

Teksty Drugie 2013, 1, s. 57-74
Special Issue – English Edition



From Ideology of the Body to Ideologized Carnality: Sports and Literature in 1918-1939 (selected examples).

Wojciech Śmieja

Przeł. Benjamin Koschalka

Wojciech ŚMIEJA

From Ideology of the Body to Ideologized Carnality: Sports and Literature in 1918-1939 (selected examples)

Here, naked youths, tanned and lithe, climbed in black underpants onto a tower with five levels and leapt from various heights into the dead arm of the River Dunajec, deep at this point – some head first, others feet first, which seemed strangest to me. Boats, canoes, swimming, nudity – everything that used to be the preserve of beaches on foreign coasts today just happens, amid life, among townspeople out for a walk.¹

The above description comes from Zofia Nałkowska's 1935 *Diaries*. The writer's recollection brings together almost all the aspects of the issue that I would like to discuss: the male body, the cult of physical fitness, and the novelty of sports in bourgeois life. In another extract from *Diaries*, Nałkowska connects the "sportification" of reality and the cult of the body with the political sphere: "Teatime discussion on the Radio. Fear of where this is all leading. Today's leaders like brawn, good cheer and optimism" (Nałkowska 1988 58). Her fear became more concrete when the reflection led towards Fascist Italy, where the "demonism of flesh and blood," and "red biology" were an element of political manipulation, the basis of its decorum and a narcotic stirring up the masses:

The cry of the orator is utterly bestial, and one can make out the words "Vittoria," "eroi," "giustizia." In the breaks the chorus responds – the joyful holler of the rabble. One hears without believing. From this comes naked dread, the demonism of flesh and blood, some red biology, bedlam. Yet there is no doubt that this bedlam is simulated. (28)

The emotions of the crowd are guided, bodies disciplined, the bedlam controlled, the muscle imposed, the ecstasy channelled, and sports are publicized – how far we are from

¹ Nałkowska, Zofia, *Dzienniki*, vol. 4: 1935-1939, part 2, ed. and intro. Hanna Kirchner. Warszawa: Czytelnik, 1988: 20.

Julian Tuwim's famous *Spring – a Dithyramb* from 1918, in which carnality was a joy in itself, indulging the body was a kind of ideology, and the biological and anarchic amorality of the crowd was an object of the poet's fearful fascination: Włodzimierz Maciąg writes that "The poetic power of *Spring* is produced in the violent collision of degrading emotions – contempt, disgust, distaste at the cruelty of the crowd – with uplifting emotions – admiration, rapture, glorification; yet both sequences concern the same phenomena, the same people, the same behaviors."²

All – yours! With your hips, your thighs, dash!
Let the dance of indecent excitement go! It matters not!
O, how I praise you, crowd, with exalted words
And you, Spring, that a criminal is begotten!³

The human body is a subject that is neglected by gender studies in Poland, and I consider the means of its conceptualization in 1920s and 1930s literature to be particularly interesting. In the 1920s, Jan Lechoń, one of those who – to quote a poem by Antoni Słonimski – “cast off the coat of Conrad,” showed readers a burly, young, muscled body, rounded biceps and solid shoulders. At first it was not clear what to do with this body. In the first decade of independent Poland, the liberated male body and male carnality became an ideology in themselves. Newly discovered as an object of literary description, cultural representation, education through sports, rest, but also work, they became an important component of the avant-garde poetics of the time. Rather soon, though, the delight at its possibilities would be replaced by fear at its political appropriation, the first signs of which appeared in 1923 in the work of Tadeusz Peiper. By the 1930s, these concerns had become widespread. In the second decade of the interwar years, the *ideology of the body* gave way to *ideologized carnality*, which aroused the fear of the liberal elites which it consigned to the margins. This was because the model male body incarnated (if you will excuse the pun) the ominous tendencies of the Fascistization of politics and the popularizing of culture. The figure of the writer, the man of letters who in the 1920s very frequently gave a self-description, in keeping with the dominant model of male carnality, as strong, physically fit, sporty, replaced the figure of someone weak, physically fragile, standing on the sidelines of change, and outside of the main current of culture.⁴ Weakness would be a feature that was not only class-based, but also racial, in this case concerning the Poles as a nation. In

² Maciąg, Włodzimierz, *Nasz wiek XX. Przewodnie idee literatury polskiej 1918–1980*. Wrocław: Zakład Narodowy im. Ossolińskich, 1992: 18.

³ Tuwim, Julian, “Spring – a Dithyramb” (translated here by Ben Koschalka).

⁴ Cf. The texts of Gałczyński, e.g. “Wciąż uciekamy” [“We are still running”], in which the poem's collective intellectual protagonist is on the side of atrophy and dying (Gałczyński, Konstanty Ildefons, “Wciąż Uciekamy” in: idem, *Poezje*. Warszawa: Alga, 1979: 345) or “the generational *credo* of the ‘Zagary’ poetic group” – Miłosz's poem “Wam” [“To You”], in which the young revolutionary heroes belong to a “cursed generation,” and, despite the appearance of strength, are “already falling” (see Beres, Stanisław, *Ostatnia wileńska plejada. Szkice o poezji kręgu Zagarów*. Warszawa: PEN, 1990: 47).

Antoni Sobański's description of the German race, the conviction that young Germans represented a stronger race is striking, better personifying the modern corporeal model of manhood than their Polish peers:

The reason for the simply excellent physical state of this German youth, enduring poverty and inaction for so many years, must remain a mystery. Sports, the cult of the body, sun and water – all this exists in Poland too. And yet, when, the day after my return from Germany, I saw a parade of the Polish military preparation, and compared these lads with their German peers, despite myself the thought occurred to me to wonder whether at the time of Grunwald the physical condition of our races was the same. And if so, then what wins? I imagine that the German youth is by heredity burdened with health and the effects of a higher level of life. Clearly, almost two decades of poverty cannot destroy this heritage.⁵

The columnist's concern was shared by the ruling authorities – a consistent objective of the policy of the Second Republic was to improve the physical condition of its citizens. The independent country used all available resources to make up for the deficiencies left after the partitions. The authorities were keen to promote physical activity among citizens as widely as possible, and this intensified in the 1930s – in 1932 there were 5259 active sporting clubs, with 289,500 members, numbers which by 1938 had increased to 8,188 clubs with 469,500 people active in them.⁶ Physical education was closely linked to military preparation, with the Sokół (“Hawk”) Sport Society and Strzelec (“Shooter”) Marksmen's Association striving to create the model “citizen soldier.” The statute of the latter organization (whose strength was shown by its half a million members in 1938) states that the overriding objective was to “arouse and strengthen among members the national spirit, discipline, moral courage and physical fitness, as well as to spread military knowledge.” “Shooting” education was characterized by: the cult of the leader (Józef Piłsudski, and later Edward Rydz-Śmigły), militarism, and anticommunism.⁷ These societies, shooting associations and sporting corporations provide a background against which we can explore the subject of the conceptualization of sport and the carnal ideal of manhood in literature.

Yet before the model image of the male body could be subjected to ideological pressures from various sides, it would appear as a new subject in 1920s avant-garde literature. All poetics of the time – from the moderate group Skamander, via anarchic futurism to the extremely experimental Krakow Avant-garde – made of the image of the sporty male body a symbol of a new era, a new lifestyle. The “Mañifesto concerning imediate futurization of life” declared, let us recall, that “We rejekt umbrellas, hats, bowlerz, we will walc with uncovered head. Bare necks. We need every one to get as

⁵ Sobański, Antoni, *Cywil w Berlinie*, ed. Tomasz Szarota. Warszawa: Sic!, 2006: 53.

⁶ Jastrzębski, Włodzimierz, *Historia kultury fizycznej*, Bydgoszcz: Wyd. Akademii Bydgoskiej, 2005: 73.

⁷ Szymańczak, Z. and J. Hildebrant, “Wychowanie obronne młodzieży przez organizacje społeczne w systemie pozamilitarnym II Rzeczypospolitej”, in: Kubiak, Stanisław, *Polska odrodzona w 1918 roku*. Bydgoszcz: Wyd. Uczelniane WSP, 1990: 220.

much tan as possible.”⁸ This postulate was realized in the social reality by Aleksander Wat in a rather unrefined form: Anatol Stern carried the naked poet in a wheelbarrow through the streets of Warsaw.⁹ The body and carnality at this time were spread between biologism (visible, for example, in the quoted words of the manifesto) and machinism, perhaps best expressed by Bruno Jasiński in *Polish Futurism (A Summary)*: “Art should lift a machine to the level of the ideal of erotic humanity.”¹⁰

In Kazimierz Wierzyński’s “sporting” poems from the volume *Laur Olimpijski* [“Olympic Laurel”], the sportsman’s body is generally described either as a mechanism or in terms of animal carnality. In 1927, when the volume was written, neither way of depicting shocked to the extent that they had at the time of *Picador* and the first futurist manifestos. Having become “familiar,” they could harmonise with the neo-classical form of the poem. Their “lexicalization” in the poetic lexicon of the time is perhaps best shown by the poem “Paddock i Porritt” [“Paddock and Porritt”], in which Wierzyński compares two sporting styles, the mechanistic and the biologistic:

One rolls from side to side like a rattling tank
The other blown by the breeze glides a little, like a wave...
One is a machine in a rush, alive, strong and young
The other is speed itself, the law of motion, nature.¹¹

Perhaps due to the convention of competition, Wierzyński’s volume expresses the hope and expectations that are linked with the revived idea of Olympianism and the popularization of sports. As readers we are especially struck by the frequency with which the adjective “new” occurs. In the keynote opening poem “Defilada atletów” [“Athletes’ parade”], “newness” functions in a “them” and “us” opposition. “We” – a collective lyrical subject – renews the face of the earth: “We surrounded the earth with a new panorama / And to its new beat we give a step” (Wierzyński 1981 115). This face will be different, better: “Our song joins peoples and forges them strong.” So sports are at the same time a pacifist activity and, importantly, a supranational one. Several years after the end of

⁸ Bruno Jasiński “Manifest w sprawie natychmiastowej futuryzacji życia,” in: Jasiński, Zbigniew and Helena Zaworska (ed.), *Antologia polskiego futuryzmu i nowej sztuki*. Warszawa: Zakład Narodowy im. Ossolińskich, 1978: 10.

⁹ Jasiński, Zbigniew “Introduction” to: Jasiński and Zaworska 1978: LIX.

¹⁰ Jasiński, Bruno, “Futurizm polski (bilans),” in: Jasiński and Zaworska 1978: 51. The fascination with the mechanisation of corporeality fits into the aesthetic canons of European futurism. George L. Mosse claims referring in particular to German culture- that its post-war universality grew on the basis of technicisation of the wartime experience. Cf. Mosse, George L., *Nationalism and Sexuality. Respectability and Abnormal Sexuality in Modern Europe*. New York: Howard Fertig, 1985: 124. Perhaps it was this experience of war, in which people were only a supplement to the machine, that contributed to the revaluing of the mechanisation of corporeality: it became weal and threatened by the double-edged sword of Jasiński’s *Nogi Izolda Morgan* [“The Legs of Izolda Morgan”].

¹¹ Wierzyński, Kazimierz, *Poezja*, ed. Michał Spruskiński. Kraków: WL, 1981: 119.

the Great War, this no doubt rang especially loud and true. We do not know who “they” are and what ideology they confess, but in practice the reader fills this unspecified place with an image of those to blame for the outbreak of war.

Our song knows not your raptures and words,
Another standard called us and lay on our heads,
We are famed for inspiration, muscles and space,
And hearts which a marathon endure.

Now, in the post-war era, the time of the radio, aeroplane, women’s emancipation and jazz bands, the person too would be important – his arrival is signalled by the poem “Panie na start” [“Ladies get set”] (123). Bestiality and biologism were no longer treated as a civilizational threat or a certain kind of “tumbling” from the human pedestal – on the contrary, they were the aim of sporting efforts: the text “Bieg na przelaj” [“Cross-country race”] is concluded with the exclamation: “What a marvellous herd!/ Demi-gods! Demi-people! Animals!” Bestiality and divinity are combined not in opposition, but in their sameness: the demigod, just like an animal, is beyond human morality. Bestiality in terms of the “sporting classicism” of Wierzyński’s poem therefore means the heroization of the body, which in this (natural)¹² state demonstrates culture’s lack of authenticity and is a sign of the true essence of humanity.¹³

An extremely interesting work in *Olympic Laurel* is “Match Footballowy” [“Football Match”], in which the poet speaks with admiration of the enthusiasm of crowds for soccer: “Here a secret meaning binds and enthusiasm bonds/ A million people lounging in the great audience... And show me now – where, in which theaters/ a million spectators will fire with such a mighty voice.” The tone is enthusiastic, and the juxtaposition of sports as mass entertainment with elite theatre attributes negative associations to the latter: the European culture inherited from previous eras is worthless. Although the poem does not spell this out, the context of the era makes the reason obvious: it was compromised on the fields of the Great War (apart from the theatre, this is represented by the openly militaristic connotations of “standards”). Yet the same poem uses – and this provides great dissonance against the background of the volume’s pacifist meaning – a series

¹² However, the naturalness has an overtly conventional character. The way in which Wierzyński represents the male body is surprisingly close to the Fascist aesthetic, with which it shares a classical inspiration: “the male body, if presented publicly, had to be carefully prepared – so hairless, smooth and tanned skin. The strength and potency of the man were supposed to be represented by cool, rather unerotic poses: the ‘Arian’ should be defined by ‘silent greatness.’” (Maiwald, Stefan and Gerd Mischler, *Seksualność w cieniu swastyki. Świat intymny człowieka w polityce Trzeciej Rzeszy* [Original: *Sexualität unter dem Hakenkreuz*] (Polish trans. Ryszard Wojnakowski). Warszawa: Trio, 2003: 84).

¹³ Cf. Mosse 1985: 64. The convention of bestiality can also be realised in terms of grotesqueness – the human-as-animal body is then uncontrolled, greedy, dirty and clumsy. So grotesquely bestial are those resisting the ideology of the body in inter-war pacifist literature (Remarque’s *All Quiet on the Western Front* was published two years after Wierzyński’s volume, in 1929).

of very military comparisons and epithets. These are the expression of the underlying anxieties which would be manifested two years later by Władysław Broniewski (more of which later). The ball in the poem is a “missile,” “sent as if from the barrel of a mortar,” “jumping from city to city.” Perhaps it is the very confrontational nature of this team sport that is the cause of its undying popularity – yet this is the only text in *Olympic Laurel* in which the audience appear.

In “Olympic Laurel,” the author as speaker is discretely put to one side, and we can say little about it: standing on the sidelines, it seems to admire the sporting spectacle, sporty bodies and feverish crowds. But in 1920s poetry, self-creations of the personas of lyric poems are frequent: in them, the poets are often sportsmen, record holders, or strongmen. The picture is supposed to be monumental, like in Anatol Stern’s “Nagi człowiek w śródmieściu” [“Naked Man in the City Centre”]. The poem’s protagonist, and at the same time its speaker, roams naked around town (“slender body,” “hard leathery soles”) until “beautifully I fancied/ to become a statue brown, having climbed the plinth// And look from high at the gleaming windows/ Of cafes, spewed out from time to time by the crowds.”¹⁴

From the outset, sport as a factor shaping the ideal of male carnality had a rival – work. “Sporting bodies” were criticized from left-wing and proletarian positions. Broniewski, for example, in his poem “Lekka atletyka” [“Athletics”] from the volume *Troska i pieśń* [“Care and Song”], described sports as a means for the landed classes to produce cannon fodder. In all its perfection, the sportsman’s body is a lethal tool. The speaker addressed sportsmen in an entirely different way from that of “Olympic Laurel,” pacifist, uncritical and fascinated with carnality:

Winners of decathlons,
Sprinters at the finish –
You’ll get live ammunition,
You’ll get sharp bayonets.

You must be courageous,
You wear the uniform
Of Europe in crisis and baloney,
Unemployment and dictators¹⁵

¹⁴ In: Jarosiński and Zaworska 1978: 207. The biographical poem “We czterech” [“The Four of Us”] in Józef Czechowicz’s debut volume is a similar testimony to the sense of power. The poet describes his literary friendship with Waław Gralowski and Konrad Bielski, who (along with Czechowicz’s brother Stanisław) are compared to the four horsemen of the apocalypse, and at the same time sportsmen. The poetic career is presented here as no more and no less than an athletics meeting: “There are four of us at the start / There are four of us at the golden line of the comet / ...there are four of us aiming for the finish / First!” (Czechowicz, Józef, “We czterech,” in: idem, *Wybór poezji*, ed. Tadeusz Kłak. Warszawa: Zakład Narodowy im. Ossolińskich, 1985: 14).

¹⁵ Broniewski, Władysław, “Lekka atletyka,” in: idem, *Wiersze zebrane*. Warszawa: PIW, 1956: 102-103.

This poem, essentially an appeal meant to raise sportsmen's class awareness, ends in a call to "turn the bayonets round – against the governments!," for their military and physical fitness to become a tool in the class struggle.

A similar risk in forming the new person through sports are perceived by Tadeusz Peiper, who in his renowned 1923 manifesto "Tędy" ["This Way"] criticises futurism for its radicalism, claiming that the apotheosizing of the gymnastic step, one of Marinetti's famous postulates, inexorably led to fascism.¹⁶ Although "the gymnastic step was able to be a salutary reaction to lunatism, which around the year 1900 dominated literature [...], to be a slogan of health, masculinity, agreement with life: it was able to be a call for a new person,"¹⁷ according to Peiper it led to the "trivialization and vulgarization of life" (Peiper 1979 104). In spite of such poems as "Football," in which the image of a bird in flight overlaps with the image of a flying ball (297), the Krakow avant-garde places physical labor before the shaping ideal of male carnality: as Peiper's poem "Z Górnego Śląska" ["From Upper Silesia"] proclaims, the "walls [from workers'] muscles" are the object of admiration of the avant-gardists.

At least in towns and cities, sports in the 1930s became a significant element of social life. The appearance of this phenomenon itself, as well as of the model of carnality that it produced, occupied literature and literary journalism. Their reactions were very different.

On the face of things, it is a simple task to depict sports in lyric poetry. But one critic shows caution:

It is hard to enclose the heroism of the sporting battle, the beauty of disinterested effort, mastering one's weakness, the splendour of the battle and competition in stadiums, on tracks, jumps...in the metaphorical formula of a poem....rhetoric replaces the dynamic.¹⁸

It is therefore no surprise that attempts to make a lyric record of sporting toils are not especially common. The topos of sports is much more frequently the basis of a metaphor, a symbol of "modernity," than an intrinsic subject of lyric poetry. An example of such a text is Konstanty Ildefons Gałczyński's 1931 poem "Každy wiek ma swoje sporty" ("Every age has its sports"). In it, the poet forms a versified *exemplum vitae*, achieving comic effect by placing the eternal theme of didactic literature, which divides life into specific periods, together with types of activity accorded to them, alongside the triviality of the contents (a child's "squatting" on a potty) and a modern staffage of sporting disciplines attributed to the successive stages of life, including "Swedish gymnastics," "squats," "open-air games," "cross-country" and "match." The enumeration finishes in the last stanza "pole vault' to eternity" (Gałczyński 1979: 189).¹⁹

¹⁶ Peiper's text was written at the time of the socio-political revolution in Italy.

¹⁷ Peiper, Tadeusz, "Tędy," in: idem, *Pisma wybrane*, ed. Stanisław Jaworski, Wrocław 1979: 103.

¹⁸ Marx, Jan, *Grupa poetycka "Kwadruga"*. Warszawa: LSW, 1983: 193.

¹⁹ In another of Gałczyński's texts ("Concert" from 1926), we encounter the comparison "the stars in the sky are spinning like a velodrome."

A lyric poet who followed in Wierzyński's footsteps and surrendered to his admiration for sport was Stefan Flukowski. Although in his work he did not avoid the threat mentioned by Jan Marx, i.e. use of "rhetoric," his series of Olympic poems from the volume *Dębem rosnę* ["I Grow into an Oak"] (1936) is an interesting attempt to combine a literal and metaphorical nature in presenting sporting themes. In "Ofiarowanie" [Sacrifice], which takes the form of an extended apostrophe, we find the collective recipient of the lyrical confessions of a member of the avant-garde group Kwadryga. This means sportsmen, to whom homage should be paid: "So those of you who are the fastest runners in the world,/ tireless in hurling, and the furthest jumpers/ to you, thrice to you!!!"²⁰

Flukowski's volume has three parts. Notably, the first is titled "Piechota" ["Infantry"] and is a monumental, almost epic, but bloody picture of war. In the poems included here we watch uniformized human masses, divisions and regiments moving along dusty roads. Following these images of explicitly catastrophic provenience, there comes the three-part "javelin cycle," comprising the poems "Obraz oszczepu" ["Image of a Javelin"], "Wojna" ["War"] and "Olimpiada" ["Olympiad"]. Sports (and very specifically the javelin throw) are universalized here as the experience of history and of human nature. In the titular "Image of a Javelin," we read: "None of us asked then,/ In the years of naïve youth,/ why the javelin holds in the clenched fist/ and where the ash missile will reach" (Flukowski 1936 35). Two interpretations are legitimate: "the years of naïve youth" might be childhood years (the javelin is then a boy's toy which gives rise to a soldier), or the times of primitive humanity (the javelin then becoming a weapon-tool in the hands of the hominid, in which perhaps the whole future of mankind is cursed). The javelin thrown in the poem falls "on the red field of war," but it might also fall "on the ellipse of the stadium," where "the Olympiad is closing us/ in harvest time, in the long and peaceful time of summer" (36). Note that, whereas for Wierzyński sports satisfied a human need for competition and almost in some evolutionary order replaced war, which belonged to the past, for Flukowski both pursuits, sporting or martial, are equal. The next two poems of the cycle, "War" and "Olympiad," provide a poetic (somewhat diffuse) exemplification of the two possibilities mentioned. This architecture of the cycle seems to contain the suggestion that sports can be a pacifist substitute for war, but it is not, as Wierzyński suggested a decade earlier, an evolutionally later creation; perhaps it is only ethically higher. The use of this rhetorically worn-out topos in 1936 (Berlin Olympics) should be treated as in keeping with the current of common moods, which, on the one hand, clearly divide sporting and political-military competition, but on the other hand, put Olympic fitness into the ideological framework of nationalistic concepts²¹ – after all, the same year, Antoni Słonimski wrote about the Berlin Olympics and its repercussions in the radio and press as follows:

The very idea of the Olympics has been falsified. Sports conceived in this way do not bring nations together, but rears antagonisms and hatreds. Freedom and noble rivalry in physical exercise is changed ever more clearly into some pre-war manoeuvres mobilizing the passion

²⁰ Flukowski, Stefan, *Dębem rosnę*. Warszawa: Towarzystwo Wydawnicze, 1936: 43.

²¹ The connection between the parts of the cycle – "Infantry," "Image of a Javelin" and "Olympiad" – remains open to interpretation.

of the crows. We read ridicule of Czechoslovakia for “bringing up the rear,” and reports from the Olympics have adopted the terminology of war reports. The ambitions of the nation have been put at the end of Martyna’s shoe. The radio blared all day about what our fellows are doing, how they are “giving a hiding,” “walloping,” until it finally fell into an ashamed silence when it turned out that Berlin is our sporting “Waterloo”... The lie of the Olympics sent doves to all the corners of the world and crowned the most dangerous militarism in the world with an olive branch.²²

The next group of poems from *I Grow into an Oak*, simply titled “Wiersze Olimpijskie” [“Olympic Poems”], comprises the texts “Ofiarowanie” [“Sacrifice”], Memorjał Alfreda Freyer” [“Memorial to Alfred Freyer”], “Start Pływaków” [“Start of the Swimming Race”], “100 metrów dowolnym” [“100 Meter Freestyle”], and “Kort” [“Court”]. Here, sports are a peculiar experience subjected to poetic rhetoric according to, speaking in general terms, the rules designated by Wierzyński.

The year 1933 saw the publication of Jan Parandowski’s *Dysk olimpijski* [“Olympic Discus”], which presents the Games in a similar way to Flukowski. The novel, which claimed third prize in the literary competition accompanying the Berlin Olympics, is above all an apotheosis and evocation of Antiquity. Its action unfolds in 476 BC at the first Olympics following the end of the Hellenic wars, during which two main protagonists, Ikkos and Sotion, compete. Yet Parandowski’s erudite display does not exhaust the book’s semantic potential. Its absolutely contemporary meanings were expounded by Stanisław Piasecki in a review in *ABC*, a newspaper attached to the National Radical Camp party.

In the unprecedented development of the Olympic Games, still healthy and pure...being a symbol of physical and spiritual fitness...already the first signs of the changes bringing decline to the Olympiads and Greece have appeared. The process which from Greek palaestrae and gymnasia would lead to the famous school of gladiators in Alexandria has already begun... The same process that took place in Greece over the course of centuries is taking place in the modern world over decades.²³

The process which Piasecki was referring to, and which follows Parandowski in building his fears, was the disappearance of noble amateurism and the Greek ideal of *kalokagathia* and emergence in their place of professionalized sports, incorporated in the mechanisms of ludic culture and – as Parandowski showed in the epilogue to his novel – toxic: “in 1896 the First Olympiad of the modern era was opened. The spirit of Greek agonistics started its second life, to repeat in it all the old virtues and mistakes.”²⁴

²² Słonimski, Antoni, “Chore zdrowie fizyczne – czego Owens nie przeskoczy – nie gołębie, lecz Kruki,” in: idem, *Kroniki tygodniowe, 1927-1939*, ed. Władysław Kopaliński. Warszawa: PIW, 1956: 487.

²³ Piasecki, Stanisław, “Ikkos i Sotion,” *ABC Literacko-Artystyczne* 1933 no. 108, cited in: Piasecki, Stanisław, *Prosto z mostu. Wybór publicystyki literackiej*, ed. Maciej Urbanowski. Kraków: Arcana, 2003.

²⁴ Parandowski, Jan, “Dysk olimpijski,” in: idem, *Dziela wybrane*, vol. 1, Warszawa: Czytelnik, 1957: 445.

If we can permit ourselves to make a generalization, it is that prose writers have considerably more space to demonstrate what they can do, since particularly in the 1930s sports were becoming a fairly common element of the world represented in the novel. Particularly popular in this respect, mainly thanks to Jarosław Iwaszkiewicz and Witold Gombrowicz, was tennis (Słonimski was another great tennis lover). Sports in *Ferdydurke*, *Possessed*, *Zmowa Mężczyzn* [“Conspiracy of Men”], *Pasje błędomierskie* [“Błędomierz Passions”] and even Roman Dmowski’s *Dziedzictwo* [“Heritage”] are something that young people do. This may seem obvious, but we should note that this “sporty lifestyle” is not a neutral attribute of youth, but with the new attitude to the body represents an expression of the emancipation of young people, their rebellion against the socio-cultural conditions they were left with, and even – as was the case at the turn of the 20th century in Germany – their detachment with cultural continuity. The best example of this, albeit a grotesque one, is the conflict of Professor Pimko with the “modern schoolgirl” in *Ferdydurke*. But there are more examples – just think of Iwaszkiewicz’s 1929 story entitled *Przyjaciele* [“Friends”]. In it, the amoral “sporty” Achilles Korecki has a romance, and at the same time an ideological battle, with the passeistic aesthete Wiesław Wolff, who commits suicide, but leaves his fortune to his younger colleague. Standing over his patron’s corpse, Korecki contemplates where he could build a tennis court.²⁵

“New corporeality” (German Ritz’s term), emerges in the face of the European culture compromised in the trenches of the First World War as an exceptionally attractive proposal. In *Conspiracy of Men*, written in the second half of the 1920s, “new corporeality is above all a symbol of the new time or new person, but not of sublimation. The sports grounds near Kielce bring together a new society no longer divided by class.”²⁶ The novel’s fascination with the body reaches its apogee in a scene in which one of the young protagonists, Janek Szmit, presents his body to his paralysed mother:

Look at my muscles, mother. Do you see? Here and here... And the chest? Oh! And my legs, mother, look as I stretch them – one, two, one, two, just like strings, forward, to the side, back...! Oh! You see, mother, what kind of son you have.

At this sight, Mrs Szmit crosses herself in horror: “‘You have no shame,’ she repeated.”²⁷ The contrast of the figure of the sporty son and the paralyzed mother is duplicated here by the contrast of Janek’s “shameless” exhibitionism with the traditionally defensive gesture of Mrs Szmit’s crossing herself. According to Ritz, the fascination with male corporeality (which is not shared by the main protagonist, Władzio Sawicki, thus

²⁵ The exceptional character of the conflict of “young” with “old” in the 1930s is emphasised especially strongly in right-wing discourse, e.g. in Bolesław Piasecki’s manifesto pamphlets: *Duch czasów nowych a Ruch Młodych* (Warszawa 1935) and *Przełom Narodowy. Zasady Programu Narodowo-Radykalnego* (Warszawa 1937).

²⁶ Ritz, German, *Jarosław Iwaszkiewicz. Pogranicza nowoczesności* (trans. Andrzej Kopacki), Kraków: Universitas, 1999: 157.

²⁷ Iwaszkiewicz, Jarosław, *Zmowa mężczyzn*. Warszawa: Czytelnik, 1975: 94.

automatically putting him outside the male community²⁸) planted within the conflict of the old with the new:

is not displayed in the staffage of the avant-garde or pre-Fascist fascination with the young “corporeal” person, and does not have such references to an era that material from the mid-1920s might throw up – for this fascination with the body is not manifested radically enough. Its reference to the era ultimately only has a metaphorical character. The ahistoricity of the new corporeality is an expression of the ahistorical condition of the new, normalizing Polish society almost ten years after attaining independence. (Ritz 1999)

Interestingly, the Swiss scholar argues that in *Pasje błędomierskie* [“Błędomierz Passions”], written a decade later, there is a characteristic evolution of attitudes to the body: “Amoral corporeality becomes [in *Passions*] a catastrophic image of society on the eve of the Holocaust” (163). The underrated work that *Błędomierz Passions* is locates corporeality and sports in an area that we are already familiar with – that of the conflict of the new with the old – but also refers them to such questions as changes in European culture, nationalism, and crisis of values. The intrigue is played out around the presentation of the procession of the Passion, which is supposed to attract tourists to the titular Błędomierz and make a new Oberammergau out of it. This idea is pushed through by Władysław Kanicki, a young Warsaw poet and absolute career type. This idea provokes ambivalent reactions in the town: on the one hand, people are enticed by the vision of easy earnings, but on the other hand, the fear arises that the ancient local tradition will lose its authenticity and turn into a “tourist attraction” for visitors.²⁹ Kunicki’s most stubborn opponent is the 24 year old Otton Krobowski. When we meet him at the theatre, he is “clumsy in a dark blue, quite simple suit. Clumsy – meaning that he moved as if he were naked, which after all looks very bad.”³⁰ He is linked to his main adversary, Kanicki, by a belief in the “decline of the West,” although the conclusions that they draw are diametrically different:

And also the thought of the death of European culture hung on to him (Kanicki). However, in this respect he could not count on Otton’s sympathy:

“What do you think?” he asked, “Are we the last?”

“What do you mean, the last?” said Otton with a smile, “A new race is growing.

Fine strapping lads.”

“Yes, physical strength, that’s known. And the head?”

Otton reddened, not knowing how to express his thought.

“Heads think better now too, more healthily, with no fog. Without looking in the mirror.”

(Iwaszkiewicz 1976 47)

²⁸ Cf. Śmieja, Wojciech, “Dlaczego Pana powieść nie jest homoseksualna?” *Zmowa męzczyzn* Jarosława Iwaszkiewicza – próba lektury, in: idem, *Literatura, której nie ma. Szkice o polskiej literaturze homoseksualnej.* Kraków: Universitas, 2010: 37–60.

²⁹ The problem of loss of authenticity under the pressure of the greedy attractions of tourist-consumers represented in the book is a good 40 years ahead of Baudrillard in analysing this phenomenon!

³⁰ Iwaszkiewicz, Jarosław, *Pasje błędomierskie.* Warszawa: Czytelnik, 1976: 41.

Texts and the Body

Otton Krobowski shares the Fascist conviction that “new” can appear only as a restitution of the mystically understood “great age”:

“The biggest vermin of our culture,” in his fervor, Otton said each word twice, “are all those who interfere in the matters that take place between a man and a man or a man and the land. This is innate, primal, peasant culture, and every touch from an urban hand thwarts, squanders and ruins it.” (51)

Characteristic in Krobowski’s statement is the phrase about the “urban hand” that will destroy “peasant culture,” since it belongs to the *loci communes* of nationalist and Fascist thinking. As George L. Mosse claims,

From the nineteenth century on, the guardians of nationalism and respectability felt menaced by the big city, the apparent center of an artificial and restless age. Such cities were thought to destroy man’s rootedness...It was further said that the extremes of luxury and poverty to be found in cities favored the practice of sexual deviance...The dark and secret recesses deep within the “jungle of cities” were usually considered breeding grounds of homosexuality and masturbation [both practices were mortally threatening to the fabric of the nation]. The village or small town close to nature possessed no dark bowels within which vice could flourish. It symbolized those eternal values that stood outside the rush of time. Here the nation and manliness were at home; here one could still recall the healthy, happy past. The city was home to outsiders – Jews, criminals, the insane, homosexuals – while to countryside was the home of the native on his soil. (Mosse 1985 32)

The revival of old values and protection of what remains from them (the Passion) is linked to the disciplining of the body, which in this way (this is the paradox of the thought represented by Krobowski) is to return to a natural state, in accordance with the premises of the “new corporeality.”

Modernity...now seemed a threat for stability. The normal–abnormal dualism so far interpreted in medical and aesthetic terms acquired a new dimension – naturalness contrasted with artificiality, the organic contrasted with the stunted.

(70 (retranslation from Polish))

Disconcerted by Krobowski’s conservatism, Kanicki reminds him that he is a “sportsman,” and so should not (consistently) have respect for tradition and the great “golden age.” Krobowski corrects him, specifying that “Sports for me means nothing. Only physical education exists for me” (Iwaszkiewicz 1976 51).³¹ The distinction Otton makes is significant, as sports are entertainment for the masses, whereas he understands “physical education” rather in terms of elite asceticism, which had no shortage of proponents in the inter-war period. From here, they could have been a moral renaissance or at least, in more pessimistic terms, an adjournment of moral decline.

³¹ This physical education also lacks authenticity, as Otton, when put to domestic work, to his own surprise is “awkward and clumsy,” and “his figure, which he thought was full of strength, turns out to be “powerless faced with the simplest farm work” (Iwaszkiewicz 1976: 130).

As one advances in life, one realises more and more that the majority of men – and of women – are incapable of any other effort than that strictly imposed on them as a reaction to external compulsion. And for that reason, the few individuals we have come across who are capable of a spontaneous and joyous effort stand out isolated, monumentalized, so to speak, in our experience. These are the select men, the nobles, the only ones who are active and not merely reactive, for whom life is a perpetual striving, an incessant course of training. Training = *askesis*. These are the ascetics.³²

Iwazskiewicz seems to be saying that if the future of European culture is to belong to the amoral Kanicki, who kills his own son in the course of events, and the fanatical Krobowski, then catastrophe awaits. The representatives of the “new corporeality” also include another protagonist, Ansgar (Anek) Zamoyłło. The son of a great writer, Tadeusz Zamoyłło (who in the novel represents the departing grand tradition of modernism), is a rising star of Polish tennis and in his father’s eyes “the true specimen of this anonymous generation. Handsome, calm, unremarkable, an excellent tennis player, runner, sportsman – nothing more” (Iwazskiewicz 1976 61). During a disagreeable discussion with Otton Krobowski, in whom he discerns fanatical traits,³³ old Zamoyłło tries to tone down the disagreement by asking about Anek, who is living in Warsaw: “Yet Otton was hostile in his disposition to tennis as a sport of the wealthy, and in fact, he said that he ‘hated sport’, and was interested only in physical education” (74). This distinction, so important for Krobowski, from old Zamoyłło’s point of view has not the slightest meaning: “This all seemed fierce, vague and impolite to Zamoyłło. ‘They’re all the same, these youngsters,’ he said to himself”

In the eyes of his father or Otto, then, Anek is an immature, flippant hero. The reader might get the impression that Ansgar is, alongside the cynical Kanicki and the fanatical Krobowski, a character who augurs equally little hope for escape from the crisis, a young hedonist. Yet this image will be shattered, and the opinion about Anek the sportsman must be nuanced. Leaving for his last journey,³⁴ Tadeusz Zamoyłło happens upon a tennis match between Anek and the Dane Jacobsen. The attention of the egotistical writer is caught by the fact that such a large audience has come to watch what is for him an entirely uninteresting sporting spectacle. Perhaps his pride is wounded, especially as he is plagued by quandaries regarding the value of his own work. Zamoyłło the writer seems to lose hearts and minds to Zamoyłło the dashing tennis player (Iwazskiewicz 1976 218) There is a rather heated discussion between father and son, during which old Zamoyłło, and with him the reader, have the opportunity to see that Anek is not as superficial and carefree a person as it might seem, and his passion in life – sports – means the same to him as literature does to his father. The essence of life proves unchanging – only the outer robes donned by each generation and era change.

³² Ortega y Gasset, José, *The Revolt of the Masses*. New York: W.W. Norton & Co., 1994: 65.

³³ This observation, important as it is, is repeated after the attack on the “Garage of the Passion” organised by Otton: “He could become a dangerous person.” (Iwazskiewicz 1976: 200).

³⁴ Also inauthentic, as it is styled on Tolstoy’s famous journey.

Because you, your generation, always think that our anxiety should be expressed in writing poems and painting pictures. For you there is no salvation outside of art. Father, it has never occurred to you that I play tennis out of anxiety... And that is why you would think that I am doing something extremely trivial, lousy, if I told you that I want to join the Merchant Navy School. Right? Right? Father, in a moment you'll think that this is betrayal of the name, family, your situation and the poetry, poetry that you have always talked so much about. But this is the purest poetry, just in another form. No, it's not poetry – just anxiety, it is anxiety, fear. That it is dark there! (ibid. 239)

The “poetry of tennis” about which Anek speaks so convincingly demonstrates that *Passions* is the 20th-century work that was perhaps the most serious in presenting the dilemmas of “new corporeality,” and it is here that the image or role of sports and the sporty body against the background of contemporary culture is presented most broadly. The understanding of the essence of sports and ready relinquishment of the invalid claims of “high culture” expressed by Iwaszkiewicz are a voice that is as melancholy as it was isolated at the time. To avoid giving a distorted picture, we should stress that the “elite” understanding of sports described above does not mean that Iwaszkiewicz was uncritical of sports as meaningless mass entertainment. Anek, after all, is a rather elite character – it is no accident that he is the son of a great writer: albeit in an altered form, he continues to carry forward the spiritual legacy of culture.³⁵ The other side of the coin is less noble. After the fiasco of the presentation of “the Passion,” the Błędomierz authorities organise a sporting competition, which is “meant almost to seal the reassurance of the Błędomierz community and show the reconciliation of all its classes with common loves and interests” (210). In the eyes of old Zamoyłło, the competition is plebeian, trivial, “keeping the rabble happy,” and for a thinking person “unbearable” (213-214). “Why are they not screaming? Why do they not flee with great fear?,” asks the old man, finding no answers. The antonyms and problems represented by the characters in the novel therefore remain unsolved, and the perspectives that appear on the event horizon are rather gloomy.

Numerous ideological paradoxes emerge: sports or “physical education,” mass or elite, team sports or individual competition, developing the sense of competition or cooperation.³⁶ Roman Dmowski and Ferdynand Goetel, who represent a similar style of thinking but different generations, opt for different solutions. The former, deriving from 19th-century tradition, is a proponent of elitism, while the latter, a child of the

³⁵ The problems of the artist, duration and changes in form, and durability of works constitutes an important part of the book's ideological issues. See e.g. the conversation of Tadeusz Zamoyłło and Otton Krobowski on the “mystery of the Passion” (ibid., 70-75).

³⁶ “These dilemmas have been with European societies since the time of Friedrich Jahn, the Prussian founder of gymnastics: “Jahn's definition of gymnastics was all-encompassing. It took in not only fencing but also swimming, dancing, skating, riding, and the martial arts. These are athletics as opposed to team sports, an important distinction. The male body had to be sculpted in order to approach the male ideal, and here team sports were thought to be useless. Such sports, moreover, meant competition, but patriotism required solidarity.” (Mosse, George L., *The Image of Man. The Creation of Modern Masculinity*. New York-Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996: 44)

“revolt of the masses” era, perceives in his book *Pod znakiem faszyzmu* [“Under the Banner of Fascism”] the possibility of involvement through sports of wide ranks of society. It is no coincidence that the protagonist of Dmowski’s novel, Zygmunt Twardowski, is a mountain climber – in the national, pre-Fascist economy of meanings, climbing holds an honorable place. As Mosse writes of the wave of German Alpine films,

Mountain climbing was a sport in which the human body could measure itself against the “immutable,” take “a little eternity” with itself. Virgin peaks, crystal-clear water and air, pure white glaciers symbolized renaissance in the face of the German defeat, economic chaos and revolution. Although Alpine films do not openly contain a nationalist message, their implications are obvious: a strong, valiant and morally pure strong nation can be reborn.

(Mosse 1985 129 (retranslation from Polish))

When Zygmunt returned home “from abroad,” in accordance with the unwritten rules of the right-wing vision, he compared this mystical feeling with his climbs:

He remembered his Alpine excursions. They had refreshed him, developed his physical strength, even built a spiritual panache – but this was something different. Here he had the sense that he had found something that had been missing: this was the feeling that a plant must have when rain falls after a drought, a fish when it is thrown back into the water, a captured animal when it escapes from captivity into the forest, a highlander when he returns to his mountains from the city.³⁷

It is interesting that Witkacy, who could hardly be suspected of having a nationalist bent, to a degree shares Dmowski’s sporting views. For him, sports could favor “physical revival,” but he lamented that this was not the case since at the time it was listed among the plagues of the “Fordian” civilization. The author of *Insatiability*, approaching the theses of Słonimski’s columns, would emphasise the “stupefying,” light aspect of sports:

stupefied by alcohol and tobacco, the individual...must, in order to relax, look for diversions that are even more stupefying than his work, and he has them in abundance...and the best of them: sports, which if a rein were only kept on it, and it were not inflated to the ridiculous dimensions of a kind of priesthood, could at least be good for physical revival, without its own stupidity destroying all the interests of young and healthy people.³⁸

Similarly, Witkacy too would not like the sporty model of modern corporeality, to which he would refer, describing the bodily changes undergone as a result of military drills, by Genezjap Kapen, the protagonist of *Insatiability*:

Military drills were turning that boy’s body into something truly marvellous – no exaggeration...He was not a troglodyte of the square-in-the-shoulders, lean-in-the-hips-and-trim-in-the-gut jock type. This mass of organs formed a hermaphroditic synthesis of masculinity and femininity bordering on maximal harmony, not devoid of animal power.³⁹

³⁷ Wybranowski, Kazimierz (Roman Dmowski), *Dziedzictwo*. Wrocław: Nortom, 2003: 42.

³⁸ Witkiewicz, Stanisław Ignacy, *Narkotyki. Niemyte dusze*, ed. Anna Micińska. Warszawa: PIW, 1979: 177-178.

³⁹ Witkiewicz, Stanisław Ignacy, *Nienasylenie*. Warszawa: PIW, 1992: 288-289.

Witkacy would also put the question of sports in terms that we are already familiar with, of the contention between young and old. In a discussion in the salon of Princess Irena Vsevolodovna, the young Marquis di Scampi hears from his father, “You people in the F.O. treat everything as a sport: you trivialise life’s seriousness.” Note that the accusation does not concern sports in a strict sense: Scampi means rather that sports are “frivolous,” that it is “pretend life,” “pretend war,” that the most one has to lose and gain is abstract points, and everything that sports represent as such is transferred by young people to the whole of life, to all its domains. This results in a loss of “metaphysical sense.” The young man’s response is as honest as it is unpretentious: “Of course life must be treated as a jolly sport today... The state can be defended the way you defend a goal in a football game.” (Witkiewicz 1992 140) Sports acquire gravity by being ascribed to an ideological framework – the popularity of the Fascist ideology supported by physical education which so pleased Ferdynand Goetel,⁴⁰ was perceived entirely differently by Antoni Słonimski, for whom “everything that we today call sports at the time [in the author’s youth] bore the contemptuous name of truancy and hooliganism” (“Ogród saski” [“Saxon Garden”], Słonimski 1956 411), and now was popularized by mass culture and prepared and annexed in this way by militaristic ideology. In his column *Chore zdrowie fizyczne* [“Sick physical health”], quoted above, the author writes:

The lie of the Olympics is cynical, because those who provide money for all kinds of centres of physical education, and encourage advertisement of sports, are not interested in the nation’s physical health, but in its value as a material of death.
(487)

Yet several years earlier, around the time when Kazimierz Wierzyński was delighting in the universality and cosmopolitan nature of the religion of sports, Słonimski wrote sneeringly of the cultural situation: “Young people do not have the time or inclination to glance at a book. The press do everything they can to set the sporting mindlessness of the young generation in motion.” (“Boy walczy nie tylko o bibliotekę Boya” 87). For Słonimski, as with Witkacy, sports are a harmful, mindnumbing phenomenon, and the mindnumbed, sporty individual is an “athletic bull” (“Kogo zaprosić – książki dla jubilatów – snobizm urzędniczy – hrabskie patałachy,” *ibid.* 53), a “child or sportsman” (“Proszę o dzwonek,” *ibid.* 101), constituting excellent material for ideological, Fascist molding.

Sports, which are treated somewhat instrumentally in *Ferdydurke* as a synonym of “modernity,” is an important constructive element of the world of another of Gombrowicz’s novels, *Possessed*. It is hard to judge to what extent this happened for opportunistic reasons (after all, it was the author’s intention for the novel to meet rather simple tastes, for which sports are, of course, very attractive), and to what degree he wanted to use the

⁴⁰ In his essay published before the war *Pod znakiem faszystwu* (“Under the Banner of Fascism”) (Warszawa 1939), Ferdynand Goetel perceived a positive phenomenon in the concentration of youth around the National Democracy movement and Fascist organisations. His book presents Fascism as an ideological choice that Poland should take in a given social, economic and geopolitical situation, and the youth as that – fresh, uncorrupted and uncompromising – force that might manage this.

medium of sports to speak about his constant fascination with the mixing of the bodily with the social. As with other novels of the time, in *Ferdydurke* too the sport of the young is an opposing value to the culture of the old. The young bodies of Leszczuk (Walczak) and Maja (Maya) are always sporty, while the old ones are grotesque (the holidaymaking ladies staying at the Ochołowski's manor) or utterly decrepit (Prince Holszański, Professor Skoliński); to the former are attributed open spaces (tennis court, forest, city), and to the others closed and musty ones (the gloomy castle). According to Ewa Graczyk, the existence of the court is one of the things that allows Gombrowicz to make the important gesture of "invalidation of the past, according it inferior significance."⁴¹ Leszczuk's sporting career follows the model pattern: young, talented, but poor, he becomes a helper at the court, and here his ability is discovered, and he becomes a coach, all the time with his boyish dream of an international tennis career.⁴² This schematic model in the bodily and social space leads the previous hierarchies to catastrophe. In the 19th-century world of stable social hierarchies, their existence was written on the body of the individual. Yet the present time disturbed the previous order (sporting career), which translated into the impossibility of categorizing the "new corporeality" and the perceptual anxiety of observers (in the novel this means the representatives of the old order: Councillor Szymczak, Professor Skoliński):

"Who could that be," thought the councillor [about Leszczuk], "He's carrying two racquets, so perhaps the son of some citizen from these parts? Hm, but his hands are calloused, with badly kept nails, as if from manual work. Come to think of it, his hair's not that well groomed and his voice is rather common. Proletariat, then? No, the proletariat wouldn't have ears and eyes like that. But his mouth and chin are almost peasant...and there's something suspicious about him as a whole, a certain mixture. (6)

The conservative looks are confused, but the same Leszczuk, watched on court from far, through the crowd, personifies the emotions associated with him: "amazement, hope, praise, rapture, dreams" (257) It is tempting to interpret this by saying that Leszczuk and his sporty body express the desire of the crowd connected with social advance, smashing the oppressive and ever more dysfunctional structures of society.

Leszczuk's body is all the more disconcerting as it uncovers the vulgarity of Maja, the young lady from a good home (cf. 38). Thanks to sports it has been liberated, at least partly, from its proletarian fate, but this same sport exhibits the body of the girl, which according to the people of Połyka is vulgarized in comparison with the corporeality of Leszczuk. All the characters, including Leszczuk and Maja, perceive this worrying analogy of bodies crossing class, monetary, social, educational and cultural barriers. Fortunately, Maja soon discovers the alarming similarity to the working-class man that her coach

⁴¹ Graczyk, Ewa, "Strona Myślowy w 'Opętanych' Witolda Gombrowicza," in: *Ciało. Pleć. Literatura. Prace ofiarowane Profesorowi Germanowi Ritzowi w pięćdziesiątą rocznicę urodzin*, ed. Magdalena Hornung, Marcin Jędrzejczak, Tadeusz Korsak. Warszawa: Wiedza Powszechna, 2001: 310.

⁴² Gombrowicz, Witold, *Opętani*. Kraków: WL, 1994: 18-119 [Engl. version: *Possessed. The Secret of Myslotch* (trans. from French by J.A. Underwood), London and Boston: Marion Boyars, 1982].

is provides her with an unexpected sense of freedom: “As long as I was plain old Miss Ochołowska I couldn’t allow myself what a young lady ... similar to Leszczuk might” (80).

The young protagonists are a mystery to themselves: Leszczuk does not understand why he stole Maja’s letter (46) while Maja runs away from home to “understand the way she really is” (154). Concerned by their own corporeality and not understanding it, they are left to each other – there is no help from any cultural code to which they might ascribe their experience. The young lady seeking to find her feet and her fiancé Cholowacki prove to be hopelessly naïve in valuing works of art; the Proletarian *arriviste* has no clue about what they are worth. The aesthetic dumbness of the young people is not an intrinsic phenomenon; in the context of the novel’s plot and the construction of the characters it constitutes a signal of the wider problem that is the alienation of young people from the world of values respected in the society in which they live. The breaking from the suffocating tradition and social convention, which must in sum be treated as a positive phenomenon, has side effects: the ethical uncertainty of the protagonists, psychological upset, and anxiety towards the unknown.

The conventional happy ending relieves all antagonisms: “taxi drivers and ladies on market stalls,”⁴³ the recipients of the novel, must have been satisfied: the safe old order is preserved, but not without change, as the new one has been inscribed in it. The old castle, with its priceless collection of art, will be saved, the youngsters will not surrender to bad temptations, and – we can assume from what Maja says – will cross the social barriers that divide them.

Let us summarize our discussion: the 1920s uncovered for literature the importance and “vividness” of male corporeality, which then lost its 19th-century transparency. The 1930s were a time when bodies experienced “the pressure of collective ideologies,”⁴⁴ and as a result the boundaries between “correct” and “incorrect” corporeality were sharpened.⁴⁵ Sports in the 1930s were the cause of fear for two reasons. The first was its being harnessed in the mechanisms of mass culture, whose danger was perceived by writers.⁴⁶ The second, much more serious one, without doubt closer and in a way resulting from the first, was the exploitation of the attractiveness of sports, physical education and “new corporeality” by politics, with a particular emphasis on Fascist movements and the right wing in general, to attract *en masse* young people, who were almost, in the conditions of the time, outside of the existing social structures.

Translation: Benjamin Koschalka

⁴³ Cf. Jarzębski, Jerzy, “Jawne i ukryte tajemnice ‘powieści dla kucharek,’” afterword to: *ibid.*: 357.

⁴⁴ Włodzimierz Maciąg’s term (*Nasz wiek XX*: 147).

⁴⁵ I have not been concerned with tracing this process here; however, it seems to be an interesting research problem.

⁴⁶ The next research postulate assumes the need for a comprehensive study of literary attitudes regarding the invasion of mass culture, a new hierarchy of phenomena assumed by it, new ways of distributing contents and a new configuration of aesthetic values. Sport treated fragmentarily is only one of the elements of this new reality.