

2020.12.17

Karolina Kumka

God writes straight along curved lines. Studies on the work of Jan Grzegorzczak

Abstract

In the dissertation entitled *God writes straight along curved lines. Studies on the work of Jan Grzegorzczak*, the oeuvre of the author of *Przypadki księdza Grosera* was discussed in detail, taking into account the following adopted methodologies: cultural research, comparative study, and psychoanalysis.

In the paper, various aspects of the Poznań author's oeuvre and its relationship with literary contexts as well as extra-literary reality are explored as having a significant impact on the creation of not only the Father Groser series but also other novels (*Chaszcze* and *Puszczyk*) and short story collections (*Niebo dla akrobaty*, *Pieśń słoneczna*, *Róży Bluszcz*). The aim of the dissertation was to shed light on the Jan Grzegorzczak's works which to this day remain very much outside the scope of research interest, despite being readily reviewed. The conducted research prompted an observation that the works in question belong to the "priestly narrative" genre, which is rooted in religious and Catholic literature but which highlights the difficulties of being a priest in different societies over time. The dissertation draws attention to several themes and topics that appear in earlier literature and are rediscovered by Jan Grzegorzczak. This is done with the hopes of presenting this very fact as an attempt to establish a dialogue between the author and other writers' works, especially his own and religious novels such as Jerzy Andrzejewski's *Lad serca*, Georges Bernanos's *Under the Sun of Satan*, François Mauriac's *Vipers' Tangle* or Graham Greene's *The Heart of the Matter*. To properly conduct the analysis in question, a comparative method was used, which enabled exploring not just the protagonists of individual religious works alongside those brought into existence by Jan Grzegorzczak, but also to compare authors themselves in terms of their religious attitudes - from Greene's refracting image of the "defender of human weaknesses", through Bernanos' marked traditionalism, ending with Grzegorzczak's simple and naive faith.

In the dissertation, much space is devoted to broader references to foreign contexts for Jan Grzegorzczak's prose, which go beyond the works of the aforementioned "writers of Christian despair". To this end, three works were recalled in which the attitude of the priest was widely

outlined in the environment portrayed: Andrew Greeley's *The Cardinal Sins*, Roger Peyrefitte's *The Keys of St. Peter*, or José Maria de Eça de Queirós's *The Crime of Father Amaro*.

In addition, attention was drawn to other works related to those penned by Jan Grzegorzczak, which were not previously referred to by the reviewers of his oeuvre, noting along the way a relationship that exists between Grzegorzczak's pentalogy and the religious works of Bernanos, Mauriac and Greene. The comparative method made it possible to bring into the picture the character of Father Paweł Siecheń from Jerzy Andrzejewski's novel *Ład serca* and to identify the far-reaching similarities between that priest and the attitude of the protagonist of the Father Groser pentalogy. In the character of Father Groser from Jan Grzegorzczak's pentalogy, as well as in many other protagonists appearing throughout the author's oeuvre, similarities to priestly predecessors from the aforementioned works were observed.

The comparative method offered a broader insight into the priestly genre and helped identify an interesting context for the oeuvre of Jan Grzegorzczak in the form of Maciej Grabski's trilogy *Ksiądz Rafał*. Despite their many similarities, these works are significantly distant in the way Grabski embeds the plot in a small town pegged against the backdrop of 1970s communism, where global change echoes with a delay, while Grzegorzczak opts for a contemporary background. Having noticed these basic disparities between the two authors' works, the hypotheses put forward by researchers regarding the priest's status could be confirmed - from Grabski's total acceptance and the real need for the presence of the priestly factor in the lives of the faithful in communist Poland, to Grzegorzczak's uncertain position of the "wounded healer" who forever remains on the margin of the ongoing events in contemporary Poland and whose authority is no longer assigned automatically from above but must be worked out.

The dissertation also touches on the priestly attitudes found throughout the oeuvre of Jan Grzegorzczak, analyzing them and trying to trace their literary prototype, taking into account the fact that Grzegorzczak, being a Polish philologist, could freely use the literary output of earlier writers, especially those whom he knew from his university readings and master's thesis devoted to the oeuvre of Roman Branstaetter which he wrote under the supervision of Professor Jerzy Ziomek.

The dissertation does not just shed light on the Church as an institution but also on the various challenges faced by the priest who, Grzegorzczak holds, remains a "wounded healer" - this very term was also explored along with its source and ways of incorporating it not only in the works of the author in question, but also in the other mentioned contexts.

To portray the difficult position of Grzegorzczuk's priest, attention was paid to the description of dreams about the heroes-priests in the discussed works, and psychoanalysis was used for this purpose as a method of explaining dreams. This led to a conclusion that priests' dreams in the Father Groser series are closely linked to the worries, fears and emotions experienced by priests in their daily lives but also that they express the subconscious fear of punishment for sins.

Subsequently, a cultural outline of Grzegorzczuk's priest helped portray him as both a product of surrounding culture and an individual who himself builds meanings read by others. In this context, the Church was presented as an institution possessing mechanisms of controlling individuals, which is detailly described in the novels of Jan Grzegorzczuk on the example of disciplining priests.

To further discuss the oeuvre of Jan Grzegorzczuk, the theme of "inverting the sacrosphere" appearing in this contemporary artist's works was also presented. To this end, an event was analyzed in which the protagonist of the Father Groser series decides to build a shelter for the homeless in the middle of a new parish, before the church building is erected there. One may wonder whether what the author hints at is not the transformation of the Church from a religious community oriented towards God into an anthropological community driven by charity. All this is followed by a discussion of the cases of alcoholism among priests, withdrawals from the Church and attempts to continue living in a secular environment, as well as attitudes widely cited by the author among clergymen, such as careerism, debauchery and greed.

Concluding the study, Chapter seven casts a look at and analyzes the clergy's current media image as viewed by Grzegorzczuk. Lastly, the author's teaching on love and mercy is explored, enabling to embed the work in question in the morality-play context. For this purpose, the anonymous translation of Jakub Locher's *Iudicium Paridis* or the religious drama *The Merchant* translated into Polish by Mikołaj Rej were recalled.

The methodologies used in the dissertation, together with the themes and topics examined in the research process, resulted in a in-depth analysis of Jan Grzegorzczuk's prose in reference not only to the rich contexts of the discussed oeuvre, but also in its classification within the "priestly narrative" genre of socio-moral novels.

Karolina
Kuciel