could recall the nineteenth-century beginnings of the so-called cultural industry (understood as in Max Horkheimer and Theodor Adorno 2007) in the Barnum Museum (Harris 1981, Wilson 2019; however, this understanding of the significance of P.T. Barnum is mine), which also called itself a circus. In this context, it is not without reason to quote an interview with the author in question, George Bernard Shaw:

Thank you, Mr. Shaw. The world has been transformed in the past 50 years, chiefly through your plays, and perhaps in another 50 years we shall all be good sensible Shavians. Isn't it true that history is made from the 50-year plans of poets and philosophers rather than the 5-year plans of sanitary engineers and production experts?

Until the poets know all about sanitary engineering and the sanitary engineers all about poetry and philosophy neither of them will be of any use as planners. Our present way of giving votes to ignorance and calling it democracy will upset any plan. Wisdom, knowledge, and energy can save civilization; electioneering can only wreck it. (Shaw 1943)

You can clearly see in Shaw the Platonic reluctance to democracy as a system of the diletante, or simply ignorant and arrogant. Shaw seems to be clearly an enemy of the open

society (As understood in Popper 2020/1945). Unfortunately, it seems that the current mechanisms of the cultural industries and the media in general also favour “great leaders” who may also be “ignorant” at the same time. And the arrogant... The neurotic personality of Karen Horney’s time has been replaced by the narcissistic personality of social media. Eccentricity and transgressions rule (cf. Kellner, 2016).

Magic and the modern enchantment

This magic of the 19th century revue, also present in a way in the already mentioned Barnum’s circus — the beginning of the modern cultural industry — is one of the topics of the article by Nizar Zouidi, “A Sleight of Mind: The Idea of Magic and the Narrative Structure of A Christmas Carol by Charles Dickens”. It is common to perceive the nineteenth century as an age of reason and industrialization, as a continuation of the Enlightenment process (today the prevalent view is in Pinker 2018). But it was also the time of the development of both popular culture, such as Barnum’s circus, but also this dominant, rationalist trend was often not entirely so in culture, including literary culture. The process of disenchantment, which Max Weber wrote about in his lectures (see Weber 2020), is a process of long duration and it can be said that it is still an unfinished project. Just as not everything has to become McDonalds in the public consumption area, just as not every country has to be a totalitarian gardening state (as in according to Zygmunt Bauman 2000), just as rationalization cannot dominate literature: the magic and mythical creatures “sway over popular culture and the literary world remained undisturbed. Magic even found other ways to return. One of these is stage magic”. *Christmas Carol* by Charles Dickens is really a special phenomenon in this context because it deals with basic Christian impulses and, at the same time, it might refer also to some extent to universal activities of the human mind and brain. A special attention must be paid to the figure of the magician who is not only the special figure in any circus but also might serve as a narrator who is enchanting not only characters but also readers. This view of the narrator must direct our attention to social impact. Dickens, however, was not only a writer of so-called belles-lettres, but also a journalist, and was — one could say — a political figure on the map of London.

Rococo and militancy

You could say that being apolitical these days is a kind of luxury, not to say extravagance. This is how Tomasz Jędrzejewski sees the matter of the common perception of rococo aesthetics and works as games and toys in a fascinating article entitled *Militant Anacreontics. Preliminary Investigations of Two Examples*, in which verses by John Thelwall (*Anacreontic* 1794) and Adam Mickiewicz (*Pieśń Filaratów* 1820) show comparatively against a broad European background. According to the author, whose comparative research is financed by the National Science Center in Poland, the ‘toys in verse’ have also a political dimension. Anacreontics — which usually are seen as a non-serious minor genre — became an attractive genre of ideological expression of poets with democratic and pro-revolutionary inclinations. It is essential to notice that both described poets are not just any literary authors but also political activists. The themes of “wine, women and singing” and feasting and boisterous games seem to be against political activity. It seems that this stereotype was used by Adam Mickiewicz, the Polish poet of Romanticism, who, writing the Song of the Filarets, wanted to confuse the censorship of Tsarist Russia, which was then present in Poland.

Our author writes about it. It is really funny that the censorship could be fooled by a special linguistic similarity between Polish “pił” with “bił”:

For you to play like the Greeks
And like the Roman beat.

(‘Bił’, eng. ‘beat’ might be confused with a natural in anacreontic Pol. pił — eng. drink’).

This tendency to use aesthetic toys for political activity is not always romantic. But it probably happens to be also common in the romantic period. This may be the case of Adam Mickiewicz, but not necessarily, because, as Jędrzejewski himself notes, Thelwall was also active in the French Revolution. This political commitment significantly changed the colour of the involvement of literary games. Nevertheless, it must be borne in mind that being apolitical is also political; just as a rococo play is also of political importance, it is not — although it may seem so — extravagance and eccentricity.

Translating on the margins

Małgorzata Cieliczko wrote a very informative comparative presentation of Polish literary culture entitled *Proust by Anna Iwaszkiewiczowa*. The eccentricity of the essay’s heroine lies in her apparent marginality, which makes her a bit of a queer. Anna Iwaszkiewiczowa (1897–1979) is a Polish writer and translator, known mainly as the wife of the famous Polish writer Jarosław Iwaszkiewicz, incl. Ambassador of Poland to Copenhagen and president of the Polish Writers’ Union, the editor-in-chief of the monthly literary “Twórczość”. It is worth mentioning that despite the successful marriage, both spouses are known for their bisexual preferences, although this is not fully disclosed in this text, and it is not necessarily of great importance for the understanding of the entire article. However, in the entire reception of Marcel Proust presented by Cieliczko in our article (Iwaszkiewiczowa translated fragments of it, wrote critical sketches and was privately fascinated by it), it is striking that just as her writing career could be dominated by her husband’s position, her career as a translator could also be realised only in part, mainly because of her idealistic perfectionism, did she want a genius translation. At the same time, while writing *Diaries* for many, many years, she showed her talent, extraordinary sensitivity, and remarkable personality. And she was an exceptional person: a polyglot, musically and artistically gifted. During the occupation, she helped Polish Jews organise escapes from the ghetto and hid them in her estate. For this activity, in 1988, she and her husband were honoured with the Righteous Among the Nations medal. Incidentally, it can be mentioned that near Łódź, in the town of Byszewy, there is a historic manor house, which the Iwaszkiewicz family used to visit many times. Anna Iwaszkiewiczowa was known mainly locally in Poland, but her life is multicultural, and her literary experiences are polyphonic and comparative.

Multilingual postcolonial translation

Agnieszka Kruk touches on a different multicultural experience related to the translation of literary texts. Her sketch on *Orality in the original and in the translation of African literature written in Portuguese* is extremely important for the present day, not only because it concerns literature often marginalized by symbolic dominations, called the West and the North. In this context, we should mention the contemporary Abdulrazak Gurnah,

winner of the 2021 Nobel Prize in the field of literature, thanks to which you can find out, for example, that the Polish language lacks a study combining the Old English “tale” with even other protrusions such as ‘saga’, Russian ‘skaz’ or Polish ‘gawęda’. Nevertheless, thanks to this — now famous — refugee, students of storytelling and creative writing will also learn that similar stories, such as tales, were in Swahili, the first mother tongue of this year’s Laureate (Our journal sponsored from the first issues Materials for the Dictionary of Genres, and Grzegorz Gazda finalized the Dictionary in 2006. However, we lack the entry of ‘tale’, see Gazda 2012). This context is essential for the stories and novels of Joseph Conrad, a Polish-English postcolonial writer, but also the theory of genres (called in Polish “genology”: there is a gap in Polish dictionaries of literary terms, there is no entry “tale”. J.A. Cuddon in *The Penguin Dictionary of Literary Terms and Literary Theory* writes on p. 954 that “tale”:

Narrative written (in prose or in verse) or spoken, in prose almost indistinguishable from a short story [...]. If there is a difference, the story may suggest that something is written according to the sound of the speaker. Usually the topic of the story is fairly simple, but how it is tied together can be complex and elaborate. Much depends on the writer’s point of view. The kind of narrative that R.L. Stevenson, Rudyard Kipling, W.W. Jacobs, Joseph Conrad, Somerset Maugham, and William Faulkner liked to write and excelled in such stories. [...] However, any such classifications can be completely confusing, and such a division would not be useful in classifying shorter works by Poe, Saki, Chekhov, Maupassant, and DH Lawrence, or a dozen or so other such writers. (Cuddon 1992: 954)

That is why the article by Agnieszka Kruk, which deals with Postcolonial African kinds of literature written in Portuguese, is of extraordinary relevance. One of the most striking features is orality “referred” and/or “translated” in this Portuguese literature. The orality is a special sign of identity, it differentiates kinds of literature of eccentricities from the one written in the centres. The oral features are often neutralized in translation, and they are dissolved in the centres. So, the real problem is to translate from translation: orality translated into Portuguese and Portuguese into Polish. One excentric language into another and then into another. The chain of translations is a very special one.

Post-human analysis of the national myths

The last article fully devoted to extravagance and eccentricity is about one writer and one novel; however, it has been placed in this section due to elements of post-human poetics. Radek Rak, actually Radosław Rak, is a Polish fantasy writer born in 1987 and won the most important Polish literary award, “Nike” in 2020. Michał Koza wrote an analysis about his novel: »*He enjoyed it in any form, except of a stone*«. *Post-human figurations in Radek Rak’s “The Tale of the Serpent’s Heart”*. Rak’s piece is a fantasy and fairy-tale rewriting of the genesis and fate of the Galician uprising in 1846 and the history of its leader. It is, therefore, a fantastic translation of the eccentric history of Poland because it concerns a folk hero known for his cruelty. The story re-tells a fabled biography of Jakób Szela, the leader of the Peasant Uprising of 1846. The world created by the novel is subjected to non-human laws and relations, as well as to the feudal system. This fantastical-political juxtaposition exposes and deconstructs various inequalities sanctioning the exploitation of the peasant class.

The extravagance of the revolt is associated here with the extravagance of non-human perspectives. Extravagance can also mean excess in cruelty. Thus, an eccentric, non-feudal, non-human alternative history is presented to one story. The eccentricity of such an approach is particularly striking, but it is essential to note the contemporary tendency to shape the history of Poland, not necessarily from the point of view of the feudal nobility.

Reportage and gonzo-journalism

The second part of our notebook is devoted more to factual creation. Kamila Augustyn wrote a very detailed analysis of the current Polish book market and outlined the role of reportage in it in the first decades of the 21st century. This dominance of the literary mode is perhaps a unique phenomenon in Polish literary culture: literary reportage has been one of the most popular genres in Poland in recent years. Poland is known not only for such repo-writers as Ryszard Kapuściński, Hanna Krall and Małgorzata Szejnert. Their books gain literary prizes, and that seems to dominate the book market in Poland.

In the view of the author of the article, a special place is devoted to Polish-Swedish author Maciej Zaremba Bielawski who represents investigative journalism. It is also interesting to link such reports with a gonzo-style non-fiction novel by the American journalist Charlie LeDuff. Gonzo Journalism can be indicated as the type of journalism that, on the one hand, is associated with qualitative research in the social sciences and humanities. However, on the other hand, the mixing of fiction and facts made Gonzo journalism help the alternative reality of simulacra, Instagram selves and post-truth.

Storytelling and quality research

The next article in the second part of our issue is devoted to this qualitative research in radio reportage. Kinga Sygizman wrote *The Story is Born in Dialogue — the Specificity of Narration in Radio Documentary*. The narrative is treated as an individual statement by the character and as the text of culture. Radio documentary, which theoreticians and practitioners of the genre emphasize, is born in a dialogical meeting between the author and the protagonist and the verbalization of experiences during this meeting.

Qualitative methods in social sciences and humanities emphasize empathic steps into the skin/shoes of the interlocutor. Much has been written about empathy recently (see for instance Holmqvist, Pluciennik 2009), but earlier in the peak of modernism, Wilhelm Worringer (1908, eng. 1997) and Edith Stein (1916, eng. 1989) wrote about it. It can be said that Worringer already recognizes the role of abstraction and especially abstraction in the arts. Nevertheless, the most significant point for qualitative research is that at around the same time, a revolutionary shift in social science is taking place: the birth of field anthropology, ethnography, and participant observation. Of course, the prominent representatives of the participating observation are Frank Hamilton Cushing and Bronisław Malinowski (see Denzin, Lincoln 2011). When characterizing participant observation, different degrees of participation, i.e. different degrees of immersion, are emphasized. It can be metaphorically said that this immersion will oscillate between absolute capture and quasi-objective distance. The first model can be found, for example, in the case of Cushing, who identified so much with the Hopi, the “object” of observation, that he adopted the Indian religion, moreover, became its priest, while losing its scientific-observer value. The second case is “scientific” magazines about communities

on the Trobriand Islands by Bronisław Malinowski. However, there are also those who supplement this perspective with Malinowski's diary, and then the narrative perspective takes on a different dimension, both works become somehow complementary, and Malinowski seems to be a man whose main problem is the problem of truth (see Clifford 1998) as this issue became the heart of Józef Conrad's literary experience in "the Heart of Darkness".

Crypto-philosophy

In philosophy, an attempt to go beyond formal structures is sometimes accompanied by changes in genres. In Poland, the "crypto-philosophical statement" is chosen, among others, by Stanisław Brzozowski, Bronisław Malinowski, Jerzy Żuławski, or — last but not least Bolesław Miciński. Natasza Koźbiał writes about it in the text *A Painterly Concept in a Philosophical Essay by Bolesław Miciński*. Bolesław Miciński (1911–1943) is a Polish essayist, poet, and philosopher, author of literary essays and philosophical sketches published in the volumes *Traveling to Hell* (1937) and *Portrait of Kant and three essays on war* (1947). He finds "individualisation of the form of expression" in an ambiguous and multi-layered essay, thanks to which he avoids the so-called "Bergson's paradox" — critically speaking about patterns through a template. Such an attempt may seem, for example, to create equivalents of Kantian critics in essayistic and clinical terms: *La perte de la fonction du réel* — for the first, *L'amour exagéré de l'honnêteté* — for the second and, finally, *Les émotions sublimes* — for the third. As Koźbiał notes, "In the 20th century, we observe the formation of a group of writers and philosophers who make a kind of sfumato between literature and philosophy. Philosophy — as a mental attitude — from a solid cognitive (scientific cognition), methodological (systemic) and institutional (professionalization of the discipline) foundations, shifts the emphasis to greater freedom of expression". The device to translate two reasons into something artistic is noticeable.

Understanding as a passerby

A great supplement to the articles in this ZRL notebook is Justyna Szumańska — *The Myth of the Battle of Grunwald and the myth of the Teutonic knight in Szczepan Twardoch's novel "Eternal Grunwald". A novel from behind the end of time*. An alternative story concerns a fundamental Polish national myth Szumańska, in our journal, presents her version of Polish-German relations. The Battle of Grunwald, Battle of Žalgiris or First Battle of Tannenberg was fought on 15 July 1410 during the Polish — Lithuanian — Teutonic War. There are many historical and propaganda versions of the battle.

The most crucial thing in Twardoch's perspective is its Silesian character. The author does not deny it, even emphasizes it. *Eternal Grunwald* forms a settlement with the knightly legend of Polishness. Interestingly, the author proposes not only the Nietzschean reading of "eternal return" and "eternal Grunwald", but also a nomadic interpretation of it: nomadism in the considerations of the German philosopher, meanwhile, is to lead through the paths of madness and wandering to distant areas, lying "beyond" the boundaries of morality and "beyond" captivity.

In this editorial introduction, extravagance and reportage are the chosen forms of creation and understanding. I have tried to interpret the everlasting elements in the historical development of crisis: from political extravaganza to fantasy writing on political issues.

All literary and cultural forms help to become aware and help to understand. We can paraphrase one citation: "I am not a peasant or a knight, I am not a German or a Pole, I am not a good Christian or a pagan, I am no one"... Understanding being a passerby, understanding the fluidity of all forms of identification and collective identity is the key to understanding cultural forms.

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