

Dezorientacje. Antologia polskiej literatury queer

Ed. by Alessandro Amenta, Tomasz Kaliściak, and Błażej Warkocki, 2021

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One of the newest anthologies of non-Western queer literature¹ is *Dezorientacje. Antologia polskiej literatury queer* (Disorientations: An Anthology of Polish Queer Literature). As its editors write, the work aims to demonstrate that ‘despite the increasingly dangerous and growing use of homo- and transphobia, a queer tradition in Polish literature and culture exists and has never been a margin.’²

Dezorientacje, the first anthology of Polish queer literature, advances the research provided by Maria Janion and Zbigniew Majchrowski, collected in the form of an academic series entitled *Odmieńcy* (Queer).³ Although, in this case, the identifier of ‘queer’ is considered in terms of a wider meaning, including various literary representations — Jewish, homosexual, female, and androgynous. The examples collected by Amenta, Kaliściak, and Warkocki, spanning from 1970 to 2018, are connected by their shared signification of

[...] a non-essentialist vision of human subjectivity in its gender and sexual dimensions. In this sense, queer literature is not homosexual literature, because it tries to encompass a richer range — also in terms of history — of phenomena.⁴

¹ Among others: Joseph M. Pierce, *Argentine Intimacies: Queer Kinship in an Age of Splendor, 1890 – 1910* (New York: SUNY Press, 2019); Hongwei Bao, *Queer China: Lesbian and Gay Literature and Visual Culture after Postsocialism* (London: Routledge, 2020).

² *Dezorientacje. Antologia polskiej literatury queer*, ed. by Alessandro Amenta, Tomasz Kaliściak and Błażej Warkocki (Warsaw: Wydawnictwo Krytyki Politycznej, 2021), p. 20.

³ *Odmieńcy*, ed. by Maria Janion and Zbigniew Majchrowski (Gdańsk: Wydawnictwo Morskie, 1982).

⁴ *Odmieńcy*, p. 28.

The main point of reference for *Dezorientacje* is the definition of ‘queer’ gathered in works by Eve Kosofsky-Sedgwick⁵ and Wolfgang Joehling.⁶ As a novel approach, the scholars combine the Western idea of this term (as a sign of transgression in gender and sexuality) with the Slavic reception of queerness (literary examples derived from Romanticism, such as folk tales and legends).

Fragments of literary works representing queer characters, codes, and themes are published alongside commentary from the anthology’s editors and bibliographic sources for further reading. The work not only comprises the writings of authors who consider(ed) themselves as part of the LGBTQIA+ community, but also includes various representations of (among others) romantic familiarity between friends, characters experiencing gender transgressions, and signs of homoeroticism in nineteenth-century travel writing. There are also examples of gay, lesbian, and bisexual texts dated from the twentieth to the twenty-first century to commemorate the centenary of Polish independence, celebrated in 2018. By offering examples of queer identities and desires, the editors revitalise the legacy of forgotten artists such as Aniela Gruszecka or Gustaw Daniłowski, unknown to contemporary Polish readers. The editors also exhibit the writings of the biggest names in the Polish patriotic literary canon, widely considered to be cisheteronormative and conservative, such as Adam Mickiewicz and Juliusz Słowacki. Amenta, Kaliściak, and Warkocki’s collection reevaluates the history of Polish literature by showing the inherent presence of queer representations. The anthology is an emancipatory project which ‘ontologizes’⁷ its described phenomena, offering a vision of an alternative canon built with excluded, forgotten and/or silenced stories.

What could be next, then? For further academic study, collections with even greater specificity of focus would be valuable. By suggesting this, I have in mind texts describing the experiences of fewer recognized aspects of the queer literary experience, such as asexuality, which would make for a more eclectic anthology. Another possibility would be compiling works according to the methodological framework of intertextuality or performativity. However, these propositions are offered only in acceptance of the invitation made by the anthology’s editors. I do not criticise their approach of compiling a wide-ranging anthology. On the contrary, the

⁵ Eve Kosofsky-Sedgwick, *Epistemology of the Closet* (Oakland: University of California Press, 1990).

⁶ *Diskrete Leidenschaft. Homosexuelle Prosa aus Polen* (Discreet Passion: Gay Prose from Poland), ed. by Wolfgang Joehling (Frankfurt a.M.: Foerster, 1988).

⁷ *Wiek teorii. Antologia 1* (The Age of Theory: Anthology 1), ed. by Ulicka Danuta (Warsaw: Instytut Badań Literackich, 2021).

idea of queerness is always replete with diversifications and transgressions, therefore, the editors' choice is understandable. *Dezorientacje* is an impressive achievement. But more interesting is what will appear following this anthology's publication; the subsequent works which will bring more queer stories together.

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