3 Spanish American prose evaluated by Polish critics

1 Literary criticism vs. translation criticism

Critical texts dedicated to literary translations can be ascribed to two separate disciplines: literary criticism and translation criticism. The former deals with the current literary production and is characterised by the fact that it does not only describe works, but also “assumes a direct impact on the development of literature, the formation of new styles, actions and aesthetic ideals” (STL, 2008:264). Translation criticism, also commenting on contemporary works, very frequently refers to literary heritage since it deals with new translations of old works. Moreover, the natural context of the activities of translation criticism, which often compares different renderings, is a series of translation facts, the old and current ones (Balcerzan 1999:25).

In studies concerning the Polish language and literature, reflections on the place and role of criticism among literary research have a long tradition. In classic textbooks, it was regarded as one of the three disciplines of literary studies, beside the theory of literature and the history of literature (Głowiński et al. 1962:5). Similarly, in the compendium of literature, Markiewicz (1980:12) distinguishes three fundamental divisions: historic knowledge of literature, theoretical knowledge of literature and meta-knowledge of literature. Currently, literature studies, along with the history of literature and the theory of literature, embrace methodology, while literary criticism can be included on the condition that it deals with contemporary literature (STL 2008:337).

Analysing the relations between the history of literature and literary criticism, and in particular, the usefulness of critical texts to historians of literature, Sławiński (1974c:15) enumerates five possible ways of their use:

1. as a testimony of reception at a certain time and environment;
2. as an expression of norms defining decisions taken by authors of works created in given social and historical circumstances;
3. as messages about the ideals of the literature desired by the literary audience of that place and time;

104 Ritz (1999:41) observes an interesting regularity: in Poland, translation critics chiefly deal with poetry, while it is usually linguists who examine translations of prose.
4. as information concerning the condition of literary life in the given epoch;
5. as elements of the timeless body of knowledge of literature.

Let us then discuss to which degree these aspects of the analysis of critical texts can become essential from the perspective of research on the reception of literary translations.

A literary work is firstly addressed to non-professional readers. A critic is a reader, although a specific one since he has competences that other readers do not generally have. Furthermore, a critic has different – better – conditions to maintain contacts with literature. This does not change the fact that critics’ texts can be considered as characteristic of a certain group of receivers. Critics make comments on their behalf, verbalise and record convictions and evaluations which “ordinary” readers usually find no occasions to express. Critical texts used to be almost the only available – since produced in a written form – acts of receptions of works. So they can be treated as traces left by readers who are actually difficult to identify and describe (Wunberg 1986:257). For those who investigate receptions of translations, they are invaluable sources on the basis of which one can attempt to reconstruct readers’ expectations towards concrete works or writers as well as critics’ attitudes and their evaluations made from the perspective of the norm of the target culture.

At the same time, critical texts contain information about concrete expressions of literary life and its organisation in a given epoch, such as activities of publishing houses, the functioning of the book market, the existence of literary groups, readers’ circles, etc. Critical texts themselves can be interpreted as testimonies to tendencies present in the literary life of some concrete place and time.

Critics are also advocates for writers, and one of their tasks is to inform readers about the assumptions of works, and authors’ ideas. Thus, a critical message also “represents the space of broadcasting” (Sławiński 1974c:16). This role is especially important while discussing translations of foreign literature since translated works refer to the world of values and literary norms which readers know

105 “Addressing it directly to criticism is hard to be regarded as typical, and thus decreased social circulation of works in a self-sufficient circle of producers and experts – as natural” (Handke 1977:96).
106 Płachecki (1982:172) stresses differences between the experience of an elite reading, being part of a professional critic, and the common experience of a reader, “You usually read one book at a time. In order to read many, you need time and money. Literally. Such a reading requires constant, professional contact with the literary production […].”
Literary criticism vs. translation criticism

to a smaller or bigger extent. Consequently, they can occur to be difficult and incomprehensible for them. Critics commenting on translated works not only explain the writers’ intentions but also show readers the essential elements of foreign cultural systems that constitute the origins of works. Therefore, analyses of critical texts can contribute to reconstructing the state of knowledge about writers’ cultural circles at a given moment in history.

On the other hand, it seems that from the perspective of research on reception, the dimension of critical texts, understood as a record of certain “aspirations, longings, wishes” (Sławiński 1974c:18) formulated for an ideal work and postulated by a given circle of receivers, is less interesting. Similarly, a researcher of reception will not deal with the timeless elements of these texts, being part of the objective, beyond-historical dimension, knowledge of some work, author, epoch, etc.

Numerous works have been dedicated to reflections on distinguishing the roles and tasks of literary scholars and critics. Their places in the process of exploring and interpreting literature were recognised as complementary for many years. Scholars were to be characterised by scientific attitudes, while critics’ activities were understood as being based on intuition to a greater extent. However, one should remember that the figurativeness and colloquialism that characterised the style of the older criticism might have resulted from the lack of a proper terminological apparatus (Głowinski 1984:76). Both attitudes were regarded as indispensable in order to explain all the senses of a literary work (Dutka 2000:6).

The 20th century introduced specialisations: on the one hand, we have historians of literature who enjoy prestige, and on the other, craftsmen who cultivate their professions and who “having dealt with literary issues, analyse particular works for ad hoc uses, rejecting any scientistic preferences” (Dutka 2000:16).

Literary criticism can be seen as “an authority managing the growth and activation of literary tradition, [...] participating in the internal history of literature” (Płachecki 1982:167). One of its important tasks is to regulate the production, distribution and consumption of books. It also exerts an important influence on the type and course of contacts between receivers and literary works.

107 These issues are widely discussed by Dutka in Literatura – badacz i krytyk. Wybrane role partnerów interakcji poznawczej [Literature – Scholar and Critic. Selected roles of partners of cognitive interactions], Wyższa Szkoła Pedagogiczna im. T. Kotarbińskiego, Zielona Góra 2000.
Critics belong to the literary public and as such are active participants in the process of literary communication. They enter the space between authors and readers as mediators, explaining new literary phenomena to the latter. They provide writers with specific feedback on how their works can be received and interpreted. Critics try to act bi-directionally:

They respond to the authors’ lack of knowledge and uncertainty concerning the fate of their literary activities by providing their own understanding and evaluations of works. On the other hand, they juxtapose the readers’ lack of knowledge and uncertainty with their explanations and evaluations of the authors’ works (Sławiński 1974b:177).

Translations play a similar role in literary communication. However, their function is not only to enlarge readers’ competence and make accessible works which they might not get to know because of a language barrier, but also to change their perceptive habits, widening their intellectual horizons and creating new paths for the local literature. Translation critics, like critics of literature, participate in these processes. They present literary forms to readers and explain the author’s intentions. The difference between these two kinds of critics is that translation critics stand between receivers and translators, not between receivers and writers. They enter into polemic with translators and not with the authors of the originals. Writers are not the addressees of their texts as it happens with literary criticism. If translation critics address writers, they address local artists whose attention to new, unknown possibilities they might want to draw.

Dutka (2000:227–236) lists the following roles of contemporary critics of literature:

- witnesses of their epochs. Critics immediately recognise the meanings in a literary work which are essential at a given place and time, and thus their texts and potential polemics become important testimonies of the attitudes and views of a concrete period of time.
- “experts.” Critics co-create and organise the whole system of literary production. They justify their existence arguing that without having proper knowledge and an adequate terminological apparatus it is impossible to understand a literary work. Thus, they try to impose their ways of interpretation and visions of literature on other participants of literary communication. Consequently, critics, especially those who enjoy substantial authority, many a time define the horizon of non-professional readers’ expectations (Handke 1977:98).
- participants of a “spectacle.” Co-players in a game “in which various artistic texts clash with one another, trying to impose their visions of the world on
the receivers” (Kowalewicz 1977:30). In a public spectacle, they behave as if they transmit readers’ opinions, following the similar principle as actors lending their voices to playwrights. However, it is a game of appearances since readers are not really able to influence to a considerable extent the evaluations expressed by critics.

- interpreters. They reveal and show hidden values and meanings of works just like those who perform dramas and musical pieces, revealing various nuances of works through their own innovative interpretations;
- stars. Contemporary literary critics tend to expose their own selves, setting aside the commented work and its author. What is more important is their specific way of analysis and interpretation that is transformed into a kind of self-promotion.

The roles of a translation critic in the great spectacle, which is literary communication, can be described in a similar way. Yet, there are essential differences between literary criticism, traditionally understood, and translation criticism. One of the most fundamental differences is that literary criticism is limited to the area of one culture – the local culture. Even if a work is a product of some foreign culture, literary critics usually evaluate it from the perspective of the norms of the local culture as if the work was an element of its system. On the other hand, translation criticism operates at the meeting point of “two cultures, two languages, two kinds of sensibility: collective and individual, as well as various forms of their expression” (Tokarz 1999:53). Any dissimilarity from the original is a constitutive feature of translation, hence one of the substantial characteristics of translation criticism should be to make readers aware of this difference, and consequently, to signal otherness, which is inevitably part of a literary text created in a different cultural circle (Balcerzan 1999:32). Translation criticism faces very high requirements: “it should investigate the texts of the original works and their translations considering their multilevel nature, polysystematic nature of their components, concentrating on reconstructing all of the senses of the original” (Bednarczyk 1999:76). Therefore, translation critics should know not only their own culture but also show the knowledge of the cultural conditions of the original text. In the case of critical texts analysing local literary works, one can assume the identity of the critic and reader’s competence based on one language and cultural heritage, but the knowledge of the translation critic is much broader than the knowledge of the reader who does not generally operate with a similar freedom in the space of two cultural systems (Balcerzan 1998d:151). Because of that, literary criticism is to a large extent subject to receivers’ control, while the probability of the verification of translation critics’ mistakes is relatively small.
Translation critics are interested in two texts: the source text and the target text. They investigate what happens between them and how the process of translation is conducted and determined. Moreover, they often evaluate its final effects. Therefore, they deal with the process of translation and the product of the translator’s work. Hence, Bednarczyk (1999:79) proposes a division into the model of descriptive criticism and model of evaluating criticism. In the first model, the critics’ task is to investigate discrepancies between particular elements of texts and to present the influence of the changes introduced by the translator on the remaining factors of the target text and the meaning of the whole text. If critics assume the second model, their task is to evaluate the translator’s decisions and choices as well as their final product.

Evaluating is therefore part of both literary criticism and translation criticism. Yet, the object of evaluation is different. Literary criticism focuses on the work itself as the product of the writer’s creative activity, while translation criticism evaluates the translator’s work and its final result, seldom dealing with the quality of the original work.

Another important difference between the activities of literary critics and translation critics is that the local literary work is a single utterance: “the essence of a single original work is its uniqueness” (Balcerzan 1998b:17). Translation is not the only reading of the given work, but only one of its possible readings. The same work can be translated many times; thus, literary translation is characterised by repetitiveness and existing in a series. Accordingly, translation critics usurp the right to correct translated texts and submit their own versions, which Balcerzan (1998a:34) calls “the corrective function.” A similar action of interference cannot be undertaken in the case of the original work, which is treated as an integral whole, not subject to any corrections done by anyone from the outside.

108 According to Soliński (1987:77), the fact that translation critics deal with at least two acts of communication, i.e. the original and its translation (there can be more elements in the case of a translation series) is a fundamental factor distinguishing between literary criticism and translation criticism.

109 Bednarczyk particularly appreciates the model of descriptive criticism, claiming that critics, not being obliged to formulate evaluative opinions, can ensure greater objectivity.

110 If there exist several author’s versions of the same work, usually one is assumed to be canonical.

111 Balcerzan (1998a:35) writes, “Critics limit their role to interpreting and evaluating what there exists, [...] reserve for themselves the proud privilege of corrective inability in accordance with the principle: I know that the translation is bad, but I do not have
2 The review of the translated text

STL (2008:464) defines “a review” in a very general way: “an explanation of a literary text, theatrical spectacle, concert, exhibition, scientific work, etc., published in the press or through other mass media.” It is one of the most typical genres of literary criticism, but it assumes various forms depending on which medium it has been intended for. Book reviews published in cultural or literary periodicals are usually longer, linguistically and stylistically elaborated, but above all, written with specialist tools since as a rule their authors are experts in literature. Reviews placed in dailies and weeklies are shorter, marked with rush resulting from the quick mode of publication. If they were written in more comfortable conditions, they would assume more thorough forms. Yet, knowing about the pressure of time that does not allow longer reflections while writing, reviews can be juxtaposed with readers’ common practices and as such, they are valuable sources of research on reception (Płachecki 1982:173). Sławiński (1974b:173) does not hesitate to call journalists’ reviews “primitive critical messages,” which however does not discourage him from conducting detailed analyses of such texts written for dailies. In his opinion, such reviews should be placed at the lowest level of critical activities, and their prevailing function is advertising.112

Press reviews of translated literary works are written by critics who do not know the original works; most frequently, they do not know the language of the original. I do not intend to condemn this state of affairs since one cannot really require from reviewers who regularly collaborate with a certain periodical to know the original language of each book they analyse. Neither are they required to know the original works nor to compare them thoroughly with their

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112 However, the randomness of reviewers working for popular and daily press is not a rule, e.g. the editors of the popular afternoon paper Echo Krakowa published in the period of the Polish People's Republic always cared for collaborating with experts in literature. The reviewers who regularly commented on new editions in this paper included Jerzy Pilch and Tadeusz Nyczek.
renderings; in the case of longer literary texts, such a procedure is simply impossible. However, this inevitable situation causes definite consequences: translated texts are treated as if they were written in Polish. Reviewers, publishing both in popular and specialist press, usually take it for granted that the originals were created in foreign languages and do not bother about the scale and range of translators’ interferences. They assume that translations are perfectly transparent, blaming translators for every mistake and ascribing them every advantage even if their comments concern choices of concrete lexical units or grammatical structures.

The state of affairs is not specifically Polish; it occurs all over the world. Obviously, the translator’s task is to render in the target language what has been written in the original, and the effect of the translator’s work seldom becomes the subject of critical reflections unless the rendering is offensively full of linguistic mistakes or clumsy wording. Blame should be put partly on the editors of literary periodicals since they do not make reviewers pay attention to the quality of translation (Christ 1982:18).

In the Polish reviews of Spanish American prose, one can hardly see the reviewers’ awareness that they deal with renderings. If there is some commentary concerning the translator’s work, its author openly admits not knowing the original version:

Cortázar’s novellas have been translated very well, and it seems that the translator rendered faithfully not only all the surprises in the avant-garde structure of the novellas (since these are what you can always do), but also the melodic structure, the expressive waviness of Cortázar’s prose. Naturally, I claim that only on the basis of my intuition,

113 Reviewers of translations often face such requirements (see e.g. Christ 1982:21), which in my opinion are utopian.
114 “It is notoriously written about translations as non-translations,” notes Balcerzan (1999:31).
115 Reviewers in other countries act in a similar way. Munday (1998:140) cites a fragment of a review concerning a translation of one of García Márquez’s short stories, published in The New York Review of Books, whose author in detail analyses the style of the Columbian writer. This critic uses a quotation from the English version which he regards as a perfect exemplification of Márquez’s way of narration. However, the quoted sentence is 50 % shorter than the long complex original sentence… Other critics follow a similar procedure: they stress the uniqueness of Márquez’s style, using examples from the English translations. Munday’s conclusions are as follows: in the background of English criticism what is analysed is not Márquez’s style but what is regarded to be the “Márquezian” style. What is forgotten is that the target language and translator’s idiolect are filters through which the original is out of necessity passed.
having no chance whatsoever to compare the translation with the original (about Chądzyńska’s translation of Cortázar’s All Fires the Fire).\textsuperscript{116}

One can hardly avoid suspicions while dealing with such phrases as “dampen a handkerchief to the limits” [empapando el pañuelo a un punto increíble] or clauses “the seed of the fight was won from place to place” [Un conato de cinchada fue ganado de punta a punta] in the Polish translation. It is difficult to suppose that the Spanish idioms could be satisfied with literary renderings instead of having their Polish equivalents. Nevertheless, one can submit an objection to many passages even not knowing the original (about the rendering of Cortázar’s Cronopios and Famas).\textsuperscript{117}

Generally, critics showed whether a given translation was easy to read:

[...] the effort put in this work became completely undetectable (about Wojciechowska’s translation of Carpentier’s The Lost Steps).\textsuperscript{118}

Zofia Chądzyńska’s rendering is readable – which is proven best by the parts coloured with light humour placed not so much in the situation but in the words used there (about the translation of Cortázar’s novel 62: A Model Kit).\textsuperscript{119}

The translation of Vargas Llosa’s novel The Green House, done by Marródan, is defined as “efficient.”\textsuperscript{120}

The quoted fragments show that reviewers, not knowing the original, highly valued transparent renderings in which the translators’ work is unnoticeable, translations that do not surprise readers with any forms that they are not used to finding. In their opinions, the best renderings are those in which contents and meanings are transferred through the structures of the target language in such a way that readers do not have the impression that they are dealing with a text that has been written in a foreign language.\textsuperscript{121} This is a kind of translation that Venuti calls “domesticated.”

This attitude of reviewers contributes to consolidating the effects of refrac- tion, i.e. activity leading to “the adaptation of a work of literature to a different audience, with the intention of influencing the way in which that audience reads

\begin{thebibliography}{99}
  \bibitem{Bukowska1974} Bukowska, \textit{Kultura} 1974, no. 20, p. 3.
  \bibitem{Maier1990} Similarly, the English-speaking literary public appreciate a high degree of readability of a text and on its behalf readers are ready to sacrifice a series of values of the original, such as the individual style of the writer or the foreignness of the realities. For example, it can happen that in the renderings of Latin American prose into English the exotic fruit are changed into those that Americans eat daily (Maier 1990:20).
\end{thebibliography}
the work” (Lefevere 2000:226). This adaptation concerns mainly conscious, i.e. not resulting from insufficient language competence, changes introduced by translators to ensure that their translated works win readers. The primary goal is to adjust the original to readers’ needs and canons of the target culture. Since only in this modified form, the work can exist in a new context and truly influence a foreign literary culture.  

Refractions can also happen on the level of criticism when reviewers “reading a rendering as a non-rendering” anchor the image of the translated work for which the translator is responsible in the native culture. They base their own interpretations of the work on this version, constructing them, as a rule thoughtlessly, on refractions resulting from translation strategies. They themselves are responsible for creating refractions by forcing interpretations that contradict authors’ intentions but support the prevailing trends of the literary life of the native culture.

Reviews of translated literary works reveal characteristics of both critical texts concerning native literature and translation criticism. According to Sławiński (1974b:175), various critical texts share indicators of four functions: cognitive-evaluative, postulative, operative and metacritical. They all occur simultaneously, but are not equivalent; their hierarchy and mutual relations can be different depending on the type of the critical utterance.

The cognitive-evaluative function is realised in a critical text through assessing a literary work and its author. It is carried out in such activities as

- identifying the work in the background of some convention, assigning a given text to a literary genre, describing the rules of poetics used in the work, introducing an opposition between the work and tradition, interpreting a work by its authors’ biography, presenting a work as an equivalent of subconscious “complexes” of its author, reducing the content or shape of a work to concrete ideological or philosophical attitudes, interpreting a work (or literary output) by referring to the dynamics of social movements (Sławiński 1974b:186).

These activities are especially important while reviewing a foreign work that is defined by a different literary and cultural tradition. Receivers can find it difficult to discover the place of a rendering among other pieces of world literature.


123 Refractions are also revealed in activities aiming at creating literary hierarchies, e.g. making a list of set reading in school programmes or creating anthologies. It is from them that we learn which writer is “more important” or which of his works are most “typical.”
to discover its novelty or on the contrary – to discern how it is adjusted to the canons of the source literature. Reviewers should play the role of a guide for receivers, presenting the work and its author in the background of his or her native culture as well as explaining literary and non-literary factors influencing the form of the work.

The element of evaluation appears both in critical texts referring to native literature and in translation criticism. Evaluative activities conducted on a literary text aim at juxtaposing it with the system of values constituting a source of criteria that are necessary to issue judgements or to compare it with other works known to the receivers. In reviews concerning literary translations, critical reflections on a work as a product of a foreign cultural circle are undertaken from the perspective of norms and values that are prevailing in the critic’s native culture.

A literary critic actively participates in the literary life of his place and time, co-creates them, trying to influence them by formulating postulates concerning the shape of literature. The addressees of the postulate are other participants of the process of literary communication – native artists. It is to them that a reviewer of a translated text can turn to show patterns created in a foreign cultural circle as factors that could potentially enrich the repertoires of native literature. This is the way the postulative function of literary criticism is realised.

The operative function is revealed when we see the critic as a member of the process of literary communication, joining the arrangement made by the writer, the work and its receiver. Critics dealing with native literature enters the space between the author and his or her work and between the work and its reader. On the other hand, translation critics enter between the translator, the translated text and its reader. In both cases, a critical utterance plays the role of a sieve in the communication channel that selects information intended for the receiver and passes it to the receiver. The critic makes this selection by choosing a work to be reviewed and suggesting its interpretation. Thus, the critic introduces the work into the social circle influencing the shape of literary life.

Metacritical function can be seen when a given utterance reveals self-thematic threads, i.e. commentaries or judgements concerning critical activities. At this point, we are dealing with criticism that describes itself, its methods, tasks as well as explains its attitude towards critical tradition and gets involved in a dispute with it. This function can be fulfilled both in texts referring to native literature and in translation criticism.

Realising the roles which a critical utterance can assume is a pre-condition for conducting analyses of reviews of literary translations from the perspective of research on reception. It allows us to distinguish various layers of meaning.
in a given text, determine their hierarchy, separate the most essential elements and indicate the addressees. Yet, there is the question about the research procedure towards critical texts that refer to translations considering their number and variety. The interesting proposal of the description of a critical utterance presented by Głowiński (1984) can be applied to the analysis of a single, well-prepared text, but his proposal seems less useful in reference to reviews written under the pressure of time.

Both the quantitative and qualitative aspect is important in research on reception. Munday (2001:157) points to the possibility of synchronic analyses, i.e. considering reviews of one edition of a concrete work, and diachronic analyses, i.e. taking into account reviews of the literary output of a given author in a defined period of time or reviews published in a chosen periodical. He also signals the possibility of using certain elements of both attitudes, i.e. describing the review of a given work in the background of critical texts referring to the whole output of its author. At a later stage, after careful reading of the collected reviews, one should separate between those that repeat remarks and evaluations and those that are original, leading to deeper reflections. Thanks to that, one can show the prevailing critics’ convictions about a given work or writer and separate texts that could be more intriguing, expressing individual critical evaluations and setting new interpretative trends.

3 Critics about Spanish American prose in 1945–1967

In the Polish press during the pre-boom period, there was not a significant number of critical texts dedicated to Spanish American prose, which was a direct consequence of the little interest of editors in that region. If some texts about authors from that continent appeared, they focused on the authors’ political activities, which I have mentioned in the previous chapter. The authors’ involvement in defending the ideals of socialism or communism was stressed. One could also read about the repressions that the authors many a time experienced because of their attitudes. Their artistic achievements were rarely mentioned, and when they were, the comments were of an ideological character.

One of the few reviews that was published in Nowa Kultura during those times concerned the novel Nueve lunas sobre Neuquén by Enrique Amorim (1950). The critic, using the initials “bd,” mentioned the participation of the Argentinian writer in the Intellectuals’ Congress in Wrocław, ensuring the

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124 bd, Nowa Kultura 1951, no. 34, p. 11.
Critics about Spanish American prose in 1945–1967

readers that “after his departure the writer spread the truth about the creative, peaceful efforts of the Polish nation on the other side of the world.” The critic indicated that the book “focused on the fight of Argentinian workers against the terror and violence of the reactionary government,” and using characteristic rhetoric of that time he added:

The novel takes place in 1944–46, when the Argentinian reaction, instigated by residents and agents of foreign fascism, suppressed all progressive movements by the cruellest methods in Argentina, persecuting the communist party with a particular severity […]. Amorim illustratively depicts this system of suppression against the communist fighters used by the Argentinian authorities, and their steadfast attitudes […].

The work was condemned for its lack of disapproval of the former and present politics of the United States:

It hardly ever mentions the North American materialism that endangers the Argentinian nation and all those nations that love peace by posing threats which are as concrete as those born by the European fascism.

Yet, the ideological rightness of the book did not make the reviewer miss its formal drawbacks. The critic singled out “a rather poor plot, certain textual lengthiness and sketchiness of the depiction of some figures and conflicts.”

The tone of critical texts changed considerably in the 1960s. It was related to the distinguishable changes of the publishing policy towards Spanish American prose. Consequently, Polish readers were able for the first time to get to know books that were gradually winning European markets. However, the ideological perspective did not disappear completely from the reviews. When PIW published the first Polish translation of Sábato’s work The Tunnel in 1963, there were opinions that one should get to know the author’s works first of all for his leftish views.125

The Polish critics’ reactions to this book were generally positive. The title of one of the reviews showed the work as an “Argentinian bestseller.” Krzysztof Mętrak defined this work as “an excellent study of psychopathy,”126 while Henryk Bereza assured readers that:

Ernesto Sábato would have kept his place in world literature even if he had remained an author of this single small novel.127

125 Chociłowski, Trybuna Mazowiecka 1963, no. 123, p. 4.
The similarities between the works of the Argentinian writer and the French existentialists, first of all Albert Camus’ *The Stranger*, were shown. Critics described the feelings of a contemporary man, stripped of any illusions, chasing some unreal “real love,” love devoid of jealousy, verging on madness, as the fundamental theme of *The Tunnel*.

In 1967, Sábato’s most important novel *On Heroes and Tombs* was published in Poland. Anna Tarska, who was charmed by the “magic of the exotic,” did not hesitate to call the book a masterpiece. Other reviews were also positive. The critic for *Odra* focused on the multi-level panorama of modern Argentina: visual, sociological, cultural and psychological strata. Reviewers’ attention was captured by the part of the novel entitled “Report on the Blind” (*Informe sobre ciegos*). Styczeń associated it with the prose of E. A. Poe, while Tomasz Burek described it as a sarcastic, cynical, offensive, furious and extremely eloquent attack on the principle of common sense in social life, psychology and literature.

The novel was mainly seen as a pre-discussion about contemporary literature and the realisation of the original Argentinian writer’s concept of a literary work. In the 1960s, there were several translations of Mexican literature in Poland. In *Trybuna Ludu*, Zofia Kwiecińska wrote an article that had a meaningful title “The heirs of Montezuma and Cortez,” warning the readers that this prose is very difficult for the Polish reader through its “otherness,” its attitude towards the world and philosophy of life that are slightly exotic for us.

Discussing the selection of Mexican short stories published by Iskry in 1965, both Kwiecińska and the reviewer for *Odgłosy* saw the Mexican attitude towards death as different from the one of the European attitude: death appeared as “a living being who one can talk to as equals” and which “is treated without any pathos and completely emotionless.” The specificity of Mexican literature

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128 Chociłowski, ibid., Mętrak, ibid.
130 Chociłowski, ibid.
131 Bereza, ibid.
133 Styczeń, *Odra* 1967, no. 7/8, pp. 88–89.
137 Kwiecińska, ibid.
138 B. M., ibid.
was to depend on showing the co-existence of two layers: everyday, real life and “magic circle of beliefs filled with gods and shadows of the dead.”

The translations of Mexican prose published in Poland in the late 1960s, before the beginning of the boom, included the novel *Pedro Páramo* by Rulfo. Only a few critics noticed this edition, and their reviews stressed a sense of certain helplessness towards this new phenomenon in Polish literary culture. It was revealed in using generalisations that could refer to almost any book. For example, the reviewer for *Tygodnik Demokratyczny* regarded *Pedro Páramo* as an interesting novel that mentions serious and most recent matters in a mature and profound way […]. It is deeply humanistic, and showing the tragedy of an individual and society, it tells us a lot about the mechanism of interpersonal relationships.

On the other hand, in a review published in *Nowe Książki* there was the term “magical realism,” which the author wrote in inverted commas. It was defined as a technique that will abolish the division between reality and unreality, possibility and impossibility, existence and non-existence, past and present, sleep and waking. For various forms of life and consciousness, the writer preserves the same forms of artistic expression, the same language, the same stylisation, the same range of vocabulary. Helena Zaworska emphasised that the Indians depicted by Rulfo did not fit the stereotypes prevailing in literature and films, whereas they could seem familiar to those who read works on cultural anthropology by James George Frazer or Claude Lévi-Strauss.

Before the beginning of the boom, two important works by Carpentier: *The Lost Steps* (1963) and *Explosion in a Cathedral* (1967) were published in Poland. Both evoked vivid interests of the critics. The works were reviewed in specialist papers, such as *Nowe Książki* or *Miesięcznik Literacki* and in *Kierunki* and even in *Trybuna Ludu*. These books were discussed by the experts in Latin American culture and literature, for instance Zofia Jaremko-Pytowska and Jadwiga Karbowska, and eminent literary critics who did not specialise in this field, e.g. Marta Wyka, Zofia Starowieyska-Morstinowa and Artur Międzyrzecki.

*The Lost Steps* was interpreted first of all as a 20th century prolongation of the Arcadian myth, anti-civilisation myth whose essence was not an escape from the present but an attempt to return to the pre-beginnings of speech, emotions

139 Ibid.
and art. The critics saw a motif of the confrontation of two civilisational formations, i.e. the clash between the hypocrisy and exhibitionism of contemporary culture and clear rules, and discretion, characterised by a style of life in accordance with the laws of nature. The musical aspect of Carpentier’s prose was also mentioned. The description was recognised as the major constitutive element of the composition of this novel.

*Explosion in a Cathedral* had two very detailed analyses. The author of one of them, Adam Klimowicz, stressed the attempt to revive the form of historical novel. The work was to be connected with the 19th century classic prose by its attempt to extend the limits of descriptive possibilities of prose and powerful epic constructions. The detailed reconstruction of the epoch did not prevent the writer from practising modern historical thinking revealed in:

- directing attention and sensibility to the whole complexity of relationships between individuals and society, and the consequences for both parties.

In turn, according to Marta Wyka, Carpentier’s reflections on the individual being entangled in the collective adventure led to antitheses which resulted directly from the organisation of the material of the novel. This is the essence of literary baroque, i.e. a world in which contrast is a fundamental law of existence. Both reviewers’ attention was attracted to the main hero of the novel, Victor Hugues. According to Klimowicz, he was a typical figure, a revolutionist who having forgotten about his juvenile ideals assumed the attitude of cynicism and conformism. For Wyka, he was a schematic figure called to undermine the alleged conventionality of the novel.

In the case of Carpentier’s works, there were attempts of ideological interpretations: according to Alicja Lisiecka, the escape from the present as the main motif of *The Lost Steps* should not mean withdrawal in time since it rather meant looking ahead, which, in the reviewer’s opinion, could turn out to mean the support of the revolution. This followed Wiktor Sadkowski’s demand to inscribe *Explosion in a Cathedral* in the context of the current events in Cuba because in this novel

- one should seek explanations for the ideological conceptions of Carpentier who became one of the leading cultural activists of liberated, revolutionary Cuba.
Moreover, Sadkowski drew attention to the informative layer of the novel that was important to the European reader who seldom had the occasion to come across the Caribbean history and culture.

The aforementioned reviews included threads that would be developed in critical texts concerning Spanish American prose created during the boom, such as the interpretation referring to the political context of the origin of the work, emphasising the exotic as well as anthropological and cognitive values, and referring to the mottoes of magical realism. However, one should stress that the reviews written before the boom were free from the tone of exaltation that was so characteristic of the later critical texts. The first Polish edition of Carpentier’s novels drew attention of several reviewers who belonged to the elite of Polish literary criticism. They did not treat the novels as “a literature of special care” that should be analysed remembering the alleged cultural backwardness or “otherness” of South America. Despite the lack of any allowances, the works were highly praised. Yet, neither Wyka nor Międzyrzecki, nor Woźniakowski, nor Starowieyska-Morstinowa commented on Spanish American prose in the later period even though among the several hundred titles published in Poland there was a number of unquestionable masterpieces.

4 Critics about Spanish American prose during the boom (1968–1981)

4.1 Preliminary remarks

This section is dedicated only to critical texts discussing the translations of Spanish American works that had originated during the boom. The research material is very large, and hence there is a need to order it. I have decided to follow the thematic key because my aim is to reconstruct the picture of Spanish American literature included in these articles. A similar procedure was adopted by Meg H. Brown (1994) when she analysed the reviews of twelve books of Spanish American authors that appeared on the lists of bestsellers in Spiegel/Buchreport in 1981–1991. Her work was a very important inspiration for me while planning my scholarly investigations and ordering the gathered material.

Reading the reviews allowed me to distinguish four fundamental thematic fields that characterised them. In the period of the boom, the critics did their best to realise the cognitive-evaluative function, i.e. present the writers and
origins of the discussed books as well as the place of Spanish American literature among other national literatures. Their attention was captured by the exoticism of this prose, in particular its form: using the technique of the so-called magical realism. The critics stressed the social and political aspects of the works. They often noticed the repeated reflections on the essence of Latin American identity.

Another subchapter has been devoted to the reception of Cortázar, i.e. the author who was most strongly associated with the boom in Poland and whose status in the Polish literary culture of the 1970s could not be compared with any other writer.

4.2 The corpus

The analysed corpus includes all kinds of critical-literary texts concerning Spanish American prose that were published in the Polish press in 1968–1981. Since the bibliographic sources are incomplete, it is difficult to define the exact number of the sources. Elbanowski (1980:296) estimates that in 1968–1978, there were over 350 sources, not indicating which sources he took into account (perhaps he based his calculations on his own collections?). I managed to compile about 300 articles, which is certainly not an exhaustive corpus, but fulfils the condition to be a representative one. Texts concerning Spanish American literature include repeated threads, motifs, interpretative attitudes, sometimes even formulations, which allowed me to assume that further analysing several dozen articles would not fundamentally influence my conclusions about the attitudes of Polish criticism towards this prose.

Three groups of texts can be distinguished: reviews of particular books, articles dedicated to the works of a concrete writer and more widespread publications concerning selected issues of Spanish American prose. My analysis of the contents of the periodicals confirms the reflections of Elbanowski (1980), the author of the only study that has reconstructed the picture of Spanish American prose in Polish literary criticism so far: during the boom, there did not appear many articles of a cross-sectional character; reviews were the prevailing forms. Some authors enjoyed the critics’ keen interest. The most frequently reviewed works were those by Cortázar, Borges, Vargas Llosa, García Marqués, Carpentier and Fuentes. It is not surprising because during the boom, their works were predominantly published in Poland. Most of their works had at least several reviews both in specialist periodicals (e.g. Literatura, Nowe Książki, Miesięcznik Literacki and Twórczość) and the so-called coloured ones directed to various receivers (Czas, Dookoła Świata, Itd, Kobieta i Życie and Radar), or even in the dailies (Życie Warszawy, Echo Krakowa and Trybuna Ludu). As for the less known writers, the
Critic about Spanish American prose during the boom (1968–1981)

The total number of published reviews was between one and five, and they appeared almost exclusively in magazines dedicated to literature. Considering that in 1968–1978 over a hundred titles of Spanish American prose were published in Poland and assuming the number of reviews given by Elbanowski, one can easily calculate that one book was reviewed on average 3.5 times.

Despite the extremely intensive activities of the critics, which could be seen in the press, only one book dedicated almost entirely to the literature and art of Latin America was published during the boom. It was *Bunt i gwałt* [Revolt and Violence] by Samsel (1978), including essays and sketches as well as interviews with some writers (e.g. with Fuentes and Vargas Llosa).

Among the authors included in the corpus there are several experts in Latin American culture and literature, such as Karbowska, Kalicki, Komorowski and Kühn. For some of them, the texts were connected with their own experiences, many a time with their long-term stays in some country on this continent. There is also a quite big group that could not boast of any specialist education nor had occasions to live on the Green Continent, but being clearly fascinated with this literature, they more or less systematically wrote reviews of the translations published in Poland. These embraced Alojzy Pałłasz, a theatre scholar and translator of Italian literature, the critics Andrzej Werner and Henryk Bereza, the writers Bohdan Czeszko and Krzysztof Rutkowski, and the anthropologist Leszek Kolankiewicz. This circle included only a few experts in Spanish literature, but one should remember that the first alumni of Spanish philology left the University of Warsaw in the mid-1970s and the Jagiellonian University – in the late 1970s, the remaining universities did not offer this study programme. The reviewers of Spanish American prose embraced Spanish scholars associated with the University of Warsaw: Grażyna Grudzińska, Elżbieta Skłodowska and Jerzy Mazur. All those critics carefully followed the Polish editors’ proposals and quite regularly wrote commentaries for the press. Some of them, e.g. Komorowski, have continued these activities until today. The corpus also includes texts by critics who dealt with Spanish American prose only sporadically.

Hence the collected articles are necessarily very different. Some referred to outstanding works, other focused on decisively weaker books. Some seemed to be well-thought-out and thoroughly constructed, while some were evidently written in a hurry. There were texts written by eminent critics, whereas some texts were written by incompetent ones. However, all of them, regardless

150 A few articles concern Spanish literature.
of their quality, constitute important testimonies of reception. All of them are connected as they describe the works or phenomena of Spanish American literature.

In the aforementioned article, Elbanowski (1980:300) opposed the “overall” approach towards the literatures of Latin America, claiming rightly that their cultural and national distinctiveness was thus blurred. It is hard not to agree with him when he shows that the features recognised as typical of Spanish American literature comprise only a general model of the novel of the continent within which there are many variants, many different concretisations of the linguistic layer, many subject matters and ideas which determine the separateness of particular works.

Elbanowski used the same reasons to utter critical remarks about the attempts to reconstruct the picture of society in Spanish American prose as a homogeneous phenomenon. However, he himself acted similarly: in his article, he did not discuss separately texts concerning Argentinian, Mexican or other literature, but generally wrote about the picture of Spanish American literature in Polish literary criticism. Consequently, he validated this research procedure. It was justified by the fact that in the late 1960s, the prose of Latin America was perceived in Poland in that way – as a certain whole with distinct characteristics. It does not mean that this was always the case: till 1963, Rocznik Literacki discussed the literatures of particular countries of the Green Continent separately. For instance, the 1963 volume includes separate entries dedicated to Argentinian and Cuban works, while the volume concerning 1965 had the article entitled “Iberian and Iberoamerican literatures.” The following volume had a similar content. Since 1967, the works of Latin American writers have been analysed under the common entry “Iberoamerican literatures,” which is further divided into particular national literatures; Spanish literature has been commented on separately. These cases illustrate well the change in perceiving Spanish American literature in Poland: firstly, as a collection of national literatures and then as a certain whole. The change could have been made under the influence of the prevailing trends in Western European criticism where a common label was given to the works of Latin American writers from the beginning of the boom (see Chapter I).

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151 Scholars dealing with the reception of Latin American prose in other European countries have acted in a similar way. Malingret (2002) deals with the translations of Latin American prose into French. Brown (1994) describes the fate of Latin American works that were placed on the list of bestsellers on the market of West Germany.
4.3 Julio Cortázar

Julio Cortázar was a writer who was most strongly related to the Polish boom for Spanish American prose. The publication of *Hopscotch* in 1968 gave rise to this phenomenon, while the writer’s death, according to some publicists, marked its symbolic end (Majcherek 1984:120). As already mentioned, the publication of *The Time of the Hero* by Vargas Llosa in 1963 is commonly regarded as the beginning of the boom in the Western countries. However, Donald L. Shaw (1981:99), referring only to literary criteria, considers *Hopscotch* as the first novel of the boom.

Cortázar’s position in Poland was a feature that distinguished the Polish boom from the variants of this phenomenon in other European countries. Outside Poland, the lists of the works that were most frequently published in 1960–1979 began with *One Hundred Years of Solitude* by García Márquez. The next place in this ranking was occupied by *Mr. President* by Asturias, followed by books by Borges, Fuentes, Vargas Llosa and Manuel Scorza (Rymwid-Mickiewicz 1995:246). Neither *Hopscotch* nor any other works by Cortázar could be found on the European lists of bestsellers during the boom. For example, in West Germany, the translations of the Argentinian writer’s books were published with a considerable delay: the first anthology of his short stories *Der Verfolger. Erzählungen (El perseguidor)* appeared in 1978, and *Hopscotch* – only in 1981, i.e. 18 years after the first edition of the original (Morales Saravia 2005:307).

The publication of the Polish rendering of *Hopscotch* was accidental to a certain extent. Chądzyńska came across this novel during her return trip on the ship from Argentina, which she had decided to leave definitively two years after her husband’s death. She was so much fascinated with the book that she resolved to translate it although she had had no experience in this field. During her short stay in Paris, she managed to obtain the writer’s telephone number and asked him to give permission for a translation into Polish. When Cortázar learnt that Chądzyńska had not dealt with translating he posed one condition: first to translate into Polish his collection of short stories *The Secret Weapons (Las armas secretas).* She did not only fulfil his wish but also convinced the editors of PIW to publish both books of the writer who had not been known in Poland before.\(^{152}\)

The publication of *The Secret Weapons* passed almost unnoticed by the literary public. The only comprehensive review was produced for *Nowe Książki* by Werner, who showed that the heroes of Cortázar’s short stories obsessively

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\(^{152}\) One the basis of Chądzyńska’s momoirs Nie wszystko o moim życiu [Not Everything about My Life] Łódź 2003.
desired to go beyond the boundaries of their existence, looking for some confirmation of their uniqueness in the world that they created themselves. Yet, the success of the novel was unexpected. “The success of Hopscotch went far beyond my expectations” – recollected Chądżyńska. Several thousand books were sold out quickly, and even today the copies of the first edition cannot be found in libraries – it is difficult to find out whether lovers of Cortázar’s prose did not return the borrowed copies or whether they were withdrawn from the library collection due to their destruction. Hopscotch was also noticed by critics. In 1969, some reviews of the novel appeared in periodicals of a literary (Twórczość, Nowe Książki) and cultural (Życie i Myśl) character, in the ephemeral student magazine Orientacja, and even in the daily Echo Krakowa.

Some reviews reveal the evidence of critics’ helplessness towards this pioneering work. “An ambitious and courageous work,” “a chronicle of an extraordinary spiritual adventure,” “a difficult and controversial book” – Grudzińska wrote about the novel employing generalisations. Likewise, Michał Moszkowicz’s review did not contain any concrete elements and attempts of its evaluation although his title was accurate: “The reader is the hero of the novel.” For a few critics, the novel signalled that its author exceeded the borders of normality in a popular sense of the term, which was expressed in the titles: “Cortázar’s madness” or “The deck of cards in the madman’s hand.” In order to bring the literary work closer to Polish readers, work that was so different from the literature they had encountered, the critics attempted to place it in some familiar context. Consequently, they called Hopscotch “a true anti-novel.” Some reviewer for Twórczość who was clearly fascinated by the book analysed the narrative techniques used in the work and discussed their functions. He stressed the motif of game which obsessively appeared in the book. He focused on the specific, sometimes coloured with malice, sense of Cortázar’s humour, which caused that all declarations, messages and ideals were taken in ironic brackets. Only the critic for Życie i Myśl did not fall under the spell of the novel, claiming that

157 Tarska, Echo Krakowa 1969, no. 33, p. 4.
158 Werner, Twórczość 1969, no. 6, pp. 109–117.
159 Werner, ibid., p. 117, Tarska, ibid.
160 Werner, ibid.
Hopscotch had committed the sin of knowing everything, writing about nothing, false originality revealed in the double numbering of pages, apparent philosophical depth, and he summed up, “Julio Cortázar is an ‘alchemist’ of literature who seems to think that gold can be made from ordinary sand.”

Today a question can be posed: what made Hopscotch a sparkle that created a fashion for Latin American prose in Poland? From the perspective of time, the novel does not have any features that were commonly recognised as typical of Spanish American literature. Its plot is not located in some exotic scenery; it contains neither phenomena that are contrary to rational cognition nor politics that interferes brutally in the heroes’ private lives, nor the cruelty of naturalistic descriptions. The protagonists of the first part of the novel live in Paris and, besides the main lovers, they are not even Hispanic. The background of the love affair between Horacio Oliveira and La Maga is the streets and corners of France’s capital, described in a suggestive style.

In the 1960s, the French culture was quite well known in Poland and highly appreciated thanks to the country’s partial openness to the Western world that happened after the “thaw” of 1956. Paris in the eyes of the Polish people living behind the Iron Curtain remained the unattainable, often idealised, capital of culture.

For many years, Paris was a city-myth for me, known from literature and stories of those who were lucky to live in it (generally before the war), but distant and unattainable recollects Michał Głowiński.

The French songs performed by Charles Aznavour, Yves Montand, Juliette Greco and Edith Piaf were very popular. If feasible, since foreign films were shown in Poland a few years after their premieres, the development of the French cinematography was followed by Polish audiences. The movies of the classics and masters of the New Wave, François Truffaut, Jean-Luc Godard, Claude Chabrol and Eric Rohmer, were highly evaluated by the critics and were enthusiastically received by the audience. “Two masterpieces” – was the evaluation of “Purple Noon” directed by René Clément and “Breathless” by Godard written by August Grodzicki, who saw them in France several years before the Polish premiere.

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162 Kulwieć, ibid., p. 79.
Directly after the thaw that caused among other things a radical retreat from social realism, one could observe “a rapid increase in the number of translations of French novels” (Skibińska 2008:94). Taking into account the total number of translations, at the turn of the 1950s and 1960s, literary renderings from French occupied the third position after translations from English and Russian. Beside classic works, there were contemporary books, whereas political criteria stopped being decisive in the selection of texts to be translated: names of the party members and followers of the French Communist Party disappeared from the editors’ plans (Skibińska 2008:99). The published books included works by Alain Robbe-Grillet, Nathalie Sarraute, Marguerite Duras, Michel Butor, Marguerite Yourcenar and the representatives of existentialism: Simone de Beauvoir, Jean-Paul Sartre and Albert Camus. The influence of the last writers was stressed by Głowiński:

[…] they achieved great success with the Polish literary audience […]. Their works were read with burning cheeks; they were something more than literature; their novels, essays and dramas answered the present questions of the Polish intelligentsia. They have directly influenced the attitudes and ways of thinking […]. One could say that during the mid-1950s and early 1960s, existentialism became a common worldview with a colossal range of impact in Poland. It had a profound meaning for the intellectual biography of the generation to which I belong and for my own biography, too. One could be a sans le savoir existentialist since one could be at the same time a Catholic or a Marxist, a follower of Neo-Positivism in scientific research or an enthusiast of any other doctrine. Existentialism […] was revealed not only in clothes (preference for black turtlenecks165) and also in listening to the songs of Juliette Greco on the radio. One spoke Sartre and Camus to some extent. It was them who defined our mental horizon.166

France was known to Poles through the works of her culture:

We drove our little Fiat to Paris which we knew from the films of René Clair and which fascinated us – streets, cafes, underground stations; all of them had the same names as in films and books; they looked the same
– Wojciech Albiński spoke about his first journey to the West.167

Full of formal experiments, *Hopscotch* brought new tricks for Polish readers. At the same time, the mood of the Parisian part of the novel resembled the mood of

165 “The existentialists’ black turtlenecks” appeared also in the stories about their youth told by my parents and their friends.
166 Głowiński, op. cit., pp. 220–221.
some French films and novels of the 1960s. La Maga walked along the streets that were known from the pictures created by the New Wave. The impression of otherness evoked by pioneering techniques was to some extent neutralised by the fact that the plot took place in a scenery that was close to Polish readers. Thus, *Hopscotch* fulfilled their expectations concerning a novel about Paris – a mythical city. As for its form, the novel constituted a complete novelty: its open invitation to readers to co-create a book was something that certainly went beyond the horizon of the Polish receivers’ expectations in the late 1960s.

If we pose questions about the reasons for this surprising success of the novel of the Argentinian writer in our country, we can put forward a hypothesis that the knowledge and popularity of the French literature and films of those days made the reception of *Hopscotch* in Poland easier in some way. The mood created by Cortázar was close to the one which Polish receivers could get to know, for example, from the pages of the existentialists’ works. Moreover, some Polish critics stressed the similarities between *Hopscotch* and Sartre’s works.\(^\text{168}\) Therefore, it seemed that Cortázar won popularity in Poland not because his prose could have appeared as exotic, but on the contrary, because it spoke about a reality that was known and – though allegedly – close to readers. The works by Carpentier and Sábato that had been published earlier did not manage to overcome the barrier of foreignness. These authors won popularity only when the boom triggered by the publication of *Hopscotch* continued, and the horizon of the readers’ expectations was modified.

A decade later, in Polish literary culture, *Hopscotch* played a role that was similar to the role of the French existentialists’ in the 1960s. In Janusz Majcherek’s recollections,\(^\text{169}\) the novel evoked emotions that resembled those referred to by Głowiński when he wrote about the influence of the works by Camus and Sartre:

One may say without making any mistake that Cortázar was a generation writer. Anyone whose youth, earlier or later, fell on the 1970s will certainly agree with me. I remember the mid-1970s, when the second edition of *Hopscotch* appeared; I began attending grammar school. One day my teacher of Polish, belonging to those teachers who tried to keep pace with all novelties, brought a thick, green book and confessed that she had begun reading it, and the book had turned out to be more difficult than *Ulysses*. The book had nothing in common with the classic majesty of *Ulysses*. It became a part of life, one could not part with it, people talked only about it and used its wording; it dominated our imagination completely.

\(^{168}\) Tarska, op. cit., Kulwieć, op. cit.


An important event for the Polish reception of Cortázar was the publication of *Cronopios and Famas* (1973). All of the critics marvelled at the specific sense of humour with which the book was saturated. For some the book was first of all the author’s escape to a spontaneous, uninterrupted game. Others found serious tones in it: the review placed in *Nowe Książki* suggested that Cortázar’s work should make readers aware of the sense of daily, routine activities that can turn out to be a source of metaphysical experiences. Following this thought, Olędzka-Frybesowa juxtaposed *Cronopios and Famas* with paintings of the Dutch masters. She also saw in it an opposition against the pragmatically-oriented morality. In her opinion, Cortázar’s jokes masked the most important matters:

> On the pretext of game, it hides experiences and evaluations, a universal (if not consciously expressed, it was even more honest) writer’s creed.

In extreme cases, reviewers found social criticism in the work of the Argentinian writer. Sadkowski called it a satire on the terrible town folk. The reviewer for *Trybuna Ludu* saw in the author of *Cronopios and Famas* a penetrating observer and critic of the social reality of his country.

From the moment of the publication of *Cronopios and Famas*, most critics shared readers’ enthusiasm. Reviews of his books were published in various sources:

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170 The Polish translation was based on the edition published in 1976, containing the short stories written in 1951–1969; their order was arranged by Cortázar himself.
171 The dates of the first original editions were given in brackets.
175 Olędzka-Frybesowa, ibid., p. 109.
types of press, both in literary periodicals, such as Literatura and Miesięcznik Literacki, and social-political papers (Polityka, Czas, Perspektywy), coloured weeklies (Radar, Razem), dailies (Trybuna Ludu, Glos Robotniczy), and even sporadically, in specialist papers (Nowy Medyk, Politechnik). However, the tone and arguments put forward by reviewers most frequently repeated what had been said about Hopscotch. So they wrote that the topics of his writings were very diverse. They regarded the attempts to cross the limits of reality and search for a world that human senses could not fathom as the main theme of his output. The critics also focused on the formal aspect of his works, on his experimenting with novel techniques. The mastery of his writing technique was also stressed. Komorowski described Cortázar’s work:

it is enough to lock the hero in a hotel room and let him discover that in this room there is a locked drawer, the rest of the text will be written automatically.

The critics were impressed by Cortázar’s multitude of narrative forms. They all agreed that the writer expected readers’ active attitudes, their readiness to co-create his literary works.

Despite the fact that Cortázar’s prose was already present in Poland, some critics found it difficult to interpret it. An example can be the review Around the Day in Eighty Worlds, published in Poglądy, in which the author used a series of citations from the book, but was unable to articulate his own opinion. The review concerning the second edition of Hopscotch written by Maciej Zalewski was characterised by mumbling rhetoric. “He was terrified by the consequence of being more than less of a human being,” the reviewer wrote about the main hero, adding that he could not forget “old keys-patterns,” and “the key to reality is to look for some key to it.” Thus, one cannot be surprised reading Kühn’s opinion that what was written about Cortázar was “with sense and without any sense, apart from accurate opinions and clichés” [...].

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179 Bugajski, Nowe Książki 1973, no. 2, pp. 11–12; Bukowska 1974, no. 20, p. 3; Wróblewski, Dookoła Świata, 1975, no. 13. p. 17.
180 Komorowski, Miesięcznik Literacki 1977, no. 3, p. 129.
181 Kwiatkowski, ibid.
The presence and meaning of erotic threads were stressed first of all in the reviews of *A Manual for Manuel*. Ewa Borkowska defined it as an erotic-moral blasphemy, being harmonised with the political rapacity of the writer.\(^{186}\) For Skłodowska, it was an act of affirmation of an erotic desire, a manifest demanding freedom from all bonds of taboo.\(^{187}\) It may seem surprising that most critics omitted the approval of terrorist activities that was clearly articulated in this novel. Those who discerned it looked for some kind of justification, following the maxim “the end justifies the means.” According to Ireneusz Felicjańczuk, the *guerrilla* contested a certain state of affairs in the name of permanent ethical values, while *A Manual for Manuel* “was to show that one should not identify ethics and law, approving tortures and murders in the name of temporary objectives.”\(^{188}\) Only Borkowska wrote straightforwardly that interpreting terrorism as a noble utopia was risky.\(^{189}\)

The most interesting critical texts concerned *Collected Short Stories*. Leszek Bugajski\(^{190}\) and Adam Elbanowski\(^{191}\) concluded that the non-chronological author’s order of the short stories was the key to interpret the book. The stories arranged in particular parts were connected by the fact that “another reality” was revealed in them in a different way, from a sense of being unable to go beyond the barrier of the rational works in “Ritos,” through blurring the border between reality and the world of imagination in “Juegos,” to experiencing “another” reality in “Pasajes.”

Summarising, the Polish critics concentrated on the formal features of Cortázar’s writing, the love stories and his attentiveness towards the existence of a world that could not be known through the senses and not accessible to the intellect. Generally, they omitted the political aspects of his prose and his clearly declared leftist views. Maria Bojarska, reviewing *Last Round*, put it straight that she was irritated by the intrusively given political message of the book.\(^{192}\) Therefore, the reception of the Argentinian writer’s prose in Poland was completely different from the one in Latin America where Cortázar was seen as


\(^{187}\) Skłodowska, Borkowska.


\(^{189}\) Borkowska, ibid.


the author of one novel – *Hopscotch*, and above all, as a polemist and political activist.193

The reviews of Cortázar’s books were full of positive, sometimes even enthusiastic, evaluations. The tone of some reviews showed exaltation to a great extent. The writer was described as “probably the greatest and surely most fashionable writer of Latin America,” an outstanding author and “a great Argentinian.”195 The critics ensured readers that beside several other contemporary Latin American writers, Cortázar won a permanent place in the history of the 20th century literature.197 His literary output was juxtaposed with the works of the greatest writers: Jean-Paul Sartre,198 Franz Kafka,199 Thomas Mann and Robert Musil.200 He was praised for his successful formal experiments, ironical distance and original sense of humour. The critics concluded:

Cortázar’s writing – to a great extent – is a sign and embodiment of the social transformations of the continent, the Hispanics’ culture-creative power that is being awakened.201

Negative opinions were much smaller in number and generally concerned Cortázar’s later works. Some reviewers regarded his novel *62: A Model Kit* as ectypepal and epigonic. They showed that good scenes and ideas were found next to empty, specious moments that were psychologically improbable.202 They accused the writer of producing artistic “ready-to wear clothes”:

Using the demand for Robbe-Grillets, Butors and Godards, like a skilful trader the author sold his book that was fashionably cut, attractively wrapped, not forgetting to advertise its “literary wall unit” properly.203

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193 Komorowski, *Miesięcznik Literacki* 1980, no. 5, pp. 132–133. Komorowski reminded readers that *Last Round* was translated only into Polish and published in 40,000 copies, a circulation bigger than the Spanish original.
201 Bauman, ibid.
They demanded to “revalue Cortázar,” seeing him as “typical fashionable writer who gives things invented by others in a perfectly made form.”

Without mincing his words, the reviewer for Kultura called Around the Day in Eighty Worlds a projection of a moral primitive. In his opinion, the author created pseudo-anthropology characterised by “all things at the service of illiteracy.”

Andrzej Hamerliński was irritated by the lack of indicators of cultural differences in Cortázar’s works. He thought that they could have been found in the writings of a novelist coming from any Western European country. He regarded Cortázar as an eminent but not pioneering writer.

Cortázar’s works did not convince Jerzy Pilch who called him “a secondary” author. In his review of Last Round, he showed that the model of total literature, combining different forms, styles and genres in one work, stopped proving to be right. Although the writer managed to show the chaos of reality, he did not meet the needs for clear values.

As it can be seen, Cortázar’s works evoked extreme emotions. They made some reviewers fall into a state of probably excessive exaltation. It should be added, however, that the texts filled with negative evaluation were not free from emotions and malice. Reliable analyses of the Argentinian writer’s works, for example, the extensive article about Hopscotch written by Jerzy Niecikowski and published in Literatura na Świecie, were exceptions.

4.4 The ways of realising the cognitive-evaluative function in critical texts concerning Spanish American prose

4.4.1 Critics as guides of culture

As I have mentioned in chapter two, in Poland the average level of knowledge about South America and its culture was low because of the lack of access to sources concerning this continent and because direct contacts with Latin America, not mentioning the administrative difficulties, required financial means that were beyond most Polish citizens’ capacities. The critics who tried to analyse books of Latin American writers in the late 1960s and the early 1970s were aware of that situation. They also knew that for Polish readers, Spanish American literature was a new phenomenon. Readers knew neither the names of contemporary writers nor representatives of the earlier generations. They were...
not familiar with the schools, trends and literary traditions. They had almost no references to the culture developed by inhabitants of Latin America. One can assume that this continent was not associated with the so-called high culture. Its picture, preserved on the pages of the suggestive reportages of Arkady Fiedler, which was close for many Poles, depicted the Hispanics as friendly, but rather simple and naïve people, not to say primitive ones. “Latin American literature reveals the continent about which we know less than about the surface of the Moon,” wrote the reviewer for *Echo Krakowa*.209

Some critics noted that from the perspective of the Polish reader, the literature of Latin America carried some essential cognitive values. The reviewer for *Kultura* showed that the novel *Dead Houses* by Otero Silva presented a 30-year history of Venezuela, a country which Poles did not know at all.210 In turn, the critics mentioning the values of the novel *Son of Man* by Roa Bastos wrote that it depicted the realities of Paraguay during Stroessner’s dictatorship.211

The critics who tried to discuss the works of Latin American writers in the Polish press faced the task of showing the new literary phenomenon and depicting the cultural background in which it developed. Most critics treated it seriously and tried to show the context of the origin of the Latin American works to Polish readers. A good example of that was the beginning of the review of the collection of short stories *The Man and the Rose (El hombre de la rosa)* by Manuel Rojas introducing the reader to the most important problems of the history of Latin America literature:

Regaining freedom by Latin American countries, independence from Spain or Portugal did not mean a complete break with the Iberian Peninsula. For many citizens of the new countries, the Iberian Peninsula was a spiritual homeland, as though – homeland of the whole huge continent. [...] When and how did the literature of particular Latin American countries stop being dependent on Spanish literature, when did Argentinian, Chilean and Columbian literature begin?212

Some reviewers thought it necessary to show the characteristics of the literature of a concrete country. Commenting on the edition of the first Polish translation of the novel by the Uruguayan Mario Benedetti, Komorowski explained:

The literature of Uruguay has been known in our country to a very small extent. [...] There have been many reasons for the lack of interest in this literary area. The first one

has undoubtedly been the limited character of the publishing market in this country. Because of that, the especially privileged form has always been short stories which being published in Sunday editions or in the known weekly *La Marcha* could reach a wider audience although the audience was limited to one country and to a single reception. Even such writers as Juan Carlos Onetti or Benedetti are above all authors of short stories. Another reason for the relatively low interest in Uruguayan literature is undoubtedly the fact that among Latin American countries Uruguay [...] has been a country where European literature and culture has had the deepest roots. Hence Uruguayan literature, completely not exotic for European readers, has not evoked such interests as Mexican or Argentinian literature.\(^\text{213}\)

In some cases, the subject matter of a work required the reviewer to show the historical background of the depicted events. It was suggested by the titles of the reviews of the Mexican novels created in the first half of the 20th century, “Mexican post-revolution triptych,”\(^\text{214}\) “In the cobs of the revolution,”\(^\text{215}\) “Novel of the Mexican revolution.”\(^\text{216}\) The reviews referred to the facts that inspired the origin of these works, i.e. the revolution of 1910 and its results:

> On the first days of February 1917, after seven years of fratricidal fights, one of the most progressive and democratic constitutions in the world was voted in Mexico. The previous constitution of 1857, placing the individual over the society, maintained the individualistic spirit, while in 1917, the scheme was reversed, placing the society over the individual. However, the collective spirit of this constitution was little beneficial for the Mexican nation.\(^\text{217}\)

*Życie Literackie*, in order to fill the gaps in the Polish readers’ knowledge about the Mexican revolution and its literary images, published a large article written by Joanna Petry entitled “A novel of the Mexican revolution.”\(^\text{218}\) The reviewers also focused on the meaning of the works for the culture of the whole of Latin America:

> Reaching certain European patterns “the novel of the Mexican revolution” together with *gauch*o literature created in Argentina were the first symptoms of the cultural independence of the “green continent.”\(^\text{219}\)


They also pointed to the literary trends related to these works. Reviewing Ciro Alegría’s novel *Broad and Alien is the World* (*El mundo es ancho y ajeno*), Komorowski explained the characteristics of the trend called indigenism:

A way to get to know the specificity of the Latin American reality was a trend in the literature of those countries called “indigenismo,” which according to the ambiguity of the term itself caused us to turn attention to the Indian nature and tribal character.220

In turn, Ryszard Olczak described the intellectual background of the author of the reviewed book *The Invention of Morel* (*La invención de Morel*) by Bioy Casares:

[…] The Argentinian Adolfo Bioy Casares belongs to the literary group “Sur” the same as Borges – rejecting the trend of Argentinian literature that is socially involved […] but it looks for the aesthetic, intellectual and metaphysical aspects.221

Sometimes the critics turned the reader’s attention to the circumstances of the origin of a given work, as in the case of the review of the famous *Legends of Guatemala* by the Nobel Prize winner Miguel Angel Asturias, whose author reminded the reader that the writer had become interested in the pre-Columbian past of his country during his stay in Paris, where in the library of the Sorbonne he came across the sacred books of the Indians: *Popol Vuh* and *Chilám Balám*.222

A quite common practice was to present a less or more detailed biography of a given writer and to list his most important books. Such detailed information about the author can be found in the review of *Paradiso* by Lezama Lima:

José Lezama Lima – a Cuban – was born in Havana in 1910 and died there in 1976. From his early childhood, he suffered from asthma, and his illness was one of the reasons why Lima hardly ever left Havana.223

This biography was written on more than two pages of *Nowe Książki*. Yet, biographical information included in reviews were usually more synthetic.224 Only those literary periodicals that had more space for book discussions could publish large reviews containing more data about a given writer, his or her work and the

context of its origin. At the same time, editors of such periodicals invited competent critics to collaborate with them.

Reviewers, knowing that they had deeper knowledge about Spanish American literature and culture than an average Polish reader, sometimes showed their superiority by demonstrating a conviction that the lack of knowledge about the origin of a given work and its background made it impossible for readers to understand it:

Since only the knowledge of the meanders and paradoxes of the spiritual and material culture of a nation, transmitted through an artistic synthesis, can allow us to have an authentic contact with the signs used by the literary structures,

Rodowska\textsuperscript{225} concluded reviewing \textit{Cantar de ciegos} by Fuentes, while another critic undersigned as “yo,” doubting the competences of Polish critics, cried out in \textit{Twórczość}:

Can you at all write anything real about Argentinian literature not having read \textit{Radiografía de la pampa} by E. Martinez Estrada or the collection of sketches \textit{De Sarmiento a Cortázar} by D. Viñas?\textsuperscript{226}

Komorowski expressed similar fears:

We still have an open question to which extent it is possible to interpret Borges without knowing \textit{Martín Fierro}, Marquéz without \textit{La Voragine}, Fuentes’ novels without knowing Azuela or Guzmán.\textsuperscript{227}

We can agree with the assumption that the history of Spanish American literature was not commonly known, but the fear that the lack of sufficient knowledge created barriers that Polish readers could not overcome seems exaggerated. Since we know that the universality of certain experiences and values causes that a literary work can be appreciated in a different context of its reception. Such an opinion seemed to be accepted by Komorowski several years later:

Latin American literature is for us so interesting first of all because it presents adventures of values that we can recognise as ours.\textsuperscript{228}

\textsuperscript{225} Rodowska, \textit{Nowe Książki} 1973, no. 12, p. 9.
\textsuperscript{226} yo, \textit{Twórczość} 1977, no. 12, pp. 161–162.
\textsuperscript{227} Komorowski, \textit{Nowe Książki} 1973, no. 23, p. 17.
\textsuperscript{228} Komorowski, \textit{Życie Literackie} 1979 no. 37, p. 13.
4.4.2 The form

The realisation of the cognitive-evaluative function in critical texts should also be revealed in attempts to ascribe a work to a concrete literary genre, to show it in the background of tradition and point to its pioneering elements. In other words, one of the critic’s tasks is to look at a literary work from the formal aspect.

Reviewing Spanish American prose, critics focused on the construction of a given work as well as various means and techniques used in it. It seems that even those critics who had no specialist knowledge about Spanish American literature, admitted that they were able to analyse the texts in a more or less profoundly formal way. They must have assumed that the knowledge of the theoretical-literary apparatus was enough to describe any work, even one created in a distant cultural region.\(^{229}\)

Looking at the numerous reviews of the boom, one can see the authors’ uncertainty caused obviously by their encounters with this new literary phenomenon. Some critics confessed that they could not find any key to interpret a work.

Writing about *Son of Man* you follow the principle “I can manage – I cannot manage,” as Witkacy used to say. Should we say openly that it is a masterpiece? Such an evaluation should be justified. And how can I justify it when I am still in the middle of the world created by the writer? Perhaps I can quote him? But which fragments? None is representative of the whole book. Thus, why should I write a review at all? Because the book is a masterpiece. Consequently, the circle is closed. But in the end, I may not manage…\(^{230}\)

the reviewer for *Kultura* admitted frankly. Another reviewer for *Nowy Wyraz* confessed that she could not understand Borges’ prose.\(^{231}\) However, a more frequent practice to mask one’s incompetence or fear of expressing one’s own opinion was to hide oneself behind the authority of some undefined “criticism.” For instance, Grudzińska wrote about *El apando* by José Revueltas that it was “commonly regarded as outstanding by literary criticism,” not saying precisely whether she meant Latin American critics, Spanish critics or those of some other nationality.\(^{232}\) In turn, in the review of *Holy Place* by Fuentes, the same author quoted many evaluations concerning this book published in the Mexican press. Her own opinion was placed at the end of the review and had only two sentences:

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\(^{229}\) In this context, I find it difficult to agree with Elbanowski (1980:306), claiming that the formal side of works is “as a rule completely omitted in reviews.”


In Poland, Latin American literature has its lovers fascinated with its specific mood as well as beauty and richness of the language. *Holy Place* is a book that has these attractive values although I would not recommend it to those for whom it would be the first contact with the literature of this continent.\(^\text{233}\)

Another strategy to mask one's ignorance or fear of presenting one's own opinions was to use clichés that could appear in a review of almost any book. In the texts dedicated to the second edition of Sábató's *On Heroes and Tombs* (1977), we can read that it discusses the eternal problems of humanity: search for the truth, borders between good and evil, the question about the sense of life and the impossibility of reaching consent.\(^\text{234}\) Some critics tried to find shelter by using a pseudo-scientific style, often balancing on the border or at the verge of being understood:

> The irrationality of declaration and the randomness of identity and alliance […] undermine individual aspirations, question the honesty of people's ambitions; only in their stoicism, they show the valuable vulnerability towards betrayal. A philosophy of abnegation? – no, rather the discursive reasons of force.\(^\text{235}\)

Analysing the attitude of German critics towards Spanish American prose, Brown (1994:96) showed that they treated it as a kind of sub-genre having characteristics that could not be found in literature created in other parts of the world. Therefore, they stressed its specificity and uniqueness. It does not seem that the attitude of Polish criticism during the boom was similar. Polish reviewers looked for features that would be common with works of world literature in order to bring the prose of a new type closer to Polish readers and to refer it to some known literary context.

One of the strategies leading to this goal was to point to books or authors that were to some extent similar to the discussed work. At the same time, such a technique was of an ennobling character – juxtaposing with a renowned work suggested a good quality of the reviewed book. Being aware of what kinds of works entered the circulation of the Polish literary culture, reviewers referred to the readers' knowledge to help them place Spanish American works on the map of world literature. And so *The Fair* (*La feria*) by Juan José Arreola was called “Stendhal’s mirror” although it aroused doubts whether, because of the unusual composition of the book, i.e., juxtaposing short monologues depicting the life of the society of the Mexican little town Zapotlán, it could be called a novel.\(^\text{236}\) In


\(^{235}\) Lubelska, *Nowy Wyraz* 1973, no. 5, pp. 147–149.

\(^{236}\) Tarska, *Echo Krakowa* 1972, no. 289, p. 4.
Borges’ works, they found features that were common with Joyce’s writings. In *Where the Air Is Clear* by Fuentes, they saw inspirations with the prose of Sartre and Faulkner, while in *The Good Conscience* of that author, Komorowski found the influences of Benito Pérez Galdós and Honoré Balzac. Onetti’s *The Shipyard* (*El astillero*) reminded some reviewers of Kafka’s novels, whereas others – *Death in Venice* by Thomas Mann. The writing of García Márquez was interpreted as a literary polemic with Faulkner although Komorowski regarded any similarities with this writer as overestimated. In turn, the tragic grotesqueness of the situations of García Marquéz’s heroes was to, in Leszek Żuliński’s opinion, come from Kafka’s prose, and the irrationalism, full of fantasy, fulfilled a similar function as in the works of Mikhail Bulgakov. Kühn perversely called *The Obscene Bird of Night* by Donoso as

an extraordinary novel that makes the impression that as if some Balzac or another demon for realism wrote it after having taken a dose of LSD.

Reviewers rarely saw parallels with Polish writers’ works. Borkowska saw some convergence between Borges and Teodor Parnicki in the attempts to go beyond the dimensions of time and reality, while in the way of creating Borges’ own mythology and world, she discerned similarities with Bruno Schultz. Komorowski thought that *Un tal José Salomé* by Arturo Azuela resembled the novels of the Polish writer Wiesław Myśliwski.

The critics also tried to define the status of the genres used by Latin American writers. *A Plan for Escape* by Bioy Casares was to combine threads of a detective story and spy thriller. In the novel *The Invention of Morel* written by that author,
the critics saw elements of a corsair-adventure novel and science-fiction. In *Miesięcznik Literacki*, the book was said to be

a simply excellent, gripping fantasy-adventure novel, with a skilfully interwoven romance, having a well-thought plot and extraordinary mood.

According to Komorowski, *Aura* by Fuentes was an elaborate form of a horror story. *El secuestro del general* by Aguilera Malta was recognised as a political novel of a grotesque-prophetic character. It was shown that *All Green Shall Perish (Todo verdor perecerá)* by Eduardo Mallea was a rare example of a successful Spanish American psychological novel.

The most common analyses of the writer’s technique concerned the most popular writers of the boom. Cortázar, Carpentier, García Márquez and Vargas Llosa were first of all seen as those who renewed the novel, a genre experiencing such a severe crisis in Europe in the 1960s that it was doomed to disappear. The reason why readers abandoned novels was their being over-refined and excessively avant-garde.

*Hopscotch* was attractive by its being different from what Polish receivers were used to reading. The complete novelty was that the author regarded the work as incomplete, and thus he directly invited readers to co-create it. Niecikowski claimed that for the first time in history Cortázar created a work that did not await an ideal reader. The author drew the reader into his game that seemed to have no end since the number of possible readings was unlimited. This feature constituted the uniqueness of *Hopscotch*.

In their reviews of Carpentier’s works published before the beginning of the boom in Poland, the critics noted that the Cuban author returned to the 19th century sources of the novel. This was evident in his large descriptions, strong epic constructions, building clear-cut figures and thrilling plots. The author spared no effort in depicting the epoch in detail, but he also saturated his work with a modern historical thinking concentrated on analysing the complex relationships.
between the individual and society. In that way, he revived the formula of the historical novel that was full of adventure elements.\footnote{Klimowicz, Nowe Książki 1966, no. 16, pp. 114–115, Wyka, Miesięcznik Literacki 1966, no. 4, pp. 120–122.}

Polish critics faced many problems with interpreting \textit{One Hundred Years of Solitude}. They saw it as a realistic family saga,\footnote{Tremer, Trybuna Ludu 1974, no. 139, p. 8; Baterowicz, Tygodnik Powszechny 1974, no. 31, p. 6.} written in a traditional way without any “modern fanciful additions.”\footnote{Kragen, Dziennik Polski 1974, no. 116, p. 6.} Some expressed contrary opinions that the author gave up using realism and turned to the creationist convention.\footnote{Henzel, Sigma 1974/75, no. 2, p. 26.} They stressed the natural skill of García Márquez’s storytelling.\footnote{Pałłasz, Kultura 1974, no. 22, p. 12.} \textit{One Hundred Years of Solitude} was regarded as the unquestionable \textit{opus magnum} of the Columbian writer. Hence all his earlier works, of which some (\textit{In Evil Hour, Big Mama’s Funeral, No One Writes to the Colonel}) were published in Poland before \textit{One Hundred Years of Solitude}, and some (\textit{Eyes of the Blue Dog – Ojos de perro azul} and \textit{Leaf Storm}) were published later, were interpreted as an introduction to the masterpiece\footnote{Marrodán, Nowe Książki 1971, no. 19, pp. 1260–1261; Marrodán, Nowe Książki 1974, no. 16, pp. 45–46; Lubicz, 1977, no. 24, p. 10; Lichniak, Słowo Powszechne 1978, no. 21, p. 4.} depicting the “pre-history of Macondo.”\footnote{Pilch, Życie Literackie 1976, no. 47, p. 15.}

Although Vargas Llosa’s works evoked mixed emotions, from a limitless admiration to strong disapproval, the critics generally agreed that the writer mastered his writing technique to the full. In some critics’ opinions, one of his most famous books, \textit{Conversation in the Cathedral}, was a testimony of breaking with the convention of realism;\footnote{Henzel, Sigma 1973/74, no. 7, p. 25.} in other’s opinions, it fitted into the realistic categories.\footnote{Umiński, Kierunki 1976, no. 29, p. 10.} In the reviews of \textit{Conversation in the Cathedral} and \textit{The Green House}, the critics noticed the film-collage structures of the works,\footnote{Umiński, Słowo Powszechne 1976, no. 47, p. 15.} the skill to conduct a multi-layered narrative\footnote{Henzel, Sigma 1973/74, no. 7, p. 25, Umiński, ibid.} and the introduction of the technique of ‘stream of consciousness.’\footnote{Umiński, ibid.} However, the reviewers warned readers that the excess of

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257 Tremer, Trybuna Ludu 1974, no. 139, p. 8; Baterowicz, Tygodnik Powszechny 1974, no. 31, p. 6.
262 Pilch, Życie Literackie 1976, no. 47, p. 15.
263 Umiński, Kierunki 1976, no. 29, p. 10.
264 Henzel, Sigma 1973/74, no. 7, p. 25.
266 Henzel, Sigma 1973/74, no. 7, p. 25, Umiński, ibid.
267 Umiński, ibid.
literary tricks made it difficult to follow the chronology of the plot and consequently, the reception of these novels. Tadeusz Nyczek regarded the composition of *Conversation in the Cathedral* as a fine piece of work but tiring for readers.

Looking at the few articles dedicated to Vargas Llosa’s works, our attention should be turned to the text of Krzysztof Rutkowski who distinguished the fundamental laws which, in his opinion, governed Vargas Llosa’s writing. They were: the law of cyclical construction realised through the concurrence of the narrative tenses thanks to which the literary way of presenting the world became more dynamic, the law of “dialogue collision,” the law of the “left side” of the material, i.e. the author did not mask the literary tricks he used, and the law of freed imagination concerning the unfolding of the time of the presented reality into the time of the projection of the protagonist’s consciousness.

As for the critical texts about Borges’ works, one should share Elbanowski’s opinion (1980:305) that they evoked “the biggest number of doubts and objections.” “Many funny (in their seriousness) studies have been written about Borges” – wrote some mysterious “yo” in *Twórczość*. There were no attempts to conduct reliable analyses; instead there were commentaries “beside” the discussed work that Elbanowski called “a kind of meta-creativity pushing the substance to the margin.” Sometimes, the critics confessed this “meta-creativity” straightforwardly like Klemens Szaniawski in his article entitled “Glosa do *Doktryny czasu cyklicznego*” [Gloss to *The Doctrine of Cycles*]. We read among other things:

> It seems that Borges’ imagination was stimulated by a certain statement of set theory, really rather surprising. It says that a set of points that make up the side of a square is equinumerous with a set of points that make up its interior […] The same character of point space creates a limitless number of sets, realised without repetitions in a limited time.

These speculations on the mathematical-physical themes extended through several paragraphs of the article.

Many reviewers noted that Borges had drawn from numerous literary traditions and that his works indicated inspirations from various cultures.
Critics about Spanish American prose during the boom (1968–1981)

[...] Borges, showing that he knew scientific papers, practises the myth-creating cultural ‘bricolage’, i.e., breaks up the fixed parts of the whole into pieces and organises them in a completely different way, in different original systems [...],

– stated Chądzyńska. This attitude towards Borges’ writing sometimes led to passing judgements that were weird in their extremes. ‘The writings of Borges are secondary, a library extract, weaving from someone’s else ball,’ Wojciech Żukrowski proved, continuing his thought:

every work was conceived from literary stereotypes, in a way it is secondary, parasitic although it astonishes us with an idea; it resembles orchids living in a broken rotten tree.

In the meantime, Komorowski warned against bringing Borges’ writing down to a combination, and at another place, he noted:

It seems that the fundamental mistake of the Polish reader [...] was that he interpreted Borges’ writing as an example of an elaborated and over-intellectualised literary game, that he treated his writing in the ludic spirit as juggling actually petrified and mummified cultural forms.

Looking at the few reviews of Paradiso by Lezama Lima, first of all we note attempts to provide formal descriptions. The critics stressed that the borders between prose and poetry were blurred. In their opinions, the compositional principle of Paradiso was its over-organisation characteristic of poetry, implying that

the esthetical effect results from some clash – from some unusual co-existence in time and space – of phenomena, their features and forms of existence.

However, the final effect of conducting narrative from the perspective of the poetical vision of the world did not turn out to be satisfactory for all the critics. Some thought that Paradiso “breaks into a number of fragments, which are sometimes poetical and sometimes essayistic, frequently of great beauty.” They paid attention to multitudes of metaphors, allusions and citations that require readers’ erudition and involvement. Rutkowski did not hesitate to call

274 Chądzyńska, Odra 1977, no. 1, p. 33.
276 Komorowski, Nowe Książki 1981, no. 4, pp. 68–69.
277 Komorowski, Miesięcznik Literacki 1976, no. 6, pp. 131–132
279 Godlewski, Literatura 1979, no. 35 p. 4.
the work of the Cuban writer “one of the most important treatises that have been created in our century.”

4.4.3 Summary

The analyses of several dozen critical texts concerning Spanish American prose produced during the boom allow me to state that the reviewers did their best to be guides to foreign cultures and literatures. On the one hand, they quoted more or less detailed information about writers, literary currents, works and their origins, and on the other hand, they tried to refer the discussed works to a literary tradition that the Polish reader knew. The effects of their efforts varied and depended on the critics’ competences, on their knowledge of Latin America and the sources that they were able to reach. One should remember that the access to reliable sources, and above all to the foreign literary and cultural press, was very limited during the times of the Polish People’s Republic. Thus, a lot depended on the reviewers’ entrepreneurship and personal contacts.

The reviewers often attempted to discuss formal aspects of literary works in the conviction that analysing their structures and literary tricks would help understand the works. Many a time they overestimated their skills. Applying critical-literary methods that proved sufficient in analysing European or North American prose more frequently led to blurring the image of a work than explaining some of its aspects.

It was the cognitive-evaluative function of criticism that was realised in these reviews. Their addressees were predominantly potential readers of the analysed works. The reviewers very rarely addressed the writers; the postulative function can be seen in their articles only sporadically. One of the very few attempts to fulfil this task can be found in the review of Rulfo’s The Burning Plain and Other Stories, written by Stanislaw Stanuch. He claimed that the fictional realism in its 19th century form stopped to be attractive to contemporary readers. Spanish American prose proposed a new formula of realism since on the one hand, it used the achievements of the 20th century novel and at the same time,

it preserved the love of the concrete, ability to care for the fate of every individual and the skill of combining patriotism with sensitivity for social matters.

In his opinion, the prose created in Latin America had the potential that was necessary to create a new literary pattern; that could inspire authors who wrote...

282 Rutkowski, op. cit., p. 134.
283 Stanuch, Dziennik Polski 1971, no. 91, p. 5.
in languages other than Spanish. A similar tone was adopted by Piotr Skórzyński in his article under the significant title “An overlooked kingdom” in Tygodnik Powszechny. He regarded the publication of *Hopscotch* as one of the most important events in the Polish literary life and warned readers that not noticing Cortázar’s writing can cost our literature as much as having overlooked Joyce’s works earlier.\(^{284}\)

Yet, this vision was not fulfilled. Ten years later, Andrzej Ogrodowczyk announced the fall of the myth of the hermetic nature of Spanish American literature since it became a source of inspiration for writers from other continents.\(^{285}\)

### 4.5 Exoticism, magic and magical realism

Without any scrupulous calculations one can easily discern that the most frequently occurred words in the Polish critical texts concerning Spanish American prose were exoticism (*egzotyka*) and magic (*magia*) as well as exotic (*egzotyczny*) and magical (*magiczny*).

According to *Mały słownik języka polskiego* (1989:158) “*egzotyka*” means all features typical of countries with a completely different climate and civilisation; otherness, strangeness, exoticism, and “*egzotyczny*” is typical of countries of a different climate and civilisation, especially subtropical, coming from these countries; foreign, alien, overseas.

Thus, the concept of exoticism reminds Poles of distant countries, those characterised by completely different climatic conditions, typical of the areas located around the equatorial zone. Moreover, inhabitants of those lands have built a culture that differs from ours. Quotations from the corpus of the Polish language show that certain plants and fruit are exotic for us (yucca, lemon, avocado, pomegranates, palms, Douglas fir), some countries or provinces (Brazil, New Caledonia) and elements of the landscape (tropical beaches, crystal clear seas, islands).\(^{286}\)

In the Polish language, exoticism also connotes difference, otherness; something that we do not encounter in our daily experiences and what does not

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\(^{284}\) Skórzyński, *Tygodnik Powszechny* 1971, no. 29, p. 4.
\(^{286}\) http://korpus.pwn.pl/results.php?k_set=1&k_find=egzotyczny&k_free=free&k_limit=300&k_ile=100&k_left=10&k_right=10&k_order=Center
necessarily result from the geographical location. These meanings are confirmed by quotations from the corpus of the Polish language:

The fascination of the Czechoslovakian culture was based first of all on the feeling of otherness, attractive exoticism. Exoticism that seemed to be included within our possibilities and culture, but still, as it turned out, unexpectedly inaccessible.\(^\text{287}\)

If in modern Poland something resembled the local councils of the nobility, these would be the assemblies of fine artists. The April assembly in Lublin resembled the 13 earlier ones in many ways: at least in its noble-democratic-artistic exoticism.\(^\text{288}\)

In the first case, “exoticism” referred to Czechoslovakia, our neighbour that appeared to be culturally and not geographically distant. In the other one, it referred to the elements of our culture, alien to us because it concerned distant times. “Exotic” also means something that fascinates us with its otherness although being part of our reality:

Lusia told me only about her colleagues from the GS cooperative, about the manager’s fraud, female neighbours, who was with whom and when. It was exotic and quite interesting for the first several meetings.\(^\text{289}\)

In the Polish reviews of the early 1970s, Latin America appeared as a land that was archetypically exotic, fulfilling the condition of “oversees” and different in its climate, landscape and culture.

In the second half of our century, a journey to the Amazonian basin is an endeavour that is much riskier than a space journey […]. On the Amazon, people still disappear without any traces; the jungle digests the bodies of its victims more completely than the ocean covered by a radio signal network. […] There are old thick forests of a purely primordial nature, huts inhabited by people who eat roots and wild bee honey and who can neither light a fire nor kill

– was the image of South America depicted by a reviewer for Echo Krakowa towards the end of the 1960s.\(^\text{290}\) Similarly, Wanda Kragen saw the nature of Latin America as a dangerous and unpredictable element, while the Hispanic – as people whose attitudes and behaviours were incomprehensible for us.

\(^{290}\) Tarska, Echo Krakowa 1968, no. 229, p. 4.
In this novel, its exoticism is wonderful and extraordinary – exoticism of not only the environment in which the plot takes place, not only its nature, destroying the works of human hands by its horrible, brutal exuberance, but first of all, the people are exotic, all of them marked by suffering and loneliness, alien to us by their culture and customs, all the ways of their lives […]

– Kragen wrote about *One Hundred Years of Solitude*. The inseparable elements of this nature were tropical heavy rains and unbearable and paralysing heat, phenomena that were difficult to understand for citizens of a Central European city.  

From the Polish perspective, both the customs and rituals of the Indians from the Andes depicted in Alegria’s novel *Broad and Alien is the World* turned out to be exotic. So was the attitude of the protagonists in his novel *The Golden Serpent (La serpiente de oro)* that was devoid of forms and falsity characterised of people being under the influence of the urban culture. The rafters from the Amazonian basin:

> can still feel the spicy taste of life […]. They do not ponder on the sense of their lives but only think about how to live their lives, to make them wonderful.

Exoticism could be a direct effect of referring to certain poetics as it was in the case of Borges’ stories in which the application of suitable artistic means made the unreal world have the appearance and status of reality.

The number of translations and the increasing popularity of Spanish American prose caused that readers expected the next publications to meet the criteria of “exoticism.” In the reviews of some books, there were warnings for potential readers if the work could not receive such a label. Komorowski also explained that Uruguay was the most European country of Latin America, hence the literature of this country would not seem exotic for Poles. The Argentinian writer Mallea seemed to be a quite universal artist, and consequently in our eyes, he could not be seen as an exotic author. In fact, Komorowski placed his works outside the boom, which made them be in some opposition to the most popular books in Poland for which this trend was to be a common denominator.

293 Komorowski, *Nowe Książki* 1975, no. 8, p. 25.  
Discussions about the problem of corruption in a country having stable capitalist production attitudes or psychological novels were regarded as “non-exotic.”

Marródan’s statement is not unreasonable in that the term “exoticism,” de facto showing the attitude of superiority, helped Europe accept a different culture many times.298 However, the excess of foreign elements often became an obstacle for readers. When more and more Spanish American works appeared on the Polish market, the lack of characteristics customarily ascribed to the tropical regions, such as the richness of colours, fertile soil, joy, unburdened people, in some works began evoking critics’ astonishment and puzzlement.299 The reality depicted by Latin American writers considerably differed from this stereotype and was far from the postcard, idyllic picture:

The ruthlessness of nature, intensified by its cyclicality, surely symbolised by rain, is depicting a new image of hell: this is everyday reality which is repeated monotonously […]; this is also the fear of the advent of evil times300 – wrote Kalicki about García Márquez’s prose. The gap between the European culture and Latin American culture many a time turned out to be so wide that at first it caused discouragement leading to the rejection of some work. According to the reviewer for Kultura, Deep Rivers (Los ríos profundos) by José María Arguedas was

a book that is […] exotic in many ways. It is exotic in its description of the child’s experiences. It is exotic as a testimony to a distant culture. Finally, it is exotic as a product of equally distant political, social and moral relationships. All of that constitutes a world that I have never seen and will not surely see. […] Exoticism is […] very distant, but in its colours, it is dim and not very effective. In fact, there is no reason to become interested in it at all.301

However, the critic admitted that having such artistic skills, Arguedas managed to build a bridge thanks to which the plot and problems presented in the book made him read it with interest. In another critic’s opinion, the course of the heroes’ fates in One Hundred Years of Solitude might have seemed incomprehensible for European readers since they did not follow the values which were important from their points of view, such as money, career and love.302

299 Kalicki, Twórczość 1975, no. 1, p. 132.
300 Kalicki, ibid, p. 131.
301 Kultura 1973, no. 24, p. 3.
302 Czeszko, Nowe Książki 1974, no. 14, pp. 18–19.
In some cases, the barrier of otherness seemed to be insurmountable. Because of
the organic connection with the documents of pre-Columbian culture, Legends of
Guatemala (Leyendas de Guatemala) by Asturias appeared to European readers as
a hermetic and unfathomable work. Rulfo’s prose was almost completely ignored
by Polish critics, while for West European critics it proved to be shocking. In
the few reviews that appeared in Poland during the boom, their authors emphasised its
drastic nature and attitude towards death that could not be understood from the
European perspective. In Marródan’s opinion, this brutal vision of the world was a
serious obstacle to understand the Argentinian writer’s works:

Readers from our continent will accept Juan Rulfo’s novel or short story as the usage of
this or that narrative technique or as some contribution to anthropology […] – however, they
will not accept a vision of the world and human being that is too cruel in their
opinion.

The Polish critics’ attempts to place the new Spanish American prose among
the renowned works of the world literature can be recognised as endeavours to
familiarise it, to break down the barrier of its otherness and misunderstanding. The
reality depicted in this prose, which was distant from the stereotyped exoticism,
appeared to be alien and incomprehensible; the rules of that reality seemed
completely different from the ones adopted by our culture. Polish readers were
not able to refer numerous Spanish American works to any element of the non-
linguistic reality with which they were familiar. The horizons of the knowledge
of the writer and of the reader had hardly anything in common. As a consequence, it seemed more effective to get to know this literature by emphasising the
questions related to the structure of works and their formal solutions. This tactic
was realised by seeking parallels that could be present in Polish readers’ awareness
and choosing an interpretative key according to the known rules, which
was discussed in the previous section. When the reviewers suggested to look at
García Marqués’s works through the prism of Faulkner’s works, they sent a clear
message to the readers: it is the type of prose that you know, and the difference
is its setting.

According to Skłodowska, the technique thanks to which the impenetrable
reality of Latin America appealed to European readers was magical realism. She saw the success of this literature in “the skilful presentation of exoticism.”

303 Skłodowska, Tygodnik Kulturalny 1980, no. 23, p. 11.
305 Marródan, ibid.
306 Skłodowska, Tygodnik Kulturalny 1980, no. 23, p. 11.
Through his works, Gabriel García Márquez introduces us to the exotic Caribbean world. [...] Marquéz’s short stories, simply swollen with the tales, myths and fables of the Caribbean, are mixed with surprisingly realistic pictures of life – was written about *The Incredible and Sad Tale of Innocent Eréndira and Her Heartless Grandmother.*

The Polish critics recognised Carpentier as the creator of the conception “lo real maravilloso,” i.e. miraculous reality. Its source was to be his fascination with the abundant and untamed nature of the Caribbean which the writer observed with the eyes of a thrilled outsider. As a result, the Polish critics dealing with Spanish American prose lost the European origin of this term. This was in a way justified because some writers and critics, in particular Alejo Carpentier, categorically denied Europe any participation in creating magical realism, restricting the possibility of the existence and perception of the miraculous reality – “lo real maravilloso” – only to the territories of both Americas or even only to the Caribbean (Mroczkowska-Brandt 2009:18).

The “marvelousness” of the Caribbean landscape did not, however, guarantee the quality of the prose which used to describe it. It had to be artistically reshaped. Therefore, the technique of magical realism fulfilled the cognitive function for reality, naming the areas that had not been named in literature so far. The use of this technique caused that Hispanic prose assumed the characteristics of irrationality, which was to result directly from the irrational character of the reality of Latin America. In García Márquez’s works, differently than in Carpentier’s works, reality was observed, as it were, from the inside, thanks to which exoticism appeared in the appropriate dimension, not as glitter, but as an element

309 In Poland, two large monographs dedicated to magical realism have been published. The first one, *Zjawy, szaleństwo i śmierć. Fantastyka i realizm magiczny w literaturze hispanoamerykańskiej* [Ghosts, Madness and Death. Fantasy and Magical Realism in Hispanic Literature] by Tomasz Pindel (2004), focuses on Latin American prose. In the other, *Przeczucia innego porządku. Mapa realizmu magicznego w literaturze światowej XX i XXI wieku* [Intuitions About Another Order. The Map of Magical Realism in the World Literature of the 20th and the 21st Centuries] by Katarzyna Mroczkowska-Brandt, the term is understood in a broader sense as a trend revealed in literatures of various countries. In both studies, one can find large analyses of the usage of this term and interpretations of the works that meet the criteria of belonging to this trend.
of common experience for a certain group of people. In other words, what seemed to Polish or European readers improbable, from the perspective of Hispanic receivers it could be a realistic background. Using this technique caused that the distinction between reality and fiction was blurred, and that two worlds: the one perceived with the senses and the one inaccessible to the senses, co-existed. Further, magical realism was interpreted as a modern realisation of the American myth, America as paradise made flesh, as a vision born from the tiredness of classicism and logic as well as longing for the old style sea voyages. The foundation of magical realism was the folkloric origin of the way of depicting as well as the permanent setting in “the plasma of folk morality and spiritual culture.”

In the critics’ opinions, the concept of time – different from the European one – was inseparably connected with magical realism. They pointed to García Márquez as the first writer from Latin America who gave up the traditional chronometry. In his work, time was measured not according to the calendar but to consecutive generations. It becomes a historical time characterised by myth.

This is how History and Myth are interwoven: time that passes and time which we order to rotate. [...] García Márquez’s saga is the description of a process that makes the history of the Buendía family transform into a myth.

In Donoso’s The Obscene Bird of Night, the chronometry is measured by myth that works its way into – and between – the two main layers of the novel, that unites it and consolidates it just as it connects the present tense and past tense, today and history. [...] And moreover, all the stories belonging to the present [...] are subsequent incarnations of myth, modernisations of the 17th century legend.
In García Márquez’s *Leaf Storm*, time is divided and subordinated to the course of personal experiences. Similarly, “Fuentes does not burden himself with chronology,” as one of the reviewers of *The Death of Artemio Cruz* stated, whereas another stressed that the events depicted in the novel followed the order that occurred in the consciousness of the dying hero.

The fascination with various dimensions of time was noticed in Carpentier’s works. It was to result from his conception of Latin American reality in which different stages of civilisation co-existed. Subsequently, chronology was replaced by a synthesis of history, as in the novel *The Kingdom of This World*. Carpenter’s masterly technique allowed him to do literary anything with time and space.

Nonetheless, according to a large group of critics, magical realism was not a new writing technique or new literary trend, but in the Hispanic writers’ works it was predominantly related to the presence of magical elements understood rather literary as “all beliefs and practices based on the conviction of the existence of supernatual powers that can be controlled and invoked.” *One Hundred Years of Solitude* was classified as a “typical” work of magical realism directly because of the practices which it depicted and which were regarded as magical. For similar reasons, *The Autumn of the Patriarch* was recognised as “the peak” of this direction. The characteristics of magical realism were

the levitation of beautiful Remedios, who before her astonished relatives took to the skies from the yard where she had used to pour grain to her hens, the dead constantly circling every corner of the house; the raid of thousands of butterflies announcing death or rainfall of yellow flowers that were falling from the sky throughout the night during which Arcadio Buendía passed away.

Asturias’ *A Kind of Mulatto* was given as a “classic example of the so-called magical realism.” The main heroine was seen as a signal of the world of Indian legends and beliefs as well as the “pre-Guatemalan medium of the magical world.” The reviewer for *Kultura* continued:

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324 Słodowska, *Tygodnik Kulturalny* 1980, no. 20, p. 3.
327 Źródło: http://www.pwn.pl/?module=multisearch&ksearch=magia, 2.03.2010.
This book is about the magic of South America, its history, philosophy, geography, geology, demonology and imagination.331

The novel *Garabombo the Invisible* (*Historia de Garabombo el Invisible*) by Scorza was included to magical realism because of the invisibility of the main protagonist, the divination from coca leaves, the activities motivated by magic, ghosts and extraordinary expansion of time.332 Komorowski’s remark that magical realism did not depend on the descriptions of shamanistic practices was an isolated case.333 Czeszko simply ascribed the popularity of *One Hundred Years of Solitude* to the prevailing fashion for spells, magic, divination and all kinds of esoteric practices, predicting that when the fashion faded the book would be forgotten.334

In the late 1970s, the term “magical realism” gradually expanded its meaning. It was defined as “a challenge to common sense.”335 Contacts with the inexplicable began to be treated as an indicator of Spanish American literature:

The actions of irrational powers and the existence of extraordinary behaviours, all kinds of friendly terms with the non-human world, whether the world of animals or plants or spirits, everything that is obvious and not subject to commenting.336

The Polish critics began using the concept of magical realism referring to various Spanish American works if the books included elements that could not be qualified as realistic.

The realistic and at the same time mythological and philosophical novel by Casares should be certainly counted as a work of magical realism, although at times we are tempted to call is “magical” since in the novel all things are dreams, visions and desires, – was written about *The Dream of Heroes* (*El sueño de los héroes*).337 Cortázar was said to have sought elements of magic and myth in our thinking about the world.338 Sometimes it was signalled that the term “magical realism” was misused:

When someone writes about “the curious alliance between poetic magic and political realism,” about “the co-existence between the rational world of revolution and the world

of the baroque splendour of experiences and magical imaginations,” it should be defined which of the Cuban realities fulfil magical functions.339

Otherwise, the allegedly extraordinary, especially from the Cuban perspective, phenomena might have occurred to be rationally explainable. This reasonable view shown in the review of the novel La última mujer y el próximo combate by Cofiño was, however, an exception. Despite the efforts of some critics trying to explain the misunderstandings that had arisen around magical realism, the term became a kind of a word-key that was almost automatically associated with Latin American prose. Elbanowski (1980:295) noted that

in all of the critical works, magical realism is the term that is to constitute the essence of Latin American prose, i.e., a certain literary way of seeing and experiencing reality reflecting the whole richness and originality of the continent.

In his opinion, the common characteristics of Latin American works was blurring the distinction between reality and fiction as well as relativizing truth and fantasy, while magical realism should be recognised as one kind of this convention.340 Yet, the term turned out to be so suggestive that until today it has been functioned colloquially and almost as a synonym of the prose of the Green Continent – “it became a label that has been attached to this literature.”341

The identification of Spanish American prose with magical realism caused that the concept of exoticism as referred to this prose underwent a profound evolution and began to be referred to wonder and magic. The reviewer for Literatura na Świecie described Elena Poniatowska’s novel Here’s to You, Jesusa (Hasta no verte Jesús mío), published in 1977, as being reversely exotic as she did not find these elements in it:

It is no longer the kind of exoticism leading to discovering weirdness, uncanniness, wonder and magic, to which we have got used to reading the translations of, for example, Márquez’s or Donoso’s works. The otherness of Here’s to You, Jesusa is its authenticity, which seemed not to occur in this literature. Poniatowska introduces us to realism, not a fictional one, typical of the novel – in the traditional sense – but to the authentic realism of truth referred to life, to life that has been conditioned literally by historical time and inscribed in this time.342

340 Elbanowski seemed to accept the thesis of Kalicki who pointed to the neo-baroque quality as a characteristic of Latin American works.
4.6 Politics, violence, social threads

The entanglement of Spanish American prose in politics is a phenomenon that has been seen and stressed both in numerous afterwords to works edited within the series of Wydawnictwo Literackie and Polish critical texts. In Nowe Książki, Urbański showed that in Latin America the ideological confrontation has […] the most dynamic character, and the novels originated in these conditions are difficult to be seen only from the perspective of literary tradition.\footnote{Urbaniski, Nowe Książki 1979, no. 12, p. 38.}

The fight aimed at transforming the reality was regarded as the main task of writers living in this continent.\footnote{(zm), Kobieta i Życie 1976, no. 43, p. 3.}

It is noteworthy that political threads were discussed in the press reviews from different points of view.

4.6.1 Reflecting the official propaganda

There was a group of critics who in Spanish American prose saw an ideology that was close to the worldview promoted in Poland by the official propaganda. This attitude was visible, for example, in the reviews of the Venezuelan works belonging to the so-called literature of violence. We can find statements that are now astonishing, and which seem to be rather manifestations of wishful thinking than the real record of the state of mind:

In Poles’ opinions, the Green Continent is first of all Bolivia and the greatness of the spiritual leader of the struggle for social-political liberation – Ernesto Guevara, called El Che – we can read in the review of Adriano González León’s novel Pais portátil, whose fundamental theme was the urban guerrillas in Caracas in the 1960s.\footnote{Turczyński, Tygodnik Kulturalny 1976, no. 42, p. 4.}

The ideological perspective allowed the critic to justify the activities that today would be condemned unambiguously. The reviewer for the weekly Itd described the guerrilla as a social phenomenon, having historical reasons, and protested against recognising it as an expression of the pathology of certain groups of young people or as “Cuban export of revolution,” thundering, “we cannot agree to put into one bag these groups with the Bader-Meinhoff group or Carlos’ terrorists” because history explains and confirms the choice of terror as a tool of revolutionary fights.\footnote{Kos., Itd., 1976, no. 43, p. 27.}

Fight against violence was not the way of parliamentary
fight – echoed Turczyński on the pages of Tygodnik Kulturalny and developed his thought:

Such people as Che Guevara, Regis Debray, Luis de la Puente, Maraluanda, Carlos Marighela or Douglas Bravo, a Venezuelan, became national heroes, apostles of fight. The motto of “Oda do młodości” [Ode to Youth] Gwałt niech się gwałtem odciska [When force is used, with force respond] was confirmed in Guerrilla’s activities.

He continued using the best patterns of the rhetoric of socialist realism:

González León’s book [...] allows us to get to know the sense and history of the fight of the Venezuelan nation, tormented by the local and foreign capital, by the self-preservation, i.e., the hostile politics of the clergy […], finally by the police and security forces.347

The reviewer for Nowe Książki reproached the author of La muerte de Honorio, Miguel Otero Silva, for the lack of the figure of a typical proletarian. Yet, he justified that by the national-bourgeois character of the South American revolution, and concluded his argument, “it is always known who, and with what hands, pulls the chestnuts out of the fire.”348 We can find similar views in the reviews of Scorza’s Drums for Rancas (Redoble por Rancas).

The modern world, precisely its American model, degenerated and blighted by the cancer of corruption and the officials’ arbitrariness, forces its way in the Andes with an iron hand […],349

commented Michał Mroziński on the tragedy of the inhabitants of the Peruvian village who had no chance for defending their rights in the world ruled by the American capital and large landowners. The artistic values of the novel were pushed away to the background. The reviewer thought that the style of the book embracing the pathetic-naïve poetry of everyday life, the traces of the mythologised reality, the very complicated time constructions and pretentious languages in some parts, was used earlier many times and so it was intensively exploited. He saw the essential value of the novel in its publicist dimension, which was “to claim the rights of those who cannot do that themselves, to inform about them, to raise the consciousness.”350

348 Mazur, Nowe Książki 1977, no. 16, pp. 15–16.
350 Mroziński, ibid.
In extreme cases, the ideologised attitude ordered critics to reject magical realism as a trend that was dangerously falsifying the image of social relations in Latin America. Urbański warned the readers of *Polityka*:

This kind of novels [...] does not actually reflect the Hispanic reality but rather testifies to the extremely wild fantasy of some writers.\(^{351}\)

One can only sporadically encounter the ironic attitude towards the revolutionary fight in the reviews. Paweł Śpiewak wrote about the fighter’s dilemmas, the main protagonist of the novel *Dead Houses* by Otero Silva:

He must choose between political fight and a real woman. His alternative is clear and unique. He is a kind of our Doctor Judym,\(^ {352}\) but placed within the rhythms of Latin American rumba [...].\(^ {353}\)

The negative evaluation of the book resulted from the black and white schematic image of the conflict and monumental depictions of men engaged in political fights.

### 4.6.2 Attitude towards Cuban prose

A striking example of the perception of literary phenomena from the perspective of current politics has been the attitude of the editors and critics towards Cuban literature. The first Cuban writers’ translations appeared in Poland in 1965, i.e., six years after the success of the revolution. These were *Gestures* by Sarduy\(^ {354}\) and *Writes of Passage* by Cabrera Infante. The latter supported at first the reigns of Fidel Castro and held high posts in Cuba for a short time.\(^ {355}\) The Polish translation of *Writes of Passage* was published in 1965, the year when the author, who had fallen into disgrace, was arrested by the counter-espionage service officers, and then left the country. This coincidence might have resulted from the long publishing cycle in the reality of the Polish People’s Republic. The censor did not decide to withhold the distribution of the book, the probable reason being that some images of the life of various pre-revolutionary social

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352 Tomasz Judym, a medical doctor, is the main character of Stefan Żeromski’s novel *Ludzie bezdomni* (Homeless People), some sort of an idealist who wants to help poor people even at the cost of sacrificing his life and love.
354 I have mentioned this book in chapter two.
355 He was also the director of the National Council of Culture, Film Institute, and the deputy editor of the most important press organ – the weekly *Granma*.
strata in Cuba were presented in the background of the author’s notes “speaking in a brutally laconic way about the acts of the police’s terror during Batista’s rules.” These scenes were “a river flowing under the surface of everyday life […] tremor predicting an approaching explosion.” The author was presented as an extremely gifted representative of the young generation “before whom Cuba’s liberation from the local and foreign dictatorship opened new paths.” The critics admired the author’s views, being obviously unaware of the fact that he had changed them in a fundamental way after the publication of his novel. They also appreciated that he had presented the known content and “right” message in a modern form.

In 1968, the anthology of Cuban short stories with the Polish title The Coral Horse (El caballo de coral) was prepared by Babad, Wojciechowska and Piekarec. From 1966, Carpentier’s works were gradually published in Poland. In her review of Explosion in a Cathedral, Karbowska hoped that “indeed, this novel will end the code of silence and begin demand on Hispanic literature.” The reviews of Carpentier’s works published in the 1970s were not free from ideological interpretations. Sadkowski called the Cuban writer “the most outstanding writer of our revolutionary world.” The writer’s enthusiastic access to the Cuban revolution was mentioned. Some critical texts included certain disappointment by the fact that nobody who has read Alejo Carpentier without knowing his biography would not expect any relations with the Cuban revolution in his prose.

Yet, there were critics who discerned this relation. Rutkowski, in Miesięcznik Kulturalny, wrote about Baroque Concert (Concierto barroco):

In Cuba, music and dance have been manifestations of the victory of the revolution, its most spontaneously artistic expression, the corporal acceptance of the current social transformations. […] Here the revolution is combined with carnival – carnival reveals its revolutionary essence.

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357 Kwiecińska, Trybuna Ludu 1966, no. 93, p. 6.
358 Jaremko-Pytowska, Nowe Książki 1966, no. 7, p. 422.
360 Sadkowski W., Trybuna Ludu 1966, no. 251, p. 5.
and concluded:

The relations between time, music, carnival and revolution are some of the major problems in Carpentier's works.\textsuperscript{363}

In Poland, Cuban literature was probably best known among the national literatures of Latin America. In the series “Proza Iberoamerykańska,” several works were published and could be counted as Latin American classics. Cirilo Villaverde’s novel \textit{Cecilia Valdés or el Angel Hill} was called by the reviewer for \textit{Literatura na Świecie} a melodrama emphasising social issues, whose publication was “a total misunderstanding.”\textsuperscript{364} Miguel de Carrión’s \textit{Las honradas} was evaluated in a milder way in the same magazine. Although the reviewer’s opinion about the main thread of the novel, the heroine’s non-marital relationship, was ironic, the other values, such as the accurate observations of the customs and interesting remarks concerning economy when the small sugar industry had been developing, were recognised:

> It is a very interesting country, so different from the present country; it is Cuba depicted just before the outbreak of World War I; American-European Cuba, for which that trend of African culture, exposed so much in the contemporary reality, has not left any distinct, sometimes decisive, traces yet.\textsuperscript{365}

Furthermore, several books of the contemporary writers were published in Poland: \textit{The Situation} (\textit{La situación}) by Lisandro Otero, Onelio Jorge Cardoso’s short stories, \textit{Bertillón 166} by José Soler Puig, \textit{Siempre la muerte su paso breve} by Reynaldo González, two novels of Cofiño. The works of Otero, Puig and González were not reviewed separately. Some critics focused on the novels of Otero and Cofiño. The reviewer for \textit{Miesięcznik Literacki} described \textit{The Situation} depicting the stories of several Cuban families as

> a 20th century history of Cuba, a record of the most important political, social and economic problems of this island.\textsuperscript{366}

One should add that it was the history of Cuba before the revolution. Otero described the end of this epoch, before the arrival of Fidel Castro. The critic appreciated that the novel

> had nothing of a simplified agitation which frequently occurred in the post-revolutionary works; the writer does not try to prove anything at all cost.\textsuperscript{367}

\textsuperscript{363} Rutkowski, \textit{Miesięcznik Kulturalny} 1978, no. 6, pp. 128–129.
\textsuperscript{364} Walc, \textit{Literatura na Świecie} 1977, no. 4, p. 362.
\textsuperscript{365} Borkowska, \textit{Literatura na Świecie} 1979, no. 2, p. 348.
\textsuperscript{366} Kamiński, \textit{Miesięcznik Literacki} 1978, no. 9, p. 128.
\textsuperscript{367} Kamiński, \textit{Miesięcznik Literacki} 1978, no. 9, p. 128.
On the contrary, he showed why the revolution had had to break out and what the circumstances of the outbreak had been.

In Cofiño’s novels, the critics found analogies to social-realist literature. They showed that the unambiguous presentation of the revolutionary strategy was put into the mouth of the main hero of *La última mujer y el próximo combate*. The Cuban author’s book differed from the typical examples of socialist realism fiction by its narrative carried out on two layers: realistic and poetical-fairylike, and its saturation with magic, myth and legend. The reviewer for *Nowe Książki* recommended both works of Cofiño to those interested in contemporary Cuba.

Summarising the 15-year presence of Cuban literature on the Polish publishing market, Kühn wrote:

> [...] the political and economic aspects were prevailing: the strengthened links between both countries – Cuba was one of the first and most important stages of the Polish translators and editors’ expedition to discover the literary treasures of Hispanic America. Today, after fifteen years, the literature of this country, which is friendly to Poland, belongs to the most known ones in Poland, beside Argentinian and Mexican literatures.

Nonetheless, his opinion was not completely true since Kühn forgot to add that only the works published and officially recognised in Cuba appeared on the Polish market. The literature created by Cuban immigrants and those who fell in disgrace in Cuba was not translated into Polish.

The situation changed in the 1990s. The Polish editors discovered the Cuban authors living outside the island, such as Zoé Valdés or Guillermo Cabrera Infante, while the books published in Cuba were considerably less frequently published in Poland.

4.6.3 Political novel

The term “political novel” is not defined in all the Polish dictionaries of literary terms. It does not appear in the vast studies, such as STL, ed. Sławiński (2008) or *Słownik rodzajów i gatunków literackich*, ed. Grzegorz Gazda and Słownia

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Tynecka-Makowska (2006). Sierotwiński’s dictionary (1986:189) gives the following explanation:

It [political novel] is related to the social novel, in which the mechanism of political life is presented in a particular place and time […]. The variants of the political novel include those […] showing the ways of gaining and exercising power as well as creating programmes (the protagonists are personalities who are involved in politics), those showing the practice and formation of political reality (the heroes are activists realising political programmes) and those reflecting in the background of political relationships, the fate of the governed, the formation of their political awareness as well as dependence on the conditions and transformations.

Among the Latin American writers, it was Vargas Llosa who was regarded as the author of political novel thus understood by the Polish critics during the boom. In particular, his *The Time of the Hero* was included in this kind of fiction. The main theme of the novel was thought to be the picture of Peru in the 1950s, during the dictatorship of General Odría. The narrow, schematic analyses, which were published in the 1970s, stated that the novel presented the behaviours of the political elites on the one hand, i.e. the political mechanism of the Latin American state, and on the other hand, the activities of the illegal political groups: the Aprista and the Communist Party. What was also stressed was the authenticity of the political reality, shown, for example, in the descriptions of the methods used by the chief of the security services.

The reviewer for *Nowe Książki* juxtaposed Vargas Llosa’s work with the poor novel *The Seed in the Sand* by Volodia Teitelboim, which was omitted by other critics. The comparison was decisively better for the Chilean writer (sic!) since his writing technique should not become a real obstacle for the reader as it could be in the case of *The Time of the Hero*, described as “a gigantic crossword without any slogan”:

Not comparing these two so different novels, it should be said that an average Latin American reader […] will find it easier to understand Teitelboim’s novel than the one by Vargas Llosa.

Teitelboim’s book was appreciated for its “lack of over-revolutionary pathos and empty words,” and that he became a symbol of a lifetime struggle for the Chileans.

*El secuestro del general* by the Ecuadoran writer Aguilera Malta was recognised as a political novel. The book depicts a grotesque picture of “tasty democracy,” typical of the police state in South America four centuries after its birth and long after the general political and economic collapse.

According to this vision, representatives of the authorities satisfied their lowest instincts and greed, while the oppositionists were in prison. The grotesqueness of the novel was revealed in the caricatured construction of the portraits of the members of the ruling stratum, contrasted with the figures of the guerrillas having the significant names: Saint Peter, Our Lady and Jesus Christ. The world thus depicted appeared as black and white as well as schematic although the political context was to justify to a certain extent the artistic imperfectness of the work:

There is no doubt who and why should win in the end. This schematisation is obviously not a value of the book as a literary work, probably being a right form in the fight against the South American dictators.

4.6.4 *Novel of the Revolution*

The term “Novel of the Revolution” is understood as a group of prose works, longer than an average short story, using the theme of fights run by the army and ordinary people, as well as political and social transformations resulting from the movements (peaceful or militant) in the revolution began by the uprising of Francisco I. Madero on 20 November 2010, its military stage could be considered as completed at the moment of the fall and death of Venustiano Carranza on 21 May 1920.

The authors of this trend did not generally limit themselves to depict the military campaigns and the accompanying political transformations but analysed their backgrounds as well as psychological, philosophical and social results. Thus, one can recognise the novel of the Mexican Revolution as a local variant of the political novel.

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In Poland, several novels set in the Mexican Revolution were translated: *The Edge of the Storm* (*Al filo del agua*) by Agustín Yañez (1965), *The Underdogs* (*Los de abajo*) by Mariano Azuela (1973), *Here’s to You, Jesusa* by Elena Poniatowska and *El tamaño del infierno* by Arturo Azuela (1977). In the Polish critics’ opinions, the theme of the revolution seemed prevailing in the 20th century Mexican literature; its writers were even called “chroniclers of the revolution and at the same time, its thorough analysts.”

The reviewer for *Trybuna Ludu* suggestively wrote about *The Edge of the Storm*, focusing on the gloomy mood of the book:

Yañez depicts a city of “women in mourning black.” The place is overwhelmed by the mood of musty water. The medieval sense of sin burdens all the forms of life there. The customs are also medieval. The retreats are accompanied by flagellation. People do not live but vegetate. The feelings, when they manage to break through the shell of superstitions and rigors, explode in madness. Even a love song is sung with the sound of the church bells. The sounds of political fights reverberate in this environment […]

The reviewers of *The Underdogs* generally praised the work, stressing the authenticity of the depicted events. The author, who was involved in the revolution as a physician in the army of Pancho Villa, presented the revolution without any ornaments and black and white divisions. In turn, Arturo Azuela’s achievement was to be his introduction of a representative of the low strata, playing the role of a true protagonist in history, into Mexican literature:

The Indian in Azuela’s novel became a man of flesh and blood and not a beautiful, though slightly stupid, savage.

The critics discussing Poniatowska’s book stressed its unique construction, related to a report based on a tape recording, thanks to which the authoress was able to cover the traces of her interference into the depicted world. However, incoherent stories form a harmonious whole, betraying that the collected material underwent some literary treatment. At the same time, it was emphasised that Poniatowska’s novel “is both an excellent literary image of the 50-year
turbulent history of Mexico,”\textsuperscript{386} and that “the Polish reader will benefit from it more than reading any textbook on Mexico’s history.”\textsuperscript{387}

The book \textit{El tamaño del infierno} was not positively received in Poland. It was described as a well-written novel, but epigonic, secondary and behind time. From the perspective of the Polish reader, who had the chance to read some good works about the Mexican Revolution, it did not have any specific cognitive values.\textsuperscript{388}

The threads concerning the Mexican Revolution returned in a number of Fuentes’ works. Pałłasz regarded the disappointment of the results of the agrarian revolution of 1910 as a fundamental, even obsessive, theme of his literary output.\textsuperscript{389} In \textit{The Death of Artemio Cruz}, Jan Drohojowski discerned a revolt against “the exploiters of the revolution” who were personified in the dying hero.\textsuperscript{390}

4.6.5 \textit{Dictator novel}

During the boom only two books that can be described as the dictator novel (\textit{novela del dictador}) were published in Poland. These were \textit{Reasons of State} (\textit{El recurso del método}) by Carpentier (1980) and \textit{The Autumn of the Patriarch} (\textit{El otoño del patriarca}) by García Márquez (1981).

It seems astonishing that in the reviews of these works, reflections concerning their political dimensions were marginal. It is true that García Márquez’s novel was depicted as “a gigantic parabola of the Latin American dictatorship” and interpreted as an attempt to demythologise absolute power\textsuperscript{391} and recommended to be read in its proper political context, which was Pinochet’s dictatorship.\textsuperscript{392} Moreover, it was stressed that \textit{Reasons of State} was not a description of a concrete situation but an attempt to synthesise a broader phenomenon.\textsuperscript{393} However, other threads prevailed. The critics saw \textit{The Autumn of the Patriarch} first of all as a mature work of magical realism.\textsuperscript{394} They pointed to its elements of myth, such

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{386} Hamerliński, \textit{Tygodnik Kulturalny} 1976, no. 42, p. 4.
\item \textsuperscript{387} Komorowski, \textit{Nowe Książki} 1977, no. 16, pp. 12–13.
\item \textsuperscript{388} Mazur, \textit{Nowe Książki} 1978, no. 15, pp. 19–20.
\item \textsuperscript{389} Pałłasz, \textit{Kultura} 1973, no. 8, p. 9; id., \textit{Kultura} 1973, no. 30, p. 9.
\item \textsuperscript{390} Drohojowski, \textit{Nowe Książki} 1969, no. 11, pp. 731–732.
\item \textsuperscript{391} Krzemień, \textit{Kultura} 1981, no. 13, p. 5.
\item \textsuperscript{392} Mroziewicz, \textit{Polityka} 1981, no. 16, p. 13.
\item \textsuperscript{393} Skłodowska, \textit{Tygodnik Kulturalny} 1980, no. 37, p. 11.
\item \textsuperscript{394} Krzemień, \textit{Kultura} 1981, no. 13, p. 5; Wojciechowski, \textit{Nowe Książki} 1981, no. 7, pp. 56–59.
\end{itemize}
as the age of the dictator and the indefiniteness of time in which the depicted events took place, and the tragic dimension of the old general loneliness. Similarly, Carpentier’s novel served as a pretext for reflecting on the essence of magical realism. The critics were much more interested in its relations with the Cartesian philosophy than in the political problems it depicted.

4.6.6 Social accents

Spanish American prose naturally related social issues to political matters, which was reflected in the critical texts written during the boom. The critics generally regarded the portrayal of society as an obvious value of a work.

A value of the novel is [...] its attempt of showing a broader perspective on the Venezuelan society: family relationships and traditions, professional and friendly relationships, illegal and as if accidental activities of the opposition, mechanisms of heavy-handed rule – the reviewer for Nowe Książki wrote about the novel La muerte de Honorio by Otero Silva. The value of The Kingdom of This World by Carpentier was determined by the fact that it could be interpreted as a novel about the political and social reality of the Latin American countries in general. Conversation in the Cathedral by Vargas Llosa is “a broad social panorama”, it should be praised for presenting a gallery of characters from different social strata: fraudsters, deviants, politicians, mestizos, revolutionaries, revolutionising students and starving Indians. On the pages of Miesięcznik Literacki, Rutkowski demanded that García Márquez’s works should be interpreted in the context of social-cultural conditions, otherwise any analysis would be reduced to pure aestheticism. Kazimierz Żórawski included it to “social-political warring fiction.”

One Hundred Years of Solitude was seen as

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395 Pietrzak, Trybuna Ludu, 1981, no. 84, p. 5.
396 Pietrzak, ibid.; Wojciechowski, ibid.
397 Ogrodowczyk, Nurt 1981, no. 10, pp. 35–36.
399 Mazur, Nowe Książki 1977, no. 16, pp. 15–16.
401 Henzel, Sigma 1973/74, no. 7, p. 25
402 Pałłasz, Kultura 1974, no. 18, p. 5.
403 Rutkowski, Miesięcznik Literacki 1978, no. 6, p. 127.
sociological lecture embracing initially simple (family community) and then complex (feudalism, capitalism) social relationships seen through the prism of mythical consciousness.\textsuperscript{405}

The societies of the Latin American countries appeared to the reviewers as deeply divided, the indicator of the drastic divisions being predominantly property. The division into the rich and the poor most frequently overlapped with the racial division, defined by the opposition: the White – the Coloured. For example, Arguedas’ works were called “prose of a two-edged revolt, being the most distinct testimony of Peru’s division into the world of the Indians and the White.”\textsuperscript{406} It could be a warning for the elites of the country since the Indians who had been pushed to misery were on the verge of their endurance:

The strings of the reality that are tight to their limits break time and time again because of the plundering of the salt, revolts of the coloni, women’s riots and the epidemic of typhus.\textsuperscript{407}

The critics even mentioned Arguedas’ passion for local community activities originated from his personal experiences since he had spent his childhood among the Quechua Indians.\textsuperscript{408} They also saw that the Peruvian writer was shocked to observe the destructive influence which the consumptive civilisation of the West began exerting on the Indian culture.\textsuperscript{409}

Further, the picture of the divided Peruvian society was discerned in the novel \textit{A World for Julius (Un mundo para Julius)} by Bryce Echenique. Its hero, young master Julius, began discovering the existence of two worlds: the world of his parents stuck in isolation – the Peruvian oligarchy, and the world of servants and labourers. In the Polish reviewers’ opinions, Fuentes also depicted the Mexican society as being divided into two parts. In \textit{Where the Air Is Clear}, the representatives of the highest social strata in Mexico were divided into “palaces and dung”:

The first world is ruled by the desire to maintain property and by inaction. The other is completely involved in looking for better paid jobs or thinking of economic immigration.\textsuperscript{410}

According to Rodowska, the Mexican writer

discerns his mission in fighting the relicts of the social and psychological situation left as the legacy of colonialism.\textsuperscript{411}

\textsuperscript{405} Henzel, \textit{Sigma} 1973/74, no. 7.
\textsuperscript{406} Mazur, \textit{Nowe Książki} 1980, no. 10, p. 34.
\textsuperscript{407} Pałłasz, \textit{Kultura} 1973, no. 47, p. 9.
\textsuperscript{410} Pałłasz, \textit{Kultura}, 1973, no. 8, p. 9.
“The profound impression concerning social issues, based on the comprehensive knowledge of the fate of peasants, workers and miners’ fate” was recognised as a characteristic of all contemporary Mexican works.

The critics’ attention was drawn to the fate of small local communities that were doomed to die as a result of economic transformations. The community depicted in Alegria’s novel *Broad and Alien Is the World* had to lose not because it did not want to be transformed but because becoming open to the world it began competing with the great landowner whose plantation was based on slave labour. Scorza’s novel *Drums for Rancas* was a complaint, full of bitterness and desperate irony, lodged on behalf of the Peruvian Indians who had been deprived of their place under the sun.

The depicted world was ruled by the American capital and great landowners; those living in small villages, being obstacles for the landowner’s economic interests, had no chance in this conflict.

### 4.6.7 Violence

Social tensions often lead to acts of violence. In the Polish reviews of the Spanish American prose of the boom, brutality and violence were frequently connected with politics as a function of specific social relations:

In the eyes of the Europeans, the whole of South America is a continent of violence. After all, its present is determined by politics that is not being manifested by party marches and declarations, but by police terror and conspiracy.

Critics reviewing the trend of the Venezuelan literature of violence stressed the scenes of rapes, tortures and mutilation. They were shocked by the images of bestiality. The overload of scenes presenting all cruel details turned out to be counterproductive: instead of shock, the reader felt tired and oversaturated.

The didactic *loci comunes* in *Rajatabla* are full of bleeding victims, tortured fighters or (reversely) awful policemen and senile intellectualists. From this perspective, a special aesthetic category is shouting since it is known that what is loud is perceivable and in consequence, digestible – at all cost, certainly when it is repeated seventy-seven times.

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– the critic for *Nowe Książki* wrote about the writing method of Luis Britta García.\(^{417}\) The word “cruelty” also occurred in the reviews of books called novels of the Mexican Revolution.\(^{418}\)

Extreme misery that the lowest social strata suffered was described in a naturalistic way. The childhood of the heroine of *Dead Houses* fell on the period of the dying old world, and this dying looked horrible. Malaria, cholera, haematuria, fleas biting the feet, children’s swollen bellies, sallow and ulcerated skin of people who will probably die at night, plaster falling from collapsing houses and empty windows […].\(^{419}\)

Grudzińska, discussing the short story *El apando*, which Revueltas wrote in prison, admitted that she was shocked by the sickening scenes and vile language. The reviewer of *The Time of the Hero* was also disgusted with the language of the novel: he called Vargas Llosa’s book “a barrack pornography” and claimed that the number of vulgarisms could be reduced without any loss of its artistic value.\(^{420}\) Rulfo’s prose was perceived as saturated with violence. The critics saw it as a streak of torment, escapes, hunger, ploughing fallow land and fighting with other people. In the critics’ opinions, there was “a smell of death” in the novel, which was also full of brutality and murders.\(^ {421}\) The world created by García Márquez in *One Hundred Years of Solitude* seemed to be marked by violence:

> the understanding for human weaknesses and vices does not cover the cruelty and ruthlessness prevailing in the world of the relationships that the author reveals in a truly realistic way.\(^ {422}\)

The reviewers of *The Autumn of the Patriarch* were shocked by its cruelty, ugliness and drastic images.\(^ {423}\) Bereza called *The Obscene Bird of Night* by Donoso “a cosmogony of monstrosity” and a product of sick imagination.\(^ {424}\) Kühn also

showed the specific cruelty of the writing vision of the Chilean author who, in his opinion, depicted horror as “definiens of human existence.”

4.6.8 Summary

The analysis of the critical texts concerning the Spanish American publications in Poland during the boom allows me to conclude that the political themes were often chosen by their authors. The presence of these problems was recognised as a characteristic of this prose. At the same time, it was pointed out that in Latin America, literature fulfilled not only artistic functions but also the publicist and propaganda ones; that it was “the voice of conscience,” which in the eyes of some reviewers justified the defects of writing technique.

Political threads were discussed from various perspectives. One can notice a clear tendency to comment on these issues from the perspective of the official line adopted by the Polish People’s Republic. In Spanish American works, many critics saw elements that were similar to the ruling ideological interpretation in Poland, such as the defence of the interests of the lower strata of society and fight against the imperialism of the United States. At the same time, in the Polish reviews there were no attempts to show the universal values of these works; on the contrary, their authors generally stressed the local context of the depicted events, i.e. the specific situation in Mexico, Cuba or Venezuela. It was silently assumed that what the protagonists of Spanish American novels and their authors fought for had already been achieved in Poland, and Polish readers were only to cheer the overseas combatants in their fight for the right cause.

The term “political novel” was relatively seldom used in the Polish reviews. It could have resulted from the fact that this genre did not develop in post-war Poland. Even nowadays, the dictionaries of literary terms mention The Coming Spring by Stefan Żeromski and General Barcz [General Barcz] by Juliusz Kaden-Bandrowski as examples of political novels. The “engaged” novels of the 1950s were unambiguously associated with socialist realism and pushy propaganda; hence it is no wonder that the reviewers did not refer to them as patterns of political prose. In result, one can hardly find a common denominator in the Polish critical texts as far as the discussion of the political themes depicted in Spanish American works is concerned. What was stressed was their local specific features and different experiences resulting from the social conditions that were fundamentally different from the Polish reality. Consequently, according to the

Polish critics, the politics presented in Spanish American literature was an area that was necessarily marked with rape and violence which were justified by the extremely unjustly constructed system based on the exploitation of the poorest social stratum originating from the indigenous people.

4.7 The issue of Latin American identity

Another thread that the Polish critics discerned in the Spanish American prose published during the boom was the writers’ reflection concerning the identity of the population of this continent:

The whole Latin American contemporary literature [...] is an attempt of self-identification, seeking the answer to the question: what does it mean to be an Argentinian, a Chilean, a Mexican, what does it mean to be a Latin American?426

According to the reviewers, Latin American writers saw the modern culture of their continent as an heir of two civilizational formations: European and South American, originating from the pre-Columbian cultures, from both the general and regional perspective. On the one hand, Latin America was discussed as a supra-regional cultural whole. On the other hand, elements of the native cultures were sought in the characteristics of the particular nations. Therefore, in the Spanish American works, the Polish critics saw the tension between the foundation, which was the existing culture, and the elements brought by the culture of Europe. Some books were interpreted as expressions of intellectual complexes towards Europe, which was recognised as a characteristic of Hispanic literature.427 Since Europe was treated as the most important point of reference to which writers had to define themselves so that their works were not described as provincial:

It is a matter of cultural spaces – the relation between the province and the capital. For these writers who wanted to overcome the frames of regionalism it was not enough to limit themselves to local realism or local myths. And none of them dared to turn their backs on the European culture.428

The opposition between Europe with its capital in Paris and Latin America, whose centre was to be New Cordoba, was seen at the foundation of the structure of Carpentier’s novel Reasons of State. In the novel, the European culture

428 Bernat, Nowe Książki 1979, no. 23, p. 20.
personifying Reason was presented in a distorting mirror; its grotesqueness was revealed when it reached the least Cartesian continent. The Cuban writer appeared as a fighter of the recognition of the value of his home culture. In the first part of One Hundred Years of Solitude, the critics saw the destruction of the myth of Europe. García Márquez was to capture the specific character of the relationships between Latin America and the outer world. In turn, in her article bearing the meaningful title “Hispanic Europe,” the reviewer for Nowe Książki presented Cortázar as an artist standing between two cultural models.

In the critical texts, the repeated term was “a melting pot of cultures” referring to Latin America. As a result of the impact of so different factors, a completely new quality, incomprehensible by the outer observers, was to be created. And so, for instance in Francisco Rojas González’s El diosero, the reviewer found literally and sociologically interesting analyses of Indian behaviours and attitudes which may seem strange and unclear to the white, simply constituting the heritage of the pre-Columbian and Spanish tradition and culture.

However, for other critics, the specific culture of Latin America, reflected in literature, was not an obstacle to its reception, but constituted its unique artistic values. As an unprecedented achievement of Asturias in Legends of Guatemala, the critics considered the awareness of the duality of heritage that led to a lasting weave of two cultures: indigenous and European. It was stressed that exoticism did not make the book hermetic because it is possible to “discern the signs of universality in the diverse forms of the myth-creating imagination.”

The thread of discovering cultural roots was especially frequent in the reviews concerning Fuentes’ works. In Where the Air Is Clear, the critics saw first of all the constant search for national identity. The fate of the protagonists of this novel and the allegedly accidental scenes provided a synthesis and created Mexico’s legend,
its pre-history and history influencing the heroes’ awareness, making them astonishingly non-authentic, stubbornly seeking some confirmation of their Mexican or Spanish identity.437

Contemporary Mexicans were to bear the curse of the raped mother’s children (hijos de la Chingada). According to the critics, Fuentes presented them as victims of a sexual relationship between an Indian woman and a white invader; its figure was to be the relationship between Hernán Cortés and his Aztec lover Malinche.438 The complex of “malinchism” seemed to be a prevailing and at the same time driving factor of Fuentes’ prose.439 However, the greatness of the Mexican writer was testified by the fact that he managed to give a universal dimension to the local problems and conflicts.

Fuentes combines the realities of everyday life and the layer of myth, the past and the present in order to raise the problems of the city and country to the highest level of generalisation in the wonderful final scene,440 – was written about Where the Air Is Clear. Fuentes’ Mexico appeared to be a peripheral country, “a country of snobbish elites, sinister rites of Indian and Spanish origin, a country seeking its own face.”441

The articles dedicated to Borges’ prose focused on the dual aspects of his inspirations: local and European. It was shown that his Argentinian character was combined in a natural way with his cosmopolitanism.442 His prose was to refer to gaucho literature.443 As it contained such a big number of motives taken from European culture, Borges’ works were defined as apocryphal.444 He was called a Gallophile, but his desires to redefine Argentinian literature were related to his negation of French literature, which had influenced his prose for a long time.445 At the same time, the critics saw his opposition to any attempts of canonising the gauchoesque saga Martín Fierro as the most important paradigm of the Argentinian national literature.446 Buenos Aires depicted in The

437 Chołodowski, Tygodnik Kulturalny 1972, no. 47, p. 4.
441 Chołodowski, Tygodnik Kulturalny 1972, no. 47, p. 4.
442 Pallasz, Kultura 1975, no. 32, p. 8.
444 Komorowski, Nowe Książki 1981, no. 4, pp. 68–69.
446 Pallasz, Kultura 1973, no. 2, p. 3.
*Book of Sand* had the characteristics of a universal city, but it also preserved its specific realities.447

### 4.8 The picture of Spanish American prose in the reviews of the boom

The reviews of Spanish American prose published in the Polish press in the 1970s show the critics’ attempts to interpret the otherness that launched a massive attack on the Polish publishing market. The otherness had many aspects. Firstly, there appeared books from a land that in Poland had not been known as a place where literary works were produced. Hence, describing this phenomenon, the critics used the aforementioned terms “continent without novelists” or “explosion from nothingness.” As the number of these books was large, the critics and readers had to face over a hundred new names of authors and several times bigger titles of their works in a relatively short time. Naturally, the works did not have the same artistic value, and besides excellent books there were mediocre or even poor ones. That fact escalated the confusion, the more that the number of experts in Latin American culture and literature was small in Poland in those days.

Secondly, Spanish American prose featured a world the knowledge of which was poor in Poland. An average Pole had second-hand information about Latin America, and it was not always reliable. Knowing that, the critics tried, with a better or worse result, to play the roles of guides concerning the culture and literature of the continent that were little known. The task was difficult and should not be fulfilled only by providing historic, biographic or bibliographic data. Yet, sometimes even such sparse data could not be given due to the lack of access to reliable sources.

The strangeness of the world depicted in Spanish American prose did not correspond to the stereotype of exoticism that functioned in Poles’ awareness. In the reviews written in the late 1960s and the early 1970s, the critics attempted to find that stereotype but soon discovered that the image of that world did not relate to the common picture of the reality that was described as exotic. For that reason, this concept was gradually redefined in reference to Spanish American literature. Its indicators were those “flying grandmothers” and various kinds of phenomena, which from the European perspective were regarded as paranormal. The works depicting a reality that differed from ours but were devoid of those features appeared to be “reversely exotic.”

The horizons of the Latin American authors and Polish readers coincided to a small extent, which was reflected in the reviews. The inability to match the elements of the depicted world with the possessed knowledge or even the images was a serious obstacle to understand and interpret Spanish American works. Everything seemed alien, commencing from the scenery that was stunning but also horrifying through the system of values that the Europeans could not understand, to people whose appearance and clothing were different and who behaved in a strange way and celebrated unfamiliar rituals.

According to the Polish reviewers, Spanish American prose was full of political and social accents. However, the problems that were essential to the inhabitants of the Green Continent turned out to be difficult to understand from the Polish perspective since their historic context was unknown. Attempts to interpret these problems through tools related to the political propaganda of those times flattened and trivialised the real conflicts and at the same time led to making allowances in the evaluation of particular works. Thus, there were tones of compassion and solidarity with those wronged by fate, but the causes of their tragedies seemed so strange that they made it impossible for the readers to identify themselves with the protagonists. What was emphasised was the locality of the conflicts that were inscribed in the historic background. On the other hand, the critics did not look for any universal dimension of this prose.

In the analysed reviews, one can hardly find any reflections on the identity of the Hispanics. From the Polish perspective, this issue seemed rather uninteresting.

What else struck us was that in the critical texts, Spanish American prose appeared as a literature depicting important but difficult problems concerning big or small communities. The reviewers very seldom saw the problems of individuals, perhaps with the exception of the reviews concerning some books written by Cortázar and Carpentier. This image of Spanish American prose was yet another barrier that made it difficult for readers to understand it: they find it easier to identify themselves with concrete people rather than with ideas.

The analysed reviews testify to the fact that in the 1970s, the Polish critics saw Spanish American literature as a phenomenon that was alien, incomprehensible and difficult to describe. Sometimes they expressed their helplessness straightforwardly. Now it seems that a certain way to familiarise this otherness was their strenuous efforts to refer Spanish American prose to the trends present in the world literature and to confront it with the works that had already existed in the readers’ awareness. When the critics found it difficult to see any universal dimensions in the problems and scenery of the particular works, they tried to discover them in the purely literary, formal characteristics of this prose. Their
tools of formal analyses were to be effective means to describe and familiarise the unknown phenomenon. Yet, the tools were generally insufficient. This could have been the reason why, as Elbanowski (1980:302) shown, the Polish reviewers, facing a phenomenon that they could not comprehend and for whose reception they were not prepared, often repeated opinions of international experts. The lack of their own views on Spanish American prose and their repeated judgements of which the Polish critics were so frequently accused must have resulted from their ignorance and lack of courage to seek new instruments of literary analysis.

5 Polish critical texts concerning Spanish American prose in 1982–1989

In the 1980s, the number of critical texts concerning Spanish American prose considerably decreased, which was the obvious consequence of the collapse of the publishing market. Only those Spanish American works that the editors managed to include in their earlier plans were published. New positions, even those written by renowned authors, appeared sporadically. As already mentioned in the previous chapter, there was a decrease in the number of magazines, which brought about a smaller number of literary reviews. Moreover, a large group of journalists refused for various reasons to collaborate with the officially published periodicals. Consequently, even the works of those authors who were favoured by critics, such as Cortázar or García Márquez, did not have many reviews.

During the discussed period, Czytelnik published a collection of critical texts entitled *Ojcowie i ojcbójcy. Szkice o literaturze Ameryki Łacińskiej* [Fathers and Patricides. Sketches about Latin American Literature] by Jerzy Kühn (1984), embracing interesting texts about the greatest personalities and the most important literary issues of Latin America. It was actually the only book written in Polish that could be used as a guide to Latin American prose for several years.  

Some reviewers, for whom time seemed to stop, did not see the publishing crisis and decrease of readers’ interests in Spanish American prose. The changes of the context of the reception of this prose, caused by the political transformations in Poland at the early 1980s, did not influence the way of perceiving Spanish American prose. In the mid-1980s, one could still see arbitrary opinions that in Poland the interest in Spanish American literature was timeless, and that every

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448 Only in 2010, a history of Latin American literatures written by two Polish authors Ewa Łukaszyk and Nina Pluta was published.
new book was worth noting.\textsuperscript{450} The critical texts most frequently focused on the same threads as during the boom. There were no new interpretative proposals, either.

Just as in the texts published in the 1970s, the Polish reviewers saw that Latin American writers strongly emphasised the formation of the culture of their continent by two powerful civilisations: local and European. In the critics’ opinions, the origin of the contemporary American culture was the fundamental thread of reflection concerning the Hispanic identity in Fuentes’ works:

So Fuentes – as usual – reflects on the specificity of the New World, still dreaming about a harmonious synthesis of the cultural, pre-Colombian and Christian characteristics, which was difficult to achieve.\textsuperscript{451}

Carpentier was seen as someone balancing on the verge of two civilisations. In common understanding, the European heritage brought learning, erudition, concern for the reliability of facts and respect for authorities to Latin America. The New World was rather associated with dynamism, spontaneity and irrationalism. However, this did not mean that the European settlers contributed only great values:

The ballast of Europe, which Carpentier ridiculed [...], turns out to be the only guarantee of rescuing fundamental values against the pressure of unbridled instincts, greed for material gain, rape and terror. These instincts crawled out of the stuffy cabins of the first conquers of America.\textsuperscript{452}

The problem of identity, yet from a slightly different perspective, was stressed in the reviews of the short story by the Puerto Rican José Luis González \textit{The Night We Became People Again} (\textit{La Noche que Volvimos a Ser Gente}). The most important problem the heroes faced was to preserve their cultural identity despite the danger of the direct expansion of the Anglo-Saxon culture.\textsuperscript{453}

The social reality of Latin America still appeared to be divided by the opposition: the White – local people or the Black. For instance, in Aguilera Malta’s novel \textit{Don Goyo}, the critics saw a warning against the possessiveness of the White and the Creoles who lived at the cost of the indigenous people and the Black living in tragic conditions in the Ecuadorian province.\textsuperscript{454} The image of the similarly

\textsuperscript{450} Rudzińska, \textit{Tygodnik Kulturalny} 1984, no. 3, p. 12.
\textsuperscript{451} Pałłasz, \textit{Miesięcznik Literacki} 1984, no. 7, pp. 146–147
\textsuperscript{452} Krasicki, \textit{Opole} 1983, no. 6, p. 29.
\textsuperscript{453} Olszewski, \textit{Tu i teraz} 1983, no. 35, p. 10.
\textsuperscript{454} Pałłasz, \textit{Tygodnik Kulturalny} 1984, no. 15, p. 12.
Polish critical texts concerning Spanish American prose in 1982–1989

The re-evaluation of the figure of the dictator has no essential value for us since very few people know the nuances of Paraguay’s history.456

The presence of social themes was still one of the indicators of the positive evaluation of books, for example, *Viernes de Dolores* was recommended for its reflections on social problems, along with political and economic issues.457 A value of *The Angel of Darkness* by Sábato was that one could read the book as a sociological study of the whole country.458 Social threads were indicated as an important element of José Donoso’s prose.459 *Compadre Lobo* by Gustavo Saínz presented a panoramic picture of the Mexican society.460

The critical texts still used the term “exoticism” although it appeared decisively less frequently than in the 1970s. In the review of *Don Goyo*, the term referred to fishermen and peasants living in the Ecuadorian islands.461 It was used not to refer the reader to the stereotype exoticism but rather in the peripheral sense, to describe what was distant, not necessarily geographically, but culturally and mentally – and thus alien to us. A similar function was attached to this term in the commentary on *Viernes de Dolores*, which “astonished us by its exoticism and originality of the presented plebeian community.”462 Moreover, the critics did not often use the term “magical realism.” For instance, it was used to discuss Donoso’s novel *This Sunday (Este domingo)*:

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in the realistic world of facts there are certain gaps through which another world
born from the author’s over-inflated imagination and the magical folk mythology is
breaking.\footnote{Borkowska, Miesięcznik Literacki 1985, no. 4, p. 147.}

Among the themes that the critical texts emphasised more than in the previous
decade was \textit{machismo}. Poniatowska’s \textit{Dear Diego} (\textit{Querido Diego, te abraza Quiela}) was recognised as an interesting contribution to the discussion of this
phenomenon because of its analysis of the role of women in strengthening this
pattern of masculine behaviour.\footnote{Skłodowska, Nowe Książki 1987, no. 10, p. 127.} In the book \textit{Kiss of the Spider Woman} by Puig, \textit{machismo} was shown as the foundation of the Latin American social model in
which the cult of masculinity reached its apogee.\footnote{Borkowska, Miesięcznik Literacki 1985, no. 3, p. 135.} In turn, Gustavo Sainz in \textit{Compadre Lobo} treated this pattern with an ironic distance and re-valuated it.\footnote{Skłodowska, Nowe Książki 1986, no. 10, p. 21.}

In numerous reviews of the 1980s, we can find traces of theoretical reflections
on the discussed books. For instance, according to a certain critic, \textit{Distant Relations} by Fuentes can be included partly in the convention of science-fiction, and partly in the detective story.\footnote{Pałłasz, Miesięcznik literacki 1984, no. 7, p. 146, Skłodowska, Nowe Książki 1983, no. 11, pp. 28–29.} The novel reminded another reviewer of
the scheme of a Gothic novel.\footnote{Rudzińska, Tygodnik Kulturalny 1984, no. 3, p. 12.} Roa Bastos’ books were described in a gen-
eral way: \textit{I, the Supreme} was, according to the critic for \textit{Tygodnik Kulturalny}, a
novel that is “formally innovative”\footnote{Pałłasz, Tygodnik Kulturalny 1982, no. 22, p. 12.} but that innovativeness was not precisely
defined. Similarly, the works included in the volume \textit{Kurupi and Other Stories}
were characterised by “versatility and formal \textit{maestria}.”\footnote{Skłodowska, Nowe Książki 1985, no. 4, p. 79.} \textit{On Heroes and Tombs}
by Sábato was intriguing with its many-layered plot set in several layers of time,
while the novelty of \textit{The Angel of Darkness} appeared to be its constant weaving
of three tricks: a theatre in the theatre, a novel about creating a novel and a
kind of a live diary.\footnote{Pałłasz, Kultura 1988, no. 24, p. 6.} \textit{Kiss of the Spider Woman} by Manuel Puig was particular
because of its unique, devoid of a single narrator, construction consisting only of
dialogues and monologues.\footnote{Borkowska, Miesięcznik Literacki 1985, no. 3, pp. 134–137.} The author perfected his technique thanks to his
experience gained in film editing. His most important inspirations were to be the patterns of mass culture. In her critical texts, Borkowska tried to use a rather unclear category “Latin Americanness”: “Son of Man (Hijo de hombre) is more Latin American than I, the Supreme and also than the short stories in the volume Kurupi.” However, it was a single attempt to make Latin American prose a separate genre ruled by laws that differed from the known genres functioning in the world prose.

Sklodowska was one of the few critics who in the 1980s noticed trends that differed from the specific poetics of the exemplary works of the boom and from magical realism. In Distant Relations, which is “already far beyond the circle of the boom,” she discerned symptoms of the changes: Fuentes, considerably limiting his formal tricks and choosing a more traditional construction, stopped trying to be original:

*Distant Relations* has been written for the reader who prefers an interesting intrigue over the complexities of form although the author’s cultural and metaliterary obsessions have been skilfully interwoven in the narrative.

In a similar way, his earlier book *The Hydra Head* was

not only another variant of reflections on the Mexican nature and the third world […], but first of all “a thriller” whose hero is a Mexican technocrat.

Sklodowska also mentioned the generational change in Mexican prose. The group of younger writers, such as Gustavo Saínz, José Agustín or Juan Pacheco, creating the La Onda trend, worked out a programme devoid of reflections on the Mexican or Latin American identity and of the effects of the revolution, drawing inspirations from mass culture and using a colloquial language. La Onda destroyed “the temple of literary ceremony” as well as undermined the institutionalised vision of nation and revolution in Mexican literature. According to Sklodowska, the novel *Compadre Lobo* by Saínz was

a synthesis of the tendencies spread in the latest prose written on this continent, prose created increasingly more commonly outside the circle of magic and fantasy, and understood in a human and not exotic dimension.

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476 ibid.
478 op. cit., p. 22.
Similar observations can be found in the reviews included in the anthology of the Argentinian short stories *Każdego lata* [Every Summer] published in 1988. The critics saw “a new face of Argentinian literature” in them,\(^ {479}\) manifested in the rejection of magical realism in favour of new forms of expression.\(^ {480}\) The works of writers who debuted in the 1960s and 1970s, though embracing diverse themes and styles, seemed to be much humbler and more tranquil.\(^ {481}\)

The tone of the reviews published in the 1980s remained friendly and full of approval. Even if some reviewed work did not evoke enthusiasm, its cognitive values, essential from the perspective of the Polish reader, were stressed, like in *The Afternoon of the Dinosaur (La tarde del dinosaurus)* by Cristina Peri Rossi. This little book was recognised as noteworthy since it enriches our knowledge of Uruguay literature and widens our Hispanic horizon of translation by including the genre of narrative poetry.\(^ {482}\)

Similarly, *Kurupi and Other Stories* by Roa Bastos added Paraguay to the literary map of Latin America.\(^ {483}\)

Jan Marx broke away from the unanimous choir of lovers of Spanish American prose. He intended to build his image of a critic on his anti-Hispanic attitude, which he accepted as his programme. “I would like to break away from the bad tradition of praising everything what has the sanction of official greatness”\(^ {484}\) – he declared openly. In the text, assumed to be dedicated to Donoso’ novella *Hell Has No Limits*, he made a ruthless attack on the phenomenon of the boom which in his opinion was,

artificially created and had little to do with true formal-artistic values of the writing of this geopolitical region. It was first of all the sale of exoticism; the Latin Americans simply managed to convince European and American critics who were blasé and bored with their native formal refinements to praise folklore and ethnography.\(^ {485}\)

Unfortunately, Marx never explained which formal-artistic values of Spanish American literature he regarded as true. Additionally, the positive acceptance of the boom in Poland was to result first of all from the fact that “as a rule the

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\(^ {479}\) ba, (the section “Regał z książkami. Latynoski”), *Kontynenty* 1989, no. 8, p. 29.
\(^ {481}\) L.B., the section “Między książkami,” *Życie Literackie* 1988, no. 28, p. 15.
\(^ {482}\) Skłodowska, *Nowe Książki* 1984, no. 8, p. 85.
\(^ {483}\) Skłodowska, *Nowe Książki* 1985, no. 4, p. 77.
\(^ {484}\) Marx, *Kultura* 1987, no. 50, p. 11.
\(^ {485}\) Marx, *Kultura* 1988, no. 43, p. 15.
reviews of Latin American prose are written by translators, and so, those are interested in its promotion,”[486] which was obviously false.

According to Marx, *Chronicle of a Death Foretold* by García Márquez was trash for indiscriminate readers, a kind of a tabloid which fed them a chronicle of accidents. It was full of unjustified erotic descriptions and acts of cruelty.[487] As for *Hell Has No Limits*, he regarded it as a boring, with an over-complicated plot, story about a lowly brothel.[488]

Borges’ works remained disturbing. However, any attempts of their re-evaluation led to negate their right to be called literature. For some critics, Borges was still a compiler:

Borges’ writing has something of an exclusive, snobbish game, something compiled from rebuses, complicated, metaphysical crosswords, something related to playing solitaire games.[489]

The Argentinian writer’s erudition was to cover his inability to face the reality, to face real life:

Dazzling readers with books is good for the nouveau riche; truly metaphysical writing, for example, of Kafka or Beckett, do not need any support and mock-up as it draws from life and reality.[490]

Summarising, the critical texts of the 1980s widened the Polish reader’s horizon about Spanish American prose only to a small extent. They did not bring any fresh views or new interpretative perspectives. They generally repeated the threads and opinions that had already been known in the previous decade.

6 Critics about Spanish American prose after the transformation (1990–2005)

6.1 Introductory notes

The number of critical texts is obviously connected with the number of publications which critics are to review. As already signalled, in the early 1990s, the editors seemed to forget Spanish American literature, as if making a silent assumption that its popularity in the previous decades was some ephemeral

[490] Ibid.
fashion. Hence, this period witnessed no articles dedicated to this literature in
the press. A gradual return of Spanish American prose to the Polish publishing
market brought about the critics’ interest and a bigger number of publications.
In those 15 years, articles and mentions of Spanish American works appeared in
dailies, opinion-forming weeklies, magazines for different receivers, and natu-
rally, in periodicals dedicated to cultural and literary issues. The number of the
latter was quite big, but some of them were local, sometimes they were ephem-
eral – only a few issues were published.

Investigations concerning this problem were very difficult due to incomplete
bibliographical sources. The most reliable and comprehensive data concerning
texts dedicated to literature can be found in the Polish Literary Bibliography
(Polska Bibliografia Literacka), accessible online; however, it stopped being
updated in 1996. One can also use the Index to Periodicals (Bibliografia
Zawartości Czasopism) that is updated on an almost on-going basis. Yet, this
catalogue embraces only selected non-scientific periodicals: the dailies –
Rzeczpospolita and Gazeta Wyborcza; the opinion-forming weeklies – Polityka,
Wprost, Przegląd Tygodniowy and Tygodnik Powszechny, and does not cite any
texts published in colour magazines, including the so-called women’s press. As
far as literary periodicals are concerned, the catalogue cites them only if they
have been submitted as legal deposit to the National Library. Consequently, it is
not possible to gather an exhaustive corpus of critical texts concerning Spanish
American prose published in 1990–2005. Nevertheless, it seems that a corpus
consisting of over one hundred press publications should be a representative
corpus to signal new tendencies.

In the first period of the return of interest in Spanish American litera-
ture, works of the greatest stars of the Polish boom (the dead writers Borges,
Cortázar and Carpentier as well as those still active: García Márquez, Fuentes
and Vargas Llosa) were published in Poland. In those years and slightly later, the
reviewers’ attention was drawn exclusively to novelties. They omitted the books
of the same authors that had been published earlier, unless they appeared within
series aiming at consolidating or establishing a literary canon.491 Books written
by authors who Polish readers did not know, published in the mid-1990s, were
noticed only sporadically. Some of them had one or two reviews, others – none.
In these cases, literary critics, according to Sławiński’s definition, acted as a sieve,
introducing certain works into the literary circulation only to a minimal extent,
whereas some works were doomed to be forgotten.

491 I will return to that later on.
There was a generational change of critics dealing with Spanish American literature. In the new period, there were still some critics who had reviewed this prose during the boom, for example Komorowski and Bugajski, but new names prevailed.

During the discussed fifteen years, the texts dedicated to Spanish American prose included considerably more cross-sectional articles than in the previous periods. The time distance obviously favoured in-depth reflections on issues that stopped evoking emotions.

Moreover, the character of the reviews changed fundamentally. The biggest change was probably that the critics stopped seeing Spanish American prose as an extraordinary phenomenon: this prose became a normal element on the map of the world literature. In Poland, it stopped being treated as a literature enjoying special rights. The critical texts did not contain any didactic objectives, which was so characteristic of the boom. The critics did not feel obliged to complete the gaps of readers’ knowledge, assuming that they had already gained some information, or in case they had not, assuming that during the period of electronic communication the proper sources were commonly accessible and everyone could gather indispensable information. Thus, in contemporary reviews, we did not generally come across a short history of any national literature or writer’s biography. This attitude could have resulted from the acceptance of a different perspective, which did not assume that profound knowledge of the circumstances of the origin of a literary work was needed to experience it.

At the same time, the authors of critical texts stopped attempting at all cost to adhere Hispanic works to a particular literary genre. They also stopped being obsessed with juxtaposing Spanish American works with other, renowned works of European and American writers. Spanish American prose, also from the Polish perspective, began to appear as an autonomous phenomenon, not requiring any justification through its alleged similarities to other works.

The fundamental changes on the publishing market caused that the reviews assumed a more commercial character. As already mentioned, demand on valuable literature exceeding its supply was over. It was considerably more difficult to sell books, especially foreign fiction. The editors tried to reach readers who were interested in various kinds of literature, thus their offers became very rich. The reviewers, aware that their opinions could influence the decisions of potential buyers, generally focused on listing advantages and disadvantages of

492 I have written about the phenomena on the Polish publishing market in Chapter two, section 9.
the discussed works, giving up their roles of guides to foreign cultures. An interesting aspect of the critical texts of the 1990s was their remarks about the functioning of the emerging book market.

Summarising, in the critical texts of 1990–2005, the cognitive function was considerably reduced as compared with the reviews of the 1970s. The evaluating elements were the top priority. The most important aim of the critics was to encourage, or discourage, readers to buy or simply read a certain book.

6.2 Borges, Cortázar, Carpentier: the dead stars of the boom in contemporary criticism

Cortázar, who died in 1984, stopped being the favourite of the Polish critics after 1989, which was testified among other things by the decisive decrease in the number of articles dedicated to his works. The reeditions of his books were seldom reviewed in non-specialist press. He was rather mentioned in literary papers, such as Odra and Literatura na Świecie. Sometimes these papers published translations of his prose. The reviews of his works were usually short, and their authors presented only the main topics of his works. From time to time, especially when the reviews were written by the critics who belonged to the boom generation, one could observe a sort of nostalgia for the time when Cortázar enjoyed unconditional recognition, revealed even in the title of the note concerning the reedition of Cronopios and Famas “The reedition of the cult.” Larger texts about Cortázar’s works could be found in scientific periodicals, including Nowa Krytyka, Ameryka Łacińska and Pro Libris. However, their range was very limited. Ameryka Łacińska, edited by CESLA, which was to discuss various aspects of the culture of this continent, is not to be found in most libraries. Thus, its impact can be hardly compared with the popularity of Kontynenty or Poznaj Świat, which were sold in every press kiosk during the times of the Polish People’s Republic. The authors of the younger generations, who published in these periodicals, focused on Cortázar’s concept of game.

Out of the dead writers whose books became known in Poland during the boom, Borges was in the focus of the critics. The author of the note, published

493 Varga, Gazeta o Książkach 1993, no. 9, p. 3.
494 Gondowicz, Gazeta o Książkach 1993, no. 10, p. 4.
in *Gazeta Wyborcza*,\(^{496}\) concerning the seminar on Borges organised by ZAIKS (Polish Society of Authors and Composers) in 1992, reminded readers that he was one of the writers who had fascinated Polish translators in a special way. It was calculated that Borges’ works had appeared 952 times in 46 papers in Poland till 1992; some of his works were even translated eight times. His texts were translated into Polish by 38 people!

Borges belonged to the small circle of Hispanic prose writers whose works were published in book form as early as in 1990. That year the Publishing House Przedświt\(^{497}\) prepared a volume of Borges’ texts written in various periods, which was the first edition of his works after his death. Although almost every aspect of his works – commencing from his metaphysical search to his style of writing rendered by the translator in a way that evoked respect – arose admiration, the editorial aspect raised objection.\(^{498}\) According to the reviewers, the volume was not professionally edited; it was not even proof-read before going to print. Accordingly, it contained stylistic, typing and factual errors.\(^{499}\) The editor was also criticised after publishing the collection of Borges’ books entitled *Historie prawdziwe i wymyślone* [True and Invented Stories]. Now criticism concerned the gangster policy of Muza which combined the short stories from the collections *Fictions* and *The Aleph and Other Stories* in one volume under one title and put information in the footer that it was the first edition. Thus, Musa undermined the efforts of the previous editors and misled potential readers who looking at the title could have thought that they would receive Borges’ new, unknown works.\(^{500}\) The volume did not have any information about the copyright although the copyright did not expire seven years after the writer’s death.

The ignorance concerning the legal aspects of an edition could condemn a book to artistic absence in extreme cases, which happened with Borges’ *Eseje zebrane* [Collected Essays] translated by Sobol-Jurczykowski. The reviewer for *Odra* was evidently amused by the complexities of the editorial process of this volume:

“[…] the editor is the firm “Lobos,” which I do not know, while “Talleres Barcelona” was responsible for the printing. Now you see what’s happening! Spaniards

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497 In 1982–89, Przedświt was an independent editor publishing literature in “clandestine circulation”; this literature could not be published officially. Since 1990 the company has been managed by Markiewicz.
500 *Tygodnik Powszechny* 1993, no. 46, p. 11.
Spanish American prose evaluated by Polish critics

(sorry – Catalonians!) are printing Polish translations of Argentinian writers, intended for our market.\textsuperscript{501}

However, because of the copyright the book could not be distributed in Poland and became inaccessible.

In 1990–2005, the reviews of the volumes of Borges’ prose, both the reeditions and first Polish editions, included threads that had been known from the critical texts of the 1970s and 1980s. And so the critics wrote that for Borges, reality was a mirror of what all kinds of books contained; that he avoided current matters in order to deal with issues that had been part of culture for many millennia\textsuperscript{502}; that he was a philosopher rather than a writer\textsuperscript{503} and that he blurred the borders between truth and fabrication.\textsuperscript{504} They praised his erudition and unmistakeable style.\textsuperscript{505} Beside the enthusiasts of his writing, there were critics who did not appreciate his works because they still regarded him predominantly as a pretentious compiler:

I admit shamefully that I have been fooled. The repetitiveness of the threads, the overuse of Great Words, the all-present phantasms of the Babel Library and the Book made me see an attempt to make time invalid instead of noting in them a \textit{reductio ad absurdum} of Plato’s discourse.\textsuperscript{506}

In the 1990s, in various periodicals, including the scientific ones, several interesting articles about the writing of the Argentinian author were published. For example, Elbanowski,\textsuperscript{507} referring to Gérard Genette’s conception, created a typology of Borges’ own prologues and enumerated their most important functions. He also paid attention to the fact that the prologues constituted an integral part of the collections composed by the writer although they were so interesting that could be treated as autonomous works. Radosław Piętka, using the classical rules of rhetoric, analysed Borges’ selected short stories looking for the means of persuasion in them.\textsuperscript{508} Ziętara focused on the Argentinian context of his writing, which was usually omitted by Western critics.\textsuperscript{509} In her very

\textsuperscript{501} Szelegejd, (bt), \textit{Odra} 1999, no. 11, pp. 112–113.
\textsuperscript{504} Cichowicz, \textit{Twórczość} 2001, no. 4, pp. 129–132.
\textsuperscript{505} Gondowicz, \textit{Nowe Książki} 2000, no. 3 p. 42.
\textsuperscript{506} Komendant, \textit{Twórczość} 2002, no. 4, pp. 57–64.
\textsuperscript{508} Piętka, \textit{Meander} 2004, no. 3–4, pp. 257–264.
thorough and subtle analysis of “Averroës’s Search” (La busca de Averroes), Mroczkowska-Brandt showed Borges using the mechanisms of intertextuality to undermine the knowability of the world.\footnote{Mroczkowska-Brandt “Intertekstualność w służbie wyobraźni. Jorge Luis Borges – Dociekania Awerroesa,” Ruch Literacki, 2002, no. 4–5, pp. 467–474.}

Most critics did not draw attention to Carpentier’s writing. La consagración de la primavera, published in Poland twenty years after its appearance on the market, was noticed only by those who remembered the boom. Komorowski discussed the autobiographic background and origin of the work, i.e. that the work was a literary response to the memories of Anaís Nin, who identified the revolutionary inclinations of her Hispanic friends with the manifestations of machismo.\footnote{Komorowski, Nowe Książki 1997, no. 11, pp. 27–28.} In turn, Bugajski recalled the author as the creator of the term “magical realism” and enumerated the characteristics of his prose. He did not forget to mention that the book expressed optimism concerning the future of the Cuban revolution.\footnote{Bugajski, Wiadomości Kulturalne 1997, no. 27, p. 20.}

6.3 García Márquez, Fuentes, Vargas Llosa: the older and present works of the stars of the boom from the perspective of literary criticism

6.3.1 Gabriel García Márquez

The writers who were younger than those described in the previous section and whose prose appeared in Poland slightly later than the works of Carpentier and Cortázar, and who were still using their creative powers, were heroes of quite a large number of critical texts in 1990–2005. Among them, a special place was occupied by García Márquez who seemed to play a similar role as Cortázar in the 1970s and 80s, who was almost ignored by the critics after the boom. “Márquez’s novels influence me like a drug,” confessed one of the reviewers of Love in the Time of Cholera.\footnote{Zaworska, Nowe Książki 1994, no. 9, p. 49.}

Out of the great boom for Hispanic literature that swept over Poland some twenty years ago only Márquez remained. And so did Borges. The rest of the eminent writers from those places: Onetti, Bastos, Llosa, Cortázar, Fuentes, Donoso, Lima and dozens of others, did not endure twenty years (provisional test of eternity)
– wrote Pilch,\textsuperscript{514} having different opinions than the editors who had not avoided publishing the books of Cortázar, Fuentes and Vargas Llosa, and who were thus evidently meeting the readers’ expectations.

The reviewers noticed the reeditions of García Márquez’s works, even those that were not his bestsellers. Their commentaries that were only short notes were not very innovative: we read that \textit{In Evil Hour} was a preparation for a masterpiece and that

the extraordinary power of Latin American magical realism was the magic of description, its unique vividness and tangibility.\textsuperscript{515}

It was also noted that in the new times, the writing of García Márquez wore out. The works that had functioned in common awareness as a literature of particular high artistic values, elaborate literature, were published in pocket series on poor quality paper.\textsuperscript{516}

\textit{One Hundred Years of Solitude} was the subject of reflection in many critical texts. This book was also reviewed by authors belonging to the younger generation. Yet, if anyone had expected them to look for a new interpretative key to García Márquez’s \textit{opus magnum}, he would have been disappointed. Their texts emphasised the influence of the grandparents’ stories on the Columbian writer’s imagination and provided the explanation of the term “magical realism” as well as the way García Márquez used this technique:

prosaic realities and historic facts freely mix with supernatural phenomena and incredible events;\textsuperscript{517}

Miraculousness, magic, dream, fairy tale… All the terms, contributing to the many-layered construction of \textit{One Hundred Years of Solitude} … \textsuperscript{518}

We learnt about the cyclic nature of the time presented in the novel, about the fate hanging over the inhabitants of Macondo, about the curse of the title loneliness, about the use of biblical motifs, about the suspension of the principle of probability, and finally, of course, about its affinity to Faulkner’s prose.\textsuperscript{519} Therefore, it was a catalogue of motifs occurring in the Polish critical texts concerning García
Márquez’s prose for over twenty years, which now sounds banal. After reading these articles one can have the impression that contemporary readers could not find any new content in the works of the Columbian writer, that his time has passed and that his books, once bestsellers, are now covered with a thick layer of dust.

However, the market data contradicted that image. The 1990s were a period of catching up with Garcí a Márquez’s prose which had not been published due to the editors’ crisis in the previous decade. In 1993, PIW gave readers The General in His Labyrinth, which had its first edition in 1989; while in 1994, Muza edited Love in the Time of Cholera (nine years after the original edition) and – Strange Pilgrims (three years after the first edition). The publication of the Polish translation of Of Love and Other Demons (1996) appeared only two years after the Spanish premiere. Then Polish readers could follow García Márquez’s works almost just after they had been written: News of a Kidnapping (Noticia de un secuestro, 1997) was published a year after its first edition, the writer’s autobiography Living to Tell the Tale (Vivir para contarla, 2004) – less than two years, Memories of My Melancholy Whores (Memorias de mis putas tristes, 2005) – a year later. All of these books aroused the Polish critics’ interest.

The first new book by García Márquez, The General in His Labyrinth, published after a ten-year break, was favourably received by the critics. They hurried to assure the fans of his writing that the Columbian writer did not break with magical realism, and “they will see all the characteristics of his style and poetic imagination in the book.” The novel was described as a historical reportage about the last days of Bolivar: in that novel, the mythical figure of the Dictator was wildly multiplied, but in The General, the writer’s untamed imagination tries to subject itself to the historical rigours.

However, in the 1990s, the unwritten principle of praising García Márquez or any writer coming from Latin America ceased to exist. Although positive evaluations prevailed in the reviews, they were not produced by a unanimous choir of flatterers. Love in the Time of Cholera enthused most critics, but some were disappointed that it was not another masterpiece and that the writer “is
not here – unfortunately – a shaman from magical Macondo." The book surprised readers with its optimism which García Márquez had not showed earlier, and with, first of all, its move away from the formula of magical realism to a realism that was close to the 19th century novel. It was “rather nostalgic realism, evoking the aura of the colonial epoch,” revealed in the chronicle’s conscientiousness in registering daily details that assumed miraculous features in García Márquez’s writing. For all of the critics, the book was predominantly a remarkable story about love, an alternative to the story of Romeo and Juliet in which the romance stereotypes were reversed. Some clarified that the universality of the Columbian author’s writing depended on the exotic decoration providing the setting for stories whose protagonists could be anyone regardless of the latitude they lived at. Since violent emotions and dependence on the course of history are experiences that are common for all people:

Unfortunately, one cannot read it with relief that it happened a long time ago, far away, and we are living in other lands and at other levels. […] We can discover ourselves in these love stories as we discover ourselves in an unhappy absurd history.

The volume *Strange Pilgrims* proved to be more controversial. For some it contained twelve novel masterpieces testifying that “Márquez’s writing is unquestionably beautiful, timeless.” For others it was a slightly disappointing collection, uneven, “several interesting little stories showing that being Hispanic is completely different than being European.” The reviewers considered the disillusionment about Europe as the prevailing motif.

The critics’ expectations towards García Márquez’s next works were best illustrated by the statement of the reviewer for *Wiadomości Kulturalne*:

> When a writer creates something like *The Tin Drum* or *One Hundred Years of Solitude* before he gets very old, he only has problems afterwards and must constantly compete against himself.

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The same critic wrote about *Strange Pilgrims* that it could be regarded as excellent “if it is evaluated independently of what we know about its author’s writing.”

His attitude towards *Of Love and Other Demons* was similar. Speaking highly of its style and composition reflecting the mood of the fall of a certain cultural formation, he noted that it was devoid of breadth and narrative tension.

Some reviews of this novel show how difficult it was to write something original about García Márquez’s works. We read in these reviews that the author drew an intriguing image of the colonial world tossed about by contradictions and embracing complex ethnic relations, the problem of racism, the question of slavery and the role of the Church; that the author found the final source of creative inspiration in the Caribbean and that one could feel the heat of the tropics flowing from the book…

Diverging evaluations were also given by the Polish reviewers to *News of a Kidnapping*, in which, in some critics’ opinions, the penetration of the Columbian reality “under the pen (laptop?) of the master assumed the proportion of a metaphor – so broad that it could embrace the whole world,” while according to others, the novel contains a shallow, naïve and sometimes even suspicious moralising. Abandoning the convention of magical realism in favour of “press realism,” despite the reliability of journalistic skills, turned out to be unconvincing.

García Márquez’s autobiography was recommended to his fans as an exciting reading. Wyka paid special attention to this work proving that it was governed by the same laws as the literary fiction created by the author. She defined it as “a self-portrait novel” in which the writer again showed his masterly:

Márquez […] unfolding before our prying eyes all of his colourful technique as an outstanding writer, thus avoided the readers’ intrusive curiosity. His skills absorb us so much that we have no desire to ask the writer indiscreet questions.

*Memories of My Melancholy Whores* was appreciated for its unconventional view on eroticism and
for its polemic with the version of love as a kind of therapy against loneliness and alienation, which is common in our civilisation.544

García Márquez was also in focus of some publications that were not directly connected with his literary works. These texts concerned among other things his biographies published in Poland: Gabriel García Márquez by Dagmar Ploetz545 and Gabriel García Márquez: El viaje a la semilla by Dasso Saldívar.546 Much paper and ink was used to investigate the origin of the writer’s strange, friendly relationships with Fidel Castro or Pablo Escobar. Many a time, a publication of a book dedicated to some fragment of García Márquez’s biography, e.g. Fidel and Gabo (Gabo y Fidel: el paisaje de una amistad) by Angelo Esteban and Stephanie Panichelli,547 was a pretext to discuss these matters. One of the reviews had a meaningful title “My friend executioner.”548 Looking over the current press, one could have the impression that the non-literary aspects of the writer’s life became more interesting than his works.

6.3.2 Mario Vargas Llosa

As in the case of García Márquez’s writing, the works of Vargas Llosa which had not been published in the previous decade appeared in Poland in the early 1990s. In 1992, after an eleven-year delay, PIW published The War of the End of the World. In the same year, the Publishing House TENTEN released The Real Life of Alejandro Mayta, seven years after the first edition. In Praise of the Stepmother was published in 1993 by Muza, a five-year delay, while in 1995, Rebis edited the novel Who Killed Palomino Molero? that was published for the first time nine years earlier. The same publishing house introduced the translation of Death in the Andes in 1997, after a four-year delay. The Notebooks of Don Rigoberto was published by Muza in 1999, which was only a two-year break after the publication of the original, and so was The Feast of the Goat (La Fiesta del Chivo), whose relatively quick publication (2002) Polish readers owed to Rebis. The next translations of Vargas Llosa’s books appeared about two years after their first editions, which should be regarded as a reasonable date considering the time that

546 Łubieński, Nowe Książki 2001, no. 11, p. 31.
547 Domosławski, Gazeta Wyborcza 2006, no. 295, p. 14
translators needed to do their renderings of books that were often quite thick and of high artistic values.

The novels of the Peruvian writer enjoyed constant interests of the critics. Their reviews appeared in dailies, opinion-forming weeklies and periodicals dedicated to culture. Sometimes these were long articles and sometimes only short notes, e.g. in the cultural “Menu” of the weekly Wprost, where we can find the information entitled “Wysokie loty Llosy” [Llosa’s high flights]:

Mario Vargas Llosa deserved a Nobel a long time ago, and only the members of the Swedish Academy know the reasons why he has not received it yet. The author of Conversation in the Cathedral, in his latest book The Feast of the Goat, takes us to the Dominican Republic. The plot concerns the last days of the dictator’s life. This time again, Llosa uses his unique rhythm of narration that the critics describe as “others write books, whereas he writes literature.”

The editors cared for the promotion of Vargas Llosa’s books inviting him to Poland. For example, in 1998, he was a guest during the 43th International Book Fair in Warsaw. That year Rebis published Death in the Andes. This book and Who Killed Palomino Molero? were Vargas Llosa’s most appreciated works out of those published in 1990–2005 by the Polish reviewers. Who Killed Palomino Molero? was praised mainly for the tricks that were typical of a thriller and for presenting Peru’s important problems. Death in the Andes was recognised as one of the most important works of Vargas Llosa, depicting the most valid and essential issues of his homeland: the sources of terrorism. At the same time, it was seen as one of the author’s best books that:

has everything what can be looked for in a novel: a sensational plot, a moving love affair and a charming hero whom we could encounter again soon. A vision of history and judgement concerning politics were interwoven in the action.

In the reviews of his other novels, the author’s excellent technique was stressed, for instance the polyphonic narrative in The War of the End of the World, the elaborate construction in The Feast of the Goat, showing parallel stories of the protagonists or the juxtaposition of Paul Gauguin’s biography and

553 Ciupek, Dekada Literacka 1993, no. 20, p. 8.
Vargas Llosa’s grandmother in *The Way to Paradise.* The critics noted the recurrent motifs and themes in Vargas Llosa’s books, such as setting the action in a military environment and describing its pathology, political questions, the clash between the relics of the pre-Columbian civilisations and the present, the impossibility of establishing a clear border between truth and invention, like in literature, like in life. Sometimes the cultural otherness of the depicted world was stressed, for example in the review of *Who Killed Palomino Molero?* called “a magical crime story”:

> Since such a book could have been written by a writer coming from that cultural circle, a world where crime of jealousy is morally justified, while love has a more complicated dimension, which is at the same time deeply rooted in the quasi-religious context.

Vargas Llosa’s works of a purely entertainment character *In Praise of the Stepmother* and *The Notebooks of Don Rigoberto* were evaluated as decisively less significant by the Polish reviewers.

In the Polish press, Vargas Llosa was discussed not only as a writer. The media noticed his role as a politician, for example when he competed for the position of Peru’s president, and as an expert and commentator on world politics, e.g. when he praised the Spanish king for his strong statement concerning Venezuela’s President Hugo Chavez during the Latin American summit in Chile in November 2007.

6.3.3 *Carlos Fuentes*

The reception of Fuentes’ works after 1990 was at first similar to those of García Márquez and Vargas Llosa: catching up with his latest works. In 1994, his three novels, including two older ones, were published in Poland. *Czytelnik* published...
The critics after the transformation (1990–2005)


The critics saw *A Change of Skin* as old-fashioned and pretentious, though written with passion and pain. The accumulated writing techniques and artistic means were not seen so much as evidence of Fuentes' virtuosity but rather as elements that made the reading of the book difficult. Similar accusations were made towards *The Buried Mirror* although it was also stated that the irritation resulting from mixing mythology and cultural areas, the use of vocabulary of various register types, the author’s showing off his eloquence and his inclination to use the teacher's persuasion were essential ingredients of artistic experience while reading Fuentes' prose.

The critics carefully followed the next editions of the Mexican writer's works. Yet, they did not evoke the same enthusiasm as his books published in the 1970s and the 80s. The reviewers showed their impatience with the recurrent motifs of his writing. *The Years with Laura Díaz (Los años con Laura Díaz)* was described as another variation on the obsessive themes of Fuentes' writing: issues determined by the Aztec heritage, the epoch of the Spanish conquistadors and the contemporary history of the identity of Latin American culture [...], the problem of the course as well as moral and political consequence of the Mexican Revolution [...], finally – the image of Mexico City [...].

Fuentes was suspected of flattering readers’ tastes. *Diana: the Goddess Who Hunts Alone* was called “hunting for a bestseller.” In this novel, “a leftist soap opera,” the critics saw two persistent sins of Latin American literature: Europe-centrism expressed in the author's showing off his erudition and summarising the European ideas and “philosophisings,” and anti-Americanism resulting from the complex of a big neighbour. The thread of defining identity was perceived as hermetic:

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our troubles with reading this book resemble those of Mexican readers if they were given a book about the problem of the national identity of the inhabitants of Silesia or Masuria, torn between their Germanness and Polishness.

His political involvement, also expressed in his prose, was not convincing for all the critics. The Crystal Frontier (La frontera de cristal) was “magical journalism”; the writer seemed not to know which role he wanted to play: an elaborate writer or an interim publicist. “Why using magic where humble publicist concreteness would be more effective and understandable?” asked the reviewer for Gazeta Wyborcza.

6.4 New names

Out of the writers who were unknown in Poland before 1990, the most popular one was the Chilean Isabel Allende. Her books appeared in 1990–2005 as many times as twenty-five! She belongs to the younger generations of Hispanic artists. She debuted in the 1980s. Her first book translated into Polish was the novel Of Love and Shadows, edited by the Kraków-based Oficyna Literacka in 1991, seven years after the original had appeared. One had to wait long for the next publication of her books. They were published by Muza. Some titles were reedited, which proved their popularity.

The Polish critics saw Allende as an heiress of the boom, someone who had learnt magical realism in the Venezuelan Caribbean. In her prose

the jungle – together with the power of the ancient names, faith in magical rituals and exuberant, sinless eroticism – is still alive and breathes among the monuments of modern civilisation.

Works “originating directly from the Latin American tradition of magical prose, coloured with the characteristic irrationalism related to the Caribbean region” and having social changes in the background were bound to succeed. Hence Allende’s books were defined as well-written page-turners, classic “middle literature” and “a response to the ordinary need to read, serving

572 Bratkowski, ibid.
jolly amusement.”\textsuperscript{578} However, the female reviewers saw the essential difference between her prose and the magical realism of the boom: her protagonists were mainly women, which made Allende part of feminist literature. Her feminism was evident in her proud emphasis on women’s otherness, most fully expressed through sex, eroticism and sensuality.\textsuperscript{579} The authoress

says what the patriarchal culture recognised as non-verbalised – first of all, maternity and its motherly attitude towards the world and creativity.\textsuperscript{580}

Allende’s books were seldom reviewed by men. If they were, attention was paid to completely different elements. For Jacek Zychowicz, \textit{The House of the Spirits (La casa de los espíritus)} was predominantly a political novel that could satisfy demand for this genre, absent in the Polish contemporary literature:

its social contents impress with perspicacity, and even sometimes they seem to still – or allusively, as one wishes – apply in our reality.\textsuperscript{581}

All the critics stressed the autobiographic elements in the prose of the Chilean authoress\textsuperscript{582} and her extraordinary gift of narrating which she sometimes shared with her heroines: “the story restores things their proper dimensions, while people the sense of dignity and fulfilment.”\textsuperscript{583}

The revelation of the beginning of the new millennium was another Chilean writer – Luis Sepúlveda. In 2002–2005, the Publishing House Noir sur Blanc published five titles of this author: \textit{Diario de un killer sentimental \& Yacaré} (2002), \textit{Patagonia Express} (2003), \textit{The Story of a Seagull and the Cat Who Taught Her to Fly} (2002),\textsuperscript{584} \textit{Mundo del fin del mundo} (2003) and \textit{Desencuentros} (2005). The first volume of his prose published in Poland included two short stories being a pastiche of a crime novel, which were called “ pearls.”\textsuperscript{585} The critics liked “the mood

\begin{thebibliography}{99}
\bibitem{578} Myszkowska, \textit{Nowe Książki} 1999, no. 12, pp. 48–49.
\bibitem{580} Szumlewicz, \textit{Literatura} 1999, no. 1, p. 59.
\bibitem{583} Myszkowska, \textit{Nowe Książki} 1999, no. 12, pp. 48–49.
\bibitem{584} This book was published in Poland in 1997 by Muza.
\bibitem{585} Szczerba, \textit{Książki w Dużym Formacie}, insertion to \textit{Gazeta Wyborcza} 2002, no. 219, p. 18.
\end{thebibliography}
of magic and mysterious exoticism” as well as his reporter’s eye for details and skill to describe them.

The Mexican bestseller *Like Water for Chocolate* by Laura Esquivel enjoyed considerable popularity in Poland as well. The premiere of this specific novel, mixed with a cookbook, and firstly distributed in sections, took place together with the premiere of a film having the same title on 17 December 1993. The premiere evoked mixed feelings of the reviewers. In the novel, some saw only stereotypes known from the prose of magical realism, the function of which can be reduced to ornaments:

In the love story by Esquivel […], fantasy threads have been introduced, and the unreal is interwoven with the real; however, what has been created is not an integrated, poetic vision of the world, but a little work full of poetic decorations; these ornaments have been reduced to the function of evoking a certain mood, constituting the background of an exalted sentimentalism.

The novel was described as “an ersatz of a cookbook and an ersatz of literature” that lacks the Hispanic soul, and the Mexican protagonists made the impression of being Americanised Hispanics.

Once there was a literature for cooks. […] Now the times have changed. Cooks write books from their kitchens that bubble with life, while the intelligentsia admire their wonderful ideas.

– the reviewer for *Nowe Książki* commented with malicious remarks.

According to some other reviewers, magical realism was present in Esquivel’s novel as citations, and the convention of a romance was taken in ironical brackets. The book gave both intellectual entertainment and proven, though exotic, recipes.

The other books of Latin American writers published in Poland in 1990–2005 were reviewed sporadically. Most of them were not noticed at all. Attention was directed to several novels written by the Cubans who could hardly be called ‘favourites of the regime.’ Pedro Juan Gutiérrez, living in Cuba, but publishing his works in Spain, intrigued the reviewers with the journey “to one of the last land of the fallen utopia,” described in *Dirty Havana Trilogy* (*Trilogía sucia de La Habana*):

592 Ziędta, *Polityka* 1994, no. 3, p. VII.
Everyone and everything are painfully authentic. Thanks to Gutiérrez, I again was taken to Havana, found the little streets, squares, pubs and people’s behaviour I had known before.\(^{593}\)

In his books, the critics saw the writer’s unconditional love of Cuba’s capital, even when the city was ruined after fifty years of the communist rules.\(^{594}\) Politics was pushed to the background. The function of the metaphor of the social-political sphere was fulfilled by descriptions of natural phenomena, such as cyclones that devastated the island.\(^{595}\) In *Tropical Animal (Animal Tropical)*, the writer made the “dirty” culture of salsa, defining Cuba, clash with the sterile culture of bolero, identified with Sweden or Europe in general. The critics were shocked by the “unbridled eroticism” of his prose;\(^{596}\) “if one cannot speak well of the regime, one should draw the joy of life from sex.”\(^{597}\) Yet, not all of the critics seemed to be convinced by such an approach towards the intercultural contrasts:

> When the macho spreads his charm, which is not self-ironic enough only in Cuba, this unnecessary novel defends itself in some way. Unfortunately, in the middle of the novel, Pedro Juan, the artist who was known and censored in the island (proven charm of a dissident), goes to the seminary to... Stockholm. This is a graceful theme since there are no two cities that are so different from each other like Stockholm and Havana. Thus, if someone wants to know all the ways in which a fiery, uncompromising and sexually liberated Cuban shows that he is classy as contrasted with the Swedes who are choked with their conventions – *Animal Tropical* will be irreplaceable.\(^{598}\)

The press also focused on the Cuban authoress Zoé Valdés. Yet, critics more often wrote about her as a dissident than a writer.\(^{599}\) The authors of the notes for *Gazeta Wyborcza* saw the grotesqueness of the descriptions of the post-revolutionary everyday life in Cuba\(^{600}\) and mentioned the spirits of the past from which the immigrants could not free themselves.\(^{601}\)

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\(^{596}\) Uglik, *Czas Kultury* 2006, no. 5–6, pp. 21–22.  
\(^{598}\) Grzymisławski, *Gazeta Wyborcza* 2005, no. 84, p. 18.  
\(^{599}\) For example, this role was stressed in a large interview published in *Wysokie Obcasy* (2005, no. 5, pp. 10–15), in which the writer spoke about her childhood and youth in Cuba, immigration despite her will, surveillance by the agents of Castro’s regime.  
6.5 Summary

The collected material, though incomplete, allows us to note that in 1990–2005, as far as Spanish American prose is concerned, the reviewers’ attention focused both on the living and dead writers who had won popularity during the boom. This was hardly surprising since their subjects of interest were the current works of García Márquez or Vargas Llosa. The other authors, popular during the boom, were mentioned in articles or notes summarising their literary outputs, often published after their deaths, as it was the case of Onetti. Yet, the brand of Latin American literature itself was not sufficient to attract the Polish critics’ attention. This was testified by the divergence between the number of published books of authors who had not been known earlier, and the number of reviews dedicated to them. Many writers whose literary talents were evident remained unnoticed.

The literature of Latin America lost its status of novelty and uniqueness in Poland and other countries. The critics got used to its presence in publishing announcements and in bookstores. At the same time, it stopped being the latest fashion and its knowledge did not guarantee a social success any longer. Spanish American prose was commented on just like other works originating in countries known on the map of world literature. Therefore, the critical texts did not contain any special themes or threads that would be reserved for Spanish American literature.

In the reviews of the works that the critics noted, one could discern some nostalgia for magical realism, which evidently met the readers’ expectations. The use of this technique was stressed in the reviews concerning the bestsellers in Poland, i.e. books written by Allende, Esquivel and Sepúlveda. Apart from them, of interest was Cuban prose, but not the one that was promoted by the Cuban authorities in the 1970s and 80s, but the one created by dissidents or by writers in exile. This situation created the impression that the realities of the relics of the communist system touched some strings of the Polish critics’ sensitivity in a special way. At the same time, it could be noted that in spite of the stereotype spread in Poland, magical reality was not the only theme of Spanish American prose:

Obviously, the Cubans are not the only immigrants from Latin America. At the airports and in the streets of big cities, we pass by Hispanics whom other dictatorships, persecutions or longings forced to leave their native spaces. New York, Madrid, Paris, London, Stockholm are full of those fugitives and wanderers; Latin American literature narrates as frequently about magic as about exile.

At the threshold of the new millennium, some articles of a general character signalled a change of generations taking place in Spanish American prose. The critics mentioned the anthology *McOndo* published in 1996, including 18 short stories written by writers who were under 35 years old. The title itself was an obvious polemic with the prose of the previous generation that “for the following generations became a death kiss” and attributed “the label of magical realists to Hispanic writers.” The stories were “aggressive variations on urban life pulsing in the rhythm of sex, drugs and pop music.” One could see a change of perspective in them: the sphere of privacy and not the question of national identity was in the centre of interest. The plots in these stories were set in urban communities, giving “a detailed picture of the present-day Latin America, its streets, politics, social transformations and a specific sense of humour.” One of the issues of *Literatura na Świecie* (2004, no. 9–10) was dedicated to the new prose. These threads appeared almost exclusively in larger texts written by experts. Nonetheless, before 2005, this was not reflected even in the books selected to be reviewed.

### 7 Changes of the way of perceiving Spanish American literature in the span of 60 years

Reading the critical texts led to a greater conviction that the attitude towards Spanish American literature had been fundamentally modified from the post-war times till 2005. First of all, this literature emerged from oblivion. Till the mid-1960s, very few critics realised that some interesting prose was born in Latin America. This continent was commonly seen either as a place of the wandering of the 19th century Polish immigrants whose fate was recorded in such works as *Pan Balcer w Brazylii* [Mr Balcer in Brazil] or drew amateurs of colourful, attractive adventures known from Fiedler’s reportages. Latin America was not regarded as a land of valuable literature or art. In fact, the number of experts in Latin American culture was very small in Poland. Literary reviews in the 1970s were written either by enthusiasts or those who had to produce them.

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604 Published in Santiago de Chile, ed. Sergio Gómez and Alberto Fuguet.
609 The reviewer for *Gazeta Wyborcza* paid much attention to it, but it was on the occasion of discussing *Memories of My Melancholy Whores* by García Márquez!
because of their professions. Consequently, one should be neither surprised nor outraged by the fact that many a time the authors of critical texts referred to the opinions of Spanish-speaking critics, in a way hiding behind their authority. From the perspective of time, one can state that this situation also had positive aspects: this was the way the reviewers and readers deepened their knowledge of Latin America. They could use that knowledge later when the presence of Spanish American prose became natural and obvious in Poland. The critics, having very humble means at their disposal, did a great job: thanks to them the literature that was almost completely unknown became part of Polish literary life, and knowledge about this literature was reinforced in the readers’ awareness.

One of the most striking differences between the reviews published during the boom and those published in 1990–2005 was that the latter lacked long passages about the context of the origin of the reviewed works. In the 1990s, this knowledge was regarded as obvious and not requiring any mention or as unnecessary to be affected by a certain work. However, one should remember that Spanish American works and their critical texts were one of the most important sources of information about the literature and culture of this continent for almost two decades.

The reviews published after 1990 had completely different structures. The aspect of advertisement was prevailing, and their fundamental aim was to gain readers, i.e. potential buyers. Hence, almost every remark assumed an evaluative character. If the use of magical realism was emphasised in a work, the goal was to encourage those readers who had been brought up during the boom to buy it. In the contemporary critical texts, the imperative to praise Spanish American literature, which could be easily perceived in the earlier reviews, was unnoticeable. In other words, the snobbism related to the necessity of showing admiration of every Spanish American work was gone. In the 1990s, ideological interpretations occurred considerably less frequently than in the period of the boom. The political context and significance of a given book were also perceived but to a smaller extent. Spanish American prose became more frequently seen as stories about real people and not ideologies.

Interest in Spanish American literature was fuelled by the stars of the boom promoted in Poland in the 1970s. The younger writers’ books were hardly noticed by critics, which was connected with the considerably bigger publishing offers than in the times of the Polish People’s Republic; it was difficult to discover an interesting book among numerous new titles on the market. Naturally, great names drew like a magnet. Most periodicals were eager to publish reviews of renowned authors’ books rather than those works that appeared on the Polish market for the first time.
From the early 1990s, the appearance of new Spanish American works was not announced as sensational unless they were premieres of some works by García Márquez or Vargas Llosa, still being part of promotional campaigns, at the international or even global level. In the 1970s, almost every new name from that region was a novelty; every new novel was qualified as an obligatory reading if it was not for its artistic values, it was at least for its cognitive function. Quite simply, nowadays the prose of Latin America is evoking substantially less intense emotions. Only in the texts of the critics of the older generation, one can discern some delicate feeling of nostalgia for the times of the boom.