

Lech Sokół

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The Anonymous Work: Individual Versus Society

Bezimienne dzieło (*The Anonymous Work*) was finished exactly on November 27th, 1921. Witkiewicz was at that time the author of plays which had already been performed in the theatres, one who had already gained a significant though modest theatrical experience: on June 30th, 1921 Teofil Trzciński produced in Cracow his *Tumor Mózgowicz* (*Tumor Brainiowicz*; the performance was repeated on July 1st). Soon after *The Anonymous Work* had been completed, in one of the theatres in Warsaw there appeared his play *Pragmatyści* (*The Pragmatists*; première on December 29th, 1921) performed 4 times. Despite the fact that the vicissitudes of Witkacy's plays in the theatre of the midwar period ran much to the disadvantage both of their author and of the Polish theatre as a whole, 12 of his plays were performed in 18 different productions. As Janusz Degler managed to demonstrate in his book¹ they fashioned, along with Witkiewicz's theories and polemics then contended, a significant argument in the discussion about new art.

Witkiewicz of the year 1921 is the author of a considerable number of plays among which can be found quite a few still today considered significant in his total literary output. Apart from the already mentioned *The Pragmatists* (1919) and *Tumor Brainiowicz* (1920) other dramas worth mentioning here are the following: *Nowe Wyzwolenie* (*New Deliverance*) and *Oni* (*They*; both written in 1920),

¹ J. Degler, *Witkacy w teatrze dwudziestolecia międzywojennego* (*Witkacy in the Midwar Theatre*), Warszawa 1973.

W małym dworku (*In a Small Country-House*), *Metafizyka dwugłowego cielęcia* (*Metaphysics of a Two-headed Calf*), *Gybal Wahazar* and *Kurka Wodna* (*The Water Hen*; all of them written in 1921). Moreover, he had already published his *Nowe formy w malarstwie* (*New Forms in Painting*, 1919) as well as a number of critical essays about the theatre which then went to make up the book entitled *Teatr* (*The Theatre*, 1923). Just before writing or completing the play *Witkiewicz*, together with Tadeusz Langier and Tymon Niesiołowski, published a satirical special occasional leaflet, *Litmus Paper*, in which there appeared his dramatic self-parody entitled *The Redemptoars*. The characters there presented seem to anticipate *The Anonymous Work*. Among them there is Cynga (“a chopster”), count Giers (“a first-class cheated liverish chap”), Rosa van der Blaast (“a beautifullish woman”) and dr. Plasmodeo Blödenstank (“a doctor”).² Slight differences in the spelling of the names which appear in this work may well be the author’s idea or merely a misprint. The existence of *The Redemptoars* seems to fix the span of time in which *The Anonymous Work* was created between September and November 1921.

The drama takes up the problem of revolution, of the masses versus the individual, of the fate of the individual in the times of crises and political upheavals—all of them issues that had appeared earlier in his work and which will recur time and again. Suffice it to mention in this context his *Maciej Korbowa* and *Bellatrix* (1918), *Gybal Wahazar* and *The Water Hen*—of the earlier plays, and *Wariat i zakonnica* (*The Madman and the Nun*, 1923), *Matka* (*The Mother*, 1924) or *Szewcy* (*The Shoemakers*, 1927–1934). All these plays are concerned with the issue of the individual versus the masses in times of a violent crisis and although it may assume various guises, it invariably portends an approaching catastrophe. Prior to attempting a review and a presentation of these problems in the form they were given in *The Anonymous Work*, it seems worth-while to read the drama from beginning to end in order to get an idea of the manner in which the problem appears, evolves and acquires final form in the sequence of events as well as through

² S. I. Witkiewicz, *Dramaty* (*The Dramas*), ed. by K. Pużyna, vol. 2, Warszawa 1972, p. 702. All citations have been taken from this edition.

the heros' experiences. Let us then start from the very beginning.

The title of the drama alludes to Shakespeare. In the first scene of act IV of *Macbeth*, the protagonist of the tragedy approaches the three witches with a question:

How now, you secret, black, and midnight hags!
What is't you do?,

to which the three witches reply in chorus: "A deed without a name".³ Girtak, Witkiewicz's perpetrator of the "deed without a name" (in his case a peculiar revolution within a revolution, undertaken in the name of a uniform mass undifferentiated into real individuals), a poet and a revolutionary, prepares his *coup d'état* brewing it in the kettle of the social chaos attendant upon the primary revolution. The kettle in which Shakespeare's three witches brew abominations of all kinds calling up ghosts to foretell Macbeth's future had already made its presence in Polish literature in connection with revolution and revolt. Obviously I have in mind the Introduction to *Kordian*. It is taken for granted today that in this scene Słowacki must have drawn on *Macbeth*. Let us only recall here that the Witch accompanied by devils pulls out of her kettle the future leaders of the Polish revolution, i.e. the November 1830 uprising. When Witkacy referred the "deed without a name," the anonymous work, to the revolution of the nameless, the anonymous, to the revolt of the Mass brewed by Girtak on the sly, he also seems to have referred to Słowacki.

There are many more Shakespearean allusions to be found in the play. The most important among them are those to *Hamlet* since they called to life Witkacy's gravediggers. One of them turns out to be a philosopher, as it happens in Shakespeare, while the other dabbles in poetry "off-work" as we would express today, being secretly involved in politics. One of the characters of the drama when talking about colonel Giers, chairman of the court-martial, utters these words: "The souls of the condemned torment him as they did Richard III" (p. 83). Generally speaking Shakespeare plays a significant role in the work of Witkacy, the problem going back to the year 1893 when eight-year-old Staś was composing

³ W. Shakespeare, *Macbeth*, ed. by K. Muir, London, p. 112.

the dramas of his childhood under the impact, among others, of his impressions on reading Shakespeare's plays. His interest in them finds corroboration in his father's letters from that time as well as from his correspondence of a later date.

The peculiarity of Witkacy's allusions and references to Shakespeare is that he quoted and used not only the texts of the plays but also the pictures with which they were illustrated. He often had in mind the citation together with the picture or even he visualized first of all the picture referring to a given scene in the play. Daniel Gerould took up this issue and advanced the idea that "since earliest childhood the dramatic imagination of Witkacy fed upon pictures and underwent evolution both in pictorial as well as in literary categories. This thesis finds corroboration in a phenomenon that apparently concerns solely literature, namely Witkacy's profuse application of citation or allusion". Witkacy became familiar with the edition of Shakespeare's plays illustrated by Henry Selous already in his childhood. These illustrations, accompanied by subtitles—citations from the dramas, penetrated "deep into the very sources of the boy's imagination in the phase of life when his creative energy was just being aroused. Buried for a long time to come, the pictures of Selous's Shakespeare issued forth in quite many of his works".⁴ The scene with the three witches can also be found among Selous's engravings.

The play bears the subtitle: "Four Acts of a Rather Nasty Nightmare," a motto: "The Mieduvalshchiks feemper at the sight of Black Beatus Buvay the Trundler (from a dream of 1912)" as well as a dedication to Bronisław Malinowski (p. 65). All the three elements that appear on the frontispiece of *The Anonymous Work* seem to convey important information. The meaning of the subtitle is quite obvious: in the pangs of the revolution as it is first prepared and then experienced by the protagonists of the play, a new world is being born, one that neither Witkacy himself nor none of his characters who have preserved but a single memory of values inhering in the individual, in metaphysical experience, in the Mystery of

⁴ D. Gerould, „Cytowanie obrazów – Witkacy i Shakespeare Selousa” (Witkacy, Selous's Shakespeare and Pictorial Citation), *Pamiętnik Teatralny*, 1979, nos 3–4, pp. 529, 532.

Being, would like to face. It is a world where the Mass has triumphed over the Individual and social mechanization—over metaphysics.

The motto, dating back in its origins to a dream Witkiewicz had in 1912, was used as late as 1921. It provides a clear hint, not at all unique, at the significance he ascribed to the unconscious sources of creative work. The problem of the similarity of Witkacy's theories and artistic practice to those of surrealism seems to impose itself at this point as has been frequently remarked upon by critics including Krystyna Janicka⁵ who studied it more extensively. However, there is still much to be done about this issue. The motive from an old and therefore an especially suggestive dream remembered in full detail, is that of Joachim Mieduval and the Mieduvalshchiks and it went into *The Anonymous Work* obviously having been thoroughly transformed and done over. The sentence from the dream, when considered from the standpoint of Witkacy's theory of poetry, has but a purely formal value, that is, it can be used in literary activity as an example of unity in the diversity of the components which go to make up the whole phrase. Moreover, it is endowed with a purely sound value containing words which mostly have no defined meaning in Polish, thus in a vague manner alluding to possible senses and creating an undefined, mysterious mood. The sentence could function as an appendix to Witkacy's discussion on meaningless words in poetry to be found in his article "The Theory of Pure Form in Poetry." It could even replace the paragraph with the famous word *kalamarapaksa*⁶ which appears there.

A broader analysis of the role of the dream and the unconscious in Witkacy's plays seems to be out of place in an article devoted to *The Anonymous Work*. Therefore I only wish to emphasize that while moulding his solitary surrealism, the surrealism *avant la lettre*—a motive of such importance in his artistic work—Witkiewicz clearly referred back to a significant tradition whose most important components seem to have been the Polish Romanticism, the plays

⁵ K. Janicka, „Stanisław Ignacy Witkiewicz a surrealizm.” [in:] *Studia o Stanisławie Ignacym Witkiewiczu*, ed. by M. Głowiński and J. Sławiński, Wrocław 1972.

⁶ S. I. Witkiewicz, „Teoria Czystej Formy w poezji,” [in:] *Czysta Forma w teatrze*, ed. by J. Degler, Warszawa 1977, p. 94.

of Strindberg, especially *The Dream Play* (though it is impossible to ascertain whether he knew it), and finally the work of Freud with which he became acquainted either directly from psychoanalytic practice (it is a well-known fact that Witkacy underwent psychoanalysis with Dr. Karol de Beaurain in 1912, the year of the dream from which the motto was taken) or indirectly as second-hand knowledge (except the *Introduction into Psychoanalysis* he read later).⁷ The important issue concerning the Witkiewicz–Freud relation still remains open to investigation.

The dedication of *The Anonymous Work* to Bronisław Malinowski seems to indicate the significance of the problems contained in the play despite the farcical guise or its entertaining and sensational rendition. It must be admitted, however, that Witkiewicz's polemics with Malinowski's conceptions of culture, so frequently recurring in his articles, theoretical treatises and plays, does not make its presence in *The Anonymous Work*, at least not in a more articulated form. Since I have forestalled the chronological sequence of my considerations I assumed at the outset, let me only add that *The Anonymous Work* is endowed with an exceedingly complicated plot. There are 16 fully individualized characters not to mention 8 Mieduvalshchiks, a crowd of prisoners, soldiers of the guard, gendarmes and an enormous street rabble. Included in the play are evidently sensational motives developed and managed by Witkacy with great expertise. What we seem to deal with are spies and agents, a disintegrating state and a dawning revolution alongside of a second revolution conceived in the womb of the first one. The characters experience passions involved in money, danger, love and desire; even the motive of a grown-up son discovering his true father—for centuries used in European playwriting—is not missing.

It is easy to discern in this list patterns of various types of drama we have become well familiar with in the history of the genre. Yet in order to discover the pattern most suited to the complicated and sensational character of the plot of *The Anonymous Work*, it would seem most appropriate to refer to Eugène Scribe and out of his numerous plays point out the one which came to play a significant role in the history of the theatre and drama serving as often

⁷ Cf. S. I. Witkiewicz, *Narkotyki – Niemyte dusze (Narcotics – Unwashed Souls)*, ed. by A. Micińska, Warszawa 1975, pp. 191–194, 212.

as not as a model for both applied playwriting as well as for its more ambitious variety. I have in mind Scribe's *Un Verre d'eau* (*A Glass of Water*). Should we however decide to define the theme of the play in terms of a parable of the fate of the artist in times of subsequent revolutions with social mechanization as their utter goal, Witkacy's "four acts of a rather nasty nightmare" could most aptly be divided into two main parts. The first of them comprises the span of three acts and introduces the audience into the problems of the metaphysical individual, gradually cumulating something which is no longer a "rather" nasty nightmare but has become "quite" a nasty one. The other part (the fourth, "epiloquish" act) brings about the resolution of the conflict between the individual and the Mass, leaving slightly ajar the door onto a terrifying future.

The first scene of the play introduces us to colonel Manfred, count Giers, chairman of court-martial on the one hand and to the two gravediggers—on the other. The colonel, a representative of the ruling power which most probably keeps people in a tight grip (court-martial, the ghosts of the condemned who come to torment the colonel—already mentioned above) literally incarnates the saying "to stand with one foot in the grave." Quite logically, then, he simply has to have a grave to keep his foot in and meditate upon death. Of the two gravediggers one is a philosopher in the Hamletean vein, the other a poet and a peculiar one at that. He creates through romantic or perhaps surrealist inspiration (*écriture automatique*): "I write poetry. Actually, it writes itself. [...] I can't possibly realize where poems come to my mind from" (p. 70).

Girtak, the gravedigger-poet seems to be communicating a significant truth about the process of creation, about it being rooted in the unconscious. The problem recurs many a time in Witkacy's works but is given possibly the fullest articulation in *Beelzebub Sonata* (1925), a play whose main theme is precisely that of creative endeavour in its relation to evil. Daniel Gerould perceives in Girtak the "undertaker of the old world and the midwife of an emerging one"⁸ and he is undoubtedly right. The poetry Girtak pursues

⁸ D. C. Gerould, *Stanislaw Ignacy Witkiewicz as an Imaginative Writer*, University of Washington Press, 1981.

is but a prelude to his greatest, anonymous, work prepared in total secrecy and brought about through the agency of masses, specially prepared to fit the purpose.

In this respect Girtak turns out to be a close relative of another poet and a revolutionary, Sayetan Tempe from *Pożegnanie jesieni* (*A Farewell to Autumn*). Tempe first writes poetry and then embarks upon revolutionary activity. Girtak follows a similar pattern. With both of them poetry proves to function as a prelude to action and when the propitious moment comes for action to be started, both poets discard completely creation *tout court* becoming totally immersed in "creation through life": it is there they place their energy and all their ambition.

The brilliant scene of digging the grave for Giers affords an opportunity to present all the most important characters of the play. They find excuses of all kinds to seek out the cogitating colonel in his retreat and simultaneously present various motives enabling the playwright to knit up a much complicated and sensational plot. "A field in the vicinity of Centuria, the capital city" (p. 67) as Witkacy defined the place in stage directions to the first act has a function identical to that of the conventional "theatre court" in front of a palace or a hall inside it, both well known if only from the drama of French classicism.

The first character to appear in the pageantry in front of Giers is Plasmonick Blödestaug, a painter, former officer of the guard, dismissed from the army because of consumption and suspected of spying. Both his Christian and his surname prove to be of significance foretelling some traits of his personality and hinting at what could be expected of him. His name suggests plasm, formless or impossible to be moulded. A part of his name, *blöde* means in German "weak" but also "silly" and "shy". The detrimental connotations, with particular emphasis placed on weakness and irresoluteness, are underlined again by prince Grifuellhes in act IV: "this Plasmonick of yours, madam, is actually a plasm, not a man. Your Rosa, mother, has made a complete psychophysical pulp out of him" (p. 123). It is noteworthy that in the case of Plasmonick his tumbledown is brought about by a vamp who is quite capable to trample down men of even the strongest psychophysical stature. His malady, however, the fact of his being

an artist, seems to stand in contradiction to the suggestion implied by his name and surname. Plasmonick's intellectual dependence and weakness seems to be brought out by the fact that in his painting he attempts to put into practice theories close to that of Pure Form, of which he is by no means the author. They were created by his father while the son merely tries to actualize them in his art. The values of these theories are open to impeachment in the first place since they were of another Blödestaug's authorship, were it not for the clearly underlined similarity to the theories of Witkacy himself. The name of Plasmonick's father could be interpreted as the "god of plasm" (Plasmo-deus); moreover, he possesses the degree of doctor. The revolutionary government grants him the portfolio of minister of health and culture. He might therefore be a doctor of medicine and an amateur theoretician of art. His name and scholarly degree might well fashion the ground for drawing the conclusion about the father's intellectual superiority over his son. This would be in line with Witkacy's idea: with the steady decomposition of the world and the individual each successive generation is usually found to be inferior to the preceding one.

The next character to appear on stage, the woman-painter Claudestina de Moutreuil, introduces some quite important issues, namely the dispute concerning the true (i.e. art in Pure Form), untrue and sentimental art. She arrives at colonel Giers' retreat informed by Girtak about the supposed beauty of the scenery around. She would like to paint "dew upon cobwebs" which she ever so slightly "stylizes metaphysically". Her artistic credo, simple as it is, turns out to stand in dire opposition to the views of Plasmonick:

I seek to paint the wonders of nature from the point of view of insects, frogs and other little creatures. Yet I never paint them as they are but in the light of my metaphysical spiritual vision. For me *form*, in the sense your father gave to it [i.e. Pure Form] simply does not exist (p. 75).

Plasmonick, on the other hand, airs his views in Witkacy's vein:

The point is to express the metaphysical strangeness of Existence in purely formal constructions, directly, through the very harmony of colours which are put into certain compositions (*l.c.*).

A tentative conclusion seems to impose itself: Plasmonick functions as the author's mouthpiece who represents true values all his

weaknesses notwithstanding, even despite Witkacy's ironic treatment of him. In this respect he closely resembles Witkacy's other personalities, to mention Leo from *The Mother*, a prophet, swine, spy and pimp, who likewise seems to advance views similar to those of his author. The characters' meanness stems from the decadence of the world as well as from the steady decline of the individuals. Though the values they represent prove to be genuine, they do not accomplish to realize them because it is too late. Witkacy believed no one achieved to realize them any more and this is precisely what his catastrophism essentially consisted in.

The artists' argument is interrupted by the arrival of the prince, heir to the throne, who had just learned he was the son of the old gravedigger Virieux and had been begotten upon the grave of his alleged father, right after his funeral. Following in his footsteps there arrives his mother, duchess Barbara, worried about her only son who had been made to face the revelation through the indiscretion of baroness Lydia Ragnock, the duchess' lady-in-waiting—who arrives with her. Finally the pageantry of characters ends with the arrival of the Mieduvalshchiks together with their leader, the mysterious Cynga who introduces himself as Baron de Buffadero. Cynga expounds the doctrine of Joachim Mieduval and wins over Giers for the Mieduvalshchiks' revolution. Yet Mieduval himself has long been dead while Cynga distorts his doctrine along the lines of the ideal of social mechanization. His political credo is as follows:

Our goal is the replacement of temporal power by ecclesiastical power. We'll be the priests, in keeping with the system of beliefs devised by Joachim Mieduval, our prophet. The only difference is that he believed in some kind of cryptopanteism, whereas *we don't believe in anything*. A certain form of mealy-mouthed democracy under the guise of worship. Something along the line of the Egyptian priests. The people howl for a new religion—the fact that theosophical [sic! certainly: theosophical] nonsense has so many followers proves it. We've got to get it all under our control and spread throughout society (p. 84–85; emphasis mine—L.S.).

Briefly saying, the sense of the above quotation is obvious enough: in contradistinction to Mieduval himself the Mieduvalshchiks or at least their leaders replace faith with a lie, a lie for social (political, that is) purposes. In the fragment presented here the sense of the word "socialization" comes very close to that of "incapacitation" of the individual by the collective, incapacitation suitably perpetrated

by distorted faith that the leaders seek to inculcate in the individual. This is not at all unlike the situation presented in other plays, also in Witkacy's novels, e.g. *Nienasyencie (Insatiability)*, where the believers in Murti Bingo advance their faith fortified by the use of drugs... Having taken the pills of the wonderful drug davamesc B₂, properly trained "former people" submit to social mechanization and the Chinese rule.

When Giers is worried about the political system of the future state, Cynga leaves no room for doubt, rightly irritated by his bluntness:

A pseudodemocratic system yet with no parliamentary bluff. The syndicates ought to be given a *true, fictitious religion*, and not a substitute like the myth of the general strike. [...] the people today are much more prone to religion than the totemic tribes of New Guinea. Even if they were to use spiritism and turning tables—there must be a religion (p. 85; emphasis mine—L.S.).

It becomes clear at the end of act I that it does not only introduce almost all the characters in their inter-relatedness but also their ideology, if they have any. Whole groups of characters are delineated, especially two which stand in opposition to one another. Those belonging to the first still have to be considered as metaphysical individuals although in point of fact they have become "former people" whose metaphysical feelings appear as but a beautiful memory. Naturally, the matter concerns artists, mainly Plasmonick who, all the reservations notwithstanding, remains the only artist devoted to art in the proper sense of the word, i.e. to Pure Art. The spokesmen of mechanization, the people of the future, make up the other group of characters. Here belong Girtak, Cynga, the Mieduvalshchiks as well as the newly converted Giers. The third group, ideologically indeterminate, is composed of characters such as duke Padoval, a bored-to-death aristocrat ready to do anything to escape boredom; his mother together with the Baroness Rangnock and finally the old Virieux, the ideology-proof philosopher of grave-digging, the true father of duke Padoval.

Act II enriches the already delineated picture, multiplies or develops the sensational motives of the play. Thus Cynga turns out to be the lover of Rosa van der Blaast, a woman composer hopelessly loved by Plasmonick. He confesses to his beloved he had been making money for "higher purposes" by spying on behalf

of a neighbouring country. The house is searched, Cynga's spy documents taken over while unexpectedly Plasmonick confesses a guilt he never committed driven by the desire to go to prison where he could devote his life to art and to his love for Rosa whom he expects to win. He does it all on condition—guaranteed by Giers—that the two alleged spies could share their prison cell. However, act II is not all about espionage, searches, love and money. Plasmonick resumes here his reflections, interrupted in act I, upon art and the artist complementing and rounding off his credo: “the life of an artist is but a coincidence”—he avers.

In my conduct so far I followed the voice of my artistic intuition. There are artists who by creating, create positive values in life, and there are those who create most significantly by destroying their own lives and even those of others. [...] I've been living in a dreadful state of anguish but I haven't been able to find any artistic justification for it, I couldn't change it into significant values. Now the end has come. Now the theory of my father will really get incarnated [...] If I were locked up completely alone, I'd go mad and wouldn't create anything. With her (*points to Rosa*) I'm going to accomplish simply things infernal. So is she. I will metaphysicalize her music. Today I know I have enough strength to do so (pp. 95–96).

Plasmonick credo seems to demonstrate that he has by and large managed to shake off the weakness he evinced at the beginning of the play. An idea worthy of note appears in his monologue: as a matter of fact he seems to enjoy the prospect of spending his life in prison and this time his decision proves to be both fully conscious and responsible. One can create only beyond life in an existential void, in asceticism. We have learned the same lesson from *622 upadki Bungo* (*The 622 Downfalls of Bungo*, 1909–1911) where the main hero's guilt was precisely that he failed to perceive and apply this truth at the opportune moment. Bungo refused to pay the price of destroying his life in order to create art and he lost everything: love he so much strove for, art he wanted to pursue without giving anything up (as if he forgot one could not serve God and Mammon) and finally his life. It would have been difficult to punish the condemned character more severely than Witkacy did in his youthful novel.

Act I of the play closes upon the manifesto of Mieduvalism whereas act II is finished off with the declaration of the metaphys-

ical artist. Thus the opposition between the metaphysical individuals and the people of the future—set up earlier—now becomes clear. One could say it was now expressed in terms of the opposition between individualism and Mieduvalism, while at the same time the ideologically vague and indeterminate characters provide now a merely vague and indeterminate background. Girtak's peculiar statements—who always emphasizes he is playing his own game—betray that he is engaged in preparing his future coup inside Mieduvalism. This point will be defined still more unequivocally in act III.

Almost a full year elapses between the end of act II and the beginning of act III—as can be gauged from a few remarks in the statements of the characters. Plasmonick spent all this time in artistic and erotic agony. Creative endeavour seems to be inseparable from suffering. Moreover, in order to earn some more food for Rosa and himself he paints a naturalistic portrait of Mieduval based on his photograph! One can imagine what this could mean to Plasmonick, the artist of Pure Form.

Plasmonick's erotic agony springs as much from his disappointed love as from Rosa's demonism. He won her body but never her feelings. In keeping with the habits of all Witkacy's demons she surrenders to him and at the same time refuses to give herself away to him. She scorns him and gloats over his suffering. The situation is still worsened by their divergent, indeed incompatible, views on art. Rosa recognizes only music despising painting as much as she despises Plasmonick. She never recognizes his theoretical views even though he did "metaphysicalize" her music as he had vowed to do in his pre-prison manifesto.

Inherent in the opposition of their aesthetic views is another opposition, indeed a real struggle, the struggle of sexes. The problem seems to be quite significant for Plasmonick's artistic identity. As a woman Rosa is above all driven by emotions, even in her art. Consequently, Pure Form is completely inaccessible to her even though he had done all the intellectual work for her. Actuated by emotions she cannot wrench herself away from life and enter the paradise of Pure Form. Here Plasmonick faces a defeat identical to the one he experienced in his discussion with Claudestina whom he failed to convince although he spoke to a painter. Both being women, no communication between them and a man could be estab-

lished. This is the reason why Plasmonick doubts whether "a woman can at all be a great artist. For with a woman emotions will inevitably prevail over form, Pure Form" (p. 113). In view of Witkacy's whole artistic work one can venture a statement that women are essentially uncreative: they create either pseudo-art or art of a rather mediocre quality. Most frequently they tend to become actresses—then the principle of their artistic impact rests with, by and large, arousing emotionality, sentimentalism or with playing upon the sensuality of the male part of the audience.⁹ Consequently, Plasmonick's attempts to make an artist in Pure Form out of Rosa are doomed to be thwarted while his erotic as well as artistic agony in the prison cell—except perhaps his suffering inseparable from existence and especially from artistic endeavour—prove to be but two sides of the same coin.

There is yet another revelation in store for the wretched Plasmonick. He learns from Rosa herself that the only person she loves is Cynga, the real spy who entered espionage "for purposes of a higher order." Both this revelation and his agony precipitate his maturation towards a full awareness of his own condition and fate—the condition and the fate of the last Individualist. He declares to his father who comes to visit him: "I am in the process of a great inner transformation, papa. For me the world has turned at least a hundred and eighty degrees" (p. 113). He also matured as an artist: in the stage direction to this particular scene—Witkacy observes ironically—Plasmonick shows to Claudestina "canvases covered with incredibly pure Pure Form" (*l.c.*).

Plasmonick's transformation has a counterpart in the consolidation of the Mieduvalshchiks, when even the duke Padoval gets converted to the new "faith," naturally not being convinced about its validity but out of sheer boredom. However, since the new "faith" is based upon the bad faith of its votaries, it does not matter in the least why he gets converted.

Plasmodeus Blödestaug, the true originator of Pure Form theory, also strikes a compromise with the new revolution that is just

⁹ Cf. L. Sokół: "Metafizyka płci: Strindberg, Weininger i Witkacy" (*Metaphysics of Sex: ...*), *Pamiętnik Literacki*, 1985, fasc. 4; "Introduction à la Witkiewiczienne métaphysique du sexe," *Les Cahiers de Varsovie*, 1987 (in print).

about to take its first leap when he accepts the "chair of health and culture" (p. 114) in the future government. Now the polarization of standpoints becomes even more pronounced: Plasmonick consolidates his individualism while the Mieduvalshchiks score such a success in preparing the coup that they can enjoy the foretaste of triumph. Girtak alone more and more openly foretells a short-lived reign of Mieduvalism. When he comes to see the finished portrait of Mieduval, he outright declares to Plasmonick: "He is sure to reign soon—even in that portrait. Well, well, well! You don't even realize what's brewing. [...] Strange, strange things are going on" (p. 112). Having pronounced these words he directly proceeds to recite his poem which clearly portends a transition from revolutionary poetry to revolutionary action along the principles discussed above.

In his awful poem Girtak embodied, in an obscure language typical of "poetry," his whole plan as well as the utter goal of revolution—deluding the people in the initial preparation for the revolution with subsequent social mechanization, mechanization of the people of the future, irretrievable splendour of the past before the onset of mechanization and finally the triumph of the "Mass that have never gorged to their fill." True, the Mass did experience injustice of all kinds and is altogether in the right both morally and historically. Yet it is absolutely unable to replace the order of injustice and evil with a better one. The new order can only be different whereas meeting the otherwise rightful demands of the Mass will have to be bought at the price of the downfall of culture. Witkacy expressed this point time and again in his theoretical writings, plays, novels and articles. In *The Anonymous Work* it finds a full-fledged expression in Girtak's address to the street rabble.

Towards the end of act III, which at the same time finishes the first of the two parts the play was divided into *ad usum* of the present analysis, the Mieduvalshchiks are stripped of all the masks they had been wearing while the cynicism of their basic principles as well as the deception inherent in their political system show through with perfect clarity. It is Cynga who seems to excel in cynicism and Giers who turns out to be the most honest of them all. Plasmonick will never prove anything against Cynga, the true spy whose methods of covering up his tracks are infallible, whose accomplices have long been dead: "What happened to them—even

the devil himself will never find out. Contagious diseases, you know?" To Plasmonick's charges he simply replies:

The position I hold has ennobled me. Right at the start Napoleon was mere bandit. But leading France to glory made him truly great as he was at Waterloo. Now I couldn't be a spy any more (p. 118).

Plasmonick is indignant about Cynga's megalomania, all the more so since he has not officially assumed any post and still functions as merely a leader of a conspiracy—a conspiracy that is sure to win. Girtak makes malicious and derisive comments on some statements of the characters. At the beginning of act IV he openly declares: "I am the author of the Anonymous Work!" (p. 121).

Both the beginning and the end of the Mieduvalshchik revolution occur almost simultaneously. The end of their revolution signifies the beginning of the Anonymous Work. Even the leaders of the Mieduvalshchiks did not realize immediately they had actually been defeated. For the time being the revolution releases prisoners—criminal and political ones alike. In the atmosphere of unqualified joy Plasmonick behaves in a completely different way: "I don't enjoy my freedom" (p. 124), he declares. What kind of freedom might this be to him? He cherishes no illusions about the government that granted him freedom. Actually he expects the worst even though he never mentions the words "social mechanization," a "suicide of the individual and through him of art and philosophy" which would be appropriate in this case. Through his suffering and the course of events Plasmonick assumes the dimensions of a tragic hero and this process can already be observed in prison. Thus in act IV it would be unfair to apply to him the suggestions carried by his name and surname. By accepting his views on art, indeed, by putting his own views into the mouth of his hero, Witkacy came to accept Plasmonick as a character. Despite all his weaknesses, his ridiculous peculiarities, Plasmonick rises to the stature of a martyr of values which are passing away into the irretrievable past.

Meanwhile, creeping behind the back of the Mieduvalshchik revolution, the revolt of the Girtaks scores its victory. It proves to be much worse than its predecessor, coming closer to the final downfall of the individual and culture. The first programmatic speech to the street rabble leaves no room for doubt:

Fellow citizens! Men like this aren't our leaders; they're garbage waiting to be carted off! We—the real people—have made use of them for our own purposes. They made the first breach! We don't need a priest-run government camouflaged as mealy-mouthed democracy. We're going to create our own true self-government. We're going to get along without any parliament by organizing trade unions of loafers. We're going to create a true paradise on earth without any leaders and without any work! That's what we're going to do. We! The uniform, gray, sticky, stinking, monstrous mass: a new Separate Being, defying all the mataphysics based on the concept of the individual and the hierarchy! There are no individuals!! Down with the personality! Long live the uniform MASS, one and indivisible!!! Hurrah!!! (p. 126).

The insertion of Witkacy's own terminology into Girtak's speech turns it into a *sui generis* debate between the Future, so horrifying to the author of the play, and his own views. Obviously, the triumph of the Mass is tantamount to the defeat of the Individual. The question that arises now is how Plasmonick, with all the reservations made, the mouthpiece of the author—will react to this speech. He replies immediately and with decisiveness:

I cannot live in the society run by Mr Girtak and the mob from across the tracks. I've come to like my room in that building very much. (*Points to the prison*) Art has come to an end, and no one is going to produce an artificial religion. [...] I'm going back to prison. [Futher on he adds:] In our times there are only two places for metaphysical individuals: prison or the insane asylum (pp. 128–129).

Plasmonick chose prison whereas another of Witkacy's artists, Mieczysław Walpurg from *Wariat i zakonnica* (*The Madman and the Nun*) finishes his controversy with society in a madhouse.

Plasmonick seems to fulfil, even though only partly, Witkacy's prophecy of 1917:

True artists [...] will be locked up in specially created establishments for the incurably ill. There, as vestigial forms of old humanity, they will serve as subjects for learned psychiatrists' research. Museums will be opened to rare visitors, specialists in specialized fields of history—the history of art, similar to Egyptologists or Assyriologists or others concerned with the science of extinct species. For the species of artists is bound to die out as did the ancient peoples.¹⁰

¹⁰ S. I. Witkiewicz, "Nowe formy w malarstwie i wynikające stąd nieporozumienia" (New Forms in Painting and the Misunderstandings Resulting Therefrom), [in:] *Pisma filozoficzne i estetyczne*, ed. by J. Leszczyński, vol. 1, Warszawa 1974, p. 264.

The defeat of the individual on the one hand and the triumph of the mass on the other fall in *The Anonymous Work* as well as in other works of Witkacy, into a pattern which has now become clear. The individual and the mass seem to form two orders of values torn asunder by an irreconcilable conflict. Since the two constitute two orders of values and the split between them cannot be healed, the conflict assumes a tragic character while it seems to correspond to the highest degree to the concept of the tragic advanced by Max Scheler. It is difficult to ascertain whether Witkacy was familiar with his work *Bemerkungen zum Phänomen des Tragischen* of 1915 (Polish edition—1922). Undoubtedly however he arrived at a tragic conviction within which values of one order inevitably annihilate those of a different one—and Witkacy came to this conclusion quite independently in the sense that this conviction lies at the very core of his catastrophism. Let us recall that in the view of Witkiewicz the side of the individual is represented by values like the metaphysical experience, religion, art and philosophy whereas the side of the Collective (species, society) embodies those of social justice, equality in the eye of the law. Yet to accomplish the latter means to destroy the former. Witkiewicz refused to pay this price convinced as he was that the downfall of art and philosophy (he believed religion to have long been dead) could not be prevented. The final victory of the Collective will in point of fact liquidate all values since they are realized by people of the Girtak cast. They portend—in Witkacy's eyes—the oncoming social mechanization tantamount to an all-embracing stagnation, a social living death (which he presented in the finale to *Insatiability*). Despite all hesitation his basic view can be expressed in the well familiar words: "Abandon all hope." And yet he seems to have desired so little. Sayetan in *The Shoemakers* declares at one point: "if there is a single good thing in the world, it is individual existence in materially sufficient conditions" (p. 578). "Individual existence," alas! This is precisely what, according to Witkiewicz, cannot be accomplished.