

ABSTRACT

Theatre in Zbigniew Herbert's poetry is the subject of the thesis by means of which the author tries to show the connections of Zbigniew Herbert's lyric works with the theatre. By this word it is understood not only a kind of performing arts which employs its own sign system and creates in front of the audience a fictional reality based on actors' activities who play defined roles, but also everything this term implies. Thus, the theatre means also a theatrical building with its stage on which performances are mounted as well as this part of the building where spectators sit. By the theatre one should understand a hidden behind the backcloth offstage space which pinpoints a stage space from where the actors walk out, a dressing room – a place where the actant make their characterisation, and sometimes prepare for their performance, an overstage – a space over the upper framework of a stage box which is unseen for the audience and where not only extraction devices for changing decorations lifted or lowered with ropes, but also acoustic and lighting equipment are fitted as well as each different space of the theatrical building. The theatre implies also the people who create a theatrical performance in front of the audience, that is not only the actors who play their roles on stage, but also its creators who are invisible for the viewers such as: director (regisseur), screenwriter, scene designer, prompter and many others without whom it would not be created. The theatre also connotes a literary work – a specific work written for the stage – a genre of drama, on the basis of which the director (regisseur), together with a troupe of actors and other theatre staff, creates a performance and stages it in front of the audience, having translated it in an intersemiotic way.

My attempt to uncover the connections between Zbigniew Herbert's lyrical works and the theatre in the broadest sense of this term was prompted by my observations and research. Looking at the poet's dramatic works, I came to the same conclusions as Anna Krajewska – author of a monograph on the drama and theatre of the absurd in Poland – who claims that some of Herbert's dramas "reveal a lyrical pedigree" (Krajewska 1996: 116)¹. Reading, on the

¹ Krajewska, Anna (1996): *Dramat i teatr absurdu w Polsce*, Poznań.

other hand, the essays, poetic prose and lyrical texts of the author of *Elegy of Fortinbras*, I noticed that the poet, while constructing his poems, refers not only to the poetics of drama, but also to the dramatic experience.

When doing the research, I realised that the scientists who deal with Herbert's lyrical works most often use the following notions interchangeably: *dramatyczność* (dramatic), *dramaturgiczność* (dramaturgicality) and *teatralność* (theatricality) or *sceniczność* (stagity), which causes these categories to become ambiguous, making the results of the research relative. The lack of ambiguity, in turn, is an obstacle to undertaking and carrying out further inquiries within the discipline. Therefore, it should come as no surprise that I found it necessary to remove these obstacles and first decided to sort out the definitions of these categories.

It was noted that most of the research up to now has been superficial. It turned out that the researchers who studied Herbert's lyrical texts did not focus on showing all the genre-forming factors that make a given work connote drama, but on those most representative structural elements of drama. It was not shown which types of dialogues or monologues are most frequently encountered in the poems of the author of *Mr. Cogito*. It was not also presented which his works include a single-threaded, finite and cause-and-effect plot in which its basic moments can be distinguished. No attempt was made to show the size that a secondary text can reach in Herbert's poems, or all the functions performed by stage directions. Not all lyrical works of the poet were examined in terms of the connections between his poems and drama, but only a selection of his poems.

While writing the dissertation, I came to the conviction that research which was aimed at revealing the links and relationships between the poet's lyrical texts and selected genres of drama were cursory, limited, unconvincing or completely inaccurate. Some researchers who attempted to uncover the dramatic-theatrical character of Herbert's lyrical texts also took into account those poems that have narrative features, as if they forgot that the time when a text is uttered in drama must be tantamount to the time when the events depicted in it take place. On the other hand, those who tried to prove that the lyric text entitled *Prologue* from the volume *Inscription* (1969) was stylised as an antique tragedy paid attention only to selected structural features of the work, while they did not refer to such an important for the functioning of this genre descriptive and interpretative category as transcendence, which did not provide convincing proof that the work has features of a tragedy.

I also found that the connections between Herbert's poems and the theatre was insufficiently exposed. It was paid no attention to the functioning in his works such basic

structural elements of the theatre as the actor, the spectator, the director (regisseur) or the screenwriter. The verbal or extra-linguistic signs used by the actors that play their roles in the performances written by the author of *Mr. Cogito* were not shown. No attempt was made to depict the look of the stage space or spoken space which pinpoints the first one in his lyrical works. I also pointed out that the poet created poems based on two methods of acting, i.e. the method of the Russian director (regisseur) Konstantin Stanislavsky, consisting in full identification with the character, and “playing with detachment”, developed by Bertold Brecht, but it was not proved on specific examples of Herbert’s poems. Neither was any attempt made to depict the theatrical space in which Herbert's lyrical works are mounted, nor the offstage places where the actor and director (regisseur) can be encountered during their work, as it is reflected in the poet's lyrical texts.

In order to uncover the links that connect Herbert's lyrical works with theatre and drama, I took advantage of analysis, interpretation and description – research methods maintained in the semiotic-structural tradition, as well as tools – concepts created by ordering the definitions of such categories as: *dramatyczność* (dramatic), *dramaturgiczność* (dramaturgicality) and *teatralność* (theatricality).

My dissertation consists of five chapters: two theoretical and three research chapters. I began my work with presenting the state of the research on the dramatic and theatrical aspects of Herbert's lyrical works. The first chapter of the thesis will be devoted to this issue. I illustrated there all that has been established so far about the connections between the his poems and drama and theatre. I also demonstrated what has not been said yet.

In the second chapter, I outlined the ambiguous and relative character of categories such as *dramatyczność* (dramatic), *dramaturgiczność* (dramaturgicality) and *teatralność* (theatricality) which have been used so far, and then decided to sort them out. By redefining the above categories, I created the research tools that I used in the next part of the thesis to uncover the connections and relationships between Herbert’s lyric works and theatre and drama.

In the third chapter, it was shown how the structure of drama, understood as a literary genre, is manifested in some of the poet’s lyrical texts. I presented the way of appearing the person who speaks in drama and indicated the function that stage directions play in Herbert's poems. I characterised the types of dialogues and monologues – the basic forms of dramatic utterance used by the characters in the lyrical works written by the author of *Mr. Cogito*, and presented such poems that fit the model of a single-threaded, finite and cause-and-effect action, typical of the ideal model of drama, and those that deviate from it.

In the fourth chapter, I depicted those poems that clearly come close to dramatic genres (tragedy, mystery play, morality play, romantic drama and monodrama), which bear witness to the dramatic nature of the world and of human existence, according to which a person who depends only on themselves, while they are aware that his doom or salvation lies in their hands, cannot avoid tragedy in their life, understood as evil, suffering or death.

In the fifth chapter, I unveiled, on the other hand, the relationships and connections between Herbert's lyrical works and the theatre. I presented how such essential components of theatre as the actor, the spectator, the director and the screenwriter function in his poems. I proved that the structure of theatre is manifested in the lyrical texts of the author of *Elegy of Fortinbras* through the realisation of their plot in the specific theatrical and stage space and spoken space, as well as the multiplication of theatrical illusion in Herbert's poems. I showed that the actors who play roles of characters from his lyric works use a whole range of verbal and extra-linguistic signs. I proved that the category of theatricality is also realised in the lyrical works of the poet by referring to two methods of acting: the method of Konstantin Stanislavsky and the method of Bertold Brecht. I pointed out that the structure of the theatre is also realised in Herbert's poems by showing other places where the actor or director (regisseur) works.

While writing the thesis, I came to the general conclusion that Zbigniew Herbert's lyrical texts have a dramatic-theatrical character. In other words, his poems own the structure of drama, understood as a literary genre, and have features of the genres of drama which show such a vision of the world and human existence, according to which man, in life, cannot avoid tragedy: evil, suffering or death, and have the structure of theatre, seen as a kind of performing arts.

While studying the poet's lyrical texts, I also came to a number of specific conclusions. I noticed that in Herbert's poems the same person who speaks in drama appears. Its existence is sanctioned by the appearance of stage directions in the poems.

I noticed that in Herbert's lyrical works, stage directions occur in a form degraded to the necessary minimum, more or less developed and covering the whole lyrical text. These stage directions in a degraded and more or less developed form accompany other forms of utterance, usually typical of drama, i.e. dialogues or monologues, creating, together with them, the text of a poem.

When researching Herbert's lyrical works, I noted that the poet employs stage directions that encompass the entirety of the lyrical text in those works which, like drama, present a finite, single-threaded plot which is the effect of a close interweaving of events that

remain in a cause-and-effect order towards each other, with its individual moments clearly marked, in particular: the conflict, which is the driving force behind the further course of events, its resolution, climax or peripeteia.

I pointed out that exclusively by means of stage directions, Herbert also creates scenarios for pantomimic performances that do not follow the pattern of Aristotelian action, but present tragic stories, for some reason important and significant or tragicomic.

It was also proved that the poet constructs due to stage directions, enriched with short dialogues or monologues, theatricalised ekphrases, often going beyond the frame of the work in terms of content. I pointed out that Herbert generates scenes exclusively by means of secondary texts, creating individual moments in the single-threaded plot of his works.

While researching the Herbert's lyrical works, I came to the conclusion that Herbert brings the speaking character(s) into existence and gives them his or her voice by using stage directions.

Studying Herbert's poems, I noticed that, except for stichomythia, the poet allows the stage characters he creates to express themselves basically through all known varieties of dialogue and monologue that we encounter in drama. Additionally, I spotted that Herbert has a liking for those forms of stage utterance which, as it were, impose an a priori distance between the actor and the audience, i.e. dramatic monologue, dialogising monologue, action dialogue, conversational dialogue, tirade, as well as their variants which allow the theatrical illusion to be broken, i.e. *apart* or parabasis.

I concluded that all dialogue variants spoken by the created characters have a primarily dramaturgical function in Herbert's lyrical texts, most often a conflict-forming one. Sometimes, the dialogue between the characters also brings about a resolution of the conflict. The dialogic monologue also has a dramaturgic function in Herbert's texts. It usually assumes a conflict-creating character, too. In the parabasis and *apart* monologue utterances which the characters created by the poet take advantage of the characterising function dominates, although it often indirectly reveals the protagonist's internal conflict. In stage monologues, on the other hand, the dramaturgical, characterising and informative functions complement each other, although in the text *Report from a Besieged City* the first one seems to dominate over the others.

When examining Herbert's lyrical texts, I pointed out that the poet had not managed to construct a lyrical text solely on the basis of dialogue or monologue, which, like a drama, would show a finite, single-threaded plot which is the effect of a close interweaving of events,

remaining in a cause-and-effect order towards each other, with its individual moments clearly marked.

I also noticed that a considerable number of Herbert's lyrical texts are characterised by an action typical of the ideal model of drama. In the vast majority of cases, the action of his lyrical works is of a finite nature or is clearly heading towards a finale. Among Herbert's poems, one can also find some whose plot is open-ended, demanding a later completion. The vast majority are also characterised by a single plot, which is usually reflected in the title. An exception to this rule can be found in the poem *At the Gate of the Valley*.

While examining Herbert's poetry, I spotted that among the lyrical works with a finite and single-threaded plot, only one (*Mr. Cogito's Game*) is characterised by the occurrence of all the moments typical of Aristotelian plot. As a rule, lyric texts with a single-threaded and finite action are characterised by exposition in the form of a conflict and its resolution. Quite often in Herbert's lyrical texts, there is a prologue before the proper action, followed by a supplement in the shape of an epilogue.

I noted that among the lyrical works which connote drama, there is a preponderance of those characterised by a single-threaded action of a cause-and-effect nature. However, a sizable group is made up of the poems that do not have an action of this character. They usually resemble "lively images" or pantomimic scenes, detached from a larger whole, or those dramatic-theatrical genres that are not characterised by the action of Aristotelian nature.

While researching Herbert's poetry, it was noticed that the poet often refers to the principle of three unities, typical of Greek tragedy, when creating a work with a finite and cause-and-effect plot. The single-threaded action in his poems takes place in one place and is not longer than 24 hours.

I also came to the conclusion that by taking diverse perspectives on some Herbert's texts, we will read the moments of action differently. Such a situation can be encountered in the poem *Elegy of Fortinbras*.

It was proved that the evidence of the dramatic in the poet's lyricism can be found in such genre forms of drama as tragedy, mystery play, morality play, romantic drama and monodrama.

While doing the research, I realised that in numerous poems written by Herbert, the structure of the theatre is manifested by the existence of such basic components of the theatre as the actor and the spectator. I noticed that typical forms of expression which signal the spectator imply at the same time the actor. It was also perceived that the spectators in the

poet's performances function not only as witnesses to the events they observe, but often participate in them, obliged to do so by the actors speaking to them from the stage.

While researching Herbert's lyrical texts, I saw that actors impersonate not only people, including primarily historical or literary figures, but also God, gods, animals, plants and even things, including parts of the human body.

It was also noticed that when acting, the actors employ a whole range of acoustic and non-verbal means: words, intonation, movement, gesture and mimicry. They change costumes and put on stage "masks". They use props, in particular mirrors.

I pointed out that Herbert's poetry also realises theatricality in the way that such essential components of the stage work as the director (*regisseur*) and the scriptwriter can be found in them. I concluded that in most of his poems the director (*regisseur*) functions as a figure that is a part of the metaphor of the world seen as theatre, i.e. as a demiurge, a more or less defined divine being or other transcendent force that creates and governs the world. While examining Herbert's lyrical texts, it was spotted that usually the place of the transcendent force directing the life of the hero/heroes of the poems is taken by the all-powerful totalitarian system imposed by history. Only in one text (*Mr. Cogito's Game*) the director (*regisseur*) – the hero of the poem, known by name – performs the function of the creator of a play, who, realising his own artistic concept, stages a theatrical performance in front of the audience, designates the actors, time and space in which it will take place, its beginning and end, and watches over the course of the performance according to the script written earlier on the basis of real events.

In Herbert's poems that connote theatre, one can also encounter such a situation where the lack of a director (*regisseur*) results in the impossibility of performing a play.

I also noticed that the scriptwriter appears in the poems only as a figure who is a part of the metaphor of the world and plans the events that are to unfold in the future on the stage of the theatre of life.

I also came to believe that the category of theatricality in the Herbert's poems is realised through the multiplication of theatrical illusion. It was perceived that the poet often reaches for the trick of "play within the play" in his poems and exposes the director's (*regisseur's*) procedures in the staging process. Nevertheless, the metatheatricality in his works is realised most readily by the poet when revealing the process of communication between actor and audience. It turns out that this way of breaking the theatrical illusion is a procedure Herbert uses on purpose. It is meant to involve the spectator in the performance on

stage; to force him to judge the behaviour of the character played by the actor, or to suggest that the boundary between life and theatre is fluid.

I concluded that the structure of the theatre is also manifested in the Herbert's poems through the realisation of the plot of the lyrical texts in a specific theatrical and stage space. I noticed that his lyric texts very often connote the space of the Greek amphitheatre and the simultaneous stage. The former is usually evoked by those poems that have the characteristics of tragedy, whereas works with the characteristics of morality play and mystery play connote the simultaneous scene. His lyric texts are also set in the space of the Elizabethan theatre and puppet theatre. On the Elizabethan stage, Herbert "mounts" glosses to Shakespeare's dramas, while in the puppet theatre he stages a performance for marionettes – chess pieces – symbols of specific characters, set elements and props, as it is in *Mr. Cogito's Game*. I spotted that usually his poems connote a box stage, whose overriding principle is to evoke the impression of the illusion of reality by separating the playing and observing terrain.

The stage space and spoken space in Herbert's poems repeatedly refer to specific places known from culture and history in the broadest sense: Castle of Elsinore, The Peter and Paul Fortress and the streets of Saint Petersburg, the Louvre in Paris or Utica. The stage space most often shows a stage set created in imitation of reality, which does not evoke a specific place, but functions as a symbolic space. This is the case in the lyric text *Report from a Besieged City*, in which the stage space and spoken space are metaphors for all the cities and countries besieged by their invaders. It is relevant to mention that the stage space is usually defined by a character or prop that appears in it.

I also noticed that the category of theatricality is realised in Herbert's poems by referring to two methods of acting: Konstantin Stanislavsky's method which consists in complete identification with the role (*Elegy of Fortinbras*) and Bertold Brecht's method based on creating an effect of alienation (*At the Gate of the Valley*).

It was spotted that the structure of the theatre is realised by showing other places where the actor and director (regisseur) work. It turns out that the action of some of his texts also takes place in the dressing room, above the stage or backstage.

I am convinced that while writing this dissertation I not only managed to fill in the gaps in previous research, but, above all, to create the tools and establish new research procedures that can be used by others in the future to study this type of relationships.

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