

**Marek Rajch\***

 <https://orcid.org/0000-0003-0194-8699>

## Henryk Sienkiewicz's output and literary censorship in the DDR

As one could discover, based on the DDR censorship documents stored in German archives, one of the first attempts at publishing Henryk Sienkiewicz's works in the still relatively young East German state was undertaken by the Neues Leben publishing house. It began its operations in 1946 and was one of the first publishing houses created by the new state authorities. Formally, it was part of the Free German Youth (*Freie Deutsche Jugend*) organisation, and from its very beginning it was associated with major communist activists, e.g. Erich Honecker, from 1971 the general secretary of the Socialist Unity Party of Germany (SED) who later became the chairman of the FDJ. The political and propaganda profile of the publishing house and its social-educational functions were clear. Paradoxically, though, such a strong position in the DDR's publishing environment did not actually guarantee an easy path to publication for the respectable and widely read work *W pustyni i w puszczy* by Henryk Sienkiewicz. On the contrary, the experiences of Neues Leben editors who prepared the most widely read young adult novel by one of the best known (in the 19th century!) Polish writers could offer a classic example of censorship in a socialist state.

When, by the end of 1955, the publishing house's employees were developing the publishing plan for the following calendar year and included Sienkiewicz's novel in it, they probably did not suspect that their efforts to familiarise young East German readers with the courageous character of Staś Tarkowski and his lovable companion Nelly Rawlison would face such obstacles put in place by officers who yielded the power of ideological and political censorship. The story of *W pustyni i w puszczy* and the East German censors could be considered as a model example of that.

---

\* Ph.D. hab., Adam Mickiewicz University in Poznań, Faculty of Modern Languages and Literatures, Institute of German Studies, Department of Polish-German Literary Relations; e-mail: [mrajch@amu.edu.pl](mailto:mrajch@amu.edu.pl)

However, its model nature was not determined by the ever-extending publishing procedure or the attempts by the publishing house to acquire publication permits, or even the excessive complexities of those procedures. The publication procedure, in that case, was short. It took under 6 weeks, from 20 December 1955 (when the publishing house submitted to the censorship office an application for a print permit) to 1 February 1956 (the final decision of the office).<sup>1</sup> The model nature of the story consisted in the fact that the publishing house's internal reviewer, who as per the assumptions of the DDR's censorship system was the initial censor, presented a completely different opinion from that offered by the reviewer of the ministry of culture, i.e. a censorship officer. Since the decision of the internal reviewer was decisive, Sienkiewicz's novel was removed from the production plan of the publishing house for 1956.

The editorial board of the publishing house, which submitted titles for the procedure of issuing a print permit, had to fill out a specific form, which changed over the years. The form valid in the mid-1950s included a box for a short description of the content of the book being submitted (*Kurze Inhalts-Charakteristik*). In the case of *W pustyni i w puszczy*, the editorial board of the Neues Leben publishing house included the following remarks in the box:

During the Mahdist War in Sudan, Staś and Nell were kidnapped and held hostage. After many unsuccessful attempts, the boy and the persons under his care manage to escape and return to their parents. Apart from Staś's moving love for his little companion and the friendship between man and animal, the book includes rich descriptions of the African plant and animal worlds.<sup>2</sup>

Apparently, the publishing house expected a good level of sales of the book as they applied for 20,000 copies. The publishing house's reviewer noticed in Sienkiewicz's work certain "ideological flaws", yet he failed to discuss these in his evaluation of the novel. One could even conclude that he intentionally, out of caution, included that remark in the final paragraph of his evaluation. Such a structure of the review fulfilled, clearly, two functions. On the one hand, it was supposed to protect the reviewer against any possible accusations of overlooking the novel's ideological problems. On the other, though, the fact that he included the line "which force one to turn a blind eye to the ideological flaws"<sup>3</sup> in a paragraph in which he mentioned only the positive aspects of the novel cannot be interpreted other than as intended

---

1 Vide: BArch, DR 1/5077, Henryk Sienkiewicz, *Durch Wildnis und Wüste*, Verlag Neues Leben, Berlin 1956, Druckgenehmigungsbogen, k. 127–128.

2 Ibidem, k. 128 [unless indicated otherwise, English versions of quotations were translated from Polish].

3 Ibidem, Verlagsgutachten dated 17.12.1955, k. 134.

to draw the censors attention to the novel's positive aspects. It is hard to resist the feeling that the closing paragraph of the internal review entitled "Evaluation" stemmed from the publishing house's tactic or, at least, attempt at avoiding any possible difficulties in publishing the planned titles:

The presentation of the boy Staś is wonderful and humanly touching. He is a protagonist who will become a role model for every young person. His courage, persistence and readiness to make sacrifices are admirable. It is moving how delicately and movingly the author presented with much skill the boy's love and his sense of duty all the way until giving himself up. Such a presentation (of the character) includes grand and wonderful human values of the work, which undoubtedly, **force one to turn a blind eye to the ideological flaws** [emphasis – M.R.] Furthermore, the book becomes exceptionally valuable thanks to its vivid presentation of the plant and animal life of Central Africa. The continent, the desert, wild areas, the jungle, and the animals that live there are not only the backdrop for, but rather a part of, the narrative. They participate as a major factor in the storyline and they make their impression on it. That is not only because the descriptions are extremely vivid and visual, but also because [the novel] also teaches readers something and evokes in them compelling and strong emotions, especially regarding the continent, the people, the animals and the climate of a distant part of the Earth. The structure of individual scenes is extremely fascinating and makes a huge impact. The entire narrative is based on tension which takes your breath away. We highly recommend the book.<sup>4</sup>

Nothing indicated that the external reviewer from the censorship office read the internal review quoted above. When reading his opinion, one could rather conclude that a different work of literature was being reviewed, or that in his review he followed completely different criteria.<sup>5</sup> The external reviewer did admire the "author's fable fantasy" and his empathy for alien nature, and he evaluated the novel itself as "engaging" and "interesting", despite considering it one of "the worse works by the author."

There were two main points where both reviews, of the publishing house and of the censorship office, differed considerably and arrived at divergent evaluations of the text. The first one was the general message of the novel or the "ideological concept", if one was to follow the wording of the external reviewer, while the other was the world of the characters and the features of character of the protagonists, mainly Staś Tarkowski, central for the narrative, who came from Poland. The internal reviewer saw *W pustyni i w puszczy* exclusively as an interesting adventure novel, which offered, in an attractive manner, knowledge on the geography of Africa,

---

4 Ibidem.

5 Ibidem, Außengutachten dated 3.01.1956, k. 130–132.

and was able to charm young readers with such values as prowess, relentlessness, the ability to make sacrifices, a sense of duty, etc. However, the novel's political-historical background, i.e. the Mahdist War in Sudan in 1881–1885 and the related circumstances, which were almost entirely omitted from the review, constituted a major starting point for the discussion by the external reviewer. In the first paragraph of his three-page-long review, he made the following remarks:

The ideological concept of the work includes support for the colonial system. Generally speaking, the novel could be summarised as: the English colonial authorities are good, the population of Sudan are a wild mob, Negroes in the south are pitiful creatures who should, first and foremost, be baptised and “civilised.”<sup>6</sup>

Regardless of whether the thesis of the apotheosis in Sienkiewicz's novel of English or European colonial dominance in Africa could be justified, the external reviewer made it the central element of his evaluation. He did not condemn the alleged apotheosis of the colonial system in itself, but he assumed the novel might have influenced contemporary DDR readers, and, even if it was not expressed in the review explicitly, he contrasted it with the Marxist–Leninist world view. To prove his argument, he included the following short quotation in his review:

The final page concluding the book presents the following image of a colonial idyll: “Staś finds out there that Kali (the native) remains in very good health; under English protection, he governs the entire country south of Lake Rudolf, and he has brought missionaries to the country, who spread Christianity among the native tribes.” By the end of the 19th century, when the novel was written, the understanding of the essence of colonialism was, of course, limited. Yet in the case of such a major matter, that cannot be taken into consideration.<sup>7</sup>

The external reviewer accused the author of not describing the Sudanese uprising as a mutiny against the oppression of the English, but rather as a rebellious attempt at destroying the existing order without considering, apart from some minor critical allusions, the cruel methods of their colonial rule.

The other point at which the two reviews diverged, applied to the novel's protagonist: Staś Tarkowski. The internal reviewer described him as a character who “will remain in the memory of every young person as a role model.”<sup>8</sup> The external reviewer described Staś thus:

---

<sup>6</sup> Ibidem, k. 130.

<sup>7</sup> Ibidem.

<sup>8</sup> Ibidem, Verlagsgutachten of 17.12.1955, k. 134.

In his contacts with the native people of southern Sudan, the character of young Staś embodies not only positive qualities, but also the **racial arrogance** [emphasis – M.R.] of white masters. Staś behaves like a **little coloniser** [emphasis – M.R.], visiting his “lands” (326). The fourteen-year-old boy makes Kali, the native, feel his complete superiority as a “white master” (252). He continuously emphasises that “white people from Europe always keep their word” (66, 100). “White people do not murder prisoners” (395).<sup>9</sup>

As one could infer from the external review, Staś’s “wayward” arrogant attitude was supposed to be reason enough to prevent the novel from being published. The external reviewer, serving the role of a representative of the state’s cultural policy, saw a problem in publishing it within a broader political context, i.e. in relation to the political situation in the world at that time and the attitude of the DDR towards the issue of colonialism. Using that context, he also objected to Staś Tarkowski serving as a role model for the youth of his country:

Despite all his wonderful skills, the protagonist Staś cannot be a role model for our youth, not to mention the fact that many of his heroic deeds are too incredible. The publication of the manuscript would stand in extreme conflict with the current situation in the world and our position on the issue of colonialism.<sup>10</sup>

The external reviewer’s opinion was decisive for the decision regarding the print permit. The decision was made to temporarily withdraw the title. To fill the gap in the production plan for 1956, the Neues Leben publishing house decided, upon consulting the Office of Literature and Publishing Houses, to re-issue the novel *Der Kellerschlüssel* by Karl Veken. According to a 1975 list by the Ministry of Culture of the DDR entitled “Polish fiction from 1945 in the DDR”, Henryk Sienkiewicz’s novel *W pustyni i w puszczy* had never been published.<sup>11</sup>

The Poznań June events of 1956 and Władysław Gomułka’s rise to power caused in Poland some loosening of political, social and cultural life. As a result of the period of the “Thaw” which lasted for some time, there emerged on the publishing market many publications which could not have been published earlier for ideological reasons. In an effort to protect their society against the alleged negative ideological influence from Poland, East German authorities restricted contacts between authors from the two countries and cultural exchange considerably. In the publishing market that was visible in that there were far fewer translations

<sup>9</sup> Ibidem, Außengutachten of 3.01.1956, k. 131–132.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid., k. 132.

<sup>11</sup> Vide: BArch, DR 1/7145, Polnische Belletristik erschienen seit 1945 auf dem Gebiet der DDR, without page.

of Polish literature. The situation lasted for a few years, and it finally changed for the better in 1963. However, since, officially, both countries remained in brotherly relations and, formally, it was necessary to indicate the results of their cultural cooperation, East German publishing houses used the trick of printing classical Polish literature.

By the end of the 1950s, two publishing houses had undertaken to publish anthologies of Polish prose works from the 19th century: the Berlin-based Aufbau-Verlag publishing house, the best-known publisher of *belles lettres* in East Germany, and the Weimar-based Volksverlag publishing house. Both houses were created in 1945 and thus belonged to the group of the oldest publishing houses which operated in the DDR. The priorities within their operations included not only the publication of classical and contemporary German literature, but also familiarising East German readers with world literary heritage.

The Aufbau-Verlag publishing house planned a publication in 1958 and applied to the Ministry of Culture of the DDR for a print permit. The volume being prepared included works by: Adolf Dygasiński (*Bracia Tatory*), Eliza Orzeszkowa (*Obrazek z lat głodowych, Tadeusz, Dobra pani*), Maria Konopnicka (*Mendel Gdański, Miłosierdzie gminy*), Bolesław Prus (*Powracająca fala, Antek*), Aleksander Świętochowski (*Chawa Rubin*), and Henryk Sienkiewicz (*Janko Muzykant, Latarnik, and Szkice węglem*). Sienkiewicz's novella *Janko Muzykant* was included in the planned publication with a German translation of the title shortened by the name of the protagonist (*Der Spielmann*), yet, as the surviving documentation indicates, the editors intended for the novella to occupy a special place within the anthology. Initially, it was planned to be published under the title *Der Spielmann. Polnische Meistererzählungen*, or at least that was the title the publishing house included in the application for the print permit filed with the Ministry of Culture.<sup>12</sup> The anthology was eventually published under the slightly shorter title of *Polnische Meistererzählungen*, but not in 1958, as had been planned, but a year later.<sup>13</sup>

The short stories by Henryk Sienkiewicz intended to be published in the anthology and submitted for review did not include, according to authorised officers, any fragments which should be changed or deleted. The internal reviewer included in his opinion a short summary of the stories of all three works by Sienkiewicz and only in the case of *Szkice węglem* did he add a commentary which positive under the DDR's cultural policy. He applauded the fact that in his work Sienkiewicz applied fierce criticism to the backward interpersonal relations which had existed in the 19th century countryside, and were manifested in the fact that peasants had no rights and, as a result of their ignorance, they were at the mercy

<sup>12</sup> Vide: BArch, DR 1/5126a, *Der Spielmann. Polnische Meistererzählungen*, Aufbau-Verlag, Berlin 1958, Druckgenehmigungsbogen, k. 332.

<sup>13</sup> Vide *Polnische Meistererzählungen*, K. Harrer, H. Loppe, Aufbau-Verlag, Berlin 1959.

of the representatives of the educated: officers, authorities or the gentry.<sup>14</sup> The external reviewer who received the anthology's manuscript for review also did not notice in Sienkiewicz's short stories any content, just as in the case of all the other works included in the anthology, which could have exerted an adverse influence on East German readers.<sup>15</sup>

The censorship office at the Ministry of Culture issued the print permit for *Polnische Meistererzählungen* on 16 April 1958. Three months later, the afterword by Wolfgang Grycz, once verified, was also released for printing.<sup>16</sup>

A similar anthology of Polish prose was prepared a little later by the Weimar-based Volksverlag publishing house. It was developed in cooperation with Polish literary scholars from the University of Warsaw: Prof. Jan Zygmunt Jakubowski wrote the foreword and Anna Milska, Ph.D., prepared bio-sketches. According to the publisher, that was supposed to facilitate East German readers' understanding of the individual works included in the anthology. The publishing house planned to publish it in 1959 and submitted the appropriate application to the Ministry on 9 February of the same year.<sup>17</sup> The working title of the anthology was: *An einem Winterabend. Eine Anthologie polnischer Meistererzählungen*. Eventually, the anthology was published under nearly the exact same title as the volume published at that same time by the Aufbau-Verlag publishing house. Presumably in order to differentiate the two publications, publishers added the title of a short story by Eliza Orzeszkowa (*Ogniwa*). Thus, the anthology prepared by Volksverlag in Weimar with the contributing Polish literary academics was eventually entitled: *Die Kette. Polnische Meistererzählungen*.<sup>18</sup>

The collection included works by former masters of Polish prose and examples of novels by contemporary Polish authors. It included the following works: *Nasza szkapa* and *Miłosierdzie gminy* by Maria Konopnicka, *Siłaczka* and *Rozdziobią nas kruki, wrony* by Stefan Żeromski, *Orka* by Władysław Reymont, *Przy torze kolejowym* by Zofia Nałkowska, *Brzezina* and *Ikar* by Jarosław Iwaszkiewicz, *Rodecki* by Jan Parandowski, *Noc ponad światem* and *Ksiądz Filip* by Maria Dąbrowska, *Wniebowstąpienie* by Adolf Rudnicki, *Złoty lis* by Jerzy Andrzejewski, *Z legend starego Egiptu* by Bolesław Prus, *Dobra Pani*, *W zimowy wieczór*, and *Ogniwa* by Eliza Orzeszkowa, *Latarnik* and *Orso* by Henryk Sienkiewicz. The

14 Vide: BArch, DR 1/5126a, *Der Spielmann. Polnische Meistererzählungen*, Aufbau-Verlag, Berlin 1958, Verlagsgutachten, k. 336–343 (336–337).

15 Vide: ibidem, Außengutachten, k. 344–345.

16 Vide: ibidem, k. 334.

17 Vide: BArch, DR 1/5113, *An einem Winterabend. Polnische Meistererzählungen*, Volksverlag 1959, Druckgenehmigungsbogen, k. 112–113.

18 *Die Kette: Polnische Meistererzählungen*, eds. J.Z. Jakubowski, A. Milska, A. Hermann, Volksverlag, Weimar 1959.



external reviewer did not find in the submitted typescript any ideological or political problems which would require interventions in the text. He did indicate, though, certain motifs in specific works, which, in his opinion, proved the need to publish the anthology. The element which, according to him, was a major argument in favour of publishing Sienkiewicz's novella *Orso* was the criticism of racial discrimination included in it.<sup>19</sup>

In 1965, a total of two editions of Sienkiewicz's *Krzyżacy* (The Teutonic Knights) were published on the East German publishing market. Despite its unequivocally anti-German message, the novel was quite popular and the two editions sold 51,000 copies. Such popularity of the novel in the DDR was a result of, on the one hand, the reading habits of the country's citizens, educated to a large extent on reading historical novels of educational and entertaining nature, and, on the other, Aleksander Ford's adaptation featured in East German theatres in 1962.<sup>20</sup> However, before the novel could be published and reach so many readers, it had to pass through the rather dense sieve of East German censorship, ill-disposed in the past several years (from 1956) towards Polish literature. Apparently, Sienkiewicz's *Krzyżacy* passed through it without any major problems, and if one reads the documentation from the censorship office carefully, one can even ascertain that the publication of the novel accompanied with the right historic interpretation matched the geopolitical and propaganda expectations of the authorities of the DDR.

While the struggles of *W pustyni i w puszczy* are interesting for the reasons due to which, nearly ten years earlier, the authorities had decided to prevent the novel's release in the DDR, the case of *Krzyżacy* offered a completely contrary situation: the book's example is interesting considering the arguments which were used to justify the need for its publication.

Sienkiewicz's *Krzyżacy* was prepared for print in the mid-1960s by two East German publishing houses: Union Verlag and the already mentioned Neues Leben. The Union Verlag publishing house was established in 1951 and it belonged to the Christian Democratic Union of Germany (*Christlich Demokratische Union*), a party which operated in the DDR and which was subordinate to the communist SED.

The editors of the Union Verlag publishing house included the novel in their production plan for 1965. The application for the print permit was filed with the Ministry of Culture on 1 September 1964. It was approved relatively quickly, i.e. on

---

<sup>19</sup> BArch, DR 1/5113, *An einem Winterabend. Polnische Meistererzählungen*, Volksverlag, Weimar 1959, Außengutachten, k. 116–123 (117).

<sup>20</sup> H. Olschowsky, "Das Ähnliche und das Andere. Polnische Literatur in der DDR", [in:] *Die Rezeption der polnischen Literatur im deutschsprachigen Raum und die der deutschen in Polen 1945–1985*, eds. H. Kneip, H. Orłowski, Deutsches Polen-Institut, Darmstadt 1989, p. 54.



12 October.<sup>21</sup> As the internal reviewer confirmed in his opinion, the publication was supposed to be a completely new translation of a novel by Henryk Sienkiewicz which was already known to German readers. The minor abridgements in the German translation introduced by the editors were supposed to only apply to those fragments which included repetitions and enumerations of Polish place names. In the editors' opinion such abridgements were supposed to facilitate reading for the German audience.<sup>22</sup>

The internal reviewer began his opinion with a short presentation of Henryk Sienkiewicz as an excellent representative of Polish literature and the recipient of the 1905 Nobel Prize, and summarised the novel in a few sentences. Significantly enough, in the second paragraph of his opinion he included a remark which stated that *Krzyżacy* was included in the production plan of the publishing house, apart from the undeniable artistic value of the novel, for its ideological value. The editors decided that Sienkiewicz accurately presented the struggle of the Polish state as a defensive war against the "aggressive and expansive German Order of the Teutonic Knights."<sup>23</sup> Through a rather complicated train of historical thought, the author of the internal opinion claimed an extremely simple and direct relationship between the politics and the actions of the Teutonic Order:

The conceit and brutality of the Order in relation to the Slavic nations and neighbouring countries it oppressed, as well as the shameful acts by its members seem today a foreshadowing of that which was repeated in Poland in 1939–1945 during the fascist occupation in such a horrifying manner. The national socialist regime tried to put into action an attempt to ravage the Polish nation, as declared by some members of the Order using many barbaric methods.<sup>24</sup>

The train of thought and, which might prove even more accurate, manner of argumentation thus outlined in the internal opinion led the reviewer to assign Sienkiewicz supernatural abilities of foretelling the future and anticipating in the novel future events which would occur several decades later. According to him Sienkiewicz, who experienced the Germanisation operations in the Polish lands under the Prussian partition, included many retrospections, referred to his times, and looked into the future, foreshadowing the imperialist goals of German fascists, who in history books glorified the Teutonic Order as their originator.<sup>25</sup>

---

21 BArch, DR 1/2423, *Die Kreuzritter*, Union Verlag, Berlin 1965, Druckgenehmigungsbogen, k. 244.

22 Vide: *ibidem*, Lektoratsgutachten, k. 251–253 (252).

23 *Ibidem*, k. 251–253 (251).

24 *Ibidem*.

25 *Ibidem*.

Another statement in the internal opinion of the Union Verlag publishing house seems very interesting in view of modern research into literary censorship, the cultural policy of the DDR and the Polish-German (literary) relations; in it, the reviewer discussed the prospective readers of the planned publication. In line with the publishing house's intentions, the book should mainly attract older readers, who acquired at school a positive image of the Teutonic Order, and it should force them not only to correct the image, but also to reflect on the question of what German fascism was and where its roots could be found.<sup>26</sup>

The external reviewer wrote in a similar tone to that of the internal review, though one should note that he stressed other elements of the novel and its potential reception more. It seems somewhat surprising that the censorship office assigned the task of developing the external review to the same person who was tasked by the publishing house with writing the afterword. That might indicate that the office did not expect any publication problems. The external review and the afterword to the novel were written by dr. Alois Hermann, a researcher of the Slavic Institute at the Humboldt University in Berlin, a specialist in Polish literature.<sup>27</sup>

In the review commissioned by the censorship office, Alois Hermann described Henryk Sienkiewicz's output, indicating that, at some point, having been recognised as a representative of epic realism, Sienkiewicz departed from contemporary social themes and undertook historical themes creating "heart-raising" literature for his compatriots.<sup>28</sup> The reviewer's explanation of the choice of the topic of the novel was that after Sienkiewicz's public protests against the Germanisation pressure of the Prussian state (the writer published, e.g. an open letter to Wilhelm II), *Krzyżacy* was supposed to constitute a literary protest. That was why, despite its historical setting, the novel became a story of emphatic political influence, which was enthusiastically accepted by the author's readers. The very successful depiction of the Battle of Grunwald of 1410 had a major symbolic significance for Sienkiewicz's contemporaries.<sup>29</sup>

According to the reviewer, a few major elements of the novel, related to both its content and form, determined its high value. He included among these: the novel's depiction of the conflicts with the deceitful Teutonic Order, the just defensive struggles of the Poles, the dynamic development of the progressive, still at that time, Polish-Lithuanian feudal state [!]; the colourful, easy to remember diverse descriptions of individual social groups [the king's and prince's courts, the knight castle, the highroad, a military camp, tournaments, etc.]; diverse character

---

<sup>26</sup> Ibidem, k. 252.

<sup>27</sup> Vide: ibidem, k. 253.

<sup>28</sup> Vide: ibidem, Außengutachten, k. 246–250 (246).

<sup>29</sup> Vide: ibidem, k. 247–248.

depictions; which all proved Sienkiewicz's writing mastery, and the beauty of the language of the novel.<sup>30</sup>

Right before the conclusion of his opinion, according to which the publication of the novel should be supported without any reservations, both for aesthetic and ideological reasons, Alois Hermann included an argument which officials who decided whether to issue the print permit could not have rejected:

[...] in the face of the growing revisionist intentions in West Germany, one cannot overlook the current political significance of the novel for our struggle for friendship among nations and to maintain peace in the world.<sup>31</sup>

That remark should not be underestimated as yet another hollow slogan repeated mindlessly on various occasions in states governed in the totalitarian manner by communist parties. The DDR's situation after the erection of the Berlin Wall in 1961 and the reinforcement of the border between the German states was not easy. As if through its own doing, both the country and the governing party were becoming increasingly isolated in the international arena and were engaged in an aggravated conflict with West Germany. The search for, and the reinforcement of, international contact, especially with neighbouring states which belonged to the same political bloc, even if their cultural policies raised considerable doubts amongst the DDR authorities, became, in the 1960s, a major element of foreign policy. It seems that the above-quoted argument from the external review of the planned edition of *Krzyżacy* by Henryk Sienkiewicz should be also viewed in these terms.

The edition of *Krzyżacy* prepared by the Union Verlag publishing house was released in 1965 in two volumes.<sup>32</sup> The publication of the novel was also planned for the same year by the Neues Leben publishing house, which mainly released children's and young adult literature. Since the publishing house undertook activities towards that end a few months later than the Union Verlag publishing house and, as a result, the work had already been verified in ideological terms, the question of whether the censorship office would permit the print was only a formality.<sup>33</sup>

---

<sup>30</sup> Vide: *ibidem*, k. 249.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibidem*, k. 250.

<sup>32</sup> H. Sienkiewicz, *Die Kreuzritter*, Bd. 1, VOB Union Verlag, Berlin 1965; H. Sienkiewicz, *Die Kreuzritter*, Bd. 2, VOB Union Verlag, Berlin 1965.

<sup>33</sup> At this point one should note that *Krzyżacy* was planned to be released in a series entitled *Spannend erzählt*. The publishing house planned to release "Extremely interesting stories" in it. The publisher had planned to publish *W pustyni i w puszczy* in the series, ten years earlier,

The internal review of the publishing house indicated the same advantages of the novel as those indicated by the reviewers of the publication prepared by the Union Verlag publishing house. It emphasised Henryk Sienkiewicz's writing skills, which compensated for some historical inaccuracies to such an extent that "the major aspects and processes are presented basically correctly."<sup>34</sup> The author of the review noted that the main themes of the novel were, on the one hand, the massacres, pillaging and intrigues of the Teutonic Knights, and, on the other, the defensive measures by Poles, who, together with Lithuanians, were forced to defend their homeland.<sup>35</sup> The novel *Krzyżacy* by Henryk Sienkiewicz was published by the Neues Leben publishing house in 1965 in 25,000 copies, which could be considered as a form of redress for the failure of the Polish Nobel Prize winner and his other novel *W pustyni i w puszczy* in their encounter with the DDR's censors ten years earlier.<sup>36</sup>

The above-discussed examples of the treatment of the works of Henryk Sienkiewicz by the DDR's censors offer a basis for conclusions on the functioning of literary censorship as a whole and the literary censorship in communist states using the example of the special case of East Germany. Those mainly indicated that censorship was an instrument of exacting power and was applied in each instance for more or less precisely defined interests and goals of the authorities. The work of censors often consisted of severing a work of literature from its original meaning and assigning it new meanings through re-interpretation within a specific political reality and depending on the current (ideological) needs. That was accompanied by the conviction that through works of literature it was possible to influence readers and develop in them desired attitudes and trigger expected actions. That was a result of the general political-cultural assumptions of the communist party, according to which, art should influence its recipients in an educational manner. In that sense, censorship constituted a mirror image of propaganda: it applied different means and methods, yet the objectives remained the same.

---

yet, due to ideological reasons which I discussed at the beginning of the article, the novel was not released.

<sup>34</sup> BArch, DR 1/5077, *Die Kreuzritter*, Neues Leben, Berlin 1965, Verlagsgutachten, k. 124–126 (126).

<sup>35</sup> Ibidem.

<sup>36</sup> H. Sienkiewicz, *Die Kreuzritter*, Neues Leben, Berlin 1965.

---

## Bibliography

- BArch, DR 1/2423, *Die Kreuzritter*, Union Verlag, Berlin 1965.
- BArch, DR 1/5077, *Die Kreuzritter*, Neues Leben, Berlin 1965.
- BArch, DR 1/5077, Henryk Sienkiewicz, *Durch Wildnis und Wüste*, Verlag Neues Leben, Berlin 1956.
- BArch, DR 1/5113, *An einem Winterabend. Polnische Meistererzählungen*, Volkerverlag, Weimar 1959.
- BArch, DR 1/5126a, *Der Spielmann. Polnische Meistererzählungen*, Aufbau-Verlag, Berlin 1958.
- Die Kette: Polnische Meistererzählungen*, eds. J.Z. Jakubowski, A. Milka, A. Hermann, Volkerverlag, Weimar 1959.
- Olschowsky Heinrich, "Das Ähnliche und das Andere. Polnische Literatur in der DDR", [in:] *Die Rezeption der polnischen Literatur im deutschsprachigen Raum und die der deutschen in Polen 1945–1985*, eds. H. Kneip, H. Orłowski, Deutsches Polen-Institut, Darmstadt 1989, pp. 41–76.
- Polnische Meistererzählungen*, K. Harrer, H. Loppe, Aufbau-Verlag, Berlin 1959.
- Sienkiewicz Henryk, *Die Kreuzritter*, Bd. 1, 2, VOB Union Verlag, Berlin 1965.
- Sienkiewicz Henryk, *Die Kreuzritter*, Neues Leben, Berlin 1965.

---

Marek Rajch

## Twórczość Henryka Sienkiewicza a cenzura literacka w NRD

### *Streszczenie*

Utworky Henryka Sienkiewicza, polskiego pisarza i laureata literackiej nagrody Nobla z 1905 roku, zostały poddane kontroli aparatu cenzury w NRD kilkakrotnie. Za pozycje pożądane i godne przybliżenie wschodnioniemieckim czytelnikom uznano jego nowele, które poruszały dziewiętnastowieczną problematykę społeczną. Nawijającą do tematyki średniowiecznej powieść *Krzyżacy* spotkała się z dużą aprobatą wydawnictw i urzędu cenzury z tego względu, iż pozwalała na krytyczne rozliczenie się z narodowym socjalizmem w Niemczech, od którego NRD się dystansowała. Sporego zagrożenia ideologicznego dla młodych

czytelników wschodnioniemieckich dopatrywano się natomiast w powieści dla młodzieży *W pustyni i w puszczy* i z tego powodu została ona wycofana z procedury wydawniczej.

**Słowa kluczowe:** cenzura literacka, literatura polska, polityka kulturalna, NRD

## Henryk Sienkiewicz's output and literary censorship in the DDR

### Summary

Works by Henryk Sienkiewicz, a Polish writer and the winner of the 1905 Nobel Prize for Literature, were subjected to verification by the DDR's censorship apparatus several times. Censors considered his novellas which discussed 19th-century social issues as desirable and worth promoting among East German readers. His novel *Krzyżacy*, which was set in the Middle Ages, was accepted eagerly both by publishing houses and the censorship office as it enabled national socialism in Germany to be viewed in critical terms, as the DDR distanced itself from the system. Reviewers did, however, find a major ideological threat for young readers in East Germany in a young adult novel entitled *W pustyni i w puszczy*, and for that reason it was withdrawn from the publishing procedure.

**Keywords:** literary censorship, Polish literature, cultural policy, the DDR.

**Marek Rajch** – Ph.D. hab., professor of UAM, employee of the Department of Polish-German Literary Relations, Institute of German Philology, University of Adam Mickiewicz University in Poznan. Scope of scientific interests: history of German-language literature, literature and politics, literary censorship in Germany and Poland, German theater in Poland, Polish-German relations. He published, among others: *Cenzura pruska w Wielkopolsce w latach 1848–1918* (2004), “*Unsere andersartige Kulturpolitik*”. *Zensur und Literatur in der DDR and in der Volksrepublik Polen* (2015).