

Summary

The Narration and Performativity. On Leopold Buczkowski's Late Prose

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The book focuses on the late works of Leopold Buczkowski, one of the most unusual and controversial Polish writers of the 20th century. His early prose, especially his critically acclaimed novel *Czarny Potok* (*Black Torrent*), was seen as the birth of a major talent. Buczkowski's subsequent works disappointed critics as what "the recluse from Konstancin" wrote was becoming more strange, hermetic and – for many readers – completely incomprehensible. The most cerebral and the least commented on are his late works, published after 1970: *Uroda na czasie* (*Timely Beauty*), *Kąpiele w Lucca* (*Bathing in Lucca*), *Oficer na nieszpiorach* (*The Officer at the Vespers*) and *Kamień w pieluszkach* (*A Stone in the Nappies*). Bogdan Owczarek's book is devoted to these texts.

Buczkowski was compared to Joyce, Faulkner, Ionesco; he was also called – perhaps most aptly – "a Polish Beckett". His works link Polish literature to the most important trends in the avant-garde Western novel and that is why Owczarek begins his book with the outline of changes in the 20th century prose: apart from Beckett's works, he discusses Cortázar's novels, the French "Oulipo" group and Philippe Sollers, John Barth and Italo Calvino in order to place the avant-garde project of Buczkowski against this background. The common feature of the abovementioned writers' works, as well as the key problem and motif of the

book, is the crisis of the novel in contemporary prose. It is not unfictionality, about which Owczarek wrote in his previous books – Buczkowski in his late works does not narrate at all.

The role of the stream of events, forming a narrative novel, in Buczkowski's prose is assumed by the composition. The writer constructs his works from fragments, using counterpoint and dialogicality, as well as "the rule of two figures", multiplying and breaking text collages. Performativity is the main feature of his works. This term in Bogdan Owczarek's book refers to the theory of speech acts and contemporary theatrical practices. In his opinion, Buczkowski's works can be called text performances, because instead of narration, he uses composition "staging": the events and discourses appear and collide according to different rules, which produces the effect of meanings emerging from reading, similar to those communicated during a performance.

Buczkowski's imagination circulates around several major themes, constructing his performative prose. The most important one is a war from a twofold perspective: a historical or historiosophical, returning in the history of mankind as a negative element, inherent to our civilization, and as a concrete, tied to the writer's fate World War II, which marked his prose with Holocaust experience. Bogdan Owczarek's analyses link, but also discuss the latest research, which puts Buczkowski's works in the Holocaust perspective. The notion of trauma in this context explains the break-up of the shown world and the destruction of narration of the writer's world, using categories of memory and archive as well as the ultimate experience, which destroyed the existing narrative strategies.

The war collides with the idyll in an ironic structure of *Uroda na czasie*; the threads connected with World War I form a polyphonic novel *Kąpiele w Lucca* and a mosaic pattern of *Oficer na nieszpiorach*, whereas the episodes from World War II – especially the motif of Polish defense in Wizna – play a crucial role in *Kamień na pieluszkach*. In his analysis, Owczarek links this last novel to a mythical motif of trickster, referring to the ancient tradition and the characters known from Hesiod's works. This apparent paradox – radically avant-garde writing inspired by antiquity – closes the discussion with a significant counterpoint.