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After Bereza. Polish literature towards the Confinement Centre in Bereza Kartuska. 1939–2018¹

Sereza–Bereza and other Berezas

The debate in Poland regarding the Confinement Centre in Bereza Kartuska (Miejsce Odosobnienia w Berezie Kartuskiej), which operated between 6 July 1934 and 18 September 1939, did not subside as the camp was shut down due to Poland being invaded by the Red Army. It was restarted by Władysław Sikorski's government after the September defeat.

Sikorski, having been sidetracked after the May Coup, designated as the prime minister on 30 September 1939 and gaining power, having surrounded himself with people just like him discriminated by Sanation and hungry for revenge after years of humiliation, began settling accounts with the opposition. One manifestation of that was the “Commission related to the result of the 1939 war campaign” created through a decree of the President of the Polish Republic of 30 May 1940. The commission analysed the case of Bereza Kartuska. It was also raised pursuant to Section II of the executive order of the minister of internal affairs of 7 December 1939. On 8 June 1940 for the purposes of discussing the matter of Bereza, pursuant to a motion by the National Council (Rada Narodowa), a separate commission was established.² Its postulate was to hold the Council of Ministers and other persons

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1 Vide A. Morawiec, “Brr, Bereza. Polish literature towards the Confinement Centre in Bereza Kartuska. 1934–1939” (in this volume).

2 Vide I. Polit, *Miejsce odosobnienia w Berezie Kartuskiej w latach 1934–1939*, Adam Marszałek, Toruń 2003, p. 206. [Unless indicated otherwise, English versions translated from Polish].

directly engaged in the operations of the Confinement Centre legally accountable for abuses of power.³

Another example of Sikorski's government settling accounts with their political opponents was, which is worth mentioning at this point, the creation in November 1939 in Cerizay in Deux-Sèvres department and later, after France was defeated, on Isle of Bute in Great Britain, confinement centres sometimes referred to as concentration camps (per official nomenclature, in Cerizay there was an Officers Centre (Ośrodek Oficerski), while an Officer Rallying Point (Stacja Zborna Oficerów) on Isle of Bute in Rothesay, despite in both cases the camps also included civilians).⁴ It was rather a place of forced displacement, and of inactivity, which was particularly painful for soldiers. In the case of the "camp" in Rothesay (in the nearby Tighnabruaich, there was a penal camp for the DPs, which was actually a prison), outside such inconveniences as reduced pay, requirement to report daily in the commanding office, and limitation of correspondence, the internees could freely choose their living quarters and they could use entertainment amenities: cinema, dance meetings, and they could play tennis or bridge. Some even brought their families to the island. However, some misfortunes also happened on the Isle of Bute: suicides, nervous breakdowns, and alcoholism. Around 1,500 persons passed through the Rallying Point which had operated since the summer of 1940. Those included around twenty generals, many soldiers, and civilians who possessed competences which should have been used for the benefit of Poland. Seldom did it happen. An indirect reason for the release of the internees was the plane crash in Gibraltar in which Sikorski died, but mainly it was due to an interpellation of two Labour deputies in the House of Commons. Allow me to add that the first "Scottish prisoners" came to London in the spring of 1942, while the Rallying Point was officially shut down on 15 November 1943.

3 Vide P. Siekanowicz, *Obóz odosobnienia w Berezie Kartuskiej 1934–1939*, Instytut Historyczny im. Romana Dmowskiego, Instytut im. Romana Dmowskiego, Warsaw 1991, p. 59–63. Isolation camps were abolished by a document entitled *Resolution of the Council of Ministers of 26 September 1941 on repealing the resolution of the President of the Polish Republic of 17 June 1934 on persons threatening the security, peace and public order*. The 1934 resolution was then repealed by the communist authorities pursuant to a *Decree of 22 January 1946 on the responsibility for the September defeat and the fasciation of state life*.

4 Vide M. Dymarski, "Polskie obozy odosobnienia we Francji i w Wielkiej Brytanii w latach 1939–1942", *Dzieje Najnowsze* 1997, issue 3, pp. 113–127; M. Szejnert, *Wyspa Węży*, Znak, Kraków 2018, pp. 138–139 (the author referred to a 2016 book by Simon Webb entitled *British Concentration Camps. A Brief History from 1900–1975* a chapter of which was devoted to "Polish concentration camps in Great Britain", while other discussed, e.g. camps for Boers (in South Africa) and camps for Mau Mau warriors (in Kenya) where thousands of people had died; Szejnert stated unequivocally: "In Rothesay there was no Polish concentration camp.")

The Officer Centre in Cerizay was called, or rather nick-named, Bereza. That analogue, quite unfounded considering the clear difference in the extent of repressions used in both confinement centres, was strengthened by the popular among refugees Polish reading of the name of the town which rhymed with Bereza: Sereza–Bereza⁵. It would be more justified to assign the nickname Bereza to a penal camp for common soldiers which operated in 1941 in the Scottish town of Shinafoot. At the camp, repressions used against the internees included penal muster, beating, hanging by hands tied behind one's back, pouring water on the fainted, and forcing internees to sleep on bare ground.⁶ Maciej Feldhuzen, who helped shut the camp down (Gen. Sikorski also helped the cause), referred to Capt. Korkiewicz, the camp's commandant, as Lagerführer, and the methods applied there as copied from the Gestapo.⁷

Literature on Bereza (after Bereza)

Let us, however, return to Bereza, or rather to its broadly considered literary depictions and images. The area of German camps is mostly known from artistic literature and the literature of personal recollections (or from the “fringes” of those areas, which included the works by Tadeusz Borowski, Zofia Kossak, and Seweryna Szmaglewska), rather than historical studies. In the case of Bereza, it is easier to find, though few, academic texts than recollections or strictly literary texts. Allow me to add that the literature on Bereza is dominated by, similarly to as in the case of Lager and Gulag literature, recollections of political internees⁸, with a predominance of recollections by communists, who constituted the majority of the persons interned at Bereza. Therefore, it comes as no surprise that in the post-WWII communist-ruled Poland there were published mainly the recollections of persons associated with the communist movement or authors who shared its views like some (communising) socialists and peasant activists, which helped legitimise the “people's rule”. Texts by representatives of other groups, i.e. national radicals, (unfavourable to communism) socialists and peasant activists, as well as Ukrainian nationalists, were published mainly abroad.⁹

5 Vide M. Dymarski, *Polskie obozy odosobnienia...*, p. 118.

6 Vide M. Feldhuzen, “Rubens miał filię w Szkocji”, *Kultura* [Paris] 1953, issue 11, pp. 110–112 (the chapter of the article included there was titled “Czy w Szkocji była Bereza?”).

7 *Ibid.*, p. 111.

8 Criminals interned at the camps, as a rule, did not write memoirs.

9 In Ukrainian literature, the best-known recollections were those by Wołodymyr Makar, a member of Ukrainian Nationalists (Organizacja Ukraińskich Nacjonalistów, OUN), entitled *Берега Картузька (Спомини з 1934–35 рр.)* (Ліра Визволення України, Toronto 1956). Vide B. H. [B. Heydenkorn], “Ukraińskie wspomnienia z Berezy”, *Kultura* [Paris] 1955, issue 12, pp. 78–85; H. Колошук, “Берега Картузька в українській табірній мемуаристиці”,

Texts devoted to Bereza, regardless of the political or national inclinations of their authors, were usually biased in that they idealised those inmates who belonged to the same group as their authors. Furthermore, for many authors, and their publishers, it was much more important to convince the readers about the brutality of the Sanation system than to achieve a reasonable objective depiction of the camp reality.¹⁰ That also applied to Bereza-related strictly literary texts, the authors of which consisted mainly the supporters of the new PRL reality. Their ideological function emphatically outweighed their cognitive function. As Wojciech Śleszyński observed:

[...] since the very moment of its establishing, the confinement centre in Bereza Kartuska had been the symbol of the fight against “Polish fascism”, while the political prisoners interned there were considered martyrs. That helped the construction of the myth of Bereza Kartuska, which in the Polish communist pantheon occupied one of the highest places, as indicated by, e.g. various politically committed works of literature.¹¹

I have already mentioned the texts created at the camp in the first part of this article. Let us now study those which were written later, and the contexts in which they operated. There are few of those when compared to the works of Lager and Gulag literatures. Firstly, because the number of Polish internees at German and Soviet camps was significantly higher than the number of the internees at Bereza, and, secondly, because, allow me to use a piece of communist nomenclature, German fascism left a much greater impression on the experiences of Poles than “Polish fascism did.”¹²

Among the first works published after the camp in Bereza had been shut down there were, unsurprisingly, recollections of communist internees printed in Polish-language Soviet periodicals emphasising the harassments they endured both at Bereza and in Sanation Poland in general. Already on 25 November 1939

Київські полоністичні студії, vol. 18 (2011), pp. 280–287. Nadia Kołoszuk made a noteworthy observation (somewhat provocative for Poles) that Bereza was not the only Polish “concentration camp” (*ibid.*, p. 282). The Ukrainian researcher stated that in the early-1920s there were “internment camp” (*табори інтернованих*) in, e.g. Strzałkowo, Wadowice, and Tuchola (mind you, those were first POW camps for Red Army soldiers, and later internment camps for the soldiers of the Ukrainian People’s Army), while after WWII there were “the so-called labour camps” (*так звані табори праці*) in Łambinowice, and Jaworzno, where Ukrainians were interned, among others (*ibid.*)

¹⁰ Vide W. Śleszyński, *Obóz odosobnienia w Berezie Kartuskiej 1934–1939*, Dom Wydawniczy Benkowski, Białystok 2003, p. 9.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 77.

¹² M. Mirski, *...biegiem marsz!*, Książka i Wiedza, Warszawa 1958, p. 118.

the Lviv-based *Czerwony Sztandar* published the recollections of Witold Kolski entitled *Walec*¹³ (Road roller)¹⁴. (Nota bene, in Bereza, a roller used for smoothing out roads which is usually pulled by a tractor or several horses, was pulled by internees). Then, there were two texts, one presumably a translation inscribed as: "Poterucha, delegat Najwyższej Rady ZSRR", and the other by W. Szymański, were published in 1940–1941 in *Sztandar Wolności*, circulated in Minsk¹⁵. Much more extensive recollections by Maksymilian Bartz, a communist as well, was published in 1945, still during the war, yet not in the Soviet Union but in the West. I am referring to a brochure entitled *Przeżycia Bereziaka Nr. 793* (Experiences of Berezer #793), which its author began writing in 1938 in Poznań, and on which continued to work, having left Poland that same year, in Brussels¹⁶. Since he was a communist, its content, its message in particular, was not much different from the texts published in Soviet (or pro-Soviet) press, or, later, PRL press. *Przeżycia Bereziaka* constitute, what the author explicated in the introduction, an indictment against the "Sanation-nationalistic"¹⁷, and mainly against the Government of the Republic of Poland in exile, which considered itself the successor to the constitutional Polish government. The brochure's author, since December 1944 fulfilling the function of the chairman of the Executive Council of the Polish Patriots Union in Belgium (Zarząd Główny Związku Patriotów Polskich w Belgii)¹⁸, was the advocate of the Provisional Government of the Republic of Poland (Rząd Tymczasowy Rzeczypospolitej Polskiej) established under the patronage of the Soviet Union.

13 W. Kolski, "Walec (Wspomnienia z Berezy)", *Czerwony Sztandar* 1939, issue 53, p. 2. Kolski was first the periodical's literary editor, later to become its deputy editor-in-chief. Soon afterwards, on 27 January 1940, three days after NKVD arrested writers "consumed with Polish nationalism to the marrow", e.g. Władysław Broniewski, Tadeusz Peiper, Anatol Stern, and Aleksander Wat, the same periodical published the infamous libel signed by Kolski (who might not had written it, though) entitled *Zgnieść gadzinę nacjonalistyczną* (1940, issue 104, p. 2) – vide M. Inglot, *Polska kultura literacka Lwowa lat 1939–1941*, Towarzystwo Przyjaciół Polonistyki Wrocławskiej, Wrocław 1995, p. 56.

14 [Translator's remark: No official demonyms for the internees at Bereza exist in English; this is a version proposed by the translator]

15 Poterucha, "Polityczni więźniowie obozu odosobnienia w Berezie Kartuskiej (Z niedalekiej przeszłości)", *Sztandar Wolności* 1940, issue 55, p. 4; W. Szymański, "Wspomnienia z Berezy (Z niedalekiej przeszłości)", *Sztandar Wolności* 1941, issue 32, p. 2.

16 M. Bartz, *Przeżycia Bereziaka Nr. 793*, Bogdan Sobiesiński, Brussels 1945. A fragment of the brochure with the added title *Kuźnia* was reprinted in *Bereziacy* (L. Pasternak (ed.), *Książka i Wiedza*, Warsaw 1965, pp. 313–315).

17 M. Bartz, *Przeżycia Bereziaka...*, p. A.

18 Vide Public Information Bulletin of the Commission for the Prosecution of Crimes against the Polish Nation, Institute of National Remembrance, <https://katalog.bip.ipn.gov.pl/informacje/8> [accessed on: 29.10.2018].

The description of the camp reality included in the brochure seems reliable. The aspects of Bereza's operations presented in it were confirmed by later recollections not only by communists. Both the reliability and the impact of the brochure were amplified by the copies of official documents regarding the author inserted in it, including those related to his internment at the Confinement Centre. A similar function was fulfilled by addresses to the readers, e.g.: "The reader could only imagine our strength after such a scramble [i.e. tormenting the internees – note by A.M.]"¹⁹ The inclusion of the names of a few policemen who treated internees decently was intended as a proof of the author's objectivity.²⁰ The narration's descriptions are outweighed considerably by the incessant ideological commentary, or rather a huge dose of propaganda. Its main goal was to depict the Government of the Republic of Poland in exile (Rząd RP na Uchodźstwie) as the successors of Sanation, and to discredit it. The author referred to Sanation as a rotten regime and a branch of international fascism.²¹ One would be hard pressed to doubt the fact that Bereza brought shame onto the history of the Polish nation²², yet to agree with a statement that it could be compared "only to Majdanek or Auschwitz"²³ would be a completely different thing. Bartz's recollections carry something, though, which is absent from all other recollections by communists published in the following years, after they seized power in Poland completely. The brochure only solicited (fought) for communist to govern Poland. In 1945, the Provisional Government of the Republic of Poland was forced to seek not only recognition abroad, but also domestically. Therefore, Bartz avoided the motif, which later in the "people's" Poland became standard, of communists as a power most persecuted by Sanation, including at Bereza. Of course, in *Przeżycia Bereziaka* communists were perfectly visible, yet by attacking the legitimate government in exile Bartz intentionally displayed the solidarity and unity among the people oppressed by Sanation, including internees. He stressed that representatives of all political groups and various professional unions operating in Poland had been interned at Bereza, as well as people of letters and the representatives of other liberal professions. Unsurprisingly he did not mention Polish national radicals or Ukrainian nationalists nor, obviously, criminals. Of course, there was no unity at Bereza. But Bartz did not strive to keep the facts right. His recollections were mainly intended to serve the cause. So he incited: "May the bloody experiences from prisons and Kartusza [!] unite our nation around the authorities that propagate freedom for the oppressed,"²⁴ "together we'll

¹⁹ M. Bartz, *Przeżycia Bereziaka...*, p. 23.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 38.

²¹ *Ibid.*, p. 22.

²² *Ibid.*, p. 16.

²³ *Ibid.*, p. 28.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 37.

march to victory: peasants, Polish intelligentsia hand in hand with their Jewish, Ukrainian and Belarusian brothers.”²⁵

One of the earliest post-WWII strictly literary works which featured the motif of Bereza was a poem by Marian Pankowski entitled *Wina* (Fault) published in Brussels in 1946 and dedicated to intellectuals dispassionate about political and military matters²⁶. By including in it a statement: “My fault that after the third of May / Witos was tortured, / that there was Bereza and Brest...”²⁷ the poet brought forward not his own crimes as in the mid-1930s he was only in his teens so he could not had protested against those events. After listing various trespasses and crimes with which the history of mankind is filled, including the tragic events of the recent war, and wearing the mask of a Romantic poet, he asked: “Let’s protect man.”²⁸ In a book older by over fifty years entitled *Z Auszwicu do Belsen* (From Auschwitz to Belsen) the narrator (who can be identified as the author himself), a former KL prisoner, wearing a uniform and subjected to military discipline, spoke of his commander ironically:

[...] [he] is of those officers who in the 1930s charged at deputies in the Polish Sejm with sabres in their hands, who threw peasants and workers to the Brest [Brześć nad Bugiem] fortress, who established the concentration camp in Bereza Kartuska, and kept there “revolutionary individuals”, i.e. leftist. And me – still the son of an unemployed metalworker. I remember, I remember...”²⁹

In that same year as *Wina*, *Orka*, a Polish social-economic and farming periodical, published a short story by Józef Pogan, a writer of peasant pedigree, entitled *Wicek z Berezy nie wrócił*³⁰ (Wicek has not returned from Bereza). The title *Wicek Groch* was the protagonist of the text stylised to resemble a folk tale. He was a poor peasant farming somewhere by the Vistula; honest and hard-working, yet he and his family often suffered hunger due to not so much natural disasters as to the unjust social system (Groch unequivocally rejected his wife’s interpretation as God was the reason of all events). Because he often spilled his grievances to his neighbours, “politicising” so to speak, the protagonist was one night taken from his home by policemen, presumably from Bereza. Soon afterwards the wife went mad, while his neighbours not being extremely fond of Groch concluded that

25 Ibid., p. 32.

26 M. Pankowski, “Wina”, [in:] idem, *Pieśni pompejańskie*, R.-J. Stenuit, Brussels 1946, pp. 43–45.

27 Ibid., p. 43.

28 Ibid., p. 45.

29 M. Pankowski, *Z Auszwicu do Belsen. Przygody*, Czytelnik, Warsaw 2000, p. 74.

30 J. Pogan, “Wicek z Berezy nie wrócił”, *Orka* 1946, issue 10, pp. 4–5; issue 11, pp. 4–5; issue 12, pp. 4–7.

he got what he deserved: “let him suffer, the blabbermouth. All he ever did was to curse lords and priests, so Dear God punished him for that.”³¹ Bereza which was not discussed in the text nor the name, apart from the title, was never mentioned, fulfilled the role of a symbol of pre-WWII Poland as a country of social injustice.

Works devoted to Bereza, both documentaries and fiction, began to appear more and be more visible since 1949. Their origins and the way they functioned were mostly influenced by (that applies to the entire period of the so-called People’s Poland) ideology and policies, including the historical policy. Joanna Wawrzyniak indicated that immediately after the end of WWII, the management of the Polish Workers’ Party (Polska Partia Robotnicza) was keen on also including Sanation prisoners in the Union of Former Political Prisoners of Nazi Prisons and Concentration Camps (Polski Związek byłych Więźniów Politycznych Hitlerowskich Więzień i Obozów Koncentracyjnych). The underlying intention was to equate the persecution of communists during the interwar period with the persecutions people suffered during World War II. It was, according to the researcher, “one of the many methods for legitimising the Sanation government by equating the victims and the tormentors from Bereza Kartuska with the victims and the tormentors from Nazi camps.”³² A speech by president Bolesław Bierut of 16 November 1947 offered an important stimulus for creators in the form of the following postulate:

[...] the nation not only suffered and turned to ash in the rubble of the crematoriums [...]. [...] the nation has the right to pose their own requirements for creators, and one of the basic requirements is for the deeper current of a work, its objective, its intentions to be aligned with the needs of the society, not to cause doubt when we need zeal and trust in victory, not to apotheosise depression when the nation wants to live and act.³³

It was not long until the call brought about results. The number of works regarding German camps, quite significant immediately after WWII, decreased significantly during the period of intense Stalinisation of social life and socialist realism. Under the index entry of “Oświęcim”, the *Polish Literary Bibliography* for years 1952–1953 included only one entry. During the domination of socialist realism, in works which raised the topic of the camps, the numbers of which continued to decrease, martyrdom was being replaced with heroism, and by political (pro-

31 J. Pogan, “Wicek z Berezy nie wrócił”, *Orka* 1946, issue 12, p. 7.

32 J. Wawrzyniak, *ZBoWiD i pamięć drugiej wojny światowej 1949–1969*, Trio, Fundacja „Historia i Kultura”, Warsaw 2009, p. 98.

33 [B. Bierut], *O upowszechnienie kultury. Przemówienie Prezydenta Rzeczypospolitej Bolesława Bieruta na otwarciu radiostacji we Wrocławiu 16 listopada 1947*, Radiowy Instytut Wydawniczy, Warsaw 1948, pp. 18–19.

communist) protest. Writers and especially journalists began focussing not only on German camps and Bereza, but also on the operating at that time “fascist” and “imperialist” camps.

The most detailed depiction during the socialist realism period of the Confinement Centre in Bereza Kartuska, or rather its ideological formation and manipulation of reader expectations, was offered by *Za wolność i lud*, an outlet of the Society of Fighters for Freedom and Democracy (Związek Bojowników o Wolność i Demokrację). It was a simplified biased image, often with the intention to forge facts. In the periodical, according to Wawrzyniak,

The presentism of the image of martyrdom did not only consist of comparing prisoners to communist martyrs. The propaganda manipulation also entailed the use of identical notions in the descriptions of non-Nazi camps and prisons. Polish pre-WWII government was accused of cooperating with the Third Reich, i.e. Sanation prisons were equated to Hitler's camps. Bereza Kartuska was usually referenced as a symbol of the persecutions of communists during the interwar period.³⁴

It is worth quoting at least a few texts from the periodical. The article *Powstanie w Buchenwaldzie. Pod sztandarem internacjonalizmu*³⁵ (Under the banner of internationalism) emphasised the heroism of communist prisoners. In the case of a non-politically infused recollection by Samuel Willenberg, an escapee from a death camp, entitled *Treblinka w ogniu* (Treblinka up in flames), the editorial board superimposed on the text a slogan in red capital letters: “Away with Tito's agents of imperialism, spies and hirelings of war instigators.”³⁶ It was also typical to equate with Greek (intended for communists) and Yugoslavian (established by communists for communists – by the supporters of Tito for the supporters of Stalin) camps with German camps, and to abuse the term “death camps”. A study of the camp in the island of Makronisos was entitled *W greckim Dachau*³⁷ (At the Greek Dachau). An article entitled *Jura – grecki obóz śmierci* (Jura – Greek death camp) discussed a camp organised by “American imperialists and their Greek monarchy-fascist puppets,” which constituted “a continuation and a perfected version of Nazi death camps of the Dachau sort.”³⁸ In an article regarding a camp in Goli Otok run by “Tito's Gestapo”³⁹, Yugoslavia was depicted as a “land of terror,

34 J. Wawrzyniak, *ZBoWiD...*, p. 132.

35 T. Witek, “Powstanie w Buchenwaldzie. Pod sztandarem internacjonalizmu”, *Za wolność i lud* 1950, issue 7, pp. 12–13, 22.

36 S. Willenberg, “Treblinka w ogniu”, *Za wolność i lud* 1950, issue 7, pp. 16–17.

37 (K.), “W greckim Dachau”, *Za wolność i lud* 1950, issue 4, p. 9.

38 A. Spiliotis, “Jura – grecki obóz śmierci”, *Za wolność i lud* 1953, issue 2, p. 20.

39 N. Sandułowicz, “Goli Otok. Wyspa śmierci”, *Za wolność i lud* 1953, issue 4, p. 21.

prisons, concentration camps, Gestapo tortures, and gallows.⁴⁰ The readers could learn from it that due to excessive labour, hunger and beating, dozens of people died in Goli Otok daily. Communists interned there were given the (deceitful) name of Yugoslavian patriots. There is one more thing worth noting. The author of the text claimed that Tito's politicians who travelled to the United States visited American prisons and emulated the practices of "the butchers of the island of Koje-do."⁴¹ Another article published in *Za wolność i lud* reported on the "killings by Americans on defenceless Korean and Chinese POWs in the islands of Koje-do and Cheju-do, in Busan, and in other camps", as well as on the massacre of Chinese and Korean POWs of 14 December 1952 in the camp on the island of Pongam-do, for which, according to the article, "the Nazi tormentors from Oświęcim and Buchenwald could take credit just as well."⁴² Interestingly enough, during the Korean War, Koje-do was equalled to Auschwitz not only in the press, but also in Polish poetry.⁴³ An emphatic example of that was a narrative poem by Witold Wirpsza entitled *Dziennik Kożedo*⁴⁴ [Koje-do journal]. The poet felt the need to write the poem upon seeing the still standing guard towers of a former Nazi camp in Police near Szczecin. Readers could have perceived those as a relic of a world which will never come back, yet, as the poet warned: "Again the thug / Erected towers in the island of Koje-do."⁴⁵

Allow me to discuss similar manipulations regarding Bereza introduced in *Za wolność i lud*. The earliest text related to it was a 1949 article by Roman Nawrocki entitled *Od agenta "ochrony" do komendanta Berezy*⁴⁶ (From an Okhrana agent to the commandant of Bereza), in which the main character was Józef Kamala-Kurhański, a prisoner of Auschwitz, a former commandant of Bereza (termed in the article as Sanation's "Lagerfuehrer"), and before that an officer of tsar's "Okhrana", which, in Nawrocki's argument, was the "role model for 'Gestapo'."⁴⁷ Nawrocki emphasised that the "concentration camp in Bereza Kartuska" was established just as illegally as the Nazi concentration camps, and it was, similarly

40 Ibid.

41 Ibid.

42 Obserwator, "Punkt obserwacyjny", *Za wolność i lud* 1953, issue 1, p. 19.

43 Vide F. Przytułski, "Druga wojna światowa, okupacja niemiecka i zagrożenie wojenne w propagandzie prasowej Polski Ludowej (1948–1989)", *Przegląd Historyczno-Wojskowy* 2012, issue 3, p. 71.

44 W. Wirpsza, *Dziennik Kożedo*, Wydawnictwo Ministerstwa Obrony Narodowej, Warsaw 1952.

45 Ibid., p. 7.

46 R. Nawrocki, "Od agenta 'ochrony' do komendanta Berezy", *Za wolność i lud* 1949, issue 6, p. 10.

47 It is unclear whether Kamala-Kurhański was actually an Okhrana agent. What is known is that before 1914 he served in the Russian police in the area of Vistula Land – vide B. Piętka, *Józef Kamala-Kurhański – komendant Berezy Kartuskiej i więzień KL Auschwitz*, <https://bohdanpietka.wordpress.com/2014/07/08/jozef-kamala-kurhanski-komendant-berezy-kartuskiej-i-wiezien-kl-auschwitz/> [accessed on: 22.03.2018].

to Nazi camps, intended “for communists, for leftist activists, and for progressive people” (which was true only to some extent, so as a whole it was untrue). He did not mention anything about Jews or Jehovah Witnesses in relation to Nazi camps, nor about Polish and Ukrainian nationalists. The fortunes of Kamala-Kurhański were in the article partly an example of an ironic series of events, but mostly a symbol of all systems of social injustice, which should meet the punishment they deserved: annihilation.⁴⁸

Not only authors displayed inventiveness. The editors of *Za wolność i lud* inserted *Za drutami Berezzy*⁴⁹ (Behind the wires of Bereza), a recollection of Piotr Gazdajka, between texts regarding Nazi camps thus equalling the Bereza camp with Nazi camps. In fact, Gazdajka himself suggested that by indicating that the camp in Bereza was modelled after German camps, and by adding that some differences, such as night inspections, mock executions or beating on the heels were “proof that the Polish students of Himmler, and their master Kostek Biernacki were quick learners, and they were able to add new ideas.”⁵⁰ In the conclusion, Gazdajka called for the navy blue policemen who tormented and persecuted “Polish anti-fascists” to be punished; he asked where the “famed oppressor Markowski, and his later deputy Pytel”⁵¹ were. Nota bene, the same issue, i.e. of the responsibility for the crimes, was not much later raised by Zygmunt Byczyński in *Wiadomości* published abroad. He stated that crimes against humanity should be treated and judged the same way –

[...] regardless whether they are committed by a German or a Pole. The oppressors from Oświęcim and Dachau, if only they were within reach, they were punished.

48 Roman Nawrocki made a reservation in the article that Kamala-Kurhański was not killed by former Bereza internees (idem, “Od agenta...”, p. 10), whereas Bohdan Piętka of the Auschwitz-Birkenau State Museum wrote: “Based on an account by Czesław Sułkowski [...] in the autumn of 1941 Kamala-Kurhański was lynched by fellow internees in front of the entrance to Block 19 in the parent camp of KL Auschwitz I. ‘He was tortured,’ Sułkowski reported, ‘his head smashed into a high pile of snow, until he stopped moving. The tormentors included block leaders, room leaders, and some other older internees.’ Leon Wiczorek, a communist activist and a former Bereza internee, interned for a short time in 1944 as a police prisoner at block 11 of the parent camp of KL Auschwitz I, stated that Kamala-Kurhański was murdered by internees/German communists, when they found out he was the commandant of Bereza Kartuska. Wiczorek did not, however, witness the event; he only heard about it from other internees at KL Auschwitz. Therefore, one should assume that throughout his nine-month internment at KL Auschwitz Józef Kamala-Kurhański was abused by fellow internees in retaliation for his activities at Bereza Kartuska” (idem, *Józef Kamala-Kurhański...*).

49 P. Gazdajka, “Za drutami Berezzy”, *Za wolność i lud* 1951, issue 6, pp. 14–15.

50 Ibid., p. 15.

51 Ibid.

Unfortunately, the criminals and degenerates from Bereza avoided the punishments they deserved, because even if they died in the recent war, it was not for that what they had done in Bereza.⁵²

Earlier, I discussed the death of Kamala-Kurhański in Auschwitz, so allow me to add that Stanisław Markowski, undoubtedly a sadist, was killed in Mednoye by Soviets.⁵³

An accusation against Sanation and mostly an idealisation of communists was included in a recollection by Leonard Borkowicz entitled *Bereza szkołą walki*⁵⁴ (Bereza as the school of the struggle). Three arguments were emphasised in it the most. Firstly, that Bereza Kartuska constituted “a shameful stain in the history of the fascist regime in Poland.”⁵⁵ Secondly, the methods used against communists at the camp failed completely (instead of breaking them, Bereza made them stronger). Thirdly, in 1939, communists rushed from prisons and Bereza “to join the ranks of the units fighting against the Nazi invasion.”⁵⁶ The second and the third arguments were untrue, just as any generalisation is (while the first one, considering the phrase “fascist regime”, is debatable). In the recollections of Bereza communists, there are remarks stating that some comrades unable to endure the camp discipline any more, signed pledges of loyalty (at the same time they downplayed the significance of the “pledgers” within the ranks of the movement).⁵⁷ Finally, apart from communists who did try to join the ranks of Polish units fighting against the Wehrmacht, there were also, and there is much evidence to corroborate that, enthusiasts and sympathisers of the “liberating” Red Army.

Similar notes as in the texts printed in *Za wolność i lud*, to which one should add the documentary short stories by Waław Świdorski of 1957 entitled *Pierwsze dni w Berezie* (First days at Bereza) and *Majowe wspomnienia z Berezy*⁵⁸ (May recollections from Bereza), resonated in a 1955 recollective book by Jan Wójcik, before

52 Z. Byczyński, “Zbrodnia Berezy. Do redaktora ‘Wiadomości’”, *Wiadomości* [London] 1956, issue 17, p. 6.

53 Vide *Miednoje. Księga Cmentarna Polskiego Cmentarza Wojennego*, developed by a team led by G. Jakubowski, vol. 2, Rada Ochrony Pamięci Walk i Męczeństwa, Warsaw 2006, p. 550.

54 L. Borkowicz, “Bereza szkołą walki”, *Za wolność i lud* 1952, issue 6, pp. 8–9.

55 *Ibid.*, p. 9.

56 *Ibid.*

57 Cf.: “Those who signed the pledges were of minor importance in the workers’ movement. One of the better known among the pledgers was Wall from Warsaw, a member of the intelligentsia” (M. Bartz, *Przeżycia Bereziaka...*, p. 32).

58 W. Świdorski, “Pierwsze dni w Berezie”, *Za wolność i lud* 1957, issue 2, pp. 5–7 (underneath the text, there is a note: “Fragment of a larger whole on Bereza Kartuska entitled *Miejsce odosobnienia*”; the volume has never been published); W. Świdorski, “Majowe wspomnienia z Berezy”, *Za wolność i lud* 1957, issue 5, pp. 5–6.

WWII a member of the Communist Party of Western Ukraine (Komunistyczna Partia Zachodniej Ukrainy, KPZU) and a Bereza internee, entitled *Poszedłbym tą samą drogą*⁵⁹ (I would have gone the same path). It was a classic autobiography of a communist presented on the backdrop of “the maturation of the political awareness of [rural] proletariat.”⁶⁰ It included fragments regarding the author’s internment at Bereza, describing the terror to which communists were subjected: verbal abuse, beating, and forcing pointless labour. It also included a comparison which was in line with the spirit of the times: “These Hitler’s pawns strived to match the SS, diligently making sure Bereza was no different from Hitler’s camps in Germany.”⁶¹ He also mentioned the previously discussed sadists like Pytel and Nadolski, he discussed the murder of Germanicki [i.e. Abram Germaniski – note by A.M.] and [Aleksander] Mozyrko, he quoted songs developed at the camp which included, which he emphasised, not as much words and music, as the “will and fervour of the party, the longing and the strength of each of us.”⁶² He eventually stated that what was most important at Bereza was to “keep a strong soul underneath the wounded body, keep the revolutionary resistance under the mask of obedient performance of orders.”⁶³ He succeeded; few comrades “broke down.”⁶⁴

The “thaw” of the mid-1950s and the gradual removal of socialist realism as the official creative method brought about relatively little change in terms of shaping the image of the Confinement Centre. The main reason for that was persistent strong ideological entanglement of the topic. Significantly enough, the experience of the internment at Bereza constituted for the members of the Polish United Workers’ Party (Polska Zjednoczona Partia Robotnicza, PZPR) virtually a guarantee of admittance to the party echelon⁶⁵, therefore, Bereza could not disappear or lose its value as a literary or journalistic theme. Having suppressed in the social consciousness (of the citizens of the PRL) the fact that Bereza was the place of internment of not only communists, the camp was sentenced to live on – an incessantly socialist realist, i.e. simplified, life. Socialist realism stopped being the official creative method around 1956, yet it persevered as an unofficial method

59 J. Wójcik, *Poszedłbym tą samą drogą*, Wydawnictwo Ministerstwa Obrony Narodowej, Warsaw 1955 (2nd edition extended: Książka i Wiedza, Warsaw 1973). In the remainder of the article I shall refer to the first printed version.

60 J. Wójcik, *Poszedłbym tą samą drogą*, pp. 238–239.

61 *Ibid.*, pp. 207–208.

62 *Ibid.*, p. 215.

63 *Ibid.*, pp. 213–214.

64 *Ibid.*, p. 221.

65 Vide I. Polit, *Miejsce odosobnienia...*, p. 218. Cf. the telling sentence (call) concluding the recollections of Maksymilian Bartz of 1945: “may Bereza brothers take the lead positions in the fight for the unity of our peoples, in the fight for a fortunate and democratic Republic of Poland” (*idem, Przechylenia Bereziaka...*, p. 41).

all until 1989, labelled by Marxist critics as socialist literature, and performed by second-class opportunistic creators.⁶⁶ Its resilience was visible in works raising the topic of Bereza, both works of fiction and works located on the division line between documentaries and belles lettres.

Let me begin with a discussion of Leon Pasternak's works. I have already devoted some consideration to those in the first part of this article. Now I am returning to them. Jan Brzoza, before WWII a member of the Przedmieście Literary Group (Zespół Literacki "Przedmieście"), thus recalled a "meeting of intellectuals" that took place in 1939 in the Soviet-occupied Lviv:

Two Bereza internees spoke, the recently liberated Leon Pasternak and Aleksander Hawryluk. I saw those men and I was shocked. I had never seen such emaciated and exhausted people in my life. Pasternak, being held up by colleagues, thanked the Soviet authorities for liberating him and hundreds of his fellow internees.⁶⁷

Not much later in that same year, Pasternak wrote a play entitled *Bereza*. It was, actually, rejected by the State Polish Dramatic Theatre in Lviv (Państwowy Polski Teatr Dramatyczny) – I could not establish the reasons why it was rejected – but it most probably was staged and discussed upon during an event at the Writers Club in Lviv (Klub Pisarzy we Lwowie) on 18 October 1940. What is certain, then, is that in November 1940 and January 1941 its fragments, fulfilled by Erwin Axer (according to some sources: directed by Aleksander Bardini) were broadcast by the Lviv radio. The play's typescript was lost during World War II.⁶⁸

In a 1958 review of *Bereza* recollections by Michał Mirski entitled *...biegiem marsz!* (Double time, march!), which I shall discuss later on, Pasternak posited that the only literary trace of the former's "Bereza experiences" was a short story entitled *Jestem* (Present!) included in a volume entitled *Dzień zapłaty*⁶⁹ (Day of retribution). That note was not exact, most of all because during World War II and immediately after it ended he wrote, which I have mentioned in the first part of this article, a few poems with the motif of Bereza. Let us focus on *Dzień zapłaty*.

⁶⁶ Vide K. Krasuski, "Realizmu socjalistycznego śmierć i życie pośmiertne", [in:] *Słownik realizmu socjalistycznego*, Z. Łapiński, W. Tomasiak (eds.), Universitas, Krakow 2004, pp. 271–278.

⁶⁷ J. Brzoza, *Moje przygody literackie*, Śląsk, Katowice 1967, p. 88.

⁶⁸ Vide L. Pasternak, "Bereza" [note on having written the play], *Sztandar Wolności* 1940, issue 23, p. 4; [author not credited], "Wieczór autorski", *Czerwony Sztandar* 1940, issue 327, p. 6; L. Pasternak, "Nareszcie książka o Berezie", *Nowe Drogi* 1958, issue 11, p. 162; M. Ingłot, *Polska kultura literacka Lwowa...*, p. 169, 191.

⁶⁹ L. Pasternak, *Nareszcie książka o Berezie*, p. 162.

It consisted seven texts organised chronologically.⁷⁰ The first six short stories formed a series, while the seventh, entitled *Rudy, graj dalej!* (Keep playing, Rudy!), used the topic, still valid in 1956, though one which was approached at that time only by authors eagerly serving the government, of the field trip of a “progressive writer” Paweł Drozdowicz to a glass factory, which ended in a success. The text, just as the series which preceded it, constituted a model application of the socialist realism doctrine.⁷¹ The story of the series was defined by the fortunes of Jacek Sawa, a young communist fighting Sanation. It covered the period from 1930 to 17 September 1939. In the first two short stories, it took place in a community of Polish and Ukrainian communists, members of the KPZU. The first short story entitled *Gorące życie* (Fervent life) depicted their “work” in Lviv: hanging up posters, circulating samizdat, installing illegal printing shops, and encounters with the police; all that against the backdrop of workers’ protests, suppressed ruthlessly by the police. In the second one entitled *Wyklęty* (The damned) the narrator recalled a document of 15 February 1937 lifting police supervision over Sawa related to his recent internment at Bereza. The protagonist travelled to, with the approval of the authorities, Brzeżany (Berezhany), where he continued his revolutionary activities, and where he fell in love with comrade Olga, a young Ukrainian girl. After he had been caught by the police and transported to Tarnopol (Ternopil) he learnt that he would be sent to Bereza Kartuska. The previously mentioned short story *Jestem* discussed the topic of the internment at the confinement centre.

It is a strictly literary text, a work of fiction, just like the other short stories included in the volume. In it, the author used third-person narration, omniscient, personalising it locally by using free indirect speech. The dramatic nature of the events and situations described in it was amplified by the shortened time perspective manifesting itself in reporting both events and the protagonist’s thoughts: “Several peasant wagons are riding towards the town. Sawa and the policeman are stopping”⁷²; “The same high wall, supplemented at the top with complex barbed wire entanglements. Nothing changed through that time. What was there supposed to change? He has just left it.”⁷³ The main advantage of the text is the description of the camp reality, in line with the descriptions in recollective texts. The opening sentence: “The road to the camp from the admission office leads through

⁷⁰ L. Pasternak, *Dzień zapłaty*, Wydawnictwo Ministerstwa Obrony Narodowej, Warsaw 1956. The “Jestem” short story covers pages 66–77.

⁷¹ Jerzy Kwiatkowski assessed *Dzień zapłaty*, and it would be difficult to disagree with him, as a mediocre book indicating that its major advantage was an “uncompromising passion of a revolutionary typical for all of Pasternak’s works” (idem, “Autentyzmy”, *Życie Literackie* 1956, issue 12, p. 5).

⁷² L. Pasternak, “Jestem”, p. 66.

⁷³ *Ibid.*, pp. 66–67.

an old park, the paths of which lead to a road”⁷⁴ if included in a documentary, it could be considered as true. It is not surprising, then, that *Jestem* was reprinted in *Bereziacy*, which was announced by the editorial board headed by Pasternak as a recollective volume⁷⁵. The short story described the so-called gymnastics, labour, beating internees, and solitary confinement. The narrator offered (while the author explained) the names of some of the guards. He also mentioned commandant Kamala-Kurhański.⁷⁶ The commentary did not always deviate from reality: “The word ‘arrested’ is the official term used towards the prisoners.”⁷⁷ The ideological message of the short story was compliant with the recollections of communists, the most committed of them. Pasternak presented (idealised by transforming it into a general truth) the steadfastness of the communists interned at Bereza, and the forging of their world view. The devices he used towards that end could hardly be considered as sophisticated. The text’s story focussed on the “Bereza torment”⁷⁸, which began with the ritual of the admission to the camp (with the obligatory beating of newcomers) and concluded with the agony of the time spent in solitary confinement. The dramatic nature of the text which I indicated earlier did not rely on the protagonist’s internal dilemmas. He simply had none: “No, they won’t break him. They didn’t break him then, they won’t break him now.”⁷⁹ Battered immediately upon arrival, standing in the so-called admission room, he heard a whisper: “... hold on in there... comrade...”⁸⁰ And he refused to sign the pledge of loyalty.

Its fragment most saturated with literariness is the description of Sawa’s hallucinations while in solitary confinement. In the first one, Olga, his love, revealed to him the name of the traitor who caused his arrest. In the second one, Sawa as an old disabled partially blind professor went to a piano concert of his student having bought the ticket with his last penny. The student recognised him. At that point he, embarrassed, was treated with great honours. He was led to the banquet room. Everyone was eating but the professor could not reach the bread because his arms were limp. The room suddenly changed into a shop where “he manages to get one loaf off the shelf but in doing so he knocks other loafs, they fall down crashing into the floor, crashing incessantly, thundering, rumbling...”⁸¹ Reality penetrated his visions: a guard kicked on the door.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 66.

⁷⁵ L. Pasternak, “Jestem”, [in:] *Bereziacy*, pp. 176–183; “Od kolegium redakcyjnego” (in: *ibid.*, pp. 5–7).

⁷⁶ The first printed version included an error: Kemala-Kurhański.

⁷⁷ L. Pasternak, “Jestem”, p. 69.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 67.

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 68.

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 71.

⁸¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 76–77.

In the morning, when the first ray of sunlight shines through a crack in the wall into solitary, [Sawa] is already sitting with his back against the wall talking to himself in lowered voice:

I am. I will endure somehow... I will endure...⁸²

Thus, the short story unequivocally and emphatically concluded. His dream caused by the sense of hunger constituting a natural reaction of the organism proved partly an attempt to fool his instinct, but mostly a projection of a (according to the subtitle of the second short story in the collection) “cursed” person. Within its ideological layer the dream constituted a confirmation of the arguments of communists who fought to build a better world, and through whom (which the readers should add themselves) it was just being realised.

The actions of the following three short stories occurred already after Germany invaded Poland. In the first one entitled *Kierunek Warszawa* (Direction: Warsaw), Sawa together with other former internees of the No. 24 Penal Mobile Labour Centre, established in Polesia marshes, to which the narrator referred as a camp though it did not resemble Bereza⁸³, set off to defend besieged Warsaw. In the next one entitled *Słownik* (The Dictionary), Sawa having been suspected by a smartly dressed (which in this case was mostly a mark of her social status) woman of being a spy, he was arrested by the gendarmerie. To his despair he not only did not have any documents on him, but he also was found carrying a Polish-German dictionary. However, he was eventually released. In the last short story with the telling title of *Pierwsza konna* (The First Cavalry), which brings to mind the Bolshevik formation which participated in the 1920 campaign against Poland, the protagonist realised, in mid-September 1939, that the defeat was total. The conclusion of the short story just like of the entire series satisfied the enforced in the PRL perception of the September failure, its causes and consequences. The protagonist set off east, towards the Polish-Soviet border:

The only thing he, a communist and a former political prisoner, could had expected from fascists, and Nazis on top of that, was to be killed. A best-case scenario would had been a concentration camp like Dachau, descriptions of which sometimes

⁸² Ibid., p. 77.

⁸³ The first Penal Mobile Labour Centres (Karne Ruchove Ośrodki Pracy) were established in 1936. They were organised near prisons, mainly in eastern lands. They operated on a seasonal basis, from April to November. They received convicts sentenced to short-term penalties. They performed drainage works, and road construction and maintenance works – vide M. Rodak, “Praca więźniów w Drugiej Rzeczypospolitej na przykładzie więzienia karnego ‘Mokotów’ w Warszawie”, [in:] *Praca i społeczeństwo Drugiej Rzeczypospolitej. Zbiór studiów*, W. Mędrzecki, C. Leszczyńska (eds.), Instytut Historii PAN, Warsaw 2014, pp. 297–298.

made their way to the pages of semi-legal leftist press. He knew their methods from the stories told by his comrades who on behalf of the party visited Germany.⁸⁴

Watching the fleeing “top echelon Sanation” he saw the “traitorous army”.⁸⁵ The left battlefield where, as always, the cheated nation remains, there entered the “Krasnaya Armiya soldats”, whom Sawa welcomed with joy, and who reminded him of the Budyonny’s first cavalry army. The short story (and the entire series) concluded in the words: “Whatever awaited him in the future – the payback day has come.”⁸⁶

Pasternak, benefiting from the new socio-political reality, raised once again the theme of Bereza in a 1965 satirical comedy entitled *Album*⁸⁷. Its protagonist, a director of some undefined Institution in which one could see the metaphor of the People’s Poland, a former Bereza internee (the head accountant was another character of the drama who had also been interned at Bereza), thus spoke to a press clerk, a young man:

Bars? In Bereza? C’mon, what are you talking about? And are scribbling there all the time? I beg your pardon, Skalski, but you know squat about all that; that’s how much you can write. Only someone who experienced that could know and write about it, or someone in one hundred years. Some academic who will be able to approach it coolly⁸⁸.

It should be added that the motif of Bereza fulfilled a similar, auxiliary yet telling function in a play published eight years earlier by Roman Brandstaetter entitled *Milczenie* (Silence), in which he attempted to raise the topic of Stalinism.⁸⁹ In it, Bereza was referenced as the protagonist’s, a communist activist and a man of letters, formative experience, just as Sanation prisons, Nazi Pawiak and Auschwitz. Having crossed that painful road, he became the victim of a new reality – the story takes place in 1951 – which destroyed him both as a man of letters, who forced himself to remain quiet, and as a man of ideals depriving him of his faith in the future. The protagonist committed suicide. Clearly, Bereza was not in every text an experience which hardened the protagonist, or, in the case of memoirs, the author.

⁸⁴ L. Pasternak, “Pierwsza konna”, [in:] idem, *Dzień zapłaty*, pp. 128–129.

⁸⁵ Ibid., p. 129.

⁸⁶ Ibid., p. 137.

⁸⁷ L. Pasternak, “Album”, *Dialog* 1965, issue 1, pp. 5–32.

⁸⁸ Ibid., p. 6.

⁸⁹ R. Brandstaetter, *Milczenie. Dramat w trzech aktach*, Państwowy Instytut Wydawniczy, Warsaw 1957.

It appeared a somewhat painful, but mostly a hardening factor in 1958 fictionalised recollections by Michał Mirski (actually Mojsze Hersz Tabacznik), a former Bereza internee, entitled *...biegiem marsz*⁹⁰. An indication of their fictionalisation was the evident in some sections omniscience manifested by, e.g. revealing the thoughts of Bereza guards. When compared to earlier works written by communists, *...biegiem marsz!* seemed somewhat new. Mirski warned his readers that if what they sought were macabre sights, well exposed in the short stories by Waław Świdorski or the recollections of Stanisław Gębala⁹¹, they might feel disappointed. Bereza, the author stated,

[...] was not a Nazi death camp. It was the result of the Nazi intentions of Sanation rulers, and their limited capabilities. Bereza was full of life, struggle, and humour. Yes, humour. Bereza did not only result in broken bones; it was also a place where true character was forged. The camp in Bereza Kartuska is a page in Poland's modern history where, on the one hand, Sanation recorded their disgrace, while, on the other, the Communist Party of Poland [Komunistyczna Partia Polski, KPP – note by A.M.] drew the fortitude of their sons, and the vitality of the Polish working class.⁹²

I have already mentioned how Bereza was recalled as the forge of true character by Leonard Borkowicz. A similar elevating approach could be found in the recollections of Polish and Ukrainian nationalists.⁹³ The new element offered by Mirski in his narration, then, was the (factually justified) abandonment of the use of the term of “death camp” towards Bereza. The fact of emphasising humour and not martyrdom may seem surprising or even debatable as Bereza internees, not only communists, seldom had anything to laugh about. Mirski most probably shared the intentions of Ludwik Rajewski, a former prisoner of Auschwitz and a member of the camp underground, who in a book entitled *Ruch oporu w polskiej literaturze obozowej* (The resistance in Polish camp literature), having brought forward communists among the members of the underground in German KLs, focussed on offering proof of the resistance of the internees, thus supplementing (or modifying) the dominant image in earlier writings of the internees as martyrs⁹⁴. Mirski wrote:

90 M. Mirski, *...biegiem marsz!*, Książka i Wiedza, Warsaw 1958.

91 S. Gębala, “1 maja i Bereza Kartuska”, *Życie Literackie* 1965, issue 18, pp. 8–9.

92 M. Mirski, *...biegiem marsz!*, p. 5.

93 Cf. e.g. “Those not even two hundred nationalists [members of the Organisation of Ukrainian Nationalists – note by A.M.] formed such a morally tight block that any attempt at ‘re-educating’ them by the camp authorities had to fall flat” (E. Wreciona, “Bereza Kartuska [!] z innej strony”, trans. J. Łobodowski, *Kultura* [Paris] 1950, issue 4, p. 117).

94 L. Rajewski, *Ruch oporu w polskiej literaturze obozowej*, Ludowa Spółdzielnia Wydawnicza, Warsaw 1971.

Previous recollections from Bereza, and there were very few of those, usually emphasised the grim side of the life of the internees: their torment, suffering, and the tortures used against them. However, focussing on only that side of their life does not reflect the whole reality, leaving out the source of the moral and the physical strength of Berezers, and it impoverished the image of the whole.⁹⁵

Other qualities of ...*biegiem marsz!* also made it exceptional when compared to other recollections by communists. It indicated, though it was not the only one to do so, that not all camp guards were degenerate. Of course, Bereza had no shortage of sadists. Mirski described some of them (e.g. Nadolski shouting in a voice “almost identical to the shouts of SS men”⁹⁶), but he also mentioned Królikowski, who was punished by the camp authorities for being too lenient towards the internees, and Małecki, a sadist who changed into a human being.⁹⁷ In Mirski’s recollections, communists were first of all rebels, who did not easily yield to oppression, and who used passive resistance. He continued:

At Bereza, there was a persistent fierce and incessant struggle between violence, bare flagrant physical strength of Sanation’s police apparatus, and the spirit, ideology and the awareness of the members of the Communist Party of Poland. Our bodies were the field of the struggle. They were exposed to the flames to save our spirits, our communist dignity.⁹⁸

Significantly enough, the book included few such clichés, especially when compared to the texts published in *Za wolność i lud*. What it did include were pieces of information which one would be hard pressed to find in texts published during the Stalinist period. For example, having stated that the news reported by the camp authorities to communist internees on the execution of Tuchaczewski and other generals of the Red Army caused “no doubts” in the latter, the author added that, years later, after Stalin had died, viewing the matter already as former internees, they were more objective seeing the truth “in its whole terror and atrocity.”⁹⁹ Mirski

⁹⁵ M. Mirski, ...*biegiem marsz!*, p. 117. Humour as a form of the internees’ self-defence was also mentioned by Leonard Borkowicz (idem, “Okruchy wspomnień”, [in:] *Bereziacy*, p. 274).

⁹⁶ M. Mirski, ...*biegiem marsz!*, p. 86.

⁹⁷ Decent policemen were also mentioned, as I have already indicated, by Bartz. He wrote: “Lewatyński belonged to those few policemen who did not use beating. He was very helpful to us, and thanks to him many of us had medicine, white bread for the sick, tobacco, and newspapers. Szykowny, Hasko and Wolica also peddled some products” (idem, *Przeżycia Bereziaka...*, p. 37).

⁹⁸ M. Mirski, ...*biegiem marsz!*, p. 45.

⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 225–226. A clear expression of the sentiment (and the ideological indoctrination) of a communist internee upon hearing of Stalin’s purge was included in Bartz’s brochure of 1945: “Sir Kamala Kurchański [!] wanted to educate us reporting to us the course of the trials

also noticed that the internees consisted not only of communists, yet he remained silent about Ukrainian nationalists, and he sneeringly reported on the arrival of the members of the National Radical Camp (Obóz Narodowo-Radykalny, ONR) at the camp: "Apparently, the Sanation-nationalistic family had a huge falling out since they sent their dear sons, the fighters for the explicitly Nazi methods of governing the country, to Bereza."¹⁰⁰ (Obviously, he failed to mention anything about the communists' support for Piłsudski in 1926). When discussing the matter of fingering, he stated that mostly "common" internees (i.e. criminals) fingered other internees, as well as members of the ONR.¹⁰¹ He referred to both as "snitches". He continued that among communists, however, there were only "pledgers" – "terrorised cowards", and "the strays in our midst."¹⁰²

The image of Bereza presented by Mirski, surely non-objective, was broader, fuller than that presented in earlier texts by communists. It would be difficult to guess how much that was thanks to the author, and how much to the post-thaw mitigation of the ideological (Stalinist) pressure. Either way, the author maintained the thesis on the relationship between Sanation Poland and Nazi Germany emphasising the traces of Hitler's camps on which Bereza was modelled, and he mentioned, in the conclusion, a navy blue policeman who, after Warsaw was seized by the Nazis, wanted to report him thus proving his zeal in exterminating communists.¹⁰³ An even broader image of Bereza, one could even say panoramic, was presented in a collective book entitled *Bereziacy* (Berezers) published in 1965.

It was a work of various authors, and a manifestation of the PRL's historical policy, or the applicable party narrative, to be precise. *Bereziacy* was a selection from many accounts that were received by the Party History Unit at the Central Committee of PZPR in response to the call of the "publishing and press unit at the Berezers' commission."¹⁰⁴ The authors almost entirely consisted communists (members of the Communist Party of Poland, the Communist Party of Western Ukraine and the Communist Party of Western Belarus [Komunistyczna Partia Zachodniej Białorusi, KPZB] – Poles, Polish Jews, Ukrainians, Belarusians, and Lithuanians); there were only a few members of the Polish Socialist Party (Polska Partia Socjalistyczna, PPS): Lucjan Motyka and Włodzimierz Stankiewicz, the Bund, and union

of the Nazi supporters, with whom the Soviet court was dealing" (idem, *Przeżycia Bereziaka...*, pp. 40–41).

¹⁰⁰ M. Mirski, *...biegiem marsz!*, p. 90.

¹⁰¹ *Ibid.*, p. 189.

¹⁰² *Ibid.*, pp. 108, 205–206. Further in the recollections there appeared a puzzling remark, tough: "it would seem that once our common idea became victorious, Berezers would come even closer together. Something else happened instead. Some of them became impoverished lacking the emotional load of a communist." (*ibid.*, p. 253).

¹⁰³ *Ibid.*, p. 355.

¹⁰⁴ "Od kolegium redakcyjnego", [in:] *Bereziacy*, pp. 5–6.

activists. National radicals were left out entirely. Władysław Ryncarz, a member of the People's Party (Stronnictwo Ludowe, SL) wrote with reverence about communists. Józef Soroka, removed from the People's Party and from the Wici Union of the Rural Youth of the Republic of Poland (Związek Młodzieży Wiejskiej RP „Wici”), sympathised with communists. According to the introduction headed as *Od kolegium redakcyjnego* (From the Editors) (editors' board was headed by Leon Pasternak, while Michał Mirski was one of its members) in Bereza internees “mainly [included] communists, but also leftist members of the PPS, radicals of the peasant movement, and non-partisan anti-fascists.”¹⁰⁵ Polish national radicals and Ukrainian nationalists were not mentioned at all (only some minor recollections included in the collection referenced them). It is not surprising as the communists considered the former as national-fascists interned due to “internal intrigues within the fascist movement in Poland”¹⁰⁶, while the latter as “Ukrainian fascists.”¹⁰⁷ *Bereziacy* carried undeniable cognitive advantages, particularly regarding camp operations and the fortunes of the internees. Sadly though, they were diminished by ideological clichés, e.g. the following one included in Henryk Zołotow's recollections: “Communists were the only internees at the camp who did not steal from anyone, neither their own, nor others. Not only did they not steal, but they also shared bread with their comrades leaving solitary confinement to feed them a bit.”¹⁰⁸ Nota bene, many examples of similar idealisations of prisoners who belonged to the same group as the author of an account could be found in literature regarding both Nazi and Soviet camps.

Three years after the publication of *Bereziacy*, on 17 February 1968 Teatr Powszechny in Łódź staged a play with the same title with a subtitle of *Reportaż sceniczny* (Stage report). The script of the play, based on the recollections included in the book¹⁰⁹, was written by Karol Obidniak, a former internee of a Spanish Fran-

105 Ibid., p. 7.

106 Vide [author not credited], “Znieść obóz koncentracyjny w Berezie Kartuskiej!”, *Czerwona Pomoc* 1935, issue 3, p. 21.

107 L. Leblang, “Transport z ‘Brygidek’”, [in:] *Bereziacy*, p. 53.

108 H. Zołotow, “Chleb”, [in:] *Bereziacy*, p. 126. In contrast (or rather to highlight the difficulty in establishing “what it was really like”, and the bias in the recollections of the internees representing specific political groups), it is worth quoting a statement probably regarding Zołotow made by a Ukrainian nationalist: “I remember a communist, an intellectual, I think it was the poet Zołotow from Warsaw. It is possible that with a nagant in his hand and a five-pointed star on his hat he would have been completely different, but at Bereza he behaved like an ethical freak. Even his party comrades sighed a sigh of relief when he was taken from Bereza to a prison to serve his sentence.” (E. Wreciona, “Bereza Kartuzka...”, pp. 118–119). The “poet” determiner probably resulted from the fact that before WWII Zołotow was a member of the Jewish Writers and Journalists Union [Związek Literatów i Dziennikarzy Żydowskich] – vide [author not credited], “Henryk Zołotow”, *Zeszyty Prasoznawcze* 1965, issue 2, pp. 137–138.

109 Vide J. Kłossowicz, “Wstęp do dramatu”, *Polityka* 1968, issue 16, p. 6.

coist concentration camp in Miranda de Ebro.¹¹⁰ It was prepared for the stage by Roman Sykała. Though the text of the play has not survived¹¹¹, there is proof of its reception: reviews of the play staged by Teatr Powszechny at their own location and, in May of the same year, during the 9th Wrocław Theatre Festival.

The main story of the play, or rather the theatre work, unfolds in a room of the Bereza camp, occupied by communist internees, who are abused both physically and mentally. A counterpoint to that plot is offered in scenes which present a web of political intrigues weaved in ministry offices and in the Sejm, which focus on the “confinement centre” intended as the solution to the problem of communism, which worries the government.¹¹² The play’s climax is a scene where the camp authorities notify the internees that the KPP has been dissolved. The dilemmas, even tragedy, suffered by some of them was accompanied by the will to continue fighting and remain true to the communist ideal: “No means can break anyone.”¹¹³ The play concludes with a thunder of bomb explosions: “Communists are drawing their weapons. They are setting off to fight the mutual enemy of the Homeland and humanity.”¹¹⁴ Reviewers remained restrained, if you will, in reviewing the stage report. One reviewer stated the Wrocław staging was extremely uneven in artistic terms, and he accused it of being poster-like.¹¹⁵ Another reviewer posited that the accounts on which Obidniak based his play, were not enough to make the play attractive.¹¹⁶ Wanda Karczewska concluded that the play had the texture of commentary theatre, not deep intellectually, though able to seize the audience’s attention with the terror of the scene of policemen torturing internees, and she added that the humorous elements it included were unacceptable. She did admit that the grim humour might had been something that kept the internees going (historians, allow me to add, are clear on the subject)¹¹⁷, however, in her opinion, the “merry Bereza” distorted the artistic truth of the work.¹¹⁸

110 Vide A. Morawiec, “Campo de Concentración de Miranda de Ebro. Nieostrzeżony rozdział polskiej literatury obozowej”, [in:] *W kręgu twórczości pisarzy emigracyjnych. Kontynuacje*, Z. Andres (ed.), Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Rzeszowskiego, Rzeszów 2011, pp. 329–332.

111 Anna Maria Dolińska, the literary director of Teatr Powszechny in Łódź, notified me (in an e-mail of 6 November 2018) that the script is not stored in the theatre’s archive.

112 Vide R. Łoboda, “Bereziacy”, *Odgłosy* 1968, issue 18, p. 7; M. Wawrzekiewicz, “Łódzki ‘sezon polityczny’”, *Współczesność* 1968, issue 10, p. 9.

113 A. Wróblewski, “Przemoc jest bezsilna”, *Panorama Północy* 1968, issue 19, p. 12.

114 R. Łoboda, *Bereziacy*, p. 7.

115 J. Bajdor, “‘Bereziacy’ – próba tematu”, *Słowo Polskie* 1968, issue 124, p. 2.

116 M. Wawrzekiewicz, “Łódzki ‘sezon polityczny’”, p. 9.

117 Vide, e.g. A. J. Obrdlik, “‘Gallows humor’ – a sociological phenomenon”, *The American Journal of Sociology* 1942, issue 5, pp. 709–716; E. Polak, [statement], [in:] Z. Jagoda, S. Kłodziński, J. Masłowski, *Oświęcim nieznanym*, Wydawnictwo Literackie, Kraków 1981, p. 294.

118 W. Karczewska, “Teatr Powszechny i żywy”, *Kultura* [Warsaw] 1968, issue 22, p. 10.

Similar doubts regarding both its artistic quality and the reality it described were raised regarding a 1976 novel entitled *Wzbierająca fala*¹¹⁹ (Growing waves). Czesław K. Domagała, its author, before World War II was an activist of the Wici Union of the Rural Youth and KPP. In 1936–1937 he was interned at Bereza. After the war he fulfilled prominent functions in the PZPR, and he was also a deputy for the Sejm.¹²⁰ *Wzbierająca fala* was promoted on the cover as a social novel from the interwar period, in which on the backdrop of the moral reality of the Polish countryside the author presented

[...] the fortunes of a boy from a poor peasant family, his difficult educational path, attempts at finding a job, and, in those conditions, his social maturation, and the formation of his class awareness. The protagonist participated in the political struggles in the countryside, which led him and his comrades to Bereza Kartuska¹²¹.

Allow me to add that the social novel was both an autobiographical novel fulfilling, by presenting the development of an individual in a specific environment and in the backdrop of a specific epoch with its conflicts, the model of a Bildungsroman.¹²²

Most of all, though, the work was heterogeneous. Apart from autobiographical traces, it also included well-exposed traces of other people's recollections, included in *Bereziacy*. In the sections which applied to Włodzimierz Skiba's, the protagonist, internment at Bereza, which covered roughly half of the book's total volume (i.e. 576 pages), there was a tendency for a panoramic approach to the matter. Unfortunately, the author padded it excessively with fiction. Had he refrained from that and had he not been a doctrinaire, the cognitive quality of the work would have been higher. It would also be a valuable source because its aesthetic qualities are not high. *Wzbierająca fala* was a classic example of tendency writing of the socialist realism persuasion. The novel was dominated by the ideology, shaped both by the story and, especially, by the commentary-like dialogues, statements, and opinions. For example: the protagonist's visit at Jasna Góra was used only to criticise, or rather defile, the clergy. The image of fr. Macoch, a member of the Order of Pauline Fathers, who in the early-20th c. gained the grim reputation of a murderer and

¹¹⁹ C.K. Domagała, *Wzbierająca fala*, Książka i Wiedza, Warsaw 1976.

¹²⁰ Vide Domagała's bios: The Sejm Library, https://bs.sejm.gov.pl/F?func=find-b&request=000004082&find_code=SYS&local_base=ARS10 [accessed on: 7.04.2018]; Public Information Bulletin of the Commission for the Prosecution of Crimes against the Polish Nation, Institute of National Remembrance, <http://katalog.bip.ipn.gov.pl/informacje/1481> [accessed on: 7.04.2018].

¹²¹ C.K. Domagała, *Wzbierająca fala*, p. IV of the cover

¹²² Cf. W. Nawrocki, "Opowieść o rewolucjonistach", *Życie Literackie* 1976, issue 45, p. 12.

a thief and who was suspected of cooperating with the Okhrana¹²³, shovelling the coins donated by pilgrims, was expressive enough. Similarly expressive was this ideological cliché about the protagonist: “In the most difficult of circumstances, he always remained a soldier of the revolution army.”¹²⁴

The image of the confinement centre was similarly exaggerated in the novel. The names of the members of Bereza authorities and guards were real; the author included: Kamala-Kurhański, Pytel, Markowski, Kowalski. Not that far from truth was the narrator’s (author’s) statement that “the basic assumption of those who established the camp was to harass the internees through exhaustive senseless labour and exercise.”¹²⁵ The terror was, actually, in it a tool used for repressing political opposition, not a goal in its own. One would be hard pressed to question the described (or rather depicted) in the text instances of the sadism of the guards, yet Kamala-Kurhański’s decision to place in solitary confinement an internee for bringing a blade of grass into the camp seems (not in Aristotelian terms but rather when considering common sense) unbelievable. Yet it cannot be excluded completely, just like many other seemingly unimaginable acts of violence which had been actually experienced by internees at Bereza and other camps. Either way, the array of arguments employed by the author, including rhetoric devices used for equating Bereza to Nazi camps, was not much different from the practices common for Stalinist era commentators, i.e. it was rather used to evoke an ideological effect than to help depict the truth. An out of context sentence: “They set off onto a path at the end of which there was the mostly unknown to them inferno of the concentration camp”¹²⁶ one might consider as borrowed rather from the recollections of a former prisoner of a Nazi KL than of Bereza. The opinion that the methods used at Bereza were “borrowed from Berlin and tested in Dachau, and only constantly being perfected here,”¹²⁷ before September 1939 could had been an ascertainment as the knowledge of Poles on Nazi camps at that time was limited; however, if expressed in 1976 when “inferno” was a common metaphor for Nazi camps, it constituted chiefly a hyperbole and an accusation. Różycki, an internee and the protagonist’s mentor, said:

The world knows about Nazi concentration camps [...] – but Bereza Kartuska is not much different. Comrade Preschel, a Pole born in Vienna, remained here for a few

¹²³ A year before the publication of *Wzbierająca fala*, the novel by Władysław L. Terlecki entitled *Odpocznij po biegu* (Państwowy Instytut Wydawniczy, Warsaw 1975), revolving around the character, was published.

¹²⁴ C.K. Domagała, *Wzbierająca fala*, p. 566.

¹²⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 328.

¹²⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 267.

¹²⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 308.

months. He was in Dachau for some time. Once released, he was brought back to Poland where the defence [political police – note by A.M.] cooperating unofficially with the Nazis sent him to Bereza. It was he who told me, when comparing the camps, that in Dachau after Hitler came to power many communists were killed, yet he did not see there such sophisticated methods of abusing people as at Bereza.¹²⁸

The accounts available today prove that in both camps the level of sophistication was extremely high, yet the guards in Dachau did not fall behind the policemen in Bereza.¹²⁹ Another, undoubtedly reliable, Różycki's observation is certainly noteworthy. He indicated that the measure similar to those developed by Germans and Poles "for years were used in Mussolini's Italy. It wasn't much better in Spain, Hungary, Romania or Bulgaria."¹³⁰ Obviously neither Różycki nor the narrator mentioned anything about Soviet camps.

Other omissions and distortions regarding Bereza were more telling or even surprising, though resulting from similar, i.e. ideological, reasons. *Wzbierająca fala* remained almost silent, excluding a paragraph-long mention, about Ukrainian nationalists and ONR radicals interned at the camp (the latter were termed as "gang members")¹³¹, and it completely omitted the members of the PPS. What was even more surprising, though after 1968 quite telling, were the extremely rare mentions of communists of Jewish descent, who in the pre-March *Bereziacy* were mentioned often and with the highest respect, e.g. Jakub Prawin (nota bene, his recollections were quoted in *Bereziacy* first). Domagała in his book devoted to him merely a paragraph. He mentioned him as Jakub Rawin.¹³² The "erasing" of the names of the persons who were the prototypes for the characters of the autobiographical novel was a common procedure. However, Domagała's changes were considerable. The prototype of Józef Rubin¹³³, a student of the Warsaw University of Technology and a member of the Communist Union of Polish Youth (Komunistyczny Związek Młodzieży Polskiej, KZMP), was Józef Rubinsztajn mentioned in *Bereziacy*¹³⁴. At another location, the narrator mentioned "an internee whom others called the poet, because he wrote poems when he was free. He was a Jew,"¹³⁵ yet did not mention his name or call him a comrade despite the fact that he was undoubtedly modelled after Abram Germaniski, a communist. A few pages on

¹²⁸ Ibid., pp. 371–372. On Preschel, a real figure, vide M. Bartz, *Przeżycia Bereziaka...*, p. 36.

¹²⁹ Vide N. Wachsmann, *Historia nazistowskich obozów koncentracyjnych*, trans. M. Antosiewicz, Świat Książki, Warsaw 2016, pp. 50–53.

¹³⁰ C.K. Domagała, *Wzbierająca fala*, p. 389.

¹³¹ Ibid., p. 388.

¹³² Ibid., p. 533.

¹³³ Ibid., p. 473.

¹³⁴ *Bereziacy*, p. 488 (list of former Bereza internees).

¹³⁵ C.K. Domagała, *Wzbierająca fala*, p. 477.

(pp. 486–487), he mentioned Germaniski (without mentioning his name) who died due to beating by the guards, yet he meant someone else. He also mentioned Aleksander Mozyrko, a forest worker and a union activist in Białowieża, who was beaten severely by the guards and died soon afterwards in the hospital in Kobryń.¹³⁶ The reader will surely think both victims were Polish, but in fact Germaniski was a Jew, while Mozyrko a Belarusian.¹³⁷ The author's efforts aimed at convincing the readers, who perceived *Wzbierająca fala* mimetically, that the majority of Bereza internees were communists (which was true) and ethnic Poles – which was surely not true since Jews (or Poles of Jewish descent) constituted a significant share of the total number of communist activists in pre-WWII Poland¹³⁸ – appear understandable in the context of the author's political activities. Domagała, being 1st Secretary of the Voivodship Committee of PZPR in Krakow, during a rally on 25 March 1968 included Zionists among “various revisionists, reactionaries, and servants of international anti-Polish powers.”¹³⁹ On another occasion, during a debate in the Sejm on 11 April 1968, he stressed that not every writer may be the nation's conscience – surely “no [January] Grzędziński, [Antoni] Słonimski, [Paweł] Jasienica or [Stefan] Kisielewski” ever was nor ever will be that, just like “Zionist revisionists.”¹⁴⁰ Słonimski, as I have mentioned in the first part of the article, managed to avoid internment at Bereza thirty years earlier. In any case, the author quoted extensively the “non-reactionary” writers, or rather their poems they had written at Bereza. Those included two poems by a “young Jewish poet Żyrman.”¹⁴¹

The Confinement Centre in Bereza Kartuska remains in Polish memory, in which, incidentally, it never occupied an established place, a problematic issue subject

¹³⁶ Ibid., pp. 482–483.

¹³⁷ Vide W. Śleszyński, *Obóz odosobnienia...*, p. 53.

¹³⁸ Cf.: “Upon a study of the national composition of KPP and KZMP one might conclude that those formations mainly included minority groups, mainly Jews, less so Belarusians and Ukrainians. Poles constituted around 30% of KPP and KZMP, and 69% of the general population of the Second Polish Republic,” “The share of Jews was usually higher among KPP and KZMP authorities than among their regular members. [...] According to the National Office of the Central Committee of KPP [Sekretariat Krajowy KC KPP], at the beginning of 1936 the share of Jews in the management of the party and KZMP was too high – 54%. Moreover, they constituted 90% of MOPR [International Red Aid, Międzynarodowa Organizacja Pomocy Rewolucjonistom], around 75% of the technical apparatus of the party, and 100% of the technical apparatus of the Office and the management of the Regional Office of KPP of Warsaw.” (H. Cimek, “Żydzi w ruchu komunistycznym w Polsce w latach 1918–1937”, *Polityka i Społeczeństwo*, vol. 9 [2012], pp. 37, 39).

¹³⁹ [C. Domagała], “Naszym celem – rozkwit ojczyzny, budowa socjalizmu i pokój. Przemówienie I sekretarza KW PZPR w Krakowie tow. Czesława Domagały”, *Gazeta Krakowska* 1968, issue 72, p. 2.

¹⁴⁰ [C. Domagała], “Tow. pos. Czesław Domagała” [statement in a Sejm debate of 11 April 1968], *Trybuna Ludu* 1968, issue 102, p. 6.

¹⁴¹ C.K. Domagała, *Wzbierająca fala*, p. 515.

for ideological manipulation. Literature, including that which was predominantly supposed to be a testimony, became a tool of manipulation, or at least it was treated that way – by authors themselves, by the political administrators of cultural life, and by readers. Since 1989 the issue of Bereza Kartuska has been available for an open discussion using new sources. Despite the publication of three books devoted to the camp (by Siekanowicz, Polit, and Śleszyński), and a selection of material on the issue, mostly previously unreleased, including recollections of Ukrainians, was published in 2009 by *Karta* historical quarterly¹⁴², the topic of the Confinement Centre still awaits a honest discussion.

Instead of being the subject of a discussion, Bereza appeared, quite unexpectedly, in a few pages of a 2014 novel by Robert Żółtek entitled *Szakale*¹⁴³ (Jackals), and in a dozen or so pages of a 2016 novel by Szczepan Twardoch entitled *Król*¹⁴⁴ (King). Both are examples of popular literature.

Żółtek's work, despite the fact that its story is based on historical events, i.e. the massacres of the Polish population in Volhynia, it chiefly fulfilled the model of an adventure novel (in the type of Sienkiewicz's quasi-historical novel). The protagonist of *Szakale* is lieutenant Staniewicz, a *cichociemny* special operations paratrooper whom the Polish government-in-exile ordered to develop a report on the situation in Volhynia. His fortunes intersect with the fortunes of two adversaries, deadly enemies: major Kaniuka, a special tasks officer of the National Army Command (Komenda Główna Armii Krajowej) in the Volhynia voivodship and a deputy commandant of Bereza Kartuska from a few years back, and Taras Palucha, commander of a unit of the Ukrainian Insurgent Army (Ukraińska Powstańcza Armia, UPA), a former internee at the camp. Thus, the Confinement Centre appeared in the novel as a side story, as a motivation for Palucha's actions, who tried to take revenge on his Bereza tormentor at whatever the cost might be. It also served as one of the text's many, apart from, e.g. villages and churches burnt by Polish army in 1937, sources of hatred of Ukrainians towards Poles, which exploded in the summer of 1943.

Palucha, more of an egocentric rather than an avenger of national grievances, confessed in an insult-filled letter addressed to Kaniuka that he swore to himself at Bereza that he would kill one Lach (a male Pole) for each day he spent there. He added that he had already done that: he killed, e.g. some guards in Bereza, as well as Kaniuka's wife and daughter. It is also worth mentioning Palucha's Bereza-centred thoughts triggered by the sight of the Bereza tormentor he caught: "He promised himself that he would repay Poles for each kicking, for each hit with

142 "Bereza Kartuska", selected and submitted for printing by A. Knyt, *Karta*, issue 59 (2009), pp. 24–67.

143 R. Żółtek, *Szakale (opowieść o UPA)*, published by author, Ostróda 2014. I would like to thank Magdalena Lachman, Ph.D., for indicating this work to me.

144 S. Twardoch, *Król*, Wydawnictwo Literackie, Krakow 2016.

a bat or whip, each insult directed at him, and for each breath when he was made to crawl in puddles made by prison corporals by urinating in the training square called the ensign school, which was used for internee so-called gymnastics. Each was welcomed personally by that human lying at their feet.”¹⁴⁵ Kaniuka died torn apart by horses, in terrible agony (his death resembled the death of Azja Tuhaj-Bej, a fictional character in the novel *Fire in the Steppe* by Sienkiewicz). What draws the reader’s attention is not the story or its historic background (extracted from various studies referenced in the bibliography included at the end of the book), but the expression of not so much Palucha’s as the novel’s author’s (expressed through the narrator) conviction that Bereza Kartuska was “the most abominable, strenuous in terms of the abuses and the living conditions, re-education camp for political opponents that was used in the totalitarianised Europe of that time”, “worse and more brutal than German and Italian KTs of that time.” That surely excessively radical opinion was founded not in historical facts, but an aesthetic intention of the writer to amplify the expressiveness of the “UPA story” intended for popular and crime literature.

The publication of *Szakale* made no effect whatsoever (the database of the National Library of Poland lists no traces of its reception), and surely not much will change in that matter. However, Szczepan Twardoch, the author of the other novel I indicated earlier, is one of the most popular Polish prose writers.¹⁴⁶ It might be the case, then, that his *Król* will cause an increase in the interest in the camp in Bereza Kartuska, and it will encourage readers to seek other related works, which are subject to the principle of truth and probability. The novel, fulfilling a crime story model, being a manifestation of the recent increase in the interest of Polish writers in the interwar period, may also result in a situation where the Confinement Centre will appear in other works of literature as a motif or even a theme.

The story of *Król* takes place in 1937 in Warsaw, or rather two hostile Warsaws: the Polish one and the Jewish one. It also depicts two social strata: the community of criminals, and the world of politics, yet in both the governing principle is violence. Significantly enough, the strata are not separated from one another. The novel’s protagonist is Jakub Szapiro, a Jewish boxer, who works for Jan Kaplica, a.k.a. Kum (Polish word for *godfather*), a former member of the Combat Organisation of the Polish Socialist Party (Organizacja Bojowa Polskiej Partii Socjalistycznej), now a gangster. Kaplica, widely respected by the worker population of the capital, remained untouchable for a long time due to his former merits. He was

¹⁴⁵ R. Żółtek, *Szakale*.... I am quoting as per the electronic version of the novel (EPUB format) without page numbering.

¹⁴⁶ Vide A. Szałagan, “Twardoch Szczepan”, [in:] *Polscy pisarze i badacze literatury przełomu XX i XXI wieku*, http://www.ppihl.ibl.waw.pl/mediawiki/index.php?title=Szczepan_TWARDOCH [accessed on: 2.11.2018].

protected by his former comrades who occupy high positions in the government. But the good streak came to an end. Colonel Adam Koc while planning with the support of marshal Edward Rydz-Śmigły and collaboration of Bolesław Piasecki an armed (and bloody) coup by National Front (Zjednoczenie Narodowe) and Fałanga saw in Kaplica the potential for becoming a leader of “worker-gangster mobs of Śródmieście, Wola and Ochota” districts¹⁴⁷, which could oppose the coup forces, so he sent Kaplica to Bereza.¹⁴⁸

In describing the “confinement centre”, Twardoch did not care much either for the description’s comprehensiveness or accuracy. Being the author of a crime novel, he had every right to do that. He introduced the Bereza plot within a chain defined by (often depicted pornographically) mob executions, chopping up corpses, rapes of women, family violence (of which rape is sometimes one aspect), as well as boxing matches, street riots, and fights at the university (related to ghetto benches). Kaplica, a ruthlessly brave man, was terrified by the very name: Bereza. He learnt from urkas (criminals imprisoned at gulags) that it was better to spend ten years in prison than three months at Bereza. And after he visited Abraham Bloch, a swindler, who not so long ago was a fat yob, he saw that “after Bereza” that was not the Abraham Bloch he used to know: “He was emaciated by the starvation rations, his hands were shaking, he was missing his front teeth, and his thick black shag thinned and greyed, as if he lived twenty years in three months.”¹⁴⁹

Kaplica, much more audacious than Bloch, immediately upon arriving at Bereza pounced at a guard beating him severely. Though in the light of the existing accounts the scene verges on pure fantasy, Twardoch was less interested in truth about the Confinement Centre and more in amplifying its menacing and inhumane image. The narrator focussed not so much on describing the camp *milieu* as on reporting on the repressions to which Kaplica was subjected. The descriptions of the torments suffered by the former member of the PPS resembled those suffered by communists according to their own recollections. When reading *Król* one cannot escape the impression that the author’s main source of knowledge on the confinement centre was *Bereziacy*. It is also possible that the cry “Jestem!” (Present!) recurring like a refrain in Kaplica’s description of his time spent in solitary confinement, from time to time forced by the guards, Twardoch took from a short story by Leon Pasternak entitled *Jestem* reprinted from the above-mentioned book. That would be a peculiar union of politically committed literature stemming from the experience of internment at Bereza with popular literature (which in the case

¹⁴⁷ S. Twardoch, *Król*, p. 282.

¹⁴⁸ The issue of the planned coup d’état allegedly by the above-mentioned politicians remains open – vide M. Przeperski, *Polska “noc długich noży”*, <https://histmag.org/Polska-noc-dlugich-nozy-7219/1> [accessed on: 25.11.2018].

¹⁴⁹ S. Twardoch, *Król*, p. 289–290.

of *Król* pretends to be something more by raising the important issues Polish anti-Semitism and Jewish anti-Polonism).

In the case of texts raising the topic of Nazi camps such unions are no longer surprising as KLS have long served as the theme for all sorts of popular works.¹⁵⁰ Bereza Kartuska is only beginning to be noticed for such a role, or, more broadly, as the theme for fiction. For it to become that it would first be necessary to have a clear idea what the “confinement centre” located in Bereza Kartuska actually was, and even more importantly its inseparable grim myth, the gloomy legend, if you will. That which emerged from the existing narrative formulated mostly by communists proved unattractive, being too brazen, indoctrinating, and it was mostly obscured by Lager and Gulag narratives. Yet that might someday change. Bereza is still a topic for the taking.

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¹⁵⁰ Vide A. Morawiec, *Literatura w lagrze, lager w literaturze. Fakt – temat – metafora*, Wydawnictwo Akademii Humanistyczno-Ekonomicznej, Łódź 2009, pp. 291–325 (part *Od tematu do metafory. Użycia i nadużycia*). A similar phenomenon, regarding Holocaust literature, was analysed by, e.g. Sławomir Buryła (*Wokół Zagłady. Szkice o literaturze Holokaustu*, Universitas, Krakow 2016, pp. 83–111), and Marta Tomczok (*Czyja dzisiaj jest Zagłada? Retoryka – ideologia – popkultura*, Instytut Badań Literackich PAN, Warsaw 2017, pp. 146–206).

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Po Berezie. Literatura polska wobec Miejsca Odosobnienia w Berezie Kartuskiej. 1939–2018

Streszczenie

Artykuł dotyczy obecności w szeroko rozumianej literaturze polskiej tematu i motywu Miejsca Odosobnienia w Berezie Kartuskiej. Omówiono w nim kształtowanie wizerunku tego obozu koncentracyjnego od chwili zaprzestania jego działalności (w 1939 roku), dyktowane w zasadniczej mierze przez ideologię oraz politykę, w tym politykę pamięci. Wśród analizowanych utworów są zarówno wspomnienia, głównie komunistów (m.in. Michała Mirskiego i Jana Wójcika), jak i utwory fikcyjne, w tym opowiadanie *Jestem* Leona Pasternaka, dramat *Bereziacy* Karola Obidniaka i Romana Sykały oraz powieści: *Wzbierająca fala* Czesława K. Domagały, *Król* Szczepana Twardocha i *Szakale* Roberta Żółtka.

Słowa kluczowe: Miejsce Odosobnienia w Berezie Kartuskiej; obozy koncentracyjne; literatura polska; temat i motyw; polityka pamięci

After Bereza. Polish literature towards the Confinement Centre in Bereza Kartuska 1939–2018

Summary

The article concerns the inclusion in the broadly understood Polish literature of the theme and motif of the Confinement Centre in Bereza Kartuska (1934–1939). I discussed in it the formation of the image of the concentration camp since it ceased its operation (in 1939), mainly defined by ideology and politics, including the politics of memory. I particularly focussed on works of literature regarding the Confinement Centre created after the Centre ceased its operations. Those include both recollections, mainly by communists (e.g. by Michał Mirski and Jan Wójcik), and works of fiction, including the short story *Jestem* by Leon Pasternak, the play *Bereziacy* by Karol Obidniak and Roman Sykała, and novels: *Wzbierająca fala* by Czesław K. Domagała, *Król* by Szczepan Twardoch, and *Szakale* by Robert Żółtek.

Keywords: Confinement Centre in Bereza Kartuska; concentration camps; Polish literature; theme and motif; politics of memory

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