

Aleksandra Kremer, Harvard University

Concurrent Modernizations? Poetry and Politics after the Transition

The early 1990s in Poland witnessed not only rapid economic and political reforms, but also changes in the functioning of literature, such as book publications of *bruLion* poets. While the country opened to the West, Polish poetry chose American inspirations, colloquial language, and private matters. The *bruLion* generation was compared to the 1920s, when Polish poets similarly abandoned national topics. Yet eventually it was a different author that debuted in the 1990s, Andrzej Sosnowski, who moved Polish poetics one step further and modernized Polish poetic diction. The author and his critics embraced Western literary theories: intertextuality, poststructuralism, deconstruction, imported at that time to Polish humanities, which similarly tried to make up for the lost time. These modernizations seemed, however, controversial: Sosnowski became a symbol of hermetic, unintelligible poetry, despite being a guru for many young authors.

Changes can be observed in the last few years, when the youngest poets and critics move from Sosnowski's influences towards politically engaged texts. This correlates with public debates on Polish transition, as well as new, interventionist books in the humanities, where the word "Marxism" reappears after being a taboo in the last decades.

From this perspective, Sosnowski's poetry, usually treated as ahistorical, autotelic, and language-oriented, can be seen as part of wider modernization processes known from the other spheres of life. Yet at the same time Sosnowski's attitude to the new reality was never simply affirmative, and he created almost apocalyptic visions of contemporary civilization and mass media. His warning was overlooked, because he did not choose direct condemnations, yet discreetly hid the despair behind elegant irony, and defended poetic autonomy as well as complex and aesthetic language. In that sense he remained close to the post-transitional ideas of pluralism, discussion, and freedom.