

HORS LA SÉROTONINE

LA LITTÉRATURE
DU XXI^E SIÈCLE
ET LES HORMONES
SOCIALES

5 – 6 MAI
2022

ACADÉMIE POLONAISE
DES SCIENCES
CENTRE SCIENTIFIQUE À PARIS
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NOT ONLY SEROTONIN. EUROPEAN LITERATURE OF THE 21ST CENTURY AND SOCIAL HORMONES

05/05/2022 – 06/05/2022

Académie Polonaise des Sciences

Centre Scientifique à Paris

74 rue Lauriston

75016 Paris

PROGRAMME

05/05/2022

09:45-10:00 REGISTRATION

10:00-10:20 WELCOME SPEECH

Magdalena Sajdak (Polish Academy of Sciences – Scientific Center in Paris)

Bogumiła Kaniewska (Rector of Adam Mickiewicz University in Poznań)

Przemysław Czapliński (Adam Mickiewicz University in Poznań)

PART I : THE LITERARY & HORMONAL SYSTEM

10:20 – 12:00

10:20-10:40 Jerzy Franczak (Jagiellonian University in Cracow)

Hormony i homeostaza społeczna. Literatura jako projekt immunologiczny

Hormones and Social Homeostasis. Literature as an Immunological Project

10:40-11:00 Anna Saignes (Grenoble Alpes University / CNRS)

Endokrynologia literatury: Fabryka hormonów S. Goldschmidt (2012),

Serotonina M. Houellebecq (2015)

Endocrinology of literature: The Hormone Factory by S. Goldschmidt (2012),

Serotonin by M. Houellebecq (2015)

11:00-11:20 Przemysław Czapliński (Adam Mickiewicz University in Poznań)
Od luzu do oburzenia. Literatura XX i XXI wieku a polityki hormonalne
From looseness to outrage. 20th and 21st century literature and
hormonal politics

11:20-12:00 DISCUSSION

12:00-12:20 COFFEE BREAK

PART II : HORMONES & POETRY

12:20 – 13:30

12:20-12:40 Dorota Walczak-Delanois (The Free University of Brussels)
Od „Radości pisania” do „radosnego pisania”? Klika uwag na temat poezji
XXI wieku
From ‘Joy of Writing’ to ‘Joyful Writing’ ? A Few Considerations of Poetry in
the 21st century

12:40-13:00 Paweł Próchniak (Pedagogical University of Cracow)
„Widzieć jasno przyrodzoną ciemność rzeczy”. Endorfinowy haj i poezja
"To see clearly the natural darkness of things". The endorphin high and poetry

13:00-13:30 DISCUSSION

13:30-15:00 LUNCH BREAK

PART III : LAGMA SCREENING & MEETING WITH THE ARTISTS

15:00 – 17:00

15:00-16:00 INTRODUCTION & LAGMA PERFORMANCE (Dana Chmielewska, Alicja
Czyczel, Aleksandra Gryka, Marta Szypulska)

16:00-17:00 DISCUSSION (Alicja Czyczel & Dana Chmielewska)

06/05/2022

09:45-10:00 REGISTRATION

PART IV : HORMONES & LITERARY CRITICISM

10:00 – 11:40

- 10:00-10:20 Alicja Chwieduk (Adam Mickiewicz University in Poznań)
Krytyka literacka na adrenalinie. Recepcja prozy M. Houellebecq'a w Polsce
Literary criticism on adrenaline. The reception of Michel Houellebecq's prose in Poland
- 10:20-10:40 Clara Metzger (Paris Nanterre University)
Le passage à l'acte : paradigme de l'action dans les romans Baise-moi (1994) de Virginie Despentes et Les Amantes d'Elfriede Jelinek (1975)?
Passage à l'acte: a paradigm of action in Virginie Despentes' Baise-moi (1994) and Elfriede Jelinek's Les Amantes (1975)?
- 10:40-11:00 Joanna B. Bednarek (Adam Mickiewicz University in Poznań)
Terapie hormonalne. Więzy i ich zerwania w polskim reportażu antyreligijnym (antykościelnym)
Hormonal therapies. Social bonds and their breaks in Polish anti-clerical reportage

11:00 – 11:40 DISCUSSION

11:40 – 12:00 COFFEE BREAK

PART V : HORMONES & HISTORY

12:00 – 13:10

- 12:00-12:20 Karoline Thaidigsmann (Heidelberg University)
Imperium w fazie andropauzy. Badania nad współczesną literaturą rosyjską
The Empire and its Andropause. Inquiries into Contemporary Russian Literature
- 12:20-12:40 Justyna Tabaszewska (Polish Academy of Sciences)
Historie niebyłe. Literatura a afektywna przyszłość
Non-existent History. Literature and Affective Future
- 12:40-13:20 DISCUSSION
- 13:30 LUNCH

ABSTRACTS

Joanna B. Bednarek (Adam Mickiewicz University in Poznań)

Hormone therapies. Social bonds and their breaks in Polish anti-clerical reportage

The title „hormone therapies” indicate the regulatory function of the hormones. In my paper, I will apply this concept to one of the most powerful de-regulators of social bonds in contemporary Poland – to the institution of the Catholic Church.

In the second decade of the 21st century, over a dozen books on the scandalous entanglements of the Catholic Church in Poland were published. Here is an incomplete list that shows the scale of this phenomenon: „Lękajcie się. Ofiary pedofilii w polskim Kościele mówią” by Ekke Overbeek, „Czy Bóg wybaczy siostrze Bernadecie?” by Justyna Kopińska, „W rodzinie ojca mego” and „Celibat. Opowieść o miłości i pożądaniu” by Marcin Wójcik, „Zakonnice odchodzą po chichu” and „Dzieci księży. Nasza wspólna tajemnica” by Marta Abramowicz, „Żeby nie było zgorzenia. Ofiary mają głos” by Małgorzata Szewczyk-Nowak and Artur Nowak, „Dzieci, które gorszą” and „Duchowni o duchownych” by Artur Nowak, „Gomora” by Artur Nowak and Stanisław Obirek, „Tylko nie mów nikomu” by Tomasz Sekielski, „Hipokryzja” by Radosław Gruca, „Korporacja Kościół” by Piotr Babiński, „Krucjata polska” by Agata Dziduszko-Zyglewska, „Spróchniały krzyż” by Joanna Podgórska, „Czarni” by Paweł Reszka, „Sakrament obłudy” by Robert Samborski, „Uzurpator” and „Imperator” by Piotr Głuchowski. We need to add to this list the films of the Sekielski brothers – „Tylko nie mów nikomu” and „Zabawa w chowanego” – and the translations of the books “Sodoma” by Frédéric Martel and “Mortal Sins” by Michael D'Antonio. Together they formed a critical mass. It triggered hope for social change, but finally it left us with the question: why does not change happen? I will ask this question to these reportages.

The working thesis suggests that these texts are non-cathartic (Sianne Ngai's notion). This means that our action is blocked or suspended. In other words: after reading the book, we do not get a solution in the form of a set of rules and instructions for action neither we do not experience affective reassurance. Quite the opposite: reading leads to a feeling of emotional confusion that cannot be worked through (for the characters and for the reader). I understand them as the specific dynamics of trust (built up and rapidly shattered), shame (nullified and induced), and anger (induced and dissipated). I will follow these ambivalent, contradictory, tangled affects and ask about their regulation – that is, about the existing and potential social bonds. First of all, I will be interested in the role of religion and the Church in the lives of the protagonists of the reports. Secondly, I will reconstruct the attitude of the community towards the victims and towards the institutions of the Church. Finally, I will ask about the possibility of building a different bond of society with the victims – for which it is not necessary to mediate through the religious framework.

Joanna B. Bednarek – historian of contemporary literature and culture; PhD. Co-author (with Przemysław Czapliński and Dawid Gostyński) of „Literatura i jej natury” [„Literature and Its Nature”] (2017). Co-editor of collective volumes i.a.: „Nowa humanistyka: zajmowanie pozycji, negocjowanie autonomii” [„The New Humanities: Taking Positions, Negotiating Autonomy”] (2017), „O jeden las za daleko. Demokracja, kapitalizm i nieposłuszeństwo ekologiczne w Polsce” [„A Forest too Far: Democracy, Capitalism and Ecological Disobedience in Poland”] (2019), „Rewolucje i utopie” [„Revolutions and Utopias”] (2019), „To wróci. Przeszłość i przyszłość pandemii” [„It'll be back. Past and Future of the Pandemic”]

(2022). Editor of the fortnightly “CzasKultury.pl”, collaborator of the editorial board of the quarterly „Czas Kultury” [“Time of Culture”]. Contractor in the project “Before the Law. Alliances and conflicts between literature, art and law in Poland 1989-2020” (NCN [National Science Centre]).

Alicja Chwieduk (Adam Mickiewicz University in Poznań)

Literary criticism on adrenaline. The reception of Michel Houellebecq's prose in Poland

Concepts such as catharsis or the ethical notion of empathy are often mobilised to understand the effects of literature. The ability of fiction to develop our empathy and social skills of understanding others is emphasised. Alexandre Gefen, a researcher at the Institut des Sciences Humaines et Sociales of the CNRS, in his article *Les écrivains peuvent-ils changer le monde?* [Can writers change the world?] (2020), hypothesises that "the promise of a literature that would cure, heal, help, save, or at least 'do good', has made a comeback in contemporary French literature. It is as if, in our democracies deprived of great collective hermeneutical and spiritual frameworks, literary narratives promise to think the singular, to memorialize the dead, to give meaning to pluralized identities by constituting communities. [...] Writers will reshape territories, [...] they will try to grasp the future of our forms of life".

When researchers write about the power of literature, about its ability to 'change lives', they usually refer to the positive experience of reading. In this presentation, I will focus on another – perhaps even more striking – facet of reading. The one that evokes anger, bitterness, powerlessness.

I examine three, very vivid, accusatory texts: Mr. Houellebecq! [letter to a misogynist] (2015) by M. Gębala, Feminist reads Houellebecq, or the misogyny of the author of Submission (2015) by M. Grzyb and Uninvited (2019) by I. Iwasiów. The French novelist has obviously offended not only these authors. Polish feminist scholars and journalists hold a common front: Houellebecq does not deserve our – women's – approval. Although the authors want to defend the good name of women, and even more, defend their subjectivity in a masculinized world, this argument with Houellebecq ultimately boils down to a much broader discussion. The real stakes in the argument are neither the defence of women's image nor the banishment of the "ugly and mean" French writer from the canon once and for all. The game is, even if beyond the authors' intentions, about defining the function of literature and the role of the writer in Western European society.

We don't know what (or if anything) changed in the authors' lives after encountering Houellebecq's prose. Their reviews interest me because they capture the tension not only between Houellebecq (the writer) and women, but between writer and reader in general. The reactions of the three female authors open up a wide field of discussion. I would divide it into 3 areas:

- I) The question of the act of reading itself (an intimate, sensual, acute process that strongly involves the psyche).
- II) The problem of the perception of the role of the writer and literature in the 21st century in Western European society (the ethos of the writer; the practice of ethical criticism; the unity of the writer and the work; responsibility; the temptation to consider the creation as an extension of the writer's morality, even if the transfer of the hero's characteristics to the writer qualifies as an attribution error).

III) The question of the indispensability of literature (W. Iser : "interpretation is an endless process of orienting oneself in the world, and literature constitutes a particular form of this process, since it is a reaction to the world altogether with its variability"¹. On the individual level, the literary experience, if we refer to H.R. Jauss's thought, can indeed orient or even modify a reader's worldview and, consequently, react on his or her social behaviour. On the collective level, literature – conceived as a way in which an author meets his reader – "itself contributes to shaping the image of the society that is at its origin"²).

In the presentation, I will examine in the following order:

- 1) Reactions of female readers – how do they write about Houellebecq's prose and the writer himself?
- 2) What in Houellebecq's prose and behaviour can outrage a Western European (woman) reader?
- 3) What is the reason of such a violent reaction of female readers? (Here I will refer to the mentioned, three areas of reflection).
- 4) Can Houellebecq meet female readers' expectations and soothe their anger?

Alicja Chwieduk – PhD student at the Faculty of Polish and Classical Philology of the Adam Mickiewicz University (Poznań, Poland) and copywriter. In her research work she is focused on the contemporary literature seen through the prism of cultural anthropology. She devoted her MA thesis to the French Prix Goncourt and the “power of the literary award”. She is preparing a PhD thesis, in cooperation with the Université Paris-Nanterre, on the reception of Michel Houellebecq’s works in Poland and France.

Przemysław Czapliński (Adam Mickiewicz University in Poznań)

From looseness to outrage. Twentieth and twenty-first century literature and hormonal politics

In the first decade of our century, democracy was given two diagnoses. They concluded that democracy is threatened by the same fury it vitally needs. Jacques Ranciere's *La haine de la démocratie* (2005) and Stéphane Hessel's *Indignez-vous!* (2010) signaled the end of the short-lived peace between the hormones.

Peace reigned - with all the conventionality of such caesuras - after the collapse of the communist system. The end of the world division into American and Soviet spheres of influence meant a revolution in the immune system of states, societies, and individuals. Instead of hostility and cold war, agreements (primarily trade agreements) emerged; they stipulated that borders would become permeable to people and goods. Instead of the hitherto constant stimulation of the immune system, suppression of defensive reflexes was introduced. Immunology was turning into immunosuppression. The world at the end of the 20th century was to become a job market and an amusement park, not a theater of warfare. This required a change in hormonal policy.

These policies have probably always existed, as rulers have always attempted to influence the public mood or emotions of the people. However, the evolution of the modern state and its focus on biopolitics has brought hormones into the very center of population management. The intense development of endocrinology - spanning the period from the late nineteenth century to

¹ W. Iser, *Zmienne funkcje literatury, w: Odkrywanie modernizmu*, pod. red. R. Nycza, Kraków 1998, s. 362.

² H.R. Jauss, *Pour une esthétique de la réception*, Gallimard, Paris, 1978, p. 81.

the 1960s - coincides with the gradual association of politics with hormones. This trend was picked up by the anti-utopias of the last century, which warned against two extremes - the politics of pharmacological bliss (Huxley) and the politics of controlled hatred (Orwell). Both models led to a kind of end of history: the politics of serotonin stripped society of its capacity for self-defense, while the politics of aggression eliminated the capacity for coexistence and cooperation. The end of the Cold War made it possible to base hormonal politics on dopamine, the hormone that stimulates action while being gratified by pleasure. It seemed that a source of energy had been found that would drive society but not destroy it.

Already in the first decade of the twenty-first century, dopamine policy has proven ineffective. Houellebecq's prose shows how, under conditions of obligatory happiness, lack of success becomes failure. Instead of an energy that promotes cooperation and consumption, there is a negative energy, namely frustration. It is too weak to defend democracy and too strong not to threaten democracy. Hence the contradictory diagnoses: one warns against anger, the other calls for anger. French literature seeks to resolve this contradiction by going back to 1968 (J.M. Clezio, V. Despentès, P. Deville) and finding there the hormones of anger and bonds.

Przemysław Czapliński – historian of 20th and 21st century European literature, essayist, translator, critic. Recent publications: *The Shifted Map* (2016), *Literature and Its Natures* (2017; co-authors: Joanna B. Bednarek, Dawid Gostyński), *A Forest Too Far. Democracy, Capitalism and Ecological Disobedience in Poland* (co-editors: J.B. Bednarek, D. Gostyński; 2019), *Identity after Massacre. Testimonies and interpretations of March '68* (co-editor: Alina Molisak; Warsaw 2019).

Jerzy Franczak (Jagiellonian University in Cracow)

Hormones and Social Homeostasis. Literature as an immunological project

The subject of my paper is the relationship between social homeostasis, collective immunity, and literature. The starting point is the anthropotechnical theory of Peter Sloterdijk, according to which the biological immune system is complemented by two others: socio-immunological (comprising legislation, solidarity agreements, etc.) and psycho-immunological (symbolic practices). I am supplementing this vocabulary with the concepts of homeostasis, understood as a shared image of a well-functioning community, and of social hormones, defined as mechanisms regulating the relationship between individuals and groups in the second immune sphere or, to be more precise, as factors that *set in motion* elements of social structure.

Literature is of course assigned to the third sphere. It used to play an important role in traditional symbolic immune system (with religion, philosophy, scientific discourses, and art) as one of compensating mechanisms that allowed to put down roots in the inhospitable world. But in modernity the grand spheres have collapsed and illusion-based immunity has disappeared. Literature has to face a failure of collective, top-down strategies of immunisation. It serves today for diagnostic tool, helping understand that historical disaster. It may also help to examine the vitality of the social body, to indicate threats, and sometimes to formulate therapeutic suggestions.

I focus on French literature from the turn of the centuries, and I try to describe how contemporary writers engage in immunological and homeostatic processes. Novelists such as Michel Beigbeder, Michel Houellebecq or Virginie Despentès ask questions about social ties in the era of late modernity and global capitalism, introduce the context of the communities'

health and vitality, namely the relationship between *immunitas* and *communitas*. I try to outline a map of possible functions of literature. Firstly, it may diagnose an imbalance in the collective body, describe one social hormone dominance, e.g. serotonin (Houellebecq), dopamine (Beigbeder) or cortisol (Despentes), a deficiency of happiness hormones (especially oxytocin) or autoimmune diseases (the excessive immunisation leads to the recognition of some parts of the social body as foreign). Secondly, it can design a possible homeostasis by devising training procedures for individuals or a comprehensive treatment plan for whole the community. Thirdly, it presents itself as a recovery practice: an instrument of exclusion from the outside world, or a tool of social and political change.

Jerzy Franczak – writer, essayist, literary scholar, and academic teacher at the Faculty of Polish Studies of the Jagiellonian University. He has published many books, recently *Wandering words: Jacques Rancière and the Philosophy of Literature* (2017), *Machine for Thinking: a Study of Modern Literature and Philosophy* (2019), *Irresponsible* (essays, 2019), *Explosion* (novel, 2022).

Paweł Próchniak (Pedagogical University of Cracow)

„To see clearly the natural darkness of things”. The endorphin high and poetry

1. Contrary to what we think, we are high on endorphin on a daily basis. And it's only when the feeling stops, when the dopamine and serotonin metabolism goes low, that we see the world as it is. We see the abyss of existence, the chasm opening up in everything. I argue that such moments of seeing things clearly sometimes appear in poems.

2. In the poem *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell*, Blake wrote the famous sentence: „If the doors of perception were cleansed then everything would appear to man as it is, Infinite”. This thrilling vision tells us that we live in the depths of the abyss, and that every grain of existence is the edge of the abyss and the abyss itself. This is why sometimes – as Nietzsche wrote – we feel that we are detached from all suns, that we are falling in all directions. And then we feel that it is getting colder, that the night is coming and there is more and more of it.

3. Our eyes usually do not see this chiasm, our feet most often seem to be firmly on the ground. Why do we act like that? Why do we take the illusion of solid ground and relative stability for reality? We owe it – I repeat after Bergson and Huxley – the reductive action of the nervous and endocrine system. I leave aside the real sensitivity of our senses, their organic and physiological conditioning, actual possibilities. I am interested in those moments in which, as Baudelaire says, „we see clearly the natural darkness of things”. There is something shocking in this vision. It shows the horror of the ultimate things, the horror of naked existence.

4. It seems to me that art manifests this specific perception of reality. I also have the impression that this broad and clear vision sometimes makes itself felt in or through poetry.

Paweł Próchniak – professor of humanities, literary historian, literary anthropologist, literary critic. Researcher of poetry, cultural memory and symbolic imagination. Author of nine books on literature. Recently published *Promieniowanie tła. Szkice o wierszach i czytaniu* (Wołowiec 2020).

Clara Metzger (Paris Nanterre University)

Passage à lacte: a paradigm of action in Virginie Despentes' Baise-moi (1994) and Elfriede Jelinek's Les Amantes (1975)?

Both in *Baise-moi* by Virginie Despentes, a contemporary French author, and in *Les Amantes* by Elfriede Jelinek, the 2004 Austrian Nobel Prize winner, the “hormone games” informs a narrative scheme punctuated by *passages à l'acte*, which are actions "shortcircuiting the mental life" - disconnected from reflexive thought processes.

The initial view of society seems similar in both novels. In contemporary societies, generalized violence in social relations, “hormone games” have become a substitute for polished sociability and conscious, mediated action. We may consider the “hormonal” aspect of these two novel since neither of them adopts a psychological approach to human action or explores what psychically underlies action – in this sense, it is not about impulse. This refusal to resort to the psychologization of actions in the narrative and the preponderance given to bodies and bodily matters in the relationships between the characters necessitate a study of the stylistic and narrative means used to make this absence of mediation by discourse apparent. In particular, from a stylistic point of view, by the recourse to an outrageous obscenity or, from a narrative point of view, by the recourse to models of paraliterary narratives (road book for ex.) or by the mechanization of the plot.

Since action is no longer mediated and psychological motives have been put aside, the narration explores the drivers of societies that have lost their "social" (i.e. civilized) character in favor of the mechanical interactions of bodies – and thus to power relations. Functional concepts related to the body are transposed to society, which questions the value of this "hormone game". Both mechanical and organic, the “hormone game” creates a tension between what belongs to the organic life and what belongs to social determinism mechanisms. This tension is what we want to explore through the schemes of action found in Virginie Despentes' *Baise-moi* and in Elfriede Jelinek's *Les Amantes*. In these texts, actions are not merely *passages à l'acte* in the traditional sense. However, the framing of action corresponds to an extended definition of *passage à l'acte* insofar as action is characterized by the absence of reflexive evaluation and analysis. In this sense, the characters' *passages à l'acte* have a paradigmatic function: action becomes self-actualized in its purely chemical or mechanical aspects.

This obliteration of language, in the refusal of recourse to the psychologization of actions in the narration and the preponderance given to the body in the relationships between the characters, raise the question of vitality in its ambivalence: life force in a perspective that could be described as Nietzschean in *Baise-moi*, free field left to power relations and social determinisms in *Les Amantes*. These novels question the value of the "hormones game" in contemporary European literature.

Our aim is to study in these two texts the social conditions allowing the emergence of this unmediated, "hormonal" model of action. How this obliteration of speech and thought works from a stylistic and narrative point of view is our second question. Eventually we will question the value of the action on a hormonal mode – between vitality and power relations.

Clara Metzger – agrégée de lettres modernes, former student of the ENS Paris, currently in the first year of a thesis in comparative literature at the Centre de recherche en littérature et poésie comparées attached to the ED 138 "Lettres, langues, spectacles" at the University of Paris-Nanterre and lecturer at the UFR PHILLIA She is preparing a thesis: "Ecritures scandaleuses:

poetics and politics of outrageousness in a corpus of contemporary fictions and in particular in the novels of Virginie Despentes, Edgar Hilsenrath, Elfriede Jelinek, Antonio Lobo Antunes, Philip Roth".

Anna Saignes (Grenoble Alpes University / CNRS)

Endocrinology of literature: The Hormone Factory by Saskia Goldschmidt (2012) and Sérotonine by Michel Houellebecq (2019)

To reflect on an endocrinology of literature, among the literary works published in the last decade, next to Michel Houellebecq's *Serotonin*, one title seems to offer a particularly relevant field of exploration: it is *The Hormone Factory* by Dutch author Saskia Goldschmidt. The novel was published in the Netherlands in 2012 (*De Hormoonfabriek*), in Germany in 2014 (*Die Glücksfabrik*), in the United States in 2014 (*The Hormone Factory*) and in France in 2015 (*La Fabrique des hormones*).

Serotonin is in the vein of novels about the "magic pill", that could improve the cohabitation between human beings. We can mention the Soma (A. Huxley, *Brave New World*), or, to summon up a Polish reference, the Murti Bing (Witkiewicz, *Nienasyccenie*) or the Altruizine (S. Lem, "Altruizyna"). The dystopias of the twentieth century present many examples of these molecules, which can be thought to belong to the family of hormones and which complement the deprivation of freedom, as a means of neutralizing the fundamentally impulsive and pessimistic nature of human beings.

This is not the approach chosen by Saskia Goldschmidt in *The Hormone Factory*, which tells the story of hormones throughout the 20th century. The action of the novel begins in the 1920s. The hero, a Dutch Jew, inherits a slaughterhouse from his parents. As he is good at business, he joins forces with a scientist to create a pharmaceutical laboratory specializing in the extraction of insulin (recently discovered) from animal waste. The laboratory is growing rapidly, even if its development is occasionally disrupted by the Second World War. In 1935, testosterone is isolated there, and it is one of the first to develop the contraceptive pill (1962), several inventions in the field of contraceptives and antidepressants. The story of this laboratory is strongly inspired by the true story of the Dutch-based multinational, Organon, renamed Farmacon in the novel.

The Hormone Factory is indeed a novel. The story of the laboratory's discoveries, all highly emblematic, is constantly interwoven with the great History, through individual destinies. The story is told by the inner voice of the laboratory's founder, a cynical businessman driven by impulses, but now 97 years old and unable to move or speak. In the distortions that the novel brings to its factual material, a philosophy of history comes into tension with the idea of a History reducible to a game of hormones.

Anna Saignes – teaches comparative literature at the University of Grenoble Alpes. Her research focuses on the relationship between literature, history and politics. Books: *Stanislaw Ignacy Witkiewicz et le modernisme européen* (Grenoble, Ellug, 2006) and *La pensée politique de l'anti-utopie* (Paris, Champion, 2021).

Justyna Tabaszewska (Polish Academy of Sciences)
Non-existent History. Literature and Affective Future

The main aim of the paper is to analyze how literature – by creating a wide range of formally different narratives about alternate, potential or non-existent histories – copes with the fluid and not yet fully expressed, but already existing and developing, collective responses to certain events. Throughout this analysis, I will try to trace the relationship between social hormones and collective affects. Hormones, as chemicals produced by the body, are synthesized and secreted into the extracellular fluid by specialized glands, tissues, and cells of the endocrine system in response to specific intracellular or environmental stimuli, and then distributed throughout the body and delivered to target cells. The secretion of hormones is therefore always a reaction to a stimulus, a reaction that triggers a specific sequence of cause and effect. This simple definition of how hormones work is, in fact, very similar to the definition of affects constructed by Baruch Spinoza. He defined the body in terms of movement and rest, of the ability to be agitated and move or, in other terms, to affect and to be affected.

To put it simply: hormones respond to stimuli (so they are “affected” by what happens) and at the same time their response is aimed at producing specific chemical effects that “affect” the human body. The similarities between affects and hormones also result from their complex, transactive nature, and the tendency of being in-between: between the bodily and intellectual sphere and between individual and collective response. Although hormones are secreted individually, the stimuli to which they respond may, and often do, have a collective and social nature. To better explain this phenomenon, as well as the relationships between affects, hormones, society, and literature, I will focus on just one chemical – cortisol. This lesser-known stress hormone, adrenaline’s little brother, is released in stressful situations. As we all know, stress factors tend to be collective in their nature – not only in the sense that interactions with other people might be stressful, but also because stressful situations are most often collectively shared. Two most recent global events, that is the coronavirus pandemic and the war in Ukraine, are the source of individual, but socially shared, hormonal and affective reaction. Adrenaline and cortisol are the chemical side of this reaction, while the anxiety, confusion, and the feeling that something – though it is hard to say what, exactly – should be done, is its affective side. This response can be interpreted as a symptom of a newly emerged affective and hormonal profile, which works – according to K. Stewart, for example – in a very complex manner: not only do the individual reactions shape the collective ones (and vice versa), but also responses to specific stimuli, producing specific affects and hormones, themselves begin to shape and modify subsequent reactions. Thus, the hormonal and affective profile of society is shaped by our collective responses to the way we experience various conflicts and crises, and, as many scholars point out, the future is always at the center of affective politics: we are taught, sometimes in quite subtle ways, to react to what is yet to come (Massumi).

As R. Grusin claims, keeping society in a state of constant moderate stress is a way of deflecting the shock of an unpredictable future, that otherwise could prove too difficult to handle by unprepared masses. And literature, especially that concerned with the issue of what can happen or what could have happened, is one way of both producing and neutralizing this specific hormonal state. For this reason, it is worth interpreting the genre of alternative histories in particular as a kind of cortisol regulator, signaling how society is dealing with change. In the paper, I will present a short typology of such texts, interpreting them as a response to the highly affective present and, at the same time, as a diagnosis of reality, which always concerns and premediates the future. The key analytical example will be the anthology *PL +50. Histories of the Future*, edited by Jacek Dukaj.

Justyna Tabaszewska – an assistant professor at the Institute of Literary Research of the Polish Academy of Sciences, member of the Editorial Board of the “Teksty Drugie”. She specializes in literary and cultural studies; currently works on a project concerning Polish cultural memory after the 1989 breakthrough and the issue of future in memory and affect studies.

Karoline Thaidigsmann (Heidelberg University)

The Empire in Andropause. Inquiries in Contemporary Russian Literature

Meno- respectively andropause is considered a significant crisis in human life caused by hormonal changes. These changes lead to a decline in strengths, particularly with regard to sexual prowess, attractiveness and the ability to reproduce. Thus meno-/andropause may challenge one's self-perception and calls for redefining oneself. Looking at contemporary Russian literature, one could argue that Russia is going through meno-/andropause. In my talk I will inquire, how the meno-/andropausal crisis is being mirrored within Russian literature and what alternative self-concepts it offers for post-meno-/andropausal Russia. Is the hormonal crisis a chance for change or rather a danger, caused by a shaken ego? I will consider two examples from contemporary Russian literature that epitomize Russia's hormonal crisis and two examples that point to an alternative self-conception.

Read through the lens of endocrinology Vladimir Sorokin's 2008 novel *The Sugar Kremlin* shows a society that has stopped to regulate its inner system via self-produced chemical messengers, by which the organism regulates itself, but instead is controlled by surrogates supplied from the outside. The central surrogate is sugar. In each of the episodes a Kremlin, made from sugar, is being shattered and consumed. The analogy between the shattered sugar Kremlin and the menopausal/andropausal crisis becomes evident by Sorokin's use of the sugary Kremlin towers as a phallic symbol. Like Sorokin's book, Dmitry Glukhovsky's novel *Metro 2033* (2005) is a dystopia set in the near future. After a nuclear war life has moved underground to the subway system. I will offer a figurative reading, arguing that the metro lines can be understood as blood vessels through which chemical messengers (hormones) travel. Seen through this lens Glukhovsky's book reflects on society's hormones as an interconnected system of transport and communication within which hormones compete, gain strength or decrease. While Sorokin and Glukhovsky reflect on the (declining) prowess of the depicted world, both Maria Stepanova in *In Memory of Memory* (2017) and Linor Goralik in her flash fiction suggest that it is precisely the renunciation of strength, potency and control of time that may offer post-meno-/andropausal Russia an alternative conception of self.

Karoline Thaidigsmann – postdoctoral researcher and lecturer of Polish and Russian literature at the Slavic Department of the University of Heidelberg. Her research interests include trauma narratives and memory studies as well as crossover literature. Latest monograph: *Poetik der Grenzverschiebung. Kinderliterarische Muster, Crosswriting und kulturelles Selbstverständnis in der polnischen Literatur nach 1989* (2022; "A Poetics of Shifting Borders: Patterns of Children's Literature, Crosswriting and Cultural Identity in Polish Literature since 1989"). Forthcoming, together with Przemysław Czapliński: *Polnische Literatur der Gegenwart 1976-2020. Führer für eine deutschsprachige Leserschaft* ("Contemporary Polish Literature 1976-2020. Guide for a German-Speaking Readership").

Dorota Walczak-Delanois (The Free University of Brussels)

From "Joy of Writing" to "Joyful Writing"? A Few Considerations about Poetry in the 21st century

The twentieth century "Joy of Writing", to refer to Wisława Szymborska's poem, still stands on the side of the possibility of experiencing and describing the world, and the literary message - here poetic - guarantees the creator at least a partial experience of fulfilment, even though it is known that it will come to an end. This is unaffected by potential life or collective misfortune: suffering, trauma, war. It involves a sense of being able to describe the world and a certain satisfaction in naming it. Happiness (reflected in the poem) is possible, or/and in the poetic biography, as well as sense of agency and creation of the world, including the fantastic one, and its possible revindication ("Take me to happy islands"). In other words: a renewable/renewed poetic utopia is possible. Among other reasons, because the twentieth-century poet remains in a state of "experiential connectivity" and coherence with himself and with the world he narrates and names; the connection to his experiential physicality (here: hormonal) becomes the building material and fuel of creation.

There are significant changes in the recognition of the creating and created poetic state in the 21st century. The most contemporary poet builds his work on his own non-recognition, although he strives to recognize and reflect the world presented.

For the time being, designing a new, i.e. better world, is not possible; the former utopia of escaping to "happy islands" is impossible. Nor is the 'joy of writing' possible. The disturbed "hormonal" economy of the world - contrary to more than two decades ago - changes the status of the poet and his (self-)recognition. Here the poet becomes a diagnostician, a kind of "endocrinologist", diagnosing a disease entity.

This happens globally, regardless of the language of poetic expression, as I try to show on selected recent poems in Polish, English and French. "The joy of writing" is no longer the joy of (auto)creation, but only a temporary stimulating act (just as serotonin or endorphin is temporary); sometimes only a poem is an attempt to calibrate the disturbed economy of "self" and "other's". What makes today's poet unwilling and unable to be a happy (read: fulfilled in writing) poet? What diagnosis do "endocrine poets" give to themselves and to the hormonally disturbed world? This is also what I would like to discuss in our talk on the lyrical form of literature.

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