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Moscow - just yet Another Rome: Zbigniew Herbert's Postcolonial Antiquity (1956-1990)

This paper proposes a postcolonial reading of antiquity motifs from Zbigniew Herbert's poems from the times of socialism. References to ancient history, mythology, and biblical allusions are interpreted as allegories of the political culture in the Polish People's Republic. While in his poems written between 1956 and 1990 Herbert depicts communism as an attempt at Russian colonization of Poland, in seminal texts such as "Przesłanie Pana Cogito" ["The Envoy of Mr Cogito"], "Potęga smaku" ["The Power of Taste"], "Modlitwa Pana Cogito - podróżnika" ["Prayer of Mr Cogito the Traveler"], "Pan Cogito o postawie wyprostowanej" ["Mr Cogito on Upright Attitudes"], "Raport z oblężonego miasta" ["Report from the Besieged City"], "Pana Cogito - powrót" ["Mr Cogito - the Return"] or "Przemiany Liwiusza" ["Transformations of Livy"], the focus lies mainly on the internal effects for the Polish colonized mind.

Linking communist Moscow to ancient Rome, Herbert accomplishes a peculiar anti-imperial *translatio imperii*. It is this transhistorical perspective of Herbert's poems which allows for rounding off the paper with connecting Herbert's anti-imperial attitude with defensive nationalism and proposing recent right-wing tendencies in the Polish appropriation of postcolonial theory (Ewa Thompson et al.) as a heuristic model for understanding Herbert's civil position during communism. It is argued that Herbert's anti-imperial take on communist Russia can be viewed as symptomatic of Eastern Europe's entangled history with (post-)Soviet Russia since 1956, which should therefore be approached from a postcolonial angle, even if it comes encapsulated in an allegorical *translatio imperii*.