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21st Century prose and freedom – from the issues of proza śródka

Since the early-1990s, the problem of how to define freedom has been raised by various groups of opinion-makers, historians, philosophers, and sociologists forced to diagnose the new political situation. In 1993, fr. Józef Tischner published his famous book entitled *Nieszczęsny dar wolności* [The Unfortunate Gift of Freedom], the main topic of which was the unexpected yet nationwide “fear of freedom”, and the inability to use and implement it.¹ During a series of meetings held at the same time, under the general name *Rozmowy w Castel Gandolfo* [Castel Gandolfo Talks], there were held discussions between European thinkers, who tried to identify and name the nature of the changes happening in nations and societies entering a new path of self-determination. The interlocutors mainly provided many warnings against simplifying the problem. For example, Ralph Dahrendorf concluded, fully convinced: “Any definition of freedom which is based on what people do, not only on what they are allowed to do, is risky, leads us astray, and constitutes an invitation for tyrants.”² Ronald Dworkin in an article entitled *Wolność, równość, wspólnota* argued: “respect for freedom and equality, at least within the most convincing definitions of those virtues, is incorporated into the respect for a community, it is an element of the community bond.”³

In the People’s Republic of Poland, freedom, particularly in its common understanding, was usually defined as the reverse of the condition shared both by the community, and its individual constituents operating within the imposed political system. Models of the vision of freedom have been sought after in the past or areas geographically distant. The freedom of action, choice, and thought, mythicised

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¹ Vide J. Tischner, *Nieszczęsny dar wolności*, Znak, Krakow 1993.

² R. Dahrendorf, “Wolność a więzi społeczne. Uwagi o strukturze pewnej argumentacji”, trans. A. Kopacki, in: *Spoleczeństwo liberalne. Rozmowy w Castel Gandolfo*, K. Michalski (ed.), Znak, Krakow 1996, p. 16 (first printed in Stuttgart 1993). [English version translated from Polish].

³ R. Dworkin, “Wolność, równość, wspólnota”, trans. A. Pawelec, in: *Spoleczeństwo liberalne...*, p. 78. [English version translated from Polish].

in all possible manners, seemed an unattainable dream of the Grand Change, an opening – transformation of reality. It permeated into popular culture: the lyrics of the cult song by Chłopcy z Placu Broni⁴: “Wolność kocham i rozumiem / Wolności oddać nie umiem” [Freedom, I love and understand it / Freedom, I cannot part with it] appeared to be a message equally honest and compensatory in nature: both in terms of the long-term lack of it, and the sudden yet unexpected emerging unease of its appearance. The popular culture of the turn of the 1990s, in its various versions and manifestations, stored the memory about a time of irrefutable certainties, and easily aroused emotions.

I

The political breakthrough of 1989 initially offered a hope for implementing previously rarely specified dreams into the reality of community life. Freedom in its collective dimension became, initially, an obvious literary topic, yet soon, not as a myth but as a group of social practices, it was subjected to increasingly critical consideration. No wonder, then, that the centre of gravity of artistic searches began to shift towards exploring the problems associated with freedom within its personal dimension. After less than a decade had passed, the authors of the first guide to the literature of the time of the transformation thus described the recent past, having a short perspective:

Therefore, the breakthrough was happening inside and around us – in the changing attitudes: to respected figures, the society, the authorities, the government, the market, and freedom, which connected those perspectives, which is key for today’s situation, and which constitutes the foundation of any discussion of identity. Freedom occurred in literature, which did not necessarily mean a blissful time without pressures and limitations.⁵

The principles of marketisation of the area of art began to rapidly influence the transformations within social communication. The rapid development of the mass culture, the popularity of works which mainly offered entertainment, and the popularity of the translations of world literature works of various magnitudes

⁴ *Kocham wolność*, lyrics and music by B. Łyszkiewicz. Rock songs from the turn of the 1990s raising the topic of freedom became rooted into the collective memory as an important component co-forming the air of regaining freedom. No wonder, then, that twenty-five years later they became the soundtrack for a film bringing back those events: *Walesa. Man of hope*, directed by A. Wajda.

⁵ P. Czaplinski, P. Śliwiński, *Literatura polska 1976–98. Przewodnik po prozie i poezji*, Wydawnictwo Literackie, Krakow 1999, pp. 215–216. [English version translated from Polish].

helped both creators and researchers or critics realise that the ongoing changes determine not only creative processes, but mostly receptive strategies.

The market success of a work of literature verified its author's technique, the acuteness of their choice (focussed on the current needs of the audience) of a topic, yet it also depended on extra-literary mechanisms of promotion, trends, and distribution. Krzysztof Uniłowski stated that a large portion of the literature of the 1990s featured: "an inertive approach to selected conventions, displaying technique skills, and care for a rapport with readers."⁶ The establishing of contact with the audience within the areas of various communication realms became a condition necessary to become successful in the market. Prose offering a sensation of coming into contact with literature of higher artistic intent, yet focussed mainly on establishing a real, and as wide as possible, rapport with the literary audience, was termed *prose of the centre* ("proza śródka"). Uniłowski emphasised that within it:

the areas of archtextual references are not created by popular prose genres, but conventions associated by readers with "ambitious" literature. In other words, *prose of the centre* appeals to the solidified in the wide social consciousness vision of literature of the highest kind, its poetics, problems, and, finally, the role of literature and writers.⁷

Prose of the centre began to somewhat replace the literature of high artistic ambition offering the illusion of participation in the culture without testing the receiver, and their cognitive competences. The conventions noticeable in it were defined by the stereotypical common view of modern literature, emulated and reproduced in its simplified reflection.

The more broadly known texts assigned to that category occupied higher levels of the pyramid, which consisted of numerous works belonging to popular and entertainment literature, while exploiting similar themes. The topicality of the themes raised remained one of the conditions of their popularity among readers, while the provocation strategy became a tamed and accepted mode of drawing attention to a text and its author. Freedom of speech, having been guaranteed with the lifting of censorship, acquired an additional communicational dimension: it enabled one to raise themes indicated by temporary trends using even the most drastic means, including linguistic, violating social habits and moral taboos.

Within thus functioning reception, there might occur appropriations and a type of "lowering", thus taming, within the reading processes of works actually subversively designed. A representative example of that strategy was *Lubiewo* by

⁶ K. Uniłowski, "Proza śródka' lat dziewięćdziesiątych, czyli stereotypy literatury nowoczesnej", in: *Stereotypy w literaturze (i tuż obok)*, W. Bolecki, G. Gazda (eds.), Wydawnictwo IBL, Warsaw 2003, pp. 262–263. [English version translated from Polish].

⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 263.

Michał Witkowski, a novel transcending the horizons of readers' expectations, yet absorbed even by the popular circulation as a kind of moral peculiarity – somewhat disturbing, yet, basically, “harmless”. Andrzej Skrendo indicated that possibility of a double reception. By arguing that in *Lubiewo* there occurred a kind of restitution of the sacred, as without it any violations, transgressions, dressing up, and metamorphoses would prove impossible, he stated in the summary of his deliberations:

If one forgets about that restitution, one can see in *Lubiewo* nothing more than a collection of exotic anecdotes. If we remember about it, we will see the whole ambiguity – suppressed desire, and living off that suppression, no one's fault, and a dominating punishment, a fear of loneliness and the joy of becoming liberated.⁸

Witkowski's following works, carrying a decreased subversive load, more and more matched the main stream of *prose of the centre*, which was accompanied by the author's spectacular, camp gestures used for promoting them. That may change, though, of course, it does not have to, with the release of the latest novel entitled *Fynf und cwancyś*, which can be considered as an intentional return to the stylistics and message of *Lubiewo* performed in the altered and quickly changing conditions of collective communication.

II

The contention of socially imposed limitations was the distinctive feature of the writings of many authors who debuted after 1989. An obvious result of that was that, in their works, they explored in various manners the topic of individual freedom. The literature which in the 1990s demysticised or even destructed the mythologies which formed around the notion of community freedom, in the 21st c. set its study focus on personal freedom, the civilisation transformation-based threats and visions of limitations founded on the new definitions of the freedoms of an individual. The freedom of an individual was mainly studied within the area of interpersonal contacts, the ability to establish contacts with the Other.

At the beginning of the new millennium, Przemysław Czapliński in a book entitled *Efekt bierności* argued that literature which leaves communicational capital in an unspoiled condition, and only draws from it as if from a collection

⁸ A. Skrendo, “Miejsce ujawnienia”, *Pogranicza* 2005, issue 1, p. 15. [English version translated from Polish]. Skrendo concluded: “*Lubiewo* is explained through that which is not there, and it talks about a need for that about which it remains silent. It is, so to speak, a place of discovering the need to conceal, i.e. the need for taboo. It reveals the rarely known part of reality, and it shows us new places in the world of literature.”

of ready-made formulas, produces, not without the receivers' consent, an effect of passiveness, similar to that produced by mass culture. By not intending to change the habits of the audience, the authors use templates thus making them understand that "common means of communication – our stereotypes, prejudices, linguistic clichés, including fictional patterns, which we carry in our heads – do not require any expansion or refreshing."⁹ Thus form simplified reflections of particularly significant problems – e.g. being responsible for other people – and often against the noble intentions of authors.

The topic of individual freedom limited by external circumstances often assumes the conventional, i.e. generally understood and accepted, shape of a story on the "cruelty" of fate. One such example was the famed novel by Dorota Terakowska entitled *Poczwarka*, which raised the topic of limiting freedom caused by illness and disability – a limitation on the individual afflicted with a disability, but also one which determines the fate of their loved ones forced, against they will, to care for the sick. When attempting to reach the world of the experiences of a young girl born with a severe form of Down's syndrome, Terakowska also depicted mainly the extent of the destruction to her parents' lives. The father limited his contact with his loved ones, hiding in the space of professional work restrictively separated from the zone of family life, while the mother made the "worst and yet the only [decision] she could have made: she isolated Myszka from the world in order to spare her pain and disappointment, while sparing herself shame and despair."¹⁰

The child's death must have proved for them a true liberation, while their "reward" for the years of voluntary withdrawal from the external world was later giving birth to a child not burdened by the hereditary disease. Czapliński concluded: "Against her best intentions, Terakowska sacrificed *Poczwarka* on the altar of normality – for parents who have a normal child could pretend to be mature."¹¹ It should be added that in that story, there was a reflexively objectionable vision of heaven – one of the most shocking, as the invented after world also has a ghetto for the disabled, a special zone, in which they can all stay together without disturbing the peace of the souls not afflicted by disability. Disability, in fact, proved to be a taint transferred there, against the principles of mercy, from the time of corporal existence on Earth.

In another famous novel of that time, i.e. *Heroina*, the author Tomasz Piątek created a world where not only family ties but all interpersonal ties had disappeared giving way to an individually fulfilled project of achieving happiness. In

⁹ P. Czapliński, *Efekt bierności. Literatura w czasie normalnym*, Wydawnictwo Literackie, Krakow 2004, p. 10. [English version translated from Polish].

¹⁰ D. Terakowska, *Poczwarka*, Wydawnictwo Literackie, Krakow 2003, p. 279. [English version translated from Polish].

¹¹ P. Czapliński, *Efekt bierności...*, p. 92.

the reality marked by decay, devoid of any alternative projects for fulfilment and success, the title heroine proves the only way for achieving happiness. Despite their destructive power, drugs remain in the novel the only way to put up screens to hide from the reality of everyday existence. One of the characters states directly: “People think that if they have a wife and kids, everything will be OK. But when they get the wife and kids, it turns out that it’s not OK. And then they understand that actually they never wanted a family. They only wanted everything to be OK.”¹²

Thus freedom proves to be mainly one’s ability to escape from the world and one’s obligations towards others – freedom wasted in pursuit of chemically delivered and momentary happiness, eventually leading to self-destruction. Piątek’s début, his uncompromising diagnosis of contemporary times clearly surpassing his later works, was cautiously removed from a wider field of view, and placed in a niche of so-called “drug-related literature”, popular mainly amongst teenage readers.

A similar fate befell Olga Tokarczuk’s novel entitled *Prowadź swój próg przez kości umarłych* (Drive Your Plough Over the Bones of the Dead), which became popular among teenage, though not exclusively, animal lovers, and for ardent protectors of animal rights. The story of Janina who set out on a ruthless fight against animal murder became, also due to the novel’s genre convention, a niche story on the one hand, and, on the other, one which offers a special sense of compensation for the readers convinced of the undue marginalisation of the problem. Before reaching for extreme measures, the protagonist tried to reach the people surrounding her through speeches with an apocalyptic tone: “The world is a prison full of suffering constructed in such a way that one needs to inflict pain on others to survive.”¹³ Yet her crusade was bound to fail from the start – the people surrounding her remained deaf to her words, which drove her to cross all lines.

Since the 19th c. the conventions of crime and action prose have been used within high literature as a convenient device to convey the most complicated discursive content. At the same time, the morality play-style nature of each story (including crime stories) about the struggle between good and evil enables one to engage within its framework in a polemic with the rules of socially accepted orders. Since *The Name of the Rose* by Umberto Eco, prose with more ambitious aims using action patterns has also indicated a conscious engagement in an intertextual play – usually at a level which does not hinder one’s satisfaction in

¹² T. Piątek, *Heroina*, Czarne, Wołowiec 2002, p. 79. [English version translated from Polish].

¹³ O. Tokarczuk, *Prowadź swój plug przez kości umarłych*, Wydawnictwo Literackie, Krakow 2009, p. 131. [English version translated from Polish]. Earlier, Janina indicated another type of individual imprisonment: “The entire complex human psyche formed to prevent Humans from understanding what they actually see. For the truth to reach them, entwined in illusions, and empty talk.”

reading. It was similar in the case of a theatre staging of the novel by the Poznan-based Teatr Polski¹⁴ – the director did try to extract its subversive content, while the actors tried to shout them out with gusto, yet on the whole it drew viewers through its attractive packaging, i.e. an exceptionally rich and special-effects-filled visual side.

The example of Tokarczuk's novel indicated how the freedom of uttering the most provocative theses clashes with the freedom of social reception, which defines its own extra-artistic hierarchies. Novel fiction touches upon invariably controversial problems, while the audience defuses the explosive load by ousting the presented attitude towards the zone of harmless oddities. Works considered as *prose of the centre* remain, nonetheless, a proof of not only the changes occurring in communication circulations, but also of the main problems sensitive at a given moment for the community for which they were written. In 1994, Piotr Śliwiński argued:

High art today, having exhausted, as it is rather generally considered, the deposits of the belief in its own mission and future necessary for further development, stoops to mass culture. Thus we ourselves gain the right to seek inspiration in trivial literature, including of older times. Therefore, the question whether the concerns of an epoch related to, e.g. the philosophy of history, can become expressed in a trivial form, is no longer as shocking a misunderstanding as it once was. That is because concern is expressed in different languages, while philosophy and psychology rather reveal themselves, accidentally and wilfully granted to a work of literature, than allow for them to be systematically planned and found in it.¹⁵

Therefore, from that point of view as well it would be difficult to define the limits of *prose of the centre* – the clarity of displaying philosophical consideration of the human condition in the contemporary world seems a somewhat added value in relation to writers' intentions, and one which is not always clear for the ordinary reader – usually included in interpretational reconstructions performed by literary critics and researchers.

Scandal and moral provocation as a domesticated device which draws the audience craving for emphatic experiences can also be viewed in various dimensions. Obscenity, one of the emanations and models of which for the author of *Simulacra and Simulation* was pornography, was defined by him as a set of projects of renouncing distance, rejecting play, and resigning to seduction propagating itself in

¹⁴ O. Tokarczuk, *Pomórnik. Kryminal ekologiczny*, directed and adapted for staging by Emilia Sadowska, premièred: 11.09.2010.

¹⁵ P. Śliwiński, *Tadeusz Dołęga-Mostowicz*, Rebis, Poznan 1994, pp. 166–168. [English version translated from Polish].

contemporary communicational circulations. When writing about shattered communicational principles, about being lost, or even the decline of previous principles of dialogue, Jean Baudrillard concluded that today communication has been replaced by an immediate and direct transfer of data.¹⁶ Baudrillard also emphasised the need to defend against the generally accepted obscenity (in all its more or less defined forms) appropriating an ever growing number of media areas.¹⁷ In a world sliding towards total obscenity, irony proves “the final form of seduction”: a category often unnoticed or omitted by receivers, which remains a peculiar “alibi” of creators. The use of irony could thus be considered an indication of a higher creative self-awareness, and a signal of one’s readiness for accepting more difficult artistic challenges. The intensity of the signals of moral provocation, increasingly difficult in the reality of declining taboos, remains a simple utilisation of the strategy of provocation for marketing purposes, while ironic interferences in that strategy could constitute a defence against its domesticated, pervasive form in the media and on the internet.

III

The emergence and the rapid development of virtual communication space was a phenomenon to which literature (and art) had to respond, trying to reach the core of the changes. In a similarly accelerated manner, it was necessary to identify the transformations of interpersonal relations.

At the beginning of the 21st c., Ryszard K. Przybylski argued:

The increasing availability of the internet, and the expanding utility of the Web lead to promoting new forms of social communication, which creates a considerable disturbance in the hierarchies which had applied in this scope. Yet it mainly combines qualities which seemed irreconcilable within the previously applicable norms, i.e. the drive for freedom and captivity, once suspected in consumption.¹⁸

Furthermore, the general consent to new forms of addictions and subordination caused their severity to be removed from view. A perverse and ironic proof of those changes, and a critical diagnosis of those was offered in *Kurator* by

¹⁶ J. Baurillard, *Słowa-klucze*, trans. S. Królak, Sic!, Warsaw 2008, p. 28. [English version translated from Polish].

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 30.

¹⁸ R.K. Przybylski, “Media i ich wpływ na świadomość literacką po 1989”, in: *Transformacja w kulturze i literaturze polskiej*, B. Bakula (ed.), Bonami, Poznan 2007, p. 146. [English version translated from Polish].

Zbigniew Kruszyński, an obscene tale aimed against the degenerations in interpersonal relations, which are born and which mutate in the new communicational conditions. The freedom offered by the virtual space appeared in the novel mainly a pretence, and a dangerous illusion.

Kurator is sometimes considered as a somewhat boring story on fringe areas of social life, in fact, it was sometimes advertised as a voice on sponsorship/prostitution, an allegedly generally accepted phenomenon, which is no longer outrageous, and not even distasteful. But maybe it ought to be read as a variation on the topic of the possibilities opening in front of today's Humbert Humbert, a distant descendant of the protagonist of *Lolita* by Nabokov¹⁹, in the world of virtual communication. *Kurator* could also be included in a series of stories on the contemporary versions of "loneliness on the web", and beside it. Mainly, though, it is a story on the emergence of new areas of consumption, and on the unexpected manifestations of the laws of demand and supply. The protagonist, and, at the same time, the ever-identified with the narrator of the story, thus described his everyday common actions upon having his morning coffee: "So I went to websites marked as: sponsorship. They were increasingly bigger and more avaricious. Everyone demanded gratuity, raising the rates."²⁰

The degree of acceptance of virtually established relations, which are momentary and expire without a trace, and the unabashed certainty of the protagonist that everything can be found and bought on the web (the only issue being the price), was supposed to make him a model member of the internet community from the start. Nicolas Bourriaud in a study entitled *Estetyka relacyjna* wrote:

we discover that we are bare, and exploited by the electronic media, amusement parks, organised cohabitation areas, exuberant development of compatible social formats [...] That which cannot be commercialised, must disappear. Soon you will not be able to maintain interpersonal relationships outside that commercial dimension.²¹

Even though that diagnosis echoes a tone of anxiety or fear for the future, the protagonist of *Kurator* seems to be in that respect devoid of any doubts, hesitation, and indecision. The possibility of establishing contacts on the internet was the reason why there appeared a procession of women in the life of a divorced fifty-year-old. *Kurator* is not, however, their collective portrait, rather, similarly to Nabokov's work, a portrait of a man watching them, evaluating his casual partners according to their attractiveness, usefulness, ease of use, i.e. the quickest in consuming the contents of the sexual offer.

¹⁹ Vide V. Nabokov, *Lolita*, trans. R. Stiller, Państwowy Instytut Wydawniczy, Warsaw 1991.

²⁰ Z. Kruszyński, *Kurator*, W.A.B., Warsaw 2014, p. 6. [English version translated from Polish].

²¹ N. Bourriaud, *Estetyka relacyjna*, trans. Ł. Bialkowski, MOCAK, Krakow 2012, p. 35. [English version translated from Polish].

The types of the contacts being established, the course of each meeting, and the trite chats devoid of any emotions reveal the vapidness of his actions. Then the obscene details of random acts presented with ironic detachment reveal the superficiality of the incidentally established relations. They do not help to build erotic tension. Their goal is to hinder the possibility of any pornographic concretisation. That is confirmed in the presentation of each of the paid one-time contacts outlined in the novel. It took the relationship with Marta, a high school graduate he met in the same internet manner, a character who appears at the end of the book, to seemingly lead to a change of the situation, and opening of a new chapter in the life of the protagonist. Everything, however, was, in fact, a repetition of previous arrangements. What did change was only the attitude of “the curator”, unexpectedly capable of feeding off illusions, and using them to conceal the inconvenient truth.

Unexpectedly, including for himself, the protagonist became similar to Aschenbach from Mann’s variation on old age and death²² (they are, in fact, of the same age), to his two extremely different incarnations: a rationalist capable of observing the world from a distance, and a man dazed by his recent infatuation, heading for the end, devoid of any instincts of self-preservation. Shivering with cold, the protagonist spends hours posing nude in order for Marta to fill her portfolio with works necessary to become accepted for university. While undergoing a similar experience to those during his previous contacts with partners met on the web (including a blackmail attempt), he cannot afford the necessary detachment, or notice their core. The change of the point of view could not, obviously, influence a change of the status of the relationship between the protagonist and the graduate, the self-appointed “curator” and the paid “protégé”.

He died alone leaving behind outdated classifieds, and a few fading unwanted memories. Yet prior to committing suicide, he tried to look into Marta’s face for the last time. He saw the face of a stranger, like hundreds of others previously browsed in the photographs of internet classifieds. Similar to numerous faces, which coupled with nude photos promoted the commercial offer. As Giorgio Agamben argued when writing about contemporary changes in viewing nakedness: “The face, now an accomplice of nudity—as it looks into the lens or winks at the spectator—lets the absence of secret be seen; it expresses only a letting-be-seen, a pure exhibition.”²³ When viewing such exhibitions, while scouring through the mass of images posted on the internet, he treated the photographs not as a trace of subjective existence, but, usually faked, retouched, and imitated, signs of the quality of the services being offered.

²² Vide T. Mann, *Śmierć w Wenecji*, trans. Leopold Staff, Wydawnictwo Dolnośląskie, Wrocław 1996.

²³ G. Agamben, *Nagość*, trans. K. Żaboklicki, W.A.B., Warsaw 2010, p. 98. [English version: Agamben G. *Nudities*, Stanford University Press: California, p. 89].

The story of “the curator” is not, though, a record of the erotic adventures of a lonely fifty-year-old. It becomes for the reader a test of their own acceptance of the changes occurring in how people establish, build, and maintain interpersonal relations. In the early-1980s, Jerzy Ziomek as if predicting the contemporary virtual forms of eroticism and *voyeurism*, thus concluded his study entitled *Pornografia i obscenum*: “A ritual can be orgiastic. Yet even the wildest ritual can never become pornography due to the actual participation of everyone. A ritual is not pornographic, but the viewing of a ritual from a secure location may be.”²⁴

That statement could be transformed today into a series of questions. What today becomes a ritual – and whether the virtual scene of interpersonal contacts has a dimension of ritualistic space? Whether online presence can acquire the nature of the participation of everyone? In fact, to what extent would that be an “actual” participation? And finally: are there still any secure locations for observing it? Kruszyński in *Kurator* tried to answer some of them without turning the answers into a unidimensional diagnosis. Instead of a scandalous and thus attractive story on sponsorship, the readers were offered a pessimistic vision of the contemporary pretences of freedom, a depressing the truth about the human condition. Yet another novel of *prose of the centre* thus became yet another warning against the abuse of freedom resulting from misunderstanding its essence, and yet another indication of the destructive force of civilisational changes damaging the foundations of its understanding.

The category of *prose of the centre* acquiring along the development of the latest literature increasingly emphatic theoretical markers has been used for defining the modes of functioning of individual works and not the entire output of the writers indicated in specific interpretations. It particularly coincides with the considerations of the contemporary role of literature, and its status within social communicational circulations. It mainly proves the durability of the conviction on the community dimension of literary works. The desire for literature to remain something more than literature, to reach the biggest group of receivers, and to be able to influence the shape of collective life is actually fulfilled today most emphatically in works categorised as *prose of the centre*, and maybe their generally accepted presence in publishing offers extends the existence of the slowly fading, and less important “text-based world”.

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²⁴ J. Ziomek, “Pornografia i obscenum”, in: idem, *Rzeczy komiczne*, Wydawnictwo „Poznańskich Studiów Polonistycznych”, Poznan 2000, p. 188. [English version translated from Polish].

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21st Century prose and freedom – from the issues of proza środka

(Summary)

The main aim of the article is a consideration the problems connected with this part of contemporary literature which is called “proza środka” (“prose of the middle”). 21st century novels treated as the examples of this phenomenon (e.g. *Lubiewo* written by Michał Witkowski, *Poczwarka* by Dorota Terakowska, *Kurator* by Zbigniew Kruszyński) and their reception prove that new political situation after 1989 changes the rules of common literary perception. The readers expectations support origination of textes which are ambitious, attractive but also easy to assimilation. The main theme of that part of prose is freedom, especially freedom of the individual.

Keywords: contemporary prose, 21st century literature, freedom, 1989 year’s turn