

**Katarzyna Cieplińska**

(University of Warmia and Mazury, Olsztyn)

ORCID: 0000-0003-4011-1429

## Jerzy Pietrkiewicz's Two English Novels: *Loot and Loyalty* and *Green Flows the Bile*

Jerzy Pietrkiewicz's novels were not known in Poland for a long time, both because of their numerous anti-communist allusions and the author's reluctance to print in the country.<sup>1</sup> One of his books (*Green Flows the Bile*) has not been published in Poland so far; other novels appeared relatively late, after 1986: *Gdy odpadają łuski ciała* (1986, translated by Alicja Moskalowa; original: *The Quick and the Dead*, 1961); *Wewnętrzne koło* (1988, translated by Alicja H. Moskalowa; original: *Inner Circle*, 1966); *Odosobnienie* (1990, translated by Bronisława Bałutowa; original: *Isolation*, 1959); *Anioł ognisty, mój anioł lewy* (1993, translated by Marta Glińska; original: *That Angel Burning at My Left Side*, 1963) and *Sznur z węzłami* (2005, translated by Maja Glińska; original: *The Knotted Cord*, 1953). The newest publication is the Polish version of *Loot and Loyalty* done by Jacek Dehnel which was issued in 2018 as *Zdobyc i wierność*.<sup>2</sup>

---

<sup>1</sup> About the fact that Pietrkiewicz was against publishing in Poland, Bolesław Taborski wrote in his *Dziennik* [Diary], under the date June 24, 1956, B. Taborski, "Dziennik Bolesława Taborskiego. Fragmenty z lat 1953–1965" [Bolesław Taborski's diary. Fragments from 1953–1965], in: *Jerzy Pietrkiewicz – inna wersja emigracji. Materiały Ogólnopolskiej Konferencji Naukowej 11–12 maja 2000 r. w Toruniu* [Jerzy Pietrkiewicz – another version of emigration. Materials of the National Scientific Conference on May 11–12, 2000 in Toruń], eds. B. Czarnecka, J. Kryszak, Toruń 2000, p. 264.

<sup>2</sup> J. Pietrkiewicz, *Zdobyc i wierność*, translated J. Dehnel, Warszawa 2018.

When Pietrkiewicz arrived in England in 1940, he did not speak any English. Due to his poor health, he was unable to take up military service and so he was given a scholarship and sent to study in Scotland. There he went to the oldest Scottish university, founded in 1413, St. Andrews. Years later, in June 2006, the university awarded the author with an honorary doctorate. In his autobiography, Pietrkiewicz recalled numerous moments of doubt when, at the age of twenty-five, he began his studies in a foreign language and understanding old English literary texts like Chaucer's seemed unachievable to him. Years later he wrote about the tremendous difficulties in understanding the language of medieval texts: "Starting with Middle English texts and Chaucer made sense academically, but not in my case."<sup>3</sup>

After completing his studies in Scotland, Pietrkiewicz continued his studies at the University of London. In an interview with Andrzej Bernat, he emphasized that both the language he had to master and "a certain discipline to which he was subjected to" were important in the education process. The result was not only excellent knowledge of the English language, but also of the literary tradition. The erudition he acquired changed not only his view of the world, but also influenced his further academic and artistic work.<sup>4</sup>

\*

In *The Knotted Cord*, Pietrkiewicz described the first years of his life and achieved significant – as for a foreigner – success. The decision to start writing in English turned out to be the right one. His first novel was well received by British critics. Both the book's plot and the author's style in English were highly rated. For the author himself, however – as he recalled in his autobiography – describing his childhood was also an attempt to "come to terms" with the past and beautiful (safety, beloved mother), but also extremely painful memories (mother's illness, early death of both parents).

---

<sup>3</sup> J. Peterkiewicz, *In the Scales of Fate*, London–New York 1993, p. 172.

<sup>4</sup> "Dajcie mi tylko jedną ziemię milę". J. Pietrkiewicz w rozmowie z A. Bernatem" ["Give me just one mile of land." J. Pietrkiewicz in a conversation with A. Bernat], *Nowe Książki* 1987, no. 5–6, p. 1. All citations from Polish are in my translation – K.C.

Jerzy Pietrkiewicz's second English novel, *Loot and Loyalty*,<sup>5</sup> was published in 1955. The plot is set in 17th-century Poland and Russia. For the first time, the writer reached for a new genre – a historical novel. The reviewers appreciated the author's idea to make a Scotsman the main character in the book. While *The Knotted Cord* presented the Polish countryside through the prism of the fate of little Broniek, in *Loot and Loyalty* Poland is shown from the perspective of a Scottish soldier. Pietrkiewicz's second book therefore proves the author's desire to reach for themes closer to the British reader, even though they are embedded in the Polish culture.

The novel was enthusiastically received by British critics, and the most favorable opinions were focused on the mastery of the language of the book. The *Cambridge Daily News* reviewer noticed that “the author, though writing impeccable English, yet contrives to give the book an unusual and piquant flavor such as it would be unlikely to have if, say, it had been written in his own language and then translated.”<sup>6</sup> Comparisons to Conrad appeared again. It was repeatedly emphasized that Pietrkiewicz wrote in more natural and idiomatic English than his famous compatriot. Another critic wrote in *The Times Weekly Review*: “Like Conrad, Mr. Pietrkiewicz is a Pole writing in English, and, although his prose lacks the majestic cadences of the older novelist, it is shot through with the gleams of a poetic imagination.”<sup>7</sup>

“Pietrkiewicz [...] is an authentic master of English prose”<sup>8</sup> – admitted Bolesław Taborski, who also drew attention to the poetic metaphors and the richness of descriptions of nature and action in *Loot and Loyalty*: “no wind creased the clear sky, and the grass was too young to wear a penitent garb of dust” (LL 128); “the birch trees paraded in a black-and-white file

---

<sup>5</sup> J. Pietrkiewicz, *Loot and Loyalty*, William Heinemann Ltd, Melbourne–London–Toronto 1955. All quotations from the novel come from this edition and are marked with the abbreviation LL.

<sup>6</sup> University Library in Toruń, Archives of Emigration, Jerzy Pietrkiewicz's Archive (hereinafter AE), “Remarkable Tale of 17th Century Poland,” *Cambridge Daily News*, October 7, 1955.

<sup>7</sup> “This Side of Paradise,” *The Times Weekly Review*, August 11, 1955; AE.

<sup>8</sup> B. Taborski, “Między grabieżą a wolnością” [Between plunder and freedom], *Mercuriusz Polski Nowy ale Dawnemu Wielce Podobny i Życie Akademickie* 1955, no. 9.

along a bog from which the frogs sent their raucous commands” (LL 23). Taborski classified the book as “strange and beautiful,” seemingly simple, but deeply thought-provoking, written by a mature, understanding man.

Just like in the first Pietrkiewicz’s English novel, *The Knotted Cord*, here, too, the characters use some Polish words in their dialogues, for example: “pan,” “pani” [Mr., Mrs.]. The Poles call the captain “pan Hume” to simplify the pronunciation of his foreign surname. The Russians, in turn, use the form common in their own language and call Hume “Tobias Davidovich.”

*Loot and Loyalty* consists of twelve chapters and an epilogue. The narrative is conducted from the perspective of an omniscient narrator, and dialogues prevail in the text. The language is styled into seventeenth-century English, though styling appears only in dialogues or quoted historical texts. The lexical forms include archaisms, for instance, in the spelling of some words: “Pollish” (contemporary: “Polish”), “songes this bee sung” (contemporary: “songs to be sung”), “poore brethren” (contemporary: “poor brothers”). Peterkiewicz emphasized that, in his opinion, the archaization of the language might be the hardest part of a translator’s work – if the book was to be translated.

Bolesław Taborski noticed that irony and situational comedy dominate some scenes in the novel: “Honesty and meditation combine in his book smoothly with humor, irony and even sarcasm,”<sup>9</sup> pointing out chapter XI of the novel *The Great Machine*, in which a group of flagellants eagerly volunteer to build the destructive war machine, according to Hume’s instructions. They want to reach salvation as quickly as possible, and the deadly machine gives them hope for the imminent annihilation of the world. Another scene, saturated with black humor, shows a young Russian boyar, Alexey Petrovich Rukin, (so far the Tsar’s favorite and his best companion at drinking), who, though still drunk, is trying to reconstruct the facts and discover how he could have possibly become a traitor – which he is now accused of and captured in a bear cage. The only explanation coming to his mind is: “I must have become traitor while drunk. Yes, I drank much, with Dmitri Ivanovich, uncle. Long live the Tsar! Death to all traitors!” (LL 139).

---

<sup>9</sup> Ibidem.

Making the exile Scot, roaming in the war-torn Eastern Europe, the main hero of the novel is a clear allusion to the fate of the masses of immigrants who found refuge in Britain after World War II.<sup>10</sup> In the novel, the situation is reversed: thousands of Scottish mercenaries are looking for work in the Republic of Poland which is described as a wealthy and stable country. Furthermore, Poland guarantees the refugees religious freedom.<sup>11</sup> Yet, despite the freedom, the Scots feel alienated in this both geographically and culturally distant country. Tobias Hume, seems to be almost obsessed with his awareness of being a foreigner:

He heard [...] voices in different languages. One word was always clear in each of them, clear in Swedish, Polish, Russian, in German, Hungarian and Litvovian, the word which pursued him as he ran into the dark corners of memory. "Foreigner!" the Russian voice spat at him. "Foreigner!", the Polish voice applauded him. "Foreigner?" a question fell on his neck with a rope, held by a German hand. "Foreigner... Foreigner..." they all repeated, intriguing, urging and laughing. (LL 166)

Scottish mercenary soldier, Tobias Hume, was shown in the novel as a man devoted to two great passions: music and the art of war. His beloved instrument, viola da gamba, is his only "faithful companion." Music allows him to fight the "melancholy" (depression) and gives relief in difficult times. Hume dreams of constructing a powerful war machine which would ensure an easy victory over any enemy. Therefore, he is obsessively trying

---

<sup>10</sup> Derek Stanford used the term "DPs in reverse." D. Stanford, "Report from London. Literature in England: The Present Position," *The Western Review* (Iowa City, Iowa, USA) 1957 no. 4; AE.

<sup>11</sup> The of emigration of Scots to Poland was caused by both economic and religious factors, especially from the mid-16th century settling in the Commonwealth was advantageous for the Scots due to religious tolerance and economic structure. The Scots were known as excellent riflemen and infantry; therefore Polish magnates hired them for military service. See also: G. Brzustowicz, *Szkoccy "żołnierze fortuny" w ekspedycjach militarnych na tereny Księstwa Zachodniopomorskiego i Nowej Marchii podczas wojny trzydziestoletniej* [Scottish "soldiers of fortune" in military expeditions to the Duchy of West Pomerania and the New March during the Thirty Years' War], Choszczno 2009; A. Biegańska, "Żołnierze Szkoccy w dawnej Rzeczypospolitej" [Scottish soldiers in the former Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth], *Studia i Materiały do Historii Wojskowości* 1984, no. 27.

to improve the machine's design. Finally, thanks to the financial support of Seton-Setonski, Hume constructs the deadly device. Despite of all the efforts of the builders, the machine eventually collapses, completely destroyed. Hume, as it turns out, does not have any technical knowledge and is, thus, merely an eccentric dreamer.

Jerzy Peterkiewicz, creating the novel's main character, was inspired by two authentic documents: a collection of music compositions by Hume dated 1605<sup>12</sup> and a petition to the English Parliament sent in by captain Tobias Hume in 1642, in which he request the Parliament for financial support in creation of a war machine (both mentioned in the novel).<sup>13</sup>

Despite making Hume one of the protagonists in the book, as well as other numerous references to historical sources, the critics asked the question whether *Loot and Loyalty* should be qualified as a historical novel or not. The critics' opinions varied in this respect. The reviewer of *Mysł Polska* noted that, although the action is set in the seventeenth century, it is merely "historically plausible"<sup>14</sup> and, therefore, *Loot and Loyalty* does not belong to the traditional genre of the historical novel. Hilary Corke defined Peterkiewicz's novel as

pseudo-historical fantasia woven around two historical persons, the Scottish mercenary Captain Tobias Hume (noted for his compositions for viola da gamba), and the peasant pretender to the Russian throne known to historians as *the second false Dmitri*.<sup>15</sup>

"*Loot and Loyalty* has the effect of a waking dream" – wrote an anonymous critic of *The Times Literary Supplement* – "though the hero actually existed."<sup>16</sup> Derek Stanford noted that the book "is more the nature of a fan-

---

<sup>12</sup> The book with Hume's compositions was published in 1605 in London; it is kept in the archives of the British Museum. See: O. Scherer-Wirska, "Druga powieść angielska Pietrkiewiczza" [Pietrkiewicz's second English novel], *Wiadomości* 1955, no. 50.

<sup>13</sup> See: Hume Tobias, in: *Dictionary of National Biography*, ed. P. Lee, vol. XXVII, New York-London 1891, p. 235.

<sup>14</sup> "Ballada o Tobiaszu Hume" [The ballad of Tobias Hume], *Mysł Polska*, October 1, 1955.

<sup>15</sup> *The Encounter* 1955, no. 10; AE.

<sup>16</sup> "The Stock of History," *The Times Literary Supplement*, August 12, 1955; AE.

tasy,"<sup>17</sup> and in *The Times Weekly Review* it was described as a concoction of folklore and history.<sup>18</sup>

Bolesław Taborski was against classifying *Loot and Loyalty* as historical, since – as he noticed – it was not strictly based on facts. For example, in 17th century Poland the King resided in Warsaw and not (as presented in the novel) in Krakow. According to Taborski, such mistake should not diminish the value of the book which is the author's artistic success, even though loosely based on archival sources.<sup>19</sup>

The author himself considered *Loot and Loyalty* to be a historical novel, since the plot was based – even if loosely – on authentic historiographical sources. Peterkiewicz started working on the book at the beginning of 1952, even before the release of *The Knotted Cord*. Full of enthusiasm, he wrote to his wife:

I have got a happy plot for another novel: an *ironical* setting in the 17<sup>th</sup> c. Poland and Russia with [...] Tobias Hume as a mercenary captain. (Don't tell anything about it: superstition!). It would be a tale on the loot & loyalty theme with a humorous twist. But a lot has to be thought out still. Don't think it's *just* a historical novel. History would be a poetic excuse (as the witches in the first novel). As to the material I'll have tons of it (including the stores of the State Papers Library).<sup>20</sup>

*Loot and Loyalty* should definitely be assigned to the genre of the historical novel. Furthermore, a great deal of freedom in creation of the world presented in the book can be justified by the fact that historiographical sources do not reveal much about the two main characters (Hume and Dmitri).

Another protagonist of the novel – vividly described by Peterkiewicz – Dmitri (called False Dmitri II), a peasant boy, who became a Russian Tsar, is associated with an extremely turbulent period in the history of Russia.

<sup>17</sup> D. Stanford, "Report from London. Literature in England: The Present Position."

<sup>18</sup> "This Side of Paradise," *The Times Weekly Review*, August 11, 1955; AE.

<sup>19</sup> "Powieść Pietrkiewicza jest artystycznym sukcesem, nawet jeśli całkiem luźno oparta jest o historyczne źródła," B. Taborski, "Między grabieżą a wolnością" [Between plunder and freedom].

<sup>20</sup> Jerzy Pietrkiewicz's letter to his wife, Christine Brook-Rose, January 22, 1952; AE.

In 1591, during the reign of Tsar Fyodor I, his younger step-brother, Prince Dmitri (other transliterations *Dmitriy*, *Dmitry*, *Dmitrii*) of Uglich, a rightful pretender to the throne, was assassinated. The circumstances of this event have never been explained, and the authors of Russian history in English, Nicholas V. Riasanovsky and Mark D. Stienberg, called the event “one of the most famous criminal mysteries in the history of Russia.”<sup>21</sup>

In 1604 Dmitri entered Russia with an army consisting, inter alia, of the Cossacks and Polish mercenaries. After the death of Boris Godunov, which took place in the following year, Dmitri came to Moscow and took the throne. His wife and Tsarina of Russia was the daughter of a Polish magnate, Maryna Mniszecz.<sup>22</sup> The marriage with a Catholic and the prevalence of Polish magnates in the Kremlin escalated anti-Polish attitudes. In May 1606 the boyars and their armed troops attacked the court and captured Dmitri. The Tsar’s personal guard, which consisted then of Scottish mercenaries, failed to defend the ruler. Dmitri I was brutally murdered and several thousand Poles and Russians were killed during the massacre. Vasily Shuisky became the new Tsar.

In 1607 another usurper to the throne appeared, known as the False Dmitri II.<sup>23</sup> Again, like Dmitri I, he claimed to be the Tsarevich, survivor from Uglich. Second false Dmitri was supported by groups of Russian rebels, Cossacks, Polish<sup>24</sup> and Lithuanian mercenaries and various adventurers. His supporters also included several famous Polish commanders.<sup>25</sup> Both Maryna Minszech – the wife of the first Dimitri, as well as the mother of the tsarevich murdered in Uglich, the widow of Ivan IV the Terrible, publicly

---

<sup>21</sup> N. V. Riasanovsky, M. D. Stienberg, *Historia Rosji [A history of Russia]*, translated A. Bednarczyk, T. Teszner, Kraków 2009, p. 160.

<sup>22</sup> Maryna Mniszecz was the daughter of a Polish voievode in Sandomierz, Jerzy Mniszecz. See: W. Kozlakow, *Maryna Mniszecz*, translated A. Wołodźko-Butkiewicz, Warszawa 2011, p. 11, 49, 102–103.

<sup>23</sup> N. V. Riasanovsky, M. D. Stienberg, *Historia Rosji [A history of Russia]*, p. 172.

<sup>24</sup> His armed forces initially included about 7000 Polish soldiers, but then, with the arrival of King Sigismund III Vasa at Smolensk in 1609, a vast majority of his Polish supporters left him and joined the army of the Polish king.

<sup>25</sup> Their support for Dmitri declared – among others – J. P. Sapieha, A. Wiśniowiecki, P. Tyszkiewicz. See: A. Andrusiewicz, *Dymitr Samozwaniec i Maryna Mniszecz*, Warszawa 2009, p. 425.



recognized him as Tsar Dmitry.<sup>26</sup> The troops supporting the alleged ruler of Russia defeated the Russian army in the spring of 1608, and the false tsar set up his camp in Tuszyno.<sup>27</sup> Called “the scoundrel from Tuszyno,” the newly self-proclaimed Tsar created his own court and the Boyar Duma, collected taxes and granted titles and estates to his supporters.

At that time, several thousands of people gathered in the place, including boyars who did not support Shuysky. Dymitr died in 1610, in unexplained circumstances, probably killed by his own servant sent by Maryna’s lover.<sup>28</sup>

Dmitri, as described in Peterkiewicz’s novel, appears to be a simple and uneducated young peasant. Neither rich, nor witty, he is ready to follow the boyars’ manipulations and easily believes he should be the Tsar of Russia. The surly boy, tempted with the prospect of wealthy and lavish life, quickly begins to fight for his alleged right to the throne. Having tasted the power, he discovers the darkest features of his soul – ruthlessness, cruelty and greed.

The critic of *The Times Weekly Review*, by specifying Dmitri as an “inferior Perkin Warbeck,”<sup>29</sup> drew attention to the convergence of the Russian “tsar” with the story of another usurper, to the English throne.<sup>30</sup> This analogy, however, is not obvious to the reader, unless one is acquainted with the history of both countries. The accumulation of historical facts in the novel, yet, not known or clearly presented to the English reader, states for one of the weak points of the book. Moreover, even contemporarily, an average Polish reader encounters difficulty in reading the novel, unless familiarized with the story of “False Dmitris.”

<sup>26</sup> Ibidem, p. 439.

<sup>27</sup> In the 17th century Tuszyno was a village located north-east from Moscow. Currently its area is within the city boundaries. See: L. Bazylow, P. Wieczorkiewicz, *Historia Rosji* [A history of Russia], Wrocław 2005, p. 102.

<sup>28</sup> Maryna Mniszech died in a Moscow prison in 1615 (during the reign of Tsar Michael Romanov). See: A. Andrusiewicz, op. cit., pp. 488–491.

<sup>29</sup> “This Side of Paradise,” *The Times Weekly Review*, August 11, 1955; AE.

<sup>30</sup> Perkin Warbeck in 1492 as an alleged Richard York, younger son of Edward IV, pretended to the English throne. He was supported by Ireland, Scotland and France. In 1497 he was executed. See: P. Zins, *Historia Anglii* [A history of England], Wrocław 2001, p. 117.

\*

Many British critics emphasized that the novel was difficult to understand: “His material is so wild (and, yes, wooly)” (H. Corke);<sup>31</sup> “The book may be puzzling at times by its casual reference to customs and habits unknown by the average Englishman and which it does not bother to explain.”<sup>32</sup>

Excerpts of the book may be perceived as unclear, mainly due to the superficial descriptions of customs and traditions – unknown to the average English reader – and left without explanation. Possibly, the novel would have profited, if the author had affixed footnotes and comments the text, to show the linkages between the events in the plot and historical facts.

*Loot and Loyalty*, despite its artistic success – praised by critics for its style – was doomed to commercial failure. The theme of 17th-century Poland and Russia, though exotic, appeared to be unattractive for the English reader. Moreover, the material presented in the book proved to be too difficult and culturally distant for the British. Finally, it seems that neither British, nor Polish exile readers could properly grasp the author’s intentions, mainly due to insufficient knowledge of historical events.

*Loot and Loyalty* can be read as a novel with a thesis written “to cheer the hearts” of Pietrkiewicz’s compatriots in exile. The English reader then had the possibility to get acquainted with the period of Russian history, when the country was not a superpower and Polish king almost took the Russian throne. The author used historical facts to build the plot of the novel, but also to express his personal anti-Soviet manifesto.

\*

The last of Jerzy Pietrkiewicz’s novels published in Great Britain, *Green Flows the Bile*<sup>33</sup> aroused mixed reactions among the critics. Sheila Savill expressed her disappointment with the book in a review published in *Eastern Daily Press*. Encouraged by Anthony Burgess’s flattering comparisons

---

<sup>31</sup> H. Corke, *The Encounter* 1955, no. 10; AE.

<sup>32</sup> *Remarkable Tale of 17th Century Poland*, *Cambridge Daily News*, October 7, 1955; AE.

<sup>33</sup> J. Peterkiewicz, *Green Flows the Bile*, Michael Joseph, London 1969. All quotations from the novel come from this edition and are marked with the abbreviation GF.

of Pietrkiewicz to Artur Koestler and Joseph Conrad,<sup>34</sup> Savill admitted: "I opened the book eagerly. My hopes were rudely shattered [...] To me the book seems slick and essentially frivolous."<sup>35</sup> Of the two books she reviewed, thematically referring to the countries of the Eastern Bloc – *Cancer Ward* by Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn and *Green Flows the Bile* – Pietrkiewicz's book seemed much less interesting to her. "Recounted with a dispassionate attention to nauseous detail, the novel is lucid, coldly amusing and uncomfortably clinical" (J. H.)<sup>36</sup> – the opinion appeared in *Birmingham Evening Mail*. "An original writer and he is still experimenting"<sup>37</sup> – noted the reviewer of *Hampstead and Highgate Express*. "Mr. Peterkiewicz is no orthodox novelist" – pointed out the critic of the *Knighley News* – "He likes to shock, even repulse his readers. Look at the title of the book for that."<sup>38</sup> The title appeared to be provoking and the book was referred to as: "unappetizingly titled,"<sup>39</sup> "intriguing [title], but presages the type of book and humor that awaits the reader."<sup>40</sup>

Both the title of the novel and the detailed descriptions of the physiology of an old man undergoing surgery were regarded by critics to be the weak points of the book. The plot, showing the journey of an aging comedian to the Eastern Bloc countries, was also unappreciated. Perhaps, driven by these opinions, Pietrkiewicz decided not to publish any more novels in English.

\*

The opening scene of the novel is located in a private clinic in London. A detailed description of the main character, Gerald Gull – unconscious after gallbladder removal surgery – is made by Miron Wilber, Gerald's newly

---

<sup>34</sup> A. Burgess, *The Novel Now*, New York 1970, p. 165.

<sup>35</sup> P. Savill, "Lives of Individuals in the Soviet Union," *Eastern Daily Press*, March 7, 1969; AE.

<sup>36</sup> *Birmingham Evening Mail*, March 7, 1969; AE.

<sup>37</sup> "Gull the Gullible," *Hampstead and Highgate Express*, March 14, 1969; AE.

<sup>38</sup> *Keighley News*, March 1, 1969; AE.

<sup>39</sup> "Fiction," *Cambridge News*, April 19, 1969; AE.

<sup>40</sup> M. Czajkowska, "Czy w ślady Conrada?" [Going in Conrad's footsteps?], *Oficyna Poetów* 1969, no. 3, p. 41.

employed secretary and the narrator of the novel: “Abruptly, the snoring stops, the yellow hand on the yellow smudge, the skin of a lizard, taut, segmented by green veins. It jerks, becomes a fist” (GF 10).

As the hours pass and Miron spends more time at the bedside of the famous Gerald Gull (known from the media as G. G.), his disgust towards the old, sick man grows: “This inflated his nostrils, the whole face, from yellow bags under the eyes, all the way down developed a huge crinkly pout, which wobbled, threatening to burst. The bile was there, changing colors, I could imagine its concentrated stink, green after yellow, after green back to yellow” (GF 16).

Miron is a cynical young man who earns his living by writing biographies of famous people at the end of their lives. His own reflections include such monologues: “As a matter of fact three great men have conked on me. Which is a thing to play down if you want to remain in my discreet business. A perfect off-beat secretary. After all, no private nurse would want to be credited with too many dead patients in her letter of recommendation. And death is such a clumsy indiscretion whichever way you try to cover it up.” (GF 12).

Gerald’s second ex-wife, Alicia (“Dame Alicia”), employed Miron and it is her who pays his monthly salary. She wants him to collect materials for writing G. G.’s biography. She is no less cynical than Miron – it is her dream to become famous – at least as a celebrity’s wife. Her favorite joke is: “What is the highest ambition of every American woman? [...] To be a widow” (GF 21). Gerald himself illustrates the hypocrisy of his wife with a comment: “the last stage of capitalism” (GF 10).

Miron was described in some reviews as: “snake-in-the-grass,”<sup>41</sup> “reptilian secretary,”<sup>42</sup> “creature flapping about the bedside of a world-famous figure in his hospital ward,” “loyal secretary, human vulture, avid collector of famous last words.”<sup>43</sup> Miron himself has no remorse and truly believes that he works hard and thus deserves his lucrative contract:

---

<sup>41</sup> P. Crawley, “Next Step a Film,” *The Journal*, March 8, 1969; AE.

<sup>42</sup> “Nails,” *The Times Literary Supplement*, February 27, 1969; AE.

<sup>43</sup> N. Shrapnel, “Vulture and Shadow,” *The Times Literary Supplement*, no date; AE.

Dear me, everybody is paid nowadays for being an amateur. Students, ideological advisers, drug-takers, blood-donors, bird-watchers, part-time evangelists, the lot! I am a mixture between an amateur and a professional disciple, that's why I find myself in these awkward situations. Great men pouncing on me in the hour of their ultimate vision. There is a horrible attraction about being available at the right moment. (GF 13).

During the process of preparation for writing the biography of Gerald Gull, the secretary meets all his ex-wives. The third in order ex-wife is a Cuban beauty – Paquita. As she regards Miron a “political gigolo” (GF 26), she invites him to her bedroom and so does the fourth and last G. G.'s American wife – a frivolous and as cynical as the other characters, Nancy.

Gerald Gull, once awarded the People's Prize for Peace is a politically engaged traveler who provokes controversial opinions and loves reading press releases about himself.

As Sheila Savill stated, the hero may be described as “*enfant terrible* and fellow traveller.”<sup>44</sup>

According to another reviewer (*The Times Literary Supplement*) – the protagonist “is not merely a papier-mâché construction of famous men, but a lively and memorable fictional character [...] He is as promiscuous as H. G. Wells, and delightful to youth, especially young girls. He shocks people according to their age group.”<sup>45</sup> And G. G.'s life motto is: “If you can't shock them, at least flatter the young” (GF 17).

Gerald eagerly talks about himself and his past. He created his own philosophy of life based on hedonism, and his life wisdom is based on skepticism and cynicism. In the 1930s, during his travels around the Eastern Bloc countries, Gerald met the greatest political figures of the communist era: “A mountaineer by instinct: he had climbed every great peak along the European range, from Salazar to Stalin, he had seen the famous sights when they could be seen: Lenin, Mussolini, Madame Lupescu, Comrade-Madame Pauker, Bierut, Rakosi, Khrushchev” (GF 64–65).

One day, Gerald receives a telegram from the Kremlin and, accompanied by Miron, leaves his house in Hampstead to go to Moscow, invited by

---

<sup>44</sup> P. Savill, “Lives of Individuals in the Soviet Union.”

<sup>45</sup> “Nails,” *The Times Literary Supplement*.

Khrushchev. During this “hilarious and increasingly bizarre tour behind the Iron Curtain”<sup>46</sup> Gerald visits his “old Communist buddies”<sup>47</sup> in Sofia, Bucharest, Budapest, receiving warm welcome in all the places.

The political context of the book did not gain the approval of some critics. According to Christina Hobhouse, the protagonist’s liberalism was deeply rooted in communism.<sup>48</sup> *The Times Literary Supplement* reviewer noted that it was Kingsley Martin<sup>49</sup> who was the prototype of the main character in Pietrkiewicz’s novel and the author overtly parodied Martin’s television appearances in which the journalist questioned the credibility of Malcolm Muggeridge’s<sup>50</sup> reports from Moscow as giving apparently false vision of Stalinist Russia.

Gerald is uncritically fascinated by the people and cultures of Eastern European countries (another allusion to Martin’s attitude):

I met Maslov in the corridor and he slapped my back saying “Comrade Gull, would you like to shoot hares with me?”

I answered Maslov that I had never shot an animal in my life, and so I could not start doing it now. He asked me to have a drink with him, and I accepted, although I find vodka far less agreeable before lunch. Maslov talked about the traitor Bukharin and drank my health twice, so that I was obliged to drink his health, although I find that a third glass of vodka goes to my head at once.

---

<sup>46</sup> J. Whitley, “Discipline of Faith,” *The Sunday Times*, February 23, 1969; AE.

<sup>47</sup> P. Crawley, “Next Step a Film.”

<sup>48</sup> C. Hobhouse, “A Legend,” *Western Mail*, March 22, 1969; AE.

<sup>49</sup> Basil Kingsley Martin (1897–1969), British journalist, in the years 1930–1960 editor of a leftist magazine *New Statesman* (since 1931 *New Statesman and Nation*) known for his pro-Soviet views. See: *The Encyclopedia of the British Press 1422–1992*, ed. D. Griffiths, London–Basingstoke 1992, p. 404; B. Jones, *The Russia complex: the British Labour Party and the Soviet Union*, Manchester 1977, p. 25, 100.

<sup>50</sup> Malcolm Muggeridge (1903–1990), English journalist and writer. Graduate of the University of Cambridge. In the 1930s, he was a correspondent for the British magazine *Manchester Guardian* in the Soviet Union. After a period of youthful fascination with Soviet Russia, he changed his views and reliably described the period of great famine in the Ukraine. In the 1960s, he was rector of the University of Edinburgh. At the end of his life he converted to the Catholic faith under the influence of Mother Teresa. His writings include: *Jesus Rediscovered* (1969), *Something Beautiful for God* (1971), *Jesus: The Man Who Lives* (1976), *Conversion* (1988), See: G. Wolfe, *Malcolm Muggeridge. A Biography*, London 2003.

"If you were Russian," said Maslov, "you would be shooting hares with friends instead of getting drunk like a typical Englishman."

I admit that I cannot resist Maslov's *bonhomie*. Such charm, too. I wish the journalists from London would speak to him rather than concoct fantastic stories about what they think is going on here in Moscow. (GF 111).

In the final scene of the book the protagonist dies in a television studio. "G. G. greatest cup he brings off by dying *live* in front of his beloved television cameras,"<sup>51</sup> which Miron observes with satisfaction, such death being a spectacular ending of the biography he is writing: "I rushed to the lamp, and my first professional thought came with the pressing of the switch: he has done very well, better than in the clinic: G. G. has had his death televised" (GF 156).

Gerald's death, publicized by the media, is also an allusion to the figure of the journalist who aroused extreme opinions with his political views, Kingsley Martin, and who died in the year of publication of Pietrkiewicz's novel. The reviewer of *The Times Literary Supplement* drew attention to this analogy:

There is no impropriety in making the comparison so soon after Martin's death: he was not the kind of man who gets an uncontroversial obituary, and this novel – though basically hostile to his kind of leftist pays a sort of tribute to such independence of spirit, and expresses, beneath a light, mannered coating of "stylishness," a serious concern with the issues that were important to Martin.<sup>52</sup>

\*

Few favorable opinions of critics referred to the humor in the novel. As *The Times Literary Supplement* reviewer noted "*Green Flows* is a piece of enigmatical, brilliant black comedy."<sup>53</sup> John Whitley he compared the comic elements in Pietrkiewicz's book to the black humor in the novel *Memento Mori* by Muriel Spark.<sup>54</sup> Richard Jones admitted that as he read the text,

---

<sup>51</sup> C. Hobhouse, "A Legend."

<sup>52</sup> "Nails," *The Times Literary Supplement*.

<sup>53</sup> N. Shrapnel, "Vulture and Shadow."

<sup>54</sup> J. Whitley, "Discipline of Faith," *The Sunday Times*, February 23, 1969; AE.

Pietrkiewicz's humor seemed more and more annoying.<sup>55</sup> Other reviewers emphasized the novelty and experimental form: "An earlier book by this author has been described as *uncategorisable* and this is probably the word for *Green Flows the Bile*."<sup>56</sup> The critic of *Halifax Evening Courier & Guardian* assessed the novel as "a record introducing a real *mélange* of humor, pantomime and romance, garnished with snippets of political history."<sup>57</sup>

Pietrkiewicz once again surprised the public with the style of the novel, which is completely different from the style of all his previous books. "Jerzy Peterkiewicz is an immigrant writer who uses English with far more versatility than most of the English" – wrote Norman Shrapnel, who referred to the language of the book as an "exotic slang in artful tone." Magdalena Czajkowska drew attention to "linguistic and stylistic puzzles" woven into the text and the critic of the *Hampstead and Highgate Express* commented similarly: "For there is a barb in nearly every paragraph, a pun on every page." According to the reviewer of *The Times Literary Supplement*, the novel is characterized by "unmistakable style and tone – fresh, airy, so cool as to seem heartless."<sup>58</sup> The novel also contains jokes, both with political undertones: "But surely the milk is flowing less fast now that old Joe is gone from the Kremlin?" (GF 60), as well as erotic.

In *Hampstead and Highgate Express* the also underlined that *Green Flows the Bile* is an extremely difficult novel, addressed to a narrow audience. The apparent lightness of the style does not mean that the book was not intended to be sheer entertainment, and appreciating the author's skills or grasping the main point of the work requires a thorough analysis of the content.<sup>59</sup>

Magdalena Czajkowska referred to the novel as "playing with English," in which the story about Gerald and his secretary is only a pretext. The

---

<sup>55</sup> R. Jones, "Lambrakis Lives," *The Listener*, February 27, 1969; AE.

<sup>56</sup> "Near to Zany," *Halifax Courier and Guardian*, February 28, 1969; AE.

<sup>57</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>58</sup> "Nails," *The Times Literary Supplement*.

<sup>59</sup> "Skim through Jerzy Peterkiewicz's slim new novel *Green Flows the Bile* [...] and you can count yourself clever if you understand the half of it [...] read it carefully and you will begin to appreciate its rich irony. Re-read it and you will savour its flavour;" "Gull the Gullible."



main thesis of Pietrkiewicz's book is an ironic presentation of a vision of reality devoid of illusions, based on hypocrisy and simulation. The heroes of the novel have lost their moral values, denying traditional sources of happiness such as family, interpersonal bonds, honesty and hard work. In the world presented in *Green Flows the Bile*, fame and high social status do not depend on origin, wealth or level of education. Success can only be achieved with dishonesty and cunning, and the most important values turn out to be opportunism and greed. The characters disregard social norms and break with the restrictions of commonly accepted customs. They live only for themselves, which means that the primary goal of each of them is to become rich and famous.

The characters in the novel reject the traditional moral norms and that gives them the sense of liberation. Yet, eventually, it does not bring them happiness. Pietrkiewicz shows that selfishness and emotional isolation lead to loneliness or betrayal, and the disruption of the teleological order of the world causes the loss not only of all rules, but also of the core meaning of life.

Original issue: "Archiwum Emigracji" 2018/2019, no. 1-2 (26-27)  
<https://apcz.umk.pl/AE/article/view/AE.2018-2019.001>