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**THE GREEK-CATHOLIC PRIEST AND HIS FAMILY IN
THE UKRAINIAN AND POLISH PROSE OF THE
POLITICAL TOTALITARIAN PERIOD (IRYNA VIL'DE,
ANDRZEJ KUŚNIEWICZ)**

The Ukrainian Greek-Catholic Church (Rutheno-Catholici) is the largest Eastern Catholic Church of its own law. It dominates in Western Ukraine, in Ukrainian Galicia, and has a long history. The Church played a leading role in preserving the cultural and religious independence of the Ukrainian population in this region. As the western Ukrainian lands later passed into Austrian control, the imperial government of the Hapsburgs supported and protected the Greek-Catholic hierarchy. The relations of the Ukrainian Greek-Catholic Church and Polish Roman-Catholic Church and Polish government during the interwar period were complicated and conflicting. Communist regime conducted the war on religion; the Ukrainian Greek-Catholic Church was liquidated in Galicia in 1946. Polish and Ukrainian fiction, created in these borderland territories depicts the problems of Church, ideology and nation. In order to illustrate the problem of Greek-Catholic Church in Galicia between the two wars with the help of comparative parallels in the presentation of the character of the Greek-Catholic priest and his family I have chosen two novels: the Ukrainian, Iryna Vil'de's (1907–1982)¹ novel *The Ritchyn'sky's Sisters*, (*Сестри Річинські*, 1958–1964) and the Polish *Zones* (*Strefy*, 1971) by Andrzej Kuśniewicz (1904–1993). Both authors built their imaginative stories in the same space-time: Galicia between the two wars, the Ukrainian-Polish borderlands of the II Polish Republic (II Rzeczpospolita, 1918–44). The Second World War changed the borders, Iryna Vil'de in September 1939 found herself in totalitarian Soviet Ukraine and Kuśniewicz in the post-war period found himself in the People's Republic of Poland (Polska Rzeczpospolita Ludowa, 1952–1989), which was a sovereign state as defined by international law, but aligned its policies

¹ Iryna Vil'de is a pseudonym; her real name is Daryna Polotniuk.

with Moscow, making the democratic republic a satellite state member of the procommunist Eastern Block almost entirely subordinated to the Soviet Union. The Soviets had much influence over culture in both countries, but this regime was far stronger, more cruel and durable in Ukraine. These historical and political differences, as well as different national literature traditions, author's biographies, opinions and styles influenced the creation of the dissimilar images of the church and the priest. The comparative analyses of these images help us to study literature internationally, across native borders, with the help of 'eye' and 'ear' (Gifford 1969:16).²

The Ritchyn'sky's Sisters is a kind of traditional social-psychological, realistic novel, which consists of two parts. It gives a very detailed portrait of morals and manners of the Galician society between the wars. It appeared in the Soviet Union in the epoch, when socrealism dominated in the East and French existentialism and American behaviourism prevailed in the West. In spite of maintaining the main features of its eastern model (it follows the classical pattern of the novel as it was shaped in the 19th century – with the domination of the political ideas: the idea of social revolution, Marxism, and the orientation on the Soviet Ukraine etc.) – this novel is a high brow artistic creation, interesting and outstanding, exhibiting the artistic abilities of Iryna Vil'de as a prosaist.

Iryna Vil'de has created in her novel a rich and colourful vision of various aspects of life, concerning different social layers of Pokuttya in Galicia, Eastern Lesser Poland, and a part of the II Polish Republic. Sometimes her text is called *the novel with a geological cut*. The Greek-Catholic Priest's family: the Ukrainian priest Arkadiy Ritchyn'sky, his wife, Olena Ritchyn'ska and their five daughters – is at the center of the novel. The Ukrainian Greek-Catholic priest may be considered as the dominant figure of *The Ritchyn'sky's Sisters*. He is barely present in the novel, but his death at the midway point of the first volume does not change this dominant position. The author had chosen the priest as the central figure because, thanks to his social status, he was able to mix and cooperate with the people of different social strata: with common people, for whom he was a cure of the soul, with so called 'intelligentsia', whose representative he was, with various smart dealers, to whom he partly belonged, with civil servants and politicians. Fulfilling his priestly duties, for all these people he was a precious mediator as the representative of Greek-Catholic Church in Galicia. Iryna Vil'de showed the Ukrainian Greek-Catholic priest and his family in a wide historical and ideological context.

² Henry Gifford wrote: *In comparative study both the eye and the ear are important. The eye discerns what two or more literatures, two or more individual writers have in common. It fastens on themes, recurrent patterns, topoi in their development. It enables the reader to command a wide area, and to find categories. [...] But the ear must also be brought into play. [...] The ear catches the echoes of one writer in another; learns to distinguish the counterpoint of a work to its predecessor; recognizes the national accent; reveals the presence of an inner tradition.*

It is necessary to remember that the role of this church in the formation of the national consciousness of the Ukrainians was of the highest importance. The numerous historical documents confirm that the Ukrainian Greek-Catholic Church was the largest, the richest, the most powerful and the most influential organisation of the western Ukrainians. Till the end of the 30s about 4 million believers in approximately 3,000 parishes belonged to Greek-Catholic Church with its Metropolitan head Andrey Sheptyts'kyi (Субтельний 1993:539). This Church organized the whole network of youth and feminine unions. What is more – it retained its own political party – the Ukrainian Catholic National Party. In the two decades (20–30s) the Greek-Catholic Church headed by Andrey Sheptyts'kyi undoubtedly furthered the process of national revival of the region. Edvard D. Wynot, studying the Galician history of the 30–ies recollects:

When Marchal Józef Pilsudski died in May 1935, the numerous political, social and economic problems which his near-decade of authoritarian rule had both fostered and suppressed swiftly erupted to the surface of the Polish life. In a desperate attempt to preserve their own internal cohesion as well as to rally the dubious Polish community around their policies, the heirs to Pilsudski's mantle charted a course which openly aimed at uniting all Poles under the banner of the state, to the obvious exclusion of non Polish peoples who comprised nearly one-third of the country's entire population (Wynot 1970:44).

Among these non-Polish peoples there were the Ukrainians. Ukrainian Greek Catholics found themselves under the governance of other nations (Poland, Hungary, etc.) after World War I. Under the previous century of the Austrian rule, the Ukrainian Greek Catholic Church attained such a strong Ukrainian national character that, in the interwar Poland, the Greek Catholics of Galicia were considered by the nationalist Polish and Catholic state as a great threat. Carrying its Polonisation policies throughout its Eastern Territory, the Polish authorities sought to weaken the Ukrainian Greek Catholic Church in various ways. Overcoming the repressions and ostracism, Ukrainians became in the course of the 30s one of the dominant elements in Polish political life (the population of the Ukrainians (Greek-Catholics) was officially listed as 10.4% of the total) (Zieliński 1983:126). They developed their own political and social organizations. When suppressed by the Polish government, these organizations were forced to operate underground. The repressive Polonisation, the brutal 'pacification' furthered the formation of the new Ukrainian political parties and national unions. The Greek-Catholic Church helped to organize them. For example, the chief political movement of the Ukrainians was the Ukrainian National Democratic Union, or UNDO, formed in 1925 as a fusion of several national groups and based on the Greek-Catholic Uniate faith. It aspired to the creation of an independent Ukrainian state with a constitutional-parliamentary system. In the 20s and 30s the Greek-Catholic Church concentrated its attention

on fostering the patriotic spirit of the Ukrainian Youth; it tried to enunciate the spirit of Christian moral as the foundation of patriotism. The history confirms that the metropolitan Andrey Sheptyts'kyi was widely outspoken against every form of terror (Torzecki 1993:11), even if it happened as the protest against Polish 'pacifications'. It is best to refer to his own words about himself and his mission:

I would like so much to wipe the tears of those who cry, to amuse those who grieve, to strengthen the weak and powerless, to sustain the sick, to illuminate the ignorant. I would like to become everything for everybody to save them. I would better die today, not taste the cup of eternal happiness, be excommunicated from Christ, if only, you, my brothers in blood, were redeemed. (see Суханова, Сулима-Малташенко 1991:89–96)³

Consequently, the Greek-Catholic Church supported UNDO, which was moderate in its actions and took a position between the left, organized in a Communist Party of the Western Ukraine and the Social Sel-Rob, and the Right, organized in the Organization of Ukrainian Nationalists (OUN) and the Ukrainian Military Organization (UVO) forces. [...] *Metropolitan Count Andreas Sheptyts'kyi poured forth a torrent of anti-Polish invective from his Lviv (Lwów) base* (Wynot 1970:46), but without bloodshed. That is why the official soviet historiography blamed the activity of the Ukrainian Greek-Catholic Church. With the occupation of Galicia by soviet armies in 1939, all church activity was suppressed. In 1944 the Soviet authorities began to put pressure on the Ukrainian Greek-Catholic bishops to dissolve the Union with Rome. On their refusal, they were arrested and imprisoned or deported. For a long time the activity of the Ukrainian Greek-Catholic Church was illegal. The highest level of invectives we observe in the totalitarian period. Iryna Vil'de's novel, published in this period following Stalin's regime (1958–1964), is not free from the ideological bias of this time. It is true, that Vil'de tries to present both: the objective, epic picture of the history, and her own individual vision as the author; the external and internal truth are constantly interweaving in the novel. There remains the fact, that the gifted author in the given political conditions was forced to accept the truth of the official soviet history as the objective. In *The Ritchns'ky's Sisters* the communist vision of the society interferes directly with the created world. Greek-Catholic Church, presented by Arkadiy Ritchyns'ky and other priests, some of whom were his relatives and colleagues, seems to be mean, greedy and unfaithful in the political battles.

³ [Я так дуже хотів би обтерти сльози з очей тих, хто плачуть, потішити кожного, хто сумує, – покріпити кожного, хто слабкий та немічний, уздоровити кожного, хто хворий, просвітити кожного, хто темний. Я хотів би стати всім для усіх, щоби всіх спасти. Нехай нині умру, нехай у вічності не зазнаю щастя, нехай відлученим буду від Христа, коли б лишень Ви, браття мої по крові, були спасенні.]

At the very beginning of the novel the Greek-Catholic Church is shown as an institution wholly adapting to the situations created by the state. When the state is Austrian – Arkadiy serves the Austrians, when tsarist Russian Army occupies his land – he serves the Russians; in the Polish Galicia of the interwar period he tries to compromise with the government in order to enrich his own family. He also betrays his neighbour in order to save his own life: he brings to military trial and puts to death the innocent man, a father of young children and a husband Il'ko Savytz'ky, producing the tipsy kissing and fraternization of this Ukrainian peasant with tipsy Russian soldier as evidence of treason against the Austrian monarch. The author, in an utterly realistic fashion, presents that instincts of self-preservation, a vital and common element of human nature, dominate over the priest's own principles. Not without 'soviet' exaggeration she shows, how the egoistic nature of the priest wins the Christian morality:

Death cell, – a thought flashed in Ritchyns 'ky's head and only now he felt a strong thirst for life. Firstly in his time he clearly understood that he was capable of anything: of betrayal, sacrilege, false oath, murder, cannibalism!

Not only because of thought, but while imagining that he, Andriy Ritchyns 'ky, could be led shackled between the wallpaper of the ragged gloating over his misfortune, he felt dizzy.

It is dreadful, extremely dreadful to expose an innocent person to the death, but, oh, the great god, it is much more dreadful to die oneself! (Ірина Вільде 1977:20)⁴

His vital choice was short, although not without confession. The priest tries to justify himself, tries to conveniently reinterpret Catholic Church's postulates:

*That night priest Arkadiy believed that the saint catholic church according to God's will gave him a proof of its mother's protection. It had brought him on the verge of disaster, that he should peep in the giddy depth, and took him away to the safe place. [...] The great services of catholic church are quite those, that it gives philosophical interpretation to dogmas, releasing them from their static character and submitting them to the demands of life practice. (op. cit. 23–24)*⁵

⁴ [Камера смерті, – стукнуло у мізку Річинського, і тільки тепер він відчув страшенну жагу життя. Впеше за свій вік чітко усвідомив, що в ім'я життя він здатний на все: на зраду, на святотатство, на кривоприсягу, на вбивство, на людоїдство!]

Не тільки від думки, а навіть уявивши на мить, що його, Аркадія Річинського, можуть вести закутого поміж шпалерами злорадно тріумфуючої голоти, відчував запоморочення в голові.

Страшно, дуже страшно прирікати на смерть невинну людину, але, господи великий, куди страшніше вмирати самому!]

⁵ [В ту ніч отець Аркадій вірив, що свята католицька церква по волі господа бога давала йому доказ своєї материнської опіки. Привела його край безодні, щоб заглянув у запаморочливу глибіню, і відвела у безпечне місце. (...) Заслуга католицької церкви саме в

The most characteristic feature of priest Arkadiy Ritzyns'ky is his servility towards power. It is no exception that Iryna Vil'de created the image of Greek Catholic priest Arkadiy Ritzyns'ky according to the characteristic of a real person. Paradoxically, it even may be a galician Greek-Catholic bishop Hryhoriy Homyshyn (1867- 1947), who was criticized by Arkadiy Ritzyns'ky for his supporting of catholic celibacy. Nevertheless, the western orientation and the policy of 'normalisation' with respect to Polish power and Rome Church chosen by this Ukrainian bishop (Енциклопедія Українознавства 2000:3624–3625) are recalled in the priest from Pokuttya. His politic and clerical activity was – in his days – very often criticized. Bishop Homyshyn was blamed by many of his contemporaries and he was still blamed by some representatives of younger generation. Thus, Homyshyn was treated as a symbol of servility and compromise between the two world wars; a perspective which remains to this day. What really characterised him, it was his consistent pragmatism. It is true, that Andrey Sheptyts'kyi did not agree with the ways chosen by bishop Homyshyn, but at the same time the Metropolitan failed to openly criticise the bishop. Sheptyts'kyi knew, that bishop's ways were ones of the possible roads for the Ukrainian Greek-Catholic Church in the difficult political situation of 20–30s in Eastern Galicia. Vatican, Ukrainian and Polish historians re-evaluated Homyshyn's activity.⁶ The task of the philologist is thus to re-evaluate the literary image of real Ukrainian priests of obsequious orientation, encapsulated in Arkadiy Ritzyns'ky. Priest Ritzyns'ky, like the bishop, was devoted to his church and he did not betray it. He simply made a choice: among many possible ways he chose the way of pragmatic adaptation – at the first stage of relations between the state and the Church. Thus the Metropolitan refrained from condemning his bishop. But in Iryna Vil'de's opinion, the compromise, pragmatism of Arkadiy Ritzyns'ky and the whole Church deserve to bear the blame.

The hyperbolical presentation of priest's instincts of self-preservation and his yearning for richness – so distant from world literature canon of a priest: Georges Bernanos thirty-year-old cleric of Ambricout Parish, a child of poverty, who tries entirely and unselfishly to help his poor parish people materially as well as spiritually! (Bernanos 1936:312) – is nothing but an appreciation of communist regime. The atheistic propaganda of this time obliged the author to

тому, що вона дає догмам філософське тлумачення, знімаючи з них тим самим статичність і підкоряючи практичним вимогам життя.]

⁶ After Pope Pius XII officially sympathized with the persecuted Ukrainian Greek-Catholic Church (*Orientalis omnes Ecclesias*, 1945) Bishop Homyshyn was one of the first who became the martyrdom. He died in Kiev, in prison hospital as the result of severe torture at the age of 78: See also Ryszard Torzecki's *Sheptyts'kyi and Polish Society* (Magocsi 1989:75–100), Bohdan Budorowycz's *Sheptytskyi and the Ukrainian National Movement after 1914* (Magocsi 1989:47–74), Lubomyr Husar's *Sheptyts'kyi and Ecumenism* (Magocsi 1989:185–200).

criticize any church, all the more the Ukrainian Greek-Catholic Church, fighting for the national liberation of Ukrainians as well. However, the ideology failed to disfigure the image of Greek-Catholic priest, it only chipped it. Without comments, Iryna Vil'de drew into characterization the wider context: the reader understands, that priest Arkadiy Ritchyns' ky is a normal human being, a loving father of five daughters and a loving husband.⁷ He was not rich enough to provide his daughters – just young ladies – with dowry and give them a happy future in marriage. The descriptions of his feelings to his wife (he maintains his romantic feelings towards her after 25 years of their marriage) and to his daughters, of his sincere love, his care for their future are bright, touching and moving. Repeatedly, the author emphasized his astute mind (5,15), his attractive courageous masculine traits (15). That is why her image of Arkadiy Ritchyns' ky as Greek-Catholic priest is not flat, schematic, simplified and the image of the Ukrainian Greek-Catholic Church does not condescend to sharp caricature, as in other Ukrainian fictions of totalitarian period.

The Greek-Catholic priest created by Andrzej Kuśniewicz is a complete contrast to Bernanos' priest also. He isn't poor, rather middle-rich intellectual. As priest Arkadiy Ritchyns' ky, he has a family: a wife, two sons and a daughter. By this image the Polish author shows the role of Greek-Catholic clergy in the formation of the national consciousness of the Ukrainians and in the raising of their cultural level.

The priest from the Galician village of Suchodol, then a professor of Theology in Lwow, Hryhorij Łuczko has raised his two sons, Vlodko and Yevhen and his daughter Olena in a spirit of Ukrainian patriotism. The elder brother, a gifted pupil of the Stryj's gymnasium in the 30s, a graduate on the eve of the Second World War, in the 40s joined the Ukrainian Insurgent Army (UPA). He became the leader of a group of Ukrainian nationalist partisans (UPA) in order to protect ethnic Ukrainians from repression and exploitation by the Polish governing authorities, his ultimate goal was an independent and unified Ukrainian State. The head of the family, the Greek-Catholic priest Łuczko has to emigrate after war from the Ukraine, which corresponded with the real fact of mass emigration of the Ukrainian Greek-Catholic clergy. His daughter supported her brother Volodymyr (Vlodko) in his struggle (as illustrated in her letter to him) (Kuśniewicz 1985:78). In order to reflect the activity of the Greek-Catholic priest's family in the insurrectional movement of the Ukrainians, the author links his heroes with activities of the Ukrainian National Party (as with the example of the episode with secret papers) (*ibid.*:111).

Kuśniewicz strongly emphasizes the high cultural level of the Greek-Catholic priest and his family; Łuczko's flat is a typical flat of the Galician intelligentsia, overfilled with books and pictures testifying to the range of the

⁷ Greek Catholic Church, like the other Eastern Catholic Churches, ordains married men.

Luczko's erudition. The other figure of the novel, the son of the Polish teacher, Olek Bogaczewicz, who once visited his Ukrainian friend was surprised, seeing the rich library, valuable pictures and connoisseurs attitude of the family:

We were sitting on the sofa under the picture by Novakivs'ky (titled The War – almost of miniature scale [...] Jewhen said [...]: Look, it's our great artist Novakivs'ky). (ibid.:114)⁸

Kuśniewicz shows also the high human qualities of the priest's family: the priest's and Yewhen's honesty, human dignity and self-respect. The narrator notes:

He [Yevhen] didn't belong to the first class people, which some Poles craved for, but to the second class, as Ukrainian, however he managed to make his way in the world, come to the fore and with mocking expression he looked down on other colleagues, even on Gucio (he tapped him on his shoulder), and Gustaw was a descendent of hetmans or chancellors, you know, as well as on Ludek, who was the burgomaster's son (Yevhen helped him in mathematics) [...] One can see, even Olek, staid and solid in his gests and words, fell under his influence. (ibid.:74)⁹

All in all Kuśniewicz with objectivity and sympathy estimates the role of Greek-Catholic Church – showing the personalities and activities of its representatives. Sometimes, though, his remembrance of things fails: for example, he names the Greek-Catholic priest with a Russian Orthodox term “pop”. The writer who was born and grew up in Galicia between the two wars had to know that this term had a scornful connotation in the ears of the Galician Ukrainians: they gave their priest the name of *svyashchennyk* (from Ukr. ‘svyashchenny’ – ‘sacred’; those who fulfil their priest's duty of guarding the sanctuary and its sacred contents accounts for use) or more Polonised ‘ksyondz’ (ksiądz).

In neither novel are the Greek-Catholic priests the heroes, the protagonists of the story. The leading character of *The Ritchyn'sky's Sisters* is the priest's family, which – in the form of his daughters – after his death and with the beginning of communist regime in Galicia doesn't follow the principles of their church. His widow and their mother was too weak to counteract these changes. The reader of Kuśniewicz's *Zones* does not meet the priest directly: the author creates the personality of priest Łuczko by means of indirect description. Characterization of this literary person is done by other characters and with the help of description of

⁸ [Siedzieliśmy obaj na kanapie pod obrazem Nowakowskiego (pod tytułem *Wojna* – niemal miniaturowych rozmiarów [...] Jewhen powiedział [...]: Popatrz, to nasz wielki malarz, Nowakiwski).]

⁹ [[Yevhen] Należał [...] nie do narodu klasy pierwszej, za jaki pragnęli uchodzić niektórzy Polacy, lecz do klasy drugiej, jako Ukrainiec, a potrafił mimo to wybić się, wysunąć na czoło i z drwiącą miną spoglądać z góry na resztę kolegów, nawet na Gucia (poklepywał go po plecach), a przecież Gustek był jakimś tam potomkiem hetmanów czy kanclerzy, a także na Ludka, który był synem burmistrza (Jewhen pomagał mu w zadaniach z matematyki) [...] Nawet poważny i solidny w gestach i słowach Olek Bogaczewicz wyraźnie ulegał jego indywidualności.]

setting – both, the general location and particular physical surrounding of the Ukrainian priest. Paraphrasing the critic's definition, *As a 'witness' to such character's actions, the reader is free to draw his or her own conclusions* (Morner, Rausch 1991:33). Both authors avoided showing the priests conducting their sacramental duties, helping their parish, visiting every family in the parish, in order to 'amuse those who grieve, to strengthen the weak and powerless, to sustain the sick', as the real metropolitan Andrey Sheptyts'kyi and fictional anonymous Bernanos' priest did. Priest Ritchyn'sky appears among his parishes to his own advantage only. Both novels outline the Greek-Catholic priests' images.

This sketchy comparison of the two novels: Kuśniewicz's *Zones* and Iryna Vil'de's *The Ritchyn'sky's Sisters* shows what was to expect: that in the political conditions of totalitarian system no objective estimation of the role of Greek-Catholic Church was possible. The system rejected *a priori* any positive role of any religion. The ambiguities of Iryna Vil'de's novel were the only way to escape a total lie. As Stanisław Cieślak noted, *religion played in Poland a culture generating role, and, vice versa, literature inspired and contributed to religion* (Cieślak). Polish literature from its beginning was inspired by the values, contents of the Christian religion, and Catholicism in particular. This catholic tradition obliged society to respect a priest of any religion. Therefore it is no wonder that the image of Kuśniewicz's priest is more positive and more attractive. We must remember, in Poland, the imposition of Socialist Realism as the obligatory creative method in the arts, as well as cultural, scientific and political domination of the Soviet model in all spheres took place mostly over the years 1949–1955. The 'Thaw', which took hold of Polish life from 1954, led to the gradual relaxation of these rigors. In September 1956, the Main Office for Control of the Press, Publications and Public Performances (GUKP) appealed for the abolition of censorship. At this time, contacts with Polish emigre centres abroad were restored and major writers such as Gombrowicz and Miłosz began to appear in print within Poland. In that time Kuśniewicz, who fulfilled after World War II his diplomatic duties in Lille, returned from France to Poland. That is why Kuśniewicz's novel, written in more slight political conditions in comparison with Soviet Ukraine, marked with especially 'liberal' French handwriting, is free from any doctrinal bias; if something fails, memory fails. It does happen in literature as in life.

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