

## From the Editor

The current issue of the *Polish Journal of English Studies* offers a selection of scholarly articles which cover the time period of almost the entire twentieth century. Starting with an analysis of E.M. Forster's *Howards End*, through two studies devoted to Samuel Beckett, and one article on Tom Stoppard's radio plays, finishing with a look at a contemporary American documentary film, the issue collects approaches whose main theme could perhaps be summarized as "between form and anti-form." All of these authors develop ways of diversifying formal structures, perspectives, and cultural references in a way which produces dynamic possibilities of reading and interpreting. The internal dynamics of their work are produced by a controlled loss of coherence and by intentional play with open structures, escaping from the constraints of not only traditional plot conventions but also standard possibilities of reading characters and their motivation. The play between form and anti-form would, therefore, be a general concept to call the strategy of dialogic confrontation incorporated into both structure and ideology of a given work. With this mechanism of splitting composition and comprehension, authors presented here venture into a deeper analysis of their own themes and the world around.

It is interesting to see that authors coming from different periods of the twentieth-century literature and art despite general differences of interest, theme, and form, follow a similar compositional stratagem based on employing shifting perspectives of looking, engaging their readers and viewers in a tactical game in which media of expression, conventions, genres, and styles are positioned in a dialectical distance, offering a critical view on the presented reality. As a consequence, readers and viewers are offered a superior, somewhat external location in relation to plots and characters, they also acquire a critical tool to decompose their own position as interpreters whose cultural foundations are determined by universal as well as personal axioms. The authors of articles collected in this volume trace exactly this formal aspect of writing which highlights both stylistic preferences of individual artists and broad assumptions implicitly performed by the historical epoch which they represent.

E.M. Forster's *Howards End* achieves much of its compositional coherence by incorporating into the structure of its plot rhythmic movements of Beethoven's *Symphony No. 5 in C minor* (Patrick McCullough's "More Than a Soundtrack: Music as Meaning in *Howards End*"). The play with conventions of different arts

originates in the modernist practice of intermediality and intertextuality. The formally diversified composition of a modernist work, often turning into a collage of citations and references, can be seen in Patrick McCullough's opinion as an "interart" project. Forster's novel, then, can also be interpreted as a work relating together different disciplines of artistic practice and reaching for completeness unavailable for writers working merely in one medium or art form.

McCullough's specific point is to argue that Forster's novel achieves a required level of complexity and is, thus, able to "challenge notions of certainty," by "harmoniously" combining literature with music. While the interdependence between arts was a typical stylistic feature of modernism, it was also a specifically chosen writerly practice of Forster who, in his *Aspects of the Novel*, declares that "the more the arts develop the more they depend on each other for definition". Literary composition involves here relating different forms of art, developing textual or intertextual connections through which the presentation of ideas grows more nuanced and subtle, resisting conventional solutions or traditional closures. As McCullough stresses in his concluding comments, such novels as *Howards End* encourage "scholars to consider how contributions from another seemingly unrelated field (Music) augment the fictional mode and allow authors to reflect the world more accurately." On the one hand, the tension within work, spanning compositional structures characteristic for different artistic fields, helps transcend limitations imposed by genres. On the other hand, it facilitates negotiations with individual artistic imaginations, allowing both the writer and the reader to explore alternative identities.

Searching for otherness which provides an alternative formal solution as well as differentiating plot possibilities dominates two approaches to Samuel Beckett's drama presented in this volume. In both articles (Ivan Nyusztay's "The Experiment of Rebellious in Beckett: The Impact of Camus and Havel" and Thomas Thoelen's "'my thoughts are elsewhere': Reading (In)Attention in Beckett's *The Unnamable*"), Beckett's drama and prose are analysed as compositions woven out of a complex network of references to other authors, works, and stylistic dictions. Beckett's journeys to the "elsewhere" regions of language and imagination refocus attention away from his usual narrative and dramatic structures, as well as from his preferred thought patterns and solutions. Exploring links between Beckett's writing and that of Camus and Havel, one can discover not only what Nyusztay calls "all-inclusive obsession with contradiction," but also playwright's attempt to break with his own attachment to the concept of absurd

dominated by the sense of pessimism and futility. The anti-structure of hope and rebellion helps establish contrast with the usually endless cycle of failures symbolically featuring Sisyphus and his stone. For instance, in *Catastrophe*, a play dedicated to the Czech dissident Václav Havel, Beckett transgresses his own imagery of waning and decreasing energy and offers a politically inspired gesture of rebellion, as if taken out of a different world view. As Nyusztay stresses, Beckett's play "presents a positively subversive cadence unknown in his other works." The presence of echoes of other sensibility and references to other writers presents the author with a formal alternative and a more promising solution, which both distances him from his own writing and helps integrate new ways of expression or as Nyusztay has it: "probe these limits by occasionally exploring an alternative world view."

Thomas Thoelen's article concentrates solely on Beckett's prose, focusing especially on his final novel *The Unnamable*, and delving into an elusive area of inattention – the subtle concept of voluntary or involuntary loosening of concentration, of grasp which one's mind secures on subjects of one's deliberation. Searching the threshold of Beckett's intellectual perception, looking into the strain of informational overload and associative rush, Thoelen manages to provide the portrait of a writer whose mind foretells the arrival of hyper reading at the age of technology but primarily whose controlled dissipation of focus secures freedom for artistic exploration. The gesture of abandon of formal and intellectual disciplines, imposing anti-form or what amounts here to no-form onto Beckett's usually highly premeditated and calculated rigour of symmetry produces in effect a way forward towards the "elsewhere" of literary discovery. What Thoelen calls the "creative potential of *inattention*" makes for a "wholly different material context for writing" in which so much is left for uncontrolled experience outside of usual language structures and cognitive habits. Therefore, inattentiveness both constitutes an "important source for creativity" and an extra possibility for "artistic freedom," and it builds a model of human intellect immersed in mediatised culture responsible for countless intrusions into mind's inner circle.

With Beckett, then, it is the constant play with otherness that mobilises his landscapes of human reflection and thought. As Nyusztay claims, it is possible to "examine the Havel-inspired rebellion in the Beckett play together with the Beckett-inspired rebellion in Havel's play," and subsequently to grasp the "transgressive" nature of Beckett's formal experimentation as well as his ethi-

cal responsibility. Then, if hyper reading – the required skill of today’s digital-ly-driven mindset – enables in Thoelen’s opinion a “reader quickly to construct landscapes of associated research fields and subfields,” Beckett’s subjective and idiosyncratic version of this intellectual practice which sends his mind into the area of creative elsewhere opens the possibility of inadvertent paradox and unlocks the power of his creative experiment.

A special coda to the aesthetic strategy in which forms convene and contrast in order to explore alternative paths of perception is provided by Tom Stoppard’s radio plays. These forms, naturally more modest in their length, contain dramatic material of perhaps greater density and formal precision than standard, full-length plays. *Artist Descending a Staircase* and *Where Are They Now* both experiment with audience aural perception in order to set traps for both ordinary logic of reception and audience expectations. The phrase characteristically used about Stoppard’s strategy, the “ambush,” refers here to the structure of soundscape which confronts the listener with an interpretative disturbance, gap or multiplicity of narrative possibilities. The reconstruction of the logic, hidden behind the suggested and simulated illusion of probability lies entirely on the listener’s side and invites multiple trials for logic and sense. As Jadwiga Uchman points out (“Experiments with time structure in Tom Stoppard’s dramas”), there is a multiplicity of interpretative possibilities which constitute his compositional strategy for which – as Stoppard puts it himself – “the only useful metaphor I can think of for the way I think I write my plays is convergences of different threads.” Especially in his *Arcadia*, Stoppard uses “time as a thematic and structural element in a number of different ways” and connects two different historical periods in order to facilitate an external, distanced, and dialectical overview of both of them. His primary point is to show how different structures of thought and different forms of expression, when alienated and analysed, reveal divergent and misleading logic of interpretation which stumbles and crumbles under false assumptions, wrong reasoning, misguided calculation. In other words, the multiplicity of forms reveals the crooked logic of human thinking and the strained reliability of what is normally considered a sound rational argumentation.

Playing exactly with such schemes and patterns of audience perception and preference lies in the centre of analysis of *Let The Fire Burn*, a documentary film by Jason Osder which concerns the 1985 bombing of the headquarters of Philadelphia’s radical political group the MOVE (Kevin King “Truth Out

of Context: The Use of Found Footage in *Let The Fire Burn*"). The film is composed entirely out of authentic footage of the period based on police archives and media reports. It does not contain authorial narrative or commentary and leaves all the interpretation of the "contemporaneous footage and testimony" for the contemporary viewer to make. However, what undoubtedly remains and authentic and objective archival testimony of the period does not necessarily function as a completely transparent form of recording and archiving facts. Jason Osder, as King stresses, relies heavily on "contextual assumptions of current audiences" in controlling his own message, if not manipulation, without making an open presence in the diegetic reality of the film. Thus, the old form and the new form of documenting reality, now boosted by modern devices used for recording private lives, remain in constant tension. Therefore, King's major objective in his analysis is to show how the authentic material is "re-contextualized in the compilation process through editing and historical perspective" by which the director of the film successfully "demonstrates the perspective of the filmmakers and the historical differences in audience perceptions." Watching the film, as its analysis proves, gives a possibility of not only looking at a particularly fatal fragment of American history, but it also helps realise the "power of utilizing the contextual assumptions of re-purposed footage to develop a wholly different narrative." The very process of rearranging ready, archival material indirectly captures differences in conventions of form as well as habits of perception between old and new audiences. Self-conscious structuring of visual conventions and narrative logic opens a possibility for acknowledging "modern attitudes" as well as for maneuvering the viewer into grasping "what to feel while watching these images, instead of allowing the found footage to speak for itself." Ultimately, as King claims about the film's production crew "their use of various forms of footage, editing technique and use of other film technique such as music, do reveal a viewpoint which reflects their own cultural assumptions about such found footage."

With all of the works in question the final message and interpretative thrust are constructed through indirect play with form and structure. Instead of a straightforward narrative comment elucidating the conclusive evaluation of ideas and theses, writers and artists whose analysis is collected in this volume have chosen to rely on confrontation between arts, narrative structures and references or intertextual borrowings in order to reach for deeper understanding of their themes and for more complex presentation of motifs. Tying together

formal traditions and artistic styles into a dynamic structure allows for a more open space in exploring what otherwise would remain too narrow and limited. Such multiplicity, though at times disturbing and definitely more demanding on the reader or viewer, remains nonetheless a powerful strategy of breaking what has lost its resonant potential to redefine convention and decompose traditional language structures. Clashing form and anti-form, used as a controlled aesthetic device, illustrates the created, historical nature of art as well as our perception of its achievements.