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Brr, Bereza. Polish literature towards the Confinement Centre in Bereza Kartuska. 1934–1939

*... the camp has a beautiful traditional Polish name: “Seclusion spot”
(almost like: “Temple of Meditation”).¹*

*M.O., i.e. miejsce odosobnienia (confinement centre), generally
termed by people as the slaughter house of citizens².*

Emulating the one in Dachau, Poles built their own, in Bereza³.

The Confinement Centre in Bereza Kartuska

On 18 June 1934 Maria Dąbrowska wrote in her diary: “Brr – Now we have isolation camps – Soon, you won’t be able to speak, write, or live!”⁴ That was her reaction to a Resolution by Ignacy Mościcki, President of the Republic of Poland, of 17 June 1934 on persons threatening the security, peace, and public order. The first of six articles of the document, which was enforced as an act of law, stated:

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1 M. Niedziałkowski, “‘Kurs na lewo’ i obozy izolacyjne”, *Robotnik* 1934, issue 251, p. 1. [Translator’s note: the term “miejsce odosobnienia” is ambiguous in Polish literally meaning “a place of seclusion”. However, in English such places are referred to as “confinement centres”, I decided to use this, still somewhat euphemistic, term as a translation of “miejsce odosobnienia”] [Unless specified otherwise, English versions translated from Polish]

2 M. Bartz, *Przeżycia Bereziaka* Nr. 793, Bogdan Sobiesiński, Brussels 1945, p. 24.

3 S. Twardoch, *Król*, Wydawnictwo Literackie, Krakow 2016, p. 301.

4 M. Dąbrowska, *Dzienniki 1914–1965*, T. Drewnowski (ed.), Polska Akademia Nauk. Wydział I Nauk Społecznych. Komitet Nauk o Literaturze, Warsaw 2009, vol. 2, p. 184.

Persons the activities or actions of whom offer the basis for assuming that they might violate the public security or order, can be subject to detention and enforced relocation to a confinement centre, which is not intended for persons sentenced or arrested in relation to committing crimes⁵.

The Resolution was published on 18 June in the Official Journal (*Dziennik Ustaw*), and in the press the following day, thus coming into force. It soon resulted in, though not immediately, as Dąbrowska suggested, the creation of the Confinement Centre in Bereza Kartuska (*Miejsce Odosobnienia w Berezie Kartuskiej*).

The direct reason for introducing the act on confinement centres, the only example of which was Bereza (the toponym soon became synonymous with the infamous institution), was the murder of Bronisław Pieracki, minister of internal affairs, on 15 June 1934 by, as it quickly turned out, Hryhorij Maciejko, a member of the Organisation of Ukrainian Nationalists (*Organizacja Ukraińskich Nacjonalistów*, OUN). The idea to create the confinement centre came from Prime Minister Leon Kozłowski and it was accepted by Józef Piłsudski, whose signature together with the signature of the minister of military affairs, can be found among the signatures of the signatories of the resolution. Supposedly Piłsudski consented to that, as he called it, *Czeka* only to operate for one year⁶. Yet it operated much longer. Confinement centres, as per the act (which, in practice, meant: in Bereza Kartuska), were intended for persons who due to a lack of sufficient evidence of illegal activities, could not be tried. Confinement could had been decreed for three months with an option to extend it, should a confined person behave improperly, for additional three months⁷. In many cases it lasted more than six months.

The Resolution of 17 June resembled in legal terms an earlier resolution passed in Germany on 28 February 1933 on the “protection of the nation and the state”, offering basis for establishing the institution of protective custody (*Schutzhaft*), which fulfilled not so much a *de iure* preventive and educational function with the intention to adjust an individual for honest work, as mainly a means of repression, as it soon turned out. It was the predecessor of Nazi concentration camps. The Confinement Centre in Bereza Kartuska, just like Hitler’s camps initially, was mainly intended to break the detainees mentally so that they would never again oppose the state. It was meant for those who, according to the government, operated with the goal to destabilise the social and political situation in the country.

5 *Resolution of the President of the Republic of Poland of 17 June 1934 on persons threatening the security, peace, and public order*, <http://prawo.sejm.gov.pl/isap.nsf/DocDetails.xsp?id=WDU1934.0500473> [accessed on: 5.03.2018].

6 Vide M. Lepecki, *Pamiętnik adiutanta marszałka Piłsudskiego*, Państwowe Wydawnictwo Naukowe, Warsaw 1987, pp. 219–222.

7 *Resolution of the President of the Republic of Poland of 17 June 1934*.

After Piarecki's murder, the arrests applied not only to Polish national radicals, who from the very beginning were suspected of the murder (unjustly as it soon became clear), but also OUN operatives and communists. The first inmates (detainees *de nomine*)⁸ were brought to Bereza in the evening of 6 July 1934, three weeks after the resolution came into force. Those were two members of the National Party (Stronnictwo Narodowe) from Krakow. Soon afterwards, three communists from Nowogródek (Navahrudak) were added⁹. The following day, a transport from Warsaw arrived carrying, e.g. members of the National Radical Camp (Obóz Narodowo-Radykalny, ONR, far-right Polish ultranationalist party) including Włodzimierz Sznarbachowski and Bolesław Piasecki¹⁰.

The Confinement Centre in Bereza Kartuska operated for over five years, until 18 September 1939¹¹. The guards left at night on 17 September upon learning the Red Army had invaded Poland. The following morning, the inmates broke free not impeded by anyone. It has been estimated that by the end of August 1939, when the number of internees began to increase rapidly due to the expected German invasion, over 3,000 inmates were at some point interned at Bereza Kartuska. They could be divided into several groups. I have already mentioned three of those. Ukrainian nationalists and Polish national radicals (members of the ONR and the National Party) constituted the largest group in the initial period of the functioning of the Confinement Centre. Since 1936, the largest group which was treated the worst consisted communists and members of the radical peasant movement who supported them. At the turn of 1938, Bereza Kartuska experienced a massive influx of criminal offenders, and persons accused of economic offences. In mid-June 1938, as Poland began experiencing an inflow of foreigners, stateless persons (mainly of Jewish descent) expelled from the Third Reich, the Polish government decided to send to Bereza persons who could not had been deported due to formal reasons. The operation's objective, which was rather preventive than repressive in nature, was to repel foreigners attempting to enter Poland illegally and remain there. By the end of April 1939, another group of Ukrainians was interned, or rather

8 Cf.: "In Bereza, the term 'inmate' was banned. You were a detainee, that is someone deprived of some of the rights that inmates possess. Normally, you conduct an investigation regarding a detainee [...]. No investigations were undertaken in relation to those interned in Bereza" (A. Garlicki, "Bereza Kartuska", [in:] idem, *Piękne lata trzydzieste*, Prószyński i S-ka, Warsaw 2008, p. 245).

9 Vide I. Polit, *Miejsce odosobnienia w Berezie Kartuskiej w latach 1934-1939*, Adam Marszałek, Toruń 2003, p. 75.

10 Vide W. Sznarbachowski, *300 lat wspomnień*, Aneks, London 1997, pp. 93-96.

11 I provide the data in this and the following paragraph on the Confinement Centre in Bereza Kartuska after Ireneusz Polit (*Miejsce odosobnienia...*, pp. 91-168) and Wojciech Śleszyński (*Obóz odosobnienia w Berezie Kartuskiej 1934-1939*, Dom Wydawniczy Benkowski, Białystok 2003, pp. 83-102)

detained, in Bereza: members of the Carpathian Sich fighting to establish within the area of the so-called Carpatho-Ukraine an independent Ukrainian state (subject to a separate mild statute). At the beginning of September 1939, Bereza received a massive influx of persons suspected of pro-German sympathies (however, the first persons classified under this group were interned in mid-1938), and, more broadly, persons threatening state security during wartime, including communists and Ukrainians. (That was when, for the first time since the Confinement Centre began its operations, the Centre started receiving women)¹². Presumably, in the first days of September, several thousand persons were interned at Bereza. Those included captured German soldiers (they were held in a separate room).

Between July 1934 and late August 1939, the majority of the internees at Bereza consisted political activists (63%), who between 1934 and 1936 were virtually the only group of internees. The second largest group of internees were criminals (35%). The remaining inmates (2%) consisted mainly profiteers and persons belonging to other groups discussed above. Among political prisoners (63% of all inmates) communists constituted a majority (55% of all inmates), there was a large representation of Ukrainian nationalists (4%), Polish national radicals (2%), members of the People's Party (Stronnictwo Ludowe) (1%), and sympathisers of German Nazism (or Germany).

Debate about the name (and affiliation)

I have intentionally avoided the term “camp” when referring to the Confinement Centre in Bereza Kartuska. It is present in the fragments of the 1934 article by Mieczysław Niedziałkowski and of Maria Dąbrowska's diary which I quoted as mottoes. Apparently it was clear for some that the term “confinement centre” was a euphemism. At that time the word “camp” did not carry such negative associations as it does today, but it surely connoted, in the context of politics, a place considerably less pleasant than a refuge, and especially Niedziałkowski's, ironic, temple of meditation. The titles of the monographs quoted by me devoted to the place, both published in 2003, include the term: “miejsce odosobnienia” (confinement centre) and “obóz odosobnienia” (confinement camp)¹³. The author of the latter, Wojciech Śleszyński, noted that earlier publications included various names: not only “confinement centre” (such a name was used in official documents)¹⁴ and “confinement camp”, but also “isolation camp” and “concentration camp”. Ac-

¹² The only testimony of a female inmate that I know of was by Józefa Ozimek (idem, “Kobieta-więzień”, [in:] *Bereziacy*, L. Pasternak (ed.), Książka i Wiedza, Warsaw 1965, pp. 445–446).

¹³ I. Polit, *Miejsce odosobnienia...*; W. Śleszyński, *Obóz odosobnienia...*

¹⁴ Cf.: “[...] isolation camp officially referred to as ‘Confinement Centre’” (W. Czarnecki, “W Berezie Kartuskiej. To, co widział nasz sprawozdawca”, *Robotnik* 1934, issue 252, p. 3).

cording to him, all of them were adequate from the methodological point of view. However, due to the experiences of World War II the term “concentration camp” has lost its original meaning of, as the monograph indicates: “a place intended for temporary concentration (locking up) of political opponents and civilian population, and it became the synonym of a death camp”¹⁵, the author refrained from using that term and focussed on using the other three instead. Had the author not refrained from using it and had he indicated that there was a considerable difference between concentration camps, such as Dachau and Buchenwald, and (direct) death camps, such as Treblinka, no one would have found it offensive or, at least, people would consider as controversial a statement that Poles too had their share in concentrating, and, mind you, repressing at camps people against whom no fault had been proven. I am referring to not only the (Sanation) Confinement Centre in Bereza Kartuska, but also the 1945 (communist) camps in Jaworzno and Świętochłowice¹⁶.

The terminology was, in fact, not precise enough and unstable from the very beginning. Prime minister Kozłowski in a statement of 19 June 1934 published in *Gazeta Polska*, which was considered as an outlet of the governing party, mentioned a regulation establishing “isolation camps” in Poland, and then, having quoted the expression: “There must be order”, he stated emphatically: “Concentration camps. Yes. Why? Because it is obvious that those eight years of work for the greatness of Poland [...] were not enough for some.”¹⁷ Where did the “concentration” camps come from in that passage? Ireneusz Polit indicated that Kozłowski derived inspiration to establish camps in Poland from a speech delivered in Warsaw on 13 June 1934 by Joseph Goebbels, Reich minister of public enlightenment and propaganda, on the educational role of concentration camps in Germany¹⁸. An extremely telling name of Confinement Centre in Bereza Kartuska appeared in a manifesto of the Communist Party of Poland (Komunistyczna Partia Polski, KPP) of 18 June 1934,

¹⁵ W. Śleszyński, *Obóz odosobnienia...*, p. 11.

¹⁶ Vide, e.g. B. Kopka, *Obozy pracy w Polsce 1944–1950. Przewodnik encyklopedyczny*, Niezależna Oficyna Wydawnicza Nowa, Ośrodek „Karta”, Warsaw 2002; T. Wolsza, *W cieniu Wronek, Jaworzno i Piehcina... 1945–1956. Życie codzienne w polskich więzieniach, obozach i ośrodkach pracy więźniów*, Instytut Historii PAN, Warsaw 2003. It is telling that Mateusz Wyrwich, a conservative journalist, included in the title of his book on the Central Labour Camp in Jaworzno (Centralny Obóz Pracy w Jaworznie; that was the official name of the facility) a Russian (so also Soviet) term for the camp thus suggesting it was not a Polish creation (or not entirely so): *Łagier Jaworzno. Z dziejów czerwonego terroru* (Editions Spotkania, Warsaw 1995).

¹⁷ “Miejsca odosobnienia. Oświadczenie premjera L. Kozłowskiego”. *Gazeta Polska* 1934, issue 168, p. 2.

¹⁸ I. Polit, *Miejsce odosobnienia...*, p. 38. The author indicated an incorrect date of the speech, i.e. one day later – cf. “Co mówił dr. Goebbels? Skróć odczytu o ‘Ideologii Niemiec hitlerowskich’: hitleryzm nie jest towarem na eksport”, *Republika* 1934, issue 161, p. 2.

which stated that “the fascist government and president announced a decree on Hilter [!] isolation camps.”¹⁹ That was surely no mistake but an intentional usage intended to suggest a relationship between the existing German (Hitler) camps and the planned Polish camps due to the alleged similarity of the political systems of both states. Either way, the remainder of the manifesto used the term concentration camps²⁰. That name referring to Bereza Kartuska was also used by national radicals. It can be found, e.g. in *Historia Polski* (History of Poland) by Stanisław Mackiewicz of 1941²¹ and in a fifty years younger foreword by Leszek Żebrowski to a book by Piotr Siekanowicz entitled *Obóz odosobnienia w Berezie Kartuskiej 1934–1939* (Confinement Centre in Bereza Kartuska)²². Austerity in using the term “concentration camp” in reference to the Confinement Centre in Bereza Kartuska was characteristic of mainly Polish authors, though, apparently not all. The least hesitant in that respect were authors who were critical of the Sanation government, as well as foreign authors.

In fact, both in the Soviet Union, and in the former Soviet republics of: Belarus, Ukraine and Lithuania, it is common to use, regardless of one’s political affinity, the term concentration camp: *концентрационный лагерь* (*концлагерь*)²³, *каницэнтрацыйны лягер*²⁴, *концтабір*²⁵, *koncentracijos stovykla*²⁶. In Poland, even after 1939, it was mainly used by communists, including historians, writers, and journalists. The concentration camp, euphemistically referred by its creators as a confinement centre or camp, was referenced by, e.g. Jerzy Rawicz, and former

19 *Dyktatura faszystowska Piłsudskiego wprowadza obozy koncentracyjne*, Archiwum Akt Nowych w Warszawie, set MSW, ref. 1163, l. 78, as cited in: “Bereza Kartuska”, selected and submitted for printing by A. Knyt, *Karta*, issue 59 (2009), p. 25.

20 Ibid.

21 S. Mackiewicz (Cat), “Zbiórka i Bereza”, [in:] idem, *Historia Polski od 11 listopada 1918 r. do 17 września 1939 r.*, M.I. Kolin, London 1941, p. 321.

22 Żebrowski wrote: “‘confinement camp’, is, in essence, a concentration camp” (idem, “Przedmowa”, [in:] P. Siekanowicz, *Obóz odosobnienia w Berezie Kartuskiej 1934–1939*, Instytut Historyczny im. Romana Dmowskiego, Instytut im. Romana Dmowskiego, Warsaw 1991, p. 5).

23 В. Беляев, “Третий брат Сакко и Ванцетти”, [in:] А. Гаврилюк, *Песни из Березы*, В. Беляев (ed.), trans. [from Ukrainian], Молодая гвардия, Москва 1954, p. 17; *Они не стали на колени. Сборник воспоминаний и документов о концлагере Береза Картузская*, [selection and literary editing] В. Поссе, Л. Аржаева, Я. Миско (eds.), Беларусь, Минск 1966, p. 6.

24 [author not credited], “Бяроза-Картузскі канцэнтрацыйны лагерь”, [in:] *Беларуская энцыклапедыя*. У 18 т, vol. 3, БелЭн, Мінск 1996, p. 410.

25 Н. Колошук, “Береза Картузька в українській табірній мемуаристиці”, *Київські полоністичні студії*, vol. 18 (2011), pp. 280–287.

26 E. Brazaitienė, “Juozas Kėkštās (1915–1981)”, [in:] Maironio lietuvių literatūros muziejus, <http://maironiomuziejus.lt/lt/iseiviu-literaturos-skyriaus-114/juozas-kekstas-19151981-1629> [accessed on: 29.11.2018].

internees of German, Nazi camps, i.e. Stanisław Wygodzki and Teofil Witek²⁷. The latter added the qualifier “Sanation”. Other authors, including Piotr Gazdajka, a journalist, and Aron Skrobek, a former Bereza internee, wrote openly about a “Polish concentration camp.”²⁸ A similar expression was used in the title of an article published in the already independent Poland entitled *Bereza, polski obóz koncentracyjny* (Bereza. Polish concentration camp)²⁹ by Andrzej Garlicki, a historian (obliging to the authorities of the People’s Republic of Poland). In a chapter of *Piękne lata trzydzieste* (Wonderful 1930s), of which the article was an abridged version, Garlicki stated that when Bereza was being created, it was not being modelled, as some historians posited, after Soviet gulags, which preceded German concentration camps, as, according to him, they were “a strictly protected secret and usually no one knew they existed.”³⁰ Regardless whether Bereza was actually “modelled after Dachau”³¹ one must indicate that in pre-WWII Poland people knew this and that about Soviet gulags. That was because before the Nazis created their first concentration camps and before the Confinement Centre in Bereza Kartuska was established, Polish readers had the opportunity to read books on Soviet prisons and gulags. One such publication was a 1927–1928 two-volume collection entitled *Za kratami więzień i drutami obozów* (Behind prison bars and camp wires)³²; the other was a 1930 “memoir from Solovki” by Mieczysław Lenardowicz entitled *Na wyspach tortur i śmierci* (In the islands of torture and death)³³. In any case, Piotr Siekanowicz stated that Bereza was modelled both after the GPU (Soviet state political directorate) camps in Soviet Russia and the concentration camps operating in Hitler’s Germany. He added that the creators of Bereza were not unfamiliar with the “domestic school”, i.e. the prison for parliamentary opposition

27 J. Rawicz, *Diabeł przegrany*, Czytelnik, Warsaw 1976, p. 250; S. Wygodzki, “Epopcja bohaterstwa i solidarności”, *Express Wieczorny* 1965, issue 203, p. 6; T. Witek, “Książka o Berezie”, *Za wolność i lud* 1956, issue 8, p. 20.

28 P. Gazdajka, “Za drutami Berezy”, *Za wolność i lud* 1951, issue 6, p. 14; M. Skrobek, “Nie wierzymy w bogów”, [in:] *Bereziacy*, p. 120. I shall return to Skrobek further in the article, so allow me to explain now that the name Mendel which can be found in the biographical note to *Bereziacy* (ibid., p. 463) is a pseudonym; he also used a pseudonym of Dawid Kutner – vide W. Sznarbachowski, *300 lat...*, p. 94.

29 A. Garlicki, “Bereza, polski obóz koncentracyjny”, *Gazeta Wyborcza* 2008, issue 93, pp. 29–30.

30 A. Garlicki, *Bereza Kartuska*, p. 240.

31 Nota bene, that was the subtitle of one of the chapters of the previously quoted article by Garlicki.

32 *Za kratami więzień i drutami obozów (wspomnienia i notatki więźniów ideowych z lat 1914–1921)*, collection and editorial commentary by W. Lipiński [et al.], t. 1–2, Komitet Organizacyjny Zjazdu b. Więźniów Ideowych, Warsaw 1927–1928.

33 M. Lenardowicz, *Na wyspach tortur i śmierci. Pamiętnik z Sołówek*, Wojskowy Instytut Naukowo-Wydawniczy, Warsaw 1930.

activists established in Brest (Brześć nad Bugiem) Fortress in 1930. Siekanowicz wrote: “The similarity of the methods used in Bereza towards those ‘kept’ [in Brest], in particular the torture they were subjected to, and the chief of the camp being none other than the famed [Wacław] Kostek-Biernacki confirm the stipulation emphatically.”³⁴ The issue of the possible models used for the Confinement Centre in Bereza Kartuska, as well as the similarities between it and locations used for concentrated oppression of a different origin, Russian (and, later, Soviet) and German in particular, requires a detailed study. That is a task for historians. Before I move on to discussing literary references to Bereza, being a literary scholar, I can only quote a few passages attempting to “grasp” the institution by indicating actual or alleged antecedences and affinities.

The manifesto of the League for the Defence of Human and Citizen Rights (Liga Obrony Praw Człowieka i Obywatela) of May 1936, a facsimile of which was included in the 1965 collective volume entitled *Bereziacy*³⁵ (Berezers) published by Książka i Wiedza, mentioned the Confinement Centre as independent Poland’s version of *tzar’s katorga*, just as harsh in terms of living conditions and how inmates were treated with the only difference that “to a *katorga* a convict was sent upon receiving a court sentence knowing when his torment would stop, while the internment at Bereza is often done at the decision of unknown persons, recently it has become normal that it was done in secret, and the duration is virtually undefined.”³⁶ An extract from the manifesto kept at the State Archive in Warsaw (Archiwum Państwowe w Warszawie) includes a telling fragment which had been removed out of view from *Bereziacy*, i.e. censored. It is worth quoting if only for the previously quoted opinion by professor Garlicki regarding the fact that Poles supposedly did not know anything about Soviet gulags. In it, Bereza was further defined as the “Polish [...] edition of *tzar’s Akatuy*, modernised to match Hitler’s Dachau, the fascist Lipari Islands and Soviet Solovki.”³⁷ Eighteen months prior, on

34 P. Siekanowicz, *Obóz odosobnienia...*, p. 27. At this point, it is necessary to deny the piece of information recurring in numerous publications stating that Wacław Kostek-Biernacki was the commandant of Bereza. He was actually the commandant of Brest Fortress during the time when opposition activists were interned there in 1930. He has been known, though, as, and that might be possible, the author of the book of regulations of the Bereza Kartuska confinement centre (vide W. Śleszyński, *Obóz odosobnienia...*, p. 38) and “somewhat a superior instance in relation to the camp administration” (I. Polít, *Miejsce odosobnienia...*, p. 68).

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

36 “O ‘miejscu odosobnienia’ w Berezie Kartuskiej” [manifesto of the League for the Defence of Human and Citizen Rights], [in:] *Bereziacy*, insert between p. 48 and 49.

37 State Archive in Warsaw, set 72/1/0: Government Office for the Capital City of Warsaw, series 2.1: 1 Political-National Branch – information notes, 72/1/0/2.1/35: Information notes of the Investigating Office regarding the League of the Defence of Human and

6 November 1934, during a session of the Sejm of the Republic of Poland, Dymytro Ładyga, a deputy of the Ukrainian Club (Klub Ukraiński), stated that “the so-called confinement centre in Bereza Kartuska is the same thing for Ukrainians in Poland as Solovki are for Dnieper Ukrainians under the rule of the imperialist Moscow.”³⁸ He went on to add that Bereza was the manifestation of human degeneration³⁹. Jewhen Wreciona, another Ukrainian, a former Confinement Centre inmate, admitted over a dozen years later that while “Bereza cannot be directly compared to Solovki or Auschwitz, it was no holiday resort.”⁴⁰

However, the most common point of reference both before and after World War II were German, Nazi camps, undoubtedly known better at that time than Soviet camps.⁴¹ Already on 19 June 1934 in *Gazeta Warszawska* it was indicated that there was a “strong analogy” between the confinement centres announced in the resolution published two days earlier and the “concentration camps which Mr. Goebbels discussed during his speech describing them as a type of ‘education centres’ for political opponents.”⁴² Franciszek Ryszka, a historian, reported nearly three decades later on the visit (or rather: return visit) in Germany of Gen. Kordian Józef Zamorski, the chief of the Polish police, as a chance to “exchange experiences in Dachau and Bereza.”⁴³ Leon Lenzion recalled that he learnt from German anti-fascists who were his fellow inmates at Sachsenhausen that the camp was visited before WWII by the chief of Polish police with an entourage of officials, and he added: “Judging by the description of the general which emphasised his feature

Citizen Rights with an internal circular of the League no. 1 of 1934, manifesto “O ‘miejscu odosobnienia’ w Berezie Kartuskiej” provided by Fordon, Jankowski, Grochowski, Kielecki et al., sh. 53. The document is available online at: https://szukajwarchiwach.pl/72/1/0/2.1/35/str/1/4/15/q7tTnKz62lvVeR_VPUFnEg/#tabSkany [accessed on: 22.11.2018]. Between 1832 and 1917, in the village of Akatuy, there operated a heavy katorga – vide B.B. Бардакова, “Акатуйская тюрьма”, [in:] *Энциклопедия Забайкалья*, <http://www.encycl.chita.ru/encycl/concepts/?id=448> [accessed on: 26.11.2018]. On fascist camps and displacement camps in Italy which operated between 1926 and 1943 one of which was located on the island of Lipari vide M.R. Ebner, *Ordinary violence in Mussolini’s Italy*, Cambridge University Press, New York 2011, pp. 1–22 (ch. “The fascist archipelago”).

38 “Sprawozdanie stenograficzne ze 124 posiedzenia Sejmu Rzeczypospolitej Polskiej w dniu 6 listopada 1934 roku”, [in:] *Bereza Kartuska*, p. 44.

39 *Ibid.*, p. 45.

40 E. Wreciona, *Bereza Kartuska* [!] z innej strony, trans. J. Łobodowski, *Kultura* [Paris] 1950, issue 4, p. 117.

41 Vide A. Morawiec, *Literatura w lagrze, lager w literaturze. Fakt – temat – metafora*, Wydawnictwo Akademii Humanistyczno-Ekonomicznej, Łódź 2009, pp. 41–54.

42 [Author not credited], “Miejsca odosobnienia”, *Gazeta Warszawska* 1934, issue 182; as quoted in: *Bereza Kartuska*, p. 26.

43 F. Ryszka, *Noc i mgła. Niemcy w okresie hitlerowskim*, Zakład Narodowy im. Ossolińskich, Wrocław 1963, p. 286.

black goatee, I suspected that it must have been General Kordian Zamorski.⁴⁴ In a monograph devoted to Zamorski, Robert Litwiński did discuss extensively the general's visits in Berlin and Hamburg in May 1936 and in Nuremberg in September 1938, yet he did not mention, similarly as post-visit reports recorded on those occasions, that the general visited any of the concentration camps⁴⁵. Neither did Zamorski mention that fact in his journal⁴⁶. What is known, however, is that the camp in Dachau was visited before WWII by two other Poles. In August 1933 attaché Witold Mieczysławski received from German authorities, at the demand of the General Consulate of the Republic of Poland in Munich, a permit to visit three Jews of Polish nationality held in "protective custody". He was accompanied by Hienrich Himmler, a company which the Polish diplomatic mission surely did not encourage. The post-visit report was, according to Stanisław Schimitzek, shocking⁴⁷. Jerzy Rogowicz, a journalist, was the other person to visit the camp. He described his visit in a series of reports in *Kurier Warszawski* published between 17 September and 22 November 1936⁴⁸.

In the discussed context it is worth recalling the opinion of Jerzy Rawicz, a writer and journalist, emphasising in it the doubt, possibly a suggestion, regarding direct determining factors of the so-called camp reality:

Not only camp regulations were modelled after Nazi experiences (which was a public secret), but also the customs and the forms of existence were brought from Oranienburg or Dachau to Polesia. Or maybe the camp system itself produces such phenomena? Obviously Nazi K.Ls, especially the ones which existed during the war,

⁴⁴ L. Lenzion, "Cat w Berezie", *Polityka* 1986, issue 49, p. 2. Teofil Witek, a former internee at Auschwitz and Buchenwald, mentioned the "widely known to the public" visit of General Zamorski in Dachau (idem, *Książka o Berezie*, p. 20).

⁴⁵ Vide R. Litwiński, *Kordian Józef Zamorski „granatowy” generał*, Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Marii Curie-Skłodowskiej, Lublin 2018, pp. 194–195; [author not credited], "Odwiedziny p. Komendanta Głównego w Berlinie", *Przegląd Policyjny* 1936, issue 4, pp. 338–339; [author not credited], "Drugi wyjazd policji polskiej do Berlina", *ibid.*, pp. 339–340.

⁴⁶ K.J. Zamorski, *Dzienniki (1930–1938)*, R. Litwiński, M. Sioma (eds.), Instytut Józefa Piłsudskiego, LTW, Warszaw-Dziekanów Leśny 2011.

⁴⁷ Vide S. Schimitzek, *Drogi i bezdroża minionej epoki. Wspomnienia z lat pracy w MSZ (1920–1939)*, Interpress, Warsaw 1976, p. 316.

⁴⁸ J. Rogowicz, "W obozie koncentracyjnym", *Kurier Warszawski* 1936, issue 255 (evening edition), pp. 2–3; "Za co? Od jak dawna?", issue 256 (evening issue), pp. 2–3; "'Wychowanie' przez obóz", issue 258, p. 6; "Wszzerz i wzdłuż obozu", issue 260 (evening issue), pp. 2–3; "'Korytarz' polski w obozie", issue 308 (evening issue), p. 2; "Jak ich żywią?", issue 314, p. 5; "Przyszłość obozu", issue 321, pp. 7–8. Vide also: Zbigniew Anculewicz: "Obóz koncentracyjny w Dachau w reportażu Jerzego Rogowicza." *Mrągowskie Studia Humanistyczne*, vol. 2 (2000), pp. 3–14; A. Morawiec, *Literatura w lagrze...*, pp. 44–46.

were something else. In Bereza, there was no mass extermination. The analogy lies somewhere else. It applies to certain forms and manifestations, accessories, if you will, accompanying the phenomenon of concentration camps⁴⁹.

Clearly when compared to Dachau and other Nazi concentration camps, the Pruzhany (Prużany) poviát confinement centre of Bereza was a disgrace, particularly of the political system which caused its creation. Bereza internees (it is noteworthy that among them there was a communist activist by the name of Eichler who had escaped from Dachau)⁵⁰ instead of their names had numbers sawn on their jackets. They were subjected to both physical and mental abuse. They were forbidden from talking loudly. They were not allowed to receive food packages, and their ability to send letters (censored, written per a template: "I am well and healthy") was limited.⁵¹ No visits were allowed. Their accommodations were below any civilised norms, and food rations were extremely small. Some internees performed hard physical labour, often pointless, while those who were not working were forced to do exhaustive physical exercises. Within the camp, the internees had to run. They were verbally abused. They were often beaten by the guards (policemen served as guards there) as well as their fellow internees – regular criminals. At least a dozen people died within the five years of the Confinement Centre's operations. Strictly speaking, most of them died in the hospital in Kobryń, where internees in severe conditions were sent as the camp authorities made sure internees would not die within its premises⁵². The objective of the camp was not to kill people. One could conclude that deaths were a side effect of the guards' overzealousness.

Allow me to use the recollections of a communist by the name of Juliusz Katz-Suchy:

On 9 May [1936] in the morning someone whispered during breakfast about the murder of [Aleksander] Mozyrko and [Abram] Germaniski. The other day we saw Germaniski being maltreated. [...] it seems that the bodies of the first of our murdered comrades restrained the police mob in their cruelty. [...] The news spread that some ministry commission was to arrive. [...] You could see the policemen mellowing. Some easing resulted.⁵³

⁴⁹ J. Rawicz, *Diabeł...*, pp. 258–259.

⁵⁰ Vide W. Sznarbachowski, *300 lat...*, p. 105.

⁵¹ It is worth mentioning that the phrase "Ich bin gesund und es geht mir gut" ("I am well and I am faring fine"), known mainly from the official correspondence sent by the internees at Nazi concentration camps, had already been used in the Austrian army during World War I: it was printed (in several languages) on postcards sent by soldiers from the front – vide I. Rebhan-Glück, *Die Feldpost im Ersten Weltkrieg „Ich bin gesund und es geht mir gut“*, <http://ww1.habsburger.net/de/kapitel/ich-bin-gesund-und-es-geht-mir-gut> [accessed on: 28.11.2018].

⁵² Vide I. Polit, *Miejsce odosobnienia...*, pp. 85–86; W. Śleszyński, *Obóz odosobnienia...*, pp. 51–53.

⁵³ J. Katz-Suchy, "Moje pierwsze dni w Berezie", [in:] *Bereziacy*, pp. 344–345.

The easing did not last long. Undoubtedly, the camp in Bereza, using Rawicz's words, was not the same thing as Nazi KLs during World War II. But were they so different from what Hitler's camps were prior to WWII, i.e. in 1933–1939? Is it justified to compare Bereza with the “early” camps or is it an exaggeration? As I have already mentioned, the over five years of the operations of Bereza resulted in the deaths of at least a dozen people. In that context it is worth considering a monograph by Nikolaus Wachsmann entitled *Historia nazistowskich obozów koncentracyjnych* (A history of Nazi concentration camps), where he quoted the numbers of casualties in some SS concentration camps which operated in the same period: Berlin-Columbia (operation: 1934–1936): at least 3 casualties, Esterwegen (1934–1936): 28, Lichtenburg (1934–1939): 25, Sachsenburg (1934–1937): at least 30, Bad Sulza (1936–1937): 0⁵⁴. The analogies between Bereza and German camps during their operations were not unfounded.

Of course, while reading either historical studies or recollections of former internees one has to remember that they were shaped by various factors, including emotional and ideological considerations, which often deform the truth, however, and that must be also stated, not always and not in all respects. Nonetheless, Leonard Borkowicz, a communist, stated:

When during the war, especially after Germany was defeated and all Nazi barbarity was uncovered, there was a lively debate about the national character of Germans, I recalled the policemen from Bereza: Próchniewicz, Pytel, Solecki, and Tomaka. Well, fascism turned those Poles into monsters not differing much from SS men.⁵⁵

Jonasz Stern, another communist and a famous painter who during WWII escaped from a transport to Belzec and later survived a mass execution, when recollecting on his internment at Bereza, referred to it as the threshold of the ghetto and death camps.⁵⁶

Confinement Centres – a view from the outside

Let us take a closer look at the “threshold” or rather its literary, in the broad sense of the word, image. I perceive literature broadly, covering both works the dominant function of which is aesthetic, i.e. fiction, and the so-called fringe literature,

⁵⁴ N. Wachsmann, *Historia nazistowskich obozów koncentracyjnych*, trans. M. Antosiewicz, Świat Książki, Warszawa 2016, p. 686, Table 2.

⁵⁵ L. Borkowicz, “Okrucy wspomnień”, [in:] *Bereziacy*, pp. 278–279.

⁵⁶ J. Stern, “Komunista Pitagoras”, [in:] *Bereziacy*, p. 282. It is worth mentioning that Stern was the protagonist (or rather a model for the protagonist) of “Krajobraz, który przeżył śmierć” by Kornel Filipowicz (in: idem, *Krajobraz niewzruszony. Opowiadania*, Czytelnik, Warsaw 1947, pp. 91–117).

including testimony literature, journalistic reports and memoirs in particular. The closest, used by me, context of thus perceived literature which cannot be ignored in this case are journalistic texts, and various kinds of documents and historical studies.

25 years ago, i.e. relatively recently, Rafał Habielski noted that the history of the Bereza camp had not had its historian who “would reveal the actual number of those interned there, their party affiliations, the reasons for their internment, and, finally, who would answer the question of the actual political significance of Bereza and the place it occupied in the pre-WWII system of power.”⁵⁷ Ten years later, in 2003, two books, already referenced in this article, were published: one by Polit and one by Śleszyński. They include many valuable details, yet some important issues still remain unsettled because some cannot be accessed while other have been lost. Let us, then, focus first and foremost on that what was known about Bereza during its operations.

Apparently, its existence was not, and was not supposed to be, a secret. The intention behind the confinement centres drafted in the resolution of 17 June 1934 was not only to isolate but also to “correct” and deter people willing to violate the “security, peace and public order” in the country. Therefore, Bereza was supposed to function as a place which should be avoided at all cost. But when it came to the details of its operation, its living conditions, forms of repression, and casualties, the always protective of their image authorities did not intend to inform the public opinion about those. Thus, it is not surprising that the first and, as it turned out, the only confinement centre was located in the country, at a desolate location near a railway track. Soon after the confinement centre resolution was passed, the press began a non-restricted by the authorities, thus probing social moods, exchange of opinions, including polemics and protests. When, almost immediately, it turned out that the creation of the camp in Bereza Kartuska was not accepted by the society, or at least by the politicians, the authorities attempted to justify its existence as a painful yet the only means for eliminate the social and political tension in the Second Polish Republic⁵⁸. Once the camp was finally erected, some journalists made attempts to access it, yet to no avail. One of those was Waclaw Czarnecki. He described his unsuccessful trip to the Confinement Centre in a three-part report published in *Robotnik*, an outlet of the Polish Socialist Party (Polska Partia Socjalistyczna, PPS), in issued of 13–15 July 1934. He began somewhat provocatively: “I’m in Bereza Kartuska. Yet not as a political ‘criminal’ or ‘destructor’ of social order, but as a journalist willing to see what the camp looks like from up close.”⁵⁹ He also

57 R. Habielski, “Bereza Kartuska”, [in:] *Nie szablą, lecz piórem. Batalie publicystyczne II Rzeczypospolitej*, D. Natęcz (ed.), Wydawnictwo Instytutu Badań Literackich PAN, Warsaw 1993, p. 219.

58 Vide W. Śleszyński, *Obóz odosobnienia...*, pp. 19–20.

59 W. Czarnecki, “Bereza Kartuska”, *Robotnik* 1934, issue 251, p. 3.

mentioned a “somewhat different ‘confinement centre’” which was “once” established in Brest⁶⁰. However, he did not manage to see the camp itself. Commandant Bolesław Greffner, whom he requested to issue a permit to tour the Confinement Centre, referred him to the Polesia Voivode Waclaw Kostek-Biernacki⁶¹, who used to inform journalists willing to visit the internment centre that Bereza was no circus and it could not be a journalistic scoop.⁶² But Czarniecki managed to see the internees. He wrote: “A kilometre from Bereza Kartuska, I can see a crowd in the road. I drive up to it and there I see the members of the ‘camp’ at work.”⁶³ That was all.

Quite quickly the Polish government limited as much as possible explicit references to the Confinement Centre. From the mid-1935 onwards censorship halted texts reporting any details about it.⁶⁴ The main, and virtually the only, official platform for discussion was the parliament (lower and upper chambers) established after the so-called Brest elections of 1930. In 1934, that debate was still lively, but because almost all opposition parties boycotted the 1935 elections, the issue of Bereza was seldom raised in the following term, i.e. in 1935–1938.⁶⁵ One significant event in that context, not only for literary historians, was the speech delivered on 20 December 1935 during a senate debate on the draft of an amnesty act delivered by Waclaw Sieroszewski, a senator of the Polish Republic and the chairman of the Polish Academy of Literature, who had been a political prisoner of the czar and an exile. In arguing against applying amnesty to people interned at Bereza, Sieroszewski used a logical yet cynical argument: “the persons locked there cannot be subject to amnesty as they had not been sentenced with a court sentence,” only to add:

Confinement centres, such as Bereza Kartuska, are, we must all agree, the mildest form of counter-terror there is. Yet I think they should rather be a preventive measure, something akin to “sending unruly children off to another room” or sending them to “stand in the corner.” Give them time there to come to their senses. Help break their organisational emotional ties which drive their young souls to inconsiderate acts.⁶⁶

The author of *Zacisze* (Retreat) then called upon other senators to vote for the amnesty in the form passed by the Sejm rejecting the proposed amend-

⁶⁰ Ibid.

⁶¹ W. Czarniecki, “W Berezie Kartuskiej. W ‘sztabie’ obozu u ‘komendanta’ Greffnera”, *Robotnik* 1934, issue 253, p. 3.

⁶² Vide W. Śleszyński, *Obóz odosobnienia...*, p. 18.

⁶³ W. Czarniecki, *Bereza Kartuska*, p. 3.

⁶⁴ Vide W. Śleszyński, *Obóz odosobnienia...*, pp. 78–79, note 7.

⁶⁵ Vide I. Polit, *Miejsce odosobnienia...*, pp. 169, 183.

⁶⁶ As cited in: [author not credited], “Prezes Akademii Literatury o więźniach brzeskich, skazańcach prasowych i Berezie Kartuskiej”, *Prosto z mostu* 1935, issue 54, p. 8.

ments. The amendments intended to extend the amnesty to cover the Brest internees staying abroad and the so-called press criminals were rejected. Senators also came to an agreement regarding the matter of Bereza Kartuska. The amnesty of 2 January 1936 did not cover sentences in excess of ten years or the internees at Bereza.⁶⁷

Not all Polish writers reacted that way to Bereza. Before Sieroszewski expressed his opinion, in October 1935 a group of social activists and writers issued a statement regarding the amnesty for political prisoners and shutting down the camp in Bereza Kartuska (in it, the term *confinement centre* is inscribed in quotation marks and next to it there is the name *isolation camp* without any quotation marks). It was signed by, e.g. Władysław Broniewski, Marian Czuchnowski, Konstanty Gałczyński, Halina Krahelska, Leon Kruczkowski, Jan Nepomucen Miller, Tadeusz Peiper, Lech Piwowar, Włodzimierz Słobodnik, Andrzej Strug, Wanda Wasilewska, Aleksander Wat, and Stefania Zahorska. The statement was confiscated by the authorities. It was printed in the December issue of the Paris-based periodical *Informacje Prasowe*⁶⁸. Romain Rolland, a well-known French writer, an activist of the Global Committee against War and Fascism and a winner of the Nobel Prize, also spoke out on the matter of Bereza. In April 1936, he sent a letter to the prime minister of the Polish government in which after mentioning that hundreds of anti-fascists were sent to Bereza Kartuska he added that the camp cast an “unpleasant shadow” on the good name of a country “famous for its 150 years of fighting with the tyranny of the partitioning powers.”⁶⁹

Let me, however, return to Polish authors who wrote on Bereza and who had to struggle with Sanation censorship. In fact, not just with censorship. They also had to struggle with law enforcement agencies. In July 1935 Adam Grot-Czekalski, a writer and a journalist, a Polish Socialist Party activist and author of various belles lettres, wrote for a Prague-based daily *Lidové Noviny* an article entitled *120 dni hańby w Berezie Kartuskiej* (120 days of disgrace at Bereza Kartuska). The police, having learnt about it, confiscated the article at a post office in Busko-Zdrój and arrested the author. During the investigation Grot-Czekalski admitted to writing the article, the material for which he indicated to had collected from the stories of Bereza internees and from articles printed in domestic periodicals. During the hearing he stated that he wrote it based on press releases and various leaflets, and that he never considered that information as false. He was accused pursuant to an article on propagation of untrue information outside Poland in order to harm the country, and he was sentenced to eighteen months in prison. He appealed the sentence and in 1936 he was acquitted of the charges. Until then he served his

67 Vide H. Zatorska, “W walce o amnestię dla więźniów politycznych”, *Z pola walki* 1956, issue 1, p. 12.

68 *Informacje Prasowe*, issue 2 (1935), p. 13. Reprinted in: *Z pola walki* 1956, issue 1, pp. 16–17.

69 As cited in: C.K. Domagała, *Wzbierająca fala*, Książka i Wiedza, Warsaw 1976, p. 520.

sentence in prisons in Kielce and Pińczów.⁷⁰ Despite the limitations enforced by censorship and the risk of penalisation, articles on Bereza continued to be released, though illegally. One such example was an article entitled *Znieść obóz koncentracyjny w Berezie Kartuskiej!* (Abolish the concentration camp in Bereza Kartuska) published in April 1935 in the illegal *Czerwona Pomoc*, an outlet of Red Aid in Poland (*Czerwona Pomoc w Polsce*), a section of the International Red Aid (Międzynarodowa Organizacja Pomocy Rewolucjonistom, MOPR)⁷¹. In February the following year, under the patronage of the organisation, a brochure entitled *Prawda o Berezie*⁷² (Truth about Bereza) was released. In June 1937, *Bereza Kartuska*⁷³, a single-issue publication, was released. Former internees also experienced how dangerous it was to propagate any information on what was happening at Bereza Kartuska. It is unclear whether the “public confession” of Edward Piotrowski, a national radical, published in the September issue of *Łódzki Głos Narodowy*, regarding his internment at Bereza resulted in any repercussions⁷⁴. What is known, though, thanks to a report of the Łódź Voivode intended for internal circulation, is that one Holcman spreading news of the “conditions at MO” was re-interned.⁷⁵ The publication of own experiences entailed risk, no wonder then that one of the earliest recollections from Bereza by Aron Skrobek, a communist, written in Yiddish, was published abroad, i.e. in Buenos Aires in 1936⁷⁶, while the Polish language *Wspomnienia z Berezy* (Recollections from Bereza) by Samuel Podhajecki was published by a Toronto-based *Głos Pracy* three years later⁷⁷. Sources indicate that Wiktor Grosz (actually Izaak Medres) convinced

70 Vide [author not credited], “Proces autora artykułu o Berezie Kartuskiej”, *Orędownik* 1935, issue 284, p. 6; [author not credited], “Echa artykułu o Berezie. P. Grot-Czekalski niewinniony”, *Orędownik* 1936, issue 84, p. 3 (there, the title of the discussed article differed slightly: *120 dni w obozie odosobnienia w Berezie Kartuskiej* (120 days at the confinement centre in Bereza Kartuska)).

71 [author not credited], “Znieść obóz koncentracyjny w Berezie Kartuskiej!”, *Czerwona Pomoc* 1935, issue 3, pp. 20–21. Reprinted in: *Bereziacy*, insert between p. 48 and 49.

72 Vide I. Polit, *Miejsce odosobnienia...*, p. 203.

73 Vide P. Gazdajka, *Za drutami Berezy*, p. 14.

74 [E. Piotrowski], “Spowiedź publiczna młodego narodowca. Edward Piotrowski był więźniem Berezy w liście do przyjaciela opowiada nam o swoich przeżyciach”, *Łódzki Głos Narodowy* 1935, issue 1. Reprinted in: I. Polit, *Miejsce odosobnienia...*, pp. 235–237.

75 As cited in: I. Polit, *Miejsce odosobnienia...*, p. 138.

76 D. Kutner [actually A. Skrobek], *Kartuz-Bereze. Der poylišer koncentracie lager*, Farlag „Caytšrift” ba der Centrale fun Idiše Patronatn in Argentine, Buenos Aires 1936. In that same year, a French translation of the recollections was published: *Kartus-Bereza. Le camp de concentration polonais*, trans. N. Skrobek, Secours Rouge, Paris 1936.

77 Reprinted “with slight abbreviations” in: *Kartki z Dziejów KPP*, M. Zwolak (ed.), Książka i Wiedza, Warsaw 1958, pp. 413–460.

Liber Muszyński, a formed internee, to write with him a book on Bereza. And so they did. Its manuscript was lost in 1939⁷⁸.

People of letters at Bereza

The discussion of recollections and strictly literary texts printed after the Confinement Centre ceased its operations must be preceded by some remarks on people of letters and literature at Bereza. That is because Bereza was not only a motif in Polish literature, but also its, or rather its authors' experience. And, in fact, a rather large group of people of letters. People of letters, i.e. writers, publishers, and journalists, were sent to Bereza usually for reasons other than literary practices. Stanisław Mackiewicz and Leon Pasternak were two exceptions in that respect, as they were sent to the camp exactly because of their texts. I shall discuss the latter separately.

Mackiewicz, a friend of prime minister Kozłowski, initially supported the idea to establish a confinement centre, with time, though, he turned from supporting Sanation to criticising it, and he began opposing it. He expressed that in articles published in the Vilnius-based *Słowo*. Being a representative of the right-wing opposition, he was arrested and interned at Bereza Kartuska where he remained from 23 March to 8 April 1939 for, as he stated, "a systematic criticism of the government using artificially selected arguments, and undermining national trust in the 'Supreme Leader.'"⁷⁹ Mackiewicz recalled his internment at Bereza in, e.g. a 1941 book entitled *Historia Polski od 11 listopada 1918 r. do 17 września 1939 r.*⁸⁰ and in a letter he wrote a decade later to the editor-in-chief of the London-based *Wiadomości*⁸¹. Let me add that in May 1941 in London he testified on his internment at Bereza before judge Piotr Siekanowicz, who operated on behalf of a Commission established in relation to the outcome of the 1939 war campaign.⁸²

Other columnists and journalists were also interned at Bereza, including National Radical Camp activists interned from 7 July to 18 September 1934, wrongly suspected of participating in the assassination of minister Pieracki: Bolesław Piasecki, Włodzimierz Szarnbachowski and Bolesław Świdorski (the last one was

78 Vide F. Muszyńska, "Z relacji żony więźnia Libera Muszyńskiego", [in:] *Bereziacy*, p. 244.

79 S. Mackiewicz (Cat), *Zbiórka i Bereza*, p. 321.

80 *Ibid.*, pp. 319–324.

81 S. Mackiewicz, "Dlaczego osadzono mnie w Berezie. Do redaktora 'Wiadomości'", *Wiadomości* 1951, issue 42, p. 4.

82 S. Cat-Mackiewicz, "Cat w Berezie", [submitted to dr. A. Garlicki], *Polityka* 1986, issue 46, pp. 1, 14; "Cat w Berezie", *Puls* [London], issue 32 (1986/1987), pp. 96–99. *Puls* published the fragments of Mackiewicz's testimony *Polityka* omitted, which included, e.g. the words his fellow internee and a communist uttered to him: "here in Poland there is just one Bereza, while the Soviet Union is one huge Bereza" (*ibid.*, p. 96). On Cat's internment at Bereza – vide J. Jaruzelski, *Mackiewicz i konserwatyści. Szkice do biografii*, Czytelnik, Warsaw 1976, pp. 192–205.

Bereza interneer No. 1)⁸³. The group also included Jerzy Korycki, a well-known after WWII author of crime novels released under a nom de plume of Jerzy Edigey. Other Bereza internees included Józef Przybyszewski, a member of the National Party and a nephew of Stanisław Przybyszewski, a writer⁸⁴, and Witold Kolski (actually Bernard vel Baruch Cukier), a communist activist and journalist.⁸⁵

Closer to literature than journalism were: Abram Germaniski, a beginner writer in Yiddish⁸⁶, Mark (vel Marek) Rakowski⁸⁷, a translator, Andrzej Wolica, an assimilated Jew who wrote in Polish, in fact an extremely interesting figure. Before WWII he published two collections of poems, a novel and a series of short stories, as well as (together with Maksymilian Emmer) a script for a film entitled *Legion ulicy* (Legion of the street) directed by Aleksander Ford. He was associated with the Kwadryga literary group.⁸⁸ Initially, he sympathised with PPS, later he joined KPP. In February 1933, he was sentenced for his political activities for five years in prison. He served the sentence in several facilities. In the spring of 1936 his imprisonment was suspended due to poor health, and he was later covered by the amnesty. In 1938, he was expelled from KPP for disloyalty, i.e. for condemning Moscow trials.⁸⁹ He was arrested again in August 1938. He was interned until September that year at Bereza. The *Współcześni polscy pisarze i badacze literatury* compendium states that in the autumn of 1939 Wolica was arrested by NKVD, and that the exact date and the circumstances of his death remain unknown⁹⁰. Today we know that he was murdered in April 1940 and buried in a mass grave in Bykownia.⁹¹

A more impressive (I do realise how unsuitable such a gradation is) is the list of writers who managed to avoid internment at Bereza. First and foremost, that

⁸³ Vide W. Sznarbachowski, *300 lat...*, p. 98.

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 105.

⁸⁵ B. Gadomski, "Kolski Witold", [in:] *Polski słownik biograficzny*, vol. 13 (1967–1968), pp. 321–324.

⁸⁶ Vide W. Śleszyński, *Obóz odosobnienia...*, p. 53. Sometimes, subject literature provides a different name: Germański.

⁸⁷ Vide I. Polit, *Miejsce odosobnienia...*, p. 142; M. Fuks, "Rakowski Mark (Marek)", [in:] *Polski słownik judaistyczny*, [http://www.jhi.pl/psj/Rakowski_Mark_\(Marek\)](http://www.jhi.pl/psj/Rakowski_Mark_(Marek)) [accessed on: 23.11.2018].

⁸⁸ Vide K. Woźniakowski, "Andrzej Wolica i jego twórczość", [in:] A. Wolica: *Rudy*, 2nd edition, Wydawnictwo Literackie, Kraków–Wrocław 1985, pp. 115–131.

⁸⁹ Vide A. Pragier, "Zbrodnia na 'Ulicy Ogrodowej'", *Wiadomości* [London] 1961, issue 6, p. 1.

⁹⁰ M.K.-K. [M. Kotowska-Kachel], "Wolica Andrzej", [in:] *Współcześni polscy pisarze i badacze literatury. Słownik biobibliograficzny*, team under J. Czachowska and A. Szałagan (eds.), vol. 9, Wydawnictwa Szkolne i Pedagogiczne, Warsaw 2004, p. 245.

⁹¹ Vide *Listy katyńskiej ciąg dalszy. Straceni na Ukrainie. Lista obywateli polskich zamordowanych na podstawie decyzji Biura Politycznego WKP(b) i naczelnych władz państwowych ZSRR z 5 marca 1940 roku*, Niezależny Komitet Historyczny Badania Zbrodni Katyńskiej, Polska Fundacja Katyńska, Centralna Biblioteka Wojskowa, Warsaw 1994, p. 107; *Katyń... ocalić od zapomnienia*, <http://www.katyn-pamietam.pl/bohaterowie/page/569/> [accessed on: 2.04.2018].

would be Antoni Kasproicz, a poet associated with the Łódź-based Meteor literary group and a communist activist. Sent on a train transport to the Confinement Centre soon after WWII broke out, he managed to escape during a Luftwaffe bombing. Soon, though, he was captured by Germans and sent for forced labour to East Prussia.⁹² Aleksander Wat was luckier, yet only until he was arrested in January 1940 in Lviv by Soviets. In an essay entitled *Prawdziwy początek Iwana Denisowicza* (The real beginning of Ivan Denisovich) he recalled: "I found out recently that I was included in a list developed by pre-WWII Polish authorities for internment in a domestic Lager, modelled after Dachau."⁹³ A similar, or, possible the same, list included the names of other renowned writers. In the early 1939, as reported by Piotr Stawecki, the highest military officers planned to send to Bereza for their pacifist outputs, considered harmful for Poland, Antoni Słonimski, Julian Tuwim, and Józef Wittlin: "As indicated by a signature of Gen. T[adeusz] Kasprzycki, the minister of military affairs, he consented to that. But someone interfered. Gen. J[anusz] Głuchowski made reservations in the matter that 'if new instances emerge.'"⁹⁴ The execution of the motion was postponed.

Apparently, one could end up in Bereza not only for their political activities (often it was enough if someone was suspected of those), but even for writing literature. One such example is well-known. I am referring to Leon Pasternak, the author of the popular after WWII song of Tadeusz Kościuszko's 1st Division entitled *Oka* (The Oka River).

Pasternak's case

Pasternak, who came from a Polonized Jewish family⁹⁵, which in this context may be significant, since 1932 he was a member of Polish Professional Writers Union (Związek Zawodowy Literatów Polskich, ZZLP). He cooperated with *Lewar* and *Tryby* leftist cultural periodicals, and with *Szpilki* weekly, where he published his satirical works. Before WWII, he published two collections of poems: *Naprzeciw* (1935, Across) and *Dzień pochmurny* (1936, Cloudy day). In 1936, he joined KPP

92 Vide J. Wawrzak, "Antoni Kasproicz – robotnik słowa", [in:] A. Kasproicz, *Ich dzień powszedni*, Wydawnictwo Łódzkie, Łódź 1977, pp. 5–13; A.Sz. [A. Szatagan], "Kasproicz Antoni", [in:] *Współcześni polscy pisarze...*, vol. 4, Wydawnictwa Szkolne i Pedagogiczne, Warsaw 1996, pp. 78–79.

93 A. Wat, "Prawdziwy początek Iwana Denisowicza", [in:] idem, *Świat na haku i pod kluczem. Eseje*, Czytelnik, Warsaw 1991, pp. 318–319.

94 P. Stawecki, *Następcy Komendanta. Wojsko a polityka wewnętrzna Drugiej Rzeczypospolitej w latach 1935–1939*, Wydawnictwo Ministerstwa Obrony Narodowej, Warsaw 1969, p. 132.

95 Vide K. Woźniakowski, "Pasternak Leon Jakub", [in:] *Polski słownik biograficzny*, vol. 25 (1980), p. 257; J.Z. [J. Zawadzka], "Pasternak Leon", [in:] *Współcześni polscy pisarze...*, vol. 6, Wydawnictwa Szkolne i Pedagogiczne, Warsaw 1999, p. 268.

with which he used to sympathise. He was arrested several times for his political activities. Within the period 1932–1939, he spent a total of five years in prison, including twice at Bereza Kartuska (in 1937 and in 1938–1939). The first time, he was released due to pressure of public opinion, as a result of an intervention of ZZLP, especially owing to the efforts of Maria Dąbrowska⁹⁶, while the second time – he left on his own. That occurred on 18 September 1939 once the police staff left the camp.

According to Marian Stępień, Pasternak's verse works "best reflected the fate of a political prisoner in Sanation Poland."⁹⁷ Many of those, included in the collection *Dzień pochmurny*, were created, as indicated by the notes inscribed under each, behind bars: "prison in Mokotów" (*Na spacerze*, At a walk), "prison in Łomża" (*Nokturn*, Nocturne), "prison in Brzesz" (*Nocą*, At night)⁹⁸. Some works written during WWII, under Soviet occupation or in the Soviet Union, included the motif of Bereza, sometimes side by side with prison motifs. Here are several examples of that: "in Bereza cells we saw Red Square" (*Lenin*, 1940)⁹⁹, "Whoever suffered and fought – they believe. / They will not obscure you, our vision, / the walls of Wronki or the wires of Bereza" (*Do wizji*, 1941, For a vision)¹⁰⁰, "For them Spała and Białowieża, / for us sticks and Kartuska Bereza" (*Tak było*, 1943)¹⁰¹. In *Warszawskie szosy*, bearing the telling inscription: "17 September 1943 / On route to the front" (the specific date, which brings to mind the date when the Red Army invaded Poland in 1939, seems intentional) one may read: "Here all colleagues, there goes the inmate in Bereza, / former cop and count ensign, / there goes a carpenter from Omsk, and a locksmith from Radomsko, / but battle helmets weigh down on them."¹⁰² In the poem, Bereza is not so much, as in earlier works, a political scandal and a sign of social injustice, which hardened communists and demanding revenge, as a buried (for the time being) incident less important than the idea, being implemented by the Polish Patriots Union in the USSR (Związek Patriotów Polskich w ZSRR, ZPP), of "uniting Poles for the time of the war who live in Soviet lands, regardless of their political, social or religious views,

⁹⁶ Vide [author not credited], "Obrońcy Pasternaka", *Prosto z mostu* 1938, issue 21, p. 4; J. Łobodowski, "O Cyganach i katastrofistach (3)", *Kultura* [Paris] 1964, issue 10, p. 44; K. Woźniakowski, "Pasternak Leon Jakub", p. 258.

⁹⁷ M. Stępień, *Polska lewica literacka*, Państwowe Wydawnictwo Naukowe, Warsaw 1985, p. 252.

⁹⁸ L. Pasternak, *Dzień pochmurny. Poezje*, Dom Książki Polskiej, Warsaw 1936.

⁹⁹ L. Pasternak, "Lenin", [in:] idem, *Linia życia*, Związek Zawodowy Literatów Polskich, Łódź 1948, p. 45.

¹⁰⁰ L. Pasternak, "Do wizji", [in:] idem, *Słowa z daleka*, Związek Patriotów Polskich w ZSRR, Moscow 1944, p. 3.

¹⁰¹ L. Pasternak, "Tak było", [in:] idem, *Rzeź niewiniątek*, Czytelnik, [Warsaw] 1946, p. 87.

¹⁰² L. Pasternak, "Warszawskie szosy", [in:] idem, *Słowa z daleka*, pp. 18–19.

in a single patriotic camp to fight Nazism.”¹⁰³ The Tadeusz Kościuszko 1st Division, established in May 1943 under the political supervision of ZPP, was an important manifestation of the idea and its tool. Pasternak was its political and education officer. Allow me to add that a poem entitled *Droga Stalina* (Stalin’s path) written a few years later (i.e. in 1950), the title of which refers to one form of the torture used at Bereza (forcing internees to walk on their knees down a path covered in crushed brick), mentioned guards Tomak and Nadolski, who tormented communists in Bereza, and who were in the poem referred to as fascists (which was not surprising in the period of intense Stalinisation of the life in Poland)¹⁰⁴.

But let us not go too far into the future. Allow me to discuss another poem by Pasternak, one which not so much reflected or recalled Bereza as one which led to it. I am referring to *Pieśń o hańbieniu rasy* (Song of disgracing the race) published on 13 February 1938 in a Lviv-based satirical weekly *Chochół*¹⁰⁵. Just over two weeks later, on 1 March, *ABC*, a daily affiliated with the extreme right, published an article entitled *Co na to polski Lwów?* (What is the Polish Lviv’s position on this?), signed as T. G., probably referring to Tadeusz Gluziński, a columnist and the ideologist of the national radical movement. It discussed the “pornographic poem by Leon Pasternak, a Jew.”¹⁰⁶ Its author admitted that he would had excuse the pornography, various manifestations of which censorship in Poland had overlooked, yet the work included something that could not had passed unpunished: “the cynical insulting of a woman.” The poem, the columnist continued,

[...] is a description of the author, a Jew, having coitus with an Arian woman, Zosia, and it is entitled *Pieśń o hańbieniu rasy*. We know that the so-called Rassenschande, i.e. “race disgrace”, constituted in Germany a crime subject to severe punishment. Hence Mr. Pasternak’s jeering. The poem is so pornographic that one cannot manage to read it whole. Yet I must quote these excerpts to the readers to indicate the author’s exceptional impudence.¹⁰⁷

103 “Deklaracja ideowa Związku Patriotów Polskich w ZSRR” [of 16 June 1943], *Wolna Polska* 1943, issue 15, p. 1.

104 L. Pasternak, “Droga Stalina”, [in:] idem, *Lira i satyra. Wybór wierszy 1931–1951*, Czytelnik, Kraków 1952, pp. 91–92.

105 L. Pasternak, “Pieśń o hańbieniu rasy”, *Chochół. Tygodnik Satyryczny* 1938, issue 2. Reprinted in: *Satyra prawdę mówi... 1918–1939*, Z. Mitzner and L. Pasternak (eds.), Czytelnik, Warsaw 1963, pp. 301–302.

106 T. G. [T. Gluziński?], “Co na to polski Lwów?”, *ABC* 1938, issue 65A; here and further on I quoted after: [author not credited], “Sprawa Pasternaka”, *Prosto z mostu* 1938, issue 14, p. 4. As a side note it is worth mentioning that earlier, in the ONR-supported *Sztafeta*, Gluziński expressed his fascination with Hitler and Hitlerism – vide W. Sznarbachowski, *300 lat...*, p. 78.

107 T. G. [T. Gluziński?], *Co na to polski Lwów?*

According to T. G., the following stanza, which was the final in the set of four he quoted (the entire poem included fourteen stanzas), was the most impudent of all

Me? A kike. What? A Semite.
 There was no Bolek in my house.
 What kind of a woman will she become,
 what kind of a matriarch, a Mother Pole.¹⁰⁸

Pasternak's poem, allow me to clarify the columnist's statement, described a love relationship between a Polish woman and a Polish Jewish man, and mainly the consequences thereof explicated in the quotations provided above. The agitated columnist continued: "Enough with the filth and lousy cynicism. Now I'm asking simply: Where was censorship that should had acted here? Won't the prosecutor find here a classic case of Art. 152 of the Penal Code on the vilification of the Polish nation?"¹⁰⁹

The periodical's readers might had thought that the whole case would end in outraged statements. However, three days later, on 4 March, various Polish daily newspapers published a communication by the Polish Telegraph Agency (Polska Agencja Telegraficzna, PAT):

On 2 March this year, authorities detained in Krakow and sent to the confinement centre a known communist activist writer Leon Pasternak, who already in 1932 was sentenced by a district court in Stanisławów for subversive activities to 7 months in prison, while in 1937 he was interned at the confinement centre for communist activities.

The previous month Pasternak published in a Lviv-based periodical *Chochół* a poem entitled *Pieśń o hańbieniu rasy*, which included various offensive and insulting remarks on women and Polish mothers.¹¹⁰

The communication in *ABC* was supplemented with a commentary explaining that the repression suffered by the communist man of letters was an obvious result of *ABC*'s actions. *Bereza*, the newspaper continued, "is not for us the perfect

¹⁰⁸ Ibid.

¹⁰⁹ Ibid.

¹¹⁰ I cited after: [author not credited], "Literat-komunista w Berezie", *Gazeta Lwowska* 1938, issue 51, p. 4. Newspapers printed the announcement supplementing it with various quotations, some supporting the fact of incarcerating the poet – vide, e.g. [author not credited], "Komunistyczny literat w Berezie", *Czas* 1938, issue [63], p. 3; "Pasternak po raz drugi w Berezie za wiersz satyryczny 'Pieśń o hańbieniu rasy'", *Głos Poranny* 1938, issue 62, p. 4; [author not credited], "Bezczelny wywrotowiec w Berezie", *Kurier Łódzki* 1938, issue 62, p. 2.

solution and we would prefer it was conducted via the regular system of justice.”¹¹¹ A similar, though expressed much more emphatically, stance was taken by the *Prosto z mostu* weekly, to which Pasternak alluded in his poem by referring to a periodical “Prosto w zęby” (Straight into the teeth). It stated that:

[...] the case of the hideous poem by Pasternak qualified for being settled completely through the regular justice system. The crime was obvious and beyond all doubt. We do not perceive Bereza as a beneficial institution even when such scoundrels like Pasternak are sent there. Because we remember that to the same Bereza the authorities have recently sent, exactly without any concrete proof of any crimes (which they can do based on the act on “confinement centres”), distinguished nationalist activists from Vilnius: [Piotr] Kownacki, [Stefan] Łochtin and [Witold] Świerzewski. And the possibility of the same reception being applied to a Jew brazenly smearing the Polish Nation, that qualifies for the court, and nationalist activists fighting for great Poland who could not be accused of anything before the court is something inconceivable for a normal person.¹¹²

Other right-wing periodicals which published PAT’s communication used the article in *ABC* emphasising its certain passages, mainly through specific stylistic operations. The nationalist *Nowy Kurier* called *Chochoł* an excuse for a periodical devoted to spreading pornography and the poem’s author a Jewish cynical hack.¹¹³ The pro-Sanation *Echo* mentioned Pasternak’s excessive insolence.¹¹⁴

Leftist press reacted quite differently to the entire matter. In the PPS-affiliated *Robotnik*, Zbigniew Mitzner protested:

[...] we cannot, while remaining silent, consent for freedom of poetry to lead the poet to the prison. We think that Pasternak’s arrest was made not due to some actions of his but as a reaction against his ideological stance, being such a sinister challenge [for] official literature, official poetry, and court satire.¹¹⁵

¹¹¹ As cited in: [author not credited], “Sprawa Pasternaka”, p. 4.

¹¹² [author not credited], “Sprawa Pasternaka”, p. 4.

¹¹³ Iks., “Rassenschande”, *Nowy Kurier* 1938, issue 50, p. 3.

¹¹⁴ [author not credited], “Pieśń o hańbieniu rasy’. Cyniczne oplwanie polskiej kobiety”, *Echo* 1938, issue 63, p. 7. It is worth adding that the consequences of publishing the poem were borne not only by its author, but also by Leon Deresiewicz, *Chochoł*’s publisher, and Izydor Berman, the responsible editor. Initially, an investigation was started against them for defaming the Polish nation. Eventually, though, they were accused of propagating pornography – vide [author not credited], “Pieśń o hańbieniu rasy’ przed sądem”, *Orędownik. Ilustrowany dziennik narodowy i katolicki* 1938, issue 156, p. 14.

¹¹⁵ Z. Mitzner, “Leon Pasternak w więzieniu”, *Robotnik* 1936, issue 120, p. 3.

Conservative periodicals *Czas* and *Słowo* partly critical of Sanation also stood in defence of Pasternak. In the latter, in an issue of 10 March 1938, Stanisław Mackiewicz concluded that Pasternak's internment at Bereza was unnecessary. He posited:

Leaving aside the fact that the thought of sending someone to a concentration camp for writing a poem disgusts me deeply, I believe that Poland can exist without a Bereza, and it is the weakness of our government that requires such a means of reinforcement to exist, which is actually being used for ad hoc results, without any long-term objectives. [...] The poem was published in a periodical read by Jewish intelligentsia sympathising with Bolsheviks, that is in a closed community isolated from the general public, which should actually be considered uncertain in state terms in all respects.¹¹⁶

Thirteen days after the article was published, Mackiewicz himself ended up in Bereza as being uncertain in state terms.

Other people of letters also protested against Pasternak's internment at Bereza. The Executive Council (Zarząd Główny) of ZZLP received a formal letter by Janina Broniewska, Halina Górka, Karol Kuryluk and Wanda Wasilewska in which they demanded an explanation why the Council did not intervene with government officials for Pasternak to be released.¹¹⁷ They achieved nothing. When Kostek-Biernacki asked Pasternak while he was interned at the Confinement Centre why he wrote such a poem, Pasternak supposedly responded that it was *licentia poetica*¹¹⁸. He paid a high price for creative freedom.

Literature at Bereza (and outside it)

However, as far we know, Pasternak did not write poems at Bereza. Others did. To practice literature at the camp was a form of rebellion and therapy.¹¹⁹ Mieczysław Popiel recalled: "Poetry was for us a weapon in the solitude and the torment of solitary confinement. It also enabled us to disconnect our minds from the pain."¹²⁰ Aleksander (Ołeksandr) Hawryluk, a Ukrainian poet, stated:

¹¹⁶ Cat [S. Mackiewicz], "Na marginesie polemiki o 'Przodownicę'", *Słowo* [Vilnius] 1938, issue 67, p. 1.

¹¹⁷ Vide [author not credited], "Obroncy Pasternaka", p. 4.

¹¹⁸ Vide J. Rawicz, *Diabeł...*, p. 275.

¹¹⁹ The same applied to German, Nazi camps – vide A. Morawiec, *Literatura w lagrze...*, pp. 70–71.

¹²⁰ M. Popiel, "Gaudeamus igitur..." [in:] *Bereziacy*, p. 118.

In Bereza, specific folklore emerged; songs, poems, anecdotes, and even comedy sketches were written in Polish, Belarusian, and Jewish. Obviously, no one sang those songs aloud, but at work inmates learnt in whispers the lyrics and the melodies one from the other. That was surely one way to raise the heart.¹²¹

Surely inmates did not seek inspiration for the poetry at the camp library as it mainly included writings of Józef Piłsudski.¹²² Sznarbachowski, one of the first internees, recalled that one could read on Sunday and that the library of two or three dozen books apart from Piłsudski's *Pisma zbiorowe* (Collected writing) included novellas by Kostek-Biernacki (whom he appreciated highly for his literary talent) and the course books of third year law students taken from him, Piasecki and Korycki when they entered Bereza.¹²³ Sometimes internees were forced to read Piłsudski's writings: "After the works, 'lectures' were held. One inmate had to read *Pisma, mowy, rozkazy* (Writings, speeches, orders) by Marshal Piłsudski aloud. Then, there was the exam. Inmates reported the contents of the works they had read quoting the more important passages."¹²⁴ Interestingly enough, for Ukrainian nationalists Piłsudski's works constituted a valuable read, desired even. Wołodymyr Makar recalled:

All his works display very good style. They are vivid, clear, full of soldierly humour. [...] We eagerly read his directions on how to fabricate and distribute samizdat, and his remarks on firearms. As we talked later on, we compared the methods of the Polish revolutionary organisation with ours.¹²⁵

In time, access to the library became limited. Few inmates were allowed to use it.

A much closer companion for Bereza internees, particular communists and socialists, than Piłsudski's writings was the memorised by heart and recited aloud poetry by Władysław Broniewski¹²⁶, which inspired many of their own creations. We know relatively many of those, particularly thanks to *Bereziacy*. Often, though, which is natural for literary folklore, their authors remain unknown. The image of

121 A. Hawryluk, *Bereza*, trans. W. Rzymowski, for the edition it was studied, compared with the original and the gaps were filled by A. Wat, [in:] idem, *Bereza*, Wydawnictwo Ministerstwa Obrony Narodowej, Warsaw 1956, p. 93.

122 Vide I. Polit, *Miejsce odosobnienia...*, pp. 95–96, 121; W. Śleszyński, *Obóz odosobnienia...*, p. 51; M. Mirski, *...biegiem marsz!*, Książka i Wiedza, Warsaw 1958, p. 82.

123 W. Sznarbachowski, *300 lat wspomnień*, pp. 110–111.

124 [author not credited], "Jak żyli więźniowie w Berezie Kartuskiej?", *Robotnik* 1934, issue 327 [edition was confiscated]; as cited in: *Bereza Kartuska*, p. 42.

125 As cited in: B. H. [B. Heydenkorn], "Ukraińskie wspomnienia z Berezy", *Kultura* [Paris] 1955, issue 12, p. 79.

126 L. Borkowicz, "O Broniewskim w Berezie", *Nowa Kultura* 1950, issue 28, p. 2.

a comrade whispering news of the fighting Spain and of China pushing forward included in an anonymous 1936 song *Przez błota poleskie* (Through the muds of Polesia) with the phrase: “two of us fell”, which referred to, as one can only guess, the killing of Mozyrko and Germaniski at Bereza, indicated that a communist wrote the song.¹²⁷ It was originally printed (with a different title) together with several other “songs of Bereza” in the illegal communist press.¹²⁸ Communist, or at least revolutionary, origins also applied to a recorded from memory by Zelik Zylberberg optimistic *Karna sala* (Penal room), which prophesied the lifting of the “lordly creation”, meaning as much the Confinement Centre as Sanation Poland.¹²⁹ Another anonymous poem Zylberberg recorded from memory was *Karcer* (Solitary confinement), “It is cold in here as in a well, / The walls will suck your health”¹³⁰. Significantly enough, based on the recollections of Bereza internees, solitary was the most dreadful of tortures they were subjected to. An anonymous song *Biegiem marsz* (Double time, march) which began with the words: “If you want to know, / How in Bereza it was”¹³¹, constitutes a chronicle (or a timetable) of a day at Bereza. A large set of camp facts carried “pieśń bereskiej betoniarni” (song of Bereza concrete plant), with obvious communist provenance, which began with the words: “Bones must be hard on Bereza concrete plant, / They pay us every day, every week a penal report.”¹³²

It is also worth mentioning a poem with an inscribed date of 15 Dec 1935 entitled *O Berezie* (On Bereza), which was a reaction to opinions voiced in the press demanding that Bereza be shut down. In the *Satyra prawdę mówi...* (Satire tells the truth) anthology it was accredited to Emanuel Szlechter (actually Schlechter), while in *Bereziacy* published two years later its author was stated to be Edward Szymański¹³³. Since Pasternak participated in the editing of both books, the latter assignment should be considered the more reliable one, and Szymański’s *Dziela*

127 [author not credited], “Przez błota poleskie”, [in:] *Polskie pieśni rewolucyjne z lat 1918–1939*, collected and supplemented with notes by F. Kalicka, musical editing E. Olearczyk, Książka i Wiedza, Warsaw 1950, pp. 245–247. Reprinted in: *Bereziacy*, p. 38; *Polska poezja rewolucyjna 1878–1945*, S. Klonowski (ed.), Państwowy Instytut Wydawniczy, Warsaw 1977, pp. 312–313.

128 [author not credited], “Przez pola polskie grupa nasza szła...”, [in:] *Они не стали...*, insert between p. 128 and 129.

129 [author not credited], “Karna sala”, [in:] Z. Zylberberg, “Migawki bereskie”, [in:] *Bereziacy*, p. 147.

130 [author not credited], “Karcer”, [in:] *Bereziacy*, p. 221.

131 [author not credited], “Biegiem marsz”, [in:] *Polskie pieśni rewolucyjne...*, pp. 241–244. Reprinted in: R. Borkowski, “Tu rządzą ja – sędzia, i moja pałka – prokurator...”, [in:] *Bereziacy*, pp. 259–260; *Polska poezja rewolucyjna...*, pp. 310–311.

132 [author not credited], *** [“Kostki twarde muszą być...”, [in:] J. Wójcik, “Fragmenty wspomnień”, [in:] *Bereziacy*, p. 59.

133 E. Szlechter, “O Berezie”, [in:] *Satyra prawdę mówi...*, p. 406; E. Szymański, “O Berezie”, [in:] *Bereziacy*, p. 304.

zebrane (Collected works) did not include the poem at all¹³⁴. What is just as important, though, is that neither Szymański, a leftist poet and a member of the PPS murdered in 1943 in KL Auschwitz, nor Szlechter, author of pre-WWII hit songs, satirist and screenwriter murdered in the same year at the Janowska camp in Lviv¹³⁵, were interned at Bereza. Allow me to quote the whole satire (after *Bereziacy*), as it belonged to the rather rare works of literature in which Bereza was perceived from the outside, not from the perspective of an inmate or a former inmate:

A new era has come –
 Until recently – keep mum
 about Bereza –
 But now – all you can!...
 One by one,
 First Poranny, then Czas
 Or Słowo – the whole press
 of Sanation can use this mess:
 “Shut down!”... “Close!”... “Destroy”... “Sweep away!”

Strong words, acute words
 Write the government herds.
 Censorship is not afraid –
 Smacks it all... hard!...

While Bereza, as they say,
 remains uncharred.

Engaged poetry was written not only by communists and socialists. In the surviving reports of the State Police in Łódź, Ireneusz Polit found two anonymous propaganda songs: *Maszerują nasze bataliony* (Our battalions marching) and *Kolczaste druty* (Barbed wire), both by national radicals. (*Marsz na polską Syberię* (March to the Polish Siberia) was the original version of the latter, composed during a transport to Bereza by ONR elite members: Piasecki, Sznarbachowski, Świdorski, and, possibly, other detainees). The following are some of the more explicit fragments:

¹³⁴ E. Szymański, *Dzieła zebrane*, Ł. Szymański (ed.), foreword R. Matuszewski, notes E. Rudziński and Ł. Szymański, vol. 1–2, Wydawnictwo Literackie, Krakow 1971.

¹³⁵ Vide A. Redzik, “Jak twórca szlagierów wszech czasów nie został adwokatem – rzecz o Emanuelu Schlechterze (1904–1943). W 110. rocznicę urodzin i 70. rocznicę śmierci”, *Palestra* 2014, issue 1/2, pp. 245–255.

We won't be stopped, we won't be intimidated
 By prison bars, the Bereza tomb
 We'll break the hostile Jewish violence
 At our feet the Sanation's enemy's doom.¹³⁶

New Siberia is created by vermin,
 [...] When for Bereza we march
 And spray four hundred bullets
 Onto the kike crowd
 When we ONR win
 The bloody judgement will come
 And home [for? – note by A.M.] Sanation's dark gallows
 We will many plant.¹³⁷

The unknown author of a poem recited during a peasant rally in Dębica in 1937 was surely affiliated with the peasant movement; the poem began with the words: “When you came back from Bereza... – / What did they greet you with? / Bread did not rise this time / Nor do we have any salt...”¹³⁸ It presented Bereza as a painful place, though not more painful than the everyday reality of the impoverished Polish countryside bereaved of not only food, but also kerosene, soap, and clothes.

The literature at Bereza, similarly to the literature on Bereza, was created not only by Poles nor only in Polish. In the PRL, Ołeksandr Hawryluk, a member of the Communist Party of Western Ukraine (Komunistyczna Partia Zachodniej Ukrainy, KPZU), was the most widely promoted and printed foreign author. He was not the most outstanding writer, but he displayed the utmost political commitment, which was visible in a poem entitled *Bereza* and in a narrative poem entitled *Pieśń z Berezy* (Song from Bereza), both written at the camp, as well as in extensive

¹³⁶ [author not credited], “Maszerują nasze bataliony”, [in:] I. Polit, *Miejsce odosobnienia...*, p. 233.

¹³⁷ [author not credited], “Kolczaste druty”, [in:] I. Polit, *Miejsce odosobnienia...*, p. 234. A distant echo of the poem was a rap song which used its fragments (or fragments of a variant of the poem) by Ptak (actually Maciej Ptasznik) entitled “Bereza Kartuska” included in a record entitled *NaRa* published in 2013 by 3DOM recording studio. The author of the song is a member of the ONR, while his song (an example of graphomania, vulgarity, and hate speech) constitutes an apology of the pre-WWII founding fathers of the ONR. The following are its final verses: “Trust me, man, the situation is changing, / we will put the authorities in prison. / They talk bullshit that we're the threat, / for traitor Bereza – confinement place.” Apparently, the idea of Bereza lives on. Vide “‘NaRa’ to mój największy sukces... – an interview with Ptak”, <https://wzww.wordpress.com/2013/07/17/nara-to-moj-najwiekszy-sukces-rozmowa-z-ptakiem-%E2%98%9A-posluchaj/> [accessed on: 14.12.2018].

¹³⁸ [author not credited], *** [“Gdy wrócisz z tej Berezy...”], *Świat* 1957, issue 33, p. 5.

recollections he completed in 1941, from which one learns, e.g. that Bereza “is one [...] of the ghastliest slaughter houses established by global capitalism.”¹³⁹ The final sentence of the work read: “The country is blossoming with banners welcoming the liberating march of the Red Army.”¹⁴⁰ Wołodymyr Makar, a nationalist, recalled that among all the Ukrainian works created at the camp, of which he knew only a few in a printed version, the greatest of all was a narrative poem by Dmytro Sztukała entitled *Duma o Berezie Kartuskiej* (Ballad of Bereza Kartuska). He also indicated several other Ukrainian poets who wrote while interned at Bereza: Ostap Derlic, Bogdan Goszowski, Roman Gut-Kluczycki, and Roman Mirowiczki¹⁴¹. Yet he did not mention Hawryluk.

Szołem Żyrman, a Yiddish poet, was yet another internee of Bereza – twice, actually. He released his poems in illegal prints circulated in the north-eastern voivodships of the Polish Republic. When the Red Army invaded Poland, he began work on a book describing the life of Bereza Kartuska internees.¹⁴² He probably failed to complete it, or at least he did not publish it. *Bereziacy* includes three of his camp poems. *Polesie* (Polesia) and *Karcer kołujący* [Circling solitary confinement] resonate somewhat positively, i.e.: the roar of cannons in Madrid saluting Moscow¹⁴³. A less optimistic yet artistically more refined, was a poem which began with the words: “The creak of the lock.” It went on as follows:

Solitary closed –
A seven-day night.
I stood still
In dark terror
With curses on my lips:
The hell with you!...¹⁴⁴

Żyrman, allow me to add, was referenced in the recollections of Józef Keksztas (Juozas Kėkštas, actually Juozas Adomavičius), a Lithuanian and Polish poet and

139 A. Hawryluk, *Bereza*, p. 27. The book also included, which I have already mentioned, a poem (*Bereza*) and a narrative poem (*Pieśń z Berezy. Poemat*). The first printed edition of the *Bereza* recollections supplemented with the misleading subtitle: *Reportaż* (Report), was published in April 1941 in *Almanach Literacki* (issue 1, pp. 62–87), a periodical of the Lviv Organisation of the Writers Union of the USSR.

140 A. Hawryluk, *Bereza*, p. 116.

141 Vide B. H. [B. Heydenkorn], *Ukraińskie wspomnienia...*, p. 82.

142 Vide W. Śleszyński, “Białostockie środowisko pisarzy sowieckich (1939–1941)”, *Białoruskie Zeszyty Historyczne*, vol. 13 (2000), p. 115.

143 S. Żyrman, “Polesie”, trans. [from Yiddish] A. Słucki, [in:] *Bereziacy*, p. 263; S. Żyrman, “Karcer kołujący”, trans. [from Yiddish] A. Słucki, [in:] *Bereziacy*, p. 196.

144 S. Żyrman, *** [“Skrzyp rygla...”], [in:] M. Popiel, *Gaudeamus igitur...*, p. 118.

translator. They were both held in a Vilnius prison called *Centralka*.¹⁴⁵ At Bereza, Keksztas met another poet, a Belarusian by the name of Siarhiej Chmara (Сяргей Хмара, actually Сяргей Сіняк)¹⁴⁶, who composed poems in his memory. One of those was created in 1937 entitled *Бярозка* – a lyrical complaint of a prisoner longing for freedom, which began with the words: „Між калючых драцяных аслон / Вецер кінуў насенне бярозы” (“Between the barbed wires / The wind tossed birch seeds.”)¹⁴⁷ In a 1981 poem entitled *На камень*, Bereza already seems a faint memory¹⁴⁸.

The literature which came to life at the Bereza camp due to its multi-lingual nature requires a comparative study. It could be of high value. That would also apply to the literature which was created outside the confinement centre, in which Bereza functioned as a motif or theme. I devoted the separate article to its Polish examples, which were published after the infamous institution ceased to operate.¹⁴⁹

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¹⁴⁵ J. Keksztas, “Stałem się numerem”, [in:] *Bereziacy*, p. 194. In 1940, after Lithuania was seized by the Soviet Union, Keksztas was sent to Wiatłag (Вятлаг) gulag in the Kirov Oblast – vide E. Brazaitienė, “Juozas Kėkštās...”

¹⁴⁶ Vide Z. Ponarski, “Zapomniany poeta Kekstas Juzosas”, *Nowy Kurier* [Toronto] 2008, issue 10, p. 8.

¹⁴⁷ С. Хмара, “Бярозка”, [in:] idem, *Рабінавы хмель. Выбраныя творы*, Кнігазбор, Мінск 2009, p. 49 (own translation – А.М.). There is a note beneath the poem: “Картуз-Бяроза, 1937 г.”. *Балада аб Амарантах* was also written at Bereza – vide idem, “Кароткія даныя аб сабе”, [in:] idem, pp. 145–146.

¹⁴⁸ С. Хмара, “На камень”, [in:] idem, *Рабінавы хмель*, p. 55.

¹⁴⁹ A. Morawiec, “After Bereza. Polish literature towards the Confinement Centre in Bereza Kartuska. 1939–2018” (in this volume).

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Brr, Bereza. Literatura polska wobec Miejsca Odosobnienia w Berezie Kartuskiej. 1934–1939

Streszczenie

Artykuł dotyczy obecności w szeroko rozumianej literaturze polskiej tematu i motywu Miejsca Odosobnienia w Berezie Kartuskiej. Zaprezentowano w nim najważniejsze fakty odnoszące się do tej instytucji oraz kontrowersje związane z jej nazwą (uznawaną za eufemizm) oraz podobieństwem „miejsca odosobnienia” do innych miejsc represji, takich jak rosyjska katorga, komunistyczny Sołowiecki Obóz Specjalnego Przeznaczenia czy nazistowski obóz koncentracyjny Dachau. Zrelacjonowano spory, jakie toczyły się wokół Miejsca Odosobnienia w okresie jego funkcjonowania (1934–1939), w których uczestniczyli także pisarze. Zamieszczono informacje o osadzonych w Berezie literatach (Stanisław Mackiewicz, Leon Pasternak, Andrzej Wolica i in.) oraz tworzonej tam poezji (także obcej). Przedmiotem uwagi są także utwory literackie powstałe poza Miejsca Odosobnienia w okresie jego funkcjonowania.

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

Brr, Bereza. Polish literature towards the Confinement Centre in Bereza Kartuska. 1934–1939

Summary

The article concerns the presence of the theme and motif of the Place of Isolation at Bereza Kartuska in broadly understood Polish literature. It presents the most important facts pertaining to this institution and the controversy related to its name (considered a euphemism) and the similarity of the “place of isolation” to other places of repression, such as the Russian Katorga, the communist Solovetsky Special Purpose Camp, or the Nazi Dachau concentration camp. The disputes that took place around the Place of Isolation during its functioning (1934–1939) are discussed, in which the writers also participated. Information on writers imprisoned at Bereza (Stanisław Mackiewicz, Leon Pasternak, Andrzej Wolica et al.) and poetry (also non-Polish) created there are also included. The subject of consideration are also literary works created outside the Place of Isolation during its functioning.

Keywords: Place of Isolation at Bereza Kartuska, concentration camps, Polish literature, theme and motif, politics of memory

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