

The *Descensus* Motif in the Gospel of Nicodemus and *Historyja o chwalebnym Zmartwychwstaniu Pańskim* against the Background of Biblical Literature, Apocrypha and Modern Theatre Adaptations

The purpose of this study has been to determine to what extent the Gospel of Nicodemus and *Historyja o chwalebnym Zmartwychwstaniu Pańskim* [The Story of the Glorious Resurrection of Our Lord] by Mikołaj of Wilkowiecko are similar, and to what extent they differ. Our analyses were intended to answer the question of whether Mikołaj of Wilkowiecko could have been inspired by the description of the descent into the abyss present in this apocryphal Gospel, and if so, to what extent the Gospel of Nicodemus inspired him. Considering the voluminous scale of the source material and the strictly defined research purpose, we have decided to limit the study only to those parts of the aforementioned works that address Jesus' descent into hell, namely the second part of the apocryphon, *Descensus Christi ad inferos*, and the fourth scene of *Historyja o chwalebnym Zmartwychwstaniu Pańskim*.

Comparative analysis has been chosen as the primary research method to be applied in the introduction to this study. The choice of such a method has rather been intuitive in light of our research objectives. Since we intend to determine the scale of similarities and differences between two (or more) sources, the use of comparative analysis appeared to be appropriate. As it is easier to juxtapose comparative materials once a comparative key is approved, as noted in the introduction, we have adopted certain elements of the narrative method, the components of which will allow us to structure comparative analyses within strictly determined components set by this method (form, characters, location of the story, time period and plot).

The source material of the Gospel of Nicodemus has been the excellent and valuable edition of Tischendorf. In turn, the drama of Mikołaj of Wilkowiecko, the study by Jan Okoń has been taken as our source text. On the one hand, this choice was based on time frames (Okoń's edition is the most recent study of *Historyja o chwalebnym Zmartwychwstaniu Pańskim*), and, on the other hand, on editorial grounds (accuracy and precision as well as the inclusion of several other versions). Considering the contemporary staging of Mikołaj's drama, we have decided to confront it with seven adaptations made by Schiller, Dejmek, Cieplak, Basinski, Tomaszuk, Malak and Gajewski. In this case, the source materials were theatrical scripts available to the public or received from the theatres with which the above directors were associated.

Finally, the last group of sources were the best editions of the Holy Scriptures or their ancient translations. For the Old Testament, it was *Biblia Hebraica Stuttgartensia*, while for the

New Testament, *Novum Testamentum Graece*, as well as *Septuagint. Id est Vetus Testamentum graece iuxta LXX interpretes* and *Biblia Sacra iuxta vulgatam versionem*. Regarding the apocrypha, *Evangelia apocrypha*, *Nachrichten von der König. Gesellschaft der Wissenschaften zu Göttingen*, and *Sources Chrétiennes* or *Patrologia Orientalis* have primarily been used.

Our analyses have been structured in five chapters. The first chapter focuses on the Gospel of Nicodemus, and more specifically on that part, which contained the description of Jesus' descent into the abyss, the so-called *Descensus Christi ad inferos*. Analyses of this description were preceded by an introduction to issues related to the apocrypha and their role in the development of Christian thought. Then we have examined the apocryphon in terms of the criteria previously indicated.

The second chapter has entirely been devoted to the analysis of *Historyja o chwalebnym Zmartwychwstaniu Pańskim*. Its first part is an extensive introduction, analogous to the one in chapter one, to liturgical dramas and mystery plays has been made. We have also shown the characteristics of Mikołaj's drama. The main section of this chapter gives a detailed literary analysis of this sixteenth-century drama according to the same ordering elements used in the first part of this study.

The third chapter juxtaposes the motifs present in the biblical and apocryphal traditions related to the theme of *descensus*. These juxtapositions were ultimately intended to help determine whether (and, if so, to what extent) the initial significance of these passages changed and whether the motifs received completely new interpretations.

In chapter four, we have directly confronted the Gospel of Nicodemus with *Historyja o chwalebnym Zmartwychwstaniu Pańskim*. These two works were juxtaposed according to the same key that has been used so far in our work, that is, components of the rhetorical method. By using the same model in the first two chapters, our analyses have properly been ordered. Here both literary and theological aspects have been compared.

Finally, the last chapter of this study has focused on the influence of *Historyja o chwalebnym Zmartwychwstaniu Pańskim* on contemporary theatrical productions. On the one hand, we have synthesized the selected contemporary adaptations on the basis of the criteria that have been adopted. On the other hand, these productions have been juxtaposed with the drama by Mikołaj of Wilkowiecko in order to determine to which extent the directors have interfered with the 16th century message, regarding the motif of Jesus' descent into the abyss, bearing in mind that our analyses were limited to this scene (in accordance with the research objectives of this work).

Juxtaposing the various comparative criteria used in the study (literary genre, characters, setting, plot), we may be tempted to conclude that Mikołaj of Wilkowiecko based his drama on the message present in the Gospel of Nicodemus. Such dependence is supported primarily by the criteria of the characters, setting and plot. The only criterion in favour of the opposite thesis seems to be the time period of the story. In this case, the dependence of the sixteenth-century mystery play on the apocryphon is considerably smaller, and the basic problem lies in the reversal of the chronology of the events of the resurrection and the descent into abyss. The criterion of literary genre has not in fact been helpful in our analyses, since Mikołaj of Wilkowiecko may deliberately have changed the literary genre he captured in the Gospel of Nicodemus.

Regarding the second research problem, i.e. which variant of the apocryphon Mikołaj of Wilkowiecko used, it should be concluded that the dependence of *Historyja o chwalebnym Zmartwychwstaniu Pańskim* on the Latin B variant is the least likely. One criterion for drawing such a conclusion is that of the characters of his drama, who indeed shows a greater dependence of the 16th-century mystery play on the Latin B variant than on the Greek and Latin A editions, nevertheless this predominance is not significant. On the other hand, considering the setting and plot, the degree of dependence on the Greek and Latin A versions over the Latin B edition is noticeably bigger, and as regards the location of the story, this dependence is significant. Again, the criterion of literary genre does not play a major role here for the reasons cited previously.

Attempting to specify on which variants of the Gospel of Nicodemus (Greek and Latin A) *Historyja o chwalebnym Zmartwychwstaniu Pańskim* was dependent, it should be noted that the answer to such a question is not simple on the basis of the source alone. Latin version A contains some themes that do not appear in either the Greek variant or Mikołaj of Wilkowiecko's mystery play. This has allowed us to risk the claim that the author of *Historyja o chwalebnym Zmartwychwstaniu Pańskim* did not include these motifs in his drama, because he did not know them. Yet, such a conclusion is very risky and is not based on thorough analyses. Since these motifs are not so important, Mikołaj of Wilkowiecko might have omitted them purposely, as they did not play a major role in his drama. For all these reasons, it will be safe to refrain from determining whether the 16th century drama was based on the Greek or Latin A version.

As for the question of which modern adaptation most faithfully depicted the 16th-century mystery, the answer should be that in each of them the directors chose to introduce some innovations, which did not appear in the original mystery play. In order to give a reliable

answer to such a question, it would be necessary to analyze in detail the entire work, not only one part, based on correct comparative criteria.

When it comes to presenting the spirit of the original work, in my opinion, Schiller's adaptation was the most faithful. Although the dematerialization of the figure of Christ is undoubtedly a major intrusion into Mikołaj's mystery play, this procedure excellently shows the otherness of Christ in relation to the other characters, and his transcendence. Moreover, Schiller makes a very interesting use of the symbolism of space to express the idea of good and evil, which is in line with the symbolic thinking of the dramatist's contemporaries.

In turn, in Tomaszuk's staging, the figure of Christ was secularized and presented in a way that is undignified to portray God. The humorous nature of the drama should not exempt the director from maintaining reverence for the holy figures. While there were secularized protagonists in Basiński's staging, at least the figure of Jesus was presented in a dignified manner.