

Loneliness, Discovery, Imagination: The Poetics of Polar Experience in the Writings of Antoni Bolesław Dobrowolski

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1. INTRODUCTION

The presentation constitutes an attempt to demonstrate how Polish humanities may engage in a creative interpretation of texts situated at the intersection of science and literature, such as the journals and memoirs of polar explorers. The analysis focuses on selected passages from *Wspomnienia z Wyprawy Polarnej* by Antoni Bolesław Dobrowolski (Dobrowolski 1950) – one of the pioneers of Polish Antarctic exploration and a participant in the Belgian Antarctic Expedition (1897–1899). The objective is to reveal how, within the scientist’s prose, a distinctive “poetics of the polar space” emerges, wherein cognitive endeavor is interwoven with introspection, and scientific inquiry with the work of the imagination.

2. METHODS

By juxtaposing Dobrowolski’s descriptive strategies with Gernot Böhme’s concept of the atmosphere of space (Böhme 1998, 2002) and Gaston Bachelard’s poetics of place (Bachelard 1998a,b), it is argued that his writings can be construed not merely as documentation of meteorological and glaciological research, but also as subtle records of affective and existential attunement (Durand 1986). In Dobrowolski’s account, the polar landscape is not relegated to the status of a static backdrop; rather, it becomes an active participant in the experiential field.

3. RESULTS

The encounter with such a space heightens the reflexivity of the subject – a phenomenon rendered in the poetic form of his notes, wherein landscape serves as a catalyst for contemplation and existential reflection. As Dobrowolski himself observes: “Nigdy nie patrzyłem tak śmiało w przyszłość jak teraz; nigdy nie czułem takiej równowagi”¹ – a statement which confirms that

¹ Dobrowolski, A.B. (1950), *Wspomnienia z Wyprawy Polarnej*, Prasa Wojskowa, Warszawa, 63 pp. (in Polish).

engagement with an extreme environment not only fails to diminish the sense of harmony, but may, paradoxically, intensify it. His attentiveness to sensory phenomena – the chromatic palette, the modulation of light, the depth of silence – attests to a subtle traffic between the lexicon of science and the poetic register of lived experience. Elsewhere, he remarks: “I nigdzie człowiek nie umie tak się skupić, tak milczeć, bo nigdzie chyba nie staje tak głęboko, tak naprawdę sam na sam z sobą”². This passage discloses a pivotal dimension: solitude in a severe landscape is experienced not solely at the corporeal level, but as an ontological condition. The radical space of Antarctica – conceived by Dobrowolski as a world immensely alien to us, not ours and not for us (“świat ogromnie nam obcy, nie nasz i nie dla nas”³) – thus fosters intensified introspection and enables the formation of a particular mode of relatedness to nature, apprehended not as a passive object of cognition but as a moving co-presence.

4. CONCLUSION

The presentation is part of a broader proposition to integrate humanistic reflection into the domain of polar studies. It demonstrates that texts such as Dobrowolski’s memoirs, when analyzed through the methodological lenses of the humanities, imagology, and phenomenology, permit the construal of polar space as a symbolic, epistemological, and affective territory – thereby contributing to a more profound apprehension of human experience under extreme conditions. In this sense, the humanities do not merely interpret texts concerning the Arctic; they become an integral component of its investigation.

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² op. cit., p. 35.

³ op. cit., p. 35.