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# LOCAL GENRE – UNIVERSAL RECEPTION? POLISH LITERARY REPORTAGE FROM THE FIRST TWO DECADES OF THE 20<sup>TH</sup> CENTURY READ BY A FRENCH-SPEAKING AUDIENCE\*

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## Abstract

The article examines the reception of Polish contemporary authors associated with the genre of “literary reportage” among the readers of their French translations. The analysis starts with the assumption taken from the thoughts of Tzvetan Todorov, who claimed that genre – shaping both the author’s writing model and the reader’s horizon of expectations – can be an important mechanism of mediation driving the literary communication.

The analysis includes translations of books by Wojciech Tochman, Jacek Hugo-Bader, Mariusz Wilk and Mariusz Szczygieł. In the first part, the publishing peritext is examined, through which French publishers create the perception of Polish authors and the literary genre they can be associated with. The second part of the analysis is devoted to the reception of translations of the above-mentioned authors – both among professional critics and amateur reviewers or readers – with particular emphasis put on the genre classification made by the audience.

The summary attempts to determine whether French-speaking readers perceive Polish authors in accordance with the specific rules of “literary reportage” and what role the publishing peritext may play in this process. The issue of marketing potential of the literary genre as an important tool in creating the publisher’s offer is also discussed.

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## Introduction

Literary genres, whatever their various definitions or roles, constitute a phenomenon that goes far beyond the field of genre studies itself, and can appear in the process of literary communication, where genre, as stated by Tzvetan Todorov, can, on the one hand, define a model of writing for authors and, on the other, shape the horizon of the readers' expectations. In such a communicative system, "authors write as a function of (...) the existing generic system", while the readers "read as a function of the generic system, with which they are familiar through criticism, school, the distribution system for the book, or simple hearsay" (Todorov 1976: 163). The genre thus becomes a kind of institution which enables literary communication to take place more smoothly via the attunement of the communicator and the audience to one common frequency.

In the case of such a communication, the importance of the "third partner" taking part in the process of literary communication, namely the publisher, is on the increase. As Janusz Lalewicz notes, the publisher considers the production and transmission of literary content in a different way to the author or reader: from the publisher's point of view, these are operations of a technical and economic nature, rather than semiotic or communicative (Lalewicz 1978: 24). In practice, this often results in a literary genre being reduced to its taxonomic function, whereby the publisher applies different genres and genre-related terms with the sole aim of marketing its new offerings. Such a process can raise the profile of a book which is thus treated merely as a product (cf. Squires 2007: 71). In addition, the publisher's role allows them to use the concept of genre in an arbitrary manner, in isolation from the actual content of literary works (cf. Lacôte-Gabrysiak 2017: 23). This is especially true in the case of imported literature, when the author may well be unknown to the reader. Books by authors associated in Poland with the genre of literary reportage and published in French translation in the last twenty years may serve as an excellent example of this phenomenon.

## National good

To a large extent, literary reportage is a genre indigenous to the Polish literary field, where it has been present in various forms for several decades. Melchior Wańkowicz is considered to be one of its main exponents, and the work of Ryszard Kapuściński and Hanna Krall has also proved popular. In recent years, this genre has been dominated mainly by authors originating from the reportage section of the daily newspaper *Gazeta Wyborcza*, edited for many years by Małgorzata Szejnert, and previously by Krall (cf. Potrykus-Woźniak 2010: 215–220). The most distinctive feature of literary reportage is its hybridity – on the borders between journalism and literature – the result of which is a rather loose approach to the so-called reference pact, i.e., one of the corner stones of press reportage, which commands the author to stick strictly to facts (cf. Żyrek-Horodyska 2017: 121). Thus, the inclusion of literary fiction into the non-fictional form of reportage is a source of much debate among not only literary scholars and critics, but also reporters themselves. Nevertheless, the enduring popularity of the genre remains unaffected: as Edyta Żyrek-Horodyska notes, the increased interest in literary reportage observed in recent years is due to a particular appreciation of this form among both critics and readers (Żyrek-Horodyska 2019: 12–13). We can therefore assume that in Poland this genre serves as an example of the institution of literary communication described by Todorov, whereby authors combine the documentary character of reportage with literary creativity, while readers are aware that they are dealing with a specific, hybrid genre.

As a result of natural mechanisms that regulate the global circulation of literary works, the popular success of literary reportage in Poland has also led to its being exported: the genre now constitutes an increasing share of domestic literary production directed at foreign publishing markets (Frukacz 2016: 104), and is even regarded as the genre of Polish contemporary literature most frequently translated into foreign languages (Gliński 2014), making the foreign reception of Polish literary reportage an even more fruitful subject for study. However, when authors, who are used to communicating with their local audience within the context of a genre specific to a given national literary culture, reach a foreign market, they cannot always count on a reader being attuned to their mode of writing. In such a situation, the potential establishment of literary communication through genre will depend primarily on the publisher, who, in the context of translated genre literature,

plays a major role in facilitating the context of reception. Therefore, in order to examine the reception of Polish literary reportage among French-speaking readers in recent years, I will first analyse the editorial peritexts formulated by the French publishers in terms of genre connotations, and then turn to the reception of the published translations by reviewers and other recipients.

My analysis will include three books by Wojciech Tochman (*Like Eating a Stone*, *Today We're Going to Draw Death* and *Eli, Eli*), two by Jacek Hugo-Bader (*White Fever* and *Kolyma Diaries*), five by Mariusz Wilk (*The Journals Of A White Sea Wolf*, *The House on the Bank of Onega Lake*, *Following the Reindeer*, *Flying Like a Goose* and *House of the Wanderer*), and two by Mariusz Szczygieł (*Gottland: Mostly True Stories from Half of Czechoslovakia* and *Make Your Own Paradise*), published in French between 1999 and 2018.<sup>1</sup> The first three authors were published by Noir sur Blanc (NsB) and the last by Actes Sud (AS). The above list deliberately omits the translations of works by Ryszard Kapuściński, who died in 2007, which were reissued during this period, as well as new translations of works by Hanna Krall and Agata Tuszyńska, and the translation of Anna Bikont's *The Crime and the Silence: Confronting the Massacre of Jews in Wartime Jedwabne*. The reasoning behind these omissions is as follows. Krall has been published in French since the early 1990s and it would be difficult to compare the reception of her works among French-speaking readers with that of subsequent generations of Polish reporters. In the case of Tuszyńska, who also used to be associated with literary reportage, the list of French translations primarily includes her biographical and autobiographical works. Finally, although Anna Bikont's work was originally included by the Czarne publishing house in a collection dedicated to reportage, in France it was perceived as a work of a purely historical-essayistic nature. Nevertheless, the works selected for analysis constitute a representative corpus for the study of the reception of contemporary Polish literary reportage among French-speaking readers.

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<sup>1</sup> For ease of reading, the titles of English translations (when appropriate, i.e., when they exist) or the provisional translations of titles into English have been used throughout the article, even when referring to French translations.

## Genre in the editorial peritext

Peritext, as defined by Gérard Genette, consists of elements provided within the book itself and, as part of a larger paratext, is supposed to provide, among other aims, “a better reception for the text and a more pertinent reading of it” (Genette 1997: 2). One of the primary means for a publisher to indicate to a potential recipient what type of literature they are dealing with is to place a book in a particular series (cf. 1997: 4). In Poland, the works to be analysed are consistently placed either in series dedicated to reportage (Tochman, Hugo-Bader, Szczygieł) or travel literature (Wilk). The choices made by the publishers responsible for the French translations: NsB (Tochman, Hugo-Bader, Wilk) and AS (Szczygieł) by no means clearly label the genre for the potential reader. The NsB’s catalogue is divided into ‘literature’, ‘poetry’, ‘albums’ as well as ‘essays and non-fiction’ (*essais-documents*). All three works by Tochman were included in the latter section, while the translations of Hugo-Bader and Wilk were classified simply as ‘literature’ and only in the notes in the publisher’s catalogue is it clarified that they belong in fact to the subsection of ‘travel literature’ (*littérature de voyage*). In the case of Szczygieł, both his works were published by AS outside of any series (*hors collection*), with *Gottland* assigned in the catalogue to ‘novel, short stories’ (*roman, nouvelles*), and *Make Your Own Paradise* to ‘memoirs, testimonies and autobiographies’ (*mémoires, témoignages et autobiographies*). It is worth mentioning here that neither publisher offers distinct series dedicated to reportage and they rarely use the qualifying term of *reportage* itself in descriptions of the volumes.

Another editorial peritext with potential impact on the book’s reception is the fourth page of the cover, which Genette calls “a privileged place of pragmatics and a strategy”, and where short descriptions of the book (blurbs) and bio-notes are to be found (cf. 1997: 2). The blurb itself is an important marketing tool, combining relevant information with marketing objectives, and as a rule has a strictly persuasive role (Narbutowicz 2012: 28).<sup>2</sup> Here, the publishers, especially NsB, attempt to quantify certain genre connotations for their readers, thus potentially influencing the aesthetics of reception, although without any meaningful consistency or uniform terminology. Tochman,

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<sup>2</sup> The article also takes into account the blurbs and bio-notes on the publishers’ websites, which nowadays can also be treated as editorial peritext.

for example, is defined either as a “reporter” (*reporteur*) or as a “writer” (*écrivain*), affirming the overall hybridity of literary reportage; he is also described as “the brilliant successor to Ryszard Kapuściński”<sup>3</sup> and “one of the leading authors of the Polish School of Literary Reportage”. At the same time, however, *Like Eating a Stone* is described as an “essay” (*essai*), and *Today We’re Going to Draw Death* is simply a “book about Rwanda”. The contents of the books are described using terms such as “testimony” (*témoignage*), “document” (*document*), “report” (*rapport*), emphasising the factual rather than the literary character of the writing. Hugo-Bader is introduced by his publisher as a journalist and press reporter. *White Fever* is described in the author’s bio-note as “an account of a journey” ( *récit de voyage*), although the blurb of the *Kolyma Diaries* already contains the term “literary reportage” and mentions the “continuation of Kapuściński’s legacy and the tradition of Polish literary reportage”. Wilk is mostly described in blurbs as a “travelling writer” (*écrivain voyageur*), while the classification of his works ranges from “an account of a journey” ( *récit de voyage*) to “literary diary” (*journal littéraire*) or “personal diary” (*journal intime*); in his case, we also find the term “literary reportage” and a reference to the heritage of the “famous Polish reporters” such as Kapuściński or Krall. Szczygieł, on the other hand, appears in the more modest peritexts of AS as a combination of journalist and editor, as well as “an excellent storyteller” (*merveilleux conteur*), while his book *Gottland* is described as a “novel” (*roman*). Moreover, the terms used to describe the content of this book, such as “characters” (*personnages*), “stories” (*histoires*), “scenes” (*scènes*), “composition” (*composition*), or epithets such as “written with flair” (*écrit avec brio*), aligns his writing far more with fiction, and is underpinned by the fact that the publisher has added the word “stories” ( *récits*) to the title of the French translation. Szczygieł’s background as a journalist remains a mere detail in his bio-note; for French-speaking readers he appears above all as an erudite expert on Czech culture.

As can be observed in the above-mentioned examples, the potential of the editorial peritexts to link the author to the genre of literary reportage was either not used at all by the publisher (AS), or was only partly used,

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<sup>3</sup> It is worth noting that reference to the legacy of Kapuściński is possible not only due to the wide variety of his works available in French translation, but also due to the availability of the renowned biography by Artur Domosławski: *Ryszard Kapuscinski: A Life (Kapuscin-ski: la vérité par le mensonge*, translated by Laurence Dyèvre).

due to the lack of uniform genre-related terminology (NsB). Although the publisher of Tochman, Hugo-Bader and Wilk consistently attempts to set all three authors into the tradition of a particular genre, nevertheless, as a result of the books' individual classifications, their works end up in two unconnected sections, thus hindering any potential creation of a "Polish Literary Reportage" brand. This is all the more surprising as NsB has an anthology of Polish literary reportage (*La vie est un reportage. Anthologie du reportage littéraire polonais*) published as early as in 2005, as well as an anthology of selected works by Kapuściński and Krall (*La mer dans une goutte d'eau*) from 2016. Labelling them as Polish literary reportage would go some way to strengthening the genre's marketability.

### **Does a hybrid genre imply hybrid reception?**

As can be seen from the above examples, peritexts mostly concern themselves with obtaining a "better reception" of the literary work, by shaping the horizon of expectations of the potential reader. As noted by Hans Robert Jauss, every literary work, even when it appears to be new, "does not present itself as something absolutely new in an informational vacuum, but predisposes its audience to a very specific kind of reception by announcements, overt and covert signals, familiar characteristics, or implicit allusions" (Jauss 1982: 23). Thus, following the example of Genette, if we consider that the peritext is an integral part of any literary volume, it seems a natural tool to produce the kind of effect on the reader that Jauss mentions above. This is evidenced by regular references to the works of Kapuściński and the more or less explicit classification of a given work in terms of genre, since the elements that make up the reader's horizon of expectations include "the form and themes of already familiar works", as well as any "pre-understanding of the genre" (Jauss 1982: 22). In order to assess the potential impact of the editorial peritext on the reception of the selected authors, we shall study reviews published both in the mainstream media as well as amateur reviews published in the blogosphere, social media accounts and readers' forums. The inclusion of these latter sources is due to the structure of modern reading practices, which are heavily influenced by multimedial means of communication, with the particular dominance of online cultural exchange (cf. Wójcicka 2017: 136–137). It should also be noted here that due to the marginal position of Polish literature in the French marketplace,

translations from Polish are reviewed rather sparingly and selectively by the French mainstream media. That is why, when analysing reception, it has been deemed necessary to include not only the opinions of professional critics or reviewers, but also the voices of the readers themselves, in order to gain a more comprehensive overview of the books' reception when viewed as a social phenomenon (Głowiński 1998: 144).

In the case of Wojciech Tochman's works, genre connotations in press reviews vary, depending on the individual book. The author himself is sometimes referred to as a "journalist" (Madelain 2004; LeLittéraire 2012), a "reporter" (*Wojciech Tochman...*, Libération 2004; Elkaim 2018; Mailles Viard 2018), but also a "writer" (*Un Polonais...*, Books 2014). Reviewers of *Like Eating a Stone* mainly emphasise aspects of his style that are typical of classic reportage, such as "restrained" (*Wojciech Tochman...*, Libération 2004, Dabitch 2004), "austere" (LeLittéraire 2012), or "minimalist and concise" (Madelain). The book itself is most often described as an "account" (Libération 2004, Dabitch 2004), "document" or "testimony" (LeLittéraire 2012), the role of which is to "reproduce life and facts" and "give an account of a certain historical situation" (Dabitch 2004). At the same time, however, one of the reviews finds Tochman's "writing" goes "far beyond random journalistic investigation", and thus constitutes "a text of universal dimensions" (Madelain 2004), while another explicitly states that this work, due to its unique composition, "could be classified as a literary reportage" (Dabitch 2004). In one review of *Today We're Going to Draw Death*, Tochman is referred to as a "great reporter" and "successor to Kapuściński", but the explicit genre that links the two authors is not mentioned, while the author's work is described as a "testimony" (Decheref 2014). The other two reviews of this book emphasise its factual value, without mentioning its sphere of literary creation. According to the reviewers, Tochman creates "a portrait of the country [Rwanda]" (Books 2014) and juxtaposes in a "curt" style the "unprocessed testimonies, facts and figures" (Rüf 2014). In the case of *Eli, Eli*, we encounter once again such terms as "a non-fiction book" (Jeancourt Galignani 2018), "reportage" (Simon 2018), "documentary book" (Mailles Viard), although, at the same time, the literary aspect of Tochman's writing is recognised: according to one of the reviewers, the author utilises "highly original techniques", drawing on "observations, interviews, historical facts, tableaux, statistics, tirades, geopolitics and even fiction", while using "beautiful" language, the lyricism of which is comparable to the French writer Céline (Babey 2018).



The amateur reviewers, in turn, almost completely overlook the literary aspects of Tochman's writing. *Like Eating a Stone* is for them first and foremost a "perfectly documented testimony", written by a "sensitive observer" (Beskid), who shows the reader the "naked reality" without any subjective intervention (Babelio 2017). Similar phrases can be found in an amateur review of *Today We're Going to Draw Death*, when the reviewer describes how Tochman, "the great Polish reporter and founder of the Polish Institute of Reportage", spent months collecting "testimonies" in order to present them in the book "in a raw form, without any defined order, without trying to take anyone's side" (Les lectures d'Arès 2014). The same applies to *Eli, Eli*, which is described as a "very realistic" book (Babelio 2018). Moreover, almost every review of Tochman's works posted on the largest French social media website Babelio mentions the term "testimony" (*témoignage*), and one review even claims that the book is of an essayistic nature. On the one hand, this clearly indicates that Tochman is perceived primarily as a reporter, on the other hand, it is difficult not to see in this particular choice of vocabulary the inspiration drawn from the content of the publisher's blurbs.

Two books by Jacek Hugo-Bader elicit a similar reception. In the press reviews, the author is referred to as a "journalist" (Rüf 2014), a "writer" (*A la Kolyma...*, Mediapart 2015) or "journalist and writer" (Jacob 2012). Moreover, he is consistently juxtaposed with Kapuściński: sometimes referred to as a "decent imitator" (Jacob 2012), an author close to Kapuściński "in both his tone and style" (Talles 2015), or someone who is "sometimes compared to Kapuściński" (Rüf 2012). The genre connotation, however, is once more inconsistent, fluctuating between such terms as a "travel account" (Chez Canel 2013), a "logbook" collecting "testimonies" (Jacob 2012), or a "series of encounters" (Rüf 2012), and hybrid descriptions such as "a reportage written like a novel" (Talles 2015), or "a long story or excellent reportage" (Mediapart 2015).

In the case of reviews and opinions published on Babelio, Hugo-Bader is most often referred to as a "journalist", although the terms "reporter" or "writer and reporter" are also used (Babelio 2018). Regarding the literary genre, apart from a single mention of "reportage" (Babelio 2015), the reviewers generally stick to the category of a "travel account". Again, the impression given is that the choice of terminology is largely inspired by the publisher's marketing classification, and that readers are unaware of the literary aspects of Hugo-Bader's writing. This is evidenced by a number of recurring genre-like terms such as "testimony" (Goodreads 2014),

“collection of notes”, “picture of society” or “compilation of testimonies” (Babelio 2012, 2015). Moreover, some reviews contain reflections that emphasise the implicitly factual character of the works: “a story about the current reality that sets aside literature and culture (...) to focus on people”; “the author makes no selection in the more or less reliable accounts of his interviewees” (Babelio 2018). Furthermore, some reviews suggest that the deliberately literary quality of the author’s non-linear narrative is misunderstood: such stylistic features are considered both a shortcoming and a disadvantage, especially in the case of *White Fever*, which “resembles more a sketch” and the reading of which is made difficult by the “confused chronology” and the lack of precise geographical locations (Babelio 2018). It is worth mentioning, however, that in the case of both of Hugo-Bader’s books, there are also some individual, more perceptive analyses, whose authors seem to have taken account of the literary aspect of these works and who write about the “narrative”, the “account composed like an adventure novel”, or the “seemingly spontaneous” style, which is in fact full of “repetitions, corrections and digressions” (Babelio 2018).

Among the authors whose reception is analysed in this article, Mariusz Wilk is certainly the most original and distinct, particularly in terms of literary form, which is reflected in the reviews. Wilk is sometimes referred to as a “journalist” (Parfum de livres 2014), a “writer” (Librairie Autrement), a “writer and journalist” (Vers les îles), a “traveller and writer” (Parfum de livres 2009), or simply a “Polish author” (Barrault 2010). However, in hardly any of the reviews, either in the press or in amateur reviews and discussions on literature forums, is there a reference to the broadly defined genre of reportage: the reviewers usually follow the genre terms somehow suggested by the author himself in the titles of his books. Thus we can read reflections on his “diary” (Devarrieux 2007; Barrault 2010; Babelio 2016; Parfum de livres 2010), a “travel account”, and a “personal diary” (Librairie Autrement) or “memoirs” (Parfum de livres 2010). In one review, the genre of reportage is even referred to as an antonym of literariness: the amateur reviewer states that Wilk “does not write about the world, in the sense that his work is not a reportage on the world, its people and customs (...); rather he ‘writes the world’: from the inside” (Babelio 2016). Such a reading of Wilk’s work seems to be aligned with expressions typical of literary fiction which appear in reviews and discussions: “a vision (...) characterised by great richness and depth” (Devarrieux 2007), “descriptions close to literary style” (Devarrieux 2009), a “fluid and poetic style”, “rough and expressive

prose” (Babelio 2016). However, at the same time, the literary qualities of Wilk’s works are sometimes combined with the factual nature of his writing: he “does not idealise reality” (Devarrieux 2007), does not try to “embellish or colourize” and prefers to “describe reality as it is: hard and often repulsive” (Librairie Autrement). Thus, although there are no specific references to ‘literary reportage’ as such, the basic features of this genre are recognised in Wilk’s work.

Among the authors whose works are analysed in the present paper, Mariusz Szczygieł is the only one not published by NsB. In the bio-note and blurbs edited by his publisher (AS) hardly any reference to the reportage ‘origins’ of the author and his works can be found. Nevertheless, both reviewers and readers perceive Szczygieł as a “reporter” (Babelio 2018), a “journalist” (Czarny 2012; Quatremer 2009), “a representative of the Polish school of journalism established by Ryszard Kapuściński” (Quatremer 2009), “one of the great names of Polish literary reportage” (Levisalles 2008), “the literary successor to the late Ryszard Kapuściński” (Buisson 2008), or “one of the most brilliant” representatives of the genre of reportage, which in Poland constitutes “an important branch of literature” (Les Amis du Roi des Aulnes 2012). Moreover, when it comes to genre connotation, a significant number of press reviewers do not follow the editorial peritext, but instead note the hybridity of the two works: *Gottland* is considered to be “a series of short stories (...) on the border between reportage and the novel” (Quatremer 2009), “short stories the credibility of which balance between a chronicle and a novel” (Clément 2012), “unbelievable, funny and frightening stories (...) based on curiosities and historical facts that have already been told many times before” (Levisalles 2008), or “stories based on accounts and archives, full of realism that borders on the absurd” (Buisson 2008). Two reviewers are adamant that this work cannot be classified as a novel, stating that it resembles “a collection of short stories” written “in a neutral tone and from an external point of view”, and describing the author’s choice of literary form as “a chronicle that only allows for historical and journalistic analysis, completely depriving the characters of the psychological depth that could be offered by a novel” (Kammerer 2009), or by recognising that “it is neither a novel in the classical sense of the word, nor an essay” (Lemaire 2012). Both of these opinions may be considered as a kind of dialogue with the editorial peritext. *Make Your Own Paradise* is described as a “series of scenes and encounters” (Dupuis 2012).

The amateur reviewers of Szczygieł prove to be a little more penetrative than in the case of the works by Tochman or Hugo-Bader and, almost

unanimously, reject the publisher's genre classification of *Gottland*: they describe the book as "a non-fiction book composed of short stories, historical episodes, anecdotes" (Babelio 2018), a work "between journalistic investigation and fiction" (Librairies Sorcieres), created "without inventing or deforming facts" (Babelio 2018), in which "reality surpasses fiction" (La chariotte à bouquins 2010). One of the reviewers even refers directly to the editorial peritext, stating that "the fourth page of the cover hits the wrong note when it mentions 'stories'", because the reader is not dealing with stories, but with "articles written in clear language, without commentary, going straight to the point", written by a journalist after in-depth research on the topic (Vehesse 2013). It is thus clear that the publisher's taxonomic choice, even when supported by a peritext, can be openly contested by the readers when the literary matter of the book deviates too much from the context of reception as proposed by the publisher.

## Summary

An attempt to assess the reception of Polish literary reportage on the French-language book market and among French-speaking readers reveals divisions, based on the dual nature of the genre as such, which can be considered either as a platform for literary communication or as a marketing tool. In the first case, it is clear that the outcome is only partially successful. On the one hand, reviewers and readers often follow instructions prompted by the peritext, and associate contemporary Polish reporters with Kapuściński, and even occasionally utilise the term "literary reportage". Sometimes, in the description of specific works, both professional and amateur reviewers use epithets usually applied to fiction, which could also indicate that the characteristic fictional nature of Polish reportages is acknowledged. On the other hand, however, there are also numerous opinions and reviews, especially among amateur reviewers, which reflect an understanding that assumes the author's adherence to the 'reference pact'. This leads to a serious error in literary communication, because the 'writing model' of Polish reportage, which combines facts with literary flair, is presented to a reader whose horizon of expectations has not been properly prepared for the reception of such a hybrid genre.

This discrepancy seems to go beyond the sphere of French-speaking readers and is in line with, for example, the results of a study by Katarzyna

Frukacz, who surveyed a group of Russian, German and Czech students to identify the role played by publications associated with reportage in the process of circulating Polish literature abroad. As stated by Frukacz, it can be cautiously assumed that the participants of the study were not fully aware of the existence of a specific genre of Polish ‘literary reportage’, with clear distinctive features, and that its poetics was rather identified with the broadly defined sphere of non-fictional literature (Frukacz 2016: 105). In fact, the two authors whose books were most frequently ‘identified’ with this ‘non-fictional’ sphere by French-speaking readers, namely Tochman and Hugo-Bader, have been recently involved in a couple of serious arguments in Poland, provoked by their alleged unreliability as reporters and the perceived manipulation of their readers (cf. Leszczyński 2017; Mencwel 2011; Wosińska 2011).

An assessment of the commercial potential of “Polish literary reportage” as a brand that can bring authors some kind of marketable recognition abroad is also ambiguous. On the one hand, Tochman’s work has been recognised via a literary award: his *Like Eating a Stone* was nominated for the Témoins du monde prize, awarded by the French radio station Radio France International (RFI) for literary works. Moreover, both Tochman and Wilk have been invited to the prestigious literary festival Étonnants Voyageurs, which could be interpreted as evidence of recognition in the literary marketplace. On the other hand, it is actually Szczygieł himself who has achieved the most success in this field: he received the European Book Award<sup>4</sup> for *Gottland* in the Novel category and, a few years later, was nominated for the same award in the same category for *Make Your Own Paradise*<sup>5</sup>. He has also been invited to the festivals Les Belles Étrangères and Un weekend à l’Est, and taken part in the promotional meeting in Paris dedicated to the publication of an anthology of reportages by Kapuściński and Krall. It seems that Szczygieł has managed to use the influence attributed to literary awards, enabling the transformation of cultural capital into public visibility (cf. English 2013: 34). He has gained international recognition beyond the field of Polish literature

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<sup>4</sup> The prize is awarded by a jury of journalists (Brussels correspondents) from nine member states, and the selection of books includes works from all the EU member states. Generally, the nominated book does not have to be translated into other EU languages, but given the composition of the jury that awarded a prize to Szczygieł, it would be difficult to ignore the impact of the well-received French translation on this decision.

<sup>5</sup> It is worth mentioning that a separate prize for *Gottland*, Prix Amphi, was awarded to Szczygieł, together with his French translator, Margot Carlier.

translated into French, which is a rare feat for a Polish writer: he was also invited to write the foreword to the French translation of the book *Death of Beautiful Roebucks* by the Czech writer Ota Pavel. Therefore, somewhat paradoxically, among the four authors associated in Poland with literary reportage, the greatest success in France, at least from the point of view of “the currency of prestige” (Czapliński 2013: 11), has been achieved by Szczygieł, as an author of “novels”, as well as an expert on the culture of the Czech Republic, but not as a reporter.

Trans. by Paweł Łapiński

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