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Discourse of heresy in Polish post-WWII literature Herling's and Herbert's heretics

Heretics, stakes, and inquisitors invaded Polish literature of the second half of the 20th century. That was visible in the outputs of renowned Polish authors who endured the apocalypse of World War II and the dictatorships of the last century: Gustaw Herling-Grudziński (1919–2000), a prisoner of the Gulag in Yertsevo, combatant in the Warsaw Uprising, as well as Andrzej Szczypiorski (1928–2000), a prisoner of the Lager in Sachsenhausen, Zbigniew Herbert (1924–1998), a young poet in occupied Lviv, or those who survived Soviet occupation, e.g. Czesław Miłosz (1911–2004) and Jerzy Andrzejewski (1909–1983).

What heretics can be found in their works? Jacques de Molay, a Knight Templar burnt at the stake together with 36 other “relentless brothers”, Albigensians, Cathars, the related Bulgarian Bogomils in Herbert's essays in the *Barbarzyńca w ogrodzie*¹ volume: *Obrona templariuszy* and *O albigensach, inkwizytorach i trubadurach*. Herling-Grudziński's short stories featured the heretic Giordano Bruno and his spiritual ally the artist Caravaggio, e.g. in the short story *Głęboki cień*, the mysterious heretic from Bolsena in the short story *Drugie przyjście*, and the legendary St. Aaron, a former heretic, stealer of the Host, who by God's miracle was saved from the stake in the short story *Legenda o nawróconym pustelniku*. Giordano Bruno was also featured in one of Miłosz's key poems from 1943 entitled *Campo di Fiori* (Herling-Grudziński referred to it in his texts on Giordano Bruno), where the historical parallel became vivid during the nightmare with the burning

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1 Z. Herbert, *Barbarzyńca w ogrodzie*, Zeszyty Literackie, Warsaw 1962. [Unless indicated otherwise, English versions translated from Polish]

down of the Warsaw Ghetto, near which Miłosz lived. Szczypiorski's novel entitled *Msza za miasto Arras* is saturated with the millenarianist persecution of heresy turning into mass hysteria. Szczypiorski also witnessed the burning down of the Ghetto and he felt as if he was dying with those inside there.

The image of heretics cannot be separated from their persecutors: traitors and informers, inquisitors and popes. Andrzejewski penetrated the thoughts and the methods of Tomás de Torquemada in the short story *Ciemności kryją ziemię. Głęboki cień* by Herling-Grudziński features two informers: Giovanni Moceni, a Venice patrician, and a Capuchin monk named Celestine from Verona, Giordano Bruno's cell mate burnt at the stake a year before Bruno. They are all dominated by the figure of the brutal Pope Clement VIII, a jealous counter-Reformer, who conducted Giordano Bruno's trials. In *Drugie przyjście* by Herling-Grudziński the role of the inquisitor is assumed by a crazed millenialist mob viewed from a window by Pope Urban IV, the originator of the celebrations of "Corpus Christi", but there are also references to the times of his predecessor Pope Innocent III (1160/1161–1216), considered the originator of the Roman inquisition (also related to the history of Bulgaria). The war with Albigensians was also an element supporting the development of the Roman inquisition under the auspices of said Pope Innocent III, the originator of the crusade against Albigensians known as the Cathar Crusade (1209–1229). The character of the pope could not have gone unnoticed by writers who traced the holy inquisition in the footsteps of heretics and their persecutor. He appeared for the third time in Andrzejewski's *Bramy raj*. In Herbert's essay on Albigensians, there appear many jealous "fanatics" led by Pierre de Castelnau, a Papal legate, and Simon de Monfort, i.e. leaders of the wave which caused not only the cruel killing of Albigensians, but also seizing the entire region of Languedoc in southern France, and the destruction of a culture (which Herbert indicated in the introduction). The essay on the Knights Templar depicted a "collective plot", with Philip the Fair, king of France, as its originator. The figures could also include the "shadow" of Dostoevsky's Grand Inquisitor, to whom Herling-Grudziński referred often.

Clearly, the list of heretics was considerable. The indicated examples prove the importance and the significance of the matter. They may also trigger questions about the reason for the considerable representation of the topic in literature, contemporary prose in particular.

It was no accident that historical fiction, related to the persecutions of heretics, was used in the works by Herling-Grudziński, Herbert, Andrzejewski, Szczypiorski, and Miłosz. Their experiences of the apocalypses of the 20th century led these authors to reconstruct them and study the persecutions, trials, and executions of the heretics of the past, with whom they found some spiritual kinship. In *Dziennik, pisany nocą*, a record of March 1971, Herling-Grudziński defined his contempo-

rary times as “our new Middle Ages.”² The topic of heresy and the persecutions of heretics, studied during the period of the “extended Middle Ages” (Jacques Le Goff) and long absorbed by myths and legends, was revived in contemporary times to help them understand themselves and creatively codify their extended period of *praesens historicum*. A synchronic vision formed on the parallels between that which was past and that which was present. There emerged a tone of revenge triggered by the will to judge history itself and its “transformative” violence (which was visible emphatically in Herbert’s essay on Knights Templar, and Herling-Grudziński’s short story *Drugie przyjście*). By recreating the fires, uncovering the hidden mechanisms of cruelty and injustice, and the absurdity of inquisition trials, Polish writers built alternative timeless trials and become attorneys – defenders of the heretics tried by inquisition.

The theme of heretics and the persecutions they suffered was so emphatic in Herling-Grudziński’s works that it could be considered a meta-theme and meta-discourse. The writer’s camp experiences played a significant role in that development. In his output, the status of heresy applied not only to literary themes and characters (both historical and fictional), but also to the entire gallery of his favourite paintings. It should be noted that the author saw himself as a heretic, that it applied to his literary self-identification.

A conclusion on Herling-Grudziński could be largely referred directly to the well-known criticism³ of the heretic attitude by Miłosz, who stated bluntly: “I am not, and I do not want to be, a possessor of the truth. / Wandering on the outskirts of heresy is about right for me,”⁴ as he wrote in the third part of *Traktat teologiczny*, thus refusing himself the dangerous right to possess the truth. The discourse of heresy is also present in poetic and essay works by Herbert, who could be defined as the “defender of the defeated”, the victims of hegemony and violence.

Persecutions, torments, and executions gave the heretics of the past an air of martyrdom. Their fates were presented through associations to the Christian ideal of saint martyrs. The saint martyrs of Christianity suffered torments in defence of the new faith and in protest against the regime of the former pagan beliefs. And when the Inquisition committed machinations in Christianity and transformed it into a dictatorship, heretics became their saint antagonists. The category of sanctity in the outputs of the discussed authors was verified and defined anew in that

2 G. Herling-Grudziński, *Dziennik pisany nocą*, Czytelnik, Warsaw, 2001, p. 10.

3 One could indicate the studies by Paweł Lisicki (P. Lisicki, *Manichejczyk i trapiста*, „Znak”, 1993, issue 1, pp. 132–138), Łukasz Tischner (Ł. Tischner, *Sekrety manichejskich trucizn. Miłosz wobec zła*, Znak, Krakow, 2001), Zbigniew Kaźmierzyk (Z. Kaźmierzyk, *Dzieło demiurga. Zapis gnostyckiego doświadczenia egzystencji we wczesnej poezji Czesława Miłosza*, Słowo/obraz/terytoria, Warsaw, 2011).

4 Cz. Miłosz, *Traktat teologiczny*, in: idem, *Druga przestrzeń*, Znak, Krakow 2002, p. 65.

direction, and it assumed key significance. Herbert described the burning at the stake of 200 Cathars at the foot of a hill near the *Monsegur* fortress, today known as *Camp des Crematz* (*Crematz* meaning “set ablaze” and which today could be understood as similar to a crematorium in the death camps), and he felt obliged to explain why 6 women and 11 men in the last moments of the struggle accepted the Cathar faith. He stated directly that the decision was, in fact, their choice of a martyr’s death, and that “the martyrs of destroyed religions are never canonised.”⁵ The pagan prototype of a heretic referred to punished rebels such as Prometheus⁶, Tantalus, and Marsyas (the protagonist of Herbert’s mythological deconstruction in the poem *Apollo i Marsjasz*).

Herbert’s vision of the saint martyrdom of heretics was parallel to Herling-Grudziński’s stories on the heretics burnt at the stake, e.g. Giordano Bruno, who had doubts, who did not accept faith in a naive way, who did not believe automatically in dogma, and who, through their agonising (in a completely human and heroic manner) paths, came closer to the sacred. Apart from Giordano Bruno, the burning at the stake was used against the already dead heretic from Bolsena, and the family of the Jew who profaned the Host in *Legenda o nawróconym pustelniku*. It is easy to see that Herbert’s essays and the works by Herling-Grudziński were related through the similarity of these historical and cultural themes, and the methods for interpreting them. Their moral and spiritual closeness and their similar sensitivities were discussed by, e.g. Piotr Siemaszko in a book on Herbert’s essays entitled *Zmienność i trwanie*⁷.

The parabolic message can be found both in the works of émigré authors (Herling-Grudziński, Miłosz), who were not subjected to censorship in Poland, and the authors who sooner or later became members of domestic opposition (Szczypiorski, Herbert, Andrzejewski). The narrations, recorded in specific styles, based on historical sources, acquired a universal dimension.

Herbert – defender of the defeated

Zbigniew Herbert developed his analytic short stories on the Knights Templar in the form of an attorney’s defence in front of the Grand Inquisitor (be it of papal Rome or of history). Piotr Siemaszko noted that Herbert in the role of an attorney

5 Z. Herbert, *O albigensach, inkwizytorach i trubadurach*, in: *Barbarzyńca w ogrodzie*, Zeszyty literackie, Warsaw, 2004, p. 157.

6 Panayot Karagyzov, a Bulgarian Slavist, noted that the development of Prometheism in literature indicated that “the type of theomachy is a function of the existing ideology” (P. Karagyzov, *Degradacja prometeizmu na podstawie literatury antycznogreckiej i polskiej*, “Postscriptum Polonistyczne”, 2013, issue 2(12), p. 133).

7 Cf. P. Siemaszko, *Zmienność i trwanie. O eseistyce Herberta*, Świadectwo, Bydgoszcz, 1996, p. 146.

“tried to coolly, objectively, and justly consider the arguments of both sides, though everywhere, including there, his sympathies lied with the victims.”⁸ In his defence address, Herbert in a measured manner described in detail the events and their locations, indicating the circumstances which, as he assumed, once could have been considered. By the end of the text, Herbert wrote: “the defence had a modest task: examine the tools.”⁹

The writer's defence in such a trial was a significant and essential voice, because all Inquisition trials were conducted in such a manner as to, first of all, prevent the accused from defending themselves, and, secondly, to induce them to admit to everything they were accused of. The process itself was absurd, a mockery of justice. The accused were defenceless and bombarded with accusations, infused from the very beginning with all types of negative determinations. Testimony was coerced with torture. The accused were forced to admit to crimes which were often doubtful or simply absurd. Herbert indicated that “the simple tool for breaking skulls was replaced with cudgel-words, which had the additional advantage of psychological shocking of the opponents. Such words included ‘perverter of minds’, ‘witch’, and ‘heretic.’”¹⁰ The accuser omitted all the facts which could have proved advantageous for the heretic. “In fact, every political and social organism has a light and a dark side,” Herbert emphasised. In the case of the Knights Templar, in their trials the accusers omitted the entire period of the bravery of the order, and instead they emphasised only that which could have smeared the knights.

Herbert the attorney admitted to sympathising with the accused heretics, told the thankful story of the order, and stressed that it was on the knights' shoulders that the fame of Christianity spread through the Holy Land. The Templars' disfavour was mostly, as emphasised by Herbert, related from the very beginning to their assigned function, not of their own choosing, of being the “bankers” of the Middle Ages (as they protected vaults even though they did not use them). Eventually, that fact played a detrimental role in their trials. Herbert stressed the huge role the capricious enmity of the French monarch towards the knights.

The selected mode of depiction of the history of the order indicated that the Knights Templar were rowdy heroes traditionally associated with the strange secrets of Christianity. Their mythological success was based on the mysteries of the Holy Grail, the Ark of the Covenant, and the head of John the Baptist. They were cherished by the crowds, and they were immortalised in the songs of returning heroes. Even today the mysteries of the Knights Templar survive in mystery romans à clef, susceptible to parody (e.g. the 2008 Polish film *Kod Matejki*). However, Herbert did not succumb to the temptation of literary sensationalism, even though

8 P. Siemaszko, *Zmienność...*, p. 125.

9 Z. Herbert, *Obrona Templariuszy*, in: *Barbarzyńca...*, p. 177.

10 Z. Herbert, *Obrona...*, p. 170.

the topic entails it. He strived to show that which remained outside the myth; he tried to base the story of the knights on archived documents and existing sources, and he described them without evoking a cheap sensational effect. For Herbert, it was important to undo the injustices, to restart the long finished trial, to analyse the “motivations” and the process “tools”.

Siemaszko noted that *W obronie templariuszy* occupied an important place among Herbert's essays. It distinctly displayed the universal nature of the events, the moral commitment of the author, and the allusions to contemporary times. One could easily state that it was a complete and sharp analysis of the functioning of totalitarian rule. Researchers agree that Herbert “once again revealed the mechanism of exercising power, one which is absolute, total, based on lies and violence. The mechanism, regardless of the time and place, is fulfilled through identical means, and it operates based on the same model.”¹¹ Herbert studied the important role of levelling accusations and the forms of interrogations, he analysed the Inquisition's methods, such as using people with a criminal past for trial purposes, and a lack of any real defence of the accused.

Inquisition's legal acts included all the basic characteristics of a totalitarian rule: the will to destroy the opponent using any means necessary, intimidating not only the infidels but the entire society, the need to monitor all the activities of the citizens, the sanctioning of the most immoral means and motivations which could lead to apprehending those who thought differently: lies, desire for profit, hatred, fear, revenge, as well as instilling a conviction of the strength, ruthlessness and infallibility of the institutions. A totalitarian rule knows perfectly that only police methods may prove successful, only gradual intimidation and demoralisation of the society may bring about the desired results...¹²

Jacques de Molay was a legend who rose from the fire of the stake. Many years before Herbert's interpretation, the fire of the Grand Master appeared in the works of a Czech writer Alois Jirásek. In *Psohlavci* (1885) Jirásek compared de Molay's fire at the stake with the scaffold of Jan Kozina (1852–1995), the leader of a peasant uprising. (Kozina, similarly to de Molay, heralded for his opponent God's judgement in one year and one day). It is worth remembering that the “God's judgement” was the common name of a knight tournament, so that would indicate a form of a tournament in the name of the truth, a strong personal duel developing on two levels: at present and in the past, within a higher spatial dimension. The legend of Jacques de Molay was based on the *qisas* principle (entailing revenge), not on the *hodoud* principle (entailing a crime against God).

¹¹ P. Siemaszko, *Zmienność...*, p. 125

¹² Ibidem, p. 125–127.

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In the essay *O albigensach, inkwizytorach i trubadurach* Zbigniew Herbert recalled the second huge fire which resembled a hecatomb – a monument to mass martyrdom. After the riveting descriptions of the purges of Albigensians and the destruction of their temples, there came the climax which led to wiping the heresy from the face of the Earth. At the end of the essay, Herbert described the sight of around 200 Albigensians, women and men, burnt in a huge fire built of wheels, branches, tree trunks, and brushwood. That scene was the apotheosis of ruthlessness against those “believing differently” (as if Herling spoke using the words of Giordano Bruno). It was followed by a soft, discreet, hardly noticeable epilogue. At night, when human bodies were still burning at the stake, three Albigensians, all the time hiding in the basements of Montségur, stealthily left the city, hiding in the dark. “They carry the remainders of the treasures, sacred books, and proofs of martyrdom.”¹³

Herbert's objective was to reconstruct actual events. That was difficult, and it was rather artistic as there were few existing sources. “The rescued original texts of the heretics,” he wrote, “could be counted using the fingers on one hand,” and he added: “so human thoughts and suffering must be reconstructed from tiny pieces, doubtful accounts, and quotations from the writings of adversaries.”¹⁴

Herbert made the enormous effort to reconstruct the events because he believed that to view the history of Albigensians from “up close” was worth the effort, and already at the beginning of the essay he stated that only minor evidence of them remained afterwards in Southern France (“ruins, temples, legends.”) That “viewing from up close” specific for Herbert was also triggered by the discussions of the “learned professors who boasted their knowledge” in discussing the topic of Albigensians. Herbert wrote that he witnessed such discussions, and during one of those he understood that it was one of the least completed sheets of contemporary mediaeval studies.

Herbert stressed that he was not a historian, that he only told the story, and his depiction was a “defence of the defeated.” Herbert's ethical stance was particularly significant in that context. Sharing the torments of those who, like Marsyas in *Apollo i Marsjasz*, became the object of cruelty in criminal trials.

Herbert supported his work with academic papers and contemporary research into the history of Albigensians. He began his description with a detailed presentation of the moving teachings of the dualist heresy, which featured a lack of physical seat and incessant changes of the teaching locations, presenting the diversity of their geographical and cultural areas. Among those, he referenced such researchers as: René Nelly, the publisher and researcher of Cathar manuscripts, Antoine

¹³ Z. Herbert, *O albigensach...*, p. 157.

¹⁴ Ibidem, p. 123.

Dondacine, the author of many works devoted to Cathars, such as *Les Heresies Et L'Inquisition, XII–XIII Siecles*, and the most active contemporary researchers of the crusades against Albigensians, i.e. Zoja Oldenburg, a French historian of Russian descent, and Pierre Belperron, the author of *La croisade contre les Albigeois et l'union du Languedoc à la France. 1209–1249*. Herbert also used source documents. He developed his own view and reiterated the questions posed by Fernand Niel: Were Albigensians heretics at all (i.e. did they depart from Christianity?) or were they the creators of a new religion? At that point Herbert referred to Antoine Dondacine, who pointed out the similarity of Cathar rituals with the beginnings of Christianity. All that amplified the ethical and emotional story of the Albigensian genocide. Herbert's literary journey into the world of Albigensians occurred in an important period for the research into Catharism. In 1959, René Nelly published a book entitled *Écritures cathares : La cène secrète. Le livre des deux principes. TRAITE CATHARE! Le rituel occitan. Le rituel latin. Textes précathares et cathares présentés, traduits et commentés avec une introduction sur les origines et l'esprit du Catharisme* (*Cathar manuscripts: The Mystery of the Supper. The book of two principles. CATHAR TREATISE! The Provence ritual. The Latin ritual. Presentation of the texts of the father of Catharism and Cathars, translated with commentary and introduction regarding the origins and the spirit of Catharism*), which became a seminal work in the area. Anne Baron wrote that after the publication many other valuable academic studies were published, yet in terms of their academic value none even came close to that what Nelly studied, discussed and published in 1959.¹⁵

Herbert was convinced that with the annihilation of Albigensians the culture they represented was also destroyed. He considered the political, religious, and cultural “mutual diffusion” of the national elements of heretics and, in historical memory terms, their persecution and killings. For Herbert, the Albigensian cleansing meant the destruction of a civilisation, the demolition of a bridge linking the East and the West. It should be read as indicating that the clash of the Crusaders and Albigensians was a conflict of civilisations and the “defeat suffered by the county of Toulouse was a disaster similar to the annihilation of the Minoan of the Mayan civilisations.”¹⁶

Herbert revealed two approaches of philosophy historians to Gnosticism. He argued that the first was displayed by scholars who take delight in cool analytic doctrines and who propose Gnosticism be expunged from handbooks. The other was represented by those attached to the aesthetic pleasure in discovering in the Gnostics' theosophy elements they found attractive related to the complex ladder of divine hypostasis, elements binding heaven with Earth.

15 А. Бренон, *Въведение*, in: Р. Нели, *Ръкописите на катарите*, trans. Васил Стоев, И.К. Мирям, Sofia, 1999, p. 8.

16 Z. Herbert, *O albigensach...*, p. 130.

Those fragments of the text which refer to Bogolims in Bulgaria I find the most interesting. Herbert viewed the origins of the dualist heresy in a holistic manner, and he often indicated its key place in Bulgaria, and the role of Bogomils in propagating it.

Bogomils came to Bulgaria in the 10th century, even more fervent followers of dualism than Paulicians, proclaiming that the sensory world was created by Satan, and man was a mixture of water and dirt that had a soul created by the breath of Satan and God. Bogomils opposed both Rome and Byzantium. They engaged in impressive missionary efforts reaching as far as the Apennine Peninsula, Tuscany and Lombardy, and even southern France. They found particularly favourable conditions in areas which fostered the growth of the strong Cathar (from the Greek word for chaste) heresy, the followers of which called themselves *patarini* in northern Italy, Bosnia and Dalmatia, and *Albigensians* in southern France.¹⁷

Herbert argued that Languedoc, similarly to Lombardy and Bulgaria, was one of those countries in Europe which experienced the highest intensity of the Cathar heresy because Catharism developed there into a common, official and serious form of religion, which threatened the Catholic Church. He mentioned the Bulgarian episcopate Nikita who led the heretic council in Saint-Félix-de-Caraman (1167).

Herbert indicated Nikita in just one sentence, but the mission of the alternative Bogomil pope was strongly connected with Catharism in Languedoc. Today on that basis one might indicate the extent of the territory of the dualist Church of Cathars, into which Bogomilism was also included. Yuri Stoyanov (Юрий Стоянов) wrote that the opposition "pope Nikita" during the council ordained Cathar dioceses in Northern France, Albi and Lombardy, and appointed bishops of the new church in Toulouse, Carcassonne and *Ecclesia Aransensis*, and in an address to the Church in Toulouse he explained the source, the organisation and the rules of operation of the mother churches, among which an important place was occupied by *Ecclesia Bulgariae* (in Eastern Bulgaria). "The extensive mission of pope Nikita led to the unification of Cathar Churches into a spiritual community of the reviving absolutist dualism, which maintained the hegemony over the Cathars in Languedoc until the final destruction,"¹⁸ Stoyanov added that after the Balkan dualism was shattered, *Ecclesia Bulgariae* became associated with moderate dualism, a thesis which was supported by Borislav Primov (Борислав Примов) in 1960.¹⁹

17 Z. Herbert, *Barbarzyńca...*, p. 126.

18 Ю. Стоянов, *Другият бог. Дуалистичните религии от Античността до Катарската ерес*. Trans. Л. Дуков, Кралица Маб, Sofia, 2006, p. 233.

19 In his work *Богомилският дуализъм – произход, същност и обществено-политическо значение* (*Dualizm bogomitów – pochodzenie, istota i znaczenie społeczno-polityczne* B. Primov

Herbert's remarks on Bulgarian Bogomils were scant, yet significant. They corresponded to historical data and confirmed that they played a decisive role as the progenitors of Catharism. "Bogomilism was born in Bulgaria in the early-10th century or not so long later. It reached France and Italy in the 11th century," René Nelly wrote. "It would be unfounded to state that there was no continuity between Bogomilism and Catharism; that continuity is accepted by the Roman Catholic clergy and Cathars themselves."²⁰

Herbert conducted a study, which he applied to the entire procedure of Inquisition trials, like a true attorney carefully processing the reports created by the Inquisition. For Herbert those reports were the "files of terror and cruelty", and "they knew everything." The conclusion was surprising, basically contradicting what readers might have expected. "Whoever thinks that the Inquisition reports include shocking material easily adaptable for literary purposes, they are mistaken," he wrote. "The dialogue, as indicated in the extensive collection known as Collection Doat, did not consist of sharp replies, passion, threats, resistance and breaking, but of terrifying monotony. Yet from the inventory of the torture chamber one must read the real horror," Herbert wrote.²¹ The reports included many names, dates, and places. Herbert indicated the nature of the accusations, which usually had poor factual grounding, being based on insignificant or simply fabricated facts. It revealed the function of the inquisitor, who was at the same time the investigator, the prosecutor and the judge. He referred to the Inquisition handbook *Practica Inquisitionis Haereticæ Pravitatis* by Bernard Gui (1261–1331). He quoted *Capitula* extensively, which was passed at the congress in Toulouse in 1229, thus helping the readers understand how uncompromising and how extremely persecuted and battled the heretics were, like the lowest of criminals.

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The Albigensians' eschatological vision depicting the end of the world ironically also referred to the stakes. According to their teachings, the end of the world was supposed to occur after a great fire. It started and its flames crossed the borders of the place which is today called the "Place of the burnt" and, as Herbert wrote in the conclusion of his essay, from their stake a "heavy nauseating smoke descends into

(Б. Примов) indicated: "surely one could say that Bogolims preferred moderate dualism, which in fact was created by them and it did not borrow anything from other heresies" (Б. Примов, *Богомилският дуализъм – произход, същност и обществено-политическо значение*, in: *Известия на Института за история*, кн. 8, БАН, София, 1960, p. 144).

²⁰ Р. Нели, *Ръкописите на катарите*, Мириам, София, 1999, pp. 15–16.

²¹ Z. Herbert, *O albigensach...*, p. 148.

valleys and spreads throughout history.”²² The smoke from the fires also spreads over the author's contemporary times, and his essays on heretics could be read as a “parabolic novella about his times, the latter half of the 20th century when one could feel the dark demon of intolerance lurking behind one's back.”²³

Gustaw Herling-Grudziński's heretic Christ in the short story *Drugie przyjście* and Dostoevsky's hypotext

A strange ritual of millenarianist stupidity. It all began with the outbreak of plague in 1260. It swallowed its sacrificial form from the short story “*drugie przyjście*” [second coming] by Gustaw Herling-Grudziński, i.e. the heretic from Bolsena (called the “dissenter” in the short story). He questions the trans-substance of the holy communion, and he doubts whether Christ was present also through his body in the Eucharist.

A telling scene appears in the short story. A frenzied mob drags a heretic under the roar of not human but beastly screams from Bolsena to the papal city of Orvieto, where he is to be punished. He dies in an iron cage before the mob's eyes, and his remains are burnt at the stake in a fire excessive in size when compared to his dead body.

The whole situation is observed in silence by a “lone old man” – the terminally ill Pope Urban IV. He views it through a gap in the window curtain of his residence in Orvieto. Soon after the heretic is burnt the Pope receives a message about a miracle in Bolsena, where some unknown pilgrim priest during a three-day vigil at the altar polluted by the presence of the non-believer had seen a piece of the Host from the corporal after the transubstantiation begin dripping blood and leave a stain on the corporal.²⁴ Shortly before his death the Pope has a vision in which he sees the pilgrim walking from Bolsena, surrounded by a cheering crowd. When he raises the Host high in his hand it seemed as if he was holding the pure white disc of the Moon. The pilgrim himself “shone the light of faith.” Suddenly, in the vision the face of the pilgrim changed. It was wry with pain, and the Pope notices in it the face of the burnt heretic. Soon afterwards the Pope sends a messenger to bring him the miraculous corporal where the sign of the bleeding Host appeared, and on his deathbed, calling upon the miracle, he originates the holiday of Corpus Christi, one of the major Catholic holidays.

The short story has a significant epilogue in which a question is posed WHO the unknown pilgrim priest was. Conventionally it is assumed that it was Peter of Prague, while one version suggested Peter doubted in the Host and was suspected of a deal with the devil (Herling mentioned a 12th century Czech chronicle).

²² Ibidem, p. 157.

²³ D. Opacka-Walasek, *Czytając Herberta*, Wydawnictwo Naukowe Śląsk, Katowice, 2001, p. 14.

²⁴ White linen cloth on which the liturgical cross is placed.

Herling-Grudziński went on writing about the daily wait for the second coming for the next 100 years, which was accompanied by burning “Jews and heretics.” Eventually, the Coming came, and the One awaited by everyone came and wrote only one word in the ash from the burnt. “The legends remain silent as to what the word was,” Herling wrote leaving the readers with a conundrum typical of all his short stories.

That is a short summary of the unconventional short story *Drugie przyjście*, which Herling-Grudziński constructed as an alternative version of the well-known story of the holiday of Corpus Christi, which was introduced by Pope Urban in 1264 after the miracle in Bolsena. The title *Drugie przyjście* also indicated Apocalypse as a hypotext. The core of Herling-Grudziński’s short story is the execution of the heretic who appeared to be identical to the pilgrim priest who caused the miracle in the corporal. Their shared image indicated the existence of a higher universal archetype: the archetype of Christ. One could say that Herling-Grudziński saw Christ in the image of the burnt heretic and that was the basis for his non-standard decision. However, the source for that decision should be traced to Fyodor Dostoevsky’s *Legend of the Grand Inquisitor*.

In the *Legend of the Grand Inquisitor*, Christ returns to the earth, performs a miracle by reviving a dead child but soon afterwards the Grand Inquisitor appears clad in thick attire, the crowd parts, he arrests Christ and has a long discussion with him in Christ’s cell. Actually, it is an extensive monologue about the history of his teachings as Christ remains silent. The abominable old man demands that Christ stopped “disturbing” since for the last fifteen centuries the teachings have remained in the Pope’s and the Church’s hands, who have been “improving” them. In his words, the following passage can be found:

I know not who Thou art and care not to know whether it is Thou or only a **semblance of Him, but to-morrow I shall condemn Thee and burn Thee at the stake as the worst of heretics. And the very people who have to-day kissed Thy feet, to-morrow at the faintest sign from me will rush to heap up the embers of Thy fire.** Knowest Thou that? Yes, maybe Thou knowest it.²⁵ [emphasis by M.G.]

It is more than certain that Herling-Grudziński approached those words literally and derived from them the image of Christ the heretic²⁶, whom the mob led to the stake. His short story included a system of references to Dostoevsky’s hypotext,

²⁵ F. Dostojewski, *Bracia Karamazow*, trans. Ryszard Łużny, http://niniwa22.cba.pl/dostojewski_wielki_inkwizytor.htm [English version: Fyodor Dostoevsky, *The Brothers Karamazov*, The Gutenberg Project (e-book)]

²⁶ Interestingly enough, Giordano Bruno referred to himself as “New Christ” before being burnt at the stake (in the short story *Głęboki cień*): “He, unlike the beautiful yet weak Christ the human, will not ask God to move the chalice of bitterness away. Maybe he is the new Christ.

who in turn referred to the ideological basis, the topic and the visual and emotional atmosphere. In that ideological attitude Herling-Grudziński considered as very important the teachings of the Grand Inquisitor that "there are three powers on the earth which can enslave and unify the consciousnesses of those weak rebels for centuries for their own happiness. Those are: miracle, mystery, and authority." According to the Inquisitor, Christ rejected all three. Gustaw Herling-Grudziński quoted those words of the inquisitor in his journal entry of 26 May 1971 (I quote a fragment below), and he pondered on them.²⁷ In the series of short stories associated with the decisive influence of religious miracles on the human mass, it was that *case* that was significant for him.

The second coming proves a new crucifixion. At the end, the short story reads: "People expected the Second Coming, but instead Jews and heretics were burnt accused of desecrating and mocking the holy Host. (...) People expected the Second Coming and while they sent their prayers to the heavens, Jews and heretics were burnt."²⁸ In *Rozmowy w Dragonei* Herling-Grudziński explained the finale to Włodzimierz Bolecki and expanded on it: "The one who was expected came. And that is that Second Coming." The following sentence was very important: "he spread his arms wide after writing the mysterious word in the sand, as if he was crucified again. And that is the Second Coming."²⁹

In line with *Legend of the Grand Inquisitor*, Herling-Grudziński's short story indicated that humanity was unable to identify the true image of the Saviour and crucified him again; by killing a man it killed God. His voice was a voice in defence of the victims of religious fanaticism; he indicated how the paradox of killing for religious reasons occurs. The reconstruction of the legendary/mythical topic was conducted similarly to that which one can find in Herbert's works, and also similarly to those Herling-Grudziński stood in support of the victims.

The plan for the short story formed in the writer's mind during his visit in Orvieto and Bolsena, and it was fostered by his familiarity with the legends and the stories related to Urban IV. Orvieto, once a papal residence, was one of Herling-Grudziński's favourite Italian towns. It is most visible in *Dzienniku pisanym nocą*. In the writer's mind, Italian towns often transform into scenes of once performed plays, which today could say so much more. The author assumed the function of the mediaeval narrator, which was visible in the composition of the short story and its subtitle *Opowiadanie średniowieczne* [Mediaeval short story].

Maybe he will start a new faith." – G. Herling-Grudziński, *Głęboki cień*, in: *Gorący oddech pustyni*, Czytelnik, Warsaw, 1997, p. 163.

²⁷ G. Herling-Grudziński, *Dziennik pisany nocą*, Czytelnik, Warsaw, 2001, p. 17.

²⁸ G. Herling-Grudziński, *Drugie przyjście*, in: G. Herling-Grudziński, *Pisma wybrane*. T.I. *Opowiadania*, Czytelnik, Warsaw, 2001, p. 185.

²⁹ G. Herling-Grudziński, W. Bolecki, *Rozmowy w Dragonei*, Szpak, Warsaw, 1997, p. 211.

Orvieto was a town common for both writers (Herling-Grudziński and Herbert) and it could be interesting to compare how it was presented in their respective outputs. In Herbert's essay *Il Duomo* the image of the town was developed around the image of the *Last Judgement* in the cathedral, which was also visible in its title, and the essay also concluded with it. Initially, the image was the reason why he travelled to the town, and eventually Herbert wrote: "Everything is dominated by *Il Duomo*, like a raised hand of the prophet. But for now 'the Last Judgement' is enclosed under the dome of the San Brizio chapel, and it is not being fulfilled over the town. In the honey air Orvieto sleeps peacefully like a lizard."³⁰ Herbert treated the painting *the Last Judgement* differently than Herling-Grudziński, who animated it in his short story *Pożar w kaplicy Sykstyńskiej*. The former's image of Orvieto included many architectural elements of the city and paintings from the cathedral, while his attention focused on Fra Angelico (1387–1455), the student of his favourite Piero della Francesca (1415–1492), and there were no images of Pope Urban IV. He did mention, though, that Orvieto was "the lair of heresy."³¹

The historical period chosen by Herling-Grudziński was very significant, and it proved fruitful in artistic terms, offering his work a document-like strength. The short story not only described anew one of the major Catholic holidays of Corpus Christi (celebrated formally in Poland), but also created a broader narration which covered the milleniaristic and Eucharistic motifs combined with a masterful paraphrase of Dostoevsky.

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³⁰ Z. Herbert, *Il Duomo*, in: *Barbarzyńca...*, p. 59.

³¹ Ibidem, p. 54

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Margreta Grigorova

Dyskurs herezji w literaturze polskiej po II światowej wojnie. Heretycy Herlinga i Herberta

Streszczenie

Heretycy, stosy i inkwizytorzy zasiedliły literaturę polską drugiej połowy XX wieku. Widać to w twórczości polskich twórców, którzy przeszli przez apokalipsę II wojny światowej i dyktatury minionego wieku: Czesława Miłosza, Gustawa Herlinga-Grudzińskiego, Andrzeja Szczypiorskiego, Zbigniewa Herberta, Czesława Miłosza, Jerzego Andrzejewskiego. Niniejszy tekst skupia się na dominacji fabuł, związanych z herezją i jej prześladowaniem w utworach wymienionych twórców. Rekonstrukcje artystyczno-dokumentalne odczytano w obronie tezy o istniejącym parabolicznym i historiozoficznym dyskursie herezji w powojennej literaturze polskiej. Specjalną uwagę zwrócono na eseje Herberta, związane z herezją oraz na heretyczną postać Chrystusa w *Drugim przyjsciu* Herlinga.

Słowa kluczowe: dyskurs herezji, literatura polska po II światowej wojnie, heretyczna postać Chrystusa, Gustaw Herling-Grudziński, Zbigniew Herbert

Discourse of heresy in Polish post-WWII literature Herling's and Herbert's heretics

Summary

The present text explores the theme of heresies and their persecution in the works of a group of writers, survivors of World War II and of the two dictatorships of the century – Gustaw Herling-Grudziński, Zbigniew Herbert, Czesław Miłosz, Andrzej Szczypiorski, Jerzy Andrzejewski. An artistic-documentary reconstruction of medieval processes and executions of heretics, as well as striving for protection and rehabilitation are observed in a series of their works. Deep allusions to the dictatorships of the 20th century are made. Particular attention is being paid to Herbert's essays, connected with heresies and to a heretic image of Christ in the short story *Drugie przyjście* by Herling-Grudzinski.

Keywords: Discourse of heresy, Polish post-WWII literature, heretic image of Christ, Gustaw Herling-Grudziński, Zbigniew Herbert

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