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## Tributes to Professor Andrzej Kopcewicz

Semrau, Janusz, ed. *American Literature in Studia Anglica Posnaniensia 1968–2008: A Selection of Articles*. Poznań: Wydawnictwo Naukowe UAM, 2009;

Kopcewicz, Andrzej. *Intertextual Transactions in American and Irish Fiction*. Ed. Janusz Semrau. Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang Verlag, 2009;

Semrau, Janusz, ed. "Will you tell me anything about yourself?" *Co-memorative Essays on Herman Melville's "Bartleby the Scrivener"*. Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang Verlag, 2009.

In the course of the past year there came out three intellectually stimulating and carefully edited books dedicated to the memory of Professor Andrzej Kopcewicz (1934–2007). For Polish Americanists, Professor Kopcewicz was the Founding Father. The first Polish professor whose research interest in American literature was formally recognized as a distinctive field of specialization, Andrzej Kopcewicz became the Head of the first Department of American Literature in Poland established at Adam Mickiewicz University. He taught there for many years, acting as academic adviser or external reader for at least two generations of Polish Americanists at practically all universities in the country. His doctoral students and younger colleagues, whose dissertations and habilitationsschriften he supervised or read as a member of their degree committees, have by now become chairs of American Departments at various Polish institutions of higher education and have, in turn, educated their own successors.

Professor Kopcewicz's patience and kindness as a reader and adviser were legendary. So was his erudition and his appetite for intellectually stimulating conversation spiced with a wonderful, sometimes subversively wicked sense of humor. He graciously set off his position of acknowledged intellectual authority with the humility of a scholar attentive to differing opinions and open to learning from his students and younger colleagues. A supportive and inspiring teacher, a generous friend, and a charming person, an academic enamored of his discipline, Professor Kopcewicz walked through the increasingly pragmatic groves of our academe in the otherworldly aura of a man of learning so preoccupied with pursuits of the mind that the practicalities of daily existence seemed but a nuisance. The three

books dedicated to his memory amply testify to the loving admiration and respect he commanded among his students, disciples, friends and colleagues. Together with their contributions, the books collect Professor Kopcewicz's late essays keeping up our conversation with him across the Great Divide.

Presenting the volumes in order of their appearance, let me start with selections from *Studia Anglica Posnaniensia*. Intended to emphasize "the continued presence of American literature in *Studia Anglica Posnaniensia* since its founding in 1968" (editor's Preface), the book is dedicated to Professor Andrzej Kopcewicz as "the longest serving member of the editorial board." Opposite the title page of the handsomely published volume, its editor placed a particularly warm portrait of Professor Kopcewicz taken by Jerzy Durczak, probably the best photographic artist among Polish Americanists. Today, the picture must seem unbearably poignant to all of us who had benefited from Andrzej's vast knowledge and unstinting collegial support. The collection features 24 essays by international and Polish authors arranged in order of their appearance in the successive issues of the yearbook. Andrzej Kopcewicz's "Poe's Philosophy of Composition," published in the first issue of *Studia Anglica Posnaniensia* opens the selection, especially strong on American poetry. Among the essays on a range of American poets from Dickinson (Magdalena Zapędowska) through the modernists like William Carlos Williams (Marta Sienicka), Marianne Moore and Gertrude Stein (Paulina Ambroży-Lis) to contemporaries like David Waggoner (Joanna Durczak), I particularly enjoyed Joseph Kuhn's fine article dealing with the poetry of Allen Tate and John Crowe Ransom, perhaps because, with the fading of New Criticism as the dominant critical approach, their work has undeservedly gone into eclipse as well. Pointing to the frequency with which titles such as "Pastoral," "Cold Pastoral," "Eclogue," or "Idyll" appear in the poetic volumes by Ransom and Tate, Kuhn's article ("Cold Pastoral': Irony and the Eclogue in the Poetry of Southern Fugitives") pays special attention to Tate's "The Swimmers." On the personal level the poem reveals for Kuhn "the terror in the Southern pastoral and its survival in the adult memory" (309) but the poem is also "a kind of historical pastoral" as it moves beyond the ironic yoking of the pastoral mode and the terrors of Southern racial history, "subduing the violence of nature to ritual without losing the rawness of naturalistic image" (310). The struggle of the late modernists (including, for instance, Elizabeth Bishop) to employ irony as a tool of asserting order, without diminishing its distancing and questioning power, seems to me a measure of the heroism of their project. Kuhn's article shows that effort very well indeed.

Among the articles dealing with American prose fiction, Andrzej Kopcewicz's "The Machine in Henry Adams, Frank R. Stockton, and Thomas

Pynchon. A Paradigmatic Reading” merits attention. Kopcewicz traces the circulation of the image of the machine in its different embodiments, from Adams’s dynamo through Stockton’s submarine to Pynchon’s rocket, as the ambivalent symbol of modernity and of the changes it brings about in the sphere of culture and morality. The most interesting aspect of Kopcewicz’s analysis is his acceptance of Stockton’s early science fiction novel as an “intertextual partner to both Adams and Pynchon” (191) on the basis of the symbolic merging in each variant of the machine image of sexual and technological energy. The three works differ widely in genre and the targeted audience. The essayistic, philosophical-autobiographical *Education* diagnoses the cultural shift to modernity; Stockton’s once popular short novel (first published in 1887) takes an imaginative leap to 1947 in a popular, simplified narrative form, while Pynchon’s *Gravity’s Rainbow* attempts to represent the condition of western civilization following World War Two in an intricately fragmented, sprawling novel teeming with characters, subplots, shifts of location, and intertextual clues. In all three texts Kopcewicz uncovers a similar functioning of the machine metaphor which fuses (or displaces?) human re-productive with productive powers. The essay seems to me a significant contribution to the analysis of American cultural mythography.

Kopcewicz’s articles collected in *Intertextual Transactions in American and Irish Fiction* are linked by the author’s fascination with intertextuality as a critical approach, as a method of virtually living inside the world of literature, for Kopcewicz calls himself a paranoiac of intertextuality. In his persistent tracings of textually incestuous relations in the twentieth century novel in English, *Finnegans Wake* appears as the Great Father Text. Ever so many paths lead back to Joyce and, especially, to *Finnegans Wake*. It is perhaps unsurprising to read Flann O’Brien’s *At Swim-Two-Birds* (1939) alongside *Finnegans Wake* (1939) but Kopcewicz extends the Joycean genealogy viewing Gilbert Sorrentino’s *Mulligan’s Stew* (1979) and Donald Barthelme’s *Snow White* (1967) and *The Dead Father* (1975) as *Finnegans* progeny. It’s not, of course, a question of direct borrowings, rather—of transformations of *Finnegans* motifs and games. As a lover of Barthelme’s stories, I especially appreciated Kopcewicz’s analyses of the American writer’s affinities with Joyce. While we usually think of Joyce’s work as the apex of high modernist literary elitism, we tend to think of Barthelme as the most democratically accessible among the so called American post-modernists like John Barth or Thomas Pynchon. Kopcewicz’s essays linking *Finnegans Wake* and the two novels by Barthelme persuasively demonstrate the erudition and depth of philosophical insight underlying Barthelme’s playfulness and the seemingly unpremeditated lightness of his style. *Intertextual Transactions* opens with an essay on “The Intertextual

Paradigm” which I would like to recommend as introductory reading for graduate students interested in the methodology and practice of intertextual criticism. The essay contains a useful bibliography.

The third of the commemorative books is a collection of essays on Melville’s classic tale “Bartleby the Scrivener” by six Polish authors with Joseph Kuhn, who has taught at Adam Mickiewicz University for so long that one no longer thinks of him as a foreign scholar. The book opens with Andrzej Kopcewicz’s essay on “Dark Rooms and Bartleby. An Intertextual Reading,” an essay included also in the volume of *Intertextual Transactions*. Its author places “Bartleby” in the context of Paul Auster’s *City of Glass*, Emerson’s “The Over Soul,” Borges’s story “God’s Script” and Robert Burton’s *The Anatomy of Melancholy* persuasively integrating Melville’s text into the literary discourse investigating and calling “into question the concept of transcendental self-reliance” across temporal, spatial, and cultural divides.

Among the essays collected in this book, I was particularly moved by Tadeusz Sławek’s meditation on “Bartleby” as an inconclusive consideration of the possible? practicable? desirable? wise? modes of the individual’s being in the world; of being there as an integral, solitary, immutable self but also as a participant in the contractual, changeable social reality. Is any kind of wise compromise between the two equally necessary modes of our being at all possible? What are the consequent dangers and ills of unhesitant commitment to either mode? To my mind, that is the central, agonizing dilemma not only of “Bartleby” but of Melville’s whole work; the most profound source of his creativity but also—of his long creative impotence and personal suffering. Keeping the lawyer in the center of his meditation, Sławek reads the story as a narrative of the essentially prudent, public man’s awakening to the painful imperative of at least acknowledging the reality of existence outside the safety of his smoothly managed, wall enclosed office/ial way of life. Focused at the beginning of the story on functional adjustment to diffuse the conflict, the lawyer appears, by the story’s end, as helplessly exposed to the enigma of being as “a creature,” stripped of protective barriers of possessive authority and pragmatic efficiency, stripped even of bodily appetites, yet paradoxically aware, in confrontation with death, of being as spiritual (in opposition to legal) bond. With his wide erudition and inclination to subtle philosophical reflection, the clean simplicity of Sławek’s style feels noble in its concern for the reader and in its emphasis on the primacy of meaning as opposed to delight in the brilliance of wording. The latter feature mars for me Janusz Semrau’s contribution “‘He would do nothing in the office: why should he stay there?’ Domesticating Bartleby.” Seeing Bartleby as a figure “in between,” contesting borders and categorical divisions, Semrau seems to

be thinking along the lines somewhat similar to Sławek's but he appears more interested in displaying verbal virtuosity than in achieving clarity of insight and argument.

Altogether, *"Will you tell me anything about yourself?"* is a fine collection of essays (one would like to mention as well Joseph Kuhn on the functioning of Egyptian-like architecture and references to Egypt in "Bartleby") returning to a classic American text, perhaps as much puzzled over as James's notoriously enigmatic *The Turn of the Screw*. The book insists that, as Marek Wilczyński in his "Bartleby after Lacan" repeats after Derrida (and somewhat helplessly too?), "There is a great deal to be said about the immense text of Melville's." The idea of having several critical voices converge in one volume on a strong canonical text seems to me especially appealing at the time when the sense of the canon has been questioned and eroded and when reading literary classics, if still practiced at all, is not infrequently done with unseemly self-serving intentions.

Bringing the three collections of essays to the attention of the readers of the first issue of *Text Matters*, I also want to join their editor and contributors in remembering Professor Andrzej Kopcewicz, in paying tribute to Him as colleague, friend and role model for, by now, quite a sizable group of Polish scholars and lovers of American literature.

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## **New Media Effects on Traditional News Sources: A Review of the State of American Newspapers**

The internet is eating up newspapers. The New Media are having dramatic effects on all parts of American culture and on all types of Old Media, but newspapers seem to be suffering the most. Basically, the internet is taking away newspaper readers, lowering the value of information, and destroying the newspaper's traditional revenue source. The future looks rather grim if you are a newspaper editor, reporter, or reader.

Dave Barry, a respected long-time reporter for the *Washington Post*, stated the situation rather succinctly in a recent article which summarized major trends in 2009, saying, "The downward spiral of the newspaper industry continued, resulting in the firing of thousands of experienced reporters and an apparently permanent deterioration in the quality of American journalism." Referring to the technological trend that is at least partially responsible for the deterioration of American newspapers, he notes that more people are tweeting.

It was way back in 2000 that the number of U.S. households subscribing to internet access outnumbered those subscribing to daily newspapers (Dimitrova and Nezanski, 249). Since then news audience behaviors have changed dramatically. The number of Integrators, those who get their news from a variety of sources, and Net-Users, those who get their news primarily from the internet, have increased, comprising at least 40% of the American news audience ("Key News Audiences"). For those under 30 years of age, a full 64% get most of their national and international news from the internet ("Press Accuracy"). Peter Johnson reports that now "everyone is consuming their own kind of mix of media . . . [so that] most news consumers now get their news from four different types of media in a typical week," referring to a mix of broadcast TV, cable and satellite, radio, newspapers, and the internet. A 2009 Pew Center for the People and