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**Kafka, Mrozek, Lem i inni
- w kontekstach filozoficznych**

**Kafka, Mrozek, Lem and others
- in philosophical contexts**

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Marzena Woźniak-Łabieniec

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KAFKA, MROŻEK, LEM I INNI – W KONTEKSTACH FILOZOFICZNYCH
KAFKA, MROŻEK. LEM AND OTHERS – IN PHILOSOPHICAL CONTEXT

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FRANZ KAFKA

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Uniwersytet w stanie podejrzenia Na marginesie *Sprawozdania* dla Akademii Franza Kafki

Streszczenie

Idea uniwersytetu nigdy nie stanowiła znaczącego kontekstu dla badań twórczości Franza Kafki. To inne instytucje społeczne stawały się naturalnym polem aluzyjnych rozpoznań literaturoznawców (sąd, zakład ubezpieczeń, cesarski urząd państwowy). W niniejszym szkicu (napisanym na marginesie słynnego opowiadania Kafki *Raport dla Akademii*) próbujemy to zmienić. Uniwersytet (tytułowa Akademia) staje się „centralnym obiektem krytyki”, instytucją w ruinie, miejscem, gdzie nie praktykuje się badań i nie doskonalą humanistycznych cnót. Wręcz przeciwnie, jakże często (konsekwentnie) zamyka się tu „wrota percepcji” i wysadza śluzę „krytycznego myślenia” – w hołdzie partykularnej grze interesów. W najgorszym przypadku – skutkiem oddziaływania tak pomyślanej Akademii staje się destrukcja wynikła z aktów tresury i upokorzenia.

Słowa kluczowe: Franz Kafka, Uniwersytet, Akademia, ruina, kryzys

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Nie ma żadnych cudów,
są tylko instrukcje obsługi, formularze i przepisy¹.
Ucywilizowany świat wspiera się głównie na ciągu udanych aktów tresury².

W murach uczelni

Kafka rozpoczął studia na Niemieckim Uniwersytecie Karola i Ferdynanda (*Deutsche Karl-Ferdinands-Universität*) w Pradze jesienią 1901 roku. Wskazanie filozofii jako pierwszego kierunku kształcenia (jeszcze w trybie późno gimnazjalnych fantazji i rojeń o przyszłości) musi budzić zdziwienie i konsternację: „wybór niemal groteskowy, biorąc pod uwagę jego wyraźny brak uzdolnień w tym kierunku”³.

Stąd jeszcze podczas wakacji letnich, które spędzał z przyrodnim bratem matki, wujem Siegfriedem Löwym na wyspach Helgoland i Norderney „Kafka zaczął mieć wątpliwości co do zasadności swego prowokacyjnego wyboru kierunku studiów. Kiedy wrócił do Pragi, zmienił zdanie i przepisał się na wydział chemii, ni mniej, ni więcej” (KR, 137). Jednak i tu nie zagościł zbyt długo. Jak informuje Paweł: „krótco po początku semestru przeniósł się na prawo” (KR, 137). Kto by chciał wierzyć w stałość uczuć młodego akademika i zobaczyć Kafkę, jako studenta jurydycznego fakultetu pilnie zgłębiającego tajniki prawa rzymskiego – ten musi się rozczarować. Przyszły autor *Procesu* już „wiosną 1902 roku, [...] postanowił rzucić prawo i jeszcze raz zmienić wydział, tym razem na germanistykę i historię sztuki. Wybór znowu był prowokacyjnie niepraktyczny [...]” (KR, 149). Miarą „niepraktyczności wyboru” niech będzie fakt wskazania dwóch przedmiotów w ramach kursu historii sztuki (malarstwo niderlandzkie, rzeźba chrześcijańska⁴) oraz ciąg filologicznych kursów spod znaku gramatyki języka niemieckiego, szeroko rozumianej poetyki czy analizy twórczości lirycznej Hartmanna von Aue.

Głęboko rozczarowany nacjonalistyczną „linią” wykładów gwiazdy praskiej germanistyki – profesora Augusta Sauera – kontynuuje Kafka proces poszukiwania swojego miejsca w murach uczelni. Niekoniecznie zresztą wiąże swoją przyszłość (w tym zakresie) z groźną „Mateczką” – Pragą. Latem 1902 roku sonduje

1 G. Janouch, *Rozmowy z Kafką. Notatki wspomnienia*, przeł. J. Borysiak, E. Dyczek, postawiem i przypisami opatrzył E. Dyczek, „Czytelnik”, Warszawa 1993, s. 43.

2 Tamże, s. 84.

3 E. Paweł, *Franz Kafka. Koszmar rozumu*, przeł. I. Stąpor, Twój Styl, Warszawa 2003, s. 134. Dalsze odesłania do niniejszej edycji opatruję skrótem KR i odpowiednim numerem strony. Dobrze zorientowany w temacie Klaus Wagenbach dodaje: „Będąc jeszcze maturzystą, podawał [Kafka – M.J.] jako »zawód obrany« filozofię – plan, któremu z całą pewnością sprzeciwił się ojciec”. Por. K. Wagenbach, *Franz Kafka*, przeł. B. Ostrowska, Nisza, Warszawa 2009, s. 50.

4 Por. K. Wagenbach, dz. cyt., s. 50.

„siłę koneksji” swego wpływowego wuja Alfreda Löwy’ego (dyrektora hiszpańskiego towarzystwa kolejowego). Rozważa także możliwość kontynuowania nauki w sąsiedniej Bawarii: „do Monachium, studiować, tak, studiować”⁵ – pisze w liście z 24 sierpnia do swego przyjaciela Oskara Pollaka. Ostatecznie i te pomysły zarzuci, wracając jesienią 1902 roku na ulicę Żelazną, gdzie przy rogu Targu Owocowego mieścił się gmach Wydziału Prawa – słynne Karolinum:

Pobyt w Monachium trwał tylko kilka dni. Z jakichś powodów – rada wuja Siegfrieda, obiekcje ojca, atmosfera miasta czy fatalne zauroczenie Pragą i wszystkim, co reprezentowała – Kafka zarzucił początkowy plan, zrezygnował z germanistyki i przed trzecim semestrem wrócił do domu. Poddał się w końcu swemu losowi i gorliwie zabrał do pracy, by stać się prawnikiem, tak jak wypadało przyszłemu członkowi żydowskiej klasy średniej [...] (KR, 151).

„Gorliwie” wypełnienie obowiązków studenckich doprowadza go wkrótce do szczęśliwego finału – składa wszelkie wymagane regulaminem egzaminy i kończy w czerwcu 1906 roku studia z tytułem doktora praw. Lapidarność ostatniego zdania zbyt łatwo przesłonić może jednak skomplikowane relacje łączące Kafkę z praską *Alma Mater*. Czy szerzej: referencyjna siła użytej frazy – zdolna jest zaciemnić obraz Uniwersytetu, jaki Kafka zdawał się wytwarzać. Wszak jako student dość swobodnie „orbitujący wokół” czterech wydziałów uczelni (przypomnijmy geografii kwerendy: filozofia, chemia, prawo, filologia) doskonale orientował się w intelektualnej topografii instytucji, której historię współtworzył. Wedle wielu świadectw źródłowych: toczył dyskusje z uniwersyteckimi profesorami nie tylko w ramach egzaminacyjnych rygorów, brał czynny udział w licznych otwartych seminariach i prelekcjach, organizowanych przez wpływową organizację studencką (Lese- und Redehalle deutscher Studenten in Prag). Poza tym, regularnie (przez blisko pięć lat) nawiedzał modne Café Louvre, by uczestniczyć w zebraniach elitarnego koła filozofów – wielbicieli myśli Franza Brentana. Wywodząca się zaś z tego kręgu intelektualistka Berta Fanta „sponsorowała” kilka lat później

pokrewny salon filozoficzny u siebie w domu, gdzie Kafka pojawiał się nieregularnie, przynajmniej w 1914. Możliwe, że zainteresowanie antropozofią Rudolfa Steinera i znajomość teorii względności Einsteina Kafka wyniósł z wykładów i wieczorów dyskusyjnych odbywających się w domu Berty Fanty⁶.

5 F. Kafka, *Listy do rodziny, przyjaciół, wydawców*, wybrał, przełożył i komentarzem opatrzył R. Urbański, współpraca A. Urbańska, Wydawnictwo W.A.B., Warszawa 2012, s. 12.

6 R.T. Gray, R.V. Gross, R.J. Goebel, C. Koelb, *Franz Kafka. Encyklopedia*, przeł. J. Kozak, Państwowy Instytut Wydawniczy, Warszawa 2017, s. 113. W dalszej części pracy – edycja oznaczana skrótem FKE, wraz z podaniem strony.

Wydaje się więc, iż Kafka dość szeroko wykorzystuje swe koneksje towarzyskie, by pozostawać w zasięgu oddziaływania praskiej elity akademickiej i intelektualnej. Inny przykład w tym względzie – skwapliwie korzysta z zaproszeń szkolnego przyjaciela, z którym studiował prawo, Ewalda Přibrama do udziału w spotkaniach „profesorskiego” salonu wpływowego ojca – doktora Otto Přibrama. Jakby tego było mało – nie porzuca myśli o kontynuowaniu nauki w kolejnej uczelni wyższej. Profiluje swe zainteresowania już jednak bardziej pragmatycznie: szlifuje języki obce (angielski, hiszpański, francuski, włoski), myśli o karierze biznesowej. W liście do Hedwig Weiler zanotuje we wrześniu 1907 roku: „Będę przez cały rok studiował na Akademii Eksportu”⁷. Enigmatyczna nota kryje plany studiów w najbardziej prestiżowej uczelni ekonomicznej Europy początku XX wieku. Chodzi wszak o założoną dekadę wcześniej Cesarsko-Królewską Akademię Eksportu w Wiedniu – instytucję przygotowującą adeptów do swobodnego poruszania się w przestrzeni rynku międzynarodowego i handlu światowego.

Uniwersytet w czasie marnym

Trudno nie zauważyć, iż Uniwersytet to pierwsza duża instytucja państwowa, jaką Kafka doskonale poznał z bliska, jakiej doświadczył „na własnej skórze”. Zaznał się dobrze z jej strukturą, sposobami funkcjonowania, specyficznym rozumianą ideą autonomii oraz swoistymi trybami samoorganizacji. Doskonale zdawał sobie sprawę z „ekonomii” oficjalnych obiegów wiedzy, a także z typów hierarchicznie zorientowanych relacji wewnętrznych. Wreszcie – świetnie poznał topografię tzw. „otoczenia uniwersyteckiego”: świat salonów profesorskich, wagę prywatnych, domowych sympozjów, siłę łączącą sieć przyjacielskich relacji akademików – niekoniecznie zbieżnych z oficjalną stratyfikacją wydziałową i rektorską, przyznającą odpowiednie miejsce i rangę w korporacyjnej „rodzinie” uczonych.

Tym bardziej dziwi fakt ostentacyjnej nieobecności wszelkich „atrybutów uniwersyteckich”, zastanawia swoista atrofia rekwizytów i realiów akademickich w dziele praskiego pisarza⁸. O ile pozostałe „instytucjonalne” doświadczenia Kafki

7 F. Kafka, *Listy do rodziny...*, s. 41.

8 Możemy mówić tu ledwie o czterech nieznaczących odstępstwach od opisywanej reguły. Ostrożnie używam słowa „nieznaczących”, wszak wykreowane przez Kafkę postaci filozofa (*Bqk / Der Kreisel*), uczonego (*Olbrzymi kret / Der Riesenmaulwurf*), etnologa porównawczego (*Budowa chińskiego muru / Beim Bau der chinesischen Mauer*) oraz podróźnego-badacza (*Kolonia karna / In der Strafkolonie*) stanowią jedynie wyizolowane „ślady uczoneści”, pozbawione jednoznacznie stabilizującego sens kontekstu. Brak tu bowiem jakichkolwiek dodatkowych rekwizytów i atrybutów „akademickości”. Protagonści owych krótkich form narracyjnych, opatrzeni mianem „filozofa”, „uczonego”, „etnologa/historyka”, „badacza” funkcjonują przecież jako pozbawione indywidualnych cech i różnicujących jakości osobniczo-zawodowych:

(zawodowe, związane z podejmowaną profesjonalną praktyką: aplikacja sądowa, kariera ubezpieczeniowa, inspektorat w zakresie ochrony warunków pracy i likwidacji szkód⁹), działania stanowiące szerokie spektrum urzędniczych kompetencji pisarza, znajdują takie czy inne zastosowanie artystyczne, stanowią uchwytny element narracyjnej referencji względem realiów rzeczywistości – o tyle fenomen Uniwersytetu (oraz jego wszelkie możliwe pisarskie atrybuty i przekształcenia) pozostaje znaczącym „przemilczeniem” w Kafkowskim uniwersum tekstowym. Oczywiście z jednym wyjątkiem! Chodzi rzecz jasna o krótkie opowiadanie z kwietnia roku 1917 – *Sprawozdanie dla Akademii (Ein Bericht für eine Akademie)*.

Waga owego wyjątku stanowi bezsprzecznie o jego – użyjmy jubilerskiej metafory – niezwyklej rynkowej wycenie. Dodajmy: w kilku rejestrach potencjalnej wartości. Po pierwsze – sam Kafka zdawał się szacować opowiadanie dość wysoko w prywatnym rankingu dokonań. Ustalając kolejność utworów, które miały znaleźć się w przygotowywanym zestawie wydawniczym¹⁰, umieścił *Sprawozdanie...* na ostatnim miejscu w tomie. Stanowiło ono tym samym mocną kompozycyjną puentę „sumującą” sekwencje utworów tej miary co: *Przed prawem*, *Wiadomość od cesarza*, *Lekarz wiejski* czy *Bratobójstwo*. Po wtóre – jak zauważa Łukasz Musiał – opowiadanie „zapowiada bez wątpienia nowy etap” w ewoluującej wyraźnie twórczości Kafki¹¹. Wedle poznańskiego badacza wzmiankowany utwór „anty-

emblematy. To tylko uschematyzowane, tekstowe nośniki autorytetu opartego na wiedzy i obiektywnym dystansie do obserwowanych zjawisk. Ich emblematyczność podkreślają użyte w oryginale sygnatury słowne: *Der Philosoph*, *Der Forschungsreisende*, *Der Gelehrte*.

- 9 Dla porządku wymieńmy trzy instytucje, z którymi związał się Kafka zawodowo po ukończeniu studiów: sąd powszechny (odbył obowiązkową roczną praktykę dla absolwentów prawa – wedle własnego wyboru: najpierw w sądzie krajowym, później karnym), włoskie komercyjne towarzystwo ubezpieczeniowe (Assicurazioni Generali), cesarski urząd państwowy (Zakład Ubezpieczeń Robotników od Wypadków przy Pracy na Królestwo Czech). O skali zaangażowania pisarza w świat „korporacyjnych niuansów” świadczy wiele fragmentów *Dziennika* i listów do przyjaciół, krewnych i znajomych. Osobliwie zaś – szereg „zapisków kancelaryjnych”. Por. np. F. Kafka, *Z zapisków w piątym notesie. W kancelariach dyrektorskich*, przeł. B.L. Surowska, „Literatura na Świecie” 1987, nr 2, s. 98–100 oraz F. Kafka, *Pisma urzędowe*, przeł. U. Pałłasz, „Literatura na Świecie” 1987, nr 2, s. 103–159.
- 10 W liście z 20 sierpnia 1917 roku, kierowanym do swego wydawcy Kurta Wolffa, określił Kafka liczbę utworów w tomie (15), ich wzajemne względem siebie usytuowanie oraz zasugeruje ostateczne brzmienie tytułu całości: *Lekarz wiejski. Małe opowiadania (Ein Landarzt: Kleine Erzählungen)*. Por. F. Kafka, *Listy do rodziny...*, s. 153. Finalnie tom ukaże się dopiero w roku 1920 (antydatowany na 1919), pomniejszony o jeden utwór – Kafka wycofał opowiadanie *Jazda na kuble* na etapie prac korektorskich (Por. FKE, 246).
- 11 Por. Ł. Musiał, *Próg. „Sprawozdanie dla Akademii” i zapowiedź nowych motywów w prozie Kafki*, [w:] tegoż, *Kafka. W poszukiwaniu utraconej rzeczywistości*, Oficyna Wydawnicza ATUT, Wrocław 2011, s. 201.

cypuje całe mnóstwo motywów, które będą stanowić przedmiot zainteresowania pisarza w ostatnim okresie jego twórczości, po roku 1922¹².

Na czym polega owa zasadnicza Kafkowska „przemiana”? Oto jedna z możliwych odpowiedzi:

W nowych opowieściach Kafki wyraźnie mniej... opowieści, żywiół narracji ulega, by tak rzec, wyhamowaniu. We wcześniejszych utworach często mieliśmy do czynienia z mocno rozbudowanymi wątkami fabularnymi, tymczasem teraz fabuła staje się bardziej ascetyczna. To często po prostu monologi wewnętrzne, jak w przypadku Sprawozdania dla Akademii, Jamy (Der Bau), czy Dociekań psa (Forschungen eines Hundes), przy czym właśnie ten ostatni tytuł wydaje się nadzwyczaj znamienny dla schyłkowej fazy twórczości Kafki. Jeśliby bowiem pokusić się o prowizoryczne uogólnienia, można by śmiało powiedzieć, że o ile wcześniejsze jego utwory pozostawały zasadniczo wierne poetyce przypowieści, choćby i „pękniętej”, o tyle teraz przekształciły się one w refleksyjne „dociekania”¹³.

Na inną prawidłowość ewolucyjną, biorąc pod uwagę kierunek w jakim rozwija się twórczość autora *Zamku* w tamtym czasie, zwracają uwagę autorzy tematycznej encyklopedii – w dwóch obszernych i niezwykle ciekawie opracowanych notach. W pierwszej – poświęconej w całości fenomenowi opowiadania *Sprawozdanie dla Akademii* – kierują uwagę czytelnika na fakt pozornie błaży, związany ze zwyczajową i zakulisową wymianą korespondencji artystów i wydawców:

Już w końcu kwietnia [1917 roku – przyp. M.J.] Kafka posłał kopię tego opowiadania, wraz z jedenastoma innymi tekstami, do Martina Bubera, który szukał materiałów do swojego nowego pisma „Der Jude”. „Bericht für eine Akademie” był jednym z dwóch tekstów, które Buber wybrał do publikacji: ukazał się razem z opowiadaniem „Schakale und Araber” („Szakale i Arabowie”) pod wspólnym nagłówkiem „Zwei Tiergeschichten” [...] (FKE, 83).

Wspomniane „dwie historie zwierzęce” otwierają – warto pochwalić znakomitą intuicję Martina Bubera! – rozległy i tajemniczy „kosmos” Kafkowskiego bestiariusz. W tym porządku: *Sprawozdanie dla Akademii* inauguruje, a *Śpiewaczka Józefina* zamyka bogaty korpus tekstowy, w ramach którego Kafka obsługuje imponujące prozatorskie laboratorium, w którym siłą wyobraźni przekształca byty ludzkie w zwierzęce, zwierzęce w ludzkie, wytwarza istnieniowe mutacje, powoduje do życia krzyżówki i hybrydy, hołubi „mieszkańców”, każe tropić twory-zagadki (Odradek!). Kruszy – tym samym – stabilne na pozór wiązania molekularne,

¹² Tamże, s. 202.

¹³ Tamże, s. 203.

plącze jednorodny łańcuch DNA, by wywołać ontologiczne zamieszanie. Niepostrzymany w swym kreacyjnym pędzie: ucłowiecza faunę, zezwierzęca co ludzkie, animuje materialne, petryfikuje w formę to, co wyrwa się ku życiu....

Literacka „zoofilia” wprowadza prawdziwy zamęt w narracyjny żywioł powstających utworów. Na tekstową „arenę” wkraczają nie tylko „istoty stojące na rozdrożu życia, niepewne własnej sytuacji egzystencjalnej, ogarnięte nieokreśloną tęsknotą za inną, pełniejszą formą istnienia. Tę ostatnią zaledwie przeczuwają, jednak na tyle silnie, by chcieć jej szukać”¹⁴. Ale też: artystyczne „obiekty marginalne” – figury lichy, peryferyjnie umocowane w strukturach życia:

Bohaterami i narratorami czyni pisarz ludzi (artyści, geometry) i istoty (zwierzęta) egzystujące na marginesie większych społeczności. Nietrudno dostrzec, że wszyscy oni mają jakiś melancholijny rys. Przywodzą na myśl coś, czego nie chcemy o sobie wiedzieć, choćby to, że sami sobie stajemy na drodze do prawdy; że w zagubieniu sami plączemy sobie ścieżki poznania. Owo splątanie widać zresztą w ostatnich utworach bardzo wyraźnie również na poziomie strukturalnym: nie są one formalnie tak precyzyjne jak teksty powstałe w latach 1912–1917, poza tym wiele ważnych utworów pozostaje niedokończonych, jak gdyby Kafka, przygnieciony ciężarem rozlicznych, nachodzących na siebie wątków, w trakcie pracy stopniowo tracił oddech. Widać to w powieści *Zamek*, widać w objętościowo mniejszych utworach, takich jak *Dociekania psa* czy *Jama*. Pisząc je, Kafka wyraźnie się mozoli. Za każdym razem zaczyna opowieść, mając nadzieję, że dobrnie do satysfakcjonującego zakończenia, lecz albo ono w ogóle nie nadchodzi – i utwór się urywa – albo pokazuje, że jakakolwiek wiara w szczęśliwe zakończenie jest mirażem niewiele silniejszym od odległego wspomnienia” (WP, CXV–CVI).

Mechanikę owego „mozolnego” procederu odsłania znakomicie ostatnie, zamykające tom (cytowanej tu po wielokroć encyklopedii) hasło – *Zwierzęta* (por. FKE, s. 403–405). Uzmysławia ono dobitnie (w zgromadzonej obficie bibliografii i zestawie hasłowych odesłań), jak „zwierzęcy kostium” pozwala Kafce dyskretnie „rozgrywać” nieoczywiste „role” i tematy – demaskować miraż obiektywizującego dyskursu (*Dociekania psa*), parodiować ograniczenia myślenia skrajnie racjonalistycznego, pułapki postawy „uporządkowanej” (*Jama*), rozważać społeczną misję artysty-proroka (*Śpiewaczka Józefina*, czyli *Naród myszy*).

Pomija się w jednakowoż w „kafkologii” – powróćmy znów do opowiadania „założycielskiego” – fakt istotny i brzemienny (w interpretacyjne skutki). Kafka napisał *Sprawozdanie dla Akademii* (utwór stojący na początku owego „zwierzęcego” zestawu tekstowego) w trzydziestym czwartym miesiącu trwania Wielkiej

¹⁴ Ł. Musiał, *Wstęp*, [w:] F. Kafka, *Wybór prozy*, wstęp i opracowanie Ł. Musiał, Ossolineum, Wrocław 2018, s. CXII. Dalej jako WP, wraz z rzymską paginacją.

Wojny, w szczególnym momencie twórczej aktywności¹⁵, przypadającym na osobliwie trudny czas wojennej zawieruchy – kumulację niedogodności: znaczonych uciążliwościami przerw aprowizacyjnych oraz atakami zimna i głodu¹⁶. Znamienne, iż otwierające wiele „nowych dróg” w pisarstwie Kafki opowiadanie, nie zostało właściwie nigdy przeczytane, jako literacki komentarz do tragicznych wydarzeń historycznych, jako głos zabrany przez pisarza w dyskusji na temat roli Uniwersytetu w owych wydarzeniach i jego ewentualnej winie w dziejowym bilansie strat. Oczywiście – gdyby tak potraktować wspomniane dzieło Kafki – byłby to „głos” zabrany nie wprost, stanowiłby jedynie cichy szept, dobiegający dyskretnie pomiędzy słów budujących prozatorską miniaturę. Tytułowa Akademia byłaby zaś jedynie dyskretną „figurą Uniwersytetu” w czasach ostatecznych: w czasach regresu człowieczeństwa. Ale także w momencie potencjalnego wydobywania się owego żywiołu *humanitas* z otchłani upadku – w chwili „odziewania się” owego człowieczeństwa na powrót „w kulturę”. Tekstowy proces denaturalizacji protagonisty – Rotpetera – byłby narracyjnie opracowanym elementem uzyskiwania nowej, „człowieczej” tożsamości.

Kafka – przyjmując taką optykę – byłby bez wątpienia myślicielem usytuowanym w awangardzie zachodniej refleksji nad miejscem i pozycją, jaką zajmuje Uniwersytet w europejskim pejzażu (po)wojennym. Snułby swą diagnozę autor *Ameryki* jeszcze w realiach dogasającej pożogi – podczas gdy inni (uważni) krytycy zjawiska potrzebowali kilku lat dystansu, by móc objąć poważną refleksją bolesny i trudny temat. I tak: Karl Jaspers dopiero sześć lat później (1923) wyda w Berlinie swój słynny esej *Idea uniwersytetu* (*Die idee der Universiät*). Ponowi swą publikację – dodajmy dygresyjnie – także po drugiej wojnie światowej, jakby świadom powagi zdarzeń, nakazujących przemyślenie brzegowych warunków istnienia zachodniej cywilizacji, która bez odnowionego Uniwersytetu niezdolna będzie do dalszego

15 Od zimy roku 1916 aż do wiosny roku następnego siostra Kafki Ottla użyczała mu wynajmowanej przez siebie kwatery (zlokalizowanej przy praskiej Złotej Uliczce, w domku należącym do ciągu bliźniaczych, mikroskopijnych, renesansowych budowli). Tak charakteryzuje ten czas Ernst Pawel: „Tam właśnie zakopał się na całą zimę, wiodąc pielęgnowane z perwersyjną przyjemnością życie pustelnika. Stało się ono źródłem porządku i rutyny, od której uzależnił swoją wydajność, jeśli nie natchnienie. Pracując systematycznie między grudniem 1916 roku i kwietniem 1917, stworzył główny trzon swojego pisarstwa, na które, oprócz fragmentu *Strażnika grobu*, jedynej próby dramatopisarskiej, składały się krótkie opowiadania wydane za jego życia [...]” (KR, 437–438).

16 Pawel charakteryzuje Pragę przełomu lat 1916/1917 jako „miasto wymarłe”, w którym: „Tramwaje przestały jeździć, teatry zamknięto, większość wykładów i spotkań odwołano. Najgorsze były prawdopodobnie noce arktycznej samotności: tych kilka kawiarni i restauracji, które nadal funkcjonowały, nie miały do zaoferowania nic poza mrocznymi, nieogrzewanymi wnętrzami i naparem z cynizmu domowego chowu. Krajowi zaczęło brakować żywności, paliwa i nadziei” (KR, 438).

harmonijnego i pokojowego rozwoju. Napisze Jaspers w siódmym rozdziale swej *Autobiografii filozoficznej*:

Dwukrotnie, bezpośrednio po każdej z wojen światowych, pisałem o Idei uniwersytetu – zamierzałem pogłębić świadomość tej idei w sobie, wśród studentów oraz nauczycieli akademickich. W 1946 roku nadałem książce poprzedni tytuł, gdyż kierowały mną te same przekonania. Zmieniłem ją jednak i napisałem na nowo, pragnąc przyczynić się do odnowy uniwersytetów niemieckich. Każdorazowo słowa moje nie odniosły skutku. Mimo to jestem rad, że dałem wyraz poczuciu wielkiego dziedzictwa idei uniwersytetu i niezbywalnej nadziei jej odrodzenia¹⁷.

Kreśląc w Heidelbergu (w maju 1945 roku) *Przedmowę* do drugiej edycji tekstu, aluzyjnie przywoła Jaspers zdarzenia z roku 1933, gdy fatalny sojusz niemieckich profesorów i narodowych socjalistów okazał się najgorszym z możliwych lekarstw na bólczki Uniwersytetu, zmuszonego działać w trudnych czasach powojennego chaosu lat dwudziestych i kryzysu społeczno-gospodarczego lat trzydziestych:

Dwanaście lat pracowano nad moralnym zniszczeniem uniwersytetu. Teraz nadeszła chwila, która zmusza studentów i docentów do namysłu nad własnym postępowaniem. Gdy wszystko się chwieje, pragniemy wiedzieć, dla wspólnej świadomości, gdzie jesteśmy i czego chcemy. Przy ponownej organizacji uniwersytetów powrót do naszych najlepszych tradycji – dzięki dziś podejmowanym twórczym działaniom – jest w ogóle zasadniczą kwestią naszego życia intelektualnego. Jesteśmy odpowiedzialni za to, kim winniśmy się stać. I jedynie nasza najgłębsza powaga będzie w stanie urzeczywistnić to, co możliwe¹⁸.

Prezentując swą propozycję, zakreśla Jaspers możliwie najszerszą perspektywę wprowadzenia reformy i gruntownej sanacji tak drogiej mu instytucji. W czasach, „gdy wszystko się chwieje” chce zobaczyć Uniwersytet w „całości życia umysłowego”¹⁹, pragnie „ukazać zadania uniwersytetu, jakie wynikają z urzeczywistnienia życia umysłowego w korporacji”²⁰ oraz „zastanowić się nad wa-

17 K. Jaspers, *Autobiografia filozoficzna*, tłum. i przypisami opatrzył S. Tyrowicz, Wydawnictwo Comer, Toruń 1993, s. 55.

18 K. Jaspers, *Przedmowa*, [w:] tegoż, *Idea uniwersytetu*, przeł. W. Kunicki, Narodowe Centrum Kultury, Warszawa 2017, s. 29. Szerzej sprawę wstydliviego związku uniwersytetu z nazizmem omawia Victor Farias, biorąc za przykład „przypadek Heideggera”. Por. V. Farias, *Heidegger i narodowy socjalizm*, przeł. P. Lisicki, R. Marszałek, Aletheia, Warszawa 1997. Uwagę zwraca zwłaszcza drugi rozdział książki.

19 K. Jaspers, *Wprowadzenie*, [w:] tegoż, *Idea uniwersytetu...*, s. 33. W oryginale – rozstrzelony druk.

20 Tamże.

runkami istnienia uniwersytetu”²¹ w nowoczesnym świecie (kolejne, trzecie wydanie – z roku 1961 – każe i w taki sposób traktować dalekowzroczne przesłanki Jaspersowskiej publikacji). Autor wprowadzenia do polskiej edycji omawianego eseju (Tadeusz Gadacz) zdaje się wydobywać właśnie ten wątek „aktualności” i „adekwatności” propozycji Jaspersa. „Idea uniwersytetu” musi być bowiem myślna nieustannie, uparcie, „wciąż do nowa”:

Jesteśmy świadkami czasów, w których za cel kształcenia nie uznaje się kształtowania człowieczeństwa, lecz „przygotowywanie podmiotów na rynek pracy”; w których nie ceni się samej prawdy, lecz jej technologiczną użyteczność; w których państwo przestaje bronić niezależności uniwersytetów, oddając je rynkowej grze popytu i podaży; w których urzędnicy i biurokraci zaczynają odgrywać większą rolę niż autorytet profesorów; w których dbałość o interesy narodowe jest wyżej ceniona niż wykształcenie uniwersalnego człowieczeństwa²².

Zaprezentowany ciąg przeciwstawięń porządkuje tu w jednej linii myślowej obszary największej troski Jaspersa, jeśli chodzi o modelowe zorganizowanie dzisiejszej Akademii, której racją istnienia winna być przede wszystkim: troska o kształt człowieczeństwa, poszukiwanie prawdy, zabieganie o szlachetny mecenat państwa, gorliwość w obronie wartości uniwersalnych.

W podobnym duchu – troski i zaangażowania – wypowiedział się kilka lat później (1930) hiszpański myśliciel José Ortega y Gasset, publikując intrygujący szkic *Misja uniwersytetu* (*Misión de la Universidad*). Przywołajmy kilka wątków, wypreparowanych z jego dość radykalnie i bezkompromisowo nakreślonych tez. Na wstępie, zdaje się autor *Buntu mas* wskazywać na zagrożenia. Wedle niego Uniwersytet zredukowany do swej beznamietnej „maszynierii” działań²³, będący tylko urzędniczo uorganizowanym tworem, generującym mechanicznie wypreparowane moduły wiedzy – „jest rzeczą raczej żalostną”²⁴. Jak zauważa filozof, wąsko wyspecjalizowany Uniwersytet współczesny „skomplikował nauczanie zawodowe i rozbudował badania naukowe, natomiast zrezygnował niemal całkowicie z nauczania czy przekazywania kultury”²⁵. Owa rezygnacja z ożywczego promieniowania *artes* to wedle Ortegę „okropność”. Wszak do „dzisiaj Europa ponosi zgubną konsekwencję tego stanu rzeczy”²⁶. Moment w jakim znalazł się zachodni świat po pierwszej wojnie światowej

²¹ Tamże.

²² T. Gadacz, *Wstęp do wydanie polskiego: Karla Jaspersa idea uniwersytetu*, [w:] K. Jaspers, *Idea uniwersytetu...*, s. 27.

²³ J. Ortega y Gasset, *Misja uniwersytetu*, przeł. H. Woźniakowski, „Znak” 1978, nr 6, s. 712.

²⁴ Tamże, s. 714.

²⁵ Tamże, s. 717.

²⁶ Tamże.

definiuje y Gasset w sposób bezceremonialny i winą za widoczny kryzys obarcza wprost „praktyczną politykę edukacyjną” Akademii:

Katastrofalny charakter obecnej sytuacji europejskiej należy zawdzięczać temu, że przeciętny Anglik, Francuz czy Niemiec są niekulturalni, nie dysponują żywotnym systemem idei na temat człowieka i świata, odpowiednim do współczesności. Ów przeciętny osobnik jest nowym barbarzyńcą, zacofanym wobec swojej epoki, prymitywnym i archaicznym w porównaniu z przerażającą aktualnością stojących przed nim problemów. Ten nowy barbarzyńca jest z reguły bardziej wykształcony zawodowo niż dawniej, ale też bardziej niekulturalny – niezależnie od tego, czy jest inżynierem, lekarzem, adwokatem czy naukowcem²⁷.

Uniwersytet zredukowany do encyklopedycznego kształcenia (reprodukcja wiedzy) i prostego formatowania specjalistów (pułapka profesjonalizacji) sprzeniewierza się swej istocie (poszukiwanie prawdy) i lekceważy uświęconą tradycją „arystokratyczną drogę do celu” – jakim jest wszechstronnie uformowana „pełnia człowieczeństwa”.

W niezgodzie z tym porządkiem „redukcji” – zdaje się pouczać Ortega: 1) „nauka jest twórczością”; 2) „nauka jest rzeczą wielką i bardzo delikatną”; 3) ścieżka wiedzy „wymaga [...] bardzo szczególnego i niezmiernie rzadkiego typu powołania”; 4) „uczony staje się współczesnym mnichem”²⁸. Uniwersytet jako przestrzeń naładowana „entuzjazmem” musi być jednak otwarty na „aktualność”²⁹. Świadomy swej społecznej roli i powinności – musi być zanurzony w swym czasie teraźniejszym. Winien być w Historii „pogrążony”³⁰. Wszak „życie zbiorowe” pilnie potrzebuje – wedle Ortegi – Uniwersytetu zaangażowanego, uczestniczącego – niezatapionego bez reszty w immanencji wyrafinowanych badań i niejasno zdefiniowanych poszukiwań.

Na podobny, „wspólnotowy” rys instytucji (która winna jednak bardzo starannie i ostrożnie udzielać swego „akademickiego obywatelstwa”³¹ wskazywał w swej efektownej mowie doktorskiej nestor polskich filozofów – profesor Kazimierz Twardowski³². Podkreślając wagę i moc oddziaływania instytucji akademickiej na

27 Tamże. Podkreślenie – Ortega y Gasset.

28 Por. Tamże, s. 722.

29 Tamże, s. 730.

30 Tamże.

31 K. Twardowski, *O dostojęństwie Uniwersytetu*, [w:] tegoż, *Lwowskie wykłady akademickie*, t. 2: *Wykłady o idei Uniwersytetu*, wykłady z rękopisów i maszynopisów przeczytali, przepisali, opracowali oraz słowem wstępnym i wprowadzeniami poprzedzili R. Kuliniak, D. Leszczyzna, M. Pandura, Ł. Ratajczak, Wydawnictwo Marek Derewiecki, Kęty 2018, s. 442.

32 Odsyłam tu oczywiście – co nie wynika wprost z treści poprzedniego przypisu – do mowy profesora Kazimierza Twardowskiego, wygłoszonej przez niego na lwowskim Uniwersytecie

„społeczeństwo” i „życie samo” – przestrzega przed łatwą pokusą „wpływu bezpośredniego i doraźnego, wywieranego na sprawy bieżące”³³. Wedle Twardowskiego Uniwersytet to instytucja, która sama pilnując „niezawisłości duchowej”³⁴ – nie może poddać się „czyjejkolwiek kontroli i komendzie”³⁵. To organizm świadomy „doniosłości funkcji, którą pełni”³⁶, korporacja przyjaciół „powołana do służenia prawdzie naukowej” i „wiedzy obiektywnej”³⁷. Wydana w Poznaniu (1933), trzy lata po eseju Ortegi i dziesięć lat po traktacie Jaspersa, drukowana wersja przemówienia stała się wydarzeniem intelektualnym w życiu przedwojennych elit polskich. Mówiący z „namaszczeniem”³⁸ o nieoczywistym już wtedy „dostojeństwie Uniwersytetu” Twardowski wskazywał – podobnie jak Ortega – na jego cele kulturotwórcze i „doniosłe zadania wychowawcze”³⁹. Przestrzegał przed postawą „wyznawczą” i pozbawionym krytycyzmu serwilizmem myśli (także – aluzyjnie – w wymiarze partykularnych wyborów i doraźnych ocen politycznych):

Jednym z największych niebezpieczeństw, zagrażających zajęciu [...] niezależnej, wolnej od wszelkich uprzedzeń postawy wobec prawdy obiektywnej, jest przynależność wewnętrzna, nie tylko formalna, do takich organizacji, które nakazują swoim członkom wyznawać pewne przekonania albo przynajmniej zachowywać się tak, jak gdyby je wyznawali. Kto takiej organizacji pragnie wiernie służyć, zrzeka się swej niezależności duchowej, z góry będzie żywił niechęć do wszystkiego, co się owym nakazanym przekonaniom sprzeciwia; łatwo ulegnie pokusie lekceważenia argumentów, przemawiających za przyjęciem faktów lub poglądów, z owymi przekonaniem niezgodnych – a jeśli mimo wszystko będzie je musiał uznać, gotów czynić to tylko w skrytości swej myśli i nie zechce ich śmiało wyznawać, chociaż jako profesor, co dosłownie znaczy wyznawca, jest do tego zobowiązany⁴⁰.

W opinii Twardowskiego **Profesor Uniwersytetu** to człowiek „wzniosłej misji”⁴¹, odporny na zakusy modnych „doktryn”, immunizowany na działania ła-

Jana Kazimierza w dniu 21 listopada 1932 roku. Senat Uniwersytetu Poznańskiego podjął decyzję o nadaniu Twardowskiemu tytuł doktora *honoris causa* już w maju roku 1930 – jednak z powodu przedłużających się kłopotów zdrowotnych uczonego uroczystości odbyły się we Lwowie z ponad dwuletnim opóźnieniem.

33 K. Twardowski, *O dostojeństwie Uniwersytetu*, s. 444.

34 Tamże.

35 Tamże.

36 Tamże, s. 442.

37 Tamże, s. 443.

38 Tamże, s. 442.

39 Tamże, s. 445.

40 Tamże, s. 447.

41 Tamże.

tych „haseł” i „programów”⁴². To ktoś głuchy „na podszepty różnych ambicji”⁴³, zdolny obronić się przed „pokusą odgrywania jakiegokolwiek roli tam, gdzie wcale nie chodzi o prawdę, lecz o wpływ, o godności, o zaszczyty i tytuły albo po prostu o pieniądź!”⁴⁴.

Raport pisarza – preliminarz

Oczywiście zarysowana tu (dość zbieżna w swych zasadniczych punktach) linia myślowa, reprezentowana przez cytowane teksty trzech wybitnych filozofów – ni- jak ma się do diagnozy ordynowanej przez Franza Kafkę w *Sprawozdaniu dla Akademii*. Próżno szukać u praskiego mistrza jednolitego zbioru jakkolwiek ułożo- nych, „pozytywnych i konstruktywnych” myśli, określających miejsce i znaczenie Uniwersytetu we współczesnym świecie. Nie znajdziemy tu solennych zapewnień i patetycznych zaklęć przypisujących Akademii szczególną, „dostojną” rolę na ma- pie instytucji nowoczesnego państwa. Wręcz przeciwnie – można rzec, iż jawnie ironiczna⁴⁵ „marszruta słów” użytych w opowiadaniu, każe widzieć Uniwersytet jako twór podejrzany, instytucję niepewną, „organizm” niedający ludziom, po- wierzającym mu swe losy, gwarancji należytej ochrony i harmonijnego rozwoju. Kafkowska „Akademia” nie przechowuje nic z powabów swego greckiego pierwo- wzoru. Próżno szukać tu przyjemnej woni platanowca, gościnnej rośliny świętego gaju Akademos. Nie bratnia wspólnota oparta na idei dialogu i bezinteresownych poszukiwań leży u podstaw Kafkowskiego świata, a samotna i pełna udręki droga ku indywidualnej doskonałości (wszak ścieżka jaką pokonuje uczeń tejże szkoły to tylko: wstydliva „antropogeneza w pigułce”⁴⁶).

Nie jest także Akademia tak widziana spadkobierczynią ideałów średniowiecz- nego Uniwersytetu – nie przypomina w niczym „obszaru wyłączonego” (przestrze- ni eksterytorialnej, samowładnej, autonomicznej), do którego prawa wstępu nie posiadają jakiegokolwiek służby zewnętrzne (państwowe, municypalne, kościelne). To terytorium, którego nie chroni żadna *Magna Charta Universitatum* ani święte prawo zapisane w duchu dawnego kodeksu *Authentica habita*. Panują tu jedynie bezduszne reguły anonimowego, „metaforycznego trybunału nauki”⁴⁷, uosabiane

42 Tamże.

43 Tamże, s. 448.

44 Tamże.

45 Na rolę ironii w konstrukcji myślowej *Sprawozdania dla Akademii* zwróciła swego czasu uwa- gę Żaneta Nalewajk. Por. Taż, *Ironia jako alternatywa rozpaczy. Krytyka kultury w „Sprawozda- niu dla Akademii” Franza Kafki*, „Tekstualia” 2008, nr 3.

46 Ł. Musiał, *ZwierzoczkęKafka*, „Konteksty” 2009, nr 4, s. 70.

47 A. Barcz, *Posthumanizm i jego zwierzęce odgłosy w literaturze*, „Teksty Drugie” 2013, nr 1-2, s. 71.

groźnym autorytetem „nieobecnych profesorów”⁴⁸. Reguła absolutnego posłuszeństwa (zalecenie: „dostarczenia Akademii sprawozdania z [...] przeszłości małpiej” – SA, 407; podkr. M.J.) i wymóg pełnej podległości (raport jest odpowiedzią na „wezwanie” – SA, 407) to obligatoryjny tryb budowania hierarchicznych relacji, a także podstawowa forma „zarządzania lękiem” w wewnętrznym świecie korporacji uczonych. Na czele tekstowego inicjalnego i finalnego akapitu oraz całej instytucji sprawującej zwykle dojmującą, nadzorczą kontrolę stoją przecież – niczym biblijni cherubini – „Dostojni Akademicy” (SA, 407, 418). „Dostojeństwo” jest tu jednak tylko synonimem wyniosłej pychy i jako takie stanowi znak rozpoznawczy Kafkowskiej Akademii. Wszak dysponenci korporacyjnych reguł (domyślnie: Profesorowie) celowo zaburzają komunikacyjne kanały, uniemożliwiając stworzenie partnerskich relacji w ramach akademickiej wspólnoty uczonych. „Wezwanie” dostarczone zapewne „drogą służbową” ma na celu adresata skonfundować i przestraszyć – w najlepszym wypadku: postawić w poczuciu winy („Nie umiem niestety **zadośćuczynić** temu wezwaniu tak, jak zostało ono sformułowane – SA, 407; podkr. M.J.).

Zauważmy również, że tytułowe zderzenie słów („sprawozdanie” i „Akademia”) rodzi w uchu czytelnika niemiłą, kakofoniczny zgrzyt. Piękne echa greckiego słowa, określającego zmysłowy charakter ateńskiego miejsca (*Hekademeia*), wzmocnione etymologicznie bogactwem rękodzielniczego kunsztu⁴⁹ – niepokojąco interferują i groźnie rezonują z „chłodnym” brzmieniem urzędniczego sloganu, każącego ludzkie relacje wpisywać w ramy bezdusznego raportu. Użyte przez Kafkę w tytule opowiadania słowo *sprawozdanie* (*Ein Bericht*) odsyła wszak w swej semantycznej osnowie do aktu beznamiętnego odtwarzania (w mowie lub piśmie) zaistniałego stanu rzeczy. Głosi chwałę czynności pozbawionej emocjonalnego zaangażowania wykonawcy. Zgodnie bowiem z definicją słownikową – sprawozdanie to aktywność skupiona na przygotowaniu „ustnego lub pisemnego opisu przebiegu jakichś wypadków, zdarzeń, zdanie sprawy z czego, raport”⁵⁰. Lista przykładów podana w rozwinięciu definicji pojęcia odsyła do różnorodnych specjalistycznych działań instytucji urzędniczych o jawnie biurokratycznym charakterze (parlament, Rada Ministrów, sąd, wojsko, szkoła, bank). Niezwykle klarowna i oczywista staje się sugestia ekonomicznego adresu słowa – por. „sprawozdanie gospodarcze, rachunkowe”⁵¹. Podobny zakres rozumienia terminu określa definicja innego słownika. Tu – wedle autorów noty – „sprawę zdaje się” głównie

48 Tamże.

49 Akademia Platońska posadowiona została w ateńskiej dzielnicy Keramejkos (gr. Κεραμεικός), zamieszkałej w starożytności przez rzemieślników wytwarzających produkty gliniane (gr. κέραμος – glina).

50 Słownik języka polskiego, red. W. Doroszewski, t. 8, Warszawa 1966, s. 629.

51 Tamże, s. 630.

z wyjazdu służbowego, prac komisji sejmowej, sądowego procesu czy finansowej transakcji (por. sprawozdanie kasowe)⁵².

Wątek ekonomiczny wpleciony w treść ostatnich zdań każe postawić pytanie o bilans „zysków i strat” potencjalnego członka (adepta?) wspólnoty uczonych, o efekty transakcji zawieranej w murach *Alma Mater* z „dostojnymi Akademikami”. Jak kształtuje się zatem owo indywidualne saldo, jak księgowane zostają środki na osobniczym rachunku? Spróbujmy prześledzić kilka operacji tekstowych.

Nota księgowa

Po pierwsze – „człowiek” aspirujący, poszukiwacz indywidualnej prawdy (a z kimś takim mamy do czynienia w przypadku protagonisty opowiadania) spędza życie w Akademii na „bieganiu tu i tam” (SA, 407). Choć owo osobiwe „ćwiczenie gimnastyczne” wykonuje pośród „znakomitych ludzi, dobrych rad, oklasków, muzyki orkiestr” – pozostaje nieodmiennie: „samotny” (SA, 407). Dzieli go od towarzyskiej śmietanki akademickiej nieusuwalna granica, niewidzialna linia demarkacyjna separuje go od oświeconego salonu uczonych: skutecznie odgradza sferę poznania (tu grupują się ci, którzy mają „pełny obraz”) od sektorów ignorancji. „Mały światek” akademików nie ulega nigdy niebezpiecznej naturalizacji, stroni od życia eko-logicznego – wręcz przeciwnie. Kto schlebia swej naturze, kto – zmodyfikujmy gramatyczną linię cytatu – „trzyma się swego pochodzenia i wspomnień młodości” (SA, 407) nie jest w stanie „podołać” trudom procesu morderczej antropogenezy, opartej na kulcie wyuczonej wiedzy. Wszak „całe towarzystwo [...] trzymało się z daleka od bariery” (SA, 407): życia, biologii, ciała, małpiego instynktu rzeczywistości. To, co jawi się jako domena *zoe* stanowi nieusuwalny lęk członków Akademii, skupionych na formotwórczej pracy pielęgnującej indywidualny, niepowtarzalny *bios* wybitnej, samoświadomej jednostki.

Po drugie – każdy osobnik poszukujący swego miejsca w ramach opisywanego modelu usłyszy prędzej czy później groźny nakaz kierowany z wnętrza Akademii (kierowany zresztą zarówno do przyszłych adeptów, jak i obecnych członków): złożyć rezygnację, ogłosić osobistą kapitulację, zaniechaj „wszelkiego uporę” (SA, 407)! By stanowić część Uniwersytetu trzeba bowiem „podać się [...] jarzmu” (SA, 407) instytucji. Idea „rozumnego człowieczeństwa” (*humanitas*) musi mnie całkowicie pochłoniąć, musi zatrzaskać się „wielka brama, którą niebo tworzy nad ziemią” (SA, 408) – zamknąć muszą się wrota wiodące do *zoe*: pierwotnego, zwierzęcego pierwiastka we mnie, „dawnej małpiej prawdy” (SA, 411). Akademia to klatka o dobrze obstalowanych kratkach. Tu całość jest zawsze „zbyt niska, aby stać, a zbyt wąska, aby usiąść” (SA, 410). Kto tu trafi – pozostaje zawsze w „położeniu bez wyjścia” (SA, 410). Akademia, jako dom bez klamek...

⁵² Por. *Wielki słownik języka polskiego PWN*, red. S. Dubisz, t. 4, Warszawa 2018, s. 515.

Po trzecie – adept cichy, spokojny, „robiący niezwykle mało hałasu” (SA, 411), stanowi dla Akademii nabytek niezwykle cenny i pożądaný: „jeśli uda mu się przeżyć okres krytyczny, stanie się bardzo zdalny do tresury” (SA, 411). Zauważmy, że progres uniwersyteckiej kariery wyznacza zawsze zasada nadzorcza (kara jako element motywujący). Zasada doprowadzona zresztą do perfekcji w ramach systemu ewaluacyjnego, zorientowanego na ustawiczny pomiar jakości badań naukowych (zachodni model „późnego uniwersytetu”, zbudowanego wedle zasad nieubłaganej korporacyjnej metodyki funkcjonowania). Tu rozwój mierzony jest zwykle: „przyspieszanymi batem postępami” (SA, 408). Z czasem proces wymyka się spod kontroli („uczymy się bez względu na wszystko”; SA, 417) i rodzi się pragnienie „jakiegoś wyjścia” (SA, 417). Zwykle jest już wtedy za późno – stajemy się swoimi własnymi oprawcami: „nadzorujemy się sami batem, rozdieramy sobie ciało przy najmniejszym oporze” (SA, 417). Akademia, to zawsze w jakimś sensie kolonia karna.

W innym aspekcie: nawet język obnaża tautologiczny charakter procesu wytwarzającego zachodnią *episteme*. Wszak administracyjna różga (*resp.* dyscyplina) – na przykład „okresowej oceny” – skutecznie chłoczce wydziałowe ciała autonomicznych (dyscyplin). Akademia kultywuje w ten sposób (pewnie nieświadomie, choć kto wie!) stare cnoty militarne. Łacińskie bóstwo (Disciplina) czczone szczególnie chętnie przez członków zbrojnych legionów rzymskich łączyło wszak walory mądrości, praktycznej wiedzy, szerokiego wykształcenia oraz surowych rygorów i zdecydowanych, bezkompromisowych zachowań, a także forsownych ćwiczeń i musztry.

Po czwarte – codzienna egzystencja zorientowana względem (potencjalnie) opresywnie zorganizowanej struktury, czyni z członka Uniwersytetu istotę pracującą *de facto* w „trybie responsywnym”. Musi on dobrze i „z wielką radością”, w miarę możliwości „w najbardziej zacieśnionym sensie” – „odpowiadać [...] na zapytania” (SA, 408). Swoboda naukowych poszukiwań (kwestionowana zresztą nie tylko w zakresie ograniczeń płynących z metodologicznych aporii i pułapek języka opisu – o czym przekonywał Kafka w *Dociekaniach psa*) to miraż, powabna fatamorgana wytworzona przez „członków Akademii”. Kto tego nie dostrzega i ufa, iż „każdy wielki myśliciel odrzuca najwykwintniejsze maniery” (SA, 410) w imię prawdy – utrwała to piękne złudzenie. Ktoś taki czym prędzej musi wyrwać się spod wpływu krępującej ruchy „polityki interrogacji”, musi umieć demaskować interesowność „obiektywnego” procederu konstruowania informacji (*casus*: „czytałem ostatnio w artykule...” – SA, 408), powinien „dać sobie spokój ze swoim taktem” – w imię poznawczej bezkompromisowości. Przekonanie, iż w Akademii „wszystko widać jak na dłoni”, że „nie ma [tu] niczego do ukrywania” (SA, 410) – to niebezpieczny i dobrze utrwalony przesąd.

Po piątą – lekcja składającej uniwersytecki raport człeko-małpiej istoty uczy (to kontynuacja myśli z punktu poprzedniego) dystansu względem idei bezinteresownego posłannictwa nauki. Znajdujący się „u progu człowieczeństwa” Rotpete (zdobywszy

z mozołem „kulturę Europejczyka” – SA, 417) relacjonuje cierpliwie zdarzenia minione. I owa niespieszna retrospekcja (odślaniająca kolejne etapy indywidualnej ewolucji jednostki, swoiste przystanki (nie)możliwej „genezis z ducha”) przynosi niepomernie ciekawy wątek sprawy: „Pierwszą rzeczą, której się nauczyłem, było podanie ręki; podanie ręki oznacza szczerłość; niechże więc dziś, gdy znajduję się na szczycie kariery, temu pierwszemu podaniu ręki towarzyszy także szczerze słowo” (SA, 408).

Oznaczające „szczerłość” podanie ręki i „szczerze słowo” – oto dwa czyste, szlachetne, bezinteresowne „gesty”. Jako takie jednak – konstatuje ironicznie sprawozdawca – „nie przynoszą one Akademii niczego istotnie nowego i pozostają bardzo daleko od tego, czego się ode mnie żąda [...]” (SA, 408). Delikatność wyciągniętej dłoni i klarowność słownej intencji lokują się – zauważmy ze smutkiem – w porządku diametralnie różnym od oczekiwań Akademii. Przemoc obiektywnej formy (sprawozdanie jako danina „dla” instytucji) pozornie paraliżuje bohatera i sprawia, iż „mimo najlepszej woli nie umie” (SA, 408) on dotrzeć do źródła tajemnicy przemiany, która go dotyka. Oczywiście Czerwony Piotruś odpowiada na „wezwanie” i podejmuje próbę odtworzenia kolejnych etapów „drogi, którą dawna małpa przedostała się do świata ludzi” (SA, 408), odślania także „sposób, w jaki się w nim utwierdziła” (SA, 408). Faktycznie czyni to jednak z pełną świadomością „gry”, którą musi toczyć z ludzkim, rozumnym otoczeniem:

Ale z pewnością nie śmiałbym powiedzieć nawet tego, co nastąpi, gdybym nie był zupełnie pewny siebie i gdyby moja pozycja na wszystkich scenach kabaretowych cywilizowanego świata nie umocniła się do tego stopnia, że nic nie potrafi nią zachwiać (SA, 408–409).

Protagonista Kafkowskiej miniatury zdolny jest „opowiedzieć się” Akademii, bo pozostaje świadomy reguł (także retorycznych!) aktorskiej, kuglarskiej gry, którą toczy. „Scena języka” oraz kinetyka samoświadomego, doskonale wystudiowanego ruchu ciała to jednak przeciwny biegun dla bezinteresownego gestu i „czystego” słowa, które było „na początku” (owo: „pierwszą rzeczą, której się nauczyłem...”). „Szczerłość” to wyblakły luksus, na który Akademia pozwala jedynie „na szczycie kariery” (SA, 408).

Appendix

Powyższe zestawienie, mające kształt buchalteryjnego bilansu, nie pozostaje jednak w swej wymowie tak sardoniczne i gorzkie, jak słowa kierowane przez „wyedukowaną małpę” do „dostojnych Panów z Akademii” (SA, 418) w finale dziwnego „raportu”. Seria podszytych szyderstwem, gładkich retorycznych przeczeń („I niech mi nikt nie mówi, że nie było warte trudu...”; „nie pragnę żadnego ludz-

kiego sądu...” – SA, 418) przygotowuje sarkastyczne *credo*, będące swoistym zaleceniem praktycznym – akademickim *modus operandi*, kierowanym do każdego, kto chce „rozszerzać wiedzę” (SA, 418), a więc spełniać swe naukowe posłannictwo. Ktoś taki winien „obsadzić się” co najwyżej w roli prostego reproduktora wiedzy. Dopiero poddany takiemu ograniczeniu uczony może skutecznie zawęzić horyzont swych poznawczych oczekiwań, zrezygnować z twórczych aspiracji, powściągnąć wyobraźnię – docelowo: „ograniczyć się tylko do zdania sprawy” (SA, 418).

Motto Uniwersytetu, którego Kafka był prorokiem i którego nadejście przewidział w swej fantasmagorii, brzmi: „Zadawałam się sprawozdaniem” (SA, 418). Rzeczywistość, która nadeszła – pozbawiła jednakowoż oryginalną frazę zjadliwego cudzysłowu ironii...

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Mariusz Jochemczyk

University under suspicion. On the margins of *Report for the Academy* by Franz Kafka

Summary

The idea of the university was never a significant context for researchers of Franz Kafka work. It was the other social institutions that became the natural source of allusive recognition of literary scholars (court, insurance company, imperial state office). In this sketch – written on the margins of Kafka’s famous short story: *Report for the Academy* – we are trying to change it. The university (title: Academy) here becomes a “central object of criticism”, an institution in ruins, a place where one does not practice research and does not perfect humanistic virtues. On the contrary, it is a space where the “gate of perception” and „critical thinking” are

consistently closed – as a tribute to the particular game of interests. In the worst case – the effect of the Academy’s impact becomes destruction resulting from training and humiliation.

Keywords: Franz Kafka, University, Academy, ruins, crisis

Mariusz Jochemczyk – dr hab., polonista, historyk i teoretyk literatury, eseista. Autor książek poświęconych poezji Juliusza Słowackiego i Władysława Broniewskiego, a także problemom współczesnej re-aktywacji tradycji literackiej i fenomenowi śląskiej oikologii. Zastępca redaktora naczelnego rocznika naukowego „Fabrica Litterarum Polono-Italica”. Członek Komisji Historycznoliterackiej PAN w Katowicach.

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Swojskie przestrzenie absurdu

Streszczenie

Przedmiotem analizy w artykule jest *Przemiana* (1915) Franza Kafki. Autorka podejmuje próbę uchwycenia różnorodnych aspektów fenomenu przestrzeni kafkowskiej w kontekście funkcjonowania motywu murów/ścian/sufitów w tym bodaj najsłynniejszym opowiadaniu literatury światowej. Badaczka traktuje przy tym utwór Kafki jako niedościgniony wzór artystycznego kształtowania scenarii: takiego mianowicie, które plastyczność i konkret motywów oraz relacji przestrzennych czyni swego rodzaju *residuum* wysublimowanych, symbolicznych znaczeń, realizujących się w pełni dopiero za pośrednictwem wyobraźni odbiorcy, w toku kontemplacyjnej lektury i towarzyszącego jej przeżycia estetycznego. Wywód prowadzi do konkluzji, że Kafka w swym parabolicznym, absurdalnym, pełnym niedopowiedzeń (a jednak zaskakująco konkretnym) opowiadaniu nie odsłania sensu historii bohatera przemienionego w stawonoga, pozwala nam jednak ten sens przeżyć i przeczuć – jako treść naszego własnego życia.

Słowa kluczowe: Franz Kafka, *Przemiana*, metamorfoza, proza groteskowa, absurd, wyobraźnia artystyczna, przestrzeń przedstawiona, parabola, symbol

Niniejszy szkic stanowi próbę nakreślenia potencjału symbolicznego motywu murów/ścian w kontekście *Przemiany* Franza Kafki¹. Utwór ten uważany bywa za jed-

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¹ Do tego niezapomnianego dzieła wracam po latach, dążąc do uwypuklenia w nim coraz to innych aspektów nowatorstwa (por. mój pierwszy szkic o opowiadaniu Kafki, który został zogniskowany wokół problemu szeroko pojętej eliptyczności tego utworu: B. Pawłowska-Ją-

no ze szczytowych osiągnięć prozy światowej, może on być jednak także uznany za niedościgniony wzór a r t y s t y c z n e g o kształtowania scenerii: takiego mianowicie, które plastyczność i konkret motywów oraz relacji przestrzennych czyni swego rodzaju *residuum* wysublimowanych, głębokich i złożonych znaczeń nadanych, realizujących się w pełni dopiero za pośrednictwem wyobraźni, w toku kontemplacyjnej lektury i towarzyszącego jej przeżycia estetycznego. Kafkowska *Przemiana* zdaje się zaświadczać, że na obszarze sztuki poprzez misterną symbiozę „namacalnego” szczegółu i efemerycznych treści przenośnych absurd wpisany w ludzką egzystencję wyraża się nadzwyczaj sugestywnie i, *nomen omen*, szczególnie dotkliwie².

Od naturalności do niezwykłości

Vladimir Nabokov, wybitny pisarz i zarazem wielki admirator opowiadania Kafki, podkreśla w jednym ze swoich wykładów: „[...] musimy pamiętać, że literatura to nie zestaw i d e i, lecz określony system o b r a z ó w. Idee nie znaczą wiele w zestawieniu z artystyczną wizją autora i z magią książki”³.

Fenomen *Przemiany* (*Die Verwandlung*, 1915)⁴ bez wątpienia opiera się właśnie na sugestywności autorskiej wizji. Co znamienne, wizję tę współtworzą heterogeniczne komponenty opowiadania, w tym między innymi: narracyjna technika przemilczeń czy niedomówień (styl „drugiego planu”)⁵ i zaskakująca konkretność niezwykłych przedstawień, estetyczne pierwiastki absurdu, groteski, ironii, komizmu

drzyk, *Strategie pisarskie. „Przemiana”, [w:] Poetyka egzystencji. Franz Kafka na progu XXI wieku*, red. E. Kasperski, T. Mackiewicz, Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Warszawskiego, Warszawa 2004, s. 127–146). W niniejszym artykule zasadniczo podtrzymuję swoje wcześniejsze opinie na temat kształtu artystycznego *Przemiany* i jego konsekwencji interpretacyjnych, starając się w sposób wieloaspektowy i możliwie systematyczny uchwycić problem różnorodnych aspektów fenomenu przestrzeni kafkowskiej w kontekście funkcjonowania motywu murów/ścian w *Przemianie*.

2 Nie mam tu na uwadze wyłącznie twórczości literackiej ani też tylko *stricte* groteskowej, jak w przypadku prozy Kafki. Por. np.: B. Pawłowska-Jądrzyk, *Haneke w polu kontekstów fakultatywnych. „Miłość” z Kafką w tle*, [w:] *Rozjaśnianie Hanekego*, red. B. Pawłowska-Jądrzyk, K. Taras, Wydawnictwo Naukowe UKSW, Warszawa 2019, s. 167–186.

3 V. Nabokov, *Anna Karenina*, [w:] tegoż, *Wykłady o literaturze rosyjskiej*, przeł. Z. Batko, Wydawnictwo Muza, Warszawa 2002, s. 221 (podkreślenie – autora).

4 *Przemiana* ukazała się najpierw w piśmie „Die Weißen Blätter” 2. Jg., Heft 10 (Oktoberheft 1915), s. 1177–1230, redagowanym przez René Schickele, następnie, w listopadzie 1915 r., w wydawnictwie Kurta Wolffa w Lipsku, w serii *Der Jüngste Tag*, jako numer podwójny 22/23 (na karcie tytułowej umieszczono rok 1916).

5 Por. B. Pawłowska-Jądrzyk, *Strategie pisarskie. „Przemiana”, s. 141–143.*

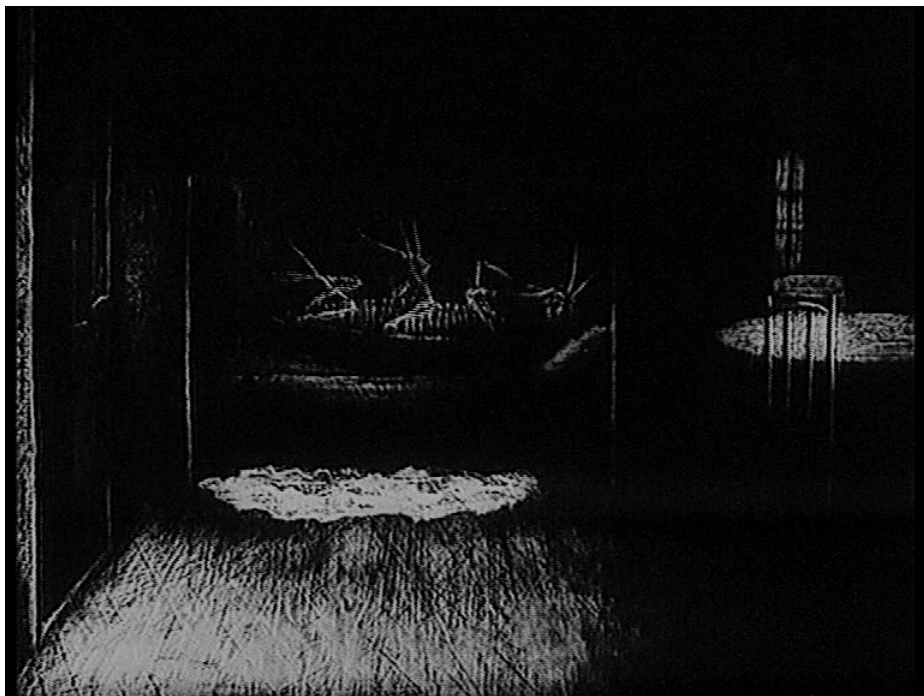
i tragizmu⁶, momenty niemal beztroskiego zapomnienia i ciężki, klaustrofobiczny klimat osaczenia, upiornej mistyfikacji. Nabokov, który rozpatruje *Przemianę* w kontekście twórczości Nikołaja Gogola (*Płaszcz*) oraz Roberta Louisa Stevensona (*Doktor Jekyll i pan Hyde*), szczególnie akcentuje paradoksalne rysy w kreacji protagonisty opowiadania. Zdaniem autora *Lolity* kunszt Kafki przejawia się

[...] w nagromadzeniu z jednej strony owadzych cech, wszystkich przygnębiających detali owadziej powłoki Gregora, a z drugiej w zachowaniu żywego i niezmaconego obrazu jego ujmującej i subtelnej ludzkiej natury⁷.

Z kolei egzystencjalista Albert Camus w następujący sposób określa ten utwór, naświetlając zarazem istotę fenomenu całej spuścizny praskiego pisarza:

Przemiana [...] jest przerażającą figurą moralności, która wynika z jasności widzenia. Ale jednocześnie jest rezultatem niewypowiedzianego zaskoczenia, którego doświadcza człowiek czując, jak bez wysiłku staje się zwierzęciem. W tej fundamentalnej dwuznaczności kryje się sekret Kafki. Nieustanne przejścia od naturalności do niezwykłości, od tego, co indywidualne, do tego, co powszechne, od tragiczności do codzienności, od absurdu do logiki można odnaleźć w całym dziele Kafki; w nich siła tego dzieła i jego znaczenie. Aby dzieło absurdalne stało się zrozumiałe, paradoksy te trzeba wyliczać i podkreślać sprzeczności⁸.

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- 6 „W świecie k a f k o w s k i m komizm nie tworzy kontrapunktu dla tragizmu (tragikomizm), jak to się dzieje u Szekspira. Nie pojawia się w nim, by dzięki lekkości tonu uczynić bardziej znośnym to, co tragiczne; nie t o w a r z y s z y tragizmowi, n i s z c z y g o w z a r o d k u, pozbawiając w ten sposób ofiarę jedyne go pocieszenia, którego mogłaby jeszcze oczekiwać: pocieszenia, jakie przynosi wzniosłość [...] tragedii”. M. Kundera, *Sztuka powieści*, przeł. M. Bieńczyk, „Czytelnik”, Warszawa 1998, s. 95; podkreślenia – autora. Por. E. Kasperski, *Tragigroteska Kafki*, „Tekstualia” 2008, nr 3, s. 19–34.
- 7 V. Nabokov, *Wykłady o literaturze*, przeł. Z. Batko, Wydawnictwo Muza, Warszawa 2001, s. 348. Zgodnie z konkluzją Nabokova, Gregor jawi się jako istota ludzka o powierzchowności owada, jego rodzina zaś „to insekty o powierzchowności ludzi” (tamże, s. 360). Nabokov, znany z fascynacji owadami, podjął próbę spojrzenia na bohatera *Przemiany* z punktu widzenia zoologii. Analiza sceny, w której Gregor stara się obrócić klucz w zamku, doprowadziła autora *Lolity* do wniosku, że Kafkowski żuk musiałby mieć mniej więcej metr długości. Nawiasem mówiąc, scena ta stanowiła jedną z inspiracji twórczych dla legendarnego rysownika „Przekroju” Daniela Mroza, zob. „Przekrój” 1956, nr 576; J. Kwiatkowski, *Daniel Mróz*, Wydawnictwo Literackie, Kraków 1961.
- 8 A. Camus, *Nadzieja i absurd w dziele Franza Kafki*, [w:] tegoż, *Mit Syzyfa i inne eseje*, przeł. J. Guze, Wydawnictwo Muza, Warszawa 1999, s. 152. Por.: W. Rainczak, *Logiczność absurdu w twórczości Franza Kafki na podstawie „Przemiany” i „Procesu”*, [w:] *Komentarze do Kafki*, red. B. Małczyński, J. Furmaniak, Wydawnictwo Chiasm, Wrocław 2007, s. 71–76.



Fot. 1. Piotr Dumała podkreśla w swojej animacji mroczny wymiar świata przedstawionego *Przemiany* (inaczej niż np. Daniel Mróz, który raczej wypuklał w nim baśniowość). Kadr z filmu Piotra Dumały pt. *Franz Kafka* (1991)

Groteskowy dramat „wśród czterech dobrze znanych ścian”

Już przed wieloma laty zauważono, że Kafka czyni wszystko, by uniemożliwić odczytanie *Przemiany* jako baśni, horroru, nadprzyrodzonej fantastyki czy wizji sennej⁹. Służy temu między innymi umiejscowienie dramatu głównego bohatera w banalnej scenerii jego rodzinnego mieszkania, a nie w przestrzeni obcej, nierozpoznanej, jaką stanowią na przykład zamorski ląd (w powieści przygodowej) czy las (w konwencji baśniowej). „Ontologiczny skandal” rozgrywający się w czterech ścianach pokoju Gregora Samsy – tak niewyobrażalny, a zarazem tak silnie utwierdzony w powszedniości – domaga się od czytelnika interpretacji parabolicznej i wywołuje zgrozę; wszak nie chodzi o bardzo odległe czy wymaginowane krainy, ale o n a s z w ł a s n y ś w i a t, którego pewność i stabilność niespodzianie okazują się tylko złudzeniem¹⁰.

⁹ P. Thomson, *The Grotesque*, Published by Methuen & Co Ltd., London 1972, s. 7–8.

¹⁰ *Przemianę* z powodzeniem można interpretować za pomocą Kayserowskiej koncepcji groteskowości: „[...] groteskowość to świat, który stał się obcy. Przydadzą

Szukające odkrycie Samsy w ekspozycji opowiadania (bohater Kafki budzi się z męczących snów, by stwierdzić, że jest ogromnym stawonogiem) to dla niego przede wszystkim doznanie skrajnej inkongruencji tożsamości i sposobu własnego przejawiania się¹¹. Co znamienne, po przebudzeniu się¹² Gregor-robak, zanim pogrąży się we wspomnieniach, rozgląda się po ścianach swojego pokoju, próbując znaleźć grunt dla odbudowy własnej tożsamości poprzez identyfikację z miejscem:

Gdy Gregor Samsa obudził się pewnego rana z niespokojnych snów, stwierdził, że zmienił się w łóżku w potwornego robaka. Leżał na grzbiecie twardym jak pancerz, a kiedy uniósł nieco głowę, widział swój sklepiony, brązowy, podzielony sztywnymi łukami brzuch, na którym ledwo mogła utrzymać się całkiem już ześlizgująca się kołdra. Liczne, w porównaniu z dawnymi rozmiarami żałośnie cienkie nogi migały mu bezradnie przed oczami.

„Co się ze mną stało?” – myślał. To nie był sen. Jego pokój, prawdziwy, nieco tylko zbyt mały ludzki pokój, mieścił się spokojnie wśród czterech dobrze znanych ścian. Nad stołem, na którym rozpościarała się rozpakowana kolekcja towarów tekstylnych – Samsa był komiwojażerem – wisiał obraz, wycięty przez niego niedawno z ilustrowanego czasopisma i umieszczony w ładnej pozłacanej ramce (s. 21)¹³.

— się tu wszakże jeszcze pewne wyjaśnienia. Świat baśni, gdy patrzy się nań z zewnątrz, dałoby się określić jako obcy i niezwykły. W istocie nie jest to jednak świat, który naprawdę stał się obcy. Nic bowiem, co było swojskie i znane, nie objawia się tu jako obce i tajemnicze. To nasz własny świat, tyle że uległ przeobrażeniom. [...] Zgroza przejmuje nas tak bardzo właśnie dlatego, że chodzi o nasz świat, którego pewność stała się pozorem. Czujemy zarazem, że w owym odmienionym świecie nie moglibyśmy żyć. W przypadku groteskowości nie chodzi o lęk przed śmiercią, ale o lęk przed życiem. Jej cechą strukturalną jest ujawnienie zawodności kategorii naszej orientacji w świecie”. W. Kayser, *Próba określenia istoty groteskowości*, przeł. R. Handke, „Pamiętnik Literacki” 1979, z. 4, s. 276–277; podkreślenie – autora.

- ¹¹ Nawiasem mówiąc, jaskrawo heterogeniczny charakter tej relacji prowadzi do efektu wyobraźniowego kojarzącego nową powierzchowność Gregora z ideą przebrania (maskarada, upozorowanie życia), która przykuła uwagę Henri Bergsona w części jego klasycznego eseju poświęconego zjawisku komizmu. Por. H. Bergson, *Śmiech. Esej o komizmie*, przeł. S. Cichowicz, Wydawnictwo KR, Warszawa 1995, s. 33 i nast.
- ¹² Scena przebudzenia się głównego bohatera rozpoczyna także inicjalną część *W poszukiwaniu straconego czasu* (1913) czy *Ferdydurke* (1937). Dla Marcela Prousta i Witolda Gombrowicza motyw ten stanowi punkt wyjścia do artystycznej eksploracji doświadczenia dezintegracji świadomości, przy czym w pierwszej z wymienionych powieści stan ten ma charakter chwilowy i daje się przewyciężyć dzięki scalającej mocy pamięci, w drugiej zaś zostaje ukazany jako przejaw nieuniknionej relatywizacji tożsamości, która, zgodnie z koncepcją polskiego pisarza, dokonuje się w procesie interakcji społecznej.
- ¹³ Wszystkie fragmenty *Przemiany* cytuję według przekładu Juliusza Kydryńskiego za następującym wydaniem: F. Kafka, *Cztery opowiadania. List do ojca*, przeł. J. Kydryński, J. Ziółkowski, Państwowy Instytut Wydawniczy, Warszawa 2003.

Dezorientację i ograniczenie władz poznawczych Gregora Kafka akcentuje za pomocą motywu mgły: rzecz dzieje się o siódmej rano, gdy poranna rosa tak gęsto spowija okolice mieszkania Samsów, że monstualny robak nie jest w stanie dostrzec z okna przeciwnej strony wąskiej ulicy, gdzie znajduje się szpital. Spokojnie kontemplując swoją nową fizjonomię oraz wygląd dobrze znanego lokum, Gregor nie powątpiewa ani przez chwilę, że w istocie swiej jest człowiekiem, pozostał nadal s o b ą, wystarczy tylko trochę poczekać, by powróciły „rzeczywiste i zrozumiałe stosunki” (s. 28). Jego postawę cechuje niepojęta wręcz „niefrasobliwość”: Gregor nie zlorzeczy, nie docieka przyczyn własnego losu, nie próbuje uwieżyć w żadne uzasadnienie ani też niczego zrozumieć¹⁴. To naprawdę intrygujące i osobliwe, że Kafkowski nieszczęśnik obserwuje swój brązowy, podzielony sztywnymi łukami brzuch oraz liczne odnóża i nie pyta „dlaczego? za co ta kara?”.

Lektura dzieła Kafki, w oryginalny sposób przetwarzającego motyw archetypowy, nie prowadzi do wypełnienia luk po konwencjonalnych rozwiązaniach fabularnych i wskazania koherentnych ciągów znaczeń czy klarownych odniesień aksjologicznych. W *Przemianie* przede wszystkim brak jest określenia determinant konfliktu wyjściowego – można rzec, iż psychologicznej redukcji postaci odpowiada tu w aspekcie fabularnym chwyt elipsy w sferze motywacji zdarzeń¹⁵. Konsekwencją takiego stanu rzeczy jest poniekąd unik aksjologiczny, jako że związek zjawiska przemiany z wartościami określa się właśnie przez jego genezę, przyczynę lub motywację¹⁶. Taka konstrukcja w zasadzie uniemożliwia określenie w kategoriach pozytywnych prawidłowości rządzących rzeczywistością przedstawioną.

Problemu sprawstwa własnego upadku nie ignorują natomiast inni protagoniści Kafki. Józef K. z *Procesu*, w swym „śmiesznym zaślepieniu”¹⁷, podejmuje usilne

¹⁴ Wiele utworów baśniowych traktuje o osobach zaklętych w zwierzę, ale w zasadzie wszystkie z nich w ten czy inny sposób określają przyczynę metamorfozy: wskazują na jej p o w ó d bądź s p r a w c ę . W baśniach zazwyczaj zostaje uwydatniony moment rozpoznania, w którym to, co wydawało się zwierzęce – odwrotnie niż w *Przemianie* – odśtania się nagle jako źródło ludzkiego szczęścia. Zob. B. Bettelheim, *Cudowne i pożyteczne. O znaczeniach i wartościach baśni*, przeł. i oprac. D. Danek, Wydawnictwo W.A.B., Warszawa 1996, s. 114–124, 427–475.

¹⁵ Więcej na ten temat w: B. Pawłowska-Jądrzyk, *Strategie pisarskie. „Przemiana”*, dz. cyt., s. 131–136.

¹⁶ M. Gołaszewska, *O zjawisku przemiany*, [w:] *Nauka o pięknie. Rozprawy z pogranicza estetyki, aksjologii ogólnej i antropologii filozoficznej*, red. M. Gołaszewska, Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu M. Curie-Skłodowskiej, Kraków–Lublin 1990, s. 53. Trzeba jednak zaznaczyć, że utwór Kafki „z całą bezwzględnością” stawia czytelnika wobec p o w a g i przedstawionej sytuacji aksjologicznej (por. A. Tyszczyk, *Estetyczne i metafizyczne aspekty aksjologii literackiej Romana Ingardena*, Lublin 1993, s. 78).

¹⁷ B. Schulz uznaje, że Kafka przez ukazanie desperackich dążeń Józefa K. ośmiesza bez nadziei poczynania ludzkich w stosunku do porządku boskiego (tenże, *Postawie do polskiego*

próby odnalezienia siedziby sądu, który osacza go za pomocą anonimowej maszyny biurokratycznej. Również geometra K. w *Zamku* z uporem usiłuje sforsować niewidzialną barierę odgradzającą go od nieosiągalnego zleceniodawcy. Natomiast Gregor Samsa zachowuje się tak, jakby kwestia przyczyn czy uwarunkowań aktualnie doświadczanego dramatu nie stanowiła żadnego problemu, a jego myśli i działania ukierunkowane są ku determinantom fizjologicznym i – jak dawniej – ku trywialnym stronom bytowania¹⁸. Między innymi dlatego w *Przemianie*, będącej niewątpliwie jednym z najmroczniejszych dzieł literatury światowej, możliwe są paroksyzmy komizmu i lekkości.

Rewiry zapomnienia – obszary doświadczania upadku. Metamorfozy przestrzeni w świecie przedstawionym *Przemiany*

Niektórzy badacze skłaniają się ku opinii, że metafora człowieka jako nędznego robaka nie posiadałaby uzasadnienia poza perspektywą istoty boskiej, odczytując opowiadanie Kafki poprzez konteksty biblijne (*Psalmy*, *Księga Hioba*, *Księga Izajasza*): „w *Przemianie* fizjologia prowadzi nieoczekiwanie do metafizyki. Gregor Samsa, zamieniony w robaka, odkrywa – tak jak Plotyn i jego naśladowcy – że ciało jest więzieniem bytu”¹⁹. Trzeba jednak zaznaczyć, że ów „konflikt między pokraczną formą a duchową treścią” zostaje przez Kafkę przedstawiony za pomocą stylu epatującego błazeńskim wręcz weryzmem i hiperbolicznie spotęgowany (absurdalne w swojej istocie „zatrzaśnięcie” Gregora w pancerzu stawonoga znajduje swego rodzaju przedłużenie w uwięzieniu go przez rodzinę w „klatce” jego własnego pokoju).

Własną metamorfozę w budzącego odrazę owada były komiwojażer postrzeżga zrazu w kategoriach „lekkiej niedyspozycji” („nie czuł się szczególnie świeży i rześki”, s. 23) i wiąże ją także z pewnymi – by tak rzec – przywilejami bycia istotą posiadającą czułki. Fragment, w którym Gregor pełza dla rozrywki po ścianach

przekładu „*Procesu*” Franza Kafki [1936], [w:] tegoż, *Szkice krytyczne*, opracowanie i postowie M. Kitowska-Łysiak, Wydawnictwo UMCS, Lublin 2000, s. 23).

¹⁸ Wątki te akcentują badacze dopatrujący się w opowiadaniu Kafki krytyki egzystencji mieszczańskiej i idei egzystencjalnej winy, grzechu przeciwko samemu sobie. Na przykład Marek Wydmuch uważa, że „przemiana to tylko akt zewnętrzny, krystalizacja sposobu życia, który z Gregora Samsy czynił myślące zwierzę. Poza nim samym nic nie zmieniło się w tym świecie, a i on odsunięty został jedynie od aktywności, zamknięty w nowym ciele, a nie przemieniony od samych podstaw swej egzystencji. [...]” (M. Wydmuch, *Franz Kafka*, „Czytelnik”, Warszawa 1982, s. 35 i nast.). Refleksja tego rodzaju prowadzona bywa po torach socjologicznych, psychologicznych, wreszcie biograficznych (koncepcje Waltera H. Sokela i H. Richtera).

¹⁹ J. Tomkowski, *Robak*, „Więź” 1982, nr 11/12, s. 49.

i suficie, należy do najbardziej wzruszających i najpogodniejszych w opowiadaniu; nieliczne obrazy tego rodzaju stanowią w nim pewną (jedynie chwilową i złudną) przeciwwagę dla scen, w których charakterystyczna dla praskiego pisarza technika kształtowania przestrzeni prowadzi do efektu osaczenia, pułapki.

[...] W ciągu dnia Gregor nie chciał już ze względu na rodziców pokazywać się w oknie, lecz po kilku metrach kwadratowych podłogi nie mógł zbyt wiele pełzać, spokojne leżenie źle znosił nawet w nocy, jedzenie nie sprawiało mu już najmniejszej przyjemności, przyzwyczał się więc dla rozrywki pełzać we wszystkich kierunkach po ścianach i suficie. Chętnie zwłaszcza wisiął na suficie; było to coś zupełnie innego niż leżenie na podłodze; oddychało się swobodniej, tułów kołysał się z lekka, a wśród szczęśliwej niemal zabawy, jaką Gregor znajdował tam w górze, mogło się zdarzyć, iż ku własnemu zaskoczeniu odrywał się i padał plackiem na podłogę. Ale teraz naturalnie o wiele lepiej panował już nad swoim ciałem niż dawniej i nawet przy tak poważnym upadku nie wyrządzał sobie krzywdy. Siostra natychmiast zauważyła nową zabawę, jaką Gregor sobie wynalazł – pełzając, zostawiał tu i ówdzie ślady swych lepkich nóżek – i wbiła sobie w głowę, by umożliwić Gregorowi pełzanie po jak największej przestrzeni, a więc usunąć meble, które w tym przeszkadzały, przede wszystkim komodę i biurko (s. 57–58).

Cecha „zamknięcia świata” łączy pisarstwo Kafki między innymi z twórczością Sławomira Mrożka, w którego utworach „bezradność ludzkiego kręcenia się w kółko” jest – zdaniem krytyki – głównym źródłem komizmu. Włodzimierz Maciąg, zestawiając *Przemianę* z opowiadaniem *Z ciemności* (tom *Słoń*, 1957), czyni na ten temat interesującą obserwację:

Warto zauważyć, że marionetkowość (źródło komizmu) nie znajduje miejsca w wizji Kafki; jakkolwiek Kafka również nie zakłada wyjścia, zakłada wszakże wyjątkowość postaci Gregora Samsy, zakłada jakby jego powołanie do rozpoznania sytuacji zamknięcia. Samsa jest pierwszy i jedyny, który przeżywa swoje zamknięcie w obcości, z a m k n i ę c i e g o w y o d r ę b n i a i p o d m i o t o w o i n t e n s y f i k u j e. Narrator Mrożka przeciwnie: im silniej wali głową w mur, tym skwapliwiej chwyta się sprawdzonych frazesów, tym bardziej zanika w zjawiskach²⁰.

Gregor jest stopniowo pozbawiany przez rodzinę ostatnich swoich małych radości: okaleczony przez ojca, nie jest już w stanie pełzać po suficie, a w końcu

²⁰ W. Maciąg, *Sławomir Mrozek – czyli świat zamknięty*, [w:] tegoż, *Nasz wiek XX: przewodnie idee literatury polskiej 1918-1980*, Ossolineum, Wrocław 1992, s. 282; podkreślenie – B.P.J. Zob. też: A. Morawiec, *Konstrukcja i znaczenie przestrzeni przedstawionej w powieściach Franza Kafki*, Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Łódzkiego, Łódź 2000.

– dostrzeżony przez sublokatorów podczas jednego z popisów muzycznych siostry, których wieczorami zwykł z lubością wysłuchiwać przez uchylone drzwi do salonu – zostaje zatrzaśnięty i zaryglowany w pokoju-pułapce²¹, gdzie też – zaniedbany i niedożywiony – w końcu umiera (zdycha). Rodzina przyjmuje śmierć swojego byłego dobroczyńcy z ulgą i nieskrywanym zadowoleniem. Jak uogólnił tę kwestię Eleazar Mielecinski, w opowiadaniu Kafki tradycja mitologiczna zmienia się jakby we własne przeciwieństwo („[...] *Przemiana* stanowi w pewnym sensie mit odwrócony, antymit, jeśli mit starożytny uznamy za pewnego rodzaju wzorzec”)²². Według rosyjskiego mitoznawcy metamorfoza Samsy nie jest znakiem przynależności do rodowej wspólnoty, ale przeciwnie – „znakiem odłączenia, wyobcowania, konfliktu, zerwania więzi z rodziną i społeczeństwem”²³.

W opowiadaniu Kafki niezwykle ważną rolę odgrywają metamorfozy przestrzeni, które – co istotne – idą w parze ze stopniową przemianą postaw postaci drugiego planu. (Myślę nie tylko o potęgującej się agresji wobec Gregora, której prawdziwa eksplozja następuje w wyniku zetknięcia się Samsów z „ludźmi z zewnątrz” – szczególną uwagę zwraca przedzierzgnięcie się siostry z troskliwej niegdyś opiekunki Gregora w jego najbardziej bezwzględnej prześladowcy – ale i o zaskakującej zaradności życiowej osób tak niegdyś nieporadnych, że „zmuszonych” do pozostawiania przez całe lata na łasce dobrotliwego chlebodawcy.) Ujmując problem skrótowo: tragiczny los bohatera opowiadania wypełnia się z szybkością wprost proporcjonalną do zagracania jego lokum starymi, nikomu już niepotrzebnymi sprzętami. Z czasem pokój Samsy przekształca się w zaniedbaną rupieciarnię, w której funkcję ostatniego bastionu prywatności właściciela pełni stara kanapa. Jego przestrzeń życiowa ulega izolacji i sukcesywnemu zawężaniu²⁴,

21 Żaneta Nalewajk interpretuje Kafkowskie motywy miejsc-klatek, miejsc-pułapek w kontekście egzystencjalistycznego problemu samobójstwa. Badaczka dostrzega w nich „metafory egzystencji cechującej się gwałtownym ograniczeniem możliwości wyboru, egzystencji, którą można tylko albo przyjąć w całości (bez względu na to, jaka się okaże, jakie uwarunkowania napotka, jaka przemiana będzie jej ceną), albo w całości odrzucić, wyzbyć się pragnienia trwania, powiedzieć życiu i światu albo »tak« albo »nie«” (też: *Ironia jako alternatywa rozpaczy. Krytyka kultury w „Sprawozdaniu dla Akademii”, „Tekstualia”* 2008, nr 3, s. 68).

22 E. Mielecinski, *Poetyka mitu*, przeł. J. Dancygier, przedmowa M.R. Mayenowa, Państwowy Instytut Wydawniczy, Warszawa 1981, s. 437.

23 Tamże.

24 Odkrywamy tu kolejną różnicę między kreacją świata przedstawionego w *Przemianie* i w bajce. Przestrzeń bajkowa jest wręcz nieograniczona. Do jej maksymalnego rozszerzenia prowadzi „dynamiczna lekkość bajki” (zob. D.S. Lichaczow, *Świat wewnętrzny dzieła literackiego*, przeł. J. Faryno, „Pamiętnik Literacki” 1974, z. 4). Lekkość ta przejawia się m.in. w łatwości, z jaką porozumiewają się postacie – w tym, że zwierzęta mogą mówić, a drzewa rozumieć słowa bohatera (por. dramat komunikacyjny Gregora).

co znajduje estetyczny wykładnik w doznaniu ciężkości, towarzyszącym lekturze ostatniej części utworu. Przemiana przestrzeni przedstawionej i związane z ową przestrzenią opozycje przestrzenne (górze – sufit, ściany; dół – podłoga) zyskują tu znaczenia naddane. Dotkliwie osamotnionemu Gregorowi przychodzi skonać w brudzie, w pomieszczeniu przypominającym śmietnisko, oddzielonym zaledwie ścianą od członków rodziny, którzy przez całe lata korzystali z jego ciężkiej pracy, a teraz odnoszą się do niego z wrogością i odrazą; wielki żuk, schorowany i „zakleszczony” na podłodze w odpadkach oraz w bezliku zbędnych przedmiotów, traci dostęp do ścian i sufitu, a także możliwość przemieszczania się w płaszczyźnie wertykalnej, ku górze.

Wstrząsająca historia człowieka przemienionego w stawonoga, tak sugestywnie rozegrana w sferze motywów przestrzennych, znajduje chyba najbardziej ironiczny, szyderczy wręcz kontrapunkt w zjawiskach będących w opowiadaniu emblematami przemian czasu. Gregor Samsa „zdycha” (z własnej niemalże woli, i nie bez uczucia ulgi) przy pierwszym brzasku świtu, w końcu marca, u progu budzącej wszystko do życia wiosny. Wzgardzone szczątki Gregora zostają usunięte z pokoju przez posługaczkę, bez udziału któregośkolwiek z członków rodziny. W ropiejącej ranie na jego wychudzonym ciele tkwi jabłko – atrybut będący w kulturze europejskiej między innymi symbolem zdrowia, życia oraz doczesnych radości, a także odkupienia, nieśmiertelności i obecności boskiej...²⁵

W niedalekim sąsiedztwie tej wizji Kafka kreśli sugestywny obraz siostry Gregora, Grety – dziewczyny pięknej, rozwiniętej i bujnej, niczym bogini płodności przeciągającej w słońcu swe młode ciało. Francuski pisarz i filozof Maurice Blanchot uznał finałową scenę *Przemiany* za wstrząsającą:

[Samsa] Umiera – śmierć nieznośna, w opuszczeniu i samotności, a jednak śmierć prawie szczęśliwa, bo daje uczucie wyzwolenia, przez nową nadzieję na koniec, teraz już ostateczny. Ale wkrótce z kolei ta ostatnia nadzieja okazuje się płonna; to nieprawda, nie było końca, egzystencja dalej trwa, a gest młodszej siostry, jej ruch budzenia się do życia, wezwanie do rozkoszy, którym kończy się opowiadanie, jest szczytem potworności. W całej tej opowieści nie ma nic bardziej przerażającego [...]²⁶.

²⁵ W. Kopaliński, *Słownik symboli*, Wiedza Powszechna, Warszawa 1990, s. 112–113.

²⁶ M. Blanchot, *Wokół Kafki*, przeł. K. Kocjan, Wydawnictwo KR, Warszawa 1996, s. 60–61. Nawiasem mówiąc, na podobieństwo finału dwóch opowiadań Kafki, *Przemiany* i *Głodomora*, zwróciła uwagę Maria Janion w szkicu poświęconym fascynacji Tadeusza Różewicza twórczością tego pisarza (zob. *Przeraźliwość istnienia*, [w:] tejsze, *Żyjąc tracimy życie*, Wydawnictwo W.A.B., Warszawa 2001, s. 179–192).



Fot. 2. *Przemiana* przyjmuje kształt formy fragmentarycznej i nierównomiernie oświetlonej, której właściwe są opisy kreślące zjawiska pobieżnie oraz wypowiedzi krótkie, oderwane, ostro ze sobą zderzone, spychające w mrok niedomówień fundamenty świata przedstawionego. Te cechy dzieła praskiego pisarza znakomicie wydobyl Piotr Dumała w artystycznym filmie animowanym pt. *Franz Kafka* (1991)

Motywy drzewi, ścian, sufitu, podłogi w *Przemianie* (słowo podsumowania)

Jak już dowodziłam przy innych okazjach, *Przemiana* Kafki jest utworem, który zadreżca interpretatora niedosytem sensu, wzywając do odkrywania coraz to nowych zasad scalających. W zasadzie każdy pojawiający się w niej motyw symboliczny uzmysławia znaczeniowe rozwarstwienie przedstawionych sytuacji czy przewrotnie aluzyjny charakter tekstu. Na przykład styczność czasowa i domniemany związek wynikowy dwóch planów wydarzeń: ofiarnej (w pewnym ujęciu) śmierci Samsy²⁷ oraz nadejścia „życiodajnej” wiosny zdają się odsłaniać metafi-

²⁷ Można np. zaryzykować stwierdzenie, że historia Gregora Samsy – jeśli dopatrywać się w niej elementów parodii – jest dyskretnie stylizowana na starotestamentową opowieść o ofierze Abrahama. Abstrahując od konfiguracji postaci, można zauważyć, iż – poza podobieństwem techniki kształtowania rzeczywistości przedstawionej w obydwu tekstach

zyczny i złowrogi wymiar przerażającej historii, kierują uwagę ku nieprzenikniomym mrokom istnienia, które gotują człowiekowi ostateczną zgubę. Nawet banalne, pozornie nieistotne czy przypadkowe elementy tła mogą stać się tu znakiem „zgubionego ogniwa”, kluczem do zasłoniętego sensu zdarzeń²⁸.

Nieszczęśnik zostaje zamieniony w insekta – i co z tego? Na tak zadane sobie pytanie Nabokov odpowiada:

Nie ma sensownej odpowiedzi na to „i co z tego?”. Możemy rozebrać historię na czynniki pierwsze, możemy się przyjrzeć, jak te części są do siebie dopasowane, jak się ma jeden element mozaiki do drugiego, ale człowiek musi mieć w sobie pewną komórkę, pewien gen, który rozwibruje się w reakcji na doznania, trudne do zdefiniowania, ale też nie dające się zignorować. »Piękno plus litość« to najtrafniejsza definicja sztuki [...]»²⁹.

Jak wzmiankowałam na wstępie, Nabokov upatruje genialności *Przemiany* w zdenerwieniu precyzyjnego stylu ze śmiałością wizji³⁰, w sposobach, w jakie opowiadanie to pobudza emocje i wyobraźnię odbiorcy, igrając pierwiastkami fantazji i rzeczywistości.

– do zestawienia tego prowokują znamienne elementy tła (m.in. motyw świtu, o którym kiedyś interesująco pisał Erich Auerbach), a nade wszystko dwa najbardziej intrygujące „węzły problemowe”, ukierunkowujące lekturę obydwu opowieści: milcząca zgoda na ogrom niezawinionego cierpienia i nieogarnialność przyczyn straszliwych doświadczeń człowieka. Por.: E. Auerbach, *Blizna Odyseusza*, [w:] tegoż, *Mimesis. Rzeczywistość przedstawiona w literaturze Zachodu*, przeł. Z. Żabicki, przedmowy Z. Żabicki, M.P. Markowski, Prószyński i S-ka, Warszawa 2004.

²⁸ Por. uwagi na temat narracyjnej zasady metamorfozy w inspirującym szkicu Teresy Dobrzyńskiej poświęconym opowiadaniu *Wiosna w Fialcie* Vladimira Nabokova (T. Dobrzyńska, *Tekst – styl – poetyka*, Universitas, Kraków 2003, s. 57–106); wersja rozszerzona tego tekstu: też, *Opowiadanie Vladimira Nabokova „Wiosna w Fialcie” w kręgu możliwych wykładni sensu*, [w:] *Możliwość i konieczność w kulturze. Idee, narracje, interpretacje*, red. red. B. Pawłowska-Jądrzyk, Wydawnictwo Naukowe UKSW, Warszawa 2017, s. 99–143. Nawiasem mówiąc, utwór Nabokova – tak odmienny w swym klimacie i literackim kształcie od *Przemiany* – zawiera motywy zbieżne z opowiadaniem Kafki, by wspomnieć tylko nadejście tytułowej wiosny, które wiąże znacząca koincydencja ze śmiercią bohaterki.

²⁹ V. Nabokov, *Wykłady o literaturze*, s. 326.

³⁰ Rosyjski pisarz kończy swoje obszerne studium na temat *Przemiany* następującymi słowami: „Zwróćcie uwagę na styl Kafki. Jego klarowność, jego precyzyjna i bardzo formalna intonacja stanowi uderzający kontrast z koszmarną treścią opowiadania. Żadne poetyckie metafory nie zdobią tej surowej, czarno-białej opowieści. Przejrzystość stylu uwypukla mroczne bogactwo tej fantazji. Kontrast i zgodność, styl i materia, maniera pisarska i fabuła łączą się tu w perfekcyjną całość” (V. Nabokov, *Wykłady o literaturze*, dz. cyt., s. 326).

Do głównych motywów tematycznych najsłynniejszego opowiadania Kafki zaliczył autor *Lolity* motyw drzwi – „ich ciągle otwieranie i zamykanie”³¹. Śledząc historię Gregora, jesteśmy nieprzerwanie świadomi istnienia drzwi (w pokoju byłego komiwojażera jest ich aż troje, tyle ile pokoi w mieszkaniu Samsów)³², przez jakiś czas wiążemy z nimi jakąś nieokreśloną, ostatecznie płonną nadzieję na możliwość koegzystencji dwóch połówek tego „rozpękniętego” świata, co wydaje się lustrzanym odbiciem pragnień i złudzeń samego Gregora. Motyw drzwi – nader konkretny, w naturalny sposób umotywowany w świecie przedstawionym utworu i pozostający w ścisłym związku z motywem ścian – sprzyja stematyzowaniu kwestii otwartości/zamkniętości świata, a zatem uwypukleniu problemów wolności i zniewolenia człowieka, uległości i dominacji³³.

W odbiorze *Przemiany* jaskrawa absurdalność przedstawionych sytuacji nabiera wyjątkowej „siły rażenia” dzięki wpisaniu obrazowo ukazanego dramatu byłego komiwojażera w prozaiczną, drobiazgowo opisaną, bliską poniekąd każdemu scenerię. „Ontologiczny skandal”, który przesądza o upodleniu, alienacji i śmierci Gregora, dokonuje się wśród osób mu najbliższych, w czterech ścianach jego własnego pokoju, którego rzeczywistości (w obrębie świata przedstawionego) nie sposób kwestionować. Predylekcja pisarstwa Kafki do szczegółowości i prozaiczności bywa interpretowana jako „drwina – zarówno z realizmu, jak i z alegorii”, co wiąże się z niemożnością krystalizacji na kartach jego utworów jednoznacznego, ogólnego przesłania³⁴. Podobnie rzecz się ma z symboliczną wykładnią poszczególnych motywów, w tym przestrzennych. Rola tych ostatnich jest istotna – wszak pozwalają wyrazić realność i dotkliwość koszmaru, przedstawić inwazję absurdu w przestrzeń świata, który – mimo pozorów zwyczajności – na naszych oczach wyobcowuje się i przekształca w pułapkę. Nader łatwo zaciera się tu granica mię-

31 Tamże, s. 343, 363 i inne.

32 Nabokov w pierwszym rzędzie podkreśla znaczenie liczby trzy w *Przemianie* (tamże, s. 362).

33 Autor książki *Fiction of the Modern Grotesque* dowodzi, że do najistotniejszych we współczesnej grotesce literackiej należą problemy uległości i dominacji, a to właśnie Kafka bodaj jako pierwszy przekroczył próg groteski współczesnej, przedstawiając postać, która „nie tylko potrafi stać się robakiem, ale w istocie s t a j e s i ę nim” (B. McElroy, *Fiction of the Modern Grotesque*, The Macmillan Press LTD, Houndmills, Basingstoke, Hampshire and London 1989, s. 29; podkreślenie autora).

34 „Problem dziwnego spiętrzenia szczegółów, które co jakiś czas pojawia się w prozie Kafki, kazał mi zadać pytanie o realistyczny, symboliczny bądź alegoryczny charakter tego pisarstwa. Dowodziłem, że żadne z tych określeń nie stosuje się zbyt dobrze do Kafki, i że między innymi to właśnie owa szczegółowość sprawia, że Kafkowskie historie są całkowicie odrealnione, zarazem jednak nie są w stanie przekazać spójnego alegorycznego pouczenia. Sądzę zatem, że szczegółowość jest u Kafki gorzką drwiną – zarówno z realizmu, jak i z alegorii” (A. Lipszyc, *Szczegół i nieczytelność. Esej o negatywnej hermeneutyce Kafki*, [w:] *Poetyka egzystencji. Franz Kafka na progu XXI wieku*, s. 171).

dzy schronieniem a więzieniem (zob. przemiany znaczeń przestrzeni ograniczanej ścianami pokoju Gregora), zaś pogłosy odwiecznych metafizycznych tęsknot człowieka wybrzmiewają karykaturalnie (zob. ironiczne ujęcie kulturowo utwierdzonej opozycji góra – dół we fragmentach osnutych wokół motywów sufitu i podłogi). Kafka rzeczywiście nie odsłania sensu historii Gregora Samsy, pozwala nam jednak ten sens przeżyć i przeczuć – jako treść naszego własnego życia.

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Familiar spaces of absurdity


Summary

The subject of analysis in the article is *The Metamorphosis* (1915) of Franz Kafka. The author attempts to capture various aspects of the Kafka space phenomenon in the context of the functioning of the wall / ceiling motif in this probably the most famous narrative of world literature. At the same time, the researcher treats Kafka's work as an unsurpassed pattern of artistic scenery shaping: namely, which plasticity and concrete motifs and spatial relations make a kind of *residuum* of sublime, symbolic meanings, realizing fully only through the imagination of the recipient, in the course of contemplative reading and accompanying it aesthetic experience. The argument leads to the conclusion that in his parabolic, absurd, full of understatement (and yet surprisingly specific) piece of work, Kafka does not reveal the sense of the story of a hero transformed into an arthropod, but allows us to experience this sense and presage it – as the content of our own lives.

Keywords: Franz Kafka, *The Metamorphosis*, grotesque prose, absurdity, artistic imagination, depicted space, parabola, symbol

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Rumory wojny. Szkic do portretu Franza Kafki (na przykładzie opowiadania *Bratobójstwo*)

Streszczenie

W dotychczasowych badaniach nad twórczością Franza Kafki problematyka wojenna występuje raczej zdawkowo i incydentalnie. W prezentowanym artykule, Autor wytyka zaniechanie kafkologów i próbuje wskazać możliwe kierunki belumicznej interpretacji. Szkic do portretu wojennego inspirowany jest opowiadaniem prażanina zatytułowanym *Bratobójstwo*. Tekst, w którym widać inspiracje biblijną historią Kaina i Abla, to zacytn kafkowskiego myślenia o świecie zdeterminowanym przemocą, opanowanym przez krwawy konflikt. Gest podniesienia ręki przez barata brata to prototyp masowej zagłady, wojny jako takiej, a także ludobójstwa. Wydaje się, że na tym tekstowym poligonie doświadczalnym, przećwiczył Kafka swe przyszłe projekty fabularne. Utwory autora *Bratobójstwa*, czytane jako wykwit wyobraźni opanowanej pożogą wojenną, uzupełniają, zaniechane wcześniej przez znawców, pole badawcze.

Słowa kluczowe: Franz Kafka, bratobójstwo, agon, choroba, Wielka Wojna

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Jeśli chodzi o słuchaczy, to dzieło moje, pozbawione baśni,
 wyda może im się mniej interesujące,
 lecz wystarczy mi, jeśli uznają je za pożyteczne ci,
 którzy będą chcieli poznać dokładnie przeszłość
 i wyrobić sobie sąd o takich samych lub podobnych wydarzeniach,
 jakie zgodnie ze zwykłą kolejną spraw ludzkich mogą zająć w przyszłości.
 Dzieło mojej jest bowiem dorobkiem o nieprzemijającej
 wartości, a nie utworem dla chwilowego popisu.

Tukidydes, *Wojna peloponeska*¹

Żyjemy w czasach zła.

Franza Kafka²

Bakcyl utajony

Poruszając się samochodem z północy Europy w kierunku Wenecji, można zjechać z autostrady A1 i przemierzyć kilkanaście kilometrów drogą SR305, by trafić do miejscowości Fogliano Redipuglia, w prowincji Gorycja. Tam, nad wejściem na cmentarz wojskowy z okresu I wojny światowej, na którym spoczywa ponad 100 tysięcy żołnierzy różnych narodowości (w tym 60 tysięcy bezimiennych), widnieje złowieszczy napis: *A me che importa? (Co mnie to obchodzi?)*. Odwiedzając to miejsce wiecznego spoczynku nowoczesnego świata, mogiłę zbiorowego szaleństwa wojny, nie można opędzić się od myślowego natręctwa, że jednak ta bezsensowna rzeź mnie obchodzi, zniewala i paraliżuje. Ile takich widmowych miast, zapomnianych nekropolii widnieje na historycznych mapach? A ile ukrytych kurhanów mieści się pod soczystą zielenią pagórków, w sedymentacyjnych warstwach meandrujących rzek, w balsamizującej otulinie bagien i moczarów? Odkryte kości noszące ślady zabójstwa z epoki neandertalskiej zasilają pasje kryminologów. Dziesiątki tysięcy lat czasowego odstępu powoduje, że i orzeczenie winy i wymierzenie kary musi zostać bezterminowo odroczone. Nie można ustalić przebiegu zdarzeń, przesłuchać świadków i wskazać sprawcy. Zabójstwo jednak było, bo taka jest ludzka natura. I może był to mord założycielski, który później w biblijnej opowieści przybrał kształt osobowy, wyszedł z cienia biologicznych żądzy w stronę parabolicznej kwantyfikacji. Zatem w interpelacji zawisłej na bramie włoskiej nekropolii, która tylko w małej części oddaje wyobrażenie siedmiu milionów zabitych w czasie pierwszej wojny światowej, słychać zasadnicze pytania: A cóż mnie obchodzi mój brat? A któż mnie ustanowił stróżem brata mego? Gdzieś pośrodku

¹ Tukidydes, *Wojna peloponeska*, przeł. K. Kumaniecki, „Czytelnik”, Warszawa 1957, s. 13.

² G. Janouch, *Rozmowy z Kafką. Notatki wspomnienia*, przeł. J. Borysiak, E. Dyczek, postawieniem i przypisami opatrzył E. Dyczek, „Czytelnik”, Warszawa 1993, s. 79.

na symbolicznym moście, przerzuconym pomiędzy dzikością neandertalczyka zabijającego swego brata a oszalałym żołnierzem z frontów pierwszej wojny światowej rzucającego się na przeciwnika, sytuują się słowa biblijnego Kaina.

Pismo Kafki zbliża się pod względem prostoty formy i totalności sensu do stylu biblijnego. Przypowieść o Kainie i Ablu, bo to bezpośredni kontekst *Bratobójstwa*, nie zostaje w utworze Kafki bezpośrednio przytoczona. To charakterystyczny model działania wizjonera z Pragi, który ignorował rzeczy i zdarzenie zbyt wielkie by z nimi konkurować o czytelniczną uwagę (podobnym milczeniem zbył fakt wybuchu samej wojny). Powiedzieć, że kierowała nim bezwstydną pycha lub lekceważąca ignorancja to złożyć kapitulację najprostszą odpowiedzią, Milczenie mogło brać się z podziwu, z bezwstydnej i niezdrowej fascynacji ogromem rażenia – czy to wojny – czy Pisma Świętego. Rywalizacja z tymi „moločami” była dla Kafki z góry zapowiedzianą klęską. Jedynym ratunkiem była kontrpropozycja, spryt i przebiegłość w walce o niepodległość własnego głosu. Ciekawe, że Kafka, pomimo ciągłego unikania wszelkiej nadprzyrodzoności, bez ustanku zajmował się właśnie przekraczaniem materii, od-świętnością swojego pisma, skrupulatnym nadpisywaniem ksiąg i przypowieści. I pomimo, że głównym zadaniem Kafki jest uwalnianie człowieka, poprzez demaskację, od uwikłania, spętania i zamknięcia w prawie, to pozostaje on prozaikiem formy rygorystycznej, której prostota równać się może tylko z tekstami proroczymi. Samo *Bratobójstwo* ma również kilka możliwych egzegez interpretacyjnych.

Będąc wariacją na temat alienacji i podejrzliwości w stosunkach międzyludzkich, zawartych w biblijnym micie Kaina i Abła, opowiadanie to oferuje kilka poziomów interpretacji. W historyczno-społecznym kontekście Europy, a zwłaszcza Pragi, w czasie gdy powstało to opowiadanie (zimą 1916/1917), tekst jest aluzją do krwawych wydarzeń pierwszej wojny światowej oraz zrywów społecznych i nacjonalistycznych, które trzymały w kleszczach Pragę i konającą monarchię Habsburgów, reprezentowaną w anachronicznym „braterstwie” odrębnych grup etnicznych utrzymywanych w jedności przez tradycję i osobę cesarza – tekst Kafki odczytywać można jako ironiczny komentarz do rozpadu wielonarodowego państwa. Krytycy sugerują też, że trzy postacie tego tekstu przedstawiają projekcje trzech czynników Freudowskiej psyche, gdzie Schmar, Wese i Pallas symbolizują odpowiednio, nieokiełznaną pożądlivość podświadomości, społeczną fasadę ego i obserwującą postawę superego. Przy takim założeniu tekst opowiada historię psychologicznej autodestrukcji³.

To, co łączy biblijną opowieść z opowiadaniem Kafki to sceniczność. Spektakl zbrodni i wojny, mimo oczywistej różnicy skali, ma wiele punktów wspólnych.

³ R.T. Gray, R.V. Gross, R.J. Goebel, C. Koelb, *Franz Kafka. Encyklopedia*, przeł. J. Kozak, Państwowy Instytut Wydawniczy, Warszawa 2017, s. 108.

Historia bycia widzem miała różne fazy. Oglądając tragedię grecką widz czuł się częścią widowiska, które wyznaczało ramy jego symbolicznego świata. W następnych wiekach odbiorca był już skazany na obserwację, bądź też kontemplację – najpierw boskiego (średniowiecze) – a potem ludzkiego planu (czasy nowożytne). W wieku dwudziestym widz niespodziewanie znalazł się na scenie, a odgrywany spektakl wyznaczał scenariusz jego życia (powszechność wojny). Można to nazwać sytuacją Kafkowską, kiedy absurdalna niespodzianka zmienia, z reguły rujnując, życie człowieka. Przypadek *Bratobójstwa* jeszcze inaczej dekomponuje perspektywę widza i uczestnika. Kafka, pragnie wypreparować pierwszą sytuację zabójstwa, kiedy widzowie staną się zaraz uczestnikami tego szalonego spektaklu. Metafora teatralna pokazuje mechanizm wciągania do uczestnictwa coraz szerszych kręgów społecznych. Jak rozlewa się wojenna zaraza? Jak dotrzeć do pierwszego poruszonego wojennej maszyny? Opowiadanie Kafki to inscenizacja „pierwszej przyczyny”: oto jak na pierwotnej scenie następuje eskalacja przemocy, jak świadkowie (bliscy i dalecy), po kolei, stają się uczestnikami zdarzeń, jak prawo jest umowne a sprawiedliwość fasadowa.

Opowiadanie Franza Kafki zaczyna się w zaskakujący sposób:

Dowiedziano, że morderstwa dokonano w następujący sposób: Schmar, zabójca, około dziewiętej stanął w rozświetloną księżycem noc na tym rogu ulicy, gdzie Wese, ofiara, musiał skręcić z uliczki, w której leżało jego biuro, w tę, przy której mieszkał⁴.

Podobnie jak w ponowoczesnym kryminale na początku opowieści jesteśmy już po procesie sądowym, wszystko zostało ustalone, zbadane i zamknięte, a zagadki mnożą się bardziej niż w momencie otwarcia sprawy kryminalnej. Skoro *dowiedziano, że morderstwa dokonano w następujący sposób* to mamy do czynienia z retrospektywą, nawet nie z wizją lokalną, co z poprocesową rekonstrukcją zdarzeń. Autorzy *Encyklopedii* poświęconej Kafce, również zwracają uwagę na szczególną wymowę początku:

Ein Brudermord jest jednym z najbardziej realistycznych opisowo i nacechowanych przemocą opowiadań Kafki. W zgodzie z jego realistycznym zamysłem pozostaje fakt, że rozpoczyna się zdaniem wprowadzającym, które stwierdza kategorycznie – językiem przywodzącym na myśl pismo prawnicze albo suchą notatkę prasową – że wszystkie opisane zdarzenia są zgodne z prawdą [„Dowiedziano, że morderstwa dokonano w następujący sposób [...]”]. Obiektywna, niemal wszechwiedząca narracja lokuje ten tekst w sąsiedztwie innych utworów z tego samego okresu, takich jak *In*

4 F. Kafka, *Bratobójstwo*, [w:] tegoż, *Opowieści i przypowieści*, przeł. E. Ptaszyńska-Sadowska, Państwowy Instytut Wydawniczy, Warszawa 2016, s. 304.

der Strafkolonie (Kolonja karna) czy opowieści *Auf der Galerie (Na galerii)* i *Ein Bericht für eine Akademie („Sprawozdanie dla Akademii”)*, które wykorzystują bardziej obiektywną, zdystansowaną perspektywę w fikcyjnej akcji⁵.

Poetyka notatki prasowej z działu kryminalnego pozostaje w stylistycznym sporze z konwencją pełną bufonady i obrazowych deformacji. Można się również zastanawiać nad przyczyną tak realistycznego odtwarzania zabójstwa, skoro przestępca został przyłapany na gorącym uczynku, morderstwo zostało ukarane, a rozmyte zakończenie nie staje się żadną przestrożą, ani pouczeniem. Kryminologia rządzi się własnymi prawami. Dowody zabezpieczone na miejscu zdarzenia pozwalają ustalić sprawcę i dowieść ostatecznie przed sądem jego winy. W tak oczywistym przypadku samo opowiedzenie tej historii nie jest domeną sztuki detektywistycznej, ani formą apelacji od wyroku, jak również nie jest przykładem pomyłki sądowej. Zatem oschłość jurydycznej noty we wprowadzeniu w historię zabójstwa Wesego przez Schama, tylko pozorowało realistyczne ramy opowieści. Narrator celowo myli czytelnicze tropy, odwodzi od rozwikłania zagadki morderstwa. Najważniejsze pozostaje do ustalenia nie kto zabił kogo, lecz w jakim celu? W ustalaniu powodu zabójstwa większość badaczy wskazuje zbrodnie w afekcie, z pożądania, z zazdrości. Rzeczywiście, denat Wese pozostawał w związku małżeńskim z panią Wese. Zabójca jednak nie ujawnia żadnym uczuć względem żony pana Wese. Trudno wnioskować o jakiegokolwiek znajomości między sprawcą a żoną poszkodowanego. Logika kryminalnej dedukcji nie sprawdza się do końca w dociekaniach nad tekstem Kafki. Co nie znaczy, że jej elementy nie będą podtrzymywać napięcia narracyjnego. Dla interpretacji mogą być tylko jedną z wielu możliwych metodologii badawczych. Pamiętać należy, że w utworach Kafki następstwo przyczynowo – skutkowe nieraz odbite zostało w zwierciadłach iluzji i wyrażone w szeregu przesądów (przed/sądów). Niemniej jednak pozostając w lekturowym trybie kryminalnej dedukcji, warto zwrócić uwagę na narzędzie zbrodni: „Narzędzie mordu, na wpół bagnet, na wpół nóż kuchenny, całkowicie obnażony, przez cały czas trzymał mocno w ręku”⁶.

Trzeba przyznać, że techniczna hybryda *na wpół bagnet, na wpół nóż kuchenny* przypomina niesamowite przedmioty rodem ze snu nadrealisty. Bagnet jako kuchenne utensylium? Taka pomyłka nie wydaje się przypadkowa. Biała broń kłująco-sieczna, mocowana u wylotu lufy karabinu to podstawowy ekwipunek w uzbrojeniu żołnierza. Słowo bagnet nie należy do zwykłego zbioru leksemów z zakresu rynsztunku i oręża. Można powiedzieć, że jest ogniwem pośrednim między cywilną a wojskową stroną życia. Miasto Bayonne we Francji, gdzie wymyślono konstrukcję bagnetu, wcześniej słynęło z produkcji kuchennych noży.

5 R.T. Gray, R.V. Gross, R.J. Goebel, C. Koelb, dz. cyt., s. 107–108.

6 F. Kafka, *Bratobójstwo...*, s. 304.

W *Bratobójstwie* ślad bagnetu przynosi interpretacyjną superatę. Zwraca uwagę na znaczeniowe residuum wojny. Biorąc pod uwagę wojskową komendę „bagnet na broń”, która nakazuje rozpoczęcie procedury uzbrajania muszkietu, by oddać salwę lub zacząć szarżę, nie można pomyśleć o słowie „bratobójstwo” już inaczej niż jako o synonimie masowej eksterminacji, regularnej wojny. Ten *na wpol* artefakt celowo został położony przed czytelnicznymi oczami. Nóż, który przypomina tylko kształtem bagnet to bardzo ważna poszlaka w materiale (dowodowym/literackim), który pozostawił nam Franz Kafka. Przedmiot, który połyскуje znaczeniową migotliwością, skłania do zmiany odczytania całego opowiadania w zupełnie inny sposób. Nie jako przypowieści o zbrodni, lecz jako paraboli konkretnego krwawego wydarzenia, którego świadkiem był pisarz – pierwszej wojny światowej.

– Gotowe! – mówi Schmar i rzuca nóż, zbędny krwawy balast, o ścianę najbliższego domu. – Błogość mordu! Ulga, uskrzydlenie przez przelanie obcej krwi! Wese, ty stary nocny cieniu, przyjacielu, kompanie z piwnej ławy, wykrawisz się w ciemny bruk. Dlaczego nie jesteś po prostu wypełnionym krwią pęcherzem, żebym mógł na tobie usiąść, a ty zniknąłbyś doszczętnie. Nie wszystko zostaje spełnione, nie wszystkie kwieciste marzenia dojrzały, twoje ciężkie szczątki leżą tutaj, niewarte już kopniaka. Co ma znaczyć to nieme pytanie, jakie w ten sposób zadajesz?⁷

Kafka realizuje w tym opowiadaniu podwójną, a nawet wielokrotnie złożoną, grę. Z jednej strony opisuje, w bardzo realistyczny sposób, pospolity mord, który spotyka się z zasłużoną karą. Z drugiej strony, co rusz czyni błazeńską woltę i sprowadza wszystko do potocznego żartu. Dodatkowo, narracyjna gra piętrzy się jeszcze w ramach tematycznych i genologicznych. Raz, będzie to apokryficzne dopowiedzenie o krwawym braterskim konflikcie, przepisane na modłę współczesną Kafce, innym razem karnawałowy popis mówienia jednocześnie o wielu sprawach i w wielu konwencjach: parabolicznie o wojnie, bombastycznie o unicestwianiu ciała, teatralnie o przygodach ego, id i superego, czy jarmarcznie i knajacko o zabójstwie. Pośród tego rozgwaru głosów warto konsekwentnie wsłuchiwać się w **rumory wojny** jako ścieżkę dźwiękową tego opowiadania, jak i ukryty puls całej twórczości pisarza po 1914 roku. W tekstach Franza Kafki, nastrojając odpowiednio aparaty metodologiczne, można wychwycić te ultradźwięki: świsty, wystrzały, terkoty, trzaski, jazgoty, rzężenia⁸. Cały ten wojenny zgiełk i łoskot pozostaje dalekim tłem odsłuchu w opowieściach prażanina, który sam również musiał słyszeć, w dalekich rejestrach, nadsłuchujący hałas historii. Przestrzeń akustyczna w utworach Kafki to kolejny przyczynek do belumicznych predylekcji. Wracając do zacytowanego fragmentu *Bratobójstwa*

⁷ Tamże, s. 305.

⁸ Por. P. Kładoczny, *Odgłosy wojny w przekazach prasowych i literackich*, „Oblicza Komunikacji” 2017, nr 10.

uwagę zwraca mowa Schmara wygłoszona nad zwłokami Wesego. Zabójca zaczyna monolog od wykrzyzanego meldunku: *Gotowe!* Odnosząc to krótkie zaraportowania o wykonaniu zadania do rodzaju wykonanej czynności – zabicia człowieka, czytelnik zmuszony zostaje do wikłania się w domysły o przyczynę takiej tekstowej prowokacji. Czym są te dziwne zawody w zabijaniu? Odpowiedź wybrzmiewa majuskułą w tytule: *BRATOBÓJSTWEM*, czyli wojną. Dalsze czytanie z tak założoną tezą przynosi kolejne odkrycia. Słowa, wskazujące w normalnym stanie na osobowość dewiacyjną, pełną sadystycznych pasji: *Błogość mordu! Ulga, uskrzydlenie przez przelanie obcej krwi!*, w stanie wojennych nie budzą zdziwienia, wręcz są oczekiwanym podnoszeniem morale narodu w obliczu przyszłych wyzwań bitewnych. Podobnie jak tautologia *zbędny krwawy balast*, czyli opisowe zdefiniowanie użytego już narzędzia zbrodni, a w domenie wojskowej *zbędnego ekwipunku*, który przeskadza w sprawnym przemieszczaniu się, maskowaniu. Dla żołnierza ów nóż nie ma wartości dowodowej, gdyż działa on poza prawem, w stanie wyższej konieczności i po dokonaniu egzekucji – to po prostu *zbędny krwawy balast*. Leksyka wojenna, celowo używa eufemizmów, omija słowa mord. Zabójstwo zastępuje eliminacją, wykluczeniem. Schmar w jeremiadzie nad zwłokami Wese nazywa go *przyjacielem, kompanem z piwnej ławy*. Czy to wyraz solidarności podłego losu, braterstwo broni i prywatna ceremonia żałobna, *pompa funebris* dla nieznanego wroga? Czy wynika to z konkretnej sytuacji dziejowej, praskiej geopolityki, w której brat stanął przeciwko bratu w wielonarodowym państwie Habsburgów? W tym obłędzie zadawanych przez Schmara pytań jedno szczególnie zapada mocno w pamięć: *Dlaczego nie jesteś po prostu wypełnionym krwią pęcherzem, żebym mógł na tobie usiąść, a ty zniknąłbyś doszczętnie*. Nauka w szkole zabijania miała przygotować rekrutów do widoku bryzgającej krwi, czy elementów ujawnionej anatomii człowieka. Stąd wymieniony przez Kafkę artefakt – *wypełniony krwią pęcherz* – który z pewnością był ćwiczebnym rekwizytem imitującym wroga i przyzwyczajającym wojaków do krwawego zawodu. Semantyczny *blitzkrieg* dosięga również osoby ludzkiej. Pan Wese na początku miał imię i nazwisko, czytelnik mógł również poznać jego miejsca zamieszkania, relacje rodzinne. Kafka wręcz odsłonił jego pełną melancholii duszę, w – jak się okaże – ostatnim monologu. I nagle Pan Wese, mąż, obywatel, pracownik staje się truchłem, zezwłokiem, szczątkami. Tak działa machina wojny przeistaczająca tych, którzy mieli miano, pozycję i krąg serdecznych sobie ludzi w nieznanego żołnierza, jednego z milionów poległych, którego odlany w brązie profil ma przesłaniać prawdziwą dezintegrację ciała. W tym opowiadaniu, najbardziej tajemniczą osobą pozostaje Pallas – świadek całego zdarzenia, który w ten oto sposób reaguje na zauważony mord:

– Schmar! Schmar! Wszystko odnotowane. Nic nieprzeoczone. – Pallas i Schmar lustrują się nawzajem. Pallasa to zadawała, Schmar nie może skończyć⁹.

9 F. Kafka, *Bratobójstwo...*, s. 306.

Kto kryje się za postacią Pallasa? Reżyser krwawego spektaklu, historiograf zdarzeń codziennych, a może przełożony wyższy stopniem wobec Schmara. Pallas to w mitologii greckiej imię jednego z wojowniczych tytanów, któremu Atena zawdzięcza swój przydomek. Znacząca podpowiedź płynie z analizy etymologicznej: Pallas znaczy „wymachujący włócznią”. Czy zatem to generalskie oko, które z wysokości spogląda na scenę wojny? Czy to ten, który miota batalionami, dywizjami „włóczni”? Kafka w bardzo intrygujący sposób zaaranżował tę scenografię i pokładał w jej planie poszczególne postaci.

Dlaczego tolerował to wszystko rentier Pallas, który nieopodal ze swojego okna na drugim piętrze obserwował tę scenę? Zgłębiaj ludzką naturę! Z podniesionym kołnierzem, w zawiązanym wokoło rozłożystego ciała szlafroku, potrząsając głową, spoglądał w dół¹⁰.

[...] Pallas wychyla się jeszcze bardziej, nie może niczego przegapić¹¹.

[...] Pallas, dławiąc w swoim ciele cały jad, staje w rozwierających się dwoma skrzydłami drzwiach domu¹².

Rzecz dzieje się „pod okupacją” Innego, pod czujnym okiem Patrzącego. Ma to wymiar groteskowy, wręcz karykaturalny. W tej mechanice deformacji Kafka prezentuje nam świat, w momencie przeobrażenia, w chwili radykalnej zmiany. Pieśni niewinności stają się pieśniami doświadczenia. I nie ma powrotu do świata sprzed tej zbrodni. Czytając teksty kafkologiczne, można spotkać się również z interpretacyjną propozycją, która *Bratobójstwo* mieści w korpusie tekstów opisujących konflikt z ojcem, Hermannem Kafką, który miałby być rozsądzającym wszystko „okiem Pallasa”.

Inne opowiadanie, zatytułowane „Jedenastu synów”, którego rękopis nie przetrwał, odnosi się do właśnie 11 opowiadań Kafki, które zostają poddane autoocenie. Pośród tego grona tekstów znajduje się również *Ein Brudermord* (*Bratobójstwo*). Ojcowski aparat krytyczny, który w tym monologu znajduje swe przekorne i wyostrzone wyobrażenie, być może ma na celu pokazanie niedoskonałości części wobec pretekstowej pełni, synowskich realizacji wobec ojcowskiego cenzorskiego oka. Taki gest umniejszenia, również badanego przez nas tekstu, nie może zostać pominięty¹³.

¹⁰ Tamże, s. 304.

¹¹ Tamże, s. 305.

¹² Tamże, s. 306.

¹³ Zob. R.T. Gray, R.V. Gross, R.J. Goebel, C. Koelb, dz. cyt., s. 132–133.

Czy kompleks ojca rzeczywiście zostaje w jakiś sposób zapseudonimowany w tym opowiadaniu? Jeden z elementów trójkąta mimetycznego z koncepcji René Girarda, dopasowany do ram *Bratobójstwa*, mógłby być symbolicznym wyobrażeniem ojca. Wydaje się jednak, że analiza tego natręctwa (kto wie czy nie większego u niektórych badaczy niż u samego pisarza) nie ujawni nam nic ponadto w tekście, który według mojej oceny jest przełomowy dla wyobraźni belumicznej pisarza.

Bratobójstwo Kafki ma w sobie coś z oczywistości, z nieprzynoszącej zaskoczenia powszedniości, pomimo niecodzienności zdarzenia. Nie ma tu złożonej motywacji działań, psychologizowania, medytowania nad skutkami czynu. W zamian dostajemy teatralizowaną scenkę kryminalną, w której wystudiowana poza i włożony w usta słowny gest umniejsza ją do podrzędnej farsy. Gdzie zatem podziała się ta arcydzielność Kafki, jego przenikliwość dziejowa i egzystencjalna nadwrażliwość? Właśnie w tej sztuczności. Lecz tylko przy założeniu, że *Bratobójstwo* stanowi, możliwie najmniejszą, „wojenną epopieję”, zminiaturyzowaną, do granic artykulacyjnych możliwości, panoramę belumicznych zdarzeń. Mamy tu i gorączkę parcia do wojny, wybuch wojny, jej przebieg i rozejm, kapitulację, sąd. Jeśli tak potraktujemy to opowiadanie – jako lalkarski spektakl, w którym poruszane za pomocą sznurków postacie odgrywają role sił, mocarstw, ludów, to ta prozatorska miniatura staje się doniosłym dziełem historiozoficznym, atomizującym konflikt zbrojny do skali eksperymentu naukowego. Tak jak biolog pracuje na pojedynczych komórkach, antyciałach, cząstkach genetycznych by pokonać trawiącą cały organizm chorobę, tak filozof dziejów będzie przeszukiwał te mikrozdarczenia, które uruchomiły serię historycznych wypadków. Metaforę wojny jako choroby toczonej ciało można rozwinąć w „bratobójczym” oglądzie nieco szerzej. Namysł nad pojedynczym incydentem będzie stanowił pierwszą reakcję pociągającą za sobą łańcuch podobnych zdarzeń. Tak zaprezentowana etiologia wojny pokazuje jej permanentną obecność w świecie, labilny żywot, który w utajeniu może trwać wiele spokojnych lat. Lecz, kiedy okoliczności, nastroje i ludzka słabość zaczynają sprzyjać stanom chorobotwórczym, wtedy te uśpione bakcyle namnażają się w geometrycznym tempie i nadkażają organizm społeczny, czasem prowadząc do jego śmierci. Wtedy tych pojedynczych „bratobójstw” multiplikuje się miliony.

Zabójstwo, bratobójstwo, ludobójstwo

W *Bratobójstwie* Franca Kafki pada enigmatyczne zdanie, nie wiadomo dokładnie przez kogo wypowiedziane, najprawdopodobniej to słowa narratora. Brzmi ono tak: *Zgłębiaj ludzką naturę!* Czy to napomnienie w duchu Lukrecjusza, nie pozwala właśnie rozpatrywać stanów wojennych jako aberracji w naturze. I czy właśnie na ludzką naturę nie wskazuje sam autor jako na winowajcę wszelkiej zbrodni.

W oczach Franza Kafki człowiek wychodził z kręgu *natura naturans*. Z jednym zastrzeżeniem. Istota ludzka nie naśladowała zdolności kreacyjnych natury, lecz ćwiczyła się w destrukcji, konstruowała modele niszczycielskie. Dlatego Kafka nie sprawdzał religijnych i imaginacyjnych zdolności człowieka, które sugerują, że człowiek staje się człowiekiem przekraczając siebie, będąc nad-ludzkiem. Lecz poddawał on badaniu ludzką materię, „ruchome ciało”, które staje się człowiekiem schodząc do granic jego zwierzęcości, będąc pre-ludzkiem.

Pierwiastki zbrodniczości tkwią we wszystkich, choć w różnym procencie; w niejednakowym też stopniu są spojone z psychiką człowieka; raz występują w niej jako „obce ciało”, to znowu jak krew krążą po żyłach. Zbrodnia żyje między nami, nawet w nas; wszyscy jesteśmy – w pewnym stopniu – jej współuczestnikami¹⁴.

Natura ludzka ma wpisany program zadawania zbrodni – tylko moralność i prawo hamują jego wykonanie. Jeśli obydwa bezpieczniki zostaną wyjęte, lub odpowiednio przeprogramowane, wtedy bakcyl zbrodni opanuje całe narody. Nosimy w sobie wroga wewnętrznego. Trzeba tylko koincydencji zdarzeń, chwili ludzkiej słabości aby proch wybuchnął. Można setki razy powtarzać daną czynność, znajdować się w podobnej rutynowej sytuacji, by w kolejnym krytycznym momencie stał się on chwilą rozstrzygającą. Sam determinizm szczególnie się nie wyróżnia, po prostu jest w katalogu innych odziedziczonych po przodkach atawizmach. Niebezpiecznym staje się dopiero wtedy, gdy nada mu się prostolinijność patosu, żar wzniesłego czynu, ideę relacji we wspólnocie. Wtedy staje się nieusuwalnym i niezmordowanym tyranem, który musi dokonać rytualnego mordu na przeciwniku. Kafka próbował w *Bratobójstwie* wypreparować ten gen wojny, który inicjował proces nowotworzenia, patologiczną mitozę. Podniesienie ręki na brata to pre-aberracja, replikująca się w nieskończoność. Tak rozumiał pisarz historyczną kancerogenezę.

Kafka celowo podkreśla niewyraźność wojny. Metaforyzuje tragedię, pomimo, że jako specjalista od pojedynczych wypadków, osobnych dramatów nie uznaje prymatu statystyki i wielkich kwantyfikatorów. Jednak to tylko pozorna alegoria. A zabija B na oczach C – to sytuacja powtarzana po wielokroć, wojenna mantra śmierci, nie czyn bohaterski a pospolite zabójstwo. I Kafka wytacza proces wszelkiej bohaterszczyźnie, martyrologii, militarystom. Wojna – w myśl Kafki – to wina bez kary, to usankcjonowane, na narodowych mitach, ludobójstwo. Bo komu przedstawić akt oskarżenia, kogo postawić przed trybunałem, kogo skazać? Wielkie kłamstwo ludzkości, dające przyzwolenie morderczym instynktom, to właśnie wojna. Uporządkowana, hiperpoprawna i pusta niczym żołnierska mowa,

¹⁴ J.E. Skiński, *Na przełaj oraz inne szkice o literaturze i kulturze*, oprac. M. Urbanowski, Wydawnictwo Literackie, Kraków 1999, s. 352.

wyglansowana niczym żołnierski mundur – tym właśnie próbuje się przesłonić nieczystość sumień, zakrzepłą krew i śmiertelny pot. W czasie pokoju ohydne zabójstwo/ w trakcie wojny słuszna interwencja – tak język w służbie ideologii zakłamują rzeczywiste wypadki. Kafka musiał być przerażony tym odkryciem, a pierwsza wojna światowa odsłoniła po raz rzeczywiście pierwszy ogrom tego narodowo-wojennego zakłamania.

Kafka w *Bratobójstwie* dokonał redukcji Wielkiej Wojny do mniejszej wojny, a nawet najmniejszej wojny, czyli bratobójczej zbrodni z premedytacją. Wojna zazwyczaj ogromniała, powszechniała, wylewała się na światowe fronty – tutaj zachowała wszelkie układy agonu a została zredukowana do najmniejszej skali – dwóch antagonistów, widz, wdowa, rozjemczy tłum, powojenna sprawiedliwość. Pasja mikrologiczna pisarza była próbą opanowania wielkiej historii, która w momencie wybuchu pierwszej wojny światowej ruszyła z miejsca, działa się na oczach współczesnych. Historia nie może być wyizolowana, obojętna wobec człowieka, wyczyszczona z ludzkich pretensji do opanowywania świata. Byłaby to historia naturalna, odtwarzająca szkielety dawnych istot, eksponująca za szklaną gablotą dowody na istnienie życia minionego. Natomiast wojna to kwintesencja historii ludzkiej – eksplozja krwawych namiętności, złych skłonności i cnót spektakularnie wykoślawionych. Konflikt zbrojny odsłania prawdziwie ludzki charakter „ducha dziejów”. Materializuje się on za pomocą specjalistycznych technologii, służących zadawaniu śmierci masowej. Konflikt zbrojny do czasów pierwszej wojny światowej omijał ludność cywilną. Potyczka bitewna, która była rozstrzygana przez wrogie, zawodowe armie teraz stała się wojną totalną, eksterminacją, metodycznym wyniszczaniem zasobów ludzkich.

Wynikało to stąd, że musiały zajść istotne przemiany pomiędzy konfliktami zbrojnymi prowadzonymi do końca oświecenia a wojnami toczonymi od XIX wieku. Wydaje się, że przekształcenia dokonane przez rewolucjonistów francuskich, czyli obalenie ancien régime i obdarzenie suwerennością narodu, wprowadziły nową, dramatyczną jakość do ideologii wojny. Skoro suwerenem przestał być władca, a stał się nim naród (czyli wspólnota wyobrażona, jak pisał w 1983 roku o narodzie Benedict Anderson), to siłą rzeczy zarówno agresja, jak i obrona była już wyrazem woli narodu, a nie władcy¹⁵.

Jak podłe to były czasy i jak łatwo było poddać się dyktatowi tłumowi, niech świadczy fragment artykułu młodego Bertolta Brechta, literata słynącego później z antymilitarystycznej retoryki. Jednak na łamach „Augsburger Neueste Nachrichten” z dnia 17 sierpnia 1914 roku możemy przeczytać w *Uwagach o naszym czasie*:

15 Tamże, s. 202.

My jesteśmy uzbrojeni, moralnie uzbrojeni. Mocny niemiecki charakter, nad którego uformowaniem pracowali od dwóch stuleci niemieccy poeci i myśliciele, teraz się sprawdza. Spokojni i opanowani, w żelaznej dyscyplinie, choć płoną z zapału, mniej wiwatując, a raczej zaciskając zęby, pociągnęli nasi mężowie do walki. [...] Kobiety zaprzeczają słowom o słabej płci, a młodzież podejrzeniom o jej demoralizację. My wszyscy, wszyscy Niemcy, lękamy się tylko Boga i niczego na świecie¹⁶.

Franz Kafka tworzył *in partibus infidelium* (łac. w prowincjach niewiernych), nie okopywał się po żadnej stronie i nie był sztandarowym pisarzem żadnej opcji politycznej. Pisał, by historię ujarzmić, upokorzyć, unicestwić. Benedetto Croce definiuje historię jako akt pojmowania wynikający z praktycznych potrzeb życiowych. I Kafka tak właśnie ją pojmował. Wojna przerwała mu literacki eksperyment, który prowadził, więc zaczął się nią żywo interesować. Taka jest morfologia wojennego kompleksu pisarza. Nie ujawnia on w twórczości literackiej narodowych kontrybucji. W *Bratobójstwie* wręcz czyści tekst z wszelkich partykularyzmów, objawia nam sytuację poza uwikłaniami politycznymi, czy etnicznymi. Życie, które nam przedstawia cechuje specjalna drażliwość, dynamiczna zwrotność. Wszystko tu wre, kipi, jakby w próbówce z jakąś aktywną substancją. Ludzie są ruchliwi, głośni, bezceremonialnie prosi, zamroczeni własną rolą. Historia przemocy zaczyna się od pierwszej krwi. Potem mamy do czynienia już tylko ze statystyką. Zabójstwo, podwójne zabójstwo, potrójne etc. Od ilu zabójstw zaczyna się ludobójstwo? Imiona wojny można mnożyć w nieskończoność – jako wszelka relacja przemocowa – objawia się i w pojedynku, incydencie, zamieszkach, stanie wojennym, eksterminacji, bitwie, pogromie, jak i w Zagładzie. Sam termin ludobójstwo sformułował Rafał Lemkin:

Pojęcie ukształtował, jak sam uzasadniał, „przez połączenie (staro)greckiego słowa *genos* (plemię lub rasa) z łacińskim *cide* (analogicznie do takich terminów jak *homicide* – ang. zabójstwo; czy *fratricide* – ang. bratobójstwo)”¹⁷.

Kafkowska sytuacja ma miejsce i w prawniczej nomenklaturze. Między sprawcą i ofiarą zawsze toczy się wielka wojna światowa. Kiedy ścierają się z przemocą dwa światy, później wyznają winę, dokonują zadośćuczynienia i przebaczą sobie nawzajem. Dlatego nawet podniesienie ręki na brata mieści się już w wielkim zbiorze ludobójczej statystyki. Każdy żołnierz nosi znamię Kaina, ten nieśmiertelnik zdrady.

¹⁶ Za: R. Szydłowski, *Bertolt Brecht*, Wiedza Powszechna, Warszawa 1973, s. 24–25.

¹⁷ M.J. Mazurkiewicz, *Koncepcja zakazu ludobójstwa Rafała Lemkina a eliminacjonizm Daniela Jonaha Goldhagena. Próba redefinicji teorii masowych mordów?*, „*Studia Iuridica Toruniensia*” 2015, t. XVI, s. 200.

Problem z ludobójstwem polega też na niewyobrażalnej skali zbrodni, trudnościach w dotarciu do krewnych ofiar, które często były bezimienne albo zostały zapomniane, gdyż eliminowano wszystkich, których łączyły jakiegokolwiek relacje. Rozmiar zbrodni i jej automatyczna – można by rzec taśmowa – powtarzalność poniekąd ją odrealnia, czyni czymś wręcz absurdalnym. Wynika to z tego, że przecież nawet zbrodni przypisujemy jakąś wewnętrzną logikę. Poszukiwania winnego zmagają się w kierunku znalezienia osoby, która miałaby motyw do dokonania zbrodni. Ludobójstwo przekracza tę logikę¹⁸.

Moment, w którym historyk musi zawiesić głos staje się dobrym punktem wyjścia dla historiozofa. Z całej gamy ludzkich cech Kafka wybiera tony niejednoznaczne, brzmiące złowieszczo, ukrywane w mieszczańskości pełnej dystansu i fasadowego opanowania, a niestety rozplenione z pełną furią w ówczesnej rzeczywistości. Rozum zafascynowany technicznością doprowadził do nieobliczalnych konsekwencji ludzkich działań. Nie wierząc w człowieka pięknego, dobrego i mądrego, zaczyna on badać jego ciemną stronę, zagłębiać się w przestrzeni, w której czuje się pewniejszy. W sukurs przychodzi mu historia, której staje się zapisem niemoralności, mactw i zbrodni, a której ukoronowaniem będzie wybuch pierwszej wojny światowej. Jednak nie tylko etyczne aspekty konfliktów zbrojnych interesowały Kafkę. Pośród 7 milionów ofiar I wojny światowej każda śmierć była finałem niezwykłej fabuły, czasem awanturniczej biografii z przykrym finałem, czasem bohaterskiej przygody uwieńczonej piękną śmiercią. Do tego doliczyć trzeba kilkanaście milionów ludzi, którzy „przeżyli” wojnę, każdy na swój sposób, tworząc własną legendę rodzinną. I z tym przeciwnikiem naprawdę mierzy się Kafka. Wielka epopeja wojenna to potężna machina fabularna, wielkie repozytorium biogramów, opowieści i faktów, którego ogromu nie pomieszczą najwymyślniejsze kwantyfikatory uogólniające. No chyba, że wpadnie się na ten sam pomysł co Franz Kafka by dotrzeć do atomu wojny, prątką zapalnego konfliktu, pojedynku, który można później mnożyć przez miliony.

¹⁸ J. Kłos, *Ludobójstwo – czyli zbrodnia, której nie ma*, „Zeszyty Naukowe Katolickiego Uniwersytetu Lubelskiego” 1918, nr 4, s. 140–141.

Porucznik Kafka

Będę trwał niewzruszenie przy następującym:
 chcę pójść do wojska, ulegając pragnieniu
 w ciągu dwóch lat powściąganemu.
 Franz Kafka¹⁹

W tym podrozdziale chciałbym wskazać na pewne zaniechanie kafkologii, której badacze nie mogą wyjść z zakłętego kręgu, intencjonalnie zaprogramowanego przez samego pisarza. Na antypacyfistyczne, militarystyczne oblicze praskiego wizjonera natrafiłem przy pisaniu wcześniejszego artykułu. Wtedy jeszcze nie do wierzałem swoim odkryciom, wydawały mi się niemożliwe do udowodnienia. Jak można mówić o twórczości Franza Kafki w aspekcie doświadczenia wojennego? Dlatego ograniczyłem się do kilku niepodważalnych fragmentów z *Dziennika* pisarza. Po lekturze książki Berndta Neumanna *Franz Kafka: aporie asymilacji. Rekonstrukcja tryptyku powieściowego* już wiedziałem, że warto przemyśleć jeszcze raz twórczość Kafki pod kątem paradygmatu belumicznego. Pierworodnym grzechem kafkologii pozostaje przesąd, że twórczość prażanina układa się w parable, anagramy i nadrealne przypowieści. Owszem, odnajdziemy taki repertuar genologiczny w pismach Kafki, natomiast pretekst powstania większości utworów bierze się z bolesnych konkretów, z uwierania Realnego.

Wydaje się, że to, co Kafka chciał przekazać przekraczało literaturę, i gdzieś głęboko, wbrew jemu samemu, sztuka wydawała mu się płytka, a w każdym razie zbyt niepełna, by mogła być czymś doniosłym w porównaniu z rzeczywistością²⁰.

Wstrząsy ziemi wywołane artyleryjską kanonadą, powodzie spowodowane wysadzeniem tam i zawaleniem mostów, podmuchy morowego powietrza przesyconego fluorem i gazem musztardowym, płonące kwatery miast, szeregi wiosek – oto żywiły wojny, których działanie nieobce było ludziom żyjącym w czasach pierwszej wojny światowej. Sam Kafka w szczególnie dotkliwy sposób nie doświadczył wojny. Jego myślenie o chorobie, która opanowała świat z początku wieku było głębokie i widoczne w utworach literackich, ale nie w sposób publicystyczny czy interwencyjny. Nie przesuwiał chorągiewek na mapie będącej wielkim teatrem działań wojennych, nie był ochotnikiem, rekrutem czy dekwonikiem. Wojna totalna jednak zmieniła jego życie. Zobaczył, że na wojnie życie ludzkie jest mniej

¹⁹ F. Kafka, *Dzienniki 1910–1923*, przeł. J. Werter, Wydawnictwo Literackie, Kraków 1969, s. 384.

²⁰ C. Greenberg, *The Jewishness of Franz Kafka: Some Sources of his Vision*, [w:] *Collected Essays*, tłum. A. Rejniak-Majewska, vol. III, s. 207–209.

warte niż poczucie narodowej jedności i wyznawanych reguł. I choć ta „męska przygoda” miała pełne garście nośnych komunałów, sam Franza Kafka kilka razy z zacięciem spogląda na żołnierski oręż. Opowiadanie *Bratobójstwo* powstało w latach trwania krwawego konfliktu.

Chociaż nie zachował się rękopis tego opowiadania, powstało ono najprawdopodobniej między połową grudnia 1916 a połową stycznia 1917. Fakt, że Kafka sam kilkakrotnie publikował to opowiadanie, świadczy o tym, że musiał je wysoko cenić. Ukazało się najpierw, razem z „Derr neue Advokat” („Nowy adwokat”) i „Ein altes Blatt” („Stara kartka”), w 1917 w lipcowo-sierpniowym numerze dwumiesięcznika literackiego „Marsyas”, wydawanego przez Theodora Taggera²¹.

W czasach pierwszego, tak powszechnego konfliktu zbrojnego, mało kto z cywilnych uczestników wojny myślał o geopolityce. Krwawa stawka za nowy podział świata, zakresy wpływu i nowe źródła zysku znajdowały się tylko w optyce, widzących więcej, proroków. Franca Kafkę, w gruncie rzeczy, martwił koniec drobnomieszczańskiego uniwersum, kres filozofii pokoleniowej akumulacji dóbr, ostateczny koniec społecznej kastowości. Prażanin jest mniej rebeliancki niż nam się wydaje. Pomimo, że spełnia się on w pisarstwie, które jest dla niego zawodem, sportem i krucjatą. Koniec mieszczańskiej, wielonarodowej sielanki odnotował także badacz twórczości autora *Opisu walki*:

Przed ową „wielką wojną” żyła jednak jeszcze w jako takim zdrowiu monarchia habsburska wraz z uwielbianym przez jego podwładnych żydowskiego pochodzenia monarchą – Franciszkiem Józefem – i to uwielbianym aż do przesady. Nie zgąsła też nadzieja odnośnie do wielonarodowego państwa. Pierwsza powieść Kafki odzwierciedla jeszcze ten fakt – czyżby to z tego względu, że chodzi tu o tekst w pewnej mierze infantylny, „mający spełnić życzenia”? Sam pomysł o napisaniu powieści o Ameryce można odszukać u Kafki w jego czasach gimnazjalnych. Jako „małe dziecko” – jak mówi o tym wpis do dziennika z dnia 19 stycznia 1911 roku – Kafka planował „powieść, w której przeciw sobie walczą dwóch braci, z których jeden pojechał do Ameryki, podczas gdy ten drugi pozostał w europejskim więzieniu”²².

Czy opis walczących braci nie powróci już w zupełnie innej, dojrzszej i isticie parabolicznej formie w *Bratobójstwie*. Czy wiek XX nie ograniczył znaczenia „walczący” do podstępnie zwabiony, skrycie zabity, tajnie zaszlachtowany? Kafka często nadpisywał nowe znaczenia swoich tekstów. Czy wypadki historyczne nie

²¹ R.T. Gray, R.V. Gross, R.J. Goebel, C. Koelb, dz. cyt. s. 107.

²² B. Neumann, *Franz Kafka: aporie asymilacji. Rekonstrukcja tryptyku powieściowego*, przeł. S. Mrozek, Oficyna Wydawnicza Atut, Wrocław 2012, s. 46–47.

ukształtowały tego palimpsestu w oparciu o motyw walczących braci, który rysowałby się następująco: szkic powieści *Zaginiony*, *Opis walki*, *Bratobójstwo*? Wtedy ze zwykłego agonu, który znamionuje konflikt, zderzenie poglądów, przechodziemy do skrytobójstwa, mordu założycielskiego nowego świata.

Fascynacja i nienawiść podsycają się wzajemnie do tego stopnia, że mogą zamienić się miejscami bez stanów pośrednich. Postawa życiowa i wybory pisarskie Franza Kafki noszą znamiona osobowości dyspersyjnej. Wydaje się, że nosił on w sobie i stateczną duszę mieszczańską, i wywrotowego ducha rebelianckiego. Postawy te często zamieniały się i oddawały pierwszeństwo jedna na rzecz drugiej. Podobnie rzecz się ma z hekatombą wojenną²³. Z jednej strony to coś przerażającego, niszczącego, antyhumanistycznego, lecz z drugiej strony to żywioł przeobrażający, w swej destrukcji oczyszczający, znoszący opresję prawa na rzecz chaosu. Milczenie Kafki wobec faktu wybuchu wojny, jak i późniejszy brak komentarzy, może wynikać z tej ambiwalencji odczuć. Brulionowy szkic walki dwóch braci ćwiczony na planach różnych konwencji i gatunków literackich może być ilustracją wewnętrznej walki samego autora. Tym bardziej, że już w *Bratobójstwie* działania bohaterów przybierają karykaturalne rysy. Trwanie pisarza na pograniczu strefy, jednoczesne przywiązanie do cnoty i pragnienie grzechu mogą przenosić się na deformacje narracyjne, rodzaj cierpkiej rozkoszy, którą odczuwają źli bohaterowie i znużenia, które towarzyszą protagonistom sytuującym się po stronie dobra. Schamr i Wese są mlecznymi braćmi samego Kafki – bliscy mu zarówno ze względu na wiek, jak i ze względu na pewne charakterystyczne przejawy mentalności. Obydwoje są, każdy na swój sposób, emanacją autora *Bratobójstwa*. Stają się tym, kim mógł stać się Kafka, gdyby nie stał się sobą. Wypełnienie sprzecznościami każdego z bohaterów naznacza ten utwór, pomimo werystycznych cech opisu, pewnego rodzaju pamfletowością. Tortury dualizmu, którym poddaje swych bohaterów Kafka, ale i które sam odczuwa, przywodzą na myśl manichejskie trucizny. Dodatkowo cały obrazek zbrodni wyrysowany jest monochromatyczną grą: bycia widocznym i pozostawania w cieniu. Być może właśnie podejście pisarza do tematu wojny pozwoli odkryć zagubiony klucz do jego twórczości i osobowości. Fascy-

23 Nieskrywane fascynacje Franza Kafki wojenną rzeczywistością tak opisuje Hartmut Binder: „Kafka w próbie zrozumienia wydarzeń wojennych poszukiwał znaczącego zachwyty. [...] Jego szczególne upodobanie do książek wojennych [...] mogło mieć następnie swoją przyczynę w tym, że swoje własne życie widział w obrazie walki [...] Obecny jest tutaj cały arsenał militarnych pojęć: Kafka mówi o sytuacji wojennej, dowódcy, kwaterze głównej, rozkazie, oddziale wojsk, walce niszczycielskiej, ubezpieczeniu, zapasach broni, jeździe przedniej, maruderach, partyzantach, ucieczce etc. [...] Konstrukcja tych obrazów pokazuje jednak, że Kafka widział siebie w roli »zawodowego żołnierza«, który pozwala na karmienie się wojną, widział się jako »naturę żołnierską«, która zobowiązana jest do trwałej walki na przednim froncie [...] i pewna jest beznadziejności zwycięstwa”, H. Binder, *Kafka und Napoleon*, [w:] *Festschrift für Friedrich Beissner*, Bebenhausen 1974, s. 52. Za: B. Neumann, *Franz...*, s. 58.

nacje militarystyczne Franza Kafki muszą anihilować część badawczych ustaleń, a przynajmniej nadszarpnąć ich kategoryczności. Trudno postrzegać pisarza jako dobrodusznego klerka i wycofanego literata, którego nie obchodziły sprawy geopolityczne dziejące się za rogatkami Pragi. Jeszcze trudniej zrozumieć człowieka, który wpatrywał się, jak wiemy nie bez zachwytu, w pożogę wojenną i skwapliwie taił swe atawizmy. Czy to zwykły mesmeryzm żywiołu ognia, czy może czekanie na Golema, który dopełni zniszczenia?

Szkice Franza Kafki to jedne z najbardziej tajemniczych zapisów literackich. Ocalałe, pomimo ostatniej woli autora, pozatranscendentne lecz przypominające przypowieści pisane na użytek jakiejś religii, pełne fantastyczności i nadrealizmu mimo realnego świata *logosu*. Możemy dodać do tego katalogu binarnych opozycji jeszcze jedną oksymoroniczną pozycję. Światy Franza Kafki uchodziły za strefy zdemilitaryzowane, wolne od wszelkich alokacji wojsk. Sam autor sprawdzał, ile w zwyczajnym człowieku jest nadludzkiego a ile zwierzęcego. W oczach krytyków jawił się jako pisarz o pacyfistycznych poglądach, który już w swoich czasach przeczuwał tragedię swojego narodu. Autor *Bratobójstwo* był, rzecz można, zawsze na wojennej ścieżce, wiecznie wypowiadał wojnę, toczył (go) spór. Czy natręctwo asymilacji – poczucia bycia gorszym, czy pozostawanie w wiecznym zwarcu z ojcem, czy utarczki miłosne i budowanie pozycji na rodzącym się rynku literackim odpowiadają za tajone pasje militarystyczne Franza Kafki? Obraz walecznej asymilacji, tyrani, która twardą ręką zapobiegałaby, jak zwykł się wyrażać Kafka, „bałkani-zacji” uzyskuje swój sztandarowy, wręcz monumentalny wyraz w literackim przekształceniu formy Statuy Wolności. Jak konstatuje Bernd Neumann:

U Kafki trzyma ona miecz zamiast pochodni. [...] To dziwne przeformowanie Statuy Wolności, które nastąpiło nie z niewiedzy – Kafka w końcu regularnie zajmował się studiami nad Ameryką – ilustrowało prawdopodobnie fascynację autora z Pragi aspektem męsko – wojennym, który był wyrazem szczególnego bezpieczeństwa egzystencjalnego, które z kolei możliwe było do osiągnięcia jedynie przez szczęśliwą, bo odważnie zrealizowaną asymilację. „Należy zwrócić uwagę”, konsekwentnie, „że Kafka zafascynowany był postaciami, które nosiły miecz lub szablę. Owe [...] statuy są nie tylko obiektem obserwacji, lecz także obecne są w snach, rysunkach i opowiadaniach [...] Dowody pozwalają na wniosek, że dla Kafki bohater wojny uzbrojony w ten sposób był obrazem siły, niezłomnej witalności oraz instynktownej zdolności podejmowania decyzji”²⁴.

Nemann podejmuje ten temat przy lekturze *Procesu*. Nie zgadzając się z błyskotliwymi i klasycznymi już dzisiaj interpretacjami Heinza Politzera czy Eliasa

²⁴ B. Neumann, *Franz...*, s. 75 [autor zaznacza w swojej wypowiedzi cytaty z książki Hartuma Bindera]

Canettiego, które to forsowały tezę, że *Proces* staje się refleksem zerwanych za-
ręczyn z Felicją Bauer. Niemiecki badacz posługując się metodą lekturową *close reading* uważnie wsłuchuje się odgłosy tekstowej rzeczywistości. Jego koronkowa
analiza korespondencji ujawnia ciągły nasłuch Kafki wobec wydarzeń z frontów.
Austriackie porażki, które odbiera Kafka jako rosyjskie zagrożenie, powodują, że
pisze równocześnie *Proces* i *Wspomnienie kolei kałdańskiej*. Pierwszy utwór może
być uznany, za projekcję działania rosyjskiego bezprawia, w którym zawsze ktoś
inny ponosi konsekwencje – od trybunału ludowego po skazańca. Dodatkowo
w momencie pracy nad tekstem wybuchła sprawa „czeskiego Dreyfussa”, czyli
proces błędnie skazanego Hilsnera, z którym Kafka się utożsamiał. Drugi utwór,
którego akcja dzieje się w głuchej, dalekowschodniej, iluzorycznej prowincji Kał-
da, można odczytać jako dystopię po zwycięstwie Rosji. Widać tu pewne podo-
bieństwa z wydaną w 1911 roku powieścią Josepha Conrada *W oczach Zachodu*.
Na kartach *Procesu* można odnaleźć kilka belumicznych poszlak. Józef K. zosta-
je „aresztowany” a pomimo to „pozostaje na wolności” – podobnie w okupowa-
nym kraju ludzie „pozostają na wolności” pomimo, że znajdują się już pod inną
jurysdykcją prawną. Sam moment pojmania przypomina realia kraju ogarniętego
wojną – aresztowania bez powodu, bez podania przyczyny, w przypadkowej ła-
pance. Trybunał mieszczący się na poddaszu przypomina swą kategorycznością
sąd wojenny. Kryzys samoudręczenia Józefa K. kończy się egzekucją. Tych kilka
wojennych poszlak może sugerować, że *Proces* jako kompensacją szoku spowodo-
wanego wybuchem wojny. Długotrwały, traumatyczny wstrząs był wzmacniany
doniesieniami z frontu. Porażki, zwycięstwa i okresy przejściowe wyznaczały rytm
pisarski Franza Kafki.

Wojna stała się kompleksem psychicznym prażanina, który napędzał jego pisa-
nie. Zwodniczość błędnie umiejscowionej konkretności, która utwory Kafki każe
czytać z przypisanym każdemu tekstowi zespołem uświęconych, koronnych egze-
gez interpretacyjnych, spowodowała zamknięcie ich na nieoczywiste interpelacje.
Można posłużyć się takim oto przykładem. Z perspektywy nauk fizykalnych świat
jawi nam się w określony sposób i w obrębie praw jakie panują w tych naukach
możemy się interpretacyjnie przemieszczać. Jednakże idea, że ten światopogląd
jest poglądem na świat *par excellence*, opiera się na ustaleniach wywiedzionych
właśnie z nauk fizykalnych. A ta ocena w żadnym wypadku nie może już być we-
wnętrzną sprawą nauk fizykalnych, bo należy już do filozofii. Sofizmat ten pozwala
nam wyjść z błędnego koła nawracających, stale tych samych interpretacji, poprzez
zmianę paradygmatu. Kafka, który wydawał się odludkiem zamkniętym w swych
wyobraźniowych światach, w świetle „reflektorów wojny” jawi się nam jako strateg
żywo reagujący na bieżące wypadki. Kafka grał o najwyższą stawkę, nie zajmo-
wały go wewnątrz europejskie spory. Polityczności swej postawy, głównie chodzi
o asymilację narodu żydowskiego, upatrywał w sporze dwóch mocarstw Ameryki
i Rosji. Jeśli w „Ameryce” dostrzegł ewentualnego sojusznika, to z pełnym prze-

konaniem możemy mówić o jego antyrosyjskości. Lektura *Dzienników* odkrywa dosyć pogardliwy i negatywny stosunek Kafki do ustroju demokratycznego. Być może wynika to z uwielbienia mocarstwowości, bycia pod kuratelą silnego sojusznika niż wsłuchiwania się w głos ludu. Lęk przed absolutyzmem rosyjskim, który dla Kafki był żywiołem dzikim, agresywnym i nieprzewidywalnym (a było to jeszcze przed rewolucją 1917 roku) w dużej mierze powodowany był obawą o gwałtowne eksplozje wewnątrz europejskie i powstanie nowych, panslawistycznych organizmów państwowych. To, że nie upatrywał tam syjonistycznej szansy jeszcze bardziej wzmacniało te strachy.

Dla Kafki wojna była odległym odgłosem, utrudnieniem uporządkowanego życia, ale przede wszystkim projekcją tego co w sobie nosił. Dla innych wojna była urealnieniem życia, odkryciem własnego ciała poprzez obrażenia i rany, wyzwoleniem życiowej zapobiegliwości, nauką nowej topografii i sztuką trzeźwego spojrzenia na świat. Ale nie dla Franza Kafki. On to wszystko poznał można powiedzieć, pomimo pokoju, dzięki własnemu aparatowi krytycznemu. Wojna wytworzyła w jego umyśle poczucie nierealności, zerwała wszelkie zrozumiałe powiązania, tak jak zepsuta zabawka wyzwała w lękliwym dziecku poczucie strachu i rozpacz. Odtąd pierwiastek demoniczny przeniknął na stałe do utworów Franza Kafki. Przeczytać tę twórczość jako zamaskowaną autobiografię trwożliwej i zalęknionej absurdem wojny osobowości twórczej to zadanie do odrobienia. Podmiot piszący, który padł łupem długotrwałego przerażenia, by ukryć wstydlivą słabość zasłania ją figurami męskości: żołnierskiej tężyzny, wojennej brawury, ekwipunkiem i prezencją rekruta. Może wszystkie wewnętrzne światy Kafki powielają model szaleńczej dyspersji między lękiem a pewnością siebie. Możliwe, że Kafka zabrął w kąt własnych lęków, a efekt zwielokrotnienia i nadmiarów semantycznych jego literackich przestrzeni bierze się z genialnej zdolności percypowania własnego przerażenia. Matryca historyczna, na której powstawały dzieła praskiego mędrca jest zbyt często pomijana w imię uniwersalizmu i wielkiej kwantyfikacji. Warto przeczytać wszystkie pisma Kafki jako „prozę wojenną”, a wtedy być może zamiast kabalistycznych zagadek będziemy mieli prawdziwe rzeczy: kawałek muru, mostu i zwykłe zdarzenia: proces, pobór rekruta, milczenie syren (alarmowych).

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Miłosz Piotrowiak

Noises of war. Sketch for the portrait of Franz Kafka (on the example of the story *Fratricide*)

Summary

In current research on the work of Franz Kafka, war issues occur rather incidentally. In the presented article, the Author points out the omission of kafkology and tries to indicate possible directions of belumic interpretation. The sketch for Kafka's war portrait is inspired by the short story *Fratricide*. The text, which shows the inspiration of the biblical story of Cain and Abel, is a beginning of Kafka's

thinking about a world determined by violence, controlled by a bloody conflict. The first assassination is a prototype of mass destruction, war and genocide. Kafka seems to have subordinated his future feature projects on the subject of war. The author of the article postulates the reading of Kafka's books as texts about war, not only about the metaphorical one but also the real one.

Keywords: Franz Kafka, fratricide, agon, disease, Great War

Miłosz Piotrowiak – dr hab., historyk i teoretyk literatury, adiunkt na Uniwersytecie Śląskim. Jego zainteresowania badawcze skupiają się wokół liryki testamentalnej i poezji stanów granicznych, wojennych, kryzysowych. Pisał m.in. o Jerzym Kamili Weintraubie, Zuzannie Ginczance, Władysławie Broniewskim. Współredaktor tomów zbiorowych m.in.: *Urzeczenie. Locje wyobraźni i literatury*; *Wiersz-rzeka*. Zastępca redaktora naczelnego rocznika naukowego „Fabrica Litterarum Polono-Italica”.

W KONTEKSTACH
FILOZOFICZNYCH /
IN PHILOSOPHICAL
CONTEXTS

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What does the silent planet tell us? The analysis of selected philosophical themes found in Stanisław Lem's *Solaris*

Summary

The paper analyses selected philosophical aspects of Stanisław Lem's *Solaris*. I argue that there is an interesting similarity between the history of "Solarist studies" – the fictional scientific discipline depicted by Lem and cognitive science. I show that both disciplines go through similar stages as they try to describe their main subject (the planet Solaris and human consciousness respectively). In the further part of the paper, I focus on two problems identified in cognitive science that can be directly related to the themes found in *Solaris*: the problem of the detection of intelligence and the problem of the notion of mental representations.

I finish the paper by looking at the mysterious guests that stalk the main protagonists and show that they can be understood as heuristic models that are taken into account in the theories of mind uploading.

Keywords: Stanisław Lem, *Solaris*, representations, computationalism, upload

Due to its well-deserved international popularity, *Solaris* is often seen through the prism of its adaptations. The novel is therefore seen as a tragic romance in a cosmic setting or as a contribution to theological reflection, depending on whether we fo-

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cus on the American or the Russian adaptation. Of course, these perspectives are not entirely unfounded, as Stanisław Lem's book contains both of these elements. In my analysis, however, I am not going to pursue any of these directions. Instead, I will focus on threads that, although not central to the main storyline, inspire questions that are in my opinion the most philosophically interesting. This dissonance should not come as a surprise. As Filip Kobiela notes,¹ Lem's novel does not contain a narrative-philosophical unity characteristic for some other SF classics, such as works of Philip K. Dick.² Philosophical themes that can be found in *Solaris* are most often contained in parts that are relatively autonomous and could, in principle, be omitted from the summary of the main plot.

From the philosophical point of view, *Solaris* is primarily a story about dealing with the unknown. Kelvin, the main character of the novel, is a trained psychologist, but above all a "solarist". Solarist studies is an interdisciplinary field of research on the eponymous planet Solaris – a globe surrounded by an ocean whose behavior eludes the description of Earth's science. Arriving at the nearby Solaris research station, Kelvin finds the facility in a mess. It turns out that a handful of those stationed became haunted by "guests" – copies of people who mattered to them in their earthly past. The reasons and causes of these visits are not clear to them – the most likely hypothesis is that they are products of Solaris, but their existence does not contribute to a better understanding of the planet. It is not known whether the unexpected visits are a long-awaited attempt at contact or a by-product of some cosmic process.

Lem's novel contains two parts that detail the history of Solarist studies. Both are fascinating from the perspective of philosophy of science, as they can be seen as a tongue-in-cheek analysis of the stages of development characteristic of many existing disciplines. As we learn, initially, only astronomers were interested in the planet's study. This changed when researchers realized that the behavior of the planet could not be fully explained using the well-known laws of celestial movements. It led to the conclusion that Solaris somehow interferes with its trajectory. This finding paved the way for new research and hypotheses – including the boldest ones that attributed intelligence to the planet. The result of accepting this hypothesis was a dramatic expansion of the number of disciplines engaged in the planet's study.

Lem masterfully describes the individual phases of the development of Solarist studies. Initially, the field brims with collective optimism of all researchers. The next stage looks more like a relay race, in which individual disciplines – tired of the lack of progress – pass the baton to others who come to the fore with a new research program. In Kelvin's times the field is in a decline: continuing the analogy,

¹ F. Kobiela, *Grzęznąć w Solaris*, "Forum: Biuletyn Mensy Polskiej" 2016, no. 4, pp. 29–33.

² A famous example of skepticism of this kind can be found in L. Wittgenstein, *Tractatus logico-philosophicus*, trans. by B. Wolniewicz, Wydawnictwo Naukowe PWN, Warsaw 2004.

we can say that researchers no longer even agree as to whether they are participating in the same race. They criticize the methodology of their predecessors and undermine all of their findings.

In these parts of the novel, Lem shows not only an excellent knowledge of the history of science but also sensitivity to the institutional, cultural, and economic context of research as the amplitude of scientists' optimism is clearly correlated with the hopes of funding agencies and taxpayers.

Solaristics differs from the real-world disciplines in that its history is a combination of the history of humanities and empirical sciences. Similarly to humanities, Solarist studies go through fads, dramatic attempts to break with the past, and unexpected returns to old threads. The phases of optimism alternate with discouragement bordering on nihilism. Similarly to empirical sciences, Solarist studies oscillate between hopes aroused by new research methods and the disappointment resulting from the lack of hard results. In the humanities and philosophy, in particular, upheavals are sometimes possible because we realize the questions we have been asking led us astray and that ultimately the problem is only apparent.³ In empirical science, certain fundamental questions are much less likely to be simply eliminated or forgotten. This is so even in the case of fundamental cosmological questions, that many researchers are skeptical about. The planet Solaris is a constant remorse – a giant celestial body that is impossible to ignore even though it ignores us. It provides new data but does not correct our hypotheses.

At first glance, Lem's description of the fictitious discipline is unlike any particular field of science in existence – it is a hybrid of sorts. I think that we can, however, try to make one comparison and, as I will try to show, it will not be a superficial one. I believe that, to a large extent, the history of Solarist studies resembles the difficulties faced by cognitive science – in particular the part of the discipline that tries to explore the mystery of human consciousness.⁴

First, let us note that, just like Solarist studies, cognitive science is an interdisciplinary field and that this leads to similar methodological difficulties. Hypotheses proposed in cognitive science must often be tested using vastly different methodologies. Researchers may have problems understanding each other or they may use technical terms in distinctly different meanings. In the case of Solarist studies, this phenomenon is clearly exaggerated, but it does not differ in principle. The paradigm changes that Solarist studies go through are most often the result of the rise of skepticism of one of its sub-disciplines and the explosion of hopes caused by the emergence of a new one. This is reminiscent of the changes in cognitive science,

³ A famous example of skepticism of this kind can be found in L. Wittgenstein, *Tractatus logico-philosophicus*, trans. by B. Wolniewicz, Wydawnictwo Naukowe PWN, Warsaw 2004.

⁴ For obvious reasons, Lem could not refer to cognitive science – a discipline that rose to prominence a decade after the release of Solaris.

where different sub-disciplines replace each other at the forefront and try to set the new paradigm for the field. At one point it is computer science, at another point neurology or the philosophy of mind.⁵ The similarity between Solarist studies and cognitive studies is also due to the waywardness of the subjects they study. Solaris experts may disagree profoundly but all of them agree on one fact – the very existence of Solaris. Something similar can be observed in cognitive science. Most researchers – let alone laymen – agree that the phenomenon of consciousness does exist. However, the widespread agreement on this point does not translate to further stages of research. We have enormous difficulties in describing the mechanisms of consciousness. What is more, we often fundamentally disagree on what exactly does the phenomenon boil down to.⁶ The only result of having a common, relatively uncontroversial starting point, is that, just like the planet Solaris, it is an uncomfortable remorse. Even though we all feel tired of the idle discussions and the lack of progress, we cannot withdraw from our research and pronounce that it was all just an illusion.⁷

The analogy between Solarist studies and cognitive science is not limited to similar methodological quandaries and is also sometimes manifested in the very topics they tackle. One of the key questions that trouble solarists is whether they are dealing with an intelligent being or a regular object devoid of intelligence. It is not difficult to see that the answer to this question is essential for the direction of further research of the planet. Our expectations of the behavior of intelligent and unintelligent objects differ fundamentally. Seemingly random behavior of an object can be taken very seriously, provided that we assign intention and purposefulness to this act. And yet, detecting rationality in the world around us is not an easy task. We do not have a clear and unambiguous criterion that would allow us to separate sentient and non-sentient objects. Interestingly, at least two candidates for such a criterion discussed in the literature are directly related to Lem's novel.

The first possibility is based on the assumption that the thinking processes are computational.⁸ Of course, researchers do not assume that any computational process generates human-like thoughts. It is better to employ a more cautious stance and treat computational properties as a necessary condition for thinking. Therefore, using this approach we can break the problem of detecting thinking crea-

5 For a good summary of the upheavals in cognitive science see M.A. Boden, *Mind as Machine: A History of Cognitive Science*, Clarendon Press, Oxford 2008; T. Crane, *The mechanical mind. A philosophical introduction to minds, machines, and mental representation*, Routledge, London–New York 2016.

6 M. Velmans, *Understanding consciousness*, Routledge, London 2009.

7 One of the exceptions is Paul and Patricia Churchland, who promote the reductionist model of explaining the phenomenon of consciousness: P.M. Churchland, *Reduction, Qualia, and Direct Introspection of Brain States*, "The Journal of Philosophy" 1985, vol. 82, no. 1, pp. 8–28.

8 M. Miłkowski, *Explaining the computational mind*, MIT Press, Cambridge (MA) 2013.

tures into two stages. First, we must learn to determine whether computational processes are taking place in a given object at all. Secondly, we need to determine what additional conditions must be met by the computational process to be classified as “thinking”. Unfortunately, as we will see, even the first of these stages (which on the surface may seem relatively easy to implement) generates dilemmas straight from the pages of Lem’s books.⁹ The fundamental difficulty we face is that we need a clear criterion for distinguishing between “ordinary” physical processes and those that perform computations.¹⁰ The bad news is that with a little bit of creativity computational properties can be assigned to any object.

To understand this, we need to realize how ordinary physical processes differ from those that perform computations. The simplest answer to this question is to assume that a given physical process is computational if the sequence of its states corresponds to the sequence of some algorithms. It turns out, however, that this intuitive criterion is easy to ridicule, as shown by the following thought experiment proposed by John Searle.¹¹ Imagine you are looking at a wall. Despite the simplicity of this object, its structure is sufficiently complex in the sense that we can distinguish many of its different states. Now imagine that we are taking a record of a computational process – in Searle’s example it is a text editor running on the computer. Let us note that no matter how laborious and useless this activity may be, there is nothing to prevent us from writing a function that assigns program states to individual wall states. Does this mean that we have successfully launched the text editor on the wall? Should our action be regarded as the pinnacle of emulation, or perhaps as evidence that the wall has always implemented a program (and therefore had computational properties)? Both solutions seem quite absurd. It turns out that defining computational properties in an intuitive way seems to trivialize this concept. This dilemma is practically identical to the problem tormenting Lem’s solarists – their main trouble is, after all, the constant uncertainty as to how much of what they think about the planet counts as a real discovery and how much was only attributed to it by their complex theories.

As the readers probably suspect, the discussion on computational properties did not end with clever thought experiments. In recent years, philosophers proposed additional restrictions aimed at tightening the criteria for computational properties,¹² but we do not have room for further analysis of this issue here. Instead, let us

9 P. Grabarczyk, *O niearbitralnym kryterium posiadania struktury obliczeniowej*, “Filozofia Nauki” 2013, no. 4, pp. 31–50.

10 David J. Chalmers, *Does a Rock Implement Every Finite-State Automaton?*, “Synthese” 1996, no. 108(3), pp. 309–333.

11 J.R. Searle, *Umysł na nowo odkryty*, Państwowy Instytut Wydawniczy, Warsaw 1999.

12 R. Chrisley, *Why Everything Doesn't Realize Every Computation?*, “Minds and Machines” 1995, no. 4, pp. 403–420.

look at the second stage of the discovery of sentient beings. As we remember, even if we assume that we have some good method of detecting computational properties, this means that we have only given a necessary condition for the property of being an intelligent being. Most researchers believe that to attribute thinking to an object, it must be characterized by something more than a mere computation, although opinions as to what this additional factor is may be different. One of the most influential proposals for indicating such a factor is to refer to the concept of representation. This theory, most often associated with Jerry Fodor,¹³ postulates that the jump from “ordinary” computing to “thinking” is made because the internal states of an object performing computational operations represent something – they are “about something”. Using this argumentation, we can now say thinking is computation with content – a series of formal operations that refer to something. It is not difficult to associate this idea with John Searle’s Chinese room, the famous thought experiment in which the philosopher argued that even the greatest computational skills will not turn into thinking if it is based solely on a series of purely formal transformations (which is an adequate description of the events that occur in computers).¹⁴ Lem knew this experiment well and referred to it in the title of one of his late collections of essays,¹⁵ although for obvious reasons he could not have it in mind at the time *Solaris* was written. Still, this does not change the fact that the problem of the mystery of the planet coincides, to a large extent, with the riddle of the Chinese room. Having agreed that the behavior of *Solaris* shows signs of logical transformations – the basis of all computational processes – researchers might still not be able to determine whether it is only a manifestation of an idle process, complex transformations “about nothing” or an act of “cosmic thinking”.

The concern of the solarists is philosophically interesting because it does not come from the specificity of the fictional planet. It is the result of a fundamental difficulty we have in detecting representations. How do we know that the state of the object we encounter refers to something – is about something?¹⁶ We don’t have to go into space to fall into the same skeptical trap. Could the image of Churchill engraved in the sand by the accidental wandering of ants still be called *his* image? Does being a representation of something require a properly directed intention of the message sender? If this is the case, then it seems as if we are starting to tread in place. Accepting this assumption requires that we have an external, objective criterion for detecting intentions. After all, we cannot simply ask the candidate for a thinking being if it has intentions. Even if we find a creature more talkative

¹³ J.A. Fodor, *The Language of Thought*, Harvard University Press, Cambridge (MA) 1975.

¹⁴ J.R. Searle, *Minds, brains, and programs*, “Behavioral and Brain Sciences” 1980, vol. 3, issue 3, pp. 417–424.

¹⁵ S. Lem, *Tajemnica chińskiego pokoju*, Universitas, Krakow 1996.

¹⁶ S. Yablo, *Aboutness*, Princeton University Press, Princeton 2014.

than a silent globe, it is impossible to take its words at face value. After all, even the most convincing explanation may turn out to be only a product of clever formal transformations, a syntactic shell.

Let us stick to the mental representations for a moment, because one of the ways in which this concept is understood in modern philosophy of mind fits Solaris like a glove. According to the concept of *structural representations* competing with Fodor's theory,¹⁷ the relationship between representations and their reference may be actually based on purely formal properties. In a nutshell, the idea behind this concept is that for us to be able to say that a certain object A represents some other object B, the only thing we need is the existence of a non-trivial homomorphism between them. Maps are a textbook example of such representations. When we say that the map of Warsaw represents the city of Warsaw, what we mean is that it is structurally similar to the city. This concept can be derived from the idea of Peirce's iconic representations, but its roots run even deeper, reaching very old intuitions, according to which thinking consists of mapping or modeling parts of the world. The key consequence of this approach is that it allows us to talk about representations in cases where no intentions are assumed. An example of this can be found in wooden rings, which we say to represent the age of the tree, even though we know very well that no tree has planned to inform us of its age.

This fits the planet Solaris perfectly. In one of the detailed descriptions of observations made by the planet researchers, Lem mentions the countless strange creations that the mysterious globe produces and later destroys seemingly without purpose. Some of them resemble simplified versions of human cities, that may be associated with mock-ups or with three-dimensional models generated by modern computer programs. On the surface, this is a useless activity because it does not correlate with any changes in the planet's behavior. The perspective of structural representations, however, allows us to look at it differently – perhaps Solaris simply devotes itself to contemplation, dreams, or explores every possibility it can think of. The notion of *structural representations* gives us the license to treat the planet's creations as representation even if they are completely disconnected from their targets. Moreover, if the processes generating them happen to be computational, we could easily say that the planet “thinks”.

It is possible that the “guests” who act as the main driving force behind the plot of the novel are precisely the result of this compulsive need for reflection and imagination. The reader never learns what they actually are, or what purpose they

¹⁷ R. Cummins, *The role of representation in connectionist explanations of cognitive capacities*, [in:] *Philosophy and Connectionist Theory*, edited by W. Ramsey, S.P. Stich, D.E. Rumelhart, Routledge, London, pp. 91–114; idem *The World in the Head*, Oxford University Press, Oxford–New York 2010; R. Grush, *The emulation theory of representation: Motor control, imagery, and perception*, “Behavioral and Brain Sciences” 2004, vol. 27, issue 3, pp. 377–396.

were created for. The only certain thing is that they are exact copies of people (and maybe other beings) that the researchers met in their lives and who were very important to them. We get to know well only one of them – Harey, the former lover of the main character, whom he lost in tragic, suicidal circumstances, for which he (most probably rightly) blames himself.

The guests are therefore the embodied memories or even pangs of conscience of those stationed. At first glance, it would seem that such a specific selection of memories has to be interpreted as a deliberate activity of Solaris, the cosmic malice of the planet. However, it is not obvious at all. As Kelvin himself notices, the choice of emotionally burdened memories may result from their formal properties. He hypothesizes that these kinds of memories are simply relatively well isolated in the brain, which makes them better material to recreate. What is interesting, the isolation of these memories is usually not absolute, which is evident at the moment when the copy of Harey casually makes a comparison that the real Harey could not use, because it is based on knowledge of events that took place after her death. At this moment Harey is not a carbon copy of the deceased lover, it is her dynamic simulation.

I believe this to be the most interesting philosophical aspect of the “Phi-beings” (as the station residents call their visitors). Lem’s vision can be interpreted as a perfect illustration of the idea of a “reconstructive upload” mentioned by David Chalmers in his article *Uploading: A philosophical analysis*.¹⁸ To put it briefly, the idea boils down to the possibility of recreating persons by analyzing the records of their memories, views, behaviors, etc. Equipped with such a personality model, artificial intelligence could then use heuristics based on psychological theories and anticipate their new reactions, views, and behaviors with high accuracy.

It is not difficult to imagine the advantages of such an invention. People who have lost loved ones often find themselves wanting to know what the lost people would say in a certain situation, how they would have reacted to their decision, or whether they would have liked the latest film from their favorite director. We often allow ourselves to do an amateur simulation based on our knowledge about the deceased and try to put a statement in their mouths. Dreams, in which we sometimes see absent relatives who give us important advice from beyond the grave, also fulfill a similar function. These types of advice from the dead are hybrid – they are not really their actual view, nor our view that we are trying to attribute to them. They are simulations of their minds based on our knowledge of them. Reconstruction uploads should be understood as a more advanced version of such amateur simulations based on a larger amount of information. Needless to say, reconstructive

¹⁸ D.J. Chalmers, *Uploading: A philosophical analysis*, [in:] *Intelligence Unbound: The Future of Uploaded and Machine Minds*, edited by R. Blackford, D. Broderick, Wiley Blackwell, Chichester 2014, pp. 102–118.

uploads are not meant to function as a continuation of the same person after their death, a digital form of immortality. They serve the relatives of the deceased rather than the deceased himself.

The idea of reconstructive uploads provokes many ethical and epistemological questions, which Lem partially anticipated. First, we can have serious doubts about the accuracy of the simulation. Remember that the reconstruction is based solely on the external products of the reconstructed mind. If the person had many secrets and hidden thoughts that co-determined her reactions (although she never revealed them), then the simulation may result in erroneous predictions from the very beginning. Moreover, since each new reconstructed opinion or behavior is partly the result of prediction, there is a risk that the gap between the new responses and the old personality will increase. This is because all subsequent reactions will have to be based on the totality of the memories of the new consciousness. Over time, most of them will be part of the simulated memories collection. Let us imagine that after a few years the reactions of such a “reconstruct” become very surprising to us, very out-of-character. Should it be considered the result of an accumulation of predictive errors, or is it a perfect simulation of the personality change that our loved one would have experienced if he or she survived the extra few years? This question is difficult to answer, although one can imagine testing it by creating a reconstruction of a living person and allowing it to function alongside the original. After a few years, we could then compare the views of both and check their convergence. The problem is that it would require us to fully synchronize the experiences of the living and simulated person, which would be extremely difficult or maybe even impossible.

Second, as the character of Harey clearly shows, the existence of reconstructive uploads provokes ethical dilemmas that are difficult to solve. This becomes clear when we exert empathy and put ourselves in the shoes of a simulated person. From their point of view, they will simply be a continuation of the original. From the inner perspective of their mind, the moment of activation will be no different from the moment of our everyday awakening. Despite this, they will most likely not be treated the same way as the person they claim and feel to be. It is possible that to get the simulation correct, we will have to lie to the simulated persons and hide their true nature from them, the same way Kelvin does with Harey. It is also possible that having discovered the truth, they will be deeply unhappy and prone to self-annihilation (which, again, happens to Harey in *Solaris*). Are we allowed to create minds that live in falsehood or unhappiness simply because they alleviate our grief?

The perspective of the original – the source of all the memories – also raises ethical problems. Although Lem does not take this into account, we can reflect on how the reconstructed people would have reacted to the prospect of leaving their digital simulations running years after their death. Let us imagine a world in

which this technology is the norm. There is no doubt that this would have a significant impact on all the traces we leave behind. If I know that every opinion I hold and every behavior I display will become a subsoil of the synthetic personality of my reconstruction in the future, then it is easy to predict that I will become much more careful and aware of what I say and do. It will probably limit my will for self-expression and hamper authenticity. Ironically, this may lead to the failure of the whole idea, because the reconstructions will only reflect the personality we wanted to show to the world, not the personality we actually had. We can also imagine that many people will forbid the creation of their reconstructs for fear of the content that will be attributed to them after death. Needless to say, the rules for belief attribution will have to be rewritten as claims will be divided into “genuine” and “heuristically generated”.

Contemporary dilemmas related to the so-called “deep fakes” – a technology that allows one to manipulate people’s images by placing their animated likenesses in any situation are only a foretaste of the problems that the existence of reconstructs may generate.¹⁹ It can be suspected that even if technology similar to that used by the planet Solaris becomes available to us, it will not be accepted for social reasons.

Both of the perspectives I have proposed allow us to see some of the contemporary processes as a continuation of Lem’s story. Even though observing further advances in cognitive science, won’t tell us anything new about Solaris, we will still be able to follow the development trajectory of a discipline with a profile similar to Solarist studies. Looking closely at the reception of technologies such as “deep fake” or “reconstructive upload”, we may find out what would happen to society if the planetary station researchers managed to return to Earth accompanied by their uncomfortable “guests”.

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Paweł Grabarczyk

O czym nam mówi milcząca planeta? Analiza wybranych wątków filozoficznych w *Solaris* Stanisława Lema

Streszczenie

Artykuł bada wybrane filozoficzne aspekty powieści *Solaris* Stanisława Lema. Twierdzi, że zachodzi interesujące podobieństwo pomiędzy historią „solarystyki” – fikcyjnej dyscypliny naukowej opisywanej przez Lema a historią kognitywistyki. Pokazują, że obie dyscypliny przechodziły przez podobne etapy, starając się opisać swój przedmiot (odpowiednio, planetę Solaris oraz świadomość ludzką). W dalszej części artykułu skupiam się na dwóch problemach zidentyfikowanych w kognitywistyce, które można bezpośrednio odnieść do wątków obecnych w *Solaris*: problemie wykrywania istot myślących oraz problemie reprezentacji umysłowych.

Kończę artykuł przyglądając się tajemniczym gościom, którzy prześladowają bohaterów powieści i pokazuję, że mogą oni być zinterpretowani jako modele heurystyczne rozważane w teoriach uploadu.

Słowa kluczowe: Stanisław Lem, *Solaris*, reprezentacje, komputacjonizm, upload

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The woman had to fall? Jean-Baptiste Clamence and the literary infection by evil

Summary

The article presents the concept of evil, as developed in the literary as well as philosophical works of Albert Camus. After a short, preliminary notice on the relationship between literature and evil, the article presents two spheres, in which the problem of evil was grasped by the author of *The Rebel*. In the main part of the article, the complexity of the problem of evil, as represented by Jean-Baptiste Clamence from *The Fall* is shown. It is seen as a development of the concept of evil from *The Plague*, with the potency to disseminate onto others. It is also perceived, as something resulting from severe trauma of the main character. In conclusion, I claim, that the problem of evil, as experienced by Clamence may be understood as a still relevant metaphor of contemporary culture, struggling with passivity against the rise of social evil.

Keywords: evil, literature and philosophy, Camus, *The Fall*

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Introduction: On evil, guilt and literature

Why would philosophers need literature in their contemplation of the problem of evil?¹ In search of the possible roots of their interest in the literary vision of evil, we could perhaps reach back to the times where there were no distinct lines drawn, for example, ancient Greek philosophy. And the simplest answer derived from Greek thought could be that literature allows for separation. Fictional work creates distance. The creation of a character struggling with the problem of evil, and the presentation of the problem of evil in motion by means of the narrative, allows for a different perspective. As such, literature becomes a kind of laboratory for the problem of evil, where writer-philosophers present the problem of the tension between the noble intentions and the evil outcomes of human actions.²

The interesting thing about literary laboratories, however, is that that one cannot predict what influence the experiment will have on the readers. When Georges Bataille asked a question about the meaning of the connection between philosophy and literature in his introduction to essays on the problem of literary evil, he made some claims that are worth mentioning here: “Literature is not innocent. It is guilty and should admit itself so. (...) I believe that the Evil – an acute form of evil – which it expresses, has sovereign value for us.”³ Literature thus not only presents evil: a novel on an evil person makes the literary work engaged with the normative sphere. Even though it only depicts the actions of a person doing something wrong, the book itself becomes “guilty” in the sense

1 A more general question, regarding the relationship between philosophy and literature is certainly worth asking and has profited with abundant research from philosophers and literature theorists. While it is not the scope of this specific article, it is certainly worth to mention at least three contemporary dimensions of this relationship. First and foremost, we may follow Richard Rorty and consider literature the essential domain of philosophy, going as far as interpreting philosophy as literature (see R. Rorty, *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature*, Princeton University Press, Princeton 1979). The second attitude, I believe much closer to Camus’s perception of literature, is founded on treating literary fiction as a domain of thought experiments, influencing theoretical claims and offering them a sphere to develop in causal and consequentialist environment (for an analysis of literary fiction as the realm of thought experiments, see P. Grabarczyk, *Eksperymenty myślowe w służbie esencjalizmu*, “Filozofia Nauki” 2009, no. 1(65), pp. 23–29). Finally, a discussion in the domain of philosophy of fiction should be considered, offering important conclusions regarding the truth value of sentences from the literary domain, raising questions concerning their usefulness outside the fictional field (see D. Lewis, *Truth in fiction*, “American Philosophical Quarterly” 1978, no. 15(1), pp. 37–46).

2 C.H. Whitman, *Sophocles: A Study of Heroic Humanism*, Harvard University Press, Cambridge 1951, pp. 6–7.

3 G. Bataille, *Literature and Evil*, Penguin Books, London, p. 3.

of engaging us with the problem of evil and demanding a normative reaction to the phenomenon. Bataille says something exceptional about the – we could risk saying – dialectical nature of the traditionally separated notions of content and form. The evil of the content undermines the lack of “innocence” of the form. Both the author who presents literary evil, and the reader who discovers the problem of evil through literature, are in a way, responsible. They are both responsible, because even though the evil they confront is purely fictional, it genuinely demands answering. By not presenting a solution to the problem of evil, the author becomes responsible. By presenting a straightforward answer to the problem of evil he becomes obvious and superficial. By rejecting the evil as portrayed by the novel, the reader isolates the phenomenon from his experience and does not contemplate the possible reaction that could be deemed necessary. Evil in literature asks an important question: “What would you have done?” And this moral reaction to the problem of evil – the reader’s moral reaction, who becomes acknowledged of the problem – as I shall try to present here, is an interesting element in the process of reading Camus’s *The Fall*.

Camus’s last published novel is a book, which ever since its publication, has engaged readers and philosophers in debates on the intersection of moral philosophy and literature.⁴ By means of the literary character, Jean-Baptiste Clamence, Camus is portraying the belief in the total impossibility of innocence. Such a state opens up the perspective for the problem of evil, as without the possibility of being innocent, everyone is guilty and thus bears some part of mankind’s responsibility for the existence of evil itself. Even though Camus did portray the problem of evil in numerous novels and philosophical essays (especially in *The Rebel*), the role of *The Fall* is unique and specific. The novel might be considered a phenomenological exploration of the problem. It presents a person struggling with evil, without any attempt at moralising, without any inherent commentary. Clamence is the sole narrator of the book, and the lack of any other narrative only condenses the novel more closely around the only issue the main character is struggling with. On the level of guilt, as Bataille mentioned, *The Fall* is completely guilty: there is no hint whatsoever as to the attitude one should take when confronted with the character of Clamence. On the philosophical level, especially the moral level, such a reaction

4 Albert Camus Bibliography [online] <https://www.boisestate.edu/camusbibliography/3-4-la-chute-the-fall/> (access 29.08.2019) contains a list of numerous contemporary articles and book chapters dedicated to deciphering Camus’s last published novel. While it is not the purpose of this article to review recent contemporary interpretations of *The Fall*, one should certainly pay special attention to the magnificent collection of essays, *Textes, intertextes, contextes. Autour de La Chute*, edited by R. Gay-Crosier (1993). Out of many earlier works engaged in the problem of Camus’s novel, R. Girard’s article, *Camus’s Stranger Retired* (1964), deserves special attention.

is, however desired, as Clamence's conception of evil is especially deceitful and disturbingly relevant.

One more introductory note has to be made. We have already stated that literature is of interest to philosophy because of the possibility it offers when presenting evil. The presentation, however, is not innocent and bears significant moral problems regarding both the author's and reader's responsibility. In the case of *The Fall*, both the reader, as well as the philosophically oriented interpreter, may be lured into an act of understanding in which the central theme and its significance override the context and subplots, the main text dominates the hesitations enclosed in the footnotes, and the clarity of central figures eliminates the importance of understatements. I propose, that we should invert these figures and offer an interpretation of *The Fall* in which the central elements, like the famous woman on the bridge, must withdraw to the background. Consequently, elements of the background will demand closer inspection and focus. Such elements, as I will try to demonstrate, may become convenient tools for orienting ourselves in the maze of meanings within *The Fall*.

Part 1: On the genealogy of evil leading to *The Fall*

Before proceeding to the problem of evil in *The Fall*, a general outline of Camus's understanding of evil is needed. This issue is much more complex and demands some typology. In recent work on the issue, Matthew Sharpe⁵ makes important distinctions regarding Camus's view on the phenomenon of evil. He observes that at least two essential categories of evil are present in his work, relating to the metaphysical as well as social dimensions of the phenomenon.

Initially, Camus's occupation with the problem of evil reaches back to his studies in Algiers where he developed a thesis about the relationship between Greek thought and Christianity (OCI, 999–1084).⁶ Undoubtedly, his early concept of evil is derived from St. Augustine, and evil is understood here as either a natural element of the human condition, or as an element of the moral action of a free-willed agent. Already, in the early stages of his career Camus was interested in the relationship between the natural and moral evil. He assumed that the latter should to be considered a reaction to divine or natural evil, a form of metaphysical rebellion against misery, suffering, and death. The process of becoming evil is not

⁵ M. Sharpe, *After the Fall: Camus on evil*, [in:] *The Routledge Handbook of the Philosophy of Evil*, edited by T. Nys et al., Routledge, Abingdon-on-Thames 2019.

⁶ All references to Albert Camus, unless indicated otherwise, refer to the most comprehensive source of his works, the four volume edition *Œuvres complètes* published by Gallimard, Paris 2006–2008, abbreviated in this manuscript as OCI, OCII, OCIII, OCIV.

only a reaction to the existence of natural evil experienced by human beings. It is consequently amplified by the fact that natural evil is simultaneously understood as a form of harmony-bringing process, by which we are reminded that we have corrupted our souls by acts of free will, and that we must be punished for the sins that result from these actions. The punishment, however, only strengthens the will to reform the world by consequent acts of rebellion. Camus was especially interested in the fact, that in the Augustinian view of the problem, only free will, accompanied by God's grace, could provide escape from the corruption. The lack of acceptance of natural evil, the refusal to understand the harmony-bringing process as an element of the nature of the world are symptoms of man's departure from grace.

In his works on the absurd, especially in the philosophical essay, *The Myth of Sisyphus* (OCI, 219–320), Camus evidently engages in the problem of evil, but given his main (although certainly not isolated) focus on the epistemological rather than normative aspect of the human condition, he does not engage too deeply in the relationship between the absurd and the problem of evil in the bespoken essay. The publication of *Letters to a German Friend* (OCII, 3–34) marks a significant evolution of this attitude; Camus clearly moves on from the descriptive to the normative problems of experiencing the absurd. In short, only after having dedicated great effort to describing the problem of the absurd and the possible consequences of the experience on the human being, can Camus develop the moral reflection towards a better understanding of the relationship between absurdity and the problem of evil. Camus concludes, that absurdity may lead to nihilism, granting the subject the belief, that performing evil acts, like killing others, in an apparently meaningless world, cannot encounter any serious moral objections. The human being experiences the absurd, which is understood as the tension between human desire for meaning and the lack of meaning offered by the world the human being lives in. Evil is not a necessary reaction to this experience, but it is one of the possible outcomes of the absurd experience. When a person kills another human being, he puts himself in a position of power, and so restores meaning through an act of destruction, not creation. If there are no transcendent rules to obey, one is free to create rules of his own, and nothing will stop the subject from choosing dominance and power. And the subject confirms his power, by killing and by conquest, which, Camus concludes, is actually represented by his *German Friend's* activity.

But to Camus, this God-like power for taking away life turns out to produce no meaning at all. It does not bring the desired feeling of harmony, but instead – solitude. Moreover, such person discovers that such destruction cannot be undone. Caligula, the hero of Camus's play discovers that he cannot become like the gods. Although he can equal them in destruction, he is unable to bring the dead back to life (OCI, 367). The positions of the other characters of Camus's dramas and novels from the absurd cycle, in regard to the problem of evil, are rather more complex

than homogenous. Members of society perceive Meursault as evil, so that he can be understood and condemned, so as to make his absurd crime seem logical. Martha, from *The Misunderstanding*, lacks the profundity of Caligula's intentions and is limited by her very shallow idea of happiness, leading her to criminal activity. She may be considered evil, given the fact that in order to obtain happiness she does not find anything wrong with killing her guests, but it would be highly debatable whether one could compare the level of her corruption with the one that occupies Camus after 1943. Caligula, in one of his moments of deep insight about the consequences of his actions, shows a deep awareness of the inadequacy between means and ends: "murder is not a solution" (OCI, 387). Having both experienced and performed evil he genuinely wants to be overruled, and his last words "I am still alive!" (OCI, 388), can be seen rather as a warning: there is a dangerous potency in each of us to become like him.

For Camus, the true problem of contemporary moral evil begins, however, when a human being becomes convinced that he can justify murder by means of logic and reason (OCIII, 63–64). An affirmative answer to the question: "do we have the right to kill others?" replaces Caligula's position. A metaphysical rebellion against death and absurdity, as portrayed by Caligula, is replaced by a revolution that justifies killing as a necessary element in the production of social and existential well-being. Murder, which previously was individual, becomes universalized (OCIII, 306–313). In its most acute form – defined as historical murder – murder is given justification, and as such it is no longer considered evil. If one rebels against the historical and philosophical justification for murder, one must resort to faith, or God and his commandment: "Thou shall not kill". Such a possibility is, however, according to Camus, problematic: it condemns evil, but does not eliminate it from the history and the experience of the human being (OCIII, 307). Camus presents this problem also on literary grounds in *The Plague*. There, the character of Father Paneloux represents the Christian dilemma of the means of confronting evil. And even though the character changes his early, Augustinian attitude towards evil (OCII, 98–101), for a more compassionate, solidary approach (OCII, 186–192), it seems curiously ineffective in reaction to the evil he recognizes under the guise of the disease.⁷ This is perhaps because the nature of evil has changed as well, without making Paneloux fully aware of the process. When we are confronted with the Plague – a natural disease, an exemplar of natural or divine evil – we can use the Augustinian metaphysics of evil to create a description of the problem. The corruption of human nature is responsible for the occurrence of the disease, interpreted as a punishment sent from above. Paneloux becomes fully aware – after having

⁷ This lack of effectiveness is also criticized by Camus in public speeches. His opinion about the role of the Church when confronted with the political evil of fascism and Nazism was highly critical (OCII, 471–472).

experienced the death of an innocent child – that the metaphysical description of evil is woefully inadequate for the problem of contemporary evil. Therefore, in his second sermon, he does not present the plague as a punishment anymore. Still, he tries to embrace it on purely theoretical, rather than action-oriented grounds. But the action-oriented approach to evil, Camus claims, as manifested by the ill-conceived revolutionary movements, demands the legitimization of murder, and the abolition of freedom and human dignity in order to reach the desired historical ends of humanity. In both cases the evil persists. Moreover, and more importantly, Camus makes an exceptional remark on the nature of evil in *The Plague*: Evil is contagious. This is caught by the Tarrou's reflection (OCII, 208–210): evil spreads, it is transferable from man to man, so it must have a different nature than being purely a privation, an absence of good. It is possible to control evil, but not to eliminate it. Transmissible and omnipresent, it demands constant governance and effort by the human being, to keep it isolated. And even though the moral evil of human beings can be put back under control, as the ending of *The Plague* suggests, one cannot completely eliminate the possibility of human evil taking control over individuals once again. Furthermore, control over moral evil does not alleviate the problem of natural evil. One can abstain from killing, or be ready to suffer the consequences for unavoidable acts of killing, but one is nevertheless condemned to die, which is the only evil in the human condition that cannot be truly resolved or eliminated.

Moral evil requires subjective control, so as not to become aligned with the evil performed by others. But what should one do against the evil endangering our existence and exercised by others upon us? An effective way of eliminating external, moral evil for Tarrou seems to be condemned to have to resort to murder and killing that is directed against those who had performed killing in the name of the alleged reparation of the world (OCII, 208–209). Camus consequently develops this issue in the play, *The Just Assassins*, in presenting the dilemmas of the revolutionary, Kaliayev. Once a person yields to political murder in an attempt to restore justice and harmony in the world, he is no longer morally allowed to believe that he will be able to control himself in future decisions. Not being able to justify murder (as that would be self-defeating), the only option that remains for Kaliayev is self-sacrifice. This element of Camus's reflection, especially the idea of compensating for the evil of taking away life by offering one's own life afterwards, understandably caused a stir and debate, and still remains controversial today.⁸ We may only conclude here, regarding the relation of the issue to the problem of

⁸ See P. Thody, *Albert Camus 1913–1960*, Macmillan, London 1961, p. 127; G. Kateb, *Utopia and Its Enemies*, Free Press, New York 1963, pp. 39–40; H. Hochberg, *Albert Camus and the Ethic of Absurdity*, [in:] *Contemporary European Ethics – Selected Readings*, edited by J. Kockelmans, Anchor, New York 1972, p. 345; J. Foley, *From the absurd to revolt*, Acumen, Stocksfield 2008, p. 95.

evil, that it seems that for Camus it is permissible to kill another highly dangerous human being, but that such an act can never be generalized or universalized. Murder can never be justified, leading Camus to have a stubborn condemnation for the death penalty (OCIV, 125–170), and to the conviction that the consequences of killing must always be severe for the perpetrator. This can be interpreted, coming back to the literary source of *The Plague*, as a necessary element of control over human evil.

In the remaining part of this article, I would like to focus solely on the issue of evil generated by human beings: the perpetrators responsible for violence and harm against other persons. Tarrou mentions that one must use one's conscience in a moral attempt to control evil so as not to allow it spread. What does this mean, though, and how do we – non-metaphorically – infect others with evil? An obvious paradox with such an understanding of evil is that if we are all capable of doing evil things, then the conception of evil as also being contagious seems obsolete. We spread evil by making evil things. It seems to me, however, that the problem could be solved in the following way: it is by experiencing evil from the other that our own control over evil deteriorates. Experiencing or being witness to evil does indeed seriously affect our moral attitude and leads to what Camus believes to be a loss of control over the limits of human moral behaviour.⁹

In the case of political ideology, the Camusian answer is quite simple: we spread evil if we make others believe that they will be not made responsible or guilty for the crimes they have committed. We make others believe that the end will justify the means, and that executioners will be absolved from having made their victims suffer. The death of Kaliayev is convenient for the elimination of the problem of guilt and responsibility. It seemingly ends the dilemma in which the protagonist of Camus's play was engaged. But on a moral level it is certainly worth asking: what are the consequences of living on that are feared by Tarrou, and not experienced by Kaliayev? And these consequences, related strongly to the problem of infection with evil by a person actively engaged in morally wrong actions is brilliantly developed in *The Fall*, to which we shall now proceed.

⁹ An example of real events in line with such reasoning can be found in witness accounts of concentration camp prisoners, who spoke of the growing indifference to other's suffering of inmates. One of them was asked about the mob law that functioned in Auschwitz. Prisoners suspected of stealing the food of other inmates were strangled by other prisoners at night: "(Kazimierz Piechowski, former Auschwitz prisoner): »What was done to get rid of such people? They were liquidated. The prisoners killed them at night. (...)«; (Interviewer): »And you didn't feel anything? This was normal?«; (Kazimierz Piechowski) »Absolutely, it was completely normal, except for a kind of flash, subconscious perhaps: God, and still things such as this are happening. And still things such as this. But these things couldn't be helped«, *Auschwitz, The final solution*, dir. Laurence Rees, et al., BBC, London 2005, 10:03–11:03.

Part 2: Evil, responsibility, and guilt: *The Fall*

Camus's preoccupation with the problem of evil from the point of view of the absurd and rebellion cycles may be considered as an engagement with the problem of an individual's reaction to the experience of natural or divine evil. Moreover, in the laboratory of novels and plays, the author tries to understand the possibility of becoming morally evil, being possessed by either individual nihilism, like Martha and Caligula, or political ideology, like Stephan and the addressee of his *Letters to a German Friend*. In the 1950's he becomes intriguingly interested with the growing evidence of his belief that there is something infectious about evil. In the intersubjective realm, this relation is also burdened with the desire of the perpetrator of the evil to eliminate or dilute his feelings of guilt. He would certainly agree with Czesław Miłosz, whose *The Captive Mind* he admired,¹⁰ that following the problem of the secularisation of evil, the problem of guilt has consequently changed in significant way. The transference of human evil is related to the problem of transference of guilt. In *The Rebel*, Camus observes that the main problem for the executioner would be the innocence of his victim. The evil develops (and spreads) then, not only by the proliferation of executioners (e.g. by means of political ideology), but also by achieving a situation in which the victims feel guilty (OCIII, 218). To spread evil, the executioners must then destroy their victims' belief in innocence. In this situation of victims and executioners, the idea of evil as reflected upon by Camus is this: the source of evil (the executioner) is aware of his guilt and tries to share this guilt with others. Not only with other executioners by making claims about an alleged redemption achieved through History, but also with their victims, by making claims about their alleged guilt. It is precisely this element of the problem of evil that I argue Camus wanted to develop in more detail in *The Fall*. While *The Plague* was a literary attempt at presenting the possibility of control of human, moral evil; *The Fall*, conversely, shows how evil can transgress the boundaries between subjects. Interestingly, and in line with the aforementioned concept of literary guilt, the novel also transgresses the borders between fiction and reality, as eventually we – the readers – become the main targets of Jean-Baptiste Clamence's masterplan.

Clamence, the main protagonist in *The Fall*, makes multiple attempts to reduce his feelings of guilt and his recognition of the fact that he has lost control over evil, that it has essentially corrupted his sense of dignity. If we follow, chronologically, Clamence's story, we can arrive at the conviction that he was doing all the best in his life and that his early career as a lawyer did allow him to spread goodness and obtain happiness. This stance was interrupted by his inability to act on the bridge

¹⁰ Assumption made by the author on basis of the unpublished correspondence between Miłosz and Camus.

to save a suicidal woman, leading to his moral demise. The situation, however, as I will try to show, is much more complex. If we consider the most highlighted story presented by Clamence as the source of his corruption, then we arrive at a discussion – yet again – on the commonly debated problems of the post-war period. Are we all guilty of not having done anything to confront the evil that had spread during the prosecution and extermination of the Jews in European countries?¹¹ Clamence finds himself guilty of having done nothing when another human being needed assistance, and presents the story of the woman on the Parisian bridge as, arguably, the main source of his corruption and of the consequent spread of his own disease. But why bother with the whole plan of making others share guilt, if all others are already guilty? The answer would be, that Clamence is sure, on the one hand, that there are qualitative differences in guilt; while on the other, he is also aware of the presence of others who did resist and confront the evil. And so, the great difficulty for Clamence is not only the existence of evil, but the awareness, that at least some did rebel against it, even if it resulted in their death. The situation becomes even more nuanced when Clamence makes his final confession: in a camp in Africa, where he was responsible for distributing water, he drank a dying comrade's portion of water, having assumed that his survival chances were higher than those of a person in agony (OCIII, 753–755). If we compare the situations from the bridge and from the camp in relation to the problem of evil, we can see an asymmetry: it is wrong not to help someone whose life is threatened (the woman on a bridge), it is arguably worse to diminish someone else's chances of survival in a camp by taking away his water.¹² This act can be seen as the negative baptism of the hero of *The Fall*, and having severe consequences, together with his inability to act when the woman needed assistance in Paris. Clamence may feel guilty, but he is not responsible for the death of the allegedly suicidal woman. But he is both guilty and responsible for the death of his comrade in the prison camp, because he had decided to save himself from death by stealing the water. And the moral paralysis he experiences in Paris may be seen as the traumatic aftermath of his experience of

¹¹ K. Jaspers, *The Question of German Guilt*, Indigo, Toronto 2001.

¹² In one of reviews of this article an interesting point was raised, namely, that it is actually worse not to help the woman on the bridge. In the camp, Clamence seems to be in a “life-boat” situation, influencing his moral decisionmaking, and it is debatable whether he did wrong. My point here, however, is that not doing anything on the bridge, did not worsen the situation of the woman – she still was in a life threatening situation, resulting from her decision to jump. On the contrary, taking the water must have resulted in the worsening of the condition of Clamence's comrade. Taking into account the “victim's” perspective, Clamence's inability to act on the bridge did not deteriorate the situation of the woman. Taking the water, though, I argue, did deteriorate the condition of the dying prisoner.

evil in the war camp.¹³ This guilt and this responsibility are a kind of psychological trauma, which clearly haunts the hero of the book.¹⁴ Its importance for the character is amplified by its place in the novel: it is told in the last part of Clamence's confession, when resigned, diseased, and possibly foreseeing his imminent death, he decides to tell the truth.¹⁵ Having to choose whether one should improve his own chances of survival or share those chances equally with others has haunted many prisoners of war and concentration camp inmates. Historically, this kind of additional moral suffering was intentionally added to the structure of the violence in the concentration camps. The wardens knew that there was not enough food for a person to survive more than three months. The prisoners were aware of the impossibility of surviving the camp, of being intentionally deprived of hope (Deem 2012, 18–20). Coming back to the initial reflection on Bataille from the introduction, we can see that this particular piece of literature, *The Fall*, is not innocent: it is genuinely the narrator's intention to dispense with the guilt resulting from his experience of moral evil onto his listener and onto the reader themselves.

Evil in the human being becomes even more active and less controllable once the person is, or feels, isolated, excluded, and separated from others. Not being able to cope with his trauma and feeling of individual guilt, Clamence tries to universalize it. Instead of dialogue, the peaceful way to reach others, the isolated person "communicates" with others through violence, murder, and power relations, enslaving and forcing others to end his solitude by forcibly entering the lives of others. When Clamence speaks, he speaks abusively, he speaks intelligently. He speaks violently, because the sole purpose of his speaking is making the interlocutor be silent, be passive, be reactive. It is in silence that we accept evil. Instead of following the positive claim in *The Rebel*: "Parler répare" (OCIII, 68), we are being forced into a situation where "Se taire, détruit". It is in speech that we manifest revolt against evil; the initial "no" of the rebel must be communicated to the person whom he wants to confront. The world of Clamence is the world of monologues, not dialogues; because dialogues can modify the positions of the persons involved. And Clamence, by all means, does not want to change; he wants others to become infected by the consequences of his own possession by evil, his own disease, which he finds incurable.

We may feel little sympathy for the character possessed by evil and presented by Camus in *The Renegade*. He is lost, more and more isolated, becoming more and more

¹³ M. Longstaffe, *The Fiction of Albert Camus: A Complex Simplicity*, Peter Lang, Bern 2007, pp. 189–190.

¹⁴ S. Felman, *Camus' The Fall, or the Betrayal of the Witness*, [in:] *Testimony: Crises of Witnessing in Literature, Psychoanalysis and History*, edited by S. Felman, D. Laub, Routledge, New York 2013.

¹⁵ S. Ungar, *Scandal And Aftereffect: Blanchot and France since 1930*, University Of Minnesota Press, Minneapolis 1995, p. 30.

fanatical. The case of Clamence is quite different: he is genuinely evil and at the same time attractive. In theatrical adaptations of the novel, he usually very quickly achieves a fine communication with the audience; and one can sometimes genuinely feel a rising sympathy for the character among the viewers, as if they were attending a stand-up comedy show. The state of relaxation that occurs when one reads or listens to Clamence is alarming; it is exactly because of this state that we tend to be much more easily convinced by his narrative, together with its dangerous consequences.

By openly confessing his sins, we find Clamence deceptively honest. It strengthens our feeling of his honesty when he frankly admits that some of his stories are completely made up (OCIII, 761). When he openly says that the sole purpose of his narrative is seduction and possession, we feel fully secured because we have been warned (OCIII, 762). But, at the very end, the person who has denied water to a dying comrade wants us to confess, to join the forcedly horizontal moral sphere in which Clamence strives to exist. And this is exactly the very moment we have to remember what Tarrou said about evil, and, as readers endangered by this attempt to make us inmates of Clamence's hell, we have to resist the call. This decision is made much more difficult once we remember that Clamence must have gone through a moral, personal hell living with the post-camp trauma, which arguably shaped his entire enterprise for becoming a judge-penitent. The decision to publish *The Fall* must have been very hard for Camus, because the novel does not offer a solution to evil that so prominently emanated from *The Plague*.¹⁶ In a famous debate between Roland Barthes and Camus, Barthes accused Camus of making the struggle against evil look so easy: after all, everyone will be attracted by the call to fight the Plague, because the Plague does not have anything humane in it. It could be argued that even though Camus was strongly opposed to Barthes' claims,¹⁷ he did listen, because the evil in *The Fall* has the very humane face of Clamence.

Władysław Stróżewski once compared the relationship between philosophy and literature to the act of looking in the mirror.¹⁸ Philosophy finds itself in the act: the reflection offered by the mirror of literature fulfils philosophical reflection. Henri Petit, one of the early, insightful critics of *The Fall*, remarked: "Jean-Baptiste Clamence is the mirror, reflecting everything that is negative in our times" (OCIII, 1369, own translation). The sole purpose of the reflection, in which we only find the negative and the evil, is to find in oneself, the deeply philosophical grounds

¹⁶ Camus was irritated by the constant criticisms of *The Plague*, that it offered a kind of Red Cross morality. However strongly he opposed these claims, they have possibly influenced the composition of *The Fall*. There are no evident moral conclusions offered by the book.

¹⁷ R. Barthes, *Annales d'une épidémie ou roman de la solitude?*, "Bulletin du Club du Meilleur Livre", February 1955, pp. 4–8.

¹⁸ W. Stróżewski, *Literatura i filozofia*, "Ruch Literacki" 1995, no. 6, p. 693.

for the goodness and dignity to resist the image. About these grounds, however, the book says nothing. If literature is not innocent, this silence demands courage, and above all, hope, that there is a disposition in the reader not to follow Alamance.

The recognition of evil in another human being often leads others to the condemnation and to the isolation of the possessed individual. The process, however, leads to unfortunate outcomes, like the conviction that the German Nazis, the truly evil hosts of Auschwitz death camp, are in some way ontologically alien to the rest of humanity. And yet, Camus argues that each one of us shares a disposition towards evil; nobody is free from the plague. It is not a difference in nature, but a difference in the control of nature, the control of humans' natural desire to become meaningful, perhaps even immortal. By making the claim that each of us carries a disposition towards evil, Camus could have contributed to the discussion, which years later split intellectuals, on the claims by Hannah Arendt regarding the nature of evil, after her publication on Eichmann.¹⁹ And quite possibly he would have agreed with Susan Neiman's claim that "Auschwitz was conceptually devastating because it revealed a possibility in human nature that we hoped not to see" (Neiman 2002, 254). Thus, when Clamence, in his narrative, smoothly changes from "I" to "We" in an attempt to have the listener become burdened with his own moral failings (OCIII, 762), he does have grounds to believe he may succeed.

One could argue that Clamence was, before becoming the judge-penitent, yet another victim of the terror imposed upon him in that very moment he was forced to decide who should survive and who should die in the African camp. As such, he shared the same horrible burden as many of the survivors of the atrocities of the concentration camps in Europe did. In the end, we could say that Clamence is doubly diseased: he is plagued by a disease that any one of us can have and can transfer to others, the evil that can arise from our insistence on meaning and purpose in life; and he is also plagued by the post-camp trauma, which makes any of his consequent moral decisions much more difficult. A traumatized holocaust survivor who suffered from the immense and intentional process of destruction of all meaning, had immense problems in readapting. Multiple cases of suicide among holocaust survivors shows, acutely, how deeply these people have been affected.²⁰ One of symptoms of post traumatic disorders is a state called paroxysmal hypermnesia,²¹ the necessity to continuously re-live the traumatic situations that haunt the victim of the camp. This experience has had a severe impact on the survivors. Jean Améry, who survived Auschwitz concentration camp, remarked that no one who went through the expe-

¹⁹ H. Arendt, *Eichmann in Jerusalem: A Report on the Banality of Evil*, Viking Press, New York 1963.

²⁰ Y. Barak, *Increased risk of attempted suicide among aging holocaust survivors*, "American Journal of Geriatric Psychiatry" 2005, no. 13(8), pp. 701-704.

²¹ W. Póltawska, *Stany hipermnjezi napadowej u byłych więźniów obserwowane po 30 latach*, "Przegląd Lekarski" 1978, no. 35(1), pp. 20-24.

rience would ever wish for its recurrence.²² Yet, as psychiatric studies have shown, traumatized people have to re-live it constantly. In this context, Clamence's final cry: "O young girl, throw yourself again into the water so that I might have a second time the chance to save the two of us!" (OCIII, 765) is significant. He may be seen as simply being obsessed with the evil he has witnessed and experienced, and dreams of the possibility of the abolition of his condition. Significantly, Clamence does not exclaim: "Get me back to the camp in Africa, so I can save my comrade!", because, in agreement with Améry's claim, this is exactly the situation he never wants to reappear, and which, possibly, constantly reappears in his mind nevertheless.

Clamence is also profoundly struck, not only by the evil he has witnessed, but also by the possibility of having confronted the evil that so many others chose, and by this choice met their fate. Duguesclin's appearance in the camp (OCIII, 755) is a burden for the survivor, because he knows that evil could have been confronted. In reality, the character may refer to Simone Weil, who, preceding Jasper's conclusions on metaphysical guilt, made her decision to take on her responsibility and enforce upon herself the conditions others had had to endure under Nazi occupation. In 1943, diagnosed with tuberculosis, she persistently limited the amount of food she ate to the level she believed was rationed to the people in occupied countries. As the existence of others may influence our decision to do wrong, it seems from Clamence's narrative that the existence of Duguesclin may have seriously impacted on his decision regarding water distribution: "If he was there, because of the love I had for the man, I would have resisted longer" (OCIII, 755). It should be stressed here – for the defence of Clamence, that this statement bears, indirectly, an important ethical message. The death of the person, being a moral beacon for Clamence, might have deprived him of faith in the virtues of the deceased character.²³

By publishing *The Fall*, Camus voiced the concern that no one is free from the moral responsibility of the horrible historical events of war and occupation, and, more importantly, that these events, disturbingly, assisted in making further moral choices even more difficult. *The Fall*, in this view, could be seen as an appendix to Jasper's concept of metaphysical guilt, presenting the potentially dangerous consequences of the continuous experience of guilt and trauma. With such an interpretation of evil we may feel, on the one hand, that there is something seriously wrong with post-war humanism too hesitantly reacting to the disturbing news of genocide, and terror in USSR. On the other hand, this does not mean that the study of Clamence

²² J. Améry, *Jenseits von Schuld und Sühne*, Klett-Cotta, Stuttgart 1977, p. 116.

²³ It may be possible to interpret Clamences' persistence to find Christ guilty as an aftereffect of having witnessed Duguesclin's firm ethical stance. Christ and Duguesclin are mentioned by Clamence as the people he truly loves. But this admiration deepens his feeling of guilt, so he has to find evidence of Christ's failure to be innocent. Perhaps, only with Christ being guilty, and his follower – Duguesclin – dead, can Clamence stop resisting the evil.

and his conscience is an apology for the existence of evil. Camus never agreed with Sartre's view on the relationship between violence and freedom. On the contrary, Camus's stubborn appeal to limits constantly irritated other thinkers and made him enemies on virtually all sides of the political fence. The confrontation with evil, the confrontation with Clamence, seen as a modern embodiment of human evil, must be carried out. Such a struggle with the will for power and domination, as Camus had warned in *The Rebel*, must, however, be very selective and thoughtful regarding the means of engagement. On one side, once the reaction to Clamence's claims that we are supposedly on the same horizontal moral plane becomes violent, that is, confrontational, not dialogical, Camus's hero actually succeeds in reaching his goal, as one becomes then yet another person in need for the confession of his guilt. On the other side, once the reaction to Clamence becomes too permissive, we are in danger of sympathy, which he continuously attempts to use against us.

Conclusion

The evil manifested by Clamence has its foundation in the totality of guilt. It is only, when all people are guilty and feel responsible for the moral, cultural, and religious failure of their civilisation, that this "plagued" conscience can develop and succeed. This success is achieved by Clamence in the moment the interlocutor accepts full responsibility and condemns himself in the repetition of the sentence "It is too late, it is always too late". To make sure the lack of innocence is total, Clamence burns the last bridge to salvation by openly manifesting the guilt of Christ, and the impossibility of innocence on both the human and divine levels.²⁴ It is only on the condition that the reader accepts this guilt, together with despair, that nothing can be done. This is the moment when evil, as spread by Clamence, triumphs, in isolation and despair. But even on a human level, without going into a detailed discussion on the metaphysical aspects of guilt and responsibility, we are aware that people forgive; wrongdoers are capable of accepting responsibility for their actions without the desire to burden others for their crimes.

Camus insisted, that it is necessary to accept "reasonable guilt", which he understood as an evasion of "impossible innocence" (OCIII, 70). Clamence claims he accepts guilt: he openly enumerates his moral failures. But the truly evil thing about this strategy is that it is not aimed at – as in Christian confession – receiving abso-

²⁴ A response to Clamence's claim, that a proof of Christ's guilt was hidden, could be that it is clearly visible in the New Testament: *And when he was gone forth into the way, there came one running, and kneeled to him, and asked him, Good Master, what shall I do that I may inherit eternal life? And Jesus said unto him, Why callest thou me good? there is none good but one, that is, God (Mark, 10:18). Christ does not present himself here as absolutely innocent and free from sin.*

lution and redemption, but only attention.²⁵ He does not believe anybody has the power to absolve him of his wrongdoings. He does believe, however, that by openly manifesting his corruption, he obtains the power to judge others (OCIII, 762), and to gain dominance over anyone who follows him in the confessional act. This literary character openly assumes the immoral stance as presented by Camus in *The Rebel*. Clamence restores universal sin, but without the compensation of grace so as to accept the force that negates him (OCIII, 376). Here, I believe, we arrive at the core of the problem of the secularisation of evil. It is not, by any means, a fully secularized notion. Camus was convinced that the secularisation has led to a dead-end. There is the notion of universal sin (e.g. against History), of collective responsibility, but there is hardly any concept of grace, forgiveness, redemption or charity. Worse still, the character, like Clamence, is aware of their former importance but experiences and laments (like Nietzsche) their fading. And although Camus did envisage the possibility of a renaissance, in dialogue, forgiveness, and measure (OCIII, 324), there is only monologue, resentment, and excess in Clamence.

In the end, Camus identifies evil as something, that having undergone the long and painful process of secularization is, above all, persistently inscribed into the human condition. His exceptional character from *The Plague*, Tarrou, makes us fully aware of this fact: evil is like an infection, it may spread to others through our actions. But, like an infection, it can also be stopped, or at least controlled, by human activity. And perhaps having recognized such nature of evil we are fully responsible for, we should rather ask others how can we avoid the epidemic, while accepting the reasonable guilt that allows for necessary action. If literary evil, as introduced by Clamence, can teach us anything, it is perhaps that we still need dialogues – like those between Tarrou and Rieux, instead of monologues, in order to confront and control evil. *Dialoguer, réparé?*

²⁵ Camus was a patient reader of Alfred Adler, and Clamence's character seems very closely related to the psychological trait described by the psychiatrist: "The vain person always knows, how to transfer responsibility for any mistakes on other's shoulders. He is always right, others are always wrong [...] the vain individual is occupied with complaints, excuses and finding alibis. We deal here with many tricks of the human soul's attempts at maintaining, at all costs, the sense of superiority and protection of vanity from any insult", A. Adler, *Connaissance de l'homme*, Payot, Paris 1949, p. 121, translation by the author.

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Maciej Kałuża

Dziewczyna musiała upaść? Jean-Baptiste Clamence i literacka infekcja złem


Streszczenie

Artykuł przedstawia koncepcję zła, rozwiniętą zarówno w dziełach literackich, jak i filozoficznych Alberta Camusa. Po wstępnym omówieniu o związku między literaturą a złem, w artykule przedstawiam dwie sfery, w których problem zła został uchwycony przez autora *Człowieka zbuntowanego*. W głównej części artykułu ukazana zostaje złożoność problemu zła, którą reprezentuje postać Jean-Baptiste Clamence'a z *Upadku*. Zło jest postrzegane w kontekście refleksji zawartych w *Dżumie*, szczególnie w związku z jego możliwością rozprzestrzeniania się, infekowania innych. Ale jest również analizowane jako coś wynikającego z ciężkiej, wojennej traumy głównego bohatera. W podsumowaniu argumentuję, że problem zła, którego doświadcza Clamence, może być rozpatrywany jako wciąż aktualna metafora współczesnej kultury, zmagającej się z biernością wobec zła społecznego.

Słowa kluczowe: zło, literatura a filozofia, Camus, *Upadek*

Maciej Kałuża – dr, jest adiunktem w Zakładzie Filozofii Społecznej Uniwersytetu Pedagogicznego. W pracy naukowej interesuje go przede wszystkim problematyka śmierci, przemocy i myśl społeczna i etyczna w obrębie egzystencjalizmu francuskiego. Aktywnie uczestniczył w działaniach antyrasistowskiego i antyfaszystowskiego Stowarzyszenia „Nigdy Więcej”. Członek Société des Études camusiennes, założyciel Polskiego Stowarzyszenia Alberta Camusa. Aktualnie kształci się na CMUJ w zakresie wsparcia pacjenta chorego onkologicznie. Wydał dwie autorskie monografie na temat myśli Alberta Camusa, jest także redaktorem dwóch monografii z zakresu badań nad egzystencjalizmem.

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With rhymes about the human fate Philosophy in the poetry of Giacomo Leopardi

Summary

Giacomo Leopardi is one of those authors whose texts oscillate on the border between literature and philosophy. It is true that Leopardi does not use traditional forms of philosophical expression, but the fact is that most of the considerations of the Italian thinker are expressed by the simultaneous conduct of two discourses: literary and philosophical. Leopardi experimented almost every form of literary expression, but he went down in history mainly as a poet, who contained a significant part of his highest beliefs in poetry. The practice of philosophizing through poetry is nothing new in literature, and the various connections between literature and philosophy are almost ancient, but the ongoing discussions in the world of Italian critics about the relationship between Leopardi and philosophy suggest that the reflective lyrics of the famous poet from Recanati are an noteworthy case. This article is a reflection on the use of figures of speech in the process of explaining the worldview by Leopardi, with particular emphasis on metaphor, and on the overall impact of the poetic medium on the presentation and shaping of adopted ideology.

Keywords: Leopardi, philosophy, poetry, philosophical discourse, literary discourse, figures of speech, imagination, cognition, truth

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Despite decent renown among Polish intellectuals, especially modernists from the period of Young Poland,¹ Giacomo Leopardi did not mark his presence in Polish popular culture visibly enough to be able to surpass the fame of other Italian writers, such as Dante, Petrarch, Eco or Savino (who are known even to the readers unrelated to the literary environments). Polish critics have mentioned Leopardi fairly briefly since the mid-nineteenth century, interest in his work increased temporarily at the end of the century. At that time, the first, not very successful, translations of his work appeared.² The monograph of Joanna Ugniewska, *Giacomo Leopardi*,³ was to be an attempt to fill this incomprehensible gap in Polish criticism, caused by the lack of interest in the Italian poet. Nevertheless, Leopardi is mentioned on the pages of the history of world literature as a figure of extraordinary importance. He is not only the most important Italian poet of the nineteenth century, but also the epitome of a contemporary intellectual: disappointment with the surrounding reality, criticism of blind following the current trends, inability to find an adequate interlocutor, and thus, a deep sense of loneliness and alienation, made him the emblematic figure of the modern thinker, who throughout his life stubbornly asked himself painful, but also great questions about the sense of human existence, doing so with the courage, but also with the desperation of a great poet.

Leopardi is an extremely complex character which often escapes the attempts of academic organization. Critical studies avoid labelling Leopardi as a romantic, while underlining the inadequacy of other potential terms. I will not describe here the debate of researchers about the relationship of Leopardi with the Enlightenment and the Romantic tradition,⁴ but it is worth noting that this fact shows that Leopardi's thought goes through phases which are so different that it is impossible to formulate a single, coherent interpretation of his entire work. The nineteenth-century Italian pessimist was attempted to be called a nihilist, progressivist, empiricist or materialist, which provoked lively and sometimes even violent discussions over the intellectual profile of the Italian thinker. Attempts to catalogue the work of Leopardi, resulting in an increase in interest in the philosophical aspect of his work, lead to the situation in which many sources describe Leopardi not only as a writer, but also as a philosopher. It is true that Leopardi

1 Cfr. A. Ceccherelli, *Leopardi w Młodej Polsce (Rzeczywistość i wyobrażenia w kręgu intertekstualności)*, "Rocznik Towarzystwa Literackiego imienia Adama Mickiewicza" 1997, XXXII, pp. 133–152.

2 Cfr. K. Żaboklicki, *Historia literatury włoskiej*, Wydawnictwo Naukowe PWN, Warsaw 2008.

3 J. Ugniewska, *Giacomo Leopardi*, PWN, Warsaw 1991.

4 Most of researchers investigating Leopardi's work maintain that it should be analysed through the prism of the Enlightenment tradition rather than the romantic one, even though he lived in the period of Romanticism; others emphasize the presence of romantic elements in the poetry (lonely pondering under the cover of the night, almost religious contemplating of the mystery of existence, rebellion against destiny, mourning unfulfilled hopes for love, etc.).

does not use genres that are traditional forms of philosophical expression (such as an essay, treatise, manifesto etc.) or a specialized language and therefore not all critics agree on the classification of the Italian writer as a philosopher, but the fact is that Leopardi's work is one of those moments in the history of European culture, when human thought is expressed through the simultaneous conduct of two discourses: literary and philosophical. Although the metaphor and literary imagination may deprive the philosophical argument of the features of a scientific discourse, they may also open the thought to wider interpretations, and thus broaden it.

Leopardi tried his hand at almost every form of literary expression: from various lyrical genres, youthful dramas, *History of astronomy*, an extensive diary of thoughts, known as *Zibaldone*, a collection of short dialogical forms (published under the title *Small Moral Works*), to critical and theoretical literary texts. His letters have also been published. However, he went down in history mainly as a poet, who included a significant part of his highest beliefs in verses. The practice of philosophizing through the poems is nothing new in poetry, and the various connections between literature and philosophy are an almost ancient issue, but the ongoing discussions in the world of Italian criticism about Leopardi's relationship with philosophy suggest that the reflective lyrics of the famous poet from Recanati are a particularly interesting case.⁵ Leopardi's philosophy is usually analysed in the context of his prose works, which capture Leopardian models and paradigms in a more factual and transparent way. The interest in Leopardi's prose, with particular emphasis on the *Zibaldone* and the *Small Moral Works*, increased also because the poetry of the famous Italian author grew into a network of repetitive and generally known school and academic analyses and interpretations. It should be remembered, however, that what Leopardi contains in his prose reflection, he also expresses through the medium of poetry, which becomes a significant carrier of philosophical thought, in the full sense of the word. This fact leads us to the following questions: how the use of rhetorical figures affects process of lecturing the worldview? Does the metaphor make the presented image of the world hazy or, on the contrary, broaden its semantics? Is it possible to expose the thesis with verses in a sufficiently explicit way? How does subjectivity and emotional involvement of the lyrical subject influence the nature of the judgments about man and the world? I will try to consider the above doubts on the basis of selected poems by Leopardi, in which the lyrical situation clearly results from careful observation of the world and desperate, almost, attempts to explore the secrets of the human condition.

⁵ The still vivid interest in Leopardi's philosophy may be evidenced by the fact that in 2018 the works of Giuseppe Rensi (G. Rensi, *Su Leopardi*, edited by R. Bruni, Aragno, Turin 2018) and Adrian Tilgher (A. Tilgher, *La filosofia di Leopardi e altri scritti leopardiani*, edited by R. Bruni, Aragno, Turin 2018) were published. They investigate Leopardi's philosophical thought confirming his status as a philosopher.

There is no doubt that Leopardi is one of the most eminent Italian poets of the nineteenth century, while his authority as a philosopher has been repeatedly challenged and put to the test of time. It seems that even the native criticism has not managed to solve the dilemma of the “philosophicalness” of his poetry. Skeptics preferred to call Leopardi “a thinker”. According to Umberto Panozzi, the author of the manual on the history of Italian literature, *Periodi e scrittori della Letteratura Italiana*, Leopardi was “a thinker and not a philosopher in the true sense of the word.”⁶ It is true that the Italian writer never expressed his thoughts in the form of an orderly doctrinal system, and never tried to control his innate tendency to experience the reality in an extremely personal, subjective way. For this reason, Italian neo-idealism of the early 20th century looked suspiciously at the inspired poet from Recanati, who wrapped his thoughts in various metaphors and symbols, sophisticated vocabulary and complex syntax. Italian neo-idealists, with Benedetto Croce at the forefront, accused Leopardi’s style of excessive rhapsodicity, fragmentation, lack of order and sometimes even inconsistency. Croce himself “categorically denies all values of Leopardi’s thought, calling it pseudo-philosophy, philosophy for private use, or sees in it only a projection of the private woes of the poet.”⁷

However, while the above allegations may appear to be justified, reducing the philosophical aspect of Leopardi’s work to a collection of disordered or, worse, inconsistent reflections is a mistake resulting from single interpretations that do not take into account the general context of the monumental output of the Italian writer, which constitutes an extremely thoughtful and logical whole. Interestingly, the assessment of the lack of scientific rigor in Leopardi’s system of thought seems to be a matter of interpretation, as some researchers see in this freedom of form rather signs of a truly modern philosophy – unrecognized, admittedly, in doctrine, but taking on its eloquence. This is best demonstrated by Giuseppe Rensi,⁸ who, by opposing the idealistic concept of understanding philosophy, tries to show that not only the one who in the process of creating paradigms uses scientific formalism and objectivity is entitled to call himself a philosopher. For Rensi, the philosophical system is merely a tissue that binds individual thought particles, while many of the most authentic philosophers have been fragmentary: ranging from Leopardi, Amiel and Pascal to Nietzsche himself. Attempts to achieve categorical demarcation in this context seem all the more unreasonable as literary attempts to develop universal truths and concepts seem more useful in the process of seeking the truth than striving to give definitive answers. I will not explore the complex relationships in which literature and philosophy have always been entangled, since many

⁶ U. Panozzi, *Periodi e scrittori della Letteratura Italiana*, Paravia, Turin 1982, translated by the author.

⁷ J. Ugniewska, *Giacomo Leopardi*, PWN, Warsaw 1991, p. 192, translated by the author.

⁸ G. Rensi, *Lineamenti di filosofia scettica*, Zanichelli, Bologna 1921.

comprehensive scientific papers have been written on this subject, I would just like to emphasize that the boundary between literature and philosophy is much more complex than the idealists thought.

A significant increase in interest in Leopardi outside Italy occurred in the post-war period, mainly thanks to the contribution of historical-Marxist criticism, which emphasized the essence of the last phase of Leopardi's work (after 1830). The poet's commitment and progress was admired, contrasted with the lonely and thoughtful lyrical ego from the idylls. This multiplicity of voices in the post-war criticism is important not only because Leopardi has been raised to the rank of a philosopher, but also because it emphasizes the ideological or even "heroic/titanic" line of creativity of the Italian writer (it is about heroism understood as a voluntary and conscious confrontation with destiny). In the light of these interpretations, Leopardi appears not only as a lyrical ego contemplating distant landscapes, but a self-conscious individual, attempting to understand the universe, accepting the inevitable with a great dignity. This attitude is the result of Leopardi's long and persistent meditations on man's relationship with nature, on the theory of pleasure and on the tragedy of human fate, which resulted in truly philosophical conclusions – even though these beliefs are lined with deeply subjective experience and literary imagination.

It is worth emphasizing, however, that Leopardi was fully aware of the specifics of the medium he chose for his reflections. He repeatedly explored the connections between literature and philosophy, showing their common points,⁹ but also juxtaposing them in the form of drastic opposition. However, despite the fact that philosophy, seeking the truth, and literature, striving for beauty, are usually placed on two opposite poles of humanistic studies, "a true poet must be ready to become a great philosopher, and a true philosopher to be a great poet."¹⁰ It is one of the many fragments of the *Zibaldone* in which Leopardi explores this issue extremely carefully. This anti-metabolic statement has become a popularly quoted aphorism, but one should not forget that there is a series of interesting statements and solid logical argumentation behind it. Several days earlier, Leopardi describes in his diary the ideal thinker who is able to climb to reach inconceivable intellectual heights because he is "a poet with lyrical inspirations and a philosopher with lofty thoughts,"¹¹ and also a man with great enthusiasm, passionate, and most impor-

⁹ According to Leopardi, philosophy and literature share not only a similar goal, which is cognitive value (fact that conditions, at least in a way, thematic community), but also a similar story: he draws attention to the process of depreciation of the philosopher/poet's status over the centuries. Philosophy and literature, respected in ancient times, are today stripped of their former dignity and prestige (*Zibaldone*, 26 VIII 1823).

¹⁰ G. Leopardi, *Zibaldone*, 8 IX 1823, translated by the author.

¹¹ *Ibidem*, 26 VIII 1823, translated by the author.

tantly – imaginative. Leopardi writes about the role of imagination in the process of conceptualisation of thoughts two years earlier (7 XI 1821). It is by using the imagination that the “enthusiastic human spirit” can see “relationships between the furthest things” that a prudent objectivist cannot see. Thanks to the unfettered pragmatism of imagination, it is possible to find the right comparisons, to see the “the darkest and most brilliant” similarities, to acquire “the wonderful ability to bring the most distant things closer” – like matter and ideas – which makes it possible to materialize the greatest abstraction and to reduce the physical world to imagination. “This is what a philosopher is: an entity capable of discovering and exploring the relationships between things, of connecting details, of generalizing.”¹² According to Leopardi, this complex system of dependencies and associations, discovered through creative elation, can be described not only by a series of comparisons, but also by new epithets and bolder metaphors. We know, of course, that the “literary” nature of Leopardi’s philosophical discourse still raises many reservations from the point of view of scientific reasoning, but it is also somewhat understandable why Leopardi associates the process of cognition with “imagination” or “enthusiasm” rather than with a neutral description. So, if Leopardi is far from the image of the philosopher-scientist, we can be sure that he is fully aware of the nature of the discourse he chooses and of the consequences that literary matter brings to the reception of philosophical content.

Leopardi’s theoretical considerations lead us to claim that his definition of “poetry” is very broad in the meaning and includes also philosophy, or at least some of its important aspects. It is true that Leopardi’s lyrics are less directly oriented towards philosophical problematization, but the philosophical thought of the Italian writer

should be considered primarily in the context of the most poetic texts: from the *Canti* to the *Small Moral Works*, not limited to the discursive lecture offered by the *Zibaldone*. Only in poetic texts do they appear to us as truly “double”, according to the optics described in the famous fragment of the *Zibaldone*.¹³

It is a fragment in which Leopardi explains why for a man of extraordinary imagination (and thus, as we said above, a poet-philosopher), all things exist “twice”: “such a man will see the tower, the village, he will hear the sound of a ringing bell; at the same time he will see in his own imagination a different tower and a different village, he will hear a different bell.”¹⁴ Real objects, therefore, seem to

¹² Ibidem, 7 IX 1821, translated by the author.

¹³ C. Galimberti, *Cose che non son cose. Saggi su Leopardi*, Marsilio, Venice 2001, p. 15, translated by the author.

¹⁴ G. Leopardi, *Zibaldone*, 30 XI 1828, translated by the author.

be only a shadow cast by shining ideas, created and stored in the human mind, which creates its own immortal world without borders. It is a fictional world, the only source of happiness – happiness that only children and ancient civilizations who are unaware of its illusion can truly enjoy. Illusions (*illusioni*), truth (*vero*) and imagination (*immaginazione*) are key concepts in the philosophy of the thinker from Recanati.

As Galimberti writes, these are also concepts whose essence the poetics of Leopardi's lyrical compositions reflects in a particularly fluent way – not only because the very essence of any poem is based on the use of these categories, but also because in many poems of the Italian author there is a special relationship between the stylistics of the poetic expression and the way of presenting the worldview. This happens, for example, in the case of the famous *Infinity*, in which appropriately selected vocabulary, rhetorical figures and grammar of the poetic expression become the interpretation of the philosophical thought. The poem constitutes a poignant, extremely lyrical meditation on infinity understood as the limitlessness of human imaginations. The whole monologue is structured around a series of eloquent opposites: the “lonely hill” on which the lyrical subject is located contrasts with the planes below; a hedgerow, obscuring the view, is the opposite of infinitely stretching spaces; the rustling of the wind among the bushes is a counterweight to this immeasurable silence of eternity. Moreover, the whole lyrical situation oscillates between past and present. The concept of appearances of Leopardi is reflected in the language of the poem very clearly, not only through this series of contrasts, but also at the strictly grammatical level: the pronoun “this” always points to elements belonging to the physical world, while the pronoun “that” refers to that world of ideas and illusions, which exceeds the boundaries of empirical experience. Also, the vocabulary used in the poem is selected with great care (the inestimable importance of the poetics of words in the process of creating images is described by Leopardi in the *Zibaldone*). The poem is full of words and phrases indicating a certain limitlessness/indeterminacy (“superhuman silence”, “depthless calm”, “endless”, “eternal” “immensity” etc.). In addition, the use of enjambement reflects the lack of clear boundaries.

Leopardi continues meditating on infinity in many of his later poems. *The setting of the moon*, one of the last works of the Italian master, explicitly refers to the poetics of the *Infinity*: “a thousand lovely insubstantial images and phantoms”, projected by the “far-flung shadows” construct the same inconceivable dimension of “delightful deceptions” that the human mind desiring immortality undergoes. However, while in the case of the *Infinity* we are dealing with charming, lyrical meditation on the infinite beauty of imaginations, the lyrical ego from the *The setting of the moon* emphasizes the rather painful awareness of the illusion of this dimension. The ultimate ridding of delusions is for Leopardi the end of youth, metaphorically reflected by the eponymous moonset. When the moon sets, nature

is overwhelmed by darkness, what happens also in human life, which, stripped of youthful delusions, is deprived of its former light. However, while nature will soon be flooded with sunlight, which is even more intense than moonlight, human life will never be coloured by another glow. The problem of “the duality of things”, illusion and truth, explored by Leopardi in the *Zibaldone*, is shown in the poem through an extensive metaphor. In Leopardi’s philosophizing poems, metaphor is a carrier of relevant content. The setting of the moon becomes the end of youth, the volcano heralds death, the hedgerow symbolizes the border of cognition, the flower of broom is the embodiment of dignity and courage in the face of the inevitable.

Much attention has already been devoted in the academic reflection to cognitive values of poetic discourse, and in particular to the metaphor. However, this is not entirely consistent reflection, as the admissibility of metaphor in philosophical discourse remains until today a subject of vivid discussions. As an example of diametrically different opinions in that matter, Jan Garewicz cites Fitzosborne, who “refuses the metaphor the right of citizenship in philosophy and treats it as a relic of pre-scientific thinking” and Popper, “according to which the philosophical language consists only of metaphors.”¹⁵ Regardless of what position we take on this matter, the fact is that the presence of metaphor in philosophical discourse remains a phenomenon of extraordinary importance. This is demonstrated, among others, by the practice of using the metaphor in the titles of philosophical works (*Leviathan* by Thomas Hobbes, *The Myth of Sisyphus* by Albert Camus, *The Holy Family* by Marx and Engels), resulting from the fact that the metaphor is a catchphrase synthesizing the views contained in the books, binding them in its imagery and eloquence. In addition to the semantic capacity that characterizes metaphor in philosophy, it is often also an extremely exponential tool (Plato’s cave, Marx’s opium of the people, Nietzsche’s Apollo and Dionysus). Expressing complex ideas in the forms available to human’s imagination guarantees greater accessibility of the lecture, hence Garewicz points out didactic aspect of metaphorical discourse as one of the potential reasons for which philosophers use metaphor in their argumentations. However, he rightly suspects that such a simple answer does not solve the matter. “Rather, the point is that thought repeatedly eludes expression in strictly philosophical terms.”¹⁶ The metaphysicality and magniloquence of philosophical thinking often breaks down into a strict, specialized language that, in all its simplicity and plasticity, is not able to match the intellectual provocation contained in the metaphor. It is not my purpose to prove the importance of metaphor in philo-

¹⁵ J. Garewicz, *O metaforze w filozofii: Sowa Minerwy*, [in:] *Wypowiedź literacka a wypowiedź filozoficzna*, edited by M. Głowiński, J. Sławiński, Ossolineum, Wrocław 1982, p. 79, translated by the author.

¹⁶ *Ibidem*, p. 81, translated by the author.

sophical discourse, since this question has been explored many times, I would only like to emphasize the importance of the explanatory function of the metaphor in Leopardi's philosophical poetry, which has repeatedly emphasized in his writings the importance of imagination in the process of seeking the truth.

It is worth emphasizing that Leopardi's lyrical work has developed remarkable coherence in terms of imagery and symbolism. Leopardi's carriers of metaphorical content are usually elements of nature, which is one of the problems that the Italian writer explores with extreme desperation. The famous wild broom and the deadly volcano, whose metaphorical significance we have mentioned above, are contrasted against the background of wilderness – another recurring motif in Leopardi's poems. It is a wasteland whose inhabitant – a man – is condemned to eternal loneliness. From this great desert of the world it is sometimes possible to see the beauty of the stars, while at other times it is a place tormented by destructive forces, which in the poetry of Leopardi are embodied by fire. In the poems of the Italian poet, fire and light are two secret forces that dominate the world, but also over communities. In a letter to Pietro Giordani, Leopardi compares reason with a spark that is supposed to illuminate but not ignite – just like the moon, which in one of Leopardi's last poems, unlike the sun, does not burn, but shines with reflected light. Also *Sapho's last song* resounded in the light of the setting moon. Leopardi's most momentous considerations take the form of this lonely reverie, being depicted against the background of this great metaphysical moon night. The moonlight symbolizes in the work of the Italian poet nothingness that is present in Leopardian thought from the first philosophical meditations to the last poetic experiences.¹⁷ We could, therefore, say that the concepts described within the *Zibaldone* with a professional language (world, nothingness, loneliness, destiny) are explained in the poetry with the help of metaphors depicting them, which in a synthetic summary seem to summarize the most important fragments of Leopardi's philosophical discourse (desolation, moonlight, sparrow, motion of the celestial bodies).

The fact that poetry was for Leopardi not only the pursuit of beauty, but also of cognition, can be testified by more than one statement formulated by the Italian author. According to Tristan from the *Small Moral Works*, the oldest poets and philosophers are “full of ideas, stories, and reflections on extreme human misery.”¹⁸ These are images and stories, not final statements. Attempts to read some aspects of Leopardian thoughts in the context of his lyrical work seem therefore justified. In addition, it is worth emphasizing that sometimes a reliable interpre-

¹⁷ Galiberti mentions an interesting wordplay used by Leopardi (C. Galiberti, *Cose che non son cose. Saggi su Leopardi*, Marsilio, Venice 2001, p. 20): Luce di luna e luce del nulla (the light of the moon and light of nothingness) – evident phonic similarity indicates the identity of meanings.

¹⁸ G. Leopardi, *Operette morali*, BUR, Milan 2008, p. 590, translated by the author.

tation of Leopardi's poems can even lead to a reinterpretation of his theoretical considerations. In this way, Leopardi's poems become not only a colourful, lyrical reflection of the philosophical concepts contained in the *Zibaldone*, but also their complementation and sometimes even enlargement. One of such poems is *Sappho's last Song*, in which Leopardi extends the concept of nature with one more important aspect: something that the lyrical ego of the poem calls "heaven", "Jove", "blind decider of fates". It is about destiny, which is another secret force ruling human fate, hiding behind the face of nature. As Galimberti writes, considering the vision of nature constructed in *Sappho's last song* may shed more light on the Leopardian philosophy of nature than the resumed discussions around the *Zibaldone*.¹⁹ It is a vision constructed on the basis of lyrical ego's deep conviction of the irresistible beauty of illusions created by nature, under the guise of which one discovers what really awaits him: illness, suffering and death. To face the latter is being forced the Leopardian Sappho, who has lost forever broadly understood beauty. The concept of the final exclusion of man from the dimension of beauty and youthful illusions is emphasized in the poem by a carefully selected lexicon, expressing a sense of loss ("gone", "none", "died", "no") and contrasting elements ("tranquil night", "bashful light", "quiet woods" and "rumbles", "darkened air", "roaring anger of the rising river water") emphasizing the fact that, in nature, two opposing forces meet: beauty and destiny (illusions and truth) – concepts constantly recurring in Leopardi's poems under the form of the same imagery. What characterizes Leopardi's lyricism is that it always becomes a carrier of cognitive value. The Italian author's poetic imagination radiates with myths and symbols that constitute a coherent system of senses.

The example of the poems cited above clearly shows that Leopardi's poetic reflections on the world are often based on the construction of lexical contrasts and antithetical combinations. Reality seen through the eyes of the Italian poet appears as a system of multiple contrasts. He opposes the power of love and the power of death (*Love and death*), illusion and truth (*To Silvia*), loneliness and happiness of lovers (*The solitary Thrush*), the eponymous *Calm after the storm* with "lightning, clouds and wind" (this is, incidentally, a poem praising the perception of the world through the tension between opposites). This juxtaposition of semantic oppositional segments of expression not only emphasizes the particular position of the lyrical ego and colours his monologue, but above all it reflects the vision of the world that Leopardi has professed all his life: a place which is contradictory in its essence, absurd and full of inexplicable paradoxes. *The evening of the holiday* is a composition that is one of many examples of poems illustrating this belief through a series of opposing meanings: a troubled lyrical ego looks at a woman sleeping in peace; the picturesque illustration of a quiet night contrasts with the

¹⁹ Cfr. C. Galimberti, *Cose che non son cose. Saggi su Leopardi*, Marsilio, Venice 2001.

subject's internal dilemmas. In the poem, the motif of "ancient nature" returns. It is a nature which not only devotes man to suffering, but also denies him all hope. In Leopardi, nature is subjected to personification extremely often – one of the most significant concepts of the Italian poet is the personified nature-stepmother. Speaking of personification in Leopardi, first of all, of course, we should mention the *Small Moral Works*, in which the dialogues are lead, among others, by Death, Fashion, Nature, Earth, Moon. However, obviously, personification, as a procedure "characterized by a high degree of poetic conventionality,"²⁰ is also used in many of Leopardi's poems. As an example we could mention the moon – the addressee of the *Night song of a wandering shepherd in Asia*, the *Love and death* that the fate made siblings, or about the exhausted, wounded woman from the poem *To Italy*, embodying Italy and its recent history. These are poems in which Leopardi revives, sets in motion and give a voice to some of the most significant elements of his philosophical system. This makes Leopardi speak from "the interior of the metaphor", using the expression of Józef Tischner.²¹

The same critic hypothesized that philosophical thinking in man's life derives from the tragedy that marks his existence, and the first task of philosophical metaphysics is to bring out this basic pain.²² Such a statement would somehow explain Leopardi's tendency to explain his worldview through a tender poetics of lyrical compositions. The Italian writer's philosophy mainly concerns the drama of human existence, awareness of the illusory character of happiness, and sometimes even the temptation of self-destruction. No wonder that in his painful reflections, Leopardi reaches for the language of emotions, images and metaphors. This is because, as we have said, the metaphor has pictorial properties, and at the same time, through the lyricism of the poetry Leopardi is not only able to explain the complex reasons of all things, but he also expresses the emotional attitude of the lyrical ego towards reality – this is an element that scientific discourse does not allow and, as we presume basing on Leopardi's considerations, it is an element that as an artist he wanted to keep. It is this lack of scientific objectivity that some critics will accuse Leopard-philosopher of (even in the context of the *Zibaldone* deliberations), but this self-awareness and detailed auto-analysis are what make Leopardi's philosophical reflection so stimulating. It expresses basic pain of a human being – the pain of radical uncertainty.

The purpose of this reflection was not to show that Leopardi deserves to be called a philosopher, as it is not as important as it may seem. More noteworthy is

²⁰ *Słownik terminów literackich*, edited by J. Sławiński, Ossolineum, Wrocław 1988, p. 351, translated by the author.

²¹ J. Tischner, *Myślenie z wnętrza metafory*, [in:] *Wypowiedź literacka a wypowiedź filozoficzna*, edited by M. Głowiński, J. Sławiński, Ossolineum, Wrocław 1982, pp. 53–64.

²² Cfr. *Ibidem*.

the fact that Leopardi's philosophical thought is expressed not only in prose and deserves a full-scale analysis, which takes into account the lyrical aspect of the thoughts of the Italian master. Through this article, we have tried to show that there is a clear relationship between the stylistics of the Italian author's poetic expression and the way he presents his beliefs. Leopardi in his "poetising thought" – using the expression of Antonio Prete²³ – utilises not only lexis, semantics and grammar of poetic expression, but also the great explicative potential of rhetorical figures, especially metaphor. This is due to Leopardi's belief in the invaluable role of imagination in the process of cognition, which he writes about many times in his theoretical considerations. "The process of cognition [...] takes into account the imagination."²⁴

In conclusion, the choice of poetry as a carrier of philosophical content significantly affects both the reception of Leopardi's philosophy and the very formation of the worldview, which is influenced by personal experience of the world and subjectivity of relating facts characteristic for the lyrical ego. It should be remembered that the overall interpretation of Leopardi's poems should include two mirror questions: "how does the worldview is expressed in Leopardi's poetic texts?" and "how does poetic activity affect the worldview?" Taking the tension between these questions into account reflects the complexity of the whole situation. The peculiarity of Leopardi's "philosophical" poetry lies in the fact that the tragic considerations of the Italian poet (such as consciousness of one's destiny, boredom, disappointment, anxiety etc.) are described through the subtle forms in which the desperation collide with the lightness of form and the beauty of the poetic imaginativeness. This fact changes the reception of Leopardi's thoughts radically: overwhelming in content, yet tantalising with poetic craftsmanship, poems by Leopardi become something like Petrarch's "dolce tormento". "At the most intense moments, Leopardi raises his lament and protest against the dark power that governs us, while remaining impressed by the inexpressible beauty accompanying this revelation."²⁵ Uncovering the truth, or as Leopardi wrote, getting rid of youthful delusions, is inevitably associated with the burden of the painful consciousness of all things, but it is from this tragedy that Leopardi's "poetizing ego" is born, and by discovering beauty in what is tragic he somehow justifies this tragedy. It was Leopardi's "poetising thought", that, with the philosopher's intellect and sensitivity of the poet, hit in the most desperate tones of human tragedy.

²³ A. Prete, *Il pensiero poetante: saggio su Leopardi*, Feltrinelli, Milan 1988.

²⁴ G. Leopardi, *Zibaldone*, 12–23 VII 1820, translated by the author.

²⁵ C. Galimberti, *Cose che non son cose. Saggi su Leopardi*, Marsilio, Venice 2001, p. 21, translated by the author.

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Aleksandra Koman

Mową wiążaną o losie człowieka. Filozofia w poezji Giacoma Leopardiego

Streszczenie

Giacomo Leopardi jest jednym z tych autorów, którzy w historii kultury zachodniej zapisali się jako twórcy z pogranicza literatury i filozofii. Co prawda Leopardi nie posługuje się tradycyjnymi formami wypowiedzi filozoficznej, jednak faktem jest, że większość rozważań włoskiego myśliciela wyraża się poprzez jednoczesne prowadzenie dwóch dyskursów: literackiego i filozoficznego. Leopardi próbował

swych sił niemalże w każdej formie wypowiedzi literackiej, do historii przeszedł jednak głównie jako poeta, który znaczną część swych najwniośniejszych przekonań zawarł w mowie wiązanej. Praktyka filozofowania za pośrednictwem wiersza nie jest w poezji niczym nowym, a rozmaite związki literatury z filozofią stanowią zagadnienie niemalże starożytne, jednak toczące się do dziś w świecie włoskiej krytyki dyskusje na temat relacji Leopardiego z filozofią pozwalają sądzić, że liryka refleksyjna słynnego poety z Recanati stanowi przypadek nad wyraz zajmujący. Niniejszy artykuł stanowi refleksję nad użyciem środków poetyckich w procesie wykładania światopoglądu przez Leopardiego, ze szczególnym uwzględnieniem metafory, oraz nad ogólnym wpływem medium poetyckiego na prezentowanie i kształtowanie przyjętej ideologii.

Słowa kluczowe: Leopardi, filozofia, poezja, dyskurs filozoficzny, dyskurs literacki, środki poetyckie, wyobrażenia, poznanie, prawda

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“Why do I write?” On Sławomir Mrożek’s writing philosophy

Summary

This article focusses on the meta-literary thread in the correspondence exchanged between Sławomir Mrożek and Wojciech Skalmowski. The latter, wondering about the actual reason why writers create literature, provocatively reduced the metaphysical dimension of a work of art to learn about its contemporary actual value; whether it is was only trade-based. Baudelaire’s work as interpreted by Walter Benjamin became a major context indicating the diversity in the perception of the analysed problem depending on historical time. The article discusses how during his exchange with Skalmowski Mrożek tried to answer the title question about the reason why he created literature, and, which is the most important, how he started focussing on elements which he previously missed or marginalised.

Keywords: Sławomir Mrożek, Wojciech Skalmowski, trade, product, originality

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I can't write anything smart about your book because what could be written by someone who even if they flexed their every mental muscle, they would not be able to write a book even slightly matching yours. That's like with listening Rubinstein play the piano – I can listen to him, but criticise or analyse his music? My head is terrifyingly devoid of those skills at which you excel. It's unnerving because there are many artist/writers who are, at the same time, not so helpless in that respect. Miłosz is not helpless, nor was Gombrowicz or Witkiewicz. But I have a sense of abyssal ignorance and mental void. And that's what I'll be left with.¹

Thus, Mrozek wrote about his inability to theorise in a letter to Wojciech Skalmowski, his friend, after the release of a book selection of his literary critical texts originally published in the “Kultura” journal. Skalmowski, a specialist in Oriental studies,² did actually display a passion for theorising and he was not put off even the slightest by his friend's confessions that he lacked any skill “in that respect.” “I am always interested in the structure”³ (meaning: in how things work – author's clarification) – he kept saying to Mrozek. He treated letters to him, among other, “as a pretext to »poke« him and compel him to reflect on literature or culture”⁴ One such »poker« was the question: “what is the motivation behind writing in the artistic sense, such as, e.g. Yours?”⁵ Skalmowski thus explained it:

I question artist's magnanimity: “I give you beauty, take it”, that conceals the unspoken “instead, you give me...” – and now: what? Probably: good disposition; certainty that I'm wise, meaning armed, meaning safe. I think that thus presented a case is a fair trade, and actually because it is trade, not an attempt to hustle something for nothing. [...] I'm referring to, e.g. Gałczyński who wrote entertaining poems because he needed cash for booze; and that is much more pleasant than Norwid's pathos and writing for progeny. When I hear someone talking about the “self-sufficiency of the arts” I suspect a deceitful attempt to wangle something, and when someone concedes “culture's demise” and the stupidity of the audience I suspect the bitterness of a clumsy – or even ignorant – con artist. Your Vatzlav bragging that they beat him

1 S. Mrozek, W. Skalmowski, *Listy 1970–2003*, Wydawnictwo Literackie, Krakow 2007, p. 499. [Unless indicated otherwise, quotations in English were translated from Polish.]

2 In the 1950s, Wojciech Skalmowski was enrolled in Oriental studies at the Jagiellonian University where in 1952 he first met Mrozek. In 1968 he emigrated to Belgium. In 1975–1998, he was a professor of Oriental studies at a Belgian university in Leuven. Apart from his academic work, Skalmowski published on an on-going basis in the “Kultura”, under the nom de plume Maciej Broński, book reviews and discussions of the outputs of major authors.

3 S. Mrozek, W. Skalmowski, *Listy...*, p. 83.

4 W. Skalmowski, J. Strzała, *Partner Sparringowy*, „Tygodnik Powszechny” 2007, issue 17, p. 8.

5 S. Mrozek, W. Skalmowski, *Listy...*, p. 110.

(and no one gave him anything in return for that) could also be a symbol of a lesser artist, not only a Pole. But now the matters get interesting – in a theoretical sense, not personal – You, a true artist, uncovering that hustle: what would you gain? Is it only the fact of sincerely pointing out the comicality, novelty, and a point of view previously unknown [...], or is there something else – whether, e.g. you thus force a change in the world, like a scientific discovery changes the world? [...] Or differently still: did, e.g. Dante add anything new or did he simply make a grand-scale trade? Could he be compared to Einstein or rather to Onassio?⁶

In his question regarding the cognitive value of a work of art subjecting its eternal myths to criticism Skalmowski embodied a modern scientific point of view. According to one of the earliest myths, art originated from Telchines, a tribe of ingenious inventors and grand artists who combined “both those talents into as if a »Leonardian« type. And beauty was certainly something they created and excelled at, because that was one of the reasons why they were called the »Thelgines«, because they wanted to entice and charm people [...]”⁷ From that myth, as Monika Sznajderman has argued, another myth was born: of the jester artist, a clown, ropedancer and a juggler who crosses the existing limits and fulfils the role of a cultural demigod, the creator of culture, and the teacher of humanity.⁸ According to Sznajderman, Baudelaire was first to create a counter myth yet which actually supplemented the original one: “the myth of a tragic clown – abandoned, forgotten, living in misery.”⁹ In fact, Gałczyński, whom Skalmowski mentioned, not only “traded” poems for money and booze himself but he also created the first lyrical character as a transformed Baudelaire’s original: a charlatan artist trading items no one needed [not necessarily for money or booze].

The fact of comparing art to trade is, of course, nothing new, though one must admit that the question regarding the consequences of the comparison, a question posed by the critic for the artist about what the former gains in trade with his art, is provocative in nature. When referring to rhetoric devices one could state that Skalmowski used rhetoric license [*licentia* in Latin] which consisted of a bold and opened expression of his judgement.¹⁰ However, he did not intend to draw attention to himself; he even stated explicitly: “This is no rhetorical question as I do not know the answer to it, I don’t have it up in my sleeve to close it with an

⁶ Ibidem, pp. 110–112.

⁷ M. Sznajderman, *Błazen. Maski i metafory*, Wydawnictwo ISKRY, Warsaw 2014, p. 193.

⁸ Ibidem, pp. 45, 203.

⁹ Ibidem, p. 208.

¹⁰ M. Korolko, *Sztuka retoryki. Przewodnik encyklopedyczny*, Wiedza Powszechna, Warsaw 1990, p. 119.

alinea.”¹¹ Contrary to a rhetorical question which is used “to emphasis the speaker’s own position,”¹² Skalmowski’s question seems a kind of a provocation, a “poking” to trigger the writer to offer a statement on writing, a writer who doubted his theoretical mind and who could never be persuaded by his friend to write down a philosophical summa of his artistic experiences. Yet it did exceed, as Skalmowski did admit, one’s personal perspective. One could say that it approximated the friends’ dialogue to Plato’s dialogues as it included a method specific for Socrates: of deriving the core of things from opinions. The researcher intentionally reduced the metaphysical dimension of a work of art to establish its contemporary actual value – whether it was only useful for trade. One of the people to ask that question was, of course, Baudelaire, a critical observer of the modernising city. In the 19th century he observed, being “completely disillusioned,”¹³ the transformation of literature into a literary product – a novel in instalments produced in a manner resembling the products of an assembly line. He was also disillusioned about his own situation, that of a flâneur who “ventured onto the market to, in his mind, only browse things, but actually to find a buyer.”¹⁴ Walter Benjamin argued that he fact of comparing the writer “and most of all oneself to a whore was for him a common practice.”¹⁵ Baudelaire felt somewhat inferior when compared to manufacturer writers who reproduced literary clichés for newspaper readers since he subjected to parametrisation something about spiritual value, something most valuable for him. In *L’art romantique* he wrote with bitter irony:

However beautiful a house might be, until its beauty is proven it is mostly a certain amount of metres up and across. The same applies to literature, which is the most immeasurable of matters; it mainly consists of filling up columns; a literary architect who cannot profit from his name alone, must sell things at whatever the cost might be.¹⁶

Baudelaire experienced his own downfall as the downfall of the supreme modernist concept of art.

To paraphrase a well-known poem by Różewicz, one could say that in the 20th century “the bottom end of art was removed” as in losing its sacred character it lost its former vertical structure. What the French poet considered a downfall of an artist, Mrożek approached with irony. When he was asked why he wrote during a meet the

¹¹ S. Mrożek, W. Skalmowski, *Listy...*, p. 111.

¹² M. Korolko, *op. cit.*, p. 119.

¹³ W. Benjamin, *Twórca jako wytwórca. Eseje i rozprawy*, trans. by R. Reszke, Wydawnictwo Poznańskie, Warsaw 2011, p. 77.

¹⁴ *Ibidem*.

¹⁵ *Ibidem*.

¹⁶ As quoted in: W. Benjamin, *op. cit.*, p. 77.

author event in Düsseldorf organised by the NKVD, he answered that he did it for the money and simply sat down.¹⁷ Yet it was not only in the presence of the NKVD that he spoke about his writing with ruthless self-irony. The artist’s musings in his *Dziennik* indicated pessimism when it came to art, not to mention him doubting himself as an author. He thus responded to the question posed by Skalmowski: “For some time I only wrote to propel my career, and even if also for something else, I never thought about that.”¹⁸ One could notice, however, how during his writing he wondered – he considered a conditional clause and “rewrote” it increasing its probability: “And, probably, for something else still, not only my career, fortunately, because nothing would have survived only from that which I had written at that time.”¹⁹ Skalmowski’s provocation was apparently successful. It snatched Mrożek out of his way of thinking. The artist started musing on elements which were overlooked, marginalised, “non-tradable”, which survived from his writing at that time; or maybe which saved him as a writer. After a short pause, he continued on a path he knew well:

Later, for career’s sake, too, though less so because I satiated my hunger, and somewhat further, because my eagle-eye fixed on the Tatras, the Nysa, the Oder and the Baltic, and the chieftain’s forehead became split with a deep wrinkle. I need to conquer it. Or maybe even further, past the Alps... In fact, the careerist model had already borne the model of a professional and it slowly began to transform into it. Mundane routines, necessity, and habits.²⁰

Once more, though, he broke the easily flowing story and with some irritation he noted that he was losing something important: “All that is for certain, but that’s not everything. But what now I don’t quite know myself.”²¹ He began to question himself reducing his interlocutor to a mere witness of a peculiar conversation. Was he writing only for himself? “Surely not entirely so.”²² Would he be writing had he been wealthy and had any other choices? Let us assume that he would be writing. But would he publish? If so, for whom? For everyone? Or maybe he would only lend to his friends his original copies of small releases or he would read to them aloud? “I shall never find that out,”²³ Mrożek concluded because he came to the realisation that pure meditation, suspending historical order is impossible. The force of negation which he unleashed provoked him to question the established order: Why should

17 S. Mrożek, W. Skalmowski, *Listy...*, p. 656.

18 *Ibidem*, p. 115.

19 *Ibidem*.

20 *Ibidem*, pp. 115–116.

21 *Ibidem*, p. 116.

22 *Ibidem*.

23 *Ibidem*.

he “communicate with everyone, that is publish books in the existing commercial mode or stage plays which anyone can attend?”²⁴ That which seemed a downfall to Baudelaire, Mrożek considered with cool approval: “Entertain” strangers for money? “Yes, that is acceptable,”²⁵ he concluded, only to add: “But to offer them something more personal? Why exactly?”²⁶ Mrożek defended the sanctity but not of art as something supreme, rather as something which the most deeply intimate, personal, and hidden. Contrary to the Romantic model in which creators intended to dazzle the world with their originality. “To include in your own writings your whole life and your whole self is completely something different than a simple intellectualization,”²⁷ Michel Maffesoli wrote. According to him, true knowledge comes at the price of own existence. Probably at that level there occurs the most significant of trades in which an artist participates. Unlike in the case of knowledge devoid of a body, a pure, abstract, and intellectual juggling, it is introspective, corporeal and gloomy; it emerges from primitive darkness.²⁸ Skalmowski’s question compelled Mrożek to descend into “crypts” which held that which was the most primitive in humans.²⁹ He met the eighteen-year-old himself down there. It was then that he started writing his journal, and he “had never even dreamt”³⁰ of being a writer. While descending into those crypts Mrożek, his adult version, of course, managed to inform his interlocutor: “I’m not feeding you some stories of the »Chopin’s youth« kind. I want to wonder a bit.”³¹ Intellectual consideration transforms into a corporeal perception of that Beginning and a suspicion about its Original Beginning:

In this you probably cannot omit that which is not articulated, something sensory. Which later can be called: a craftsman’s instinct, something that happens at the interface of the hand, tool, and material. In fact, all children have that instinct of doodling, though usually it is rather a desire to destroy. I don’t know. Maybe some never grow past that. When I started writing the journal, I remember that moment clearly as the contents of the first entry. I felt that same sensory pleasure between good smooth paper, pen, and my hand. I remember realising that. I wouldn’t completely separate the instinct of writing, that is expressing thoughts, from writing, calligraphy, and decorative art, or writing as the act of placing signs, witchcraft.³²

²⁴ Ibidem.

²⁵ Ibidem, p. 147.

²⁶ Ibidem.

²⁷ M. Maffesoli, *Rytm życia. Wariacje na temat świata wyobraźni ponowoczesnej*, trans. by A. Karpowicz, Zakład Wydawniczy Nomos, Krakow 2012, p. 106.

²⁸ Cf. M. Maffesoli, *op. cit.*, pp. 106–108.

²⁹ Ibidem, p. 105.

³⁰ Vide S. Mrożek, W. Skalmowski, *Listy...*, p. 114.

³¹ Ibidem, p. 115.

³² Ibidem.

Mrożek also wrote about writing in which that which people commonly include in the sphere of the logos, i.e. expressing thoughts, is mystically connected to the very sensory act of writing, transforming into a ritual. Antonin Artaud, an artist fascinated with primitive culture, argued that it used a language which was limited, specific, and corporeal.³³ The fact of finding in oneself such a language would be a kind of an architext, something which preceded Mrożek's proper writing, explained by himself with the voice of a rational modern order. That voice omits that primitive experience of sacrality, the magicity of writing, yet Mrożek has realised that it was impossible to omit it. How much of that experience did survive in his later writing? In a letter of 24 May 1974, he stated:

[...] if there is one more thing I can count on, it is only that kind of motivation. Some curiosity about own imagination, curiosity about that which might leap out of it or which might appear. The pleasure in introducing order and organising, shaping, selecting elements, and grouping. Of expressing and applying outcomes. But this is where I descend from the higher level to a lower one, I'm not talking about sacredness or magic but about something more like a game, a mental sport.³⁴

Mrożek saw the threat awaiting artists, especially professional ones, who can unwittingly forge creative sensory creations using craft skills. They can turn from creators into producers, mere imitations of themselves. Mrożek wished to create, i.e. find something unexpected in himself, to cross his own "mediocrity, measurability, and his inherent limitations."³⁵ He often seemed to himself a mere craftsman, though, at the same time, he defended craft as a value in elementary art; his defence was, of course, futile. In the age of reproduction, talent and craft have lost their value among the multitude of imitations. Once he returned to Poland, Mrożek viewed the fact of creating under a *nom de plume* as a sign of imitating art, something which as he argued in a letter to Skalmowski discussing one Ingrid Villquist "happens here and nowadays more than once and more than once under just one pseudonym."³⁶ Suffice to add that one critic raved about Villquist while considering a play by the author of *Tango* to be *dépassé*.³⁷

When Mrożek sent to Skalmowski his new work for evaluation, what seemed most important to him was that it was sound in terms of the employed craft, though, of course, he always hoped for, as he termed it, a *surplus*. In a letter of 26 March 1983, he wrote:

³³ Cf. L. Kolankiewicz, *Święty Artaud*, Wydawnictwo słowo/obraz terytoria, Gdańsk 2001, p. 179.

³⁴ S. Mrożek, W. Skalmowski, *Listy...*, p. 149.

³⁵ *Ibidem*, p. 264.

³⁶ *Ibidem*, p. 820.

³⁷ *Ibidem*, p. 821.

As always, I'm relieved that the new play, this *Letni dzień*, is to your liking, that you accept it. Because I'm convinced – at some level I don't know anything, while on others I have more and more convictions, vide: storeys, ranks, hierarchies – that everyone face the danger of slipping below the acceptable level, if not down to talentless scribbling. Only starting from some level is debate possible and, fortunately, *Letni dzień* is a case of that. So once again I managed. And since this time, I ventured into something new for me and I succeeded, it is the more an encouragement to, in the future, engage my further still hidden reserves.³⁸

In his writing Mroźek tried to discover in himself the previously uncovered reserves, yet in his life he complained about having “no reserves.”³⁹ Despite his declared lack of faith in literature one might infer that Mroźek hoped for experiencing completeness and intensity in writing, not in life. Even more so, he noted that actually his writing was an act of defence against life, that his mood improved when fiction “became truer than reality.”⁴⁰ When considering Skalmowski's question, eventually this thought came to his mind:

To write maybe also because: in my head there is still so much stuff going on. By happening incoherently it's tiring. The only form of repose is to have such a setup so that everything happens according to a specific order, preferably mine. Through writing. [...] Only writing, the perfectly introvert activity, enables you to focus your attention. Any other work, less introverted, does not allow me to focus, lose myself, feel a relief to such an extent as writing does. There is absolutely no other activity that could keep me at a table for six hours straight without me being distracted. Even reading can't do that, though it is second best in terms of preoccupying me only to writing. So maybe that?⁴¹

In his concept of the creative process Walter Hilsbecher has stated that the integrity of a monad is constantly threatened by becoming infected with the shapeless, surging, festering matter of reality.⁴² Artists exact a very subtle spiritual re-

³⁸ Ibidem, p. 566.

³⁹ “Everything mounts and attacks, demands things, while tiredness is ever increasing, not dropping. A huge longing for rest, reduction, calming. And the inability to satisfy it. An inability to cope with everything that's bearing on you [...]. No reserves. And I'm afraid that one day in the simplest of circumstance, when, e.g. the postman comes and demands that I sign the receipt of a registered letter, that that would tip the scales and then it would be too much, and that I would become overcome by a fit of hysteria. I would start shouting and I would thrust the postman down the stairs, and then they would take me away.” (S. Mroźek, W. Skalmowski, *Listy...*, p. 368).

⁴⁰ Ibidem, p. 205.

⁴¹ Ibidem, pp. 116–117.

⁴² Vide W. Hilsbecher, *Tragizm, absurd, paradoks. Eseje*, trans. by S. Błaut, Państwowy Instytut Wydawniczy, Warsaw 1972, p. 162.

venge on that matter. By using an unstable material – paint, wood, stone, sounds or language – they transform it into a work of art with a perfect harmonious order.

We don’t have at our disposal any artistic or philosophical answer to erase for ever the question posed by life and the unrest with which it infects us. For a moment we feel free from its torments, then it starts tormenting us anew, forcing us to venture new attempts, answers, new attempts at healing. Sisyphean labour!⁴³

One could note that the distinct moment of Mrożek’s mood plummeted after he had finished working on a text. When after reading *Garbus* Skalmowski wrote to him: “I envy you writing a play – I mean the realisation you finished it,”⁴⁴ in response he read: “Yes, I’m glad I wrote something new, I mean I was glad when I was writing it, now I’m glad no more. Now I’m dumb, empty, and yet foggy, without a direction, assignment and meaning.”⁴⁵ In short: Mrożek had just finished his new play and yet it was too late to envy him anything. Skalmowski tried to put himself in Mrożek’s position – of an artist and analyse that mysterious “mechanism”: “I believe that all concrete kinds of work lead to that – when you can’t see the result immediately, when you can’t see the direct application for the work, etc. – so, probably, you too, after finishing writing, feel things – those inside – in a similar manner.”⁴⁶ Despite his best intentions, Skalmowski rather managed to reproduce his own experience of an academic, not of an artist. Could he, however, have arrived at any nuanced conclusions using only his theoretical skills, without an insight into that special experience? In response, Mrożek admitted:

Writing is too much for its own sake, it is for me only a process, for the question about the meaning of it to pester me. Eventually, couldn’t you compare it to music? To playing music, or maybe even to composing it? I have always suspected that a busker is free of hastiness (when he plays) because his playing has no specific end, his only aim is to play, which means his intention is not to end a composition, the final note is no more particular than any of the preceding ones in any part of the composition. Works which I have written interest me as products which can ensure for me some place within the society (that also covers earnings), yet as “artistic compositions” they interest me to a surprisingly low extent. [...] So my blandness and feebleness are not caused by the fact that I have doubts why and what for I write. [...] But

43 Ibidem.

44 S. Mrożek, W. Skalmowski, *Listy...*, p. 202.

45 Ibidem, p. 204.

46 Ibidem, p. 210.

when I finally finish writing something, and through simple exhaustion I don't start anything new, a hole appears in my head through which blandness and feebleness trickle in. I have noticed that concentration, any concentration, it's not at all about its object, its object has no significance whatsoever, it works well on your mood. [...] No, it's not about the goal of writing because it exhausts itself. Blandness rather lurks there and then when there is no writing.⁴⁷

Mroźek argued that a busker immersed in his playing is free of haste, though it would be probably more precise to write that he stops experiencing time. In his book *The Dance of Life: The Other Dimension of Time*, Edward Hall argued that "Concentration of any sorts obliterates time."⁴⁸ Is there a relationship between the obliteration of time and good mood? Emil Cioran would respond that when we stop experiencing time, we experience the direct dynamism of life, whereas "sensitivity to time is associated with an ability to live in the now. [...] We no longer live *in* time, rather *with* time, in parallel to it. With life we only form a unity, but we *are* time [...]"⁴⁹ The breakdown of that timelessness is heralded by "the final note", which is why, contrary to Mroźek's argument, one can suppose it is special. The fact of being immersed in a melody which had stopped resonating within the physical space could be sometimes seen in concert halls. For example, Rafał Blechacz thus reported on the reception of Frederic Chopin's Mazurka in A minor Op. 17 during a concert in Hamburg: "It is a melancholic composition and it ends in a special way – an accord turns to silence. When I stopped playing, I waited for applause which usually emerges immediately. Yet that time there was silence. The audience was so enthralled as if they were hypnotized."⁵⁰ According to Mroźek, the object of concentration is unimportant. But is it? The artist's feelings described in the letter can be treated as a record of some universal artistic experience confirmed by various writers. This is how, e.g. Sándor Márai framed it:

A minute after I had finished writing a book which for the past eight months demanded my entire life, health, patience, happiness, freedom, and time, I felt strange embarrassment. I felt like someone who broke free from under a tyrant and torment, I felt ease, I would like to cautiously scream with joy because finally, finally I didn't

⁴⁷ Ibidem, pp. 212–214.

⁴⁸ E.T. Hall, *Taniec życia. Inny wymiar czasu*, trans. by R. Nowakowski, Warszawskie Wydawnictwo Literackie MUZA SA, Warsaw 1999, p. 154. [English version: Edward T. Hall, *The Dance of Life: The Other Dimension of Time*, Anchor, 1984, p. 127.]

⁴⁹ E. Cioran, *Zmierzch myśli*, trans. by A. Dwulit, Wydawnictwo KR, Warsaw 2004, pp. 14–15.

⁵⁰ R. Blechacz, K. Tadej, *Nie wstydzę się mówić o Panu Bogu*, „Niedziela Ogólnopolska” 2017, issue 30, pp. 10–13, <https://opoka.org.pl/biblioteka/Z/ZF/ZFS/niedziela201730-blechacz.html> (access 22.07.2019).

have to give into the same craze, the same *idée fixe* day and night, I finally broke its neck and broke free from it, from my prison warden and guard, my executioner and tormentor! And, at the same time, I felt homeless. As if I was expelled from my terribly familiar family house and from my homeland where everything hated me and yet was close and personal to me. That is because work is also a homeland, meaning both a yoke and happiness. So, I dotted the "i". I'm finally free. And I warily look around: what am I supposed to do with this freedom?⁵¹

Mrożek, just like Márai, used the category of homelessness to describe that "borderline" experience. "Now I'm homeless once again,"⁵² he concluded in a letter to Skalmowski after finishing work on *Piękny widok*. Finally, in Gombrowicz's *Dziennik* one can read: "I don't know what to write. I don't know what to write after finishing *Operetka*, and I don't know what to write now in the journal. The situation is nothing to be envious about."⁵³

One could assume that for modern writers the necessity to create art as a product for sale is not as bad as "finalising" production and the following state of unproductivity, when they no longer create, i.e. no longer creatively process reality. Clearly, the question about the meaning in creation poignantly applies to the issue of time, which in artists' perceptions is a peculiar phenomenon. It is defined by as if an interchangeable rhythm: the flexing of creative forces and their crisis when a work is finished, when an artist has to face a sense of pointlessness, exhaustion, blandness, and "homelessness".

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⁵¹ S. Márai, *Niebo i ziemia*, trans. by F. Netz, „Czytelnik”, Warsaw 2011, pp. 141–142.

⁵² S. Mrożek, W. Skalmowski, *Listy...*, p. 760.

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Sara Kurowska

„Dlaczego ja piszę?” Wokół filozofii pisania Sławomira Mroźka


Streszczenie

Przedmiotem artykułu jest metaliteracki wątek korespondencji Sławomira Mroźka z Wojciechem Skalmowskim. Skalmowski, zastanawiając się nad właściwym powodem, dla którego pisarze tworzą literaturę, prowokacyjnie redukuje wymiar metafizyczny dzieła sztuki, by dowiedzieć się, jaka współcześnie jest jego rzeczynista wartość – czy jedynie handlowa? Ważnym kontekstem, pokazującym odmienną spojrzenia na analizowany problem w zależności od czasu historycznego, uczyniono twórczość Baudelaire’a w odczytaniu Waltera Benjamina. Celem pracy jest pokazanie, jak w trakcie dialogu ze Skalmowskim Mroźek próbuje odpowiedzieć na tytułowe pytanie o powód, dla którego tworzy literaturę oraz, co szczególnie ważne – jak zaczyna zwracać uwagę na elementy, które wcześniej przeoczał, marginalizował.

Słowa kluczowe: Sławomir Mroźek, Wojciech Skalmowski, handel, produkt, pierwotność

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Emmanuel Lévinas. Praise of atheism

Summary

Lévinas presents atheism as the original good condition of the soul before acknowledging or rejecting God. Such description is closely linked to the notion of separation. Man is a created being, but a separated one, self-contained, though not absolute. Even if not *causa sui*, he may exist on his own. The description is radically different from that by Augustine, who refers to creation as the participation of man in God. Similarly, there is an almost literal contradiction between the statement by Lévinas and the words of Tertullian, claiming that the soul is Christian by nature. A comparison of Levinas' text with the theology of Karl Rahner also points to significant differences. Rahner presents the awareness of God as a transcendental, unthematic experience. Lévinas also states that the awareness of God is unthematic, however, he does not share Rahner's description of the experience of God as the primary transcendental experience. According to Lévinas, God comes from outside through the face of the Other. Levinas' analyses seem highly interesting for fundamental theology and the theology of spirituality.

Keywords: Lévinas, atheism, Augustine, Rahner, Tertullian

This article should begin with an explanation, or even justification of its title. Originally, it was meant to be entitled *Atheism According to Levinas*, which, however, would suggest that Levinas simply analyses the phenomenon and various perceptions of atheism, presenting their descriptions and his own interpretation which deserves to be studied. Such an impression would be totally false. The atheism

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which we are going to discuss here is a significant part of Levinas's own philosophy. It constitutes an irremovable part of his perception of human being and the whole reality, which he clearly expresses in *Totality and Infinity: An Essay on Exteriority*.¹ It is his personal approach to atheism, created for his own use, involving a praise of atheism which is, at the same time, a praise of the Creator.

Status questionis

Philosophers studying Levinas's thinking are not particularly interested in the notion of atheism which appears in his writings. The bibliography for the article devoted to Levinas in *the Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* contains a list of 254 studies, however, none of the titles contains "atheism" or a related word.

Neither do theologians seem to be keen on the notion. The *Electronic Bibliography of Theology and Religion FIDES*² which lists all the theological texts published in Poland, including those written by philosophers who are also theologians, shows 81 entries devoted to Levinas. The notion of atheism does not appear on the list but for one exception, which is the article *Hipostaza, ateista i Sługa Jahwe, czyli trzy koncepcje samotności w filozofii Emmanuela Levinasa* by Marek Jędraszewski.³ However, despite the suggestion in the title, the Author provides no analysis of the notion. Even though he quotes the appropriate passages of *Totality and Infinity* referring to atheism, he does not undertake an in-depth analysis of the dimension that is interesting to us. Such a casual treatment, only touching the surface of Levinas's approach to atheism, can be observed in the texts by other Polish theologians studying the idea of God in Levinas's thought. Another article by the same author, "*Interior intimo meo*": *św. Augustyn i Emmanuel Levinas o Bogu i o człowieku*,⁴ seems to be of interest in the context of this article. We will refer to it in the sub-chapter devoted to the relation between Levinas's and Augustine's thinking.

International bibliographies of theological texts⁵ yield similar search results: there is a large number of theological texts devoted to Levinas, however, judging

1 E. Levinas, *Totality and Infinity: An Essay on Exteriority*, trans. by A. Lingis, Duquesne University Press, Pittsburgh 1969. Further referred to as TI.

2 <http://biblio.fides.org.pl/> (access 3.11.2020).

3 M. Jędraszewski, *Hipostaza, ateista i Sługa Jahwe, czyli trzy koncepcje samotności w filozofii Emmanuela Lévinasa*, "Filozofia Chrześcijańska" 2015, vol. 12, pp. 129–144. Jędraszewski is both a philosopher and theologian. He writes the quoted texts as a philosopher, yet his theological formation is clearly visible.

4 Idem, "*Interior intimo meo*": *św. Augustyn i Emmanuel Lévinas o Bogu i o człowieku*, "Filozofia Chrześcijańska" 2006, vol. 3, pp. 105–154.

5 Index theologicus: <http://www.ixtheo.de>, Global Digital Library on Theology and Ecumenism: <http://www.globethics.net/web/gtl> (access 2.11.2020).

by their titles at least, their authors are not interested in the issue of atheism in Levinas's thought.

The paragraphs above have been written as a result of a very quick and rather superficial query, however, we take the courage to claim that even such a query suffices to demonstrate that analysing of the notion of atheism in Levinas's thought does not mean a duplication of work that has already been done and concluded. Likewise, the very nature of Levinas's thought justifies its analysis "from within", which we will try to explain in the next subchapter.

Methodology

Before we present an analysis of Levinas's texts, we are obliged to describe and justify the methodology applied in this article. In the first place, this text has been written by a theologian, who interprets Levinas from a theological perspective, not necessarily adhering to the methods of analysis which apply in philosophy. It would be difficult here to provide a detailed description of the differences between theology and philosophy,⁶ let us, however, reiterate the old statement that *philosophia ancilla theologiae* (philosophy is the servant of theology). Unlike a philosopher, a theologian seriously considers the experience of faith (or, broadly speaking, a spiritual experience), it is never methodologically bracketed. In other words, whereas authentic philosophy requires neutrality as the point of departure,⁷ or methodological questioning of every assumption, theology precludes such neutrality as it builds on faith (spiritual experience), though, obviously, it poses every possible question concerning the act of faith, or the spiritual experience.

It seems justified to assume that Levinas as a philosopher never bracketed his own spiritual experience, namely the Talmudic reading of the Bible.⁸ In his works, he repeatedly introduces biblical passages as legitimate texts. Even though he frequently emphasises that he writes philosophical text and avoids stepping into the quicksand of religious deliberations, the biblical foundation is present in his philosophy not only in the biblical quotes, but also, for example, in the claim that man is a created being, which he takes as his starting point. Likewise, the category of

6 A more comprehensive discussion of the theme can be found in: J. Słomka, *Wprowadzenie do teologii katolickiej*, Wydawnictwo UŚ, Katowice, 2018, pp. 50–59.

7 The above mentioned deliberate rejection of neutrality by Levinas demonstrates that he is not a typical philosopher who smoothly fits in the canon of pure philosophy. Of course, that statement does not exhaust the full meaning of "the neuter" in Levinas's thought.

8 The thesis that Levinas is, first and foremost, immersed in the world of the Bible, and he reads the Bible drawing from the masters of Talmud, which cannot be omitted in the interpretation of his philosophy, is comprehensively substantiated by Azzolino Chiappini in his book *Amare Torah più di Dio. Emmanuel Lévinas lettore di Talmud*, Giuntina, Firenze 1999.

rationality in his writings is almost identical with that of spirituality. Pure and sterile rationality devoid of a spiritual aspect seems inhuman to Levinas.

Back to the realm of philosophy: to interpret Levinas's texts, it is essential to constantly remember the starting point of his philosophy. For Levinas, the foundation of all knowledge is the face of another human being, the concrete, personally encountered individual. That is the arche, metaphysics that is prior to any form of ontology, the Cartesian idea of infinity, primordial identification of I as I. One can accept Levinas's philosophical foundation or reject it, yet, it is impossible to read his texts with understanding unless one takes it into account. The nature and the inner structure of that primordial experience, which we are not even attempting to outline here, dominates the way in which Levinas develops his thought. In general, it runs across the set line of the European thought, and Levinas repeatedly signals the subsequent "clashes" in his texts.

Both comments presented above indicate a certain distinctness of Levinas's thought. He is an acknowledged philosopher of the European tradition, however, to interpret his thinking by merely comparing him to others and pointing to the similarities and differences within the said tradition is not sufficient to grasp the specificity of that thinking and, as we believe, it is not very helpful for the understanding of its essence. Likewise, the presentation of Levinas as a philosopher of dialogue, juxtaposing him with Martin Buber, may be correct but not fully satisfactory. Levinas himself mentions his significant indebtedness to Rosenzweig. A study of that relation is a separate important issue, which, however, will not be discussed in this article.

The statement that classification is of limited usefulness also refers to the literature devoted to Levinas. Relying on commentaries and multiplying references can be laborious and misleading if one really wants to study his thinking. There is a great number of various commentaries available, so in order to refer to them and choose from among interpretations that are often mutually exclusive, one needs to acquire an understanding of Levinas's texts which is based on personal reading.⁹ Thus, to begin with, one has to devote plenty of time to the exploration of his texts, searching for hidden messages and meanings. Since a thorough study of his relation to the earlier authors or going through commentaries fail to facilitate the understanding of Levinas, one needs to delve into the inner structure of his texts, treating the links with the other texts as a complement or continuation of that analysis. Therefore, referring to Paul Ricoeur and his distinction between exegetical analysis and structural hermeneutics, we give an absolute priority to the latter.

⁹ E.g. in her introduction to the Polish translation of *TI*, B. Skarga claims that God in Levinas's writings "is not the Christian God". The thesis is not obvious, yet any reaction to it, be it polemical, corrective or affirmative, requires prior comprehensive study of Levinas's texts.

Our intention is to first present the relevant text by Levinas, and then to develop our reflection, referring to the source. Ricoeur described the effect of such work, or the understanding of a text, as the construction of one or more new sentences based on the best possible comprehension of the grammar of the text.¹⁰

Thus, creating one's own text which grasps and transmits the thought of the studied text is the way to proceed and, at the same time, the evidence that the text has been understood. Such understanding is partial by nature and with no guarantee of its correctness, it does not provide the only possible interpretation. It only contributes to greater work which is required in order to understand Levinas's thinking on atheism. In the subsequent stages of our study, we will attempt to confront, or even clash Levinas's ideas with a few well known theological texts. The confrontation, however, belongs to the realm of structural hermeneutics rather than exegetical work.

To conclude this subchapter, we would like to specify the scope of our study, which is not explicitly expressed in the title. The analysis pertains exclusively to the essay *Totality and Infinity*, which is acknowledged as one of the most significant Levinas's text. It belongs to the second period of his writing, and it contains a comprehensive presentation of Levinas's perception of atheism. An analysis of its text alone presents a research problem that is sufficiently wide. To study other Levinas's texts and to examine how the author tackles atheism there, and whether his thinking on the issue evolves,¹¹ would require a separate research work.

Definition of atheism

Levinas writes about atheism at the beginning of the first part of his essay. The whole part is entitled *The Same and the Other*, and the relevant subchapter of its first chapter, *Separation and Discourse*, bears the title *Atheism, or the Will*:

One can call atheism this separation so complete that the separated being maintains itself in existence all by itself, without participating in the Being from which it is separated – eventually capable of adhering to it by belief. The break with participation is implied in this capability. One lives outside of the psychic, being an accomplishment of separation, is naturally atheist [in the original text: “égoïsme” – J.S.]. By atheism we thus understand a position prior to both the negation and the affirmation of the divine, the breaking with participation by which the I posits itself as the same and as

¹⁰ See P. Ricoeur, *Esquisse de conclusion*, [in:] *Exégèse et herméneutique*, collectif, Paris, Seuil, 1971, p. 290.

¹¹ The suggestion that Levinas's perception of atheism evolves with time can be found in the texts by Marek Jędraszewski and Krzysztof Wieczorek.

I. It is certainly a great glory for the creator to have set up a being capable of atheism, a being which, without having been *causa sui*, has an independent view and word and is at home with itself.¹²

Levinas provides the above definition after several pages of introductory explanations. The most important concept which he introduces and which needs to be clarified is that of separation.¹³ It means disconnection which makes it possible for each of the separated beings to exist all by itself, without relying on another being for its own existence. For Levinas, a separated being is the only being that exists truly and independently and is not a function, an extension or part of another being. At the same time, Levinas acknowledges that human being is a separated being in that sense, and he develops his analyses, including those establishing the meaning of the notion of atheism, not to prove that separation, but to better understand and explain the primary situation of man. The separation is so fundamental and so absolute that it precludes the existence of an outside look that could see what is common; it precludes the possibility of a higher level synthesis that would join two separated beings into one and form a unity of higher order.¹⁴ The only link that can connect two separated beings is speech, a discourse. The belief referred to in the quoted passage exists only insofar far it is pronounced, or expressed in words.

Separation regarded as the relation of man to God proves to be atheism. It is, however, an atheism that is prior to acknowledging or rejecting God, it does not mean rejecting God as a result of reflection. Levinas is not interested in conscious atheism which rejects God following some kind of deliberation. The primordial atheism, on the other hand, is for him a prerequisite for the existence of human being as a being that is separate and finite, and, at the same time, aware of its own finiteness: a being that is born, that is mortal, vulnerable, weak and limited.

It is that primordial atheism that makes it possible for the soul to be at home with itself, to be the host of its own "I", the host who is or is not willing. Atheism is the foundation of possessing oneself. The will, the possibility of wanting or not wanting, is for Levinas one of the fundamental names of human being, of the soul,

¹² TI, pp. 62–63.

¹³ In Levinas's philosophy, it is one of the central concepts describing the nature of the relations between beings. Here we only refer to it insofar as it is significant for the description of the relation man-God.

¹⁴ Levinas thus suggests that when we believe we can embrace the whole reality with one synthetic look, we are under an illusion, while our look and our thought in fact embrace only the inside of "the same".

of the separated being. Only one who is at home, who is an independent host can, if he so wills, invite a guest, including God, to stay with him.¹⁵

In the subsequent parts of the essay, Levinas devotes much attention to the analysis of enjoyment as the fundamental manifestation of “I” being at home with itself, experiencing its own separateness, being “I” in the strongest sense of the word. The analysis helps to better understand that the word “egoism” used in the quoted passage has no negative connotation: it is just another notion describing the beautiful condition of “I” being at home. The enjoyment experienced by “I” is explicitly sensual, and therefore it truly means being at home.¹⁶ Feeling and senses are for Levinas the primary, fundamental way of experiencing oneself; sensual perception is a primordial experience. Here Levinas adopts a perspective that goes contrary to the Platonic tradition, which subordinates the sensual and volatile to what is transcendent, intelligible and eternal.

Levinas and Augustine

The description of atheism as the primary condition of human being that is regarded as good is in sharp contrast with another description of the situation presented by Augustine in the initial passage of the *Confessions*: “For Thou madest us for Thyself, and our heart is restless, until it repose in Thee.”¹⁷

Thus, Augustine knows no peace of human heart without a “repose in God”. Left to himself, man cannot be at home, he is at home only in God. Therefore, a desire for God is the deepest and the only authentic desire of the human heart, even if hidden or stifled.

Similarly to Augustine, Levinas begins his essay with the phenomenology of desire that is constitutive for human existence. It is different from need, it is primary and unquenchable, directed towards the absolutely Other. In the first subchapter of his essay, entitled *Desire for the Invisible*, he describes that primary human desire as a metaphysical movement, “toward an alien outside-of-oneself [*hors-de-soi*],

¹⁵ One might ask whether the beginning of a relation with God, i.e. a religious relation, eliminates the primordial atheism, or it remains as the inner state of the soul as a pre-requisite for the existence of that relation. Levinas’s writings do not provide a clear answer. In his article on Levinas and Augustine quoted below, Jędraszewski, suggests that the atheism vanishes, however, it does not seem fully convincing to us.

¹⁶ The appearance of another human being radically breaks that primordial enjoyment. The Other, however, is never an obstacle, or a limitation. He or she always comes “from high up”. That thought is central for Levinas’s philosophy, and without bearing it in mind, one could read his analysis of enjoyment as a praise of selfish egoism.

¹⁷ Augustine, *The Confessions*, trans. by E.B. Pussey, <https://faculty.georgetown.edu/jod/Englishconfessions.html> (access 2.11.2020).

toward a yonder.”¹⁸ However, in his essay, Levinas does not identify that desire for the invisible as a desire for God, not even unconscious.¹⁹ Thus, we deal with two similar, though at the same time almost mutually exclusive descriptions of the primordial inner reality of human being. That contradiction becomes even more significant when one considers that both Levinas’s and Augustine’s anthropologies regard man as God’s creation which is limited and weak, yet aware of its limitations. More than that, they both perceive human being as a being that is free and desirous in the first place. Thus, the difference mentioned above does not result from radically different anthropologies. It reflects two different perceptions of the relation between man and God. We will elaborate on the subject while commenting on the notion of separation.

In his article, Marek Jędraszewski gives a comprehensive analysis of the similarities and differences between Augustine and Levinas, stressing some significant similarities which can only be detected after a thorough study. He writes:

That heteronomy inspired by Descartes, or the radical transcendence of the Other in relation to the Same, took a very specific form of the notion of the Other in the Same (l’Autre-dans-le Même) in Levinas’s philosophy, recalling, to a certain extent, Augustine’s thinking on God who is present in human soul – God who is *interior intimo meo*.²⁰

Jędraszewski focuses his analysis on Levinas’s late thought. In TI, the beginnings of the concept of God, the Other in the Same, are already present, however, the dominating motif is that of separation.

¹⁸ TI, p. 37.

¹⁹ Elsewhere, Levinas refers to God “at the level of desire that cannot be fulfilled or satisfied”. See *Korespondencja między Emmanuelem Lévinasem i Simonem Decloux*, “Logos i Ethos” 1991, issue 1, p. 116 (quote translated by J.S.) In the essay discussed in this article, he also refers to “the alterity of the Other and of the Most-High” (p. 38), yet, let us reiterate: firstly, in TI Levinas explicitly excludes the identification of desire for the invisible with religious longing, searching for God, and secondly, he repeatedly stresses the fundamental impossibility to satisfy that desire for the invisible, which is part of its very essence. The quoted exchange of letters took place in 1963–1965, it is thus later than TI. Jędraszewski believes that it was a period of an intensive evolution of Levinas’s thought combined with a change of some of his opinions. (See: idem, *W stronę prehistorii Ja. Korespondencja między Emmanuelem Lévinasem a Simonem Decloux*, “Filozofia Chrześcijańska” 2006, vol. 3, pp. 51–52).

²⁰ M. Jędraszewski, “*Interior intimo meo*”..., p. 131 (the quote translated by J.S.).

Man as created being

Let us now expand on what Levinas writes about man as a created being. It is explicitly referred to in the second part of the above quoted passage. Levinas always considers man as a being created by God. For him, it is not a mere metaphor, a verbal ornament or an attractive way of treating man in a more sublime way: it is a fundamental statement. For human beings, there is a beginning and the end of their earthly existence: birth and death, and those are not incidental or secondary elements of human life, which seem somewhat negligible even though unavoidable. They are constitutive for our lives. And it is exactly the man who is not *causa sui* that, here on earth, is at home with himself as a separated being. Being created belongs to his very essence. Consequently, Levinas perceives the original atheism of the soul as ground for proclaiming the greatness of the work of creation and the glory of the Creator: He created a being that is different from Him, separated and non-absolute, yet capable of autonomous existence. It calls to mind a statement by another Church father, Irenaeus, this time sounding in harmony rather than as a counterpoint: “For the glory of God is the living man.”²¹

Let us return to the description of human condition. Man cannot regard himself as an absolute being. If that is the case, it is clear for him that he is not *causa sui*, the first beginning. Such perception of man as created being poses entire Levinas’s thought against those existentialist trends which regard human freedom as autonomous, primary and absolute in its self-realisation. Man is not only freedom limited incidentally by external circumstances, man is a created being. His freedom, the Will which is autonomously at home in its own “I” is not an absolute will: it is a will that is established, and it needs to seek its own justification, yet that need does not mean its limitation, but the very foundation: “Existence is not in reality condemned to freedom, but is invested as freedom. Freedom is not bare.”²²

It has to be clearly stated that the close relation between the fact that man is a created being and atheism as the original condition of the soul makes Levinas’s notion of atheism significantly different from modern atheisms, which tend to perceive human being only in a physical or evolutionary perspective, or as “thrownness,”²³ coming from nowhere, and are thus atheisms which essentially mean the negation of the existence of God.

²¹ Ante-Nicene Fathers vol. I, Against Heresies: Book IV by Irenaeus, trans. by P. Schaff et al. https://en.wikisource.org/wiki/Ante-Nicene_Fathers/Volume_I/IRENÆUS/Against_Heresies:_Book_IV/Chapter_XX (access 2.11.2020) It has to be noted, though, that Irenaeus would not be likely to fully embrace Levinas’s description of atheism. It seems, however, that Levinas’s thought has more in common with Irenaeus than Augustine.

²² TI, p. 89. It is obviously a hint to J.P. Sartre’s existentialism.

²³ Martin Heidegger *Geworfenheit*. See SuZ § 39, p. 181 (M. Heidegger, *Sein und Zeit*, elfte, unveränderte Auflage, Max Niemeyer Verlag, Tübingen 1967) (Eng. *Thrownness*, p. 225 in: Blackwell Publishers Ltd 1962).

Separation, not participation

As has already been mentioned, separation is one of Levinas's fundamental concepts. He does not search for unity or synthesis, on the contrary, he accepts and strives to demonstrate in his reflection that there exists a multiplicity of beings which do not succumb to any form of synthesis. In particular, every human being is a separated being. Community has yet to be established, and it is established by Discourse. Levinas repeatedly contrasts the notion of separation with that of participation. According to him, there is no participation, there is only separation.²⁴ To make it more precise: man's relation to God does not consist in participation, he is separated from God. Let us reiterate: man is a separated being.

Thus, Levinas stands in clear opposition to the long tradition that uses the concept of participation to describe reality, including the relation of man to God. Let us, therefore, briefly recall the history of the notion in order to better understand the revolutionary nature of Levinas's thought.

Like many other significant philosophical ideas, the concept of participation was introduced by Plato, to be fully developed by the Neoplatonists.²⁵ It perfectly expresses both the unity and the hierarchical nature of reality, allowing for the gradation of perfection. It embraces the whole history of European philosophy. The concept was naturally adopted by Christian theology, with Augustine as the key figure for the Western tradition. He placed the concept in the centre of his philosophy, which is regarded as the foundation of theology. Participation makes it possible for Augustine to describe the goodness of created beings which come from God, and thus participate in His perfection, while, at the same time, they are imperfect since participation implies being only "a part". Likewise, in the opening sentences of the *Confessions*, man is referred to as "a particle of Thy creation" (*aliqua portio creaturae*).²⁶ Thus, the concept covers both being a part and being incomplete. In the East, the idea of participation has evolved to theosis, or deification, as the ultimate purpose of man.

Let us reiterate: Levinas opposes the above described tradition not only at the level of one notion, but also with the entire logic of his thinking. It is within the logic of separation that his perception of atheism has its place.

²⁴ He should thus be classified as a nominalist, yet, as we mention in the Introduction, those classifications do not bear much significance to us in this context.

²⁵ This short presentation is based on the article by Zofia Zdybicka in *Powszechna Encyklopedia Filozofii*, which is also available on the website of the Polish Thomas Aquinas Society: <http://www.ptta.pl/pef/pdf/p/partycypacja.pdf> (access 2.11.2020).

²⁶ Continuation of the already quoted passage of *Confessions*: "For Thou madest us for Thyself, (*quia fecisti nos ad te*)". Levinas, however, never refers to the purpose of creation in this way. The category of purpose is not significant to him.

The Soul as naturally atheist and *anima naturaliter christiana*

Levinas's claim that the soul is naturally atheist brings to mind the famous statement by Tertullian about the soul that is naturally Christian. Let us quote an extensive passage from *Apologeticus* which comprises the above mentioned statement:

Do you wish that we should prove this from his own works, so many and of such a character, by which we are restrained, upheld, delighted; nay even by which we are terrified, or should we prove it even from the evidence of the soul itself? Although weighed down by the prison of the body, though confined by evil customs, though emasculated by lusts and passions, though enslaved to false gods, yet, when it recovers its senses, as after surfeit, as after sleep, as after some illness, when it becomes conscious of its own health, it names God, for the sole reason that he alone is by nature the true God. "Good God", "Great God" and "Which may God grant" are expressions used by all. That he is also a judge is attested by the words: "God sees", "I commend to God", and "God will recompense me". O evidence of the natural Christianity of the soul! (*O testimonium animae naturaliter christianae!*) For when uttering these words it looks not to the Capitol, but to the sky. It knows indeed the place of abode of the living God; from him and from there it descended.²⁷

The reference to the whole passage enables us to see a significant element that is common to both thinkers. Tertullian knows that the beauty of creation can be considered as evidence of the existence of God, however, he does not attach much importance to it. What matters to him is the evidence of the soul. Levinas also focuses on human being, on the evidence of the human soul.

Let us now consider the final part of the quoted text. Tertullian contrasts faith stemming from the human soul with pagan beliefs and practices. His text (as well as the entire *Apologeticus*) is meant as a defence of Christian monotheism against the assaults of pagan idolatry. The defence essentially means attacking: Tertullian demonstrates the foolishness of idolatry, and his reasoning, which culminates in the quoted passage, points to the depth of the human soul as the ultimate authority. Levinas repeatedly raises the subject of pagan gods who have no face, and he would fully agree with Tertullian's criticism of idolatry.

The above mentioned similarities, however, must not obscure the fundamental difference. God referred to by Levinas does not dwell in the human soul, thus he cannot speak from its depth. God speaks exclusively through the face of another

²⁷ Tertullian's *Defence of the Christians Against the Heathen*, trans. by A. Souter, Chapter XLII, http://www.tertullian.org/articles/mayor_apologeticum/mayor_apologeticum_07translation.htm#59 (access 2.11.2020).

human being. Levinas often refers to God speaking in that way, here, however, we only raise the issue in the context of our study of Levinas's perception of atheism. The following juxtaposition will take us further.

Levinas and Rahner

In this subchapter, we juxtapose Levinas's text with a well-known passage from the beginning of *Foundation of Christian Faith* by Karl Rahner. Let us recall that Levinas and Rahner are contemporaries, and, as young people, they both listened to Heidegger.²⁸ Rahner openly admitted Heidegger's significant influence, while Levinas, even though he recognized his impact, polemicalized with him even more openly, also in the essay discussed here.

Levinas writes:

It was to escape the arbitrariness of freedom, its disappearance into the Neuter, that we have approached the I as atheist and created – free, but capable of tracing back beneath its condition – before the Other, who does not deliver himself in the “themmatization” or “conceptualization” of the Other. To wish to escape dissolution into the Neuter, to posit knowing as a welcoming of the Other, is not a pious attempt to maintain the spiritualism of a personal God, but is the condition for language, without which philosophical discourse itself is but an abortive act, a pretext for an unintermitting psychoanalysis or philology or sociology, in which the appearance of a discourse vanishes in the Whole. Speaking implies a possibility of breaking off and beginning.

To posit knowing as the very existing of the creature, as the tracing back beyond the condition to the other that founds, is to separate oneself from a whole philosophical tradition that sought the foundation of the self in the self, outside of heteronomous opinions.²⁹

The following text is Rahner's:

We shall call *transcendental experience* the subjective, unthematic, necessary and unfailing consciousness of the knowing subject that is co-present in every spiritual act of knowledge, and the subject's openness to the unlimited expanse of all possible reality.

²⁸ Levinas was born in 1906, Rahner in 1904. Levinas studied in Freiburg under Heidegger in 1927–1928, while Rahner much later – 1934–1936.

²⁹ TI, pp. 90–91.

[...]

We shall be concerned later with showing that there is present in this transcendental experience an unthematic and anonymous, as it were, knowledge of God. Hence the original knowledge of God is not the kind of knowledge in which one grasps an object which happens to present itself directly or indirectly from outside. It has rather the character of a transcendental experience.³⁰

Both passages emphasise unthematicity as a fundamental characteristic of our “knowledge of God”. It is a significant concept, indispensable for any relevant theology cultivated today. Regarding our knowledge of God as unthematic by its nature sets it free from the scientific paradigm and guards it against the temptations of modern fundamentalism.

At the same time, the unthematicity of the knowledge of God precludes agnosticism, or, in other words, exposes the fundamental error in the assumptions of modern agnosticism. Having read the above quoted texts, one may define agnosticism as a desire to know God that is thematic, similar to acquiring the knowledge of mathematics, physics, or other lands. Rahner’s theology and Levinas’s philosophy explicitly demonstrate that the desire for such knowledge of God must remain unsatisfied as it is essentially incompatible with the only possibility to know God: the unthematic knowledge through the Other (Levinas) or a transcendental experience (Rahner). If one claimed, however, that he or she had found God taking agnosticism as a starting point and using the reason to search, it would be very likely that he or she never managed to reach the other dimension, that of unthematicity, but considered an aspect of the created reality around us to be God, and thus committed idolatry.

Apart from the common motif of the unthematic knowledge of God, the two texts are fundamentally different.

Rahner continues the tradition of transcendental philosophy and carries over its achievements as an intellectual foundation of his theology. Hence God is present beforehand, before we acquire any knowledge, he is present in a transcendental experience, therefore it can be stated that he dwells in the very depth of our hearts, minds, “selves”. It is a continuation of not only transcendental philosophy, but also the great tradition of Christian theology which perceives God as one that dwells in the heart of our hearts. Let us quote Augustine again and his declaration: “What, then, do you desire to know? I desire to know God and the soul. And nothing more? Nothing whatever.”³¹ God dwells in the depth of our souls even before we get to know him, and by entering that depth, we acquire the knowledge of God.

³⁰ K. Rahner, *Foundations of Christian Faith: An Introduction to the Idea of Christianity*, trans. by W.W. Dych, Crossroad, 1982, pp. 20–21.

³¹ Augustine, *The Soliloquies*, trans. by R.E. Cleveland, Little, Brown, and Company, Boston 1910; I, II, 7, <https://oll.libertyfund.org/titles/augustine-the-soliloquies> (access 2.11.2020).

The point of departure of Rahner's theology, as briefly presented above, provides a foundation for his concept of anonymous Christianity. It is not a concept that is marginal to his theological deliberations: it permeates his whole theology as it stems from the fundamental assumption concerning the way of knowing God and his presence in the heart of man.

Levinas intentionally breaks with that tradition. For him, God comes exclusively from outside, through an experience that is primordial and irreducible, insusceptible to any kind of synthesis, subordination or generalisation: the face of another human being, the Other. The soul is originally atheist. God does not dwell in the human soul, therefore it is at home with itself. It is a separated being.

As a result, the primordially of a mystical experience can be contested. Levinas does not dwell on the subject in TI, however, such an implication seems to be obvious. Even if we do not exclude the possibility of such an experience, in Levinas's thought it will never be classified as primordial. Levinas, as can be inferred from his thought and is sometimes explicitly articulated, does not accept the existence of an inner voice that would have the form of speech and the status of God's voice. Speech means solely a discourse, and it only happens between me and the Other who is facing me.³²

Theological perspective

Turning to theological conclusions, one has to bear in mind that Levinas wrote a philosophical essay. If he mentions God, creation, or faith, he speaks as a philosopher. For those subjects especially, philosophical concepts are only prolegomena of theology. While pursuing theology, one does not have to accept or reject philosophical theses in their entirety, or subject them to the criteria applied for theological concepts. Yet, philosophy can provide an inspiration when regarded as an introduction, preparation for cultivating theology. Levinas's texts can also be interpreted in this way: as an inspiration for theological reflection on the ways in which God is present in human beings.

At the same time, Levinas's text is a meditation, reflection of spiritual nature; it is a record of a profound inner experience. It is also an attempt to understand the relation between God and man from the perspective of a Jew who survived the Holocaust.³³ Therefore, the text seems particularly interesting for fundamental and

³² Thus, also Augustine's *Soliloquies* – his conversations with himself – do not seem to be a concept of great value when viewed from this perspective. However, after having seen the vast differences between Levinas and Augustine, one should not be surprised.

³³ During WWII, Levinas, as a French officer, was a prisoner of war, his wife, a Jew, was hiding in France, while his brothers and parents were killed by the Nazis in Lithuania.

spiritual theology. The former might take interest in the basic structure of Levinas's thought: his philosophy explicitly polemicalises with that of Hegel, Heidegger, and all the trends of modern philosophy where the fullness of humanity is seen in total autonomy, while any heteronomy is considered as limitation, which is the case of the majority of existentialist movements.

Levinas is also one of the very few renown 20th century non-Christian philosophers openly writing about the Creator God. What is significant, he justifies his conviction of the existence of God referring to Descartes, the father modern philosophy. Levinas carries out a very thorough analysis of Descartes's *Meditations*, and there he finds a way which was abandoned by virtually all Descartes's followers. The analysis itself merits a separate study, however, it may be interesting to quote Levinas's comment on the adoration of God concluding Descartes's third meditation in which he attempts to prove the existence of God. Levinas writes:

The last paragraph of the Third Meditation brings us to a relation with infinity in thought which overflows thought and becomes a personal relation. Contemplation turns into admiration, adoration, and joy. It is a question no longer of an "infinite object" still known and thematized, but of a majesty: "...placet hic aliquamdiu in ipsius Dei contemplatione immorari, eius attributa apud me expendere et immensi huius luminis pulchritudinem quantum caligantis ingenii mei acies ferre poterit, intueri, admirari, adorare. Ut enim in hac sola divinae majestatis contemplatione summan alterius vitae felicitatem consistere fide credimus, ita etiam jam ex eadem licet multo minus perfecta, maximum cujus in hac vita capaces simus voluptatem percipi posse experimur...". To us this paragraph appears to be not a stylistic ornament or a prudent homage to religion, but the expression of this transformation of the idea of infinity conveyed by knowledge into Majesty approached as a face.³⁴

The central theme of this article, on the other hand, could prove interesting to spiritual theology. After all, the question about the way in which God dwells in the human soul belongs to its most significant issues. Because of the very nature of that

³⁴ TI, pp. 215–216. For the English translation of Decartes: 1911 edition of *The Philosophical Works of Descartes* (Cambridge University Press), trans. by E.S. Haldane. "But before I examine this matter with more care, and pass on to the consideration of other truths which may be derived from it, it seems to me right to pause for a while in order to contemplate God Himself, to ponder at leisure His marvellous attributes, to consider, and admire, and adore, the beauty of this light so resplendent, at least as far as the strength of my mind, which is in some measure dazzled by the sight, will allow me to do so. For just as faith teaches us that the supreme felicity of the other life consists only in this contemplation of the Divine Majesty, so we continue to learn by experience that a similar meditation, though incomparably less perfect, causes us to enjoy the greatest satisfaction of which we are capable in this life".

branch of theology, it is very rare that questions, especially the one above, receive explicit answers, precluding opinions that seem contradictory at first sight. Therefore, having identified a radical difference between Levinas and Augustine, one is not obliged to take sides with one of them and rule out the arguments of the other.³⁵

Besides, the analysis of atheism as the original state of the soul, or the created human being, might be inspiring for other disciplines of Catholic theology, wherever the theme of atheism emerges. It allows a new perception of the widespread atheism which seems to be dominating in most European societies today. The perspective opened by Levinas shows that all the studies aimed at the sociological, cultural, psychological, or philosophical determinants of atheism may not be particularly significant for theological reflection. The present state of modern European societies may simply be regarded as the actualisation of one of the possibilities resulting from the fact that man was created by God as a separated free being. Thus, the prevailing situation need not be considered in terms a failure, a fall. A reflection on the source and motives of modern atheism remains interesting, but it may not necessarily be of key importance for the understanding of our faith.

Levinas's analyses of speech as the only way to overcome separation, the theme directly linked to his description of atheism, may provide an impetus for a renewal of the Christian perception of the mission, the obligation to proclaim faith, to spread the Good News about the God of Jesus Christ. Since God only comes through the Other, the call for the proclamation of God seems not to be a mere implication of faith, but its very essence, a requirement that is fundamental for our life of faith. For our faith exists and comes to life in proclaiming God and welcoming the Other. Discourse is a privileged place for the revelation of God.

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³⁵ To some extent, the above quoted article by M. Jędraszewski, "*Interior intimo meo*": św. Augustyn i Emmanuel Lévinas o Bogu i o człowieku, represents a search for a thread binding the two viewpoints. Yet, spiritual theology should avoid too quick syntheses. Theologians should rather act according to the words of Jacob: "I will move along slowly" (Genesis 33:14)

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Emmanuela Lévinasa pochwała ateizmu

Streszczenie

Lévinas przedstawia ateizm jako pierwotny, dobry stan duszy, przed przyjęciem lub odrzuceniem Boga. Taki opis ściśle związany jest z pojęciem separacji. Człowiek jest bytem stworzonym, ale odseparowanym, a więc samodzielny, choć nie absolutny. Pomimo że nie jest *causa sui*, może istnieć osobno. Taki opis jest radykalnie różny od opisu Augustyna, który pisze o stworzeniu jako uczestnictwie człowieka w Bogu. Podobnie, niemal literalna sprzeczność jest widoczna między twierdzeniem Lévinasa a słowami Tertuliana o duszy z natury chrześcijańskiej. Ważne różnice pokazuje też zestawienie tekstu Lévinasa z teologią K. Rahnera. Rahner przedstawia poznanie Boga jako doświadczenie transcendentalne, atematyczne. Lévinas również pisze, że poznanie Boga jest atematyczne, ale nie podziela Rahnerowego opisu doświadczenia Boga jako pierwotnego doświadczenia transcendentalnego. Według Lévinasa Bóg przychodzi z zewnątrz, przez twarz Innego. Analizy Levinasa są interesujące przede wszystkim dla teologii fundamentalnej i duchowości.

Słowa kluczowe: Lévinas, ateizm, Augustyn, Rahner, Tertulian

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Poetic landscapes of Wilhelm Przeczek

Summary

Wilhelm Przeczek is a Polish writer who has lived in Karviná, the Czech Republic, since he was born in 1936. He is a member of a Polish minority and he has aimed his literary output at its members and at readers in Poland. Translations into the Czech language are aimed at readers in the Czech Republic. Having made a protest against the intervention of the Warsaw Pact armies into Czechoslovakia in August 1968, W. Przeczek was not allowed to publish and he was dismissed – he had worked as an editor of a Polish paper “Głos Ludu”. In 1970–1977 he worked as an actor, stage director, and dramatic advisor of a puppet show theatre Bajka in Český Těšín, the Czech Republic.

In his article, the author deals with poems by W. Przeczek’s on the subject of journeys about Europe. The starting point is local, but a global result.

Keywords: poetry, Wilhelm Przeczek, traveling, house, home, identity, borderland, Polish literature, Polish national minority, Czech Cieszyn Silesia

Poet, novelist, translator Wilhelm Przeczek, born on April 7, 1936 in Karviná, grew up in a coal miner’s family. Father, brothers and brothers-in-law worked in the mines. He spent his childhood and youth in old Karviná. In 1956 he graduated from the Pedagogical Grammar School in Orlová, then he worked as a teacher at a Polish primary school in Horní Suchá. After completing basic military service in

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Prešov and České Budějovice, he was employed in the years 1958–1964 as a teacher at Polish schools in Czechoslovakia, and in 1964 he took up the position of an inspector for culture in Frýdek-Místek district. From 1966 to 1968 he studied at the University of Politics in Prague, from 1968 to 1969 he worked as an editor of *Głos Ludu* in Ostrava. However, he was dismissed for protesting against the entry of Warsaw Pact troops into Czechoslovakia. In the years 1970–1977 he was employed as an actor, director and literary manager of “Bajka” puppet theatre in Český Těšín and in the years 1978–1983 he held the position of an instructor for culture of the main committee of the Polish Cultural Enlightenment Association in Český Těšín. Unfortunately, after joining Solidarity in Poland, he was dismissed. In 1984 he was allowed to return to the field of education and in the years 1984–1992 he taught at the Polish primary school in Jablunkov. Since he had a stroke, he was entitled to invalidity allowances.

In the years 1969–1989, Wilhelm Przeczek found himself on the index in Czechoslovakia and his work was published mainly in Poland. Today he belongs to the most important Polish authors living in the Czech Republic. He has won many literary prizes and awards for poetry and journalism: among other things, he won the first eight prizes in national poetry competitions in Poland (Warsaw Poetry Autumn, Golden Torch, Mimosa Laurel, Polish Olympic Committee Prize, Witold Hulewicz Prize for Poetry written outside Poland, Opole Prince Governor Prize, Quail Prize awarded by the Czech Literary Fund, etc.). He received the departmental medal of the Ministry of Culture and Arts of the Republic of Poland “For his Merit in Polish Culture”.

The poetry of Wilhelm Przeczek has been translated into Czech by Erich Sojka, Vlasta Dvořáčková, Lucyna Waszková, Jindřich Zogata, Lech Przeczek, Ludvík Štěpán, Karel Vůjtek, Eva Sobková, Otakar Bartoš, Věnceslav Juřina, Libor Martinek, František Všeticka, and the prose by Helena Stachová, Erich Sojka. Przeczek’s verses were translated to Slovak language by Vlastimil Kovalčík and Eudovít Kiss.

Wilhelm Przeczek published his verses, prose and reflections in the Polish magazines “*Twórczość*”, “*Poezja*”, “*Regiony*”, “*Życie Literackie*”, “*Poglądy*”, “*Miesięcznik Literacki*”, “*Tygodnik Kulturalny*”, “*Arkusze*”, “*Opole*”, “*Śląsk*”, “*Słowo*”, “*Tak i Nie*”, “*Gość Niedzielny*” and others. In the Czech Republic he published in magazines “*Tvar*”, “*Literární noviny*” (both in Prague), “*Alternativa-Nova*” (Opava), “*Katolický týdeník*” (Prague), “*Proglas*” (Brno), “*Akord*” (Brno), “*Psí víno*” (Zlín), in Slovakia in magazines “*Javisko*” and “*Kultúrny týždenník*” (both in Bratislava), in Germany in magazines “*Plomjo*” (Budyšín), “*Słowo*” (Berlin), in USA in magazine “*Przegląd Polski*” (New York) and in England it was magazine “*Pamiętnik Literacki*” (London).

He has written more than thirty programmes and literary programmes for the Polish broadcast of Czech Radio in Ostrava, including a programme with transla-

tions of Jaroslav Seifert's poetry *Příběh s Nobelovcem* (*A Story with a Nobel Prize*, 1989) and Vilém Závada's *Živote, díky* (*Life, Thanks*, 1990).

Wilhelm Przewczek is an author of collections of poems *Czarna calizna* (*Black whole unit*, Katowice 1978), *Wpisane w Beskid* (*Inscribed in the Beskid Mountains*, Bielsko-Biała 1980), *Śmierć pomysłu poetyckiego* (*Death of a poetic idea*, Łódź 1981), *Szumne podszepty* (*Loud whispers*, Katowice 1982), *Nauka wierności* (*Learning to be faithful*, Katowice 1986), *Księga urodzaju* (*Book of harvest*, Krakow 1986), *Terzet* (*Trio*, Cieszyn 1986, bibliophily), *Przeczcucie kształtu* (*The shape of premonition*, Ostrava 1989), *Mapa białych plam* (*Map of white spots*, Český Těšín 1995), *Małe nocne modlitwy / Wpisane w Beskid* (*Little night prayers/Inscribed in the Beskid Mountains*, Cieszyn 1996). His work includes following anthologies: *Notatnik liryczny 1985–1990* (*Lyrical notebook*, Warsaw 1990, edited by M. Stępkowska), *Promlčeny počet štěstí* (Karviná 1991, edited by I. Šajner), *Dym za paznokciami* (*Smoke behind the nails*, Opole 1992, edited by H. Duda), *Na ubitej ziemi* (*On solid ground*, Jablunkov 1993, edited by J. Pyszko), *Příliš pozdní milenec* (*Too late lover*, Praha 1996, edited by J. Šofar), *Krajina v kouři* (*Landscape in smoke*, Ostrava 1996, edited by L. Čada, bibliophily).

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A collection of poems *Intimní bedekr* (*Intimate Baedeker*) inspired by the author's various trips around Europe is an anthology of Przewczek's existing work, however it is very specific anthology. The author's intention was to include there mainly verses inspired by his travels in Europe. This created a distinctive poetic travelogue, essentially resigning to the factuality and documentary value of the description of the journey to foreign countries and lands or to various places in the author's homeland in favour of pure or partial literary fiction. (Wilhelm Przewczko's term "homeland" is burdened with a meaning because it points to a member of a national minority, born and permanently living in a country that is the "homeland" of another ethnic group; the poet solved this question for himself with a verse from the poem *Zlatá koruna* (*Golden Crown*): "The golden circulates in my heart / The crown circulates in the homeland of my body /.../ There is only one homeland of mine: THE GOLDEN CROWN /.../"). Przewczek's poetry undoubtedly has an immediate, self-representative character, expressing a certain mood or reporting a unique experience and evoking either more or less important memory. Hence the intention to name the collection of verses from travels as *Intimní bedekr* (*Intimate Baedeker*). The word "intimate" points to the originally confidential, private fixation of the poet's experience and memories, later made available to the reader, and the word "bedekr" (Baedeker = book travel guide published by a German publishing family company that started by Dietrich Baedeker, + 1716, currently in Stuttgart, Germany) which has the function of an etiquette assigned to thematical-

ly distinctive poetic texts. These texts represent an unusual guide in the footsteps of the author's pilgrimages in the reader's mind. And in this context, we cannot forget other poetic travelogues of Czech, Polish or world writers: the Czech revival poet Josef Krasoslav Chmelenský (1800–1839) sent his friend František Ladislav Čelakovský 31 epigrams relating to various cities and places where he stayed or came into contact with, and which he included into the cycle *Kvítí polní z Moravy a ze Slezska* (*Field flowers from Moravia and Silesia*, Denice 1840). Of the Polish national literature, let us mention at least the collection of Wincenty Pol (1807–1872) *Pieśń o ziemi naszej* (*A song about our land*), written in 1835 and published in 1843 as “romantic depiction from travels, a description of different Polish regions” and *Obrazy z życia i podróży* (*Pictures of life and travel*), a book written in 1834–1846 and published in 1846, which includes reflections from travels in the Tatras or the collection of Bogusz Zygmunt Stęczyński (1814–1890) *Śląsk, podróż malownicza w 21 pieśniach* (*Silesia, a picturesque journey in 21 songs*, Wrocław 1949). We could certainly find more similar examples, because poems inspired by travel are not unique. The essence of Przeczek's Poetry Anthology is that travelling through space and time becomes the dominant and unifying principle of the compositional construction of the entire book.

The verses included in the *Intimní bedekr* (*Intimate Baedeker*) anthology come from Przeczek's older and more recent poetry collections. The editor of the anthology (i.e. the author writing these lines) respected the chronology of their publication. This fact allows us to look in more detail at the development of the author's work.

As a poet, Wilhelm Przeczek made his debut in the generational almanac *Pierwszy lot* (*First Flight*, 1959), whose contributors rebelled against the narrowly defined understanding of regional poetry in the Cieszyn Silesia region. Przeczek's book debut took place in the collection of poetic prose *Skrzyżowanie* (*Crossroads*, 1969), and due to the ban on publishing, he waited for his poetic debut until 1978, when he published *Czarna calizna* (*Black whole unit*) collection in Katowice. As a poet, Przeczek was initially influenced by the example of another Polish poet from the Czech Cieszyn Silesia region – Paweł Kubisz (May 12, 1907–August 19, 1968), but soon finds his own poetics close to the Krakow avant-garde imbued with mysticism and faith in the content of the word (e.g. Czesław Miłosz).

Przeczek's latest anthology of verses in the Czech language begins with the first collection of his existing bibliography *Czarna calizna* (*Black whole unit*). The title of the book was previously translated into Czech as “Černý celek” (Black whole unit), for example in some literature dictionary. However, this translation does not accurately capture the content of Przeczek's collection, as it is dedicated to Karviná (especially its older look, as the author recalled it from the “layers” of his memory) and to people living in the city and working in Karviná mines. The layers of coal (coal seams) mined in them were formed, as it is known, by charring of accumulat-

ed decayed plant residues in the absence of air, by the action of compressive forces of overlying layers of sedimentary rocks and higher temperatures in the deeper parts of the earth's crust. This follows the logic that the Czech equivalent of "vrstva" ("layer" in English) would have been more appropriate than the word "celek" ("whole unit" in English) to convey particular significance of the Polish lexeme "calizna". That is to say, coal stands for the "black layer" of the Earth's crust as well as memories in the poet's individual memory.

In one of his interviews, Wilhelm Przeczek states that coal miners belong to his frequent readers. Mining themes in his poetry form a significant, although not the dominant part of the thematic sphere. He could see a parallel between his creative effort to dig for an idea from the reserves of his memory and an elevator taking the miners into the depths of a mine to dig for the coal. The poet's memory is here the memory of the human collective, while the memory and its fixation represent an echo of the crisis of values in post-industrial society. Przeczek's seemingly realistic description of reality leads to primarily existential situations; a typical example here will be the poem *Svatý u cesty* (*Saint by the road*), dedicated to the victims of a mining accident in 1990. The depiction of Karviná in Przeczek's first collection acquires mythological validity and mythical power.

The following book, *Wpisane w Beskid* (*Inscribed in the Beskid Mountains*), contrasts with the previous collection, and introduces mountain nature together with the events that take place in it. In this context, we recall Novalis's statement that the poet understands nature better than scientific reason. However, one who would expect descriptive and sensitive landscape picturing would be wrong. Wilhelm Przeczek follows in the footsteps of experimental and linguistic poetry, which also places considerable demands on translators. However, the language experiment itself does not in itself guarantee the aesthetic quality of the work. Undoubtedly, the author managed to find an appropriate framework for his message – that is his artistic language style and mastered verse form (which refers to the construction of a literary work). A new phenomenon here is also a more pronounced individualization of the lyrical subject, which in the previous collection was rather part of the defined collective, and similarly the poet's "self" was more closely connected with family and genealogical ties. In the poem about river Olza *Klíč od Olše* (*The key to Olza*), the archetypal symbolism of the key has an extremely important ontological validity. It refers to the author's orientation in the region, which is a natural part of the universe,

The third collection, *Śmierć pomysłu poetyckiego* (*Death of a Poetic Idea*), presents Wilhelm Przeczek in a markedly private and sometimes even intimate situation. The atmosphere of distress is evoked by autobiographical scenery from the hospital environment. It brings back the memory of the dearest person – the mother. In addition, pure lyrics without significant epic overlaps are underlined by linguistic experiments and contrasting phrases. There is a significant anthropomor-

phization of things (cross in the poem *Jízda v autě s křížem – Riding in a car with a cross*), which subsequently leads to the dynamization of the poetic image.

In other collections represented in the anthology, the perceptive reader will also discover other layers of Przewczek's poetic style, but the most importantly we find in them an author faithful to himself and his poetic diction. For example, the collection *Nauka wierności (Teaching of Loyalty)* highlights the motive of faith both in the poem *Celetná ulice (Celetná Street)* and in one of the strongest poems in this section – *Korunní svědek (The Approver)*, which can be described as Przewczek's artistic confession anchored in the metaphysical span. In the poem *Laterna magika (Magic Lantern)*, the lyrical subject is simultaneously on the outside of the lyrical "self": „In the monastery wine bar / I was coming to myself / for a long time / And it seemed to me that I went out / to immerse my head and imagination / into the insides of the city /.../ .“¹ In the poem *Vinohrady (Vineyards)*, the lyrical hero is even divided into two characters, one from the past and the other from the present, while the internal subject of the lyrical speaker deliberately lets them walk together (“We walk along the banks/these are the laces of our memories / my former self / my other self / two enchanted pilgrims.”)² Wilhelm Przewczek demonstrates his extraordinary formal skill in building a literary work.

Wilhelm Przewczek follows the Bible with the mythical title of the collection *Księga urodzaju (Book of the Harvest)*. This time, the author embarks on paths known from childhood, on trips around his immediate surroundings, the region, which are no less dramatic, insidious or painful. The time for reckoning is coming even for the mature poet and the awareness of “what happened cannot be undone” is not a sign of resignation, announcing the end of one human destiny, but rather an impulse to work further on the word at a clear table (“Our guilt is unforgettable “X” You dig into the meaning of the word / through defiant layers / Every other site / warms up “X” I erase tracks on my own / trails.”)³ A striking view is made by the point of the poem *Kámen u cesty (Stone by the road)*: “Our actions diminish space / fertility”.

Wilhelm Przewczek seemed to attribute retroactive effect to the biblical verse “there was a word in the beginning”, which humanity exchanged for the Faustian motto “in the beginning there was an act”, because man of the (post) industrial era is probably no longer able to reflect back on his actions, which resulted in putting a man himself/herself at a risk as a unique species, but also putting at risk the life (harvest) of the entire planet, the Earth. The author makes the feeling of existential

1 “V klášterní vinárně / jsem se dlouho dostával / k sobě / A zdálo se mi že jsem vyšel/ ponořit hlavu a představivost / do vnitřností města /.../”.

2 “Chodíme po březích/ jako po tkaničce vzpomínek / Já tehdejší / Já tamten / dva očarování poutníci”.

3 “Naše viny jsou nesmytelné” X “Dokopáváš se významu slova / přes vzdorující vrstvy / Každé další naleziště / hřeje” X “Zamazávám stopy na vlastních / stezkách”.

crisis once again fully heard in the parable contained in the poem *Pouliční ruch* (*Street rush*).

It is no coincidence that the selection from the collection *Przewzucie kształtu* (*The shape of Premonition*) starts with the poem *Budyšin* (*Bautzen*), in which the poet comes up with very unique view of the world. The lyrical hero is here at the congress of the Lusatian Serbs, an ethnic group whose existence in the middle of the “German Sea” makes it increasingly difficult to defend its national and cultural identity.

The topic is undoubtedly close to the feeling of the Polish poet Przewzek as a real psychophysical personality. However, a closer look reveals fundamental differences. Above all, the modern Polish poet from the Czech Cieszyn region does not hesitate to use subtle ironies to portray the Lusatian-Serbian intellectual society, which indicates his clear distance from the described lyrical situation. It refers to the differences between the minority Polish writers and Lusatian-Serbian writers before 1989. Given the minority position of the Polish intellectual in the Cieszyn region, we could predict a different kind of trope than the irony in the author’s relationship to his minority colleagues. This fact can be explained from a broader context. Apart from the political context, where a citizen of a communist state lived in a society that was centrally managed and controlled, where local cultural initiatives were not heard, what was considered a positive and progressive process it was the loss of identity of nations and nationalities together with the specific cultural needs of different ethnic groups. All this concerns the question of the relationship of the local in relation to the global.⁴

The Lusatian-Serbian intellectual resides in a framework that we could define as an enclave with self-preserving, defensive elements in which he transcends his loneliness although without the possibility of linking to some centre or some higher systemic level. The given enclave ipso facto becomes a kind of an “open-air museum”, a museum or panoptical structure, which is preserved or gradually disappears (without the possibility of some “overlap”, i.e. “nutrition”, energy supply, cultural impulses from the centre), while the Polish writer from the Czech Cieszyn region is located in an enclave which can be left from time to time, to become part of a more complex system. (Let us add that this could have been done for ideological and political reasons only after the so-called Velvet Revolution in November 1989, when publishing bans from the late 1960s were cancelled, but unfortunately, they already affected one generation of Polish writers in the Těšín region.) The advantages of this type of enclave are obvious, as it is possible to establish a multilateral type of relations with the immediate environment (Wilhelm Przewzek is a member of the Moravian-Silesian Writers’ Association and

4 Here we rely on the thesis of the Slovak literary scholar Peter Zajac: *Región ako problém lokálneho a globálneho*, [in:] *Región v národnej kultúre*, Dolný Kubín–Nitra 1988, pp. 106–107. [*The region as a problem of the local and the global*, [in:] *Region in National Culture*]

even a councillor the Ostrava Centre of the Moravian Silesian Writers' Association), with the environment in which you grow up and live (the writer is also a member of the main committee of the Upper Silesian Literary Association in Katowice, a member of the Polish Writers' Association in Opole) and with higher system levels (for example with magazines published in England, Germany and the USA). Although the work of Polish writers in the Czech Cieszyn region originates on the fringes of Polish and Czech literary life, outside big cultural centres, it proves that even on the periphery, distinctive artistic values can arise. This has been confirmed by their best performances. The Cieszyn region is therefore able to radiate energy that goes back into cultural centres (on the Polish side it will be more Katowice and Opole than Krakow, on the Czech side undoubtedly both Ostrava and Opava).

However, let us return from the non-aesthetic issue to the purely aesthetic issue. In the mentioned poem *Budyšin (Bautzen)* we also find elements typical for Przewzek's poetic style, lapidary and economical in its expression, rich in content. Those stylistic elements undoubtedly include a focus on the concrete, a kind irony mixed with a perception of the tragedy of the world, endless sadness and vocal instrumentation of the text reflected, among other things, in the use of euphony. This is also clearly present in the poem *Zbraslav*. The realistic description of Przewzek results in existential positions, which are sometimes replaced by efforts to cope with metaphysical problems. This can be illustrated with an example of the poem *Hlavní nádraží (Central station)*, which also reveals the bitterness of local misunderstandings. The use of proverbs and sayings, which the author adapts to the needs of the verse, becomes characteristic, as in the poem *V parku Julia Fučíka (In the park of Julius Fučík)*.

The most poems on the topic of travelling have been included into the anthology *Notatnik liryczny (Lyrical Notebook)*. We can find there many verses related to the Western European as well as the Eastern European cultural tradition. There is again noticeable continuation of proverbs and sayings that serve the poet to disrupt conventionalized symbols and to give their content a new meaning. Archetypal motives of natural elements are increasing, especially the element of water, which is manifested there in virtual contexts (spa towns are frequent locations). Motives from the field of astrology are also very frequent, we can find the semantics of magical numbers (especially numbers three and seven). The accompanying feeling of many of these verses is the feeling of loneliness, nostalgic memories, desire to return home, to places familiar to us. (Specifically: "At the end there is always a dot / specifically: house / at the top of the hill / It no longer exists / that's why you choose so stubbornly memory /.../")⁵ Wilhelm Przewzek often balances on the border between concreteness and metaphor. And it must be said that Przewzek's metaphor, despite its avant-garde hallmark, is very close in its verticality to the romantic metaphor. This will most likely

⁵ Konkrétno: "Na konci je vždy tečka / konkrétno: dům / na vršku kopce / Dávno už neexistuje / proto ho tak tvrdohlavě vybíráš / z paměti /.../".

be a valuable legacy of Polish poetry, verses of romantic Polish poets – classics, from which the poetry of our northern neighbours is fed as if it were their living source even up to these days. Let us add that only a few of our Czech contemporary poets are able to cope in a similar way with the legacy of our romanticism, especially with Karel Hynek Mácha's legacy, precisely with his metaphor (also built vertically as if in extension from the Baroque period, from Fridrich Bridel's metaphor). Most of our writers live more intensively in a *fin de siècle* atmosphere, as many contemporary literary critics believe, and experience a variant of Biedermeier (where the metaphor has a more horizontal framework). Let's look for exceptions among poets such as Zdeněk Rotrekl, Ivan Slavík and Bohumil Pavlok, i.e. the authors of Christian orientation. After all, Baroque, or more precisely some of its characteristic elements and features, is thematized in Przewczek's poems in several places, naturally with distance or a pinch of humour. And perhaps we would also be able to think about the places of the Rococo playfulness in connection with some of Przewczek's verses. The sensitive reader must necessarily be captivated by Przewczek's immense imagination; his "spell of words". It is fascinating to watch the poet's conscious struggle to build an artificial barrier to the expansion of his imagination which needs to be tamed by him and obviously takes lots of his effort and energy. The poet emphasizes the magical power of the word as if in harmony with the Gospel of St. John – "In the beginning was the word...".

In Przewczek's extensive anthology *Dym za paznokciami* (*Smoke behind the nails*), prepared for publication by the prominent Polish poet Harry Duda, the author dedicated *Seven main poems* to the Lusatian Serbs. Wilhelm Przewczek proves to be a bright and sensitive observer-regionalist, if we understand regionalism positively as a certain state of social consciousness that dominates the society of the region's inhabitants and its creative circles (and which is also linked to economic, cultural and political activities of stated population). Michał Głowiński also defined regionalism as a literary and linguistic term. According to him, regionalism is "a set of directions about a diverse literary and ideological program, which is characterized by a tendency to associate literary works with the peculiarities of regions, their customs, culture, language and ideas of the national culture."⁶ It is also viewed as a "phonetic, lexical or syntactic element, appearing only in a part of the given linguistic area (e.g. in one part of the region), and is used in a statement which also implements the norms of literary language". These elements include lexemes from Lusatian Serbian used by Przewczek as "wutrobne" (= honest) and "božemje" (= goodbye).

Przewczek's new step in the development of his own poetics is represented by the avant-garde typography of poetic texts using computer typesetting in the anthology

⁶ M. Głowiński et al., *Słownik terminów literackich*, edited by J. Sławiński, Ossolineum, Wrocław 1998, p. 367.

Mapa białych plam (*Map of White Spots*) and the more intense expressiveness of the poetic image (under the influence of Georg Trakl) as it is indicated in the poem *Předpis na přípravu mozku* (*Prescription for brain preparation*). The author returns to some earlier typical motives to re-evaluate them and illuminate them again through the lens of a mature verbal artist. The need to balance life pilgrimage and one's own destiny, which leads to the hope for a better future, is more pronounced now than ever before. (The final three verses of the poem *Zvětšená prosba* (*Enlarged request*) contain a humanistic gesture with a call reminiscent of Schiller's *Ode to Joy*: "And if I hear your voice in my singing / I will be calm at the beginning / of a new journey").

Wilhelm Przewczek, in his latest collection *Małe nocne modlitwy* (*Little Night Prayers*), focuses more on the genre of prayer and litany. He uses established verse schemes but gives them innovative and unusual content. The shape qualities of the verses in the collection, such as their rhythm, are obvious. Some of the ideas and ideas contained in the poems, for which we have no support in our own empirical experience, allow the perceiver to transcend the thresholds that normally shape the image of the world in his/her consciousness and lead the reader to a transcendent receptive experience. The anthology *Intimní bedekr* (*Intimate Baedeker*), as a kind of poetic travelogue, is finally coming to an end in the noetic sense.

Wilhelm Przewczek was never a so-called "Cieszyn bard" and probably never even wanted to be one. The figure of Petr Bezruč is a matter of a completely different era, and the logic of his poetic performance was related to the completion of the Czech National Revival. Moreover, it would be difficult to find a Polish parallel to him. The artistic work and social activities of Gustav Morcinek or Adolf Fierla were carried in the spirit of different goals than those set by Petr Bezruč, the author of *Slezské písně* (*Silesian Songs*).

Wilhelm Przewczek is a modern Polish poet who is also alien to the aspirations of regional authors closely connected with their environment and the readership they serve with their work. He is a sovereign verbal artist, to whom both Polish and especially Czech literary criticism still owes a lot.

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Poetyckie krajobrazy Wilhelma Przeczka

Streszczenie


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Słowa kluczowe: poezja, Wilhelm Przeczek, podróże, dom, tożsamość, pogranicze, literatura polska, polska mniejszość narodowa, czeski Cieszyn

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GŁOSY Z TEATRÓW /
VOICES FROM THEATERS

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Performing death: Marina Abramović's *7 Deaths of Maria Callas*

Summary

This essay analyses the opera project *7 Deaths of Maria Callas* by Marina Abramović, premiered in Munich in September, 2020. The first section reconstructs the role that the Greek soprano played in the life of the Serbian performer, bringing the latter to a gradual sense of self-identification. Then, the thirty-years-long development of the original concept of the video piece *How to Die* into the actual project through its various stages is taken into account, and the stage realisation of the work is described in detail. The third section focuses on the representation of death in Marina Abramović's performances, while section four compares Callas and Abramović's works and lives, and their status as iconic women. The last section retraces Abramović's artistic path which has led her from her extreme and essential performances of the 1970s to her recent experimentations with other media and to her meditation on immaterial art.

Keywords: performance, opera, Abramović, Callas, death, icons, presence

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Every morning the tragedy of being began anew,
 behind balconies first closed and then opened, as in a Church.
 Whether the divine wind blew without purpose
 or only for the sake of witnesses –
 Then the habits, those sisters of tragedy –
 The sea and its wind won all our most gushing praises –
 Your *esse est percipi* encountered tremendous obstacles
 it had to overcome, and every victory was minor,
 and you had to start over again at once
 like a plant that continually needs water.
 P.P. Pasolini, *Presence*¹

Callas: a presence in Abramović's life

Maria Callas died every night anew on the stage, interpreting the tragic destiny of opera heroines in an unusual and psychologically intense way – which was not common for the genre. Pier Paolo Pasolini, in a poem that was addressed to Callas, and is quoted above, tries to fix on paper her ephemeral “presence” and the paradox of her existence – torn between strength and fragility, fame and solitude. A presence that goes far beyond her artistic contribution to opera and which has become mythic. It is difficult to identify which qualities made Callas the “Bible” and the new “model” for opera – as Leonard Bernstein defined her:² the unmistakable timbre of her voice, or the impressive vocal range of about three octaves, which allowed her to explore a huge repertoire, or the “instrumental” sense of singing and the technical skills, or the expressiveness and acting competence...³ To be sure, however, other elements contributed to feeding the mythos of the Greek soprano – elements, such as her self-staging (also outside of the theatre), her worldliness, her troubled life and probably, most of all, the convergence of private and

1 P.P. Pasolini, *The Selected Poetry of Pier Paolo Pasolini. A bilingual Edition*, ed. and trans. by S. Sartarelli with a foreword by J. Ivory, University of Chicago Press, Chicago-London 2014, pp. 399–401.

2 *Maria Callas alla Scala. Mostra documentaria a vent'anni dalla scomparsa*, Teatro alla Scala, Milano 1997, p. 149.

3 For a rich collection of essays on different aspects of Callas' work and biography, see L. Aversano, J. Pellegrini (eds.), *Mille e una Callas. Voci e studi*, Quodlibet, Macerata 2016. For her dramatic incisiveness see also G. Guccini, *Maria Callas: attrice del Novecento*, “Acting Archives Review” 2019, vol. 9, no. 17, pp. 1–47. The most complete bibliography on Callas available online can be found at: <https://www.callas-club.de>. This and all following URLs last accessed 20.10.2020.

public life.⁴ So many years after her death in 1977, the “diva” Maria Callas still conquers new devotees and becomes, again and again, a figure with whom so many can identify, thanks to her complex personality.

Marina Abramović, the “diva” of performance art, has also held a fascination with Maria Callas since she first heard her voice at the age of fourteen, by chance, in her grandmother’s kitchen.⁵ “I had become obsessed with Callas, with whom I identified tremendously”, writes Abramović in her autobiography *Walk through Walls*.⁶ She continues, “Callas was my inspiration. [...] I felt such a powerful identification with her. Like me, she was a Sagittarius; like me, she had a terrible mother. We bore a physical similarity to each other. And though I had survived heart-break, she died from a broken heart.”⁷ This identification process lasted through the years, and the idea for a piece dedicated to Maria Callas (conceived in 1989) was subsequently developed, and has resulted in the opera project *7 Deaths of Maria Callas* – first performed in Munich in September, 2020.⁸

4 See E. Rieger, *Ecco un artista: Maria Callas*, [in:] M. Abramović, *7 Deaths of Maria Callas. Programm- buch zur Uraufführung*, Bayerische Staatsoper, München 2020, pp. 52–59.

5 *Ein Gespräch mit Marina Abramović*, [in:] M. Abramović, *7 Deaths of Maria Callas. Programm- buch*, p. 21.

6 M. Abramović (with J. Kaplan), *Walk Through Walls. A Memoir*, Penguin Books, London 2017, p. 204.

7 Ibidem, p. 356. For the physical resemblance, compare Callas’s portrait by Cecil Beaton (1957) and the picture of Abramović taken by René Habermacher as an homage to Callas (2011), ibidem, p. 357, and see *Ein Gespräch mit Marina Abramović*, p. 23. For the only, although, substantial difference between Maria and Marina in this mirroring-relationship – i.e. the fact that the first died “of love” and the second survived two separations, those from Ulay and those from Paolo Canevari – see also A. Heyward, *Die Verletzliche*, “Max Joseph. Das Magazin der Bayerischen Staatsoper” 2019/20, no. 3 (“Loslassen”), p. 31.

8 *7 Deaths of Maria Callas*. An opera project by Marina Abramović. A coproduction of the Bayerische Staatsoper, which staged the project for the world premiere on 1 September, 2020 at the Nationaltheater in Munich (with only 500 spectators due to the Coronavirus health and safety measures), and the Deutsche Oper Berlin, Maggio Musicale Fiorentino, the Greek National Opera and Opéra National de Paris, where it will tour in the coming months. Written by Marina Abramović and Petter Skavlan. Director and sets: Marina Abramović. Co-director: Lynsey Peisinger. Film director: Nabil Elderkin. Visual intermezzos: Marco Brambilla. Conductor: Yoel Gamzou. Music: Marko Nikodijević. Sound design: Luka Kozlovacki. Costumes: Riccardo Tisci. Stage design: Anna Schöttli. Lighting: Urs Schönebaum. Dramaturgy: Benedikt Stampfli. Film actress and performance: Marina Abramović. Film actor: Willem Dafoe. Carmen: Nadezhda Karyazina. Tosca: Selene Zanetti. Desdemona: Leah Hawkins. Lucia Ashton: Adela Zaharia. Norma: Lauren Fagan. Cio-Cio-San: Kiandra Howarth. Violetta Valéry: Hera Hyesang Park. Bayerisches Staatsorchester. The project was streamed on 5 September and broadcast on the network television channel, arte, through 7 October, 2020.

The opera project

Originally, the idea, born in 1989, was about creating a video piece entitled *How to Die*. This piece sought to present the juxtaposition of two representations of death – real deaths, on the one hand, filmed among the miners’ community in Serra Pelada (once an enormous open pit of a gold mine in Brazil whose infernal conditions have been photographed by Sebastião Salgado in the reportage *Gold*), and, on the other hand, aestheticized deaths in the form of scenes or recordings taken from operas interpreted by Maria Callas, where the heroines die of love.⁹ The contrast between real and fictive representation of death was intended to shed light on our reactions to death, in particular on our tendency to be emotionally moved by the artistic one in movies, theatre pieces and operas, and, on the contrary, to be annoyed by and to reject real scenes of death, such as those shown on the news in cases of cataclysms: “We don’t want to see the reality, but only something, that is played for us.”¹⁰ And again: “When we see death staged beautifully in opera or film, we cry and have emotions. But when we see real death, on television or internet, it’s horror, we can’t deal with it.”¹¹ Opera, with its tendency towards great tragedy, seemed, to Abramović, to be the best form of art for reflecting on death. Statistics say that at about every three minutes, one person on the earth dies. This revelation led the performance artist to think of creating 3-minute video sequences for each death and, then, combining the sequences with an opera aria.¹² As a result of this conception, Marina Abramović travelled to Serra Pelada, with the support of the French Minister of Culture, and made contact with the miners there. The project eventually had to be interrupted, however, due to financial constraints. Abramović had wanted to commission seven different fashion designers to create costumes for the opera segments that she, herself, would have directed, as well, but this aspect of the project turned out to be too expensive.

A further step towards the realisation of the project was made some years later, in 2013, in Oslo, Norway, where Marina Abramović met the screenwriter Petter Skavlan.¹³ At this time, the two agreed on the need to make the project simpler, while also agreeing to substitute the documentary footage of actual deaths with

⁹ See M. Abramović, *Walk Through Walls*, pp. 203–205 and J. Westcott, *When Marina Abramović dies. A Biography*, Massachusetts Institute of Technology, Cambridge 2010, pp. 223–224.

¹⁰ *Ein Gespräch mit Marina Abramović*, p. 22. My translation.

¹¹ From the interview in A. Heyward, *Die Verletzliche*, p. 28. I wish to thank the Bayerische Staatsoper, in particular, Ms. Sophia Lechner, for kindly making the original English version of this interview available to me. For the “spectacle of death” and the “uncanny ambiguity” that pervades tragic theatre, see also H.-T. Lehmann, *Tragedy and Dramatic Theatre*, trans. by E. Butler, Routledge, New York 2016, p. 29.

¹² See A. Heyward, *Die Verletzliche*, p. 28.

¹³ See M. Abramović, *Walk Through Walls*, pp. 356–357.

scripts fashioned from seven operas. Abramović, herself, was to act out the scripts while Callas' voice resonated. This iteration of the project would see a parallelism coming into being in which the man scripted as standing next to the heroine in the opera (who either stays with her or eventually kills her) would represent the shipping magnate Aristotle Onassis – a figure with whom Maria Callas had had an intense love affair, but who had left her in order to marry Jacqueline Kennedy. The male role, in the video installations, was to have been played by the actor Willem Dafoe. Dafoe and Abramović had already collaborated once on the theatre piece *The Life and Death of Marina Abramović*, by Robert Wilson (2011).¹⁴ Additionally, between the scripted scenes, the plots of the operas would be summarized and condensed to their essence in less than ten sentences. The fashion designer of Burberry, Riccardo Tisci, was slated to make the costumes, and seven different film directors were to direct the videos.

This second stage of the project's development was very close to the one that was finally realised at the Nationaltheater in Munich. In 2017, when Abramović was in Stockholm, Sweden, for her first major retrospective in Europe – *The Cleaner* at the Moderna Museet¹⁵ –, the general director of the Bayerische Staatsoper, Nikolaus Bachler, proposed a collaboration in which he would abandon the idea of letting her stage the opera *Bluebeard's Castle* by Béla Bartók, in favour of producing the Callas project.¹⁶ As a result, the last three years – from 2017 to 2020 – had been dedicated to preparing for the premiere which was to have taken place on 11 April, 2020. Unfortunately, owing to the Coronavirus pandemic, the long-awaited event had to be postponed. Recent rehearsals have been held using every precautionary measure available to prevent the spreading of the virus. Working in an almost empty opera house; focusing, unusually, on one single production at time – this precarious situation, and the monastery-like atmosphere it has produced has turned out to be ideal for the artists to be able to concentrate on the theme of death.¹⁷ At the age of 73, Abramović has succeeded in realising a project that had been pending in her agenda for 31 years and which will probably lead to further artistic “side-products”.¹⁸

¹⁴ Ibidem, pp. 334–338.

¹⁵ See L. Essling (ed.), *Marina Abramović – The Cleaner*, Hantje Cantz, Berlin 2018.

¹⁶ See *Offen gesprochen. An open conversation. Marina Abramović and Nikolaus Bachler*, available at <https://mediathek.staatsoper.de/playlist/7-deaths-of-maria-callas.html>

¹⁷ Ibidem.

¹⁸ See the preparatory sketches and drawings made in pencil, spit, blood and tears on paper, which can be seen as storyboards for *7 Deaths*, [in:] M. Abramović, *Drawings 1963–2017*, Henie Onstad, Høvikodden 2018, pp. 12–13 and 355–365. In connection with the opera project, Marina Abramović also realised some film projects which have not yet been published, with the exception of *Spirit House – Insomnia* (1997): see K. Dillkofer, *Marina ist nicht Maria ist nicht Violetta*, [in:] M. Abramović, *7 Deaths of Maria Callas. ProgrammBuch*, pp. 14–15.

From the performances of the '70s, reduced to the essential, passing through the experience of video-making and theatre, up to this grandiose opera project, the way was long but it was not surprising: Marina Abramović has become more and more open to other media, and opera offers a fertile ground for experimenting with “crossovers”. Since its birth, moreover, opera has always taken advantage of other art forms, such as dance, pantomime, painting and architecture, and has had a central role in the debate on the *Gesamtkunstwerk*.¹⁹ *7 Deaths of Maria Callas* in its final version, consists of seven videos, all directed by Nabil Elderkin, where Marina Abramović and Willem Dafoe act out different kinds of death, each inspired by seven operas.²⁰ Most of the filmed sequences are in slow motion, a device that painfully dilates the deaths and at the same time increases the power of their aesthetic experience. The initial idea of showing real death scenes was abandoned. As the videos are projected onto a screen that spans the entire stage, seven sopranos take turns singing a famous aria taken from the respective opera (not necessarily from the death scene), all costumed in the same white dress. Between the arias, we see video interludes with clouds and storm images (by Marco Brambilla) over which Abramović’s voice can be heard reading lines that describe, in a poetic and evocative way, the essence of the respective deaths.²¹ Just as evocative are the links between the videos, the opera arias, Maria Callas’ life and Marina Abramović’s past performances. The music, by Marko Nikodijević, holds the arias together and serves to frame the entire work, with newly composed orchestral overture at the beginning and a long final scene for the eighth death, performed on stage by Marina Abramović. During the first, hour-long part of the project, Marina Abramović lies on a bed under a spotlight on the right side of the stage, while the singers perform at the foot of her bed, as in a mourning ritual. The death scenes succeed each other as follows:

1. *Violetta dies of tuberculosis*. During the aria *Addio, del passato bei sogni ridenti*, from the third act of Giuseppe Verdi’s *La Traviata*, the video shows the ill woman exhaling her last breath, while a gust of wind blows out one of two burning candles on the nightstand close to her. The man stands by her.
2. *Tosca plunges into the depths*. During the aria *Vissi d’arte, vissi d’amore*, from the second act of Giacomo Puccini’s *Tosca*, the video takes place in New York

¹⁹ E. Huttenlauch, *Marina Abramović und die Parrhesie*, [in:] M. Abramović, *7 Deaths of Maria Callas. Programmbuch*, p. 75.

²⁰ For the choice of the number seven with its symbolic and biographical implications, see *Ein Gespräch mit Marina Abramović*, p. 24.

²¹ The texts written by Petter Skavlan can be read (albeit with slight differences to the final performance) in M. Abramović, *7 Deaths of Maria Callas. Programmbuch*, pp. 10–11 and in M. Abramović, *7 Deaths of Maria Callas*, photographs by M. Anelli, Damiani, Bologna 2020, pp. 15, 33, 53, 73, 95, 119, 141.

and, first, shows the woman cradling the body of the man as in a *pietà*, and, then, it shows a free fall of the woman from top of a skyscraper.²² The link to the opera's finale, where Tosca bemoans the death of her beloved Cavardossi and, then, jumps off of the bastions of Castel Sant'Angelo, is clear.

3. *Desdemona is strangled by Otello*. During the aria *Ave Maria*, from the fourth act of Giuseppe Verdi's *Otello*, the video shows the man placing three pythons around the neck of the woman who is sitting on a throne-like chair. The pythons slowly wrap around the neck of the woman, while the man observes her suffocation.²³ In the opera *Otello*, himself, strangles Desdemona.
4. *Cio-Cio-San commits suicide*.²⁴ During the aria *Un bel dì vedremo*, from the second act of Giacomo Puccini's *Madama Butterfly*, the video transposes the last scene of the opera onto an apocalyptic setting, where green poison gases force men to wear protective suits. When the man (the U.S. naval officer, Pinkerton, in the opera) arrives to take the little son (who is playing, unawares, with a small American Flag) away from the mother (Cio-Cio-San), she takes off her suit and stifles – falling to the ground and dying in an hostile environment: one that mirrors that of Cio-Cio-San, who was disowned by her family and abandoned by the husband. The voice-over in the cloud sequence mentions the “butterfly effect” (small causes leading to unpredictable consequences), adding an ecological and dystopian meaning to the scene.²⁵
5. *Carmen is stabbed by Don José*. During the aria *L'amour est un oiseau rebelle*, from the first act of Georges Bizet's *Carmen*, the video takes place in a bullfight arena, directly recalling the final scene of the opera in Seville. The woman wears a traditional *toreador* dress and the man is dressed in black. The latter throws

²² Abramović had already used the *pietà* symbolism in two works with Ulay in 1983: in the theatre piece *Positive zero* (see M. Abramović, *Walk Through Walls*, p. 154) and in the video *Anima mundi* from the series *Modus vivendi* (see M. Abramović, *Artist Body. Performances 1969–1998*, Charta, Milano 1998, p. 257).

²³ The video is actually a reperformance of Abramović's *Dragon Heads*, first performed in 1990: see M. Abramović, *Walk Through Walls*, p. 227 and M. Abramović, *Artist Body. Performances 1969–1998*, pp. 314–321.

²⁴ Referred to as *hara-kiri*, the Japanese ritual suicide by disembowelment in the name of honour (see M. Abramović, *7 Deaths of Maria Callas*, p. 71), even though Cio-Cio-San slits her throat.

²⁵ M. Abramović, *7 Deaths of Maria Callas. Programmbuch*, p. 10. Note that this same effect is mentioned by E. Fischer-Lichte, *The Transformative Power of Performance. A new aesthetics*, trans. by S.I. Jain, Routledge, New York 2008, p. 206, to describe the complexity of the globalized societies, where even modern science contributes to the notion that within the human being, itself, mysterious and unpredictable forces are at work which contribute to the “re-enchantment” of the world, and with which the aesthetics of the performative puts us in contact.

a lasso around the woman's body and they initially play a kind of tug-of-war, suggesting, both, courtship rituals (underscored by the playful glances between them and by the sensual *habanera* aria) and, at the same time, an actual fight between *toreador* and bull. Although, at the beginning, the costumes could suggest that the woman symbolizes the *toreador* and the man the bull, the roles become unclear afterwards, and overlap in the finale of the opera: she pulls out a dagger and tries to cut the ropes around her body, but the man grabs the dagger and stabs her, just as Don José kills Carmen.²⁶ Who is the human being and who is the animal? Who wins and who is conquered? And what kind of fight do we see? Everything blurs into the symbolic impact of the scene.²⁷

6. *Lucia dies of madness*. During the aria *Il dolce suono*, from the third act of Gaetano Donizetti's *Lucia di Lammermoor*, the black and white video shows an elegant room full of mirrors where the woman sits in a white wedding dress, initially covered by a veil. She launches into, what seems to be a fit of anger, a bout of despair and an attack of madness all-at-once (perfectly corresponding with the "madness" aria sung by the soprano). She destroys the mirrors around her, tears her garments and smashes three vases, one of which against her chest, making it bleed. The last sequence shows the woman as a martyr (Saint Lucy?), or a Madonna bleeding from her eyes (Photo 1) and, then, spreading the blood all over her face and chest.²⁸

²⁶ The explanatory text in the "cloud" sequence reinforces the ambiguity of the roles by emphasizing Carmen's strength, even though, in the end, she dies: "Her fearlessness fascinates me. Her love of freedom mirrors mine. Her smoldering sexuality empowers her. [...] Love guides her hearth" (M. Abramović, *7 Deaths of Maria Callas. Programmabuch*, p. 11).

²⁷ For the aesthetic relevance of the *corrida* in its traditional context, where life and death, as well as oppressor and victim tend to overlap, see the last chapter of Thomas Mann's *Confessions of Felix Krull, confidence man*, trans. by D. Lindley, Vintage International, New York 1992. For example: "I call him a sacrifice because one would have to be dull indeed not to feel the atmosphere that lay over all, at once oppressive and solemnly joyous, a unique mingling of jest, blood, and dedication, primitive holiday-making combined with the profound ceremonial of death" (p. 375); "this teaching contained something that united its believers irrevocably, joining them in life and in death; and its mystery consisted in the equality and identity of slayer and slain, axe and victim, arrow and target..." (p. 379). For the concept of *Homo aestheticus* in Thomas Mann and the identity of life and art through imitation – which is a central issue in *7 Deaths of Maria Callas*, as well – see F. Rossi, *Variazioni poetiche di modelli evolutivi. Thomas Mann e l'Homo aestheticus*, "Prospero" 2014, vol. 19, pp. 121–142.

²⁸ For Marina Abramović's interest in the repertoire of images and symbols of mysticism, see the photo and video-series *The Kitchen: Homage to Saint Teresa* (2009): M. Abramović, *Walk Through Walls*, pp. 305–306. In general, on spirituality in Abramović's works, between Shamanism, Buddhism and rituals of the Aboriginal, in addition to her autobiography, see the documentary *Marina Abramović in Brazil: The Space in Between*, directed by M.A. del Fiol,

7. *Norma goes into fire*. On the aria *Casta Diva*, from the first act of Vincenzo Bellini's *Norma*, the video shows man and woman, hand in hand, running into the flames, just as Norma, the high-priestess of the druids, and her lover, the Roman proconsul Pollione, do in the finale of the opera. There are some references to scenes from the other videos in the work. For example, the woman wears male attire, with the same shoes as the man in *Carmen's* scene (n. 5), while the man wears the gold sequin dress we'll see in the eighth scene.

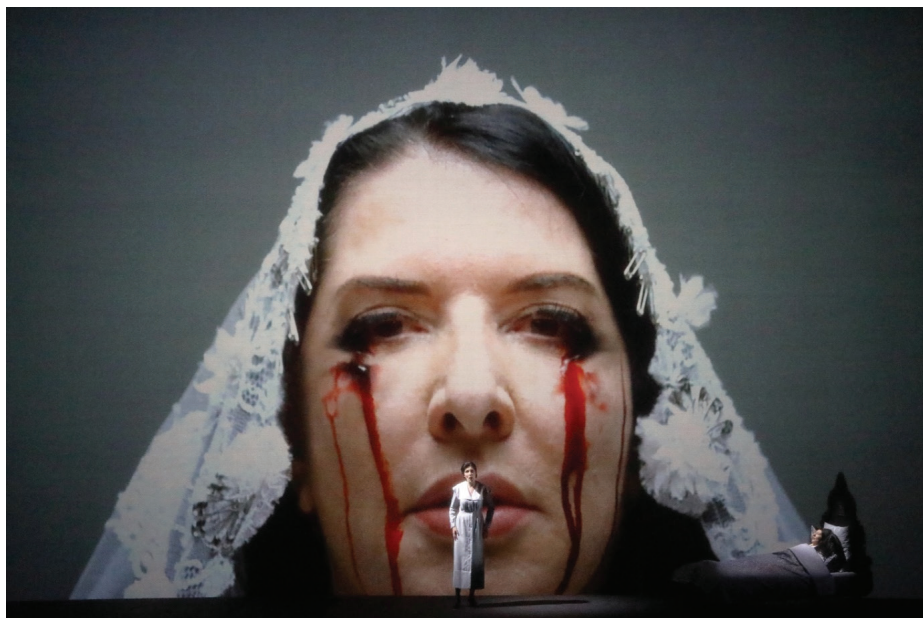


Photo 1. *Lucia dies of madness* from *7 Deaths of Maria Callas*. Adela Zaharia (in the middle), Marina Abramović (on the right). © Bayerische Staatsoper, Wilfried Hösl

Maria Callas dies of a broken heart. For the eighth scene there is no video. In its place is a performance by Marina Abramović, herself. Around the bed where Abramović lay the whole time, the stage setting accurately reproduces the bedroom of Maria Callas as it was in her last residence (36 Avenue Georges-Mandel in Paris), where she spent her last years living largely in isolation and eventually died of a heart attack at age 53 on September 16, 1977. Marina Abramović supports the thesis that the primary cause of Maria Callas' death was heartbreak. She neglected her work and her voice after falling in love with Aristotle Onassis. Even though his marriage with Jacqueline Kennedy was a massive shock for Callas, she didn't stop loving him, and after he passed away in 1975, "she became a recluse in her Paris

2016, and D. Zuber, *Leuchtkraft im Norden – Die Verortung des Spirituellen in der Kunst der Marina Abramović*, [in:] L. Essling (ed.), *Marina Abramović – The Cleaner*, pp. 252–262.

apartment, where she died of heart failure. [...] She didn't want to live anymore. She actually died for love.”²⁹ For the performance, Marina Abramović abandons her motionless lying position and, following the instructions of the voice-over (her own voice), she slowly begins to become animated (“Breath... Swallow... Open your eyes...”).³⁰ The voice-over text is fragmented and follows the stream of consciousness of the woman, mixing up sensations of the awakening with memories evoked by the place (friends of Callas are evoked and are almost begged: “Where are you all now?”). Abramović does not speak and follows, as a puppet, the movements prescribed by the voice (“Push the duvet aside. Lean forward. Turn...”), which guides her through the room – counting, altogether, 17 steps. Some actions are, however, autonomously performed. While the chorus, mid-sequence sings “The rite is over”, she moves a vase on the small table in the foreground, takes some photographs out of a drawer, chooses one showing her and her ex-husband, Paolo Canevari, leans it against the vase, smashes the vase on the floor (as a veiled reference to the sixth video of Lucia di Lammermoor).³¹ The voice-over keeps counting the steps during an epic *crescendo* of the orchestra until Abramović opens the window and an intense ray of daylight pervades the room. The music fades out and ends while Abramović leaves the scene in a trance-like state – following the beam of light. In the following sequence the seven sopranos who had sung the respective arias act as members of a cleaning company, or maid service, cleaning up and disinfecting the room and covering every piece of furniture with black veils. At the same time, on a sound carpet made of distorted fragments from the arias, the voice-over (this time recorded by Dafoe) quotes lines spoken by the male lovers of the dead heroines (Cavardossi, Otello, Pinkerton, Don José, Edgardo, Pollione), all making love declarations to their women. The last maid turns on the record player – which gets stuck, repeating the same fragment over and over – and turns off the light. At this point, a recording with Maria Callas' interpretation of the aria *Casta Diva*, from 1954, can be heard playing and Marina Abramović walks on stage with the already mentioned gold sequin dress from the seventh scene. She reproduces,

²⁹ M. Anderson, *The Coronavirus Derails Marina Abramović's Maria Callas Opera*, “New York Times” 9.04.2020, <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/04/09/arts/music/marina-abramovic-maria-callas.html>. See also *Ein Gespräch mit Marina Abramović*, p. 23 and A. Heyward, *Die Verletzliche*, p. 28.

³⁰ The script of the eight death, written by Marina Abramović and Petter Skavlan, is published in M. Abramović, *7 Deaths of Maria Callas*, pp. 161–171, but differs in the ending with the actual version of the premiere, where two main elements have been omitted (Marina Abramović taking all the costumes from the films out of the wardrobe and throwing them on the bed, and her leaving the stage towards the audience) and substituted, as described, in the following text.

³¹ Compare the pictures with Paolo Canevari in M. Abramović, *7 Deaths of Maria Callas. Programmbuch*, p. 145 and M. Abramović, *Walk Through Walls*, p. 286.

in a kind of *tableau vivant*, typical gestures and mimics of Maria Callas (Photo 2). In the end what remains is Maria Callas' body as a symbol – here, present, or even re-incarnated in Marina Abramović's body – and, most of all, in her voice.



Photo 2. Maria Callas dies of a broken heart from *7 Deaths of Maria Callas*. © Bayerische Staatsoper, Wilfried Hösl.

Performing death

How should we interpret Abramović's presence on the stage? We do not know in which role she has been lying there (as Maria Callas, as herself, sleeping, or already dead), nor do we know the meaning of her alleged awakening ("Am I sleeping?"). Whether it is meant to be a dreamlike evocation of Callas' last day, or a representation of the intermediate condition between life and death, in which the dying person sees herself from outside,³² we do clearly see elements from two biographies converging. The detailed reconstruction of Callas' apartment and the remembrance of her close acquaintances (her maid Bruna, her ex-husband Meneghini, Bernstein, Zefirelli, Pasolini...) merge with the references to other people relevant for Abramović: the ex-husband, Canevari, through the photograph, but also Willem Dafoe, as artistic partner, as well as fictional symbol for lover, through the

³² For this second possible interpretation see *Ein Gespräch mit Marina Abramović*, p. 25.

reuse of the gold sequin dress from the seventh death-scene. This dialectical process culminates in an identification of Marina and Maria in the very last sequence, the pantomime on the aria *Casta Diva* from *Norma*, which was Maria Callas' flagship-role. The celebration and process of mythologisation of Maria Callas, of which the entire opera project *7 Deaths* consists, reaches its fulfilment in this final apotheosis, which is reinforced by the mystical imagery of resurrection/eternalisation (Abramović walking into the light)³³ and of the creative power of the *logos* (Callas' voice resonating in the end).

Interestingly, we see Callas-Abramović dying on-screen seven times, but the death of Maria Callas in the final scene is not represented, as if it were an irrepresentable and "obscene" event, which has to take place "off-stage" (*ob skeně*), like in the Greek tragedy.³⁴ The dramatic destiny of the seven heroines, which Callas interpreted over and over in theatre, is absorbed, as in an oneiric vision, by the body which had been lying in the bed throughout the entire duration of *7 Deaths*, but is redeemed in the end and sublimated in a divine picture of the immortal opera "diva", Maria Callas, while we hear from her vocal performance of *Casta Diva*, the prayer to the Moon: "Chaste goddess... Temper the daring zeal of the burning hearts... Spread on earth the peace that you make reign in heaven."³⁵

Marina Abramović's work has always been a meditation on death. She often uses her performances as a way of exorcising the fear of death: they are concrete signs against the disappearance of her physical presence.³⁶ Even though, or rather, precisely *because* she is terrified by the idea of death, she always tries to overcome her limits and fears. She is "thrilled by the unknown, by the idea of taking risks."³⁷ As early as the 1970s, she had considered art as "a matter of life and death", as she affirms, quoting Bruce Nauman.³⁸ The strength of most of her works is derived, indeed, from her confrontation with those basic human fears of pain, of suffering and of death (which, unlike joy, stimulate creativity)³⁹ – all themes that shock, disorient, yet, at the same time attract and "train" the audi-

³³ R.J. Brembeck, *Die Callas ist tatsächlich auferstanden*, "Süddeutsche Zeitung" 2.09.2020, <https://www.sueddeutsche.de/kultur/marina-abramovic-maria-callas-nationaltheater-muenchen-1.5018515>, sees in *7 Deaths* a kind of Dantean itinerary from death to light (leading to ineffable and indescribable just as in the *Paradise*) and depicts the last scene as a "resurrection" of Callas.

³⁴ For the debate on representation of death in Greek Tragedy, see R.S. Pathmanathan, *Death in Greek Tragedy*, "Greece & Rome" 1965, vol. 12, no. 1, pp. 2–14.

³⁵ My translation.

³⁶ See A. Heyward, *Die Verletzliche*, pp. 26–27.

³⁷ M. Abramović, *Walk Through Walls*, p. 58.

³⁸ *Ibidem*, p. 59.

³⁹ See *Ein Gespräch mit Marina Abramović*, p. 24.

ence emotionally, in full accordance with the “aesthetics of risk” of which Hans-Thies Lehmann writes.⁴⁰

Of the many episodes in her life, in which Marina Abramović was confronted with death, the funeral of her dear friend, Susan Sontag, in 2004, triggered further reflections: “I’ve always believed death should be a celebration. Because you’re entering a new place, a new state. You’re making a major passage. The Sufis say, »Life is a dream and death is waking up«.”⁴¹ That’s the moment when Marina Abramović got the idea of planning her funeral as a “going-away party” and a “celebration of all the things I had done, and of my leaving for a new place.”⁴² Her funeral is supposed to be her last performance, her “final piece.”⁴³ The celebration will take place in New York, but there will be three graves, in the three places, in which she lived longest: Belgrade, Amsterdam and New York. Nobody will know in which of these graves her body will actually rest.⁴⁴ But in order to see her own death, at least on a stage, Marina Abramović already acted it under the direction of Robert Wilson in the piece *The Life and Death of Marina Abramović*.⁴⁵ Again, an exorcism of her fear of death:

I put death in my work very often, and I read a lot about dying. I think it’s crucial to include death in your life, to think about death every single day. The idea of being permanent is so wrong. We have to understand that death can appear at any moment, and being ready is essential.⁴⁶

This confrontation with death is, hence, programmatically part of the last two points in Marina Abramović’s *An Artist’s Life Manifesto*:

Different death scenarios:

- An artist has to be aware of his own mortality
- For an artist, it is not only important how he lives his life but also how he dies
- An artist should look at the symbols of his work for the signs of different death scenarios
- An artist should die consciously without fear

⁴⁰ See H.-T. Lehmann, *Postdramatic theatre*, trans. by K. Jürs-Munby, Routledge, New York 2006, pp. 186–187.

⁴¹ M. Abramović, *Walk Through Walls*, p. 275.

⁴² *Ibidem*.

⁴³ *Ibidem*.

⁴⁴ *Ibidem*. For Abramović’s will and funeral instructions, see J. Westcott, *When Marina Abramović dies*, p. xiii.

⁴⁵ Premiered on July 9, 2011 at the Manchester International Festival, The Lowry, Manchester, United Kingdom.

⁴⁶ M. Abramović, *Walk Through Walls*, pp. 334–335.

Different funeral scenarios:

- An artist should give instructions before his funeral so that everything is done the way he wants it
- The funeral is the artist's last art piece before leaving⁴⁷

Two iconic women

One of the most powerful description of Maria Callas comes from the pen of the Austrian poet and author Ingeborg Bachmann. Bachmann perfectly depicts Callas' mixture of tragedy and greatness, her fragility, the interdependence of private and artistic life and her intense connection with the public:

She [Maria Callas] is the only creature that ever set foot on an opera stage. [...] All her sentences, breaths, tears, joys, her precision and desire of making art – a tragedy that one doesn't need to know in the usual sense – are evident. [...] She will never make one forget that there are an *I* and a *You*, pain and joy; she is great in hate and love, in tenderness and brutality, in each expression [...]. She knows what expressiveness is all about. [...] She never sang roles, but rather lived on the razor's edge [...], she was so present [*gegenwärtig*]. She is the only person who legitimately went on stage in this century in order to make the listener below freeze, suffer, shiver; she was always the Art [...] and she was always a human being, always the most wretched, the most afflicted, the *Traviata*. [...] She provided the means for turning listeners on to new worlds: one could suddenly listen through the centuries; she was the last fairy tale.⁴⁸

The idiom “sie hat auf der Rasierklinge gelebt” (she lived on the razor's edge), in particular, catches the essence of Callas' personality and represents, at the same time, a point of intersection with Abramović's life and work. Both Callas and Abramović devoted themselves – body and soul – to art. Bachmann, and many other witnesses, report that Callas had a liveliness and an authenticity that went far beyond the interpreted roles. She was also ready to sacrifice, as her legendary physical metamorphosis proves: she lost 36 kilos of body weight between 1952 and 1954, in her golden years at Teatro alla Scala, reaching a low of 54 kilos in 1957, in a way that could have irreparably compromised her voice. She went through this in order to reach her artistic ideal to enhance her acting and expressive options on stage.

⁴⁷ M. Abramović, *Writings 1960–2014*, Walther König, Köln 2018, pp. 356–357.

⁴⁸ I. Bachmann, *Hommage à Maria Callas*, [in:] *Werke*, ed. C. Koschel, I. von Weidenbaum und C. Münster, Piper, München 1978, vol. IV (*Essays, Reden, Vermischte Schriften, Anhang*), pp. 342–343. My translation.

Her new image contributed, also, to Callas' lifelong goal of modernizing the obsolete standards of the opera genre and opening it up to new audiences and medias.⁴⁹ As far as Abramović's use of the body and attitude to sacrifice are concerned, these are evident pillars of her entire production, as her statements on pain as "door of secrets" and access to another state of consciousness ("liquid knowledge") show.⁵⁰ To mix discipline and intuition, to enter another dimension, using the body as a medium, is, additionally, something that Callas and Abramović share. The latter often repeats a quote she attributes to Callas, herself: "When I perform, the most important thing is that half of my brain is in complete control and the other part of the brain is totally loose".⁵¹ This balance between two completely contradictory states – between strength and fragility – is "the magic of a good performance."⁵² Abramović seems indeed to paraphrase and gloss Callas' statement, when she attempts to provide a definition of "performance art":

Performance is a mental and physical construction that I step into, in front of an audience, in a specific time and place. [...] You have to do the spinning and you have the possibility of losing control. But at the same time you must have an enormous mental control not to lose it, or you will die. I stage this kind of edge situation in performance in order to get to the point of elevating the mind. But when you elevate your mind, automatically it is transmitted to the public. That's why it becomes so emotional.⁵³

Showing fragility, exposing the body, opening to risk – herein lies the greatest similarity between Maria and Marina, besides the aforementioned biographical

49 G. Guccini, *Maria Callas: attrice del Novecento*, p. 6.

50 See the interviews *Liquid Knowledge*, [in:] M. Abramović, *Interviews 1976–2018*, Abramović LLC, New York 2018, pp. 355–367, in particular pp. 366–367; *The Serbian of Pain*, ibidem, pp. 383–397, in particular pp. 388–389; *Death is Waking Up*, ibidem, pp. 251–278, in particular p. 271. For the role of pain in Abramović's performances throughout the decades, see also M. Abramović, *Walk Through Walls*, pp. 60–61, 74–75, 89, 136–139, 309–310, 314, 319, 339–342. For the centrality of the term "body", in the broadest sense, in Abramović's "body of work", see the trilogy of catalogues edited by Charta: *Artist Body. Performances 1969–1998*; *Public Body. Installations and Objects 1965–2001*, Charta, Milano 2001; *Student Body. Workshops 1979–2003. Performances 1993–2003*, Charta, Milano 2003.

51 See M. Richards, *Marina Abramović*, New York, Routledge, 2010, p. 133, and among the lectures of the *Marina Abramović Institute*: <https://mai.art/terra-comunal-content/2015/4/9/fifth-lecture-highlight>. See, also, the discussion in M. Abramović et al., *Marina Abramović*, essays by A. Vettese, G. Di Pietrantonio, A. Daneri, L. Hegyi and Societas Raffaello Sanzio, Milano, Charta, 2002, p. 143.

52 M. Abramović et al., *Marina Abramović*, p. 143.

53 M. Abramović, *The Artist Is Present*, Museum of Modern Art, New York 2010, p. 211.

and physical ones: “The closest link for me – the emotional link – is her mix of extreme strength and extreme fragility at the same time. I see this in me and I see it in Callas.”⁵⁴ Maria Callas was, to be sure, at her best in those roles that show the most dramatic destinies (agony, suicide, madness...) and that show internal conflicts.⁵⁵ Vulnerability also creates a very powerful connection with the audience. By either showing the drama of the heroines as a mirrored image of her private life (Callas), or by painfully exploring the limits of the human condition (Abramović), both women win empathy and trust from the audience. The spectators are, in both cases, overwhelmed by the aesthetic formalisation of intense emotions, which leads to a process of “transference”⁵⁶ – where the artist serves as a “filter” or a “mirror”⁵⁷ – and pushes the audience, as well, to its emotional and cognitive borders. Or, more precisely, to quote Erika Fisher-Lichte, both artists manage to transform those borders (*Grenzen*) into thresholds (*Schwellen*), which is ultimately the goal of the aesthetics of the performative – they realize with their works and with their presence an “art of passage” (*Kunst des Übergangs*), and invite the audience to take their performances (*Aufführungen*) “both as life itself and as its model.”⁵⁸

If Abramović programmatically affirms “My work and my life are so connected”, Callas, in turn, then, considered her artistic work as being “endless” – in unison with her life.⁵⁹ By virtue of this total dedication to art, to this holistic experi-

⁵⁴ *Ein Gespräch mit Marina Abramović*, p. 23, my translation. See also A. Heyward, *Die Verletzliche*, p. 31. G. Guccini, *Maria Callas: attrice del Novecento*, p. 10, writes, in this respect, about a “human archetype in which strength and fragility alternate and feed each other, causing continuous oscillations between the extremes” (my translation).

⁵⁵ E. Rieger, *Ecco un artista*, p. 55. See also L. Alberti, *La scenica scienza*, [in:] *Mille e una Callas*, pp. 53–76 and E. Montale, *Prime alla Scala*, Arnoldo Mondadori, Milano 1981, pp. 52 and 260.

⁵⁶ See E. Bronfen, *Diven in der Kunstgeschichte*, [in:] M. Abramović, *7 Deaths of Maria Callas. Programmbuch*, pp. 34–42, especially pp. 39 and 42.

⁵⁷ For the artist as a “filter”, see M. Abramović, *The Artist Is Present*, p. 211: “the performance [...] is based on energy values. [...] It is crucial that the energy actually comes from the audience and translates through me – I filter it and let it go back to the audience. [...] I really like that moment when the performance becomes life itself”. For the artist as “mirror”, see Marina Abramović’s TED-Talk, *An art made of trust, vulnerability and connection*, at minute 04:52, https://www.ted.com/talks/marina_abramovic_an_art_made_of_trust_vulnerability_and_connection.

⁵⁸ E. Fischer-Lichte, *The Transformative Power of Performance*, p. 205.

⁵⁹ M. Abramović, *Walk Through Walls*, p. 118, where Abramović also explains how some of her works have an unconscious meaning that retrospectively illuminates biographical events. For the convergence of private and artistic life in Maria Callas, see E. Rieger, *Ecco un artista*, p. 58 and E. Bronfen, *Diven in der Kunstgeschichte*, p. 40. G. Guccini, *Maria Callas: attrice del Novecento*, p. 43, quotes Callas about this topic: “Our work is timeless. After the rehearsals, back at home, alone in the night, I concentrated and started the real creation [...]. Our destiny is to work endlessly. Art is so huge that the more you know, the more you realise you know nothing” (my translation).

ence that makes life and art converge, to gradually reducing and eliminating the distinction between private and artistic life, one could venture to include Maria Callas, retrospectively, as well, within the realm of the performance art.

A side effect of this symbiosis between public and private life is, to be sure, the process of mythologising that both Callas and Abramović undergo. A process that transforms the two women into icons – the quintessence, respectively, of opera and performance art. On one hand, it is something controlled by the artists, themselves. One can think of Callas, who the poet Eugenio Montale describes as a “character” deliberately living, also, out of the theatre and who could turn her flaws into virtues (which is the key to becoming a “diva”),⁶⁰ or one can think of Abramović's often repeated anecdotes and memories from her life which she quotes to explain her works, turning her stories into a manner of exegetical parables in this regard.⁶¹ On the other hand, however, this mythology around the two women fosters an individual and unpredictable life, as the queer reception of Callas, and the sudden interest for performance – shown by Lady Gaga's young fans – caused by the fascination of the pop star in Abramović's work, demonstrate, just to name two examples.⁶² Callas and Abramović reach an increasingly large and diverse public. One could say that they talk to masses. Not only were, and are, Callas' operas and recitals, as well as Abramović's performances and exhibitions, always sold out, attracting people from all over the world, but they also offer a “universal potential” for identification and connection for people. This is, in a way, typical for the divas: “the masses see in them their desires satisfied with a rapid psychological »transfer«. [...] It's clear that the celebrity doesn't belong anymore to art, but to the world of sociological phenomena.”⁶³ However, behind the sociological aspect, the myths of Callas and Abramović do offer a fertile ground for identification, meditation on pain and life, catharsis and spirituality.⁶⁴ And this awareness for

⁶⁰ See E. Montale, *Dal teatro alla vita*, [in:] *Prime alla Scala*, pp. 49–54 and *ibidem*, p. 418; E. Montale, *Divismo e carità*, [in:] *Auto da fé. Cronache in due tempi*, Arnoldo Mondadori Editore, Milano 1995, p. 295; the entire section *Il mito*, [in:] *Mille e una Callas*, pp. 405–599.

⁶¹ Abramović's biographer, James Westcott, affirms: “I think a lot of her genius it's exactly the mythology she creates for herself and how not only can she do these extreme acts [...], but she knows how to project it, she knows how to communicate it to the world” (*Marina: Art vs. Life* in the extras of the DVD *Marina Abramović. The Artist is Present*, directed by M. Akers, 2011, at minute 00:55).

⁶² See M. Emanuele, “Every body is a civil war. Callas sang the war”: *culto della diva e ricezione 'queer'*, [in:] *Mille e una Callas*, pp. 77–96 and M. Abramović, *Walk Through Walls*, pp. 315 and 346–351.

⁶³ E. Montale, *Divismo e carità*, p. 296.

⁶⁴ See the sea of people attending Abramović's lectures, or the performance *As One* (Athens, 2016), where she led 3000 people through 7 minutes of silence (M. Abramović, *Walk Through Walls*, p. 352; *Marina Abramović - The Cleaner*, p. 30; M. Abramović, *Interviews 1976–2018*,

the deep, meaningful potential on which the myths rely – beyond fame, success, money and the star-status that both Maria and Marina achieved⁶⁵ – is probably the key to not compromising the authenticity and integrity of the artist. Even if the artist has become an icon, “an artist should not make himself into an idol” – writes Abramović in her Manifesto.⁶⁶

On the “lived dichotomy of art and life” that connects Callas and Abramović, Eva Huttenlauch, Curator at the Lenbachhaus in Munich, sheds some light.⁶⁷ According to Huttenlauch, Callas turned her life into a performance and found, for that, a grateful and receptive audience, while Abramović turned performance into her life and approaches the audience with that – challenging the it on a moral, emotional and intellectual level. To go back to Ingeborg Bachmann’s quote at the beginning of this section (about Callas living on the razor’s edge), it perfectly applies to both women. For the singer, it’s about pouring out her emotional life, her inclination to suffering and pain, for the performer it’s about giving all of that a precise form – she, literally, grabs the knife and hurts herself. Both attitudes contribute to the myth, and if Callas already is an icon well beyond the opera world, Abramović is not far from becoming one herself:

An icon means, first and foremost, an image, and icons have always been created through reproducible media. [...] Abramović always made sure that her performances were captured in pictures or on video, in order to save her work for a collective memory. That’s also what this production [*7 Deaths*] is about – overpowering, by means of these images – at the centre of which she stands. In this respect, she is on the best path for becoming an icon, if she’s not one, already.⁶⁸

p. 362). And consider the “long durational performances” and the workshops of the Marina Abramović Institute, where the participants *live* a process and *are* the work of art. M. Abramović, *Interviews 1976–2018*, p. 361: “The public is my work. I am removing myself and the public becomes the work. Everything comes out of each performance experience as a natural flow”.

⁶⁵ For the link between cachet and prestige in Callas, see G. Guccini, *Maria Callas: attrice del Novecento*, p. 7. For Abramović becoming a “public figure”, see M. Abramović, *Walk Through Walls*, p. 334.

⁶⁶ M. Abramović, *Writings 1960–2014*, p. 340. See also the interview in S. Thornton, *33 Artists in 3 Acts*, W.W. Norton & Company, New York 2014, p. 288: “This larger-than-life thing is a dangerous state. Your ego can become an obstacle to your work. If you start believing in your greatness, it is the death of your creativity”.

⁶⁷ *Vorbericht mit Interviews* by the Munich-based public radio station BR Klassik, presented by Maximilian Maier, 5.09.2020.

⁶⁸ *Ibidem*. My translation.

From performance to opera (and beyond)

Apart from the implications of the mythologising process, documentation and reproducibility have been, since the 1990s, central elements of, not only Abramović's artistic reflection, but also of performance studies in general. From the first radical performances of the 1970s, where the presence of artist and audience, and the concrete use of the body were a dogma,⁶⁹ up to the opera project *7 Deaths of Maria Callas*, the differences are evident, but they mirror a long artistic path, articulated by many intermediate stages.⁷⁰

When asked to list the peculiarities of her first works in comparison to theatre, Abramović answered: "No rehearsals, no repetition, and no predicted end."⁷¹ And as far as the documentation is concerned: "The first performances in the early seventies were not even documented because most of us believed that any documentation – by video or photos – could not be a substitute for the real experience: seeing it live."⁷² But, since the '90s, in order to protect the ephemeral performances from plagiarism and at the same time to "leave some trace of the events for a larger audience,"⁷³ Abramović changed attitude and has started to document her work scrupulously.⁷⁴

⁶⁹ See the discussion on the "radical concept of presence" and on the "embodied mind" in E. Fischer-Lichte, *The Transformative Power of Performance*, p. 99. For the centrality of body and presence in the performance art, see *ibidem*, pp. 67–74 ("Liveness") and pp. 76–107 ("Corporeality").

⁷⁰ For the gestation of the idea of "reenactment" see T. Gusman, *Ciò che resta della presenza: Marina Abramović tra unicità e ripetizione*, [in:] R. Carpani, L. Peja, L. Aimò (eds.), *Scena madre. Donne personaggi e interpreti della realtà. Studi per Annamaria Cascetta*, Vita e Pensiero, Milano 2014, pp. 377–382. On the topic see also A. Jones, "The Artist is Present". *Artistic Re-enactments and the Impossibility of Presence*, "The Drama Review" 2011, vol. 55, no. 1, pp. 17–45.

⁷¹ M. Abramović, *Interviews 1976–2018*, p. 300. Still in 2015, as far as the performances are concerned, she affirms: "I never rehearsed any of the pieces I performed" (M. Abramović, *Walk Through Walls*, p. 283).

⁷² M. Abramović, *7 easy pieces*, Charta, Milano 2007, p. 9.

⁷³ *Ibidem*. For these two arguments in relation to *7 easy pieces*, see M. Abramović, *Walk Through Walls*, p. 279. As examples of plagiarism that caused her "indignation", see the use of her performance with Ulay, *Relation in Space*, in the photo shoot by Steven Meisel in "Vogue Italia" 1998, no. 579 – also in M. Abramović, *7 easy pieces*, p. 8 –, or the use of her performance *The House With The Ocean View* in the series *Sex and the city* (M. Abramović, *Walk Through Walls*, p. 269).

⁷⁴ Using photography and videos, but also experimenting analogic ways: see the transcription made by James Westcott of every single movement she made in the 12-day-performance *The House With The Ocean View* (Sean Kelly Gallery in New York, 2002), in M. Abramović, *The House With The Ocean View*, Charta, Milano 2004, or the fragments of conversations

Not only was the documentation of a one-time event her goal, but she also sought to maintain the possibility of repeating a performance – the “re-enactment”⁷⁵ – something that she did regularly with, both, her own performances and those of other well-known colleagues in *7 easy pieces* (a re-creation of six famous performances of other artists along with one new performance by her at the Guggenheim Museum in 2005). She also allows other young, trained artists to do the same in the major retrospectives on her work. With *7 easy pieces*, Abramović wanted to “open a discussion about whether performance art could be approached in the same way as musical compositions or dance pieces – and also examine how performance can best be preserved.”⁷⁶ But, the idea of a performance as a composition to be interpreted had already emerged, however, in an interview back in 1998:

First I want to go a little bit backward and present a piece about doing performance works as if they are musical scores. I mean, a pianist plays a score by another musician, tells who it is by, yet imprints his own style on it without taking it over. I want to do a series of classic performances by performance artists of the 1970s but I will be doing all of them myself, like a musician playing Mozart again years later.⁷⁷

It might be ambitious to expect to see a “post-performative turn” in this re-enactment-process that makes a performance reproducible (and hence, no longer unique), as Nikolaus Müller-Schöll does,⁷⁸ because, after all, as Tancredi Gusman, with reference to Erika Fischer-Lichte, noted – the “event” takes place in the realisation of the performance in any case, which is, consequently, not reduced to its planning or its “score”.⁷⁹ But, still, it is undeniable that we assist to a process of “dramatization of the performance” (*teatralizzazione della performance*), as Marco De Marinis defines it.⁸⁰ Whether we agree, or not, with De Marinis’ thesis that, even in the purest performance, there is a playful, theatrical, fictional element, and the *jeu*, as self-representation persists,⁸¹ we do clearly see how Marina Abramović has, over the decades, been coming closer to the world of the theatre and of “repetition”.

captured among the unaware spectators during the performances of *7 easy pieces* and printed in M. Abramović, *7 easy pieces*.

⁷⁵ See M. Abramović, *7 easy pieces*, pp. 9–11.

⁷⁶ M. Abramović, *Walk Through Walls*, p. 278.

⁷⁷ M. Abramović, *Interviews 1976–2018*, pp. 203–204.

⁷⁸ N. Müller-Schöll, *Die post-performative Wende*, “Theater heute” 2012, no. 12, pp. 42–45.

⁷⁹ T. Gusman, *Ciò che resta della presenza*, p. 382.

⁸⁰ M. De Marinis, *Performance e teatro. Dall’attore al performer, e ritorno?*, [in:] A. Cascetta (ed.), *Il teatro verso la performance*, “Comunicazioni sociali” 2014, no. 1, pp. 29–46, in particular pp. 40–42. This phenomenon is complementary to the “performatization of theatre” (*performativizzazione del teatro*), that can be observed beginning in the 1960s.

⁸¹ *Ibidem*, p. 42.

Traces of this can be found in some texts of Abramović, herself. In direct opposition to the manifesto she wrote in 1975 with Ulay for their life on the road, *Art Vital*, which reads “No repetition” as a commandment,⁸² she writes, in 1991, in her diaries: “The power lies in repetition. [...] Through repetition the ego disappears and one enters into a collective consciousness.”⁸³ One could also see in these lines – and in the performances of the respective years – a transition from an individualistic conception of art to the collectivism of her more recent presentations. But, besides this, Abramović made very clear statements about how her way of seeing theatre, fiction and reproducibility has changed over the years:

When I was in my 40s, after I ended the walk on the Great Wall of China with Ulay, I was unhappy, depressed and lonely. The only possibility that I saw of freeing myself from the pain of this broken relationship, was to bring my life onto stage as a theatre piece. Through theatre, I wanted to take distance from my life [...]. Until then, I didn't want to do theatre. Theatre and opera were for me enemies of performance art. In theatre, for me, everything was a lie. Someone plays the role of someone else, everything is rehearsed, the audience remains in the dark, nothing is real. In performance art, it's all about the “here and now”, every element deals with the truth of the moment. But, at 40, and as an already established performance artist, I could be much more indulgent with other forms of art – I did not need to fight them anymore. At this point, I wanted to understand them. And theatre was the right medium.⁸⁴

The healing power of theatre was tested by Abramović several times. At first with the piece *Biography*, in 1992, in which she staged her life and works (with re-performances of old solo works).⁸⁵ It is worth mentioning, here, that in such an autobiographical piece Maria Callas' voice was employed (again her interpretation of *Casta Diva*) in the so-called “bye-bye scene”, her symbolic farewell from the past with Ulay.⁸⁶ In a following version of the biographical piece in 2004, *The Biography Remix*, Jurriaan, the son of Ulay, played the role of the father in the re-performances showed on stage, and Ulay himself was in the audience to receive Abramović's farewell: “it was the perfect mixture of life and theatre.”⁸⁷ Altogether Abramović

82 M. Abramović, *Walk Through Walls*, p. 91.

83 M. Abramović, *Writings 1960–2014*, p. 263.

84 *Ein Gespräch mit Marina Abramović*, p. 21. My translation.

85 See M. Abramović, *Walk Through Walls*, pp. 206–210 and M. Abramović, *Artist Body. Performances 1969–1998*, pp. 385–399.

86 M. Abramović, *Walk Through Walls*, pp. 207; see *ibidem*, p. 210, for a memory that combines the listening of Callas with the centrality of the grandmother's kitchen in her young years. See also *Ein Gespräch mit Marina Abramović*, p. 22.

87 M. Abramović, *Walk Through Walls*, pp. 273–274.

had staged her life in five different versions for five different directors, when she decided to make one more version to include her death, as well – the already mentioned *Life and Death of Marina Abramović*, directed by Robert Wilson in 2011.⁸⁸ The collaboration with Wilson and co-star, Willem Dafoe, brought Abramović to a further consideration about “truth” on the theatrical stage:

I had always believed performance was real and theatre was fake. In performance art, the knife is real, the blood is real. In theatre, the knife is fake and the blood is ketchup. Despite this illusion, which I had always associated with a lack of discipline, Willem taught me that getting into a role can be every bit as demanding and real as performance art.⁸⁹

From this lesson, Abramović profited in *7 Deaths of Maria Callas*, as well: “I learned from Bob Wilson and Willem Dafoe that you can go very deep into it, that you can really become that person. I really felt I became the character. I understood on a deeper level, that I could do that.”⁹⁰ Maybe the compromise that Abramović found between performance art and theatre, with which she goes beyond the polarity *Acting/Not-Acting*,⁹¹ lies exactly in this acknowledgment. “In a performance I become, somehow, not like a mortal.”⁹² What she is not able to show in a performance, the actual death, can only be shown on the theatrical stage – at least until her very last performance, the really unique event of her actual death.

The meditation on death, carried out on stage, is a very personal one, strictly connected with Abramović’s own life: “The only theatre I do is my own. My life is the only life that I can play.”⁹³ This statement reinforces once more the already discussed identification-process with Maria Callas, that allows her to be on stage for *7 Deaths* still as “herself”. And this is also probably the reason why – together with technical and financial factors – Abramović abandoned the initial idea of *How to die*, in order not to show another’s death on stage (that of the miners but also Callas’ death).

Having established Abramović’s openness towards theatre – or even her need of it for certain purposes – it remains to be seen how her new opera project will fall within this process of experimentation with new formats.⁹⁴ Opera is, indeed, from

⁸⁸ Ibidem, pp. 334–338.

⁸⁹ Ibidem, p. 337. For the differences between theatre and performance, see also Marina Abramović’s TED-Talk, *An art made of trust*, at minute 03:35.

⁹⁰ A. Heyward, *Die Verletzliche*, p. 30.

⁹¹ M. De Marinis, *Performance e teatro*, pp. 42–43.

⁹² A. Heyward, *Die Verletzliche*, p. 30.

⁹³ S. Thornton, *33 Artists in 3 Acts*, p. 292.

⁹⁴ Two preliminary steps for Abramović on the big opera stage are the production of Maurice Ravel’s *Boléro* in 2013 at the Opéra Garnier in Paris and of *Pelléas et Mélisande* by the same

among the stage arts, the most regimented and fixed, and the amount of physical distance experienced between artist and audience (if only because of the architecture of opera houses) is the greatest:

Opera gives a space between audience and the person on stage. So you need much more effort, energy and strength in order to concentrate to actually create an energy-dialogue with the public. So it's a big demand for me.⁹⁵

But, as far as this dialogue is possible, Abramović seems, now, to be open to any kind of medium:

In the beginning of my career, I hated theatre and opera because I had to establish my own rules and position for performance art, in which everything is real and blood is blood. Once I established the rules I could be much more flexible. Media now is not so strict as it was in the early 70s. You can mix things... You must trust the intelligence of the public.⁹⁶

As claimed by Eva Huttenlauch, the fixed dramaturgy (consisting of a script *and* an orchestral score) and the aesthetic border of the opera stage do not prevent Abramović from approaching Maria Callas extemporaneously, outside of the dynamics of stage direction (which is coherently entrusted to the co-director Lynsey Peisinger), and always anew.⁹⁷ Moreover, the scenic realisation of *7 Deaths* works with real, live operating artists. The seven singers do not play as typical a role as in an opera, but sing just a short aria – a short entry in which they have to reach a climax immediately, a couple of minutes of singing – pure voice and presence, the two essential elements to which opera is reduced, here. Finally, even though the course of events is fixed, there is no traditional plot, nor is there a clear directorial line. It is much more about the power and the impact caused by strong images.⁹⁸ And it no longer matters how these images are produced, rather, what effect they have on the audience. That is why Abramović also took part, for the first time

composer in 2018 at the Vlaamse Opera in Antwerpen. For both of them she created the concept and scenography in collaboration with the choreographers Sidi Larbi Cherkaoui and Damien Jalet.

⁹⁵ See the interview with Abramović in *Vorbericht mit Interviews*, at minute 01:10.

⁹⁶ A. Heyward, *Die Verletzliche*, p. 29.

⁹⁷ See E. Huttenlauch, *Marina Abramović und die Parrhesie*, pp. 78–79 and *Offen gesprochen. An open conversation*, at minute 11:20: “I don't want to act and I'm not an actress. That's why I'm now working with my co-director Lynsey Peisinger, [...] to find my space in this room of Callas. [...] Every emotion has to come out of real emotions”.

⁹⁸ See *Vorbericht mit Interviews*, where E. Huttenlauch speaks about “Wirkungsmächtigkeit von Bildern”.

in her life, in film shoots in Hollywood, where Nabil Elderkin directed the seven videos – an extremely different filming experience in comparison with the video-performances Abramović has been used to since the 1970s.⁹⁹ “Everything is new for me. [...] It was not easy at all, it was also to learn a very new media for me” – said Abramović about the filming experience.¹⁰⁰

Abramović’s experimentation with new media and technologies is far from being concluded. Her meditation on how to reach as many people as possible with her art, on the one hand, and her research on the potential of an immaterial art on the other, have already taken her on the path of Mixed Reality (a hybrid of reality and virtual reality) for the “immaterial performance” *The Life* (London, Serpentine Gallery, 2019). In this performance, audience members were provided with wearable spatial computing devices (similar to Virtual Reality glasses) for seeing and exploring the movements of the artist which were captured in advance through an extensive volumetric process.¹⁰¹ The new possibilities of Mixed Reality will probably be further developed and refined in the upcoming, grand retrospective planned at the Royal Academy of Arts in London for autumn 2021, *After Life*. As the title reveals, after the long gestation of *7 Deaths of Maria Callas*, Abramović focuses on life, and on life *after* death, combining spiritual and technological research:

Spirituality travels so far in front of science, then science finally finds devices to measure its realities. I want to deal with intuitive knowledge. I want to live in synchronicity, where you are so attuned to existence, yourself and your surroundings, that things happen without effort. To have this last period of life, but to see it the way a child sees it. That fresh view: where everything is possible. This is my biggest dream. This is something that is unfinished.¹⁰²

After having used her body as an instrument and object for so many years,¹⁰³ and after having produced so many “transitory objects” for human and non-human use,¹⁰⁴ Abramović is now completely dedicated to immateriality:

I believe that the twenty-first century will be a world without art in the sense that we have it now. It will be a world without objects, where the human being can be on

⁹⁹ For the first video see M. Abramović, *Walk Through Walls*, p. 79. For a backstage documentation of the shooting see M. Abramović, *7 Deaths of Maria Callas*, photographs by M. Anelli.

¹⁰⁰ *Vorbericht mit Interviews*, at minute 02:38.

¹⁰¹ See A. Heyward, *Die Verletzliche*, p. 29, and <https://www.serpentinegalleries.org/whats-on/marina-abramovic-life/>

¹⁰² M. Abramović, *Interviews 1976–2018*, p. 359.

¹⁰³ *Ibidem*, p. 31.

¹⁰⁴ M. Abramović, *Public Body. Installations and Objects 1965–2001*.

a high level of consciousness and has such a strong mental state that he or she can transmit thoughts and energy to other people, without needing objects in between. [...] There will just be the artist standing in front of a public, which is developed enough to receive a message or energy.¹⁰⁵

But in this open research process that she will be carrying on into her final years, she wants to do more than eliminate objects. It seems that she wants to modify, or rather, expand – in space and time, also *post mortem* – her concept of presence and performance:

At the moment I am transcending my previous understanding of performances by structuring them in such a way that they can also be carried out by others. [...] I am trying to show this is possible through my Abramović Method which is currently being developed at my non-profit organization the Marina Abramović Institute (MAI). Through it, the audience becomes my work. I am still doing performances. However, I would like to reach the point where it is no longer for me to be there physically. Time is necessary to reach this point and I hope I manage to achieve it before I die.¹⁰⁶

Conclusions

In the uncertain conditions imposed by the Coronavirus pandemic, Marina Abramović's opera project *7 Deaths of Maria Callas* offers a great opportunity to meditate on performance art and theatre, both on its constituent elements and its relevance to society.

Drawing on her fascination with music, the purest and most intangible form of art,¹⁰⁷ and, in particular the voice of Maria Callas, Abramović exploits the potential of the genre of opera as a laboratory for cross-mediality. The openness to other media, which has always been one of the salient characteristics of performative theatre,¹⁰⁸ is taken to its extremes in this project. Moreover, *7 Deaths* marks a new stage in Abramović's reflection on the relationship between theatre and performance art, overcoming the polarity representation-presence and finding a new synthesis for it.

¹⁰⁵ M. Abramović, *Interviews 1976–2018*, p. 97. See also V. Spallino, *Marina Abramović. Il paradosso dell'assenza. Performance 1967–2017*, Villaggio Maori, Catania 2018, pp. 9–33, in particular pp. 31–33.

¹⁰⁶ M. Abramović, *Interviews 1976–2018*, p. 393.

¹⁰⁷ M. Abramović, *Anders hören. Die Abramović-Methode für Musik*, Alte Oper Frankfurt, Frankfurt 2019, p. 16: "For me, music is absolutely the purest form of art [...] because it is intangible. There is no 'object' between it and the recipient: music is always unmediated and direct".

¹⁰⁸ A. Cascetta, *European Performative Theatre. The Issues, Problems and Techniques of Crucial Masterpieces*, Routledge, New York 2020, p. 8.

The project *7 Deaths* revolves around the theme of death, a cornerstone of Abramović's works. Not only is death the protagonist here in terms of contents, with the aestheticised representation of the deaths of opera heroines and Callas herself, but it also has an impact on the way we perceive both the portrayed and the portraying artists – Callas and Abramović, whose images are fused by virtue of a process of identification that the latter undergoes. Besides the physical resemblance, the two women share a similar attitude towards vulnerability, a comparable relationship with the audience and the same tendency to let artistic and private life coincide – all elements that contribute to making them icons, in a partially controlled and partially autonomous process of mythologisation.

A full and deep reception of the project presupposes that the audience knows, if not the opera plots, at least some aspects of Callas's and Abramović's lives and work. The biographical and autobiographical dimensions play an important part and for this reason the universality of the message is somehow weaker in this than in other works by Abramović. But the visual strength of the videos and of the last scene together with the power of the voice on stage largely compensate for this.

The above-mentioned use of new media and technologies has a significant role in Abramović's current projects and her research into immaterial art – the art of the future according to the Serbian performer, freed from objects and reduced to its essential: the energy-exchange between artist and audience. Immateriality and contemporaneity relate back to the discussion on documentation and re-enactment (a central topic in Abramović's production), but at the same time open up new prospects for the possibilities of art in the near future. If the performative arts can be considered “a sort of *laboratory of live art* adapted to the new times,”¹⁰⁹ they cannot remain unchanged after such an event as the pandemic we are experiencing, with the constraints and limitations it imposes on culture and the question of how and whether art is relevant to our system. We feel more than ever in these days how necessary and irreplaceable artistic theatre and performance art are, as tools to investigate the phenomenology of existence.¹¹⁰ And the new conditions and alternative forms in which we experience art now (for *7 Deaths* only 500 spectators could enter the theatre, the others had to view it streamed online) throw up some questions, which, in Abramović's case, contribute to the already operating process of redefining the basics of performance art. The attempt discussed above (§ 5) to expand the concept of presence and performance beyond the physical presence of the artist could be a new path for her art. The conclusion she reached – that the public itself *is* her work of art¹¹¹ – shifts the focus onto the addressee of the per-

¹⁰⁹ Ibidem, p. 6.

¹¹⁰ See C. Bernardi, A. Cascetta, *Ci sarà ancora teatro nel mondo che verra?*, “Munera” 2020, no. 2, pp. 111–117, in particular pp. 112–113.

¹¹¹ See n. 64.

formance.¹¹² Provided that art is not reduced to a superficial experience, to cluster of pixels always accessible on our electronic devices or assimilated to that flow of information that turns us into “emotional invalids”, and also provided that we can explore with new tools how to really “be in the moment” with our body *and* our mind,¹¹³ art could in future be less bound to a physical place and survive beyond any unpredictable restrictions – such as those imposed by the Coronavirus pandemic. Maybe Abramović’s research is more than a temporary alternative and could be a path for the future, a way to live and perceive art with full awareness, openness and spiritual dedication.

To what extent will she manage to extend the event of her existence, of her “being there” (*Dasein*)? Will she find a way, as Maria Callas did, with the event of her eternal voice,¹¹⁴ to convey to us after her death – the real one, her last performance – her experience, the “full emptiness” and the “positive void”¹¹⁵ that she has found behind the many thresholds that she has crossed, and to preserve her presence for us in the Here and Now?

[...] you have experienced
a place I've never explored, A VOID
IN THE COSMOS
It's true that my earth is small
But I've always been happy to spin yarns
about unexplored places, as if none of it was real
But you're actually in it, here, *in voce*
P.P. Pasolini, *Timor di me?*¹¹⁶

¹¹² See T. Girst, *Alle Zeit der Welt*, Hanser, München 2019, pp. 74–75 for Abramović’s idea of rearranging museums worldwide by placing single works of art in little rooms accessible to one single visitor, in order to allow a much more intense and personal encounter with the work.

¹¹³ M. Abramović, *Anders hören*, p. 15.

¹¹⁴ See E. Matassi, *La voce come evento*, [in:] *Mille e una Callas*, pp. 21–35.

¹¹⁵ M. Abramović, *Interviews 1976–2018*, p. 116. The germs of a transcendent concept of presence can be found in the demanding performance *Nightsea Crossing* with Ulay (performed 90 times between 1981 and 1986), described in M. Abramović, *Artist Body. Performances 1969–1998*, p. 258, as a dematerialisation process: “Presence. Being present, over long stretches of time, until presence rises and falls, from material to immaterial, from form to formless, from instrumental to mental, from time to timeless”. See also how Abramović broke her silence and announced the conclusion of the last performance (*Entering the Other Side*) of *7 easy pieces*: “Please, just for a moment, all of you, just listen. I am here and now, and you are here and now with me. There is no time” (M. Abramović, *Walk Through Walls*, p. 283).

¹¹⁶ P.P. Pasolini, *The Selected Poetry of Pier Paolo Pasolini*, pp. 395–397.

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Francesco Marzano

Odegrać śmierć: Mariny Abramović 7 śmierci Marii Callas

Streszczenie

Esej analizuje projekt operowy Mariny Abramović pt. *7 Deaths of Maria Callas* (7 śmierci Marii Callas). Premiera projektu odbyła się w Monachium we wrześniu 2020 roku. W pierwszej części artykułu rekonstruuje rolę, jaką grecki sopran odegrał w życiu serbskiego wykonawcy, wprowadzając go w stopniowe poczucie samoidentyfikacji. Następnie bierze pod uwagę kolejne etapy trzydziestoletniego rozwoju pierwotnej koncepcji utworu wideo *How to Die* i opisuje szczegółowo etapową realizację dzieła. W trzeciej części koncentruje się na przedstawieniu śmierci w przedstawieniach Mariny Abramović, a w czwartej porównuje dzieła i życie Callas i Abramović oraz ich status jako status kobiet ikonicznych. W ostatniej sekcji przedstawiam artystyczną drogę Abramović, która prowadziła ją od jej ekstremalnych i kluczowych przedstawień z lat 70. XX w. do ostatnich eksperymentów z innymi mediami i medytacji nad sztuką niematerialną.

Słowa kluczowe: performance, opera, Abramović, Callas, śmierć, ikony/ikoniczność, obecność

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The theater is always dying

Summary

The Theater Is always Dying traces the resilience of live theatrical performance in the face of competing performative forms like cinema, television and contemporary streaming services on personal, hand-held devices and focuses on theater's ability to continue as a significant cultural, community and intellectual force in the face of such competition. To echo Beckett, we might suggest, then, that theater may be at its best at its dying since its extended demise seems self-regenerating. Whether or not you "go out of the theatre more human than when you went in", as Ariane Mnouchkin suggests, or whether you've had a sense that you've been part of, participated in a community ritual, a Dionysia, or whether or not you've felt that you've been affected by a performative, an embodied intellectual and emotional human experience may determine how you judge the state of contemporary theater. You may not always know the answer to those questions immediately after the theatrical encounter, or ever deliberately or consciously, but something, nonetheless, may have been taking its course. You may emerge "more human than when you went in".

Keywords: Communitas, Victor Turner, David Mamet, Marshall McLuhan, Ariane Mnouchkin, Dionysia, Jerzy Grotowski, Laboratory Theatre, Peter Brook, Charles Marowitz, Richard Schechner, Antonin Artaud, Herbert Blau, Samuel Beckett

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Commodity and community

In his 2011 collection of essays called simply *Theatre*, American playwright, director and theatrical provocateur, David Mamet, reminds us that “the theatre is always dying”. The comment echoes Peter Hall in a 2007 interview, “One of the interesting things about theater is that from time immemorial it’s been dying. It’s always dying. It’s always going through some awful convulsion.”¹ A theater in continual death throes may seem a tough sell in the era of *The Book of Mormon* in 2011 and *Hamilton* in 2015, with their exorbitant ticket prices and lucrative touring companies, but Mamet is not necessarily, or perhaps not exclusively talking about commerce or theater as a commercial enterprise, although commerce and commercialism are never far from the theater. Writing in the *Vulture* section of “New York” magazine in March of 2016, on the other hand, Jesse Green proclaims that “Theater is a force in New York” again; my students, however, admittedly not in New York, don’t routinely go to plays, or go as a class assignment when they’re required to do so, even at a school with a large and dynamic theater department, but they are interested in and do attend performances of various kinds. Theater, as an entertainment vehicle, as a literary experience, or as a mode, a channel of serious political or ethical discourse, is already dead to them. Forecasts of theatre’s demise, furthermore, have tended to dominate twentieth century critical discourse, as drama has become the neglected genre of literary study; theatrical texts, plays, have been relegated, along with their performances, to theater departments – outside of Shakespeare, of course, who is treated in departments of literature almost exclusively as a poet – and as technological changes to performance emerged and proliferated. Except for Artaud, perhaps, theater is simply a tangential part of modernist literary study, the other exception, perhaps, the work of Samuel Beckett. *The Bastard Art* Susan Harris Smith calls it in her 1997 monograph, *American Drama* published in the prestigious Cambridge Studies in American Theatre and Drama series. Mamet’s emphasis on theater’s protracted demise is, then, as useful as it is misplaced, since the continuous process Mamet describes is always and simultaneously regenerative. But are we talking about commodity, economic success, the principle measure of creative products these days, or something like what Green calls, “the intellectual traditions of the stage”, that is, theater as an art form, as a mode of cultural discourse, and as a reflection and builder of community, what cultural anthropologist Victor Turner called “communitas” – something like what the Greeks apparently had in the *Dionysia* during the age of Pericles, the so called “first citizen” of democratic Athens? The focus on this essay will be less (although some) on death throes than on theater’s periodic revitalizations.

¹ Interview and transcript at https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TN6CbJ_MSXY (access 3.11.2020).

Theatrical death throes

Cinema, then, would be the death of theatre, we were told, but even early cinema mimicked the theatrical experience with group attendance at specific venues, usually a theater, often a converted music hall, so that the community function of performance, a recasting of theatre's origins in the fifth century B. C. where it was a major religious, ceremonial, aesthetic, political and social experience, at once ex-coriating and pleasurable, remained. Moreover, through the first half of the twentieth century at least, Hollywood functioned as Broadway west: witness the film versions of Tennessee Williams, especially the Brando-dominated *A Streetcar Named Desire* in 1951. Broadway was Hollywood's farm team as the real national exposure to American theatre came through film, such opinion reflected by one D.V. Whyte writing from Oklahoma City, Oklahoma to "Theatre Arts Magazine" (XL.8) in August 1956: "I believe that motion-picture art is every bit as important as the theatre art... even more so. So won't you put movie reviews back in »Theatre Arts«?" (p. 3). But cinema now is looking moribund in these days of personal video access to just about anything.

Much of Mamet's wrath in 2011 was directed toward the theatrical hierarchy, particularly toward the power of directors and the institutionalization of acting into "methods", into acting theory and acting schools. Mamet's early, roustabout years and contrarian views were not dissimilar to those of acting icon Robert Mitchum with whom Mamet shares contrarian opinions. While Mitchum approved of or accepted a role for directors, up to a point, at least for the purposes of a 1957 interview, "In the theater, yes, but not pictures", but like Mamet he believed that acting could not be taught, that studying acting was, in Mitchum's famous quip, like taking lessons to become taller. The issue of "Theatre Arts Magazine" cited above, for instance, carries five pages of listings for "Schools of the Theater and Community Theatres" interspersed with paid advertising for a wide variety of theater training programs: "Professional Training" from American Theatre Wing (founded in 1917 by Antoinette Perry, one of the "seven suffragettes" who created the program and after whom the nation's principal theater awards are named, with Helen Hays, as President in 1956) (p. 14); Actors' "Studio 29", "Professional Training for the Stage"; "Elizabeth Holloway School of Theatre"; "Goodman Memorial Theatre School of Drama" (pp. 6-7); "Herbert Berghof Evening Acting Classes" (p. 8). Berghof had just directed the Broadway premiere of Samuel Beckett's *Waiting for Godot*, a curiously jumbled text for which is featured in this issue of "Theatre Arts Magazine". And by the 1950s American universities began degree granting programs for performance: Emerson College advertised its Bachelors and Masters degrees for "Drama-Speech-Radio-Television" in the issue under discussion (pp. 6-7), and Boston University School of Fine and Applied Arts advertised its Division of Theatre Arts with an impressive list of "Participating Directors",

which included Alan Schneider (p. 9), the director who premiered the disastrous try out of *Waiting for Godot* at the Coconut Grove Theatre in Coral Gables, Florida, before being replaced by Berghof for the Broadway premiere. Impressive as such institutionalizing of performance or theater arts is, it remains a constant target for Mamet as a contributor to theatre's continual dying.

The received wisdom was that television would be theater's (and film's) next apparent replacement, yet even that more personal medium, which, according to Marshall McLuhan in *Understanding Media* (1964), was more medium than message, the technological form embedded in and as the content. Television generated and signaled a change in our religious, political, ceremonial environment. For McLuhan television was a cool medium that functioned, in his famous if disputed metaphor, more like a light bulb than, say, a book, or live theatre, for that matter. It creates a space almost content free and thus requires more participation than a hot medium since the former is low definition. Yet even for television, in those pre-vidéo-streaming days, families gathered in that illuminated space at prescribed times, at least until the proliferation of cheap appliances put the machine in every room of the house save the toilet, and recording devices freed audiences of time constraints. Time and space no longer needed to be shared, and images in "cool" media were not prescribed as they were in "hot" media like cinema where participation was low. Television required creative rather than passive viewing, McLuhan tried to tell us. By century's end, however, the vestiges of that community function of performance had all but vanished as we were offered films and streaming video and television on demand and on (almost un-sharable) miniaturized, hand held, personal devices. We became each our own community, and the medium got perhaps even cooler, in McLuhan's terms.

So what remains for theatre as community becomes virtual and the medium itself becomes the message. For one, theatre or the theatrical has expanded, now seen as segment of a larger entity called performance, and it has evolved, hybridized over the course of the twentieth century, just as McLuhan's categories of "hot" and "cool" have hybridized with the advent of movies on TV, say. Moreover, rather than another cultural vehicle for conveying and critiquing master narratives, the glue of cultural cohesion, theatre too became a medium for the presentation of images, often non-narrative and non-metaphorical, non-representational, and so in many respects "cool". That is, neither a metaphor nor a representation of the recognizable world but an image, an entity of its own, and so it eluded the metaphorical, equation, definition, but was, in the phrase of Henri Bergson, a bridge between matter and memory, simultaneously material and immaterial, external and internal, a thing and an idea. Beginning with the Futurists, the Dadaists, the Surrealists theatre or performance, that is, acts outside of theatrical confines, got cooler and so more participatory. A theatre of images might itself be something of a hybrid medium, both "hot" and "cool". As McLuhan explains it, "Any hot medium allows

of less participation than a cool one, as a lecture makes for less participation than a seminar, and a book for less than a dialogue.”² Much of conceptual art of the mid 1970, in galleries and theaters, following Duchamp, and then perhaps John Cage and Merce Cunningham, broke with narration and representation, broke with a sense of artistic unity. Robert Wilson, for instance, would ignore contemporary artistic dicta of psychology and meaning in his efforts “to break up unity and displace the center, using a visual language that was more architectural than theatrical”, according to Sylvère Lotringer, who began the journal “Semiotext(e)” and its book series after organizing the revolutionary Schizo-Culture conference at Columbia University in 1975.³ Lotringer quotes from his interview with Wilson: “I didn’t have to bother about plot or meaning [...] I could just look at designs and patterns – that seemed enough. There was a dancer here, another dancer there, another four on this side... [It was] visual poetry.”⁴ Such artists opened a space where “Theater could do without language, concepts without referents.”⁵ As John Cage puts it in essay/visual experiment/book, “Empty Words”, a work in “IV parts (or lectures)”, “What can be done with the English Language? Use it as material. Material of five kinds: letters, syllables, words, phrases, sentences”. What Cage was doing was “Making music by reading aloud.”⁶ In 1976 almost immediately after the Schizo-Culture conference, Wilson would collaborate with Philip Glass and dancer, Lucinda Childs, for the plotless opera, *Einstein on the Beach*. By 1979 Glass would reunite with Childs and filmmaker/visual artist Sol LeWitt for the collaborative piece, *Dance*, a work that critics cite as a “seminal [...] iconic performance” (“ArtDaily”), “legendary” (Rockwell) and as a performance that fundamentally changed theater (Dwyer). Such art, with its assault on story and linearity, often on language itself, was finally deeply political in that it dealt a blow against ruling syntax, order itself.

By the twenty-first Century theater had absorbed a pattern of performative hybrids, film in live performance, say, used brilliantly and seductively in the works from *Dance* to *Disappearing Number* from the innovative Complicité (2008). Headed by its one man, rather one person trans-Atlantic theatrical revival, Simon McBurney, *Disappearing Number* weaves two love affairs on two continents in two centuries, live and filmed. It went on to win the Olivier Award for Best Play in

2 M. McLuhan, *Understanding Media: The Extensions of Man*, McGraw Hill [Reissued MIT Press, 1994, with introduction by L.H. Lapham; reissued again by Gingko Press, 2003], New York 1964, p. 25.

3 S. Lotringer, *Notes on the Schizo-Culture Issue*, “Semiotext(e)” 1978, vol. III, no. 2, p. xiii [2013 reprint “Semiotext(e) Foreign Agents Series”, MIT University Press, Cambridge, pp. v-xxiv].

4 Ibidem, pp. xiii.

5 Ibidem.

6 Ibidem, p. 165.

2008.⁷ Mark Rylance, another British trained dynamo, was the first artistic director of Shakespeare's Globe in London between 1995 and 2005 and had lead not just a revitalization of Shakespeare, a playwright who never needed one, but a reconceptualization of Shakespeare in a renewed age of gender flexibility as he re-emphasized Shakespeare as a performance artist.

But theater, as we generally know it, requires space, a place, a theater, most traditionally. In an essay for the British newspaper "The Guardian" on December 30, 2017, playwright David Hare outlined what he called *My Ideal Theatre*, meaning not any particular space, although that does play into Hare's ideal, but the idea of theatre:

A theatre is partly memory, the residue of the greatness that's passed through. If you are my age [Hare was 70 at the time], then whenever you go to the Aldwych theatre, you will be moved to remember Paul Scofield playing King Lear, or Peggy Ashcroft playing Queen Margaret. At the Royal Court, you are in a space where Caryl Churchill, John Osborne, Andrea Dunbar and Athol Fugard offered their most original work. ... Ariane Mnouchkine, the director of the *Théâtre du Soleil*, was often found tearing tickets as the audience came in to the *Cartoucherie* in Paris. [...] Clearly the Brooklyn Academy [of Music] aspired, in its Majestic auditorium, to transport the magic of Peter Brook's *Bouffes du Nord* in Paris for the transatlantic premiere of *The Mahabharata* in New York in 1987. But however assiduously they scraped the paint off the proscenium, and however rakishly they degraded the naked brickwork, the chi-chi effect was, and remains, disastrous. Nothing is worse than fake authenticity.⁸

Despite Hare's evocation of what is now the Harvey Theater of the Brooklyn Academy of Music, America, despite its rich theatrical tradition, especially in the 20th century, has little of the theatrical memory that Hare evokes. There had been attempts at such but they tended to run up against American discomfort with if not distaste for public funding for the arts. Attempts had been made during America's progressive periods to create a theatre that would reflect and consolidate an American ethos.

But theater with memory became theater as memory, and the stage was its bank: As Gilles Deleuze struck out on his own after *A Thousand Plateaus*, he turned from desire and desiring machines to aesthetics and cinema. Along the way he

picked up a number of his ideas on the arts from friends like Pierre Boulez and the painter Gérard Fromanger. From Fromanger, for example, he learned that the blank

⁷ <http://www.complicite.org/productions/ADisappearingNumber> (access 3.11.2020).

⁸ D. Hare, *David Hare: My Ideal Theatre*, "The Guardian" 30.12.2017, <https://www.theguardian.com/stage/2017/dec/30/david-hare-my-ideal-theatre> (access 3.11.2020).

canvas is not white, but rather “black with everything every painter has painted before me” – an idea he would explore in his book on Francis Bacon, *The Logic of Sensation*.⁹

The blank canvas like the “empty” stage, or page for that matter, was, nonetheless, filled, with history, the past, memory. Deleuze was, of course, not unusual in such emphasis on the cross pollination of the arts, at least since the early twentieth century where hybridized art forms, and emphasis on performance were central to the Dada and Surrealist ethos. Painting had always been “theatrical” but the Surrealists foregrounded theater and theatricality. Painting, like theater, was, traditionally, framed, but then frames could be framed even as memory, self-consciousness could be conscious of itself being conscious.

More traditionally, Clifford Odets’s *Waiting for Lefty* was staged by The Group Theater, founded by Harold Clurman, Lee Stasberg and Cheryl Crawford, in January of 1935. The play was in the “Living Newspaper” tradition developed by the Federal Theater Project (disbanded in 1939). It was first published in “New Theatre Magazine” with the subtitle “A Play in Six Scenes, Based on the New York City Taxi Strike of February 1934”. Real-life striker, Samuel Orner, noted that Odets based the meeting scene on a real meeting in the Bronx where Orner addressed his fellow cabbies: “He must have taken notes because so many lines in *Waiting For Lefty* were the same as in the meeting, almost word for word.”¹⁰ As such it was close to the work being done by Elmer Rice, one of the forces in the short-lived “Living Newspaper” theatrical experiments, his own *The Adding Machine* of 1923 and *Street Scene*, which began as fifteen scenes of life in New York and which won the Pulitzer Prize in 1929, paving the way. Its revival in 1952 directed by Clurman was part of the American National Theater and Academy (ANTA), the attempt to establish an American national theater as an alternative to Broadway (that is, as a theater for the whole nation in conjunction with the Federal Theater Project).¹¹ By 1982 in the “Forward” to his collection of essays, *Blooded Thought: Occasions of Theater*, Stanislavski well behind him, Herbert Blau outlined the failures of traditional theater and the ideology which sustains it:

9 A. Shatz, *Desire Was Everywhere*, “London Review of Books” 16.12.2010, vol. 34, no. 4, pp. 9–12, <https://www.lrb.co.uk/v32/n24/adam-shatz/desire-was-everywhere> (access 3.11.2020).

10 M. Brenman-Gibson, *Clifford Odets: American Playwright: the Years from 1906–1940*, Applause, New York 2002, p. 283.

11 See “National Theatre Is Authorized by Congress to Advance the Drama; Distinguished Patrons of the Stage Are Named as Incorporators-Art of the Theatre to Be Developed by School and Productions Throughout the Country”, <https://www.nytimes.com/1935/06/30/archives/national-theatre-is-authorized-by-congress-to-advance-the-drama.html?sq=%2522American%2520National%2520Theatre%2520and%2520Academy%2522&scp=2&st=cse> (access 3.11.2020).

I will not have much to say of the old social occasions of theater when people gathered (so we are told) as a community to remember, through the enactment of a dramatic narrative, the maybe half-forgotten signals of a common set of values and the venerable features of a collective fate.¹²

Blooded Thought was a book that signaled overtly Blau's shift to the performing self on the *mise en scène* of the page. The shift of playing space from the boards to what Blau calls "the chamber drama of the *mise en scène* of the unconscious"¹³ was driven by his assessment "that there is no contemporary theater of any consequence which is conceived for the gathering of an audience with such expectations", that is, "of a common set of values and... of a collective fate". Blau had arrived at such skepticism through a distinguished – if tempestuous – thirty-year theatrical career which included his co-founding and co-directing with Jules Irving, from 1952–1964, the theatrical collective they called the San Francisco Actor's Workshop, which introduced at least west coast audiences, and often American audiences, to much of what has since become canonical modernism: Samuel Beckett, Harold Pinter, Jean Genet, Boris Vian and Bertolt Brecht. The Actor's Workshop, along with Blau's manifesto for the decentralization of American theater, *The Impossible Theater*, published in 1964, led to a brief stint as co-director (again with Jules Irving) of the Repertory Theater of Lincoln Center in 1965, where he tried, among other futile tasks, to bring an anti-war consciousness to New York bankers (that is, Chairman of the Repertory Theater Board was Robert L. Hoguet, Jr., vice-president of the First National City Bank of New York.); as Blau cites in *The Impossible Theater*, "I would say that the purpose of the Workshop was to save the world", and that was the sensibility he brought to New York in the early years of establishing an American national theater, Lincoln Center Repertory Theater, as heir to director Elia Kazan and producer Robert Whitehead's initial version at ANTA Washington Square, "the only subsidized theater in America", as Blau noted in "Saturday Review."¹⁴

By 1967, after the abrupt cancellation of Blau's multi-media production of Wilford Leach's *In Three Zones*, a production designed to inaugurate the new, smaller Forum Theater at the Vivian Beaumont for the theater's second season, the bankers appeared to have won, the issue as much economics as ideology; Blau had apparently spent the entire year's budget on that one production, and so he resigned to begin teaching at the City College of New York before his return to Los Angeles as Dean of the Cali-

¹² H. Blau, *Blooded Thought: Occasions of the Theater*, Performing Arts Journal Publications, New York 1982, p. xi.

¹³ *Ibidem*, p. 180.

¹⁴ H. Blau, *I Don't Wanna Play, The American Theatre '64: Its Problems and Promise*, "The Saturday Review" 22.02.1964, vol. XLVII, no. 8, p. 88.

fornia Institute of the Arts, that Disney-funded institution now popularly called Cal Arts. Blau's transcontinental move may have been fore-doomed, anticipated by Theodore Hoffman's piece on American regional theater for *Show: The Magazine of the Arts*, in April of 1965, provocatively entitled *Who The Hell Is Herbert Blau?: The road may be dead, but regional theater is a lively business*, in which Hoffman noted

they'll [that is, Irving and Blau, rather now Blau and Irving] attract plenty of violent partisans, make lots of provocative copy for the Sunday drama sections and probably drive the board of directors to as many secret discussions as the last regime [Elia Kazan among them].¹⁵

Blau would launch his next theatrical phase with the touring theater group, KRAKEN in 1971, the group named after the mythical and tentacled sea monster. The 1970s was a period when he was still concerned with the training of actors and whose protracted periods of rehearsals seemed to grow out of Blau's work on *Endgame*, which opens with the lines, "Finished, it's finished, nearly finished, it must be nearly finished", and which, according to Blau, "became the methodological grounding of the KRAKEN group, where the work was not finished until it was finished, or we'd exhausted everything we could think about it – which usually took more than a year."¹⁶ The details of this work with KRAKEN make up much of the text of his second book, *Take up the Bodies: Theater at the Vanishing Point*. With KRAKEN, text became a performative pretext, but Blau's emphasis was still on psychological acting, even as the grounding of that method, a coherent, stable, knowable ego, was disintegrating in post-Freudian psychoanalytic theory. What Blau finally objected to in his repudiation of psychological acting was "the disguise of performance... which pretends that it is not performing."¹⁷

The resurgence of communitas

But something continues, "Something is taking its course," as Beckett reminds us in *Endgame*, if only the theatre's continual dying, like *Endgame's* collection of moribunds, some already relegated to trash bins. On the one hand, theatre has hybridized and reached beyond its circumscribed spaces, a shift evident in the global digital broadcast of musical theatrical performances. In 2009–2010, for in-

¹⁵ T. Hoffmann. *Who The Hell Is Herbert Blau?: The road may be dead, but regional theatre is a lively business*, "Show: The Magazine of the Arts" 04.1965. p. 39.

¹⁶ H. Blau, *As If: An Autobiography*, Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press, 2012, p. 249.

¹⁷ H. Blau. *Take up the Bodies: Theater at the Vanishing Point*, Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press, 1982, p. 181.

stance, London's Royal National Theatre began to broadcast its hit plays "live" to movie theatres worldwide, including Complicité's *Disappearing Number* and Dion Bouccicault's nineteenth century farce, *London Assurance*, among others. Glyn-debourne Festival and New York's Metropolitan Opera performances are regularly so broadcast as well. Much is being produced by a group called Highbrow.tv, which in the summer of 2010 also offered *Traverse Live*, short, new, 30-minute plays or performance pieces from Edinburgh's famed Traverse Theatre, works thereafter archived and available on-demand. But the broadcasts have also become part and expanded the reach of the most famous contemporary theater festival in the world, the month-long Edinburgh Theatre Festival, which dominates the theatre world for the entire month of August. With such broadcasts audiences for the Edinburgh Festival became virtual as well as actual. Whether or not Highbrow remains or develops into a major player in such "live" or real-time broadcasts is less at issue than the fact that it has opened the door to another kind of performance, or perhaps has just stepped further through a door already opened by YouTube.¹⁸

Moreover, something of a de-centered, barely controlled pandemonium, a Dionysian spirit, characterizes the Edinburgh Theatre Festival, or more particularly the open access Edinburgh Fringe Festival, which blurs the distinction among traditional theatres, makeshift spaces, and the street as many groups and individuals perform ad hoc, *en plein air*, music, mimes, puppet shows, magic shows, circus acts, performances scripted and unscripted in all their diversity and perversity, thousands of performances over the month of August documented and scheduled in the Festival's huge catalogue – and thousands more unscheduled, uncatalogued, impromptu acts, hundreds daily as Edinburgh itself becomes the stage or circus tent.¹⁹

Such summer festivals proliferate in Avignon, Spoleto (U.S. and Italy), and in urban centers like the *Festival d'Automne* in Paris and the Dublin Theatre Festival (now sadly scarred with corporate branding, the Ulster Bank Dublin Theatre Festival), among others. And more specialized theater festivals are as prolific, drawing the like-minded to particular locals, rural and urban, ranging from Shakespeare festivals world-wide to the likes of the New York International Fringe Festival, which boasts of having nurtured *Debbie Does Dallas* and *Urinetown*, or the International Cringe Festival, which touts "Bad Plays, Bad Musicals, Bad Films."²⁰ Such summer or autumn festivals may be as close as our contemporary culture comes to the semi-annual Dionysian Theatre Festivals of Athens on hillsides that produced a natural *theatron*.

¹⁸ See for example director Richard Eyre's promotion of the Traverse project on: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tHATTYDSQts> (access 3.11.2020).

¹⁹ See <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ic6VTzqb21I> (access 3.11.2020).

²⁰ See <http://nyartists.org/festivals.html> (access 3.11.2020).

Furthermore, performance has been a regular part of political action and street protests, most evident since the 1960 anti-war movement when theater led something of a cultural revolution, a transvaluation of values. American theater groups like Julian Beck and Judith Malina's Living Theatre, Peter Schumann's Bread and Puppet Theatre, and Ronnie Davis's San Francisco Mime Troupe (the latter two still very active, although Bread and Puppet Theatre now seems on something like permanent retreat in Vermont and Ronnie Davis left the Mime Troupe after its first decade) were central to that cultural revolution we call, all too loosely, the 60s. Dormant on occasion, such theatre remains, lying low, awaiting its moment, as it had in the streets of France not only in May of 1968 but in 2010 as the anti-Sarkozy manifestations not only took on the characteristics of Dionysian street festivals, complete with unions offering wine, beer, mojitos to the marchers, but featured theatre troupes as well, like Ariane Mnouchkine's famed international group, *Théâtre du Soleil*.

For Mnouchkine the street remains an extension of the theatre space, and while she strongly advocates a fully collaborative theatrical process where neither playwright nor director dominates, she herself is a strong director, and on the streets of Paris on 19 October 2010, at the staging area just outside the Manufacture des Gobelins, just below the *Place d'Italie*, amid posters and placards, quotations from famous authors, her troupe gathered in preparation for the march, and the then 72 year old Mnouchkine was very much in charge, rehearsing her percussion group and choreographing the movements for the 15 foot high star of the show, a puppet version of the image of freedom, *La Liberté*, from Delacroix's contemporary masterwork depicting the popular insurrection of 1830, *La Liberté guidant le peuple*, a painting that evoked the revolution of 1798 as well and in many ways anticipated Picasso's *Guernica*.

La Liberté would come under attack every 200 or so meters by a swarm of rooks, ravens, crows, and almost succumb. *La Liberté* would twist, flail her arms, and falter under the attack of the ravens only to recover and march on proudly, held aloft and manipulated by six equally proud puppeteers. Each resurrection was greeted by cheers from marchers and sideline spectators as well. If we measure the success of such performance in wholly practical terms, we might consider it a failure since the Sarkozy government did not relent, but as an exercise in political awareness, as a lesson in history, a builder and reinforcer of communities, as an aesthetic experience, it was the most exhilarating theatre I have seen since last I saw Mnouchkine's work at the *La Cartoucherie*.²¹ Mnouchkine, like Peter Brook, is still at it. As she told interviewer Andrew Dickson in August of 2012, "I hate the word »production«. It's [that is, theatre is] a ceremony, a ritual – you should go out of the theatre more human than when you went in."²²

²¹ See <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=lueuCTAkA1M> (access 3.11.2020).

²² A. Dickson, *Ariane Mnouchkine and the Théâtre du Soleil: a life in theatre*, "The Guardian" 10.08.2012, <https://www.theguardian.com/culture/2012/aug/10/ariane-mnouchkine-life-in-theatre> (access 3.11.2020).

Like *La Liberté* herself, theatre is always under attack and somehow, even bloodied, resilient enough to keep reviving. One measure of its successful and periodic resuscitation is whether or not artists in the field can not only find work but make a living at their craft. The American theatrical director Alan Schneider was fond of saying that theatrical directors can't make a living on Broadway. They can make a killing, but not a living. That is, if they stage a smash hit they are rewarded substantially, but of course such a system fosters the culture of smash hits. Values here are economic rather than aesthetic. On the other hand, in cultures where the arts are deemed central to the fabric of a culture, where they reflect and shape its identity, and contribute to its unity, where they enhance not so much the local economy (as often they do) but the quality of life, they are often supported by public funds, and in European cultures theater remains central to such an idea of community, not only within individual nations but in the loose collection of nations called the European Community, no accident that final noun. In Europe, and in Italy in particular, theater and theatres play a major role in defining a common culture through the post-war *Teatro Stabile Pubblico Regionale*, the *Emilia Romagna Teatro Fondazione* (a consortium of some 13 theaters) among the most powerful and stable of such institutions. Those regional theatrical *Fondazioni* are themselves often parts of wider pan-European consortia like the 2007 Prospero project, “*un projet, le théâtre en commun*”, that include six theaters, *Le Théâtre National de Bretagne*, *Théâtre de la Plabe (Belgique)*, *Schaubühne am Lehniner Platz (Berlin)*, *Fundação Centro Cultural de Blemén (Lisboa)*, *Tutkivan Teatterityön Keskus (Tampere, Finland)*, as well as the *Emilia Romagna Teatro Fondazione*. Prospero's four goals are:

1. To develop the mobility of performances and artists;
2. To contribute to the development of the concept of “European citizenship”;
3. To exploit a common space and a common cultural heritage;
4. To strengthen the intercultural dialogue and to promote the diversity of cultures. [From ERT publicity]

Another kind of theater: Laboratory theater

In the United States the arts, theatre in particular, have had to be self-sufficient, to exist in a free market system, and so the taxpayer supported network of the Italian *Teatro Stabile* and their associated *Fondazioni*, which allows artists like Pippo Delbono, among many others, to maintain his acting troupe and tour Italy (and abroad) constantly, is non-existent in the United States, despite some very fine regional theatres like The Guthrie Theater in Minneapolis and The Goodman in Chicago, but somehow, even in the United States, without national, public support, or rather where the public is generally hostile to taxpayer support for the arts, the-

atre survives, actors work, playwrights emerge, theater festivals proliferate. David Mamet may spend the bulk his essays in *Theatre* attacking that institution, but he continues to write new plays, *Bitter Wheat* most recently, to direct them, and to understand, to work, and to maintain faith in the powers of this living, changing, cultural institution we call theater.

A short history of laboratory theater

The purpose then of laboratory performance is as much discovery as public performance, although the latter is often the driving force of the rehearsals. In a special performance issue of the “Journal of Beckett Studies” (XXIII.1 [2014]), editors Jonathan Heron and Nicholas Johnson outline their aims in laboratory/workshop exercises and performance, to counter “the distinction, if not the false opposition, [that is, the division] between the archive and the theatre [which opposition they aim to break down or erase] by defining the laboratory as a »liminal space in which discourses and ways of knowing combine. It is [performance] defined by process, uncertainty, and failure, and yet it produces a form of truth«” (p. 8), or at least understanding, we might add. That desideratum comes close to characterizing the work we were trying to do in Sopot, their focus on their own production of a Beckett manuscript fragment, the “bare room”, as part of the Samuel Beckett Laboratory in Trinity College Dublin: “performance in this experimental space of labs and workshops turns into research by expanding the textual and the performative possibilities of encountering Beckett’s pieces in the theatre”, as Arka Chattopadhyay suggests in a review of my *Ohio Impromptu* laboratory production for the “Journal of Beckett Studies”. He goes on to note that “Gontarski’s *Ohio Impromptu*, as we shall see, uses bilingualism and technology to subject Beckett’s play to a dynamic ‘process’ of performance that generates new meanings from the text.”²³

While Herron and Johnson introduction outlines short-term history of laboratory performance, of, what Chattopadhyay calls “a dynamic »process« of performance”, my own view of theater as research or laboratory theatre reaches back to or is informed by Peter Brook’s experiments in the 1960s as he and collaborator Charles Marowitz established something of a laboratory approach to British theatre as they worked through the Royal Shakespeare Experimental Group to develop in 1964 a “Theatre of Cruelty” season at the Lamda Theatre Club.²⁴ Under the auspices of the RSC, the “Theatre of Cruelty” season was something of an enquiry

²³ A. Chattopadhyay, *Beckett’s Ohio Impromptu*, “Journal of Beckett Studies” 2017, vol. XXVI, no. 2, p. 291.

²⁴ C. Marowitz, *Peter Brook at Eighty*, “Swans” 6.06.2005, <http://www.swans.com/library/art11/cmarow19.html> (access 3.11.2020).

based, experimental theatre project. The most famous result from such collaborations with Marowitz and Artaud were the legendary, experimental, collaborative, politicized productions of the Jan Kott-inspired *King Lear* (with Peter Scoffield), Genet's *The Screens*, *Marat/Sade* and *US*, the play over which the bond between Brook and Marowitz was tested: "In our case, that bond was frayed, if not actually broken, when as a critic in the late 1960s, I expressed a dim view of his anti-Vietnam farrago »US.«" The Peter Weiss *Marat/Sade* (more fully, *The Persecution and Assassination of Jean-Paul Marat as Performed by the Inmates of the Asylum of Charenton under the Direction of the Marquis de Sade*) would feature newcomer Glenda Jackson as Charlotte Corday but also with Patrick Magee as the Marquis de Sade. The 1967 film version retains much of what was so stunningly original in this ensemble production with an audience in the film rising up finally to destroy the theater.²⁵ Magee had by then already established himself as a major Beckett actor first in *From An Abandoned Work*, called a "meditation for radio", broadcast on BBC's Third Programme on 14 December 1957,²⁶ a performance which led Beckett to write a play specifically for him. Its working title was "Magee Monologue" but would develop into the landmark production of *Krapp's Last Tape* with Magee at the Royal Court Theatre in 1958 under the direction of Donald McWhinnie, but with Beckett's close oversight. The production was reprised for BBC television in 1972.²⁷ Brook would finally break from the Royal Shakespeare Company and move toward fuller anthropological research, after Howard Turner, leaving behind the legacy he established with such productions as his acrobatic *A Midsummer Night's Dream* of 1970, soon after which he left for France to establish the International Centre for Theatre Research (with occasional returns to the RSC), where Brook could more fully explore the textual body in performance developed through the gymnastic exercises and rehearsals for *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. In his tribute to Brook on his eightieth Birthday, Marowitz puts his emphasis on the diminished level of language in such productions, even of Shakespeare:

At one rehearsal [of *King Lear*], there was a set of drums in the studio and Peter sat down behind them and started beating out different tattoos and cymbal clashes. »Wouldn't it be marvelous«, he said, »if we could use rhythms like this as directions to actors, instead of words«. It was a period when »the word« had fallen into disrepute and rooting out subterranean »sub-text« had an appeal that no linguistic construction, no matter how eloquent, could possibly equal. That was the way Peter's mind worked. It was constantly searching for alternative means of expressing ideas. It was that instinct which probably led him to Antonin Artaud's *Theatre and Its*

²⁵ Available on YouTube at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RJc4l6pivqg> (access 3.11.2020).

²⁶ Available on YouTube at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=j8sbllLeDA8E> (access 3.11.2020).

²⁷ Available on YouTube at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=otpEwEVFKLc> (access 3.11.2020).

Double and to our next collaboration which was the creation of a “Theatre of Cruelty Season” in a small theatrical adjunct to the Royal Shakespeare Company off Sloane Square where many of Artaud’s more tantalizing ideas could be researched and tested. [...] while preparing the Theatre of Cruelty Season (a term created by Artaud himself) [...] Peter and I delved deeply into the poet’s writing to see how ideas he himself never managed to realize could be fleshed out using a hand-picked group of actors under the aegis of the Royal Shakespeare Company.²⁸

Brook, with Marowitz, essentially created fringe theatre in the UK with the “Theater of Cruelty Season”, and, Marowitz with Thelma Holt went on to found, develop and run the experimental Open Space Theatre in London in 1968.²⁹ In 1976 having difficulties renewing the lease on his theatre, Marowitz left London for Los Angeles and founded the Malibu Stage Company, which he ran for a decade. In 1981 the Los Angeles Actors’ Theater produced Marowitz’s recut, reshuffled *Hamlet*, and that production began his long association with LAAT, where our paths crossed when I directed Alan Mandell at LAAT in my adaptation of Samuel Beckett’s novella *Company*, which, gratefully, the generally acerbic Marowitz reviewed favorably.³⁰

Brook and Marowitz’s commitment to a research focus to performance and to theatre as an experimental laboratory had parallels in the United States as Richard Scheckner, teaching at Tulane University, shaped the “Tulane Drama Review”, which he inherited from Robert W. Corrigan in 1962, into a research based performance journal before he went off to New York (NYU) in 1967, taking what was now “TDR” with him, to form The Performance Group and direct its most landmark, environmental³¹ adaptation of Euripides *The Bacchae* in 1968, complete with substantial audience participation, *Dionysis in ’69*. On the west coast of the United States, Herbert Blau, Professor of English at San Francisco State created, with Jules Irving, the San Francisco Actors’ Workshop to produce a psychologically focused theatre, and its most famous production was the 1956 *Waiting for Godot* that the group famously brought into the confines of the San Quentin prison and played before 1,500 hardened criminals, who somehow, felt the power of a play about waiting. Once Blau left San Francisco for New York to run the Lincoln Center Repertory Theater where his experimentalism and political edge did not sit well with the theater’s Board of

²⁸ C. Marowitz, *op. cit.*

²⁹ J. Schiele, *Off-Centre Stages: Fringe Theatre at the Open Space and the Round House, 1968–1983*, Hertfordshire 2006, UK: University of Hertfordshire Press [published in conjunction with STR, Society for Theatre Research].

³⁰ An excerpt is available on YouTube at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=v11Ki2bfmHY> (access 3.11.2020).

³¹ R. Schechner, *Six Axioms for Environmental Theater*, “The Drama Review: TDR” 1968, vol. 12, no. 3, pp. 41–64 (access 5.11.2020).

Directors. Fired after his first season, Blau went on to become founding dean and provost of the School of Theater Arts at Cal Arts after which he returned to theater forming a group called Kraken, which, like much of Grotowski's work was a research venture or theater laboratory without care for public performance. Much of the work of that period is detailed in two of Blau's books, *Take Up the Bodies: Theater at the Vanishing Point* (University of Illinois Press, 1982) and *Blooded Thought: Occasions of Theater* (Performing Arts Journal Publications, 1982).

Such an abbreviated history of laboratory theater and the experimental tradition in English language performance as research is meant to suggest the "tradition" in which I still see Beckett, even as he has been co-opted by mainstream theaters and actors chosen for their marquee appeal. As Marowitz concluded of Brook, "Peter took many of Artaud's ideas and gave them a form they never had before; he worked closely with Jerzy Grotowski [*sic*] and that minimalist approach to theatre unquestionably influenced his own scaled-down work on the classics."³² I would like to think that the two production I developed, or at least began in Sopot, Poland in 2016 and 2017 were not intended to be imitative, even of Jerzy Grotowski's Laboratory Theatre, although they were conceived in Poland so some comparison seems inevitable, but to continue a line of theatrical research aimed less at entertainment value or even public performance than on textual archeology, to understanding more fully the theater as a mode of discourse and to dig further into particular works written for performance the potential of which, intellectual, aesthetic, psychological, has been under excavated. The issue for me, then, is not so much how much information and background one brings to rehearsals since for a scholar it is difficult not to be fully immersed in the critical discourse, but what sorts of preconceptions one has to the performance, how much authority one brings. Central to an effective process is the avoidance of standard hierarchies of theater, and such hierarchies are often embedded in the names of theatre groups, actors' theatres, directors' theatres, playwrights' theatres, since the key to laboratory theatre is not anticipating results and allowing the process to work, or allowing participants through the process to discover what will work and what will not, and not to stop when one discovers what might work but to dig for what else might work. Such an approach is different, I think, from directors who want nothing to do with the critical discourse of a work before they take it on in rehearsals – or ever, for that matter. That is simply an argument from ignorance. But that critical discourse should not be imposed as something of a preconceived framework.

To echo Beckett, we might suggest, then, that theater may be at its best at its dying since its extended demise seems self-regenerating. Whether or not you "go out of the theatre more human than when you went in", as Ariane Mnouchkin suggests, or whether you've had a sense that you've been part of, participated in a com-

³² C. Marowitz, *op. cit.*

munity ritual, a Dionysia, or whether or not you've felt that you've been affected by a performative, an embodied intellectual and emotional human experience may determine how you judge the state of contemporary theater. You may not always know the answer to those questions immediately after the theatrical encounter, or ever deliberately or consciously, but something, nonetheless, may have been taking its course. You may emerge "more human than when you went in".

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Stanley Gontarski

Teatr zawsze umiera

Streszczenie

Teatr zawsze umiera [*The Theater Is always Dying*] śledzi odporność spektakli teatralnych na żywo w obliczu konkurencyjnych form performatywnych, takich jak kino, telewizja i współczesne usługi przesyłania strumieniowego na osobistych, przenośnych urządzeniach, i koncentruje się na zdolności teatru do kontynuowania roli znaczącej siły kulturowej, społecznej i intelektualnej w obliczu takiej konkurencji. Przypominając Becketta, moglibyśmy zatem zasugerować, że teatr może być na najlepszej drodze umierania, ponieważ jego przedłużający się upadek wydaje się samoregenerować. Niezależnie od tego, czy „wychodzisz z teatru bardziej ludzko niż wtedy, gdy wchodzisz”, jak sugeruje Ariane Mnouchkin, czy też miałeś poczucie, że byłeś częścią, uczestniczyłeś w rytuale społeczności, Dionizja, czy niezależnie od tego, czy czułeś się dotknięty performatywem, ucieleśnione intelektualne i emocjonalne ludzkie doświadczenie może wpłynąć na to, jak ocenisz stan współczesnego teatru. Być może nie zawsze znasz odpowiedź na te pytania natychmiast po spotkaniu teatralnym, a może nawet celowo lub świadomie, ale mimo wszystko coś mogło się toczyć. Możesz okazać się „bardziej ludzki niż wtedy, gdy wszedłeś”.

Słowa kluczowe: *Communitas*, Victor Turner, David Mamet, Marshall McLuhan, Ariane Mnouchkin, Dionizja, Jerzy Grotowski, Teatr laboratorium, Peter Brook, Charles Marowitz, Richard Schechner, Antonin Artaud, Herbert Blau, Samuel Beckett

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