

Ryszard W. Wolny / Stankomir Nicieja (eds.)

Poisoned Cornucopia

Excess, Intemperance and Overabundance
across Cultures and Literatures



PETER LANG
EDITION

Introduction

The notions of excess, intemperance and overabundance belong not only to one of the most important categories in the realm of Western civilization, but also constitute an important reference point in all possible discussions revolving around the theme of human nature – its vices and limits. Moreover, intemperance and excess are a focal subject of deliberation and critique in all major religions.

Just like many other similar categories, the notions of excess, intemperance and overabundance became subject to radical overvaluation during the 20th century, and this process is still ongoing in the first decades of the new millennium. Restraining mankind's inclination towards intemperance and excess stopped being only the ambition of religious movements and became an important subject of political and ideological disputes. Thus, one of the greatest ambitions of the leftist movements in the 1920s was to suppress the excess and immoderation naturally generated by the rapidly developing capitalism. Both communism and socialism were to provide resistance to the flagrant (and ultimately self-destructive) greed of the ruling classes. However, in the heat of revolutionary zeal, the radical left itself became victim of intemperance and greed. In the name of spreading emancipation, gulags and concentration camps were established, mass executions were organized, and the liberties of travel and personal expression were drastically reduced.

On the other hand, in the face of the spectacular triumph of the market economy and the Western political model at the end of the 20th century, the belief that greed, intemperance and overabundance had been unjustly stigmatised – at least in terms of economic activity – gained immense popularity. Instead, they were viewed as positive inclinations that propelled economic dynamics. It was only the financial crisis of 2008 that exposed the simplifications of such a vision of the world.

The ambivalence in the approach to excess and intemperance also entered into the world of literature and arts – generally speaking – the humanities. On the one hand, greed and overabundance are still subjects of critique and branded as morally detrimental, yet, on the other, invoke fascination and beguilement. In the face of economic – and above all else – moral crisis, one is often inclined to

look at notions of excess, intemperance, and overabundance. The search for new interpretations which would be found between the strict and ineffective religious sanctions of a rampant nature are ultimately self-destructive excesses, stimulated by postmodern capitalism and consumption.

Upon looking at select publications in this volume one is able to observe a growing interest in new forms of artistic expressions, particularly that of film (which has become one of the central and subsequently most prestigious forms of media, expressing collective ambitions and thoughts, ultimately surpassing the boundaries of the novel in this task). Many authors have used film to understand the issues of excess and overabundance in the contemporary world. The complexity, multilayered nature, and mode of production of this medium clearly illustrate the more widespread cultural issues of the beginning of the 21st century. However, as one can undoubtedly observe in the highly regarded articles of professors Andrew Taylor and Tadeusz Rachwał, the method of literary analysis of cultural phenomena that was developed can prove to be extremely useful (and even indispensable) when modern developments loosely pertaining to contemporary literature are concerned.

The necessity for a more in-depth method of cultural analysis has also emerged, which up to this point only took place on the peripheries of literary studies or was simply regarded as too controversial or “unworthy” of such an analysis by the academic community. This mainly applies to notions of eroticism, transgression and pornography.

What also deserves more attention are issues not directly connected with literature relating to the general atmosphere of excess in all aspects of life – the overabundance of information, stimulation, and excessive choice (such as a surplus of consumer goods and television channels), which have a significant impact on the functions of cultural products in the contemporary world.

This volume, therefore, investigates the notions of excess and overabundance from three fundamental perspectives: the perspectives of literary studies, cultural studies and mass media studies. It opens with Andrew Taylor’s attempt to bring all of them together in a brilliant essay propelling the idea of necessity of excess and exploring its various ambivalences. Other essays in this part explore excess and intemperance in literature: from canonical works to contemporary authors, from great English and American masters (William Shakespeare, David Lodge and Herman Melville in the articles by Andrew Taylor, Zbigniew Głowala and Tomasz Pilch respectively) to Canadian, Australian and Taiwanese writers (Jen Sookfong Lee, Tim Winton and Tswen-show Song by Anna Brabach-Kallas, Tomasz Gadzina and Nainu Yang).

The second part concerns selected articles, that revolve around the theme of intemperance in a broader cultural context and discuss excess in eroticism, religion and political or historical discourse. Ryszard W. Wolny's essay connects eroticism with excessive consumerism in contemporary capitalist societies, while Ilona Dobosiewicz explores excessive opiate use in Victorian England and Marzena Zielonka – excessive drinking in traditional Irish culture. John Eric Starnes' attempt to discuss the excess of tolerance, American white nationalist fiction and the backlash against political correctness is counterbalanced by Masaya Hiyazaki's treatment of politics as expansion of life by way of Osugi Sakae's anarchism.

Finally, the third section focuses on the aforementioned issues in mass media, with a particular emphasis on film. And, again, we have Western contemporary classics like Ridley Scott's *Blade Runner* and Sophia Coppola's *Lost in Translation* (Stankomir Nicieja's article) and Asian masters (Yu Lin Lee's "The Excess of Affect: The Technologies of History in *Seediq Bale*") and the Taiwanese feminist writer, Li Ang, in particular (Hung-chiung Li's essay). Daniel Broudy's and Katarzyna Molek-Kozakowska's attempts focus on mass media, unrestrained American consumption and sensationalist headlines in online newscasting, respectively.

Stankomir Nicieja and Ryszard W. Wolny
Opole, April 2014