

IN THE SHADOW OF HISTORY

20th-century experiences and narratives

SUMMARY

The aim of the monograph *In the shadow of history. 20th-century experiences and narratives* is to show the ways in which important social problems present in literature or in the wider writings from the inter-war period appear the prose of later periods. The chronological framework adopted in this work takes as its boundaries 1918, the year in which Poland regained its independence, and the first decades of socialist Poland. However, these are not impermeable boundaries. The continuous nature of the narrative regarding issues of interest to the author was interrupted by the Second World War, a central event in 20th-century history, and the experiences connected with this have been and will continue to be the subject of multifaceted reflections.

The monograph is divided into three parts.

Part One, titled *Behind the walls*, opens with the chapter *What is it with this wall?* Devoted to socially-engaged reportage of the 2 decades of the inter-war period, whose authors penetrate places otherwise inaccessible on a daily basis, such as juvenile detentions centres for children with special needs or psychiatric hospitals. They also chronicle the night-time arrests of Warsaw prostitutes and the customs of Warsaw's Jewish population. The two chapters that follow deal with prison narratives. The chapter *The marginal on the margins. Prison narratives in the inter-war period* analyses pieces written by authors connected in some way with the state institutions of the 2nd Polish Republic. In their narratives prisons are presented as efficient, modern institutions, in which the resocialization process is carried out effectively. These pieces are contrasted with the accounts of people concerned by the difficult fate of prisoners and the conditions in which they live (Zofia Nalkowska and Stefania Sempołowska). The Chapter entitled *From the cell. Prison narratives in the Polish People's Republic and later times* concentrates on prose about incarcerated criminals from the communist era. The focus of interest is the role prison plays in the protagonists' lives. Often these characters are autobiographical, for whom prison is a place to stay temporarily, albeit repeatedly, which is an inherent risk in this "profession". The next chapter, *"Barbarians' prose*, focuses on *homines novi* works,

dubbed “barbarians” by one literary theorist. Such terms related to authors from the lower social classes, who had entered higher social milieu and literary circles purely on the basis of their prose, whose subject matter was exotic for the 1930s reader. These writers include convicts (Urke Nachalnik), smugglers (Sergiusz Piasecki), waiters (Henryk Worcell and Zbigniew Uniłowski) and a cabaret artist (Maria Ukniewska). This part of the book closes with a chapter on the generational consciousness of writers and poets from what was called the “Współczesność” generation (from the journal of that name), and is titled *Being a writer/ poet from the “Współczesność” generation*. The analysis here focuses on the reflections of representatives of this generation, their reminiscences, and also elements of the artistic and generational mores.

The second part of the book is titled *Women and breakthroughs*. The first chapter, *Woman. Independence. Money* deals with the changes in moral customs in Poland influenced by the First World War, which impacted on the literary depiction of female protagonists, for whom sexual and economic freedom became very important values. It has to be highlighted at this point that for some of them, motherhood still remained a significant value. From this perspective, the prose by Juliusz Kaden-Bandrowski, Zofia Nałkowska and Jarosław Iwaszkiewicz is analysed here.

The next chapter, entitled *Women in the marshes*, aims to show how a woman as a protagonist in literature is instrumentalised. Antoni Ossendowski’s novel *Teacher* follows the typical structure of popular literature, where the main female protagonist moves to Polesie (a territory of importance in the Polish imaginary universum) in order to engage in a mission of propagating the Polish spirit and culture. In another novel, *Flame in the marshes*, written by Wanda Wasilewska, the female main protagonist witnessed the intensifying spread of communist ideology in this area bordering Soviet Russia, and she finds herself incapable of supporting this ideology. The third and final chapter in this part of the book, *The Forgotten Female Protagonist of the Thaw Prose*, focuses on female writers whose literary debuts fell around the time of the Polish October 1956. These works found little favour among both female and male literary critics of the time, even though their prose did create an entirely new type of (female) protagonist and took up a new set of issues. This chapter discusses the following female writers and their works: Magdalena Leja, Monika Kotowska, Krystyna Salaburska, Anna Danuta Kaczyńska.

The last part of the book, entitled *From the East*, contains a discussion of the communist ideas present in selected literary works and in the literary critic magazine “Literary Monthly”, edited by Aleksander Wat. For the Polish writers of the time, the most frequent image of communism was seen through their eyes during trips to the USSR and this is also the issue covered in the first two chapters of this monograph (*A Word on Moscow and a particular metaphor; In the beginning there was a roll of film: On photo reports from trips to the USSR from the late 1940s and early 1950s*). The other image of communism was from the 1920s and 1930s, which originated from publications, films and journalistic pieces on the USSR, and later those that surfaced during the Second World War. After the War, the only source of the image came from the writer’s own experience, not solely in the literary sense. This is the issue covered in the following chapters: *Aleksander Wat’s Prestuplenie [Crime]; Wat – Russia – Miłosz; Stanisław Wygodzki’s communisms*.

Translated by Aleksandra Oszmiańska-Pagett