

A Stroll through Polish Leporellos: Some ‚Liberatic‘ and other Accordion-Folded Works

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Radosław Nowakowski: *Sienkiewicza Street in Kielce* (2003)

Pulled into slumber by the rhythmic rocking of the train, a man is nodding off in a comfortable compartment. He is on his way from Warsaw, where he flew from Australia, to Kraków, where he is going to attend a conference. Suddenly, he jumps up as he spots a large letter „K“ in the signboard. With a panicked jerk he grabs his suitcase and dashes out of the compartment onto the platform. Only then does he realise that it is not the city where he is heading, but a strange town called Kielce. Yet, it is too late to get back. The train is already moving, leaving him behind in a strange place. Now he has four hours before he can continue the journey. Curious to see where this accident has landed him, he goes out of the station building onto a street unfolding before him like an arabesque carpet.

Thus begins to unfold Radosław Nowakowski's *Sienkiewicza Street in Kielce* (2003),¹ arguably the best known Polish leporello book. It was commissioned by the local municipal office as a fancy, handmade souvenir, but when it was put on display in the local art centre Biuro Wystaw Artystycznych (BWA), the institution offered to publish it in a trade edition.²

¹ Radosław Nowakowski: *Ulica Sienkiewicza w Kielcach / Sienkiewicza Street in Kielce / Sienkiewicza Strato en Kielce*. Kielce 2003. 1st ed., signed copy no. 16. The book bears a trilingual title: in Polish, English and Esperanto. For general information on this work see Nowakowski's personal website *Liberatorium*: <<http://liberatorium.com/ulica/ulica.html>> (last accessed 1 March 2018). For an interview of Nowakowski by Małgorzata Zgaińska see: Tu rysunek, tam rysunek, tu coś innego, in: *Pogranicza* 5 (2010), pp. 75–80.

² Personal information from the author. This is also mentioned on the facebook page of the book in the entry dated 13 June 2013; cf.: *Ulica Sienkiewicza w Kielcach*, <<https://pl-pl.facebook.com/UlicySienkiewiczaWKielcach/>> (last accessed 1 March 2018).

The book came out in May 2003 in the print run of 500 copies and was available through selected bookshops. Already in the same year it was awarded a prize at the local art competition *Przedwiośnie* (Early Spring) in Kielce, and in May 2005 it won the 2nd Prize at the *International Book Arts Fair Competition* in Seoul, Korea. Since then it has been on display in numerous book art and 'liberature'³ exhibitions in Poland and abroad, always gaining admiration of the audience. As the first edition was sold out, the author, who runs a small publishing press called Liberatorium, issued the second edition in an open print run in 2009.⁴ The first edition was offset printing; the second one is printed with an inkjet printer, assembled and bound by the author, like all his other books. Each copy is signed and dated when completed.

The book is composed of 34 segments, each consisting of the central plate (or page) and two flaps opening to the sides (fig. 1).⁵ So technically, each central 'page' or plate with the side flaps is a gatefold.⁶ Because of this structure it could be called an 'expanded' leporello. Hardbound in cloth, the closed copy is a 16,5 x 31,5 x 5 cm block that can be read by opening each subsequent segment and the flaps attached. Alternatively, it can be read partially or fully spread; yet the latter requires sufficient space as the unfolded book is 10,71 meters long. Consequently, while reading it fully unfolded, one is forced to literally walk along the text. In this form the book looks like a miniature model or map of the high street in Kielce,⁷ which leads from the railway station into the town centre.⁸ The central 'lane' (i.e. the sequence of central plates) corresponds to the roadway and pavements, while the flaps on the sides carry the images of buildings and spaces along the street. Evident-

³ The term is explained in more detail below.

⁴ This edition is available from Nowakowski's on-line bookshop at <<http://liberatorium.com>> (last accessed 1 March 2018).

⁵ See also scanned, unfolded segments reproduced on *Liberatorium*, Nowakowski's official website <http://liberatorium.com/ulica/ulica_strony.html> (last accessed 1 March 2018).

⁶ In that sense, this unconventional book format comes close to a phenomenon called 'harlequinade', a style of lift-the-flap book that became popular in 18th century England.

⁷ Today the street is a pedestrian area. When Nowakowski was working on the book, it was still open to road traffic, but some renovation works were already in progress (this is mentioned in the text). In a sense it is an artistic documentation of the location in around the year 2002.

⁸ Against this backdrop, the work stands in a tradition of panoramatic accordion-books depicting streets that goes back to the 19th century, cf. Christoph Benjamin Schulz's introduction to this book.

ly, Nowakowski's choice of this modified (expanded) accordion structure was deliberate, motivated by the shape of the represented space, as the unfolded leporello has enabled him to display the street in one piece.⁹

Besides, being a modified folded 'scroll', the book ingeniously blends writing (literature) with visual and spatial arts, a combination crucial for Nowakowski, who often uses text, images, unconventional formats and imaginative structures in his artistic works.¹⁰ However, *Sienkiewicza Street* is not merely a visual book, nor an artist's book. It can be described more adequately as 'liberature', i.e., a literary genre in which the (verbal) text is enhanced by typography, page layout, sometimes images or other non-verbal elements, and complemented by a meaningful book format, all intentionally shaped by the author.¹¹ As is the case with Nowakowski's book, in which an accidental mistake forces a traveller to spend a few hours strolling in an unknown city, in liberatic works, unconventional shapes and structures are motivated by their subject. This is why 'liberature' is sometimes labelled 'literature in the form of the book'.¹² In such integrative poetics, the visual

⁹ Nowakowski also used the leporello format in the first version of *Nieopisanie świata 3* (*Nondescriptio of the World 3*): an exploration of one square meter of land through time and space (from 1988 to 1999 Nowakowski made eight copies of the book), and in *NORWAY TO KVIKAKO* from 2011: a journey through an imaginary, non-existent country „[o]r the voyage to nowhere“, cf. Nowakowski website *Liberatorium* <<http://liberatorium.com/kvikako/kvikako.html>> (last accessed 1 March 2018). It needs to be stressed that in both cases the accordion form is motivated by the content.

¹⁰ It is worth mentioning that before Nowakowski launched into writing and bookmaking, he studied architecture. He is also a drummer in the well-known band *Osjan* playing so-called ethnic music.

¹¹ Polish poet and editor Zenon Fajfer proposed this term in 1999 in an essay commenting on the exhibition of unconventional books *Booksday*, which he co-curated with Radosław Nowakowski and the present author. More on the concept of 'liberature' in: Zenon Fajfer: *Liberature or Total Literature. Collected Essays 1999–2009*. Ed. and trans. by Katarzyna Bazarnik. Kraków 2010. Online for download at: <http://haart.e-kei.pl/e-booki/Zenon_Fajfer_-_Liberature_or_Total_Literature_ENG.pdf> (last accessed 1 March 2018); Wojciech Kalaga: *Liberature. Word, Icon, Space*, *ibid.*, pp. 9–19; Katarzyna Bazarnik: *Liberature. A Book-Bound Genre*. Kraków 2016; Katarzyna Bazarnik, Izabela Curyłło-Klag (eds.): *Incarnations of Textual Materiality. From Modernism to Liberature*. Newcastle 2014; Radosław Nowakowski: *Traktat kartograficzny czyli rzecz o liberaturze*. Dąbrowa Dolna 2002.

¹² Katarzyna Bazarnik, Zenon Fajfer: *Liberature. Literature in the Form of the Book*, in: Sarah Bodman and Tom Sowden (eds.): *Traditional and Emerging Formats of Artists' Books. Where Do We Go from here?*, Online material relating to the conference *What will be the canon for the artist's book in the 21st Century?* at the Centre for Fine Print Research, UWE

features of print along with the other non-verbal features of the book constitute a complex semiotic code that requires equally complex reading.¹³

Although *Sienkiewicza Street* contains a plethora of images, it is a heavily textual work. Admittedly, the text featuring in it has very rich visual texture. It appears as (adult and childish) handwriting, block writing, small print, and ornamental writing. The ornamental writing comes in several varieties. For example, it imitates signboards and posters. Sometimes a cornice and a frieze are formed with letters (fig. 2), possibly because they seem like an obscure type of writing to the protagonist. In front of a florist's the script is full of looping tails and flourishes. When the autodiegetic narrator is looking at trees in front of a building, his thoughts, inscribed in careless handwriting of different shades of green, form a tree top (fig. 3). A similar, bluish calligram represents a stream, and where there is some roadwork a mass of tiny little letters stands for gravel. When the hero is in haste, the text flags this through careless, outstretched script. So the visual features of text, such as shape, colour, saturation and direction of lines, carry meanings that, in purely verbal types of literature (novels, short stories, poems), are communicated through narratorial comments. Hartmut Stöckl notes that such devices are typical for visual communication, but they can be semantically relevant in written communication, too.¹⁴ In *Sienkiewicza Street* we can see how they enhance textual meanings: substitute detailed descriptions, suggest nuances in visual perception, and reflect the narrator's movements, activities and feelings. It seems as if Nowakowski conflated the narratological distinction between 'mimesis' and 'diegesis', and he *shows* (i.e. represents through image) what is usually *told* in literary fiction.

On the purely linguistic level, the work has a comparably rich texture. It uses Polish, English and Esperanto; moreover, there are single phrases in French and Italian. Besides, there are Chinese characters, and mock Aztec inscriptions (fig. 4). These references to non-western scripts may be understood as a hint to the fact that accordion-folded books were the standard

Bristol <<http://www.bookarts.uwe.ac.uk/news-archive/contrad09/conpdfs/liberature.pdf>> (last accessed 1 March 2018).

¹³ Bazarnik: *Liberature. A Book-Bound Genre*, pp. 96–98. See also Wojciech Kalaga: *Liberature. Word, Icon, Space*, in: Fajfer: *Liberature or Total Literature*, pp. 9–19.

¹⁴ For example in advertising. Hartmut Stöckl: *In between Modes. Language and Image in Printed Media*, in: Martin Kaltbacher, Charles Cassily, Ventola Eija (eds.): *Perspectives on Multimodality*. Amsterdam 2004, p. 11 and pp. 14–15.

book form in pre-columbian South American cultures, as they were in many Asian cultures, particularly in China, Japan and Korea. At the same time, this is again motivated by the content: the narrator is fluent in all three languages, being an Australian cultural studies scholar of Polish descent, fascinated by the constructed language invented by Zamenhoff.¹⁵ Since he is personally and professionally interested in what he sees, his mind registers signs and sights with an almost camera-like precision. But the protagonist does not believe naïvely that it is possible to produce an objective, neutral representation. When he spots a photographer's shop, he remarks:

There a photo here a photo there also. And I haven't taken any photos, and won't do this. And rightly so. What for? They deform, cheat, flatten, disfigure, silence, simplify_ _ _ so will it be better if I draw this tenement house? Or describe it? BETTER OR WORSE?¹⁶

As we learn from his internal monologue, he is on his way to a conference on changes in the aesthetic consciousness in post-communist countries.¹⁷ So he responds reflexively to the surrounding architecture, *reading* the environment as a text. This is why to him architectural details resemble writing: „FRIEZES – PHRASES / CORNICES – SENTENCES / ENTABLATURE – LITERATURE / ARCHITRAVE –????RAVE.“¹⁸ He is looking at passers-by and imagines them as letters taking part in a happening: „WŁAŚNIE YES! THAT'S IT GREAT! EVERYBODY WEARS A LETTER OR A WORD ALBO SYLABĘ CHODZĄ MIESZAJĄ SIĘ ZUPEŁNIE SIĘ MIESZAJĄ.“¹⁹ Again, the layout of the passage is iconically²⁰ related to its content: the letters themselves are scattered on the

¹⁵ This is a fascination the hero shares with Nowakowski, as the writer himself is fluent in Esperanto. His books of essays and non-fiction are always trilingual, too.

¹⁶ Trans. by KB, in Polish: „TAM FOTO TU FOTO TAM TEŻ. A JA ŻADNEGO ZDJĘCIA NIE ZROBIŁEM: I NIE ZROBIĘ. I DOBRZE. BO PO CO? DEFORMUJĄ OSZUKUJĄ SPŁASZCZAJĄ, WYKRZYWIAJĄ PRZEMILCZAJĄ UPRASZCZAJĄ---A LEPIJ BĘDZIE JAK TĘ KAMIENICĘ NARYSUJĘ? ALBO OPISZĘ? LEPIJ CZY GORZEJ?“, in: Nowakowski: *Ulica Sienkiewicza w Kielcach*, p. 25-26. I use the capitals to quote block writing.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 12.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 26.

¹⁹ The original mixes English and Polish (in Polish: „OR SYLLABLE. THEY ARE WALKING, THEY ARE MIXING, THEY ARE COMPLETELY MIXED“, translated by KB). *Ibid.*, p. 13.

²⁰ This is the case of combined figural and diagrammatic iconicity in which the size of the letters corresponds to particles of stone, and their chaotic layout reflects loose aggregations of grit. For types of iconic relations see Elżbieta Tabakowska: *Iconicity*, in: Jef Verschueren et al. (eds.): *Handbook of Pragmatics*. Amsterdam, Philadelphia 2001, pp. 1–17.

page, indicating the position of the people in the street (fig. 5). Their random, confused position is linguistically emphasised by his mixing English and Polish. Finally, he feels overwhelmed by his own mental activity, so he comments that:

this is some kind of obsession – to perceive the city as a page of text – as a newspaper page – houses as letters, huge, too big to be recognised, to form words and sentences with them, then a page of text would be a flattened city, a city projected onto the surface of the page. A photo every hour to check what the street has written.²¹

Accidentally, this interpretive ‚twist‘ (taking the street for a page of text) coincides with a twist in the direction of his stroll. Initially, he planned to go down the left side of the street and return along the right side, but he is forced to change the plan due to some roadwork.²² This frustrates him. His original, neat plan is falling apart, and so is the text. The uncovered piping, which offers him a „lesson in the anatomy of the street“, also appears to him as a labyrinthine script: „THE GUTS OF THE CITY THE BOWELS OF THE TOWN BEBECHY MIASTA.“²³ As he passes by excavators, probably loud and aggressive, silencing speech, he reflects that „a town is not just a collection of signs and symbols.“²⁴ It is also full of sounds. When he is getting away from the noise, he becomes aware of its peculiar rhythm, which he perceives as „HARD ROCK CORE / HEART OF THE MUSIC“²⁵ of the city. At this moment he experiences a sensory and semantic overload, so he bursts out in a complaint: „WHY DOES EVERYTHING NEED TO MEAN SOMETHING? I VENTURE TO SEARCH SOMETHING THAT DOES NOT MEAN ANYTHING“ and hopes to „MAKE THIS SIGNFULL [sic] WORLD A SIGNLESS ONE.“²⁶

In this arguably climatic moment of his stroll he considers parallels between other arts and media: theatre and cinema. City squares, as self-

²¹ Trans. by KB, in Polish: „TO JAKAŚ OBSESJA – MIASTO POSTRZEGAĆ / JAK STRONĘ TEKSTU – JAK / STRONĘ W GAZECIE – / DOMY LITERY OGROMNE / ZA WIELKIE BY JE ROZPOZNAĆ / BY Z NICH UŁOŻYĆ WYRAZY / I ZDANIA / WTEDY STRONA TEKSTU BYŁABY SPŁASZCZONYM MIASTEM / MIASTEM RZUTOWANYM NA PŁASZCZYZNĘ KARTKI“, in: Nowakowski: *Ulica Sienkiewicza w Kielcach*, p. 14.

²² Ibid.

²³ Ibid., pp. 15–16.

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ Ibid., p. 17.

²⁶ Ibid., p. 18.

contained, delimited spaces, remind him of the former. The street, which prompts his forward movement, unrolls before him during the stroll, so it appears to him akin to film. This provides us with another connection between the unfoldable leporello structure and the content of the story. Like cinema, *Sienkiewicza Street* is a multimodal work. It is a story narrated through text, images, and the architecture of the book, a sort of novella written in an original, „verbivocovisual“²⁷ stream of consciousness technique. As Nowakowski explains on his website:

It's the main street in the town [the hero] does not know at all, where he has stopped accidentally and has to spend a few hours. He is not in a hurry, so he's walking slowly looking around, listening, letting thoughts to flow across his head. He stops from time to time and then goes on walking flapping and clacking walking along the street-sentence reading-writing this sentence-street This is not a book about a street. This is not a book about what's going on in a street. This is a book about what's going on in the head of somebody walking along a street.²⁸

So it could be called a phenomenological narrative since it aims at recreating for the readers the protagonist's experience. The book is unfolding to them in reading just as the street is ‚unfolding‘ before the hero as he is walking along it. They can see the same sights as the narrator does, and confront their responses with his.

Besides, the experiential quality of reading is enhanced by its haptics. *Sienkiewicza Street* engages the readers not only in a mental exercise, but also in a physical activity. It can be read by turning each section (page with the flaps) one by one. But due to its size and the gatefolds, the turning of the pages is a more self-conscious activity. Opening and reading the flaps corresponds to the protagonist's turning left and right to glance at the sides of the street. Besides, since the direction of the text reflects the protagonist's wayward route, the reader must often turn the book around, or stand up and walk round the desk to read a meandering line or an upside down passage. Alternatively, he or she can unfold several sections (pages) at a time, or if space

²⁷ The neologism is borrowed from James Joyce's *Finnegans Wake*, whose text, due to its visual qualities, can be also described as „verbivocovisual presentment“, see: James Joyce: *Finnegans Wake*. London 1989 [1939], p. 411.

²⁸ Nowakowski: *Ulica Sienkiewicza w Kielcach*, <<http://liberatorium.com/ulica/ulica.html>> (last accessed 1 March 2018).

permits, even the whole book, and walk along it. Interestingly, the reading takes about three hours, the same length of time as the stroll described in the book.²⁹

The readers also get occasional insights into the minds of people standing in windows of the surrounding buildings. Their internal micro-monologues, commenting on the heat or on the protagonist whom they spot in the street, are written down on the reverse sides of the flaps, inside window frames (in segments 6, 8, 17, 20, 24, 28, 29–30; for an example see fig. 6). Incidentally, the first of them appears in segment 6, at the point when the hero reflects that he can see neither roofs nor cellars: „Supposing I went into cellars? Roofs I cannot see. Cellars I won't see. So what am I going to see?“³⁰ Only surfaces is the answer. But the presence of the text on the reverse makes the reader aware of the spatial nature of the book. In fact, right after this reflection, the narrator decides to explore the spaces beyond the surface, and walks into a courtyard.³¹ These backside spaces offer the narrator (and the author) more space for subversion, „A CHANCE TO THINK / INCORRECTLY ABOUT THE HOUSE EFFECT / AND IN AN INCORRECT / LANGUAGE.“³² It may not be a coincidence that this comment appears in his final excursion into the backyards, when he has reached the end of the street and must turn back. Yet before he does so, he decides to sum up his experience, as he states, „unmethodically“, in the „strange and incomprehensible“ language of his ancestors.³³ He should be in Kraków, preparing his work on transformations of aesthetics in post-communist countries, but due to an accident, he stops by in Kielce. This inspires him to turn the accident into a method of research:

random sampling. Connected with purely superficial surveying. Of external symptoms only (but are there any internal ones?). Symptomatic aesthetics.

²⁹ I measured the time of reading; in a private conversation Nowakowski also confirmed that some readers had reported the same duration of reading.

³⁰ In Polish: „Gdyby tak zejść do piwnic? Dachów nie widzę. Piwnic nie zobaczę. To co zobaczę?“ (Trans. by KB.). Nowakowski: *Ulica Sienkiewicza w Kielcach*, p. 6.

³¹ *Ibid.*, p. 9.

³² *Ibid.*, pp. 30–29 (the back of the flaps).

³³ *Ibid.*, p. 34.

Symptomatological aesthetics. What can you learn by only looking? WYSIWYK. What you see is what you know.³⁴

Sienkiewicza Street seems to be an object lesson in such a post-transformative aesthetics. An accidental, unexpected order resulted in an exceptional, liberatic work, exemplifying one of avant-garde tendencies in contemporary writing.³⁵ It shows how literature can offer a space for experimentation and subversion, and how it can be liberated from literary conventions, technological limitations, and possibly even political restraints.³⁶ In which case it can be dubbed ‚liberature‘.

Zenon Fajfers leporello poem *Balcony* (2015)

Interestingly, Zenon Fajfer’s leporello poem, which I discuss in this section, is also connected with architecture. Fajfer, just as Nowakowski, is the key figure in Polish ‚liberatura‘ movement. As already indicated, he is the creator of the term, and one of the major theorists of the concept. However, since the publication of his collected essays³⁷ he ceased theoretical and popularising activities, and devoted himself entirely to poetry writing. *Balcony* comes from his latest poetic volume entitled *Widok z głębokiej wieży* (A View from

³⁴ Ibid.

³⁵ Since the concept of ‚liberature‘ was first formulated in 1999, Ha!art publishing house has published 22 titles in the series under this name. But this kind of integrative, multimodal writing does not concern Polish literature only. Analogous tendencies, which Jessica Pressman characterised in 2009 as the ‚aesthetics of bookishness‘, are also evident in Anglophone literatures. Suffice it to mention Jonathan Safran Foer, Mark Z. Danielewski, Reif Larsen, Steven Hall, and Adam Thirlwell. Incidentally, Thirlwell’s liberatic novel *Kapow!* (London 2012) also includes two accordion inserts suggestive of Scheherazade’s embedded Arabian tales. Worth mentioning in this context is also Anne Carson’s *Nox* (New York 2010). For Pressman’s concept of ‚bookishness‘ see: Jessica Pressman: The Aesthetic of Bookishness in Twenty-First Century Literature, in: Michigan Quarterly Review 48.4 (Fall 2009), pp. 465–482: <<http://hdl.handle.net/2027/spo.act2080.0048.402>> (last accessed 1 March 2018).

³⁶ Mia Lerm-Hayes has drawn my attention to the fact that the concept of ‚liberature‘ was formulated in the 1990’s, when Poland was undergoing a major political change that was essentially understood as liberation from the communist regime. Her remark opens an interesting vista on the matter, which is, however, beyond the scope of this article.

³⁷ Fajfer: *Liberature or Total Literature*.

the Deep Tower).³⁸ At first glance the book looks like a conventional codex, but a thoughtfully arranged order of poems, certain subtle typographic elements, two photographs, and the leporello poem testify to its ‚liberatic‘ character. Considering the content and compositional space of the book it becomes clear that the underlying conceptual metaphor of the volume is ‚house‘, or ‚home‘.³⁹

A View from the Deep Tower contains a series of poems focusing on family relations. Some are addressed to the persona’s wife (especially the part entitled „TERAZ“, i.e., „NOW“); others feature his children, siblings, parents, grandparents, and close friends. A few are self-reflexive musings on the poet’s existential condition. Many poems are set inside a house, in clearly identified spaces: a bedroom, a kitchen, a living room, a study. The poet has a special liking for windows; the two photos in the book show the view of a window from inside a room. „Szczelina“ (i.e. „A gap“), the poem opening the collection, refers to the sunlight streaming in through a half drawn curtain. It seems that it is through this thin gap that the lyrical I is watching life inside and outside the house.⁴⁰ It also opens up a passage through which he is taking glances into the past.

His ‚house of poetry‘, to paraphrase Henry James’s phrase, has also a balcony, or rather the *Balcony* – a poem printed on an expandable accordion sheet. In the folded variant it is spread on two pages: 50 and 51; on which the text is printed in black ink (fig. 7). However, page 51 can be unfolded. When spread, it consists of five panels with columns of text printed in green (labelled as page 51A, see fig. 8). So it extends out of the book, just as a balcony sticks out of a building. The balcony is an element that is both a part of the house, but also external to it. It is projected from the building proper into the outer space, which is somewhat parallel to a position of close friends, who are almost like a family, but usually live outside it.

In Fajfer’s volume, *Balcony* functions in a similar way. It belongs to the group of texts devoted to friends. It is dedicated to „Mrs. H. N.“, who:

³⁸ Zenon Fajfer: Balkon, in: Widok z głębokiej wieży. Szczecin 2015, pp. 50–51A (the leporello insert). The poem was first published in the literary journal: Fabularie, No. 1 (2013), p. 38. All further quotations from the poem come from my unpublished translation.

³⁹ This is one of the favoured conceptual metaphors in ‚liberatic‘ works. I discuss this in the chapter „Books are buildings“ in: Bazarnik: Liberature. A Book-Bound Genre, pp. 65–70.

⁴⁰ Several poems are also set in a garden, park or fields.

Leaned on the piano
she's looking at

The Balcony

a tree drinking straight from the river
smiling at a spoiled tit
sleeping over sunflower seeds⁴¹

As she seems to be confined to her room due to age and illness, the balcony is the only external space where she is able to go. But this is not certain because she may be confusing a picture hanging on the wall with a window:

over the bed is a window in an ornamental frame
a winter landscape with riverbanks frozen with a
bridge⁴²

On the bridge the woman sees her daughter with a younger man. The daughter is holding a book from which she is reading to the man. The old lady is:

curious what
she's reading
now

time to go back but where are we actually
are we too bright to see anything
better switch off the light
here and in the balcony

she won't be able to see letters
letters won't be able to see her

what now shall

⁴¹ Fajfer: Balkon, in: *Widok z głębokiej wieży*, p. 50. I reproduce the original layout to show how due to the large font the title typographically stands out of the text, as if to imitate the balcony protruded from the wall. The Polish is as follows: „oparta o niewidzialne pianino / patrzy na / BALKON / na drzewo pijące prosto z rzeki / uśmiechając się do rozpieszczonej sikorki / śpiącej na ziarnku słonecznika.“

⁴² „nad łóżkiem wisi okno w stylowej ramie / zimowy pejzaż z brzegami skutymi mostem.“ Ibid.

the palace burn
no

not that

birds'
twitter⁴³

As the dusk is falling, anxiety creeps into the initially serene landscape. The old lady is agitated, confuses words, breaks them in the middle, unable to finish her sentences. She is afraid of switching on the lights, she seems to see or recall a fire in a palace. We realise that this may be connected not only with her aging, but also with her traumatic experiences. Physically confined to her room, mentally she is locked in the past.

This becomes evident when one unfolds the poem to read the text on the accordion sheet. Its position, as if concealed inside the poem proper, and the green colour of print indicate that it represents another, metaphorical space, the inside of her mind. This central, enclosed part of the poem contains her stream of consciousness in free indirect speech. Her thoughts flow in accordance with free associations. Like the protagonist of *Sienkiewicza Street*, she responds to external stimuli. When she notices the TV set (whose name already escapes her), she is wondering if „anybody [is] going to be in this glass box today / or maybe that lad will sing / you shall be my lady.“⁴⁴ When she smells „this insipid smell of pines this green on [her] plate / she doesn't feel like eating pine needles today“⁴⁵ and refuses her meal, or her medicine. This is when the reader realises how much she has been affected by illness and age.

But her fragmented, incoherent thoughts gradually reveal a dreadful truth. When knocking on the door interrupts her listening to music, she

⁴³ „czyta / teraz / czas już wracać tylko gdzie my właściwie / jesteśmy zbyt jasno żeby coś zobaczyć / trzeba zgasić światło / tu i na bal / konie / nie będzie widzieć liter / litery nie będą widzieć jej / co teraz czy / pałac pło / nie / to nie / ptaków / śpiew.“ Ibid., p. 51.

⁴⁴ „czy w tej szklanej skrzynce będzie dzisiaj ktoś / a może tamten młodzieniec zanuci / będziesz moją panią.“ Ibid., p. 51A.1 (the additional number after the comma indicates the folded pages).

⁴⁵ „ten mdły zapach sosen to zielone na talerzu / nie ma dziś apetytu na sosnowe igły.“ Ibid. Incidentally, this may also suggest why the green ink is used in this section.

checks if the door is properly locked, and when she focuses on the music again, she recalls how

she used to play it from memory
about an hour ago in Lviv
until the piano hid itself
at the bottom of the wardrobe with musty hay⁴⁶

This brings back horrifying violence she witnessed in her home city of Lviv decades ago during World War II.⁴⁷ She wants to „plug the ears / not to hear the hoofbeats / on the streets / cobbled with kid’s heads“.⁴⁸ No wonder that she has repressed the gruesome memories, concealing them deep inside her mind. Then, it is only appropriate that this passage is also hidden before the readers’ eyes in the folded page.

Fortunately, her debilitating illness is also a blessing in disguise. Azaleas „blossoming like fire“ in a vase on the table attract her attention, which diverts her from the traumatic memories. Then she spots her meal, which „has not cooled down yet“ and tries to have a little more, perhaps prompted by her daughter with the demanding request „eat“.⁴⁹ The word, which she mishears as „eight“, makes her think about Henry the Eighth, and the kingdom of kangaroos, which her daughter once visited.⁵⁰ This cheers her up, and she starts singing again. She would like to sing with this handsome, young man on TV, „only now she can’t find the words / when [she] was asleep they must have gone to the garden“ where they are dancing with phloxes, asters,

⁴⁶ „kiedyś grała to z pamięci / jakąś godzinę temu we Lwowie / dopóki fortepian się nie ukrył / na dnie szafy ze stęchłym sianem.“ Ibid., p. 51A.2.

⁴⁷ During World War II Lviv and the surrounding territories were the stage of cruel ethnic cleansings. During the Nazi occupation, in 1943–44 in consequence of the Ukrainian Insurgent Army’s massacres of the Polish population in Easter Galicia and Volhynia, tolerated by the Germans and possibly inspired by the Soviet secret service NKVD, the majority of Poles living in Lviv fled to General Governorate, the German administrative zone covering part of pre-war Poland. For more information see, for example, Timothy Snyder: *Bloodlands. Europe Between Hitler and Stalin*. New York 2010.

⁴⁸ „zatkać uszy / nie słyszeć tych stępujących kopyt / na ulicach brukowanych / dziećmi łbami.“ Fajfer: *Balkon*, p. 51A.2.

⁴⁹ Ibid.

⁵⁰ „usmażona byłaby smaczniejsza / ile Henryk Ósmy miał żon / w tym królestwie kangurów.“ Ibid., p. 51A.3.

and snapdragons.⁵¹ The name of the last flower alerts her again. The old lady is getting worried about her daughter, who went out to do some shopping a week ago, and hasn't returned yet, because she knows that „it is so dangerous / to walk on her own in a strange / territory.“⁵² The trauma returns: she recalls the childbirth, the fear that they would be spotted through a broken window, so „it needs darning“.⁵³ Once it is mended, „then nobody will find us here they won't come“. „Darning“ brings back another recollection about the most „princessly dress“ „in the whole wide world“ that she sew for her little girl, who now pacifies her gently: „it's late“, time to leave the balcony and go inside.

The „beautiful bright day“ is drawing to a close. The folding provides a natural occasion for the repetition, so typical for people losing their memory. When the reader folds back in the accordion sheet, the old lady returns to her darkening room, and wonders again:

curious what
she's reading
now

time to go back but where are we actually

[...]

what now shall

the palace burn
no

not that

birds'
twitter⁵⁴

⁵¹ „sama miałaby ochotę śpiewać / tylko chwilowo nie może znaleźć słów / kiedy spałam pewnie wyszły do ogrodu / i tak zatańczyć / z floksami i chmurą astrów.“ Ibid.

⁵² „to takie niebezpieczne / samej chodzić po obcym / terenie.“ Ibid., p. 51A.4.

⁵³ „trzeba zacerować to okno / wtedy nikt nas tu nie znajdzie nie przyjdą / [...] na całym świecie żadna dziewczynka / nigdy nie miała królewniejszej sukienki / już późno / tak wcześniej / taki piękny jasny dzień.“ Ibid., p. 51A.5. All further quotes come from the last page of the accordion sheet.

⁵⁴ Ibid., p. 51.

Małgorzata Gurowska and Joanna Ruszczyk's *Lokomotywa / IDEOLO* (2015) & *Książę w cukierni* by Marek Bińczyk and Joanna Concejo (2013)

While Nowakowski's book invited its readers to a stroll, *Lokomotywa / IDEOLO* (The Locomotive / IDEOLO, fig. 9)⁵⁵ takes them on a train ride. This is a collaborative work of Małgorzata Gurowska, a graphic designer, and Joanna Ruszczyk, a journalist, who reinterpret creatively one of the best-known Polish children's poems: Julian Tuwim's *The Locomotive*; hence, the modernist poet is listed as the third author on the book cover.⁵⁶

In Tuwim's poem a thick, fat, oily train engine is waiting at the station to set off for a journey through the countryside. Out of over forty wagons the original text enumerates the load of the first ten. They are full of people, horses, cows, fat pigs, and „fat-bellied dummies sitting and eating greasy salamis“. They are „packed with bananas“, „six grand pi-an-as“, a monster, a cannon, tables, wardrobes and chairs, an elephant, a bear and two giraffes – amongst many other things.⁵⁷ The rest is left to be filled in by the readers' or listeners' imagination. Ruszczyk and Gurowska take up this challenge, presenting the content of the train in simple, black outlines that may remind of paper cut illustrations. So the readers can see that further wagons are full of more pigs, cows, and foxes, sometimes neatly arranged in rows, sometimes randomly massed together. Beside them, the train carries other, illegal cargo: rare and endangered species of animals, smuggled alive in horrific conditions (for examples, live parrots are bottled), and deer, elks, bears, and the like (usually brought from exotic trips as hunting trophies). Some wagons are filled with naked men and women, or people dressed in national costumes. We can speculate that some of them may be tourists, while others may be refugees, smuggled illegally, under inhumane conditions. There are also military troops travelling with their modern weapons, as if to comple-

⁵⁵ Julian Tuwim, Małgorzata Gurowska, Joanna Ruszczyk: *Lokomotywa / IDEOLO*. Trans. by Walter Whippley, David Malcolm, and Ewa Lipińska. Poznań 2015.

⁵⁶ Though a collaborative work, it is labelled as ‚liberature‘ in the Polish National Library catalogue, too: <<http://nukat.edu.pl/lib/item?id=chamo:3527245&theme=nukat>> (last accessed 1 March 2018).

⁵⁷ Julian Tuwim: *Lokomotywa. The Locomotive. Die Lokomotive*. Trans. into English by Marcel Weyland. Trans. into German by Wolfgang von Polentz. Kraków 2006.

ment the giant cannon in the original poem, and veterans returning home, as is evidenced by an occasionally missing leg or arm.

The visual message of this over 11 meters long leporello is austere, simple, and moving, offering a powerful, critical commentary on the contemporary social reality. As Krystyna Rybicka comments, „the precisely rendered locomotive, through the continuity of the accordion structure, presents the content of the cargo, yet deprived of the colourful carelessness, buzz, and clatter. All is ruled by dramatic whiteness of silence.”⁵⁸ Based on the stark, visual contrast of black and white,⁵⁹ the design separates images from text, which is printed on the reverse sides of the accordion sheets. This text is made out of excerpts from Tuwim’s political satires, articles, and letters in which the poet commented on the condition of the interwar Polish society: philistinism, hypocrisy and narrow-mindedness of the bourgeoisie, consumerism, the class conflicts, anti-Semitism, and militarism. The quotes, carefully chosen by Ruszczyk, are juxtaposed with fragments of reports on the meat industry, smuggling of endangered species, environmental pollution, deforestation, war casualties, persecution of LGBT people. They enter into a dialogue with Tuwim’s original commentaries, echoing his concerns. Thus, the children’s poem provides Gurowska and Ruszczyk with an opportunity to reflect on the state of the contemporary world. In conclusion, let me quote Rybicka again, as she aptly explains how Tuwim’s playful text becomes a pretext to a serious discussion, not only between parents and children, but also among adults themselves:

The book warns us that it is all too easy to change a dream journey into a deadly torture, to reduce a priceless individual life to an anonymous sign. In its focused, ascetic design the book shouts with the suffering of the helpless. Its refined aesthetics exposes cruelty and mindlessness of those who continuously usurp themselves the right to nominate victims for the sake of higher ends.⁶⁰

⁵⁸ Krystyna Rybicka: Review, in: Polish Section of International Board on Books for Young People, <http://www.ibby.pl/?page_id=2249> (last accessed 1 March 2018).

⁵⁹ The reviewer associates this with Kasimir Malewicz’s painting *The Black Square*, and the dynamism of Gurowska’s design with the dynamism of the revolutionary social changes of the early 20th century.

⁶⁰ Rybicka: Review, in: Polish Section of International Board on Books for Young People, <http://www.ibby.pl/?page_id=2249>.

The form of the book is motivated not only by the original theme, i.e., the representation of the train. On a metaphorical plane the accordion form may also flag continuity between the past and the present. It shows vividly how the past can be nostalgically idealised – by evoking the familiar, children’s poem, and how it can be critically reread through Tuwim’s other texts. Gurowska and Ruszczyk’s work has been critically appreciated. The book has received several awards, including the *IBBY Book of the Year Award* in 2014,⁶¹ the *European Design Gold Award 2015*,⁶² and a special mention of the Polish Association of Book Publishers as the *Most Beautiful Book of Year 2014*.

Interestingly, another recently published, awarded leporello is also a children’s book for the double audience of children and adults. It is Marek Bieńczyk’s and Joanna Concejo’s *Książę w cukierni* (Prince in a Pastry Shop, fig. 10).⁶³ The story was written by Bieńczyk, a well-known contemporary novelist and essayist; the illustrations and book design was authored by the established graphic designer Concejo. The book was apparently curated by the editor who invited both artists to collaborate. The result is equally impressive – the book was also awarded IBBY’s prize for Concejo’s illustrations,⁶⁴ and received the title of the *Best Book of the Year in 2013*. A visit in a cakeshop serves as a pretext for a seemingly humorous anecdote in which the eponymous Prince discusses the meaning of happiness with his beloved Cactus Girl. His melancholic reflections are counterpointed with the Cactus Girl’s brusque answers, and Concejo’s ironic, surrealist illustrations: a big, brown bear, and a pack of playful, small dogs which seem to parallel the human characters. Printed on a 6-meter-long sheet, this work can be read by turning pages, or by unfolding it into one, large textual-visual narrative panorama.

In an article on the accordion-book, Manfred Breede and Jason Lisi remark that the conventional codex form „is undoubtedly the best architecture for the majority of reading materials, however the accordion form has some features that can enhance the reading experience. A case in point is multiple

⁶¹ International Board on Books for Young People: <http://www.ibby.pl/?page_id=2249> (last accessed 1 March 2018).

⁶² See: <<https://europeandesign.org/submissions/the-locomotive-ideolo/>>.

⁶³ Marek Bieńczyk, Joanna Concejo: *Książę w cukierni*. Wrocław 2013. The English translation by Benjamin Paloff was brought out in 2014 by the same publisher.

⁶⁴ See: <http://www.ibby.pl/?page_id=1454> (last accessed 1 March 2018).

page spreads to reproduce panoramic views for example⁶⁵. That is precisely the benefit gained in *The Prince in a Pastry Shop* and in *Locomotive / IDEOLO* – and the reason why Radosław Nowakowski decided to use this specific book form in *Sienkiewicza Street*. When these accordion-books are fully unfolded, the result is breathtaking. In Zenon Fajfer's moving poem, the accordion format enhances the sense of mystery that the reader is gradually uncovering. But it may also communicate the tenderness felt by the lyrical I. Unfolding the expandable sheet with its fragile structure makes one think of the fragile body of the old lady. One must be as careful with handling the multiple-page spread as the daughter must be when she takes care of her mother. This is a kind of emotion that the codex format can hardly inspire.

⁶⁵ Manfred Breede, Jason Lisi: *The Accordion Book*, in: *International Journal of the Book* 4.1 (2007), pp. 75–83.

Illustrations



Fig. 1: Radosław Nowakowski: *Sienkiewicza Street* (2003) in the ‚Liberature‘ exhibition, Academy of Fine Arts, Sofia 2014.

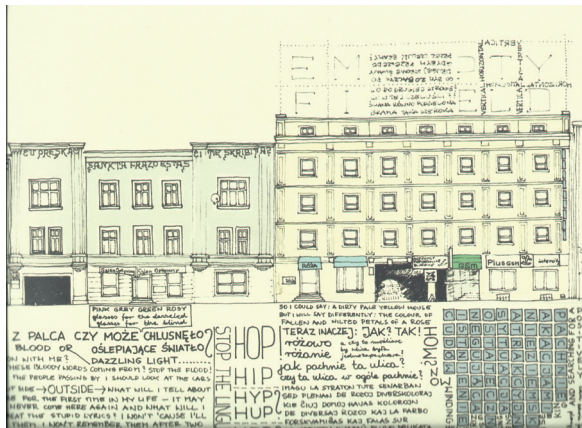


Fig. 2: Detail from *Sienkiewicza Street* (2003) showing the friezes as texts.



Fig. 3: Detail from *Sienkiewicza Street* (2003) showing the calligrammes of trees.

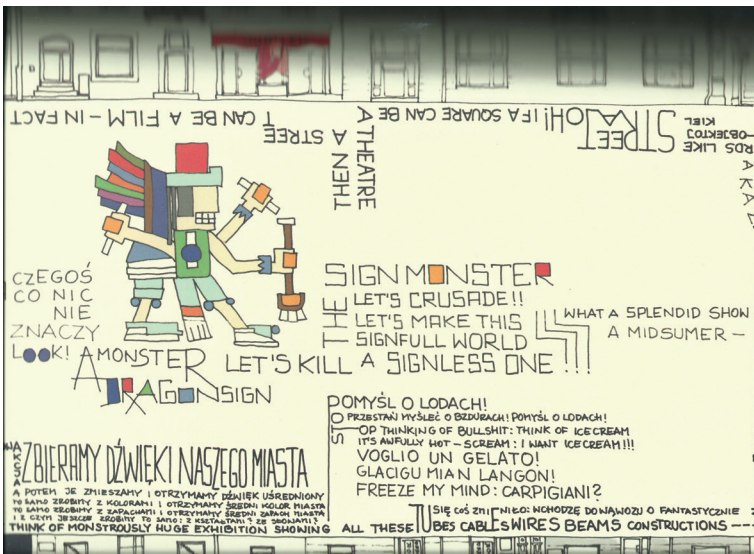


Fig. 4: Detail from *Sienkiewicza Street* (2003) with an Aztec „monster dragon sign“.

Katarzyna Bazarnik



Fig. 7: The folded state of Zenon Fajfers poem *Balcony* in: *Widok z głębokiej wieży* (2015).



Fig. 8: The unfolded state of *Balcony* in: *Widok z głębokiej wieży* (2015).

A Stroll through Polish Leporellos



Fig. 9: Małgorzata Gurowska, Joanna Ruszczyk:
Lokomotywa / IDEOLO (2015).



Fig. 10: Marek Bieńczyk, Joanna Concejo: *Książę w cukierni* (engl.: *Prince in a Pastry Shop*, 2013).