

Article

The Franciscan Undercurrent in Polish Literature as Exemplified by the Works of Józef Wittlin and Roman Brandstaetter

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Abstract: This article discusses the Franciscan theme in Polish literature, which was apparent from the 19th century onwards, and especially towards the end of that century. This trend involves the works of many authors and an enormous variety of texts. Therefore, this article focuses on two writers—Józef Wittlin and Roman Brandstaetter—who clearly inherited the broad Franciscan tradition, and also developed and popularised the Franciscan message. The Franciscan revival in Polish literature was initiated by Protestants, which often meant a departure from the figure of St. Francis established by the Church in favour of an individual understanding and presentation of him. The first Polish centre of the revival of Franciscanism as a literary and cultural formation was Lviv. Józef Wittlin grew up in this environment; moreover, he authored, inter alia, the first Polish unfinished novel about St. Francis Salt of the Earth, which refers to Franciscanism, as well as a number of smaller texts with a Franciscan message. Wittlin was a mentor to Roman Brandstaetter, who, after World War II, became the greatest bard of Assisi and St. Francis in Polish literature. Unlike Wittlin, who was Protestant-inspired, Brandstaetter clearly placed the Assisi saint in a Catholic context. This writer greatly expanded references to Franciscan tradition and art in his work. He wrote essays on Assisi, wrote a drama about St. Francis, and combined Franciscanism with biblical themes, as evidenced by his Jesus of Nazareth tetralogy. Despite their differences, what both writers shared is that the saint from Assisi was neither an object of devotional worship nor an outdated figure, but a representative of ideas and layers of spirituality that had remained fresh for people living in that conflicted era. Although they emphasised other aspects of the Franciscan ethos, they both accepted it as a counterbalance to a cold and indifferent world, an idea for living addressed not only to Christians, but also to people of other faiths and agnostics.

Keywords: Franciscanism; Poland; literature; Józef Wittlin; Roman Brandstaetter



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1. Introduction

This study is part of a wider scope of research, including the religious aspect of Polish literature (collective works). In Poland, there is no shortage of researchers (especially literary scholars) who have broached the subject of the literary sacrum. Here, it is particularly worth mentioning the following scholars from the John Paul II Catholic University of Lublin: Stefan Sawicki (1967, 1978a, 1978b, 1984, 1994), Marian Maciejewski (1991, 1995), and Maria Jasińska-Wojtkowska (1983, 1996, 2003), who pioneered this topic in Poland during the difficult period of communist rule. In the context of the literary sacrum, one of the most extensive and expressive undercurrents is Franciscanism. The Franciscan theme in literature is a rather vague and internally complex issue. Irena Maciejewska (1993a, pp. 302–7) chooses ‘franciszkanizm’ (Franciscanism) as the dictionary entry rather than ‘literatura franciszkańska’ (Franciscan literature). Antoni Bednarek also writes about Franciscanism in literature (Bednarek 1986, pp. 61–73), while Jacek Kolbuszewski mentions the Franciscan theme (Kolbuszewski and Loboż 2010). Literature (and perhaps also the visual arts) is where Franciscanism is particularly manifest. At the same time, it has been subjected to various transformations (which testifies to its power), because it has been

constantly updated and is still referred to today. Its boundaries are fluid yet established, according to the free interpretation of researchers. Maciejewska noticed that Franciscanism, as a quasi-trend in literature, transcends the features of a literary theme, as follows: 'The multi-presence of Saint Francis in twentieth-century literature is one of the clear proofs of how deeply this literature is fused with Christianity, despite its independence from the Church and religion. It also indicates that an important encounter between Christianity and the secular worldview occurred through Franciscanism, and continues to take place.' (Maciejewska 1993a, p. 307). Even these cursory remarks indicate how important, rich, and complex this issue is.

Researchers started to become interested in the topic of Franciscanism in Polish literature from the 1920s (Zahorska 1927; Bielak 1927). By then, a conviction had already emerged that the Franciscanism of a specific work was not determined by the presence of the motif, character, or idea of Francis, but by using them 'creatively,' as manifested in a deeper reflection on his life and spirituality (Bielak 1927). However, it was not until the 1980s that this research gained momentum and significance. The first very general and cross-sectional study on the subject was published over forty years ago (Bednarek and Duchniewski 1982). Subsequently, more detailed work was published later. Of particular note are the short studies on the literary reception of St. Francis (Bednarek 1983, 1986), as well as the spirituality he inspired (Bednarek 1986, 2001, 2004a, 2004b; Cieślak 2001). Researchers have been generally most interested in how Franciscanism came to the fore in the oeuvre of selected writers (Dąbrowski 1980; Maciejewska 1993b; Łuczyńska 1993–1994; Kundzicz 1993; Nguyen 2017; Cieślak 2019; Maciąg 2019; Olech 2019) or in specific works (Olszewska 2004). Attempts were also made to study the phenomenon of Franciscanism in literature in relation to selected literary periods—Baroque (Cieślak 2019) and Romanticism (Birkenmajer 1927; Bednarek 2004b), but especially Young Poland (Maciejewska 1993b; Podraza-Kwiatkowska 1992; Koziej 2013), when Franciscanism first clearly wended its way into the output of many writers. It is also worth noting the attempts at comprehensive (though still far from sufficient) historical overviews of this phenomenon (Kasprzyk 1993; Kolbuszewski and Łoboz 2010).

In the context of the above, the question arises as to whether, among the numerous authors and texts from recent centuries referring to what may be broadly understood as Franciscan themes, it is possible to single out any names and titles that would be manifestly representative of this topic—outstanding examples but relatively universal (going beyond a narrow cultural circle), with considerable social resonance and, finally, worth recommending to contemporary researchers, translators, and readers, and thus corresponding to the sensibilities of someone living in the 21st century. Of course, such a choice is not easy, especially since, in this case, the number of authors and texts is vast (Michlacz 1989). Not wishing to deny the achievements of other writers, I have chosen two outstanding works that have promoted Franciscan ideas and are distinguished, at the same time, for other literary achievements. In the case of Józef Wittlin (1896–1976) and Roman Brandstaetter (1906–1987), they have not only dabbled in a kind of Franciscan theme, but also consciously adopted and developed the Franciscan tradition, while also offering an in-depth reflection on the phenomenon of the life and spirituality of St. Francis of Assisi. When we take into account the times when Wittlin and Brandstaetter lived and worked, they represent the period of peak literary interest in Franciscanism (from the end of the 19th to the end of the 20th century). Therefore, the aim of this article is to explore how Franciscanism functioned in the literature and culture of the times in which they lived and how it fertilised artistic awareness, based on the example of Franciscan texts by both authors. I am interested in writing that which espouses Franciscanism not as a frozen cultural and religious element, but as an important tradition to be preserved, a pretext for considering the problems of the present day. This marks the first concise attempt to describe the sources, development, and specificity of Polish Franciscanism in literature, based on a well-documented hypothesis, and, at the same time, a contribution to a broader

study of this phenomenon, especially in the context of European literature—all the more so because Polish literature is unfamiliar to foreign readers.

2. The Historical Background of Franciscanism in Poland—From the Middle Ages to Young Poland

Polish Beginnings and the French Influence

Polish culture encountered St. Francis with the first Franciscans, who arrived in Wrocław in 1236. For several centuries, Franciscan spirituality and culture in Poland was very poorly received. In the 16th and 17th centuries, minor literary references to him emerged, and ‘a significant artistic inauguration of the motif occurred among the positivist circle.’ (Bednarek 2001, p. 9). This theme came more prominently to the fore in the 19th century. Firstly, St. Francis and Assisi were mentioned in works by A. Mickiewicz, and later by some positivist writers, especially Lucjan Siemieński and Eliza Orzeszkowa (Bednarek 2004a). Also, in Europe in the 19th century, interest in St. Francis grew, especially among rationalist and secular-minded researchers from the Romantic period, such as Joseph Görres, Jules Michelet, Karl von Hase, and Ernest Renan. However, true zeal for Franciscan values would only arrive in the mid-19th century from France. It was there that the book *Les poètes franciscains en Italie au XIIIe siècle* by Antione-Frédéric Ozanam was published in 1852. But the most famous manifestation of these interests was a controversial and influential work in Europe by Paul Sabatier, a student of Renan and a French pastor, entitled *La Vie de Saint François d’Assise*, published in 1894, which would be reissued 45 times over 35 years (Przybyła 2016, pp. 209–13). It presented Saint Francis as a rebel par excellence, a revolutionary, and a great reformer, whose message transcended Catholic doctrine. The book soon found itself on the Index librorum prohibitorum, but this did not thwart the attempts to re-read Poverello’s message. Its author revealed the greatness and grace of Saint Francis and his relationship with art, poetry, and the great painting of the Trecento and Quattrocento. In the saint, he discovered—as the Romantics, such as François-René Chateaubriand, had already noticed—a living source of poetry for an era that, in various ways, turned to exotic and primitive cultures and saw the inspiring role of the Middle Ages.

Sabatier’s work led, inter alia, to the emergence of the so-called ‘Franciscan question,’ a dispute concerning how to interpret the sources of the life and thoughts of St. Francis, their authenticity, and, as a result, the relationship of Franciscanism with the institution of the Church (Nieżgoda 1982). Also of significance were the novels translated into Polish by Johannes Jorgensen—a Danish Protestant who converted to Catholicism (Paczoska 2004, pp. 169–75). Apart from scientific and literary inspirations, an important role in the process of the revival of Franciscanism was played by factors such as the discovery of the relics of St. Francis in 1818, the 700th anniversary of the founding of the order (1909), and the 700th anniversary of his birth and death (celebrated in 1882 and 1926). The latter date in particular inspired many writers who, in their own way, wanted to recapture the message and person of St. Francis. At that time, an ‘authentic, original and unique, systematically growing Franciscan trend in literature emerged in Polish lands, constituting one of the most interesting phenomena in Polish literature, because the influence of other saints and the memory of them did not yield such valuable literary fruits.’ (Kolbuszewski 2010, p. 92).

Franciscanism, as a trend in Polish literature, has existed since at least the end of the 19th century and began to grow in popularity, especially since the end of World War I. It was then that it took on a different face than it had in Romanticism and Young Poland. Initially, the revival of Franciscanism in Polish literature was Protestant-inspired (especially when it comes to the reception of St. Francis), which often meant a departure from this saint’s image as established by the Church, in favour of individual and ‘revisionist’ means of understanding and presenting him. Of relevance too were the editions and translations of medieval texts on Franciscan themes, anniversaries related to St. Francis, and the social actions of Franciscan orders. All of this coincided with a trend for discovering the Middle Ages. The vast majority of Polish writers have made at least modest references to the

Franciscan tradition, and the number of Franciscan-inspired works of various genres runs into the thousands.

The first Polish centre for the revival of Franciscanism as a literary and cultural formation was Lviv. It was there that the scientific and literary version of Franciscanism was shaped. Edward Porebowicz, a professor at the local university and Romanist, published a book entitled *Święty Franciszek z Asyżu* (Porebowicz 1899)—the first Polish monograph on this saint, which would also become an inspiration for writers (Koziej 2013, p. 11). Porebowicz's work was, on the one hand, a transposition of Sabatier's views, and partly those of Ozanam and Heinrich Thode (the author of the book *Franz von Assisi und die Anfänge der Kunst der Renaissance in Italien*, Berlin, 1885), to Polish soil, and on the other hand, a record of the author's own research and an attempt to place St. Francis in the cultural sphere of France and Italy. The interpretation from these countries of St. Francis as a mystic and artist would spark the birth of literary Franciscanism in the late 19th century, in the era of Young Poland (Koziej 2013, p. 67). At that time in Lviv, the literary milieu closely cooperated with university circles (Podraza-Kwiatkowska 1992, p. 24). This is why Porebowicz soon found supporters and followers among his eminent friends and writers (among them were Jan Kasprowicz, Maryla Wolska, the brothers Leopold and Ludwik Staff, Józef Rutter, and Józef Wittlin). It was they—together with the author of the monograph—who introduced Saint Francis into the mainstream of Polish literature in the 20th century, 'secularised' him, and created the most mature literary image of Franciscanism. Thanks to them, the Franciscan approach was universalised in literature, travelled beyond the walls of monasteries, and became a kind of worldview, not specifically religious. The widespread interest in Poverello was also influenced by the translations of *Fioretti*, initially by an anonymous Poor Clare from Lviv (Kraków 1892), followed by Leopold Staff's, a masterful translation (Staff 1910). Literary modernists were, therefore, the actual revivers of Saint Francis.

The Young Poland fascination with St. Francis influenced the artistic circles that emerged after 1918. Historian and essayist Bolesław Cywiński indicated that Franciscanism, alongside Thomism, had an equal influence on the revival of spiritual attitudes as on the relations between tradition and modernity, including between secular and sacred spheres (Cywiński 1971, p. 484). Moreover, it dispersed across many areas of literature, not only in lyric poetry, but also in journalism, essays, travel accounts, etc. (Bednarek 2004a, p. 80). Also characteristic of this period was the heightened awareness of the scale of the phenomenon, which translated into the first attempts at historical and literary overviews (Bielak 1927; Birkenmajer 1927; Brahmer 1927). Writing about the Franciscanism of the time, Antoni Bednarek emphasises that 'the interwar period continued a great deal, but also massively refreshed the subject [...]. However, the essayistic prose of the time achieved a special quality thanks to the deepened relationship between religious and existential reflection [...]. Among the texts from those years, Wittlin stands out, of course, with his insight as a creator of the poetic past and a concern for the present.' (Bednarek 2004a, p. 10).

There were several reasons why Józef Wittlin (1896–1976) and Roman Brandstaetter (1906–1986) were selected from the wide circle of writers interested in Franciscan themes. Firstly, they pioneered this theme in Polish fiction. Wittlin clearly inaugurated the Franciscan trend in literature after World War I, while Brandstaetter was its first and main continuator from 1947 (when he published *Kroniki Asyżu* *The Chronicles of Assisi*). Secondly, this was not a marginal theme for either of them, but one of importance and prominence through their entire oeuvre. It was a topic that they often revisited unconventionally, building their own, original image of St. Francis. Thirdly, both authors did not stop at banal associations. For example, they did not refer to the ecological themes often explored today in connection with St. Francis. They went further, searching for deep layers of spirituality and promoting the relevance of the Franciscan message for the people of the 20th century. Finally—fourthly—they showed the Franciscan heritage in the context of the history and culture of Italy (for Brandstaetter, a 'second home'), the mystery of Assisi, and the nature of

Italy. Their Franciscanism was, therefore, not an artificially isolated phenomenon, but a vibrant and colourful one.

3. Józef Wittlin—Franciscanism as a Legacy of War and Exploration of Italy

3.1. Attempt to Write the First Novel about St. Francis

Józef Wittlin came from Lviv, the main Polish hub of Franciscan ideals at the beginning of the 20th century. The beginnings of his reflections on the relationship between art and religion, and especially the responsibility of artists to communicate the content of faith, date back to the 1920s. He wrote about this in his article *Homer, the Bible and St. Francis*. First noting the contemporary world's loss of sensitivity to the spiritual dimension (mainly among the intelligentsia), he concluded the following: 'therefore today [...] we must arouse religious awe by means of art.' (Wittlin 1921). The fascination with the Saint of Assisi was a permanent element of the writer's identity from the very start of his literary journey. Although Wittlin was an unbaptised Jew at the time, the person and message of the Saint of Assisi quickly became a permanent part of his biography and work. Perhaps it is with some surprise that we read today the confession that this twenty-five-year-old writer, working on his first translation of the *Odyssey*, wrote in a letter to Dr. Kazimiera Żuławska—a Romance language expert and friend of young artists, stating the following:

'I am currently weighing up whether, after finishing the Odyssey and a few smaller pieces, I should convert and actually join the Franciscans. I would like to become a preacher. I have a calling for it. I feel that I could change something in the world, not with books, but through living words and good, albeit ruthless, deeds. To preach truths from mouth to mouth, fruitful and unique, even if they might be unpleasant. This shall be settled shortly.' (Wittlin 1996¹)

Wittlin's Franciscan attitude was also confirmed by people who knew him before the war. Julian Tuwim wrote about him somewhat ironically, but warmly, to Antoni Słonimski on 28 November 1941 from New York, as follows:

'As for Joe [...] relations are quite casual. Besides, he lives outside the city, which is why we rarely see each other. However, I like him very much and I think he is a great writer, although I am a bit embarrassed by the "Europeanness" he cultivates (as a program) [...]. He raises his eyes and begs St. Francis for culture.' (Tuwim 1979)

The writer's daughter, Elżbieta Wittlin-Lipton, recalled her father as follows:

'My father always wanted to live like St. Francis. He was quiet and modest. He prayed to him often and tried to introduce his ideas to his daily life. He traveled to Assisi many times, and even stayed there with monks, to better understand the life of his spiritual master. [...] In addition, there was a great similarity in appearance between my father and St. Francis, as immortalised by Giotto, but that is where the similarity ends. More than this likeness, I see my father's admiration for the Saint's attitude. This was highlighted in several of his poems: Saint Francis and the Poor Jews, The Pain of the Tree. ...' (Wittlin-Lipton 2005)

Many references to St. Francis may be found in Wittlin's texts dating back to the early 1920s. The writer's attempts to investigate this character are continually evident. He sought different perspectives from which to understand him. For example, in 1922, in the introduction to the *Odyssey* that he translated, he presented St. Francis as the one who unites the Greek and Christian traditions. In his opinion, in the person of St. Francis, only once in history '[...] did Christian love kiss Hellenic beauty in broad daylight. [...] At that time, the sun shone, and the blue of Greece filled the gloomy darkness of the Middle Ages and the ecstasy of mortification [...]. St. Francis was the last Greek and man of the Gospel in one. He alone is still conceived in the spirit of the great religious epic.' (Wittlin 1924).

Moreover, 'for Wittlin, Saint Francis is [...] a kind of gateway to Christianity and the sacralisation of humanity.' (Maciejewska 1997, p. 47). The writer's attitude towards Poverello fell within the diverse mosaic of literary representations of this character at that

time. Jerzy Liebert noticed as much in a letter to Agnieszka, as follows: ‘I attended Wittlin’s evening about Saint Francis. What he said about Saint Francis was very beautiful, but it was not Francis . . . Many things marginalise Francis, pulls him out from under the vault of the Catholic Church and creates a character of his own.’ (Liebert 1976, p. 287). Wittlin was greatly influenced by P. Sabatier, E. Porebowicz, and L. Staff. In 1925, he went to Italy for a year to work on the first Polish novel about Saint Francis. Although he did not manage to finish it, he published a number of excerpts. The author’s concept was to attempt to describe Saint Francis primarily as one of the heroes of the Middle Ages, and, at the same time, to usher him into the modern era, to show his relevance to the people of the 20th century.

The writer’s biggest problem was how to represent Francis’s sanctity, which is why this theme is almost absent in the published excerpts of the novel. The literary account ends with St. Francis setting off to preach the Gospel (which, a year later, would result in his first *Rule* and Innocent III’s approval of his work). Although Wittlin relied on the Franciscan sources known at the time, he adopted a significantly different principle of work. He did not wish to present the events in such a way as to focus the reader on Francis’s actions and experiences, nor did he strive to select episodes that might constitute a model for action or arouse admiration for their extraordinariness. Instead, he attempted to illustrate the contextual richness of the subject by broadening the historical perspective, referring to the customs of the Middle Ages, and examining the motives behind Francis’s decisions from a psychological, family, and social perspective. When he used sources, he did so mainly to develop the epic background of a specific episode. As a result, despite the layer of religious references, we encounter Francis as a person who acted in the spirit of heroic humanism, whose holiness was rather that of a man individually rebelling against social evil and acting with love and service towards those who had been humiliated by this evil. Wittlin refrains from commenting on or even expanding upon the descriptions that are supposed to familiarise the reader with the essence of St. Francis’s bond with God. This is not a spiritual biography, but a historical one.

3.2. *Salt of the Earth: The Saga of the Patient Soldier — A Franciscan Novel*

Wittlin’s novel about St. Francis remained unfinished. In the 1920s, this Jew, although sympathetic towards Christianity and Franciscanism, did not want to be baptised at that time (however, he would eventually do so in 1953 in New York), so as not to distance himself from the Jews, who sometimes found themselves in an awkward situation as a national and religious minority. Undoubtedly, however, over the years, he had become more and more familiar with Christianity—and, therefore, with Franciscanism too—as resounds in his other famous novel, *Sól ziem. Powieść o cierpliwym piechurze* [*The Salt of the Earth. The Saga of the Patient Foot Soldier*] (Wittlin 1936), which was even nominated for the Nobel Prize (incidentally, the writer did not finish his work this time either, stopping at the first volume, although it was supposed to be a trilogy). The Franciscan nature of this book is not at all reliant on the introduction of the hero—simpleton Piotr Niewiadomski, who indeed has nothing in common with the Saint of Assisi (the truth is that such a thesis was promoted too hastily by some researchers who had not sufficiently explored the content of this text). Niewiadomski is, in many respects, the negation of St. Francis. Nevertheless, the novel is profoundly imbued with the Franciscan message. This results from the perspective adopted from the beginning by the narrator, who sees the world from the point of view of the little people, the outcasts, and the marginalised. They are mentioned in the very first sentences of the work, just before the famous description of Emperor Franz Joseph signing the war declaration. They too, not their leaders or superiors, are the heroes of the work, as follows:

‘My brother is a simple man. My brothers are simple people: hairdressers, shoemakers, railwaymen, tram conductors, foundry workers in huge iron foundries, office hands, waiters, peasants. Peasants.

My sister is a simple woman. They are all like that: simple and talkative. Vendors, ironers, modistes, seamstresses, "girls for all jobs", wet nurses for children, better off than mine.' (Wittlin 1991, p. 4)

Such people—simple, insignificant, and largely flawed—fill almost the entire novel; in addition, from the perspective of their difficult fate and tragic experiences, the author tells the story of the first month of the war. Thus, construing the world in this way, the writer is able to speak on behalf of the poorest and through their voice—a true ‘poor cousin’ who has descended to the level of people deprived not only of material goods, but also of human dignity, to describe their fate and stand by their side. Kazimierz Wierzyński noted a valid remark in relation to the main protagonist, as follows: ‘In this human microcosm, Wittlin placed his compassion for human misery. This beautiful novel is a defence of Niewiadomski, in whom resides the last remnants of a human being, and it is this minimum of humanity that Wittlin defends against all the powers of the world [. . .]’ (Wierzyński 1991, p. 150).

There is, however, an even more profound Franciscan dimension to this work. This concerns the beginnings of World War I, when the wheels of the great machine of death and destruction slowly start turning. However, there are no battlefield descriptions. The subject matter is shifted to preparations for war, especially the mobilisation and training of recruits. Piotr Niewiadomski is not just a simpleton. This character has a deeper meaning. He is there to unmask the ‘culture of reason,’ the ideologies that threaten man. It is no coincidence that one day war intrudes upon his world as an act of Satan and a kind of celebration of the sacrifice offered up to him. There is something demonic about the sounds, orders, procedures, regulations, troop movements, and commanders. Wiktor Weintraub noticed that ‘the novel is written in a language that plays with different meanings, turning the events it presents as a great metaphor for a world where the forces of evil have come to fight the forces of good.’ The same researcher goes on to say the following: ‘War is judged here from the position of a religious man and is condemned as a negation of the world of Christian concepts, as the kingdom of the Antichrist. It is not condemned directly, but in the author’s judgments, thanks to a specific strategy of artistic language that constantly plays with religious allusions.’ (Weintraub 1977). The novel reveals the hidden, spiritual dimension of armed conflict and, on the other hand, the evangelical foundations of peace, which should lead to the construction of a new civilisation to replace the structures shaped by greed, hatred, exploitation and enslavement. Here, it comes close to the Franciscan slogan of ‘peace and goodness.’ It is no coincidence that Herling-Grudziński stated that ‘when one writes about the *Salt of the Earth*, one should take the excellent essay by Simone Weil *L’Iliade ou le poème de la force* as a springboard and model: war, peace and the Greek soul—war, peace and the Christian soul.’ (Herling-Grudziński 1980, p. 159).

3.3. *An Essay on Saint Margaret of Cortona*

Much of Wittlin’s pre-war work can be interpreted in the Franciscan spirit, but his sensitivity to the Franciscan message is also demonstrated by what he published when he settled in America as an immigrant in 1941. The essays he wrote at that time reveal him as an author who, while speaking on many topics, remained close to the Franciscan spirit through a compassion for the wronged and the weak; a love of peace and brotherhood between people, joy, and humour; and, finally, a fascination with art that sprang from Franciscan inspiration. In the years 1962–1975, the writer spent his holidays in Europe (especially Italy) almost every year, and it is no coincidence that his travels usually included Cortona, a small town in Tuscany, halfway between Florence and Rome, featuring a sanctuary of Saint Margaret, a Franciscan saint from the 13th century. Cortona became a symbolic city for Wittlin, where he returned to and drew inspiration for his work, while New York was, for him, the very opposite of the places where St. Francis and his followers stayed (Zajackowski 2012, p. 161). His excellent 1972 essay *Cortona, Luca Signorelli and Saint Margaret of Cortona*, written during his final stay in this medieval town teeming with numerous monuments and unique frescoes and mosaics, marks the blossoming of his Franciscan interests. This work is an apology for the great Italian art of the Middle

Ages and the Renaissance and Franciscan spirituality. In his alternate ending, ‘the Italian mystical land is contrasted with American pragmatism and the sceptical coldness that is invading the regions of faith’ (Ligeza 2014, p. 184), symbolised by the modern but cold and prayer-unfriendly new church in New York dedicated to St. Margaret of Cortona.

The writer’s numerous unknown notes preserved in his archives form a kind of commentary on *Cortona, Luca Signorelli and Saint Margaret of Cortona*. They offer a deeper insight into the saint, also illustrating the broader horizons of Christian spirituality while aiming to highlight the mystery of the cross. The case of Saint Margaret of Cortona underscores the universal issue of the world’s encounter with holiness. In the author’s notes made before the writing the work itself, the teachings of mystics such as Saint John of the Cross clearly resonate. It is worth mentioning at least one passage, underlined in red, as follows: ‘The alleged madness of the saints stems from [...] the fact that they are in Someone else; they breathe and move in an infinite essence.’ (Wittlin 1962–1970, p. 63). In another note, Wittlin wrote the following: ‘God nourishes, absorbs, occupies and finally possesses this soul emptied of all that is not Him.’ (Wittlin 1962–1970, p. 66). This is a very short description of the transforming union, described by St. John of the Cross in *Cantio espiritual* (Spiritual Canticle), and more recently by Thomas Merton in *The Ascent to Truth* (Merton 1951) or *The Climate of Monastic Prayer* (Merton 1969). There is no doubt that while writing the essay on St. Margaret of Cortona, Wittlin was able to once again (this time successfully) think through the issue of holiness, something that he was unable to deal with in the novel about St. Francis written in the 1920s. Here, the writer’s interest in profound spirituality and Christian mysticism came to the fore once again. His archival notes also provide an answer (at least in part) as to why he so persistently referred to St. Francis throughout his life. In his notes, he emphasised, for example, the tremendous value of Franciscanism in terms of awakening authentic religious attitudes, as well as an inspiration to create art. It is worth recalling this unknown text, which carries not only a certain observation and opinion, but also reveals something about the writer’s attitude, as follows:

‘Dryness of heart is not an official sin, but who knows whether it is not precisely this that is the source of many serious and mortal sins. We are ashamed of feelings, especially good ones, we hide them not only from other people, but from ourselves [...]. I become righteous thanks to religion and holiness. [...] André Malraux assumes that art came first, and only then religion. [...] The greatest influence on the development of religious feelings in Europe was exerted by Franciscanism, and art grew from it. [...] Malraux claims that Giotto restored the smile to medieval painting, a smile that Byzantine art does not have. Giotto replaced the symbolic gesture with a dramatic gesture.’ (Wittlin 1935–1975)

Thoughts on faith, Christianity, and the Church are enormously dynamic in the writer’s archival notebooks. He does not hesitate to formulate statements such as ‘The highest rank, the highest distinction that a person can achieve is holiness.’ Another time, he asks a potential reader the following question: ‘You decide: either you are a Christian or a person who worries that you have to fail in life.’ For Wittlin, cordial interpersonal relations were a crucial determinant of religious attitude. Hence the conviction, recurring in his reflections, about the importance of ‘Christian imagination sympathetic to one’s neighbour.’ In Wittlin’s case, the emphasis on human feelings and the authenticity of religious attitude was connected to his exile in the United States, where he noticed coldness, indifference, and superficiality in interpersonal relations. That is why he left many critical remarks in his notebooks about this country, where he saw ‘pure, healthy paganism and a pagan world materialised.’ It is, therefore, not surprising that the writer made such a bitter observation about America, as follows: ‘In no other country—that I know of—is there so much talk about God, religion, Christianity, and in no other is there so little God, religion, and Christianity.’ This explains why, *inter alia*, Wittlin so seriously treated the spirit of radicalism or even Christian heroism. Much can be said about the writer’s attitude, for example, in the following note: ‘I was lukewarm and I will be spat out. The stigmata of

St. Francis. Can I cope?’ (Wittlin 1941–1975). The first sentence is of course a personal commentary on the Apocalypse of St. John 3:15–16, while the second refers to the model of heroic Christian attitude associated with St. Francis and with the internalisation of the mystery of the cross. Wittlin took the entire realism of the cross and the radicalism of living the Gospel from St. Francis. His notes record the liberation of man from the tyranny of a small and fragile personality by walking the path of trust and grace. Following the example of St. Francis, the writer values the mystical aspect of Christianity (rather than merely ethical categories), so as not to squander the radicalism of the Gospel. The motif of the stigmata (related to the motif of the cross) underlines man’s own complicity in evil, and not moral superiority. It also teaches how to resist hatred without introducing it ourselves and how to oppose evil without transforming into evil. It is also a testimony to the victorious fight against the old consciousness and a change in the perception of the world.

4. Roman Brandstaetter and the Post-War Version of Franciscanism

4.1. Franciscan Continuity and Innovation

In 1925, Józef Wittlin met Roman Brandstaetter for the first time, when Wittlin briefly returned to Poland, interrupting his year-long stay in Italy, a country that fascinated him, especially Assisi and places associated with where St. Francis stayed. As a well-known writer and translator of the *Odyssey*, he had a considerable influence on Brandstaetter—a young, budding poet at that time. The next meetings between the two writers certainly occurred in the interwar period in Warsaw. Although they were somewhat related and both were of Jewish origin, they differed significantly in terms of their views and interests. Wittlin was a sober intellectual. He was more inclined towards the *renouveau catholique* and pacifism combined with Christianity. Brandstaetter, on the other hand, had adopted the attitude of a staunch Zionist. He was one of the most famous and active Polish Jewish poets (Zajczkowski 2001, pp. 171–88). From the 1930s, he published poems on Zionist themes, as well as over three hundred articles in which he promoted Jewish culture and fought anti-Semitism. Their wartime fates also took a completely different turn. Wittlin emigrated to the United States, while Brandstaetter headed to Palestine, where he experienced a spiritual breakthrough. After the war, they did not manage to meet, but, for a quarter of a century, they remained in correspondence. This began in the late 1950s and is largely evidence of their fascination with Franciscanism. Wittlin maintained that he ‘played a key role in laying the groundwork for Roman Brandstaetter’s conversion, because he once persuaded him to visit Assisi.’ (Kubiak 1991). In turn, Brandstaetter mentioned his debt of gratitude to his older colleague for his literary and spiritual initiations. This is what he wrote to him on 12 January 1960:

‘Dear Sir, letters from you offer me great joy, not only because they come “from an older brother in Assisi”, but also because this brother is you. After all, your fragment about St. Francis, printed many years ago in “Skamander”, made such a great impression on me that I began to take an interest in the Poor Man. [...] Then life took other turns. Finally, St. Francis returned to me in Jerusalem, during the war, at a very difficult time for me, when all the values in myself and around me were going bankrupt. This was in 1945, on an autumn night. The shock was forceful, although at that time I was not aware of all the further consequences. In December 1946, on Christmas Eve, I was baptised in Rome, in the Pauline Fathers’ Church, by an exceptionally wise and noble priest. One of my names is also Francis.’ (Zajczkowski 2012, p. 161).

Looking back today at the period from the end of World War II to the conclusion of the 1980s, it is clear that Franciscan themes had an insignificant presence in Polish literature. Two works by Ewa Szelburg-Zarembina (1961) are worthy of note, as follows: *Zakochany w miłości* (Loved in Love 1961), about the author’s impressions from her stay in Assisi, along with a presentation of the figure of St. Francis; and *Imię jej Klara* (Her Name Clare, 1964)—a story about St. Clare. In 1976, the book *Brat Słońca. Anthologia polskiej poezji o św. Franciszku z Assisi* (Brother of the Sun: An Anthology of Polish Poetry on St. Francis of Assisi) was also published. Therefore, the body of work is small, especially when compared to the number

of scientific and ascetic works devoted to St. Francis. What does this mean? It is certainly evidence that it is not easy to create an original, literary image of St. Francis. In addition, in post-war Poland, this was a troublesome topic for publishers because literature on religious themes was often marginalised. There were also no writers who could have tackled this topic out of passion and conviction (rather than merely being commissioned to write). This is all the more reason to appreciate Brandstaetter's effort and determination in deciding to take on what was a difficult and unpopular subject at that time.

Along with Brandstaetter, a new period began in the history of the St. Francis motif in Polish post-war literature. The writer became an ardent promoter of the spirituality of Assisi. He first went there with his wife during their honeymoon during Christmas 1946, less than two weeks after his baptism. The fruits of this visit, as well as subsequent ones, include the *St. Francis Theatre* drama (1948), several poems, and the following three prose texts that form a kind of 'Assisi trilogy': *Travelogue. All memoirs. Notes from our two stays in Assisi 1946 and 1947* (unpublished), *Kroniki Asyżu [The Chronicles of Assisi]* (1947), and *Inne kwiatki świętego Franciszka z Asyżu [The Other Little Flowers of Saint Francis of Assisi]* (1976) (Zajączkowski 2003). A separate area of Franciscan references is occupied by the *Jezus z Nazarethu [Jesus of Nazareth]* tetralogy (1967–1973).

4.2. Essays on Assisi and St. Francis

The inspirations and ideas that emerged embryonically in Wittlin found rich continuation in Brandstaetter. In his reception of Franciscanism, he went much further than his older friend. The task he set himself was contained in the following question: 'How to explain to some people, deprived of inner sight, that events with biblical content are taking place before their very eyes?' (Brandstaetter 1981, p. 334). Therefore, Brandstaetter did not confine himself to history, but attempted to include Assisi and St. Francis in the biblical and contemporary context. Let us begin with Assisi. According to Brandstaetter, this Umbrian town is essentially set in landscapes derived from the Bible and expounds the core of the Christian message. 'Everything here is evangelical,' the author notes in his travelogue and marks this sentence with a red dot. In the *Chronicles of Assisi*, he adds that it is simply 'the most evangelical city in the world.' (Brandstaetter 1981, p. 21). Here, 'for the second time in the history of the world, the Gospel was incarnated in its purest form of spirit. That is why the valleys, hills and olive groves of Umbria are like open pages of the Gospel, illuminated by the sun, greenery and weather. The fields, the roar of the streams, the dignity of the pine trees, the darkness of the forests can be read like an inspired verse of the Gospel.' (Brandstaetter 1946–1947). According to Brandstaetter, Assisi and its surroundings concentrate the truth about God and evoke the land of Jesus. That is why the topography of the Italian town described in the *Chronicles of Assisi* was woven from biblical references.

Umbria seems to be a fragment of the Holy Land. The Fonte Colombo Mountain, where St. Francis established the rule for his order, evokes the Sinai, while the nature of La Verna with the chapel of the stigmata recalls the landscape of Jerusalem. Moreover, Jerusalem and Assisi complement and explain each other, because 'God came to Assisi from Jerusalem. He came to find and know his majesty [. . .]. In Assisi, God repeated himself—the Gospel repeated itself—and God rose organically in Assisi.' (Brandstaetter 1946–1947). It is no wonder that, in the descriptions of Assisi, the combination of light, music, and architecture constructs a grand metaphor of the divinity that imbues this place. Almost everything here reveals its metaphysical base. What strikes and delights the narrator the most initially is the city's architecture, but assessed not only through an urban lens. The birthplace of St. Francis is above all a world of spiritual matter. In the *Chronicles of Assisi*, architecture and nature are consistently described in sacred terms. For example, when speaking about the Assisi sky, the narrator triggers far-reaching associations. The 'Franciscan azure' becomes an emanation of 'invisible divinity,' a 'Jacob's ladder' that leads to the stars, and a 'basilica of the holy heaven.' In addition to architecture and nature, in Brandstaetter's quest for the truth about Poverello run themes of music and painting. While

the latter reigns supreme in the churches, music is omnipresent in Assisi and encapsulates the melodic nature of Italy.

The compositional axis of the narrative in the Assisi Chronicles is a journey to places particularly present in Poverello's life. Like Assisi, the saint who grew up there is, according to Brandstaetter, archaically biblical. This is how he interprets the frescoes from the Basilica of St. Francis by Giotto, Lorenzetti, Martini, and Ciamabue. Giotto in particular is a great teacher of the Gospel. The writer perceives the frescoes by this Italian master as not so much a masterpiece of painting, but a commentary on Poverello's spiritual attitude. Brandstaetter, when speaking about the saint from Assisi, constantly refers to the Bible—both the Old and the New Testament. He interprets the entire life of the saint in terms of 'Jacob's wrestle with the Angel,' and discovering the secrets of his life means accepting the richness of the Bible and faith, because 'St. Francis's struggle sometimes took the form of dramatic tussles for the possession of God, for the purpose and meaning of existence.' (Brandstaetter 1981, p. 184). The writer understands the journey in Poverello's footsteps as following Jesus and the apostles. That is why he is 'surprised' that this great follower of Christ was not among the heroes of the Good News. Of course, Brandstaetter can hardly be suspected of searching for St. Francis among the pages of the Gospel. However, if the quote is to be taken seriously, it should be understood as an expression of the conviction of the special rapport between Poverello and Christ. Brandstaetter does not doubt that the charm and spirituality of the saint is timeless and contributes to the teaching of the Gospel. For him, the Holy Scripture is a book that is a record of a mere fragment of the history of salvation, which includes people of different times and nations. The Saint of Assisi has a privileged place therein as one in whose life 'everything [...] played out in biblical terms, where evil often mysteriously leads to good; good encounters obstacles, but suddenly they turn out to be convenient bridges connecting shores brought closer.' (Brandstaetter 1981, p. 203).

4.3. St. Francis in Theatre

During his first stay in Assisi, Brandstaetter decided to write a drama about St. Francis. This work, written in 1948, marked an attempt by the writer to establish himself on the stages of Polish theatres with religious and 'mystical' art, which turned out to be impossible in a country ruled by Stalinists. The protagonist of *The Theatre of St. Francis* is an actor making his theatre debut in the role of St. Francis. Unexpectedly, during a performance on stage, he hears Christ's call, as follows: 'Francis, I tell you, go and repair my house. You see that it is falling to pieces.' (Brandstaetter 1958, p. 106). The artist perceived these words as addressed personally to himself, from God, although in fact they were spoken by an old actor, who at that moment was playing the role of his life (which is why the work was initially entitled *Miracle in the Theatre*). From that moment on, the life of the main character underwent a complete revaluation. He set out to preach the Gospel to the people of his city. There, however, he would learn a bitter lesson regarding the resistance that the Gospel encountered. He gathered a group of supporters, but there was also no shortage of those who wished to instrumentalise or thwart his activity. The actor's decision meant abandoning familiar surroundings to embrace an uncertain fate—one subject to harassment.

In a sense, the actor began to repeat the story of the saint from Assisi. He was considered mentally ill, ended up in prison, accepted utter poverty, showed a will to come to others' spiritual and material aid, and so became extremely effective in his apostolic work. The world to which the actor feels sent is based on the following myths: ideological (world-view and religion), political (perpetuating unjust social relations), economic (proclaiming the primacy of economics and success), commercial (the extraordinary effectiveness of advertised products), and, finally, scientific (proclaiming the superiority of science over religion or excluding the existence of immaterial reality). The actor's mission is far-reaching since he, together with his companions, seeks to step out into the world to 'help rebuild people's homes and hearts.' (Brandstaetter 1958, p. 24). It is certainly not only a question of giving people a roof over their heads. After all, his goal is to rebuild spirituality and interpersonal bonds. The actor confesses his life credo to the entire theatre group, as fol-

lows: ‘I’ve understood that it is not enough to play Saint Francis on the stage, but that in real life, on the world’s stage, I must embody his idea [. . .]. I knew that this moment would come—only I didn’t know when and where—when the voice that had matured yet remained silent in me for so long would be revealed. [. . .] Oh, brothers, let’s not forget that the true and wise reality of earth exists only when the reality of heaven hovers above it.’ (Brandstaetter 1958, p. 25).

The *Theatre of Saint Francis* cannot be reduced to a stage anecdote. Instead, it is a parable about vocation and a Christian life, about the essence of God’s calling as something that will always transcend man’s earthly horizons and cannot be reconciled with human tastes, with petty plans and with limited possibilities, which only serve to narrow God’s vision. Brandstaetter’s drama about Saint Francis is a parable about a person and a culture whose value is ultimately measured by free adherence to the word as heard, and not by narcissistic delight in one’s own truth. The spirituality of the exit and the path prevails in the work over people’s closed hearts and egoism.

4.4. Continuity of the Medieval Franciscan Model in Contemporary Times

Almost thirty years after the publication of the aforementioned drama, *The Other Little Flowers of Saint Francis of Assisi* was published. Throughout this time, the writer had retained his fascination with Assisi and Saint Francis. When circumstances allowed, Brandstaetter decided to write a work that would testify to the relevance of Saint Francis’s attitude and teachings for modern times. This text is a series of stories reminiscent of the most famous work written around 1330 under the influence of Franciscanism, *The Little Flowers of Saint Francis of Assisi*, which is a testimony to the life led by the first brothers, revealing Franciscanism at its sources, experienced daily in word and silence, in gestures, and in anecdotes. It is not a biography of the first Franciscans, but rather a collection of examples testifying to the truest attitudes and spiritual aspirations of the sons of Saint Francis and himself. At the same time, it is an unfinished work, to which new chapters can be added continuously—until the present day.

Brandstaetter’s text—like the medieval model that it refers to—is characterised by the simplicity of form, including elements of colloquial language and humour, and drawing on similar vignettes from the lives of the saint and his companions. From a formal perspective, *Other Little Flowers* is a paraphrase, or a type of reworking, of an authoritative text. There are many types of references to the original within it. Sometimes—albeit rather rarely—the writer takes an anecdote from the medieval work, which he then reworks in a more literary style (for example, in the *Instructive Story of a Severed Pig’s Leg*). Other times—much more often—he rehashes motifs taken from the original (for example, in *On a Miracle That Wasn’t There*). Finally, a large, and certainly the most original group of *Other Little Flowers* are those penned by the author himself and attempt to look at Saint Francis and Franciscanism from the perspective of modernity (for example, the following micro-essays: *St. Francis experiences Father Irenaeus*, *How Brother Egidius experienced perfect joy*, and *Where Satan does not dwell*). In this type of story, St. Francis himself appears and provides answers to questions that trouble people in the contemporary world, such as about the nature of humility, poverty, happiness, helping the poor, joy, suffering, a lack of time, or victory over Satan. In this sense, *Other Little Flowers* resembles St. Francis’s sermons, whose aim—as the writer notes—was the ‘practical application of the principles of the Gospel.’ (Brandstaetter 1981, p. 149).

Brandstaetter does not argue with the *Little Flowers*, but complements them. Characteristically, this work bridges the past and the present. From this perspective, the present confirms the truth of the past, and the past is the starting point for reflection on the Christian revival of modernity. Franciscanism is shown here as a reality that constantly strives for completion. The saint enters the current world, with our problems and questions, measures the current times with his ethical radicalism, and demonstrates the reality of his message in relation to a completely different era, with its politics, customs, and culture. In *Other Little Flowers*, a reflection on how Franciscan ideas are alive and well among the people of the

20th century and how the same models of behaviour repeat themselves in ever-different conventions returns time and again. In the medieval work, he searches for the truth about Poverello, and, at the same time, creates a further, modernised continuation of his legend. He is constantly animated by the desire to create a spiritual biography of St. Francis, which would also appeal to contemporary people. The deliberate anachronism of dropping St. Francis into the realities of the second half of the 20th century resembles the method of depiction used in Giotto's frescoes. The work can, therefore, be considered a literary version of the history depicted in the paintings of the Italian master.

4.5. Christ or St. Francis—A Novel Icon

Profoundly embedded in the logic of Brandstaetter's work is a desire for a chronologically closer, tangible, and pictorial presentation of biblical events. The culmination of these aspirations was his famous tetralogy *Jesus of Nazareth*, published between 1967 and 1973. In the world presented here, the writer successfully combines a broad knowledge of ancient history and Jewish customs, the Bible, Judaism, and Christianity. His goal was to regain Jesus in a broad historical, cultural, and theological dimension. The tetralogy is not so much an account of the life of Jesus, but a contemplation of him as a person, in order to perceive him as the one who introduces people to the experience of God. In his book *Jesus by Roman Brandstaetter*, devoted entirely to the writer's greatest work, Paweł Kochaniewicz expertly demonstrates that Christ, as created in this opus, is based on numerous references to early Franciscan sources (e.g., *The Mirror of Perfection*, the *First Life of St. Francis of Assisi* by Thomas of Celano, or the *Lesser Life of St. Francis of Assisi* by St. Bonaventure) and to Franciscan iconography (frescoes, paintings, stained glass windows, mosaics, and sculptures depicting St. Francis), but the 'Franciscanisation' of Jesus 'belongs to the literary rhetoric of expressing the invisible in this work.' (Kochaniewicz 2010, p. 131).

The cultural modelling of Jesus based on the early writings and biographies of St. Francis and the work of artists from the Franciscan culture should be considered a highly original and bold artistic idea. Incidentally, such an approach bares similarities to certain artists, such as Ciamabue or Giotto. The latter, in particular, updated the Bible and transposed it onto the times of St. Francis. In turn, Brandstaetter transports St. Francis to biblical times and makes him an icon of Christ. However, both cases present a parallel between Jesus and Francis. The Polish writer attempts to embody Christ in the person of St. Francis. By means of cultural images and the artistic canon, the writer lends his work a theophanic flavour. According to Kochaniewicz, the memory of events, phenomena, and characters mentioned in the work are preserved in the work. 'Brandstaetter the narrator perceives reality according to the model constituted by cultural texts [. . .]. Therefore, the writings of the "greatest of saints"—St. Francis—and his biographies in the literary reworking of the Gospel could be taken as more trustworthy than the material testimonies of the Palestinian land or the scientifically developed vision of New Testament events.' (Kochaniewicz 2010, p. 138). In turn, the writer took the human features of Jesus from St. Francis through Franciscan literature and art (Kochaniewicz 2010, p. 165). In this way, the writer filled the 'gap' mentioned in *The Chronicles of Assisi*, being the absence of St. Francis throughout the pages of the Gospel. In this way, the character of Jesus (as well as St. Joseph!) became more tangible and the work took on the characteristics of an icon. Brandstaetter's *Jesus of Nazareth* is not only a story about Jesus based on the content of the Gospel, but also with reference to the iconographic tradition, especially to the iconography of St. Francis. The aim of Brandstaetter's tetralogy is not so much to present the biography of Jesus, but rather to reveal him. An icon is a pictorial text of the Holy Scriptures.

Brandstaetter did not find himself in the communist authorities' favour, because he refused to legitimise them with his work (for example, he did not agree to a proposal from the Stalinist period to write a drama about Lenin, for which he would have received a former German villa in Szczecin). The Assisi Chronicles were to be scrapped in 1953. The staging of his dramas in state theatres in Poland was obstructed (although his plays were performed abroad), and his work was also overlooked in silence. The vast majority of the

writer's texts were published by the Catholic PAX Publishing House, which was tolerated by the communist authorities. However, due to restrictions in the allocation of paper, the books only had a limited print run. In addition, he often had problems with censorship. He also found it difficult to obtain a passport, which is why he rarely travelled to his favourite places, which he regarded as a spiritual asylum and inspiration for writing (especially Italy, which he considered his 'second home'). Despite this, he was known and read in Poland and abroad, especially by the Catholic intelligentsia. Amateur theatres performed his plays (although not always successfully), usually in community centres or church halls. However, the church authorities did not agree to his Bible translations being included in the liturgy (even in the breviary).

5. Conclusions

Józef Wittlin grew up in Lviv, and from his youth he took a personal interest in St. Francis and his message and gave literary expression to it. As the author of the first, albeit unfinished, novel about St. Francis and *Salt of the Earth* referring to Franciscanism, Wittlin is rightly considered to be Roman Brandstaetter's mentor, because he piqued his interest in Franciscan themes and encouraged him to visit Assisi. After 1945, Brandstaetter became the greatest bard of Assisi and St. Francis in Polish literature—both as a person and in terms of spirituality. While Wittlin had succumbed to the Protestant influences fashionable in the interwar period in his reception of St. Francis, Brandstaetter clearly placed the Assisi saint in a Catholic context. This writer also greatly expanded his references to Franciscan tradition and art in his work, combining them with biblical themes, as best demonstrated by his tetralogy *Jesus of Nazareth*. Despite their differences, what both writers did have in common was that they not only inherited the Franciscan tradition in Polish literature, but also developed and popularised it. Both authors took the message from Assisi as a measure of life attitudes and an unwavering source of creative inspiration. For them, the Saint of Assisi was neither an object of devotional worship, nor an outdated figure, but a representative of ideas and layers of spirituality that had retained their relevance for people living in a modern, technological, and conflicted era. Both of them, although they emphasised different aspects of the Franciscan ethos, accepted it as a counterbalance to a cold and indifferent world and strove to illustrate how Franciscan ideas could still be appealing today, not only among Christians, but also among non-Christians and agnostics.

Józef Wittlin and Roman Brandstaetter are the writers who made the largest contribution to the promotion of Franciscanism in Polish literature of the 20th century, and who also made it their artistic manifesto. For them, the message from Assisi was a measure of their attitudes to life and an unwavering source of inspiration. They inherited and, at the same time, developed an interest in St. Francis, which had been present in Europe, especially since the 19th century. They considered him to be neither an object of devotional worship, nor an outdated figure, but a representative of ideas and aspects of spirituality that had retained relevance for people in a technological and conflicted era. Both adopted the Franciscan ethos as a counterweight to a cold and indifferent world. They had much in common, but they also set different paths for shaping the Franciscan tradition.

Wittlin developed an interest in St. Francis and his message while still a follower of Judaism. At that time, he could have been mainly influenced by the Protestant reception of St. Francis. Franciscanism was pioneered by Paul Sabatier, the author of *La Vie de St Francois d'Assise* (The Life of St Francis of Assisi), published in French in 1894 and well known in Europe. Ewa Paczoska noticed that 'Sabatier (in the original, as well as through the Polish version by Edward Porebowicz published in Warsaw in 1899) was read by many writers from the generation of positivists and modernists.' (Paczoska 2004, p. 167). This approach to Franciscanism, therefore, became an important proposal of a worldview at the beginning of the 20th century—hence the richness of its manifestations and vast number of interpretations. Initially, shortly after World War I, Wittlin demonstrated tendencies to Protestantise St. Francis, in line with the contemporary trend towards Catholic (religious) modernism (this path was also followed by writers of that era such as Leopold

Staff, Bolesław Leśmian, Tadeusz Miciński, Adolf Nowaczyński, and others). In addition, he placed St. Francis at the interface of Greek and Christian culture, claiming in the introduction to the *Odyssey* that he translated in 1922 that, in the person of the saint—for the one and only time in history—“[...] Christian love kissed in broad daylight with Hellenic beauty. [...] Saint Francis was the last Greek and the man of the Gospel in one person” (Wittlin 1924, p. 16). According to Wittlin, Saint Francis “in a Christian way completed the achievements of the ancient Greeks; he brought a new quality to what had been developed by the genius of Homer’s countrymen and what had been taken over by the Renaissance” (Wittlin 1921, p. 5). Later, in his poems, in his novel *The Salt of the Earth*, and in his post-war essays, the writer remained close to the Franciscan spirit through compassion for the wronged and the weak, a love of peace and brotherhood between people, joy, and humour, and, finally, his fascination with art that sprung from Franciscan inspiration.

It was different in Brandstaetter’s case. He first went to Assisi during his honeymoon during Christmas 1946 (already a Catholic having been baptised on 15 December). In his reception of Franciscanism, he went much further than his older mentor and friend. The task he set himself was stated in the following question: ‘How to explain to some people, deprived of inner vision, that events with biblical content are taking place before their very eyes?’ (Brandstaetter 1981, p. 21). Brandstaetter did not, therefore, confine himself to historical considerations, but attempted to include Assisi and St. Francis in the biblical and contemporary context. In the *Chronicles of Assisi*, the topography of the Italian town was woven with biblical references. Like Assisi, the saint who grew up there is, in the writer’s view, archaically biblical. The following is how he reads the frescoes from the basilica, especially those by Giotto: ‘St. Francis is the smallest in the paintings (there is fear, a bow of the head) [...] The main character of this cycle is the Gospel.’ (Brandstaetter 1946–1947, p. 40). Umbria, on the other hand, resembles the Holy Land, and the writer is surprised that he cannot find St. Francis within the pages of the Holy Scripture, because he, like no one else, ‘came into’ the Bible and made it part of his life. Therefore, in the writer’s view, various types of biblical attitudes and behaviours are associated with St. Francis. Brandstaetter clearly perpetuated the persona of St. Francis in the biblical context in *Jesus of Nazareth*. Jesus is presented here in the likeness of St. Francis through well-known texts of culture—especially Franciscan. Such an approach ‘belongs to the literary rhetoric of expressing the invisible in a work.’ (Kochaniewicz 2010, p. 131). Finally, ‘the Franciscan summa’ (Serenda 1977, pp. 131–34) was called *The Other Little Flowers of Saint Francis*, which paraphrases a well-known medieval work. The writer does not argue with this text, but complements it. Franciscanism is shown here as a reality that constantly adapts to new circumstances. The deliberate anachronism whereby Saint Francis is inserted into the realities of the 20th century is reminiscent of the method used in Giotto’s frescoes. The saint enters the modern world and measures it with his ethical radicalism.

The Franciscan texts written by Wittlin and Brandstaetter have retained their freshness and relevance to this day, despite the changing sensitivity of readers and historical circumstances. They also remain an important example of creativity at the interface between literature and religion.

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