

Summary

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A Chronicle of Zbigniew Herbert Life and Work 1924–1998

A Chronicle of Zbigniew Herbert Life and Work 1924–1998 is the first major source work recording, in strictly chronological order, facts from the life and work of the author of *Mr. Cogito*. It refers to the tradition of similar works devoted to outstanding Polish writers (including: I. Krasicki, A. Mickiewicz, J. Słowacki, C.K. Norwid, H. Sienkiewicz, B. Schulz...), created in Poland since the 1950s. It uses manuscripts, letters and other handwritten archival materials, oral sources, the press, writers' diaries, memories of Herbert's friends and acquaintances, and editions of his correspondence.

The main collection of handwritten sources, Zbigniew Herbert Archive, is kept in the National Library in Warsaw. It contains, among other things, notebooks with the first, scratch-written versions of Herbert's poetic works, often precisely dated that enabled capturing the "birth" of the poems over time. The letters to Herbert in his archive allowed to create a map of his most important correspondents, which in turn gave rise to the search for Herbert's letters to them – they are, of course, scattered, located in numerous Polish and foreign libraries. Efforts were made to reach the letters. It is Herbert's letters that are the most used material – they were sources of crucial quotations: information about his whereabouts, illnesses, travel reports, descriptions of events in which he took part, mentions of the people he met, and finally information about the writing itself, the effort of creation. Correspondence already published in print was also used, as well as letters from public collections and private individuals. The author also consulted the archival collections of institutions with which Herbert was associated before his book debut in 1956. And then, for example, the archives of the Polish Writers' Union in Warsaw and Gdańsk, the archives of the German publishing house Suhrkamp Verlag in Deutsches Literaturarchiv Marbach and many others. Interviews conducted with Herbert's friends and the accounts (which had not been included in previous publications) were also used. Herbert's private library, consisting of approximately 7,000 volumes, was also a source – the poet had a habit of often writing down the dates and places of purchasing or receiving books, and making notes in them while reading.

The basic unit of the chronicle is a note under the daily date: for dates relating to life with information about the place and event, for dates relating to work with information about the writing or publication of the work. Each note is accompanied by a source note and possibly a footnote regarding the content of the note.

The Chronicle of Zbigniew Herbert's life and work 1924–1998 is a part of biographical searches devoted to Polish culture of the 20th century. Its author has grounds to believe that, due to the source nature of the work, it will serve the ever-developing Zbigniew Herbert's studies.