

Łukasz N i e w c z a s – WORLDS AND LIFE. METAPHORS  
IN POLISH LITERARY CRITICISM  
OF THE ROMANTIC PERIOD

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DOI: <https://doi.org/10.18290/sn2139.17en>

The subject of the literary consciousness of the Romantic writers lies at the centre of Marek Stanisław's research interests. This is evidenced by his numerous publications, in particular his two monographs: *Wczesnoromantyczne spory o poezję* [*Early Romantic Disputes over Poetry*] (Kraków 1998) and *Przedmowy romantyków. Kreacje autorowe, idee programowe, gry z czytelnikiem* [*Romantic Forewords. Authorial Creations, Programmatic Ideas, Plays with the Reader*] (Kraków 2007), in which the author made a name for himself as an excellent expert in meta-poetic reflection, developed both within the author's own paratexts, as well as in the field of literary criticism. Complementing and, perhaps, culminating this research is Stanisław's latest book: *Światy i życie. Metafory poezji w polskiej krytyce literackiej doby romantyzmu* [*Worlds and Life. Metaphors of Poetry in Polish Literary Criticism of the Romantic Era*] (Rzeszów 2019), in which the author – treating metaphor and related figurative devices as the “semantic centre” of Romantic literary criticism – examines what (and how) the Romantic authors wrote about poetry, the poet and the process of poetry-making through the prism of metaphor.

The main part of the book consists of a four-chapter analysis of metaphoricity centred on the creative act, the poet and – above all – poetry itself. This is preceded by an introduction (*Od metody do metafory i z powrotem* [*From method to metaphor and back again*]) and followed by a conclusion (*Romantyzm i ciągi dalsze. Podsumowanie* [*Romanticism and beyond. Conclusion*]). The introduction goes beyond a conventional “introduction to the main problem”. Drawing on his many years of experience in researching Romantic metapoetic texts, Stanisław describes the state of research in this field as defined by a notable paradox. According to the author, on the one hand, we are inclined to disregard the critical discourse of Romantics, especially Polish Romantics, accusing it of vagueness, obscurity, excessive poetisation, exaltation, verbosity and, in effect: non-conclusiveness. On

the other hand, we do not have major problems with the description of the Romantic concept of the poet and poetry, our knowledge on this subject appears to be thoroughly established and the characterisation of the phenomena – at least in its basic outlines – is obvious from the historical-literary perspective. However, as the author notes, this knowledge is derived from the interpretative practices of Romantic poetry rather than from the analysis of critical discourse, and this is because – here the author postulates another thesis – such analysis seems to eliminate inventiveness, interpretative creativity. Rather, it requires accuracy and attentiveness, diligence and erudition. Therefore, both as a process and its effect, it is something much less attractive research-wise. This is why such research is undertaken reluctantly, and reconstructions of the Romantics' metaliterary consciousness are based on a relatively narrow group of the same, repeatedly invoked statements: "the iron canon of programmatic manifestos of the Romantics" (p. 14), with a clear predilection for foreign-language authors.

Against the background of this situation in the state of research, Stanisiz puts forward two important postulates that are essential for the analyses to follow. The first calls for broadening the scope of inquiry, aiming to encompass, if not the entirety (an obviously unattainable goal), then at least the widest possible panorama of perspectives, including the contributions of lesser-known Polish critics from the Romantic era. The second postulate, simply put, advocates for reading a critical text using the same methods applied to the analysis of literary texts. This approach entails viewing the text not as a linguistically transparent "container" for ideas but as a rhetorical structure that communicates not only discursively but also through the specific organisation of its expression – its composition, intertextuality, and, most importantly, its figurativeness. While this postulate is not particularly groundbreaking, the author underscores that it is seldom implemented in practice.

Importantly, the formulation of these initial research assumptions is accompanied by a clear rhetoric of promise: "outside the area of our research interest there remains a vast number of statements, the consideration of which could complete the picture of the transformations of Romantic poetry theory and even – perhaps – bring about completely new solutions" (p. 16). Whether the analyses ultimately fulfil this promise, however, will be addressed later in this discussion.

Stanisiz dedicates a portion of the introduction to more theoretically oriented observations on metaphor, which are nonetheless closely connected to the book's central concept. The aim here is to explicate those properties of metaphor that enable it to play an important role in the metapoetic discourse of Romantic criticism. Stanisiz is supported by contemporary theorists' findings on metaphor, which is viewed as a basic tool for categorising reality and – to simplify it – a form of thinking about the world inherent not only in literature / poetry, but also in every

linguistic utterance. The paradigm invoked by the researcher in this context, most relevant to the concept of metaphor adopted in his work, is cognitivism, best exemplified by the classic dissertation by George Lakoff and Mark Johnson *Metaphors We Live By*<sup>1</sup>. While the theoretical findings are not, of course, the primary focus of Stanisz's book – serving instead to briefly reference certain frameworks in what might be called an operational manner, i.e. to establish a functional understanding of metaphor for use in the analytical chapters – I find it somewhat lacking that this section, and indeed the book as a whole, makes no mention of scholars such as I. Richards and M. Black<sup>2</sup>. The interaction theory of metaphor developed by them, the first such strongly anti-rhetorical concept of metaphor – showing that the use of metaphor almost always involves the creation of a new meaning, non-paraphrasable and non-reducible to discursive explication, a tool of insight into reality and endowed with the power of semantic creation – is very much in line with those properties of metaphor that Stanisz emphasises in his work. It will not be out of place to add that the findings of American researchers preceded the reflection of cognitive scientists, and that the theory of metaphor developed by them corresponds better with the studies of poetic, idiomatic, fresh and original metaphor than the conceptual apparatus of cognitive scientists, whose most important achievement was the discovery and description of the metaphorical source of “colloquial” language and our thinking about the world.

The second issue, arguably the more significant one that could have enhanced this theoretical exploration but is unfortunately absent from Stanisz's book, is at least a cursory reconstruction of the understanding of metaphor within Romantic critical discourse. How was it conceptualised? What was the awareness of its function? How did it align with the Romantic philosophy of language? These questions seem highly relevant and would have complemented Stanisz's cognitive approach to metaphor effectively. It can be argued, although the matter would require much more extensive argumentation, that cognitivists did not so much discover the metaphorical system of concepts operating at the basis of our speaking/thinking about the world, as they revived and brought to the surface earlier intuitions about this phenomenon, developing and describing them scientifically by means of categories and terms created by them. Suffice it to recall Giambattista Vico's extremely innovative concept of the metaphorical origins of language, formulated in the 17<sup>th</sup> century. Bearing in mind that Vick's reflection on language and metaphor strongly

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<sup>1</sup> G. LAKOFF, M. JOHNSON, *Metafory w naszym życiu*, transl. and introduction by T. P. Krzeszowski, Warszawa 2010.

<sup>2</sup> This is even more surprising since he quotes, and rightly so, T. Dobrzyńska – a researcher whose findings on metaphor owe much to the interaction theory.

influenced the concepts of the Romantics, one may regret that the author did not decide to follow this trail.

As it has been mentioned above, the main part of the book consists of four analytical chapters, organising the research material first according to the criterion of the target of metaphor (Chapter I – metaphors of the creative act), and in the following chapters according to the criterion of the metaphorical sources (Chapter II – topographical-spatial metaphors, III – visual metaphors, and IV – organic metaphors). Below, I will briefly outline the most important findings.

Chapter I is devoted to metaphors of the creative act. Reflecting on the metaphorical expressions of the sources of poetry contained in Romantic criticism, the author positions them between two poles: poetry as stemming from the external world or transcendent realms (“upper inspirations”) and the poetry originating from the poet’s inner self (“sounds of heart”). The metaphors of the second type, capturing poetry as a form of internal expression rather than external inspiration, are more numerous. This image is co-created by numerous metaphors in Romantic metapoetic discourse, in which poetry turns out to be the “speech of the heart” or a “child of imagination”. The creative act, on the other hand, is sometimes conveyed by metaphors of “pouring out” or figurative expressions focused around the image of a volcanic eruption, thus suggesting the “fluidity” of the poetic element, as well as its difficult-to-tame nature. The researcher concludes: “the metaphors typical of the Romantic understanding of poetry as expression arose within a common image schema, depicting the poet’s consciousness as a depth from which the elements (especially water and fire) emerge and in which the basic ‘poetry-making authorities’ are hidden (heart and imagination). This set of metaphorical imagery could thus be problematised as follows: poetry is the revelation of the hidden; it is heat, power, energy and might” (p. 58).

The metaphors of expression described above are complemented in Polish metaliterary discourse with metaphors of inspiration, indicating sources of poetry external to the subject, mainly of a metaphysical nature. In this view, poetry is first and foremost a “gift from heaven,” a “spark from heaven,” a “heavenly visitor,” a “voice from the heavenly homeland,” etc. Poetry is thus a form of representation of the infinite, while the poet is a medium of higher forces. Stanisiz links these metaphors with the category of inspiration as one of the key Romantic notions, the emphasis on the role of the unconscious element in the creative process and the Romantic concept of the bard. Apart from the overarching image of poetry as the effect of inspiration from the “heavens,” which organises many individual variants, Stanisiz also cites other ways of concretising the Romantic concept of poetic inspiration, in which poetry is conceptualised as flight (or ascension), singing, “music of nature,” school.

In Chapter II, the criterion for ordering the material discussed by Stanisz changes. Whereas in Chapter I, the subject of analysis was the target of metaphor (sources of poetry, metaphors of the creative act, poetic expression and inspiration), in the following chapters it is the metaphorical themes that form the criterion for ordering and classifying figurative expressions. The first circle, discussed in the Chapter II, consists of metaphors which conceptualise poetry and creative acts by means of topographical and spatial images – starting with the metaphors of road, journey, wandering, straying, strongly rooted in tradition; through figuratively understood lands, kingdoms, aquatic motifs (seas, wide waters), sky, skies, depths. What most of these metaphors have in common – the researcher concludes – is an openness to infinity, immensity, the transgression of boundaries, as well as the expansiveness and omnipresence of poetry, both in the vertical and horizontal dimension. Metaphorical places and objects also correspond with the Romantics' inherent conviction of poetry's omnipresence and its multiple forms. What draws attention is their multiplicity and diversity, as well as their tendency to be made concrete, often by association with local geo-cultural realities. Among the abundance of metaphorical associations, Stanisz singles out those that prove particularly characteristic of the Romantic understanding of poetry: border zones, border posts, signposts, lighthouses, mountains, edifices, temples, monuments, ruins and graves, into which poetry can transform itself via metaphorical shifts of meaning. These metaphors highlight the borderline nature of Romantic poetry, the inherent tension between what is known and assimilated and what remains the domain of mystery, often also between the realm of the material and the spiritual world.

Chapter III of the book is devoted to visual metaphors, which mainly conceptualise the object and methods of poetic presentation of reality, the model of the represented world, the cognitive possibilities of poetry and its artistic suggestiveness. The material presented in this part is divided into three groups. The first is made up of painting metaphors, based on the association of poetic activities with the "painting" of reality (the central metaphor of "painting" and its extensions: the poet as painter, the artistic effect as painting, the poetic word as brush, etc.). The second group consists of mirror metaphors (poetry as mirror, speculum, reflection, etc.). The characteristic thing – and highlighted by Stanisz – is that these metaphors have been widely used in the tradition since antiquity and were also a very important part of the critical apparatus of the classics, since they perfectly capture the mimetic aspect of literature. Let us recall, following the researcher, that the transition from poetry understood metaphorically as a mirror to poetry conceived of as a lamp was described as the Romantic breakthrough by Meyer Howard Abrams in his classic treatise *The Mirror and the Lamp: Romantic Theory*

and the Critical Tradition<sup>3</sup>. And yet, Stanisiz notes that the mirror metaphor was also abundantly represented in the critical discourse of the Polish Romantics, however, it was used in a different way, through modifying its traditionally established form. I will elaborate on this this issue further in the polemical part of the review.

The final group of visual metaphors in Stanisiz's discussion are metaphors of light, created on the basis of various motifs found by the Romantic critics in many areas of surrounding reality (metaphors of poetry as sun, brightness, rays, light, lightning, stars, "celestial glows," lamp, etc.). Despite their often conventional nature, they were readily used by the Romantics as epistemological figures, based on a permanent association with categories important for the Romantic worldview, such as the absolute and transcendence or illumination with light.

The analytical part of the book closes with Chapter IV, which discusses the organic metaphors of poetry. These include anthropomorphic metaphors (mainly personifications of poetry), plant metaphors (used more frequently: poetry as earth, role, forest, flower, plant, seed, tree) and animal metaphors (used less frequently: poet as eagle, swallow, or spider spinning a thread from its body). Noting the significant predominance of plant metaphors over animal ones, Stanisiz links it to the Romantic tendency to fully unite the subject with nature permeated with life, a tendency which, in the researcher's opinion, is easier to illustrate with plant metaphors.

The final subsection *Metafory organiczne i obrazy życia* [*Organic metaphors and images of life*] brings to a conclusion the analyses conducted in the preceding chapters. An important observation is made here, namely that almost all the discussed types of metaphors highlight movement, spirituality and life – these categories are treated synonymously or complementarily within the critical discourse of the Romantics. In the context of these considerations, Stanisiz invokes, *inter alia*, Krasiński's well-known formula, describing two models of poetry – that of Mickiewicz and that of Słowacki – in terms of centrifugal and centripetal force. By analogy to nature, the organic metaphors of poetry, which conclude the entire argument, emphasise its productive power, its unpredictability, expansiveness, mysteriousness, and the synthesis of material and non-material elements.

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The fundamental and indisputable value of Marek Stanisiz's book is its documentary aspect. The author, one of the best experts in critical discourse of the Ro-

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<sup>3</sup> M. H. Abrams, *Zwierciadło i lampa. Romantyczna teoria poezji a tradycja krytycznoliteracka*, transl. M. B. Fedewicz, Gdańsk 2003.

mantic period, analysed a huge number of metaliterary statements, both canonical and non-canonical, thus fulfilling the promise made in the introduction. Probably no one has done this before on such a scale, within a single monograph.

What is also admirable is the clarity of the discussed problems, the ease with which the phenomena are classified, the freedom to organise the research field. This, by the way, is a characteristic feature of the author's workshop, apparent in many of his articles and larger publications. This goes hand in hand with the logic and communicative value of the research narrative. It is evident that Stanisiz cares about this aspect of his utterance, keeps the audience in mind, does not overload the argument with scientific terminology, and applies his theoretical awareness of metaphor in a functional manner. I draw attention to these aspects which, although they may sound trivial, are by no means the rule in the work of contemporary literary historians.

And now, some critical remarks.

The first concerns the question whether metaphor really is such an important element of the Polish metapoetic discourse of the Romantic era as the author suggests. Let us recall that, according to Stanisiz, it constitutes the semantic centre of a critical utterance (the author even emphasises: "of every utterance"). Meanwhile, the abundant source material presented proves that many critics treat metaphor as a stylistic ornament, according to the old rhetorical tradition. Let us look at a few examples from different chapters, using different types of figurative expressions for poetry: "he was the first to go down this much-vaunted Romantic road" (F. Grzymała on Mickiewicz, pp. 86-87), "these are the mistakes of the writer, not the roadhe took" (Grabowski, p. 87), "the higher talents began to let themselves go down a new road" (Gosławski, p. 88). In this case, we are dealing with a metaphor that is completely lexicalised; its figurative potential is suppressed. The metaphor of "road" in this sense was used also in colloquial Old Polish, and it is still used in this way today. I therefore doubt whether there is any point in considering such examples at all. Similar doubts are raised by examples – though, of course, not all of them – that use the metaphor of "painting" and "picture": "he painted the nature of man with bold and true features" (Mickiewicz on Shakespeare, p. 123), "he did not want to limit himself to painting the superficiality of the Lithuanian nobility" (Ropelewski on Mickiewicz, p. 124), "he sketches an incomparable picture based on old memories" (Klaczko on Dante, p. 124), "draw a faithful picture of his soul" (p. 128). There are more similar examples in the book – not so much conventional expressions but formulations with completely bleached metaphorical meaning.

Among the examples cited by Stanisiz, we naturally find phrases that are intriguing, original, ambiguous and thought-provoking. However, they are by no means very frequent, and when they do appear, the author himself directly signals



their uniqueness. “In Mochnacki’s writings we also find other unusual metaphors for poetry” – with these words the author announces his poetic definition of poetry as “shadows reflected in the crystal of illusions” (p. 144). The example of Mochnacki is quite significant here, because the excerpts from his critical writings cited by Stanisz prove that metaphor there is indeed a “semantic centre” of expressions. This means that in Mochnacki’s writings, the most essential content is conveyed by means of metaphor, it is the starting point of critical discourse. It is often unusual in its form, “poetic” in the strict sense, ambiguous, not easy to interpret, it reveals in a specific, poetic way some content, which is later added, specified by the critic in the discourse. However, in the case of most of the critics cited by Stanisz it is the other way round – the metaphor is rather a “destination” (not necessarily in the linear order of the text, but in the semantic-logical formation of the argument) – it acts as a kind of visual summary, fully paraphrasable, translatable into a literal expression. In a word – it serves more as a flashy ornament rather than being the semantic core of the statement.

The second fundamental remark concerns the degree of originality of this system of metaphors that the Romantics used in their critical discourse. Stanisz clearly states that the Romantics invented their own peculiar way of metaphorical articulation to express their concepts of poetry, the poet, the essence of the creative process, etc. He even writes in the conclusion that the principle of “permanent innovation,” which would be continued in subsequent eras, including the modern era, is a kind of novelty in the Romantic metaphorisation of these issues. On the other hand, the author himself, with almost every newly introduced metaphorical category, states its deep embedding in tradition – a fact that cannot be overlooked. For example, let us recall the following comments: “The heart was at the same time a category deeply rooted in European ideas about the essence of creative activity – since antiquity it had been seen as the basis of lyrical expression” (p. 49), “[the Romantic metaphoricality of poetic inspiration] was a continuation of many traditional ideas about artistic activity” (p. 59), “poetic inspiration is one of the key Romantic notions that conceptualised the problem of the origin of poetry, but it is also one of the oldest categories in European reflection on art” (p. 60), “It happened, of course, that in the Romantic era poets still identified poetry with the Muse. In such cases they used much more conventionalised metaphors” (p. 67), “the [metaphorical] motif of poetic flight (or ascension), present in reflections on poetry already since ancient times” (p. 69), “one can obviously notice here the use of traditional topoi depicting poetry as ‘singing’ or ‘praising’ (derived from the ancient epic tradition)” (p. 71), “among references of this type, the motifs of the lute and harp (traditional emblems of poetry for centuries) set records in popularity”. (p. 72), “the metaphor of poetry as a school, inherited from our predeces-



sors, has a slightly different character” (p. 76), “the incredible popularity [of the image of poetry as a journey] in the Romantic era still had its source in Classical thinking about literature” (p. 85), “the metaphorical image of poetry as a kingdom still functioned within pre-Romantic metaliterary imagery” (p. 93), “[Romantic] authors drew extensively on the traditional, to a large extent already lexicalised, metaphor of poetry as painting” (p. 121), “Similarly, there was another, even more popular metaphor – based on the motifs of a mirror, a speculum or a reflection. It, too, has left a permanent mark in the history of European metaliterary thought, and has been used for centuries” (p. 135), “By resorting to organic metaphors, the Romantics – educated, after all, in the classical school – must have been well aware that they were entering an area that was already well recognised and carefully cultivated” (p. 161).

Similarly to the Romantics in the last quote, the author of the book must have been well aware of the internal contradiction between the thesis of a “permanent competition for originality” (p. 209) and the inescapable rooting of much of these metaphors in a usually already very respectable tradition. It seems that Stanisiz tries to deal with this paradox by attempting to present metaphor as a “stirred form”. This term was once used by Michał Głowiński to describe Norwid’s allegory – a traditional figure, but one that is used in an untraditional way because it is introduced into contexts that are atypical for it. Stanisiz explains the subsequent types of metaphors in an analogous manner – while stating their conventional character, he also points to the transgression of convention. In some cases such an argument is definitely convincing. This is the case, for example, in one of the most interesting passages of the book, devoted to the metaphor of a mirror/speculum/reflection. Stanisiz notes that these classical, ancient metaphors, perfectly suited to illustrate the mimetic duties of art, were not rejected by critical Romantic discourse, but on the contrary, appeared frequently. Thus, we are dealing here with a situation fundamentally different from that described by Meyer Abrams in the aforementioned dissertation. However, by means of well-chosen examples, Stanisiz shows that the Romantic mirror not only faithfully reflects reality, but also transforms it, multiplies its image in repeated, multiplied reflections, and creates new visions. The figure traditionally implying mimesis is transformed into an anti-mimetic figure. And this happens not through a discourse that modifies the metaphoric meaning, but through the metaphorical image itself, the most prominent examples of which are provided (again) by Mochnacki’s writings. Similarly, the researcher’s reflections on the Romantic re-creation of traditional allegories, above all the conventional personifications of poetry, are convincing. Romantic critics animate them in a way that is both simple and suggestive – they imbue them with the concrete realities of 19<sup>th</sup>-century life. In this way, poetry is pre-

sented, for instance, as an exile from the world of salons and enlightened societies (Mochnacki, p. 166), an artistically depicted woman who wears different clothes, depending on her needs, fashion and taste (Gosławski, p. 167), an independent, strong, self-reliant, spiritually independent woman (Grabowski, p. 168), a penitent woman kneeling before Christ (Ujejski, p. 170), etc.

While the above arguments are unobjectionable, in the book we also find ways of describing metaphor as a “stirred form” (let us stick to this term) that provoke doubts and polemics. This is the case, for example, with the analysis of the painting metaphor. It is introduced in the following passage: “The quoted utterances may give the impression of rather conventional statements, criticisms and praise, and the metaphor of painting used in them may evoke back the beliefs about poetry inherited from their predecessors. This would indeed be the case if, at the same time, the Romantic critics had not tried to imbue this metaphor with new meanings” (p. 125). What would these new meanings be? One of Stanisz’s most important answers is that the metaphor of painting, as used by the Romantics, points to a much broader reality than had previously been the case – not only accessible to the senses, but also the poet’s inner world and spiritual reality. To simplify it: the classical poet “paints” nature, the Romantic poet paints nature along with the spiritual-emotional landscape. “The vision of the world of the time thus entailed a significant enrichment of the spectrum of phenomena worthy of representation in poetry, expanding it to include the entire sphere of non-empirical and supernatural phenomena” (p. 126), writes Stanisz. Indeed, this is certainly the case, but what does this have to do with metaphor itself? The fact that the Romantics understood reality differently (we are dealing here with an obvious breakthrough) in no way affects the originality of expression. This is confirmed by the vast majority of the examples cited: “The poet’s noble aspiration [...] has cast upon his brush the sacred quality of indelible truth. His verse always corresponds faithfully to his mind and heart” (Mochnacki, p. 128); “[Romantic poetry] in its images does not shy away from terror and from the most repulsive sights” (Lelewel, p. 128); “the poet paints with pathetic inspiration the misfortunes of today, the glory of the past, the hope of the future”. The metaphor of “image,” “brush,” “painting” itself remains conventional, it is used in the same way as practiced by the classics – it is what follows it that is indeed a novelty, but this does not emerge from the metaphor.

Let us consider another example – metaphors of light. In his work, Stanisz seldom determines the frequency of use (only occasionally employing general quantitative terms such as “numerous,” “frequent”, etc.). This is understandable, though one might recognize the challenge involved in providing such documentation. Nevertheless, I will venture to assert that metaphors of light are among the

most prevalent types of metaphors in Romantic criticism, particularly in relation to poetry. Bearing this in mind, it may be striking that the author devoted only five pages to this type of metaphorical expressions, much less than to all the other classes of figurative expressions discussed. Here we observe again the above-mentioned method of argumentation, according to which the Romantics, reaching for a metaphor rooted in tradition, give it an original function. These creative “departures from previous practices” would consist in “referring to the rich catalogue of the motifs of light found by the Romantic critics in many areas of the surrounding reality”. These views are questionable, as the tradition also employed these metaphors in various ways, and the abundance of motifs would not set the Romantics apart in any distinctive manner. What proves to be more significant, however, is that the examples provided do not support this richness at all; on the contrary, they strengthen the belief in the strongly conventional nature of metaphors of light in the discourse of Romantic critics. Poetry is here metaphorically juxtaposed with: the sun (repeatedly), light (repeatedly), a ray, a “radiant phenomenon”, a “flash of genius,” a flame, a “flash of lightning,” a spark, a star. And that is all – hardly an impressive catalogue of phenomena. Incidentally, in some of the examples given by Stanisz (here and elsewhere in the book) one can see a poetic device that makes the semantic and compositional role of metaphor more attractive and strengthens it, especially against the background of traditional approaches. What I have in mind here is the phenomenon of metaphor implementation (Wiktor Żyrmunski’s term), i.e. the extension of the metaphorical theme and developing it into an autonomous poetic image. Among the metaphors of light cited by Stanisz, the following passage from Mochnacki’s writings may serve as an example here: “which as Bohdan Zaleski writes seems to be like a willing fire in the night time, when a flaming stream suddenly, swiftly, shooting upwards very high, spreads, spills and splashes into a thousand stars, wreaths, crosses, zigzags, ribbons and streaks of light. Or it is also something like a veil of Rusalka, from the ruby sparks of the dawn” (p. 159).

This does not change the fact that the metaphor of light presented by Stanisz seems rather secondary, hardly original in the critical discourse of the Romantics, and it is difficult to argue that it is in fact a “stirred form”.

Finally, the third remark concerns the realisation of the research objectives and goals set in the introduction to the book.

The first was the desire to include as wide a spectrum of critical statements as possible, to go beyond the rather ossified canon of references related to the Romantic criticism. This task has been achieved unquestionably and impressively. The material documentation of the book, with its accompanying commentary, is of inestimable value.

The second objective was to propose a “different reading,” a proposal seemingly derived from a reflection on the Romantic understanding of the text, in which the literary order is mixed with the non-literary, thus the boundary of discourses is blurred, or even more so – it is obliterated by definition. Stanisz’s reading strategy is therefore based on a “literary” reading of critical texts, on becoming sensitive to their composition, rhetorical structure, tropes, including metaphors. I have the impression that this objective has been attained only partially, but I find it difficult to find fault with the author himself. In short: the reason lies with the subject rather than the object. In the course of reading successive excerpts from the dissertations by Romantic critics, the conviction grew in me that “the devil is not so... literary as he is painted”. Obviously, the stylistics of a Romantic critical text differs substantially from that of the Enlightenment period, but it is still – except in fewer cases – a conventionalised literariness, remaining clearly at the service of reason and the communicative-cognitive function. In this sense, the metaphors contained in these texts did not demand special analyses and interpretations since, for the most part, they were self-explanatory, translatable into the language of discourse without any semantic loss. I would like to emphasise once again – an exception could be made here for Mochnecki’s literary-critical contributions (at least on the basis of the material cited). In addition, I regret a little, levelling here a mild reproach at the author of the book that he did not subject some of Mochnecki’s metaphorical formulas to a more extensive, in-depth analysis. Such an analysis could have highlighted how Romantic metaphor can make discourse more dynamic in a strictly poetic sense: elucidating an issue while simultaneously complicating it, adding to it, and entangling it with ambiguity and inconclusiveness. It is precisely in Mochnecki’s work that one can see the potential for such inquiries; Stanisz, meanwhile, treats the characters in his book very fairly, “equally”. At times, however, one might wish for a different approach.

Finally, there is the hypothesis presented in the introduction, which might have raised the highest expectations for the reader of Stanisz’s book – the idea that broadening of the scope of view and the application of a “literary” reading strategy might “complete the picture of the transformations of the Romantic theory of poetry, and even – perhaps – bring completely new solutions” (p. 16). While the first of these intentions is unquestionably realised in the book, the second was not fully achieved, and the author himself was likely aware of this, as several pages later he notes that his goal is not “to discover some radically new thesis on the Romantic understanding of poetry or a new element of the literary programme of the time” (p. 33). The superbly conceived and composed conclusion (pp. 200-207), in which Stanisz synthesises the semantic potential of the analysed meta-

phors and reconstructs the concept (philosophy?) of Romantic poetry that emerges from them, should be compulsory reading for students of Polish Studies, albeit – and this is nota reproach – it does not add much new to the established body of knowledge on the subject in the literature. To adequately conclude with a painting metaphor – through the analytical lens of “critical” metaphor, we can indeed see much more clearly: wider, further, panoramically; but essentially we are still looking at the same picture.

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## ŚWIATY I ŻYCIE

### METAFORY W POLSKIEJ KRYTYCE LITERACKIEJ ROMANTYZMU

#### Streszczenie

Artykuł jest omówieniem książki Marka Stanisza *Światy i życie. Metafory poezji w polskiej krytyce literackiej doby romantyzmu*. Autor recenzji podkreśla ogromną wartość dokumentacyjną i analityczną książki (poddanie bardzo szerokiemu omówieniu wypowiedzi romantycznych krytyków literatury na temat poezji i koncepcji poety). Polemizuje jednocześnie z tezą, że oryginalna metaforyka stanowi semantyczne centrum wypowiedzi krytycznych polskiego romantyzmu.

**Słowa kluczowe:** metafora; romantyzm; romantyczna krytyka literacka; Mochnacki; M. H. Abrams.

WORLDS AND LIFE.  
METAPHORS IN POLISH LITERARY CRITICISM  
OF THE ROMANTIC PERIOD

Summary

This article discusses Marek Stanisław's book *Światy i życie. Metafory poezji w polskiej krytyce literackiej doby romantyzmu* [*Worlds and Life. Metaphors of Poetry in Polish Literary Criticism of the Romantic Era*]. The review emphasises the immense documentary and analytical value of this monograph, especially the broad discussion of statements made by Romantic literary critics about poetry and the concept of the poet. At the same time, the review polemically disputes the claim that original metaphors constitute the semantic core of Polish Romantic criticism.

**Keywords:** metaphor; Romanticism; Romantic literary criticism; Maurycy Mochnacki; M. H. Abrams.

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