

Poetic faith and a willing suspension of disbelief in Zygmunt Haupt's prose

Tomasz Garbol

ORCID: 0000-0001-5411-0780

A willing suspension of disbelief

In chapter 7 of the monograph *“Jeden jest zawsze ostrzem”. Inna nowoczesność Zygmunta Haupta* [“One is always the blade.” Zygmunt Haupt’s other modernity], Andrzej Niewiadomski writes, as announced in the Introduction, about the writer who “touched upon eschatological, metaphysical, and ontological issues” thus elevating “the enigmatic nature of his works.”¹ This is most clearly visible in the works in which the writer discusses “philosophical and ideological” questions; coincidentally, such works also “contain the most metatextual elements.”² Respectively, metatextual elements in Haupt’s prose must be read in the wider context of aesthetic quality, which Haupt explains referring to *Biographia Literaria*: “The writer has the right to expect from the reader a kind of cooperation that Coleridge called ‘a willing suspension of disbelief;’ the reader should be prepared to accept the things invented by the author as true, to suspend his disbelief, to allow him to confidently move into the represented world. Indeed, the reader is able to co-create the story through understatements, through filling in the gaps. It is a great device, and it gives the reader a lot of satisfaction; the reader is able to engage with the work. But you have to leave some space for the reader.”³

¹ Andrzej Niewiadomski, *“Jeden jest zawsze ostrzem”. Inna nowoczesność Zygmunta Haupta* [“One is always the blade.” Zygmunt Haupt’s other modernity] (Lublin: Wydawnictwo UMCS, 2015), 17.

² Niewiadomski, 395.

³ Jerzy Giedroyc, *Zygmunt Haupt, Listy 1947–1975* [Letters 1947–1975], ed. Paweł Panas (Warsaw: Towarzystwo Więzi, 2022), 179.

Indeed, Haupt refers to Coleridge's "suspension of disbelief" in the wider context of poetics – the text must be shaped and structured in such a way as to allow the reader to enter the represented world and accept its rules. We can see that in a letter to Jerzy Giedroyc, and we can see that in the story "Nietota," in which the writer fully expects the reader to voluntarily suspend his disbelief.⁴ This is also visible in "Pereketypołe" [Tumbleweed], where remarks about aesthetic satisfaction induced by fear intertwine with reflections that are clearly inspired by Coleridge: "sami ściszymy w sobie niewiarę, byle osiągnąć tę chwilę doprowadzającego do zawrotu głowy strachu i strachu" [we suspend our own disbelief in order to experience that moment of dizzying fear and dread] (BD 508). When the reader "suspends his disbelief," the artist may represent people and events either through excess and exaggeration or through understatement, and the reader is thus allowed to enter the represented world.

"Suspending disbelief," which Haupt mentioned only once in a relatively long text (almost as a digression), should by no means be reduced to the question of communication between the writer and the reader, or even to the question of mimesis in literature, to which Haupt himself alluded, drawing attention to the question of artistic imitation discussed by Aristotle in *Poetics*. Indeed, in *Biographia Literaria* Coleridge discusses "a suspension of disbelief" in a much broader context than just poetics. In Chapter 14, which opens volume 2, Coleridge explains that when he and Wordsworth were writing *Lyrical Ballads*: "The thought suggested itself (to which of us I do not recollect) that a series of poems might be composed of two sorts"⁵: "it was agreed, that my endeavours should be directed to persons and characters supernatural, or at least romantic; yet so as to transfer from our inward nature a human interest and a semblance of truth sufficient to procure for these shadows of imagination that willing suspension of disbelief for the moment, which constitutes poetic faith. Mr. Wordsworth, on the other hand, was to propose to himself as his object, to give the charm of novelty to things of every day, and to excite a feeling analogous to the supernatural, by awakening the mind's attention to the lethargy of custom, and directing it to the loveliness and the wonders of the world before us; an inexhaustible treasure, but for which in consequence of the film of familiarity and selfish solicitude we have eyes, yet see not, ears that hear not, and hearts that neither feel nor understand [cf. Isaiah 6:10]."⁶

We strive for an understanding that would be as complete as possible. The language of poetry should allow one to see, hear, and feel God's works. Coleridge refers here to the famous quote from *The Book of Isaiah*, which is also repeated many times in the New Testament, because it seems to succinctly describe how one should experience the world. We know that this issue was important to him because in the conclusion he wrote "ΘΕΩ ΜΟΝΩ ΔΟΞΑ"⁷ (Theôi Monôi Dôxa), that is "Glory to the only God." He thus summarized his discussion about *Lyrical Ballads*. He professes his faith in the (Anglican) Church – even though some things may not be comprehended by reason, they are still reasonable – and, at the same time, he turns his eyes towards the starry "Heaven." Reason has its limits and that is when faith takes over. And faith is like a dark

⁴ See: Zygmunt Haupt, "Nietota", in: *Baskijski diabeł. Opowiadania i reportaże* [The Basque Devil: Short stories and reportages], ed. Aleksander Madyda (Wołowiec: Wydawnictwo Czarne, 2016), 504. Further quotations from this edition are marked with the letters BD and the page number.

⁵ Samuel Taylor Coleridge, *Biographia Literaria*, ed. Adam Roberts (Edinburgh: Edinburgh UP, 2014), 207.

⁶ Coleridge, 208.

⁷ Coleridge, 414.

night with “sparks twinkling in the amazing depth.” Such a vision of faith is for Coleridge a “pure Act of inward Adoration to the great I AM, and to the filial WORD that re-affirmeth it from Eternity to Eternity, whose choral Echo is the Universe.”⁸ The emotionality of this final statement is echoed not only in religious but also in epistemological passion. It refers to the words from *The Book of Isaiah*, quoted in the context of “suspending disbelief,” insofar as every writer in the Romantic era and later would ask himself: what do we see, what do we hear, and what do we feel?

Biographia Literaria was published in 1817. Thomas Carlyle’s *Sartor Resartus* was published several years later. It was another book important for understanding the intellectual and spiritual climate of the era. Meyer H. Abrams referred to *Sartor Resartus* to describe the complex transformation of the model of the world found in the works of Romantic poets. As the title of his book suggests,⁹ he focused on and explored “Natural Supernaturalism.”^{10,11} Indeed, Coleridge’s “endeavours [were] directed to persons and characters supernatural,” and Wordsworth was “to excite a feeling analogous to the supernatural.”¹² The focus on the supernatural is thus clear. Abrams’s understanding of Romantic art is similar to that presented by Earl Wasserman more than two decades earlier in *The Subtler Language* – the model of poetry in Romanticism changed from mimetic to “creative;” instead of using ready-made conventions to describe nature, Romantic writers wished to articulate in poetry their own experiences.¹³ Abrams analyzes *Lyrical Ballads* precisely in this context. Specifically, he argues that the general tendency in the Romantic era was to “to naturalize the supernatural and to humanize the divine.”¹⁴ Romantic poets wished “[t]o speak humanly from the height or from the depth/ Of human things.”¹⁵ Here, Abrams quotes Wallace Stevens, a 20th-century American poet.¹⁶ Another quote from Stevens is also important for him: “The poem of the mind in the act of finding/ What will suffice.”¹⁷ Abrams recognized that modern poetry wished to reformulate the religious tradition in such a way as to find artistic motivation that “will suffice” without religion. “Finding what will suffice” is to poetically test “natural supernaturalism,” and thus to, as Coleridge put it, “excite a feeling analogous to the supernatural.”

Stevens’s poetics help Abrams capture the long durée of “natural supernaturalism” in literature. In one of his letters, Stevens remarked: “The major poetic idea in the world is and always has been the idea of God. One of the visible movements of the modern imagination is the movement away from the idea of God. The poetry that created the idea of God will either adapt it to our different

⁸ Coleridge, 414.

⁹ Meyer Howard Abrams, *Natural Supernaturalism. Tradition and Revolution in Romantic Literature* (New York – London: W. W. Norton, 1973).

¹⁰See also: Polish translations of Thomas Carlyle’s work: *Sartor Resartus. Życie i zdania pana Teufelsdröckha w trzech księgach*, trans. Sygurd Wiśniowski (Warsaw: Nakład i druk S. Lewentala, 1882), 193–201.

¹¹See also: Zdzisław Łapiński’s reception of Abrams’s book in: “Dwaj nowocześni: Leśmian i Przyboś” [Two modern poets: Leśmian and Przyboś], *Teksty Drugie* 5-6 (1994): 84.

¹²Samuel Taylor Coleridge, *Biographia Literaria*, ed. Adam Roberts (Edinburgh: Edinburgh UP, 2014), 207.

¹³See: Earl Wasserman, *The Subtler Language. Critical Readings of Neoclassic and Romantic Poems* (Michigan: Johns Hopkins Press, 1959), 10–11.

¹⁴Abrams, 68

¹⁵Abrams, 69. See: Wallace Stevens, “Chocorua to its Neighbor”, in: *The Collected Poems of Wallace Stevens*, ed. John N. Serio, Chris Beyers (New York: Vintage Books, 2015), 316.

¹⁶See: Abrams.

¹⁷See: Abrams. See also: Stevens’s “Of Modern Poetry” translated by Czesław Miłosz – Wallace Stevens, “O nowoczesnej poezji”, in: Czesław Miłosz, *Przekłady poetyckie* [Poetic translations], ed. Magdalena Heydel (Kraków: Znak, 2005), 283–284.

intelligence, or create a substitute for it, or make it unnecessary. These alternatives probably mean the same thing (...).¹⁸ Stevens seems to have shared this kind of poetic sensitivity with Romantic poets. Abrams, as an insightful critic of Romanticism,¹⁹ found in Stevens's poetry a continuation of certain Romantic notions. Natural supernaturalism – to which we cling once we “suspend our disbelief” – encourages us to explore spirituality and not to rely on any transcendent authority. Stevens, who was more radical in his critique of the relationship between culture and religion than Coleridge and Wordsworth (both of whom continued to seek inspiration in Christianity), said that “[a]fter one has abandoned a belief in God, poetry is the essence which takes its place as life's redemption.”²⁰

Indeed, I discussed the relationship between Coleridge and Abrams, who built a new interpretative model of belief and disbelief in literature on the basis of Wordsworth's poetry, because I wish to argue that Haupt, culturally and artistically, was an ally of Abrams and Stevens. There are many similarities between their lives (Haupt was a few years older than Abrams, and he made his artistic debut at the time when Stevens entered the literary scene), but what is even more important is the fact that Haupt's references to Coleridge transcend the question of poetics. I emphasize the aesthetic affinity between Haupt and Coleridge because I believe that “suspending disbelief,” which was so important for the Polish writer, also constitutes in Haupt's prose *the* moment in which the mind awakens from “the lethargy of custom.” Imagination must accept new creative (and not imitative or conventional) worlds.

Down a footbridge

In the introductory remarks to chapter 7 of his monograph, Andrzej Niewiadomski argues that the stories “Światy” [Worlds], “Warianty” [Variants], “Zabawa w zielone” [A game of green], and “Szpica” [Vanguard] are “saturated with philosophical and ideological reflection.”²¹ Let us take a look at “Warianty” and ask how poetic faith, which results from the willing suspension of disbelief, is expressed in the story.

The story addresses the question of human life and its unique nature – we may come across the same thing many times but the circumstances, and above all we, change; our perception depends on the most subtle external stimuli and emotions. The second part of the story presents a different “variant” of the same event. It shows that things are not always as they seem, as they appear to be, “po wierzchu” [on the surface] (BD 573). Haupt compiled the memories of several days. The last day is a Sunday. The memory is one of taking part in a liturgical rite, probably in a Sunday mass, although, to be honest, the narrator does not “take part” in the mass, as he speaks of “nudzie długiej nabożeństwa” [a long and boring church service] (BD 574). Indeed, when the mass is over, he has this to say:

¹⁸Wallace Stevens, “To Henry Church, October 15, 1940”, in: *Letters of Wallace Stevens*, ed. Holy Stevens (London: Faber and Faber, 1966), 378.

¹⁹Abrams explained that he chose to focus on Wordsworth because his *Prospectus* best expressed what he wanted to illustrate. See: Meyer Howard Abrams, “Rationality and Imagination in Cultural History: A Reply to Wayne Booth”, *Critical Inquiry* 2, 3 (1976): 460.

²⁰Wallace Stevens, *Opus Posthumous*, ed. Samuel French Morse (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1957), 158.

²¹Niewiadomski, 395.

Po wyjściu z kościoła ma się taki straszny ucisk i próżnię równocześnie serca, jakby wina za to, że brało się porcję wiary jak komunię i świętokradczo, kiedy nie można było wzbudzić w sobie prawdziwej wiary, i stał tęgi barczysty dzień jak klucznik więzienia

[When you leave the church, you at the same time fell that your heart is aching and completely empty, as if you were feeling guilty for taking a piece of faith like communion, sacrilegiously, because you can't truly believe, and a stout, broad-shouldered day stands before you like a jailer] (BD 575).

The manner in which Haupt describes the whole situation is not “superficial.” The prepositional phrase “powiedzmy szczerze, dla uprzedzonych” [let's be honest, for the prejudiced] (BD 573) challenges the belief that the world at large is more picturesque and more interesting than the writer's homeland. This seemingly unimportant remark about how boring and peripheral the lands which the Austrian officers contemptuously and vulgarly called “Arschhöle” was preceded by a much more “metaphysical” sentence: “Wydawałoby się, że tak może wyglądać nicość” [It would seem that nothingness could look like this] (BD 573). The narrator is no longer simply concerned with nostalgic flashbacks. The metaphysical meaning of the story, which avoids superficiality, may be found in the memory of the Sunday mass. It is not simply another declaration of disbelief in literature, another vision of a man who does not find the genuine in the rite, which thus turns out to be “empty” as far as faith is concerned. Haupt evokes this experience because he does not want to give in to disillusionment; he seeks faith, “poetic faith,” elsewhere. It becomes clear at the end of the story:

Bardzo trzeba się odseparować, odkroić, odlepić, odessać od cycka wiadomości, łona rzeczy omówionych i grubych. Myślenie musi być cienkie, filigranowe, kruche kruchością wyciągniętego na gorąco szkła. Trzeba sobie z tym dać radę.

Trzeba oddzielić się od przestrzeni, jak by to nie było trudne i niemożliwe, powiedzieć sobie: tu jest tu, a tam jest tam. Być sobie takim panem, który jest obiektywnym panem. Posegregować sobie, ale nie systematycznie, bo w całej systematyce można zagubić się dla dobra samej systematyki, ale podzielić sobie i powiedzieć, że jest inaczej.

Nie dlatego, że powiedziano nam co ino o względności i porządku rzeczy zależnym od kondycji, instrumentu, jakim mierzę, od tego, gdzie przypadkowo się znalazłem.

Tylko nie być zaraz trąbą jerychońską.

[You must truly separate yourself, cut yourself off, detach yourself, untie yourself from the tit of the news, from the womb of the discussed and important things. Thinking must be thin, intricate, brittle, and fragile like hot glass. You must deal with it.

You must separate yourself from space, however difficult and impossible it may be, you must say to yourself: here is here, and there is there. Be your own objective boss. Order things for yourself, but not systematically, because you can get lost in the whole systematics for the sake of systematics itself; judge for yourself and see for yourself.

Not because we know about the relativity and the order of things which depends on one's individual situation, the instrument one uses to measure it, one's position.

Just don't be a Jericho trumpet] (BD 575)

At the very beginning, we find the word “truly,” which points to the persuasive power of final remarks – even if it is only self-persuasion, a personal investigation into the question which is followed by this desideratum composed of “musts,” “not because,” and “don't be.” Epistemologi-

cal passion is palpable; one should free oneself from, as Haupt puts it in the story, the oppressive prison of disbelief. Having left the church, feeling “empty” and lost, and physically weak on this very hot Sunday afternoon, as well as irritated by the sight of stupid faces, the “dis-believer” asks:

Jak tu uchwycić istotę rzeczy, jak sobie zadać ten worek, którędy pomacać za futrynę drzwi? Z wielkim przecuciem, z naiwnym rozmysłem macam nogą kładkę, kładeczkę prowadzącą na właściwą stronę. Pewnie, że się będę mylił, ale najważniejsza jest w takim wypadku decyzja; jedno, co pozostaje, zdecydować się ostro.

[How can I grasp the essence of things, how can I carry this bag on my shoulders, which way should I go once I step over the threshold? With great intuition, with naive intention, I reach out and try to find a footbridge, a little footbridge, to the right side. Of course, I will make mistakes, but the most important thing in such a case is to make a decision; all that remains is to make a decision, once and for all] (BD 575)

This passage connects the image of the “empty” heart with the call to reject the absolute truths. Desiderata help one confront the “empty” heart, the onslaught of nothingness.

Haupt’s language in “Warianty” is essentially similar to that identified by Abrams in the works of Romantic poets and such “natural supernaturalists” as Stevens. Haupt, Stevens, and Romantic poets all believe that one should awake from the “lethargy of custom” and “untie [oneself] from the tit of the news, from the womb of the discussed and important things,” that is reject conventional and traditional epistemological tools and search for the essence of things oneself. Other images used by Haupt in “Warianty” confirm that he questions any and all “absolute” truths. Let us take a look at the description of the mass: “Nuda długa nabożeństwa, kiedy organy dudnią i złoci się promień słońca wbiegły przez okno, i stacje męki pańskiej, i zacheuszki na ścianach kościelnych, które są twarde i sterczące do góry jak dogmat” [a long and boring church service, the pipe organ is playing loudly and a golden ray of sunshine is falling through the window, stations of the Cross, and the candlesticks on the walls of the church which are rigid and stick up like dogma] (BD 574). Haupt writes that the candlesticks on the walls (they traditionally indicate the places of anointings at the act of consecration) are like dogmas – they are rigid and thus disheartening – which confirms that what is certain and sanctified by tradition is suspicious. The hardness and the rigidity of the candlesticks/dogma are contrasted with hot glass – it is thin, intricate, brittle, and fragile. What in the celebration of mass is dull, boring, thoughtless, and repetitive – not only artificial flowers but also “stupid faces” – is associated with emptiness, hopelessness, entropy, the terrifying abyss of the universe, and nothingness.

This fight against disbelief that takes place during Sunday mass is actually a form of self-defense against the onslaught of nothingness, as confirmed by two other memories which are recalled before the description of the service. The first memory celebrates an abundance of cherries and the ecstatic joy of boys who pick them. Immediately after the description of “Arschhölle,” as if to deny that “tak może wyglądać nicość” [nothingness could look like this], the conjunction “ale” [but] is introduced and cherry trees in the summer are described: “Ale popatrzeć po drzewach, powiedzmy, w lecie, po czereśniach, które stały tegimi gajami Hesperyd – olbrzymie drzewa czereśniowe, olbrzymie jak sekwoje kalifornijskie, pieniające się czarnym albo czerwonym jak minia owocem” [But look at the trees, let’s say, in the summer, look at the cherry trees that are like the lush gardens of the Hesperides – huge cherry trees, huge as California sequoias, abundant with black or

minium-red fruit] (BD 573). The superficial impression of overwhelming nothingness turns out to be false – just look at the trees and admire the ripe cherries. The delight caused by this image increases when cherry pickers are introduced – those boys want to both make some extra money and have fun. The narrator recalls their joyful cries: “do teraz słyszę ich nawoływania do siebie, kiedy olśnieni, otępieni mnogością, ilością tego wspaniałego dobra, zawieszeni pośród zielonych kul drzew nawoływali do siebie słowami: «Massa jagód, massa!»” [today I can still hear them shout – dazzled, stunned by the multitude, by the amount of these wonderful fruits, suspended among the green balls of the trees, they shout: “An abundance of fruit, an abundance!”] (BD 573). This radiant and joyful memory is part of a metaphysical reflection on how to protect oneself from the onslaught of nothingness. We are reminded of it at the end of the “cherry-picking” scene:

Dotąd słyszę to ‘massa’ prawie że aż monotonne jak śpiew i nawoływania wilg, ‘massa’ chłopców ptaków zawieszonych wpośród przestworu głowami w dół (mam na myśli: jak wszystko inne zawieszone głowami w dół – drzewa, domy – w dół niebieskiego przestworu, przepaści strasznej i rozkosznej)
[Today I can still hear them shout “an abundance” – the cry is monotonous like the singing and the calls of the oriole – “an abundance” of boys hanging upside down among the trees, like birds (I mean: everything else was hanging upside down too – the trees and the houses – as if falling into a blue abyss, an abyss that is both dreadful and delightful)] (BD 573–574).

The memory of “abundance” (the cry is repeated many times in the story) helps us overcome the fear of the abyss. A different point of view – hanging upside down from a tree and looking up into the vast sky – reminds us of the constant presence of the “dreadful abyss.” Thanks to this simple literary trick we realize that the whole world, “everything else,” is also afraid of nothingness; indeed, not only houses and trees can be seen hanging upside down. This unusual point of view reveals a dreadful yet delightful perspective. Haupt seems to suggest that if we look at the world superficially, we may give in to fear, while a careful look at the details reveals a “delightful” image of reality.

The overwhelming feeling of emptiness and nothingness also affects characters in a “harvest scene” set in acid-soil meadows. On a rainy and cloudy day, two boys hide from the rain under a cart. They observe the world from this perspective and feel the onslaught of nothingness:

było najstraszliwiej pusto i beznadziejnie: nic, tylko brudna zieleń traw, woda i wilgoć, ciurki deszczu spływające po wszystkim, i deszcz niesiony pochyło i zapylający i zawiewający świat do najbeznadziejniejszej pustki, i zgrzyt brzękliwy kos po trawach, i kamień osełki toczący kosę, i ten sam garb horyzontu, i ten sam deszcz, i niebo szare jak woda w akwarium
[it was most dreadfully empty and hopeless: nothing but dirty green grass, water and dampness, raindrops falling on everything, and the rain slanting down and pollinating and pushing the world into the most hopeless emptiness, and the annoying sound of the scythes on the grass, and the sound of the scythe on a whetstone, and the same hump of the horizon, and the same rain, and the sky as gray as water in a fish tank] (BD 574).

It seems that nothingness is taking over the world because the day is rainy and cloudy. Nothingness does not triumph, however, it is but a lasting impression: “Wydawało się pod mokrymi batami deszczu, że świat już osiągnął zapowiedzanego błogostanu wyrównania entropii [...]” [It was raining heavily and it seemed that the world reached the blissful and desired state of the balance of

entropy [...] (BD 574). The description of the meadows in the rain, however, ends with a sentence which begins with the conjunction “tylko” [only], which counters the void: “Tylko trawy leżały pod deszczem gęste i otulające w swym uścisku ziemię i tchu, zdawało się, braknie, kontemplując tę beznadziejność łąk” [Only the thick grass lay under the rain, embracing the earth, and it seemed you could run out of breath contemplating this hopelessness of the meadows] (BD 574). Lush grass, ready to be cut, challenges the hopelessness of the rain, which can, however, be noticed if you look close enough. A superficial view of things evokes resignation and a sense of hopelessness. Haupt, however, seems to remember Coleridge’s advice: do not succumb to the lethargy of custom, do not settle for the obvious, the stereotypical, the known but look at the world in such a way as to be moved by ordinary things – “excite a feeling analogous to the supernatural.” Thanks to “poetic faith,” the clash with the hopelessness of nothingness does not end in defeat.

Indeed, the metaphysical experience of nothingness, and not a specific religious tradition, is a negative point of reference for Haupt. There is some evidence of Haupt’s religious beliefs in his works; for example, Haupt wrote and delivered a radio lecture (which was later published as an essay) about the Basilica of the National Shrine of the Immaculate Conception in Washington, DC.²² It testifies to the writer’s extensive knowledge of Christian religious symbols, architecture, and art. Also, the “mass scene” in “Warianty” proves that Haupt knew a lot about religion – the narrator of the story is familiar with the liturgies of Roman Catholic Church.

In Haupt’s short stories, religion does not stop one from finding poetic faith. At the same time, however, religious rituals do not help one escape nothingness but indirectly inspire the search for different answers, as it was shown in “Warianty.” Such a vision of religion may be also found in a confession scene in the story “Appendicitis.” The title refers to the appendix surgery that the Lady is supposed to undergo. She urges her beloved to go to confession because she, somewhat superstitiously, thinks that it will help her recover. The protagonist steps toward and kneels at the confessional and openly admits that he does not believe in the power of the sacrament. He also does not confess his sins; instead, he openly states his motives:

Proszę księdza, bardzo mi przykro, że w tym miejscu i czasie znajduję się niewłaściwie. Robię to dlatego, że przyniesie to spokój dziewczynie, którą czekają ciężkie chwile. Nie mogę powiedzieć, czy jestem wierzący, i to nawet nie przez jakikolwiek rodzaj indyferentyzmu, tylko są to sprawy dla mnie zbyt skomplikowane, ażeby je móc samemu sobie rozstrzygnąć. Nie czuję tego, co się nazywa darem łaski, co pomaga może innym w tych sprawach. Proszę nie brać mi za złe, że nie dla siebie w takiej mierze, jak dla kogo innego, stwarzam tę... tę sytuację, a i tak jest to dla mnie ciężkie i nie dzieje się dla mnie bez trudności, i jest to... jest to dla mnie ciężkie. Bardzo księdza przepraszam i odwołuję się do jego ludzkich uczuć. Jestem przy tym śmiertelnie niespokojny i dostatecznie w tej chwili nieszczęśliwy, żeby zapomnieć o tym, że to, co mówię i robię, może być przykrym do słuchania i pojęcia dla kogo innego. Tyle...

[Father, I’m in the wrong place at the wrong time, and I’m very sorry for that. I’m doing this because it will bring peace to a girl who is going through hard times. I can’t say whether I am a believer, and

²²See: Zygmunt Haupt, “Symbol i kamień. Narodowa Świątynia Niepokalanego Poczęcia w Waszyngtonie [Audycja radiowa]” [Symbol and stone. The Basilica of the National Shrine of the Immaculate Conception in Washington, DC [Radio lecture]], in: *Z Roksolanii. Opowiadania, eseje, reportaże, publicystyka, warianty, fragmenty (1935–1975)* [From Red Ruthenia. Stories, essays, reports, journalism, variants, fragments (1935–1975)], ed. Aleksander Madyda (Toruń: Wydawnictwo Naukowe Uniwersytetu Mikołaja Kopernika, 2018), 214–218, and a version of this essay published a few years later in “Ameryka”, Haupt, 276–281.

not even because of indifferentism but because there are matters which are too complicated for me to be able to decide on my own. I do not feel what is called the gift of grace, which may help others. Please don't take it against me that that I create this... this situation; it is not for my sake but for the sake of somebody else, and it's hard for me, and it's not easy for me, and it's... it's difficult for me. Father, I would like to apologize to you, and I would like to talk to you man to man. I'm so mortally restless and so unhappy right now that I forget that what I say and do may be painful and difficult for someone else to hear and understand. That's all...] (BD 98).

Although absolution is formally granted, the penitent does not receive the grace of reconciliation. He is confused and embarrassed; he is worried even more about the Lady, even though he went to confession only to reassure her. Going to confession made the Lady happy, but the protagonist is disappointed, embarrassed, sad, and anxious. It is only after he leaves the hospital where the operation was to take place that he feels a kind of consolation: “[...] schodziłem sam z góry i niebo granatowe nad miastem rozpękało się w kawały nad moją rozpaczą i samotnością [...]” [I was walking down the mountain alone and the navy-blue sky over the city broke into pieces over my despair and loneliness] (BD 98). It is not the religious rite but the sight of the evening sky that brings consolation – the protagonist realizes that he is not completely alone in his despair; perhaps he is part of some greater whole, because the sky responds to or, in a way, partakes in his pain.

Importantly, the medical term “appendicitis” is highlighted in the title of the story. The medical procedure that the Lady undergoes is presented in the story as “wynalazek amerykańskich doktorów, mający uszczęśliwić ludzkość, a im napełnić kieszenie” [an invention of American doctors; it's supposed to make humanity happy and make American doctors rich] (BD 94). The surgery is thus presented as something unnecessary – a modern fad. The word “appendicitis” appears in a similar context in the story “Sprawa Wilsona. Biuletyn z gór” [Wilson's Case. Bulletin from the mountains]. One of the characters is forced to “wiary w konieczność operacji *appendicitis* tylko z nieufności dla jakichś niedomagań wewnętrznych” [believe in the need to undergo surgery to treat appendicitis, only out of distrust for some internal ailments].²³ In both short stories, the unnecessary procedure of removing what in medicine is seen as something additional, redundant was mentioned in the context of difficult, even borderline, experiences, that is fear for the life of a loved one and the death of fellow mountaineers in the Himalayas. In “Appendicitis,” the “fashionable” surgery inspires a reflection about life and death – not only because the medical procedure might go wrong but also in the wider context of loose associations, such as the death of the German soldiers who attacked Lviv in September 1939: “w parę lat potem wyszlę śmierć zamkniętą w skorupach setek granatów na przywarte do ziemi tułowie niemieckiej piechoty” [a few years later I will unleash death enclosed in the shells of hundreds of grenades onto the torsos of German infantry soldiers lying on the ground] (BD 101). In “Sprawa Wilsona. Biuletyn z gór,” the digression about appendicitis foreshadows the fatal ascent. The expedition's motto, “Rush up!,” turns out to be a curse. The narrator presents the entire story in terms of “giving in” to the magic of words – to primal uncontrolled language, to emotional statements which “get out of control” and have power over people: “Jedno słowo mogło być tak wspaniałe, że o mocy zdolnej dźwignąć człowieka na napięty łuk tęczy szczęścia, inne, okrutne

²³Zygmunt Haupt, “Sprawa Wilsona. Biuletyn z gór” [Wilson's Case. Bulletin from the mountains], in: *Z Roksolanii. Opowiadania, eseje, reportaże, publicystyka, warianty, fragmenty (1935–1975)*, 45.

– rzucić w loch i w studnię hańby i śmierci [...]” [One word could be so wonderful, it had the power to lift man up to the strained arc of the rainbow of happiness, and another word could be cruel – it could throw man into a dungeon, into a well of shame and death].²⁴ The abyss of death is a constant threat – you can fall into it unexpectedly, succumbing to a deceptive impulse or fad.

In turn, a deliverance from nothingness is often unexpected. In “Sprawa Wilsona. Biuletyn z gór,” one word could counter the fatal call “Rush up!,” in “Appendicitis,” first the navy blue sky, which breaks into pieces, and then the landscape around the Podzamcze Lviv railway station make the protagonist stop worrying about the Lady’s life. He probably takes a tram to the top of the Lviv High Castle, where the hospital is, and he looks at the line of the horizon, with the railway station in front and the village Birky Dominikanski to the left. In the sentence which summarizes this narrative sequence, the point of view of a resident of Lviv before WW2 and the point of view of a soldier who recalls the city’s defense in September 1939 intertwine: “Przestałem zupełnie myśleć” [I stopped thinking completely] (BD 101). The eye of the tormented observer wanders up to the line of the horizon, as he nervously awaits the news from the hospital. This emotion, in turn, is intertwined with the memory of WW2 and, as result, the narrator’s mind is suspended somewhere beyond time. This, respectively, gives him comfort, diverts his attention from unsettling predictions and speculations. This entire experience – the feeling of imminent death and hopeless desolation which give way to the comforting abundance of life, and then to a kind of apathy, which silences the fear of nothingness – reveals the mystery of reality. The mind focused on the medical procedure produces a unique image of the world. This is evident in the reference to the death of the German soldiers – which was inspired not only by the city of Lviv, where the fighting took place, but also by the fear for the Lady’s life. The description of the tram line to the High Castle reveals that imagination is controlled by the fear of death: “Potem był już ostatni szczytowy przystanek, gdzie te szyny urywały się ostro i donikąd już nie można było jechać” [Then there was the last stop at the top, where the rails ended unexpectedly and there was nowhere to go] (BD 101). The rails themselves form a kind of appendicitis; the protagonist worries about them as much as he worries about the Lady. A trivial operation stimulates imagination to uncover the mystery of reality – sensed somewhere between nothingness and life.

In “Zabawa w zielone,” imagination works in a similar way; it is suspended in an undefined space-time: “Pomyśleć, ale innym zestawem myśli, / że nie ma tu ani początku, ani końca” [To think, but with a different set of thoughts / that there is neither beginning nor end here] (BD 584). In a series of fourteen sequences, Haupt attempts to devise a formula which will allow him to capture the mystery of reality, and he then puts it to the test. He is lying in a meadow and staring at the green grass and lush plants. The goal is to achieve the state defined thus: “Wypolerować sobie myśl jak srebrne zwierciadło” [Polish your thought like a silver mirror] (BD 585). He should not think too much about obvious associations. The kind of “letarg” [lethargy] (BD 585) thus achieved allows the narrator to experience the world anew. It is worth noting that such a “purification” of perception brings to mind Coleridge’s *Lyrical Ballads* and the postulated new way of experiencing reality. We find a similar artistic formula in the poetry of Wallace Stevens; for example, Stevens’s “Study of Two Pears”²⁵ is a poetic attempt to describe an object in an unbiased way – in a way that is not influenced by any

²⁴Haupt, “Sprawa Wilsona” 48.

²⁵See: Wallace Stevens, “The Study of two pears”, in: *The Collected Poems of Wallace Stevens* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2011), 196-197.

epistemological stereotypes. In Haupt's works, this cathartic lethargy helps one find hidden meaning in different forms of existence: "kod niesamowity, który mam odczytać" [an amazing code that I have to decipher] (BD 587). It is not unambiguous; sometimes the message is banal and at other times it delights with a plethora of meanings. The ending of "Zabawa w zielone" once again reminds us of the constant threat of death and nothingness: the tension between the horror of annihilation and the delightful abundance of existence conditions the understanding of the meaning of life.

The slightly surprising ending of "Warianty" – "Tylko nie być zaraz trąbą jerychońską" [Just don't be a Jericho trumpet] (BD 575) – is not only an ironic counterpoint to the solemn reflections that precede it. Importantly, it helps clarify how one should live and look at the world: "Bardzo trzeba się odseparować, odkroić, odlepić, odessać od cycka wiadomości, łona rzeczy omówionych i grubych" [You must truly separate yourself, cut yourself off, detach yourself, untie yourself from the tit of the news, from the womb of the discussed and important things]. One must distance oneself from a destructive, disruptive attitude. The metaphorical images conjured up in this story show that the point is not so much to tear down the prison walls as to escape from it down a footbridge. One may understand the world – fulfill the desire expressed in the first sentence of "Światy" [Worlds]: "Odkryj się, świecie [...]" [Reveal yourself, world [...]] (BD 565) – in and through the image of reality reflected in, as Haupt writes, a thin film of saliva formed around a loop made of wet (licked) grass.²⁶ An equally subtle moment of capturing the essence of reality²⁷ may be found in the ending of "Szpica:" we can see a lark singing on a summer morning; the pyramid of its voice is metaphorically based on green grass. The quasi-epiphany "to już! to już!" [that's it! that's it!] (BD 597) is revealed in a quiet squeak of a lancer's saddle, in the "fine" dust from under a horse's hooves. The entire image is only a projection of the possibility – signaled by the use of the future tense – of uncovering the mystery in the future.

In Haupt's works, poetic faith is not found through opposing and challenging dogmas and traditions.²⁸ One can only reach it by going "down a footbridge," that is through patiently waiting and believing that one day the mystery of reality will be revealed to you. As if following in the footsteps of Coleridge, Haupt tests the possibility of seeing, hearing, feeling, and understanding the things of this world, in their beauty and variety. In doing so, he also constantly questions the tools, approaches, and philosophies which are considered certain and safe; he constantly challenges systematized ways of reaching the truth, and at the same time he constantly needs them as a reference point, as a stimulus in his own search. Ultimately, this is how he finds true faith. It is *true* faith not only because it is devoid of appearances and sacrilegious sentiments but, above all, because it protects him from the onslaught of nothingness.

translated by Małgorzata Olsza

²⁶See: BD 568.

²⁷On "Plötzlichkeit," as defined by K.H. Bohrer, see: T. Mizerkiewicz, "«Ale będę. Ale będę». Proza Zygmunta Haupta a nowoczesna kultura obecności" [«But I will be. But I will be». Zygmunt Haupt's prose and the modern culture of presence], in: *Po tamtej stronie tekstów. Literatura polska a nowoczesna kultura obecności* [On the other side of texts. Polish literature and the modern culture of presence] (Poznań: Wydawnictwo Naukowe UAM, 2013), 180–181, 198–199.

²⁸Niewiadomski discusses, referring to the example of "Szpica," the constant tension between invention and principles in Haupt's works. See: Niewiadomski, 413–414.

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KEYWORDS

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ABSTRACT:

This article was inspired by the importance which Zygmunt Haupt attached to the “willing suspension of disbelief” on behalf of the reader. It discusses how Coleridge’s formula may function in a context that is not strictly poetic. A “suspension of disbelief” and poetic faith are complementary concepts which encourage in literary and cultural studies deep reflection on the demise of religious faith in favor of “poetic faith,” which, as M.H. Abrams writes, may essentially be described as “natural supernaturalism.” The article argues that this modernist experience may be found in Haupt’s works.

willing suspension of disbelief

MEYER HOWARD ABRAMS

Wallace Stevens

ROMANTICISM

NOTE ON THE AUTHOR:

Tomasz Garbol – Associate Professor of Literary Studies at the Catholic University of Lublin, Poland. His main research interests include literature and religion and contemporary poetry. He is the author of: *Chrzest ziemi. Sacrum w poezji Zbigniewa Herberta* [The baptism of the earth. The sacred in Zbigniew Herbert's Poetry] (2006); *After the Fall. On the Writings of Czesław Miłosz* (2020); *Miłosz. Los* [Miłosz. Fate] (2018); and *Literatura a religia w stanie podejrzenia* [Literature and religion under suspicion] (2019). |