WIELOGŁOS
Pismo Wydziału Polonistyki UJ
3 (17) 2013, s. 57–71
doi: 10.4467/2084395XWI.13.023.1559

Paweł Kaczmarski

Uniwersytet
im. Adama Mickiewicza
w Poznaniu

Marta Koronkiewicz

Uniwersytet Wrocławski

Barbarians Come and Go: Kopyt, Góra and the New Anarchism

Abstract

This essay aims to describe the difference between 'barbarism' and 'anarchism' in contemporary Polish poetry. Analysing the critical voices in the wake of a well-known essay by Karol Maliszewski, in which he coined the term 'barbarism' to refer to certain contemporary Polish poets, we come to the conclusion that the distinction between 'civilised' and 'barbaric' poetry after 1989 has been based solely on the literary personae of the various authors. Thus we claim that the generational shift between the poets of brulion and the younger 'anarchist' poets may be seen as leading to a certain new kind of persona, which is, at the same time, more coherent (due partly to their clear political statements) and more independent of the poem (due to their non-literary sociopolitical activities).

Keywords: poetry after 1989, anarchist, brulion, intertextuality

Today it is commonly and justifiably noted that in the last twenty years or so Poland has had few 'serious' and influential debates about literature, and as far as contemporary poetry is concerned, only about three or four. Moreover, most of those discussions – and by 'discussions' we mean a public exchange of opinions – are considered overrated and less than influential (or crucial) in

hindsight. One such discussion was started by Jacek Podsiadło in "Tygodnik Powszechny" in 2000, when he criticised the 'opacity' of what he called 'incomprehensible poetry' (*poezja niezrozumiała*). Another, from which we take our cue for our discussion in this paper, dealt primarily with the distinction between 'barbarians' and 'classicists'; it was started by Karol Maliszewski in a literary magazine called "Nowy Nurt" ["The New Trend"] in 1995. Our concern is with 'contemporary barbarians', or 'neo-barbarians'.

But first, let us explain why this topic seems so important at this moment. The greatest problem every critic encounters when writing or speaking about the young Polish poets is perhaps the sense of *separation*, or even *isolation*, of every contemporary poet from each other, and consequently, from any school, group or tendency (we are referring to poets born in the 1970s and 80s). Paweł Mackiewicz has expressed the same feeling in the title of his book, *Written Separately*. The old categories seem to be of no use, but the new ones have not (yet) emerged – except, perhaps, for some political ones, but more on this later.

It feels as though it is no longer possible to speak of more than one poet in the same breath; at the same time we know we cannot surrender to this feeling of separation, as overwhelming as it may sometimes be. One possible approach is to try and 'wait out' this troubling situation, to consider it, in its totality, a temporary – and, in fact, perfectly normal – state of limbo between two generations of writers. We, for our part, believe that it is the critics' role to find and establish new categories. With this in mind, we believe that in tracking the contemporary history of the notion of *barbarism* it is important to consolidate a new, coherent critical perspective. In fact, the figure of a *barbarian* seemed fairly dominant during the early 1990s, coinciding with the publication of a literary magazine called "brulion" . However, at the beginning of the present century, or perhaps even earlier, "brulion" fell by the wayside and disappeared completely, leaving a chasm where a clear, defined image of the poet (or, perhaps, the Poet) used to be. But let us not get ahead of ourselves.

* * *

Maliszewski's essay, entitled *Our Classicists, Our Barbarians* (which later became the title of an entire book), has been paradoxical in at least one sense: although the author himself admits that the conflict he deals with is perhaps obsolete and clumsy, and should be considered a provocation of sorts, his work ultimately invigorates it. Indeed, Maliszewski's essay – and the critical voices that followed – played a role in popularizing a certain way of apprehending contemporary poems, while claiming that there was something fundamentally wrong with it. As hard as it may be to find a single voice defending the credibility of any real tension between barbarism and classicism, we should mention certain 'features' or 'elements' that Maliszewski and other critics have attached to either term:

> Classicist: Yes [to this world], moderation, trust, 'the primacy of form' [...] antirealism and objectivism, primacy of the 'old': of finding oneself in the culturally credible forms [...] exposing the commonality, that is – evoking the universal communion [...] overall balance based on the tested values [...] positive metaphysics [...] belief in the bis-reality [...].
>
> Barbaric: No [to this world], lack of moderation, distrust, 'primacy of meaning' [...] realism and sensualism, primacy of everything fresh and new [...] exposing the singularity [...] despair [...] belief in reality [...]. (Maliszewski 1995: 1)

Note: All translations from the Polish by P. Kaczmarski, M. Koronkiewicz

We have only chosen just a few passages, and our selection was naturally biased, but it is primarily to expose the clear contradictions included in those enumerations and perhaps even more clearly, the incoherence of what Maliszewski says about the 'classicists and barbarians' and what he thinks, or rather *feels* about them – the incoherence between the critical perspective and the intuitive aspect of his work (we are discussing Maliszewski at length, as other participants in this discussion have tended to reproduce the same 'mistakes').

First of all, Maliszewski combines the affirmation of the world with the belief in the linguistic nature of reality; and the negation of that world, in turn, with the belief in the reality 'outside of the poem' – this is at the same time a great simplification and an obvious reversal of a common intuition. Secondly, the description of the barbarians could match – with a little effort on both sides, that is, from the poets and critics – the metaphysical poets of the seventeenth century or, for example, some of the poems by Wojciech Wencel, one of Maliszewski's main 'classicist' examples (nowadays only a minor poet of the far right). At the same time, the 'classicist' set of features could be used to describe many poems by Marcin Świetlicki, the leading 'barbarian' of the time. Last but not least, there are poets – and we would say this is valid for most of the contemporary Polish poets, and was so when Maliszewski wrote those words – who could be successfully placed on either side of the dividing line; Sosnowski (declared a 'classicist' by Maliszewski just a little later) is an obvious example.

Despite all of these contradictions and Maliszewski's open declarations that this opposition was just a thing of critical spontaneity – and provocation – it became one of the most inspirational and influential divisions in contemporary literary criticism. We shall try to explain why (although one obvious reason must be that large portions of the essay resemble a seminar text, as if designed from the beginning for a group of MA students; and indeed, it is not hard to imagine that the opposition drawn by Maliszewski became so popular because of its academic tenor). One more thing must be noted: although it may seem that barbarians emerged 'after' the classicists, in opposition to the affirmative gesture, it was in fact the other way around: the negation itself was the *positive* quality of the barbarians and it was the classicists who were supposed to 'stand in the way'. That is exactly because the *image of the poet*

on the 'barbaric' side of the fence was much 'stronger', more focused, intricate and self-sufficient.

* * *

When speaking of 'barbarism' in Polish poetry after 1989, one might begin with a poetry anthology of the authors associated with "brulion" – *Przyszli barbarzyńcy*, published in 1991 – and a poem by "brulion"'s editor, Robert Tekieli (under the same title). Besides being an untranslatable play on the word 'przyszli' (which is both third-person plural form of the verb 'to come' in past or perfect tense – and a third-person plural form of the adjective 'future', so the meaning of the title is both 'the barbarians have come' and 'the future barbarians'), the poem itself is a paraphrase of the last line of the Polish translation of *Waiting for the barbarians* by Cavafy. Although this fastens it to literary tradition (suggesting a connection between "brulion" and the poets of the mid-war Skamander group, such as Julian Tuwim), contemporary barbarism in Polish poetry starts here – we do not want to digress on the matter of its historical roots, preferring to try and show what happened *next.*

"brulion"'s association with *barbarism* was largely a result of the expectations placed by critics and poets on the authors associated with the magazine – and, in a broad sense, on the 'generation of the thirty-year-olds'. Although not really open to a messianic interpretation (as more and more things seem to be in today's literary criticism), "brulion"'s hopes and wishes were surely high – with the desire to free the language from its politically-tinged stagnation and the burden of political manipulation. It may be a simple fact that "brulion" had no coherent literary program or manifesto, but it seems in fact very difficult to make a clear distinction between what critics described as 'barbarism' in the early 1990s and what "brulion"'s authors came to describe as their common denominator: Maliszewski's 'no to the world', 'realism and sensualism', but perhaps even more, their 'non-engagement' in the political sense and, as a main shared feature (though this may seem a broad simplification), their radical individualism and anti-collectivism. Many of those features functioned under the common name of 'privacy' (a phenomenon which has been described as a 'myth of privacy' by Joanna Orska (2006: 23–37). What neither Maliszewski nor the voices that followed could grasp with a clear critical analysis is probably best described in terms of 'aura', as proposed by Marek Piasecki (1998: 479), especially if we relate it to the way Marjorie Perloff made use of this term when speaking about modernism.

And yet, one of the main poets associated with "brulion" became, at least in Maliszewski's eyes, one of the main classicists. In hindsight we can see clearly that there is – and was from the beginning – serious difficulty in defining what barbarism really is and who the barbarians are or were. The problem with Maliszewski's critical writing – and this goes for Koehler and for Klejnocki (1995: 12) as well – is, as we have shown, that neither describing

the key features of the 'barbaric' poetry, nor the more 'intuitive' aspect of his analysis are sufficient when it comes to describing what barbarism really is. It works well as a common presupposition, especially when narrowed down to one generation of authors; but when trying to summarize who the 'barbaric' poets were, one would probably rather paraphrase Grochowiak and say that they were *closer to the bloodstream* than use any specific critical term. Then we must not forget about the general feeling of obsolescence which necessarily accompanies every attempt to re-read the discussion published in "Nowy Nurt". Interestingly, as Anna Nasiłowska notes, the term itself – barbarism – has been considered 'exhausted' ever since "brulion"'s circle fell apart (Nasiłowska 1998: 464).

At the same time, what emerges here is a very important notion: we cannot – and we never could, at least not since "brulion" – think about *barbarism* in terms other than *the image of a poet*. There are neither 'barbarians' nor 'classicists' without Świetlicki's 'nieprzysiadalność' (a neologism – and a cult phrase – meaning a certain mood, when the poet sits alone in a pub and does not want anyone to join him); there is certainly no barbarism when we cut all the poems about drinking, smoking and walking around in a black polo neck. Moreover, we cannot forget about the black polo neck itself: about all the young poets mimicking certain habits and resurrecting certain types of behaviour; this impression has been neatly summed up by one of today's young poets, Przemysław Witkowski, who said that every poet of his generation had to wear either a black pullover, have dreadlocks or read *Locus Solus* (each of these key attributes symbolizes a major living poet: Świetlicki, Podsiadło, Sosnowski). What participants of this discussion were trying to grasp by being both general and specific at the same time, what we have come to describe as the 'aura' of barbarism, is really the *image,* as in the 'romantic image', of the poet or the literary persona (Polish: *autokreacja*) of a certain author. One of the first critics to describe this phenomenon was Mieczysław Orski, who wrote about the increasingly important role of the literary persona in his visionary book of the late 1990s (Orski 1997: 6–13).

One could go so far as to say that, when speaking about particular *poems*, and not *poets* in general, the only 'unambiguously barbaric' ones were those that matched the *image* of the barbaric poet. The aspect of the persona, of creating one's own image and establishing an archetypal *look*, became a kind of criteria for verifying the *credibility* of the poem itself. In other words – and this sounds like a fairly conventional statement some thirteen years after "brulion"'s collapse – Świetlicki is the archetypical barbarian only for as long as he *plays the role of himself;* as long as he conforms to the criteria established by his activities as a songwriter, public figure and – finally – literary celebrity. The *poetic image* becomes somewhat hegemonic. As we have written elsewhere:

> It is not about Świetlicki becoming widely known or popular; it is more about what use his poetry makes of this popularity, how this popularity gets incorporated into a poem and how it builds the character inside this poem; how it detaches itself from every confession and becomes a stage prop, the password and the response, a collection of leitmotivs. (Kaczmarski, Koronkiewicz 2012: 237)

* * *

We should remember that the *image of the poet* was also of crucial importance in another well-known literary discussion in the last twenty years or so in Poland – that is, in the discussion about the necessity of the 'new political engagement', started by Igor Stokfiszewski in his essay *Polska poezja uników* (*Polish Evasive Poetry*) in "Gazeta Wyborcza" in 2007. Although widely criticized for his simplifications and non-intentional manipulation of specific poems, Stokfiszewski's claims reached the mainstream media. Summarizing his views on the nature and goals of contemporary literature is not easy, for those very views have evolved from a simple 'generational' attack on poets such as Sosnowski, Świetlicki and Różycki, to a total analysis of what Stokfiszewski calls 'the political turn'. This turn marks, in Stokfiszewski's thought, the moment when majority of the young poets abandoned the 'deconstructionist' and 'postmodernist' principles, in order to defend poetry as a constructive mean of social and ideological analysis (Stokfiszewski 2007).

Stokfiszewski's main claim – for poetry to engage itself in the political, social and economic contexts of the contemporary society – has often been rearticulated by the author himself in terms of the 'function', 'stereotype' and 'image' of a poet. While on a more abstract level the task of a poet is to notice, describe and rethink the political and ideological conflicts on a more 'textual' level, his main goal is to shatter the romantic image of an 'alienated' poet, who should entangle himself instead in the pop-cultural codes and establish a new connection between himself and the everyday reality of capitalist reproduction. In other words, it is true that Stokfiszewski's main idea was to rediscover the political potential of the poem by changing the perspective from which the poets see their own social status, but the opposite is also quite true, because the other main idea of Stokfiszewski's work was to redefine and rethink the 'popular image' of contemporary poets – the way in which they are seen by the society.

Thus, for Stokfiszewski, poets like Szczepan Kopyt and Konrad Góra – young authors with somewhat anarchist taste – not only engage in the socio-political conflict; they actively change the way in which the image of the poet himself (or herself) is created. We cannot, however, agree with Stokfiszewski when he basically says that this change was provoked by the fact that the young poets broke with a postmodern paradigm; we believe the reason is to be found elsewhere.

* * *

At this point we should probably explain what (and whom) we mean by the term *anarchists*. We do not want to create another abstract category just to be able to summarise a few key features of the poetry written by those born in the 1970s and 80s. We believe that it is actually possible – and this is the main difference between Maliszewski's use of the term *barbarians* and our idea of *anarchists* – to separate 'our anarchists' from all the other poets, without creating such an opposition as strict as the one between the barbarians and the classicists. Indeed, there can be no opposition where there is only one group – and after the failure of certain experimental groups (like the cybernetic poets or the neo-linguistic circle) we have no categories apart from ones like 'poets living in Warsaw', 'women', 'gay poets', etc. The anarchists stand strong simply because they may be spoken of as a group; if they are to be separated from the others, it is only possible by way of contrast.

So whom do we mean by this term? Above all, Szczepan Kopyt and Konrad Góra – two poets already counted among the most interesting contemporary voices, both recognised by critics of various generations (e.g. Piotr Śliwiński, Anna Kałuża), both noticed in the mainstream (Góra won the "wARTo" award in 2010, Kopyt was nominated for a 'Paszport Polityki' last year). Then, probably, poets like Kira Pietrek, Roman Bromboszcz, Tomasz Pułka (who died this year in a tragic accident), Łukasz Podgórni and others. But we shall discuss only a few of them here. This group should not be considered a 'school' in the sense of there being a co-ordinated creative effort. They are each strongly individualistic; however, they do share the same political views (well, not exactly – some are Marxists, some are 'only' anarchists and most of them are a combination of the two) and 'social insight'. But there is, as always, something more to it – and that is the story of how the anarchists came to occupy the place vacated by "brulion" and its barbarians. It seems that the relationship between barbarism and anarchism might be of key importance when it comes to understanding young poetry.

To understand the 'anarchists' one needs to recognise how they create a literary persona; it starts, metaphorically speaking, on the back cover of the first book, where we find the photograph and a short biographical note, usually alongside a blurb. Let us take a look at the first book by Konrad Góra, *Requiem for Saddam Hussein and Other Poems for the Poor in Spirit*: what we can see is a picture of the poet holding celery. The picture was taken while Góra was gathering food for an anarchist action called 'Food not bombs' (basically: redistribution of food to the most needy) (Góra 2008).

Then we should consider how Góra reads his poems; biting the microphone, making incomprehensible (and, one may argue, inappropriate) noises, reading in Czech and talking directly to a chosen man in the audience. All of this he combines with a bunch of literary anecdotes; he can interrupt a reading of his own poems to make *ad hoc* references to Gruenbein or Bondy (we shall return to this observation later), which he can sometimes expand to such an extent that it almost seems he knows them personally. But this is, of course,

not all, because Góra loves pretending: he has been living in the city for a long time, but he acts as if he just arrived from the 'backwoods'; he tells stories of his life, recreating them over and over until there is more than ten versions of each story (his physical appearance is also not without significance). Therefore, he is at once a storyteller, an activist, a friend of Allen Ginsberg and a farmer from some eastern part of Poland.

Góra likes to perform his poetry in squats; this one thing he shares with Szczepan Kopyt, who, besides being a poet, is an activist in a leftist organization called 'Zaczyn', dealing every day with things like blocking the eviction of tenants in Poznań. Besides making various political statements in public, Kopyt's main way of 'projecting' his literary image is through music and songwriting – he writes typical protest songs about contemporary social life in Poland, among others. Then we might say a few words about Kira Pietrek, whose poems – primarily concerned with the everyday absurdity of corporate life – draw from her work as a 'creative executive' in an advertising company. This is just as important an activity as that of Kopyt or Góra – although Pietrek stands 'on the other side', as it were, exploring and using 'the ways of the enemy' for her own purposes.

The focus on creating a literary self is something that the anarchists share with the barbarians – and at the same time, it is the main difference between the two groups. We shall try to explain.

Firstly, there are similarities. There is a certain *coarseness* of personality or behaviour, shared by both groups, which manifests itself in their relation towards the reality of so-called "Literary Life" ("Życie Literackie"), especially in its 'high' forms – i.e. literary awards, mainstream festivals, interviews, etc. They mock – although perhaps no longer *despise* – what they consider the loftiness of mainstream literature. We must also remember that the *anarchists,* alongside almost all the other contemporary poets, use the formal achievements of the "brulion" group, such as the ability to 'vulgarize' the poem and to give it certain *opacity of meaning* – or to make it simply incomprehensible – without any need for justification. They quote voices heard in the streets, they use different sorts of literary ready-mades, they recycle common phrases of the dominant ideological discourses.

Then there are obvious differences: political involvement instead of an 'apolitical' approach; collectivism and speaking 'in the name of the people' instead of the radical individualism commonly associated with "brulion"; an eagerness to revive classical forms instead of resisting the heritage of the literary canons. One might also argue, not without reason, that the anarchists' biographies are more *sincere* or *authentic* (or simply 'down-to-earth', connected to the social reality in a more direct way). There is, in other words, a certain *roughness of image* even when we compare those poets to their barbaric predecessors.

But what is more important is that persona does not imply (in case of the anarchists) building a single, coherent 'lyrical subject'; there is no single fig-

ure of the one-who-speaks in the poem. Whereas the barbarians widely used the sylleptic subject as a way to consolidate their poetic work – and they could put a lot of effort into creating a credible and coherent figure of narrator – the anarchists tend to multiply these figures, to create a polyphony of idioms and plurality of subjects. One may get the impression that the *image* created by Góra and Kopyt for and of themselves is developed entirely outside the poem. It comes to the foreground every time they perform their poems, every time they read their poetry in a squat, every time they discuss literature or politics in public; but the poem never serves as a way to enrich or embolden their *poetic image* – instead, it gives way to *other voices*.

These other voices may take different forms; in Góra's poetry they become the voices of the people met in the streets, of a disabled boy sweeping the pavement 'for less money than may be found on it' (Góra 2011: 42), of people from a country who use long-forgotten words and phrases, which – paradoxically – become neologisms when placed in a poem. As Góra says, 'as we have all decided to turn mute / I've been sent to you to make this clear' (2008: 7). Both Kopyt and Pietrek prefer, in turn, using idioms rooted in the general ideological discourse; the language of advertisements, public announcements, the 'white noise' encountered in television and the newspapers. They wear different masks – speaking from the perspective of a businessman, an ad maker, a man commuting to work in an office; not without irony, of course, but perhaps trying to be more subversive than ironic, making a desperate attempt to show the mechanisms and basic presuppositions on which these languages are built. Of course, all these poems have strong political foundations, but there is no single narrator figure we could hold onto and describe; the poets shift all the time, being 'themselves' only for the short moments between being a worker, a poor man, an animal in a slaughterhouse, a white-collar worker in a city bus and a banker.

How is this possible, if we just admitted that their literary biographies are even *harsher* (or *rougher*) than those of their predecessors', the barbarians? First of all, neither Góra nor Kopyt rebel against the *literature itself*; although they affirm neither the language in its totality (as the classicists were supposed to), nor the reality outside the language (as the barbarians were supposed to), they still accept literature as a medium and a cultural phenomenon (or whatever general definition we may use). In other words, they are critical of both the language and the society they live in, but there is no *contestation*, no attempt to rebel against the literary heritage they are influenced by. Their anger is directed *outwards*, from the literary reality towards a sociopolitical one. This is a significant shift from what was known as the 'nay-saying debuts' (*debiuty na nie*), which was considered fairly common among the poets associated with "brulion".

What remains constant in the anarchists' case is the general political orientation. Kopyt can use both the language he identifies with (Marxist rhetoric, the language of the Revolution) and the language of his opponents – capital-

ists, ad men, neoliberal ideology – because the reader is supposed to know where the poet stands politically. The same, of course, is valid for Pietrek; it might be somewhat different in Góra's case, because here we *know what we should presuppose* not because of his political declarations, but because of *whom we believe he is*. Nonetheless, political consciousness – in the form of either straightforward declarations or lifestyle choices – is in itself the way of *consolidating* the poems and giving a general focus to all the different voices and rhetorical figures.

In other words, the poem no longer works as a mean to 'verify' and strengthen (or weaken) the image of the poet, as was the case with the barbarians. When we read Kopyt's poems or hear Góra performing his poetry, we *know all the time* what political stance they take; but at the same time we know they will never – they simply cannot – *fall out of their role*, because this role is rooted in activities outside of the literature itself. This is why we do not use their poems *against* them, as a mean to sabotage their effort to make a persona; we rather accept their literary biographies as something *parallel* to the poems themselves. One could perhaps call this approach a 'new biographism' of some kind, though we should be very careful here, as we must bear in mind two simple facts: first of all, it is all about the persona, and not about the 'real' biography; secondly, their poems are *openly political*. This is not a case of projecting one's biography onto the poem itself: what we should try to do instead is to accept that both the poems *and* the images share the same level of complexity, and neither can be replaced or given pride of place over the other. They secure each other, but they never try to *verify* each other's credibility. Konrad Góra was once asked about the possibility of writing a 'squatter novel'; this is what he said:

> There will be not a 'squatter novel', we're not some sort of a complement to reality, we're not a oddity, we're not canaries released from their cages, we're not a walking metaphor, none of us represents the metaphor of a human (Góra, undated).

This is not a response of a *barbarian*; Góra recalls his literary persona, but at the same time, he claims that his anarchism can not become a kind of 'separate reality' for literary purposes. Those words do not weaken his image as an anarchist poet; they state a simple fact that there will be no 'poem about living in a squat' (although the barbarians have written many, many poems about drinking, smoking and sitting in a pub).

As a result, there is a curious reversal of the typical "brulion" scheme. Despite embracing individualism, the barbarians used to build their image on their activities as a group; on the other hand, the anarchists, although they embrace collectivism in political terms, are decidedly individual when it comes to their literary and artistic activities. It is more plausible to see them standing together during a protest march, speaking in the name of other people – the

poor and the excluded – than to see them preparing some sort of artistic collaboration for their own promotional purposes.

We should probably stress the fact that the anarchism represented by Kopyt or Góra is not the kind that was supposed to be inherent in case of the barbarians; for example, when Joanna Orska mentions 'the anarchist way of contesting the dependent relationship between poetry and an external system of communication' (2006: 252), it is not at all a *literal*, political anarchism we are talking about. This 'new' anarchism has its roots in a belief in community, along with the belief that communication *is* possible in the poem (no matter what, one could say). Moreover, we believe that Orska's statement of 2006:

> We live in times when being a romantic, an anarchist, a barbarian, an underground, a hippie, an Indian, a classicist, a punk or anyone else may be reduced to the question of uniform, sticker, hairstyle, the colour of your flag or the label on your underwear [...]. (Orska 2006: 252)

is no longer valid precisely because *both* the anarchists' self-created image and their poetry are openly political and claim to be *authentically* political; because there is, after all, a consequence without a simple projection.

* * *

The image we are trying to create here will not be complete without the final element, that is, the anarchists' foreign influences and inspirations. In other words, this is where comparative contexts come into play; they are crucial for at least two reasons.

First of all, poets like Szczepan Kopyt and Konrad Góra seem to consider foreign poets not only valuable sources of 'purely literary' inspiration, but also of models of personae. There is no image of Konrad Góra without reference to Egon Bondy or Durs Gruenbein; there is probably no Szczepan Kopyt without Bob Dylan or Saul Williams.

Secondly, the very role of the literary translation – and how it is read – marks an important difference between the barbarians and the anarchists.

The most important foreign inspiration for the "brulion" circle was, of course, the New York School, especially Frank O'Hara. Reading the great poets of New York was something more than an *influence* really; it was nothing less than a generation-forming experience. The odd thing is that – in hindsight – one does not really notice a strong connection between the poems of Marcin Świetlicki and Frank O'Hara's, for instance. In the 'barbaric' interpretation, O'Hara was just a synonym for abstract categories such as 'privacy', 'everyday life' or 'life in a big city'. In other words, it is hard not to notice that the whole New York experience was just a pretext, a way of justifying one's own literary manifesto, legitimising the 'barbaric image' and binding different poets – different voices – into a single literary group.

Things are different when it comes to anarchists. They choose their inspirations freely, each on their own, without any 'generational' key whatsoever. They are 'diggers', finding their most important foreign inspirations in forgotten anthologies, old bookshops and old issues of literary magazines. There is no fashion. They also seem more sincere (although this is always arguable) in admitting where the 'patronage' of the great poet ends – they will borrow phrases and learn a lot from each of the foreign poets they read, but they never seek any sort of 'shelter' (this is the case with some of the most recent poems by Szczepan Kopyt, such as 'uderzenie', where he obviously draws a great deal from Saul Williams, yet clearly shows that certain elements, like the modified Marxist rhetoric, were added by himself). In other words, they do not claim – as the barbarians did – that a foreign poet is a general frame for all their work.

And so, Góra's main sources of inspiration are Durs Gruenbein and Egon Bondy. With Gruenbein Góra shares a respect for the classical form, along with a belief that an ancient poem may sound as if it was written yesterday. Then there is Gruenbein's strange combination of elitism and pacifism:

> Whole centuries were centred around a single epic, and whole dynasties gathered round one morning song, while contemporary wars are increasingly started by illiterates in the name of statements which have long been dismissed in writing. (Gruenbein 1998: 31)

Góra's poems are full of implicit elitism, which he tries to merge with his fundamentally anarchist position – and it works in a very similar way.

One of the key topics of Góra's poems – and his non-literary activity as well – seems to have a strong connection to Góra's reading of Gruenbein: the problem of hunger. They both regard hunger as a fundamental human sensation in which all social inequalities manifest themselves; from another, complimentary perspective hunger is a basis for universal communion – it affects the writer and everyone else, including, of course, the poorest people, but also the non-human, the animals. 'Perhaps writing is nothing more than the articulation of hunger', says Aris Fioretos in conversation with Gruenbein (Gruenbein, Fioretos 1998: 51).

Moreover, Góra and Gruenbein seem to share the relationship with their own poems. 'Poetry as an unwanted intimacy', says Gruenbein (1998: 32); 'I am hungered for as a flipside' of the society in stagnation, says Góra (2011: 12). In their literary work they are both very serious and very sarcastic at the same time; Góra is known to have used Gruenbein's understanding of *sarcasm,* which – in turn – is drawn from the ancient etymology of this word, meaning 'separating the meat from the bone'. It is something very distinct from *irony* and perhaps marks yet another difference between the anarchists and the barbarians. In sarcasm there is bitterness and responsibility, but no distance, no desire to close oneself in the mere textuality, no *contestation* in the sense that we used earlier.

Although Bondy might be an even more important poet for Góra, their connection is more abstract, more 'spiritual', one could say (although Góra begins his second book with a poem by Bondy, and the last poem in the book is dedicated 'to Egon Bondy'). What is perhaps crucial to Góra is Bondy's 'risky contestation' – so different from that proposed by "brulion" – which occurs inside the poem, but challenges the specific social situation and political regime outside of the text. Bondy rebels *through* the literature, but not *against* it. Furthermore, there is something we could call an 'underground version' of the 'spirit of anarchy'. What we mean is that Góra's anarchism has a strong 'artistic' flavour to it, it is deeply rooted in a certain 'fringe' Central European tradition – namely, the 'Bohemian *boheme*', the Czech underground, with all its surrealist and avant-garde influences.

Kopyt's inspirations are probably more difficult to pinpoint, harder to grasp. Of course, there is Marx; reading Marx and Spinoza 'as poets' (or, perhaps, 'as if they were poets') is an important part of this author's unwritten manifesto. One of the poets Kopyt seems to hold in high esteem is Hans Magnus Enzensberger – he sees this German author as having created a general model of political involvement, allowing him not only to merge the political and the literary, but to *include* political figures inside the poem (as Enzensberger does in 'Bakunin' and Kopyt, for example, in 'wywiad', 2009: 23); one could perhaps argue that Enzensberger taught Kopyt to be *political*, *literary* and *literal* at the same time.

Looking in the opposite direction we note the influence of Bob Dylan on Szczepan Kopyt. Kopyt himself calls Dylan one of his favourite authors and it is still very unclear the extent to which his declarations on this matter may be ascribed to a general leftist sentiment towards the 1960s and the 70s. It is obvious that Dylan serves as a means to legitimise the form of the protest song, which Kopyt seems to use more and more often.

Last but not least, the whole tradition of American jazz poetry has deeply influenced Kopyt – not only because of how jazz poetry combines the poetry with music, but because of a certain *exaltation* which is possible within this tradition. Kopyt seems to struggle (especially recently) against a taboo in the Polish language which excludes the possibility of *exaltation*, *exaggeration* and *immediacy* in a poem. For Kopyt, jazz poetry is an opportunity to overrule the law of the euphemism with the law of the rhythm, of the musical *flow*. Saul Williams (with his solar mythology), Yusef Komunyakaa, Bob Kaufman perhaps – these (especially the first named) are among Kopyt's major sources of inspiration.

* * *

All the above observations bring us to one conclusion: the anarchists might truly be called *the civilized barbarians*. They share a *superficial* image – what we have called a 'coarseness' of personality – with the "brulion" circle, they

make use of "brulion"'s formal achievements; but they have a different relationship towards their own literary selves, towards their own 'poetic images' and towards their potential foreign influences, through which they civilise themselves, though they do so in a free and spontaneous manner.

This is perhaps when the name of Andrzej Sosnowski should be mentioned once more. Last year he published a collection of John Cage's poems in his own translation – and he dedicated it to Konrad Góra (Cage 2012: 5). This symbolic gesture marks something much more important than a generational turn – the *continuity* of a certain tradition, which combines both barbaric and classicist elements. 'Our anarchists' replaced 'our barbarians' because they created an image of a literary self which does not restrict their poeticism.

References

Cage J., 2012, *Przeludnienie i sztuka*, transl. A. Sosnowski, Wrocław.

Góra K., undated, *Lech jest zwrotny. Z Konradem Górą rozmawia Jacek Bierut*, "Magazyn Literacki Cegła"; http://magazyn-cegla.net/index.php?p=5&id=15 [accessed: 20.12.2012].

Góra K., 2008, *Requiem dla Saddama Husajna i inne wiersze dla ubogich duchem*, Wrocław.

Góra K., 2011, *Pokój widzeń*, Poznań.

Gruenbein D., 1998, *Mój Babiloński Mózg*, transl. J. Ekier, "Literatura na Świecie" 3, p. 23–34.

Gruenbein D., Fioretos A., 1998, *Rozmowa o strefie, psie i kościach*, transl. A. Kopacki, "Literatura na Świecie" 3, p. 40–58.

Kaczmarski P., Koronkiewicz M., 2012, *O czym mówimy, kiedy mówimy o Świetlickim?* [in:] *Mistrz świata. Szkice o twórczości Marcina Świetlickiego*, ed. P. Śliwiński, Poznań.

Klejnocki J., 1995, *Trochę czytał, ma tupet i lubi pouczać*, "Nowy Nurt" 22, p. 12.

Koehler K., 1995, *Wysychające kałuże (Krótki traktat o poetach barbarzyńcach)*, "Nowy Nurt" 25, p. 1, 5.

Kopyt Sz., 2009, *Sale, sale, sale,* Poznań.

Kopyt Sz., undated, *Uderzenie* [poem], "Art-papier"; http://artpapier.com/?pid=2&cid=17&aid=3309 [accessed: 21.12.2012].

Maliszewski K., 1995, *Nasi klasycyści, nasi barbarzyńcy*, "Nowy Nurt" 19, p. 1, 7, 11.

Nasiłowska A., 1998, *Dzicy i barbarzyńscy klasycy* [in:] *Sporne sprawy polskiej literatury współczesnej*, eds. A. Brodzka, L. Burska, Warszawa, p. 459–476.

Orska J., 2006, *Liryczne narracje. Nowe tendencje w poezji polskiej 1989–2006*, Kraków.

Orski M., 1997, *Autokreacje i mitologie (zwięzły opis spraw literatury lat 90.)*, Wrocław.

Piasecki M., 1998, *Akcje czy wiersze? O literaturze „pokolenia trzydziestolatków" uwag kilka* [in:] *Sporne sprawy polskiej literatury współczesnej*, eds. A. Brodzka, L. Burska, Warszawa, p. 477–485.

Stokfiszewski I., 2007, *Polska poezja uników*, "Gazeta Wyborcza", 8 February.
Witkowski P., undated, *Muzyczność, obraz, detal, skrót. Z Przemysławem Witkowskim rozmawia Paweł Kaczmarski*; http://www.biuroliterackie.pl/przystan/czytaj.php?site=100&co=txt_3150 [accessed: 20.12.2012].