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Research interest: British, American and Polish academic novels and college movies

Allegories of the Campus in Polish Academic Narratives

In the paper, two Polish academic narratives Krzysztof Zanussi's movie "Camouflage" ("Barwy Ochronne") of 1976, and Wit Szostak's novel "A Hundred Days Without Sunshine" ("Sto dni bez słońca") of 2014 are discussed from the perspective of the use of the campus space as an image of the state. Drawing from the tradition of the British and American campus novel – a literary genre that developed in the 1950s and reached the peak of its popularity in the 1990s, the two narratives, created in two different political realities, make use of the absence of academic campuses in Poland and offer the campus as a miniature of the social space of the state in which conflicting ideas and ideologies clash, revealing the mechanisms of meritocratic privileging and hierarchization of positions. Such elements as imagery, the presentation of characters, forms of narration, literary / film techniques, use of language are analysed in order to show that they are used by the authors to stress an allegorical meaning in the analysed narratives.

KEYWORDS: Polish Campus Novels, College Movies, Cinema of Moral Anxiety.

Introduction

The aim of the paper² is to compare two Polish academic narratives in the context of the place in which their actions take place. As it is closed, limited and hierarchical, it can

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be treated as an allegory of the state. Two different types of narratives present two different periods: the 1970s and contemporary times and differ from their Anglo-Saxon counterparts. The first of them is *Camouflage* (Zanussi & Zanussi 1976), by Krzysztof Zanussi, which is the only example of Polish cinematography which can be analysed in the context of campus movies, although it differs from the trend which appeared at the turn of the 19th and 20th centuries in America and became popular in the 1990s. *Camouflage*, taking place during the away-from-home scientific conference, presents the Polish academic reality of the 1970s and is a sample of the Polish People's Republic society in which moral dilemmas were quite a normal thing.

The second narrative described in the paper is *A Hundred Days Without Sunshine* (*Sto dni bez słońca*) (Szostak 2014), which is one of a few examples of a Polish academic novel – a literary genre developed in the United Kingdom and the United States in the 1950s – written in 2014 by the representative of young Polish writer, Wit Szostak, and corresponding to the Polish academic reality. The genre is not as popular in Poland as in Anglo-Saxon countries and is addressed to a narrow and educated audience. It differs from its original counterparts, and some critics even admit that there are no true examples of it in Polish literature. Szostak makes such an attempt to criticize the Polish Academy, putting his novel in a fictional place and writing under a pseudonym.

The novelty of the research relies on the analysis and the comparison of the two different narratives – a film and a novel as examples of the Polish academic narratives, produced in two different Polish political realities, showing the problem of moral dilemmas and the fall of the academic world. Such elements as imagery, the presentation of characters, forms of narration, literary / film techniques, use of language are analysed in order to show that they are used by the authors to stress an allegorical meaning in the analysed narratives.

***Camouflage* as the Polish campus movie**

As the only example of a Polish film which dealt with the problem of the universities, *Camouflage* (*Barwy ochronne*) by Krzysztof Zanussi, dated 1976, can be mentioned. It is one of the most important films of the trend in Polish cinematography called 'the cinema of moral anxiety' and was deeply rooted in Polish culture of the bygone era of the Polish People's Republic. It presents a realistic portrait of the demoralized and cynical academic world of the Polish People's Republic and it can be understood as an allegory of the whole of society of the 1970s (Birkholz 2014). The film shows that the society is devoid of all moral fundamentals and that breakdown of all values is its main rule (Jankun 1989 cited in Marczak 2011: 186). It was addressed to the authorities and it was very problematic for censors when they noticed its real message.

The director used various devices to present the moral depravation of the society connected with unhealthy competition, hypocrisy and careerism and aimed to criticize the propaganda of the authorities. Imagery is the first means of conveying the allegorical meaning, which is associated with the creation of the analogy between animal behaviour and human strategies and also the comparison of the mechanisms that govern the academic

world to the laws of nature. It is presented a few times in the main hero's statements. It is also revealed in its title which refers to the camouflage of animals, allowing them to gain food and masks them from danger and in the film location which is in the palace and park complex in Rozalin, near Warsaw, and the nature reserve "Stawinoga" which serves as a university holiday centre which hosts a group of students who participate in the summer camp of linguistic, scientific circles, joined with the contest of research works (Dondzik 2015: 168, 170).

It can also be seen in the title sequence of the film where there are drawings of animals living in Poland in the background of the inscriptions. The initial inscriptions are an obvious display of the title, and the individual animals characterize the filmmakers. Birds' trilling coming from a nearby park and their shots at the background of the reserve also emphasise the meaning.

The film was to be a dissertation about the struggle of culture with nature in man, a mind which tries to control instincts, and the hiding of emotions and how surprisingly they can be manifested even in balanced, rational, self-controlled people with a proper system of values (Marczak 2011: 191). That contrast between culture and nature is revealed through corporeality, seen, for example, in the scenes of the men's room where students and academic teachers share a toilet or a bath of naked students of both sexes in a nearby river which is interrupted by Szelestowski. Additionally, corporeality is seen in the sexual relationship between Nelly Livingston-Pawluk, a foreign grant holder, a symbol of Western culture, and Kruszewski, shown in the scene when she, reversing the stereotypical male-female relations, wants to take him to bed under the pretext of an aching head massage. The key scene proving the true human nature which comes out even from the principled Jarosław is the last one. Seeing sexual intercourse between Nelly and an Italian student, Jarosław loses his control and starts to beat Jakub who deceives him by making him think that he is dead (Dondzik 2015: 178).

The next element which emphasises the film message is its non-linear narration, which is presented in the form of a conversation of Jakub Szelestowski – a docent and Jarosław Kruszyński – a young assistant, is regularly interrupted and which, starting from the problem of the student contest, leads to philosophical questions about human nature, which resembles Plato's dispute. According to the former, all values are relative, that is why a man differs little from animals, and culture can be treated only as imperfect camouflage, barely masking the wild side of his nature. He says that the system of values called the conscience is sometimes a millstone round somebody's neck, which does not allow him to reach the aim. The conversation between Jarosław and Jakub, whose essence was an argument, usually stormy, and aimed to find the truth (Dabert 2000 cited in Marczak 2011: 186, 194).

Characters are the next device of which the author takes advantage to highlight his message, which is a hidden critique of the academic society. The morality of the academic cadre is presented from individual and group points of view (Marczak 2011: 187). Szelestowski is an intelligent, cynical, egoistic and crafty man who chose a careerist path, full of moral compromises and does not want to change the system in which he functions.

Various critics claimed that he was similar to the creations of Johann Wolfgang Goethe and Fyodor Dostoevsky (Skwara 1977 cited in Dondzik 2015: 191) and was a bearer of evil, a devil to depose the victim (Saniewski 1977 cited in Dondzik 2015: 191) during a devil's game and seduction (Dabert 2000 cited in Marczak 2011: 188). He is a perfect product of his time and tries to adapt his younger colleague to academic society. Jarosław is idealistic, naive, inexperienced, full of pure intentions, believes in justice and attempts to act in harmony with his own conscience. Jakub's attitude to Jarek is similarly ambivalent as he is to himself. On the one hand, he deprives him of illusions about the possibility of not losing face in the morally depraved society. On the other hand, he is kind to him, probably as he finds himself in him, before his fall connected with his first compromise which he has made in his academic life (Marczak 2011: 189).

The university relations, quasi-friendships and coteries are revealed through the relationship between students and academic staff, which begin to be tense when it comes out that not all universities, have received invitations for the conference, thanks to the Vice-Rector's decision. The students of the period are criticised by Zanussi and presented as a group of conformists which is not able to organise themselves and form an opposition. It can be seen in the scene of their occupation of the canteen entrance and when they swim naked in the lake. The only controversy is aroused by Konrad Raczyk's lecture and his behaviour during the award ceremony when he bites the Vice-Rector in the ear, which becomes the pretext to remove him from the camp by the militia (Dondzik 2015: 182). Zanussi sneers at the representative of the university authority, presenting the Vice-Rector overdrawn features of character and presenting some speculations and casts doubt on the value of his habilitation, either plagiarised or written by someone else. One cannot be sure whether the story was invented by Jakub in order to test Jarosław's character.

The other academics are presented as the ones who did not come up with their titles thanks to their scientific work, like a silly doctor who owes her position to being a favourite student of her professor (Birkholz 2014). Zanussi also shows that making an academic career can also cause moral dilemmas, as in the case of Jarosław. He is to decide whether to follow his rules or to make compromises and become a supporter of the Rector's team, meaning the acceptance of injustice, fraud or vileness. However, every choice is wrong and makes a loss and resembles the permanent situation during communistic times. Such choices are typical when someone wants to be accepted by the group. Jarek pays his price for the acceptance of the society and rules which govern it (Marczak 2011: 187).

The confrontation of high culture with the reality of the Polish People's Republic is used to emphasise the meaning and to criticise the communistic system. The song, sung by Ms Magda during the supper which causes the scientists to laugh, is a fragment of the Casanova opera by Ludomir Różycki. The artistic part of the award ceremony is enriched by the recitation of poems of Krzysztof Kamil Baczyński and Wisława Szymborska, accompanied by Fryderyk Chopin's Sonata B-minor op. 58 and Berceuse in D-flat major, op. 57. There are also some connotations to Socrates' methods, sophists, Aristotelians and the heritage of ancient Rome. Moreover, the scene in which Konrad Raczek, who bites the rector in

the ear, is an allusion to the main hero of Fyodor Dostoevsky's *Demons* (Dondzik 2015: 175–176). The last important element which should be mentioned here is a discreet camera style. The director used a hexagonal lens, which deforms the perspective thanks to which the presented reality seems to be disturbing and aggressive, as if the heroes were constantly threatened by the attack of other human predators (Birkholz 2014). He used a hand-held camera which was very close to the actors and destroyed the area of psychological safety, preventing concentration and naturality of behaviours. It was a new solution used in the Polish cinema which was to catch life close up and show the reactions of characters and their gestures as naturally as possible. It was said that it is a perithetic film, which means that the protagonists imitating Aristotle and his students walked while arguing (Kłosiński 1996: 116–117). Heroes are filmed by slight zooms which make a complex interaction between the walk-and-talk stages and the stand-and-deliver dialogue. The film is not decorative with straight cuts and the soundtrack consisting of conversations and music indicating the end of the scene (Walsh 2010) and without sentimental elements. There is a contrast between the emotional content of the film and the cool, vivid narration created by pictures made by Edward Kłosiński emphasising the distance of the narrator–observer (Marczak 2011: 193).

Wit Szostak's *A Hundred Days Without Sunshine*

Wit Szostak's *A Hundred Days Without Sunshine* (2014) deals with the Polish contemporary academic reality, which is completely different from the British one of the 1970s when most famous masterpieces of that genre were written or the Polish one of those times criticised in *Camouflage*. After 1989, Polish universities went through various organisational changes and achieved autonomy from the state. Many new universities, including private ones, were established, and the number of students increased, although not necessarily connected with the increase in the quality of education. There were attempts to reform universities following the models of American and European universities and also, at present, there are various ideas of the governing party to change the whole educational system, which has been met with opposition from various lobby groups. The novel presents a grotesquely distorted image of the academic world and can be treated as an allegory of contemporary society.

Similarly to Zanussi's film imagery is the first means of conveying the allegorical meaning of the novel. The name of the novel setting refers to James Joyce's writings, such as *Finnegans Wake* and *Ulysses* (Sidowska 2015: 149), and its plot takes place in a fictional, small island, belonging to the Finnegan archipelago on the Atlantic Ocean, being a miniature of the country isolated from the surrounding world in a small village called Newport. The life of the academic community in the monastery walls of St. Brendan College, founded by bishop Berkley in the old cloister is ruled by traditional rules, and repeated rituals taking place at its own pace and is not progressing at all.

Although it appears to its main protagonist that it is the last place where humanities mean something, it is a place where fallen scholars from all over Europe are sent by their

superiors to meet their end. Putting the novel action to the isolated place means that it can be treated as any realistic place, and proves that badness is part of human nature, independent from outside factors.

The author's message, which is to criticize contemporary humanities and its representatives, is highlighted by the characters presented in the novel. Finnegan's academic community works at the provisional university at the end of the world and is presented as a group with various curiosities and past celebrities. Among them are sociologists, philosophers, specialists in literary studies and other divisions of humanities who are bored, old and weary. They neglect their basic academic tasks and sit in a pub where they have erudite discussions on literature. Dr Lesław Srebroń, introduces a bit of confusion into their lives, not realizing that they are blasé. However, they look at themselves without any illusions and firmly refuse to participate in any new initiatives among which there is his programme of the preservation of European culture called *New Iona*.

Moreover, Szostak condemns academicians for their loneliness and lack of communication between them. It can be seen from the example of its main protagonist, 40-year-old Polish Dr Lesław Srebroń from Krakow and his relationship with the Finnegan community of St. Brendan College, where he spends one semester as a visiting scholar. He is absorbed in the atmosphere of a small town and describes the college, its fellows, students, and his own didactic work from the perspective of a newcomer. He is a narcissist, megalomaniac, suffering from isolation and loneliness within the crowd, completely out of touch with reality and without the rational ability to interpret the events in the surrounding world and a caricature of a contemporary scholar (Zańko 2014). It is also said that the novel is an excellent mockery of intellectuals and unbearable debauchery, which are characterized by quite a large part of the academic community (Zańko 2014). It is worth noticing, following Nowacki, that the author is subtly mocking the British university culture, its pretentious conservative style expressed in tweed navy jackets, pipes and the fellowship community and says that the future of the Academy cannot be reduced to the preservation of old norms and order (Nowacki 2014).

The lack of inhibitions and moral debauchery of the community is even the subject of research in the framework of the international grant made by Prof. Sadhbh O'Sullivan – an Irish scholar, indomitable feminist, who is the author of the famous monograph of *The March of the Penis* through history in the light of Hegelian phenomenology of the spirit.

The problem is also reflected in the presentation of the hidden relationship between Prof. Lew Michajłowicz Protopopow and Dr Jadranka Vidović. He is an old Russian professor, a theorist of literature, a structuralist, a Marxist, with unmistakable manners and costumes from the preceding epoch, who suffers from ingrown nails. In the 1990s, he disappeared from the international arena and moved to Finnegans, where he took benefits from a romance with his younger colleague, Jadranka Vidović from Croatia, a specialist on the motives of grapes in contemporary prose of the Balkans.

The other examples which should be mentioned here are Ms Magge, a homeowner from whom Dr Srebroń rents a room during his stay at Finnegans, the MacLaughlin Sisters who

were tempered women, generously gratified by their charms and were a living legend of Newport, although the years of their fame passed and a student, Saoirse, who provoked Dr Srebroń insignificantly during his class.

The next device used by Szostak to present his vision of the Academy is a form of narration – the diary written by a character in it – Dr Lesław Srebroń. In this way, he avoids commenting on events and presents a story told by an acquaintance to the reader, who can evaluate his opinions in accordance with his knowledge of the narrator-character.

It is also worth noticing that the language used plays a major role in the creation of the academic atmosphere. The narrator describes every detail concerning the surrounding world, builds up contradictory fantasies and uses great metaphors. He lives in a fictional world full of references to literature, various theories and thoughts. As some critics claim, Szostak sneers at the academic tone, which is very often pathetic and blown, the conviction of academicians' self-righteousness and the magnitude of their accomplishments (Czechowicz 2014, Zańko 2014).

Conclusions

To conclude, the way of dealing with the problem of moral dilemmas and the fall of the academic world distinguishes two analysed narratives. Zanussi criticizes the propaganda of the authorities and the whole social and political reality, based on unhealthy competition, hypocrisy and careerism and its influence on the layman. In contrast, Szostak condemns contemporary academicians for their loneliness, and lack of communication between them, criticizes their keeping away from reality, their self-righteousness, the uselessness of their research but also a lack of inhibitions and moral debauchery.

Authors tackle the problem thanks to some elements of the narratives, which differ by way of presenting the problem: forms of narration, literary/film techniques, use of language, imagery, characters used to stress an allegorical meaning. *Camouflage* is a film production which presents a gradual process of the discovery of human nature similar to one of the animals, while *A Hundred Days Without Sunshine* – is a novel which illustrates the fall of the contemporary academic community. The place of action of the narratives is different: *Camouflage* illustrates the reality of the 1970s, and *A Hundred Days Without Sunshine* – contemporary times. However, the issue of isolation and loneliness, characteristic for both narratives, allows for the treating of the place of action as any realistic place, and proves that badness is part of human nature, independent from outside factors.

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