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**BLOODY LINING OF HIGH-MINDED IDEAS:
“UN-DIVINE COMEDY” AND ITS CONTEMPORARY CONTEXTS**
**KRWAWA PODSZEWKA WZNIOSŁYCH IDEI. NIE-BOSKA KOMEDIA
I WSPÓŁCZESNE KONTEKSTY**

Key words: Zygmunt Krasiński’s “Un-Divine Comedy”, Romanticism, Polish Jews, nationalism, phantasmal criticism in literary research

Słowa kluczowe: *Nie-Boska komedia* Zygmunta Krasińskiego, romantyzm, Żydzi polscy, nacjonalizm, krytyka fantazmatyczna w badaniach literackich

This paper focuses on the problem of the place of the Jewish population in Poland, as well as on the relevance of this issue for Polish society and the project of Polish state *in spe* moulded during the period when Poland was partitioned, namely in 19th century. Two main lines of thinking about this matter were represented by Romantic poets, Adam Mickiewicz and Zygmunt Krasiński – both gave, offering contradictory views, their contribution to the discourse on the role of Jew’s cultural, economical and symbolic existence in Poland and in Europe¹. In this essay I will analyse just one of these lines of interpretation, the one that in my opinion ultimately won out in the end²;

¹ The book of J. Fiećko, *Krasiński przeciw Mickiewiczowi* (2011, pp. 73–101) contains one of the most comprehensive summary of these contradictory views.

² To this conclusion leads me the thoroughgoing analysis of the conservative thought in Poland with regard of the shaping and development of Krasiński’s political ideas (Sekuła, *Sylwetka ideowa Zygmunta Krasińskiego*, 2015, pp. 352–393), as well as the reading of M. Janion’s works (i.e. *Bohater, spisek, śmierć. Wykłady żydowskie*, 2009). Counterrevolutionary aberration of Polish conservative thought together with the phantasm of “Judeo-Communism” (Polish: “żydokomuna”) predominated the 20th-century and contemporary discourse on Jew’s place in Polish culture and history. The Mickiewicz’s conviction (and prediction) that something important and new should emerge in Europe (and for Europe) from the “providential”

Kraśiński's writings will serve as an example of this. Mickiewicz voiced the concept of the providential significance of coexistence on the same territory of Polish Christian society and the "the elder brother" ("elder" here being understood in religious terms: as the worshippers of the older, monotheistic religion, Judaism, from which the Christianity emerged), i.e. the Jewish community.

Kraśiński on the contrary expressed the idea of a Jewish plot against Poland and Christianity. For Kraśiński both targets of this vicious conspiracy were connected, since he perceived Polish society as the new incarnation of Christ, this time embodied in the collective body of the nation. This idea was incorporated in his famous drama, *Un-Divine Comedy* (1835). After the drama had enjoyed some success (especially among Polish political emigrants), Kraśiński planned to supplement his text with two other parts, thus creating a trilogy. Drafts of the first part of the intended trilogy were preserved as the *Unfinished Poem*, *Unfinished Poem*, *Undivine Comedy* was to become the second part, and the third part [...] and the third part took the form of the poem *Przedawn* (*Przedświt*, 1843).

Zygmunt Kraśiński's *Un-Divine Comedy* shows how the young author (he was only 21 when he wrote the text and 23 when it was published) perceived the conflict between two crucial 19th-century "principles": aristocracy and (egalitarian) democracy. Although the drama is clearly divided into two parts (one concerning the private life of the protagonist, Count Henry, and the other dealing with his political activities), the problem of the social revolution lingers throughout of the whole work. Moreover, Kraśiński describes the revolution in a way that highlights the issue of the Jewish plot, which inspires revolutionary powers in society and at the same time uses them for Jewish own sombre goals (namely for taking over the world and destroying the God's plan of salvation). This is shown in the third act of the drama in the scene featuring the Jewish converts, in Polish scornfully referred to as "przechrzyty".

It would be too easy to blame the author's youth for this dangerous idea. The issue returns years later in his *Unfinished Poem*, where it is both deepened and refined: here Jews are ruling through the stock market, buying from the political leaders the blood of the downtrodden and the poor, buying what was left of the former chivalric glory from the descendants of the knights and noblemen etc. The scene from *Un-Divine Comedy* informs us only that the Jews *are* plotting; from the *Unfinished Poem* we know exactly *how* they do this. I am convinced that the planned trilogy should be interpreted as a single entity.

Nonetheless, the most significant theatrical adaptations have concentrated on the main text of *Un-Divine Comedy*, especially the "private" or "political" parts. Sometimes also other works of Kraśiński have been used³. For example in *Un-Divine*

coexistence of Jewish and Christian communities on the Polish territories – did not spread in Polish society. Moreover, after the extermination of Jewish community during the World War II Mickiewicz's idea is rather impossible to incorporate.

³ The following productions can be indicated as the most important Polish stage versions of *Un-Divine Comedy* in last hundred years: directed by Arnold Szyfman (Teatr Polski, Warszawa 1920), Leon Schiller (Teatr im. W. Bogusławskiego, Warszawa 1926; with *Unfinished Poem* included), Bohdan Korzeniewski (Teatr Nowy, Łódź 1959), Jerzy Kreczmar (Teatr Polski,

Comedy directed by Jerzy Grzegorzewski (2002) fragments of the *Unfinished Poem* were included together with Krasiński's short story *In Venice*, and the monologue of Beatrix Cenci by Percy Bysshe Shelley as paraphrased by James Joyce. Nevertheless, these excerpts did not relate to Krasiński's anti-Semitism. The emphasis was put not on the social problems addressed in the play, but on individual issues, such as those of the existence of an artist and a man (both as a male and as a human being); the revolution was depicted as a secondary problem, an event that brought chaos and destruction to individual lives.

The other famous stage version of *Un-Divine Comedy*, the one directed by Konrad Swinarski (1969) was influenced by Hegelian thought, perceived as a dominant ideology of the 19th-century. Two distinctive agents representing opposite factions – the conservatives (aristocracy) and the revolutionaries (people) – were depicted as the tools of the Spirit that uses history for its own purposes, even though the leaders might think they were working for the future happiness of humankind. Swinarski used the old literary genre of the mystery play⁴ to allow the historiosophical vision of Krasiński to speak. Just as in the original text it transpired that neither of the factions could be considered “good” in the face of God, and that neither had power or could claim the authority to establish a better world, subject to moral rules. The aristocracy, incapable of action, was being infected by egoism, whereas the common people tended to imitate the worst traits of the former ruling class. Krasiński gave the last word in his text to the vengeful, apocalyptic God (Christ): the leader of the revolution, Pankracy, dies blasted with the preternatural light from the sky, saying “Galilee vincisti” (i.e. “Galilean, you won”). Swinarski in his adaptation transformed this symbol into a stage prop: the neon sign shaped like an eye of Providence, blinking and shimmering in the last scene while disassembled by the backstage crew accompanied by a hit pop song from the 60's “Ciao, ciao Bambina”.

Grzegorzewski included our knowledge of the author as a private person and used a selection of fragments from the original text to convey his vision. Swinarski included all of the scenes from Krasiński's drama, but in the context of the dialogue of political ideas.

Poznań 1964; with *Unfinished Poem* and excerpts from Krasiński's letters to Delfina Potocka included), Konrad Swinarski (Teatr Stary, Kraków 1965), Adam Hanuszkiewicz (Teatr Narodowy, Warszawa 1969), Maciej Prus (Teatr Dramatyczny, Warszawa 1991; with *Unfinished Poem* included) and by Jerzy Grzegorzewski (Teatr Narodowy, Warszawa 2002). See also: <http://encyklopediateatru.pl/sztuki/1437/nie-boska-komedia>.

⁴ The Swinarski's stage interpretation of *Un-Divine Comedy* was labelled as “morality play” in medieval or baroque style (the scenography shows the interior of an abandoned church), which allegorically displays the struggle between good and evil, although it must be said that it was thoroughly secular. The director himself alleged he decided to put the emphasis on “universal way of thinking”.

Some of the other historical stage versions of the Krasiński's drama also have their labels, e.g. Kreczmar's production (1964) was pinpointed as the tragedy of “the leader separated from the masses he leads”, and *Un-Divine Comedy* directed by Prus (1991) was also considered as the morality play but taking place only in poet's mind, whereas Grzegorzewski's version from 2002 was called “postmodern”, as the intimate play about withering and inflation of ideas.

The former theatrical adaptations prepared the ground for the most recent interpretation of Krasiński's drama made by Paweł Demirski (adapter of the text) and Monika Strzępka (director). There is not much left of the original Krasiński's text in the 2014 production staged at the National Stary Theater in Krakow⁵. On the other hand, Demirski's adaptation takes hold of recent literary and historical scholarship, especially the biographical contexts. Because of this, and despite Demirski mixing and shuffling the characters and utterances from the original play, he somehow managed to reach closer to the core (or sense) of the drama that it might seem to be at first sight.

For example, in the second part (Demirski's text is divided into 17 parts) character named Rotschild recounts his parody of Zygmunt Krasiński. He does so by repeating "papa" in almost every phrase, and the specific way he pronounces the sentences, etc. In this scene, Rotschild impersonates Krysiński – the real nightmare of Zygmunt: a Jew, whose name differed from his own by only one letter and who dared to be richer than him (wearing gloves of bright coloured leather, always clean, which means he had to change them often). The real Krysiński was probably quite "innocent", perhaps he didn't care much about Zygmunt Krasiński and didn't want to mock the young dandy count. (Incidentally, we can say that the title of "count" was fake, having been given to Krasiński's father by the revolutionary emperor Napoleon I.) But the real Krysiński doesn't matter: we are *inside* Zygmunt Krasiński's inner world: watching his fears, obsessions, phantoms and phantasms⁶.

The dominating presence of Papa Wincenty corresponds to the importance of the father figure in Krasiński's life. This overwhelming dominance has been obvious since Maria Janion published her biography about Krasiński's early years (Janion 1962).

"You won't go anywhere."⁷ With this incisive sentence, Papa Wincenty interrupts the (internal) dialogue of Krasiński, split into two distinct personages in the play. This can be understood as the reminiscence of the incident from 1829 that was going to influence the whole life of the future author of *Un-Divine Comedy*. The incident was linked with the verdict of the Parliamentary Tribunal (*Sąd Sejmowy*) in the trial against plotters from the Patriotic Society (*Towarzystwo Patriotyczne*) accused of high treason. The Society itself had connections with the Decembrists and also with the Freemasons. The Parliamentary Tribunal was composed of 42 Polish senators appointed by Tsar Nicolas I (who at this time was also the King of Poland, or so-called Congress Poland, existing from 1815). The accusation of high treason was dismissed by the Tribunal, acting under immense pressure of public opinion; out of 42 senators, only one declared his *votum separatum*. His name was General Wincenty Krasiński. Firstly, he declared that he perceived plotting against the legal monarch and the internationally accepted borders to be a crime – a high treason at that, since the plotters

⁵ Narodowy Stary Teatr im. Heleny Modrzejewskiej, <https://stary.pl/en/about-the-theatre/>

⁶ The literary research in Poland owe the introduction of the term "phantasm" (in Polish: *fantazmat*) to Maria Janion (see: M. Janion, *Projekt krytyki fantazmatycznej. Szkice o egzystencji ludzi i duchów*, Warszawa 1991); it can be understood as half philosophical idea and half imaginary material.

⁷ The whole text of the stage version of Paweł Demirski was available during the performance, printed along with the theatre programme, but has not yet been published.

were in the army. Secondly, he was demonstrating his loyalty to the Tsar, because he wanted to continue his career within the political structures imposed by Nicolas I, though he could not declare this openly. Nevertheless, the verdict of the Tribunal was in accordance with public opinion, which expected the Tribunal to protect Polish patriots from the Tsar's vengeance. So the chair of the Tribunal, Senator Piotr Bieliński, was proclaimed a national hero, whereas general Krasieński was accused of being a traitor (graffiti of the time – the first reported work of this kind in Warsaw – showed the general vomiting with Russian money).

In these unpleasant circumstances young Zygmunt Krasieński began his study at the University of Warsaw. Senator Bieliński died soon afterwards and his funeral doubled as a patriotic demonstration; all the students joined to show their solidarity with the Senator who had not succumbed to pressure from the Tsar. Zygmunt was the only one who did not join his colleagues – he asserted afterwards that he intended not to show disloyalty to his father; thus he was listening to the lecture, sitting alone in the auditorium. Immediately after, one of Zygmunt's colleagues, Leon Łubieński, accused him in public of cowardice. Somebody even slapped him in the face, while others shoved him around. Zygmunt Krasieński never forgot this incident, nor could he forgive those who had attacked him. As he felt at this time, everybody was against him, and nobody had tried to understand his sophisticated motives. He remembered this for ever as his personal experience of revolution: he equated Łubieński to a leader of the wild, instinctive, predatory, revolutionary crowd. The sentence from Demirski/Strzępka's play: "You won't go anywhere" (along with a few other hints) – references this story."

There are more examples that show the erudition that sustains the construction of Demirski's text. If the same actor plays Pankracy and Satan, this embodiment is also justified by Zygmunt Krasieński's perception of the world around him. In his letters he describes Leon Łubieński as a "satan"; the poet indicated his colleague from his student days to be the living model of Pankracy's character in *Un-Divine Comedy*.

The only original scene from Krasieński's drama given *in extenso* can be found in part 15th. The dialogue between Count Henry, the conservative forces' fugleman, and Pankracy, the revolutionary leader – in the Demirski-Strzępka adaptation, turns into a conversation between two actors playing Henry (one of them being female). This concept makes it the *inner* conflict of antithetic points of view. The scene – the count against the revolutionary – functioned for a long time as an argument for Krasieński's political impartiality, even as proof of it. It was interpreted as an evidence of his absolute detachment from different needs, different points of view, as well as of his sensitivity for the sufferings of the other social classes. This was originally Maria Janion's argument in her monograph on Krasieński⁸.

Nonetheless, Krasieński's political detachment is suspicious and in *Un-Divine Comedy* the conflict of antithetic points of view – seemingly equivalent – is built in a tendentious way. In other words, this ideological fight is staged. The revolution is

⁸ Chapter "An Attempt at the 'Christian Tragedy' of Human Revolt" (*Próba „chrześcijańskiej tragedii” o ludzkim buncie*). In: Janion, *Zygmunt Krasieński. Debiut i Dojrzałość*, Warszawa 1962, pp. 199–240.

depicted as a mere change of positions: the poor (Kraśiński call them “those, who do not have”) struggle to become the rich (both financially and in terms of social status; i.e. in Kraśiński’s words, to gain the position of “those, who have”). We know this from those scenes in *Un-Divine Comedy* where Count Henry visits *incognito* the camp of revolutionaries: he looks at the different groups of mean people, drunk with the blood of their former masters and with alcohol. Servants and maids, butchers and cobblers – united in clubs – celebrate the day when they can eat and drink and amuse themselves, instead of serving the others. They celebrate the day when their position in society changes.

While writing the *Un-Divine Comedy*, Kraśiński reported on his work to Henry Reeve. From these letters we know that he viewed the revolutionary crowd as “a million cobblers and peasants”; a more detailed description of the camp of revolutionaries generates a feeling of abhorrence: “convulsive scenes in the ruins of demolished cathedrals, songs of fury, choruses of converted Jews, Saint-Simonists, unfettered women, prophets of the future, liberated flunkies, butchers, indifferent to everything except their passion for bloodshed, a club of assassins.”⁹

Zygmunt Kraśiński definitely sided with Count Henry and the aristocracy: he declared this in his letters (e.g. to Henry Reeve from Geneva, dated 20th October 1831). He argued (referring to the social conflict, but transposing it into more lofty conflict of ideas) that there are two main “principles” fighting against each other in the 19th century: aristocracy and democracy, or, in the other words, the nobility and the people. Kraśiński explained in his letter that he leaned towards the aristocracy, because “it is great with its memories” and because there is “more poetry” in a single member of the aristocracy than in the whole unified, democratic crowd (simultaneously, with these declarations he presents himself as a romantic poet). He asserted thereafter that the only possible path in front of the “democratic principle” (i.e. masses that crave for the social revolution) leads inevitably to blood shedding. Finally, in order to withhold Henry Reeve from the temptation to foster the democratic ideas – he confessed he didn’t want himself or his friend to dip their “white hands in blood”. He envisioned only one possibility for the aristocracy to get involved in the affairs of the people: namely to become leaders of the infantile, predatory crowd and to correct their ways by unwinding “the old, famous flags” of “the religion and the glory of the past”.

One can say that usually revolutionaries also have other aims than “to possess”; there are indeed more complex and subtle achievements of revolutionary movements. If we are to maintain impartiality, it must be said that wars also are waged only to elicit as much as possible from those who are labelled as “the enemies”. Thus not only are the revolution’s aims achieved through blood, conflagration and destruction, but so is the glory of the kings, commanders, and countries.

And yet Kraśiński marginalizes or even fails to consider any high-minded goals of the revolution. Ultimately the better world for all the poor people under Pankracy’s

⁹ Letter to Henry Reeve, Rome, 19th December 1833 (translation AS); see: Z. Kraśiński, *Listy do Henryka Reeve*, Warszawa 1980, vol. 2, p. 127.

leadership will be undone by the “*deus ex machina*” scene: the apocalyptic Christ killing the leader of the revolution with his sacred light.

Because of the aforementioned incident at the University of Warsaw, Zygmunt Krasiński had to leave the country to continue his education in Geneva. A year after his departure, the November Uprising broke out. General Krasiński was involved in supporting the legal order of monarchy, as well as the Tsar, against the rebels. His son, being instructed by the general, perceived this political conflict by analogy to confrontation between Senator Bieliński and his father. When the Uprising had fallen a year later, he described the events in Congress Poland in the following manner:

The members of the clubs led us to ruin. You yourself cannot imagine their madness and fury. Those wretches, cobblers, converted Jews and tailors, greedily for money, completely ignorant about Poland and its past – they wanted to amass their fortunes, to cash in, to speculate on the market, by hanging, calumniating and stirring up [public opinion], and now they are disseminating booklets against everything we hold to be great. They call it aristocracy. But (...) outside of the aristocracy there are neither talents, nor enlightenment, nor self-dedication! Our third class is nothing, our peasants are machines. Only we are Poland¹⁰.

Thereafter, in the same letter, Zygmunt Krasiński envisions the annihilation of his social class by the radical forces that are emerging in the world and ends his argument with melancholy and generosity: “I wish something good would happen to this miserable country at the very least, when we are gone. Let those new people be successful in becoming a great nation again”¹¹.

As a matter of fact, during last years we have witnessed in Poland the fulfilment of those wishes and desires of the Romantic poet. The new leaders of the “infantile crowd” emerged and revised the people’s endeavours and wishes by unfurling “the old, famous flags” of “the religion and the glory of the past” and, of course, of the nation. Even if the leaders are not “the aristocracy” (in the same way that Krasiński was not a “count”) they invoke similar ideas and the fables of the old gentry, incessantly speaking about Poland, its honour and its traitors, engaging conservative (or rather counter-revolutionary) discourse etc.

Zygmunt Krasiński was convinced that, being a poet, he was able to “attune” his imagination accordingly in order to decipher the profound meaning of the ongoing events and to predict the future – similarly as the telegraph was able to receive the information sent from far away. Maria Janion legitimated this unusual talent of the Romantic poet and identified it as “the phantasmal ability to set himself at the centre of history, in the middle of the events of his time”¹². This was the seed from which the *Un-Divine Comedy* has grown.

¹⁰ Letter to Henry Reeve, Vienna, 14th July 1832 (translation AS), see: Z. Krasiński, *Listy do Henryka Reeve*, Warszawa 1980, vol. 2, pp. 11–12.

¹¹ *Ibidem*, p. 12.

¹² See: M. Janion, *Wobec zła*, Warszawa 1989, chapter “Katastrofa i religia” (“Catastrophe and Religion”), p. 78.

Going back to the stage version of Krasiński's tragedy, recycled by Demirski and Strzępka: what the audience is watching on the scene is taking place *inside* the Zygmunt Krasiński's mind. It can be noticed, that he is arguing with himself, being Pankracy and Count Henry, man and woman at the same time, split in two, simultaneously expressing his will and criticizing it without mercy¹³.

Spectators are not just *watching* his struggles, but are also *stepping inside* Krasiński's mind and imagination. During the play the audience is invited to situate themselves in the same *phantasmal point* in which Krasiński was perceiving himself: the point (slightly adjusted to our times), from which one can see (or feel) the principles, forces and fears that constitute history right now.

Krasiński's *moment* in the history of Europe (and of these parts of the world politically connected with Europe) is, firstly, the time when the idea of national state emerges, and, secondly, the time that shapes conservative parties and factions. Krasiński approved of both of these projects. The idea of nation – pure and great – seemed high-minded, sublime and redemptive to him. And this kind of sublime idea was very important to him, since he perceived it as poetic.

Moreover, while the protagonist of *Un-Divine Comedy* is criticised (even condemned) as a poet because of his selfishness and moral disorientation, the sublime idea of the nation leads the poetry to become high-minded, non-egoistic and thoroughly moral.

The *moment* – the *phantasmal point* of history – in the adaptation by Demirski and Strzępka takes place after the Second World War and after the extermination of Jews in Europe. The fears and phantasms are adequate to this *moment*.

The audience is aware of all the calamities that took place in the last century and is awaiting future catastrophes. The revolution broke out and failed. Spectators can hear the words from Krasiński's original text from early 19th century expressed by the Philosopher about the forthcoming day of the "liberation of women and Negroes" – derided by the self-confident, caddish Papa Wincenty. He is convinced that nothing will change: a man with a social status similar to his will only have "his own liberated Negroes and even more of his own liberated women". His conviction about the impotence of social revolutions is legitimated by the miserable fortunes of others: Leonard/Przechrzta and his daughter Przechrzta/Cepelia Winy (i.e. "Folklore Of Blame"). Leonard/Przechrzta has made the revolution with his own hands (still lacerated and in bandages), so he demands praise for his achievements from the next generation. But his claims sound pathetic. His character resembles the character from Wajda's film *Man of Marble* – Birkut, the over-achieving but painfully naive bricklayer, who beat the record of laying 30,000 bricks in one day. He legitimated the communist government, but in the end was betrayed by the proletariat authorities. In Demirski's play, the daughter of Leonard/Przechrzta works in an office operating the photocopier. She is a kind of "office maidservant" or "xerox machine maid". The absurdity of this secondary character and the hopelessness of her job and social position, although funny

¹³ Incidentally, this concept of the personage incorporating Zygmunt Krasiński echoes the interpretations and analyses of Marek Bieńczyk, who introduced Krasiński to the family of great melancholics (Bieńczyk, 1998, 2002).

somehow, has an immensely deep resonance. She incorporates the defeat of revolution. The revolution didn't change the world for the better. The life of revolutionary's daughter ends with suicide. And it is not even tragic. It is also pathetic as her father's pretension to the appreciation for his deeds. Nobody cares about what happened to her except for her father, who searches for her desperately. He cannot believe in her suicidal death and remains incapable of leaving behind his claims that he secured a better life for a new generation.

Thus this is one of the threads that leads us back to the scene with converted Jews ("Przechrzty") from Krasiński's drama. It is not the only one, however. The scene is crowded with characters evoking "Jewish motifs" and the text is littered with references to them. Demirski and Strzępka were even questioned on whether the play is "about the Jews", which they denied. Which they did, because it obviously is not. The play calls out *our* inner fears and obsessions. This is the explanation – that is *why* there are so many different Jewish characters on the stage. This is also *our* phantasmal point, which I referred to above.

Another Jewish character is not betrayed by the revolution. He is the winner. He is rich. The play refers to him by two names – Rotschild/Wolf of Wall Street – so he represents the privileged. He is the predator and he does business with the second representative of this class, Papa Wincenty – some critics were misled because of this scene. They found that the message of the play is that anti-Semitism is not a problem of racism or nationalism, but is the result of inequalities between different social classes. One of the reviewers stated, summarizing: "if Rotschild were poor he would end up in crematorium [in the death-camp], but he was not, so the Holocaust overtook him".¹⁴

I believe that this assessment is over-simplified. Firstly, anti-Semitism *is also* a problem of social inequality. If we simplify things and assume (after Zygmunt Krasiński and his father) that the revolution is a mere change of positions between the haves and the have-nots (and a huge amount of people in Poland still believe this), then we have to see that Jews were "those who did not have right to have anything" and therefore they constituted a complete distinct social class. Going back to Rotschild/Wolf Of Wall Street, let us recall that he also impersonates Krysiński, the Jew parodying Krasiński, and that he was a well-dressed Jew.

The character named Auschwitz Tour, the last depiction of a Jew (this time female), enters the stage with the words "And that is why I'm travelling to all these hell-holes by bus. Because somebody was well-dressed". A connection can be made between her coming out of a hole resembling the city sewage system and a person escaping the Warsaw ghetto after the defeat of the Jewish uprising in 1943. And also a ghost from the concentration camp's crematorium, as one of the prominent critics noticed,¹⁵ connecting this scene with Grotowski's theatrical masterpiece *Akropolis* (1962).

Israeli tourists are perhaps those dreadful figures who remind us of 3 million Jews murdered in gas chambers. Decades after World War II it was already quiet in Poland,

¹⁴ See: review by Mike Urbaniak, <http://www.sztukawspolczesna.org/recenzja/2014-2015/192/wysluchaj-nas-panie>.

¹⁵ See: Łukasz Drewniak, *Kolonotatnik* (part 9), <http://teatralny.pl/opinie/kolono-tatnik-35-ciemy-punkt,850.html>

already “clean” (in terms of the nationalistic thinking), we suffered a lot, we survived the revolution and minimized its effects, all those members of the revolutionary crowd incorporated by the character of Leonard/Przechrzta became pathetic losers. The peasants didn’t slaughter their lords, the gentry, as Zygmunt Krasiński was foretelling with fear; on the contrary: their children now attempt to emulate the old social patterns. Citizens of Poland nurture the high-minded ideals of a great nation, purified (i.e. free from foreigners-citizens, the Jews), unified by the catholic religion and the cult of pure, sinless, innocent Poland with its spotless history – as once upon a time Zygmunt Krasiński, our Romantic poet, wished it to be. But the foreigners come here again by buses, trains and planes, they are coming out from every hole and want to see only those ugly, unpleasant places, not the beauty and glory of Poland.

The character called Auschwitz Tour also has a second name: Count Henry’s Fears. Namely, the fear that he (we) may be guilty of death of the Polish Jews. In the 6th part of the Demirski’s adaptation, Count Henry/Krasiński shouts the monologue from Sara Kane’s *Psychosis 4:48*, standing in front of two Jewish characters (Auschwitz Tour/Count Henry’s Fears and Przechrzta-Ojciec/Leonard):

I gassed the Jews, I killed the Kurds, I bombed the Arabs, I fucked small children while they begged for mercy, the killing fields are mine, everyone left the party because of me, I’ll suck your fucking eyes out send them to your mother in a box and when I die I’m going to be reincarnated as your child only fifty times worse and as mad as all fuck I’m going to make your life a living fucking hell I REFUSE I REFUSE I REFUSE LOOK AWAY FROM ME.

He screams out his fear, he clarifies his feelings, but *he isn’t justified*. His words could be put in mouths of those who are afraid of refugees today. They are coming – and nothing can be done. What can we do? What are we doing? We are telling on them to God, like children in school: “I’ll report you to the headmaster!” Like Krasiński – so sensitive, vulnerable and *noble* – did before, telling on all those awful, brutal “new people” to God.¹⁶ Of course, Krasiński and others – those who postulated conserving (or: constructing in the process of politics of memory) the purity of the endangered Polish nation and who talked about the Jews’ vicious nature – are not directly and personally responsible for events that happened over a hundred years later. Still, it isn’t innocent to indulge the creation of ideas that have a “bloody lining”: that are laced with bloodshed hidden from our sight. In Krasiński’s case, this bloody lining consists of two problems. Firstly, Krasiński’s premise that Poland is impeccably pure¹⁷ and in its history was always the victim, that all its wars were waged in the name of God and His causes – leads to the notorious practice of concealing the “ugly” side of any military conflicts in which Poland and Polish patriots were involved¹⁸. Secondly,

¹⁶ This is also the subtitle of Demirski’s stage version: *Un-Divine Comedy or I will tell all this to God*.

¹⁷ This concept was developed later, in the 1840’s, in *Psalms of the Future*; see: A. Sekuła, *Sylwetka ideowa Zygmunta Krasińskiego*. Warszawa 2015, chapter “Czystość i wykluczenie”, pp. 216–299.

¹⁸ This practice pertains to the *narration* e.g. on the contribution of Polish volunteers in the Napoleon’s wars as well as to the “chopping the border edges” of Poland action (i.e. expanding the

the claim to *purify* Polish nation from the influence of Jews, while knowing that this vital group is striving to achieve an appropriate social status, obviously must entail some kind of *elimination* of that group¹⁹, so this contempt also reeks of bloodshed.

One may get the impression that Demirski and Strzępka are equating the Holocaust with the annihilation of the Polish gentry during and immediately after the Second World War, but they are not. Again, we must interpret this motif through the general perspective revealed in this paper and find ourselves in the *phantasmal point* of perception before looking at the historical and social issues. This would lead us to notice yet another national myth being played out before our very eyes by the character named Barbara Niechcic and Papa Wincenty – the myth of a nice family. Barbara Niechcic is the personage from the novel *Noce i dnie* (*Days and Nights*) written by Maria Dąbrowska in the 1930s. The novel is depicting the socio-cultural changes in the years 1863–1914 on the territories of partitioned at that time Poland and Barbara Niechcic together with her husband Bogumił are the protagonists; they witness the decline of social status of the gentry in Polish society. Barbara represents a type of romantic noble woman, a daydreamer bitterly disappointed with her life and an individual unwillingly, but severely afflicted by big world's history. In the Demirski/Strzępka adaptation Barbara Niechcic and Papa Wincenty constitute a phantasmal, ultra-Polish (should we know their backgrounds) married couple. They have all the traditional, typical characteristics of Polish family (the phantasmal one of course) and to add the new, element from 20th century historical narration – they are hiding the Jew (as *some* people did during Hitler's occupation, which seems to be in current nationalistic narration extended to *all* Polish families). But even if Barbara Niechcic and Papa Wincenty do it – they are not sure if he is still alive: this is their skeleton in the closet. And also ours, contemporary Polish people. The Jew in the hiding place somewhere in Polish family home hints at the problem of the witnesses – or, to put it more precisely, of Polish fear of being guilty and of the possibility of shifting places – sliding from the position of bystander to the position of the haunted and the oppressed.

Zygmunt Krasiński's *Un-Divine Comedy* is not a comedy at all: it is tragic, very lofty and thus sometimes pathetic. Demirski's play makes us smile or even laugh sometimes. But we have to regard these moments with suspicion, particularly when the text or the situation suggest playfulness. The performers are playing on the strings of the apocalypse, of panic and fear. The fear of refugees and the fear of becoming refugees ourselves is the dominant one. "Watch this" – Demirski and Strzępka are saying – "these are your (and our) fears. This is what they look like. We are afraid that it is our turn now, that we will have to flee, to throw away everything and run away in the middle of our dinner, in the middle of our life, in mid-sentence... What if it is your turn to be the victim of extermination...?". This attitude: to be an apocalyptic reminder, is also what evokes the litany of dates and places at the end of the play: only

borders of the new established state of Poland by sending troops to pacify the areas near the edge of the boarder, mainly in the East) directly after First World War.

¹⁹ See: M. Wodziński, *Oświecenie żydowskie w Królestwie Polskim wobec chasydyzmu. Dzieje pewnej idei*, Warszawa 2003; M. Janion, *Mit założycielski polskiego antysemityzmu*. In: *Spółczesność europejskie i Holocaust*, Freidrich Ebert Stiftung, Warszawa 2004, pp. 20–21.

the year parts of the dates and the names of the cities burst like bombs out of mouths of two women (the angels of apocalypse?): the extermination is encircling us above our heads.

The dates relate to the assassination of Archduke Franz Ferdinand of Austria as the symbolic beginning of the First World War, the armed insurrection of the workers led by the Bolshevik Party who stormed the Winter Palace, as the symbolic beginning of the October Revolution in Russia, the political upheavals that brought to power Mussolini in Italy, Hitler in Germany, Andino in Honduras, Franco in Spain, as well as many others in Latin America, and Africa. There are dates pertaining to the Troubles in Northern Ireland and dates recalling the social movements in 1968 in Europe and in 2011 in north Africa and the Middle East. The end of the litany of recent dates (from 2014 to 2019) does not feature the names of cities. This brings the menace even closer, because it stirs up the anxiety that perhaps one of these dates could be connected with *our* city in the future. Will it remain in history as: “(20)19 Warsaw”?

This clever artistic trick makes us all the successors of Zygmunt Krasiński. What will we do with our fears? What strategy will we construct? Will we go deeper in the ideological purification of our nation and head-hunting the traitors?

It was Krasiński's courtesy to say at the news on the death of Mickiewicz that “We all took after him”²⁰ which was to mean that we, all the Polish people, the Polish nation owe a lot to this Romantic poet and that we grew from his poetry. Mickiewicz's idea (or: project) of nation was nonetheless inclusive; Krasiński's one was exclusive and based on fears, as I circumstantiate in this paper. It must be said therefore: much more we took after the author of *Un-Divine Comedy*.

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²⁰ The phrase in Polish is quite ambiguous; the elliptical sentence: “My wszyscy z niego” can be also interpreted as “we are all his descendants”.

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Streszczenie

Jeden ze sporów wokół *Nie-Boskiej komedii* Zygmunta Kraśńskiego, dramatu romantycznego o rewolucji, zogniskował się wokół sceny z przechrztami, ukazanymi jako zdrajcy wszelkiej idei, spiskujący przeciw chrześcijańskiemu światu i pracujący wyłącznie dla osiągnięcia własnych celów. Adam Mickiewicz określił taki sposób ukazania społeczności żydowskiej w dramacie, skądinąd wysoko przezeń cenionym, mianem „występku narodowego”. Interpretacje historyków literatury starały się unieważnić niewygodną sekwencję jako „nieorganiczną” w kontekście całości problematyki utworu. Również przez inscenizatorów bywała ekstrahowana lub bagatelizowana. Heurystyczne teksty Marii Janion wbudowały powtórnie sensy wypływające z „zalatującej siarką” sceny w konstrukcję ideowo-fantazmatyczną dramatu, osadzając ją przy tym w historii myśli europejskiej, obiegu idei charakterystycznych dla epoki oraz w biografii autora. Wystawiona w Teatrze Starym w Krakowie w 2014 r. inscenizacja Pawła Demirskiego zatytułowana „*Nie-Boska komedia. Wszystko powiem Bogu*” zdradza nie tylko świadomość dotychczasowych opracowań historyczno-literackich utworu, ale prowadzi wydobyte z nich myśli, sensy i utożsamienia dalej, skalając je w wizję uniwersalnej opowieści o ludzkim lęku.

Summary

Zygmunt Kraśński's "Un-Divine Comedy", the 19th-century drama on revolution, although in general highly prized by a prominent Polish romantic poet, Adam Mickiewicz, was nonetheless criticised by him because of the scene with converted Jews, which depicted them as traitors, provocateurs of the revolutionary disorder and plotters that strive to achieve power and ruin Christianity. In this scene, called by Mickiewicz "a national crime", focused one of the literary contests for "Un-Divine Comedy". Some of the literary interpretations and theatre versions seek to revoke this cumbersome fragment as "non-embedded" in the main context of problems in the drama. However, the heuristic works of Maria Janion inserted the incriminated

scene anew in the ideological construction of the whole drama by using the phantasmal criticism in literary research, placing it in the history of the European thought and the circulation of ideas in the romantic epoch and in Krasiński's biography. The 2014 production by Demirski (adapter of the text) and Strzępka (director) shown at the National Stry Theatre in Cracow takes hold of recent literary and historical scholarship and, moreover, makes a step forward: carries on the phantasmal interpretation, without losing any of the drawn out meanings and connotations, in order to raise the universal question about the people's fear.

Biography

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