

REVIEWS

Charles Altieri. *The Particulars of Rapture. An Aesthetics of the Affects*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2004. x and 302 pages.

How do we come to understand possible ways in which the arts can move us? In what sense could we be changed by what we feel when we allow works of art to generate modes of perception helping us to express our desires and satisfactions? How can we come to understand better how these modes may engage our fellow participants in a culture? What kind of language could do justice to expressive intensity and to values immanent in our responses to the aesthetic?

As Charles Altieri convincingly argues in his fine book, when sought in the realms of cognitivism and those Enlightenment perspectives that stem from rule-oriented and criteria-based practices, possible answers to these queries are likely to blind us to expressive subtleties shaped by the arts. He claims that both cognitivism and rationalistic philosophy provide interpretive frameworks the acceptance of which makes literary theorists prefer contexts to texts, which results in literature's subsumption under rubrics of philosophy or moral psychologism. In order to honour texts outside sociopolitical and ideological contexts, the author proposes to consider the role of elemental feelings in our response to the aesthetic that, as he argues, condition and mould our ways of being moved.

In Altieri's opinion, if we view emotions generated by the arts from the perspective of traditional cognitivism or Cartesian representationalism, in static classificatory terms, we then sacrifice the particularity and subtlety of the elemental response that does not easily lend itself to aprioristic interpretations. However, when acknowledged by our sensibilities not for the sake of judgment or systematic knowledge, but for the sake of expressive value that can direct our attention to certain forms of desire and thus can make us better aware of who we wish to be, elemental feelings are not an object of knowledge (as they are in contextual models of interpretation), but a source of knowledge. Only by allowing our motivation for talking about the arts to step outside those domains of philosophy and theory that seek explanation by subordinating the aesthetic to the first-order impersonal claims of knowledge can we assert that "the arts inspire accounts that make affective experience not just something we understand, but something that we pursue as a fundamental value" (4).

Instead of the category “emotion” that in the cognitivist model is inevitably associated with particular beliefs and thus links emotional response to dictates and projects of reason, Altieri proposes to use the term “affect” because it provides “a means of referring to the entire range of states that are bounded on one side by pure sensation and on the other by thoughts that have no visible or tangible impact on our bodies” (2). He then divides affects into four primary categories of feelings, moods, emotions, and passions. In his categorization, a basic theoretical tension is established by juxtaposing feelings and emotions. Emotions arise whenever an attitude informed by a belief or a set of beliefs happens to situate the agent in a particular narrative or an action-oriented or cause-governed account of behaviour or identification. In this context, emotions are treated as theological instruments of knowledge aiming at explanation. Contrasted with emotions theologically understood, feelings may be then seen as unmediated elemental responses that can modulate the agent’s consciousness in ways that invite description, yet which defy a criteria-based explanation. The book’s emphasis is on affective experience that manifests itself in particular elemental modulations of the agent’s consciousness and reveals areas of salience beyond the claims inherent in cognitivist views.

Asking for serious forms of attention paid to feelings, Altieri is more interested in ways of being available through art rather than in modes of knowing which need the arts as their epistemological ally. The critical orientation the author wishes to honour allows him to focus on those affects that do not form as emotions and cannot be explained in terms of what he identifies as “belief-judgment nexus” and, more important, it provides him with a theoretical stance from which works of literature can be viewed as texts beyond the dominance of historical, political, and philosophical contexts (9). In ways that cannot immediately be defined but which can nonetheless be practiced, the stance offers a critical scrutiny of relations between the agent and works of literature that come to bear on our ethos as exemplars of particular existential states. Focusing on their power to engage our consciousness, the author reflects on how they can bring us closer to our understanding of what and how we value. And it would be difficult to deny that in order to be able at all to meditate on our sense and process of valuing, we cannot ignore the role elemental affects play in our relation with literary texts and with the world as it stands.

The book powerfully demonstrates how it is possible to make philosophy bear on how we engage in works of art without making it a framework that may always become a temptation to make literature a means for rehearsing philosophical truths. When contrasted with recent critical attempts to read literature from the heights of philosophy, as is the case of Martha Nussbaum’s Neo-Aristotelian position, for example, Altieri’s model seems to be even more interesting for what it promises. In his attempts to bypass epistemically driven attitudes toward the psyche and the arts, he shows that in our deal-

ings with how texts move us philosophy may have its important place without becoming the arbiter of what we are to find in them.

Altieri is right to point out that in the mainstream cognitivist approach emotions are predominantly viewed as states of the psyche to be pegged on an adjectival scale of gradation and intensity where complex responses of consciousness become reduced to such categories as “sad,” “jealous,” or “angry,” for example. He claims that adopting the adjectival line of scrutiny cannot do justice to the more fluid and fleeting aspects of our affective lives that invite our awareness of ‘how’ rather than ‘what’ affects may modulate our desires and aspirations in culture. Instead of seeing emotional responses pursued as adjectival categories, he wants to understand them as adverbial modes of intensity, modes that can make us aware of certain possibilities of self and ethos that the adjectival orientation tends to suppress. In this respect, he may be said to be insisting on the value of adverbial “hows” and on their theoretical superiority over adjectival “whats.” He emphasizes a process of being moved, not a category under which one would wish to sum up aesthetic experience.

The book’s central achievement resides in its making us freshly aware of the distance between texts and their audience moulded by ambitions of epistemically guided concerns of literary theory. It enables us to see that, by responding to works of art from the adverbial stance, we can tap into modes of salience that come to bear on reflexive consciousness outside ambitions of discursive knowledge. Although the author does not entirely deny the role reason has to play in our making sense of human experience, he is suspicious of treating the domain of the arts as merely supplementing what philosophy and science may sponsor as knowledge. He honours those interpretive positions that can see the arts not as processed by impersonal knowledge but, most important, as processing the world and providing us with self-knowledge through what moves us.

In his reflection on the advantages of the adverbial approach to the arts, he draws on Spinoza, Kant, and Heidegger. Showing how philosophy can become an ally of literary criticism without subsuming it under epistemic rigour, he demonstrates how literary studies can make use of philosophy without making literature dependent on its dogmas. If he decides to see phenomenology as “central to my argument,” this is only because it “insists that there has to be some kind of intuition or noncriterial judgment through which we register the possible rightness of our descriptions” (34). The phenomenological perspective can serve theoretical purposes just because “it offers means of seeking generalization without relying on either induction or deduction” (34). Making admirable use of those aspects of the Enlightenment thought that acknowledge ways of talking about human value different than project-based and cause-oriented forms of reason, Altieri shows how Kant’s idea of “purposiveness,” Spinoza’s concept of “conatus” or

Heidegger's discussion of the significance of mood can become tools that can help us refine our sensibilities as we try to come to terms with the elusive and the enigmatic in our affective response. They do not serve as master scenarios here; rather, they are lines of description in our attempts to make sense, in the elemental, adverbial fashion, of the affects generated by the arts.

As he applies his critical model to an impressive range of art works, the author reflects on how they can be read as texts outside contexts, as entities engaging consciousness on deeply personal levels unacknowledged by forms of attention circumscribed by conceptual reason. Reading texts as texts (not as con-texts), as autonomous art forms bearing on our psyche without our appeal to a distinct ideal of knowledge, may indeed be said to constitute the book's central preoccupation. That literary value does not have to be collapsed into the philosophical, or political, and that we are better off caring not about ways in which theory moves us, but about modes in which works of art can redirect our attention as for who we aspire to be, is not only a most important statement Altieri has to make; it is first of all a critical practice that he successfully implements as he dwells on examples from both literature and visual arts.

Reading poems that range from Henry King Bishop and Matthew Arnold to Sylvia Plath and Robert Creeley, looking at pictures from Caravaggio and Titian to Paul Cezanne and Edvard Munch, he meditates on how value may reside in how these works of art move us. In order to acknowledge the affective modes of interpretation, he proposes to analyse three basic subjective states that he thinks "afford significant affective satisfactions in relation to the manners by which we pursue investments even though the values involved are very difficult to fix or to assess in the terms provided by the practical understanding" (186). Identifying these states as "intensity," "involvedness," and "plasticity," and, discussing them in the context of poems, he illustrates how intensity may come to modify our subjectivity; how involvedness may make us aware of an extension of our personal boundaries toward other lives; and, finally, how plasticity can engage the psyche as it rehearses various rival imaginative demands. In Altieri's model, the three states, and with them our standing in the world, can become modified through particular engagements in the aesthetic. The three states are by no means conceptual carriers that the arts are supposed to equip with a meaning. Rather, they designate forms of attention that can be shaped by our serious dealings with art works. Most important, they are not lines of explanation to be followed by the ambition of reason but paths of description to be practiced in our hopes to do justice to expressive behaviour nurtured and sustained by the arts.

That the adverbial approach to the affective states generated by our encounters with literature may provide us with broader and richer interpretative fields is best illustrated in an impressive reading of Yeats's "Long Legged Fly." Altieri's discussion of the lyric

focuses here on intensity as an organizing feature and shows how the poem's structure participates in shaping a concern that eventually escapes any practical orientation and makes the agent acknowledge an existence of powers that set limits for historical consciousness. He isolates particular moments of crisis for consciousness that the poem brings into focus and proposes "to ask what form of concentration the poem asks of us if we are to raise ourselves to the modes of intensity that bring the various moments into conjunction" (192). Dwelling on intensity as a value actualized by the lyric's structure, he points to possibilities of interpretation that make attempts to thematize, allegorize, or historicize look insignificant in view of what texts reveal and how they bear on our consciousness (as well as on our ways of talking about how they achieve that) when we look for value in the literary from first-person or elemental angles. In this interpretation, Yeats's famous lyric becomes an arena where the forces of history are juxtaposed with a psychological reality acting as a limit condition of historical consciousness. By pondering on how intensity enters the lyric's drama, Altieri shows how we can fruitfully reflect on the affects as energies bearing on our sense of who we are. His analysis convinces us that "we may be able to isolate an imaginative force enabling us to treat what history imposes as if it were a challenge rather than a sentence" (192).

Overall, the book's argumentative power, its lucid and engaging style along with a trim index and informative division into six chapters will surely have their specific rewards for the reader. Although its "envisioned audience is primarily those concerned professionally with philosophy and those who study the arts," the book may be of great interest especially to those literary critics who are wary of the cognitivist approach to value, and who, in their dealing with the literary, wish to seek and practice ways other than rational appraisal guided by philosophy. As the author claims, the books "can be considered an effort to modify how we talk about literary works" (33). And with its fine emphasis on subtle qualities of texts that escape the ambition to place them in the domain of rational assessment, *The Particulars of Rapture* achieves this aim by restoring the significance of text through its emphasis on the role played by affective modes in our appreciation of why and how literature matters.

Rafał Dubaniowski

Grzegorz Kość. *Robert Lowell. Uncomfortable Epigone of the Grand Maîtres*. Frankfurt a. Main: Peter Lang, 2005. 338 pages.

After Robert Lowell's bright star faded almost completely before the end of the eighties, the story of his life and achievement quickly hardened into academic common knowledge. Much like its more general equivalent, academic common knowledge, dis-

seminated via textbooks, seminars, lectures, and anthologies, is inevitably selective, prone to didactically expedient simplifications, and resistant to novelty and change. In the case of Lowell, this common knowledge rests upon a handful of facts and near-facts: he was the last American Puritan, alienated, tormented, and self-centered, ruthlessly exploitative of the world and others in his poetry; he was a renegade New Critical prodigy, who in *Life Studies*, a volume central to his career, turned his back on his modernist masters to join the ranks of the confessional poets; he was one of those prominent American intellectuals who in the troubled times of the sixties supported with their authority the anti-war protests and the student revolts.

To see common knowledge occasionally shaken up is a refreshing and energizing experience. Therefore a book like the recently published Grzegorz Kość's *Robert Lowell. Uncomfortable Epigone of the Old Maitres* cannot be overrated. Kość not only revises much of the mythology that has encrusted the poet, offering at the same time a re-examination of his work, but also redefines Lowell's relation to the two literary epochs he straddled – modernism and postmodernism – with his feet, the author argues, planted equally insecurely in both.

The argument Kość presents in his book can be summarized as follows. Except in his earliest years as a poet, Lowell never felt entirely comfortable in the role of a latter-day Modernist. Although not until the end of his life did he manage to divest himself of vestiges of his early, grandiose modernist ambitions, such as to make of art a shield against the world's contingency or to impose the imperial mind's control upon its chaos, much of the poetry he wrote in the sixties and seventies witnesses his efforts – irreducible to a continuous development, erratic, contradictory, half-deliberate, and often frustrated – to articulate an alternative poetics to that which he had inherited from his modernist masters. "For the lack of any other convenient term" Kość writes, "I shall call [the poetics] *post-modern*" (10). In that long process, meticulously traced and documented by Kość, Lowell's *Life Studies* of 1959 does not mark any particularly important breakthrough. It is, the author claims, in many respects a product of the same mind (albeit more mature and less secure) that expressed itself in *Lord Weary's Castle* (1946); the poems communicate the same aloofness on the part of the speaker, and are marked by the same ironic distancing which, by then, had become the poet's habitual response to the evident unfeasibility of the modernist project to represent in language all of reality, the world's as well as the self's. Far from being genuinely confessional, the volume is "crypto-modernist," and is best read as a "rhetorical performance," disclosing nothing of the real Lowell and persistently "insinuating that all this verbal junk bears no relation" to its author (36).

It is in the notorious *Imitations* (1961) that Kość discerns the earliest signs of Lowell's attempts to move beyond the confines of the modernist narcissistic and control-

ling self. In these rather liberal “translations” of various European poets, often unmistakably “Lowellized” in tone and imagery, he sees, paradoxically, Lowell’s first tentative efforts to empathize, to hear what others (rather than himself) have to say, and to see the world through their eyes. This new interest becomes more pronounced in *Notebook 1967-68*, then wanes in the *Notebook* of 1970, is altogether abandoned in *History* (1973), only to resurface again in *The Dolphin* (1973) and *Day by Day* (1978). The unauthorized inclusion of Lowell’s second wife’s personal letters in *The Dolphin*, much criticized when the book first appeared for breaching fundamentals of human decency, when viewed in the context of this wavering evolution, appears to Kość to have been only another of the poet’s efforts “to break away from the cultivated garden of his mind,” an effort which “ambiguously reflects his ambition to do justice to the universe beyond his own projections” (93).

Increasingly weary of his poetry’s self-absorption, in the sixties Lowell not only sought ways to open it to the Other, but also started looking for a poetic idiom more adequate to communicate the world’s contingency than his customary language of irony and silence. Interestingly, the chapter in Kość’s study that documents that aspect of the poet’s erratic evolution focuses on Lowell’s brief flirtation with politics, his involvement in the anti-war protests of 1968 and the McCarthy campaign. While the episode revealed to the poet (extremely ill at ease in the role of political spokesman) the inadequacy of ironic evasion of self-disclosure and commitment in the political realm, it fostered his reliance on the unexpressed and implicit in his public poetry, and thwarted the transformation which he sensed his language needed. But in the convoluted story of Lowell’s struggle to depart from the models he absorbed in his youth, almost every setback coincides with a step forward, and the experiment given up on in one set of poems is returned to in another, not infrequently only to be again abandoned, even in mid-text. And so, by the end of his career, Lowell had experimented with prose, with the loose, undisciplined, associative, clichéd colloquial speech, laboriously adjusting in this way his aesthetics to the demands of his (and the time’s) growing sense of reality’s fluidity and resistance to forms.

Tracing the evolution in the poet’s metaphysics and aesthetics, Kość discusses several striking similarities between the attitudes and propositions Lowell articulated (or only half-articulated) in his last volumes, *Day by Day* especially, and the thought of Martin Heidegger, the philosopher whose ideas make the foundation of the post-modernist literary project. Although never a student of Heidegger in the literal sense, Lowell was not unaware of his revolutionary theories and their aesthetic implications. And so ever since *The Dolphin*, Lowell begins to distance himself from the modernist ambition to freeze life’s flux into permanence, seeking instead to reflect temporality and change. Even

earlier, in *Notebook 68-7*, he starts showing awareness that the modernist goal of objective description is unfeasible, and that what we see is always colored with what we know, assume, and believe. Increasingly discernible in his late work is a Heideggerian humility about human chances to grasp and tell the truth. As understanding is always incomplete, and – moreover – communication of what we have understood always falls short of our intention, there is no other way for a poet but to accept failure, error, approximation, and to construe an aesthetic mindful of these limitations. This insight goes hand in hand with the recognition, again paralleling Heidegger's, that language is more than *logos*, i.e. a means of representing and making sense of the world; that there is an aspect to language – *phûsis* – “which is pronouncedly the other of *logos* – ‘raw and raw,’ wayward, and excessive, invariably resistant to mastery” (224). It is precisely that aspect of language that, as Kość argues, Lowell explores with considerable interest in *Day by Day*, loosening his habitual control over words, letting language “speak for itself,” and thus opening his poetry up to language's surprises and mysterious otherness.

A question that Kość's study endlessly provokes is what would have happened had the poet not died an untimely death in 1977. If by the end of his life he had come to the brink of envisaging a poetics that was postmodern in several of its aspects, if he had come to contemplate the postmodern proposition that language, rather than being a tool of describing reality is a medium of creating it, what kind of poetry could have resulted from that? The logical implication of Kość's argument (though not articulated in the study) is that Lowell probably would *not* have made the plunge his post-modernist explorations entailed, or that the plunge would have been – as was his wont – half-hearted. The poet's age aside – and radicalization in old age is less probable than reverting to the well-entrenched positions occupied in one's youth – Lowell's testing of new ideas never guaranteed that his commitment to them would last. This is precisely the sense in which his evolution was erratic. Besides, the grip of modernism on his mind was comparable to the grip of New England from which, as the author argues in the book's third chapter, there was no easy escape. Boston could be left – first for New York and later for England – but not so the Boston state of mind. “Sad friend you cannot change,” Kość quotes Elizabeth Bishop remarking in “North Haven,” her elegy for Lowell (234). But then other questions immediately come to mind – Would we have *cared* to see Lowell changed, transformed dramatically into somebody like Ashbery or like Olson? Isn't what we cherish about him precisely his imperial, tortured vision, his all-devouring solipsism, his maddeningly multiplying ironies, and his inimitable, violent, emphatically non-pedestrian language? The late Lowell can be mistaken for some other poet; the mid-career cannot.

There is literary criticism that dazzles with the boldness or extravagance of its claims, and there is criticism which, quietly and patiently, goes about its job of unearthing unknown or overlooked facts to correct misrepresentations, received opinions, and well-entrenched beliefs. Kość's criticism is of the latter kind. It is polemical and yet not for the sake of polemics. Meticulously researched and scrupulously documented (one third of the book is taken up by footnotes), it builds its case not only against the background of, one feels, virtually all of Lowell's important past and current criticism, but also through reference to the poet's unpublished material, collected at the Houghton Library of Harvard University and the Harry Ransom Humanities Research Center of the University of Texas. Relying on that material, Kość painstakingly, indefinitely adjusts, attenuates, corrects, and challenges established opinions of the poet and his work, as for instance, when he introduces Lowell's unpublished prose eulogy written upon Pound's death to show that Lowell did, after all, have second thoughts about his position in the Bollingen Prize controversy concerning *The Pisan Cantos*, or when he inspects an early, unpublished draft of *The Dolphin* to argue that Lowell's revisions testify to his determination not to excuse himself but to assume full responsibility for the failure of his second marriage. Yet Kość does not try to heroicize the poet any more than he deserves, that is for his "sustained struggle to unlearn the conception of art, which he absorbed so thoroughly in his youth and to which he was so prone because of his mental illness" (232). Nor does he ever try to streamline history. A strength of this study – though from another perspective also its weakness – is that it tirelessly acknowledges all of the complications, makes myriad reservations, reports all dissenting and contrary opinions, till the reader either turns the book's last page with a sense of having been offered an impressively complete picture or, having gone through some fifteen pages of a chapter, becomes disoriented and unsure about the gist of the author's argument.

Emphatically, however, this book deserves all of the attention one can muster. Lowell's volumes of poetry may have been moved in the last twenty years "to the ... back stacks." But this is the fate of "everything printed," as the poet remarked stoically in *Notebook*. Sooner or later, much of the postmodern writing of today will probably also end up on the same dusty shelves. Once this happens, whether Lowell managed or did not manage to jump on the postmodern bandwagon, whether he was only a "miraculous anachronism" (110) or an unacknowledged, hesitant explorer of the postmodern frontiers, will cease to be critical to his reputation. And then his place in American letters may yet again be reassessed. Meanwhile, it is good that studies like Grzegorz Kość's keep Lowell's books, though in the back stacks, well dusted and properly displayed.

Agata Preis-Smith, ed. *Kultura, tekst, ideologia. Dyskursy współczesnej amerykanistyki* [Culture, Text, Ideology. Discourses of Contemporary American Studies]. Kraków: Universitas, 2004. 458 pages.

The anthology *Kultura, tekst, ideologia. Dyskursy współczesnej amerykanistyki* is a comprehensive selection of essays representing current trends in American cultural and literary studies. Translated by scholars affiliated with Warsaw University and the University of Warmia and Mazury in Olsztyn, it is meant to acquaint Polish readers with the state of theory and research in this field in the United States. The essays have been divided into four parts devoted to issues of the ideology, literary canon, revaluations within literary criticism, and current trends in Afro-American criticism.

In the introduction, the editor outlines the main tendencies in American literary studies and criticism in the twentieth century. She points to both specifically American factors and European influences on the development of critical approaches in the American academia. This historical overview considerably facilitates the reception of the essays included in the volume because their authors often rely on and refer to previous achievements of American scholarship. Thus, the introduction puts the essays in a wider historical perspective, which allows for a more holistic and comprehensive view of the contemporary state of American Studies. The essays included in different parts often deal with similar issues, which testifies to the presence of interconnections between ideology, literary canon, constructions of ethnicity etc.

The first section "Tekst a ideologia" [Text and Ideology] opens with Edward Said's classic text "The World, the Text, the Critic" (1979). Essentially, Said opposes the poststructuralist claim that texts do not belong to physically existing reality. He insists on the worldliness of texts and discusses different modes in which texts function in reality. He also raises the problem of relation between the text and its external circumstances and demonstrates that literature can only be understood in the broader historical and social context in which it is produced. To support his claim, Said refers to the Arabic research in the Middle Ages on the nature of language and text. He focuses on the thesis that historical circumstances influence textual meanings, and opposes the approaches which emphasize unlimited freedom of interpretation. Referring to texts as diverse as Gerald Manley Hopkins's poetry, Oscar Wilde's and Joseph Conrad's stories, Said demonstrates the worldliness of literature. Following in Foucault's footsteps, Said argues that texts arise from conflicts, external pressure and are engendered by power relations. Addressing the question of the critic and criticism, he tries to define the nature of critical essays, and opposes the theories viewing them as secondary in relation to literary texts.

The next essay, "American Criticism Left and Right" (1986) by Gerald Graff, takes up the subject of ideological dimension of literary criticism. He points out that ideas which appear in literary texts are often appropriated to serve purposes beyond authorial intentions, which leads him to consider the question whether writers can control social uses of their texts and, consequently, be held responsible for historical events. He argues that in modern societies traditional ideology of the ruling class was substituted by consumer pluralism, which led to the crisis of radical theories. Admitting that the status of the Right is problematic in the United States, which lacks both reactionary and revolutionary tradition in the European sense, Graff questions the applicability of the dichotomy radicalism vs. conservatism to the history of American criticism. He sees the 1960s as the turning point in ideological and political interpretation of literature, and focuses on revisions proposed by feminists and poststructuralists. Like Said, Graff refers to Michel Foucault's theory; however, he concentrates rather on the problems arising from defining literature as the locus of power. Graff criticizes poststructuralists for breaking with liberal and democratic ideas. Skeptical of poststructuralist rhetoric, Graff, like Said, expresses a longing for literature regaining its social function.

The subsequent essay, "Pastoralism in America" (1986) by Leo Marx, is devoted to a more particular issue, namely, the question whether pastoralism can serve as a basis for convincing ideology in the United States. The author raises this and other related problems, having realized some of the shortcomings of his own book *The Machine in the Garden* (1964), where he discusses intellectualists' reactions towards the rise of industrialism. The mainstream culture considered this transformation as a sign of progress but there was also a minority which associated it with uprooting and alienation. In his book Marx stressed the affinity between such skeptical mentality and the pastoral model, which as he foretold, would soon become an anachronism. Upon reflection, in his essay, he reconsiders this prediction in the light of radical movements of the 1960s, which, as he argues, constitute an ideological continuity of the nineteenth-century pastoralism. Apart from the counterculture of the 1960s, Marx also points to other contemporary movements which voice skepticism about material progress, and concludes that pastoralism is an ideology which expresses the views of a large group of educated middle-class people. He defines pastoralism by referring to the origin of the term, and stresses the initial admiration for shepherd's lifestyle. Based upon opposition of conventional and collective vs. personal, spontaneous, and natural, pastoralism gradually came to express the kind of mentality not necessarily associated exclusively with shepherds. The bulk of his essay is devoted to tracing pastoral motifs in classical works of American literature such as *Moby Dick*, *The Scarlet Letter*, *Walden*, *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*, and *The Great Gatsby*. He argues that such American attitudes as skepticism of progress,

escape into nature, romantic individualism, and rejection of organized society are all rooted in pastoralism. Marx views the cultural revolution in the 1960s as resistance against the technocratic concept of material progress, and promotion of pastoral world-view.

As opposed to Marx's discussion of a specific model, two subsequent essays deal with ideology on a more general level. In the text "The Problem of Ideology in a Time of Dissensus" (1993), Sacvan Bercovitch focuses on the importance of ideology in the confusion caused by divergent contending critical approaches in modern American Studies. He argues that there is no escape from ideology, and questions the separation of literary criticism and ideology, which was part of the old canonical consensus within literary studies. The scholar claims that ideology can move us towards a new understanding of texts as historically conditioned. To illustrate this thesis, he discusses the role of ideology in reassessment of the American Renaissance, focusing particularly on the question of how a literature opposing the dominant ideology can be culturally representative. Bercovitch concludes that the recognition of the impact of ideology liberates interpretation and helps to understand fully the history of American literature, whereas denying its role precludes dialog between different critical discourses.

Bercovitch's views are challenged by Giles Gunn in his essay "Beyond Transcendence, or Beyond Ideology: The Problematics of Cultural Criticism in America" (1995). Gunn acknowledges that ideology pervades modern American Studies and calls attention to New Historicism as a particularly ideology-oriented approach with Sacvan Bercovitch as one of its main representatives. However, Gunn questions Bercovitch's view of "American ideology" and his assumption that texts cannot separate themselves from and reflect upon ideology determining them. According to Gunn, even though ideology is pervasive, it is not omnipotent. Therefore, he postulates criticism which recognizes the role of socio-political context but does not become absorbed by it. This aim, as Gunn claims, can be fulfilled by pragmatism represented by William James and John Dewey because it allows for criticism from the outside, from "beyond ideology", which Bercovitch considered impossible. In this sense, Gunn expresses ideas corresponding to Said's concept of "worldliness" of texts, which critics should be aware of, but he adds a clear reservation that ideology is not an all-powerful factor.

The presentation of ideological issues would not be complete without reference to multiculturalism. This problem is the subject of Henry Louis Gates's essay "Good-bye Columbus? Notes on the Culture of Criticism" (1995). Presenting his stance on multiculturalism, the scholar rejects both extremes: protectionism of the Right as well as aggressive attitude of the Left; (which refutes pluralism and any possibility of non-violent co-existence) and calls himself a liberal pluralist advocating tolerance. Similarly to Berco-

vitch and Gunn, Gates recognizes the growing importance of political issues within literary studies, which led to re-evaluations in the literary canon. Examining the causes of the present crisis and dissensus, he argues that oppositional criticism gradually absorbed by the academia did not manage to keep up with reality, and failed to help understand America in its variety. Moreover, Gates also claims that the dichotomy of sovereign vs. colony it was based on, exhausted its potential for describing complexities of modern American culture.

The second part of the volume, "Problematyka wartości i kanonu literackiego" [The Problems of Literary Canon and Values] comprises three texts, which share a lot of common views on these issues. In the opening essay "Contingencies of Value" (1989), Barbara Herrnstein Smith observes that within the last fifty years the study of literary evaluation has been neglected and evaded by literary academia in favor of an intensified attention devoted to interpretation as a source of objective scholarly knowledge. However, abstention from evaluations resulted in accepting the established academic canon of "literary masterpieces" as the object of critical studies. Consequently, recent attempts to challenge the canon revived interest in values. To remedy conflicts over their role in literary studies, Herrnstein postulates a new approach acknowledging that values are changeable and historically determined. To illustrate this, the scholar describes literary works and values in economic terms, and claims that the value of literature depends on how it satisfies the needs and interests of receivers at a given time and in particular circumstances. As values are not stable entities, also evaluations are not sources of any objective knowledge of those values. Finally, Barbara Herrnstein Smith points out how values are culturally reproduced through individual factors such as author's choices and readers' interpretations, as well as institutionalized evaluations such as awards and academic research. The dynamic process of generating values explains both why texts become outdated and lose their appeal when they fail to satisfy receivers' needs, and, on the other hand, how they can survive once canonized. Thus, circulation of texts in culture, which seemed to be a result of their value, constitutes the source of it.

Similarly to Herrnstein, Jane Tompkins in "'But Is It Any Good?' The Institutionalization of Literary Value" (1985), the last chapter of her book *Sensational Designs*, calls for a new approach to literature, arguing that what makes a masterpiece is often not an intrinsic value of the text but historically-dependent critical approaches. According to Tompkins, this explains changes in literary canon reflected in the content of subsequent anthologies of American literature. However, less radical than Herrnstein, Tompkins does not deny existence of literary value, but only stresses subjectivity and changeability of evaluative criteria nested in historical conditions. Therefore, the crucial problem to consider is not whether a text is any good but rather what was its cultural role in its own

time, which is the attitude she adopts to defend texts successful after initial publication but denied “literary value” afterwards. The fact that the texts she focuses upon were mostly written by women poses the question about possible reasons for excluding female writers from literary canon, which is thoroughly investigated in the following essay, “Melodramas of Beset Manhood. How Theories of American Fiction Exclude Women Authors” (1989) by Nina Baym. Similarly to Tompkins and Herrnstein, Baym points out that reception of literature is influenced by literary theories and shows how in the past these theories led to underestimating women’s texts. She gives three possible reasons; first, prejudice of male critics, second, divergence of women’s literature from literary standards of the time, and finally, the role of gender-related restrictions imposed by later critical theories. Concentrating on the latter aspect, Baym discusses different approaches to literature focusing on its “Americanness,” including a myth of America defined by critics in the 1950s. She points out, that women’s literature generally did not fit into those patterns, which led to its exclusion. Baym also refers to persistent metaphors of “exploration” and “fathering” that turn literature into the domain of men. As she concludes, while pursuing uniquely American traits modern theories ironically reduced the variety of American fiction as they eliminated women and left men to their own devices in a melodrama of beset manhood.

The third part, “Z zagadnień prozy: wewnątrz i na zewnątrz kanonu” [On Prose: Inside and Outside the Canon], continues the discussion of literary canon; however, it focuses more on specific re-evaluations and changing approaches within literary criticism. The opening essay, “The Novel and the Middle Class in America” (1986) by Myra Jehlen, tries to account for the fact that in predominantly middle-class America, writers have not produced realist novels describing everyday life of ordinary people but rather romances recounting stories of exceptional individuals’ escape from conventionalized society, often ending up in failure. As an explanation Jehlen points to different origins of the dominant middle class in Europe and America. The latter clearly lacked the challenge of the old bourgeois class. The scholar refers to the works of such authors as Flaubert, Balzac, James, Melville, Hawthorne, and Faulkner to illustrate the contrast between the novel, where the central problem is the internal structure of society, and the romance, which accepts the status quo and focuses more on how to overcome the difficulties in adjusting to it. Whilst Jehlen discusses a particular genre, in the following essay “Bio-Political Resistance in Domestic Ideology and *Uncle Tom’s Cabin*” (1995), Lora Romero focuses on a single text, one written by a popular woman author and excluded from the literary canon. Challenging existing interpretations of Stowe’s domestic ideology as based on the opposition of power and resistance, Romero analyses the text from a perspective which links the abolitionist and feminist aspects of the text with the

concept of biopolitics. She argues that the nineteenth-century notion of physical health and harmony of body and mind constitutes the basis from which Stowe criticizes patriarchal power.

The essay closing the part devoted to re-evaluations in American literary criticism resumes a more general level of reflection. In the text "Fictions of the Present" (1988), Lary McCaffery discusses the dominant modern literary trends and genres. Rejecting easy simplifications, which affirm the death of postmodern experimentalism and stress a conservative nature of contemporary prose, the scholar gives examples of unconventional contemporary writers. However, he also notes upon the evolution of postmodern forms adjusted to grasp the new reality. McCaffery is one of the few academics advocating that science fiction is the quintessential literary genre of contemporary American culture. Moreover, he points that writers from marginalized groups (such as ethnic or racial minorities), whose texts used to be distinguished predominantly by the subject matter, now have moved to some formal experiments, very often within SF. He acknowledges the increased interest in political issues; however, he also notices the continuation of postmodern trends like indeterminacy of meaning and blurring of genre distinctions within politically engaged prose.

One of the aspects mentioned by McCaffery; namely, the emergence of new prose going beyond traditional representation of racial experience, is thoroughly discussed in the last part of the volume, "Kultura i literatura Afroamerykańska" [Afro-American Literature and Culture]. It opens with Henry Louis Gates's seminal text "Writing, 'Race' and the Difference It Makes" (1999) in which the author challenges the very concept of "race" defined in terms of distinct and deterministic racial essences. He rejects the nineteenth-century theories openly discussing "race" as a distinctive factor as well as more modern approaches taking it tacitly for granted. Gates argues that such a perception of "race" is only a social and linguistic construct, with no objective and scientific validity, which is why he puts the term in quotation marks throughout his essay. As the concept of racial difference originated among others from the lack of Black "writing" as a means of representation, he views the emergence of Black literature as a reaction against those accusations, intended to assert identity. However, for Gates this attempt of the Black voice to enter the "White discourse" confirmed the existence of the difference. Therefore, the new task for Black critics is to free Black literature from its dependence on the "White" canon, and judge it on its own terms and merits.

The discussion on the position of Afro-American literature within the canon and the challenges for critics is continued in Toni Morrison's text "Unspeakable Things Unspoken: The Afro-American Presence in American Literature" (1999). Similarly to Gates, Morrison deconstructs the concept of "Blackness" and analyses arguments for excluding

Black art from the canon throughout history. She also supports the view held by several authors included in this collection, especially Smith, Tompkins, Baym; namely, that critical discourse structures the consumption of texts deemed to be literature. She admits the achievements of recent racial criticism, which led the recognition of Afro-American literature, however, like Gates she also sees the dangers of analyzing it in the context of (and thus adjusting it to) the “White” standards. Consequently, like Gates, who breaks with traditional Black literary criticism, she postulates a new approach necessary to fully express the “Unspoken”. According to Morrison, the tasks of such criticism are; first, to work out a theory to study Black literature with reference to its own culture, second, to reinterpret the canon, and third, to analyze all contemporary literature taking into consideration Afro-American presence and influence. As regards the second aim, Morrison shows how the “Whiteness” of the American literary canon derives from the work of critics who fail to explore the social and cultural significance of texts adjudicated as literary, namely, she discusses Melville’s *Moby Dick* from a new perspective, as a political allegory exploring racism and “Whiteness.”

While Gates and Morrison undermine traditional Black criticism which confines Black writers and scholars to focusing on the relationship between Black people and the oppressive White system, bell hooks in “Postmodern Blackness” (1990) calls for the recognition of Afro-Americans’ role within postmodern discourse. She points out the paradox that although postmodernism claims to raise the concepts of “difference and otherness” as legitimate issues in the academia, it fails to recognize Black presence in the culture and in scholarship. While critical of some postmodern ideas, bell hooks highlights the ways postmodernism illuminates the understanding of the African-American experience.

To sum up, *Kultura, tekst, ideologia* undoubtedly deserves much credit as a successful attempt to render the atmosphere and stylistics of “cultural wars” waged within the American academia over the past three decades. Although every choice inevitably bears the traces of initial presumptions, the editor of this collection, through a meticulous selection of authors and texts, has managed to present a variety of voices in contemporary American Studies without bias. In bringing diverse approaches together within a single volume, this valuable book helps Polish readers (scholars, students, journalists) grasp the dynamics of the current debate in the American humanities. This survey of different voices within the American academia not only provides a comprehensive view of the debate, but also helps trace both commonalities and controversies. The arrangement of essays is most commendable as it greatly facilitates our understanding of the problems explored. Somewhat paradoxically, the intellectual mosaic, representing confusion, dissensus and disagreements, turns out to be particularly well-structured and coherent itself.

Agata Preis-Smith and Marek Paryż, eds. *The Poetics of America. Explorations in the Literature and Culture of the United States*. Warsaw: Institute of English Studies, University of Warsaw, 2004. 257 pages.

The collection of essays entitled *The Poetics of America. Explorations in the Literature and Culture of the United States* is a product of cooperation between Polish institutions and former American Fulbright professors. The eighteen papers published in the work cover an impressively wide scope of subjects and approaches: from the reassessments of the works of such classic writers as Faulkner and Whitman, to poetry published on the Internet; from meticulous studies on single texts, to comprehensive views of tendencies in American literature as a whole; and from novels to guidebooks to poetry to paintings to comic books.

Among the varied topics presented in the anthology, three issues seem to be particularly recurrent: how ideology may be either imposed or exposed by literary and extra-literary texts; how language is used for such political rhetoric; and how it could be freed and renewed, often with the help of other means of expression. Several papers seek to examine canonical texts from such new perspectives, and, indeed, already the first essay in the section "Signifying Landscapes" illustrates this tendency.

In "Realism and Representation: Considering Some Images" John R. Leo reexamines Andy Warhol's art. Comparing it to nineteenth century representations of the Mountain of the Holy Cross, which textualize landscape to serve the ideology of Manifest Destiny, the author argues that Warhol's Pop images similarly re-spiritualize the material world. In both cases reality effects in paintings and photographs are in fact used to turn objects into icons and, ultimately, promote American ideology. An analogous undercurrent of colonial thinking is exposed in "Passage to (more than) India: The Poetics and Politics of Walt Whitman's Textualization of the Orient" by Marek Paryż. The prevalent reading of Whitman's poem is called into question, as the author shows how metonymic and metaphoric representation in the poem leads to asymmetrical portrayal of the East and the West, again influenced by the concept of the latter's manifest destiny. What appears to be harmonious coexistence of all cultures, religions and philosophies, on closer scrutiny reveals a contrast between the timeless anonymous passivity of the East and the active individuality of the West. Thus, Whitman seems to be torn between "imperial zeal" and "colonial anxiety." A similar paradox is extensively described by Andrew S. Gross in "The American Guide Series: Tourism, Consumerism, and Managing Space." The author demonstrates how the guidebooks, funded by Federal Writers Project in the 1930s, simultaneously promote consumerist Yankee expansion and express nostalgia for the disappearing local color. Gross observes how, while promoting the political ideal of

a united nation, the guidebooks also demonstrate a carnivalized treatment of local communities in terms of tourist attractions. These two issues of nostalgia and carnivalization are also present in the last paper in the section, "The Individual in Urban Space: Some Perspectives of American and Canadian Fiction" by Nancy Burke. The author illustrates apocalyptic visions of the city in the literature of the USA, where, unlike in Canadian fiction, the influence of urban landscape and absence of natural environment seems to be blamed for carnivalization and degradation of culture.

The topic of the idealized retreat to nature returns in several articles in the next two sections of the anthology: "Horizons of American Poetry" and "Focus on Prose." However, the dominating theme seems to be the uses of language in constructing and promoting ideologies. In "A Civic Model of Reading *The Cantos*," Tadeusz Pióro examines analogies between the readers of Pound's poetry and ideal citizens as envisaged by the poet. Language emerges as a bearer of ideology, with the power of shaping and categorizing readers, with no less pressure than civic authority. "Faulkner's Fable. The Poetics and Politics of Displacement" by Ewa Turlik shows that a similar analysis was performed by Faulkner, who portrayed the mechanism of instilling public solidarity and national spirit under the headlines of Manifest Destiny as means of ideologically loaded social control. In "The Architecture of Desire in Faulkner's Disembodied *Mansion*" by Holli Levitsky, Faulkner's fiction also proves to be a good illustration of how serious matters – death, love, and marriage – are parodied and, literally, carnivalized. In "Throw your body on the line: Tom Hayden's Rhetoric of Activism for the 1960s to the Present Decade," by tracing the methods and rhetoric of auto-creation in the memoirs of a leading anti-establishment activist, Jacek Romaniuk presents another case of language used to construct a radical political program. A more traditional and utopian outlook was promoted and upheld by Polish American fiction, discussed by Danuta Romaniuk in "Literature and Domesticity in Polish Immigrant Communities in the USA, 1880-1939," an essay which can be found in the third part of the anthology, "Constructing Ethnic Poetics." Here the ideological role of literary fiction was to uphold the national identity through ennoblement and idealization in the portrayals of Polish families. Even gender and sexual identity seem to be subject to linguistic and ideological manipulation: as Agata Preis-Smith argues in "Gender Masquerade as a Social Statement in Confessional Poems of the 1950s and 1960s," gender roles in the poems of Plath, Berryman, and T.S. Eliot are mostly socially determined, and gender as such appears to be constructed by "reiterated rhetorical structures."

It is hardly surprising that such visions of pervasive, ideologically charged artificiality should provoke artists and scholars to seek ways back to authenticity. In "Surprise Ending: Affirmation and Altruism in Dreiser's Last Novels," Lawrence E. Hussman reconsiders

the treatment of religion in *The Bulwark* to state that, although self-neglect described by Dreiser seems rather extreme, it might surely provide a valuable alternative to the present day culture of consumerism. “‘Natural Truth’: Laura Riding, L-A-N-G-U-A-G-E and the Romantic Connection” by Julia Fiedorczuk presents a different way out – through reformed language. The essay describes struggles by a modernist poet Laura Riding and L-A-N-G-U-A-G-E school to find a mode of expression that would be directly connected to physical experience of the “natural truth.” In the romantic rebellion against conventionalized and dead language the author sees the American dream of freedom and self-reliance. Ewa Łuczak describes a similar search in “Between Speech and Silence: Sandra Cisneros and Ann Castillo,” where the ideal language in question could facilitate the fullness of expression of feminist discourse. However, this hope of finding a “natural language” that Riding voices seems to be deflated by Whitman’s poetry, reconsidered by Mikołaj Wiśniewski in “Walt Whitman: The Co(s)mic Poet. Unfixing Nature in the *Song of Myself*.” According to the author, Whitman is far from naive hopes of unity with the universe, but rather treats nature with irony. Since nature’s message to humanity is blank, it may at most inspire people to fill nature’s emptiness with artefactic constructs.

In this respect Whitman’s views come surprisingly close to several new literary projects examined in the anthology. E-writers, whose output is examined in “Exploration in American Poetics: Beyond the Boundaries of the Printed Page” by Ann C. Colley use the potential of computer technology to overcome the limitations imposed on language by the medium of the “printed page.” The examples and history of e-literature detailed in the paper point to the interactivity and non-linearity of e-texts as a means of achieving freedom of both expression and readership. Also in the case of graphic novels by Neil Gaiman, discussed in “Dreaming America: Political Desire and Nostalgia in Neil Gaiman’s Graphic Novel Series *The Sandman*” by Stanisław Gieżyński, cultural myths are re-told and given new strength by the new medium, once again encouraging readers to visualize the American Dream. In the last part of the anthology, “Constructing Ethnic Poetics,” two more papers are devoted to mixed media: a fusion of literature and photography. “Striving for Visibility: Using Photographic Imagery in Asian American Literature” by Agnieszka Bedingfield describes attempts to demonstrate that Eastern and Western identities are not mutually exclusive. In the age when visual stimuli gain precedence over the written word, it is literally visibility that shapes the perception of ethnic minorities. Analogically, as Joanna Ziarkowska shows in “Photographs in Leslie Marmon Silko’s *Storyteller*: A Dialogue of the Past and the Present,” supplying autobiographical text with photographs may help overcome stereotypes about Native American communities.

The blending of various media, of fact and fiction, of ideology and imagery, as presented in the last part of the anthology, may well be a new direction characteristic for the poetics of American literature. Matched by the diversity of themes and methodological approaches of the papers, this fascinating variety shows how rich the cultural field is and how challenging it is to follow recent developments within it. *The Poetics of America* surely helps map the main itineraries in the study of American literature and culture, both in Poland and abroad. Hopefully, similar collaborative scholarly projects will be appearing in the future so that Polish readers can stay in touch with the current developments in American Studies.

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