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The Mode of Being of Popular Literature in the 20th Century*

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Słowa kluczowe: literatura popularna, czasoprzestrzeń awanturnicza, komercjalizacja produkcji literackiej, schematyzacja i deschematyzacja, wariantywność, polskie badania literatury popularnej, ponadnarodowość literatury popularnej, krytyka literatury popularnej, historia literatury popularnej, pozycja odbiorcy

Summary

The article is devoted to the functioning of literature (and, more broadly, cultural texts) in popular circulation and the transformation of their role in the 20th century. The starting point for the analysis is the link between commercialisation (as an immanent feature of the 'lowbrow' circulation) and the artistic quality of the output that is part of it.

The examples of the phenomena under discussion come from different linguistic milieux. This highlights the transnational nature of popular works, which feature invariant solutions to plots. In these two contradictory yet simultaneous tendencies can be observed: schematisation and de-schematisation, which renews conventionalised solutions. The author also emphasises the role of English-language works in the creation of figures of the collective imagination. Their presence in the minds of readers and the transformations they undergo with the development of industrial society and urbanisation processes can be traced from the late 19th century to the 1990s. That is why the 20th century — a period of intense expansion of popular culture — is a cohesive cultural entity with distinguishable individual periods. They are usually associated with socio-political crises, with stories becoming a cultural response to them and, at the same time, their artistic reception in the

* This article is a translation of Professor Żabski's programmatic paper: T. Żabski, 'Sposób bycia literatury popularnej w XX wieku', [in:] *Wiedza o literaturze i edukacji. Księga referatów Zjazdu Polonistów, Warszawa 1995*, eds. T. Michałowska, Z. Goliński, Z. Jarosiński, Warszawa 1996, pp. 489–502, with an added bibliography, abstract and commentary. For further historical context, see the editorial note published separately in this section of the present volume, pp. 357–358.

imaginarium communis. In addition, this is a time of technological progress, significantly affecting the distribution and media-based mediation of cultural texts in popular circulation. Literature has ceased to be a 'separate phenomenon' in it, hence the need to look at it as a part of a larger whole, with which it enters into various relationships.

The domination of English-language output during the analysed period is associated with the global hegemony of the Anglo-American entertainment model. At the same time — in the works available to Polish-speaking readers — its 'over-presence' stems from the appearance after 1989 of a large number of translations, which have significantly influenced domestic pop-culture; moreover, their popularity in the reality of the free market economy has been determined by the readers themselves with their purchasing choices. It is hard to speak in this situation of the existence of national models of popular culture, although undeniably there are authors who dominate the local publishing markets. And yet they, too, exist in the context of the global pop culture industry.

Colourful, phosphorescent, attractive and frightening book covers with images of muscular warriors, voluptuous women, aliens, zombies and mutants with deformed physiques have been an integral part of the bookselling landscape for some years now. Scholars ponder over the need to acknowledge this fact, critics ironise, teachers think how to resolutely oppose the 'flood of kitsch.'

The surprise, bewilderment and indignation stem from very different experiences: in the previous half a century ludic culture was reduced to a minimum, confined to Western classics and ideologically correct domestic products. The classics were represented primarily by crime novels, science fiction, westerns intended essentially for young people, as well as individual works from other varieties of popular writings, such as Irvin Shaw's *Young Lions*, Frederick Forsyth's *The Day of the Jackal* and Alistair MacLean's *The Guns of Navarone*. What was missing on the market was nearly the entire Western spy fiction, including Ian Fleming's James Bond novels.¹ Other missing pieces were horror stories (including even such a classic novel as Bram Stoker's *Dracula*),² representative fantasy works (Robert E. Howard's *Conan*)³ and all romance literature intended for women, with its works being guilty of the 'sin' of presenting images of Western wealth and glamour. Moreover, Polish pre-war authors, even including Antoni Marczyński,⁴ were

¹ Editorial comment: The character of James Bond, the famous agent 007, was created by the British writer Ian Lancaster Fleming (1908–1964). Bond appeared for the first time in the novel *Casino Royale* (1953). It was initially published in Poland as *Sam chciałeś te karty, czyli Casino Royale* (1990). The first to be published in Poland was the sixth novel in the series, *Dr. No* (1958).

² Editorial comment: The first Polish print of Stoker's novel was published (as *Drakula*) in 1990. It was an incomplete edition — only 13 of the 27 original chapters were translated. The first complete edition in Polish came out in 1993.

³ Editorial comment: Howard described the adventures of the eponymous hero in short stories published between 1932 and 1936 in the American magazine *Weird Tales*. The first piece in which Conan appeared was 'The Phoenix on the Sword' (1932). In time Conan became one of the most recognisable heroes of popular culture.

⁴ Editorial comment: Antoni Stanisław Marczyński (1899–1968) — Polish writer, author of many detective, thriller, adventure and romance novels; screenwriter. Creator of the character of de-

not reprinted either, for obvious political reasons. These reasons, concealed, were replaced with the myth of paper shortages, which caused objections to the publication of *Trędowata*⁵ or works by Maria Rodziewiczówna.⁶ This kind of behaviour made us accustomed to disapproval of popular literature in general and generated a tendency toward restrictive measures.

Meanwhile, in countries with a free publishing market, the invasion of populism is a perfectly natural phenomenon, existing at least since the late 18th century; it was no different in Poland in the 19th and first half of the 20th century.

The naturalness of the phenomenon came from the fact that, as a result of the development of the educational system, there emerged an ever-expanding group of millions of people who could read and showed interest in reading. Therefore, authors and publishers had to and did appear as well, responding to the readers' needs by exploiting the market law of demand. Obviously, when investing in a publishing company, publishers had to make sure that they would be able to provide potential readers with the kind of books that would match their reading needs. Unless publishers had a patron or additional income, they could not afford to print loss-making works. Thus, the commercialisation of publishing output as a business is a natural phenomenon. It is natural to seek to maximise profits and lower production costs, which means generally shoddy printing, careless proofreading, translations done by middling craftsmen and, above all, mass piracy, taking advantage of the inefficiency of copyright law. There are natural ways of winning a sizeable market share: relatively low prices, intriguing titles, bright illustrations, hype surrounding the works; finally, it is natural to exploit success by continuing bestsellers as well as creating cycles and series of novels.

Contrary to popular belief, commercialisation does not have to mean providing readers with works that appeal to their so-called low instincts. In any case, until recently such works could not be printed due to censorship barriers. In the 19th century popular publishers got their biggest profits not from works that were a threat to morality, but, on the contrary, from devotional books: prayer books, hymnals, biblical stories, lives of saints, as well as parareligious texts like prophecies, apocalypses, dream books, books on magic, etc.; these writings accounted for half of their publishing repertoire. The same publishers put on the market — and profited quite nicely from — a number of completely innocuous booklets of medieval provenance, still attractive to the popular audience and containing stories of Mélusine, Maguelonne, Griselda, Ahasuerus (the Wandering Jew), Ali Baba, Aladdin or

tective Rafał Królik. Several of his works have been filmed, and a television play based on one of his novels has also been produced.

⁵ Editorial comment: A novel by Helena Mniszkówna (1878–1943) published in 1909. The author probably has the 1972 edition in mind. It was published by Wydawnictwo Literackie in Kraków.

⁶ Editorial comment: Works by Maria Rodziewiczówna (1864–1944) were published in communist Poland to be used instrumentally as an element of propaganda.

Rinaldo Rinaldini.⁷ And it is no coincidence that in this context what turned out to be an absolute bestseller in Poland, boasting seventy editions, was the tearful story of St. Genevieve, written ‘for mothers, children and good-hearted people who in their suffering seek consolation in God and their own innocence.’⁸

Such commercialisation of the market provoked no particular objections, especially since it was accompanied by non-commercial, subsidised publishing output of educational organisations, reaching an incredible one million copies in the early 20th century. On the other hand, protests, and very violent ones at that, were sparked by a new product on the market, which appeared in the early 1870s in the form *Barbara Ubryk* and *Izabela królowa Hiszpanii* by Georg Füllborn (born Karl Georg[e] Füllborn) as the author and Jan Breslauer as the publisher. The product in question is, of course, the serial novel, which fascinated the common readers and deprived them of their reading innocence. The novel revealed to those simple readers a whole new world, previously known only to bourgeois readers of mystery novels, historical adventure novels, melodrama and crime literature. The serial novel absorbed all these genres and trivialised them to the extreme. It also had a way of captivating its readers: by running several exciting plots simultaneously and spreading out tension-filled climaxes over the various instalments, it somehow forced people to buy more issues. The genre came to dominate the lowbrow readership in the first half of the 20th century, until the outbreak of the Second World War. And it was this genre, along with series like *Buffalo Bill* and *Lord Lister*,⁹ that was identified with the ‘products of scandal,’ so fiercely fought by critics and journalists.

⁷ Editorial comment: All of these stories had many editions, including Polish ones. The editors were unable to determine which specific editions were accessible to Professor Żabski, it is also impossible to establish the original dates (and indeed languages) of publication of the original prints. As such, the reference list contains the editions (both in Polish and other languages) most probable to have been used by the Professor. The tales of Mélusine and Maguelonne were reprinted in *Piękne historie o niezłomnym rycerzu Zygfrydzie, pannie wodnej Meluzynie, królownie Magielonie i świętej Genowefie. Antologia jarmarcznego romansu rycerskiego*, eds. J. Ługowska, T. Żabski, Wrocław 1992. This edition was based on, respectively, Jan Breslauer’s 1885 and Feitzinger’s 1912 publications (see: *ibid.*, pp. 300–301). As for the story of Griselda (rendered in Polish) — although the Professor mentioned its source, Giovanni Boccaccio’s *Decameron* (circa 1470), he probably had Józef Lompa’s edition on his mind (cf. T. Żabski, *Proza jarmarczna XIX wieku. Próba systematyki gatunkowej*, Wrocław 1993, p. 77). The Professor designated 1847 as the year of publication of this source, but according to Estreicher it was most likely 1846 (cf. K. Estreicher, *Bibliografia polska XIX stulecia*, 1st ed., vol. 2, Akademia Umiejętności, Kraków 1874, p. 620).

⁸ Ch. Schmid, *Życie świętej Genowefy: napisane dla matek, dzieci i pocziwych ludzi, którzy w swych cierpieniach szukają pociechy w Bogu i swej niewinności*, Rzeszów 1861 (repr. in: *Piękne historie Piękne historie o niezłomnym rycerzu Zygfrydzie, pannie wodnej Meluzynie, królownie Magielonie i świętej Genowefie, Antologia jarmarcznego romansu rycerskiego*, eds. J. Ługowska, T. Żabski, Wrocław 1992). Editorial comment: The author’s notes have been left in their original form. Other data, such as names of publishing houses, have been supplemented in the bibliography.

⁹ Editorial comment: Buffalo Bill — the protagonist of many Wild West stories; a character modelled on William Frederick Cody (1846–1917), a hunter, U.S. Army scout during the Civil War

This world of sensation and romance was perfectly in tune with the film productions of the day, which presented mostly vulgar entertainment, adapted to the perceptual capabilities of workers, domestic servants and generally people with the lowest viewing competences. The films also gave rise to some of the song repertoire of street bands, garden theatres and cabarets.

After the Second World War the popular circulation virtually ceased to function. As part of the eradication of illiteracy books were printed for the newly enlightened, editions of highbrow literature were issued for a mass readership, as were propaganda writings, in which the entertainment factor played no small role, especially when it came to socialist spy, crime and war stories. There was no room in this repertoire for the serialised novel, once so popular, and the same was true in the West. The serialised novel has been replaced in recent years with genre-wise similar, incredibly popular long-running television series. This circulation is additionally fuelled by VHS rental shops offering largely film productions of the lowest quality. This marks a growing revival of vulgar entertainment (video tapes were sold in market stalls until recently!) — primarily visual, which does not require any reading effort on the part of the audience.

The cultural elites' reluctance to treat a work as a commodity, and thus to commercialise trivial literature is neither a new nor typically Polish phenomenon. As early as in Gautier and Flaubert's times¹⁰ a rebellion against the pressures of the publishing market was expressed through the formulation of the fundamentals of the 'art for art's sake' theory. Writers faced a cruel alternative: either to write, like Flaubert, 'for twelve friends,' or, like Victor Hugo and Henryk Sienkiewicz,¹¹ to introduce an element of adventure into outstanding works, making them widely-read. Second-rate writers were in the worst situation, because a weak high-art work cannot count on any audience, while a weak popular work can potentially appeal to a less picky audience. For it is worth bearing in mind that associating highbrow literature with masterpieces is misleading. Although it is made up of masterpieces and masterpieces give it direction, highbrow literature is also made up of hundreds of imitative, epigonic works produced in its convention — a visible sign of entropy, creative inertia and passivity of second- and third-rate authors. And if we can speak of the harm of commercialisation, it affects not the masterpieces, as they are always present on the market, but precisely these second-rate works.

(1861–1865) and the Indian Wars, and organiser of the *Buffalo Bill's Wild West* show (1883–1916), which presented events from the history of the Wild West. Lord Lister — the protagonist of many detective stories. Relevant data have been provided in the bibliography.

¹⁰ Editorial comment: Théophile Gautier (born Jules Pierre Théophile Gautier, 1811–1872) — French writer and literary critic of the Romantic era. Gustave Flaubert (1821–1880) — French author, precursor of naturalism.

¹¹ Editorial comment: Henryk Sienkiewicz (born Henryk Adam Aleksander Pius Sienkiewicz, 1846–1916) — one of the most popular Polish authors; winner of the Nobel Prize in Literature (1905).

Regardless of the writers' dilemmas, opposition to popular literature was triggered — already in the second half of the 19th century — by the belief of critics, moralists, journalists and promoters of education in its multifaceted harmfulness. The 'products of scandal' were fought for decades, and critics were joined, throughout Europe, by intellectuals who felt a growing threat from broadly defined mass culture disseminated by the mass media. Their judgments have been extensively and comprehensively discussed by Antonina Kłoskowska, author of the now classic book *Kultura masowa*, the first outstanding scholarly work on the subject in Poland.¹²

However, opinions expressed by critics and scholars can be categorised as self-referential. This is because they are, in fact, opinions of 'experts' having little in common with the views of the readers. And it is the readers who are the all-powerful lords and masters of popular literature. They have their own opinions, their own system of artistic values, their own preferences and passions. They are distrustful of experts, and when choosing a work they take advice from colleagues and friends — readers like themselves. Moreover, they create bestseller lists through bookshop purchases and hit lists through voting. They also participate in awarding prizes for the best athlete, singer, TV presenter, etc. They have a decisive impact on the audience ratings of individual broadcasts and thus influence the programming. No wonder, therefore, that authors are increasingly succumbing to their pressure. The recently presented Western-style quiz shows such as *Wheel of Fortune*, *The Game* (of ping-pong), or *Familiada*¹³ are a great tribute to the common taste, giving immense satisfaction to an audience of millions, each of whom feels capable of solving the tasks posed to the participants and can win a car in half an hour, even if they fail to answer half of the simple crossword-style questions. TV executives, in the end, do not really care whether they give an award for skilful use of the joystick or for perfect knowledge of, for example, South American amphibians.

Scholars have long tried to explore this remarkable phenomenon of our era. Kłoskowska's 1960s study played a pioneering role, bringing us a wide-ranging, objective and balanced picture of Western cultural and social phenomena. The author thus transcended taboos and lifted the curse from mass culture, which was treated with hostility as bourgeois culture, not befitting the civilisational model of socialist society. After this 'dispelling' came translations of prominent works in the field produced in the West by authors like Johan Huizinga, Roger Caillois, Edgar Morin, Roland Barthes, Abraham Moles and others.¹⁴ At the same time the

¹² A. Kłoskowska, *Kultura masowa. Krytyka i obrona*, Warszawa 1964.

¹³ Editorial comment: These are the titles of quiz shows popular in Poland in the 1990s. Relevant data have been provided in the bibliography.

¹⁴ J. Huizinga, *Homo ludens. Zabawa jako źródło kultury*, transl. M. Kurecka, W. Wirpsza, Warszawa 1967; R. Caillois, *Odpowiedzialność i styl*, sel. and ed. M. Żurowski, introd. J. Błoiński, Warszawa 1967; E. Morin, *Duch czasu*, transl. A. Frybesowa, Warszawa 1965; R. Barthes, *Mit*

proverbial wheel was reinvented by Polish journalists, the most widely-read among whom was Krzysztof Teodor Toeplitz.¹⁵

Broader research into popular literature began in the early 1970s and immediately took off in several different directions. Stefan Żółkiewski placed popular literature in cultural and social contexts, subjecting the resulting communicative situation to semiological interpretation.¹⁶ The key concept for him was the circulation of literature, encompassing all participants in communication — authors, publishers and readers. He treated literature itself as a single text — comprehensively conventionalised and schematic. That is why the poetics of types, genres and individual works ceased to interest him, especially since in his concept popular literature was only a product of unsuccessful imitation of highbrow literature and had no structural determinants of its own.

At the same time Janusz Dunin, author of *Papierowy bandyta*,¹⁷ characterised the popular writings from the perspective of a library scientist and collector. Without getting into methodological analyses, he created a clear typology of old popular printed matter, which no one remembered anymore, and presented it in great quantity and full glory. The need for further inventory of this heritage, protected from material annihilation with great difficulty, prompted the ‘Łódź school’ to compile several detailed bibliographies, by Dunin and his colleagues: Krystyna Mierzwanika, Zdzisław Knorowski and Alicja Jędrych.¹⁸ The early 1970s also brought the first major attempts in the field of text poetics. The Institute of Literary Research of the Polish Academy of Sciences produced a collection of studies, *Formy literatury popularnej*,¹⁹ which combined analyses of individual texts with concepts, often hypothetical, of general nature. Some of the articles included in the volume were forerunners of their authors’ further, more extensive studies in the field of popular literature: studies by Zofia Mitosek on stereotypes,²⁰ Anna Barańczak on song lyrics,²¹ Józef Bachórz on the mystery novel (several separate studies), and

i znak, sel. and introd. J. Błoński, Warszawa 1970; M. MacLuhan, *Wybór pism*, Warszawa 1975; A. Moles, *Kicz czyli sztuka szczęścia. Studium o psychologii kiczu*, transl. A. Szczepańska, E. Wende, introd. A. Osęka, Warszawa 1978.

¹⁵ See three books by K.T. Toeplitz: *Mieszkańcy masowej wyobraźni*, Warszawa 1970; *Kultura w stylu blue jeans*, Warszawa 1975, as well as *Sztuka komiksu, Próba definicji nowego gatunku artystycznego*, Warszawa 1985.

¹⁶ See studies by S. Żółkiewski: *Kultura literacka (1918–1932)*, Wrocław 1973; *Kultura. Socjologia. Semiotyka literacka. Studia*, Warszawa 1979; *Wiedza o kulturze literackiej. Główne problemy*, Warszawa 1980.

¹⁷ J. Dunin, *Papierowy bandyta. Książka kramarska i brukowa w Polsce*, Łódź 1974.

¹⁸ J. Dunin, K. Mierzwanika, *Polska powieść zeszytowa*, Łódź 1978; J. Dunin, Z. Knorowski, *Polskie powieściowe serie zeszytowe*, Łódź 1984; A. Jędrych, *Polskie serie literackie i paraliterackie 1901–1939*, Łódź 1991.

¹⁹ *Formy literatury popularnej. Studia*, ed. A. Okopień-Sławińska, Wrocław 1973.

²⁰ Z. Mitosek, *Literatura i stereotypy*, Wrocław 1974.

²¹ A. Barańczak, *Słowo w piosence. Poetyka współczesnej piosenki estradowej*, Wrocław 1983.

Anna Martuszevska on various theoretical and methodological issues, raised by her systematically in various articles over the following years (articles deserving to be reprinted in a separate volume). In addition, Martuszevska is the author of an innovative monograph on Rodziewiczówna's oeuvre.²² It is necessary to return to the early 1970s for the fourth time. This was when Czesław Hernas published a programmatic article 'Potrzeby i metody badania literatury brukowej.'²³ Having substantively justified the 'need for research,' he established the Popular Literature Research Centre at the University of Wrocław, which initially studied cultural policy and some aspects of the poetics of popular works. This centre, headed in the 1980s by the present author, formed a permanent team of researchers from almost all national Polish studies centres and organised annual conferences. The team carried out systematic research within the framework of 'key problems' and a grant from the State Committee for Scientific Research, resulting in several original books²⁴ and a test volume of *Słownik literatury popularnej* (1994), which heralded imminent publication of the complete dictionary. To ensure continuity of research, the centre has been publishing a nationwide series (featuring authors from all over the country), 'Literatura i Kultura Popularna', since 1991.²⁵

Other books have been written in Wrocław also outside the Research Centre²⁶; similarly to monographs originating at other universities,²⁷ they are devoted to vari-

²² A. Martuszevska, *Jak szumi Dewajtis? Studia o powieściach Marii Rodziewiczówny*, Kraków 1989.

²³ Cz. Hernas, 'Potrzeby i metody badania literatury brukowej', [in:] *O współczesnej kulturze literackiej*, vol. 1, eds. S. Żółkiewski, M. Hopfinger, Wrocław 1973.

²⁴ P. Kowalski, *Parterowy Olimp. Rzecz o polskiej kulturze masowej lat siedemdziesiątych*, Wrocław 1988; J.A. Choroszko; *Huculszczyzna w literaturze polskiej*, Wrocław 1991; W. Dynak, *Z dziejów polskiej pieśni lowieckiej*, Wrocław 1991; J. Ługowska, *W świecie ludowych opowiadań. Teksty, gatunki, intencje narracyjne*, Wrocław 1993; T. Żabski, *Proza jarmarczna XIX wieku. Próba systematyki gatunkowej*, Wrocław 1993; J. Kolbuszewski, *Od Pigalle po Kresy. Krajobrazy literatury popularnej*, Wrocław 1994.

²⁵ Editorial comment: The series quickly developed into a journal under the same title, currently published annually.

²⁶ J. Jastrzębski, *Czas relaksu. O literaturze masowej i jej okolicach*, Wrocław 1982; J. Kolbuszewski, *Wiersze z cmentarza. O współczesnej epigrafice wierszowanej*, Wrocław 1985; L. Ślękowa, *Muza domowa. Okolicznościowa poezja rodzinna czasów renesansu i baroku*, Wrocław 1991; W. Dynak, *Łowy, łowcy i zwierzyzna w przysłowiaach polskich*, Wrocław 1993.

²⁷ R. Handke, *Polska proza fantastyczno-naukowa. Problemy poetyki*, Wrocław 1969; S. Lem, *Fantastyka i futurologia*, Kraków 1970; B. Sułkowski, *Powieść i czytelnicy. Społeczne warunkowanie zjawisk odbioru*, Warszawa 1972; M. Wydmuch, *Gra ze strachem. Fantastyka grozy*, Warszawa 1975; J. Siewierski, *Powieść kryminalna*, Warszawa 1979; K. Dmitruk, *Literatura – społeczeństwo – przestrzeń. Przemiany układu kultury literackiej*, Wrocław 1980; J. Nowakowski, *W kręgu obiegowych idealów estetycznych. Szkice o literaturze popularnej*, Rzeszów 1980; A. Zgorzelski, *Fantastyka. Utopia. Science fiction. Ze studiów nad rozwojem gatunków*, Gdańsk 1980; A. Smuszkiewicz, *Stereotyp fabularny fantastyki naukowej*, Wrocław 1980; A. Smuszkiewicz oraz id., *Zaczarowana gra. Zarys dziejów polskiej fantastyki naukowej*, Poznań 1983; O.S. Czarnik, *Proza artystyczna a prasa codzienna (1918–1926)*, Wrocław 1982; W. Władysław, *Krew na pierwszej stronie. Sensacyjne dzienniki Drugiej Rzeczypospolitej*, Warszawa 1982; J. Rurawski, *Tadeusz*

ous aspects of popular literature. To this we should add numerous articles and dissertations published in scholarly periodicals and sometimes raising issues of fundamental importance, with papers on science fiction deserving special mention. Obviously, popular literature is also indirectly included in the orbit of interest of theorists and historians of literature as a whole, or even historians of education, culture, etc. However, this sizable list of works is not entirely satisfying. They tend to be narrow in their thematic scope, and if their authors propose any general solutions, they formulate them as working hypotheses, with a view to testing them on broader material. Particularly acute is the lack of studies on recent literature, the one that is so prominently displayed on bookshop shelves. In this regard, literary scholars fall clearly behind film scholars, who provide monographic studies concerning the various genres. Literary scholars, for example, have many terminological problems. The very term 'popular literature' is controversial because of its inappropriate associations with popular science writing or with any popular oeuvre. Its replacement with the terms 'trivial literature' or 'entertainment literature,' not to mention 'pulp' fiction and 'tawdry' literature evokes feelings of axiological (pejorative) nature and thus precludes objectivity, which should guide researchers. Even more troubles are generated in the sphere of genology. The classic distinction of genres (novels, short stories) is very limited content-wise and does not include what is the most important in terms of varieties of popular literature like horror, science fiction, fantasy, etc. It seems that these concepts will require separate research tools making it possible to explore their basic meaning.

Many problems are posed by the history of popular literature. The priority role of reception and circulation makes it necessary to deal not so much with 'Polish popular literature' as with 'popular literature in Poland,' with considerable attention being devoted to foreign works, which have been the readers' main fare. In addition, the history of popular and highbrow literature follow separate paths; only in some periods (for example, Romanticism) can a closer link between the two types be found. The matter is compounded by the fact that some genres (historical novel, love story, novel of manners) derive directly from highbrow literature, while others (crime fiction, spy fiction) are completely independent of it. However, the autonomisation of the history of popular literature does not solve all the problems, for it turns out that this history is governed by very strange laws. Popular literature is, in fact, a collection of varieties and genres that originate randomly and unexpectedly, as the products of — usually — specific authors (for example, Horace Walpole is the creator of the Gothic novel, Eugène Sue — the mystery novel, Arthur Conan Doyle — detective fiction). These varieties form certain

Dolega-Mostowicz, Warszawa 1987; A. Niewiadowski, A. Smuszkiewicz, *Leksykon polskiej literatury fantastycznonaukowej*, Poznań 1990; A. Niewiadowski, *Literatura fantastycznonaukowa*, Warszawa 1992; P. Kowalski, *Samotność i wspólnota. Inskrypcje w przestrzeniach współczesnego życia*, Opole 1993; J. Szocki, *Literatura popularna dla ludu na przykładzie Wydawnictwa Ludowego 1882–1920*, Kraków 1994.

thematic blocks (wartime-chivalric, brigand-crime, etc.) and the development of genres, their transformation, disappearance and emergence, takes place within these blocks; they form their own history as a whole, independent of the development of other varieties. This is partly because the various varieties correspond to different, independent reading needs (compare, for example, erotic and crime literature). Consequently, the history of popular literature paints a picture of an uneven development of its different varieties, independent of each other. Irrespective of this, the history of popular literature has not yet been written and it is unclear what form it will take.

Another research task will be to verify widespread opinions about this kind of writing. Such judgments are generally the result of fragmentary research and do not take into account the complexity of the phenomena; they fail to note the constant tendency of professional authors to innovate and improve their writing forms. Hence the widespread, and in no small measure correct, belief in the schematic nature of such forms. Yet it is well known that popular literature, seeking to attract readers' attention, must provide them with increasingly fresh food. There is an increase in variance, leading to the emergence of new genre varieties. The more interesting ideas, which have been accepted in line with the mechanism of preventive reader censorship, are exploited to the maximum by the 'inventors' themselves and their successors, as a result of which there follows a period of schematisation, bringing a risk of oversaturation of the reading market. In such a situation imitators, unable to innovate, try to keep the genre alive by intensifying its features. This is the source of the increase in brutality in crime and war literature, and the increasingly bold display of sexuality in amorous literature, leading to pure pornography, and in horror — the maximisation of the gross and the macabre. Needless to say, this intensification of features is accompanied by an inexorable trivialisation of genres, clearly visible in contemporary vulgar entertainment.

Thus, the dynamics of popular literature are determined by variance. This can be demonstrated by the growth of adventure literature. Dying out in the first half of the 19th century, it gained new impetus in the following decades thanks to tremendous advances in civilisation. The exuberant development of transport played an important role; it now became easy, fast and attractive to travel by rail, steamship, balloon, later by submarine and airplane. There began the exploration of the virgin colonial territories²⁸ — Africa, the Far East,

²⁸ Editorial comment: This phrasing (which, when filtered by modern sensibilities, can be construed as burdened with certain post-colonial underpinnings) is to be attributed to a lack of adequate (as in: ideologically neutral) terminology in Polish academic discourse of the time. The areas that the Professor described as 'virgin colonial territories' were perceived as geographically and scientifically uncharted, similar to blank areas on Roman 'maps' marked as *hic sunt dracones* ('here be dragons'). What likened these types of spaces to their ancient counterparts was their highly imaginary status; they were at the same time uncanny, like magical realms from folk tales and fables, and exotic, and also highly prone to being designated as resting places for unimaginable riches and treasure.

western²⁹ and southern America.³⁰ Scientific expeditions, hunting teams, groups of gold diggers, bands of smugglers set off, trying to outdistance each other. For authors this was an opportunity to conquer a new adventure space (in the Bakhtinian sense)³¹ — vast, free, full of dangers and surprises of various kinds. A fascinating world of adventure opened up before the bourgeois readers. Hunters, conquerors and scholars were becoming new knights, inspiring genuine admiration.

The new adventure space-time was a godsend for authors, tempting the imagination with new ideas. Jules Verne's and Robert Louis Stevenson's classic novels (*The Mysterious Island*, *In Search of the Castaways*, *Treasure Island*, *Kidnapped*, and others)³² were followed towards the end of the century by the works of Henry R. Haggard (*King Solomon's Mines*; *She*), who 'discovered' relics of lost civilisations in inaccessible regions. However, Haggard's was not the attitude of an archaeologist, for his 'discoveries' were mostly made in the world of fantasy. He reduced the essence of a lost civilisation to a magical reality, in which, for example, a sacred fire could ensure the protagonists' eternal youth. And thus emerged a new type of literature, called fantasy, creating the prospect of moving to an alternative world, a prospect that fascinated prominent writers as well, enabling John Tolkien,³³ for instance, to create works of high quality.

A more ludic version of fantasy — heroic fantasy — evoked, thanks to the author of *Conan* Robert E. Howard, a pre-glacial era in which a barbarian hero fought against the sinister forces of magi and sorcerers. In addition, Howard came up with an altered map of Europe and Africa, freeing himself from the geo-natural determinants of the world as we know it. This idea was eagerly taken up by his successors (for instance Tolkien and Andre Norton³⁴), who further populated the new earth — on our globe — with various non-human rational beings.

Thus, the tremendous growth of modern heroic fantasy — literature of the 'sword and sorcery' kind — created many private mythologies, filled with dozens

²⁹ Editorial comment: More precisely the so-called Wild West, occupying a separate place in the collective imagination of popular literature readers as the place of action of cinematic and literary westerns.

³⁰ Editorial comment: The author most likely meant South America.

³¹ Editorial comment: Mikhail Mikhailovich Bakhtin (1895–1975) — Russian literature scholar, philosopher, culture scholar. Author of the study mentioned by Professor Żabski and devoted to adventure space-time. A Polish translation of 'Формы времени и хронотопа в романе. Очерки по исторической поэтике' was first published in *Pamiętnik Literacki* and then in a collection of Bakhtin's sketches, see M. Bachtin, 'Czas i przestrzeń w powieści', transl. J. Faryno, *Pamiętnik Literacki* 1974, no. 4; M. Bachtin, 'Formy czasu i czasoprzestrzeni w powieści', [in:] M. Bachtin, *Problemy estetyki i literatury*, transl. W. Grajewski, Warszawa 1982.

³² Editorial comment: Jules Verne (Jules Gabriel Verne, 1828–1905) — author of *The Mysterious Island* (1874) and *In Search of the Castaways* (1868); Robert Louis Stevenson (Robert Lewis Balfour Stevenson, 1850–1894) — author of *Treasure Island* (1882) and *Kidnapped* (1886).

³³ Editorial comment: The man in question is the British writer John Ronald Reuel Tolkien (1892–1973).

³⁴ Editorial comment: Pen name of Alice Mary Norton (1912–2005).

of new creatures, eagerly accepted by the reading masses, guided largely by Eliade's³⁵ 'mythical thinking.' The upheavals of the 1930s³⁶ were very conducive to the rise of the mythical protagonist. Originally, it was some totemic figure (Batman,³⁷ Spiderman³⁸) — a man following the example of some animals and using the forces of nature. Soon there appeared Superman,³⁹ a being of cosmic origin endowed with superhuman abilities. He was the personification of Goodness fighting against Evil, associated at the time with the German *Übermensch*.⁴⁰ In the post-war years Superman's vitality was linked to the mass viewers' dreams of a man

³⁵ Editorial comment: Mircea Eliade (1907–1986) — Romanian historian of religion, religious scholar, philosopher of culture, indologist. Author of *Treatise on the History of Religions* (1939).

³⁶ Editorial comment: Professor Żabski was probably referring to the consequences of the Great Depression of 1929–1933, consequences that included the rise of the Mafia in the U.S., and the so-called Castellammarese War (1929–1931) between Giuseppe Masseria (1886–1931) and Salvatore Maranzana (1886–1931) for domination in New York's criminal underworld. It led to the creation of the National Crime Syndicate (1931). In Europe this was a time of radicalisation of nationalist movements (NSDAP seizing power in Germany in 1933) and economic cartelisation, leading to market monopolisation.

³⁷ Editorial comment: Batman [alter ego of Bruce Wayne] — comic book character created by Bob Kane (Robert Kahn, 1915–1998) and Bill Finger (Milton Finger, 1914–1974), avenger and defender of the innocent in Gotham City, who uses technical gadgets that give him an advantage over his enemies. He appeared for the first time in *Detective Comics* (1939).

³⁸ Editorial comment: Spiderman (or Spider-Man) [alter ego of Peter Benjamin Parker] — comic book character, defender of the oppressed, characterised by extraordinary physical prowess. Created by Stan Lee (born Stanley Martin Lieber, 1922–2018), Steve Ditko (born Stephen J. Ditko, 1927–2018) and Jack Kirby (born Jacob Kurtzberg, 1917–1994). He is a mutant that originated through a bite of a radioactive spider. The character first appeared in *Amazing Fantasy* (1962).

³⁹ Editorial comment: Superman [alter ego of Clark Jerome Kent] — comic book character created by Jerry Siegel (born Jerome Siegel, 1914–1996) and Joe Shuster (born Joseph Shuster, 1914–1992). Superman is a humanoid visitor from the planet Krypton. Rescued and raised by Earthlings, he stands up for them under the mask of a clumsy journalist for the *Daily Star* (later *Daily Planet*) in the city of Metropolis. As an extraterrestrial, he possesses superhuman strength and fitness, and can fly. He appeared for the first time in *Action Comics* (1938). Although the Professor's argument seems to suggest that Batman and Spiderman came into being before him, Superman is chronologically the first of the superheroes created by the popular culture of the 1930s. The characters listed here appeared in Polish popular consciousness at roughly the same time via various texts of culture that the Professor potentially could have had access to. As such, this fragment of the article might be viewed as an accurate reflection of the state of knowledge on these issues in Poland at the time.

⁴⁰ Editorial comment: *Übermensch* — a concept discredited by Nazi ideology, derived from the philosophy and works of Fyodor Dostoevsky (1821–1881) and Friedrich Nietzsche (1844–1900). Of key importance to the foundations of the *Übermensch* idea are Dostoyevsky's novel *Crime and Punishment* (1867) and Nietzsche's work *Thus Spoke Zarathustra: A Book for All and None* (1883–1885). The original Nietzschean idea of the superman was deformed by the philosopher's sister, Therese Elisabeth Alexandra Förster-Nietzsche (1846–1935), who edited the notes she collected after her brother's death in the spirit of National Socialism. Together with *The Foundations of the Nineteenth Century* (1899) by Houston Stewart Chamberlain (1855–1927), the idea of the *Übermensch* became a fundamental concept of Nazi ideology, legitimising the crimes of genocide, especially the Holocaust.

who, doing the job of an weak police force and a flawed law, brings law and order to society, as Duke of Gerolstein once did in Eugène Sue's *Mysteries of Paris*. From that moment on the superhuman hero became a major figure in modern popular culture. Mythologisation came to the protagonists of adventure novels of war, politics and espionage, protagonists such as the commandos from MacLean's *The Guns of Navarone*, Robert Ludlum's Bourne,⁴¹ David Morrell's famous Rambo,⁴² Fleming's James Bond⁴³ — all those individuals capable of going 'where eagles dare,' performing tasks beyond ordinary human capabilities. Other heroes who underwent mythologisation were those from police fiction (especially movies), figures who, like Dirty Harry, Mad Max or Cobra,⁴⁴ fought a lonely battle against the demonised world of humanity's enemies. They have in them something of the ancient cultural heroes such as Theseus,⁴⁵ and I think that mythographic research, utilising Jung's⁴⁶ theory of archetypes, might uncover the essence of the vitality and stature of popular literature and culture.

In discussing the transformation of classic adventure literature, it is necessary to take into account the other directions of its development. Thanks to his *Jungle Book*⁴⁷ the Nobel Prize-winning author Rudyard Kipling popularised anew the idea of a return to nature, illustrated even more broadly, albeit more naively, by the creator of *Tarzan* Edgar Rice Burroughs by means of the example of children growing up surrounded by wolves and monkeys. At the same time the jungle became an attractive adventure space, where the adventure participants included semi-intelligent animals.

But that is not all. Arthur Conan Doyle put into practice the idea of introducing his protagonists into a space from the Jurassic Age (*The Lost World*). He had to resort to a truly Sherlockian genius to rationally justify the presence of an unusual natural enclave in modern reality. The idea was risky, but the attraction of the protagonists' struggle with dinosaurs, pterodactyls, apes and the entire 'antediluvian' menagerie prevailed over common sense, especially since the informative values of this 'paleontological novel,' supported by solid excavation-based knowledge, were

⁴¹ Editorial comment: The character in question is Jason Bourne, the protagonist of a series of novels by Robert Ludlum (1927–2001): *The Bourne Identity* (1980), *The Bourne Supremacy* (1986) and *The Bourne Ultimatum* (1990).

⁴² Editorial comment: The figure in question is John Rambo, the protagonist of David Morrell's novel *First Blood* (1972).

⁴³ Editorial comment: For information about this character see Footnote 1.

⁴⁴ Editorial comment: The characters listed here are the title characters from action and crime movies. Relevant data have been provided in the bibliography.

⁴⁵ Editorial comment: Theseus — one of the greatest mythical heroes of ancient Greece. Son of Poseidon and Aethra, slayer of the Minotaur.

⁴⁶ Editorial comment: Carl Gustav Jung (1875–1961) — Swiss psychiatrist and psychologist, co-founder of depth psychology. Professor Żabski may have used a collection of his works entitled *Archetypy i symbole. Pisma wybrane* (Polish edition 1976).

⁴⁷ Editorial comment: Joseph Rudyard Kipling (1865–1936). Kipling's 1894 collection of short stories had its Polish premiere in 1900. The edition was published as *Księga puszczycy*.

indisputable. Doyle's idea was eagerly copied by Burroughs (*The Land that Time Forgot*), and in some aspect also by filmmakers, who introduced King Kong, the giant gorilla, into the Beauty and the Beast story, eternally loved by viewers.⁴⁸ The screenwriters of *King Kong*⁴⁹ was no less skilful than Doyle in justifying the presence of the giant, placing it on an island untouched by the foot of civilised man.⁵⁰ A different explanation — a nuclear bomb explosion — was used by the creators of Godzilla⁵¹ and other Japanese monsters,⁵² yet another — a genetic experiment — by Michael Crichton and Steven Spielberg as the creators of *Jurassic Park*.⁵³

This evolution of adventure literature, merely outlined here, demonstrates how much dynamism was generated by its pursuit of new adventure space and new protagonists. Schematisation is always intertwined with de-schematisation, innovative ideas of the best authors with their mass exploitation and trivialisation. The same happened with other varieties of popular literature — crime, science fiction, love and horror novels.

⁴⁸ Editorial comment: The first literary treatment of the 'Beauty and the Beast' theme came from the pen of Gabrielle-Suzanne Barbot de Villeneuve (1685–1755). It was published anonymously in the collection *La jeune Américaine, et les Contes marins* (1740). However, Professor Żabski most likely had in mind an abbreviated version of the story by Jeanne-Marie Leprince de Beaumont (1711–1780). The piece appeared in *Le Magasin des enfants* in 1756 and was more popular than the original.

⁴⁹ Editorial comment: The lead screenwriters of the original *King Kong* were James Ashmore Creelman and Ruth Rose. It is difficult or indeed impossible to determine which version the author cites. The 1933 version was known in Poland, as it was screened in the year of its American release (and widely publicised as well — Merian C. Cooper was a well-known and celebrated figure as one of the American airmen who fought in the Polish-Soviet war a decade prior). As such, it cannot be ruled out that the Professor was referencing the original film. On the other hand, however, the post-World War 2 film-going audience in Poland had no means of access to Cooper's and Ernest B. Schoedsack's grand opus. The 1976 retelling followed Creelman's and Rose's script and adhered to its general outline to a considerable degree. John Guillermin's picture was widely screened and garnered a considerable following, so it is not unreasonable to assume that it was the *King Kong* that the Professor had in mind while writing the article, not least because of its chronological proximity.

⁵⁰ Editorial comment: This phrasing might seem at odds with certain (mostly architectural) artifacts depicted in both films, which were left behind by previous inhabitants of the island. It is nevertheless fair to assess that in the popular cultural consciousness of the 1930s the concept of 'civilisation' was almost exclusively identified with the achievements of 'the white man.' As a remake of a motion picture from 1933, the 1976 *King Kong* replicates this line of reasoning.

⁵¹ Editorial comment: We do not know if the author is writing about the original 1954 Japanese version of the film, but it is likely, since in Poland the film was released in 1957. However, he may have been referring to the 1956 version intended for the American market: *Godzilla, King of the Monsters!* (1956)

⁵² Editorial comment: It is hard to speculate which specific monsters Professor Żabski had in mind. It may have been Rodan, because the film featuring him, *Rodan* (1956), was released in Poland in 1967. We would like to thank Agnieszka Nieracka and Zbigniew Wałaszewski for their help in finding information about relevant Japanese films from this period.

⁵³ Editorial comment: Michael Crichton (John Michael Crichton, 1942–2008) was the author of the novel *Jurassic Park* (1990), on the basis of on which Steven Spielberg made the 1993 film with the same title.

This entire output, so rich and diverse, is the work of a collective effort by hundreds of authors with an international reach. The prehistory of popular literature can be traced as far back as ancient romance, medieval religious writings, stories of chivalry and oriental tales. At that time the most important works originated in France; adapted by the Germans, they subsequently reached the Slavic countries. In the late 18th century it was the English and the Germans who were tremendously active in the genre; in the 19th century the French took the lead again. Later they were joined by the Americans, who until then had had only westerns to their credit. In the 20th century their role began to increase, at the expense of European countries. In fact, the last popular French novel of world renown was *Emmanuelle* by Emmanuelle Arsan (1959).⁵⁴ Among writers from other European countries, few individuals carry any clout. They include the Pole Stanisław Lem,⁵⁵ the Norwegian Margit Sandemo,⁵⁶ the German Hans H. Kirst⁵⁷ or, unexpectedly, the Italian Umberto Eco.⁵⁸ All the rest do not generally cross the borders of their own countries. Yet Europe's honour is saved by the British, supported by their own powerful tradition and heritage. Inattentive readers might think that all English-language literature comes from America. Yet the Brits include the already mentioned Ian Fleming, Frederick Forsyth, Alistair MacLean as well as Ken Follett (*Eye of the Needle*, *The Key to Rebecca*), Graham Masterton (*The Manitou*, *The Devils of D-Day*) and the almost century-old Barbara Cartland,⁵⁹ whose minor but numerous romance novels have exceeded half a billion copies; there is also Arthur Clarke (*2001: A Space Odyssey*), James Herbert (*The Rats*), Wilbur Smith (*The Burning Shore*), Colin Forbes (*Avalanche Express*), Jack Higgins (*The Eagle Has Landed*) and others. It is probably safe to say that the most vivid inspirations come from England, especially when it comes to war, spy, political and horror fiction. The Americans have their aces, of course, but a total Americanisation of contemporary popular culture is an illusion, generated in part by the domination of American film,

⁵⁴ Editorial comment: The 1959 edition was published anonymously and outside legal circulation. The first official edition was published in 1967 under the pen name of Emmanuelle Arsan (pseud. of Marayat Rollet-Andriane, 1932–2005). This authorship is disputed; the work is sometimes attributed to Marayat's husband. See É. Losfeld, *Endetté comme une mule ou la Passion d'éditer*, Paris 1979; F. Leroi, *70, années érotiques*, Paris 1999.

⁵⁵ Editorial comment: Stanisław Lem (Stanisław Herman Lem, 1921–2006) — Polish science fiction writer, author of *Solaris* (1961).

⁵⁶ Editorial comment: Margit Sandemo (1924–2018) — Norwegian-Swedish writer. The author of the forty-seven-volume *Legend of the Ice People* (1982–1989), which began with a volume entitled *Spellbound* (1982, Polish edition 1992). Professor Żabski may have been familiar with the Polish translation of forty-three volumes of the series, which appeared between 1992 and 1995; translations of the last four volumes came out in 1996.

⁵⁷ Editorial comment: Hans Hellmut Kirst (1914–1989) — German writer, author of the *08/15* series of novels, which began with *The Revolt of Gunner Asch* (1954).

⁵⁸ Editorial comment: Umberto Eco (1932–2016) — Italian writer, author of *The Name of the Rose* (1980).

⁵⁹ Editorial comment: Mary Barbara Hamilton Cartland (1901–2000).

television and music although in that last field the contribution of the English (for example, the Beatles) is unquestionable. A characteristic feature of modern popular culture is its English language focus; thanks to the widespread knowledge of the language there has developed a relatively uniform international, cosmopolitan culture. Popular literature has always been like this (though once it was predominantly French), although it is known that various genres have their own homelands. As a multinational product, it has become the shared property of readers around the world. This is the perspective from which we can define its 'mode of being.'

Translated by Anna Kijak

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