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Polish Futurism: Its Origin and the Aesthetic Program

In the development of twentieth-century Polish literature the years from 1917 to 1923 are marked by the origin of numerous poetic schools, each of which grouped a number of poets who, despite their differences, united in order to promote new tasks in literature. Each of the schools formulated its own program, often opposite and antagonistic to one another. In the opinion of Ryszard Matuszewski and Seweryn Pollak, the authors of a survey of Polish poetry in the years 1914-39, the difference between these groups do not appear now as great as they did to their contemporaries.

When one examines the literary products of these groups from the perspective of forty years, none of them seems to be free from links with the past. Moreover, none of them, at least at the starting point, seems so different from one another, as it appeared to their contemporaries. The borderlines between groups have become fluid and the elements of different poetics co-exist in writings of those, who initiated individual movements.¹

Matuszewski's remarks are undoubtedly true in regard to the poetic practice of individual poets, but as far as the official programs are concerned, the disparities are still much greater than the similarities.

One of the first poetic schools to establish itself in post-war Poland was the Poznań Expressionist group which in 1917 founded its own literary review, *Zdrój*. Its editor was Jerzy Hulewicz, and the chief contributors were his brother Witold, Adam Bederski, Jan Stur, Józef Wittlin and Emil Zegadłowicz. Their program was best formulated in their manifesto "Czego chcemy" (What Do We Want), written by Jan Stur.² The true essence of reality, emphasized Stur, lies in the metaphysical experiences of the soul, not in the outer forms perceptible by our senses. The task of the arts is to penetrate into the phenomena of the inner sensations: "to give the most faithful and the most direct

1. Ryszard Matuszewski and Seweryn Pollak, "Główne nurty rozwojowe liryki dwudziestolecia," *Przegląd Humanistyczny*, VI (1969), 39.

2. Jan Stur, "Czego chcemy," *Zdrój*, 1920, nos. 5-6, reprinted in Andrzej Lam (ed.), *Polska awangarda poetycka: Programy lat 1917-1923*, II (Cracow, 1969), 134-50.

pronouncement of the bare soul.” In order to express all the sensations, both conscious and subconscious, the artist has the right of deformation, illogicality and formal novelty. But the form of a work of art is not an autonomous value and has to be subordinated to the content it carries. Content in the arts is what matters, not form.

Some of the Expressionist assumptions were adopted by “Czartak,” a group organized in 1922 by Emil Zegadłowicz and including Edward Kozikowski, Janina Brzostowska and Tadeusz Szantroch. But “Czartak,” with its explicitly anti-urban program, laid the principal stress on the cult of Nature. The city was regarded as a symbol of evil: “a monstrous swarm of the worst instincts.” The only salvation for mankind was a return to Nature which would bring back “belief, hope and love.”³ In short, “Czartak’s” vision embodied the familiar Utopia of the idyllic life close to Nature. This determined its attitude toward folklore which was regarded as a true source of artistic inspiration.

If primacy of content over form was the battle cry of Expressionism, exactly the opposite view was expressed by the Formists. The only great value of poetry, argued Leon Chwistek, a theoretician of that group, lies in its perfect form, and the task of the poet is to modify the content in such a way that the form is predominant. The logician changes the form in order to reach the invariable content, while the poet changes the content to achieve the perfect form. This is due to the difference of the language function in science and poetry; science aims at the sentence with the clearest meaning, poetry aspires to ambiguity of meaning which allows the foregrounding of its formal features. Chwistek’s programmatic article “Formizm” (Formism) was published in the second issue of *Formiści*,⁴ a periodical edited by Chwistek himself and Tytus Czyżewski, the most representative Formist poet until he joined the Futurist movement.

In January 1920 another literary periodical made its appearance. It was *Skamander*, official organ of the “Skamander” group, whose leading poets were Julian Tuwim, Antoni Słonimski, Jan Lechoń, Kazimierz Wierzyński and Jarosław Iwaszkiewicz. The first issue of *Skamander* opened with an introductory article by Wiliam Horzyca, stressing that the policy of the group was to have no definite program.⁵ But in the next sentence Horzyca spoke of “Skamander’s” attachment to the present and of their desire to extol contemporary life in all its manifestations. Recognizing the importance of poetic form, the “Skamandrites” promised to be honest poetic craftsmen and to accomplish their

3. E. Kozikowski, “Do czytelnika,” *Czartak*, 1925, no. 1.

4. Leon Chwistek, “Formizm,” *Formiści*, 1920, no. 2, reprinted in *ibid.*, pp. 156-59.

5. Wiliam Horzyca, “Słowo wstępne,” *Skamander*, 1920, no. 1, reprinted in *ibid.*, pp. 105-108.

work exceptionally well. The idea of the poet as craftsman did not exclude the notion of inspiration; the article emphasized "Skamander's" belief in "the sanctity of good rhyme, the divine origin of rhythm, the revelation of images, born in ecstasy and chiseled by work." The above-mentioned article was the only theoretical statement made by the "Skamander" poets; the group was otherwise devoid of doctrine.

Unlike "Skamander," the Cracow group "Zwrotnica" from the beginning lent great weight to theoretical considerations. The elaboration of aesthetics was for "Zwrotnica" as important as poetic practice. The chief theoretician of the group was Tadeusz Peiper, who in 1922 founded the periodical *Zwrotnica*, thus uniting a number of talented poets: Julian Przyboś, Jan Brzękowski, Adam Ważyk and Jalu Kurek. Peiper's basic assumption was that the change in modern life, transforming as it does both the physical conditions and the psychology of modern man, must also influence the development of the arts. "Embrace the present" was his slogan, suggesting the need to introduce new themes: "the city, the crowd, the machine and their derivatives — speed, inventiveness, novelty."⁶ But "embrace the present" also demanded the transformation of the forms of artistic expression. Peiper explored the problems of the new poetics, elaborating a whole system of principles dealing with the function of rhyme, rhythm, metaphor and poetic composition. In "Metafora terażniejszości" (Metaphor of the Present) he justified the hegemony of metaphor as one of the most efficient means of transforming existing reality into poetic reality with a minimum of verbal material.⁷ In "Rytm nowoczesny" (Modern Rhythm) he argued against traditional metric systems in favour of free verse based on the natural rhythm of a sentence and distinguished by the use of rhyme.⁸ In *Nowe usta* (New Lips) he advocated the principle of "blossoming composition," in which an initial part presents a condensed expression of all motifs to be developed in the following parts. Each consecutive part would contain a fuller representation of the basic motif, enriched by new elements and shown in a more detailed way.⁹ Peiper's poetic theory, embracing a settled and closed system of norms, was distinguished by an inner coherence and consistency which placed "Zwrotnica" among the most interesting schools of the twentieth-century Polish literature.¹⁰

6. Tadeusz Peiper, "Miasto, masa, maszyna," *Zwrotnica*, 1922, no. 2, reprinted in *ibid.*, pp. 307-24.

7. Tadeusz Peiper, "Metafora terażniejszości," *Zwrotnica*, 1922, no. 3, reprinted in *ibid.*, pp. 325-31.

8. Tadeusz Peiper, "Rytm nowoczesny," *Kwadryga*, 1929, nos. 3-4.

9. Tadeusz Peiper, *Nowe usta: Odczyt o poezji* (Lwów, 1925).

10. This review of the most important poetic schools in the 1920's has been restricted to the years 1917-23, i.e., the years of the origin and development of Polish Futurism. Out of necessity, all the poetic schools that were established after 1923 — "Reflektor," "Trzy salwy," "Kwadryga," "Żagary" — have been

The same could not be said about the Futurist program, which was often contradictory and vague. One of the reasons for the meagerness of Futurist theoretical output and its lightweight quality was the lack of a theoretician of the stature of Tadeusz Peiper or Leon Chwistek. Neither Anatol Stern and Bruno Jasieński, authors of the Futurist manifestoes, nor Kordian Gacki, the editor of *Almanach Nowej Sztuki*, had the intellectual capacity to evolve a coherent aesthetic theory. Stern and Jasieński were simply poets who wrote the manifestoes to stress the need for a new poetry. Their manifestoes were intended to baffle the audience rather than to clarify issues. Kordian Gacki was an acute interpreter of Futurist poetry, but he failed to elaborate a system of concepts which would function as a universal Futurist aesthetics.

It is characteristic that Polish Futurists never established their own literary periodical. For a while it seemed that *Nowa Sztuka* might become their official organ, but it ceased to exist after the publication of two issues. When *Almanach Nowej Sztuki* was founded in 1924, it was already too late. The process of the disintegration of Futurism was well advanced and there was no way to stop it. Lack of a periodical was certainly a drawback to the effective dissemination of Futurist ideas, but Futurists solved that problem by publishing so-called “jednodniówki,” occasional publications containing Futurist manifestoes as well as selections of their poetry. The first Futurist “jednodniówka” appeared in Warsaw in December 1920, and was entitled *Gga: Pierwszy polski almanach futurystyczny* (Honk: The First Polish Futurist Almanac). Its authors, Anatol Stern and Aleksander Wat, opened the publication with a manifesto “Prymitywiści do narodów świata i Polski” (The Primitivists to the People of the World and Poland). Its general tone was noisy and aggressive; its aim to outrage public opinion as much as possible. It began with a denunciation of all tradition: civilization should be scrapped and all tradition should be renounced.

CIVILIZATION, CULTURE, WITH THEIR DISEASES —
INTO THE JUNKPILE.

we choose simplicity coarseness,
gaiety health, triviality, laughter . . .
WE REJECT HISTORY AND POSTERITY.

also rome tolstoi, criticism hats india bavaria and cracow.¹¹

disregarded. For more information on the development of Polish poetry in the years 1917-39, see Matuszewski and Pollak, *Przegląd Humanistyczny*, VI (1961), 39-59; S. Barańczak, “Ugrupowania poetyckie w dwudziestoleciu międzywojennym,” *Nurt*, 1968, no. 1, pp. 22-33; J. Witan, “Poezja polska między wojnami,” *Polonistyka*, 1969, no. 12, pp. 1-14.

11. “Prymitywiści do narodów świata i Polski” (1920), reprinted in Lam, pp. 170-72. An attempt is made here to reproduce the original typography of the Polish manifestoes, in which a daring variety of typefaces was used.

Laughter and nonsense were pronounced the essential elements of life: “nonsense is splendid, while logic marks the constraint and cowardliness of the intellect.” The essence of art, according to the authors of the manifesto, lay in primitiveness and laughter. Art had to go on the streets and be a part of live circus performances for huge crowds of people. As for poetry, it should dispense with grammatical forms, spelling and punctuation, while preserving rhyme and rhythm. The manifesto called for a new approach toward the word, understood as phonetic material deprived of its meaning.

On the whole, the program introduced in “Prymitywiści do narodów świata i Polski” had more in common with Dada than with Futurism, espousing as it did an anarchistic negation of all values and apotheosizing nonsense and laughter. “Dada means nothing,” wrote Tristan Tzara in “Le Manifeste Dada 1918.”¹² In their rejection of all values, all assumptions, all beliefs, the Dadaists also rejected the arts. The creative process was regarded as a joke characterized by spontaneity and lack of deeper meaning.

Nevertheless, there was a basic difference between the Polish Primitivists and the Dadaists, who were in principle against all programs. The Primitivists regarded the whole world as a huge playground where artists came together with crowds of people to create art. The Polish poets wanted to abolish the barrier dividing the artists from the audience and to engage the masses in the reception as well as in the creation of art. In contrast, Dada’s emphasis was on the artist, liberated and irrepressible in his fantasy, aloof from the public which they regarded as ignorant and hostile. The task of the new art was to amaze and to shock the public rather than to establish contact with it.

The slogan of art for the masses was expressed not only in “Prymitywiści do narodów świata i Polski,” but also in a manifesto “Do narodu polskiego: Manifest w sprawie natychmiastowej futuryzacji życia” (To the People of Poland: A Manifesto Concerning the Immediate Futurization of Life), written by Bruno Jasiński and published in *Jednodniówka Futurystów [sic]* (Cracow, 1921). Jasiński rejected the idea of pure art — art for art’s sake — and advocated “human art,” i.e., art that is democratic and common, and belongs to the masses. In order to reach the masses, the artists have to go into the streets and organize concerts and exhibitions at factories and cafeterias, on trams and in railway stations, in the parks and on the balconies. The crowd has to become engaged not only as the audience but also an active participant. This new mass art was supposed to replace the art of the past, which had outlived itself and had to be dismissed. Jasiński urged that the classics, symbolized by the names of Mickiewicz and Słowacki, be dis-

12. Tristan Tzara, “Le Manifeste Dada 1918,” *Dada*, 1918, no. 3, p. 4.

carded. Paying homage to Romantic poetry for its national character, Jasiński promised to disparage their epigones, presumably the poets of “Młoda Polska,” described in the manifesto as the “phantoms of Romanticism.”

This revolt against literary tradition was combined with a revolt against all inherited values.

Following St. Brzozowski, we announce a big sale of old trash.
We sell for half price old traditions, categories, habits, paintings
and fetiches.

A GREAT NATIONWIDE WAX MUSEUM IN WAWEL.

*We will wheelbarrow from squares and streets stale mummies of
mickiewiczzes and slowackis. It is time to empty pedestals, to clean
up squares, to prepare room for those, who are coming.*¹³

Contrary to “Prymitywiści do narodów świata i Polski,” Jasiński’s manifesto approved of modern civilization. Technology, with its economy, purposefulness and dynamics, was itself regarded as an art. The telegraphic apparatus seemed to Jasiński a thousand times greater as a work of art than Byron’s “Don Juan.” This admiration for the precision and purposefulness of the mechanized world was, however, contradicted by his praise of illogicality and nonsense. The manifesto called for liberation from logic and the rule of nonsense and humour.

Surprisingly, Jasiński completely disregarded purely aesthetic questions in “Do narodu polskiego.” His neglect was intentional, for he was to apply these general assumptions to the arts in his next manifesto. “Manifest w sprawie poezji futurystycznej” (A Manifesto Concerning Futurist Poetry) was Jasiński’s ambitious attempt to provide the Futurist movement in Poland with some aesthetic foundations. First of all, Jasiński insisted on the autonomy of art, which he regarded as a self-contained process that did not bear any causal relation to life or psychology. Art, wrote Jasiński, is neither a reflection and an anatomy of a soul (psychology), nor a manifestation of our aspiration toward the other world (religion), nor an analysis of the eternal problems (philosophy).

Every work of art, emphasized Jasiński, is determined by its inner dynamics and each component has its value precisely in terms of its relations to every other component. “A work of art is an accomplished fact, concrete and physical. Its form is determined by its own intrinsic need. As such it agrees with a whole set of forces that compose it, . . . all the individual elements are coördinated in relation to each other and to the totality.”¹⁴ Without using the term “structure,”

13. “Do narodu polskiego: Manifest w sprawie natychmiastowej futurystyki życia” (1921), reprinted in Lam, pp. 208-14. Emphasis in the original.

14. “Manifest w sprawie poezji futurystycznej” (1921), reprinted in *ibid.*, pp. 215-18.

Jasieński came very close to the structural approach, viewing the work of art as a complex, multi-dimensional structure, integrated by the unity of aesthetic purpose. Jan Mukařovský, for instance, gave the following definition of structure:

The mutual relationships of the components of the work of poetry, both foregrounded and unforegrounded, constitute its structure, a dynamic structure including both convergence and divergence, and one that constitutes an undissociable artistic whole, since each of its components has its value precisely in terms of its relation to the totality.¹⁵

Foregrounding meant to Mukařovský the act of relegating the communicative function to the background and the expressive function to the centre. Foregrounding in poetry, according to Mukařovský, is carried against two norms, that of the standard language, and that of the traditional aesthetic canon.

A similar insistence on novelty as the necessary quality of art characterized “Manifest w sprawie poezji futurystycznej.” Jasieński was convinced that the core of artistic value lay in divergence from the prevailing tradition. He was merciless even in regard to Futurist art; the achievements of Italian Futurism were for him outdated. Consequently Polish poets, starting in 1921, did not intend to repeat what was done in 1908.

Distinguishing poetry from the other arts, Jasieński drew an analogy between its use of words on the one hand and the use of shapes in plastic art and of sounds in music on the other. Poetry, stressed Jasieński, is a verbal art, since a word is its basic material. Both aspects of the word — the phonetic and the semantic — are equally important to poetry. As for Futurist poetry, it should reject syntax and grammar, but preserve a perfect composition; in other words, allow “a maximum of dynamics with a minimum of material.”¹⁶ Jasieński called for the destruction of the sentence, regarded as incidental composition joined by the weak glue of petty bourgeois logic. It should be replaced by the condensed and consequent juxtapositions of words, not restrained by any rules of syntax, logic, or grammar. As to the subject matter of the new poetry, it should reflect the changes taking place in society, and speak of the city, the crowd, and the machine.

Jasieński wrote two more manifestoes. The first, “Manifest w sprawie krytyki artystycznej” (A Manifesto Concerning Artistic Criticism), called on all authors to become critics of their own writings;

15. Jan Mukařovský, “Standard Language and Poetic Language” in P. Garvin (ed.), *A Prague School Reader in Esthetics, Literary Structure and Style* (Washington, 1964), p. 22.

16. “Manifest w sprawie poezji futurystycznej,” reprinted in Lam, p. 216.

while the second, “Manifest w sprawie ortografji fonetycznej” [*sic*] (A Manifesto Concerning Phonetic Spelling), proposed orthographic reform to make spelling simple and phonetic.¹⁷

The importance of Jasiński’s manifestoes for the development of Polish Futurism was immense; they provided the movement with a constructive program. But despite the insistence on total originality, the program launched in *Jednodźwiękowa futurystów* was in many ways similar to those of both Italian and Russian Futurism. The antagonistic and uncompromising anti-traditionalism, the cult of civilization, the search for new forms of artistic expression — all these elements of Jasiński’s manifestoes were to be found in those of the Italian and Russian Futurists. It is instructive to examine these earlier manifestoes and note the striking similarities, which far outweigh the points of difference.

The initial manifesto of Italian Futurism, “Fondazione e manifesto del Futurismo,” written by Filippo Marinetti in 1909, repudiated all authorities and all established standards, be they social, ethical and aesthetic. Its strongest attack, however, was directed against cultural and literary tradition. Similarly, the first Russian manifesto, published in 1912 and bearing the characteristic title “Poshchetchina obshchestvennomu vkusu,” declared the past “too narrow” and the Russian Academy and Pushkin “more incomprehensible than hieroglyphics.” And if Jasiński considered Mickiewicz too narrow-minded and Słowacki incomprehensible, this Russian manifesto was for “throwing Pushkin, Dostoevskii, Tolstoi and others from the steamer of modern times.”¹⁸

In addition to proclaiming a complete break with the “stifling past,” Marinetti announced the cult of modern civilization and technology: “We shall sing of the great crowds in the excitement of labour, pleasure and rebellion; of the multi-coloured and polyphonic surf of revolutions in modern capital cities; of the nocturnal vibration of arsenals and workshops beneath their violent electric moons.”¹⁹ Marinetti continued in this vein in “Manifesto tecnico della letteratura futurista,” in which he advocated “a lyric obsession with matter.” The new poetry was to discover the activity of matter, and to sing of the instincts and sensitivity of ores, stones and wood. But the only way to grasp the essence of matter was to rely on intuition, not on intellect or logic. Here we encounter the identical contradictions that were present in Jasiński’s manifestoes: the cult of technology as opposed to the cult of intuition; the fascination

17. “Manifest w sprawie krytyki artystycznej” and “Manifest w sprawie ortografji artystycznej” were published in *Jednodźwiękowa futurystów* (Cracow, 1921) and reprinted in *ibid.*, pp. 218-20.

18. “Poshchetchina obshchestvennomu vkusu” (Moscow, 1912), reprinted in V. Markov, ed., *Manifesty i programy russkikh futuristov* (Munich, 1967), p. 50.

19. F. T. Marinetti, “Manifesto del Futurismo,” *Le Figaro*, 20 February 1909, reprinted in J. Taylor, *Futurism* (New York, 1961), p. 124.

with both modern civilization and with earlier times when primitive instinct supposedly held sway; the admiration for the precision and accuracy of the mechanical world along with the appeal for illogicality and nonsense.²⁰

But it became obvious to Marinetti, as it was to Jasieński, that a change in subject matter and a reliance on intuition could not carry Futurist poetry very far, and that the revolution would have to be directed into the field of poetics as well. Thus his "Manifesto tecnico della letteratura futurista" called for the abolition of traditional syntax, the elimination of punctuation, and the repudiation of metrics. Adjectives must be discarded since they drag and introduce unnecessary nuances. Verbs must be used in the infinitive only for more speed. And nouns must be juxtaposed freely with one another to show the analogies between different phenomena. Punctuation, a corollary of syntax, must be abolished and partly replaced by mathematical and musical notations. And rigid metric schemes must be repudiated in favour of free compositions of words, to which Marinetti gave the term "parole in libertà."²¹

An identical concern for the innovation of poetic form was expressed by the Russian Cubo-Futurists who firmly believed that genuine novelty does not depend on content but on form. Their second manifesto, opening the second volume of *Sadok sudei*, formulated a detailed constructive program of "new principles of creation." Chief among these were: disregard of syntax and of all grammatical rules, rejection of orthography and punctuation, emphasis on the phonetic aspect of the word, recognition of the role of prefixes and suffixes, enrichment of the poetic vocabulary, abolition of traditional rhythms, and finally, and least important, the introduction of new themes.²²

So far this comparison of the theoretical pronouncements of Polish, Italian and Russian Futurism has concentrated on aesthetic programs. But the Futurist movement sprang out of a certain interpretation of extra-artistic reality. The Futurists regarded art not as an independent value, but as a means to change the complex of contemporary life. Depending on the conditions in which the movement developed, as well as on the ideology it served, each Futurist school determined the function of art in a different way.

In the case of Italian Futurism, the emphasis was on violence and militarism. War was considered the only "health giver of the

20. These inconsistencies and contradictions of Futurism were pointed out by Halina Zaworsko in *O nową sztukę: Polskie programy artystyczne lat 1917-1922* (Warsaw, 1963), p. 100.

21. F. Marinetti, "Manifesto tecnico della letteratura futurista," in *Manifesti del futurismo* (Milan, 1914), p. 94.

22. *Sadok sudei*, vol. II (St. Petersburg, 1913), reprinted in Markov, pp. 51-52.

world”; hence the slogan to extol militarism, patriotism and “the destructive arm of the Anarchist.” Violence, cruelty and injustice were pronounced the necessary ingredients of art — “no masterpiece without aggressiveness.”²³

Marinetti’s militarism and nationalistic discipline were completely foreign to the Russian Futurists, who had begun as spokesmen of anarchist freedom, but progressed toward revolution. When the October Revolution took place, Futurist poets declared themselves on its side and proclaimed their art “the left front in arts” and themselves “the drummers of the revolution.” “Na ulitsu futuristy, barabanshchiki i poety!” exclaimed Vladimir Maiakovskii in “Prikaz po armii iskusstva.” This slogan of the artists going into the streets suggested the necessity of bringing art closer to the people.

Bruno Jasiński, who insisted that art must be “mass, democratic and common,” had much in common with Maiakovskii, though the Pole emphasized the entertaining value of art rather than its educational function, so important for the Russian. Jasiński’s lack of concern for a definite social program was characteristic of the Polish Futurists, who, by comparison with their Russian and Italian counterparts, were the least determined and the most abstract in their enunciation of desirable social change.

Some of the contemporary Polish critics, however, considered Futurism a manifestation of “Bolshevism, a purposefully destructive work laying the foundation for the revolution.”²⁴ After the publication of *Nuż w bżuhu [sic]* (A Knife in a Belly), Wierzbiński wrote in the newspaper, *Rzeczpospolita*:

“A Knife in a Belly.” These letters appeared on Warsaw walls, they screamed at pedestrians from a huge paper rag covered with the products of so-called “Futurist poets” — the products of foul exhalation of Bolshevism. These are not free and innocent jokes, or the literary routine performed for money, but the purposeful, planned and clever destructive work.²⁵

Futurism also brought strong criticism on itself from the respectable literary critics. Karol Irzykowski wrote an article, “Plagiatowy charakter przełomów literackich w Polsce” (The Plagiaristic Character of Literary Changes in Poland), accusing Futurism of unoriginality and plagiarism. A multitude of artistic movements, in his opinion, appeared in Poland unexpectedly and without having gone through a development of their own. The reliance on foreign models secured for them from the begin-

23. Marinetti, “Manifesto del Futurismo,” reprinted in Taylor, p. 124.

24. M. Wierzbiński, “Głupota czy zbrodnia,” *Rzeczpospolita*, 13 December 1921.

25. *Ibid.*

ning a level of maturity that would otherwise require a long period of development on native ground.

And this, what swarmed out today from everywhere like the spring beetle, smelled from a distance with plagiarism. These creatures came out too unexpectedly, without justification and without the developmental need; they immediately reached such a level of sophistication that could not be secured without long explorations. . . . People, who by themselves would have never thought of dadaism, or futurism, do not have the right to imitation, and should be only translators and faithful intermediates of foreign novelties.²⁶

Stefan Żeromski, a famous Polish writer, also criticized Futurism for copying foreign ideological and artistic attitudes, instead of taking up great social issues.

The news, that supposedly “batter with the butt of rifles” at all windows and doors, are snobish news, a literary formula transferred from Russian into Polish books together with the whole system of foreign accessories. It is, therefore, a literary movement, read over, played over, rejected by the local snobbery and replaced by new movements.²⁷

The charges of unoriginality, as has been seen, were to a great extent justified. The aesthetic program of the Polish Futurists in many ways coincided with the programs of the Italian and Russian movements. The Polish poets were not, however, merely copying the flamboyant Futurist slogans automatically, but were attempting instead to evolve a relevant aesthetic theory. They did not succeed in evolving a full-blown aesthetics but they did formulate a number of propositions that were later used by their successors, especially the Cracow “Zwrotnica.”²⁸

26. Karol Irzykowski, “Plagiatowy charakter przełomów literackich w Polsce,” *Kurier Lwowski*, nos. 25 and 31 (1922).

27. Stefan Żeromski, *Snobizm i postęp* (Warsaw, 1923), pp. 46-47.

28. The problem of Futurism’s contribution to twentieth-century Polish poetry still awaits thorough investigation. The existing critical studies deal primarily with its theoretical program and completely overlook its poetic practice. Cf. Helena Zaworska, *O nową sztukę* (Warsaw, 1963); Andrzej Lam (ed.), *Polska awangarda poetycka* (Cracow, 1969); A. Kowalczykova, “O pewnych paradoksach futurystycznego programu,” *Poezja*, V, no. 6 (1969), 39-49.