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MUZEUM HISTORII POLSKI

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1. *La première naïve*

Since at least the middle of the 19th century it has been a matter of course to believe that every man – not, of course, the Everyman of Morality plays – can become the hero of a novel. Any and every man – regardless of his social status and intellectual aptitudes, regardless of the pattern into which his works and days have fallen or of what adventures or experiences he could tot up in his life's reckoning. The everyday, in all its glorious banality, could kindle the same burning interest as high adventure. Writers were faced with the problem of how to write of the everyday so as to remain within it and refrain from looking down upon it whilst, nevertheless, so shaping the world as to convince the reader that the banality of the proffered world was not characteristic of its author. The great novelists of the 19th century were fully conscious of this issue, whose continuing and unabated life still gives pause to historians and critics of narrative prose. The question must have presented itself to Prus too, and never more so than during the composition of *Emancypantki* (*Blue-Stockings*). For he undertook an unusual task: to describe the world by means of the categories available to the first naïve woman. Even the very earliest critics of the novel described her in terms borrowed from stage comedy, and the phrase "the *ingenue*" suggests itself: how else is one to characterize Miss Magdalene?

Let me stress that *Emancypantki* is concerned above all, not with the rendition of the fortunes of a naïve girl, but with the presentation of the world through the categories she acknowledges as her own.

An arduous and unusual task for an author to attempt – especially so where that vision of the world is not only not subject to question but becomes a value in itself: and this we know to be the case in *Emancypantki*. By its nature approval precludes distance. But can the narrator of a multi-tomed novel, whom the reader of necessity treats as the author's *porte-parole*, identify himself with a girl whose immense nobility is matched by her no less immense naïveté?[1] To attempt to solve this problem in a manner that will be both consistent and sufficiently well operable to ensure the novel some degree at least of compositional unity: to attempt this is to strive to square the circle. Prus elected to take this risk and tried to resolve a problem that appears to be insoluble – and that is the fascinating thing about this strange novel.

In *Emancypantki* the role of the narrator has been clearly restricted, especially in comparison with the practices of somewhat earlier writers. In himself he informs one what within the bounds of the novel's ontology has the status of indubitable fact, but even in this area the extent of his jurisdiction is limited, for – in accordance with a tendency prevalent throughout the novels of the *fin de siècle* – he depicts the novelistic world by arranging close-ups into a series of individual scenes that are concrete in their non-reproducability. Prus' narrator shies away from judgement of any and every kind and even – with a few exceptions – refrains from generalizations. It seems that the writer proceeded throughout with the utmost self-awareness, as is witnessed by the fact – analyzed by Edward Pieścikowski in his excellent study of the novel[2] – that he deleted from the final version all those expressions that would have provided narrative confirmation of the events in the novelistic world: all such words as "essentially," "obviously," "really," and "truly." Thanks to this the novel's world gained a far greater degree of autonomy, which of necessity hindered the establishment

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[1] Historians of the English novel (e.g. K. Tillotson) have pointed out that the placing in the middle of a work for adults of a child – that is, of a naïve hero – was Dickens's great literary innovation. With regard to Prus' relation to Dickens see J. Kulczycka-Saloni's, *Z dziejów Dickensa w Polsce: Emancypantki a Bleak House* (*From the Fortunes of Dickens in Poland: Blue-Stockings versus Bleak House*), "Prace Polonistyczne," 1947, S. V.

[2] E. Pieścikowski, *"Emancypantki" Bolesława Prusa* (*Bolesław Prus' "Blue-Stockings"*). Warszawa 1970, p. 109.

of distance. But such distance is nevertheless—at least to some extent—a prerequisite of the novel, so the writer is driven to establish it by other means. Above all there are two methods worth consideration. Firstly, there is a stylistic coloration of the narrative that prevents the reader from identifying himself with the figure under consideration at any given moment. This primarily fosters the irony to which the novel frequently has resort; yet it is less crucial from our point of view, for Miss Magdalene herself is never treated ironically, so it is not thus that distance is to arise. Far more decisive is the second method, which rests upon the registration of the disparities between the facts the scenes put before the reader (who is thus an eye-witness *sui generis*) and their interpretation by the heroine. The problem: fact and its interpretation (an interpretation carried out by... the heroes, not by the narrator) is fundamental to the novel's composition and global sense, and manifests itself in various set-ups and entanglements. In the meantime I would like to draw attention to one side of the question: the explanations and judgements of events, facts and purposes formulated by Magdalene differ quite considerably from the knowledge of things and their values garnered by the reader, who is witness to the scenes. (In this case it is he who is the custodian of "objective truth.") The hiatus between the world of the imaginings of the first among the naïve and the actuality within which she has to live—which is, the order of the novel, the real world—creates its own particular dimension in *Emancypantki*.

That is, it serves to indicate the heroine's naivety, and thus to some degree suggests distance, but it never acts totally to disqualify her. Rather the reverse: naivety not only lends the young person charm but is also a positive force on the scale of values with which the novel is bound. It is true that naivety is a symptom of false consciousness, but in this case that consciousness—which is no drain on the author's account—expresses a noble soul that is not only free of the world's depravity but also incapable of even comprehending it. That is one of the novel's chief peculiarities.

The illusions of the hero have been a favourite theme of the novel ever since the age of Cervantes. But these illusions are not naïve ones: Don Quixote was not naïve when he imagined himself a knight errant, nor was Emma Bovary when she dreamed of a world that would be something more than a provincial town, nor were countless

other novelistic heroes naïve when they lived out dreams of adventure and power. All aspired to assume a role forbidden them by the practice of everyday social life. The great novels, however, turned these dreams into problems, subjected them to analysis, and thus in a sense unmasked them. To recall Girard's renowned book – the novel opposed truth to the Romantic lie.[3] A truth that lay in the demonstration of the falsity of consciousness, in the piercing of illusion-filled balloons. Limiting oneself to the classic examples that researchers into the novel have frequently exploited – the false consciousness of Don Quixote or Madame Bovary derived from the quarrel with the world that determined their experiences, and if it was not always a revolt, it was in any case a vote of no-confidence.

In *Emancypantki* all this is turned around. Its heroine assents to the surrounding world, does not wish to be anyone but herself, and her thoughts – unlike those of the chemist's wife in Tuwim's verse – are not "in the bed of the tenor-king." Our first naïve lady has little in common with Flaubert's doctor's wife. She adheres to the set of values her environment holds to be binding, and she does not permit herself to think that there can be any discrepancy between the moral laws instituted as obligatory and the practices of the members of this environment. This is the source of her naivety, but it is also the very thing that precipitates her into incessant conflict with the environment and eventual defeat. Let me repeat that the conflicts do not arise out of any desire to transgress against the rules; they are the consequences of the heroine's wish consistently to apply them. The situation in *Emancypantki* is paradoxical: when taken seriously, conformism becomes a non-conformist stance.

One of the phenomena most essential to this novel is – I repeat – the discrepancy between the facts of which the reader is already conscious and the interpretations thereof proposed by the heroes. In the majority of cases these interpretations are fallacious, and their falsity is enlisted into the novelistic play. Maddie herself is frequently the creatrix of false interpretations, primarily as a result of her – fitting for the first lady in naivety – continual quest for honest intentions behind every deed. And whenever sober remarks emerge into her consciousness they are immediately disavowed:

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[3] R. Girard, *Mensonge romantique et vérité romanesque*, Paris 1961.

Mr. Romanowicz looked at her from an angle, bowed politely, albeit distantly, and sighed as he left. In Maddie's breast there arose suspicions regarding the cause of his sigh: was it for Helena or over the 10-złoty lessons at Mrs. Latter's? But she immediately told herself that she was stupid and perverse to condemn Mr. Romanowicz – and this quieted her (I, 111).[4]

For the heroine – at least up to a certain moment – the world is without flaw, and all the inadequacies she remarks within it she ascribes to herself, to her suspiciousness, stupidity and inability to behave correctly. Hence her endless self-accusations: "I am very depraved" (I, 441); "the thought occurred to her that the Lord God might not hear the prayer of so great a sinner as herself" (II, 133); "I, a stupid, weak and wicked girl" (II, 306). A simple-minded reader, failing to notice the barrier between the world of novelistic fiction and reality, might call out to this great sinner: *ego te absolvo*. Imaginary sins are the province of straightforward virtue. But the conviction of their presence continually nourished by the heroine creates suitable conditions for pointing out her errors – noble errors which thus cannot rebound to her discredit. Although they cannot do so, they nevertheless require counter-arguments of a different type. For Maddie continually "botties" everyone, "botties" herself and the world it has befallen her to inhabit, perhaps even "botties" the work of which she is the chief protagonist.* Her very existence, like that of Gombrowicz's Yvonne, unleashes new conflicts and constricts the world. Constricts it in a dual sense. Firstly, the heroine's presence introduces the element of naivety, which to her companions on the novelistic stage often seems to be a peculiar variety of perfidy. And, secondly, Maddie takes the avowed moral rules of the environment for legal tender,

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* [Translator's note] *Upupić* (to botty) is a neologism of Gombrowicz's which appears in *Ferdydurke* and *Yvonne* and refers to the way parents use the stereotype of helpless soft childhood to drown their children in downiness. *Pupa* is the baby-word for "botty."

[4] All quotations from *Emancypantki* are drawn from the edition *Wybór pism* (*Selected Writings*), Warszawa 1966. This is a two-volume edition: Volume I contains vols. I and II of the novel; and Volume II, the novel's third and fourth volumes. This edition ignores the divisions between Vol. I and Vol. II and between Vol. III and Vol. IV, which is inexcusable, for it erases the structure of Prus' work. In my quotations the Roman numeral designates the volume; the Arabic one, the page. Whilst analyzing the novel I have – of course – respected the fact that it is a work in four volumes.

she does not conceive of conflicts between words and deeds, rules and actual practices. Morality requires that one succour the needy, so one is honour-bound to visit a pair of travelling artists, and even to enter Mrs. Nikodema Turkawiec's dubious establishment. But yet another rule states that a young lady of respectable family does not visit sanctuaries of this kind and that when she does so she becomes suspect herself. Theoretically the imperatives of Christian morality are far more important, but the judgements people make are nevertheless influenced above all by one's standpoint with regard to conventional injunctions and prohibitions. The former is to a large extent a matter of theory; the latter, one of everyday practice. The heroine, who is by no means in revolt against this world, must inevitably come into conflict with these injunctions and prohibitions the moment she seeks to follow the generally binding principles; she must become a non-conformist, and against her own will, for no plus sign stands next to non-conformism in her system of values— moreover, she cannot even envisage it. In this situation Maddie's very presence necessarily arouses confusion. Drawn so as not to conflict with the poetics of the realistic novel of manners, her fortunes could furnish material for a parable entitled: "On the Ambivalence of Good." Prus does not introduce any hints of parable: this type of discourse could find no place in a realistic novel, and such a reading could only be a response elicited from the reader by the continual repetition, in various frameworks and entanglements, of a single situation: one in which the heroine's good deeds are misjudged by her environment and expose her to various collisions, unpleasantnesses and snubs. The angel swims against the current of conventionalized social opinion: conflict becomes unavoidable.

2. Tittle-Tattle

Contemporary social opinion is, as it were, one of the main heroes of the book. It is treated in such a manner as to deprive it of binding force: the text does not reproduce it uncritically, quite the reverse, for conflicts with it are one of the primary generators of the dramatic tensions. It assumes a rather unusual shape, for it by no means comprises a set of opinions formulated in a systematic

fashion and does not appeal directly to any professed morality – it situates itself on the level of gossip. Gossip, being an expression of everyday views, becomes a variety of authority *sui generis*, it interacts with the characters' enterprises, and they have to take note of what is said of them, of how they are judged. Its rôle by no means ends here: equally important is the gulf separating the facts as experienced by the reader in his rôle of an eye-witness from the forms they take on after they have been processed by the mechanism of gossip.[5] Gossip is where surfaces triumph over reality: reduced to friendly chatter, social opinion becomes the domain of error, of "form," which emerges victorious over "reality." Any event can be squeezed into the straitjacket of this form and thereby mystified: Maddie is an angel beset around by false tongues. The great literary discovery made by Prus in *Emancypantki* is this very grasping of the mechanism of gossip so the novel's subject becomes more than just the set of facts that constitute the narrative: to a far greater degree than is common in the realistic novel of manners, its subject is the reception accorded these facts by social consciousness, the process that transmutes that which represents truth in the novelistic order into the stuff of gossip. It is as if facts had no independent existence, the rule being rather that they become significant only through their second incarnation in the unverified accounts of the protagonists. The fate of the main heroine also unfolds upon two planes: it follows its actual course but is also played out simultaneously on the level of gossip, which glosses her actions with false meanings. As we know, Maddie misinterpreted events as a result of her naïve nobility; but gossip is the domain of fallacious interpretations, a supra-individual plane devoid of honourable intentions – in short, it is one of the forms of social false consciousness.[6]

Gossip is not only a typical novelistic fact, it is also a mode of utterance which can – though it does not have to – influence narrative

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[5] Cf. Pieścikowski's remarks on this subject, *op. cit.*, p. 42.

[6] As far as I know, the role gossip plays in the novelistic world of *Emancypantki* has not been described at length. One can find remarks on the subject in the following studies: K. W. Zawodziński, *Na marginesie Emancypantek* (*In the Margin of Blue-Stockings*), [in:] *Opowieści o powieści* (*Accounts of the Novel*), ed. C. Zgorzelski, Kraków 1963, p. 206; H. Markiewicz, "*Emancypantki*", [in:] *Prus i Żeromski*, Warszawa 1964, p. 109; Pieścikowski, *op. cit.*

conceptions and thus situate itself within the field of the novel's language. This is exactly what happens in *Emancypantki*. Gossip is variously embodied during the course of the narrative process. Gossip can be summarized, just like any other kind of account. It can appear in the cited utterances and can eventually find itself within the field of the narrator's discourse. In Prus' novel it appears in all these guises.

For instance, it manifests itself in the narrative (in the narrow sense). The subject of the narration is not that which is but that which is spoken of. The formula "it was said" appears on the very first page of the novel:

> It is no suprise that Mrs. Latter herself, whose establishment brought such happiness to its daughters, was considered to be a happy person. It was said of her that although she had begun work with modest funds she must nevertheless own a good thirty thousand or so roubles in ready cash; one was ignorant only as to whether her capital rested in shares or in a bank (I, 5).

And on the subsequent pages is recorded what one thinks of Mrs. Latter in Warsaw. One is also informed of the general opinion concerning other characters. Miss Ada Solska

> had completed boarding-school almost six months ago and could have gone out into the world which, as was remarked, was awaiting her with longing, but—despite all that—Miss Ada resides with Mrs. Latter (I, 50).

One could locate many similar formulae. They fulfil a dual function, serving on the one hand to introduce information concerning how a given figure in the novelistic world is viewed and its position evaluated, and on the other hand it saves the novelist from underwriting the transmitted information with his own authority. In this way the teller draws closer to the world whose history he recounts; in repeating the currently circulating opinions he practically participates in it (an extra reason why he cannot use his authority to question the gossip). Opposed to the latest crop of gossip and imputations are "the facts," i.e. the scenes presented in close-up. Here the gossip is not overturned and denied: rather, the reader has to qualify it for himself after comparing it with the scenes. In any case, the order in which "fact" and "gossip" appear is a variable one. Usually the event is presented first and then there follows the false information about it exchanged by the protagonists. Nevertheless, from time to

time gossip antedates the fact and thus – obviously – the reader is acquainted with it first. In any case, it is couched in such a manner that there can be no doubt of the need to qualify it.

As we have already remarked, gossip influences the course of events and represents an essential element in the story. There is even an active figure whose chief role is to disseminate gossip (Mr. Zgierski). But the most important thing to note is the way the gossip that accumulates around Maddie affects her biography. She did not perish crushed by crumbling leftovers of feudalism: she succumbed before the swarms of insinuations that had selected her as the object of their favour. It is almost explicitly stated at one point (II, 585) that the sole answer to gossip is the assumption of a nun's wimple. Here gossip becomes the measure of all things[7]. And this too is stated in the novel, although – as if for ironic effect – it comes from Zgierski, the very figure whose main vocation in the novel is the retailing of unverified information:

"The last straw of despair was the death of the brother, of which I once had the honour to inform you, my lord... But the actual preparation of the ground was the work of gossip... of calumny, which has no respect for even the most sainted persons... For two months on end Warsaw howled it non-stop... And for what reason?... Because this very angel in human shape visited a dying woman, sought to succour an orphan, and ministered to a sick brother!..." (II, 582).

The false tongues have no compunction with angels, but the angels themselves must be aware of their existence, at least from a certain point onwards; are forced to be so, even if they decline to change their behaviour. Miss Magdalene becomes conscious of the role gossip plays in life despite her unwillingness to take it into account. But she is warned against her behaviour:

I congratulate you – wrote the doctor's wife – on the consequences of your independence. The whole town is repeating that you lost your position with Miss Malinowska through bad management, that you promenade with unmarried men, and that you even frequent hotels! I cannot comprehend what could have been the source of this shameful gossip but from my father's expression I gather that he too has heard something, for throughout the last few days he has looked like a person just taken down from the cross (II, 573).

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[7] Zawodziński writes of this, not without sarcasm: "in this world rumours spread with the speed of lightning across a town of one and a half million people, where everyone knows and is concerned with everyone else" (*l.c.*).

What the whole town says (not just Dullsville but Warsaw too) becomes the highest test of morality. Public opinion has been placed on the level of gossip – that is, it has been demoted. This demotion is one of Prus' boldest moves: there exists here no other social necessity than the voice of gossip. Whatever convictions acquire positive value according to the immanent value-system that is obligatory throughout the novel spring from private initiatives and come into conflict with public opinion. The novel's chorus is made up of nothing but gossips and the prevailing ideology is that of "general rumour" (II, 299). It is contested by wisdom: "what doth the wise man and what doth the gossip?" – this distinction, phrased so tellingly in the title of one of the chapters, is of tremendous significance for *Emancypantki*. In tracing the course along which petty tattle flows, Prus names gossip as what it is and so prevents the reader from slipping into misunderstandings, from taking fantasies and insinuations for factual knowledge. "Rumour" is one of the words that appears most frequently in the novel. It does not merely occur whenever an unverified piece of information intervenes in the story – when it is said, for instance, that "a young lady of your age must not make a display of herself, for their tongues will catch her out" (I, 422) – or whenever the effects of various items of news and rumour are portrayed. "Rumour" also has a metalinguistic character and qualifies the utterances with which the reader meets in the course of reading. This happens when the narrator makes no explicit mention of it, when it is subsumed into the speech of one or another of the characters (as is usually the case in *Emancypantki*. The incessantly reiterated word "gossip" evolves something akin to a safety device, introduces the element of evaluation and allows one to attach qualifications to utterances. This is possible because – in every one of its conjunctions – "gossip" is part of the novel's metalinguistic array. And this in its turn is an offshoot of the general qualities of the genre: the novel not only relates the activities of its heroes, but also renders their modes of speech and utterance.

3. A Gauge of the Essential

La première naïve, albeit an angel and a genius of compassion, cannot by the nature of things pretend to the role of an ideologue.

False tongues cannot have any ideological aspirations to be treated seriously... especially when their sole product is gossip. If one bears in mind that the narrator of *Emancypantki*, whose wings have been closely clipped, is also no ideologue, then it could seem as if the novel was without ambitions in this area. Nevertheless, such a type of writing would be unacceptable to Prus, for he has brought into the field of the novel two figures who are indeed ideologues: Miss Howard and Professor Dębicki. The juxtaposition may seem shocking when one recalls the different manners in which the novel treats these two figures. But novelistic ideologues need not always make pronouncements to which value is attached – they play a part rather than fulfil a mission.

For it was in connection with the figure of Miss Howard (a famous review by Krzywicki termed her a frump) that the first critics of *Emancypantki* expressed their regrets over Prus' propensity for excessive caricature. The brave battle-axe striking blows for the rights of woman is a comic figure, and this expresses itself above all in her manner of speech. She speaks the very language that contemporary journalism uses for the theme of emancipation, and thus she always selects the set formula appropriate to the evaluation of a given situation. The repertoire of phrases at her command is meagre, and their repetition has a comic, caricaturing effect that does not deserve to be slighted. Her native manner of speech is to lecture, to broadcast her knowledge regardless of the situation in which she finds herself:

"In the course of a long succession of centuries – spoke Miss Howard with an inspired mien – woman, battered, cheated and exploited, has won from man an admission of her superiority to him as regards external forms – as well as a concession that she comes first on the street, in the salon and at the table. Thus it is my opinion that a woman who renounces this privilege betrays the feminine community of which she is a part..." (II, 106).

For Miss Howard, things become interesting only when they are susceptible of discussion in her schematized language. The story of the hapless wandering *artiste* recounted by Maddie becomes a fit object of her attention only once she has translated it into her own language:

"Aah! – she cried – why wasn't the matter put like that at the very start... a woman, a victim, covered with disgrace because she regenerates humanity, cast off by her accomplice, which is quite normal, and... deserted, discarded, lashed at by other

women, which is the height of depravity! Just use these terms with me and I will tell you that for five years now I have been calling women upon to do battle – and all in vain!" (II, 166).

It seems that Miss Howard's numerous and decided pronouncements are not only a parody of the articles published by the press, but also a parody of the tendentious novel – of that variety of novel that was already on the defensive during the period of the publication of Prus' novel. Around the close of the 19th century the parodistic subtext was probably felt to be strongly present, since at that time the form of the tendentious novel was still a living memory even though it had ceased to enjoy any prestige.

It is difficult even to speak of Miss Howard as a false ideologue, for she stands upon the ground most fatal to any enunciator of ideas: she has become a figure of mirth. Thus she cannot represent a well-matched opponent for the figure in the novel who assumes the role of a serious and – one could say – discreet ideologue. Discreet, for he does not reveal his calling at once: when he first appears in Mrs. Latter's establishment it is impossible even to guess what purpose he is later to fulfil in the novel. Prus does not have him mouthing commonplaces which serve equally well any and every occasion; quite the reverse, for he speaks – and in a pointed fashion – only at the most pregnant of moments. He has at his fingertips various modes of expression, ranging from the parable about cosmic events to the philosophical treatise. Dębicki is a means of introducing real philosophical problems into the novel; his statements are a gauge of whatever is essential in this entire friable world.

His figure has been the centre of a marked critical interest from the very outset and it has provoked various reactions. Dębicki's grand lecture has at times been treated as if it represented a self-sufficient and fully-fledged philosophical text.[8] Critics and literary historians have been intrigued by the very presence of such a mode of discourse: intrigued and often inclined to doubt. Chmielowski wrote that *Emancypantki* is a work "cooler in conception and execution, warier, weighed down at points – especially at the close – by an ele-

[8] See for instance B. Gawecki, *Filozofia teoretyczna Bolesława Prusa* (*Bolesław Prus' Theoretical Philosophy*), "Przegląd Warszawski", March 1923.

ment of didacticism, not even framed in an inviting manner."[9] That lack of "an inviting manner"—alias the low level of bellelettristic embellishment in Dębicki's lecture, and above all, its weakly-motivated rupture of the course of the narrative—has not met with approval. It looked as if Prus had disregarded the binding rules of the novelistic game. This question is of interest for us from another point of view, namely, with regard to the particular indications of this reasoning. Ignacy Matuszewski pointed this out: "Since his statement embraces a few score pages, Prus was attacked for overloading his novel with unnecessary ballast. This reproach would have been justified had Dębicki plunged into his dissertation out of the blue, as often happens in—for instance—Balzac. But Dębicki is addressing a man at the threshold of death, and the discussion is heard by the main heroine, in whose soul the philosopher's words effect a deep upheaval that influences her later actions and fortunes. And so the dissertation is not superfluous filler or an insert but is organically connected with the whole."[10]

Matuszewski represented a standpoint that was far from characteristic of his time and is far more typical of modern criticism: he sought consistently to demonstrate that every element that appears in a work has a functional character, that the work as a whole represents a coherent, organic construction. His treatment of this dissertation is one of the ways in which this stance manifests itself. In this case, however, one ought to make a further distinction. If one approaches this fragment with the composition of a classic realist novel in mind, it seems to be both minimally functional (or even utterly non-functional) and weakly motivated: everything that happens in the novel would take its course even without this episode. Dębicki's philosophical tract is nevertheless deeply functional when considered in a different perspective, as an attempt to formulate a problematic which the novelist himself—for various reasons—holds to be indispen-

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[9] P. Chmielowski, *Aleksander Głowacki (Bolesław Prus)*, [in:] *Pisma krytyczno-literackie (Writings in Literary Criticism)*, ed. H. Markiewicz, vol. 2, Warszawa 1961, p. 46.

[10] I. Matuszewski, *Artysta i filozof (Artist and Philosopher)*, [in:] *O twórczości i twórcach (On Creation and Creators)*, ed. S. Sandler, Warszawa 1965, p. 70.

sable and which could not enter the novel in any other way; without this episode *Emancypantki* would be devoid of all positivity, even despite the presence of Maddie, who has been so conceived that she cannot grasp the world, is incapable of interpreting it, and thus cannot comprehend it within a broader ideological, moral and philosophical framework. Prus belonged to an intellectual formation that was not prepared to accept any such undiluted negativity.

In addition, Matuszewski pointed out another extremely important matter: Dębicki's disquisition differs fundamentally from those in the novels of Balzac. In *his* case they appear "out of the blue" because the narrator is entitled to them as part of his right to interrupt the narration of occurrences within the domain of the novel so as to indulge in general remarks. Such a procedure is no longer available to Prus' narrator. Hence the necessity to introduce a reasoning hero who—and everything points to this—pronounces views of which the author approves, but who enters the course of the novel's events by means of an insertion (in the opinion of many critics a very loose one).

The creation of a reasoning hero has often been interpreted as a reversion to tendentiousness, and Dębicki's extensive metaphysical meditations have been seen to be—in Zygmunt Szweykowski's term—"tendentious interpolations."[11] This is certainly true, but it requires the qualification that Prus' tendentiousness is essentially different from the methods applied in the early Positivist tendentious novel. In these novels the reasoning hero was the novelist's mouthpiece[12] and, as it were, expressed the ideas he proclaimed in another manner. But Dębicki is no mouthpiece and in this respect enjoys complete independence. The following difference is equally essential: in the *roman à thèse* of early Positivism the tendency—as one knows—was utilitarian and referred to current social affairs. Even if the reasoner was "a philosopher," he could develop his philosophical conceptions only to the extent to which they generated propositions concerning

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[11] Z. Szweykowski, *Twórczość Bolesława Prusa* (*The Work of Bolesław Prus*), Warszawa 1972, p. 274.

[12] A broad and suggestive analysis of this question has been carried out by J. Barczyński, *Narracja i tendencja* (*Narration and tendency*), Wrocław 1976. Cf. the analysis in M. Żmigrodzka's book *Orzeszkowa. Młodość pozytywizmu* (*Orzeszkowa. Positivism in Its Youth*), ch. "Strategia powieści tendencyjnej" (The Strategy of the Tendentious Novel), Warszawa 1965.

current affairs. In *Emancypantki* all is differently disposed: the old professor is no reformer, presents no remedial formulae for the contemporary world, and his fundamental interest is absorbed by philosophical matters. This type of problematic lay outside the range of the tendentious novel. But the basic difference – let me stress – is that Dębicki's argument represents the novel's only chance of outlining fundamental intellectual problems that had found no place in the heroes' powder-puff of a world.

4. The Novel of an Epoch in Crisis

Emancypantki is undoubtedly symptomatic of the crisis in which the classic realist novel found itself at the close of the 19th century. "Crisis" has no evaluative overtones, it merely registers the collapse of a certain agreed manner of pursuing literature. It expresses itself in Prus' work primarily in the cutting of direct lines between the novelistic narrative and reigning social opinion, which has been reduced to gossip. Thus the novel has lost a point of reference that for a century had seemed to be self-evident. The opinions the reader had to recognize as binding had already been tied to a concrete character.

This crisis is also manifest in the disturbance of classical novelistic composition remarked upon when the work first appeared.[13] Even then it was suggested that the cause lay in "the modern method of writing," i.e. from one number of a magazine to the next. Obviously – as Pieścikowski has excellently demonstrated – the rules for serial writing exerted a great influence upon the composition of *Emancypantki*, but it seems that one ought also to indicate the presence of other factors. As Szweykowski accurately puts it, the novel is composed according to "a technique that juxtaposes totalities."[14] By the close of the 19th century the history of that technique had rendered it, as it were, ambiguous. On the one hand it could seem archaic and bring to mind the 18th-century novel (as Zawodziński noted when he derived Prus' work from the tradition of

[13] For instance, L. Krzywicki stated: "Prus' latest work is so disconnected that it makes a very strange impression" "Prawda", 1894, nr 8, p. 90).

[14] Szweykowski, *op. cit.*, p. 251.

English prose in that era[15]). But on the other hand it can be linked with the type of novelistic composition that was to dominate the period of Young Poland: composition in the form of a linear series of scenes.[16] The more so since the dominant position is occupied by the heroes' language, a language variously shaped, which also falls into a series of extensive monologues that have been termed, and not without a certain justice, "interior."[17] But this language, even at its most elevated and dramatic moments, is far-removed from the notions that dominate the modernist novel.

Emancypantki is situated on the border between epochs and styles, in a half-way house between archaism and modernity. This placing determines the drama peculiar to the novel, as various tendencies intersect; its conception was not realized with complete consistency. The novelistic world that animates the angelic maid, the false tongues and the philosophic reasoner proved to be full of contradictions – contradictions that could not be resolved and harmonized within the bounds of the classic realist novel.

Transl. by *Paul Coates*

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[15] Zawodziński, *op. cit.*, p. 209.

[16] With regard to this, see my book *Powieść młodopolska* (*The Young Polish Novel*), Wrocław 1969, above all the chapter: "Przekształcenie powieści realistycznej. Powieść jako zespół scen" (The Transmutation of the Realist Novel. The Novel as a Group of Scenes).

[17] S. Furmanik used this term in his study *Uwagi o Emancypantkach Bolesława Prusa* (*Some Remarks upon B. Prus' Blue-Stockings*), [in:] *Prace o literaturze i teatrze ofiarowane Zygmuntowi Szweykowskiemu* (*Studies of Literature and Theatre in Honour of Zygmunt Szweykowski*), Wrocław 1966, p. 192–195.