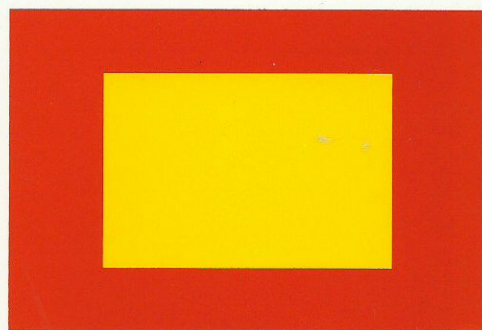


Praca zbiorowa pod redakcją
Aleksandry Kuzior

GLOBALNE KONTEKSTY POSZANOWANIA PRAW I WOLNOŚCI CZŁOWIEKA

10



Praca zbiorowa pod redakcją
Aleksandry KUZIOR

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Inspiracje teoretyczne i potencjalne rozwiązania

Zabrze 2018

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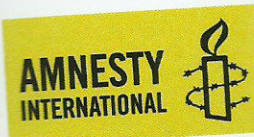
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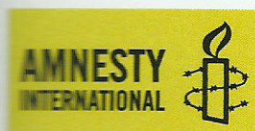
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Aleksandra Kuzior

Irena DIMOVA

THE CO-EXISTING WITH FAIR IN CONTEMPORARY POETRY AND THE LANGUAGE OF HUMAN RIGHTS

Abstract. The paper is supposed to make a contribution to clarifying how ethics are being manifested through contemporary poetry. With a view to some social and linguistic aspects, the author emphasizes Emmanuel Levinas' idea of re-ligare and the problem of otherness, as well as the link between poetry and ethics, that is, the author's responsibility and the readers' empathy. This contribution involves an analysis of the language of human rights in some poems, which are a part of the Button poetry's performance poetry events. Attention is paid to the idea of any latter-day manifesto and the feminist code in the literary works.

Keywords: performance poetry, human rights, ethics, aesthetics, otherness, Button poetry

WSPÓLISTNIENIE Z RZETELNOŚCIĄ WE WSPÓŁCZESNEJ POEZJI I JĘZYKU PRAW CZŁOWIEKA

Streszczenie. Artykuł ma przyczynić się do wyjaśnienia, w jaki sposób etyka przejawia się we współczesnej poezji. Mając na względzie pewne aspekty społeczne i językowe, autor podkreśla ideę re-ligare? Emmanuela Levinasa i problem inności, a także związek między poezją a etyką, czyli odpowiedzialność autora i empatię czytelników. Udział ten obejmuje analizę języka praw człowieka w niektórych wierszach, które są częścią wydarzeń poetyckich Button poetry's. Zwrócono uwagę na ideę jakichkolwiek manifestów z ostatnich dni oraz kodeksu feministycznego w dziełach literackich.

Słowa kluczowe: poezja, prawa człowieka, etyka, estetyka, inność, poezja Buttona

1. Ethics and poetry

*'it is actually in the art
of poetry that the power [i.e., faculty] of aesthetic ideas can manifest
itself to full extent'¹*

The article focuses on the question of the ethical meaning of human rights, as long as the ethical aspect is part of the literary work, and more precisely of the poetical one. The question of ethics and poetry has always troubled the human mind. Kant, for example, looks at poetry as serving the ethical, as something of a provider. The function of poetry, in that case, is seen as a healer or a filler for the spaces between theory and practice, if ethics indicates the theoretical realm, so poetry is labeled as a practical realm. From this point of view, the role of poetry is representational. Kant classifies this form of art as the highest of the arts because, according to him, poetry offers the most direct presentation of "aesthetic ideas"². In this paper, we undertake to specify the poetical quality of the language that is being used when writing or talking about ethical problems. Because only through the special usage of linguistics we can differentiate the piece of art from the work as a product of the ethics as a certain branch of philosophy. However, the main characteristic of this interdisciplinary connection always stays, and it is the fact that the transmission itself of ethical knowledge is connected with literature in general. Or as Joseph Brodsky defines it two decades ago in his Nobel lecture, "aesthetics is the mother of ethics"³.

2. Contemporary poetry and the 'process of re-ligare'. The otherness

The radical poetics as an ethical expression can be best tracked through the contemporary American poetry. The so-called 'poetry of saying' leads to the development of something of an ethical politics in this poetry⁴. Of course, any kind of an analysis needs a commentary on the social, political and historical background during the certain period in the concrete poetry. The form of poetry that we are analyzing here exists under different names, and 'poetry of saying' is one of them. On the other hand, it is called 'slam poetry' or the literary works itself

¹ Kant E.: On the Powers of the Mind Which Constitute Genius, [in] Critique of Judgement. Hackett Publishing Company, Indianapolis 1987, p. 183.

² Kant E.: Comparison of the Aesthetic Value of the Various Fine Arts, [in:] Critique of Judgement. Hackett Publishing Company, Indianapolis 1987, p. 196.

³ Brodsky J.: Nobel Lecture – December 8, 1987, https://www.nobelprize.org/nobel_prizes/literature/laureates/1987/brodsky-lecture.html, 20.12.2017.

⁴ Sheppard R.: The Poetry of Saying: British Poetry and Its Discontents 1950-2000. Liverpool University Press, 2005, p. 274.

are being called 'spoken word' of this poetry, but in both cases of art as a performance on stage or a written form. The spoken word is a performative poetry art with the process of 're-ligare'. The problem in Levinas' ideas lies in his statement that the Other cannot be bridged by the self because it is a responsibility. Poetry is always 'told' to us, it is always something of a gift. On the one hand, we have the Other as a subject and on the other hand, it is the Other in the mind'. The problem is that the Otherness can be based on the extent to which one is identical to the Other and the third idea is the one that is not identical.

What we incline to is to think of it as i.e. dedicating something to the Other. A first philosophy, dedicated to the Other, is a central thematic axis in Levinas' philosophy. Levinas defines as a process of 're-ligare'.

3. The poetry of human

The ethical elements of the complexity of human rights, political and philosophical areas of the world, whose Levinas defines as a process of 're-ligare'.

⁵ Wheeler R.: Imperatives in Phenomenology's Original Position. Council for Research in Values and Philosophy, 2005, p. 274.

⁶ Todorov T.: The Conquest of the New World, 1984, p. 274.

⁷ Levinas E.: The Proximity of the Other. Emmanuel Levinas. Robbins, 2005, p. 274.

are being called 'spoken word poems'. Each of these names emphasizes different characteristic of this poetry, but in both cases, it comes to the performative aspect of the poetry. Any product of art as a performance on stage can sound drastically different from its realization on a page in a written form. The spoken side of this poetry is the important aspect that connects the performative poetry art with the ethical saying because what we witness here is the so-called process of 're-ligare'. The latter is connected with the figure of the Other. The importance of Levinas' ideas lies in his statement that the Other appeals to me, calls me out across a gap that cannot be bridged by the self-certainty of the cogito. The neediness of the Other calls me because it is a responsibility that exists for the Other to be felt and understood⁵. Performance poetry is always 'told' to somebody and is in most of the cases 'a talk about somebody'. Thus it is always something of a talk that is set in the context of a communication. So on the one hand, we have the Other as a receiver, that is to say, a listener, in the communication process, and on the other hand, it is the problem of the Other, who represents the otherness and the 'other mind'. The problem is the one of understanding and treating Otherness. The concept of Otherness can be based on the idea that the other is good or bad, it can be connected with the extent to which one is identifying himself or herself with the other and assimilating him or her, and the third idea is the one of the indifference towards the identity of the other⁶.

What we incline to is the idea of the re-ligare as a process of re-connecting with the Other, i.e. dedicating something entirely to the Other, if paraphrasing Levinas' belief that 'ethics is a first philosophy, dedicated entirely to the Other'⁷. The feeling of responsibility for the other is a central thematic axis in the poetry that we are going to analyze. So the poem turns into what Levinas defines as a process of giving oneself as a 'hostage'.

3. The poetry of human rights. The responsibility

The ethical elements of human rights in literature will be difficult to discuss due to the complexity of human rights issues. The complexness of human rights comes from their socio-political and philosophical basis, as well as from the fact that they take place in a lot of different areas of the world, whose cultures we can't be familiar with, or at least not with all of them. In his essay "In defense of poetry," Percy Bysshe Shelley penned his famous line, "Poets are

⁵ Wheeler R.: Imperatives in Levinas's Doctrines of Sensibility and Alterity. [in:] Kantian Imperatives and Phenomenology's Original Forces: Kant's Imperatives and the Directives of Contemporary Phenomenology. Council for Research in Values and Philosophy, USA 2008, p. 105.

⁶ Todorov T.: The Conquest of America: the Question of the Other. University of Oklahoma Press, Norman 1999, p. 274.

⁷ Levinas E.: The Proximity of the Other. Ethics as First Philosophy. Is It Righteous To Be? Interviews with Emmanuel Levinas. Robbins J. (Ed.). Stanford University Press, Stanford 2001, p. 211-218.

the unacknowledged legislators of the world".⁸ In fact, every single story from our childhood, *and not only, includes elements of human rights within its storyline. And this is how we meet and acknowledge the Otherness.*

Poetry, on the other hand, possesses other means of sending human rights messages. The author of the poetical work alone chooses how to manifest ethics and virtues through his or her writings. But what leads to the role of poetry as an ethically constructed message in a certain social context has already been partly mentioned. The different social and political background is one of the main factors that have an impact on the poetical realization of the thought in a certain country. For this reason, the poetry that we have chosen for this analysis is the American one. The representing of ethics in this literature is typical for a whole group of writers in the current generation. Thus we witness a lot of so-called slam poetry competitions for example, and it is a cultural phenomenon which can not be seen in every country, or more precisely in every part of a continent. As part of the Slavic world, we can hardly notice traces of such a cultural trend. While on the other hand, 'the poethical trajectory', as John Wrighton calls it in his book on American poetry, is a space especially for the communication between ethics and literature, when it comes to the twentieth-century and twenty-first century poetry. One of the questions is why this kind of poetical works are situated in this context but not in the one of the Slavic world for example. And the answer can be simply given because the need for something leads to the product. These poets' works have an experimental nature and the nature of the poem as a genre is transformed. Poetry is not anymore an abstract and vague literary genre radiating metaphysical messages in mysterious ways. To feel is standing right next to the idea of understanding poetry. The latter is no longer meant to say something and to make somebody feel something, poems are simply saying what they are supposed to say.

The issue of ethics in art has always had a very strong position in the field of aesthetics. The responsibility of the artist, i.e. of the poet, seems to be controversial. The question of the place of ethics and morality in this form of art stays opened, as well as in the writer's views on the subject.

4. The language

What defines the quality of the poetical works when it comes to the ethical aspects that can be found in the texts is the main axis, that the poem is built on, but it is the language that is used in it too. From this perspective, the poetics of the poems is what we put an accent on in this analysis. The quality of the language lays in a lot of concepts of the function and responsibility

⁸ Shelley P.: In Defense of Poetry, <http://www.rjgeib.com/heroes/shelley/defense.html>, 19.12.2017.

of poetry, as for example, about a special sort of communication understood as referring to described as a systematic system. These two names can be seen as an example, normative, applied about the examination of the

Our focus is primarily on and are aimed at something to ethical problems and emotions. One of the characteristics of and at the same time of keeping to look at are a product of the society founded in 2011 by Button website and blog to long as every single poet. The performance poetry has values and ideals. Button provides a specific entrance into language. Gatwood and Sierra DeMulder is the power of metaphor and idea of ethical life and ethical pragmatic responsibility of

5. The health of a state

As we have already mentioned means that the self becomes holding, storing and radiating and Sierra DeMulder writes rights too. The health of the

⁹ Pound E.: The Serious Artist, 1968.

¹⁰ Tate A.: To whom is the poet?

¹¹ Wrighton J.: Introduction: The Routledge, London 2012, p. 3.

of poetry, as for example, the ones of Ezra Pound⁹ and Allen Tate¹⁰. In poetry, we can talk about a special sort of connection between morality and ethics. As long as morality is commonly understood as referring to a set of rules that determine how we ought to behave, ethics is described as a systematic study of the reasoning framework informing morality¹¹. However, these two names can be seen as synonymous, when it comes to different types of ethics, as for example, normative, applied or meta-ethics. The voice of poetry speaks about morality, but about the examination of the ethical application of morality too.

Our focus is primarily put on the poetical praxes that contribute to the idea of ethical life and are aimed at something of a try to change the world. We look at poems which are addressed to ethical problems and embody the social and pragmatic responsibility of this form of art. One of the characteristics of every form of art is the capability of embodying the ethical life and at the same time of keeping the individual and cultural memory. The poems we are going to look at are a product of the so-called Button poetry, what represents something of a poetical society founded in 2011 by Sam Cook and Sierra DeMulder, when they launched the first Button website and blog too. Their poetry is strongly connected with the performative art, as long as every single poem is a part of the slam poetry competitions they organize. The performance poetry has the quality to combine gestures and words and thus is able to bear values and ideals. Button poetry's performers freely submit their freedom of thought through a specific entrance into language. For this analysis, we have chosen a few poems by Olivia Gatwood and Sierra DeMulder. What we are going to take a look at in their literary works, is the power of metaphor and of the other reflexive tools that are directly connected with the idea of ethical life and ethical acting towards the others, as well as with the idea of social and pragmatic responsibility of poetry, and with the special weight that poetry has in society too.

5. The health of a state and the health of an individual. The feminist code

As we have already mentioned, Levinas speaks of giving oneself as a 'hostage', by what he means that the self becomes 'victim without being guilty'. A poet is somewhat of a capacity for holding, storing and radiating social messages which have an ethical nature. Olivia Gatwood and Sierra DeMulder write their poetical books with the idea of standing behind the women's rights too. The health of the society is directly connected with every individual who is a part of

⁹ Pound E.: *The Serious Artist*, [in:] *Literary Essays of Ezra Pound*. Eliot T.S. (Ed.). New Directions, New York 1968.

¹⁰ Tate A.: *To whom is the poet responsible?*, [in:] *Essays of Four Decades*. ISI Books, Wilmington 1999.

¹¹ Wrighton J.: *Introduction: The Poethical Trajectory*, [in:] *Ethics and Politics in Modern American Poetry*. Routledge, London 2012, p. 3.

it. On the other hand, women are often connected with stereotypical roles in life. The latter leads to one of the main messages in the poems written by the two authors mentioned above.

In her poem "Paper Dolls" Sierra DeMulder traces the life of the girls, or of how she calls them, including herself, "paper dolls". She writes, and speaks, about the way these "dolls" are being taught to live. It starts "from the moment we leave our pink nurseries", when "we are collapsible paper dolls". The poem speaks of the negative aspects of being taught to live like girls, who are "light to hold, easier to crumple" and reaches the point, when the female body is seen just as an object that others use. Sierra DeMulder's work represents all the material looks that are pointed at the female body and the ways they act towards it. The poem speaks of the need to witness if one wants to understand and change.

6. The idea of any latter-day manifesto

*Write it. Write. In ordinary ink
on ordinary paper (...)*

From "Hunger Camp at Jaslo" by Wislawa Szymborska

The form and the language of the poetry speak about the idea of the genesis of true poetry. All dictions are available to the contemporary poet, and that's why what is worth discussing is the language chosen. The tone of the two poems, written by Sierra DeMulder and Oliwia Gatwood, is mainly defensive, apologetic. The vocabulary is the every-day one. The poem is not between the pages, but between people, because it is transmitting a certain message. The language that is being used speaks itself of tolerance for any sort of experimentation. Both authors write on gender equality, sexuality, and social justice. Olivia Gatwood is a co-founder of the poetry show „Speak Like a Girl“ too. Both poets do not use traditional meters, their verses are somewhat of a flow of words, that follow the crowd, the natural way of speaking, and mainly of defending one's rights. Their poems appeal for a shared sense of humanity, most of them are of address to the global problems of social or gender inequality.

As best examples of human rights poems can serve "Ode to my Bitch Face" and "Paper Dolls". The literary genre of the ode that Olivia Gatwood uses in itself speaks of the tone, which this text is written and spoken in. Here the ode does not come with its strict definition's realization, but still expresses some typical characteristics of this genre, such as elevated emotion, for example. That's why here it comes to the idea of any latter-day manifesto, which give us both poems mentioned above. The topic and the language lead to the idea of manifesting somebody's human rights, and the way of presenting the poetical texts shows the any-day nature

of this poetry. Olivia Gatwood doing this thing lately where I which is largely how shame v "Ode to My Bitch Face". Whi from a girl to be, and how it fr the one who has already free questions, they can consist ap prose or poetry.

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9. Tate A.: To whom is th Wilmington 1999.

of this poetry. Olivia Gatwood even explains her decision of writing these odes – “So I’ve been doing this thing lately where I write odes to things I think I’m supposed to feel ashamed of, which is largely how shame works”, and this is actually part of the beginning of her poem “Ode to My Bitch Face”. While Sierra DeMulder by her poem shows what is being expected from a girl to be, and how it fits the stereotypical image of girls, Olivia Gatwood speaks about the one who has already freed herself. Their poems sometimes ask, and are comprised of questions, they can consist aphorisms, and mainly what we find are broken passages of lyric prose or poetry.

The poetry, which is connected with human rights, shows certain characteristics when it comes to the language that is being used by the authors. Olivia Gatwood and Sierra DeMulder write poems, which are somewhat of manifestations because they manifest author’s internal ethics and virtues. But at the same time, they are not part of any specific literary movement, that is introduced by some sort of a ringing manifesto.

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