

STUDIEN ZUR KULTURELLEN UND LITERARISCHEN
KOMMUNISMUSFORSCHUNG 1

Michał Głowiński

Totalitarian Speech



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Michał Głowiński

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Totalitarian Speech brings together a range of texts on totalitarian manipulations of language. The author analyzes various phenomena, from the hateful rhetoric of Nazi Germany to the obfuscating *newspeak* of communist Poland, finding certain common characteristics. Above all, totalitarian speech in its diverse manifestations imposes an all-embracing worldview and an associated set of dichotomous divisions from an omniscient and authoritative perspective. This volume collects the work of over three decades, including essays written during the

communist era and more recent pieces assessing the legacy of totalitarian ways of thinking in contemporary Poland.

The Author

Michał Głowiński is among the most eminent Polish literary scholars. In a career spanning almost six decades at the Institute of Literary Research of the Polish Academy of Sciences (IBL PAN), he has published over thirty books, largely specializing in twentieth-century Polish literature and literary theory.

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Herausgegeben von Grzegorz Wolowiec und Anna Artwinska

BAND 1



Michał Głowiński

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Introduction: The Critic's Revenge

Stanley Bill

Jagiellonian University

Michał Głowiński (born in 1934) is among the most eminent living Polish literary scholars. In a career spanning almost six decades at the Institute of Literary Research of the Polish Academy of Sciences (IBL PAN), Głowiński has published over thirty books, largely specializing in twentieth-century Polish literature and literary theory. During the communist period in Poland, he gained particular recognition in opposition circles for his extensive work on the language of socialist totalitarianism as a form of Orwellian “newspeak.” Some of this analysis forms the core of the present volume. In 2005, Northwestern University Press published Marci Shore’s translation of *The Black Seasons* (*Czarne sezony*), an account of Głowiński’s traumatic childhood experiences as a Polish Jew in the Warsaw Ghetto during the German Occupation. In a more recent autobiographical work, he made an important step for gay rights in Poland by becoming one of very few Polish scholars to declare his own homosexuality.

Głowiński is a pivotal figure within Polish literary studies because he stands at the interface of two opposing paradigms. On the one hand, he is a leading exponent and promoter of Polish structuralism. This approach is clearly evident in the method of his analyses, which concentrate on closely defining and tracing the relations between multiple recurring elements within individual texts and broader literary trends. On the other hand, he anticipates and supports the “social turn” in literary studies, opening the field to influences from the broader domain of cultural studies. Here, Głowiński appears almost in the role of mediator. He does not wish to reduce literary studies to a mere sub-discipline of cultural studies, yet he refuses to ignore the deep and productive interpenetration of the two fields. According to Głowiński, the study of literature must maintain its specificity, while opening itself to contact with various other disciplines concerned with diverse aspects of human culture and society.

The present volume exhibits this powerful thread of continuity running through Głowiński’s diverse and extensive scholarly oeuvre, as structuralist literary analysis meets the “social turn.” The first section of the book – “Literature and Totalitarian Experience” – largely sees Głowiński in his primary role, engaged in exhaustive analysis of literary texts and tendencies. His essay on “Narration as Dramatic Monologue” is a classic of Polish literary studies, mapping the rise of the dramatic monologue in Polish prose of the late 1950s. The context here is explicitly political, since this short-lived literary trend arose immediately after the

so-called “thaw” of 1956, when Polish communist totalitarianism briefly moved in a more liberal direction. In other essays in this section, Głowiński assesses “Polish Literature on the Holocaust,” the contradictory movement of “Socialist Parnassianism,” and “newspeak” as the language of socialist realist narrative (“Narrative, NewSpeak, Totalitarian Form”). In the two remaining pieces, Głowiński engages in close analysis of individual texts: the medieval *Dialogue of Solomon and Marcolf* and Jonathan Littell’s controversial novel, *The Kindly Ones*. The essay on Marcolf may at first appear somewhat tangential to the main subject of *Totalitarian Speech*. In fact, it contributes a crucial commentary on the logic and rhetoric of proletarian revolution, while its conclusion reveals a cryptic, though unmistakable allusion to a communist ruler who often liked to play the Marcolfian “bumpkin” – namely, Nikita Khrushchev.

The second section of the book – “Political Forms of Language” – collects various essays on the manipulations of totalitarian discourse both before and after 1989. Głowiński wrote the majority of these pieces during the communist period, when he produced his classic analyses of the diverse forms of socialist propaganda. Among them, he examines the daily distortions of the socialist press (“Ulysses’ Day”), the official media coverage of John Paul II’s visit to Poland in 1979 (“An Account of the Papal Visit”), the meaning of national identity (“Russian, German, Jew”), the cult of the leader as a fairy tale narrative (“Stalin the Magician”), the ideological rewriting of history (“Don’t Let the Past Run Wild”), and the instrumentalization of anti-Semitic discourse during the political crisis of March 1968 (“Instigators”).

Of course, “totalitarian discourse” is by no means restricted to ostensibly communist political systems. Indeed, Głowiński finds similar rhetorical and discursive strategies at work in Nazi Germany (“Talking Like Them”) and even in post-1989 democratic Poland (“Three Days with *Nasz Dziennik*” and “The Crisis in Patriotic Discourse”). In the key essay, “On Totalitarian Discourse,” he delineates the general characteristics of totalitarianism not merely as “a way of exercising power,” but rather as a “mode of speech.” Above all, totalitarian speech imposes an all-embracing worldview and an associated set of dichotomous divisions from the omniscient perspective of an authoritative and radically “de-subjectivized” speaker.

The final section of the book – “Anti-Semitic Discourse” – includes essays on a particular variant of totalitarian speech whose function has been to vilify and incite violence against Jewish people both in Poland and elsewhere. Głowiński analyzes the “Characteristics of Anti-Semitic Discourse” and its various manifestations in Poland (“Always the Same”), while also offering close textual analysis of the infamous *Protocols of the Elders of Zion* (“The Poetics of a Political Forgery”). The volume concludes with a peculiar character portrait of Jan Dobraczyński, an anti-

Semitic ideologue and writer who received the title of “Righteous of the Nations” for his role in saving Jewish children – including Michał Głowiński himself – from the Nazi Holocaust. Here, we witness the unpredictable relations between discourse and action in an individual life. Głowiński movingly acknowledges that he partly owes his life to a man whose courageous actions came into sharp conflict with his hateful words. As the power of totalitarian discourse unleashed death and destruction in Warsaw under the German Occupation, Jan Dobraczyński resisted the concrete consequences of his own anti-Semitic ideology.

In his analysis of diverse totalitarian texts and rhetorical strategies, Głowiński methodically applies the tools and techniques of structuralist literary criticism. He is convinced that analyzing the literary characteristics of non-literary texts and discourse may help us to understand certain persuasive mechanisms and deeper meanings at work within them. This conviction also reveals an indefatigable faith in the power of human reason. By reasoning, analyzing, explaining and exposing, Głowiński hopes to gain a certain measure of power over even the most terrifying political and social phenomena, subjecting them to the processes of reflection and critique. Detailed analysis and rational inquiry are the frontline weapons in his intellectual struggle with the irrational excesses of naked political force and racial hatred.

Totalitarian power has two primary means of social control at its disposal: violence and the discourse of propaganda. Violence is indispensable – and a literary scholar can do little to resist it. However mighty the pen, the sword may always cut off the hand that clutches it. Yet the linguistic manipulations of “newspeak” form an even more insidious and far-reaching means of control, as George Orwell revealed in *Nineteen Eighty-Four*. If a totalitarian regime can brainwash an entire society to believe that two plus two equals five, then violence becomes increasingly superfluous. According to Głowiński, literary scholars and other intellectuals have an important role to play in resisting this process. By revealing how totalitarian speech functions, they can expose the mechanisms of manipulation, rendering them less persuasive or even ineffectual.

Indeed, it was partly thanks to the tireless efforts of opposition intellectuals that the mendacious rhetoric of Polish socialism broke down in the period leading up to the Solidarity revolution. The regime was left with no alternative but to fall back on violence, as General Wojciech Jaruzelski declared martial law in 1981. This strategy would prove unsustainable in the long term, especially once Mikhail Gorbachev removed the underlying threat of Soviet intervention. The project of Polish totalitarian speech collapsed, as Poles eagerly embraced democracy and the discursive hubbub of a free press. Nevertheless, its influence has survived in unexpected forms. In the final section of this volume, Głowiński traces the peculiar

afterlife of totalitarian discourse in the nationalistic and anti-Semitic divagations of certain fiercely “anti-communist” groupings in post-1989 Poland.

Diverse totalitarian systems have always attempted to subjugate literature and literary studies to the limitations of a totalizing ideology and discourse. Socialist realism was the official literary style of communist Poland. Accordingly, literary studies and criticism also had to follow strict guidelines. Literature was always subject to ideological interrogation. Michał Głowiński effectively reverses this power relation, submitting the language of totalitarian systems to the discourse and analytical techniques of literary studies. In his essays, ideology is always subject to literary interrogation. This is Głowiński's way of fighting back against linguistic oppression. As we read the works collected in this volume, we bear witness to a sustained campaign of scholarly resistance to manipulation and violence – the spirited revenge of a literary critic.

Part I

1. Narration as Dramatic Monologue¹

1.

The term “monologue” does not evince any unambiguous clarity, as it may refer to many different phenomena, even in the case of exclusively narrative utterances. When we analyze works of literary prose, we may use the term in its broadest sense – namely, with the meaning assigned to it by linguists, who have often defined it in opposition to dialogue. According to Jan Mukařovský:

For linguistics [. . .] monologue signifies the utterance of a single active participant regardless of whether other passive participants are present or absent. Therefore, the story is a typical monologue in the linguistic sense.²

For scholars primarily interested in narrative utterances, this definition is too general (embracing the entire field of phenomena under consideration). Consequently, it is a rather inefficient tool of analysis. In this broad understanding, the concept of monologue does not allow for any distinctions. In this sense, monologue includes stories in both the first and third persons (whereas here the distinctions should be of fundamental significance). Similarly, one cannot differentiate between phenomena that appear within such a monologue, since it may also include the speeches of characters cited by the narrator, irrespective of whether these are dialogues or monologues. On a side note, one may also understand as monologue the lengthier speeches of individual characters, when the narrator falls silent and surrenders the main space of the text to the voice of one character or another.

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- 1 Translator’s Note: I have chosen “dramatic monologue” as the best possible rendering of the Polish term “*monolog wypowiedziany*” that forms the subject of this article. In fact, we might translate the term more literally as spoken, uttered or voiced monologue. Largely thanks to Głowiński’s article, this term is now well established within Polish literary studies, where it carries a slightly different meaning from “dramatic monologue” in the strict sense (“*monolog dramatyczny*”) – though the two terms are very closely related. I have chosen to use the term “dramatic monologue” here partly for the sake of simplicity, but also because Dostoevsky’s *Notes from Underground* and Camus’s *The Fall* – which form key examples in Głowiński’s argument – are often discussed under this more general category in English. Therefore, in an English-language context, we will probably best comprehend Głowiński’s article as a Polish exploration of a particular variant of the dramatic monologue in this broader sense.
 - 2 Mukařovský, Jan, “Dialog a monolog,” trans. J. Mayen, *Wśród znaków i struktur*, ed. J. Sławiński (Warszawa: PWN, 1970), p. 221.

Therefore, it would seem that in practice it would be much more useful to limit the scope of the term “monologue” to certain forms of narration – namely, those in which the speaking subject appears as a specific and defined person whose “I” externalizes itself in narrative utterance, thus determining its linguistic structure. Within this definition of narrative monologue, we can differentiate three basic varieties: monologue referring to forms of written language, internal monologue, and monologue referring to forms of oral utterance.

Monologue referring to written forms uses non-literary or paraliterary forms of utterance, such as memoirs, diaries, letters (though here we can only talk about monologue when the work consists of a single person’s letters, since exchanges of letters have a quasi-dialogical structure), and so on. This kind of monologue is close to formal mimesis, since it not only implies the authenticity of the source and the events described, but also turns the narrator into the measure of everything.³

While written monologue dominated the early period of the novel’s development – for instance, forming one of the first developmental phases of the so-called psychological novel – the internal monologue has embodied a convention that fully emerged only in twentieth-century writing. This form aims to access the pre-rational flow of consciousness, and – unlike written monologue – it finds no models in non-literary forms of utterance. According to Edouard Dujardin:

In the system of poetry, internal monologue represents an unenunciated utterance without a listener, through which a character expresses his or her most intimate thoughts, which are close to the unconscious and prior to any logical organization – thoughts still in their natal state. The character expresses these thoughts through simple sentences reduced to the syntactic minimum, so as to give the impression of “randomness.”⁴

Monologue referring to oral utterances breaks down into two distinctive forms: “skaz” and monologue addressed and delivered to a specific listener. “Skaz” – or, as Francisezk Siedlecki has translated this Russian term into Polish, “oral narration” (“*narracja wypowiedawcza*”) – is based above all on bringing the element of colloquial language into the story. Here the story does not so much convey information about past events in any complete form, but rather constitutes an account based on small talk with a clearly defined listener. The story emerges over the course of this contact with the listener. According to Viktor Vinogradov:

3 Victor Erlich writes about this form of monologue in his article “Some Uses of Monologue in Prose Fiction: Narrative Manner and World View,” published in the collective volume *Stil-und Formprobleme in der Literatur (Heidelberg: Carl Winter, 1959)*, pp. 371-378.

4 Dujardin, Edouard, *Le Monologue intérieur* (Paris: Messein, 1931), p. 59.

“Skaz” is a peculiar literary and artistic attitude, an orientation towards oral monologue of the narrative type. It represents an imitation of the kind of monological speech that by relating the story forms itself as if based on a model of direct storytelling.⁵

The second form of oral monological utterance is directed at a depicted addressee and has certain elements in common with “skaz.” Both forms assume a dominant role for the oral component and the presence of a listener. Nevertheless, this form of monologue forms a separate and independent form of narration, endowed with different functions than “skaz” and deriving from different cultural and literary traditions. Ultimately, the story is not told exclusively over the course of the narrator’s banter with the listener (or listeners).

Apart from these elements of “skaz,” various other elements also appear within dramatic monologue, including an attempt to ensure that at least some sections of the story should be intellectually rigorous and capable of conveying a fundamental issue. These attempts express themselves through the introduction of rhetorical elements, which are usually absent in “skaz.” This combination of essentially contradictory components determines the specific characteristics of dramatic monologue. Like almost all forms of written utterance, it has both immediate and more distant equivalents in the non-literary sphere and in the sphere of normal linguistic relations or colloquial speech. A basic equivalent here is the phenomenon that Vinogradov explicitly describes as “dramatic monologue”⁶ in his typology of monologue as a component of direct colloquial linguistic relations. This dramatic monologue is a “complex linguistic form in which the language of words becomes merely a kind of accompaniment for other systems of psychic expression, including mime, gestures, artistic signs, and so on.”⁷

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- 5 Vinogradov, Viktor, “Zagadnienie narracji wypowiedawczej w stylistyce” (“The Problem of Skaz in Stylistics”), in: Spitzer, Leo, Karl Vossler, and Viktor Winogradov, eds. *Z zagadnień stylistyki* (Warszawa: IBL, 1937), p. 139. The differentiation of “skaz” from “gawęda” – a specifically Polish form of epic tale – is a separate matter. Ultimately, these phenomena differ significantly from each other, and not only in their provenance or in the fact that the former emerged in Russian culture and the latter in Polish culture. After all, the “skaz” is more a method of narration, while “gawęda” is above all a generic structure. See Kazimierz Bartoszyński’s “O amorfizmie gawędy,” published in the collective volume *Prace o literaturze i teatrze ofiarowane Zygmuntowi Szwejkowskiemu* (Wrocław: Zakł. nar. im. Ossolińskich, 1966), pp. 91-116.
- 6 Translator’s Note: Here Głowiński directly translates Vinogradov’s Russian term as “*monolog dramatyczny*” – literally “dramatic monologue” – rather than as the “*monolog wypowiedziany*” that forms the main subject of his own article. In this context, we can observe how significantly the two terms overlap in Polish.
- 7 Vinogradov, p. 135.

2.

Dramatic monologue is not a classical form of first-person narration like other well-known historical variants, such as the story in letters, the memoir story, the diary story, and so on. Nor is it linked with such old traditions as “skaz” in Russian literature or “gawęda” in Polish literature. On the contrary, we shall see that as late as the nineteenth century dramatic monologue was nothing but the individual endeavor of a brilliant writer – an isolated enterprise ignored by his contemporaries. Only recently did this type of monologue become a more widely used form of utterance (especially in Polish prose). This is clear from a list of works that offers substantial and indisputable evidence of the form’s popularization:

1. Iwaszkiewicz, Jarosław “Wzlot” (*Twórczość* 12 [1957], pp. 11-38);
2. Iwaszkiewicz, Jarosław, “Opowiadanie szwajcarskie” (*Nowa Kultura* 13 [1958]);
3. Wygodzki, Stanisław, “Koncert życzeń” (*Koncert życzeń* [Warszawa: PIW, 1961], pp. 207-247);
4. Brandys, Kazimierz, “Sobie i Państwu” (*Romantyczność* [Warszawa: Czytelnik, 1960], pp. 61-104);
5. Wiernik, Bronisław, *Nietutejszy* [Warszawa: Czytelnik, 1960];
6. Kabac, Eugeniusz, “Płacz milczących włóczęgów” (*Gorzka plaża* [Warszawa: Iskry, 1960], pp. 16-21);
7. Sztajner, Bernard, “Uśmiech” (*Tajemnica Maxa Hellera* [Łódź: 1960], pp. 56-60);
8. Eberhardt, Konrad, “Granica” (*Nazajutrz po wojnie* [Warszawa: 1960], pp. 72-98);
9. Kołakowski, Leszek, “Wielkie kazanie księdza Bernarda” (*Twórczość* 10 [1961], pp. 8-16);
10. Umiński, Zdzisław, “Sprawozdanie konfidenta” (*Sprawozdanie konfidenta* [Warszawa: Pax, 1959], pp. 5-97);
11. Wojdowski, Bogdan, “Opowieść Srebrnej Trąbki” (*Życie Literackie* 8 [1958]);
12. Brandys, Kazimierz, “Jak być kochaną” (*Romantyczność*, pp. 157-210);
13. Stanuch, Stanisław, *Portret z pamięci* (Kraków: Wydawnictwo Literackie, 1959).

This list requires two additional remarks. The first concerns the order in which I have given the specific titles. Firstly, I have placed those works in which narration as dramatic monologue has taken pure form, generally undisturbed by elements of any other nature (titles 1-9). Secondly, I have grouped those works in which this narration appears together with other kinds of monological storytelling – namely, monologue referring to written forms (titles 10 and 11) and internal monologue (titles 12 and 13). In the first category, I have attempted to include all possible works, while in the second category I have been more selective, limiting myself to a few representative titles.

The second remark concerns chronology. All the above mentioned works appeared between 1957 and 1961, whereas we do not find this type of narration in earlier Polish novels or short stories – despite a general tendency towards the monologization of the novel in recent decades. The sudden rise of the dramatic monologue – its simply extraordinary vitality – is a striking phenomenon

worthy of discussion, especially when we see it appearing in works by multiple writers belonging to different generations and with completely different literary backgrounds. The first Polish monologue of this kind appeared in print in December 1957 – Iwaszkiewicz’s “The Ascent” (“Wzlot”), which he dedicated to Albert Camus. In fact, the title is a literary allusion, while the dedication is highly symbolic, since none other than Camus himself is the patron of this form of narration in Poland. Once again, the chronology supplies us with a few fundamental arguments. In 1956, Camus published his short novel *The Fall* (*La Chute*), which entirely takes the form of dramatic monologue. A year later, the book came out in Poland in Joanna Guze’s translation,⁸ while the literary press had published extensive fragments even earlier. Therefore, the novel was immediately familiar in Poland even to those writers who could not read the French original. The Polish publication of Camus’ book came at the culminating point of a process of catching up on a several-year time lag in acquaintance with French literature. Translations of Western literary works were the most important events in Polish literary life at the time. In this light, the impact of *The Fall* makes sense, while it makes even more sense when we consider the nature of Polish prose production immediately after 1956, when its fundamental element was a great settling of accounts with everything from the recent national past and from history in general – a settling of accounts with itself and with the contemporary forms of social life. The form of the dramatic monologue or narration had all the qualities to become the key literary expression of this account settling and to give it form.

Camus’s *La Chute* undeniably marked the very beginning of the dramatic monologue’s development in Poland. However, this does not mean that Camus actually invented the form. Indeed, this is by no means the case – and not only because there is no such thing as pure invention in literature. We can point to another classic work of world literature from which Camus drew the form of his story to some extent – namely, Dostoevsky’s *Notes from Underground* (1864), especially the first section, entitled “Underground.”⁹ In *The Fall*, we not only find

8 Camus, Albert, *Upadek*, trans. Joanna Guze (Warszawa: PIW, 1957). According to the publication information: “Printing completed in May 1957.”

9 Indeed, Camus’s novel was not the first attempt in French literature to assimilate the monologue shaped by Dostoevsky. In the 1920s, Georges Duhamel alluded to it in the first part of his *Vie et Aventures de Salavin* cycle, entitled *Confession de minuit*. Duhamel takes care to respect the adopted form with great consistency, though he still ties it much more closely than Dostoevsky or Camus to more traditional forms of first-person narration. The following works examine the relation of *The Fall* to Dostoevsky: Przybylski, Ryzard, “Camus i Dostojewski nad Upadkiem,” *Polityka* 23 (1957); Bloch-Michel, Jean, *Le présent de l’indicatif* (Paris: Gallimard, 1963), pp. 51-54; Strem, George C., “The Theme of Rebellion in the Works of Camus and Dostoevsky,” *Revue de Littérature Comparée* 2 (1966), pp. 246-257. Scholars have devoted an enormous amount of exegetical literature

the same structural foundations as in *Notes from the Underground*, but also a whole host of direct allusions to Dostoevsky's work, suggesting that we are dealing with a consciously developed association and not merely a random convergence or relation. At the same time, it is crucial that Camus is the patron of the dramatic monologue in Poland. *The Fall* forms the starting point for the development of this form of narration after 1956, even though it contains references to Dostoevsky's work that suggest the mediating influence of Camus. The similarities between *The Fall* and the Polish works are so immediately striking on first reading that there is no need to list them here. They are self-evident. Consequently, all that remains is to describe the form and the reasons for its extraordinary success.

3.

From the very first sentences of any work of this type, we find a particularly clear manifestation of the linguistic function that Roman Jakobson describes as the "phatic function," where the basic intention of the word is to establish contact.¹⁰ The phatic function is closely related to the "conative function" (orientation towards the addressee).

Here I will offer a few examples (I have cited the first sentences of various monologues): "May I, *monsieur*, offer my services without running the risk of intruding?"¹¹ "Ladies and Gentlemen, I didn't sleep a wink last night. I was imagining today's ceremony in every detail: the speeches, the flowers, the moment in which the order would be pinned to my chest and the accolades of the union representatives" (Brandys, "Sobie i Państwu," p. 63). "No, no, no, don't open your eyes. Just listen. Please lean back and make yourself comfortable, yes, that's it, on the pillow, not against the wall – it's been freshly white-washed. I spent four

to Dostoevsky's *Notes from Underground*, though above all these discussions concern the work's philosophical concerns. With respect to the literary questions raised by this brilliant story, we should mention N. M. Chirkov's reflections on the role of the confessional form in Dostoevsky's work (in Chirkov's *O stile Dostojevskogo* [Moscow: IzdatePstvo Akademii Nauk SSSR, 1963]). N. S. Trubetzkoy also analyzed this problem in *Dostojevskij als Künstler* (The Hague: Mouton 1964), pp. 114-122. More recently, B. de Schloezer devoted an essay to the same question in his article "Sur trois nouvelles de Dostoievski," *Nouvelle Revue Française* 157 (1966), pp. 97-108.

10 Jakobson, Roman, "Linguistics and Poetics," *Style in Language*, ed. Thomas A. Sebeok (Cambridge, Mass.: The Technology Press of the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, 1960).

11 Camus, Albert, *The Fall*, trans. Justin O'Brien (New York: Vintage, 1991), p. 3.

days white-washing the walls, and that's why I couldn't come to see Justyna. And why did you think I didn't come?" (Wiernik, *Nietutejszy*, p. 5).

All these "beginnings" share the attributes of the opening gambits of a conversation or – when the speaking subject addresses himself to a group (Brandys) – of a speech. The narrator not only establishes contact, but also reveals his identity from the first moment only to the extent that this contact allows. We might say not only that the character exists within this contact, but also that he or she is broadly defined by it. This is also the case when the phatic function is not clearly or directly realized – in other words, when the monologue begins after the initial phase of the conversation, while still serving *de facto* to establish contact between the narrator and his or her interlocutor, even taking narrative omissions into account.

"Why didn't I go to Warsaw? It's Sunday after all? I can't take it! I've had enough of these dames. I tell you, I can hardly beat them off with a stick, and – if you'll pardon my saying so – they're all old" (Iwaszkiewicz, "Wzlot," p. 11). "Alright then, I shall take advantage of your offer, sir, and express myself freely on the subject of motives before making my formal statement. Anyway, I don't mind if you use some of my words for the statement at your discretion. I shall try to express myself clearly" (Sztajnert, "Uśmiech," p. 56).

The shift from the foregrounded phatic function to the conative function becomes the first essential compositional factor in dramatic monologue. From the very moment of first contact, the two characters reveal themselves – the speaker and the listener. At the same time, we recognize the first manifestation of the basic tension that will develop throughout the whole work.

This tension determines the nature of the narration, since the speaker is a function of the listener, just as the listener is a function of the speaker. The speaker finds himself under the constant influence of the silent listener, while the listener only exists insofar as his presence is reflected in the words of the monologist. The listener is the second actor, whom the reader only encounters indirectly. He never speaks, nobody speaks about him, but the narrator speaks only to him. His existence constitutes a *sine qua non* of the monologue. The listener is a specific character and the speaker remains in direct contact with him. This constant contact precisely warrants the use of monologue as a basic form of narration, as well as all the linguistic means used within it. Therefore, it also justifies the assimilation of monologue to conversation. During his speech, the monologist takes into account the real and potential reactions of the listener, wishing to influence him, converse with him, attempt to persuade him. Though the listener is condemned to silence, he is always present and active in his own way. Without the listener, the narrator's words would remain suspended in a vacuum. Without a specific addressee, they

would lose their sense. At the same time, the whole monologue would lose its meaning, since its very reason for existence is to speak to somebody.

In his article on “L’usage des pronoms personnels dans le roman,” Michel Butor develops and justifies the claim that in epic prose the author constantly deals with three singular personal pronouns:

In novelistic narration, three persons necessarily come into play: two real characters – the narrating author, who appears in a normal conversation as “I,” and the reader, to whom the story is narrated, or “you” – as well as a fictional person, the character whose story is narrated, or “he.”¹²

In “normal” novelistic narration, the most noticeable pronouns are “I” and “he.” The basic line of tension runs between them. In dramatic monologue, things take a different shape, since the “he” essentially does not appear (with certain minor exceptions, which I shall discuss later), since the protagonist is frequently identical with the narrator. On the other hand, the role of the listener, or “you,” grows enormously in significance – in a manner incomparable with either third-person narration or any other varieties of monological narration (even in “skaz” or “gawęda,” the role of the listener is not as structurally significant). Accordingly, we might say that the constant play between the narrator “I” and the listener “you” defines the narration. The “I” dominates those moments in which the narrator conveys information about himself, while the “you” dominates episodes where the narrator seeks contact with the listener, reducing his story to a means for maintaining contact or introducing elements with no essential informative or expressive contents, serving only to further the conversation. For example: “Are you disturbing me? But of course not. No, no, not at all. Sit down. It’s a pleasure to speak with you. You’re no fool, sir. I could speak with the likes of you all evening, this lonely Sunday evening – just not with any dames” (“Wzlot,” p. 11). In order for this constant play between the first and second person to be possible, one element is necessary. Specifically, the communicative situation must be clear enough to warrant this continual shifting from one form to the other. It seems that in dramatic monologue this situation plays a greater role than any other narrative situations in other types of story, since it is clearly visible, manifesting itself from the very beginning in the first words of the monologue. The monological utterance and the situation in which it occurs are not merely the means of conveying a message. Instead, the fact of speaking is a component of the world being depicted. Therefore, all the authors of the monologues listed above endow the situation with a very specific character, placing it against the background of a clearly outlined

12 Butor, Michel, *Répertoire II* (Paris: Minuit, 1964), p. 61. This quotation is rendered into English here from Joanna Guze’s Polish translation of Butor’s essays, *Powieść jako poszukiwanie* (Warszawa 1970), p. 64.

setting in which the whole monologue plays out (almost without exception, the unity of place is maintained here) at a precisely defined time. For example, the various settings include: an evening in a pub on the outskirts of a city, the narrator's room during a conversation with a friend, a public square in a small town as the background for a conversation between a guide and a tourist, etc. The situation that gives the monologue its distinctiveness never itself initiates any chain of events. We might say that it only initiates things in the linguistic sphere, since it constitutes a pretext for evoking events that took place in the past. It is essentially a dialogical situation, creating the possibility for two partners to speak. Yet – as we know – only one party takes advantage of this privilege.

Consequently, the narration itself becomes an indirect phenomenon. It becomes a monologue permeated with the elements of dialogue, or even a monologue fulfilling the function of a dialogue, formed in such a way that it becomes a “one-way conversation (Józef Mayen's term¹³). Therefore, it also constitutes the result of a general process that Vinogradov calls “the dialogization of monologue.” The dialogical character of dramatic monologue reveals itself, above all, in the fact that it develops in accordance with the relations that form between the speaker and the second actor. It transforms itself depending on the mutual relations between the two partners of the one-way conversation (the reader learns about these relations not from any information on this subject, but indirectly from the very course of the narration). This development of the utterance is clearest in Iwazkiewicz's “Wzlot.” As the relationship between the narrator and the listener deepens, the monologue becomes more intimate, more direct in its expression and increasingly similar to the seemingly uncontrolled forms of colloquial speech. The significance of dialogical elements in dramatic monologue also reveals itself in the speaker's reaction to the non-verbalized utterances of the interlocutor. These reactions manifest themselves either in a peculiar quotation of questions posed or potentially posed by the conversation partner or in the construction of a suitable episode as a reply. The reader encounters the words of the partner only indirectly through the narrator's utterances, thus finding himself or herself in the same situation as scholars of those philosophers who have not left a single text behind them and whose ideas have only survived through the mediation of other authors engaging in polemic with them. Both of these forms of reaction reveal, with particular clarity, the connection between monological narration and dialogue – this time within the specific episodes of a work:

13 Mayen, Józef, “Monolog i dialog radiowy (odcinek 9),” *Dialog 10* (1958), pp. 128-130. Mayen's extensive book on the subject has had great significance for the general theory of the monologue. See also the new edition: Mayen, Józef, *O stylistyce utworów mówionych* (Wrocław: Zakład Narodowy im. Ossolińskich, 1972).

You don't drink, sir? Come now – go on – let's have a drink. I'm already off my head? Oh no, this is all nothing to me. I never lose my head. Everything just becomes transparent like a well-washed window pane, and then I can see everything as plain as a pikestaff (Iwaszkiewicz, "Wzlot," p. 12).

How do I know that? Perhaps because a person can feel such deep sentiment for a country where he has experienced certain feelings that he even gets himself acquainted with its crazy literature (Iwaszkiewicz, "Opowiadanie szwajcarskie").

In certain cases – where there is no quotation (appearing most frequently in the form of a question) or reply – the presence of the interlocutor manifests itself in the fact that the course of the narration only makes sense insofar as we interpret it as the consequence of the partner's words, which do not betray their presence in any other way: "Let's get a small bottle. Vodka in your company will have a completely different flavor. Well, that's great. I'm very glad. When I met you, you were a fine fellow. I declare that your travels, the "grand world" and the capital haven't changed you a bit" (Eberhardt, "Granica," pp. 72-73).

A monologue so strongly emphasizing the role of the listener and so strongly orienting towards the "you" raises the vital question of this figure's mode of existence. Clearly, we might easily define it as an element of the world depicted by the work. But is this all? In fact, it would seem that the constant appeals to the listener are not only limited to the relation between the narrator and the listener. They also engage the reader in a peculiar way, since he or she must place himself or herself on the very line between "I" and "you" that bears such fundamental significance for the dramatic monologue. The problem of the reader's presence in the work of literature – not as an external phenomenon, but as one of the work's constitutive structural elements – has recently become one of the key questions of literary theory. In his important treatise on literature, Sartre writes: "To write is to make an appeal to the reader that he lead into objective existence the revelation which I have undertaken by means of language." Elsewhere in the treatise, he is more precise: "Thus, all works of the mind contain within themselves the image of the reader for whom they are intended."¹⁴

It seems that different poetics introduce this reader in different ways and that the degree of intimacy arising between the work and its intended recipient results from the use of selected structural elements of a certain language. Above all, dramatic monologue is an extraordinarily interesting phenomenon because it draws the reader into its orbit. It does so by means of a method that we might describe as invocation. The ever present "you" is something other than merely a second partner in the dialogue, if only because – despite its extraordinarily important role – it is essentially indefinite. Therefore, it evokes a constant process

14 Sartre, Jean-Paul, *What is Literature? and Other Essays* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1988), pp. 54 and 73.

of definition in contact with the reader. The reader (treated here not as a specific person, but as a character defined or delineated by the text of the work) performs a kind of substitution. In other words, he or she enters into direct contact with the narrator, becoming the “you” whom the narrator addresses.¹⁵

Accordingly, it would not be far from the truth to assert that dramatic monologue represented a form of direct conversation with the reader. In the terminology of drama, we might say that works of this type consisted of the main text alone, while any marginal text was absent. This means they contain no sentences supplying information to where the monologue takes place, in what circumstances, with what accompanying phenomena, and so on. If such sentences are included, they appear in the central part of the monologue. Here they provide its situational motivation, even though they are still fragmentary in nature. For example, “It’s pouring, damn it. The autumn’s always like this around here. Sometimes it comes later, sometimes earlier. This year it came early, last year it was later, but it’s always the same when it comes – mud, shoddy lighting in the towns, a glare over Warsaw” (“Wzlot,” p. 11).

We can assume that all the elements accompanying the monologue – both in the external sense (time and place) and in the behavior of the narrator – express themselves directly in the monologue itself, not only in the meaning conveyed by its words, but also in its syntax, intonation, and even in strongly emphasized phonic gesticulation.¹⁶ We might even intensify this claim by assuming the direct presence of the reader through direct contact with the narrator – the same contact in which the fictional partner of the conversation exists. Therefore, any information beyond the basic monologue is unnecessary, just as it is unnecessary to the second actor in direct communion with the story teller.

15 On the problem of the reader of the novel, see the following studies, among others: Kayser, Wolfgang, “Narrator w powieści,” *Twórczość* 5 (1959), pp. 101-113; and, Thibaudet, Albert, “Le liseur de romans,” *Réflexions sur le roman* (Paris: Gallimard, 1938), pp. 239-257. Also see the numerous remarks on this subject in: Pouillon, Jean, *Temps et roman* (Paris: Gallimard, 1946). I have examined the problem of the reader more broadly in my study “Wirtualny odbiorca w strukturze utworu poetyckiego,” published in the collective volume, *Studia z teorii i historii poezji: Seria I* (Wrocław: Zakład Narodowy im. Ossolińskich, 1967), pp. 7-32.

16 Ultimately, phonic gesticulation plays a lesser role in dramatic monologue than in “skaz” as a result of its more intellectualized character (on gesticulation in “skaz,” see: Eichenbaum, Boris, “The Structure of Gogol’s ‘The Overcoat,’” *Russian Review* 22.4 [Oct. 1963]: 377-399).

4.

We already know that the language of the monologue unifies in relation to both the character and the behavior of the listener. Accordingly, it is extremely significant whether the listener is an individual or a collective. Each of these cases demands a different stylistic model. Among the stories under analysis, only two of them include a collective addressee, which exerts a decisive influence on the narrator's words. In these cases, the storyteller turns to those forms of linguistic contact that usually develop when the intimacy of close communication is impossible; when a certain distance arises between the two poles of the linguistic relation. These stories (Brandys's "Sobie i Państwu" and Kołakowski's "Wielkie kazanie księdza Bernarda") follow the conventions of oral expression. The narrator does not read out his speech, but improvises it as he stands before his audience, so that it almost seems to develop under the audience's influence. Monologue addressed to a collective audience appeals to the socially established patterns of public speaking and existing oratory styles. Brandys's story involves a perceptible reference to the conventions of a jubilee speech, while Kołakowski's tale refers to a sermon.¹⁷ Monologues addressed to a collective audience differ from others in that they are at least partly parodical.

In such monologues, the most general feature of dramatic monologue manifests itself with great clarity – namely, the invocation of social styles. Here these styles form an easily recognizable pattern, since they exist in a consolidated form. This kind of invocation can also be conspicuous in monologues addressed to an individual listener, which sometimes evoke typical forms of colloquial communication – including drunken tales told at a bar table ("Wzlot") or a story related by a tourist guide (in Kabac's short story). Nevertheless, since these forms of colloquial linguistic contact do not exist in any recorded form, we cannot demonstrate their relation to the dramatic narration – despite the fact that this connection is very easily perceptible on an intuitive level.

Monologues addressed to both individual and collective addressees also share a crucial common feature. We might describe this feature as the uni-perspectival nature of the narration. This type of storytelling essentially does not allow phenomena to be depicted from any other perspective than the perspective of a clearly delineated and specific narrator. He or she is the measure of everything. Ultimately, the scope of the world evoked is limited by his or her mental horizon,

17 The question of the listener appears in a particularly interesting light in the prototype of the dramatic monologue as I have defined it – Dostoevsky's *Notes from Underground*. The audience here is essentially collective, since the narrator systematically addresses it as "gentlemen." Nevertheless, he shapes his speech as if he were speaking to an individual interlocutor.

while the type of language evoked is limited by his or her linguistic inclinations and habits. Although this is the basic tendency, in practice it may undergo certain transformations. This makes perfect sense when we consider that dramatic monologues almost invariably have high aspirations when it comes to world view. They are – as I have already suggested – works that settle accounts. The extent of the transformation depends on the character of the narrator. Specifically, it depends on whether he or she is capable of bearing the whole intellectual burden placed upon him or her by the author (this can become quite another matter in works of more dubious value) and whether the character is conscious enough to formulate the premises of his or her world view in a more or less rational form. In Camus's *The Fall*, the degree of transformation is minimal, since his narrator is a rebellious intellectual who is quite capable of laying out the reasons for his rebellion. Things unfold very differently in the majority of the Polish monologues, in which we find a tendency for expressing ideological material through the mouth of a protagonist who takes part in various conflicts over world view. The character is a participant in historical processes, yet – as a so-called “simple person” – he or she cannot express this material conceptually or verbalize his or her experiences. Therefore, the majority of dramatic monologues are characterized by a peculiar tendency: the language is supposed to attach itself directly to the narrator, becoming an expression of his or her mind and experiences, while also expressing material of which the narrator is unaware. This tendency is especially strong in Iwaszkiewicz's “Wzlot.” Indeed, he alone manages to resolve it in a rational manner. The narrator – who is essentially a person from the social margins – not only tells his own story, so as to define his human situation and thus to reveal the fate of a human individual in specific historical conditions (for the narrator himself, the story is a fundamental settling of accounts with the world, and indeed he knows that he is doing so by telling it), but also reflects on certain familiar questions from current philosophical discussions. Iwaszkiewicz translates the most diverse issues into the narrator's language. For instance, a certain problem expressed by the existentialists appears in the narrator's version as follows:

Once I've had myself a little bit to drink – because we haven't drunk much tonight – then all these things get tangled up together, and I don't know myself what I am or where I belong. Am I civilized or wild? Is there no difference between myself as I was then and my present self? In a word, I haven't the faintest idea. You probably have no idea either. You just pretend that you know and that you understand everything, when really nobody understands. Because if you kill a man – this is completely incomprehensible. (“Wzlot,” p. 21)

Throughout the story, Iwaszkiewicz ensures that the narrator never drops out of the role assigned to him, even when he expresses ideas that go beyond his ability to control. The problem of keeping the narrator in an assigned position is one of

the central problems for authors of dramatic monologues. They do not always find effective solutions. Sometimes, the narrator entirely falls out of his role and thus becomes an internally contradictory character, like the corporal serving in the Bieszczady mountains from Eberhardt's (rather inept) story, who speaks as if he had just completed a seminar on contemporary philosophy and refers to a collection of avant-garde poetry published in only five hundred copies. In the story, "Nietutejszy," Wiernik attempts to avoid the same problem by introducing quotations from other characters into the monologue of his female narrator. These citations then work to problematize her story. We find here an attempt to justify those elements that do not fit comfortably into the confessions of the particular narrator – a peasant woman from the lake country near Augustów. However, this justification remains superficial because it shatters the established form of the monologue. It also fails to eliminate the problem, since in certain episodes the narrator speaks the language of a Warsaw literary cafe, which – even in the form of a quotation – sounds rather strange. On a side note, Wiernik's book is extremely interesting for the insight it offers into how an author constructing a folk protagonist may be incapable of escaping the schemas of intelligentsia language. Sometimes a conflict between various social styles emerges within a single sentence. For example: "Aye, sir, things were very bad back then, when after twelve hours of washing other people's clothes, I came home *to commune with myself*" ("Nietutejszy," p. 253; emphasis added – M. G.).¹⁸

The necessity imposed by the chosen form to maintain a single narrative perspective leads to a potential contradiction within the monologue. This contradiction reveals itself even more clearly when the narrator's status gives us no reason to regard him or her as a *porte-parole* for the author. Yet this is not the only contradiction. There is also a second contradiction, though it is linked to the first. We might define it as the contradiction between colloquial speech and the intellectualized written word (which partly fits into the contradiction delineated above), or – if we examine the composition of the monologue as a whole – between "skaz" (or "gawęda") and rhetoric.

The references to erudite written language result from a certain problematization of the monologue – as do the tendencies to combine "skaz" and rhetoric. This combination seems to be a constitutive feature of dramatic monologue, especially in the works of the Polish authors. Pure rhetoric, however, dominates Camus's *The*

18 The inability to maintain consistently the style of suburban colloquial language without any flights of literary language – which is the everyday language of the authors – represents one of the characteristics of Polish prose. Even writers with a good feeling for contemporary colloquial speech – like Marek Nowakowski – can never remain entirely faithful to it, since they always introduce their own intelligentsia language into the narration. Therefore, it is no coincidence that Polish literature has had no writer like Isaak Babel.

Fall – which makes sense insofar as the protagonist is a Parisian lawyer and thus a born rhetorician. By “skaz”, I mean here a tendency to endow the monologue with the characteristics of a direct and colloquial story, expressing itself in reference to apparently unregulated and spontaneously recorded colloquial speech. By rhetoric, I mean the use of methods more typical of public speaking. It would seem that both these tendencies might be warranted by the situation in dramatic narration – a fundamentally dialogical situation that determines the monologue.

The elements of “skaz” manifest themselves in stories that are intentionally off-hand, where sentences trail off and the intonation serves to convey phonic gestures, as well as in colloquialisms that seem to be consciously reproduced in the course of the story:

Oh, my dear Kostek, the worst are the ones they let out. They know what they’re doing where my mama was. Once they lock someone up, he’s in there for good. There’s no point in sentencing someone just to let them out again when the time’s up. And rightly so, because otherwise he’ll be off somewhere before you know it, and you may as well search for the wind in a field, since nobody knows where he’s gone. Like my brother. He’s around here somewhere, but no one knows where. (“Wzlot,” p. 35)

In “skaz,” the characteristics of conversation manifest themselves very strongly, with its multiplicity of subjects and its free jumping from one subject to another, from sentences concerning the narrator’s current situation (at the moment of speech) to remarks about his past:

Why the long face, sir? It’s getting late? So what? Our darling Zielonkowa will see to us patiently until the sun comes up. One more bottle of the bootleg stuff, eh? You don’t like the bootleg? Well, maybe pure. Pure’s good, too. Maybe it’d be better if they took me to the Reich after all. I’ve really let myself go here. I’ve been drinking vodka, playing cards, conning people all over the place, selling goods – since everybody’s been chasing after them. Bread make people proud, as the saying goes. True, isn’t it, good sir? (“Wzlot,” p. 20)

The presence of “skaz” in dramatic narration has deep roots, since it represents one of the realizations (perhaps the most crucial) of the conversational element at its very foundation. Indeed, in certain cases, the whole monologue is a kind of tall tale told to a patient and silent listener. Such conversational stylization is marked by linguistic expressions that might serve rhetorical purposes in other contexts. This is precisely the function of repetitions, which are meant to suggest the incoherence of the narrator’s speech, its oral and improvised character, as well as its lack of organization or refinement – all characteristic features of colloquial utterances (for this reason, repetitions are used almost to the point of caricature in Wiernik’s novel).

The co-existence of “skaz” and rhetoric is the most important feature of dramatic monologue. In this respect, rhetoric is similar to “skaz,” since it can both

form an organizing element of particular passages in the story and also determine the composition of the whole monologue, since it always exists within the sphere of the monologue's possibilities. In the first function, it usually appears in those sections of the story that the speaker wishes to clearly emphasize, bringing out their particular importance for his or her own life. Accordingly, these rhetorical episodes fill the culminating role, highlighting the crucial ideological moments in the narrator's speech and constituting the most important components in his or her settling of accounts with the world. This rhetorical quality expresses itself partly in a certain reduction of the colloquial vocabulary (which is very clearly discernible against the broader background of colloquial narration). But, above all, rhetorical organization involves a syntax in which the dominant elements are repetitions – performing a different function than in the “skaz” sections – and especially parallelisms. The relevant passages generally exhibit a gradational composition:

And they collapsed, I tell you, sir, just like a man falls to the ground when he's been shot. After all, nobody needs to tell us, men of the twentieth century, how a man falls when he's been shot. Every one of us knows. Every one of us has seen it. Every one of us has mused to himself that he falls like an empty sack. As if something had suddenly leaked out of him. Maybe that's why the twentieth-century man is inclined to believe that the soul leaves the body when it's been shot like that – and that's why the body turns into a sack. (“Wzlot,” p. 14)

The rhetorical elements that refer to the whole composition of the monological narration are precisely the consequence of the fact that it represents an extensive and unbroken utterance, so that – despite the non-verbalized interventions of the other actor – it partly resembles a public speech. Therefore, the rhetorical tendencies assume the significance of key organizational components influencing the arrangement of the material. This is especially evident in the fact that all these works tend to exhibit a closed composition. This means that the situation between the speaker and the listener is constructed in such a way as to permit an utterance that would embrace a semantic whole with a distinct outline and a clear total meaning. A certain order is imposed on the freedom and chaos of conversation. As an element of an unrealized conversation, the monologue develops according to different rules from those that ordinarily would organize a conversation. After all, in a certain sense – despite any appeals to the interlocutor or direct contact with him or her – the narrator's utterance is always a speech (even when delivered in a bar). In some works, the authors conceal this fact, while in others they underline it. Among the latter group, the most characteristic case is Sztajmert's story, which simply develops in accordance with the rules of rhetoric, since the author constructs it on the principle of parallelism. In this work, we can observe the phenomenon of symmetry – so important to rhetoric – to an extent unknown in the other stories.

We might say that the elements of rhetoric had risen to the role of a fundamental component in dramatic monologue. The writers make no attempt to justify their presence: for instance, through the specific construction of a protagonist who might be predisposed to use rhetorical mechanisms for various reasons. Camus supplied this kind of justification in *The Fall*. For his Polish followers, the presence of rhetoric is a self-evident phenomenon, which therefore requires no justification.

5.

In works where the authors emphasize the orality of the utterance, the narration does not appear to the reader as a fully formed or ready account, but rather comes into being in the presence of the listener. This has certain consequences for their temporal construction. The time of the narration occupies the central position. In the conventions of narrative time, we might call this present time. It is distinguished by a measurability that would be rare in other cases. Indeed, we can almost measure the duration on the clock. The starting point is the beginning of the narrator's conversation with the silent interlocutor, while the end point is the conclusion of the conversation. Therefore, the time of the narration is equal to the speaking time.

The dominant position of present time also influences the time in which the recounted events unfold. This time submits to a particular disintegration and does not arrange itself into a continuous flow, since the narrator essentially evokes only episodes that are significant for one reason or another, though in some cases they might be unrelated. The narrator leaves the reader the difficult task of reconstructing the narrated time, or the time of the story. Only the reader can give it form or establish the relations between its particular elements and the general character of its flow. The central phenomenon with respect to temporal construction presents itself as follows: the precise contours of the speaking time appear alongside the indeterminacy of the time relevant to the phenomena about which the narrator speaks – or, more precisely, of the portions of those phenomena that concern the narrator's own past, since during the monologue he or she also speaks about phenomena that complement or supplement the conversation with the interlocutor. Eberhard Lämmert has observed that the reasons for the abandonment of consecutiveness in the narrated time lie in the time of narration, emerging from the constantly transforming relation between the two times.¹⁹ This law manifests itself with great clarity in dramatic monologue.

19 Lämmert, Eberhard, *Bauformen des Erzählens*, (Stuttgart: Metzler, 1955), p. 32.

The elimination of consecutiveness sometimes reaches such a high degree that it entitles us to speak more about the disintegration of the past as a phenomenon with its own specific flow or existence. Here the past exists only with respect to the narrator's current situation, manifesting itself in the present tense – that is, in the course of his or her utterance. Therefore, we do not find here the phenomenon described by Lämmert as the “the present of action,”²⁰ since within the narrated time the narrator does not attempt to arrange things in a chronological order that would allow us to speak of a given chain of events as primary, so that all other events would be – still in the terms of narrated time – either past or future (hence we cannot use the traditional terms *Vorgeschichte* and *Nachgeschichte*). Narrated time takes on the role of “evoked time,”²¹ while it largely ceases to be structural time, since this role falls to the time in which the narrator tells his story – the speaking time.²²

This is the case because the past tense fulfills a subordinate function to the present tense, facilitating the explanation of why the narrator finds himself or herself in this – rather than any other – precise situation at the moment of narration. The relation between present and past time seems to be dialectical within monological narration. In referring to the past, the narrator assumes that it has determined his or her present position and that this position is in some way the consequence of what happened earlier. On the other hand, by evoking the elements of what has already happened, he or she also explains them by his present position. Therefore, the narrator always creates a certain interpretive system, irrespective of which pole of this dialectical relation it tends toward. This fact seems to represent one of the fundamental features of monological narration. It does not so much depict certain events or attitudes as interpret them.²³ The element evoked from the past may have no substance or not exist at all (especially since we do not always know which parts of the narrator's account are reconstructions of facts that really took place in his or her biography and which are the products of imagination; writers

20 Ibid., pp. 44-45.

21 This is Kazimierz Wyka's term, which differentiates between the evocative and constructive roles of time, while distinguishing within the latter the time of the narration, the time of the action, and the time of the setting (“*Czas jako element konstrukcyjny powieści*,” *Mysł Współczesna* 7 [1946], pp. 220-245).

22 It seems that the novelistic process of “making present” is a crucial phenomenon for contemporary prose with a much broader scope than the monologue under discussion here. This is associated with the ever stronger emphasis on the role of the narrator and the situation in which he or she narrates. Jean-Paul Sartre pointed to this phenomenon as early as his essays in the 1930s on Faulkner and Dos Passos.

23 This moment was very evocatively emphasized by one of the first Polish critics of *The Fall* – Stanisław Lem in his essay “Mówi głos w ciemności (po przeczytaniu ‘Upadku’),” *Nowa Kultura* 31 (1957).

influenced by Dostoevsky's *Notes from Underground* often include a moment of contradiction here), but it must have meaning, constituting a voice for or against something. The evoked past fills the function of a particular argument within the discussion conducted by the narrator in his or her monologue. Any individual episodes are largely exemplary in nature; they provide evidence. This exemplary character is the furthest reaching consequence of the fact that dramatic monologue does not "depict," but rather "names," thus constituting the most transparent expression of a dominant system we might describe as the internal interpretive order of the work.

This interpretive order allows us to define the nature of dramatic monologues – specifically, to define them as quasi-autobiographies. "Quasi" not only because the subject is a fictional character, but also because the readers must reconstruct the course of the character's life from dispersed and apparently uncoordinated elements, giving them a finished form in the process of reading and shaping them into a system. In almost every work (with very few exceptions), however, there is a moment we may define as the beginning of the autobiography. This moment usually occurs once the narrator has made contact with the listener. After establishing this contact, he or she proceeds to introduce himself/herself. The pretext for commencing the autobiography is usually a statement concerning the speaker's current position:

Do you imagine that dames disgust me for no reason? I can't do without them, and most of all I can't bear when one of them undresses in the light. I just can't take a dame's naked body. You see, sir, this is what happened. I was still a little boy at the very beginning of the war – in '42 or '43. I was ten years old. I was born in '32 – well, so it must have been '42. What does a little boy know at that age? Nothing. But all sorts of things go through his little noggin – some sights, some girls. Something occurs to him. It was war time and my mother had been deported at once in thirty-nine. You see, sir, I'm the child of divorced parents. My mother followed her second husband to Lwów. I had an elder brother, and there was some kind of cock-up with him and my mother, so they deported them from Lwów for the devil to have his way with them somewhere, the devil knows where, and I didn't see my mother for the whole war – and after the war I didn't see her for a long time either. And my father wandered off somewhere else with that other woman. ("Wzlot," p. 13).

As Georges Gusdorf²⁴ has shown, autobiography is a form of expression in which a person depicts and analyzes the past in relation to his or her present situation. It

24 Gusdorf, Georges, "Conditions et limites de l'autobiographie," published in the collective volume, *Formen der Selbstdarstellung, Analekten zu einer Geschichte des litterarischen Selbstportraits. Festgabe für Fritz Neubert* (Berlin: Duncker und Humblot, 1956), pp. 105-123. On the relation of the novel to the autobiography, see: Fernandez, Ramon, "L'Autobiographie et roman, l'exemple de Stendhal," *Messages, première série* (Paris: Gallimard, 1926), pp. 78-109; and, Pouillon, pp. 52-68. Pouillon distinguishes between

is more than merely a story, but rather constitutes an assessment or interpretation of a person's whole life. According to Gusdorf:

A person who hopes to discover himself by evoking his own life does not devote himself to passive contemplation of his private existence. The truth is not a hidden treasure [. . .] it is not enough simply to uncover or reproduce it as it is. The confession of the past realizes itself as a creative work of the present moment.²⁵

Therefore, the autobiography always concerns the writer's current attitude. The same is true for the narrator recounting his story in the dramatic monologue. Such narrators present themselves in the process of constructing an image of their lives – an image by no means derived from the conviction that the past hangs over a person's present in any fatalistic way. For this reason, autobiography takes a dramatic form. According to Gusdorf, "it is never a finished image, a final definition of the person's life [. . .]. By engaging in a dialogue with himself, the writer is not attempting to utter any final word that would close his life."²⁶

This understanding of autobiography is extremely characteristic of dramatic monologues. The meaning of this kind of story emerges directly from its close adherence to the narrative "I." Among the works under discussion here, only two are far removed from any autobiographical structure – Kołakowski's "Wielkie kazanie księdza Bernarda," which is a specific case since it constitutes a kind of philosophical tale, and Iwaszkiewicz's "Opowiadanie szwajcarskie," in which the narrator recounts the history of his friend, a young Pole who ends up in Switzerland through a strange twist of fate, while the narrator himself remains in the background. However, it is precisely this work by Iwaszkiewicz – as if through its negation – that reveals the meaning of autobiographical structure in the dramatic monologue. By relating another person's story instead of his own, the narrator introduces into the monologue certain elements that do not exist in the other stories. Above all, he reduces the role of the listener, who is necessary largely for the purposes of providing a clear initial situation, but who otherwise interferes very little in the account of the young Pole's story. The tale itself is far better organized (including chronologically) than the stories related in the other monologues. Despite certain narrative peculiarities of its own (which are often masked), the monologue in "Opowiadanie szwajcarskie" resembles the more traditional short story in many respects. Therefore, it constitutes a phenomenon somewhere between the dramatic monologue and other forms of story.

two different forms of autobiography. In the first, the author wishes to present himself as he once was – to recreate himself. In the second, he wants to view himself in a fresh way (p. 61).

25 Gusdorf, p. 119.

26 Ibid., p. 122.

6.

Here arises the problem of the relation between the dramatic monologue and other forms of monological narration – specifically, the internal monologue and the monologue referring to forms of first-person written expression. In this regard, I shall concentrate on the works occupying positions 10 to 13 of the list provided above.

The story in which dramatic monologue most clearly overlaps with internal monologue is Kazimierz Brandys's "How To Be Loved" ("Jak być kochaną"). The overlap expresses itself in the very temporal structure of the work. The time of the female protagonist's monologue is precisely defined, paralleling an airplane flight time from Warsaw to Paris from the moment of take-off to the moment of landing preparations. This precise measurability of time – which can be measured objectively and which exerts a strong influence on the composition of the story – resembles the time of the dramatic rather than internal monologue, especially since subjective time tends to dominate the latter. In Brandys's story, subjective time does not exist, since the narrator is immersed in an objective time that she does not oppose with her own intimate sense of time. In the article cited above, Michel Butor points out that contemporary prose tends to reduce the distance between the time of the narration and the narrated time, while adding that this is never entirely possible, since, for instance, there is no way to eat and write simultaneously. Therefore, contemporary prose has had to invent such conventions as the internal monologue. This tendency makes itself very clear in Brandys's story. We even find the emergence of a kind of instantaneous narration. As I have already suggested, however, the narrator does not shift the present into the realm of subjective time. Even during the monologue, intersubjectively measurable time forms an important element:

What time is it? In a quarter of an hour I'll be back on the ground. They'll listen to my voice from the tape recorded a week ago. Felicja has already picked up her passport – the tortures of travel nerves. Tomasz is soothing his wife – so touching. ("Jak być kochaną," p. 162)

The female narrator presents herself in similar fashion to various other speakers in dramatic monologues. She does not so much reveal the progression of her thought as interpreting her life and the current situation in which her monologue is taking place. To some extent, we find a form of a stream of consciousness in the story, though it is highly regulated. The narrator's monologue only follows the illogical and undisciplined flow of thoughts and feelings to a very limited degree. Instead, an external order takes control on the basis of the objective situation in which the narrator finds herself. Therefore, the narrative develops in the same way as dramatic monologue, especially when the narrator directly refers to her current

situation. Consequently, we can observe a process that we might describe as the intellectualization of internal monologue.

This process has certain consequences in the realm of language itself, since the impetus is not oriented towards the reproduction of an illogical flow of associations, but rather towards sketching out a certain position. In her monologue, the narrator aspires to self-definition. Essentially, she holds a dialogue with herself, which justifies the formation of her utterances in accordance with conversational patterns. Yet this is not the only justification. The narrator also introduces other people into her internal monologue, fellow travelers who happen to be in the same situation (this is a highly characteristic phenomenon, as it reflects the duality of the narration). The narrator formulates her arguments as if in opposition to them:

So how would you behave then, sir? Another bump! They're throwing us around more and more. Some kind of turbulence. The wing has gone dark and lost its light. No sign of the ground – a fog? It's stuffy in here, silent, a solemn mood. Nobody's talking now. (“Jak być kochana,” p. 194).

These remarks allow us to conclude that the internal monologue develops in accordance with the rules of dramatic monologue. This phenomenon does not apply to Brandys's work alone, but also – to some extent – to Stanuch's novel, though its narrative style is different.

The influence of dramatic monologue on written monologue expresses itself above all in the temporal structure – specifically, in a tendency to reduce the distance between the time being narrated and the time of the narration. Here the convention of verbally enunciating the story rather than writing it down is supposed to suggest both simultaneity and the fundamental significance of the time of the narration – and thus of the narrator's current situation. In this case, the role of the listener – the second actor – appears much more clearly than in Brandys's work. The writer has this listener constantly in mind, even though he or she is not a specific person. The narrator addresses the listener, anticipating his or her reservations or doubts:

We play every day – from ten in the evening till three in the morning. In the late afternoon hours we're replaced by three fellows who are almost unlistenable – but the audience isn't too fussy. At that hour? We all know who comes along after midday – young folk and a few hungry people. What do they care?! Then there's a break, almost a full hour, and then that blind old chap plays – what's his name again? Karol, that's right, Karol. Mostly Viennese waltzes, but sometimes he makes an exception for a tango (Wojdowski, “Opowieść Srebrnej Trąbki”).

Inevitably the question arises as to what drove me to become an informer. I would like to point out that it was not sympathy for the new regime. I couldn't stand the NSDAP from the very beginning. Yet something broke inside me when I surrendered to Stok's

proposals. I'll try to explain it – though not every “thing” can be conveyed (Umiński, *Sprawozdanie konfidenta*, p. 7).

It would appear that when it comes to the whole structure, dramatic monologue and written monologue fit together much more closely than dramatic monologue and internal monologue. In the case of the latter pair, the tendencies of the two types of narrative are ultimately contradictory. This contradiction manifests itself from the level of the word, which is socially accessible in dramatic monologue as an instrument of contact, while in the other monologue it is “internal” in nature and its fundamental dimension is psychological. The contradiction does not appear where the elements of dramatic monologue overlap with written monologue, since the word is socially accessible in both. Partly for this reason, the basic tendency of the speaker of a dramatic monologue to define his or her own attitude in the moment of speech can express itself in written monologue without much difficulty. Both these forms of narrative may easily undergo intellectualization. Therefore, they may serve as an expression of self-definition understood in philosophical or moral categories.²⁷

7.

The popularity of *The Fall* in Poland has been extraordinary. Indeed, it would be difficult to name another contemporary book that has had the same significant impact, inspired such a large number of other works or formed the starting point in the development of a new convention. We should repeat that this short novel has provided the fundamental inspiration – not Dostoevsky's classic work, to which Camus owes so much, or Duhamel's well known *Vie et Aventures de Salavin* (whose Polish translation appeared in 1959). Nor is there any way to link the dramatic monologue in Poland with various other similar forms of monologue well known from European literature. Links with the sentimental monodramas of the eighteenth century or with the poetic monologues of Robert Browning do not enter into consideration. Neither do links with the stage monologue – which attained a certain status in Polish popular culture in the second half of the nineteenth century (these monologues were often published in separate books, as in the case of Klemens Junosza) – or the poetic monodramas characteristic of

27 The tendency for monologization in contemporary Polish literature is not limited only to narrative prose. It also includes both theatrical and radio drama. Examples of the former include the first part of the *Imiona władzy* triptych and *Dwie przygody Lemuela Culliwera* by Jerzy Broszkiewicz, as well as Miron Białoszewski's *Wiwisekcja*. The latter includes numerous radio dramas by Bronisław Wiernik.

early work by the Skamanderites. Therefore, we should repeat once again: in the beginning was *The Fall*.

The Fall became the model, its specific features elevated to the level of dominant norms. The peculiar characteristics of Jean Baptiste Clamance's speech came to represent the elements of a genre, the components of a literary convention. The various differences do not change in any way the fact that even they have emerged in a pattern imposed by Camus's novel. There are many differences. In the Polish stories, the element of colloquial language plays a much greater role, alluding to such traditions as "skaz" and "gawęda." These traditions remain unknown to French literature, which has never produced its own Gogol or its own Henryk Rzewuski (despite certain allusions to colloquial conversation, *The Fall* is much more rhetorical). One difference is fundamentally important. As he analyzes his own situation, the former lawyer Clamance is a morally ambiguous character.²⁸ As he tells his story, he by no means purifies or sanctifies himself. On the contrary, conscious of the absurdity of his position, he is inclined to accuse himself and to seek out his own guilt. In this respect, things unfold very differently in the Polish works, in which the monologue is a way for the protagonists to convey their complaints against the world or their grudges against history and other people. The speakers never accuse themselves, even when they are people on the margins, since they see themselves as victims of devious machinations or fatal coincidences. Self-sacralization takes the places of masochistic self-accusation. Sublimation takes the place of deprecation. The great confession ceases to be an admission of sins, but rather metamorphosizes into a catalogue of complaints. If the protagonists of the Polish dramatic monologues indulge in chest beating, then they usually beat the chests of others. Accordingly, they are not ambiguous characters, since the basic aim of their confessions is self-justification.

The proof of these transformations lies in the appearance of the same form in other kinds of works, which are at least partly associated with a different set of literary problems than those revealed to Polish writers in *The Fall*. After all, the dramatic monologue also appears within the philosophical tale (Kołakowski) and the novel of manners, which alludes to the older traditions of its literary genre (Wiernik). It has even appeared as parody, since Brandys's story "Sobie i Państwu" is ultimately a parody (though it may not so much be parodying the form of the monologue as the social style at its foundation).

28 The English Camus scholar John Cruickshank has accurately defined him with the phrase "judge-penitent" (Cruickshank, John, *Albert Camus and the Literature of Revolt* [London: Oxford University Press, 1959], p. 104). He also provides a conceptual explanation of the character's name. Jean Baptiste Clamance = Jan the Baptist vox clamantis in deserto (p. 187).

One more highly significant question remains. What is the place of dramatic monologue among the newer forms of storytelling – in the world of the various transformations in narrative art that have taken place over the last few decades? As the object – so to speak – of universal literary use, the monologue is clearly a new phenomenon, despite the fact that its prototype emerged over a century ago. This does not mean, however, that it is a novelty in the superficial sense. This kind of narration does not essentially abandon the basic features of novelistic storytelling. Indeed, Cruickshank considers *The Fall* to be a much more traditional work than Camus's earlier novels, resembling the vigorous French literary form of the *roman personnel* as well as the works of the French moralists of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries (the numerous aphorisms suggest connections with La Rochefoucauld).²⁹ Bloch-Michel expresses a similar opinion.³⁰ He is especially concerned with questions of the soliloquy, questions of spoken literature, whose aim is to imitate living speech in all its chaos and lack of order. Soliloquies in this sense – as they appear in contemporary French literature – do not enter into any pact with rhetoric. On the contrary, they represent its programmatic negation. Instead of closed composition – which forms the condition of all rhetorical speech – they propose an open composition that begins and ends at apparently random moments. Even more significantly, they abandon any rhetorical imposition of established meanings once for all. Therefore, they abandon the fundamental privilege of all earlier prose. These works are above all speech acts rather than coherent interpretations of the world. They are the expression of the protagonist's uncertain situation and wavering mind, but they do not prove anything or represent a voice within a discussion. The world of soliloquies sinks into deliberate chaos, while the world of dramatic monologues – though it has been created by a narrator who seems to have no control over his or her situation – ultimately submits to a kind of order and thus to rationalization. Though it might start and end in mid-sentence, the dramatic monologue is always a closed intellectual proposition, since it always provides an interpretation of its subject. In this sense, the confession at its foundation is never disinterested, but rather permits experience to be ordered

29 Cruickshank, pp. 181-182.

30 Also see his essay "*Le Soliloque*," from the volume *Le présent de l'indicatif*. Bloch-Michel writes: "Though *Notes from Underground* and *The Fall* closely resemble the novel of the spoken word, they still remain [. . .] within the boundaries of the traditional novel. In essence, the speaker and the silent interlocutor are there only in order to support a strictly classical structure – that is, an ordered discourse based on logical thought, expressing this thought, preserving a continuous aesthetic and intellectual line, using the dramatic plot in its traditional form and driving it forward. Therefore, these two novels assimilate the essential conventions of the novelistic art as they have survived until our own time and which the new novel is attempting to demolish" (*Le présent de l'indicatif* [Paris: Gallimard, 1963], pp. 110-111).

and interpreted. This precisely has been the main reason for the development of the dramatic monologue after 1956, while also determining the extraordinarily active role of its primary model – Camus’s *La Chute*.

Addendum (1966)

I wrote this article in 1961. Five years later, when I looked at the materials contained in it, I saw that the dramatic monologue was precisely at the apogee of its development at the time. Not only with respect to quantity, but above all because it almost always appeared with a clear function. Specifically, it expressed an intimate settling of accounts with the world, with history and with the main character’s own self, and thus it somehow became a specialized form of speech that was linked with a certain set of meanings resulting from this specialization. The situation changed radically in the years that followed. The dramatic monologue has by no means disappeared, but it has essentially ceased to be a confession. It has also become less dynamic. The greatest number of new texts appeared around 1963. Even if they came out slightly later in book form, they were written or published in periodicals around this time. The most significant of these works included the following: Leszek Kołakowski’s further monologues, collected in the volume *Rozmowy z diablem* (Warszawa: PIW, 1965); five stories by Artur Międzyrzecki from the volume *Śmierć Robinsona* (Warszawa: Czytelnik, 1963); Antoni Słonimski’s “Spowiedź emigranta” and “Jak to było naprawdę” from the volume *Jawa i mrzonka* (Warszawa: PIW, 1966); and Tadeusz Różewicz’s *Śmieszny staruszek*, which is admittedly labeled as a “comedy in two scenes,” but which is also – as I shall attempt to demonstrate – a dramatic monologue (republished in *Utwory dramatyczne* [Kraków: Wydawnictwo Literackie, 1966]).

To repeat: after 1961, the dramatic monologue ceased to be the confession of a disappointed person who wished to order his or her own experiences. It also ceased to be the autobiography of this person. Kołakowski expands on the ideas already included in his “Wielkie kazanie księdza Bernarda.” His monologues are philosophical tales, even when the other person in the drama – as in the stylized prayer of Heloise’s monologue – is God. In Międzyrzecki’s story “Zegarmistrz Piko” the most important element is polemic. The same is true of Słonimski’s especially witty “Spowiedź emigranta” (his other monologue is a satirical work of the highest class). This story is only a “confession” in a very metaphorical sense, representing more of a free conversation on various subjects. The element of plot plays a minimal role within it, since it does not apply to the entire work, but only to a short section of it (the history of an expedition of Polish engineers to South America). In works taking the form of rationalized discussions, any clear plotlines

are essentially banished. Sometimes they appear only as a set of anecdotes cited by the narrator. Międzyrzecki's monologue "Szanowny Autorze" ("Dear Author") is composed of precisely such a cycle of provincial tales. The story also exhibits another important element. The titular "Dear Author" is merely a passive listener of a speech made by a representative of a small town community. In a certain sense, Słonimski proceeds in similar fashion when he lends his own surname to the listener in his story "Jak to było naprawdę" ("Mr. Słonimski, I'll tell you how it really happened. What can coincidence do? I was standing outside the second-hand shop on Mokotowska Street, so I was there from the beginning almost to the very end. Mr. Słonimski, I tell you, don't believe what they wrote in the newspapers" [p. 43]).

Finally, we have Różewicz's "comedy in two scenes," which is a theatrical work – at least according to the author's intention. *Śmieszny staruszek* (*Funny Old Man*) differs from the other dramatic monologues in just one way – namely, the list of characters and stage directions at its beginning. However, these stage directions seem to be intended only for the use of theatrical performers. They are unnecessary for readers, who may discover everything from the monologue of the Old Man standing before the judge. Of course, I do not wish to argue that Różewicz was wrong to treat his work as a monodrama. The key point is that *Funny Old Man* demonstrates – like other works of this kind – that there are essentially no fundamental differences between monodrama and dramatic monologue.³¹ Almost every monologue is potentially a theatrical work, since it is not only a confession or polemical discussion, but also a role.³² The silent listeners might be companions in an alcohol-soaked chat at a bar table, colleagues at an anniversary celebration, but also theater audience members gathered in an auditorium – especially in an era in which so-called "one-actor theater" has become a significant and interesting cultural phenomenon. Those who remember Isaak Babel's stories in Semyon's interpretation, Halina Mikołajska's production of the *Letters* of Mademoiselle Lespinasse, or Danuta Michałowska's evenings will doubtless find this convincing.³³

Above all, when the dramatic monologue first appeared, it had moralistic aspirations. Then it lost them. Nevertheless, *The Fall* – the primary initiator of the

31 One argument here might be the fact that Słonimski's monologues were originally published in *Dialogue*, and thus in a magazine that does not publish narrative works. Nevertheless, there is no doubt that in the book edition they are interpreted as stories and not as dramas.

32 Bloch-Michel has pointed this out with respect to *The Fall* (p. 55).

33 As proof that the dramatic monologue has broadened its scope while losing its former functions, we may point to the fact that children's authors have also been drawn to it. In 1964, a short story by Janusz Domagalik called "Men's Business" appeared, fulfilling all the conditions both of dramatic monologue and of a didactic story for ten-year-old boys.

whole movement – has sunk deep into contemporary consciousness. This is clear from Różewicz’s poem “Spadanie” (“Falling”), which forms a polemic with both this novel and its proposals:

La Chute The Fall
 is still possible
 only in literature
 in a fever dream
 you remember the story
 about a decent man
 who did not leap to the rescue
 about a man who went in for depravity
 who lied and was slapped in the face
 for his confession
 the late great perhaps the last
 contemporary French moralist
 received in 1957
 the prize
 how innocent falls can be

Therefore, what appeared to one moralist as a direct description of human existence appears to another moralist as mere literature – conventional and soft as a swan’s neck (to use a comparison from one of Różewicz’s early poems), rooted in old beliefs and old notions. In writing his polemical poem in 1963, Różewicz seemed to utter the final word on the fate of the dramatic monologue, which had arranged itself into a pattern of The Fall – “The Ascent” – “Falling.”

Postscript (1972)

But how has the fate of the dramatic monologue unfolded in recent years? As far as I can tell, not a single work of this type has appeared – or at least no outstanding work of this type. At the same time, the elements of dramatic monologue have sometimes appeared in works with different narrative structures – for example, in several short episodes in the final part of Andrzej Kuśniewicz’s *Strefy* (1971). This suggests that the dramatic monologue has lost its original dynamic, but that it has entered the repertoire of narrative forms and may manifest itself in diverse contexts.

2. A Portrait of Marcolf

1. Superiority in Inferiority

He was fat. He was rude. We know this much about him. We also know that he tried to outwit the wise King Solomon – and in this he achieved some notable successes. Here our knowledge of this rather strange and mysterious character usually falters. He appears in a medieval tale in which a folkish wisdom based on common sense triumphs over a dogmatic book of wisdom founded on a set of claims accepted and endorsed by social consciousness. Yet this narrative does not exist only in amusing and mischievous tales by anonymous plebeian authors. It also continues to interest and disturb the twentieth-century imagination, though no longer as an expression of non-conformism or authentic folk wisdom. Things have become significantly more complicated. For the moment, let us leave these concerns to one side. We shall deal with them in detail later in the course of these reflections. In the meantime, we shall focus our attention on the general outline of what we know about the strange figure of Marcolf “that right rude and great of body was.”³⁴ Let us first examine his physical form more closely:

This Marcolf was of short stature and thykke. The hede had he great, a brode forhede rede and fulle of wrinkelys or frouncys, his erys hery and to the myddys of chekys hangyng, great yes and rennyng, his nether lyppe hangyng lyke an horse, a berde harde and fowle lyke unto a goet, the handes short and blockysssh, his fynGRES great and thycke, rownde feet, and the nose thycke and croked, a face lyke an asse, and the here of hys heed lyke the heer of a goet.

And so on and so forth. All the elements of Marcolf’s physical form are depicted in the same deprecating manner.³⁵ Clearly, he was no legendary knight to inspire

34 All quotations come from the online edition of the Middle English text edited by Nancy Mason Bradbury and Scott Bradbury, originally published as *The Dialogue of Solomon and Marcolf: A Dual-Language Edition from Latin and Middle English Printed Editions* (Kalamazoo: Medieval Institute Publications, 2012). See: <http://www.lib.rochester.edu/camelot/teams/bndsmfr.htm>. As proof of the interest inspired by Marcolf’s story, we may point to a French reprint of “Dialogue de Salomon et de Marculfe” in the *Nouvelle Revue Française* (No 122, 1963). This is a translation into contemporary French of a version first published in Venice in 1550.

35 We find an astonishing description of a “boor” – alluding to the Marcolfian tradition and thus somewhat contradicted by this literary game – in Witold Gombrowicz’s *Diary*: “I saw him again! Him! That boor! I saw him while having a nice little breakfast in the café suspended over the gardens. O holy proletariat! He (a fruit vendor who came in a wagon)

the dreams of maidens ensconced in castles from medieval tales. The story depicts Marcolf's wife in similar fashion ("His wyf was of short stature, and she was out of mesure thycke wyth great brestys, and the here of hyr hede clusted lyke thystelys"). So what does this all mean? Does it merely suggest that in medieval plebeian culture any faith in the strict parallel between wisdom or spiritual value and physical beauty had ceased to operate? Or could it rather suggest a reversal of the order, a conscious and predetermined disharmony, or even the perverse idea of an ugliness permeated with wisdom – since clothes maketh not the man (and here the "clothes" are the body)? According to Stanisław Grzeszczuk:

Ugliness is an inseparable quality of the plebeian clown, the boor and the peasant. Authors of clownish literature have often provocatively emphasized this characteristic. Though Marcolf was "right rude and great of body," he was also "right subtyll." Consequently, ugliness – like birth in a state of slavery (peasantry) or poverty – is a mere appearance concealing entirely different contents and much deeper values.

Grzeszczuk goes on to discuss

the antinomy of appearance and truth, which fits Marcolt's – and especially Aesop's – situation extremely well.³⁶

Is this really the case? Surely physical ugliness – so strongly foregrounded here with almost masochistic satisfaction – cannot merely be a question of appearances. We might guess at a much deeper significance. Anonymous plebeian authors seem to view their plebeian characters through the eyes of participants in a cultural formation to which they themselves do not belong. Consequently, the characters themselves do the same thing in their own self-characterizations and self-assessments. Therefore, we are dealing here with a classic example of a situation

was mostly dumpy and butt-heavy – but he was also stubby-fingered and chubby-cheeked and a stocky, ruddy, greedy gut straight from a good snooze in his bedclothes with a hot chick and right from the outhouse. I say 'right from the outhouse' because his butt was stronger than his mug; he was all butt. The whole was characterized by an incredible striving for boorishness, his liking and relishing of it, stubborn persistence in it, diligent and active transformation of the whole world into boorishness. Plus, the guy was in love with himself. [. . .] . . . but to find myself eye to eye with, not a boy but a peasant – and to have to bear him in his double ugliness of an aging boor. [. . .] This adult boor torments and exhausts me. . . . I cannot get away from him! That walking abomination!" (Gombrowicz, Witold, *Diary: Volume Two*, trans. Lillian Vallee [Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1989], pp. 75-76). Clearly the author views this Marcolfian physicality from outside, though he does not spare himself either. Ultimately, this is a self-ironizing passage.

36 Grzeszczuk, Stanisław, *Blazeńskie zwierciadło: Rzecz o humorystyce sowizdrzalskiej XVI i XVII wieku* (Kraków: Wydawnictwo Literackie, 1970), pp. 213-214. In connection with Aesop's fables, Maria Ossowska writes of the "persistent link of low birth with ugliness" (Ossowska, Maria, *Ethos rycerski i jego odmiany* [Warszawa: ZGTUR 1973], p. 56).

in which a person views himself through the eyes of the other or in categories imposed by the other. Marcolf is able to represent himself (even to himself) only once he has begun to see himself as he appears to his partner in the dialogue – Solomon, who clearly belongs to a different cultural and social formation with different notions of the beautiful. In other words, Marcolf consents to a way of seeing himself through the other, endorsing this vision and adopting the role imposed upon him. This kind of approval does not necessarily – and ultimately does not – suggest any form of reevaluation or the imposition of a new network of meanings and values. The caricatured figure is in no way ennobled. If this were the case, Marcolf would have to proclaim a new canon of beauty. He would have to elevate himself, attempting to fit the prevailing notions of the court in which he has somehow found himself by a strange turn of events. Yet he does not exhibit any such tendencies. Instead, we find a somewhat different mechanism at play.

Above all, this mechanism reveals that Marcolf's non-conformism has clearly defined boundaries, even as he takes the liberty of arguing with the ruler. For now it will suffice to say that this non-conformism does not apply to the foundations defining the image of the world. By accepting his appearance – which we know derives from the gaze of the other – our hero endorses the value system of his dignified adversary in the dialogue. At best, he seeks his own place within this system. In principle, this does not necessarily coincide with the place Solomon might be inclined to grant him, though – as we shall see – things are somewhat more complicated, since the system grants clowns a separate position. Imprisoned in this position and anchored in the dominant system of values, he still wishes to demonstrate his superiority over the figure who stands at the center of the system and guarantees its stability – the ruler. He wishes to prove his superiority, while not throwing off his inferiority. Therefore, we might define the Marcolfian dialectic as superiority in inferiority. The plebeian with the misshapen physical form turns out to be wiser than the powerful and educated king who has devoured so many splendid tomes, though this intellectual advantage – as we shall discover – is rather peculiar in nature. As he achieves this dazzling success, he not only fails to throw off or overcome his inferiority, but rather he confirms it, almost programmatically demonstrating its virtues without transforming it into superiority. By proceeding in this manner, Marcolf is no rebel. If he had become one, he would not have rooted himself in his inferiority, but instead declared “I am – like everybody else in my situation – different.” The dialectic of inferiority and superiority constitutes one of Witold Gombrowicz's key literary discoveries. He was the first to demonstrate its crucial significance with extraordinary profundity and suggestiveness in both discursive and strictly literary texts. As is generally the case when somebody formulates a new and interesting problem, we may very easily broaden its scope. In this way, fresh categories can serve to problematize phenomena sharing no direct connection with

the objects to which these categories refer. We may also project them into the past in order to reveal new or previously undetected aspects. The Gombrowiczian idea of inferiority and superiority fused into a mutually complementary whole serves as a perfect tool for revealing certain features of the strange figure of Marcolf – and perhaps also of other bygone characters from plebeian literature.

2. The Great Debate

The main part of the story about Marcolf's encounter with King Solomon – as the title suggests – involves a debate between them. Not until later in the tale do we find accounts of how the wise and ugly clown acted towards the ruler, including various indignities to which he exposes the king by playing a series of practical jokes and generally making fun at him. At the same time, this debate is peculiar, since we cannot equate it with any genuine discussion in the usual understanding of the term. This is not a battle of arguments. Neither is it a display of eristic skill as classical rhetoric has defined it. Mikhail Bakhtin makes the following observation about the Marcolfian stories:

One of the main attributes of the medieval clown was precisely the transfer of every high ceremonial gesture or ritual to the material sphere.³⁷

This applies to Marcolf's tale, since in most cases the relation between the respective utterances of Solomon and Marcolf is precisely one that we might characterize as a form of translation. Almost without exception, Solomon takes the initiative, opening the dialogue as the first speaker. Marcolf himself is denied the right to speak when his utterances are not rejoinders to the king's words. He is defined by them. Ultimately, he has no right to choose. Examples of this type of "translation" appear in enormous numbers throughout the text:

S: "It is no frende that dureyth not in frendeshyp."

M: "The dung of a calf stynkyth not longe."

[. . .]

S: "As a man playeth upon an harpe, he kan not wele indicte."

M: "So whan the hownde shytyth, he berkyth noth."

37 Bakhtin, Mikhail, *Rabelais and His World*, trans. Hélène Iswolsky (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1984), p. 20. Bakhtin would return to this question on multiple occasions – for instance, in a section of *Forms of Time and Chronotype in the Novel* entitled "The Functions of the Rogue, Clown and Fool" in the novel (See: Bakhtin, Mikhail, *The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays*, trans. Caryl Emerson and Michael Holquist [Austin: University of Texas Press, 1981], pp. 158-167). F. K. Barasch analyzes the development of the Marcolfian theme as an example of the formation of the medieval grotesque (Barasch, F. K., *The Grotesque: A Study in Meaning* [The Hague: Mouton, 1971], pp. 43-44.)

There are very few deviations from this prevailing rule. One deviation is the Marcolfian parable, which in size and scope outstrips the problem – raised by Solomon – to which it responds. Two other types of expression function as complete exceptions here. We might define the first as a kind of explanation of behavior. Here Marcolf does not make phrases parallel to the monarch’s declarations, but instead explains his way of being and speaking, pointing indirectly to their “causes”:

S: “God yave wysdam in my mouth, for me lyke is none in alle partys of the worlde.”
 M: “He that hath evyll neighborys praysyth hymself.”

This clearly differs from another passage in which Marcolf juxtaposes Solomon’s royal lineage with his own plebeian origins, proudly concluding his genealogical digression as follows: “Marquat gat Marcolphum and that is I.” The passage in which he presents this genealogy is constructed as a parody.³⁸ In the other episode cited above, this element is clearly absent. Another exception is the format in which Solomon formulates a thesis, while Marcolf offers an example, replacing the king’s generalized knowledge with concrete specifics:

S: “Evrything chesyth his lyke.”
 M: “Where a skabbyd horse is, he sekyth his lyke and eyther of thaym gnappyth othre.”

We should note here that the thesis-example relation is closer than the behavior explanation to the translation model, since the explanations must, by definition, go beyond the conceptual world imposed by Solomon. We must repeat that these are only exceptions. In the dialogical part of Marcolf’s story, the principle of translation applies. But is he a faithful translator? To what extent does Marcolf include his own experiences and point of view in his paraphrases of the monarch’s lines? It seems indisputable that he lowers the tone, introducing what Bakhtin refers to as “the material sphere.” As the cited passages suggest, this often implies the nether regions of the physical body. Yet things are more complicated when we consider that Solomon does not always formulate his truths conceptually. Sometimes he also refers – in the style of proverbs – to concrete realities that supposedly convey the relevant knowledge. Therefore, we cannot reduce the differences merely to an opposition between an abstract wisdom derived from dogma or belief and a practical, spontaneous wisdom springing from experience and direct observation. In this regard, the juxtaposition of loftiness and baseness is more significant, since even the contrast between gravity and levity – or seriousness and mockery – does

38 Julian Krzyżanowski has emphasized the element of parody – especially biblical parody – in his commentaries to the Polish edition of the text (*Rozmowy, które miał król Salomon mądry z Marcholtem grubym a sprosynym*, trans Jan z Koszyczek and Julian Krzyżanowski [Warszawa: PWN, 1954]. Bakhtin writes about the role of parodies of sacred texts in medieval culture in various places throughout his work on Rabelais.

not always find expression. After all, Marcolf often expresses essential and binding truths in his bawdy and vulgar plebeian language. This is particularly true when he manages – following the example of his dignified adversary – to make general statements. Then the discussion comes closest to a debate in the contemporary sense:

Salomon: “As verelye God helpe thee! In Gabaa, God appieryd to me and fulfilled me wyth sapience.”

Marcolphus: “He is holdyn wyse that reputyth hymself a fole.”

Yet one thing seems certain. Marcolf’s original contribution to the discussion is his own poor man’s wisdom (or philosophy) – a wisdom that for obvious reasons remains outside Solomon’s realm of experience. But is this contribution sufficient to guarantee Marcolf’s intellectual freedom and independence from the rules, opinions and views represented by the monarch in this clash between the clown and the king? This is the most significant question. Does the translation from the “high” to the “low,” from the “spiritual” to the “physiological,” constitute an intellectual innovation and thus an act of plebeian non-conformism against the ruler? If so, how? In slightly different terms, we might ask whether this kind of translation can overthrow or – more modestly – reshape the worldview of the person being translated. It would be difficult to answer these questions with a clear and decisive “yes.” For it seems that the essence of the conversations between Solomon and Marcolf lies in the fact that both gentlemen – despite their different social conditions – largely verbalize the same set of opinions, though they do so in different ways and in different languages. Ultimately, this phenomenon should not surprise us, as it accords with what we usually understand as translation. By definition, a text that arises from an act of translation – even the most peculiar form of translation, as in this case – cannot defy or contradict the text that forms its basis. Marcolf’s translation of Solomon’s categories into the “low” and “physiological” does not break this rule. Indeed, we are essentially dealing with differences in expression rather than in conceptual universes. Marcolf hopes to outwit Solomon, but only in the realms of verbal expression and trivial life experience. He does not aim to overthrow the king’s set of notions or to establish his own in its place. In this sense, Marcolf’s world is closely dependent on Solomon’s world. It has no independent existence of its own, but exists only as a response. This must be the case, since in most instances a precise parallelism exists between the two utterances – and parallelism does not permit genuine discussion. At the root of this parallelism – as is often the case in folklore³⁹ – is a situation that we might describe as a contest, though the prize here is not the hand of a princess after many

39 The echoes of the tale of Marcolf and Solomon still resonate in folklore. Jan Mirosław Kasjan analyzes one example in his book on Polish folk riddles. See: Kasjan, Jan Mirosław, *Poetyka polskiej zagadki ludowej* (Toruń: Rozprawy, 1976), pp. 163-168.

extraordinary deeds as predetermined conditions. Instead, the prize is simply to outsmart the opponent in the realm of expression without violating the existing system at all. After the verbal tournament, Marcolf and Solomon do not change their positions in society, since they both have pre-established roles. Furthermore, when a change of roles does occur – and we shall encounter precisely this situation when Marcolf seats himself on the royal throne – it does not transform the social order in any fundamental way, for in this order the role is more important than the person. The role is the defining element. After his unexpected promotion, Marcolf will perform the role of king, just as previously he has filled the role of clown. Clownish jokes are not essentially directed against the king, but rather they fit into the system. Our hero himself also becomes aware of this fact:

Tho sayde Salomon: “Not so, but yeve hym wele to ete and drinke and lete hym than goo in pease.” Tho spak Marcolphus goyng his weye to the king: “I suffre ynough what that ye have sayde. I shall alweyes saye, ‘There is no king were no lawe is.’”

This is far removed from any non-conformism. After discharging his duty as a clown, Marcolf renders unto the king the things that are the king’s. But why was the king willing to admit a person of such physical appearance and condition into his chambers in the first place – and even to enter into competition with him?

3. The Ritual Clown

Pantagruel says to Panurge:

Take heed, I have often heard it said in a vulgar proverb, The wise may be instructed by a fool. Seeing the answers and responses of sage and judicious men have in no manner of way satisfied you, take advice of some fool, and possibly by so doing you may come to get that counsel which will be agreeable to your own heart’s desire and contentment. You know how by the advice and counsel and prediction of fools, many kings, princes, states, and commonwealths have been preserved, several battles gained, and divers doubts of a most perplexed intricacy resolved.⁴⁰

The role of the fool or clown has become part of the political game, where he has turned into something like a state advisor, though he has no formal right to such a role. We do not learn whether Marcolf gave Solomon advice when the king found himself in military or political need. The medieval text says nothing on this point, though the problem does not cease to intrigue in this case. It remains interesting if only because the king has admitted Marcolf – a strange guest from the east – into

40 Rabelais, François, *Five Books of the Lives, Heroic Deeds and Sayings of Gargantua and His Son Pantagruel*, trans. Sir Thomas Urquhart and Peter Antony Motteux (Electronic Classics), pp. 443-444.

his palace. Moreover, by entering into competition with him, he converses with him as one equal with another, only occasionally threatening him with sanctions or punishments. As a plebeian, Marcolf has attained an absolutely extraordinary position inaccessible to others of his class. He does not owe this honor only (or perhaps at all?) to his individual virtues. Events have taken this particular turn because he has become the incarnation of a role that already existed in the inventory of roles established by the archaic social system. Marcolf is necessary to the king and his court as one who is free to behave in a manner that clashes with the prevailing etiquette and free to say things sternly forbidden to others. In other words, his deviation from the system has been designed and interiorized by the system itself, or inscribed within it. Marcolf reaps the benefits of this social device.

In his essay “The Priest and the Jester,” Leszek Kołakowski makes the following observations:

The jester is one who moves in the circles of high society, but does not belong to it and says impudent things to it. He casts doubt on everything that might seem obvious. He could not do so if he himself belonged to high society. Then he would be nothing but an acerbic salon wit, at best. The jester must be external to high society, viewing it from outside in order to reveal the unobvious nature of its obvious truths and the unnecessary nature of its necessities. At the same time, he must move in high society in order to become familiar with its sanctities and have the chance to make his impudent remarks.⁴¹

Marcolf was not the only one to assume this strange and highly ambiguous position. He had forerunners in various kinds of archaic communities. Sometimes even the most rigid societies – the most bound by rigorous regulations – in certain specific situations endorsed behavior that ostentatiously departed from the norm and sometimes even constituted its prearranged violation. Yet it is here that this departure from the norm has been foreseen and sanctioned by the norm itself. Ethnologists who have examined this question in their analyses of primitive societies often talk about these licensed violators of norms as ritual fools or clowns.⁴² The ritual clown – and he alone – is free to break the taboo:

Above all, we must consider the fact that even when this violation is practiced in the interests of the group, it can only be perpetrated individually, as a singular and

41 Kołakowski, Leszek, “Kaplan i błazen,” *Twórczość* 10 (1959), p. 82. Elias Canetti has captured this problem equally well: “The court jester, one of those who possesses the least, by the side of the all-possessor. He ceaselessly displays before his lord a particular kind of freedom, since in reality he is at the lord’s mercy. The lord sees the freedom of the joker. Since the clown belongs to him, it seems to him that freedom belongs to him as well” (Canetti, Elias, *Prowincja człowieka — Zapiski 1942-1972*, trans. H. Orłowski, *Głosy Marrakeszu* [Warszawa: Czytelnik, 1977], p. 193).

42 Here I am basing my assumptions on an extraordinarily suggestive piece by Laura Makarius, “Clowns rituels et comportement symbolique,” *Diogenè* 69 (1970).

exceptional fact. The social order, which is based on respect for taboos, would find itself in danger if the collectivity committed the violation or consented to it. At the same time, it is obvious that if the whole group were to violate the taboos, the magical value attached to their negation would be negated. Therefore, the violator must necessarily be imagined as somebody who acts alone, even if he does so in the interests of all. He must be conceived as “other,” as somebody who opposes the group, even when he sacrifices himself for his comrades. This explains why clowns distinguish themselves through individual, independent and asocial characteristics as they participate in rituals.⁴³

Therefore, the clown was accorded a special position in society. The fool’s license became institutionalized. Indeed, this very sanctification became a condition if not for the existence then at least for the normal functioning of an archaic society. Paradoxically, it became a function of the prevailing orthodoxy in multiple senses. Thanks to this license, various positions could express themselves that otherwise would have had no right to appear and thus would have been condemned to complete non-existence. Swept up from the surface of life, they could have survived in latent form and then emerged at a favorable moment to threaten the system, since they had all the attributes to break it down from inside. Therefore, the institutionalization of the fool’s license fostered the consolidation of the system, while also guaranteeing a curious form of psycho-social hygiene. It fostered this consolidation because – as Larua Makarius has argued – the privileges of the clown were only accorded to selected individuals, who were distinct from the rest of society precisely through this very specific role. The rulers clearly could not grant the clown’s insignia (and the associated rights) to any social group – to say nothing of the whole society (this would be tantamount to altering its structure). Neither could a guild of clowns exist. They could never form a trade organization, even one similar to those formed by the cut-throats and prostitutes – representatives of much more dubious professions. By the very nature of his function, the clown was a soloist, and never a member of a choir.

From the institutionalization of the fool’s license, certain other advantages arose for the guardians of the prevailing laws in archaic societies. Above all, the scope of the license’s jurisdiction did not have to be established once for all. Its boundaries could shift, widening or narrowing depending on the specific situation or on entirely random circumstances. The general rule seemed to dictate that the harsher the system, the more extensive the clown’s domain. This certainly did not mean that the clown’s real possibilities were greater when measured in absolute terms. Indeed, from this perspective, they were clearly diminished, impoverished and even more restricted. We should remember that no scenario defining the scope of the clown’s action allows him to say absolutely anything. Even he must

43 Ibid., pp. 56-57.

observe certain prohibitions. He may never pronounce certain truths. There are boundaries he may never cross (if he crosses them, he abandons the role of clown and becomes a revolutionary). But let us return to the earlier question. In a harsher system, the clown's possibilities are relatively greater because the possibilities of the ordinary member of society have diminished. Issues and opinions that in other times and places might be expressed aloud in a normal manner are here saddled with various prohibitions. In the normal run of things – assuming the prohibition is not absolute – they become the domain of those who hold the fool's license.

We must also not forget that this institutionalization brings yet another benefit. Though the clown may have pronounced truths of the greatest importance, he does not cease to be a clown – and thus a suspicious, strange and ridiculous figure. Laura Makarius emphasizes that ridiculousness can be a fatal phenomenon in some tribal societies, where it is intolerable in normal social practice.⁴⁴ The clown has the right to express opinions incompatible with orthodoxy, allowing him to violate taboos. However, the community can always disavow, demean and disqualify his actions very easily. After all, nothing could be simpler than proclaiming to all and sundry that only a clown would behave in a manner at odds with the prevailing customs and beliefs, thus violating the sacred sphere. This argument has a strong chance of success with its intended audience. For why should any level-headed and loyal member of an archaic society take seriously a suspicious character who deviates from the norm? Indeed, he or she might even find the proper place for this person in an asylum for those who are said to be unbalanced or who disrupt the accepted order. Therefore, the clown might just as easily be a beneficiary of the king's good graces or a victim of royal disfavor – elevated or debased. Both possibilities form part of the scenario that defines his activities.

The Marcolf who comes to Solomon's palace personifies the clown's lot in all its ambiguity. The king converses with him almost as one equal with another, listening to his boorish expressions with an indulgent ear, though he might easily turn him out or throw him in the dungeon. The king understands that the clown never ceases to be a clown, even when he has been admitted to the royal chambers to take part in a debate. Indeed, his clownishness – and thus the very essence of his role – may well manifest itself even more clearly in the shadow of the monarch, and thus of somebody whose position makes him the highest guardian of the existing order. The king cannot entirely eliminate the clown's role, though – as we have seen – he can quite easily manipulate the boundaries of the freedoms accorded to those who hold the institutionalized fool's license. However, he is able to eliminate certain

44 *Ibid.*, pp. 99-100. Grzeszczuk informs us that “Catholics associated Protestants with Marcolf and Till Eulenspiegel, while Protestants associated Catholics with the same characters – mutually accusing each other of stupidity and a lack of moral principles supposedly personified precisely by this clownish pair” (Grzeszczuk, p. 176).

clowns: for instance, when a clown overestimates the scope of freedom accorded to him by tradition. Marcolf seems to be aware of these limitations. Ultimately, he does not test the boundaries, even when he wishes to prove his superiority to the king in debate. As we have already discussed, the debate takes place on ground marked out by the monarch. Marcolf may not independently choose the subject or problem for discussion. His role is to debase and parody the lines pronounced by the king. The reverse situation of the king elevating or ennobling the clown's vulgar remarks would be unthinkable within archaic culture. Admittedly, the king may sometimes be exposed to the clown's mockery, but the king never loses the initiative. He can also permit himself all kinds of caprices towards the clown. If the king so desires, he can treat the clown as an ordinary servant, dress him in a lackey's livery, or order him to dance a mazurka on the banquet table for the amusement of the court rabble.

4. Marcolf on the Throne

The clown is the shadow of the king.⁴⁵ But might another situation also be possible – namely, the clown as the king's successor, exercising power, seated on the throne and endowed with all the insignia of authority? At first glance, this would seem implausible. Nevertheless, the tale of Marcolf, who never really questions the king's rule, contains certain hints to this effect, though in rather peculiar form. Indeed, we cannot include these hints under the familiar “peasant to king” motif of the folk imagination – a theme that continues to recur in literature today. In the end, the bumpkin promoted to monarch is not a clown, while the promotion itself usually occurs in peculiar fashion, taking place through imagination or play – and often through the two elements simultaneously. In both cases, the criteria of reality are suspended, while ludic rules come into play. Here we find the development of what Bakhtin called “carnivalization.” There are no true connections binding the peasant to the king. Instead, the peasant's only relation is a kind of dressing

45 In this article, I have examined only this particular side of the matter. We may also include the clown in various other oppositions. Sometimes he is depicted in juxtaposition with the priest, where the two are treated as representatives of different styles of philosophy – as in the abovementioned essay by Kołakowski. Jean Starobinski examines the tension between the clown and the artist in his book *Portrait de l'artiste en saltimbanque* (Genève: Skira, 1970). It is also worth pointing out that the pair of king and clown is often expanded by a third figure – the executioner. The Czech satirists Jiří Voskovec and Jan Werich wrote a song in the interwar period entitled “The Executioner and the Clown.” See: *A co básník: Antologie české poezie 20. století* (Praha: Mladá fronta, 1963). Professor Mojmir Grygar kindly drew my attention to this text.

up. Either the peasant consciously pretends to be the king during the carnival festival, or he is treated as a king by others during the same game. For a clown like Marcolf – who is the shadow of the king – this kind of dressing up is impossible. One cannot pretend to be the king while in the king's presence, even when normal social relations have ceased to apply due to the carnival. Therefore, when Marcolf seats himself on the throne, he has no thought of treating his new role as the outcome of a game or the consequence of a temporary suspension of the world's prevailing laws. He was a serious clown and now he wants to be a serious king, though – as we shall see – he will never entirely renounce his devious ways, even when the fate of the world depends on him. This royal elevation of the clown has especially fascinated the poets of our own century. In this section of my reflections, I shall refer above all to two works – namely, to Jan Kasproiwicz's drama, *Marcolf* (*Marcholt*, 1920), and to Antoni Słonimski's long poem, *The Judgment of Don Quichote* (*Sąd nad Don Kichotem*, 1963-1965), in which the equivalent of the clownish wielder of power is Sancho Panza.⁴⁶

Marcolf – who for so long has been subject to the king's caprices – gets a taste of power and the possibilities it opens:

And I have a great desire,
 though I be Marcolf and a boor,
 to seat myself upon the throne,
 Which is Power, which does not stand
 as if on a bog, as if it were sinking
 in a swamp! . . . A throne which in
 all its proverbial form is equal to
 the might of a stony mountain,
 not only in appearance, but in truth
 – this is the throne I want!
 (Kasproiwicz)

He does not wish to be a mere make-believe king. He believes in his mission, and so he comes to bring order to the world. This order is harsh, both in conception and realization, unmitigated by any experiences from the earlier phases of his own biography, when he himself was in a miserable state – if not exactly hanging off the king, then always dependent on his monarchical whims. Marcolf's rule turns out to be populist only in the genetic sense, while it becomes functionally anti-populist. This state of affairs is not altered by the superficial preservation of certain popular customs, which we shall subsequently refer to as Marcolfian gestures. Its

46 I shall refer to the following editions: Kasproiwicz, Jan, *Marcholt gruby a sprosny: Jego narodzin, życia i śmierci misterium tragicomiczne*, in: *Dziela, Volume XV*, ed. S. Kołaczkowski (Kraków: Meisels, 1930), pp. 157, 180, 224, 225, 155; Słonimski, Antoni, *Sąd nad Don Kichotem*, in: *138 wierszy* (Warszawa: PIW 1973), pp. 229-240.

sole ideological foundation is faith in brutal and ruthless power. When he must part with the throne, Kasprowicz's Marcolf makes the following proclamation:

I have turned away forever
 from that old hag,
 from that slut,
 who calls herself Mercy,
 but who like a strumpet,
 sucks the blood out of the weak
 down to the very last,
 and even turns the bravest
 into her vile prey...
 [. . .]
 If today I were to sit upon the throne,
 if today my hands were once again
 to clutch the scepter,
 I would be just as harsh
 and just as cruel!

Leaving aside the Nietzschean terminology of this monologue, the text still remains crucial for us here. The important point is that it reveals what we might define as the consciousness of the charismatic clown – a clown convinced of his mission and refusing to shun any means that might lead to the realization of his stated aims. In Słonimski's poem, Sancho Panza – who now holds the reins of power in hands previously accustomed to other uses – declares:

It is worth it, I say, for the sake of the altar
 To sacrifice a few generations of little shits.

In this interpretation, a "little shit" is anybody – besides the charismatic clown himself – who has sat on the throne. The clown has ceased to be a character with any moderate dreams of power. He does not abide by any rules stemming from noble human wisdom. Instead, he becomes the hero of an anti-utopia, the ruler of a world in which power and ruthlessness are the main regulating components. We are a long way here from the clownish banter with the king of the medieval tale or the simple opposition between folk wisdom and official wisdom. The common people will not find their representative in Marcolf the ruler or feel any kind of solidarity with him. "Autocrat!" they shout at him in Kasprowicz's drama. This clownish autocracy turns out to be just as difficult to abolish as the autocracy of the king who inherits a throne passed down from father to son from time immemorial. Once again, function is more important than genesis.

It's true, I did not happen to see the triumph of justice.
 The lips of the innocent make no claims.
 And who knows whether a fool in a crown,
 a winecup in his hand, roaring that God favors him

because he poisoned, slew, and blinded so many.
 would not move the onlookers to tears: he was so gentle.⁴⁷
 (Czesław Miłosz, “Counsels”)

Yet clownish autocracy is different in certain respects from traditional autocracy – above all, because to some social groups it can appear to be an impossible phenomenon. Paradoxically, this can appear to be the case even when it actually exists, constituting a palpable reality. It seems impossible because it clashes with what we regard as the laws of common sense or as the prevailing order of the world.⁴⁸ It is impossible not only because it threatens to institute a harsh regime to which it is difficult for people to accustom themselves, but also because it alters the style of exercising power, introducing genetically populist elements and revising the rituals previously associated with kingly power. Marcolf on the throne has no capacity or desire to fossilize into a dignified form. He does not wish to be “stiff.” He wishes to sow fear and to command absolute obedience, though he still retains some of his former customs, expressions and tricks, even when – like Sancho Panza in *Ślonimski’s* poem – he wishes to forget about his lowly past and demands the same of his underlings. Accordingly, he changes the external trappings of power, transforming the facade. When he comes to power in a state previously ruled by a tyrant, however, he does not introduce any fundamental innovations to the actual design of the structure. Marcolf on the throne no longer holds the fool’s license, though – as we may observe – he retains certain habits from the times when it gave him legitimacy. Ultimately, the fool’s license can never belong to the ruler, even when he himself – like Caligula – is a confirmed lunatic. The fool’s license can never belong to the ruler because once it becomes the law it ceases to be a sanctioned departure from the norm. During Marcolf’s reign, this matter becomes somewhat complicated, since the fool’s license can no longer function in its previous form. In a world ruled by a clown, the role of clown in its classical form is condemned to wither away. One might surmise in this situation that a person representing “academic gravity” or “academic dignity” could assume the role. Any examination of this rather theoretical possibility falls beyond the purview of this article.

Specifically, it falls beyond the purview of the article partly because Marcolf the king does not value this wisdom at all. Indeed, he probably fears it, preparing a whip for it like a hammer of witches:

47 Miłosz, Czesław, *New and Collected Poems: 1931-2001* (New York: HarperCollins, 2003), p. 237.

48 The subject of these reflections is the evolution of a literary motif rather than historical events, even as analogies. Nevertheless, it is difficult not to permit myself a certain digression here. At the beginning of the 1930s, Hitler was above all a ranting clown in the liberal imagination. His rise to power seemed impossible. There is no need to recall that this imagination turned out precisely to be a lack of imagination.

Marcolf: Nobody forbids you, my vassals,
 from conviction or humility from imitating the wisdom – of counselors!
 Somebody: The wisdom of the world!
 Marcolf: For such wisdom a whip today
 is what's needed – I have one somewhere,
 as all shall soon see.
 (Kasprowicz)

This passage by no means concerns only the “wisdom of counselors”: in other words, of the professional executors of the ruler’s orders. Marcolf himself is no bureaucrat in the old style, but from the moment he seizes power he values the bureaucracy. He understands that it forms a reliable support for the throne. Yet this is not the most significant point here. After all, it is no secret that the blows of the whip against wisdom are not largely aimed at the counselors, but rather in quite a different direction. As a clown, Marcolf had already expressed his deep distrust of theoretical reason. He opposed Solomon – who was not only the ruler, but also the personification of such wisdom – with his own rough-hewn wisdom, which he had apparently acquired from life experience. In one version of the medieval tale, Marcolf convinces Solomon that nature is something higher than learning. Nobody taught the cat to hunt mice, and yet it performs this activity very effectively.⁴⁹ In the same way, a category as irrational and suspicious as instinct may take the place of knowledge in social phenomena (which are also at stake here). Marcolf does not abandon this attitude when he gains the throne. On the contrary, he intensifies it. There is no place for intellectuals in his state, just as there is no place for them in Guybal Wahazar’s state in Stanisław Ignacy Witkiewicz’s play (entitled *Guybal Wahazar*). Intellectuals are immediately suspect. The clown turned king no longer has any desire to debate with them, but wishes to treat them in a different and somewhat less courteous fashion. Now clownish wisdom – raised to the dignity of law – excludes the existence of any other type of wisdom. On the surface, it even resists closed and dogmatic wisdom, a wisdom that finds its only support in ritual books and is unable to develop or integrate social experiences in new ways.

Certainly, Marcolf is no dogmatist. He cannot be one, since he does not belong to the guild of commentators on sacred books. At the same time, he does not oppose this ossified thought with any new or adventurous thought, since he is only prepared to acknowledge whatever has – or rather appears to him to have – direct support in practical life. Accordingly, he is always anti-intellectual. Nevertheless, despite his constant references to practice, it would be difficult to call him a pragmatist. Above all, he cannot free himself from a certain set of

49 Here I am a drawing on the work of Julian Krzyżanowski, who analyzed this version of the tale, which emerged quite late in a nineteenth century work by Józef Lompa. See: Krzyżanowski, Julian, *Paralele* (Warszawa: PIW, 1961), pp. 471-473

established rules. He continues to define himself by them even when it seems to him that he has gone far beyond them or even overthrown them. The clown king is still dependent on the old overthrown king in whose court he once performed the duties of clown. He is still the shadow of this old king. He cannot (or does not wish to) overcome the tradition that invariably forms his only point of reference, for he simply does not know any other traditions. Even if he has heard of such traditions, they present themselves to him as alien, suspicious and sometimes even diabolical. Marcolf's pragmatism is not a principle of conscious long-term action. Instead, its essence lies in capitulation to immediate circumstances, and thus in complete dependence on the demands of the moment and previous experiences. This is a small-minded form of pragmatism, the pragmatism – as with Słonimski's Sancho Panza – of a lackey, who has intellectually remained a petty servant, even though he has seized the position of autocratic ruler. Such pragmatism negates both theoretical constructions and the products of the imagination, thus partly undermining its own existence – though this is quite another matter.

The burden of past experience not only manifests itself in this limited version of pragmatism, but also defines the clown king's style of being and mode of behavior, which do not fit the usual images of how a king should carry himself. Marcolf retains certain habits and gestures from the time when his role was to play the fool. We have already referred to these as Marcolfian gestures. They are based on the introduction of clownish pranks into a social context that does not require them and perhaps even excludes them. An example of a Marcolfian gesture would be hurling a shoe at an opponent to shut him up. Here debate degenerates into mere bar room brawling. A shoe hurled by the man on the throne may testify to his human qualities, but it also constitutes a shocking disruption of accepted customs, violating the rules of the game. It is not “diplomatic.” Marcolfian gestures, however, are not limited to this type of action. Language forms a separate area of their operation. In this case, such gestures might include an introduction of an unexpected style that astonishes listeners with its bawdiness and boorishness, as it ignores the accepted rules. This means the use of the same arguments to which Marcolf appealed when he was His Majesty's clown, constantly converting the “high” into the “low.” Yet such a conversion now takes on a different meaning, since the one-time holder of the fool's license has reached the top. Marcolfian gestures represent innovations only in the domain of external trappings. They do not change the system. They may not even make it less grim. They have ceased to reflect any ludic element. Now they possess the attributes to dominate as a model worthy of imitation. Nothing remains of their former clownish brilliance.

3. Socialist Parnassianism

Literary historians like words ending in “-ism.” I have no wish to defy this professional predilection, so I shall refer here to a certain set of literary phenomena characteristic of the 1970s under the term “socialist Parnassianism.” At least at first glance, this term is rather peculiar, since it would seem to suggest that a refined aestheticist literary movement of the mid-nineteenth century had something in common with socialist realism, which clearly is far removed from both aestheticism and refinement.

The distinction drawn by Stanisław Barańczak between “the facade” and “the back”⁵⁰ has recently achieved dazzling and well-deserved popularity. I would like to use these terms here, though I have no intention of rejecting what we often euphemistically refer to as the literature of the “two circulations.”⁵¹ In fact, the official literature of the “first circulation” also breaks down into facade and back, often recalling the well-known medieval motif of the virgin corpse. From the front, this maiden is extraordinarily comely, even intoxicatingly beautiful, while from behind her body is repulsiveness itself, rotting and decomposing as worms consume it. This medieval motif served as a moral lesson about the vanities of the world, but I do not evoke it here for didactic purposes. In contemporary literature, we find ourselves dealing precisely with a striking front and a rotten back. This literature consists of various kinds of “frivolousness” – trashy detective novels, pseudo-memoirs, sensationalist historical tales from the occupation years bearing no relation whatsoever to the historical truth, and the so-called literature of labor, which has appeared from time to time, though it has lacked a social audience from the very beginning.

Although these “backs” have ultimately created what passes for popular culture, they might easily escape the attention of certain people with no desire to see them, since they are obscured by the magnificent facade – the socialist Parnassianist facade. This facade has been constructed from books that are often good, written in a high-brow manner, linguistically elegant, and sometimes even inventive. So, what more can we expect of these works, since we attribute so many virtues to them? Why should they represent manifestations of socialist

50 Here I am referring to his brilliant piece “Facade and Back” (1977), republished in the volume *Etyka i poetyka: Szkice 1970-1978* (Paris: Instytut Literacki, 1979).

51 Translator’s Note: Literature published by official communist publishing houses was referred to as “literature of the first circulation,” while independent or samizdat literature was described as “literature of the second circulation.”

Parnassianism? Their standards are high, they are often appealing, and yet in the vast majority of cases they still lack one thing – relevance. They lack literary, social, moral, philosophical and psychological relevance.

Socialist Parnassianism seems to have been supported by two closely overlapping processes. The first of these is a cultural policy that has directly imposed its propaganda message at “the back” – that is, at those domains of art addressed to the broad masses – but abandoned an attempt at the beautiful facade, with its created pretense of freedom. Here the cultural policy has limited itself to prohibitions, while retreating from any direct prescription. This distinguishes it from the cultural policy of the Stalinist era. The new policy allows for various kinds of freedom at the front, on the condition that these do not make contact with real social experience, influence or catalyze social consciousness, or provoke any sort of non-conformist thought or even associations. Accordingly, this has created a program for a mild, unengaged and essentially pacified literature. Clearly, neither the later novels of Tadeusz Konwicki,⁵² nor Kazimierz Brandys’s *Unreality (Nierzeczywistość)* would fit into a program formed in this manner. Indeed, any attempts to go beyond this peculiar “literary program” have been made impossible, as we may observe from the fate of such an obviously interesting formation as the group of talented poets who made their debuts around 1970.⁵³ Moreover, the “program” understood in this sense has become the foundation of literary education. The monthly *New Word (Nowy Wyrzaz)* illustrates this trend, paralyzed by dull academicism and conceived as a tribune for older mediocrities. Therefore, it is no surprise that whenever interesting young writers have appeared in the last decade, they have done so outside the reach of this magazine, which has represented a prime example of socialist Parnassianist tendencies.

The second process has involved the erosion of what was described as modernism during the October “thaw” of 1956, and subsequently assumed such great and positive significance for Polish literature over the course of the following decade. This modernism – or, as we might prefer to describe it, avant-gardism – was a movement of the greatest literary importance. Yet this was not its only relevance, since it also bore great social and perhaps even political significance. It crystallized during the struggle for the expansion of freedoms and became an expression of these freedoms. In the mid-1950s, various poems and novels going beyond the socialist realist schemas became sensations, while even a fresh and original metaphor that undermined the well-worn forms of speech could be an event. On the subject of this modernism – whose achievements and significance

52 See Konwicki’s *Polish Complex (Kompleks polski, 1977)* and *Minor Apocalypse (Mala apokalipsa, 1979)*, both published in samizdat editions.

53 Here I have in mind the poets of the “New Wave,” including Barańczak, Ryszard Krynicki and Adam Zagajewski.

cannot be underestimated, even when we consider the literature of recent years – we might repeat what the writer and critic Karol Irzykowski once said about the Young Poland movement in the final phase of its existence: it aged very quickly. Perhaps not over night, but quickly enough. It aged all the more rapidly once the architects of the cultural policy began to treat it as an ornament, or rather as an alibi (in certain cases it clearly filled this role). It aged because it lost its non-conformism. It was no longer against anything or anybody. As an accepted movement, it became part of a minor literary stabilization and metamorphosed into socialist Parnassianism.

This movement has included many intricately written and often effective novels (some of which have achieved a modicum of success, with a few even catching on in Paris). Here we might mention various works about the era of Franz Joseph II and the *belle époque*, poetic memoirs of childhood, as well as grotesques written in a watered-down Gombrowiczian style, exchanging the discoveries of the great writer for mere epigonic small change. Socialist Parnassianism has also included many so-called “village novels” – glass paintings poeticized and over-aestheticized to an excruciating extent, beautiful only in the most kitschy style, like garish baubles. This peasant version of socialist Parnassianism is the most astonishing and irritating of all – especially against the broader background of this historical current in Polish literature, which has included the acerbic works of Eliza Orzeszkowa, Władysław Reymont, Władysław Orkan and Maria Dąbrowska.

Nevertheless, socialist Parnassianism does not so much raise the question of subject matter, but rather of a certain conception of literature – and, above all, of literature’s social situation. In writing about it here, I do not wish to appeal for any turn towards “contemporary subjects,” especially since such appeals often conceal manipulative tendencies aiming to subjugate literature to propaganda. We cannot reduce socialist Parnassianism to thematic choices, and it is not based on any escape into the realm of history, which has so often provided a refuge. On the contrary, it is precisely those books on historical subjects – at least some of them – that have tended not to fit into socialist Parnassianism (we need only mention the works of Marian Brandys or the novels of Jan Józef Szczepański and Władysław Terlecki on the complications of nineteenth-century Polish history). Nor is socialist Parnassianism founded on any escape into the realm of fantasy, allegory or parable. Here I entirely agree with Marian Stala’s remarks in his intelligent and profound article “The Clearing” (“Prześwit”), published in *Polityka* (No 47, 1980):

The maxim that we need a realist culture says nothing to me. I would prefer to say that we need a culture based on truth and authenticity. We also need the same kind of literature – authentic and exhibiting its values. I believe that these terms – despite their philosophical complications – are much more relevant than any

“realism,” while the question of whether one reaches these values through concrete specificity, allegory or symbolism is not the most important. The enduring nature of culture would seem to suggest that each of these ways of speaking may serve both authenticity and kitsch, integration and enslavement. I have nothing against allegory, parable or myth.

Socialist Parnassianism is by its very nature something else, and it cannot be reduced to any particular subject or any particular poetics. It represents literature consenting to its own slide into irrelevance, while still paying careful attention to external appearance, high literary standards, and sometimes even a peculiar kind of novelty. It emerges from literature’s agreement to cultivate its own garden irrespective of what is going on in the world around it. Splendid and beautiful flowers may grow in this garden, but nobody has time to mourn the roses when the forests are burning.

Socialist Parnassianism does not involve isolation from social problems alone – as it might appear at first glance. In fact, it would be difficult to use the term at all if the works representing it were filled with any great intellectual and moral problems, if they strove to express these problems in one way or another, or if more clearly defined ambitions appeared within them. Yet this is not the case. This well-made literature is only capable of satisfying the small-minded. It can be inventive, but never illuminating. Though it sometimes includes darker shades, its basic character is ludic. Ultimately, it fits in with the entertainment tendencies dominating the “back” within the sphere of mass culture, though it exists on an incomparably higher plane. Socialist Parnassianism provokes a certain impatience, though I would not exclude the possibility that historians will one day attribute some merit to it. Some of its novels may survive. But this is not all. Probably its merit will turn out to lie in the fact that it fostered the development of literary forms and preserved literary culture in an era in which trash came to dominate mass culture – either subordinated to an aggressive propaganda permeated with newspeak or reduced to pure entertainment. This impatience and lack of distance do not help us to measure its worth on the scales, especially since socialist Parnassianism is neither a style nor a poetics. It is simultaneously the co-creator and product of a cultural situation that has favored an irrelevant and thus crippled literature – even when it has reached the highest degree of artistic craft. In the end, its artistry is oddly dysfunctional.

November 1980

Postscript Ten Years Later

I wrote this article towards the end of 1980. Now – a decade later – I wonder whether I might appear myself in the role of a historian prepared to perceive other virtues in socialist Parnassianism or to raise its merit. Clearly it represented neither a continuation of socialist realism nor a parallel phenomenon. Some might say it was a mere flower pinned to a real socialist sheepskin, intended to beautify what could never become more beautiful. To some extent, this was indeed the case, though why should we not appreciate these flowers used to decorate something so undeserving of elegant ornamentation? At least some of the works we would be inclined to regard as characteristically socialist Parnassianist have retained their value, and it seems fitting to accord the whole phenomenon the credit it deserves. Thanks to socialist Parnassianism, a certain literary culture survived and the general level of literary speech did not decline dramatically. This in itself means a great deal. Socialist Parnassianism was the product of the peculiar situation in Polish culture between October 1956 and 13 December 1981. It emerged from a cultural policy pursued by the communist authorities over several decades, but it never became a tool of their propaganda. It maintained its independence – unfortunately, for the most part because it bore little social significance. We should remember all these complicated circumstances.

4 October 1991

4. Polish Literature on the Holocaust (Preliminary Reflections)

1

We may say without fear of exaggeration that the Holocaust is one of those problems and events to which Polish literature has returned constantly and in various ways over the last several decades.⁵⁴ In fact, Polish writers addressed this event from the very beginning – when their writings formed a spontaneous reaction to what had seemed impossible only a few years earlier, its enormity stretching beyond the realms of probability and the borders of the imagination, inexpressible within the limitations of language. Polish literature did this at first hand, through works both by writers who were to become victims and by others whom fate assigned the role of witnesses and observers – writers who did not experience the Holocaust themselves, but who were able to empathize and to comprehend what was taking place. Polish literature continued to address the Holocaust in later years, though the perspective inevitably shifted – at first not significantly, then more dramatically as time passed. The diversity of perspectives that had characterized the early moments did not vanish overnight. A distinction continued to exist between writers telling their stories in order to understand what they had survived and other authors whose works were not based on any personal experience. Naturally, the number of people who could speak about their own fates steadily dwindled with time. Any new texts of this kind emerged only from various archives, while the inevitable eventually occurred. Subsequently, the whole

54 Many scholarly works on Polish Holocaust literature exist, most of them from the last two decades. Firstly, we should mention the pioneering anthology edited and introduced by Irena Maciejewska, *Męczeństwo i zagłada Żydów w zapisach literatury polskiej* (Warszawa: Krajowa Agencja Wydawnicza, 1988). Secondly, we should note another collective work edited by Alina Brodzka-Wald, Dorota Krawczyńska and Jacek Leociak, *Literatura polska wobec Zagłady* (Warszawa: Żydowski Instytut Historyczny, 2000). See also Jacek Leociak's classic book, *Tekst wobec Zagłady (O relacjach z getta warszawskiego)* (Wrocław: Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Wrocławskiego, 1997). The more recent titles published after the writing of this article include a collective work edited by Przemysław Czapliński and Ewa Domańska, *Zagłada, Współczesne problemy rozumienia i przedstawiania* (Poznań: Poznańskie Studia Polonistyczne, 2009). The second part of this book is sub-titled "Literature and Literary Studies on the Holocaust" ("Literatura i literaturoznawstwo wobec Zagłady").

situation of Holocaust literature has undergone a great change of fundamental significance.

Yet one thing has not changed. Frank Ankersmit opens a brilliant essay on the subject with the following observation: “Writing about the Holocaust has its own specific difficulties.”⁵⁵ The Dutch author has in mind above all the difficulties encountered by historians. At the same time, his remark applies to anybody who wishes to say anything about the issue, depicting a set of specific events or simply sketching out an individual biography. These difficulties are universal, defining the endeavors of the scholar and the memoirist, but also – and perhaps above all – the writer. The various complications revealed themselves from the very earliest phase and have continued to affect everybody who has written about the Holocaust (with the exception of the so-called “deniers,” who are not worthy of attention here). The problems have not disappeared, continuing to plague every author, irrespective of the signs he uses or the immediate goals he sets himself. These very difficulties – which have changed to a relatively minor extent over time – form the main subject of scholarly reflections on literature about the martyrdom of the Jews. This is especially true, since in a certain sense the genre represents an absolutely unprecedented form of literature. Jean-Luc Nancy is undoubtedly correct when he asserts that we cannot speak of the camps (and thus of the Holocaust in general) in the same way as we speak and have spoken about wars.⁵⁶ In simple terms, war literature boasts a tradition stretching back to Homer, while Holocaust literature lacks this kind of centuries-old cultural background.

In fact, most of the discussion on this kind of writing concerns the constant difficulties involved, for in a certain sense everything within it has proven difficult – if only because it has faced entirely new tasks and challenges. However, before taking up these questions, I would like to point out that in the case of Polish literature some of the complications have been associated with the specific situation in which it has functioned and developed. Its very existence, its evolution and its various transformations have been dependent on the broader political situation. We should be aware that changing contexts and circumstances have necessitated various approaches to both literary and non-literary speech about the Holocaust. At times, the phenomenon found itself marginalized; at other times, it became the subject of more or less blatant falsifications and manipulations. In this respect, the question of the extermination of the Jews did not differ greatly from many other issues under discussion in communist Poland in the realm of contemporary history. Neither did it differ from other questions whose discussion was prohibited. In this

55 Ankersmit, F. R., “Remembering the Holocaust: Mourning and Melancholia,” *Historical Representation* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2001), p. 176.

56 Nancy, Jean-Luc, “Forbidden Representation,” *The Ground of the Image*, trans. Jeff Fort (New York: Fordham University Press, 2005), p. 29.

case, these effects were linked with – and resulted from – much broader processes. In certain periods, people were reluctant to talk about anything concerning the Jews. When this tendency appeared, there could be no place for accounts or images of the Holocaust. Any reflections on this subject became impossible. Clearly, we must mention here the first half of the 1950s – the era of classic Stalinism – as well as the period of unrest in March 1968, together with everything that preceded and followed it.⁵⁷ This literature – which was limited in various ways, though never directly undermined (perhaps with the exception of certain excesses after 1968) – never entirely disappeared. This is one of the Polish paradoxes. Despite all the silences and falsifications, there was a lack of consistency. In the Stalinist period, in which the problem of the Jewish martyrdom was regarded as an irrelevant issue, the precious stories of Adolf Rudnicki appeared, generally taking a form quite distant from the prevailing schemas of socialist realism.⁵⁸ Shortly after the anti-Semitic madness of the late 1960s, Bogdan Wojdowski published his heartbreaking work, *Bread for the Departed* (*Chleb rzuczony umarłym*).⁵⁹

From the very outset, questions arise concerning other matters associated with this literature beyond the problem of its rootedness in the realities of communist Poland's cultural and political life. Above all, there is the problem of its evolution. Ultimately, the genre did not petrify in the form given to it as early as the 1940s by such writers as Zofia Nałkowska, Tadeusz Borowski, Adolf Rudnicki, and – somewhat later – Leopold Buczkowski, the author of *Black Torrent* (*Czarny Potok*). In my view, an image of these transformations – though little more than a preliminary one – emerges from the articles recently assembled in a collective volume entitled *Appropriateness and Form* (*Stosowność i forma*).⁶⁰ These transformations resulted not just from political changes (in certain cases these are of entirely secondary significance), but also from differences in experience, perspective and generation. We must emphasize with particular clarity that the fortunes of this literary genre have not only been determined by biological factors: in other words, by the inevitable departure of those who survived the Holocaust as adults. Holocaust literature has not disappeared with them. Instead, it has somehow

57 Translator's Note: In March 1968, students and intellectuals mounted major protests against the communist authorities. After taking strong measures to suppress the unrest, the government launched an "anti-Zionist" campaign that saw many Polish Jews leave the country.

58 See Józef Wróbel's monograph, *Miara cierpienia, O pisarstwie Adolfa Rudnickiego* (Kraków: Universitas, 2004).

59 See Alina Molisak's monograph, *Judaizm jako los, Rzecz o Bogdanie Wojdowskim* (Warszawa: Wydawnictwo Cyklady, 2004).

60 Głowiński, Michał et al., *Stosowność i forma, Jak opowiadać o Zagładzie?* (Kraków: Universitas, 2005).

become a more general problem – no longer restricted to records of personal experience or even to secondhand accounts based on the reports and stories of participants and observers. This shift in the authorial subject has produced certain fundamental transformations.

This change has been an important factor determining the extraordinary diversity and richness of Holocaust literature, though we must emphasize that it is by no means the only factor. From the very beginning, variety prevailed in genre, style and rhetorical form. The scope of this diversity is enormous: including descriptive reporting intended to impart knowledge of the facts, records of despair and cries from the heart, as well as various intermediate forms. In other words, we find everything from reportage to dream diaries. From another perspective, we should note that this tremendous range extends from classical stylistic models to those associated with more experimental methods of writing, from popular forms to the highly refined. This enormous variety forms a fundamental question for literary historians and critics concerned with the subject of Holocaust literature.

2

I would like to turn particular attention here to the relation between fiction and factual content in literature representing the Holocaust. In broad terms, there is no denying that these are distinctly separate spheres. Non-fiction has no right to turn into fictional literature. In less serious cases, distortions may occur, while in the worst cases we end up dealing with blatant fraud. We find clear confirmation of this simple truth in the case of a Swiss author who published a fake autobiography under the pseudonym Wilkomirski. This supposed memoirist invented everything in the book, while stubbornly insisting that it was the true story of events from his childhood.⁶¹ Fortunately, this falsification is an isolated case within Holocaust literature – perhaps even the only example. Berel Lang is correct to observe (in reference to the American writer Leslie Epstein, author of a novel about Chaim Rumkowski, entitled *King of the Jews*) that eyewitness testimonies tell us more about what happened in the camps and ghettos than fictional constructions.⁶²

The relation between fiction and documentary writing presents itself in an entirely different way when we examine certain classic literary forms – above all, the short story, since this form assumes a particular or even dominant position

61 Tomasz Basiuk and Agnieszka Graff have written an article on this affair (entitled “Falszerstwo Wilkomirskiego: trauma jako konwencja kulturowa i narracyjna”), published in the volume *Stosowność i forma*.

62 Lang, Berel, *Holocaust Representation: Art within the Limits of History and Ethics* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2000), p. 22.

among prose genres. Admittedly, novels about the extermination of the Jews also emerged as early as the occupation period (Jerzy Broszkiewicz's unjustly forgotten work, *Oczekiwanie* [*Waiting*], dates back to this era). Nevertheless, the short story – generally very different from the classic novella – was a particularly active and suitable form. Indeed, at least some of the outstanding novels on the subject – once again, we might mention the works of Buczkowski and Wojdowski – at least partly consist of fragments to a greater or lesser extent resembling short stories.

This genre's exceptional role seems to make sense. The short story allows the fates of individuals to be presented in a concrete way, without any concerns about complicated plot mechanisms. The whole form is by its very nature akin to the report, the factual account, the memoir – understood here as its own peculiar genre – and journalistic reportage. Indeed, sometimes the borders between the short story and the factual account or report begin to blur. This happens not because these documentary forms are subordinated to any classic varieties of literary expression, but rather – and I would like to emphasize this with particular force – for the opposite reason. The short story begins to resemble non-fiction forms. We find contrasting examples of this disappearing border between reportage and the short story – which in no way violates the documentary function – in the reportage of Hanna Krall and the short stories of Ida Fink.

The dominance of the short story – and thus of a relatively loose form – and its influence on more expansive literary constructions provoke various questions. Why exactly did it turn out to be the right form in so many cases? Everything points to the relative ease with which the genre conveys specific contents. Yet it also gives voice to individual subjects recounting experiences that the world has never encountered before. It allows us to hear the quavering voices of the people who experienced these events. First person narrative takes on a particular value in this genre, where it forms a self-explanatory and somehow natural phenomenon with no need of justification. Just as the documentary form lets us hear the voices of people speaking about their terrible experiences, first person narration allows them to keep their perspective in all parts of a given narrative. The dominance of documentary or quasi-documentary forms is a fact of primary significance, pointing to the crisis of the novel and the collapse of traditional models of the grand epic.

3

The dominance of various documentary forms – especially in the writing of the first decades after the Holocaust – suggests a diverse set of problems. At the same time, it poses no direct challenge to either literature or literariness. After all, there

were perhaps no cases – however terrible or unpredictable in their consequences – which cast any doubt on the very existence of the written word, whether it took the form of a “page found by the execution wall” (to use the title of a well-known story by Rudnicki) or the most expansive and complex literary constructions. In fact, the opposite has been the case, even when the pressure of the monstrous events has made all words seem lifeless or inappropriate.⁶³ Clearly, these feelings have often arisen, finding expression in diverse situations and with varying degrees of clarity. Such emotions are understandable and deserve respect, but they should never become the dominant rule. If wordless mourning were ever to prevail, then it would condemn the murdered victims to a second death. Indeed, there is a certain paradox here, which we must never forget. Alvin Rosenfeld puts it well in his pioneering book: “The Holocaust demands words, even if it forces us into silence.”⁶⁴

So what words does it demand? The simplest reply would be: the right words or appropriate words. Yet such generalizations ultimately sidestep the issue. We cannot afford to do this, even if the term “appropriateness” most frequently appears in this kind of context.⁶⁵ The word “appropriateness” has various advantages, some of them springing from its relative lack of precision. The term has two main spheres of reference. One of them is comprehensible and significant above all for certain specialists who are aware that this familiar sounding word translates a fundamental category from classical poetics – namely, *decorum*. Nevertheless, even in this kind of usage, the colloquial meaning accessible to all never disappears from view. “Appropriate” means what is right or suitable, what is in its place, what does not contradict accepted aims or enter into conflict with its context or with prevailing – or at least widespread – sentiments.

A semantic explication of the word “appropriateness” and its derivative expressions clearly will not suffice here. We cannot avoid the fundamental question. What are the contents, assumptions and characteristics of this category? Sometimes such questions are easy to ask; they seem to suggest themselves to us. Yet finding answers is much more challenging, especially when we expect them to be as lucid, exhaustive and precise as possible. Here certain insurmountable difficulties present themselves. Every reader – without necessarily being a specialist or expert in Holocaust literature – can judge what in his or her understanding is appropriate

63 See the classic essay by Jerzy Jedlicki, “Dzieje doświadczone i dzieje zaświadczone,” in his book *Złe urodzenie czyli o doświadczeniu historycznym, Scripta i postscripta* (London: Aneks, 1993). The essay dates originally to 1976.

64 7 Rosenfeld, Alvin H., *A Double Dying: Reflections on Holocaust Literature* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1980).

65 See the first part of Katarzyna Chmielewska’s study, entitled “Literackość jako przeszkoda, literackość jako możliwość wypowiedzenia,” published in the volume *Stosowność i forma*.

or inappropriate. Moreover, the reader's personal or private beliefs and reactions may happen to concur with broader or even universal opinion. Yet this does not put an end to the matter, for it soon becomes clear that extremely diverse utterances may all be interpreted as "appropriate." This does not apply only to dramatic or highly subjective judgments and perspectives. In fact, a certain consensus usually emerges in such cases. More generally, we find ourselves unable to state the rules that determine what is "appropriate." Perhaps we shall succeed in the future, when we are further removed from these events and the writing that describes them.

We might also put the dilemma in a more extreme and paradoxical form: everything is appropriate and nothing is appropriate. This extremism – if it were indeed responsible for the real state of things – would suggest a lack of unbending rules in this area. The realm of possibility is extensive and highly diversified. Of course, certain linguistic forms may be defined in advance as "inappropriate." These would include – above all – anti-Semitic discourse (and Holocaust "denial"), but also anything that would reduce this enormous event, unique in history, to something familiar, recognizable or banal. For this kind of thinking places the Holocaust in the realm of certain literary schemas, turning it into a domain ruled by the power of stereotypes. I shall return to this question later, since it represents one of the main threats to Holocaust literature. For now, I would merely point out that certain reservations and concerns may arise in response to an element that might seem especially suitable, somehow predestined to form a part of this literature's style – namely, the sublime. It might appear that the sublime should form a fundamental aesthetic category in texts devoted to such great suffering and to such a terrible crime. However, this is not the case.⁶⁶ Often, the aspiration to reach the sublime removes all specificity from literary works that speak about the Holocaust or pay tribute to its victims. Especially in the case of poetry, this tendency may reduce these works to the mere repetition of noble banalities that contribute nothing to the subject. Yet if we view the matter from a very different angle, there is little doubt that grotesque or ironic forms of expression not only provoke no particular dissonance or discord in this context, but may even reveal their usefulness as legitimate and useful means of expression.⁶⁷ Here a fundamental phenomenon for Holocaust literature comes into view. There is no preordained language assigned to it or occupying a privileged place beyond the reach of

66 On the sublime in Holocaust literature, see Grzegorz Marzec's article "Holocaust, wzniosłość, ironia, Przedstawienie nieprzedstawialnego w 'Umschlagplatzu' Jarosława Marka Rymkiewicza," *Pamiętnik Literacki* 1 (2005). Jarosław Płuciennik examines this issue from a more general perspective in his book *Retoryka wzniosłości w dziele literackim* (Kraków: Universitas, 2000).

67 See Magdalena Kowalska's piece on this question, "Ironia jako strategia narracyjna w opisie świata Zagłady," published in the volume *Stosowność i forma*.

possible failure or criticism. There is no language, style or expression that might be acknowledged in advance as suitable or appropriate in works devoted to the Holocaust in literature or in any other artistic discipline. No *a priori* premises or principles apply here, though it is easy enough to make practical distinctions and to point to what serves the cause of speaking about the Holocaust in specific cases and what does not. Yet the applicable rules are still essentially unknown, and the problem raised by Hayden White remains relevant:

The question that arises with respect to “historical emplotments” in a study of Nazism and the Final Solution is this: Are there any limits on the *kind* of story that can responsibly be told about these phenomena? *Can* these events be responsibly plotted in *any* of the modes, symbols, plot types and genres our culture provides for “making sense” of such extreme events in our past.⁶⁸

There are no simple and unambiguous answers to these questions. We find here phenomena that may appear paradoxical – not only in the realm of strictly narrative forms but also in poetry. Genres rooted in tradition can reveal an extraordinary vitality, including those of which this might be unexpected. Indeed, this is the case not only with poetic laments – for instance, the “Song of the Murdered Jewish nation,” written in Yiddish by Itzhak Katzenelson – but also with styles and forms that have never been associated with martyrological themes. The articles collected in the volume *Appropriateness and Form (Stosowność i forma)* clearly present this phenomenon. The broad poetic style of the Skamander movement⁶⁹ – which by the end of the 1930s had become highly conventionalized and was slowly passing into the realm of literary archaism – suddenly displayed an entirely unexpected usefulness. Accordingly, it was not the canon-shattering style of the Avant-Garde, or even – with some individual exceptions – the dramatic style of the interwar Catastrophists⁷⁰ that would become the basic style of Polish poetry attempting to convey the experience of the Holocaust. Instead, this role fell to the poetics of the Skamander movement. The style was simple, unpretentious, unafraid to represent everyday realities and concrete facts, and in a certain sense outdated. One might

68 White, Hayden, “Historical Emplotment and the Problem of Truth,” in *The History and Narrative Reader*, ed. Geoffrey Roberts (London: Routledge, 2001), p. 375.

69 Translator’s Note: The Skamander movement – named after the River Scamander of Homer’s Troy – was an important grouping of Polish poets formed after the First World War, including such influential figures as Jarosław Iwaszkiewicz, Julian Tuwim, Antoni Słonimski and Jan Lechoń. The movement was related to various strains of Polish neo-romanticism, though it tended to de-emphasize the national element often characteristic of Polish literary production – and Polish romanticism in particular.

70 Translator’s Note: “Catastrophism” was an informal grouping of poets, writers and philosophers giving expression in their writings – particularly in the 1930s – to a sense of impending historical cataclysm. The most famous representative of this tendency – at least in some of his early writings – was the future Nobel-Prize-winning poet Czesław Miłosz.

say that this was the case because Polish poetry – though its achievements in this domain are enormous – did not have its Paul Celan, an artist who could forge his or her own style almost as a poet of a single theme. No such figure exists in Polish Holocaust poetry. Nevertheless, the continuation of the Skamander tradition was an important phenomenon with very wide-ranging significance. The poems written in the Warsaw Ghetto by Władysław Szlengel testify to this fact, not only as shocking documentary evidence, but also as a momentous poetic record.⁷¹ The poems of Stanisław Wygodzki – written immediately after the war and collected in the volume *Pamiętnik miłości (Memoirs of Love)* testify to the same phenomenon.⁷²

The relation of Holocaust writing to Polish romanticism is a separate question. This subject still awaits a more thorough investigation, since currently we have only partial examinations. We know that romanticism influenced various ways of representing the Jewish community's situation during the Holocaust – and the situation of particular individuals⁷³ – by suggesting certain models of poetic speech. Clearly the occupation era poetry of Mieczysław Jastrun is deeply rooted in Polish romanticism. In this period, his work constantly revolved around the Holocaust. Moreover, when we consider the two most famous Polish poems on the subject – Czesław Miłosz's "Campo di Fiori" and Władysław Broniewski's "Ballads and Romances" – one of them refers directly to romanticism.⁷⁴

Here we should point out an extraordinary phenomenon. The literary ballad might have appeared to be an entirely historical genre, which had enjoyed its golden age in the early phase of romanticism. Admittedly, we should also mention certain later masterpieces by Bolesław Leśmian, but these are of little significance in this case. Broniewski's remarkable work is not an isolated case, though it would

71 See: Szlengel, Władysław, *Co czytałem umarłym, Wiersze getta warszawskiego* (Warszawa: PIW, 1977). John and Bogdana Carpenter have now translated some of Szlengel's poems into English, including the title piece, "What I Read To Be Dead." These poems appeared in the Fall/Winter 2012-2013 edition of *The Manhattan Review*.

72 Bartosz Kaliski writes about this issue in his article "Siła tradycji. O poezji Stanisława Wygodzkiego." We should point out that the few verses by the major Polish-Jewish poet Julian Tuwim which refer to the Holocaust are of little significance here. Of the lyrics by poets belonging to the Skamander group, perhaps the most memorable is Antoni Słonimski's "Elegia miasteczek żydowskich" ("Elegy for Little Jewish Towns").

73 See the following articles from the volume *Stosowności i formie: Ławski, Jarosław, "Narracja i 'wyniszczenie.' O spowiedzi Calka Perechodnika"; Żukowski, Tomasz, "Ballady o Szoa."*

74 Translator's Note: The title of Broniewski's poem is taken from romantic poet Adam Mickiewicz's breakthrough volume of poems, *Ballads and Romances (Ballady i romanse, 1822)*.

be difficult to find other poems of the same quality.⁷⁵ Against all expectations, the ballad became one of the most popular genres in the poetry of the Holocaust (see Żukowski's article). There have been many such peculiar cases over the course of its development and evolution. This fact is worthy of consideration.

4

The Holocaust itself is not the only *sui generis* event. The creative literature devoted to it (along with various other works of art) is – or at least should be – regarded as an equally unique and singular phenomenon. At the same time, it is also open to various kinds of dangers and threats, which have accompanied it from the beginning, perhaps even arising at its very origin. Here I shall turn my attention to the most significant dangers.

One of these threats lies in what Lawrence L. Langer has termed the “preempting” of the Holocaust:

When I speak of preempting the Holocaust, I mean using – and perhaps abusing – its grim details to fortify a prior commitment to an ideal of moral reality, community responsibility, or religious belief that leaves us with space to retain faith in their pristine value in a post-Holocaust world.⁷⁶

More is at stake here than merely inserting visions or discussions of the Holocaust into a specific worldview dear to a particular writer, philosopher or journalist, however inconsistent this worldview may be with the event itself. For even if we wish to minimize this process in a programmatic way, it would appear to be unavoidable. The problem depends on how far this appropriation of the crime against the Jews goes, and – above all – on the scope of its application. Ultimately, “preemption” may lead to the effacement of the event's specific nature, so that it may be treated as if it were merely one of a whole set of historical events, with no distinctive characteristics.

Indeed, this “preemption” has all the necessary attributes to become an intermediate phase leading to a much more serious danger – namely, to universalization. The scholar Marek Zaleski maintains that the possibility of universalization forms a “crucial question and a matter of the most vital

75 Though Wisława Szymborska's magnificent poem “Still” (“Jeszcze”) is just as extraordinary. See my article, “Wisławy Szymborskiej ballada o Zagładzie” in *Lustra historii, Rozprawy i eseje ofiarowane Profesor Marii Żmigrodzkiej z okazji pięćdziesięciolecia pracy naukowej*, eds. M. Kalinowska and E. Kiślak (Warszawa: IBL PAN 1998).

76 Langer, Lawrence L., *Preempting the Holocaust* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1998), p. 1.

significance.⁷⁷ This danger is not limited to the practices followed for years in communist Poland and other countries of the Communist Bloc – namely, programmatic de-judaization, or systematic omission of the fact that what happened was an extermination of the Jews.

Indeed, we cannot reduce this problem to ideological manipulation – which had clearly defined political goals in the communist world. The question also applies to cases that do not necessarily reveal any immediate or utilitarian concerns. The disturbing possibility arises that the Holocaust might begin to lose its unique status, becoming simply one of many terrible events in human history. The awareness of what has determined its specific character might begin to disappear, thus transforming into a parable about the power of evil or the imperfections of human nature. In one form or another, this type of universalization is inevitable, as events become more distant in time and the broad outline becomes more clearly perceptible than the everyday realities, particularities and concrete facts filling the space within it. Such universalization is probably unavoidable, but this does not mean that we should simply succumb to it. Universalization is based on equivalency – and this demands falsification of the truth. A parable is not a narrative about history or its concrete realities. Above all, it is a means for conveying various forms of moral teachings, sometimes without any relation to the contents of the specific historical “emplotment,” as White describes it.

Another danger to literature (and to art more generally) conveying the experience of the Holocaust is encroachment into the realm of kitsch.⁷⁸ This is not synonymous with entering the sphere of mass culture. In fact, these phenomena only partly overlap. Works about the extermination of the Jews that clearly belong to mass culture are not necessarily kitsch (this especially applies to film), while works that are kitsch do not necessarily belong to the realm of mass culture. On the contrary, kitsch may also arise in the realm of culture we usually refer to as “high culture.” For kitsch does not only refer to works that use the schemes and conventions of popular art. Indeed, examples of kitsch can sometimes be found in works that distance themselves ostentatiously from these conventions. Such works represent what we might describe as contemporary mannerism, boasting rich and sophisticated artistic trappings that are impractical and do not serve to convey visions of such a terrible world. The border between ridiculously trivial kitsch and more sophisticated kitsch – much like the border between the kitsch and the non-kitsch – are not strictly delineated. Instead, they are fluid and sometimes even

77 Zaleski, Marek, “‘Ludzie ludziom’...? ‘Ludzie Żydom’...? Świadectwo literatury,” in *Literatura polska wobec Zagłady*, p. 90.

78 This problem has been observed in various contexts. Imre Kertész has done so with particular clarity on many different occasions.

blurred. For instance, Imre Kertész appraises Steven Spielberg's famous and – in its own way – important film, *Schindler's List*, as indisputably kitsch.

We should emphasize that kitsch – denoting the reduction of everything to polished banality, a sentimental image, an adventure tale or mere conventional outrage – is by no means a new danger in Holocaust literature. On the contrary, kitsch appeared very early in its development, almost at the very beginning, where it already constituted a threat. For example, we might mention various American novels by third-rate authors published shortly after the war or the rather different kinds of kitsch appearing in early Polish literature on the subject (including Wojciech Żurawski's short story "Pod śniegiem" from the volume *Z kraju milczenia* [1946]). Nevertheless, the relatively low level of kitsch evident in the first phase of Holocaust literature's development resulted from the fact that it referred in many cases to direct experiences and thus was under strong pressure from the facts. Wherever we find accounts from personal experiences or observations, the potential for kitsch shrinks dramatically.⁷⁹ But as the descriptions of these experiences lose their dynamic immediacy with the passage of time, the realm of kitsch begins to expand.

5

The distinctive evolutionary paths of Holocaust literature and visual art form separate questions. Nevertheless, in all fields one thing is clear – a radical expansion of possibilities. Things that were unthinkable not long ago have become artistic realities. This expansion of possibilities essentially applies to everything: to styles of speech about the Holocaust and even to the very semiotic systems that an artist may justifiably employ. Once it was difficult to imagine that such a secondary genre as the comic strip – basically associated with mass entertainment in a low style – could advance to the role of conveying a serious story about the fates of people subject to extermination. And yet this is precisely what has happened.⁸⁰ Once it was difficult to imagine that a film could be made about the Holocaust

79 Even when this concerns works that are weak or not especially interesting from a literary point of view. The volume of realistic stories by Krystyna Żywulska about everyday life in the Warsaw Ghetto – entitled *Pusta woda* (*Empty Water*) – is clearly without higher literary value. Nevertheless, it speaks about specific experiences, situations, and concrete realities – and thus it has nothing in common with kitsch.

80 See Art Spiegelman's *Maus* series of comic books. Tomasz Łysak deals with this subject in his piece "Autobiografia (auto)biografii. *Maus* Arta Spiegelmana," published in *Stosowność i forma*.

in the generic conventions of comedy. And yet this, too, has happened.⁸¹ Neither the comic nor the comedy provoked any scandal. On the contrary, they have been treated as legitimate expansions of the artistic repertoire for talking about the Holocaust in a manner that does justice to the horror of the event.

This process manifests itself even more clearly in various fields of the fine arts – including monumental memorial architecture, museums,⁸² and various artifacts of avant-garde production. Admittedly, in this realm, the process of expansion often arouses discussion and sometimes provokes protest. Nevertheless, the fact remains that avant-garde literature and art attempting to convey visions of the Holocaust and preserve the memory of the past have not stagnated. Instead, they remain in a state of constant evolution, or rather in a process of ceaseless transformation. When we analyze the body of Holocaust literature as it exists today, we cannot treat its diverse forms as final or definitive. Neither can we forget that its greatest works – which often arose from immediate responses to the event – remain unique and inimitable phenomena. In a certain sense, any description of Holocaust literature as it stands today will also constitute an open question about its future.

Postscript: This text – written in 2005 – originally formed the introduction to the collective volume *Stosowność i forma, Jak opowiadać o Zagładzie? (Appropriateness and Form: How Should We Speak About the Holocaust?)*. This volume contains works by various participants of a seminar devoted to Holocaust literature, which I conducted over several years at the School of Social Sciences in association with the Polish Academy of Sciences (PAN) Institute of Philosophy and Sociology. I edited this volume together with Katarzyna Chmielewska, Katarzyna Makaruk, Alina Molisak and Tomasz Żukowski.

81 See Roberto Benigni's Oscar-winning film *Life Is Beautiful*. Katarzyna Makaruk discusses this question in her article "Czy możliwa jest komedia o Holokauście? O filmach *Życie jest piękne* Roberta Benigniego i *Pociąg czasu* Radu Michaileanusa," also published in *Stosowność i forma*.

82 See Zofia Wóycicka's "Niezrealizowany projekt upamiętnienia terenu byłego obozu zagłady w Treblince z roku 1947 roku. Próba analizy ikonograficznej," published in *Stosowność i forma*.

5. Through the Eyes of the Executioner (On Jonathan Littell's *The Kindly Ones*)

1

The most talked-about novel in the world in recent years is an extraordinary work. Indeed, it is no surprise that it should have evoked such strong and contrasting reactions, ranging from rapture to uncompromising rejection – and not just for aesthetic reasons. Among the various motives for disapproval, moral considerations have often come to the fore. Critics have advanced numerous contradictory evaluations. Some call it a masterpiece, while others declare it kitsch. Some claim that it is a great novel about a murderous history, while others insist that it is the story of a psychopath, a work that stoops to the level of pornography and aims to stun the reader with its brutality. Appraisals of a book are rarely so conflicting. Their very extremity says much about the work, which refuses to leave the reader in the realm of intermediate states. Instead, it consistently provokes violent reactions, making it difficult for anybody to maintain the analytical calm so desirable in criticism – and even more difficult to find the middle ground between kitsch and masterpiece. There would seem to be no way to reconcile what is magnificent in the book with what is vague, mannered, trashy or simply calculated for cheap effect. Yet certain facts remain beyond doubt. The book is brilliantly written, and it reads extraordinarily well.⁸³ Above all, it is an important work that has provoked thought and discussion. How many such novels have appeared in our times?

So the book is neither kitsch nor a masterpiece, though it also represents much more than a mere bestselling literary sensation cooked up to exploit current fashions and ephemeral interests. Since we are defining *The Kindly Ones* here via negative formulations, let us state the case more clearly: it is not an historical novel. Here I agree with a claim made by Stefan Chwin in his recent – and profound – remarks on the book: “I am against treating *The Kindly Ones* as an historical novel. This book is about something else.”⁸⁴ The question immediately

83 I am basing my remarks on the Polish edition of the book: *Laskawe* (Kraków: Wydawnictwo Literackie, 2008). Therefore, I am referring to the translation by Magdalena Kamińska-Maurugeon. I would like to emphasize that it is wonderful translation. Most of the Polish authors writing on Littell's work have used it, though without giving the translator any credit.

84 See Andrzej Franaszek's conversation with Stefan Chwin, “Erynie wybaczą każdemu,” published in *Tygodnik Powszechny*, No 40 (3091), 2008.

arises: what is it about, then? I would reply: it is about history, though this does not make it a historical novel. The novel about history and the historical novel may sometimes be the same thing, but this is by no means always the case. The differences are fundamental, and we may find them beyond the strictly literary dimension. Indeed, elements related to social consciousness may also come into play, sometimes proving more significant than literary conventions. From a certain perspective, the historical novel constitutes its own peculiar literary genre, and we may easily point to its constantly evolving conventions. No particular difficulties arise here. But various complications inevitably emerge when we take into account the prevailing attitude towards the past elaborated in any given period. To repeat: not every fictional narrative depicting historical events necessarily constitutes a historical novel. Often this is because the narrative strips these events of any autonomy, using them as mere examples of a contemporary thesis or idea, or even – and this is more common – as a vehicle allowing the author to speak about important issues of his or her own time. This may involve Aesopian language, as it does when censorship prevails – though this is not an absolute rule. Either way, allusions to former times generally allow authors to introduce their own original material in a symbolic dimension and to emphasize what would be difficult to discuss without the historical scenery. Two well-known and important novels published in communist Poland – Jerzy Andrzejewski's *And Darkness Covered the Earth* (*Ciemności kryją ziemię*, 1957) and Andrzej Szczypiorski's *A Mass for the City of Arras* (*Msza za miasto Arras*, 1971) – are set in historical times, though they are not historical novels, but rather allegorical narratives.

Of course, Stefan Chwin was not talking about allegory, and *The Kindly Ones* has nothing in common with any form of allegory. In fact, the novel is constructed in such a way that it allows for no secondary allegorization in the act of reading. The important question is whether we may treat the novel's subject as if it belonged to a closed period of history with no reference of any kind to contemporary times. A historical novel – even the most artistically radical and unconventional – must refer to an era regarded as irrevocably closed. Indeed, I wonder whether Tolstoy, as he wrote *War and Peace* in the middle of the nineteenth century, imagined that he was writing a historical novel. Could any Russian living at that time have been at all inclined to assume that the Napoleonic Wars were so distant in time as to form the subject of a historical novel? Or were they nothing but a distant part of the present (“today, just a little further away” – to cite the Polish late Romantic poet Cyprian Kamil Norwid)? One thing seems certain: even today – so many decades after the period in which it took place – a historical novel about the Holocaust is still impossible. It is impossible for various reasons. The Holocaust is so traumatic and terrible that we cannot categorize it with other past events that simply happened, then melted away, petrified or crystallized. The events of

the Holocaust have refused to fade away not only because a handful of survivors who escaped with their lives are still with us – or even because we have only begun to understand what it really meant in the last few decades. As a set of historical facts, the Holocaust is closed. But it is not closed as a problem, or as a set of questions inevitably associated with it as an object of reflection. The historical novel is possible only when events begin to evoke what I would call a “distant word,” which no longer refers to any living experience but rather offers a long-term perspective, as a kind of closed interpretation (which of course does not mean a final or immutable interpretation). We know that the extermination of the Albigensians was a manifestation of the Church’s struggle against heresy. Accordingly, we are able to classify this event and somehow to assimilate it. This is possible because we no longer wage religious wars – at least not in this form – in the civilized world (tribal conflicts in which questions of faith play an important role are another matter). Though we now know so much about the Holocaust, it continues to exist as an open problem and to pose new dilemmas, including the basic question: how was such horror possible within European civilization? These questions remain relevant, and thus they rule out the type of narrative characteristic of the historical novel.

So, *The Kindly Ones* is clearly not a historical novel, since – at least for the reasons presented above – this cannot possibly be the case. At the same time, it is certainly a novel about history. This does not mean that it can be categorized as non-fiction or “historical reportage.” The multiple novelistic procedures used within it make such a definition unthinkable. We are dealing here with a fully blown novel – a novel that not only depicts history, but illustrates and presents particular historical episodes. At least, this appears to be the intention when we read certain sections of the book. On the one hand, the novel has a consistent structure, or rather a structure set in stone by the historical course of events in the years 1941-1945. On the other hand, it contains traces (to put things as delicately as possible) of episodic composition. Littell has invented the fate of Max Aue – and this is true even when we recall its mythological references – in order to depict what in his view is most significant about the Second World War and the Holocaust. Aue is a participant in the anti-Jewish massacres in Ukraine. He takes part in battles on the eastern front and visits concentration and death camps, including Majdanek and Auschwitz. This illustration of history also includes events of narrower significance. For instance, Littell rightly draws attention to a Parisian episode, in which SS Officer Aue makes contact with French fascists collaborating with the Germans and ideologically supporting them. If we consider the novel as a whole, it would lose nothing if this episode were omitted. Perhaps the author included it because he intended the novel above all for the French reader, for whom this matter might have been especially significant.

2

The view that Littell's work cannot be treated as a historical novel is rather widespread among critics. So what is it, then? Chwin defines it as a "phantasmic novel, which mixes reality with illusion." Here he goes into further detail: "My definition of a phantasmic novel is as follows: a hyper-realistic description of an imaginary world, shaped from facts, traumas and obsessions." This is an interesting and lucid definition, which undoubtedly applies to many literary works of the twentieth century – and probably to some recent writing from the first decade of the new century as well. Nevertheless, certain questions immediately present themselves. After all, the subject of the novel is nothing like the penal colony of Franz Kafka's imagination, a creation depicted with an attention to detail worthy of a realist, and – as has often been observed – somehow anticipating real places of a similar kind. Kafka's story is undoubtedly a phantasmic narrative in Chwin's understanding. But Babi Yar and other sites of massacres in Ukraine really existed. The concentration camps and gas chambers really existed. In various parts of the continent called Europe, a few million people were really murdered in various ways that included industrial methods. The source and basis of these phantasms are events that did not spring from dreams or arise in a pathological and sadistic imagination. The narrator protagonist lives in a world that not long before would have seemed nothing but the senseless dream of a lunatic, violating any possible notions of what could be real. He submits himself to the prevailing rules of this world, an ardent executor of its accepted laws. He makes a career for himself within it, and thinks in categories determined by the official image of reality. For all these reasons, he becomes one of the perpetrators of the crime. Littell does not conceal the fact that he is showing the world "through the eyes of the executioner." He states this openly in an extremely interesting conversation with the historian Pierre Nora.⁸⁵ This is the choice he has made. One might wonder in the case of such great crimes whether there is any sense in showing the world from this perspective. After all, it seems indecent to focus on the soul of the executioner when people are dying all around him. I do not share this inflexible position. Literature should concern itself with everything, even when this means violating the sense of appropriateness or provoking scandal. The problem of whether a story of Nazi crimes can be told by one of its perpetrators is much older than Littell's work. It arose as early as the 1950s with Robert Merle's much talked about novel *Death Is*

85 Littell, Jonathan, and Pierre Nora, "Conversation sur l'histoire et le roman," *Le Débat* (Gallimard) 144, pp. 25-44. This is a very important dialogue for understanding the work. Nora's comments are much more than mere questions posed by an interviewer to an author. Instead, they represent the glosses of an equal partner, including many interesting ideas and interpretive concepts.

My Trade (which was controversial in Poland as well), written as the confessions of an Auschwitz commandant presented as a literary equivalent of Rudolf Hoess.⁸⁶ This novel lacks the impact of Littell's work, and it is free of many complications. Merle's hero is simply a common criminal. One might call Max Aue many things, but certainly not "common." Even as he participates in the crime, affirms it and accepts it as something beyond any moral reflection, he is no common executioner. Of course, it does not matter to the victim whether the executioner's psychology – or indeed his life more generally – is banal or whether he distinguishes himself by extraordinary attributes. It makes no difference whether he is a primitive boor or an aesthete and a reader of Plato's dialogues. Nevertheless, this does not mean that these questions may not interest a writer.

The decision to write in the first person in such a situation undoubtedly carries a certain risk. In the conversation with Pierre Nora, Littell explains:

I have almost always written in the first person. (. . .) I'm incapable of writing in any other way. The only novel I haven't written in the first person singular was written in the first person plural, in a kind of Genet-style "we," though ineptly executed. In fact, I came to understand long ago that for me "I" functions like "he." I'm afraid of "he," because this "he" is almost always more "I" than "I." So using "I" allowed me to gain greater distance.

This argument questions certain views that are well-established both in novelistic theory and in the confessions of other writers, casting doubt on what might have seemed self-evident and thus leading to a kind of paradox. Here we find a very different dilemma from Rimbaud's famous confession that "'I' is another," especially since the narratorial "I" in a novel – unlike in lyric poetry – is not usually identified with the authorial "I." Only the most naive readers – unversed in the rules of literature – would insist on identifying the two. In the case of *The Kindly Ones*, this identification is clearly impossible, though the question of distance is probably not as simple as it may seem to the author. In order to recognize and appreciate this distance, we must first understand that every part of the narrative is historically and situationally conditioned. There is no reason to ascribe any utterance within it directly to the author. We can be in no doubt that he does not identify with his protagonist. In this sense, he clearly does not construct an empathetic narrative, though certain skeptical and suspicious critics of *The Kindly Ones* have hinted with concern at the proximity of the author to his murderous narrator. It would appear in this case that information about the author

86 See: Merle, Robert, *Death Is My Trade* (London : Derek Verschoyle, 1954). Certain German critics in particular have examined links between Littell's novel and Merle's book. Wojciech Pięciak discusses this question in his article "Historia w oczach psychopaty," *Tygodnik Powszechny* 40 (2008).

– specifically, about his Jewish background – might disturb this interpretation of the novel, precluding any reading that would identify the two.

Here a risk appears that we might characterize as “compositional.” Enormous novels written in the first person obviously exist. We need only mention Marcel Proust’s great cycle or Thomas Mann’s *Doctor Faustus*. These works are of an entirely different nature, however, since their ambition is not to capture historical events, but rather to concentrate on the personal world. Alternatively, they might represent a kind of biography written by a friend – as in Mann’s novel, in which the game unfolds between Serenus Zeitblom and Adrian Leverkühn. As we have established, Littell’s work is a novel about history. It includes a great many characters, while the action takes place in multiple locations, from the Caucasus Mountains to the French Riviera, filling the novelistic stage with various events in which the protagonist is a participant, a witness or sometimes merely a commentator. Consequently, the narratorial “I” bears a heavy burden. The protagonist must fulfill numerous tasks and sometimes he seems suspiciously ubiquitous. Nevertheless, we must concede that Littell deals with these compositional difficulties tremendously well in his consistently and lucidly constructed novel.

A much more significant danger lies elsewhere. Can a person who has involved himself in genocide be entrusted with telling the story of Nazi crimes – above all, of the Holocaust – especially when he is not inclined to feel any regret for his sins, which simply do not arouse any moral reflection in him? For he really does not acknowledge his sins – neither at the time of his actions nor later as he recounts them. They exist beyond the boundaries of his mental world. But things do not end there. A character who never leaves center stage even for a moment in a thousand-page novel cannot be a man without qualities. He cannot be a mere schematic creation, like a figure from a morality play or any other form of allegory. If anything, Doctor Max Aue has too many qualities, though it would be difficult to agree with the view that “the main character, Max Aue, for all his complexity, turns out in the end to be more a collection of clichés drawn from other works of literature than a living, convincing character.”⁸⁷ He is undeniably a psychopath. His crimes are not merely the fulfillment of the ideological imperative to which he has chained himself. Indeed, they are sometimes similar to the transgressions of Lafcadio from André Gide’s novel *Les caves du Vatican* – strangely gratuitous acts without any particular justification (*actes gratuits*). This psychopathic nature has aroused concerns among some critics. Among other things, they have accused Littell of engaging in cheap games with the reader, allowing for the introduction

87 Musiał, Łukasz, “Unde malum, Wokół *Łaskawych* Jonathana Littella,” *Przegląd Polityczny* 90 (2008), p. 54. On a side note, in expressing his longing for a “living, convincing character,” the author evokes categories that might be appropriate in relation to a nineteenth-century realist novel, but in this context are clearly anachronisms.

of extreme sexual themes bordering on outright obscenity. It would be difficult to shrug off the presence of these themes in the novel. At the same time, I would not accuse the writer of introducing them in order to appeal to a mass audience. They have a deeper meaning here, even when they are not occasioned – as in the case of matricide – by references to myth or to Aeschylus's plays. They represent much more than mere spice to be sprinkled ostentatiously on a Holocaust story.

We might suppose that Littell was entering the discussion on precisely what kind of people became the architects of such murderous activities, freely choosing the Nazi ideology and subordinating themselves to it without scruple or hesitation. Were they largely bureaucratic types, prepared to do anything their superiors ordered them to do? Or, were they psychopaths who followed these orders with complete commitment, satisfaction and even pleasure, convinced that they had to exterminate the Jews, hating them as the bane of humanity and the very incarnation of evil? The greatness of Littell's work lies partly in the fact that he does not seek to solve this problem unambiguously. Among the enormous number of characters populating the world of the novel, representatives of both types appear. For instance, there are those – like Adolf Eichmann – who are efficient administrators, organizing the transportations to the gas chambers as if they were merely freighting cargo. But there are also maniacs – and in certain respects the main protagonist is one of them. Evil – in accordance with Hannah Arendt's famous diagnosis – is sometimes banal in Littell's novel, but it can also be sophisticated, curiously motivated and of uncertain origin. Doctor Max Aue is a representative of this second variety.

As Aue tells his story, he does not only talk about fictional characters like himself. His own biography – full of extraordinary and even improbable events – is clearly the creation of the novelist. But over the course of the narrative he also encounters characters who are lamentably real. He works with Eichmann, visits his apartment and listens to a Brahms string quartet performed by an ensemble in which he plays first violin. He receives a promotion from Himmler, whose orders he faithfully carries out. He also encounters criminals like Odilo Globocnik (with whom he comes into contact in Lublin) and various concentration camp commandants, whom he mentions by name. In certain cases – particularly where background characters are concerned – it is unclear whether we are dealing with real perpetrators or fictional characters. Several decades ago, when the *nouveau roman* was a literary innovation at the center of lively debate, Alain Robbe-Grillet declared that the inclusion of authentic characters in the novelistic plot clashed with the very essence of the genre, representing a form of aberration. Fiction could not be combined with non-fiction. Robbe-Grillet's extremely strict views have never entirely applied to the novel. In fact, in the cases of both the historical novel and the novel about history, they cannot apply. Littell pays no attention

to them at all. If he had accepted them, he could never have written this novel – particularly since he frequently includes specific events familiar to historians, such as Himmler's stay in Poznań, where he gave a crucial speech (this section constitutes one of the work's most brilliant episodes).

So who is this doctor of laws, Max Aue? He is undoubtedly an educated man, who has certain problems with himself and with his family. But he is also an aesthete who reads philosophers and listens fervently to musical masterpieces. We might say that he is an intellectual, though undeniably he is twisted, full of anomalies and by no means the ideal model of a Nazi promoted by the party ideologues. However, he does not belong to this murderous movement simply because he has problems with himself or because he feels hatred for those whom the ideology orders him to hate. He is clearly not a model Nazi – if for no other reason than his sexual orientation. If this were exposed, the perpetrator might very easily be transformed into a victim. Yet one of the signs of greatness in Littell's narrative is the fact that he does not make causal links between individual pathology in the psyche of the protagonist and his active participation in the crimes. Ultimately, not all those who participated in the executions at Babi Yar, for instance, had personal problems. There were also exemplary family men among them, people undistinguished in any particular way, self-satisfied and ordinary people. By renouncing the easy path of causality, the writer avoids any references to a trivialized version of psychoanalysis and thus to a one-sided perspective on the matter. A person did not have to violate the prevailing prohibition on incest in European culture in order to murder Jews or any other people whom Hitler considered to be enemies of the German nation without scruple. Doctor Aue never wavers, while scruples are entirely alien to him. Yet he is still an aesthete and a well-educated man. Accordingly, he observes certain procedures from a distance, while never actively questioning them. As a witness to murders and mass executions, he reacts with nervous diarrhea and retching. He is simply not fond of viewing such things.

The author seems to have referred to various traditions of German literature and ideology – and perhaps to certain Nietzschean themes – in his creation of the narrator and main protagonist. These inter-textual references – which are undoubtedly important in the work – will probably interest many critics and literary historians. It seems to me that I have stumbled across one of these traces, perhaps not especially significant from an ideological point of view, though still worthy of consideration. Why is the protagonist's name Aue? In the second half of the twelfth century, the German poet Hartmann von Aue wrote – among other things – an epic poem entitled *Gregorius*, which adapted a popular medieval legend. Littell probably does not look quite so far back in literary history. In fact, Thomas Mann makes reference to the work in one of his late masterpieces, *Der*

Erwählte, where he almost rewrites it. The title character enters the world from an incestuous relationship in a royal family, which subsequently marks his whole life (we might point to other similarities in plot, such as the disappearance of the father). He is one of fate's chosen ones, and he goes on to become pope. Max Aue represents another type of chosen one, as we observe when fate makes him the director of a lace factory. Here we find one of the most crucial, though concealed, aspects of the novel's plot: irony.

3

In many interpretations of *The Kindly Ones*, we encounter the view that the novel is about evil, absolute evil with no justification or explanation, evil taken to extremes, beyond all limits, manifesting itself in both general and individual dimensions. I have no wish to enter into any polemic with this view. However, I think that one might complicate this interpretation somewhat. Evil is the right category when we look at the novel's world from the outside. We as readers can use this term with absolute validity when we talk about it. But the main actors within this world have no basis on which to do so, though the narrator protagonist looks back at the Nazi era from quite a distant perspective, talking about his past at a time when he is no longer a high-ranking officer, but works in the more ideologically neutral setting of a lace factory. The novel does not depict a repentant sinner. No reflection on sin is accessible to him, since the concept finds no place within the limitations of his mind. No moral reflection is possible here at all. I quote from a highly characteristic conversation between Max Aue and his brother-in-law, the musician Von Üxküll, who is not a Nazi:

Von Üxküll was looking at me: "Do you know why you're killing the Jews? Do you know?" Throughout this strange conversation he kept provoking me, I didn't reply, I savored the wine. "Why have the Germans shown so much determination to kill the Jews?" – "You're wrong if you think it's only the Jews," I said calmly. "The Jews are only one category of enemy. We are destroying all our enemies, whoever and wherever they are." – "Yes, but admit it, for the Jews you've shown a special determination." – "I don't think so. The Fuhrer, in fact, may have personal reasons to hate the Jews. But at the SD, we don't hate anyone, we objectively pursue our enemies. The choices we make are rational ones." – "Not as rational as all that. Why did you have to eliminate the mentally ill, the handicapped in hospitals? What danger did they pose, those poor wretches?" – "Useless mouths. Do you know how many millions of reichsmarks we saved that way? Not to speak of the hospital beds freed for the wounded from the front."⁸⁸

88 Littell, Jonathan, *The Kindly Ones* (New York: HarperCollins, 2009), p. 874.

In this brief conversation, from a time when the fall of the Nazi state is in no doubt, certain things emerge that are highly characteristic of the novel. The most important element – or so it seems to me – is its presentation of a world in which there is no moral reflection. This is not the case simply because the narrator protagonist perceives the world in this way as an ardent Nazi. Ultimately, his individual attributes are not at stake here. Instead, it represents a characteristic feature of the entire Nazi system. This is not merely an immoral world – for being immoral does not necessarily mean undermining the very existence of morality. Instead, it reflects a complete ignorance of moral principles. Above all, the novel depicts an amoral world – one in which all reference to morality and all moral reflections are eradicated. Therefore, not only is the protagonist amoral, but the whole reality he has entered and assimilated is amoral. We might legitimately say that this reality exists beyond the law. Of course, there is a clear difference here. The Nazi state created a pretense of law, but it never suggested even a pretense of morality. “Law” is the final solution. Thus it was necessary to establish whether the Mountain Jews of the Caucasus were authentic Jews from a racial perspective or rather mountain tribes who by a strange twist of fate had come to profess the Jewish faith. In order to do so, the Nazis conducted quite wide-ranging studies, including research on the Caucasian languages. According to the Nuremberg Laws, considerations of blood were crucial, and thus one had to answer the basic question: to exterminate or not to exterminate? The story of these Caucasian mountain people of Jewish faith is one of the most extraordinary episodes of the novel.

In my view, Littell’s great success as a writer lies in his exceptionally consistent and insightful depictions of a world in which totalitarian ideology has usurped the place of morality. Here ideology imposes all meanings and forms, subjugating everything to its demands. It forms the basis of dichotomous divisions according to which whatever does not submit to it must be treated – as we observe in the conversation above – as the work of the enemy. Fulfilling the directives resulting from this ideology is the guiding principle of all action. In this domain, ideology determines everything. If pragmatic considerations arise – and undoubtedly they play a role – they are important above all in areas defined by ideology. Littell takes up an extraordinarily interesting theme here. In the final phase of the war, Max Aue is occupied with the exploitation of slave labor for military purposes. On Himmler’s orders, he visits the greatest reservoirs of this labor – the concentration camps. He finds that carrying out his orders demands a more humane approach to the prisoners. Here an interesting conflict presents itself. The camp functionaries know that their primary task is to exterminate all the prisoners. Famished, living in the worst possible conditions, struck with disease, the inmates are clearly not capable of any rationally organized work to achieve the desired results in arms

production. Therefore, according to Max Aue, it is necessary to improve their rations and general living conditions, so that they might be exploited on the appropriate scale. The executioners of Auschwitz are also pragmatists, though their pragmatism is very different in nature. Their task is to make use of whatever means will most rapidly achieve the aim of extermination. This is the law imposed by Hitler. For the novel's protagonist, improving the living conditions of slaves is a purely pragmatic question, unrelated to any moral or humane considerations. He is incapable of such reflections, since in his world morality simply does not exist.

4

We must also view *The Kindly Ones* as another book in the vast cycle of works devoted to the Holocaust. Littell's novel occupies an important and original position within this cycle, which has been in a process of constant transformation since the war. A collection of Polish articles dealing with this genre bears the sub-title *How Should We Speak About the Holocaust? (Jak opowiadać o Zagładzie?)*.⁸⁹ There is no clear answer to this question. Certainly nobody will succeed in producing a prescriptive formula. Instead, we find many diverse answers to this question. What might have seemed inappropriate or even impossible in the earliest period might begin to seem appropriate and possible with the passage of time. We can observe a clear evolution in this domain. The danger for Holocaust literature – as it turns out – does not lie in extraordinary ideas or concepts. The main threats from the very beginning to this day – and probably into the future – have been banality, kitsch, and a certain kind of allegorization. Holocaust narratives will inevitably diverge further and further away from firsthand experience, though they will not express themselves in the dispassionate form of the historical novel for some time yet. They will lose the forcefulness and persuasive power of documentary evidence, though – in certain places and perhaps even in Littell's novel – they might come close. I am convinced that if a novel depicting the Holocaust from a perpetrator's perspective had appeared immediately after the occupation, it would have provoked a scandal (as Robert Merle's novel did in some circles). Indeed, there are those who have judged *The Kindly Ones* precisely in this negative way. They are wrong. The sphere of "appropriateness" has expanded and diversified, so that what once might have seemed tactless is no longer reprehensible – not only from a literary point of view, but even from a moral perspective. Depicting the crime from the executioner's perspective allows the writer to reveal or emphasize aspects that might escape our attention or remain entirely unnoticed in other

89 See "Polish Literature on the Holocaust (Preliminary Reflections)" in this volume.

representations. Jonathan Littell's novel proves that depicting genocide through the eyes of its perpetrators does not soften its image, falsify the historical truth, or even erode what we might describe as its documentary value. We might still express certain reservations about *The Kindly Ones*, but it is impossible not to acknowledge its significant, remarkable and perhaps even landmark position within Holocaust literature, where it has greatly expanded the range of possibilities. I am not surprised that it has won such renown.

October – November 2008

6. Narrative, Newspeak, Totalitarian Form

In Fyodor Dostoevsky's *The Idiot*, Adelaida Yepanchin makes the following remark about Prince Myshkin: "As soon as you start telling about something, you stop being a philosopher."⁹⁰ This observation – thrown into a somewhat listless conversation at the general's apartment – raises a number of intriguing questions. Does it refer only to the prince, whose style of being seems so incomprehensible to those with whom he has been fated to spend his time? Is it only relevant to his individual case? Or does Adelaida Ivanovna formulate a general rule that applies equally to the prince and to anybody else who decides to "tell about" things? Perhaps she even gives expression to a problem that tormented Dostoevsky himself. I shall not comment here in any further detail on the issues lurking behind this brief sentence pronounced in a Petersburg salon, though the problem has clearly not lost any of its relevance. Instead, I shall give it a somewhat different form, as I am concerned here not so much with the philosophical possibilities of the narrative art, but rather with whether ideologically imbued language rooted in doctrine can "tell about" things. In other words, is it possible to construct narrative discourse from a language conceived not to report facts and events, but rather to convey interpretations and commentaries, thus apodictically imposing meanings and value judgments? Perhaps this question is poorly phrased, since we know in advance that the answer is "yes." We know this from the substantial list of sanctioned narrative forms in which events have no autonomous existence whatsoever, but whose *raison d'être* is simply to signify or document more general ideas – the exemplum, the tendentious novel, the thesis novel, the parable, and so on and so forth. Susan Suleiman has claimed that "the parabolic plot exists only in order to provide a pretext for interpretation."⁹¹

However, the parable is clearly not the best example here, since it represents one of the primary narrative genres of those great religions that do not eschew ambiguities and leave the interpreter a great deal of freedom. From our point of view, the more important forms are those that do not give so much license for interpretation, but rather impose it. In such cases, there can be no doubt that only one exclusive interpretation is possible – not through any desire to extract the singularity and unique character of the facts under discussion, but so as to impose a heterogeneous order upon them.

90 Dostoevsky, Fyodor, *The Idiot*, trans. Richard Pevear and Larissa Volokhonsky (New York: Vintage Books), p. 66.

91 Suleiman, Susan, *La Roman à thèse ou l'autorité fictive* (Paris: PUF, 1983), p. 43.

Narrative speech is often geared towards the transmission of facts. We might even call them “bare facts,” whether we have in mind an account of something that really took place or a story about events whose only existential basis is in literary fiction. *Veni, vidi, vici* – Caesar’s words would seem to provide the basic model for narrative speech limited to reporting events and leaving no space for any interpretive or explanatory additions. Whoever formulates this kind of utterance – like Prince Myshkin – ceases to be a philosopher. More importantly for us, he or she ceases to be an ideologue, no longer suggesting clear evaluations to the reader or interlocutor. Caesar’s account – treated here as an archetype of narrative discourse – stands in opposition to ideological speech. His words cannot be reduced or subordinated to it.

At the same time, we may also find persistent attempts by ideological speech to exploit narrative by forming stories that would not only speak about the facts, but also suggest evaluations of them. In certain cases, these judgments appear as the only proper appraisals, excluding all other evaluations. Yet the ideological dimension of the exemplum or the thesis story cannot be reduced only to their position with respect to certain prevailing assumptions. Ideology may also become a matter of the very substance of language, thus assuming the role of a key aspect of discourse.

Here the question arises: is it possible to tell a story in newspeak? Is newspeak capable of reporting facts? On the basis of what we already know about it, we may immediately exclude any account in the style of *veni, vidi, vici*. Nevertheless, narration can (and frequently does) establish what is right and what is not, reporting facts not in order to record them, but rather to project or impose modes of behavior on those who might become acquainted with it.

The narrative possibilities of newspeak are a fundamental issue for socialist realism. Indeed, it is no coincidence that the only serious Polish book on this subject to appear thus far – a work by Wojciech Tomasiak⁹² – opens with this very question. In fact, the issue does not apply to literature alone, but has a much broader scope connecting it with more general questions raised by a totalitarian form. Not only should it be the only officially valid model of expression, but it should also form an example of desirable behaviors. In the domain of totalitarian form, facts do not matter if they are not intertwined with aggressively suggested meanings and if they do not form an argument for a thesis adopted in advance. This is the case irrespective of whether we are dealing with literary fiction or with what passes

92 Tomasiak, Wojciech, *Polska powieść tendencyjna 1949-1955: Problemy perswazji literackiej* (Wrocław: Zakład Narodowy im. Ossolińskich, 1988). A second serious Polish book on socialist realism – Włodarczyk, Wojciech, *Sztuka polska w latach 1950-1954* (Paris: Libella, 1986) – concerns the visual arts, and thus does not examine questions of newspeak’s exploitation of narrative.

for reportage or with basic journalistic reporting. We might assume that newspeak ultimately excludes narrative in the strict sense and that socialist realism abolishes it, since they are unable to fulfill its demands. However, socrealism can never entirely exclude narrative, for no literature can dispense with storytelling. In fact, without storytelling any form of social life becomes impossible. Consequently, we do not so much see a compromise between narrative and newspeak as a clash between them.

The result of this collision is socrealist narrative, which may be either literary or non-literary, using either language or an image. Here I would like to add a little tale from former times. I remember a particular story that even then seemed both characteristic and peculiar. I probably read it in the *Sztandar Młodych* (*Youth Standard*), or perhaps in *Po prostu* (*Simply*), which was exemplarily boring and exemplarily Stalinist before it became the voice of a rebellious generation in 1955. The tale went as follows. A certain soldier had to swim across a river in such a way as to keep his rifle dry. But he also had another treasure with him that he could not under any circumstances expose to any harm – his Polish Youth Association identity card.⁹³ The soldier sat down to think about how he might deal with such a difficult dilemma. Eventually he worked it out. As he swam, he held his rifle in the air in one hand. For obvious reasons, he could not hold the identity card in his other hand, so he clutched it between his teeth. He managed to keep it dry. When he reached the other bank, the card was unblemished.

This tale is clearly didactic in nature and resembles the medieval exempla. Indeed, it was probably conceived as a tale to illustrate certain edifying principles. I have intentionally chosen such an exemplary story, even though today it might appear as a rather grotesque specimen. Of course, this was not the author's intention. After all, he did not restrict himself to a straightforward account or relate the deeds of the brave soldier swimming across the river in any factual manner (though this would clearly have sufficed to make the intention clear), but rather in a highly ideological fashion. The soldier behaved as he did because he was a good soldier of the people's army and a good member of the youth organization, holding its symbols in the highest esteem.

The penetration of ideological language into such exemplary tales as this one demonstrates that totalitarian form is dominated by mistrust of any narrative perspectives pretending even to relative independence. The story has a right to exist and function only as subordinate discourse. This subordination expresses itself not only in the attitude towards elements external to the narrative, but also within the narrative itself. The question arises as to whether every story can be told in newspeak. In theory, the answer is affirmative, since one could shape any

93 Translator's Note: The Polish Youth Association (*Związek Młodzieży Polskiej*) was established in 1948 on the model of the Soviet Komsomol. It operated until 1957.

story in this way. However, it seems that not all narrative materials submit so easily to these operations and that at least some of them resist such perspectives to some extent.

By analyzing these two opposing examples – Caesar’s sentence and the story about the brave soldier who would not expose his identity card to harm – I have proceeded in typically narratological fashion. In other words, I have examined extremely simplified textbook varieties of different stories. Concentrating on typical perspectives is clearly justified when the problem appears in general outline. However, it would seem unwarranted when one wishes to respond to more particular or concrete questions – that is, when one wishes to show how the problem at hand manifests itself in more complicated instantiations. Clearly we are dealing with these more complex manifestations in socrealist narratives, since we cannot reduce everything to the elementary cases that might submit most easily to analysis. For instance, unlike exemplary tales or reports transmitted with telegraphic brevity, the novel belongs to the sphere of these more complex cases. The structure of the novel ensures that it not only uses discourse (which is obvious), but also speaks about this discourse and absorbs it various ways. In this respect, even the most primitive socrealist novel does not undermine the main features of the genre. Tomasik makes the following perceptive observations:

Newspeak imbues all layers of the socrealist novel, but it does so in differing degrees. This does not imply any distinction between the narrative level and the level of external quotation, since such a distinction does not exist. [. . .] The crucial distinction in the degree of newspeak’s permeation exists among the different forms of external quotation and modes of narration. Here it is worth pointing out that newspeak can acquire a peculiar validity precisely with respect to quotations. In other words, it may become the most natural form of utterance, ideally suited to the conditions in which it appears.⁹⁴

Yet if newspeak only appeared in places in which it constituted “the most natural form of utterance,” there would be no problem and socrealist romances would not differ in any way from the novel as a genre. But they do differ – partly because newspeak is the most important language within them, taking the highest position in the hierarchy and towering above any other forms of discourse. Moreover, the presence of newspeak here does not result from the general fact that novels may mimetically refer to any kind of speech that functions within society, absorbing them all and turning them into objects of metalinguistic commentary. There would be no separate question if the matter were restricted to quoted speech, if the only people using newspeak were secretaries of party units, youth activists and progressive farmers fighting to establish production collectives in their native villages. Yet Tomasik has clearly shown in his book that newspeak is by no

94 Tomasik, pp. 51-52.

means limited to these situations. We must repeat his assertion that this is no mere distinction between narrative text and quotations.

Therefore, the question of narrating in newspeak appears with particular clarity, even when the novel seems to avoid the basic so-called role of the exemplary tale. After all, things may present themselves in various ways, but it remains a fact in such cases that newspeak “tells about” the events, thus constituting the fundamental narrative language. We must accept this fact, in spite of Tomasik’s well-founded observation that newspeak has permeated descriptive language to a much greater extent than narrative language. In Tomasik’s view, description here is linked – among other things – with the saturation of the text with value judgments.⁹⁵ We might well wonder whether this situation would allow socialist realism to absorb various types of novels that concentrate on plot. After all, if narrators tell about events in newspeak, then at least to some extent these events will lose their autonomy and become somehow blurred. This is an inevitable consequence of the domination of ideological language over a language in which it is possible to speak about events (irrespective of whether they are the creation of literary fiction or they really happened). Here ideological language encounters no limits to its expansion. In contrast with Prince Myshkin, socialist realists do not cease to be “philosophers” when they start telling about things. Even when relating the most trivial events, they understand the order of the world, the meanings within it and the direction in which it is headed. The case of socialist realism shows that newspeak can tell stories and that it has the attributes to become a primary medium of narrative discourse. Yet it also demonstrates with exceptional clarity that it is not worth telling stories in newspeak.

This is true partly because so-called texts use newspeak as a component of narrative discourse while remaining incapable of telling us anything about it. In other words, they cannot treat it as problematic or consider why and how the characters use it. Here we find precisely the opposite of the approach adopted in later narratives – from the first satirical sketches of Sławomir Mrożek to the prose of Tadeusz Sijak – in which newspeak is not a straightforward instrument of narrative, but rather its problematic object. Therefore, literature – including its narrative forms – has experienced a fundamental change in its attitude towards newspeak.⁹⁶

I wish to make one final point. Throughout this sketch I have used the expression “totalitarian form.” I do not treat it merely as a casual phrase. In my view, we might use this term to define all forms of discourse that have emerged from totalitarianism and served its needs. This means all forms of discourse on which totalitarianism

95 Ibid., pp. 56-57.

96 I have written about this more broadly in a sketch entitled “Literature and Newspeak” (“Literatura wobec nowomowy”) in *Nowomowa po polsku* (Warszawa: PEN, 1990).

has directly and powerfully left its imprint, radically homogenizing and molding these forms in order that they might exclusively convey its ideology, its visions of the world and its values. The totalitarian forms that function at any given moment may be diverse and rich, but one element always remains uniform (and limited). These forms not only avoid questioning the totalitarian reality, but also legitimize it, becoming the vehicles of its mandatory interpretations. Any narratives derived from newspeak, and using it in an uncritical manner, undoubtedly constitute manifestations of totalitarian form.

January 1990

Part II

7. On Totalitarian Discourse

The eminent journalist Konstanty Gebert (whose real name is Dawid Warszawski), author of numerous astute and fascinating articles on the war in Bosnia, has recently drawn attention to an important phenomenon. Specifically, he has claimed that the transition from communist language to nationalist language only requires a change in vocabulary, while the transition from communist expression to democratic expression also demands a change in syntax. The events taking place in the former Yugoslavia form the basis for Gebert's generalization. However, we should not delude ourselves into thinking that it holds true only where post-communist nationalisms have clashed so dramatically. The phenomenon has much broader significance, though I would still make certain modifications to Gebert's formulation. We are not dealing here only with a change in syntax, but rather with a shift in the entire discourse, and thus in the basic rules for constructing an utterance. In this domain, we find the most fundamental differences between the modes of language use developed by various totalitarianisms and the methods employed by democracy in its diverse manifestations. I would maintain that totalitarianism does not merely constitute a certain way of exercising power, a certain ideology or a certain attitude towards the human being, but also a mode of speech characterized by distinctive and easily distinguishable features. Furthermore, whatever happens in the sphere of language and communication has constitutive significance for totalitarianism. If I were to characterize totalitarian discourse in its most general and – in my view – fundamental mode, I would enumerate five basic features.

1. In totalitarian discourse, persuasive elements are limited, since the point is not to convince the audience, but rather to impose certain views and ways of seeing the world upon them, providing guidelines on how they should think and behave. Persuasion requires argument, while totalitarian speech in its deepest sense conveys what is conceived as a command. Its recipients – both individual and collective – must treat it as such. Therefore, the role assigned to them by totalitarian discourse is by definition passive. The discourse does not propose anything to the addressees (since proposal would suggest a certain freedom with respect to what is being presented) or enter into any discussion with them, since they have no right of reply. Instead, they are quietly and obediently to accept what the discourse serves up to them.

2. In totalitarian discourse, we find a peculiar construction of the speaking subject. If one wished to speak in paradoxes, one might say that a radically non-subjective conception of the subject presented itself here. From this perspective, the subject

is essentially not an individual, but rather the depository of “correctness.” This is the case both when the speaker – like Hitler or Stalin – can arbitrarily impose his opinions, while excluding in advance any criticism. When the speaker is an insignificant member of the rank and file, then his or her task is merely to repeat whatever belongs to the official canon at a given moment. Therefore, even in the case of a dictator who seems to possess unlimited possibilities, the expression of individual personality is not important. The main criterion is precisely what we might describe as “correctness.” Of course, the speaker’s position is not irrelevant. The more important his role on the political scene, the more correctness is ascribed to his utterances. Correctness understood in this sense is the opposite of personality – even when a dictator is concerned.

3. For totalitarian discourse, unusually clear and dichotomous divisions are of fundamental significance, treated as absolute and indisputable. Any questioning of these divisions would be tantamount to casting doubt on the general principles of the discourse. In fact, the most important element is the very sharpness of the divisions. In certain cases, their contents – even if they are not of entirely secondary concern – are clearly subordinated to the very rule of absolute contrast. The oppositions between “We” and “You” or “Ours” and “Yours” can be composed of diverse contents and packed with various concrete details. Yet the essence of the matter is determined by the simple opposition between “us” – that is, the people in possession of correctness – and a clearly named opponent (clearly named even when he is a fictional or semi-fictional creation). As we know from the history of communism, the enemy has many names, fits various descriptions and emerges from diverse spheres of reality. He may take one name or another, but he has always existed and acted. Totalitarian discourse would be simply impossible without him. Here I have cited the most fundamental opposition between “us” and “our enemies,” but this discourse includes many other such oppositions with various different scopes.

4. The next feature of totalitarian discourse is linked with the clarity of the simplest dichotomous divisions. One-dimensional value judgments always predominate. They are formed in such a way as to be indisputable and to exclude any other axiological forms in advance. Totalitarian discourse imposes on the audience a certain system of values. Indeed, this is one of its most important distinguishing features. These value judgments are often specifically delineated, sometimes strengthened by extensive series of adjectives, but they manifest themselves throughout the entire discourse, unrestricted to particular expressions or phrases. One-dimensional value judgments permeate everything that appears within totalitarian discourse.

5. Totalitarian discourse constructs a certain vision of the world. There is no way to enumerate the specific components of this vision, since they are extremely diverse. Nevertheless, we may expose a certain general feature. The vision is constructed as if it revealed certain features of the world that are inaccessible to the uninitiated or superficial glance. Specifically, it reveals how things really are, who is whom, who wants what, who stands behind whom, who is dangerous and hostile. We might say that this discourse – characterized by indisputable “correctness” and authority – forms a conspiracist vision of the world, often irrespective of its genuine subject. Innumerable enemies, generally well-disguised, lie waiting to attack us and the values we represent. This enemy might be – as in Nazi propaganda – a Jew with a menorah in his hand, ready to set the world on fire, or – as in Stalinist propaganda – an American imperialist, dropping potato beetles on our fields and soil. It is possible that all the constitutive characteristics of totalitarian discourse are concentrated precisely in the conspiracist vision of the world.

While I have the chance, I would like to draw attention to another important feature of totalitarian discourse. To a much higher degree than any other forms of speech, we may treat it as a historical record or testimony reflecting the type of thinking about the world that totalitarian regimes wished to create and how the totalitarian mentality was intended to present itself. We can learn a great deal about this world – both real and postulated – from the general rules of totalitarian discourse, its particular historical forms, specific expressions, rhetorical devices and phrases. This world is partly real, since the discourse sometimes expresses what those who formed its rules and invented its specific utterances might not have intended to convey. Here I shall refer to a single example. In a certain report published in 1961, I came across the phrase “incorrectly hounded.” Of course, we might regard this as a mere stylistic infelicity or curious lapse, but it also reveals something incomparably more important. It seems to me that we might treat this expression as an element of totalitarian discourse from the era in which the Stalinist crimes were being criticized, though still only in such a way as to cast no aspersions on the system of real socialism. Especially intriguing is the use of the characteristic qualifying adverb of the time – “incorrectly.” This word is the cause of some confusion here. Not because the author of the report imposes a direct judgment, but rather because he applies it to a word that does not need any additional evaluative qualifiers, since it is already sufficiently strong and clear. Yet something else is also at stake here. The adverb creates a curious presupposition, for it follows from the phrase that in certain cases one may hound somebody correctly. The historical significance of the phrase also manifests itself in the fact that it paraphrases a popular cliché in official speech from the time of Beria’s downfall and the denunciation of Stalin’s crimes – “incorrectly repressed.” Of course, it behooves us to assert that one can never repress anybody

“correctly.” Nevertheless, in spite of everything, the phrase is still less extreme than “incorrectly hounded.” In my view, this particular combination of words says a great deal about the times in which it appeared, testifying to a certain mentality. And yet this is merely a single example – one of hundreds or even thousands of possible examples.

When we speak about totalitarian discourse, it is impossible not to ask what has happened to it today in democratic Poland, in which no serious political group subscribes to the ideologies and traditions that we may unequivocally define as totalitarian. Yet unfortunately, the fall of totalitarianism has not meant the disappearance of totalitarian discourse from public life. It continues to exist in various forms, manifesting itself in diverse situations. Sometimes certain snatches of it appear with greater or lesser clarity on the basis of conventions unthinkingly accepted simply because they existed for many years and people became accustomed to them. Interestingly, totalitarian discourse in its extreme form is most striking not so much in the speech of those politicians and journalists who might represent its continuation, but rather in certain radical anti-communists, who unconsciously and unreflectively adopt the modes of speech characteristic of the people they detest. In certain cases, we might even speak of Bolshevik expression in reverse. The Solidarity pamphlets, brochures and bulletins emanating from the Ursus factory outside Warsaw form characteristic examples here (I am familiar with some of them thanks to the courtesy of their editor Piotr Lipiński). The similarities even suggest themselves in the visual imagery. An image of a western banker about to plunder Poland and suck the blood out of it – with the obligatory cigar in his mug – differs in no way from the monstrous Wall Street banker who formed one of the permanent incarnations of the enemy in Stalinist propaganda. We find a great many similar examples. This confirms the validity of Konstany Gebert’s observations, which do not only apply to the warring nations of the former Yugoslavia. Clearly, the vocabulary and scale of values here are different, but the rules for constructing the discourse are the same as those of communist propaganda. The use of signs to denote values is also similar, though the values themselves – at least superficially – are diametrically opposed.

8. “Don’t Let the Past Run Wild”:

The History of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union (Bolsheviks): Short Course as Mythical Narrative

Telling Stories, Bolshevik Style

When I was forced to read this book in my youth, I associated it above all with boredom. It was painful to read, and we were expected to know it in great detail, since it was an acknowledged fact that every phrase within it was worth its weight in gold. We could not simply skim through its pages, for we were supposed to recall the wisdom it contained. It was both a holy book and a textbook at the same time. In the first half of the 1950s, it was compulsory reading for every student, irrespective of whether his or her field was water engineering, zoo technology, medicine or – as in my case – Polish literature. Lessons in Marxism were part of the general tertiary education program. The foundation of these lessons lay in a close analysis of this book, the application of its teachings, and an initiation into the one true message contained within it. I happened to have lessons with a certain Mrs. N. – an old auntie of the revolution from its first Polish generation (she had apparently come into contact with the communist movement during the bleak times of the rightist Sanation regime in the 1930s). She was fanatical, ardent and ruthless, like many communists of the time. I am not the only person who still remembers her. Janusz Szpotański mentions her in the introduction to his *Collected Poetic Works (Zebrane utwory poetyckie)*, though in a less indulgent manner than I have referred to her – for he cites her name in full. Mrs. N. expected us to memorize phrases, which was not especially difficult, since the book was based on repetitions. Yet she also demanded that we empathize with the stories told within it and experience them emotionally. At the same time, she insisted that our non-party brains could not understand very much of it, since real discussions of the book only took place at party training sessions. Only during these sessions would we come to comprehend it fully. Therefore, the proper exegesis was accessible only at the highest level of Marxist initiation, where the book would open its great profundity and meaning before the reader.

I can easily imagine what this exegesis was like, and I have no intention of competing with it. Nevertheless, I have decided to return to this text – this time of my own volition. I do so not only from a simple desire to revenge myself decades

later by describing a book that bored me in my youth. Undoubtedly, this revenge would offer some satisfaction, but this is not my main concern here. In my view, it is generally worth returning to this text from time to time, however repulsive it might be. We should do so not for masochistic reasons, but because *The History of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union (Bolsheviks): Short Course*⁹⁷ is one of the most horrific books – with the most evil consequences – to be published in the twentieth century. It belongs together with *Mein Kampf*, *Mythus des XX Jahrhunderts*, *The Protocols of the Elders of Zion*, and *Problems of Leninism*. The book is a clinical example of a totalitarian narrative.⁹⁸

This side of the matter is precisely what interests me. I am not so much concerned with how this screed falsified history or transformed Marxism. Instead, I wish to look at the wretched and inconceivably primitive text of the *Short Course* as a unique form of narrative. Narratology – which has developed so strongly in recent decades – has created useful tools not only for the analysis of literary, folk and historical tales. Such tools are also applicable to the analysis of those extremely peculiar stories that are intended both to represent an exposition of ideology and to create a sort of model or canon. On the title page of the *Short Course*, we find the following words: “Authorized by the Central Committee of the C.P.S.U (B.)” This kind of statement – proof of the highest ideological imprimatur – would naturally appear on official elaborations of doctrine, but perhaps not in a book supposedly treating the history of a political party. Yet the fact that the authors have included this statement at the very beginning of the *Short Course* exerts a significant influence on the nature of the story. In fact, it is something more than a story. According to Leszek Kołakowski:

The *Short Course* not only established a whole pattern of Bolshevik mythology linked to the cult of Lenin and Stalin, but prescribed a detailed ritual and liturgy. From the time of its publication party writers, historians, and propagandists who touched on any part of its subject-matter were obliged to repeat every relevant phrase verbatim. The *Short Course* was not merely a work of falsified history but a powerful social institution – one of the party’s most important instruments of mind control, a device for the destruction both of critical thought and of society’s recollections of its own past.⁹⁹

97 I shall refer to the 1939 version issued by International Publishers.

98 The category of the “totalitarian narrative” was introduced by the French writer and sociologist Jean-Pierre Faye in his books *Théorie du récit: Introduction aux langages totalitaires* (Paris: Hermann, 1972) and *Langages totalitaires* (Paris: Hermann, 1972).

99 Kołakowski, Leszek, *Main Currents of Marxism: Its Origin, Growth, and Dissolution: Volume III: The Breakdown*, trans. P. S. Falla (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1978), pp. 94-95.

The Sacred History of Communism

But before we show how the authors told this story – which was supposed to be the sole and obligatory version of history, an instrument of tyrannical rule not only replacing but completely obliterating all other stories on the subject – we should turn our attention to one crucial moment. As the sacred history of communism, it had to be more than a mere account of the facts regarded as especially important or as the only ones worth relating. It also had to embody doctrinal principles, turning them into the primary elements regulating the construction of the text, while at the same time propagating these principles. This is not the case exclusively in the lengthy passage from Chapter Four on “Dialectical and Historical Materialism,” which constitutes the canonical Stalinist interpretation of Marxism. Nevertheless, this passage still has particular status, since it represents a kind of interjection interrupting the narrative flow of the work, while also elevating its importance (after all, the work was supposed to contain a complete interpretation of the prevailing world view, so it could not omit the general framework of the faith). This was especially true, since the authorship of the section – though it remained in the sphere of collective anonymity – was often ascribed to Stalin. Something greater was at stake here, since the whole was meant to be an exemplary lesson in Marxism and to form the canon of Marxist discourse – and indeed it filled this role for more than a decade and a half. Yet here we also find the emergence of the problem I would like to examine. People certainly spoke (and possibly still speak here and there) about “Marxist history.” However, in the worst times of absolutizing doctrine and fanatical indoctrination of its adherents, the term “Marxist narrative” never arose. Marxist history clearly could not eschew storytelling, but it placed the emphasis on other elements, thus avoiding any reduction to the question of historical narrative. I am interested precisely in how the story of Bolshevism was told.

First of all, I must state clearly that Marxism as an ideology did not open any stunning new possibilities for storytelling. This was the case for many reasons, including its relatively low level of interest in details. After all, when one understands the laws that govern the development of humanity – its distinct historical periods and its future path – then one need not pay any attention to specific events, which are by definition ephemeral. This attitude caused a weakening of interest in anything individual or unique – and thus in the constitutive elements of any story. Perhaps the only exception here was the exemplary narrative, in which events were blatantly and directly subordinated to certain higher meanings or evoked as confirmations of a more general teaching. The events related in the *Short Course* appear in precisely this role. Indeed, the whole work is to a certain extent an exemplary tale presenting history as the triumph of right over wrong, the victory of the only acceptable and lucid principles over everything murky, hostile

and incoherent. Yet it would be difficult to reduce it to the rules of such a story. In spite of everything, the *Short Course* is no mere communist parable.

The narrative constantly oscillates between the individual and the universal. This conflict between a story of incontrovertible facts in all their concrete specificity and a more general story reveals itself at every opportunity. The conflict cannot be resolved. Any tendency towards concrete details – even those selected with maximal bias – would weaken the ideological dimension of the work. Yet concentrating exclusively on the general – and thus on the broad meanings ascribed to events, weighing them down and eliminating a crucial dimension of any account that does not wish to abandon all sense of factuality (even in the loosest understanding) – would undermine the narrative’s “historicity” (the word must appear in inverted commas here, as we are dealing with pseudo-history, though this fact does not abolish or even weaken the dilemma at hand).

Undeniably, there is a certain specificity in the information provided by the *Short Course* on how many participants took part in successive party congresses. Of course, “concrete” does not necessarily mean true, though we need not ask any questions about the truth of the book’s specific claims. This would be a pointless exercise – and not only for the purposes of this article, in which my primary interest lies in how the story was told. In fact, it would be pointless from any imaginable perspective. Such questions assume that the *Short Course* says something about reality, an assumption at odds with its fundamental character and intentions – not to mention its poetics. This sacred book with the word “history” in its title says absolutely nothing about the past. Instead, its main intentions and only aims are to create a mandatory worldview, to shape a peculiar object of faith and to forge a unique kind of myth. In his parody of communist vocabulary, an anonymous contemporary Russian satirist wrote under the word “history” that one could not “let the past run wild” (“puszczać przeszłości na żywioł”).¹⁰⁰ We can only fully understand and appreciate the flavor of this advice when we recall the place occupied in newspeak by such words as “żywioł” and “żywiolowość.”¹⁰¹ We need only cite the following sentence from the *Short Course*: “Lenin showed that to bow in worship of the spontaneous working class movement [*żywiolowością ruchu robotniczego*] and to belittle the importance of consciousness, of Socialist and Socialist theory, meant, in the first place, to insult the workers, who were

100 From an unknown Russian author at the beginning of the 1970s. See: “Słownik pojęć służących do owijania w bawełnę,” trans. R. Zimand, *Teksty Drugie* 4 (1990), p. 162.

101 Translator’s Note: These words translate roughly as “element” or “elements” (“żywioł”) and “elemental force” or “spontaneity” (“żywiolowość”). The expression “puszczać coś na żywioł” essentially means to let something develop spontaneously, to let something run wild or to give something a free rein.

drawn to consciousness as to light."¹⁰² The *Short Course* precisely raises this consciousness, while not "letting the past run wild." On the contrary, not a single episode appears that would not fit within the general plan of history.

Various authors have emphasized the *quasi*-religious nature of the book.¹⁰³ I share this opinion. Indeed, it was not by accident that I spoke of a "sacred book" at the beginning of these reflections. A sacred book partly implies the impossibility of posing questions about the truth of its specific claims or accounts. One must either fully endorse it or totally reject it. This fundamental work of Stalinism demanded the reader's total endorsement. The authors conceived it in such a way as to give the reader no other choice, since by rejecting it you would declare yourself an enemy. Accordingly, you would become one of those under attack in the book's stories. You would not be able to endorse one particular element and distance yourself from another. Myth does not permit such solutions. Either you accept it entirely with all its consequences or you totally negate it. This is precisely how the situation presents itself here, since we are dealing with a mythical narrative constructed in the language of Marxism and referring to it at every opportunity. Within this narrative, we may find information on such matters as the number of delegates who participated in a given congress, but ultimately this is not important. Facts do not matter here, but rather their meanings, which emerge from a particular plan accepted in advance – a plan of the work, but also a plan of history to be conveyed, discussed and explained by the work. The reader does not pick up this book with the aim of learning anything specific, but rather does so in order to become acquainted with the plan, to assimilate it, and – above all – to believe in it. In this sense, the antinomy between the individual and the universal is at least partly resolved, since Marxist narrative – which for various reasons is impossible – transforms itself into mythical narrative.

So let us survey its most basic elements. The *Short Course* does not tell the story – even in the most idealized manner – of how the Bolshevik party arose and how it functioned until the end of the 1930s, though this would seem to constitute its main or perhaps only theme. Instead, it relates the formation of a certain order,

102 *The History of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union (Bolsheviks): Short Course* (New York: International Publishers Co., 1936), p. 36.

103 This *quasi*-religiosity is linked with certain general features of totalitarianism. According to Father Józef Tischner: "There is much evidence to suggest that twentieth-century totalitarianism in both its National Socialist and communist versions is a paradoxical imitation of religion. Totalitarianism fights against religion, while becoming a "religion" itself. It proposes its own version of revelation, its own vision of salvation and its own form of bond between human beings, which resembles the mythical bond in religion" ("Rekolekcje po czasach przelomu: Z księdzem profesorem Józefem Tischnerem rozmawia Tadeusz Szyma," *Tygodnik Powszechny* 6 [1990]).

in which progress, harmony and justice achieve victory over the agents of evil and the chaos that had reigned before the new ideal began to form and finally prevailed. In this way, it represents a kind of Book of Genesis and simultaneously a theogony, in which two successive leaders take the place of the Olympian gods. This history ends with the total victory of the new order, which also means the obliteration of everybody and everything that had resisted its establishment. Accordingly, as often happens in mythical tales, the event presented is not simply a fact that is interesting or important because of its noteworthy consequences – and thus worth telling. Instead, the event is emphasized in a particular way because it participates in the grand process of a new world's creation. It cannot occupy a neutral position. It cannot be irrelevant to this process. It must either contribute to the formation of the new order or resist it. Similarly, the participants of these events always play some role on the global stage of this world. Their actions are never limited to the framework of a particular event. If a revolutionary wishes to differ from Lenin's opinion on a strictly defined question, then this fact appears as something more than a mere difference of opinion between a party activist and the leader. By assuming such a position, the revolutionary takes the side of evil, and his hostile attitude interferes with the realization of the new world order.

Thus, every event is something more than a mere link in a chain of facts or a component within a historical plotline. From the beginning, it has been molded to correspond with a pre-established and universally binding plan. The workers who founded the first revolutionary or trade union movements in Petersburg or Odessa were already acting to prepare the way for the realization of this plan. These were no humble beginnings or attempts to respond to challenges thrown up by specific situations. The narrator of the *Short Course* does not attach great significance to these movements for the simple reason that they formed in the pre-Lenin era. Therefore, they were not yet marked with the stamp of the leader, but rather belonged to the period before the inauguration of sacred history. Nevertheless, they were already on the right side, and they contributed to its great triumph in later years.

Admittedly, no historian who describes things that happened in the past can pretend that he or she knows nothing of what was to follow. Yet here we are dealing with a particularly clear case of historical stylization. In essence, there is something else at stake other than the horizon of knowledge that determines the epistemological perspective of all historians. In the *Short Course*, the authors tell the story of every event – including those constituting the back story – as if its participants were entirely conscious of what its consequences would be and of what would ensue from their complex actions. In his works on the philosophy of history, Arthur C. Danto argues that we should define narrative statements as those that can be pronounced only after the related facts. Therefore, we shall not

find such statements in eyewitness reports. No participant in an event like the outbreak of the Thirty Days' War could – according to Danto – declare that the Thirty Days' War had just broken out.¹⁰⁴ Superficially, the narrative of the *Short Course* sticks to this rule, since the criterion for the selection and appraisal of the facts is their relation to the triumph of socialism towards the end of the 1930s in the Soviet Union. Yet we must also make a fundamental adjustment here, for the book speaks about the events and their participants as if the theological principle defining history was no secret to them. This concerns not only the rather random groups of workers who established revolutionary circles in Petersburg, Odessa and other Russian cities, but everybody else mentioned in the book – leaders, supporters, and even those others whose only practical and political goal was to thwart their intentions and oppose the good they were bringing into the world. A narrative that includes this element of consciousness to such an extent – linking it with clear ideological assumptions – is a mythological narrative. It is precisely in myths that actions are peculiarly directed and interesting only insofar as they lead towards a clear, predetermined point. Therefore, myth determines the events comprising the plot to a much greater extent than history.

We might also look at the matter in a slightly different way. In mythical narration, events are maximally determined. They are meaningful precisely for this reason. In a superficial sense, accidents may still occur in the world created by this form of narration. There are sometimes unexpected meetings, journeys composed of episodes that do not logically follow from another, as well as astounding miracles (understood metaphorically or literally). Yet in a deeper sense, there are no accidents at all, since accidents are entirely unknown to myth – or at least to this type of myth. Every event, every tiny detail, every word uttered by chance or in any other situation is part of an established order of the world (on the right side or the wrong side). Therefore, it occupies a precisely designated place on the stage and carries a clear meaning that cannot be questioned in any way whatsoever. This is a pre-established meaning, determined in advance and authoritatively given as an article of faith. The world of the *Short Course* is precisely this kind of world without accidents – a world in which everything has been defined.

Here an encounter between mythological narration and Marxism ensues. Arthur C. Danto makes the following observations:

It is, I think, instructive to recognize that Marx and Engels, although they were materialists and explicit atheists, were nevertheless inclined to view history through essentially theological spectacles, as though they could perceive a divine plan, but not a divine being whose plan it was.¹⁰⁵

104 Danto, Arthur C., *Narration and Knowledge* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1985), p. XII.

105 *Ibid.*, p. 9.

This interpretation applies perfectly to the *Short Course*. The degraded divine plan is evident here as well. Whoever is conscious of this plan has the right to know better about everything and to submit every object, every person, and every event to a universal judgment formulated in such a way that it may never be questioned (from this perspective, we may define Marxism as a system of institutionalized know-it-all-ism). As in the case of myth, the narrator need not explain how he has acquired the powers entitling him to tell such an authoritative story. He has no need of legitimization or higher sanction, but rather assumes in advance that history has destined him to deliver this narration, since he has acquired knowledge of history's laws and now shapes the world in accordance with them. The narrator in the *Short Course* not only speaks in the name of those who have worked for the triumph of socialism in the USSR, but also tells the story of the universe, which from the very beginning of the narrative tends towards this final triumph (despite the activities of those who would interfere with the forces of right). Marxist know-it-all-ism and the rules of mythological narrative form a harmonious whole.

The Epic Struggle with Heresy

The opening paragraph of the work runs as follows:

The Communist Party of the Soviet Union (Bolsheviks) has traversed a long and glorious road, leading from the first tiny Marxist circles and groups that appeared in Russia in the eighties of the past century to the great Party of the Bolsheviks, which now directs the first Socialist State of Workers and Peasants in the world.¹⁰⁶

Already in this first sentence, the most important characteristics of the text appear. The authors indicate the main subject – the communist party – and immediately inform the reader of its destiny. A sacred history can never omit the final point, even at its very beginning. If we examine the story from a narratological point of view, we should immediately ask about the significance of the party's role as the subject of the account. The simplest answer would be to suppose that it becomes a kind of collective hero. Undoubtedly, this answer would be correct, though – as we shall see – certain complications emerge, as the main characters turn out to be above all two successive leaders of the party. Yet these are not the only difficulties, since other questions also constantly occur to the reader as to the boundaries and scope of the party's history. Clearly, these do not include the history of the European or Russian socialist movements more generally. This is because one of the key assumptions is precisely the juxtaposition of the party – which has chosen the right path, understanding the laws of history and leading the

¹⁰⁶ *The History of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union (Bolsheviks)*, p. 1.

people to victory – with all other movements, however closely related. Indeed, anyone regarded as a heretic becomes an even more dangerous enemy than any open opponent.

So does the narrative present the history of Russia from the end of the nineteenth century until the 1930s? There would not appear to be any direct connection here, though ultimately the book treats the mythical history of the party as if it concerned the whole of society, or even the whole world. After all, we must not forget that this is the story of how a new reality emerged, endowed with values and meanings that no possible world anywhere had ever previously possessed. When we take this concept into account, the book is clearly also a history of Russia. As the one and sacred history, it is supposed to eliminate the possibility of telling any other story, in which the works and deeds of the communist party might not form the main point and most important subject. Indeed, it must obliterate such tales in advance. In this sense, it constitutes an exposition of the history of Russia, Europe and the world. After all, the events befalling the Bolshevik party comprise a universal history, relevant in all places and at all times. This universality flows from the scope of the book's main themes, as a consequence of its primary ideological assumption. Bolshevism has succeeded in building a new type of world, where socialism has triumphed and social justice has prevailed, where right has conquered all obstacles and finally seized power, at least in one country. Therefore, this universality does not conflict with the constantly apparent Bolshevik or revolutionary egotism: in other words, the constant referral of everything that has ever happened anywhere back to themselves.

We should also add that the narrative's objective is so strongly focused on the main subject that anything beyond its field of vision – even things that have influenced it – receive extraordinarily perfunctory treatment. This principle applies to various workers' movements in other countries – which the narrator treats patronizingly and often with aversion – and to the wars in which Russia fought during the period spanned by the narrative. This narrow perspective might seem self-evident, since the book is a history of the party and it may easily refer the reader to other works for information on other matters. However, this does not happen in the *Short Course*, since all references are impossible – apart from those citing works by authors who have come to be known as classics of Marxism. Sacred history cannot cooperate with histories deprived of the sacral sanction. Instead, it must resist the claims of these histories. It must be the only history.

Therefore, the party finds itself at the center of the story, becoming the very center of the world. However, this position – though it is indisputably deserved for very self-evident reasons – is not given forever. After all, there are those who have continually attempted to interfere with its progress. The main theme of the *Short Course* is an account of how the Bolsheviks have fought against these obstacles.

Once again, a passage from the first page of the “Introduction” cuts to the heart of the matter:

The C.P.S.U.(B.) grew and gained strength in a fight over fundamental principles waged against the petty-bourgeois parties within the working-class movement – the Socialist-Revolutionaries (and earlier still, against their predecessors, the Narodniks), the Mensheviks, Anarchists and bourgeois nationalists of all shades – and, within the Party itself, against the Menshevik, opportunist trends – the Trotskyites, Bukharinites, nationalist deviators and other anti-Leninist groups.

The C.P.S.U.(B.) gained strength and became tempered in the revolutionary struggle against all enemies of the working class and of all working people – against landlords, capitalists, kulaks, wreckers, spies, against all the hirelings of the surrounding capitalist states.¹⁰⁷

This is an excellent sample of the general style, providing a good sense of the whole work. At the same time, like the passage cited earlier, it represents a peculiar narrative microcosm, a sort of epic introduction anticipating with whom the main hero will come to fight his fatal battle. Once again, the peculiar nature of the *Short Course* reveals itself here. The book says very little about the struggle with the tsarist system – which might appear to have been the communist party’s main enemy – as if this were a less important issue, or at least familiar to everybody and sufficiently discussed. The main subject of the story becomes the battle with those representing other currents within the revolutionary movement or merely deviating from the party line. We can explain this fact in various ways. For instance, by the end of the 1930s, the heroic struggle with the tsarist system was more of a memory for Stalin than a sphere of immediate interest. After the recent purges, Stalin had a much more urgent problem in the struggle with those within the communist movement who had been so bold as to think in different ways from what he had commanded. Yet this is probably not the only explanation. Another consideration is equally important here. In short, by speaking about the struggle with the main opponent outside the movement, one could not say much about the formation of one’s own doctrine. This problem disappears when one presents the history of the various struggles with other revolutionaries, who have questioned certain principles and thus are heretics rather than pagans. Therefore, the narrator of the *Short Course* tells the story of how the party has battled with dissenters. In the accounts of its actions, the narrator frequently uses the following verbs, among others:

to defeat – to crush [perhaps the most frequently recurring verb in the whole book] – to smash – to wipe out – not to leave a single stone standing – to deal a devastating blow – to beat [the opportunists] – to rebuff – to devastate – to tear the mask off – to overthrow – to unmask – to rout – to drive out – to drive back – to expel – to condemn – to cut off [any deviation] – to sweep away – to raze – to destroy.

107 Ibid.

All these phrases have a decidedly positive tone when applied to the actions of the Bolsheviks. They refer to deeds about which the narrator speaks with the greatest approval. Admittedly, some of these verbs may also refer to their opponents – above all, to the tsarist apparatus. In such cases, they obviously carry a negative connotation, though this typically has no effect on the use of these words where the Bolsheviks' deeds are concerned. Even "crushing" may be divided into right and wrong. The list compiled above – which is extensive, but merely representative – fully reveals its specific features only when we compare it with another list including phrases that describe the actions of the heretic enemy:

to smuggle – to cunningly change face – to stumble (into a position or into a bog) – to try to cobble something together – to sling mud (at the revolution) – to throw off the "democratic" mask – to reveal one's true face – to mask – to deceive the people – to aid the bourgeoisie – to come to wreck and divide – objectively to aid the counter-revolution – to fall over oneself to destroy – to scheme in an underhand way – to pronounce laughable theories – to pave the way to fascism – to take advantage of an error – to worm one's way in so as to damage and destroy – to fail to understand.

A comparison of these two lists tells us a great deal about the basis of the narrative in the *Short Course*. In the first list, we find phrases describing determined and merciless actions. Here the actant (to use the accepted narratological term introduced by A. J. Greimas) is somebody energetic and ruthless, with no mercy for the enemy and no common ground with the heretic. It is worth emphasizing that these verbs refer often – or perhaps even above all – to a sphere of ideas. Lenin (and with him every faithful Bolshevik) has unmasked not only particular individuals, but also the notions propagated by them; and by doing so crushing not only the specific group that has erred, but also the group's doctrine. In the *Short Course*, the actant – that is, the party as a whole (here the narrator speaks about those who oppose Lenin or Stalin as if they were outside the party, though he does not conceal the fact that in certain cases they have still belonged to it) or as an individual leader – constantly fights for the purity of doctrine, its Marxist character, and so on. This purity is under attack from all sides.

The second list points to an entirely different kind of action. Some of the verbs speak about blatantly hostile deeds – after all, only an enemy could sling mud at the revolution. Yet another kind of verb predominates here. The heretics do not operate openly, but constantly mask themselves to deceive the people. In short, they scheme in an underhand way. Therefore, the party's task is to face up to a hidden enemy that conceals its true aims, infiltrating where it has no right to infiltrate, dividing from within – the enemy secret agent. Accordingly, the basis of the narrative is a police perspective on events, which, here, achieves a genuine triumph:

The “Stalinist bible” of the “short course” on the *History of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union (Bolsheviks)* was based on a spy’s vision of history. The history of the USSR appeared in the “short course” as a chain of continuous battles with a hostile and powerful conspiracy, which had somehow managed to place its agents on the highest rungs of power in the party, the state and the military. This was yet another version of the vision to be found in the *Secret Councils of the Jesuits* or the *Protocols of the Elders of Zion*. The only difference here was that instead of the deceitful Jesuit, the insidious Freemason or the Jew in the service of the Sanhedrin, Stalin’s work presents the extremely active, dangerous and ubiquitous Trotskyist, the constant participant in a “great conspiracy against the USSR.”¹⁰⁸

In this sense, we should repeat that the *Short Course* is not so much a story of the struggle with the pagans as it is of the struggle with the heretics. These very heretics are creeping in everywhere. They are the class enemies who never sleep. To put it in still other terms, they are those modern devils, nosy and perfidious, who constantly hinder and damage the party in unexpected ways. Sometimes they do this by imposing endless discussions on one subject or another. Yet the party – as communist theorists liked to repeat – is not a discussion club. Discussion is not its task. Indeed, it can become a nuisance, hampering the march towards socialism. “Discussion” here carries exceptionally negative connotations. In order to realize his wicked intentions, the devil acts perfidiously. In this case, he wishes to disrupt the vanguard of the working class by imposing “discussion” upon it. He has many such ingenious ways and means. The *Short Course* describes them in detail, as the peculiar dialectics of the devil play a significant role within it.

This devil incarnates himself in various individuals, but he is always depicted in an extremely schematic, uniform and stereotypical fashion. In this respect, the *Short Course* is not an unusual text, but rather represents a summation of a certain tradition, while also significantly influencing later practices. In 1960, Mircea Eliade recorded his reflections on communist speech about the enemy. Even though the work under discussion here was not the direct object of his remarks, his remarks remain relevant to the work:

I’ve extracted somewhat haphazardly, from the vocabulary of Communist trials: Titoist, Trotskyite, assassin, agent of imperialism. These are categories, characters, archetypes which do not correspond to human, historical personalities. One has the impression that in Soviet trials it is not men, not individuals, who appear, but types, archetypes, characters. Exactly as in the ahistorical horizons of archaic societies (cf. *The Myth of the Eternal Return*). Whence comes this need of identifying (historical) individuals with a (mythical) archetypal character, of transforming the concrete man into an exemplary category? Is it a return to popular archaic thought?¹⁰⁹

108 Tazbir, Janusz, “*Polityczna teoria dziejów*,” *Polityka* 24 (1988).

109 Eliade, Mircea, *Journal II: 1957-1969*, trans. Fred H. Johnson, Jr. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1989), p. 88.

The diabolical enemy is treated in the most schematic manner. If he distinguishes himself with any individual characteristics at all, these only add to his evil. Yet he never represents only himself. As we might expect of a tale founded on a conspiracist vision of history, somebody always lurks behind him. And he can always be unmasked, condemned and punished. After all, evil has no right to triumph, and the devil cannot romp about with impunity. He has the party against him. Admittedly, the party must first rid itself of the enemies who wish to infiltrate its ranks, clouding its aims and ideas, or even entirely subjugating it. Ultimately, however, it is destined to be victorious. This destiny is the sentence of history, but also (and perhaps above all) a result of the fact that two great chiefs have successively stood at its head. But before we examine how the *Short Course* depicts them, we must also state that the party (in accordance with Lenin's conception) appears as a military division. The text says almost nothing about the individual fighters who enter its ranks. They remain anonymous, forming a de-individualized collective subject on the one hand and a background for the chief's activities on the other. Shaped in this way, the party is the sole actant. The party purges itself of enemies, but also leads, directs and sets out goals. But for whom? It might seem that it does so for the working class, to whom it appeals at every opportunity and whose mythology it creates. Yet another exceedingly characteristic noun also appears here – the "masses." One scholar of Marxist discourse has observed that this word does not appear in the writings of Marx or Engels, since they tended to speak about classes. It was Lenin who introduced this word.¹¹⁰ In the *Short Course*, the masses are the party's main partner. The party leads and mobilizes the masses, enjoying their support. Apart from the emphasis on the struggle with heretics, this is the second basic element involved with the construction of the historical plot. This is the case for many reasons, including the fact that the masses do not constitute a clearly defined social category, but rather a flowing magma that somebody else above them must shape. The masses themselves are passive, perhaps even entirely without will. They are incapable of organizing themselves or acting. At best, they are able to follow somebody else. In this case, they follow the vanguard division that knows where to guide them. This unit is the active party in the fullest sense of these words. It may compel, impose and lead. This development of the relation between the party and the masses shows how profoundly ideology has permeated the narrative. There is no discussion here of society or the nation, but rather of a group organized in military fashion or a shapeless crowd – de-individualized, passive, almost begging to be subjugated.

110 Laclau, Ernesto, "La politique comme construction de l'impensable," *Matérialités discursives* (Lille: Presse Universitaires de Lille, 1981), p. 67.

Two Chiefs

So far I have not yet examined an element that absolutely cannot be ignored. The party is not only a vanguard division, for it also has a chief. In this case, “chief” is precisely the right word – not head, boss or leader. Here a whole set of problems comes into view. Above all, how should one speak about the chief’s deeds, achievements and ideas in a narrative springing from a collectivist ideology? How should one situate him with respect to the organization he heads? How far one may one individualize the chief and thus distinguish him from everybody else? How can one depict the figure of the chief and talk about him in the language of Marxism? Here we find a specific variant of an issue anticipated earlier – Marxist expression as the building blocks of narrative. Above all, when it comes to the chief, the *Short Course* presents a curious dialectic of duality in unity – a strange Bolshevik holy duality. Lenin and Stalin are clearly separate people, but they are functionally identical. This is not only connected to a curious form of lineage (Marx begat Lenin, Lenin begat Stalin), though this element plays a certain role in the unintentional parody of religious narrative. The essence of the matter lies in the propaganda slogan the communists used for years: “Stalin is the Lenin of our times.” Thus, all of Lenin’s attributes were given to Stalin, while their biographies and historical roles were supposed to run parallel with one another. Whatever one might have said about the former could essentially apply to the latter. The former was a prefiguration of the latter, or – alternatively – the latter embodied the return of the former. In fact, we are dealing here with a single figure submitted to a peculiar duplication. From the collective portrait of the four classic figures of Marxism that appeared in millions of reproductions, only the third and fourth profiles – to allude to an epitaphic poem by a certain female poet¹¹¹ – mattered. Marx and Engels took marginal positions. At the beginning of the story, the narrator defines them as the “great teachers of Marxism” and then shifts them into the background. After all, what matters is Marxism as a doctrine and the dual chief, Lenino-Stalin.

But in order for this duality to be possible, the story of the chief must fulfill certain conditions. Above all, it must be suitably de-individualized. Despite the cult that surrounds the chief in both his manifestations, the propaganda must say very little about him, avoiding any information that might tell us anything about either Lenin or Stalin as individuals. They are the superhuman geniuses of the revolution, the great teachers of the nations, the greatest chiefs of the proletariat. One may multiply these lofty definitions at great length, but no coherent or comprehensive

111 Translator’s Note: This a reference to a phrase from a laudatory poem – entitled “That Day” (“Ten Dzień”) – written by the future Nobel laureate Wisława Szymborska on the occasion of Joseph Stalin’s death. Szymborska later renounced her youthful engagement with communist ideology.

set of characteristics emerges from the *Short Course*. Unsurprisingly, the narrator treats both as mythical heroes from the very beginning. They do not experience any development. They are immediately ready. As a very young man, Lenin is already the great Lenin. For instance, we learn that the Petersburg workers loved him from the first phase of his activity. The chief (in both incarnations) sets goals from his earliest youth. He never errs, loses his way or allows himself to be beguiled by appearances or temptations.¹¹² The narrator speaks about him in a radically different way from any methods of character representation typically employed in the novel (at least in its *Entwicklungsroman* variant). There is no transformation, evolution or development whatsoever. The actions of the mythical hero are free of the motivations that other types of stories cannot do without (for instance, psychological motivations).

In the *Short Course*, a highly developed de-personalization prevails. Accordingly, we might agree with Eliade's claim that archetypal references play a primary role. This also concerns the chief, despite the fact that an absolute Führerprinzip applies. Here I borrow a phrase from another variety of totalitarianism not only because these totalitarianisms often come to resemble each other, but above all because the idea of the chief lies at the very foundation of the narrative. The world manifests itself in accordance with what the chief has thought about it, the position he has adopted towards it and how he has evaluated it. Accordingly, the attitude towards the chief is the fundamental criterion for all evaluation. Whatever the chief has mentioned favorably deserves approval, while whatever opposes the chief or his ideas immediately deserves condemnation without any need for further justification. Here the frequently recurring adjective "anti-Leninist" is above all an evaluative label.

The chief's activity in the *Short Course* is not restricted to actions and operations naturally undertaken by a political leader, party boss or head of state. The chief is also a kind of doctrinal father and master of all orthodox believers. Within the repertoire of his activities, we find some that we might more easily associate with the priest than the ruler. The chief constantly teaches or condemns those who go astray, since he is a kind of spiritual guide (in this very unspiritual world), a quasi-guru who shows the way, teaches, reveals, explains and admonishes. But he

112 A similar principle applies in the case of enemies. According to Leszek Kołakowski: "A totalitarian system cannot survive without constantly rewriting history, eliminating past events, personalities, and ideas and substituting false ones in their place. It was unthinkable in terms of Soviet ideology to say that a particular leader who had fallen a victim to the purge has once been a true servant of the party but had subsequently fallen from grace: anyone who was proclaimed a traitor in the end must have been one from the beginning. Those who were simply done to death without being branded as traitors became un-persons and were never heard of again" (Kołakowski, *Main Currents of Marxism, Volume III*, p. 95).

also foretells, since he has talents that approach the prophetic. We constantly read that Lenin or Stalin have predicted one thing or another. These predictions are never mistaken. “Things unfolded as Lenin had predicted and warned” is a typical sentence that frequently recurs in various forms.

Of course, nobody else can compare with the chief (in either his first or second incarnation). Nevertheless, he still has what Aleksander Hertz refers to in a classic essay as his “team,” which consists of faithful disciples, close collaborators and uncritical executors of his orders. The *Short Course* rarely mentions Lenin’s or Stalin’s teams, which generally remain anonymous – though it would not be difficult to list the leading Bolshevik activists. Their names appear above all in connection with various errors, deviations and betrayals. After all, the *Short Course* was cobbled together after the great purges and Moscow show trials. Therefore, it could only depict those members of the chief’s team who had either died years earlier or come through the purges alive. Their names appear, but not very often.

Another factor also comes into play here. In a story constructed according to the *Führerprinzip*, the narrative lens must focus on the leader, which means pushing all other figures out of the field of vision. After all, they have no right to threaten his central position. In the *Short Course*, this procedure reaches an exceptionally high degree of development, since this question is not only linked with the anonymity or near anonymity of any associates, acolytes or collaborators. It is also linked with a much more fundamental question. In this account, only Lenin and Stalin enjoy the privilege of speech. As the depositaries of justice, they are endowed with the right to speak on any subject and to evaluate all possible things and processes. Consequently, they become the only possessors of the logos. Only their works, books, theses and articles are cited or mentioned. Nobody else receives this honor. Even party documents – which might appear to claim particular importance – are not quoted. The narrator does not cite the words of any individual from the chief’s personal team. Obviously, he does not cite the utterances of the enemy. Indeed, the enemy consistently appears here as mute. If the flow of the discourse demands that some of his opinions be reported, then they are always conveyed in a language considered appropriate, so that all their specific characteristics – and sometimes their meaning – dissipates. This rule applies without exception. Granting the right to speak only to the Bolshevik duality ensures that the monophonic principle of speech takes an extreme form apparently only possible in totalitarian contexts. In a world of silence, only the chief has the right to speak up.

Mythical Time and its Stages

Since we are looking at a very particular story from a narratological point of view, we must turn our attention to yet another curiosity and ask how time is shaped or formed within this view as to follow the principles of the mythological tale. As in the case of the collective and the chief, certain noteworthy antinomies reveal themselves here. Indeed, two different conceptions of time apply in the *Short Course*, and these two perspectives are fundamentally at odds with each other. They spring from different traditions and establish opposing modes of narration.

The first time is overtly mythical in nature. The formation of the first Marxist circles in Russia, or even the very first signs of interest in Marxism in the country, are treated as the absolute beginning of sacred history, the starting point of a new chapter in the history of the working class, society, the nation and humanity. From the moment this time commenced, everything took on a new dimension and began to develop in different registers, while meanings and values also arranged themselves in different ways. Ever since those who came to understand the course of history and delineate its correct direction began to act, everything that has appeared in the world must refer to the new movement. Nothing can be neutral. Anybody who has been occupied with any activity at all during this sacred time – even with matters far removed from politics – cannot exist outside this movement. Those people who are building the new world and are laying down the tracks on which the bright future will run, define our deeds and give meaning to our actions. If we insist that these people do not affect us, then we are objectively mistaken (in the specific, profoundly Marxist meaning of the word “objectively”). Either we contribute to the construction of the new world or we hinder this process – *tertium non datur*. In Stalinist sacred time, only dichotomous divisions may exist, since any others would cloud the clear image of reality and interfere with the elementary principles on which this vision of the world is based. The mythical nature of this time reveals itself with even greater strength and clarity here, since its final point is the time of fulfillment, the time of the absolute victory of justice, the triumph of principles and values. Though this time is mythical, it does not run in a circle, but rather leads towards a clear destination or final apotheosis.

However, a second, completely different form of time also functions in the *Short Course*. This time is not characterized by continuity. On the contrary, it is discrete, chopped into segments of various lengths, generally extremely brief. Together with uninterrupted time, we find another kind of time, measured from one event to the next, dispersed and unable to form a clearly defined whole. We might describe this as immediate time. Its units are the successive waves of the revolution (in the era preceding the shots fired from the *Aurora*), the diverse party congresses, conferences and plenary sessions, and – finally – the various history-

making remarks of the chief. During the Stalinist era, the category of the historical “stage” was predominant. Something could be correct or permissible in one stage, but deserving of condemnation in another. The overtly mythical form of time became the equivalent of eternity, while immediate time – broken into “stages” – was the equivalent of the moment. But I am not specifically concerned here with the antinomy between the moment and eternity, familiar in the works of the Romantic thinkers. Time measured from one tide to the next – or from one plenary session to the next – does not so much constitute mythical time as fill it. This is the time of the tactician devising the actions of his group for a particular situation, or the politician (or rather the tub-thumper) determining the right behavior for a given moment while never forgetting about the final time of fulfillment towards which he constantly aspires. The co-existence of these two times forms one of the narrative peculiarities of the *Short Course*, since it assumes two entirely different methods of storytelling – corresponding, respectively, with the myth and the chronicle. Both these conceptions of time work together above all through the shared assumption that every moment from the beginning of sacred history is doubly meaningful and significant, since it belongs to the time of the grand myth, while also representing a particular stage. There is no such thing as even a single moment that might be neutral, ordinary, or free of superimposed meaning. This duality in temporal perspective has become one of the foundations of communist propaganda. The enemy always shows particular treachery and baseness by commencing his subversive activities at important and extraordinary moments.

Yet these two times are also correlated for other reasons. The narrative of the *Short Course* is constructed from the perspective of the victory won by Joseph Stalin towards the end of the 1930s, when he eliminated his opponents, established the one and only right order, and enacted the immortal principles of Marxism-Leninism. Although the text does not mention this directly, the final triumph of Stalin is the constant point of reference, constituting the mythical fulfillment that gives the story meaning by defining the whole of history until now. So does the text claim that history – by entering its phase of fulfillment – has reached its conclusion? This a complicated question. On the one hand, there is no doubt that the “victory of socialism in the USSR” is treated as the final act of history, a kind of descent of the messiah to establish the new order. On the other hand, the mythical account of the birth of the new society and the creation of the new world under the enlightened guidance of the chief had an immediate function and grew out of immediate needs. Hannah Arendt draws attention to this side of the matter with characteristic perceptiveness:

When [. . .] Stalin decided to rewrite the history of the Russian Revolution, the propaganda of this new version consisted in destroying, together with the older books and documents, their authors and readers: the publication in 1938 of a new

official history of the Communist Party was the signal that the superpurge which had decimated a whole generation of Soviet intellectuals had come to an end.¹¹³

The specter of what happened in the Soviets in the second half of the 1930s hangs over the mythical version of history. Without at least a minimal knowledge of these events, this history is incomprehensible, since it developed alongside the prosecutorial speeches of Andrey Vyshinsky at the Stalinist show trials. The myth was not only supposed to supply these events with an appropriate interpretation, but also to whitewash them to a certain degree. Above all, it was to form a holy book of the faith. Lévi-Strauss wrote years ago that all versions of a myth are equal. None are better or worse; none are more or less important. Yet this observation does not apply to the official totalitarian myths. The task of the dominant myth – venerated by the authorities as the text that codifies the faith – is to eliminate all other myths and to prevent the formation of new ones (which can only be heretical). This kind of myth enjoyed absolute dominance in the communist world for over a dozen years – from the moment of the *Short Course's* publication to the first condemnations of Stalin.

So why was the book which conveyed this myth – and which ultimately represented the leading intellectual production of Stalinism together with the separately published biographies of the two chiefs – defined as a “short course”? This is an intriguing question, especially since there was never a full, comprehensive or more detailed course. Indeed, as far as I know, there was never any intention of preparing an extended version, since the book already contained everything necessary for the purposes for which it had been written. The ancients – especially the Romans – were familiar with a genre of writing called the epitome. This represented “an extract from a more extensive literary or scientific work, usually prepared by a direct student of the author or by future students or grammarians.”¹¹⁴

The *Short Course* is the most curious epitome imaginable. The subtitle suggests that it is an abridged version of a larger work, yet this work does not exist. We might well wonder what induced the authors to include this subtitle. I must confess that I cannot find a satisfactory explanation for this fact, which remains somewhat mysterious, since it is quite extraordinary that a book laying out the final version of history should bear a subtitle intended to diminish it. Perhaps the idea was that the sacred history of the Bolshevik party – which was simultaneously the history of the world, since it presented the triumph of the right over the wrong, the orthodox over the heretical – was so important and packed with content that no single book could possibly contain it. Therefore, it was necessary to emphasize

113 Arendt, Hannah, *The Origins of Totalitarianism* (New York: Meridian Books, 1958), pp. 341-342.

114 “Epitome,” in: *Mala encyklopedia kultury świata antycznego* (Warszawa: PWN, 1958).

that it was fragmentary and incomplete, heralding future works that would form an account worthy of their subject.

Here we should turn our attention to one further matter. The 1938 first edition of the book became the canonical version. The authors added no further installments, though clearly the history of the Bolshevik party and the Soviets did not come to an end in this particular year. The persistence of this form of the text underlines its mythical nature. One might add new episodes to the myth, but ultimately there was no need for extra scenes depicting events from the years after the conclusion of the main storyline. Such extra scenes would have interfered with the narrative structure of the work, since it had been conceived in order that the time of writing might coincide with the time of fulfillment, thus defining the meanings of everything that had happened earlier as the subject of the story. The book concludes with the apotheosis of the party – and, above all, of Stalin. This apotheosis must be the final word, so nothing else may occur after this moment. The *Short Course* says nothing about Stalin's triumphs after winning the war. A *ne varietur* principle applies. We must confess that the adoption of this principle shows a certain wisdom in the authors of the *Short Course*, as well as a strong familiarity with the rules governing myth. In the brief biography of Stalin that was also a sacred text at the time, the authors emphasize his exceptional modesty. Here this modesty reveals itself, since he does not appear at the conclusion in the role of the victorious generalissimus who won the war.

The Archetypal Model of Totalitarian Form

Unlike the authors of the *Short Course*, we may take the liberty of adding a short epilogue to reflect on its later fate. After the death of Stalin and critique of the so-called “personality cult,” the course lost its earlier status and ceased to be a holy book. Successive general secretaries must have been unimpressed by a tale ending with the apotheosis of one of their predecessors. After all, they preferred “not to let the past run wild” in a manner more conducive to their own interests. The *Short Course* soon fell into oblivion. Nobody reads it today. Even its former exegetes and enthusiasts can no longer bury themselves in it. I suppose that Mrs. N. – even if she has remained loyal to the faith of her youth – has found more interesting books with which to while away her old age. We might well marvel at the fading fortunes of stories once elevated to evangelical roles, but a different thought suggests itself to me. As I read this horrible screed decades later, it constantly occurs to me that the book was more than merely a canonical title from the last fifteen years of Stalin's rule. I became convinced that it had remained one of the most important books for communism in general. Without knowledge of this work, it would be impossible

to understand communism – not just because it was a holy book for a certain period, but rather because it lies at the center of communist ideology, mythology and expression. The book summarizes everything that existed within Marxism-Leninism up to its own time, consolidating its key elements and giving them their canonical form. Yet it is not oriented exclusively towards the past. Even in eras in which it was forgotten as an original source, it continued to provide a collection of verbal patterns and phrases that remained vital for decades in communist speech. The book undoubtedly represented the focal point of newspeak, an unsurpassable model, and simultaneously a collection of idioms, institutionalized metaphors and even conventionalized insults. Though forgotten, relegated to the museum and degraded, it never ceased to exert an influence. The *Short Course* remained the archetypal model of totalitarian form. In terms of both historical and literary narration, it remained the archetypal model for party historians and writers, while also becoming one of the foundations of socialist realism. Therefore, as I write about this book from over half a century ago, I recognize that I am dealing with something more than a totalitarian museum piece. Understanding the preeminent book of communism triumphant may even prove relevant to our own era, in which communism is departing the stage of history

May 1991

9. Stalin the Magician (On the Totalitarian Fairy Tale)

1.

The idea is not mine. I take it from a Czech author writing under the pseudonym Petr Fidelius, who has used it in a brilliant book entitled *Language and Power (Jazyk a moc)*.¹¹⁵ One of its chapters is “A Fairy Tale about Stalin” (“Pohádka o Stalinovi”), in which the author provides an evocative analysis of the methods employed to represent the great leader to the whole of progressive humanity. Yet this question is much broader in nature, concerning more than just the style in which various authors have created the figures of communist heroes. Perhaps we should consider whether the elements of fairy tale have appeared in the official language about communism or in the declarations of its ideologues, theoreticians and adherents: in other words, in its self-representation. Of course, none of the doctrinal commentators or propagandists can admit to any association with the fairy tale. After all, they believe that they speak about the real world in a manner consistent with its rules and characteristics. But this claim tells us very little, especially when they might simply be unable to confess any affinity with the fairy tale for a whole host of reasons. These reasons are not only political and doctrinal, but also related to the fact that such ideologues cannot admit to having anything in common with what social consciousness regards as pure fantasy – the product of imagination or poetic invention. This is especially true given that the legislators of socialist realism have tended to take a decidedly negative view of any inclination towards fairy tales.¹¹⁶

And yet this connection still appears in the most diverse ways – not only in tales about Stalin modeled on stories of traditional heroes, demi-gods and gods. It appears because this ideology presents the world as a fairy tale domain – partially designed, subject to clear rules and generally far removed from the dictates of common sense. I am not sure whether this was the case from its earliest beginnings or only from the moment when the ideology gained power over enormous territories. We might describe it as follows: any categories that describe reality as given, ordinary and accessible to direct observation lose their significance. Anything empirically accessible becomes less important. The main

¹¹⁵ Fidelius, Petr, *Jazyk a moc* (München: Arkýř, 1983), pp. 101-157.

¹¹⁶ See Mariusz Zawodniak’s article “Królewicz i murarz (Socrealistyczne potyczki z fantazją),” *Teksty Drugie* 1.25 (1994).

indicator of significance lies in what is narrated or interpreted, thus revealing meanings that are often hidden – sometimes deeply – but which determine the essence of things, telling us what we must consider or recall. We should view communism not only as a political concept or a more or less coherent ideological construction, but also as a peculiar kind of story – a story which communism itself constantly generates. After all, communism has had its own Scheherazades, both famous and anonymous.

This peculiar story – which has appeared in the most diverse situations and circumstances – has taken various forms. Accordingly, it may suggest diverse tools and perspectives with which to describe the world it has postulated or constructed according to set premises. Here I would follow Fidelius in choosing the fairy tale as the most appropriate category, since it opens up the broadest interpretive possibilities. At the same time, I would not deny that this story has also manifested itself in the form of the myth or utopia. There is nothing surprising about this. Many authors have written from many different perspectives about the communist myth and especially about the communist utopia. In my view, the fairy tale does not enter into any conflict or competition with these two categories. When we refer to it, we simply place the emphasis on a slightly different side of the problem and on slightly different facts, though it would be difficult to make any fundamental distinctions. Bruno Bettelheim writes the following:

In most cultures, there is no clear line separating myth from folk or fairy tale. [. . .] Some fairy and folk stories evolved out of myths; others were incorporated into them. Both forms embodied the cumulative experience of a society as men wished to recall past wisdom for themselves and transmit it to future generations.¹¹⁷

Yet here the question does not concern genetic links. These are of secondary importance for the problem I intend to examine. The important point is that the “the fairy tale is presented in a simple, homely way; no demands are made on the listener.”¹¹⁸ Anybody can understand it – even in cases where the person is unfamiliar with the foundations or principles of the beliefs to which it refers or which it conveys in mediated form. Neither does it place the reader before any narratological difficulties, since the events are put together in such a way that the plot might be immediately comprehensible, entering at once the domain of what is accepted or self-evident. The differences between fairy tale and myth – including those in the case of the communist narrative about the world – are important, even if we acknowledge that they derive not from the thing itself, but rather from the nature of the tools we use to approach it. The fundamental distinction here

117 Bettelheim, Bruno, *The Uses of Enchantment: The Meaning and Importance of Fairy Tales* (New York: Vintage, 2010), p. 26.

118 Ibid.

perhaps lies in the fact that myth places greater emphasis on the general senses of the story and the general meanings of the world that derive from them, while fairy tale focuses on extraordinary events. Such events do not necessarily predominate in myths, but they form a distinguishing feature of fairy tales.

The situation appears in a similar light when we view the relations between the communist utopia and fairy tale. The utopia creates a fantastical vision of society and presents it as the point of destination, the point towards which everything that happens is headed – or should be headed – in the mandatory pattern determined by doctrine. The utopia delineates a certain end to the course of things. The fairy tale does not do this. Instead, it emphasizes the plot much more strongly. Fairy tales do not outline the future dimension as clearly, and thus this element tends to remain less conspicuous. A fairy tale permeated with ideology may well come close to a utopia, especially when it depicts the point of destination or outlines a vision of a magnificent future. Nevertheless, the action still takes place in the here and now, in contemporary times, in a world that is not separated from empirical reality by any insurmountable barriers. We might put it as follows: one does not make one's way towards a fairy tale as one makes one's way towards the utopian world; one lives in a fairy tale. If you accept a certain vision of reality and regard a certain understanding of it as your own, then you must be consistent and recognize the world of the fairy tale around you. The fairy tale generates this world, which must then resemble it in one way or another. Ultimately, the totalitarian fairy tale is not just a story, but also a law for structuring the reality in which you live or to which you are condemned. If you affirm the laws of the ideological fairy tale – which constitutes a categorical and exclusive interpretation of the world – then you become a participant in a peculiar game, as well as a co-believer and co-participant in the story. The fairy tale not only speaks to you, but also about you. The distance disintegrates between discourse – in its narrative, fantastic, or fairy tale forms – and the world.

2.

The fairy tale perspective (or – as Fidelius puts it – “the fairy tale point of view”) expresses itself extraordinarily clearly in the construction of main characters. These include leaders to be worshipped, people to whom extraordinary deeds and powers are ascribed, and people we should admire. Even though they belong to the world of ordinary mortals, they really represent another world – a better world stamped with the sacred (or rather the quasi-sacred). According to Fidelius, the king acts alone in fairy tales. He cannot be compared or lumped together with anybody else, and thus he becomes an object of worship. Here the border begins

to blur between what fairy tales say about monarchs and various depictions of the great leader of leaders, the ruler and hero without equal, the man to whom we can ascribe every virtue and depict as the cause of the most extraordinary and – from the perspective of everyday logic – improbable events: Joseph Stalin. Even what was described after his death via the grating euphemism of the “personality cult” became part of the fairy tale strategy. By worshipping the person of the king in the form of the real socialist ruler, society itself became a character in the fairy tale drama. For even if it did not actually do so, it was meant to behave in accordance with a script written into the fairy tale. Anybody who did not wish to submit to this way of being or who dared to rebel was violating the dominant principles of this world and deserved to be punished.

The less freedom and more terror there was in society, the more explicit the fairy tale order could become. In this case, there was no longer any reason to camouflage or moderate the message, including when one spoke of the leaders. In the early 1950s, the press and radio would claim quite seriously that Comrade Stalin was changing nature. This statement could be understood in various ways. It might have suggested that Stalin had developed a brilliant plan for restructuring the human natural environment or perhaps that he was guiding those who were performing extraordinary feats through superhuman efforts to improve the lives of the working people of the towns and villages. Such interpretations could not be ruled out in advance. Indeed, they existed and manifested themselves in various different circumstances. Nevertheless, they were quite clearly not the most important interpretations. As in a fairy tale, the emphasis was supposed to fall on the individual aspects of these extraordinary achievements. Of course, the leader’s team – the party – were not forgotten. But the leader clearly gave them strength, and not the other way around, despite what might have been officially proclaimed. As Fidelius perceptively points out, this kind of ideological fairy tale (in accordance with the language of the era, we might call it the “new type”) transforms everything supposedly general into the individual. As a result, there was nothing strange about the general secretary’s ability to change nature. In fact, one could interpret this claim in the most literal sense, especially since there was nothing unusual about stories in which he changed the flow of rivers or reversed the direction of the winds. The plant scientist Ivan Michurin was a magician of orchards, while Comrade Stalin was a magician on a scale beyond the most enormous and magnificent garden – or even the scale of the most enormous country. Everything he did had a planetary dimension. Admittedly, he only changed the flow of rivers in Siberia. But the clear suggestion was that his powers might affect not only those rivers whose flow his genius had turned from north to south, but also – at least potentially – the Wisła, the Seine and the Amazon. Things looked just as promising with the winds. Comrade Stalin – who loved humanity and

constantly worked for its benefit – was set to make the winds blow in such a way that they would no longer bring cold weather to human settlements.

As we can see, the leader, dictator and legislator of the world is no mere ruler. He is also a magician. If you wish to live in harmony with the world, then you cannot question his magical power. If you are unable to believe, then you must at least pretend to take it seriously. The more naive the reader or participant of social life, the easier it was to reach him or her with this vision of the leader-magician. It appeared on the front pages of newspapers and formed an important element of political discourse, but it also took its canonical form – undiluted in any way – in all kinds of popular stories and in children’s literature. In this respect, it would be interesting to analyze school textbooks from the Stalinist era (especially Russian language textbooks in Poland). It is no coincidence that various folk tales about Stalin were particularly valued at the time, including poems by singers from Central Asia and the Caucasus who set these heroic stories in the highest forms developed over centuries by their own local customs (one famous producer of such works called himself Suleiman Stalski).

In the fairy tale, there is only one king. Therefore, it is no surprise that the highest and most extraordinary powers belong to him. No assistant, close collaborator or even potential successor could be the magician from the highest echelon of power. Here Stalin is not an isolated case. Lenin retrospectively acquired a similar status,¹¹⁹ while the stories about Mao Zedong and Kim Il-sung are perhaps the most characteristic. I am not certain whether Mao altered nature, though it is clear that – like Stalin – he was also a magician. This fact expressed itself in his legendary achievements. At certain moments, his abilities seemed limitless. As a venerable elder, he swam across the mightiest Chinese river. He possessed extraordinary strength, and so things that would have been improbable for ordinary people became a reality with him. This amazing feat of swimming – which received enormous publicity at the time – was not the Chinese leader’s only magical deed. During the time of the Cultural Revolution, the Xinhua News Agency reported quite seriously that a certain very complicated and risky surgical procedure had succeeded only because the doctors had performed it under a portrait of Chairman Mao. Of course, we sense the embarrassing grotesqueness of all this and lament the fact that such tales were treated seriously – at least by those who composed them and put them forward as articles of faith. At the same time, we cannot help noticing that they would go on to shape social consciousness.

119 The fact that stories about Lenin in fairy tale style became fully legitimate and did not arouse suspicion is demonstrated by the fact that Mikhail Zoshchenko’s overtly parodical tales could be published, repeatedly reissued and translated into various languages. Not only did they not bring down any repression on the author, but they were even received as an expression of his loyalty towards the Soviet sacred sphere.

The equation of the communist leader with the fairy tale magician king also created certain practical problems. These become quite comprehensible when we recall that the totalitarian fairy tale was supposed to be not only a story, but also a vision of the world. It was meant to be a factor in the organization of the world, a peculiar principle according to which reality would be constructed and subsequently function. The main difficulty emerges from the fact that the era of the fairy tale king – understood in the manner under discussion here – never comes to an end. Perhaps there are no explicit claims that he is immortal or that he rivals the gods in this respect, but there is no mention of his departure, and thus there can be no talk of succession or of a heir to the throne. If a heir appears at all, he fills the same immutable role of the leader from whom he has assumed power. For the socialist realist fairy tale, this was an important issue for several reasons. Above all, one could not speak about the death of the ruler. In Stalin's time, any official statement concerning his physical demise would have been impossible, while those who spoke about his death in private would have been treated as counter-revolutionaries aspiring to overthrow the existing order and thus were dealt with accordingly. Therefore, one could not speak about the dictator's illnesses, while any reflections on the succession would have been regarded as anathema undermining the established rules that governed the universe. Unsurprisingly, the death of the king – impossible in the fairy tale world – dramatically destroyed this order, shaking its foundations and jeopardizing a system of values that was supposed to be timeless and eternal. The news that the end of a particular fairy tale had actually arrived, and that a new fairy tale – similar, but different – was about to begin, violated the supposedly singular order of the world. Such an announcement appeared as a destructive act.

To repeat: the fairy tale is not only a story, but also one of the principles governing the organization of the totalitarian world. Here we find an astonishing compatibility between narratives and things, words and material. Hence the problems with the succession of power. The greater the powers ascribed to the ruler and the more consistently he appears as a super-human figure who changes the design of the world, the greater the need to overthrow him after his death – and sometimes even to erase him from memory; The next fairy tale can only begin on the condition that this has already taken place. The process unfolds in this way because each new fairy tale – though it is never simply a repetition of its predecessor – can exist only on the condition that its predecessor should be at least to some extent revised, disavowed or even treated as non-existent. We might even suggest that each new mutation of the communist fairy tale saw a weakening of what had once been strong in their unimpeachably canonical versions about Stalin or Mao Zedong. Relatively soon after their respective departures from this world, their myths were shattered. The Soviet authorities admitted that Stalin

had committed crimes, though at first they only did so reluctantly and in secret, while Chairman Mao's closest associates were named the "gang of four" and put in prison for long terms. This approach was the condition for any effective installation of a new ruler on the throne, and indeed – it might appear – for the very functioning of the totalitarian state. When the posthumous dethronement of the leader-magician does not occur, the problems with the succession can seem insurmountable. We see evidence of this in everything that has unfolded after the death of Kim Il-sung in North Korea, the terrible relict of communism that has resisted even the smallest changes. The cult of Kim Il-sung has persisted after his death, while his designated dynastic heir has not succeeded in assuming his role. Indeed, little is known about what has happened to him. As a leader, he should be the object of a cult, and to some extent he already is. Yet he cannot compete with his own father, who has taken on divine attributes. Such dilemmas within the totalitarian fairy tale are truly irresolvable.

At the same time, we should not forget that figures from highest rungs of power are not the only ones to have become fairy tale heroes. Minor heroes have also appeared, though they have not assumed any kingly or divine qualities. The socialist realist fairy tale is – for obvious reasons – suitably hierarchical. Minor heroes do not define the nature of the world in which they live and act, though they still play an important role within it by submitting themselves entirely to the system whose master and guarantor is the leader. Their task is to bring this predetermined order to life. In the Stalinist era – and indeed in later periods – there were many different fairy tale roles. Here I shall draw attention to just one – the Stakhanovites. These individuals were also extraordinary figures, who went beyond the bounds of probability and everyday reality. They performed superhuman deeds, since they possessed extraordinary spiritual and physical strength – as well as a desire to contribute to the more rapid construction of the new world. Such leaders of labor did not alter nature, but their actions surpassed all previous norms, thus entering the realm of the miraculous and introducing it on their own lower level into the real world. They became like Waligóra and Wyrwidąb, the mythological twin brothers endowed with superhuman strength from Polish folklore. The figures of Wincenty Pstrowski, Wiktor Markiewka and the Bugdoł brothers (to name a few leaders of labor whose names appeared often at the beginning of the 1950s in Poland) were presented in precisely this manner. This kind of mythical character also had a female mutation, as in the legendary Soviet tractor driver Pasha Angelina or the Łódź weaver Wanda Gościmińska, who both achieved astounding results.

3.

We might now look at the figures populating the world of real socialism from a new perspective and ask what function they fulfill in the specific sense of the word “function” established by Vladimir Propp in his classic work.¹²⁰ Here it would undoubtedly become clear that the principles of a highly developed schematic system are in operation. Each character has certain strictly defined tasks to perform. Moreover, one must generally speak about these tasks in the same conventional phrases, which have become mandatory. Any violation of these formulations implies an undermining of the sacred, since they count among its concrete manifestations. It would be difficult to treat the Stalinist fairy tale as a form of oral production, but one cannot help noticing that certain types of formulaic constructions dominate within it. Indeed, one might profitably reconstruct an entire network of plot outlines and the ossified verbal constructions associated with them, though I shall not undertake this task here.

At the same time, I cannot neglect one element without which the Stalinist fairy tale would be unimaginable. In the world of which it speaks, not everybody can understand the wisdom and deeds of the great magician, not everybody wishes to subordinate themselves to his greatness, and there are even some who have no other goal than to disrupt the realization of what his wisdom proposes. In this grim fairy tale, one role remains to be cast – the role of the wolf who threatens the main characters, doing evil deeds and baring his fangs as he tries to bite them. Enemies constantly appear. They operate in diverse ways, sometimes openly, but more often covertly, deceitfully, dishonorably, or in disguise, since they like to dress in sheep’s clothing.

These devious enemies act treacherously and with the element of surprise, thus forcing those who are faithful to the king-magician to be ever vigilant, since their opponents may take various forms and bear many different names. Sometimes the sources speak about the adversary in genuine fairy tale style as a wolf baring his teeth, though this description is too general to fit every situation. Sometimes it is much better to describe him as “the attack dog of imperialism” or “the filthy dwarf of reaction.” This enemy acts in very particular ways, even going so far as to drop the voracious Colorado beetle – known colloquially as the “potato bug” – from planes with the aim of destroying the potato crop and causing famine.¹²¹

120 Propp, Vladimir, *Morphology of the Folktale*, trans. Lawrence Scott (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1968).

121 Vladimir Macura provides a brilliant analysis of this voracious beetle’s adventures in Stalinist propaganda in his article “Stonka ziemniaczana,” trans. M. Burkówna, *Teksty Drugie* 1.25 (1994).

The “filthy dwarf of reaction” and the “attack dog of imperialism” are colorful expressions, but the enemy – without whom the Stalinist story could not exist – may also bear much less poetic names. These include revisionist, revanchist, Trotskyist, reactionary cleric, Zionist, cosmopolitan, kulak, relict of the former system, and – as in the 1930s – simply enemy of the people. The representatives and perpetrators of evil may take different names, but their function – irrespective of their title – is always the same. They hamper and hinder, and strive to ensure that good does not prevail in the world. They constantly attempt to lead everybody else astray, often by pretending or impersonating other people. They must be exposed. We must never forget that they exist and that they are active, always ready to pounce on us and devour us, while also devouring the values we cherish and regard as our own – the ideals to which we are supposed to be faithful.

The appearance of the wolf, using various battle cries and taking diverse forms points to one fact: the world of the real socialist fairy tale is dichotomously divided. The borders between the two zones are sharp and clearly marked. This world is axiologically determined down to the very last detail. Here the good represented by the king-ruler-magician clashes with evil, whose representative is the vicious wolf baring his teeth, sometimes known as the enemy of the people, sometimes as the class enemy, and sometimes as a thousand other things. The totalitarian fairy tale is precisely the story of how such a diametrically arranged world came into being and how it continues to exist – a world in which we all know who is who, what is what, and who stands behind whom and what, a world in which we must make unambiguous choices and in which we cannot deceive or pretend for long. Above all, it is the story of good fighting with evil, since the enemy must ultimately be exposed and defeated. The conclusion of the fairy tale must be optimistic. Even if communism is losing at a given moment in a particular place on earth, it must eventually be victorious and come to rule the world. The wolves – who are now so dangerous and unscrupulous – will simply disappear from the face of the earth. Irrespective of the specific story to be told, the fairy tale always bears the same clear message. The new will triumph over the old, the just over the unjust, good over evil.

4.

When I describe real socialist visions of the world as peculiar fairy tales, I am thinking not only about specific motifs or certain simple narrative processes. I also have in mind another element of equal significance – namely, the fairy-tale attitude towards the audience. The fairy tale demands naivety of the reader. After all, if readers are to interpret the story in accordance with the rules, they must

suspend all criticism and leave aside any realistic criteria that might come into conflict with the assumptions of the fairy-tale narrative. One either accepts the interpretive principles contained within the fairy tale or one rejects them. In the latter case, one can no longer read it appropriately or interpret it with any accuracy. The anti-fairy tale is an impossible phenomenon here. If it came into being, it would have nothing in common with the fairy tale, though certain conventional motifs and traditional plots might still function within it. The fairy tale assumes the reader's approval, excluding any possibility of rebellion, negation or even tactful and timid skepticism. The "either-or" principle is in force. Either you agree with this way of presenting the world and identify with it, or you reject it – and then you cannot enter into any relation with the fairy tale.

This phenomenon is even more conspicuous in the Stalinist fairy tale, which is not merely a story about the world, but also a set of principles according to which this world should be constructed. You – the person to whom the fairy tale is addressed – must not only take on board the stories proposed, but you must also come to live in their world. You must love this world and nurture the conviction that it is the best of all realities. You must act appropriately in this world: in other words, according to the instructions inscribed within it. Therefore, you are not free to reflect on whether the tale about Stalin changing nature – reversing the course of rivers and the direction of winds – is a true story. You must believe uncritically that it is. If the slightest shadow of a doubt arises, you will immediately be suspected. You must believe as you once did when you read "Hansel and Gretel," "Cinderella," or any other fairy tale. You must act like a naive little child, believing that things are as they tell you they are. The difference here lies only in the fact that the real socialist fairy tale involves a preordained position deriving from indoctrination and fear. This fairy tale does not necessarily tell of cruel events, yet it is always linked with unscrupulous terror. In the fairy tale *sensu stricto*, the infantile reception is a natural phenomenon resulting from the nature of the literary game in progress. In the totalitarian fairy tale – conceived as a factor organizing life – it is forced above all by the circumstances. After all, in this case, the attitude towards the audience is also an attitude towards human beings in all their dimensions and an attitude towards society. The fairy-tale discourse of communism is not merely a matter of a certain type of utterance. It is also a question of a preexisting human condition and a consequence of pre-established, arbitrarily conceived behaviors. The fairy tale understood in this peculiar way becomes a kind of regulator of the world. We normally commune with a classic fairy tale. We read it or listen to it, remembering certain themes and telling it to others who do not yet know it or who wish to hear it for the umpteenth time. But in the totalitarian fairy tale, you should live as if the fairy-tale discourse were in no way detached, as if it encompassed the world that you must approve, thus treating its fictions as realities. If you cannot do this,

then you will perish – and not because the fairy-tale wolf will bite you, but rather because somebody very real will destroy you.

In this case, the fairy tale – I must repeat this point with particular clarity – is something more than a story, a fantasy or a form of discourse. Instead, it represents a principle for building a real world, a set of rules governing its organization, and a factor constituting a social and intellectual universe. It is something more than a story, because in totalitarian systems – especially in their most extreme or radical versions – there is no difference between discourse and its object, between the word and the world to which it refers. The world itself becomes a discourse with clearly marked meanings and transparent, unambiguous messages. The foundation of this discourse is the leader who takes the designated role of magician. He assumes the position of ultimate guarantor of meaning. This magician not only alters the social world, but also nature. And, of course, he creatively reforges man into a new type of being.

2005

10. Russian, German, Jew (Names of Nationalities in the Language of Communist Poland)

In ethnic languages, the names of nationalities are established by tradition, and therefore they are – so to speak – given in advance. Accordingly, it might appear that neither individual proposals nor the arbitrary determinations of authoritarian power could have much influence here. And to a certain extent this is precisely what we find, even when we examine the dominant practices in the communist People’s Republic of Poland. In many cases, nothing changed, since a Frenchman remained a Frenchman, an Englishman an Englishman, and a Senegalese a Senegalese.¹²² Clearly this was the natural shape of things, and nobody would have questioned these meanings. At the same time, we must ask whether a German remained simply a German, a Russian simply a Russian, or a Korean simply a Korean. When we attempt to answer these apparently uncomplicated questions, certain difficulties immediately present themselves. It soon becomes clear that things are not quite as simple and straightforward with the Russian and the German as they were with the Frenchman and the Englishman. This is no coincidence. Indeed, an examination of this question will hopefully allow us to reveal certain mechanisms that shaped the official molding of language in communist Poland.

In the use of national names, we find the expression of a fundamental tendency distinguishing linguistic practices within real socialism, and at the same time – in my view – one of the most characteristic aspirations of totalitarian power more generally. Any categories introduced or admitted into public language must directly correspond to political and ideological assumptions. This rule also applies to phenomena reflecting traditions deeply rooted in language and – more generally – in culture. In the case under discussion here, the names of nationalities were to correspond with whatever was regarded as the political reality of the time. Consequently, these names coincided with the names of states. But since there were two German states, could anybody be described as “German”? And

122 Krystyna Pisarkowa has devoted an important and influential article – entitled “Konotacja semantyczna nazw narodowości” (“The Semantic Connotation of Names for Nationalities”) – to this question. Her main focus is the stereotyping of this domain of language. The article appears in her book *Z pragmatycznej stylistyki, semantyki i historii języka, Wybór zagadnień* (Kraków: IJP, 1994). It was first printed in the journal *Zeszyty Prasoznawcze* in 1976. The author’s arguments were censored, which explains the particular choice of examples under analysis.

could anybody be described as “Russian” when no Russian state existed on the world map – but rather the Union of Socialist Soviet Republics? Such questions were of fundamental significance to the official languages and were also exposed to various difficulties, complications and inconveniences. After all, how could one use the names of nations when the traditional versions were inappropriate or even objectionable, while the obligatory terms did not fit all contexts, sounded odd in certain circumstances, and were sometimes even impossible? Communist propaganda in Poland wrestled with these problems for decades.

What could one do with the terms “Russian” or “the Russians” when the key point was precisely to emphasize that it did not matter whether somebody was an ethnic Russian, but rather that he or she was a citizen of the Soviet Union? The authorities were quick to introduce various phrases intended to circumvent these difficulties. One of the official periphrases for the USSR was the “state of a hundred nations.” The Russian, the Kazakh and the Georgian could all find their places within these one hundred nations. However, it proved difficult to use this term in practice – not only in colloquial language, but even in the propaganda of the time. This was especially problematic since such formulations soon took on solemn and pompous overtones that best suited them to rhetorical forms of language – such as the speeches at various celebrations for the anniversary of the Great October Socialist Revolution. Here these phrases found their proper place. Meanwhile, they became the object of parody in colloquial speech.

Another phrase promoted in communist Poland was “the Soviet people,” along with its equivalent singular form, “the Soviet person.” This phrase had similar characteristics to the “state of a hundred nations” and was equally difficult to use on an everyday basis – even in propaganda speech, which did not take colloquial linguistic practices into account. The terms “Soviet people” and “Soviet person” carried even more pompous overtones than those analyzed above. Indeed, it is no coincidence that in Stalinist times the well-known pro-regime novelist Jerzy Andrzejewski wrote a panegyric brochure entitled *On the Soviet Person*.¹²³ A few decades later, the irony of fate transformed the revered “Soviet person” into the ominous “*homo sovieticus*.” It goes without saying that this term does not constitute the name of a nationality, since it may apply to the representatives of all nations.

When we consider the absolute Russian domination of the time, it is astonishing – though also characteristic – that the Russian identity of various people and things was usually passed over in silence rather than advertised. This practice did not accord with colloquial linguistic usage, according to which such words as “Russia” and “Russian” could be (and generally were) axiologically neutral like the vast

123 Andrzejewski, Jerzy, *O człowieku radzieckim* (Warszawa: Książka i Wiedza, 1951).

majority of proper nouns. The propaganda clichés, “Soviet person” and “Soviet people,” were not neutral. It was completely impossible for colloquial language to absorb these terms with the connotations given to them in the solemn speeches at various anniversary celebrations. But something much more significant took place: colloquial language gave these phrases a thoroughly negative meaning. People used them only with ironic emphasis or in satirical and grotesque contexts. Sometimes (rather rarely) the word “*radzianie*” also appeared – as a colloquial Polish neologism for “the Soviets” – though it never entered official language. This is hardly surprising, since the word was bursting with negative connotations. In colloquial speech, every citizen of the USSR (and thus every “Soviet person”) was described as a “Russian” – doubtless partly for reasons of economy, but also partly due to confusion or capitulation to certain schemas of thought. This practice clearly did not enter official language. Sometimes it took on a contradictory and unintentionally grotesque character. Everything Russian could be described as Soviet. At the beginning of the 1970s, a bookseller friend of mine once told me that his customers sometimes asked if he had a “Polish-Soviet dictionary.”

The application of the term “Russian” to specific individuals formed an interesting problem: for instance, in various publications providing basic factual information. At times, the introductory descriptions appearing in various articles were highly ritualized, corresponding to preordained schemas developed and officially approved in the USSR. In the *Great Universal Encyclopedia (Wielka Encyklopedia Powszechna)* published by the Polish Scientific Publishers (*PWN*) in the 1970s, we read the following in the entry devoted to Lenin: “Leader of the Russian and international revolutionary labor movement.” “Russian” does not refer to nationality here, since the leader of the Russian movement did not have to be a Russian himself. This becomes particularly clear when we examine the entry devoted to Stalin. Here we find the following qualification: “Activist of the Russian and international labor movement, statesman.” We should note that in this article there is no explicit mention of the fact that this particular statesman was of Georgian origin. This fact can only be implied, and the less informed reader might entirely overlook it. In the case of other leading activists in the communist movement, a strictly observed convention applies. For instance, in the *Encyclopedia* we also learn that Georgi Dimitrov was an “activist of the Bulgarian and international labor movement, statesman of the Bulgarian popular state,” while Feliks Dzierżyński was an “activist of the Polish and Russian labor movement.” Clearly we may observe here that the descriptions of communist leaders belong to a realm of highly developed, controlled, top-down conventions, according to which national determiners appear only indirectly. They are more a matter of implication than of any direct assertion.

In cases less susceptible to ideological pressure and centralized control than the brief biographies of communist leaders, certain rules also applied, though they were probably not observed with the same consistency. As an example, I would refer to the attributions of nationality in the descriptions of various musical composers appearing in a two-volume encyclopedic dictionary published in the mid-1960s.¹²⁴ This publication contains several hundred names, including those of less familiar figures whose work bears a strictly local significance. Each name appears alongside a categorization of nationality. However, there is one exception to this rule. In the case of artists defined as “Soviet composers,” the term “Russian” does not appear, even when the artists in question belonged to this nation. Thus the two greatest and most famous figures – Prokofiev and Shostakovich – are simply Soviet composers. The same principle applies to dozens of other musicians who never achieved fame. Yet the world-famous Aram Khachaturian is not characterized as a Soviet composer. His entry stresses that he is Armenian. This reflects another unbending rule. To give just a few random examples, such composers as Sulkhan Tsintsadze, Vano Muradeli and Alexander Shaverzashvili are Georgian, while Alexander Arutiunian and Arno Babajanian are Armenian. Here an interesting problem emerges, since we might well ask what has determined this particular assignment of terms.

It seems certain that this arrangement did not result from any conscious or even partially free decision taken by the music critics responsible for compiling this extensive dictionary.¹²⁵ The main principle – which is observed almost without exception – clearly represents the realization of a directive from above (only those composers whose work falls in the period before 1917 – or who emigrated after this date – are described as Russian, though Stravinsky is defined as an American composer of Russian origin). Yet the question remains as to what could have caused the rule to take such a peculiar form. It appears that various considerations might have come into play. Perhaps the attribute of “Russianness” is treated as a fundamental category here. In a certain sense, it need not even be mentioned, while everything outside this category must be specifically delineated. From this perspective, “Russian” might be understood as a fundamental and characteristic determinant of everything “Soviet” – as an absolutely dominant element incomparable with any other national categories. Accordingly, there would be no reason to stress this fact in any particular way (since we need not verbalize self-evident facts!). It is also possible – and indeed this might be the

124 See: Schaeffer, Bogusław et al., *Leksykon kompozytorów XX wieku* (Kraków: PWM, 1963-1965).

125 Admittedly, we should point out a certain inconsistency here. In the *Great Universal Encyclopedia*, Prokofiev is presented as a Russian composer (perhaps because he spent more than a decade as an émigré), while Shostakovich appears as a Soviet composer.

simplest explanation – that the word “Soviet” was consciously (or subconsciously) identified with “Russian.” In this understanding, these two adjectives would simply be synonymous. This practice made it possible for language users to avoid placing them together, though this still sometimes happened. For instance, I remember announcements of “Russian and Soviet music concerts” on the Polish radio.

One way or another, the use of all categories referring to Russia and Russians diverged to a greater or lesser extent from what might seem natural, self-explanatory or obvious. Consequently, the use of the adjectives “Soviet” and “Russian” became a question that was far from neutral in colloquial speech as well. In fact, “Soviet” (“*radziecki*”) gained a certain popularity under the influence of the mass media, though it never lost its official overtone (all the more so since a negative, Russified version of the word – “*sowiecki*” – still existed in community consciousness, especially among the older generation, though this version never entered the public discourse of communist Poland at all). Yet the word “Russian” had various unofficial connotations – at least in certain contexts. It did not always have to refer directly to things Russian, since it was sometimes synonymous with “Soviet.” Semantic precision was clearly not among the word’s virtues.

The use of the many expressions referring to Germans forms an equally interesting question. Thanks to the censorship materials brought out of Poland and published in 1977 by Tomasz Strzyżewski, we know that the regulations governing how people had to write about the two German states were extraordinarily pedantic and particular. Moreover – characteristically for most declarations of this kind – they were phrased in a highly categorical manner. There could be no German state, but only the GDR and the FRG. There could be no German organizations, trade unions or institutions (including sporting organizations), since one always had to indicate the state with which they were associated. We learn from this official document that the term “Germany” could never be used in (simultaneous) reference to the area of the GDR, the FRG or West Berlin.¹²⁶ But did Germany exist as a nation?

Historically, Germany clearly had existed, since in all kinds of texts about the past – including those about the Second World War and the occupation of Poland – we find regular mentions of Germany. After all, if restrictions had been introduced in relation to facts from the past, then any historical discourse at all would have become impossible – even if the term “Germans” had been replaced by such expressions as “Fascists,” “Nazis” or “National Socialists.” Apparently, historical discourse – which the regime generally attempted to subordinate to ideological goals and principles – was not the primary concern of the propaganda makers. A much more important issue was whether it should be permissible to talk

¹²⁶ Strzyżewski, Tomasz, *Czarna księga cenzury PRL*, Vol. I, (London: Aneks, 1977), p. 25.

about Germany without circumlocutions, additional qualifications, paraphrase or hyperbole (and sometimes euphemism). Anti-German propaganda was theoretically impossible, and yet we know that it was practiced with various levels of intensity in all phases of communist Poland's history.

The fact that it was impossible to speak directly about Germany – since two German states existed – exposed official formulations to various kinds of difficulties and inconveniences. I shall refer here to an example drawn from the abovementioned materials from the censor's office. In a report explaining the censorship of an article in the Catholic *Tygodnik Powszechny* (*The Universal Weekly*), the following strange expression appears: "current relations between the nations of Poland and FRG." Since it was impossible in such contexts to speak directly about the Germans, it was necessary to use the awkward phrase "the nation of FRG." But the strangeness here does not lie in the fact that parallel phrases emerge – as in the case of the "Poles" and the "Polish nation." Instead, we find a completely different expression – the "nation of Poland," meaning the nation that inhabits Poland. Clearly the rules dictating the naming of one nation affect the ways in which one may speak about other nations – including one's own.

Of course, it is difficult to determine what kind of impact this official use of names for the Germans (and Germany) had on colloquial linguistic practices. Based on recollections and passing observations from those times, I would risk the thesis that the two abbreviations – FRG and GDR – entered colloquial speech and established themselves there with little resistance. Various kinds of pragmatic considerations were probably responsible for this situation, including an awareness of the differences in government between the two states, but also – above all – in the standard of living. Adjectival uses of the two abbreviations became popular and entered general use. These adjectives were not synonyms for "German," but rather gained autonomy and semantic distinctiveness, exclusively referring to contemporary phenomena. Sometimes amusing misunderstandings could arise, generally as a result of the speaker's ignorance. An editor working at a certain well known publishing house once asked whether he should replace the adjective "German" in the phrase "classical German philosophy" with "GDR" or "FRG" in order to avoid the censor's intervention. Mistakes of this kind show how great the pressures of officialdom could be.

The status of the word "Germans" and its associated expressions in the prevailing official speech of communist Poland provides a good illustration of a basic tendency defining the various uses of linguistic resources to address questions of nationality. This tendency reflected the aim of adapting names to current political realities, which were regarded as fundamental and immutable. In the case of the Germans, this was particularly clear, partly because matters

associated with them – regardless of the political situation – remained important from the Polish perspective for a variety of reasons. But something else was at stake here as well. The use of diverse names for this national group demonstrates how distinctions with a strongly axiological overtone could be introduced. The clearly drawn dichotomous division between people from the GDR and people from the FRG represented a fundamental axiological distinction. The first group was supposed to be good, while the second was bad. Here we may observe the functioning of a fundamental mechanism underlying the ideologized language of real socialism, and – more generally – the language of totalitarianism. Nothing can be free of unambiguous signs of value – especially when the expressions in question refer to important phenomena. In the area under examination here, the axiological treatment of speech is especially conspicuous.

The adaptation of names to political realities – especially those approved by the USSR – did not only apply to East and West Germany. In fact, it included all divided countries, including Korea. In the published materials from the censor's office, the detailed nature of the recommendations dictating how people should refer to North and South Korea is astonishing,¹²⁷ though in the Polish context this was a matter of very little practical significance. Similar problems arose when the subject was not the division of once singular states but rather their unification. In 1958, the United Arab Republic (UAR) was formed from a union of Egypt and Syria, which lasted until 1961 (after its dissolution Egypt remained alone under the name for a certain period). The formation of this kind of political organism necessarily limited the use of such national names as "Syrians" and "Egyptians" (and to a certain extent even "Arabs"). Instead, the phrase "citizens of the United Arab Republic" began to appear.

One phenomenon demands a separate discussion, since it cannot be reduced to any of the models provided by the preceding cases of the "Russians" or the "Germans." Of course, I am referring here to the Jews. I can do little more than outline this question, since it is linked with a whole range of other issues that determined its peculiar status – and thus with various historical problems and tensions over the lines between Jews and Poles or Jews and communists.¹²⁸ One thing seems certain: language users consistently avoided the term "Jews," sometimes in such an extreme and consistent manner that the word perhaps appeared shameful or even indecent. Accordingly, speakers omitted or replaced it with diverse paraphrases and circumlocutions. Various considerations determined this situation, including the not so distant past of the Nazi occupation. The

127 Strzyżewski, *Czarna księga cenzury PRL*, Vol I, p. 25.

128 Krystyna Kersten has published an outstanding book on this subject. See: Kersten, Krystyna, *Polacy Żydzi komunizm, Anatomia półprawd 1939 - 68* (Warszawa: Niezależna Oficyna Wydawnicza, 1992).

experiences of this time had taught people that one should not call anybody a Jew, since this often meant a death sentence. These experiences were bilateral – affecting both the Jews themselves and any other individuals conscious of the past and of how terrible the dangers associated with this word had been. This occupation syndrome lingered and continued to be significant, though clearly it only explains certain practices – and not always the most important ones – in communist Poland.

The avoidance of this word also reflected the assumption that the People's Republic of Poland was a nationally homogeneous country devoid of minorities. Yet this fact does not form a sufficient explanation either. The most important point – especially in the early years of the communist government – was to emphasize that none of the ruling clique could be treated as alien by Polish society. Another consequence of this tendency – though only partly linked with the question of national names – was the eagerness with which people consented to change their names, replacing those which might be interpreted as Jewish with Polish equivalents. In any case, particular individuals were almost never described as Jews. Once again we may turn to the *Encyclopedic Dictionary of Twentieth-Century Composers* for an example. Here we find an entry for Mojżesz Wajnberg, born in Warsaw in 1919, who is described as a Soviet composer with no further qualification. This seems to represent a slightly different case from the entries devoted to “Soviet composers” like Myaskovsky, Kabalevsky, Prokofiev and Shostakovich, since here the use of the term “Soviet” suggests suppression more than appropriation. Indeed, this case seems to be particularly self-evident, self-explanatory and somehow unobtrusive.¹²⁹

It would be interesting to determine the specific contexts in which the words “Jews” and “Jewish” appeared in communist Poland. Clearly they appeared in the names of institutions uniting people who identified themselves as Jews or who were concerned with Jewish questions (for example, the Jewish Institute of History) – though such institutions were far from numerous. We might say that these uses were localized and restricted – or perhaps even rationed. This was not simply a result of the formation of the state of Israel in 1948, after which its citizens could be termed Israelis. The relations between the categories “Jew” and “Israeli” were not particularly important for communist propaganda – at least not before the political unrest of March 1968 – and did not affect its practices. This was all the more the true since the Communists also had another word, which they

129 In 1999-2000, the Warsaw Philharmonic performed this composer's monumental symphony, with choral sections set to words written by the Polish-Jewish poet Julian Tuwim (1894-1953). The composer – who had died only a few years earlier – appeared in the program as Mieczysław Weinberg. I am unsure as to which versions of his first and last names are correct.

used from a certain moment as if it actually represented the name of a nationality. Of course, I am referring here to the term “Zionists.” This word (along with its derivatives) was of crucial significance to the anti-Jewish propaganda that followed the unrest of March 1968. There is no space here for any detailed description of the ways in which the Communists manipulated this term. One thing, though, is certain: they used it not to describe the supporters of a certain political option or party – a certain national ideology – but rather to refer to all Jews. This projection of a part onto the whole was an unprecedented linguistic move, essentially impossible in other cases (for instance, it would be hard to imagine all English people being described as Labourites, Wigs or Tories). The word “Zionists” as the name of a national group had many advantages for the proponents of anti-Semitic propaganda. Two of these elements were closely, though rather peculiarly linked. On the one hand, the word denoted all those regarded as Jews (and even those adjudged to be friendly towards them). In other words, it referred to what the anti-Semitic right has often called “world Jewry.” On the other hand, it was meant to suggest that not all Jews were involved, but only a certain group. Therefore, if somebody was an anti-Zionist, he or she was not necessarily an enemy of the Jews as a nation or community. Accordingly, he or she was not an anti-Semite. Nevertheless, during the 1968 crisis in Poland, various ideologues used the word “Zionists” in a manner leaving the intended audience in no doubt that it referred to the entire Jewish community. Indeed, this was the fundamental connotation of the word in this context. It was a classic substitute name, performing various functions for official propaganda.¹³⁰

In this analysis of the manipulation of national names in communist propaganda, I have by no means exhausted the entire phenomenon. Instead, I have concerned myself only with certain specific elements, though the whole question undoubtedly merits more extensive analysis. For instance, I have not examined a certain fundamental issue – namely, the function of expressions referring to Polishness, Poles, the Polish state or simply Poland within this radically ideologized language of propaganda. This important subject is worthy of separate consideration.

2000

130 See my remarks on this subject in my book *Marcowe gadanie* (Warszawa: Pomost 1991).

11. Talking Like Them

(Notes on Chapter Twenty-Eight of Victor Klemperer's *LTI*)

1

The final sentence of this extraordinary chapter – entitled “The Language of the Victor” – offers a perfect summation of its main problems and ideas:

The language of the victor . . . you don't speak it with impunity, you breathe it in and live according to it.¹³¹

We might briefly encapsulate the problem as follows: victims inevitably adopt the language of their tormenters, assimilating the speech of the executioner, the prison administrator or the guardian of ideological correctness with the apparatus of terror behind him. This language becomes the standard model, permeating everything, surrounding the person and disarming his critical faculties, desensitizing him to things from which all his moral and emotional instincts – as well as common sense – tell him to keep his distance. The conclusion that emerges from this chapter is extremely depressing. When one lives in slavery, under the constant pressure of a totalitarian language, it is difficult not to succumb – irrespective of one's education, views and life experience. Klemperer demonstrates this principle through the extremely diverse examples of individuals who differ from one another in almost every respect. Among them is a Germanist devoted to Goethe and Schiller – and thus to classical German language. There are also two doctors – a Zionist who dreams of a Jewish state and a fervent admirer of English culture (including political culture). Klemperer offers the following advice to the Germanist:

“Don't you realize that you are speaking the language of our mortal enemies and thus admitting defeat and thus putting yourself at their mercy and thus betraying that very Germanness of yours? (. . .) It's entirely natural that in our troubled isolation we should have developed a special language, that we ourselves should use official terms from the Nazi dictionary originally coined to refer to us, that here and there we should come across an extension of jargon with Hebrew terms. But this subjugation to the language of the victor, of this victor!”¹³²

131 Klemperer, Victor, *The Language of the Third Reich: LTI, Lingua Tertii Imperii: A Philologist's Notebook*, trans. Martin Brady (London: Continuum Books, 2000), p. 186.

132 *Ibid.*, p. 178. In this context, the meaning of the word “jargon” is unclear. We cannot tell whether it refers to a specific language created by the Jews holed up in a Dresden household

This passage gives rise to various reflections. Above all, it suggests that adopting the language used by the totalitarian authorities – in this case, blatantly murderous authorities (though in other cases they might merely be oppressive) – amounts to capitulation, and thus to thinking in the categories imposed by them. As we learn from Klemperer’s later arguments, the problem is not limited to verbal expression. Instead, it extends to much broader phenomena, including questions of values and basic mentality. The words of a certain Jewish merchant testify to this broad application. After the fall of the Nazi regime, he has no desire to return to his profession:

For a while Stühler dried his plates vociferously and without saying a word. Then he said with passionate insistence: “I’ll never travel again . . . they are quite right, it’s unproductive, it’s just sharp practice {geschachert} . . . I’ll do gardening or something . . . I’ll be close to nature!”¹³³

These confessions about the future result directly from a theory drawn from anti-Semitic ideology. The persecuted Jewish merchant has assimilated the idea that Jewish involvement in commerce – which supposedly signifies a separation from nature – is somehow pathological. Consequently, the victim of the ideology interiorizes it, since he no longer has any basis on which to oppose it consciously. These observations belong more to the realm of social psychology than to any reflections on language, though they clearly have direct linguistic consequences. At the same time, another problem is linked with the same issue. Klemperer’s reflections suggest that using the terminology devised and imposed by the Nazi tormentors (or by any dictatorial government) – referring to the institutions and situations created by them – does not necessarily constitute a form of surrender to their language or to their vision of the world. In fact, quite the opposite may even be the case. Such expressions do not necessarily suggest an assimilation of enemy speech, but rather they may – and frequently do – represent signs of a critical position towards them. Evoking these phrases is simply a practical necessity, since there is no other way to name phenomena that did not exist before the formation of Nazi discourse and the coming to power of its exponents. In the Polish case, the same is true for the period of the Nazi occupation. This is a fundamental issue for the Polish language under German rule, and – in a slightly different sense – for the language of the Holocaust.

Here I shall raise two characteristic examples – one a translation and the other preserving the original German form. When people spoke of the “Aryan side,”

or whether it denotes the Yiddish language, which had been known as a “jargon” for years, even among assimilated Jews. If the latter is the case – and everything suggests that it might be – then Klemperer is mistaken, since today we know that Yiddish is a language like any other. On this subject in the Polish context, see the collective volume *Jidyszland – polskie przestrzenie*, eds. Ewa Geller and Monika Polit (Warszawa: WUW, 2008).

133 Klemperer, p. 186.

they were not adopting the language of the occupier, though this phrase sprang directly from Nazi ideology. It was necessary to use this term because nothing of the kind had existed before the creation of ghettos in the occupied Polish cities. There had been Jewish quarters and other districts in which Jews did not live (in many cases because this was prohibited), but the category of the Aryan race did not and could not appear in this context before the establishment of racist ideology. Similarly, nothing had ever existed like the “Umschlagplatz,” from which Jews were deported from the Warsaw Ghetto to the Treblinka death camp. Given what took place there, this was no mere loading site or freight ramp. It was simply “the Umschlagplatz.” The fact that this German name has been preserved in Warsaw to this day is an expression and demonstration of respect for history. But it is also an indication of critical distance.

According to Klemperer:

No, even if everyone had adopted the language of the victor in the Jews' houses, it was merely an unthinking enslavement, and certainly didn't amount to an assent to their teachings or a belief in their lies.¹³⁴

Here the fundamental issue for Klemperer reveals itself. The oppressed adopt the language of the victor because they constantly hear it assailing them from all directions and imposing itself upon them. Yet they protect themselves against it by maintaining a distance that expresses itself via critical reflection. In other words, a certain kind of metalanguage prevents them from surrendering to the public language imposed by oppressive power. In my view, this is one of the central lessons to emerge from the extraordinary book, *LTI*.

2

Klemperer's *LTI* is one of the classic works of twentieth-century humanities, and a great deal has already been said about it. I refer to it here not merely in order to add a few more words of commentary, but rather because the book's twenty-eighth chapter provides a perfect point of departure for reflections on similar questions in the communist People's Republic of Poland. Employing words and set phrases used by “them” was a very important part of the social communication of the time, taking diverse forms and fulfilling diverse functions. I would describe the first set of these phenomena under the heading of **rhetorical compromise**. Here speakers, journalists, applicants, petitioners or negotiators adopt to a greater or lesser extent the language of those they are addressing. Sometimes they might do so from a sense of shared views, which would then naturally influence the form of

134 Ibid.

expression. This situation is easy to imagine, though in fact it might constitute a very specific case. I am like you. I speak your language and share your convictions. We share a common world. So please respond positively to my request.

In such cases, it would be difficult to speak of any true rhetorical compromise. Instead, we find a partial or complete unity of views and expressions. Admittedly, the two parties in communication do not generally belong to the same circle. Therefore, the most important point is to make contact and to create a common field in which the speaker and the listener – that is, the petitioner and the representative of the authorities, or even the authorities themselves in all their glory – can come into contact. The subjects of these conversations, requests, petitions and exertions were often private matters that could not be arranged in any simple manner within a system based on a shortage economy. Such matters included the assignment of certain goods, such as apartments, telephones or coupons facilitating the purchase of a car, but also the obtainment of various forms of authorization, such as the right to reside in a city subject to strongly codified restrictions (as Warsaw was for many years).

The significance and scope of this phenomenon reveals itself with particular clarity when we consider the characteristics of speech assimilated from “them” as elements of public language. We might put the question as follows: when does a publically speaking subject who does not belong to or identify with the circles of power – a subject who in democratic conditions would undoubtedly oppose them – resort to using the elements of newspeak? In other words, when does this subject decide to enter into what I have described above as the rhetorical compromise? In most cases, this is a conscious act, since in order to gain something from those who have the right to decide (the “deciders” – another characteristic term from communist Poland, which came into use at the beginning of the 1970s) one cannot ignore their language. Indeed, one must use it – at least to some extent – though clearly for pragmatic rather than ideological reasons. In this way, the two parties may bridge the abyss between them and form a certain kind of community, or at least the pretense of one. In some cases, this is an absolute necessity: for instance, when statements in any language other than the one used by the authorities will simply not get through to them or remain incomprehensible. In the terms of Basil Bernstein’s well known distinction, we might say that the language system regarded by the authorities as the only proper code must be highly restricted. Nothing (or almost nothing) can penetrate it from outside. During the carnival of Solidarity – before the imposition of martial law in 1981 – a certain Western commentator wrote that Mikhail Suslov, the leading Soviet ideologue of the time, was impervious to any discourse outside the horizon of newspeak. He immediately classified any such discourse as the language of the enemy. The language used by Solidarity in Poland was not merely unacceptable to him, but incomprehensible.

Any understanding that a workers' movement had arisen in Poland against the party – which defined itself precisely as the same kind of movement (the distortion of such terms as “workers' party” and “working class” is well known) – was simply beyond his perceptual abilities.

This particular case is rather extreme, since no agreement was possible. But the realm of rhetorical compromise more generally submits to a principle well rendered by the Polish saying “When among crows, caw as the crows do.” Here the question arises as to how developed this adoption of the authorities' language must be and to what extent speakers can abandon their own speech in favor of the language used by their intended addressees. Of course, there are no universally applicable rules here. Everything depends on the seriousness of the matter, the nature of the situation and the speaker's position. Years ago I described an extraordinarily characteristic and eloquent example of this phenomenon. Romuald Bukowski – the one member of the communist Polish parliament who remained close to the Solidarity movement after the announcement of martial law – gave a speech in 1984 in which he appealed for an amnesty for political prisoners. Here he unambiguously conveyed one of the democratic opposition's primary demands, though in order to do so in the regime's parliament he had to present the matter largely in its obligatory language. Nevertheless, what he said did not differ in substance from what various opposition activists were writing in the underground press. But Bukowski would discover that whoever agrees to rhetorical compromise may later incur various significant personal costs. Both contemporaries and historians may misunderstand the texts resulting from such a rhetorical position, interpreting them as evidence of opportunism or capitulation; though, in fact, they are the consequence of certain pragmatic decisions.¹³⁵ These kinds of documents call for particular interpretive skills in the historian.

3

The shape of Klemperer's problem as it coalesced in the specific conditions of communist Poland is exceedingly interesting. Clearly it took a less dramatic form than in the Jewish household in Dresden, since in the latter case the elements

135 Romuald Bukowski's parliamentary speech was published in the Catholic magazine *Tygodnik Powszechny* (No 20, 1984) alongside the speech of another representative, Edmund Osmańczyk, who demanded an amnesty for Polish citizens who had remained abroad, though the validity of their passports had expired. I have provided broader analysis of Bukowski's speech and related issues in my book *Language Under Siege (Mowa w stanie oblężenia)* [Warszawa: Open, 1996], pp. 198-200). I wrote the sections devoted to this matter on 17 May 1984.

of “their” speech were adopted by people and social groups forced to live in an authoritarian system with a death sentence hanging over their heads. We should also emphasize that although the assimilation of certain linguistic elements used by the authorities may well have indicated submission and lack of criticism, it did not indicate complete capitulation or conscious adoption of the authoritarian ideology. On the contrary, this assimilation was largely unconscious – just like the views of the Jewish merchant who admitted that the profession he had pursued for many years was inappropriate and unworthy of a decent person. This attitude resulted directly from the pressure exerted by the authorities through ideologized speech on people who, against their will, found themselves within its sphere of influence. These pressures were oddly self-activating, since “they” – whether in Nazi Germany or communist Poland – had no intention of educating or inclining “the enemy” towards what they regarded as the only right worldview and form of expression. We might say that this kind of influence was an ideological by-product.

Unlike the case of the Dresden Jews, the problem also had a peculiarly institutional dimension in communist Poland. Since the communist government never entirely liquidated or pacified all independent organizations, the official form of speech also stamped itself on their methods for using words. Above all, this concerned the traditional genres of language used for transmitting religious teachings, such as the sermon (of course, this did not affect the liturgy, which was so codified and traditional as to remain impervious to such influences). Various analysts (among others, Krzysztof Obremski) dealing with the language of sermons during the communist years emphasize that hints of newsspeak were clearly evident within the sermons (in fact, this phenomenon has not disappeared from view in contemporary times), though these were never linked – and could not be linked – with the adoption of ideological positions. However, the fundamental issue concerns how “their” speech – and the system of values perpetuated by it – influenced everyday communication and colloquial language practices.

The use of “their” language was not restricted to the adoption of particular words or phrases. In certain cases, the very inclusion of such elements could have far-reaching implications. At the same time, it often involved phenomena that were not of the greatest importance from the regime’s point of view. Words that appeared frequently in colloquial speech and that clearly echoed official ideology might not have appeared at all in official discourse – or only on its margins and in specific forms. Nevertheless, these words still conveyed the official worldview and the prevailing system of values.

I shall try to show how this phenomenon functioned on the basis of two semantically and intentionally related expressions: “*prywatniarz*,” meaning a small or “private” business owner, and “*badylarz*,” referring to a private market

gardener. In the *Dictionary of the Polish Language (Słownik języka polskiego)* edited by Witold Doroszewski, the word “*prywaciarz*” is defined as a colloquial expression with the following meaning: “an owner of a private factory, workshop or shop; a private entrepreneur” (Volume VII, 1965). In a different dictionary published three and a half decades later, we read the following definition: “A ‘*prywaciarz*’ is a private tradesman, merchant or owner of a small production plant. A colloquial word, used with a tone of disapproval” (*Inny słownik języka polskiego PWN*, 2000). The dictionary gives the following sentence as an example: “He worked occasionally for a ‘*prywaciarz*’ in season.” The entry is supplemented by the adjective “*prywaciarzski*,” which is undefined though illustrated by the following sentence: “I am exposing their scams and links with the ‘*prywaciarzski*’ system.”

These explications are especially significant for our discussion because both dictionaries – despite the fact that they are divided by several decades and a fundamental change of system – define “*prywaciarz*” as a colloquial word. Indeed, they are quite right to do so, for although the word has economic connotations it probably never appeared in the speeches of the various first secretaries at communist party congresses. Nor would we have been likely to find it in any academic discussions of socialist economics. Nevertheless, the word is a colloquialism of a special type. This is not only the case today, when the expression is inevitably falling out of use as a result of changes in the economic system (after all, it is difficult to speak of “*prywaciarz*” when everything has become private property and privatization has become a major plank of political programs proposed by certain parties). It is worth looking more closely at this phenomenon. The popularity of the word “*prywaciarz*” in communist Poland probably sprang from the contemporary use of the adjective “*prywatny*” – meaning “private” – with a very specific implication. In the early years after the war, official statements on economic matters delineated three sectors: state, cooperative and private. It was no secret which of these sectors had a future. The value judgments inherent in these terms were quite explicit, as axiological connotation trumped meaning. The authorities coined the special phrase “private enterprise,” though there was never any talk of state or cooperative enterprises.¹³⁶ Anything “private” was by definition inferior, marginal, and without a future, dubious from both economic

136 In the Doroszewski dictionary, this phrase is differentiated within the entry for “enterprise,” though it is wrongly classified as a colloquial expression. It is true that the phrase entered colloquial speech, but it originated in the language of the authorities. In the more recent dictionary, this erroneous classification is repeated, though the commentary is supplemented in an important way: “A private enterprise is a private business or individual economic operation. A colloquial expression, used especially in relation to the specific realities of communist Poland.”

and moral perspectives, since it was associated with the “scams” mentioned in the more recent dictionary entry quoted above (indeed, this entry is somewhat surprising). The entries in both dictionaries seem not only to convey information on certain ways of using this word, but also to represent active examples of these usages. We may assert with no risk of exaggeration that “*prywaciarz*” is a word imbued with ideological meaning, derived from the ideologization of the adjective “*prywatny*” – or “private” – which took on a strongly pejorative connotation in the postwar communist period. Therefore, the expression directly reflects the officially promoted system of values.

The question arises as to how the word entered colloquial speech. Clearly, this was partly a matter of strictly linguistic factors, since in the Polish language there are many nouns with the ending “-arz” denoting professions or people who perform certain activities. Yet this was probably only a supporting or additional factor. The main influence was undoubtedly the sociolinguistic situation. Ultimately, the expression was formed as a consequence and example of a certain kind of value judgment. People used the word as an unconscious means of emphasizing critical distance: I know that anybody defined as a *prywaciarz* is inferior, suspicious and generally stigmatized in some way. These judgments did not necessarily – and generally did not – have any practical significance in the specific case of any individual speaker. He or she might well have had no qualms about going to a *prywaciarz* to buy necessary gadgets unavailable elsewhere, stocking up on food items at a private corner shop, or having a pair of shoes repaired by a *prywaciarz* cobbler. The disconnect between the ideological phrase and everyday experience is typical here, but also profoundly important, since it constitutes a form of doublethink. I speak disapprovingly about the *prywaciarz*, but I do not deny the usefulness of his activities. In fact, when necessary, I have no scruples or concerns about using his services. But I speak with much more hostility about women engaged in private business activities. The augmentative feminine form of the word – “*prywaciara*” – carries an overtly negative connotation. The regular feminine form – “*prywaciarka*” – is perhaps more neutral, constituting an equivalent of other feminine forms of Polish nouns for human professions. However, this word does not appear in the dictionaries, and I have never encountered its use. We should note here that the noun “*sklepikarz*” – meaning “shopkeeper” – might to some extent be the model for “*prywaciarz*.” The older word had long been used in the Polish language as the name of a profession without any particular pre-established connotation (with the possible exception of the anti-philistine satires written during the Young Poland period at the end of the nineteenth century and the beginning of the twentieth).

Similar socio- and psycholinguistic mechanisms reveal themselves in the case of the noun “*badylarz*” – meaning “market gardener.” The Doroszewski dictionary

(Volume I, 1958) defines this term succinctly: “A suburban gardener cultivating vegetables.” The more recent dictionary briefly elaborates on this definition: “A market gardener is somebody who earns his main income from the cultivation of vegetables or flowers, especially in greenhouses in the vicinity of a large city. A colloquial word, used with disdain.” The blatantly negative example provided is typical: “The school students were conceited and stupid; half of them were the sons of market gardeners.” If we treat this matter with a modicum of common sense, there is clearly no reason to condemn a person who makes a living by cultivating vegetables, flowers or fruit (in the earlier dictionary the definition is too narrow) – or even to express hostility towards him or her. In rational terms, this is inexplicable, but in ideological terms it is entirely justifiable. A *badylarz* – or market gardener – is a kind of *prywatniarz*. Here the theme of social resentment and hatred comes into play, since the prevailing conviction – fueled by propaganda – insisted that the “*badylarz*” was a rich and thriving individual who earned significantly more than his or her customers – that is, than everybody else. The word “*badylarz*” – like “*prywatniarz*” – never appeared in any official texts, though it still conveyed the prevailing value judgments promoted and imposed on society from above. In this case, these judgments were amplified, since the term “*badylarz*” derives from the word “*badył*,” meaning “weed” or “dried stalk,” and thus denoting the dead, withered or useless part of a plant.

Here I would like to analyze one more example of a peculiar “PRL-ism” (for perhaps this is how we might describe this type of linguistic fact).¹³⁷ This time it comes from a text written by Adam Tarn – an eminent author, editor, translator and playwright, who was highly conscious of linguistic matters. Tarn writes the following from Lausanne to his fellow writer Sławomir Mrożek – in Italy at the time – on 18 May 1967:

I’m curious about [...] the changes to take place in the editorial positions in Warsaw. For instance, I’ve been told in private that **I am to be removed** [my emphasis – M. G.] from *Dialogue*. I’ve heard these kinds of rumors many times over the years, so I’m not too concerned. But who knows whether this time they won’t turn out to be true?¹³⁸

The phrase “to remove somebody from a position” (director, editor-in-chief, chairperson, etc.) is typical of the language of authoritarian power, which can act with impunity according to its own wishes or whims in such matters. This expression merits a more detailed analysis. The phrase was universally comprehensible, and thus the fact that Tarn uses it rather elliptically does not interfere with its clarity in

137 Translator’s Note: *PRL* stands for “*Polska Rzeczpospolita Ludowa*,” denoting the communist “Polish People’s Republic.”

138 Mrożek, Sławomir, and Adam Tarn, *Listy 1963-1975* (Kraków: Wydawnictwo Literackie, 2009), p. 124.

this context, where it concerns his “removal” from the position of editor-in-chief at a literary monthly. The various uses of this “PRL-ist” expression are interesting. “To remove somebody from a position” apparently could not be used with respect to the highest positions within the party nomenclature (one did not hear about the “removal” of a minister or secretary from the party Central Committee). Yet it could not apply to much lower positions within bureaucratic hierarchy, either. One did not talk about the “removal” of an office secretary, a cultural officer at a vacation home, or a school teacher (though a school principal could be “removed”).¹³⁹ By describing the situation in this manner, Tarn was unconsciously defining his predicament, foreshadowing the future and demonstrating his own helplessness. This phrase is all the more characteristic when we consider the other well-established expressions that might easily have replaced it: “to lay somebody off,” “to dismiss somebody,” “to vacate a position,” “to fire somebody,” etc.

The phrase “to remove somebody (an editor, director, etc.)” formed a permanent element in the language of the authorities. At first, it might appear to be a thoroughly technical expression, connected with a specific practice and unrelated to ideology. However, this is not the case. These words reveal that the person wielding power has complete freedom to maneuver on personnel decisions, while the person subject to “removal” is entirely passive and subordinate. He or she has no say in the matter. Indeed, we should also draw attention to the associated element of depersonalization. The authorities “remove” a person from a position like an insignificant object from a shelf or a pawn from a chessboard. The other classic phrases for dismissal from a position or job do not carry these depersonalizing connotations, even when they are somewhat unceremonious – like the expression “to fire somebody.”

4

The cases discussed above reveal that the elements of speech belonging to those defined by the pronoun “they” – and thus representing the equivalent of Klemperer’s “victor” – filter through to places where we might not expect to find them. But the question is not restricted only to rhetorical compromise and unconscious appropriation. We should also draw attention to a third way in which the elements of official speech can permeate colloquial language. Here we find a peculiar kind

¹³⁹ Immediately after writing this piece, I read an article by Andrzej Werblan, entitled “Gomułka and Stalin,” published in *Polityka* magazine (No 10 [2746] of 10 March 2010), where the author quotes a note he made after a conversation with Gomułka in January 1981. The former first secretary of the Polish communist party supposedly made the following remark after his downfall in 1970: “Brezhnev removed me.”

of language game. As this game becomes more widespread and significant, the aggressiveness of official speech increases accordingly, while its characteristics become more established and conspicuous in social circulation. This process takes the form of a language game because the phrases from the victor's speech are not simply assimilated or integrated into new contexts. They may well be subject to incorporation, but they still preserve their characteristic features, which provide more than a mere indication of where a given expression or phrase comes from. Instead, this origin becomes a component of the meaning – an element fulfilling an extremely important function. For instance, when people in communist Poland used the expression “the first country of the workers and peasants” to refer to the Soviet Union, they were not merely citing a frequently used – and even obligatory – circumlocution from the official press and especially from various anniversary speeches. They were also doing something else – namely, emphasizing critical distance by indicating that they were using a phrase from a language that was not their own. In general, the intended audience of sentences with this type of construction could neither doubt where they came from, nor fail to notice the ironic tone. Here I would refer to Maria Renata Mayenowa's well-known theory on expressions in quotation marks.¹⁴⁰ Mayenowa is mostly concerned with poetic works containing hidden quotations that refer to other texts familiar to the reader. But this phenomenon is not restricted to literary works. Indeed, it may have a much more universal application, representing a manifestation of the dialectics of the “other's word” – about which Mikhail Bakhtin wrote so much.

Quoted expressions have particular significance as reactions to various forms of totalitarian speech – irrespective of the nature or extent of its oppressive power. Klemperer recognized this fact in the Dresden of Nazi times. Anybody who has lived in a country subject to the ideology of real socialism might make the same observation. In fact, certain types of phrases in their canonical forms never filtered through to colloquial speech without clearly perceptible “quotation marks.” One of the self-definitions employed by the ruling elite was the phrase “the people's authorities.” This expression appeared in various contexts, generally – but not exclusively – on ceremonial occasions. Here various speakers would announce how much good the “people's authorities” had done for “the working people of the cities and countryside” (another ritual expression), presenting the authorities as benefactors showering gifts on their naturally passive subjects. The people's authorities ensured the provision of various goods, handed out various things, cared for, looked after and tended to various groups, constantly giving and distributing, and so on and so forth. But this expression did not only appear in positive contexts.

140 Mayenowa, Maria Renata, “Wyrażenia cudzysłowowe, Przyczynek do badań nad semantyką tekstu poetyckiego,” *Studia i rozprawy* (Warszawa: IBL PAN, 1993). The original French version of this text was published in 1967.

After all, the people's authorities also had every right in appropriate situations to threaten and punish – withholding assent or permission, and even chopping off the evil hands raised against them. In colloquial speech, “the people's authorities” became a typical expression in “quotation marks.”

The various terms referring to Joseph Stalin – most of them obsequious periphrases – also appeared as quoted expressions in colloquial speech. In his book on the postwar cult of the Soviet leader in Poland, Robert Kupiecki compiles an impressive “‘Index of Titles’ bestowed upon Stalin in the Polish media in the years 1944-1956.”¹⁴¹ The list includes 336 entries. Among them are laudatory phrases cited widely in official texts of the time – including “the standard-bearer of peace” and “the greatest man of our times” – but also expressions resulting from flights of individual panegyric enthusiasm, such as “the majestic redoubt of freedom and peace,” “the star of the Caucasus,” and “the friend of Polish youth.” Today, this remarkable list seems quite grotesque (the words of praise listed one after another appear to parody a religious litany). Even in the era when its elements were treated with absolute seriousness, they still provoked ironical reactions. In other words, they functioned exclusively as quoted expressions. Indeed, the same was true of what appeared to be merely objective mentions of his name, preceded by his title and topped off with the typically Russian patronymic: Generalissimus Joseph Vissarionovich Stalin.

The quoted expressions permeating colloquial speech represented a form of defensive response to the aggression of official language. This question is connected with the role of irony and its various manifestations in the linguistic situation of totalitarian and authoritarian systems. But this must be a matter for future consideration.

141 Kupiecki, Robert, *„Natchnienie milionów”, Kult Józefa Stalina w Polsce 1944-1956* (Warszawa: Wydawnictwo Szkolne i Pedagogiczne, 1993), pp. 238-250.

12. Styles of Being, Styles of Speech (Notes from 1977 to 1985)

Communication Breakdown

We may speak about language as a communication schedule – or breakdown¹⁴² – in the same sense as we speak about a transport schedule. A transport schedule defines the possibilities of travel, breaking down the various options for us. It is the authority that determines the potential choices. Language defines the possibilities of speech, marking out the sphere within which we may make our choices. When we look at things from this perspective, language is to speech what the transport schedule is to travel. I will not take this analogy any further, since any continuation would surely become rather clumsy, but also because it is essentially of little interest to me here. I am more concerned with language as a communication breakdown in a different sense – as dissolution, as a process of decomposition or disintegration. A certain type of language – totalitarian language – represents a breakdown of communication in precisely this sense. More than any other variety of language, it tends to represent a breakdown in the organizational sense by imposing certain choices, excluding others and precisely tracing out the boundaries of possible speech, thus offering a kind of communication schedule. Yet the further it heads in this direction, the more it becomes breakdown in the second sense. This is only superficially a paradox. Indeed, things tend to present themselves in this way for multiple reasons – above all, because decisions concerning the meanings of words can result, to a large extent, from the arbitrary decisions of certain groups with power and propaganda at their disposal. In newspeak, the speaker may ignore tradition, as well as the expectations and habits of the listener. Ultimately, the listener exists for the speaker, and not the speaker for the listener. The relations between them should develop on the same basis as those between master and servant. The master's orders must be intelligible to the servant, if only so that he can follow them quickly and efficiently. Here intelligibility is also important, though there is a key difference. The master is also the master of intelligibility. He is free to establish, in advance, what the listener should understand, and – more importantly – how he should understand. The master does not feel restricted or bound to respect the prevailing conventions.

142 Translator's Note: In Polish, the word "*rozkład*" may be translated as "breakdown" in two different senses: 1) as an arrangement of options, such as a schedule, layout or timetable; 2) as disintegration, decomposition or dissolution. Here Głowiński is playing with this double meaning, which comes through more clearly in Polish than in English.

He may speak in whatever way is convenient to him in a given situation. Of course, this negation of tradition plays out very differently here than in the case of avant-garde poetry. It does not establish the problem as a separate phenomenon. Instead, it results from the combination – once again, superficially paradoxical – of two fundamental tendencies: towards pragmatism and towards ritualism.

But how do listeners behave in this communicative process (or rather this supposedly communicative process), in which their interests, habits and expectations have been ignored? Sometimes they remain oblivious and identify the new meanings with the old meanings. Indeed, this is the ideal towards which propaganda aspires. We may describe such listeners – in the words of Stanisław Barańczak – as a “captive audience.” However, another reaction may also arise on the basis of a more or less total rejection of any language grounded on such principles. Strong expressions of this attitude appear in various metalinguistic colloquial expressions, such as “*mowa-trawa*” and “*dreṭwa mowa*,” translating roughly as “claptrap” and “piffle” (though literally meaning “speech grass” and “lame speech”). These forms of “speech” (“*mowa*”) lose all communicative value, becoming mere empty chatter to which one listens when one must, but which one does not take seriously. In this way, propaganda – based both on freedom of expression subordinated to immediate pragmatic goals and on a highly sclerotic ritualism – somehow abolishes itself, undermining the basis of its own existence. However, this process is not restricted to propaganda in the narrow sense, especially when we consider that totalitarian language and the language of propaganda, in fact, form a single whole. This leads to the complete breakdown of language, and thus to the breakdown of communication. Language itself is at stake here – the very existence of the Polish language (or of Russian, Czech, etc.). In a country ruled by totalitarian methods, totalitarian language has an almost universal reach, dominating multiple regions of speech. Once again I shall put the case in the clearest terms: totalitarian language makes communication impossible, breaking it down. Real communication is only possible when one may subvert its rules. Indeed, people do subvert these rules in colloquial practice. Yet the ruling authorities cannot subvert the rules, partly because the authorities are identified with them in social consciousness. They cannot subvert the rules, even when they would like to do so. Sometimes they seem to harbor this desire – in dramatic moments, when something important happens, when pragmatic or ritual chatter no longer suffices, when they wish to convince society that what they are saying now is authentic and does not merely flow from the immediate demands of a campaign or from yet another instance of ceremonial speech. In such moments, the characteristics of totalitarian language as the breakdown of communication reveal themselves with particular force. This was evident in the early months after First Secretary Edward Gierek’s ascent to power. He seemed to aspire at least to a partial overcoming of

totalitarian language. Yet this aspiration was doomed to failure, since it could only succeed in one situation – namely, when this language would submit itself to basic criticism or to the possibility of rejection. The negation of totalitarian language would undermine the principles of the regime (like the liquidation of censorship), since communism identifies itself with a certain type of speech. Therefore, any deviation from this language represents a heresy to which the guardians of the code cannot consent – an especially dangerous form of revisionism. The process of communication breakdown is unrelenting, spreading to ever wider circles and engulfing ever greater regions of language. The last remaining channels that might serve even the most minimal exchange of opinions between society and the ruling elite are disappearing. This process may lead to tragic events. Wherever the possibility of communication no longer exists, there may be blood.

June-July 1977

The Rhetoric of Revolution in Conservative Society

In the first chapter of his book *The Rhetoric of Revolt* (1971), Paul D. Brandes demonstrates that various rhetorical features correspond with the three stages in the development of revolutions. At the first stage, the rhetoric announces the overthrow of the old law, attempting to develop symbols of identification through copious production of slogans. At the second stage, this rhetoric degenerates into a series of personal invectives. At the third stage, the rhetoric is based on a peculiar *argumentum ad misericordiam*: support us, for we are noble, we are fighting for your interests and we are surrounded by enemies on all sides. Brandes is concerned with the rhetoric of the period in which a revolution is still in progress or is just beginning to establish the new order. He does not examine the question of revolutionary rhetoric in a society that – according to the authorities – arose from revolution and remains eternally revolutionary, while in fact all its ideological, political and economic practices are characterized by extreme conservatism. For communist countries and for the prevailing language within them, this is a fundamental question. The expression “revolution” belongs to the vocabulary of the sacred. According to the conception of ritual time, the revolutionary process has far from ended, but still continues. It would seem that the features of revolutionary rhetoric identified by Brandes have survived to this day in more or less concentrated forms, despite the fact that six decades have passed since “Great October.” In Russia, everything is still compared with tsarist times, while in Poland the comparison is with the bleak Sanation era.¹⁴³

143 Translator’s Note: The “Sanation” regime was the clique of military officers that essentially ruled Poland from Józef Piłsudski’s *coup d’état* in 1926 until 1939.

We still find invectives directed at opponents and an obsession with the enemy, who treacherously threatens us from all sides. As primary elements of propaganda, these relics have become completely conventionalized. In the same way, the glorification of the old, historic revolt has become a manifestation of extreme conformism. Even if certain genuine beliefs once hid behind revolutionary slogans, now – rehashed years later – they have inevitably been transformed into revolutionary platitudes. These are empty platitudes, since education from the earliest school years fundamentally teaches people to conform. This perpetuation of revolutionary rhetoric has become one of the forms of communication breakdown. The empty platitudes of a tame, ritualized and institutionalized rebellion have become the linguistic expression of stagnation and totalitarianism. This situation was convenient for the authorities in the Stalinist era, when the intensity of terror ensured that nobody could even dream of rebellion or opposition. However, it has changed somewhat in recent years. Even in its present ossified form, the rhetoric of revolution allows the regime – which regards itself as the product of the revolution – to speak of its opponents as counterrevolutionaries. The propaganda frequently makes full use of this possibility, though in recent years a certain change has taken place. Now the authorities tend to speak about political opponents more as enemies of the state or the nation – or of both at the same time – rather than as opponents of the revolution, progress or the people. As the opposition movement crystallizes, it is becoming more difficult for the authorities to use the rhetoric of revolution, since it can only function with impunity in a society that submissively allows itself to be manipulated, enchained or lulled to sleep. Such rhetoric could suddenly turn against those who use it, though, so far, this has not occurred. The rhetoric of revolution arouses distrust and has clearly become a symbol of the regime – one of the dullest forms of ritual babble. Therefore, even the regime's critics face the task of developing a new rhetoric that would in no way resemble the rhetoric sanctified in Russia after 1917 (though based on longstanding tradition). Perhaps this will turn out to be the rhetoric of human rights.

21 August 1977

Language of the State of Emergency, Language of the Everyday

In these notes, I am concerned above all with the variant of official (propaganda) speech linked with various states of emergency. After all, March – along with everything that preceded and followed it – was a state of emergency. December and June were also states of emergency, as was the spring. In these situations,

language runs wild. It becomes brutal and aggressive. It stops at nothing. Public speech turns into mere brawling. Yet the language of the state of emergency has not been the only language of communism – at least, not after the mid-1950s. Instead, it represents only one of its possible actualizations. Alongside it we also find a language of normality, which is less aggressive but just as highly ritualized. Much like the everyday reality, it is characterized by boredom and grayness. In the language of the state of emergency, the main form of persuasion is ranting – a blow to the head with a blunt instrument. In the language of the everyday, persuasion often takes an infantile form. The language of the everyday is a patronizing language that treats the reader as a child. This is evident in its vocabulary, metaphors and idioms. So what is the mutual relation of these two languages? It is certainly not true that the language of the everyday is the base level and the language of the state of emergency a mere deviation from it. Here there is no neutral sphere and thus no base level at all. The two languages are simply two sides of the same phenomenon.

2 December 1977

Censorship and Language

I am writing under the immediate impression of an extensive (over 70-page) manuscript made available to the public by KOR¹⁴⁴ under the title *From the Regulations of the Main Office for Control of the Press, Publications and Performances (Z księgi zapisów G. U.K.P.P. i W)*. This manuscript contains extracts from the censor's recommendations over the last few years. It is an astounding and terrifying text, consisting of official instructions that bluntly formulate the reality whose consequences confront the citizen of the People's Republic of Poland every day. Of course, I was already aware of the censor's activities. I knew the destructive ways in which censorship operates. However, reading this document not only revealed the details – showing how the machine functions – but it also allowed me to see the whole shape of Polish social life in all its limitations. It allowed me to see our imprisonment. This document is an extraordinarily clear and specific manifestation of totalitarian activity – by which I mean activity aiming towards the regulation of as much as possible, the imposition of impassable borders, and the elimination of everything spontaneous, authentic and unregulated. Totalitarian

144 Translator's Note: KOR – denoting *Komitet Obrony Robotników*, or “Workers’ Defense Committee” – was an independent organization that arose in communist Poland to aid workers and their families punished in government crackdowns after the unrest in June 1976.

activities – including the censor’s activities – are not exclusively negative. They are not based entirely on expunging or forbidding. They also aim to determine modes of speech so as to establish once and for all exactly how one may speak about any given subject. Accordingly, we cannot reduce totalitarian activity to mere suppression orders. Above all, it is supposed to provide norms for life, not only in its political dimension. It should also regulate everyday reality, and – ultimately – what a person may and may not think. The extraordinarily pedantic nature and grotesque triviality of these instructions are astonishing. This is a sphere in which everything is equally significant. Censorship must arrange the world down to the smallest detail.

The impact of censorship on language is a familiar fact. Thanks to the censor’s demands, we must resort to paraphrases, euphemisms and symbols. Wherever the censor’s office exists, we find words, phrases and names that may not be used or pronounced. The document released by KOR reveals the enormous extent of this influence. In a certain sense, we might interpret these recommendations in the categories of a peculiar grammar of the regime, which is intended to define ways of using language. From this perspective, they seem to comprise a metalinguistic text, helping me to provide better explanations of much that I have written about in regards to the peculiarities of speech in the People’s Republic of Poland. This metalinguistic strand is not entirely indirect. Indeed, certain clear commands also appear in the instructions as to which phrases one may use and which are forbidden. A few examples would be useful here. Since both the GDR and the FRG exist, the word “German” may only be used in a certain way:

b) to define our western border, the following phrases may be used:

- the border on the Odra and Nysa rivers
- the border between Poland and the GDR
- the Polish-GDR border.

The following expression should not be used:

- the Polish-German border. [. . .]

d) the expression “Germany” should not be used in (contemporary) reference to the area or state of the GDR, FRG or West Berlin,

e) in reference to the capital of the GDR, the phrase “Berlin” should be used, in contrast with “West Berlin” [p. 2]

Similar rules apply in the case of the two Korean states:

- a. Official names – “the Democratic People’s Republic of Korea,” “the DPRK Government” – should be used. The expressions “North Korea,” “the Government of North Korea” and “the Pyongyang Government” are not permitted.
- b. The official name – “demarcation line” – should be used. The expressions “38th parallel” or “border” should not be used in reference to this line.
- c. The name of the South Korean state – “the Republic of Korea” – should be avoided, as should any derivative expressions of the type “the Government of the Republic of Korea,” etc. Apart from the expressions used so far – “the puppet government of

South Korea,” “the Seoul regime,” etc. – the expressions “South Korean authorities,” “the government of South Korea,” and other analogous expressions are also permissible [p. 3].

The regulations concerning Korea are especially characteristic, since they concern a question of little or no relevance to Poles and are completely disconnected from the Poles’ everyday experiences. This example is even more eloquent, since it reveals that totalitarian activity does not necessarily apply to things that are genuinely important. After all, it is supposed to regulate everything. Here the censor simply creates models for permissible speech, thus shaping the licensed form of language. This is just as clear in paragraphs concerning the Arab countries and the so-called “Third World” in general.

Of course, regulations of this kind do not only apply to borders and to other states. They also refer to other spheres. For instance, the Polish soldiers deported to Russia during the war should not be referred to as “prisoners of war”. The expression “prisoners of war” must be eliminated in reference to Polish soldiers and officers interned by the Red Army in September 1939. The correct term is “internees.” It is permissible to name the camps – Kozielsk, Starobielsk and Ostaszków – where the interned Polish officers were later shot by the Nazis in the Katyń forest [p. 24 – later regulations introduce even greater rigors into this subject matter].¹⁴⁵

Numerous instructions concern the terminology to be used in reference to the Church. In general, one cannot name certain Church institutions, since they are supposedly operating illegally.

The censor intervenes not only in terminology applicable to the Church, but also in the vocabulary used by the Church’s own dignitaries:

It is necessary to eliminate the term “second world” propagated by Cardinal Wyszyński to define the community of socialist states [p. 32].

(In fact, interference in the language of those regarded as ideological or political opponents forms a separate issue. Totalitarian activity recognizes no law protecting quotations.)

Here I have only cited sections that refer directly to language. However, all the censor’s recommendations indirectly apply to language, since their aim is to suppress the possibilities of speech on any given question. Censorship forms one of the main elements – or the main element – in the development of the regime’s meta-language. Of course, we cannot reconstruct this language in its entirety from the documents published by KOR, which only represent a single three-year period and do not repeat earlier instructions. For this reason, we find

145 Translator’s Note: The Soviet NKVD executed around 20 000 Polish officers in the forest near Katyń in present-day Belarus. The Soviets later blamed the Nazis for the massacre. This lie was compulsory throughout the communist era in Poland.

no recommendations on how to speak about the USSR, though these undoubtedly form an extensive block. There are also no instructions concerning Israel, as a set of regulations in this area has probably been in force since spring 1967 and has undergone no significant changes. The constancy or mutability of the language constructed by censorship forms a separate question. In fact, these are two sides of the same phenomenon. The aim of censorship is the total institutionalization of speech, but this aspiration does not always result in recommendations of an invariable nature. Arbitrary changes introduced due to various considerations of situational expediency or tactical evolution represent the manipulation of language and information to the same extent as any permanent elements. I have too little material at my disposal to determine which elements in the censor's recommendations – apart from the most general directives – are absolutely constant (over longer periods of time), and which are, so to speak, interchangeable parts. In any case, constancy and mutability – subject both to general political trends and to the demands of the moment – are essential ingredients of totalitarian activity. The censor's instructions suggest that the authorities are well aware of this fact. We can tell this from the information that one directive or another has been revoked – of course, only after a certain time. This occurs not only because a given problem has ceased to be relevant.

21 December 1977

Leftist Terror and the Language of Communism

Italian, German and various other ultra-leftist terrorists use a traditional Marxist language. They speak of class, the dictatorship of the proletariat, the people's justice, imperialism, the struggle with capitalism, and so on. This is a characteristic and familiar repertoire. They call their organizations Red Brigades, sections of the Red Army, and other such names. In these titles, the word "red" almost always appears. In short, they adopt the official symbolism of communism. In writing about the exploits of these terrorists, the mass media in communist Poland preserves the terrorists' language and gives the names of their organizations, though it does not conceal its disapproval. This is an interesting phenomenon, since it reveals that the communists have ceased to care about the traditional revolutionary language. Now other regions of language are protected instead, especially those associated with the possession of power. The old revolutionary ritual – which was still verbally respected in the time of Stalin – has broken down. A kind of court ritual has taken its place, verbal rituals directly dependent on Soviet policy. The authorities cite the empty phrases of revolution more and more infrequently, for purely ornamental purposes, especially on various

anniversary occasions. Ultra-leftist language has come to fill an important role. It has become a caricature of communist language.

28 March 1978

The Power and Weakness of the Word in the Totalitarian System

Power – because it is impossible to oppose or question the official word in public. When the word has officially been spoken, then not only has the horse bolted, but so has the whole reality, the entire world and everything else along with it. During the Stalinist era, the authorities constructed a total language, an extraordinarily powerful language in which every single thing was precisely defined. It was quite clear what its repertoire was and which elements of its repertoire could be linked with one another and in what ways. Yet ordinary censorship and state appropriation of the means of mass communication were not sufficient to establish this language. Extreme terror was also necessary – and thus the knowledge that using a different language could expose a person to suffering, prison or even death. However, when we examine it from a certain perspective, this terror is an ambiguous phenomenon. It even became an item of faith. According to Raymond Aron: “History has a strange logic. In order to fascinate, the Soviet regime needed Stalinist insanity and terror. The more the Soviet planners have acknowledged the demands of the market, the less of an impression they have made on the people of the West through the pace of growth (which is shrinking in any case).”

This applies not only to those naive people of the West who believed that over there in the East a paradise for the proletariat had been created – with equality, democracy and no more exploitation. It also applies to those who lived within this system, people who did not necessarily occupy advantageous positions or who even found themselves on the margins, vegetating in humble conditions and with little hope for the future. They somehow interiorized a language filled with noble platitudes and boorishness, aggressiveness and brutality, a language that formulated ideas whose absurdity was immediately apparent. Why? Was it because no other language was available, since it excluded all other ways of thinking beyond its own assumptions? Or are we dealing here with simple dissemblance, a form of Orwellian doublethink, often conscious but still operating as a defense mechanism? I am unable to answer these questions. However, I am convinced that any unequivocal answer of “yes” or “no” must lead to simplification or falsification. Was the penniless student (say, in 1951) in patched trousers and a torn jacket – eating a pauper’s meals in a gloomy dining hall – consciously lying

when he spoke about the prosperity that had come with the system of the people's democracy? Of course, he could have been lying, but not necessarily. Clearly, he must have known that the conditions in which he was living were far from prosperity. Sometimes – in the right circumstances – he may even have expressed this opinion. But he still accepted the dominant language and took no liberties with any criticism of it. Since the party said there was prosperity, then there really was prosperity. Thoroughgoing totalitarianism does not permit any gaps between the word and reality. It does not permit these gaps by its very nature, since it assumes that it has established the world about which it speaks. Paradoxically, in these kinds of historical situations, the creative nature of language reveals itself with particular power. Yet this language is only possible in a period of extreme terror. Language indirectly or directly justifies terror, while terror justifies language, becoming its foundation and in a certain sense its grammar. The power of terror is the power of language. Here we are dealing with total harmony. Stalinist language and Stalinist terror are communicating vessels.

However, the power of a language based on violence is a superficial power, even when it has been interiorized by the majority of society. This power does not flow from the language itself. Indeed, the moment the terror ceases, or even slackens, the language collapses. We experienced this disintegration in an acute and spectacular form in the middle of the 1950s (the Czechs experienced it a decade later). Stalinist speech was vigorously rejected, and now it would seem impossible to restore its former character. In fact, it would be impossible to restore the principles according to which it functioned. The restoration of these principles would require a return to Stalinist terror – and thus to complete lawlessness, labor camps, show trials, and so on. Stalinist speech has been rejected, though countless idioms from the time have survived in official babble. We still live under the dictatorship of a single party and the words of the opposition have no access to the mass media. When terror no longer supports totalitarian language, it weakens. Gaps between language and the world immediately appear, while language ceases to be a joyful creative act to form reality. The authorities can no longer say whatever they like with impunity. Accordingly, its systematic nature, its absoluteness and its exclusivity all come into question. In a period of overt and uninhibited terror, the primary means of language's persuasive power is fear. Is official speech able to develop other means of persuasion now that the role of fear has significantly declined, while non-conformism has exposed it to ridicule without yet threatening it with destruction? The party is constantly seeking these persuasive means. It has deviated from traditional Marxist rhetoric (and its extreme Stalinist form). The leaders speak (at least sometimes) as if they were the fathers of exemplary bourgeois families, appealing to patriotism and a sense of responsibility. Yet their searches are in vain, for this language has shown its complete powerlessness.

It means nothing, and it has no way of exerting any influence (though certain elements inevitably enter colloquial speech, since they assault our consciousness from all directions). People hear this language as empty chatter. Consciousness of the weakness of official language has become an almost universal fact. People accept it as a kind of ritual, but not as an item of faith. The degradation of this language today is to some extent a consequence of its superficial power in the Stalinist era.

31 March 1978

Newspeak and Diglossia

The concept of “diglossia” was introduced over twenty years ago by the American linguist Charles Fergusson. It is based on the idea that two different forms of language exist within a given social group. People use these forms in different situations. They cannot mix these two ways of speaking, since they are reserved for the specific situations in which they should be used (e.g.: in primitive societies, the language used in everyday life versus the language used during religious rituals). It seems to me that newspeak leads directly to diglossia. Its very existence supposes a dichotomous division. Newspeak must be juxtaposed with another language. However, this is not the most important point. Newspeak cannot support all possible social situations, but rather we use it only in a limited number of typical circumstances. It is difficult to imagine that a party functionary – who might speak publically only in newspeak and be incapable of speaking about public issues in any other language – would also use it in conversation with his wife about everyday matters. At the end of the day, surely he would use a different language. Therefore, a clear division emerges between public language and private language. Sometimes this is linked with what Orwell calls doublethink, though there is no particular rule here. The party functionary who speaks normally to his wife might always think in the same way. The differences in expression might derive simply from the fact that he has different linguistic means at his disposal in different situations. The connection with doublethink reveals itself when a person who does not identify with newspeak still uses it to speak about public issues, since he believes for one reason or another that one must speak in this manner. One of the aims of propaganda would appear to be the complete institutionalization of diglossia, the creation of a state in which newspeak would be the only form of expression with respect to ideology, politics, history and social questions.

21 December 1978

The Socialist Art of the Insult

The idea for these remarks emerged as I read Borges's beautiful essay "The Art of Verbal Abuse." Invective is one of the primary elements of communist rhetoric. The classics of Marxism hurled insults, and so do their faithful and devoted disciples. They hurled insults because they had (and still have) no respect for their opponent, whomever he or she might have been. They possessed the absolute truth, while all those who opposed or refused to acknowledge this truth could be treated as fools or mortal enemies. Various undeniably crass, though still rather colorful expressions appeared. However, they soon became ritualized, and in the Stalinist era they were institutionalized. People used them as if they were periphrases. The cruder the insult the better. There can be no talk here of the finesse and playfulness that Borges discusses. These abusive phrases must be used with absolute – and fully justified – seriousness. At the root of the socialist art of the insult, we find dichotomous divisions – between "ours" and "theirs," us and the enemy. At the same time, both "ours" and "the others" can be understood in various ways. Once class and ideological difference lay at the foundation of this division. Now emphasizing these differences has little impressive force, so an important addition has been introduced. The division into ours and theirs has become national. Class and ideological criteria overlap with ethnic identity. There are no fundamental differences in the rhetoric of the insult, irrespective of whether its object and addressee is an individual person or a collectivity (for instance, an organization representing the western world, an opposition group, a group that has deviated from party orthodoxy, a ruling clique or a group aspiring to take power, like the "Mao Zedong group" in Soviet propaganda or the "Gang of Four" in Chinese propaganda). Dichotomous divisions linked with nationalist motifs are also characteristic both of insults that emanate directly from the official sphere and of those that represent more individual utterances unrelated to any official declaration. Precisely in the case of the latter the extreme schematization and ritualization of the communist art of the insult reveals itself. Even the pretense of stylistic freedom does not diminish them. We find an especially clear example in Wiesław Górnicki's shameful attack on Stefan Kisielewski, published in the weekly *Kultura* magazine. Górnicki is an accomplished journalist with many years of experience with insults. Yet in this libel he is unable to go beyond the dichotomy I have described. In his virulent attack, the most important point is that Kisielewski is "anti-Polish," since he hates People's Poland.

The socialist art of the insult is a well-developed, lasting and schematized rhetorical technique. Relatively few changes have occurred within it. Instead, it has been characterized only by differing degrees of intensity. It falls into the background when the authorities prefer not to provoke society or when they seek

its favor (as in the first years of Edward Gierek's government), while it intensifies during various "campaigns," such as 1968 or spring 1977. Insults play a much larger role in Soviet writing (both in government or party announcements and in the annunciations of *Pravda*) than in the equivalent publications in the People's Republic of Poland.

1 December 1979

A Conversation with an Official

I would like to record a few remarks that occurred to me after a conversation with the head of the Mokotów Passport Office. Here I am not concerned so much with any lexical or syntactical peculiarities (my interlocutor followed the principle of using as few words as possible), but rather with a peculiar communicative situation that excludes the possibility of any real communication. In People's Poland, this is a banal situation recurring thousands of times a day in the diverse matters that countless applicants wish to arrange in various offices. My own experience revealed this to me in all its glory. The situation has developed under the influence of three fundamental elements:

1. Laws, directives and decrees, or – more generally – any acts of law formulated in such a way as to facilitate the justification of any act or decision of the authorities. The leadership wishes to create the pretense that they operate with the full sanction of the law. Therefore, they must have an appropriately formulated law at their disposal – a vague and general law facilitating the justification of arbitrary decisions. In the case of a refusal to issue a passport, the authorities refer to a paragraph of the act stipulating that foreign travel may be refused "for important state reasons" (or "for important social reasons"). And this is all. The text gives no further information on specific reasons. Nor does it offer any recommendations that might qualify the general rule. The official at the passport office read out (several times!) the paragraph (referred to on the notification of refusal). However, he did not feel obliged to explain it or to say what was involved in my particular case. When I told him that there was no need to read out the text so many times – since I understood Polish – and that what I really wanted was some specific reasons, he always replied with the same tautology: "for important state reasons means for important state reasons." He behaved as if any reduction of the general to the individual was strictly prohibited. This alone would suffice to make any real conversation impossible.

2. In the People's Republic of Poland, there is an "above," whose verdicts are inscrutable. The official spoke to me as if he were merely conveying a decision

that had come “from above,” as if he had no influence on it whatsoever (which was probably true), though he did not necessarily support the authorities’ decision and took no responsibility for it. He made it clear that “they” up “above” had decided to prevent me from traveling to France. He used a strange phrase – “over there, in the Office.” When I stated that to me he was a representative of the Office, since he was the highest authority accessible to the applicant, he said nothing in reply, muttering something under his breath. So the head of a passport office serving a large district in Warsaw behaved as if he were merely the conveyer of things that took place beyond his control and independently of him. The whole time he took great care not to fall out of this role. He even gave me to understand that if it were up to him he would quite happily grant me a passport (this was the drift of his monosyllables). He consistently avoided taking any personal responsibility, preferring to take a defensive position.

3. The authorities of the People’s Republic of Poland still operate via secretive methods, unable to reveal their intentions and motives. This is a phenomenon of enormous significance and scope. Perhaps it reveals itself most clearly in the judiciary (in this context it is impossible to speak of the “justice system” – if anything it is an “injustice system”). They put the labor activist Edmund Zadrożyński in prison for three years under the pretext of common crimes. They arrest Miroslaw Chojcecki, the organizer and head of an unofficial publishing house, on the accusation of stealing a mimeograph. Everybody knows that these are pure fictions, but the authorities seem unconcerned. Indeed, they participate enthusiastically in various fictions. In my own case – which is obviously far more trivial than these other matters – the same basic mechanism is at work. The general way in which the authorities have formulated the passport law supports the creation of fictions and allows them to conspire. The generality characteristic of these legal formulations allows them to avoid explaining or to conceal the motives for their decisions. Nevertheless, this concealment is only a pretense, since both sides know very well what is happening. So a strange game resembling children’s play begins. Children at play know that they are acting in a make-believe world. At the same time, they ascribe a certain reality to this world. The official with whom I spoke is a participant in a fictitious world – and he must know this, like every official who deals with such matters (though this particular individual gave the impression of being unintelligent and somewhat pathetic). He must know, even if he might not fully realize it, since this is a general mechanism.

These three elements ensured that the conversation ceased to be a conversation. I have used this word simply because there is no other that would render the peculiar nature of this phenomenon. And how did I behave during this “conversation”? With respect to the first two points, I refused to accept them and tried to force the official to reject them as well. I did not succeed, since he responded to everything

I said with well-rehearsed formulas (doubtless he had conducted many such “conversations”). Yet I accepted the law of fiction. In other words, I behaved as if I really did not know why the people’s authorities would make my trip impossible. I joined the game and even expressed astonishment. Of course, there was no reason for me to talk with the official about the TKN.¹⁴⁶ As far as I know, my behavior might not have been unusual. In fact, I suspect that it was typical, since most people have to play this kind of game in conversations with the authorities – at least when it comes to arranging certain matters. This suggests that the authorities have succeeded to some extent in imposing certain communicative practices. At least in certain cases, this is a bilateral game, a fiction raised to the power of two.

25 April 1980

Newspeak, Colloquial Language, Jargon

The word “newspeak” – until recently known only to readers of George Orwell – has been appearing more and more frequently. Doubtless this is partly under the influence of a certain TKN pamphlet. The word is losing some of its clarity and precision. Its semantic range is beginning to blur. People incorrectly assume that newspeak refers to anything in language that is clumsy, incoherent, jarring, or at odds with tradition. Stefan Kisielewski uses the word in this broad sense, essentially concerning himself with what has been called the general contemporary trash heap of language. Yet not every form of contemporary gibberish is newspeak, while newspeak is not necessarily gibberish. By losing its focus, the word also loses its meaning. For this reason, I am firmly against such amplifications. By newspeak, we should mean the official language of the regime and any derivatives of it. This refers to manipulated and manipulative speech, to speech that serves as a tool of indoctrination or disinformation, to speech imposing pre-established values by authoritarian means, and slogan speech with a clearly determined attitude towards the receiver. From these definitions, it follows that those regions of language that are not subject to manipulation and that have developed naturally do not belong to newspeak. For instance, the language of queues is not newspeak, though it is undoubtedly a product of socialism. It is not newspeak, because it arose spontaneously as a reaction to a specific situation. In the same way, language that

146 Translator’s Note: TKN denotes the Society for Academic Courses (*Towarzystwo Kursów Naukowych*), an independent organization providing tertiary-level lectures outside the official university system between 1978 and 1981. Michał Głowiński was a founding member of the society. This “illicit” activity was doubtless the reason for the official refusal of his passport request.

clashes with grammatical and stylistic norms is not newspeak. Nor is language that creates its own phraseology or comes into conflict with the linguistic sense of aesthetics. Therefore, we must clearly distinguish newspeak from various forms of colloquial speech and even from jargon. When a helpful shop assistant in a neighborhood shop tells me “don’t buy the cheese today, it’s un-bitable,” she is by no means using newspeak, though her sentence is still a linguistic abomination. She is using a certain kind of jargon, which is apparently prevalent and popular among shop workers. The sloppy and deformed language of jargon clearly remains in some relation with newspeak, but it cannot be reduced to it. It remains in this relation precisely because it represents a reaction to newspeak. Official language cannot be a model for speech. It evokes anti-bodies of a nature and quality corresponding with the cultural level of the speaker. Perhaps this is one of the most important points when we analyze the contemporary Polish linguistic situation. Although newspeak filters through into everybody’s language and nobody can evade its influence, it always represents a kind of anti-model. This anti-model stimulates the appearance of jargon and widens its scope. In the end, the process works both ways, since forms of jargon also influence newspeak. This is especially clear during campaigns, when propagandists attacking opponents wish to show that they belong to “our people” by trying to speak as people talk on the street. Therefore, jargon can become a component of newspeak through a form of transplantation. Yet jargon itself is not newspeak – and certainly not when a shop assistant from a neighborhood shop uses it.

19 May 1980

Language of Revolution, Language of Opposition

I have already written about the strange fate of revolutionary rhetoric in the communist world. Now I would like to examine this question from a different perspective, inspired by Leszek Kołakowski’s fascinating essay “Revolution as Beautiful Disease” (“Rewolucja jako piękna choroba,” *Aneks* 22 [1979]). Here the author attempts to define the phenomenon of revolution without concealing his own negative attitude towards it: “If somebody announces the invention of a ‘revolutionary chair,’ you can be certain that these are chairs on which nobody can sit” (p. 8). Describing revolution as the consistent aspiration to destroy everything that once was, Kołakowski takes up the question of language:

One thing was unachievable even in Cambodia, as the appropriate technique had not yet been developed. It was impossible to force people to unlearn their language. But any consistent destruction of the past would require people to cease to know their inherited language, which in itself carries cultural traditions, imposes certain

structures of thought and thus limits the possibilities for the creation of the New Man. It contains words and grammatical forms that the New Man ought not to know. The perfect Revolution supposes a cultural desert. Therefore, it must invent a technique for dragging people back to a pre-linguistic state. The youth of humankind: the troglodyte, the anthropopithecus. Total liberation: a cage (p. 14).

In this sense, language is by its very nature – as a storehouse of tradition – an anti-revolutionary phenomenon. Even in the periods of the most intensive brainwashing, the communists were not able to destroy it entirely. In spite of everything, newspeak could not eliminate speech, though it placed a terrible strain on it and often made it ugly. To some extent, this gives us cause for optimism.

Like other articles on similar issues, Kołakowski's essay forces us to think about a certain paradox. It would be neither an exaggeration nor a simplification to describe Kołakowski as a philosopher of the opposition in the communist countries – an opposition that has questioned the very system and its legitimacy. Therefore, it might appear in this situation that revolution should be a highly valued category and that revolutionary language should be greeted with approbation. Yet, as we have seen, this has not been the case. This is precisely the paradox I have in mind. The language of revolution has become either a ritualized language or the language of troublemakers and terrorists, whose actions can only lead us towards a Huxleyan "brave new world." This determines the peculiar linguistic situation of the opposition. Naturally, opposition activists cannot refer to the language of the authorities (which in this case, ironically, overlaps to some extent with the "language of revolution"). Nor can they appeal to the language that usually operates within reform movements. After all, the aim is not to reform what already exists, since what exists can neither be reformed nor "refined." In theory, this paradox ought to cause a linguistic crisis in opposition circles. Yet numerous publications suggest that this crisis has not occurred – or at least that it has not reached a level that would hamper the communication or formation of ideas. The situation has changed. The language in which people express their anti-totalitarian attitude and their desire for change is a language that refers to tradition.

2 July 1980

Styles of Being, Styles of Speech

Various consequences flow from the fact the first secretary of the party is the most important and dominant figure in the communist system. These consequences are not only political. Here I am interested in a question that is perhaps not the most important, though it remains crucial. How does the first secretary's style of being affect the official social norms, the style of behavior and thus the style of speech not

only of the secretary himself, but also of the party, the propaganda and the ruling clique more generally? It has almost become a rule that after assuming power the first secretary tries to behave in a different manner – at least to some extent – from his predecessor. Sometimes these differences in behavior coincide with political differences, though this is not always the case. The greatest departure in this respect was Khrushchev's particular way of being. He introduced a Marcolfian folk element into communism, though of course he did not completely liberate himself from official mores. Khrushchev's behavior, words and reactions were unpredictable, sometimes even erratic. The most famous and spectacular example was when he pounded his shoe against the rostrum at the United Nations. His way of being formed a marked contrast with the Byzantine style of Stalin. In turn, the behavior of Brezhnev – every inch the bureaucrat – contrasted with Khrushchev's way of presenting himself in public.

In Poland, we observe the operation of a similar rule, though not on the same imperial scale. Władysław Gomułka – Edward Gierek – Stanisław Kania. The behavior of each was defined to one extent or another by his predecessor's way of being, though in Kania's case – after only one month in power – we can only surmise. After all, first months in power are generally atypical. The newly selected “number one” endeavors to gain popularity, to create and consolidate an image of himself in public opinion, and – above all – to present projects for reform. He promises various things and then soon forgets about them. Gomułka's behavior in the initial period of his rule – when he enjoyed great popularity and passed himself off as a providential man – differed greatly from his way of being in the years to follow, when he became a dictator with no memory of the social movement that had brought him to power. In his mentality, Gomułka remained a simple man, whose image of the world was defined by an impoverished childhood in a working-class family and his pre-war activity in the communist party. He could not understand society's aspirations, since anything above the living standards of a working-class family in a poor region of Poland at the beginning of the century appeared to him as luxury. Coffee was a luxury, since nobody had drunk it at that time in his social milieu. A car was a luxury. A regular, modest apartment was certainly a luxury. Gomułka's style was a style of limitation and asceticism. This probably characterized his personal way of being, which then affected his style of speech and the style of his contact with society. In later years, this contact became less and less frequent, restricted to meetings with his camarilla. Gomułka spoke in newspeak. In his addresses, he constantly accused Poles of eating too much, living beyond their means and entertaining excessively high aspirations. Yet his personal asceticism did not protect him from what communist jargon describes as a “cult of personality.”

Edward Gierek's political biography is similar to some extent, though the differences are worthy of consideration. Before I elaborate further on this question, I would like to linger over a certain unrealized episode, only potential, but still significant. Here I have in mind Mieczysław Moczar and his aspirations to take the highest party position in the late 1960s. By appealing to patriotic emotions, Moczar wished to shape his image as a good Pole. Both he and his supporters made constant references to patriotic platitudes. Gomułka maintained a certain distance, according to the classic models of communist bureaucracy, while Moczar wanted to show that he was "one of our boys." In practice, it turned out that he was above all "one of the police," but his intentions still remained clear. Brutality, organized anti-Semitism, anti-intellectualism (perhaps even greater than Gomułka's distaste for intellectuals) and an almost inconceivable primitivism created a different social image of Moczar than what he intended. The rhetoric of his propagandists came close to the slanging of the gutter press or the insults of the worst Stalinist years. It formed a peculiar synthesis of elements that were not so far removed from one another as they might have appeared at first glance.

Moczar never became the "number one." The style he promoted did not prevail. Gierek came along, speaking much better and more elegantly than the fallen dictator – and certainly much better and more elegantly than his competitor for the position. At the very beginning of his term, he tried to cultivate the image of a prudent and serious leader, who would enter into sincere dialogue with society. He had a talent for acting, a strong presence, and a pleasant-sounding deep voice, so he was able to pull off various tricks. The workers responded positively to his famous appeal – "Will you help us?" We must concede that in his early years in power the level of official rhetoric rose significantly (only to drop dramatically soon after). Gierek broke away from the petty-mindedness that had characterized so many of Gomułka's speeches. He did not enter into any polemics with writers. He did not reproach Cardinal Wyszyński for taking hard currency out of the country on a trip to the Vatican.¹⁴⁷ From the beginning, Gierek shaped his style in opposition to Gomułka's style. He rejected his provincialism, rubbed shoulders with the wider world, and was able to turn these facts to his advantage. Above all, he opposed Gomułka's asceticism. He stopped reproaching Poles for eating too much or getting too big for their boots. He acknowledged that a modern society should be a motorized society. He had no wish to hamper

147 I do not remember exactly when this happened, but it was probably towards the end of Gomułka's second term in power. The press wrote extensively in a vicious tone that Wyszyński had taken hard currency out of the country. On a side note, it was none other than Gomułka himself who had brought the cult of the dollar to Poland. Here he expressed the mentality of a peasant raised in those regions from which people emigrated to America and sent dollars back to their families.

the ambition to consume, but rather he supported it. Gierek struck the pose of a good, solicitous and especially self-satisfied father of the nation, who would care for the “great Polish family” (he used this phrase himself). Almost until the very end, his speeches were paternalistic. He became the great communist lord or king, to whom the people paid tribute and for whom they created a fictional reality. In contrast with Gomulka, he did not only work in the seclusion of his office. He traveled around Poland, though he only met with his so-called “base” and with representatives of local authorities: in other words, with those who were constructing this mock-up of the Potemkin for him. There were famous stories about his visits to one city or another, when the streets were scrubbed clean for him (even if he was just passing through), while at the collective farms he deigned to visit, they borrowed any presentable cows from local peasants so as to please the lordly, stewardly eye of the first secretary. Propaganda constantly trumpeted amazing achievements, singing his praises at every opportunity. In certain periods, his picture appeared on the front page of the papers every day. The news became a mere court circular. Pomp and ceremony reigned, as Kania later insinuated in his inaugural speech. Life became a theater, in which the first person was the ruling secretary – a pompous, feudal, courtly theater. His speeches – which bore less and less relation to reality – became monologues in a surrealist performance. By then, the obligatory newspeak within them was nothing more than juggling with words. Yet it seemed to Gierek that he enjoyed great authority, that Polish society truly regarded him as a good father and felt gratitude towards him. Rumor has it that he was very surprised and disappointed when his speech of 18 August 1980 did not evoke any significant response from the workers and failed to bring about any suspension of the strikes. He lived in a fictional world that he had created himself with the help of his obsequious propagandists. He could not understand that the striking shipyard workers in Gdańsk did not want to listen to his speech at all. In their understanding, he was so played out and compromised that they expected nothing from his words. At the same time, we must concede that as he departed this ghastly theater, he never ordered the security forces to shoot at the workers. Perhaps in this way he was different from Gomulka to some extent.

Now Stanisław Kania has arrived. Here a change in style is apparent once again, though it is difficult to characterize it after only five weeks in power, especially since the new boss has hardly appeared publicly in this initial period. Of course, we cannot say where this change will lead or how the new style of being and speech will evolve. A report in *Trybuna Ludu* (*The People's Tribune*) on Kania's visit to the Warsaw steelworks suggests that the same old rule continues to apply. The public behavior of the new ruler is shaped in opposition to his predecessor's way of being. In contrast with the communist lordliness and Byzantinism of Gierek, Kania projects simplicity and directness. The limited evidence so far available

suggests that he is trying not to speak only to the base, but rather to speak to the workers (though admittedly only to party members). He wants to avoid any theatricality. Yet in opting for simplicity, he has not fallen into Moczar's coarse and popular style of trying to be "one of the boys." He has radically broken with party decorum. At the Warsaw steelworks, he did not lecture the workers, but allowed them to lecture him. We had not seen such a reversal of the roles before. Kania has sought to avoid the rhetoric of both Gomułka and Gierek. However, he has not managed to free himself from newspeak, even if he may have restricted its operation. The complete elimination of newspeak is impossible for a "number one." So far we can only talk about Kania's style as potential. We shall see how it develops.

11 October 1980

A Little Retrospection

I have been closely following newspeak since the mid-1960s. However, when it comes to the earliest years, I have only fragmentary memories of both particular phenomena and the general tone – too little to write a history. In newspeak, many elements never vary, while many others change. The co-existence of constant and changeable elements is seemingly easy to explain. The constancy results from the fact that newspeak is a language subject to a defined ideology and politics, whose principles have only shifted to a very limited extent. Furthermore, various determinants of stability play a crucial role, including ritualism and a highly developed schematism. The mutability comes from the fact that language must fill various immediate functions, answering the party's needs in the given moment, serving diverse and often short-lived political trends, while conveying their successive twists and turns. I reflected on this point as I read a passage from Leopold Tyrmand's *Dziennik 1954* (London: 1980), in which he writes about the Second Congress of the Polish United Workers' Party. This event took place in March 1954 on the first anniversary of Stalin's death, though it still remained thoroughly Stalinist in spirit. After a summarizing a speech from Adam Schaff – the main party ideologue of the time – Tyrmand writes:

And so on and so forth, jargon in a wave of gibberish that rolled over the council room. Somebody wants to force school students to read the *Young Guard* (*Młoda Gwardia*) magazine, so he demands that we "surround the youth with more care." Somebody else says that "we have reached a breakthrough in staff morale," but he means that half the factory has been arrested. "Farmers have hailed the superiority of the collective farm" means that several villages have been reduced to penury

by means of ruinous social benefit payments, graft and taxes. I particularly like the term “narrow practicalism,” which means that dock cranes must have a bust of Stalin mounted on them, while engineers who express any doubts about this improvement are guilty of this “narrow practicalism.” The party secretary from Łódź was also pretty good, with his complaints about the influence of National Democrats¹⁴⁸ in the textile industry. And to think that I had always taken the NDs for irrelevant reactionaries, while now we find them so strong and influential fifteen years after the National Party ceased to exist! That’s ideology for you! [p. 284] Today, this passage sounds like a caricature, yet a caricature it is not – even if Tyrmand adds a little color to the discussion. He has captured the essential characteristics of newspeak, especially in its Stalinist version. Mild-sounding phrases signify something entirely different from the meaning suggested by the words within them. This language forms a kind of code composed of euphemisms, periphrases and various formulations whose meanings one can only understand on condition of familiarity with certain contexts and specific realities. Thus Tyrmand translates newspeak into normal Polish as if it were a foreign language. In the Stalinist era, newspeak was more intense and developed than it is today. Over the last twenty-five years, the overcoming of Stalinism in its canonical form has rested – among other things – on restrictions placed upon this language’s sphere of operation. For it is clear that newspeak becomes more arbitrary the more the authorities feel they can act with impunity without taking social feelings and aspirations into account. In the Stalinist period, the authorities had every right to ignore them completely. Of course, this false language has not disappeared. After all, “ideological work” still means indoctrination, while the “foundations of the socialist system” mean the complete impunity of the ruling elite. Nevertheless, it seems that in spite of everything the scope of its operation has been limited in comparison with the era of classical Stalinism.

14 June 1981

Class Interests

The strange ensemble known as the Katowice Party Forum presented its strange form of speech to a wide audience in an hour-long television discussion broadcast on June 30. A horrible form of speech. Here I do not even refer to the fact that these strange gentlemen – the majority of whom work at the Silesian Scientific Institute (I have no idea whether this is a party institution, a regional equivalent of

148 Translator’s Note: The National Democracy movement was a strong political force in interwar Poland – with an integral nationalist and decidedly anti-communist agenda.

the Advanced School of Social Sciences or an institute dealing exclusively with local affairs) – speak appalling Polish, with constant grammatical errors, erroneous emphasis and awful intonation. This is bad Polish even from a schoolbook point of view. We might compare it with the Polish of Jan Szydłak, a communist functionary whose way of expressing himself became almost proverbial over the years. Yet the crucial point here was the revival of Stalinist vocabulary in a form that had fallen out of use and withered away over the last twenty-five years. The very tone of their speech was Stalinist. All these men spoke almost like the primitive prosecutors from the show trials of the 1950s – with accusatory intensity and unrivalled self-assuredness, with great ardor and even with foam at their mouths. We had not seen such a display of Stalinist rhetoric for a long time. The leader of the group, Wsiewołod Wolczew, spoke in a more cultured manner (though “culture” is a highly relative concept here), but with clear Russian influences in both vocabulary and intonation. For the viewer of the television spectacle, this way of speaking must have borne unambiguous symbolic significance, while it also overlapped with Stalinist language. I have already written about the rebirth of the language of Marxist orthodoxy after the formation of Solidarity in August 1980. The language of the Katowice Forum may represent another example of this process, though it is different in nature and serves different goals. In the other case, I was concerned with official assimilation of the Solidarity transformations through their presentation in the language of traditional Marxism. Here something else is at stake. The language of Stalinist orthodoxy is a language of rejection, a verbalization of positions maintaining that recent events in Poland have betrayed communism and the workers’ class interests. These interests correspond precisely with the interests of the party, and especially with the interests of its professional apparatus. After the speeches of the forum participants, the broadcast included a discussion involving representatives of Silesian party organizations critical of its pronouncements. One of them said bluntly that what the Katowice Forum described as the class interests of the workers really meant the class interests of the party apparatus. For the participants of the forum, the workers meant apparatchiks.

2 July 1981

The Congress Speech as Rhetorical Genre

The main speech given at the communist party congress by the first secretary is a genre with clearly crystallized characteristics, a conventionalized genre steeped in ritualized features. It represents one of the primary ritual elements of any congress, irrespective of the specific circumstances. The main distinguishing feature of this kind of speech is immediately apparent – the vague identity of the rhetorical

speaker. This vagueness does not even concern the question of who has written the speech or shaped its final textual form, since clearly the secretary's secretaries tend to produce these speeches. The crucial point is the very peculiar form of textual subjectivity associated with them. Ever since the condemnation of the "cult of personality," the congress speeches of first secretaries have presented themselves not as personal utterances, but rather as collective works of the political bureau or the central committee (Stanisław Kania's speech at the recent congress was described as a speech of the central committee), as the expression of collective opinions that the party has shaped and will doubtless continue to shape. At the same time, this collective work loses none of the usual features of individual expression, even if it remains devoid of any directly personal attributes (generally these are eliminated). Brezhnev's speech at the recent congress of the Soviet party conveyed the collective wisdom of the executive, but it was still Brezhnev's speech and his own personal utterance (though it was entirely impersonal in nature), exhibiting and drawing on his political authority. In the same way, Kania's speech of a few days ago – which he credited to the Central Committee – was his own speech. This peculiar collectivity of the subject affects the nature of the text in some cases. It must take various, often contradictory perspectives into account. It becomes a work of compromise, and thus it generally lacks decisiveness and clarity, especially when the first secretary is not distinctly superior to his comrades. In this respect, Kania's situation is completely different from Brezhnev's.

A congress speech must be long. It must last several hours. This is one of its constitutive and ritualized characteristics. It would simply not count if it were too short. Perhaps Alexander Dubček might have questioned this ritual during the Prague Spring in 1968 if he had had the opportunity to give such a speech. But Kania did not violate the communist ritual in the least degree. The monstrous dimensions of the speech are meant to reflect the gravity and seriousness of the event, while also differentiating the figure of the first secretary from the other orators. None of them has the right to speak at such length. Yet length is not only a question of dimensions, but also of the text's structure and of its ritual meaning. The first secretary's speech must be a summa of very diverse subjects – ideology, economy, the problems of specific social groups, foreign policy and international relations. He has a duty to speak about all this, a duty fulfilled almost without exception. The very fact of neglecting one of these obligatory themes must at once appear as conspicuous and meaningful. Kania remained faithful to the concept of the summa. But a summa does not mean – and cannot mean – intellectual coherence. Indeed, it need not even have to show consistency in the elucidation of contemporary problems. For this reason, heterogeneous and contradictory languages may appear within a single speech. The first secretary's speech is constructed as an elaboration of accepted and clearly formulated theses.

Logical consequence plays only a secondary role within it, as does logical rigor. This is a text constructed on a principle of adding diverse elements together. I would describe its poetics as building-block poetics. The speech puts the elements together as a child puts blocks together. As a result, the structure that arises is not always self-evident – especially since these are usually blocks from different sets, incompatible and jumbled. This was precisely how Kania's speech emerged. His summa came together from a combination of blocks that were different in many respects – not only thematically, but also intellectually. It had to answer various needs, meet diverse expectations and form a reaction to pressures coming from many different directions. In Kania's speech, the summa had to be a response to the expectations of the so-called “grass-roots” party members and to the general social situation, but also to the demands of the Kremlin and its native agents (open, covert and hermaphroditic). This was a fundamental reason for its lack of coherence. In this case, the block construction was not only the work of tradition or a consequence of the prevailing ritual. To some extent, it was also the outcome of a complicated contemporary situation. As a result, Kania presented the central ideas of his speech in a roundabout way, hedged with conditions and tangled in contradictions. This mainly reflected the basic guideline of Kania's politics – namely, the so-called “line of communication,” according to which social conflicts were not supposed to be resolved by force.

The congress speech is a paradoxical genre in some respects. Although it takes place at the beginning of the congress, it is only superficially a point of departure for discussion. The speech presents itself as an obligatory text. The participants and the entire party should treat it as such, while society should accept it in a similar way. Thus the opening summa immediately becomes a kind of summary. It defines not only the course of the discussion, but also the nature of its determinations, conclusions and resolutions. Though it seems to be merely the declaration of the withdrawing executive, it is really a program. Everything else becomes an insignificant addition, the ritual rounding out or completion of the image with a few extra details. As a result of the role assigned to the first secretary's speech, it follows that the whole congress should turn into a highly conventionalized classical ballet. His speech is the determining factor and prefiguration of the entire ritual. Here we should add the caveat that the text presented by Kania could not play this role, since the general situation undermined the ritual. Indeed, I have noticed that the various discussants so far have referred relatively rarely to his address, while normally these references would be compulsory. For instance, at the last Soviet congress almost every speaker began with tributes to Brezhnev and his speech. Kania's address did not violate the basic poetics of the genre, but it could not fulfill its traditional functions over the course of the congress.

16 July 1981

The Ninth Congress of the PZPR¹⁴⁹: An Attempt at a Linguistic Profile

This attempt at a profile – made in the heat of the moment a day after the event’s conclusion – will mainly constitute a loose collection of remarks aimed at capturing the most significant and distinctive elements of the congress. Several years ago, the French sociolinguist Marcelessi published a book about the language used at one of the congresses of the French socialist party in the 1920s (regrettably, it is unavailable in Warsaw). The latest congress of the PZPR doubtless deserves its own monograph, not least because it differed from all previous party congresses in several respects, including its modes of speech. Two differences are fundamental here – the restriction of ritualism and an increase in diversity. With respect to the first phenomenon, the ritual element was reduced to a bare minimum, limited to certain scripted elements that are inevitable in this kind of rally (speeches from the representatives of fraternal parties, official welcomes, etc.). Party etiquette was also preserved – at least in the ways of addressing the audience (including the compulsory opening line of “honorable comrades,” though some speakers gave their allocutions a more direct character by adding “dear”). However, this party etiquette did not determine the various modes of speech in advance, but rather it constituted an external element of rhetorical decoration. The decline in ritualism largely resulted from a change in the role of the first secretary’s opening speech. It was no longer necessary for other participants to refer to his address obsequiously, citing his words and making sure they thought alike. The congress lacked the textual matrices that usually form the foundation of the prevailing ritualism. This, in turn, made diversity possible. I have been studying newspeak for many years, and I have never encountered a large party assembly whose participants could speak in such diverse ways. Therefore, if I were to describe the congress as a whole, I would feel obliged to make the claim that party language as a coherent creation no longer existed. The common elements were ultimately insignificant, reduced to the mere rudiments of Marxist expression. Accepting these elements did not determine in advance what the various participants could speak about. At times, they used this language to formulate ideas that were very far removed from party orthodoxy. In this respect, the most characteristic example of those I read or heard would be the address by Grzegorz Rysz from Krosno. Using the infallible categories of Marxism, he argued that the frequently recurring crises in Poland were not a random phenomenon and did not result from specific mistakes made by one ruling clique or another. Instead, they were a consequence of the basic fact that communism in Poland had not emerged in any natural way from

149 Translator’s Note: “PZPR” denotes the ruling “Polish United Workers’ Party” (“*Polska Zjednoczona Partia Robotnicza*”).

a process of development. It had been introduced in 1945 as a result of a certain convergence of political and military circumstances. This speech undermined one of the primary communist myths (that Poles chose the socialist path after the war), while still remaining faithful to Marxism.

As far as I know, nobody questioned *expressis verbis* the ideological foundations of the party: for instance, its democratic centralism or the binding of the socialist idea to the idea of certain alliances and thus precisely to the ideas defended by our allies. Nevertheless, the scope of diversity was enormous. At this congress, the speakers used all the languages that have ever functioned within the PZPR, from Stalinist language onward. Each of these languages appeared in various versions on various different levels. Even Stalinist language – which took on a glaringly primitive form in the address of a certain Ojrzanowski from Gdańsk – recalled the babble of party tub-thumpers from the early 1950s (this particular individual treated any suggestion of equal rights for private agriculture as worthy of the same condemnation as social democracy). A member of the Katowice Forum named Grębosz made similar remarks in a discussion of the plan for the party's program. At the same time, in a speech by party hardliner Stanisław Kociołek, the very same Stalinist language formed a logically constructed whole (according to principles peculiar to party logic) and contributed to the construction of a rhetorical structure with a distinct outline. A separate style that clearly crystallized at the congress was the language of party bureaucracy. This form of speech was sometimes devoid of any direct ideological references, though they generally played some role within it – if not the main role. In contrast with the language of ideology – which was sometimes very flexible – it generally served to formulate conservative positions, absorbing nothing of what we might describe as the language of reform. There were many speeches on specific subjects that might well have been given at an economic council. They did not take up any political or ideological motifs, but endeavored mostly to consider the actual state of things. Of course, here we find the least space for the traditional elements of party language.

But how did the party liberals speak? In general, they spoke better than their hard-headed comrades. In some speeches, we find visions of progress and reflections on real problems. The authors of these texts did not deviate from orthodoxy, though they attempted to speak about concrete realities in a matter-of-fact manner. In contrast with their comrades, they avoided aggressive tones. Certain atypical texts also appeared in the discussion, including the voice of a doctor from Rabka named Kurdzielewicz, who distinguished himself by his humanitarian tone. A speech by Zbigniew Ciechan – a delegate from Toruń – attracted particular attention. He seemed to go beyond the bounds of party thought, and thus he was not representative of the congress.

Newspeak obviously did not – and could not – disappear from view at the congress, since it represents the style of the party, irrespective of any other political twists and turns. It could not disappear, since the party has not abandoned the many concepts, arguments and myths that can only be verbalized in this language. At the same time, the party speakers are accustomed to this style and grounded in it. Ultimately, they know no other way of speaking. It is difficult for them to abandon the stereotypes, clichés and well-worn metaphors that they have used for years and that have carried a kind of obligatory power. So newspeak did not disappear, though its operation was limited. This was a result of many factors. Firstly, the set of speakers expanded significantly beyond the ranks of party veterans who have spent their lives in committee rooms. Secondly, the congress held its discussions under pressure from reality, making it difficult to speak about the real in newspeak, which was ultimately the language of ideological fiction. Thirdly, the congress was the scene of a political struggle between different factions. We can imagine that it might have been much more vigorous in closed debates than in the publically accessible discussions. In certain speeches, we saw clear attempts not to speak in tired stereotypes and according to the prevailing rhetorical models. At times, a rhetoric approaching literary stylization was conspicuous. Literary quotations and allusions often appeared – with Stanisław Wyspiański's play, *The Wedding*, being the most frequently cited work. A greater degree of colloquialism was also striking. Even Kania spoke more informally than any previous first secretary.

What about the social status of speakers and their modes of speech? It would be difficult to point to any rule here, though there seems to be a clear difference between older and younger workers (by older I mean those around the age of fifty). The younger workers speak much more competently. Their speech does not differ at all from intelligentsia speech. The older generation was generally inept at the congress, with no command over party rhetoric, though it was difficult for them to refer to any other speech models. Various traces of their background were conspicuous in their speech. This applied to an even greater extent in the case of the peasants. Generational differences became extremely apparent within this group. The older generation spoke in a traditionally peasant way, sometimes even using parables. The party influences within this peasant speech brought to mind the ridiculous Head Man Kierdziołek, a well-known character from a cycle of satirical radio monologues by Jerzy Ofierski in the 1960s. Nevertheless, I would emphasize that social status was not necessarily related to any particular modes of speech. To recognize this fact, it suffices to compare the words of a sensible worker from Ciechanów, named Dobrowolski, with the babble of a certain Siwak, who has reached the highest authorities of the party. Yet Siwak represents an isolated phenomenon, at least at this congress. His style – which is undoubtedly

distinctive in various respects – is the style of a primitive secret police officer. Suburban cunning mingles in him with the Stalinist tradition. He constantly strives to demonstrate his proletarian and party credentials, presenting himself as “one of the boys” and as a true party workman, for whom everything non-communist is naturally alien.

21 July 1981

The Ideological Discourse of the Party, Autumn 1981

A year ago I wrote that the sudden reactivation of Marxist vocabulary and the grinding out of expansive ideological screeds were intended to serve the reduction of the unknown to the known. They represented an attempt to tame the changes then taking place, to give them the desired form, to mark out their boundaries and thus to control them. This attempt did not succeed. The new social movement could not be reduced to the form that the PZPR wished to give it. In fact, even within the party itself the movement would not fully submit. Consequently, the type of discourse that was utilized shortly after August 1980 turned out to be useless, and so it had to change. In taking up the task of describing its current form, I am conscious that the party does not presently have a homogeneous way of speaking on the subject of its so-called ideological principles. There is a considerable degree of diversity within this material, as the Ninth Congress and subsequent plenary meetings of the party have shown. The range is truly enormous, from the aggressive statements of the Katowice Forum and the speeches of hardliners like Stanisław Kociołek to the texts presented by more enlightened party activists from Toruń. Nevertheless, in this attempt to describe the party’s ideological discourse, I shall not so much concern myself with extreme cases, but rather with those utterances that reflect the more widely representative intermediate positions.

An important factor defining the current nature of the discourse is the fact that almost nobody cares about ideological matters. Society has no interest in them – which goes without saying, since it has never showed any such interest – but now the majority of the party is no longer concerned with them either. For the majority, practical issues are now much more important, which makes complete sense in Poland’s present situation. These practical questions include multiple components. The post-Solidarity leaders claim that Gierek and his team disarmed the party ideologically. The ideology has become so hackneyed that it is now entirely superfluous to the party itself in times of stability. Accordingly, it fulfills a new role without much difficulty – a decorative role. The indifference of even the highest members of the party leadership to these matters is clear from the lack

of reaction to a recent speech on ideological questions given by another hardliner, Stefan Olszowski. This speech passed almost unnoticed. More importantly, the speech itself – incoherent, filled with platitudes and devoid of any persuasive power – strongly confirms my theory.

This lack of interest in ideological matters – even from the party itself – defines to a large extent the characteristics of the discourse. Above all, elements that I would describe as “meta-ideological” play a significant role within it. Various statements – from both party leaders and professional ideologues – make it absolutely clear what ideology means for the communist party (most frequently it is a “compass”) and that without it the party could not function or even exist. Hence the subsequent appeals to stop neglecting this area and proclamations of the urgent need for intensive ideological work, ideological training, and so on. Every member of the party should protect its ideological purity.

The meta-ideological motifs are meant to suggest the continuation of the communist movement’s most important values, which cannot be neglected under any circumstances. Such reflections are astoundingly bland and out of touch with the current situation. It is impossible here not to recall the famous phrase from the deceased Soviet politician Andrei Zhdanov – “toothless vegetarianism.” In any case, it would appear that ideological discourse in its current form does not aim to convince anybody. It exists for itself (and for the party), babbling to itself about principles. The party has subordinated persuasiveness to ritualism. The ideological word has completely reduced itself to the ritual word. But ritual here is by no means an innocent thing emerging only from the power of tradition, which is meant to ensure what party language describes as “identity.” Ideological discourse is supposed to constitute simultaneously an expression and guarantee of orthodoxy in the utterances of individual activists and of the party as a whole. It is supposed to represent proof of participation in the socialist community and of faithfulness to the prevailing Soviet models.

This discourse is not innocent from yet another point of view. In a brilliant article about newspaper published in *Aneks* No 21, Tadeusz Marczak has described it as “background noise.” This noise is meant to interfere with the crystallization of more liberated forms of speech. Ideological discourse fills this very function perfectly, since it is intended to prevent the formation of any other ideological formulations, including those within the language of the party. It is supposed to impose this form of speech as singular and obligatory. Such a discourse fulfills the same role as ritual. One of the tasks of ritual is to prevent unpredictable behaviors. Participation in a ritual in its canonical version, uncontaminated by reformist novelties, becomes a sign of orthodoxy. It proves that belonging to the community evokes no doubts and excludes any possibility of questioning the rules on which the ritual is based.

Ritualized and conceived as a kind of background noise, this discourse is fundamentally conservative. This is the case not only because it wants to preserve the ideological tradition without submitting it to any change or even retouching it. The very essence of this discourse is conservative. Among other things, this conservatism is based on a way of thinking that treats ideology in its officially accepted, solidified form as superior to reality. Ideology does not subordinate itself to the evolving social world, but – on the contrary – the world must bow to ideology. Here the hallowed rules of Marxist dogmatism are in force. This dogmatism does not allow for any ideological corrections, even when the party must adjust its actions to concrete realities. Ideological discourse to some extent (to no small extent, as it seems to me) removes the party's ability to remain in touch with reality. However, this conservatism also has another side, since its basic function is to slow down the process of transformation. Here we are no longer dealing with the imposition of meanings that are convenient for the party onto this process. The basic idea is to batten down the hatches and completely cut off the possibility of discussion on certain subjects. From a certain point of view, this discourse is largely defensive in nature. Through discourse, the party defends itself against current events and changes. Sometimes it only defends itself verbally, since circumstances have forced it to make decisions that contradict its own ideological discourse.

24 October 1981

Propaganda and Terror

People often say that the most crucial aspect of communist propaganda is that it creates a new reality, constructing it in words with no consideration for the actual state of things. Roman Zimand has argued for a similar theory of newspeak. I would tend to support the same theory, emphasizing the role that a certain magical element plays within this language. However, it is not presently my intention to examine this theory or to consider its validity and to what extent it integrates the basic properties of newspeak. Instead, I wish to draw attention to one fundamental point. Propaganda can forge a fictional prosperity in words (this prosperity is meant to be a substitute for real prosperity). It can create from words the verbal illusion of efficient production and good work (which was ubiquitous in the Gierek era). But there is one thing it cannot do. Propaganda has no ability to create fictional terror from language, replacing repression with the word. Everything else can be imaginary, but the apparatus of terror must be real. As early as the Bolshevik revolution, Lenin began to build a fictional world of words and an apparatus of

terror. Felix Dzerzhinsky operated and was supposed to operate in the real world, just like his numerous successors and imitators to this day.¹⁵⁰

The relation between propaganda and terror is not merely a relation between fiction and reality. Propaganda is supposed to conceal terror, to beautify it, but also to justify it. Therefore, it is indispensable to violence. Yet terror can still do without it, at least in certain situations, when it “goes the whole hog.” A certain type of propaganda – on the other hand – cannot exist without terror. Indeed, such propaganda would not even be able to emerge in the first place without it. It would immediately collapse, like a structure without foundations. The reality of terror makes all kinds of propaganda fictions possible, providing a platform for them. Without the terror from the years of the great purges, Stalin’s joyful and triumphant speech in 1936 on the new Soviet constitution would have been unthinkable. His tone would have been impossible, as would his specific promises and claims, which were an affront to the everyday experience of citizens living in the first country of the workers and peasants. In the same way, the activities of such Polish propaganda symbols of the 1950s as Wanda Odolska (the author of commentaries on the show trials written in the style of prosecutors’ speeches) or Stefan Martyka (an announcer on a radio program called “Fala 49”) would have been unthinkable without Stalinist terror. The fear of a terrorized society is indispensable to communist propaganda. Violence is the very air that it breathes. One day historians will doubtless trace how the intensification (or moderation) of terror brought about changes in the style and methods of propaganda.

But what happens to propaganda in a communist state when a large proportion of society suddenly frees itself from fear? In the Polish case, it has freed itself not because the terror has diminished or its apparatus significantly reduced in size. Indeed, we know that during the Gierek era it was systematically expanded, and yet things developed in such a way that the authorities could no longer use it freely. The apparatus of terror could harass rebels and sometimes even persecute them, but it could no longer function as it had done in the good old days. Waldemar Kuczyński recently published a brilliant article in *Tygodnik Solidarność* (*Solidarity Weekly*), in which he claims that the decline in fear among Poles has borne fundamental political significance, exerting a strong influence on the course of events. A fearful society would not have been able to achieve what took place in Poland during the Solidarity strikes in August or to participate in what has continued to unfold. In a state in which society has rid itself of fear, the apparatus of terror becomes powerless and mostly useless to the party – at least until the moment the party decides to “go the whole hog.” Admittedly, the party has decided from time to time to utilize the apparatus, as we may observe from certain events of recent weeks –

150 Translator’s Note: Felix Dzerzhinsky (1877-1926) was the founder of the *Cheka*, the early incarnation of the Soviet secret police. He was of Polish origin.

including a raid on Jacek Kuroń's apartment,¹⁵¹ an attack on a Fire Academy, and various incidents involving Solidarity vehicles from which dissidents were selling independent publications in Katowice and Wrocław. These incidents cannot be ignored, but at the same time they do not have the same significance as similar moves from earlier years. These recent shows of strength, intended to demonstrate the authorities' determination, have not aroused fear, but rather provoked protests, thus becoming the center of a public response.

So what happens to communist propaganda in a country in which society has freed itself from fear and in which the apparatus of terror cannot function as it does in other real socialist states? This is a question of great importance for any account of contemporary party propaganda. The authorities have quickly realized that the form given to it by Jerzy Łukasiewicz in the Gierek decade no longer fits the new system. After the August events, they immediately abandoned the so-called "propaganda of success" – and not only because it was no longer possible to continue the fiction, though this consideration was by no means irrelevant. From the party's point of view, this propaganda style had ceased to be functional, especially since its well-worn material often served more to put society to sleep than to mobilize it (the party tends to bet on soporific propaganda in periods of stabilization). In an article written for *Tygodnik Solidarność*, I have argued that a similar mechanism operates in both the current propaganda and its earlier version, with the sole difference being that the earlier propagandists created a positive world for display, while now they created an equally false negative world. This propaganda is aggressive, refusing to take concrete realities into account and constructing a frightening world for display. Since it can no longer depend directly on terror, it becomes a form of terror itself. Psychological terror takes the place of the earlier physical terror. If all the expanded police divisions, cohorts of secret agents, institutions whose only goal is to hold society at bay, wire taps and surveillance can no longer evoke fear, then other means and methods become necessary. Now the purpose of propaganda is to disseminate fear, thus adopting the functions of terror. Today's the propagandists from the Central Committee division responsible for such matters – together with herds of obedient executors, including journalists rustling up television news bulletins three times a day – fulfill the role of the secret police. The repulsive television news reader Mrs. Falska is the functional equivalent of Julia Brystiger, the notorious "Bloody Luna" who tortured dissidents in secret police interrogations during the Stalinist years. Mrs. Falska is the Brystiger of our times. Admittedly, she is only the pathetic instrument of somebody else's orders, a reader of texts she has not written herself. Yet

151 Translator's Note: Jacek Kuroń (1934-2004) was an important member of the democratic opposition in communist Poland. He was a co-founder of *KOR*, the Workers' Defense Committee (*Komitet Obrony Robotników*), in 1976.

public opinion has identified her with this style of propaganda. What I refer to as “interpretive excesses” precisely serve the cause of psychological terror, evoking fear and arousing states of anxiety in society. A catastrophist vocabulary and various statistical calculations are the main instruments of terror here. Numbers conveying information about losses – numbers that the Solidarity press has demonstrated to be totally false – are meant to evoke a sense of terror at the strikes. By sowing fear, the propaganda intends to call society to order, and thus to passivity and obedience. This aim is quite apparent. The propagators of a propaganda filling the function of terror are clearly working towards it (it is no secret that the hardliner Olszowski is the main driving force here, perhaps even representing a functional equivalent in the current Polish situation of the Stalinist secret police chief Jakub Berman). Once again, Poles are meant to be afraid. Aggressive propaganda based on lies, insinuations and demagoguery currently provoke above all irritation and resistance. However, these are mainly the reactions of people who have freed themselves from fear. It would be overstating the case to say that everybody in Poland has ceased to be afraid. Older people in particular are still afraid. They are afraid of everything. The experiences of their generation have taught them fear. They lived through the occupation and the years of Stalinist terror. It seems to me that the organizers of this propaganda have aimed it above all at pensioners.

7 December 1981

Symbolic Struggles

The French sociologist Pierre Bourdieu uses this term (“*lutttes symboliques*”) in his book *La Distinction* (1978). It can mean various things. In the most general sense, it represents one term in the juxtaposition between armed struggles and struggles whose instruments are various types of signs. According to this understanding, it refers above all to the attributes of the means used in the struggle, without determining the nature of the struggle itself. Hence the necessity of distinguishing two narrower meanings. We can speak of a struggle through symbols not only when we mean to juxtapose it with struggles in which the combatants use material means, but also when the emphasis falls on its very symbolic nature. At the same time – and here a new meaning emerges – the struggle through symbols does not only define the methods for waging war, but also delineates its goals to some extent. The struggle through symbols is also – and often exclusively – a struggle over symbols. The parties in the conflict are not only concerned with developing effective symbols, but also with eliminating and neutralizing the symbols used by the opponent – or even with the adoption, seizure or reconstruction of these symbols to make them more convenient for their own side.

The struggle through and over symbols has become an especially important phenomenon after December 13.¹⁵² Admittedly, it was already significant, but it has taken on a particular meaning. This is an uneven struggle for multiple reasons. The communists have at their disposal all possible means for continuing it. Symbols are by no means their only tools. They also control the entire media, which can serve to disseminate those symbols they regard as their own. Society – on the other hand – has very little beyond its symbols, which have formed spontaneously, rapidly gained popularity, and adopted a clear orientation and axiological tone. A characteristic feature of this clash with important consequences is the fact that the junta have not paid attention to the symbolic side of their own activities – even in spite of an intensive propaganda campaign. We can explain this largely through the fact that their activities have been aimed at destruction, while the “positive” element was simply meant to introduce terror. Marxism’s inability to generate anything new is a significant element here, as it has essentially become a fossil in its official form. One of the clear aims of martial law was the restoration of orthodoxy. Therefore, the junta have persisted with familiar platitudes from decades ago and – in accordance with established practice – adopted various national symbols. They have exploited national banners and anthems, while alluding to great traditions. This is nothing but a patriotic masquerade, which offends any sense of decency, as in the case of the national anthem framing General Jaruzelski’s announcement of the imposition of martial law.

In the second half of 1981, Solidarity intensified its poster propaganda, “taking to the walls” (in an allusion to one of its own slogans – “we’ll come down from the walls once we’ve appeared on the screens”). These posters generally used short texts in a very clear language, often employing verbal and visual jokes. Immediately after December 13, the junta not only destroyed all traces of this activity (teams of city workers could be seen painstakingly scraping off the inscriptions), but they also began to use these propaganda methods themselves – though such measures were completely unnecessary, since they already controlled television, radio and the press. The junta’s posters either did not make sense (e.g. “PPR Fights,” supposedly on the anniversary of the wartime Polish Workers’ Party) or were painfully awkward. For instance, Warsaw was covered for many days in sheets of paper with the following text: “If you want to support the Military Council of National Salvation, work devotedly in every position of employment.” This piece of advice in the imperative form ultimately contained no symbolic content that could stick in people’s minds. Instead, the sentence was awkwardly constructed and wordy. These posters were supposed to be a response to Solidarity’s earlier

152 Translator’s Note: On 13 December 1981, General Wojciech Jaruzelski announced the imposition of martial law in Poland. It would remain in place until 22 July 1983.

activity in this area, and thus they represented a clear manifestation of the struggle through symbols.

This appeal exposes a fundamental awkwardness. From the very first days of martial law, people immediately interpreted the acronym “WRON” – denoting the Military Council of National Salvation (*Wojskowa Rada Ocalenia Narodowego*) – as “*wrona*,” or “crow.” And so the crow became the symbol of the military authorities. In this context, the crow was the opposite of the Polish eagle, while also recalling the German “blackbird” of the occupation years.¹⁵³ Apparently, the military did not foresee this possibility, and so they themselves ended up suggesting a negative symbol to society. From the outset of martial law, people used this symbol as if it were a proper noun for the authorities (“the crow has banned,” “he’s with the crow,” “we won’t give in to the crow,” and so on through hundreds of other examples). The authorities repeated this curious error – which suggests a lack of both linguistic and social imagination – when they formed an organization called the Civil Committees for National Renewal (*Obywatelskie Komitety Odrodzenia Narodowego*) and began to use the acronym “OKON.” Before long, the “perch” (“*okoń*,” denoting the species of fish) were born. This word also gained popularity in colloquial speech at lightning speed. Characteristically, the military has not reacted to these negative symbols by referring to them. They act as if they did not exist, though they undoubtedly know about them. Clearly they do not wish to spread them further or even to acknowledge that people call them these names. At the same time, they have reacted quite differently to positive symbols, endeavoring to eliminate or dismantle them. They responded hysterically to the slogan “the winter belongs to you, but the spring belongs to us” (“*zima wasza, wiosna nasza*”). They treated the famous phrase from a song by Jan Pietrzak – “Let Poland be Poland” (“*żeby Polska była Polską*”) – in a similar fashion, even more infuriated by its appearance as the title of a prominent American television program about Poland. The propaganda is especially consistent in its condemnation of any symbols taken from the occupation years – the “V” sign of victory and the anchor symbolizing Poland’s resistance struggle against the Nazis. It is unable to oppose them with anything else, while for obvious reasons it cannot adopt them. Therefore, it can only attempt to persuade people that any use of these symbols in a period in which Poland is a sovereign and socialist country would represent an abuse worthy of the strongest condemnation. Indeed, this forms a separate and very interesting topic of discussion – namely, the use of symbols and words associated in Polish consciousness partly or exclusively with the years 1939-1945. The word “collaborator” is a clear example. The range of its meaning narrowed

153 Translator’s Note: During the Nazi occupation, Poles colloquially referred to the black eagle dominating the Nazi version of the German coat of arms as the “*gapa*,” loosely meaning “crow” or “blackbird.”

long ago to refer only to people working with the imposed authorities. Official organs have chosen not to react to this word either, while those to whom it refers often express their dissatisfaction. Czesław Bobrowski has spoken about this problem. Ryszard Manteuffel lamented at an official gathering that people were calling him a collaborator. Wojciech Żukrowski has repeatedly raised the matter – or so I have heard – on his radio program, claiming that nobody who works with the lawful authorities of his own nation can be a collaborator. “Collaborator” is a category with enormous symbolic resonance. Now it has been updated, and perhaps even intensified, while the junta can neither adopt or negate it. “Martial law” has clearly led to the reactivation of the symbolism from the occupation era. Perhaps this symbolism would not be so lively if the authorities had chosen to call the event a “state of emergency” instead.

One of the aims of the propaganda has been the neutralization of all symbols created and popularized by Solidarity over the last fifteen months. The very name of the trade union is a symbol, and thus the authorities have sought to undermine it. Among other things, they have presented Solidarity as the organization responsible for all the bad things that have happened in Poland, including the economic crisis. They have also questioned various other symbols established by Solidarity, including the monuments commemorating the massacres in Poznań and the Baltic port cities.¹⁵⁴ The response to these monuments is to be a statue of a secret policeman, which will supposedly stand in Warsaw. Kazimierz Koźniewski directly questioned the idea of monuments and the sense of raising them in an article published in *Trybuna Ludu* at the beginning of January. In his view, they play a negative role, since they memorialize conflicts between Poles. The party is powerless against a large proportion of social symbolism, which springs from religion. The party is powerless, because it can neither appropriate it – in order to falsify and disarm it – nor neutralize it by other means. From this perspective, even the removal of crosses from public places (which the authorities have done in Silesia) is of limited significance, since it in no way diminishes the symbolism of the cross.

The struggle through symbols (and over symbols) represents one of the most important components of the communication situation during martial law. It points to a lack of any communication between society and the junta. Indeed, the specific circumstances of this lack form the most characteristic element of the situation. In this struggle, society has won a clear victory, creating a highly

154 Translator’s Note: These monuments commemorated worker demonstrations that had been ruthlessly crushed by the authorities. In 1956, dozens of people died when soldiers opened fire on protesting crowds in Poznań. In 1970, dozens died and hundreds were wounded as security forces quashed demonstrations in the northern port cities of Gdynia, Gdańsk, Elbląg and Szczecin.

influential, suggestive and widely supported symbolism. In this domain, the junta – who have generally been oriented towards destruction and imposing their will – are simply powerless. If this struggle were to unfold through symbols alone, its outcome would be predetermined. Yet even victorious symbols cannot defeat terror – at least not in any brief episodes of history.

24 April 1982

The Unreliable Subject

The unreliability of the speaking subject who hides behind various official and propaganda declarations is one of the most important factors defining social communication during martial law – or, rather, defining the lack of communication. There is no doubt that the communist subject is played out and unreliable in Poland, though the broad masses of society have only recently become aware of this fact. The process of reaching this awareness has been a lengthy one, gathering strength over a period of fifteen months to reach its culmination after 13 December 1981. In social communication, what matters is not what is said, but rather who says it. This “who” may be treated as a particular person – the author of a given utterance – but also as a social group, the party, the authorities, etc. The communist subject cannot be reduced to a particular leader, ideologue or propagandist mentioned by name. Instead, it is a collective body speaking in a sanctified style and expressing the same interests, views and aims. This very subject has completely played itself out, like a card sharp who has cheated as much as possible in all previous games, while promising that he will play the next game honorably and according to the rules. At first, one closely watches the player’s hands, but later one simply refuses to play with him. Society has begun to refuse all contact with a subject who practices a kind of verbal card-sharpping, though the situation dictates that it cannot stop playing. The subject’s words have lost all credibility. They mean something different from what they are supposed to mean. They serve a different purpose than they are supposed to serve. People no longer believe the unreliable subject even when it speaks the truth. After all, truth in social communication is not merely the relation of words to reality, but also their relation to the subject. In this case, the subject is so compromised – having abused the people’s good faith so many times – that it no longer has anything in common with the truth. Once again, the analogy presents itself: people are suspicious of a card cheat even when he happens to be playing honestly. The communist subject – which has shaped its entire earlier speech (and this comprises an element of its activity) in such a way as to establish an untrustworthy image in social consciousness – has undoubtedly achieved certain short-term successes through such actions. It has achieved what it

set out to achieve. Its various deceptions – great and small – have often triumphed. However, these have been the victories of a shortsighted policy devoid of any imagination. By constantly striving for immediate success, the communist subject has destroyed itself. It has destroyed itself, because society has eventually come to understand that this unreliability is more than just an incidental affliction, but rather that it represents a constitutive feature. Years ago I wrote about totalitarian language as a communication breakdown, analyzing the problem at hand from a somewhat different point of view. Here I must note a fundamental change. The communist subject was undoubtedly as unreliable then as it is today, but people were not aware of this fact to such a significant extent. Society still took at least some of its declarations in good faith, while the tricks of propaganda had not yet been exposed to the same degree for the majority of the target audience. We might even say that by using these procedures over several decades, the communist subject has unmasked itself.

The tragedy of the situation lies in the fact that any contact with the communist subject has become impossible, though for various reasons – including geopolitical concerns – such contact is necessary. This seems to me to represent the most basic feature of social communication during martial law. This communication is by definition impossible, while remaining both inevitable and essential. The playing out of this subject has revealed itself with particular clarity after 1980. In this period, the social subject in the form of Solidarity has spoken out loud and clear, while the institutional subject of the Church has gained authority and increased the significance of its voice. The official subject has entirely played itself out, since this no longer applies only to particular individuals or even groups within the ruling elite, but to the communist subject as a whole. Anybody who wished to preserve any credibility could no longer speak in its name, while anybody who continued to do so became its typical representative. The fate of Mieczysław Rakowski offers a characteristic example here. As a journalist and editor-in-chief at *Polityka* magazine, he was clearly not a played out subject – or at least not entirely played out – though he often wrote things that were far removed from anything that social opinion could support. He remained somewhat credible, because he avoided the most blatant lies and tried to justify his theses in a rational manner. However, over the last year, he has played himself out completely. A subject has emerged from his utterances with the same lack of credibility as any other representatives of the regime. In fact, this is a matter of broader concern. For years Rakowski passed as a so-called party liberal. Accordingly, people received his voice in a different manner in comparison to their interpretation with the more hardline and orthodox voices. Now a fundamental change has taken place. Positions have polarized to such an extent that the basic opposition between the communists and society has taken on crucial significance, while any differences

among communists have become less important and less perceptible. Being a communist or collaborating with the regime at all (even in a so-called positive or non-party manner) immediately means being treated as an unreliable subject. This also applies to scholars who maneuvered for years to carry out the party's directives while simultaneously striving to interiorize – at least to some extent – the opinions of society. Previously, people treated any subject as credible when he or she expressed at least minimally what society considered as valuable or true, even in a context that it could not accept. In recent years, society has raised the criteria for credibility. This has been fundamentally significant for the processes of communication. Yet the party has not reacted at all to this lifting of expectations. Indeed, what might once have seemed to be a reaction has turned out to be another deception, a game of appearances or a fraud. Martial law has intensified this unreliability and entirely exposed it.

27 April 1982

The Authorities Speak about Themselves

During a conference devoted to newspeak at Jagiellonian University in February last year, Jerzy Bralczyk gave a paper on the authorities' self-image. Regrettably, I have not yet had the opportunity to acquaint myself with this work, so I might perhaps find myself repeating his arguments. Nevertheless, this question is so important and interesting that it is worth taking the risk. The decisive turning point was August 1980, and not December 13. This was the case because the ruling clique was forced to defend its positions and decisions from social critique, while also seeking legitimacy and trying to persuade society that it represented the rightful authorities elected by the Polish people and the only group that could manage their affairs. Immediately a characteristic fact strikes us here. In arguments of this kind, the word "authorities" appears instead of "government." This makes sense, since "authority" has no precise legal definition within the communist system. Authority does not belong to the state administration. Instead, its main proprietor is the party. Hence the need arose to use a suitably capacious and general word. Accordingly, "the authorities" is a synonym for the phrase "the party and the government." In times when they have not felt threatened, the authorities – thus understood – have created their own image in a paternalistic style. Poles are to work conscientiously, while those in managerial positions perform the leading role, thus fulfilling the mission of the party. These party leaders oversee the growing prosperity, giving advice and instructions. In short, they are the good fathers of the Polish family. This paternalistic style dominated the conduct of Edward Gierek, who constantly sought to create the image of a gracious lord, solicitous and benevolent, though

issuing admonitions and reprimands where necessary. This style had no chance of surviving once various social conflicts emerged from their state of latency. It collapsed together with Gierek's leadership, and any attempts to revive it after August 1980 have been anachronous. This collapse has borne significant consequences, for it has led to a certain hesitation and uncertainty in the behavior of the highest representatives of the authorities. This has clearly manifested itself in Stanisław Kania's style (especially in the early months of his secretariat).

Since August, the authorities have not abandoned these earlier attributes, though they have been forced to speak about some of them in different ways. This is understandable, since things have changed to such an extent that being an "authority" is no longer self-evident, but requires at least some minimal justification. Accordingly, the propaganda now asserts that the authorities are legitimate because in 1944-45 the Polish people chose the socialist path of development. In formulating such a thesis, the authorities entirely ignore the historical memory of society, which knows very well what this "choice" really looked like. Yet this is not the only problem, for this attitude also expresses the conviction that people make choices forever and with no possibility of revising them. Since Poles supposedly chose the socialist authorities in 1944, they have no right to change their decision. Here we find two characteristics of the authorities' post-August way of speaking about themselves. Firstly, it is based on fictions, and thus – at least for this reason – it is devoid of any conative linguistic attributes. We might even say that only a clique representing a system that could not be justified in any other way would use such arguments. Of course, the communist authorities do not raise the only genuine argument – namely, Soviet patronage. This is not permissible under any circumstances, since the authorities have no wish to unmask themselves, even if this would only mean confirming the obvious. Secondly, the authorities speak and think about themselves as immutable, inviolable and given once for all. Since they have ruled for thirty years, they must continue to rule. Such are the pronouncements of history. Indeed, evocations of history are typical of this style of thought (especially when there is a lack of justification in the present).

The next important element is the identification of these particular authorities with the state. After the announcement of martial law, the cult of the state reached previously unknown dimensions. Ultimately, this has amounted to a cult of the current authorities, their manner of ruling, their decisions and generally everything associated with them. Consequently, any criticism of the authorities means criticizing the state or acting against its interests – an unpatriotic deed. The authorities not only represent the state, but they become the very embodiment of Polish statehood.

Identified with the state, the authorities speak about themselves as something separate from society, entirely independent and not emanating from the people.

In doing so, they must ignore the subject of elections. The authorities do not exist because society elected or appointed them. Indeed, the rulers make no reference to this fiction (apart from the abovementioned function of historical choice). This is clearly not through any consciousness of the fictional nature of elections, but rather because it would have been difficult to do so after August, since so many of those who had received almost one hundred percent of votes were removed from offices and positions. While they were busy stripping people of their seats, the argument of elections might have been awkward or ambiguous – especially since the issue here was not the election of particular people, but rather of the mythologized “authorities” in the most general terms. Admittedly, they were always supposed to be associated with certain figures known by name, but they were never entirely reducible to them. The authorities were supposed to be associated with order and concern for national affairs. Characteristically, this did not only apply to the team operating at the very top, but also to local teams – as we may observe from the defense of a group of corrupt dignitaries in Bielsko-Biała during the strike in early 1981. All authority is sacred and sanctifies those who are part of it. Society has no right to dismiss them. Indeed, it appears that one may not take this possibility into account at all. Moreover, any form of social pressure on the authorities is by its very nature reprehensible. Under no circumstances can the authorities accept such pressure. Therefore, the official press wrote on many occasions between August and 13 December 1980 that various people were trying to coerce the authorities or exert pressure on them, etc. The authorities must be uninhibited in every situation. They must operate in accordance with their own unconstrained will. Nobody has a right to disrupt them. According to this vision of the world, the authorities do not exist for society, but – on the contrary – society exists for the authorities. Any social activity that does not conform with the authorities’ intentions becomes hostile activity.

We must emphasize this fact with particular clarity. The authorities never speak of themselves as a function of society, and therefore they do not admit the possibility that society might ever dismiss them. The months of Solidarity saw the formation of a crucial opposition between “governmental” and “social” (the word “governmental” [“rządowe”] appeared probably because there is no Polish adjective derivable from the noun “authorities”). Everything the authorities say about themselves – and the manner in which they say it – confirms the legitimacy of this opposition. When they feel like it, they may conduct a dialogue with society, but they will never admit that they are society’s *porte-parole* or that they express its interests. Here the idea itself suggests that the authorities’ speech may reveal not only alienation, but also the mentality of invaders. This is apparent in various kinds of official announcements, in the style of propaganda, and generally in any other documents recording their positions and views. Historians will doubtless

elucidate this phenomenon with more precision than we can do today, though even now its outline is clear enough. This manner of speech is not only typical of dictatorial authority that aims to subjugate society, but also of archaic authority in its most basic form – feudalism. This type of authority assumes, as the basis of its existence, that the monarchy is immutable. Any forms that power takes within it must be independent of the will of the subjects. Therefore, the authorities in communist Poland have formed a feudal style of speaking about themselves, a style that reveals their fundamental features.

29 April 1982

The Modal Frame in Propaganda Speech

In speaking of propaganda speech, I have in mind the propaganda being employed here and now, though what I shall write might apply to all propaganda, at least in the era of the mass media. The following sentence takes the form of an affirmative statement and is supposed to refer to reality: “The call of the ‘Solidarity’ underground and hostile foreign radio stations for general street protests on August 31 has not been heeded by the working class.” Yet ultimately the sentence does not refer to reality. If it were to appear in a text of any other sort, its modal frame would look something like this: “I state that the case is such.” In communist propaganda, the same frame seems to appear, but in fact it is entirely different in nature. Here we are dealing not with a statement of verifiable fact, but rather with the imposition of a certain opinion, assessment or interpretation. We might phrase it in various ways. The authorities desire that the case be such. The authorities have decided that the case is such. The authorities have ordained, determined, established, etc. The phrase “I state,” which belongs to the modal frame, has essentially been subordinated to a different verb, which serves to establish a particular state of things rather than to describe it, thus expressing more or less indirectly a wish or desire. This bears consequences of extraordinary significance. I shall briefly examine three of them.

First of all, this use of the modal frame in affirmative propaganda statements means that assertion is always pseudo-assertion. We might almost say that we were dealing here with quasi-affirmative statements that are affirmative only from the purely formal point of view, but different with respect to semantic structure and function. Those who refer to the creative objectives of communist propaganda and see in them its primary characteristic might find a fundamental argument here. The sentence cited above says nothing about what happened on August 31 (nor on November 10, though a significant number of workers really did ignore the calls to protest on that day). Instead, it merely demonstrates that the authorities would

like the workers to be deaf to the appeals of Solidarity. This modal frame applies to all propaganda sentences, and not only to those that are blatantly deceptive. We might say that the pseudo-assertion in propaganda speech destroys even those sentences that might be regarded as sentences about reality.

Secondly, the only subject to appear in the modal frame is the authorities, who are furnished with such great power that they can establish what is real and unreal. They are not only omnipotent, but omniscient, refusing to accept that their statements about the world could be in any way restricted, even by the direct objects of these statements. From this perspective, we might say that one of the authorities' prerogatives is precisely an assertion of this magical power. The ruler is not just a dictator, but also a shaman or grand magus. He can say that there is a drought while it is pouring with rain (or vice versa). He can say anything, with no regard for the direct experience of the people he addresses. As the subject of the modal frame, the authorities presuppose a form of radical anti-empiricism. The experiences of society are irrelevant. If they come into conflict with the authorities' claims – which happens in the vast majority of cases – these experiences must be dispersed, disavowed, shattered and subjected to arbitrary interpretation. Once this has taken place, the desired normalization ensues. This forced obedience is the work not only of the censor, but also of the whole apparatus of terror. The riot police officer – though he might even be semi-literate – is a co-author of the party's propaganda discourse. Furthermore, when I say that the authorities are the true subject of the modal frame determining the nature of the propaganda, I am suggesting neither that the phenomenon is restricted to the utterances of those who directly belong to the ruling clique nor that anybody who makes propaganda statements is a member of this clique. Quite simply, every communist propagandist speaks in the name of the authorities, from their position and for their benefit. In this respect, there is no difference between the first secretary or any other gray eminence and an author of trivial propaganda pieces under the command of the Central Committee's press department. From this perspective, the subject of the authorities is a collective subject.

Thirdly, the constant pseudo-assertions and attributions of shamanic power to this subject have led to a situation that I have observed for years – a breakdown in communication. Both these factors have ensured that propaganda messages are treated *a priori* as unreliable and deceptive, while the authorities do not differentiate propaganda from any other form of speech, since everything they do is subject to propaganda. One of the primary successes of the social movement in the months in which Solidarity operated officially and freely was in making the majority of society aware of this fact. In 1968, the students shouted "the press is lying." They had learned this literally from their own experience, but they were not able to do anything constructive with this obvious fact. In fact, they did

not succeed in going far beyond it. Now both students and other social groups (including some of the workers) know incomparably more on this subject. This knowledge is dangerous to the regime, because it leaves the propaganda – and the regime depends on propaganda as it does on terror – idling in neutral gear. It whirls round with increasing intensity, but it cannot budge from its present position or achieve its goals.

23 November 1982

From Populism to Statism

Here I would like to reflect on a fundamental transformation of communist propaganda in Poland. In the initial period of the People's Republic of Poland (until the mid-1960s), especially in the earliest years, a populist attitude prevailed. The essence of communism lay in the fact that the people had liberated themselves through it, taken the place of the bourgeoisie, become the dominant group in society, and then – of course – begun to rule. The authorities legitimated themselves by appeals to the people, since they could show no other form of legitimacy. Hence the standard phrase of the time – “the people's authorities.” This propaganda worked to some extent, but people quickly – or even immediately – realized how false it was. I am not sure exactly when the phrase “the owners of People's Poland” first appeared, but it must have been early, since it was already nothing new by the time of the political unrest in October 1956. Later, as the new elite grew stronger and more stable, populist motifs declined, though they never entirely disappeared. Indeed, the authorities have continued to exploit them, though in a very particular way. Before I discuss this in more detail, I would like to pause over the question of the distinct changes that the propaganda underwent in the second half of the 1960s. At the time, it seemed that nationalism would replace populism as the dominant orientation. The nation was slowly taking the place of the people. During the unrest of March 1968, the nationalist component in communist propaganda shifted into a dominant position and took control of other elements. However, it soon turned out that this component could never become the overriding factor – not only because the nationalist communist demagogues led by Mieczysław Moczar failed to reach the highest positions of power, but above all because they had no chance in a country with internationalist obligations and real allies. Even in its satellite version – the only variety known to communist propaganda – nationalism could become an irritation to the Soviet Union. Therefore, it was no surprise that nationalist motifs soon faded into the background, though they are still employed where necessary – as we may observe from the activities of the pro-regime nationalist “Grunwald” organization. Populism no longer suits the ruling

class's way of thinking, while nationalism is potentially dangerous. Yet statism – or, as I prefer to call it, state worship – is neither outmoded nor dangerous. Admittedly, it has existed within the propaganda discourse of People's Poland from the beginning, though it has tended to occupy an inferior position, seldom evoked or appearing only on special occasions. It began to play an increasingly significant role in the Gierek-era propaganda of success, but it only became dominant after the advent of Solidarity. According to the official interpretation, the great social movement was breaking down the state and planning to destroy it. The mission of the communist authorities was to prevent this destructive action. "Social" and "state" became antonyms. The state was treated as if it were communist property. In fact, the communists had absolute control over its structures, even when its control over society had diminished enormously. In statist propaganda – and this seems to be the most important fact – the state is treated in a very particular way. In this case, the authorities have identified the state with its current real socialist form, as if this were not subject to any question or change – as if it were eternal. There was also a strange identification of the state and the authorities, understood here as ruling clique of the moment. The state is its legitimate property, instead of being an emanation of society. When Jerzy Turowicz wrote in the Catholic *Tygodnik Powszechny* (*Universal Weekly*) that a strong state has the support of its citizens, this obvious statement met with so-called "resistance" from party journalists. After all, the state is not for the citizens, but above them. They are to submit to the state. In fact, this is their only task, as any other action will be interpreted as anti-state. The state is the first and only value, since the state means "us" – not even the party, but the party's current ruling faction, the military and the security services. This kind of statism does not pose a threat to the statism of the neighboring superpower. Not only does it not undermine the statism of the Soviet Union, but it cannot do so (as Hélène Carrère d'Encausse has showed in her book *Stalin, l'ordre par la terreur*, the statist trend in propaganda began to dominate only after Stalin). We may treat the current Polish statism as an adaptation of the Soviet model, or even as one of its copies. In the world of statist propaganda, the mythology of the people cannot play a significant role. The fundamental values are represented by those who control the mechanisms of the state: in other words, by the authorities broadly understood, and not by those who are subject to them. Therefore, this popular mythology presently occupies a marginal position, belonging more to the armory of demagogical tricks used to play – or even to set – one group against another. Populist motifs – usually in demagogically egalitarian form – serve to manipulate public feeling, appealing to the darkest resentments and frustrations or to the most impoverished social groups (the bricklayer turned politician Albin Siwak specialized in this tactic).

4 February 1984

The Writings of First Secretaries

The writings of party leaders appear in enormous print runs while they are in power. Anthologies are published, while speeches are printed not only in the press, but also in separate brochures. The publishing house “Książka i Wiedza” (“Book and Knowledge”) specializes in publishing the works of the general (or first) secretaries of fraternal parties. The avid reader may reach not only for successive volumes of Brezhnev, but also for extensive selections of the writings – printed in hardcover editions and on excellent paper – of Yumjaagiin Tsedenbal or Kim Il-sung. General Wojciech Jaruzelski released his first (and so far only) volume into the world last year. Official party organs publish reviews of these books, emphasizing the significance and gravity of the ideas contained within them. Yet when the “gensec” – or general secretary – leaves the political stage, his texts immediately cease to count. Nobody refers to them and they fall into oblivion, though the hefty volumes fill the shelves of bookstores for years to come. The one exception to this rule is Lenin. Mao Zedong was revered as a god, but the authorities withdrew his “little red book” shortly after his death. Chinese children probably no longer have to learn its verses by heart. Doubtless these volumes will turn out to be valuable documents for future historians of newspeak. In the end, they represent collections of the textual matrices that were uncritically replicated by the entire communist propaganda in certain periods on a national or – as in the case of the Soviet leaders – even global scale. At least some of these texts played an important role in the formation of newspeak and influenced its evolution.

Yet here I am interested in another question – namely, the swift invalidation of these texts. In communism, a strange rule applies. The only texts that count are those by figures regarded as classics – since they were there at the beginning, participating in the birth of the new communist world – and texts by current leaders. Everything in between falls into oblivion and irrelevance. Only dogma and absolute topicality count. Perhaps because there is no continuity of tradition in communism, there can only be mythical time and the present. The first secretary has no need to evoke either his nearest or most distant predecessors. For Jaruzelski today, the writings of Bierut, Gomułka and Gierek – lovingly published in multiple volumes – are irrelevant. If at certain moments he recalls something from them (like the passages from Gomułka’s speeches after the announcement of martial law), it is only because one passage or another might sound topical in a particular instant. This forgetting of one’s predecessors’ works has a deeper meaning. The communists constantly aspire to create their own official history, their own form of sacred history. In this pious project, documents are superfluous. Indeed, they might only get in the way. Above all, this history needs a contemporary authority. Even if the current gensec repeats word for word what his predecessor has already

declared, this does not matter in the least. What matters is that the person who is presently in power has said it. Continuity does not count here. Yet in certain cases the communist leaders do not limit their creative work to strictly political texts. Mao was not the only one among them to write poetry. Brezhnev – who never tired of new honors – also wanted to appear in the role of a literary writer. He published several volumes of memoirs (he probably did not write them himself). In his lifetime, these volumes received a lot of publicity and were treated as literary events (they were soon translated into Polish), disseminated in all possible ways. An ardent composer – the subject of an article by Adam Kruczek in *Kultura* magazine – even cobbled together an oratorio in which she used the general secretary's texts. And yet today, less than two years after the literary leader's death, they have sunk into oblivion. They have probably become irrelevant even to those who once acclaimed them as the latest achievements of Soviet literature.

3 June 1984

Marcolf and Newspeak

Beyond the reach of the censor, an underground press has published fragments of Khrushchev's memoir, comprising a translation only of those episodes that have appeared in Russian in the United States (thus far the whole volume is only available in English translation). We have received a text that is fascinating and remarkable for many reasons. Above all, the very fact that the communist leader (even after being removed from power) would feel the need to compile this account is extraordinary. The autobiographical writings of party secretaries published during their lifetimes are nothing but mind-numbing propaganda brochures (for instance, those of Brezhnev or Maurice Thorez, though in the latter case the real author of the autobiography was a communist journalist named Jean Freville, who only revealed the truth years later). Khrushchev's account is different. Admittedly, he speaks from the position of a communist and a supporter of Soviet power, delighted by the annexation of the Baltic states and the eastern Polish borderlands. Nevertheless, his text departs significantly from the communist standard line. His narrative is a typical narrative of an uneducated person, a primitive narrative. As I read these memoirs, they kept reminding me of the stories from the slums of Mexico and Puerto Rico recorded in the wonderful books of Oscar Lewis. Khrushchev is incapable of constructing a story, balancing perspectives between the main narrative and the merely episodic, while avoiding repetition. From this point of view, his tale is clearly a peasant story, the account of a village head man thrown into big-world politics. In speaking for himself, unofficially, Khrushchev could not use the models of communist speech that took the decisive

role in his language while he was a functionary and dignitary. Indeed, even back then he had violated these models, as Solzhenitsyn would later write. He could not use these models, since communism had never developed a narrative style within its language. Its speech represents either ideological discourse, attacks on opponents or didactics. In newspeak it is difficult to tell a story, since this style of speech is not adapted to the expression of concrete realities or the personal experiences of the speaker. Of course, in communist states, people still write variants of reportage, which is not a typical genre for newspeak. Nevertheless, the element of newspeak still manifests itself in reportage, though generally in those passages marked by ideological generalization or didactic moralizing (in the Stalinist era, writers developed a truly socialist realist form of reportage, but it tended merely to reflect the mannerisms of contemporary literary fiction – as in a reportage series released in the mid-1950s under the title “Library of the Labor Leaders”). Therefore, the rules for talking about concrete realities limited the scope for newspeak in Khrushchev’s text. The second important limiting factor is the uncontrolled Marcolfianism and spontaneous folkishness so characteristic of Khrushchev. When we examine this narrative in generic or stylistic categories, we might even say that it derives from the peasant yarn. Admittedly, this quality also shone through in the speeches (or at least in some of them) he gave when he was the gensec. But here it finds full expression. Marcolfianism implies at least to some extent the free play of language to question rituals, while newspeak excludes this possibility. This does not mean that there is no newspeak in these memoirs, since such an absence would border on the miraculous. One cannot so easily free oneself from the influence of a language one has used for decades. Khrushchev does not seem to make any particular effort in this direction. Indeed, he might be entirely incapable of doing so, since he is not fully conscious of the problem. Above all, newspeak appears in those episodes in which he speaks about ideology and attempts to examine the facts from a more general perspective. It is a strange paradox that newspeak has become his “intellectual language.”

17 June 1984

Czech Newspeak, Polish Newspeak

Newspeak is the *lingua communis* of communism. Like any language with such a broad range, it breaks down into local dialects. In the end, it must not only fit the Soviet center, but also meet local needs, which – despite systemic homogeneity – are to some extent distinctive. Here I am interested in the problems raised by Czech author Petr Fidelius’s original and profound book *Language and Power* (*Jazyk a moc*, 1983). Reading it has brought many things to my attention. The

author concentrates above all on the party's ideological discourse, seeing this as the most significant phenomenon and showing how this discourse forms a reason for the semantic inflation of language. The aim here is to reveal the party's way of thinking, which conceals itself behind discourse. Fidelius brilliantly achieves his goal of depicting the mental world of propaganda. The Polish communists' universe of ideas and notions is identical or very similar, though it would be impossible to write a comparable book here, as this kind of discourse plays a negligible role in Polish reality and in Polish newspeak (and thus in Polish propaganda). Ultimately, it only comes out on special occasions, even in the party press. Fidelius bases his observations largely on articles published in the Czech *Rudé Právo* newspaper, which includes a great many ideological screeds – incomparably more than in the Polish *Trybuna Ludu*. This difference appears to be of fundamental significance, though we certainly cannot establish on this basis that the PZPR is much more pragmatically oriented party than the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia. This would be a false conclusion. The striking difference (which does not simply derive from Fidelius's perspective, or at least not exclusively from it) is a consequence of certain differences that still exist between Poland and Czechoslovakia. Ideological discourse disintegrated in Poland as early as the 1970s, and thus far it has not managed to reassemble itself, while in Czechoslovakia it returned to canonical status after the turmoil of the Prague Spring. This return is a manifestation and a result of what communist jargon refers to as “normalization.” Propaganda can popularize the principles of doctrine and use them as the basis for everything it says about the most diverse subjects. This is even the case when the party feels like the sole master of the situation, when it has no need to polemicize with enemies, when it is completely certain that society will accept its revelations as binding declarations. Such propaganda is in equal measure a co-producer and product of normalization. This is also the case because the more passive society becomes – and thus the more “normalized” – the less contact the propaganda requires with reality. Therefore, ideological discourse can be a completely open domain of uninhibited fiction – or, as Fidelius describes it, of fairy tale. His thesis that politics begins to resemble a fairy tale from the perspective of propaganda seems to me to be particularly revealing and profound. It begins to resemble a fairy tale, because it explains social and especially political phenomena as individual. Accordingly, a murderous system is not to blame for Stalinism, but the evil nature of the almighty tsar. Errors do not spring from the system in general, but rather they form individual cases, epiphenomena that have no influence on the system itself (for instance, they result from the fact that certain officials are not working properly). Here there is no difference between the Czech and Polish forms of newspeak. In Poland, this style of fairy tale perhaps reveals itself even more clearly, especially in the philippics directed against various enemies. As I read Fidelius's

book, I realized that one of the fundamental components of Czech propaganda had a precise equivalent in Gierek-era Poland – namely, the assumption that once the capitalist class had been eliminated from social, economic and political life the whole society would have only common interests (and the advocate of these interests – as *Rudé Právo* emphasizes very clearly – is the party). Therefore, no conflicts can have any justification and if there is any criticism of the authorities, then it is groundless. In the latter half of 1980, the party was forced to reject this idyllic assumption – which the authorities had exploited so powerfully during the Gierek decade – since it had become fatal. In any case, at a time of strikes and open conflict, it simply sounded ridiculous. Such an assumption can only function in years regarded by the communists as normal. In summary, the Czechoslovakian communist propaganda described by Fidelius already exists in the context of a normalized society, while the propaganda of the Polish party does not. The Czech scholar does not draw any attention to the immediate circumstances of the propaganda discourse or to its pragmatic dimension. An analysis of Polish newspeak cannot ignore these factors, since despite the intensifying terror and the complete lack of regard for society's wishes, the Polish communist party's propaganda cannot resort (even now!) to the domination of purely ideological discourse. Therefore, in a certain sense, it is more "pragmatic," though this is an extremely odd form of "pragmatism." I would put the case as follows: the party can make general ideological statements, but only when they are polemical. Accordingly, it is unable – in spite of everything – to liberate itself entirely from all contact with the external world, though it constantly aspires to this very form of liberation.

28 June 1985

Old Communists and Newspeak

Teresa Torañska's book *Them (Oni)*, (1985) is not only a historical record of the highest class, but it also makes for fascinating reading. This journalist has come up with a wonderful idea and brilliantly succeeds in realizing it. As she sets about interviewing seven former communist worthies (Edward Ochab, Roman Werfel, Stanisław Staszewski, Wiktor Kłosiewicz, Leon Chajn, Julia Mincowa and Jakub Berman), she takes an active – sometimes even aggressive – stance, provoking them and questioning their self-proclaimed acts of faith. In doing so, she forces them to throw off the masks they have been so eager to wear. This magnificent book also interests me from the perspective of newspeak. Do these old communists nearing the end of their lives (in fact, two of them, Chajn and Berman, died shortly after the interviews) – who were removed from power decades ago and condemned even

by their political disciples and successors – still use newspeak? We cannot give any unequivocal answer to this question. Mincowa's utterances are certainly the most thoroughly ensconced in newspeak, as she is unable to attain any perspective whatsoever on the actions of the clique to which she belonged with her husband, Hilary Minc. Her world is still the fossilized world of the Stalinist era. Yet she is also the least politically significant and clearly the most idiotic of the seven. Her statements are interesting more as a cultural record documenting how the elite of the time lived and as an almost implausible testimony to the communist mentality. In the other cases, which are ultimately more significant, things are more complex. Undeniably, these politicians – who exited the stage in infamy during the years of de-Stalinization – have remained faithful to the ideological language of communism, which represents one of the components of their faith. Indeed, they do so as if it were impossible to express this faith in any other way, as if it had merged for centuries to come with the forms of expression codified by Lenin and Stalin. There is no possibility here of any hiatus between dogma and its verbalization. Faithfulness to dogma is faithfulness to the language in which it expresses itself in doctrinal form. Unsurprisingly, there are a great many idioms of various kinds. Sometimes the interviewees use the characteristically fossilized expressions of party speech quite unconsciously. For instance, Berman, who detested Piłsudski until the end of his life, calls him “Mr. Piłsudski” every time he mentions him, as if he were not talking about a historical figure (in this language, “Mr.” is a sign of distance and disapproval). This may well be a trivial detail, but we encounter a great many of these characteristic trivialities throughout the book. Despite the strong role of communist language, we cannot say that these functionaries from bygone years answer Torańska's questions in newspeak. It would seem that several factors are responsible for this state of affairs. Above all, the pragmatic situation in which they find themselves does not favor its use. Communists generally do not give interviews unless they wish to make official declarations, while these interviews were conceived from the outset as unofficial. The interviewer not only asks questions, but also goes on the attack. Unless they wanted it to become a pure fiction, the subjects could not verbalize their defense in newspeak. If these Stalinist politicians had used newspeak, it would have demonstrated a desire to brush the journalist aside, and thus to wriggle out of any genuine conversation. Yet this is not what happened. The interviews became a kind of chance for them as well, especially since they had no other opportunities to speak in public. They could say something about their political past, refute any opinions they regarded as damaging or wrong, while paradoxically showing themselves in their communist roles, thus confirming them in one way or another. Another important element is the fact that Torańska's interlocutors – especially those who played leading roles, like Ochab or Berman – often speak about subjects

that are officially forbidden. Above all, these include the Russian attitude towards Poland, pressures from Moscow, the role of Soviet specialists, and so on. All of them are pro-Soviet, though they try to emphasize that they always represented Polish interests, endeavoring to limit Soviet intervention to a bare minimum. This forms part of the struggle to protect their good names and public images for posterity. There is absolutely no way for them to conduct this struggle by means of newspeak, especially in this type of situation. Newspeak is associated with an extraordinarily clear and ossified axiology. Any violation of this axiology means a violation of newspeak and its ruling principles. The facts are quite another matter, ultimately connected with the question of value judgments. Newspeak is a language that finds itself at the opposite pole from any objective conveying of the facts. It serves to evaluate events, but it cannot depict them. All the interlocutors (perhaps apart from the indefatigable Mincowa) speak about facts of some kind, conscious that they were the co-creators of history and thus desiring to convey their own truths about it. The opinions they express are in many cases undeniably false, but – in spite of everything – they still refer in some way to facts. Here newspeak has no role to play.

I have pointed to only a few of the issues that emerge from the pages of this brilliant and singular book, which reveals the outlandish mental world of the people who brought communism to Poland. All of them share this mental world – even Staszewski, the only one of Torańska's interlocutors who no longer believes in communism.

23 November 1985

13. An Account of the Papal Visit

1.

Even newspeak – as schematized and well ordered as it may appear to be – has its adventures. It is not always doomed to the everyday routine, but it may also speak about extraordinary things undreamt of even by the prophets, though suddenly real. The pope's journey around Poland in 1979 undoubtedly represents one of these events. The official press could not ignore it, yet any writing on this subject brought the risk of various kinds of indignities. The main focus of this article will be precisely the descriptions and accounts of the papal visit that appeared in Polish daily and weekly newspapers (excluding the Catholic press, which reported much more extensively and in a different manner, as well as any other publications beyond the censor's reach). I have drawn the basic material for my reflections from around a dozen daily newspaper editions from 15 May to 15 June 1979 and from weeklies published between 15 May and the end of June. This cross-section of material will allow me to examine the preparations for the visit, the progress reports and summations, while also revealing the fundamental features of these publications.

First of all, the whole cycle of articles was written according to preordained directives flowing from above in a set of instructions with binding power to regulate even the most minute details. Apart from certain interpretive articles, which usually included general ideological statements (also written according to the same template), the Polish Press Agency provided all the materials that subsequently appeared in the various press publications. Even newspapers based in the cities visited by the pope used these materials. Consequently, the key point is not the differences between the individual publications, but – on the contrary – the extreme homogeneity perceptible even in the choice of specific words and phrases. When it comes to the manipulation of language, this highly developed uniformity is evidently not a matter of indifference, but represents one of the clearest manifestations of the phenomenon.

Secondly, these accounts of the papal visit, which constituted – as I shall attempt to demonstrate – a prime example of the manipulation of information and speech, generally avoided blatant lies. The reports did not describe events that never took place, but rather conveyed partial information, selecting it according to an established scale of relevance that often came into conflict not only with general sentiments, but also with common sense. This manipulation was founded

on a very specific apportioning of emphasis, the selection of facts to be discussed or ignored, and the imposition of interpretations. Information molded in this manner became disinformation – even though nothing appeared in these press reports that did not really take place and the summaries of the pope’s statements included nothing that he did not really say. The press was free of outright lies, but it still created a decidedly false vision of events.

Thirdly, another peculiar feature of the manipulation in the press accounts of the pope’s visit was that it took place at a time when society was by no means cut off from information. Anybody who wanted information could get hold of it without much difficulty. Above all, millions of people directly participated in the celebrations associated with the pope’s stay in Poland. The Catholic press reported on these events extensively and in great detail. International radio stations broadcasting in Polish also provided an excellent news service. Yet the interpretive manipulation that took place in this very particular situation was not mere art for art’s sake. Even if one wished to regard it as madness, one would have to concede that it was a methodical madness. The aim of this manipulation was to impose an official interpretation and to create the binding framework in which this remarkable event could be placed. Perhaps most importantly, it aimed not to clash with the style of propaganda discourse that the authorities had been shaping for years according to certain easily reproducible rules.

2.

A characteristic phenomenon for manipulation in general – and especially in the case under discussion here – is the attempt to compose a dominant text, uniform down to the smallest details, which would then make any individual report or interpretation impossible. Here we find one of the fundamental characteristics of newspeak (and of linguistic manipulation): the operation of textual matrices. A textual matrix is a kind of utterance that becomes a binding pattern for speech within a certain period of time, a model copied by everybody who makes official statements on a given subject. Textual matrices usually come from the speeches of the leaders, which are then developed, interpreted and – above all – watered down by the exegetes and popularizers. In the case of the papal visit, we are partly dealing with this phenomenon. The vocabulary and tone of official statements connected with Cardinal Wojtyła’s election as pope was defined in the initial cable from the communist authorities after the announcement of the conclave results. In this dispatch, the authorities use the word “satisfaction” to define the Polish response to this event. Later the same word appeared in association with the preparations for the papal visit to Poland. Two months before his arrival, a

programmatic article appeared in *Trybuna Ludu* (*The People's Tribune*) with the following lead paragraph:

The announcements made by the Episcopal Secretariat and the Polish Press Agency regarding Pope John Paul II's planned visit to our country in June this year have been received by society with interest and satisfaction.¹⁵⁵

“Satisfaction” became the obligatory word that official sources always repeated in discussions of the attitude of Poles towards the new pope. Of course, textual matrices are not primarily concerned with specific words, though these are by no means irrelevant. The aim of such texts is to impose the general direction of argumentation, as well as the scope and general tone of any utterances on a given subject.

However, the representatives of the highest authorities – the main authors of the textual matrices – never commented on papal subjects like the June visit extensively enough to form an adequate model for speech. To some extent, the articles published in *Trybuna Ludu* set the tone, but they, too, turned out not to provide a model fully answering the requirements. Therefore, the most important factor ensuring the uniformity of texts on the papal visit was apparently the detailed set of instructions that defined – according to the testimony of those who encountered them – even the most insignificant details. These directions indicated which facts were to be emphasized and which were to be ignored. They included advice on which words authors should use and which were prohibited (I shall discuss the words on this list later on). In general terms, they imposed modes of speech.¹⁵⁶ The aim of this homogeneous discourse of propaganda – undisturbed in even the most minor detail – was to create the obligatory version of the papal pilgrimage to Poland. This was quite clearly its primary task, but by no means its only one. Ensuring the general continuity of propaganda discourse also formed an important element. This continuity concerned not only utterances about the pope, but also the consistent application of propaganda rules that had developed over decades. There was a clear effort to ensure that speech about the pilgrimage of John Paul II might cohere with the obligatory propaganda style. Reports about this extraordinary event could not violate its principles in any way. They had to fit within the generally accepted framework. The interpretation regarded as the only correct or admissible interpretation dominated any reporting of the facts.

155 “Państwo i Kościół,” *Trybuna Ludu* 106 (10-11 May 1979). This article was part of an initial cycle of publications that began to appear once it became clear that the papal visit would come to fruition. See also: Rakowski, Mieczysław, “Interes nadrzędny,” *Polityka* 10 (10 March 1979).

156 The instructions were not limited to linguistic facts. Photographic material was also subject to manipulation (not to mention television broadcasts), though the analysis of these particular questions falls beyond the purview of this article.

Indeed, this interpretation formed the basic order superior to any factual accounts. As early as the first half of May, articles were appearing in the press with the aim of preparing Polish society ideologically for the papal visit.¹⁵⁷ Some of them did not mention the event directly. Instead, they referred to relations between the state and the Church, or between the state and the Vatican. An important element within them was often an abstract ideological exposition assuring people that the visit would change nothing in the prevailing ideology, which was based on scientific principles and would remain unwaveringly materialist. The same tendency appeared in *Notatnik Lektora* (*The Teacher's Journal*): the pope's visit would be a manifestation of traditional Polish tolerance, but it would not imply any change in worldview.¹⁵⁸ Of course, the goals of this type of declaration might seem rather puzzling. Apparently, there were two of them. The statements were intended to announce to one group of people that if they pinned any expectations to this visit, they would be bitterly disappointed. At the same time, they informed another group that they need not fear that the visit would change anything in their daily routine or place any strain on the dominant ideology.

In these preparatory articles, certain theses persistently recurred. Contact with the Vatican had become possible thanks to the fact that the Church had undergone a significant evolution from the pontificate of John XXIII. It had become a supporter of reform and peaceful politics. Here the various articles usually mentioned the Polish communist leader Edward Gierek's visit to Paul VI. In articles immediately before June 2, slightly more specific details appeared, though general ideological discourse continued to occupy the dominant position. Characteristically, they observed one principle with cast-iron consistency – namely, they discussed the pope's visit as an isolated fact separate from the entirety of Polish life. The one exception was that they gave no information about the organizational preparations for the visit.¹⁵⁹ Sometimes this omission assumed a completely grotesque form. In

157 The following articles were among these preparatory pieces: Kuszewski, M., "Przez pryzmat interesu Polski: Stosunki Państwo – Kościół," *Trybuna Ludu* 118 (23 May 1979); Wysocki, A. W., "Polska-Watykan," *Życie Warszawy* 114 (18 May 1979); Salecki, J. A., "W imię wartości najwyższych: Państwo i Kościół," *Express Wieczorny* 107 (16 May 1979); Winiewicz, J., "Jan Paweł II na ziemi ojczyznej," *Literatura* 21 (24 May 1979); Rakowski, M., "Na przyjazd Papieża," *Polityka* 22 (2 June 1979); Horodyński, D., "Wizyta Papieża," *Kultura* 22 (3 June 1979); Juskiewicz, B., "Patriotyczna jedność – sprawą nadrzędną," *Trybuna Robotnicza* 120 (30 May 1979). Kuszewski's article was reprinted in the regional party newspapers (an extensive summary of it also appeared in *Życie Literackie* 22 [3 June 1979] in its press review). Salecki's article – sponsored by Interpress – was reprinted in several local newspapers that were not official party organs.

158 "Wizyta Papieża w Polsce," *Notatnik Lektora* 21 (21 May 1979).

159 The exception here was the following article: Teneta, A., "Wszystkie przygotowania organizacyjne przebiegają sprawnie: Przed wizyta Jana Pawła II w Krakowie," *Dziennik Polski* 121 (31 May 1979).

the May 31 edition of *Express Wieczorny* (*The Evening Express*), a short notice appeared under the headline “Road Closure at Victory Square” (“Wstrzymanie ruchu na pl. Zwycięstwa”), which I cite here in full:

As a result of works being done on Victory Square and Krakowskie Przedmieście, from today, May 31, at 3 pm, until further notice, Victory Square and all surrounding access roads will be closed to traffic.

The notice leaves the reason for these mysterious road works to the reader’s intelligence.¹⁶⁰ This trivial announcement reveals a generally accepted principle: not to speak about the pope’s visit outside those contexts in which it was absolutely necessary.

In these introductory interpretations, one problem remained unresolved, since no decision had been made as to the precise nature of the pope’s visit. The official statement on the subject of Gierek’s meeting with the Primate of Poland, Cardinal Stefan Wyszyński, announced that the aims of the visit would be above all religious.¹⁶¹ However, we cannot treat this statement as an integral part of propagandist discourse, since it reports the positions of both sides. Accordingly, it is not binding. In articles expressing the position of the authorities, this question is not treated in any unambiguous manner.¹⁶² Their authors mention the religious purpose of the trip, but they simultaneously attempt to keep everything associated with religion in the background, treating this subject as if it were a matter of embarrassment. For ideological reasons, any emphasis of religious motifs would quite clearly be inadvisable. At the same time, such an emphasis might be advantageous from another perspective, since it would minimize the general significance of the visit, restricting it to a single sphere. Yet there were also other considerations to take into account. If the significance of the visit could be consistently restricted to religious meanings, then it would be more difficult to build the authority of the communist leadership through the person of the pope – a strategy that formed one of the primary aims of the propagandist.

The ideological introductions to the June visit also had another meaning. They revealed and established the obligatory language in which the press could speak about the pope’s visit. Here we observe the crystallization of the vocabulary – the

160 For instance, *Życie Warszawy* (*Warsaw Life*) gave the following information about radio and television programs: “At 4pm, live transmission from the ceremony at the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier and Victory Square in Warsaw.” *Życie Warszawy* 123 (29 May 1979).

161 This statement appeared in the newspapers on 30 May 1979.

162 In the abovementioned article, “Na przyjazd Papieża,” Mieczysław Rakowski makes the following claims: “The arrival of the highest dignitary of the Catholic Church has various dimensions – religious, state and national.” More generally, newspaper articles tended to avoid this kind of statement.

listed words and admissible phrases – that would define the structure and scope of published reports during John Paul II's sojourn in Poland.

This vocabulary also applied in the summarizing articles published after the visit by the majority of weekly and daily newspapers.¹⁶³ These pieces did not differ significantly from the preceding interpretations. They used the same vocabulary and took up the same motifs. Indeed, one might even maliciously assert that the whole papal visit was superfluous to the writing of such articles, which were constantly vague and devoid of specific details. Nevertheless, they occasionally referred to the pope's utterances, isolating particular passages that were meant to support and strengthen the established assumptions. Naturally, they altered the perspective, emphasizing that the pope's visit confirmed the precepts of Polish politics, both internally and abroad. Characteristically, declarations on the subject of so-called political and ideological principles appeared here, along with the usual claims about unshakeable alliances, and so on. These summations demonstrate the concern for the continuity of propaganda discourse and prove that the various utterances about the pope's visit in Poland formed a single well-composed text accomplishing clearly defined propaganda goals.

We must now examine what appeared between the preparations and the summaries: in other words, the actual reports about unfolding events. Between June 1 and 10, dedicated articles of a programmatically ideological nature essentially did not appear, though this did not mean that the official press ceased to pursue the single correct explanation of the facts. In this period, a different technique became obligatory. The press appeared superficially to satisfy itself with the basic facts, "reporting" on the successive stages of the pope's journey. Here we are dealing with a highly stylized form of factual reporting. This stylization lay above all in the fact that the accounts appeared to stick to objective press reporting, while their actual aim was by no means to chronicle these extraordinary events. On the contrary, what seemed superficially to be mere factual reporting was really interpretation. The main factor regulating this chronicle-style narration was not the aspiration to convey accurate information about events, but rather

163 The most important summarizing articles included the following: Kuszewski, M., "Doniosła wizyta," *Trybuna Ludu* 134 (11 June 1979); Roliński, B., and A.W. Wysocki, "Wizyta Papieża," *Życie Warszawy* 134 (11 June 1979); Horodyński, D., "Godnie i z pożytkiem dla kraju," *Kultura* 24 (17 June 1979); Rakowski, M., "Spotkanie," *Polityka* 25 (23 June 1979). A strange text by S. Kryski and A. Tokarczyk – "Golgota jest równina: Zapiski z papieskiej peregrynacji," *Argumenty* 25 (24 June 1979) – takes a different position. This article is an example of the very peculiar art of speaking expansively and at great length without saying anything. In general, the *Argumenty* magazine did not show much interest in the papal visit. An unintentional caricature of official utterances on the subject of the pope is supplied by W. Machejek's hefty screed – "Jan Paweł II w Polsce," *Życie Literackie* 24 (17 June 1979). Machejek writes: "John Paul II's pilgrimage was strenuous and productive."

to impose a particular meaning upon them. This is even apparent in the specific newspaper page positions accorded to various reports on the papal pilgrimage. Here we also see the complete dependence on elaborate instructions from above. The newspapers clearly foreground any news associated with the pope's contact with the representatives of the authorities, including his arrival, departure and official meeting at the Belweder Palace in Warsaw. The only exception here is his visit to Auschwitz. The remaining stages of the trip appear among other pieces of news: for instance, about such events as the Soviet Song Festival at Zielona Góra, Gierek's visit to the town of Siedlce and his meeting with Prime Minister Piotr Jaroszewicz, who was just recovering from a period of ill health. Immediately we see here a clear attempt to impose a hierarchy of importance and to minimize what was most important. Accounts of the pope's journey have no right to push the communist court circular into the background. We also find that the reports capture the pope's visit, as if it were entirely separate from Polish life, as if it were taking place in a different realm. Accordingly, there is no interruption to the regular routine of information, while the pope's stay in Poland has no influence on the prevailing visions of the world. Everybody is working conscientiously as usual, while the authorities – as usual – are making sure that things go well for the Polish people. Information about the pope's visit must not interfere with the dominant vision of Poland in propaganda discourse. On the contrary, the reports consistently attempt to subordinate his journey to this image.

An important element within the stylized factual reporting is a tendency to report secondary or irrelevant aspects instead of the more significant events. Sometimes this procedure is so blatant that it becomes immediately obvious. Here pure informative waffle comes to the fore, including extensive information about the places visited by the pope: for instance, in a pompously poetic description of Warsaw during his journey from the airport to the cathedral. In this case, the stylized factual reporting almost seems to unmask itself, as the report becomes something akin to a tour commentary for foreign tourists visiting Warsaw for the first time. The main aim in many such cases is not to inform, but rather to create the pretense of informing. It is impossible not to write about the pope's visit, and so the official journalists must pretend to write objectively and accurately. Stylized factual reporting frequently serves not to inform, but rather to raise barriers to information. These barriers are meant to hinder access to any information about the real course of events – among other things, about the general public interest in the visit, about the pope himself, and about his specific statements. This stylization restricts itself to mere official notifications of where the pope has been and where he has spoken, without going beyond the narrowest form of chronicle. Here the manipulation is quite evident, revealing itself above all in the highly generalized

nature of the reports and the omission of any specific facts or details (apart from specially selected exceptions).

Ideological introductions, stylized factual reporting and ideological summaries form the basis for an astoundingly homogeneous text – though by necessity it is divided into separate segments. The purpose of the text is not to depict events in any multifaceted, comprehensive or objective manner, but rather to impose meaning upon them. Like a novel in a more traditional style, the text is transparently composed so that the basic premises of the entire construction appear from the very exposition, while every detail has a clearly defined place within the overall form of the composition and always appears from the same narrative perspective, which dominates the whole and introduces the unconcealed element of axiology. It would be no exaggeration to describe the whole text – in which every detail is well thought out in advance – as a *pièce bien faite*.

Another manifestation of this manipulation is the choice of vocabulary, which is subject to very clear criteria. In all the reports and commentaries on the pope's visit, the authors were obliged to apply a predetermined vocabulary – very limited and apparently strictly catalogued. They could not use this vocabulary with any freedom, since it was assigned *a priori* to specific contexts. The vocabulary clearly comes from a list, thus demonstrating the consistency with which the authorities prepared the uniform text that ostensibly informed the public, but actually supported unambiguously propagandistic aims. Of course, any utterances that appear within newsspeak are usually schematic and measured. Yet even in this general context, the discourse on the subject of the papal visit is an unusual case, since it reached an even higher level of regulation and standardization. The words from the list were not only supposed to impose a certain way of speaking, but also to eliminate any competing expressions. The authorities probably prepared the list of words in advance, since its operation is evident as early as the first articles intended to prepare the ideological ground for the pope's visit.¹⁶⁴ It would be impossible to describe this list in its full extent, though it consists of relatively few words and phrases. Therefore, examples will have to suffice.

As early as 16 October 1978, the word “satisfaction” – mentioned above – was already on the list (to give a random example: “All people – believers and non-believers – heard the words of John Paul II with satisfaction and pleasure. With no less satisfaction, we heard his declarations concerning the idea of broad dialogue initiated by John XXIII”¹⁶⁵). Yet “satisfaction” would not suffice to define

164 Rakowski's article “Na przyjazd Papieża” is particularly interesting in this respect. The author's sense of inhibition is clear. He cannot go beyond the obligatory canon, yet he attempts – while still using the recommended words – to say more than those commentators who have accepted the pre-established model uncritically.

165 Mercik, W., “Wartość nadrzędna,” *Gazeta Południowa* 129 (11 June 1979).

the attitude of Polish society towards the pope. Therefore, several other equally regulated words appear. The pope would be (is or was, depending on when the article appeared) received “cordially” and “with dignity” by Polish society. The expression “with dignity” demands some consideration here. These words in various forms recurred hundreds of times over the entire month. For example, *Trybuna Ludu* wrote the following:

Two weeks before his visit, the most important point is to ensure that the head of the church state should be received in his homeland with true Polish hospitality and dignity, as befits our nation and its culture.¹⁶⁶

Yet this is not some strange manifestation of perseveration or linguistic poverty, whereby the author is incapable of using synonyms for expressions of similar meaning. Instead, it is a consciously instituted language game characteristic of propaganda discourse.

The expression “with dignity” (“*godnie*” or “*z godnością*”) is ambiguous, and this ambiguity makes it useful for propaganda purposes. According to the Doroszewski Polish dictionary, the word “*godnie*” – an adverb meaning “with dignity” – may suggest accordance with the dignity of the person being received. However, it may also suggest a sense of one’s own virtue and pride – and thus in a manner that would remain within certain limits, calmly, and with restraint. Therefore, sentences like those I have cited from *Trybuna Ludu* do not so much urge cordiality as warn against its excess. For many reasons, the official press could not do this openly, and thus they accomplished it in an indirect and veiled manner. Especially in the articles preparing society for the papal visit, “with dignity” means above all calmly, without excess, and without overexcitement. These connotations of the expression clearly come to the fore, thus suppressing the basic meanings. The use of this phrase also had other aims – simultaneously to program and describe the reactions of Polish society. “With dignity” and “cordially” seemed somehow to mark out the officially authorized boundaries, setting the emotional temperature at which the visit was to unfold. Not once do the words “with joy” or “with enthusiasm” appear – as if they did not exist in the Polish language.

The pope would be received “cordially and with dignity” not only by society, but also by the authorities. Here we find the next verbal conglomerate from the mandatory list: “the authorities and society.” These expressions usually appeared in this order, even when they concerned the local authorities of towns visited by the pope (their representatives were always mentioned by name, while the vast majority of people who played one role or another in these events remained anonymous). The use of the word “society” is distinctive here – especially since it played a minimal role in the propaganda of the Gierek era, seldom used or even avoided.

166 Kuszewski, M., “Przez pryzmat interesu Polski.”

In the spring of 1979, this word was suddenly recalled, though previously the dominant tendency had been to speak about the nation, the state or the population. It was not recalled without reason. Above all, the press used this word almost always in combination with the word “authorities.” The authorities and society formed one side, while the pope visiting his homeland found himself on the other. “Society” generally denoted all Poles who greeted the head of the Vatican state cordially and with dignity, just as they greeted any other widely respected leader. Society would never enter into any direct contact with the pope, but rather would remain an abstraction. A sentence stating that the pope had greeted society (in Warsaw, Częstochowa, Krakow, etc.) along his route would have been impossible in the official press. Neither did society take part in any religious ceremonies. Both actions were associated only with “the faithful” or with the faithful and the clergy.¹⁶⁷ Therefore, whenever there was any mention of direct contact between Poles and the pope, the expression “the faithful” would appear (with the obvious exception of official meetings with the representatives of the authorities). The press observed the division between society and the faithful with unwavering consistency. These were to form two completely different and separate worlds.

The use of vocabulary connected with religion was another matter. As I have already suggested, the attitude of the propaganda to the religious dimension of the pilgrimage was not unequivocal. Initially, there was a tendency to avoid such words as “service” or “mass.” The most characteristic examples in these cases were expressions like “the ceremony at the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier” or – less commonly – “the ceremony on Victory Square.” These formulations were meant to suggest that there would only be a laying of wreaths – and thus the same ritual followed during every diplomatic visit. This tendency prevailed only at the beginning of the trip. Later, the repertoire expanded. Words like “mass,” “service” and “religious ceremony” came back into favor. This was probably a result of linguistic necessity, since without these expressions it would have been difficult to create even a stylized form of factual reporting.

The regulation of specific words represented an especially clear and conspicuous manifestation of linguistic manipulation. These words served to compose an unequivocal and singular version of events, mandatory and not subject to any discussion. Here the manipulation appeared at a fundamental level. The aims of propaganda determined the use of the most elementary units of language – the raw material from which utterances would be constructed. The assignment of words was intended to eliminate in advance any possibility of diversity – and thus of unforeseen or undesirable contents. The list of words became by necessity

167 For example: “Greeted by the faithful, the pope drove in an open car to Wawel Cathedral, where the metropolitan chapter delivered a liturgical welcome” (*Trybuna Ludu* 131 [7 June 1979]).

a list of ideas. In this way, it imposed the boundaries of what was possible to say in a language composed of regulated expressions.

The aim of the vocabulary list was to introduce advance restrictions on what the press could write about the pope's visit and how it should summarize his statements. The stylized form of factual reporting described above emphasized those episodes of the pope's visit in which the representatives of the authorities took part. Especially in the later summaries, the press constantly underlined that one of the two culminating moments was the meeting with First Secretary Gierek at the Belweder Palace (the second was at Auschwitz). The intention here is so obvious that it requires no commentary – above all, the person of the pope was to build the authority of the party leadership. Subsequently, the hierarchy of relevance was to be transformed so that anything associated with his contacts with the establishment might appear in the foreground, obscuring any other motifs from his sojourn in the country. This tendency was linked with multiple instances of verbal manipulation.¹⁶⁸

Above all, the authors emphasized that the pope had come to visit “the homeland” – that is, the Polish People's Republic, and not Poland. Some even claimed that it was precisely the People's Republic that had produced him and formed him.¹⁶⁹ Using the official name of the state in contexts where this was unnecessary found apparent justification in the pope's own utterances – namely,

168 Here we should mention, above all, the reviews of the western press that appeared in Polish newspapers over the course of the month. These reviews were conceived to create the impression that western journalists writing about the pope's visit to Poland were saying only what the official press was declaring in Poland. These reviews were meant to strengthen and legitimize the official theses and interpretations, suggesting to the naive reader that they had been universally accepted – irrespective of differences in politics or worldview. For instance, we learn from one of these press reviews – signed, as always, by the Polish Press Agency – that the Catholic *La Croix* “writes, among other things, that his [the pope's] visit to Poland – irrespective of its religious character – should serve to bring the Polish nation closer together” (here I quote from *Gazeta Południowa* 128 [9-10 June 1979]). From the same press review, we discover that the Swiss *Weltwoche* writes about Poland as a country that has passed through enormous transformations in a short period of time and that is free of such symptoms of “western prosperity” (inverted commas from *Gazeta Południowa*) as mass unemployment, drug addiction and general uncertainty about the future.

169 This tendency crystallized immediately after the election of John Paul II on 16 October 1978. A clear example is provided by A. W. Wysocki's abovementioned article “Polska-Watykan,” in which the author makes the following claims: “I have good reason to advance the thesis that only the People's Republic of Poland – as an important link in the socialist community and as a country putting into practice the principles of coexistence and cooperation between believing and non-believing citizens – has truly become a country of greater interest and importance to the Vatican than ever before.”

those resulting from the conventions of diplomatic protocol. Here a much broader phenomenon also reveals itself – the transposition of mere courtesies into substantive statements and the suggestion that what is really mere diplomatic protocol represents the most important part of the pope's speeches. The official press reported on every single gesture towards the authorities, every expression of thanks and every word of gratitude. When we take into account the omission of many other issues, the disproportion here becomes very clear. The press also reported with delight every expression of gratitude towards the security services – especially towards the so-called Citizen's Militia, or police force. The transformation of diplomatic courtesies into substantive statements was meant to confirm the reader's conviction that John Paul II was somehow indebted to the authorities, showering them with respect and supporting all their actions. It is not impossible that the propagandists were attempting to create the impression that the pope had come to his homeland above all to give thanks to the authorities.

Subsequently, the press extracted with unwavering consistency those elements from the papal sermons and addresses that might confirm the vision of Poland constructed by the propaganda of the time. This meant a vision of a country in which universal prosperity reigned (a basic slogan of Gierek-era propaganda), in which all pressing social problems had been solved, and in which all manner of social ills had been eliminated. Poland was developing harmoniously and dynamically. Diverse authors displayed this tendency with astonishing consistency. In a sermon delivered at Wadowice, the pope added the following remark: "Today, as far as I know, Wadowice has more middle schools."¹⁷⁰ This news did the rounds of all the official press, as if information about the number of schools in Karol Wojtyła's home town was the most important news. Yet the press simply could not ignore this comment, since it represented another little piece of praise for People's Poland.

The method of reporting the content of the pope's utterances – and thus the attitude of the various journalistic accounts to his language – was a vital question that determined the specific nature of linguistic manipulation. In general, journalists were careful not to come into any glaring conflict with the pope's language, though they still treated it in a particular manner. Above all, the very general nature of the summaries is striking. The press used the words of John Paul II in such a way as to strip them of all specific meaning and to free them from any particular circumstances. This especially meant separating these words from any religious symbolism thus according them only the most general significance, so that nobody could possibly disagree with the contents of his utterances. Here is a characteristic example:

170 Dziwisz, Stanisław, Józef Kowalczyk, and Tadeusz Rakoczy, eds., *Jan Paweł II na ziemi polskiej* (Vatican City: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 1979), p. 119.

The pope spoke of the need for justice and love between people. These qualities are necessary both to families and to the whole of society. Justice and love should serve the internal unification of the nation. The foundation of this unity is love for the homeland.

John Paul II showed that loving one's native culture and history, loving the specific values that determine the place of our Homeland in the great family of nations, loving one's compatriots, who speak the same language and are responsible for the same common cause, is among the most important values of any person and of society.

Speaking of the mission of the contemporary Church, John Paul II emphasized that he sees it as fruitfully serving the cause of unity and reconciliation in the contemporary world, as well as the cause of peace.¹⁷¹

Admittedly, certain stylistic elements appear in this summary that could lead to the conclusion that it might be reporting the speech of a clergyman: for instance, the concept of "love" in a form that originates in Church rhetoric. However, the language of the speaker still succumbs to a significant reduction, becoming vague and colorless in many different respects. Above all, as I have already mentioned, the context of religious symbolism vanishes here. But let us be indulgent and accept in good faith that this aspect might simply not have attracted the attention of the author of the report published in *Trybuna Ludu*. Let us assume that he had every right to concern himself only with what might have been significant to a reader with no interest in religious questions. Yet even if we make this assumption, there is still no way to claim that the summary gives any adequate impression of what the pope said. It cannot do so, since the report includes nothing but noble generalities. Moreover, this generalization is by no means disinterested. In fact, it appears to be the consequence of a consistently applied propaganda technique.

The essence of this technique lay in the suggestion or – in more extreme cases – the blatant imposition of identity. It represented an attempt to convince the reader that the pope essentially was saying the same things that official sources in People's Poland had been saying for many years – and that a fundamental unity of thought and language existed here. The technique expressed itself directly in various interpretive commentaries, especially – though not exclusively – those that were supposed to sum up the pope's visit. The technique also formed an organizing factor within the stylized factual reporting described above. The imposition of identity was meant to give the reader the impression that – in spite of various differences – a common universe of thought and attitude on fundamental questions still existed. The shared elements were predominant. This manipulation through identity served two separate goals at the same time. On the one hand, its task was to weaken the resonance of the ideas propagated by the pope by reducing them to elements that had long been familiar from other sources and

171 *Trybuna Ludu* 130 (6 June 1979).

from other authorities. On the other hand, its goal was to confirm the discourse of propaganda in its obligatory form and to strengthen it – with the authority of the pope. Look and listen: the head of the Catholic Church says the same things that we have been telling you for years. You can trust us. The truths we propagate are universal, acknowledged by the greatest moral authorities in the contemporary world, irrespective of any differences in worldview.

The attempt to create this sense of identity – and thus to enforce the belief that the pope was saying what we had been saying for ages – expressed itself above all in the selection of motifs to be reported in the summary articles and in the associated assignment of emphasis. For instance, the official press reported with pleasure what the pope had said on the subject of labor, attempting to suggest that his conceptions completely coincided with the dominant social doctrines in communist Poland. The press conveyed his sentiments on peace in similar fashion, hoping to convince readers that everything the pope had to say on this subject coincided fully with the ideas of Polish foreign policy (and thus of the whole socialist community). The authors devoted very little space to the pope's remarks on the history of Poland. This vision almost completely disappeared from the press reports. The only exception here was in relation to various martyrological motifs.

But the imposition of identity expressed itself most fully in the question of unity. “Unity” was one of the main propaganda slogans of the Gierek era – perhaps even the most important and most consistently exploited. It also arose in relation to the pope's visit from the very beginning in the earliest preparatory texts. In *Trybuna Ludu*, an extensive article by Ryszard Wojna appeared a week before the visit. On the surface, it had nothing to do with the event, but in fact it unquestionably referred to it. In his article, Wojna engages in a semantic discussion on the meaning of the word “unity,” before eventually coming to the conclusion that Edward Gierek personifies the unity of Poles forged by the communist party. Gierek places “a particular emphasis on the unity of people committed to the homeland, while at the same time broadening the scope of its application and making the aspirations of society its object.”¹⁷²

On the day of the pope's arrival, an article by Adam W. Wysocki appeared in *Życie Warszawy*, which included the following remarks:

Poland today is a country of labor, construction and development, resolving multiple historically accumulated social and economic problems. [. . .] We have built a socialist state, strong through the unity of Poles gathered around the party program, whose primary goal is the prosperity of Poland and every one of its citizens. We have a right to be proud of our achievements.¹⁷³

172 Wojna, R., “Droga do jedności,” *Trybuna Ludu* 120 (25 May 1979).

173 Wysocki, A. W., “Doniosła wizyta,” *Życie Warszawy* 127 (2-3 June 1979).

In a summary article, Marian Kuszewski asserts that “labor” has deepened

the cohesion of our whole society and the unity of the social and political nation. This unity constitutes an important prerequisite for the future of our country, for the building of prosperity – and thus for the realization of all the primary goals that underpin the activities of the socialist state, the party and the people performing the leading functions within our political and social life.¹⁷⁴

Accordingly, the idea of unity became the specific interpretive framework that would impose meaning on the papal visit. After all, according to the propaganda, the visit not only did not violate this unity, but – on the contrary – it confirmed the concept. It is difficult to follow the line of reasoning that led to this conclusion, but logical coherency is not the key point here. The axiom was simply accepted and given binding power. Thus it is hardly surprising that the concept of unity appeared on every possible occasion during the pope’s visit. Gierek referred to it in his speech at the Belweder Palace:

The main source of our achievements so far and the basic prerequisite for the future of the Polish nation is its unity in the basic questions of national and state existence, irrespective of social position, education or attitude towards religion. This unity today embraces all generations, all social classes and groups, who are engaged in labor for the Homeland.¹⁷⁵

A description of Warsaw as the pope passed through the city could also become an opportunity for further reflections on unity:

Along the entire route there were red and white flags and papal standards, as well as banners with slogans about the patriotic unity of Poles, saying that the foundation of this unity lies in common labor and the idea of the Homeland.¹⁷⁶

On the surface, this constant return to the question of unity was supposed to be at least partly justified by the fact that the pope himself had spoken about it. In his speech at Warsaw Airport, he said:

Finally, I would like the fruit of my visit to be the internal unity of my compatriots, as well as the favorable development of relations between the state and the Church in my beloved Homeland.¹⁷⁷

In his arrival speech, doubtless John Paul II adopted to some extent the language of those he was directly addressing. Here his use of the word “unity” remained in keeping with the prevailing usage in the Polish press. Therefore, it might have appeared that at least in this case there was harmonious concord – and thus no

174 Kuszewski, M., “Doniosła wizyta” (characteristically, Kuszewski’s and Wysocki’s articles bear the same title – “An Important Visit.” Perhaps the list was also in force in this domain!).

175 *Życie Warszawy* 128 (4 June 1979).

176 *Trybuna Ludu* 128 (4 June 1979).

177 Dziwisz, Kowalczyk and Rakoczy, *Jan Paweł II na ziemi polskiej*, pp. 11-12.

propagandistic abuses. However, the pope returned to the idea of the unity of Poles in many other sermons and addresses, in which he ascribed an entirely different meaning to the concept than Gierek.

Above all – and perhaps self-evidently – this unity bears a strongly religious meaning in the words of John Paul II:

Unity puts down its roots into the life of a nation – just as it put down its roots through Saint Stanislaw in a difficult period in Polish history – whenever human life on its various levels surrenders to justice and love. The first of these levels is the family. My dear compatriots, I wish to pray with you today for the unity of all Polish families.¹⁷⁸

The “unity” motif appeared in various reports on this sermon (see the quotation from *Trybuna Ludu* of 6 June 1979, p. 115). Thus the imposition of identity at all costs also reveals itself here. Again we must emphasize that, in speaking of unity, the pope had something entirely different in mind from Edward Gierek – even when he understood unity in social and historical categories. For the pope, the term contained no immediate political references (which clearly represented the most crucial elements in any official declarations). Polish unity in his understanding referred to a unity of tradition and history, a unity resulting from spiritual and historical experiences.

Of course, “unity” is only one of many possible examples. The official press imposed similar interpretations on the pope’s political statements at every opportunity, especially on those from the Belweder Palace address. Among other things, these declarations included appeals to “the right to existence, to freedom, to social and cultural subjectivity, to the creation of one’s own culture and civilization”; “support for authentic progress and for the peaceful development of humanity”; as well as the rejection of “forms of political, economic or cultural colonialism.”¹⁷⁹ The pope had supposedly said the same things that we had been saying for decades in communist Poland, thus confirming our ideas. Here a peculiar drama played itself out through the use of the same words to say different things. For the broad question of linguistic manipulation, this is a matter of fundamental significance. In this case, the manipulation expressed itself through the shifting of phrases from one semantic register to another, through the suggestion of similarities where there were none, and through a process of imparting meanings to the pope’s words that were either broader or narrower than the intended meaning of his texts.¹⁸⁰ The

178 *Ibid.*, p. 135.

179 *Ibid.*, p. 22.

180 A characteristic example here is the narrow interpretation of the word “others” used by the pope in his sermon at Auschwitz. According to the official version, “others” here referred unequivocally to the Germans. Even a sophisticated journalist like Michał Radgowski writes: “The pope did not wish to accuse. He wished to remember, to find a path away from war and cruelty towards peace and understanding. I watched the faces of the gathered

inevitable consequences of these procedures included the oversimplification and even banalization of the pope's utterances.

We also find one more rather specific form of linguistic manipulation: the arbitrary creation of symbolism, or the imposition of symbolic meaning where it does not belong, usually by force and without any reference to the general social feelings and ideas required to make a given symbol truly self-evident, natural or justified. These attempts to create symbols emerged with particular force as early as the preparatory publications, which were meant to place the papal visit within a pre-established framework. Already in these articles, the authors asserted with great emphasis – as an especially telling fact – that the pope was coming to his homeland on the thirty-fifth anniversary of the Polish People's Republic and at a time when the Polish nation was preparing to commemorate the fortieth anniversary of the beginning of the Second World War.¹⁸¹ These dates were supposed to be especially significant – and thus a powerful symbol emerged. The press promoted this motif with particular persistence, repeating it at every opportunity (indeed, there was no utterance on this subject in which it did not appear), especially in the articles preceding the visit and accompanying its first phase. Later it became more muted. In fact, the symbolism of dates has played an important role in communist propaganda on numerous occasions. There is no such thing as neutral time for propaganda, since every particle of time is marked by particular meanings. Accordingly, the constant emphasis on the symbolic nature of the anniversaries with which the pope's visit coincided was nothing new here. Indeed, we might even reflect on the clumsiness of the idea, which quite clearly did not fit the situation. Yet it also had much deeper motivations. The aim of this official ritualization was not only to place the journey within an order of secular events, but also to form a response to the Church's own symbolism – a kind of hidden polemic. Everybody knew that one of the reasons for the pope's trip to Poland was to celebrate the nine-hundred-year anniversary of the death of Saint Stanisław. These celebrations had every right to be a strictly Church event, but in fact they became politically awkward. The more recent secular anniversaries were intended partly as a response to the Church anniversary, which commemorated a

people closely. Would they not have preferred for the "others" – those from Auschwitz – to have been named?" ("Krzyż na rampie," *Polityka* 24 [17 June 1979]).

181 The propaganda significance of emphasizing this thirty-fifth anniversary is evident from the fact that the official press took up this motif in various reviews of the western press (for instance, see *Życie Warszawy* 126 [1 June 1979]). Even the bourgeois western journalists supposedly emphasized the importance of the fact that John Paul II's visit would fall at a time when the Polish nation was preparing to celebrate this anniversary.

conflict with state power from the early Middle Ages.¹⁸² It is also worth drawing attention here to the difference between the time frames evoked in the respective utterances of the pope and the official propaganda. The pope's vision comprehended large-scale history, unfolding across the entire space of Polish history, including the history of Christianity and sometimes – in references to the Old Testament – even the most ancient times. By contrast, the texts published in the official press referred to a much shorter history, essentially including the thirty-five years of the Polish People's Republic, perhaps expanded back as far as the outbreak of the Second World War. The symbolism of the dates clearly depended on these very different historical time frames.

The shaping of symbolism was not restricted exclusively to anniversaries. Sometimes pure and meaningless coincidence took on particular significance. In various reports on the pope's visit to Jasna Góra,¹⁸³ the following sentence appeared:

As he made his way to Jasna Góra, the pope drove past the Monument of Gratitude raised by the inhabitants of Częstochowa to commemorate the liberation of the city by the Soviet Army in 1945.¹⁸⁴

In fact, the pope did drive past this monument, but the report fills this fact with symbolic significance, imposing meaning where there is none. The author of the report does not directly contradict the facts. Nevertheless, he creates a false symbolism by destroying the hierarchy of importance, transforming something irrelevant and coincidental into something relevant and meaningful.

3.

We should now examine the problems under analysis from a different perspective. John Paul II came to Poland at a time when a certain style of propaganda – which in autumn of the following year would be termed the “propaganda of success” – had reached its apogee. This style appeared not only in utterances on the subject of the papal visit, but also in allocutions directly addressed to the pope himself. The most important and representative of these was Edward Gierek's speech at the

182 Translator's Note: Stanisław of Szczepanów (1030-1079), Bishop of Kraków, was murdered by King Bolesław II the Bold in an early conflict between the Church and the new Polish state, making him a comparable symbolic figure to the later Thomas Becket in England.

183 Translator's Note: The Jasna Góra Monastery in Częstochowa is the most important pilgrimage site within Polish Catholicism. It is especially famous as the home of the revered image of the “Black Madonna.”

184 This sentence from a statement released by the Polish Press Agency (PAP) circulated through almost the entire Polish press on 5 June 1979.

Belweder Palace, in which he sketched out a vision of a country where all the most important problems had been solved, where history had been fulfilled, and where human beings had achieved total harmony in their lives. The only remaining task for the authorities and for society was merely to perfect and develop what they had already achieved. For the pope, this linguistic context clearly could not be a matter of indifference – for various reasons. He had to respect this language, at least to some extent, during official meetings, so as to create the minimal common ground for communication. This was crucial in these situations in order to reduce the impression that the two sides were speaking entirely different languages. At the same time, he must have been aware that his words would be interpreted by the broad mass of society precisely in the context of this language, which the authorities forcefully imposed by all possible means, thus influencing the people's linguistic consciousness or even defining it. The pope must have taken this fact into account. Accordingly, we may interpret all his utterances in the first ten days of June 1979 as the outcomes of conscious and considered linguistic decisions.

In an improvised speech addressed to young people on the Lech Hill in historic Gniezno, John Paul II joked: “Since I’m here in this country, I’d better use the language of this country.”¹⁸⁵ The specific subject of this little aside was the phrase “social expectations,” though it clearly does not refer only to a single expression. In fact, the remark summarizes the fundamental idea of the pope’s speech in communist Poland. He would not avoid words that had been distorted by various kinds of manipulation, abused or semantically deformed – words that communist propaganda had cut off from their traditions or frozen into mere slogans. Ultimately, the pope did not underestimate the fact that he was speaking in a country in which the main public language was newspeak. He did not ignore or dismiss this language. He could not fail to notice its existence, but neither did he speak in such a way as to clearly differentiate his own words from it. He did not seek out phrases that would obviously belong to a different linguistic register from newspeak. He spoke in contemporary Polish and took a great linguistic gamble – in a situation in which the risk was not merely linguistic. Indeed, we cannot exclude the possibility that he engaged in a conscious linguistic polemic with the specific intention of restoring the traditional meanings of words in order to speak about things that newspeak would not discuss.

From today’s perspective, we should view the pope’s addresses as one of the most important elements within a much broader process – a process of linguistic repossession. We may interpret everything that John Paul II said in Poland as the manifestation of a struggle for language. As I have already suggested, he did not avoid words or phrases that the propaganda had appropriated. By using them

185 Dziwisz, Kowalczyk and Rakoczy, *Jan Pawel II na ziemi polskiej*, p. 56.

himself, he restored their traditional meanings, which had previously played such a large role in the history of Polish consciousness. In this way, he revitalized expressions that communist propaganda had transformed into platitudes. By reconstructing this tradition, he restored the true meanings to words, reviving phrases that had turned into fossils. He had the courage to speak about patriotism, national history, moral questions, social and political problems in words that had been corrupted. I emphasize courage here, because his actions carried a significant risk – the risk of misunderstanding or misinterpretation from his listeners, but also the risk of making it easier for the propaganda to manipulate his words by what I have described as the imposition of identity. Taking this risk seems to me to have represented one of the most socially significant aspects of the pope’s speeches. Linguistic repossession became a matter of theoretical reflection, but also of linguistic practice itself. Difference revealed itself in many situations through apparent identity. The response to manipulated language became – and here we may permit ourselves a neologism – “demanipulation.” In this case, we find a form of demanipulation chosen by a speaker of the highest moral authority, whom nobody could possibly accuse of using newspeak.

Perhaps the most important example of this linguistic repossession was the pope’s speech at the Belweder Palace, since – apart from his greeting and farewell speeches – this was the most widely disseminated and thus most easily accessible of his texts. Here we can ignore the style of diplomatic courtesy, which is self-evident and inevitable in this type of address. The most important point is that the speech constituted a response to Gierek’s address, which painted an idyllic vision of contemporary Poland, in which

fundamental national problems have been solved – just borders, lasting guarantees of independence, sovereignty and security based on unfailing alliances, and above all on alliance, friendship and cooperation with the Soviet Union. Industrialization, urbanization and fundamental social transformations have ensured civilizational and cultural progress – along with decent living conditions – for the great masses of the people and for the entire nation, opening up new developmental perspectives.

The pope does not seek to polemicize with this idyllic vision of history fulfilled. Indeed, he even implies that he accepts it in good faith. He uses the very same words as Gierek’s address, but he uses them to say something different. We need only recall such statements as “the rationale for a state is the sovereignty of society, the Nation, the Homeland”¹⁸⁶ and “all forms of political, economic or cultural colonialism contradict the demands of international order.”¹⁸⁷ We might view this encounter at the Belweder Palace as a great dramatic scene, in which

186 *Ibid.*, p. 21.

187 *Ibid.*, p. 22.

the protagonists seem to be saying the same thing or at least using the same tone, while really saying completely different things. This is precisely how linguistic repossession takes place – the repossession of patriotic language, the language of history, and the language of society. Here we saw a repossession of the greatest historical significance and one of the great acts of linguistic reconstruction, especially since the silent witness to this scene was none other than the whole of Poland. At the same time, we must ask whether everybody was able to understand what was unfolding before their eyes. How would the faceless consumer of everyday television fare react to this scene? Perhaps we should give this question a more specific form. How would the average person – whose linguistic consciousness was defined above all by the mass media – comprehend the pope’s speeches, in which there were so many words that had been abused and devalued by newspeak? Would this person be capable of perceiving the differences and perhaps even certain polemical elements? Or would the illusion of similarity prevail, feeding the belief that the pope and the first secretary were saying the same thing? These are questions of fundamental significance, though there is no way to answer them now, since these phenomena were never subject to sociolinguistic study. Only this type of study could reveal how the contemporary Pole reacted to linguistic manipulation and to the distinctive ways of overcoming it. At best, we might imagine that the ability to perceive the differences probably depended on general levels of intellectual and linguistic education, as a consequence of many factors, including the extent to which a person had been shaped by the mass media and the consequent ability (or lack thereof) to maintain any distance from its claims. One thing is certain: the basic context for the pope’s utterances – especially those in which he took up social and national questions – was that of manipulated speech. His words formed an important “demanipulative” act, partly because he paid no mind to the possibility of misunderstandings in his general reception. He took the risk of using distorted words so as to restore their lost meanings and the lost values associated with them. It would be difficult to overestimate the significance of this fact, even if we acknowledge that one naive listener or another might have proved incapable of comprehending what was happening. This was a fact of great historical significance. We can already speak of it as such from today’s perspective, as only a short span of time separates June 1979 from August 1980.¹⁸⁸ We must never forget it.

April 1981

188 Translator’s Note: The Solidarity trade union federation was formed on 31 August 1980 at the Gdańsk Shipyard under the leadership of Lech Wałęsa.

14. Instigators

(On the Conspiracist Categorization of the World in March 1968¹⁸⁹)

The words we use not only convey a certain vision of the world; they also influence its construction. They make – or at least they can make – their own contributions, and thus they easily fall victim to various kinds of manipulation. From the very outset, I wish to make the following assertion: it is possible to examine the conspiracist vision of the world from a linguistic point of view, since it represents a certain way of speaking and a certain way of constructing discourse. Therefore, we may also choose to view it as a set of metaphors, idioms or well-worn phrases, which are often essentially neutral in themselves, but which lose this neutrality when harnessed within a specific type of argument. Then they become vehicles and agents of a specific way of understanding the world.

Here I shall be concerned with this very question. How does the conspiracist vision of the world – understood as a peculiar form of discourse or a certain way of using linguistic resources – develop? This is a very general theoretical problem. We may analyze it as it applies to all conspiracy theories, but we can also examine it in connection with specific, precisely delineated historical material. In this article, I shall attempt to do the latter. The direct object of my observations will be a set of official texts associated with the unrest of March 1968. This material is limited in scope, since I have drawn it from two recently published collections of documents (to some extent these volumes overlap), which include various complaints, denunciations and reports produced for the party authorities.¹⁹⁰ In general, these documents do not say anything *expressis verbis* about conspiracy or conspiring. Such words rarely appear, though this does not prevent the whole set

189 Translator's Note: In March 1968, students and intellectuals mounted major protests against the communist authorities in Poland. After taking strong measures to suppress the unrest, the government launched an "anti-Zionist" campaign that saw many Polish Jews leave the country.

190 Sołtysiak, Grzegorz, and Józef Stępień, eds., *Marzec '68: Między tragedią a podłością wstęp, wybór i opracowanie* Grzegorz Sołtysiak i Józef Stępień (Warszawa: Profi, 1998) [I shall cite from this source in parentheses with the word "Marzec" followed by the page number]; Zaremba, Marcin, ed., *Marzec 1968: Trzydzieści lat później*, t. II *Aneks źródłowy: dzień po dniu w raportach SB oraz Wydziału Organizacyjnego KC PZPR* (Warszawa: PWN, 1998) [I shall cite from this source in parentheses with the word "Aneks" followed by the page number].

of texts from being completely saturated with the conspiracist vision of the world. A more or less latent notion of conspiracy remains the discourse's main defining feature. These documents make for extremely appealing objects of analysis for various reasons (though in themselves – as I hardly need to mention – they are repellent), including the fact that they allow us to capture the phenomenon as a whole. Ultimately, they are remarkably close to the party propaganda journalism of the time, in many points not differing from it in any way. According to Jerzy Eisler:

The texts of such March authors as Maria Osiadacz, Alina Reutt, Anna Wyszacka, Zdzisław Andruszkiewicz, Witold Filier, Henryk Gaworski, Ryszard Gontarz, Klaudiusz Hrabyc, Kazimierz Kąkol, Ignacy Krasicki, Tadeusz Kur, Wiesław Mysłek, Jan Ruszczyk, Tadeusz Walichnowski, Janusz Wilhelm were in no way inferior to Stalinist and perhaps even to National Socialist journalism.¹⁹¹

In the end, we may say the same thing about those texts – produced for very narrow circles and by definition secret – that remained anonymous, published years later only when this became possible thanks to the opening of the archives. At the beginning of the twentieth century, the eminent Polish literary theorist Kazimierz Wóycicki published a now classic article entitled “The Stylistic Unity of the Poetic Work” (“Jedność stylowa utworu poetyckiego”). I shall paraphrase his title to express the analogous stylistic unity of totalitarian discourse – a unity that eliminates any distinction between propaganda texts intended to reach a wide audience via the mass media¹⁹² and those addressed to a much smaller and more restricted group. On the basis of these reports, this group was supposed to gather information on the current situation and make appropriate decisions. The more combative the situation and the greater the pressure of official ideology, the more powerfully this unity manifested itself. Consequently, the differences between a press article and a secret report or denunciation began to blur. As a result of this circumstance, my remarks on the set of documents that form the direct object of my reflections may also apply to the “March talk” as a whole.

The content of this talk – in both its oral and written forms – may be defined as a conspiracist understanding or organization of reality. Linguists speak about various categorizations of the world¹⁹³ and about how speakers may capture it via the linguistic means they use in their utterances. Language itself suggests

191 Eisler, Jerzy, *Marzec 1968 — geneza, przebieg, konsekwencje* (Warszawa: PWN, 1991), p. 351.

192 I analyzed these journalistic writings in various private notes that I later compiled to form my book *Marcowe gadanie: Komentarze do słów 1966-1971* (Warszawa: Pomost, 1991).

193 Here I am referring above all to the following sources: Grzegorzycykowa, Renata, and Anna Pajdzińska, *Językowa kategoryzacja świata* (Lublin: UMCS, 1996); Wierzbicka, Anna, *Język — umysł — kultura* (Warszawa: PWN, 1999).

ways of categorizing the world, even if this sometimes comes about thanks to the traditions that have established themselves within it. At the same time, we cannot assert that it possesses any power to impose a given understanding of reality on everybody in any absolute manner. The speaker is not the slave of the language he or she uses. The conspiracist categorization of the world as it manifested itself in Poland in 1968 did not emerge only from conditions imposed by speech. It also arose from a consistent practice – if not a conscious choice – with ideological roots and the aim of achieving certain goals. The conspiracist categorization of the world reflects a certain method for using language. It need not express itself in any direct phrases. It need not appear as an explicit theme – and in most cases it does not. This is not simply a matter of using the word “conspiracy” or its derivatives. Such words may not arise at all, and yet the text might still represent a perfect realization of the conspiracist categorization of the world, thus confirming the thesis formulated by Daniel Pipes in his brilliant book on the subject – a conspiracy theory need not refer to any specific conspiracies. Instead, a conspiracy theory constitutes a fear of non-existent conspiracies. Accordingly, it represents a peculiar form of perception.¹⁹⁴ The accuracy of these observations is confirmed by the conspiracist categorization that characterized the language of the party and its security services during the March unrest in 1968.

We usually – and quite correctly – consider the true inauguration of this period to be a speech given by Władysław Gomułka at a trade union congress in June 1967, shortly after the Israeli victory in the Six-Day War. It so happened that this several-hour oration – or rather its oral version (since the key words were omitted from the printed version) – gave direct expression to the conspiracist categorization of the world. Gomułka spoke about “the Zionists” (that is, the Jews) as a fifth column. At the time, it seemed that this was the first appearance of this ominous phrase in post-war Poland, though this was not really the case. In fact, propagandists had written about the Zionist fifth column in the period preceding Stalin’s death, which saw an intensification of the campaign against “cosmopolitans” and the eruption of the Kremlin doctors’ affair. Michał Mirski – a little known communist journalist and one-time activist in official Jewish organizations – wrote an article entitled “Zionism: A Tool of American Imperialism” (“Syjonizm – narzędzie amerykańskiego imperializmu”), published in the February edition of *New Paths* (*Nowe Drogi*) in 1953:

In the feverish preparation of a new world war, the American and English imperialists have intensified their attempts to create a “fifth column” in the USSR and the

¹⁹⁴ Pipes, Daniel, *Conspiracy: How the Paranoid Style Flourishes and Where It Comes From* (New York: The Free Press, 1997). Among the other important books to examine this problem, we should mention Janusz Tazbir’s *Protokoły mędrców Syjonu: Autentyk czy fałszyfikat* (Warszawa: Interlibro, 1992).

people's democracies, sending their agents to these countries. In order to achieve this aim, American intelligence is using, among others, Zionist organizations and their offshoots.¹⁹⁵

I would guess that Gomułka was probably unaware of the historical communist tradition to which he referred in his speech – though ultimately this is of little significance here. Neither is it significant that the phrase “fifth column” itself was questioned by the first secretary’s comrades and subsequently disappeared from the March vocabulary, perhaps as overly “literal” and burdened with unambiguous connotations. This questioning in itself was an extremely rare event, if not entirely unprecedented. Nevertheless, the elimination of this phrase did not signify any abandonment or even limitation of the conspiracist categorization of the world. Both the documents collected in the two volumes under discussion and the extensive journalistic writings of the time clearly suggest that such phrases as “fifth column” were not essential to any attempts to capture the world in this manner or to convey conspiracist visions of it. This is a very interesting point.

The conspiracist understanding of the world became the central point of the March discourse, thus representing what Dieter Groh described in a phrase that captured the essence of the matter as “the center of a coherent interpretative schema.”¹⁹⁶ Dichotomous divisions lay at the very foundation of this schema. The primary division with the most fundamental significance emerged between two distinct groups. On one side was the Polish nation, which loved socialism and was always faithful to it, yearning to build its foundations in peace, supporting the party and its leaders, adoring the Soviet Union. On the other side were all those who took part in any anti-Polish or anti-socialist rows, irresponsible people and enemies with only their own deleterious interests at heart, the vast majority of whom were marked with the stigma of foreignness. This fundamental division was nothing new. It had appeared in the communist world on many different occasions. Indeed, we may assert with no fear of exaggeration that it endured for decades in unaltered form, perhaps only slightly adjusted to suit changing circumstances.

195 I cite Mirski’s article – which announced that the authorities in the Soviet Union had discovered “a terrorist gang of doctor poisoners in the service of the imperialist intelligence agencies” – from the following volume: Cała, Alina, and Helena Datner-Śpiewak, eds., *Dzieje Żydów w Polsce 1944-1968: Teksty źródłowe* (Warszawa: Żydowski Instytut Historyczny, 1997), p. 139. From Mirski’s brief biography in this volume, we learn that he emigrated to Denmark in 1968, where he lived to a ripe old age. Mirski’s case is one of those that forces us to ponder the irony dictating the script for certain biographies.

196 Groh, Dieter, “La tentation des théories de conspiration,” *Storia della storiografia* 2 (1998), p. 107.

In its March version, this division functioned in its canonical form, though it was also supplemented in a characteristic way. The canonical whole included a quantitative opposition. Those who formed the majority were on the good side – the working people, who sympathized with the party’s policies and did not rebel. Those who disturbed the peace and questioned the existing state of things were enemies working with evil intentions at the instigation of foreign agents.¹⁹⁷ Thus, an evil section of society isolated itself from the good whole – the evil “others” from the good “locals.” This operation was still relatively vague in form and it could not suffice in itself. The divisions also manifested themselves on a lower level, which is especially characteristic of the conspiracist vision of the world. Those who came into conflict with the people’s authorities – in this case, mostly students – were secondarily divided into two groups. Nobody could question that a large number of students were participating in the various rallies, demonstrations, strikes and marches. The two-volumes of documents generally do not attempt to downplay this number, though they only discuss it to a very limited extent, as if it were irrelevant. Many of the documents report statements from work plants and especially party organizations demanding harsh punishment of the rebels. It is extremely telling that the majority of them say nothing at all about the participants in the “excesses” (the word “excess” as a term for student demonstrations was almost obligatory, sometime replaced only by the synonymous “incident”). The expression “participants” almost never appears. I came across it only twice in the whole set of documents, as the authors preferred to proceed as if the conflict were not between the authorities and demonstrators, but rather between the authorities and somebody else entirely. In this way, the authors expressed themselves as if they did not wish to view the protesting students as enemies. The students might have been ignorant of certain things, naive, deluded, or at worst ideologically errant (sometimes the authors even avoided the noun “students” altogether). The propaganda lens focused on those who stood behind them, pushing them into evil, acting covertly and treacherously. These were the people who deserved to be punished.

This secondary dichotomous division is immeasurably important to conspiracist discourse. It allows the authorities to point to the individuals who supposedly provoke hostile activities, cynically and ruthlessly manipulating other people, governed by base intentions, and – above all – instigating all things evil. This tale of enemies acting behind the scenes – and often outside the country’s

197 On the figure of the enemy in the March ideology and its journalistic writings, see the article “Figura wroga” in my book *Nowomowa po polsku* (Warszawa: PEN, 1991). I would add here that a typical move during the March propaganda was the manipulation of names or the foregrounding of those that might have sounded foreign or come across as Jewish. These names helped readers to identify the enemy.

borders – forms the interpretive center of the March discourse. The authorities can afford not to worry about the demonstrating students who were denouncing the lies of the official media and who were demanding the introduction of democratic reforms. Instead, the authorities must expose and condemn the powers who have induced or commanded the students to behave in this way. In other words, the activists whom we can see and hear – and who evidently exist beyond any doubt – are irrelevant. The “hidden hand” is much more important.¹⁹⁸ The conspiracist vision of the world excludes the possibility of any spontaneity. There is no place for the idea that somebody could undertake a given action from his or her own unconstrained will.

The people who have intentionally provoked these anti-socialist and anti-Polish disturbances appear under various names. Their deeds and actions are also described in various ways. For instance, some authors talk about “provocative elements” (Marzec 186), “organizers of brawls and disturbances” (Marzec 181) and “trouble-making elements” (Aneks 89). Sometimes these mythical owners of the hidden hand are defined without any evasions as “the agents of international Zionism and the FRG” (Aneks 103). The Zionists usually form the main point of reference, even when they are not specifically mentioned by name, since the context inevitably suggests them beyond any shadow of doubt. Nevertheless, the diverse authors define these Zionists with varying degrees of specificity. Often they talk about the “ringleaders” of the student disturbances, treating them as if the “participants” had nothing in common with these leaders, as if the students were clearly distinct from them. The word “ringleader” may also be translated – though in most cases with difficulty – into a certain reality. For instance, we might say that anybody who organizes rallies, gives speeches at them, or prepares petitions addressed to the authorities is a ringleader. But the March discourse was not interested in these kinds of ringleaders, who could easily emerge from the group of “participants.” Such ringleaders could not represent the most important, decisive, or highest members of the hierarchy, since the authorities could appeal for the punishment of the “ringleaders of the excesses and their ideological leaders” (Aneks 157). Sometimes the texts also speak of “ringleaders and leaders” or “ringleaders and instigators.” The mysterious, though ultimately Zionist leaders had their own name. The authors of the documents refer to them with astounding consistency as “instigators” (“*inspiratorzy*”). This word and its various derivatives are of crucial significance to the March discourse.

It is worth paying some attention to it. The word itself (“*inspirator*”) is classically Polish, though we can still establish when it entered the journalistic writing and denunciations of the March unrest. At the time, an exceptionally

198 I have borrowed this phrase from Daniel Pipes. See: Pipes, *Conspiracy*, p. 65.

repulsive and aggressive article by Ryszard Gontarz – entitled “Instigators” (“Inspiratorzy”)¹⁹⁹ – contributed greatly to its popularization. I am not sure whether the introduction of this term was the idea of this incomparably lousy journalist or whether he received it from the list of words provided by the press department of the Central Committee of the Polish United Workers’ party. Ultimately, it does not matter. The use of the term during the March period seems to demonstrate very clearly the mechanisms of the conspiracist vision of the world and the role played by particular expressions in its formation and transmission.

As I have already suggested, the word “*inspiracja*” (“inspiration” or “instigation”) and its derivatives are classically Polish expressions appearing in various forms and combinations in Polish dictionaries from the classic Linde dictionary to more recent editions. Linde lists “*inspiracja*” and details its theological meaning, defining the adjective “*inspirowany*” as “inspired” (“*natchniony*”). In later dictionaries, the theological interpretation becomes increasingly marginal or even disappears completely. Instead, various psychological meanings appear, including such derivative phrases as “*inspirator*” (“inspirer,” “initiator” or “instigator”), “to inspire,” “to be inspired,” and so on. One point reveals itself here with absolute consistency: “*inspirator*” and the other expressions from this family of words are either axiologically neutral (one can inspire or be inspired to do both good and evil) or carry decidedly positive connotations. In the most recent dictionary of contemporary Polish, we find as many as eleven entries associated with this set of expressions. In the definition of the word “*inspirator*,” we read the following: “A person who provides the impetus for something, stimulating creative action.”²⁰⁰ Moreover, even when “*inspirator*” (or its feminine equivalent, “*inspiratorka*”) appears in newspeak, its connotations remain decidedly positive. Indeed, the communist party may even appear as a kind of universal “inspirer.” In the Dorozewski dictionary, we find a line taken from Jerzy Andrzejewski’s book *The Party and the Writer’s Work* (*Partia i twórczość pisarza*, 1952), a line so beautiful that I cannot resist quoting it: “The party – the great inspirer of the people – shows people outside the party how they can and should join the people.”

Yet in 1968, in various publications expressing the views and interests of this great “inspirer of the people,” the word “*inspirator*” – generally in plural form – took on decidedly negative connotations. Indeed, it clearly came to dominate conspiracy discourse in the form in which this discourse developed during the

199 This article appeared in the *Kurier Polski* on 12 March 1968. Despite the fact that it was published in the evening edition, which had little political significance, it immediately gained wide publicity. Accordingly, Ryszard Gontarz took the preeminent position among the hack masters of the March propaganda writing.

200 See: *Praktyczny słownik współczesnej polszczyzny*, Volume 14, ed. H. Zgólkowa (Poznań: Kurpisz, 1998).

period of the March unrest. People appealed for the punishment of the “instigators” (or “inspirers”) and their elimination from the party – or even from Polish life – in various press articles, denunciations and more or less official declarations. Sometimes the authors referred to them on the same level as other kinds of vermin, as “disturbers of public order and instigators of various attacks on the Central Committee and Comrade Gomułka” (Aneks 101) or “political troublemakers, reactionaries and instigators of the recent excesses” (Aneks 216). In such cases, it is not always clear whether these terms refer to specific groups of people or whether they simply represent a sequence of synonyms with a redundancy typical of communist expression.

But this is not the most important point. We should note that the people defined as “instigators” remain the main actors on the stage of events. They determine their general direction. They seek to influence those defined as participants. Above all, they take primary responsibility for the deliberately organized “anti-Polish and anti-socialist disturbances.” Again, I emphasize that they alone are the active parties, since everything happens as a result of their persuasion or instigation. Everybody else is incapable of acting. All they can do is listen to hostile suggestions: in other words, to what the “instigators” pour into their heads. This situation is highly characteristic of the conspiracist vision of the world. All attacks are “instigated attacks.” The people who join them are devoid of any ability to determine their own conduct. By definition, they are condemned to passivity. This depiction of the instigators’ role explains the minimal interest in the participants and the clearly indulgent attitude towards them.

According to this interpretation, the instigators essentially represent a homogeneous group, though in certain cases we may hear about “the main instigators” (Aneks 166) and sometimes the expression is strengthened in characteristic newspeak style with an authenticating adjective (“genuine instigators” [Aneks 191]). But who are these instigators? Superficially, this question might seem easy to answer, but in a certain sense it is not quite so straightforward. The category of the instigator has the advantage of allowing the user of the term to explain events in two different ways, making it possible to point to general phenomena whose indisputable virtue lies in their lack of precise definition. In this form, the category of the instigator allows its users to draw attention to the general structure of the world. In this world, there are always people who act with no other intention than to do evil, and thus to oppose our sphere of values or the established order of which we alone are the guardians. These people represent obstacles on our path into the luminous future and towards the realization of our national aims. According to this understanding, instigators form the strange equivalents of evil spirits. Though invisible to the naked eye, they act treacherously and are capable of beguiling

anyone who does not listen to our good advice or follow our instructions. Real socialism's prevailing conspiracist vision of the world had its own demons.

This particular formation of the category of "instigators" clearly could not suffice. The fact that they were similar to elusive (though omnipresent) spirits had its advantages, but it could never fulfill all requirements. Therefore, the instigators also received more concrete definitions. This rarely implied any mention of specific names (in this context, the name of the dissident writer Pawel Jasienica probably appeared most frequently). Instead, the group was concretely defined in various other ways. Sometimes, this still involved elliptical statements, apparently because the instigators operated deviously and always out of sight, so it was difficult to catch them red-handed. After all, it was no accident that their hands remained hidden. Yet sometimes there was no lack of concrete details. For instance, in the *Report of the Organizational Department of the Central Committee of the PZPR* of March 13, we read the following:

The belief has been expressed that the demonstrations of the Warsaw students were a result of hostile activity [. . .], that the instigators were Zionist elements and political bankrupts. This includes the claim that the ringleaders of the riots were young people with the best conditions of life and learning, who had been spoiled by these very conditions. Accordingly, their attitude is even more deserving of general condemnation. (Aneks 84 – these arguments are supposed to reflect views expressed by the working class).

In this way, the instigators are almost always depicted in association with Zionism, whose tentacles are far reaching. Certainly, this is what the students of the Teachers' College in Siedlce claimed in the following resolution addressed to the Central Committee of the PZPR:

We cannot understand how we can tolerate the enemies of People's Poland, the agents of international Zionism and the FRG in leading positions within our state. We demand explanations as to why the good names of honest Poles like Comrade Gomulka and Comrade Moczar are being vilified. We are not anti-Semites, but we do not agree to allow the tentacles of Zionism to penetrate this far (Aneks, 103).

These students in training to be teachers in Siedlce express very well what is really at stake in the persistently recurring image of the "instigators" – namely, the exposure of the Zionists as the universal perpetrators of evil and as a constant threat. The use of the word "instigators" in this type of context reveals a consistently conspiracist categorization of the world. Indeed, the very idea of conspiracy permeated communist thought and expression so profoundly that there was no need – as I have already suggested – to speak directly about any specific conspiracies. The conspiracist vision of a hostile plot against everything good, native, socialist and national completely saturated speech, while also constituting

– in a certain sense – an element of style. Here the conspiracist categorization of the world reached one of its apogees.

In conclusion, I would like to make a few additional remarks. In my analysis of the materials published in these two volumes of documents, I have not drawn any attention to another important aspect. The analyzed materials represent more than simply a set of reports passed on to the highest authorities. They also had a very clear goal: namely, to influence those known as the “deciders” within the communist system, convincing them to undertake certain action and to weed out even more consistently those defined as enemies – and especially as “instigators” – from their positions and even from the country. Accordingly, the creation of such an expansive conspiracist vision embracing all forms of official utterance contributed not only to the molding of social consciousness, but also to certain concrete outcomes in the struggle for power between various party factions and orientations. From this perspective, the conspiracist narrative about the world was connected with a certain type of rhetoric. Indeed, the rhetorical (or rhetorical/pragmatic) aspect of conspiracist discourse would make an interesting subject for further reflection. After all, we are not dealing with an isolated case here. The conspiracist vision of the world has its own rhetoric, which springs from the simple fact that this vision does not constitute an aim in itself, but always represents a way of exerting influence. The rhetoric of conspiracist discourse appears to be based on a peculiar attitude towards the audience, whom the writers treat as if appearances had deceived them or as if they were somehow uninitiated – or at least not fully initiated. One can only reach the truth – which is usually hidden and undiscoverable by means of common sense or immediate observation – through the revelation of mysterious powers, which must be exposed and unmasked by a discourse that discusses all kinds of covert activities, secret gatherings and exploits, as well as various kinds of conspiracies. The rhetoric of the March discourse – but also of any other conspiracist discourse – gives readers or listeners an almost exclusively passive role, making no appeal to their critical faculties, but rather attempting to paralyze them completely. The role of readers or listeners is to accept that what they have previously seen, learnt or believed has been based on naivety, delusion or outright lies. Conspiracist rhetoric is a peculiar rhetoric that simultaneously reveals and disabuses.

It is also worth drawing attention to the possibility of yet another diagnosis of the conspiracist categorization of the world beyond the linguistic and rhetorical interpretations. I would describe this perspective as “narratological.” All visions of plots and conspiracies against what is good, worthy and valuable form peculiarly constructed narratives, stories told in a particular way. How? It is difficult to answer this question, since – as far as I know – the matter has not been the subject of any separate consideration. Nevertheless, we can clearly point to the specific

features of the conspiracy narrative and observe that certain rules apply that might differentiate it from other types of stories. These are evident in the construction of both characters and plot.

From the narratological point of view, conspiracist discourse above all represents a story about the existence of a secret world, which is not directly accessible to people deprived of certain additional information and thus inclined to hold naive beliefs or simply to live in ignorance and delusion. We might characterize the attitude of the narrative speaker in conspiracist discourse as follows: I am telling a story about something you know nothing about, and could not know anything about, since I alone (together with the broad group I represent and with which I identify) possess full knowledge of this matter and have at my disposal the relevant factual and ideological data on the basis of which to interpret the facts properly. Various horror stories and other tales meant to freeze the blood in one's veins often appear within this narrative framework – in other words, stories based on a dichotomous division between good and evil, stories intended to show the dangers associated with the actions of treacherous and hidden enemies. The world of the enemy being unmasked must be unambiguously evil or even criminal. The narrator does not enter into their arguments, but rather rejects them in advance. The Polish conspiracy tale of March 1968 is no different from the classic manifestations of this genre.

Finally, I have one further observation to make. The conspiracist narrative was a great surprise when it first emerged, making an enormous impression and appearing as something improbable or even impossible. This is how people initially perceived it when they viewed it from up close and without the necessary distance. Today we find that the narrative has lost none of its terror, though it also seems remarkably banal. Jerzy Eisler – whom I quoted earlier in this piece – has compared the journalistic writing of March 1968 with Stalinist and Nazi publications. We might make the same claims about the whole March conspiracist vision, which generally reflected the totalitarian conspiracist narrative that had been propagated on both the left and the right. Indeed, the March narrative seemed so shocking and peculiar precisely because it managed to intertwine both communist and fascist or Nazi motifs. But does this peculiarity contradict the sense of the narrative's banality? Perhaps. On the other hand, we might also ask whether any narrative expressing the conspiracist vision of the world could be anything but banal.

15. Ulysses' Day

The task of describing a single day – even if it might not always be a day in a gulag – remains an appealing one. After all, the day is our most basic unit of time, as the Spanish dramatic poets of the Baroque understood very well when they divided their plays precisely into days. For years I have been tempted by the idea of describing a day in the life of communist propaganda, though I have always understood that any such description could only be partial – if only because I could never hope to take all media into account. I would never know exactly what had been served up on television screens on a particular day. I would never be able to recall the banners that hung in the city on that ordinary day. Yet the idea remains tempting, even if I must limit the scope of its application to the press alone.

But which day should I choose? The choice is fundamentally significant here, especially since I wish in some sense to pick just any old day, undistinguished in any way and independent of the highly developed liturgical calendar of real socialism. Could I make this choice by drawing lots? No – but I stumbled upon another idea instead. I found a day devoid of any particular distinction in what then passed for reality in the People's Republic of Poland. Nothing happened on that day. No particularly important anniversaries were celebrated. I chose a day that had remained completely neutral from this point of view: namely, the day on which the events of James Joyce's *Ulysses* take place – June 16. I shifted the action from 1904 to 1982 and asked myself the following question: what would Leopold Bloom have encountered had he spent this single day wandering not through Dublin at the turn of the century, but through Warsaw during the first year of martial law. Of course, I was not thinking of an Irishman who had somehow found himself in the Polish capital on the Vistula River. According to Joyce's intention, Mr. Bloom is not a distinctly individual character, but rather a kind of contemporary Everyman or Quidam. Therefore, in the Polish context, he might well bear a name like Poldek Kwiatkowski – or, even better, Leopold Kwiatek²⁰¹ – a local person who knows the city and all its byways, accustomed to the realities of the system in which he has been fated to live for almost forty years, understanding its customs and forms of expression. Mr. Kwiatek would not be surprised by what he encountered. He would accept it all as familiar, accustomed and natural – in a word, as normal. He would be capable of turning a deaf ear and a blind eye to it

201 Translator's Note: "Kwiatek" means "little flower" or "little bloom" in Polish (while also representing a relatively common surname), so that the protagonist's name here is a play on Leopold Bloom.

all, and yet he would not be entirely indifferent to the conditions in which he was fated to live. After all, the various components of reality in People's Poland would attack his consciousness even when he chose not to focus his attention on them. They would influence his thoughts and behavior. And so what did Mr. Leopold Kwiatek – an avid reader of the daily press – encounter on 16 June 1982 A.D.?

Before we answer this question, we must first accept a certain basic premise. On this particular day, for reasons known only to himself, our hero purchased as many as six newspapers. He not only had a copy of *Życie Warszawy* (*Warsaw Life*) sticking out of his pocket – as on other days – but a whole sheaf of other papers as well. Or perhaps it happened like this: Mr. Kwiatek visited the reading room of the International Book and Press Club (there were several of them in Warsaw at the time) and perused the day's press there. Apart from *Życie*, he read *Trybuna Ludu* (*The People's Tribune*), *Żołnierz Wolności* (*The Soldier of Freedom*), *Sztandar Młodych* (*The Youth Standard*) and *Słowo Powszechne* (*The Universal Word*). This list might look extensive, but in fact there was relatively little to read. Mr. Bloom noticed at once that the materials repeated themselves. The same items appeared in all six newspapers. Even their headlines hardly differed from one another at all. And this applied not only to the news coming in from the wider world about important events – after all, it was difficult to ignore the war over the Falkland Islands (which was just reaching a conclusion favorable to the United Kingdom). It also concerned something else, which might in fact have failed to attract our hero's attention, since he had already managed to accustom itself to it. Everywhere a single point of view prevailed, a single tone, and – above all – a single language, irrespective of the subject at hand. Admittedly, a few religious themes unknown to the other newspapers appeared in *Słowo Powszechne*, which promoted itself as a Catholic publication. Yet the editors presented these themes as if they loved real socialism so much that they wished to harness even the Lord God himself to its service.

Mr. Kwiatek could be positively convinced of only one fact after his perusal of the Warsaw press, which repeated the same message to him with the greatest insistence and at every opportunity: the world in which we live is divided into two. This means more than a mere political division. It is divided in every way, in every domain, and above all in the sphere of values. The world “over there” is aggressive, warmongering, ruthlessly fighting whatever it dislikes, constantly involving itself in various rows. Accordingly, June 16 could not pass without a fundamental condemnation of imperialism from the highest level. On this day, the loudest and most significant accusations came from Boris Ponomarev – no mere nonentity, since he was a member of the Political Bureau and the secretary of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union. He had made these accusations in Sofia at the anniversary celebrations marking one hundred

years since the birth of the great internationalist Georgi Dimitrov (Mr. Kwiatek could have found a full list of Polish dignitaries taking part in these important celebrations). The United States was expanding its bases in the Pacific to serve its aggressive aims. Israel was also becoming more aggressive and increasingly insolent, conducting raids on the Palestinians. Yet the British were equally repulsive, as Henryk Kawka writes in *Żołnierz Wolności* in a dramatic and strongly accusatory tone, since they were supposedly shooting plastic bullets at children in Ireland. The western world was a world of crime. In any real socialist country, only a person who was himself an enemy could sympathize with this world. On 16 June 1982, Stefan Kisielewski appeared by name in the role of this enemy.²⁰² *Trybuna Ludu* devoted a separate article to him under the headline “Jugglers of Ideas” (“Kuglarze idei”). The article was modestly undersigned by two little letters: “I. K.” If Mr. Kwiatek had been a regular reader of the communist party Central Committee’s main organ, he would not have had to strain his imagination to figure out that the man behind these letters was a certain Ignacy Krasicki – not the great Polish eighteenth-century writer of the same name, but a contemporary star of vitriolic party journalism.

How different is our world – always good, peaceful and honorable. How different are its leaders – not only Ponomarev in Sofia, but above all Leonid Ilyich Brezhnev, who has just announced to the world that the Soviet Union will never use nuclear weapons first. The opposition between war and peace becomes quite clear, while there is no doubt who is on which side. But it is not only the leaders who are active in the cause of peace. Indeed, we discover that on this day 7,102,000 people signed a protest of the Soviet youth sent to NATO in Brussels. The young people express their ardent opposition to the policy of this aggressive military block, which continues to push for war. Yet the Soviet youth does not stand alone in defense of the beloved peace. Poland also has something to say in the matter: for instance, in the “central youth festival,” which will take place this year in the city of Kielce. The children seek peace, while the authorities take good care of them. Mr. Kwiatek could read the following headline in *Rzeczpospolita* (*The Republic*) – “Heartfelt Care for the Youngest” (“Serdeczna troska o najmłodszych”). Of course, the young were not the only objects of constant and cordial care. The whole of Polish society was the object of particular solicitude, as Mr. Kwiatek could learn as he skimmed through the second page of *Trybuna Ludu*, which included reports and notices concerning more than a dozen different conferences, meetings and plenary sessions (on this occasion only involving regional committees). A very important object of care revealed with great enthusiasm on June 16 – as on any

202 Translator’s Note: Stefan Kisielewski (1911-1991) was a Polish writer, composer and musicologist who was a vocal critic of censorship in socialist economics from the late 1960s onward.

other day – was the “formation of ideological and political attitudes,” together with a corresponding reinforcement of the ideological offensive. Yet in order for this to be possible, a “strengthening of party organizations” was necessary. On this very day, the authorities were taking care of this matter, especially in Tarnów at the appropriate meeting of party leaders. At the same time, “support for the idea of national understanding” was also the object of particular care in Szczecin. In general, there was a lot to care about.

This was especially true, since the various newspapers depicted the reality of People’s Poland without denying the existence of various kinds of difficulties and problems. Nevertheless, they spoke about these realities only in the vaguest terms, and thus we cannot be certain that Mr. Kwiatek noticed the articles on these subjects at all. Did a short text in *Życie Warszawy* under the headline “Removing Tensions, Staff Review – Tasks for the Education Ministry?” (“Usuwanie napięć – Przegląd kadry – Zadania resortu nauki?”) catch his attention. If so, he would have read the following paragraph:

This review and assessment of academic teachers is also being conducted in advanced schools by departmental, institutional and college-wide commissions. Among other things, the aim of this review is to create conditions ensuring the proper academic development of the most talented and creative academic staff.

The reader familiar with how to read this type of text has undoubtedly understood that it announces a purge in academic circles. But was Mr. Kwiatek this kind of reader? It is not for us to say. However, we may safely assume that he fully understood the article in *Trybuna Ludu* under the headline “Song and Dance Over Chipboard” (“Taniec wokół płyty”), in which Krystyna Panek writes about the production of faulty sofa beds made of chipboard. In general, the propaganda of success is in the past, and we now find consideration of various kinds of irregularities, cases of negligence and other deficiencies. There is now very little to say about the extraordinary successes of the Polish economy or about the prosperity enjoyed by the Polish nation thanks to socialism. Yes, problems and difficulties exist – and these are not necessarily mere “diseases of growth” (Mr. Kwiatek perhaps remembers from his youth Hilary Minc’s creative slogan) – but we are not responsible for them. Others are the perpetrators – always others. On June 16, Mr. Kwiatek could learn (at least from *Sztandar Młodych*) that Solidarity had driven Polish society into penury. Moreover, society itself was guilty, since it had not behaved as it should have done. Our protagonist was supposed to become convinced of this fact after reading two different texts written by professors.

The learned sociologist Kazimierz Żygulski demonstrates that what is unfolding within social consciousness has only deepened the crisis, since everywhere there are “appeals, calls, proclamations and slogans – the catastrophic bombast of passionate accusations and threats.” From the context, it is absolutely

clear that this critique applies to the rhetoric of the enemy, and clearly not to the language used by the authorities who care so much about the people's affairs. The author himself nobly appeals for national understanding. Elsewhere, the learned economist and minister for prices, Zdzisław Krasiński, is more specific in his arguments, maintaining that people have financial problems because they do not understand the principles of good nutrition. Consumers mismanage their money, and thus it is no surprise that it only suffices to get them to the twenty-fifth of every month (here Mr. Kwiatek doubtless thought to himself – perhaps with relief, perhaps with concern – that he would not have to take out any loans over the next nine days, while perhaps he recalled Władysław Gomułka's pronouncement many years earlier that Poles had excessively good appetites and generally ate too much).

However, there are also ways to overcome the various iniquities and problems. The press on 16 June 1982 A.D. is constructive, pointing to a method that would allow the authorities to overcome these difficulties – namely, inspections. The word “inspection” perhaps recurs more than any other in the newspapers on this particular day. The economist Krasiński speaks about the market in an interview that appears in almost all the papers, while *Życie Warszawy* very appropriately gives the text the headline “Prices, Inspections, Consumers” (“Ceny – kontrole – konsumenci”). In *Rzeczpospolita*, one of the subtitles in a report on the “Łucznik” factory in Radom is “A Necessary Inspection.” The report announces that “an active inspection must be conducted at every work station.” Yet Janusz Rowicki's article in *Słowo Powszechne* – “How To Blunt Sharp Edges: The Benefit of Inspections” (“Jak tępic ostre kanty: Pożytek z kontroli”) – is a true poem in honor of inspections, though we should concede that its enlightened author is aware that they cannot solve every problem in the economy. He also takes the liberty of making certain bold demands: “Here the conclusion irresistibly arises that there is a need for a thorough inspection of the operations of train station catering.” This sentence might well have caught the eye of our Leopold, since it appears in bold print. I cannot say whether he was aware of the rules governing the press in People's Poland, but if so, then he certainly would have concluded that “inspections” must have been the assigned theme of the day. As always, *Słowo Powszechne* – often more communist than the first secretary himself – makes the most fervent efforts to realize this directive.

At the same time, the reader of the newspapers on 16 June 1982 need not have been overly distressed, since they also brought good news: for instance, about Polish successes at the Poznań Fair. He was also supposed to receive the impression that many things were changing for the better. The magic adjective “future” served to intensify this impression. According to established custom, it often appeared in combination with the noun “improvement.” As *Trybuna Ludu*

reported, the “Baildon” steelworks hosted a party committee meeting graced by the participation of another learned gentleman, Professor Zbigniew Messner, a member of the Political Bureau of the Central Committee of the Polish United Workers’ Party. During this meeting, the participants deliberated precisely over “the future improvement of the current motivational system at the steelworks.” Mr. Kwiatek was perhaps not especially interested in the future improvement of a steel mill somewhere in Silesia, but he must have been pleased when he read about the “future improvement of society’s health” and “the future reduction of the infant mortality rate.”

Assuming our Leopold merely browsed through the press (we cannot expect him to have read it carefully), he might also have learnt about various other things, including the peculiar economic miracle described by *Rzeczpospolita*: “In light industry, production has fallen while profits continue to grow.” He might also have paused over more serious issues. On June 16 – and thus significantly early – *Życie Warszawy* rushed to publish an article for the approaching anniversary of the 1956 events in Poznań.²⁰³ Ryszarda Kazimierska wrote this article, which was one of those expansive texts in which the Warsaw press abounded. The general idea in these lengthy disquisitions was to speak without saying anything, or – as people described it so eloquently in the language of the People’s Republic – “to fudge” a subject. Our hero had been reading *Życie Warszawy* for years, so the author’s name was probably not unknown to him. Perhaps he had a good memory, recalling that in 1968 she had written several articles in the purest style of the March anti-Jewish propaganda.

But Mr. Kwiatek would learn very few concrete facts from the newspapers of that day. He might have been puzzled to learn that motor vehicles could form the subject of a doctoral thesis, as he discovered from *Żołnierz Wolności* that a certain lieutenant-colonel and engineer at the Military Academy of Technology had defended his doctoral dissertation on “Methods for Determining Dynamic Loads and Fatigue Strength for Car Frames.” Perhaps the adjectival form of “fatigue” (in the Polish version) caught his attention, since he was meeting it for the first time in this form. Or perhaps he thought that flipping through the pages of such a thick stack of newspapers was rather fatiguing to himself. Nevertheless, certain concrete facts associated directly with everyday life sometimes appeared. For example, Mr. Kwiatek learnt that the price of eggs had fallen, but only “for work places and food outlets.” For them, eggs would cost four zloties – cheaper than

203 Translator’s Note: On June 28, 1956, protests broke out against working conditions at various factories in Poznań. Later massive crowds converged on the center of the city, where security forces opened fire and killed dozens of people. These events were part of the process leading to the later anti-Stalinist “thaw” in October of the same year.

the standard retail price. Would the scrambled eggs he occasionally consumed at his local milk bar be cheaper than usual?²⁰⁴

But such concrete facts were above all the domain of death notices, theater and cinema schedules, and advertisements. On this day, there is no information on the passing of anyone well-known for their public activities, though the list of shows and performances looks interesting and enticing. If Mr. Kwiatek had wished to go to the cinema that evening, he would have had a selection of decent films to choose from. The theaters also boasted some very good shows (or – as people had begun to say by then – “offers”). If he had desired to see something more ambitious, he could have attended a performance of Witold Gombrowicz’s *Ferdydurke* or Sartre’s *No Exit*. If he had preferred to divert himself with something lighter, he could have chosen musical comedies like *The Bachelor’s Club* (*Klub kawalerów*) or *Old-Polish Pleasures* (*Uciechy staropolskie*). Regrettably, Mr. Kwiatek could have learnt nothing about the more contemporary pleasures from the newspapers. These times were virtuous and the newspapers published no offers (again these “offers”!) from escort agencies, though we know that our hero did not always ignore such establishments on his wanderings through the city.

There were also advertisements – a great many of them in *Życie Warszawy* alone, since this was the main classified newspaper of the time. Some of them had been written exclusively for specialists: “Screw jack for sale, forms, raw material. Will help to start Vinidur production” (another advert announces: “Vinidur sheets for sale”). But of course the majority of these advertisements were no mystery to Mr. Kwiatek. Indeed, if anything, he might have been surprised that they remained so general. For instance, in the “Wanted” section, somebody merely enters the word “books” and a phone number. Could he or she possibly have been interested in all books indiscriminately, from *The Odyssey* to *Ulysses*, from Maria Rodziewiczówna to Witold Gombrowicz, from vulgar pamphlets to rare collector’s items? Yet this was probably no surprise to Mr. Kwiatek, since in the very same “Wanted” section he found “vouchers now available” or simply “vouchers.” He immediately understood what this meant without the slightest shadow of doubt. Indeed, he would probably have been astonished if somebody had informed him on 16 June 1982 that fifteen years later such an advertisement would be completely incomprehensible to a young person with no memory of those times. Vouchers? What vouchers? From where and for what? This young person would probably be equally surprised by the presence of an advertisement expressing the desire to buy a refrigerator. As we can see, this era developed ways

204 Translator’s Note: The “milk bar” was a very cheap restaurant or canteen serving standard Polish fare including various soups, *pierogi* (dumplings), breaded pork cutlets, potatoes and pickled vegetables. Some still exist in Polish cities and towns.

of communicating in monosyllables, using as few words as possible – and at once everything was clear.

But let us not torment our hero any longer. Mr. Kwiatek has planned many other activities for June 16, all of them doubtless more interesting than the perusal of newspapers. Let us free him from the task of poring over the news they bring. Let us absolve him from the responsibility of reading the evening papers – of which there were two in Warsaw at the time, *Express Wieczorny* (*The Evening Express*) and *Kurier Polski* (*The Polish Courier*). We shall not examine any further what was of particular interest to him, what he chose to treat seriously and what he ignored. Above all, we have been concerned here with what the Warsaw press offered to its readers on a certain normal day in the People's Republic of Poland, how it attempted to shape their consciousness or form their image of the world, as well as the divisions or values it imposed – on Ulysses' day or any other.

16. Three Days with *Nasz Dziennik*

1

Many years ago I wondered what the average reader of the Warsaw press in the time of the communist Polish People's Republic might read and discover in a single day. I had in mind a politically, socially and symbolically normal day, a day in which nothing worthy of either genuine or pretended (that is, feigned) attention took place, a day coinciding with no special holidays or anniversaries to be endowed with any particular meaning. In other words, my intention was to examine the press on a day devoid of distinction, a day that might be described with the titular phrase from one of Józef Czechowicz's verse collections – "a day like any other."²⁰⁵ I recalled that the events of James Joyce's *Ulysses* take place on June 16, 1904, when Leopold Bloom wanders the streets of Dublin. Accordingly, I decided to investigate what a certain Mr. Kwiatek might learn on June 16, 1983, if he set out to wander Warsaw's highways and byways, browsing through the pages of its press publications with greater or lesser interest.²⁰⁶

More recently, I intended to revisit this idea by examining what the same Mr. Kwiatek might discover on June 16, 2009, if he were to peruse the Warsaw press once again – from *Trybuna (The Tribune)*, a daily newspaper linked with the post-communist Democratic Left Alliance party (*SLD*), to *Nasz Dziennik (Our Daily)*, a Catholic daily representing the conservative Radio Maryja organization.²⁰⁷ I

205 Translator's Note: Józef Czechowicz (1903-1939) was a prominent Polish poet of the interwar period. He died during the German bombing of Lublin in the early days of the Second World War. His collection *A Day Like Any Other (Dzień jak co dzień)* was published in 1930.

206 "Dzień Ulissesa" ("Ulysses' Day") first appeared in a collective volume entitled *Kultura staropolska – kultura europejska: Prace ofiarowane Januszowi Tazbirowi w siedemdziesiątą rocznicę urodzin* (Warszawa: Semper, 1997). I also included it in my book *Dzień Ulisses a i inne szkice na tematy niemitologiczne* (Kraków: Wydawnictwo Literackie, 2000).

Translator's Note: "Kwiatek" means "Little Flower" in Polish (while also representing a relatively common surname), so that the protagonist's name here is a play on Leopold Bloom.

207 Translator's Note: "Radio Maryja" ("Radio Maria") is a conservative Catholic radio station founded and directed by Tadeusz Rydzyk, a Roman Catholic priest and Redemptorist. The owner of the station is the Lux Veritatis Foundation, which also owns the Catholic television station "Telewizja Trwam." *Nasz Dziennik* – literally translated as "Our Daily" – is a daily newspaper owned by the same foundation.

expected to report after a more or less detailed analysis that these ideological extremes inevitably touched, and that certain presumably unintentional similarities existed between the opposing publications. However, I soon realized that nothing of the sort was the case. I discovered that *Nasz Dziennik* was the only newspaper of its kind, incomparable with any other Polish daily in circulation at the time. Consequently, if I wished to draw any comparisons, I would have to place *Nasz Dziennik* in a category of its own, entirely separate from all other publications. Ultimately, whatever the ideological options at their foundations – and whatever their more or less overt political orientations – the other newspapers respected certain principles forming the very basis of the modern press. Regardless of any other entanglements, these principles cannot be ignored. Here I would like to draw attention to two of them.

I would define the first principle as a certain minimum requirement of pluralism. This means not denying a voice to those whom one might regard as ideological or political opponents – those with whom one clashes or disputes. To give a simple example, if one wishes to criticize the government's actions or the declarations of its representatives, one must first briefly relate what these proposals specifically entail. A variety of opinions should always be represented in any discussion, including views that might provoke a passionately polemical response. The popular *Rzeczpospolita*²⁰⁸ daily has clearly taken a strongly right-wing direction in recent times. However, despite this ideological turn, it has not ceased to be a newspaper that respects at least a certain pluralistic minimum. The June 16 edition reveals how seriously the editorial team takes these principles, since it includes a lengthy article written by Alina Cała – a well-known scholar of Jewish studies and Polish-Jewish relations – entitled “The Anti-Semitic World of Anti-Values” (“Antysemicki świat antywartości”). In this piece, Cała responds to various arguments made by her conservative opponents in a debate she had initiated several weeks earlier with a text about Polish-Jewish relations during the Nazi occupation.²⁰⁹ It is no accident that most newspapers print the various conflicting positions on such issues in a section under the heading “Opinion.” In *Nasz Dziennik*, nothing of the sort exists, since such a section would fundamentally clash with its very nature and with the rules applying within it. Despite the aversion that certain articles in *Rzeczpospolita* might provoke in some readers (including this author), any attempt to equate it with *Nasz Dziennik* would be unfair and ultimately indefensible – an exaggerated accusation. In *Nasz Dziennik*, multiplicity of opinion is nowhere to be found, and one would search for an “Opinion” section

208 Translator's Note: *Rzeczpospolita* – or, *The Republic* – is one of two major daily newspapers of record in Poland (the other being *Gazeta Wyborcza*).

209 Cała, Alina, “Antysemicki świat antywartości,” *Rzeczpospolita*, 16 June 2009, No 139 (8345).

in vain. *Nasz Dziennik* offers its readers only one authoritatively formulated and irrefragable “opinion” every day from the first page to the last.

The second principle is linked with the first. In all the Warsaw dailies, from *Trybuna* to *Gazeta Wyborcza* to *Rzeczpospolita*,²¹⁰ there is a certain level of respect for the diverse forms of expression and perspective characteristic of the different people being described or presented. The language of commentary and interpretation is not the only language in evidence. Moreover, this language has no right to extinguish the original or initiating languages, even when these languages become the objects of strong refutation. In other words, we might say that a newspaper has no right to use only its own language, even if it considers this language to be entirely right, justified or morally superior. Accordingly, if a newspaper creates a certain dominant language on its pages, then it must inevitably enter into relations with other languages – even if these are to be rejected and repudiated. The language of interpretation and commentary cannot exist without the language being reported. The interplay between these languages is what makes public discourse authentic. But in *Nasz Dziennik* – I repeat the phrase – nothing of the sort exists. The operative word in this newspaper is always a one-dimensional word. It constitutes an element within a pre-established and apodictic interpretation dominated by judgments made bluntly and without qualification. Here we find a variety of journalistic writing characterized by extreme monophony (and consequently – we might add – by extreme monotony). Commentaries and evaluations overwhelm facts. The most important thing is not to report what happened, but above all to impose a judgment. The first task of the newspaper’s journalistic and editorial team is not to give the reader the facts. Indeed, this type of publication has entirely different aims. The reader should learn what he or she is supposed to think about a given matter, how to view it and how to evaluate it. Finally, the reader should learn how the matter at hand relates to what he or she must regard as the mandatory, indisputable and binding world (or world view). This approach bears a surprising resemblance to another very well-known phenomenon.

Ewa Bobrowska – the author of an outstanding book on the discourse of Radio Maryja, and to whom I owe a great deal for my own reflections – makes the following argument:

When we examine this vision of the world (...) we find that it is constructed on the basis of cognitive categories and schemas that are deeply rooted in colloquial thought. Here I mean not only the fact that we are often inclined in colloquial thought to explain developing processes by reference to human will (ignoring systemic factors

210 In these reflections, I have not considered tabloid newspapers like *Fakty* or *Superexpress*, which have long been characterized as Poland’s “gutter press.” These represent an entirely different kind of news publication, and thus they demand a different type of analysis.

and connections), but also that in the discourse of Radio Maryja phrases appear that were first coined in communist times and are still associated with the typical strategies of that era. These schemas proliferated in conditions where opportunities for the formation of grass-roots social structures independent of the state were suppressed. (...) The discourse of Radio Maryja is deeply rooted (...) in the mentality inherited from the Polish People's Republic (...). Paradoxically, a milieu that loudly declares its anti-communist attitude constructs its vision of social reality on the basis of cognitive schemas that were formed in communist times and remain an unfortunate legacy of that era, thereby both eclipsing and sustaining them.²¹¹

Herein lies the heart of the problem. These are not passing or unsystematic linguistic practices, but rather they reflect a certain set of principles or even a coherent system – a method for using language according to clear rules. Consequently, these practices also imply a certain attitude towards the reader – a highly restrictive attitude subject to rigorous discipline imposed from above and generally devoid of incidental elements or any form of improvisation. Each element within the system has its designated place – if not a permanent place, then certainly a long-term position. The cognitive schemas always remain identical, regardless of any differences in ideology or political preferences. Indeed, I would formulate Bobrowska's thesis in an even stronger version. I would argue that almost no other discourse formed since 1989 and currently functioning in democratic Poland has come as close to the communist mode of expression as that presented to the reader of *Nasz Dziennik*. When we view matters from this perspective, the fact that this particular discourse ostensibly takes an extreme anti-communist position is of limited significance. Almost everything on the newspaper's pages suggests analogies to various ways in which Marxist-Leninist speech functioned – and in its grimmest periods for that matter. Ultimately, much more is at play here than merely the well-known phenomenon of opposite extremes meeting. Instead, we find the suggestion of a much broader category embracing both forms of speech. This general category is totalitarian discourse, which may be either leftist or rightist, dogmatically attached to one religion or another, or programmatically atheist.

2

As is customary in such cases, various characteristics of the discourse in question reveal themselves in the use of particular words, especially those associated with fundamental ideological premises. Here we find different forms of manipulation,

211 Bobrowska, Ewa, *Obrazowanie społeczeństwa w mediach, Analiza radiomaryjnego dyskursu* (Kraków: Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Jagiellońskiego, 2007), p. 10.

since in most cases the words manipulated by *Nasz Dziennik* differ from those misused by “newspeak,” the ideological creation of Leninism. Nevertheless, the phenomenon itself only differs to a minor extent, or perhaps not at all.

In *Nasz Dziennik*, one word employed in a very particular way is “life.” Every language user understands that this word has many different meanings, and that it may appear in extremely diverse contexts in both literal and metaphorical forms. The user has no need to consult a dictionary to confirm this knowledge, since it forms a basic element of his or her linguistic competency. However, for the columnists of this newspaper, the word “life” refers almost exclusively to a single set of issues. Without going into any greater detail, we might define this area in the most general terms as the question of abortion. “Life” here essentially refers to the life of embryos – that is, to prenatal life. The word almost never refers to the mature phases of human existence, simply ignoring them as unworthy of interest.²¹² Characteristically, there is no discussion of violence against children (according to the prevailing logic of *Nasz Dziennik*, one would have to say “born children”), though this is clearly a subject of great social significance – and one which commercial television stations regularly address in their news programs. Such colloquial phrases as “to take somebody’s life” (in the case of murder) or “to lose one’s life” (in the case of a road accident) essentially have no right to exist on the pages of *Nasz Dziennik*. The editors have radically restricted the range of the word’s applications. Its character is ideological in the highest degree.

A whole set of interesting and characteristic uses of language revolve around this word. The positive heroes are the “defenders of life” or “supporters of life.” These phrases do not refer to opponents of the death penalty, for this issue has no relation to “life” thus understood. In fact, the “defenders of life” in this sense frequently do not oppose capital punishment at all – and sometimes they reveal themselves to be enthusiastic supporters of it. These are quite distinct spheres according to the vision of the world conveyed and perpetuated by *Nasz Dziennik*. In extreme cases, there is no link between them at all. We might be astonished to find that such inconsistency is possible, but it remains a fact. When the subject of life arises – including prenatal life – it is inevitably juxtaposed with death. This logical and rather obvious juxtaposition appears above all in an opposition fundamental to this type of discourse – namely, between the “civilization of life” and the “civilization of death,” where both life and death are understood in a restricted manner typical of the discourse. Indeed, this formula represents its ideological foundation. One might say that this opposition – even when it is not directly evoked – represents the implicit basis of the discourse, which exists in a

212 The exception here is euthanasia, which is also treated as a rejection of life. Euthanasia is condemned in very strong terms, though this theme is not as heavily exploited as those concerning birth.

realm of implied notions accepted as self-evident and impervious to critique. Life is always the life of embryos. The “right to life” concerns this sphere.

On the opposing side, we find not only “supporters of abortion,” but “supporters of killing (or murdering) children.” Here all evasive language disappears from view as the value judgment finds its fullest expression. There is nothing wrong with calling an American gynecologist a “butcher” (as a certain American gynecologist – who was later murdered by a “defender of life” – is described). Melanne Verwee – a former colleague of Hillary Clinton now tasked with women’s issues – is described as a “supporter of killing newly-conceived children.” Mrs. Clinton and President Obama are consistently depicted in *Nasz Dziennik* as negative figures. They are involved with the “promotion of abortion” around the world, and thus they support the killing of innocents. These death-dealing politicians are juxtaposed with “defenders of life in the Congress,” who have exposed Mrs. Clinton’s plans. Her understanding of “reproductive health” includes the killing of children. In a summary of views expressed by conservative congressman Chris Smith, we find the claim that Mrs. Clinton’s promotion of a pro-choice agenda around the world is imperialistic and destroys traditional cultures. It is difficult to ascertain whether or not this is a genuine quotation from one of the congressman’s speeches. Perhaps the editors of *Nasz Dziennik* remembered a strategy commonly employed in Soviet propaganda – namely, accusing opponents of “imperialism.” However the case may be, the expression is characteristic. In the opposition between this narrow definition of “life” and killing, the phenomenon observed by Ewa Bobrowska shows itself with particular force in references to the “will” (usually ill will) of those condemned. Even their most horrific deeds are supposedly premeditated acts. They kill children because they want to kill children, because they have a criminal attitude to the world and a criminal nature. They are fully aware of what they are doing. Here Mrs. Clinton becomes a kind of Lady Macbeth on the global stage. She wants to murder innocent children before they enter the world, not just at home but everywhere. So far in my examination of the word “life” and its functions, I have referred to articles concerning the United States. Yet the views in question clearly have universal relevance in *Nasz Dziennik*, applying to all countries and nations, including, of course, Poland.²¹³

Nasz Dziennik’s manipulation of words embraces an enormous range of phenomena and takes the most diverse forms. The strategy is conspicuous even

213 We should add that the so-called “defense of life” is directed not only against the termination of pregnancies, but also against the “in vitro” method. The Catholic cardinal William Levada devoted a lecture – entitled “*Dignitas personae*” – largely to this subject at the Advanced Seminary in Radom, Poland. His lecture was subsequently published in *Nasz Dziennik* on June 17, 2009. The cardinal’s conclusions do not differ at all from those consistently presented in *Nasz Dziennik*.

when we examine editions from three random days. This is true for both positive and negative terms. Another subject of a peculiar verbal ideologization is the use of the noun “family” and the various contexts in which it may be employed. The word “family” carries an exclusively positive connotation. It would seem that related expressions in common currency elsewhere (especially in journalistic writing on social questions), such as “dysfunctional family” or “family violence,” would be unthinkable on the pages of *Nasz Dziennik*. If they were to appear, they would represent a kind of ideological oxymoron. Even the average family is not especially prominent here, though it also enjoys a positive valuation. The sense of approval is especially evident when the emphasis lies on “family” as the relationship between a woman and a man (where the word “marriage” is also used), as opposed to informal spousal relationships – not to mention homosexual couples. At the same time, the basic use of the word in *Nasz Dziennik*’s discourse has a strongly metaphorical character. “Family” above all, or perhaps even exclusively, means “We” – that is, the listeners of Radio Maryja and the viewers of Telewizja “Trwam,” the good and godly people, “our” community and “our” society. This carries far-reaching consequences, though for the time being I wish merely to underline the metaphorical meaning of the word in *Nasz Dziennik*’s prevailing usage. To some extent, this practice fits into the classical framework of conservative discourse, which treats the family as one of the fundamental values representing the generalized normative model for social structures. According to this interpretation, the word “family” has no individual dimension. It does not refer to the Kowalski family or the Nowak family. Instead, it succumbs to generalization. The values it implies are much more important than its specific meaning. Consequently, it represents a clear example of the intensive application of axiological assumptions to language. Within this expression, all words or phrases associated with matters of essential importance to Radio Maryja’s discourse may be semantically distorted. At the same time, they can never remain unsettled or ambiguous. They must distinguish themselves by absolute singularity of meaning within a sphere of values that are not so much proposed or suggested as imposed. This constitutes one of the fundamental elements defining the totalitarian use of language.

A primary characteristic of the style employed by *Nasz Dziennik* is that almost all linguistic phrases and expressions are subordinated to more or less – generally more – definitive judgments. In essence, they become the vehicles for these judgments. We may illustrate this point with an example that is not especially extreme from an ideological point of view, though it remains no less typical precisely for this reason. The three editions of *Nasz Dziennik* under discussion came out in a period in which media attention was focused on the question of the former Polish Prime Minister Jerzy Buzek’s election as president of the European

Parliament. We might imagine that this issue ought not to have provoked much protest – especially in a newspaper in which various columnists regularly argue that all manner of foreigners have vicious designs upon Poland and Poles, constantly trying to take advantage of our country and doing everything in their power to take away what is rightfully ours. In fact, things take a very similar shape in this article. Of course, it was hardly possible directly to describe the election of a prominent Polish politician to such a prestigious position as another national catastrophe resulting from a sinister conspiracy against Poland. Therefore, the article employs indirect means instead. Above all, the article belittles Buzek himself, portraying him as a petty dealmaker with no personality or character. In fact, it depicts him as a dealmaker who would sell himself to be elected for high position within the European Union. The whole affair comes across as a highly suspicious and dishonorable commercial transaction – perhaps even a corrupt one, as the author indirectly suggests. In the same spirit, the article includes a brief edited paragraph allegedly summarizing Buzek’s statements on TVN television about his plans to join the Civic Platform Party.²¹⁴ This note is accompanied by a photograph of Buzek on the back page (ND 16²¹⁵) with a caption supposedly quoted from his statements: “Let’s just say . . . that the price for my position was not too steep.” Even if the caption does not constitute a blatant falsification, the sentence taken out of context suggests the reprehensible attitude of a petty wheeler dealer – with the clear intention of compromising Buzek. But the commercial metaphors do not end here. An interview with Law and Justice party²¹⁶ spokesman Konrad Szymański bears the title “[Prime Minister] Tusk Sells the Polish National Interest for a Handful of Beads.” Later the specific price to be paid is implied by the claim that “Tusk will trade the Polish position at the [European] Commission.” The commercial metaphor is by no means unusual here. Politicians and activists whom “we” do not support are always cynically and ruthlessly engaged in selling Poland’s national interests and concerns. These accusations frequently apply to

214 Translator’s Note: The Civic Platform (*Platforma Obywatelska*) Party – led by Prime Minister Donald Tusk – is presently in its second term of government. Though the party might broadly be characterized as center right, many conservative voices in Poland – including those associated with *Nasz Dziennik* – have strongly attacked almost all areas of its policy.

215 The number after the abbreviation “ND” (*Nasz Dziennik*) in parentheses denotes the date (in June 2009) of the edition in question.

216 Translator’s Note: Law and Justice (*Prawo i Sprawiedliwość*) – led by Jarosław Kaczyński – is the main opposition party in the Polish parliament. Law and Justice held power between 2005 and 2007. The party leader’s twin brother, Lech Kaczyński, was president of Poland from 2005 until his death in the Smolensk air catastrophe in 2010. Law and Justice is socially more conservative and traditional than Civic Platform, though its economic policies are perhaps closer to the center left.

Donald Tusk's government (and – retrospectively – they seem to include the period from 1997 to 2001 when Buzek was prime minister).²¹⁷ The fact that the Christian Democrat faction in the European Parliament supports Buzek's candidacy carries no positive significance for *Nasz Dziennik*'s journalists. On the contrary, politicians defining themselves with this tag are subject to particularly strong attacks. The very term "Christian Democracy" – along with its derivative expressions – bears no positive connotations here. Instead, it falls within the domain of what the newspaper programmatically rejects.

Everything on the pages of *Nasz Dziennik* is subject to categorical judgment, whether in the form of open accusations (and clearly formulated prescriptions) or via suggestions made to the reader in an explicit, though ostensibly indirect manner. We find a characteristic example of this approach in the June 16 edition. The headline – in very large type – immediately sounds the alarm: "History Slashed." In the lead paragraph, we learn why the alarm has been raised: "According to reforms planned by Education Minister Katarzyna Hall, lower high school students will now study an abridged version of history – only as far as 1918." But this is not sufficient. Before they read any further, readers must know in advance what they should think about the matter. Accompanying the text is a photograph of a middle-aged woman clutching a dossier of papers in both hands. The caption announces: "Education Minister Katarzyna Hall has energetically set about reforming Polish schools. Her first victim will be history." This kind of reporting has nothing to do with conveying information. The caption is intended to expose the person in the photograph. The planned reforms constitute a threat not only to Polish education, but to the motherland more generally.

Another interesting issue is the relation of the newspaper's characteristic vocabulary and rhetoric to the traditional forms of expression associated with Christianity – and especially with Catholicism. I am unable to discuss this problem in any exhaustive manner, though I am convinced that the whole notion of love for one's neighbor disappears from view. Piety is both the field of battle and an instrument for the continuation of the struggle. I am not qualified to judge to what extent the language of *Nasz Dziennik* reflects the language of the contemporary Church or whether it represents a departure from this language. It seems to me that certain elements find no place within the Church's discourse, though any further reflections on this subject would be beyond my expertise and the aims of this article.

217 Admittedly, this kind of metaphorical language is not the exclusive preserve of *Nasz Dziennik*. An article by Piotr Zaremba – a journalist who generally follows the positions of the opposition Law and Justice party – bears the headline "Tusk-Schetyna Tandem Strikes a Deal" (*Dziennik*, 16 June 2009).

On the subject of linguistic manipulation, we cannot ignore another specific practice—namely, the use of expressions from foreign languages, especially German and Russian. Here I shall discuss two characteristic examples. An editorial in the June 16 edition bears the headline “Will Deutsche Bahn Block the Development of PKP Intercity?” (“Deutsche Bahn zablokuje rozwój PKP Intercity?”).²¹⁸ The name of the German rail company appears in its original language neither for the sake of accuracy nor merely to add local flavor. Indeed, formally speaking, “Intercity” is also a foreign phrase, though in this context the name of the Polish company counts as a native expression. Words and phrases drawn from German and Russian serve to emphasize their foreignness and to highlight the dangers coming from outside. The question mark in the headline does not perform its normal function here. The author is not actually asking whether German rail will pose a threat to Polish railways. He writes as if he were convinced that this is exactly what will happen. The key word here is “expansion.” Clearly this refers to German expansion, which is meant to remind the reader of the historical *Drang nach Osten*. This expansion is juxtaposed with the Polish side, where there will be no expansion or development at all. Once again, we shall be the hapless victims.

Two other interesting questions arise in this article. Firstly, it does not refer to any specific event. No specific circumstances have prompted the piece. Instead, it functions entirely in the sphere of possibility – by referring to our inevitable future losses. The article speaks of this potential future as a coming invasion (after all, this is what “expansion” means) rather than regarding it as a mere manifestation of competition (not to mention potential cooperation). The headline immediately suggests the approaching threat of the foreigner – though in this case its carriers will not be enemy bombers and tanks, but fast trains.

The second, more general question concerns the function of headlines in *Nasz Dziennik*. There are two main functions. Firstly, they should never be neutral. They are bursting with content conveying the basic intentions of the text. This is their most important task. Informing the reader of a given article’s content is much less important, or perhaps even completely out of the question. Secondly, the newspaper’s headlines intensify the meaning of the given text. The railway issue forms the subject of an interview with Janusz Piechociński, an MP from the Polish People’s Party (*Polskie Stronnictwo Ludowe – PSL*). Mr. Piechociński, an infrastructure specialist, speaks to the point and does not corroborate the terrifying tale of the German threat. His statements contain only one brief, non-committal sentence that might arouse any concern about the fate of Polish trains: “Polish rail

218 Translator’s Note: “PKP” is the acronym for Polish State Railways (*Polskie Koleje Państwowe*). “PKP Intercity” is the corporate division responsible for long distance or “Intercity” trains.

is contracting.” Yet this sentence provides the basis for the headline. Here we find a manifestation of what Bobrowska accurately terms “interpretive additions.”²¹⁹

Nasz Dziennik also employs words from other languages to evoke the effect of foreignness in reference to particular people whom the newspaper wishes to repudiate for one reason or another. In a virulent attack on the writer Ryszard Kapuściński – to which I shall return shortly – the name of an eminent professor of musicology appears. His first name is the Polish Michał, which he has used from childhood to this day. Not only does the article include compromising information about his family background, but the author also adds the Russian diminutive “Misha” in parentheses after his name. The Russian version of the name is meant to emphasize his foreignness. This method offers perhaps the easiest way to include the desired information, though the musicologist himself has no connections with Russia and does not even study Russian music. But such facts are irrelevant to the authors and editors of this newspaper. If someone is regarded as foreign, then the author must inform the reader of this circumstance, irrespective of the real facts, *per fas et nefas*. The well-known anti-communist activist Róża Thun, who is presently a member of the European Parliament, appears in the newspaper as Róża Maria Graefin von Thun und Hohenstein. Of course, her maiden name – the historically significant Polish surname of Woźniakowska – goes unmentioned. For the readers of *Nasz Dziennik*, she is to be a German aristocrat meddling – without any right to do so – in the affairs of the Polish people (the Law and Justice party has resorted to similar propaganda in successive election campaigns).

3

Thus far I have pointed to certain key discursive practices followed by this newspaper, though the majority of these them are so dishonest and far removed from the dominant practices of respectable modern press outlets that it might be better to speak of malpractice. Now it would be worth considering the main constitutive features of the discourse and its structure. The most important element is a set of dichotomous divisions that are largely linked with a conspiracist vision of the world – “Us” versus “Them.” This is both the point of departure and the final destination, since the idea is not merely to emphasize this basic contrast, but also to demonstrate its all-embracing character and to convince the reader of its absolute and indisputable significance. Ultimately, almost nothing beyond this division appears in the newspaper (Adam Czopek’s objective and professional

²¹⁹ Bobrowska, *Obrazowanie społeczeństwa*, p. 110.

articles on musical subjects constitute a commendable exception here²²⁰). The division bears an unambiguously axiological character, which reveals itself in the very name of the newspaper.

“Our” (“*Nasz*”) is a word of enormous importance in the discourse cultivated by *Nasz Dziennik*, reflecting many of its fundamental features. But does “our” refer to a particular community, group or organization? Clarifying the meaning of this term is no easy task. On the one hand, it undoubtedly has a strictly limited meaning. Not everybody has the right background to be defined as “ours.” Not everybody can be approved or anointed as a member of this peculiar collective subject. On the other hand, the term is very vague. The features of “ourness” are unambiguously implied, but often not precisely defined. We might perhaps speak of its boundaries in both broad and narrow senses. In the most general understanding, “our” refers to the Polish nation. Indeed, the category of nation is fundamental here, since the newspaper generally makes no mention of society. The term also refers to the Catholic Church – or, ultimately, to the Catholic Polish nation. But here certain complications begin to arise, since not every Pole or Catholic qualifies in *Nasz Dziennik* as “ours” (“*nasz*”). The divisions in the social realm function according to two basic criteria. Being neither Polish nor Catholic immediately disqualifies a person from the group associated with the term “our.” Yet being both Polish and Catholic does not necessarily constitute a sufficient condition for an individual to become “ours.” Additional criteria are also required.

These criteria do not explicitly reveal themselves, though they are essentially unambiguous. They include both ideological and institutional dimensions. They are ideological, because only a person who thinks and views the world in the manner considered by our publication as absolutely obligatory can be “ours.” They are institutional, because they are attached to the institutions founded by Father Tadeusz Rydzyk (the title “Director” usually appears before his name, almost filling the function of a fixed honorific – as if the reader could forget the position of the newspaper’s Redemptorist founder²²¹). The ideological and institutional components are indivisible in this case, representing two sides of the same phenomenon. *Nasz Dziennik* suggests that it speaks in the name of a large community, and therefore of the nation, though for various reasons it does

220 Theater criticism is no exception here, as we may observe from the aggressive tone adopted in a recent review by Temida Stankiewicz-Podhorecka (ND 17). This piece – entitled “Fun and Games in the Madhouse” (“Wesoła zabawa w psychiatriku”) – reviews a production of Peter Weiss’s *Marat/Sade*, though in fact it constitutes little more than a hateful and contemptuous attack on the director, Maja Kleczewska. We might add that artistic questions are of no interest to the hostile reviewer in this case.

221 Translator’s Note: Father Tadeusz Rydzyk is an extremely well known and controversial figure in Poland – adored by his supporters and often detested by his opponents.

not enjoy the support of the entire nation. This community is not a sociological fact in the ordinary sense. Indeed, a feature underlined by Bobrowska in her book remains crucial – namely, that it represents a “community of the excluded.”²²² Above all, this community is an ideological construct, created and sustained in the newspaper with astonishing consistency.

Now we must turn our attention to those on the other side of the barricade. In this context, this rather banal metaphor is entirely justified when we observe the newspaper’s attitude to persons unworthy of being “ours.” Those who are not “ours” do not merit any attempt at dialogue from “our” side. They do not deserve to be approached with persuasive methods in “our” confrontations with them. They are much more dangerous than any mere opponents. We must treat them as enemies. They are precisely what we must fight against, and to fight against them is a religious, national and moral duty. This figure of the enemy – characterized in diverse ways – forms a basic component of the rhetoric employed by *Nasz Dziennik*. This element constitutes one of the major points of similarity with the prevailing norms of communist propaganda, especially in its most severe variants from the Stalinist era and after the unrest of March 1968.²²³ Without an enemy, the totalitarian vision of the world has no justification. Ultimately, it can have no positive meaning without participating in a fundamental conflict. According to this view, one must fight with one’s enemy. One does not try to convince him or turn him onto the right path. He or she cannot be included in any program of evangelization. Anybody who has been categorized in this way can only become the object of condemnation, exposure and stigmatization.

The question immediately arises as to the identity of this terrible enemy who slithers out of every possible gutter or closes in from the outside world. Ultimately, the enemy may be anybody who cannot be defined as “ours,” anybody who might be described in one way or another as “foreign.” The category of xenophobia has a very wide and internally diverse range of application here. Typically for this sort of discourse, there is a national dimension. Above all, the enemies are our neighbors, who constantly plot against us, threatening both our material goods and our spiritual and moral virtues, hoping to deprive us of both, as well as certain international organizations (especially the European Union). The politicians of the ruling party in Anno Domini 2009 are also our enemies. There is no sense in talking with them – and we should not attempt to do so. The only engagement we can permit ourselves is to call for them at least not to act against Poland’s

222 Bobrowska, p. 79.

223 Translator’s Note: In March 1968, students and intellectuals mounted major protests against the communist authorities. After taking strong measures to suppress the unrest, the government launched an “anti-Zionist” campaign that saw many Polish Jews leave the country.

interests. “Stop Damaging Poland!” goes one appeal directed at Prime Minister Donald Tusk, Marshal of the Senate Bogdan Borusewicz and President Bronisław Komorowski. Another call rallies support “Against the Discriminatory Treatment of Radio Maryja and Associated Enterprises” (this is a recurring appeal, with the names of supporting readers printed below it).

However, the most serious enemies are those who oppose in one way or another whatever the newspaper regards as its fundamental values. Here we must list two main categories of enemy. The first includes “the supporters of killing unborn children.” As I have already mentioned, Hillary Clinton is among them, while President Obama has also earned the rank of major enemy by allegedly promoting abortion around the world (“The Obama Doctrine: Abortion Across the Globe” announces one headline, ND 17). People who support sex education (“sex indoctrination”) and women who demand respect for their rights are also enemies. The second broad category denotes sexual minorities. The condemnation of homosexuality is an obsessive theme in *Nasz Dziennik*, a constant *Leitmotif*. There is no reason to believe that the four articles published on this subject in the three editions under discussion are exceptional in this respect. The “descendants of Sodom” (this phrase appears in one of the articles) are presented as deviants who not only disturb the moral order of the world, but also threaten the whole of civilization by their very existence. The newspaper reserves the most absolute condemnation for the so-called “gayfrontmen” (this strange neologism, borrowed from English, appears in various articles), who do not necessarily belong to sexual minorities themselves, but support the rights of these “deviants.”²²⁴

Hanna Wujkowska (ND 15) – a particularly aggressive columnist and a medical doctor by training – knows no restraint on this subject, invariably using the strongest possible language of rebuke. In everything related to this issue, she presents matters in the harshest possible light. In her view – and according to various other authors writing about sexual minorities in *Nasz Dziennik* – the problem goes far beyond the minorities themselves. The most significant problem is that they are winning approval in the degenerate contemporary world. They have supporters. They are “promoted” (the Christian Democrats also support them). The human rights claimed by homosexuals and their patrons represent a general menace to humanity, disturbing the order established by God. Their worldview poses an extraordinarily dangerous challenge to all of us, since it shatters the moral order in which human beings should live. Accordingly, this is a matter of fundamental importance, since it affects the very essence of the world order in which humanity exists and should exist. Yet for *Nasz Dziennik*’s journalists it also has a second dimension, which is temporal and strictly political. They may argue that people

224 See: “Palikot Splits the Gayfrontmen”, ND 15.

have been opposing homosexuals since ancient times (we learn that Euripides apparently did so), but the main question concerns what is happening here and now. Dr Wujkowska is not interested in the medical or biological aspects of the issue. Instead, she concentrates on its political significance – and here she finds the perfect opportunity to attack the European Union and its declared principles. The Christian Democrats are her main targets, since they have chosen not to oppose the fundamentally inhuman law established by the EU. Consequently, they are guilty of defending the deviants and forgetting about others:

There are certain inconvenient groups, including Catholics, families, the disabled, the elderly, children in their mothers' wombs, who are the victims of legal violence, discrimination and even exclusion. (...) The gagging of people simply because they speak the truth is a method assuming the name of law in the European Union. (ND 15)

4

The passage cited above from Dr Wujkowska constitutes a perfect example of the explicitly ideological discourse employed in this newspaper. Of course, we have already seen that essentially nothing in these articles can be neutral or independent of unambiguously formulated and unquestionable assumptions.²²⁵ At the same time, in each issue there are also substantial texts going far beyond even this loose form of journalism, which one way or another at least refers to what can be regarded as current events. In the three issues under consideration, four such texts appear: Cardinal Levada's lecture, mentioned above in a footnote; "The New Humanity" ("Nowa ludzkość," ND 15) by Jan Maria Jackowski; "The Canon of Polish Politics" ("Kanon polskiej polityki," ND 16) by Dr Krzysztof Kawęcki (we are informed of the academic title with which this author distinguishes himself, though there is no information about who he is); and, in a slightly different vein, a vitriolic text, entitled "I Want to Live, Work and Fight for the Party': A Different View of Ryszard Kapuściński" ("Chcę partyjnie żyć, pracować i walczyć", czyli o Ryszardzie Kapuścińskim inaczej," ND 15), which is also worthy of attention for a variety of reasons.

Kawęcki's article commences with Thomas Aquinas's reflections on politics as a striving towards the common good. However, it soon turns out that what Thomas understands by the "common good" is mere ornamentation. The proper authority here is not the great and revered Catholic thinker, but one of the idols of

²²⁵ Even the radio and TV guide is ideological – as the choice of stations included suggests. They appear in the following order: Radio Maryja, TV Trwam, TV Trwam – American edition, TVP1, TVP2, TVP Polonia. Characteristically, a bank account number is supplied next to TV Trwam.

the radical Polish right, Feliks Koneczny. After all, it was he – along with Roman Dmowski – who supposedly best described the relation between the state and the nation: “The fundamental goal of politics should be to guarantee the primacy of natural law over positive law.” In order for this goal to be achieved, Christian politics should oppose leftist, liberal, Masonic politics. In this way, Poland will become a socially harmonious state. Currently, it is exposed to various dangers – namely, anti-Polonism, rising Islamization, as well as civil unions, which pose a threat to European civilization. There is no sense in giving a more detailed summary of this normative ideological manifesto. In short, it presents a consistent program for a religious state, explicitly rejecting the morally neutral state preferred by liberals.

Jackowski’s arguments constitute an ideological lecture not only about Poland and its prevailing order, but about the condition of the entire contemporary world. The very opening of the article reveals the author’s appraisal of its current state:

The new human being and the new humanity – resulting from what might be called the medical or genetic Frankensteinzation of the human being – is no longer merely a theme for science fiction literature or film. What was once fiction is becoming reality before our very eyes. The basic principle of how human life comes into existence has been questioned. So has the very definition of the human being, who may now be a component or hybrid of freely combined human and animal cells. (...) The tendency towards total control over human life from conception to death, supported by new reproductive technologies and genetic engineering, is gathering strength.

Jackowski delivers his entire argument in this tone. Everything is heading towards the collapse and annihilation of man’s humanity. A world of robots is rising. This new world would arrive much more easily and quickly if not for the resistance of those who still know where right and truth lie. J. M. Jackowski bravely sounds the alarm against the activities of the contemporary Frankensteins, but he is no catastrophist. He knows that there are still people who place morality over immediate expediency and reject “the killing of conceived children on demand” or the “prenatal Holocaust” resulting from the activities of the “global pro-abortion lobby.” He points to the deeper causes of these horrors engulfing the contemporary world, including a tyrannical materialism springing from the interpenetration of Marxist culture with radical secularist culture:

The Marxist dogma of social liberation has been replaced by the postmodernist affirmation of cultural freedom, the search for a “new model family” and the creation of a “new society” based on moral relativism. Erotic activity is an especially vital element, torn away from procreation and treated as art for art’s sake.²²⁶

226 Jackowski charges the Soviet Union with responsibility for spreading the practice of murdering (unborn) children, while attacking the Polish law of 1956 permitting the termination of pregnancies. Like many “defenders of life” writing on the subject, he passes

In contrast with his two ideological allies, Żebrowski only deals with one person, Ryszard Kapuściński – and somewhat indirectly with those around him. Apparently, Żebrowski is a historian. However, his article is the negation of what should constitute the basis of a historian’s work. He cites extensively from documents intended to compromise Kapuściński, though he does not reveal where these documents are or how he accessed them. This type of approach immediately disqualifies his arguments, even if one accepts that a text published in a daily newspaper is bound by less rigorous professional standards than an academic article. Nevertheless, this quasi-historian’s method is highly characteristic, so it is worth devoting a few sentences to it here. The method includes several dimensions. Indeed, the author evidently intends to pursue diverse aims with a single stroke. Kapuściński is to serve merely as an example, while the main objects of attack are those whom the *Nasz Dziennik* milieu considers more generally as false authorities. Eventually, Żebrowski specifies whom he has in mind. The phrase “democratic opposition” (from the era of the People’s Republic of Poland) takes on a strongly negative coloration in his article. At the same time, he strongly criticizes Bronisław Geremek and Adam Michnik (it does not bother Żebrowski that the latter was in pre-school in 1952, when the events he describes took place).²²⁷ The text is accompanied by two photographs. A photograph of a young Kapuściński, the main negative protagonist, bears the following caption: “It is my greatest wish and desire to join the ranks of our beloved Party’ effused Ryszard Kapuściński in 1952.” The picture of Geremek, probably taken years later, is accompanied by the following line: “Kapuściński was recommended to the PZPR²²⁸ by Bronisław Geremek himself.”

Żebrowski’s vitriolic article exhibits an extremely characteristic phenomenon within *Nasz Dziennik* – a kind of special code. One might easily agree that the declarations of love for the party written by the twenty-year-old Kapuściński are distinctly unappealing – or, to put it plainly, ridiculous. However, this article is not

over the fact that this was the time of the so-called “thaw” after Stalin’s death, and thus this law was treated as one of its manifestations. In the Stalinist era abortion was strictly forbidden and punished accordingly. This widespread historical falsehood is characteristic, since it would be very difficult for the contemporary radical right to refer to Stalinist legislation as an ideal or model. Hence the historical distortion.

227 Translator’s Note: Bronisław Geremek and Adam Michnik were both key figures in the “Round Table” talks inaugurating the political transformation of Poland in 1989. Both had a leftist background (Geremek was even a member of the ruling communist party) – for which many on the Polish right have never forgiven them – before going on to become important members of the opposition and dissident movements of the 1970s and 1980s. Michnik is currently the editor of the most popular Polish daily – *Gazeta Wyborcza*.

228 Translator’s Note: “PZPR” is the acronym for the Polish United Workers’ Party (*Polska Zjednoczona Partia Robotnicza*), the ruling communist party in Poland.

about a young man who erred, but rather about Kapuściński in general. According to Żebrowski, nothing can ever make amends for Kapuściński's error. For this type of "moralist historian," such sins are ineffaceable. It does not matter what he did later in his life, what merits he displayed, what attitudes he represented or what he wrote. The important thing is to show the naive and humble people of Poland what their so-called authorities are really like, how compromised they are, and the lies told by those who would treat these alleged authorities as the elite of the Polish nation.²²⁹ In the terms of this special code, both time and historical context are ignored. Since Kapuściński once declared his love for the Polish United Workers' Party in his youth, it is irrelevant that he soon changed his views and became a different person. People treated as negative characters by *Nasz Dziennik* are deprived of any chance to evolve. They are defined forever by things they did or said long ago. In the rhetoric of a newspaper that speaks so much about evangelization, joy at the sinner's conversion is an entirely unknown phenomenon. The special code is followed only by condemnation. This line of reasoning also brings additional advantages, since it shows that the authorial speaker has all possible justification on his or her side, along with the external and internal attributes and qualifications to judge others clearly, directly and absolutely. In other words, it gives the author the right to condemn those he or she regards as enemies. This practice has a contemporary – or political – dimension. By revealing or exposing the past, the author opposes those who remain outside the *Nasz Dziennik* family, those who represent different ideological and social ideas, and those who take a different attitude to current events and realities. This version of the "special code" is clearly not an exclusive characteristic of this newspaper. Indeed, it constitutes one of the primary forms of totalitarian discourse. The similarities between the image of the enemy constructed in the communist press and the enemy portrayed in the media outlets controlled by Father Director Rydzyk are striking. Historical irony has even led in several cases to the objects of their attacks being the very same people.

229 Interestingly, the point of departure for this vitriolic attack is the news of an academic conference devoted to Kapuściński at the Cardinal Stefan Wyszyński University in Warsaw. The university is not the subject of direct attack, though the fact that a serious Catholic university would occupy itself with an eminent writer of world renown gives the author no pause for thought, and does not constitute a mitigating circumstance. The hierarchy of universities prevailing in *Nasz Dziennik* is revealed by the headline of another article: "WSKSiM – Best College in the Region, Leading in Poland." The acronym refers to the college founded by Father Rydzyk himself in Toruń.

5

What I have described as *Nasz Dziennik*'s "special code" points towards another primary feature of the discourse employed within the newspaper. This characteristic is linked both with the fundamental role of dichotomous divisions and with a conspiracist vision of the world. I shall call it "**anti-empathy**." Ultimately, this term refers to more than mere lack of empathy. The attitude adopted in the newspaper expresses not only a lack of this approach to other human beings, but rather a programmatic and astonishingly consistent undermining of it. All forms of empathy – even the most minor or vestigial varieties – are beyond the ideological horizon of *Nasz Dziennik*'s authors, patrons and leaders. Since any person who cannot be categorized under the word "ours" – or who does not belong to the "Radio Maryja family" – is an enemy, then there is no reason whatever to examine his way of thinking, his worldview, the arguments that guide him, or the existential situation inclining him to take one position instead of another. There is no reason to engage with anything that concerns or belongs to him. The dichotomous vision must not be disturbed under any circumstances.

The acceptance of this principle has colossal significance for the discourse employed in *Nasz Dziennik* – from the perspective of both the publisher and the reader. When we look at the issue from the publisher's point of view, we find that this attitude towards other people (all other people!) helps to build group cohesion – in other words, a sense of "we." "We" are Poles and Catholics (or to use a phrase with a stronger connotation – Pole-Catholics), though – as we have seen – not everybody who is Polish and Catholic represents the nation or the right kind of faith. Accordingly, not everybody meets the conditions to be admitted into our group. In order to join this group, you must share the views proclaimed by Radio Maryja and its associated media outlets. Moreover, you must share these views absolutely, without reservation, and in all things. You should understand them not merely as an expression of Radio Maryja's views or a representation of its professed values, but also as a defense against the threats and dangers encroaching from the degenerate outside world.

But can this group be defined in social categories? According to Ewa Bobrowska:

This stereotypical characterization of the current state of affairs provides the basis for the creation of an especially strong sense of community around *Nasz Dziennik* – a community of the excluded. In this respect (...) all other stereotypical characterizations of other states of affairs presented in *Nasz Dziennik* are constructed in a very similar way.

I entirely agree with this analysis. The newspaper's various short articles, reports, announcements and more extensive opinion pieces are all conceived and edited to

express this sense of exclusion, which may be understood in various ways. In the most general terms, we as Poles and as Catholics are excluded by the degenerate systems of power dominating the world. We as a group are excluded in our own country, since we have no power over it (or no absolute power). Yet people from smaller groups are also excluded – in fact, everybody with whom we identify. This exclusion may be equated with harm, humiliation or suffering. For instance, Bobrowska has demonstrated in her analysis that when *Nasz Dziennik* examines conflicts between employees and employers, the workers are always in the right – even when their requests are unjustified and the fulfillment of their demands would lead to the bankruptcy of the company (here it makes no difference whether the employer is the state, a large concern or the owner of a workshop employing a mere handful of people).

In fact, in the three editions of *Nasz Dziennik* under analysis here, no articles appear on this particular subject. Perhaps the editorial office is no longer interested in such problems – or perhaps this silence is simply a question of random chance. Either way, this is not an especially important point. The main factor holding the group – or the “family” – together is a cultivated sense of threat. Here I follow Bobrowska’s argument in a section of her book entitled “Poland Under Threat” (“Polska zagrożona”).²³⁰ We should be conscious of all kinds of threats – national and religious, moral and economic, as well as dangers appearing in various domains of everyday life. We are under threat as Poles, since – as Dr. Kawęcki informs us in his article – the Club of Rome has decided to reduce the population of the Polish nation by more than half to a mere seventeen million. Unfortunately, the author neglects to give us the source of this terrifying information. Neither does he tell us who would carry out this reduction and in what way. The reader should perhaps suppose that new death camps will be built on the model of Auschwitz, Treblinka and Bełżec – or perhaps that forced sterilization will be introduced. The readers of *Nasz Dziennik* should feel threatened in every possible way – as Poles and citizens, but also as residents of a particular region, as employees and participants in economic life, as consumers of various food stuffs, and as people who care when Poland suffers harm. Bobrowska cites an article in *Nasz Dziennik* claiming “Germans To Destroy Polish Dairies” (“Niemcy dążą do zniszczenia polskich mleczarni”). In two of the three editions under examination here, we find similar items. The Germans are threatening Polish railways, since Deutsche Bahn plans to expand into Poland. There is no mention of competition – which, of course, is a perfectly normal phenomenon in today’s world – or of the possibility of cooperation. The Germans simply wish to do us harm, as they have done throughout our history. Similarly, the British are insolently robbing us

230 Bobrowska, pp. 96-102. On the threat to Polish dairies, see p. 98.

of the credit we deserve to share for deciphering the Nazi “Enigma” code. We are constantly under threat and constantly wronged. According to the vision of the world constructed by *Nasz Dziennik*, the main contemporary threat – and also the main evildoer – is the European Union.

The question arises: for whom is this newspaper intended? How do its publishers and patrons imagine their potential readers? I do not know how many copies are printed or sold daily. The answers to such specific questions are of no great importance here. But another question is fundamentally significant: to what kind of reader does *Nasz Dziennik* address itself? What are the moral, intellectual and practical attributes of this reader? In my view, the newspaper addresses itself exclusively to the “family.” In other words, the newspaper addresses its own – that is, readers formed in such a way that they might uncritically accept its views, its appraisal of social and historical phenomena, and its presentation of everyday realities. *Nasz Dziennik* does nothing to attract readers from outside this circle. It employs means and methods of persuasion that speak only to the persuaded. This approach is a direct consequence of what I have termed “anti-empathy.” After all, in order to convince somebody, you must first interiorize his arguments to some extent, or at least take them into account in some minimal way. But in a discourse based on consistently sustained dichotomous divisions – in which anybody who thinks differently is treated as an enemy – any internalization or even consideration of other people’s arguments falls beyond the pale of possibility. Accordingly, *Nasz Dziennik* has no ambitions to attract those who are estranged from it, but rather it endeavors simply to hold its own group together. In this way, it closely resembles the publications of various religious, political and other sects.

17. The Crisis in Patriotic Discourse

1

Few of Jan Kasproiwicz's poetic stanzas or phrases have endured in collective memory. Few of his words have remained in the Polish language as recognizable quotations, though he was regarded as a great poet in his own lifetime. Yet oblivion has not yet consumed the following stanza:

Rzadko na moich wargach –
Niech dziś to warga ma wyzna –
Jawi się krwią przepojony
Najdroższy wyraz: Ojczyzna.²³¹

[Seldom on my lips – / Let my lips now pronounce it – / It comes soaked with blood /
The dearest word: Fatherland.]

There is no space here to enter into any interpretation of this poem, which is widely known in Poland. Yet it is worth drawing attention to the fact that this stanza is in a certain sense polemical. It declares itself against the abuse of this “dearest word,” while treating everything connected with it as part of the private or intimate sphere. Today, almost one hundred years after the poem's first publication, we may assert that the poet's admonitions against the flaunting of patriotic emotions have had little effect. This is especially evident when we observe that public life continues to demand not so much the expression of these emotions as their exploitation. The aims of this exploitation are many and various – sometimes for the common good, sometimes for the benefit of a certain group with which a particular person identifies, and often simply for personal gain through the construction of a desirable image and its subsequent imposition on public opinion. In one variant or another – and in one situation or another – speaking about the “fatherland” and its most pressing contemporary concerns has become a permanent element of public discourse.²³² This was the case long ago and it remains so today. We find the same pattern in diverse eras: in the distant past when Poland was a free country

231 This is the first stanza of poem “XL” from Kasproiwicz's *Księga ubogich* (*The Book of the Poor*). See: Kasproiwicz, Jan, *Wybór poezji*, ed. J.J. Lipski (Wrocław: Zakład Narodowy im. Ossolińskich, 1973), p. 389.

232 In speaking of public discourse I refer to the collective volume *Rytualny chaos, Studium dyskursu publicznego*, edited by M. Czyżewski, S. Kowalski and A. Piotrowski – especially to the “Introduction” written by the editors and to M. Czyżewski's inspiring piece, “W stronę teorii dyskursu publicznego.”

and later when it was dismantled by its neighbors; in the more recent past, when the country found itself under totalitarian rule; and in contemporary times, when democratic governments have taken power. Speaking about the fatherland has become a constant component of public life, though admittedly this discourse has also submitted to significant and sometimes radical transformations.²³³ Yet it has also become an instrument for the strategies of politicians – a kind of universal tool, varying according to political or ideological orientation only in the particular manner of its use.²³⁴

We should emphasize at once that patriotic discourse is entirely different in times of subjugation, war and external threat than in times of independence – when enemy guns are not lurking over the border ready to strike. On account of Poland's specific traditions, it is difficult to make any clear and precise distinctions between the patriotic discourse from the years of captivity and struggle for independence and the equivalent discourse from the years of peace and independent existence. Nevertheless, I am convinced that making such distinctions is absolutely necessary, since these are very different phenomena – both in their basic contents and from a more functional point of view. As a simple example, we might observe that elegiac themes play an important role in the first case, while there is no place for them in the second. Indeed, if they were to appear in the latter context, they would be meaningless, and one would have to treat them as a peculiar and unjustified anachronism.

In these remarks, I shall concern myself exclusively with the discourse of today – a time in which there are no external or totalitarian threats to the country on any significant scale. Obviously I am aware that tradition still plays an enormous role in the shaping of this discourse, especially – though not exclusively – the romantic tradition that coalesced in the nineteenth century. Within this framework, a language developed that in one form or another has endured and continues to function in contemporary times, though it appears to be further and further removed from today's concrete realities and imponderables. Indeed, it is no accident that these traditions have been undermined ever since the change in political system. Yet despite critical philippics of various kinds (and qualities), their position still remains strong. They are difficult to dispel perhaps because what was once imbued with genuine meaning and connected with clearly formed positions and choices

233 Much has been written about patriotism in recent years. For example, see the interesting issue of the *Znak* monthly (No 4 [563], April 2002), entitled “Jak być patriota?” (“How To Be a Patriot?”), and in particular the pieces by M. Cichocki, J. Szacki, J. Jedlicki and Z. Krasnodebski.

234 See: Kurczewska, Joanna, *Patriotyzm(y) polskich polityków*, (Warszawa: IFiS PAN, 2002). For the questions under examination here, Kurczewska's book – which is rich both in material and in the problems it raises – is greatly significant.

(not only ideological, but in many cases practical) has metamorphosed into mere banality, platitude or insubstantial cliché. In any case, it is an indisputable fact that the characteristic features of patriotic discourse that coalesced in the nineteenth century have not disappeared along with changes in the historical situation. They have not been eclipsed by any models of a different provenance or oriented towards a different set of positions. They certainly have not been forgotten. The discourse dating back to the time of the nineteenth-century partitions²³⁵ – in its two primary versions, emphasizing, respectively, romantic rebellion and the importance of so-called “organic work” – constitutes a constant point of reference. In many cases, people evoke the elements of the discourse without reflection, as if they were self-evident and obvious, or simply unconsciously. It represents a reservoir from which they may draw metaphors, images and set phrases. This is the case both when it appears as a positive model that has lost no value or relevance and when it becomes the object of open or concealed polemic with the aim of limiting or rejecting its vision of the world. Nevertheless, the fact remains that once vital ideas, images and slogans have inevitably transformed into a series of stereotypes. This process has taken place within the two emotionally distinctive forms of romantic discourse – which we might describe, respectively, as the active or heroic strain, and the lamenting or suffering (or martyrological) variant. Indeed, stereotyping is one of the primary manifestations – and in general terms perhaps the primary manifestation – of the crisis in contemporary Polish patriotic discourse. We must ask whether it has become a mere collection of hollow, ritualized words to be pronounced in certain situations under the weight of custom – a mass of noble and sentimental clichés.

A fundamental question for the crisis of patriotic discourse appears to lie in the decline of school-level humanities from its earlier form – when the humanities did not only convey ideas, but also words, phrases and symbols. This is not a new question. Indeed, it would be hard to find better testimony on this subject than the work of Witold Gombrowicz from the interwar period. Here I am thinking particularly of the school scenes from *Ferdydurke* and certain earlier works, especially the short story “The Diary of Stefan Czarniecki.”²³⁶ I am unable to confirm to what extent the “classroom” talk about the fatherland in these satirical works reflected an official style imposed from above in a set of absolutely obligatory phrases and views – or to what extent it reflected real opinions and

235 Translator’s Note: In three forced “partitions” – taking place in 1772, 1793, 1795 – the imperial powers of Russia, Austria-Hungary and Prussia absorbed the former territories of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth, thus wiping it off the map of Europe until 1918.

236 I attempted to analyze this story in an essay entitled “Między obcością a swojskością,” published in my book *Gombrowicz i nadliteratura* (Kraków: Wydawnictwo Literackie, 2002).

actively shaped people's consciousness. I suppose there is no unambiguous answer here (and there never has been). Lower and upper high schools in the interwar period undoubtedly had an impact on attitudes, modes of expression and forms of narrative, as well as on discursive methods in the broadest sense. Gombrowicz's entire oeuvre essentially testifies to the strong influence of these classroom models, since his visions of Polishness derive from them. In fact, these models clearly define the very nature of the polemic he ceaselessly directed against them. Many other phenomena from the postwar period suggest the same mechanism. We need only recall some of Sławomir Mrożek's early plays, especially *Death of a Lieutenant* (*Śmierć porucznika*, 1963).

Vitality and banality, officious schematism and correspondence with genuine intellectual, moral and emotional needs – this is how we might characterize the situation of patriotic discourse, which has played such an enormous role and which endures today, if only in vestigial form. The end of the paradigm announced by Maria Janion – an eminent scholar of romanticism and nineteenth-century culture – could perhaps never fully accomplish itself.²³⁷ The various kinds of parody reacting against the schematism and stereotyping of the discourse clearly did not constitute a genuine threat, while the protests against it – which were quite numerous in the 1960s – had little influence. The demonstrations staged during a Warsaw production of Mrożek's play – which supposedly insulted the Polish nation – were pathetic events with none of their intended (and no doubt expected) gravity.

If we regard the interwar form of classroom patriotic discourse as canonical – and indeed we may do so, even when we recall its artificial pathos, stereotyping and official tone, along with various other amusing idiosyncrasies and naiveties – then we must consider that the crisis emerged with greatest force from the earliest period of the People's Republic of Poland. The communist authorities could not accept this canonical version of patriotic discourse while invoking the principles of Marxism (especially in its Stalinist form). But neither could they reject it out of hand, treating it as non-existent or irrelevant. Instead, they wished to inscribe themselves into these traditions, showing that they had not merely been installed by foreign armies. They were “from here.” As Marcin Zaremba has demonstrated very clearly in his fascinating book on the subject, references to native themes (sometimes in their most unenlightened and nationalist versions) served to legitimize the communist authorities in Poland. Zaremba explains this process on the basis of extensive evidence, while also revealing the dynamics involved,

237 Janion, Maria, “Zmierzch paradygmatu,” in *Do Europy, ale razem z naszymi umarłymi* (Warszawa: Sic!, 2000). This text was written at the beginning of the 1990s.

since it unfolded in different ways in different periods.²³⁸ These references were often ambiguous in nature. On the one hand, they preserved certain elements of patriotic discourse in their traditional forms. On the other hand, they introduced radical new falsifications. Communist ideology demanded the elimination of all religious elements (and without them Polish patriotic discourse is crippled) and the selective use of symbols (including symbolic individuals: for instance, in the omission of Józef Piłsudski,²³⁹ or his treatment as an overtly negative figure in certain periods). Most importantly, anything associated with Russia was to be effaced for immediate political reasons. This included imposed silences on universally known historical facts. One of Lenin's most frequently cited articles bore the title "On the National Pride of the Great Russians." Could a text with a similar title and subject concerning "the Poles" have appeared in communist Poland?

Patriotic discourse in its various manifestations – even in its distorted versions (on both the political right and left) – establishes a kind of communal symbolism, imposing it in stronger or weaker forms and often in indirect ways. We might say that it immerses the society in this symbolism, thanks to which it becomes an important component in social communication, an element facilitating mutual agreement without any added explanation or commentary. This leads to the formation of a general sphere of understanding, which embraces diverse phenomena. Above all, the common sphere includes selected historical events, heroes, places and dates that have entered into social consciousness. This requires a more or less coherent and historically grounded symbolic system – and not merely "vehicles of historical memory." Here I am alluding to the title of a recent book by Marcin Kula, whose arguments I would fundamentally question.²⁴⁰ Kula enumerates and describes various "vehicles". He identifies an enormous number of them and concludes that in favorable circumstances almost anything can become a "vehicle." However, he does not emphasize the basic fact that we are dealing here with a set of symbols. This category appears on the periphery of his arguments, while in my view it should occupy a central position. Patriotic discourse – which refers to history in the vast majority of cases – is loaded with symbols. As a whole it is profoundly

238 Zaremba, Marcin, *Komunizm, legitymizacja, nacjonalizm, Nacjonalistyczna legitymizacja władzy komunistycznej w Polsce* (Warszawa: ISP PAN, 2001).

239 Translator's Note: Józef Piłsudski (1867-1935) was a Polish statesman and military leader who played a crucial role in the formation of the newly independent Second Polish Republic in 1918. Later he halted the westward march of the Soviet Red Army in a battle outside Warsaw known as the "Miracle on the Vistula" in 1920. He launched a military coup in 1926, and remained essentially in power in Poland until his death in 1935.

240 Kula, Marcin, *Nośniki pamięci historycznej* (Warszawa: DiG, 2002).

symbolic in nature, though clearly it also expresses social memory, which is often consciously constructed.

A matter of key importance for patriotic discourse lies precisely in the art of employing symbols, extracting their meanings and treating them as a primary means of social communication within a national community. These symbols form a complex that facilitates direct contact between individuals, institutions and social groups in selected domains. The more strongly the symbolism is grounded in tradition, the less it demands commentary or explanation, and the more it appears to be naturally self-evident – regardless of whether its sources lie in historical events, popular narratives, literature or anywhere else. Thanks to a patriotic discourse grounded in tradition, we are not only familiar with Jan Henryk Dąbrowski²⁴¹ and the significance of various places and incidents, but we also know what values should be associated with them. In most cases, these values are positive, though there is no lack of negative examples: for instance, the Targowica Confederation of 1792 or the figure of Nikolay Novosiltsev.²⁴² Clear axiological orientation is one of the constitutive features of patriotic discourse – perhaps even its very foundation. This orientation is not only characteristic of specific utterances regarded as patriotic, but also of the discourse as a whole, which is supported by various value judgments embedded in language. Any reevaluations in this sphere are difficult and usually involve long-term processes stretching over several decades.²⁴³

Certain phenomena that crystallized after 1989 demonstrate this fact. The political changes of the time brought about an immediate – though perhaps not complete – cleansing of patriotic discourse. This meant purging any material that the authorities had artificially and forcefully introduced during the communist

241 Translator's Note: Jan Henryk Dąbrowski (1755-1818) was a Polish military hero during the failed struggle for independence at the end of the eighteenth century and the beginning of the nineteenth. He famously marched Polish legions from Italy to Poland during the Napoleonic Wars. This event is memorialized in the Polish national anthem.

242 Translator's Note: The Targowica Confederation was an alliance of Polish and Lithuanian noblemen against the new "democratic" Polish Constitution of May 3, 1791. They leagued themselves with Russian Empress Catherine II, opening the way to Russian invasion and the final dissolution of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth in the second and third partitions of 1792 and 1795. Count Nikolay Nikolayevich Novosiltsev was a Russian statesman who served in the Russian administration in the Kingdom of Poland. He is remembered in Poland for brutal oppressions of Polish patriotism and culture. Most famously, he appears as a character in romantic poet Adam Mickiewicz's national closet drama, *Forefather's Eve, Part III (Dziady, Cz. III, 1832)*.

243 A wide-ranging analysis of axiological phenomena appearing in language may be found in two works by Jadwiga Puzyńska: *Język wartości* (Warszawa: PWN, 1992) and *Słowo – wartość – kultura* (Lublin: RW KUL, 1997).

era, though there was no instant restitution of the earlier traditions. In my view, there is no reason to bemoan this fact. An entirely traditional discourse devoid of any critical distance towards the past may represent a mere stylization inevitably leading to the creation of a national mythology. This usually happens when the discourse is based exclusively on a literal interpretation of tradition. In such cases, the recreation of what has been passed down from former times occupies the leading position in the hierarchy of importance, while the question of whether this discourse fits the new era and its specific problems carries less significance. If one believes that the value of the discourse comes mostly from the revival of the past, then this excludes any possibility of change and evolution – thus leading, in turn, to the stagnation and withering of once vital and meaningful symbols. Patriotic discourse is the field on which a constant battle rages both “over” symbols and “through” symbols.²⁴⁴ The stakes include the domination of a certain symbolic system based on a defined set of values and the social existence of particular symbols. This struggle can manifest itself in efforts both to broaden the repertoire and – in some cases – to restrict it. These changes apply not only to overt and indisputable symbols (whether the Polish eagle appears with or without a crown; the demolition of monuments and the raising of new ones), but also to many practical elements of everyday life. A particularly eloquent example here would be the numerous alterations to street names after the system change in 1989.

Over the course of these important symbolic battles, certain radically conservative tendencies have clearly emerged in the last decade or so. However, these movements have had little impact on patriotic discourse or on reversing its decline. In short, they represent a marginal phenomenon. The fundamental problem for this crisis is the conventionalization of traditional symbolism, which is evident even at the level of school humanities. Conventionalized symbolism may form a natural element in various rituals, but it cannot foster independent thought or mark out a sphere of ideas in any creative way. The main manifestation of the crisis is stereotyping, which hinders the development and adaptation of patriotic discourse in new situations. I would strongly emphasize here that conscious parody or caricature are not (or at least do not have to be) symptoms of the crisis. After all, people do not usually parody or caricature things that are insignificant, irrelevant or completely outdated.

The vital question arises: has anything been invented to take the place of the traditional or inherited discourse, which now feels so highly conventional, stereotypical and anachronistic? There is no simple answer here, though one thing seems clear. Patriotic discourse cannot exist when tradition is entirely ignored. Likewise, when patriotic discourse is limited to the mere repetition of tradition,

244 Here I am alluding to Pierre Bourdieu's reflections on this subject. See: Bourdieu, Pierre, *La Distinction: Critique sociale du jugement* (Paris: Les Editions de Minuit, 1979).

it is crippled and can no longer fulfill its functions. It would be hard to say in our own times that we were seeking any golden mean in this area or striving towards compromise and synthesis. The simple truth is that patriotic discourse occupies an entirely different place in our culture than it did even in the relatively recent past. The humanities at the school level still transmit selected elements of the discourse, but they no longer shape it as a coherent whole. Neither is it formed by monolithic ideological factors, since this is impossible in a democratic society characterized by a multiplicity of political tendencies. Something else entirely has become the most important defining factor: mass culture.

This is a phenomenon of the most fundamental significance, and it demands serious consideration. Mass culture – especially through television, its primary medium – promotes people, images and symbols, thus shaping ideas. So how does it affect the formation of patriotic discourse in the broadest terms? By what means does it respond to particular social needs and shape them in its own image? I do not ask here whether it has any impact at all on this sphere of phenomena, since this seems to be a self-evident fact. One might suggest that it has always been influential. Indeed, patriotic ideas and ways of speaking about the most important issues for the country and society – about independence, freedom, attitudes and values – were formed as early as the nineteenth century under the influence perhaps not of mass culture, but certainly of popular culture. For instance, the representation of Tadeusz Kościuszko²⁴⁵ as a model or paragon – though it had some historical basis – was an idealized representation, a consciously formed model for behavior. Consequently, the Kościuszko who appears in various plays intended for a broad and often poorly educated audience – for instance, in Władysław Ludwig Anczyc's 1881 drama, *Kościuszko at Raclawice (Kościuszko pod Raclawicami)* – had a much wider and more profound influence than the historical Kościuszko (I refer here to Piotr Mitzner's book on this subject²⁴⁶). Nevertheless, there is no doubt that the differences here are more significant than the similarities. They not only apply to the methods and scope of influence, but they also define the very essence of the question. This is especially evident in the choice of figures to be depicted, but also in the manner of their representation. Clearly, these procedures are not always linked with patriotic discourse, though in certain instances the connection is obvious. This is not so much the case when the “inhabitants of the

245 Translator's Note: Tadeusz Kościuszko (1746-1817) led an ultimately failed Polish-Lithuanian uprising against the partitioning powers of Russia and Prussia in 1794, thus becoming a national hero. Earlier he had fought with distinction in the Continental Army during the American Revolutionary War.

246 Mitzner, Piotr, *Teatr Tadeusza Kościuszki, Postać Naczelnika w teatrze 1803-1994* (Warszawa: Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Kardynała Stefana Wyszyńskiego 2002).

mass imagination²⁴⁷ – in the useful phrase coined by Krzysztof Toeplitz several decades ago – hold forth on national themes, but rather when they are treated as the pride of the nation, as those of its representatives who provide good reason for positive national feelings. The victory of a Polish sportsperson in an international competition becomes something much more than a mere sporting event. Instead, it turns into a happening of national significance and thus moves into the very center of patriotic discourse.

Here I would find one of the fundamental manifestations of the crisis. The problem is not simply that trivial events become the basis for patriotic discourse, but that symbols of a merely temporary nature are being formed. These symbols have a limited range and soon fall into oblivion. For instance, does anybody in Poland still remember Janusz Kusociński? In an encyclopedia entry devoted to this figure, we read the following:

Kusociński, Janusz (1907-40): athlete, winner of the Olympic gold medal in the 10,000-meter run (1932), world record holder in the 3,000-meter run (1932), and multiple Polish record holder over distances from 1500 to 10,000 meters. Introduced the innovative interval method in long-distance running. Participated in the defense of Warsaw in 1939 and later in the Polish underground. Shot by the Germans at Palmiry.²⁴⁸

Here we are dealing not only with an eminent sportsman who was astoundingly popular in the interwar period, but also with a man who was murdered at a young age and whose biography is not short in heroic deeds. Nevertheless, Kusociński has not been a hero of the mass imagination for many years. Accordingly, his name does not appear in the patriotic discourse of recent decades.²⁴⁹ A similar fate has met the Polish pilots Franciszek Żwirka and Stanisław Wigura, who became popular – and were consciously popularized – in the interwar period after their tragic deaths in 1932. In Warsaw, a long and important street leading to the airport bears their names. However, the strange manner in which people tend to use this street name indicates that few are aware of its origin. In an untranslatable grammatical confusion specific to the Polish language, many people – not just taxi drivers – use Żwirka's name as if it were the name of a place rather than a person, while generally omitting Wigura entirely.

247 Toeplitz, Krzysztof T., *Mieszkańcy masowej wyobraźni* (Warszawa: PIW, 1970).

248 See: *Nowa encyklopedia powszechna PWN*, Vol. 3 (Warszawa: PWN, 1996).

249 Recently, I heard a news report on the Polish Radio informing that a small town in western Poland had removed Kusociński's name from a street after the system change in 1989. This happened because the town councilors did not know who he was and apparently decided that he must have been an obscure communist activist. This event shows how such symbols function and how vulnerable they are to oblivion.

These examples from the interwar period demonstrate that we are dealing with phenomena of a limited lifespan or transitory nature. Indeed, I would describe them as “short-term identification symbols.” This phrase requires some explanation. Patriotic discourse not only supports the remembrance (or reactivation) of tradition and the shaping of attitudes. It also constitutes an important component in the formation of national identity, distinguishing itself – and this is worth emphasizing – by its symbolic qualities. The crisis in patriotic discourse has manifested itself in the fact that trivial, second-rate and especially ludic phenomena have increasingly come into play. The success of a talented sportsperson is elevated to the status of a national triumph, while the failures of the Polish football team on the world stage turn into a tragedy. We are supposed to feel good because “our boys and girls” have been victorious, shown their skill, or simply refused to give in to the foreigners. We have a right to demand victories from them, just as we have a right to demand that our politicians manage national affairs properly. Sometimes this attitude takes on astonishing dimensions, as we may observe in the widespread “Małysz mania” of the last few years.²⁵⁰ Małysz represents a classic example of a short-term identification symbol. The ski jumping of this likeable young man from the town of Wisła is supposed to have become a reason for national pride. At least, this is how the mass media presents things – not only on television, but even in serious newspapers. Thus, the sportsperson – not the eminent historical figure, the poet or the composer – becomes the center of patriotic discourse. Nobody considers the fact that in a few years’ time he or she must depart the scene. The name of a record-holder like Adam Małysz will live on in the memories of the generation that witnessed his exploits, but eventually it will come to require an explanatory footnote, as it appears more and more seldom. Other sportspeople will move into the limelight to receive similar treatment. The crisis manifests itself not only in the fact that popular idols and mass culture events are accorded such high status, but also in the transitory nature of the discourse, which is subject to constant change and a complete lack of continuity. And it is precisely a respect for continuity that represents one of the indispensable features of any serious patriotic discourse.

Here I must examine a phenomenon of immense significance, which complicates my arguments and forces me to make various qualifications. The undisputed hero of Polish patriotic discourse – including the discourse of the mass media (especially television) – is John Paul II. We can look at this issue from diverse points of view. First of all, the pope is the highest religious authority in predominantly Catholic Poland. I shall not concern myself with this side of the question, since I do not feel qualified to do so. I have no specific data on

250 Translator’s Note: This refers to the mass public support for the world-champion and Olympic-medalist Polish ski jumper, Adam Małysz.

this subject and it does not fit within the investigative parameters of this article. But John Paul II is also a Polish national hero, so one might imagine that all the talk about him over the last quarter of a century would have reinvigorated patriotic discourse in some fundamental way. In my view, this has not been the case, despite the fact that mass media outlets invariably emphasize the pope's Polishness whenever he enters the discussion.²⁵¹ Common phrases include "our pope" or "the Polish pope" (though in recent years the phrase "Holy Father" has come to dominate – and not only in the speeches of clergymen – while I have not yet come across the phrase "the Polish [or our] Holy Father"). One might ask whether the emergence before our very eyes of a new national hero – and of such eminence – had influenced the changes in contemporary patriotic discourse. We can be certain of one thing: we have witnessed the formation of an omnipresent symbol in contemporary public life, and this symbol is quite clearly more than a mere ephemeral sign of collective identity. Nevertheless, it has not contributed to shaping the new forms of patriotic discourse – or at least the form of discourse that dominates the most widely influential media outlets, and especially television. In the end, the highly conventional and unproblematic nature of this particular symbol is striking. Indeed, these negative qualities seemed to intensify during the pope's last visit to Poland in the summer of 2002. The crisis of patriotic discourse could not be overcome in this realm either.

The figure of John Paul II became a national symbol in a more or less spontaneous way. But the process of expanding the list of national heroes does not always unfold as it did in this unusual case. Attempts to admit various other people into their ranks have ended in failure – unable to win broad support, undermined and ultimately rejected. We witnessed this process throughout the last decade of the twentieth century. For instance, various efforts were made to turn Ryszard Kukliński²⁵² into a national hero. These attempts did not meet with any positive response, and the colonel became a hero only for certain political groups. In fact, this particular instance calls for a deeper analysis that would fall beyond the purview of this article. In any case, it would be interesting to compile a list of unsuccessful candidates for the role of national hero. Political fanaticism has even brought some to propose convicted murderers (as in the sad case of Eligiusz Niewiadomski²⁵³).

251 See Joanna Kurczewska's remarks on the role of John Paul II's authority in the worldview of contemporary Polish politicians (*Patriotyzm[y] polskich polityków*, p. 121).

252 Translator's Note: Ryszard Kukliński (1930-2004) was a Polish army officer who leaked secret information from the Warsaw Pact to the CIA in the 1970s.

253 Translator's Note: Eligiusz Niewiadomski (1869-1923) was a right-wing fanatic who murdered the Polish president, Gabriel Narutowicz, in 1922. Many on the right believed at the time that Narutowicz had been elected largely by Poland's large ethnic minorities.

2

In order to understand the specific characteristics of contemporary Polish patriotic discourse, we must compare it with a discourse that seems very similar – namely, nationalist discourse. My assumption is that the latter constitutes its own distinctive sphere of reference, since it allows us to distinguish the characteristic features of the former. Indeed, I am convinced that we are dealing here with two very different phenomena – and not only from the axiological perspective.²⁵⁴ Patriotic discourse and nationalist discourse also differ in their most basic orientations and in various other structural features. They form two markedly different ways of speaking, supported by contrasting visions of the world and contrasting methods of linguistic categorization.²⁵⁵ At their respective foundations, we find two entirely different attitudes. Positive aspects tend to prevail in patriotic discourse, while negative elements hold sway in nationalist discourse. In the case of the former, the emphasis falls on phenomena that unite and strengthen the community, while the latter focuses on things that might threaten the nation or lead to its destruction.

I would summarize the fundamental differences between them under five main points.

A

In patriotic discourse, cultural factors form the fundamental distinguishing feature, while in nationalist discourse ethnic factors are decisive. In other words, the primary unifying and identifying factors in the first case are relations to tradition, common historical experiences, culture and language. In the latter case, the guarantor of unity and identity is usually described – for reasons I do not fully understand – as “blood.” This distinction is by no means absolute, but it remains significant enough to deserve preeminence. All other distinctions derive to a greater or lesser extent from this primary distinction, which also strongly

254 In communist ideology, patriotism was often juxtaposed with “cosmopolitanism.” This distinction was clearly made for propaganda reasons. Specifically, it was intended to justify yet another wave of repressions. The struggle with cosmopolitanism – which ultimately represented a manifestation of Russian nationalism in its Stalinist form – emerged towards the end of the 1940s. Here I would refer to Andrzej Drawicz’s instructive book – published beyond the reach of official censorship – *A/kos czyli szkoła podłości* (Warszawa: Oficyna Wydawnicza Pokolenie, 1987).

255 On the subject of linguistic categorizations of the world, I would refer to the publications of various linguists associated with the MariaCurie-Skłodowska University in Lublin. In particular, see: Grzegorzyczkowa, Renata and Anna Pajdzińska (eds.), *Językowa kategoryzacja świata* (Lublin: UMCS, 1996).

influence the types of arguments employed and the metaphors used within them. Nationalist discourse refers to natural phenomena, which do not play a major role or are entirely meaningless in patriotic discourse. The key metaphor of blood gives rise to various other metaphors. Patriotic discourse is able to treat what is genetically foreign as native – or at least to place it within a naturalization process. People who describe themselves as Poles – though they may be of German, Jewish, Ukrainian or any other origin – are compatriots. Here identification is largely a question of free choice, while it must always be the result of strict determinism wherever ethnic factors prevail. I can choose the language and culture to which I wish to belong and which I regard as my own; I cannot choose my blood, which is given to me at birth. This distinction between cultural and ethnic factors means that patriotic discourse is open and does not erect any insurmountable barriers in advance, while nationalist discourse is closed and consistently builds barriers. Accordingly, certain distinctions made with greater or lesser intensity take on primary significance: us and them, insiders and outsiders.

B

The two types of discourse differ fundamentally in their attitudes towards matters of faith. Patriotic discourse does not impose any limitations in this domain. Though the vast majority of Poles are Catholics, being a Catholic is not a necessary criterion for belonging to the Polish nation. Alongside Catholic Poles, there are also Protestant Poles, Orthodox Poles, Jewish Poles, and so on. To say that a specific individual is a Pole and a Catholic may well represent an objective statement of fact. But describing somebody as a “*Polak-katolik*” (“Pole-Catholic”) involves a phrase with a clearly ideological character suggesting that religious criteria are crucial in the definition of national identity. I cannot say when the phrase “*Polak-katolik*” first arose or in what circumstances. It might have played a positive role in the period of the partitions as a response to the oppression of the partitioning powers – Protestant Prussians from the west and Orthodox Russians from the east. However, as a primary marker of nationalist discourse, it has never been especially defensive in nature. Instead, it has been more concerned with the introduction of clear restrictive categories. By means of religious criteria, it becomes possible to establish who is a “real Pole.” Nevertheless, this point demands some additional explanation. After all, these criteria clearly did not work in all circumstances. We need only consider the hostility directed against neophytes, and even their descendants. This attitude was strong as early as the nineteenth century, as we may observe from the attacks on the romantic poet Adam Mickiewicz – who supposedly took a Jewish woman for his wife – and from fellow poet Zygmunt Krasiński’s

various negative remarks about converts.²⁵⁶ Switching to what was regarded as the correct faith did not automatically guarantee approval. This situation reveals, with particular clarity, the closed nature of nationalist discourse – in marked contrast with the open character of patriotic discourse.

One more problem demands an explanation here. If we examine the phenomena in question – leaving aside the historical context – we find that biological criteria (the so-called “blood,” which forms the key metaphor) do not cohere with the religious criteria, since most religious doctrines emphatically reject them. Certainly, the Catholic Church does not accept them at all. Nevertheless, in practice there is no overt conflict here. The contradictory criteria simply exist alongside one another, since any question of intellectual and ideological cohesion or consistency turns out to be immaterial to certain types of discourse. This is precisely the shape of things in this case.

C

The next clear difference between patriotic and nationalist forms of discourse manifests itself in the shaping of what I have called “the figure of the enemy.”²⁵⁷ In patriotic discourse, the figure of an adversary obviously may appear, but this usually entails a real and specific opponent. This figure may take various forms – partitioning powers, invaders, occupying forces, and so on. The figure of the enemy is not a characteristic feature here. It may appear or not appear, depending on specific and tangible historical circumstances. But the enemy is an indispensable element within nationalist discourse, irrespective of the era or political system in which it arises. We may say with no risk of falling into unfounded generalization that without the figure of the enemy there can be no nationalist discourse. It is simply impossible. The real existence of this enemy is not the fundamental question here because we are, in fact, dealing with a mythical figure. No genuine Hannibal need stand before the gates of Rome to become a crucial problem within nationalist discourse. He can be a mere figment of the imagination. Indeed, this mythical, imaginary enemy – who has been created more or less consciously – often takes the place of an aggressive real enemy with genuinely evil intentions. In the journalistic writings of Poland’s radical nationalist right in the 1930s, the

256 Translator’s Note: Adam Mickiewicz (1798-1855) was the leading poet of Polish Romanticism. Zygmunt Krasiński (1812-1859) was an important poet of the same era, well known for his more conservative cultural views. Together with Juliusz Słowacki, Mickiewicz and Krasiński comprised the so-called “Three Bards” of Polish Romanticism.

257 See my article “Figura wroga (O propagandzie marcowej),” published in *Nowomowa po polsku* (Warszawa: PEN, 1991), and also the volume *Marcowe gadanie, Komentarze do słów 1966-1971* (Warszawa: Pomost, 1991).

Jews appeared as the main enemy.²⁵⁸ They represented the constant mythical point of reference, while everything suggests now that they served to obscure two real and deadly external enemies. After all, it was not the Jews who invaded the country and divided it between them in September 1939 (neither was it the Freemasons or any other mythical enemies). This attitude towards the figure of the enemy suggests that nationalist discourse does not differ in any fundamental way from twentieth-century totalitarian discourse. In fact, it forms a part of this discourse – both in its Nazi version, in which the image of the Jew presented in the *Sturmer* magazine and elsewhere was a crucial component, and in the Soviet version, where the “filthy dwarf of reaction” and the “attack dog of imperialism” were indispensable elements. Here the difference between patriotic and nationalist discourse presents itself with particular clarity.

D

The next contrast is directly linked with the previous one. Patriotic discourse – I wish to emphasize this strongly – is inclined towards positive phenomena, while nationalist discourse highlights everything negative. For this reason, a large role in the structure of the latter falls to reflections on the subject of various open or covert threats, including conspiracies that are constantly being organized against the nation and the state. The dominant position is occupied by what the sociologist Andrzej Piotrowski calls the “rhetoric of fear.”²⁵⁹ Threats and conspiracies are a permanent element of nationalist discourse, while there is no place for them in patriotic discourse. Accordingly, the conspiracist vision of history is a vital ingredient, since without it nationalist discourse would have no justification.²⁶⁰

According to Janusz Tazbir:

The adoption of the conspiracist vision of history excuses people from any need for intellectual effort. The imagined enemy appears as a scapegoat. People do not like admitting their mistakes; they prefer to ascribe them to others. Instead of a historical vision in which a great many events are the result of simple coincidence or stupidity, it is much more tempting to adopt the thesis that they are guided by mysterious forces acting with complete premeditation.²⁶¹

258 Jan J. Lipski writes about this subject in depth in his book *Katolickie państwo narodu polskiego* (London: Aneks, 1994).

259 See Andrzej Piotrowski’s article, “Tożsamość zbiorowa jako temat dyskursu polityki,” published in the collective volume, *Rytualny chaos*, eds. Marek Czyżewski, Sergiusz Kowalski and Andrzej Piotrowski (Warszawa: WAIp, 2010) p. 195.

260 On the conspiracist vision of the world, see: Pipes, Daniel, *Conspiracy: How the Paranoid Style Flourishes and Where It Comes From* (New York: The Free Press, 1997).

261 Tazbir, Janusz, “Nieśmiertelne fałszyfikaty,” *Przegląd Polityczny* 57/58 (2002), p. 44.

The conspiracist vision of (both historical and contemporary) reality explains absolutely everything and implies specific causes, while also representing a universal appeal for vigilance. Even those who present themselves – or whom we regard – as friends may be conspiring against us. “Vigilance” is a category drawn from communist propaganda, though it does not function exclusively in this context. We must be vigilant, since “enemies of all stripes” – to use a phrase from one of Polish communist leader Władysław Gomułka’s most dreary and belligerent speeches (from 19 March 1968) – have banded against us. In nationalist discourse, it is precisely vigilance that constitutes the main national bond – not a common language, common tradition or common culture. All around us – like in fairy tales – are wolves that wish to devour us.

E

The next – and final – contrast is a direct consequence of the previous one. Here I have in mind a motif of disinheritance – the stripping of various goods from the national collective. This motif is essentially irrelevant to patriotic discourse, and thus it tends not to appear within it (assuming it does not refer to concrete facts). However, it holds fundamental significance for nationalist discourse, which presents the nation’s situation as one of great danger. The mythical enemy wants to strip us of everything valuable, to disinherit us of all manner of goods, irrespective of his own origins – for he may be either an external or internal enemy.

This strand of nationalist discourse has turned out to be extremely vigorous in recent years, where it has constituted one of the leading arguments advanced in the conservative press by opponents of Poland’s entry to the European Union. According to this perspective, those in favor of accession really wish to deprive the fatherland of everything precious within it.²⁶² This language of deprivation is so aggressive and widespread that even supporters of Poland’s accession to the EU have been known to use it.²⁶³

The theme of deprivation is clearly symbolic or even archetypal in nature. At first, most examples of this discourse seem to examine specific situations and

262 Sometimes the logic of deprivation becomes a domain of the pure and unadulterated grotesque. One extreme right-wing publication seriously reported that after Poland’s accession to the European Union, Jews would come and take away two million chickens from Poles. Why only the chickens were to be such tasty morsels, I do not know. Perhaps this argument was intended exclusively for chicken farmers. But why were the Jews not interested in our ducks, geese or turkeys? Were they not also under threat?

263 Here I am referring to arguments made in an excellent article by Cezary Lewanowicz, entitled “Eurosceptyczny język eurozwoleńników,” published in *Gazeta Wyborcza*, 6 December 2001, No 285 (3839).

realities, but in fact something else entirely is at stake. Accession to the European Union will supposedly deprive us of our land. This does not mean merely a single plot of arable land or even a certain number of hectares. The very basis of national existence and its immeasurable – and ultimately symbolic – value are under threat. Nationalist discourse includes motifs that are far removed from any specific reality. For instance, certain activists claim that unification with Europe will deprive Poles of their faith. It is difficult to imagine how this would happen, but the motif is impossible to ignore. The disinheritance hanging over our national existence like a sword of Damocles also includes non-material values.

3

The separation of patriotic discourse from nationalist discourse – and the drawing of a clear line between them – remains important for current events and contemporary phenomena. Patriotic discourse is undeniably a positive value. Unfortunately, whenever it experiences a crisis or loses its identity, nationalist discourse may flourish, often in extreme forms, rearing its head in books, periodicals and on the radio. In this way, a discourse that is undeniably anti-value may assume the dominant position in society.

In my view, a few lines from a certain classic work of Polish literature may allude precisely to this form of speech. I began my article with a poetic quotation. Here I shall conclude it with another one, convinced that the force of its bitter irony has not yet faded:

Idą zatem dyskursu tonem statystycznym
 O miłości ojczyzny, o dobru publicznym,
 O wspaniałych projektach, mężnym animuszu;
 (...)
 Reformujemy państwo, wojny nowe zwodzimy,
 Tych bijem wstępny bojem, z tamtymi się godzimy,
 A butelka nieznacznie jako się wysusza.²⁶⁴

[So the discourse drones on in a static tone / About love of the fatherland and the public good / About glorious projects and manly courage; // (. . .) // We'll reform the state and wage new wars, / We'll beat these in battle and treat with those, / And somehow the bottle will empty itself.]

264 Krasicki, Ignacy, “Pijaństwo” (“Drunkenness”), lines 39-41 and 45-47. See: Krasicki, Ignacy, *Pisma poetyckie*, Volume II, ed. Z. Goliński (Warszawa: PIW, 1976), p. 222.

Part III

18. Characteristics of Anti-Semitic Discourse

Anti-Semitic discourse forms a variety of nationalist discourse. At the same time, it is distinguished by so many unique attributes that it might easily be treated as a quite separate phenomenon. Nationalist discourse in its diverse forms and variants is characterized by the large role played within it by specific factors resulting from local circumstances and the situations of particular societies. Of course, these elements are not entirely absent within anti-Semitic discourse, yet, by and large, they do not predominate. They might consolidate or influence its specific character – and indeed they often do – but they are always grounded in phenomena that function independently of national borders or ethnic languages. Accordingly, they refer to much more widespread motifs and arguments. In fact, various internationalisms frequently dominate anti-Semitic discourse. The views of a National Democrat in Poland about the Talmud or Jewish conspiracies and threats at the beginning of the twentieth century might not have differed at all from the opinions expressed by a supporter of Action Française in France, a member of a radical right-wing movement in Germany, or a fanatical adherent of the Orthodox Church, supporting the pogroms of the Black Hundreds in Russia. Of course, nobody has used the slogan “Anti-Semites of the world, unite!” Nevertheless, the far-reaching analogies between various beliefs and activities are impossible to ignore. These similarities have probably resulted not so much from the fact that the object of their attacks and hatred is a community residing in various countries, living in a diaspora scattered among various nations and present in various places. Instead, they have resulted, above all, from strong foundations in culture, religion and history.

As the first attribute of this discourse – though perhaps not the most important – I would cite the fact that its object need not be defined in advance. Indeed, it may be treated with a certain degree of vagueness. The category of “Jew” is not always directly provided. He is not a figure at which one might point one’s finger, but rather he represents an ideological construct. In such cases, the real existence of the object is not necessary, while in many situations it may even be undesirable. A high-ranking Nazi – probably Göring – once supposedly declared: “I will decide who is a Jew.” In this proclamation, we find the arrogance of a man whose power was so great that he could decide the fates of human beings. At the same time, it is clearly more than just the self-indulgent joke of a totalitarian ruler. Indeed, we may recognize a broader tradition in Göring’s declaration. There is no singular or unambiguous answer to the question “Who is a Jew?” And there is no possibility

of any precision in the various definitions, since a certain kind of paradox emerges within them. Ambiguity coexists here with clear determinism – and even with extreme determinism in the case of racist theories. After all, once biology comes into play there is no possibility of individual choice, since everything is decided in advance and in absolute terms. In this sort of discourse, a Jew is not necessarily a person who regards himself as such. A person who does not define himself in this manner and who does not wish to be a part of the Jewish community may also be a Jew. This circumstance is not as rare as it might seem. Sometime the existence of real Jews is entirely superfluous.²⁶⁵ This vagueness also manifests itself in specific situations and in extremely diverse kinds of texts. Professor Waldemar Chrostowski argued several years ago in a sermon delivered to army chaplains in Częstochowa – which subsequently circulated on the Internet and was later published in the *Midrasz* monthly – that there are “good” biblical Jews and “bad” Talmudic Jews. We should attempt to communicate only with the first group. However, a slight problem immediately arises here, since “biblical Jews” have not existed for a thousand years. Only the repulsive Jews of the Talmud have remained.²⁶⁶

Of course, we cannot ignore the vast differences between a Nazi war criminal and a contemporary preacher (even the most fanatical) with no scruples about proclaiming his hateful views. At the same time, neither can we ignore certain elements that bind them together, since these represent the most constitutive components of this type of discourse – and therefore of this type of thinking. The fact that this discourse represents an ideological construct gives rise to a crucial principle. The objects of anti-Semitic discourse in all its forms can never be specific people insofar as these people are treated as individuals with no relation to the community from which they originate or in which they live. One can say the worst things about individual people, calling them every name under the sun, denouncing them in justified or unjustified ways – from this perspective it makes no difference. If all this invective only concerns individual people, then it ought

265 See, for instance, the discussion of this subject in an article by Anna Cała, Dariusz Libionka and Stefan Zgliczyński, entitled “Anti-Semitism without Jews and without Anti-Semites: A Pathology of Anti-Semitism in Poland, 1999-2001” (“*Antysemityzm bez Żydów i bez antysemitów, Patologia antysemityzmu w Polsce w 1999-2001 r.*”), published in *Nigdy Więcej* 13 (Spring 2003).

266 This instructive lecture offered a foretaste of an expansive book in which this cleric and scholar would go on to express everything he thought and felt on the subject of Jews. See: *Kościół, Żydzi, Polska, Z księdzem profesorem Waldemarem Chrostowskim rozmawiają: Grzegorz Górny i Rafał Tichy* (Warszawa: Fronda, 2009). The conservative *Frona* magazine published the book. On the overleaf of the title page, we read the following: “Realized within the Operational Program for the Promotion of Reading launched by the Minister for Culture and National Heritage.”

not to be treated as anti-Semitic. The fundamental distinguishing characteristic of this type of discourse is that it recognizes no individual cases in the creation of the ideological construct. The individual appears in such discourse only as material for generalizations or as a pretext for their creation. The particular use of the noun “Jew” in the singular indicates that it refers here to a representative of a community rather than to any individual person. Universal quantifiers are common in this discourse, constituting one of its primary elements. To emphasize: an individual defined as a Jew is not simply a Jew in this understanding, but rather a representative of the Jewish community, an embodiment of its negative characteristics, a personification of its general features. Accordingly, when this particular Jewish person is under discussion, it is really Jews in general who are under discussion. The individual can only represent a kind of exemplum.

As the second attribute of anti-Semitic discourse, I would point to the fact that it always aims to expose, or – more precisely – to expose and accuse. After all, even when it appears in the form of a minimally objective argument or as a text meeting the demands of scientific objectivity (and such cases are by no means rare), the purpose as a rule is not to convey verifiable information, but rather to impose certain views or interpretations. This aim is linked with a strong authorial position. The author feels obligated to convey the truth about this community, a truth that may only be reached with great difficulty, since the essential features of the group are always deeply hidden or secret. The author’s responsibility is to show the true nature of things, to tear away the deceitful veil and reveal the lies beneath. In other words, the author must show who the Jews really are and why they represent such a great threat (to our nation, to Christians, to the working people of the towns and villages, to all decent people, and so on).

Here we should draw attention to another fundamental feature of this accusatory and revelatory rhetoric. There is no need to explain where any information on a given subject comes from or what sources have been used. In fact, this kind of rhetoric requires no rational justification at all. And even when certain authors make attempts to provide it, their sources of information are extremely vague and often simply fictional (here we observe the return of a convention known to literature for centuries – namely, the “found document,” as in the case of the infamous *Protocols of the Elders of Zion*). The unbending rule is as follows: the authoritative narrator is credible on the basis of the very fact that he reveals this hidden knowledge about the Jews, warning us about their nefarious manipulations and intentions, sounding the alarm.

This principle is associated with another widespread phenomenon. Within the framework of anti-Semitic discourse, one can say absolutely anything negative about the Jews and accuse them of absolutely everything. Of course, a certain set of traditional accusations have recurred over the centuries: the murder of God,

the killing of children to use their blood for matza bread, the desecration of the host, the poisoning of wells, etc. In the contemporary world, these traditional motifs have not entirely vanished, though they play a much smaller role than in the past.²⁶⁷ Professor Jerzy Bajda – a Catholic priest – has claimed openly on Radio Maryja that the Jews themselves organized the Holocaust, since they were Hitler’s main Pretorians – his personal guard.²⁶⁸ In the extreme right-wing press, we find the repeated claim that the Jews arranged the Jedwabne affair in order to demand billions of dollars in reparations.²⁶⁹ Such groundless assertions are often quite astonishing. For instance, Feliks Konecny – an ideological mentor and idol for the Polish extreme right – seriously claimed in a work on *Jewish Civilization* (*Cywilizacja żydowska*), which he wrote during the Nazi occupation, that Hitler had modeled his own efforts to subjugate the world on the example developed and put into practice by the Jews.²⁷⁰ From this point of view, we might say that anti-Semitic discourse forms a realm of unlimited possibilities, giving absolute creative freedom to those who cultivate it.

The third specific characteristic of anti-Semitic discourse involves its peculiar communicative features – namely, the relations between the speaking subject and the audience. Anti-Semitic authors almost always speak as if they were authorities on the subject with no need to explain their qualifications, the basis of their positions or the foundations supporting their information. They are authorities simply because they are – and nobody has the right to question this state of affairs. They are authorities when they play the role of agitators revealing secrets unknown

267 Joanna Tokarska-Bakir deals with these traditional motifs in her broad-ranging studies on the subject.

268 I refer here to a text presented on Radio Maryja. Excerpts of this text were printed in *Gazeta Wyborcza* in an article under the headline “Radio Maryja on the Jews” (“*Radio Maryja o Żydach*” Number 197 [5505] of 24 August 2007).

269 Translator’s Note: A pogrom took place in July 1941 in the Polish village of Jedwabne. Several hundred Jewish local residents were murdered. The pogrom took place under the auspices of the Nazi occupation, but the perpetrators were the Polish inhabitants of the village.

270 Numerous authors from extreme right-wing circles refer to Konecny’s works, but they also form the subject of various publications with more scientific ambitions, published by serious academic publishers. Unfortunately, these publications entirely ignore his writings about the Jews. There is no mention whatsoever of his anti-Semitic doctrines, which – filled with extreme hatred and superstition treated seriously – in fact represent the very core of his thought and the foundation of his worldview. Regrettably, a reader of the extensive entry devoted to Konecny in the *Catholic Encyclopedia* published by the John Paul II Catholic University of Lublin (KUL) will learn nothing on this subject. An absolute conspiracy of silence seems to prevail in this regard, as if any mention of this subject were officially forbidden. We cannot fail to note that silence often serves falsehood – or barefaced lies, in this case.

to broader social circles, when they give information about conspiracies or secret organizations aiming to take over the world, when they appeal to their readers to be watchful, and when they stylize their arguments as academic lectures (here Feliks Koneczny's publications represent the exemplary models). Within anti-Semitic discourse, the narrator's position cannot be questioned when it is constructed in this fashion. Indeed, this position constitutes one of the discourse's main foundations, so that casting any doubt on it would be tantamount to questioning the discourse as a whole. We cannot exclude the possibility that anti-Semitic discourse thus betrays one of the major features of authoritarian discourse more generally, since it determines in advance that all discussion and dialogue are impossible. The narrator is de-individualized. All that matters about his character and position is that he represents the only justified point of view. In short, the self-evident truth is on his side. This truth is indisputable, whether or not everybody is prepared to accept it.

The peculiarities of anti-Semitic discourse reveal themselves even more clearly when we turn our attention to the construction of the audience. We might say that the narrator only addresses those whom he considers as actually or potentially "his own." In other words, he speaks to those who are already convinced or whom he might convince through argument, clear and eloquent examples, or through direct description of the dangers so as to provoke anxiety and fear. Here an absolute division between "us" and "them" prevails – a division that sets clear boundaries, excluding all moderate or indefinite states. In grammatical terms, we might say that the Jews do not belong to any realm denoted by the pronoun "you." Instead, they find themselves in the domain marked out by the pronoun "they."²⁷¹ Anti-Semitic discourse does not address itself to the Jews, but rather it speaks about the Jews. They have no right to be anything but its object – never its addressee. They are placed within what this type of thinking and speech defines as the "Jewish

271 The forms of speech employed in direct communication with Jewish people are a separate issue. For instance, it has often been possible to address a specific person as "you Jew," which not only depersonalizes the individual but also expresses a highly contemptuous sense of superiority to him or her. This practice is widely recorded in the nineteenth-century Polish novel of manners. As a socially sanctioned form of address, this constitutes an important and interesting phenomenon that merits separate analysis. However, it is not directly linked with the specific characteristics of anti-Semitic discourse. The word "Jew" ("*Żyd*") is also often used as an insult. As an example – interesting for its authenticity, but also atypical, since the insult meets with a reply – we may cite from the memoirs of Jerzy Berent: "When little Tadeusz Ulewicz said to me on our first meeting in first grade 'You Jew,' I was surprised. Then I replied 'You Catholic,' and considered that we were even" (See: Berent, Jerzy, *Piechotą z Krakowa: Sam o sobie* [Kraków: Wydawnictwo Literackie, 1997], p. 238). Of course, anybody addressing another person in this way would probably not expect a reply, which could only come as a surprise.

question.” Accordingly, the treatment of the Jews within anti-Semitic discourse differs fundamentally from texts whose aim is to drag a social group over to their own side – be it pagans or any other national minority.

Here we find the expression of another fundamental characteristic of anti-Semitic discourse. Specifically, this attitude towards its main characters – who are given the status of mere objects – suggests that it has no missionary dimension. The approach that I define here as “missionary” denotes endeavors aimed at converting those who are foreign, mistaken, or adherents of the wrong faith. In missionary discourse, persuasion is by definition not aimed at one’s own. Instead, it targets pagans or members of other tribes, who are meant to enlarge the circle of one’s own. In anti-Semitic discourse – or at least in its classic manifestations – no such efforts are made. After all, the goal is not for the Jews to cross over to the right side or simply to stop being Jews. The aim is to expose, drive out and ultimately to annihilate them. Therefore, persuasion is consistently directed at those who should become aware of the “Jewish question” so as to use whatever means necessary to neutralize it. One of the reasons for this approach is the belief that being a Jew is something given once for all – an ineradicable affliction from which there can be no release simply by changing religion or joining another national community. In many cases, such attempts are viewed as especially threatening. “Crypto-Jews” are more dangerous than open Jews, since they operate even more insidiously – in disguise or under cover. Accordingly, it is easier for them to beguile or deceive healthy societies, stealing into their good graces and perfidiously acting against their interests. This explains the frequently recurring motif of the sinister, aggressive and especially dangerous converts to Christianity.

As the fourth specific characteristic of anti-Semitic discourse, I would cite the prevalence of value judgments directly linked with broad generalizations. An indispensable feature of this discourse is its axiological way of thinking. This tendency inevitably constitutes the organizing principle within anti-Semitic texts, even when they might appear at first glance to be objective accounts of the facts. The formation of any domain of axiological neutrality is impossible here, since every element is subject to value judgments linked with dichotomous divisions maintained with absolute consistency and ultimately amounting to a black-and-white vision of the world. Everything good is on our side (for various reasons, from religious to racial), while everything bad is on the Jewish side. These value judgments may be expressed directly in sequences of evaluative adjectives, though this is not necessarily the case. The very vocabulary employed is heavily loaded in this respect. More broadly, names referring to members of national groups or to followers of various religions are generally neutral in language. If they lose this neutrality, it is usually in colloquial speech, where they assume various derivative forms, including diminutives and augmentatives. However, in this case, we are

not dealing merely with such colloquial Polish expressions as “Żydek,” “Żydziak” and “Żydzisko” – roughly meaning “little Jew,” “Jew boy” and “dirty Jew” (from the word “Żyd,” meaning “Jew”). Neither are we dealing simply with the addition of various contemptuous terms to form pejorative compounds like “Jew-scab” (“Żyd-parch”) or with various kinds of substitute expressions. In this discourse, the very word “Jew” (“Żyd”) – even when it appears in isolation – carries a strongly negative connotation.

This has far-reaching consequences. In anti-Semitic discourse – especially when it addresses itself to a wider audience – we often encounter various stories intended to offer concrete examples of the ideas being promoted. In other words, they are somehow supposed to show explicitly how Jews behave, the kinds of vile acts they resort to and how dangerous they are to everybody. These interjected stories are supposed to refine mere generalizations into individual and specific cases, which are somehow tangible and easily accessible even for a less sophisticated audience. In this way, they embody a principle well known to didactic literature for centuries: the exemplum. The particular tale itself has no independent significance as a mere fictional curiosity. Instead, it is subject to clearly conveyed theses. For instance, the tale’s protagonist might deserve condemnation not simply because he is a swindler. If he is defined as a Jew, then his character and the reasons for his fraudulent activity are clearly and indisputably situated. The general category of “Jew” does not serve so much as an explanation as a condemnation. This is the case even when the category includes no further qualifications. Here we find one of the most distinctive examples of how this general axiological logic functions within anti-Semitic discourse.

The fifth attribute may seem even more particular than the previous four. Nevertheless, in my view, it remains extraordinarily important and characteristic. I have already mentioned that one can say absolutely anything about the Jews – with no reference to any actual state of things – in accordance with the revelatory and accusatory reasoning developed within anti-Semitic discourse. But here we must examine not only concrete facts, but also the internal coherence of the discourse itself. For anti-Semitic thinking pays no attention to what logicians call the law of excluded middle, which may be defined as follows:

p or not *p*. Of these two contradictory statements, one is true. Either statement *p* is true or the contradiction of *p* is true. No third possibility comes into play. I may not know whether a particular problem is solvable, but according to the law of excluded middle I know that it is either solvable or unsolvable.²⁷²

272 Here I am citing the entry on the “Law of Excluded Middle” from the *Little Encyclopedia of Logic (Mala encyklopedia logiki)*, edited by Witold Marciszewski (Wrocław: Zakład Narodowy im. Ossolińskich: 1970).

Since anti-Semitic discourse generally ignores this law of logic, it includes claims, charges and accusations that are mutually exclusive. Two examples will reveal very clearly how this works. In anti-Semitic propaganda of the interwar period, two particular claims routinely existed alongside each other, often on equal terms. The first accusation suggested that Jewish shopkeepers were colluding against Polish clients by purposefully and dishonestly raising their prices. Don't buy in Jewish shops – the propaganda admonishes – because you'll pay too much. Yet in the very same text, we might encounter the claim that Jewish shopkeepers were perfidiously lowering their prices to beat their Polish merchant competitors. The failure to respect the law of excluded middle – as in this example – probably resulted from the fact that the propaganda in question did not clearly differentiate its addressees, whose interests were not identical. After all, the consumer wanted to buy a given object as cheaply as possible, while the merchant wanted to beat his rivals.

The internal distinctions between different addressees of anti-Semitic discourse do not represent the only reason for this rejection of the law of excluded middle – and perhaps not even the most important. I would find the main cause in what I would describe as the superimposition of stereotypes. In this domain, there are so many different stereotypes that organizing or arranging them into a transparent and consistent order becomes a particularly difficult challenge. In fact, this task becomes unnecessary here, since every stereotype has its own separate significance and can be emphasized with equal intensity, while simultaneously being included in various configurations of other stereotypes. Once again, this applies to anti-Semitic discourse both as a singular whole and as individual texts. For example, the anti-Semitic propaganda campaign of March 1968²⁷³ referred to stereotypes of the Jewish community as a highly organized, mafia-like group. This organization supposedly looked after its own interests, enforced radical solidarity, and was subject to central bodies of control – all with the aim of harming others. From this perspective, the Jews comprised one enormous clique. At the same time, the anti-Jewish propaganda campaign updated another old stereotype – the Jews as a community incapable of common action, composed of amoral, selfish and predatory individuals looking after their own interests with no regard for the good of their fellows. Therefore, they comprised a group existing in a state of complete anomie. Ryszard Gontarz – one of the leading exponents of anti-Semitic propaganda in 1968 – presented this image in a cycle of articles about Hungarian Jews during the Holocaust published in the *Walka Młodych (Struggle*

273 Translator's Note: In March 1968, students and intellectuals mounted major protests against the communist authorities in Poland. After taking strong measures to suppress the unrest, the government launched an "anti-Zionist" campaign that saw many Polish Jews leave the country.

of the Youth) magazine. According to his reasoning, the fact that the Jews were persecuted and murdered is irrelevant. Instead, he emphasizes that they destroyed themselves, devouring one another in the attempt to save their own lives. The first of these two stereotypes is intended to provoke anxiety and fear of a well-organized mafia gang, while the second is supposed to reveal moral degeneration. There appears to be no need to make these stereotypes cohere. The rejection of the law of excluded middle leads on to a broader question – namely, the relation of anti-Semitic discourse to the principles of logic. This is a separate issue, and I have no space in which to examine it here. Nevertheless, it would seem that we are dealing with phenomena broadly characteristic of propaganda speech – and especially of authoritarian propaganda. Here this form of speech clearly appears in highly concentrated form.

As the sixth attribute of anti-Semitic discourse, I would cite the consolidation within it over the centuries of a certain repertoire of motifs characterized by great stability and submitting to relatively few changes – some of them only cosmetic. Of course, this repertoire also includes the abovementioned “exempla,” which probably involve the fewest transformations. These exemplary tales allude to the most deeply ingrained ideas, and thus it is completely irrelevant that the facts do not corroborate and have never corroborated them. Ultimately, such motifs as the murder of Christian children to obtain blood for matza bread or the clandestine activity of Jewish leaders secretly planning to take over the world are still alive today. It would be no exaggeration to say that an anti-Semitic topos has formed, constantly recurring and resistant to any evolution.

This topos – which, we should emphasize, is not limited to exemplary tales – is highly uniform and essentially constitutes a form of stereotype. All kinds of ideas converge to form this stereotype, including the supposed physical appearance of Jews. In this area, the caricatures from the Nazi newspaper *Der Stürmer* are especially interesting. These images exist in a decidedly loose relation with the appearance of actual Jewish people.²⁷⁴ Of course, we are not dealing here only with representations of dark and diabolical monsters with long beards and crooked noses.²⁷⁵ The whole of anti-Semitic propaganda is filled with similar phenomena. There are a great many of these popular motifs. One of the leading motifs assumes a conspiracy of Jews who intend to take over the world. Sometimes this theory

274 It is a well-known fact that Germans hunting Jews in hiding during the Holocaust found it difficult to differentiate them from the Polish population. They treated the figures from Nazi propaganda as if they gave information about the actual appearance of Jewish people.

275 The type of image was circulated in the visual propaganda of March 1968 in Poland. See Agnieszka Skalska’s book on “the image of the enemy in the anti-Semitic press drawings of March 1968 (*Obraz wroga w antysemickich rysunkach prasowych marca '68* [Warszawa: Narodowe Centrum Kultury, 2007]).

takes more specific form: for instance, in cases claiming that the entire world press has been taken over by Jews, thus representing a huge threat to Christian communities.

These anti-Semitic topoi are highly diverse, referring to various aspects of social reality. Here I shall raise a rather unusual example – namely, the topos of the Talmud as a peculiar book or bible of malefactors. This has nothing to do with the real Talmud, in which one might find highly diverse and often mutually contradictory attitudes and teachings – as in most religious works. Instead, it concerns the idea of a society which has laid out its malevolent aims in a set of instructional writings, a programmatic treatise intended only for internal use – so to speak – and therefore by definition unavailable to non-Jews. The Talmud topos is supposed to supply especially strong evidence, and thus to hold great persuasive power. It is usually accompanied by a commentary: “See what they’re like. They say it themselves. They don’t even try to hide it. You must understand how much they hate us and how much they wish to do us harm.” This topos has appeared in this form in various kinds of anti-Semitic discourse. For instance, Teodor Jeske-Choiński used it at the beginning of the twentieth century in numerous pamphlets generally aimed at uneducated people, while Andrzej Niemojewski also alluded to it in his supposedly learned pseudo-religious digressions. Ultimately, this is still the case today, where certain authoritative writers with professorial titles take up the same theme. Once again, we might refer here to the highly representative screeds of Father Chrostowski.

Certain topoi within anti-Semitic discourse are very peculiar in the context of the phenomenon as a whole. Here I would point to one example: the topos of “the good Jew.” According to this notion, Jews on the whole are horrible, but certain exceptions may exist (this motif does not appear – for obvious reasons – in the racist version of anti-Semitism, where exceptions are by definition impossible). This does not imply any admission that certain individuals might in fact be noble and worthy of respect. Such exceptions – even if their existence were accepted – would not be worth discussing. The “good Jew” is one who says the same things that we say about Jewish society and about Jews as a nation, as a race and as followers of the Mosaic religion. His or her opinions are treated as credible in the highest degree, since these views are expressed by one of their own. Accordingly, he or she becomes an especially authoritative accuser and exposé. The topos of the good Jew is very uniform. In contemporary anti-Semitic discourse – both in Poland and elsewhere – Norman Finkelstein is honored as an inspiring figure for his pamphlet on *The Holocaust Industry*.

I would regard a peculiar kind of uniformity as the seventh characteristic of anti-Semitic discourse. Some texts have rather theoretical attributes and ambitions. This means the consolidation of certain general claims about Jews,

apparently irrespective of any more immediate complications or goals. Other texts – at first glance just as free of contemporary intentions – take the form of historical reflections. They aim to point to various facts or processes from the past. In the third variety of text – the most common and clearly the most important – anti-Semitic discourse overtly and directly serves contemporary or immediate aims. Here the propagandistic nature of the discourse is unconcealed. The differences between these types of texts ought to be significant – or at least so it would appear at first glance – but in fact they are generally rather slight. Admittedly, anti-Semitic discourse has always been to a greater or lesser extent ideologically driven, and here we might find some rather fundamental differences. For instance, in the interwar period, the Catholic Church in Poland supported anti-Semitism in various forms, but it was decidedly against one particular version of it – namely, the variant based on racist theories.²⁷⁶ Nevertheless, even in the absence of ideological uniformity, we may observe a phenomenon that I would describe as pragmatic uniformity. Works on Jewish civilization or history bearing even a partial affinity with anti-Semitic discourse – here Koneczny's publications form a prime example – generally involve immediate references and aims. From this point of view, they do not differ significantly from the variant of anti-Semitic discourse whose aim is to unmask the Jews, to oppose “Jewishness,” and to warn against Jewish temptations, tricks, swindles and deceptions. In other words, they are similar to its primary variant, which exists as a means for direct action and – above all – as a tool in the struggle.

As the eighth feature of anti-Semitic discourse – and perhaps the least obvious and most difficult to grasp – I would cite its absolute invariability. It is true that a great deal in its development depends on contemporary circumstances and immediate aims. However, this does not contradict the fact that its constitutive elements reveal a continuity over the centuries. Neither its basic attitudes and assumptions nor its broad motifs and themes have changed. This constancy through the ages has not resulted from any immutability of the object itself, especially since its real characteristics cannot generally be delineated. After all, we know that anti-Semitic discourse does not have to take the existence of real Jews into consideration, since it always develops spontaneously, propelled by its own impetus. Any references to reality can only interfere with the image created. This self-sufficiency reflects the utmost ideologization of anti-Semitic discourse. Astonishingly, the Holocaust has had a limited effect on its form. It is

276 See the outstanding book by American Catholic theologian Ronald Modras, *The Catholic Church and Antisemitism: Poland, 1933-1939* (Oxon, UK: Routledge, 2004). Damian Pałka's *Kościół katolicki wobec Żydów w Polsce międzywojennej* (Kraków: NOMOS, 2008) is just as valuable. According to the author's note, Pałka is a historian of the Church who works at the Department of Theology at the Adam Mickiewicz University in Poznań.

true that certain prominent anti-Semitic authors – including Adolf Nowaczyński and Jan Mosdorf – desisted from this type of writing when they realized what was happening during the Nazi occupation, while also referring critically to their own earlier proclamations. However, even during the Holocaust, anti-Semitic discourse did not simply vanish. To understand how insignificant the Holocaust has been to its development, we need only compare what the authors of the extreme right were claiming in the 1930s with the propaganda writings of March 1968 or even with the numerous anti-Semitic publications and pamphlets published after 1989. The continuity between them is truly astounding.²⁷⁷

Appendix: Anti-Semitic Discourse in the Age of Political Correctness

Anti-Semitic discourse in its classic form did not hide its true nature or conceal its intentions and aims. Indeed, many authors of anti-Semitic texts proudly declared “I am an anti-Semite.” This frankness and openness has been tempered – or in certain cases even entirely eliminated – after the Holocaust. The expression “anti-Semite” has taken on a much narrower meaning. In this new understanding, an anti-Semite is somebody in favor of the final solution – and thus of what the Germans did in the death camps, the ghettos and various other places. But mass murder tends to have few supporters. Accordingly, the declaration “I’m not an anti-Semite” is generally justified when the word is understood in this narrow sense. However, in my view, we ought not to reduce the term to its most extreme form. In fact, this phrase has become fundamental to anti-Semitic discourse in recent decades when accompanied by the little word “but” – as in the expression “I’m not an anti-Semite, but...” This formula is usually followed by statements repeating various claims, accusations, slanders and plans from the repertoire of traditional anti-Semitic stereotypes (for example: “I am not an anti-Semite, but the Jews should clear out of Poland for good”).

Yet reasoning based on the principle “I’m not, but...” is by no means the latest innovation in this realm. Before our very eyes, we have seen the growing prevalence of a new type of anti-Semitism, which had been relatively seldom exploited in earlier times. We might describe this new variant as anti-Semitic discourse for the era of political correctness. This form of discourse is careful to

277 Over five years, I conducted a seminar devoted to anti-Semitic discourse at the School of Social Sciences associated with the Institute of Philosophy and Sociology at the Polish Academy of Sciences (PAN). This article is closely linked with the seminar. I owe a great deal to its various participants. I thank them for their inspiring contributions.

cultivate the appearance that it has nothing in common with anti-Semitic thought, while still fulfilling its principles, confirming the ideas expressed within it and serving similar aims. I would like to demonstrate this procedure by analyzing a specific case – an article by Dorota Kania published in *Gazeta Polska*, entitled “The Family History of the President’s Wife in the Records of the IPN” (“Rodzina historia prezydentowej w aktach IPN”).²⁷⁸

The title immediately suggests that this will be a “true story,” though the author does not provide any information on precisely which “records” are involved, what kind of data they contain or how she accessed them. I understand that the requirements for journalistic articles with respect to revealing sources are less stringent than for works of scholarly history. Nevertheless, this discretion immediately arouses suspicion, especially when one of the text’s primary characteristics is what I would describe as a factographical style. The author develops her argument in a manner designed to avoid the creation of any formal analogies to classic anti-Semitic discourse. There are apparently no accusations against Jews, and when the author mentions the events of 1968 she even uses the phrase “hideous anti-Semitic denunciations.” This is an interesting phenomenon, since the author effectively creates certain safety mechanisms within the text that are supposed to shield her from the charge of anti-Semitism (these mechanisms also appeared in communist propaganda, where one did not speak about Jews but rather about Zionists, though everybody was supposed to know – and knew – whom this term really denoted). We may apply the abovementioned phrase to Ms. Kania’s work with complete justification, though her apparent aim is merely to give objective, factual information on the Polish president’s wife, Anna Komorowska.

We discover in the article that Mrs. Komorowska’s grandparents were Wolf and Estera Rojer, while her mother was Hana Rojer: “Thanks to documents forged during the occupation, Hana Rojer – the daughter of Wolf and Estera – changed her identity, taking the name of Józefa Deptuła and becoming the daughter of Jan and Stanisława, neé Rybak. Until her transportation to Germany, she lived with the Deptuła family on Radzymińska Street in the Warsaw suburb of Praga.” Neither historical works on the Holocaust nor personal memoirs ever describe the adoption of a Polish name as a “change of identity.” It is an extremely well-known fact that Jews in hiding took different names, since for obvious reasons they carried “false papers” on the Aryan side.²⁷⁹ The author of the article – addressing her tale to readers who are perhaps not well informed on the history of the occupation

278 *Gazeta Polska*, 8 December 2010, No 49.

Translator’s Note: “IPN” denotes the Institute of National Remembrance (*Instytut Pamięci Remembrance*).

279 See: Melchior, Małgorzata, *Zagłada a tożsamość. Polscy Żydzi ocaleni „na aryjskich papierach”*, *Analiza doświadczenia biograficznego*, (Warszawa:IFiS PAN, 2004).

and the Holocaust – phrases things as if Hana Rojer’s behavior were somehow suspicious, as if she had impersonated somebody else. Furthermore, this line of argument would be impossible if her parents had only had names like Jean and Sophie Dupont or John and Mary Smith – or any other conspicuously foreign names pointing to origins in a respectable nation.

The history of Anna Komorowska’s father is another matter. The author does not ascribe Jewish origins to him. Instead, she depicts him as a functionary of the hated communist security services. I cannot say whether this particular “true story” is really true. In any case, its main purpose lies somewhere entirely in the exposure of family history and the creation of suspicion. Above all, this concerns the myth of “*żydokomuna*,” which blames the Jews for the communist takeover of Poland. Of course, this word does not appear in the article itself, but the whole argument is constructed in such a way that this old National Democrat stereotype from the 1930s might be recalled or even imposed. Clearly, this can only happen indirectly, since in the pseudo-documentary line of reasoning adopted – in which one only gives the “facts” – the word would contradict its main assumptions. This reasoning follows a principle well encapsulated by a popular saying from the Warsaw slang of the communist era, perhaps still used today: “I know – and you understand.” The editors of *Gazeta Polska* are undoubtedly well aware of the nature of their audience. They know that minor hints and apparently innocent allusions suffice to ensure that their readers will interpret the information according to their intentions. Therefore, the meaning of the text is determined to a large extent by its context: in other words, by the fact that it appears in an extreme right-wing publication and fits into its recurring style and ideas. The same article could not appear in any publication with a different political orientation – and for quite comprehensible reasons.

After all, the article’s supposedly factual material really represents a conscious attempt at unmasking somebody – and this is precisely how it is to be understood by readers. Look – the text says – the person going by the name of the first lady says nothing about her family. But now it will no longer be a secret that she comes not only from a foreign mother, but also from a hostile milieu that can be simply defined with the word “*żydokomuna*.” The aims of the article are clear. Firstly, it places the person portrayed in a difficult situation – not only because it uncovers the (fictional or real?) secrets of her biography, but especially since it confronts her with certain almost irresolvable dilemmas. Any announcement that all these revelations were fabrications might seem morally dubious, since it could lead to an unfavorable sense that he or she was explaining something for which there was no reason for explanation (the first prime minister of post-communist Poland, Tadeusz Mazowiecki, faced a similar dilemma during the 1990 presidential elections; the affirmation of his Polish background issued by

Bishop Alojzy Orszulik is remembered to this day). On the other hand, any failure to respond to this type of article might directly lend it credibility. We should also take into account that the real object of *Gazeta Polska*'s attack is not the first lady, but the president himself. In the end, the reader should reach a single conclusion: Bronisław Komorowski is linked with *żydokomuna*. He represents it and belongs to it himself.²⁸⁰

As I conclude these remarks, it is difficult for me to resist yet another historical recollection. The exposure of Jewish origins by highlighting certain conspicuous names and surnames was a specialty of the anti-Semitic propaganda of the March 1968 unrest in Poland. During this period, we would constantly read that one public figure or another had a grandmother named Malka Schwarzenkopf or a grandfather called Jojne Hozenduff. In anti-Semitic propaganda, irrespective of its specific tone, this practice is universal. Jewishness is ineradicable, passing from one generation to the next. The star of the March 1968 anti-Semitic propaganda in Poland was Ryszard Gontarz. I do not know whether he is still alive. If he is, then I congratulate him on acquiring such a receptive disciple and follower as Dorota Kania from *Gazeta Polska*. She has managed extraordinarily well in an era in which even the opponents of political correctness are at least to some extent bound by its principles, and in which being an openly declared anti-Semite is inadvisable in certain circumstances for purely tactical reasons.

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280 The printed version of the article is somewhat longer than the text accessible on the Internet. In its conclusion, the author talks about Bronisław Komorowski in a Jewish context. Among other things, it conveys the exceedingly important information that in 1988 “the father-in-law of the current president” applied for a passport that would allow him to travel to Israel.

19. The Poetics of a Political Forgery

1

We seem to know everything about this text. We know the circumstances of its production; we know the sources from which its authors transcribed and paraphrased particular elements; we know the role it would go on to play in the history of the twentieth century. No sensible person with any capacity for critical thought denies that we are dealing with a clear forgery. In writing about it, I feel obliged to declare from the outset that I shall neither expand the range of our factual knowledge on the subject in any way nor enrich it by even a single fragmentary detail.²⁸¹ Nevertheless, I am convinced that it would be worth looking at this curious screed from a new point of view – specifically, to examine its structural or literary characteristics and to attempt to describe them. *The Protocols of the Elders of Zion* – for this is the subject of discussion – is an extremely peculiar creation, filled with various literary techniques that have undoubtedly contributed to its wide influence in various geographical locations and facilitated various suggestive propaganda devices. Although this document is a cunning forgery, full of contradiction and crudeness, it also reveals a complex literary construction – even if this structure is founded on a single extremely unrefined idea.²⁸²

From the very beginning, I would like to make my general assumptions clear. I am convinced that it is worth examining the linguistic and literary properties of texts that are not in themselves works of literature – works possessing no aesthetic value and often stooping to embarrassingly low levels. This principle also holds true for publications that have played shameful roles in history. Indeed, it would perhaps not be paradoxical to suggest that submitting precisely such screeds to analysis might be especially worthwhile. This is true not only because we can reveal certain formal mechanisms – which in themselves might be scarcely

281 I would like to confess here that I feel indebted to Janusz Tazbir's excellent book, *Protokoły mędrców Syjonu, Autentyk czy falsyfikat* (Warszawa: Iskry, 2003), which sums up the genesis of the text, the circumstances of its creation, and its influence. I shall be referring to this book even when I do not directly signpost these references, since it has influenced my reflections in almost all aspects.

282 I have based my arguments on one of the Polish translations of the text. I shall not be examining the philological question here, though it might be just as interesting. Indeed, the transformations of the text in various translations and reprints might tell us a lot about how the forgery has functioned. Nevertheless, an examination of this question would require separate investigations beyond the scope of this article.

relevant or completely irrelevant – but also because we can subsequently reach the deeper meanings inherent in this type of creation. In this way, we may bring to light those characteristics that have allowed them to play such fatal roles. *The Protocols of the Elders of Zion* is not a work written by a dictator or political leader. Neither is it an action plan. In fact, it is little more than a miserable piece of drivel cooked up by the Russian secret police with the intention of provoking widespread anxiety. And yet there is no doubt that it constitutes one of the most malevolent books of the twentieth century, influencing the course of history and playing its part in the terrible crimes of the epoch. Undoubtedly, it contributed to the Holocaust, as a classic work of anti-Semitism, exerting an extraordinarily broad influence and spawning all manner of ideological sequels with religious, economic and biological motivations. Of course, we cannot claim that without the *Protocols* there would have been no extermination of the Jews – though perhaps the event would not have taken such a terrifyingly systematic form.

2

The authors and editors of the *Protocols* faced a crucial problem plaguing a certain kind of forgery. I would distinguish between two basic variants of this form. In the first case, the speaker is a representative of those against whom the text is directed. In the second case, the words of the enemy have no independent identity, but exist only to the extent that they form the object of a commentary by somebody else presented as a subject with suitable knowledge and unquestioned authority. In this case, the so-called “original” appears only in the form of alleged citations, which are often directly evaluated or – even more often – refuted.

From the very first paragraph of the *Protocols*, the reader can be in no doubt that it belongs to the first variety. This form is clearly more challenging from the forger’s point of view, but also – at least in theory – it can be even more suggestive and strongly influential on the reader. Here the forgery speaks for itself, while those supposedly hiding behind the text appear within it as exponents of certain projects and worldviews – and ultimately as dangerous enemies. So how can the real author construct the text in such a way as to impose his own opinions and values on the reader, while at the same time creating the impression that somebody else – the person the author wishes to attack – is speaking? We might say that this type of text is characterized by a fundamental tension between the attempt to impose on the reader a certain vision of the world, a certain ideology and a certain set of judgments and fears, and the need to follow more or less clear rules that would allow the reader to believe that the speaker himself is the very person being exposed and accused. In other words, in this type of text a potential conflict

arises between what we might describe as the word of the ideologue producing the forgery and the speakers appearing within it. Accordingly, the main task is to provide an appropriate reason or motivation for their speech, adapting it to the particular rhetorical situation. In other words, this concerns what we might call the **plausibility of the speech situation**, since in order to be even minimally credible the speaking subjects in such texts must express themselves in accordance with their own situation,²⁸³ conforming to it and to the situation and expectations of their assumed readers.

Here we might refer to the great philosopher of language J. L. Austin. In his analysis of the self-fulfilling speech acts he dubbed “performative utterances,” Austin famously introduced the category of “felicity conditions.” In short, the uses of language not in accordance with a given situation or with socially approved conventions appear as “infelicitous.”²⁸⁴ We can apply this Austinian category to the case at hand. The utterance of the subject in a forged text must be shaped and stylized so as to cohere with the situation in which the speaker finds himself, the particular features ascribed to him, the relevant stereotypes within the given context, as well as with popular notions about the milieu represented by the speaker. In other words, in order for the utterance to be self-evident without arousing doubts, it must be appropriately motivated. It must create the illusion that it could genuinely function in this manner in its “authentic” form. At the same time – and this is the main dilemma in this type of creation – it must match the ideas and assumptions cherished by the forgery’s creators.

This question has various aspects in *The Protocols of the Elders of Zion*. How did the authors lend verisimilitude to the words of the Jewish conspirators? The most interesting, important and complicated aspect is the speech situation. But before I consider this side of the problem more broadly, I would like to draw attention to what immediately strikes us as the most distinctive characteristic of the text. Its language was conceived to be extraordinarily suggestive and to leave no room for doubt among its readers. From the very beginning, the language itself inclines the reader towards an unambiguously negative appraisal. We should be convinced that the very repulsiveness of the language reflects the terrible and hideous nature of our enemies. Their words must be quite clear in their cynicism.

283 It is worth noting that the *Protocols* directly refers to a venerable and highly ossified literary convention – namely, the found document. There is no overt consideration of this theme in the text itself, but publications of this structure seem almost automatically to suggest certain questions. Where did this “document” come from? Who discovered it and how? It is no coincidence that the various supporters of this particular forgery’s authenticity have sometimes dreamt up quite fantastical speculations on this subject – many of which would be quite at home in a second-rate thriller novel.

284 Austin, J. L., *How To Do Things with Words* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1962).

They should positively shock the reader with their concentrated and ruthless amorality – particularly when the reader is not accustomed to such frankness. This is **unmediated speech**. Since it also represents the internal language of the Jewish leaders – which is somehow faithfully reproduced in the *Protocols* – there is no softening of the message. We are in the presence here of a speech without barriers. This vitriolic device yielded staggering results. Readers noted the form of expression and judged it accordingly. More importantly, it became a piece of evidence confirming the text’s authenticity. Countless responses from its enthusiasts testify to this fact: for instance, the remarks of the anonymous author of a foreword to the 1925 Polish edition, who conceals his identity behind a set of initials. This author claims that the text represents a plan of action for “organized and disciplined groups of political Jews,”²⁸⁵ formulated in such a way that

(. . .) the reader himself might draw the appropriate conclusions from the book. We draw attention only to the astonishingly insolent and arrogant tone of the protocols’ author. Only people who are deeply convinced and entirely certain that their plan will be brought to fruition could speak in such a tone.²⁸⁶

But are they really “people”? After all, we cannot exclude the possibility that the text might originate in an entirely different kind of gathering, where evil manifests itself without any limitations. The participants in such a conventicle would be figures who only appear to be human. In fact, they belong to an entirely different order, though they like to interfere in our world and to sow constant chaos within it. Here the opportunity arises to refer to a theme with a very long and venerable tradition. Especially within the popular imagination, people have compared or even equated Jews with devils since at least medieval times.²⁸⁷ I would surmise that in *The Protocols of the Elders of Zion* we are dealing with certain allusions to this tradition – which is unmistakable, resonant and still vital – though we might suppose that these references are not always fully conscious. But what kind of language do devils use? Of course, when they want to lead somebody into evil, tempting or demoralizing him, they are good at manipulating a language that is not their own, a language that is intended to lead the naive astray or bring them under control. In these circumstances, they may use the human faculty of speech – but only for deceitful purposes. Clearly, the devils do not speak this language among themselves. Their internal language, which they use at their own murderous gatherings, is entirely different. Here they do not have to pretend to respect any system of values that might find human approval. In other words, they no longer

285 W.K., “Słowo wstępne,” *Protokoły mędrców Sjonu*, Biblioteka „Hasła Narodowego” No 3 (Kraków, 1925), p. III.

286 *Ibid.*, p. II.

287 See: Trachtenberg, Joshua, *The Devils and the Jews: The Medieval Conception of the Jew and its Relation to Modern Antisemitism* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1943).

have to put on a show. And so they do not put on a show! Neither do the elders of Zion gathered at this conventicle. They speak like devils, because they are devils. From the very sound of their words, the decent Christian – called a “goy” in this diabolical tongue – should shudder with revulsion. These conspirators – who yearn to conquer the world so as to impose their own reprehensible order – do not merely resemble devils. They truly are devils. This demonic subtext seems to be an important feature of the forgery’s linguistic structure, while also establishing in advance a certain form of its influence. No decent person who believes in God may identify with such infernal words when he or she hears them. For who could possibly be taken in by even the first paragraph of this work:

It must be noted that men with bad instincts are more in number than the good, and therefore the best results in governing them are attained by violence and terrorization, and not by academic discussions.²⁸⁸

This is no mere expression of a pessimistic opinion on human nature, or – more generally – on the human species. The first clearly formulated thesis of the text is obviously not moralistic in nature (though it might be in a different kind of text). Instead, it is a practical principle giving rise to further axiomatic assumptions, but also leading – above all – to certain concrete conclusions. We might say that in this introductory sentence the fundamental characteristics of the whole text had already revealed themselves. Only a creature who treats as good what for most decent, God-fearing and moral people is evil, could speak in such an unmediated and uninhibited way. In other words, only a devil could speak like this. Violence, force and deceit become basic positive values. In this diabolical Jewish world, there is no place for what we Christians, Aryans or decent, law-abiding people would regard as the moral foundation of the world in which we live and wish to live.

3

What is the structure of this diabolical language? Janusz Tazbir tells us that one of the arguments offered in support of the *Protocols*’ authenticity was the fact that they were not records from a lecture series, but rather minutes taken from a meeting. I have no intention of examining the legitimacy of this argument, but it is worth drawing attention to the peculiar form of the text. Does it really take the form of the titular “protocols”? This is not a simple question. A “protocol” represents a particular generic category delineating the nature and properties of a

²⁸⁸ *The Protocols of the Learned Elders of Zion*, trans. Victor Marsden (San Diego: The Book Tree, 1999), pp. 142-143.

given utterance. It refers, above all, to a practical form of writing. We might agree that from the point of view of their supposed creators these “protocols” might well have been a document with a practical purpose, recording what was said during a secret assembly of leaders. In this sense, they do not represent an autonomous text, but rather a medium intended to convey an original, spoken text – though not recorded in any literal form (we ought not to forget that this screed came into being in an era when tape recorders were still unknown). The recorder of the minutes was clearly not supposed to be a stenographer. Nevertheless, we should definitely not accept the category of the protocol without question here, since it does not match what we usually associate with the term.

After all, we cannot tell in these “lectures” who makes any particular statement. Instead, we find a single, cohesive text divided into shorter sections. At the same time, certain traces of oral discourse are preserved – with great significance for the overall meaning. There is no specific information noting that one thing or another has been said or accomplished, but the text does announce what “we” have done and – most importantly – what “we” shall do. Here is a random example:

We appear on the scene as alleged saviours of the worker from this oppression when we propose to him to enter the ranks of our fighting forces – Socialists, Anarchists, Communists – to whom we always give support in accordance with an alleged brotherly rule (of the solidarity of all humanity) of our *social masonry*.²⁸⁹

Throughout the whole text, the consistent use of the first person plural is conspicuous, though the form of the protocols does not allow us to assume that this category includes the statements of diverse individuals. Essentially, one person is speaking here. Yet this leader – or rather ringleader (we might also describe him as the chief ideologue) – is not exalting himself through some strange use of the royal “we.” The incessantly recurring “we” gives the reader the impression that this is not an individual declaration or a singular utterance. Instead, these lectures are to be read as the direct voice of a collective body. In the narrow sense, this group denotes the Zionist conspirators striving to take over the world, but ultimately it refers to the whole Jewish nation – which is evil by nature, aggressive, deceptive, hostile to everybody outside it, a nest of demons. The list of negative labels goes on and on. But the important point here is that the discourse is shaped so as to convince readers that there is no distinction – or even the slightest gap – between the individual talk of the criminal leader and the aims and thoughts of the Jewish collectivity. He is the mouthpiece and representative of what they feel and think, just as the chief of the Satanic hosts says and does what best fits the hosts.

The plural speech highlights the community aspect. The reader should sense, understand, and become all the more terrified that he or she is dealing not with

²⁸⁹ Ibid., p. 154.

individual maniacs, but rather – as the above cited author suggests in the foreword to the 1925 Polish edition – with an “invisible Jewish conspiracy” in which a community of many millions is engaged. The conspiracy is dangerous not merely by virtue of its invisible nature, but also thanks to its numerical strength. Of course, the possessive adjective from “we” is “our.” If one were to count up the many words employed in the *Protocols*, one would soon confirm that the most common expression is precisely this adjective in various forms. It may refer to anything the criminal speaker regards as past, present or future Jewish property, anything he treats as a Jewish creation or presents as Jewish aims. Accordingly, the final point and result of all current and future conspiratorial activities is “our Kingdom,” in which “our ruler” will reign over the universe. This specific understanding of “property” also includes historical events:

Remember the French Revolution, to which it was we who gave the name of “Great”: the secrets of its preparations are well known to us for it was wholly the work of our hands.²⁹⁰

Sometimes the speaker denotes the Jewish community in whose name he speaks with the word “ours.”²⁹¹ A one-sentence paragraph – subtitled “The Untouchability of ‘Ours’” in the Polish edition – provides a characteristic example of this usage:

“Ours” they [the mobs] will not touch, because the moment of attack will be known to us and we shall take measures to protect our own.²⁹²

In these sections of the lectures, we find the speaker more or less directly addressing the auditorium. The lecturer not only appears as a representative of the collectivity, but he also speaks to this collectivity. But which collectivity? The Jewish community, of course. This is beyond doubt. But how might we define its boundaries? There is no simple response to this question. Indeed, we find here a certain lack of clarity that seems to be consciously designed. When the chief of these terrible and dangerous conspirators announces that “our goal is now only a few steps off,”²⁹³ he might initially appear to be addressing his direct audience – those who have gathered to listen to his lectures. But in fact the collectivity is conceived in much broader terms here. These lessons are directly aimed at the leaders, but they ultimately address the entire Jewish community. Undoubtedly,

290 *Ibid.*, p. 156.

291 Here we find an interesting linguistic phenomenon. The word “ours” appears in the speech of people hostile to the Jews – including declared anti-Semites – as a quasi-citation from the Jews, as if it had been drawn from their language. It would be interesting to consider whether this linguistic usage entered colloquial speech from the *Protocols* or whether – on the contrary – the authors of the forgery made reference to an earlier linguistic practice.

292 *The Protocols*, p. 156.

293 *Ibid.*, p. 152.

the chiefs are the most dangerous figures, but in the end both the community as a whole and every one of its separate members represent a threat. *The Protocols* suggests this idea to the reader with unwavering consistency throughout the text.

4

Both the general structure of the text and its particular elements serve the same aim – above all, the peculiar identification of Jewish speech with a diabolical form of expression. Yet the text's operations in this realm are not limited to this particular rhetorical move. Instead, they undergo various processes of intensification. Of course, the reader is supposed to extract everything from the particular characteristics of the text itself. But this is clearly not enough for the authors, who also introduce certain reinforcing mechanisms intended to bring about what we might describe as amplifications of the meaning. The speaking subject is a definite, though unnamed figure, a kind of first-person narrator or speaker in a dramatic monologue. He is grounded in a clearly delineated situation, and therefore he himself speaks in a very transparent manner. At the same time, another voice also emerges, which I would describe as a **super-narrator**. This figure does not overtly reveal himself. He does not appear in the role of a commentator or glossist. His presence makes itself known by other means – through a peculiar manipulation of speech. This intervention ensures that certain ideas reach the reader directly – and not exclusively via the declarations made by the ringleader of the Jewish gang. The super-narrator speaks without appearing to speak, thus indirectly conveying his ideas (at least some of them). Here we find a peculiar phenomenon that I would describe as the **ideological underlay**. From underneath the textual surface, another text shows through – a text that the authors of the forgery truly regard as positive and worthy of particular emphasis. We might even speak here of a certain kind of rhetorical palimpsest. For instance, the Jewish speaker has no good reason to speak favorably about the aristocracy, and yet its activities and very existence are discussed in such a way that the reader must acknowledge it as a positive value:

The aristocracy, which enjoyed by law the labour of the workers, was interested in seeing that the workers were well fed, healthy and strong. We are interested in just the opposite – in the diminution, the *killing out of the GOYIM*.²⁹⁴

Here the real authors' own positive views find expression – namely, their conviction that the aristocracy is the guardian of the working people and the foundation of social order. This is precisely why the Jews wish to destroy it. But the opinion of

294 *Ibid.*, p. 154.

the Jewish speaker on this subject is also positive. He knows that the aristocracy is the best social class, and therefore must be neutralized. Unlike the majority of the views expressed in the text, the reader should treat this opinion about the aristocracy seriously, taking it at face value. Here the Jew is really saying something that does not fit into his own ideological order, but rather comes from another world – the world of the super-narrator. Sometimes the speaker seems almost to feel sorry for the “goyim,” who do not understand their own interests and are simply oblivious to what is best for them. After a long discussion on the motto of “liberty, equality, fraternity” as a Jewish creation that has successfully deceived the “goyim,” the speaker begins an excursus on “The Principle of Dynastic Rule”:

To all these things [that is, the power of the mob and role of upstarts striving to take control of governments – M.G.] the *goyim* paid no regard; yet all the time it was based upon these things that dynastic rule rested: the father passed on to the son a knowledge of the course of political affairs in such wise that none should know but members of the dynasty and none could betray it to the governed. As time went on the meaning of the dynastic transference of the true position of affairs in the political was lost, and this aided the success of our cause.²⁹⁵

Here we should ask why the Jewish leader depicts the virtues of the aristocracy and the benefits of the dynastic system in such detail, when from his perspective they are obstacles to his taking control of the world. Why does he lament the stupidity and recklessness of those he intends to subjugate in the very near future? These passages seem to derive from an entirely different order, established by – and identified with – the super-narrator. This narrator has introduced his own confession of faith into the enemy’s speech. Here we find a perfect example of what I have called the “ideological underlay.” From beneath the surface text, which we must expose and reject, a legitimate text shows through and conveys the truth.

Such ideological underlays may take various forms. Sometimes the super-narrator places his own thoughts about the Jews – which the reader should accept as fully justified – into the mouth of the Jewish speaker. According to him, their main activities and goals include conspiring, sparking unrest and upheaval, and provoking conflicts that would not otherwise arise without Jewish intrigue. For example:

Throughout all Europe, and by means of relations with Europe, in other continents also, we must create ferments, discords and hostility.²⁹⁶

Throughout significant tracts of the text, the unmediated and uninhibited speech of the main speaker is strongly palimpsestic. We know perfectly well that the

295 Ibid., p. 148.

296 Ibid., p. 166.

Jews are those who spark unrest and war, so why not have them speak about this directly, just as we speak about it? Sometimes the ideological underlay reveals itself with a single word. The aspiring Jewish ruler of the world has no good reason to describe his planned “Super-Government” as a “bogy”, and yet this is precisely what he does:

In place of the rulers of to-day we shall set up a bogey which will be called the Super-Government Administration. Its hands will reach out in all directions like nippers and its organization will be of such colossal dimensions that it cannot fail to subdue all the nations of the world.²⁹⁷

The word “bogy” – which is filled with negative connotations – clearly comes from an entirely different axiological sphere from that which permeates and defines the speech of the lecture’s “author” or the protocol clerk recording it. Various phrases referring to liberalism function in a similar way. For example, the text mentions “liberal lawlessness” and “the poison of liberalism.” The speaker knows that what we define as “liberalism” is really a Jewish idea serving the division and enslavement of Christian communities. Yet such phrases are not refuted, since they fit into the ideological order accepted by the super-narrator. These “underlays” – which often spring from a single word, while still managing to impose the desired meaning within a broader context – may also have a positive character. We find examples of this positive meaning in discussions of the clergy:

We have long past taken care to discredit the priesthood of the goyim, and thereby to ruin their mission on earth which these days might still be a great hindrance to us. Day by day its influence on the peoples of the world is falling lower.²⁹⁸

The lecturer speaks about many institutions that would hinder the Jews in their attempt to seize world power in strong and often demeaning language. Yet he discusses the priesthood in an entirely different tone. Indeed, “mission” is an expression with a strongly positive connotation. Once again – as in the case of the aristocracy – the speaker uses phrases that correspond with the vision of the world acknowledged by the super-narrator. Characteristically, this happens with anything that might constitute a positive value within a radically conservative worldview. Anything linked with the essential pillars of this perspective – even in the speech of the enemy, however diabolical it might be – cannot be expressed in demeaning terms. In this respect, the aristocracy, the dynastic system and the Christian clergy exist in the *Protocols* on an entirely different level from that occupied by the supporters of liberalism, the capitalists and the rebels refusing to submit to the old, properly ordered world.

²⁹⁷ Ibid., p. 164.

²⁹⁸ Ibid., p. 204.

Here we should highlight an extraordinarily important part of this screed: the need to establish values and to submit everything under discussion to evaluation. Axiology is a constant feature of the text as a whole and is found in the text's smallest details. This means imposing signs of value both on the general structure of this peculiar "work" and on specific sections within it. In this type of forgery – which aims to unmask alleged conspirators and expose their dastardly plans – negative evaluation is a key premise and a primary point of departure. Yet certain incongruent elements also emerge in connection with the paradoxical nature of the text highlighted by Janusz Tazbir. The palimpsestic ideological underlays reveal themselves with particular clarity here. We might say that certain phenomena simply cannot be negatively evaluated – even in the speech of an enemy who is supposedly the ringleader of a diabolical congregation.

This problem is linked with a curious form of utopian thought in the forgery. On the level of the statements made by the chief conspirator – who is working to bring about a glorious future for his nation – we are clearly dealing with a utopia. But on the level of the super-narrator's speech – which reflects the "correct" position – this dangerous Jewish utopia constitutes a dystopia. Indeed, this is precisely how the readers of the *Protocols* should treat it. Here we recognize one of the most important problems for any analysis of the text. How is the reader constructed within the text and what is his or her function?

5

Who is this work really for? Who is its intended audience? These are among the most significant questions – and perhaps the most significant – for the task of interpreting the text. To a certain extent, the specific reader is not directly indicated. There are no particular limitations in this respect. Nevertheless, one rather important exception remains. The discourse of the *Protocols* is clearly not intended for Jews. The work is about Jews and against Jews, but not for Jews. Of course, there is nothing unusual about this. The literature of anti-Semitic propaganda has never been addressed to Jews – with the possible exception of texts that are hostile or radically critical towards them, making explicit demands that they renounce their identity in accordance with an ideology of assimilation.²⁹⁹ In other words, if you eliminate your flaws, if you acknowledge the dominance of

299 Marcin Wodziński analyzes this particular case – examining rich historical materials from the beginning of the nineteenth century – in his excellent study, "‘Cywilni chrześcijanie’: Spory o reformę Żydów w Polsce, 1789-1830," published in *Kwestia żydowska w XIX wieku, Spory o tożsamość Polaków*, eds. G. Borkowska and M. Rudkowska (Warszawa: Cyklady, 2004).

our culture and if you come to differ from us only slightly, then you can hope that we might tolerate you and accept you in the world in which we live. Of course, this position is foreign to classic anti-Semitic discourse, which has no missionary tendencies. The proponents of this discourse make no attempt to convert or attract Jews to their own side. In fact, this is impossible, since being a Jew is an indelible flaw according to anti-Semites. Jews can never free themselves of this affliction. Even holy water cannot wash it away, especially when many Jews only adopt the Christian faith for dishonest reasons, so as to mask themselves and thus act more effectively against the *goyim*. The motif of the malevolent convert has been well known in Polish writing for a long time. It appears with particular force in explicitly propagandistic discourse committed to spreading hatred: for instance, in the radical journalism of Stanisław Trzeciak, a priest with fascist tendencies active in the interwar period (echoes of this attitude also appear in later publications).

One thing is certain: the *Protocols* are not for Jews. Yet simply recognizing this fact does not close the matter. The question of what kind of audience the work addresses still remains. “Confirmed anti-Semites” is not a satisfying answer here. After all, the text also speaks to people who are not fully conscious of the Jewish threat, who are naive or who have not yet come into contact with the problem: in other words, to people who must become aware of the problem. By exposing the various conspiracies, the *Protocols* are meant to confirm the persuaded in the rightness of their views and to encourage those who are wavering or simply unaware. These two aspects of persuasion do not contradict each other here, but rather they harmoniously coexist. We might say that the text is simultaneously for beginners and for those at a more advanced stage. For some readers, it should recall and confirm their personal convictions. For others, it should acquaint them with what it presents as fundamental truths, which they should then accept unquestioningly as their own.

Yet this is still not the end of the matter. The intended audience of the *Protocols* is certainly diverse, but – at least among those who are not Jewish – it is also in a certain sense universal. Moreover, the belief that the Jews themselves comprise a singular, undifferentiated group forms a basic assumption. The conspiracy is not the work of particular factions within this group, but rather of leaders representing the entire community, as the depositories of the whole nation. According to this interpretation, making distinctions would not only be senseless, but would even contradict its basic assumptions. The enemies are not Jews of any particular political or ideological orientation, but Jews *tout court* – all of them. Therefore, their intrigues do not only concern questions of strictly local significance without any broader relevance. On the contrary, the small matter of world power is at stake here. The threat is universal. Consequently, the future victims of Jewish plots belong not only to particular groups within the Christian community, but to the

whole community. A discourse conceived in this manner should have a universal audience. It should address everybody. And this is exactly what it does.

This is a fundamental feature of the arguments presented in *The Protocols of the Elders of Zion*, determining to a large extent its most basic characteristics. Admittedly, there is no direct mention of this question in the text itself, though one can easily infer that the intended scope is enormous. The range of projected readers extends from rulers to revolutionaries and rebels, including the working class. Certain scholars have expressed the view that the Russian secret police cobbled together the forgery to place it before the tsar and thus influence his decisions. We cannot exclude this possibility, as there are undoubtedly passages in the text that would have sounded familiar and agreeable to the tsar's ear. For instance, we can easily imagine that the idea of the French Revolution exploding as a result of Judeo-Masonic intrigues might have met with an eager reception from the tsar. This is only one example, but there are clearly many such motifs within the text. Yet treating the tsar as the main – or perhaps the only – addressee of these digressions does not fully explain their nature. After all, we also find other motifs, themes and claims that would have been either generally uninteresting to the tsar or simply self-evident and thus not worth mentioning. There was clearly no need to convince him that all revolutionary activities were deceitful, dangerous and fatal to society. And yet the text includes many such reflections. Although most of the ideological underlays suggest that the *Protocols* originated in extreme conservative circles, the text is aimed at a broader audience extending well beyond those with similar views. There was no need to convince radical conservatives that liberal and democratic ideas – not to mention revolutionary slogans – were dangerous deceptions that would lead society in the worst possible direction. For them, liberalism was truly a poison. Therefore, in the universalist spirit discussed above, the *Protocols* also directly addressed democrats, liberals and rebels who wanted to shake the world to its foundations. They had to learn that they were nothing but tools in the hands of the conspiring and power-hungry Jews. If they succeeded in undermining the ruling order, they would only usher in a terror and despotism so vicious and extreme that it was simply unimaginable to them. Liberals and supporters of democratic governments would facilitate in their naivety the most terrible dictatorship – and thus contribute to their own demise.

In connection with this diversity of potential readers, we should point out two fundamental characteristics of the forgery. Firstly, we should note its lack of cohesion, which immediately becomes apparent over the course of any unbiased reading and which many commentators have highlighted. The profiling of intended readers seems responsible for this affliction in the text as much as (or perhaps more than) the fact that it consists of elements drawn from various sources and periods, often transcribed or only slightly paraphrased in combination

with chapters apparently composed in the most haphazard manner. It is difficult to address the ruler and the rebel at the same time. It is difficult to use consistent arguments that would speak simultaneously to a conservatively inclined aristocrat and a revolutionary agitator.

The second characteristic is the above mentioned “universalism,” which is not limited to the treatment of the Jews as a monolithic mass. In a certain way, the universalized audience is the counterpart of this generalized enemy. The audience must be universal, since the Jews represent a threat to the entire world. The primary task of the *Protocols* is to sow fear. This fear is meant to seize all people who are not Jewish – and the whole Christian community in particular. The danger affects everybody. Therefore, each and every person must become aware of the threat. The assumed universality of the audience exerts a defining influence on the structure of the text.

6

The direct relation between the forgery and popular literature – namely, the novels of Eugène Sue and Alexander Dumas père, both of whom were still widely read at the beginning of the twentieth century – has been noted by two outstanding commentators: Janusz Tazbir and Umberto Eco. The latter has rightly remarked that “the variety of narrative sources makes this text rather incongruous.”³⁰⁰ In Eco’s view, the very fact that the text is such a strange patchwork points to its fictional nature. The *Protocols* represents an extreme example of what he describes as the “intrusions of fiction into life.”³⁰¹ Treated as a fictional domain, the *Protocols* is – believe it or not – a literary work. Yet this work has played a grim role in history, as its fabrications have gone unnoticed. Instead, it has passed as an authentic document. According to Janusz Tazbir: “Successive editions of *The Protocols of the Elders of Zion* were accompanied at first by pogroms, and later by the extermination of the Jewish population in most European countries. Of the many forgeries manufactured by European culture, this one perhaps most reeked of blood from the very beginning.”³⁰² Here we must return to an earlier question. If Hitler and his helpers in the “final solution” had not read the *Protocols*, would the Holocaust have happened?

Janusz Tazbir refers to an opinion expressed in March 1938 by a journalist writing in the *Osservatore Romano*. According to this writer, belief in the

300 See: Eco, Umberto, *Six Walks in the Fictional Woods* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1993), p. 137.

301 Ibid., p. 139.

302 Tazbir, *Protokoły mędrców Syjonu, Autentyk czy falszyfikat*, p. 155.

authenticity of the *Protocols* was similar to belief in the authenticity of a certain anti-Jesuit forgery from three centuries earlier. In short, it would have “reflected poorly on the intelligence of the reader.” It is difficult not to agree with this depressing, though intelligent and perceptive observation. The success of this crudely constructed forgery does not reflect well on human reason. And the regular republication of the text in various parts of the world (including Poland) suggests that the affliction of stunted intelligence is alive and well. This curiously concocted diabolical language still seems plausible in certain circles, where it passes as the voice of truth. Once again, we might refer to the words of a Catholic priest – this time the Belgian Jesuit, Pierre Charles – who concludes his excellent exposé of the *Protocols* with the following remarks:

It is a discouraging fact that in our Europe, so proud of its knowledge and its extensive arsenal of historical criticism, such an obvious forgery, the work of an ignorant and clumsy policeman, has deceived and continues to deceive thousands of people.³⁰³

303 Father Pierre Charles’s article appeared in *Nouvelle Revue Théologique* in 1938. The quotation here is translated from the Polish version. See: Charles, Pierre, *Prawda o „Protokołach mędrców Syjonu,”* trans. Wanda Błońska (Kraków: Znak, 1990), p. 16.

20. Always the Same

(On *Instead of a Trial: A Report on Hate Speech*
[*Zamiast procesu, Raport o mowie nienawiści*]
by Sergiusz Kowalski and Magdalena Tulli)

1

The *Rola* weekly – published in Warsaw over three decades (1881-1912) – is not a periodical remembered by many historians of social life or the press. I would certainly not bemoan this fact, though an analysis of the magazine might make an interesting contribution to the history of certain activities and attitudes that have continued to exist in contemporary Poland. I have chosen to examine this publication in spite of the fact that history does not concern me here. Instead, I am interested in the anti-Semitic discourse of today. The main object of my reflections – and an invaluable source of examples – is a recently released compilation of excerpts from various articles published in the radical right-wing press in 2001.³⁰⁴ This book – edited by Sergiusz Kowalski and Magdalena Tulli – is extraordinarily valuable, since it reveals both the scope and essence of the phenomenon. I have examined two years of the *Rola* weekly (1890 and 1891) with fairly close attention. This decidedly unedifying reading provokes various reflections. Above all, these concern mechanisms operating with equal intensity in the last decade of the nineteenth century and at the beginning of the twenty-first. Certain assertions, opinions and judgments recur, as if nothing had happened in the intervening period, as if the terrible history of the twentieth-century had never rolled over this country – though obviously there is some evolution of certain specific realities and changes in various details.

One unalterable principle invariably applies: one may accuse the Jews of absolutely anything. This includes things that today would arouse no particular anxiety. For instance, *Rola* sounds the alarm that a Jewish newspaper called *Kuryer Warszawski* is publishing matrimonial advertisements. This does not accord with Christian ethics and poses a threat to the family. Any Christian who would make

304 Kowalski, Sergiusz, and Magdalena Tulli, *Zamiast procesu, Raport o mowie nienawiści* (Warszawa, Wydawnictwo WAB, 2003). My reflections owe a great deal to the insightful conclusion written by both authors. A fascinating discussion of this book – even before it came out – appeared in the *Midrasz* monthly (No 2 [2003]). The participants included Hanna Świda-Ziamba, Cezary Michalski, Helena Datner and Piotr Szumlewicz.

use of this medium is merely lining the pockets of the “jewish agent” (here the first letter of “jew” [“żyd”] is always lower-case). The authors of *Rola* were not yet familiar with the adjective “Polish-speaking” (“*polskojęzyczny*”) – often used today as a cryptic term to denote a Jewish person – but what they wrote about the Jewish press differs little from what the authors of *Nasz Dziennik* or *Głos* write today.³⁰⁵ Apart from certain differences in vocabulary – which are inevitable when we consider that over a century divides them – the similarities are astonishing.

The question of the matrimonial advertisement is clearly a trivial example, one of innumerable iniquities ascribed to the hated Jewish nation. In fact, this group is not a community, but a clique destroying the contemporary world, poisoning life wherever it appears, perpetrating the most hideous crimes.³⁰⁶ They inflict particular harm on Poles. One of the journalistic pillars of *Rola* – a man writing under the pseudonym of Bolesław Szczerbic – argues in an article entitled “What Are the Jews Costing Us?” that “the jew does not toil with the plow in the field or till the soil with his own hands.”³⁰⁷ Yet neither does he work as a laborer, craftsman, sailor or soldier. He extracts nothing from the earth. In short, the Jew is a parasite:

In science, art and music, the jew never appears as an independent or creative force. We never hear about great jewish technical inventions or about extraordinary discoveries in a field of knowledge made by jews. Yet who is not familiar with the jew’s cunning at exploiting the discoveries and inventions of others for his own advantage and benefit?

At the same time, this “jew” occupies himself with particular skill and eagerness in one domain, as Bolesław Szczerbic informs us: “Yet it is a fact universally known that the jew occupies himself passionately with the mission of spying for the enemy camp.” Of course, we should never forget the constant conspiracies and endless activities of this kind.

Rola enumerates the diverse Jewish iniquities with the precision of a doctor describing a serious disease. And it does so from a distinctly Polish and Catholic perspective. For we are dealing here with activities that harm all pious Poles, irrespective of whether we are talking about a singular “Jew” or plural “Jews.” These characters are vermin, disguised or open enemies, and – above all – exploiters, ruthlessly plundering the noble representatives of the Polish people. The pecuniary theme – intertwined in a bizarre way with the religious question – takes the dominant position in many of these arguments. On various

305 Translator’s Note: *Nasz Dziennik* – literally translated as “*Our Daily*” – is a right-wing Catholic newspaper owned by Father Tadeusz Rydzyk’s Lux Veritatis Foundation. For more on this publication, see the article “Three Days with *Nasz Dziennik*” in this collection. *Głos* (“*The Voice*”) is similar in nature, though less prominent on the national scene.

306 Here I am summarizing the “Judaica” column from *Rola* 5 (1890).

307 See: *Rola*, No 1 (1891). The pseudonym Bolesław Szczerbic was used by a journalist named Franciszek Lustrzykowski.

occasions, the authors assert openly that Jews are the most ruthless capitalists. And the journalists of *Rola* harbor no sympathy for capitalism. Their vision of the world is decidedly populist, though they do not renounce the traditional forms of politics. Indeed, they are populists of a conservative kind. Not only is capitalism a Jewish invention, but so is any critique of the older forms of social life sanctioned by religion. The authors make the unquestioned assumption that only Jews are exploiters and that there is no such thing as Jewish poverty. The authors of *Rola* defend poor Christians from Jewish misers and bloodsuckers. In this way, they supposedly express their patriotism (though they are extremely prudent when it comes to the partitioning powers then occupying Poland). The magazine carries out its attacks on Jews as if Polish society had no other enemies. The task that the authors of *Rola* set themselves is to raise awareness of this indisputable state of affairs, which not everybody has yet discerned. The authors of *Rola* are by definition those who unmask the wicked, greedy, deceptive and unscrupulous Jews in the name of the national good and the one true faith.

From this cursory historical reminder, it emerges that the pronouncements of the openly anti-Semitic ideologues of former times essentially do not differ – with the exception of style, particular phrases and certain other specifics – from what various contemporary authors have to say in the five periodicals examined by Kowalski and Tulli. Admittedly, we cannot ignore one fundamental difference here. *Rola* defines itself openly and even ostentatiously as an anti-Semitic publication. Its editors and authors declare with unconcealed pride: “We are anti-Semites.” They treated the diffusion of anti-Semitic ideas and attitudes as the motivation and laudable goal of their activities. It does not even occur to them that this might be something reprehensible. On the contrary, they burst with pride and self-satisfaction.

On a side note, we might add that the extreme Polish anti-Semites of the late 1930s – with their Nazi overtones – defined themselves in a similar way.³⁰⁸ This sentiment appears in everything they wrote – even in literary criticism. The first example that comes to mind would seem grotesque today. Alfred Łaszowski – an openly fascist critic of the late 1930s, who later associated himself with PAX³⁰⁹ during the communist period – concluded one of his articles with the following prophecy: “Anti-Semitic literature is beginning to emerge; soon it will spread in a broad wave. It is in our common interest that it be good and that it avoid the

308 See, among others: Lipski, Jan J., *Katolickie państwo narodu polskiego* (London: Aneks, 1994).

309 Translator’s Note: The PAX Association was an ostensibly Catholic organization established by the communist authorities in 1947 to undermine the Church.

triviality that lowers the value of literary works in the eyes of both our friends and opponents.”³¹⁰

Here we find the fundamental difference between the classic figures of anti-Semitic journalism – like the editor-in-chief of *Rola*, Jan Jeleński, and the associates of Stanisław Piasecki³¹¹ – and the practices of today. The former openly acknowledged their ideology, since they failed to see anything wrong with it or even anything that might have inclined them towards criticism or doubt. The latter insist that they are not – of course not! – anti-Semites. The creators and perpetuators of the great anti-Semitic campaign of March 1968 proceeded in a similar manner, which many have interpreted as yet another manifestation of communist hypocrisy and duplicity.³¹² This is an interesting phenomenon worth examining, especially when we consider a certain convention that has entered colloquial speech in the construction “I’m not an anti-Semite, but. . .”³¹³ When we hear this phrase, we can be certain that a string of anti-Semitic stereotypes will follow. After all, anybody who does not entertain these superstitions surely has no use for this kind of verbal denial. The renunciation of the self-definition “I am an anti-Semite” – though it has no practical consequences – leads to many interesting phenomena. We might interpret it as a simple manifestation of hypocrisy or false consciousness. This aspect – though we cannot ignore it – seems less important here. After the Holocaust, it was possible to maintain one’s views, but it was no longer possible to express them in words whose connotations had undergone certain transformations. Here we encounter an interesting linguistic process, which reveals certain shifts in social psychology and mentality. The words “anti-Semitism” and “anti-Semite” have changed their range of meaning in various texts hostile towards Jews. Once these words referred to anybody who condemned the Jewish community for one

310 Łaszowski, Alfred, “Literatura tendencyjna,” *Prosto z mostu* No 8 (1938). The direct subject of these reflections – and also the pretext for a more generalized appeal – is a novel entitled *Jews (Żydzi)* by Mikołaj Rudnicki, a Poznań professor of literary studies who dabbled in his own literary writings.

311 Translator’s Note: Stanisław Piasecki (1900-1941) was a prominent journalist and nationalist activist in the interwar period. He founded the right-wing *Prosto z mostu* – a literary and artistic weekly that often published anti-Semitic articles.

312 Translator’s Note: In March 1968, students and intellectuals mounted major protests against the communist authorities. After taking strong measures to suppress the unrest, the government launched an “anti-Zionist” campaign that saw many Polish Jews leave the country.

313 Alina Cała, Dariusz Libionka and Stefa Zgliczyński allude to this fact in the title of their excellent article “Antysemityzm bez Żydów i bez antysemitów, Patologia antysemityzmu w Polsce w 1999-2001 r.” (“Anti-Semitism Without the Jews, and Without Anti-Semites: The Pathology of Anti-Semitism in Poland from 1999 to 2001”), *Nigdy Więcej* No 13 (2003).

(religious, ethnic, economic) reason or another, worked against it, and viewed it as the incarnation of all evil. Today people who have remained hostile to the Jews use the word in a very narrow sense. An “anti-Semite” is a person who wants to send the Jews to the gas chambers! And since supporters of Hitler’s final solution never existed in the Poland of the past – and do not exist in today’s Poland – then it logically follows that anti-Semitism has never existed in our country. Many authors go even further. There is no anti-Semitism anywhere in the world, since the Jews themselves invented it in order to gain influence and acquire all kinds of economic benefits. Therefore, anti-Semitism is nothing but a duplicitous Jewish invention that belongs to the realm of myth. At the same time, a dangerous “anti-Polonism” truly does exist, promoted exclusively by Jews with their agents and henchmen. This view is propagated not only by ordinary Polish journalists, publishing their work in the right-wing press, but also by other prominent individuals – including Edward Moskal, the president of the Polish American Congress.

2

The materials collected in Kowalski’s and Tulli’s book essentially provide examples. Although they are restricted to extracts from five publications from a single year – 2001 – they allow for more general reflections. Indeed, this is precisely the intention of this unique anthology. The authors are not interested in gathering materials simply in order to compromise one publication or another. Something immensely more important is at stake – specifically, the possibility of revealing the nature of the mechanism. On the basis of these materials, I shall attempt to bring out the basic characteristics of anti-Semitic discourse in its contemporary Polish variant. Ultimately, it constitutes a form of contemporary nationalist discourse.³¹⁴

A. Dichotomous Divisions

Dichotomous divisions undoubtedly form the basis for this kind of thought and speech. The absolute division between “us” and “you” stands as the indisputable foundation of the discourse. Any rejection of this principle – or even its demotion to a lesser role – would be tantamount to a departure from the basic rule, thus leading to the collapse of the whole discourse. This division functions in such a way as to exclude any possibility of exceptions or modifications. Anybody who belongs

314 Here I refer to my own study on “The Crisis in Patriotic Discourse,” included in the present collection.

to “you” (or “them”) must be on the other side. Such a person can never change position, even if he or she expresses a sincere desire to do so. Strict determinism always applies here. People who claim to have switched from “you” to “us” are dissimulating, making them even more dangerous than people who have planned no such strategic changes. Ultimately, there is nothing new in this attitude. We need only recall the well-known and intensely cultivated propaganda against new converts in the nineteenth century, which also found expression in literature. In short, anybody who is born a Jew – or who is regarded as a Jew by “us” – can never become a Christian, a Pole, or a representative of any other non-Semitic nation. He or she has no right to choose. Hence such phrases as “a Pole of Jewish origin” or “Jewish Pole” are unthinkable in this kind of discourse, since they violate its fundamental principle. In extreme cases, even the phrase “Polish Jews” is questionable, since it seems to represent a dangerous oxymoron. I remember a leading figure of the March 1968 anti-Jewish propaganda – who elsewhere boasted of his aristocratic genealogy and historic family name – declaring explicitly that any talk of “Polish Jews” was insulting to the Polish nation. At best, one could speak of “Jews from Poland,” where the name of the country indicates nothing more than a place of origin.

The absolute nature of the division between “us” and “you” is clearly linked with the dominance of ethnic criteria. These are the most important factors here. Nothing emerging from individual choice counts at all. Such choices are essentially irrelevant and cannot be taken seriously. There is no way for an individual to declare that he or she would like one sort of blood instead of another, since birth determines these questions. Here the racist foundation of this categorical division reveals itself – irrespective of whether its supporters recognize this fact and of how they attempt to camouflage this subtext. Religious considerations – which I shall discuss later in this article – also play a role in the division, though they are clearly subordinate to ethnic factors. According to this worldview, one cannot change religion either.

At the same time, it is highly characteristic that language is one criterion that does not fit the division. “We” can be under no linguistic illusions, since those who do not belong to “us” can also use the Polish language. Indeed, sometimes they take advantage of this fact to dissemble and plot against “us.” For this reason, one of the most beloved adjectives in the anti-Semitic press is the epithet “Polish-speaking.” The negative treatment of linguistic matters shows how cultural factors do not enter into the construction of these dichotomous divisions, which are judgmental to the highest degree. At their foundation lies the assumption that “we” are good. Everything laudable and virtuous is on our side, together with all manner of just arguments. But on the side of those regarded as enemies or aliens, evil reigns, no domain of virtue can exist, and there can be no talk whatever of

justifiable arguments. Truth, the true faith and virtue prevail on our side, while evil, falsehood, lies and greed dominate on their side. Anybody who argues that things are not as simple as this has surrendered to illusion, fallen victim to deception, or – and this is the most common case – is playing a devious game to deceive us and the entire rest of the world. Here we reach the next characteristic of the discourse under discussion, which is closely connected with the obligatory dichotomous divisions.

B. A Conspiracist Vision of the World

Those who find themselves on the wrong side of this all-embracing dichotomous division are no mere passive representatives or incarnations of evil. They actively spread their plague, striving to infect others with it in any way they can. They are especially dangerous because they usually do not operate in the open. Instead, they act secretly and in disguise, employing all possible means in their struggle to take over the world. Here the eternal model of the *Protocols of the Elders of Zion* immediately springs to mind.³¹⁵ In fact, this theme has already appeared above in the programmatic sentence cited from *Rola* claiming that the Jews specialize in spying for our enemies. We might add here that it has also manifested itself among people who have not regarded themselves as heirs or perpetrators of the *Protocols* – a literary creation produced by authors linked with the tsarist Okhrana. We need only recall that it was Władysław Gomułka – the Polish communist party leader – who spoke, in the spring of 1967, almost too unambiguously of a fifth column in the People’s Republic of Poland.

The all-consuming dichotomous divisions coexist with a conspiracist vision of the world. The Jews are the organizers of numerous duplicitous plots. In fact, everything they do is connected with conspiratorial activity. For this reason, they disguise themselves and adopt names far removed from stereotypical Jewish surnames, constantly pretending to be what they are not. This is a classic theme of anti-Semitic propaganda. The news that a well-known journalist was not really born with the Polish name under which she now appears in public, but originally received the name Sara Rotenfisz is much more important than any mere information about a specific person (whether real or invented). The revelation of this fact represents an important act in the struggle against the Jewish conspiracy. I would describe this strand within the anti-Semitic worldview – which remains extremely

315 This falsified document has seen studies in multiple languages, including Norman Cohn’s classic book from the 1960s. See: Tazbir, Janusz, *Protokoły mędrców Syjonu, Autentyk czy fałszyfikat* (Warszawa: Iskry, 2003). Also see “The Poetics of a Political Forgery” in this volume.

vigorous today – as a kind of nostalgia for the Jewish armband. This policy of the Nazi authorities left no room for doubt. Identifying somebody’s origins required no special investigation, since it was enough to see the six-pointed star. Here I refer to my own experience. At the beginning of 2004, I attended an author’s evening in my native town. In the course of this meeting, an older gentleman praised me in the middle of an overtly anti-Semitic speech for “admitting” my Jewish origins.³¹⁶ A person who does not camouflage himself ultimately has less opportunity to participate in conspiracies.

One may ascribe anything reprehensible to Jewish plots and conspiracies – not only trivial facts and local events, but also larger historical phenomena. In the materials presented in Kowalski’s and Tulli’s book, the journalists of the five periodicals under consideration constantly maintain that Stalinism was Jewish work, instigated and shaped by Jewish hands and in Jewish interests. As the authors of the previously cited article from *Nigdy Więcej* write: “Anti-Semites demonstrate (...) that the USSR was a Jewish state, and that Stalin was carrying out the orders of Jews. For Polish extremists, Stalinist and Jew are one and the same, while Stalinist crimes are Jewish crimes.”³¹⁷

However, this type of thinking does not limit itself to such accusations. In the type of journalism under discussion, we may even encounter the claim – though it appears less frequently and insistently – that Hitler came to power in 1933 above all thanks to Jewish support behind the scenes. Without their approval and assistance, he would have had no chance. Certain other features of twenty-first-century anti-Semitic discourse – which I shall discuss shortly – are also associated with this thesis.

Various things are at stake in these Jewish conspiracies – above all, control over Christian societies, or power, but also money. By organizing the “Jedwabne racket,”³¹⁸ the Jews wish to humiliate the Poles, wounding and compromising them in the eyes of the world. Money also comes into play here in two ways. On

316 I place this verb in inverted commas, because one can only “admit” to something reprehensible, evil, or worthy of condemnation. See Jan Woleński’s study “Bo przyznał się, że jest Żydem” in his book *Szkice o kwestiach żydowskich* (Kraków: Austeria, 2011), which includes a thorough and suggestive analysis of this expression.

317 This was underlining from the original text. We may learn how things really were from Arno Lustiger’s study, *Stalin and the Jews: The Red Book: The Tragedy of the Soviet Jews and the Jewish Anti-Fascist Committee*, trans. Mary Beth Friedrich and Todd Bludeau (New York: Enigma Books, 2003).

318 Translator’s Note: In 1941, certain Polish inhabitants of Jedwabne – a village in northeastern Poland – carried out a murderous pogrom against its Jewish residents with German approval. In recent years, this event has formed a flashpoint in debates both inside and outside Poland on wartime relations between Poles and Jews. Jan Tomasz Gross’s book on the massacre – entitled *Neighbors* – has proved especially polarizing in this respect.

the one hand, in an act of gratefulness for the enormous postwar reparations, they wish to disburden the Germans of guilt. On the other hand, they wish to receive unimaginably high reparations from Poland (in certain texts, figures in the billions appear). They organize their intrigues against us not only because they are greedy or because everything ultimately becomes a “*gesheft*” for them (this Yiddish word – meaning “deal” – is a favorite in this rhetoric), but also because they wish to plunder the Polish nation, economically destroying it and reducing it to poverty. In this sense, Jan Tomasz Gross – the author of a controversial book on Jedwabne – is a collaborator or even a driving force within the anti-Polish conspiracy.

C. Generalizations

Within anti-Semitic discourse in its current form, specific individuals do not appear at all. This is a consistently “subject-less” world, devoid of individual human beings, but populated only by representatives of the two sides – the noble ones on our side, and the evil, terrible, dangerous ones on the opposing side. Of course, figures mentioned by name are not entirely absent. However, they never appear as individuals, but rather as representatives of groups. This principle operates almost without exception. Here I shall merely supply a somewhat caricatured example. If a certain Mr. Epstein smashes a certain Mr. Dąbrowski in the face with a beer bottle in a pub or in front of a kiosk, this is no ordinary conflict between two drunken men. A Jew has attacked a Pole, or – even more characteristically – the Jews have attacked Poland. This tendency – which forms one of the organizing principles of anti-Semitic discourse – means that the names of Jewish people, or of people regarded for various reasons to be Jews, very rarely appear in the singular.

This phenomenon has a broader basis in the general principles governing this type of discourse. Collective responsibility implicitly applies, even when this idea is not directly formulated. Here we are not dealing with conflicts with any specific individuals – nor with any specific scores to be settled. Indeed, when such cases arise they are not necessarily anti-Semitic in nature. Kowalski and Tulli correctly decide not to include attacks on specific people if the theme of ethnic determinism does not appear. If the director of the Zachęta National Art Gallery in Warsaw had been attacked in 2001 exclusively for decisions regarded by her critics as ill-advised or incorrect, then this criticism would have been an entirely different matter. However, the attacks on Anda Rottenberg included the claim that she had taken decisions allegedly disadvantageous to the Polish nation precisely because of her Jewish roots. Therefore, according to her critics, she should have organized her exhibitions in Israel instead of Poland. In the vision of the world I am attempting to reconstruct, generalizations of this type are directly linked

with both fundamental dichotomous divisions and the conspiracist conception of reality.

At the same time, an important exception may also appear within this kind of generalized anti-Semitic discourse. At least in cases where the discourse is not thoroughly racist in nature, the figure of the “good Jew” is sometimes admissible. In this situation, a key principle consistently applies. A “good Jew” is not a distinguished person in any particular area: for instance, an eminent writer, teacher, musician or scholar (neither Janusz Korczak³¹⁹ nor Alfred Einstein could fill this role according to this ideology). A “good Jew” can only be somebody who denounces or un.masks his or her own community, thus supplying us with arguments and confirming our accusations. In other words, a “good Jew” crosses over to our side – which is the only right side. The figure of the “good Jew” is constructed in *Rola* and in the contemporary journalistic writings excerpted in *Instead of a Trial*. In the case of the latter, one man personifies this role – Norman Finkelstein, the author of an astonishing screed about the abuses (historical, interpretive and financial) perpetrated by Jews (mostly American Jews) in their pursuit of reparations associated with the Holocaust and in their attempts to convince the world that the Shoah was an absolutely unique event.³²⁰ The “good Jew” is often treated with great reverence and appears as an undisputed intellectual and moral authority who knows the hostile nation from the inside. He or she is fully aware of its iniquities and is not afraid to speak the truth about them. The “good Jew” is not usually subject to generalization.

D. A Selective Attitude Towards History

One consequence of the three abovementioned characteristics of anti-Semitic discourse in 2001 is a peculiar attitude to the past. The authors of *Instead of a Trial* rightly emphasize that references to history (almost exclusively twentieth-century history) are extraordinarily common in these publications and play a very important role. History supplies a stock of examples allowing us to demonstrate our nobility in the face of their baseness. History allows us to show that the Jews are our eternal enemies. They have always acted ruthlessly to do us harm. They wished to destroy us long ago and they wish to destroy us now – conspiring with the other enemies of our nation, publishing “Polish-language” newspapers that

319 Translator’s Note: Janusz Korczak (1879-1942) was a Polish-Jewish doctor, teacher and writer famous for his work at an orphanage for Jewish children in Warsaw. During the Nazi occupation, he stayed with his charges, eventually accompanying them on a transport to the Treblinka death camp, where he was murdered.

320 See: Finkelstein, Norman, *The Holocaust Industry: Reflections on the Exploitation of Jewish Suffering* (London: Verso Books, 2000).

denigrate our traditions, acting against our Polish religion, and disseminating false opinions about us abroad. Moreover, by supporting Poland's accession to the European Union, they wish to deprive us of our independence.

In the majority of the materials included in Kowalski's and Tulli's book, Jew means communist. The meanings of these two words almost completely overlap. In these contemporary lucubrations, the familiar inter-war idea of "Żydokomuna" – or "Judeo-Communism" – is alive and well, despite the fact that the term itself does not appear at all. The Jew – as the incarnation of universal evil – is responsible for everything bad, including Stalinism. We might say that this vision of history is not only selective, but also mono-thematic. Whatever the subject of discussion, the menacing figure of the Jew lurks somewhere in the shadows.

History is essential to the authors of such publications as *Nasz Dziennik*, *Nasza Polska (Our Poland)* and *Głos* above all so that they might present a list of evils inflicted on the Poles by the Jews. They accuse us Poles of having incinerated a certain number of Jews in a barn at Jedwabne. First of all, this is a lie. But even if it were true, what is this one event in comparison with the mass of Jewish crimes? Here we find the popular motif that the Jews aided the Soviets in the deportation of Poles to the far reaches of the Soviet Union after 17 September 1939. It was not individual Jews or Jewish communists who aided them, but Jews *tout court*, irrespective of where they were, what they were doing or what their life situation may have been. This approach fits in well with the generalizations discussed above. In this attitude towards history, the generalized vision of the enemy must be accompanied by certain gaps and silences. In the anti-Semitic story about the deportation of Poles to Siberia, there is no mention whatsoever of the fact that the deportations also affected Jews on a large scale. Such a fact is irrelevant to this vision of the world. Indeed, it has no right to exist within the desired narrative. Jews simply had no right to fall victim to the same repressions as Poles. Therefore, the fact that they really did suffer the same fate cannot be taken into account. Providence has assigned the Jews a different historical role. They must exclusively be accomplices to villainy.

This type of selective understanding of history does not apply only to the Soviet context; indeed, it carries a much more universal significance. Above all, it applies to the Second World War. Not all anti-Semitic writers have gone as far as Dariusz Ratajczak in denouncing what is usually termed the "Auschwitz lie," but many are close to the view adopted by this pseudo-historian. In similar fashion to the March 1968 propaganda, these writers downplay everything associated with the Holocaust, while also suggesting that the Jews themselves contributed to it, since they partly designed it and then assisted the Germans with its realization. According to this peculiar understanding of history, the fact that millions of people

were murdered is less important than the information that some of the so-called Jewish police collaborated with the occupiers.

Within the limitations of this vision of history, factual accuracy plays a negligible role. Sometimes it does not enter into consideration at all. The symbolic dimension is much more significant here. Indeed, symbolism applies *a priori* in this type of context. For instance, we find a strikingly thorough elimination of any events or individuals that might symbolize friendship, community or even cooperation between Poles and Jews. Such facts and characters both from more distant history and the war years are ignored. There is no place in this discourse even for the briefest mention of *Żegota* – the Polish Council to Aid Jews during the Second World War. However, we do find generalized reflections on the good things Poles have done (and continue to do) for Jews – the hospitality they have offered in their own lands and the ingratitude the Jews have supposedly shown in response.

E. Accusations

Since we are discussing the peculiar capaciousness of this discourse, we must emphasize that all kinds of accusations against Jews are possible within it – including those that would fail to take widely known facts into account, those that would contradict empirical reality or probability, and those that would ignore the demands of common sense. In this field, the tradition is ancient and extensive. We need only mention the best-known examples from the Middle Ages, including legends about Jews poisoning wells or murdering Christian children because their blood was an essential ingredient for matza bread. In contemporary times, the most radical accusation is the claim that Jews organized the September 11 attack on the World Trade Center. Here the question does not arise as to why they would have done this or how they might have induced Arab terrorists to perform the deed. As evidence that the Jews were behind this crime, we hear that Jewish people employed in the two towers did not present themselves for work that day – and thus survived. We do not learn the sources of this sensational information, though we might well suspect Arab propaganda.

Such absurd accusations – devoid of any rational explanation – are no mere blips or unexpected aberrations resulting from excessive ardor or overzealousness. Instead, they follow from the very essence of this hateful discourse, as one of its fundamental structural elements. If we treat a particular national or social group as the incarnation of the worst kind of evil, then we may charge them with every crime and accuse them of absolutely anything. This mechanism is not only a feature of contemporary hate speech. It functioned *mutatis mutandis* in the *Rola* magazine discussed above – long before the later excesses of interwar Polish nationalism.

It was also extremely conspicuous in the March 1968 propaganda: for instance, in the writings of its leading figure, Ryszard Gontarz, or in the press outlets associated with Bolesław Piasecki's PAX organization. In many cases, it involved shifting responsibility onto the Jews for negative events and trends, including economic crises: in other words, for anything that might find social disapproval. One might suppose that this process had certain sociotechnical grounds, but in fact it represented – in a peculiar sense – a realm of pure art. Indeed, the claim that the Holocaust did not so much affect the Jews as it was organized by them – in other words, that the Jews murdered themselves in a crime ordered by the very people who became its victims – does not allow for this possibility, especially as it contradicts various other accusations. But here the logical principle of excluded middle does not apply. One may simultaneously make accusations of both *a* and *not a*, since the laws of logic are of no particular concern. Accordingly, one may declare that the Jews condemned themselves to their later fate because they are generally devoid of any social solidarity, while maintaining at the same time that they constitute a vast clique collectively looking after its own exclusive interests and acting to the disadvantage of others: above all, of Poles.

F. Beyond Moral Reflection

All the authors included in the anthology compiled by Kowalski and Tulli regard themselves as adherents of unambiguous and universally binding moral principles. If they speak about immorality, it is only in connection with other people. What they do themselves exists beyond moral reflection. None of them reflect on the moral significance or ramifications of their own deeds, ideas or attitudes. They seem to assume in advance that what others might treat as the spreading of hatred is simply speaking the truth. Such speech would be morally justified. Moreover, this is a battle between good and evil; any self-reflection over ethical concerns might weaken their fighting spirit and raise potentially crippling doubts. Whoever sees himself or herself as a fighter for a just cause must dispel all doubts.

This amorality manifests itself in what various authors writing in the five publications have to say on the subject of Jedwabne. For these writers – irrespective of whether they are secular journalists or local clerics (or even representatives of the Church hierarchy, like Bishop Stefan Stefanek³²¹) – the fact that a large group of people were incinerated in a barn is insignificant, irrelevant, and does not provoke any serious reflection. Instead, they find other aspects more important.

321 Translator's Note: Bishop Stefanek delivered a homily at Jedwabne in 2001, in which he criticized the "assault on Jedwabne" and the ruthless representatives of the "Shoah business."

First, Jan Tomasz Gross supposedly gives an inflated number of victims in his book on the subject. Second, the act was justified, as it constituted a response to Jewish iniquities during the earlier period of the Soviet occupation. Third, it was not the Poles who committed the crime. Fourth, by accusing the Poles of murder, the Jews are motivated by rising anti-Polonism and a desire not only to gain enormous profits (at first, 600 million dollars is mentioned, but later the sum swells to 600 billion), but also to destroy the Polish state economically, thus reducing the whole nation to beggary or slavery.³²² The commandment “Thou shalt not kill” does not apply when it concerns those who find themselves on the wrong side of the fundamental dichotomous divide. Occasionally, a very peculiar argument emerges: even if we killed those people at Jedwabne in July 1941, there is ultimately nothing to discuss, since they mistreated and killed us in even worse circumstances. Moral reservations do not apply to individuals if they come from our side. Even active participants in the pogrom – whose involvement in murder has been proven – are ultimately victims of Jewish intrigues, or even heroes, as in the case of the Laudański brothers from Jedwabne.

This attitude towards the Jedwabne case – where the crime has come to light – is not an isolated phenomenon. Indeed, it reveals a style of apprehending the world once described in communist Poland as “resistance.” According to this perspective, the real shape of things is essentially irrelevant. Instead, the important point is to dismiss and invalidate whatever one’s opponent says. This is not an isolated phenomenon, since it constitutes an element within a much broader set of comments and judgments on the Holocaust. Within hate speech, these evaluations are extremely curious in nature. The Holocaust essentially does not evoke any direct condemnation and the victims are not accorded any sympathy, though admittedly few authors equal the ardor and boldness of Dariusz Ratajczak – a pseudo-historian from Opole (contributing several extracts to *Instead of a Trial*) – who asserts that the death camps never existed and that the Holocaust did not take place. More broadly, the mass murder of the Jews provokes no moral reflection. On the contrary, some writers claim that the Poles suffered no less than the Jews – or perhaps even more – and that they were also victims of a Holocaust (here we find the curious theme of competition for preeminence in suffering, which Kowalski and Tulli strongly emphasize in their commentaries). Others assert that the number of victims was lower – not six million, as the Jews claim, but scarcely a million and a half – as if this would reduce the seriousness of the problem. Finally, the most important point for those who support this kind of rhetoric is that the Jews themselves took part in the murder. They were the executioners of their own people, since the Warsaw Ghetto was positively swarming with Gestapo

322 The “good Jew” Norman Finkelstein evokes this thesis in a chapter appended to the Polish edition of *The Holocaust Industry*.

agents. Sometimes one might wonder while reading these arguments whether the Jews in fact died at their own behest, though the theory that they committed collective suicide has not yet appeared. At the same time, we find a reprehensible admonition of others for remembering the fate of the Jews.³²³

For authors utilizing hate speech, the question of the Holocaust does not belong to the domain of memory or history. Instead, it is a crucial part of what they customarily term “the Jewish question” (in its contemporary form). Jews have created the “Holocaust religion”³²⁴ in order to subjugate others and to take over the world. The important thing is not to reflect on the murder of almost an entire community or on how such a crime was possible, but rather to resist Jewish political and economic claims (one journalist expressed his sympathy for the Swiss banks that have had to return sums of money deposited by deceased Jews, who clearly could not claim it themselves). Here there can be no room for doubt: the Holocaust³²⁵ has become another Jewish business, whose only aim is to maximize profits. Phrases like “Holocaust industry,” “Holocaust business,” “Holocaust *gesheft*,” “Shoah business,” and so on, constantly appear in this rhetoric. Bishop Stefanek is one such person who speaks about the Holocaust as a Jewish business.

323 With respect to this particular view, the authors writing in the five publications are not isolated cases, as we may observe from a note written by the novelist Maria Dąbrowska on 15 July 1960 in connection with the jubilee celebrations for the city of Kalisz: “On the letter of Kalisz Jews from Tel Aviv. My God, what complexes! They would be satisfied with nothing less than every publication and every public occasion including some mention of the Holocaust” (Dąbrowska, Maria, *Dzienniki powojenne 1960 – 1965* [Warszawa: Czytelnik, 1996], p. 80). Dąbrowska’s remark might perhaps have been justified if the murdered Jews had indeed been mentioned at every opportunity in Poland at the time. But this was not at all the case in the People’s Republic of Poland. On the contrary, on most occasions of this kind, there was no mention of the fact that another community had once lived here before its extermination. In fact, we learn from an essay by Arkadiusz Pacholski that one third of Kalisz’s interwar population of 80 000 inhabitants were Jewish (See: Pacholski, Arkadiusz, *Krajobraz z czerwonym słońcem* [Kalisz: Sztuka i Rynek, 2001]).

324 This ironic phrase is remarkable because it is used by authors for whom the word “religion” has exclusively positive connotations. In this case, we are dealing not only with a false religion, but – even worse – one created to facilitate dishonest financial gain.

325 The word “*Holokaust*” has entered colloquial Polish, though “*Zagłada*” – literally meaning “the Extermination” – is probably still more common. On the subject of the various terms used to denote the Holocaust in Polish, see the interesting article by Monika Adamczyk-Garbowska and Henryk Duda, “Terminy Holokaust, Zagłada i Szoa oraz ich konotacje leksykalno-kulturowe w polszczyźnie potocznej i dyskursie naukowym,” published in *Żydzi i judaizm we współczesnych badaniach polskich*, Volume III, ed. Krzysztof Pilarczyka (Kraków: Księgarnia Akademicka, 2003). We may confirm with some satisfaction that the connotations associated with the word in the anti-Semitic press have not entered contemporary Polish.

The main authority on the matter is the abovementioned “good Jew,” Norman Finkelstein. There can be no moral scruples within this understanding of the issue. The murder of millions of people loses its gravity. Ultimately, most anti-Semitic journalists’ knowledge of this subject is lamentably limited. They know their own arguments – and these are enough for them. On a side note, Finkelstein’s book is the only work on the Holocaust to which they ever refer – and probably the only one they have read (though it only concerns the Holocaust indirectly). They consistently reject the entire corpus of literature on the subject.

3

The religious component of contemporary anti-Semitic discourse demands particular attention. Religious references carry fundamental significance here, since the authors who follow the principles of this discourse not only define themselves as true Poles, but also as true Catholics. This is an astonishing type of religiosity – and not only because it seems to forget that, in Greek, the word *katholikos* means “universal.” Religion has become one of the fundamental elements to determine the prevailing dichotomous divisions in absolute terms. Anti-Semitic writers treat religion as if it were self-evident, demanding no reflection, subject to no transformations and fixed in the version regarded by them as the only right one. In short, it becomes a stick for beating all those whom they regard as other, unworthy or as infidels.

We must strongly emphasize a key point here. Catholicism of this kind (like the pre-war religiosity of the National Radical Camp, or *ONR*) is decidedly anti-evangelical. It pays no attention to the idea that love for one’s neighbor does not only include those whom one might regard as coreligionists or compatriots, but also other people. Fundamental texts like the Sermon on the Mount are irrelevant for this type of religiosity. This is hardly surprising, since these appeals to religion have become instruments of battle rather than the basis for any moral reflection. If we were to seek an historical symbol for this kind of thinking, Saint Francis of Assisi would not (and could not) be its patron, though Tomás de Torquemada might fit the role perfectly.

One consequence of this anti-evangelical attitude is the consistent rejection of any ecumenical ideas. According to this interpretation, religion – treated as a single true faith – does not exist in order to unite people who might differ in various respects, but rather to set “us” apart as the only righteous believers and to provide a clear basis for rejecting all other people. Its aim is not to reveal similarities or common ground. On the contrary, it aims to underline differences and to judge those who do not belong to “us.” Indeed, this conception is not merely

anti-ecumenical. We are dealing with a much more developed phenomenon. Catholicism is understood here as a component of tribal identity – specifically, of Polish tribal identity – as one of its distinguishing features or manifestations. We find an expression of this conception in the well-known phrase dating back, at least, to the interwar period and perhaps even earlier – “*Polak-katolik*,” or “Pole-Catholic.” Catholicism is identified with Polishness. In anti-Semitic discourse, it has even become a kind of ethnic category. This conception of Catholicism appears in virtually all the extracts collected in Kowalski’s and Tulli’s book: irrespective of whether the authors are secular or clerical (sometimes occupying high positions within the Church hierarchy).

Catholicism as a marker and indispensable component of Polishness constitutes an axiom that is subject neither to criticism nor even to reflection. Self-evident facts require no discussion or thought. In this type of discourse, we find an extraordinarily clear vision of religion as an ethnic category: even as one of the fundamental categories creating ethnic divisions.

4

It is worth examining the materials collected in Kowalski’s and Tulli’s book from yet another perspective: by examining the identity of the authors whose texts appear within it. The vast majority of these authors are unknown beyond the circles that read these publications. We might even say that we are dealing with a single “one-headed author,” who uses the same shoddy language (super-nationalism shows no respect for the Polish language), refers to the same stereotypes and judgments, acknowledges the same authorities, and succumbs to the same phantasms.

This one-headed author reveals hardly any individual differences. Indeed, it would be a waste of time and energy to examine how a certain Jerzy Biernacki differs from a certain Piotr Jakucki or from a person hiding under the pseudonym Wybranowski (which the nationalist politician Roman Dmowski also used in the 1930s). Similarly, it would be a senseless task to consider how a certain Grażyna Dziedzińska (who – it must be said – is exceptionally vicious) differs from a certain Teresa Kuczyńska, the oldest expert in anti-Semitic propaganda from *Tygodnik Solidarność* (*Solidarity Weekly*). Extreme uniformity is much more important here than any diversity.

The majority of the writers whose works comprise the *opus* of this one-headed author are essentially anonymous figures. Nevertheless, some of the extracts in the book come from public personages who sometimes occupy high positions in public life. These figures include Cardinal Józef Glemp – who expresses ideas that differ little from the familiar lucubrations of the one-headed author, though

admittedly in more measured terms – as well as several bishops. We also find the opinions of priests from outside the hierarchy. Of course, the well-known figures do not hail exclusively from clerical circles. We also find among them various figures flaunting academic titles, including Professor Czesław Bartnik, Professor Piotr Jaroszyński and Professor Ryszard Bender, who was widely known – though not for any commendable reasons – in the communist era. There are also parliamentarians, including MP Antoni Macierewicz and Senator Jadwiga Stokarska. We should emphasize here that the opinions of these professors and politicians in no way differ from those produced by the one-headed author. The degree of schematization is astonishingly high, while the reduction of ideas to the lowest common denominator is equally well developed.

It is also worth asking where the many authors practicing this hateful form of journalism come from. In the case of certain individuals, this is no mystery. The historian Andrzej Szczesniak – an author of high-school textbooks who sees memorializing the Holocaust as nothing but Jewish chauvinism – was a state functionary in the communist apparatus as high up as the Central Committee of the Polish United Workers' Party. The frenetically active Jerzy Robert Nowak – who currently styles himself in professorial robes (in who knows what discipline) – was a second-rate communist journalist specializing in apologies for the post-1956 Hungarian communist leader János Kádár. Yet not all these authors hail from the circles of communist ideologues. Indeed, some (though not many) were once associated with the anti-communist opposition, while the majority seem to be the ideological heirs of the pre-war National Radical Camp (*ONR*) or of the March 1968 anti-Jewish propaganda. Their ways of thinking and writing represent a direct continuation of the ideology and rhetoric that characterized Bolesław Piasecki's nationalist movement in the late 1930s. Astonishing analogies appear in the content and style of the writings examined by Kowalski and Tulli. These analogies manifest themselves in the authors' ways of thinking, in their manipulation of stereotypes, in the ways in which they encourage their readers – both indirectly and directly – to adopt hateful attitudes and in their stylistic tendency towards unmasking enemies. We are truly dealing here with a unity that extends over many decades. In the beginning, we find the classics of anti-Semitism from various eras, then later the inter-war *ONR* and the PAX Association thriving in the upheaval of March 1968, and finally the contemporary continuators – from Leszek Bubel³²⁶ to the “one-headed author” – with whom Kowalski and Tulli are concerned in their book. Only certain concrete realities have changed, since clearly these could not persist over time. Nevertheless, the phantasmagorical framing of these concrete

326 Translator's Note: Leszek Bubel (born 1957) is a politician, journalist and singer accused of spreading various kinds of virulent anti-Semitic hate speech – including a pamphlet entitled “How to Recognize a Jew.”

realities has not changed at all. We see here a direct continuation of a Polish version of fascism, and of its communist mutation, Moczarism.³²⁷ The result is a single work of synthesis.

5

The question arises: what is the purpose of such intense and consistent anti-Semitic propaganda in a country in which the majority of people would never have had any contact with – or even laid eyes upon – a real Jewish person? In one of their commentaries, Kowalski and Tulli claim that the main aim is to foster community feeling. Indeed, this form of propaganda certainly succeeds in this respect: by referring to history, as well as to a peculiar understanding of religious and ethnic motifs and also by reviving various sets of stereotypes. This point seems undeniable to me. It also seems undeniable that we are dealing here with the simple need for self-expression. The individuals armed with pens who comprise the one-headed monster feel a strong need to express their own hateful emotions and to vent their frustrations. In my view, we cannot ignore this psychological consideration.

But what is the intended social function of this propaganda? Harassing the Jews is certainly one aim, but something much greater is at stake here. After all, the addressees of anti-Semitic propaganda cannot be the Jews themselves, since they are nothing more than its objects or victims. In this case, anti-Semitic writers are addressing themselves to Polish society. So what do they hope to gain? Here we find a curious paradox. On the one hand, they clearly wish to beat the national drum. “We” are always noble and wise, with all possible justifications on our side. On the other hand, we are not only exposed to the constant threat of conspiracies, but we seem helpless to prevent them. Everybody is waiting to attack us. Everybody wishes to do us harm, rob us or even murder us. In the end, our noble community is a helpless and isolated crowd – weak and friendless. The fact that this interpretation appears in a discourse with clear nationalist characteristics is simply astonishing. Such authors write about the Polish nation as if it were composed of helpless, lost, uneducated bumpkins at the mercy of the enemy. It is difficult to determine to what extent this sentiment expresses a chronic and entirely irrational inferiority complex and to what degree it is part of a political game with clear goals. Either way, if one wished to use the same categories that

327 Translator’s Note: Mieczysław Moczar (1913-1986) – as Minister of the Interior – was the main driving force within the communist leadership behind the anti-Jewish campaign of March 1968. He harnessed these events to mount an ultimately unsuccessful leadership challenge against the incumbent First Secretary Władysław Gomułka.

appear within the anti-Semitic lucubrations themselves, one could quite justifiably claim that these suggestions were a manifestation of “anti-Polonism.” I would add that nobody could blame the Jews for it in this particular case – or at least not without falling into complete absurdity.

The undeniable effect of this type of journalism is to arouse fear and a sense of danger. In this respect, it does not differ at all from any other totalitarian journalism, irrespective of which variant of totalitarianism it might represent. Evoking fear is a means of gaining control over society, since the people who wield this weapon inevitably present themselves as fully aware of what is happening, unwilling to surrender to illusions and always ready to fight for the interests of those under threat. The authors who propagate this form of propaganda are apparently unconcerned by the significance or potential consequences of arousing fear at a time in which – happily – the country is in no immediate danger. The Jews have taken on diverse roles within anti-Semitic discourse. Among them we inevitably find – as in the case under discussion here – the role of bogeymen.

21. The Case of Jan Dobraczyński

1

I wonder whether I have any right to write about him. I am not an expert on his vast oeuvre, which extends to over eighty volumes. I never came into contact with him as an adult. I am uncertain as to whether I ever laid eyes on him at all. But if I have decided to write about him anyway, it is for two reasons. First of all, I undoubtedly owe him a debt of gratitude from the period of the Holocaust. Secondly, I have become interested in his truly extraordinary human situation, full of contradictions and astonishing inconsistencies.

When I was asked to write a statement for Yad Vashem – the Israeli institution responsible for honoring those who rescued Jews during the war – I did not hesitate even for a moment. Indeed, I wrote my testimony in the knowledge that I was fulfilling a basic duty of human gratitude. We might say – in a slightly old-fashioned way – that during the occupation, Jan Dobraczyński had displayed heroic virtues worthy of both the greatest admiration and symbolic commemoration. His deeds were widely known. Indeed, it is somewhat surprising that the question of awarding the medal arose so late, when he was already ailing and no longer part of public life. I have heard that he himself decided not to raise the matter any earlier, since for many (including himself) it might have been awkward on account of both his anti-Semitic views and his various official functions within communist Poland. He not only made no secret of his anti-Semitic opinions, but expressed them on various occasions and in various periods throughout his life. In the People's Republic of Poland, he was an ideological activist of the pro-communist Catholic PAX Association and one of the closest collaborators of its founder, Bolesław Piasecki. He allowed himself to be nominated as a member of the Stalinist parliament in the darkest era of the People's Republic. During the period of martial law in the early 1980s, he accepted the position of chairman of the Patriotic Movement for National Rebirth (*PRON*): the pro-government umbrella organization supporting military rule.

Before the war, Dobraczyński raised the Jewish question on multiple occasions. In fact, it constituted one of the main themes of his journalistic writing, which he published in the newspapers of the Catholic-leaning, extreme nationalist right. He belonged to a sizeable group of hate mongers active in the 1930s. In one of his articles – published in 1938 (probably in the far-right *Prosto z mostu* magazine) – he claimed that Jews had no right to complain about rising anti-Semitism in the

world, since they themselves were to blame for it. If they were not so disgusting and repugnant – and if they did not do so much evil in the world – there would be no anti-Semitism. The naivety of such an argument is astonishing. Nevertheless, experience tells us that hatred is not only inconducive to intellectual (and any other) refinement, but often takes away all reason.

2

I did not set about writing these remarks in order to bemoan Dobraczyński's aberrations. I mention them only to highlight the strange fact that a man of such views and background could fully commit himself with absolute dedication to saving Jewish children. He devoted himself neither to expiate his previous declarations with heroic deeds, nor – even less so – to do penance. As he writes in his memoirs – published in 1970 under the title *Only in One Life (Tylko w jednym życiu)* – he never understood things in this way. Indeed, such an attitude did not even enter his mind. Dobraczyński writes this book as if he were completely satisfied with everything he had done in his life. The devotion of his heroic actions suggests no repudiation of anti-Semitic ideology, which would return in various forms in his writings and deeds throughout the communist years. After all, we cannot ignore the fact that he joined the anti-Jewish campaign of March 1968, together with the PAX Association led enthusiastically by Piasecki, doubtless reminding Dobraczyński of the good old days of their militant youth together with the National Radical Camp (*ONR*). Indeed, certain motifs typical of March 1968 appear even in his memoirs, though admittedly in muted form. It would be no exaggeration to say that the theme of aversion for Jews wends its way through Dobraczyński's entire life.

And yet the same man deserves enormous credit for saving Jewish children at a time when death was the penalty for such bravery. He clearly undertook this course of action with full knowledge of the risks involved. He worked at the Warsaw City Council in the department of social affairs. Accordingly, he was in charge of the city's children's homes, including one that served as a kind of transit house, offering shelter to abandoned and homeless children before they could be sent on to orphanages. In this house, in which each child could stay only for a few days, Dobraczyński took in Jewish children, which meant providing them with fictional histories and – if this had not been arranged earlier – Polish sounding names. The existence of this crèche had enormous significance, since providing shelter even for a few days often meant saving a child's life. This was especially true since the children were then transferred to various institutions run mostly by Catholic nuns.

3

I have no intention here of engaging in any general reflections. I wish only to tell my own story – for I also found myself in Dobraczyński’s transit house on little Boduen Street in Warsaw. I stayed there no longer than two or three days before being transferred to a convent at Turkowice, probably in the second half of February 1944. There was no longer any way of hiding me in the city. The sojourn at Boduen Street and subsequent transfer to the east represented my only hope of survival. I was taken there in the evening, just before curfew, perhaps because moving through the streets in the dark was at least slightly less dangerous, or perhaps – just in case – to confront the orphanage management with an accomplished fact. After all, they could hardly refuse to accept a child just before curfew, since this would mean condemning him or her to death. I am not entirely sure who took me there, though everything points to my aunt Maria – who moved about the city with relative freedom since she had what was then described as Aryan (or the right) features – accompanied by Maria Kukulska, an activist who devotedly and courageously rescued Jewish children at great personal risk.

I remember a nice man attending to me and organizing the necessary formalities. Then he took me to an enormous room, which was the boy’s dormitory. I cannot exclude the possibility that this nice young man was Jan Dobraczyński. Many years after the war, Irena Sendler – the heroic representative of the Polish Council to Aid Jews (*Żegota*) – told me that he had been in charge of the transit children’s house during the occupation and therefore that he had been one of those devoted and remarkable people to whom I owed my survival. I became convinced that he was the young man I remembered. Admittedly, I was not personally acquainted with him, though I knew what he looked like from photographs published in the press. He seemed to resemble the man who had taken me in. Today – when I think about the matter with greater distance – I am not so convinced, though ultimately I do not consider this question to be of primary importance here. Regardless of whether I personally came into contact with him or not, I owe him a great deal, since he organized and sponsored the whole operation.

4

One question constantly plagues me: what persuaded him to do it? I am quite aware that I shall find no simple or unambiguous answer. As a writer, journalist and activist associated with the extreme right – and indeed as an anti-Semitic ideologue who made no secret of his views – Dobraczyński might easily have ignored what the Nazis were doing to the Jews or simply decided that for a “*Polak-katolik*” (“Pole-

Catholic”) like himself the matter was of little importance. Irena Sendler – whose background lay in the pre-war democratic and anti-totalitarian left – asked the very same question. In her view, Dobraczyński probably fell under the influence of Jadwiga Piotrowska, one of the remarkable Polish women dedicated to saving Jewish children. For years she had not only been his colleague, but also a person with whom he shared a deep friendship. This was undoubtedly an important factor, but I would guess that it was not the only one. Indeed, more generalized humanitarian concerns probably came into consideration here – along with something else.

As I have already confessed, I am no expert on Dobraczyński’s oeuvre. Nothing about his writing appeals to me and I have read very few of his books. Nevertheless, I have seen enough of them to recognize that a strange Jewish obsession runs through his work. The Jews are by no means a matter of indifference to him. He constantly comes back to this question in his writings. The Jewish people represent a decidedly alien element in his eyes and at times – in the 1930s – even a hateful one. Yet in some peculiar way they attract him. In a certain sense, he cannot not do without them – or even exist without them. The range of his obsession is extraordinarily broad, extending from hostile contempt to rapt fascination. I do not have at my disposal even a modicum of the data necessary to investigate the origins of this obsession, but the simple fact of its existence is beyond debate.

5

I sometimes wonder whether the example of Jan Dobraczyński represents an individual case – a singular, isolated and unique marvel. I am unable to resolve or interpret this question, though I understand that the Polish right – both extreme and less extreme, but with a generally anti-Semitic point of departure – reacted to the murder of the Jews in highly diverse ways. Some of its members renounced their previous views and actively joined the aid effort (we need only recall one of the founders of *Żegota*, Zofia Kossak-Szczucka, whose position Jan Błoński has analyzed in masterly fashion³²⁸). Others remained indifferent (this was clearly the majority), while some applauded what the Germans were doing – Hitler was a bastard, but one had to appreciate that he was solving the Jewish problem for us. This approving attitude was not always limited to mere words, but sometimes even led to terrible deeds. It is difficult to imagine a greater diversity of positions: from heroic, laudable dedication to the most reprehensible crimes.

328 See: Błoński, Jan, “Polak-katolik i katolik-Polak, Nakaz ewangeliczny, interes narodowy i solidarność obywatelska wobec zagłady getta warszawskiego,” *Biedni Polacy patrzą na getto* (Kraków: Wydawnictwo Literackie, 1994).

The case of Dobraczyński is extraordinary because his actions – which demanded great devotion and courage – did not bring about any permanent change in the views he had held from the earliest years of his life. As far as I know, he never issued a statement retracting his former opinions like Jan Mosdorf, the prominent pre-war nationalist who died at Auschwitz. He never questioned – even in the most oblique manner – the views he had declared in his public writings from the very beginning. He never renounced his earlier prejudices. This is but one of the remarkable contrasts characterizing the life of Jan Dobraczyński.

In fact, his biography is full of contradictions. This extreme right-wing activist became one of the most obsequious Polish writers towards the communist regime. This devout Catholic took part in the destruction of independent Catholic thought (we should not forget the role he played in the 1950s in the liquidation of the legitimate Catholic *Tygodnik Powszechny* [*Universal Weekly*] magazine and in PAX's publication of a pro-regime sham). This ardent patriot stood at the head of *PRON*, an organization boycotted by all who did not support martial law, irrespective of their political orientation. These are almost inexplicable contradictions. Together they form a diabolical tangle that is astonishing in such a religious man. It is not for me to judge whether saving even a single human life (and Dobraczyński contributed to the rescue of a significantly greater number of people) might outweigh everything on the evil and base side of the scale.

6

Dobraczyński was a tragic figure. The moment he stepped onto the grand political stage during the period of martial law, everybody else deserted him – apparently even his family. After 1989, he fell into obscurity. This Catholic writer ceased to exist in Catholic Poland as a writer. His books – once published in large print runs – have not been reissued. He passed away in virtual oblivion. The television footage from his funeral – which was broadcast on a local channel and not on the main news bulletin – showed former communist heavyweights Wojciech Jaruzelski, Czesław Kiszczak and Józef Czyrek in attendance. Admittedly, two Catholic bishops were also present. Yet only a few weeks before his death, another bishop, Józef Życiński, had protested against his final public statement – an article in which he claimed that Pope John Paul I had been poisoned by Freemasons – dismissing it as sensationalist nonsense. Perhaps this final coincidence of facts best expresses the human destiny that befell Jan Dobraczyński.

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