

‘SUBSEQUENT SPIRITUALITY’ AND EMOTIONAL KITSCH-SPHERES IN TWO LITERARY DEPICTIONS (IRZYKOWSKI – DEHNEL)

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I. INTRODUCTION

The subject matter of this paper are phenomena related to a certain attitude to life, which is nowadays becoming increasingly common (in a broad meaning of this concept, also encompassing the sphere of human motivation, feelings and emotions) and which – in the simplest terms – may be characterized as a marriage of non-authenticity and imitationism. The subject matter determined in this mode will be discussed with a focus on the feelings of love (as particularly ‘acute’ and, perhaps, most mythologized) or rather their literary presentation, which seems to offer an accurate diagnosis of sensitivity typical for a consumer society, in the grips of obsession with money, subjected to the dictate of the mass media and giving in, under their impact, to the pressure of pop-culture ideals and notions. I find such diagnosis in Jacek Dehnel’s micro-novel entitled *The Private Tutor’s Love* (*Miłość korepetytora*, 2010) forming – along with three other stories – a volume with a telling title *Balzacienne* (*Balzakiana*) nominated for the Literary Nike Prize. It may be stated without great exaggeration that this collection offers exemplifications of several important aspects of Abraham Moles’ (1978) concepts. Moles is a researcher who emphasizes the universality of kitsch (i.e. who notices its presence in all realms of life, both individual and collective), at the same time considering the sphere of daily life its primary domain. According to this author, kitsch – the core of which has a psychological underlining and is manifested particularly clearly in human

attitude to the world of objects – is the aesthetics of middle-class affluence and a feature of every culture relying on possession.

Jacek Dehnel, making an actual artistic attempt at determining the condition of the Polish society after the political transformation of 1989, consciously refers to a distant tradition of realistic prose, established in the monumental ‘La Comédie humaine’ of Honoré de Balzac, even though the creative methods applied by him clearly go beyond such tradition¹. In the ideological layer of his work, Balzac’s aspects become most clearly apparent in scathing criticism which leads to the moral exposure of the society entangled in a world filled with objects, overwhelmed by the desire of possession and success² (the indicators of such success have been, obviously, modernized). As far as Dehnel’s determinations in relation to the ‘imitative nature’ of individual feelings and emotions are concerned, as well as certain specific features of the narrative form, it is also possible to indicate a less obvious tradition in the context of this type of prose: the tradition formed by the sole work of Karol Irzykowski *The Hag (Pałuba, 1903)*.

The diagnoses related to the problem of ‘subsequent spirituality’ and the cultural contexts to which they refer are different in these two cases; however, this does not exclude a deep kinship between the described phenomena. It is necessary to look for a common world-view and realms of artistic communion of these authors in the consistent questioning of the myth of ‘virginity’ (spontaneity) of human feelings and emotions, as well as ‘derisory’ exposure of their intermediation (this is the purpose of narrators’ comments, irony, parody, satirical or grotesque exaggeration). In both cases, the derivative nature – either with respect to the representation of lofty ideas (Irzykowski) or banal pop-cultural clichés and schemes (Dehnel) – is related to the expansion of kitsch in the existential and customary realm, as it goes hand in hand with inauthentic stances of the characters and transformation of their feelings into fetishes.

¹ About the positioning of the *Balzacien* between the tradition of realistic prose and post-modernist works see: Kwaśnik 2004.

² ‘Balzac was one of the first novelists to diagnose the money ethic of his society, in which the pursuit of fortune had replaced religion or a moral code as the key adhesive of the social system’. Burt 2009: 271.

II. FROM ROMANTIC IDEALS TO THE ‘SOUL WARDROBE’ AND ‘SUBSEQUENT WORLD OF PHENOMENA’ (KAROL IRZYKOWSKI’S *THE HAG*)

Already the first interpreters found the novel of the Young Polish critic insightful in exploring the motivation mechanisms, whereas the next decades solidified its position as an intriguing psychological treatise³. This was the main area where the significance of the work was seen; many critics have also indicated its precedence with respect to Freud’s psychoanalysis. The tradition of interpreting *The Hag* in the spirit of cultural criticism, initiated by Stanisław Brzozowski (1971), resurfaces in analogies which the researchers seek between Irzykowski’s work and interests of the 20th century sociology and cultural anthropology (Werner 1965).

It is only necessary to mention here that *The Hag* constitutes a settling of accounts with mental and emotional falsification of man whose inner world was warped under the impact of various mythologies. Irzykowski primarily faces the spiritual heritage of romanticism, with all of its ideological inflexibility and totality. *The Hag* objects to the naive schematization of reality, as well as the solidified, especially in literature, modes of explaining the secrets of emotionality. The Young Poland writer unmasks the operation of the intellectual factor at the core of human behavior, shoved to the subconscious sphere (neglected by romanticism and modernism), which saves our psychological pleasures from harm i.e. – quoting the original terminology – ‘represses’ thoughts from the embarrassing realms – the so called ‘bashful areas’ which, before reaching the conscience, have to be dressed in a decent ‘jacket’ in the ‘soul wardrobe’⁴. The novel includes numerous examples of almost instinctive calculation in the area allegedly reserved for outbursts of the heart. In particular, this refers to various actions of the protagonist, Piotr Strumiński, and his subsequent wives, Angelika and Ola. The characters more or less consciously strive for satisfaction from performing various, often tragic, roles imposed on them by the environment

³ See: Topass 1927. Several years ago, H. Markiewicz (2004) recapitulated the history of reception of Irzykowski’s work.

⁴ These issues are elaborated in Chapter IX of *The Hag* entitled *O punktach wstydliwych i o garderobie duszy (kontrabandzie)* (*On Embarrassing Points and the Soul Wardrobe [Contrabands]*)

or undertaken on their own initiative under the impact of fascination with certain ideas. Irzykowski proves that all feelings (including love, sadness and despair) practically do not occur 'in a sheer form'; they can only exist as substitutes of great passions extolled by poets, as degenerate and faded shapes in comparison to their originals, due to the fact that – as we can read in *The Hag* – 'above other human desires, hunger, love and self-preservation instinct, there is intellectual egoism, especially the one that is manifested in the willingness to create a comedy of one's own character' (Irzykowski 1981: 281). Both the plot in *The Hag* and several auto-thematic fragments contained in it prove that in actual life, paradoxically, the lofty ideal often plays the role of a 'fig leaf' for low urges, misdemeanors and ordinary human sins.

In particular, it is the love feelings that are presented in *The Hag* as a kind of game where spontaneity is subjugated to conventions (also linguistic) – a game that creates a secondary reality, in which the rules of real life cease to be binding. Almost all characters in the novel are enchanted by the word 'love', which constitutes a certain mini-plot of erotic capers. The long-term relationship of Ola and Piotr Strumieński is stigmatized by flirtation and experiment, which stresses the anti-romantic (lack of spontaneity) and anti-naturalistic (calculation above the 'blind instinct') aspect of their behavior, where words sound as if they were uttered by actors and deeds are accompanied by well-studied theatrical attitude. Appearances, along with naive and basically kitschy self-styling, are easily mocked by the narrative saturated with irony, the narrator's denunciation of facts that are coyly hidden by the characters, quoting of clichés uttered by them (after over one hundred years, Jacek Dehnel applies a similar strategy of embarrassing his own characters). For example, in certain fragments of *The Hag* which characterize the stance of Ola, second Ms. Strumieńska, the narrative sometimes changes from indirect speech to direct speech. This is the manner of manifesting the narrator's (implied author's) exceptional vigilance with respect to the words and their false meanings which make up the building material of 'turrets of nonsense.' In Irzykowski's novel – apart from interpositions – the function of ironic or even derisory commentary is often taken up by the inverted commas which perform a correcting role. This imposes intensified alertness with respect to the words which, indeed, 'make fun of themselves' just like in the fragment quoted below, characterizing Ola's naive reasoning:

Because she was no longer afraid of him [Strumieński – B.P.J.], she confessed to him: ‘Initially, I was afraid of you, but now I am not’ and further: ‘Ola allowed Strumieński to peek behind the curtain (?) of her heart and recounted her penitence on account of Gasztold’s suicide, so that Strumieński would think: »So they are even killing themselves (*pluralis*) for her; I was not capable of appreciating this treasure!«’ (ibid.: 184).

The story of the relationship between Strumieński and Angelika is much more serious in its effects, whereas emotions related to it are extremely destructive, as it is accompanied by an idea originating from fascination with romanticism: an idea that strives to be a religion, and requires a great and complete sacrifice. It is manifested most clearly in the fate of Piotr’s first wife. The woman, looking up to the ideal of Platonic love, is impatiently awaiting childbirth which, she hopes, will be related to tragic events (!), and when no such thing happens (she gives birth without complications), she decides to commit suicide and throws herself down the well. Angelika renounces life ‘for the sake of symmetry’, to ‘round the reality up’ and to bring it closer to her idealistic dreams.

The Hag puts emphasis on the inner incongruence of feelings such as love and suffering, the explicitness of which – as Irzykowski is trying to show us – is only a postulate. The novel reveals that even pain and suffering are not ‘clear’; a weird pleasure is hidden in them, by their very existence colliding with the romantic idea of suffering till folly. Love in particular is shown as a feeling internally complex and contradictory, which combines contrasting elements (for example grandeur with absurdity, spirituality with sensuousness, altruism with egoism) and unites the beloved and disdained areas. However, the character of *The Hag*, having internalized the catalogue of ‘words-postulates’, ‘words-monsters’ with its entire semantic censorship, does not accept own feelings and emotions, doggedly striving to realize the clichés. The case is complex due to the fact that imprecise, single-sided words – terms are combined into various sequences, thus creating a separate ‘subsequent world of phenomena’, where errors lay claims to facts (‘some words are rooted in the brain, solidified, surrounded with a certain melody, certain sphere of feelings and sub-verbal associations’ [ibid.: 354]). The word – postulate reserves a certain area in the brain, where it stimulates other feelings so effectively that even if such feelings do not actually exist, they run rampant in thoughts as the actual phenomena. They may even exert honest

effects (as despair, tears and even suicide) due to the fact that man – having immersed himself in the subsequent life of the soul – loses the awareness of reproducing alien models. Irzykowski notices that this process has reached so far that certain words have already lost the relation to their genesis, ‘from tools, they have transformed into masters’ – now, notions and content are pieced to them and not the other way round. The most important diagnosis in *The Hag* in this respect, describing the linguistic phenomena with grave psychological consequences, is the so-called ‘theory of namelessness’ which is set forth in detail in the auto-thematic parts of the novel (see: Pałowska-Jądrzyk 2001).

Irzykowski’s innovative and, to some degree, eccentric novel shows that culture – as a sphere superimposed on reality – constitutes a tool for creating non-authenticity, which threatens the subjective identity of man, due to the fact that the attraction of personal, behavioral and emotional models it produces contradicts the natural human inclinations and longings, replacing them with schemes. This assumption underlies the procedures aimed at revising the theories, convictions and appearances solidified in the social awareness, which the novel tries to break apart or re-evaluate. Irzykowski strips the abuse in the above-listed fields bare by, *inter alia*, a disassembly of idealism, showing the imperfections of the language and de-constructing various literary conventions. *The Hag* is primarily a novel about the collapse of romantic ideals as well as an aesthetic and philosophical settling of accounts with modernism. It also attacks various mental simplifications (‘symmetries’), promoted in the society primarily by literature and fashionable schemes of experiencing and feeling compliant with the preferences of own epoch (*inter alia* shallow decadence originating from Henryk Sienkiewicz’s *Without Dogma (Bez dogmatu)*, enthusiastically received by modernists). However, it should be remembered that the writer settles the accounts from the perspective of the beginning of the 20th century. In spite of multi-faceted innovation of *The Hag*⁵, its relation with Young

⁵ Interpreters have emphasised the innovative nature of Irzykowski’s novel for a long time and multiplied the areas of dependence between *The Hag* and other trends (decadence, empirio-criticism, conventionalism, formism, authenticity, surrealism, existentialism) and names (Schopenhauer, Gide, Freud, Adler, Mach, Sartre, Heidegger, Nietzsche, Proust and Gombrowicz). *Notabene*, I wrote about

Poland remains particularly strong; the nature of this relation tends to be justly called ‘dependency via negation’ (Werner: 1965: 356).

The inauthentic behavior related to man’s emotional life at the end of the 19th and the beginning of the 20th century was not a completely new subject matter; the same problem appeared in literature earlier and came into being in one of its variations as Bovarism, originating from naturalism (see: A. Budrecka, *Introduction*, [in:] Irzykowski 1981: LVIII). *The Hag* is rather distinguished by its different approach to the issue of non-authenticity, and also its relation to the criticism of language, due to the fact that to speak means to conjure a secondary reality, rooted in *idées fixes* solidified in the language, as shown by Irzykowski. In this perspective, personality is no longer an integral and inviolable set of primeval predispositions and innate features, because it turns out that continually changing cultural forms that falsify not only behaviors, but also psychical processes, have their share in our inner life. Friedrich Nietzsche seems to sponsor Irzykowski’s revelations:

Subsequent justification of existence. Many ideas [and probably ‘at every moment, we only have these ideas for which we possess words that can express them in some approximation’ – note by B.P.J.] have entered the world as errors and fantasies but have become truths, because men have afterwards foisted upon them a substratum of reality (Nietzsche 1973: 36-37).

At the end of discussing *The Hag*, it is worth emphasizing once again that the exposing nature of the novel (with respect to various errors and delusions) is manifested not only in the motives and images, but very frequently results from the acts of the author implied in the text: a separate intellectual force, external with respect to the presented events, yet providing them with colors depending on its liking. The grotesque nature does not seem to be the necessary function of the presented reality here, and the effect of dissonance is rather created by the specific formation of the statement about the world. Shifting of parodist and grotesque accents from images to modes and means of presentation is very characteristic for Irzykowski’s novel and constitutes an indicator of the author’s ironic attitude to the characters,

a certain overlooked aspect of innovation in Irzykowski’s novel with respect to the parodistic and grotesque trend in Poland in paper. See: Pawłowska-Jądrzyk 1995.

emphasizes his continuous presence, manifests criticism and subjectivism of judgments. The narrative of the *Balzacienne*s is similarly 'marked with derision'⁶.

III. 'FEELING AS A QUOTATION': ABOUT EMOTIONS IN THE ERA OF POP-CULTURE (*THE PRIVATE TUTOR'S LOVE*)

In spite of a different native context, which is related to over one hundred years of distance that divides the publication of Irzykowski's *The Hag* and Dehnel's *The Private Tutor's Love*, it is possible to sketch several levels of comparison between these two works. Apart from minor elements which may constitute a literary allusion (the protagonist of *Balzacienne*s is called Angelika – just

⁶ See e.g. three fragments presenting the character-creating strategies in *The Private Tutor's Love*:

'[Adrian Helsztyński] was wearing a long, dark-grey coat with velvet lapels (resembling Boss a little bit; second-hand clothes store at Chłodna Street, PLN 26.00), an ashen Japanese shawl made of raw silk (looked a bit like Kenzo; second-hand clothes store at Bracka Street, PLN 8.00) and graffito Zegna suit underneath (sold on Allegro on the first day of Christmas, due to the fact that the owner failed to determine the minimum price and all the auction participants were digesting their Christmas breakfast) and a silver tie with a pin and a pearl (unearthed from a pile of Gypsy rubbish in the Koło flea market). He looked like the embodiment of vintage style luxury' (Dehnel 2010: 258).

'Sandra Kwiczół, apart from various weaknesses of the spirit (gambling, Sex and the City and hallucinogenic substances) also had a certain corporeal weakness: namely, she was small, extremely tiny. And, which often goes hand in hand with it, she loved tall men. You can imagine the feelings of this irascible person when she spotted a two-metre giant in various shades of grey and silver twenty steps ahead of her; she stood perplexed and everything inside of her was sighing and trembling, even the tiny lip gloss in her tiny bag (...)' (ibid.: 280).

'Angelika Włost's heart, soft as a white chocolate fudge exposed to July heat, opened for Adrian a path to everything that he had desired for years; it was like a philosopher's stone (even though it was not a heart made of stone - definitely not), which could bring him any sum of money, due to the fact that as the beloved and only son-in-law he could count not only for a princess as his wife, but also a half of the kingdom' (ibid.: 321).

like Piotr Strumieński’s first wife) and certain, previously mentioned, literary modes of ridiculing the characters’ lack of authenticity, the set of issues related to the problem of ‘subsequent spirituality’ gains a prominent place. In the case of *The Private Tutor’s Love*, this term denotes more or less passive reproduction of certain schemes of behaving, thinking and experiencing, promoted by the modern pop-culture by the characters. Briefly speaking, Dehnel draws, with a thick line, a satirical image of the Polish society after the system transformation, ruthlessly denudes the entanglement of his characters in re-sentiments, aspirations and ideals typical for the era of consumerism, which designate certain models of stances or behavior, but also – as may be surmised – generate the ‘kitsch-spheres of modern emotionality’⁷.

Perhaps the most important theme of *The Private Tutor’s Love* depicted, first and foremost, by the allegedly innocent actions and snobbish poses of the characters, is the lack of authenticity, pretending to be somebody better than one is in reality (whereas – in contrast to *The Hag* – here, we are primarily dealing with creation of an attractive façade for others). This issue is presented in a caricature mode already in the first scene of the novel: the main character, Adrian Helsztyński, having refused to get into a badly-looking cab, gets into a more presentable one, in order to – after an argument with the dispatcher – drive just several dozen meters further in order to get out at the door of a hotel on the other side of the street where he has a meeting scheduled with a potential customer. The ‘profession’ in which Adrian is engaged, is of a peculiar kind: he is a ‘tutor of good manners’ and sets forth the core of his activities during a conversation with Włos, a nouveau riche chairman of a poultry company and father of an apathetic twenty-year-old named Angelika, as ‘education of people to happiness’ (at other times Helsztyński presents himself as a ‘sculptor of class and good frame of mind’, a man who teaches the ‘art of camouflage: how to look as somebody much more affluent, more talented, more interesting and better educated than one is in reality’ [Dehnel 2010: 295-296]). Such offer falls on a fertile ground as the mother and father made up their minds a time ago: they want to make their only daughter a ‘socialite, who will appear as a celebrity in all issues

⁷ Here, I refer to the title of the book Burszta, Sekuła (ed.) 2008.

of »Viva« and »Gala« at the side of best male candidates, stylized by best stylists and dressed up by best designers' (ibid.: 257).

Young Adrian Helsztyński – the charming offspring of an impoverished, yet 'noble' family, in spite of buying his clothes in second-hand stores 'looks like walking elegance' and effuses the 'impression of grandeur' around himself – finds his bearings in the environment that perceives the value of man in resourcefulness and external attributes. It has to be said that he comes across some exceptionally stubborn material, due to the fact that Włos' daughter has absolutely no passion or interest, but he is aided by a simple coincidence: he catches the attention of Sandra Kwiczół, Angelika's opponent from a group at Warsaw School of Economics and heiress of a different fortune and, 'in this conflict for power and success', this immediately makes him desired in the eyes of the chairman's daughter. The excerpt from the story describing the relations between the two girls is characterized not only by a satirical, but downright misogynistic virulence:

(...) the heiress of poultry fortune clashed here with the heiress of a network of Audi repair shops, each of them surrounded by a circle of ladies-in-waiting and a safe string of banknotes with high nominal values. They did to each other everything that young ladies baking in their anger are capable of doing: slander, disgusting gossip, claims and insults hidden among compliments were flying between them like bullets at Verdun, yet all of this was sugar-coated on the outside, so that a less perceptive observer would not have guessed that one would willingly drown the other in a glass of water (ibid.: 279-280).

The subsequent stages of the plot show how – in the course of time – along with Angelika's progress in the area of self-creation – what has initially resulted from a desire to humiliate Sandra Kwiczół becomes beginning of a change in Angelika's attitude to the world and the embers of her tumultuous passion for the handsome tutor. Angelika Włos(t)⁸,

⁸ Andżelika, following Adrian's advice, adds 't' to her surname and starts to write her name 'Angelika', which goes hand in hand with devising a family legend.

rolling indifferently in the nouveau riche affluence⁹ and with Helsztyński’s assistance, making gradual progress on the path to success in the milieu, remains unaware of the existence of emotional competition for a long time. Meanwhile, Adrian is torn between the two women, drawing various benefits from his friendships. He maintains a furtive, yet satisfactory, erotic relationship with Daria Pieleszek, a banal girl he met on a bus; he also has to constantly refuse the advances of Lidia Dereczko – an elderly interior conservator, whom he owes a lot and in whose premises he resides free of charge, which, in the course of time, leads to more and more equivocal situations. Helsztyński shows some extraordinary adaptive skills: he not only works out an attractive image of a boy from a ‘respectable family’, but he maneuvers among favorable set-ups, smoothly dons new masks, making more or less detrimental moral concessions. (The relationship with Lidia Dereczko is summed up in the following manner: ‘It became clear for Adrian that even if he does not have to prostitute himself, yet by entering this charming apartment, full of old furniture and beautiful items, he is at the same time entering a certain scheme, the important part of which is showing affection and some type of melancholic courtship’ [ibid.: 273]). In effect, Helsztyński seems to lose bearing in his own feelings and at the end of the novel he faces a completely unexpected dilemma, the solving of which determines his further fate.

It may be said that Jacek Dehnel in *The Private Tutor’s Love* presents a caricature picture of the style of behaving, thinking and experiencing, which dominates the consumer society (possibly in particular in the post-communist society). This style is characterized by the ‘loss of the soul’ (James Hillman), intellectual and emotional amnesia, emptiness causing a need

⁹ The writer methodologically and with a significant dose of irony emphasises the trapping of his characters in a world of objects, their enslavement by the desire of possession and a predilection for celebrating kitsch. This refers both to the Włos family, the owners of a pretentious villa in Konstancin near Warszawa, equipped with ‘empire-style armchairs with golden swans’ and ‘an espresso machine worth as much as a car’ (Angelika’s room is described as ‘distended to excessive sizes by the ambition of her parents and the interior designer hired by them’), as well as Adrian Helsztyński who is racking his head on how to make the small apartment in a block of flats look like a palace. Cf. in this context: Moles 1978.

of immediate excitement, which leads to grotesque imitation of illuminations or enraptures, substituting true feelings. Kundera's declaration that in the era of mass media 'kitsch became our daily aesthetics and morality'¹⁰, as well as the spiritual post-modernist awareness of 'sinking into' clichés – images solidified in the collective awareness, various schemes and stereotypes – is most acutely expressed in the scene where Angelika confesses her love to Adrian during a walk along the Vistula promenade, modernized in a western mode:

They were standing next to each other and looking at pink reindeer, or possibly deer; nobody else was around, only the night-time Praga, illuminated guy wires of the Świętokrzyski Bridge and extensive areas behind their backs, where a power plant used to be and now some developer was re-making post-industrial interiors into lofts and erecting apartment buildings.

They sat on the plastic deer. First, he did it carefully (because he was afraid that the plastic might break under the weight of a two-meters guy) and then she followed suit. They laughed a bit, they pretended to gallop a bit, they gazed at the stars just like their horned steeds. And they sat. And they were silent. And they sat and talked. And they sat in silence. And they would have gotten up and turned back if it was not for some emotional wonder, some overthrow, some spiritual breakthrough which happened inside Angelika Włost under the impact of looking at the modern art in the form of three reindeer made of colored plastic. Angelika Włost, who was deeply reluctant to take any stance, to reveal any desire or urge, (...) felt that for the first time since a very, very long while she was actually desiring something. And if she was desiring, she was desiring deeply, without limitations, dramatically, with throwing arms around somebody, kissing in the rain, trips to romantic

¹⁰ 'Given the imperative necessity to please and thereby to gain the attention of the greatest number, the aesthetic of the mass media is inevitably that of kitsch; and as the mass media come to embrace and to infiltrate more and more of our life, kitsch becomes our everyday aesthetic and moral code. Up until recent times, modernism meant a nonconformist revolt against received ideas and kitsch. Today, modernity is fused with the enormous vitality of the mass media, and to be modern means a strenuous effort to be up-to-date, to conform, to conform even more thoroughly than the most conformist of all. Modernity has put on kitsch's clothing' (Kundera 1988: 162).

European capitals, nights and mornings in luxury hotels of Venice and Paris. (...)

(...) What happened next, the entire stream of words, oaths, beseeching, kisses, deep and shallow, moist and dry, the whole rolling and rubbing against each other is practically impossible to describe in its confusion and naivety. Did Angelika act desperately? Not really, she behaved like anybody whom love struck suddenly, like a sail on a windy lake; she did not even know, well, neither of them knew that these were only quotations: a quotation from wringing snakes, from snuggling leopards, quotations from countless films about love, sequences of kisses – faces of Gable and Leigh, Pitt and Jolie, Cruise and Kidman – words uttered by great poets more emphatically and more beautifully and now inaptly repeated in the darkness by the river bank, up to the most banal quotation: 'And you, do you love me?' (ibid: 318-320)¹¹.

The scene of Miss Włost's paroxysm of affection to Helsztyński, located in a kitsch-like scenery with three amaranth reindeer made of illuminated plastic, leads to a fateful recognition. As far as the relationship between the novel's characters is concerned, the recognition pertains primarily to Adrian's becoming aware of his own feelings (the young man realizes that he loves the 'silly' and socially inapt Daria and cannot abandon this relationship at any price)¹² as well as revelation of the surprising truth about Angelika. The chairman's daughter turns out to be a very smart pupil

¹¹ This is what Umberto Eco wrote about love quotations in the epoch of 'literature of exhaustion': 'For me, the postmodern attitude is that of a man who loves a woman who is intelligent and well-read: he knows that he cannot say today »I love you desperately« because he knows (and she knows that he knows) that that is a line out of Barbara Cartland. Yet there is a solution. He can say: »As Barbara Cartland would say, I love you desperately«. At this point, he has avoided the pretence of innocence, he has clearly affirmed that no one can speak in an innocent mode; but he has still told the woman what he wished to tell her – that he loves her, but in the age of lost innocence' (Rosso 1983: 2-3).

¹² And in this sense, this is truly a story about an honest feeling, confirming the banal truth that 'love is blind.' However, judging by the title of the story, something else should be expected (a different feeling or a different couple in love). Notabene, it is quite telling that a writer who methodically lays kitsch bare, chooses a melodramatic ending.

who, vigorously and without greater sentiment, is capable of ‘reminding the master of the rules of the game’ (ibid.: 325): the emerging star of gossip columns of most important Polish tabloids, deeply hurt in her pride, kills her former tutor, previously ending their relationship via an adequate and carefully calligraphed letter, which she sends in an elegant, ‘properly selected’ envelope.

The narrator sketches Angelika’s further fate briefly, yet evocatively:

Two years later, she became a real countess (candidate number three, Count Juliusz Bończa-Kętrzyński, Kętrzyński-Kociołek-Waligóra Law Firm), yet she took it with a grain of salt, frequently comparing herself to Gilberte Swann. It was considered charming. Her minor slip-ups were forgiven; in the course of time, there were fewer and fewer of them – she sometimes forgot about somebody’s birthday or shuffled a chair too loudly. Luckily, bad education of true countesses made similar mistakes almost unnoticeable. „Gala” had the exclusive rights for a photo-report from the wedding, the reception became a legend in the restaurant industry of the capital city and the bride’s bouquet was caught by the shortest bridesmaid, Sandra Kwiczol (ibid.: 326).

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Both *The Hag* and *The Private Tutor’s Love* present the issue of a ‘subsequent spirituality’ and the sphere of human emotions and feelings in the aspect of its derivative nature – as devoid of spontaneity, intermediated by various conventions and cultural schemes. Both writers – Irzykowski and Dehnel – using, *inter alia*, the privileges of omniscient narrative, irony and grotesque exaggeration, expose the false nature of utterances, actions, thoughts and emotions of characters created by them (notabene, in places they even question the authority of the narrator/ implied author)¹³. However,

¹³ In *The Hag* the narrator (implied author) presents a certain type of self-criticism in Chapter XIX entitled *Trio autora*. On the other hand, in *The Private Tutor’s Love*, the narrative is in places reminiscent of the ‘pop-cultural gibberish’ which reveals its self-irony, parody and inner dialogising (cf. remarks about ‘the multi-directional duo-voiced word’ in: Bakhtin 1984). This attitude to the ‘words of others’ is presented most clearly in the scene in which Adrian and Angelika meet

the cultural context of their artistic and intellectual practice is quite different, and divergent diagnoses are related to them.

In *The Hag*, the characters’ idealistic aspirations clash with the resistance of life and derisory warping, due to the fact that the nature of Reality is ‘non-thematic’ and man, by his nature, is forced to re-enact the ‘comedy’ of his own character. In the consumer world of the ‘Balzaciennes’, there is no place for grand ideals, moral dilemmas or in-depth introspection. The rank of man is determined by ‘the façade’ that is presented to the world, the ability to create appearances, the skill in manipulating others. Kitsch, with imitation and lack of authenticity at its core, conformist reproduction of verified schemes, spiritual exultation, is shown in this context both as the source of depravity, as well as its effect: in line with Herman Broch’s (1969) concept, this category goes beyond the frames of aestheticism, entering the realm of existential and ethical reflection¹⁴. The area of expansion for kitsch in the presented world in *The Hag* is primarily the inner life of an individual and imitations of ideas, experiences or stances related to it; on the other hand, in the *Balzaciennes*, it is the sphere of inter-human relations, marked by flashiness, appearances and struggle for dominance, and, obviously, material surroundings, which are related to the tendency to treat objects as fetishes, which characterizes the consumer culture. Irzykowski believes in Reality (which is clear in the idea of ‘the haggish element’), whereas distortions in the emotional sphere which he denounces, exposing the cheap self-styling of the characters, derive from man’s blind idealism, who wishes to live up to his lofty ideas. Dehnel’s characters do not have any ideals; they focus on

in a café called Faux-pas (after Helsztyński tells the girl that to look as an interesting person if one is boring is the most difficult thing): ‘You hurt her, Shrek, you hurt her badly, you hit her in the abdomen, her weak spot, her soft fontanelle. Oh, Shrek, you went out on a limb; she could have shut herself in one moment like a scallop, like a lacquerware case, like a Bentley door, like a compartment in a cabinet, she could have forfeited any desire to humiliate Sandra »Ziggy« Kwiczoł, the heiress of Audi stores (...), she could have blown it off and could have even *buried it in the grave of her heart*’ (Dehnel 2010: 296).

¹⁴ Broch (1969: 50-63) believed that the ‘golden age’ of kitsch was the 19th century, i.e. the time of flourish of romanticism, expansion of middle-class and development of the industrial society.

creating appearances for the sake of others, for the purposes of a prosaically understood success and material benefit. They do not consort with real art, they thoughtlessly reproduce banal pop-cultural schemes, becoming morally lost (even though not always fully – as the tutor from the title, who pays with his life for waking up from the consumer amok). In this inanity and almost mechanical readiness to accept subsequent poses, there is no place for ‘inner heroism’ which, in spite of all, distinguishes the characters in *The Hag*. Thus, it may be said that Jacek Dehnel in *The Private Tutor’s Love* proposes a transformed, derisory and ironic variant of the ancient myth of Pygmalion and Galatea¹⁵. In the modern edition, this is no longer a story about a great feeling, but about great depravity.

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¹⁵ Doesn’t Adrian Helsztyński call himself the ‘sculptor’ (of class and good frame of mind) and Angelika Włost is his, in a certain sense perfect, product?

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Summary

The author of the article examines a phenomenon associated with a certain – today increasingly common – attitude in life that may be described, in most simple terms, as the marriage of non-authenticity with imitationism. The author focuses her attention on feelings of love (as particularly ‘acute’ and, at the same time, probably most mythologized), or rather on their literary depiction, which allows for an accurate diagnosis of the sensitivity typical of a consumer society obsessed with money, subject to the dictates of mass media and under pressure from the ideals and ideas of pop culture. A diagnosis of this kind comes in the form of Jacek Dehnel’s short story *Miłość korepetytora* (*The Private Tutor’s Love*) which, together with three other stories, comprises the volume *Balzakiana* (*Balzacienne*) (2008). The young Polish writer, attempting to diagnose the condition of the Polish society after the political transformation of 1989, makes a conscious reference to the distant tradition of realistic prose from the legacy of Honoré de Balzac.

As for the review of the sphere of individual feelings and emotions falsified by various stereotypes and abstract ideas, one can also look to a tradition closer to Dehnel: namely the only novel of Karol Irzykowski entitled *Pałuba (The Hag)* (1903). The author of the article shows some similarities between the Young Poland concept of 'successive-world phenomena' and the contemporary vision of determining the emotional sphere through pop culture templates with the underlying experience of romantic elation. References to the diagnoses of Abraham Moles, Milan Kundera and Hermann Broch allow for highlighting the issues of 'exaltation as a replacement of spirituality' and kitsch as 'our daily aesthetic and morality'.

Keywords: sensitivity in the era of pop culture, authenticity, exaltation, consumer culture, imaginative templates, existential kitsch