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Witkacy around the World

Translated by Tomasz Wiśniewski

In the year 1962, Konstanty Puzyna edited and published a two-volume collection of Stanisław Ignacy Witkiewicz's plays. It contained twenty-two texts, which were mostly unknown as they had been neither printed nor performed (in his lifetime, Witkacy managed to publish only six plays, and the publication of one of them was not fully completed¹). Puzyna's edition turned out to be pivotal for the reception of Witkiewicz's work: in the next few years, Witkacy became one of the most important Polish playwrights, and his plays were produced by professional, student and amateur companies².

Witkacy's plays were made available to the wide world, and they soon attracted the attention of translators, critics, literary scholars, theorists, and theater directors in many countries around the world. In 1963, the journal *Pour l'Art* (No. 8990) published Eric Veaux's translation of an excerpt from *The Introduction to the Theory of Pure Form in the Theatre*. Nearly at the same time, the very same excerpt – with an introduction by Konstanty Puzyna – was published as "Un nuovo tipo di drammaturgia" in the special issue on Polish theater of the Italian monthly *Sipario* (no 208–209). Another section of *The Introduction* was included in Odette Aslan's anthology *L'Art du théâtre* (Paris, 1963), where the history of theatrical thinking from ancient times to the present was discussed. A year later, the Yugoslav anthology *Avangardna drama* (Belgrade, 1964) edited by Slobodan Selenić, included the play *The Madman and the Nun* in Petar Vujčić's Serbo-Croat translation. In 1965, the Frankfurt publishing house Suhrkamp published the first book edition of Witkiewicz's plays in German, including *The Water Hen* and *The Madman and the Nun*. Heinrich Kunstmann, who translated both texts, issued in the same year the book *Moderne polnische Dramatik*, in which he extensively

¹ The following plays were published during Witkacy's lifetime: *The Pragmatists* (1920), *Tumor Brainiowicz* (1921), *The New Deliverance* (1922), *The Cuttlefish, or the Hyrcanian World View* (1923), *The Madman and the Nun* (1925), two acts of *The Horrible Counsellor (Straszliwy wychowawca)* (1935) and *The Beelzebub Sonata* (1938). In 1948 two other plays were published in one volume: *In a Small Country–House* and *The Shoemakers*.

² See: J. Degler, "Dramaty Stanisława Ignacego Witkiewicza 1921–1969", *Pamiętnik Teatralny* 1969, vol. 3, pp. 335–412; idem, "Dramaty Stanisława Ignacego Witkiewicza na scenach polskich 1971–1983", *Pamiętnik Teatralny* 1985, vol. 14, pp. 281–323.

discussed the aesthetic views and dramatic output of the author. Enthusiastic articles were published by, among others, Martin Esslin (*Theater Heute* 1966, No. 1), Henry Popkin (*Times* August 24, 1966), Czesław Miłosz ("S. I. Witkiewicz, a Polish writer for Today", *Tri-Quarterly* 1967, No. 9). In the German-speaking countries, where Witkacy's plays were particularly warmly welcomed, some of the world premieres of his plays were held: at the Theater der Stadt Baden-Baden, Tadeusz Kantor produced *In a Small Country House* (7 March 1966), on 8 January 1966 the Stadttheater in Saarbrücken premiered *The Mother* directed by Zbigniew Stok, and on 14 September 1966, the Vienna Atelier Theater presented *The Madman and the Nun* directed by Jerzy Biczyski.

The recognition of Witkacy in the West, which was labelled by a Swiss critic as "a literary miracle", took place at a particular moment in the history of European culture. Yet, there are several factors that motivated the growing interest in his work, in his dramas in particular. The mid-1960s were times of extreme prosperity and the success of the theater of the absurd. Witkacy's associations with Ionesco, Beckett, Genet, Adamov, Mrożek, and Gombrowicz were seen as of primary importance. The employment of the grotesque as the central principle responsible for the construction of the presented world, the negation of action based on a cause-and-effect chain of events, the overt undermining of verisimilitude, and the foregrounding of absurd situations, the "abnormal" psychological reactions and actions of characters – critics perceived these features of Witkiewicz's drama as closely linked to the avant-garde theater of the fifties and the sixties. The recognition of the precursory aspects of Witkacy's plays became the main measure of his artistic achievement, and his status of a precursor defined his place in the history of twentieth-century drama. The importance of this position was officially and most authoritatively confirmed by Martin Esslin. In the 1969 edition of his seminal *The Theater of Absurd* (New York 1969), Esslin introduced a special paragraph on Witkacy in the chapter discussing the most prominent precursors of contemporary drama. Besides, in the "Preface" to the American edition of Witkacy's plays, Esslin states:

"In the wider European and Western context Witkiewicz is now secure of an important place: he takes up and continues the vein of dream and grotesque fantasy exemplified by the late Strindberg or by Wedekind; his ideas are closely paralleled by those of the surrealists and Antonin Artaud which culminated in the masterpieces of the dramatists of the absurd – Beckett, Ionesco, Genêt, Arrabal – of the late nineteen forties and the nineteen fifties"³.

In the above passage, Esslin recognises two additional factors that contributed to the international recognition of the plays by Witkiewicz. His success is related not only with

³ M. Esslin, *The Search for A Metaphysical Dimension in Drama* [in:] S.I. Witkiewicz, *Tropical Madness. Four Plays* translated by Daniel and Eleanor Gerould, New York 1972, p. 4.

what was seen as affinities with surrealism, but also with parallels with Antonin Artaud. It did not escape critics' attention that Witkiewicz arrived at his conclusions on his own. It was frequently noted that the solutions which he proposed resembled those announced in André Breton's manifesto and later developed by surrealism. The point is that Witkiewicz's proposal was announced earlier. As Daniel Gerould put it, "Witkacy should be treated as an outstanding playwright of the 1920s surrealist drama, if not the most prominent playwright in this genre"⁴.

Now, surprising parallels between Witkiewicz's biography and his theory of Pure Form in the theater with the life of Antonin Artaud and his concept of the theater of cruelty were particularly attractive from an international perspective. Artaud, who was discovered at around that time, became an object of fascination and inspiration for many prominent artists (for example, Peter Brook and Jerzy Grotowski) and for almost all of the new theater. The Norwegian magazine *Teatrets Teori og Teknikk*, which was edited by Eugenio Barba, a disciple of Grotowski, devoted an entire number (1966, 3–4) to the discussion of the biographies and views of Witkiewicz and Artaud. It was pointed out that the former's theory of Pure Form had similar inspirations to those behind Artaud's theater of cruelty, namely an awareness of the culture of primitive tribes, first-hand experience of the forms of ritual art, and their attempts at restoring the ancient ritual and metaphysical functions of theater. Witkiewicz's theory was proposed fifteen years before that of Artaud, but they shared an understanding of the fact that:

"Every true art is mystical – not always in the method of creation, but always in its conclusions. Artaud recognized this truth in the 1930s. Witkacy, a disobedient disciple of modernism, did it much earlier. Frequently misunderstood, he preserved it – with a lifelong persistence – the central theme of his philosophy and his esthetics. This attitude made him an outstanding figure set against shallow innovations of his peers"⁵.

Many articles published at that time set out certain personal traits of Witkiewicz and his views on life that turned out to coincide not only with the tragic fate of Artaud, but also with his rebellion against bourgeois culture. At times, extreme features of Witkiewicz's psyche were filtered through an aura of scandal and sensation, which was done mostly for marketing purposes. The French weekly magazine *Politique-Hebdo*, devoted an entire insert to the discussion of Witkiewicz's work (29 October 1970), and presented him in these words:

"Philosophe, alcoolique, théoricien d'art, narcomane, romancier, mathématicien, érotomane, auteur dramatique, peintre, prestidigitateur, comédien, précurseur du théâtre de l'absurde".

⁴ D. Gerould, *Witkacy na Zachodzie*, "Twórczość" 1970, no 78.

⁵ A. Falkiewicz, "Witkacy, Artaud, awangarda", *Dialog* 1960, no 6.

One should also mention the role of two other Polish authors – Gombrowicz and Mrozek – in establishing Witkacy's international status. Their plays were translated and produced in Europe prior to those of Witkacy, but it was his theater that facilitated a more accurate understanding of their (chronologically later) work and the tradition they came from.

Robert Abirached put it in *La Nouvelle Revue Française* (1971, no. 218) in this way:

"As time is running out and as we begin to cover our scandalous ignorance of foreign modern literatures, it becomes more and more clear that the famous 'anti-theater' has had a long tradition. Eastern Europe in particular, proposed many of its formulas long before the last war. Ten years ago we discovered Gombrowicz, and now we are getting familiar with Stanisław Ignacy Witkiewicz, who turns into a newly discovered ancestor of theatrical mockery, who preached his theories since 1920. Between 1922 and 1939 he wrote about forty plays [sic!], and they were translated in French no sooner than in the year 1969".

Thus, in the first period of its reception, which can be delimited by the year 1970, Witkiewicz's theater was defined primarily by the context of European artistic tradition (expressionism – surrealism) and the affinities of his work with innovative dramatic tendencies of contemporary Polish and global drama. This is why the familiar – and not the original and the idiosyncratic – was commonly laid out in Witkiewicz's theoretical considerations and theatrical practice.

All these factors influenced Witkiewicz's international career as they determined the specific approach to his plays, the poetics of their productions, their interpretations and style of acting. Because he was recognized primarily as a revelator of theater form, productions of his plays aimed at highlighting their innovatory aspects and paid less attention to the meanings conveyed in them. This attitude towards Witkiewicz was shaped also by the fact that those who introduced him to the European theater represented divergent schools of Polish directing – the most avant-garde ones and those who were more traditional.

Tadeusz Kantor, who represented the former group, directed the first world premiere of a Witkiewicz play on 7 March 1966 in Baden-Baden, Germany. The performance of *In a Small Country House* was actually an adaptation of the production he did in Kraków in his theater Cricot 2. The text was translated into German by the director himself. In fact, in the process of translation, Kantor adapted the play to his own theatrical purposes and renamed it as *The Wardrobe* (*Der Schrank*), because nearly all the action in his performance took place in a large wardrobe that symbolized the old manor house. In this performance, packed with shocking and unusual concepts of stage production, Kantor pursued the idea of "a complex theater" ("teatr kompleksowy"), defined in the manifesto

published in the programme to the performance. He used elements of circus foolery, tricks of boulevard farce and Grand-Guignol theater. It is not surprising, then, that critics were confused and had serious problems in distinguishing between the playwrights' and director's contribution to the performance. Moreover, the very words uttered by the actors were deliberately blurred by them or were competitively juxtaposed to music. Such a liberal attitude to the text – and frequent treatment of the play as a pre-text for theatrical experimentation leading to the productions based on the principle "the weirder the better" – will be repeated again and again. Notably, Witkiewicz was treated in a similar way in Poland. It was assumed that since they anticipated the theater of the absurd, his plays required extravagant productions, grotesque stage solutions, and non-realistic acting⁶. This belief was firmly supported by other productions that Kantor presented during international tours of his theater Cricot 2 (as a case in point, *The Water Hen* was shown as a happening during the Italian tour, from 2 to 8 May 1969).

A day after the world premiere of Kantor's *In a Small Country House* in Baden-Baden, Witkacy's *The Mother* was presented in Saarbrücken, Germany. Zbigniew Stok attempted to direct the play in accordance with authorial instructions, especially those concerning the use of color. For example, the faces of all actors were deathly pale. Besides, in his production Stok tried to lay emphasis on those formal features that echoed the practices of the contemporary theater. Both performances were noticed by the press, but critics evaluated Witkiewicz's theater with some reservations. On the one hand, Kantor's artistic decisions overshadowed the original features of the play, and, on the other, Stok's *The Mother* had – as one reviewer noticed – the character of a "historical theater show", since it revealed these innovative features which had already been devalued in contemporary theater (H. Mudrich, *Theater Heute* 1996, IV).

Such was the beginning of Witkiewicz's theater on the world scene. One could not expect further success. Over the next couple of years, there were a few other productions that came unnoticed: *In a Small Country House* in Zagreb (25 December 1966), and *The Water Hen* at the *Theater am Dom* in Cologne (1 November 1967). A little more publicity was gained by the premiere of *The Madman and the Nun* in the *Zimmertheater* in Tübingen (18 April 1967) directed by Salvatore Poddine, since the production was presented at the festival "Experimenta 2" in Frankfurt am Main (9 June 1967).

The season of 1968–1969 was pivotal for the international reception of Witkiewicz as there were premieres in several countries. Michael Maslowski directed *The Anonymous Work* (*Bezimienne dzieło*) as part of the *Université du Théâtre International* that was held in Paris (15 July 1968), *The Madman and the Nun* was presented in Salzburg

⁶ See: K. Pużyna, "Na przełęczach bezsensu", *Pamiętnik Teatralny* 1969, vol. 3, pp. 251–264.

(December 1968), *The Pragmatists* in Vienna (3 December 1968), and *The Mother* in the *Théâtre l'Etuve* in Liège (June 1969). Radio Paris broadcast two radio-plays which were based on *The Mother* (30 November 1969) and *Metaphysics of a Two-Headed Calf* (17 February 1969). They appeared in the radio-program *France-Culture* and were directed by the famous Bronisław Horowicz. But for several reasons the real breakthrough was yet to come – in the year 1970.

Between 1968 and 1970, plays of Witkiewicz were published in many countries, and increasingly more elaborate critical interpretations followed. Prominent theater makers, critics, and researchers became interested in his work. Some of them turned into committed supporters of Witkiewicz, and they eagerly popularized his works among publishers, readers, and theaters. Among those who speak French, this role was taken by Alain van Crugten, a Belgian Slavist, and lecturer at the Université Libre in Brussels. After a one-year scholarship in Poland, he completed his doctoral dissertation under the supervision of Prof. Claude Backvis. It turned into a monograph on the dramatic output of *Roots of the New Theater* (S.I. Witkiewicz. *Aux sources d'un théâtre*, Lausanne, 1971). He commenced subsequently an impressively broad and consistent range of translations, including novels such as *Insatiability*, *Farewell to Autumn*, *The 622 Downfalls of Bungo*, and several plays written by Witkiewicz. Van Crugten's dissertation and his translations were published in Lausanne by the press *L'Age d'Homme*. It was managed by a Yugoslav director – Vladimir Dimitrijevic – a great admirer of Witkacy, who ultimately took the risk of a collective edition of his entire dramatic oeuvre. In this enterprise, Dimitrijevic cooperated with Alain van Crugten and Eric Veaux. The editorial and scholarly expertise of the former led to the publication of the first volume of *Le Théâtre complet* in May with an introduction by van Crugten. The volume was entitled *Le théâtre de Stanislaw Ignacy Witkiewicz* and contained van Crugten's translations of *Beelzebub Sonata*, *The Mother*, and additionally Veaux's translations of *In a Small Country House* and *The Madman and the Nun*. There appeared a subsequent set of five volumes, all carefully designed, in an original layout.

In Italy, several plays were translated by Lamberto Trezzini, Barbara Kozłowska and Irene Natanson. Three of them – *The Water Hen*, *The Madman and the Nun* and *Cuttlefish* – were included in the volume titled *Teatro*, published in 1969 by the press based in Rome and called Tindalo. Other plays appeared in the magazines *Il Drama* (*The Little Country House*, 1970, No. 10) and *Sipario* (*Metaphysics of a Two-Headed Calf*, 1972, No. 312). Nearly at the same time, another Italian company – De Donato in Bari – published a volume of plays translated by Ricardo Landau, containing *The Madman and the Nun*, *The Water Hen*, and *The Shoemakers*.

In Germany, the company Verlag Johannes Hertel, which specialized in issuing duplicate texts for theatrical purposes, published in separate volumes *The Cuttlefish*, *New Deliverance*, and *The Pragmatists* (Tadeusz Kantor cooperated here with the translators), and the company Kurt-Desch published *The Mother* and *The Water Hen*. The play entitled *THEY*, translated by Peter Lachman, was included in the eleventh volume of the famous series "Spectaculum" (it presented texts of prominent contemporary playwrights), and *The Shoemakers*, translated by Janusz von Pilecki, appeared in the first volume of the anthology *Polnisches Modernes Theater* (Neuwied-Berlin 1967). Walter Tiel's excellent translation of *Insatiability* (Munich, 1966) turned into a huge success. Its publisher – Piper & Co. Verlag – did something unprecedented and enclosed a booklet titled *Der Fall Witkiewicz*. It contained articles about the prose of Witkiewicz written by Heinrich Kunstmann, Andrzej Stawar, Czesław Miłosz, Witold Gombrowicz, and Walter Tiel.

In Yugoslavia, Ana D. Živković announced a series of articles on Witkiewicz's drama and the theory of Pure Form. In Czechoslovakia there appeared two separate volumes with the Slovak and Czech versions of *The Water Hen*. The November 1967 issue of *Divadlo* contained *The Crazy Locomotive* along with the Gillar's article entitled "Divadlo úniku". The magazine also published the original version of "Witkiewicz and mrtvoly", an essay by Jan Kott (1968, No. XI), which was later reprinted by magazines in other countries.

There is no doubt, however, that the reception of Witkiewicz in France and the United States was crucial for strengthening the prestige and international fame of his drama. In Paris, Jadwiga Kukuczanka, known as Koukou Chanska, together with François Marié and Jacques Lacarrière, released in 1969 in the Gallimard series *Théâtre du Monde Entier* four volumes with translations of Witkiewicz's plays: *The Mother*, *The Water Hen*, *The Metaphysics of a Two-Headed Calf*, and *The Shoemakers*. Besides this, *L'Action Théâtrale* released articles discussing two of them: *The Water Hen* and *The Shoemakers* (1969, No. 2 and 4).

Daniel Gerould⁷, professor at the University of New York, was the most important translator and elaborate interpreter of Witkiewicz in America. In 1965, he paid a passing visit to Warsaw, where he was awestruck by the National Theater's production of *The Water Hen*. In a short time, he learned the Polish language (his linguistic proficiency was attained during a one-year-long lectureship at the University of Warsaw) and commenced an impressive work of wide-ranging translations and popularizing Witkiewicz in the USA.

Initially, his translations of *The Madman and the Nun*, *The Crazy Locomotive* and *The Water Hen*, were released by American universities, and in 1968 he co-edited,

⁷ L. Sokół, "Daniel Charles Gerould", *Dialog* 2012, no 5, pp. 192–196.

with C. S. Durer, an exemplary volume entitled *The Madman and the Nun*, with a foreword written by Jan Kott. The book contained six plays: *The Madman and the Nun*, *The Water Hen*, *The Crazy Locomotive*, *THEY*, and *The Shoemakers*. Each play is preceded by an introductory note explaining its themes and delineating its position within the context of world drama. This edition made it possible for *The Cuttlefish* to be part of the new edition of John Gassner's *A Treasury of the Theater* (New York, 1969), a fundamental anthology of world drama, and *The Water Hen*, along with a theoretical introduction to *Tumor Brainiowicz* was included in the anthology *Avant-Garde Drama: Major Plays and Documents Post World War I* which was edited by Bernard F. Dukore and Gerould (Toronto-New York-London, 1969). It was Gerould who organized The Witkiewicz Festival in the Department of Slavic Languages at the University of Champagne-Urbana. The Festival was held between 9 and 13 December 1970 and consisted of an exhibition of publications and materials on Witkiewicz, the presentation of a film entitled *Witkacy* and directed by S. Kokesz, a reading of Louis Iribarne's translation of an excerpt from *Insatiability*, and Gerould's own lecture on the life and work of Witkiewicz. Besides, a student theater company staged *The Water Hen*. In April 1971, Gerould organized at Columbia University an academic symposium devoted to the oeuvre of Witkiewicz. Among several professors and critics who participated in this event was Wiktor Weintraub. Also during his university seminars, Gerould concentrated on Witkiewicz's oeuvre, which resulted in numerous papers written by students and doctoral dissertations. Some of them were published. The journal *Comparative Drama* devoted a substantial part of one issue to the theater of Witkiewicz (1969, No. III). In 1972, Gerould released a second volume of translations under the title *Tropical Madness* (New York, 1972), in which four plays were presented: *The Pragmatists*, *Mr Price*, *Gyubal Wahazar*, and *Metaphysics of a Two-Headed Calf*. A year later Gerould edited a double issue of the quarterly *The Polish Review* (1973, No. 12), in which he presented the text of *The New Deliverance*, two comparative essays (Witkacy – Malinowski and Witkacy – Gombrowicz), papers delivered at Columbia University, and deliberations of directors presenting problems of staging Witkacy's plays.

Thanks to all these publications, international awareness of Witkacy was substantially expanded and, what is more important, it was endowed with a more profound character. True, he was still seen mainly as a precursor of formal experiments, but more and more attention was paid to the themes alluded to in his plays. Their surprising topicality was noticed, as were parallels with certain phenomena in contemporary socio-political life and culture. The rapid growth in popularity of Witkiewicz was associated with the passing of the theater of the absurd, which in the years of rapid political events of 1968–1969

quickly lost its strength and attractiveness. These were the times of crisis of certain values and of social transformations in lifestyle. For this reason, existential and philosophical issues – so close to the work of Beckett and Genet – became of lesser importance, and drama of this kind gave way to plays, the main themes of which dealt with the collapse of core values, and which, with prophetic insight, showed the consequences of what this fall might mean for the human person and society.

Gerould claimed that the phantasmal world created by Witkiewicz in his plays does not reflect his psychological fantasies, but a macabre vision of a society of the future. "This is a vision of uncertainty, rapid changes, and revolutions in a self-destructive world, where all matter disintegrates or blows up. This factor may be decisive for the success of Witkacy, and for the peculiar need for his work in the history of European drama"⁸.

The Mother was a real success. The play showed the breakdown of traditional family ties and the destruction of an individual trying to oppose the ongoing process of mechanization and the unification of mankind. After premieres in Paris and in the Belgian *Théâtre l'Étude* (dir. L. Binôt), *The Mother* was put on 11 December 1969 in Rome by *Compagnia del Porcospino secondo* (in the *Teatro Centrale*), directed by Mario Missiroli. The performance aroused great interest in both audience and critics. Numerous reviews emphasized the innovative character of Witkiewicz's drama and its timeliness. In his article "Attualità di Witkiewicz", the theater critic of *L'Avanti* put it in the following way (13 XII 1969):

"The art of Witkiewicz is still alive. It is surprising that he died thirty years ago. The originality of his work, his awkward surreal anarchism, expressive way of creating and resolving action are as contemporary as the situations which are compact, even if packed with contradictions. Witkiewicz sets his action so as to by negating the principles of art, make room for some kind of desperate humor, based on unreal suggestions and verbal literalness of the Surrealists. Overall, this is a poetic chronicle which derives from the 'philosophical' pretext, if one may call in this way Witkiewicz's thought about 'the collapse of metaphysics resulting from social development', the global disintegration, which not only embraces everyone but also introduces them to the game, and then dictates its rules by rejecting and refuting existing standards".

Encouraged by the success of the play, Bulzoni, a press from Rome, published *The Mother* in a separate volume, with a foreword by the director. However, it was the premiere of the play in Paris on 15 November 1970 by the team of Madeleine Renaud and Jean-Louis Barrault, directed by Claude Régy, which was most influential. The title role was acted by Madeleine Renaud, one of the greatest actresses of her times.

⁸ See: D. Gerould, *Witkacy na Zachodzie*, "Twórczość" 1970, no. 78.

The production was immediately recognized as a prominent event in the artistic life of Paris. French television broadcast a short documentary about Witkiewicz, with an introduction by Jarosław Iwaszkiewicz, covering the Paris rehearsals to *The Mother*, and extracts from staging the play in *Teatr Współczesny* in Warsaw. Further, a special issue of *Cahiers Renard-Barrault* (No. 73) was issued, containing, *inter alia*, the French translation of *The Cuttlefish*, and two articles on Pure Form. There were also journals which published on this occasion extensive articles about Witkiewicz, and *Le Monde* devoted a whole page to the author in its number 8034. Reports, reviews and interviews appeared in several newspapers and magazines. Most of them were positive, at times enthusiastic, even though the poetics of the performance, maintained in the convention of vivid expressionism, deliberately challenging the audience with cruelty and violent eroticism, aroused considerable reservations⁹. A group of reviewers regretted that Witkiewicz had not been discovered earlier – before the theater of the absurd – when he had a real chance to become an iconic figure. Others indicated that the play was unexpectedly up-to-date because it speaks of similar phenomena to those that had emerged in Western societies under the influence of the student revolt of May 1968 and the subversive movements of that time.

On 3 December 1970, André Alter observed that in *The Mother*,

“The crime is not sublimated but shown as a direct consequence of the condemnation of art by society, which is supported by no beliefs, no metaphysics and for whom art is simply a pastime doomed to imminent annihilation”.

The success of *The Mother* in Paris was crucial for expanding the status of Witkiewicz in the world. The production opened the way for his plays to be taken up by major professional theaters in other countries, as they were no longer seen as a solely experimental enterprise. Claude Régy was invited to Rio de Janeiro where he directed *The Mother* for the theater *Maison de France* (13 August 1971), and, in this way, he introduced Polish drama to the Brazilian stage for the very first time. The critics were aware that they had discovered an outstanding writer and a tremendous play, which “not only possessed astonishing theatrical power but also fascinated by its intellectual sophistication and prophetic, if *avant-garde*, vision”.

In April 1971, *The Mother* was directed by Jerzy Markuszewski for the *Theater am Neumarkt* in Zürich, and a production of this play for the *Schauspielhaus* in Düsseldorf was prepared by Erwin Axer. The latter, presented for the first time on 16 October 1971, became a theatrical event in West Germany. This time the press was almost

⁹ See: A. Micińska, *Witkacy “à la manière française”*, “Dialog” 1971, no 3, pp. 179–184; reprinted [in:] eadem, *Istnienie Poszczególne: Stanisław Ignacy Witkiewicz*, Ed. J. Degler, Wrocław 2003, pp. 293–305.

unanimous: the director was showered with the highest praise ("he has created a thrilling spectacle, captivating, endowed with a hypnotic force of impact"). Also the play was read more profoundly and accurately than a few years previously. For some, it was a play reflecting the mood of catastrophic pessimism of the interwar era; for others the main theme of the play – the tragedy of an individual crushed by the modern organization of society – "was breathtaking in its contemporary overtones (...) and prophetic indications, which still await their full realization".

Another successful production of the play was staged at the *Royal Dramatic Theater* in Stockholm on 10 December 1971. The performance was directed by the eminent director Alpha Sjöberg and it starred Margaretha Krook in the title role. Her role was great and the spectacle was seen as the central event of the theater season. Swedish critics commented on the interesting relations of Witkiewicz with the modernist tradition, especially with Strindberg's drama (an article revealing the relationship – "The Mothers with Master Olaf" – was written by Sjöberg himself¹⁰). They recognized not only constituents of Witkiewicz's universality but also that aspect of his work that is the product of Polish culture and history. As the title of the article in the *Dagens Nyheter* stated, "Sjöberg has found a Polish writer creating for our times" (3 December 1971).

However, the real adequacy of the issues dealt with in *The Mother* may be perhaps best illustrated by the history of its aborted production in Lisbon in March 1972. Acting on instructions issued by the government of dictator Antonio Salazar, censors objected to the production of the play in the Municipal Theater. The case became the subject of interpellation and heated debate in the Portuguese parliament, and Luiz Rebello, the director of the theater, decided to express his protest by resigning from his post. Numerous writers and artists showed their disapproval of this instance of censorship¹¹. The prohibition was not repealed, but the protests contributed, perhaps, to the print release of the play, translated by José Palla e Carmo, by Prelo Editor. In addition, the volume fully documented the process of preparing the production and the reasons of its cancellation (*"A mãe" de Stanislas Witkiewicz e processo de espectáculo anulado*, Lisboa 1972).

Richard Vachoux, a great admirer of Witkiewicz, introduced his drama to the theater in Switzerland. First, *The Madman and the Nun* was read in the convention of the "theater by the table" at the *Théâtre de Poche* Hall in Geneva (April 1970), and on 30 October 1970 Vachoux directed *Metaphysics of a Two-Headed Calf* for the *Nouveau Théâtre de Poche*.

¹⁰ A. Sjöberg, "'Modern' och 'Mäster Olof'", *Dramaten* 1971–1972, no 13; Polish translation: "'Matka' i 'Mistrz Olof'", trans. Z. Łanowski, *Przegląd Humanistyczny* 1977, no 10, pp. 63–67.

¹¹ See: L.F. Rebello, *Korespondencja*, "Dialog" 1972, no 10; ju [J. Ugniewska], *Rozkwit cenury*, "Dialog" 1972, no 12.

The performance, which was enthusiastically received by critics, was filmed and shown on television, and the foundation "Pro Helvetia", for the first time in its history, granted a subsidy for a theatrical production of a foreign playwright. The production was on tour at the First International Theater Festival in Madrid (November 1970), in Barcelona, and at the Festival of Young Theater in Liège, Belgium. After the show in Madrid there was a violent incident, which proved that the art of Witkiewicz can still arouse emotions similar to those of a most contemporary piece.

Part of the audience began to whistle and abuse performers, accusing them of promoting decadence and ideas destructive of family relations. Others attempted to defend both the author and actors. Taken all together, the theater turned into a bullfight. Also the critics assumed extremely opposite positions. A few of them were ashamed to admit that unawareness of Witkiewicz's work testified to the cultural backwardness of Spain, while the majority – associated with the conservative circles – expressed indignation, and accused the author of unbelievable mockery of the institutions of marriage and family! Witkiewicz was later staged in Geneva, where Francis Simon directed – and starred as, respectively, Edgar Valpor and Walpurg – *The Water Hen* at the *Théâtre de Carouge* (December 1970), and *The Madman and the Nun* (16 November 1971).

Nevertheless, it is in the United States where Witkacy gained global fame. In the 1970s, he turned into one of the most frequently staged playwrights in American university theaters (over 40 productions). Owing much to the excellent translations by Gerould and his numerous articles, Witkiewicz's drama managed to avoid major misunderstandings and was accurately interpreted on stage. The first productions of *The Madman and the Nun* in San Francisco, directed by Jan Kott (26 July 1967), and of *The Crazy Locomotive* in Middiebury (18 July 1968), were also inspired by Gerould, but later he simply drew the attention of certain directors to Witkiewicz's drama. For some of them, this developed into fascination. This was the case with Robert Kalfin, the director of the Chelsea Theater Center, who in May 1972 introduced *The Water Hen* onto the New York professional stage. Then, on 18 January 1977, Des McAnuff directed *Crazy Locomotive*, which turned into a very successful performance among both audiences and critics.

Towson State College in Baltimore became a real "home of Witkiewicz". This was possible thanks to Paul Berman, a professional director and educator, who exercised the function of the head of Department of Theater and was a director at the Towson Theater. He perceived his interest in Witkacy as being one of possession. Within a short time, Berman staged *The Water Hen* (23 March 1971), *Mr. Price* (15 July 1971), and, to celebrate the opening of a new building of the Faculty of Fine Arts, *Gyubal Wahazar* (30 November 1973). The success of his endeavor exceeded all expectations.

According to Gerould, a lot of people traveled from Washington to watch the show. Letters flooded in and telephone lines were blocked. People who had nothing to do with the college kept asking about forthcoming plays by Witkiewicz. Frail, elderly women expressed disappointment when they learned that the next piece would be a play by Arthur Miller, rather than one by Witkiewicz¹².

Paul Berman's enthusiasm for Witkiewicz infected his students. They devoted much time to studies on his theory of theater, trying to find out and check what consequences for stage acting Witkiewicz's assumptions may bear. Similar research was conducted with students of the University of Hawaii in Honolulu by a well-known drama theorist and critic Bernard F. Dukor. As a result, he presented on 8 November 1974 the world premiere of *The Beelzebub Sonata* in the J.F. Kennedy Theater, Honolulu.

Gerould's translations made Witkiewicz known in other Anglo-Saxon countries. A student theater company from Palmerston-North in New Zealand presented *The Madman and the Nun* in July 1969, and the production was a success at the theater festival in Dunedin. At the theater festival in Canberra, Australia, student companies prepared during their workshops *The Crazy Locomotive* (August 1974), *The Madman and the Nun* (August 1975), and *The Mother* (August 1976). University theaters in Canada produced *The Madman and the Nun* three times, and *The Mother* twice. It is noteworthy that Witkiewicz managed to appear on such an enclosed stage as the British one. The Citizens Theater Club in Glasgow presented *The Madman and the Nun* (4 September 1970), and the Half Moon Theater in London – *The Shoemakers* (12 September 1973). In 1975, the London *Theater Quarterly* discussed in an extensive part of its issue (No. 18) Witkiewicz's dramatic output, and an appendix to *Theaterfacts* contained a detailed bibliography prepared by Gerould.

The wave of interest in Witkiewicz, which reached its climax in the years 1968–1971, reemerged in 1975, when as many as fifteen productions in nine countries were undertaken. The year 1975 begins the third period of the international reception of Witkiewicz. It differs from the preceding ones. Theater makers were interested in his plays not because of their fascination with a long-forgotten author who overtook his era. Since 1975, staging his plays was no longer sensational or exceptional, and turned into a standard practice, similar to that of staging a Strindberg and a Pirandello play. By then, Witkiewicz had gained the status of a classic of world drama and consolidated his position in the world repertoire. Formal novelty and, more importantly, the gravity and universality of his subject matter were not annihilated by the passage of time. On the contrary, temporal distance endowed the plays with a new dimension and meaning, which made Witkiewicz

¹² D. Gerould, "Witkacy na scenie amerykańskiej", *Odra* 1972, no 4, pp. 46–52.

not only an attractive artist but also one who met the expectations of contemporary audiences. His work became the subject of detailed academic scrutiny, the scope of which substantially expanded. Besides, the group of translators, directors, critics, scholars, and editors interested in the body of his work, and systematically dealing with it, continuously broadened. What is prominent is that their interest now included not only dramatic texts but also novels, esthetic views, and philosophy.

After completing the six-volume edition of his drama, Vladimir Dimitrijević decided to publish a special journal devoted to the work of Witkiewicz. The intention was to make it a yearly publication that included both Witkiewicz's texts, and articles written by critics from different countries. On 15 March 1976, the first issue of *Cahiers Witkiewicz* appeared. It consisted of translations of early works, fragments of unfinished or defective plays, a translation of Witkacy's 1938 treatise "On the Artistic Theater", van Crugten's article on the reception of Witkiewicz in France, and Janusz Degler's essay on his theory of the theater. In subsequent years there appeared a number focused on painting (No. 2 of 1979, designed by Antoine Baudin), and on philosophy (No. 5, 1983, edited by Bogdan Michalski), one containing 209 letters by Witkiewicz's father and directed to his son Witkacy (No. 3 of 1981), and a selection of papers presented at a Witkacy conference in Brussels (No. 4 of 1984). In this way, Witkacy as one of few writers in the world – next to Conrad and Joyce – gained his own international journal. In the turbulent and dynamic international reception of Witkiewicz, the journal is one of the most extraordinary events, which offers spectacular evidence of the sanctioning of Witkacy's position of a classic. When realizing his most outstanding ambition of publishing Witkacy's entire oeuvre, Dimitrijević managed not only to publish his three novels *Insatiability* (1970), *Farewell to Autumn* (1972), and *The 622 Downfalls of Bungo* (1979) in the translation by Alain van Crugten, but also the treatise entitled *New Forms in Painting and the Resulting Misunderstandings* in the translation of Antoine Baudin (1979), and a volume containing a treatise on drugs and *Unwashed Souls*, a study of social and moral issues, which was edited and translation by Gerard Conio (1980).

Novels by Witkiewicz were also successful in Italy. *Farewell to Autumn* translated by Pierluigi Ruggieri, appeared in 1969 in a deluxe edition from the Arnoldo Mondadori press, and a year later Anton Marie Raffo's excellent translation of *Insatiability* was published by De Donato press. The success of the latter was indicated by its 1973 pocket book mass edition issued by Garzanti. In Spain, *Insatiability*, translated by Melito Bustamente Ortiz, gained the status of a bestseller when it was published in 1973 in Barcelona. In 1976, Louis Iribarne issued a translation of the novel in the United States (it was reissued in 1985, with a foreword by Czesław Miłosz).

In Mexico, Witkiewicz's drama was popularized by Maria Sten, professor of the University of Mexico City. In the journal *La Cultura en Mexico* (1971, No. 506), she announced her translation of *The Madman and the Nun*, and in 1974 the National Autonomous University of Mexico published a volume containing *In the Small Country House*, *The Madman and the Nun*, and *The Mother*. There were several premieres. The most successful one was the production of *The Mother* by the *Teatro de la Universidad* (January 31, 1974) with Martha Verduzco in the title role. Gracia Kerényi, who is well known as a prominent translator of Polish literature into Hungarian and the author of a book on the theater of Miron Białoszewski, translated five of Witkiewicz's dramas, which were published in 1973 in Budapest. *The Mother*, directed by Janos Sandor was staged at the National Theater of Szeged (8 April 1974), and the premiere of *In a Small Country House* was held in the Budapest Academy of Theater Arts on 8 March 1975.

In Spain, Juan Caño Arecha translated *The Mother* and *The Water Hen*, which were issued by the Editorial Fundamentos in Madrid as volumes in a popular series "Cuadernos Practicos". The same series contained a volume with *The New Deliverance* and *The Madman and the Nun*, which were translated by Jorge Segovia and Violetta Beck. In Italy, the well-known director Giovanni Pampiglione published in the esteemed Bulzoni press two volumes of his translations of plays by Witkiewicz (in 1979 and 1980), and then staged them one by one. Already the first premiere of *The Shoemakers* at the *Teatro Stabile Primavera di Terni* (28 Feb 1975) aroused great interest and was warmly welcomed by critics. The performance was successfully presented in Rome and in many theaters on an Italian tour. Subsequently, Pampiglione directed *Cuttlefish* in the Roman Theater School (March 1977), *Dainty Shapes and Hairy Apes in the Laboratorio Universitario Theater* in Palermo (20 November 1979), the play *THEY* in Livorno (8 February 1980) and *The Cuttlefish*, which was announced the most intriguing play at the 25th *Festival Dei Due Mondi* in Spoleto (July 1982). Also other Italian directors took up Witkiewicz's drama. When Antonio Salines directed *In a Small Country House* at the *Teatro G. Belli* in Rome (18 April 1975), there appeared numerous reviews, reports, and notes on the author throughout the Italian press. In January 1980 *Teatro "La Fede"* in Rome staged a successful production of *The Water Hen*, directed by Julio Salinas.

One might observe a similar situation in Paris. Seven productions took place within no more than three years (1975–1977), which confirms that staging Witkiewicz had become by then a standard procedure. The *Théâtre de Fortune* did *The Anonymous Work* (5 February 1975), J.-M. Papapietro staged *The Cuttlefish* in "Ranelagh" (November 1975), the company of Sandra and Pierre Chabert produced *Metaphysics of Two-Headed Calf* (30 October 1976), the *Studio d'Ivry* staged *The Shoemakers*

directed by E. Levinson (15 November 1976), the world premiere of *Tumor Brainiowicz*, directed by J.-P. Matheron was held at the *Théâtre Mouffetard* (3 March 1977), and *Res Nullius Theater* performed *The Madman and the Nun*, directed by Ch. Remer (6 December 1977). The radio program "France-Culture" broadcast *The Water Hen* as adapted by the *Théâtre National du Palais de Chaillot*, under the supervision of Jean-Pierre Colas (March 1977). Afterwards, each season in Parisian theaters brought dramas by Witkiewicz. In February 1980, the French press noticed Andrzej Wajda's production of *THEY*, shown at *Centre Dramatique de Nanterre* as *Ils ont déjà occupé la villa voisine* (They Have Already Occupied the Neighboring Villa). The critics were infuriated by transformations made in the performance and its general meaning. The most provocative idea was to change the sex of the characters. The main character was turned into a man, and the members of a secret government became a group of military feminists (an added piquancy resulted from the fact that Spika was acted by Andrzej Seweryn, and Bałandaszka by Wojciech Pszoniak whose behavior gave the impression that the character is gay). Wajda was accused of misogyny and a desire to discredit the feminist movement. Vivid discussion ensued. Standing against the accusations, Wajda argued that he intended to "annihilate, by all means, gender diversity, and deface the erotic perspective in order better to highlight the philosophical meaning of the play". The reviewers saw the issue in a completely different way: the erotic dimension completely obscured the philosophical and social issues.

The theatrical critic of *Figaro* claimed that:

"By ordaining men to play female characters, thus multiplying the boulevard ambiguities and forcing various buxom Venus-terrorists to take over the stage, Wajda consciously diverts us from the tragedy of the impossibility, from the tragedy of the thing coming to its end, which is at the heart of this ironic, cold, and clairvoyant text"¹⁵.

In the shadow of Wajda's performance – nearly at the same time, on 11 January 1980 – the first night of *The Water Hen* at the *Théâtre de la Commune d'Aubervilliers* was held. It was directed by Philippe Adrien, one of the most talented directors of the young generation of French directors. Fascinated by Grotowski and Kantor, he had been preparing the production for a long time by analyzing the play with students at the School of Acting in Strasbourg. The selection of the cast was very careful, as he assumed that the theater of Witkiewicz "is based largely on the actors, on people, on their strength, not only when we take acting into consideration, but also their mental strength, nerves, and physical strength".

Many critics acclaimed this performance as the best production of Witkacy in France. While the stage was empty, the actors played in the middle of the audience

¹⁵ See: Z. Mierzyńska-Dréan, "Paryż pod znakiem Polski", *Przekrój* 1980, no 1824, p. 6.

among the spectators and their utterances were faithfully close to the text. The performance did not intend to provoke the audience, and showed, in a rather suggestive way, the tragic powerlessness of Witkiewicz's characters, struggling to preserve the remnants of their identity in a world that is directed towards destruction. It is noteworthy that Adrien's *The Water Hen* was accepted for performance at the BITEF festival in Belgrade (16–17 September 1980). In the years to come, the following performances of Witkiewicz were staged in Paris: *The Shoemakers* (dir. G. Cambreleng, *Théâtre de Fortune*, 28 November 1981), *The Mother* (*Théâtre de la Bastille*, dir. J.-L. Jacopin, 9 September 1983), and *The Crazy Locomotive* at the *Théâtre du Grotesque*, directed by Guy Cambreleng (10 May 1984).

It is impossible to enumerate here all the productions, translations, titles, and names. Let us list only those that demonstrate the scope of the reception of Witkiewicz, and, sometimes, an intriguing fascination with his work. In São Paulo, the Anchieta theater staged *Mr. Price* (June 1977), and in Melbourne *The Metaphysics of a Two-Headed Calf* was performed, translated and directed by Roger Pulvers (11 March 1981). The Japanese journal *Shingeki* published *The Madman and the Nun* in a translation by Yukio Kudo (1977, No. 12), and the Lebanese art magazine *Fikr* printed *The New Deliverance* (1980, No. 39–40).

In German Democratic Republic, Henryk Bereska edited a volume containing six plays: *The Anonymous Work*, *Gyubal Wahazar*, *The Cuttlefish*, *The Mother*, *In a Small Country House*, and *The Shoemakers* (Berlin, 1982). In Yugoslavia the highlights of the season 1981–1982 included the stage adaptation of *The Mother* in the Belgrade theater *Atelje 212* prepared by Mira Trailović (3 December 1981). *The Shoemakers*, in the Slovenian translation of Darja Dominkuš and directed by Jan Skotnicki, was presented in Nova Gorice on 11 January 1984.

In New York, Paul Berman successfully staged *The Madman and the Nun* at the Theater Off Park (17 January 1979). This was the twentieth production of the play in the United States, which, mocking therapeutic methods of psychoanalysis, won an authentic popularity. In Richmond (9 May 1980), it was played even by a theater of the deaf and the numb. Another "home of Witkiewicz" was established at the University of Essex in Colchester in the UK by Stuart Daly, who systematically staged his dramas. In May 1982, Daly rehearsed with the students of the Faculty of Drama *The Pragmatists*, and later *The Cuttlefish* (23 November 1982), and *The New Deliverance* (15 June 1983). Besides this, he prepared a performance entitled *Witkacy* (7 October 1982). In this original script, Daly used quotations from a number of plays and was inspired by the biography of Witkiewicz. A similar center was based in the *Nationsteater*

in Uppsala, where a play in a translation by Lenart Kanter and directed by Dag Hedman was presented every second year. As a result, the following plays were staged: *The Madman and the Nun* (4 December 1978), *The Pragmatists* (1 December 1980), and *The Beelzebub Sonata* (1 December 1983).

Daniel Gerould, in cooperation with Jadwiga Kosicka, published a third volume of Witkiewicz's plays as *The Beelzebub Sonata* (New York 1980), in which the title drama went along with *The Dainty Shapes and Hairy Apes*, *Tumor Brainiowicz*, and excerpts of *The Unwashed Souls*, *New Forms of Painting*, an article about Bruno Schulz, and a translation of the *Regulations of the Portrait Firm "S.I. Witkiewicz"*. In 1981, Gerould published a book *Stanisław Ignacy Witkiewicz as an Imaginative Writer*, which crowned many years of his translation and research. In fact, this is a monograph on Witkiewicz's oeuvre. Its main focus is the dramatic output, but it also contains an extensive discussion of the juvenile novel *The 622 Downfalls of Bungo* and a separate chapter on the novels *Farewell to Autumn* and *Insatiability*. Gerould's is only the second book – after that written by Alain van Crugten – which presents this kind of a comprehensive discussion on Witkiewicz.

The study presents impressive and thorough analysis, surprising novelty of opinions, and its inquisitiveness arouses extensive admiration. It delineates not only a fascinating vision of Witkiewicz's artistic development, but also locates his work in the mainstream of European literary and theatrical tradition. Besides, the book deals with the originality of his work and explains why "it resonates with the main concerns of contemporary European civilization". *Stanisław Ignacy Witkiewicz as an Imaginative Writer* was immediately translated in Polish (by Ignacy Sieradzki) and appeared as early as in 1982 as *Stanisław Ignacy Witkiewicz jako pisarz (Stanisław Ignacy Witkiewicz as a Writer)*. This certainly illustrates the importance of Gerould's book for Witkacy studies all around the world. Even today Gerould's book is considered one of the most important studies of Witkiewicz.

In the early 1980s, the interest in Witkiewicz was substantially broadened and it covered his entire artistic oeuvre. The shift was grounded in some early exhibitions organized in, among other places, Essen (*Stanisław Ignacy Witkiewicz 1885-1939*, at the Museum Folkwang between 31 October and 10 December 1974), in Milan and some other cities in Italy (*L'Avanguardia polacca 1910-1978. S.I. Witkiewicz – Construttivismo – Artisti Contemporanei*, from 27 January to 4 March 1979), and in Düsseldorf (*Hommage à Witkiewicz*, at the Städtische Kunsthalle, from 25 April 25 to 1 June 1980). There appeared also translations of texts on painting and Witkiewicz's critical publications in a special issue of *Cahiers Witkiewicz* that was dedicated to his views on the arts.

In 1983, the paintings and photographs of Witkiewicz were presented in Paris, much to the acclaim of critics. It is true that his portraits had been shown in Paris twice

before that (in 1969 at the Musée Galliéra, as part of the exhibition *Peinture Moderne Polonaise. Sources et Recherches*, and between 30 May and 30 July 1987 at Galerie Seine-Visconti during the exhibition *Les portraits dans l'oeuvre de Stanislaw Ignacy Witkiewicz*), but the exhibition of 278 paintings and drawings, along with 120 photographs, at a major exhibition *Presences Polonaises* at the Centre Georges Pompidou (from 23 June to 26 August 1983) granted the general public access to the whole spectrum of paintings and the genuine originality of his achievements in photography. In principle, reviewers stressed their admiration for Witkiewicz's versatility and his genuine achievements in each artistic discipline that he decided to cultivate.

This attitude to the work of Witkiewicz emerged from the major international events that were held in Pisa and Livorno (8–25 February 1980) and Brussels (November–December 1981). The former – titled *Senza compromess. Progetto Stanislaw I. Witkiewicz* – was organized by *Centro per la Sperimentazione e la Ricerca Teatrale di Pontedera* under the auspices of the Tuscan regional authorities and the Polish embassy. The event covered two exhibitions: the one held in the Hall of the Teatro Verdi in Pisa presented photographs taken by Witkiewicz in the years 1900–1925, and the one in the halls of Casa Della Cultura in Livorno contained sixty portraits from the collection of the Museum of Mid-Pomerania in Słupsk, Poland. There was a new production of *THEY*, directed by Giovanni Pampiglione, with music by Stanislaw Radwan, stage design by Kazimierz Wiśniak, and starring Jerzy Stuhr as Balandaszka at *Teatrino del "Pascoli"* in Livorno. An outstanding catalog contained several articles on Witkiewicz's painting and reproductions of forty paintings. Besides, the two-day academic session *The Work and Life of Stanislaw Ignacy Witkiewicz* (9–10 February) gathered actors, critics, journalists, several scholars of the Slavic languages from Italy, and a group of researchers from Poland. The discussion concentrated on Witkiewicz's philosophy of history, in particular the meaning of his catastrophic vision of social development. The question whether some of his predictions can be identified with transformations of contemporary modern civilization, especially the degeneration caused by mass culture, was discussed.

Organized by Alain van Crugten in Brussels, "The Festival of Witkiewicz" was global in character. As in Italy, there was also a broad spectrum of events: a major exhibition of paintings, drawings, and photographs by Witkiewicz was organized in the *Maison de la Bellone*, an exhibition of the collection of Janusz Degler titled *Witkiewicz around the World* was held at Université Libre, several theater productions were performed (*Rebelotheatre* produced *The Cuttlefish*, *Théâtre de la Balsamine* adapted *Dainty Shapes and Hairy Apes*, and the *Théâtre de Fortune* in Paris performed *The Shoemakers*, directed by Guy Cambreleng). What is more, the radio broadcast an adaptation

of a *The New Deliverance* (directed by Martine Wijckaert) and excerpts from Witkiewicz's novels. Finally, a special documentary was prepared for television. A three-day symposium, gathering scholars, critics, and directors from several countries, was the central event of the festival (25–27 November 1981). Its title – *Witkiewicz. Génie multiple de Pologne* – precisely explains the scope of the symposium. The papers delivered touched on virtually all aspects of Witkiewicz's creative output: philosophy (Bohdan Michalski), the theory of art (Jaques Sojcher), the Pure Form in theater (Alain Populaire and Janusz Degler), the plays (Alain van Crugten and Lech Sokół), the novels (Piotr Rawicz and Jan Błoński), the photographs (Urszula Czarторыska and Ewa Franczak-Okołowicz), the epistolary writing (Anna Micińska), the strategies of Witkiewicz as an artist (Wojciech Sztaba), and his relations with Russia (Gérard Conio). The session culminated in a panel discussion focused on the problems of staging Witkiewicz's drama in the reality of the theater. Among those who shared their views on this matter were: Jerzy Jarocki, Giovanni Pampiglione, Cambreleng Guy Philippe Adrien, Ewa Lewison, and Henri Béhar. The discussion exemplified not only the participants' excellent orientation in the work of Witkiewicz, but also proved that original, if varied, approaches to the problem in question was subject to given traditions, cultural and social contexts, and even political situations. In Paris, *The Mother* was associated with the student rebellion of May 1968 and the civil unrest which followed. In the United States, the "exotic" plays such as *Mr Price* and *Metaphysics of Two-Headed Calf* were the ones that were most resonant, besides *The Madman* and *The Nun*, the reason being that they reflected racial conflicts. In West Germany, where Witkacy was linked with the tradition of expressionism, the most intriguing part of his work was the vision of social upheaval, revolution, and the fall of a tyrant. Italian criticism interpreted *The Mother* and *In a Small Country House* as plays about family crisis, whereas in Sweden, Witkacy was seen as a descendant of Strindberg's battle of the sexes.

Both symposia indicated a shift in the scholarly approach to Witkiewicz. At this stage, he was not only a precursor of the theater of the absurd and an innovator in dramatic form, but also a versatile creator whose work cannot be easily defined or grasped in any general formula of interpretation. On the contrary, the legacy of Witkiewicz is of an open character, and easily undergoes varying, at times contradictory, interpretations. Its opalescent meanings tempt theater creators with possibilities for applying new solutions on stage. Such an approach would be fundamental for the later reception of his work. The confirmation of the importance of that work was the decision of UNESCO to include the centenary of Witkiewicz's birth in the official calendar of anniversaries celebrated around the world in 1985.

On this occasion a significant number of new productions were staged, several countries hosted exhibitions on the life and work of Witkiewicz (this was based on Anna Micińska's script), and there appeared collective editions of his works. Dalibor Blažina published the volume *Iz djela* (Zagreb 1985), in which he included Witkacy's child play *The Cockroaches*, along with *In a Small Country House*, *The Water Hen*, *The Madman and the Nun*, *The Shoemakers*, and *The Introduction to the Theory of Pure Form in Theater*. The Odeon Press, which was based in Prague, published a volume named *Hry*, which contained *The Crazy Locomotive*, *The Madman and the Nun*, *The Mother*, and *The Shoemakers*. In Germany, Andrzej Wirth prepared a so-called "Lesebuch" entitled *Witkiewicz - Verrückte Lokomotive*, containing *The Crazy Locomotive*, *The Shoemakers*, *The Introduction to the Theory of Pure Form in the Theater*, and extracts from *Farewell to Autumn*, *Insatiability*, *The Only Way Out*, and *Unwashed Souls*. It was published in the series "Polnische Bibliothek" by Suhrkamp Verlag.

Maria Sten published in the Mexican magazine *Cuadernos de Filosofía y Letras* (1985, No. 5) Jan Maciej Karol Hellcat, *The Crazy Locomotive*, *The Mother*, and articles by Daniel Gerould, Alain van Crugten, and Janusz Degler. Among many surprising events in this anniversary year, one deserves special attention – a comprehensive volume entitled *Witkiewicz no sekai* (*The World of Witkiewicz*) was published in Tokyo. Its editor, Yujiro Nakamura, included several theoretical essays on theater, Witkacy's letters to Bronisław Malinowski, along with articles by Jan Kott, Roman Ingarden, Alain van Crugten, Piotr Rawicz, Urszula Czartoryski, Mieczysław Porębski, and Janusz Degler. The Japanese magazine *Hermes* published a translation of *In a Small Country House*. Roger Pulvers adapted and directed this play in Tokyo, with the company Parco-bld (10 Sept. 1985).

In 1989, political transformations in the USSR connected with Mikhail Gorbachev and so-called "perestroika" made possible the publication of a volume in Moscow in which Andriej Bazilewski presented translations of *Gyubal Wahazar*, *The Cuttlefish*, and *The Shoemakers*. A few years later he founded the WAHAZAR press and – like Dimitrijević – decided to publish translations of Witkiewicz's entire literary oeuvre. So far, he has succeeded in publishing three volumes containing all the plays, and then one with *Drugs* and *The Only Way Out* (2003), another one with *Insatiability* (2004), and then one with *Farewell to Autumn* (2006).

Farewell to Autumn was published anew in several countries: a new German translation came out by Roswitha Matwin-Buschmann (Leipzig 1991), Elżbieta Bortkiewicz and Juan Carlos Vidal translated the book in Spain (Madrid, 1993), Miko Jež in Slovenia (Ljubljana 1994), and Körner Gábor in Hungary (Pécs 2007). Gábor, additionally,

translated *Insatiability* (Pecs 2005). In the Netherlands, Karol Lesman's translation of *Insatiability* (Amsterdam, 2003) turned into a bestseller and was quickly reprinted for wider circulation (Amsterdam 1996). Lesman, who recently received the award "Transatlantic" for his translations of Polish literature, also published *Farewell to Autumn* (Amsterdam 1996) and a volume containing *The Mother*, *The Beelzebub Sonata*, *Cockroaches*, and parts of *Unwashed Souls* (Leiden, 1997). The status of Witkiewicz in Sweden owes a lot to Andrew Nils Ugglä, professor at the University of Uppsala, and Dag Hedman, a director, as they have co-edited a volume of translations including *The Pragmatists*, *The Water Hen*, *The Madman and the Nun*, *The Mother*, and *The Beelzebub Sonata* (Uppsala 1988). In addition to this, Hedman directed *The Pragmatists* (17 October 1989) and *The Beelzebub Sonata* (27 October 1989) at Teater Giljotin in Stockholm. Hendrik Lindepuu translated seven plays into Estonian: *The Pragmatists*, *In a Small Country House*, *Dainty Shapes and Hairy Apes*, *The Madman and the Nun*, *The Crazy Locomotive*, *The Mother*, and *The Beelzebub Sonata* (Tallinn 1997). Two of them – *In a Small Country House* and *The Madman and the Nun* – were presented in theaters in Tallinn. The efforts of Kalina Bachnewy led to the Bulgarian publication of a carefully edited volume containing eight plays: *Metaphysics of Two-Headed Calf*, *The Water Hen*, *The Cuttlefish*, *The Crazy Locomotive*, *The Mother*, *The Beelzebub Sonata*, and *The Shoemakers* (Sofia 1993). In Spain, Josep Maria de Sagarra published *The Cuttlefish* along with the treatise on *Pure Form* (Barcelona 1991), and then *Drugs* (Barcelona 1994), *The 622 Downfalls of Bungo, or the Demonic Woman* (Barcelona 2001). Books with collected dramas were published also in Romania as *Teatru* (translated by Olga Zaicik, Bucuresti 1998), Slovakia (*Hry*, Bratislava 2001), and the Czech Republic (*Hry II*, Olomouc 2002).

The tireless Daniel Gerould¹⁴ prepared *The Witkiewicz Reader* (Evaston 1992). The volume covers the entire range of literary and theoretical work of Witkiewicz, from his children's plays to the last text that was published in his lifetime, *The Balance of Formism* (1938). Besides, Gerould published other volumes containing *Mr Price* and *Metaphysics of Two-Headed Calf* (2002), *In a Small Country House* (1997), *Maciej Korbowa* and *Bellatrix* (2009). Dimitrijevic re-issued his three-volume series of dramas and published *The Only Way Out*, translated by Gérard Conio (2001). Without any doubt, the publishing of a bilingual (German and Polish), four-volume series with the entire dramatic oeuvre of Witkiewicz was one of the most prominent achievements of translating and editing (Munich-Berlin 2006–2012). The plays it contains were translated by Eve Makarczyk-Schuster and Karlheinz Schuster of the University of Mainz, who also provided extensive prefaces. General appreciation was confirmed by the award

¹⁴ He died on 13 February 2012 in New York at the age of 84. See: *Witkacologia* : <http://www.witkacologia.eu>

granted by the Association of Polish Writers and ZaiKS for outstanding achievements in translating Polish literature. Both Makarczyk-Schuster and Schuster are also authors of books about the work of the author of *The Shoemakers*¹⁵.

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Fifty years have passed since the publication of the first translations of Witkiewicz. Today, the number of translations and the languages in which his work functions is more than impressive. Plays, novels, theoretical dissertations, and philosophical treatises have been translated into 25 languages: English, Arabic, Bulgarian, Croatian, Czech, Danish, Dutch, Estonian, Finnish, French, Greek, Spanish, Dutch, Japanese, German, Norwegian, Portuguese, Romanian, Russian, Serbian, Slovak, Slovenian, Spanish, Swedish, Ukrainian, Hungarian and Italian. There have been over three hundred productions in twenty-six countries and sixteen exhibitions of paintings, portraits and photographs have been organized in ten countries. There are several factors that have turned out to be decisive for Witkiewicz's international fame.

There is no doubt that after 1990 the following aspects became crucial. First, the endangering of the individual by the heartless world of modern civilization. Second, the loss of individuality and of the sense of personal autonomy in a unified and well-organized society. Third, the disappearance of such spiritual values and needs that endow human existence with deeper meaning. Their disappearance leads to the sterility and standardization of culture, and in the long run to the "bestialization" of humanity. World drama does not contain many works in which these problems are shown as accurately and in such a modern form, as is the case with Witkiewicz. All these factors make him a classic, and simultaneously "our contemporary", and he will probably remain one as long as the problems that his work deals with do not cease to be valid¹⁶.

September 2013

¹⁵ E. Makarczyk-Schuster, *Raum und Raumzeichen in Stanisław Ignacy Witkiewicz's Bünen schaffen der zwanziger Jahre oder Kann man am Ende der Bühne noch die Hand ausstrecken?*, Frankfurt am Main 2004 (Polish translation: *Przestrzeń i znaki przestrzeni w utworach scenicznych Stanisława Ignacego Witkiewicza z lat dwudziestych albo czy na końcu sceny można jeszcze wyciągnąć rękę*, trans. M. Borowski, Warszawa 2005); K. Schuster, *Theaterstücke ohne Sinn. Eine kurze Einführung in Witkacy's Bühnnewelt*, München-Berlin-Washington 2012. Since 1990 the following books on the life and work of Witkacy have been published: A. Schmidt, *Form und Deformation. Zum kunsttheoretischen und dramatischen Werk von Stanisław Ignacy Witkiewicz*, München 1992; Dalibor Blažina, *Katastrofizm i dramska struktura. O Stanisławu Ignacju Witkiewiczu*, Zagreb 1993; M. Peterson, S.I. Witkiewicz. *La poétique de l'inassouvissement*, Montreal 1995; A. Bazilewskij, *Witkiewicz: powieść o wiecznym bezwremieniu*, Moskwa 2000; *Stanisław Ignacy Witkiewicz. Stockholmssymposiet*, utgivare: A.N. Uggla och D. Hedman, Uppsala 2000 (a volume of papers delivered at the symposium S.I. Witkiewicz' författarskap och den svenska receptionen av hans verk, Sztokholm, Instytut Polski 29-30 September 1995).

¹⁶ See: Witkacy in English: 21st Century Perspectives. Editors of the Volume: Kevin Anthony Hayes and Mark Rudnicki, Kraków 2013 (The Polish Journal of Aesthetics vol 31); Witkacy: bliski czy daleki? Materiały międzynarodowej konferencji z okazji 70. rocznicy śmierci Stanisława Ignacego Witkiewicza, Słupsk, 17–19 września 2009. Pod redakcją Janusza Deglera, Słupsk 2013 (Muzeum Pomorza Środkowego w Słupsku).

S. I. Witkiewicz
LES 622 CHUTES
DE BUNGO



L'Age d'Homme

The cover of the French translation of the novel *622 upadki Bunga, czyli Demoniczna kobieta*
(Lausanne 1979)