



You have downloaded a document from
RE-BUŚ
repository of the University of Silesia in Katowice

Title: Introduction

Author: Wojciech Kalaga, Tadeusz Rachwał

Citation style: Kalaga Wojciech, Rachwał Tadeusz. (1997). Introduction. W: T. Rachwał, W. Kalaga (red.), "The wild and the tame : essays in cultural practice" (S. 7-9). Katowice : Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Śląskiego



Uznanie autorstwa - Użycie niekomercyjne - Bez utworów zależnych Polska - Licencja ta zezwala na rozpowszechnianie, przedstawianie i wykonywanie utworu jedynie w celach niekomercyjnych oraz pod warunkiem zachowania go w oryginalnej postaci (nie tworzenia utworów zależnych).



UNIwersYTET ŚLĄSKI
W KATOWICACH



Biblioteka
Uniwersytetu Śląskiego



Ministerstwo Nauki
i Szkolnictwa Wyższego

Introduction

“Wildness” is a term of excess. The range of words more or less synonymous with the word *wild* is also, say, excessive. Wild: untamed, savage, ferocious, feral, unbroken, native, agrarian – so much Word for Windows Thesaurus. It also means uncultivated, growing in natural conditions, easily startled, uncivilized, violent, uncontrolled, desolate, waste, unsettled, madly enthusiastic, disorderly, reckless. What makes this term attractive from the point of view of literary or cultural criticism is the possibility of its application, and of analysis of its application, to a very broad range of discursive practices from and equally broad range of perspectives.

Generally, wildness is a term close to otherness. The latter term, however, has been for some time now the domain of the postmodern considerations and theorizations of our condition. Otherness is more general and more capacious than wildness as it demarcates the area of difference, say, metaphysically, to the omission of the natural environment which in the case of wildness is always inscribed within its connotative domain. “Wild” is also “Other”, but this otherness is metonymically close, or closer, to nature. Since nature can also be wild, the term “wild” inevitably contaminates nature as a norm and thus makes “norm” yet another always already excessive term.

Wildness, unlike otherness, preserves a trace of familiarity. Thoreau’s preservation of the world in nature was, as Tadeusz Rachwał argues in his paper, a simultaneous preservation of the neighbourhood, of the civilized “near-dwellers”, regardless of the villainy which Thoreau saw in the village life. Wildness attracts as a sphere of untamed freedom, but it is also repulsive as disorderly and desolate. Hence the projection of wildness upon any kind of unfamiliar spaces and places, upon any “non-European presences and cultures”, as Krzysztof Knauer phrases it in his reading of Toni Morrison’s *Jazz*, whose presence is thus deprived of the legitimacy of the real.

Wildness is thus both real and unreal, civilized and uncivilized. If there is a method in wildness, a methodology which Wojciech Kalaga discusses in his article, then it actually dwells in the very word “wild” which “is more civilised

than any other word: it not only tames reality, as does any other word, but also immediately, in one gesture, tames that which it proclaims untamed (the wild). To name a fragment of reality (to call it wild, for example) is first to isolate and identify it and then to subdue it to our linguistic will, to tame it, or as some of us would say, to “colonise it”. Wildness, unlike madness, remains within the sphere of the familiar, or familial, structuring. This is so because, as Tomasz Kalaga tries to show, the “features of the mad may be identified as features of the wild, but wildness goes beyond and includes that which has little to do with the idea of insanity”. Wildness is only a slight madness, a Freddie Mercury wearing bananas on his head in the well known video version of his *I'm Going Slightly Mad*.

A slight madness seems to be also an important aspect of technologically reproduced realities – the case of cyberspace, for example. The possibility of reproduction of the natural *via* numerical to the point of making the latter natural is the case of what Paweł Frelik sees as wildness of technology manifested in cyberpunk narratives where technology goes wild by way of attaining “the state in which it replaces nature, man’s original environment. It merges with man and nature in an almost uncontrollable fashion” thus bringing to mind a possibility of the natural having always already been constructed and subject to be replaced by a better construction which could start an existence conditioned by the extinction of the imperfect, and thus unnatural, human race.

Construction of nature is also a constituent of its “ocular” perception whose mechanism, as Sławomir Masłoń sees it, is that of reduction of the surplus, of the excess of what we actually see, of the untamed which our eye tames never allowing the perception to reach the point of assimilation. Hence human seeing is always a narrative, a story of the appearance in the world which “is the compelling need of every creature”, which need, in case of human beings, is supplemented by the irresistible urge to speak. Wildflowers and weeds also invite naming, sometimes perhaps even wilder than they wild lives. In her discussion of the ways of seeing mullein in Polish poetry Agnieszka Pantuchowicz somehow feminizes the plant and draws our attention to the translational problems involved in wildness. Mullein (*dziewanna*) has a number of names whose translation into English seems to be futile: *królewska świeca*, *szabla*, *gorzygrot*, *dziewizna*, *krotnica leśna*, *kędzierzawica leśna*, *kędzierzawica polna*. Phonetically, the name ‘dziewanna’ might be associated with ‘dziewica’ (*a virgin*), ‘dziewka’ (*a maid*) and ‘dziwka’ (*whore*).

With the coming of the aesthetic, this urge to speak becomes a way of hiding and regressing from otherness through Art whose appeal is the promise of refuge from the Other which it seems to provide. In his essay on Oscar Wilde, Leszek Drogosław looks at the hopelessness of Oscar Wilde’s “going wild”, of facing a new self which, even in the confinement of the prison, is always a continuation of the former, “aestheticised” life. Though “one cannot escape sharing a cell with the Other, facing a new, pure self which Wilde seems to be searching for ends up with its renunciation as Other by way of regression to memories. What safeguards art and

artefacts, as Rafał Dubaniowski notices in his reading of Caliban in Shakespeare and Auden, is the presence of a phantom other which always undermines a prospect of totality in the sense of some personal order. What art inevitably implies is some attempt to tame the wild and slippery facets of reality. Art's pursuit is thus always a pursuit of a "wished-for" limitation, of a confinement of the seemingly unlimited approaches of freedom. Perhaps paradoxically, art itself can be judged in terms of wildness and cultivation, as is frequently the case with the Shakespearean criticism whose rhetoric Jacek Mydla discusses in his paper.

Wildness is also a figure recurrent in political discourse as an antithesis of social order. In his reading of Joseph von Eichendorff's "Das Schloß Dürande" Andrzej Wicher claims that regardless of the conservative message of the story, the author's attitude to wildness is ambivalent. Aristocracy, for example, are presented in the story as those who want the people tame, but also as those who "derive all their pride from exercising some control over the creatures of the wildness". Any revolutionary "return to nature" on the part of the tame is thus bound to fail because it is only the class of aristocratic "hunters" who are "naturally" predisposed to somehow control wildness. The wildness of the tame is thus something conceptually different from the wildness of the high. The ambivalence of wildness, in Marek Kulisz's reading of the marginalisation of the nomad, is something which for several centuries has characterised Western thinking. Both attractive and repulsive, wildness is the sphere of human historical existence, and thus also of the political order resting on historicity, is threatened by the possibility of there being a "wilder" order of things dwelling, like the nomads, in a purely geographical space without history. If in Pynchon's *Gravity's Rainbow* the Zone presented there is a space which has neither geography nor history, as Donata Minorowicz sees it in her paper, then this sphere becomes the manifestation of the war itself, the manifestation of the struggle for either kind of order.

Perhaps what is at stake in questioning wildness is also the question about the human. An evaluation of wildness necessitates endowing it with a value and thus asking the questions of what *value* is, what *sure* is, what *man* is, the questions which, according to Lyotard, "are taken to be dangerous and shut away again pretty fast".¹ Thoreau's vision of the preservation of the world in wildness is as conservative a vision as it is revolutionary. Perhaps it is in the wild that our tame visions and revisions find their tainted origins. The present volume, though slightly wild as regards the meaning of wildness, provides, as we hope, some tamer perspectives on what, anyway, cannot be quite tamed.

Wojciech Kalaga and Tadeusz Rachwał

¹ Jean François Lyotard, *The Inhuman. Reflections on Time*, trans. G. Bennington and R. Bowlby (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1993), p. 1.