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TRUTH VERSUS “THE POSTWAR TRUTH”
Jerzy Peterkiewicz against the Idealization
of the Communist Ideology in Postwar Great Britain

In post-war British society, the ideology of communism was accepted as a philosophical thought based on the lofty ideas of equality, sharing, and working for the case of the common good which were understood literally. Geographically and politically distant from the countries where communism became a factually incorporated system, the Left in Britain endeavored to propagate their ideology by adapting it to the British reality.

What is post-truth? The relatively new term, which has been in use for about thirty years now,¹ does not necessarily describe a newly emerged phenomenon. However, unlike in the case of numerous other words, such as “postwar,” “postcolonialism” or “postcovid,” the prefix in “post-truth” does not denote a chronological order, neither is its meaning the same as that of “after”. Thus “post-truth” is not tantamount to “after truth.” Rather, the term in question is used to describe a social and political situation in which truth is no longer crucial, having become antiquated and dominated by a new reality.²

The *Cambridge Dictionary* provides the following definition of post-truth: “relating to a situation in which people are more likely to accept an argument based on their emotions and beliefs, rather than one based on facts,”³ as well as some relevant sentence examples (“The referendum was the first major vote in the era of post-truth politics.” “He dubs the current administration a ‘post-truth’ White House.” “The world has entered an era of post-truth politics”⁴). Indeed, the last of the quoted examples may be considered as essential for interpreting the events, discussions and manipulations taking place in the world of politics, whether we look at it from the contemporary or the historical perspective. While our particular viewpoints may certainly differ, depending on our nationalities, the cultures we live in, and on our experience, as well as on

¹ For the first recorded use of the term, see Steve T e s i c h, “The Watergate Syndrome: A Government of Lies,” *The Nation* 254, no. 1 (1992): 13.

² See Vittorio B u f a c c h i, “Truth, Lies and Tweets: A Consensus Theory of Post-truth,” *Philosophy & Social Criticism* 47, no. 3 (2020): 347.

³ Cambridge Dictionary, s.v. “post-truth,” <https://dictionary.cambridge.org/pl/dictionary/english/post-truth>.

⁴ Ibidem.

our outlook upon the world, the idea of post-truth as such has become universal in Western politics and essential for analysis of the mechanisms it uses.⁵ The concept of post-truth is also not without significance in the context of research and discussion of the origins of various totalitarian systems.⁶ Indeed, “post-truth” as a semantic tool can be employed in an analysis of the historical past and, specifically, the phenomena of nations who, tempted with fake visions of wealth and prosperity, would built political systems of enslavement and oppression. Hannah Arendt writes: “Totalitarian politics—far from being simply antisemitic or racist or imperialist or communist—use and abuse their own ideological and political elements until the basis of factual reality, from which the ideologies originally derived their strength and their propaganda value—the reality of class struggle, for instance, or the interest conflicts between Jews and their neighbors—have all but disappeared.”⁷

The aim of the article is to outline the perception of the communist ideology as interpreted by representatives of certain social movements in post-war Great Britain on the one hand, and by Polish émigrés who—mainly for political reasons—settled there after the war, on the other. The contrast between these perceptions is acutely visible in the works of the émigré poet, novelist and translator Jerzy Pietrkiewicz,⁸ one of those who—after the war was over—decided not to return to the communist Poland.

⁵ See Frieder Vogelmann, “The Problem of Post-truth: Rethinking the Relationship between Truth and Politics,” *Behemoth: A Journal on Civilisation* 2, no. 11 (2018): 19–21. See also John Ambrosio, “Problematising Truth-telling in a Post-truth World: Foucault, Parrhesia, and the Psycho-social Subject,” *Educational Philosophy and Theory* 54, no. 12 (2022): 2133–44; Stuart Sim, *Post-Truth, Scepticism & Power* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2019), 11–41; Janusz Grygient, *Democracy in the Post-truth Era: Restoring Faith in Expertise* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2023), 2–21.

⁶ See Rudy Albino de Assunção, “Joseph Ratzinger e o primado da verdade na política: um confronto com Hannah Arendt,” *Lumen Veritatis* 6, no. 24 (2013): 89–110; Francisco Javier Ansuátegui Rorig, “Post-verità e menzogna: Variazioni su Hannah Arendt,” *Governare la paura*, April 2019:19–34.

⁷ Hannah Arendt, *The Origins of Totalitarianism* (San Diego, New York and London: Harcourt Brace & Company, 1973), xv.

⁸ Jerzy Pietrkiewicz, who since 1958 used the surname Peterkiewicz, was born in 1916 in Fabianki, Poland, and died in 2007 in London. As a young poet, he was influenced by the poetic group called the Authentists, who focused on nature and personal experience in their works. After the outbreak of World War II, Pietrkiewicz fled Poland and, in 1940, arrived in Great Britain. He graduated from the University of St. Andrews and then defended his doctoral thesis at King’s College, London. In 1953, his first English novel, *The Knotted Cord*, was published. See Jerzy Pietrkiewicz, *The Knotted Cord* (London: Heinemann, 1953). In the following years, he wrote seven more novels, including: *Loot and Loyalty*, *Future to Let*, *Isolation*, *The Quick and the Dead*, *That Angel Burning at My Left Side*, *Inner Circle*, and *Green Flows the Bile*. See Jerzy Pietrkiewicz, *Loot and Loyalty* (London, Melbourne and Toronto: Heinemann, 1955); Jerzy Peterkiewicz, *Future to Let* (London, Melbourne and Toronto: Heinemann, 1958); Jerzy Peterkiewicz, *Isolation* (London:

To most Polish people who found themselves in Great Britain after the war, the decision whether to stay there or travel back to their homeland was in a way obvious: only few dared to go back. In fact, at least half a million Poles who had fled their country during the war remained in exile in Western European countries. Moreover, many of them considered those who did return as traitors who accepted the Soviet rule. Even Stanisław Mikołajczyk, during the war Prime Minister of the Polish government-in-exile, who took the risky decision to go back, was not spared such disparaging remarks. Yet the issue of whether to return or not was not merely a matter of political affiliation. To the ex-soldiers, those who had fought in the Allied forces, it was a grave risk: once they came back, they could be arrested, sent to prison or otherwise persecuted, unless they declared full cooperation with the newly established communist regime.⁹

It was against such a background that serious antagonisms appeared in the circles of Polish intellectuals in London. Addressing, in 1945, the situation of the Poles in exile, Tymon Terlecki, a literary critic and historian of Polish literature, emphasized their disappointment and the huge shock they experienced at the political decisions taken in Yalta, which he described as a “gigantic

Heinemann, 1959); Jerzy Peterkiewicz, *The Quick and the Dead* (London: Macmillan, 1961); Jerzy Peterkiewicz, *That Angel Burning at My Left Side* (London: Macmillan, 1963); Jerzy Peterkiewicz, *Inner Circle* (London: Macmillan, 1966); Jerzy Peterkiewicz, *Green Flows the Bile* (London: Michael Joseph, 1969). Jerzy Peterkiewicz is also the author of, among others, a volume of essays *The Other Side of the Silence* and a monograph *The Third Adam*. See Jerzy Peterkiewicz, *The Other Side of the Silence* (London: Oxford University Press, 1970); Jerzy Peterkiewicz, *The Third Adam* (London: Oxford University Press, 1975). He compiled anthologies of Polish poetry. See *Polish Prose and Verse*, trans. Jerzy Pietrkiewicz (London: Athlone Press, 1956); *Five Centuries of Polish Poetry*, eds. Jerzy Peterkiewicz and Burns Singer (London: Secker and Warburg, 1960). He was the only authorized translator of the poetry of Pope John Paul II. His translations of the poems of Karol Wojtyła–John Paul II were published in the volumes: “Easter Vigil” and *Other Poems*, *Collected Poems*, and *Roman Triptych: Meditations*. See Karol Wojtyła, “Easter Vigil” and *Other Poems*, trans. Jerzy Peterkiewicz (London: Hutchinson, 1979); Karol Wojtyła, *Collected Poems*, trans. Jerzy Peterkiewicz (New York: Random House, 1982); John Paul II, *Roman Triptych: Meditations*, trans. Jerzy Peterkiewicz (Washington, D.C.: United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, 2003). On the output of Jerzy Peterkiewicz, see Alicja H. Moskalo, “Jerzy Pietrkiewicz (Peterkiewicz) i jego wkład w literaturę angielską,” *Zeszyty Naukowe PUNO*, no. 5 (2017): 161–69.

⁹ The case of Stanisław Skalski, one of the Polish “flying aces,” a master of military aviation, is symptomatic in this respect. In 1940, Skalski fought in the Battle of Britain. He then became a flight commander in No. 316 and in No. 317 (Polish) RAF Squadrons. Having returned to Poland in 1947, he was accused by the pro-Stalinist authorities of treason and sentenced to death penalty. The sentence was changed to life imprisonment, but eventually, in 1956, he was exonerated and released from prison. See Katarzyna Ochab ska, *Stanisław Skalski*, (Gliwice: Triada, 2007); Grzegorz Sojda and Grzegorz Śliżewski, *General pilot Stanisław Skalski: Portret ze światłościem* (Warszawa: Alma-Press, 2015).

cataclysm.”¹⁰ In his opinion, they were equal to a violation of moral norms and “committing a civilizational, moral murder.”¹¹ Among Polish intellectuals, many were well aware of the tragic position of the exiles who chose to return to their—now communist—homeland. Numerous members of the Polish diaspora were against the Soviet rule in Poland and—like Józef Mackiewicz, who declared that his “nationality was an ‘anti-communist,’”¹² did not consider coming back to their country of origin. To others, including Antoni Słonimski, who considered himself as a left-wing poet, Poland still meant their homeland and a better existence. Their initial approval of the Polish government-in-exile eventually evolved during the war and was gradually replaced by mistrust. Consequently, the Polish emigrant community was increasingly antagonized, which had an impact even on the literary preferences of the writers who were among its members. Słonimski’s socialist sympathies collided with the “open” attitude of Mieczysław Grydzewski, who published, in the magazine *Wiadomości*, texts of various authors, among them contributors who opposed the Polish government-in-exile. Such differences of opinion among the intellectuals resulted in misunderstandings and fierce debates.¹³

However, a general perception of communism in post-war British society was utterly different. The ideology of communism was accepted as a philosophical thought based on the lofty ideas of equality, sharing, and working for the case of the common good which were understood literally. In 1945, the Labor Party was not the only socialist party to contest for the general election. For various reasons, the war had spawned a new left-wing party, the Common Wealth, and allowed the Communist Party to grow on an unprecedented scale,¹⁴ with its leaders proclaiming notions of equality also in the face of waves of immigrants from former colonies arriving *en masse* in the United Kingdom. Indeed, the Communist Party’s anti-racist slogans were associated with the

¹⁰ Tymon Terlecki, “Do emigracji polskiej 1945,” in: *Emigracja naszego czasu*, ed. Nina Taylor-Terlecka and Jerzy Święch, (Lublin: Wydawnictwo UMCS, 2003): 29. All translations are my own.

¹¹ Ibidem, 30.

¹² Quoted in Marian Stępień, “*Jak grecka tragedia*”: *Pisarz polski w sytuacji wyboru (1944-1948)* (Kraków: Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Jagiellońskiego, 2005): 31.

¹³ See ibidem: 184–85. See also Monika Ładoń, “Jak my kiedyś wrócimy? Którymi drogami?” Antoniego Słonimskiego droga do kraju,” in *Dialogi z romantycznym kontekstem: Szkice o poezji polskiej*, ed. Joanna Dembińska-Pawelec and Adam Dziadek, (Katowice: Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Śląskiego, 2006), 128–51, and Katarzyna Ciepłińska “‘Polski Londyn’ – środowisko polskiej emigracji w Londynie w pierwszych latach po II wojnie światowej w przekazie Jerzego Pietrkiewicza,” in *Spoleczność międzynarodowa w obliczu przemian: ujęcie wieloaspektowe*, vol. 6, ed. Aleksandra Kordonska and Roman Kordonski (Olsztyn and Lwów: UWM, 2020), 48–58.

¹⁴ See John Callaghan, “Common Wealth and the Communist Party and the 1945 General Election,” *Contemporary Record* 9, no. 1 (1995): 62–79.

idea of equality for all people.¹⁵ Such ideals appealed in particular to younger generations, advocating for the causes of social justice¹⁶. For instance, the Left Book Club, founded by Victor Gollancz,¹⁷ which propagated radical left-wing policies, gained popularity, and its main idea was to revitalize and educate the British Left.

Geographically and politically distant from the countries where communism became a factually incorporated system, the Left in Britain endeavored to propagate their ideology by adapting it to the British reality. The situation was different in Russia, the homeland of Lenin and Stalin. In Polish historiography, there are two perspectives on the policy of “war communism” in Soviet Russia during the civil war (1917–1923). Some scholars argue that it was a policy of crisis, dictated mainly by the external circumstances. Others contend that it was rather a strategy based on the utopian Marxist vision, a mad struggle to instantly implement the communist ideology.¹⁸

Skepticism about and hostility towards Bolshevik politics, recurring in Polish historical discourse, were popular among ordinary Poles; yet, the source of their knowledge was not books, but experience.

Thus, Polish émigrés in the United Kingdom and their families in Poland knew another dimension of communism, unfamiliar to the Brits, which took the form of Stalinist terror and surveillance. The popularity of the communist ideology in Britain aroused considerable indignation among the Polish dia-

¹⁵ “The Communist Party of Great Britain, as the largest organization to the left of the Labour Party and an influential body within the trade union movement, occupied an important position in the anti-racist and anti-colonial movements in Britain from the 1920s until the 1970s. As black immigration from the Commonwealth flowed into Britain between the late 1940s and early 1960s, the CPGB was involved in campaigns against racism and for colonial independence. However, it continually encountered the difficult task of situating its anti-racist activities within the wider class struggle. At the same time, the Party’s traditional Marxist understanding of the issues of racism and colonialism were altered significantly by the decolonization process and the rise of new social movements. The CPGB viewed the issues of ‘race’ and racism, within a Marxist framework, and this had implications for the practical issues in the struggle against racism. At the core of this problem was overcoming the traditional view on the white left of black workers as still ‘colonials’ or ‘outsiders,’ whose problems had been subsumed within the wider class struggle.” Evan Smith, “Class before Race: British Communism and the Place of Empire in Postwar Race Relations,” *Science & Society* 72, no. 4 (2008): 455. See also Jon Lawrence, “Popular Radicalism and the Socialist Revival in Britain,” *Journal of British Studies* 31, no. 2 (1992): 163–86.

¹⁶ On youth policies in various national contexts, see Matthew Worley and Leo Gorretti, “Communist Youth, Communist Generations: A Reappraisal,” *Twentieth Century Communism: A Journal of International History*, no. 4 (2012): 5–13.

¹⁷ See Gordon Barrick Neavill, “Victor Gollancz and the Left Book Club,” *Library Quarterly* 41, no. 3 (1971): 197–215; Stuart Samuel, “The Left Book Club,” *Journal of Contemporary History* 1, no. 2 (1966): 65–86.

¹⁸ See Bartosz Wójcik, “Utopia i kryzys. Lars T. Lih i rozważania wokół komunizmu wojen-nego,” *Civitas: Studia z Filozofii Polityki* 22 (2018): 71–141.

spora. The growing approval of the left-wing political movements was hard to accept for Jerzy Peterkiewicz, who was strongly against any collaboration with the communist institutions, refused to publish his books in Poland, and opposed the idea of returning to his homeland. However, he did not want to remain silent in the face of evil, and he would openly express his outlook in his essays and autobiography, but above all in his novels, of which the *Future to Let* and *Green Flows the Bile* are most interesting in this respect.

In his autobiography, Peterkiewicz referred to the 1920 Soviet invasion of Poland, bringing out the brutality of the events it triggered. His narrative was based on the recollections of his parents. He wrote: "1920 shook the awareness of the [Polish] peasants; they learnt they belonged to a family which was a nation. 'Seize the squire's land,' the invading Red Army soldiers told them; but soon the peasants saw their own horses being requisitioned, their cattle killed, their wives and daughters raped."¹⁹

Anti-Soviet undertones come to light even more clearly in Peterkiewicz's *Future to Let*.²⁰ Set in London in the 1950s, the novel is a satire on the lives of Poles in exile. It reflects the dilemmas they faced in the new and complex political situation. Peterkiewicz describes the relations among the Polish community in London, an important center for the Polish diaspora. Their dominant feelings of having been betrayed by the Western political forces and, as a result, isolated, are acutely depicted by the writer. Unable to come to terms with their situation, they found different political parties, conflicted and fighting with each other. The idea of forming a new government in exile is vital, yet none of the parties is willing to compromise. The utopian vision of another world war, establishing the borders of Poland as they were before 1939 and making the country free from Stalinist influences seems to be the only common ideal. The choice to return to Poland some have taken is a vividly disputed subject.

Side by side with the Polish characters, the author presents English ones, such as Lancelot Thawroe, who has returned to Great Britain after a ten-year sojourn in Spain and now wants to sell a newly inherited house. However, the situation becomes complicated when he discovers that the house has a tenant, a Polish exile Celina Ogarek, who needs time to find new lodgings. Her initially perfunctory conversations with the new house owner in time turn into a passionate affair. In love with Celina, Lancelot gets involved in the political struggle between various political factions active among the Polish émigrés.

¹⁹ Jerzy Peterkiewicz, *In the Scales of Fate: An Autobiography* (London: Marion Boyars, 1993), 12.

²⁰ For an extensive analysis of the novel, see Rafał Moczko da n, "Satyra, paszkwil czy arcydzieło? Jerzego Pietrkiewicza 'Przyszłość do wynajęcia,'" in *Jerzy Pietrkiewicz – inna wersja emigracji*, ed. Barbara Czarnecka and Jerzy Kryszak (Toruń: Regionalny Ośrodek Studiów i Ochrony Środowiska Kulturowego, 2000), 169–88.

There are three main plots in the novel, namely, the romantic one focused on Lancelot’s affair with Celina, the political one concerning Celina’s father, Adam Gruda, and the moral one, related to the character of Julian Atrament, a communist spy sent to London from Poland.

Future to Let undoubtedly brings the Western reader closer to the experience of Poles living in exile on the British soil after the end of the war. The novel was even said to do it “much better than any politicians’ speeches.”²¹ Written in a satirical-grotesque convention, it touches upon the subject of the tragic situation of the exiles, cut off from their homeland, for whose freedom they had fought. However, the political aspects of the novel were not appreciated by critics and even earned negative comments from the author’s compatriots, who pointed to Peterkiewicz’s overly emotional presentation of political issues. Among them are references to the Stalinist repressive mechanisms, such as those of imprisonment and torture, to which political prisoners were subjected in the communist Poland, or the surveillance of the Polish community of exiles in London.

One of the characters in the novel, whose prototype was apparently Wincenty Witos,²² is Adam Gruda.²³ Gruda is an old man exhausted by many years of imprisonment; he is physically and mentally devastated by the communist repressions. After being kept in prison in the Stalinist Poland he is transported to London by communist secret agents (working under cover as employees of a company called Polexport). Just as formerly, in prison, Gruda, who wants freedom and unity for the Poles, is now (in the headquarters of the Polexport in England) administered mind-altering drugs. Under their influence, he raves and hallucinates. His pre-death vision, in which he sees a parade of skeletons, is a parody of the marches organized in communist countries to celebrate the first of May and it may be interpreted as an allegorical representation of the political situation in the Stalinist Poland where the skeletons symbolize the Polish nation. The vision begins with an introduction: “Between the happy land of the Dead and the happy land of the Blood-donors lay a state, and it lay there in state like the other two, nearly as happy and nearly as dead.”²⁴ The state of “Blood donors” is visited by two honorable guests, General Knout and Marshal Pogromov (an allusion is made here to the fascist Germany and the communist Russia). The marching dead carry banners which say, “We thank

²¹ Regina Wasiaak Taylor, *Ojczyzna literatura: O środowisku skupionym wokół Związku Pisarzy Polskich na Obczyźnie* (Londyn: Oficyna Poetów i Malarzy, 2013), 107.

²² Wincenty Witos (1874–1945) was a Polish statesman and a leader of the Polish People’s Party. In the 1920s, he served three times as the Prime Minister of Poland.

²³ It might be the case that the name of the character is not accidental, but a deliberate reference to Karol Wojtyła, who in the 1950s published under the pseudonym Stanisław Andrzej Gruda.

²⁴ Peterkiewicz, *Future to Let*, 202.

you for the concentration camps.’ ‘Forgive us that we cursed you in the hour of our death.’ ‘What is forgotten is forgiven. Help us to forget.’”²⁵ Soldiers shoot rifles at the dead walking with the banners, and then the living march behind them, represented by children who carry flags with yet another slogan: “We are grateful for future suffering and humiliation.”²⁶ The last group in the parade are peasants and workers. They march and sing: “We know the happiness of hunger, we know the glory of dirt, we know the wisdom of prisons, we know the smile of hell.”²⁷ Gruda’s vision expressed Peterkiewicz’s open protest against the Stalinist regime and its methods in Poland. However, the descriptions he included in his novel clashed with the overall positive sentiments about the communist ideology dominant in the British society at the time, and might be perceived as radical: therefore, they were not well received.

Another character in the novel who is directly related to the power apparatus in the communist Poland is the secret agent Julian Atrament. It is with his example that Peterkiewicz illustrates the dilemma faced by many Polish exiles, that is, whether to return to their homeland or permanently settle in a foreign country. In Atrament’s case this is also the choice between, on the one hand, subordination and servility to the inhuman regime and, on the other, freedom, which, however, brings the prospect of a life in exile and cutting the bonds with his homeland. A secret collaborator of the communist government, Atrament indeed faces a difficult decision, but, after long hesitations, decides to stay in England. To achieve his goal, he makes up a cunning plan, because the only way for him to avoid deportation is to get imprisoned. At the critical moment—pursued by agents of the Stalinist regime—he throws his dog into the river. This act arouses such indignation among the passers-by that they call the police. Thanks to his arrest, Julian avoids deportation to Poland. A British detention center paradoxically becomes his place of refuge, where he is finally free from the pressure of the communist secret service and, instead of writing denunciation letters, can now focus on a respectable occupation: that of a columnist writing for British newspapers on topics related to Polish issues.

Another novel in the political fiction series by Jerzy Peterkiewicz is *Green Flows the Bile*. Its main character, Gerald Gull,²⁸ better known as G.G., a co-

²⁵ Ibidem, 207.

²⁶ Ibidem.

²⁷ Ibidem, 208.

²⁸ One may associate the protagonist’s name with the way Hanna Arendt wrote about totalitarianism: “A mixture of gullibility and cynicism had been an outstanding characteristic of mob mentality before it became an everyday phenomenon of masses. In an ever-changing, incomprehensible world the masses had reached the point where they would, at the same time, believe everything and nothing, think that everything was possible and that nothing was true. The mixture in itself was remarkable enough, because it spelled the end of the illusion that gullibility was a weakness of unsuspecting primitive souls and cynicism the vice of superior and refined minds. Mass propaganda discovered that

median and celebrity living in London, is fascinated with the Soviet Union and the communist system. The surname Gull reflects the author’s attitude to the protagonist’s worldview and ridicules the gullibility of individuals like him: those easily manipulated by hypocritical activists. Gull makes a dizzying career in the media by preaching the communist ideology, although privately he enjoys a life of fame and earns a fortune.

In fact, Gerald is an ex-comic who is loved by the media not for his artistic career, but for being a leading communist figure in Britain. He is regarded as the greatest propagator of equality among people and has been presented the People’s Prize for Peace: “An historic week fell upon us: Labour won, Khrushchev lost, and G.G. was stranded with world peace certified in his pocket, on a handsome document he had received with his prize money.”²⁹ One day he gets a message from Moscow and goes on a tour visiting the Eastern Bloc countries, starting with Romania.³⁰ Accompanied by Miron Wilber, his secretary and biographer, he travels northwards, driving his *Volga* into the Carpathians, eastwards to Moldavia. It appears to be a sentimental journey: Gerald comes back to the places which inspired him as a young man, when he was visiting communist countries and meeting the most significant political leaders of the time: Lenin, Mussolini, Madame Lupescu, Comrade-Madame Pauker, Bierut, Rakosi, and Khrushchev.

Gerald publicly declares that the “Age of Ideological Affluence”³¹ has passed and manifests his contempt of possessions by the public destruction of other people’s goods. He reads popular magazines to look for his victims and finds the right candidates for “Ideological Demolition”³² among celebrities. “Ah! There’s a good chap! He found a youngish actor who claimed to be earning 330,000 dollars per film. His views were, of course, much to the Left, as good taste demanded.”³³ Having picked out the right (i.e., wealthy enough)

its audience was ready at all times to believe the worst, no matter how absurd, and did not particularly object to being deceived because it held every statement to be a lie anyhow. The totalitarian mass leaders based their propaganda on the correct psychological assumption that, under such conditions, one could make people believe the most fantastic statements one day, and trust that if the next day they were given irrefutable proof of their falsehood, they would take refuge in cynicism; instead of deserting the leaders who had lied to them, they would protest that they had known all along that the statement was a lie and would admire the leaders for their superior tactical cleverness.” A r e n d t, *The Origins of Totalitarianism*, 382.

²⁹ P e t e r k i e w i c z, *Green Flows the Bile*, 35.

³⁰ On the links between the British Labor Party and the government of the communist Romania, see Gavin B o w d, “The British Labour Party and communist Romania,” *Historical Yearbook* 18 (2021): 109–23.

³¹ P e t e r k i e w i c z, *Green Flows the Bile*, 146.

³² See *ibidem*, 147.

³³ *Ibidem*, 147–48.

person, Gull will trace the celebrity's address, enter their house and start breaking stuff. His rule is: the more luxurious the house, the more spectacular the show. Accompanied by his secretary, Miron, he traces the actor, whose house has been chosen as "a gem of aesthetic diversity, a style of imperial and Chinese."³⁴ Another of his rules is to ask whether the selected house has been insured. Then comes the Ideological Demolition. "Miron, we must be consistent, mustn't we? You'd better smash a few bourgeois relics in here, I am too tired to do it myself,"³⁵ says G.G. and they start smashing most valuable things in the house. Being a "darling" of the public opinion, Gerald is never criticized, arrested or sued to court. On the contrary, the journalists admire his honesty and actions disclosing the hypocrisy of "Marxist millionaires," those who claim to be for communism, but have adopted the Western style of life characteristic for the aristocracy. Still, nobody mentions the fact that Gerald himself has become a rich person and lives in a luxurious apartment. One day he comes to a paranoid reflection and considers a demolition in his place to make his actions more authentic.

Not only does G.G. perform local actions, but he goes international. His ideal would be to introduce communism all over the world, and his political struggle involves sending anonymous, provocative messages to the governments of capitalist countries of the West, saying: "We [the] undersigned demand immediate recognition of [the] German Democratic Republic by your government,"³⁶ "Long live united Korea. Death to Yankee imperialists gull,"³⁷ or "Grant legal aid to Pontecorvo."³⁸

Again, the strong political overtones of the novel, Peterkiewicz's overt allusions to the Stalinist Union of Soviet Socialist Republics, and his mockery of the communist ideology were not well received by British literary critics, which did not help the book's success.³⁹ Yet the value of *Green Flows the Bile* lies in that it depicts the traps of communism. The protagonists who believe in an idealized vision of the communist society are in fact greedy, hypocritical crooks who take advantage of the gullibility of others. Although they publicly propagate the sharing of possessions, they privately gather for themselves as much as they can. Peterkiewicz describes ways in which they play with

³⁴ Ibidem, 148.

³⁵ Ibidem, 149.

³⁶ Ibidem, 71.

³⁷ Ibidem.

³⁸ Ibidem. Bruno M. Pontecorvo (1913–1993) was an Italian physicist who fled to the Soviet Union in 1950. He worked there on the construction of a nuclear bomb.

The texts of the telegrams are written in capital letters in the novel and don't include punctuation.

³⁹ See Katarzyna Cieplińska, "Jerzy Pietrkiewicz's Two English Novels: *Loot and Loyalty* and *Green Flows the Bile*," *Archiwum Emigracji*, no. 3 (33) (2023): 79–93.

ideology and ways in which they play with truth, considering both the former and the latter as symptoms of dangerous social and political phenomena.

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The two novels discussed in this paper convey their author’s disillusioned image of a model communist society. Writing in English, Jerzy Peterkiewicz wished to reach out to the British readers at the time when the growing popularity of the left-wing thinking in the United Kingdom seemed alarming to him. Based on the Polish experience, he pointed out the traps of the communist system implemented in post-war Stalinist Russia and in Poland. He believed that adopting the communist ideology and promoting it will only contribute to the emergence of corrupt structures and ruthless leaders, consequently turning a democratic country into a totalitarian one.

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ABSTRACT / ABSTRAKT

Katarzyna CIEPLIŃSKA, Truth versus “the Postwar Truth”: Jerzy Peterkiewicz against the Idealization of the Communist Ideology in Postwar Great Britain

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The aim of the article is to present the idea of truth, the postwar post-truth, and manipulation in the perception of the communist ideology as interpreted by some social movements in postwar Britain in contrast to the experience of the Polish émigrés. The problem is discussed in relation to two novels by Jerzy Peterkiewicz (*Future to Let* of 1958 and *Green Flows the Bile* of 1969), a Polish émigré poet, novelist, and translator. Peterkiewicz juxtaposes the Polish perspective on communism, based on the actual experience of the Stalinist terror persecutions, with the view, popular in postwar Britain, that communism be accepted as a philosophical idea incorporating the lofty ideals of equality, sharing, and working for the common good. Peterkiewicz depicts “playing with ideology” as a dangerous socio-political phenomenon. In his view, blinding people with slogans may lead to a distortion of the meaning of words and to deviation from the actual ideals, which naturally gives way to the rise of a totalitarian system, where manipulation of truth and variously conceived post-truth results in the destruction of a democratic society.

Keywords: Jerzy Pietrkiewicz (Peterkiewicz), postwar Britain, post-truth, communism

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Katarzyna CIEPLIŃSKA, Prawda przeciw prawdzie okresu powojennego: Jerzy Pietrkiewicz (Peterkiewicz) przeciwko idealizacji ideologii komunistycznej w Wielkiej Brytanii po drugiej wojnie światowej

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Celem artykułu jest przedstawienie idei prawdy, postprawdy i manipulacji w postrzeganiu ideologii komunistycznej w interpretacji niektórych ruchów społecznych w powojennej Wielkiej Brytanii w kontraście do doświadczenia polskich kręgów emigracyjnych dysponujących wiedzą na temat stalinowskich prześladowań w kraju. Problem przeanalizowany został w nawiązaniu do dwóch powieści Jerzego Pietrkiewicza (*Future to Let* z roku 1958 [wyd. pol. *Przyszłość do wynajęcia* (2016)] i *Green Flows the Bile* z 1959), polskiego pisarza, poety i tłumacza emigracyjnego. Pietrkiewicz zestawia polskie spojrzenie na tragiczną rzeczywistość komunizmu, obejmujące faktyczne doświadczenie jego skutków, z popularnym w powojennej Wielkiej Brytanii postrzeganiem tego systemu przede wszystkim w kategoriach myśli filozoficznej, opartej na wzniosłych ideałach równości, dzielenia się i pracy dla wspólnego dobra społeczności lokalnych i całego narodu. Pietrkiewicz przedstawia igranie z ideologią jako niebezpieczne zjawisko społeczno-polityczne i ostrzega, że zaślepianie ludzi wzniosłymi, acz nie mającymi realnego przełożenia na życie praktyczne hasłami może prowadzić do wypaczania sensu słów i odbiegania od ideałów, a zatem skutkować systemem totalitarnym, w którym manipulacja prawdą i różnie pojmowanymi postprawdami może prowadzić do zniszczenia społeczeństwa demokratycznego.

Słowa kluczowe: Jerzy Pietrkiewicz (Peterkiewicz), Wielka Brytania po drugiej wojnie światowej, postprawda, komunizm

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