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Offstage: The revealed and the concealed in An-sky's *The Dybbuk*

How can we talk about the issues of faith – acts of God, supernatural and mysterious things – without using the nomenclature associated closely with the sphere of religion? The analysis of the works written by Samuel Beckett made by Shimon Levy shows that in this case it is possible to apply the concept of [what is beyond]¹ (Levy, 2000). *Nowy słownik języka polskiego* PWN defines the preposition "poza" [outside, beyond] as the word indicating the place [further than the position of a thing determined by a noun, and outside the limited space] ("dalsze niż położenie przedmiotu oznaczonego przez rzeczownik, a na zewnątrz przestrzeni ograniczonej") and gives an example of use in a sentence: "Akcja rozgrywa się poza krajem" [The action takes place outside the country] (Sobol, 2002, p. 736). And thus "outside" or "beyond" suggests an association with something remote, probably invisible or insensible with other senses; it contains in itself the element of something foreign and mysterious. This "beyond" or "outside" can be translated into the technical language of the stage by means of the English term *offstage*, i.e. backstage or behind the scenes.

As Levy notices, the works of Beckett are replete with intangible beings "from outside", which the dramatis personae constantly try to approach and search. What is "beyond", is like

¹ If not stated otherwise, all the translations in square brackets are done by the translator (Joanna Modzelewska-Jankowiak).

"restlessly re-appearing deconstructed Godot" (Levy, 2000, p. 17). The desire of transgression present in the majority of Beckett's works manifests itself in extremely frequent and unconventional references to what is backstage (*offstage*). The best known Beckett's hero, the title character of the drama *Waiting for Godot*, never appears on stage after all – and yet remains the pivot of the work's plot. In turn, in *Krapp's Last Tape* an important role is played by the memories from many years before, played back on the tape recorder. "Here and now" of Krapp is confronted not only with "not here", but also "not now", and thus the attention of the viewer is drawn beyond the place and beyond the time of the originally presented action. This is a specific variation on the device of "play within a play". The later works of Beckett show the concept of *offstage* at its most extreme. In the one-act play *Not I* the viewers observe only the actress's floodlit mouth – all the rest is invisible, silent, non-existent. The playlet *Breath*, scheduled for only several dozen of seconds of the stage performance, is a play of lighting, scenery and sounds of crying and breathing played back of the tape. The viewers do not know who makes these sounds. They are unable to see and meet the characters of the drama, who remain persons from outside the stage. The penetration into the hero's world turns out to be impossible because he belongs to the reality *offstage*.

Levy notices that the characters from the dramas of Beckett often perform personal rituals, being a desperate attempt to give a meaning to the reality deprived of this sense – or an attempt to give a possible, tolerable form to the inexpressible (Levy, 2000, p. 20). They also make the act of creation by forming new beings in their consciousness and thus becoming similar to God – the being appointing new creatures which would keep him company and prevent him from being lonely in the empty world (Levy, 2000, p. 23). But what is most important – assuming that God exists, in the Beckett's dramas God occurs to us as the backstage observer in the third person (Levy, 2000, p. 25). *Offstage* is therefore a means of expression, technique or poetics used by Beckett to express everything incomprehensible, inexpressible, mysterious, exceeding human experience.

It seems justified to treat Levy's concept of the poetics of *offstage* as a research tool and use it to analyse the drama *The Dybbuk* by An-sky (real name Shloyme Zanvl Rappoport). The classic Jewish drama, the stormy creation of which is an interesting story itself, the work repeatedly modified, started from scratch because the manuscript had been lost, written almost simultaneously in three languages (Russian, Yiddish and Hebrew)²,

² The Russian and Yiddish versions were written by An-sky himself; the drama was translated into the Hebrew language by the Israeli national bard Hayim Nahman Bialik and this Hebrew translation is today by many considered to be the canonical version.

is an excellent material for such analysis because of the permanent presence of two key elements: supernatural powers and something absent, unsaid, remaining "beyond".

The title *dybbuk*, according to *Polski słownik judaistyczny* is the soul of a dead sinner which tries to purify itself in the body of a living person. [Foreign soul takes control of the part of the human personality, uses their mouth to speak, causing suffering and disease] ("Obca dusza opanowuje część osobowości człowieka, przemawia jego ustami, powodując cierpienie i chorobę" (Kos, 2003, p. 354)). In the work of An-sky, Khanan³ – meant for his beloved Leah, even before the births of both lovers – becomes the *dybbuk*. The girl's father is the obstacle for their love as he finds a richer fiancé Menashe for Leah. Khanan dies and his lost and confused soul enters Leah's body. The main pivot of the dramatic action are attempts to get rid of the *dybbuk*, to expel the strange spirit from the girl's body.

An-sky called *The Dybbuk* [a realistic drama about mystics] and stressed the battle between the aspirations of the individual and good of the collective; between individual freedom and social norms (Elior, 2014, p. 103). Later interpretations and manners of analysing An-sky's text concentrated mainly on setting the work in specific social, historical, religious, psychological or cultural contexts.

Ira Konigsberg, writing about the film adaptation of *The Dybbuk* directed by Michał Waszyński, but also about the storyline of the drama, characterises the seizure of Leah's body by Khanan's spirit from the perspectives of religious studies and psychoanalysis. He examines the dysfunctions in Leah's family, regarding the *dramatis personae* as real people. He writes about patriarchal patterns in Judaism and in the storyline of *The Dybbuk*. In the connection of Leah and Khanan he sees an escape from the patriarchal world and an attempt to return to the original condition, to the early stage of the development of personality in which there is no division into "I" and the outside world or the male and female genders (Konigsberg, 1997, p. 36).

Rachel Elior uses the storyline of *The Dybbuk* as an exemplary situation to illustrate her thesis on the escape into madness, i.e. of the phenomenon of demonic possession as the only alternative way for a woman living in the orthodox Jewish community (Elior, 2014, pp. 103–105).

Naomi Seidman proposes the *queer* interpretation. The researcher notices that behind the facade of the heterosexual relationship between Leah and Khanan there is the sym-

³ The name of the character is written as Khanan or Khonen, depending on transcription. In a few quotations the difference in transcription of some Hebrew words can be noticed despite making due efforts.

bolic homosexual relationship between their fathers, Sender and Nisan – the relationship is even more clearly visible when considering the fact that the wives of both friends are almost completely absent from the drama (Seidman, 2003, pp. 233–234). Tony Kushner in his adaptation of *The Dybbuk* published in 1998 also highlights the gay motifs and stresses the cultural misogyny of Jewish orthodoxy (Fisher, 2001, p. 149).

There are many interpretations of *The Dybbuk* through the prism of the Holocaust, traumas related to it and the memory of the Shoah. Magda Romanska observes links between *The Dead Class* (*Umarła klasa*) by Tadeusz Kantor and *The Dybbuk*, which as a drama about a tormenting (non-)attendance was an essential source of inspiration for the director. *The Dead Class* is in this context "a mystical meditation on the Holocaust: what happened to all the souls whose earthly lives were cut short? Do they live among us (...), demanding justice, closure, remembrance?" (Romanska, 2014, p. 261). In a similar manner *The Dybbuk* was interpreted by Krzysztof Warlikowski in his stage adaptation of 2003, associating An-sky's text with the short story by Hanna Krall also entitled *The Dybbuk* (*Dybuk*).

Zvika Serper proves the existence of formal and material similarities of *The Dybbuk* to the Japanese plays of *Noh* and *Kabuki* (Serper, 2001). He himself is also the author of the stage adaptation of *The Dybbuk* in the convention of Japanese theatre. In turn, Shimon Levy analyses *The Dybbuk* in the context of chaos theory, indicating the fractal structure of the drama and recognising the dybbuk as the so-called strange attractor (Levy, 2009, p. 272).

These are just a few of the many interpretations of An-sky's drama. This sketch is not intended to reject or invalidate any of them. They are complementary to one another and broaden the scope of discussions about *The Dybbuk*, although it should be noted that some of them are focused not so much on the work itself but on the realities in which the action is set; the literary work is just a starting point of deliberations on the social roles or the collective memory. Meanwhile, the view proposed here allows us to return to the text and its literary and drama aspects. As a result, according to Patrice Pavis, another "layer of interpretation" may appear (Pavis, 1992, p. 53).

An-sky wrote *The Dybbuk* on the basis of Hasidic tales and stories, and also using the material collected in the years 1912–1914 during the field study commissioned by the Jewish Society for Research on Folklore and Ethnography in St Petersburg (Elior, 2014, pp. 101–102). Together with the group of ethnographers he travelled around the Jewish towns of Volhynia and Podolia, gathering folklore stories, legends, information about reli-

gious habits and practices, and recording chants and songs. The plot of *The Dybbuk* contains both folklore elements, i.e. the collected research material, and An-sky's own experience of the expedition. As Joel Engel, the expedition member, recollects, the love interest of Leah and Khanan, being the core of the drama's plot, was inspired by a true story:

[In Yarmolyntsi we stayed at one prosperous Jew. At dinner we witnessed the secret, silent courting game between the host's daughter and the pupil of the yeshiva, who ate in that house. This modestly led romance was broken by the father when he announced that he had decided to marry his daughter off to another man. At night the girl's crying woke us up. An-sky got up and till the morning he made notes in his notebook with great excitement. This love made a huge impression on him.]

"W Jarmolińczu gościliśmy u zamożnego Żyda. Podczas kolacji byliśmy świadkami potajemnej, niemej gry miłosnej między córką gospodarza a uczniem jesziwy, który stołował się w tym domu. Ten skromnie prowadzony romans ojciec przerwał, oznajmiając, że postanowił wydać córkę za innego. W nocy obudził nas płacz dziewczyny. An-ski wstał i w przejęciu aż do rana robił zapiski w swoim notatniku. Ta miłość zrobiła na nim wielkie wrażenie."

(quote: Rapoport, 2007, p. 10)

At the beginning of the 20th century the ethnographer Regina Liliental in her publication on the folk beliefs of the Ashkenazi Jews gave several dozen superstitions concerning evil spirits only (Lilientalowa, 1905, pp. 148–150). Superstitions and magic practices like in a provincial East European small town as from the beginning of the 20th century are reflected in the plot of *The Dybbuk*. The drama of An-sky is overfilled with witchcraft and stories about supernatural phenomena, and – apart from ordinary dramatis personae – is populated with illusive characters "from outside", led by the title dybbuk.

The whole work is constructed on the basis of the play between what is discovered and what is hidden, mysterious, unavailable (or available only for the chosen ones). The motif of liminality and transgression is outlined very strongly. The title of the play itself is significant. Although An-sky's work is commonly briefly called *The Dybbuk*, the full title is: *The Dybbuk or Between Two Worlds* [Polish titles depending on the translations: *Na pograniczu dwóch światów: Dybuk*, *Dybuk: Między dwoma światami* – J.M.J] The title two worlds are life and death, the world of the living and the world of the dead. The Dybbuk – Khanan is not the only dead person interfering in Leah's world. Leah speaks to the deceased, goes to the cemetery to invite her long dead mother to the wedding, and when the day of the wedding with her unloved betrothed Menashe comes, the girl runs up to the near grave of lovers who had died

tragically, the victims of the Khmelnytsky slaughter⁴, crying: [The saint betrothed couple, protect me! Save me] ("Święci oblubieńcy, ochrońcie mnie! Ratujcie mnie!") (Anski, 2003, p. 40). Leah constantly communes with the deceased and she herself, like a dybbuk, lives between two worlds.

Leah is in contact with the world of the dead, but in the world of the living there is also the play of the visible with the invisible, the discovered with the hidden. The following dialogue proves clearly that the drama characters can never be certain whether behind the reality available by senses something beyond, a being "from outside" would be hidden:

SECOND OLD MAN: Yes, that's the main thing. With the poor, you never know who you're dealing with. An ordinary Jew could suddenly turn out to be a rabbi, a landlord, a merchant. You never know who could be hiding beneath those rags. It could be an ordinary pauper or one of the great ones – a tsadik who has not yet been revealed to the world, a holy man going through Exile, or even one of the 36 hidden righteous ones, without whom the world would be destroyed.

FIRST OLD MAN: Or even the Prophet Elijah.⁵
[As you know, the prophet appears as a pauper.]

GUEST: You have to be careful. We don't know where a soul comes from and why it comes back to this world.]

BATLAN II: (...) Ale wzdarda dla biedaków może sprowadzić ciężką karę. Nigdy nie wiadomo, kogo łachman kryje. Może to żebrak, a może kto inny. Kto wie? Może to jeden z „trzydziestu sześciu sprawiedliwych”?⁶

MEIR: A może ELIJAHU HANAWI...⁷
Jak wiadomo, prorok objawia się jako żebrak.

⁴ The term "Khmelnytsky slaughter" [Pl: rzeź Chmielnickiego – J.M.J.] is mainly related to the Jewish experience of the events during the Khmelnytsky Uprising. This term is used, for example, by the translator of the interwar Polish edition of *The Dybbuk* (An-ski, 1922, p. 27). In the contemporary Israeli historiography there is the term "Khmelnytsky Uprising" (Heb. *mered Khmelnytsky*) and "massacre" or "slaughter of the year 1648" (Heb. *gzerot takh-tat*). The former term refers to all armed actions from the time of the Zaporozhian Cossacks and Russian peasants uprising, and the latter – only for losses incurred during the Khmelnytsky insurrection by the Jewish population. In the Polish literature the expression "Khmelnytsky slaughter" was used by Kajetan Koźmian, giving the title to the fragment of the poem *Ziemiaństwo polskie*.

⁵ (Safran, Zipperstein, 2006, p. 400).

⁶ Thirty six righteous ones – in the Jewish tradition: thirty six virtuous people who can be met in every generation of humankind, and whose services allow the world to continuously exist. What is important, those thirty six righteous ones are usually called "hidden" – Heb. *nistarim* (Żebrowski, 2003, p. 742).

⁷ Pl: Elijahu Hanawi, En: Eliyahu Hanavi – the prophet Elijah.

GOŚĆ: Trzeba uważać. Nie wiadomo, skąd dusza pochodzi, ani po co wraca na ten świat.

(Rapoport, 2007, pp. 73–74)

The concept of *offstage* – understood as poetics or dramatic strategy consisting in moving the key and most significant elements away to "behind the scenes" – can be analysed at two levels: literal (technical) and metaphorical (metaphysical). The layer of literality contains in itself everything that literally belongs to the dramatic situation and that literally can be found in the text of the drama, e.g. in the stage directions. When one of the characters leaves or when the stage directions inform us that some voice is wafting from a distance – then we can talk about theatrical literality, because the viewer receives an unambiguous message of what is on the stage and what is beyond it. In turn, the metaphorical level is the type of the "backstage" world, the existence of which can only be guessed or predicted by the *dramatis personae* and also by a reader or a viewer. All spirits and supernatural phenomena belong to that world.

An example of *offstage* in the literal sense is the scene when Menashe arrives to the house of his bride-to-be. Initially we can hear only a wedding march (the orchestra welcomes the groom in the gate), and frightened Leah is about to faint. Her friends run to check what the fiancé looks like, as neither they nor Leah had a chance to meet him after the decision of Leah's father. Menashe has not stepped on stage yet and already becomes the cause of the growing tension of the drama action. Thus the phenomena of behind the scenes affect the action seen on the stage.

In the first act of *The Dybbuk* everything what is important, is literally taking place beyond the stage. Partially it can be explained by the principles of exposition, i.e. the necessity to preliminary familiarise the viewer with the background of events, features of characters and relationships between particular characters. The easiest and fastest way to introduce the viewers in the drama situation is to tell them the most important themes, i.e. the implementation of oral statements in the form of dialogues or monologues said by the *dramatis personae*. In this manner the figure of Khanan is introduced. At the beginning of the first act Khanan is in a synagogue with other Jews. At some point he goes out, but the temple remains the place of action. From this point Khanan belongs temporarily to the "offstage" world, and the characters who remain on the stage start to talk about him.

SECOND OLD MAN: (*following him with his eyes*): What a strange young man. Who is he?

FIRST OLD MAN: A yeshivah student... Quite a remarkable young man. An extremely refined vessel.

SECOND OLD MAN: A genius. He knows almost the entire Talmud by heart.

FIRST OLD MAN: The old rabbis used to turn to him to resolve difficult questions.

OLD WANDERER: Where is he from?

MEYER (*walks up to the table*): From somewhere in Lithuania. He studied here for several years and was the pride of the yeshivah. Then he was made a rabbi and suddenly disappeared. They say he set out to go through Exile. He recently returned. He's become strange somehow... always immersed in thought. He fasts from Sabbath to Sabbath and goes often to the ritual baths, sometimes spending entire hours there. (*Softly*.) The yeshivah students say he's absorbed in the Kabbalah.

SECOND OLD MAN: These are the rumors in town, as well. I know people have already asked him for some talismans, but he wouldn't give any.⁸

MESZULACH (*Spogląda za nim*): Dziwny młodzian. Kim jest?

BATLAN I: Z uczniów jesziwy, szlachetna istota!

BATLAN II: Wybitna. Pięćset stron Gemary w pamięci.

MESZULACH: Skąd przybywa?

MEIR (*Podchodzi do stołu*): Gdzieś z Litwy. Wcześniej uczył się w jesziwie, zgłębiał Gemarę dzień i noc. Był pośród uczniów najzdolniejszym, miał zostać rabinem. Nagle zniknął. Niedawno wrócił. Inny człowiek. Chodzi jak cień. Pości od szabat do szabat, godzinami siedzi w mykwie. Chłopcy mówią, że zajmuje go Kabała.

BATLAN II (*Potajemnie*): Już wiadomo o tym w mieście. Chodzą do niego po amulety – nie daje.

(Rapoport, 2007, pp. 36–37)

Thus the character absent from the stage becomes the main hero of the plot. It is worth noting that Khanan starts to intrigue others of the expedition to nowhere mentioned by Meyer. He spends some time far away (he is said to have "disappeared"). If the town with the nearest neighbourhood is considered the stage where the action takes place, then – in flashbacks – Khanan has left this stage and set off on far roaming. His absence is a type

⁸ (Safran, Zipperstein, 2006, pp. 382–383).

of being *offstage*, beyond the stage. The time spent "behind the scenes" of the main course of events alters Khanan. Meyer recalls that Khanan returned as "a strange man". Significant things happened "not here".

Khanan is not the only absentee about whom the Jews gathered in synagogue talk. Another subject being handled by them is the person of Sender – Leah's father. Men wrangle over the way in which Sender chooses a son-in-law. Some believe that Leah's father wrongly looks primarily for a rich boy and not a religious scholar.

As soon as the discussion about Khanan and Sender ends, a woman runs into the temple so as to request a prayer in the intention of her daughter, who has been lying on her death-bed for two days. Then one of the Jews, called Old Wanderer or Meshulah or Messenger recalls that earlier on that day in the synagogue one woman lamented whose daughter could not give birth to a child for two days. Meshulah puts two and two together:

MESHULAH/OLD WANDERER [The soul of this dying woman wants to enter the body of an unborn child. And until one of them is still alive – this pregnant woman cannot give birth to the child. And when the ill woman recovers – the child will be stillborn.]

MESZULACH: Dusza konającej chce wejść w ciało dziecka nienarodzonego. A póki jedna jeszcze żyje – ta brzemienna urodzić nie może. A kiedy chora ozdrowieje – dziecko narodzi się martwe.

(Rapoport, 2007, p. 42)

Two women – one dying and the other giving birth – are beyond the stage in the most literal sense. Throughout the first act the scene is inside the synagogue. The dying woman and the woman giving birth do not come to the shul, but the people gathered there talk about them. They are secondary characters and therefore the exposition does not apply to them; the viewer does not have to know their lives to understand the storyline. So why do they speak of these women? And why – in accordance with the hypothesis above – is it important that they belong to the world of "beyond the stage"? From a technical point of view the two women indeed are located behind the scenes, beyond the stage. But the level of the theatre literality serves only as a frame on which the metaphysical layer is built up. Behind the scenes there is the fight between forces of "out-of-this-world", the soul of a dying person is attempting to break through from one body to another. This event is illusive for senses and Meshulah informs everyone about it – a flesh and blood man, but he sees, knows and understands more than the other persons of the drama. Meshulah

is one of the key characters in *The Dybbuk*⁹. He operates on the edge of two realities and like an envoy of supernatural powers he announces and explains the matters which are incomprehensible to others.

The storyline of *The Dybbuk* is full of supernatural phenomena and the episode with the two women and the explanation of it provided by Meshulah are one of the first such threads in the drama and the announcement of the next ones. They all belong to a deeper, metaphorical layer of *offstage*.

The work begins with the talks about miracles made by tzaddiks, i.e. Jewish (or more strictly – Hasidic) religious leaders. The followers of individual tzaddiks outdo one another in delivering stories on their unusual and incomprehensible deeds. For the *dramatis personae* these are stories which occurred somewhere, someday – i.e. not "here and now". They also talk about the powers of darkness – of Satan and other evil spirits. All these supernatural powers – both dark and light forces – are outside the synagogue in which the first act takes place, but the Jews are convinced that they can be brought to the stage using incantations.

[THIRD OLD MAN: You mustn't talk about these matters at night, and in particular in the synagogue.

SECOND OLD MAN: You'd better be silent when it comes to Kabbalah, because with your words you would cause harm, God forbid!]

BATLAN III: Nie wolno mówić o tych sprawach po nocy, a zwłaszcza w bóżnicy.

BATLAN II: Lepiej milczeć, gdy o Kabale mowa, bo mowę sprowadzisz, nie daj Bóg, szkodę.

(Rapoport, 2007, pp. 35–36)

Leah has also been advised that the forces of evil always lie in wait. They are invisible but they observe human doings, and at the appropriate time they exit from "behind the scenes", i.e. from every nook and cranny so as to do harm to a human being.

LEAH (*as before*): If you leave the bride alone on the day of the wedding, the spirits come and whisk her away, and she herself becomes a spirit... Why did you bring me back?

⁹ Nota bene, the character of Meshulah was added by An-sky after consultations with Konstantin Stanislavski, the director of the world-famous Moscow Art Theatre. Stanislavski read the Russian manuscript of *The Dybbuk* in 1915 and proposed a number of amendments, including the introduction to the action of the drama a character of indeterminate nature, expressing prophetic statements (cf. Rapoport, 2007, p. 10).

FRADA (*frightened*): What terrible words you say, Leah. Don't even mention the spirits. They're exceedingly cunning, lying in wait in every nook and cranny, listening and watching everything, just waiting till someone unwittingly mentions them, and then they hurl themselves upon him. Tfu! Tfu! Tfu!!!¹⁰

LEA: Jeśli zostawia się pannę młodą samotną w dzień ślubu – przychodzą wtedy duchy i unoszą ją daleko.

FRADE (*zmartwiona*): Co ty mówisz, Leo? Nie wolno wywoływać złych mocy. One kryją się po wszystkich kątach, w dziurach i szczelinach. Wszystko widzą, wszystko słyszą. I czyhają tylko, aż człowiek wspomni ich plugawe imię, i natychmiast rzucają się na niego. Tfu, tfu!

(Rapoport, 2007, p. 79)

The above dialogues present the picture of the world surrounded by phenomena incomprehensible and inaccessible to human senses. The characters exist in a limited, safe area as in a soap bubble around which the unknown whirls. In certain circumstances this bubble may be punctured and the influences from outside may burst in the quiet living space of the characters. Like in *Not I* by Beckett – the visible is just the tip of the iceberg and we may only guess the whole rest.

The space "beyond" is populated with the souls of the dead. In the second act Leah wonders what happens to the soul of a human being who dies prematurely; whether their unaccomplished deeds have a chance to be realised "in that world"; or somewhere their children are born who have not been born here. The girl, shocked at death of his beloved Khanan, compares his life to a candle. A candle blown out once is lit again later and therefore a wick can burn itself out. Leah suggests that it must be alike with the human life which ended too early. If not on the stage of this world, Khanan's life has to end somewhere else – beyond this stage. Leah concludes her deliberations by saying that it is possible to look behind the curtain separating life from death.

[LEAH: (...) A human soul doesn't die. Who wants it with all their heart, can see it, hear its voice, understand its thoughts.]

LEA: (...) Dusza człowieka nie ginie. Kto pragnie całym sercem, może ją zobaczyć, usłyszeć jej głos, zrozumieć jej myśli.

(Rapoport, 2007, p. 81)

¹⁰ (Safran, Zipperstein, 2006, p. 406).

However, Leah does not know what danger of the attempts of transmigration is, danger of looking "beyond". During his life Khanan studied Kabbalah; tried to use supernatural forces to win the hand of Leah. He knew that Sender did not approved of him and was looking a wealthy man for his daughter. Having heard that Leah's father signed the engagement document, Khanan immediately dies. But he dies not because of a broken heart, not from a shock induced by a piece of news tragic for him, but because at the same time his mystical contemplation drives him to revelation. In other words – Khanan is dying at the moment when he looks behind the borderline of earthly life, beyond "this world". The first act closes with the words of Meshulah which are said over the body of the deceased man: [He saw – and died] "Zobaczył – i umarł" (Rapoport, 2007, p. 69)¹¹. A moment earlier Meshulah speaks to himself: [The candle has gone out. We have to light another one] "Świeca zgasła./ Trzeba nową zapalić" (Rapoport, 2007, p. 65). This ambiguous statement apparently is a trivial note about the darkness, which rapidly fell in the temple, but in fact it refers to the metaphor used also by Leah: the metaphor of human life as a burning candle.

An interesting example of crossing or blurring the boundary between two worlds is the Court of the Torah shown in the fourth act, where Sender is called by his friend who died many years before, and at the same time Khanan's father – Nisan. Tzaddik Azriel performs a ceremony during which behind the bed sheet the spirit of Nisan appears and reveals his charges against Sender before the tzaddik. Rabbi Azriel does not allow the soul of the deceased go outside a small space designated for him. Only rabbis present at the Court of the Torah hear the words of Nisan. The spirit hidden behind the curtain is both present on the stage and absent from the stage – both in literal and metaphorical sense.

The Court of the Torah mentioned here concerns the mutual oath made years before by Sender and Nisan. The men promised each other that if one of them would have a son and the other – a daughter, they marry them off. Although after the death of Nisan Sender forgets his promise, the word once given remains in effect and makes Leah a woman meant for Khanan as early as from the day of her birth. The fathers' oath does not belong to "here and now" of the action but is a key event for the course of action. Fate has to be accomplished in one way or another. Like puppets in the marionette theatre, the dramatis personae follow in the direction chosen by supernatural powers from behind the scenes.

¹¹ This sentence, appearing in the Hebrew version of the drama, can also be translated as "He looked behind (looked into) – and died". This wording even more stresses that Khanan made an act of transgression; from "behind the scenes" he saw phenomena, which should not be accessible to a mortal.

An inevitable consequence of acting of this fate is the creation of a dybbuk. When Khanan dies, fate finds another way to unite the lovers. Khanan enters Leah's body in the form of a dybbuk. For some time his status is indefinite. The soul of the dead man circles between the intangible world of the dead and the material body of the girl. The tzaddik temporarily succeeds in driving the dybbuk away from Leah, but at the end of the drama the spirit returns.

LEAH (*groans heavily, then opens her eyes*): Who is groaning?

KHONEN (*appears before her in a shroud*): It is I.

LEAH (*looking at him*): Who are you? I don't recognize you...

KHONEN: You are separated from me by an invincible wall, an enchanted circle.¹²

LEA (*Wzdycha ciężko. Otwiera oczy*): Kto tu wzdycha tak ciężko?

GŁOS CHANANA: Ja.

LEA: Słyszę twój głos, ale ciebie nie widzę.

GŁOS CHANANA: Dzieli nas zaklęte koło.

(Rapoport, 2007, pp. 142–143)

In this scene Khanan is almost in every respect "beyond", "outside": out of view or touch, outside the world of the living and outside the limit of the "the enchanted circle" outlined by the tzaddik. Leah only hears the voice of her beloved. She asks him to come back to her – so that they can rock their unborn babies in their arms¹³. Finally the driven out dybbuk ceases to be the voice – his image appears before Leah on the wall.

[LEAH: And the enchanted circle has disappeared. I can see you, my husband. Come to me!

KHANAN: Come to me!

LEAH (*stands up joyfully*): I'm coming to you...]

LEA: Oto zaklęte koło znikło. Widzę ciebie, mój mężu. Chodź do mnie!

CHANAN: Chodź do mnie!

¹² (Safran, Zipperstein, 2006, p. 432).

¹³ Nota bene the dream is another variant of "play within a play" and another form of the phenomenon of "from beyond", "from outside". Oneiric motifs appear frequently in An-sky's work; in a dream deceased Khanan asks Leah to invite him to her wedding; also in a dream before the rabbi Khanan's father appears and demands the Court of the Torah for Sender.

LEA (*Wstaje radośnie*): Idę do ciebie...

(Rapoport, 2007, p. 145)

The girl approaches the betrothed as a bride. When she comes to the place where the person of Khanan appeared, the spectre vanishes.

[LEAH (*her voice from a distance*): We are engulfed in brightness. I am with you forever... We are rising higher... and higher...]

LEA (*Głosem z daleka*): Jasność nas ogarnia. Jestem z tobą na wieki... Wysoko...

(Rapoport, 2007, p. 146)

The stage directions are very significant in this fragment. Leah speaks with her voice from a distance, i.e. not "from here". She goes from one world to another. As previously Khanan, now she is looking behind the curtain separating her from the different world. She also pays the same price – after a while she falls lifeless. Finally the elimination of the border between "this" and "that" world turns out to be impossible. One can be on the stage or behind the scenes, but not in both places at the same time. This is an important observation resulting from the metaphor of the stage. Leah gets off the arena of the world of the living and she is convinced that everything she did not manage to play on it will be possible to fulfil behind the scenes – in the place inaccessible to human senses.

In *The Dybbuk* of An-sky – as in the dramas of Beckett – the viewer's attention is drawn to the direction of what cannot be seen on the stage. Of key importance are the themes and characters about which the viewer learns only indirectly or can only guess their existence. The tendency toward everything that is distant, unavailable, unattainable, incomprehensible, invisible and "out-of-this-world" is the quality of all the dramatis personae. The Jews in the temple are excited about miracles performed by tzaddiks, but they only talk about it, none of them has seen these miracles because they took place long time before or in a remote town to which they would have to go a long time, so it is a virtual impossibility to get there. Leah speaks to the deceased, cries for help over the grave of victims of the Khmelnytsky Uprising, strives to interact with spirit world, the beyond. Khanan even during his life devotes himself to deliberations on supernatural things and makes a far journey in quest for assistance. He is looking for "beyond", because "here" there is no hope for him. Khanan-dybbuk is a hero who managed to exceed the borderline, went to the other side and then he pulled Leah with him.

In this context the words of Menashe, Leah's fiancé, are intriguing:

[MENASHE (*very upset*): (...) I'm shivering when everyone is looking at me... I'm afraid of their eyes... (...) Rabbi, I'd like to escape, hide from these people, hide from their eyes.]

MENASZE (*Wielce zmartwiony*)

(...) Dreszcz mnie przechodzi, kiedy wszyscy na mnie patrzą...

Boję się ich oczu...

(...) Chciałbym, rabi, uciec,

ukryć się przed tymi ludźmi, schować przed ich wzrokiem.

(Rapoport, 2007, p. 91)

Even Menashe feels a tendency toward the sphere of *offstage*. The human eyes terrify him and he would like to escape from them, hide, become invisible. But apparently he is unable to attain transgression like Khanan and Leah. He cannot maintain a relationship with something which is "beyond".

Feelings of lack, lack of fulfilment, implicit statements, insatiability are strongly stresses in the work – which is manifested primarily in continuous pursuit of Leah and Khanan to consummate their mutual feeling. Several times in the drama in the stage directions there is information about sounds of wedding music heard from a distance. But no wedding takes place. Music from behind the scenes indicates unmet desire to the marital unification. Leah longs not only for her beloved, but also for their common unbegotten and unborn children. One of the most important commandments of Judaism: *pru u'rvu* ("be fruitful and multiply") is not obeyed and Leah can only believe that everything that has not happened "here", will happen "there". The girl strongly misses her mother who died many years before. This feeling grows before the wedding when the bride-to-be leaves the family home and the person who should prepare her and bless to her new life is missing.

The look at *The Dybbuk* of An-sky from the perspective of *offstage* allows us to distance from the terminology associated closely with the sphere of religion and social sciences – and to replace it with the language of the theatre, i.e. the language in which this work was written. But, what is more important, looking at *The Dybbuk* from the perspective of significant implicit statements and secret matters sheds new light on the metaphysical aspect of the storyline and allows us to redefine the topics and themes of the drama, paying special attention to their gravity (which can serve as a valuable guide for directors who seek new interpretations of the text). As a result of it we can see more clearly how much the *The Dybbuk* treats of empti-

ness and the need to fill the void, the desire and the wish to quench this desire, the invincible human aspiration to go beyond the limits. In particular the limits of impassable nature.

Translated by Joanna Modzelewska-Jankowiak

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Offstage: The revealed and the concealed in An-sky's *The Dybbuk*

Abstract

The Israeli theatre scholar Shimon Levy describes the works of Samuel Beckett using the category of "offstage", i.e. what is "backstage" or "behind the scenes". This notion is also suitable to describe the plot of An-sky's play *The Dybbuk*. The plot, which follows the wanderings of the soul of a prematurely deceased lover, is based on a continuous interplay between the explicit and the implicit, the revealed and the concealed, the present and the absent. Applying the category of "offstage" as an analytical tool allows for speaking about the supernatural forces which are depicted in the play, while replacing religious nomenclature with a glossary of terms from the field of theatre.

Keywords:

theatre, drama, Judaism, Dybbuk

Poza sceną, czyli jawne i niejawne w *Dybuku* Szymona An-skiego

Abstrakt

Izraelski teatrolog Shimon Levy opisuje twórczość Samuela Becketta, posługując się kategorią „offstage”, czyli tego, co znajduje się poza sceną, za kulisami. Kategoria ta doskonale nadaje się także do opisu fabuły *Dybuka* Szymona An-skiego. Akcja dramatu o wędrowce duszy przedwcześnie zmarłego kochanka opiera się na ciągłej grze jawnego z niejawnym, odkrytego z zakrytym, obecnego z nieobecnym. Zastosowanie kategorii „offstage” jako narzędzia analitycznego pozwala mówić o ukazanych w dramacie sił nadprzyrodzonych przy zastąpieniu nomenklatury religijnej zestawem pojęć ze sfery teatru.

Słowa kluczowe:

teatr, dramat, judaizm, dybuk