

Towards the Understanding of the Modern Grotesque¹

Agata Krzychkiewicz

Summary

Even though the grotesque may be seen as a phenomenon which transcends generic, theoretical and periodic categorisations, in this article the emphasis is on its significance as an artistic device which enables writers to expose, highlight or conceal their individual apprehensions in respect of the challenges facing their generation. A brief evaluation of some of the pivotal works published in the second half of the twentieth century is followed by a summary of the evolution in understanding of both the term and the phenomenon. In evaluation of the critical works the emphasis is limited to the most influential contribution each of these works makes to the body of the grotesque scholarship. Likewise, in tracing the evolution, attention is paid only to the substantial shifts in the understanding of the grotesque in a given period. In conclusion an attempt is made at specifying some criteria which might be helpful in recognising the grotesque work as well as orienting oneself in its ambivalent universe.

Opsomming

Hoewel die groteske gesien kan word as 'n verskynsel wat genre sowel as teoretiese en periodiese kategorieë oorskry, val die klem in hierdie artikel op die belangrikheid van die groteske as kunstgreep wat skrywers in staat stel om hulle individuele bedenkinge oor die uitdagings waarvoor hulle generasies te staan kom, te onthul, te beklemtoon of weg te steek. 'n Bondige evaluasie van 'n paar kenmerke uit die tweede helfte van die twintigste eeu word gegee en opgevolg met 'n opsomming van die evolusie in die begrip van die term en die verskynsel. By die beoordeling van kritiese werk is die perspektief beperk tot die mees invloedryke bydraes wat elkeen van die werke tot die studie van die groteske lewer. By die opteken van die evolusie van die begrip word daar ook net aandag gegee aan belangrike verskuiwings in 'n bepaalde periode. Die artikel word afgesluit met 'n poging om 'n paar kriteria aan te gee vir die herkenning van die groteske teks en vir die manier waarop 'n mens jou in die ambivalente wêreld van die groteske kan oriënteer.

The modern view is that the grotesque as a mode of expression has existed in art and literature as long as human consciousness but, being capable of changing its domain and scope while shifting from one meaning to another, it has adapted to the varying demands of different sociocultural formations to express themselves. In the widest sense, the purpose of grotesque work is to highlight the contradictions inherent in life and in people, and to make the reader aware of the absurdities in the real world. Because the grotesque in itself is a departure from the norm, it is frequently used in satire to expose the immediate and identifiable vices and follies of human beings.² It also frequently features in sombre catastrophist literature in which it comments on the universal dilapidation of the world; it depicts the world's physical decrepitude, it reveals the anonymity of individual suffering, emphasises the loneliness of a human being living in the hostile jungle of a modern metropolis. It also exposes the essence of evil in humankind: depravity, corruption, hatred, and the malicious misappropriation of intellect for cunning and deceit. In extreme cases of pessimism or misanthropy, the grotesque renders a philosophical comment on the total absurdity and futility of life. Because of its particular complexity and tendency to constant mutation, the grotesque has not been unequivocally defined even though its existence has been acknowledged for many centuries.

The summary of the six-centuries-long history of the term "grotesque" is given in *The Grotesque: A Study in Meanings* by Frances Barasch, the study which makes a credible case for the profound influence the grotesque always had on art. Discussing more recent uses of the grotesque, which Barasch invariably associates with theatre, allows the scholar to conclude that both traditional and modern artistic forms have certain common characteristics, "for the artists of different ages, instinctively or consciously, expressed in fantasies of mixed humour and fear, the common perception that the total human experience is beyond logical ordering" (Barasch 1971: 164). The impressive body of literature on the subject of the grotesque which is thoroughly reviewed in Barasch's work traces the evolution of the meaning and various applications of the term, but most importantly leaves one with the impression that the examination of this complex phenomenon is not about defining it but about comprehending it. Thus, each study of the grotesque mentioned by Barasch, as well as ones that appeared subsequently, advance the understanding of the grotesque as a phenomenon which affects the fabric of the work of art on different levels, for the grotesque may become an artistic device, a mode of expression, a tone for the entire work, and last but not least, an expression of a certain view of the world.

It is believed that the grotesque is "a perennial strain in the human imagination" and as such "it antedates all theories and all movements" (Mc Elroy 1989: 1 82).³ The need to understand the grotesque and its impact on the develop-

ment of the twentieth century's art became particularly evident in the second half of the twentieth century. A number of influential works on the grotesque appeared in different countries over a period of some ten years beginning with the 1957 publication of Wolfgang Kayser's *The Grottesque in Art and Literature*.⁴ Kayser relies on an intuitive recognition of grotesque work, which he juxtaposes with similar works and identifies in them similar elements. This method permits him to conclude that

the grotesque world is – and is not – our own world. The ambiguous way in which we are affected by it results from our awareness that the familiar and apparently harmonious world is alienated under the impact of abysmal forces, which break it up and shatter its coherence.

(Kayser 1981: 37)

In Kayser's words, the grotesque is determined by

the fusion of realms, which we know to be separated, the abolition of the law of statics, the loss of identity, the distortion of "natural" size and shape, the suspension of the category of objects, the destruction of personality, and the fragmentation of the historical order.

(Kayser 1981: 185)

The forces responsible for the estrangement of the world remain unknown: "the incomprehensible, inexplicable, and impersonal" – the ghostly cosmic "It". However, Kayser's final interpretation of the grotesque as "an attempt to invoke and subdue the demonic aspect of the world" (Kayser 1981: 185) unnecessarily limits all irrational forces to those originating from the paranormal and the supernatural, the drawback which becomes particularly evident in his treatment of the modern grotesque.⁵

Almost concurrently with Kayser's, research of Jennings, Clayborough and Bakhtin began to provide further commentary on different manifestations of the grotesque in literary works. While Kayser focused his analysis of the grotesque on its terrifying aspect, Bakhtin turned his attention to the comic, introducing the concept of the carnival and its liberating laughter. In Bakhtin's words, carnival is "past millennia's way of sensing the world as one great communal performance" which, being associated with the spirit of freedom and laughter (Bakhtin 1984a: 160), helped people to liberate themselves from the seriousness of officialdom (1984b: 90).⁶ Clayborough approaches the grotesque from a Jungian perspective. Focusing on perception and its reproduction in the work of art, he explains it in terms of a medium through which authors illuminate the readers' own involuntary reaction to certain phenomena or circumstances. Where the grotesque is applied deliberately, Clayborough takes it – not unlike Bakhtin – as a kind of rebellion against

systematic thoughts, which in itself implies an emotional attitude on the part of the creator (Clayborough 1965: 68).

More modest in its scope, but nevertheless important for understanding the modus operandi of the grotesque is a brief study, *The Grotesque*, by Philip Thomson (1972). The comparative approach chosen for his study allows Thomson to elucidate various aspects of the grotesque through its juxtaposition to other related terms and modes, such as absurd, bizarre, macabre, caricature and comic. His attempt to formulate his own definition of the grotesque focuses on four concepts: disharmony, a mixture of both the comic and the terrifying being responsible for the unresolved nature of the grotesque, abnormality, and extravagance and exaggeration. The disharmony may affect the work of art itself, it impacts on the reaction the work evokes and, speculatively, it reflects “the creative temperament and psychological make-up of the artist”. The most distinctive quality of the grotesque, in Thomson’s opinion, is “the unresolved clash of incompatibilities in work and response” to it, together with “the ambivalent nature of the abnormal as present in the grotesque” (Thomson 1972: 20-27). Among the important features distinguishing the grotesque from related modes, Thomson singles out the strong emotional involvement of the reader of a grotesque work.

A more recent study, *On the Grotesque: Strategies of Contradiction in Art and Literature* by Geoffrey Galt Harpham, takes the grotesque for “a protean idea that is capable of assuming a multitude of forms” (Harpham 1982: xv). Striving to define the character of the phenomenon of the grotesque, Harpham explores the effect it had on art from the conscious beginnings of humankind. The scholar attributes the grotesqueness “not so much to the specific contents of the image [but rather to] the fact that it refuses to be taken in whole” (p. 6). He persistently emphasises that the grotesque inevitably introduces into a work of art an element of clash between its different aspects, for instance, “clash between ‘virtuous’ limitations of form and rebellious content” (p. 7). For Harpham the grotesque is a “species of confusion”, which is incidentally, but most appropriately, conveyed by the etymology of the very term, which he repeats after Clayborough: “The Latin form of *grotta* is probably *crypta* (“crypt”), which in turn derives from the Greek *Κρύπτη*, a vault; one of the cognates is *Κρύπτειν*, to hide. *Grotesque*, then, gathers into itself suggestions of the underground, of burial, and of secrecy” (p. 27). Although Harpham is criticised for running the “serious risk of making indeterminacy into a fetish” (Mc Elroy 1989: 7), the seminal value of his study lies in its discussion of circumstances which may not be paramount but which certainly create a congenial atmosphere for the grotesque.

While Harpham’s study ponders the general and supra-temporal characteristics of the grotesque, other scholars prefer to formulate their understanding of the grotesque in close relation to specific historical circumstances and the

aesthetic and philosophical consciousness at particular times, referring to concrete objects of art, whether they are paintings, architecture or literary works. In the context of this thesis, *Fiction of the Modern Grotesque* by Bernard Mc Elroy (1989), is particularly interesting. The central assumption of Mc Elroy's study stands in marked contradiction to Kayser's work, for Kayser believes that the grotesque results from the intervention of mysterious supernatural forces while Mc Elroy is of the firm opinion, that in the modern world, the grotesque is rooted in human consciousness.

The grotesque depends on a number of subjective factors, such as the capacity to perceive, but also to express, people's different cultural and philosophical backgrounds, as well as each person's different emotional response to the surrounding world. That is why the definition of the grotesque stumbles every time we finally want to formulate it. To overcome this difficulty, critics, attempting to define its "jellyfish nature", to use Harpham's expression, often begin with a historical perspective of the understanding of the concept and phenomenon itself. Even a brief outline of the historical development of the concept of the grotesque helps to understand the nature of this elusive yet ever-present phenomenon, and to grasp the important role the grotesque plays in reflecting the complexities of our modern world. Paying respect to this tried method, we shall focus briefly on the evolution of the term, its meaning and its function, with the intention of showing certain patterns in the application of the term and in the progression of the critical cognisance of the grotesque since its emergence as an aesthetic category. We shall see that the development of the grotesque was never a linear process,⁷ while its criticism oscillated between negative and positive signs, making the grotesque dominant or subordinate in accordance with a given epoch's prevailing concept of art and its relation to life.⁸ Moreover, we shall see that the grotesque was never an indifferent mode of artistic expression. While some accepted it as a profound tool in the artistic portrayal of the complex world, others found it to be a figment of sick imagination. The history of art proves that both points of view coexisted throughout all times.

The existence of the grotesque as an aesthetic category dates back to the origins of the term, although as it will be shown, it has been successfully used retrospectively (cf comments on *Ars Poetica*). The term "grotesque" was coined in Italy towards the end of the fifteenth century in relation to certain ancient ornaments discovered in the *grottos* or caves of Rome (Barasch 1971: 20). An unusual compilation of human and animal body parts, intertwined with one another and with plant motifs characterised these ornaments. Their essence was in the joining together of elements belonging to different realms. The newly created entity, however, belonged to neither of them and was thus perceived as an aberration of nature, as a negation of what was considered the natural order. The method was straightforward; it relied on the disintegration

of natural entities and on synthesising their selected elements according to a novel principle of unrestrained freedom. This unusual yet simple technique gave birth not only to a new whole but, simultaneously, it was also creating a qualitatively new value and a new sense of “intriguing” beauty. The ornamental value of this rediscovered technique was noted immediately, primarily by painters, such as Rafael and Luca Signorelli, who imitated these fantastic, often playful compilations of elements in their art, not only attesting to the appeal of the grotesque art, but also identifying it with artistic inventiveness and creativity (Clayborough 1965: 2).

The discovery of the grotesque murals turned people’s attention to the ancient art which, as the modern critic points out, provides copious examples of grotesque images originating as early as 3000 years BC in the art of Mesopotamia, Egypt and India, later China and Greece. The basic elements of these images consist of human and animal parts and are known under many generic names, such as Minotaur, Midas, Daphne, Akteon, Gorgona-Medusa.⁹ The history of ancient art is full of reference to hybrids consisting of human body parts combined with elements of fish, cats, birds and bulls, grouped together according to the principle of the method by which they were created. Only, the intended meaning of these images remains obscure to us today, that is why their grotesqueness is not instantly apparent. Having lost their intended significance, they are perceived as symbols of ancient art, even though it is known that these outlandish creatures were sometimes greeted with protest from those who believed that art should be *simplex et unum*. Classical art, close to Horace’s heart, focused on the orderly world where strict segregation and classification of the observed phenomena were favoured. Named and arranged in a coherent logical system they reflected the logical world and promoted a rational response, inspiring artistic experience, categorised as classical. In these terms classical art may be associated with concepts such as archetypal, decisive, definitive, reliable, trustworthy, and sanctioned. That is why Horace saw the incongruous images created by some of his contemporary artists as mere imperfections betraying shortage of talent on their creators’ part. That is why, setting out the principals of classical art in his *Ars Poetica*, he rebukes “extravagant” images as “vain” and “wild phantoms” of a “feverish brain”.¹⁰ Nonetheless, the existence of such images stand as a proof that his contemporaries were aware of limits inscribed in the classical canon and, finding it too confining, they were perpetually defying it in their pursuit to explore *alternative* points of view. Thus, by creating “extravagant” images, these artists responded to the “other” experience of life – perhaps chaos, uncertainty of human fate and ambiguity of life. This specific response was reflected then, as much as it is today, in the feeling of fear and confusion, in evoking ambivalent response, giving rise to and creating an idiosyncratic order of the grotesque art. Mc Elroy is thus right in saying that although it is impossible to

establish precisely the meaning these images had for their creators, we are led to believe that they were of considerable significance, for even to a modern eye they carry “the suggestion of the frightful, summoning up the world of irrational fear or nightmare in which such creatures might exist” (Mc Elroy 1989: 183).

In outlining the history of the grotesque one comes across the images of Scyllas, centaurs and such monsters again in medieval art. But when in ancient times they might have been alluding to divine forces, remaining beyond the reach of the human mind, medieval artists used them as personifications of evil, frequently in accordance with a specific allegoric code to represent particular sins relevant to Christian philosophy. It is conceivable that in the Middle Ages the fear of the unknown was exploited by the Church hierarchy’s official culture. But, as researchers point out, these images of death, devils, and other monsters inscribed in the medieval version of Christianity were frequently rendered ludicrous and their actual effect was to subvert the authority of the Church. Through representing these horrifying and deformed ogre images as laughable, people were familiarising their fear of the unknown (Bolecki 1991: 109). The anti-totalitarian rebellion through grotesque laughter, as pointed out by Bakhtin, allowed the medieval man to cope with the imposition of authority whether that of the Church or the state (cf Bakhtin 1984b, especially Chapter 1, “Rabelais in the History of Laughter”).

Towards the end of the fourteenth century European art departed from the authoritarian medieval philosophy of asceticism and the dominance of spiritual over temporal aspects of existence, refocusing on the more tangible experience of life in a movement known as the Renaissance. With it the perception of the world changed dramatically. This new approach encouraged individualism and freedom of thought, frequently becoming instrumental in rejecting dogmatic Christian philosophy. Inquiry into the complex nature of the world was promoted in sciences and widely reflected in arts. The discovery of grotesque murals came at the right time, so to speak. Their patterns released artistic inventiveness, and although reportedly people viewed the outlandish frescos “as falsehoods” (cf Harpham 1982: 26), they accepted them as an embodiment of freedom.

The rediscovery of the grotesque prompted the examination of the relationship of art versus nature. Interestingly enough the same discussion rests at the foundation of the avant-garde, at the beginning of the twentieth century, which in many respects correspond to the intellectual ferment of the Renaissance. There is no question that the phenomena associated then with the grotesque had to be perceived as “unnatural”, since the grotesque frescos did not resemble anything one could see in nature. But already towards the end of the sixteenth century understanding of grotesque art was modified and the grotesque was seen not only in terms of the negation of physical reality, but

also in terms of its distortion. Commenting on this, critics usually illustrate their point by recalling the grotesque caricatures by the French artist Callot (1592–1635), whose sketches represented beggars, sick and deformed people, or characters from the *commedia dell'arte* (Clayborough 1965: 12; Kayser 1981: 30; Sokó 1973: 11). Although there is no consensus regarding the extent to which Callot's art was an invention, deformation, or even an illustration of life, critics unanimously admit that Callot's drawings and paintings captured the essence of the grotesque more than adequately.¹¹ For a student of the modern grotesque Callot's caricatures are the bizarre fusion of human and nonhuman elements, but it is important to note that, as one whole, they always retain the shape and principal attributes of the human body. That is why it may be argued that his drawings and sketches mark a new direction in the development of modern grotesque art, the one which is centred on the human body and its relation to the inner qualities of a human being. Furthermore, through Callot's drawings, the term "grotesque" not only spread throughout the European continent, but it began its remarkable critical career (Bolecki 1989: 111).

Soon grotesque images began to be recognised in literary portrayal in works by writers such as Villon, Rabelais, Cervantes and Shakespeare, thus shifting the concept of the grotesque "beyond the sphere of decorative art" (Clayborough 1965: 12) into criticism (Barasch 1971: chapters IV-VII). Clayborough finds one of the first examples of the use of the term in literature in François Rabelais's *Gargantua and Pantagruel* (1535). Working towards his own understanding of the grotesque, Clayborough observes that in literature it was initially associated with phenomena synonymous with the strange, the monstrous and the bizarre. He notes, however, that neither the function nor the potential of the grotesque was fully comprehended at that time. For many years the grotesque continued to be seen as a meaningless, playful compilation of various, naturally incompatible, elements (cf also Harpham 1982: 64) while the term itself was used synonymously with funny, bizarre, fantastic, extravagant and capricious. As an artistic mode, its use was restricted to "*les vaudevilles, les rondeaux, les épigrammes, et les ouvrages comiques*" (Clayborough 1965: 3-4).

The tolerant attitude towards the grotesque lasted until the first half of the eighteenth century, when the dominance of the Enlightenment and Neoclassicism enforced aesthetics which relied on the classical sense of beauty, namely proportion and unity. As already noted, because of its very cryptic and "impure" nature, grotesque art was always poles apart from those classical principles, so it is no surprise that neoclassicists barely tolerated it, permitting its application only in the visual arts, where it was equated with caricature. The grotesque acquired negative connotations¹² and signified everything that was considered deformed, macabre, ugly, unnatural, ridiculous and absurd, unless

used strictly as a technical term in criticism.

The attitude towards the grotesque changed again during the Romantic period when, along with the Gothic,¹³ it became one of the features, distinguishing this artistic current. The Romantic artists embraced the grotesque as an accepted, and even desired element in their works, employing it to emphasise their individuality, their liberation from the confines imposed by the previous epoch, but also to underline their isolation from the rest of the world. The grotesque in the works of Romantics aimed to turn the reader's attention to the inexplicable and rationally incomprehensible world, the existence of which Romantic art made one of its fundamental tenets. Negative connotations associated with the term in the previous epoch were replaced by new positive ones. Linking the grotesque with imaginative writing, the term itself became synonymous with full of fantasy, eccentric, fantastic, peculiar, and unusual. The Romantic convention made way for the grotesque, giving artists a right to absolute creative freedom and the liberation of art from former restrictions and conventions, including the demands of generic purity.¹⁴ Even here grotesque art benefited: the merging of tragedy and comedy became permissible, allowing them both to be components of the same context.¹⁵ This apparent confusion as to where the tears end and the laughter begins was unthinkable for classicists, whose genre of tragicomedy allowed them to use these elements only and exclusively in an interchangeable sequence.

The period of Romanticism was followed by an unprecedented development of "mimetic" realism. Nevertheless the grotesque continued to be a frequently used method,¹⁶ although its functions and spheres of application were in a constant shift. It was almost inevitable that in their portrayal of the world, nineteenth-century realist writers would face cases of ultimate poverty and debasement bordering on an alternative reality, more familiar to the grotesque than to the comprehensible world. To illustrate this, one may refer to the "ghastly grotesquerie of death in the nineteenth-century city", as featured in the satiric works of Dickens (Hollington 1984: 13). In Russian literature, too, we can find works regarded as realistic, but studded with descriptions of impoverishment, ugliness or moral decay which many critics approach today as grotesque. Gogol, Saltykov-Shchedrin, Dostoevsky and Sologub (cf Erlich 1969; Bakhtin 1984a; Ivanits 1976), to name only the most prominent, used the device of the grotesque with powerful effect when portraying both the complex nature of humanity and the social and moral degeneration of life in nineteenth-century Russia. Speaking of Gogol's phantasmagoric art, the nineteenth-century Russian critic Dobrolyubov wrote: "It is not important to us what the author wanted to say, but rather what was said by him, even if not intentionally; simply as a result of the truthful portrayal of life" (Dobrolyubov quoted by Gorelov 1961: 273; my translation).

It is readily apparent that as a result of the rapid development of civilisation

during the nineteenth century, for instance, urbanisation, its impact on society and its individual members, the grotesque became a notion identified with truth and reality. The nineteenth-century writer, whether in Russia or in England, would use the grotesque as an emphatic way “to open his readership to realities they had rejected”, if one may generalise the statement made by Hill in respect of Dickens (Hill 1981: 10). Nevertheless, works with the “radically modified” (term used by Bolecki (1991: 127)) portrayal of the world were frequently misinterpreted by contemporary critics-purists, who accused their authors of undue naturalism, exaggeration and even of deforming reality.¹⁷ It was only when the nature of the modern grotesque became to be understood better that these works gained profound significance and their revealing character became apparent.

Until the nineteenth century, the grotesque in art was viewed as a mode either juxtaposed to nature or as a mode of its deformation, for whatever reason (playful decoration or critical attitude to it; for example parody, caricature or satire), and enriching it with the ambivalent portrayal of the world.¹⁸ But nineteenth-century artists began to see the grotesque not only as a mode but also as a phenomenon of nature and life itself. The pivotal role in this regard is attributed to the “Preface” to *Cromwell* by Victor Hugo (1802-1885), where the French Romantic associated the grotesque portrayal with truth (Clayborough 1965: 48).¹⁹ Thomson, echoing Clayborough’s interpretation of the “Preface” says that “Hugo associates the grotesque not with the fantastic but with the realistic, making it clear that the grotesque is not just an artistic mode or category but exists in nature and in the world around us” (Thomson 1972: 16-17). This view was promoted by other nineteenth-century artists such as Théophile Gautier (1811-1872), who observed that the grotesque always existed in nature and in art.²⁰ This belief of the French writer is given serious consideration by some contemporary scholars, even though the issue of the grotesque in nature still seems to be a bone of contention in contemporary criticism of the grotesque. Reiterating Kayser’s view on this issue, Clayborough prefers to believe that the grotesque is born in “the unconscious mind” and its origins can be motivated only by psychological phenomena. But, even if reluctantly, Clayborough makes provision for an alternative approach, qualifying his statement with the following:

unless one is prepared to accept the idea that grotesqueness is objectively real, and that the grotesque is a simple reflection of actual phenomena – an idea which might apply to the depiction of “an exceptional monstrosity of horrid ugliness”, but scarcely to the original “grotesque” murals.

(Clayborough 1965: 69)

Clayborough’s field of scholarly interest is a work of art, his premise being

that, regardless of whether it is a creation entirely invented or inspired by reality, it is eventually a product of a certain artistic mind and both its conscious and subconscious faculties. More recent works are willing to accept the grotesque as a fact of reality and a phenomenon of “natural”. As Harpham puts it, “whereas the grotesque had once seemed the very opposite of the real, recent commentators have seemed unable or unwilling to extricate the two from each other, and have even encouraged an identification between them” (Harpham 1982: xix-xx).²¹

The artistic movement at the turn of the century, known under its common name as Modernism, exposed a new quality of the grotesque. Discussing the character of the grotesque in “Young Poland” (equivalent to Western Modernism), Bolecki formulates a thesis that the movement was almost entirely grotesque (Bolecki 1991: 102-158). Modernism as an artistic method was based on the fusion of all things and phenomena; its aesthetics were based on the synthesis, on the syncretic union of all arts, traditions, and cultures. Formally this meant the abolition of boundaries between objects, suppression of contours and permeation of shapes. In painting, this strategy was tantamount to the revival of ornaments and emphasis on fluid, undulating lines. Nature and true forms were not seen as restrictive, while symmetry and its laws were subjected to constant negotiations. As the typically modernistic devices Bolecki identifies biomorphism (likening objects and animated beings), including zoomorphism, anthropomorphism and phytomorphism, as well as micro- and macroscopy, that is, presenting objects and beings (including insects, flowers and microbes) in their unnatural size. In his view the whole of modernist art was permeated with the motif of metamorphosis and hybrid images, originating in pagan mythology. Other typically modernistic motifs, in his view, are: “madness, insanity, fantastic or demonic atmosphere, masquerade, mask, mannequin, caricature, and the like” (Bolecki 1991: 117; my translation). The paradox is that, despite this conspicuous similarity to the grotesque, none of the modernists considered themselves grotesque artists, choosing instead more precise terms such as secession, symbolism, myth, caricature, or arabesque.

In his analysis of different types of modernistic grotesque, Bolecki arrives at the conclusion that all the grotesque works of that time, whether for the purpose of polemic, parody, or caricature, operate through a range of accessories from various literary conventions, such as hybrids (mythology), devils (Gothic), monsters (fantastic), and harlequins (*commedia dell'arte*). But the reference to the tradition is always obliterated by the “radical modification, both iconic and semantic”. Thus, the paraphernalia of the *commedia dell'arte*, for instance, are shifted from its tradition of carnival to the environments characteristic of other conventions, resulting in such images as Pierrot with hoofs, borrowed from either mythology (satyr) or Gothic (Satan). The same

applies to other aspects of work, including language and its meaning, allowing the comic to be rendered as sad, or tragedy as a joke. The tradition is in a way deconstructed to allow artists to ponder over the discrepancies between the “sign of tradition” and “its traditional sense”. By reaching to the devices characteristic of the grotesque, and extending the levels of impact of the grotesque in a work from theme, plot or image to those of style, namely, narration and lexicology, modernists put in doubt the effectiveness of rules governing artistic expression: the grotesque was no longer a phenomenon of the “represented world” but became a “mechanism” by which the new meaning was created (Bolecki 1991: 120, 123-124).

It is evident from Bolecki’s survey that modernistic grotesque, unlike the realistic grotesqueries by nineteenth-century realists, was born not out of the observation of nature and life, but was primarily a method of artistic expression: it was the Modernists’ voice in their dialogue with history and even with the theory of art as a whole. The Modernists opened the door to aesthetic provocation and artistic anarchy, which their followers, the artists of the avant-garde, not only fully accepted but chose as the only possible form of the new art.

Given the exceptional tangle of circumstances which shaped life in the twentieth century, it is no wonder that a proclivity for the grotesque became a distinguishing feature of twentieth-century art. In the same way as previous epochs striving for self-expression created art responding to their aesthetic and ethical needs, so did our own. Rapid industrialisation, unprecedented scientific and technological advances, wars, migration of masses of people, totalitarian regimes, were among the most important, although diverse, factors responsible for altering people’s understanding of the world. Telling in this respect are the words of Evgenii Zamiatin, well-known Russian writer and thinker:

It seems to be so real and beyond any dispute: your hand. What you see is a smooth pink skin, covered with the most delicate hair. So simple and so undisputable.

And now – a piece of this skin sanctified by the cruel irony of microscope: ditches, pits, boundaries; thick stalks of unknown plants – once your hair; a huge chunk of earth – or meteorite, which fell down from an unreachable sky – the ceiling, that, which once was a particle of dust And this all in fact is your hand And art, born by this contemporaneous reality – can it be not fantastic, resembling a dream?

(Zamiatin [1922]1967: 232; my translation)

The elusiveness of reality and the senselessness of the world became a widely recognised notion from the very outset of our century as may be seen in the works of such famous, although diverse, authors as Kafka, Hašek, Witkiewicz, Gombrowicz, Bulgakov Grass, Joyce, and many others. Their works were all

created in response to a perception that the modern world needs its own distinct way of expressing itself. Believing that we no longer have the individual feeling of guilt or feeling for tragedy, and that comedy alone is suited for us, Dürrenmatt, the world-renowned Swiss playwright, concluded that “our world led us inevitably to the grotesque as it did to the atomic bomb ...”. In his view, the grotesque

is only a sensual expression, a sensuous paradox, the shape of a shapelessness, the face of a faceless world; and as our thinking seems to be unable to do without the concept of paradox, so is art.

(Dürrenmatt quoted by Kayser 1981: 11-12)

Similar sentiments are expressed by Andrey Sinyavsky, a one-time prominent Soviet dissident intellectual. In his view, only “phantasmagoric art” in which the grotesque “will replace realistic descriptions of ordinary life” suits the spirit of our time, and that art can be “truthful [only] with the aid of the absurd and the fantastic” (Sinyavsky 1982: 218-219).

This extraordinary success of the grotesque in the twentieth century has been noted by scholars ranging from Bakhtin and Kayser to Harpham and Mc Elroy. The reasons for this are manifold. While some point out that the grotesque has been used to portray decadence in society, others note that, through the grotesque, artists express the senselessness of life and the absurdity of modern civilisation. Harpham and many others agree that modern writers find the grotesque to be a particularly suitable tool in expressing both man’s “freakish and absurd nature, and the nightmarish malignancy of the modern world” (Harpham 1982: xix).

A comprehensive study of manifestations of the grotesque and its function in twentieth-century art has yet to be made. Whoever undertakes this difficult task will have to establish common grounds for the multiplicity of diverse trends and movements. Considerably easier is the examination of the modern grotesque in the form of a case study, as has been done by Wolfgang Kayser in his *The Grotesque in Art and Literature*, the last chapter of which offers a rudimentary analysis of different grotesque works by individual modern authors, from drama and prose “tales of terror”, through the grotesque poetry of Morgenstern and Kafkaesque “dream-like” novels, to surrealist poetry and paintings. Acknowledging the tremendous popularity of the grotesque in the twentieth century, Kayser limits his survey to some of its manifestations, refraining from pointing out traits typical to the modern grotesque. More useful in this respect is Bernard Mc Elroy’s *Fiction of the Modern Grotesque*. Admittedly, the focus of the study is on the source of the modern grotesque. Mc Elroy finds that it is produced by certain types of mental disposition, such as paranoid vision, hallucination, dream, or a degree of insanity. In other

words, its source is in the human mind and the processes of perception. Mc Elroy's basic assertion is that "the grotesque is not only a real mode of life but the only real mode once modern life has been correctly perceived". He points out that it is "not merely an assault upon the idea of a rational world; it is an assault upon the reader himself, upon his sensibilities, upon his ideals, upon his feeling of living in a friendly familiar world or his desire to live in one". It is an aggressive mode and provides an outlet for the emotional confusion of modern man. The centre stage in modern grotesque literature is given to a "repugnant" individual, "a humiliated man" – an "anti-hero", whose actions are animated not by reason but by his degenerate nature, for as Mc Elroy asserts, "perversity, not reason, is the basis of human character"(Mc Elroy 1989: 27-28).

Mc Elroy's insistence on the "internal" or psychological source of the grotesque, does not contradict our belief that the source of modern grotesque is equally firmly rooted in the outside world. The notion of tragedy has lost its relevance, not because it is obsolete in our troubled age, but because its dimensions are altered. Tragedy became trivialised by its notorious presence in everyday life and is brought vividly into our homes through the mass media. Not only the parameters of tragic and funny became blurred as the laws of relativity subject to their intrinsic ambiguity but all other aspects of life and of humanness itself (cf Krzychylkiewicz 2002: 95-119). Categories of right and wrong became relative too when contextualised by religious or ideological beliefs. To kill a human being is wrong, but to kill an adversary, especially on ideological grounds, is right, because the grotesque random division of entities makes it possible to alienate the category of human from the category of enemy. Furthermore, the tragedy of an individual has become inconsequential in the context of the mass murders and genocide by which our century has become identified in history. We have learned not to cry over roses when forests are burning

The multifarious studies of the modern grotesque are, thus, not only feasible and necessary, but they promise a fascinating voyage into the complex and controversial nature of the modern age as it is reflected in its art. One should not be discouraged by opinions as the one expressed by Harpham that even though "it is relatively easy to recognise the grotesque *in* a work of art, [it is] quite difficult to apprehend [it] directly" because "curiously, it remains elusive despite the fact that it is unchanging" (Harpham 1982: xx). Contrary to what he says, the existing scholarship, including his own work, comprises of valuable data on diverse manifestations of the grotesque, as well as useful guidelines by means of examples on how to proceed with the examination of grotesque work.

The intuition aside, from the preceding outline of the grotesque, its understanding and its career as an artistic device, emerges that, in order to

identify it, one has to look not for one but for several of its characteristics in a given work or in an aspect of it. Let us then briefly recapitulate the most important point in this matter. In his seminal study of the grotesque in English literature, Clayborough suggests that grotesque work may be assessed from the “three complementary points of view: as a reflection of the actual world, as a deliberate artistic device, and as a temperamental peculiarity” of the author.²² A somewhat different approach is suggested by Kayser who notes that apart from being viewed in a work of art, the grotesque may be examined either as an aspect of the creative process which includes the artist’s own perception of the world, or in the process of the reception of the work by its reader (Kayser 1981: 273). Although in the course of analysing the grotesque work, referring to all those aspects is usually unavoidable, it may be argued that the most tangible evidence of the presence of the grotesque lies in the work itself, that is, in the artistic devices used by the author both to convey his perception of the world and to affect the reader’s reception of it.

The first step in attempting the analysis of the grotesque work is to recognise it as such. In Ludmila Foster’s view:

We call a literary work “grotesque” when it produces upon us an effect of something distorted, absurd, incongruous, or estranged; when something is presented to us not only as different from what it is, or from what it might be, but is also presented in a way which does not fit our familiar logical or imaginative pattern.

(Foster 1966: 75)

In her definition of the grotesque Foster focuses on the presentation of the world or the events *in* the work examined as well as on the effect this presentation has on us.²³ In her subsequent essay on the grotesque, Foster advises to look both at the work’s “substance” and its “treatment”. She defines substance as “what is being told”, and treatment as “how something is being told”, concluding that either one or both of these aspects of the work “can be affected by the devices of distortion and shift” (Foster 1967: 38).

One of the most important aspects of the grotesque is the nature of its universe. The universe of the grotesque work “is and is not our own” (Kayser 1981: 37). Kayser’s formulation indicates the two equally important elements, namely the “real” and the “unreal”, which are forced by the artist to coexist in the universe of his work as an undivided entity, leading to total confusion between reality and fiction. The notion of “real” seems to be easier to grasp as it refers to commonplace situations and to phenomena that are tangible and verifiable by the senses, provided that we allow a certain margin for subjectivity. The concept of “unreal” is vast and can at times be synonymous with “ideal” or with more relevant to the concept of the grotesque notions of

fantastic, invented, contrived, dreamlike, illusory or fictitious. If used in the sense of “untrue”, the “unreal” means fake or fraudulent, implying a certain trickery and manipulation with reality – its deliberate deformation. Kayser’s statement that the grotesque world “is and is not our own” means that we can talk about the grotesque universe only when various realms fuse and mingle freely, preventing the reader from distinguishing real from unreal. Frequently such a universe seems both ludicrous and hostile as it is populated with strange creatures whose origins and identity are uncertain, concealed or multiplied in endless reflections of the same moral depravity or spiritual emptiness.

Grotesque work frequently reflects the world that is real, but it defamiliarises that world by drastically altering its proportions and perspectives. This deliberate fusion of realms may take place on various levels and may affect various aspects of the text, depending on the defamiliarisation technique chosen by the writer. The real, historically verifiable world may be invested with fantastic events, the law of statics may be suspended, meaning that inanimate objects move freely while people and animals are denied freedom of movement. The deliberate confusion of realms may affect the whole universe of the work or only its selected aspects, allowing the abolition of generic categories – people, animals and objects share parts and characteristics, preventing the reader from unequivocally identifying them. The real world may be colonised by people and other creatures whose natural sizes and shapes are ludicrously distorted, thus perceived as grotesque. It may also happen that the shapes and sizes are retained intact, yet they completely lose the essence of creatures or objects with which they are commonly associated.

The most potent grotesque images are those which manipulate our perception of a human being. Thus the human body retains all its “real characteristics” but is no more than an empty shell completely devoid of inner humanness. Hence the particular popularity of puppets, marionettes and automatons with the writers of the grotesque. Thomson explains the essence of their grotesqueness:

Human-like, animated yet actually lifeless objects, they are apt to be simultaneously comical and eerie – comical because of their imperfect approximation to human form and behaviour, eerie probably because of age-old, deep-rooted fears in man of animated and human-like objects.

(Thomson 1972: 35)

Whether heterogenic, composed by synthetising elements belonging to different realms, or heteromorphic, that is rooted in disproportion, all the grotesque forms are always polyvalent, incongruous and disquieting, always thwarting an unequivocal distinction between phenomena that are *normally* considered antagonistic.

Grotesque work displays both the extent and the nature of the departure from the model or from the norm. This may be realised intrinsically in the text, or extrinsically, in the process of juxtaposition of “the author’s presentation and the reader’s familiar frame of reference” (Foster 1967: 41). Whichever is the case, the grotesque presents a universe that is extravagant: its features and images are either exaggerated or altered in some extreme way. This concerns all aspects of grotesque work, including the logic which organises its narrative. The latter may be based on a minor incident blown out of all proportion and presented as great tragedy. It may also present genuine tragedy as an insignificant or even laughable event. Similar incongruity may affect the reasoning of individual characters, conveyed, however, as normal, logical and the only possible. Confronting this reasoning with his own, the reader is thrown into an instant emotional turmoil and loses confidence in the universe thus created. Together with the author he might even doubt the possibility of ever being able to restore harmony and reason in his own world. But if the grotesque work is to achieve its full impact, it has to make the reader believe that there is a specific purpose and a message in the inexplicable oddity of its universe. If a reader thought the work a mere caricature or burlesque of reality, a product of extravagance or of a traumatised mind, he would feel no involvement, no need to take seriously the situation put before him.

Closely related to the above is the tonality of the grotesque work. An important observation about the mechanisms by which the grotesque triggers this specific reaction is made by Mc Elroy, who maintains that the grotesque is invested with “perverse glee”, an element of play whose “purpose is not merely to titillate by rendering laughable things which we know we really should not laugh at (though some portion of that forbidden pleasure is usually involved)” (Mc Elroy 1989: 20). In his view, “the commonplace sentiments of revulsion and pity” are pushed aside by a grimly grotesque joke which initially seems to divert our attention from the terrible or pathetic aspects of life but which eventually strikes us by jarring our emotions, for “the horrible becomes vivid precisely because we are not called upon for a conventional response” (p. 20). And it is the reader’s “response” the grotesque seeks, to capture his attention and to upset the comfort of his petty-bourgeois lifestyle. By its extraordinary nature the belligerent grotesque work precalculates a certain quality and intensity of emotional response. “We are both fascinated and repelled by the grotesque”, notes Clayborough (Clayborough 1965: 73), while Kayser explains: “we smile at the deformations, but are appalled by the horrible and the monstrous elements as such” (Kayser 1981: 31). Harpham puts it more directly: “grotesque forms in fact almost always inspire an ambivalent emotional reaction” (Harpham 1982: 8). Clayborough, Harpham, Kayser, Thomson, Mc Elroy and many other critics exploring the issue define the reader’s response to the grotesque in terms of shock, confusion, mixed

reaction, unresolved clash, or an overall disturbing quality. In Kayser's view, "we are so strongly affected and terrified by the grotesque images because it is our world which ceases to be reliable, and we feel that we would be unable to live in this changed world" (Kayser 1981: 184). The reader's reaction to a grotesque work is similar to the reaction to our own image in a crooked mirror: we know that we are looking at ourselves, but the image which looks back at us evokes simultaneously laughter, revulsion, and even horror.

From the aesthetic point of view, the grotesque work violently resists the classical concept of beauty, order and harmony, introducing what is uniquely its own, based on ambivalence, incongruity and the strange coexistence of inherently incompatible elements. But the grotesque "is not what is hideous, monstrous, ugly, repulsive" warns Harpham, emphasising that it is only if such elements are in an interaction with their opposites (Harpham 1982: 5). Inevitably, the grotesque confuses or even completely shatters our own value system; what to us is insignificant is presented as significant, what is trivial is awarded recognition, while what we consider holy is placed amidst mundane banality or even obscenity. Thus, what was said about the aesthetic code being affected by the grotesque applies also to the ethical attributes of the universe created, for by its very essence the grotesque undermines concepts such as ideal justice, elevated wisdom, eternal happiness and an orderly universe.

The grotesque has the capacity to emphasise and to expose, but it is equally important to note that it has as much propensity to hide, to be used as a disguise for the "other" meaning. Harpham makes this characteristic of the grotesque a basic premise of his book, saying: "Beneath [my] study is the implication that serious attention to the grotesque might unlock many secrets" (Harpham 1982: 21).²⁴ This observation is particularly relevant when we speak of the authors of the grotesque, for the grotesque not only does reflect their "temperamental peculiarity" but, being capable of mirroring their personal confusion and anxiety, it also betrays their attitude to the "actual world". Choosing the text of their grotesque work as a mask we may never be certain what the authors' actual views are for the grotesque excuses them from speaking their mind directly. This grotesque indeterminacy does not only absolve them from being censured for the nonsense and absurdity plaguing their work, but also prevents them from being cast into an explicit ethical, philosophical or ideological pattern. The grotesque work is a work of the rebellious mind that in the process of bold recreation of the familiar world disregards accepted laws of probability, plausibility and conformity. The authors of the grotesque are individualists who appropriate the right to have an individual vision of the world, but might choose to conceal it in the intricate net of other views and voices which constantly echo in their work.

As a robust and versatile literary device, the grotesque attracts the reader's attention because it deviates from expectations of the usual and familiar. That

is why the grotesque work clashes with dogmatic establishments, encourages polemic and points at the possibility of holding a different opinion from the one officially imposed. Although traditionally the grotesque world was partially attributed to the intervention of supernatural forces, the authors of modern grotesque make a profoundly ironic statement that in the modern world we do not need the devil to inflict harm; human beings themselves are perfectly capable of making this world resemble hell.

Notes

1. This article is based on the theoretical foundation of my doctoral thesis “The Grotesque in the Works of Bruno Jasienski” (Krzychylkiewicz 1998).
2. For a discussion of the relationship of the grotesque with satire see Krzychylkiewicz 1996, vol. 51(1): 30-38, 2002b, vol. 17: 113-136.
3. Similar views are expressed in numerous other works, for instance the one by Geoffrey Galt Harpham (1982) whose opinion is based on the analyses of paintings and carvings found in palaeolithic caves.
4. All references are to the English edition: W. Kayser, *The Grotesque in Art and Literature*, 1981. This is not to say that the grotesque was not written about earlier. An important insight into the complex phenomenon of the grotesque one may find in John Ruskin’s *The Stones of Venice*, London, 1907, or in the works of some of the Russian Formalists.
5. See “The Grotesque in the Twentieth Century”, where the “verbal grotesque” in poetry by Morgenstern, the “dreamlike” world of Franz Kafka, and the “excessively real” world of Thomas Mann are analysed (Kayser 1981: 147-158).
6. An interesting perspective on Bakhtin’s theories of dialogism and carnival is presented by Booker and Juraga (1995). One of their worthwhile suggestions is that Bakhtin used the work of Rabelais as a disguise for his comment on Stalin and his policies. Indeed, in the way Bakhtin described the medieval world there is more than one hint to substantiate such an interpretation.
7. W. Bolecki illustrates this aspect on the example of modernism which successfully employed ancient mythical as well as Renaissance types of the grotesque, adding to it its own colouring (Bolecki 1991: 115-145).
8. This notion is well captured by Harpham:
it is up to the culture to provide the conventions and assumptions that determine its particular forms (logic, common sense dictates its recognition):

culture does it by establishing conditions of order and coherence, especially by specifying which categories are logically or generically incompatible with others.

(Harpham 1982: xx)

9. The oldest grotesque images include *hybrids* (the term attributed to Lukian, first century BC). Hybrids were either people with elements taken from animals (the Minotaur, Midas), or animals featuring elements of the human body (the Sphinx), or even parts of different animals compiled anew into one creature (Pegasus having the body of a horse and the wings of a bird) (Bolecki 1991: 118).
10. See Horace (1978: 450-451). See also Brink (1971: 85-88). An interesting translation of the relevant passage is found in Muller Cooke (1982: 2). What Horace conveyed in an extended phrase: *scimus, et hanc ueniam petimusue damusque uicissim; / sed non ut placidis coeant immitia, non ut / serpentes auibus gementur, tigribus agni* (verses 11-13), the translator captures with a *modern* word “grotesque”. The suitability of the term “grotesque” in this case proves both its semantic potential and its versatility for, as Harpham puts it,
As an adjective [the grotesque] has no descriptive value; its sole function is to represent a condition of overcrowding or contradiction in the place where the modifier should be. This place can never be occupied by any other single adjective but only by a number of adjectives not normally found together.
(Harpham 1982: 3)
11. To note these contradictory views, we may mention, for instance, Clayborough: “Callot’s figures were a distortion of physical reality” (Clayborough 1965: 12), and Bolecki’s view that these are “fantastic monsters having no semblance to nature” (Bolecki 1989: 111). Describing some of Callot’s illustrations to the *commedia*, Kayser notes that the distortions which appear in Callot’s sketches “are by no means inventions of the artist” (Kayser 1981: 39).
12. For instance, Barasch speaks of the “monstrous”, “barbaric” and even “immoral” as synonyms for the grotesque in the framework of the eighteenth-century aesthetic code (Barasch 1971: 113-114).
13. The origins of the term go back to the Middle Ages, when it was fashionable to adorn monumental Gothic buildings with the images of chimeras, gargoyles, dragons and so on. Together with the gloomy architecture, such decorations bolstered the outlandishly mysterious atmosphere of these Gothic structures. The relation of Gothic to the grotesque is not clearly defined. Harpham, for instance, considers Gothic to be “contained within fixities of time and place, form and function: definable architectural style, coherent symbolic significance, clear origin and terminus, and a limited number of instances”, while “none of these helpful limitations applies to the grotesque” (Harpham 1982: xvii). Mc Elroy dismisses the issue as “hair-splitting”, but acknowledges that the concept is one

of those related to but “presumably, not synonymous with grotesque” (Mc Elroy 1989: 2). Romantics adopted Gothic as a genre which accorded well with their predilection for mystery.

14. See Sokół, who maintains that turning to the grotesque at the beginning of the nineteenth century was seen as the antithesis of a decorum-defined classicism. In his view, divisions into pure forms – tragedies or comedies, compulsory in the previous epoch of Classicism, became now less obvious (Sokół 1973: 23-34). See also Kayser, the chapter on “The Grotesque in the Age of Romanticism” (Kayser 1981: 48-99). Modern concepts of tragicomedy and its relation to the grotesque are discussed briefly in Barasch and supported by the following comment based on the views of Guthke: “in the grotesque-absurd, the world is weird and distorted; in tragicomedy, the action ‘remains within the confines of logic and what is generally accepted as the common characteristics of reality ...’” (Barasch 1971: 161-162). Thomson makes a similar point, saying that “tragicomedy points only to the fact that life is alternately tragic and comic”, while the grotesque pronounces that “the vale of tears and the circus are one, that tragedy is in some ways comic and all comedy in some way tragic and pathetic” (Thompson 1972: 63).
15. As noted by Clayborough (1965: 48), one of the first expressions of this idea had been in the “Preface” to *Cromwell* (1827) by Victor Hugo.
16. See Kayser: “Our brief glance at English literature furnishes additional proof that the grotesque has also its place in realism”. Kayser illustrates his point referring to Dickens, who in his opinion, “does not always require the supernatural to alienate the world” and calls this type of the grotesque “realistic” (Kayser 1981: 123). He sees it differently though in German literature, where the grotesque in nineteenth-century realism, in his view, “almost consistently constituted a watered down version of Romantic modes of creation” (p. 130).
17. Gogol’s case is the classical example here. Thanks to the prominent Russian literary critic Vissarion Belinsky (1811-1848), throughout the nineteenth century Gogol was seen as an exemplary realist writer in the true classical sense. This led to the interpretation of his writing as a critical comment on the abominable state of Russian society in the first half of the century. It was only the Russian Formalists who started to speak of the illusory character of Gogol’s realism. The *grotesque* approach to Gogol’s writing shifts emphasis from the social to the psychological and philosophical significance of his work and makes it universal. This can be illustrated with the example of his short story *The Overcoat*, which was interpreted as a tale about the tsarist clerk – a little man – whose fate was determined by his poor social background and material deprivation. Viewed as a work of the grotesque, *The Overcoat* is interpreted in terms of the spiritual poverty of a man obsessively preoccupied with material possession, languid and submissive (cf Erlich *Gogol* 1969). Interestingly enough, similar accusations of

“false naturalism and entrails-oriented literature” were directed at futurist poets (cf Balcerzan 1968: 139).

18. See Kayser’s brief comments on the grotesque in nineteenth-century English literature (Kayser 1981: 122-123).
19. Clayborough underlines that the understanding of the grotesque in Romantic art varied from country to country. For instance it had a different connotation in German Romanticism (E.T.A. Hoffmann), in English (Scott, Byron). The French understanding of the concept interests us, however, because as he puts it, it acquired “revolutionary overtones” and was “associated with artistic freedom and the overthrow of cramping conventions” (Clayborough 1965: 13), which makes it relevant for the study of modern grotesque.
20. Clayborough refers to *Les Grottesques*, published by Gautier in 1853 (Clayborough 1965: 13).
21. Harpham is adamant: “That the grotesque exists has always been a given” and names a number of artists, scholars and works that affirm the grotesque as a fact of reality. Approving of this view, he quotes after Gahan Wilson a bizarre but true press report: “In the early days of heart transplants, doctors attempted to transfer the heart of a pig to a man. In the middle of the operation, ... the anaesthetized pig woke up and ran squealing around the room with the doctors in pursuit as the man died on the operating table” (in Harpham 1982: xix).
22. Clayborough derives his argument from G. K. Chesterton’s study *Robert Browning* (1903) (Clayborough 1965: 58-59).
23. Formulating, as he puts it, a “basic definition of the grotesque” Thomson reaches a similar conclusion, saying that it is “*the unresolved clash of incompatibilities in work and response*” (Thompson 1972: 271).
24. Admittedly, in this discussion are not included works of Russian scholars, with the exception of Bakhtin, because of their narrow interpretation of the grotesque, merely as a device particularly favoured by satirists. As Mann notes, “the grotesque is written not to hide, but to expose” (Mann 1966: 122). The possible reasons of the Russian (Soviet) approach are discussed in Krzychylkiewicz (1999).

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