

explorations



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REVIEW

Sławomir Kuźnicki. 2023. *Na stykach iskrzy: literackie konteksty rocka (Sparking Points: Literary Contexts of Rock Music)*. Opole: Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Opolskiego.

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Krzysztof Gajda (Adam Mickiewicz University in Poznań)

ORCID: 0000-0002-4456-9229

Sławomir Kuźnicki's *Sparking Points: Literary Contexts of Rock Music (Na stykach iskrzy: literackie konteksty rocka)* is a book that deals with the relations between rock music and culture. It comprises two parts: "Rock Music on the Literary Sparking Points" and "Rock Music on the Cultural Sparking Points". Such a division indicates the dominance of the literary tropes, but not their exclusiveness since the broader cultural, ideological and social background is represented here on an equal level. Kuźnicki's monograph stems from the need to demonstrate that the rock culture is a rightful ingredient of the contemporary culture, and its multitude correlations are inscribed in the universal and long-lasting relations between these phenomena that constitute the reality.

The book is stretched between the academic field and the author's essayistic temperament, which results in an appealing quality of the text. With the research passion that deserves an individual emphasis, Sławomir Kuźnicki guides the reader through the intricacies of the songs and the artists' activities that are rarely approached with such ardour and great care (at least when it comes to the Polish scholarly environment). It is a pleasure to follow the leads discovered by the author in his research that built on carefully explained levels of intertextual reliances. It is also worth noticing that Kuźnicki displays an obvious talent to spin narratives which are based on various sources. The interdisciplinary quality is one of the major assumptions of this text and it is appropriately employed to speak about issues such as dystopia, trauma, photographic poetry, the visionary, religious utopism, the fight for civil rights or challenging the patriarchal monopoly on provocative sexuality; and it is all conducted in reference to the role of lyrics, music or performativity of rock. Thanks to the detailed and erudite reading which broadens the semantic scope of the interpreted texts of culture, we reach the most remote corners of artistic inspirations and cultural contexts.

Although some of the chapters relocate the reader to distant decades of the twentieth century, Kuźnicki manages to move around the area of very lively and current ideological disputes. Each chapter undertakes a different problem, and the presented contexts help us realise how permanent some divisions are, even despite the evident progress. Hence, the book reminds the reader that no progress is achieved intrinsically and instantly but rather

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is an effect of persistence, determination, courage and disagreement with the existing erroneousness. The problems of racism, or discrimination against the minorities as well as a necessity to fight for social and religious freedom remain topical today – though on a different level – and are also publicised by the uncompromising attitudes and artistic acts. The reader has to situate the past event and issues against the current situation individually. The awareness of the relations, transformations and progress which take place in various areas nowadays constitutes a significant foundation that one should be endowed with when reading about the pioneering manifestations of the artistic activities which express the protest against the existing – and wrong – order. The possibility to better understand the ideological battle which has been still fought in the West is very important for the Polish reader. This leads us to another weighty context of the “cultural war” that is played out in front of our eyes, engaging – on various fronts – a substantial part of the Polish society. It happens so due to the graphic division into liberal and conservative blocs (to simplify matters). The cultural legacy, more and more openly attacked by the conservative side, constitutes a valuable point of reference for *Sparking Points (Na stykach iskrzy)*. The fight for civil rights, freedom to express oneself in diverse dimensions of humanness, liberty of thought and artistic expression untrammelled by bourgeois conventions – these are the protagonists of the book. As a result, it gains an additional quality of a profoundly humanist consideration on ethic functions that art can perform. Rock culture has been engaging in the challenges posed by the present day for many years, at least since the 1960s in the West and the 1980s in Poland. And it does so regardless of its entanglement with the net of economic, political, ideological and situational interrelations which are impossible to be avoided in the world of consumerism, financialisation and the growing importance of media, to enumerate just these three phenomena shaping our reality.

Sparking Points: Literary Contexts of Rock Music (Na stykach iskrzy: literackie konteksty rocka) by Sławomir Kuźnicki is a quality and absorbing book, written in an excellent style, which presents a multitude of original interpretations founded on historic and cultural background. The thematic range parallels the internal cohesion, all thanks to the clear and balanced composition. Eruditeness and genuine passion of this story make the monograph both scholarly reliable and attractive in the reading process.

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AUTHOR'S BIO: Krzysztof Gajda is Professor of Literature and Alternative Culture at the Adam Mickiewicz University in Poznań. His academic interests concern the relations between songs and literature. He is the author of four individual monographs, most recently *Szarpidruty i poeci. Piosenka wobec przemian społecznych i kulturowych ostatnich dekad* (2017). Additionally, apart from numerous co-edited books, together with Krzysztof “Grabież” Grabowski he published the conversation *Gościu. Auto-bio-Grabież* (2010).

E-MAIL: krzysztof.gajda@amu.edu.pl