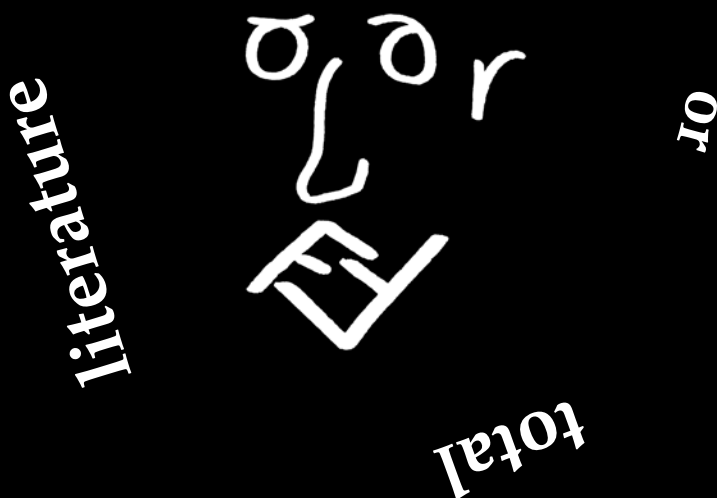


ZENON FAJFER

Liberature



Collected Essays 1999 – 2009
edited by KATARZYNA BAZARNIK

Liberature

ZENON FAJFER

Liberature

or total literature

Collected Essays 1999 – 2009

translated and edited by
KATARZYNA BAZARNIK

introduction
WOJCIECH KALAGA

Korporacja Ha!art | Kraków 2010

Zenon Fajfer, *Liberature or Total Literature. Collected Essays 1999–2009*, Kraków 2010

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Liberature or Total Literature. Collected Essays from 1999–2009 (2010)

Liberatura – literary genre, proposed in 1999 by Zenon Fajfer, combining the form and content of the book (Lat. *liber*) into an inseparable whole

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Time for Liberature

There are literary works in which the artistic message is transmitted not only through the verbal medium, but also through the author “speaking” via book as a whole. In such books a drawing or a blank space have the power of poetic metaphor, and typography is elevated to the status of a stylistic device. Literature characterised by such a total approach that reaches beyond the linguistic medium is called liberature, or literature in the form of the book (Lat. *liber*). Hence, the material book, which can be of any shape and structure, ceases to be a neutral container for a text, but becomes an integral component of the literary work. It becomes its spatial-temporal foundation shaped by authors just as they shape the fictional world represented through language.

The present volume collects essays on liberature, spanning the years 1999–2009, written by Zenon Fajfer, its proponent and major author. They are accompanied by Wojciech Kalaga’s introduction, which locates liberature in the context of hybrid phenomena and draws our attention to a new readerly experience, a kind of coda to Fajfer’s argument written by the undersigned, which presents liberature as a literary genre, followed by a brief historical account of the development of the trend by Agnieszka Przybyszewska, and the appendix consisting of Łukasz Jeżyk’s analysis of Fajfer’s liberatic poetry volume *ten letters*, complementary to the present collection. Thanks to these two books the readers have a chance to familiarise themselves with both liberatic theory and practice.

Fajfer’s argument ranges from a discussion of relations between contemporary liberature and the antiquity, through the relations of the writer to his or her material, literature rooted in the space of the book, materiality and viscosity of writing, a vision of the literary work embodied in the Book in which every detail is significant, up to Fajfer’s literary fascinations: Dante, Sterne, Joyce, and Mallarmé. This explains a seemingly puzzling sketch on Joyce’s debate with Plato, which is not directly related to liberature, but is essential for understanding the *philosophy* of the *artist* presented here. And it is worth remembering that artistic liberty (Lat. *libertas*), the subject of Fajfer’s essay on Joyce, is also at stake in liberature.

The articles collected here have been published in literary magazines and conference volumes, often hardly accessible now. However, growing interest, both in Poland and abroad, has stimulated us to gather them

in one book. Piotr Marecki was also instrumental in this project, being firmly convinced that the time has come to collect the fruit of our ten-year's work in this form. Although Fajfer and I have also published some jointly written articles, we have decided to give the floor in this volume mainly to the artist who realizes his vision not only in works written independently or jointly with the present author, but also in theoretical and programmatic essays in which he lays out the framework of his artistic practice (sometimes debating his previous stance). While the undersigned is working on a separate monograph on liberature.

Although this collection is a selection of articles some overlap is perhaps unavoidable. Most of the essays, for example, contain a more or less abbreviated definition of liberature and emanational form, which stems from the fact that they were addressed to different audiences that had never heard about them before, so it was necessary to explain, as if anew, what they consist in. However, apart from a few minor corrections and occasional editor's footnotes, no revisions or cuts have been made (with two exceptions) as it would probably distort the coherence of the arguments. Since this collection is also intended as a documentation of the development of the idea, it ends with a bibliography of works by Zenon Fajfer and Katarzyna Bazarnik, their articles on liberature, and selected articles by other authors.

*

This book would not have been published without dedication, hard work and assistance of many people, whom we would like to gratefully acknowledge here, though we are sad that we cannot name them all. So special thanks go to: dr Christa-Maria Lerm-Hayes for inviting us to chair a panel on liberature at "Displaying Word and Image Conference" in Belfast, which prompted this publication, dr Piotr Marecki for his unwavering support of liberature over the last decade and his inspiration in preparing this book, prof. Wojciech Kalaga, Agnieszka Przybyszewska and Łukasz Jeżyk for their perceptive commentaries, prof. Wacław Rapak for reviewing the collection, Joshua Crone for his discerning proofreading, Marcin Hernas for his creative and understanding look from over the desktop designer's keyboard, and last but not least, Grzegorz Jankowicz for all his efforts to popularise liberature. A special thank-you goes to our sons and mothers for their inexhaustible patience and tolerance.

Katarzyna Bazarnik and Zenon Fajfer

Liberature: Word, Icon, Space¹

The “pictorial turn” diagnosed by W.J.T. Mitchell in his book *Picture Theory*² brought about phenomena which have changed the relation between the graphical attire of the text and its verbal non-materiality. There appeared authors “who do not remain indifferent to this attire. They even harness it towards the ‘production of meaning.’ They treat language, or rather writing – its perceptible incarnation – as tangible material.”³ In constructing their sense, texts created by those authors in the previous century (yet having much earlier antecedents) utilize just as much the semantics of language as the semiotics of matter: the shape and the spacing of print, the physicality of paper, the availability of a virtual link, the spatiality and architecture of the volume, the iconic potential of the page (or the screen). One could say that such texts refuse to don their “attire”, as it has become an integral part of their bodies and thus ceased to be attire – its exteriority has been annihilated: what we see or what we touch is no longer an ornamental addition, but something that inherently belongs to the work. The book does not *contain* the work, it does not store it or cover it with its garments – the book (or its material equivalent) *is* the work.⁴

The majority of texts discussed here belong to the realm of liberature or proto-liberature. The word *liberature* is a kind of an umbrella term that merges the meaning of the Latin *liber* as *free* with that of a *book*: it thus connotes both creative freedom and the sense of the book as a material object in the artistic message (but also *liber* as *scales* – “writing as weighing of letters”⁵). The term in the sense used here was introduced by Zenon Fajfer

- 1 A more comprehensive discussion of the concept of textual hybridity, including liberature, has been presented in my article “Tekst hybrydyczny. Polifonie i aporie doświadczenia wizualnego” [The Hybrid Text: Polyphonies and Aporias of Visual Experience], which is a development of the present introduction (forthcoming in the volume *Wizualizacja, literatura i cała reszta* [Visualisation, Literature and all the Rest] edited by W. Bolecki and A. Dziadek in the series “Z Dziejów Form Artystycznych w Literaturze Polskiej”).
- 2 W.J.T. Mitchell, *Picture Theory*, Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1995.
- 3 Katarzyna Bazarnik, “Popsuta przestrzeń. O odpowiedzialności wydawcy” [Broken Space. Of Publisher’s Responsibility], in: *Autoportret. Pismo o dobrej przestrzeni (Przestrzenie książki)*, 4 (17), 2006, p. 7.
- 4 Zenon Fajfer, “liryka, epika, dramat, liberatura” [poetry, prose, drama, liberature] in: *Od Joyce’a do liberatury. Szkice o architekturze słowa* [From Joyce to Liberature. Essays on the Architecture of the Word], ed. Katarzyna Bazarnik, Kraków: Universitas, 2002, p. 234.
- 5 Katarzyna Bazarnik, “Dlaczego od Joyce’a do liberatury (zamiast wstępu)” [Why from Joyce to Liberature (instead of an Introduction)], in: *Od Joyce’a do liberatury*. [From Joyce to Liberature], p. v.

in 1999 in an article published in *Dekada Literacka*, entitled “Liberature. An Annex to the Dictionary of Literary Terms.”⁶ Initially, the author juxtaposed liberature with the three main literary genres⁷ (as illustrated by the title of one of his texts: “~~poetry, prose, drama~~, liberature”); it seems, however, that one should consider liberature as a kind of trans-genre which cuts across and transgresses the boundaries of literary typologies,⁸ a statement with which the contemporary liberartists would probably agree.

Let us add, in order to situate liberature on the map of literary evolution, that its hybridity is by no means an invention of the contemporary avant-garde. The idea of the page, letter and icon working together has been present in our culture since antiquity.⁹ The beginnings of visual poetry go as far back as 300BC – to the works of Simias of Rhodes and Theocritus.¹⁰ It was present in the Middle Ages and flourished, in Poland as well¹¹, between the 16th and 18th centuries. Some of the visual poems retain the status of masterpieces even today: for instance George Herbert’s famous “The Altar,” or his “Easter Wings,” which continues the motif of wings initiated by Simias.

The twentieth century witnessed the return of the visual usage of the verbal sign: from the futurist picture poems of Martinetti, the calligrams of Apollinaire, the poesiography of Tytus Czyżewski or the innovative “semantic poetry” of Stefan Themerson to concrete poetry, whose origin goes back to the fifties, but which is still practiced today. However, these twentieth-century efforts to harness language in the service of the eye differ from traditional visual poetry. It is not merely the matter of synchronizing the shape or contour of the poem with its content but of the exploration of the visual-semantic potentiality of the linguistic sign.

Numerous papers, not at all marginal, have already been devoted to liberature, its origins and various forms¹²; I will not, therefore, dis-

6 Zenon Fajfer, “Liberatura. Aneks do słownika terminów literackich” [Liberature. An Annex to the Dictionary of Literary Terms], *Dekada Literacka* 5–6 (153–154), 1999, p. 8–9. Reprinted with the author’s commentary “Liberum veto?” in: *Tekst-tura. Wokół nowych form tekstu literackiego i tekstu jako dzieła sztuki* [Text-ture. Of New Literary Forms and the Text as a Work of Art], ed. Małgorzata Dawidek Gryglicka, Kraków: Korporacja Ha!art, 2005, p. 11–17.

7 Polish theory follows the tradition which distinguishes three main literary genres (the so-called “kinds”): poetry, prose, and drama, other genres being subordinate to this division.

8 Radosław Nowakowski in *Traktat Kartograficzny* [Treatise on Pageography] suggests orature, literature and liberature as phases of the evolution of the art of words.

9 See for instance Piotr Rypson, *Obraz słowa. Historia poezji wizualnej* [Word Picture. The History of Visual Poetry], Warszawa: A.R., 1989.

10 An excellent overview of visual poetry may be found in Jeremy Adler and Ulrich Ernst, *Text als Figur. Visuelle Poesie von der Antike bis zu Moderne*, Weinheim: vch, Acta Humanoria, 1987.

11 Piotr Rypson, *Piramidy, słońca, labirynty. Poezja wizualna w Polsce od XVI do XVIII wieku* [Pyramids, Suns, Labyrinths. Visual Poetry in Poland from the 16th to the 18th century], Warszawa: Neriton, 2002.

12 The entry *Liberature* by Agnieszka Przybyszewska in *Zagadnienia Rodzajów Literackich* 1–2, 2007, p. 255–258, not only discusses this concept, but also contains an extensive bibliography. See also: Katarzy-

cuss this phenomenon in detail. To put it in a nutshell: the essence of liberature is the totality of the work, which integrates the semantic aspect of the text with its fabric into a semiotic unity. As Fajfer ingeniously observes, in a work of liberature, “thanks to the unity of text and the writing space, the representing world – a book, or in the case of shorter works, the surface of the page – ought to be considered as a part of the world that is represented.”¹³ This quasi-aphorism is important inasmuch as it stresses the equal significance of the two worlds – liberature is not an “artistic book,” a beautiful, material artifact, but a symbiosis of textual semiosis with the semiosis of the material vehicle. This vehicle may be constituted by an appropriately shaped volume, but also, as in the case of hypertext or so-called e-liberature, a computer interface. Just as the autopoietic metapictures described by Mitchell constitute a “reflection over the nature of visual representation,”¹⁴ library books direct our attention primarily to their physical “bookishness” and, like metapictures, “call into question the relation of language to image as an inside-outside structure.”¹⁵ Just as metafiction relates to the qualities of its plot and narration, the library book becomes a meta-book that comments upon its own bodily subjectivity.

Let us then consider the interplay of the most important elements of a work of liberature. The letter, the smallest graphical element of a work, creates meaning independently, before it joins other letters in a morpheme or a word. The kind of art which makes us particularly aware of this is concrete poetry, in which the letter is not only the vehicle of sense but also the fabric of the visual text – a seme of a textimage. However, the letter can do more than just be independent; it can amplify meaning or point towards interpretive paths. In Derrida’s *Glas*, the font indicates the source of a reference or comment: Genet, Derrida or Hegel.¹⁶

na Bazarnik, Zenon Fajfer, *Co to jest liberatura?* [What is liberature?], Kraków: Korporacja Ha!art, 2008; issue nr 4 (2006) of the journal *Autoportret. Pismo o dobrej przestrzeni*; Małgorzata Dawidek Gryglicka, ed., *Tekst-tura. Wokół nowych form tekstu literackiego i tekstu jako dzieła sztuki*; Katarzyna Bazarnik, “Liberature: A New Literary Genre?” in: *Insistent Images*, ed. Elżbieta Tabakowska, Christina Ljungberg, Olga Fischer, Amsterdam/Philadelphia: John Benjamins, 2007, p. 192–208; Katarzyna Bazarnik, “Krótkie wprowadzenie do liberatury” [A Short Introduction to Liberature], *Er(r)go* 2 (2003), p. 123–137; Katarzyna Bazarnik, ed., *Od Joyce’a do liberatury. Szkice o architekturze słowa* (also there: Zenon Fajfer “hryka, epika, dramat, liberatura” [poetry, prose, drama, liberature], 233–239); Radosław Nowakowski, *Traktat Kartograficzny czyli rzecz o liberaturze* [Treatise on Pageography or a question of liBerature], Dąbrowa Dolna 2002, 2009; and Fajfer’s above mentioned article “Liberatura. Aneks do słownika terminów literackich”.

¹³ Zenon Fajfer, “Liberum veto?”, p. 19.

¹⁴ W.J.T. Mitchell, *Picture Theory*, p. 56.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 68.

¹⁶ Jacques Derrida, *Glas*, trans. John P. Leavy, Jr. and Richard Rand, Lincoln and London: University of Nebraska Press, 1990; the original: *Glas*, Paris: Éditions Galilée, 1974.

In Stanisław Czyż's *Arw*¹⁷ or in *Oka-leczenie* (Eyes-ore)¹⁸ by Katarzyna Bazarnik and Zenon Fajfer, the shape and the form of the letter indexically ascribe particular utterances to the participants of parallel conversations in an attempt to coalesce linearity with simultaneity. The form of a letter may also, in an indexically-iconic manner, describe the quality of a meaning-carrying sound – not the notation of sound forms but the *quality* of the voice itself. In the typographical diversity of Mallarmé's *A Throw of the Dice*,¹⁹ Michel Butor notices the diversity of sound orchestration and its semantic play with silence. The size of the font corresponds to the intensity of the utterance of a word, empty spaces indicate silences, the spacing on the page the pitch of the voice, and the font type (roman or italics) the “colour” of voice transcription.²⁰

A special instance of the letter leading the reader into deeper, hidden layers of sense is exemplified by the so-called emanational texts – a form created by Zenon Fajfer and employed in shorter poetical works (for instance in “Ars Poetica” and *(O)patrzenie* [Ga(u)ze], the latter co-authored with Katarzyna Bazarnik²¹), but also in the narrative *Oka-leczenie* [Eyes-ore], in which “visible texts contain in themselves the folded structure of texts that are hidden.”²² From the perspective of the recipient, the initial letters of the text are the constituents of the hidden text, which by the same principle produces (or rather unveils) yet another hidden text, and so on and so forth through deeper and deeper layers, until the foundational word is revealed. One could say that from the perspective of its structure, the text emanates from its foundation-word through consecutive levels, unrolling the folded texts until it reaches a shape that is entirely visible.²³ This strategy goes back to the tradition of the acrostic but enriches it with “Chinese-box” spatiality and is distinguished from it in

17 Stanisław Czyż, *Arw*, with an introduction by Andrzej Wajda, ed. Dorota Niedziałkowska and Dariusz Pachocki, *Liberature* vol. 4, Kraków: Korporacja Ha!art, 2007.

18 Katarzyna Bazarnik, Zenon Fajfer, *Oka-leczenie* [Eyes-ore] (2000), *Liberature* vol. 8, Kraków: Korporacja Ha!art, 2009.

19 I have used the bilingual French-Polish edition: Stéphane Mallarmé, *Rzut kośćmi nigdy nie zniesie przy-padku*, trans. Tomasz Różycki, with an introduction by Michał Paweł Markowski, eds. Katarzyna Bazarnik and Zenon Fajfer, *Liberature* vol. 3, Kraków: Korporacja Ha!art, 2005.

20 Michel Butor, “Le livre comme objet”, in: *Essais sur le roman*, Paris: Gallimard, Collection *tel* 2000, quoted in an unpublished translation by Radosław Nowakowski after K. Bazarnik, “‘Książka jako przedmiot’ Michała Butora, czyli o liberaturze przed liberaturą” [Michel Butor’s “Le livre comme objet”, or on *Liberature* before *Liberature*], in: *Od Joyce’a do liberatury*, p. 188.

21 Katarzyna Bazarnik, Zenon Fajfer, *(O)patrzenie* [Ga(u)ze], *Liberature* vol. 1, Kraków: Krakowska Alternatywa, 2003.

22 Katarzyna Bazarnik, “Liberatura: ikoniczne oka-leczenie literatury” [*Liberature: an Iconic Ga(u)zing of Literature*], in: *Tekst-tura. Wokół nowych form tekstu literackiego i tekstu jako dzieła sztuki*, p. 25.

23 See Fajfer’s comments on invisible texts and emanationism in his “W stronę liberatury” [Towards *liberature*], in: *Ikoniczność znaku: słowo – przedmiot – obraz – gest* [Iconicity of the Sign: Word – Object – Image – Gesture], ed. Elżbieta Tabakowska, Kraków: Universitas, 2006, p. 161–179.

that “one should read the initials of words (all words from consecutively emerging layers) and not just of lines, while its entirety is a multidimensional structure reducible to a non-dimensional point.”²⁴

However, if the letter is to mean through itself, it cannot do without the surface of the page – not as a neutral substance that is no more than a writing space or even a background upon which the silhouette of a text-image surfaces, but as a partner in the spatial game: a play of black and white (sometimes colour), of spacing, of the shapes of letter configurations, geometrical arrangements, etc. “Understanding always resides beyond the words,” writes Radosław Nowakowski: “Either before. Or under. Or over. Or next to. Or between.”²⁵ Such understanding is invited by the play of the letter and the page in Bazarnik and Fajfer’s *Ga(u)ze* – already the cover, a corner of which has been torn off and inserted into the middle of the volume, calls on us to “gauze” the wound, but also to gaze carefully at the graphical and spatial events. Inside, the surface of the pages, in different shades of white, gray and black, at times seems to dominate over faded letters, at other times constitutes a mere field for a frantic play of fonts which occasionally induces an optical illusion of movement, only later to retreat into shadow and give itself completely to the foundation-word, a seed out of which the whole text emanates. In Mallarmé’s *A Throw of the Dice*, the page gives itself completely to the spectacle of fonts, and sometimes, under their pressure, merges with the following page, but also participates in the spectacle. Though the size and the shape of fonts determine a possible path of reading, the whiteness of the page is the stage for those aporetic choices: “The hidden sense moves and unfolds in the choir of pages.”²⁶

Unlike in *A Throw of the Dice*, the whiteness of a conventional page is invisible – we do not notice it in the course of reading. Attempts at functionalizing colour were already made by Laurence Sterne in his proto-liberary *Tristram Shandy*, in which an utterly black page iconically refers to the death of the protagonist. This strategy, though more varied semantically, is continued by B.S. Johnson in *Travelling People*, where the colour of the page not only connotes the progressive physical disintegration of the characters, but also becomes a metaphor for the passage of time. The narrative strategy of the page becomes more complex in *Oka-leczenie* by

24 Zenon Fajfer, “W stronę liberatury”, p. 166.

25 Radosław Nowakowski, “Dlaczego moje książki są takie jakie są” [Why My Books are What They Are], in: *Od Joyce’a do liberatury*. p. 218.

26 Stéphane Mallarmé, “Quant au livres” in: *Oeuvres complètes*, Paris: Gallimard, 1945, p. 372, quoted after Michał Paweł Markowski, “Nicość i czcionka. Wprowadzenie do lektury *Rzutu kośćmi* Stéphane’a Mallarmé,” in: Stéphane Mallarmé, *Rzut kośćmi nigdy nie zniesie przypadku*, p. 8.

Bazarnik and Fajfer. In the middle section of the trivolume (the book is composed of three subcodexes) the black colour – from the perspective of as yet unborn Dante – suggests temporal nothingness. At the same time, the blackness allows quasi-letters to pulsate, shaping a rhythmical cardiographic movement which envelops a recording of intimate experiences that escape coherent syntax. This is preceded by a conception, iconically expressed on black pages through the union of a white dot with one of the many sperm-like commas which come rushing towards it. In this part of the existential “plot” of *Oka-leczenie*, the verbal message gives way to the materiality and viscosity of the page: “Narration through pages is most visibly exploited by *Oka-leczenie* in the part which depicts the development of the embryo as a development of the text: from a comma, a full stop and a semicolon, through a series of illegible texts composed of unsegmented alphabetical magma out of which there eventually emerge intelligible words, all the way to the Polish-English palindrome composed of two figure-texts in the shapes of the letters κ and ζ.”²⁷

However, the page can provide not only a field for play but also a place for cooperation or competition. The page may juxtapose various excerpts and fragments, thus exposing contrasts, oppositions and similarities. The pages of Derrida’s *Glas* give their surface to several texts at the same time, allowing for their dialogue but also keeping them apart. The columns of commentary devoted to Hegel neighbour the commentaries on Genet, yet the space between them and inside of them is invaded by (or perhaps invites) fragments of quotations, extracts from dictionaries, framed in white and delineated by the shape of the letter, cut off mid-word only to be continued several pages later. In this way, the page becomes a terrain of multivocal dialogue and, at the same time, the reader’s journey. However, this coexistence of meanings created through textual passages does not only signify a journey through fragments of thought. Allowing for a variety of configurations of letters and texts, the surface of the page acquires a metaphorical dimension of space. In the overture to *Arw*, a “textual score,” as Piotr Marecki dubs Czycz’s polyphonic poem,²⁸ the surface of the page becomes a space where conversations, commentaries and the narrative “description of what is happening and what is being heard”²⁹ happen simultaneously, accompanied by musical pieces. In

27 Katarzyna Bazarnik, “Liberatura: ikoniczne oka-leczenie literatury” [Liberature: an Iconic Ga(u)zing of Literature], in *Tekst-tura. Wokół nowych form tekstu literackiego i tekstu jako dzieła sztuki*, p. 27. Part of the story takes place in England; κ and ζ – Katarzyna and Zenon.

28 Piotr Marecki, “Tekstowa partytura. O uwerturze do *Arwa* Stanisława Czycz” [A Textual Score. Of Overture to *Arw* by Stanisław Czycz], in: *Tekst-tura. Wokół nowych form tekstu literackiego i tekstu jako dzieła sztuki*, p. 159

29 Stanisław Czycz, *Arw*, p. 9.

the reading guide which precedes the poem, various modes of underscore (or their absence) relate indexically to particular voices.³⁰ The irregular and erratic spacing of the print reinforces the impression of simultaneous reverberation, but also of the voices competing against one another.

The ideal of liberature is realized, however, only in the complete integrity of the volume, which, in the fullness of its three-dimensionality, fulfills the dream of a total work, where meanings are constituted just as much by the fabric of the book as by its language. The space of the volume, its shape and material structure, “the representing world,” becomes a part of the message concerning external reality: “[...] a liberarist must enbook the world. He must place and fit into the book the multidimensional world of simultaneous events. Not in the text (the text is by nature flat and restrictive), but in the book – a multidimensional object-thing of simultaneous events, where a text is only one of the planes of events.”³¹ (*Nondescription of the World* created by Radosław Nowakowski, the author of the above words, and published in leporello format, where consecutively opened pages, through their spatial indeterminacy, remind one of the works of Escher and of the Moebius band, appears as a malleable metaphor which creates folds and loops of reality. In *Sienkiewicz Street*, written by the same author, the plot is delineated by a stroll taken by a casual traveller through the main street of Kielce. The book’s codex form is only apparent – to almost literally enter the text, the reader must unfold a 10.5 meter long concertinaed sheet of paper together with its side wings. There, the text traces the complex trail of the journey: of objects, graphically surfacing out of the text, and of the thoughts of the protagonist as well as of the people he passes by.

Oka-leczenie (Eyes-ore) comes the closest to the realization of the ideal total work. In this book, the letter, the page and the volume create an integrated source of meanings.³² The very structure of the book, three

30 A similar strategy is employed in the hospital scenes in *Oka-leczenie* by Bazarnik and Fajfer.

31 Radosław Nowakowski, *Traktat kartograficzny czyli rzecz o liberaturze* [*Treatise on Pageography or a Question of liBerature*], quoted after Agnieszka Przybyszewska, “Niszczyć aby budować. O nowych jakościach liberatury i hipertekstu” [Destroy to Build: On New Qualities of Liberature and Hypertext], in: *Tekst-tura. Wokół nowych form tekstu literackiego i tekstu jako dzieła sztuki*, p. 47.

32 An insightful reading of *Oka-leczenie* is given by Agnieszka Przybyszewska in her essay “Liberacka analiza tekstu (o czytaniu *Oka-leczenia* Zenona Fajfera i Katarzyny Bazarnik)” [A Liberary Textual Analysis: on Reading *Oka-leczenie* by Zenon Fajfer and Katarzyna Bazarnik], in *Polska literatura najnowsza – poza kanonem* [Contemporary Polish Literature: Beyond the Canon], ed. Paulina Kierzek, Łódź: Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Łódzkiego, 2008, pp. 190–218.

[A modified reading is offered by Przybyszewska in an article written after the official publication of *Oka-leczenie* in “Liberacki kanon literatury. O czytaniu ‘Oka-leczenia’ Zenona Fajfera i Katarzyny Bazarnik (podwójne zapiski z lektury dwukrotnej czyli w dialogu z samą sobą)” [Liberatic Canon of Literature. On Reading Zenon Fajfer and Katarzyna Bazarnik’s ‘Eyes-ore’ (Double Notes After the Sec-

subcodexes merged into one, forces upon the reader a sense of the circularity of the tactile experience – the opening of the book in fact never ends, since the closing of one part begins the opening of another. On a very basic level, this tactile circularity communicates the existential cycle of death, conception, birth, death, conception, and so on. The page numbering (with negative numbers in the scenes of agony and positive in the part concerning Dante's birth) cements the trivolume not only with respect to the dimension of time, but also enriches this dimension with the space of an intangible experience of *chora*, a pulsating rhythm of intimacy of the mother-to-be (the Roman page numbering of the middle section). The emanational text (for instance, in the first volume concerning death) grants an insight into the fading consciousness of a dying man. Yet it also allows one to hear what is hidden from the participants of a banal conversation in a hospital: an intimate exchange between a couple, which leads to an erotic finale. In the second codex, on the other hand, an invisible text emerges out of conversations in the maternity ward of a hospital – “a formal analogy of the prenatal development and the growth of a child.”³³ At the same time, the emanational strategy submerges the reader into an additional iconosymbolic space which emerges between the grapheme (the letter), the lexicon and the syntax, which further amplifies the internal integrity of the trivolume: each level of reading is rooted in the one that precedes it. In its particular way, *Oka-leczenie* realizes the postulate of Mallarmé: “the book, a total expansion of the letter, ought to directly and thanks to its equivalents, extrapolate movement and spacing, and begin some game that affirms fiction.”³⁴

The integrity of the volume in the aforementioned texts is achieved through the more or less complex permeation and cooperation, on various levels, of the letter, the page, the picture, space and their structured unions. Yet, a kind of *à rebours* integrity of the volume can also be achieved through destruction. The volume can dominate the page, subjugate it completely and even demand its material annihilation. Raymond Queneau's *One Hundred Thousand Billion Poems* is composed of pages cut up into strips; each strip contains one verse of a sonnet. The destruction of the page allows for the creation of a countless number of combinations of verses, each forming a separate poem. A different instance of

ond Reading or in Dialogue with Myself)” forthcoming in *Halart* no. 30 (2010), a commemorative 10-anniversary issue on liberature. Ed. note.]

33 Zenon Fajfer, “W stronę liberatury”, p. 174.

34 Stéphane Mallarmé, *Poésies et autres textes*, Paris, Librairie Générale Française, p. 213; quoted after Michał Paweł Markowski, *Efekt inskrypcji. Jacques Derrida i literatura*. Bydgoszcz: Studio Φ & Wydawnictwo Homini, 1997, p. 252. See also a reference by the coauthor of *Oka-leczenie* in: K. Bazarnik, “Liberatura: ikonizacja oka-leczenia literatury”, p. 39.

self-destruction – a kind of “negative disintegration” of the whole volume – is exemplified by the novel *The Unfortunates* published in a box which contains bindings of pages. The contingency of reading, enforced by the structure of the volume, is a mimetic index of the randomness of reality, both external and represented. This randomness is rendered by the physical makeup of the book: 27 loose bindings which, apart from the first and the last “are intended to be read in random order.”³⁵

It is striking, however, that literature, which to such an extent depends on the materiality of its fabric, is able to escape that materiality and in a rhizomatic movement relocate itself into the virtual space of the internet. Before that space became technologically available, there appeared books which intuitively sensed its advent and, still bound by the physical integrity of the codex, attempted to overcome the limitations of their own material form and space, employing – instead of rhizomatic technology – a rhizomatic technique (of narration, depiction and argument). Among such proto-hypertexts, we find, of course, Laurence Sterne’s *Tristram Shandy*, Walter Benjamin’s nomadic *The Arcades Projects*, some stories by Borges, Ronald Sukenick’s non-linear novels, devoid of cause-effect relations (for instance, *Bossa Nova*), or the consciously metatextual rhizomatic *Mille Plateaux* by Deleuze and Guattari.³⁶ More clearly formulated attempts at decentralization and de-hierarchization of the narrative, stripping it of its “progress,” its classical core, are found governing Cortázar’s *Hopscotch* or Johnson’s *The Unfortunates*, yet there, paradoxically, the rhizomatic principle is bound by the complete freedom of choice – the rhizome is chaotic, the text does not mark the point of convergence (the link) between the paths that the reader travels. However, it is obvious that these attempts at applying “the medium of the book to the simultaneity and multiplicity of the strata of our perception [...] within the framework of the ontology of the traditional text are possible only to a certain extent.”³⁷ The proper element of the rhizomatic text is the virtual space of the internet; let us add – its literary embodiment is the hypertext novel, a phenomenon with over 20 years of history. Hyperfiction defeats the linearity of a codex book – not only does it allow for a non-sequential reading, but actually enforces it.

35 B.S. Johnson, a note on the inside of *The Unfortunates* box.

36 Concerning the relations of *Mille Plateaux* with hypertext, see: George P. Landow, “Hypertext and Critical Theory,” in: George P. Landow, ed., *Hypertext 3.0: Critical Theory and New Media in an Era of Globalization*, Baltimore, London: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2006, p. 33–48.

37 Karin Wenz, “Der Text im Zeitalter seiner technischen Reproduzierbarkeit,” in: Winfried Nöth and Karin Wenz, eds., *Medientheorie und die digitalen Medien*, Kassel: Kassel University Press, 1998, p. 159–176; quoted from the Polish edition in: *Ekrany piśmienności. O przyjemnościach tekstu w epoce nowych mediów*, p. 105.

The requirements posed by liberature shape a new kind of recipient. The experience and the behaviour of an empirical reader in the traditional mode are rather precisely programmed: he follows the footsteps of the model reader through the paths delineated by the text, and his task is to approach his virtual prototype as closely as possible. A certain variation and at the same time a disturbance in this structure of expectations and strategies was the recognition of open works (Umberto Eco) or *scriptible* texts (Roland Barthes) which introduce uncertainty and play into those structured expectations and modes of behaviour. But neither the open work in Eco's understanding nor Barthes' *scriptible* text negates the structures of response written into the texts – instead, they form a spectrum of parallel paths and alternatives. Certainly, however, both the open work and the *scriptible* text do constitute a qualitative change in “programming” the reader's experience: his active and creative participation becomes necessary in the “production of senses” and, in a way, is written into the structure of the work by appropriately devised gaps or omissions.

The library text is the crowning of this tendency: here the visuality plays a role just as important as the semantics of language. Such a text enforces a reading which is nonsequential, nonlinear, and which enforces (more or less conscious, more or less contingent) decisions. The reader, whether he likes it or not, takes over a large portion of the author's responsibilities; the author, on the other hand, abdicates the position of an absolute creator, a final authority on meaning, and assumes the role of a “designer of the experience of response”³⁸ and his position is “‘reduced’ to one of the many co-creators of the work.”³⁹ The recipient, as Ryszard Kluszczyński has put it, “turns out to be a fragment of the same structure/process that he appeared to be ‘external to, a fragment that is decisive both of the shape that this process eventually assumes and of the sense that it realizes’.”⁴⁰ The role of the reader described in this way exceeds the classical distinction between the Dionysian and the Apol-

38 Liliana Bieszczad, “Sztuka w epoce cybernetycznej: pomiędzy estetyzacją rzeczywistości a ontologizacją sztuki” [Art in the Cybernetic Era: Between Aesthetizing Reality and Ontologizing Art], in: *Piękno w sieci. Estetyka a nowe media*, ed. Krystyna Wilkoszewska, Kraków: Universitas, 1999, p. 95. Cf. Roy Ascott: “The revolution in art which prompts these questions lies in the radically new role of the artist. Instead of creating, expressing, or transmitting content, he is now involved in designing contexts within which the observer or viewer can construct experience and meaning,” Roy Ascott, “From Appearance to Apparition: Communication and Culture in the Cybersphere,” *Leonardo Electronic Almanach*, Vol 1, No. 2, October 1993.

39 Liliana Bieszczad, “Sztuka w epoce cybernetycznej”, p. 95.

40 Ryszard W. Kluszczyński, “Interaktywność – właściwość odbioru czy nowa jakość sztuki/kultury” (Interactivity – a Property of Reception or a New Quality of Art/Culture) in: *Estetyczne przestrzenie współczesności*, ed. Anna Zeidler-Janiszewska, Warszawa: Instytut Kultury, 1996, p. 145.

lonian reader: the reader of liberature, to a greater or lesser degree, becomes an interactive and aleatory recipient.

A multiplicity of parallel paths of the experience of reading is written into the very structure of the library text. The order of reception arranges the text into sequences of perception and extracts certain (rather than other) collisions of senses in the work; one cannot innocently return to another sequence. Interactivity becomes if not an aesthetic category then a behaviour of the recipient written into the text – the kind of behaviour which is unpredictable to the last and responsible for the unfolding of the text in the reading experience, and thus also for determining its final structure in a particular act of reception. The library text disturbs the structures of expectations founded upon the syntagmatic order and the strategies of choices particular to the traditional linear text. If there is any order inscribed in its structure, it is one based on simultaneity, coincidence and wandering. The aleatory principle and the spatial rhizome appear in place of the logocentric model; this spatiality can be constituted by physical space as in the case of “paper” liberature, or virtual space, as in the case of e-liberature (hypertext). It is not difficult to notice that the dominant principle of the construction of the library text is the principle of simultaneity, adopted from the visual arts.

Simultaneity is not only the property of the most complex forms, where textual intentionality, viscosity of language and the spatiality of the volume create an integrated entirety (the simultaneity of the material, iconic and verbal messages); it is also the organizing principle in texts where the iconic element is absent or reduced to the size of the font or the demarcation and placement of sub-texts coinciding on the same page (the simultaneity of verbal messages). In each case, it is responsible for the integrity of the hybrid elements of the work.

One could presume that such simultaneity of the two ontological orders (the intentional and the material/visual) will inevitably result only in the aporetics of the reading experience. Yet it is not so: both orders can compete against one another, but they can also cooperate, creating a different reading experience. In other words, the simultaneity of the hybrid can project two vectors: it can construct a teleological union of the two aforementioned orders of semiotic media (iconic and symbolic), but it can also have a diametrically opposed effect: it can lead to the diffusion of meanings in the experience of reading. In either case, the reading experience enters realms unknown to the reception of conventional literature.



Liberature

Some people have strongly believed, and some still do, that the whole world can be contained in one Book, expressed in one Equation, explained by one all-embracing Theory. Even if they err, those people open up new perspectives, widen horizons and pave new ways which others may follow safely after them. They will always be ready to take spiritual risks and enter the unknown. They are not deterred by the prospect of many years' work and not paralysed by the fear of unfavourable response. They are characterised by a rich imagination, unusual courage and intense desire for totality, complemented by the ability to look at "old" and "well-known" matters from unexpected angles.

In the passing century one of these people was James Joyce, the writer who in *Ulysses* showed what we are really like, taking off the fig-leaf that had covered not our genitals, but our minds. Afterwards he wanted more: in *Finnegans Wake* he merged all times and places, all events and languages, all people and nations, so that we could continue the construction of the Tower of Babel, which was stopped just after its foundations had been laid. He was indeed a true Author of Words, the creator of thousands of completely new lexemes formed in the processes of genuine literary chemistry and physics.

Appendix to a Dictionary of Literary Terms

There are only a few writers who have been so radical and have had such ambitious goals as Joyce. For the majority of them, the creative act has been nothing more than inventing a plot, embellishing it with a few aphorisms and waiting patiently for their work to be placed on the obligatory reading list. They are not interested in searching for new forms, taking artistic risks and breaking social taboos. They always follow a well-known route prescribed by literary 'guide-books', a path so clear-cut that it is absolutely impossible to get lost.

And there are others who, indeed, would love to invent something, if it were only possible. However, they believe that nothing original can be developed and we are inevitably doomed to pastiche, quotation, intertextuality, and writing about writing. This act of extreme creative despair has become a widespread canon, not only in literature and, nobody has yet found any antidote for this spiritual anorexia.

Has literature really exhausted itself? Or is it possibly a momentary exhaustion of *littérateurs*?

*

I believe that the crisis of contemporary literature has its roots in its focus on the text (in negligence of the physical shape and structure of the book), and within the text, the focus on its meaning and euphony. It is indeed extremely difficult to come up with something original when one pays attention only to the above-mentioned aspects of a literary work. Even then, however, it is not impossible. There are still areas that have been hardly explored and others where no *littérateur* has ever set foot – true literary El Dorados.

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If, then, the major source of crisis in contemporary literature is the split between the structure of the text and the physical structure of the book, and identifying literature only with the text (like the Car-

tesian “Cogito, ergo sum”, which totally ignores the bodily aspect of human existence), the only way of overcoming it is to reconsider such fundamental notions as: “form”, “time” and “space”, “literary work” and “book”. Perhaps it is the established dogmas that still paralyse writers’ creativity and contribute to the present condition of literature.

Therefore, writers must ask themselves a few basic questions:

1. Is language the only medium of literature? Or could an actual piece of paper be such a medium as well, a piece of paper that the writer is going to cover with black writing? Or perhaps, for some important reason, the page should be black and the writing white? Who said that the colour of the page must always be white? This is only a convention that writers automatically follow.
2. Does the definition of form understood as “a particular way of ordering words and sentences” (*Słownik terminów literackich*, [A Dictionary of Literary Terms] ed. by M. Głowinski et al., Wrocław: Ossolineum, 1989) also include the physical shape of letters and sentences? Or does the word amount only to its sound and meaning in the world dominated by the culture expressing itself in the Latin alphabet?

The majority of writers never reflect on the kind of typeface that will be used to print their work and yet it is one of the book’s component parts. It is as if the composer wrote a piece of music but the decision as to what instruments should be used was left to musicians and the conductor. This sometimes happens today, but then the composer is fully aware of the consequences (that is, of involving musicians in his creative process). However, when the writer ignores such questions and leaves the decision to a publisher, he does not do so because of an aesthetic theory he subscribes to, but because he does not recognise the importance of the question. By doing so he proves to be ‘deaf’, as it were, since the typeface is like tone in music.

Of course, one can answer that it results from his full trust in the printer, who is an expert in this field. Well, the printer is an expert because the writer does not even try to learn about it. He is usually unaware what potential is hidden in various layouts and different typography when applied to his work (by typography I understand both the arrangement of words and verses for which writers, especially poets, sometimes feel responsible, and the neglected typeface).

A simple experiment involving printing, e.g., a Shakespeare sonnet in a loud type used in advertising, would prove how important these matters are – the dissonance would be obvious. But one could easily think of an artistically more fruitful use of a particular typeface; for example, the Polish national anthem printed in Polish, but

with Gothic type and Cyrillic alphabet – a device that would arouse strong emotions and provoke a response from every Polish reader.

I am strongly convinced that, sooner or later, writers will have to enrich their repertoire with typography. Otherwise, one would have to agree with Raymond Federman and admit that one shares the authorship of one's masterpieces with the editor, typesetter, and manuscript reviser; and what writer would like to do that?

3. The above-mentioned Polish dictionary of literary terms defines "form" as an established model according to which particular literary works are created and "literary work" as a meaningful creation in language (an utterance) fulfilling the criteria of literariness accepted in a given time and culture, and, in particular, the criterion of congruence with generally accepted standards of artistry. Do these definitions also encompass a reflection on the physical shape of the book? Do the shape and structure of the book constitute an integral part of the literary work, or are they only the concern of printers, desktop publishers, binders, and editors, and a matter of complying with generally accepted standards?

I can hardly imagine that anything original could be created in the nearest future without a serious reflection on what, in fact, is a book. Is it, as the Polish dictionary describes, a material object in the form of bound sheets of paper forming a volume, containing a text in words recorded in graphic signs, which serves to convey various kinds of information, or is it something more?

Shouldn't the shape of the cover, shape and direction of the writing, format, colour, the number of pages, words, and even letters be considered by the writer just like any other element of his work, an element requiring as much attention as choosing rhymes and thinking up a plot?

The writer must finally understand that these matters are far too serious to be left light-heartedly for others to decide. I am not suggesting that he should be a printer and a bookbinder as well. But I believe that it is his responsibility to consider the physical shape of the book and all the matters entailed, just as he considers the text (if not to the same extent, he should at least bear them in mind). The shape of the book should not be determined by generally accepted conventions but result from the author's autonomous decision just as actions of his characters and the choice of words originate from him. The physical and spiritual aspects of the literary work, that is, the book and the text printed in it should complement each other to create a harmonious effect.

Without reconsidering these matters and drawing appropriate conclusions, it will be extremely difficult to bring about any significant innovation; for example, in treating time and space, the two concepts so fundamental to literature.

For what is the space of the literary work? According to the above-mentioned dictionary, nothing. There is no such entry at all; there is only space *in* a literary work, which, in other words (and slightly simplifying the question), means the setting of the plot. But the first, elementary space one deals with, even before one starts reading a work, is ... an actual book – a material object. The outward appearance of the book, the number and arrangement of its pages (if there need to be pages), the kind of cover (if there need to be a cover) – this is the space of the literary work that includes all its other spaces. And, unlike those other spaces, this space is very real.

Perhaps a comparison with contemporary theatre practice will help clarify what I mean here. The greatest reformers of the 20th century theatre began creating their work by constructing its space. For people like Kantor and Grotowski this was the first and fundamental matter. Especially Grotowski was consistent in this respect; each of his performances had its own autonomous space, independent of the space of the theatre where it was performed, that immediately established a fundamental relationship between the actors and the audience (for example, in his famous *Kordian*¹, spectators were seated on hospital beds and the performing space had nothing in common with the traditional stage). The fictional space of the presented work was imbedded into the real, pre-prepared space (in *Kordian* it was a lunatic asylum), which produced an astonishing effect in which form and content were unified.

I expect a comparable treatment of space from writers. The writer should construct the space of his work anew, and each of his works should have its own distinct structure. Let it even be a traditional volume, so long as it constitutes an integral whole together with the content of the book.

¹ [Editor's note: *Kordian* (1833), a drama by one of the three greatest Romantic Polish poets Juliusz Słowacki].

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The question of time poses a slightly different problem. In the above-mentioned dictionary there are three different entries concerning time: time of action, time of narration, and time within the literary work, but there is no time of the literary work, that is, the time of... reading. Somebody might call this splitting hairs, but the time of open works, when the reader becomes nearly a co-author, calls for such a notion. If the reader participates in the process of creating a work, how else can we describe what is happening with time when he or she fancies to read a book backwards (as, for example, G.C. Jung read *Ulysses*)? Or when a linear book is read non-linearly? Do existing terms suffice to account for that? And how can one accurately account for the notion of time in books such as Cortázar's *Hopscotch* in which, with the author's blessing, the reader himself decides on the sequence of particular chapters?

In the literatures which use the Latin, Greek or Hebrew alphabets time is already determined to a great extent by the nature of these alphabets, that is, by the direction of reading and writing. In the majority of works events are arranged linearly, which does not correspond to our simultaneous and multi-level perception (Egyptian hieroglyphs and Chinese ideograms are closer to reality in this respect). Despite this nature of the alphabetic writing, I am convinced that it is possible to overcome the difficulties resulting from it, to create real space within the text and to represent real simultaneity of events without resorting to graphic means. Yet, this is much easier to achieve when we abandon the traditional model of the book, which, in fact, determines a particular way of reading (and consequently the perception of time and space) no less than the alphabet does.

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Why, then, don't writers abandon the traditional form of a book? Probably by force of habit and inertia. As if artists have forgotten that the present, codex form of the book has not been in existence since time immemorial, but came about as a result of economic and technological factors rather than artistic choices. And perhaps its days are coming to an end, just as the eras of clay tablets and papyri are gone.

We can only hope that a future masterpiece will change the present situation and the attitude of writers to the material aspect of the

book, which they have ignored so far. This is, I believe, the only way of saving hardcopy books from obliteration by electronic media.

It does not have to be an all-embracing Book, but it should at least be a Book embracing the whole of... the book, in which all the elements, not only the text, are meaningful.

Be it called 'literature' or rather 'liberature', the matter of terminology is of secondary importance. This is a concern for theoreticians, not writers. Perhaps we could find a compromise solution, for example, acknowledge that beside the three major literary modes: lyric, epic and dramatic (which, by no means, suffice to describe the richness of literature), there is one more that may be called 'liberatic' that would include all the kinds of works discussed above. But, whatever the case, I believe that this fourth, still officially unacknowledged, mode will infuse new life into literature. This genre may be the future of literature.

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LIBERATURE

or Total Literature

(Appendix to
the “Appendix to
the *Dictionary of
Literary Terms*”)

I have already printed this, in the previous decade even.¹ But the font was different, of varying degrees of contrast. This time around it will be printed in monoweight typeface, which in practical terms amounts to a new text. The change from a typeface with considerable contrast to a monoweight typeface is as serious as the change of one’s sex, and anyone who does not feel this will have trouble finishing my article without damage to their health.

The format, type of paper and illustrations are also different; here the same words breathe differently. To tell you the truth, there are also many new words, some have been moved and others have disappeared entirely. So, Dear Reader, even if you have an impression that you have already read this “somewhere else”, I want to reassure you that you have never read it.

And you, Dear Reader who can’t help an ironic smile, should know that I am well aware of all the traps in this kind of thinking. Just as you, I wouldn’t consider Mickiewicz’s epic *Pan Tadeusz*² printed in sans serif type as something different than *Pan Tadeusz* printed in serif type such as Times New Roman. But this holds true only for the texts of those writers thanks to whom using the term “literature” (that is something written down in letters and intended for reading) has any sense at all.

For, paradoxically, the main organ of perception for the literature of our culture is... the ear. This is visible (audible?) not

only in a writers' attitude, but also in the attitude of critics and scholars, which is exemplified by such respectable institutions as *Słownik terminów literackich* (Dictionary of Literary Terms) edited by Janusz Sławiński³ (for which I dared to write this Appendix) or a philosophy that questions the importance of the typographic aspect for the literary work propagated by Roman Ingarden, the most influential Polish aesthetician. Well, such an attitude has got quite a rich philosophical tradition that reaches back to Plato; and it is likely that even Derrida with his obsessive passion for turning everything whatsoever into writing (a tendency for exaggeration so typical of philosophers) won't change this state of affairs.

But to the point; I am moving to the text proper now. We are going to skip the pompous introduction about the Raiders of the all-embracing Book and the panegyric passage about Joyce the Hero. We will start from paragraph three, that is, an attack on the distinguished literati, and then launch an offensive on postmodernism. I hasten to add, however, that the attack will be launched not from the Ramparts of the Holy Trinity⁴, as is usual in our country, but from the trenches of a future that has already overcome the miseries of postmodernism. Let us then begin with the following words: "There are only a few writers..."

There are only a few writers who have been so radical and have had such ambitious goals as Joyce. For the majority of them, the creative act has been nothing more than inventing a plot, embellishing it with a few aphorisms and waiting patiently for their work to be placed on the obligatory reading list. They are not interested in the search for new forms, taking artistic risks and breaking social taboos. They always follow a well-known route prescribed by literary 'guide-books', a path so clear-cut that it is absolutely impossible to get lost.

And there are others who, in fact, would love to invent something, if it were only possible. However, they believe that nothing original can be invented and we are inevitably doomed to pastiche, quotation, intertextuality, and writing about writing. This act of extreme creative despair has become a widespread canon, not only in literature, and no antidote has yet been found for this spiritual anorexia.

Has literature really exhausted itself? Or is it possibly a momentary exhaustion of *littérateurs*?

*

I believe that the crisis of contemporary literature has its roots in its focus on the text (in negligence of the physical shape and structure of the book), and within the text, the focus on its meaning and euphony. It is indeed extremely difficult to come up with something original when one pays attention only to the above-mentioned aspects of a literary work. But even then it is not impossible. There are still areas that have been hardly explored and others where no *littérateur* has ever set foot – true literary El Dorados. We will return to that subject later.

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If, then, the major source of crisis in contemporary literature is the split between the structure of the text and the physical structure of the book, and identifying literature only with the text (like the Cartesian “*Cogito, ergo sum*”, which totally ignores the bodily aspect of human existence), the only way of overcoming it is to reconsider such fundamental notions as: “form”, “time” and “space”, “literary work” and “book”. Perhaps it is the established dogmas that still paralyse writers’ creativity and contribute to the present condition of literature.

Therefore, writers must ask themselves a few basic questions:

1. Is language the only MEDIUM of literature? Or could an actual piece of paper be such a medium as well, a piece of paper that the writer is going to cover with black writing? Or perhaps, for some important reason, the page should be black and the writing white? Who said that the colour of the page must always be white? This is only a convention that writers automatically follow.
2. Does the definition of FORM understood as “a particular way of ordering words and sentences” (*Słownik terminów literackich*) also include the physical shape of letters and sentences? Or does the word amount only to its sound and meaning in the world dominated by the culture expressing itself in the Latin alphabet?

The majority of writers never reflect on the kind of typeface that will be used to print their work and yet it is one of the book’s component parts. It is as if the composer wrote a piece of music but the decision as to what instruments should be used was left to musicians and the conductor. This sometimes happens today, but then the composer is fully aware of the consequences (that is, of involving musicians in his creative process). However, when the writer ignores such questions

and leaves the decision to a publisher, he does not do so because of an aesthetic theory he subscribes to, but because he does not recognise the importance of the question. By doing so he proves to be 'deaf', as it were, since the typeface is like tone in music.

Of course, one can answer that it results from his full trust in the printer, who "undoubtedly" is an expert in this field. Well, the printer is an expert because the writer does not even try to learn about it. He is usually unaware what potential is hidden in various layouts and different typography when applied to his work (by typography, totally neglected by the authors of the above-mentioned dictionary, I understand both the arrangement of words and verses for which writers, especially poets, sometimes feel responsible, and the neglected typeface). But:

Denat Denat DENAT Denat **Denat** and  are not quite the same thing.

Neither are: *Dante* Dante  DANTE  and *Dante*.

But a simple experiment involving printing, e.g. a Shakespeare sonnet in a loud type used in advertising, would suffice to prove how important these matters are – the dissonance would be obvious. But one could easily think of an artistically more fruitful use of a particular kind of typeface; for example, the Polish national anthem printed in Polish, but with Gothic type and Cyrillic alphabet – a device that would arouse strong emotions and provoke a response from every Polish reader. Another example could be a novel with no narratorial parts and ascribing to each character a different typeface corresponding to his or her tone and intensity of voice (if the ear could substitute the eye in the perception of the literary work, why couldn't the eye take it over now?).

Personally, I am strongly convinced that sooner or later writers will have to enrich their repertoire with typography. Otherwise, one would have to agree with Raymond Federman and admit that one shares the authorship of one's masterpieces with the editor, typesetter, and manuscript reviser; and what writer would like that?

3. The above-mentioned Polish dictionary of literary terms defines FORM as “an established model according to which particular literary works are created” and LITERARY WORK as “a meaningful creation in language (an utterance) fulfilling the criteria of literariness accepted in a given time and culture, and, in particular, the criterion of congruence with generally accepted standards of artistry” (following the above quoted dictionary). Do these definitions also encompass a reflection on the physical shape of the book? Do the shape and structure of the book constitute an integral part of the literary work, or are they only the concern of printers, desktop publishers, binders, and editors, and a matter of complying with generally accepted standards?

I can hardly imagine that anything original could be created in the nearest future without a serious reflection on what, in fact, is THE BOOK. Is it, as the Polish dictionary describes, “a material object in the form of bound sheets of paper forming a volume, containing a text in words recorded in graphic signs, which serves to convey various kinds of information”, or is it something more? If one complied with the above quoted definition, one could not consider B.S. Johnson's *The Unfortunates* to be a book as it is printed on loose sheets placed in a box.

Shouldn't the shape of the cover (if there needs to be a cover), kind of paper (or other material), shape and direction of writing, format, colour, the number of pages, words, and even letters be considered by the writer just like any other element of his work, an element requiring as much attention as choosing rhymes and thinking up a plot?

The writer must finally understand that these matters are far too serious to be left light-heartedly for others to decide. I am not suggesting that he should be a printer and a bookbinder as well. But I believe that it is his responsibility to consider the physical shape of the book and all the matters entailed, just as he considers the text (if not to the same extent, he should at least bear them in mind). The shape of the book should not be determined by generally accepted conventions but result from the author's autonomous decision just as actions of his characters and the choice of words originate from him. The physical and spiritual aspects of the literary work, that is, the book and the text printed in it should complement each other to create a harmonious effect.

Without reconsidering these matters and drawing appropriate conclusions, it will be extremely difficult to bring about any true innovation; for example, in treating time and space, the two concepts so fundamental to literature.

For what is THE SPACE OF THE LITERARY WORK? According to the above-mentioned dictionary, nothing. There is no such entry at all; there is only “space in a literary work”, which, in other words (and slightly simplifying the question), means the setting of the plot. But the first, elementary space one deals with, even before one starts reading a work, is... an actual book – a material object. Pages covered with print placed between the covers – this is the space of the literary work that includes all its other spaces. And, unlike those other spaces, this space is very real.

Perhaps a comparison with contemporary theatre practice will help clarify this point. The greatest reformers of the 20th century theatre began creating their performances by constructing their space. For people like Kantor and Grotowski, this was a fundamental matter. Especially Grotowski was consistent in this respect; each of his plays had its own autonomous space, independent of the space of the theatre where it was performed, that immediately established a basic relationship between the actors and the audience (in his famous *Kordian*⁵, for example, spectators were seated on hospital beds and the performing space had nothing in common with the traditional stage). The fictional space of the presented work was imbedded into the real, pre-prepared space (in *Kordian* it was a lunatic asylum), which produced an astonishing effect in which form and content were unified.

I expect a comparable treatment of space from writers. The writer should construct the space of his work anew, and each of his works should have its own distinct structure. Let it even be a traditional volume, so long as it constitutes an integral whole together with the content of the book.

The question of time poses a slightly different problem. In the above-mentioned *Dictionary* there are three different entries concerning time: “time of action”, “time of narration”, and “time within the literary work”, but there is no TIME OF THE LITERARY WORK, that

is, the time of... reading. Somebody might call this splitting hairs, but the time of open works, when the reader becomes nearly a co-author, calls for such a notion. If the reader participates in the process of creating a work, how else can we describe what is happening with time when he or she fancies to read a book backwards (as, for example, G.C. Jung read *Ulysses*)? Or when a linear book is read non-linearly? Do existing terms suffice to account for that? And how can one accurately account for the notion of time in books such as Cortázar's *Hopscotch*, in which, with the author's blessing, the reader himself decides on the sequence of particular chapters?

In the literatures which use the Latin, Greek or Hebrew alphabets, time is already determined to a great extent by the nature of these alphabets, that is, by the direction of reading and writing. In the majority of works, events are arranged linearly, which does not correspond to our simultaneous and multi-level perception (Egyptian hieroglyphs and Chinese ideograms are closer to reality in this respect). If one abandoned the traditional model of the book, which, in fact, determines a particular way of reading (and consequently the perception of time and space) no less than the alphabet does, this would facilitate a change in this respect.

*

Why, then, don't writers abandon the traditional form of a book? Probably by force of habit and inertia. As if artists have forgotten that the present, codex form of the book has not been in existence since time immemorial, but came about as a result of economic and technological factors rather than artistic choices. And perhaps its days are coming to an end, just as the eras of clay tablets and papyri are gone.

We can only hope that a future masterpiece will change the present situation and the attitude of writers to the material aspect of the book, which they have ignored so far. This is, I believe, the only way of saving hardcopy books from obliteration by electronic media.

It does not have to be an all-embracing Book, as some dreamers have envisaged, but it should at least be a Book embracing the whole of... the book, in which all the elements, not only the text, are meaningful.

Be it called 'literature' or rather '**liberature**', the matter of terminology is of secondary importance. This is a concern for theoreticians, not writers. Perhaps beside the three major literary modes: lyric, epic and dramatic (which, in fact, do not suffice to describe the richness of literature), there is a fourth which would pertain to all the matters discussed above. But, whatever the case, I believe that this fourth, still officially unacknowledged, mode will infuse new life into literature. This genre may be the future of literature.

* * *

And now the promised Eldorado. Studying maps and guidebooks leading there will probably bring little profit but chances are that it will at least provide protection from a tropigraphic disease.

A signal that was intended to clue the "gold-diggers" in the vicinity of the treasure left in the original version of Appendix to a *Dictionary of Literary Terms* consisted of a sentence following a passage about the linearity of alphabetic inscription and the inconveniences resulting from this. The sentence, cut out from that version, ran as follows: "Despite the nature of alphabetic writing, I am convinced that it is possible to overcome the difficulties resulting from it, and to create real space within the text and to represent real simultaneity of events without resorting to graphic means". Now the time has come to explain what I meant by these words. In order to do that, I will use another article, printed in this decade (of course, in a different typeface, and sometimes in different words).⁶

It is striking that in the era of quantum theory, dark matter, molecular biology and knowledge of the infinite depths of the human unconscious, that is, fairly advanced knowledge about a multidimensional Invisible World, literary texts still remain flat and on the surface as a prehistoric image of the Earth (I mean its purely physical appearance resulting from the structure of the inscription). But text does not have to be a flat surface; it can – just as the surface of the ocean – hide a true and physical depth.

Despite all limitations imposed on writers by language and notation, it is possible, let me stress this, even with the use of that inconspicuous, linear alphabetic writing, to create in the text both three-dimensional space, to reflect true simultaneity of events as well as to think

up a form capable of “showing” n-dimensional space of the Non-visible. The Invisible but present. Existing just as human thoughts. Or a baby in the womb. That is, a form which would unveil only that which can be unveiled, the rest remaining in darkness.

I hasten to explain that I do not mean hypertext, so popular today (I consider it only as a more developed variant of such works as T.S. Eliot’s *Waste Land* or Nabokov’s *Pale Fire* practically composed of footnotes), which emerged from reflection on new possibilities offered to writers by computers. Very likely what I write about here does not even have a name since new names come when new works are created.

Since the only work of such in-visible literature that I know of is *Oka-leczenie*, a triple-volume book written by myself and Katarzyna Bazarnik (the book existing since 2000 in as “many” as nine prototype copies), I am forced by necessity to write about my own book. Probably commenting on one’s own writing is not often practiced, nor is it particularly approved of, but, admittedly, it has some – good or bad – tradition. I am not going to enumerate any names now; I will only justify my decision by the interest of the case that requires me to throw full light on the question. And it is widely known that light may be not only a stream of photons but also a wave. In order to grasp properly the “wave” nature of the literary work, it was necessary to take care of its “photons”. Only in terms of literature can the present reflection be properly understood, just as the spiritual will reveal its essence only against the background of the material.

I hit upon the idea of un-seeable/invisible literature in 1993 in un-usual in-comparable circumstances: when I witnessed my father’s death, and soon after the birth of my son. It was then that I fully realized the obvious fact that such events as death and birth could not be adequately described, that words alone could not convey their essence even in some part, and that perhaps, that could be expressed only through form but, alas, such a form did not even exist. Setting out on a quest for such a form, I knew that the only form capable of rising to that challenge (if I manage to find it at all) would be that which would preserve the whole mystery, that would not reveal more than necessary. I wished for the impossible: to render the very moment of death, the moment when the man is exactly In Between – when he has not fully died yet but is not longer alive, when both worlds overlap in the mind of the dying person, accompanied by his relatives un-

aware of what's going on. I also wished to express the other impossibility – the moment of birth, when It is still There, but It will be Here in a little while, emerging from the Invisible into the Visible. And the third moment, or rather the moment preceding all other moments, when the two bodies participate in the creation of another one, being the very Beginning of the World. All that, everything that is between death and birth could not, as I felt, be sincerely described using so far available means. It was necessary to merge the sign and its referent, form had to become content, and content become one with form.

But it was to be form that would enable the readers to experience “something like that”. Of course, I am not so mad as to force the poor readers to go into labour or die in the course of reading a book. But those experiences of mine made me realize that only if I invited my readers to genuine participation, would I be able to evoke particular emotions in them. However, I did not mean an open work in which the readers have so much liberty that in fact they can be called co-authors, but I mean that the readers should perform a particular role or roles prescribed by me depending on their point of view (literally). So it was the reader who was supposed to become the true hero of my book, the one who “dies” and “is born”, providing, however, that he or she would take up the game, difficult as it was and risky, too (to paraphrase Tadeusz Kantor’s words: “you also enter the book at your own risk”⁷).

To make it feasible at all – if it is possible at all – it was necessary to take a totally different view on the book (it could not be an ordinary codex) and on the text itself. It dawned on me that it should be a text visible and invisible at the same time – hence, a paradox previously unknown to any other Zeno. I realised that only if a part of my text remained concealed before the reader, and its reading required true, almost physical involvement, would it be possible to experience the mystery.

There are at least several ways of concealing or, one could even call that, ciphering words and sentences, but none of them fulfilled my expectations. One of them is, of course, the acrostic, the form that has never gone beyond magical uses or innocent amusement. Writing acrostics, mezostiches, and telestiches appeared to me a childishly simple, and futile question (I partly agree with the poet Julian Tuwim, who ridiculed such feats of artistry in his *Pegaz dęba* [Rear-

ing Pegasus]), since little can be achieved with these techniques in a text of considerable size. My aim was to create a full-fledged, invisible text, and not coding a few catchphrases. I found notarikon, an ancient decoding technique used by kabbalists, much more useful than the acrostic. As in notarikon one reads initials of all words, unlike in acrostic in which one reads only the first letters of each verse. What emerged, or revealed itself, in consequence of such an operation was a kind of acronym, the difference being that the acronym is usually an artificial creation, associated more with names of banks or railway companies than with literature (well, unless it is OuLiPo); but in my text genuine Hebrew words emerged. The ancient Egyptians used a related system of writing, in fact, a kind of cryptography, based on acrophony, i.e., a notation in which only the first phonemes of each word coded in a hieroglyph are read. Acrophony, mostly used for writing down foreign, non-Egyptian names, had a decisive influence on the development of the alphabet, but could have only minor impact on the solution to my dilemmas. Both notarikon and acrophony (they may be in fact one and the same thing) seemed interesting to me, but they lacked a certain depth, not a spiritual one, but a physical one – the depth of space.

The solution occurred to me unexpectedly – it was a true revelation, an almost mystical vision of the Word growing into all directions and developing into an enormous text. I saw a word from whose letters there emerged new words, and then some more words emanated out of those, and more, and further words, and further more... And then I saw how all those words coil up backwards, like the Kundalini serpent: the visible layer of the text loses all the letters but initials, which form the lower layer of the text, then a new layer is revealed in an analogous way, and yet another, until the Word that gave rise to that whole, overwhelming, Chinese-box structure. I felt a bit like Alice after she had drunk the potion, folding like a telescope that was able to see the very moment of the Big Bang. Finally, I saw all those layers, all those times and spaces coexisting there at the same time, and I realised that the problem of an inability to convey simultaneous messages ceased to exist. It was different from all other things I had read and written so far.

At first writing in this way was not easy at all. This kind of literary emanationism makes one penetrate literally into every character, requires a strict control over text at all levels and an ability to write in all directions at the same time. It does not resemble any hitherto known, lin-

ear kinds of literature (in which you do not encounter such dilemmas as: “add 12 letters to your text and extract 8 words from it at the same time”). Such a different technique of writing entails a different way of reading, too, so the experience gained during traditional reading of epic or drama (whatever “traditional” means) does not help much.

In this kind of text, the role of the reader does not amount to a passive consumption of the text, but to an active operation consisting in the laborious discovery of that which has been concealed (perhaps we could call this process ‘concretisation’, and I suppose we would be more justified in this than Ingarden himself). What is more, even a moment of slight inattention while deriving the invisible words may result in barring access to lower (higher) levels of the text. The reader, like Theseus, must go through the whole maze himself without losing the thread. No one can do that for him or her. If he or she does not do that, about one sixth of the text will remain beyond his or her reach, and their vision of the book will be – literally and metaphorically – very shallow, indeed. If, in turn, he or she decides to follow the path of least resistance and uses someone else’s work, for example someone else’s notes with the decoded text, they will become familiar with the invisible part, but they will be denied the very process of cognition, that is, the very essence of in-visible literature, that which is inexpressible though words but which is truly experienced by the readers – namely, the unveiling. Perhaps it would be more appropriate to call this activity not reading but experiencing the book, and the reader its hero. To get in touch with the book (and through it, with its author or authors) is very physical, and therefore exceptionally intimate.

This is why it is wrong to treat emanationism simply as a writing technique. What is created through it is a totally new literary form whose structure is not semantically neutral (unlike, e.g. the structure of the sonnet), but pregnant with important meanings: from epistemological and ontological to cosmogonic ones. In emanational prose and poetry, every single letter of text is shown and seen from a new perspective; hackneyed words and motifs regain their freshness. Such notions as time, space, hero, plot, narrator and the lyrical “I” take on a totally new dimension in the process of literary emanation, writing off as fiction gloomy prophecies about the exhaustion of literature soaked in self-reflexivity. On the contrary, I believe that together with emanationism literature is entering a new, subtler phase of existence, and

Oka-leczenie marks only the beginning of this process. When writers get used to this technique, when they familiarise themselves with its benefits and learn to overcome technical conditions, masterpieces will appear that are not dreamt of not only in philosophy.

PS: **Go! Open! Look down! Behold! -eloise, Abelard – there inside, new grammar
Of new, emanated forms. Oh, lopped – dreadful! –
Limbs of old kabbalists
Decapitated earnestly map a new, desired El Dorado.**

Endnotes

- 1 "Liberatura. Aneks do słownika terminów literackich", in: *Dekada Literacka* (Literary Decade) no. 5/6 (153/154), 30 June 1999, pp. 8–9.
- 2 Adam Mickiewicz, *Pan Tadeusz or the Last Foray in Lithuania. A Tale of the Gentry During 1811–1812* (1834), a Polish national epic in twelve books, written in a 13-syllable Alexandrine in rhyming couplets, the most recent translation by Marcel Weyland, 2004, (ed. note).
- 3 *Słownik terminów literackich* [A Dictionary of Literary Terms], ed. M. Głowiński et. al, Wrocław: Ossolineum, 1989 (ed. note.)
- 4 A conservative, aristocratic party featuring in Zygmunt Krasicki's romantic drama *Nie-Boska komedia* (Un-Divine Comedy, 1835), defending itself during a communist-like revolution in the Ramparts of the Holy Trinity, a fortress located in the present-day Ukraine (formerly in the Commonwealth of the Kingdom of Poland and the Grand Duchy of Lithuania) (ed. note.)
- 5 See note on p. 26.
- 6 I mean an essay entitled "Liberatura nie-widzialna" (In-visible Literature), which was scheduled for publication in *Dekada Literacka*, but for various reasons has not been published yet. That the editorial board will manage to publish it still by the end of the decade is an (almost) sure thing (ed. note: the essay has never been published.)
- 7 Tadeusz Kantor (1915–1990), a renowned theatre director said that "you enter the theatre at your own risk" (ed. note).

First published in: "Liberatura czyli literatura totalna" (Aneks do „Aneksu do słownika terminów literackich”). *FA-art*. 4 (2001): 10–17.

~~lyric, epic, dramatic~~, liberature

Let us suppose that a given writer reveals one of his ideas in theoretical fashion and, quite possibly, in useless fashion, since he is ahead of his time. He well knows that such revelations, touching as they do on literature, should be brought out in the open.

S. Mallarmé (transl. Bradford Cook)

Word is the substance of literature.

When we say the word, we stress its sound and sense,
when we write the word, we (sometimes) also mean its **appearance**.

Space

is hardly ever taken into consideration, if at all.

However, in order to come into existence in time

the word needs space.

Space belongs to it as much as its

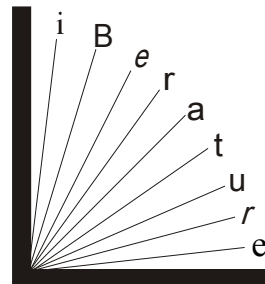
shape,

sound

and

meaning.

The word thus conceived is the substance of



Liberature

or total literature

in which the text and the space of a book constitute an inseparable whole.

The physical object ceases to be a mere carrier of text;
the book does not contain a literary work, but
i t i s i t s e l f t h e l i t e r a r y w o r k.
Its pages are as verses in a poem: there are as many of them
as there should be, and they look exactly as they should.

The architecture and the visual aspect of the work are no less important
than its plot and style.

However, there is no reason for constraining oneself to the
traditional form of the codex.

The work can assume any shape at all and be made
of any material.

For writers this means freedom, for theorists some
complications, and for publishers only trouble.
Freedom – since there is no need to follow editorial
conventions.

Complications – since the most fundamental notions
of the literary studies such as the following need revision:
material (it is no longer just language, but also a sheet
of paper or a marble block)

form (it cannot be limited only to text, but must also refer
to the surface covered with text, and include
questions of typography and editorship)

literary work (it must embrace the heretofore ignored notion
of the book)

book (it does not have to be a codex, i.e. a bunch of bound sheets)¹.

And trouble?

Well, first of all, it is often hard to guess how to publish such
an oddity, and secondly – who would buy it?

In consequence:

publishers enjoy freedom (because they do not have to publish),
complications remain complex,
and troubles are transferred to writers, who can only create
for their pigeonholes and drawers (providing their objects fit there) or
they are doomed to... handicraft.



Zenon Fajfer, Katarzyna Bazarnik *Oka-leczenie*

Triple-codex book, prototype edition of 9 copies, Kraków 2000



A different structure of the book – different physics.

Three codices joined together constitute a different message than the same text printed in one or three independent volumes².

One can argue about the status of liberature. Is it only the question of notation or is it something more? Is there anything like liberatic prose, poetry, and drama or should one rather consider it as a distinct literary mode or genre—what's more, a genre that has existed for a long time? Or, if we used the criterion based on the means of expression, should we consider it another, third stage of some development that started with orature, then literature and now has transformed into liberature, just as Radosław Nowakowski put it in his *Treatise on Pageography*³?

I will leave this to theoreticians. As a practicing writer, I am much more fascinated with the artistic prospects⁴: first of all, a vision of creating a fully autonomous work in which the author would be responsible for its every constituent, just as sometimes happens in the theatre when the author of the play is also a stage designer and director.

Total work, the total artist. Craig's and Wyspiański's dream transferred onto a page? Even if it were so, one should not forget that long before them Blake and Mallarmé had seen their "monumental theatres", and after them Joyce put that into more or less successful practice.

Mallarmé... the lesson of his failure has not been properly understood yet.

I am the author of a statement to which there have been varying reactions, including praise and blame, and which I shall make again in the present article. Briefly, it is this: all earthly existence must ultimately be contained in a book.

It terrifies me to think of the qualities (among them genius, certainly) which the author of such a work will possess. I am one of the unpossessed. We will let that pass and imagine that it bears no author's name. What, then, will the work itself be? I answer: a hymn, all harmony and joy; an immaculate grouping of universal relations come together for some miraculous and glittering occasion. Man's duty is to observe with the eyes of the divinity; for if his connection with that divinity is to be made clear, it can be expressed only by the pages of the open book in front of him.⁵

The failure that must have been the grandest catastrophe in literature.

The book, which is a total expansion of the letter, must find its mobility in the letter; and in its spaciousness must establish some nameless system of relationships which will embrace and strengthen fiction.

There is nothing fortuitous in all this, even though ideas may seem to be the slaves of chance. The system guarantees them. Therefore we must pay no attention to the book industry with its materialistic considerations. The making of a book, with respect to its flowering totality, begins with the first sentence. From time immemorial the poet has knowingly placed his verse in the sonnet which he writes upon our minds or upon pure space. We, in turn, will misunderstand the true meaning of this book and the miracle inherent in its structure, if we do not knowingly imagine that a given motif has been properly placed at a certain height on the page, according to its own or to the book's distribution of light.

Perhaps, then, liberature is nothing else but the writing of the Book that Mallarmé did not manage to create?

the monotonousness of its eternally unbearable columns, which are merely strung down the pages by hundreds.

“But,”

I hear some one say, “how can this situation be changed?” I shall take space here to answer this question in detail; for the work of art – which is unique or should be – must provide illustrations.⁶

But... is it possible at all to write such a Book?

And, in the times of electronic media,
“textualisation of the world”⁷,
and the “death of the author”
is this dream not
slightly anachronistic?

It seems I will have to share the royalties for this article
with Stéphane Mallarmé.
So I will gladly have him speak for me
again:

It is because of those daydreams we have before we resume our reading in a garden that our attention strays to a white butterfly flitting here and there, then disappearing; but also leaving behind it the same slight touch of sharpness and frankness with which I have presented these ideas, and flying incessantly back and forth before the people, who stand amazed.⁸

First published in: "liryka,
epika, dramat, literatura",
in: *Od Joyce'a do literatury*.
Ed. Katarzyna Bazarnik.
Kraków Universitas, 2002.
233–239.

Endnotes

¹ I have written two "appendices to a dictionary of literary terms", one in *Dekada Literacka*, no 5/6 (153/154) of 30 June 1999, and the other in *FA-art*, no 4 (46), 2001.

² Just as most liberatic works, the book exists outside the standard publishing market and literary circulation. Presently, the only place where the audience can familiarise themselves with such books is a newly opened LIBERATURE READING ROOM in Kraków (Małopolski Instytut Kultury, Rynek główny 25).

³ *Traktat Kartograficzny czyli rzecz o literaturze (Treatise on Pageography or on Literature)* was launched in May 2002 during the 47th International Book Fair in Warsaw.

⁴ The prospects resulting from a metamorphosis of literati into liberati is more promising for art than the effects of Gustaw's metamorphosis into forty-and-four in Mickiewicz's drama *The Forefathers' Eve*.

⁵ Stéphane Mallarmé, "The Book: A Spiritual Instrument," in: *Selected poetry and prose*, trans. Bradford Cook, ed. Mary Ann Caws, New York: New Directions Publishing, 1982, 80.

⁶ Mallarmé, 83.

⁷ Derrida, the Grammatologist is only an apparent ally. He demonstrates truly liberatic understanding for writing, so rare with philosophers, but he rejects the idea of the book: "the idea of a totality, finite or infinite, of the signifier". He writes that, "[t]he idea of the book, which always refers to a natural totality, is profoundly alien to the sense of writing" and that it is only "the destruction of the book" that "denudes the surface of the text". It is hard to think of a perspective both closer to mine (the value of writing) and more alien (the negation of the book) at the same time, so for the sake of sanity it is better to stop here.

⁸ Mallarmé, 84.

Liber- ature:

hyperbook in the hypertext era

It has been some time since the conviction about the twilight of the print (and writing) era first began taking root. It is also believed that “the Gutenberg galaxy” is contracting and collapsing and it won’t be long before some cultural supernova or at least some global crisis triggered by mass unemployment in the paper and print industry bursts out. This feeling is shared by the literati. What is more, it is accompanied by systematic digitalisation of literature as regards both writing tools (the typewriter is a seldom-used relic) and works themselves (gradual expansion of e-books, and hypertexts). To put it in a nutshell, whether one likes this or not a new E-ra is looming large, and the apparently spherical world is flattening into a disc again, the only difference being that now it is a compact disk.

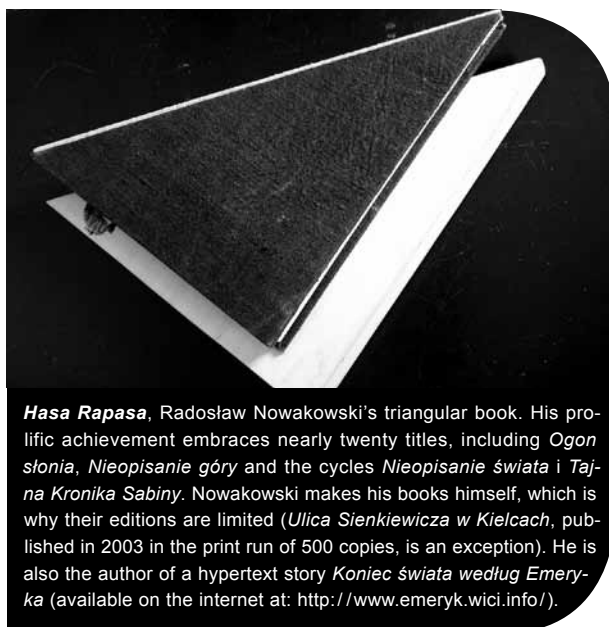
Certainly, this vision is not agreeable to many. It is not easy to come to terms with the thought that a gigantic mound of printed paper may disappear soon, or at least stop growing. We have got used to the present shape of the book, just as in the old days the Babylonians were used to their clay tablets, the Egyptians to their papyri scrolls, and the Chinese to their silk. I do not count myself among the E-nthusiasts; however, this scenario seems quite likely to me, unless Einstein's black joke about the 4th world war becomes reality. All that exorcising and consolation claiming that nothing can substitute the rustle of paper poetry could turn out quite quixotic in confrontation with ruthless economy, technological development and... simple laziness (there were times when even the invention of paper seemed no threat to excessively expensive parchment books).

The mentality is changing, too. What used to be unthinkable yesterday is quite normal today, but may in turn become "unthinkable" tomorrow. While practicing all kinds of foresight we should bear in mind that all inventions that help humankind conquer the world reciprocally influence us. Brought up on computer games and internet dating, the present generation (let alone "the late-coming posterity"¹) already does not mind reading text from a computer or mobile phone screen, or from a paper page.

And literature? How will all these inventions influence literature itself? This is hard to predict; for the time being the influence seems rather insignificant. Beside some multimedial activities enriching the written word with sound and movement, it is hard to notice any other significant novelty (hypertext is not an invention of the computer era; those who create it are perfectly aware of that, which is clear in their references to their "paper" antecedents: Sterne, Cortázar, Nabokov, Saporta, and Queneau). Perhaps this situation will change once the transfer to the electronic medium is complete, which may happen sooner than we expect (see the sentence about "ruthless economy").

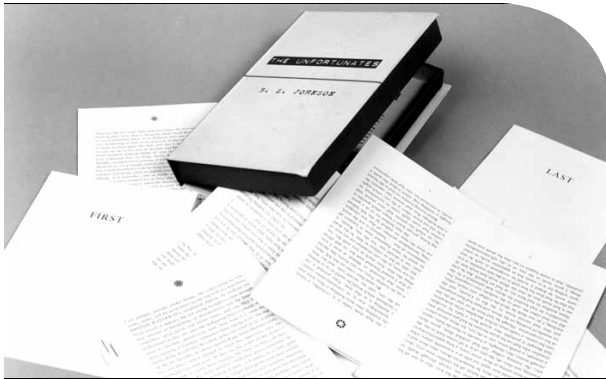
1 Cyprian Kamil Norwid, a Polish late-romantic poet (1821–1883), used the phrase in his famous poem "Chopin's Grand Piano" (transl. Teresa Bałuk-Ulewiczowa, 2000).

However, things are different with **liberature**, in which the notion of “the carrier” does not make much sense. The book (from Latin “liber”) is a part of the work; its physical shape and structure constitute its integral part. So it is not easy to take out the text and place it in the virtual space since in the liberatic work the space in which words are contained is not neutral. The author creates it with text (which is not transparent) as well as with the structure of the book itself, which in accordance with another meaning of the Latin root of the name “liberature”, can assume any shape whatsoever.



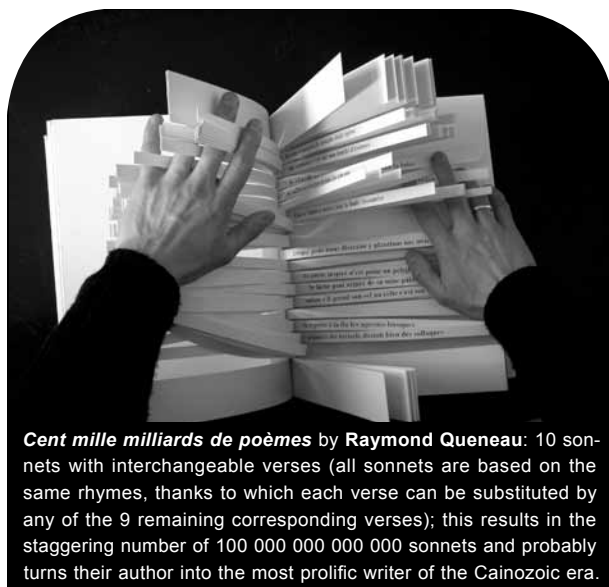
It can, but it does not have to. There are several liberatic or protoliberatic books in the traditional form of the codex: Dante's *Divine Comedy* (1321), *The Temple* by George Herbert (1633), Sterne's *Tristram Shandy* (1759), Blake's illuminated poems, Carroll's *Alice in Wonderland* (1865), and *Through the Looking Glass* (1872), Mallarme's *A Throw of the Dice* (1897), Apollinaire's *Calligrammes* (1918), Joyce's *Ulysses* (1922) and *Finnegans Wake* (1939), Durrell's *Alexandria Quartet* (1957–60), Nabokov's *Pale Fire* (1962) Cortázar's *Hopscotch* (1963), Gass's *Willie Masters' Lonesome Wife* (1968), as well as the works by B.S. Johnson, Perec, Sukenick, Pavic's *Dictionary of the Khazars* (1984) and *House of Leaves* (2000) by Mark Z. Danielewski.

Their liberatic character is evident in the deep bond between the text and its spatial arrangement: the format, the number of volumes, their size, etc. as well as all graphic elements; and within the text itself the bond between the sound, rhythm and meaning, and its material inscription: typeface, layout, colour, the number of words and lines. [At this point, for example, I have added (for free) four extra lines in order to obtain the required number of lines on this page. In order to obtain two more lines I am going to use a constellation of asterisks, which I dedicate to * * * * * Laurence Sterne.]



The Unfortunates by **B.S. Johnson**, a book consisting of 27 sheets that can be read in any order (beside the first and the last sheets). In all his novels typography is of primary importance (for example, in *House Mother Normal* each chapter consists of the identical number of pages and lines, in *Trawl* pauses in the working of the mind are marked by spaces of varying length, and in *Albert Angelo* the author decided to cut a hole in some pages).

Th- Among the most exciting examples are: *La Prose du*
Transsibérien (1913), a leporello-book by Blaise
ere are Cendrars and Sonia Delaunay, Raymond Que-
also works neu's permutational sonnets *Cent mille*
milliards de poèmes cut into mova-
in which liberatic ble strips (1961), or B.S. John-
elements are more con- son's novel *The Unfortunates*,
published in the form of
spicuous, and their appearance loose sheets placed
differs from that of an ordinary book. in a box (1969).



Cent mille milliards de poèmes by Raymond Queneau: 10 sonnets with interchangeable verses (all sonnets are based on the same rhymes, thanks to which each verse can be substituted by any of the 9 remaining corresponding verses); this results in the staggering number of 100 000 000 000 000 sonnets and probably turns their author into the most prolific writer of the Cainozoic era.

Evidently, then, *liberature* did not appear for the first time in 1999, when I put forward the term, nor in 2002, when the first **liberature reading room** was launched in Małopolski Institute of Culture (at 25 Rynek Główny in Kraków [now at 27, ul. Karmelicka; ed. note]). But both events made it possible to draw our attention to this already existing trend in literature, to identify and name it. In fact, this is not a new trend or style so much as an approach: to the word, to literature, to the book, an approach that recognises the physical features of the book, which are usually ignored by readers, writers and critics. That is why *liberature* is diverse and embraces works in different genres, distant in time and style from one another. In some works the architectural aspect is dominant, in some it is the visual or material aspect, and in some all three are interconnected.



Three poems by **Zbigniew Salaj**. The wood comes from used type cases.

It sounds paradoxical that the above-mentioned works, some of which are undoubtedly liberatic, are also mentioned as inspiration by hypertext authors who name them (and rightly so) as their antecedents. It would appear as a fundamental contradiction: on one hand, there is de-spatialised and nearly dematerialised literature, and on the other literature manifesting its materiality. On one hand, there is hypertext, multiplied and distributed with practically no constraints, and on the other the hyperbook published sometimes in maximally minimal print runs. The former diminishes the role of the author and shares responsibility for the final shape of the work with readers; the latter burdens the author with additional duties heretofore performed by editors, typesetters, illustrators and printers.

However, it is the nature of opposites to attract one another, especially given that reasons for the appearance of literature and hypertext are similar in many respects, and one of them is identical: it is disagreement with the traditional, linear model of literature, determined to a great extent by the qualities of the material carrier of the text. Consequently, some writers have willingly abandoned it, moving into the virtual space; others, in turn, have started to exploit it creatively and modify its features.



James Joyce's Anna Livia Plurabelle in Maciej Słomczyński's translation and Małgorzata Macharska-Siwulak's design (Kraków: Wydawnictwo Literackie, 1985).

What do these modifications consist in and what are they for? To put it in a nutshell, they consist in departing from the dominant form of the book (it is a paper codex nowadays, it used to be clay tablets or papyrus scrolls), or in making full use of possibilities arising from it. And, as always, they are used as tools in the search for beauty and truth.



Above: *The Temple of Stone* by Andrzej Bednarczyk – a meditative poem in concrete covers with a pebble being an element of the text (the book was published in a considerably large print run of 400).

Below: *Do końca (Till the End)*, the book existing in a four-hundred lesser print run by Marek Gajewski. The book buried in a red “sarcophagus”, next to a black mirror, is a moving monologue about dying, and constitutes just one of several, equally important elements of the author’s coherent literary-plastic vision.





The triple-book *Oka-leczenie* by Zenon Fajfer and Katarzyna Bazarnik, the prototype edition (print run of 9 copies). There are several layers of text in it, written in different typefaces, including handwriting and ideograms). Only the surface layer is visible; in order to reach the invisible text, one should read the first letters of each word. New layers can be obtained in an analogous way by repeating the procedure on a newly obtained text, until one reaches the “embryo word”. This word, in turn, is one of a thousand words that make the fabric of *(O)patrznie* (Kra-kowska Alternatywa [Wyd. Halart], Kraków 2003, print run of 2000).

materials other than paper (wood, foil, stone,

etc.) while preserving the clas-

sical, codex structure, to

completely new, for-

mal innovations

as regards

the spa-

ce.

g u n i

s u c h a s u s -

v e l y m i l d o n e s

i n g f r o m r e l a t i -

i n s e v e r a l w a y s, r a n g -

D e p a r t u r e s a r e r e a l i s e d

It must also be remembered that liberatic writers do not form any coherent, uniform group sharing a programme and an aesthetics. Liberatic works include both fairly traditional texts and some clearly avant-garde works. The former are fairly traditional as far as their literary form is concerned (the literary point of view is predominant, and this is, among other things, a difference between liberature and the so-called “artist book”), and their charm lies mostly in a juxtaposition of the subtle matter of the word and the hard materiality of wood or rock. The authors of the latter deliberately strive to turn literature into liberature (also in theoretical terms). One of the quickly recognisable (and most painfully experienced) results of their activity is break-

ing the linearity of the message, which is the aim of hypertext authors, too. In works such as *Tajna Kronika Sabyńy – Pięta Jesień* (Sabyńa's Secret Chronicle – the Fifth Autumn) by Radosław Nowakowski and the triple-book *Oka-leczenie* by Katarzyna Bazarnik and the present author this happens both due to the way language is employed as well as a radically new form of the book that requires the reader to employ different reading strategies, and consequently, to make an extra effort. To evaluate whether the aim achieved in consequence of that effort is worth it is, however, beyond my competence and duty.

First published in: “Liberatura: hiperksięga w epoce hipertekstu”. *Ha!art* 14 (2003): -10- -1 (negative pagination). A slightly modified version reprinted in: *Liternet.pl*. Ed. P. Marecki. Kraków: Rabid, 2003. -10- -1 (negative pagination).

(N)on Description of Liberature

I

Nirvana should not be sought after in the Other World, preached Nagarjuna. This desired state can be attained Here and Now; it is only the question of proper perception. However, it is evidently not such a simple matter if so few have managed to achieve this. But no wonder; people do not see many other, more obvious things. And if common people do not see them, it is even more difficult for specialists.

That nobody has noticed liberature before can probably be explained only by the burden of philosophical heritage weighing heavily on literary studies, or in fact on its most influential section, the one that specialises in footnoting Plato (I'm joking of course; since I sincerely believe that this is not a sin of the whole philosophy). Artist-writers such as Mallarmé and Butor were much closer. But their intuitions did not have that distinct character that would have allowed them to speak about a distinct literary genre. I speak about liberature as a distinct literary genre, a genre in which, beside text, all graphic elements of the book (Lat. *liber*) and its physical space are also carriers of meaning, a genre nearly as ancient as writing itself.

Plato, as is widely known, did not like writing. This testifies to his exceptionally ungrateful character since it is nothing else but writing that is responsible for his lucky fate. The lack of respect for writing became a philosophical virtue, which, unfortunately, has been reflected in theories. The literary text is still perceived as a kind of ideal entity whose physical aspect is in fact a matter of no importance. The best example of this kind of attitude is *A Dictionary of Literary Terms* edited by such authorities as Michał Głowiński, Teresa Kostkiewiczowa, Aleksandra Okopień-Sławińska and Janusz Sławiński. It was an analysis of some basic entries in the dictionary (material, form, literary work, book, time and space, layout) that led me to formulating the idea of liberature in response to the "Platonic" attitude of critics towards writing and the book.

And of most writers, too. Since only a few of them regard as their matter also the ground on which their text is inscribed, and consequently, only few take into consideration in their creative process

the physical structure of the book and its spatial nature. Mallarmé's *Un coup de dés* is an epitome of this, being a work too serious to be ignored and belying a claim that literature is tantamount only to words.

Undoubtedly, Lessing's division of the arts into spatial and temporal categories and his classification of literature as the latter has played a part in such an attitude. But it is liberature that proves that his distinction does not reflect the actual state of affairs.

Liberature or architecture of the word.¹ Architecture – that is the most spatial of all spatial arts. Of course, this parallel between liberature and architecture is a simplification since in liberature the temporal aspect still plays a significant role. Perhaps one should even speak about space-time.

So liberature is spatio-temporal literature.

But it still remains **literature**. At least, I see it as such. This is very important since there is a real risk of confusing liberature with the artist's book (so-called book art), or – even worse – with a luxury bibliophile edition, shipshape in consequence of the printer's and binder's caress. Liberature is neither, although some liberatic works can be classified as artists' books (William Blake, for example), and presented as model examples to printers. However, it would be hard to consider as artists' books the above-mentioned *Un Coup de dés* or Joyce's *Finnegans Wake*, those truly liberatic masterpieces.

So wherein lies the difference between the liberatic work and the artist's book? To put it simply, in the attitude toward text. In the artist's book text is subordinated to the book, in liberature it is the book that is subordinated to text. In both cases the work is constituted by the book, but a different attitude toward the text results in the first case in a work closer to sculpture (the book-object) in which the word is but one of several, equally important components, and in the second, we are dealing with literature that annexes into its territory the physical space of the book.

II

There are different types of liberature.

The first is dominated by the architectonic factor; in it the text imposes a certain structure on the book or its fragment (even if it is a traditional codex). Sterne's *Tristram Shandy*, the above-mentioned works of Mallarmé and Joyce, Queneau's *Cent mille milliards de poèmes* and B.S. Johnson's *The Unfortunates* are leading examples.

Another type is represented by works of a more visual nature, in which the graphic stratum (illustrations, photos) is integrated with text, or the text itself forms an image. The former is the case with Blake, of course, (it is highly condemnable to publish his poems without their accompanying illuminations) and Wyspiański, the great reformer of the art of printing in Poland, as well as W.H. Gass's *Willie Masters' Lonesome Wife* full of photographs and varied fonts. Other books of this type include the whole vast territory of illustrated children's literature (*Alice, Winnie the Pooh, The Little Prince, The Moomins*). [I can already see those ironic smiles provoked by the thought that Joyce and Makuszyński's *Koziołek Matolek* (the eponymous character is a Polish Winnie the Pooh kind of Ninny-goat) would end up in one and the same slot. Oh well, tough luck, let them butt each other then). The other sub-category would embrace George Herbert's figural poems, Apollinaire's calligrams and Federman's typographic novels.

Yet another type of literature is constituted by those works whose materiality—paper, or some other material—is foregrounded; sometimes objects form a kind of installation with the book. This type is closest to the artist's book and is practiced mainly by artists involved in book art. Among these are: some of Andrzej Bednarczyk's books (*Świątynia kamienia* [*The Temple of Stone*]; *Anatomia aniołów* [*The Anatomy of Angels*]), Bartczak's (*Kilka wierszy – palimpsestowa struktura* [*A Few Poems: a Palimpsest Structure*]), Gajewski's (*moja twoja uśmiechnięta twarz; Do końca* [*my your smiling face; Till the End*]) or early Sałaj (the wooden poems).

There is also a group of works in which all three of these factors play a more or less significant part, and Radosław Nowakowski's works are among them.

III

I do not undertake to describe Nowakowski's *oeuvre* here. It is rather going to be a "non-description", which is, however, perfectly in tune with his artistic philosophy and the series he calls "A (N)on-description of the World".

The "non-description" will be executed on the margins of *Treatise on Pageography* [*Traktat kartkograficzny*] (which has a very wide margin, indeed), the book on literature thanks to which Nowakowski was "converted" soon after the term had appeared (in the same sense as one is converted to another denomination, though in his case it is

risky to use any religious terminology). He had described his work as “book-making”, which does not change the fact that his writing has been liberatic in character since the very beginning.

To put this differently, it can be said that in his case the word (name, or label) was in the end. However, it was not a cosmetic change. On the contrary, the whole context has changed. Consequently, it was only when literature came onto the stage that Nowakowski’s work revealed its full value. It had been presented during exhibitions of artists’ books where it could not shine properly, since no one reads at exhibitions; galleries are not intended for that; and Nowakowski requires a reader. Such reading can be put into practice in the Krakovian Literature Reading Room, where nearly all his works are available to the reading audience. And I am strongly convinced that this is only the first step on their way to bookshops.

Personally, my attitude to his work is somewhat ambivalent. He creates very intelligent, consistent, sometimes very witty literature, permeated deeply with what I would call an ecological spirit. It resembles in this respect Stachura’s writing, only that any kind of religious thinking is alien to Nowakowski, the man who coined the phrase *Homo Catholicus*. On the contrary, with a bit of luck some of his books could even make a career comparable to that of Nieznalska’s, an artist sued for offending religious feelings with her installation (hello there, are there any members of the League of Polish Families in the audience?).

However, his tone, too moralising at times, irritates me slightly. Only the cycle *Sabina’s Secret Chronicle* [*Tajna kronika Sabiny*], in my opinion the best in Nowakowski’s *oeuvre*, seems to be free from it. Quite exceptionally, the writer does not speak here in his own voice but makes a little girl speak on his behalf. Choosing a little child as the narrator saves his book from moralising, so characteristic of his other books, of which the author is, in fact, quite conscious, as he looks up to Leo Tolstoy and the ending of *War and Peace* as his model example. My critical attitude to this aspect of Nowakowski’s writing stems from the fact that I value *War and Peace* highly except for its ending. (Once we had an animated discussion about this but, clearly, we haven’t reached any agreement in the matter.) Other features of his writing are its literality, which is too great at times, and does not leave much to the reader’s imagination, and his need for constant (auto)commentary, which seems to show his distrust of the reader’s intelligence and sensitivity. I do not agree, either, with the opinion or conviction suggested here and there that only some devices typi-

cal for liberature (exploitation of typography and the structure of the book), not supported by any linguistic elaboration, are sufficient for considering a work to be truly innovative. In my opinion this does not suffice.

Perhaps some will be surprised by this criticism, since it is customary to pigeonhole us together. However, I do not see here any contradiction or inconsistency. Since liberature, as I have already said elsewhere, does not constitute any common style or worldview, but just a literary mode that embraces works as different from one another as two poems or two novels can be different. So in liberature there is space for both Fajfer and Nowakowski.

The above-mentioned shortcomings do not overshadow my general high opinion on Nowakowski's work, and I realise that there are many readers who share his admiration of the ending of *War and Peace*.

IV

The commenting and moralising I criticise are probably associated with the fact that the artist and the theoretician constantly struggle in him. In effect, his prose or poetry very often turns into an essay, and a piece planned as essayistic smacks of poetry. But in all fairness to him, we must add that sometimes the results are very interesting.

Treatise on Pageography or On Liberature [Traktat kartkograficzny czyli rzecz o liberaturze] seems to be free of this mistake. Written in lucid and precise style, it constitutes an excellent introduction to the basic aspects of the matter. One can feel all the time that this is a practitioner's voice, that the author really knows the subject he is writing about. His argument is very logical, too, presented step by step, from the most elementary questions to more complex ones: from a single letter to the whole book. The author uncovers layers of meaning where average readers would not even suspect anything (see his excellent demonstration of the semantics of the paper page), alerting them to all potential traps. He does this so convincingly that it is doubtful whether the old type of reading focused only on sound and semantics of the text will be still possible.

But if I disagree with anything in his *Treatise*, it is precisely his definition of liberature. His phrase that "liberature means making books" may evoke in a careless reader a conviction that it is about doing it manually, that it is about making a copy of one's book with one's own hands. Fortunately, he adds later that in fact

what matters here is “inventing books”, and thinking about all its parts-elements-aspects-facets-volumes-and-so-on.

However, what seems to me the most valuable point in his aesthetic credo is his proposal of a new taxonomy, different from the one used so far in traditional literary studies. Instead of present literary genres or modes he suggest a division into orature (embracing oral literature), literature, and liberature. It is hard to predict if the criterion applied here, i.e., that of the means of expression, will be accepted, but at least there is something to discuss.

- 1 “Essays on the architecture of the word”. This is the subtitle of *Od Joyce’a do liberatury*, a collection of essays edited by Katarzyna Bazarnik, comprising the first scholarly publication devoted to liberature (Kraków, 2002).

Liber Europae

(excerpt)

Liber Europae – one of the many volumes of the huge *Liber Mundi*. We are convinced that here, in this part of Europe where books have always been valued highly and where the greatest national sanctity is the illuminations of Kells, such a metaphor will be recognised.

Europa – a huge volume, torn until recently, whose crumpled pages burned at the edges, were dispersed for such a long time, and some of them were irreparably lost. A palimpsest book, written in all kinds of scripts by all the peoples of our continent. A book full of lofty and horrific thoughts, black and white or colourful illustrations, with gold-gilt edges and dogears. Now the folded corners are being straightened, and the pages bound. However, it's not our intention to reduce the act of European integration to bookbinding activities. We don't have in mind a literary monument locked in a safe or a glass box.

Liber Europae Anno Domini 2004 should be a genuinely new and modern work, the book designed anew, written not by blind fate and coincidence, but planned with care for every single detail. This kind of thinking is especially close to us, liberatic writers. We perceive several analogies between the process of European integration and the concept of the integral work, between the project of placing between the covers and binding together pages so different, inhabited by nations speaking different tongues, with their histories and cultures, their likes, dislikes and prejudices, and the project of a work in which everything connects with everything: the typeface with the page size, the shape and structure of the book with the plot and theme. Liberature is a complete and holistic work, a genuine unity in multiplicity, just as the projected *Liber Europae* is supposed to be a unity of multiplicity, a work of proper political format and an economic volume in which all of the parts will find their due places and together will form a harmonious Whole.

But the Latin *liber* does not only mean “book”, it also stand for “free”. This is very important, because there is always a danger that a formally perfect work will turn out to be perfectly heartless, inhuman, and schematic in the extreme. Or that it will lack a necessary balance: some constituents will turn out more important than others,

Education draws Polish workers to Letterkenny

PAGE 1



NEWS

Nigerian community glad of Donegal's religious harmony

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DERRY PEOPLE

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'Po tysiackroc witamy, Polska'

BY COLUMBA GILL

Or, 'cead míle fáilte, Poland' as Letterkenny prepares for the 'Day of Welcomes'

His Excellency Witold Sikhow, Polish Ambassador to Ireland, will be in Letterkenny today for the beginning of celebrations to mark his country's accession to the EU tomorrow (Saturday).

As part of Ireland's EU presidency Letterkenny has been given the unique distinction of welcoming Poland into the union. A week-end of special events have been organised with the highlight tomorrow night when one of Europe's

leading carnival and dance troupes joins Donegal groups for a massive parade through the town. Somewhere there are exhibitions, talks and film. Food too is important and several establishments throughout the town will be providing a taste of what is best on Polish tables. There will also be Polish beer available in the

town. Add a concert, a fair day and another spectacle in the town park on Sunday and we have what will be a one-off weekend for the town. The celebration are being drawn together by the local that brings us the Enragati Arts Festival each year with the help of the Polish embassy. Because of the uniqueness of the 'Day of Wel-

comes' the organisers have upped for support for as many events as possible and promise a parade tomorrow evening celebrating something new in the town before. Full details of events are in pages 12 and 13 of the DN and also on page 6. Elsewhere we feature the holiday scene in Poland, interview Polish workers in Trimnagh and take a look at Slieve Donard in what is the biggest and most popular of the mountain activities. The celebrations will be shown on Polish television. The

other accession countries are being treated with similar celebrations around the country. Mr Sikhow will be the guest of honour at a reception hosted by the Town Council today and will open an arts exhibition in the Arts Centre at 6pm.

No doubt he will refer to the main similarities between his country and Ireland. During a visit there last week many of those similarities were immediately obvious. More like pre-Common Market Ireland, Poland is heavily

dependent on agriculture. The word 'Polska' is derived from Polish and there are many, we saw fields being dug with horses and harrows and fertilizer being spread by hand. But we also witness a highly developed industry turn on the outskirts of Warsaw and not a farmer for whom the EU holds no fears.

With a farmland filled with the latest machinery to believe that the Polish ability to produce high quality produce at reasonable

COURTESY OF PAGE 24

the more numerous nations will dominate the less numerous ones. But literature, although it is so carefully planned, is a domain of freedom. A book can assume any shape and be made of any material, while a single letter or word weighs no less than a whole sentence. For, literature is total, but not totalitarian, literature. So let this be a warning to all kinds of European bureaucrats and advocates of a sterile order, who, perhaps, would like to regulate even book backs and patterns of sentences.

Creators of literature will be the first to defy such an order.

(An excerpt of a talk given at the "Day of Welcomes - Letterkenny Welcomes Poland" Festival, a part of the official celebrations of the enlargement of the European Union on 1st May, 2004, in Letterkenny, Ireland. The authors were invited to it to represent Polish contemporary literature).

Joyce: Unwelcome Guest in Plato's Republic

1

Shall we, then, lay it down that all the poetic tribe, beginning with Homer, are imitators of images of excellence and of the other things that they 'create,' and do not lay hold on truth?

Republic, x, 600e¹

References to ancient Greek culture are obvious in *Ulysses*: the title of the book (Latinized Odysseus), the name of one of the main heroes, and numerous quotations and allusions. Of fundamental importance seem to be the myth of the labyrinth and the Homeric schema on which Joyce built his Dublin.

What intentions are implied in this? Not much more is known about them than what the author himself revealed and what was spread by his critics-acquaintances. The procedure of developing a close parallel between Bloom and Odysseus has been customarily considered as a new recipe for the literary everyman, and as a mixture exploding the limited, spatial-temporal framework of the pre-Joycean novel. For Eliot, for example, the use of "a continuous parallel between contemporaneity and antiquity" has the importance of a scientific discovery². In Joyce's method he noticed a possibility for the systematic ordering of the chaos of everyday life, and recommended it for use to other writers, just as scientists use Einstein's discoveries in their own research. Nabokov's opinion, which warns against overvaluing the Greek aspect of *Ulysses* and an excessive search for close parallels with *Odyssey*, has been rather exceptional.

Without questioning previous attempts at explaining the subtle bonds between Homer's epic with the Irishman's "anti-epic", I am going to present a slightly different interpretation of Joyce's device,

¹ Plato. *Republic. Plato in Twelve Volumes*, Vols. 5 & 6 trans. by Paul Shorey. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press; London: Heinemann, 1969. Perseus Digital Library. Tufts University, USA. Web. 30 March 2010. Further quotations from Plato's *Republic* will be identified by in-text references, as coming from the above-mentioned source.

² T.S. Eliot, "Ulysses, Order and Myth", in: *Selected Prose of T. S. Eliot*, ed. and introduction Frank Kermode. New York: Harcourt Brace, Jovanovich, and Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1975, p. 177.

since it seems that Joyceans have been a little misled by those earliest, “Homeric” explanations, which is why Plato’s philosophy, especially his *Republic*,³ and its role in the creation of *Ulysses* have not been adequately appreciated. And the *Republic* is a work no less essential for understanding Joyce’s novel than the *Odyssey* or Dedalus’ myth, as I shall try to prove in a moment. Such a Platonic concept could be also interesting to philosophers (despite their generally “Platonic” feeling for literature, those few exceptions only confirming the rule) since it was probably philosophers who have been offered this “*Ulysses*-*sean* Trojan horse”, offered by the artist exiled from the ideal state.

2

– *Are you going to write it? Mr Best asked. You ought to make it a dialogue, don’t you know, like the Platonic dialogues Wilde wrote. (U, 9.68–69)*⁴

There are only a few direct references to the *Republic* in Joyce’s novel, most of them in episode 9, set in the library. This is, in fact, the only passage in *Ulysses* in which critics, after Carl Linati, are prone to ascribe to Plato a slightly more significant part, perhaps not a charming one, since Plato is supposed to represent Charybdis, one of the two monsters between which the hero has to pass (the other, slightly less frightening Scylla, is represented by Aristotle). In a characteristically Joycean manner, Odysseus is in a sense humourously embodied by Socrates, which is probably meant as a warning for all teachers who should remember that even the clearest idea may be blurred and monstrously deformed in the mouths of their pupils:

– All these questions are purely academic, Russell orated out of his shadow. I mean, whether Hamlet is Shakespeare or James I or Essex. Clergymen’s discussions of the historicity of Jesus. Art has to reveal to us ideas, formless spiritual essences. The supreme question about

3 In Ellmann’s biography *James Joyce* (1982) Plato is mentioned only once, and in a footnote at that (cf. “Plato, J distrust, 103n”, p. 867). In Stuart Gilbert’s famous monograph *James Joyce’s Ulysses* (1930) he is fleetingly mentioned twice. He appears slightly more frequently in Weldon Thornton’s *Allusions in ‘Ulysses’* (1961), and more often in Gifford and Seidman’s *Ulysses Annotated* (1988), where the authors identify allusions to Plato (however, they do not draw any more definite conclusions from them).

4 James Joyce, *Ulysses*, The Corrected Text. Ed. Hans Walter Gabler et al. London: Penguin, 1986. Further citations will be identified by *U* followed by episode and line number.

a work of art is out of how deep a life does it spring. The painting of Gustave Moreau is the painting of ideas. The deepest poetry of Shelley, the words of Hamlet bring our minds into contact with the eternal wisdom, Plato's world of ideas. All the rest is the speculation of schoolboys for schoolboys. (*U*, 9.46–53)

The above words spoken by a well-known Irish poet, essayist and theosophist, George William Russell are retorted by the young artist Stephen Dedalus as follows:

– The schoolmen were schoolboys first, Stephen said superpolitely. Aristotle was once Plato's schoolboy.

– And has remained so, one should hope, John Eglinton sedately said. One can see him, a model schoolboy with his diploma under his arm. (*U*, 9.55–58)

[...]

– That model schoolboy, Stephen said, would find Hamlet's musings about the afterlife of his princely soul, the improbable, insignificant and undramatic monologue, as shallow as Plato's.

John Eglinton, frowning, said, waxing wrath:

– Upon my word it makes my blood boil to hear anyone compare Aristotle with Plato.

– Which of the two, Stephen asked, would have banished me from his commonwealth? (*U*, 9.76–83)

We have known the answer for centuries. As is well known, in *Republic* literature is subjected to a series of devastating examinations, including both its content and form; some of those reflections are worth reminding to grasp the logic and tone of argumentation:

And if a poet writes of the sufferings of Niobe – the subject of the tragedy in which these iambic verses occur – or of the house of Pelops, or of the Trojan war or on any similar theme, either we must not permit him to say that these are the works of God, or if they are of God, he must devise some explanation of them such as we are seeking; he must say that God did what was just and right, and they were the better for being punished; but that those who are punished are miserable, and that God is the author of their misery – the poet is not to be permitted to say; though he may say that the wicked are miserable because they require to be punished, and are benefited by receiving punishment from God; but that God being good is the author of evil to any one is

to be strenuously denied, and not to be said or sung or heard in verse or prose by any one whether old or young in any well-ordered commonwealth. Such a fiction is suicidal, ruinous, impious. (R, II, 380a–c)

In saying this, I intended to imply that we must come to an understanding about the mimetic art, – whether the poets, in narrating their stories, are to be allowed by us to imitate, and if so, whether in whole or in part, and if the latter, in what parts; or should all imitation be prohibited?

You mean, I suspect, to ask whether tragedy and comedy shall be admitted into our State? (R, III, 394d)

Ultimately, both these genres, as fully mimetic, and also the epic (as a mixed genre) are excluded from Plato's republic (cf. also R, III, 394b–398b)⁵. In the light of Plato's philosophy, which considers ideas the only truly existing being, it is mimesis that is the gravest sin of art, since it creates a reflection of reality whose real existence the philosopher questioned:

...so in the soul of man, as we maintain, the imitative poet implants an evil constitution, for he indulges the irrational nature which has no discernment of greater and less, but thinks the same thing at one time great and at another small—he is a manufacturer of images and is very far removed from the truth. (R, x, 605b–c)

The other “monster”, Scylla-Aristotle was much kinder to artists. He saw art as a field which imitates but also completes nature. According to Aristotle, just as philosophy, art allows us to grasp what is general, that is, it facilitates insight into the heart of the matter. Mimesis, so condemned by Plato, is for him a prerequisite for a work to come into being. But he treats mimesis differently than his teacher, not as a faithful imitation of reality but as artistic creation in accordance with the rules of art, in accordance with *its own* essence. And it is exactly this compliance with the essential rules of art that constitutes the basic criterion for evaluating a poem or a tragedy according to Aristotle⁶. So this is an aesthetic criterion, and not an ontological, epistemological or ethical one. Objections raised by Plato pertain, in his opinion, to those fields that go beyond aesthetics:

5 Just as improper musical tones (III, 398c–399e) and metric feet (III, 400–401a).

6 Henryk Podbielski, “Wstęp” [Introduction], in: Arystoteles, *Poetyka*, Wrocław: Ossolineum, 1989, LI.

But Homer and Empedocles have nothing in common except the metre, so that it would be proper to call the one a poet and the other not a poet but a scientist. Similarly if a man makes his representation by combining all the metres, as Chaeremon did when he wrote his rhapsody *The Centaur*, a medley of all the metres, he too should be given the name of poet. (Aristotle *Poetics*, 1447b)⁷

No wonder then that the modern hybrid Chaeremon was closer to Lykeion than to Academy. Aristotelian inspirations, questions, and traces are evident and numerous in Joyce, to name only Stephen's swaggering words that "Aristotle has not defined pity and terror. I have"⁸ and the tripartite division of *Ulysses* that can be seen as a reflection of the syllogism S-M-P, indicated by the initials opening each part,⁹ and which contains the most philosophy in Stephen's monologue of the most peripatetic episode III. The concept of showing the represented world in the form of a syllogism seems also interesting in the context of theses presented in Wittgenstein's *Tractatus*, published in the same year as Joyce's novel. According to the philosopher, sentences are images of reality, which ultimately means that a sentence and a corresponding state of affairs must have a common logical structure:

2.18 What every picture, of whatever form, must have in common with reality in order to be able to represent it at all – rightly or falsely – is the logical form, that is, the form of reality.¹⁰

Let us come back to Plato, however.

7 Aristotle. *Poetics*, in: *Aristotle in 23 Volumes*, Vol. 23, trans. by W.H. Fyfe. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press; London: Heinemann, 1932. Perseus Digital Library. Tufts University, USA. Web. 30 March 2010.

8 James Joyce, *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*, ed. R.B. Kershner, Boston and New York: Bedford Books of St. Martin's, 1993, p. 178. Further references will cite the page number parenthetically.

9 I repeat this hypothesis after Don Gifford and Robert Seideman, the authors of *Ulysses Annotated* (Berkley, Los Angeles, London: University of California Press, 1989, p. 12). The initials opening each part are respectively: S, M, P.

10 Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*, transl. by C.K. Ogden, with an introduction by Bertrand Russell, London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1922. Web. 30 March 2010. Hypertext of the Ogden bilingual edition at <<http://www.kfs.org/~jonathan/witt/t21en.html>>.

Unsheathe your dagger definitions. Horseness is the whatness of allhorse. Streams of tendency and eons they worship. God: noise in the street: very peripatetic. Space: what you damn well have to see. Through spaces smaller than red globules of man's blood they creepycrawl after Blake's buttocks into eternity of which this vegetable world is but a shadow. Hold to the now, the here, through which all future plunges to the past. (U, 9.84–89)

The above quoted conversation in the library refers to Plato directly. Let us now consider the structure and symbolism of *Ulysses* – if the matter pertains to the originator of the ideal state, his traces should be first of all sought in the sphere of ideas. As is commonly known, Joyce perfected the poetics of adjusting form to content to a rare degree, and employed the symbolists' principle of speaking indirectly and through suggestions with Mallarméan mastery.

In *Ulysses* that remote world of Platonic ideas is constituted by the *Odyssey*. Homer's epic functions as the ideal model, and the concrete, physical Dublin world is only its imperfect reflection. The Dublin odyssey differs so much from the ancient original that it is highly challenging to recognize in its main heroes their ancient prototypes. Neither does timid and inconspicuous Bloom resemble heroic Odysseus, nor does Stephen Dedalus, abandoning his biological father, imitate Telemachus longing for Odysseus, nor does promiscuous Molly Bloom recall patiently waiting Penelope. The relation between the Greek and the Irish heroes is conceived as a relation between the idea and its flimsy shade on the wall of the cave. The whole is Platonic *à rebours*, set against Plato, since for Joyce the reality of the Dublin day is real to the highest degree.

It is hard to think of greater malice, and of more apt conceptual satire, than to grant the role of the perfect world of ideas to the work that Plato, jealous of its power over people's hearts and minds, finds fault with and against whose pernicious influence he wanted to protect citizens of his republic. It is laughter, which the Greek sage finds as demoralizing as Homer's poetry, that the artist seems to use in a subversive gesture against the severe verdict of the philosopher.

- *Met him what? he asked.*
- *Here, she said. What does that mean?*
- He leaned downward and read near her polished thumbnail.*
- *Metempsychosis?*
- *Yes. Who's he when he's at home? (U, 4.336–40)*

If the claim that Joyce's transposition of the *Odyssey* is a parody of Platonic idealism may still seem too risky, we should consider another argument for such a thesis. Let us, then, ponder one of the key motifs of *Ulysses*, that is the idea of metempsychosis.

Metempsychosis is a belief totally alien to Homer. It appears only with the Orphists and Pythagoreans. Plato took it over and for him the teaching on reincarnation became the ultimate illustration and the point of reference for his whole philosophy. It constitutes one of the central themes of *Phaedo* (81c–82c), *Phaedrus* (246a–249d), and *Ti-maeus* (42b–d), as well as the climax of the *Republic* (x, 614–621d).

And it is precisely here, at the end of the *Republic*, that we can find a passage that could inspire Joyce to take up the *Odyssey*. It contains a description of man's fate in the afterlife. In Platonic eschatology death is followed by judgement, followed in turn by a thousand-year period of heaven or hell. After that the soul starts its journey anew and can independently choose its new incarnation. Souls pick up abandoned lots; their choices are strongly influenced by their memories of the previous life.

And it fell out that the soul of Odysseus drew the last lot of all and came to make its choice, and, from memory of its former toils having flung away ambition, went about for a long time in quest of the life of an ordinary citizen who minded his own business, and with difficulty found it lying in some corner disregarded by the others, and upon seeing it said that it would have done the same had it drawn the first lot, and chose it gladly. (*R*, x, 620c–d)

Is Leopold Bloom, a humble advertisement canvasser, not that "ordinary citizen" who "minds his own business"? Hence, is the whole of Joyce's novel not a fruit of a peculiar literary metempsychosis? If so, Joyce's *Ulysses* would be as much Homeric, as Platonic, which can be confirmed not only on the metatextual level but, as far as ideas and structure are concerned, also in the text itself.

– *Metempsychosis, he said, frowning. It's Greek: from the Greek. That means the transmigration of souls.*
 – *O, rocks! she said. Tell us in plain words. (U, 4.341–43)*

All three main heroes ponder transmigration of souls: Molly Bloom because she does not understand the word “metempsychosis” in a book she is just reading; her husband – provoked by her request to explain its meaning and the news about Paddy Dignam’s death; and finally, Stephen Dedalus, who left the framework of the *Portrait* and the family home with the words: “Old father, old artificer, stand me now and ever in good stead” (*PA*, 218) to return in *Ulysses* to search the real father. “The cords of all link back, strandentwining cable of all flesh” (*U*, 3.37), he thinks during his stroll along the beach in the peripatetic episode III. “From before the ages He willed me and now may not will me away or ever” (*U*, 3.47–48)

In another passage transmigration of souls is connected with Aristotle’s theories in his imagination: “But I, entelechy, form of forms, am I by memory because under everchanging forms” (*U*, 9.208–209), while Mr Bloom repeats obsessively a humourously twisted “metempsychosis” (“met him pike hoses”), as if he wanted to get rid of nagging thoughts:

Poor fellow! Quite a boy. Terrible. Really terrible. What dreams would he have, not seeing? Life a dream for him. Where is the justice being born that way? All those women and children excursion beanfeast burned and drowned in New York. Holocaust. Karma they call that transmigration for sins you did in a past life the reincarnation met him pike hoses (*U*, 8.1144–1148)

Besides, over a hundred pages later, among other gloomy reflections, Bloom recollects his dead son:

Met him pike hoses. Philosophy. O rocks!

All gone. All fallen. At the siege of Ross his father, at Gorey all his brothers fell. To Wexford, we are the boys of Wexford, he would. Last of his name and race.

I too. Last of my race. Milly young student. Well, my fault perhaps. No son. Rudy. Too late now. Or if not? If not? If still? (*U*, 11.1062–1067)

A vision of Rudy, his baby son, who died when he was eleven-days-old, is in Bloom's thoughts all day, just as Stephen is haunted by remorse after his mother's death. Both are unable to seek consolation in religion, which they abandoned, but both reflect on the concept of reincarnation. Its most vivid, parodistic expression can be found in episode xiv, set in a maternity hospital during Mina Purefoy's labour (both Stephen and Bloom call in; the former to meet Buck Mulligan, a medical student; the latter to ask about Mrs Purefoy's condition):

In terror the poor girl flees away through the murk. She is the bride of darkness, a daughter of night. She dare not bear the sunnysgolden babe of day. No, Leopold. Name and memory solace thee not. That youthful illusion of thy strength was taken from thee—and in vain. No son of thy loins is by thee. There is none now to be for Leopold, what Leopold was for Rudolph.

The voices blend and fuse in clouded silence: silence that is the infinite of space: and swiftly, silently the soul is wafted over regions of cycles of generations that have lived. A region where grey twilight ever descends, never falls on wide sagegreen pasturefields, shedding her dusk, scattering a perennial dew of stars. She follows her mother with ungainly steps, a mare leading her fillyfoal. Twilight phantoms are they, yet moulded in prophetic grace of structure, slim shapely haunches, a supple tendonous neck, the meek apprehensive skull. They fade, sad phantoms: all is gone. Agendath is a waste land, a home of screechowl and the sandblind upupa. Netaim, the golden, is no more. And on the highway of the clouds they come, muttering thunder of rebellion, the ghosts of beasts. Huuh! Hark! Huuh! (...)

Onward to the dead sea they tramp to drink, unslaked and with horrible gulplings, the salt somnolent inexhaustible flood. And the equine portent grows again, magnified in the deserted heavens, nay to heaven's own magnitude, till it looms, vast, over the house of Virgo. And lo, wonder of metempsychosis, it is she, the everlasting bride, harbinger of the daystar, the bride, ever virgin. (*U*, 14.1072–1101)

A little later Bloom's meditative fantasies are followed by Stephen's vision that is a direct reference to the *Republic*. But before we let him speak, let us recall the final passage of Plato's dialogue, placing all the teaching presented there in the context of the afterlife, described in the myth of Era treating of metempsychosis:

And so, Glaucon, the tale was saved, as the saying is, and was not lost. And it will save us if we believe it, and we shall safely cross the River of Lethe, and keep our soul unspotted from the world. But if we are guided by me we shall believe that the soul is immortal and capable of enduring all extremes of good and evil, and so we shall hold ever to the upward way and pursue righteousness with wisdom always and ever, that we may be dear to ourselves and to the gods both during our sojourn here and when we receive our reward, as the victors in the games go about to gather in theirs. And thus both here and in that journey of a thousand years, whereof I have told you, we shall fare well (*R*, x, 621b–d).

Juxtaposed with this is the vision of Stephen Dedalus, who contrasts Platonic moralising from the other world with the earthly power of his art:

He asked about Glaucon, Alcibiades, Pisistratus. Where were they now? Neither knew. You have spoken of the past and its phantoms, Stephen said. Why think of them? If I call them into life across the waters of Lethe will not the poor ghosts troop to my call? Who supposes it? I, Bous Stephanoumenos, bullockbefriending bard, am lord and giver of their life. (*U*, 14.1111–1116)

Again, it seems that taking up Plato's theory, the Irish writer totally reversed his intentions. Who is Bloom, that new incarnation of the "ideal" Odysseus? He is one of the most sensual characters in literature, and as his unfaithful Penelope remarks in her soliloquy, an atheist "who never goes to church mass or meeting he says your soul you have no soul inside only grey matter" (*U*, 18.141–42). Imminent consequences are known to us not only from the *Republic*, but also from Book x of *Laws*: at least five years in "the reformatory" subjected to visits of the sages of the Nocturnal Assembly, and if their persuasion did not bring any effect, even death (*Laws*, x, 908e–909d)¹¹. The Joycean Telemachus would not avoid capital punishment either, since he refused to kneel and pray at his mother's deathbed. Dedalus is an artist, and as he calls himself "a horrible example of free thought" (*U*, 1.625) who does not show any desire to correct himself. Here is

¹¹ Plato. *Plato in Twelve Volumes. Laws*. Vols. 10 & 11. Trans. by R.G. Bury. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press; London: Heinemann, 1967 & 1968. Perseus Digital Library. Tufts University, USA. Web. 30 March 2010.

the memorable scene from episode xv, when the ghost of his mother appears to him:

THE MOTHER: (*With smouldering eyes*) Repent! O, the fire of hell!

STEPHEN: (*Panting*) His noncorrosive sublimate! The corpsechewer! Raw head and bloody bones.

THE MOTHER: (*her face drawing near and nearer, sending out an ashen breath*) Beware! (*She raises her blackened withered right arm slowly towards Stephen's breast with outstretched fingers*) Beware God's hand! (*A green crab with malignant red eyes sticks deep its grinning claws in Stephen's heart.*)

STEPHEN: (*Strangled with rage*) Shite! (*His features grow drawn and grey and old.*)

BLOOM: (*At the window*) What?

STEPHEN: *Ah non, par exemple!* The intellectual imagination! With me all or not at all. *Non serviam!*

FLORRY: Give him some cold water. Wait. (*She rushes out*)

THE MOTHER: (*Wrings her hands slowly, moaning desperately*) O Sacred Heart of Jesus, have mercy on him! Save him from hell, O Divine Sacred Heart!

STEPHEN: No! No! No! Break my spirit, all of you, if you can! I'll bring you all to heel! (*U, 15.4211–4236*)

6

When anyone says that sort of thing about the gods, we shall be wroth with him, we will refuse him a chorus, neither will we allow teachers to use him for the education of the young if our guardians are to be god-fearing men and god-like in so far as that is possible for humanity. (R, II, 383c)

Plato's edict against poets long remained without any firm and exhaustive answer. Probably Joyce valued the vocation of the poet too highly to simply ignore Plato's attack:

I will not serve that in which I no longer believe, whether it call itself my home, my fatherland, or my church: and I will try to express myself in some mode of life or art as freely as I can and as wholly as I can, using for my defence the only arms I allow myself to use – silence, exile, and cunning. (*PA, 213*)

The “exile” Stephen Dedalus decided to use as his weapon differed from the exile decreed by the philosopher in that it was to be voluntary. As we know from the writer’s biography, Joyce was ready to spurn the monarchies of Edward VII and Pius X, and even – a few years later – the independent Ireland, perceiving in a possible engagement in national matters a threat to his own freedom. Exile, freedom, and cunning are, of course, aspects and prerequisites for art, the only efficient defence that the artist can use. By juxtaposing the fabulous myth with the reality of experience of his Dublin heroes, Joyce, resentful of the ending of the *Republic*, ridiculed Plato’s theory of ideas, and by parodying Odysseus’ choice derided Platonic eschatology. All this he did to rehabilitate, restore and revalue the flimsy shadows on the cave wall. Unlike Plato’s ideal republic, Joyce’s Dublin is fit for living.

How to distinguish between liberature and literature

(selected anatomical details)

Literature is full of descriptions of bodies. Beautiful and ugly and just so-so. Full of descriptions and of bodies. Full-fleshed, cow-eyed, fleet-footed. Written and unwritten. Brought to life by the imagination of a poet, the voice of a singer, and the ear of a listener, fed by the imagination of a reader. For those bodies the word is only a placenta, a chrysalis from which a butterfly emerges.

Sometimes a description is not enough: then the description itself wants to be a body. The word wants to be flesh, to be writing indecently nontransparent, visible, not only audible. STATELY and **plump**. Flesh, not (a placenta). (The book is to be that).

But not all books want to be (that). Some books themselves want to Be. A Body for reading. To Be a literary work no less fleshy than the hand that turns its pages. Or rather a **liberary** work. To Be for reading with the eyes, ears, and hands; for seeing, hearing and touching. We begin to experience books before we actually look inside them, at the text. As soon as we pick up a book, at the moment when we come into contact with its weight, shape and texture of paper.

But it sometimes happens that at first sight the liberary work does not differ from other ordinary books: there are ordinary covers, and an ordinary pile of bound pages.

Then it is necessary to maim the I to notice eyes-ore.

* * *

In the beginning was the Ear. The Eye remained in exile for a long time. Except for visual poetry, as one would like to lay it *bare*. But in those cases the Ear was missing. It is quite an achievement to write a calligram that would not kill poetry.

The Eye started to matter only with the advent of free verse, when poetry emancipated itself from the rule of rhythm and rhyme. When it started to matter not only **what** was written, but also **how** it was written. And that it **was** written down at all. The Eye and the Ear be-

came allies. And the Hand that writes, too. The hand that reads was not necessary yet.

Not so in fiction: here the Eye still seems to be redundant. It is helpful in writing, but it isn't essential for reading. In fact, you could listen to most novels without suffering any loss or lack. Even those about Albertina's imprisonment and K's arrest.

But there are novels than cannot be just listened to; this is not enough. For example, the one about the adventures of a certain advertisement canvasser and his unfaithful wife. This book must be perceived with all the senses.

* * *

Of course, this is an exaggeration, an emotional hyperbole. There is no book so all-encompassing, no work so total that it would engage all the senses. Perhaps such a work of art is impossible at all. Unless it were a piece of culinary art, since a work truly faithful and uncompromisingly total would have to be edible.

(Since it seems of secondary importance to me that paper smells and we can feel how pages taste when we lick the finger to turn them. Which does not change the fact that Taste is a must. And a good nose, too.)

* * *

When, however, the book engages the Eye together with the Ear, this means a lot. It means that the book is there to be read, that it does not suffice to listen to the actor's voice, that the episode set in the editor's office and imitating newspaper typography can be perceived, that is, read properly only with the eyes. Just like another one, in the form of a catechism, closed with a mysterious, large dot prophesying the inevitable twilight of punctuation.

Yes this is a work as rich in poly-graphy of notations as it is rich in polyphony of styles if it were not for that famous scene with winding up the clock and all that followed including Uncle Tobys embarrassing wound that took place earlier so one could risk a statement that literature that is the art of writing as the name itself indicates revealed its full charm only on the day when someone dated a certain maid from Finns Hotel nearly everything in literature before that could have been written down in any way which means that it did not have to be written down at all since writing was only a ca-

sual tool for recording speech and not a fullfledged means of expression.

* * *

Yes. That is when literature was truly born. At the moment when in consequence of a mistake the perfect dream Trismegistos turned into Tristram.

And was liberature also born then? Yes, also. And if not at that very moment, then it was in the chapter on NOSES.

Is it not too much for one book, and an unfinished one at that? Yes, too much, definitely too MUCK.

* * *

The body of text.

Uttered letters, yet seen, shaped Eccles Street.

The body develops from an embryonic form. Here the development of the embryo is rendered through the development of language: from sentences written in Old English up to modern slang. In the earlier novel the same purpose is achieved through the evolution of style: from simple, childish prattle on the opening pages up to sophisticated aesthetic judgments formulated by the young artist at the end of the book.

Each episode is supposed to correspond to some bodily organ (except for the first three, which most probably correspond to some part of the spirit, but I will leave it to those who have seen one to discuss): Episode 4 – the kidney, 5 – genitals, 6 – the heart, 7 – lungs, 8 – esophagus, 9 – brain, 10 – blood, 11 – ear, 12 – muscles, 13 – eye, nose, 14 – uterus, (see above), 15 – locomotor apparatus, 16 – nerves, 17 – skeleton, 18 – the whole body, flesh (see below).

The final stream of consciousness rolls like “the huge earth ball slowly surely and evenly round and round spinning, its four cardinal points being the female breasts, arse, womb and cunt expressed by the words *because*, *bottom* (in all senses bottom button, bottom of the class, bottom of the sea, bottom of his heart), *woman*, *yes*”.¹

¹ Ed. note. J. Joyce *Selected Letters*, ed. R. Ellman, New York: Viking, 1975, p. 258.

An interesting paradox this is. The most perfect attempt so far to render the working of the mind is at the same time the most sensual text within the range of 100 years.

But still the Hand is not necessary here. This is still the orgy of the Eye and the Ear, the charms of the body conceived of sounds and letters. Rustling, smooth and pleasant to the touch, pages are used by the author only in his next book, the body of the mystical Finnegans, molded out of nearly 100 languages and exactly 314 sheets of paper.

* * *

A Soul of text, a Body of the book?

Something more should perhaps be written about potential and actual shapes, formats, colours, textures, typography, etc., conventional and unconventional structure of the book, its weight and volume, kinds of notation, etc., the unity of word and matter, body and soul, form and content, and how **WEIGHTY** all this can be, how **DEEP**, and **WELL THOUGHT-OUT**, (and also about **in-visible literature** together with an enumeration of its kinds) – but the Eye, the Ear, and the Hand, and all Four Letters including, have clearly had enough of this writing, and it is not out of the question that also Your Noble organs, Dear Francesca and Dear Paolo, have had enough, so I would suggest that we should ease our fantasy and part in most friendly terms to meet elsewhere and on another **OKASION**, in another **SIGHTUATION**.

A Brief History of Liberature

So the critic to whom I am most grateful is the one who can make me look at something I have never looked at before, or looked at only with eyes clouded by prejudice, set me face to face with it and then leave me alone with it. From that point, I must rely upon my own sensibility, intelligence and capacity for wisdom.

T.S. Eliot "The Frontiers of Criticism"

It is arguable to what extent liberature is a new literary trend or a new way of perceiving existing literary works, a perception that takes into consideration their material aspect. Should liberature's origins be traced back to the moment when the term was coined and its scope outlined (in Zenon Fajfer's article "Liberatura. Aneks do słownika terminów literackich" [Liberature. An appendix to a dictionary of literary terms], "Dekada Literacka" 1999)? Or should we rather look for its origins in earlier attempts at integrating text, image, and the physical space in which they were located?

Phot. 1. "Liberature" publishing line, Korporacja Ha!art

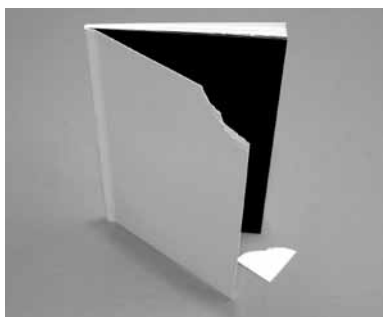


Determining the beginnings of liberature may therefore cause a considerable problem. Whichever answer we accept, though, there is no question, that its origins go back to the invention of writing and the first, most primitive forms of the book and can be traced as far back as ancient Egypt. Hieroglyphs on the walls of tombs and coffins are of markedly library character; they were coordinated with the interior space of a burial chamber and the position of the mummy and consequently they ran in various directions forming a compositional whole. Library features can be found in the Jewish *Torah*, in which each sign is charged with rich symbolism, and an omission of a single letter (out of the total 304 805) invalidates the whole book. We must also mention mediaeval illuminated manuscripts of the Gospels, such as the *Book of Kells*, cabbalist works, such as *Sepher Jecirah*, and the calligraphy of the Middle and Far East. We could give many more examples; the greatest number of them can be found in those parts of the world where writing was believed to be of divine origin and the book was considered to be a reflection of the Macrocosmos.

Library thinking can also be found in secular books. It has been associated with the development of conceptual poetry (acrostics, anagrams, magic squares, permutational poems) and of visual poems (*carmina figurata* and emblems) from antiquity to the present. Although minor forms dominated, we can also find more substantial works whose authors, driven by the ambition to imitate the cosmic or architectonic order, tried to control the structure of the whole volume. Among them were masterpieces of visual poetry: Hrabanus Maurus' *Liber de laudibus sanctae crucis* (the first half of the 9th c.) and George Herbert's carefully wrought collection of poems *The Temple* (1633). Their elaborate (and in the case of the latter also spatial) structure can serve as a model for artists concerned with liberature, along with Dante's mathematically precise *Divine Comedy* (1321), which has been compared to a mediaeval cathedral.

Laurence Sterne's *Tristram Shandy* (1759–67) anticipates another kind of liberature in which the author not only plays with the conventions of the novel, but also with the physical shape of the book by using various typographical devices, changing the sequence of the chapters and even encouraging the reader to draw on its pages.

Beside Sterne, however, the key figures in the process of transition from literature to liberature were William Blake and Stéphane Mallarmé. Imbued with a vision of the spiritual and bodily integrity of the world, Blake expressed this unity in a new kind of art – in



the book in which the word and the image interpenetrate each other to form an inextricable whole. His illuminated poems, such as *The Songs of Innocence and Experience* (1789–94), the *Marriage of Heaven and Hell* (1790) and *Jerusalem* (1804), which he printed using his own original etching technique and painted by hand (with considerable help from his wife Catherine), integrate the word and the image to a degree comparable only with illuminated holy scriptures.

In Mallarmé's innovative poem *Un coup de dés jamais n'abolira le hasard* (1897, book ed. 1914) both verso and recto pages make up a uniform space. Built up from several interwoven sentences printed with types of different sizes and shapes and stretching over 21 pages, this spatial poem is comparable to Blake's works in its total character. Obsessed with the idea of the Book, the idea of a work freed from any element of chance, unifying the word, the number and the space of the volume into the absolute one, the French symbolist was also the author of many theoretical reflections on typography and the physical aspect of the book collected in a volume entitled *Divagations* (1897; see, e.g., "Le livre, instrument spirituel").

Phot. 2. Katarzyna Bazarnik & Zenon Fajfer, *(O)patrzenie* [Ga(u)ze] "Liberature" vol. 1

Phot. 3. *Ha!art* no. 15 (2003). Monograph issue on liberature

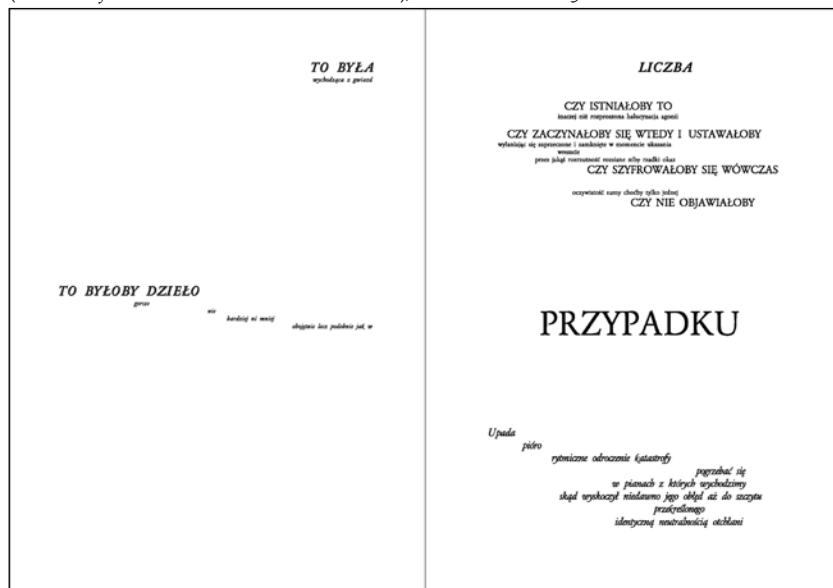
Phot. 4. Zenon Fajfer, *Społgładając przez ozonową dziurę* [But Eyeing Like Ozone Whole] "Liberature" vol. 2

The work of James Joyce could be considered an attempt at realisation of the idea of the Book: especially his *Ulysses* (1922), written in many styles and making use of different notations, and *Finnegans Wake* (1939), every edition of which preserves the same layout. It seems quite likely that Joyce had actually planned the number of pages (628) in *FW*, which, considering the size of the book, was a breathtaking achievement in the pre-computer era.

Other nineteenth and twentieth century precursors of liberature include: Stanisław Wyspiański, playwright, theatre designer and director, and reformer of the book layout; Bruno Schulz, a writer who designed illustrations and covers for his books, as well as Futurists, Dadaists, Constructivists (e.g., Przyboś, a poet, and Strzemiński, a designer, who collaborated on several books) and the concrete poets. One could even venture to say that T.S. Eliot's "The Waste Land" owes its final shape to library thinking connected with the composition of the book: namely, the book in which the poem was to be printed was too thin, which is why the poet had to add a few pages; this is how the famous footnotes to the poem came into being.

In fact, there are many more examples of "liberature before liberature", especially among those literary works where the material

Phot. 5. Stéphane Mallarmé, *Rzut kośćmi nigdy nie zniesie przypadku* (*A Throw of the Dice Will Never Abolish Chance*), "Liberature" vol. 3

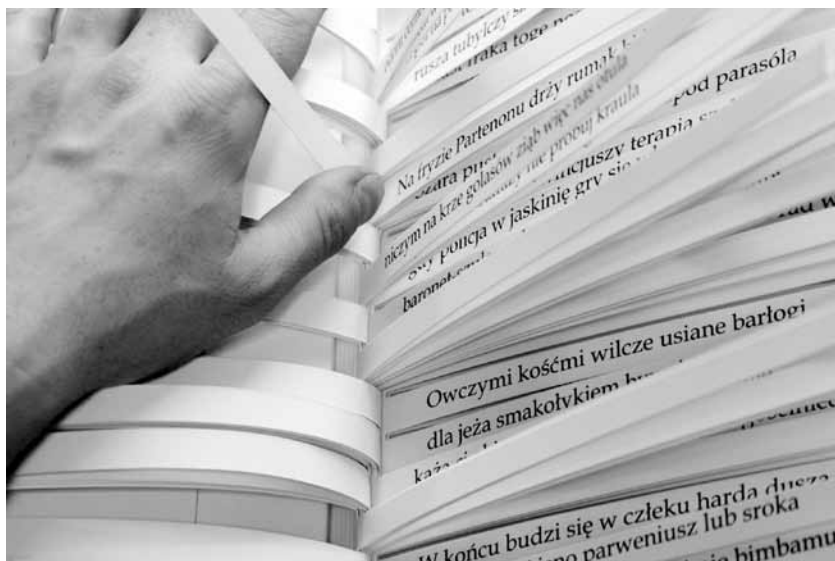




Phot. 6. B.S. Johnson, *Nieszczęśni* (*The Unfortunates*), "Liberature" vol. 5

and visual side plays an important part. It would not come amiss to mention nearly all children's literature in which one can hardly find a work which is *not* library. Thus, library character is traceable in such works as, for example: Lewis Carroll's books, Guillaume Apollinaire's *Calligrammes* (1918), e.e. cumming's typographic poetry, the works of Franciszka and Stefan Themersons, Antoine de Saint-Exupéry's *Le Petit Prince* (1943), some works of Michel Butor and Oulipo writers, e.g. Georges Perec's *Life Instruction Manual* (1978), Tove Jansson's Moomin cycle, W.H. Gass's *Willie Masters' Lonesome Wife* (1968) built out of text and photos, Madeline Gins's *Word Rain* (1969), Raymond Federman's graphic novels, John Cage's mesostichs, anthologies of one-page-long pieces collected by Richard Kostelanetz, Ronald Sukenick's *Out* (1973), Milorad Pavić's *Dictionary of the Khazars* (1984) consisting of two volumes: a male and a female one, and Tadeusz Różewicz's *Plaskorzeźba* (1991), where reproduced autographs of the poems play as important a part as their typeset versions.

Library features are also to be found in less visually conspicuous works of a more architectonic structure: in spatially conceived Lawrence Durrell's *The Alexandria Quartet* (1957–60), in Valdimir Nabokov's *Pale Fire* (1962), a substantial part of which consists of footnotes; in nonlinear, aleatoric *Hopscotch* by Julio Cortázar (1963), and Beckett's last pieces with precisely calculated numbers of words.



Phot. 7. Raymond Queneau, *Sto tysięcy miliardów wierszy* (*Hundred Thousand Billion Poems*), "Liberature" vol. 6

Works that have appeared after publication of the liberature manifesto include the well-known and much admired *House of Leaves* by Mark Z. Danielewski (2000), U. Eco's *La misteriosa fiamma della regina Loana* (2004), and Günter Grass's *Letzte Tänze* (2003) with the author's illustrations.

It should be added that many of the above-mentioned writers were also concerned with theory, which in some cases resulted in concepts akin to liberature, for example, Butor's "Le livre comme objet" (1963), Gass's "The Book as a Container of Consciousness" (1995) or the introduction to a collection of prose writings *Aren't You Rather Young to Be Writing Your Memoirs?* (1973) by B.S. Johnson.

Because of its consistently library character, Johnson's work deserves special attention. Practically all of his works are characterised by a typically library attitude to the text, which subordinates the typography of the book to the demands of the text. For example, in *Albert Angelo* (1964) certain things are communicated by the kind of typeface, and an opening is cut in a few pages to give the reader an immediate insight into the character's future. The pages of another of his novels, *Trawl* (1966), which is an interior monologue, are narrow and slightly elongated in shape, and blanks of different length are used to render pauses in the working of the mind. Then, in his "geriatric comedy", *House Mother Normal* (1971), Johnson wrote nine

chapters that occupy the same number of pages, each of them including the interior monologue of one of the nine characters, offering a multifaceted picture of the same situation. The unification of the text with its material medium culminated in Johnson's most famous work, *The Unfortunates* (1969), published in the form of 27 unbound leaflets and single pages placed in a box. The unconventional, aleatoric form of the book is supposed to reflect disintegration brought about by illness and death, and the chaotic workings of the memory.

However, this is not the only example of a literary work in which the unconventional shape of the book plays an important part. Suffice it to mention Blaise Cendrars' 2-meter-long leporello poem *La Prose du Transsibérien et de la petite Jehanne de France* (1913), with Sonia Delaunay's graphic design, printed with twelve kinds of typefaces and different colours, and abstract illuminations; or Raymond Queneau's permutational poem *Cent mille milliards de poèmes* (1961) whose verses are printed on separate stripes. In both cases only the departure from the traditional codex form of the book allowed for full realisation of the authors' vision.

*

Traditional editorial conventions are also trespassed by the first artists who deliberately use the term "liberature" to refer to their work: the authors of the present article – Zenon Fajfer and Katarzyna Bazarnik – and Radosław Nowakowski, who gradually adopted the term to refer to his work (including those that counted as artist's books).

Nowakowski is the author of nearly twenty works, each of them having their own original structure: from *Ogon słonia* (*Elephant's Tail*, 1981–93), a novel in codex form with yellow pages, to the cycles of *Tajna Kronika Sabiny* (*Sabina's Secret Chronicle*, 1996–2001) and *Nieopisanie świata* (*(N)ondescription of the World*, 1990–2000), to the triangular book *Hasa Rapasa* (1997–2001) and the ten and a half meter long *Ulica Sienkiewicza* (2003). He is also the author of a hypertextual novel *Koniec świata według Emeryka* (*The End of the World According to Emeryk*, 2003–2005) and *Traktat Kartograficzny* (*Treatise on Pageography*, 2002) devoted to liberature. Along with Bazarnik and Fajfer, he co-organised The Exhibition of Unconventional Books "Booksday" (the Jagiellonian Library, Kraków, 1999), during which the idea of liberature was presented for the first time.

Bazarnik and Fajfer, in turn, are the authors of a triple book *Oka-leczenie* (prototype edition, 2000) and *(O)patrzenie* (2003), which are char-

acterised not only by the original form of the book, but also of the text, whose structure is in a major part emanational. The emanational work is a new literary form invented by Fajfer in which the whole text is derived in several layers from one word (it is a kind of a Chinese boxes acrostic). Beside the above-mentioned titles, some of Fajfer's poems have this emanational structure, e.g., "Ars poetica" (2004), the poem that also exists in an animated version, and the bottle-book *Spoglądając przez ozonową dziurę* (*But Eyeing Like Ozone Whole*, 2004). Fajfer is also the author of numerous sign-poems (e.g., *A Portrait of the Artist*, 1996), a mobile-poem "siedemnaście liter" ("7 letters", 2003) and several articles devoted to the idea of liberature, while Bazarnik edited a volume of essays *Od Joyce'a do liberatury* (*From Joyce to Liberature*, 2002), the first critical work devoted to this concept.

Together they founded the first Liberature Reading Room (in Małopolski Instytut Kultury w Krakowie, Rynek Gł. 25 [Ed. note: now at 27, ul. Karmelicka]), which collects both library works (often of unique character) and works precursory to it as well as theoretical writings: books, articles, reviews directly or indirectly associated with liberature. It also hosts lectures and meetings with artists and supervises a series of library publications launched in collaboration with a literary-cultural magazine *Ha!art*. The series aims to familiarize the reading public not only with contemporary works, but also with classic works of liberature that contributed to this phenomenon, a phenomenon in which the word converges with matter, and extreme avant-garde merges with the remotest traditions.

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Towards Liberature

1. Total Literature

To begin with we should ask ourselves a fundamental question: is the literary work only the words themselves? Or is it sometimes possibly something more: the surface of the page, or even the whole space of the book?¹

If we answer positively to the first question and state that “yes, indeed, the literary work is only the words”, and what is more that it is only spoken words taken as a record of speech, in which the kind and form of writing do not matter, we must realise that this leaves outside the realm of literature (or at least at its margins) a whole range of works that do not quite fulfil this criterion. These are works in which the author communicates through layout as well: a typographic arrangement, sometimes a drawing or a photograph, and a particular book structure: its shape and volume, such as Sterne’s *Tristram Shandy*, Blake’s illuminated poems, Mallarmé’s *A Throw of the Dice*, Joyce’s *Finnegans Wake*, Queneau’s *Cent mille milliards de poèmes*, W.H. Gass’s *Willie Masters’ Lonesome Wife*, and B.S. Johnson’s *The Unfortunates* to name only a few (Bazarnik and Fajfer 2005).²

If, however, our answer is negative, and we state that “the literary work is not exclusively words”, then a fully autonomous land will emerge before our eyes, or rather we will be able to perceive at last that there is a land occupied by literary works in which the word grows through the agency of writing into the world of physical matter and comes to occupy a space.

The unification of word with space and matter is so significant that it is justifiable to ask about generic affiliations and the ontological status of such works. Do they not belong to a distinct literary type or genre, a genre which is characterized by an inseparable bond between the text and the nonverbal aspects of the book? In such works (unlike in the so-called “artist’s book”) the word has still the dominant position, just as music is the most important element of the op-

1 Z. Fajfer, “Czas na liberacką Nagrodę Nobla?”, *Dekada Literacka* 5–6 (May–June 2003), p. 34–37.

2 K. Bazarnik and Z. Fajfer, *Liberature*, Kraków: Artpartner, 2005.

era. The analogy with opera seems most appropriate insofar as it involves a genre of music which is of comparably syncretic nature, a genre that far exceeds the sphere of sounds.

I was wondering what to call this postulated literary type, what term to use to make its belonging to literature clear but to make room for the book at the same time, the book understood not as an indifferent word-holder external to the literary work, but as an organic component of the work. This is how the concept of liberature came about (which draws on Latin *liber*, i.e., “book” and “free”), liberature, that is, total literature in which the text and the space of the book constitute an inseparable whole.³

2. Of Fair to Middling Forms

This introduction could create the impression that liberature is a theory conceived at a theoretician's desk and that literary artefacts are later created to fit it. On the contrary. T.S. Eliot remarked quite rightly that a poet's theories should result from his poetic practice and not vice versa. Unlike in life, where inventing theories to match deeds is not a praiseworthy practice, in art, in real art we always deal with theories invented to match practice. In other words: with self-reflection. And so it was in this case. I arrived at the idea of liberature intuitively, as if groping for it in the dark. And even if some kind of America were discovered on the way, or rather some kind of America were given a name, my primary goal had been the Indies.

What Indies?

My Indies was the book entitled *Oka-leczenie*.

The book containing a totally different kind of text.

Namely... invisible text.

It is a kind of paradox that the starting point for material, visual and spatial liberature was the desire to write an invisible text, existing in some other dimension.

One could ask why should one write invisible texts? What does “invisible text” mean?

³ Liberature in the sense suggested above was first used in an article “Liberatura. Aneks do słownika terminów literackich”, *Dekada Literacka* 8–9 (1999). Its English translation “Liberature (appendix to a dictionary of literary terms)” was published in *Liberature* by K. Bazarnik and Z. Fajfer.

My reasons for fulfilling this whim were numerous. In fact, I am not an advocate of literary games of the Oulipo kind (though I appreciate Queneau's and Perec's work), or of inventing or exercising a form only for the sake of the challenge it offers, or because of a dominant fashion. I consider writing sonnets, sestinas, and lipograms for their own sake a futile activity, even though something genuine may grow out of such soil.

We should be aware that form always communicates something – with its very structure, quite independently of the words. The point is that the message should not be extraneous to its form, it should not be accidental or arbitrary, but it should follow from the deepest essence of the work. And this is extremely difficult when one uses a conventionalised form since the convention is frequently tantamount to the death of the form. Which is not to say that the conventionalised form cannot be revitalised.

Since we know very well that forms do die. It suffices to take a walk round the burial ground of poetry to see superbly stylish sepulchres. When we look from the contemporary reader's perspective, it seems that works unrestrained by limitations of rhyme or rigorous versification and strict meter are better secured against the flow of time. A kind of formlessness seems to be a better guarantee of relative timelessness than even the finest structure. Among the highly conventionalised works there are few cases comparable to the *Divine Comedy*, whose form is so perfectly united with its content that this guarantees its imperviousness to time. But such cases can only be found where the form is itself a part of the message. Perhaps the progress of literature (if we can identify any progress at all) does not consist in transforming traditional forms, but in a gradual departure from them, in rejecting them in favour of less and less constrained expression.

Of course, in literature formlessness would itself constitute a poetic form, besides this is not at issue here. My point is that there are situations when the form is not a dead convention, but something living. And the form can be living only when it is simultaneously the content.

This is precisely what Beckett meant when he said about *Finnegans Wake* that "[h]ere form *is* content, content *is* form. (...) His [Joyce's] writing is not *about* something, it *is that something itself*. (...) When the sense is sleep, the words go to sleep. (...) When the sense is dancing, the words dance"⁴. This can be, in fact, extended to all of Joyce's fiction;

4 Samuel Beckett, "Dante... Bruno. Vico.. Joyce", in: *Our Exagmination Round His Factification for Incamination of Work in Progress*, ed. S. Beckett, London: Faber, 1972, p. 14.

Joyce undoubtedly reached an exceptional level of skill in coordinating style with content. Beckett himself attained the same perfection, too, while locating his “anti-style” at the other extreme of Joycean artistry. As well as Kafka, who could not actually impose any better, more adequate form upon his exhausting books: *Trial* and *Castle*, than to leave them unfinished.

These examples can be regarded as model cases of the unity of form and content. However, it needs to be stressed that the living form that is postulated here can enter into various relationships with the words, not only the relationship of correspondence (or similarity). Not only can the form imitate the so-called “content” (I put this in inverted commas since in the cases I’m speaking about the traditional division into form and content is abolished), but it can also complement, comment upon or even belie the content. However, it is never neutral. It always co-creates the message. Sometimes the emerging relations are extremely difficult to define, especially when we deal with works so ambiguous that their content evades interpretation; consequently, the relationship of the content and form evades evaluation.

I would like to stress, however, that the intended signification of form does not guarantee survival of a work. Sometimes the effect is just the opposite. Some of Apollinaire’s tautologies called calligrammes can serve as an example: his cravats, hearts or mandolins, which do not leave much space for imagination, or comparably tautological specimens of concrete poetry, (should I call them... too concrete, too quickly exhausting its conceptual potential, as, for example, the trivial “Forgetting” by St. Dróżdż, quite unlike his intriguing “Micro Macro”). Which is not to say that tautologies are always and only wrong. If I thought so, I wouldn’t have created Joyce’s portraits out of the letters of his name (1998), nor would I use for the titles of my poems such phrases as “7 letters” (2003). I only mean that it requires great mastery to create a calligramme that would not kill poetry. The eye must be used very carefully.



Figure 1. Zenon Fajfer, *Portrait of the Artist*, sign-poem (1998). From the left: *A Portrait of the Artist as a Foetus* (1881), *A Portrait of the Artist as an Adolescent* (1904), *A Portrait of the Artist as a Mature Man* (1922), *A Portrait of the Artist – Death Mask* (1941).

Yes, the eye must be used exceptionally carefully. But can it be deceived; can one disappear from its sight? This question has brought us back to the idea of writing invisible text⁵.

3. Peeping at the in-visible

The only invisible text known so far has been the other, purposefully unwritten part of the *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*. Wittgenstein explained quite seriously to his would-be editor that his book consisted of two parts: the first, written one, and the other, which included everything that he had not written down. And that it was that other part that was really important, and that he included in it, by remaining silent, everything about which others only prattle helplessly⁶.

When I began work on *Oka-leczenie* in the late 1980s, I did not know Wittgenstein yet. However, my motivation was in many respects analogous, except for one crucial difference: I felt that what I wanted to express could not be expressed either with mere words or with mere silence. I wanted to describe the inexpressible: birth and death. I wanted to touch the very moment of leaving and arriving, the two poles of the great mystery.

What is, however, left to the writer who does not believe in the adequacy of language or the mere magic of silence? I was without an idea for a long time. Until 1993 when my father died and soon afterwards my son was born. For over forty days I was living in a very strange state; I had an impression as if both of them were somewhere near. Finally, when I witnessed the birth, when I saw how that which had remained hidden for so long was emerging, I realised that my text should be hidden, too. I grew certain that neither death nor birth can be expressed in any other way, if they can be expressed at all.

I wanted to achieve perfect iconicity: I wanted to leave invisible for the reader what is invisible for us in everyday experience. I felt that only if I were to leave it like that, would it remain true. Invisible, and yet – let us add – seeable. Just as the child in the mother's womb or the intriguing contents of mum's handbag, or a locked wardrobe. Not to mention distant stars and the insides of atoms, impossible to be seen without appropriate instruments. But this would only be pos-

5 Z. Fajfer "Liberatura czyli literatura totalna (Aneks do *Aneksu do słownika terminów literackich*)", *FA-art* 4 (46), p. 10–17.

6 R. Monk, *Ludwig Wittgenstein. Powinność geniusza*, transl. A. Lipszyc, Ł. Sommer, Warszawa: KR Press, 2003, p. 201–202.

sible with the use of some new dimension of text, some new form, a form that would enable words to be placed in another space, or to put it more precisely, enable the *creation* of that space.

I pondered on various ways of encrypting words, and finally, after a few months I hit upon a solution. The form that seemed so promising was something that I called emanationism: a kind of Chinese-box acrostic consisting of several layers of contracted text. It differs from the traditional acrostic insofar as one should read the initials of words (to be precise, all words from each subsequently emerging layer) and not only the first letters of each verse. All its layers form a multidimensional structure that can be reduced to a non-dimensional point.

How does it all work? Let us imagine a text whose words begin to disappear and only their initial letters stay. These letters form a new text out of which another text emerges through an analogous process, and the process continues up to the point when the whole work contracts to one word like an imploding star.

I would like to demonstrate how it actually works, using as an example “Ars poetica” (2004), a poem which I wrote ten years later, and which exists also in an electronic version⁷:

⁷ The “static” version of “Ars poetica” has been published twice in a literary magazine *Portret* as a part of the cycle of poems “dwadzieścia jeden liter”. However, the first publication (no 16–17/2004) contained serious editorial errors that it was necessary to reprint the whole cycle again (no 18/2004). But all’s well that ends well: comparing these two printings can serve as a model example of what responsibility falls upon the editor, desktop designer and printer and what grave consequences may result from a seemingly minor error that often passes unnoticed in other types of work.

The kinetic version of “Ars poetica”, premiered at the Fifth International Symposium “Iconicity in Language and Literature” in Kraków 2005, is available in an on-line issue of *Portret* (http://www.portret.org.pl/_4/online_04.html) and on Krakow’s Liberature Reading Room website: www.liberatura.pl.

More about the relations between liberature and electronic media in my article “Liberatura: hiperksięga w epoce hipertekstu” (*Ha!art* 14 (2003), pp. -10 – -1, negative pagination), which drew attention of critics of electronic hyperfiction and was reprinted in *Liternet.pl* (ed. P. Marecki, Kraków: Korporacja Ha!art, 2003).

It's me? Milky Oceans. Read. Trace astral letters.
 Nothing. Agni, kindle elpyrosis. Desire's
 sweet potion. A cup? Empty.
 Inside new screens I'd drink. Evil
 desire? Reset. Eat avidly my initials. Now, go:
 either you, eye

[Ars poetica]

there I. My eyesight
 obscured. Vast expanses reach
 where an intellectual trap
 arranges fate. Toward Elsinore rocks? Waves are running down,
 running up. New
 days or wasted nights.

Figure 2–6. Involution of emanational text in “Ars poetica”.

I m M O R T a l
N A k e D
s p A c E
I n s I d E
d R E a m i N g
e y e

t I M e
o V e r
w a i t
a f T E r W a r d
r u N
d o w n

ImMORTal

NAkeD

spAcE

InsIdE

dREamiNg

eye

tIMe

oVer

wait

afTErWard

ruN

down

I
N
s
I
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e

t
o
w
a
r
d

I

t

Now the whole process is repeated in the reverse direction: like a spider, the word “IT” spins off a multi-layered text, but ultimately, only its outer layer remains visible, while the rest of it exists in some kind of virtual space.

The text of *Oka-leczenie*, the book I created together with Katarzyna Bazarnik, has such a multidimensional form. Since this work has not been officially published yet, but exists only in nine prototype copies made in the year 2000, I will take the liberty of telling you a little more about it.



Figure 7. Zenon Fajfer, Katarzyna Bazarnik, *Oka-leczenie*. 1st edition, Kraków 2000.

Oka-leczenie, the oldest passage of which was written in 1988, went through a series of metamorphoses before it assumed the shape of the triple book, that is, the form of three volumes bound into one whole in such a way that the middle volume is placed inversely to the other two volumes. One of these parts (or books) contains the deathbed scene. Close and distant relatives have gathered round the bed of the dying father. Some are silent, someone is crying, others are talking: about everything; questions about one's health mix with conversations on work, family problems and politics. The dying is practically impossible to get in touch with, but some still delude themselves, they still hope against hope. The reader can see a very realistic scene built up from voices only: trivial conversations, trite remarks, grandiose gestures, grievances, and expressions of sympathy. Each character has its own particular typeface, which helps to distinguish them.

This is related to the character's age, sex, the tone of voice, but there is no narrator, no narratorial commentary.

Beside two subtle typographic hints, there is hardly anything in the story to indicate that it has any hidden layer. The reader is not shown any folding and unfolding texts, as in the case of "*Ars poetica*" and *(O)patrzenie* (2003), our second book. What is to be invisible, remains invisible till the end. Only the reader can dig up, unravel and unfold the hidden dimension. When she starts reading the initials of each word she will unveil the other sphere occupied by the consciousness of the man in a coma. Even though scraps of conversations from the upper layer reach him, he is no longer able to communicate with anybody. This is the end, of which hardly anybody is aware. Reading the first invisible layer is precisely the moment of dying, the moment of transition to the other side, the moment of In-Between. The transition to the lower layers is an equivalent to the separation of the soul from the body and its journey through the underworld. Finally, when the bottom word, which generated the whole text, is reached, a conception takes place, which marks the beginning of another journey towards the next birth.

The second book of *Oka-leczenie* has the same structure and the scenes are also presented only through dialogues. This time, however, the invisible text is the formal analogue for the development of the foetus: from a zygote to the fully developed organism. But the baby remains still hidden, in the womb of mother-text. The prolonged, naturalistic scene of a woman in labour can only be drawn to a close by the intervention of the reader, whose role it is to play the midwife and help the child into the world.

Both invisible texts are of the same length and have 642 words altogether (which is approximately the same as, e.g., in *A Throw of the Dice*). This is enough to develop the invisible part into quite a story. The folded, symmetrical structure of the text resembles a spirally twisted net or fabric of paradoxical qualities. Its visible and invisible dimensions create a whole which seems to be more adequately described by esoteric conceptions: Tantric, Buddhist, Taoist, Pythagorean ones and the Kabbalistic Tzimtzum, than by literary terms. Equally adequate is David Bohm's theory of the implicate order, according to which the universe is an indivisible quantum whole folded in each of its parts.⁸

8 In an on-line tribute to David Bohm David Pratt ("David Bohm and the Implicate Order", *Sunrise Magazine*, February/March 2003. Web. 30 April 2010) summarises his concepts as follows:

Besides the “deathbed” part, *Oka-leczenie* contains one more invisible text that leads to the middle volume, which is placed reversely to the other two (or to another book, the above mentioned (*O*)*patrzenie*). The middle volume contains a combination of two texts by two different authors: the first text is a hexastich, the other is just one word imitating an electrocardiogram. Both are handwritten, in white on black. They pulsate and intertwine, covering 64 pages, thereby creating a true Book of Changes: a structure both dynamic and static since movement is only vertical. The written word, naked in comparison to the words dressed in a typeface, reveals yet another dimension, perhaps the most intimate dimension of *Oka-leczenie*.

4. Readable body

In talking about writing, several kinds of which are contained in *Oka-leczenie*,⁹ we have finally reached the long promised liberature. To sum up, while I was writing the invisible text, I came to appreciate the material significance of its physical medium, that is, the visible text. The visible text became a body; I could no longer treat it as a transparent medium.

Each body occupies some space. In the case of such a peculiar body, this space is equivalent to the space of the page and the whole book. Thus, the book also ceased to be a neutral medium for me – it became a part of the work for which I felt fully responsible. I realised

“In Bohm’s view, all the separate objects, entities, structures, and events in the visible or explicate world around us are relatively autonomous, stable, and temporary “subtotalities” derived from a deeper, implicate order of unbroken wholeness. (...) Bohm suggests that the whole universe can be thought of as a kind of giant, flowing hologram, or *holomovement*, in which a total order is contained, in some implicit sense, in each region of space and time. The explicate order is a projection from higher dimensional levels of reality, and the apparent stability and solidity of the objects and entities composing it are generated and sustained by a ceaseless process of enfoldment and unfoldment, for subatomic particles are constantly dissolving into the implicate order and then recrystallizing. (...) Bohm believes that life and consciousness are enfolded deep in the generative order and are therefore present in varying degrees of unfoldment in all matter, including supposedly “inanimate” matter such as electrons or plasmas. He suggests that there is a “protointelligence” in matter, so that new evolutionary developments do not emerge in a random fashion but creatively as relatively integrated wholes from implicate levels of reality. The mystical connotations of Bohm’s ideas are underlined by his remark that the implicate domain “could equally well be called Idealism, Spirit, Consciousness. The separation of the two – matter and spirit – is an abstraction. The ground is always one.” (Quoted in Michael Talbot, *The Holographic Universe*, HarperCollins, New York, 1991, p. 271.) (Pratt, paragraphs 12, 17, 19).

I have an irresistible feeling that Bohm and I are speaking about approximately the same thing: he through mathematical equations, I through literary means.

9 Bogdan Zalewski, “Na początku był;” (In the Beginning There Was ;), *Ha!art* 15 (2003), pp. 89–90.

that I can fill this space in any way, that I can, in fact, create it: from the beginning, from the very foundations, starting from determining the shape, format, and size of the book, like a man of the theatre who starts working on a performance by determining the area where the actors will perform and the basic spatial relations between the actors and the audience).¹⁰ Or even, when it turns out to be indispensable – from building the theatre itself.

For the stage can be literally anywhere and the audience must be prepared to face this. The same goes for the book and the reader, who must also be prepared to face this.

And this is how, quite unexpectedly, I found myself becoming a writer who uses, beside language, writing and a sheet of paper as his medium of expression. So I started pondering on writing: on its fascinating history, the richness of types, on the kinds of typefaces, their size, and their arrangement on the page, about the meaning implied in serif or sans serif types, about the meaning of print and handwriting. What would happen if the writing were reversed and ran in the opposite direction? Or were arranged vertically from top to bottom? Or if I turned a word into an image, say, wrote down the word “denat” (which means “a dead body, a deceased”) like that:



What colour should be used here? Black? Or maybe just the opposite? Maybe white?

The change of colour of writing and the colour of the background will make us see the page that the text that occupies, notice its colour and shape. We will feel its skin, sometimes smooth and glossy, sometimes rough and wrinkled, covered with tiny hairs. Sometimes we will find a mole and not consider the paper blemished.¹¹

The sheet of paper is not transparent, not in the least. This is only an illusion. We can no longer pretend that it is not here. It is. It has always been. It was and it had a nice smell. If I wanted a transparent page, I would use transparent sheet. If I want a fully transparent page, I will print my text on a transparency and bind it in glass. The text will hover in the air, and the reader will be able to look at its members as if (possibly) God looks at us through the ozone hole.

¹⁰ Fajfer “Liberatura. Aneks do słownika terminów literackich”, p. 9.

¹¹ Zenon Fajfer, “Po czym odróżnić liberaturę od literatury (wybrane szczegóły anatomiczne)”, *Portret* 16–17 (2004), pp. 120–122.



Figure 8. Katarzyna Bazarnik & Zenon Fajfer, *(O)patrzenie*. Kraków 2003.

Figure 9. Zenon Fajfer, *Spoglądając przez ozonową dziurę*. Kraków 2004.

What will I bind it in? In glass? Why not? Who said that a book must always look like “a book”? After all, this is only a convention that everybody follows automatically. And liberature is tantamount to liberation from this convention, it is the book freed from constraints imposed on it by rules, canons, and critics”.¹²

The book can assume any shape and be made of any material. It may look like *Oka-leczenie* (whose title is a play on the Polish word meaning “injury, wound” and could be rendered as “Eyesore” or “Meyehem”) or it can have an actual sore, it can be literally maimed: the torn-off top right corner of the cover in *(O)patrzenie* is waiting for its readers. (*(O)patrzenie*, in turn, is a play on the Polish word, which means “to dress a wound” and could be translated as “Ga(u)ze”) The book may even look like a bottle. What’s more, it *may be* a bottle. But *Eyeing Like Ozone Whole* (2004) is a book like any other. But a book that cannot look otherwise. Because its form is dictated by the text.¹³

And *Oka-leczenie* cannot look otherwise either. It had to take the form of a triple book: the Trinity, triad, Trimurti. If this book were

¹² K. Bazarnik, “Dlaczego od Joyce’a do liberatury (zamiast wstępu)”, in: *Od Joyce’a do liberatury*, Kraków: Universitas, 2002, pp. v–xvi.

¹³ Z. Fajfer, “Nie(o)pisanie liberatury”, *Ha!art* 15 (2003), p. 9.

published in three separate volumes, or in one volume but in three parts, the meaning would be totally different. In this sense there is no liberty, no freedom at all. And there is no chance either.

The creative act (often) begins from reflection on the structure of the book, and the act of reading (always) begins from taking the book in hand. A different book structure is tantamount to a different physics. The invisible text is meta-physics. Somewhere in between there is the reader who learns to read anew.

First published in: "W stronę liberatury", in: *Ikoniczność znaku: słowo – przedmiot – obraz – gest*. Ed. Elżbieta Tabakowska. Kraków: Universitas, 2006. 161–179. The article is based on a presentation given at 5th Symposium on Iconicity in Language and Literature, held by the Universities in Zurich, Amsterdam and Kraków, on 17–20 March 2005 at the Jagiellonian University in Kraków.

Liberum Veto?

(an authorial commentary to my article "Liberature.
Appendix to a Dictionary of Literary Terms")

It has been six years since I wrote that essay-manifesto. In the era of atomic clocks six years is nearly a whole epoch. Much has happened in the meantime: liberature is being published¹, discussed and written about, the Liberature Reading Room² was established in Krakow, there is a growing interest in it abroad. And much has changed. I look at some things (book-things) differently now, which is why I needed to write this article.

I will start with positive aspects. Not only did the essay in question introduce quite a useful term, but it also initiated critical reflection on its designates, entailing a review of basic notions of literary studies. As soon as it was published in *Dekada Literacka*, the phenomenon gained its identity. It started to be differentiated from related phenomena (like the artist's book or beautiful book) and noticed in a field apparently so thoroughly examined, that is, in the field of traditionally understood literature.

However, the concept, only sketched in *Dekada Literacka*, does not boil down to coining a new term. More important than the introduction of a new term was the new idea behind it, the idea of a total work in which the writer or the poet speaks through the whole book³. The idea was not new, yet it has never been fully realised.

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- 1 In 2003 Ha!art, the interdisciplinary magazine on culture and the arts, launched a publishing line called "Liberature". So far three publications have appeared in it: *(O)patrzenie* by Katarzyna Bazarnik and Zenon Fajfer (Kraków: Krakowska Alternatywa, 2003), *Spoglądając przez ozonową dziurę* by Z. Fajfer (Kraków: Korporacja Ha!art, 2004) (also published in English as *But Eyeing Like Ozone Whole* in Krzysztof Bartnicki's translation), and *Rzut kośćmi nigdy nie znieśie przypadku* by Stéphane Mallarmé in Tomasz Różycki's translation, prefaced by prof. Michał Paweł Markowski.
 - 2 The Liberature Reading Room has been open since 2002 in Małopolski Instytut Kultury, formerly at 25 Rynek Główny in Kraków, now at 27, ul. Karmelicka. (ed. note)
 - 3 I have realised with time that the term "liberature" has been used before, but in a totally different sense: of "liberating literature". My concept of liberature as an objectively perceived, distinct literary mode in which the text and the book form an organic whole, has little to do with such "liberature"; the homonymy resulted from two meanings of Latin "liber". This demonstrates that the term itself is of secondary importance as long as it hits the nail on the head. So, for example, it was mostly for the sake of sound that "liberature" became preferred to "liberatics", which I initially considered as an option.

Besides, I was inspired by the wish to pit it against artistic and scientific prejudice resulting from the too-idealistic presuppositions of critics and theoreticians ignoring the material, visual, and spatial aspect of the literary work. My ambition was to make a correction to a description of all previously written literature – a perverse correction, since it was to be executed with the help of a typo. In addition, the important novelty of the proposition did not consist in drawing one's attention to the non-verbal aspects of the literary work, to the role of writing, and the book (this had been done before), but rather in the claim that the integrity of the word with matter and space is a fact so significant that it requires a modification of the classical division into three literary modes (or genres) and recognition of literature as the fourth one (or substituting the division with another, more adequate conception of literature, since in the present classification not only literature finds it hard to fit in. Such departing from old theories and replacing them with new ones more adequate to contemporary knowledge and sensitivities is quite a natural thing in science).

So what would be the fundamental generic determinants of the postulated fourth literary mode? In order to answer the question, we need to resort once more to the incriminated *Słownik terminów literackich*⁴ (A Dictionary of Literary Terms) and examine the criteria used in European literary studies:

1. The type of speaker (in lyric, it is the lyrical "I"; in the epic it is the narrator; however, in drama there is no singular speaking subject)
2. The composition of the represented world (in the lyric, scarcity or absence of a plot; in the epic, it is determined by the structure of the plot; and in the drama, it refers to the action, or presented events)
3. The linguistic and stylistic composition of the work (lyrical monologue; type of narration; and dialogues, respectively).

We shall now try to apply the scheme to describe generic features of literature:

1. Due to a wide variety of genres featured in texts of liberatic works, it should be stated that the speaker can be of any kind;
2. regarding the unity of the text and the space of notation, the representing world, that is, the book, and in the case of shorter works, for example, the surface of the page, should be considered an essential component of the represented world;
3. just as in point 1, the work can be written in any style; however, the

4 *Słownik terminów literackich*, ed. Michał Głowiński et al., 2nd corrected ed., Wrocław: Ossolineum, 1989.

features of writing and the material surface are also important. Consequently, in an analysis of the liberatic work, its typography and layout, as well as the structure of the volume should be taken into account.

Evidently, the dictionary description of “the literary mode” could be easily broadened to include the proposed, fourth mode, which proves that despite my criticism, after some modifications, the said dictionary could be fit to describe liberature as well.

If somebody were irritated by the “impure”, “hybrid” nature of that fourth mode, I would draw their attention to the fact that musicologists also deal with a comparably impure, hybrid matter when they analyse the opera. However, no sane person would leave opera out of the field of music, nor postulate to strip it off its extramusical elements. I wish the same to the theorists of literature: I wish for them to put up with the existence of works that go beyond the spoken or written word and to face the space in which the word exists and which belongs to that word.

*

In order to change a description, one must change perception. To grasp certain things, one must first glimpse them. Some do not have any difficulty with that, others need to be cured of eyes-ore.

Grasp and glimpse are not only akin in the sound, and eyes-ore is not only a pun. I use the oxymoronic calambour intentionally, since my first essay on liberature was a kind of commentary on *Oka-leczenie* (a working translation of the title is “Eyes-ore”), a kind of summa of my reflections on the literary work: what it is and what it could be, especially the one that is far from an immaterial entity, as the statistical member of the republic of Literature is usually considered to be.

However, it must be stressed that that essay by one Zeno did not avoid paradoxes: extremely bodily *Oka-leczenie* (and most of my later literary pieces) has much to say about this incorporeality. I mean incorporeality that does not stem from the habit of ignoring the graphic aspect of text but the real one, the incorporeality of potentially existing, invisible layers of emanational texts⁵ that await concretisation⁶ from the reader. The incorporeality of a higher order.

5 For a presentation of emanational form see chapter “Liberature or Total Literature” and “Towards Liberature” in the present volume (ed. note).

6 I use Ingarden’s term on purpose, since if it ever meant anything, it is exactly in the case of such works as *Oka-leczenie* or B.S. Johnson’s *The Unfortunates*, in which the reader should con-

Oka-leczenie also contributed to the currently fashionable discussion about interactivity and non-linearity, due to the open, tripartite structure of the book, as well as (or perhaps first and foremost) due to the form of the text itself. (...) However, this interactivity is of a different kind than just offering the readers freedom in determining the sequence of reading particular sections of a book. On the contrary, the reader must read very carefully and precisely, accurately to the one-thousandth of a letter (no, no, this is not an exaggeration).

Is it that mythical "Eldorado" I had promised to the readers (and other writers)? I used to think so, and even expressed that in *FA-art* in an appendix of sorts to my "Appendix to a dictionary of literary terms, entitled "Liberature or Total Literature". However, I no longer believe in any such panacea or universal recipe. And if not the willingness to a quest, it is certainly a desire to produce maps and guides leading to the alleged treasure that has long eluded me. I must also admit that despite my own merits in the field of interactivity and non-linearity, I panic slightly when I see how these categories are fetishised and treated as cult objects. It is as if people believed that the merit of a given work should be judged based on whether it is linear or not⁷. Such an axiology would hold only if the sole method of creating a work of art consisted in formal versim. Fortunately, art does not have to imitate reality. Let it rather imitate art; perhaps the world will be a more beautiful place⁸.

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I have also distanced myself somewhat from the other, too didactic aspect of the quoted essay-manifesto of 1999. I mean the categorical postulate directed not to theoreticians, but to writers themselves, or even the appeal to them to create liberature consciously. Six years later I see that as the weakest point of the programme I sketched there, being naive and guilty of missionary zeal. Let everyone write as they

cretise not so much the represented world but the representing world. By the way, liberature seems a serious blow to the Ingardenian conception of the literary work in which there is no room for any physicality of the text, nor of the book.

7 I am also to be blamed for that. In "Liberature: the Hyperbook in the Hypertext Era" (see chapter under the same title in this book; ed. note), which has exerted some influence on Polish scholars studying hyperfiction, I put too much emphasis, it seems, on transcending the linearity of the message as one of the primary features of liberature and one of the major motifs behind liberatic works. I have an impression that by doing so I squeezed liberature into the "non-linearity pigeonhole", which most certainly is not its constitutive feature.

8 Of course, much depends on how one perceives and defines "reality". There are, naturally, views in which abstract painting is considered a realistic kind of art.

like. Only let them write well; whether it is liberatic or not does not really matter. I find some consolation, however, in the fact that most manifestoes are guilty of the same sin.

Have I ceased to believe in total literature? No, I have not. However, I deem that the most important thing is quality: the work of art should be as perfect as possible. Or rather, impossibly perfect. This is my only postulate. What is more, I direct it to myself.

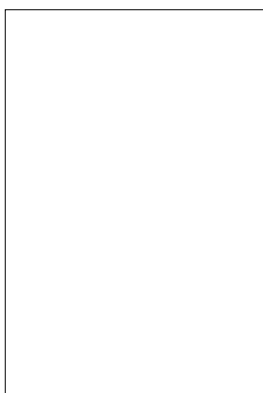
The Muse Of Liberature

(Or Who's Afraid Of Widow Wadman)

Let love therefore be what it will, — my uncle Toby fell into it—— And possibly, gentle reader, with such a temptation — so wouldst thou: For never did thy eyes behold, or thy concupiscence covet any thing in this world, more concupiscible than widow Wadman.

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to conceive this right, — call for pen and ink — here's paper ready to your hand. —— Sit down, Sir, paint her to your own mind —— as like your mistress as you can —— as unlike your wife as your conscience will let you — 'tis all one to me —— please but your own fancy in it.



——Was ever any thing in Nature so sweet!—so exquisite!

—Then, dear Sir, how could my uncle Toby resist it?

Thrice happy book! thou wilt have one page, at least, within thy covers, which MALICE will not blacken, and which IGNORANCE cannot misrepresent.

Laurence Sterne *The Life and Opinions of Tristram Shandy, Gentleman*
(Oxford, New York: Oxford UP, 1983, rep. 1990)

I do not know anybody who would be persuaded by Sterne to draw in the author's book. Though I do not rule out that there may have been some brave folks who have done this. What is more, they are not necessarily those who are addicted to embellishing books, since they do not read *Tristram Shandy*. But who knows? I should have suggested this book to my mother, but to my mother in her teenage years, when she wasn't even thinking of having any offspring, but instead was quite enthusiastic about scribbling in textbooks.

Alas, few of her original works have been preserved; I can admire her gift only thanks to her scattered, spontaneous illuminations. I remember how surprised I was when I opened her old history textbook. It was a heavy, bulky tome that I could hardly hold. There was everything imaginable there! Princesses with moustaches, kings with horns, and some knightly armours had breasts or penises, too.

But it was not the penis that was the most shocking. What shocked me most was the very presence of those drawings in the textbook. Of course, my mother denied everything, which was fully understandable considering how much time and effort she had devoted to persuading me not to scribble on furniture, walls and books, to persuading me that I was too grown-up for such schoolboy's jokes.

* * *

But it is Sterne's book that has been such a schoolboy's joke for many, and that despite its advanced age, not only because of the passage quoted above. As a matter of fact, it was only in the 20th century with Joyce, O'Brien, the postmodernists, the moustached Mona Lisa and innumerable avant-gardes that the brilliant comic came to be received with due seriousness.

And the question is serious, since it pertains to matters important not only for literature but also for the whole of contemporary art. By engaging in play with the reader, Sterne elevated chance to the status of material of art, and the reader to a participant, or even co-creator, thus anticipating such phenomena as conceptual art, the happening, or Kantor's *Multipart*, not to mention dada and the work of Marcel Duchamp.

In fact, it seems that Sterne has all the necessary qualifications to become a most relevant contemporary classic, a rejuvenated classic of today. And it seems that this rejuvenation is permanent; since he is too relevant a writer for the sensitivity of today's readers used to open plots and interaction, as testified to by the growing popularity of hypertexts.

Interactivity: a magical word, a fetish of the turn of the century. Could we also call what my mother did with the books interactivity? And an eternally unanswerable question: how would she have behaved if she had faced the book that attempts to persuade its readers to draw in it? Would she have set to work eagerly? Or, on the contrary? When something ceases to be a forbidden fruit, it often loses its appeal.

And what about other readers? Those more refined, who could be suspected of having read Sterne? How would they treat Sterne's suggestion? As a bluff? A silly joke? Leading up the garden path? Or perhaps there was someone who was more obedient to the author's bidding: if there is some space left in the book, one should follow the instructions and fill it in. According to the author's will!

I would love to know how poets have dealt with this passage, for example. How did Zbigniew Herbert respond to the prank? Or Miłosz? As for Szymborska, who demonstrates a combination of genius and sense of humour so rare in this geographical area, her response seems more predictable. "An Honest Drawing of Widow Wadman over a Glass of Whisky at an Airport, in Balice, for Example". Literary Demiurge with a crayon and a sharpener. Isn't this a true Apocalypse?

And professors? Has, for example, Professor Głowiński drawn anything in his copy of *Tristram Shandy*? And what about Professor Sławiński? Professor Wyka? And what shape has our widow taken on in all the copies in Professor Markiewicz's library? Does that which has been drawn there (if it has) differ much from what was imagined? Finally, what would Professor Ingarden have said to that?

He in particular must have faced a serious dilemma, since if he had yielded to the temptation to concretise widow Wadman in such a way, in his reflections on the literary work of art he would have had to take into consideration the graphic layer and the material foundation, that is the book, which he had ignored until then. If, on the other hand, he had not yielded to the temptation, then in order to save his idealistic theories, he should have ignored completely the life and opinions of Tristram Shandy, Esq.

The provocation entitled "Widow Wadman" can inspire various responses and opinions, just as any happening. Some love them, sens-

ing in them a refreshing breeze of the Unexpected; others look at them from a distance or deny them any value. Which reactions prevail in this case? Perhaps in the majority of cases there is no response whatsoever, which would belie the claim that "he is too relevant a writer for the sensitivity of today's readers".

It is hard to say what the situation is really like. Since if one compares this to a happening, it must be remembered that it would be a peculiar kind of happening, a more *intimate* one. Unlike situations prearranged in a theatre or a gallery, in this case we are in direct contact with the book. No one is watching us, so we can control our emotions to a greater extent, but on the other hand, we do not have to control them at all. We can do nearly anything at the author's will.

But this does not mean that we must immediately say "Widow Wadman c'est moi". But we can say so; Sterne gives us the right to do that. So if we do not say anything, if we do not respond to the author's "provocation", we deny ourselves a chance to experience something unusual in literature: an experience of real participation. Being offered an opportunity to leave the readerly crowd, we reject this.

Why don't we do this? Are we afraid of losing anonymity? Anonymity is safe; but in this case nobody is looking at me, I can draw whatever I dream of. What am I ashamed of, then? What am I afraid of? That someone would like to borrow the book from me? That someone could accidentally see my picture? What do I perceive as a greater embarrassment: the fact of having drawn in a book, or the quality of my picture?

Indeed, one can come across as a fool. What will others say? That I draw because I do not have a sense of humour and enough imagination since I take everything so literally? That I have understood less than nothing from this manifesto of artistic freedom and unconstrained imagination? Or, on the contrary, that it is the drawing that testifies to my exceptional wit and my perfect understanding of the authorial intention? Anyway, I end up in a cleft stick.

No, no, this is definitely not as innocent a book as it appears. Each choice carries a particular risk. So what should the poor reader do? Perhaps it would be best to ignore the suggestion of the cunning Irishman? To state firmly that a well-mannered person does not scribble in books, even at the author's bidding. Well, the author scrutinizes us from behind this page, and while pretending to pare his fingernails indifferently, he secretly laughs his head off.

But another danger lurks from behind this page, too, and a worse one at that, since it threatens the work itself. Because it happens that a certain type of reader treats the subject too liberally. I mean those readers who decide what others would read, that is, publishers and printers. This type of reader has often proved cleverer than the author himself, and deleted various “oddities” in their editions.

Although *Tristram Shandy's* lot is better than that of Blake's illuminated manuscripts, still thoughtlessly impaired by editors unable to respect their integrity, they can still “improve” on them to some extent. So it happens that in consequence of their particularly deep reading of the book, it is deprived not only of the black and marble pages, but even the blank space reserved for our beautiful widow.

That last case has fortunately not occurred in Polish editions, but there have been other misfortunes. For example, none of the Polish editions has managed to render the ten-page-long torn-off chapter xxiv of book iv. This should be accounted for in pagination, as this is the case in all decent English editions in which, say, page 240 is followed by page 251.

This editorial practice may result from sloppiness and misunderstanding of the work, but it can also be a symptom of genuine censorship – the censorship of convention. For no serious author of any serious book could use such trivial devices: Blake's serious poems suffer from the company of “childish” pictures, and a serious reader of Sterne should not be bothered by some conceptual tomfoolery.

It is high time to stop those scandalous dealings. Insofar as the ordinary reader has all the rights when he faces Sterne's book – the right to draw and the right to refuse drawing and participating in the game – the reader-editor, publisher and printer cannot have the right to deform the work. It should be published exactly as the author intended it to be. For one simple reason: in this case the work is tantamount to the whole book.

Now we have tackled a fundamental question, that is, the question about the limits of the literary work. Is “the work” always tantamount to “text” only, or is it sometimes something more: text and image, and even the whole book? Can the physically existing codex be a part of the literary work? If so, can such a book be published with-

out due respect for its non-verbal senses? Would this not result in changing the work?

I have suggested that such works as *Tristram Shandy* be considered a separate literary genre. I called this genre *liberature*, from Latin *liber*, meaning “book”, since in their case the book constitutes a part of the work. However, shorter pieces can also be classified as *liberature*, even though they are rarely published in a separate volume, such as for example is the case with Mallarmé’s *Un Coup de Dés*, in which the surface of the page belongs to the work.

I am aware that to thinkers of Ingardenian persuasion a proposal to include the material medium in the literary work, together with the non-verbal elements such as drawings, is a total heresy. However, they forget that this heresy has already got a rich tradition, and *Tristram Shandy* belongs to it, as one of its first but also most outstanding representatives. This is a tradition of writing not texts, but *books*.

Of course, in the common parlance every writer writes a book. But this is not quite true: most of them write texts. Books are written by *liberatic* writers. Neither the first, nor the last, Sterne is simply one of them. George Herbert, the above-mentioned Blake and Mallarmé, or Wyspiański, are all writers thinking not in terms of texts, but the whole book. Total writers. There would be more of them in the 20th century: Joyce, B.S. Johnson, Danielewski, W.H. Gass...

* * *

So what does it really mean to write a book? To write a book – that is – to see and arrange words in space. And to shape this space. Since the word is not only its sound but also visible writing on a visible page. This is how Sterne sees it. He does not pretend to be creating transparent texts. On the contrary, he exploits the fact that he uses the medium of print to the full. Hence, he is a writer in the full sense of the word.

What is more, he is a writer who is not satisfied with mere words. Or even writing and letters. He also invests punctuation marks, and all other typographical wonders – full-stops, asterisks, dashes, and brackets – with powers of expression. But when that is not enough, he starts drawing: monochromatic black, and cloudy marbles, straight and broken lines, and curves. Or he offers a page to the reader, leaving a space blank.

Sterne does not let us forget even for a while that we are dealing with a book, with a material object. Since it is the book, with its physical surface determined by the typographic coordinates of printed

and blank pages, that is the true setting of *Tristram Shandy's* plot. It cannot be otherwise, since the main event of this book, despite its multiplicity of subplots, is constituted by the process of writing it.

This is why I call Sterne a liberatic writer, that is a writer who does not create exclusively in words; he is a writer in whose writings meaning is co-created by extra-verbal constituents. Since for the liberatic writer the book, or the single page is never external to the work, just as the drawing is never an illustration but an autonomous means of *expression*.

* * *

Expression (*wyraz*) and impression (*obraz*) – is this not what our *imagination* (*wyobraźnia*) is made of? Can there be a more natural neologism, more natural unity than the one expressed in its Polish equivalent: *Wyobraźnia* (*wy+ob-raz+nia*)? Though this unity is not evident in the English “imagination”, Laurence Sterne, that crazy anarchist of imagination, is well aware of this fact. However, it is telling that though he is one of the few real “verbimagists”, he uses sparingly the image in the form of a picture.

And if this is so, if expression and image taken together form imagination, then liberature should be called the art of imagination in the highest degree – in the most literal sense. So it does matter, for both the ontology of the literary work and its understanding, what the reader will do with the purely conceptual image of Widow Wadman, and whether it will materialize thanks to us, the readers, and how.

But no matter whether we take the suggestion of drawing in the book seriously, or if we treat it as a play of the imagination, or conclude that the writer is having fun at our expense, or join in the fun with him, one thing is certain: a trap has been set for us, a trap from which there is no escape. However, this is not a trap that constrains us, but rather one consisting of snares of freedom and excess, something closer to a donkey between two bundles of hay than to Hamlet's “Mousetrap”.

* * *

If that's the case, why don't we try?

So? Shall we draw? No, not draw. Write. In the same sense as one writes icons. Though totally differently. Since the word can also be an image. Each letter can be an image. Each dot over it and each ,

Expression and impression. Imagine yourself. Image in:

So? Who should we write? Hmmm... I do not have a lover (what a confession)... I will not defile the holy image of my Wife with awkward lines... Then, let me dream of the beauty irreparably lost:



Oh, thrice unhappy Book! The midwife of inevitable failure! You get what you deserve! Here, receive from me now that bitter fruit (of my sweet dream).

The article written in 2005, and first published in: "Muza literatury (czyli kto się boi wdowy Wadman)", in: *Między obrazem a tekstem*. Ed. Alina Kwiatkowska and Jerzy Jarniewicz. Łódź: Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Łódzkiego, 2009. 109–116.

Two Throws of the Dice

or the Special and General Theory of Liberature

1

“I don’t believe that God plays dice”, wrote Albert Einstein to Niehls Bohr, which was supposed to express his disagreement with a probabilistic interpretation of quantum physics. “You believe in the God who plays dice, and I in complete law and order in a world which objectively exists, and which I, in a wildly speculative way, am trying to capture. I firmly *believe*, but I hope that someone will discover a more realistic way, or rather a more tangible basis than it has been my lot to do. Even the great initial success of quantum theory does not make me believe in the fundamental dice game, although I am well aware that your younger colleagues interpret this as a consequence of senility”, he wrote in another letter to Max Born¹.

Sometime strange things happen to time. The future may influence the past, and sometimes the arrow of time is frozen in the present moment. Is it any wonder then that after Einstein and his famous metaphor about God playing dice, Mallarmé is read differently? And isn’t it beautiful that even learned physicists leave metaphors for us?

2

TIME is frozen in PLACE. Time becomes Space. In other words, there is no more time or space, but there is SPACE-TIME. If anyone wanted to see how time is frozen in space, how time becomes spatialised, one should pick up *A Throw of the Dice*, a poem that had been written a few years before Einstein’s epoch-making discoveries. Also anyone attempting to imagine the helplessness of scientists struggling to describe the appearance and habits of the occupants of the paradoxical world emerging from the formulas of quantum mechanics, should also reach for Mallarmé’s poem. He would see a sentence split as if

¹ I. Stewart, *Does God Play Dice?: the New Mathematics of Chaos*, Blackwell: Oxford, 2002, p. 329. Googlebooks. Web. 4 April 2010.

it were the nucleus of an atom and would feel the same helplessness,
a comparable awareness of the inadequacy of description.

As an atom.
To split a sentence
Or as a light beam.

Would it also mean that poetry has epistemological powers equal to those of the exact sciences and that the Word of the poet has strength equal to that of the mathematician's Number?

3

How Einstein has changed our conception of time and space is explained by Stephen Hawking²:

Before 1915, space and time were thought of as a fixed arena in which events took place, but which was not affected by what happened in it. This was true even of the special theory of relativity. Bodies moved, forces attracted and repelled, but time and space simply continued, unaffected. It was natural to think that space and time went on forever.

The situation, however, is quite different in the general theory of relativity. Space and time are now dynamic quantities: when a body moves, or a force acts, it affects the curvature of space and time—and in turn the structure of space-time affects the way in which bodies move and forces act. Space and time not only affect but also are affected by everything that happens in the universe.

Of course, Mallarmé could not have exerted such an influence on our understanding of time and space. But he, like the first humans, understood that language, like light, is characterized by a dual, comparably "corpuscular-wave" nature. So language appears at times in the form of a sound wave, as something happening in time; at other times, it materialises itself as a quant of writing that not only occupies a definite space but also *CREATES* that space. The Word, this luminous spiritual-bodily entity, appears in its dual oral-written form: in the time of utterance and in the space of notation. That is how the Word manifests itself; its sound, hue, size and shape, as well as the sur-

² Stephen Hawking *A brief history of time. Updated and expanded tenth anniversary edition*, New York: Bantam Books, 1998, p. 34. Googlebooks. Web. 4 April 2010.

rounding space and time necessary for reading are constituents of its meaning.

The expanse of the Mallarméan Book, just as space-time in the Einsteinian vision of the world, becomes a dynamic value, not only dependent on the content of a piece, but also co-shaping it. "The book, which is a total expansion of the letter, must find its mobility in the letter; and in its spaciousness must establish some nameless system of relationships which will embrace and strengthen fiction"³, says/writes Mallarmé. "I am the author of a statement to which there have been varying reactions, including praise and blame, and which I shall make again in the present article. Briefly, it is this: all earthly existence must ultimately be contained in a book."⁴ The death of the poet stopped the work on the Book, leaving to us only scraps of his vision. But undoubtedly, with his two *Throws of the Dice*, the one executed still in his lifetime in the magazine *Cosmopolis*, and especially the other, launched under "eternal circumstances" in 1914, Mallarmé contributed, as few before him and even fewer after, to a truly Einsteinian revolution in literature, a revolution that consists in departing from the neutral status of the object called the book and including it in the work.

This revolution is called liberature.

4

Liberature is a kind of literature in which the space of the book (Lat. *liber*), hitherto perceived by the author and the readers as if in the Newtonian framework, as semantically neutral and static, becomes integrated into the orbit of the word while simultaneously influencing it. Here the matter of the statement belongs to the space of the book, and the space of the book to the material of the statement: the text and the surface of the volume constitute an integral Whole, just as matter, energy, time and space constitute an inseparable wholeness. Liberature is total literature, "a total expansion of the letter".

The author of *A Throw of the Dice* knew very well that the book (or the surface of the page) does not have to be a passive container for words, but its constituent part, as subject to creative reflection as all its other elements. Not only did he know this, but he also proved that the poet can speak through the whole book. That the book's physical,

3 Stéphane Mallarmé, "The Book: A Spiritual Instrument", in: *Selected poetry and prose*, trans. Bradford Cook, ed. Mary Ann Caws, New York: New Directions Publishing, 1982, 82. Google books. Web. 4 April 2010.

4 Ibid. 80.

material space can also serve as the poet's material and belong to his language. And if so, the structure of the book, its shape and material can be totally open. The writer does not have to comply with any editorial conventions. Nor with any readerly habits resulting from them.

For space can not only be written on, it can be also WRITTEN WITH. Even the blank space, without any traces of ink. The publishing series "Liberature" (...) proves this best.

5

The series was initiated with our own writing; nevertheless, our ambition has also been to offer to Polish readers the most outstanding works of world liberature: both those which, like *A Throw of the Dice*, have not been lucky enough to be published in a correct edition, and as yet untranslated books. On our "waiting list" are such names as William Blake, James Joyce, B.S. Johnson, Raymond Queneau, William H. Gass, Raymond Federman and Mark. Z. Danielewski, as well as theoreticians voicing intuitions reminiscent of liberature (Michel Butor, Carl Darryl Malmgren). However, the French symbolist deserved the first place, since as we have stated elsewhere: "Perhaps, then, liberature is nothing else but the writing of the Book that Mallarmé did not manage to create?"⁵

6

Finally, we would like to present to you an interesting coincidence. Many critics have frequently suggested some motifs that Mallarmé probably took from E.A. Poe's short story "Manuscript Found in a Bottle" and Alfred de Vigny's poem "La Bouteille à la mer". As it happens, Mallarmé's "Throw of the Dice" has been preceded in our series by a book that is in fact a TRUE bottle, *Spoglądając przez ozonową dziurę* (Detect Ozone Whole Nearby). This was, of course, pure Chance.

5 Z. Fajfer, "lyric, epic, dramatic, liberature", in: *Od Joyce'a do liberatury. Szkice o architekturze słowa*, ed. Katarzyna Bazarnik, Kraków: Universitas, 2002, p. 238.

First published as: "Dwa rzuty kośćmi czyli szczególna i ogólna teoria liberatury", in: Stéphane Mallarmé. *Rzut kośćmi nigdy nie zniesie przypadku. Un coup de dés j'aurais n'abolira le hasard*. Tłum. Tomasz Różycki. Wstęp Michał Paweł Markowski. Redakcja i komentarz K. Bazarnik i Z. Fajfer. Liberatura t. 3. Kraków: Korporacja Ha!art, 2005. 120–123.

From Combinatorics to Liberature

On Misunderstandings Connected
with So-called "Experimental Literature"¹

01. Experimental art or rather experimental CRITICISM?

It is amazing how successful this scientific word has been in the field of art. "Experimental" is used to describe painting, music, theatre, film; also poetry and the novel can be "experimental". "Experimental" is applied not only to attempts to solve this or that artistic problem in the process of creating a work of art (in this sense of the word, every writer, even the most traditional one, is experimenting, and traces of his experiments are left in his drawer), but also to finished works, which, since they have been completed, are no longer experiments. This subtle term of offence is used whenever one wants to ignore a work or avoid passing judgment on it (on the other hand avoiding judgement may be the most reasonable form of contact with art on the part of the critic), and often, as Raymond Federman rightly pointed out, it is used simply to protect the reader against its pernicious influence:

Everything that does not fall into the category of successful fiction (commercially, that is), or what Jean Paul Sartre once called "nutritious literature," everything that is found "unreadable for our readers" (that's the publishers and editors speaking – but who the hell gave them the right to decide what is readable or valuable for their readers?) is immediately relegated to the domain of experimentation – a safe and useless place.

Personally, I do not believe that a fiction writer with the least amount of self-respect and integrity, and belief in what he is doing, ever says to himself: "I am now going to experiment with fiction; I am now writing an experimental piece of fiction."²

To put it in a nutshell, this insult is used to characterize anything that is different, complicated, and original in the arts, and implies, intentionally or unintentionally, that there is still a long way to go from experiment to "properly applied theory". No wonder, then, that lib-

erature is also sometimes referred to as experimental. This will not change soon, however. But before any liberatic work is described as such, it is worth considering the argument of the British novelist B.S. Johnson, author of *The Unfortunates*, which has been already published in "Liberature" series:

'Experimental' to most reviewers is almost always a synonym for 'unsuccessful'. I object to the word experimental being applied to my own work. Certainly I make experiments, but the unsuccessful ones are quietly hidden away and what I choose to publish is in my terms successful: that is, it has been the best way I could find of solving particular writing problems. Where I depart from convention, it is because the convention has failed, is inadequate for conveying what I have to say. The relevant questions are surely whether each device works or not, whether it achieves what it set out to achieve, and how less good were the alternatives. So for every device I have used there is a literary rationale and a technical justification; anyone who cannot accept this has simply not understood the problem which had to be solved.³

In the past "experimental" was used in reference not only to actual experiments carried out by Dadaists drawing poems out of their hats or surrealists fascinated by *écriture automatique*, but also Eliot's *The Waste Land* created in the technique of collage, and Joyce's *Ulysses*, worked out in every detail, the fruit of several years' backbreaking labour by a highly focused mind. This last example shows perfectly well how arbitrary, how vague and unfair is the term "experimental work". And a cursory glance at the history of literature would suffice to persuade one that if one wanted to be consistent in its use, one would have to apply the term to nearly all great literary works.

Is this an exaggeration? But how else can I describe the innovation of Aeschylus, who betrayed tradition and introduced the second actor on the stage, while limiting the domination of the chorus? Sophocles' further innovation, i.e. introduction of yet another actor, could also be called "experimental". And what about Shakespearian drama with its loose, episodic plot, rejecting traditional rules of composition and ignoring the three unities? All of them were great and risky "experiments", to use today's idiom. What is more, Homer gets deserved praise from Horace for not starting his epic *ab ovo*. But does that not testify to his unhealthy tendency to "experiment"? And what about Dante? His divine *Comedy* is nothing else but, as we would call it today, an enormous "linguistic experiment". That lover of antiq-

uity (and other people's wives) literally created a new language for the sake of his poem! And Cervantes' novel? Well, volume II of *Don Quixote* is not a simple continuation of volume I, but an intertextual game with it, which points to the substantial (not to say materialistically liberatic) significance of the existence of two, physically separate volumes. Suffice it to mention also various romantic pranks, such as the Sternean, achronological numbering of Mickiewicz's drama, *The Forefather's Eve*, as the most conspicuous example, and the introduction of the second narrator in Bolesław Prus's *The Doll*, and the image that would emerge from that vast laboratory would dizzy everyone who naively believes that the authors of his favourite books in the list of school assignments were innocents unspoiled by unhealthy experimenting.

And nobody calls these eminent books "experimental writing"! The term is aimed at new works, still untamed (not to say, unarmed) by criticism, books so innovative that they evade easy evaluations and existing classifications. That those classifications have been incomplete or inadequate is best testified to by the fact that nearly all heretofore existing literature, including Sterne, Blake, Mallarmé or the above-mentioned B.S. Johnson, has evaded them.

These examples evidently prove that "experiment" and "experimental" used in reference to art do not mean much, or they mean something totally different from what is commonly understood as experimental. It is high time, then, to invent another, more adequate term of abuse. Who knows, however, if the term isn't worth saving to describe the activities of those contract critics of literature and the other Muses, since if anything is experimental, it is exactly criticism, not creative writing. And there is nothing wrong with that, if only we finally realize it. It is definitely an experiment on the living organism, and subsequent generations of critics can experiment on the same organism in different ways. So it is the theory that is experimental, not the practice. If anybody notices a risky paradox here, she is not mistaken. This statement applies also to the present discourse, which I accept with all humility.

001. OuLiPo or real experiments

After this emotional speech, it is time to pass on to the phenomenon that, contrary to the previously mentioned writers, identifies itself with the name of literary experiment, as experimenting is its essence

and its deepest calling. Of course, it is the famous Workshop of Experimental Literature or OuLiPo, which constitutes experimental literature *par excellence* due to its mostly conceptual and partly scientific character, with its fundamental emphasis on the search for new forms (as well as exploring the potential of already existing forms) and a lesser interest in creating actual works. Speaking of the philosophy and methods of the OuLiPo, Queneau himself did not call that into question:⁴

C'est-à-dire qu'on a des méthodes à priori et on traite des textes connus. Ils restent intéressants, ou bien ils cessent de l'être ; cela peut donner accessoirement des idées sur le texte, mais c'est quand même un peu secondaire, cet aspect-là. Les vraies formes, les vraies structures nouvelles n'auront d'intérêt qu'une fois utilisées dans des textes originaux, mais on ne se propose pas du tout de créer de la littérature ; on se propose seulement de proposer des formes. (...)

() Par exemple, quand je traite un poème de Mallarmé de cette façon-là, je n'estime pas que j'ai fait une création littéraire. Je fais une expérience de littérature potentielle, mais non une oeuvre littéraire à proprement parler.

However, despite the laboratory-nature of OuLiPo activities, beside a number of recipes for the work and concepts inseminating imagination (or poisoning the mind, if you like), its verbinumerical cauldrons and retorts have produced very real books, that is, the fruit of those experiments. Among those is one invoking rightful respect, the "infernal" (to use Italo Calvino's words) machine of *One Hundred Thousand Billion Poems*, published in 1961. In the afterword, undoubtedly resembling a manifesto and bearing the telling title "A Word on Experimental Literature", a mathematician and the co-founder of OuLiPo, Francois Le Lionnais declared faith in the sense of applying mathematical formulas to literature:⁵

De Lycophron à Raymond Roussel en passant par les Grands Rhétoriciens, la littérature expérimentale accompagne discrètement la littérature tout court. Avec les « Exercices de style » et le présent recueil, elle attends sortir de cette semi-clandestinité, affirmer sa légitimité, proclamer ses ambitions, se constituer des méthodes, bref s'accorder à notre civilisation scientifique. Sa vocation est de partir en éclaireur pour tâter le terrain, y tracer des pistes nouvelles, s'assurer si telle route finit en impasse, si telle autre n'est qu'un chemin vicinal, si telle

autre enfin amorcée une voie triomphale qui conduira vers les Terres promises et les Eldorados du langage. C'est l'une de ces tentatives que nous proposent les « Cent mille milliards de poèmes ». Elle s'inscrit dans un chapitre plus vast que l'on pourrait qualifier de « LITTÉRATURE COMBINATOIRE » et pour lequel Raymond Queneau semble éprouver une particulière prédilection.

0001. The Experiment was successful, now it is time for reading

Without questioning Queneau's contribution to propagating mathematical inventions and the experimental spirit among writers and literature lovers, it needs to be stressed that he managed to attain one more thing. In order to achieve the desired effect he had to break a very strong editorial taboo that forbids "serious" literature for adults to depart from the time-honoured codex-form of the book, imposed by historical, technological and economic reality, due to which he managed to create one of the most original works of literature. Looking at *One Hundred Thousand Billion Poems* from this perspective, it is no longer possible to call Queneau's work an experiment.

Endnotes:

- 1 The opening part of this essay is a slightly modified version of "A Dictionary of Literature" published in instalments in the on-line edition of *Ha!art* monthly, no. 28, 2005.
- 2 Raymond Federman "Surfiction. Four Propositions in Form of a Manifesto". In: *The Avant-Garde Tradition in Literature*, ed. with introduction by Richard Kostelanetz, Buffalo: Prometheus Books, 1982, p. 379.
- 3 B.S. Johnson, "Introductio to Aren't You Rather Young to Be Writing Your Memoirs?." *Review of Contemporary Fiction* 19.3 (1999): 64. *Academic Search Complete*. EBSCO. Web. 6 Apr. 2010.
- 4 Raymond Queneau, *Entretiens avec Georges Charbonnier*, Paris : Gallimard, 1962, p. 146–147.
- 5 François le Lionnais, "A propos de la littérature expérimentale. Postface". In: R. Queneau *Cent mille milliards de poèmes*, Paris: Gallimard, 1961.

First published as: *Od kombinatoryki do liberatury. O nieporozumieniach związanych z tzw. „literaturą eksperymentalną”*, in: Raymond Queneau. *Sto tysięcy miliardów wierszy*. Transl. Jan Gondowicz. Afterword Jacek Olczyk. Commentary Zenon Fajfer. *Liberatura* t. 6. Kraków: Korporacja Ha!art, 2008. Unnumbered pages.

First published in: *Liberatura – pięć sylab w poszukiwaniu definicji* (manifest), in: *Druka rewolucja książki w Gdyni*. Ed. Violetta Trella. Zeszyty Miejskiej Biblioteki Publicznej w Gdyni 2 (2008). 29.
Reprinted on the front cover of *Liberatura* no 1 (2009), supplement to *Ha!art* 28–29 (2009).

Liberature – five syllables in search of a definition

Zenon Fajfer

...is a return to the Book, to the un-imaginable, a wordage and image in one:



a double helix of imagination;



...is liberation of the energy of the Book, and liberation of the writer from editorial



conventions, textual neurons in the body of the book of any shape and kind;



...is a balance between the energy of speech and the matter of writing, harmony



of letter and number, a challenge to chance in the space-time of a book;



...is poetry written with silence, too, in the folds of the page and the architecture



of the volume, metaphors of unmarked void;



...is the word, visible and invisible, mobile and immobile;



total literature, the book in freedom:



How literature redefines the artist's book

Some Notes to Accompany the Project

"Collection of POLISH ARTIST'S BOOKS

AT THE TURN OF THE 20TH CENTURY"

I

In June 1999 during the Exhibition of Unconventional Books organised and curated by Radosław Nowakowski, Katarzyna Bazarnik and myself in the respectable interiors of the Jagiellonian Library in Krakow, I was approached by a couple of students of the Krakow Academy of Fine Arts. I do not remember now if it was he who was talking and she who was frowning meaningfully, or the other way round, but at any rate I was given to understand that except for some cases "there's very little going on here as far as the form goes". They let me know they made much more exciting things at their academy in the Department of Book Design. I was curious to hear that reproach concerning disregard or mediocrity of form, especially given that it referred to books displayed at the exhibition that was a part of the third Krakow Bloomsday festival, an event dedicated to James Joyce, the writer who is considered one of the greatest reformers of the form of the novel in the 20th century. (...)

Our discussion quickly revealed a conceptual difference in our attitudes to books. Communication was thwarted exactly because each party understood "form" differently. For them it was lines of solids and the rhythm of colourful patches, excluding, however, the rhythm of words, a pattern of rhymes and a linear or non-linear narration. What mattered for them was the format of a book and the nature of material used, but not the unnaturalness or realism with which the characters in a story are presented. And yet we were talking about books, objects used mostly for reading! I have had comparable (but role-reversed) conversations with literarily-disposed individuals. Using a naïve, but still quite handy distinction into "content" and "form", we, the organisers, were often given to understand that most of those "books" had little in common with real books, and that it was simply an "excess of form".

So on one hand (the more artistically-oriented one), there was a re-

proof concerning a lack or banality of form, on the other (the one disposed exclusively to literature) there were voices objecting to form dominating the message. The disagreement resulted from a fundamentally different approach to form and its function. Besides, both parties lacked openness to a more tolerant, more inclusive view of the book. Insofar as the former limited the form of the book to questions of typography and editing, the latter's reaction revealed a telling discrepancy in the perception of the literary work by so-called "ordinary" readers and the perception officially represented by literary studies. The accusation of the excess of form, its domination over content, implied that the material shape of the volume does, in fact, matter when one thinks of "the literary form", which would be considered utter heresy in officially accepted views within the field of literary studies. Since, in fact, for the majority of scholars the literary work is a transparent thing, and the material aspect of the book does not constitute a part of the literary work as such. The concept of **liberature** attempts to change this state of affairs. (...)

To return to our critical couple: after a while I managed to explain to them that our understandings of form are diametrically opposed and that what appears insufficiently bold to a graphic artist may appear a radical innovation to a reader and a literary critic.

Since then I have frequently experienced a comparable feeling of clash with surprisingly different sensitivities and viewpoints. In fact, I have felt this whenever it was someone from the art world looking at a liberatic book, someone who focused exclusively on the artistic value of the book and the art of fine printing. Or, conversely, when it was someone expecting only a readerly experience of text. It has turned out that liberature requires an unapparent thing: willingness and ability to read the WHOLE book in all its dimensions. It must be remembered, however, that it is text that is the most important in liberature, as it subordinates all other aspects of a given work to the literary component. That is why liberature is referred to as a new *literary* genre, and not a new artistic discipline, but a genre whose hybrid character can be compared to the opera in the field of music. (...)

* * *

The situation described in the opening demonstrates well how important are both the context in which a given work functions and the audience to which the work is addressed. The same object (not to say "bookject") will be differently apprehended on display in a gal-

lery, and differently on a bookshelf. The work will be differently perceived when the audience is referred to as "spectators" or "collectors", or when they are defined as "readers". Expectations differ when the author is called "a prose writer", and his work "a novel", and when the work is made by "an artist" (alas, the word "artist" is less and less frequently understood as broadly as in the days of Joyce, who entitled his autobiographic novel *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*, and nobody had any doubts that the artist in question was an aspiring writer). Last but not least, the artist's book means something else than liberature.

In view of the above reflections my possible participation in a cycle of exhibitions held as a part of the project "Collection of POLISH ARTIST'S BOOKS AT THE TURN OF THE 20TH CENTURY" would hardly be understandable to say the least. So when I got a proposal to participate in it, I had to refuse.

Should other authors regarded as liberatic writers have done the same (I mean Radosław Nowakowski in particular)? I believe that it would have been better, indeed, especially if one takes into consideration the reception of his work as well as clarity of the message about liberature; though I do understand his reasons for participating as an artist in the project. I presume they can be accounted for by two factors. Firstly, despite his strong identification with liberature Nowakowski has never limited his activities to the circles of artists and collectors of artists' books. By regularly participating in Polish and international exhibitions and artists' book fairs he has signalled that this sphere of art is still dear to him, and that he has not quit it. Secondly, Nowakowski understands liberature differently than I do, at least in one point, namely in its relation to the good, old literature. For me, and this is the point I have frequently underlined (also in this article), liberature is simply a distinct literary genre or type of literature, or, to put it still differently, it constitutes a separate kind of or trend in literature, a trend whose generic distinctness is established by an organic bond between a text and its material book form. And despite the fact that the first book deliberately referred to as liberature was *Oka-leczenie*, I have always stressed the (paradoxically) very rich tradition to which liberature belongs, which extends back to antiquity and which can boast such masterpieces as Laurence Sterne's *Tristram Shandy* and Stéphane Mallarmé's *A Throw of the Dice*. Nowakowski, however, in his *Traktat Kartkograficzny* (*Treatise on Pageography*) does not approach liberature from a genological perspective, but deals with it in terms of means of expression (voice, writing, book)

and the morphology of the book. In his approach “literature” would amount to texts, and “liberature” would correspond to a set of books containing these texts along other components, i.e. a lesser set would be included in a larger set. So Nowakowski perceives literature simply as a constituent part of liberature, just as its other constituents would be drawings and kinds of paper.

Such a fresh, commonsensical attitude seemed interesting to me to a point. However, it can consequently lead to a trap of identifying liberature with the already existing “book art”, and that was not my intention when I coined the new term (and I am not sure if that was Nowakowski’s intention, either). If I had wanted to suggest a smart synonym for book art, I would not have proposed liberature. The *raison-d’être* of new terms consists exclusively in their ability to contribute to a discussion, and throw new light on some aspect of reality. I was not preoccupied with the “art of bookmaking”, unlike in *Traktat Kartograficzny*, where it constitutes the major issue at stake. I believe it is important for artists’ books but not for liberature. Since the latter is, both metaphorically and literally speaking, the art of WRITING A BOOK. Writing, that is imagining. It entails imagining not only a text but also the book. But the question of the writer’s direct, personal involvement in the physical process of book production (no matter what shape it would assume) is of little importance. Just like the architect, the writer does not have to build his bookish towers himself; what counts is his vision, and who realises it in its material shape is of absolutely secondary importance.

I have devoted so much space to Nowakowski because I would not like anybody to draw too hasty conclusions from his stance. He cultivates one of the most spectacular kinds of liberature, but is not fully representative of the trend since his work belongs to the peculiar set that constitutes an intersection of liberature and the artist’s book (now I see it more clearly than a few years ago). In this respect he resembles William Blake since both of them manage to keep a relative balance between the literary and pictorial visions (curiously, both have created their own private mythologies or ideological systems, highly critical towards society and its official beliefs). However, I would not like these words to be taken as my evaluation of Nowakowski’s work. They refer exclusively to his attitude and to generic features of his books, which should be considered as liminary cases of both liberature and the artist’s book.

I hasten to refute a potential objection – let me do an about-face now – things are quite different when it comes to my bottle-book.

I am saying this because I have encountered opinions that my poem in the bottle *But Eyeing Like Ozone Whole* can be also counted as both liberature and an artist's book. Well, if one really insists on seeing it as such, I cannot forbid them to do that, but several arguments can be raised against this: 1) against all appearances this work does not trespass the borders of literature; it constitutes an example of a text that requires a different form of material realisation and it has found one in the shape of a bottle; beside its text printed on a transparent sheet, there are no graphic elements in it, unless one looks at the bottle in terms of a Duchampian ready-made, but a difference would consist in the fact that Marcel selected objects from his surrounding reality and turned them into pieces of art, whereas the undersigned annexes the glass object into the sphere of literature, thereby making it stand in stead of the traditional paper-made codex; 2) my bottle-book is not a unique piece, intended for galleries or private collections, but a piece addressed to readers, available in bookshops, priced as an average book, having an ISBN and published in a relatively large print run (the first edition numbered 200 copies, the second edition 500 copies, and its English translation 100 copies); 3) reviews and notes on the book are addressed to the literary audience (even with a suggestion of introducing it to schools, cf. a journal for teachers of Polish, *Polonistyka. Czasopismo dla Nauczycieli* no. 2/2009); 4) last but not least, I have not coined the term "liberature" for nothing, so I should not be forced to explain the obvious now.

Thus, I would like to close the first part of my article with this personal note, so that, after a moment of relaxation, I can move on to part II in which I will try to explain why, having refused to participate in the project, I have nevertheless agreed to be a member of the jury.

II

(...) Beside creating an opportunity for gathering an original, valuable collection, what I especially value is exactly creating an opportunity for discussions and a creative exchange of thoughts. Admittedly, there were ups and downs as far as creativity in our discussions was concerned, but undoubtedly, we have been offered an excellent opportunity to discuss some crucial, yet contentious, issues and simultaneously create a forum for future, no less inspiring disputes.

First of all, we had a chance to introduce some order in terminology, at least by providing a basic distinction between "the artist's

book" and "book art". From the point of view of liberature, the difference is crucial. While I do not see any possibility of presenting liberature within the framework of "the artist's book" (I have explained the case of Nowakowski above), within a larger framework of "book art", many of the objections I have raised above simply disappear. "Book art" refers to all forms of expression pertaining to the book: it embraces the aesthetic qualities of an "ordinary" book, bibliophile editions and the art of fine print as well as fully autonomous works in which the book constitutes an integral component of the literary work (liberature) and those belonging to a separate discipline of fine arts (the artists' books).

Katarzyna Bazarnik writes about it more extensively in her article "Some comments on liberature and artists' books". I would only like to mention now that such a limited understanding of the artist's book, i.e. treating it as a manifestation of an autonomous, visual expression in a given form that draws on the shape of the book or the symbolism of the book, would consequently exclude a considerable number of works already selected for the Collection but not meeting the criterion of autonomy of the work, fundamental to the phenomenon of the artist's book. In order to meet this requirement, one must be able to point out unequivocally the author or authors of a given work. Otherwise, we are dealing with a heteronomous work, with a kind of arrangement or edition of someone else's text (which was not, however, written with such editing and redesigning in mind), in a word, with a "staging" of someone else's utterance, analogous to staging a text in the theatre.

That is why I believe, for example, that very interesting, sophisticated work by the masters of fine print, Jadwiga and Janusz Tryzno, practised at the highest possible level of the printing craft in *Correspondance Des Arts* Foundation, should not, in fact, be classified as "artists' book". But I see their place in a slightly wider framework: in the field of book art, where they can come across as artistic or creative printing. But I would not mind counting as the artist's books (or even perhaps, liberature) potential work that, however, would meet the criterion of the author's autonomy. What is more, I am convinced that if such a work came into being, it could be an event of high importance. (...)

* * *

Finally, to sum up, I will move on to the redefinition announced in the title of this article. (...) Hence:

1. I suggest that the artist's book be regarded as a fully autonomous piece of visual or conceptual art expressed in the form of a book or in another form that draws on the symbolism of the book, which however, does not have an important, literary component.
2. Works defined thus far as "artist's books" and containing the literary (fully authorial) component should rather be considered as literature (since it is the literary aspect which is dominant) or as belonging to both fields (when the literary and the visual components are equally important).
3. However, I would not consider books that are originally designed adaptations of someone else's texts as "artist's books", but rather as examples of artistic (fine) printing and *book art* in a wide sense of the term.

Consequently, the collector of artist's books will be satisfied and the readers will get back some of their due.

This is an excerpt from an article written specially for the project "Polish Collection of the Artist's Books at the turn of the 20th century" (Polish Ministry of Culture and National Heritage grant 2009) to be published on-line in Polish and English on the website of Polish Bookart <www.bookart.pl>, run by Alicja Słowikowska and Jadwiga Tryzno of *Correspondance des Arts* in Łódź.

The article is based on a talk presented at *e-polonistyka 2* conference, held by the Department of Didactics of Polish Language and Literature at the Catholic University in Lublin on 3–4 December 2009. Forthcoming in Polish in the conference volume edited by Aleksandra Dziak and Sławomir Jacek Żurek. Lublin: CUL Press.



Liberature in the E-world

– Page One –

The universe (which others call the Library) is composed of an indefinite and perhaps infinite number of hexagonal galleries...

Jorge Luis Borges, "The Library of Babel"

It is striking how often the motif of the Borgesian Library of Babel appears in reflections on the literature of the new media, this metaphor of the Universe, reminding one of the poetics of hypertext and the vast expanse of the Internet, the insatiable Leviathan, embracing in its insides (if "insides" is the right word) textual resources exceeding by far the volume of an average library, and avidly devouring still new areas of the printed or handwritten word. During a conference "From Liberature to E-literature" (University of Opole, 23–24 November 2009) I attended not long ago I was especially struck by the following passage quoted in one of the presentations, perceived in totally different circumstances than when I read it for the first time years ago:

There are five shelves for each of the hexagon's walls; each shelf contains thirty-five books of uniform format; each book is of four hundred and ten pages, each page, of forty lines, each line, of some eighty letters which are black in colour. (J.L. Borges, "The library...", transl. J.E. Irby)

These words made me forcefully realise that just as in Plato's ideal Republic there is no place for artists, so in Borges' Library there is no place for liberature. The normalised format, the specific number of pages and the colour are its total opposite.

I hasten to reassure you: I know full well that the vision of the Argentinian writer should not be taken seriously and that, just as any proper metaphor, it contains whole layers of symbolic meanings and ambiguity. However, I must also introduce some slight anxiety: the "non-formalised" format perceptible in liberatic works should not be taken too literally. Independently of the meaning conveyed in the text, the structure of the book itself or the form of notation can also carry symbolism no less weighty than that expressed in words.

There is no space for a non-standard book in the Library of Babel; there are no shelves for a different format. There is also no space for unconventional typography; all texts are printed using twenty-five graphic characters: twenty-two letters set in line and a space, a comma, and a full-stop (though the title of the story mentions twenty-three letters; does this imply another, unknown letter then?).

So formalised and so structured, that library was supposed to be a collection of all possible texts, in all possible variants in all possible languages. No wonder then, that in that permutational abyss “the reasonable (and even humble and pure coherence) is an almost miraculous exception.” On the other hand, even the weirdest combination of letters may be understood by someone somewhere:

I cannot combine some characters “dhcmrlchtdj”, which the divine Library has not foreseen and which in one of its secret tongues do not contain a terrible meaning.

In the “divine” institution all possible variants of texts have been anticipated, but not a different shape of books. There is one exception though: it occurs when the mysterious Crimson Hexagon is mentioned, which allegedly hosts volumes evoking in some people a special, even fanatical longing. Beside their highly desirable content (“all-powerful, illustrated and magical”) they were also supposed to be different in format: “smaller than usual”.

Regardless of the evident association with the fate of sacred writings, would it be also a gate (in)voluntarily set ajar for liberature? The format of those books (if they existed at all) must have been significant, and the proportions ruling the overt and covert dimensions of its texts must have been meaningful as well. The rest is left to conjecture, just as we can only speculate about the existence of a mythical book “which is the perfect essence and compendium of all the others”.

Is it the Book that the author of *A Throw of the Dice* and others like him have dreamt about?

In Borges' story, however, there is a passage that restores to their rightful place the naughty liberatic books seemingly excluded from the Library of Babel. It is a place no longer in the Library nor outside it, but... instead of it. Here is the relevant footnote, which I will take the liberty to quote in length:

Letizia Álvarez de Toledo has observed that this vast Library is useless: rigorously speaking, a single volume could be sufficient, a volume of ordinary format, printed in nine or ten point type, containing an infinite number of infinitely thin leaves. (In the early seventeenth century, Cavalieri said that all solid bodies are the superimposition of an infinite number of planes). The handling of this silky *vade mecum* would not be convenient: each apparent page would unfold into other analogous ones; the inconceivable middle page would have no reverse.

Everyone who has encountered "inconvenient" liberature, on hearing about the "middle page" will know that it is not so inconceivable as it seems. One only needs a different, shall I say, non-Euclidean approach to the book.

In this famous, paradoxical ending Borges faces us, in fact, with the dilemma: one can choose to perceive the Universe as a Library full of a nearly infinite number of neatly arranged, equally formatted volumes, but one can also see it as the Book of an ungraspable structure. Both metaphors are permeated with similar symbolism, but the choice of one or the other produces totally different consequences.

On the level of the present discourse, it would entail a choice between the poetics of the internet, or rather *litenet*¹, and the poetics of liberature. In other words, the writer, and the reader can choose between the still not fully recognised (nor artistically explored) potential of hyperlinks and the screen, and the still (against all odds) unexhausted potential of "traditional" typography and the "ordinary" sheet of paper.

But, if one does not want to exclude anything, one can also choose

¹ This term referring to literature on the internet was coined by Piotr Marecki in his book *Litenet.pl* [ed. note].

the in-between.

The one-faced hole that was created in this article can be used in any suitable way, since

Tristram Shandy led the way
In this game.

Those eager to join in the fun are welcome to inspect not only the black page or the one intended for a certain Widow, due to which Sterne conveys some weighty matters. Truly disturbing is the ten-page gap in Book iv (reminding one of the ten-day gap during the transition from the Julian to Gregorian calendars), featuring in the pagination of original, English editions.

Creating such a palpable vacuum in the text enables the reader to notice what he usually does not see, when he or she follows a lively plot or becomes enchanted by poetic imagery. It is not only the fleshiness of the page, its proportions, but first and foremost, the power of silence, the metaphorical dimension of this gesture.

A vacuum is a precondition of real Wholeness, and a hole a condition of the tightness of a system. Paradoxically, a system is complete only when it has some holes. The system lacking a gap, the system that does lack anything, cannot be considered whole and all-embracing.

However, a similar break in a text in the internet does not speak so powerfully; the image is flat, and the hole in the net is not tangible. In comparison with a surface of even the thickest volume, the space of writing appears almost infinite on the computer screen, due to which a blank area does not make much impression. The nature of the medium is different, and something else attracts the attention of the readers.

One thinks of McLuhan, but writers and other artists had known much earlier that “the medium is the message”. They were the ones who had to approach this matter in practice. The prophet of the global village himself learnt a lot from them, anyway, investigating the modernists’ works, especially Joyce, who rose the technique of speaking through form to nearly unattainable heights, and Mallarmé’s reflections on the expansion of the press and its influence of literature.

We are said to be living in the times of remediation, when one medium is replacing another. It is happening in some areas more slowly, in others more rapidly, in yet some others it has already happened. For the majority of fiction and poetry readers the good old paper book still seems more convenient than electronic reading devices, but, for example, these changes are evident in fields such as science, business or the news – not to mention efficient management of the state, which could not function properly without electronic transfer of information (well, except, perhaps, some departments of the judiciary where the dusty shelves of yellowed documents still bear more of a resemblance to Kafkaesque Attics than the Borgesian Library). So it seems only a question of time when the parliamentary debates will be available in Second Life or something like that, providing that people do not prefer other entertainment (as they surely will).

;))

This is obvious for everyone. Less obvious are possible consequences of the remediation, since we must still rely only on overenthusiastic, or on the contrary, extremely pessimistic forecasts. Hopes are understandable, and fears justified. In fact, no one knows how all this will develop. Will this contribute to freedom or will this be rather used by Big Brother to build a Martix? Some enthusiasts offer examples of nearly unlimited access to numerous, previously unavailable sources and carefully guarded collections; others point to the oppressiveness of the internet police in the countries of people's democracy. It is also thought-provoking to ponder a still humorous, but also symbolic, case of the disappearance of a legally purchased e-book of Orwell's *1984* from the personal reading device of an American student due to some controversy involving copyrights and the company that had sold him the e-text. This is still unimaginable for the purchaser of a traditional book.

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We are living in the times of remediation but also of liberature. Lib-
erature, that is an attempt on the part of the poet and writer to evade
the effects of these historical, apparently inevitable, processes. No
matter how powerful or how naïve this sounds, I have reasons to
put forward such a claim.

So far writers have not had much influence on the shape of their
books. Though their texts occupied vast expanses of printed paper,
and earlier, patiently calligraphed parchment, silk, papyri or fired
clay tablets, the medium of the book itself was beyond their control
and supervision. It was first the ancient or mediaeval scribe, and then
the printer and publisher, who decided about its features; while the
author usually followed them unreflexively (I would call the few ex-
ception exactly liberatic). There have been only a few writers who,
like Blake, needed and could stand up against that, and suggest con-
tact with the reader in accordance with their conditions:

But first the notion that man has a body distinct from his soul is to be
expunged; this I shall do, by printing in the infernal method, by cor-
rosives, which in Hell are salutary and medicinal, melting apparent
surfaces away, and displaying the infinite which was hid.

If the doors of perception were cleansed every thing would appear
to man as it is, infinite.

(William Blake, *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell*)

“Cleansing of the doors of perception” can be executed not only by
literary, but also painterly means, just as the printing methods and
the structure of the book. In liberature, however, the Word is still of
primary importance, and it is still the Word that regulates all the di-
mensions of a book. All non-verbal means of expression are nothing
else than that: non-verbal means of Expression.

This is the case with fiery Blake, who draws himself in his books,
and this is the case with the cheerful Laurence Sterne, who lets his
readers draw in his book. But one can also sketch with words them-
selves, just as calligram poets have done. Or one can choose not to
paint at all, but immerse the reader in the carefully prearranged space
of a volume.

This space is tantamount to speech regained. The body language.

Liberature – 496 Words of Conclusion

It's all my fault. In the eponymous essay, I cautiously wrote that, call it "literature or rather liberature, terminology is of secondary importance. This is a concern for theoreticians, not writers". And, disregarding my own warnings, I have spent ten precious years haunting the unicorn.

Time is a strange thing. A decade has passed since liberature arrived. This chimes with the *Literary Decade*, which laid out my dis-laid excess in its layout (still in broadsheet format). In the preceding decade we were seeing double, con-tri-ving *Oka-leczenie*, without which liberature would not exist. But when we saw the prototype at last (on Good Friday of Jubilee Year 2000), it was hard to guess, even considering technological challenges, that another decade would pass before its official publication. So while we looked after the days, the decades looked after themselves, topping... forty years total.

"Total", for though the term was coined by the undersigned, Katarzyna Bazarnik, the other co-creator, also of *Oka-leczenie* and *(O)patrzenie*, has not signed below. It is mostly due to her that liberature came into more exterritorial view and into Academia; and I owe her English translations of my poems and essays. All this began when we decided to physically join our texts. The concept crystallised during our symposia over *Oka-leczenie*, which stimulated theoretical speculations. Also, her research mattered; it concerned the spatial structure of *Finnegans Wake*, which, as many signs in the sky and in the book indicate, is globally liberatic. Tadeusz Kantor once said that "everyone gets the chance he deserves". Well, I must have somehow deserved such a good wife.

But do I deserve equally good readers? I would like to, but when I look at this collection, I doubt it. I am not fully satisfied with any article, and cannot say "O stay! Thou art so fair!". Many a judgement leave me with a bad taste, many a sentence calls for revision or deletion. Even this commentary has been revised, half of it thrown out altogether.

Alas, it cannot be done with words already published; the past cannot be revised. No matter how ashamed I would feel now, I know they don't belong to me anymore, that those clumsy sentences are already "in the public domain", and all I can do is to take responsibility

for them. Or modify my present stance. This would be difficult, however, since I don't feel much wiser today.

But I would be more cautious now. Perhaps I wouldn't pose literature as some "fourth literary mode", as I don't see much sense in such three-coloured divisions now. A genre? Even if I mention this, I remember a cautionary tale about the African elephant, resembling its Indian cousin, and geneticists' claim that its actual cousin is the mouse. Indeed, genetics sexes life up.

So perhaps good old Croce was right when he questioned generic divisions? Perhaps there are only specific works that constitute universes in their own right? If we agree with that, I will happily abandon literature.



Liberature

or on the Origin of (Literary) Species¹

Just as in the natural world there occur mutations that originate a new type or species, in the world of literature there appear works such as *Tristram Shandy*, *Ulysses*, *Finnegans Wake* or *Un Coup de Dés*, which seem such a new phenomenon that they force scholars to reformulate the literary typology. Sterne's novel appeared at the time when the conventions of prose fiction (the novel) had just been codified (both as regards narration, typography and editorial practices). By introducing an element of the play with the reader, metatextual commentary and devices that emphasise visual and spatial features of writing, *Tristram Shandy* subverts the whole typology of the novel even before it has become fully formulated, becoming for some the model novel, and for others the model anti-novel, a self-reflexive treatise on writing a book.

Ulysses caused a comparable problem. The first readers were clearly confused by its problematic generic affiliation. When asked what is his book, Joyce first answered in surprise that it was a novel. But *Ulysses*, just as *Tristram Shandy* before, violated so many generic conventions that it was hard to classify it as a novel then. If it were a novel, then it was a very unconventional one. As T.S. Eliot remarked, Joyce "killed the nineteenth century, exposed the futility of all styles, and destroyed his own future"² (as a novelist, which, in fact, turned out to be prophetic since *Finnegans Wake* indeed exceeded the boundaries of any known literary genre). Jeri Johnson, the editor of the Oxford reprint of the first edition writes about this thus³:

Ulysses looked like a novel, but it also looked like drama, or catechism, or poetry, or music depending on which page one happened to open. If the book played a little more fair – had it, say, used quotation marks to identify the speakers of dialogue and to make that dialogue more readily dis-

1 This is an edited English version of my paper given at the conference *Od liberature do e-literature* (From liberature to e-literature), University of Opole, 23–24 November 2009, Kamień Śląski. Forthcoming in Polish in the volume under the same title edited by Monika Górka-Olesińska and Eugeniusz Wilk in University of Opole Press.

2 Richard Ellmann, *James Joyce*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1983, p. 528.

3 Jeri Johnson, "Introduction", in: James Joyce, *Ulysses*, ed. Jeri Johnson, Oxford: Oxford University Press, (1992) 1998, p. xiii.

tinguishable from the circumambient prose, or had it provided a leisurely preamble setting the scene and gently leading the reader towards a first encounter with Buck Mulligan and Stephen Dedalus, had there been less neologistic wordplay of the sort more usually found in poetry, or less psychological verisimilitude, less parody, pastiche, or stylistic extravagance – it might have been recognised as a novel. That it wasn't is simply because it isn't – a novel, that is. Not quite. Or rather, it contains within itself at least one novel (...), but it also challenges, expands, even explodes that genre's previously established conventions. Joyce himself began by calling it a novel, soon abandoned this for 'epic', encyclopaedia', or even *maleditissimo romanizzazione* ['damned monstrously big novel', ed. note.], and finally settled simply for 'book'.

So by giving the readers *Ulysses* and then *Finnegans Wake*, Joyce may have influenced not only our understanding of the novel, but also offered something so radically new that it would call for a separate definition.

In her introduction Jeri Johnson mentions these features of *Ulysses* that contribute to its originality: an innovative treatment of textuality as a network of relations permeating the language of the characters and narrators and the ensuing, peculiar time-space of overlapping worlds: the represented and the representing ones, a multiplicity of schemas-skeletons which Joyce filled with the textual "flesh" (one of them is the human body), the generic, stylistic and typographic variety (if not polymediality, since *Ulysses* also contains some musical notation), as well as meta-textuality and subversiveness demonstrated in the fact of "its seeming self-conscious awareness of itself as a written yet material artefact".⁴ Thus, *Ulysses* appears as a new genre that evolved from the 19th century novel and the tradition of the epic and the Menippean satire. No matter, however, how we classify Joyce's works, one thing is certain; both *Ulysses* and *Finnegans Wake* are *books*. Preoccupied with the creation of another textual world and perhaps tired of theoretical discussions, finally Joyce resorted to the simple, the most obvious term: I had written a book, he said – and now let critics worry for the next three hundred years what genre it is.

It is hard to determine to what extent he was inspired by another literary revolutionary Stéphane Mallarmé and his vision of the all-embracing Book, but undoubtedly, he knew and highly valued his poetry.⁵ Admittedly, the French symbolist left only a fragment of his grand Book, i.e., *Un Coup de Dés*, but both his poem and his theoretical divagations

⁴ Jeri Johnson, op. cit. xix.

⁵ Cf. David Hayman *Joyce et Mallarmé*, Paris: Les Lettres Modernes, 1956; and Sam Slote *The Silence in Progress of Dante, Mallarmé and Joyce*, New York: Peter Lang, 1999.

testify to his search of not only a new language but even a new kind or genre of literature that would emerge in effect of his pursuit. This is how he writes about this in his Preface to *Un Coup de Dés*⁶:

J'aurai, toutefois, indiqué du Poème ci-joint, mieux que l'esquisse, un « état » qui ne rompe pas de tous points avec la tradition; poussé sa présentation en maint sens aussi avant qu'elle n'offusque personne: suffisamment, pour ouvrir des yeux. Aujourd'hui ou sans présumer de l'avenir qui sortira d'ici, rien ou presque un art, reconnaissons aisément que la tentative participe, avec imprévu, de poursuites particulières et chères à notre temps, le vers libre et le poème en prose. Leur réunion s'accomplit sous une influence, je sais, étrangère, celle de la Musique entendue au concert; on en retrouve plusieurs moyens m'ayant semblé appartenir aux Lettres, je les reprends. Le genre, que c'en devienne un comme la symphonie, peu à peu, à côté du chant personnel, laisse intact l'antique vers, auquel je garde un culte et attribue l'empire de la passion et des rêveries; tandis que ce serait le cas de traiter, de préférence (ainsi qu'il suit) tels sujets d'imagination pure et complexe ou intellect: que ne reste aucune raison d'exclure de la Poésie – unique source.

Mallarmé is aware that he goes beyond the framework of poetry written so far and beyond its conventions, and that his poem originates a new phenomenon that he is not yet able to name, that he does not have to name and in fact, being a poet, he does not want to name. That is not his role, nor task, even though theoretical reflection was familiar to him

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However, some writers undertake the challenge of naming the phenomena they themselves create. Ten years ago, during an exhibition of unconventional books in the Jagiellonian Library in Kraków, *Dekada Literacka* published Zenon Fajfer's article "Liberature (appendix to a dictionary of literary terms)"⁷, in which he pondered what in fact is the writer's medium⁸:

1. Is language the only medium of literature? Or could an actual piece of paper be such a medium as well, a piece of paper that the writer is going to

6 Stéphane Mallarmé, "Préface", *Poésies et autres textes*, Paris: Le Livre de Poche, 1998, p. 254–55.

7 Zenon Fajfer, "Liberatura. Aneks do słownika terminów literackich", *Dekada Literacka*, 30 June 1999, no. 5/6 (153/154), Kraków, p. 8–9.

8 *Ibid.*, p. 8–9.

cover with black writing? Or perhaps, for some important reason, the page should be black and the writing white? Who said that the colour of the page is deemed to be always white? It is only a convention that writers automatically follow.

2. Does the definition of form understood as “a particular way of ordering words and sentences” (...) also include the physical shape of letters and sentences? Or does the word amount only to its sound and meaning (...)?
3. The above-mentioned Polish dictionary of literary terms defines “form” as an established model according to which particular literary works are created and “literary work” as a meaningful creation in language (an utterance) fulfilling the criteria of literariness accepted in a given time and culture, and, in particular, the criterion of congruence with generally accepted standards of artistry. Do these definitions also encompass a reflection on the physical shape of the book? Do the shape and structure of the book constitute an integral part of the literary work, or are they only the concern of printers, desktop publishers, binders, and editors, and a matter of complying with generally accepted standards?

Fajfer stated that if the writer's medium is language, then this must also include writing, and along with it, its visual-spatial features may also be significant for him. In conclusion he proposed to gather into one literary genre those works in which writers devise the whole book, including its typography, and call it *liberature* after Latin *liber*, or ‘book’. It is easy to notice that it could embrace the above mentioned works by Sterne, Mallarmé, and Joyce, and perhaps other similar cases.

The revision of the canonical division of literature into three major genres (or so-called kinds): poetry, prose and drama (with other genres subordinate to them) resulted not from his in-depth theoretical studies but from his artistic practice, especially our book written in the ninetieth of the last century that we entitled *Oka-leczenie* (Eyes-ore). When his article was published, *Oka-leczenie* was still a manuscript; only its middle part, called *Zenkasi*, existed as a printed book (shown during the above mentioned exhibition in the Jagiellonian Library). There was also a model of the future book, but we managed to find a bookbinder willing and able to make a prototype only after the exhibition was closed. But a year later we had nine prototype copies to show to prospective publishers. Although the planned shape of the book was indeed unconventional, it was positively not an artists' book in our view, though initially it was compared to it. What was it for us then? Undoubtedly, literature. But literature slightly different from this usually created; it was literature that apart from searching the right words, also searched the right space



Il. 1. Zenon Fajfer, Katarzyna Bazarnik
Oka-leczenie prototype, Kraków 2000.



Il. 2. Zenon Fajfer, Katarzyna Bazarnik *Oka-leczenie*,
vol. 8 "Liberatura", Kraków: Ha!art, 2009.

for them. And it has found a well-suited space in the form of the triple codex (a triple dos-à-dos, see photos 1 and 2 below).

It is worth noting that beside the unconventional book structure, *Oka-leczenie* contains so-called emanational narration devised specially for the story told in the book and called so by Fajfer since the text consists of several layers, revealed only in reading. When the reader puts together all initials of all the words he will be able to discover a new text, and when he repeats the procedure several times on the newly decoded texts, he will be lead to discover one word hidden "at the bottom", the word that has as if emanated the whole story. This is supposed to render fading or emerging consciousnesses of the heroes: a dying man in one part and a baby coming to the world in the other, represented so since they cannot consciously communicate with the outer world. This form suggests that they are in another dimension of reality.

When we devised such an unconventional shape for *Oka-leczenie*, we did not think what spatial and visual form would best reflect our concept, but how to connect the three separate texts narrating three different events, yet related to one another on some hidden plane and mutually determining one another. Finally, we came to the conclusion that the most adequate way to do that would be to show this through the book. It enables me to start reading from any volume, which underlines autonomy of each part, but simultaneously, due to its cyclical structure it suggests cyclicity of narration symbolising an uninterrupted circle of deaths and rebirths. So our inspiration was purely literary, and the theoretical questions were of secondary importance then.

However, some stir inspired by liberature, especially after the reading room with such books and a publishing series were launched, have forced us to reflect in more depth on our understanding of liberature and what it can mean for scholars of literature, cultural studies and art

historians. Perhaps this is not a coincidence that the term appeared at the moment when the death of the printed book has been announced, and texts are mass digitised. Perhaps it was only when the text was “liberated” in the cyberspace, that the so-called “remediation” has allowed us to notice the book as a potentially meaningful constituent (a semem, to use Wojciech Kalaga’s term) of the literary work. In the times of abstract art, which exposes its very matter and materiality of the medium (in painting, sculpture and installations), and the interactive, conceptual art, which invites the audience to co-create a work (and the work of art appears relational and processual), drawing one’s attention to the existence of such literary works that display their “material foundation” seems more understandable. The clash between the two media: paper covered with print and electronic text, reveals such features of the book that let us describe it as a meaningful component of the literary form.

Interestingly enough, simultaneously with Fajfer’s proposal, J.A. Cuddon’s *The Penguin Dictionary of Literary Terms* offered a description of the book as a peculiar punctuating mark. The typology of punctuating marks listed in the entry on punctuation names its eight levels: from a single character (a letter) that punctuates the blank page, through continual script, interword spaces including a division into lines, paragraphs and stanzas, punctuation marks, particular words distinguished by kind, size and colour of typeface, etc., *mise-en-page*, pagination and arrangement of the facing pages, divisions into parts, chapters, and subchapters, introductions, afterwords, appendices, up to the *book*, that is the highest, the most comprehensive spatio-material form of arranging discourse.⁹ It is worth noticing that the classification refers to structuring discourse both by linguistic devices and by visual arrangement of graphic signs in the space of the page, two facing pages and the whole codex. Hence, the definition opens up a possibility of investigating various *book forms* as interpretable “punctuation marks”. In analogy with differences in meaning of the sentences closed with the marks: . ! ?, a bound codex book, a book-in-the-box containing loose unbound pages, a scroll, and an e-book should be interpreted differently. These are, as we have seen, postulates of liberatic writers.

So liberature can be perceived as a literary trend that appeared at a specific time and space in response to mass digitisation and disembodiment of text. On the other hand, by pointing to the above mentioned writers as their ancestors and their work as a kind of protoliberature, it can be

9 Cf. “Punctuation”, *The Penguin Dictionary of Literary Terms*, ed. J.A. Cuddon, revised and enlarged by C.E. Preston, London: Penguin, 1999, p. 712.

seen as a stage in an evolution of literary forms that have already existed before, as for example, a continuation of the novel as a self-conscious “print-based genre” (to use Maurice Couturier’s phrase), or of modern poetry following the Mallarmean breakthrough and ancient visual poetry. It would be related to Wagnerian *Gesamtkunstwerk* and the modernist project of total work, fully controlled by the artist, as well as to the artists’ books emerging as a separate kind of art in those days. This, in turn, takes us back to Blake and his vision of artist’s “Printing House in Hell”, who creates the book as a bodily-spiritual being, a marriage of painting and literature, an artistic object resisting mass production but simultaneously aspiring to revolutionizing thinking of the masses. Approached from this perspective, liberature would constitute a new genre that, in accordance with Mallarmé’s intuition, would be distinguished among literary works in consequence of writers’ creative pursuit in connection with their application of the resources of other arts and because they have enlarged the scope of rhetorical means available to them by including the space and form of the book.

Now we must clarify our stance on the concept of the literary genre. If one wants to describe liberature in terms of genre theory, it seems more useful to resort to its understanding in the Anglo-American literary theory. Though “genre” is usually translated into Polish as *gatunek*, it does not correspond in a straightforward way to how *gatunek* is traditionally understood, i.e., it is a sub-kind of *rodzaj literacki*, or a literary mode, kind or... genre; one of the three major categories among: prose, poetry, and drama. In the Anglo-American world such literary forms as sonnet, the epic, the detective novel, the memoir, and the reportage are referred to as *genres*. And liberature could easily be included in their dictionaries as yet another genre among many genres of writing.

But perhaps it would be even more useful to base our understanding of liberature as a genre on the prototype theory, appropriated into philological research by cognitive scholars, Lakoff and Lagnacker. Such understanding of the literary genre is discussed in Dirk de Geest and Hendrik Van Gorp’s article *Literary Genres from a Systemic-Functional Perspective*¹⁰. They see it in terms of a “fuzzy set” that contains elements closer or farther from the prototype, or the ideal model (see fig. 1).

10 Dirk De Geest, and Hendrik Van Gorp, “Literary genres from a systemic functional perspective”, *European Journal of English Studies*, vol. 3, no. 1, 1999, p. 33–50.

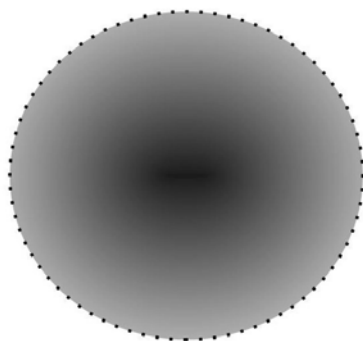


Fig. 1. A fuzzy set: elements closer to the centre are more similar to the ideal model, while those least resembling it are located at the peripheries.

The fact that the ideal is unattainable, and the borders blurred does not mean that we cannot identify elements belonging to such a set since a number of features can be differentiated that are characteristic for a given genre. The ones close to the prototype would have more of them, hence they will be located closer to the centre in our diagram. Those furthest away from the centre could probably have only one generic feature, but “strong” enough to perceive the work as possibly a borderline case of the genre. To illustrate this let us use the example from the cited article. For instance, a sparrow would be more representative for the set “bird” than, say, a duck, an ostrich or a penguin. “Eventually, all generic categories are structured on the basis of one (in some cases possibly more than one) ‘prototype’, an instance which functions cognitively as an optimal representation of the entire category”, write de Geest and Van Gorp.¹¹ In other words, such a paradigmatic prototype, functioning as a model for comparison for all the elements for which we would like to determine whether they belong to the set, can be defined as such an element that is the most representative for a given category. It would be so specific for the category that it would share a minimum number of features with other, related categories (sets). It is within this framework that the sparrow is a closer approximation of the prototype “bird” than, “for instance, an emu, a bat or a model aeroplane” (ibid.). Since, as the Dutch scholars emphasise, how we define the bird is not rooted in an objectively existing reality but to a great extent depends on knowledge of the subject attempting to define an object, as well as the domi-

11 Ibid., p. 40–41.

nant discourse and even institutional factors (ibid).¹² So in such a framework liberature would be gradational: stretching on a cline from works having most of the features described as liberatic to works that demonstrate only few of them (cf. Wittgenstein's family resemblance, and Lofti A. Zadeh's fuzzy sets).

For liberature *Oka-leczenie* could function as the prototype, as it was the first book deliberately referred to with this term and for which it was, in fact, coined. However, the concept turned out useful enough to be picked up, and gradually it came into use, since, as it seems, it can be used for a more adequate description of already existing or presently published works that demonstrate features shared with the above mentioned model. It was also described exactly as "useful" by Richard Kostelanetz, when he learnt about our work.¹³ He knew what he was talking about, since he has fought for many years with ignoring many writers whom he includes among "book art", though scholars researching "the artist book" do not mention them at all while writing about an innovative approach to the matter of the book.

Let us now distinguish these generic features of liberature whose presence enables us to classify a work as belonging to this category. It should be remembered, however, that we are dealing with a fuzzy set, therefore it is not essential to identify all the features listed below to count a work as liberatic. Besides, some of them are related to one another so there is some unavoidable overlap. Hence:

1. **non-verbal and typographic means of expression**, these are subjected to the verbal expression and include: typeface and lettering, *mise-en-page* or layout, blanks, other graphic elements (cf. various fonts and sign-poems in *Oka-leczenie*);
2. **spatial structure of the text**, often resulting in an unconventional book form, authorial structure of the book and authorial pagination, which Cuddon's dictionary counts as "punctuating device" or a way of segmenting text in space (cf. the triple dos-à-dos structure of *Oka-leczenie*, the book-in-the-box of B.S. Johnson's *The Unfortunates*; negative and positive pagination in *Oka-leczenie*; a missing chapter in *Tristram Shandy* marked by a gap in pagination);

¹² These factors also play a part in considering liberature a literary genre, since the Liberature Reading Room run by Małopolska Culture Institute (as part of its library) and "Liberature" series of Korporacja Ha!art Publishing House authorise it as a distinct literary phenomenon.

¹³ In a private e-mail correspondence. We quoted his words in *Ha!art* no. 15, 2003, devoted to liberature, but, alas, without mentioning the date. It is impossible now to establish it after our computer with the archived correspondence irreparably crashed.

3. **iconicity**, both pictorial and diagrammatic, that is iconicity of structures due to which the structure of a text or the book reflects the structure of the represented world; it can appear at various levels of the text, which an American literary scholar C.D. Malmgren labels “the iconic spaces”: the alphabetic, lexical, paginal, and compositional ones¹⁴ (cf. the emanational structure of text in *Oka-leczenie*);
4. **self-reflexivity** or **metatextuality**, what Jeri Johnson called in *Ulysses* “self-conscious awareness of itself as a written yet material artefact”, also including all narratorial comments reminding the reader that he is holding a particular text (just as it happens in *Tristram Shandy*, and partly in *(O)patrznie* [Ga(u)ze] by Fajfer and the present author);
5. **hybridity or polymediality**, that is a combination of various media (various arts) in one work (an example can be provided by Blake’s illuminated poetry, Nowakowski’s books, and graphic elements in *Oka-leczenie*);
6. **interactivity and ergodic quality**, the terms refer to a situation in which the reader determines the shape of narration, her active cooperation in giving a final shape to the work in the process of reading it (for example, choosing the sequence in which one will read the sections (or lexias) of *The Unfortunates*, generating various versions of Queneau’s sonnets in *Cent Mille Millions de Poèmes*, or discovering the hidden texts in *Oka-leczenie*);
7. **materiality**: colour and kind of paper, or using another material (e.g., black and white pages in *Oka-leczenie*, a torn-off corner of the front cover in *(O)patrznie*; a transparent sheet and glass used as a signifying medium important for understanding the message of the text in another of Fajfer’s works, *Spoglądając przez ozonową dziurę* (Detect Ozone Whole Nearby); other examples include nontransparent and semitransparent paper and rock used in Andrzej Bednarczyk’s *The Temple of Stone*, in which these materials are important elements of the lyrical message; in all these cases their use is not only iconic since their materiality and the readers’ connotations also matter);
8. **medium specificity**. In the case of works exploiting specific features of their medium, an intermedial translation is, in fact, impossible since transposing the text onto a different carrier distorts the work by depriving it of some crucial elements (just as a film adaptation of a novel is not the novel although it can give a pretty faithful account of its plot). This constitutes an inherent obstacle in digitising such works since specific features of their medium associated with their materiality and ico-

14 C.D. Malmgren, *Fictional Spaces in the Modernist and Postmodernist American Novel*. Lewisburg: Bucknell UP, 1985, p. 45–60.

nicity are distorted or disappear altogether when only text and typography can be displayed on the screen.

This last feature, i.e. an organic unity of a text with the form and structure of the material medium seems one of the key features of liberature. In Bogdan Zalewski's apt couplet, "When you give a different form/to these words, meaning is changed in those tomes"¹⁵, and what's more, it is changed so radically that an author may find it hard to put his or her name under a version modified so much (unless it is the author who agreed to such a translation, but perhaps we would deal with a new work in this case).

*

Perhaps it is consistency in stressing the importance of the medium in writing and reading that is responsible for coining a paradoxical, oxymoronic term "e-liberature" to refer to literature written in the electronic medium but displaying similar features as "material" liberature. Out of a range of features (as presented above) that last one was picked up and emphasised, and then used in reference to Radosław Nowakowski's hypertext novel *The End of the World According to Emeryk*¹⁶ and stretched to cover other unusual works, for instance, the kinetic version of Fajfer's emanational poem "Ars poetica."¹⁷

Hence, it seems that critics using this term conceive of e-liberature as such e-texts that exploit the specificity of the electronic medium and the cyberspace in such a way that it were impossible to transpose them into another medium (for example, print) without a considerable modification of their meaning, that is works using non-verbal elements such as graphics, sound and motion. However, if we consider the above mentioned generic features of liberature, especially materiality and spatial arrangement of the text, it seems that "ordinary" e-literature has been described slightly too hastily as "e-liberature". Since e-literature should be different from paper literature, hence also from liberature, insofar as it should exploit specific potential of the electronic medium, that is those features that are unavailable on paper or in any other material vehicle. Thus, scanned or otherwise digitised traditional literature available in the Internet would not be considered e-literature (which seems identical with hy-

¹⁵ Bogdan Zalewski, "Liberatura", Czytelnia Liberatury, Małopolski Instytut Kultury, Kraków 2008. Web. 15 Feb 2010.

¹⁶ The term was first used by Mariusz Pisarski, the editor-in-chief of e-magazine *Techsty*.

¹⁷ It features as an example of e-liberature on *Techsty* website, issue no. 3/2007, <<http://www.techsty.art.pl/magazyn/magazyn3.html>>

pertext), but only those works that were created in this medium and cannot be transposed into another medium without some serious distortion.

One of these specific, nontransferable features is motion. Letters, words, and sentences can move on the screen, and arrange into constellations whose structure can be dynamic and variable. Perhaps sound is another such quality. Both of them are present in Fajfer's electronic poem *Primum Mobile*, in which emanational texts fold and unfold before the readers' eyes, revealing their dynamic character, less perceptible in their immobile, printed form. The poem, included in *ten letters*¹⁸, a volume of liberatic poems composed for print in 2005, bridges in a special way the two, seemingly rival forms: print and electronic text. The poems included in the printed part are displayed in the paper space of the facing pages. In "Irreversibility" a little boy playing at the river bank throws exclamation marks-sticks onto the white surface of the water-page. In "Ars lectoria" reading of a book reveals subtly and suddenly the fleshness and nudity of the pages, contributing to a specific eroticism of the poem. In "seven letters" the pages folded in half and quarter make the readers play with the text, which alternates between confirming or denying the role of chance in human life depending on a passage the readers uncover or cover. This game with chance played with the use of typography and space reminds us of Mallarmé's *Un Coup de Dés*. Finally, jokingly and subversively "Ars numerandi" foretells the end of... the electronic text, threatening with "critica¹ S#stem error" if we keep using the principle of "commutativity" uncritically and recklessly. Since treating electronic texts as interchangeable with their printed forms is nearly tantamount to erasing the difference between "o" and "i", the poet seems to suggest. This is exactly the unrealized danger of mass digitization of literature, and in its realization lies a chance for saving the printed book.

(And yet
there is more and more uncertainty
not only about
commutativity)

(and that's all our hope)¹⁹

Here the word discloses its dualistic nature: it is simultaneously the sound and the image, a material and immaterial entity, an idea that constant-

18 Zenon Fajfer, *dwadzieścia jeden liter/ten letters*, Liberatura vol. 10–11, Kraków: Korporacja Ha!art, 2010.

19 Ibid. "Ars numerandi", unnumbered page.

ly seeks its proper form. The tension between the printed book and the digital carriers is reflected even in geometrical forms: the rectangular volume includes a circular CD disk with the electronic record of *Primum Mobile* – a film-poem that needs a cinema, TV or computer screen to reveal its existence. The double presence of “Ars poetica” (due to its title probably a programmatic expression of the poet) is not accidental: it opens the paper volume in its static form and in its dynamic one it begins *Primum Mobile*.

Would, then, *ten letters* be a model prototype of e-liberature, an example, despite the objections voiced in this article, of usefulness of even this term, and does it mean that the “Darwinian” evolution of genres would be going on?

Liberature. A Decade

(a Snapshot View on its History)

Father, mother and the adoptive uncle

Is a decade a long time? When Plato criticized writing in *Phaedrus*, denying the letters any value and claiming that this invention “will create forgetfulness in the learners’ souls”¹, it had been in use for much more than a decade.² However, ten years after 17 August 1991, when Poland was first connected to the internet, not only could most of its population use it efficiently, but it was hard for them to imagine ever having lived without it. So what is the situation when it comes to liberature, a concept born in the internet era, but stimulated rather by a reflection on signs and writing more typical for the pre-computer era? What does it mean that liberature is ten years old?

The term indeed appeared in the previous decade, in 1999.³ In his article in *Dekada Literacka*, recalling a slogan about the “exhaustion of literature”, Zenon Fajer used the coinage to refer to all kinds of literary works in which words and their spatial, material and typographic arrangement serve a similar function. In fact, he suggested that this kind of writing would bring about a renewal and ensure the future of literature. Since then, the artist has given many talks, most of them published and now collected in this volume. Three of them form a triptych that has framed the ensuing discourse on liberature. These are: “Liberature. Appendix to a Dictionary of the Literary Terms”, an appendix to this “Appendix” published in *FA-art* two years later (“Appendix to the ‘Appendix to the Dictionary of Literary Terms’”) and his authorial commentary “Liberum veto?” (2005), accompanying the reprint of the first of the above mentioned essays in *Tekst-tura. Wokół nowych form tekstu literackiego i tekstu jako dzieła sztuki* (Tekst-tura. On New Forms of the Literary text and Text as the Work of Art).

1 Plato, *Phaedrus*. Trans. Benjamin Jowett. The University of Adelaide Library eBooks@Adelaide. Web. 30 April 2010.

2 However, as Juliusz Domański stresses – the philosopher’s opinions were prompted not only by his objections to writing as such, but also from his awareness that it had already become a general practice to resort to writing to express important matters. (cf. J. Domański, *Tekst jako uobecnienie*, Warszawa 1992, 33). See also “Grecka “rewolucja książkowa” a pisarstwo filozoficzne” (*ibid.*, 18–33)].

3 However, the idea itself is older, as the author’s comments testify.

First of all, these texts define liberature as “total literature”, that is literature in which the author shapes not only every word, situation, the time and space of the events and the protagonists, but also the space of the book itself, the typographic presentation of the text, the appearance of particular pages (if he decides to segment the text into pages), and the codex (if he decides that the book should have such a form). Secondly, in consequence of these allegedly minor corrections (though Fajfer believes they are essential) to the hitherto understanding of the book and the art of literature, we obtain “new” definitions of some essential terms in literary studies (book, form, matter, etc.). Thirdly, Fajfer postulated that liberature should be considered the fourth literary mode, beside the three traditionally distinguished.⁴

But do those who write on liberature agree with his claims? Well, yes, and no. His name is not the only one mentioned in this context, though it is definitely mentioned as the first. But liberature also has a mother, incidentally Fajfer’s life companion. It is clear, even in this volume, how difficult it is to talk about liberature without mentioning Katarzyna Bazarnik, who usually sits next to Fajfer, when he is defining liberature, complementing his words, presenting papers in tandem with him, and last but not least, ordering her husband’s argument, giving it a more scholarly and theoretically grounded character.⁵

Consequently, although the two often write about the same questions (in fact, use similar expressions), their texts have slightly different characters. It seems that Fajfer’s wife distills from his concept the most essential part, purging it (at least partly) of its slightly ideological and swaggering tone, so typical of artists’ manifestoes. More importantly, however, Bazarnik opens up a discussion on the usefulness of the term and its contexts by locating Fajfer’s theory among other similar concepts and taking up a critical reading of existing reflections on the space of the book (referring mainly to J. Kestner, S. Spencer, W.J.T. Mitchell, C.D. Malmgren, Russian formalists and structuralists). It is thanks to her that the theory has gradually come to stress more and more strongly the function of the book as the specific medium of liberature (which is evident in numerous references, comments and supplements to Butor and Mallarmé’s

4 This thesis seems one of the most controversial. More on the question in my essay *Liberatura – kilka uwag na marginesie definicji i teorii zjawiska* (Liberature. A Few Remarks on the Margin of Definition and Theory of the Phenomenon) (forthcoming in *Kulturowe wizualizacje doświadczenia* [Cultural Visualisations of Experience]).

5 The couple do not deny such a division of roles. Suffice it to recall Bazarnik’s comment made in November 2009 at the conference *Od liberatury do e-literatury* (From liberature to e-literature), when she defended her husband, explaining that “Zenon is an artist, after all, and he does not have to refer to academic categorizations”.

claims) and the connection with iconicity (by developing Malmgren's theory of the iconic space). By devoting a part of her doctoral dissertation to liberature, Bazarnik completes to a significant degree earlier reflections on liberature, demonstrating with examples of literary theory (e.g., J. Frank and W.J.T. Mitchell) and practice (e.g., B.S. Johnson and L. Sterne) that the term proposed in 1999 is an effective tool to describe a fairly long tradition by characterizing some existing but nameless entities. It should also be remembered that it is Bazarnik who consistently develops Fajfer's thesis about the genological distinctness of liberature.⁶

There is one more person who cannot be overlooked in these reflections. Just as one cannot talk about liberature without mentioning Fajfer, and about Fajfer without mentioning Bazarnik, so the account of their theory would not be complete without mentioning Radosław Nowakowski. This book artist has quite willingly accepted the label "liberature" for his work, and since 1999 has called himself a liberatic writer. Since then, he has also published essays in which what he had previously described as "enbooking the world"⁷ is renamed as liberatic work. And Nowakowski himself, as the author of *Traktat kartkograficzny czyli rzecz o liberaturze* (*Treatise on Pageography or a Question of liBerature*, 2002, 2009), the only book so far entirely devoted to the subject⁸, is counted not only as a creator but also theoretician of liberature. His reflections are the least substantive and the most poetic of all of the writings discussed here. Even his *Treatise* can be hardly treated seriously, especially given that the author himself claims that, "*Treatise* is not a theory of liBerature, either. In fact I don't know what it is and what it was to be."⁹ Perhaps we should see it as a footnote to his liberatic work or an ABC of liberature, since it contains a whole catalogue of potentially available means of expression useful for liberatic writers (starting from a single dash up to the shape of

6 Cf. K. Bazarnik *Liberature: a New Literary Genre?*, in: *Insistent Images*, ed. E. Tabakowska, C. Ljungberg and O. Fischer. *Iconicity in Language and Literature* (vol. 5. Amsterdam, Philadelphia: John Benjamins: 2007), p. 192–208. Her perspective, based on Anglo-American theories, seems more convincing than Fajfer's critical discussion of the *Dictionary of Literary Terms*, which does not seem "the only and unquestionable authority" as far as the subject is concerned. However, it seems that her approach (cf. her essay "Od liberatury do e-liberatury czyli o powstawaniu gatunków (literackich)" [From Liberature to E-liberature or on the Origin of (Literary) Species], see p. 151 in this volume) cannot be accepted without reservations. One wonders not so much if liberature can be treated as a genre in the framework of polytypical genology (polytypical theory of literary genres), but if it is generally sensible to include it into any genological order (more on that in my essay *Liberatura – kilka uwag na marginesie...* [Liberature. A Few Remarks on the Margins...], in print).

7 Radosław Nowakowski, "Why do I make my books the way I do?". *Liberatorium*, Nowakowski's official website. <<http://www.liberatorium.com/teksty/why.html>> 30 April 2010.

8 Only a part of *Od Joyce'a do liberatury* (From Joyce to liberature) edited by Bazarnik is devoted to it.

9 Radosław Nowakowski, *Liberatorium*, Nowakowski's official website. 30 April 2010. <<http://www.liberatorium.com/traktat/traktat.html>>. Cf. *Treatise...*, p.107.

the whole book). As regards historical and theoretical issues, Nowakowski is most interested in temporal relations between “orature” (“describing the world in speech”), “literature” (“describing the world in letters”), and “liberature” (enbooking it”). However, in posing these questions he does not really seek answers to them, but rather poetically plays on words, and concludes by pointing out that what the three share is “RATURE”, adding:

But what is RATURE? Ha! I would love to know that (...) RATURE is very unusual. In fact amazing. It is included in orature, literature and liberature, and at the same time it includes orature, literature and liberature. This is impossible but it is so, and at the same time it is utter nonsense. But I can't help it, can I?¹⁰

His attitude makes one see *Treatise* not as a theoretical work but as a joke, a trifle, a playful game, a pun. But, through binding literature with its vehicle, the author opens up a possibility of another understanding of the concept, slightly different than Fajfer's but also implied by his theory. So, paradoxically, despite some controversial simplifications in Nowakowski's argument, he cannot be passed over in silence here since he opens up a very interesting, though not really explored, perspective on research. It is worth following all such tracks as the subject under discussion is undoubtedly still *in statu nascendi*...

Discourse *in progress*

So the past decade has brought us texts seminal for the discussion on liberature and ensuing developments. The term seems to have been accepted, and though it has not triggered widespread discussion, there is no need to prophesise its demise, especially considering that it is being used more and more frequently in articles and conversations. While in 2002 Universitas published *Od Joyce'a do liberatury* [From Joyce to Liberature]¹¹ edited by Bazarnik, liberature was still often perceived as a typo, today it is used by scholars, critics and readers as a familiar term well grounded in the discourse of the humanities. More importantly, liberature has

¹⁰ Nowakowski, *Traktat*, p. 19 (transl. KB).

¹¹ The book should be considered “the first serious academic publication” on liberature. It was available already three years after Fajfer's manifestoes, and by using the term in the title located it in the context of questions important for literary studies. For years it has been considered the most comprehensive description of liberature (see B. Śniecikowska, *Słowo-obraz-dźwięk. Literatura i sztuki wizualne w koncepcjach polskiej awangardy 1918–1939* [Word-Image-Sound. Literature and Visual Arts in the Concepts of Polish Avant-Garde], Kraków: Universitas, 2005, 79).

become a context for analyzing not only the bonds between word and image (as, marginally, in Śniecikowska's analysis of the avant-garde¹²), but contemporary art, in its interactive forms as well (as, also marginally, in Kluszczyński, in the context of his discussion of Zimmerman's notion of interactivity¹³).

Thus, since 1999, a range of theoretical problems has been sketched, including the question of the non-neutrality of the recording of a literary text, a potentially semantically charged vehicle of the literary work, the semantics of the book itself as a literary medium, and the arguable question of the generic distinctness of liberature. Gradually, the list has been enlarged to include iconicity as a feature of liberature, attempts at sketching a history of the phenomenon, the question of the medium (also the feature identified as "specificity of the medium" by Bazarnik in one of her latest papers¹⁴) and intermediality, as well as defining liberature in the context of the new media (especially after the publication of Nowakowski's hypertext novel *Koniec świata według Emeryka* [*End of the World according to Emeryk*]¹⁵). Most of these still need to be developed and completed. It is only now that the theory of liberature has seriously started to discuss Ingarden's reflection on the meaningful and semantically insignificant elements of the literary text.¹⁶ The discussions on liberature are also beginning to mention theses of theoreticians dealing with the archeology of the media (which makes it easier to detect continuity and logic in the history of liberature). And the half-serious Nowakowski has openly encouraged a discussion with Ong, for example. Since it is

12 Cf. Śniecikowska, *op.cit.*, footnote 103, p. 72 (in relation to Czyżewski) and footnote 121, p. 79 (in the context of Strzemiński's "poetrography"), and p. 412.

13 Cf. R. W. Kluszczyński, *Sztuka interaktywna. Od dzieła-instrumentu do interaktywnego spektaklu* [Interactive Art. From Work-Instrument to the Interactive Spectacle], (Warszawa: Wydawnictwa Akademickie i Profesjonalne, 2010), p. 168–169.

14 Forthcoming in the collection of conference papers *Od liberatury do e-literatury* (From Liberature to E-literature; Kamień Śląski, November 2009), ed. Monika Górka-Olesińska and Eugeniusz Wilk, Opole: University of Opole Press, see its English version in the present volume.

15 Cf. my article "Liberackie marginesy tekstu sieciowego" [Liberatic Margins of the Internet Text], in: *Tekst [w] sieci* [Text [in/of] the Internet], ed. A. Gumkowska, Warszawa: Wydawnictwa Akademickie i Profesjonalne, 2009, vol. 2, "Nowa? Wizualna? Architektoniczna? Przestrzenna? Kilka słów o tym, co może literatura w dobie Internetu" [New? Visual? Architectural? Spatial? A Word on What Literature Can Do in the Internet Era], in *e-polonistyka* (e-studies of Polish Literature), ed. A. Dziak, S. J. Żurek, Lublin: Wydawnictwo KUL, 2009 and "Daleko czy jednak blisko? O tym co łączy liberatów i e-literatów" [Wide Apart or Close Enough? On What Writers of Liberature and E-literature Have in Common] (forthcoming in *Od liberatury do e-literatury*).

16 Cf. K. Bazarnik, "Materialność jako wyznacznik gatunkowy liberatury" (Materiality as a Generic Constituent of Liberature), Z. Fajfer, "Od liberatury do niewidzialnego słowa, (autoportret z Ingardenem w tle)" (From Liberature to the Invisible Word [Self-portrait with Ingarden in the Background]), both forthcoming in *Materia sztuki* [The Matter of Art], ed. Michał Ostrowicki, (Kraków: Universitas, 2010). The first comments on the subject are included in Bazarnik's PhD dissertation, but the discussion has only been opened.

not accidental that liberature has emerged right now, after the iconic turn, in the era referred to as the twilight of the “Gutenberg Galaxy” to which, as Jakub Żuchowski suggests, liberature could serve as an antidote.¹⁷

Also, single articles analyzing the not-so-simple relations between liberature and the artist’s book¹⁸, visual literature¹⁹, comics²⁰ and Oulipo²¹ are beginning to appear. We are still waiting for comments on its comparison to concrete poetry and electronic literature (and there are international researchers who in properly defined electronic literature see an evident continuation of avant-garde work, that is, scholars who see both as a *practice based on the materiality of the medium*).²²

Academic conversations not only during coffee breaks

It is hard to deny that liberature is a topic of conversations in academic circles – and not only after promotional meetings, but in essays or longer dissertations. At first, the subject featured occasionally at various conferences (for example, in Piotr Marecki’s talk during the conference *Polska literatura najnowsza – poza kanonem* [New Polish Literature – Beyond

17 See footnote 20 below.

18 This seems the most widely discussed question, see for example. K. Bazarnik, “Liberature: a New Literary Genre?” in: *Insistent Images*; “Liberatura: ikonizacja oka-leczenie literatury” (Liberature: an iconic eyes-ore) in: *Tekst-tura. Wokół nowych form tekstu literackiego i tekstu jako dzieła sztuki* (Text-ture. On New Forms of Literary Text and Text as Work of Art.), ed. M. Dawidek Gryglicka (Kraków: Ha!art, 2005), and “Liberatura czyli literatura w formie książki” (Liberature or Literature in the Form of the Book) in: *Druga rewolucja książki. Zeszyty Miejskiej Biblioteki Publicznej w Gdyni* no. 2/2008 (The Second Revolution of the Book. Journal of the Municipal Library in Gdynia), and Z. Fajfer, “Jak liberatura redefiniuje książkę artystyczną” (How Liberature Redefines the Artist’s Book) (fragm.), an article written as part of the project *Polska kolekcja książki artystycznej* (Polish Collection of Artist’s Books, 2009).

19 The Fajfers mention this in many of their articles, also in a history of liberature at www.liberatura.pl. I discussed this question in my MA thesis “(Nie tylko) liberackie modele do składania: liberatura, e-liberatura i hipertekst na gruncie polskim” ([Not only] Liberatic Model Kits for Assembly: Liberature, e-liberature and Hypertext in Poland; awarded the first prize in the Czesław Zgorzelski Competition in 2006).

20 J. Żuchowski “James Joyce versus Koziołek Matolek albo Święty Franciszek kontra Tarzan. O związkach liberatury i sztuki komiksu” (James Joyce versus Ninny Goat or St. Francis contra Tarzan), (*Ha!art* no. 27/2007): 148–155. His MA thesis “Liberatura – antidotum na ‘zmierzch Galaktyki Gutenberga’” (Liberature. Antidote against the Twilight of the “Gutenberg Galaxy”) received in 2006 an Honourable Mention for the 2nd Leon Marszałek Competition Award granted by the Polish Society of Book Science.

21 Fajfer tackles the question only incidentally in the article “Od kombinatoryki do liberatury. O nieporozumieniach związanych z tzw. ‘literaturą eksperymentalną’” (From Combinatorics to Liberature. On Some Confusions with the So-called Experimental Literature, in: R. Queneau, *Sto tysięcy miliardów wierszy*, transl. J. Gondowicz, Kraków: Ha!art, 2008). The problem is also only signalled in “Perec i liberatura. Nota od redaktorów serii” (Perec and liberature. The Editors’ Note; in G. Perec, *Życie. Instrukcja obsługi*, transl. W. Brzozowski, Kraków: Ha!art, 2009). A deeper analysis of the question is announced in *Perec instrukcja obsługi* (Perec instruction manual) forthcoming in Ha!art.

22 Loss Pequeño Glazier, *Digital Poetics. The Making of e-Poetries* (Tuscaloosa and London: University of Alabama Press, 2002). See also K. N. Hayles, *Electronic Literature. New Horizons for Literacy* (Notre Dame, Ind.: Notre Dame University Press, 2008) and my article “Daleko czy jednak blisko? O tym co łączy liberatów i e-literatów” (Wide Apart or Close enough..., forthcoming in *Od liberatury...*).

the Canon] in 2004 in Łódź, in the next year in my papers at the VIII Tydzień Polonistów in Lublin [8th Week of Polish Studies], and the conference *Wielość sztuk – jedność sztuki. Wokół granic interakcji sztuk* [Many Arts – One Art. On the Limits of Interaction between the Arts] in Olštyn), then it begged for a more prominent, more central place in the discussion. The year 2005 brought two academic sessions in which liberature was one of the major issues. These were a panel discussion accompanying Fajfer's exhibition of sign-poems (the speakers included Fajfer, Bazarnik, Marecki, and the present author) organized by the Poznań Academy of Fine Arts in November (followed by the above-mentioned book *Text-tura* edited by Dawidek Gryglicka), and the 5th *Symposium on Iconicity in Language and Literature*, held by the Jagiellonian University in Kraków in cooperation with the Universities of Zurich and Amsterdam (followed by two publications in Polish and English²³; an English brochure *Liberature* was issued specially for the occasion; it seems also that the conference contributed to a deeper discussion of liberature in the context of iconicity).

Academia's interest in liberature is so considerable that Fajfer and Bazarnik receive invitations to various institutions. Fajfer and Nowakowski were guest speakers at the Lublin Polish Studies Conference *e-polonistyka 2* in 2009. In June 2009, Fajfer and Bazarnik presented their concept in Bristol during the conference *Traditional and emerging formats of artists' books: Where do we go from here?*, while Bazarnik is slated to chair a panel on liberature at the Belfast conference *Displaying Word and Image* in June 2010. In Poland liberature has featured as one of the major topics of some conferences lately; suffice it to mention the session *Od liberatury do e-literatury* [From Liberature to e-literature] organized by the University of Opole in November 2009, where Fajfer and his wife were invited as guest speakers. In Italy, Emiliano Ranocchi presented the phenomenon during the conference *Avanguardia i tradycje XX i XXI wieku między Polską, Włochami a Europą* [Avant-gardes and Traditions of 20th and 21st c. Between Poland, Italy and Europe] at Accademia Polacca delle Scienze di Roma. It is also worth noting that liberature is becoming a part of the curriculum of contemporary Polish literature, and some universities offer optional courses on liberature.

23 *Insistent Images. Iconicity in Language and Literature*, vol. 5, ed. E. Tabakowska, C. Ljungberg and O. Fischer (Amsterdam, Philadelphia: John Benjamins, 2007), p. 191–208, and *Ikoniczność znaku. Słowo-przedmiot-obraz-gest*, ed. E. Tabakowska (Kraków: Universitas, 2006), p. 161–179.

The Idea Hit the Road or Liberature's Adventures in Poland and Europe

It needs to be stressed though, that liberature, as the art of the word, has become food for thought not only for critics and theoreticians, but first of all for readers. The more or less scholarly divagations on the subject have been accompanied by attempts to spread the word, making liberatic works available to a wider audience (which is not at all easy, considering that they often exist in unique copies), and enthusiastic propagation of the concept both in Poland and abroad. Two institutions (based in Kraków) have played a considerable role in this: Korporacja Ha!art and Małopolski Instytut Kultury (Małopolska Institute of Culture).

Though the founding manifesto was published in a literary magazine *Dekada Literacka* and the next one in *FA-art* (just as the first reviews of liberatic works), it is Krakow's *Ha!art* that first devoted its columns to the new phenomenon in Polish literature. Its first two issues in 2003 featured several articles on liberature, and Fajfer and Bazarnik themselves were the focus of one of them. A separate section called "Liberature" appeared again in 2007 (no. 27), and in 2009 it developed into an independent supplement (so far only in one case). It must be noted, however, that issue no. 30, to be published in May this year, will be devoted entirely to the subject. What is more, it is under the auspices of *Ha!art* that the eponymous publishing series was launched, edited by Fajfer and Bazarnik. Evaluating the year 2008, Leszek Bugajski, a literary critic and journalist, wrote in *Przegląd* (Review):

There was not much wheat in culture in the past year, and it is especially hard to notice anything in literature (...). But *Ha!art* Publishing House has grown into a genuine pearl, not due to the new fiction it publishes but because it has been consistently looking for interesting and crazy phenomena at literature's margins (Stanisław Czysty's scenario *Arw*, *Sto tysięcy miliardów wierszy* [One Hundred Billion Poems] by Raymond Queneau, a B.S. Johnson's novel) thereby developing probably the most astonishing publishing line in Poland, that is their "Liberature"²⁴.

Indeed, the series includes several most interesting items, and as the editors confess, due to a considerable grant from the Ministry of Culture and National Heritage work is in progress on further publications, not only on another of Johnson's novels, a novel by Raymond Federman, but

²⁴ "Perły i plewy" (Pearls and Chuff) *Przegląd*, no. 2/2009. Web. 30 April 2010.

also last year's Nobel Prize winner, Herta Müller's *Der Wächter nimmt seinen Kamm* (in fact, the first foreign translation).

The first book in the series (their *(O)patrzenie* [Ga(u)ze]) was added to the above mentioned "black", 2003 issue of *Ha!art*; subsequent books, being not necessarily conventionally printed codices (bound in a bottle, with pages cut into strips or loose pages falling out of a box), have been published independently and made available to a wider audience. As of today, the series includes nine volumes and work is advanced on several others.

Can the series be called consistent? Fundamentally, beside the liberatic nature (liberatic coincidence?) it would be hard to find a common key. However, the variety has turned out to be not so bad, after all. On one hand, the series includes works previously unpublished in Poland (e.g. Queneau's *One Hundred Thousand Billion Poems*) and those that had already been published before but due to erroneous layout had had their communicative aspect distorted (e.g., Mallarmé's *A Throw of the Dice*), on the other, works that "normal" publishers had been unwilling to accept, but which had played an important role in the history of liberature (as, for example, Fajfer-Bazarnik's *Oka-leczenie*, which had in fact inspired the concept). Consequently, beside well-known, and classical books, it features enigmatic or unpopular books, which shows that liberature as a term is not a value judgment or a historical category, and that liberatic books can be bad, good, mediocre or brilliant, written before 1999 and after. This observation, countersigned by liberatic analyses of "serious", "established", canonical works (such as Zbigniew W. Solski's reading of Różewicz's *Kartoteka* [*The Card Index*]²⁵), testifies to the usefulness of the term in descriptions of some literary trends (which go back as far as the beginning of writing and not the year 1999). But it should be borne in mind, too, that liberature is also published outside *Ha!art* and its series, as for example Nowakowski's *Ulica Sienkiewicza w Kielcach* [*Sienkiewicz Street in Kielce*], published by BWA [*The Office for Artistic Exhibitions*] in Kielce.

Małopolski Instytut Kultury, in turn, supports the Liberature Reading Room, opened in 2002 (Kraków, ul. Karmelicka 27). The room features collections not only of liberatic works from all over the world but also the majority of articles and criticism on liberature published so far. The collection consists of Fajfer and Bazarnik's private books in deposit, other writers' donations and those interested in the phenomenon, as well as some items purchased by the Institute (partly from a grant of the

25 Paper given at the *Od liberature do e-literature* conference.

Ministry of Culture, *Wstęp do Liberatury* [Enter Liberature]). MIK is also a host of numerous meetings promoting the idea, as well as of the website www.liberatura.pl. It features a continually updated chronology and bibliography of liberature (though the continual updating makes it rather tentative), electronic versions of some theoretical essays, useful links, recommendations of liberatic books, as well as archived *Czytańce* by Bogdan Zalewski, i.e. brief radio broadcasts presented in the cycle *Miedzy słowami* [Between Words] on the RMF Classic Radio Station.

Perhaps it is due to increasing promotional activities, or perhaps due to the genuine value of the phenomenon that not only Academia, but also teachers have showed some interest in it. In February 2009, *Polonistyka*, a journal for Polish language and literature teachers (which also included Łukasz Jeżyk's analysis of Fajfer's *Spoglądając Przez Ozonową Dziurę* [Detect Ozone Whole Nearby]) postulated that Fajfer should be counted among important new writers, and liberatic activities should be seen as "a contribution to creating a new poetic language"²⁶.

And what is happening abroad? Fajfer and Bazarnik have often quoted Richard Kostelanetz's: "yes, the concept of liberature is useful", expressed after he had received *Od Joyce'a do liberatury*. I have already mentioned the foreign conferences and symposia. One should not forget about the Danish literary magazine *Den Blå Port*, which published the translation of Fajfer's article of 1999 in 2008, then enriched by his brief commentary for foreign readers.

So it is evident that liberature has hit the road (not only due to Bazarnik's papers at Joyce conferences²⁷) and it seems to be doing pretty well, considering that it is only a ten-year-old youngling. How this will develop is hard to predict. However, considering its development and reception thus far, I would be inclined to agree with Kostelanetz, and confirm that – yes, indeed – the term proposed by Fajfer in the past decade managed to get off the tiger's back and seems not only useful but also necessary. More and more readers and a considerable number of reviews of books published in the series seem to corroborate this view.

26 J. Borowczyk, K. Hoffmann, "Wymarzona przygoda" (A Dream Adventure), *Polonistyka* (Polish Studies), no 2/2009, p. 6.

27 In June 2007 during 11th Trieste James Joyce Summer School Bazarnik presented a paper "Joyce, liberature and writing of the book"; her *Joyce and Liberature* (based on her PhD dissertation) is forthcoming in *Litteraria Pragensia* (ed. note).

Behold, Believe, Beknow

Zenon Fajfer's *ten letters*¹

*our thoughts intertwine
and
become unsuitable for print
Zenon Fajfer, ten letters*

*He saw and believed.
For as yet they knew not the Scripture [...].
[J 20, 8-9]*

Liberature, writing concerned with the visibility of the word, and the question of medium, seems to respond to an ironic incommensurability of the rhetorical aspects of language with respect to other mechanisms of representation. Hence, it is such a form of literature that translates the opalescent quality of writing into a poetics and aesthetics of the interface of the book, thereby producing an impression of a visual representation of linguistic representation. The technological transfer between the physically present codex and the reality of the virtual text is important in this context, as it modifies significantly the culturally-rooted notion of the book, but at the same time heightens the awareness of the meta-linguistic existence of the text, and transforming paper into a more dynamic, contemporary medium closer to language. Hence, thoughts are intertwined and become unsuitable for print, since in the rhetoric and logic of the net, rhizome, or database it is hard to contain the figurative potential of language within the stately solid and perfectly closed codex bound by the Gutenbergian seriousness, which while not being able to live up to successive turns, constraints, and other meyeopieners of the text, the narration, and the subject, has lost the cultural legitimisation as a symbolic form of representation and expression. The questions of technology, sociology, and philosophy of communication, and the perspective offered by media analysis: mediation, convergence and remediation, open up, first of all, some paths to cognition and comprehension.

¹ The previous version of the article was published in: *Między językiem a wizualnością* [Between Language and Visuality], ed. M. Bednarek, M. Junkiert, J. Klaudy-Wartacz, Poznań: Wydawnictwo Poznańskie Studia Polonistyczne, 2008, pp. 129-141.

Seeing is believing. Seeing, as J. David Bolter admits, stimulates analysis, theory and metaphysics.² So we are dealing not so much with the question of seeing something stimulating due to its technological novelty; this is not spectacular fireworks or a formal whim that are at stake, but it is the question of perceiving, so to speak, a hermeneutic dimension in the visual qualities. For the look, and most of all, the watching of a dynamic picture or a picture referring to motion is an important factor in cognition. However, if in the spirit of the Bible, Bolter couples seeing and believing, it is worth pointing to the relation between seeing and understanding, or explication, which for the scholar coming from the Anglo-American culture must be especially obvious, because of the semantic range of the verb “to see”, which refers to both. Thus, technology and its visual aspects introduce the order of the hermeneutics of suspicious overlooking.

So if Katarzyna Bazarnik writes about a “ruined space”, I would draw the attention not so much to the fact the space itself is perhaps not so important as its, so to speak, “ruins”, that is, some kind of fragmentariness or dis-continuity that opens out to the question of space. All interventions into the traditional form of the codex: folds, cuts, bends, tears and other forms of mutil-eye-tion serve the aesthetics of imperfection or split, so fundamental for this experience, which in consequence of exposing the injury of the medium defies the order of simulation. Revealing a discontinuity in one medium puts language under a cloud of suspicion, which means that there is no possibility of irreversible, hard and fast type of knowledge, nor the disambiguation of the sign that constitutes the (same) sign that constitutes the (same) sign that constitutes.... The strategy of the deliberately uncorrected error introduces an open, discontinuous and self-fragmenting space of negotiation, exchange and differentiation, appearing as the fundamental principle of liberature: T/B.

In *ten letters*³ Zenon Fajfer, the theoretician who instituted liberature, as well as its major proponent, exploits the effect of transition between different media ensuing from an impact of the new medium on the culture of the codex – a reciprocal impact, in fact. The transition effected between the pages: the paper page and the electronic one, draws our attention to several important categories, important not only from the perspective of the reflection on the technology of cultural communica-

2 Cf. J.D. Bolter, *Turing's Man. Western Culture in the Computer Age*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1984.

3 Z. Fajfer, *dwadzieścia jeden liter/ten letters*, (prototype, 2005), “Liberature” vol. 10-11, dos-à-dos edition, Kraków: Korporacja Ha!art, 2010, unnumbered pages. All further citations from this volume marked with *tl*.

tion. *Ten letters* begins in the place where language is seen as suspicious, recognized as the medium invested with an unreliable, figural, quality; it finishes where it is not worth searching the end – in the space of the virtual reality. Thus, the reader traverses a track from a notion to a visual representation, from a suspicious look to overlooking, from irony to belief – there and back, up and down. The question of mediation and remediation⁴ and a proposal of reading calculated for a revision of the media seem, in Fajfer's case, the starting point, which beside acknowledging technology as a significant formative factor in culture on one hand, and on the other pointing to its righteous place in the humanistic epistemology, leads to the order of belief, melancholy, and epiphany.

Fajfer's liberatic-multimedial practice: the printed volume of *ten letters* including an audiovisual presentation *Primum Mobile*, constitutes an excellent example of how the awareness of the textual medium connects safely (in a non-conflicting way) with the feeling of immersion in language, and the method of overlooking the interface and the visual elements with a deconstructive, suspicious look directed at language. While the media theory influences the question of the metaphysics of presence at the intersection of the material factors and those referring to the virtual reality.

Belief as possibility

The well-known and often-quoted liberatic manifesto opens with a passage drawing on the order of faith. So Fajfer writes about hope for a potential, absolutely unverifiable possibility of including the whole world in the word, and seems to treat virtuality as a vital force and a never effectively exorcised feature of language. However, simultaneously, he points to the impassable and uncontrollable desire for perfection, for differentiating tyefaces, and draws our attention to a need for originality of languages⁵:

Even if they err, those people open up new perspectives, widen horizons and pave new ways which others may follow safely after them. They will always be ready to take spiritual risks and enter the unknown. They are not [...] paralysed by the fear [...]. They are characterised by a rich imagination, un-

⁴ I use "remediation" in the sense of a process of evolution and revision of the media, after J. D. Bolter and Richard Grusin. See J. D. Bolter, R. Grusin, *Remediation. Understanding New Media*, Cambridge – Massachusetts – London: MIT Press, 2000.

⁵ Z. Fajfer, "Liberatura. Aneks do słownika terminów literackich", in: *Tekst-tura. Wokół nowych form tekstu literackiego i tekstu jako dzieła sztuki*, ed. M. Dawidek Gryglicka, Kraków: Ha!art, 2005, p. 11. First published in *Dekada Literacka* 1999, no. 5/6, p. 8-9.

usual courage and intense desire for totality, complemented by the ability to look at “old” and “well-known” matters from unexpected angles.

Styling his discourse for that of an inspired poet, Fajfer envisages some unknown, invisible, virtual literature to deposit in it his expectations and ambitions. The liberatic practice that can be experienced sensually seems to be an objective countersignature of Fajfer’s belief which, as he declares, he has accepted on the basis of imagination. Thus, he has seen what he did not have to see in order to believe. A manifestation of new possibilities, their first-eye testimony let [him] see visuality as a source of faith, both in literature and in technologically oriented literary studies.⁶

In interpretation ignoring the question of the medium and its visual side, overlooking what awaits to be noticed leads to a repetition without differentiation. The readers, when they follow this track, are entrapped in aporias. “They always follow a well-known route prescribed by literary ‘guidebooks’, a path so clear-cut that it is absolutely impossible to get lost”⁷. Such walks in the woods of language and visuality resort to false tracks that cannot lead anywhere. To tread the well-known paths, as the author of *ten letters* seems to suggest, is as if to wade into wilderness and nostalgically observe in idleness an aporetic landscape of the mind. So we need new tracks that could determine new directions for the thought. Fajfer meets these needs. “Do the shape and structure of the book constitute an integral part of the literary work (...)?”⁸. His question, intended as a provocation to research methodologies that close their eyes tight at the sight of changes in the technology of communication, could be paraphrased as follows: is the medium, or more broadly the interface controlling the visual aspect of language a category applicable in the literary studies?

Blind faith, or faith without a suspicious

In the textual reality of *ten letters* every statement is overshadowed by a cloud of suspicion that simultaneously discloses a possibility of the opposite. This exceptional mechanism of deconstruction once discloses a multiplicity of incommensurate solutions, at other times, paradoxically, annuls itself, deconstructing its own deconstructive work: “there is

6 I cite Derek Attridge’s to retain the prophetic tone: “(...) those development in electronic media that may – who knows? – spell the end or at least the transformation of the verbal arts as we presently understand them”. D. Attridge, *The Singularity of Literature*, London: Routledge, 2004, p. 3.

7 Z. Fajfer, *op. cit.*, s. 12.

8 *Ibidem*, s. 14.

a choice?"; "AND IF IT ISN'T EVEN TRUE THAT there is some choice?". Sometimes, however, the irony of the suppositions allows for a suspiciously polar structure:

if I am
a letter or a number in the book of God [t/]

A desire for a centre able to establish the order of senses inside the text is calculated to be based on blind faith or believing in the dark, such that does not require to be confirmed by the look; it finds sufficient clarity in language. According to the Biblical teaching, faith is to be located in the very word invested with the performative force.

But Thomas, one of the twelve, called Didymus, was not with them when Jesus came. The other disciples therefore said unto him, We have seen the LORD. But he said unto them, Except I shall see in his hands the print of the nails, and put my finger into the print of the nails, and thrust my hand into his side, I will not believe. And after eight days again his disciples were within, and Thomas with them: then came Jesus, the doors being shut, (...). Then saith he to Thomas, Reach hither thy finger, and behold my hands; and reach hither thy hand, and thrust it into my side: and be not faithless, but believing. (AV, John 20, 24-27)

Hence, believing should not depend on beholding; an impossibility of the sensual perception should not result in suspicion and disbelief. It turns out, however, that the question of faith is strongly related to the fulfilment at the level of visual or tactile perception, which in turn influences the capacity for understanding. The test of faith that builds itself in the area of imagination does not bear comparison with the one that comes from a representation capable of being grasped in the sensual way. Since beholding is necessary for believing, just as believing for understanding. Faith is a prerequisite of knowledge, but a prerequisite for knowledge is the look.

Believing in the dark, or faith, its lack, and the suspicious look

if I am
[...]
A letter and a number
striving naively to understand [t/]

Blind faith, not supported by the look or touch, is then exposed to the test of doubt. Such believing in the dark, which is accepted with one's eyes closed, as if *ex nihilo*, can lead someone through groping to a belief in the dark. If the object of faith, which is a prerequisite of knowledge, cannot be overlooked with suspicion, the faith itself turns out to be suspicious, doubtful, uncertain, and the essence of knowledge turns out to be disbelief and incomprehension.

In *The Intelligence of Evil or the Lucidity Pact*, using the Biblical phrasing, Jean Baudrillard translates Pascal's wager about the existence of God into the one about the existence of reality, or rather its non-existence:

Reality: It's to your advantage not to believe in it, since if you believe in it and it doesn't exist, you're duped and swindled and you will die stupid.

If you don't believe in it and it doesn't exist, you win on all counts.

If you don't believe in it and it does exist, you retain the benefit of the doubt, since there will never be any conclusive proof of its existence, any more than of the existence of God (moreover, if it exists, given what it is, it is better to be parted from it as quickly as possible).⁹

Certain uncertain faith or faith, look and suspicious overlooking

In the case of Fajfer's *ten letters* uncertain faith beyond faith is clearly present. It turns out that Baudrillard, prone to suspiciously final solutions, has not foreseen another possibility, that of faith retaining the privilege of doubt, faith stemming from looking united with suspicious overlooking.

So in *ten letters* one can sense the faith that is not based on permanent and final exponents. (Finality) to which Baudrillard refers should be put in brackets. Since there will be no solution, or rather there will be one, but only as a chain of possibilities; for it is only possible to unravel the chain ravelling all possible solutions. By changing to some degree the configuration of the interface, i.e. the printed codex, which is executed in "7 letters", and proposing an interactive way of reading consisting in exploiting the folds, and bends of paper pages, Fajfer evokes an effect of suspension resulting from a rhetorical act of conviction:

and if it's like that?
if all this

9 J. Baudrillard, *The Intelligence of Evil or the Lucidity Pact*, transl. Chris Turner, Oxford and New York: Berg, 2005, p. 156.

was
ever really [t/]

An impression of blind faith in the illusion of textuality is enhanced by the absence of the question mark, the absence simulating a confession: “all this / was”. However, due to the authorial folding of the page it is very easy to jump over two pages, as if we were using a hyperlink activating a transition between the pages. Then the sentence looks quite different:

and if it's like that?
if all this
was
ever really

WRITTEN? [t/]

Thus, beside words unworthy of belief, there appear incredulous words, producing visual effects and activating the sense of eye-sight. Ten letters located inside the text of the volume that form the phrase “ten letters” let us see in *ten letters* Fajfer's commensurability of the pictorial representation and linguistic imagination, visibility and virtuality of meanings – but first of all, this lets us see.

“dREamiNg / eye”. A moment of media appearances

The imperative to look and see seems the fundamental precept of Fajfer's poetic craft. The essence of the visual-verbal experience in *ten letters* depends on attaining “ekpyrosis” of the senses¹⁰. The effect of bewilderment evoked clearly in the reader through the engagement of the senses of sight and touch makes one see the words as if they were swarming moths attracted by light: i.e. seeing and understanding. *Ten letters* can, thus, be called a project of media epiphany, which triggers on the process of concretisation of the semantic potential. Its precondition, the precondition of disclosing the secret in reading, using, and watching of the text is motion. The agitation happening on the screen coincides with the agitation of the reader; what is revealed is manifesting itself, and is becoming the cause of conversion. Evoking the hidden, the clouded by accumulating suspicions of suspiciously simulacral nature is executed through operations adopted from the new digital media that seemingly

¹⁰ “Ekpyrosis” from Greek: immolation. The original “eksplozja  mys  w” involves a pun on “zmys  ” (the senses), “ mi  ” (to blind, to dim or eclipse), and “ ma” (a moth, but also swarm, and darkness) as well as “s  w” (of words) (transl. note).

enable to stretch literature's traditional interface, i.e. paper. Hence, the reader is allowed to open the pages, fold and unfold them, and look between those glued together.

"Ars poetica", which opens the volume focuses on the need for a change that would enable to see something more than mere text, that is, also the interface. One needs a look that would not yield to the dictatorship of the transparency of the screen, that would differentiate that which the reading habit dictates to pass over in silence as the obvious. However, this requires a modification of the sharpness of vision. Hence, it is necessary to cut through the pages with one's sharp eye in order to overcome this silent inflexibility of paper, which prevents us from treating it as the only carrier of knowledge about the text. Hence, it is necessary to inflict further injuries with one's sharp eyes, to mark out another defect of representation in order to simultaneously discover the eyes-ore. For if the figurative power of language does not allow for the transparency of the text, there can be no mention of transparency of any other medium. The blind look is thus associated with amblyopic sight. But it is the look that entails faith in the fact that apart from the text there is another presence worth looking for. In other words, suspicious overlooking and the fear for one's sight is accompanied by the desire to look – "inside toward" with someone else's eyes. Those different eyes, whose look is invested with faith in a textual epiphany, are driven by the desire to dazzle with the clarity of "astral letters" – visible and understandable.

Suspiciously overlooked language and a suspicious look

The look at the visual text that cannot slip of the tongue is, however, a suspicious look. Since it is the very matter of the book that can be parsed, just as it is done with a language, at the same time harbouring doubts and suspicions while disassembling a fragment of the printer's sheet. But by deconstructing the medium, if you let me stick to the analogy with language, in comparison with a purely rhetorical practice we gain the advantage of a real perception, even if the look is directed toward the virtual reality. For the monitor produces an illusion in which an epiphany, a revelation, consists in displaying on the screen clarity emerging from the darkness of representation. "A screen's image strives for complete illusion and visual plenitude, while the viewer is asked to suspend disbelief and to identify with the image"¹¹.

¹¹ Lev Manovich, *The Language of New Media*, Cambridge, Mass.: MIT, 2001, p. 96.

The clarity and brightness of the screen, and the visual representation produce, however, a flickering effect, due to which seeing and knowing is possible only for a brief while – only until the moment when the gradation of brightness is reversed and moves to the dark side of language. The manifestation of the presence, i.e. a confirmation of the mystery of faith realised due to the epiphanic gesture of display: “it’s he” (“to on”) is deconstructed, turning a look into a suspicious overlooking.

it’s the she,
the he, embodied
it’s their silent
touch. [tl]

Thus, who is beholding, believing and beknowing or understanding is right, but at the same time the object of his or her faith remains suspiciously overlooked for them.

So if Zeno was right, then, he was – not right.

But it cannot be written about.

Nor read about.

Nor spoken about. [tl]

(And yet
there is more and more uncertainty
[...])

(and that’s all our hope) [tl]

“Monitoring inside monitors inside cameras”¹²

Lev Manovich’s brief historical account of the role of the screen in cultural communication contains the following, ordering typology: “(...) the computer screen represents an interactive type, a subtype of the real-time type, which is a subtype of the dynamic type, which is a subtype of the classical type”¹³.

However, Fajfer abolishes Manovich’s typological division and provides evidence for an existence of an interactive screen represented by

¹² The literal translation of the Polish excerpt is “From one screen onto another” (“Z ekranu na inny ekran” (transl. note).

¹³ Manovich, *The Language...*, p. 103.

the printed codex book. Fajfer ironically reverses the historical order of the media in order to open our eyes to their partnership; their cultural continuity and similarities. His look at the medium is only seemingly an erroneous look, but this error can provide us with a new outlook on history and theory of literature.

Fajfer characterises the print culture by employing the dictionary of media terminology (employing it, and not opening it); while he defines the digital media culture and the experience of the visuality on the computer screen through pointing out a continuation in relation to the tradition of the codex book. Observed from this angle, the two interfaces reflecting one other appear more flexible than they really are.

At this point it is worth considering two of Manovich's claims devoted to the screen: "The screen disappeared [...]", followed on the same page by a seemingly opposite conclusion: "For now, we clearly live in the society of the screen. Screens are everywhere..."¹⁴.

The two opposite claims held by the scholar are only seemingly contradictory. The screens are really everywhere, but they are not always noticed; which is why it is so hard to grasp the norms of cultural communication, for if one does not see a screen, one cannot see the meaning of the transition from one screen onto another. The lesson to be discovered in Fajfer's *ten letters* boils down to a disciplining look: don't be a doubting Thomas, but a suspicious overlooker.

Hence, *ten letters* reveals the benefits of transgressing traditional notions of literature. Fajfer seems to be hinting that literature is not contained only in the rhetorical discourse, that it cannot be reduced only to language, and certainly not to the monopoly of one dominating system of signs. That is why the readers, users, spectators witness a transition from the classical screen to another new, more dynamic one. Thus, the screen constitutes a category that allows us to look at literature with the fresh eye.

"Inside new screens (...) either you / eye there I"

The question of overlooking or blurred sight stems from the necessity to take up the challenge of responding to an implicit, potential, only possible nature of the linguistic reality. Virtuality as a feature of language spreads before the reader a territory where the game of suspicious overlooking can be played, the game that dims or distorts seeing and understanding.

¹⁴ *Ibidem*, s. 114.

My eyesight
obscured. [God! How dark!]¹⁵ [t/]

Calling the figure of divine presence, a complaint, a doubt and fear for blindness are accompanied by the desire and faith in a visible flash of revelation. Darkness, which threatens sight and seeing, casts a shadow over the text, produces figures of impossibility and leads one blindfold toward interpretative agnosticism. What reveals itself in the text as ethereal, and opalescent is getting disclosed in iteration. The iteration, the other, revitalising look is accompanied by faith in revelation. However, revelation in perceiving the text stems directly from the essence of the repetition, that is, from difference. To look like “either you / eye there I”, with some else’s eyes means, supposedly, to look at paper as if one were looking at the digital screen.

It is also worth noticing in *ten letters* a promise, inscribed in the textual faith stemming from seeing, of noticing in the iteration: “inside new screens (...) new days / InsIdE / dREamiNg eye”¹⁶. For seeing lays down a new presence of the subject.

Even though Zeno has never existed, he still enjoys eternal existence.

H
i
s

l
i
f
e

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15 The phrase present in the original, but, alas, lost in translation (trans. note).

16 Or, as literally as in the original: “you will be watched on new screens again” (trans. note).

Admittedly, looking at literature as a trustworthy screen will not lead us to final decisions. But belief and decisions based on faith are in fact figures of reading, whose essence consists in confessing the will to save epistemological powers of the reading subject. The epiphany constitutes only a certain uncertain impression, but since it is visible, then it is visibly clear. The faith, which in Fajfer's volume undergoes ironic reversals, does not offer certainty nor conviction about attaining the revealed truth, but a possibility of an impression of such truth.

Seeing and Writing (and Understanding)¹⁷

Fajfer's poems enable us to notice that between language and visibility there stretches an area where various poetics of cultural interfaces participate in a play of mutual influences in which understanding is coupled with seeing. Visuality is not a *sine qua non* for language to be meaningful, but since it is so and since visibility is also so clear and so expressive, it should be treated as meaningful for an interpretation of the whole text (or rather the whole literary object that is not reduced to mere text). The experience of visibility of language and the non-transparency of the medium should then be granted a role in differentiating the styles of reception in literature, a differentiating, though, let us stress, not definitively settling role. If we were to limit the area to the visual media, but not necessarily those material ones, if we wanted to leave some space for the digital culture, we could point to the following relation: depending how the same linguistic message is visualised, I see it differently and understand differently.

Behold – believe – beknow. But not completely/up to a point

Knowledge that rings in the ultimate, most awaited element of the eponymous epistemological triad is, simultaneously, the most suspicious. It is knowledge that, while pretending to reveal the ultimate subject of interpretative experience of the text, also reveals other, truly irreversible solu-

¹⁷ I paraphrase J. David Bolter, see his "Seeing and Writing", in: *New Media Reader*, ed. by Noah Wardrip-Fruin and Nick Montfort, Cambridge, London: MIT Press, 2003, p. 680–690.

tions, which allows us to see that knowledge is not an object but an activity, and that it constitutes a figure of understanding. Thus, the triad turns out to be a suspiciously overlooked stratagem based on the phonetic similarity of the words in which what is avidly awaited appears as a construct *au rebours*. The ultimate knowledge resulting from the proposed method of incorporating visual elements in the epistemological practice of the linguistic fragment of reality, or rather treating the interface and its ability to influence the senses of sight and touch as a legitimate participant of the reading reality (apart from language and extra-textual context), leads to an acknowledgement that in the field of literary studies there is no belief without the suspicious overlooking.

Most of all, however, Fajfer's text and this text about Fajfer that closes with this sentence testify that the imperfection of linguistic representation and an obsession with its error put a pressure leading to a creation of original forms: a new type of visibility using the paper page and potential of the digital media. Most of all, however, Fajfer's text and this text about Fajfer that closes with this sentence testify that the closure is only a sign of the irony of composition. Visibility, which thanks to the look institutes the belief in the eternal life of text, can be treated as a trope of defence against death. Hence, one can understand, but not completely.

The belief in the closure results in an appearance of a suspicious look, so there is no closure. A suspicion toward the look stems from the fact that no one can see the end. The knowledge coming from belief cannot be final. The belief based on the look would rather the closure and other final things delay. Such a delay in the order of sense, which is a consequence of prior belief, allows for an association of looking with suspicion, and most of all point to the relation between visibility and vitality of text. And literature, no matter how one looks at it, will always remain suspiciously overlooked and only looked, still to be looked forward to.

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Zenon Fajfer is a poet, creator and theoretician of liberature; invented a new poetic form called emanational poem and its electronic variant (kinetic poem). He publishes, among others, in *Ha!art*, *Odra*, *Tygodnik Powszechny*; the author of books *Spoglądając przez ozonową dziurę / But Eyeing Like Ozone Whole* (2004) and *dwadzieścia jeden liter / ten letters* (2005, 2010), and co-author of *Oka-leczenie* (2000, 2009) and *(O)patrzenie* (2003); also involved in theatre, his authorial productions include: *Madam Eva*, *Ave Madam* (1992), *Finnegans Make* (1996), *Pieta* (2006). He runs Liberature Reading Room and edits the series "Liberature" in Ha!art.

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6. "Raymond Queneau – *Sto tysięcy miliardów wierszy/Cent mille milliards de poèmes*",
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12. "Zenon Fajfer & Katarzyna Bazarnik – *Oka-leczenie*",
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