

SUMMARY

Magdalena Balaga: *Polish literature after 1989 in light of new social experiences*

The subject of this dissertation is the analysis and interpretation of select Polish prose published after 1989. The thesis stems from the conviction that literary works constitute a unique example of recorded social consciousness. I am interested in literary representations of a shift in approach towards perceptions of prestige, behavioral models and social unrest as a result of Poland's transformed political and economic realities. In the dissertation, I present how experiences resulting from the turmoil of systemic transformation are thematised and functionalised in literature. The proposed range of themes aims to describe the internal dynamics of how Polish society is shaped and to analyse the changes it has experienced as presented in literary texts.

The paper is divided into two parts. I start by analysing literary texts which enables me to take a closer look at the shifting identity of the newly emerging middle class and reconstruct the process of change. Literary portraits of this social group are an important element of critical studies presented in novels published after 1989. In my work, I analyse how contemporary prose writers depict the Polish middle class - the social group that is subject to perhaps the most dynamic of developments. The story of our middle class is also the story of Poland's systemic transformation: it describes its successes as well as the more embarrassing details. It is worth noting that literary depictions of this group - although quite often presented in a stereotypical and cartoonish manner - say a lot about the fears, needs and hopes of individuals functioning in a specific social order. To fully understand the way in which the middle class functions in our collective consciousness, I will also try to interpret popular texts published on the Internet. In a sense the study of texts published online is bordering on literary studies, yet they cannot be ignored - they are very helpful in recreating the development of social consciousness, and not only describing its de facto state. After all, literary texts with diagnostic aspirations do not function in a communicative vacuum, but (re)interpret the themes and aesthetics presented in television series, online broadcasts or journalistic texts.

In the second part, I look at the values at the heart of neoliberalism that give a distinctive meaning to life in the 21st century. Although neoliberalism is a concept without a singular, fixed definition and is often misused (most often used incorrectly

as a synonym of classical liberalism), in many analyses of the global economic crisis it is indicated as the doctrine "responsible" for novel social experiences. This is because neoliberalism is now commonly a synonym for an ideology that breeds inequalities in access to power and resources, and is oftentimes cited as a source of conflicts in public and economic life. Neoliberal practices, which result in the fabrication of social myths and a collective representation of values, are becoming the object of increasing criticism from writers of contemporary Polish prose. Contemporary novels often include an ambivalent assessment of systemic transformation, but in my paper I focus on writings criticising specifically the neoliberal foundations of Poland's economic transition. This literature clearly demands a change in attitude towards society as a whole and a change in the language describing social relations. It is a voice calling for social responsibility and solidarity.

I interpret these experiences as novel because they have been subject of reflection in the public discourse only in recent years. What is therefore interesting in these literary works is the attitude of individuals (writers) towards the fundamental issues of our time. I treat literary texts as a valuable supplement to social diagnoses formulated by sociologists, cultural scientists and anthropologists.