# The academic murder mystery as a popular subgenre from the Polish perspective

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Polish fiction. Academic murder mystery. Campus novel. Professors in literature. Heterotopia.

In his chapter devoted to academic mystery fiction included in *Critical Survey of Mystery and Detective Fiction* (2008), Joseph Rosenblum notices that the substantial collection of academic mystery novels gathered by John E. Kramer in his annotated bibliography *Academe in Mystery and Detective Fiction* (2000) illustrates the prophetic nature of John Donne's observation regarding universities as an ideal setting for crime stories. Murder mysteries set in academia constitute a thriving subgenre of academic novels, with many works written by authors connected in some way to British and American tertiary education institutions. While universities in other countries also offer compelling material for novelists, there appears to be a certain kind of reluctance among, for instance, Polish scholars to divulge academic matters to the general public, or to satirize their colleagues for fear of becoming subjects of ridicule themselves, or, even worse, to become depicted as either a victim or a perpetrator of a hideous crime committed within university walls. Nevertheless, there are authors who have chosen to explore the landscape of Polish universities, considering it a fertile ground for constructing captivating mystery plots, albeit, hopefully, without any real-life homicides to serve as inspiration.

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Academic mysteries, broadly understood as stories of mysterious crimes connected to academe, are usually classified either as crime fiction or academic fiction. For example, in *Critical Survey of Mystery and Detective Fiction* (Rollyson 2008), academic mystery novels open the list of subgenres, which also includes cozy mysteries ("cozies"), forensic mysteries, police procedurals, and even true crimes. On the other hand, Elaine Showalter's study *Faculty Towers: The Academic Novel and Its Discontents* (2005) includes Amanda Cross's and Joanna Dobson's academic mystery series featuring female literature professors playing the role of amateur sleuth as important examples of academic fiction of the 1980s and 1990s respectively (69–99). Likewise, in his essay "Types of Academic Fiction" in *The Academic Novel: New and Classic Essays* (2007), the editor Merritt Moseley considers academic mysteries as one of the minor subspecialties of the academic novel focused on faculty (108). Interestingly, the primary reason for the double inclusion of academic mysteries in these two quite distinct taxonomies is the unique character of their setting.

This article will present two contemporary mysteries written by Polish authors and analyze the way in which the heterotopic character of academia triggers different kinds of criminal offences. It aims to answer the questions: to what extent do academic mystery novels set at Polish universities imitate and adhere to the Anglo-American paradigm? Do they constitute a fully developed form of the Polish academic mystery novel, or are they merely tentative explorations into the potential of this academic novel's subgenre?

## UNIVERSITY AS A SETTING CONDUCIVE TO CRIME

Universities along with their campuses constitute separate administrative areas, often referred to as university towns. They comprise not only university buildings encompassing libraries, auditorium rooms, classrooms, and departmental offices but also dormitories, canteens, sports centers, and in some cases even a nursery school, a clinic, and a pharmacy, forming an almost autonomous unit within the municipal space. University authorities enjoy a certain degree of autonomy or even freedom from an external authority, i.e. the mayor and the city council. For example, universities in Poland possess a special status of autonomy guaranteed in the Polish Constitution, which, for instance, allows the police to enter university premises either when called by Rector (BrE – Vice-Chancellor, AmE – University President), or in cases of immediate threat to life or natural disasters. "The unique 'extraterritoriality' of universities is one of the aspects of their traditional autonomy (Article 70, paragraph 5 of the Constitution). […] This aspect of autonomy is further developed in Article 50, paragraphs 3, 4, and 6 of the Law of Higher Education and Science – explains Professor Hubert Izdebski" (Sewastianowicz 2020, n.p.).

Different university departments or institutes, depending on the administrative arrangement, usually occupy separate buildings or, at least, different floors within a building, which often results in forming almost familial bonds among members of faculty, university officials and staff. The apparent utopian character of these tightly-knit societies, whose various academic pursuits and other activities frequently en-

gage the student body, is attributed to the common goals of the academic community. These goals revolve around the university mission, which invariably focuses on education, research and personal development.

Even the above succinct characteristic foregrounds the fact that "the academic murder mystery relies on the apparent antithesis between the values of higher education […] and the homicide" (Moseley 2007, 109). After all, the academic community is expected to be involved in the pursuit of knowledge rather than that of the perpetrator, which makes a murder as well as its subsequent investigation unheard-of occurrences. Therefore, the surprise element, responsible for the initial shock, incites the readers' interest in getting engaged in the criminal investigation, which regardless of numerous university affairs, reveals universal human vices, because whether we want it or not, "[l]ike in ordinary world of ordinary people, who either respect or breach the criminal code, murder among academics – fictional or real – is not unthinkable" (Gruszewska-Blaim 2016, 92).

In "The Guilty Vicarage", an essay discussing the addictive nature of detective fiction, W. H. Auden emphasizes the importance of a closed society, characterized by the same occupation, interests, acquaintances, friendships and liaisons, in creating a compelling murder mystery. The academic community confined within university walls fulfills the criteria of such a secluded group, which, accordingly, excludes "the possibility of an outside murderer" (1948, 407). Consequently, the readers' attention is drawn to university affairs in search of scholarly or unscholarly connections between the prematurely deceased members of the university community and their murderers within the academic realm. Although Auden notes that "[it] is a sound instinct that has made so many detective-story writers choose a college as a setting" (408), their choice is attributable to the specificity of university space rather than mere gut feelings.

## UNIVERSITY AS HETEROTOPIA

Michel Foucault's seminal essay "Of Other Spaces" describes heterotopias as "effectively enacted utopia[s] in which the real sites, all the other real sites that can be found within the culture, are simultaneously represented, contested, and converted" (1986, 24). Elucidating the characteristics of heterotopic sites, Foucault divides them into two separate categories – of crisis and of deviation, followed by different principles of heterotopia and their representative examples. While "Of Other Spaces" is widely used in different fields of study, ranging from architecture to literary criticism, and has proven insightful in delineating the specific character of numerous places, many scholars point out that the essay provides neither a clear-cut definition of heterotopia, nor consistent exemplification of the idea (Genocchio 1995; Soja 1996; Harvey 2000; Topinka 2010). In "The Geographies of Heterotopia" (2013), Peter Johnson explicitly states that Foucault's accounts of heterotopia are "sketchy, open-ended, and ambiguous", accompanied by a list of "mischievous" (790) examples. Nevertheless, he admits that the very concept proves to be extremely popular, inspiring scholars to designate "a dazzling variety of spaces" (796) as heterotopic sites. Johnson enlists 36 studies discussing heterotopias, ranging from the 19th century ship narrative

to the public nude beach (797). The wide variety of studies dedicated to entirely different "locations" demonstrates that the power of Foucault's essay lies not so much in the clarity of the concept, but rather in its potential to show how certain features may result in the identification of spaces of otherness (Wesselman 2013,17).

Although Foucault does not classify universities as heterotopias, the various aspects of tertiary education institutions – educational, social, political, financial and constitutional – suggest that they can be seen as notable examples of counter-sites. Universities simultaneously reflect and contest societal norms, mores, pursuits, achievements, opportunities and limitations, both historically and in contemporary times. Moreover, the university is envisaged, or even anticipated, as the "ultimate space of critical resistance" (Derrida 2001, 24), where discussion about truth would extend far beyond academic freedom:

> But whether these discussions are critical or deconstructive, everything that concerns the question and the history of truth, in its relation to the question of man, of what is proper to man, of human rights, of crimes against humanity, and so forth, all of this must in principle find its space of discussion without condition and without presupposition, its legitimate space of research and reelaboration, in the University and, within the University, above all in the Humanities. (25)

Building on Foucault's argument that in contemporary societies heterotopias of crisis have been supplanted by those of deviation, it appears that scholars' rejection of "instrumental, pragmatic and affective modes of thinking that pepper mainstream life" (Dalgliesh 2023, 97) can be perceived as a certain kind of deviation, with the university serving as a notable example of such heterotopias. However, in contrast to the heterotopias of deviation mentioned by Foucault – rest homes, psychiatric hospitals, or prisons – the connection between university and society appears to have a completely different character. This is primarily because the members of a university community are neither involuntarily placed nor restricted in their placement. Moreover, if we argue that heterotopias of deviation not only protect society against those who fail to conform to the established norms but also constitute their shelter, then "the ivory tower [may be seen as] a refuge for the socially awkward academic, whose inability to fit is a deviation of sorts" (Dalgliesh 2023, 97). The renowned poet A. E. Housman, who taught Latin for many years at the University of Cambridge, once said, "I find Cambridge an asylum, in every sense of the word" (Richards 1947, 100). His witty remark undoubtedly underscores both the deviant and protective qualities of academia.

Examining the principles of heterotopias through the lens of university and university campuses, one may find a compelling illustration of Foucault's ideas concerning identification of other spaces. For instance, Foucault's claim regarding the power of society to adjust heterotopias to its changing fashions and mores (1986, 23) may be exemplified by the recent popularity of online courses, which Bregham Dalgliesh calls "a pandemic fuelled migration to online education" (2023, 97). Moreover, the university's capability to collate disparate spaces and violate the linearity of traditional experience of time finds manifestation in contemporary university libraries and archives. Equipped with the latest achievements of informational tech-

nology, these repositories provide their users with the immersive experience of special temporal aspects of otherness, simultaneously accumulating, abolishing, and rediscovering time in novel ways. The university's unique "system of opening and closing" (Foucault 1986, 23), representing yet another feature of Foucault's heterotopic sites, creates an illusion of an approachability of an otherwise restricted space. Contrary to what might be expected, affiliation with a certain university does not amount to getting to university, either as a student or an academic. While it is true that both studying and working in academia require "hav[ing] a certain permission and mak[ing] certain gestures" (26), such as passing an entrance exam or undergoing the tenure procedure, a mere fulfillment of these procedures, let alone physically entering the university space, does not necessarily entail the "inclusion into the community, quite the opposite, it may only evoke or enhance the feeling of otherness" (Perkowska-Gawlik 2021, 114). Academia, as a highly hierarchical institution, heavily stratifies its members, not only according to their academic achievements and titles, but also according to the perceived profitability, practicality, or popularity of their fields of expertise.

The abovementioned policy of academia, which introduces artificially created divisions among and within different academic disciplines, reflects Foucault's argument that heterotopias exist "in relation to all the space that remains", either creating "a space of illusion that exposes every real place", or a space of compensation that would be perfectly ordered, unlike the "messy, ill constructed, and jumbled" (1986, 27) reality one knows and detests or even loathes. Nevertheless, university, grounded in a rational justification for its existence, even if this justification is a mere illusion, "offers society the chance to constantly challenge itself and face its illusions by unabashedly looking at itself in the academic mirror" (Dalgliesh 2023, 99).

## DISCRETE REALMS: STUDENT AND PROFESSOR LIFE IN FICTION

Novels set in academia, where characters and their endeavors are in one way or another inscribed into the policy and functioning of tertiary education, are called academic novels, university novels, college novels, or campus novels. Some critics use all these names interchangeably, others opt for an introduction of the clear division between "student-centered" and "staff-centered" fiction (Williams 2012, 584). Since the student body constitutes the majority of dwellers on university campuses, the term "campus novel" appears to be more appropriate for novels that focus on student university or college life. Likewise, the term "academic novel" explicitly refers to academia, making it more appropriate for novels centered on academics, or simply staff-centered ones. Additionally, these novels are often authored by academics who aim not only to direct the reader's attention to the world of teaching and research but also to underscore their ability to design different textual games through "self-referentiality, […] flaunting of theoretical knowledge, […] allusiveness and postmodern playfulness" (Moseley 2007, viii–ix).

The aforementioned lack of scholars' agreement on the name of novels whose action is set at institutions of tertiary education concerns also detective novels whose criminal intrigue is strictly connected to the university milieu. The author of *Ac-*

*ademe in Mystery and Detective Fiction: An Annotated Bibliography* (2000), John E. Kramer emphasizes the diversity of mysteries set in academia, which range from serious to playful detective novels to police procedurals (ix). He opts for the name "college mystery" for detective fiction "with settings and characters drawn from the world of higher education" (xi), stating that the adjective academic in the name "academic mystery" would be too inclusive and easily applicable to "mysteries set in high schools and prep schools" (xi). A different approach is taken by Ludmiła Gruszewska-Blaim, who differentiates between the mysteries focused more on bringing the culprit to justice than those dwelling on the problems haunting the university world. Consequently, she introduces two names referring to these two dominant tendencies respectively, i.e. the college mystery novel and the mystery academic novel (2016, 93). The current author's previous study entitled *The Contemporary Academic Mystery Novel* (Perkowska-Gawlik 2021) chooses to rely on the term "academic mystery novels", as all the novels in her analysis focus on academics. My choice to choose this term is congruent with Jeffrey J. Williams's (2012) argument concerning the division of academic fiction into student-centered and staff centered novels:

> [T]he term "academic mystery novel" or "academic mystery" [refers to] all the novels [...] focus[ed] on academic staff and employ[ing] professors as amateur sleuths. Moreover, they are [often] written by academics who frequently use the vehicle of the classical detective formula to present their field of study while untangling a criminal conundrum. (Perkowska-Gawlik 2021, 16)

## POLISH ACADEMIC FICTION

No matter whether we are talking about the academic novel, campus novel, academic mystery, or college mystery, they all are typically associated with the Anglo-American world. To demonstrate that the academic genre has also generated a "regional response outside the Anglo-American territory", Dieter Fuchs and Wojciech Klepuszewski edited and published the collection of essays entitled *The Campus Novel: Regional or Global?* (2019). The collection comprises essays analyzing academic fiction written by authors from such countries as India, Japan, South Africa, Spain, Austria, Germany, Romania, Norway, Czechia, Slovakia, Croatia, Ukraine, and Poland.

In his two essays on Polish university novels included in the abovementioned volume, Klepuszewski states that Polish novels exploring and strictly devoted to academic issues are rare. He attributes this limited interest to their perceived uncertain or questionable critical value, which results in a small print run, typically publication by local publishing houses, and therefore limited significance in the book market (64). He underscores that "most novels that could be considered in the context of academic fiction establish a remote link with the theme, most often manifested in the fact that one of the characters happens to be an academic, which allows for occasional academy-related references in the novel" (64–65). Among the examples of such novels cited by Klepuszewski are Jerzy Broszkiewicz's *Doktor Twardowski* (1977), Anatol Ulman's *Szef i takie różne sprawy* (The boss and some miscellaneous matters,1982), Jerzy Plich's *Spis cudzołożnic* (Census of adulteress, 1993), as well as

*Ku słońcu* (Towards the sun, 2010) and *Na krótko* (Let's make it short, 2012) by Inga Iwasiów.

In her article "Czy istnieje polska powieść uniwersytecka?" (Does the Polish academic novel exist?), included in the volume entitled *Literaturoznawca literatem, czyli rzecz o akademii i kreatywnym pisaniu* (Literary scholar as literary figure, or academe and creative writing, 2018), edited by Ludmiła Gruszewska-Blaim, Anna Skubaczewska-Pniewska addresses the often cited Ewa Kraskowska's article (2008) bemoaning the unsatisfactory production of Polish novels which could be categorised as university fiction. As Skubaczewska-Pniewska notes the very title of Kraskowska's otherwise informative article, i.e. "Dlaczego lubimy czytać powieści uniwersyteckie, ale nie lubimy ich pisać?" (Why do we like reading university novels but we dislike writing them?) not only implies the gap in Polish fiction that still awaits filling but also discourages many scholars from taking up studies concerning the Polish equivalents of David Lodge's university trilogy. However, Skubaczewska-Pniewska's delineation of numerous Polish novels[1] presenting and/or satirizing Polish universities and their employees gives the positive answer to the question whether the Polish academic novel exists. In her opinion, it not only exists but also undergoes unceasing development interweaving with other literary genres and conventions.

Klepuszewski reiterates the question posed by Kraskowska, asking why there is a preference for reading academic novels over writing them. He ponders the absence of writers in Poland, who, despite multiple translations and publications of academic fiction by renowned authors like Kingsley Amis, David Lodge, and Malcolm Bradbury, would be willing to pursue a similar path (2019, 66). One of the factors hindering Polish authors from delving into "the Polish groves of academe" (66) is the specificity of the themes, which could only be authentically portrayed by academics. Moreover, Polish scholars who also happen to be authors of fiction tend to refrain from mocking or criticizing their colleagues, let alone revealing university secrets.

Klepuszewski favorable describes Jerzy Kaczorowski's novel *Zamek* (The castle, 1978) as a prime example of academic fiction within Polish literature (67). *Zamek* shares similarities with Lodge's *Small World* in that the academics can be compared to knights, but Kaczorowski's "knights", unlike those from *Small World*, cannot indulge in global conference hopping. For economic and, more importantly, political reasons, the communist authorities in Poland were not interested in supporting contacts between Polish academics and those from the Western world. *Zamek* focuses on a more regionally focused event, mainly due to "the hermetic and economically backward Polish reality of the 1970s" (67). Instead of numerous conference meetings, the autodiegetic narrator of *Zamek* participates in a single conference held in a remote location. The titular castle chosen as the conference venue harmonizes with the atmosphere of verbal banter, evoking the essence of courtly tournaments (70).

## POLISH ACADEMIC MYSTERY NOVELS

Interestingly, recently literary critics have highlighted the "refreshing" influence of popular literature, such as detective novels and mysteries, on the fictional portrayals of Polish academia. For example, in the pseudonymous author Tobiasz W. Lipny's

detective novels, a young art historian smoothly moves between the "musty academic world" and the clandestine world of art and antiquities trafficking, not forgetting about indulging in numerous purely sexual affairs (Kraskowska 2008, 73). Although Lipny's trilogy – *Barocco* (2006), *Kurlandzki trop* (The courland trail, 2007), and *Brukselska misja* (Brussels mission, 2008) – is an interesting example of the merger between the detective novel and the academic novel, it lacks a university ambience per se, unless we consider sensual and sexual pleasures of academics as an indispensable part of their lives. On the other hand, the reader interested in the politics of Polish academia may find some excerpts, presenting the narrator's unfavorable, not to say acerbic, comments concerning "[t]he existing system [which] promotes not so much scholarly activity, but rather the ability to publish a certain minimum with appropriate distribution over time, and the laborious creation of a 'Great Work', which is […] indigestible and unread by anyone"[2] (Lipny 2007, 172).

In "Academic Nostalgia in Mystery Novels Celebrating Old Polish Universities" (2022), Oksana Blashkiv presents two academic mystery novels by Tadeusz Cegielski and Joanna Jodełka, which were written to commemorate the 200th anniversary of the founding of the University of Warsaw and the centenary of Adam Mickiewicz University in Poznań. As Blashkiv puts it, both novels are deeply nostalgic about the spirit of patriotism and fraternity that defined the university during the turbulent times of the Partitions. "Despite different narrative strategies, both novels promote the idea of 'the Polish University' as the source of clear values, a moral compass, and even a condition of the political re-establishment of the Polish state" (92).

Despite a sense of nostalgia for the past glory of Polish tertiary educations, Polish authors – particularly academics who also try their hands at writing fiction – are not deterred from writing crime novels addressing the present condition of Polish universities and the problems haunting the Polish academic world. *Śmierć dziekana* (The death of the dean, 2014), by Zofia Tarajło-Lipowska is an intriguing example of a detective novel set in the academic milieu, reflecting actual events experienced by the author during her academic career. While it is not surprising that writers draw inspiration from real events, *Śmierć dziekana* is a rare example of the academic mystery with no disclaimer on the copyright page, on the contrary, its author openly admits that the novel presents a fictionalized version of her experiences as Professor of Czech Studies in the University of Wrocław, where she does not work any longer.[3] *Śmierć dziekana* intertwines the conventions of academic fiction with the scaffolding of the police procedural. In the course of the investigation, the reader gets acquainted with numerous conflicts and power struggles between academics camouflaged, obviously, by an aura of their studied smoothness of manners.

Interestingly, in both cases, i.e. the academic mystery and the police procedural, the reader's perception of the narrative story world is determined by the protagonists' perspective, that of the members of the academic community and police officers respectively. Thus, the fight for tenure, rivalry, and plagiarism are among the major problems of the highly hierarchical world of academia. The motifs prevailing in the police novels comprise overwhelming bureaucracy, "the overworked

force, the hostile public, the burned-out cop, the alienation from normal life" (Panek 2003,157), and the repercussions which the commitment to the never ending "struggle of good versus evil" (170) have on the private and professional lives of the protagonists. The "text" written by the criminal in *Śmierć dziekana* does not go beyond the convention of the academic mystery, whereas its deciphering, i.e. the "text" of the investigation produced by the police officers, interlaces with different aspects concerning their lives. These two "texts" do not appear in a linear and separate form but are intertwined throughout the novel, with spatial elements of the academic mystery constantly surfacing in the police procedural.

The ongoing alternation of the two aforementioned genres corresponds with Peter Hühn's approach to the formula of detective fiction "viewed in the context of narrative and reading theory" (1987, 453). Hühn defines the basic structure of the detective novel in the following way: "The plot of the classical detective novel comprises two basically separate stories – the story of the *crime* (which consists of action) and the story of the *investigation* (which is concerned with knowledge). In their narrative presentation, however, the two stories are intertwined" (452). As regards the two major parameters of Hühn's theory – reading and writing – the reader is faced with two "texts": on the one hand, the already written "text" of the criminal, and on the other hand, the "text" of the investigation which is being written by the detective (457). Hühn's approach to the structure of detective fiction, emphasising the presence of the two stories, follows that of Tzvetan Todorov, yet Hühn takes a more semiotic perspective focusing on reading and interpretation.[4] Hühn perceives the detective story as a metaphor for the process of reading, with the detective serving as a model reader.

However, to label *Śmierć dziekana* a police procedural, other characteristics than the three policemen are needed because, as Leroy L. Panek states, "nobody claims that the presence of a police officer makes police fiction" (2003, 155). John G. Cawelti considers the police procedural as a subgenre of the classical detective tale, stating that the main difference between the two "is a matter of emphasis in the narrative" (1976, 126). The reader's attention is more focused on the process of the investigation than on the mystery itself (127). In his essay "Post-war American Police Fiction", Panek notes that all police novels, no matter whether they adopt the form of the typical whodunit, thriller or love story, foreground the "unique impact" (156) of the police work on the way official investigators organize their lives and professional careers. In the amalgam of the police procedural and the academic novel, the police officers' "line-of-duty heroism" (Lehman 1989, 133) does not merely preserve the image of the university as a unique place of murder but also contributes to the realistic presentation of this institution as a potential crime scene.

In the second chapter of *Śmierć dziekana*, Professor Mirosław Korbieluch, dean of the Faculty of Humanities falls from the fourth floor down the stairwell in one of the university buildings. Of course, nobody witnesses the fall; only two students hear a heavy thump and then see their dean lying in a pool of blood. The academics interrogated by Cichosz are unanimous in demonstrating their grief as well as admiration for the deceased colleague's virtues, and they cannot conceive who might have

wished for his demise. Nevertheless, after the initial shock, many of them remember that there is indeed a person who has not been in good rapport with the late dean.

The ostracized academic turns out to be Professor Melania Melpomańska, who used to be the chair of the Middle East studies unit, until the dean replaced her with a Czech professor, Dalimil Muminek, who comes only once a week. As it turns out during the criminal investigation, he was of great assistance in awarding Korbieluch an honorary doctorate in Ostrava. Muminek's secure position and Korbieluch's advancement in academia have no legitimate foundation, since Korbieluch lacks merit for the honorary degrees, and Muminek's expertise is not as remarkable as purported. Professor Melpomańska is well aware that the loss of her administrative position was meant to be a punishment for her direct and vehement objection to the dean's plotting, which resulted in the Institute committee's decision to "torpedo" the project of Persian studies prepared by her unit (2014, 26). He convinced the members of the Institute that Melpomańska's project would not be profitable for "our people", i.e., the Latin department to which he belonged. Therefore, they voted against the project, regardless of the money granted to this enterprise by the internationally recognized "Orient-Express" fund (26).

The inspector is convinced that despite being a graduate from the same university where the homicide took place, he still needs insider knowledge. For most of the narrative, the role of the academic amateur sleuth is realized in the form of anonymous emails sent by a person who apparently wants justice to triumph in the "wasp's nest" (40). The detective's anonymous helper turns out to be a newly appointed female professor. However, unlike the female amateur sleuths, such as Amanda Cross's Kate Fansler or Joanne Dobson's Karen Pelletier, she prefers not to be directly involved in the investigation for fear of ruining her own academic career, as eventually happened to Professor Melpomańska.

Another relatively recent Polish academic mystery, also written in the form of the police procedural, is Anna Bińkowska's *Tu się nie zabija* (We do not kill here) published in 2017. Unlike the majority of academic mysteries, which adhere to the rules of the classical detective novel, Bińkowska's mystery leans towards the hard-boiled formula of crime fiction, characterized by graphic violence, sleazy urban setting and slang spiced with swear words. The homodiegetic narrator of the Prologue, who is also the murderer, does not spare the reader brutal details of the homicide scene. The stabbing of Professor Tadeusz Zawistowski, the fictional director of the Institute of Archeology at the University of Warsaw, is preceded by a vicious altercation between Zawistowski and his killer. The fierce confrontation implies both academics' involvement in some illegal financial matters.

Interestingly, criminal offences and violent behaviors appear to lie within the domain of academics working for Profesor Zawistowski. They constitute perfect suspects, as they are all "guilty of something" (Auden 1948, 409). One has a child with a girl under sixteen years of age, which is a criminal offence. Another academic, when drunk, destroyed a valuable archeological site, which was later covered up in documents. Another, a woman professor who appears as a paragon of academic virtue, is guilty of plagiarizing her MA thesis, casting doubt on her subsequent academic

achievements. Yet another has enormous financial problems, while rumors suggest that she was apprehended and suspected of art trafficking some time ago (Bińkowska 2017, 278–279).

The murderer was not only Zawistowski's subordinate but also a person emotionally dependent on him, a fact that the late director exploited relentlessly. As revealed in the course of the criminal investigation, Zawistowski achieved his powerful position in academia by blackmailing others. The investigation is carried out by Chief Inspector Jacek Budryś and Sergeant Iga Mirska, who alternate the roles of focalizers. Their initial mutual animosity gradually transforms into genuine friendship characterized by deep emotional involvement. Moreover, thanks to her family connections, Sergeant Mirska proves to be helpful in navigating the literal and metaphorical labyrinth of the campus. Her father, a professor of musicology at the university where the crime occurred, provides her with some useful observations. Therefore, albeit an outsider herself, Mirska's upbringing enhances her perceptiveness to the intricate dynamics of the academic "small world".

In *Tu się nie zabija* Bińkowska describes the financial problems of the Institute of Archeology which suffers more than other institutes in the Faculty of Humanities since it lacks funds for buying the expensive laboratory equipment and other materials for research. The absurdity of the regulations requires that even when the Institute is awarded a research grant, the anticipated costs are usually cut by two thirds, which makes the winning project unworkable. Paradoxically, regardless of the useless sum of money allotted to the Institute, academics from other institutes believe that their archeologist colleagues should be pleased since the positive evaluation of their proposal is in itself a tremendous success.

The working conditions of the scholars are hardly bearable not only because of the poor financing but due to the manipulative character of their late director, described as a sadist, recognizing no limits to his power. His subordinates are either totally submissive, or plan to quit the job once they find an opening in a different institution, which, however, borders on the miraculous. For example, Professor Irena Parys, who in addition to her scholarly duties has to do a lot of paperwork for the director Zawistowski, curses the day she decided to become "Indiana Jones in a skirt" (18). Professor Parys can be identified as the juggler, as her "academic work and family responsibilities […] occur in tandem" (Diezmann and Grieshaber 2019, 183). This balancing act leaves her feeling extremely stressed, unable to be a full time mother and a full time scholar simultaneously. Professor Zawistowski makes her life so challenging that there are moments when she wishes she had chosen to be a full-time housewife. Currently, she juggles between being partly a housewife, providing unpaid assistance to her three family members and the cat, and partly an academic, struggling with students and loads of administrative matters (Bińkowska 2017, 18). Consequently, she experiences a double sense of guilt: when at home, she cannot stop thinking about her work, and when at work, she frets over all her duties at home.

Bińkowska's vivid portrayal of the university, where she compares the institution to a large corporation, revealing how outsiders are barred from uncovering the intricate web of financial interdependence, laced with accusations of plagiarism, appears

to classify her academic mystery as yet another example of a globally relatable *roman à clef*. After all, the Internet is replete with news about financial frauds or plagiarized dissertations exposed at different universities all over the world.

## CONCLUSION

The academic mystery novel, regardless of the nationality of its author, addresses the current situation of tertiary education, not only because the criminal offense occurs within the university walls but also because the institution itself appears to be quite efficient in creating, or even fostering, conditions conductive to violating the law. The criminal investigation aimed at finding the murderer reveals "academic secrets" that otherwise rarely hit the headlines. On the one hand, murders amongst academics are rather rare. This rarity casts doubt on the revelations discovered during the subsequent investigation, serving as a protective shield for the authors, more often than not academics themselves, who might be accused of tarnishing the good name of educational institutions. On the other hand, one may hope for certain reasonable changes when problems magnified by fictional academic characters, though often treated with disbelief by outsiders to academia, finally gain attention, even if only among academics who constitute the majority of the readership of university fiction. In that vein, the academic mystery novel should be more frequently included in the syllabi of literature courses, since only an awareness of the problems haunting academia, even in their fictionalized form, could lead to necessary improvements.

Like their Anglo-American counterparts, contemporary Polish academic mysteries feature crimes in university settings but differ in their approach to investigating these crimes. Polish authors appear to favor the police procedural format with external investigators playing the roles of protagonists. Although police procedurals set in academia are also popular across English-speaking countries, their treatment of academic life and mores rarely goes deeper than that of any other professional setting as a crime scene. In the Anglo-American tradition, the genres focused on exploring university issues in depth almost by default tend to feature protagonists from within academia, primarily professors and students. These protagonists serve as amateur sleuths and sidekicks to official investigators. As a result, in academic mysteries which typically adhere to the requirements of the classical detective formula the entire cast – the amateur detective, the sidekick, the murderer, the victim, and the suspects – is drawn from the university community.

Polish authors addressing various crimes in the academic milieu show preference for the police procedural, which suggests a certain degree of detachment – either real or apparent – achieved through the employment of the outside focalizers, namely police officers. The preference for police protagonists, rather than representatives of the university community, creates an emotional distance from academic life, which is a stark contrast to the intimate and emotionally engaged insider perspective characteristic of Anglo-American academic mysteries. As a result, in Polish academic mysteries it is an outsider, the police officer, who realizes the mimetic component of character, essential to evoke the reader's willing suspension of disbelief.

Consequently, the reader becomes more familiar with the lives, thoughts, and reasoning of the police officers than those of the academic characters directly involved in the fictional murders.

The examples of Polish mystery novels presented above show that even though the criminal investigation takes place within the university walls, the readers, especially those not professionally involved in academia, are encouraged to adopt the police investigator's perspective while getting engaged in solving the criminal conundrum. After all, it is the policemen whose ups and downs as well as personal problems constitute the remaining part of the narrative, while academics and their lives are reduced to answering questions or tampering with evidence, should they feel compelled to erase any traces for some reason.

The emergence of Polish academic mysteries, while still in an early phase, indicates the popularity of this particular subgenre of the academic novel. Polish authors have a great potential to develop the subgenre further. Following the institutional insight of the Anglo-American tradition, they may show the specificity of Polish tertiary education to a wider audience, for instance highlighting and satirizing the parallels between numerous bureaucratic procedures pervading apparently different institutions like the police and the university.

## NOTES

[1] The novels which Skubaczewska-Pniewska classifies as the representatives of Polish academic fiction are, for example, *Pomysł* (The concept, 1974) by Kazimierz Brandys, *Zamek* (The castle, 1978) by Jerzy Kaczorowski, *Stręczyciel idei* (Procurer of ideas, 1980) by Julian Kornhauser, *Złoty pelikan* (The golden pelican, 2004) by Stefan Chwin, *Cyrograf* (The pact, 2006) by Andrzej Braun, *Ostatni raport* (The last report, 2009) by Zbigniew Kruszyński, *Na krótko* (Let's make it short, 2012) by Inga Iwasiów, *Wiosenne przesilenie* (Spring fatigue, 2013) by Jerzy Lesław Ordan.

[2] None of the Polish novels discussed or referred to in the present study have been translated into English; thus, all the translated quotes are mine.

[3] The "non-fiction" synopsis of the novel, which is the account of her 20-year career at the University of Wrocław, can be found on her website entitled "Ujawniamy nieprawidłowości w nauce – Tarajło-Lipowska" (We detect irregularities in science – Tarajło-Lipowska). In addition to *Śmierć dziekana*, Zofia Tarajło-Lipowska is the author of another academic mystery entitled *Recykling* (Recycling, 2017), also inspired by her career at the University of Wrocław.

[4] In chapter three of the *Poetics of Prose* entitled "The Typology of Detective Fiction", Tzvetan Todorov highlights the duality of detective fiction: "the first – the story of the crime – tells 'what really happened,' whereas the second – the story of the investigation – explains 'how the reader (or the narrator) has come to know about it'" (1977, 45).

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