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POLISH HISTORICAL ANTECEDENTS OF SURREALISM IN DRAMA

The topic of this study [1] calls, perhaps, for a methodological justification. What is the sense and the purpose of tracing antecedents in literary history? Without going into details one can answer the question in this way.

Antecedents, if accurately recognized and convincingly analyzed, strengthen the feeling of continuity, of constant transformation of the creative process, by demonstrating how earlier trends or isolated phenomena generate later ones, unwittingly announce them, pave their way.

Furthermore, the search for antecedents places literary trends and literary phenomena in a larger temporal and spatial, geographical context. The prospect revealed by this exercise is an ever more tightly knit, ever richer fabric of universal literature.

What follows is such an investigation in depth and in breadth, on a small scale, of course. Surrealism was a basically French movement between the two World Wars. I shall try to demonstrate that it had its antecedents, its *priora*, in Polish romanticism, in the period usually known as "Young Poland" (the Polish variant of symbolism) and also in the post-symbolist era.

The inquiry will be limited to a few selected, but typical and, let us hope, convincing examples. Even these very few examples will, of necessity, be treated in different ways. In the beginning, only a general vista will be opened on one work, and at the end, a similar vista on the whole *oeuvre* of one dramatist. In the middle, a single item will be highlighted, but this time treated in more detail. Such multiplicity in the

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[1] Considerably extended text of a paper read at the annual meeting of AATSEEL in Chicago, December 1971.

methodological approach is inevitable in the given circumstances, but it may turn out to be an asset, or at least, an intellectual stimulus.

ITEM 1

The first item to be introduced is a drama by the romantic poet Juliusz Słowacki (1809—1849), bearing the title *Samuel Zborowski* [2]. It was written around the year 1844 and has reached us as a gigantic ruin of some two and a half thousand lines; one is tempted to say, a transcendental ruin, without the beginning, which has been lost, and without the end, which, probably, was never completed.

Judging by the title alone, one would expect a historical drama in the romantic vein. In fact, the name in the title refers to an incident of power politics in sixteenth century Renaissance Poland, a clash between the chancellor Jan Zamoyski and the anarchical magnate Samuel Zborowski; it ended with a trial and the beheading of the latter. But in Słowacki's drama, the antagonists appear only toward the end, confront each other in the fifth act, and then not in the setting of their own epoch, but in that of eternity.

It is, therefore, not a historical drama in the generally accepted meaning of the term; Słowacki conceived it in the period of his intense, all-embracing, artistically stimulating mysticism. For our purpose, his mystical creed can be defined by using the title of one of his works *Genezis z ducha* (which means Genesis, the creation from, through and for the spirit); it can tentatively be called spiritual evolutionism, and approached to the contemporary doctrine of Teilhard de Chardin. But we are here interested not in abstruse, mystical-doctrinal intricacies, but in the dramatic structure of *Samuel Zborowski.*

It begins with an incidental but significant stage direction, concerning Eolion, the first character introduced: "he lies down and falls asleep". What follows is a comniloquy, a sequence of dreams, related by him with great dramatic strength and great visionary evocative power. We recognize this dream sequence as anamnesis, i.e. the remembrance of the past, of former evolutionary stages, of former incarnations. Among these retrospective dreams the third is structurally the most important. In the distant past of his metempsychic existence, Eolion as a Pharaoh, risked a challenging mystical experiment: together with his sister and wife Atessa, he committed a double suicide to provoke a common return, a common rebirth to new life.

[2] Cf. a critical edition by St. Cywiński (Wilno, Towarzystwo Przyjaciół Nauk w Wilnie, 1928) and a later one in *Dzieła wszystkie*, ed. by J. Kleiner in cooperation with Wł. Floryan (Wrocław, Zakład Narodowy imienia Ossolińskich, 1963), vol. XIII, part 1, text established by J. Kuźniar.

This rebirth happens in the second act. The lovers, the Egyptian ruler in the body of Prince Polonius' son, and his royal sister, now a fisherman's daughter, meet and recognize each other. Their palingenetic idyll, the triumph of immortality, the prefiguration of God's kingdom on earth is interrupted by the magic intervention of Lucifer. Observing Eolion and Atessa, he changes into a footbridge spanning a chasm. The bridge breaks, and the couple perishes.

The next part is set in the depths of the ocean. In the mystical, metaphysical sense, they represent Hell, the place where evolution is arrested. Atessa who, as it turns out, is also a watersprite, has to suffer this suspension of her spiritual progress. She now bears the name of Heliana-Diana. After having previously reached the highest level of spiritual development, she is, at this stage, enshrined and immobilized in a coral coffin.

In the following act we shift again to the quasi-human and quasi-terrestrial plane. Eolion, now also called Helion, was somehow saved from the disaster. Ignorant of his rescue, his princely father has gone mad. As his madness makes him defenseless against the intrusion of spirits in distress, his body is invaded and occupied by the soul of Zamoyski, fleeing from the beheaded Zborowski. The victim, holding his head in his hand, abducts his persecutor.

The last act (the last which has been preserved) brings a legal confrontation between the two enemies. The trial is held before two courts: an inferior and a superior one; it takes place first in Hell, then in Heaven. The presiding judges are the Devil and Christ himself. Counsel for the defense is Lucifer, who now appears as a different character, and bears the new name of Bukary. At a certain moment, he is replaced by somebody else, simply designated by the pronoun "Ja" (I) — the poet himself comes directly to the fore.

In the otherworldly trial, the historical clash between the highest magistrate and the most daring, mutinous nobleman, acquires metaphysical, eschatological proportions. It becomes a clash between soulless law and spiritual freedom, between stagnation and progress toward perfection and eternity. The outcome is unknown, because the drama remained unfinished, in spite of many (some ten) preserved attempts at finding its proper, satisfying solution. Incidentally, it is not certain whether the end of the celestial trial would have been the end of the whole drama, or whether the other characters: Eolion-Helion, Atessa-Heliana-Diana, Lucifer-Bukary were meant to return to the airy stage once more.

This is only a hasty, perfunctory sketch of *Samuel Zborowski*'s structural ligaments. It omits many details, disregards almost the whole load of mystical ideas, and leaves aside the vacillations in the concept

of the unfinished work. But it shows that it is something unparalleled, something that cannot be fitted into the previously existing types of drama. Słowacki took his inspiration from the antique tragedy; he was a great Shakespearian among the Polish romanticists; he also followed the lead of Hugo; his two earlier dramatic works of the mystical period (*Father Mark* and *The Silver Dream of Salomea*) were modelled on Calderon's religious dramas. *Samuel Zborowski* is unique, it challenges and transcends the liberties, whimsicalities and follies of romantic dramaturgy. It is a pre-surrealist drama, it can be explained and understood on the basis of surrealism, its attempts and discoveries.

Juliusz Kleiner, the last and still unsurpassed Polish monographist of Słowacki, attached to *Samuel Zborowski* the label "a dream drama" or "a drama dream" [3]. This pithy formula lacks in precision: one cannot guess whether it means a dramatized dream or the poetics of dream applied to the dramatic structure. Here is a tentative enumeration of characteristics which seem to qualify Słowacki's last dramatic work as a pre-surrealist one. The coherence of plot has been rejected; the same can be said of the characters: their names, traits and essence change within the framework of the drama. The law of causality has been suspended; the structural elements are loosely or even arbitrarily connected (especially act IV and V). Categories of time and space have been disregarded; we move here in what Gaston Bachelard called *l'espace onirique* [4], the oneiric dimension. There are only two bonds holding the work together: the individual mystical creed, and something that can tentatively be called the virtual dreamer. He is present throughout the drama, sometimes he comes forth directly indicated by the use of the pronoun "I".

Altogether, we face here a breathtaking, phantasmagoric play of images, of events sweeping over us. This impression is enhanced by the virtuosity of the verbal instrumentation, akin to what the surrealists were later to call *l'écriture automatique* — automatic writing.

ITEM 2

The second antecedent to be brought up is the drama *Akropolis* [5] by Stanisław Wyspiański (1869—1907), the foremost Polish symbolist.

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[3] J. Kleiner, *Juliusz Słowcki. Dzieje twórczości*, vol. IV: *Poeta mistyk*, part two (Warszawa, Gebethner i Wolff, 1927), pp. 48 and 98.

[4] G. Bachelard, *Le Droit de rêver* (Paris, Presses Universitaires de France, 1970), p. 195 et sqq.

[5] *Dzieła zebrane*, team ed. directed by L. Płoszewski, vol. VII (Kraków, Wydawnictwo Literackie, 1959), p. 179 et sqq.

It was published in 1904, exactly sixty years after the composition of *Samuel Zborowski*. It would be tempting to establish a direct relationship between the two, but the matter is not of primary interest here. The investigation of antecedents should not be confused with the tracing of genetic links, filiations, dependencies and outright borrowings. It is a fact that Wyspiański was strongly influenced by Słowacki [6] as well as by other Polish romanticists, but, so far, it has not been proved that he knew *Samuel Zborowski* and had felt its impact.

In Słowacki's work there were slight, fleeting traces of a story line: the metempsychic romance of Eolion-Helion and Atessa-Heliana. In *Akropolis* not even such traces are left; as a whole, it is a plotless, actionless drama. In *Samuel Zborowski*, characters were of very specific consistence: shadowy, undefined, fluid and misty in contour. In Wyspiański's drama, there is not a single living being, nothing but artifacts, objects made by man: sculptures, wall-hangings, liturgical paraments, details from sacred architecture; it is a drama of the world or art come to life. In Słowacki, there are some limp, frail links between the acts, in Wyspiański, the four parts, still conventionally called "acts", seem self-contained, juxtaposed, put together almost mechanically. This peculiarity will acquire a certain sense in the linght of structural analysis.

One unity has been preserved in all this seeming disorder, this incoherent agglomeration — the unity of place. Everything that happens, or perhaps better: what appears to happen, or perhaps better still: what is being dreamt — takes place in the royal cathedral in Cracow. This centuries-old temple, situated, together with the royal castle on the hill of Wawel, dominates the city, the ancient capital. It served in bygone times as a religious center, and still serves as a necropolis, the resting place of kings, heroes and spiritual leaders (the two romantic poets Mickiewicz and Słowacki are buried there). Hence the association indicated in the title with the holy hill of Athens — Acropolis. This precipitates the associative train, starts the chain reaction which is to be the basic structural principle of the whole drama.

It begins at midnight at Easter, the feast of Christ's resurrection,

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[6] This aspect was most strongly, perhaps even exaggeratedly, emphasized, with a somewhat derogatory intention by Claude Backvis, the Belgian monographist of Wyspiański, in his book *Le Dramaturge Stanislas Wyspiański* (Paris, Presses Universitaires de France, 1952). Theoretically, Wyspiański could have known Słowacki's last drama, because it appeared for the first time in serialized form in the Warsaw newspaper „Słowo" in 1901, and act V was also printed in the easier accessible „Słowo Polskie" (a paper published in Lwów in Galicia) the same year. In bookform the play, edited by H. Biegeleisen, was brought out in 1903, close to the composition of *Akropolis*.

which in Polish is suggestively called *Wielkanoc,* the Great Night, the night with a unique character, the night of unique events. At this moment, in the interior of the cathedral the statues come to life, begin to feel and behave like human beings. The first to awaken are four silver angels, carrying the silver sarcophagus of Stanislaus Szczepanowski, the early medieval saint of Poland. After having removed from their shoulders the crushing burden, they arouse other statues which adorn the tombs, either symbolizing death or connected with the symbolization of mourning. They all feel blood rising and circulating in their veins, they experience emotional and erotic urges, enjoy being alive, make love. This dreamy bacchanalian orgy of the statues is contrasted with the black Christ, suffering on the cross, moaning and dying in the dark background of the cathedral. It is the first contrast, the first instance of opposition, which seems to be another structural premise in the whole dramatic construction.

The next part abounds in contrasts of characters, attitudes, concepts of existence; it is an extremely ingenious and subtle shading of cross-oppositions, meaning that every instance is opposed many times, in different ways, to many others. This procedure is combined with an associative process. Part II of *Akropolis* takes place outside the cathedral, but close to it, on the castle walls. Surprisingly, the castle of Wawel is now identified with the Homeric citadel of Troy. The identification is consistently carried through, encompassing everything that is going on, everything that is thought, felt and told. It embraces the environment, the surrounding scenery as well. At the very beginning we are told that *Skamander połyska wiślaną świetląc się falą* — The Skamandros (the river close to the city of Troy) shines and ripples with the light and water of the Vistula (the river close to the hill of Wawel) [7]. After this identification of the Skamandros with the Vistula, we are not surprised that king Priamos and his wife Hekuba are listening to the nocturnal music, the midnight suite of the bells, ringing from the Cracow churches. Among them are also those of the cathedral, including the most famous 16th century one called "Zygmunt".

The rationale, or if one may say so, the irrational rationale of this part is exactly the same as in part one. Six tapestries from the Rubens school, hanging in the nave of the Wawel cathedral, come to life. They allegedly represent scenes from the *Iliad,* and specifically the duel of

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[7] This simple, yet revelatory association had an anusual career, it became a stock quotation and, on top of that, it gave its name to a group of poets, the "Skamander", which emerged after 1918, and flourished in the period between the two World Wars.

two knights, perhaps Hector and Ajax. This impulse was sufficient for dreamlike fancy to fill the second part of *Akropolis* with Homer's to heroes, to associate Cracow and Wawel with Troy and its fortress.

The initial act of this association is not directly borne out by the dramatic text or the stage directions, but is suggested by the reproduction of some "Trojan" hangings in the *editio princeps* of the drama. It is supported by tradition as well, and is beyond any doubt for anybody knowing the interior of the Wawel cathedral.

There is another indirect hint in the third part of *Akropolis*. The dramatist himself connects this part with another series of eight "Historia Jacobi" wall-hangings which decorate the cathedral's chancel. (Some of them were also reproduced in the first edition of 1904). Part three of the play is the dramatization, the theatricalization of the story of the twin brothers Esau and Jacob from *Genesis*. Here Wyspiański is even more overtly, more directly dependent on the biblical text. He just paraphrases it, transposing *oratio obliqua* into *oratio recta*, the narrative form into dramatic form, into dialogue.

There are, however, two very significant departures from the source (as well as some minor ones) in two key episodes: the dream about the angels descending and ascending the ladder between Heaven and Earth, as well as a dream, or a hallucination in which Jacob wrestles with the mighty Black Angel. These two insertions are completely original, very remote from the Old Testament. They have a special function in the structure of this part and in the meaning of the whole drama. In the most general way this meaning may be defined as exaltation of the ambiguity, the existential ambivalence, the inner contradiction of human fate.

The play of contrasts and of oppositions, observed previously acquires a wider dimension in the endings of the two successive parts of the drama: in the Trojan part the conclusion is tragic, in the biblical part a happy one.

For the structural approach pursued here, it is important to stress that this biblical part of *Akropolis* is again topographically connected with the Wawel cathedral and stays within its precincts: it is set on the steps leading from the iron gate to the main double door, which opens into the interior. It is a true feat of invention: a presentational, symbolic theatrical performance of a long, intricate story, covering a span of many decades, taking place in many countries, encompassing crowd scenes.

With the fourth and final part, we are back inside the cathedral which we did not leave for a single moment. Seemingly, there is again no connection with the previous parts, unless we tacitly agree that the heroes of Troy and the characters from the biblical tale are returning to

their places on the tapestries, that the statues from the graves take up their petrified positions, their fixed expressive roles as symbols and allegories. But this closing part is governed by the same rules of the game as the preceding ones.

From the top of the organ, the statue of King David, holding his harp descends majestically to the church floor and sings a suite of psalms; it is an anamnesis of personal, historical, mystical events, encompassing also those we have witnessed. Later, two allegorical figures appear: that of Night and of Aurora with their retinues (they have no concrete counterparts among the artifacts of the cathedral, but might have been suggested by the personification of Tempus, which came to life in part one). They announce the end of the miraculous night, the approach of the major miracle. David ascends to his usual place on the summit of the organ-loft, opposite the main altar. And then, to the accompaniment of thunderous music in the style of Wagner or Berlioz, the drama reaches its climax: a catastrophy-apotheosis. A radiant Christ-Apollo drives into the cathedral on a golden chariot, crushes with its wheels the silver sarcophagus of Saint Stanislaus, opens wide the walls and vaults of the cathedral. That is the triumph of life over death, of light over darkness, of spring over winter — the solution of all contrasts, oppositions, contradictions spun out through the whole drama.

Hopefully this more detailed, although still rather sketchy analysis of *Akropolis* justifies its having been called a presurrealist drama. Until lately, the work of Wyspiański has been considered extraordinary, but structurally imperfect, loose, disjointed — a juxtaposition of *disiecta membra,* of disconnected elements, failing to make up a coherent whole [8]. If one confronts this objection with surrealist poetics, it no longer holds true, it becomes null and void.

To put it in the simplest, elementary terms: we witness here a total rejection of the most sacrosanct, inviolable of the unities: the unity of action. There is an inherent action in the "Historia Jacobi", but it has nothing to do with the action, or rather the statement of the situation in the Trojan part. And both are unconnected with what happens at the beginning and the end. The law of cause and effect, the dramatic causality has been suspended. This goes beyond all the earlier encroachments on the classic canon. Previously, it had been violated in its temporal-spatial aspect. Surrealism attacked the dramatic substance; it rejected

[8] A. Łempicka, Introduction to S. Wyspiański's *Dzieła zebrane,* vol. 1, p. XLIV et sqq., and in the collective work *Z zagadnień literatury polskiej XX wieku,* vol. 1: *Młoda Polska,* ed. by J. Kwiatkowski and Zb. Żabicki (Warszawa, Państwowy Instytut Wydawniczy, 1965), p. 398 et sqq. (Mrs. Łempicka is the foremost living specialist on Wyspiański).

the mechanical unity of action, and replaced it with an ideal unity, the unity of psychical life, of psychical dimension. *Akropolis* foreshadows this new poetics of drama.

Both its central stories, the story of the awakening in part one and the closing story of the miracle, are situated in one ideal place: in the Wawel-Acropolis, Wawel, which is like the Acropolis, Wawel which is at the same time the Acropolis. It is both a material place, marked on the geographical map or on the city plan, and a frame, encompassing many places and times. It exists *hic et nunc,* here and now, as well as *semper et ubique,* everywhere and always, at least in many places and many epochs. Not for nothing is the Vistula flowing around the Wawel, associated with not only the Homeric Skamandros, but also with the biblical river Jordan.

Bachelard's metaphorical term, introduced previously — *l'espace onirique,* the oneiric space — can here be replaced by a more precise one: the topocosm [9]. It designates the archetypal space structure, which embraces the whole visible and invisible world, as it is evoked in *The Divine Comedy* of Dante, in many dramas and paintings of the Middle Ages and also (as we have seen) in Słowacki's *Samuel Zborowski.*

The laws governing the topocosm, the oneiric dimension, the space where dreams reign, are different from the laws of our waking existence. There the inanimate objects acquire the attributes of living creatures. In his theoretical outline on *The Fantastic in Painting and Theatre,* Victor Brauner, the Romanian-born French surrealist painter proposed, as his crowning suggestion: „Objects that speak. Objects that move" [10]. Wyspiański made them live, move and speak decades earlier. Being not only a poet but also a master of all the visual arts, he realized that the works of art are *des objets surréalistes,* surrealist objects by their very nature, that they belong equally to the waking and to the oneiric space, perhaps even more to the latter than to the former. Hence the living statues, hence the tapestries re-enacting their stories, hence a theatrical performance, staged on the steps of the cathedral.

The topocosm of Wawel-Acropolis reveals in the course of its dramatic development the layers which have been superimposed within its frame: ancient Greece, Judaism and Christianity. They are projected through

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[9] The term was proposed by Th. H. Gaster, *Thespis. Ritual, Myth and Drama in the Ancient Near East* (new and revised ed. New York, Doubleday and Co., 1961), p. 24. Northrop Frye adopted the term (in a slightly modified sense) in his *Fables of Identity. Studies in Poetic Mythology* (New York, Harcourt, Brace and World, 1963), p. 63 et sqq.

[10] L. R. Lippard, ed., *Surrealists on Art* (Englewood Cliffs, N. J., Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1970), p. 69.

their respective literary documentation: *The Iliad*, the *Book of Genesis* and the *Psalms*. For somebody who is familiar with the actual material background of the drama, as Wyspiański had been since his Cracovian childhood, throughout his short, hectic existence, this stratification is even more diversified. The Wawel cathedral is Gothic, with a Romanesque substructure, the wall-hangings are baroque, the "Confession of Saint Stanislaus", the huge silver construction framing his sarcophagus, dates from the same epoch, while some figured tombs were inspired by the neo-classicist spirit, and so on. Of course, it is not necessary to know all that. What has been given in the text, suffices to grasp the syncretic and universal character of *Akropolis*.

Looking at it from this standpoint, one can say that it is a visual presentation, a symbolic compression, an epitome of the Jungian collective unconscious. According to Jung, the collective unconscious reveals and confirms itself in archetypes, recurring mental and material constructions, through primeval images and notions, common myths and symbols. Wyspiański was instinctively thinking in Jungian terms when he associated the hill of Wawel with the hill of the Acropolis, the Cracow castle with the citadel of Troy, when he pointed out Priamos' sons and the biblical brothers as archetypes of behaviour common to all mankind. Seen from such an angle, his drama may be called a drama of civilization, a dramatic dream about Judeo-Greek-Christian civilization and its metaphysical tenets.

Akropolis is moreover a dramatized dream, in keeping with the Freudian theory of dreams. The affinity between the poet-dramatist and the scholar-psychologist seems so close, that one would be inclined to suspect a direct dependence of the former on the latter. Chronologically, it would have been possible, because Freud's *Traumdeutung*, his most important book perhaps, preceded the composition and publication of *Akropolis* by four years; Wyspiański's Cracow was close to Vienna and belonged at that time to the late Hapsburg Empire. But one can be almost one hundred percent sure that Wyspiański knew nothing of the Viennese doctor. He was already incurably ill, doomed to die, and involved in a feverish activity; generally speaking, he was, artistically and intellectually always more Paris-oriented than Vienna-oriented. The intuitive affinity is thus all the more amazing.

This affinity is yet another argument in favor of placing Wyspiański's play among the antecedents of surrealism. Freud and his doctrine acted as catalysts to the surrealist movement; it started to take shape after the personal meeting of the founder of psychoanalysis and André Breton, in 1921. All surrealism may be, to a great extent, equated with Freudism, can be considered its artistic correlate. Freud once noted that before there

were psychoanalysts, their work was done by poets and philosophers. One can supplement this generous remark with the assumption that, following the track of psychoanalysis, surrealist poetry and philosophy discovered a new world and a new dimension.

The Freudian aspect of *Akropolis* is a topic in itself, and a somewhat dangerous one. For the moment, it will remain confined to a couple of cautiously chosen and cautiously treated instances.

The first three parts of the drama can be treated as dreams having their source in strong daytime impressions, as residues of the preceding day — residue dreams. They look as if they were being dreamt by somebody who participated in the religious service, starting the Easter ceremonies, *Wielkanoc,* the Great Night (in the Roman-Catholic liturgy it is particularly long, sumptuous, charged with symbolism); somebody who, during this ceremony, came under the spell of the cathedral's interior, its many statues, its wall-hanging crowded with human figures, its emotional impact.

Each of the three parts of the drama bears a specific stamp. The first has a strong erotic tinge in the dialogues between the sculptures; the angels are differentiated by sex, they are masculine and feminine. In the second part (the Trojan-Cracovian one), we have a typical, dramatically and lyrically exploited instance of association and fusion of heterogenous elements, occurring very often in dreams — condensation (there exists a very good Polish term for it: *zbitka senna*). The biblical part resembles a dream dreamt with somebody else's words, in this case with the text of a sacred book. The same part brings us also two instances of a dream within a dream.

The finale is even more striking. It has all the marks of a wish-fulfillment dream (*Wunscherfüllungstraum*), the key discovery of Freud's theory. All oppositions are wiped out, all ambiguity and ambivalence is cleared away in the bliss of the closing vision, and in the most daring identification of Christ with Apollo.

This leads once more to the proposed working concept of the virtual dreamer. It has been suggested that *Akropolis* as a whole is the dream of the psalmist David [11]. There is no indication in the text supporting such a surmise. But David, the main dream figure in the finale, the prophet of salvation, visually occupies an equal, polar position to that of Christ-Apollo and can be considered the poet's counterpart, his selfprojection. If this were so, he would represent the equivalent of the poetic "I" in the text of *Samuel Zborowski,* he would suggest the presence of the virtual dreamer throughout the drama.

[11] W. Barbasz, *Wyspiański na tle romantyzmu* („Badania Literackie", vol. 4, 1932).

In spite of its apparently complete dissolution, *Akropolis* seems to be structurally more coherent than *Samuel Zborowski*. It is characterized both by the anarchy of dream and by the logic of dream. Apart from all the previously indicated coordinating bonds, this multiform work is the achievement of an artist, a man of the theatre, a visionary. *Akropolis* may therefore be called a theatrical dream, a dream which, through theatrical means breaks the barrier dividing the waking life from the realm of dreams.

ITEM 3

With Stanisław Ignacy Witkiewicz (1885—1939), the last item, the situation is better and easier than with the previous ones. Witkiewicz is *en vogue* by now, he has been translated into English [12] as well as into other languages, he is being produced in American campus theatres, he has his fervent interpreters in the United States, to mention only two Americans: Daniel Gerould and Edward Czerwiński, and two Poles living in this country: Czesław Miłosz and Jan Kott.

Following the track already explored, one can have no doubt that "Witkacy", as he called himself and as he is generally called in his mother country, knew *Akropolis*; in the year of its publication, he was a student of the Academy of Fine Arts in Cracow, where Wyspiański had been teaching for a while. It is most improbable that the young apprentice did not know *Samuel Zborowski*. His father, Stanisław Witkiewicz, a great painter, and an even greater critic of art perhaps, a lofty thinker, a discoverer and propagator of a specific national artistic style, was an enthousiastic admirer of both Słowacki and Wyspiański. As concerns the latter, Witkiewicz junior confessed his admiration for and indebtedness to Wyspiański and also to Tadeusz Miciński (1873—1919), another Polish symbolist with strong surrealist leanings.

But it was a relationship of a very particular, ambivalent kind: affirmative and rebellious, full of esteem and irreverent at the same time. Both in his painting and in his literary and especially dramatic activity, Witkacy opposed his father's generation and the generation which preceded it mainly in one respect. He violently tried to liberate himself from

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[12] S. I. Witkiewicz, *The Madman and the Nun and other Plays*, trans. and ed. by D. C. Gerould and C. S. Durer with a foreword by J. Kott (Seattle and London, University of Washington Press, 1968). It is a very instructive edition, containing translations of six plays, an excellent general introduction, commentaries preceding each play and bibliographical information.

all national, social, political obligations, from ideological bonds and ideological ambitions, so characteristic of Polish literature in the romantic and post-romantic period (they are also visible in *Samuel Zborowski* and *Akropolis*). True to this liberating urge, Witkacy elaborated and possionately advocated for two decades his theory of Pure Form in theatre and painting.

However, I shall not enter here — as I did not with Słowacki's mystical doctrine — into the intricacies of this theory. It has only a personal value and only limited historical importance; it is neither consistent nor really revelatory. Continuing the line previously adopted, I want instead to discuss Witkacy as a presurrealist dramatist. He wrote the bulk of his roughly thirty plays, only partly preserved, at the end of the second and in the third decade of the current century, before the earliest appearance of surrealism [13]. Witkacy's book *Introduction to Pure Form in the Theatre,* appeared in 1923, one year before the first Surrealist Manifesto of André Breton (1924).

There are several differences between these two theoretical formulations. Witkacy's point of departure was aesthetic, Breton's psychological. Witkacy started out from form, "pure form", and stressed formal inventiveness, Breton based his theories on individual, inner experience and preached the conquest of the psychic underworld. But their conclusions were similar, if not identical. Both rejected all conventions, pressures, bonds of reality; both, by way of art, aimed at superreality. Breton would have eagerly accepted Witkacy's credo that the goal of art is the experience of "metaphysical feelings", of "the Mystery of Existence".

Breton, especially at the beginning, was not interested in drama; a despotic leader, he excluded Artaud and Vitrac from the surrealist sect as a punishment for their foundation of the Théâtre-Alfred-Jarry, as couragous as shortlived. Witkacy, much earlier and all by himself, broke unequivocally away from the illusionist, imitative, representational theatre, discarded all theatrical conventions, of action, of psychology, of verisimilitude, and threw himself head-on into accelerated dramatic productivity: in 1920/21 he allegedly composed fourteen plays, which in itself sound surrealistic [14]. He gave a provocative definition of his own practice in the pithy formula: "a madman's brain projected into the

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[13] Here are some chronological data: Witkacy wrote his first play in 1918; he published a play for the first time in 1920; in 1921 a play of his was staged for the first time; the outline of his dramatic theory was printed in a periodical in 1921.

[14] Cf. St. Rzęsikowski, *Quelques problèmes actuels de la „Pure Forme"*, „Zagadnienia Rodzajów Literackich" 1963, vol. VI, fasc. 1 (10), pp. 50—51.

stage". His was surrealist drama *avant la lettre,* at once realized in its full and most extreme form [15].

However, Witkacy occupies a specific position within the poetics of surrealism. Surrealism was programmatically anti-rationalistic, wanted to exclude all rational intervention from the creative process. In his first manifesto, Breton defined it as "a dictation of thought without any control of reason, outside all aesthetic and moral preoccupations". Witkacy was an intellectual, an aesthetician prone to theorizing, an amateur but creative philosopher. His dramas are loaded with discursive elements, often to the detriment of their artistic value. For us, the structural consequences of this attitude, and the ensuing ideological message or "anti-message", are more important.

The concept of the virtual dreamer can be brought in here. For brevity's sake, let us first present it through this much later, stunning quotation from Artaud: "I am shouting in my dream. I know that I am dreaming, and ON BOTH SIDES OF MY DREAM I order my will to govern". The virtual dreamer in Witkacy's dramas is not only betraying his presence, but is opposing himself as well, is playing with his dreams, maneuvering them, testing them, turning them upside down and "debunking" them. This explains the role of irony and auto-irony, of parody and auto-parody, of pastiche and auto-pastiche. This also explains the sense of an eerie game and of a grim practical joke; the instinct of perversity and mystification reigns supreme. In Witkacy's case, the metaphorical expression: the poetics of dream, can be replaced by that of poetics of nightmare, of an intellectually controlled nightmare.

Today Witkacy is considered the forerunner of the theatre of cruelty and of the drama of the absurd, of Artaud, Beckett, Ionesco, Mrożek and a host of others. But in the light of the foregoing historical considerations, he seems to be an offshoot, an outgrowth of intrinsic tendencies in Polish literature before him. This becomes even more obvious if one recognizes in him the dialectic opposition to his predecessors, such as the author of *Samuel Zborowski* and the author of *Akropolis,* or Miciński, the creator of the huge, fantastic-historical-mystical dramas: *Prince Patiomkin* (1906) and *Bazylissa Teofanu* (1909). This antithetical position is directly recognizable in Witkacy's *New Deliverance* (1922), an outright

[15] M. Esslin, *Brief Chronicles. Essays on Modern Theatre* (London, Temple Smith, 1970), p. 154, considers S. I. Witkiewicz to be "one of the first and foremost of European surrealists". K. Puzyna, the editor of the first collection of Witkacy's plays *Dramaty* (Warszawa, Państwowy Instytut Wydawniczy, 1962, vol. 1—2), in his revealing foreword, also points out their surrealist aspect (vol. 1, p. 30 et sqq.), but links them with expressionism as well. This last, rather abstruse and complicated problem, has been omitted here.

parody of Wyspiański's *Deliverance*, directly preceding *Akropolis*; Wyspiański's drama is extremely daring, truly pre-surrealist in its structure and at the same time, overloaded with national ideology. The closing act of Witkacy's last play *The Shoemakers* (1934, published posthumously in 1948), bitterly parodies Wyspiański's *The Wedding* (1901), the unquestionable masterpiece of Polish symbolist drama.

Generally speaking, Witkacy opposed to the uniformly sublime, affirmative stance of his predecessors a vehemently grotesque one, jeering, corrosive, subversive. Against their sense of elation, he put his sense of anxiety, his utter pessimism. In contrast to their constructive, but illusionary dreaming, Witkacy was the dreamer of destruction, the victim of his own dreams. This explains perhaps the greatest paradox of this complex personality: the avowed formalist, the high priest of "pure form", was in fact *un écrivain engagé*, a prophet of doom, announcing the inevitable end of the Atlantic civilization.

Witkacy's drama, seen in a larger context, repeats the line leading from Jarry's *Ubu the King* (1896), through Apollinaire's *The Teats of Tirésias* (1917), to Ribemont-Deissaignes, Aragon, Desnos and Vitrac [16]. He could not know these later ones. When Apollinaire's work with the prophetic subtitle *un drame surréaliste* appeared, Witkacy had already started on his career as a dramatist. He knew Jarry's metaphysical farce set, incidentally, „in Poland, that is nowhere", and it might have been a stimulus for him, as it had been a stimulus for the playful antirealism of Apollinaire, as it was to become a stimulus for the surrealists who, rightly or wrongly, saw in it an expression of the subconscious.

Jarry's effect on Witkacy has yet to be proved. With or without it, he closes the chain of Polish historical antecedents of surrealism in drama. He stands on the threshold of the movement and its dramatic manifestations which continue into the present day. This explains the international recognition which he alone among the other Polish antecedents has received. But historically and dialectically speaking, he is hardly conceivable without them, without his literary heritage.

IN PLACE OF A CONCLUSION

That is the end of the methodological experiment. In spite of its perfunctoriness, it seems to have succeeded in one respect: the three links analyzed here, although often radically different and belonging to different epochs, form one chain of structural affinities.

The perspective thrown open is perhaps not without interest and

[16] Cf. H. Béhar, *Etude sur le théâtre Dada et surréaliste* (Paris, Gallimard, 1967).

meaning from the standpoint of both frames of reference indicated in the title of this essay.

Surrealism considered itself a revolutionary movement, and from the distance of time, we are inclined to admit that the assumption was justified. This did not prevent its descent to its roots, its quest for ancestors, for precursors. Their line is quite long: Gérard de Nerval, Baudelaire, Lautréamont, Rimbaud, Mallarmé, Saint-Pol-Roux (Paul Roux), Jarry, Apollinaire...

The foregoing considerations permit to assume that this line paralleled a line of antecedents in Polish literature. The fact, if accepted, would be all the more striking, for in the movement proper, in the historical trend called surrealism, the role of this literature was rather modest. It looks as if it had exhausted itself in the prophecy, not the fulfillment of the prophecy [17].

And finally, one last conclusion — and a suggestion — of a comparative nature. The attempt undertaken here may and should encourage similar endeavors in other Slavic literatures: Russian, Serbo-Croatian [18], Czech. The result of such endeavours would define and enhance the value of these literatures, would approach the moment of seeing and appreciating them within the framework of world literature.

POLSKIE ANTECEDENCJE HISTORYCZNE NADREALIZMU W DRAMACIE

Streszczenie

Praca wskazuje wyprzedzenia francuskiego nadrealizmu w dramacie polskim XIX i XX w. na kilku wybranych przykładach. Jest ona poprzedzona metodologicznym uzasadnieniem przedsięwzięcia tego rodzaju. Zdaniem autora badanie antecedencji z jednej strony wzmacnia poczucie ciągłości procesu literackiego, z drugiej wpisuje prądy i zjawiska literackie w szerszy kontekst czasowy i przestrzenny, otwiera perspektywy tego, co się nazywa literaturą powszechną.

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[17] This statement does not appear to be seriously challenged by a recent rich and interesting book: H. Dubowik, *Nadrealizm w polskiej literaturze współczesnej* (Poznań—Bydgoszcz, Bydgoskie Towarzystwo Naukowe, 1971). It deals mainly with what may be defined using a neologism: "post-cedents", the late, chosen, tamed application of surrealist poetics in contemporary Polish literature. A rare, almost isolated case of active participation in the surrealist movement is discussed in a short essay of V. E. Peppard, *Brzękowski and Surrealism*, "The Polish Review", vol. XVI, no. 4, New York, Autumn 1971, p. 16 et sqq.

[18] An attempt in this direction has already been made by A. Kadić in his *Surrealists versus Modernists in Serbian Literature*, [in:] *American Contributions to the Sixth International Congress of Slavists, Prague 1968, August 7—13*, vol. 2: *Literary Contributions*, ed. W. E. Harkins, The Hague — Paris, Mouton, 1968, p. 201 et sqq.

Pierwszym wybranym przykładem antecedencji nadrealistycznej jest niedokończony dramat Juliusza Słowackiego z epoki mistycznej *Samuel Zborowski*. Ze względu na czytelnika obcego, któremu ten trudny utwór jest niedostępny, autor streszcza jego główne wątki oraz analizuje jego główne wiązania strukturalne. Na tej podstawie dochodzi do wniosku, że nie mieści się on w ramach żadnej z poetyk, które Słowacki kolejno przyjmował w swojej twórczości, i daje się wyjaśnić na podstawie poetyki dramatu nadrealistycznego. Oto kilka wskazanych rysów: odrzucenie spójności fabuły i jednolitości charakterów, zawieszenie prawa przyczynowości, zlekceważenie kategorii czasu i przestrzeni, wreszcie wprowadzenie, obok i ponad postaciami dramatycznymi, postaci próbnie określonej jako „a virtual dreamer" (co by po polsku można oddać terminem: wirtualny podmiot śniący).

Drugi przykład, *Akropolis* Stanisława Wyspiańskiego, stanowi przedmiot bardziej szczegółowego opisu, i wielostronnej analizy strukturalnej. Założenie, że jest to utwór wyprzedzający poetykę nadrealistyczną, prowadzi do przeciwstawienia się wszystkim dotychczasowym głosom (nie brak ich także w obecnej chwili), które mu zarzucały niezborność dramatyczną. Jest on niezborny z punktu widzenia poetyki tradycyjnej, ponieważ odrzuca najbardziej nietykalną z trzech „jedności": jedność akcji. Zgodnie z teorią i praktyką nadrealizmu zastępuje ją jednością idealną, jednością życia psychicznego.

Ta jedność jest szczegółowiej wskazana przez ujęcie *Akropolis* jako struktury, którą można określić terminem „the topocosm", jako archetypu strukturalnego obejmującego cały świat widzialny i niewidzialny, zmysłowy i nadzmysłowy, przeszły, aktualny i przyszły. To prowadzi do próby wyjaśnienia dramatu Wyspiańskiego w kategoriach psychologii zbiorowej C. G. Junga, do podkreślenia jego synkretycznego i uniwersalnego charakteru oraz do formuły: „dramat kultury, dramatyczny sen o kulturze judeo-grecko-chrześcijańskiej i jej metafizycznych przesłankach".

Dopełnia tej analizy szkicowe oświetlenie *Akropolis* przy użyciu kategorii Freudowskich, w szczególności Freudowskiej teorii marzeń sennych. Także w odniesieniu do tego utworu artykuł niniejszy stosuje pojęcie „wirtualnego podmiotu śniącego", wskazując go w postaci Dawida jako autokreacji, autoprojekcji poety.

Końcowa część jest poświęcona nie roztrząsaniu pojedynczego dzieła, ale całej twórczości jednego dramatopisarza — Stanisława Ignacego Witkiewicza. Jest ona ujęta jako dramat nadrealistyczny *avant la lettre*, urzeczywistniony od razu w pełnej i skrajnej postaci, wyprzedzający również jego przedłużenia: „teatr okrucieństwa" i „teatr absurdu".

Artykuł podkreśla szczególne stanowisko Witkacego w stosunku do tych zjawisk, jeszcze raz użytkując wprowadzone poprzednio pojęcie „wirtualnego podmiotu śniącego". Pozwala ono scharakteryzować odrębne rysy dramaturgii Witkacowskiej i zaproponować formułę: „poetyka koszmaru, koszmaru kontrolowanego przez intelekt".

Włączywszy autora *Szewców* w kontekst europejski autor określa jego stosunek do poprzedników: Słowackiego, Wyspiańskiego, Micińskiego. Uważa go za dialektyczne zamknięcie polskich wyprzedzeń historycznych nadrealizmu w dramacie, właściwie z trudem dające się bez nich pomyśleć.

Konkluzja wraca do punktu wyjścia, do założeń metodologicznych i obu układów odniesienia: polskiego i pozapolskiego. Sugeruje na końcu podjęcie podobnych poszukiwań w innych literaturach słowiańskich, upatrując w tym jedną z dróg prowadzących do ustalenia ich miejsca w literaturze powszechnej.

Tymon Terlecki