

Prof. Janusz Degler

Dedication to the Founding Mother and Fathers¹

Dear Friends,

I am taking the liberty of greeting you all in such a manner although I don't know all of you personally. For sure, you would have been greeted in such a fashion by Anna Micińska, who sadly is no longer with us.

Indeed, it was Anna who always wanted us to be one big family connected by friendship mutual trust, and the desire to help each other.

That in fact is how it was and that is how it is now. There were never conflicts, competition, or academic egoism between us, which is so common in many circles. We are always ready to work together and share what we know and what we have. Perhaps, this is why they have called us the 'Masons' or the 'Witkacy Mafia.' Put simply, Witkacy joins us and does not separate us.

It is worthwhile to briefly say how all of this began. We have to go back to 1968 and remember a small room in the Institute of Arts of the Polish Academy of Arts and Sciences in Warsaw, where the editorial office of the *Theatrical Notebook* (Pamiętnik Teatralny) is located. With the occasion of the thirtieth anniversary of the death of Witkacy approaching, it was decided

¹ This article is based upon a pre-recorded presentation which was made in Poland and then screened at Witkacy 2010 in Washington D.C. and has been translated by Kevin Anthony Hayes.

to publish a monograph dedicated to the artist. I was assigned to prepare this monograph. I also had to prepare a history of the Formistic Theatre which Witkacy ran between 1925 and 1927. I travelled to Zakopane in order to find materials relating to this theatre in the Tatra Museum. I didn't find any documents, but I got to know 'Dunia' Micińska. Shortly thereafter, in the editorial office of 'Theatrical Notebook' I met Lech Sokół; together we were assigned the task of working on the more important biographical texts about Witkacy.

During the course of a further visit to the editorial office, I met Dan Gerould and Krzysztof Pomian and, together with Konstanty Puzyna, a firm friendship was established between us all. This is how the founding group of Witkacologists came into being. Soon, we were joined by Alain Van Crutgen, Bohdan Michalski, and Irena Jakimowicz.

From 1969 the "Theatrical Notebook" played a pivotal role in the reception of the work of Witkacy. Two texts in particular were of exceptional significance. The first of these was *Philosophical Reflections*, which demonstrated the close relationship between Witkacy's philosophy and his creative work. Then in a famous article, *In the Valley of Nonsense*, Konstanty Puzyna demonstrated the infertile and empty thought and indeed thoughtlessness seen in the staging of Witkacy up till that time and sent out the call that the theory of Pure Form must be left on the shelf. It was seen as necessary to connect with the philosophy of history and start to perform the plays as 'God ordained,' instead of repeating nonsense on the stage as if such a thing were the intention of the author. Some theatre directors listened to him and many excellent performances appeared, among these were Jerzy Jarocki's *The Shoemakers* and *The Mother*, Erwin Axers's *The Mother*, Maciej Prus's *Jan Maciej Karol Hellcat* and *The Shoemaker* and Krystian Lupa's *Dainty Shapes and Hairy Apes* and *The Pragmatists*.

Sometimes, I am asked how it happened that Witkacy, in such a short time achieved such a world wide career, and was translated into a dozen or so languages, such that his plays started to be performed in every European country, as well as in the United States, Australia, Brazil, Japan and Egypt.

For sure there were many factors which caused this to come about – political and social, cultural and artistic. I think, however, that without our collaboration, this career would not have been so fast and effective. I remember that I sent a dozen or so people from various countries perhaps ten examples of the 1972 second edition of *The Dramas*.

However, a decisive role was played by several people. The translations of Daniel Gerould paved the way for Witkacy on the stage in every Anglo-Saxon country. In the 'seventies he was one of the most frequently played

authors in American university theatres. Daniel Gerould's book; *Witkacy: A Study of Stanisław Ignacy Witkiewicz as an Imaginative Writer* to the present day remains an excellent introduction to both Witkacy's biography and literary work. We frequently use the Polish translation of the book.

Thanks to the translations of Alain van Crugten, the plays of Witkacy can be performed in the theatres of France, Switzerland, and Belgium. At this juncture we cannot possibly omit the contribution of Vladimir Dimitrijević's Lausanne publishing house in Switzerland, L'Age d'Homme. Through his fascination with Witkacy, he endeavoured and succeeded in publishing everything that had ever been written by him. Furthermore, from 1976 he published the journal dedicated to him called *Cahiers Witkiewicz*.

As a director and translator Witkacy was promoted by Giovanni Pampiglione in Italy. His work was translated into Spanish and Catalan by Josep M. de Sagarra – into Dutch by Karol Lesman, into German by Heinrich Kunstmann, into Hungarian by Gracia Kerenyi and into Croatian by Dalibor Blazina. Through some 25 years all of Witkacy's literary works have been translated and published in Russia by Andrzej Bazilewski.

An important role in the popularization of Witkiewicz has also been played by international conferences dedicated to him. The first of these took place in March of 1978 in the Cyprian Norwid Theatre in Jelenia Góra. I'm pleased to say that there is in existence even today a filmed recording of the session along with fragments of the excellent performance of *Dainty Shapes and Hairy Apes* directed by Krystian Lupa. In Jelenia Góra at that time the entire international Witkiewicz group met. Unfortunately, some of the members are no longer with us. Then, in February of 1980 there was a symposium in Pisa, followed by another in Brussels in November of 1981. The next was to take place in New York, but the Declaration of Martial Law in Poland made this impossible. We all met again in 1985 in Warsaw on the occasion of the Year of Witkacy promoted by U.N.E.S.C.O. Then, there was the first symposium in Słupsk in 1994 which was followed by Szczecin in 1999.

I am so sorry that I am not able to be together with you all. I wish you all inspiring debates and discussions. Support each other beautifully. This is just what Witkacy deserves!