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TOWARD THE DEFINITION OF POETIC DRAMA

Poetic drama seems to be so recognized and unanimously taken for granted as not to present any problem. Yet this is far from being true; it has always had to struggle to find its way, its present position has not become any easier. In some countries it has to struggle against the official trends in theatre imposed upon it in an administrative way. In other ones it meets strong opposition or competition on the part of commercial theatres or naturalistic tradition in acting (which is the case in the USA, I believe). Anyhow the notion itself of poetic drama, often misused and abused, needs closer consideration.

The term poetic drama won recognition in 19th century as a *nom de guerre*, as a catchword, directed against many successive adversaries: against *la pièce bien faite* of Scribe or of Sardou; later on against *la comédie sociale* d'Emile Augier; against the naturalistic drama at the end of the century. The term was not so very frequent then: we are very likely — when studying that period (in France, for instance) — to come across such more specific terms as *wagnérie*, *drame cérébral*, *drame esotérique*, *théâtre de l'âme*. All those terms have fallen into oblivion — but poetic drama, which is now felt as a more general one, has persisted. There is almost a general consent nowadays to extend it to cover a great many various attempts in the history of drama, starting with Aeschylus and including the most recent plays.

Is this extension of the term really justified? Are we able to discover in such different literary phenomena as Greek tragedies, medieval morality plays, Shakespeare, French 17th c. classicism, romantic drama, Sartre or Camus, any valid common factors? As its very core the dilemma would take us back to the old controversy of nominalism versus realism. Nominalists would not admit the notion of poetic drama in such a broad, universal sense. They would deny its very existence.

When trying to establish the *differentiam specificam* of the defined notion, we can proceed in two ways: by applying a negative or a positive method. By negative way I mean collecting all the adversaries of poetic drama, all kinds of plays it used to fight with. As for the positive

evidence, it should include all common elements in the plays we cover with the term.

Poetic drama was always opposed to the realistic and naturalistic play: opposed to the analytical and descriptive technique as applied by the naturalists or by so called socialist realism. *Tranches de vie*, when presented in drama, necessarily asked for the analytical method. The very first premises of naturalism were (and are) descriptive even when it tries to display the conflicts of a whole period. The same principle is valid for the socialist realism since it intends to present (to describe) one representative ("typical") event without ascribing any parabolic sense to it. Needless to add, that in every literary work, even in a naturalistic one, there is some generalization, some extension of meaning: one factory means all factories in the given period, as Hauptmann's *Die Weber* meant all workers. But it is the process of an almost merely numeric, quantitative extension on the same level of entities. It might be called a horizontal one. Poetic drama always protested against such a limited, merely horizontal generalization: that is why it objected to the social comedy of Augier or Dumas-fils, in spite of its social concerns and important problems.

The revolution in the theatre of the *fin de siècle* was also directed against another limitation of the social drama: against its problems being confined within the boundaries of one historical period only as presented in these plays. Thus we can set forth the notion of poetic drama against the analytical, descriptive, literal method, as well as against the historical play. It would be fitting, perhaps, to stop just here for some elucidation.

As for the opposition: literal vs. metaphorical drama it hardly needs any commentary. The terms were used by many theoreticians and poets: T. S. Eliot¹, Christopher Fry², Prof. Kitto³ or Una Ellis Fermor⁴ may be mentioned. Christopher Fry substituted for this pair another set of terms: prose vs. poetic sense of the dramatic plot. Prose sense might be equalled to the literal sense of dramatic events as in *Les Corbeaux* by Henri Becque. *Die Weber* by Hauptmann or any social comedy by Galsworthy, Scribe, Sardou. This sense is restricted to the life depicted in the drama, to one social class, to the historical period introduced in it. Most social comedies, satirical plays of the 19th and 20th centuries are limited in this way. In fact, all of them are historical plays in the sense, that they refer only to one historical period and to its specific problems such, for instance, as the emancipation of woman, social

¹ T. S. Eliot, *Poetry and Drama*, 1951; *A Dialogue on Dramatic Poetry*, „Selected Essays“, 1952.

² Ch. Fry, *Dlaczego piszę wierszem?*, „Dialog“, nr 7, 1956.

³ H. D. F. Kitto, *Form and Meaning in Drama*, London 1956.

⁴ U. E. Fermor, *The Frontiers of Drama*, London 1945.

prejudices etc. Many contemporary socialist dramas are limited in the same way, limited in their very premises, limited by principle.

The metaphorical meaning of the plot and of characters arises in poetic drama by the very process of generalization or universalization. Dramatic events constitute merely an instance, a "vehicle" of some broader idea, valid for all historical epochs and all over the world. *Der gute Mensch von Sezuan*, by Berthold Brecht, takes us to a Chinese village: but all that Chinese setting is merely a costume, a poetic joke, a vehicle. Brecht provided his play with a significant sub-title: *Parabelstueck*. The same sub-title may be applied to all poetic plays. They are parabolic. It is quite obvious in Brecht's plays, in *The Flies* by Sartre, in the *Electra* by Giraudoux and many others.

Prof. Kitto suggested a useful criterion: field of reference. This field of reference may be varied, and it separates poetic drama from the literal drama. It is not possible to draw a sharp line between the two: we should admit, rather, the existence of a borderline. I would place there some of Shaw's plays, and perhaps even the *Confidential Clerk* by Eliot, although the field of reference is very broad there: it is the man's vocation and its moral consequences.

The field of reference in poetic drama covers the whole of humanity during all its history. Poetic drama tries to discover transcendental eternal laws ruling human beings regardless of their historical, geographical or social situation. These laws are of moral nature; very often they are even called by their proper religious name. Dramatic plot serves as evidence for validity of these laws; in tragedy the hero's fate proves their immutable power. We may recall *Prometheus Bound*, *Oedipus*, *Antigone* as well as *Phèdre*, *Don Juan* of Molière, *En attendant Godot*, *Huis Clos*...

T. S. Eliot in his theoretical essays speaks of "some perception of order in life" which emerges from every poetic drama. Christopher Fry calls this ultimate sense "the design of mystery". Una Ellis Fermor ascribes to poetic drama the value of deeper insight into life which provides us with a better reading of life. According to her, Shakespeare has achieved the utmost perfection in his reading of life.

Laws, discovered and dramatized by poetic drama, are of a universal and moral nature: crime and punishment, sense and necessity of suffering, value of sacrifice, unavoidable consequences of true love — often conceived as a destroying power, leading to death. We should notice how repeatedly some metaphysical problems come up just now in Beckett's plays. The tragic hero of these plays is humanity itself and the order of the world.

Thus far, we have dealt with such features of poetic drama as generally

accepted by the critics and the poets. What seems to be rather overlooked is the antihistorical and antipsychological nature of poetic drama.

For many years poetic drama used to put on a historical garb; we may easily mention hundreds of plays introducing Julius Caesar, Antony and Cleopatra, Joan of Arc as their main characters. During the romantic period the historical dress was fashionable, almost obligatory. Not all of those plays should be labelled poetic dramas. In fact, very few romantic plays are concerned with eternal, moral laws and with two levels of meanings. Most of them are really very restricted in their field of reference and merely historical, as Victor Hugo's plays. If they won the name of "poetic dramas", they owe it merely to very superficial, rhetorical devices. They are rather *poétisants*, not *poétiques* — in the sense as defined above.

Is historical drama really opposed to and incompatible with poetic drama searching for eternal moral principles? Objections might be easily raised against this assertion. What about such a biographical drama as *Murder in the Cathedral* or *Jeanne d'Arc au bûcher* (by Claudel) or, again, *Le Livre de Christophe Colomb*? Is the historical texture in every one of them really negligible? Are they seemingly historical only? I would not hesitate to assert they are. Quite certainly *Murder in the Cathedral* is not a chronicle of Thomas Beckett's death, but a play about the power of human courage and conscious sacrifice — about martyrdom in general.

The Crucible by A. Miller is not a historical play either, not a play about the persecution against witchcraft in the 17th c. in New England. It is a play about unrestrained human tyranny and folly resulting in such trials as presented by Miller. Theatrical performance can do violence to the play and limit its meaning by applying naturalistic setting and acting; even in this case poetic drama is likely to break off such boundaries. So did Miller's play.

Another example to mention here is Brecht's *Mutter Courage und ihre Kinder*. Brecht provides it — on purpose — with a misleading title: *Eine Chronik aus dem dreissigjaehrigen Kriege* (the *Chronicle of the 30 years War*). But, quite obviously, Brecht's play is not a historical chronicle of one war: it is a poetic synthesis referring to every war in the past and in the future, to every possible war and to its human and moral expenses. *Mutter Courage* was written in a very specific historical moment (1938), but its content and meaning went on spreading and growing regardless of the author's original intentions.

The case of both of Claudel's pseudo-biographical plays is similar: *Jeanne d'Arc au bûcher* and *Le Livre de Christophe Colomb* have transgressed the limits of historical dramas for similar reason. Individual lives

of both heroes became representative of all human beings who followed-unvanquished — their exceptionally hard vocation.

Another point that needs some argument is our thesis about the anti-psychological nature of poetic drama. The first hint in that direction is to be found in Aristotle's *Poetics*: his emphasis on the plot, not on characters, should draw our attention. Let us recall, too, a very significant fragment from prof. Kitto's book where the author tries to describe the nature of the religious drama and asks some important questions. One of them is "whether the real focus lies in one or more of the characters or somewhere behind them"⁵. In poetic drama the real focus lies behind the characters. We may add now: in the higher, metaphorical meaning of the plot. Characters themselves are of secondary interest.

Why then do the majority of tragedies have their heroes' names in their titles? Why *Oedipus*, *Antigone*, *Phèdre*, *Electra*, *Cid*, innumerable *St. Joans*? If we watch the titles of contemporary poetic drama, we are likely to notice a visible shift: *Les Mouches*, *En attendant Godot*, *La Fin de la partie*, *Huis Clos*, *Rome n'est plus dans Rome*, although the titles referring to the hero have not disappeared entirely: *Caligula* (Camus), *Maître de Santiago* (Montherlant), *La Folle de Chaillot* (Giraudoux). Even in the plays in which the poet seems to concentrate on the hero, it is the plot, the pattern of his life which is really important as the argument for the higher order that reveals itself this way.

Characters in poetic drama perform their own specific role: they represent the antagonistic moral attitudes which enter into conflict. It is true as far as main characters are concerned, protagonist and antagonist. Besides, there are in many plays some secondary roles, necessary for the dramatic structure but not used in such conflicting function. Anyhow, main characters represent opposite moral attitudes, not different moods. Dramatic pattern in *Antigone* and *King Oedipus* is caused by the heroes moral convictions; psychic difference between Antigone and Creon does not enter into account. Even in such a drama as *Phèdre* of Racine psychological refinements of the heroine are of secondary importance. The main conflict does not depend upon them.

It is even more evident in quite recent drama such as *En attendant Godot* where the human fate is conceived as similarly desperate regardless of any social and psychological differences. The same is valid for *Huis Clos* (*No exit*). In these plays neither Sartre nor Beckett tries much to differentiate their characters: there is no point in it.

Although Freud and his followers were very interested in tragedy and looked there for some support, it would not be risky to say that no tragic

⁵ Kitto, *op. cit.*, p. 231.

hero would be interested in Freud's theories. Those theories could not provide him with any support; on the contrary, they would weaken him and deprive him of all human dignity.

If in some plays we have to watch closer the experience of the hero as in *Murder in the Cathedral* or Ibsen's *Peer Gynt* or *Phèdre*, it is always for the sake of moral laws which operate despite all possible psychological nuances. *Peer Gynt* fills out an old scheme of morality play where the real hero must be called Everyman or Quidam. Everyman is the proper name of every poetic dramas hero.

Neither is the chorus in drama accidental or deliberate: it is necessary as the consequence of the same first premise, of the same general tendency to lift the sense of the whole up to the highest level of universal meaning. The Chorus represents the attitude of a larger group whether opposed to that of the hero or sympathetic to him: a deeper wisdom or a common public opinion. In either case the chorus stands for an opinion, not for the group of differentiated individuals. The same is true for the more recent use of a chorus as in *Murder in the Cathedral* or *The Family Reunion*.

Another constituent element of poetic drama is poetic justice. There has been much discussion about it for centuries; there is no point in coming back to it. My intention is to point out one aspect of the problem: not the necessity to punish the trespassers and to emphasize the triumph of moral principles. Poetic drama achieves this justice when endowing every character with his own truth and his own human dignity. The point was clearly stated in Poland when in 1956 poets themselves tried to analyze the obvious failures of propagandistic dramas. The article of Roman Brandstaetter published in 1956 bore a significant title *Szpada i kij (The Foil and the Bludgeon)*⁶. You cannot create a lasting, universal drama when you provide your protagonist with every argument in the world whereas his adversary is meant to be a mean, stupid, wicked creature deprived of every human sense and human feeling. Una Ellis Fermor spoke once⁷ about the tragic equilibrium as necessary condition of tragedy; she objected to the religious drama on the ground of this requirement: religious drama — she maintained — is unable to attain such a perfect poise since it takes a clear stand. Ellis Fermor's argument seems to push the point too far: a great many poetic dramas are in fact religious dramas, too, and do not sin against this justice.

⁶ „Teatr“, nr 7, 1956.

⁷ *The Equilibrium of Tragedy*, *ibid.*

II

So far we have been concerned with the main premises of poetic drama, with its basic aims and its field of reference. We tried to approach its very core by looking at it against the background of different literary phenomena. But *differentia specifica* of poetic drama cannot be searched for on the level of meaning only: it is to be found in its structure as well. The two are tied up together in an organic unity. Let us consider now the structural consequences of these premises.

One of them — not the most important — is the frequent recurrence of some conventional patterns such as Greek myths, Biblical themes, oriental fables. There is no mystic reason for it, as the contemporary myth-hunters seem to believe: just a literary convenience. It is tempting to rediscover a new truth, a new law, in some traditional scheme: French playwrights yielded very often to that challenge (Giraudoux, Sartre, Anouilh). As for the Bible, the poets found there many parabolic patterns already provided with an upper level meaning as Job's story. These patterns and characters seem to assure the universal sense more efficiently than any historical topics. The frequent use of Greek myths, fairy-tales and the Bible is certainly connected with the ahistorical or rather supra-historical sense of poetic drama. It is a convenient way of eliminating totally the possible literal meaning for the sake of parabolic, metaphorical one.

The hardest problem involved in the structure of poetic drama are time and space dimensions. When a drama intends to spread its meaning as to apply to all epochs and all places, it must cover them, introduce them in some way into the play. Hence a difficult task for the poet known in German as *Zeitbewältigung* (Iunghans⁸).

Although every playwright has to find out his own dramatic method, the methods of overcoming space and time in poetic drama may be grouped under two types. It would be useful, perhaps, to recall the most typical solutions.

The extension of dramatic space as to endow it with the universal meaning has been obtained in two seemingly opposite ways: either by concentrating on one single place or by multiplying places ad infinitum. The first solution is classical, the second the romantic. Both have visible advantages; since Aeschylus there have been a great number of more or less original variations upon these two types.

By the classical type is generally meant an almost void stage deprived of all particularities, of all characteristic features which would suggest one historical period or one social environment. It is not entirely true as far as Greek or Renaissance drama is concerned: the plot in those plays was

⁸ F. Junghans, *Zeit im Drama*, Berlin 1931.

not intended to develop in an abstract milieu. But even then every play which proposed to raise its problem to the higher level of abstraction, used to recur to the more abstract scene. *Prometheus Bound* with its solitary rock or *The Tempest* are representative in this respect.

The possibilities of exploring the meaning of one single space are evident in new experimental dramas such as *En attendant Godot*. The void gloomy abstract place, abstract in every sense (historically, socially, geographically) performs its function powerfully. It contributes enormously to build up the ultimate sense of the whole.

The same principle of abstract space has been applied by Archibald Mac Leish in his *J. B.* although without such a rigid cruel consequence. But despair, cruelty, the idea of the world as a void desert are the very core of Beckett's play.

Let us not be deceived by such dramatic jokes as the salon empire in Sartre's *Huis Clos*. It is a joke meant to mislead us exactly by the details of historical furniture. In fact, this room "empire" is abstract: it is the hell, the place we are confined in for eternity. There will be no change for ever as in Beckett's play; it is said exactly by the setting itself and the space it stands for.

We just mentioned the extreme abstract cases but it would not be hard to prove that unity of place (*l'unité de lieu*) is often used quite consciously to extend the meaning of the plot.

The opposite solution in this attempt to extend meaning has been to multiply places as to suggest this *semper* and *ubique* proposed by the poets. It was not discovered by Romanticism, of course, even not by the medieval theatre. The principle itself is much older, and was known to the Greeks, too. Anyhow, we are used to consider medieval and romantic solutions as the most representative, each one quite different from the other. We should add, at once, perhaps, that the medieval method has proved more efficient and durable.

By medieval method we mean the simultaneous setting, simultaneous display of different places and different worlds involved in the dramatic plot. It was neither the only one nor the more widespread in the Middle Ages; this long and creative period discovered almost everything in the theatre. But the simultaneous stage is tied up with the mystery-plays; the method of presenting (in a metaphorical, allusive way) of all places at once and of putting them into the paradise-hell frame was obviously a very powerful means of achieving the universal sense of the events.

This principle has proved to be really useful; it has been adopted since then many times, in every century, and is being applied nowadays very

frequently, too. The principle of metaphorical juxtaposition and suggestion of many places — not the naive attempt of imitative display.

The Romantic method of successive changes of place has almost lost its position. The pattern of *Faust* or of a travelling hero (*Peer Gynt*) is very rare nowadays. When Claudel applied it in *Le Livre de Christophe Colomb* he introduced a new contrivance (film) to counterbalance the possible distortion caused by a frequent change of places. The new art — film — has been often used since then, mainly for the sake of the simultaneous display of the various realities: that of characters' memories and that of external events. But theatre does not need such a support: it has done without it for centuries and was able to present the *Prologue in Heaven* which occurs in poetic drama, by its own means. Eliot put this *Prologue in Heaven* in a doctor's office (*The Cocktail Party*).

The problem of time, of temporal dimension of drama, is very similar although even harder to solve. How to use a very limited space of time in order to suggest the universal applicability of the newly discovered truth, its ubiquity, the *semper* of poetic drama? Again, similarly as for the spatial dimension, attempts to create such an extended temporal frame have followed two diametrically different patterns.

The classical solution used to exalt one moment similarly to one place: this one moment, the last hour of final *anagnorisis*, revealed the main idea of the whole drama. Another extreme has been the large space of time, comprising years and even centuries as in some mystery plays. This large frame was made to suggest the life of the whole of humanity. Instead of dramatizing the last hour of human life or human cognition, the romantic type of drama tried to stage the whole process of moral evolution or moral crisis of the hero. The universal meaning of such a process was to be exalted this way (as in *Peer Gynt*).

Romantic treatment of time seems to be more naturalistic, more imitative and therefore less appropriate to the aims of poetic drama. For this reason, probably, it has been almost entirely dropped and substituted by a classical type of compressed moment which — metaphorically — means eternity.

Many contemporary poets were extremely interested in time not only as a necessary dimension of drama but as an independent problem in itself. They searched for a possibility of dramatic presentation of different perceptions of time: an objective, physical time on one side and a "psychological", individual time of human experiences on the other; time of memories — and time of present events, time of moral processes, time of cognition. Time of our past when confronted with the present; time of our future existence. We should name at least J. B. Priestley as the

author of *Johnson over Jordan* (1939) with its three-levelled time structure; *An Inspector Calls* (1946) by the same author; Thornton Wilder's *The Long Christmas Dinner* (1931), where the people grow older and older without the help of the curtain and *entre-acte* breaks. Wilder's experiment constitutes a very bold challenge both to our being used to realistic perception of time and to the dramatic convention. Nevertheless the experiment must be called very successful.

We cannot overlook, of course, the problem of language, one of the most important structural factors in poetic drama. Since it has got some specific functions to perform there, it must itself adopt specific forms, too.

The general function of poetic language in drama is to cooperate with other elements in the process of extending meanings. Dramatic plot, characters, space, time — all those factors create metaphorical sense. Poetic language contributes to it enormously. Imagery in drama performs a powerful structural rôle. It has been analysed by Shakespearean critics — to mention only W. Clemen⁹ Caroline Spurgeon¹⁰, J. Wilson Knight¹¹ or Una Ellis Fermor¹². These critics have drawn our attention to the intellectual content of dramatic metaphor also: by this means the poet can convey higher sense through his characters' deeds and through dramatic events.

Metaphor is in close relation to poetic aphorism, so frequent in Shakespeare's plays. This frequency is not accidental; gnomic expressions help in summing up the meaning of drama, they are the most economic way in achieving the final synthesis. Most often these aphorisms are metaphors at the same time. That is why poetic dramas have always served as storehouses for quotations.

When poets want to be more explicit, and when they do not trust synthetical and metaphorical ways of expression, they introduce a commentary — and very often special characters to recite it. Those characters have born different names: Prologus, Angelus, Corypheus, sometimes quite explicitly they were called Author or Commentator. We may notice that contemporary poets are very fond of such characters and very eager to comment on their own drama within this drama itself. Let us mention J. B.

One of the most discussed problems has been verse in poetic drama. We can find many important remarks in Christopher Fry's and T. S.

⁹ *The Development of Shakespeare's Imagery*, Cambridge (Mass.) 1951.

¹⁰ *Shakespeare's Imagery and What It Tells Us*, Cambridge 1935.

¹¹ *The Wheel of Fire*, Oxford 1930.

¹² U. E. Fermor, *op. cit.*

Eliot's essays. T. S. Eliot's analysis of his own successive experiences¹³ is extremely relevant and revealing. Eliot believes that some new kind of poetic language must be created in order to meet its various tasks. Christopher Fry pointed to the obvious advantages of rhythmic patterns. It is an element of discipline needed to reveal the discipline of moral order. Anyhow the problem of verse is related to the well known paradox: poetry requires discipline for its synthetical aims and at the same time it resents it, tries to break it off and to free itself from every restriction. This paradox seems to be eternal: we can hardly expect to solve it once for ever.

Poetic drama has existed in many different periods and has made its living in various conditions. It had to cooperate with different theatres, and directors, and settings. Can it live in every kind of theatre and in every kind of staging?

My answer is a very strong: no. As one of our critics stated recently, there are musical works for flute, for piano or for symphonic orchestra. The same with dramas: each one of them requires its proper instrument — its proper theatre. Granted the ahistorical and apsychological nature of poetic drama, we cannot stage it the same way as a historical or psychological play. Everything must be different, if acting, setting, directing are to join the text in its essential goals — if they are to present the poetic text — and to realize its intentions.

I happened to attend an attempt at applying to Aeschylus a naturalistic way of acting (*Agamemnon* at Yale University). The result was extremely amusing. Obviously violence was done to the broader sens of the tragedy.

Is poetic drama bound to use music, dance, light — visual means to express its ideas? We may notice, of course, that such means have often been exploited, most frequently in the thirties, for instance by Jean Giraudoux or Paul Claudel. The tradition of introducing music or dance is evidently very old; we know, too, what their part in the Greek theatre was (*choreia*).

The reason is quite obvious: music or dance have always been felt as more efficient and more powerful means of expression than the word. It is certainly true as far as emotional, not intellectual content, is concerned. Anyhow, quite often poets believed more in music than in words — and preferred to entrust their ideas to music rather than to language. Let us mention Claudel's last creative period and his essay *Le Drama et la musique*¹⁴ where he commented upon his own recourse to

¹³ *Poetry and Drama*, 1951.

¹⁴ Publ. in *Le Livre de Christophe Colomb*.

music and dance in his last plays: oratorio (*Jeanne d'Arc au Bûcher*, *La Parole du Festin*) or his ballets *L'Homme et son désir*, *La Femme et son ombre*, 1935. Dance seems also very important to Jean-Louis Barrault whose work on theatrical adaptation must be considered as genuine poetic creation. The concept of theatre as presented by Barrault emphasizes the rôle of rhythmic pattern in acting — and its close relationship to the whole theatrical space (*L'Homme dans l'espace*). But it is only one pôle of the poetic theatre — the other is theatre of the recited word — a sort of rhapsodic theatre as created recently in Poland. Successively, poets try to entrust the “design of mystery” either to extraverbal means or to poetic language. Successively, disappointed with the inadequacy of linguistic expression, the poets expect music or dance to be more accurate when transmitting their message (C Claudel, Giraudoux). Then, disappointed once more, they come back to their previous commitment. Just now — poetic language seems to be more favored, but this confidence is by no means unanimous. It is counterbalanced by pantomimic experiments, by M. Marceau and J. L. Barrault.

In the not so distant past poetic drama was sentenced to death by many literary critics; it was not even mentioned except in an obituary-like criticism. Five years ago a marxist critic in Poland declared poetic drama to be helplessly dead. Vixit.

Yet poetic drama is pretty alive and vigorous: nothing predicts its near end. It does not owe its vitality to any external theatrical devices. The more brilliant and spectacular they are, the sooner they vitiate themselves. The secret of the poetic drama is elsewhere. Let us close with Granville-Barker's words: “Plays only defy mortality when they deal — as poetry in its essence does — with things that are immortal”¹⁵.

O DEFINICJĘ DRAMATU POETYCKIEGO

STRESZCZENIE

Esej ten, oparty w swych zasadniczych tezach na artykule autorki, drukowanym w książce *Sceniczny gest poety* (Kraków 1960, s. 222—265), zmierza ku definicji dramatu poetyckiego poprzez próbę ustalenia głównych założeń tego dramatu oraz strukturalnych konsekwencji tych założeń.

I. Niełatwo zrekonstruować założenia dramatu poetyckiego, jeśli tym mianem obejmujemy różne dramaty na przestrzeni wieków. Łatwiej zaobserwować, z czym dramat ten zwykle walczył: ze sztuką tylko rozrywkową, z komedią społeczną pozytywizmu, przede wszystkim zaś z metodą opisową i analityczną w dramacie, oddaną prezentacji drobnych wycinków życia czy tylko jednej epoki. Przeciwwstawiał się dosłowności, dramatom o wąskim zakresie odniesienia, dążąc do zbudowania

¹⁵ *On Poetry in Drama*, London 1937, p. 42.

wielkiej metafory, do nadania akcji i postaciom sensu przypowieści, ilustrującej jakieś ogólne, ponadczasowe prawo. Dramat poetycki zmierza do odsłonięcia „porządku świata” (formuła T. S. Eliota) czy „rysunku tajemnicy” (Ch. Fry). Z istoty swej jest ahistoryczny i apsycho logiczny.

„Poetycka sprawiedliwość”, właściwa dramatowi poetyckiemu, to przede wszystkim sprawiedliwość wobec wszystkich postaci, udzielająca każdej postaci — antagoniście jak i protagoniście — własnej racji i własnego życia.

II. Konsekwencje strukturalne obejmują wszystkie elementy dramatu: i konstrukcję akcji, i wymiary czasowo-przestrzenne, i język. W zakresie fabuły notujemy częste użycie tematyki biblijnej i mitu — tematyki, która w naszym odczuciu ma już wartość metaforyczną. Problem rozszerzenia czasu i przestrzeni tak, by mogły one wyrazić *semper et ubique* dramatu, bywał rozmaicie rozstrzygany. Metoda klasyczna polega na jedności czasu i miejsca, na kondensacji i abstrakcji. Metoda romantyczna — na nagromadzeniu różnych miejsc akcji, na częstej zmianie i operowaniu wielkim wymiarem czasu. Romantycy tym sposobem chcieli poręczyć to zawsze i wszędzie.

Język poetycki dramatu podlega tym samym prawom i dążeniom: uogólnienie osiąga on poprzez metaforę, gnomę, budowę rytmiczną wiersza. Utwór teatralny sięga wreszcie po środki pozajęzykowe, by uzyskać to rozszerzenie znaczeń, które jest głównym celem dramatu poetyckiego.

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