

"DARKNESS EVERYWHERE" – SUMMARY

- 1. Write a morality play without moralising.*
- 2. Create a mystery play as in the Middle Ages, set simultaneously in two hierarchically ordered worlds, but without the concurrent plot lines revealing which world is the higher one.*
- 3. Write a national drama without invoking the nation; show the community as a congeries of atomised individuals, constantly fighting and chasing after something that appears terribly important to them.*
- 4. Look at this from a different perspective (a different world) to realise that this is all an illusion.*
- 5. Show the "rat race", in which there is no more "cheese" at the end. The race of which nobody knows the rules and the referee.*

"Ciemno wszędzie, głucho wszędzie, co to będzie, co to będzie?" ["Darkness everywhere, silence everywhere; what will come of it, what will come of it?"] – Again and again, the chorus chants these lines in the course of the ritual on "Forefather's Eve", which is presided over by Guslar, the chorus leader. "Forefather's Eve" by Adam Mickiewicz is the most famous Polish national drama of the 19th century. The story takes place on All Souls' Day, on November 2, immediately after All Saints' Day.

"Czy ciemno, czy jasno, płynie muza przez miasto, bo miasto jest nasze i nie może być inaczej" ["Whether dark or bright, a muse hovers through town, for the town is ours, and it cannot be any different"] – thus rhymes Abradab of the hip-hop group Kaliber 44. In the music video, a bunch of young people dash through the city by car. They feel like masters, like conquerors of the city, that is to say, the world.

In a way, these two quotations define the space in which my play "Ciemno wszędzie" [Darkness Everywhere] is set. On the one hand, we have dynamic young people: at dead of night they compete in races across town, locked up in pairs in their tuned-up cars, each couple on their own and without contact to the external world. The heroes race through the city streets to be the first to cross the finishing line somewhere on the car park at Real Hypermarket.

During the race in their whizzing cars we get to know the heroes and the relationships among them. We learn that they also compete in races without cars, for instance at work: races for career, status, position, money, or approval.

By driving at double or even triple the speed limit, the heroes get into downright euphoric states of mind, a kind of sexual excitement. While the illegal race does indeed deliver a fair dose of adrenalin, it also means walking the tightrope between life and death. Some fall.

They then end up in a white room, something like a waiting room or an admission room, where they also meet people that became victims of the illegal races by coincidence. The master of ceremonies is Guslar. Almost the same who presided over the 19th century ritual in Mickiewicz' "Forefather's Eve"... But it is left open until the very end whether it is not perhaps all about some craziness, whether he is some lunatic at large. Judging from his appearance, one might think him a hospital nurse in admission. He even gives shots... But the more scenes we see from the "white room", the more our certainty drops whether things are really so. One might mean that only the dead are admitted to this admission room and that Guslar is some kind of a Charon, leading the dead into the "world beyond". What kind of a world? Well, that's the point. For the other world is possibly nothing but our desire for another world, our desire that our lives should not end at one fell swoop like a torn film and then descend into nothingness.

As a motto I have chosen two quotations. One is a fragment of a sermon from the 15th century that deals with how, on All Souls' Day after sunset, the souls of the dead wander on earth and expect our help. I found the other, recent quotation on a wall almost exactly opposite the church that is so important to the Poles, because the murdered priest Jerzy Popiełuszko had been working there. The quotation reads: "Emptiness and nothing sacred". It expresses the attitude of modern people (and that of my heroes in the cars), who have repudiated all illusions. But no sooner have the metaphysical illusions been abandoned than others appear in their stead: with them my "heroes" get intoxicated during their illegal nightly race, which is a metaphor for the form that their lives have taken.

Staging this play faces the difficulty that some of the scenes take place in driving cars. They will probably have to be shot outside in real time, as it says in the stage directions; cordless cameras would transmit whatever happens in the cars onto a screen in the

white room, that is, onto the theatre stage. Everything else takes place in the white room and would be presented on stage as usual. One can, of course, also look for other means of interweaving the scenes from the real world (the driving cars) and the hyperreal world of the "white room".

I got the idea for the play from news reports about illegal car races in Warsaw and other cities in Poland. This ritual emerged several years ago, with the system change that also changed people's standard of living and mentality. I shifted this ritual to the holiday that is perhaps the most zealously celebrated holiday of a religious character in Poland: All Souls' Day. This is when all Poles march out onto the graveyards, visit the graves of their relatives – and if need be cross the entire country by car. One goes, as it were, to one's ancestors, to one's roots, and in so doing one maintains rituals that are by now rather faded. It turns out that in a world where success is worshipped and only the successful count there is no room for the sacred. The only thing sacred left to us is possibly our dead.

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