

Anna Sobolewska

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Anna Sobolewska, **Polska proza psychologiczna 1945–1950 (The Polish Psychological Prose 1945–1950)**, Ossolineum, Wrocław 1979. Series: *Z Dziejów Form Artystycznych w Literaturze Polskiej (History of Artistic Prose in Polish Literature)*.

Anna Sobolewska discusses in her book the novels and short stories published shortly after the Second World War. Their authors are the most distinguished Polish writers: Andrzejewski, Brandys, Breza, Dygat, Iwaszkiewicz, Mach, Nałkowska, Zawieyski, to mention but a few. Their texts represent the best achievements of the Polish psychological prose. They were selected according to the following three criteria: the presence of the psychological analysis, problematization of the psychological phenomena and so-called “psychological illusionism.” This last criterion is connected with the fact that in this particular mode of presentation the psychic processes are visualized, and not related. Besides, characters have definite individuality, in opposition to the more extreme modes of the “stream of consciousness” prose, where the contours of the individual tend to be blurred. In the texts under discussion, psychology is present on the thematic plane and also serves as the principle of composition. The structural axis of the psychological novel more often than not is the imitation of the mechanisms of memory. Those properties do not, however, make psychological prose dramatically different from other modes of narrative fiction, because psychology in fiction can also take other forms: model, parabolic ones, as in the writings of Gombrowicz or Mrożek, or behavioristic. Psychological prose simply reveals the specific condensation of properties which in other forms of narration appear with greater or lesser intensity, i.e. as a continuum.

The books under discussion appeared between the end of the Second World War and the early 'fifties, which were the years unfavourable to the psychological prose. The literature of that period had to face the events of great historical momentum, such as the outbreak of the Second World War, heroic fight of the Polish people against the prevailing German army, the Nazi occupation, Warsaw Uprising, martyrology of the Jews and the postwar political upheavals. All those events sought their artistic expression. It is Mrs. Sobolewska's view that the postwar literature came under the pressure of those forces in literature and society which were unfavourable to the

development of the experimental psychological prose. This prose accomplishes first of all the documentary tasks by giving evidence to the war experience, but it has also moralistic intentions. The postwar model of the psychological prose is the resultant of two elements: the conventions inherited from the psychologism of the 'twenties and the new concept of realism. This last tendency heralded the domination of socialist realism which sought to root psychological analysis out of the novel. The postwar continuation of the psychological trends which appeared in Polish literature between the wars did not, however, lead to the development of techniques formed in the 'thirties, but to their simplification and conventionalization. The forces which became dominant after the Second World War pressed toward the straightforward modes of expression. Those conditions caused the development of, firstly, hybridic, paradocumentary forms and eventually, the non-imaginative literature. Amorphism of the narrative prose, the interpenetration of the genres constituting the literary transposition of the crisis in the traditional forms of cognition, is still an important tendency of contemporary literature not only in Poland.

The novels by Nałkowska, Breza, Kisielewski, Broszkiewicz or Mach, which raise the traditional psychological problems, such as the authenticity of the individual, his self-knowledge or the investigations of the truth about other human beings are at the same time narratives about recent history. They were meant to shape social consciousness and at the same time fulfil the criteria of the modern psychological prose. In the opinion of Mrs. Sobolewska, this double task is the source of numerous tensions and contradictions of this prose, at times enhancing, and at other times disrupting its artistic shape. Those pressures imposed on the postwar literature the status of the compulsory "in-between," suspended between the psychological interests of writers and social demands, between the desires for the creative literature and penetrating psychological analysis on the one hand and the programmes of the simplified and tendentious realism on the other.

The first chapter discusses the problems of narration in the psychological prose. The mode of narration characteristic of the prose of the 'forties is marked by keeping to the character's perspective, i.e. by limiting the presented world to his consciousness. The

techniques developed within the psychological novel, and even earlier, in the modernist prose, found expression on all levels of discourse: in narration, by making the language of the narrator as similar as possible to the language of other characters, through the device of the indirect interior monologue, in narrative structure, or plot, where psychological analysis dominates over the events, and finally in composition, where psychological time is introduced into the narrative structure. The presented world grows in dimension through the associations of the main character. Narration and description are the reflections of his perception.

The writers of the 'forties are particularly concerned with the mechanisms of perception and actions under extreme conditions. The similarity of the narrator's and the characters' language and the close distance of narration perform specific functions in the war prose. Psychological narratives about the days of occupation as a rule are marked by the apparent "momentality": the author suggests that the event and narration about it take place at the same time. In those texts the atomistic mode of narration is connected with the disintegration of personality under physical threat.

The distinct, specific quality of the psychological poetics is particularly visible in the shaping of the fable time, which is the topic of the second chapter. Mrs. Sobolewska describes the temporal structure of the selected works and tries to reconstruct the concepts of time presented both in a discursive way and coded in the structure of narratives. In this kind of prose time is not only the main characteristic of the structure, but, in case of numerous writers such as Iwaszkiewicz, Nalkowska, Mach, Zawieyski, it forms the constitutive element of semantics. The narration dominated by the psychological time, in the presented world is usually accompanied by the problematization of time and the temporality of consciousness. The search for identity which is the basic topos of the psychological novel must lead to questions concerning the nature of time and the temporality of the self. The subjective fable time is related to the concept of the dynamic self, vibrating in time. Viewed in this perspective, the whole 20th-century literature appears as a series of attempts to reach the core of the psyche in order to see whether the self has any foundations at all.

The novel of the 'forties, structured along the lines of the re-

rospective technique, borrowing the schemes of the reconstruction of the past from Proust or Conrad, is at the same time the novel about the working of memory. "Action" in the texts under discussion is almost wholly internalized. The events take place not on the epic scene but behind it and only their motives and repercussions are presented, while the display of the events themselves requires the retrospective techniques. The focal points of the plot are usually located in the sphere of experience and moral choices of the heroes. This psychological detectivism, the gradual encirclement of the truth about the hero endows the psychological novel with the specific rhythm of psychic conflicts and surprises and is meant to force the reader toward constant efforts at reinterpretation.

The poetics of the psychological prose includes also the description of the language used by the writer speaking about the inner life of his characters. The third chapter deals with the psychology of the fictional character, i.e. the conventions of motivation and psychological analysis. The motivation covers the sphere where the models of human personality intersect with the literary structures. Thus the conventions of the psychological analysis and motivation are investigated in the double context, namely the language of the novel and the prevailing concepts of the self. An important problem for the investigator of the motivation structure presents the sphere between "life" and motivation in the literary text, namely the sphere of social consciousness, because motivation in fiction must respect those aspects of human behaviour which are regarded as permissible, probable and worth attention. More often than not motivation refers to general laws and concepts about the order of the world, existing in the collective consciousness, i.e. to everyday, commonsense vision of reality.

In the prose of the 'forties the conventions of motivation are often stimulated by the concepts already in circulation, but at the same time these works create their own norms of experience and feeling which are out of accord with everyday experience. The structure of motivation in those texts is discussed in terms of three oppositions: the indeterministic or paradoxical motivation is opposed to the deterministic one, the inner motivation is contrasted with the outer, and finally the incomplete, hypothetical motivation is set against the detailed one, assumed to be complete. The master of

paradoxical, implicated and incomplete motivation is Jarosław Iwaszkiewicz. The literature about the Nazi occupation written in that period—the writings by Andrzejewski, Broszkiewicz, Filipowicz, Otwiński, Rudnicki—also investigates the psychology of the border situation and stresses the unpredictable nature of human reactions. On the other hand, in the texts written with the intention to settle the accounts of the Polish intelligentsia with the past prevails the deterministic structure of characters.

The variety of social conditionings of that prose is the subject of the last chapter “Recent history in the psychological prose of the 'forties.” Literary critics of those years propagated the sociological model of man and the necessity of thinking in historical terms. Towards the end of the 'forties the fictional character is shaped to ever increasing degree according to the notion that Marxist ideology should be expressed through the life of a character who is a representative of his social class. The theoreticians of realism questioned the cognitive value of the fictional character's experiences. The techniques used by the psychological prose orientated on the individual self were not fit for expressing the programmes of “great realism” and even less so for “socialist realism.” Thus the poetics of the psychological prose excludes the works blatantly tendentious. The tendency, however, intrudes itself into the novel by various means: the unequivocal meaning of the narrative structure, the positive hero, the narrator's commentary and esseistic insertions.

In Mrs. Sobolewska's opinion history in psychological prose is less an attempt to present social forces than a combination of individual, carefully motivated choices. Recent history—the years before and during the Nazi occupation—is presented not through confrontation with historical facts, but through the network of interpersonal relations which form particularly important stratum of the text. More often than not the experience of history is contained in the consciousness of characters-witnesses in whom we can, as a rule, recognize the figure of the author.

The prose of the 'forties is equipped both with the precise psychological apparatus and the tools of moralistic discourse. The psychological analysis is not introduced for its own sake but serves as a means of explication of the ethical and ideological choices made by the hero under extreme conditions. Anna Sobolewska studies the

register of the real historical situation communicated through the structure of those texts and through their semantic stratum. The prose of those years expresses the tension between the documentary and veristic tendencies and the subjectivity of narration about the place of individual in history, the subjectivity arising from the very structure of psychological prose.

Sum. by the author

Transl. by *Grażyna Cendrowska-Werner*