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Mors et Vita – Another Easter Trope Drama?

The duel between death and life: *Victimae paschali laudes* (2b)

  The literary style of allegoresis generated a rich harvest, whose diversity makes it impossible to assess its volume or even to only estimate numbers of works or its percentage. The main technique in question, the personification, can be found everywhere in all genres, not only in lyrical poems or in heroic epics (frequent parodies included), further in moralizing and didactic works, also used in school curricula and preachers repertoires, even allowed in theological exegesis. More than that, we see allegoresis applied in liturgical texts undergoing very strict procedures of promulgation executed by bodies rather suspicious towards imaginary and visual expression, and allowing it only after deep consideration, or tolerating its strong embedding in tradition.
      A good case in point can be the Easter sequence *Victimae paschali laudes*, one of a few left after the Tridentine reform bringing discipline in rituals and forms of liturgy and removing most of the apocryphal narration and poetic invention.

<p style="text-align:center">

Victimae paschali laudes
immolent christiani

2a| Agnus redemit oves Christus innocens patri
reconciliavit peccatores
2b| **Mors et vita duello conflixere mirando**
dux vitae mortuus regnat vivus

3a| Dic nobis Maria quid vidisti in via
sepulcrum Christi viventis et gloriam vidi resurgentis
3b| Angelicos testes sudarium et vestes
surrexit Christus spes mea praecedet suos in Galilaeam

4a| Credendum est magis soli Mariae veraci
quam Judaeorum turbae fallaci
4b| Scimus Christum surrexisse a mortuis vere
tu nobis victor rex miserere.[1]

</p>

The extreme popularity of the Victima-sequence was a result of its place in Easter liturgy, and its soon getting vernacular progeny. The latter is very well known for everybody acquainted with the origins of European poetry in the vernacular: in German, Czech, Hungarian, Polish – to name the closest ones. We all know those carols translating and re-troping the phrase of the Latin trope „surrexit Christus". The number and importance of this progeny could possibly have obliterated other paths of our Easter trope, not marginal at all, as I'm showing below. What we do see after having heard in the first stanza the topic of the feast of the paschal sacrifice (*immolent Christiani*), is the recalling (in the second stanza) of the episode preceding the Paschal offering, alluding to the earlier

[1] Standard text in the Database Cantus: ID 508002 http://cantusdatabase.org/node/395050 The phrase „mors et vita" has there two entries: one in the sequence *Victimae Paschali laudes* (ca. 20 records), and another in the antiphon for the feast of the Inventio Crucis: *Mors et vita apposita sunt tibi si non ostendas mihi crucem Christi,* Cantus http://cantusdatabase.org/node/377216 Sung with English text at http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=biToVpwMWqw

events which actually started the Passion: the Temptations in the Desert (after Christ's baptism),

and to the Agony in the garden of Gethsemane, started with Christ addressing his disciples, but also his death: "My soul is sorrowful even to death. Remain here and keep watch with me." (Tunc ait illis: Tristis est anima mea **usque ad mortem**: sustinete hic, et vigilate mecum. Matthew 26:38).

The stanza is generalizing the roles of the protagonist and antagonist in their contest for the power over the world and its creatures.

> *Mors et vita duello conflixere mirando,*
> *Dux vitae mortuus, regnat vivus.*

The question of man's salvation is being conceptualized as a matter of life and death in general, and accordingly as a duel of the two characters, two personifications who clashed with each other in a combat. The poet doesn't allow the individual aspect of **life's personification** to be obliterated and is giving verbal expression to this "person's" real

existence by speaking metaphorically about his life in personal categories, as "the duke of life" (*dux vitae*).

And turning our attention back to the subject of the feast – the death sacrifice of that duke – the poet doesn't forget the balance of that duel, worded in an artistic paradox, saying that the killed duke is alive and reigning.

The impersonation of the introduced characters is not complete: their semantic status is that of oscillating between the sphere of metaphor for **real persons** (Christ=duke of life, Satan = death), and the sphere of **personification**, standing for general abstract concepts like life or death.

So is also the duel only a metaphor of a combat.

A matter so important that it cannot be reduced in status to mere rhetorical figure, the duel had to be characterized as uncommon, miraculous: *duellum mirandum*. This semantic ambivalence or oscillating if not coupling is a common feature of complex allegories and even of single personifications.[2] They take a part of their expressive force from the semantic oscillator 'concrete-abstract'. It happens even in case of independent or self-providing personifications, as Death we know from the *danse macabre,* who left the status of a skeleton playing in mortuaries, and was promoted to the function of God's servant, but couldn't remove from its transcendent *emploi* the obligation to remain always somebody's death, the act of dying of each separate human being.

This quality reflects the distributive character of the life phenomenon that is possible only in separate individuals. In the same way death cannot be different than distributive in its working. It may be so obvious but the thrill we experience from looking at artistically performed death dances, all their ambivalent charm, comes from stating those distributive necessities: death doesn't kill life in general, but only individual beings and this is what we should be watching with horror: that *everybody* has to take into account a sudden kidnapping and including into her procession.

In the Paschal sequence death is "the dying of all people, of all human race and of all life (*omnia viventia*), and even she is the personal perpetrator of this dying.[3]

Nam ego sum mors, que claudo omnia vivencia et finem eis impono

Deo volente et permittente et non est, qui se abscondat a meo dominio.

We hear that in her self-presentation in the Latin dialogue *Colloquium de morte* which was the source of the Slavic versions of the conversation of Polycarp, also of the Polish *Dialogus magistri Polycarpi cum morte*.[4] In both the bold and curious teacher, has to listen to her boasting about her power over all life, but to see her well-known scythe, and the lesser known attribute, sort of „Pandora's box" containing all diseases and causing the extermination of all creature.[5]

The necessarily distributive character of death is responsible for the construction of death figure in the Victima-sequence as a personal enemy of God and his creation. She has

[2] See the "simultaneous realities" in allegory, C. Erickson, *The Medieval Vision*, Oxford 1976, p. 8, and N. Crohn Schmitt 1982: 312, applying the notion to the interpretation of the allegorical drama *The Castle of Perseverance*; N. Crohn Schmitt, *The Idea of a Person in Medieval Morality Plays*, in: C. Davidson C. et al. (ed.), *The Drama of the Middle Ages. Comparative and Critical Essays*, AMS Press, New York 1982. 1982: 304–315. Cf. also oscillation of meanings in the characters in the *Erfurt morality play* (H. Linke, *Figurendarstellung in der Erfurter Moralität. Geistliche Dramatik als Lebensorientierung*, „Zeitschrift für deutsches Altertum" 1995, 124.2, p. 129–42.1995), and the „plurality of truths" in *Piers Plowman*, G. Rudd, *Managing Language in „Piers Plowman"*, Piers Plowman Studies IX, D. S. Brewer, Cambridge 1994.

[3] Nam ego sum mors, que claudo omnia vivencia et finem eis impono Deo volente et permittente et non est, qui se abscondat a meo dominio.

[4] Editor's title: Czesława Pirożyńska, *Łacińska Rozmowa mistrza Polikarpa ze Śmiercią. Dialogus magistri Polycarpi cum morte* [in:] *Średniowiecze. Studia o kulturze*, t. 3, Wrocław 1966, pp.74-187.

[5] ...omnes morbos creaturarum in vase ferreo portans in sinistro brachio et tota existens pallida et in manibus tenens falcastrum horribile, coram se habens celum apertum et retro se infernum

to be sort of knight challenging another knight – Life. For the duel to be one between equals (otherwise it would be not credible as a serious combat) the second knight figure had to be someone more than an individual although special human person, but it had to mean also the life of each human.

Rudolf, *Sermones de VII sigillis* (Sermons on the seven seals)
In the *Victima*-sequence we saw the generalized Death figure perform an ultimate duel with Life, also not yet distributed into separate beings. She had to be constructed differently to can perform in warning dialogues with single people who are bold enough to strive for a meeting with her and interrogating her "in person".

This new construction of Death figure can be found in the eschatological treaty *Sermones de VII sigillis*.[6] Afterwards she will perform this disciplining role in the collection of medieval conversations of man with death, generated in Slavic languages *Colloquium de morte*.[7] Before this Latin prototype of a **word contest of personified Death with a single person** could appear at the beginning of the 14th c., its narrative nucleus encoded in the 2nd stanza of the Victima-sequence was being transmitted in thousands of performances during the octave of the Easter period. They were countless, even if not each script of the *Visitatio Sepulchri* refers to this sequence expressis verbis.[8] This narrative nucleus could have been developed in dialogue forms introducing names of persons mentioned in the narrative, and giving them speaking turns.[9]

This was not happening necessarily in all instances of transmission of the sequence. We have enough texts where life and death are not turning to fully-fledged personifications, but are remaining abstract figures performing metaphorical services in representations of human activities and powers, as eg. in the conductus *Mors vitae propitia*.[10]

It is this step towards the death-personification, or the first act of developing the metaphor into a dramatic construction with introduced persons (*personae introductae*) that we can see in the Latin *Sermons on the seven seals* by the Cistersian Rudolf, the *Sermones de VII sigillis*, with the following initial part.[11]

incipiunt sermones fratris rudolfi   de vii sigillis sermo •i•us

Liber uite xristi jhesu clausus vu• sigillis ita ut nulli regni celorum per eum

    pateret accessus•

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[6] Rudolphus, *Sermones de VII sigillis*, in: Ms Univ. Lib. Wrocław BUWr I Q 160. From the Cistersians of Rauden/Rudy, Upper-Silesia. [f. 73r]: *Incipiunt sermones fratris rudolfi de vii sigillis*, inc. **Liber Vite Christi Jesu clausus septem sigillis** ita, ut nulli regni celorum per eum pateret accessus... [f. 73v] *Tractatus primi sigilli*. Primum itaque sigillum...
[7] Ewa Siatkowska, *Mistrz Polikarp w krajach słowiańskich*, „Studia z Filologii Polskiej i Słowiańskiej" 40 (2005), p. 421-438; *Widzenie Polikarpa. Średniowieczne rozmowy człowieka ze śmiercią*, A. Dąbrówka & P. Stępień (eds., in preparation).
[8] A positive example from the *Agenda Posnaniensis* of 1533 (Lewański 1999: 324):
    Post hoc faciant Processionem cantantes:
    Victime Pascali laudes ...
    ad finem, et intrantes chorum cantans
    Te Deum laudamus ...
    et ita finiant Matutinum ipso die Pasche.
[9] The *Breviarium Pragense* (ca 1400?) has the stanzas 3-4 divided in roles: Prelatus, Chorus, Una Mulierum (Lewański s. 326-7).
[10] **Mors vitae propitia** (France, ca. 1200):
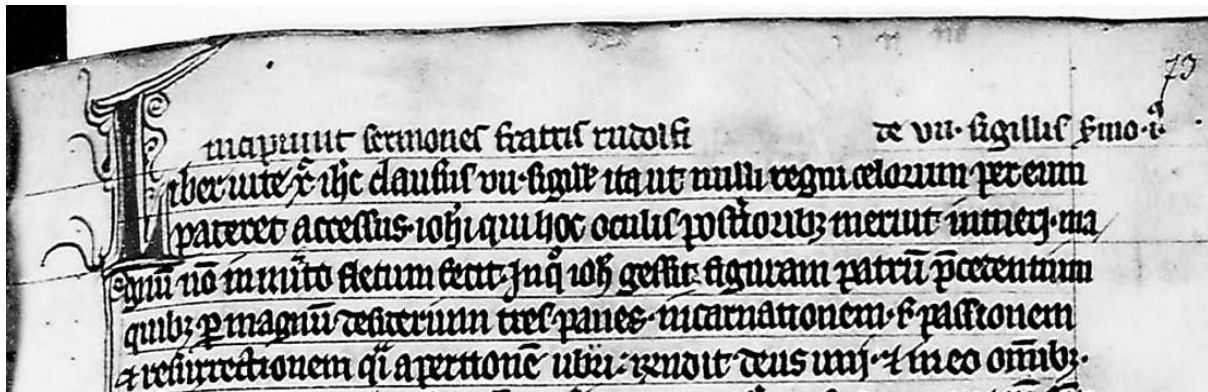   Mors vitae propitia
    Sexta passus feria,
    Mortis a miseria
    Nos direxit
    Die Christus tertia,
    Resurrexit.
[11] Contents of the codex: -▪ Rudolphus, *Summa de confessionis discretione*. -▪ Evangelia dominicalia cum orationibus brevibus. -▪ Rudolphus, *Sermones de VII sigillis* (catalogue title).

The third book of the treatise (*sermo de passione*, f. 112) is devoted to the third seal – the third one from the seven closing the life of Christ before Incarnation could happen. The seven seal-breaking events gave the structure to the history of Salvation which could not have happened if the seals remained closed – like in the Apocalypsis, but in strictly christologic and salutary categories: Birth, Baptism, Passion, Resurrection, Ascension, Transfiguration, Last Judgment.

The dialogue between death and life where Rudolf is elaborating the narrative nucleus from the Victima-sequence opens with the sentence[12] (not marked in any way):

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[12] Rudolf f. 116v, 8 line from above.

In agone etiam Xristi mors et vita duello mirabili confflixerunt
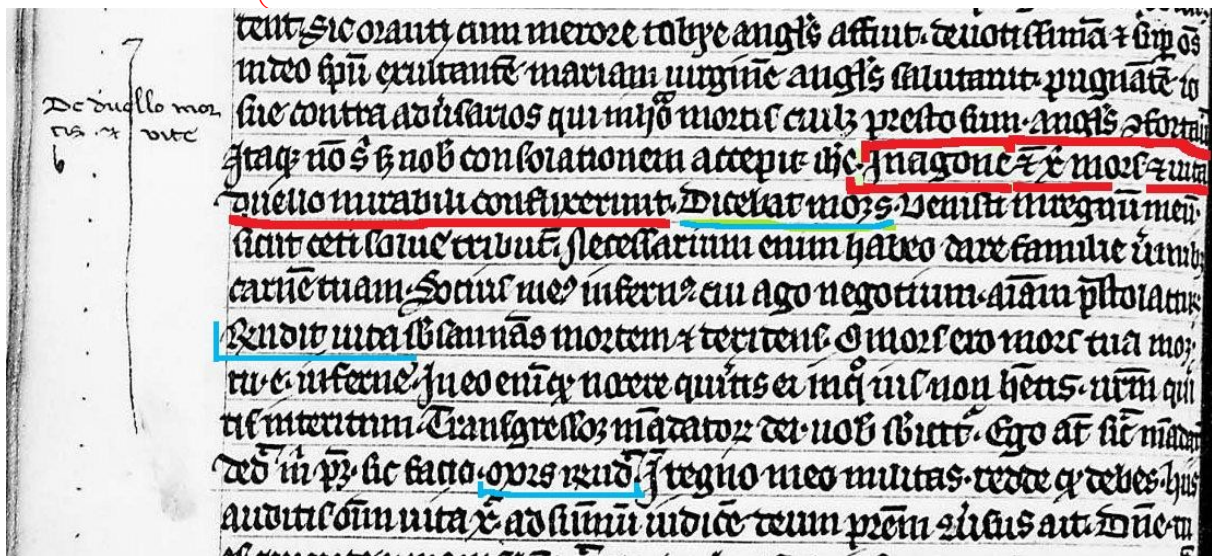
When Jesus was to die on the cross, Life and Death clashed in a marvelous duel
– says Rudolf, but we don't get any combat, only a conversation of Christ with personified Death, following the structure *dicebat mors – respondit vita*, without paragraphs or separating the speaking turns, with no role naming in the margins (as it was in the part with the Trial in Heaven[13]). Only the title of the dialogue *De duello mortis et vite* has been added by a later user of the codex (see the close-up below).
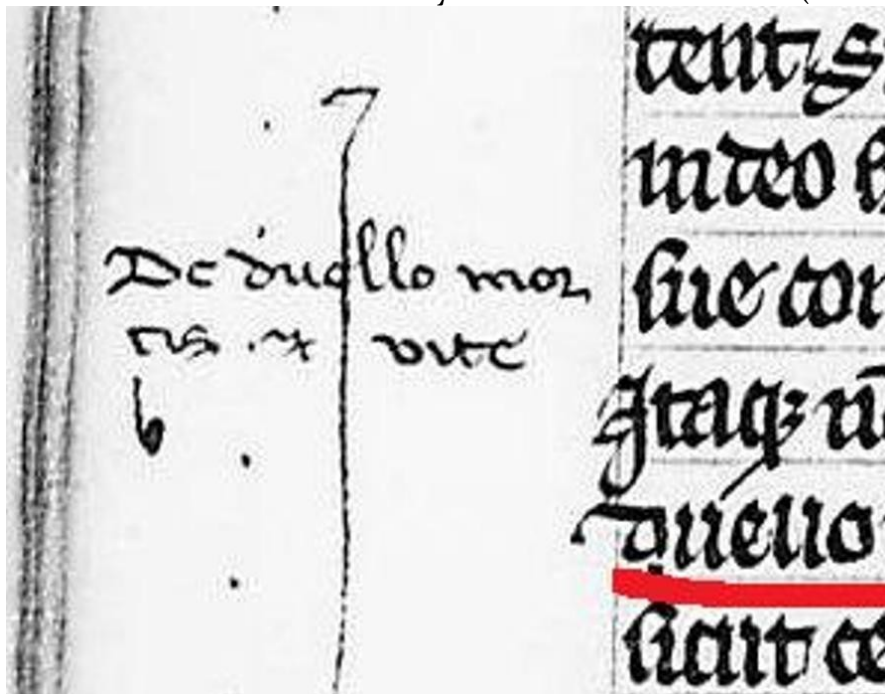
[13] Analyzed in my paper *Moraltheologische Grundsetzung des Friedens in dem Consilium Trinitatis über den Streit der Töchter Gottes*, [w:] *Konfliktbewältigung und Friedensstiftung im Mittelalter*, red. R. Czaja, E. Mühle, A. Radzimiński, Toruń 2012: 37-52

The historical figure (Christ) Has been replaced in the dialogue by the Life allegory, although temporaily, because when it is uttering its last words turning towards the highest judge God father,

  vita X[ristus] *ad summum iudicem deum patrem sursus ait (…)*
– the response comes from the character called Father

  Pater • **Noli timere vermis Jacob**…

  As we have seen, the dialogue part of the treatise (f. 116v-117r) is not consequently elaborated. It is dubious about the introduced persons, naming four of them but giving speaking turns only to three of them.

Tilo of Kulm, *Von siben Ingesigeln* (1331)

Rudolfs treatise *Sermones de septem sigillis* has been followed quite strictly by the Medieval German poet-translator Tilo of Kulm (Polish: Chełmno). In the Passion chapter of his narrative poem he also re-shaped the Latin *duellum*-conversation into medieval East-Middle-German verse (Ostmitteldeutsch).[14] In the beginning of the 3rd part the narrating instance is breaking the seal of the Passion.

We read in the prose of Rudolf [112r-140r]:

Jncipit tractatus tertii sigilli sermo primus de passione. Tertii apertio sigilli (...) de passione domini

And in Tilo:
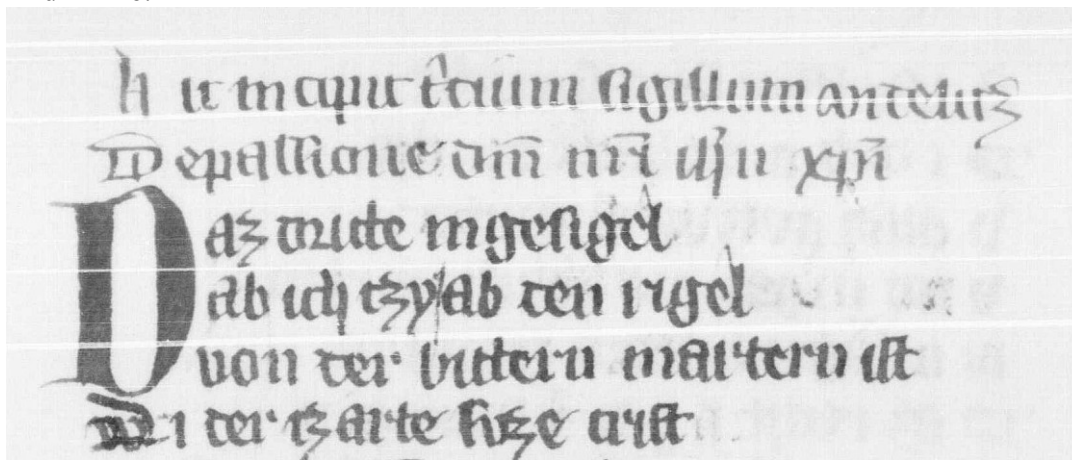
Hic incipit tercium sigillum videlicet
De passione domini nostri Jesu Cristi.[15]

Daz dritte ingesigel
Ab ich czy [zieh'] ab den rigel

The narrator takes the position of the master of the ceremony who undertakes the acts of history. Having opened the next door to salvation he begins the depicting of the duel as a battle, and an important one, "not for a sack of beets" (Nicht um einen sak vol rubn, 3602). For the duel stands the rudimentary dialogue summarizing the topic of the *Processus Belial*,[16] where the presented world is – we guess – the garden of Gethsemane (Agony), dissolving in allegory to give place for the blood-sweat flowing richly as the rivers of Paradise "for the forgiveness of sins". That is the subject of the next chapter announced with the rubrick *The same about the same*. In both Rudolf

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[14] *Tilos von Kulm Gedicht 'Von siben Ingesigeln'.* Aus der Königsberger Handschrift hrsg. von Karl Kochendörffer (Dichtungen des Deutschen Ordens II), Berlin 1907. Pojedynek Życia i Śmierci u Tylona: 3599-3652; f. 92a-94a (5stron); p.56-57.

[15] Tilo 3285ab, f.84a; Kochendörffer s.51.

[16] This is exactly the characteristics of the reported conversation between Satan and Christ *Zwiegespräch zwischen Christus und dem Teufel* in the Wrocław codex **(Univ.Lib.** IV Q 35a f.33ᵇ-35; desription of Göber f. 136): *eyn froge von dem tewfil zcu Got* (4 Questions of the Devil to Christ or God with their answers). Inc. *Criste ich froge dich yn eynen rechten orteyl, ap eyn man das gut besieczen adir ym behaldin mag mit rechte, das her niet rechte gekauft hat addir was do recht ist ...* Expl. P .35 *unnd du salt ewigk bleyben yn dem grunde der ewige hellenn. Amen. 1469*

and Tilo the Life figure is not fully elaborated personification or allegory, but only a word metaphor of Christ (**daz leben Crist**, 3641) whom the masculine personal pronouns (er) in the next sentences are referring. The speaker addresses his dialogue partner as Father (*Vater myn*... 3649). The dialogue is however not a simple conversation, but has been situated in a presented world with a recognizable place and time – that of the Temptation in the Desert. Speaking Death uses the first person speech and presents herself as companion and partner of the Hell:

> ...die helle
> myn kumpan, myn geselle
> an des gesuch ich werbe
> und stolcze houbt czukerbe,
> giret noch der sele dyn (3613-17).

The powerful instance wishes to get Life's/Christ's soul. We have here a paraphrasis of the Temptation in the Desert episode rewritten in roles with persons we know from Gospels – Christ and Satan – who have been equipped additionally with metaphorical masques.

Christ is identified with Life, Satan is being replaced by Death, and the construction has been reinforced semantically: Satan is the enemy of God, Christ is synonym of life, its antonym is death. Interaction between the personages has been defined as a duel, but this is nothing more than a militant metaphor. Taking into account the scarcity of theatrical endowment, we can include this work into the rhetorical genre using the theatrical convention with developed dialogue embedded in time and space, but not necessarily performed on stage – like the elegiac comedies.[17]

The information circuit in both Latin dialogues – the episode in Rudolf and the short treatise on Polycarp – has been divided and arranged with stage text devices like *Dicebat Mors, Respondit Vita, ait*. They are segmenting the text in speaking turns using the first person singular, which is already a dramatic feature, although not necessarily having to be performed on stage.

<p align="center">★ ★ ★</p>

Many other instances of literary treatment of the Death figure in Latin and vernacular writing have been analysed in a collective monograph focusing on the Polycarp-matter.[18]

Two aspects of this further development are worth mentioning, because they show the struggle for a unified supernatural status of Death.

First, the death personification of the type 'servant of God' (which we meet e.g. in the *Everyman*), overshadows the opposite infernal allegoresis with Death as Hell's accomplice attempting to dominate and finally to kill Christ. But this ancient episode is not forgotten, and the motif of demonic disobedience to God, resulting in the attempt to kill Christ, had to be processed in order to harmonize it with the personification's profile as servant of God. Even in the first Latin treaty on Polycarp's conversation we read Death's recollection of the only case she couldn't kill her victim (Christ) losing in the process one of the original two swords. Death legalizes her attack at God's Son with the excuse it was his human body she had to destroy, as is her obligation against all humans.

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[17] K.A. Glińska, *Między retoryką a teatrem. Teatralność komedii elegijnej w świetle teorii starożytnych i średniowiecznych* [in:] *Pogranicza teatralności. Poezja, poetyka, praktyka*, red. A. Dąbrówka, Warszawa 2011, s. 75-99.
[18] *Widzenie Polikarpa*, red. Stępień i Dąbrówka. My paper *Rozmowa Polikarpa* brings some more examples of the literary treatments of the topic.

³⁷... duos gladios prius habui, sed iam unum recepit mihi Christus, quia mortificavi eum in humana natura, quia voluntarie mori voluit pro homine et scolas meas intravit.

³⁸ Sed unum habeo ita potentem, quod nullus eum evadere potest.

The Latin version is silent about the resurrection, while the Polish text gives it as the explicit reason of Death's loss of combat power.[19] In Latin she lost one of two swords, in Polish she is armed with a scythe only, so her scythe gets chipped:

208. But I damaged my scythe
209. When I put Christ to death,
210. Because in Him there was God's might.
211. Only He conquered my scythe,
212. Because on the third day He came back to life...[20]

Secondly, semantic construal of this "fully human" Death seems to be never completed, as the meaning investing that occurs between dead people and Death is reciprocal.

We see this in the motif of the offended skull,[21] according to Joseph Klapper invented among Silesian Dominicans of Vratislavia in the 14th century.[22] An individual dead person acquires some powers of the personal Death. Offended by an aggressive atheist who kicked the skull and provoked it to appear at the banquet if there is any life after death, the ghost of the offended appears to revenge the majesty of death which is identical with the dignity of a human person and of its soul whose immortal status cannot be doubted in Christianity.

The presumable Silesian original was probably not the immediate source for the canonical early modern version of the story, given form by the Flemish Jesuit Adriaan Poirters, in his European bestseller of the 17th c., *Het Masker van de wereld afgetrocken* (1646, Latin: *Larva mundi*).[23] The author chose for his invention a non-medieval Italian setting, situating the action in the milieu of the atheistic followers of Machiavelli.

Anyway, with this moralizing narrative, addressed to a young devout woman Philothea, enriched with exemplary emblems, we have in detail an extremely rare case of transferring an elaborated literary matter into an oral fairy tale, popular in the European folklore,[24] including ballads.[25]

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[19] Alem kosy naruszyła, Gdym Krystusa umorzyła,
Bo w niem była Boska siła.
Ten jeden mą kosę zwyciężył, Iż trzeciego dnia ożył;
Z tegom się żywotem biedziła, Potem jużem wszytkę moc straciła.

[20] Transl. M. Mikoś.

[21] AT 470A *Offended skull. The Types of the Folktale. A Classification and Bibliography, Antti Aarne's „Verzeichnis der Märchentypen"* Translated and Enlarged by Stith Thompson, Helsinki ²1964.

[22] *Die Sage vom toten Gaste* [in:] *Festschrift zur Jahrjundertfeier der Universität zu Breslau*, T. Siebs (red.), Breslau 1911, s. 202-233.

[23] See below the quote of the part of the poem with the crucial moment of the offending the skull, from Poirters, p. 332, with the drawing from p. 334.

[24] 40 var., 12 Dutch and Flemish, 16 Polish (T 470 i AT 470A; J. Krzyżanowski, *Polska bajka ludowa w ukladzie systematycznym*, Wrocław ²1962, ¹1947). All Dutch variants have identical morphology and topic. New var. as local legends: De Cock 1921 No 153; and recently (1957-1966) Roeck, Marquet, p. 91-92. Cock A. de, *Vlaamsche sagen uit den volksmond*, Amsterdam 1921. Roeck A., L. Marquet, *Belgische sagen en legenden*, Antwerpen 1980.

[25] Rich ballad tradition (oldest print of 1793) follows the story quite uniformly (De Cock 1920, s. 108-152).

HET MASKER VANDE WERELDT AFGETROCKEN DOOR P. ADRIANUS POIRTERS.

It should be added that the subject matter has found its way to Jesuit theatre, which was not so difficult as Poirters was a Jesuit himself. The Latin translation of his moral narrative *Larva mundi* has been used by Gabriel Szymkiewicz as the invention source[26] for a tragedy *Drama tragicum Leontius Orci victima* performed at the college in Kroże (North-East of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania) at 26 Feb. 1677 where he was at that time professor for rhetoric.[27] We had a Latin summary in the handwritten programme,[28] now lost and known from a detailed description in the monograph of Rezanov.[29] The negative hero of the "tragedy" walking through a cemetery has kicked a skull and added to the insult a provocative challenge: If there is life after death, the dead may visit him at the evening's banquet. The offended dead – *Umbra patrui Leontii* – appears in the form of a skeleton *(monstrum osseum)* and takes Leontius to hell.

> *Hy spreeckt het doodts-hooft aen en gaeter med' staen*
>   *spotten;*
> *En seydt: Wat light ghy hier? 'tis meer als tijdt van*
>   *rotten:*
>   *Sa voort weer naer de put, flux packt u naar u graf.*
>   *Waer toe hy met de voet noch herde stooten gaf.*
> *Doch seggh' eens eerje gaet, is't waer dat ander leeren?*
> *Dat naer het doodenrif de ziel sal weder-keeren?*
>   *Seggh' of verrijsen sal dat been dat ick hier raeck?*
>   *Of is het maer alleen een praetjen voor de vaeck?*
> *Voor my dit houd' ick staen, en daer wil ick op sterven,*
> *Dat die verscheyden is, noyt aessem meer sal erven.*
>   *Y, dat is kinder-clap, daer is doch nader-handt*
>   *Geen ziel die over-blijft naer 't scheuren van den*
>   *bant.*
> *Of isser noch den gheest die in u plagh te leven,*
> *Die wil ick neffens ons een plaets aen tafel gheven:*
>   *Komt vry wie datje zijt, ick nood' u nu te gast,*

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[26] Bibliografia Dramatu Rękopiśmiennego, Biblioteka Instytutu Badań Literackich PAN.

[27] Gabriel Szymkiewicz (1644-1709), probably of Lithuanian origin (he used to write "cantilenae" in Lithuanian). Taught rhetoric at Jesuit college in w Kroże 1676-77, philosophy at Kroże 1683-86, moral theology at Kroże 1687-88; head of the college in Pińsk 1679-80, Kroże 1687-88, 1694-95, 1697-1700, 1703-6, Połock 1695-96, Poszawiec 1700-3, Mińsk 1691-92, Wornie 1693-94; head of the printing house at Wilna 1682-83, Papal Seminary Wilna 1688-89. Author of two dwu school dramas. *Encyklopedia wiedzy o jezuitach*, s. 671-62; Okoń *Dramat*, s. 127, 415-416.

[28] V. I. Rezanov, *K istorii russkoj dramy: Ekskurs v oblast teatra jezuitov* (Nezhin: Izvestija Istoricesko-Filologiceskogo Instituta, 1910), 292-452, here p. 407-409.

[29] Codex from the Załuski library (now lost), shelfmark Różn. XIV.Q.10 (f. 94ʳ).

What happened to the semantic content of the Death figure on the way from the demonic status of a helper of "God's ancient Enemy" through personification with a rhetorical status (visualization metaphor of life's mortality) to a mere ghost of a particular dead person?

The above mentioned reciprocity in the meaning investing occurring between dead people and Death is functioning as a sort of constructivist-hermeneutic circle: Death allegory is transcending the individual liminality and cumulating the horror of death, but from the overflow of supernatural grandeur (and after the concept of the individual judgment became popular), Death is distributing its/her/his spiritual force back among the **individual dead people** who assume some of her knowledge of last things and powers of judgment, so they can punish those among the living who obviously deserve it.

De duello mortis et vite[30]

In agone etiam Christi mors et vita duello mirabili conflixerunt.[31]

Dicebat mors: Venisti in regnum meum, sicut ceteri solve tributum! Necessarium enim habeo dare familie vermibus carnem tuam. Socius meus infernus, cui ago negotium, animam prestolatur.

Respondit vita subsannans mortem et teritens: O mors, ero mors tua, morsus tuus ero, inferne![32] In eo enim, quod nocere queritis ei, in quo ius non habetis, nostrum queritis interitum. Transgressor mandatorum Dei vobis subvitur. Ego autem, sicut mandatum dedit mihi pater, sic facio.

Mors respondit: In regno meo militas, redde, quod debes.

hiis auditis

omnium vita Christus *ad summum iudicem Deum patrem conversus ait*: Domine, tu es, qui vite et mortis habes patrem, deducis ad inferos et reducis, pater, *transfer calicem hunc a me,*[33] ut nec mihi, nec meis, sicut hucusque, transgressoribus mors impia dominetur.

Cui inversus respondet

Pater : Noli timere vermis iacob[34] . In puncto ad modicum dereliqui te, ut pro omnibus gustes mortem et in miserationibus multis congregabo te, resuscitans te die tercia cum omnibus et adherentibus membris tuis. Cum quibus omnibus vivens in perpetuum, dices morti: **Ubi est, mors, victoria tua, ubi est stimulus tuus?** Nec inferni pertinaciam formidabis , nam ego ante te ibo et gloriosos terrae humiliabo, portas ereas conteram et dabo tibi thesauros absconditos et animas sceleratorum in inferno reclusas et archana secretorum[35] revelabo et omnium animas electorum ex omnibus gentibus, quorum salus adhuc seculis et generatonibus est occulta.

Sic consolata **omnium in Christo vita** *exultavit ut gigas ad currendam passionis viam*[36] *et ad patrem dixit* „fiat voluntas tua".[37]

My transliteration, completed by Dr Dorota Gacka,
corrected by Prof. Mieczysław Mejor who delivered the transcription

[30] The title *De duello mortis et vite* added in the marginal gloss f. 116v of the codex BUWr I Q 160 (before 1300). The title refers to the dialogue part of the 3rd chapter of the treatise, between the words *In agone etiam Christi...* X *...fiat voluntas tua*. Catalogue title of the treatise: Rudolphus, *Sermones de VII sigillis* (In the MS: *Incipiunt sermones fratris rudolfi de vii sigillis* [f. 73-148v, no ending preserved]. Inc. *Liber Vite Christi Jesu clausus septem sigillis ita, ut nulli regni celorum per eum pateret accessus...*.

[31] Rudolf, f. 116v, line 8 from top. Cf. *Victimae paschali laudes*, 2b.

[32] Osee 13, 14; Antiphon for Saturday of the Holy Week *O mors ero mors tua morsus tuus ero inferne*, (identified by M.Mejor); text and music http://tinyurl.com/d3jge2c ; Cantus ID 004045 http://cantusdatabase.org/id/004045

[33] Mark 14. 36.

[34] Isaiah, 54. 4, 7 – 10 (Vulg.)

[35] Isaiah 45,2-3.

[36] *Exsultavit ut gigas ad currendam viam* [Ps 19 (18), 6.].

[37] Iterum secundo abiit, et oravit, dicens: Pater mi, si non potest hic calix transire nisi bibam illum, fiat voluntas tua.Matth 26.42

... sic orauit cum merore tobye angls affuit deuotissima et corpus
in deo spm exultante mariam uirginem angls salutauit pugnante to
sue contra aduersarios qui muhdo mortis

Ataq no s & nob consolationem atten   Inagone et x mors et uita
duello mirabili constuxerunt Dicebat mors venisti in regnu meum
sicut ceti salue tribut. necessarium enim habeo dare familie tuum
carne tuam Socius meus infernus cum ago negotium aiam ptolatus
Rendit uita lb saunas mortem et teritens O mors ero mors tua mor
tu et inferne In eo enimq nocere quitis et inq uis non hetis usq qui
tis interitum Transgresso mandator det nob sbuett Ego at sic mada
ded in py sic facio opus rendo. I regno meo multas redde q debes bus
auditus omin uita et ad sunum iudice reum prem susus ait Dne m
el qui uite et mortis hes prem deducts ad inferos et reducts pater
ster calicem hunc a me ut nec in nec meis sicut huc usq trasg somb
mors sumpta conuice. Cum mys rendo pater slou timere umus acob
Inpuncto ad modicum reliqui te ut pro omnibz gustes mortem et in
mi seationibz multis congrabo te resusutaui te die tertia cum omnib
et adherentibz membris tuis. Cum quibz omnibz uiuens ippetnum diet
morti ubi est mors uictoria tua u est mors stimulus tuus. Sec inferm
ptnactam formicabil slam ego ante te io et glosos terre humiliabo
portas ereas conteram et uaro et thesauros absconditos v animas sam
tu inferno reductas et arhana secretor reuelabo et omum animas
elcor ex omnibz gentibz quor saluc adhuc seclis et generationibus
est oculta Sic consolata omn iux uita exultauit ut gygas ad au
rendam passios ua et ad prem dixit fiat uoluntas tua.   Item te
t factus est sudor eius tamq gutte sanguinis decur/   eodem
tentis in terram Quatuor modz in passione de corpe et san

Summary

Liturgical factors (language, people, ceremonies and institutions) are not likely to decrease their importance for the explanation of earliest drama.

It is so obvious, that no such discussion is any more possible in the search for the sources of vernacular religious poetry. I don't know how many European languages have to point to a Latin liturgical sequence as source of its first poem or carol that was created and performed as vernacular trope needed to accompany the Latin singing.

In Central Europe the Latin Easter sequence *Victimae paschali laudes* gave birth to vernacular tropes in German, Czech, Polish and Hungarian – performed as Easter procession songs parallel to the sequence *Victime paschali laudes*. All of them are reflecting the sequence's words *surrexit Christus* (verse 3b: *Angelicos testes...*), and they share the melody drawn from its beginning verse.

In my paper I want to pay attention to the second part of the *Victime*-sequence:

2b. *Mors et vita duello conflixere mirando,*
Dux vitae mortuus, regnat vivus.

Its content is an extremely compressed Redemption history, echoing or preceding the separate episodes as the Processus-Belial, the Incarnation, Passion and Resurrection of Christ. In the duel between devil and Christ, represented metaphorically by Death and Life we can find the starting point of the long career of narrative and visual genres developed around the character of personified Death, known best from the death dances, but preceded by treatises, short narratives, dialogues and simple dramas showing conversations between Man and Death.

I have identified an early dialogue on the topic of a duel between Life and Death which was embedded in a Latin theological treatise (ca. 1300), and has been adapted into a Middle-Low-German narrative poem, presented as early as 1331 by the poet-translator Tilo of Culm to the Great Master of the German Knights at Marienburg.

The two copies of the treatise that were probably Tilo's source, have been declared lost after 1945, but I discovered another copy of it, maybe closer to the original.

This **eschatological line of allegoresis** is using death as synonym or metaphor of the Satan, and is introducing the Death personification as **Satan's helper** or proxy.

Another line of death allegoresis introduces the Death personification as **servant of God** and engages it/her/him into conversation with man, single as Polycarp,

or divided into different figures representing all sorts of human professions and roles crucial for the social structure (pope, emperor etc.), roles we know from the death dances. Both the particular and the corporative-distributive representations

belong to the great area of the ars moriendi writing.

So different as both death allegories are, they were related to each other so closely, that we can see them as actualizations of **one idea**. If so, they should meet each other at times. And indeed.

The (more human) Death talking to master Polycarp is aware of the episode where she fought with Christ. She admits that he was her only antagonist whom she couldn't fell with her scythe. The killing weapon got chipped only once at that time.

Death refers to the *duellum* of the *Victime Paschali laudes*, not to the evangelic episode of Gethsemane, because she is not mentioned there, only Satan is.