

wykazanie, że do problemów maski podchodzić można rozmaicie choć żaden z tych sposobów nie oferuje oglądu ostatecznego i decydującego. Czytelnik może jednak sformułować konkluzję odmienną: maskę epoki Stuartów trzeba analizować i omawiać nie z jednego, lecz z wielu aspektów. Aby pełnia jej znaczeń się odkryła, aby dostrzeżono także i literacki jej kształt, trzeba właśnie uwzględnić wszystkie z ukazanych przez Jerzego Limona odniesień kulturowych. Nadal jednak ten kształt literacki pozostaje — jak się zdaje — nie do końca określony.

Mimo wszystkich zastrzeżeń tu sformułowanych, książka Jerzego Limona dobrze sytuuje się wśród ostatnich osiągnięć polskich anglistów. Akcent położony na perspektywach kulturowych przybliża ją to takim pozycjom jak np. Niny Witoszek *The Theatre of Recollection. A Cultural Study of the Modern Dramatic Tradition in Ireland and Poland* (1958), a podjęcie problematyki genologicznej przypomina opracowania Artura Blaima *Early English Utopian Fiction* (1984) czy *Failed Dynamics. The English Robinsonade of the Eighteenth Century* (1987). Polska anglistyka chce zdobyć Europę, a może i świat. Szkoda tylko, że wszystkie te osiągnięcia nie dotrą do środowiska badaczy literatury nad Wisłą. Bo też książki Blaima wyszły w lubelskim wydawnictwie uniwersyteckim po prostu na prawach maszynopisu (100 egz. nakładu!), choć — jak wieść niesie — książka o robinsonadzie ma się wkrótce ukazać w USA; praca Witoszek ukazała się za granicą w serii rozpraw doktorskich Uniwersytetu w Sztokholmie, w nieznanym bliżej lecz też szczupłym nakładzie, a książki Jerzego Limona na rynku polskim są niedostępne. Taktownie nie wspomniemy o barierze językowej. Komercyjne nastawienie polskich wydawnictw w ostatnich czasach każe wątpić czy jakakolwiek instytucja w kraju wystąpi z propozycją przekładu ich prac na język ojczysty.

Wydaje się, że niby jest z czego się radować. Jeszcze nie tak dawno środowisko anglistyczne stanowiło w Polsce swoiste getto — głównie z powodu zanurzenia w dziewiętnastowiecznej wciąż problematyce i opóźnień w warsztacie teoretyczno-metodologicznym. A oto już dzisiaj niektórych książek nieznanymi bliżej w kraju badaczy — choć z polskich szkół wyrosli — szukać trzeba w księgarniach Oxfordu, Londynu i Toronto, nie w Warszawie.

Tylko, że niewielu z nas jeszcze w księgarniach tych zwykło bywać.

Andrzej Zgorzelski Gdańsk

Brian McHale, *POSTMODERNIST FICTION*, Methuen, New York and London 1987, ss. 264.

Linda Hutcheon, *A POETICS OF POSTMODERNISM: HISTORY, THEORY, FICTION*, Routledge, New York and London 1988, ss. 268.

Linda Hutcheon, *THE POLITICS OF POSTMODERNISM*, Routledge, New York and London 1989, ss. 195.

At the end of the 1980s, the critical controversy around postmodernism was already becoming a historical fact. Time was ripe for cooling off polemical emotions and for attempting a more distanced view of the literature produced during the preceding two decades. It was also the right time to replace endlessly proliferating catalogues with synthetic summaries or, in other words, to move from an analytical-diagnostic to a descriptive-systemic approach. And this is precisely the task taken up by the authors of the three important books on postmodernism signalled above. Using a different focus, they both try to meet the demand for a descriptive poetics of postmodernist writing.

Brian McHale adopts for his book a typically postmodernist stance, reminding the reader that as literary critics we generate the objects of our study, and therefore our constructs can be equally fictitious as fictions they are about. Such nominalistic excuses him from justifying the choice of his materials or from providing any general definition of postmodernism. McHale's position is paradoxical: influenced by the postmodernist suspicion of theories and systems, he is nevertheless committed to them. Which is not to say that he fails to present a highly disciplined original and consistent reading of the texts he classifies as postmodern, the reading which offers the repertory motifs and devices shared by such texts.

As he himself admits, this is a one-idea book whose central thesis derives from the Russian formalist concept of the dominant. McHale argues that postmodernist texts are organized around ontological issues, much the same as modernist fiction was dominated by epistemological issues. The change of dominant from epistemological to ontological marks the transition from the modernist to postmodernist poetics. His proposed poetics would comprise a description of different levels where the foregrounding of the question of modes of being can occur, that is the reconstructed world, the linguistic medium, the dimension of voices and speakers and the positions they occupy in the text, as well as the sphere of the book as a material object and its biographical author.

In a good chapter on the problematics of space, he defines the zone as the spatial paradigm of postmodernist fiction, which allows for the co-existence of a variety of worlds that belong to different ontological orders (e.g., the projected space of the fictional universe, the physical space of the book or page, and the intertextual space). He then discusses in detail the contiguity between postmodernist writing and science fiction, the fantastic, and the historical novel, all of which in their individual ways challenge certain ontological boundaries. Postmodernist fiction often draws upon these related three genres for congenial motifs and *opoi*. Most of the textual strategies used for constructing and deconstructing its fictional space have the dual effect of putting the projected world under erasure and exposing the processes of world-construction.

McHale demonstrates that postmodernist fiction celebrates the view of any reality as generated in and through language. To document this, he gathers numerous examples of postmodernist allegories, literalized tropes and metaphors into autonomous realities, as well as other radical stylistic strategies which tend to collapse the ontological barrier between words and world. Nowhere, however, is the basis fiction/real cut more radically problematized than in the foregrounding of the material presence of the book as a thing and the paradoxical presence/absence of the author as a biological subject and a function of the text.

Such and similar strategies and motifs

which McHale detects in postmodernist fiction are all said to reinforce its ontological dominant. To order and describe them, however, is not enough so as to discover the system underlying the catalogue. What accounts for this weakness is perhaps McHale's interpretation of the concept of the dominant, which is not specific enough to serve as a touchstone of classification. It might even seem that any "true answer" to any question we can ask of the text can become one of its "dominants". Thus at some point, it becomes clear that we cannot ask for more but accept McHale's book as an extremely useful lexicon of postmodernist fictional strategies and *topoi*, linked to the ontological thematics. In a rather formalist manner, the author examines their bearing on both the ontology of the literary text and the ontology of the world it projects. Ironically, opting for the ontological perspective on postmodernist fiction, he neglects to confront the reader with "larger" ontological issues of postmodernism itself which is after all the cultural context generating this fiction.

For a more comprehensive treatment of postmodernism, we must turn to Linda Hutcheon's latest studies, conceived as a sequel to her earlier books on reflexivity and parody (*Narcissistic Narrative: The Metafictional Paradox* and *A Theory of Parody: The Teachings of Twentieth-Century Art Forms*). However, if her approach to selfconscious art was previously formalist and pragmatic, now she extends her perspective so as to encompass the historical and the political dimension, which are both crucial to her understanding of the postmodern. History and ideology come to the focus in *A Poetics of Postmodernism* and *The Politics of Postmodernism* respectively.

Hutcheon has three adjectives that summarize her reception of postmodernism: contradictory, resolutely historical and inescapably political. Postmodern art is marked by intensely self-reflexive, aesthetic concerns while at the same time trying to relate to a discursive world external to itself. This is the source of multiple paradoxes of postmodernism: it cultivates artistic autonomy and is rooted in the historical, social and political context; it is both academic and popular, elitist and accessible, caught in between conservatism and rebellion; it partakes of a logic of "both/and" rather than "either/or". Those who ignore the postmodern

contradictions tend to interpret postmodernism as either "neo-conservatively nostalgic/reactionary" or "disruptive/revolutionary" (p. XIII). According to Hutcheon, it is both and neither as it merely questions commonly accepted values of our culture without replacing them, but questions nevertheless. Thus it is deeply implicated in and dependent on what it subverts: the dominant "liberal humanist" ideology with its notions of subjectivity, authority, origin, originality, continuity, order, value, meaning, center, hierarchy and control. In fact, there is no revolutionary change, no emergence of a new discursive formation, but only interrogating from within or critique with complicity.

Hutcheon's aim in the first book is to theorize (without totalizing) this extremely discrepant and diverse cultural phenomenon. Her poetics of postmodernism seeks to integrate artistic practice with the surrounding theoretical discourses, using the points of intersection to organize itself around the repeatedly problematized issues of narrative, representation, textuality, subjectivity, ideology, and so on. Instead of looking for formalist patterns, she postulates an open and flexible theoretical structure by which to order out current cultural knowledge of postmodern art and thought.

Part One of *A Poetics...* presents the background from which postmodernism emerges: the impact of the 1960s with their challenging and contesting of institutionalized beliefs, as well as the relation to modernism which it both self-consciously incorporates and rejects. Hutcheon's theorizing is modelled on postmodern architecture which best embodies the postmodern contradictions and paradoxes. She discusses in detail the relation between postmodern aesthetic practice and contemporary theory, such as deconstruction, Marxism, post-structuralism and feminism. Especially feminist discourse is credited for its impact on postmodernist refocusing on historicity and a move off-center. Together with other minoritarian discourses produced by blacks, ethnics, natives or gays, feminism reinstates within postmodernism the previously "silenced" issues of race, gender, sexuality, ethnicity and class difference. Hutcheon also stresses the importance of the enunciative act in postmodern discourse as part of the subject as a discursive construct and the postmodern scrutinization of the

meaning-generating mechanisms in artistic production and reception. Finally, she examines the mechanisms in artistic production and reception. Finally, she devotes much space to the problematizing of history by postmodernism which always inscribes the historical context as significant and determining while simultaneously putting into question the very possibility of historical knowledge.

Part Two is focused on "historiographic metafiction", the fictional genre best exemplifying the epistemological and ontological consequences of postmodern questioning. Its very name reveals that this kind of fiction grows from the confrontation of theory, history and literature, which all contest those traditional conventions of narrativity that suppress the problem of the textuality of the past. Concentrating on the narrative as that which transforms "knowing" into "telling", Hutcheon can raise and analyze the issues encompassed by the concept of narrativity (i.e., intertextuality, reference, the decentering of the subject in language, the ideological "situating" of discourse). As she observes, postmodern novels are more compromised than late modernist avant-garde since they rely heavily on what they try to undermine, for example anecdote and plot. Historiographic metafiction, like entire postmodern discourse, leaves its paradoxes unresolved: the self-reflexive remains distinct from the historical-political context in which it is embedded.

Hutcheon's *A Poetics of Postmodernism* may well be one of the best studies of the problem that are currently available. In addition to its impressive bibliography, it abounds in penetrating insights, consistently demonstrates the importance of mutual support of art and theory, and does full justice to the complexity of postmodern culture. She can work within a variety of theoretical perspectives, using the critical idiom in a manner which clarifies without simplifying. Moreover, her critical writing testifies to the need for a "double-edged" critical theory that would incorporate self-commentary as a way of reflecting on its own powers and limits.

The Politics of Postmodernism, published in the popular *New Accents* series, to some degree recapitulates but also supplements Hutcheon's views on postmodernism. Where earlier she defended postmodernism against the frequent

accusations of ahistoricism, now she opposes the equally popular opinion that it is also apolitical. Even though postmodernism lacks any "effective theory of agency" translatable into concrete political action, it is inextricably bound up with a critique of dominant and as such politically implicated. Besides, as her concept of representation suggests, there can be no politically innocent art: all forms of representation, linguistic and visual, construct rather than mirror or express the way we experience ourselves and the world. Consequently, culture must be seen as the effect of representations, and not as their source.

To study the forms and politics of postmodern representation and its ideological groundings, Hutcheon concentrates on fiction and photography, two seemingly "transparent" media which in fact selfconsciously foreground their discursive and signifying practises. She discusses the challenges that postmodern art offers to traditional notions of representation such as realist reference and modernist autonomy. For example, historiographic metafiction is informed by both the realist and the anti-realist view of the past understood as something that, on the one hand, existed quite independently of us but, on the other hand, can be accessible to us now only through textual traces. However, avoiding "ontological reduction" which so often in poststructuralist thought collapses everything into textuality, Hutcheon insists that events are given meaning, not existence, by their representations in history. She also emphasizes the function of postmodernist parody as an ideologically charged instrument capable of contesting our assumptions about artistic originality and out "capitalist notions of ownership and property" (p. 93). The humanist belief in the coherent, self-sufficient subject as the originator of meaning is replaced by the postmodern focus on the systems of signification tied up with certain socially-produced and historically-conditioned codes and conventions.

The most interesting part of Hutcheon's study is her feminist reading of the postmodern. Evaluated from the politicized feminist perspective, postmodernism's critique of the dominant cultural and social conventions and ideologies seems too complicitous. It performs a political double-talk because it cannot step

outside the values it chooses to contest and is therefore always implicated in them. Feminism or „feminisms“, to use Hutcheon's preferred plural form, reveal the paradoxical nature of the relation between the postmodern and its target: speaking from the "insider" position within both economic capitalism and cultural humanism, postmodernism must inevitably have share in their common patriarchal underpinnings.

On the other hand, Hutcheon is far from ignoring the obvious points of convergence between postmodernism and feminism. Both are part of the same general crisis of authority, and both are engaged in the persistent "de-naturalizing" of the culturally-sanctioned forms of representation. The involvement of postmodernism with feminism is reciprocal: feminist-inspired postmodern writing reconsiders in terms of gender-politics the power-manipulation of signifying practices, whereas feminists can effectively co-opt postmodern parodic strategies as a way of deconstructing patriarchal discourse. Yet, in her opinion, feminism with its "distinct, un-ambiguous political agendas of resistance" (p. 142) should by no means be conflated into the politically-ambiguous and unresolved postmodern.

In spite of the fact that postmodernism does not accomplish any radical move toward change, Hutcheon acknowledges the importance of its critical response to "the philosophical and socio-economic realities of postmodernity" (p. 26). The latter name, referring to the entire social and philosophical period, is not to be confused with postmodernism in the sense of cultural phenomenon. Thus the postmodern appears only as a site of the struggle for the emergence of the new area. And Hutcheon seems to trust in the end that the new will be spelled out by feminists.

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Tzvetan Todorov: INTRODUCTION
À LA LITTÉRATURE FANTASTIQUE,
Édition de Seuil, Paris 1980, s. 190.

Współcześnie, w sytuacji rosnącego zainteresowania fantastyką (przede wszystkim w po-