

GOMBROWICZ AND THE REALITY OF METAFICTION

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Abstrakt: Jak jest skonstruowana rzeczywistość metafikcji? Rzeczywistość, z istoty swojej obsesyjnalna, narasta i spęcznia „już nie do zniesienia”, demonstrując jak kropla przepełnia czarę. Problem rzeczywistości wydaje się centralnym w *Kosmosie* (1965). Nadmiar (fikcjonalnej) rzeczywistości niby jest możliwą definicją metafikcji. Tak czajnik jako figurę obfitości jakby staje się metonimią kosmosu i samej metafikcji. Akt czytelniczy więc okazuje się nielinearny, wielokierunkowy, dynamicznie ruszający i narastający jako fraktal. Ten artykuł odczyta *Kosmos* – w odniesieniu do obrazu "wielkiego mnóstwa" ("much of a muchness") Lewisa Carrolla z *Alicji w krainie czarów* (1865) – jako Gombrowicza teorię (i praktykę) metafikcji, a samego Gombrowicza – jako pierwszego teoretyka metafikcji.

Słowa kluczowe: Gombrowicz, metafikcja, rzeczywistość, nadmiar, czajnik

Abstract: The problem of reality seems to be central in Gombrowicz's last novel *Cosmos* (1965). The described reality is modeled upon the work of the abundant and the excessive. This gives ground to see some parallels with a work published exactly a hundred years before *Cosmos* – *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* (1865). How does Gombrowicz illustrate Lewis Carroll's "much of a muchness" and what is the role of the teapot? Reality, "obsessive by its very essence," grows and swells beyond endurance, demonstrating how "the last drop [...] makes the cup overflow". Nevertheless, it remains always partial, fragmented, fractional, fractal. Can then metafiction be pictured by a fractal and could we read *Cosmos* as Gombrowicz's theory and practice of metafiction? Towards a theory of metafiction as an excess of reality the following paper presents Gombrowicz as the first theoretician of metafiction.

Keywords: Gombrowicz, metafiction, reality, excess, teapot

I'm not a philosopher and theoretician... (F 76)
...my cult of reality. I consider myself a dedicated realist. One of the main objects of my writing is to cut a path through Unreality to Reality. (KT 32)

Witold Gombrowicz (1904 – 1969) may have foreseen the problems of scientific critique (Bolecki 2004, 2007) and may have ironically pronounced himself the first structuralist but above all, he provided his readership with instructions, "running deep in" his metafiction. Moreover, he seems to act not only as the Leading Gombrowiczian (Sławiński 1976, 1990) but also as a literary theoretician. That is why, in the following article, contra-Instructional, I will

study the theoretical aspects of his novels which allow for reconstruction of *a theory of metafiction*.

This journey should start from the problem of *reality*, which seems to be central for Gombrowicz. He manifested his disbelief in music, painting, non-erotic philosophy, etc. However, did he believe in reality? Elaborating on Wolfgang Iser's functionalist model of the literary text, here I will explore how *the reality of metafiction* works, how it is being constructed. This is particularly visible in Gombrowicz's first novel *Ferdydurke*, which deals theoretically with the problem of fictional reality, and his last – *Cosmos* – which illustrates it as "obsessive by its very essence" (D 676). The described reality is modeled upon the work of the abundant and the excessive. This gives ground to see some parallels with a work published exactly a hundred years before *Cosmos* (1965) – *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* (1865). How does Gombrowicz illustrate Lewis Carroll's "much of a muchness" and what is the role of the teapot? Reality grows and swells beyond endurance, demonstrating how "the last drop [...] makes the cup overflow" (C 68). Moreover, this once leads to chaos, once – to disorder. I argue that an overflow even leads to various kinds of chaos and disorders dependent upon various contingencies (cf. Kokinova 2018¹). And, paradoxically, all these products of reality, visible throughout the novel, can be put in order. By studying the inner textual context interacting with instructions, I aim to see how metafiction swells the fictional reality in the act of reading.

1. Theory of (Instructive) Metafiction

Metafiction – fiction, discussing itself and the processes of writing and reading it – has existed for centuries (notorious examples date back to Cervantes or Sterne). However, it has started to receive special attention only in the second half of the 20th century and has remained an important research topic ever since then. At that time, a multitude of novels of this kind (like those by Borges, Barth, and O'Brien) appeared, and literary scholars needed a label for them. In their attempts to discern the wide variety of types of what we now call metafiction, scholars have used a plethora of different names: self-conscious or self-reflexive novels, *littérature autothématique*, *mise en abyme*, *metapoiesis*, etc. The term metafiction was first coined by W.

¹ The article follows Vidinsky's, Spassova's and Kalinova's (2015) distinction *chaos = disorder + order* and Vidinsky's typology of contingencies (Vidinsky 2017: Vidinsky, V. *Sluchaynosti. Istoricheska tipologiya*, Sofiya: UI „Sv. Kl. Ohridski“, 2017 [Видински 2017: Видински, В. *Случайности. Историческа типология*, София: УИ „Св. Кл. Охридски“, 2017): contingency/accidence/coincidence/chance/randomness.

THE REALITY OF METAFICTION

Gass (1970) and further defined by R. Scholes (1970). This gave way to a whole series of studies, most notably by R. Alter (1975), L. Hutcheon (1980) and P. Waugh (1984).

Strikingly, metafiction is only rarely discussed regarding the specific reading process it requires (Głowiński 2002). Nonetheless, this aspect is essential to the genre, for metafiction narcissistically deals with itself, while, paradoxically, forces the reader into participation (Hutcheon 1980: 7). The act of reading, hence, is nodal to the way metafiction works. This is even more the case in a specific type of metafiction, *instructive metafiction*, i.e. metafiction which gives instructions to the reader and, more importantly, transforms reading from a central topic (characteristic for metafiction) into a plot itself. Thus, the interaction between reader and instructions stands out as pivotal for the understanding of the functions of this kind of metafiction.

2. The Reality of Metafiction

My theoretical discussion of the problem of reality of (meta)fiction is based on Iser's claim "fiction is a means of telling us something about reality" (Iser 1978: 53), followed by Waugh's argument that "literary fiction (worlds constructed entirely of language) becomes a useful model for learning about the construction of 'reality' itself" (Waugh 1984: 3). Moreover, "no literary text relates to contingent reality as such, but to models or concepts of reality, in which contingencies and complexities are reduced to a meaningful structure" (Iser 1978: 70); "Reality" is to this extent "fictional" and can be understood through an appropriate "reading" process (Waugh 1984: 16). That is why Iser's understanding of the reality of fiction here is adopted as reality of instructive metafiction (metafiction which points to its appropriate reading process).

The central role of reality in Gombrowicz's work can be traced back to *Ferdydurke*, where it sprouts in/from existence (istnienie), being (byt) and life (życie) at the opening pages. Moreover, it is introduced with its negative, *unreality*:

It was the dread of nonexistence, the terror of extinction, it was the angst of nonlife, the fear of unreality, a biological scream of all my cells in the face of an inner disintegration when all would be blown to pieces and scattered to the winds. (F1)

Here we can see "reality (what a dangerous word!)" (D 203) – that is akin to talent in dangerousness – tightly related to fear and nightmare (F 49), as well as the world of ideals

(utopia?). Reality seems to be only partly perceptible, only partly known: “Doesn't all form rely on the process of exclusion, isn't all construction a process of whittling down, can a word express anything but a part of reality? The rest is silence.” (F 72). Reality is dangerous and scary because it is intimate, private, one's own, unasserted, inaccessible, unattainable, with purifying power, mirrored (*rzeczywistość zwierciadlana*), and most likely fictional (relating to a piece of literature); “reality was also spent, also wrung out, crumpled and ruined” (F 46). In addition, it sometimes resembles Form: coming from others and created between us (“as if *the reality that they were creating between them* were something ordinary, everyday”, F 179, stress added). It is aggressive, deforming, interhuman. Under the pressure of Form

that which is real slowly turns into a world of ideals, oh, let me dream, let me — no one knows anymore what is real and what doesn't even exist, what is truth and what is illusion, what one feels or doesn't feel, what is natural behavior and what is affectation or make-believe, and, what should be becomes confused with what inexorably is, one disqualifying the other, one depriving the other of all *raison d'etre*, oh, what a great schooling in unreality! (F 131)

And again, the negative of reality enters the picture as oppressed by reality's double, Form. And it seems to be schooling, teaching, training – in a word, instructing its perceiver.

Reality often shares the very same page with fiction and art, and it is even characterized – as it was before – with the help of representative allusions to literature (Kraśiński's poem from the Polish Romanticism, and before that a notorious line from *Hamlet*). Perhaps that is why another man of letters, Nabokov, would introduce it parenthetically as “one of the few words which mean nothing without quotes” (Nabokov 1991: 312; the quotes – claws – would be taken off in *Ada*). Gombrowicz's metafiction – which according to his instructions should not be read as *nouveau roman* or new realism – introduces it with a capital letter (*Rzeczywistość*):

And once you open your minds to Reality this alone may bring you great relief — at the same time stop worrying that it will impoverish and shrivel your spirit — because Reality is always richer than naive illusions and idle notions [illusiv e fictions – kłamliwe fikcje, KK]. And I will soon show you what riches await you on this new path. (F 79)

THE REALITY OF METAFICTION

Reality seems to contain illusions and fictions but there is more to it. And “this new path” seems to be the path of (meta)fiction, in which it (reality or fiction?) seems to be as briefly described below:

Fiction is woven into all, as a Greek observed some two and a half thousand years ago. I find this new reality (or unreality) more valid; [...] We are all in flight from the real reality. That is a basic definition of Homo sapiens. (Fowles 1987: 86-7)

It looks as if reality and fiction share too many commonalities. This is in line with Iser’s functionalist approach to literature, developed in *The Act of Reading*. He presents their interaction as communication rather than opposition. How is then reality described and produced in fiction and might it differ from the process of reality production in metafiction? As human perception creates reality, the reader’s perception is what makes the reality of fiction possible and “alive”. Perhaps that is why Gombrowicz identifies *reality* with *vitality* (żywotność), claiming that literature is ill with the absence of reality (V1 177-181). Perhaps he sees metafiction as the cure for that absence. And whereas to Nabokov literature was born out of lies and fairy tales (cf. Nabokov 1982: 5, 2), to Gombrowicz its vitality depends on the element of authenticity and reality, its experience (V1 179). Thus, the reality of metafiction makes the reading process its plot while may simultaneously question its narration.

What then makes narrating (in metafiction) possible?

A story? There is no story, no **narrating**. This might sum up the main problem as manifested in Maurice Blanchot's short story *Madness of the Day* (*La folie de Jour*, 1973) as well. In addition to narrating being thematized, this claim-instruction reflects the absence of a classical plot in this story. Instead of "events" being told, reflections on the self are being noted in a "stream of consciousness". The questioning of the narrative is most visibly pointed out in the first title of the text: *A story?* (1949). Blanchot's work can be read as discussing whether there is narrative when there is no narration *stricto sensu*. Thus, two issues arise:

- 1) is narrating possible, and
- 2) how does one read a text that resists narration, how do we read the unnarrated?

In a sense, there is a narrative gap in this story or to be more precise, a very gappy context of the narrative. In *Cosmos*, Gombrowicz would further complicate this issue (as noteworthy discussed by Jerzy Jarzębski in Jarzębski 2007: 124-125):

It will be difficult to continue this story of mine. I don't even know if it is a story. It is difficult to call this a story, this constant... clustering and falling apart... of elements... (C 173, beginning of the final ch. 9)

I don't know how to tell this... this story... because I'm telling it *ex post*. The arrow, for instance... The arrow, for instance... The arrow, at that time, at supper, was no more important than Leon's chess, or the newspaper, or tea, everything — equally important, everything — was contributing to a given moment, a kind of consonance, the buzzing of a swarm. But today, *ex post*, I know it was the arrow that was the most important, so in telling this I move it to the forefront, from a myriad of undifferentiated facts I extract the configuration of the future. But how can one describe something except *ex post*? Can nothing be ever truly expressed, rendered in its anonymous becoming, can no one ever render the babbling of the nascent moment, how is it that, born out of chaos, we can never encounter it again, no sooner do we look than order... and form... are born under our very eyes? No matter. Never mind. (C 25, beginning of ch. 2)

At first, it seems that narrating is possible only at the very moment of the event being narrated, i.e. simultaneously with the reality described. Might this mean that reality and narration coincide? And then again, the gaze of the perceiver is what puts them in order. If narrating is only possible *post factum*, then how can it be simultaneously *in* the act of experiencing reality and *after* it? This paradox, by its nature paradigmatic for Gombrowicz's thought, is also representative for the paradox of metafiction's closeness in itself and dialogic exposure of its processes.

Three first sentences in a paragraph in Blanchot's story are in the form of questions, making the text sound dialogic. There is a paragraph-sentence which insists on the story being "real" in addition to giving instructions to the addressee: "All that was real; take note." (BR 194). I will get back to the problem of the reality of metafiction again later. A few of the sentences discuss reading: "I must admit I have read many books." (BR 193); "Reading was a great weariness for me." (BR 196). And eventually the last paragraphs, partially repeating the beginning, thematize narrating: "I had to acknowledge that I was not capable of forming a story out of these events."; "A story? No. No stories, never again." (BR 199). The cyclic structure of the story opens from narrating about the self and closes on the impossibility of narrating, already being narrated. Nevertheless, the circle of the narrative leaves the impression of refusal of narration towards the end of the narrative act.

It is necessary to run by again Blanchot's views on reading and narration here. First, he claims that reading is always a first one, "it only attains its presence as a work in the space opened by this unique reading, each time the first reading and each time the only reading" (BR

THE REALITY OF METAFICTION

432). The singularity of literary reading, he maintains, is a free movement, freedom without work. Nonetheless, it "seems to be a kind of participation in the open violence that is the work" (BR 434). He further stresses the freedom of Yes of reading, while what we read at the end of his story is a "No" of narrating. How these two could work together then? Is reading possible when narrating is refused? The answer may be found in his essay *The Narrative Voice* from *The Infinite Conversation (L'entretien infini, 1969)* claiming that a story/narrative [récit] is like a circle [cercle]: "Within this circle, the meaning of what is, and of what is said, is definitely still given, but from a withdrawn position, from a distance where all meaning and all lack of meaning is neutralized beforehand." (BR 459). Thus, the circularity of narrative is tightly connected with the neuter: "what is being told is not being told by anyone: it speaks in the neuter" (BR 466; *la parole du récit nous laisse toujours pressentir que ce qui se raconte n'est raconté par personne : elle parle au neutre*). That is how and why there is no story. That way the reader reads something that is not being narrated while narrating is possible no more and infinite as a circle. The narrative voice characterizes with aphony, it is "a neuter voice that speaks the work from that place-less place in which the work is silent" (BR 467). And thus, the circularity of reading centers itself as utopia. Reading occurs in placelessness. After the disappearance of the reader-narrator the read volumes' "margins will become larger" (BR 193). Apparently, reading being circular is also reversible. A text can actually be unread after the disappearance of the reading subject. And then only "the gloomy spirit of reading", hurling not very kind words is left (BR 194), for libraries are presented as a place for heating, not for reading. After facing the madness of the day and "behind curtains" and "dark glasses" reading or writing is no longer possible. And finally, reading is no longer wanted: "Reading was a great weariness for me. Reading tired me no less than speaking" (BR 196). Eventually, "the words spoke by themselves" (BR 199; compare with Gombrowicz's notorious refrain line: "It's not we who speak words, but words that speak us", cf. M 87/KT 152/ D 698/V3 114), the one questioned and the ones questioning switch and blur positions; and so do narrator and reader. "The end is beginning" (BR 194), the end is *the* beginning, circularly closed.

Curiously enough, the reader is faced with rereading the beginning. And if reading is one-time, singular, how is then a rereading possible? It seems that a rereading is only possible when it deals with the unnarrated, for there is no story, no narrating.

However, how does the reality of a unnarrated metafiction look like?

3. Instructive Metafiction: The Excess of Reality

Reality – in Gombrowicz’s *Cosmos* – is “contaminated by the possibility of meaning” (C 38), which in view of the novel’s self-reflexivity can be paraphrased as contaminated by the possibility of (over)interpretation. The narrator’s train of thought is indicative of this. It creates the reality of fiction with which it is fascinated and simultaneously presents itself as an act of obsession. In relation to the rise of obsession, in his *Diary*, Gombrowicz includes the written but unpublished as a foreword to *Cosmos* instructions to the novel:

...from the immensity of phenomena taking place around me, I draw one thing. I notice, for example, the ashtray on my table (the rest of the objects on the table slip into nonbeing).

If I can justify why I noticed the ashtray in particular (“I want to drop my cigarette ash”), everything is all right.

If I noticed the ashtray accidentally, without any intention, and I never return to this observation, everything is still as it should be.

If, however, having noticed this phenomenon without significance, you return to it for a second time... woe! Why did you notice it again if it is without significance? Ah, so it means something to you after all, if you returned... Oh yes, by dint of the fact that you concentrated unjustifiably on this phenomenon one second longer, this thing already begins to stand out, becomes remarkable... No, no (you deny), this is an ordinary ashtray! — Ordinary? Why are you denying it if it is ordinary?

This is how a phenomenon becomes an obsession.

Is reality obsessive by its very essence? In light of our building our worlds through associating phenomena, I would not be surprised if at the primal beginning of all time, there was a *double* [dwukrotne] *association*. It indicates direction in chaos and is the beginning of order.

In consciousness there is something like its being its own trap. (D 675-676)

These observations serve as a commentary to the construction of the novel and Gombrowicz’s understanding of reality alike. He calls *Cosmos*: “a novel about reality that is creating itself” (D 674), which seems like a very good definition of metafiction. If it is self-creating reality and one constructed from phenomena that have become obsession, then perhaps *metafiction* can be defined as *self-creating obsessive reality*. It is no wonder then why sometimes, and too often, it may act as its own trap, being too much.

One of the central figures in the novel is *the kettle* (in D. Borchardt’s transl.) or *the teapot* [czajnik]: an image of the abundant and the excessive. It also represents one of the

THE REALITY OF METAFICTION

meanings of the key phrase *swój do swego* as “much of a muchness”. The dictionary entrance for *much of a muchness* defines it as very much the same, difficult to distinguish, of a similar quality of being much (Merriam-Webster: resembling another in every respect). Etymologically, it derives from physical magnitude or largeness, mickleness. This, in turn, relates Gombrowicz’s teapot with another famous literary teapot, the one introduced by the mathematician and logician Lewis Carroll at the mad tea-party of his *Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland* (published exactly 100 years before *Cosmos*):

[Dormouse:] you know you say things are ‘much of a muchness’— did you ever see such a thing as a drawing of a muchness?” [...] the last time she [Alice] saw them, they were trying to put the Dormouse into the teapot. (Carroll 2000: 109-110)

Carroll’s 1865 teapot (with the Dormouse) pictures the drawing of a muchness, of something being unbearably too much and thus might have been a “silent dialogue” (Nikola Georgiev) for Gombrowicz’s 1965 teapot:

The kettle [*czajnik*, teapot].

I had been ready for anything. But not for the kettle. One must understand what is *the drop that makes the cup overflow* [cf. every little makes a mickle]. What is it that’s “*too much*”. There is something like *an excess of reality, its swelling beyond endurance*. After so many objects that I couldn’t even enumerate, after the needles, frogs, sparrow, stick, whiffletree, pen nib, leather, cardboard, et cetera, chimney, cork, scratch, drainpipe, hand, pellets, etc. etc., clods of dirt, wire mesh, wire, bed, pebbles, toothpick, chicken, warts, bays, islands, needle, and so on and so on and on, to the point of tedium, to *excess*, and now this kettle popping up like a Jack-in-the-box, without rhyme or reason, on its own, gratis, a luxury of disorder, a splendor of chaos. *Enough is enough*. My throat tightened. I won’t be able to swallow all this. I won’t be able to handle it. Enough. Turn back. Go home. (C 68-69, stress added)

At first the appearance of the teapot seems contingent, to be more specific, chance (and thus it can be also called a Chance-pot). However, through throat tightening (suffocating) and satiating it leads to intensification of chaos simultaneously with outrage, excess (psychic disorder: the strangling of the cat) and with arranging in a series (chaos: the hanging of the cat).

So many issues piling up, so many threads interweaving, Lena, Katasia, signs, pounding, et cetera, take even the frog, or the ashtray, et cetera. I was lost in the tumult, it even occurred to

me that perhaps I had killed it because of the kettle, *because of the excess, to top it all off, an extra horse to the cart*, in other words the strangling, like the kettle, was *supernumerary*. No, that wasn't true! I had not strangled the cat because of the kettle. What was the link then, what did the cat even have to do with it? (C 74) [Tyle spraw nagromadzonych, tyle wątków krzyżujących się [...] etcetera [...] etcetera, gubiłem się w rozgardiaszu i nawet przyszło mi na myśl, że to może z powodu czajnika, a nuż zabiłem z *nadmiaru, na dodatek, na przyprzążkę*, czyli zaduszenie, jak czajnik, *nadetatowe*... (K 61, stress added)]

Suddenly the growing dithyrambic rhythm of the furiously forming Reality. And its disintegration. Catastrophe. Shame.

The sudden overflowing with *excessive* fact [nadmierny]. (D 674)

The teapot here is shown as a figure of paradox: super-ordered extraordinariness; a gap in the abundance which is supernumerary but grows as central. And at this stage “No combination is impossible... Any combination is possible” (C 177), all combinations in the weaved in dithyrambic rhythm as well. The reality (of fiction) and metafiction alike seem to be overwhelming, expanding, too much, ejection, throwing out. Already in *Ferdydurke* reality was presented as (a river) overflowing:

[R]eality, under the powerful stimulus of my action, was swept off its course [wytracona z łożyska], it bubbled and spilled over [przelewała się i bełtała], roared and groaned numbly, while the dark, absurd elements of ugliness, of disgust and sordidness became more and more tangible and grew on their rising anxiety as if on yeast [wzrastał na ich wzrastającym zaniepokojeniu jak na drożdżach]. (F 173)

This description presents an analogous image of a simmering substance. The motive of rising and ripening, the picture of pouring, brimming, overflowing is already in Gombrowicz's first novel as a catalyst for events. *Cosmos*'s key scene with “the kettle” now may appear as a “remake”. Along with its chain of events importance, being a “plot”-trigger, it might have yet another role. The teapot here might also serve as an implicit instruction for reading metafiction and a metaphor for metafiction itself.

Yet another interpretation of the teapot is possible, from the perspective of philosophy and atheism. Russell's Celestial teapot (1952) is an analogy illustrating the philosophical burden of proof:

THE REALITY OF METAFICTION

If I were to suggest that between the Earth and Mars there is a china teapot revolving about the sun in an elliptical orbit, nobody would be able to disprove my assertion provided I were careful to add that the teapot is too small to be revealed even by our most powerful telescopes. But if I were to go on to say that, since my assertion cannot be disproved, it is intolerable presumption on the part of human reason to doubt it, I should rightly be thought to be talking nonsense. If, however, the existence of such a teapot were affirmed in ancient books, taught as the sacred truth every Sunday, and instilled into the minds of children at school, hesitation to believe in its existence would become a mark of eccentricity² and entitle the doubter to the attentions of the psychiatrist in an enlightened age or of the Inquisitor in an earlier time. (Russell 6)

This view as if elaborates on Gombrowicz's notoriously declared atheism (more in Tischner 2015) with the implication that the reality of (meta)fiction is akin to religion. In the context of *Cosmos* as a parody of a detective novel, the teapot between Lena and Ludwik could be read as a figure of the philosophical burden of (missing) proof in the following "investigation" of the hanged cat. Thus, the chance making possible the continuation of the series of hangings, which organize the chaos, works simultaneously as parody of the actions of the eccentric "lunatics" Witold and Fuks. It should be noted that Russell is known to Gombrowicz and in 1956 in his *Diary* in an entry, entitled Sunday (a church day for believers), he writes:

I looked at the teapot and knew that this and other teapots will be more horrifying to me as time passes, just as everything around me. I have enough awareness to drink this goblet of poison to its dregs, but not enough sublimity to rise above it. Death throes in a crushing underground await me, agony without a single ray of light. [...] The issue is not in the least one of believing in God, but of falling in love with God. (D 213)

Unlike Simone Weil who is in love with God, "Gombrowicz" himself is "self-sufficient", "God was never necessary", hence redundant, supernumerary. That way Gombrowicz argues not only why he cannot love but also why falling in love is always under pressure, i.e. *nolens volens*, forced. The (quasi-)biographical digression here illuminates the relationship between Lena and Witold in *Cosmos* and the violence-producing effect of the Chance-pot between Lena and Ludwik on Witold. Later the priest will be found alike to the teapot, hinting on the next

² It is interesting to note that the sparrow is called an eccentric, and his hanging – eccentricity.

(but not last) boiling. Then the priest's and Jadczyk's vomiting follows, as well as Leon's onanism – all of which are body ejections of the excessive.

In sum, the figure of the teapot is multiciphered – it is related to excess and bliss, chance and chaos, disorder and burden of proof. It seems however that most of all it illustrates the reality of (meta)fiction. If then metafiction is swelled beyond endurance all the time, what reading process does it imply? It must be a non-linear, multi-directional, dynamic and endless act of translating (the world). Translating from what language though? A language related to chaos and contingency is being used in the novel and that is the language of mathematics. Witold and Ludwik are engaged in combinatorics (K 29, 46); Fuks (who could also be called Chance for his name means fluke, chance success) plays tricks, calculates logarithms (ratio of numbers), develops a method at roulette, talks about probabilities (*fifty, fifty*), etc. This language is universal/cosmic and simultaneously it's a metalanguage of the described reality. "Pure chance" (as it was called at least six times) of analogies and associations is put by the narrator in a configuration and system, series, *sequentia sancti*. This in turn gets back to the reality of no impossible possibilities. Could we perhaps define this unlimitedness? Let us take a "random" formula:

$$\lim_{n \rightarrow \infty} \left(1 + \frac{1}{n}\right)^n$$

Chance plays tricks. Chance calculates logarithms while logarithms are used to measure the complexity of fractals (in turn endlessly self-similar). Decibels in which we register pounding (such as Kulka's, the Big Bang in the novel) are logarithmic units of measurement expressing the ratio of one value of a power or field quantity to another. One of the most used logarithms is the natural logarithm that is to the base of the limitless number e (Napier's constant). The formula above – the limit of sequence (where n tends to infinity) – represents one of the definitions of Napier's number:

$e = 2, 7$ 1828 1828 45 90 45 2 35 3 60 28 7471 35
2662 49 7757 2470 93 6999 5957 4 96696 76 2772 407 66 30 35 35 475945713821785251664274...

In contrast to π , which is a more popular representation of chaos, there are fascinating repetitions in e , symmetries of groups of digits after the second decimal separator. For that reason and because of the relation to logarithms, e might be useful in the proposed interpretation of *Cosmos*. The graph of e , defined as the limit of sequence, may serve as an image of the relation between contingent and excessive, tending to infinity. In addition, the number e factorizes in an infinite fraction. This might further define the excessive as the fractional part of a random decimal fraction, the decimal digits of a logarithm. In turn, this

THE REALITY OF METAFICTION

sheds light on the importance of fragmentations, brokenness in the novel (“byłem nastawiony na drobiazgi... rozdrobniony... och, ja byłem taki rozdrobniony!...”, K 40).

Reality – often described in the novel as partial, fractional – forms and disintegrates similarly to the way a fractal does. This geometric figure is endlessly similar to itself within itself; it seems to be self-creating and thus could stand as an image of metafiction. If we read Gombrowicz’s *Cosmos* as a deed of metafiction, we can also reconstruct his own theory of metafiction. The teapot (as a literal object and as an asterism from the Sagittarius constellation in the sky) can be seen as an image of metafiction, a representation within the novel itself. Many elements would be then further linked to the teapot, thus forming different constellations. These in turn as if outline the textual context through repetitive use of sets of words, revisiting (spirally, with some shifts) the “stars” in the novel. And thus, a non-linear, sometimes circular, sometimes fractal-like, endless (like the mad tea-party) reading is required. It seems that this is how instructive metafiction is constructed and what can be reconstructed as Gombrowicz’s theory of (instructive) metafiction. He then might be considered “the first theoretician of metafiction” while his *Cosmos* illuminates why metafiction’s much of a muchness, its teapot-ness and fractal form, might be defined as an excess of reality.

2019

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