

Summary

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Sypałem ziarna maku... Podróż grecka Zbigniewa Herberta [“I sprinkled poppy seeds...”: Zbigniew Herbert’s Greek Journey]

In the course of several trips to Greece starting in the mid-1960s, Zbigniew Herbert (1924–1998), one of the greatest contemporary Polish poets, visited places that are the most important, fundamental even, for Greek culture and the classical European tradition, such as Athens, Delphi, Corinth, Mycenae and Sparta, but he also saw centres of the Byzantine tradition like Thessaloniki and Mystras. His Greek travels resulted in great works: essays and poems that show the poet’s fascination with Greek culture. They also testify to the way he understood the history of ancient Greece as the foundation of European culture. Herbert’s encounter with Greece was a profound existential experience for him, and the language of Greek culture became his “tool” for expressing the existential and historical dilemmas of his generation.

The present volume is not a methodical or chronicle-like reconstruction of Zbigniew Herbert’s visits to Greece. Rather, it is an account of the most important themes and unique aspects of his Greek travel writing, captured against the background of other examples of writers’ literary journeys to the same country. Hence, the book includes references to reports from 20th-century Greek travels that function in Polish culture. However, the main context for the analyses is the European (and, more broadly, global) tradition of the Greek journey as a literary genre with a long history and some brilliant representatives – from Pausanias, through Chateaubriand, to Henry Miller and Jacques Derrida.