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How Did the Old Polish Body Read? Somatic Experiences of Reading.

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Allen Ginsberg once said that poetry is words arranged in a way that sends shivers down our spines. This is of course not how literary studies might define poetry, but a colloquial way of recognizing it by the way it works on us, its characteristic symptoms. Or, one might even say, diagnosis – as the term “symptom” refers to medical discourse. So there are texts that sends shivers down our spines, but also others (or sometimes the same ones) that make our hair stand up on end, make us laugh, cry, yawn, feel nauseous, bring a flush to our cheeks, or induce erotic excitement. Each of these reactions is an instinctive one, and so, although triggered by the work of the mind, it is not subject to its control, or is only with the greatest difficulty. In allowing the act of reading, the body reads in its own way, which is not always particularly refined and not, as particularly authors in the past were given to believe, honest. In doing this it makes its own demands, such as for basic comfort and lighting, and suggests preferences – as in the well-known academic adage *plenus venter non studet libenter* – as well as imposing restrictions by rationing periods of attention and focus, which even Benedictine diligence found itself unable to prolong infinitely.

The body, which tends to be ignored in literary reports on reading, seeking above all to be spiritual sittings, sometimes comes up in phraseology – such as when we read something “in one breath” or when, conversely, the travails of sitting for too long in one place reading leave us with a numbed rear (to put it euphemistically). Drowsiness or freshness, satiety or hunger, along with other categories of this type, establish a link between reading and fundamental bodily needs, independent of any reading activity that the body engages in. The body provides the effort that reading requires, but it can also experience relaxation itself during the reading.

One might suggest that its cooperation and reactions are, roughly speaking, dependent on three factors (apologies for the crudeness of this divide): the source, the carrier and the circumstances. This, at least, is the conclusion that can be drawn not so much from psycho-physiological diagnoses of reading – an area that is not my major object of interest – as literary (in a very broad sense) reports and descriptions. This includes testimonies and declarations that are affected, snobbish, amplified or parodic, or in some other way related to conventions seen as attractive or binding. Some reactions recorded in literature go no further than the repertoire of everyday experience, while others are reliant on the previous metaphorisation of the reading act itself. We believe Stanislas Hosius when he says that Statius' *The Silvae* can bring on fatigue and yawning, but are less inclined to believe Wacław Potocki's assertion that reading inferior poems can cause someone to vomit; it is obvious, though, that this motif is a variation of the topos that is the metaphor of the book as food.

Shivers down our spines, laughter, tears, physical symptoms of fear or excitement, sleeplessness or sleepiness, reflexes of aversion, fatigue (with a longer text) or disgust – these are some of the most typical effects of the *source*. Of course, these comprise the whole of the communicative situation, in the sense that its effects also depend on the context and the relationship linking the sender with the recipient. As for the *carrier*, the most characteristic effects would depend, firstly, on its type: different things are required from the body for unfurling a scroll, leafing through a codex, or deciphering a stone inscription or wax tablet (for example, covered in a green coating for the comfort of the eyes) or a digital file – which in some respects, incidentally, resembles an ancient scroll, but unrolled “vertically.” Carriers have their durability, smell, weight, dimensions and – most importantly for the eye – a degree of legibility. Codices will always remember their physical encounters with readers, especially those in love. As Erasmus of Rotterdam wrote:

Those who love books do not leave them untouched on their bookshelves but take them in their hands day and night so that they become used, dirty and covered with notes, and of various kinds; stained; those who prefer to see the marks of the mistakes scratched out by them than a mistaken but good-looking text.¹

The influence and type of *circumstances* of our relations with books comprise the most troublesome material for any typology. The time that it is necessary or worth investing in reading – both the amount and the time of day – have been easy to stereotype in literary terms. *Otium* and *negotium*, especially institutional obligation to read (in schools or monasteries), individual or collective reading, aloud or silent, at home, a library or on travels, while or before eating (this had a certain significance for Old Polish authors) in a sitting, lying, standing or kneeling position, with natural or artificial light – these are just some of the demands that external circumstances, so to speak, place on the spine, fingers and eyes. In addition, there are the determinants of the organism itself: in particular age, health, and eyesight. It would not be hard to name many more. For

¹ Quoted in Gruchała, Janusz S., *Iucunda familia librorum. Humanisci renesansowi w świecie książki*. Kraków: Universitas, 2002: 172.

example, *acedia*, the serious, Christian form of melancholy described by St Nilus (*De octo spiritibus malitiae*), did not help the afflicted person's concentration when reading:

Bothered by anxiety but soon falls asleep; or rubs his face with both hands, straightens his fingers and, putting the book down, looks at the wall; returning to the book, he skims several lines, muttering the end of each word he reads; at the same time he fills his head with some idle sums, counts the pages in his notebook; and, gathering hatred for the letters and beautiful illustrations before his eyes, he closes the book and puts it under his head; then falling into a short and light sleep, from which he is woken by a feeling of a sudden and great hunger.²

One might imagine that it would be especially these last two aspects of reading – the carrier and the circumstances – that would make up the subject of a book called *The Alchemy of Reading*, which at least in part constitutes a symmetrical equivalent to Jan Parandowski's *The Alchemy of the Word*, devoted to the conditions – sometimes typical, sometimes peculiar – of effective and pleasant contact with a book. Some people are especially sensitive to its smell, others to the type of paper and binding; for some, poetry is only palatable at night, and a newspaper only over breakfast. An interesting 16th-century peculiarity was a special library machine resembling a mill wheel and dispensing a succession of books, designed by Agostino Ramelli for readers whose movement was restricted by illness (*La diverse et artificiose machine del Capitano Agostino Ramelli*, Paris 1588).

The three aspects of somatic reading named above do of course meet in every reading venture. Some effects – for example, magical ones – may have had an especially distinct need for not only an appropriate source, but a carrier and circumstances as well. To quote Rabelais' ironic words, reading St Margaret brought relief to women in confinement. When the passion was read to the lunatic protagonist of the 16th-century history of Francesco Spiera, he writhed around on his bed and roared like a lion, begging them to stop.³ Finally, as *Gesta Romanorum* testifies, an appropriate writing (even unread) can take away the desire to love, as long as it is put under the sheets in advance.⁴

At the same time, then, reading can become a bodily need, as one can become addicted to it. This was how Petrarch wrote of his supposedly entirely physical hunger for books – with enthusiasm and exaltation; Franciszek Karpiński too wrote with bitterness of the ruinous reading habit. This kind of writers' self-creation corresponded to the metaphors, popular among humanists, of consuming, or even devouring books. Cicero described Cato as *helluo librorum*, a devourer of books; a similar description was used

² Quoted in: M. Bieńczyk, *Melancholia. O tych, co nigdy nie odnajdą straty*. Warszawa: Sic!, 2000: 97-98.

³ Murzynowski, Stanisław, "Historyja żałosna a straszliwa o Franciszku Spierze" oraz "Ortografija polska," ed. Janusz Mallek and Franciszek Peplowski. Olsztyn: Pojezierze, 1974: 93.

⁴ *Gesta Romanorum. Historie rzymskie*, Polish version Paweł Hertz. Warszawa: Iskry, 2001: 185 [English edition: *Gesta Romanorum. A Record of Auncient Histories*, ed. Richard Robinson, 1630].

for Andrzej Krzycki by Stanislaus Hosius (Stanisław Hozjusz),⁵ whose biographers wrote the same about him – in his youth, his father is said to have hidden books from him out of concern for his son's health.⁶ Even if such statements were imbued with emphasis, this was no accidental trope. Since addiction to the written word was seen as being purely spiritual in nature, it can be presented and described only by using paramedical language, as if reading provided particular endorphins of “happiness hormones,” the lack of which causes withdrawal symptoms as well known to lovers of chocolate as to those who “cannot see a world without books.” Petrarch maintained that he preferred to pore over books throughout the night than to sleep and rest; apparently, when doctors took his books away from him, he started having migraines and fevers (Gruchala 2002: 138-139); the Pole Piotr Tomicki, addled with illness and fatigue in his old age, ignored the advice of physicians, who forbade reading (Bieńkowska 62).

One might expect that these tropes would lead to the pleasures and delights of the text as a category of research and reading experience. Roland Barthes declared that “[t]he text gives me bliss,”⁷ but, as Mikołaj Rej wrote, Poles too have a language of their own, and “Reading is a great pleasure.”⁸ And as usual, he went on to unfurl a tempting vision to the honest man:

Is it not a delight to be able to read, having lain down beneath a pretty little tree among manifold beautiful and fragrant flowers or in winter on your pretty and blissful bed, so that you can speak with those wise old men, with those manifold philosophers, from whom you will find the great consolation of your old age, in which you will find a lesson for every matter you contemplate? (Rej 2003)

More than once, Rej encouraged constructive, useful reading, but this delight, which in the writer's language means no more than ordinary pleasure, is not so much the endowment of a good text as a value resulting from a favorable coincidence of reading factors, as well (or above all) as physiological needs. This means lying with a book, and the notes in the margin are the icing on the cake: “From reading comes an old person's delight.” The implied delight of reading in place of the lost delight of the embrace or hunting, the pleasure of lying around forced by age, called the “solace of old age” by Rej himself, are not a goal; they certainly lack that element of disinterested joy contained in the French word *jouissance*. They are just a lure, a sweetener making it easier to swallow the bland medicine of constructive reading, pointing the simplest way to the Lord.

It is easy to ascribe this example to the Old Polish topos of life as the four seasons – which is also characteristic of Rej. Winter as old age and winter the season offer similar

⁵ Hozjusz, Stanisław [Stanislaus Hosius], “Pochwała Filipa Kallimacha, męża doświadczonego [...],” in: idem, *Poezje*, intro. Władysław Odyniec (trans. Anna Kamieńska). Olsztyn: Pojezierze, 1980: 6-7.

⁶ Bieńkowska, Barbara, *Staropolski świat książek*. Wrocław: Ossolineum, 1976: 62.

⁷ Barthes, Roland, *The Pleasure of the Text* (trans. Richard Miller). New York: Farrar, Strauss and Giroux, 1975: 34.

⁸ Rej, Mikołaj, *Żywoć człowieka poczciwego*, ed. Julian Krzyżanowski, vol. 2, Wrocław–Warszawa: Zakład Narodowy im. Ossolińskich, De Agostini Polska, 2003: 599.

diversions. According to Old Polish authors such as Andrzej Zbylitowski, reading and drinking allowed one to fill the surfeit of time in the winter.⁹ As the 17th-century encyclopedist Jakub Kazimierz Haur wrote, “[f]or the reading of the library, so necessary, winter will be suitable with its long night which there is no way of sleeping through.”¹⁰ So sitting up late at night, reading and reading because one can only sleep so much – this was the difference that effectively safeguarded landowning readers from becoming addicted to their modest libraries.¹¹ Even if such things did happen, it was to “fashionable” ladies of leisure, as Haur called them, passionate readers, day and night, of secular and not spiritual literature – so satisfying the body, almost demanding their portion of romances and gossip (Kowalski 2000). In the catalogue of gentlemen’s pursuits, “amusement with books” held an inferior position, and among the ladies representing worldly delights in the work of Hieronim Morsztyn, one would not find the Maid of Reading. “At what do ignoramus men play?,” asked Waclaw Potocki, answering:

They drink; cards and draughts in turn they play
Feed their dogs and refuse knowledge of school
The other, come from the threshing floor, though through glasses
With nothing else, the old man reads the calendar.¹²

Similar verdicts were delivered by, for example, Sebastian Petrycy from Pilzno, and Wespazjan Kochowski.

There is little doubt that, whereas for most contemporary readers the reading act seems to be an entirely internalized non-bodily communication with the text (or its author), in the 16th and 17th centuries reading – intensive, often repeated and annotated – was a practice that was to a considerably higher degree conscious of its own physicality. This was even linked to the tradition of rhetorical gesticulation and old anatomical knowledge (the so-called “hands” in the margins were supposed to indicate important points in a text, and at the same time “hold” it, meaning help to understand it).¹³ On the other hand, it does not appear that our ancestors attached any special attention to the corporeal circumstances and effects of reading – Old Polish material, judging from sample views, proves to be less than modest in this regard; we can say the same, albeit to a lesser

⁹ Zbylitowski, Andrzej, “Wieśniak,” in: *Staropolska poezja ziemiańska. Antologia*, ed. Janusz S. Gruchała and Stanisław Grzeszczuk. Warszawa: PIW, 1988: 173–174.

¹⁰ Haur, Jakub Kazimierz, *Skład albo skarbiec znakomitych sekretów oekonomijey ziemiańskiej*. Kraków, 1693: 166.

¹¹ See Kowalski, Piotr, *Theatrum świata wszystkiego i poćiwy gospodarz. O wizji świata pewnego siedemnastowiecznego pisarza ziemiańskiego*. Kraków: Wydawnictwo UJ, 2000: 90–96.

¹² Potocki, Waclaw “Odjemek herbów szlacheckich,” in: idem, *Dziela, vol. 3: Moralia i inne utwory z lat 1688–1696*, intro. Barbara Otwinowska, ed. Leszek Kukulski. Warszawa: PIW, 1987: 480.

¹³ Sherman, William H., “Toward a History of the Manicure,” in: Myers, Robin, Michael Harris and Giles Mandelbrote (ed.), *Owners, Annotators, and the Signs of Reading*, New Castle, DE and London: Oak Knoll Press & The British Library, 2005: 23–26, 35–36.

extent, about European (15th and 16th century) reflections on the physiology of readers' perceptions (Gruchała 2002: 173). An internet database which compiles reports from British readers' experiences (from 1450-1945)¹⁴ has not yet made its collection available, since the number of records remains too low. It is also noteworthy that books, which are so readily anthropomorphized in the topos motif of parting with the author,¹⁵ have usually been presented as non-bodily friends or solely spiritual progeny. Incidentally, in Old Polish forewords and dedications the word "book" itself usually referred to the message, rather than the object.¹⁶

It is not surprising, then, that most surviving mentions concern the effects of the source itself, and thus speak of the reactions triggered by, for example, works of comedy or love. These testimonies, so few and far between, could at least point to the Horatian reflection on the desired link between representation and reaction: like triggers like, tears lead to tears, laughter elicits laughter. "Love lured by love rules," as the imitator of Horace, Łukasz Opaliński, put it.¹⁷ This group also includes the popular historiographical topos, deriving from Salustius, according to which the acts of one's ancestors bring to readers a kind of physical arousal of similar advantages. A different group of testimonies (from Andrzej Krzycki to, let's say, Waław Potocki) document the physical effects of communing with what we would today call a graphomaniacal book. These are dominated by scatological depictions. We must also consider here cases of unintended laughter or sleep which graphomaniacal solemnity leads to. Both collections of examples use physiological motifs with the aim of discrediting the text or its author, and as such they should be viewed not so much as a record of reading experiences as, above all, valuing amplifications. An even more modest group is that of testimonies on the somatic consequences resulting from the description of the carrier and the circumstances accompanying the reading.

"Did the Sarmatians even have a body?," asked Tadeusz Chrzanowski in a well-known essay. He then warned, "The answer is not easy, since there are few sources on this subject, and the evidence of such existence is not irrefutable."¹⁸ On the one hand, developing the views of Hippocrates and Galen, the medical discourse based on the analogy between the micro- and macrocosmos assumed a holistic approach to physical

¹⁴ Hammond, Mary, "The Reading Experience Database 1450-1945 (RED)," in: Myers, Harris and Mandelbrote 2005).

¹⁵ See Maleszyński, Dariusz C., *Człowiek w tekście. Formy istnienia według literatury staropolskiej*. Poznań: Wydawnictwo Naukowe UAM, 2002 (chapter "Książki, które mówią").

¹⁶ Bienkowska, Barbara, "Polscy pisarze i uczeni XVI-XVII wieku wobec problematyki książki, in: Grzeszczuk, Stanisław and Alodia Kawecka-Gryczowa (eds), *Dawna książka i kultura. Materiały międzynarodowej sesji naukowej z okazji pięćsetlecia sztuki drukarskiej w Polsce*. Wrocław: Zakład Narodowy im. Ossolińskich, 1975: 309.

¹⁷ Opaliński, Łukasz, "Poeta nowy," in: idem, *Poeta nowy. Coś nowego*. Kraków: Universitas, 2003: 9.

¹⁸ Chrzanowski, Tadeusz, "Ciało sarmackie," in: idem, *Wędrowki po Sarmacji Europejskiej. Eseje o sztuce i kulturze staropolskiej*. Kraków: Znak, 1988: 224.

and psychological human nature.¹⁹ The proportions of humours conditioned the type of temperament, physiognomy and predisposition to illness; here there was also room for the beginnings of the bibliotherapy that is developing so intensively today. Therefore, among the numerous remedies for melancholy, that most fashionable affliction of the age, we find – alongside wine, riding, letting of black bile and incision of haemorrhoids – cheerful reading. François Rabelais, a physician by training, was only half-joking when he claimed that his books brought considerable relief to those with the pox and gout, as well as other sick and tormented people who did not happen to have the author, the doctor, at their beck and call.²⁰ The baroque polymath Jakub Kazimierz Haur also recommended to melancholics to “read and listen to something diverting.”²¹

There is no need to add that the reverse also holds, and an excess of reading can be harmful, since as Ecclesiastes warned (in Marcin Bielski’s Polish translation), “Long reading is hard work for the body.”²² It is true, concluded Andrzej Glaber of Kobylin, the author of a Renaissance medical handbook, that nature gave man two cushions on his rear, to make lengthy sitting more tolerable,²³ but this comfort did not safeguard against more threatening consequences. The same author warns against reading after lunch, and against excessive reading in general, because this stops natural warmth from moving down to the stomach to aid digestion,

and so it feeds, left in freshness and being abandoned, rots and turns in the bad and indigestible damp, from which various illnesses come. This is why people who spend much time sitting with books are rarely fat, but commonly pale or still sick, and this is due to bad digestion of food, with which they harm themselves by sitting long; this is how we know that he who has a fat belly does not learn much (unless he has it by nature) (Glaber 1893: 108-109).

This stereotype of exhausting reading was later maintained by Szymon Maricius from Pilzno, who argued that “The work of scholars, especially professors, is no lighter than any other work, because (as all physicians agree) it harms the health and brings serious illnesses, damages strength and brings on old age.”²⁴ Polydorus Vergilius’ work *De*

¹⁹ See Jaeger, Werner, *Paideia: the Ideals of Greek Culture: In Search of the Divine Centre* (trans. Gilbert Highet). Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1986 (chapter: “Greek Medicine as Paideia”).

²⁰ Rabelais, François, *Gargantua and Pantagruel* (trans. Thomas Urquhart, Peter Antony Motteux). Warszawa: Hollywood, FL: Simon & Brown, 2013: 184, 206.

²¹ See Partyka, Joanna, “Humor w encyklopedii J. K. Haura,” in: Karpiński, Adam, Estera Lasocińska and Mirosława Hanusiewicz (ed.), *Śmiech i łzy w kulturze staropolskiej*. Warszawa: Wydawnictwo IBL PAN, 2003: 115.

²² Bielski, Marcin, *Kronika, to jest historia świata [...]*. Kraków, 1564: k. 82 [*New International Version of the Bible*: “much study wears the body” – Ecclesiastes 12:12].

²³ Andrzej z Kobylina, *Gadki o składności członków człowieczych z Arystotelesa i też innych mędrców wybrane*. 1535. Kraków: wyd. J. Rostański, 1893: 61

²⁴ Szymon Maricius z Pilzna, “O szkołach czyli akademiach ksiąg dwoje,” in: *Wybór pism pedagogicznych Polski doby Odrodzenia*, ed. Józef Skoczek. Wrocław: Zakład Narodowy im. Ossolińskich, 1956: 168.

inventoribus rerum libri tres (Paris 1505) shows a woodcut depicting a scholar at work in a rather unsterotypical pose: in a gesture of discouragement, leaning away from his desk on which a closed book lies, he wipes his tired face with a handkerchief.²⁵ We also know from Cervantes that the brain of his masterpiece's hero ran dry from intemperate consumption of knightly romances, and similarly in Charles Sorel we may find the motif of the extravagant shepherd whose head has been fuddled by romances.²⁶ Furthermore, as Leo Spitzer showed, in the language of the era we should speak here of humoral pathology resulting from quantitative abuse.²⁷

Yet, on the other hand, of course, the body, in line with the devil and the world, was one of the anti-heroes of religious and parenetic writing, often consigned to the corner not only by ascetic authors, but also by those who – at least it would seem – cared so much about its comfort, such as Rej. This was at the root of the hierarchy of instinctive reactions, including reading ones. Valued highest were tears, or rather their gift, because crying, especially out of remorse or penance (Mary Magdalene being the best example) was an act in which the body condemned itself, so to speak.

It was another matter with laughter, especially the spontaneous, unbridled variety, in which the unruly body, slipping out of the control of the higher parts of the soul, conducted a kind of self-affirmation, defending itself from damaging humours. The spleen was responsible for laughter, since, as the inestimable Glaber noted, “in it is the place of melancholy, which creates sorrow, thus when to the spleen comes joy, the opposite thing to sorrow, it is moved so that it must shake: opposite things always struggle with each other” (Glaber 1893 59). Yet this same impulse is close to insanity, with which it is contrasted, and somebody inclined to laugh at anything not only has an impressive spleen, but “is so thick in reason and food, straightforward, vain and unstable, soon faithful, not mysterious, but slow to serve.” And in contrast, people who are reserved with their laughter are attentive, level-headed and of sound reason (though mean and mistrustful) (152). It was therefore understood that the medieval monastic rules subjected laughter to strict regulation.²⁸ Humanism, returning dignity to laughter after Aristotle (On the Parts of Animals, Book III, 10), for whom the human was the only animal capable of this reflex, did not eschew the idea of the uncontrolled autonomy of

²⁵ Reproduction in: Bienkowska, Barbara, *Staropolski Świat ksiązek*. Wrocław: Zakład Narodowy im. Ossolińskich, 1976: 66.

²⁶ Sorel, Charles, *Przygody Francjona. Opowieść ucieczna* (trans. Joanna Arnold), ed. Krzysztof Choiński. Warszawa: Czytelnik, 1986, p. 226 [English ed.: *A Critical Edition of “The Comical History of Francion,”* ed. Daniel A. Gajda (trans. John Wright). Chicago: Spectrum Press, 2005].

²⁷ Auerbach, Erich, “Zaczarowana Dulcynea,” in: idem, *Mimesis. Rzeczywistość przedstawiona w literaturze Zachodu* (trans. and intro Zbigniew Babicki), intro to 2nd ed. Michał P. Markowski. Warszawa: Prószyński i S-ka, 2004: 341 [English ed.: “The Enchanted Dulcinea,” in: *Mimesis: The Representation of Reality in Western Literature* (trans. Willard R. Trask). Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2003.]

²⁸ Curtius, Ernst Robert, *European Literature and the Latin Middle Ages* (trans. Willard R. Trask). Princeton, NJ; Princeton University Press, 1990: 420.

laughter. As Antonio Riccoboni wrote in his treatise on the comedy, laughter is a physical expression of joy which comes from the loosening of the soul. “One sees how the chest, mouth, veins, face, eyes are conquered by the picture of merry thing, which takes control over the strength encompassing the spiritual inner.”²⁹ Similarly, the Pole Górnicki used the same psycho-physiology of laughter as a rather mysterious thing, stressing the sovereignty it has that cannot be reined in; “[b]ut what is laughter, where does it hide, since it is quick to shake free, so that a man, no matter how much he wants to cannot stop it, so whence does it come, that it enters one’s face, your eyes, mouth, veins, sides, as if one were about to explode, let Democritus dispute it.”³⁰ The respected variants of poetry were subject to the kingdom of the soul. Leonardo Salviati, an author of Renaissance poetry, maintained that the otherwise noble medicine, which caters for healing the body, remained behind poetry, which cares for the mind; he wrote that “[m]edicine requires very frequent manual fulfillment of unworthy services, while the poetic art is far from all carnal activity and works only on the strength of the mind itself.” And of course he meant serious, high poetry. This, as one might expect, led to the lower rank of comic works; not only because of their inferior protagonists and simple style, but also on account of the addressee of the intended effects, because this was not the spirit, nor the mind, but the body, with its reflexes and proportion of elements: after all, a humorous text is one that – etymologically speaking – corresponds with the humours and the body fluids and restores them to the right proportions.

Those works that were written for relaxation satisfied the function, in broad terms, of *delectare*, invoking the *ethos* (calm emotions), while more solemn books (the *movere* function) appealed to the *pathos* (excited and violent emotions). A surfeit of the latter, accumulated as a result of too intensive reading, rather like fatigue from excessive intellectual effort could be cured by an appropriate dose of entertainment applied in an epigram or interlude to reduce the risk of succumbing to melancholy. In the Polish Renaissance, this was often cited as a merit of ludic genres, especially in Mikołaj Rej’s self-commentary.³¹ He argued:

Do you not know that when the pitiful mood moves you,
The wise man writes that bones and blood run dry.
For if always alone people were to sit
Only thinking, without jokes, they would go quite mad.³²

²⁹ Riccoboni, Antonio, “O dziele komediowym – na podstawie nauk Arystotelesa,” in: Sarnowska-Temierusz, Elżbieta (ed. and intro.), *Poetyka okresu renesansu. Antologia*, Wrocław: Zakład Narodowy im. Ossolińskich, 1982: 392.

³⁰ Górnicki, Łukasz, *Dworzanin polski*, ed. Roman Pollak. Wrocław: Zakład Narodowy im. Ossolińskich, 1954: 199.

³¹ See Otwinowska, Barbara, “Afekty,” entry in: Michałowska, Teresa (ed.), with Barbara Otwinowska, Elżbieta Sarnowska-Temierusz, *Słownik literatury staropolskiej*. Wrocław: Zakład Narodowy im. Ossolińskich, 1998: 15.

³² Rej, Mikołaj, “Ku temu, co czys będzie ty fraszki,” in: *Mała Muza od Reja do Leca. Antologia epigramatyki polskiej*, ed. Alina Siomkajło. Warszawa, PIW: 1986: 15.

Therefore, although the theory of temperaments was equally effectively (and based on the same conceptual system) explained by sadness and merriment, theoretical reflection linked an emphatic and witty style especially with sensual impressions; in some statements by poets themselves too, the differentiation between the spirit and the body coincided with the opposition between serious art and literature as entertainment. This difference was discussed by Waclaw Potocki in an epigram titled in this very way, *Rożnica* (“Difference”):

Amusing indeed is a joke given in verse;
 But I have the most reverence:
 That body, this soul pleases with its wit.
 Yet to lively jokes, passing that, hurries
 Especially when it is better to laugh than cry,
 Though better to enter the house with tears than laughter.³³

He also repeated in his next work that epigrams “please the body, but bother the soul” (*Większy gust ludzie mają w fraszkach niż w rzeczach nabożnych!* “More taste people have in epigrams than in religious things”), as well as rebuking his readers for preferring to refresh the body with laughter than the soul with sighs (*Na poważne wiersze do czytelnika!* “For serious verses to the reader”). It therefore seems that this “carnality” of the epigrams was not exhibited by accident. And, as the poet’s other statements show, his friends in the nobility demanded poems from him like medicine (*Do przyjaciela, posyłając księgę wierszów!* “To a friend, sending a book of poems”), “for melancholy in the head of amusement” (*Każda rzecz ma swój czas!* “Each thing has its time”), or even a sleeping pill to finally calm down the young and demanding wife (*Słuchanie wierszów sen przywoździ!* “Listening to poems brings sleep”). Interestingly, this soporific quality of poems is not seen as a flaw; it was said that good poems bring sleep, although the author himself did not find satisfaction in this (*Do śpiącego, słuchając wierszów!* “To the sleeping one listening to poems”).

What, then, did the Old Polish body read? What did it demand? Merry epigrams, shaking melancholy out of the spleen, applied like medicine or, for the healthy, served as an appetizer. The well-known medieval metaphor of words and books as sustenance and reading as consumption is tinged almost by metonymic reality in reference to ludic literature. When Potocki said on more than one occasion that one must set about reading epigrams with a suitable predisposition, just as one must have a ready stomach for eating, he was sticking to a metaphor (expanded into a comparison here). Yet we do feel this when we shorten the distance between the theme and the carrier. But when were these epigrams read to guests? Before lunch, to kill time until the capon arrived, said Potocki (in more than one example), and in any case some needed convincing that “Better this than a game of cards or draughts.”³⁴ This motif also appears in Hiacynt

³³ Potocki, Waclaw, *Dzieła*, vol. 1: *Transakcja wojny chocimskiej i inne utwory z lat 1669–1680*, intro. Barbara Otwinowska, ed. Leszek Kukulski. Warszawa: PIW, 1987: 385.

³⁴ Nowohracki na Krempaku, Cadasytan, “Sakwy [...],” in: *Antologia literatury sorwizdrzalskiej XVI i XVII wieku*, ed. Stanisław Grzeszczuk. Wrocław: Zakład Narodowy im. Ossolińskich, 1985: 327.

Texts and the Body

Przetocki's work, in the culinary composition *Pustny obiad albo zabaweczka* ("Lenten lunch or toy"):

Brother, what are you whistling, walking by before lunch,
Drying your tongue in vain and clearing your throat,
Read these simple verses; you will not yearn,
Until lunch arrives from the kitchen ready on the table.³⁵

Nocturnal winter readings, lying with a book in one's old age, school obligations, the university research that is so unkind to professorial bodies, chasing away melancholy, or finally mundane preprandial refreshment on epigrams – in each of these readerly occupations we can perceive some kind of necessity, regardless of whether the book is troubling or helpful. If we are to believe the humanists, they followed Horace in reading day and night, but this was supposed to be a kind of noble addiction, so again some kind of determination. This is both a small fraction of what can be said (and has been said) about the relationship of past culture with books and a rather specific approach. If we ask the Old Polish body about reading, it proves to have rather few words. When it does speak up, this is especially to express its own limitations.

Translation: Benjamin Koschalka

³⁵ Przetocki, Hiacynt, "Do starego i młodego czytelnika," in: idem, *Pustny obiad albo zabaweczka*, ed. Sylwia Cegiela et al., acad. ed. Jan Malicki and Agnieszka Tułowiecka. Katowice: Biblioteka Śląska, 2005.