

Streszczenie w języku angielskim pracy doktorskiej Łukasza Wróblewskiego *Od wstrętu do samorealizacji. Afektywno-kulturowe konteksty twórczości Michała Witkowskiego*.

The title of my thesis is *From Disgust to Self- Actualization. Affective-cultural contexts of Michał Witkowski's works*. Witkowski's books are often perceived by readers as controversial, iconoclastic and repulsive as they address issues of human sexuality, cadavers, bodily discharges, death or immoral acts directly and in a revolting way. In particular, the writer focuses on portraying social outcasts, e.g. homosexuals, promiscuous people, prostitutes, criminals and deviants. In one of his novels entitled *Zbrodniarz i dziewczyna* (*The Criminal and the Girl*) he shows us for example the ups and downs of a psychopathic murderer who abuses and kills teenagers. The man brutally mutilates their bodies and behaves repugnantly.

Examining Witkowski's books I also consider the role that disgust and the objects that evoke it play. I study the meaning of disgust in the creation of the presented world and wonder what effect repulsion and repulsive objects exert on the readers. The way I interpret Witkowski is to a large extent innovative as his work has so far not been analysed from an affective perspective. Repulsion itself has also not been given much attention in Polish literature. Currently only Kristeva's *Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection* translated from French and Winfried Menninghaus's study translated from German about the theory and history of disgust are available.

Reading Witkowski's novels I adopt specific research procedures. First of all, I analyse the reception of the writer's literary works. At the same time, I point out that a lot of readers consider Witkowski's books to be unilluminating and repulsive. For example, one of *Margot's* readers admitted he felt like vomiting while reading the book. Therefore, he decided to tear it up so that no one in his family would have access to it. I find examining the way in which Witkowski's books are received inspiring as it allows me to understand better the factors that evoke disgust. However, in my view the negative responses of the readers are the result of the fact that they have not been prepared to read these seemingly disgusting texts. Books of this kind are not read at schools, it is in fact the 'privilege' of a narrow circle of students of humanities.

After analysing the critical reviews, I move on to the interpretation of the author's specific books. My major method of examination is a case study, that is a multifaceted analysis of Witkowski's literary output which includes nine novels and a dozen of short stories. In my work I make use of research from such fields of study as cultural studies, literary studies, and affective studies. The thesis I have prepared argues that disgust helps in self-actualization.

In introduction I explain how researchers define disgust and self-actualization. I point out, that it is not easy to define disgust unambiguously as the meaning of this affect depends on the subjective experiences of the subject like attitude, situational context, the knowledge the subject possesses as well as a number of other factors, just to mention sex or age. According to the vast majority of theories of disgust it is related to unpleasant sensations and is shoven as an extremely negative emotion. For example, one of the renowned researchers, Winfried Menninghaus claims that 'disgust is a state of alarm and emergency, an acute crisis in the face of otherness which cannot be assimilated' (2007, 8). Scholars emphasize the link between this affect as well as insecurity and the experience of alienation and a crisis but at the same time do not notice the connection between disgust and self-actualization. However, in my work I attempt to show that even though disgust brings to mind negative connotations it may help in self-fulfillment.

But what is self-actualization at all? The precursor of self-fulfilling people, Abraham Maslow, claims that self-actualization manifests itself in the possession of an 'innocent eye' and lack of fear of the unknown. According to the author of the hierarchy of needs, self-actualized people live more in a 'real world of nature and not in the mass of concepts, abstractions, expectations, convictions and stereotypes that most people mistake for the world' (2006, 209). Maslow defined the self-actualized people as 'good animals' who enjoy life thanks to being able to accept both their own and other people's imperfections as well as being able to cope with toxic feelings like fear, contempt, frustration or disgust (2006, 210). And these are in fact not often experienced. For example, self-actualized people do not treat objects of disgust as repulsive because the physiological nature of man and the awareness of the animal nature of homo sapiens are natural for them. They also do not feel fear when they break generally

accepted religious rules or community codes as they develop their own unique axiological systems that they later follow in life.

I argue in my work that Witkowski's characters and he himself look at disgust with reserve as they do not treat it as a way to exclude other people and objects but as a way to affirm Otherness. For Witkowski homosexuals, criminals, promiscuous people, prostitutes and the poor are not people who are disgusting because it is their nature but rather people who have been wronged and misunderstood by the society which stigmatizes them. The narrator of *Lovetown* tries to give them back their dignity and he does it by removing the taboo of disgust, he uses it to fight against discrimination. In other words, he writes about people, objects and behaviours evoking disgust as he wants to break certain mental stereotypes, according to which that which is different and unknown is considered worse or dangerous. One of the forms of Witkowski's literary fight is laughter. By portraying disgusting people, places and behaviours in a comic way the writer makes disgust not disgusting and human frailties more acceptable.

In the next chapters of my Ph.D. thesis I explain how exactly disgust helps in self-actualization, which is understood as acceptance of our own as well as other people's otherness.

I start my deliberations on disgust as a form of self-actualization with Witkowski's debut book from 1997 with the telling title *Zgorszeni wstają od stołów* (*The Scandalized are Leaving the Tables*), already much forgotten today. The book is of paramount importance in the literary oeuvre of the author of *Drwal* (*The Woodcutter*). By and large, *Zgorszeni* lacks the vulgarity and obscenity typical of *Lovetown*. The writer creates there a crypto-language which does not only make it possible to affirm otherness but also subtly express disgust. The characters in the book who use it articulate the desires hidden from the people around and thus learn self-fulfilment.

In the chapter *Disgust as a Guarantee of Affective Cognition. Copyright* I analyse Witkowski's short stories from the volume *Copyright* to prove that self-actualization manifests itself in self-awareness. Thanks to childhood reminiscences the characters in the stories realize the role disgust plays in the formation of their 'selves' and determining social interactions.

In the chapter *Laughter and Disgust in 'Fototapeta' ('The Photography Wallpaper')* I discuss Witkowski's collection of stories from the years 2001-2005. I pay most attention to the texts *Grosz (A Penny)* and *Kolaboracja (Collaboration)*. Based on their analysis and interpretation I argue that self-fulfilment is a way of distancing oneself from one's own weakness which increases disgust.

In the next chapter I analyse a short story *Trafieni (The Afflicted)* from 2005. I see self-actualization in the context of *Trafieni* as a task for the reader to overcome disgust towards a sick body. The main characters of the short story are young, HIV positive people. Both their love and disease are repulsive to others.

I start the chapter *Disgust as Legitimizing Perversion. 'Lovetown' - a Book about Them, a Book about Us* with the reconstruction of the reception of Witkowski's most famous work. In my interpretation I attempt to go beyond the previous readings of the book, focused mainly on a part of LGBT people. Using Mary Douglas's theory of perception and the approach of perception-action developed by Ryszard Nycz I argue that *Lovetown* promotes extraordinary cognitions.

The next chapter of my dissertation entitled *(Not) Repulsive Masculinity. 'Barbara Radziwiłłówna z Jaworzna Szczakowej' ('Barbara Radziwiłłówna from Jaworzno-Szczakowa')* is dedicated to the analysis of the correlation between masculinity and disgust in Witkowski's book published in 2007. Referring to both Zygmunt Bauman's concept of retrotopia and Gunnar Karlsson's phallic masculinity I depict the way in which Witkowski plays a multi-level game with oppressive masculism.

Next, in the chapter *Contingency, Body and Disgust in 'Margot'* I argue that disgust together with irony can familiarise contingency. Referring to Rorty's concept I prove that the main character in the book, assuming the role of an 'ironist' is confronted with the contingency of her own existence and also develops ways to legitimize it.

In the chapter *Disgust in 'Drwal' ('The Woodcutter'): from Motivation to Explanation* I suggest interpreting the novel published in 2011 as emotive narration. In my deliberations, starting with opinions of the critics questioning the criminal aspect of the novel I attempt to prove that the investigation in *Drwal (The Woodcutter)* is less about the criminal abuse of underage boys and more about the affects that the characters find troublesome.

The chapter *Death and Disgust. In the Trap of (Lack) of Shame - the case of 'Zbrodniarz i Dziewczyna'* ('The Criminal and the Girl') looks into the relations between disgust, death and shame in Witkowski's novel from 2014. An analysis of the protagonists' behaviours confirms my opinion that disgust plays a significant part in overcoming the stigmatizing dimension of both shame and death.

In another chapter, entitled *Atopy and Disgust in 'Fynfund cfancyś'* I argue that self-actualization is connected with the criticism of atopy, which in Old Greek means 'nonsensicality', 'immorality', 'sin', and 'vile behaviour'. This is the reality described in *Fynfund cfancyś*. The main characters in the book are young promiscuous boys called Strichers. They work in the streets and are abused by the rich who suffer from a superiority complex.

Erasing fear? On Disgust and Self-fulfilment in 'Wymazane' ('Obliteration') is the title of the next part and there I suggest interpreting Witkowski's novel published in 2017 as an emotional confession which recounts the affective experiences of the subject forced to live in an environment which he finds off-putting. Using the deliberations of Aristotle, Giddens and Kępiński I wonder what role fear plays in the lives of the inhabitants of Wymazane.

In the chapter *Agonic Disgust or the Flight from Polishness* I juxtapose the disgust that expresses enmity with the disgust that suppresses antagonisms and makes use of them to expand self-knowledge. Inspired by the concept of Chantal Mouffe I suggest calling this constructive type 'agonic disgust'. I argue that the most telling example of its apologia is to be found in the so far unpublished work by Witkowski entitled *Sto psów za zabicie kraba. Dziennik kubański* (*A Hundred Dogs for Killing a Crab. The Cuban Diary*).

Finally, in the last chapter *Towards Inventive Cognition. A Summary* I argue that disgust cannot be a touchstone of inventive cognition. In my view, Witkowski uses it in his writing in a creative way to redefine Polish culture and the image of the Other deep-rooted in it. Witkowski's 'abominable' texts confront the reader with a number of questions about the status of his feelings and the condition of the subject in the post-modern era. They also make the reader think about the ambivalent nature of disgust and affects in general.

The conceptualizations of disgust in Witowski's literary oeuvre put forward by me provide tools to analyse literature and culture from an affective perspective. Similarly, they make it possible to destigmatise disgust and understand its meaning while reading the writer's books.

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