

Forms of engagement

Writers in 20th- and 21st-century culture

Summary

This book is the outcome of the first part of a national conference devoted to writers from the 20th and 21st centuries. Held in 2015, the conference focused on the question of engagement understood in broad terms. Its starting point were reflections on the historico-literary approach to this category (whose key reference remains the era of communism in Poland) and its modern-day forms. The research presented at the conference showed the usefulness of employing ideologically conceived engagement with respect to specific writer profiles, as well as problematizing this perspective, revealing its ambiguity, or simply suggesting its transformation.

The first group of texts, in the chapter "Labirynty of engagement", deals with different types of literary attempts to intrude into reality. Jerzy Smulski analyzes socialist-realist literature and the way smell was ideologically marked. Piotr Pietrych's text concentrates on Tadeusz Różewicz's ambiguous attitude towards early PRL politics (Communist-era Poland). Beata Przymuszała provides a profile of Michał Borwicz and presents his views, which sought to find a language in which to discuss difficult Polish-Jewish matters. Tadeusz Konwicki's pro- and anti-regime engagement is the subject of Jacek Nowakowski's work, which analyzes various interviews with the writer. Damian Dobrodziej presents the conflict between the existential and engagement in Jacek Bierezin's creative work. Krzysztof Gajda's text deals with the songwriter's engagement in rock music, discussing the casus of Krzysztof Grabaj Grabowski. Next, Julia Kristeva's essays in support of disabled people are covered in Agnieszka Rydz's contribution. Finally, Jakub Misun focuses on the economic aspect of literary work (and its engagement) by referring to the case of Kaja Malanowska.

Part Two, entitled "Paradoxes of engagement", contains reflections on the ambiguous aspect of this category. Barbara Sienkiewicz discusses the utopian quality of literature that can change reality with reference to the novels of Witold Gombrowicz, Marek Hłasko and Sylwia Chutnik. In turn, Agata Stankowska highlights Ryszard Krynicki's poetic self-reflection, which prompts contemplation of the legitimacy of 'action' by problematizing the question of 'silence'. Marta Wiśniewska presents Tyrmand's anti-communist proclamations to show the change in the image of this writer, who became a conservative intellectual after emigrating to the USA. Finally, Grzegorz Pertek looks at the paradox of being alone/ in a community taking Marcin Świetlicki as his example.

Part Three, entitled "New paths", shows other suggestions for presenting engagement. Krystyna Pietrych shows the example of Miron Białoszewski, who engages in reality through literature, at the same time revealing the danger in sympathizing with the community (thus presenting

engagement as a kind of subversive game with the system). Patryk Szaj proposes a new reading of Aleksander Wat's poetic creativity as an existential project of engaging in understanding oneself. The relations between artistic cleanliness and the reality-related 'action' of a play are the subject of Alina Świeściak's work, which refers to Julian Przyboś' concept. Joanna Grądziel-Wójcik shows how a metaphorical image of clothing enables Ewa Lipska to reflect upon the economization of the present. Agnieszka Kwiatkowska expresses Teresa Ferenc's poetic project as a kind of somatic engagement in life: the building of relations.

The diversity of perspectives and ways of defining the category discussed in this volume allows the reader to perceive an attitude on the part of writers in the idea of engagement that is exceptionally important, not only for literary or cultural research, but also for contemporary times.

Translated by Rob Pagett