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# **“Degenerate” Forum of Małgorzata Musierowicz's Fans as an Interactive Interpretative Machine: A Case Study**

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**M**ałgorzata Musierowicz's Fan Forum (FFMM) has been active at gazeta.pl for almost seven years now.<sup>1</sup> Between February 2005 and October 2012, its users generated an incredible 114,000 posts, which translates to an average of a thousand commentaries per month. To a casual observer, numbers such as these may seem quite shocking – why would adults<sup>2</sup> devote so much at-

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- 1 By the time this article was published [in Polish – Anna Warso] the forum changed its name to ESD – Eksperymentalna Strona Dyskusyjna.
  - 2 A short characteristic of the users seems useful here. I cannot present an extensive sociological report based on hard numeric data (the changeability of the user group and inability to verify information provided by them makes such a report impossible). However, basing on what the forum participants write about themselves in the threads devoted to autopresentation: [http://forum.gazeta.pl/forum/w,25788,22323257,,Watek\\_wiekowy\\_.html?v=2](http://forum.gazeta.pl/forum/w,25788,22323257,,Watek_wiekowy_.html?v=2), accessed October 15, 2012; [http://forum.gazeta.pl/forum/w,25788,48098795,,Powiedzmy\\_cos\\_o\\_sobie\\_.html?v=2](http://forum.gazeta.pl/forum/w,25788,48098795,,Powiedzmy_cos_o_sobie_.html?v=2), accessed October 15, 2012, and the discussions conducted in other threads, certain tendencies in the demographic composition of the forum become apparent. The majority of users is female (with only a handful of men posting on FFMM) and adult (teenagers are rare on the forum, and unlikely to actively participate in the discussions). Additionally, a large part of users has declared themselves as university graduates whose educa-

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tention to an author of a dozen or so teen novels? To a literary scholar, they are intriguing. In fact, FFMM provides an exceptionally rich material for the research of various types of satisfaction obtained from discussing literature in the unique context of an internet forum, and an opportunity to investigate the latter as a special generator of interpretative text.

As a phenomenon, FFMM is interesting not only because of its longevity, but also because of the surrounding controversy. The intellectual level of the forum's discussion has been admirable,<sup>3</sup> but its users are also frequently accused of bad behavior.<sup>4</sup> Thus, an analysis of the forum may provide also an interesting perspective on several issues related to the ethics of interpretation.

In order to better understand the function of FFMM, one should focus not on particular utterances produced by the users, or their individual interactions, but rather on the mechanisms governing the development of long and extensive thematic threads (with dialogues branching out under a common title). I decided to base my analysis on one such thread, even though the only way I can present it in the following article is by providing a summary of the most interesting passages from the conversation, which in itself constitutes a certain kind of interpretation. Such a method of presenting the users' activity at least should shed some light on the specificity of their interpretative practice.

The following analysis focuses on a discussion thread under the heading "Chyba mi rozum odjęło"<sup>5</sup> ["I must have lost my mind"] triggered by a commentary containing a few critical remarks about one of Musierowicz's most recent novels. In response, other users constructed a kind of negative ranking of the author's latest additions to the cycle, supplementing their choices with short, but emotional justifications. Consequently, *Język Trolli* [*Trolla's Language*] was revealed as the least favorite novel among the fans, which led to further discussion focusing mostly on what the forum users saw as a pessimistic vision of social reality presented in the book. Ginestra, one of the more frequent commentators, initially expressed a degree of surprise about such

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tional background encompasses humanities, social sciences and science (language and literature, theater studies, history, sociology, economy).

- 3 Proposals have been made to publish the contents of the forum in print: [http://forum.gazeta.pl/forum/w,25788,137230116,137230116,mam\\_sugestie\\_czy\\_mozna\\_.html](http://forum.gazeta.pl/forum/w,25788,137230116,137230116,mam_sugestie_czy_mozna_.html), accessed October 15, 2012.
- 4 Most severely on the Książki [Books] forum, referenced by the following article: [http://forum.gazeta.pl/forum/w,151,102767067,102767067,Wynaturzone\\_forum\\_fani\\_Malgorzaty\\_Musierowicz\\_.html](http://forum.gazeta.pl/forum/w,151,102767067,102767067,Wynaturzone_forum_fani_Malgorzaty_Musierowicz_.html), accessed October 15, 2012.
- 5 [http://forum.gazeta.pl/forum/w,25788,86972827,Chyba\\_mi\\_rozum\\_odjelo\\_html?v=2](http://forum.gazeta.pl/forum/w,25788,86972827,Chyba_mi_rozum_odjelo_html?v=2), accessed October 15, 2012.

interpretations (she herself remembered the novel differently) only to discover upon another reading that she indeed found in the novel what the other readers did, namely, a bitter portrayal of present reality. Contrary to the other commentators, Ginestra saw it as one of the book's merits. In a meticulous analysis that followed, she presented *Język Trolli* as an insightful diagnosis of Polish reality from a few years ago and referred to her second reading of the book as a deeply moving process and an impulse to recognize and realize fully her own experiences from that period. This provoked several responses from other commentators, sharing their experiences and describing states and feelings both echoing and opposing those mentioned by Ginestra. Users posting in this part of the discussion did not seem to try to unify these narratives, but rather believed that such diversity allowed for a more complete picture of reality. One should also add that this part of the discussion thread was based on an underlying agreement as to the meaning of the referenced book passages.

Ginestra's commentary resulted also in a disagreement concerning her suggestion that one of the novel's characters (Fryderyk) wants to convince his girlfriend (Róża) to have an abortion, which according to Ginestra can be deciphered from the allusions found in Fryderyk's conversations with Róża's grandfather (Ignacy). This interpretation became the starting point for a parallel sub-thread devoted to an analysis of the dialogue (read closely and several times, sentence after sentence). Some of the commenters agreed that it contains an indirect suggestion of abortion, while others believed the discussion concerns only the question of whether Fryderyk is going to look after Róża and the baby in the future or ignore the responsibility and focus on his own academic career.

Some of the users viewed Ginestra's reading as an over-interpretation, one that was either impossible to defend considering the novel's intended reading group (teens) or lacking sufficient textual evidence (one of the users argued that if readings based on such weak premises were to be allowed, anything could be proven and followed with an analysis presenting the discussed dialogue as containing allusions to Fryderyk planning to kill Ignacy). However, none of these charges proved convincing enough to discourage further discussion and analysis.

Both the abortion hypothesis and the competing interpretations of the dialogue were judged according to their power to explain the characters' actions within the frame of the entire cycle. The users also reflected on how well each of the proposals fits the overall character of the discussed novel. Reaching any sort of conclusion proved difficult as individual readers not only selected various textual passages as crucial for analyzing the book, but also interpreted those passages differently.

Differences emerged already on the level of language and there were several arguments about the meanings of particular words used by the characters. "Getting rid of the problem" in the context of an unwanted pregnancy was seen by one group as an obvious reference to abortion, while other users offered more neutral interpretations. Readers also disagreed about the principles underlying the protagonists' worldviews; for instance, what kind of behavior toward a potential abortionist should be expected from the Catholic characters in the light of the entire Christian doctrine.

This discussion resulted in another hypothesis about the analyzed dialogue, namely a proposal to see it as a special (tragic) comedy of errors where Fryderyk never suggests abortion, but his words are misinterpreted by Ignacy who appropriately adjusts his replies. Assuming such interpretation of the passage in question, *Język Trolli* would reveal itself first and foremost as a book about the problems resulting from the lack of communication between characters using different languages and unaware of those differences. This could radically change the general reading of the novel: Ignacy can no longer be viewed as the key voice conveying the book's educational message and a defender of threatened values, but rather serves as proof of how an attitude of mistrust toward others may ultimately reveal itself to be potentially dangerous.

Finally, near the end of the discussion, one of the participants suggested that even if neither of the characters speaks consciously about abortion, the question is still present in the language of the novel: Ignacy's rhetoric summons it somewhat despite himself. His utterances were read as containing so many rhetorical gestures and referencing so many interpretative contexts (including references to various ideological disputes held in recent years) that it renders a coherent interpretation of his words impossible.

This proposal paradoxically became even more popular after a successful attempt was made to solve the issue by addressing the source (one of the discussion participants e-mailed the author asking about the presence of the controversial allusion in the dialogue and the answer was clearly negative). *Roma locuta, causa finita*, one could say but it was not the case this time. The writer's response did not change the position of the "abortion hypothesis" supporters. Commentaries were posted in reply, suggesting that the author had no power to determine the meaning of the text and to stop the process of interpretation.

An analysis of the conversation allows us to distinguish the presence of two coexisting types of discussion about literature on the forum. We can clearly see, especially in the early stages of the debate, characteristics typical of non-professional readers of book clubs as described by Elizabeth

Long.<sup>6</sup> This type of discussion is characterized by the free expression of emotions evoked by the analyzed text, a search for references to the reader's own life, treating the text as a starting point for a conversation about social problems, and an easy acceptance for differences in reception. However, another type of discussion can also be seen on the forum, a type where the participants attempt to establish the limits of allowed interpretations and which entails a responsibility: to locate in the text sufficient evidence to support one's interpretative conclusions and to carefully use suitable methods of analysis. Long observes that the latter type, resembling discussions held by professionals, was rare among the groups she observed which consisted of book club attendees. Moreover, the absence of those mentioned responsibilities among book club readers is viewed by Long as an important condition for deriving pleasure from the act of reading, which leads her to suggest that these two types of discussion about literature are to a large extent mutually exclusive.<sup>7</sup> Clearly, this mechanism of exclusion is not to be found on the forum presented in this article.

A question thus emerges concerning the possibility that FFMM, seemingly more conducive to the coexistence of various types of discussion about literature than the book club meetings investigated by Long, owes its character to the particular conditions of interaction offered by the Internet forum, and if so, what exactly characterizes those conditions. Part of the answer can be found in the specific mix of oral and written communication features typical of the online environment.<sup>8</sup> The specificity of each of these communication forms seems to privilege drawing slightly different types of satisfaction from discussing literature. The fact that the forum offers both *quasi*-orality and a chance for *quasi*-meetings, allowing for spontaneity of utterance, focus on exchange, a high level of emotionality and an acceptance for digressions in the debate structure, is conducive to pleasures indicated as crucial for the book club readers: for them, the text is an opportunity to get to know each other, to self-reflect and to recognize social issues viewed as important by the group members. Importantly, we are talking about *quasi*-orality and *quasi*-meetings, imitated by contact actually taking place through writing, and while this may impede related satisfaction to some extent, it may also, paradoxically, facilitate

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6 Elizabeth Long, *Book Clubs: Women and the Uses of Reading in Everyday Life* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2003).

7 *Ibid.*, 144-146.

8 Walter Ong, *Oralność i piśmienność – słowo poddane technologii* [*Orality and Literacy: The Technologizing of the Word*], trans. Józef Japola (Lublin: RWKUL, 1992); Alina Naruszewicz-Duchlińska, *Internetowe grupy dyskusyjne. Analiza językowa i charakterystyka gatunku* (Olsztyn: WUWM, 2011), 243-250.

it, since Internet communication is reported as conducive to presentation of the true self and expressing emotions.<sup>9</sup>

Written interaction and the related absence of face to face contact, and the lack of temporal limitations to the conversation, offer other possibilities as well. Allowing for an extensive, logical and ordered presentation of one's argument, giving time to reflect on the opponent's responses and to evaluate their validity through another reading of the discussed text, facilitates concentration on the ideas presented by the discussion participants instead of participants themselves, creating good conditions for using the literary text as a riddle which can be solved collectively, or a foundation for a kind of game whose participants compete in putting together all elements of the puzzle in the best possible way. Those opportunities offered by the written form seem to correspond well to certain aspects of oral communication, especially its agonistic character, allowing to better determine the principles of competition and increase the sophistication of the interpretative game.

Importantly, online interaction is not only characterized by features conducive to each type of the discussion (both types can coexist relatively seamlessly within one forum or even one thread). The interaction can be facilitated by another feature of the Internet forum, namely, the possibility to simultaneously conduct several conversations and to include an unlimited number of participants in every conversation even though there is no obligation to participate actively in any of them. Conditions such as these make it easier to find partners for various types of literary games and limit, to a certain degree, the users' disposition to streamline their needs and determine acceptable activities.

What is worth emphasizing about FFMM is not only its potential for providing the users with various types of satisfaction from talking about literature, but also its role as a platform for interpretative work and an incubator of interpretative ideas. It may thus be interesting to recognize in the analyzed material certain mechanisms of obtaining interpretations which seem to result from the specific rules of interaction of the forum's participants.

Let us first take a look at the first sub-branch of the discussed thread. Ginestra's use of *Język Trolli* to shed light on a period from her personal history and to transform her auto-narrative (i.e. her recognition of a certain moment in

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9 Krzysztof Krejz and Izabela Krejz, "Ja w sieci – sieć we mnie. Zależności pomiędzy doświadczeniami relacji w internecie a reprezentacją obrazu siebie," in *Spółeczna przestrzeń Internetu*, ed. Dominik Batorski, Mirosława Marody and Andrzej Nowak (Warszawa: SWPS Academica, 2006); John A. Bargh, Katelyn McKeena and Grainne M. Fitzsimons, "Can You See a Real Me? Activation of Expression of the True Self on the Internet," *Journal of Social Issues* 58 (1) (2002).

life as a part of a particular collective experience) could be viewed as being of key importance for this part of the forum discussion. Notably, her experience was born not only from an individual act of reading, but it was rooted in the need to negotiate her own interpretation of the text with the one proposed by the group while the previous commentaries from the participants clearly influenced her new reading, both through the addition of a certain emotional value and by highlighting particular elements of the narrative.

The fact that Ginestra's reading both resulted from a dialogue and became a part of it multiplied the potential of *Język Trolu* as a specific narrative pattern. Due to the diversity of narratives provoked by Ginestra's post, Musierowicz's novel was recognized as a pattern equally useful for producing stories which confirmed it and those opposing the pattern. It served as a center for contradictory social narratives of Poland's recent history.

What we seem to be dealing with here is a type of interpretation particularly valued by Richard Rorty – an interpretation which does not classify the work (i.e. treat it as an example of this or other phenomenon) but one where the readers use the text to transform themselves or their vision of the world.<sup>10</sup> Discussed interpretation seems even more attractive in this regard, as such use of text took place both in the individual and the collective dimension, and consequently (which the philosopher would certainly appreciate), it contributed to a recognition of the diversity of experiences among the involved group, increasing their awareness of the limits of their own experience and leading to an emphatic attempt to understand the discovered differences. Analyzed discussion is also a good example of how those interpretative effects emerge from a close relation between the users' need to find in the text elements which resonate with them on the personal level and their willingness to negotiate interpretations with other participants of the discussion.<sup>11</sup>

In the case discussed above, this relation was of a very special nature. The most interesting interpretative discoveries were developed in a process of inscribing the method of reading, already established by the group, into the context of subjective biographical experiences of its individual members. However, the discussed thread contains yet another mechanism of producing interpretations resulting from the clash of subjectivity and the search for a consensus: in the following parts of the forum discussion, one may note

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10 Richard Rorty, "Kariera pragmatysty," ["The Pragmatist's Progress"] in *Interpretacja i nadinterpretacja*, trans. Tomasz Biedroń, ed. Stefan Collini (Kraków: Znak, 1996).

11 The notion of limiting the freedom of interpretation by relating it to the interpretative community, found in Rorty, was indicated by Andrzej Szahaj as important and still requiring a more precise formulation. See Andrzej Szahaj, "Granice anarchizmu interpretacyjnego," *Teksty Drugie* 6 (1997).



a somewhat reverse situation, an interpretative engine fueled by an effort to move from the contradictory, individual readings to a meaning universally accepted by the members of the discussion.

This task itself, an attempt to determine whether the text contains an allusion to abortion, proved to be both ambitious and impossible. Instead of a resolution, the debate brought the forum users to discover that they were unable to find a single common criterion to collectively accept or reject the controversial interpretation. As more aspects were included in the discussion, more differences surfaced. Readers disagreed about the boundary conditions of interpretation (how far could one go reading between the lines of what the characters say). They learned about the traps of the model reader category (some of them believed a teenage novel cannot include allusions to abortion as that would be neither proper nor decipherable for the target group; others argued that the presence of allusions not meant for teenagers and undecipherable for them testified to the novel's wider target audience). Such vicious circle – inevitable, as the model reader is a function of the text – was part of the process through which the participants discovered that the text contained no single element crucial for the debated issue which all of them could interpret identically (from the words uttered by the protagonists to the principles of their worldviews) and, consequently, there was no single element which could be treated as a point of reference for further analysis which could realize a desired resolution.

What was produced in the course of this discussion was another interpretation, projecting the readers' problem onto the characters (who also were unable to communicate), removing some of the contradictions remaining from the previous interpretations but also opposing them. This increase in irreconcilable readings was probably the main reason why the initial goal – learning the author's intention and thus finding the winner of the interpretation game (someone whose interpretation would be accepted as valid by the group) – lost its appeal, and even perhaps sense, to at least some of the participants. They moved, maybe against their own will, from a search for the author's intention to an almost deconstructivist<sup>12</sup> understanding of the text as not only ambiguous, but also hampering a complete reading and bursting from its internal contradictions (these two positions were mediated by psychoanalytical readings).

It turns out that the attempt to determine the meaning of the novel was initiated by a group with no shared set of norms regulating their interpretative

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<sup>12</sup> Almost in the sense that it recognized the presence of an *aporia* in the text and viewed it as crucial for interpretative work; however, the readers saw them rather as a sign of writer's negligence than an imminent quality of the text itself.

procedures or (as it is common in modern society) similar world view; in other words, it was a group consisting of several intersecting interpretative communities, which necessitated the use of heuristic methods which could increase their semantic openness. We are thus witnessing an experiment confirming the connection between the functioning of a community and the definition of literature the community in question finds useful.<sup>13</sup>

In fact, mechanisms governing the analyzed material may be more interesting than the very effects of interpretation. After all, the "new" understanding of the text obtained in the final parts of the discussion remains only a certain, incomplete reflection of what had been already repeatedly said by professionals (notably those forum users who were educated in the humanities did not so much discover, as recall and take this into account when the seemingly easier, more "natural" reading of the text through the prism of the author's intention proved insufficient). The lack of obligation to include the knowledge of literary studies in their reading means that the questions and solutions proposed by the forum users were, in most cases, unoriginal.

However, the true potential of the analyzed discussion lies in the ways in which the methods of interpretation, which emerged as the conversation developed, were applied to particular literary texts. Analyzing references to contemporary reality found in *Język Trolli*, FFMM users definitely went beyond the most obvious approach to popular literature as a supplier of easily determined patterns of social narrative. Struggling to reconcile their differences in reception, forum users performed a thorough analysis of the novel's structure and language which resulted in positioning it as a text participating in several contemporary debates (as it proposed certain worldviews and entered a dialogue with opposing ones) as well as a text whose very language and narrative structure was an arena for those debates.

Consequently, the potential of literature as a basis for dialogue (and the subsequent attempt to recognize and understand visions of the world different from one's own), was utilized here to an even greater extent than in the initial stages of the discussion. Notably, at least some of the commentators viewed the discussion as interesting and fruitful even though the meaning of the novel was never discovered and the winner of the interpretation game never revealed. This in turn seems to confirm the role of literary interpretation as a "school of pluralist thinking."<sup>14</sup>

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13 A connection discussed in the context of literary interpretation by Andrzej Szahaj, see: Szahaj, *Granice*, 23-24.

14 Erazm Kuźma, "Interpretacja jako wiedza radosna," *Teksty Drugie* 6 (1997): 72.

Such understanding of literary interpretation as a way to enter a dialogue, one taking place not even above but across divisions, can be easily attributed with ethical value. And the relations among the readers are not the only ones to be evaluated in this regard; the issue of loyalty of the interpreter to the text and its author are no less important, and charges relating to the later issue resurfaced frequently among the FFMM users.

One of the frequently repeated accusations concerns the discrepancy between sophisticated interpretative methods used by some of the users and the convention and genre of Musierowicz's novel, which was viewed by other forum members as a misuse of those methods.<sup>15</sup> This places the interpretations, presented above, in the context of doubts and questions characterizing the so-called ethical turn in literary studies. What may be seen as threatened here is the symmetry of the relation between the interpreter and the interpreted.<sup>16</sup> The readers' rejection of the limits inscribed in the convention of the analyzed work and their posing of questions which the text itself "does not pose to its model reader"<sup>17</sup> propels the work into a dialogue it is unprepared for, forcing it to compete in the wrong category, although it may increase the social and intellectual importance of the work. By ignoring the rules of fair play, the interpreter gains an intellectual advantage over the interpreted. One may also wonder if there really is nothing wrong, or at least nothing "tactless", about interpretations created against the presumed (or even known) intention of the author.<sup>18</sup> In other words, we are witnessing the emergence of the question whether interpreters successfully combined invention and responsibility in their reading.<sup>19</sup>

Doubts of this kind, ones that many contemporary interpreters struggle with today, are even more serious in the case of FFMM, because many

15 See for instance [http://forum.gazeta.pl/forum/w,25788,122541484,,chyba\\_przesadzacie.html?v=2](http://forum.gazeta.pl/forum/w,25788,122541484,,chyba_przesadzacie.html?v=2), accessed October 15, 2012.

16 Danuta Ulicka "«Zwrot» etyczny w badaniach literackich," in *Polonistyka w przebudowie: literaturoznawstwo – wiedza o języku – wiedza o kulturze – edukacja*, vol. 1, ed. Małgorzata Czermińska (Kraków: Universitas, 2005).

17 "Overinterpretation" as proposed by Jonathan Culler is also a great intellectual opportunity, see Jonathan Culler "Obrona nadinterpretacji," ["In Defence of Overinterpretation"] in *Interpretacja i nadinterpretacja*.

18 Danuta Szajnert, "Intencje autora i etyka interpretatora," ["The Author's Intentions and the Ethics of the Interpreter"] in *Filozofia i etyka interpretacji*, ed. Andrzej Szahaj (Kraków: Universitas, 2007).

19 Michał Paweł Markowski, "Zwrot etyczny w badaniach literackich," *Pamiętnik Literacki* 1 (2002).

discussions taking place on the forum still today frequently combine thorough textual analysis with very harsh criticism, to an extent much greater than in the presented material. This makes various "over-interpretations" far less innocent.

But the critical forum users also present arguments in support of their actions, suggesting that they do not wish to engage in an empty play of meanings or malicious manipulation of the novels' message. What they seek is to engage in a discussion with this message, seeing their methodical analyses as a means to address the matter in a more precise manner. Conducting close readings provide them with a better orientation with regard to the differences in the system of values presented by the author and their own, and help to show where the novels' message appears self-contradictory – whether because it rests upon an indefensible vision of reality or because of the internal inconsistency of the conveyed world view.

What provokes particularly strong objections among the critical readers of Musierowicz's work is its proclaimed high esteem for openness to others on the one hand, combined with what is seen as an unwillingness to enter into a dialogue with anyone representing worldviews other than the author (evidenced by the writer suppressing and silencing the voices of protagonists who represent "improper" views or lifestyles, and resorting to caricature and mockery.)<sup>20</sup>

But accusations of disrespect for the Other are directed also at the readers themselves, including "degeneration" mentioned in the article's title. Some forum members are accused of reading Musierowicz simply with bad intentions, a reluctance to accept any aspect of the views presented in her work, and even, symbolically, of refusing the author the right to write in a particular way or promote particular positions. The fact that the tendency to criticize the writer harshly can be found among the majority of active forum users gives rise to the charge that they have turned criticism into a group norm<sup>21</sup> and a means for binding their community together instead of actually trying to communicate with the author or those readers who are less likely to judge her so harshly.

Regardless of the validity of such charges, the very fact that they have arisen allows one to approach FFMM discussions not only as an opportunity to observe how interpretations of literary texts may be used as a starting point

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20 For instance [http://forum.gazeta.pl/forum/w,25788,49046847.49122779,Re\\_Po\\_pierwszym\\_czytaniu\\_.html](http://forum.gazeta.pl/forum/w,25788,49046847.49122779,Re_Po_pierwszym_czytaniu_.html), accessed October 15, 2012; [http://forum.gazeta.pl/forum/w,25788,49260437.49260437,Wychowawczy\\_przekaz\\_Polewki.html](http://forum.gazeta.pl/forum/w,25788,49260437.49260437,Wychowawczy_przekaz_Polewki.html), accessed October 15, 2012.

21 [http://forum.gazeta.pl/forum/w,25788,105476791,106265286,To\\_ja\\_teraz\\_powiem\\_cos\\_strasznego.html](http://forum.gazeta.pl/forum/w,25788,105476791,106265286,To_ja_teraz_powiem_cos_strasznego.html), accessed October 15, 2012.

for a dialogue between various worldviews, but also to recognize the difficulties that such an endeavor may encounter.

Finally, it may be worthwhile to return to the ambiguous position occupied by online discussions about literature among other discourses of the type. As has already been stated, situated between the written and the spoken discourse, as well as somewhere between a seminar talk and an informal conversation among book lovers, online discussions about literature do not fit certain important distinctions. Furthermore, online commentaries are positioned also on the border of the private and the public spheres, somewhere between an informal discussion and a published article.

Twenty years ago, Erazm Kuźma had no difficulties distinguishing between the “interpreters” – negotiators of meaning belonging to a community of literary scholars who also exercise control over it by publishing their interpretations as part of a social and economic game – and the “readers” who remained outside the game, because their readerly experiences took place in the private sphere and their knowledge never left this intimate space.<sup>22</sup>

The Internet has largely blurred the clarity of this division. The fact that FFMM users authored what is probably the richest collection of interpretations of Małgorzata Musierowicz’s work in existence makes them actual participants of the interpretative game. At the same time, forum members, publishing anonymously and independently from the procedures regulating professional publications, never enter the professional circle. They join the interpretative game based on their own separate rules.

Consequently, as players they are new and unpredictable, and their special status has its advantages and disadvantages, frequently described today by the enthusiasts and critics of non-professional creative activities performed online<sup>23</sup> (although literary interpretation is discussed rarely). On the one hand, free from the limitations restricting the professionals, forum users may create new, untypical and inspiring interpretations. On the other hand, however, weaker mechanisms of selection as well as the spontaneous and personal character of the utterance may not facilitate balanced judgments, while the friendly atmosphere easily created online is likely to decrease the awareness of the public character of conducted discussions and the sense of

22 Erazm Kuźma, “Spór o wartość i zasadność interpretacji literackiej,” *Pamiętnik Literacki* 3 (1989): 15-16.

23 See for instance Chris Anderson, *Długi ogon: ekonomia przyszłości – każdy konsument ma głos* [*The Long Tail*], trans. Bolesław Ludwiczak (Poznań: Media Rodzina, 2008); Andrew Keen, *Kult amatora: jak Internet niszczy kulturę* [*The Cult of the Amateur*], trans. Małgorzata Bernatowicz and Katarzyna Topolska-Ghariani (Warszawa: WAIp, 2007).

responsibility for one's words, which in turn may result in the increased ease of voicing critical opinions.

Both the potential and the dangers which accompany new players as they join the interpretation game gain a particular clarity in the case of the internet forum, as they are multiplied through group interaction. This interaction comes with a certain creative potential but it may also add strength and radicalism to the expressed opinions surpassing the intentions of the individual users (both because certain views are expressed simultaneously by a large group of people and because of the tendency for radicalization of opinions which can be found sometimes within groups). The interpretative machine of the forum may be thus viewed both as creative and difficult to control, as successful as it is dangerous.

*Translation: Anna Warso*