

Gdańsk Narratological Group

This article presents a new narratological research group operating at the University of Gdańsk, Poland: Gdańsk Narratological Group. The aim of the article is twofold: to describe in three separate sections the main areas of research into rhetorical, feminist and unnatural narratology by outlining ongoing studies and individual projects, and to delineate the group's goals and objectives for the near future.

1. Introduction

The Gdańsk Narratological Group (GNG) currently operates as a sub-group of the Textual Studies Research Group (TSRG) at the University of Gdańsk. David Malcolm is the coordinator of the group and its members are Wolfgang Görtschacher (Universität Salzburg), Monika Szuba, Tomasz Wiśniewski, Marta Aleksandrowicz, Bartosz Lutostański, Marta Nowicka and Miłosz Wojtyna.

Formed in 2011, TSRG pursues research into twentieth- and twenty-first-century literary texts, focusing on narration in prose fiction, prosody and phonology in poetry, dramatic and theatrical conventions. At the 2013 International Conference on Narrative in Manchester, four members of TSRG (Malcolm, Szuba, Lutostański and Wojtyna) delivered papers on various aspects of narration in the prose fiction of Muriel Spark and John Berger and in short stories and radio plays.¹ This prompted the formation of the GNG whose members have attempted to simultaneously conduct research into the three distinct areas of narratology discussed below.

More recently, Aleksandrowicz, Lutostański, and Wojtyna have presented papers at narrative conferences in Vienna, Rome, Paderborn, and Madrid.² In addition, the group has started an innovative narrative theory course at the University of Gdańsk. The main objective of “Literature – Narrative – Business” is to introduce the basics of the narrative theory to BA students and to encourage them to put this knowledge into practice in the examination of corporate storytelling techniques.

In addition, three members of the GNG have become involved in two of the ongoing projects of sdvigpress.org, a newly established non-profit academic publishing platform from Switzerland, dedicated to the dissemination and linking of knowledge in the Humanities between Eastern, Central and Western Europe. In one of the series, “Teoria – Polish Thought in the Twentieth century” (ed. by Michał Mrugalski, Galin Tihanov and Danuta Ulicka), Lutostański, Malcolm, and Wojtyna translate into English six classical Polish texts in the field of literary theory, including studies on typically narratological

issues (such as David Hopensztand's analysis of free indirect speech or Juliusz Kleiner's narrative theory of literary criticism). The second Sdvigpress project in which GNG members are involved is a translation of selected Polish theoretical articles considered to be valuable contributions to historical and contemporary narratology (ed. Joanna Jeziorska-Haladyj).

In the following article, we would like to present GNG's specific fields of research in three separate sections. In the final part of this article, we will describe our objectives for the following months and years.

The first section, by Miłosz Wojtyna, concerns rhetorical narratology and a possible application of its analytical mechanisms in the study of short fiction. Wojtyna summarizes one aspect of his work on the short stories of two non-canonical writers, T.F. Powys and V.S. Pritchett, and suggests that the theoretical-interpretive apparatus of traditional short story criticism can be effectively supported by the rhetorical perspective. He then proceeds briefly to present some of the related observations by Aleksandra Okopień-Sławińska. Okopień-Sławińska is a prominent member of the Polish school of literary communication – an informal group of theoreticians (including Okopień-Sławińska, Kazimierz Bartoszyński, Michał Głowiński and Edward Balcerzan) who, though they would perhaps never call themselves narratologists, expressed views similar to those expounded by the American proponents of the rhetorical approach to narrative – Wayne C. Booth, James Phelan, and Peter Rabinowitz.

The second section presents some hypotheses of Marta Aleksandrowicz's work on feminist narratology and Nadine Gordimer's short stories. Aleksandrowicz explains the reasons for the application of this specific tool in the study of the short fiction by the South African author, and presents the main assumptions of her PhD project, in which she examines rhetorical aspects of Gordimer's negotiations with feminism. Aleksandrowicz combines the theoretical basis of American theoreticians such as Susan Lanser and Robyn Warhol with the work of Polish scholars such as Okopień Sławińska and Michał Głowiński.

The final section, by Bartosz Lutostański, divided into two parts, deals with unnatural narratology. The author begins by presenting his current PhD project on the post-war novels by Samuel Beckett and Witold Gombrowicz. He demonstrates how the commonly accepted ways of reading these authors as destructors or nihilists, in terms of literature or narration, should be re-approached from the perspective of unnatural narratology. That is, the novels are to be investigated as transgressing or violating particular prose fiction forms through specific devices, the most important being monologicity, concurrency and scenicness. They are not simply means of undermining literary conventions but at the same time they modify narrative structure and significantly enrich its semantics. In addition, it is argued that the accumulation and configuration of monologicity, concurrency and scenicness necessitates an alternative reading procedure. In the second part, Lutostański points to six important book-length studies on the unnatural in Polish literary theory. It is contended that the works by Wysłouch, Nycz, Indyk, Bolecki, Owczarek, and

Woźniakiewicz-Dziadosz might prove useful in wider, international literary context.

2. Rhetorical Narratology

2.1 The Norm and the Rhetoric of Short Fiction

Much short story criticism to date seems obsessed with the notion of brevity. Short stories are short – this trivial paradigm has troubled many from Edgar Allan Poe and Brander Matthews in the nineteenth to Valerie Shaw in the twentieth (1983), and Per Winther et al. in the twenty-first century (2004). What many related debates have arrived at can be summarized as follows: short stories end differently than novels do, and this difference (together with the accompanying set of devices that allow authors to squeeze large content into a minuscule form) is responsible for the unique readerly experience in contact with the short story (see Poe’s idea of a reading at one sitting). The experiential value of the ending is yet another central issue in the discussions of the short story form. Since Susan Lohafer’s seminal *Coming to Terms with the Short Story* (1983) and John Gerlach’s *Toward the End: Closure and Structure in the American Short Story* (1985) “closure” (“and preclosure”) have been crucial terms for short story critics. Little has been written in terms of theoretical modes of treating short story beginnings and the progressions from beginnings to endings that would instil in the reader some of the “unity effect” that short story endings seemingly pinpoint. This substantial imbalance in the treatment of short narratives is surprising when one takes into consideration the achievements of contemporary narratology – works like *Narrative Beginnings* (ed. by Brian Richardson) on the one hand, and a wide range of tools offered by the rhetorical approach to narrative on the other. In a book-length study of the short stories of T.F. Powys and V.S. Pritchett³ Miłosz Wojtyna is concerned, among other things, with the ways in which rhetorical narratology (as discussed by James Phelan and Peter Rabinowitz in connection with the work of Wayne C. Booth) can support traditional short story criticism in explaining the progress of short fictions from a tension-generating beginning towards a (more or less complete) (physical or cognitive) closure.

The short stories of Powys and Pritchett receive little readerly or critical attention. One reason for such a neglect may be their relatively ordinary subject matter. Since many of these texts present characters in everyday situations and happenings, and most of them (in strikingly different ways) refer to habit, reject the exotic, rely on repetition, and undermine the notion of event as central element of a narrative, the question of notice and tellability seems important. Wojtyna claims that while Powys’ stories most frequently use the event as a tellable core of the story, Pritchett’s short fictions rely on stasis and lack of event. Because of the insistent ordinary subject matter, the noticeability-

tellability status of both models is problematic. “There are two ways in which communication can fail on the question of notice: the irrelevant can appear to be prominent, or the crucial can pass by unnoticed”, Rabinowitz writes (1998, 54). In order to determine what elements are important within the larger communicative structures of Powys’ and Pritchett’s narratives, Wojtyna uses a combination of Phelan’s progression-based rhetorical theory of narrative, Rabinowitz’s insight about “the rules of notice” and an analysis of such phenomena as narrativity, eventfulness and causality. Only within such a multi-layered spectrum the importance of a textual signal (be that a fragment of an utterance, an event, a description of an object, the presentation of a character’s feature) is to be determined. Such a procedure is clearly based on the attempt to position the elements under scrutiny in as extensive a network of intra-textual connections as possible. For instance, if an event is to be considered significant (an important issue in Powys’ and Pritchett’s stories in which seemingly “nothing happens”), it needs to manifest high eventfulness. For eventfulness to be high, the event must, for example, meet the requirements described by Wolf Schmid (reality, resultativity, relevance, unpredictability, persistence, irreversibility, non-iterativity; Schmid 2010, 9-12). The criteria used in eventfulness assessment, but also in the judgements the text invites the reader to make about tensions and instabilities, all refer the reader to the total body of the text rather than only to any local, singular textual component.

Here we arrive at a crucial element of the tension-based rhetorical approach and its connection with short-fiction criticism. If short stories are characterized by an important role of the ending that relies on the sense of closure, the elements creating this closure need to be observed. What closes in the text are some tensions established throughout the narrative. A tension, itself a generator of narrative dynamics, is a conflict of norms or expectations based on a reference to norms. These norms originate in the two parts of narrative dynamics described by Phelan – the rules of the text, which belong to “textual dynamics”, are combined with the rules of the world, which partly constitute “readerly dynamics”. In this sense the rhetorical progression of narrative is a process in which the reader, cued by certain successive textual signals, makes (interpretive, aesthetic, ethical; Phelan 1989) judgements about these signals as they appear in a given place in the text, and as they are contextualized in reference to various (interpretive, aesthetic, ethical) norms. In Powys’ and Pritchett’s short stories, as well as in any given narrative, sets of these norms – specific textual and extratextual doxas – are not only complex sites of signification, but also constituents of certain, artistically organized rhetorical structures.

2.2 Polish contributions to the study of narrative rhetoric. Okopień-Sławińska, literary communication, and the order of signals.

Some of the most interesting developments in Polish literary theory in the 1970s and early 1980s were concerned with the problems of literary communi-

cation and reception theory. The articles that appeared in *Problemy socjologii literatury*, a volume edited by Janusz Sławiński in 1971, focused on, among other things, the poetics of reception (Edward Balcerzan), on stylization (Michał Głowiński) and on the sender-receiver positions in the communicative model of the literary text (Aleksandra Okopień-Sławińska). Głowiński, in *Style odbioru. Szkice o komunikacji literackiej* (1977), presented the literary text as a “sphere of tensions”, analyzed the concept of the “virtual reader” and discussed various “reception styles”. In 1986 Kazimierz Bartoszyński wrote on the connections of reception and literary conventions (“Odbiór a konwencja literacka”). All these writings deal with a set of problems that have been discussed by Phelan, Rabinowitz and other scholars who have delineated the principles of rhetorical narratology.

The question of normative systems referred to by texts and readers in literary dynamics was addressed by Okopień-Sławińska, who insists that structural aspects of narrative communication are never independent of the extratextual. In *Semantyka wypowiedzi poetyckiej* (1985, 2001), she writes that the literary communicative act is based on “the (de)coding against and in reference to a system of norms that exists outside the text but is applied to it” (Okopień-Sławińska 2001, 100). In order to coordinate these references, she claims, the reader makes judgements about information that is “thematized (in the meanings of the words and sentences used)” and “the information implied by rules of speech” (ibid., 103). Okopień-Sławińska does not focus on the fact that an essential feature of numerous artistic texts is the defamiliarizing, estranging transgression of extratextual norms simultaneous with the establishment of intratextual doxas. She herself admits that the reader’s judgements about artistic departures from and references to norms – that is, in Phelan’s sense, the judgements that constitute readerly dynamics – are not a “mere total sum of individual signals” (ibid., 106). Information in a literary text does not function on the basis of “progressive accumulation” (ibid.), but, as Okopień-Sławińska writes, “the communicative structure of an artistic text creates a complex set of corrective and indexing signals for individual pieces of information” (ibid.). These updates in narrative dynamics rely, firstly, on the different levels of authority with which thematized and implied information is invested,⁴ and secondly, on the difference between various sender positions in the structure (ibid.).

The arrangement of these positions, the proportion and the relationship between thematized information and implied information, is an important part of narrative progression from the beginning towards the ending. As Wojtyna shows in his analysis of Powys’ and Pritchett’s stories, an attempt at the determination of the role intratextual norms play in narrative dynamics needs to take these factors into account whenever a textual phenomenon is deautomatized – for instance, at all places in Powys’ and Pritchett’s short stories where an event that, in the light of extratextual norms, seems non-eventful, bears considerable significance in the doxa of the literary work. Similarly, to engage in a rhetorical observation of the closure (or lack of closure) of a short story or

any other narrative, one needs to attend to the following: 1.) the textual tensions as they unfold and change in the progression (Phelan's dynamics), 2.) the norms that these tensions refer to (Phelan's judgements, Rabinowitz's rules of notice), 3.) the level of authority of these norms represented by the sender positions, and 4.) the indexing and corrective signals that allow the assessment of the hierarchy of information (Okopień-Sławińska's order of signals). A methodology that would jointly refer to the work of American proponents of the rhetorical approach and to the achievements of the Polish school of literary communication seems particularly appropriate for the task.

3. Feminist Narratology

In her PhD dissertation Marta Aleksandrowicz reads the short fiction by Nadine Gordimer from a feminist-narratological perspective. Such a reading is conducted for three reasons. Firstly, the Nobel prizewinner's highly mimetic fiction provokes criticism concentrated on what narratologists would call the 'story', leaving in the background the 'discourse' or, to borrow Seymour Chatman's terms, "the *how* in a narrative that is depicted" (Chatman 1978, 19). Secondly, the criticism to date focuses on the problems of race, class, national identity, the sociopolitical situation of South Africa, and perhaps the relations between those. The subversions of patriarchal rules in Gordimer's short fiction are often seen in parallel to the struggle against institutionalised racism in South Africa and are mentioned only as an analogical plane on which the battle takes place. Feminist issues *per se* have often been approached from the 'Images of Women'⁵ perspective, which is always at risk of marking literature as non-feminist. The reasons for this hazard are twofold: either a particular text does not employ strategies of verisimilitude, failing to present real female experience that women readers could identify with, or it is 'too mimetic', not providing models of strong female characters that readers could imitate in reality. The third locus of neglect in connection to Gordimer's work is her status as a novelist; her work in short fiction is less regarded. The secondary status of Gordimer's short fiction may have its origin in its more allegorical enunciation of the problems of race, class, ethnicity, and national identity when compared to novels; therefore, they are less susceptible to the criticism Gordimer's readers seek.

Taking all the above-mentioned sources of neglect into consideration, Aleksandrowicz uses the tools offered by narratology to analyze the ways in which Gordimer's texts, not Gordimer herself (widely considered as a non-feminist writer) negotiates the feminist premise. She focuses on the act of communication between the flesh-and-blood author, the implied author, narrators, characters, implied, and real readers. She measures the distance between participants of particular levels of narration and examines narrative strategies that help Gordimer to rewrite the roles of a South African woman, although the author

herself consistently dissociated herself from engaging in open feminist movements. The techniques she uses to negotiate feminist politics in her short fiction embrace, among others, using free indirect speech, unreliable narration, fallible filters, and the changeable perception of the heterodiegetic narration in the narrative act.

Highly ironic, thematically Gordimer's texts often ridicule certain sets of features characters present. However, the specific choice of narrators and focalizers, and the relations between them, the extent of their perceptibility often persuade the reader to reconsider ethical judgments that he / she first makes. The hierarchical structure of narrative levels in literary texts leads to a distancing and engaging effect on the reader towards both the narrator and characters. As it has been suggested, the intratextual hierarchy can work both ways: it can encourage the reader to shorten the distance to the character on the basis of the narration regardless of the development of plot, or vice versa.

In her project, Aleksandrowicz examines conflicts and distortions: in heterodiegetic texts they will operate on the plane of narrator – focalizer, where the filter (focalizer) provides inaccurate, misled, or self-serving perceptions of events, situations, and other characters, thereby becoming the butt of the secret communion between the narrator and the reader. In stories that thematize issues crucial to feminists – such as e.g. heterosexual relationships and female solidarity – such distortions often encourage the reader to reinterpret information coming from other narrative levels. The rules governing the degrees of authority (described by Okopień-Sławińska and mentioned above) help Aleksandrowicz order the information and try to determine (not answer, as the project tries not to be predominantly interpretive) the questions texts ask, see if they lead the reader to adopt certain positions and establish the degree of freedom the reader has to take a particular stance towards gender and sexuality present in the text.

As the inviting marriage of feminism and theory of narrative is still unexplored in Polish theoretical tradition, Aleksandrowicz tries to refer to the American tradition of looking at texts from the feminist-narratological perspective and to adopt certain elements of Polish rhetorical narratology, such as the above mentioned example of Okopień-Sławińska's order of signals, her observations on the sender-receiver positions, and Głowiński's work on the virtual receiver.

4. Unnatural Narratology

4.1 The Unnatural in Samuel Beckett's First 'Trilogy'

There are literary works, according to the unnatural narratological axiom, that transcend any familiar natural, typological or genre category. It is for and because of them that unnatural narratology was gradually introduced as a concept

in the 1980s, although not yet under that name. Arguably, it is one of the most dynamically developing strands within narratology today. The most important approaches to the unnatural in narrative can be reduced to three:⁶

1. For Brian Richardson, an unnatural narrative conspicuously violates conventions of standard narrative forms and fictional modes alike;
2. Jan Alber defines the term ‘unnatural’ as denoting “physically, logically, or humanly impossible scenarios or events” (Alber et al. 2013, 102); his perspective is generally diachronic as he has attempted to trace the unnatural as a historically changing phenomenon;
3. Henrik Skov Nielsen argues that unnatural narratives “cue the reader to employ interpretational strategies that are different from those employed in nonfictionalized, conversational storytelling situations” (Alber et al. 2013, 104).

In his research, with a focus on the synchronic artistic practices of British and Polish writers in the period 1932-1989, Lutostański most often embraces Richardson’s and Nielsen’s approaches insofar as the former’s focus is on the untypical, the unconventional, or the unfamiliar with respect to literary genre and form, and the latter’s on “interpretational strategies”. A case in point of the embrace is Lutostański’s comparative analysis of Samuel Beckett’s *Molloy* (1951), *Malone Dies* (1951) and *The Unnamable* (1953), and Witold Gombrowicz’s *Trans-Atlantyk* (1953), *Pornografia* (1960) and *Kosmos* (1965). Lutostański examines the narrative structure of the novels and concludes that monologicity, scenicness and simultaneity need to be considered particularly influential.⁷ Importantly, they are frequently construed as ‘non-narrative’ (see Franz K. Stanzel, Dorrit Cohn, Michał Głowiński, Seymour Chatman, Gérard Genette, Uri Margolin, and Seweryna Wysłouch). If one recalls, for example, the status of Beckett’s prose fiction labelled as “anti-novelistic” (Brooke-Rose 1958), “antinarrative” (Prince 2003, 6), or “non-narrative” (Cohn 1978, 229), one might notice a strong correlation between the three dominant narrative devices and a common view of Beckett’s prose fiction (as being difficult, challenging or even unreadable). However, the negative terms have been, as Lutostański argues, overused and thus rendered obsolete in describing the meaning-making mechanism in a Beckett text. Therefore, the three theatre-derived devices are considered indicative of the ‘theatric’ aspect of Beckett’s three novels. ‘Theatric’ does not mean ‘theatrical’ as commonly pertaining to or describing live performances in theatre. However, the relation between those two concepts is retained in at least three ways. First, both ‘theatric’ and ‘theatrical’ should be associated with Greek *thea* (‘to show’) or *theasthai* (‘to look on’). Second, the ‘theatric’ refers to Erika Fischer-Lichte’s concept of “theatricality” since the theatre-derived devices, through their accumulation and configuration, become signs of theatrical signs and thus generate a ‘theatric’ semantics in a prose fictional medium (1992, 88). Finally, by naming Samuel Beckett’s first ‘trilogy’⁸ ‘theatric narratives’ Lutostański reverses S.E. Gontarski’s term of

“narrative theater” used to account for the dominant “narrative mode” in Beckett’s late drama (2004, 199).

The ‘theatric’ explores the mimetic dimension of fictional prose. The binary opposition of diegetic / mimetic or telling / showing traditionally corresponds to literature and theatre respectively (Rimmon-Kenan 2002, 108; Genette 1980, 162-170; Nünning / Sommer 2008, 337). As is universally agreed, “[t]he verbal fictional narrative is inherently diegetic” (Johansson 2012, 148-149). However, studies such as Chatman’s (1980) and Brian McHale’s (2004) provide ample evidence in favour of a continuum with the ‘purely’ diegetic phenomena (e.g. summary) and the ‘purely’ mimetic (scene) at its two poles as a more advantageous approach. Importantly, the dominant devices in the ‘trilogy’ univocally pinpoint the novels as mimetic.

The mimetic elements penetrate and permeate aspects of the novel, leading to the generation of a ‘theatric’ semantics, which, to some degree, approximates theatre. In his PhD dissertation Lutostański investigates extra-, intratextual and semantic evidence for that approximation. To give one example, Głowiński and Cohn contend that “there are no essential differences between the monodrama and oral monologue” and that “Virtually any monologue is a potentially theatrical work” (Głowiński 1973, 146, translation B.L.; Cohn 1978, 255). Beckett’s oeuvre provides plenty of examples of such works. *A Piece for Monologue* (1979) or *From an Abandoned Work* (1957) are said to be “almost indistinguishable from late prose fiction”, claims Gontarski (2004, 198-199).⁹ *The Unnamable* has been adapted as a radio play, read by Patrick Magee and with music by John Beckett, whilst *Company* (1980) has been staged by “some six major theatre companies” (Gontarski 2004, 199). The ‘trilogy’ could become adapted for stage through similar adaptation strategies.

When it comes to Nielsen’s “interpretational strategies”, a ‘theatric’ semantics necessitates an alternative approach to Beckett’s novels, which Lutostański calls “performative”.¹⁰ This term refers to the imitation or illusion of a performance and presupposes a simultaneous participation in that performance of the narrator and the narratee. In terms of narrative structure, the term focuses on a low order of semantic organisation: sentences, words, sounds. Associated with immediacy, intimacy and indirectness, it pertains to the event of reading as well as the narrator figure and to an intense interaction with and heightened attention to that figure. Finally, the term ‘performative’ shifts emphasis from “what the acts, actions, and movements” mean to “how they are perceived and experienced” and “what kind of impact” they have on readers (Fischer-Lichte 2008, 70-71). Consequently, it comes to account for the readers’ time- and place-specific subjective experience of and individual reaction to the novel.

4.2 Studies on the Unnatural in Poland

Theoretical studies on experimental literature in Poland have never formed a uniform body of works, let alone functioned under one rubric, or been pursued by a relatively stable and well-defined number of scholars. However, there has always been an interest in the transgressive, the experimental, the other. Numerous noted theoreticians wrote dissertations on Polish experimental prose fiction, and research in this area expanded considerably in the 1980s, which coincides with the publications of pioneering works by Brian Richardson in the field of unnatural literature. The four important works are: Seweryna Wysłouch's *Problematyka symultanizmu w prozie* (1981), Włodzimierz Bolecki's *Poetycki model prozy w dwudziestoleciu międzywojennym* (1982), Ryszard Nycz's *Sylny współczesne* (1984), and Maria Indyk's *Granice spójności narracji* (1987).

The first text is a book-length study on simultaneity in literature. Wysłouch analyzes nineteenth- and twentieth-century novels with respect to their temporal structure. The aspect she focuses on is the simultaneity of separate narrative sequences and its impact on the global construction of a work. This impact is mostly negative inasmuch as simultaneity sabotages a work's coherence. Therefore, after depicting and investigating specific types of simultaneity, Wysłouch goes on to examine the means of coherence, the so-called "cohering instructions" (Wysłouch 1981, 83). She differentiates a variety of coherence-undermining phenomena (e.g. non-successiveness or fragmentariness) and corresponding instructions (e.g. an objective modal frame).

The question of coherence is vital for Nycz and Indyk as well. The former tackles the revival of the old Polish genre of the *silva rerum* in twentieth-century fiction.¹¹ The revival, according to Nycz, has to do with two primary tendencies: explicit heterogeneity and thematization of a text's organisation. Nycz warily refuses to use the term 'novel' whatsoever, and develops an alternative terminology to differentiate between general *silva rerum* types. A good case in point is the so-called 'diary notebook', in Polish 'brulion', meaning a notebook or draft. The term refers to metatextual representations of a piece of reality or the act of reading. A 'diary notebook' teems with reviews of, commentaries on or essays about texts: the one that is being written and / or other texts. It is considered as a 'non-written text', that is a text that undergoes the process of being written; it is unfinished or incomplete, and thus capable of future modifications or restructurings. Together with its fragmentariness and deployment of 'simple forms' (anecdotes, conversations, protocols, *fait divers* etc.), which might be called signs of the *silva rerum*, the 'diary notebook' begs the question of what literature is and what it is constituted by. Hence an examination of the *silva rerum* is, essentially, an examination of literariness.

On the other hand, Maria Indyk focuses primarily on the novels of Leopold Buczkowski, one of the most important twentieth-century Polish experimental novelists, and investigates how coherence is undermined. She also looks into the "cohering instructions" intrinsically coded in the text. According to Indyk, Buczkowski's works are characterized by a gradual jettisoning of plot and by a

radical questioning of hierarchy, which leads to a juxtaposed structure of sequential and semi-autonomous scenes. The principal means of ‘accomplishing’ incoherence is an excessive use of ellipsis and an accumulation of autonomous minor narrators. As to instructions, the first and foremost is the unity of fictional reality in which characters move and act. Also, an emphasis is placed on language and on the repetitiveness of words, themes, characters, and the like.

Language, especially the fundamental difference between the language of prose and the language of poetry, is the subject matter of Bolecki’s *Poetycki model prozy*. According to Bolecki, the chief property of experimental fiction is a semantic shift of the point of narrative gravity from the ‘large semantic figures’ (plot, space, character, time) onto the ‘small semantic figures’ (words, word segments and sounds). This also brings about a change in the function of language: from the dominance of referential and vehicular functions, as in the nineteenth-century realist prose,¹² to modernist poetical and self-referential functions. Bolecki goes on to investigate reading practices at the publication of his exemplary ‘poetical novels’ and proves how deeply rooted, and thus normative or even axiomatic, were ‘realistic’ types of reading in the first half of the twentieth century.

Bolecki’s study of undermining of indispensable elements of prose fiction is echoed in more recent works: Bogdan Owczarek’s *Poetyka powieści niefabularnej* (1999) and Maria Woźniakiewicz-Dziadosz’s *Hiperpowieść* (2012). The former investigates the foundation of epic art: plot, and its fundamental understanding by Aristotle. He differentiates between unplotted narrative, one with non-linear sequence of events, and a plotted narrative, uneventful or eventless. He also looks on the crisis of representation in twentieth-century fiction and notices how narrative emphasis has shifted from the narrated to the narrating, from the referential to the auto-reflexive, from the unified to the fragmentary, and from the objective to the subjective. Similarly, his terminology of unplotted and a plotted narratives, by suggesting an alternative (non-Aristotelian) emplotment, provides alternative “cohering instructions”, for example thematic coherence, e.g. the identity of the protagonist; associative coherence, e.g. incident, symbol, character; or permutational coherence, e.g. repetitiveness of incidents or characters, semantic similarity between specific objects or events.

Finally, Woźniakiewicz-Dziadosz’s study looks into a very recent phenomenon in literature, the hyper-novel (cf. Bell 2013, Ryan 2001). Borrowed from Italo Calvino, the term refers to “fictional, non-linear, non-sequential, written narratives, whose construction is best described by means of network relation,” analogous to the “hypertextual organisation of cyberspace” (2012, 7). Woźniakiewicz-Dziadosz examines “new communicative situations” in contemporary literature promoted via new media, especially the Internet. She argues that they put an immense pressure on hitherto dominant understandings of prose fiction and narrative. The latter, for instance, is claimed no longer to reflect the progression of events and their linear, causal and chronological structuring. Its chief properties are: focal construction; intertextuality, (meta)fictionality and auto-reflexivity, explicitness of the narrative subject, and

intensive engagement of the recipient. Indeed, the no-longer passive position of the recipient appears as the most striking feature of hyper-fiction. A good case in point, Woźniakiewicz-Dziadosz claims, is that the fictional reality is not (re)presented but posed (like a riddle) or set (like a task) because of its volatility, polytextual simultaneity, the rhizome-like synchronicity of various medial signs, and a patchwork-like composition. The recipient's task is thus the active 'assembling' of disparate sections.

To sum up, there are three marked tendencies in Polish studies of the unnatural in narrative: the question of language (in prose fiction), the boundaries of the literary and the narrative, and cohering instructions. The interpretive process is then to investigate the unnatural and examine the extent of its impact on conventional or genre conceptions. Importantly, the theoretical discussions are thorough and inspirational, and their terminological apparatuses might be applied to experimental prose fiction in any literary environment. For example, Nycz's observations on *silva rerum* might shed a new light on novels such as Martin Amis's *The Rachel Papers* (1973) while Indyk's, Wylsouch's and Bolecki's elaborations of "cohering instructions" might prove productive in studying fiction such as Robbe-Grillet's, Beckett's, or, to give a more recent example, Eimear McBride's *A Girl Is a Half-Formed Thing* (2013).

5. Conclusions: GNG's Objectives for the Future

GNG's objectives and ambitions for the near future follow three main courses. The first and foremost is to officially establish GNG as an autonomous research group operating at the University of Gdańsk. Institutionalized as such, we will pursue further research into specific areas of narratology, as outlined above. The second goal is to organize a series of guest lectures at the University of Gdańsk that would accompany and compliment the "Literature. Narration. Business" classes in the summer semester 2015. The confirmed speakers so far are Michał Mrugalski from the University of Tübingen (the subject of the lecture will be the concept of fictionality and its complex status in contemporary narratology) and Magdalena Rembowska-Pluciennik from The Institute of Literary Research of the Polish Academy of Sciences (her talk will mainly concern cognitive narratology and its recent developments in Poland and around the world). It is our hope to hold the guest lectures on an annual basis and to invite renowned scholars from abroad.

Thirdly, in 2015-2016 we plan to publish a one- or two-volume collection of Polish translations of articles by leading narratologists today. We see the collection as indispensable for presenting the most recent developments in international narratology in Poland. Also, we want to publish a "New Narratology Series". Its idea is to include one literary text (say, a short story by Samuel Beckett) and various narratological analyses of that text, for example rhetorical, feminist, unnatural, etc. Thus, the series will demonstrate narratological poetics

at its best, that is, in practice and in a confrontation with diverse artistic material (the scope is therefore not only narrative prose fiction but other literary types, genres, and modes).

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¹ The titles of the papers presented are as follows: B. Lutostański: "An Introduction to the Narratological Analysis of Radio Plays"; D. Malcolm: "An Elliptical and Inconsequential Lady: Muriel Spark and the Texte Contestant"; M. Szuba: "Le Berger Extravagant: G. and the Experimental Novel"; M. Wojtyna: "The Poetics of Commonplace and the Short Story".

² The titles of some of the papers presented are as follows M. Aleksandrowicz: "Those Were the Things We Noticed About Her: Corporeal Narratology in Nadine Gordimer's Selected Short Stories", Marvellous Bodies: Corporeality in Literature, Madrid (24-25 May 2013); M. Wojtyna: "T. F. Powys and the Rhetoric of the Short Story Beginning", 13th International Conference on the Short Story in English, Vienna (16–19 July 2014); B. Lutostański: "The Narratology of Radio Plays", Audionarratology: Interfaces of Sound and Narrative, Paderborn (11–12 September 2014).

³ The book (working title: *The Ordinary and the Short Story*) will be published by Peter Lang in 2015 as part of the "[Gdansk Transatlantic Studies in British and North American Culture](#)" series edited by Marek Wilczyński.

⁴ "(1) In the case of a conflict between implied and thematized information the implied information is more powerful and decides on the way the thematized information should be interpreted; (2) in the case of a conflict between several pieces of information thematized on different textual levels the information from the higher level is more powerful. Information from lower levels is always interpreted and reinterpreted in the light of the information from the higher levels. [...] The revocation of the narrator's opinion about the character can only be conducted through a higher sender position" (2001, 107, translation by Marta Aleksandrowicz). As Okopień-Sławińska observes, these rules are subject to multiple variations whenever the authority of senders-narrators is undermined (ibid).

⁵ One of the most popular and fruitful branches of feminist criticism presenting female stereotypes in male-, but also female-authored fiction (cf. Moi 1985).

⁶ The following distinctions present a synthesised view on the basis of a number of theoretical studies, for example Alber et al. (2010); Richardson (2011); Alber et al. (Eds.) (2011), Alber et al. (2013), Alber et al. (Eds.) (2013).

⁷ *Molloy*, *Malone Dies* and *The Unnamable* are organized with three unities: of narrative subject, place and time of action. The four narrators are simultaneously exclusive storytellers and protagonists of their stories. They dwell in specific, identical locations (the room) and the narrated time overlaps with the narrating time. The so-called zero point of time orientation (the moment of uttering text) is fixed in the present at all times despite partial subjugation of the narrating time to the chronology of the narrated time. Moreover, references to their past and memories make Molloy, Moran, Malone and the Unnamable specific fictional autobiographers. However, the formal features (metalepsis and interdiegesis) as well as the subjects' properties (cognitive, epistemological and mnemonic limitations) sabotage the genre parameters. They also corroborate the undermining of the ontic stability of the fictional reality and the questioning of homodiegetic autonomy of the narrating I (located in the present moment) and the narrated I (located in the past). Their stories, because of an accumulation of narratorial utterances regarding the act and nature of narrating, are imbued with explicitly fictional and auto-

reflexive qualities. The narrative action shifts from the representation of sequence of events to the representation and discussion of the process of narrating.

⁸ Parentheses are employed over 'trilogy' inasmuch as Beckett is said to resist this name for *Molloy*, *Malone Dies* and *The Unnamable* (Ackerley / Gontarski 2004, 586).

⁹ *From an Abandoned Work* was initially collected with other theatrical works (in *Breath and Other Shorts* [1971]) but now it is anthologized as short fiction.

¹⁰ See "The Performance Issue" of *Journal of Beckett Studies* (23.2 [2014]) for more theoretical and practical examinations of the interface of prose, theatre and performance.

¹¹ *Silva rerum* (Latin for 'forest of things') is a collection of miscellaneous texts by various authors. From 16th to 18th centuries it was also a home or family chronicle composed by members of the noble class, which included factual and fictional texts but also practical tips, essayistic articles, etc.

¹² The vehicular function of language points out to specific properties of the language. It serves as a 'mediator' transposing different activity with 'maximum inactivity'. In other words, vehicular language is constructed in such a way as to communicate the meaning of a message without the message's properties getting in the way. "Vehicularity is maximal transparency of language" (Ziomek qtd. in Bolecki 1982, 6).