

Emilia Kledzik, *Perspektywa poety. Cyganologia Jerzego Ficowskiego* [A Poet's Perspective. Jerzy Ficowski's Gypsyology], Poznań, 2023, Wydawnictwo Poznańskie Studia Polonistyczne, 686 pp.

Emilia Kledzik, an accomplished and acclaimed literary scholar¹ associated with the Adam Mickiewicz University in Poznań, published her book discussing Jerzy Ficowski's Gypsyological endeavours on the eve of the one-hundredth

¹ Among the several dozen articles, chapters in monographic works, and other publications which Emilia Kledzik has authored since 2013, a special place is occupied by writings concerning Romani studies or postcolonialism. Even a preliminary look at their titles shows that the two themes have long been present in the author's scholarly efforts. Moreover, Kledzik does not limit herself to the domain of literary

anniversary of the poet's birth. Her monograph thus comes ahead of numerous talks and other events on Jerzy Ficowski and his literary projects,² as well as new editions of his prominent works.³ Although Emilia Kledzik's publication does not fall in line with the tone of the anniversary, intended rather as a deconstruction of the poet's oeuvre, the scholar nonetheless breathes new air into the reception of the author of *Cyganie polscy* [Polish Gypsies] by enriching it with new elements. In addition, and most importantly, she makes space for asking broad questions, the starting point of which is Ficowski's Gypsology. I am convinced that this is precisely what makes the book under discussion so valuable. The scholar aims to analyse Ficowski's Gypsology as a complete system of knowledge on the people referred to as Gypsies.⁴ Her interdisciplinary line of argument should prove equally inspiring to historians, ethnographers, and literary scholars. The detailed discussion and the wealth of consulted sources (some previously inaccessible to researchers) have enabled many questions to be answered, but, even more importantly, they hint at areas that merit further exploration.

studies – her interdisciplinary studies cross over to research fields traditionally occupied by ethnography or intercultural education (more at <https://researchportal.amu.edu.pl/info/author/UAM190459?tab=publications&title=Profil%2Bosoby%2B%25E2%2580%2593%2BEmilia%2BKledzik%2B%25E2%2580%2593%2BUniwersytet%2Bim.%2BADama%2BMickiewicza%2Bw%2BPoznaniu&lang=pl&pn=1&p=qki> [Accessed: 22 Feb. 2025]).

² Their list and reports from some of the events can be found on the website of the Jerzy Ficowski Foundation (<https://jerzyficowski.pl/aktualnosci/> [Accessed: 23 Feb. 2025]). The National Library has published manuscripts with the poet's pieces in open access (see <https://www.bn.org.pl/aktualnosci/5384-rekopisy-wierszy-gerzego-ficowskiego-na-polonapl.html> (Accessed: 23 Feb. 2025)).

³ Among those *Regiony wielkiej herezji i okolice. Bruno Schulz i jego mitologia* (Kraków, 2024); *Niepamiętnik* (Poznań, 2024); *Cyganie na polskich drogach* (Warszawa, 2024); *Gałązka z drzewa słońca. Baśnie cygańskie* (Sejny, 2024). There has also been a reedition of Papusza's poem collection *Lesie, ojczyzno moja*, translated and with introduction by Jerzy Ficowski (Warszawa, 2024).

⁴ Emilia Kledzik introduces the term 'people referred to as Gypsies' [Pol. *ludzie nazywani Cyganami*] in her book, arguing that 'Romani/Roma' is not a term synonymous with 'Gypsy', and the difference between them goes beyond the issue of political correctness. The Gypsiness is a collection of defined essentialising features, a foundation on which the field of Gypsology was built. The term 'Romani culture' emerged from questioning Gypsiness, and today it is primarily used in the context of the Roma's emerging political identity. The scholar displays consistent use of these terms throughout the six hundred pages of the monograph, reflecting the assiduousness with which she approaches the analysis. The cited term itself is an example of Kledzik distancing herself from the discourse associated with the topic.

In this review, I will present an overview of Jerzy Ficowski and his work, to the extent necessary for the subsequent discussion. I will then go over the contents of individual chapters in the monograph and their major conclusions. At this point, it is worth emphasising that the book's topic-based structure, devised to serve its primary purpose (as defined above), has been carefully planned and that individual sections directly reference preceding units. As a consequence, it is best to read the monograph in the intended order. Nonetheless, it is possible to read selected fragments, as each chapter ends with a short summary of its key points and opens with the author's introductory remarks. This also helps give the extensive argument (over six hundred pages) a clear structure and thus makes it precise and logical. In the final section of the review, I mention several examples of topical issues – points of discussion directly associated with *Perspektywa poety* or themes exemplified by the monograph. I have chosen them subjectively, drawing directly from my ethnographic experience. I am certain that the book could also inspire reflections in other domains, sometimes only tangentially associated with the principal topic.

Emilia Kledzik's goal, as elucidated above, clearly demonstrates that *Perspektywa poety* is not a biography of Jerzy Ficowski. And yet, the reader cannot help but wonder about how the poet became interested in the Gypsy community and who its representatives are. The author asks the same questions and retraces the Gypsiologist's path in many aspects. As it turns out, today it is impossible to reconstruct the course of events: the mail exchanged by the Wajs family and Ficowski suggests that the latter spent no more than seventeen days with a Gypsy caravan train, but he himself talked about being on the road for several months at a time over a period of two years. Depending on whom Ficowski talked to and when, he would also give different reasons for joining the caravan train (p. 268⁵). To get in good graces of the group, he offered some form of payment – material or institutional support, help with dealing with red tape, etc. Discussing the different versions of the story told by Ficowski over the years, Kledzik concludes that the poet's contacts with Gypsy dynasties and stays in Gypsy camps contributed to his auto-creation and legitimised his subsequent publications.

Jerzy Ficowski's first forays into a career in Gypsyology date back to the period immediately following the end of the Second World War. From the very beginning, he had very ambitious plans, and although he did not manage to fulfil them all, his work is to date the most extensive Polish contribution to the study of the people referred to as Gypsies.⁶ He was also a pioneer

⁵ For the sake of brevity, when directly referring to the findings included in Emilia Kledzik's monograph, I only give the page number in the main body of the text and not the full citation.

⁶ Ficowski's *magnum opus* is the monograph with its subsequent editions: *Cyganie Polski. Szkice historyczno-obyczajowe* (1953), *Cyganie na polskich drogach* (1965),

in popularising Gypsy poetry, which he considered a repository of intangible heritage essential to understand the studied culture. By publishing their songs and poems, Ficowski sought to familiarise the Polish majority with the folk culture of this minority group and, at the same time, to support the latter and protect it from marginalisation and discrimination. He worked on a poetic description of Gypsy communities without denying the existence of the structuralist opposition – savage (primitive) versus civilised – which constituted a pillar of the universal development model. Consequently, although Ficowski exhibited a great degree of sensitivity and openness to otherness and tried to avoid stereotyping, he still developed a construct of Gypsy identity which exoticised people referred to as Gypsies and was based on a set of inalienable features attributed to them.

In reality, the claim of the study's unprecedented nature, echoed by Ficowski himself, is unsubstantiated. Kledzik's argument clearly demonstrates that the poet's work was a synthesis of research carried out in the nineteenth and first half of the twentieth centuries, and that he interpreted his experiences of staying with the caravan train precisely through the framework imposed by this research (p. 238). The literary scholar also points out the political context of the times in which Ficowski started his career. The settlement and productivity campaign carried out by the Polish People's Republic against the Gypsies influenced both the reception of Ficowski's output and the content of his publications. His writings display, on the one hand, an attempt to counter the majority's prejudice towards minority groups, efforts to include the latter in his own cultural community, praise of the modernising trend, and on the other, a sense of nostalgia for what the Gypsy population was seen to embody: freedom, community. This ambivalence finds expression in many of Ficowski's works, as Kledzik repeatedly points out in her monograph. A symptomatic example is how he approached the biography of Bronisława Wajs, known as Papusza (see chapter 6 in *Perspektywa poety*). In the early 1950s, the poet primarily emphasised Papusza's emancipation, her ability to read and write, and her attitude toward itinerancy. Several years later, he argued that the poems she wrote at the time, praising the drive to productivity, were among her weakest efforts. He said that she contradicted herself, as the institutional initiatives led to the end of nomadism – the defining feature of Gypsy culture (p. 486).

Cyganie w Polsce. Dzieje i obyczaje (1989). Concomitantly throughout the years, Ficowski prolifically produced articles, collections of poems (including the poetry of Bronisława Wajs, which was one of the main pillars of his Gypsiological career), translations, interviews. He also published works with a different character: a collection of Gypsy fairy tales titled *Gałązka z drzewa słońca* (1961) and a memoir, *Demony cudzego strachu* (1986), in which the author reminisces on his wanderings with the Gypsy caravan trains and the people he met along the way.

Emilia Kledzik's analyses summarised above lead to a conclusion which I would consider paramount for her work. Namely, the figure of Jerzy Ficowski and his rich contributions to Gypsology should be considered in a specific cultural and temporal context. This makes it possible to notice certain biases which generated the earlier-mentioned contradictions. The first of these is the paradigm within which researchers operate, influencing not only the methods adopted and the topics studied, but also the conclusions drawn. The author of *Cyganie polscy* worked within the model of Gypsology developed since the eighteenth century. According to this framework, the people referred to as Gypsies are a distinct, exotic ethnic group, with a culture which has remained unchanged for centuries and which has elements making it difficult (if not outright impossible) to assimilate into the majority group. During the period when Ficowski was most prolific, research standards were moving away from the evolutionist bent prevalent earlier, but the Gypsologist seemed oblivious to this transition. The other bias was directly associated with the Polish political system. The state institutions of the Polish People's Republic launched a settlement and nationalisation campaign, which resulted in increased interactions between the majority population and the people referred to as Gypsies. Not only did the poet support the campaign in his output, but he would also, at times, serve as an expert for some state institutions.

Kledzik discusses the cultural and political context of Ficowski's work under the Polish People's Republic in the first chapter: 'Cygan, obywatel Polskiej Rzeczypospolitej Ludowej. Cyganologia Jerzego Ficowskiego pomiędzy akcją osiedleńczą a festiwalem w Opolu' [Gypsy, a Citizen of People's Poland. Jerzy Ficowski's Gypsology between the Settlement Campaign and the Opole Festival]. She devotes the section to the settlement campaign itself as well as to the first Gypsyological publications of the writer, then a young man. Ficowski's early works reflected the vision of Gypsy people dominant at the time and bore testimony to the author's field work, which soon started to legitimise his claims and lend him credibility as an ethnographer.

A particularly interesting section comes in the third part of the chapter in question, devoted to the phenomenon of Gypsy motifs at music festivals and their immense popularity. Marginal as this theme may be for the main line of argument, it embodies, on the microscale, nearly all the factors which determined the nature of Ficowski's Gypsyological endeavours and their reception. As the scholar points out, there was a need to improve the public image of the Gypsy to facilitate assimilation. For this purpose, a narrative emerged to paint the Gypsy people as wonderfully free, colourful, and unbridled. The story fell in line with the expectations of the majority group and fed itself on the corpus of frequently reproduced, and often stereotypical, Gypsy features. To avoid excessive exoticisation, which would offend the

tastes of the middle class, the narrative was naturalised – instead of inviting Gypsy performers to music festivals, as had been the case in the past, the organisers relied on star acts wearing costumes designed in line with Gypsiological clichés. An exception to the rule was Michaj Burano, who sang lyrics penned by Ficowski in the Romani dialect. This reflects the multitude of domains in which the poet operated as a populariser, authority, and expert. The latter roles gave him the sanction to decide which features to use when constructing the image of the people referred to as Gypsies, according to the current needs. It would seem that this very mechanism applied, for example, when Papusza's poems were being prepared for print, although Kledzik does not emphasise the similarities in these two spheres of the writer's activity. What she does point out is that in all his endeavours, Ficowski operated within the limits of the Gypsiological model, which he developed in his early publications and later consequently built on.

The subsequent chapter discusses the poet's contributions to Gypsiology and his literary inspirations. We find out how Ficowski was emerging as the observer and chronicler of minority or discriminated groups. He achieved this, among other things, by paying attention to these groups' pasts and studying memory. After Piotr Sommer, Kledzik cites a sentence which seems to embody this theme in the poet's output: "I have to | prevent everything | that has already happened" (p. 138). Ficowski's activity in this respect did not concern solely the people referred to as Gypsies but also Jews – or more precisely, Holocaust victims – and was aimed at bearing witness and saving their stories from oblivion. The same theme, strictly in terms of Gypsiology, returns in one of the subsequent chapters. 'Cygańskie imaginarium literackie Jerzego Ficowskiego' [Jerzy Ficowski's Gypsiological Literary Imaginarium] presents to the reader how the poet constructed the language of description he used in his Gypsiology, spanning the gap between poetic and academic style, between literature and ethnography. Interestingly, Ficowski's output unequivocally suggests that the boundaries between poetry and research are quite blurry, despite the poet denying it in interviews and arguing for a clear distinction between genres of expression.

This last theme mentioned, namely walking the tightrope between the language of poetry and of ethnography, is significant in the context of subsequent chapters, especially chapter 3, in which Emilia Kledzik analyses successive editions of the aforementioned monograph by Ficowski, *Cyganie polscy*. The book offers a confrontation of the material gathered by the author in Gypsy caravan camps with scholarly Gypsiological publications. The former helps build the poet's self-constructed image of an eyewitness to the disappearance of an authentic culture and, at the same time, legitimises (in the popular understanding) the academic nature of his approach. In reality, however, the monograph – just like Ficowski's other works – does not have the appropriate back matter. Yet it operates in scholarly discourse in a double

role: as a primary and a secondary source.⁷ Kledzik demonstrates how citation network legitimises knowledge as scientific and allows it to be taken at face value, without the need for verification. Another important theme in chapter 3 is the ‘construction of Gypsiness’, as expressed in the chapter title. This review is not an appropriate place to discuss in detail the model constructed by Ficowski, but it is necessary to point to its key element, namely the figure of belated modernisation. Despite the declarative sensitivity of the author, his output highlighted the otherness and anachronism of the people referred to as Gypsies.⁸

The chapter ‘Zagłada Cyganów w piśmiennictwie Jerzego Ficowskiego’ [The Gypsy Holocaust in Jerzy Ficowski’s Writing], which could be a separate publication, demonstrates in full Kledzik’s methodical and analytical approach to the overall topic. The scholar traces the chronology and the methods of collecting material by the poet, as well as the places where he published his works. She also points out that the Chief Commission for the Investigation of Nazi Crimes in Poland [Główna Komisja Badania Zbrodni Hitlerowskich w Polsce], despite working with Ficowski and showing interest in his endeavours, did not publish a text summarising his research, deeming it inadequate due to its imprecise factual content. Although Kledzik shows where Ficowski lacked precision and how he distorted accounts of the Holocaust he collected, she does not minimise his achievements or question the innovative nature of his findings. His study of Gypsy martyrology was a pioneering work both in Poland and on an international scale (p. 397).

The last two chapters form a single conceptual unit. The first of these is devoted to an analysis of Gypsy songs, which in Ficowski’s view constituted the most important repository of knowledge on the studied group’s customs and culture. By studying songs encountered in field research and, most importantly, in earlier Gypsiological publications, the scholar is able to shed light on the editorial techniques used by Ficowski. These included not only modifying the format (e.g. changing how the text was divided into lines) and style of the pieces, but also more radical interventions, such as removing fragments, adding new lines or transforming the existing ones,

⁷ The lack of back matter is not an accusation against the poet, but he does not give the readers any information on the sources of the claims he makes. This is especially glaring since, as Kledzik euphemistically puts it, the narrative in his Gypsiological output uses ‘the method of thick compilation of various secondary and primary sources’ (p. 239), including publications from the nineteenth and early twentieth century, material from field research, and second-hand opinions and hearsay.

⁸ Other elements of this construct of Gypsiness include: nomadic lifestyle, atemporality, anti-anthropocentrism resulting in love for nature, the need to be free, strong communal and familial ties.

thus influencing their meaning. The poet applied similar measures when dealing with Papusza's output. Over the several years during which they were in touch, Ficowski became her promoter, an intermediary, in fact, the main administrator of her biography. Even though Papusza's legend has been alive for many years and has managed to traverse the borders of Poland, it has only recently become possible, thanks to previously unresearched sources,⁹ to analyse the woman's relationship with Ficowski and her poems, which he edited and subsequently published. Emilia Kledzik's exegesis of the poet's editorial interventions in Papusza's works will surely be of interest to both literary scholars and enthusiasts of her poetry. It also urges the reader to ask about the methodology of translation, especially as Kledzik posits the thesis – supported by examples – that the discussed pieces of poetry are Ficowski's forgeries, or, namely, imperfect imitations of folk language. With the changes made in Papusza's poems and the mythologisation of her biography, "the first conscious Gypsy poet" turned out to be a construct falling perfectly in line with the assumptions of Jerzy Ficowski's Gypsiology and supporting his authority as a Gypsiologist. The objectifying tone of this last sentence is intentional – as Kledzik concludes, "one may consider Papusza's poems, presented in the context of her life story, some of the most instrumentalised narratives in the post-war history of Polish literature" (p. 617). Kledzik's discussion of the above issue, of the reception of Papusza's output, and most importantly of her relationship with the author of *Cyganie polscy*, should prove interesting for anthropologists and historians alike.

The only element which, in my view, is missing from the monograph *Perspektywa poety* is a recapitulation and summary of the theme which periodically reemerges in the successive chapters, namely the relationship between the researcher and the object of research – between Ficowski and the people referred to as Gypsies. Ethnographic reflection requires considering this sphere, especially when these relations are pretty complex, as is the case here. Paul Rabinow has remarked on this issue as follows, arguing that fieldwork accounts are the foundation of knowledge in anthropology: "Anthropological facts are cross-cultural, because they are made across cultural boundaries. They exist as lived experience, but they are made into facts during the process of questioning, observing, and experiencing—which both the anthropologist and the people with whom he lives engage in".¹⁰

Although Ficowski's experience in the field was quite short, all of Emilia Kledzik's findings in this respect suggest that the relations he struck up

⁹ Following the interventions of many people, including the author of the reviewed monograph, the most extensive collection of letters written to Ficowski by Papusza was published in 2020.

¹⁰ Paul Rabinow, *Reflections on Fieldwork in Morocco* (Berkeley–Los Angeles–London, 2007), 152.

when travelling with Gypsy caravans were ambivalent and volatile. The Gypsy people, acquainted with the poet, treated him as a figure of authority, a wise man, someone who supports and values the weaker party. On the other hand, however, he would be accused of modifying original texts or even revealing the secrets of the Gypsy community. Ficowski, declaring himself an ethnographer, entered the studied group as someone from ‘his own’ world – conditioned by the culture and the political and professional situation of the majority group. Kledzik clearly demonstrates that all these factors bore influence on the poet’s activity. His involvement as an expert, writing lyrics for Michaj Burano and interfering with songs and poems authored by people referred to as Gypsies (particularly Papusza), combined with his role as an intermediary in contacts with those people, lead us to the reflection, already expressed in other ethnographic projects, that Ficowski may have “built his image as the only white man initiated into Gypsy knowledge”, being “more an informant for the Gypsies than the Gypsies were informants for the poet”.¹¹

As I mentioned in the introduction, the monograph *Perspektywa poety. Cyganologia Jerzego Ficowskiego* urges us to raise several questions, which are quite pronounced in postmodern research and extend far beyond the field of Gypsiology. For example, are mechanisms of orientalisation, folklorisation, and exoticisation common for all subordinate and minority groups? What are the possibilities of applying the idea of heteroglossia (understood as the inclusion of voices of all the participants in the ethnographic experience) during and after research?¹² How should the process of writing produced

¹¹ I use inverted commas here because the cited sentences are a direct paraphrase of Dominique A. Lettens’s critique of the ethnographic research carried out by Marcel Griaule’s team among the Dogon (see Dominique A. Lettens, *Mystagogie et mystification. Evaluation de l’oeuvre de Marcel Griaule* [Bujumbura, 1971], 397). In all fairness, the accusations made by Lettens in terms of French ethnographers’ field visits and their contacts with the local populations were largely groundless, and Marcel Griaule’s book *Conversations with Ogotemmêli* (London, 2006) is a classic publication in the field of anthropology (its significance boosted by the fact that Griaule described the ‘behind the scenes’ of his research and the changing relations between its participants). As an aside, it is worth mentioning that *Conversations...* (first French edition in 1948) has something in common with *Cyganie polscy* (1953) – namely, they both lack back matter. However, in the case of the former author, it was a conscious decision made to help the book get a wider readership.

¹² Apart from texts well-known in the literature (such as the aforementioned works by Marcel Griaule or Paul Rabinow), new publications continue to appear, which shows that the issue of relations in the field is still relevant (see e.g. Katarzyna Kaniowska and Andrzej M. Kaniowski, ‘Przyjaźń i zobowiązanie w relacjach badacz–badany’, *Zeszyty Wiejskie*, special issue [2024], 129–44).

after field experiences (which naturally requires a reduction of voices) be approached?¹³ What are the limits of the translator's freedom and their work? Which translation methods are a transgression of these limits?¹⁴ How and to what extent is institutional power able to influence creative output? What is the impact of the paradigm and pre-research assumptions on the course and outcome of academic studies?

The perspective assumed by Emilia Kledzik in her monograph lends itself to the discussion of the above issues, which bears testament to the interdisciplinary nature of her work. I am sure that many readers will see the greatest value in the literary and comparatist analyses of Gypsy songs and of the editorial modifications made in them by Jerzy Ficowski. I will admit that I also followed this theme with great interest. However, as an ethnologist and historian, I primarily read *Perspektywa poety* as a story of relations of subordination and power across various dimensions: ethnicity, gender, authorship (during writing), and ethnography. As a fan of *The Cinnamon Shops*, I also wondered whether another scholar would be willing to equally diligently and attentively analyse Jerzy Ficowski's contributions to the study of Bruno Schulz's oeuvre.

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¹³ This is not a new problem, and it has been discussed in the Polish literature, for instance in the 1995 article 'O autorytecie etnograficznym' by James Clifford (*Polska Sztuka Ludowa – Konteksty*, xlix, 3–4 [1995], 19–31).

¹⁴ These questions have long been present among authors, translators, and readers, and they are far from limited to social sciences – they also apply to fiction, non-fiction, or historical sciences. We continuously see new publications discussing this issue and highlighting its various aspects; see Marta Kaźmierczak, 'Autor tłumaczem, tłumacz autorem – mapowanie związków', *Rocznik Komparatystyczny*, 14 (2023), 17–44.