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PhD DISSERTATION ABSTRACT

THE REPORTAGE WRITING OF HANNA KRALL: THE EVOLUTION OF GENRE AND STYLE

Demonstrating the evolution of the genre and style of the literary form of reportage requires the application of carefully selected research procedures that place the author's work within linguistic, genre-oriented and discursive perspectives. To date, Hanna Krall's work has been analysed mainly by literary scholars and press researchers. Most often her reportage is compared to the writing of Ryszard Kapuściński or Krzysztof Kąkolewski; yet, in my opinion, such analogies do not render the singular communicative profile of Krall's prose, which constitutes only a small segment of a much broader universe of speech.

The very isolation of the genre that specialists call literary reportage demands, first, the ordering of its diversified textual material and, second, the precise definition of its essence, that is:

- 1) defining and indicating the aspects and variants of the prototype as well as its dominants and genre signals;
- 2) choosing an appropriate typology or making responsible interpretative decisions that may lead, among other things, to treating collections, collages, mosaics, block

arrangements, sylva, genre chains, constellations and stratified systems as legitimate textual forms;

3) indicating the scale of paradoxes that appear in the process of 'escaping from the prototype' (especially with regard to its structural pattern) – a process that creates many epistemological problems for the researcher [emphasis – M.B.].

In the generic reflections that delimit my field of observation I have taken as my point of departure a universal, communicatively profiled conception of genre situated within textual empiria. As Kępa-Figura and Ślawska write, the perception of genres in their mutual relationships forms a communicative continuum. The linguist, therefore, observes an image of intercultural communication that is heterogeneous yet stratified, while the literary scholar presents a picture of a world created by language.

The genre descriptions proposed by Maria Wojtak reveal identical tendencies operating in various circles of discourse. The key here is a relational approach in which the perception of genres as being interrelated allows for the analysis of complicated relational networks whose nodes are genres understood as classes of texts, discursive practices and communication events – entities immersed in a discursive perspective and belonging to the category of social facts.

The variety of methodological proposals confronts the researcher with the necessity of making an individually responsible choice that entails a range of analytical consequences; therefore, overcoming filiative research habits and embracing a multidimensional textual description seems, in my view, necessary in order to avoid accusations of methodological eclecticism.

My aim was a linguistically oriented analysis of specific texts – first, a thorough description of their structure, second, an indication of the generic conventions, third, a determination of the genre's boundaries, and finally a pointing out of complex or alternative entities at the level of the generic pattern, learning about their cognitive

potential and the interpretative possibilities that arise from the reservoir of diverse interpretative proposals.

Based on my observation of a rich exemplificatory material, I distinguished four developmental stages that characterise the genre features of Hanna Krall's literary reportage. I would stress that the criteria for the presence or absence of specific dominant features, genre signals and stylistic devices refer only to the cited texts and do not exhaust the entire set of her works, which are still growing:

Stage I – the 1970s: the crystallisation of the basic structural features of the genre prototype; composition built around dramatized narration, linear sequence of facts, journalistic investigations, presence of phraseological units only in voices added in post-editing; the author's well-known statement "I am not there, only the witnesses are interesting" defines the position of the reporter.

Stage II – the 1980s and 1990s: the deepening of the thematic field of the Holocaust (fiction based on probability, allegory, amplified hero individualisation), reduction of descriptive fragments, gradual resignation from the reportage lead, broader use of axiology, stable presence of dialogues, incorporation of the reportage short story and the micro-novel – especially "The Sub-Tenant" and "Windows" – adoption of confessional techniques.

Stage III – the turn of the 21st century (late 1990s and early 2000s): strengthening of metatextual reflection, domination of the dialogic structure, polyphonic character of narratives, withdrawal of the authoritative narrator's voice, open endings, scenarisation of scenes (script-like writing), treatment of factual material as universal parables.

Stage IV – the 2020s: the "extreme Krall" (term by Mariusz Szczygieł) – combining concise reportage with online records; one situation refers to another by means of hyperlinks; existential punch-lines are retained.

- crystallisation of the genre dominants of literary reportage; combining reportage material with the online record – one situation refers to another through hyperlinks, while existential punch-lines are retained.

Researchers representing various scholarly disciplines attempt to identify the genre determinants of Hanna Krall's reportage. Their starting point is both the normative or canonised features established by socio-literary usage and the heuristic descriptions based on empirical observation. Among the typical traits they distinguish conciseness, single-plot action, transparency of fabula, event dramaturgy and causally conditioned sequences. Some of these traits correspond to literary genres such as the reportage novel or the historical reportage with an autobiographical dominant. The definitions cited do not fully reflect the author's idiolect: Krall willingly oversteps the boundaries of classical reportage, disregards chronology, and condenses the plot to the extent that in many contemporary texts the action virtually disappears, whereas the "significant details" present in her writing since the early 1970s gain new functions.[1][2]

In the first reportages these dominant features were elements of the depicted reality; in subsequent phases they began to organise that reality while simultaneously signalling the author's artistic autonomy and her unemotional syntax (semantic economy, condensation of utterances, reliance on simple sentences). They also determined the nature of her utterance and generated codes of reception that direct the reader towards a transcendental reading of history.

- breaking away from normative limitations,
- enriching the narrative convention (e.g., using the style and knowledge of an omniscient narrator, presenting in-depth character studies),
- conceptism (especially in the stylistic and structural aspects of the generic pattern),
- conscious use of fiction, iconicity, alternation of time planes, references to artistic prose [Kaliszewski, Żyrek-Horodyska 2018: 22–24].

Michał Szulczewski defines this genre variant of reportage as one that dissolves the boundary between journalism and literature. He points out adaptive borrowings (global or partial genre loans) as well as alternative formations (derivations, contaminations) or unique specimens that correspond to experimental genre hybrids. In Krall's case they involve a gradual emancipation from the dominance of literariness and the rooting of journalistic conventions as liberation from the dictate of the literary.

Magdalena Piechota, in turn, indicates other dominants of literariness in Krall's writing, among them metaphorical condensation, intersemiotic games with photographic and filmic techniques of close-ups [Piechota 2011: 45]. Andrzej Kaliszewski notes the use of cinematic montage and rhetorical figure arrangement in her mature texts.

The position of the omniscient narrator is accompanied by a specific kind of narration and a degree of fictionality as well as the frequent use of free indirect speech – penetration of the world, motivations, imagination and thoughts of the main character(s), monologues or dialogic replicas expanding the scope of language functions in concrete reportage material. In texts that result from genre borrowings, alongside the above-mentioned referential, expressive and phatic functions, we also find the autotelic (poetic), conative and metatextual functions (present in Krall's writing since the 1970s and employed today, for example, in Wojciech Jagielski's "All Lara's Wars") [Krakowiak 2024: 145].

Katarzyna Frukacz challenges Piechota's position by analysing the concept of the reportage novel; she observes that the progressive blurring of generic boundaries can be dangerous for the identity of reportage if the journalist blindly adopts solutions characteristic of the novel.

Indicating the evolutionary character of the genre and style of Krall's reportage required me to complement the linguistic descriptions with a broad range of literary-studies interpretations and to juxtapose my diachronic and qualitative findings with my own reflections stemming from twenty-seven years of professional reportage practice. In the key part of the dissertation I have attempted to verify the ontological status and the

various transformations of the generic pattern mentioned by scholars; the analyses I have proposed have given the problem a fuller and more mature dimension and have created a pretext for further scholarly observations of those aspects of the journalistic and discursive activity of authors that interest me, while taking into account scholarly positions and the journalistic self-awareness of Hanna Krall.

I focused on the characteristics of literary reportages that have already been discussed by literary and media scholars; however, these were single studies containing scattered conclusions. The adopted linguistic-pragmatic perspective allowed me to analyse both the adaptive variants of the genre prototype and its structural aspects in a comprehensive manner.

Summing up this discursively modelled part of my considerations, it is worth noting that in the genre continuum we observe dominants (indicators) that testify to the genre transformations of Hanna Krall's reportages and micro-novels. Within the genre field there appear strong elements of fictionality, a specific axiologisation, forms of self-commentary (metatextuality), intertextuality and even references to other literary forms (the post-modern novel, fable, letter, parable).

The shape of Krall's reportages, like texts modelled by authors with pronounced literary ambitions, results from the interference of two fields – the journalistic field and the field of literary references. This is evidenced first and foremost by the author's strong formal discipline, and by the presence of macro- and micro-structural solutions that decide on the evolutionary character of the author's works.

During the analysis of selected texts I noticed two regularities: first, in successive types of utterances she resigns from the lead; its absence may be treated as a game with the reader and simultaneously with the text. Following genre signals in Krall's work therefore takes on the character of a quest for fragments of history whose task is to re-member the past. This is a constant communicative practice in the journalist's Holocaust reportages. The conducted research shows that the described strategies justify the stylistic transformations of the journalist's works.

My doctoral dissertation has been divided into six chapters. The first – “Biography of Hanna Krall. A Reporter about a Reporter”. I wanted to treat the author’s biography experimentally, therefore, instead of a conventional chronological résumé I decided on a polyphonic portrait composed of statements by the reporter, her editors and critics as well as of my own commentary; this allowed for a mosaic presentation.

The second chapter of the dissertation, theoretical-analytical in nature, is devoted to the evolution of literary reportage and the transformation of genre prototypes. Apart from the selected scholarly positions, the chapter also includes numerous statements by the authors of the reportages, with particular attention paid to the phenomenon of reporter’s self-commentary. I am convinced that these meta-reflections and the linguistic observations placed in the chapter reinforce the referential potential of reportages.

The third chapter of the dissertation is also linguistically profiled; it focuses on intertextuality, intersemioticity and language games in the evolving cultural-historical space of Krall’s reportages as well as on the cognitive-stylistic variants of the generic pattern and its stylistic aspects.

The next, fourth chapter of the dissertation is genre-oriented. It discusses the polyphonic model of reportage as exemplified by Krall’s texts (often crossing genres, e.g., press discourse with media or literary discourse). Polyphony is treated here as an interdisciplinary style of thinking about reportage.

In a subsequent chapter the thesis addresses the issues of the reception of Krall’s texts. I distinguished, among others, narrative and anti-narrative models of recording the experience of Shoah, compared various ways of constructing the figure of the witness and the narrator, and drew attention to the possibility of modifying generic-stylistic solutions.

The empirical basis for the analyses carried out in the dissertation consisted of the following texts by the reporter (they may be considered the most representative for

demonstrating the evolution of genre and style): "Tematy do reportażu" (Topics for Reportage), "Ja nie chcę wiele, ale nie mogę spać" (I Don't Want Much but I Can't Sleep), "Tylko ja sama" (Only Myself), "Sublokator" (The Sub-Tenant), "Okna" (Windows), "Tam już nie ma żadnej rzeki" (There Is No River There Any More), "Zdążyć przed Panem Bogiem" (To Outwit God), "Hipnoza" (Hypnosis), "Wyjątkowo długa linia" (Exceptionally Long Line), "Szczegóły znaczące" (Significant Details), "Bajki dzieciństwa. O dziadku" (Childhood Fables. About Grandfather) as well as the "Otwock" cycle: "Prusa 11", "Prusa 11, cd.", "Sędzia" (Judge) and "Heglista" (Higglist).

Footnotes

1. Monika Wiszniowska, in the book **See – Describe – Understand. Polish Reportage: Imagination, Convention, Perspective,** enumerates the distinguishing features of literary reportage. Among other things, she lists the photographic quality of description, which she understands as the consequence of looking at people and reality through the camera's eye, and the abandonment of unequivocal value judgements.
2. Kazimierz Wolny-Zmorzyński states that "the literary character of reportage should not be identified with newspaper fiction; it is above all a journalistic genre intended for the mass media" [Wolny-Zmorzyński, Kaliszewski, Furman 2006: 58].