

Lovetown

Lubiewo

„Lovetown” (Lubiewo) is a novel by Michał Witkowski, notable for its highly heterogeneous structure composed of numerous loosely interconnected episodes. These episodes vary in length and function: some take the form of extended narrative units spanning several or a dozen or so pages, while others—particularly in the latter sections of the work—consist of brief utterances, sometimes only a few sentences long, each capturing a distinct voice. The novel does not conform to a conventional plot structure; instead, it presents a collage of episodes, recollections, anecdotes, and ambient “street voices.” The unity of the text is provided by the central figure and narrator of most episodes, Michał, who frequently adopts the feminized form Michaśka and is known by the pseudonym Literatka.

Since its publication—officially in 2005, though effectively released in December 2004—Lovetown has undergone several reprints. Each reprint differs to a greater or lesser degree from its predecessors: certain episodes have been withdrawn, while others have been added or modified. Through this process, the novel has acquired the character of an “open work,” one whose boundaries and internal configuration are not fixed and which consequently resists straightforward summarization.

The structure of the original edition—largely retained in subsequent ones—was divided into two parts: the first titled “Księga ulicy” (The Book of the Street) and the second “Ciotowski bicz” (The Lewd Beach), the latter transitioning naturally into a series of loosely arranged episodes. The first part may be described as historical in orientation. The main character, Michał, visits the apartment of two older, non-binary homosexual individuals who use the feminine names Patrycja and Lukrecja, intending to write a story about their lives. This encounter becomes the catalyst for a sequence of memories extending far into the past, reaching back to the era of the Polish People’s Republic and, at times, even further—to the pre-war period of German Breslau (prior to World War II, the city formed part of Germany; after 1945, as Wrocław, it became part of Poland). These unusual confessions provoke associative memories in Michał, who recalls his own formative experiences as a queer individual.

„Lovetown” is widely regarded as Michał Witkowski’s most significant novel and has generated several sequels and derivative works. The section titled “Dianka” (rendered as “D.” in the English translation) was later expanded into a separate novel, „Fynf und cwancyś” (2014). Narratives originating in „Lovetown” also recur in the author’s autobiographical cycle „Autobiografia” [Autobiography], the first volume of which, „Wiara” (Faith), was published in 2023; subsequent volumes are available exclusively in PDF format directly from the author.

Geographically, the novel is set in towns and cities located in western Poland, many of which had belonged to Germany prior to the Second World War. These include Wrocław (formerly Breslau) and Lubiewo itself—the western part of the seaside resort Międzyzdroje (Misdroy)—historically

known as Liebeseele. This cross-border and palimpsestic spatial setting imbues the novel with an additional, subtly political significance.

Although „Lovetown” is not a political novel in the conventional sense, it became politically charged in relation to the sociopolitical context of its reception, particularly amid the surge of LGBT emancipation in Poland during the first decade of the twenty-first century. The author has consistently renounced political involvement, yet the novel nonetheless foregrounds experiences marked by social marginalization and societal hostility. As a result, Lovetown ultimately functions as a political novel—despite Witkowski’s explicit declarations of disinterest in politics. Through its radically new portrayal of male homosexuality in Polish public discourse—one that may be described as camp, non-binary, or even transgender (the novel lends itself to all these interpretive frameworks)—Lovetown operates as a medium of public and therefore political intervention.

LANGUAGE: Polish/Polski

CENSORSHIP STATUS: