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“Ten sam odwieczny wróg niebezpieczny.”¹ The Universal Dimension of Tuwim’s Satire

SUMMARY

In the article, the author analyses the satirical works by Julian Tuwim published in his poetic collections. By indicating the strong bonds between poetry and satire in the poet’s works, the author explains the phenomenon of the unwavering topicality of Tuwim’s satire having generalising ambitions. She has considered the poet’s masterful combination of the poetic perspective with the attitude of a satirist as a factor which enables the generalisation of the critical diagnosis. However, she argues that the universal dimension of his wide-scope satirical works is mainly determined by the poet’s worldview-based horizons, which constituted the point of reference for his critical evaluation of the existing social reality, which exposed the destructive influence of a community on an individual. She also stated that he was able to peer deep into the mentality of the mindless members of the “tyrannous community” by virtue of his distance towards himself, in turn being the result of his sense of the absurdity of his own existence.

Keywords

Polish poetry, satire, satirical discourse, poetry, literary circulation

¹ “The same eternal dangerous enemy.” [Unless indicated otherwise, quotations in English were translated from Polish]

Julian Tuwim's works – commonly known and appreciated in elite, popular and village fair² circles – clearly prove that satire is a phenomenon with fluid borders, and one which is multifunctional and diverse in terms of the genres and styles it utilises.³ The relationships between Tuwim's poetic, satirical and stage texts – the quintessential example of which is *Bal w Operze*, one of his most renowned works – have been convincingly documented and the poetics of the texts “borne from a different spirit and in a different poetic climate”⁴ has impacted the shape of various works Tuwim included in his poetic collections. The satirical force is clearly visible in all of them⁵. When the poet himself published *Jarmark rymów* [Rhymes' Fair] in 1934, he indicated in the preface that it carried a different character than the collections of “lyrical” poems he had released earlier, though did also admit that:

Of course, it would be difficult to define a precise borderline between this and that “kind”; the old volumes certainly include poems which could be included in it, and there are also the rare few for which there would be a place in the previous books. There is a predominance of satirical items in it (once again, a term which is unstable and extensive!), often associated with an outworn note of currentness, and sometimes with a further and more durable reach. A few of those, but no more than there are fingers on one hand, were once spoken or sang on the stages of Warsaw's street theatres. I am emphasising that to clearly stress that those did not include

² See Tomasz Stępień, “O satyrze skamandryckiej. (Wokół „Wstępu” do „Jarmarku rymów” Juliana Tuwima),” in idem, „O satyrze” (Katowice, 1996) As the researcher noted Tuwim's “‘comedy show’ numbers written under a dozen or so different noms the plume” had “to some extent the status of folkloric texts. (They circulated as copies, they were modernised by new performers, and as anonymous content they ended up in pirate brochures operating within rowdy circles)” (ibid., 259–260).

³ See T. Stępień, “Satyra jaka jest każdy widzi? O satyrze i satyryczności w polskiej świadomości literackiej XIX i XX wieku,” in idem, „O satyrze”..., 19–80; E. Sidoruk, *Granice satyry* (Białystok, 2018), 17–123. In this article, as in the referenced book, I shall consider satire as a discursive practice with a broad reach, the domain of which covers both literary and non-literary texts. As Simpson argued convincingly, the category of ‘discourse’ proves extremely convenient when discussing complex relations between a comedian, recipients and the object of the criticism (see P. Simpson, *On the Discourse of Satire. Towards a Stylistic Model of Satirical Humor* (Amsterdam–Philadelphia, 2003), 69–109). In reference to the proposition formulated by Dustin Griffin, who polemised with the so-called “moral” concept of satire, I shall assume that a comedian does not need to operate from the position of a moralist certain of their argument who presents arguments leading to some definite conclusions (see D. Griffin, *Satire. A Critical Reintroduction* (Kentucky, 1994), 35–70). I also consider Frederic Bogel's concept that the attitude of a comedian towards the object of criticism is marked with ambivalence as it fluctuates between identification and opposition as accurate. According to him, satire is not so much the reaction of a comedian to the noticed difference between them and the object of their criticism, but rather it consists of creating that difference, an act which is triggered by an unease caused by an identification in themselves similarities to the object (see F. Bogel, *The Difference Satire Makes. Rhetoric and Reading from Jonson to Byron* (Ithaca–London, 2000), 41–83).

⁴ J. Tuwim, *Jarmark rymów*, edited by J. Stradecki (Warsaw, 1991), 5.

⁵ Anna Węgrzyniak's studies (*Dialektyka organizacji językowej tekstu w poezji Tuwima* (Katowice, 1987), and *Ja głosów świata imitator. Studia o poezji Juliana Tuwima* (Katowice, 2003)) and Tomasz Stępień's (*Kabaret Juliana Tuwima* (Katowice, 1989)) offer the most valuable contributions to the study of Tuwim's work in this respect. See also E. Sidoruk, *Groteska w poezji Dwudziestolecia. Leśmian – Tuwim – Gaczyński* (Białystok, 2004).

neither the so-called "cabaret numbers" nor the texts of Pikador's satirical nativity plays or the *Cyrulik Warszawski*, which I wrote many together with friends.

The book concludes in a few columns and humoresques written in prose.⁶

When focussing on the "quotation-mark character of genological definitions" and the lack of accuracy of the terms used by Tuwim, Tomasz Stępień has read the poet's explanations not only as an indication of the problems with the categorisation of his own output, but he also considered that as an indication of a general state of literary awareness of the interwar period.⁷ According to the researcher, the classification of literary and quasi-literary forms outlined in the introduction to *Jarmark rymów* emerged from an evident hierarchy: at the top there were collections of "lyrical" poems, below them there were rhymed "satirical pieces" and columns and humoresques written in prose, with "the natural space being the pages of satirical weeklies or satirical sections and columns in other periodicals,"⁸ and the lowest level was occupied by stage pieces, "unworthy of including them in any collection signed with a poet's name."⁹ Those remarks have led to the following ascertainment:

Satire, therefore, would be located between the "needed" and prestigious poetry, and the embarrassing, though necessary for (a quite convenient) life, serial and commercial stage productions. Printed in specialised periodicals and publications, it had the nature of single-use literature, which is why the appearance of "satirical items" in a book edition required a special justification in the author's preface.¹⁰

Though the publication of *Jarmark rymów* as a separate collection with the included preface might offer some reason for drawing such a conclusion, the fact that Tuwim published in his poetic collections such poems as *Walka (Wierszy tom 4, 1923)*, *Quatorze Julliet (Słowa we krwi, 1926)*, the *Trzy wiersze o fryzjerze triptych (Rzecz czarnońska, 1929)*, *Złota polska jesień, Apokalipsa, ...Et arceo, Magazyn gastronomiczny, Wiosna chamów, Wiec, Do prostego człowieka, Luksus, Mieszkańcy (Biblia cygańska, 1933)*, *Ruch*, ***[Znów to szuranie, bełkotu chór...], or the *Z wierszy o państwie* series (*Treść gorejąca, 1936*), which clearly included instances of satirical force, complicate the hierarchy outlined by Stępień. The appearance of the listed works next to "lyrical" poems indicates that the issue of the position occupied by the broadly understood satire in Tuwim's output is much more complex. As indicated by the above enumeration, *Biblia cygańska*, published a year prior

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ T. Stępień, „O satyrze skamandryckiej. (Wokół „Wstępu” do „Jarmarku rymów” Juliana Tuwima)”, ..., 259.

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ Ibid., 260.

to the publication of *Jarmark rymów*, was a volume in which the satirical character was particularly strong. What is noteworthy, the collection included the poem "Plajta. Kuplety," in which "the pathos of satirical vilification" was "filtered through the carnivalesque poetics of satirical nativity play and cabaret."¹¹

Unlike in the case of "Plajta," which was excluded from later releases of *Biblia cygańska*, the *Z wierszy o państwie* series included in *Treść gorejąca* – in which "Tuwim utilised all the available instruments of political satire" differentiating the critical tone depending on the importance of the object¹² – was consistently reprinted in consecutive full editions of the collection. As Anna Węgrzyniak noted, the analytical vision of the structure of the series "implies the question why a work in which the satirical force triumphed" was included by the poet in *Treść gorejąca*.¹³ According to the researcher, that was caused by the hierarchy of the importance of the juxtaposed lyrical and satirical elements throughout the whole:

Wiersze o państwie mocked and condemned the language of "state-building ideology" of the Sanation movement in defence of the irrefutable religious values of national culture. The "distorting mirror" of satire supports in this case a positive program; the mocking negation fulfils a key yet not a superior role in the work. Hence, some sections of the series are devoid of satirical instances, and in the surrounding parts they are non-existent. As a result, the structure of the whole breaks into two separate spheres: poetry and satire, where poetry fulfils a superior role, while satire is ancillary to the expression of poetry rationale.¹⁴

I believe that the decision to include the series in a poetic volume was justified not so much by the superiority of the lyrical perspective as the nature of satire, the scope of which, as indicated in Węgrzyniak's in-depth analysis, despite its clear grounding in historical facts was broader than one might expect from a cursory reading. I would venture an argument that, from today's perspective, when individual references to the political situation in which the work was created are no longer clear, the general dimension of the criticism included in the work become more distinct. The clash between the languages of poetry and political satire was used to juxtapose "two worlds: the institutionalised world of state operations hostile towards humans and the world of personal values, in which humanitarian 'sulkings' matter."¹⁵ The disapproval of the state, which was depicted as a "company" not respecting the interests of people, matched the stream of "the broadly defined reflection on the world in the poet's works, within which any organised collective destroys people condemning them for a removal of their identities," which is why "Tuwim's 'theory of the state and the political

¹¹ T. Stepień, *Kabaret Juliana Tuwima* (Katowice, 1989), 164.

¹² A. Węgrzyniak, *Ja głosów świata imitator. Studia o poezji Juliana Tuwima...*, 116.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 124.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 128.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 112.

system' did not consider the differences of individual groups."¹⁶ The fifth fragment of the series proves that emphatically:

Karności ucz, urabiaj, mustruj,
Zarządzaj, sądz i skazuj, ustrój;
Tak każe racja stanu, ustrój;
Lepszy czy gorszy – mniejsza z tem.

Teach discipline, mould, muster,
Control, judge and sentence, systematise it;
Thus, requires *raison d'être*, the system;
Better or worse – it doesn't matter.

W każdym jest śmieszność, grzech
[i zgroza,
I groteskowej mocy gest.
Szubienicznego splot powroza
Gordyjskim jego węzłem jest.

In each there is comicality, sin and terror,
And the grotesque power's gesture.
The threat of the gallows' line
Is its Gordian knot.

A sprawiedliwy niech nie wini
Mocy o przemoc. Tak ma być.
Sprawiedliwemu – na pustyni
Do gwiazd o sprawiedliwość wyć!

And may the just not blame
Power for violence. That's how it's
[supposed to be.
The just one – in the desert
May call to the stars for justice!

W państwowym Samotników sztandar
Noc go otuli. Będzie sam.
Chociaż... kto wie?... czasami żandarm
Służbowo zajrzy nawet tam.¹⁷

In the state standard of Loners
The night shall envelop him. He will be
[alone.
Though... who knows?... sometimes an
[officer
On duty may even pop in.

According to Węgrzyniak, the included in the poem "assessment of the *stricte sensu* state reality is mediocre" as Tuwim with his "extensive experience in professing pro-governmental political satire" which allowed "criticism from the position of a Sanation sympathiser" did question its "mistakes without disavowing the system."¹⁸ By expressing disapproval of the state's institutions, he discussed them from the perspective of a poet; he "spoke not as a politician but rather as a defender of the value of words, a spokesman of national interests," for which more evil was carried not by the consequences of violence inscribed in the essence of the rule of law (e.g. "prisons" and "penal expeditions"), but by unjustifiable evil, which is brought about by "forging words," and the appropriation of the language of Romantic poetry for the purposes of state-building ideology.¹⁹

One could, of course, debate whether in the *Z wierszy o państwie* series Tuwim disavowed the system itself grading "thorough evil" which he saw "w rządach, władzach i urzędach / I w tych co światem rządzić chcą"²⁰ [in

¹⁶ Ibid., 112–113.

¹⁷ J. Tuwim, "Z wierszy o państwie," in idem, *Wiersze zebrane*, edited by A. Kowalczyk, vol. II, 245–246.

¹⁸ A. Węgrzyniak, *Ja głosów świata imitator. Studia o poezji Juliana Tuwima...*, 115.

¹⁹ Ibid., 126.

²⁰ J. Tuwim, *Z wierszy o państwie...*, 250.

governments, authorities and offices / And in those who wish to rule the world] or only seemingly justified state-sanctioned violence ("A sprawiedliwy niech nie wini / Mocy o przemoc. Tak ma być. / Sprawiedliwemu - na pustyni / Do gwiazd o sprawiedliwość wyć" [as translated above]), through irony expressing his conviction that, from the perspective of an individual, every state system is oppressive and unjust. Clearly, it does not include such a radical criticism of the Sanation ideology and the general mechanisms of government as in the delayed for its obscenities *Bal w Operze*, in which Tuwim not only ruthlessly uncovered the omnipresence of state propaganda, but he also emphatically illustrated the dangerous consequences of the state's instrumental utilisation of the language of Romantic poetry:

| | |
|---|---|
| Płynie na czcionki drukarska farba: | Printing ink flows onto the sorts: |
| IDE | IDE |
| OLO | OLO |
| „Ile Rabarbar?” | “How much is the rhubarb?” |
| Karna | Disciplined |
| Kadra | Staff |
| Ducha | of the Spirit |
| Czynu | of Action |
| „Proszę za dziesięć groszy kminu” | “I’ll have ten groszys’ worth of cumin” |
| Miecz | Sword |
| Krzyż | Cross |
| Duch | Spirit of |
| Dziejów | History |
| „Proszę za dziesięć groszy kleju” | “I’ll have ten groszys’ worth of glue” |
| Ducha | Spirit of |
| Dziejów | History’s |
| Karne | Disciplined |
| Kadry | Staff |
| „Proszę za dziesięć groszy [musztardy” | “I’ll have ten groszys’ worth of [mustard” |
| Czerep rubaszny | Rowdy mug |
| Paw narodów | Peacock of nations |
| „Proszę za dziesięć groszy lodów” | “I’ll have ten groszys’ worth of ice cream” |
| Jeden | One |
| Tylko | That’s it |
| Jeden | One |
| Cud | Wonder |
| - „Ober, jeszcze butelkę na lód!” | - “Keeper, one more bottle on ice!” |
| I bac! bac! | And pow! pow! |
| I plac opustoszał, | And the square is suddenly empty, |
| I do bramy wloką truposza. | A corpse is dragged into a gateway. |
| I bac, bac! zza rogu, z sieni, | And pow! pow! from around the corner, [from the vestibule, |

I w bruk, w bruk tętniącemi
Kopytami bac po głowie

And into the cobbles, into the cobbles
[pulsating
With hooves pow over the head

Ka
Wa
Le
Ryjskimi!
Raz!
Dwa!

Ca
Va
L
ry!
One!
Two!

Hurra, panowie!
Malo, panowie!
Brawo, panowie!

Hurray, gents!
Malo, gents!
Bravo, gents!

I bac, bac!
Słońce na ziemi!
Człowiek na ziemi!
I krew na ziemi!²¹

And pow, pow!
Sun on the ground!
Man on the ground!
And blood on the ground!

Certainly the *Z wierszy o państwie* series, heralding with its poetics the masterful *Bal w Operze*, is a work that has grown the more time has passed blurring the clarity of the references to a specific historical reality and which owes its general dimension to the clash of two perspectives: that of a poet and that of a satirist. Yet I do not think that the former, despite its lyrical framework created by the first and final fragments, is superior in reference to the latter. It is rather the masterful combination of complementing elements, the lyrical and the satirical, that aids the generalisation of the work's critical diagnosis, which has remained unnerve-ly relevant.

Yet the universal character of the satirical works which Tuwim included in his poetic volumes is mostly ensured by the problems raised and the worldview of the critical attitude manifested in them towards the reality. Tuwim's satire – which has had generalising ambitions, and which emerged from the poet's aversion to any and all institutionalised forms of life – is not only laced with a fear of community having a destructive impact on human personality, as well as a sense of the absurdity of human existence. By operating as a supercilious observer and a judge of the present donning the costume of a prophet, Tuwim the satirist, driven by an eagerness which proved his emotional attitude towards the object of his criticism, exposed that which terrified him the most: the mentality of humans unwittingly submitting to the rule of popular opinion, a complete ignoramus susceptible to ideological manipulation. Such a figure is not quite comical, but rather dangerous in their idiocy as represented by the caricature in the poem "Mieszkańcy" where the "straszni mieszczanie" [dreadful townspeople] are mumbling and raving all day long:

²¹ J. Tuwim, "Bal w Operze," in idem, *Wiersze wybrane*, introduction and edited by M. Głowiński (Wrocław, 1986), 272–273.

(..) patrząc – widzą wszystko oddzielnie:
 Że dom... że Stasiek... że koń... że drzewo...

Jak ciasto biorą gazety w palce
 I żują, żują na papkę pulchną,
 Aż papierowym wzdęte zakalcem,
 Wypchane głowy grubo im puchną.

I znowu mówią, że Ford... że kino...
 Że Bóg... że Rosja... radio, sport, wojna...
 Warstwami rośnie brednia potworna
 I w dżungli zdarzeń widmami płyną.²²

(..) when looking -- saw everything
 [separately:

One house... one Stasiek... one horse...
 [one tree...]

They take newspapers in their hands like
 [cake

And they chew, chew to spongy pulp,
 Until bloated with paper sad cake,
 Their stuffed heads swell thick.

And they continue, one Ford... one cinema...
 One God... one Russia... radio, sport, war...
 Terrible nonsense grows in layers
 And they flow like spectres in the jungle
 [of events.

In emphatically depicting the futility and automatism of the existence of the “dreadful townspeople,” who cared mostly for their “reverent property and holy acquisitions” and only about the potential loss (“Pod łożka włązą, złodzieja węższą, / Łbem o nocniki chłodne trącając”²³ [They crawl under their beds smelling a thief, / Smacking their heads on the cool pots]) of that which was “theirs, exclusive, earned,” Tuwim gave vent not only to his contempt-laced aversion to community, but also, or rather mainly, to his fear of the “dreadful nonsense” spread by those who strode in “deserving steps” on the earth which was “so well-known, so round,” who “saw everything individually”²⁴ and who constituted the sustenance for ideological manipulators of the “mętny henio” [murky Henry] type, scathingly portrayed in “Wiec,” most depressing, similarly to the well-known poem “Do prostego człowieka”²⁵, for its unrelenting validity:

Ziało brednią, gorącem, czerwienią,
 Febrą trzęsło i kołem szło.
 Nie wiadomo kto, jakiś henio,
 Zaczął pleść niewiadomo co.

Przerzucało się gorączkowo
 Wypiekami z twarzy na twarz.
 Straszny henio z zadartą głową
 Wykrzykiwał, że jós, że czas!

There blew nonsense, heat, redness,
 There shook with fever and rolled with
 [a wheel.

No one knows who, some henio,
 Began blabbering no one knows what.

Feverishly there jumped
 Blushes from face to face.
 Dreadful henio with his head kept high
 Shouted that nowses, that timeses!

²² J. Tuwim, “Mieszkańcy,” in idem, *Wiersze zebrane...*, vol. II, 182–183.

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ The poem became popular because of the band Akurat, which in 2003 created music to it. On YouTube there are several versions of the work performed by various artists.

Przysięgali mętnemu heniowi,
 Kluski zdań wycharkując z grdyk,
 I wpatrzeni z zachwytem krowim
 Na komendę rzucali ryk.

They swore to murky henio,
 Spitting balls of words from their throats,
 And staring in bovine admiration
 They threw their shouts when ordered to.

I zaczęli się tłoczyć i spiętrzać,
 W piramidę gramoląc się wzwyż,
 I tak rosła brednia coraz większa,
 A na szczycie stał – nieomal krzyż.²⁶

And they began to press and pile,
 Clambering upwards into a pyramid,
 And thus, an ever bigger nonsense grew,
 And at the top there stood – almost a cross.

The “dreadful townspeople” with intellectual horizons shaped by newspapers, suppressing their existential fears with automatically mumbled prayers “...od nagłej śmierci... / ...od wojny ...od głodu ...odpoczywanie”²⁷ [from sudden death... / ... from war ...from hunger ...rest] are “dreadful” because of their susceptibility to the propaganda of those who say “no one knows what,” primitive, “some Henry” under whose influence they turn into a despicable and dangerous crowd. The caricatural depiction and the derisive tone belittling the object of criticism are a form of defence through attack, which is indicated by the poem’s closing sarcastic exclamation of the speaking persona presenting themselves as a potential victim of the followers of the “murky”:

- Tak chamjo rozdziawione i ciemne,
 Chamjo z akcentem na o,
 Rozwrzeszczało te czasy nikczemne
 W heniowate nie wiadomo co.

- Thus, oh boorish, spread and dull,
 Boorishly with a stress,
 Squalled these despicable times,
 Into this Henio’s no-one-knows-what.

Grzmij, tryumfuj, najplugawsze zło,
 My będziemy twoim żerem i pastwą!
 A ty – krwią uświetnione żelastwo
 Po muzeach rozwieszaj, chamjo!²⁸

Roar, triumph, oh, the foulest of evils,
 We shall be your prey and quarry!
 And you – iron stuff celebrated with blood
 Hang through every museum, oh boorish!

One should note that in prophesying the triumph of boorishness perceived as “the foulest of evils,” the blinded dull crowd, the poet juxtaposed that not with an “I” but with “we” which would become its “prey and quarry.” The answer to the question among whom the speaking persona considered themselves could be suggested by the motto of the poem ***[Znów to szuranie, bełkotu chór...]: *Surgunt indocti et rapiunt coelum – et nos cum scientia nostra mergimur in infernum*. In the context of the whole work, the maxim borrowed from St. Augustine in which ignorance brings one closer to God (“niewykształceni powstają i zdobywają niebo” [the uneducated rise and conquer heaven]) and knowledge condemns one to hell (“a my z naszą wiedzą toniemy w piekle” [and we with our knowledge drown in hell]) resonates ironically. In Tuwim’s poem, hell on Earth is represented by a “tyrannous

²⁶ J. Tuwim, “Wiec,” in idem, *Wiersze zebrane...*, vol. II, 175.

²⁷ Idem, *Mieszkańcy...*, 183

²⁸ Idem, *Wiec...*, 175-176.

community,” to use an expression from the poem ...*Et arceo* – a mindless “nightmare” not seeing the futility of its existence:

Znów to szuranie, bełkotu chór,
Znów na ulice wylazło z nór
Dwieście tysięcy, trzysta tysięcy
Poprzebieranych świątecznych zmór.

Zieje pustynią zeszkłały wzrok,
W otchłań zapada każdy ich krok,
W ultra-kolorach, w meta-ubiorach
Łażą rozwlekle przez cały rok.

To oni – sprawcy brzuchatych bab,
Sznycła, gazety, tryumfów, klap,
Skrótów, paszportów. Forsy i sportów,
Słowa „gustowny” i słowa „schab”.

To oni – naród, społeczność, wiek,
Styl i epoka, i dziejów bieg,
Ten sam odwieczny wróg niebezpieczny,
Podśluch powszechny, masowy szpieg.

Rozstąp się, bruku upiornych miast!
Rozstąp się, niebo, zbrojownio łask!
Biesa tępego, biesa głupiego
Oświeć i przeraź gradem swych gwiazd!²⁹

Again that shuffling, the chorus of gibberish,
Again there emerged from their dens into
[the streets
Two hundred thousand, three hundred
[thousand
All dressed up holiday nightmares.

The frozen sight emanates emptiness,
Their every step falls into an abyss,
In ultra colours, in meta clothing
They stroll around all year round.

It is them – the perpetrators of pregnant
[women,
Of pork chops, newspapers, triumphs,
[failures,
Abridgements, passports. Cash and sports,
Of the word “fancy” and the word “pork
[loin.”

It is them – the nation, community, age,
Style and epoch, and the course of time,
That same eternal dangerous enemy,
Bugs tapping everything, a massive spy.

Part, oh cobbles of dreadful cities!
Part, oh sky, you armoury of graces!
The blunt fiend, the stupid fiend
May you illuminate and terrify with a hail
[of your stars!

The community depicted in the poem is a multiplying crowd of aimlessly moving pawns hidden underneath bright costumes giving the appearance of diversity,³⁰ whose internal emptiness is revealed by their “frozen sight.” Those are consumers devoid of a sense of metaphysical dread, unaware of the fact that an abyss spans underneath their very feet, for whom material prosperity and social position are the measures of their lives’ success. Finally, those are (which stirs in the poetic person not only aversion but

²⁹ J. Tuwim, “***[Znów to szuranie, bełkotu chór...],” in idem, *Wiersze zebrane...*, vol. II, 242.

³⁰ The motif of pawns in Tuwim’s poetry was analysed in detail by Piotr Matywiecki, who referenced such poems as ***[Znów to szuranie, bełkotu chór...] as examples of the application of the motif functioning as a sociological metaphor. See P. Matywiecki, *Twarz Tuwima* (Warsaw, 2007), 588–591.

also unrest) the guardians, who violate others' right to privacy, of common opinion – "the eternal enemy" of those who do not submit to its rule. The poem's closing grandiloquent exclamation, in which the crowd seems to be the incarnation of a blunt and stupid fiend, reveals the worldview-based horizons of Tuwim's criticism of community: the tendency to yield to the pressure of a "tyrannous community" appears to be the result of a disappearance of metaphysical emotions. Those "unenlightened" by the "hail of stars" – not experiencing the terror of existence, or rather trying to suppress it – cannot see that from between all forms of social life "chaos and terror, and a deadly emptiness"³¹ emerge. Those who can notice that emptiness can only cry in vain for the enlightenment of the "blunt fiend" or resort to a seemingly cool contempt in Horace's style:

| | |
|---|--|
| <p>I w tym hucznym stuleciu tyrańskiej [wspólnoty, Śród głupich wielkorządców i tępej hołoty, Gdzie patos lwii rozdyma mrówcza [krzątanię, Gromadząc ludzkość w nudną, [mieszkańską rodzinę, Gdzie pustego kościoła krzykliwi papieże Na gruzach Babilonu – babilońskie wieże Wznoszą pośród szwargotu [wyszczekanych maszyn, A chciwa czerń szpieguje samotność serc [naszych, W tym wieku rozjątronym, wydętym, [okrutnym – Przechodzę, mijam, milczę: obcy, zimny, [smutny.³²</p> | <p>And in this thunderous century of [tyrannous community, Among stupid grand rulers and blunt [riffraff, Where a lion's pathos blows the hustle and [bustle, Gathering humanity into a boring [bourgeois family, Where the empty church's shouty popes On the rubble of Babylon – raise Babylon [towers Among the jabber of loud machinery, And the greedy blackness spies on the [loneliness of our hearts, In this rankled, bulging, cruel century – I walk by, pass, keep my silence: alien, [cold, sad.</p> |
|---|--|

Yet it is difficult to maintain a cool distance when one is constantly being attacked and excluded. Tuwim's satire certainly owed its momentum to its inherent defence mechanism. His aversion to the community, which he manifested so emphatically and ruthlessly, seems laced with a fear that his existence was not more authentic than the lives of the characters he portrayed, e.g. the "biedny ojciec beznadziejnych pociech, / Mąż zahukany" [poor father of hopeless children, / Cowed husband] experiencing a moment's happiness in a hotel toilet in the poem "Luksus," or the character in *Trzy wiersze o fryzjerze* compensating for his "wewnętrzna pustkę działaniami zastępczymi"³³ [internal emptiness with substitute activities]. As Agnieszka Czyżak noted in her interesting interpretation of the triptych:

³¹ J. Tuwim, ... "Et areco," in idem, *Wiersze zebrane...*, vol. II, 154.

³² Ibid.

³³ A. Czyżak, "Substancja miasta – wokół „Trzech wierszy o fryzjerze” Juliana Tuwima," *Czytanie Literatury. Łódzkie Studia Literaturoznawcze*, issue 3 (2014): 51.

The universal dimension of Tuwim's remarks, so often extremely pessimistic, in today's reception is sometimes lost in the spatial staffage, carefully erected decorations, and stage conventionality – yet the simplest attempt at cracking the visions meticulously constructed by the poet may lead to unexpected interpretative discoveries.³⁴

When reading the poem in the context of postmodern reflections on urban space, the researcher noted that the protagonist of *Trzy wiersze o fryzjerze* who "according to Tuwim's intentions was supposed to be (...) an example of a typical human pawn stripped of any dignity or humanity, (...) not quite guilty of his condition," could be "considered a prototype of many modern 'prisoners of space' – including those limiting themselves or being limited to virtual space."³⁵ According to Czyżak, such a consideration of Tuwim's protagonist could trigger new interpretative contexts: "The persistence of the human predisposition to produce projections and scripts of substitute lives independent of changing historical and social conditions or social norms, or of the available means supporting their creation, could prove one of those."³⁶

The fact that, despite the outdated decorations, the satirical portraits of human pawns reveal their universal dimension could be explained with an obsessive sense of the lack of obviousness of one's "own existence as a human and a poet,"³⁷ which Tuwim tried to evade by surprising "his contemporaries with bright costumes selected for roles played in various rituals. Throughout his life and with his whole life he participated in a theatre of myths. The stage for those rituals were his works."³⁸ Unlike his protagonists, the poet saw, as indicated in the self-critical "Wiersz z głuchym końcem," not only the dread of empty existence, but also the salvaging power of metaphysical terror³⁹:

Ratuje – strach, rosnący w piersi,
Zabobon, szczurem biegający,
Rozpacz i łaska zimniej śmierci,
O! nie karzącej. Drwiącej tylko.⁴⁰

Saves – fear, growing the chest,
Superstition, running as a rat,
The despair and grace of cool death,
Alas! not punishing. Only mocking.

*

In Tuwim's output, there are so strong bonds between poetry and satire that many of the works published in his poetic collections cannot be classified as unequivocally poetry or satire. The perspectives of poet and satirist complement each other, and it is often difficult to establish whether

³⁴ Ibid., 50.

³⁵ Ibid., 54.

³⁶ Ibid.

³⁷ P. Matywiecki, *Twarz Tuwima...*, 721.

³⁸ Ibid., 719.

³⁹ See T. Stępień, *Kabaret Juliana Tuwima...*, 134–135; A. Węgrzyniak, "«Wiersz z głuchym końcem». O rytmie śmierci w poezji Tuwima," in *Julian Tuwim. Biografia – twórczość – recepcja*, edited by K. Ratajska, T. Cieślak (Łódź, 2007), 86–87. An interesting attempt at explaining the essence of Tuwim's "dread" was undertaken by Tomasz Wójcik in the study "Nic Juliana Tuwima (dwie wykładnie)," *Czytanie Literatury. Łódzkie Studia Literaturoznawcze*, issue 3 (2014).

⁴⁰ J. Tuwim, "Wiersz z głuchym końcem," in idem, *Wiersze zebrane...*, vol. II, 115.

one dominates over the other.⁴¹ That is more of a question of the personal reflections of readers. However, the clash of those two perspectives seems to cause one to make a generalisation about the prevalence of the satirical nature, though the universal dimension of Tuwim's satire is mainly determined by its worldview-based horizons and the fear-laced aversion to community which has a detrimental impact on human personality. The sense of the absurdity of one's own existence, which produced for Tuwim distance not only towards the society but also from himself, enabled him to peer deep into the mentality of the mindless members of the "tyrannous community." The striking topicality of the critical diagnosis is both shocking and painful.

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⁴¹ This phenomenon was not specific only for Tuwim's works. Such tendencies could be found in the poetry of Heinrich Heine or Alexander Pushkin, whose works Tuwim translated. As I have tried to indicate in my previous works, the lines between poetry and satire prove to be fluid, e.g. in the poetry of Konstanty Ildefons Gałczyński (see E. Sidoruk, *Groteska w poezji Dwudziestolecia...*, 219–286) or Tadeusz Różewicz (E. Sidoruk, *Granice satyry...*, 287–332). It seems that the intertwining of the two elements in poetry, modern poetry in particular, is a rather widespread phenomenon.

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