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RITUAL TRANSFORMATION OF MAN IN APOCALYPSIS CUM FIGURIS BY J. GROTOWSKI

In search for the essence of the theatre Jerzy Grotowski found that it could not exist without the actor-spectator relationship. Grotowski's concept of creative process that lies at the foundation of modern theatre was based on a conviction that theatre can be a means of changing people, both actors and audience. As Kumiega (1985:150) notices: *Through his work and research he had transformed the art of acting into a vehicle for self-exploration and self-development.* Spiritual transformation of both the actors and the spectators is marked by the return to ritual as the source of an authentic experience of community within the theatre. The process aims at restoration of the original Unity of Being, which Flaszen (1974:114) regards as the fundamental function of Grotowski's theatre:

Grotowski's productions aim to bring back a utopia of those elementary experiences provoked by collective ritual, in which the community dreamed ecstatically of its own essence, of its place in a total, undifferentiated reality, where Beauty did not differ from Truth, emotion from intellect, spirit from body, joy from pain; where the individual seemed to feel a connection with the Whole of Being.

Apocalypse Cum Figuris marked a point of transition in Grotowski's research between theatre and paratheatrical experience. It was used as a bridge for the transformation of the spectator into the participant. That fulfilled Grotowski's wish for the theatre *to cross our frontiers, exceed our limitations, fill our emptiness – fulfil ourselves* (1975:121). That act of transgression could be achieved through exposing an inner process of an actor, which Grotowski (1975:38) called the 'total act'. *It is a question of giving oneself. One must give oneself totally in one's deepest intimacy, with confidence, as when one gives oneself in love.* Kott (1980:31), with reference to *Apocalypse*, emphasised the importance of actor's sacrifice. He remarked: *The only ritual which can be repeated in the theatre without blasphemy is the ritual of sacrifice in which the actor is simultaneously the executioner and the martyr.* The actor's process was intended to facilitate contact with the audience and thus affect their experience.

It is very difficult to describe and interpret *Apocalypsis* because of its structural density and multiple associations. As Temkine (1972:74) notices, the text is only one of the elements of production, being *the springboard and the challenge* for the performance. Grotowski's drama is a chaotic medley of quotations from the Bible, church songs, Dostoyevsky, T.S. Eliot and Simone Weil. It is entirely based on actors' actions and experiences. Therefore, an analysis of Grotowski's spectacle based on the text only would be an oversimplification. However, no complete video recording of the stage performance has been preserved. Therefore, the hereof analysis is based on the script of the play rather than the video recording.¹

The process of self-transformation of man who is assigned the role of God, and consequently becomes one in reality, can be seen in terms of struggles and games between various *dramatis personae*, of which the most significant are two relations, which account for two fundamental aspects of the relation between God and man: an intellectual argument between the Simpleton and Simon Peter (escape from freedom) and an emotional one between the Simpleton and Lazarus (escape from love). On the subconscious level the transformation is emphasised by certain metaphors, especially bread and wine as well as dance. The assault on the Simpleton as a Christ-figure is targeted at an archetype of God, which Puzyna (1990:169) perceives in terms of subconscious human need: the need for fatherly love, divine justice, or the redemption of sins. The relations between characters, especially between the Simpleton and Lazarus, attempt at a confrontation with these needs.

A great significance is ascribed to sacrifice, which Grotowski perceives as real, not symbolic. Bread becomes the body and wine, or rather liquor, becomes the blood, while love is reduced to pure physicality. The crudity of sacrifice strikes the audience in the very first scene, where a woman lays a loaf of bread and a knife on the floor as if she was preparing a meal. A man approaches and addresses her intensely:

*Verily, verily I say unto you. Except ye eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood, ye have no life in you. Whoso eateth my flesh, and drinketh my blood, hath eternal life; and I will raise him up on the last day. For my flesh is meat indeed, and my blood is drink indeed.*²

The words that Christ pronounced during the Last Supper augur transformation. The bread is going to be used as an offering, which evokes the sacrifice of God who is also human. The man grabs the bread and thrusts it

¹ The only incomplete video record of the spectacle is the recording made in Italy, which is in possession of the Grotowski Centre in Wrocław. Unfortunately, the recorded material is protected by the copyright. The dialogues quoted in this article are based on an English translation of the Polish 'script' made by Kumiega (1985:240–267). The author also refers to texts by Dzieduszycka (1974) and Puzyna (1990:167–181).

² All unmarked quotations after Kumiega (1985:239–269).

between his legs, his body jerking. The woman violently drags the bread from him and drives the knife into it several times, each time the man's body arches in agony as he cries out. The scene evokes a series of associations. The bread is a body: divine as well as human, a woman's body. Consuming bread calls forth the fulfilment of sexual desire, while piercing it with a knife associates with both killing a man and killing God. Thus the performers' actions arouse the basic instincts in the audience, desire and death.

An act of profanation of the holy bread provokes the group of performers to engage in a game of the Second Coming. It is initiated by Simon Peter who assigns the roles. The part of the Saviour is assigned to Lazarus. However, he does not accept it as he is too much aware that they would like to have fun at his expense. *Aye, I'm thinking of giving up their bread, for I don't need it at all* – he refuses to accept the role. Simon Peter drags the Simpleton, who has been curled up unnoticed all this time, to his feet and hauls him to the centre of the room. He seems unaware of being drawn into the group's games. Simon Peter approaches him with a smile and says: *"You were born in Nazareth."* *"You died on the cross for them."* *"You are the Saviour."* *"You are God"*. Bewildered and confused with the roars of laughter, the Simpleton leaps onto Simon Peter's back and they circle around the playing area. Then Simon Peter lies him gently on the floor and reproaches him quoting Dostoyevski's Grand Inquisitor.

You want to go into the world and you are going empty-handed, with some promise of freedom, which men in their simplicity and their innate lawlessness cannot even comprehend, which they fear and dread – for nothing has ever been more unendurable to man and to human society than freedom!

On the psychological level Simon Peter's task is to make the Simpleton aware of the consequences of freedom of choice, and thus to awaken the Simpleton's conscience. However, for the time being, the Simpleton instinctively tries to defend himself against these accusations. His words come out brokenly and sobbingly:

*Because I do not hope to turn again
Let these words answer
For what is done, not to be undone again
May the judgement not be too heavy upon us*

While the Simpleton seems to be ignorant of intellectual argument, Simon Peter resorts to mockery. The procession to Calvary begins, announced by Simon recalling the scene of piercing Christ's side: *And I saw water flowing from the right side of the temple, Allelujah; and all unto whom the water came were saved.* Lazarus whips up the Simpleton's raincoat to expose his naked side, while the others put their mouth to it and drink greedily. *It's liquor in his veins, not blood!*, shouts John and bloated collapses on the floor.

The scene of John and Magdalene's wedding is another provocation which aims at urging the Simpleton's instinctive need for love and acceptance, which is merely physical. The Simpleton, watching the lovers with enchantment, immerses himself in their infatuation. His body becomes tense and his face suffused with ecstasy. For the first time he experiences self-fulfilment. However, he is alone, ignored by the others who had become quite involved in the game which has now turned into an uncontrolled frenzied orgy. Having been ignored for so long, the Simpleton weaves in circuits around the tableau created by the other performers in hope to join in the fun, but he still remains outside the circle. Suddenly, Simon Peter sits on his shoulders and whips him into action. If the Simpleton seemed to ignore persuasion, perhaps he would react to physical humiliation. Whipping himself to ever greater frenzy, the Simpleton gallops wildly around the room while Simon spurs him on until the Simpleton, exhausted with effort, throws him off his shoulders. He still careers madly around the room until he drops. As he lies in stupor on the floor, victimised and tormented by the rest, he seems to feel a sudden glimpse of conscience, although he still does not understand his role. He speaks with confusion:

*Although I do not hope to turn again
Wavering between the profit and the loss
In this brief transit where the dreams cross
The dreamcrossed twilight between birth and dying
(Bless me father) though I do not wish these things [...]
This is the time of tension [...]*

His speech, which alludes to Easter and the mystery of death and life, recalls another ritual: the raising of Lazarus. The funeral is another extreme provocation which intends to confront the Simpleton with the mystery of death and life. The mourners lay down Lazarus' body on the floor while John breaks off small pieces of bread and distributes them. The rest of the performers are now squatting on the corpse and stuffing themselves with the bread while the Simpleton is watching them in horror. He is so shocked at being drawn into the mystery of death and resurrection that he suddenly starts to believe that he has really been appointed the Saviour. He approaches Lazarus, raps his rod on the floor three times and speaks softly, but in confidence: *Lazarus, I say unto thee, Arise.* And Lazarus slowly lifts itself up until kneeling before the miracle worker. A glimpse of hope creeps across the Simpleton's face, broken off by Lazarus' laughter. If he succeeds in provoking the Simpleton, he will be able to make him aware of the consequences of interfering with the natural laws. He assaults the Simpleton in Job's words: *For there is hope of a tree, if it be cut down, that it will sprout again, and there the tender branch thereof will no cease. But man dieth, and wasteth away.* While saying these words, Lazarus thrusts a heavy loaf of bread into the Simpleton's face. The Simpleton kneels on the floor humiliated,

his eyes full of tears, while Lazarus' voice raises grief-stricken and tragic: *Let the day perish wherein I was born, and the night in which it was said, There is a man-child conceived. [...] Why died I not from the womb? Why did I not give up the ghost when I came out of the belly?* To accomplish the Simpleton's humiliation Lazarus suddenly slides his hand under his coat and up his thighs caressing him gently. Immersed in ecstasy mixed with humiliation, the Simpleton is suddenly initiated into the mystery of love and suffering.

However, it is the love scene with Mary Magdalene which makes the Simpleton fully aware of the true nature of love. Now the Simpleton discovers the mystery of love between man and woman and, for the first time, he experiences completeness and fulfilment. These feelings exalt him in divinity and make the audience believe that his transformation is genuine. The scene is supposed to be another provocation in which John confronts the Simpleton with a prostitute. *Come hither; I will shew unto thee the judgement of the great whore that sitteth upon many waters; With whom the kings of the earth have committed fornication. And have been made drunk with the wine of her fornication.* However, the provocation, aiming at another humiliation of the Simpleton, does not bring an expected result. Mary Magdalene surrenders to the Simpleton's gentle caresses while he begins to understand the true nature of reciprocal love. *And here is the mind which hath wisdom.* Both divinity and humanity meet in an accomplishment of love which elevates man to the position of God. The Simpleton can only respond to such love with a thanksgiving prayer:

*Terminate torment
Of love unsatisfied.
Speech without word and
Word of no speech
Grace to the Mother
For the Garden.*

Even the parody of the scene by Judas and Lazarus who imitate the loving couple cannot ridicule their love. There is a renewed surge of energy through the group, which results in an orgiastic fervour. They spring into a disorganised, chaotic Dionysian dance which augurs ritual transformation foretold by John: *[...] as many as would not worship the image of the beast should be killed.* On the final word from John, Simon Peter spreads wide his waistcoat and swoops down to completely cover the two beams of light, and plunge the room into darkness. After a while he enters carrying candles, which introduces the atmosphere of *sacrum*. From now on the room will be lit only by candlelight. Judas says ironically: *Behold the bridegroom cometh; go ye out to meet him.* These words are a magic formula to call up God. The Simpleton, who has been transformed into Christ, speaks in Christ's words: *[...] one of you shall betray me. Jesus, who is it?*, John addresses him as if he was God. The Simpleton reaches over to the candle before him. Lifting up high one candle, he douses the

flame with two damp fingers and smears the sign of the cross with ash on Simon Peter's forehead. There is interjection from Judas: *And, I, Lord?* Simon Peter responds softly: *Judas, Son of Iscariot...* Simon and Judas rebel against God together, but it is Simon who is the genuine traitor, while Judas is only an insignificant figure, like a puppet.

The Way of the Cross begins. Simon Peter gives the others the lead and distributes the candles. One by one, others join in, swaying backwards and forwards. They drag the Simpleton to the centre of the room and sing: *Glory to the Great and Just...* Their voices are soft at the beginning, but while the procession proceeds, the tempo and volume of the liturgical chant rises and suddenly their voices slide into derisive bleating: a parody of the Lamb. The Simpleton rotates around on his knees and collapses on the floor. He lies prostrate with his arms outstretched while the other listen to his incoherent, crucified wail:

*If the lost word is lost, if the spent word is spent [...]
For those who walk among noise and deny the voice
[...] those who wait
[...] between
The desert in the garden [...] the desert
Of drouth, spitting from the mouth the withered apple-seed.*

The Simpleton's lament is interrupted by a church song and the Easter ceremony begins, introduced by Simon Peter, the Master of Ceremonies: *Chryste elejson; Sursum corda. Kyrie Eleison. Sursum Corda.* They are preparing the grounds for an offering made of crucified God. But before God is sacrificed, he must undergo judgement. Simon Peter makes an accusation speaking on the behalf of ignorant masses:

[...] if for the sake of bread from heaven thousands and tens of thousand will follow you, what is to become of the millions and scores of thousands of millions of creatures who will not have the strength to give up the earthly bread for the bread of heaven? [...]

Suddenly the temple turns into a fair: *"I sell myself". "Hag!". "I sell fresh meat". "I sell fresh God's body"*.³ While saying this, Simon Peter raises up his hands in a gesture of Elevation. Suddenly, the Simpleton whips around from his crouching position to glare angrily at his tormentors. He beats them out of the room in a fit of righteous indignation at such profanation of the temple. All the players leave the room apart from Simon Peter and John. They are going to pronounce the final verdict in which they would reject divine love and freedom. John tells a story of a room at the attic where God came with a promise to teach him but taught him nothing. *I understood you came to me by mistake*, is John's

³ This statement was omitted in the English script, but it was preserved in Dzieduszycka's (1974:32) version.

conclusion. Only the Simpleton and Simon Peter remain. They are sitting on the floor facing each other holding the remaining two candles. The ultimate accusation from Simon Peter concerns human freedom of choice.

Instead of the strict ancient law, man in future had to decide for himself with a free heart what is good and what is evil, having only your image before him for guidance. But did it never occur to you that he would at last reject and call in question even your image and your truth, if he were weighed down by so fearful a burden as freedom of choice?

A strange couple erupts the room. It is Mary Magdalene and Judas who bring with them an assortment of objects: a pail of water, black garment, glass phials, old shoes and white starched cloths. The scene is a parody of the procession of the two Marys to Christ's grave. Two old women are performing a comic ritual of washing and dressing themselves before a funeral. This is what man's freedom of choice boils down to: a ridiculous procession of old hags staggering to the grave chanting mournfully funeral songs. Mary Magdalene spreads the white cloth on the floor as if she was uncovering the grave. It is empty – Christ has risen from the dead. Simon Peter continues his accusation: *I do not want your love because I do not love you myself. [...] We are not with you but with him: that is our secret! It's a long time – many centuries – since we left you and went over to him.* In response, the Simpleton expresses his regret that history *Gives too late / What's not believed in.* His face shows exhaustion and utter despair. He drops to his knees and begins to sing in a low, sobbing voice: *Cogitavit Dominus dissipare.* At the same time, Simon Peter crawls stealthily towards him, extinguishing the candles one by one, as he goes. Suddenly, he blows the last candle and the room plunges in the darkness. Then follow Simon Peter's words: *Go, and come no more.* Mercilessly, the lights are flickered and the room is empty.

On the metaphorical level the transformation of man who becomes God in *Apocalypsis Cum Figuris* resembles ritual sacrifice, which according to Jung (1992:7), is rooted in Greek *deiphon* ('feast') and *thysia* (from *thein* – 'to offer', 'to kill' but also 'to burn', 'to boil'). Thus Grotowski's spectacle can be compared to a ritual feast during which the participants are consuming an offering. The essential elements of the sacrifice are bread transformed into a body and ritual dance which augurs the transformation itself. This is a ceremony which involves an active participation of both the actors and the audience. Grotowski uses ritual in order to provoke the audience's instinctive reactions such as terror or disgust. This can be observed in the very first scene of transformation of bread into a body which is virtually consumed and violated. In the funeral scene the mourners are consuming bread while sitting on Lazarus' body, which associates with both cannibalism and the holy communion. Lazarus then thrusts the bread at the Simpleton's face using it as an instrument of humiliation. Thus bread is the body, both God's and human, the food to satisfy one's hunger and a symbol of metaphysical transformation.

While bread and body are used in the spectacle as instruments of transformation, dance, which here has a form of a Dionysian orgy, constitutes an act of transformation itself. It is introduced in the wedding scene, which follows Simon Peter's first accusation. It aims at relieving the tension and releasing energy which has accumulated as a result of Simon Peter's assault on the Simpleton. The dancers fill the whole space in a chaotic uncontrolled frenzied orgy. The Simpleton tries in vain to join in the fun by imitating their movements awkwardly. He is outside the circle, excluded from the game. Likewise, the dance which follows the scene of love between the Simpleton and Mary Magdalene counterpoints the elevated mood of the previous scene as well as augurs the Simpleton's transformation. Again, the Simpleton remains outside the circle of the dancers, which not only emphasises his isolation but also makes the audience aware of the fact that he is the only one excluded from the convention of a folk carnival, at the same time, being unaware of the rules of the convention. Church and folk songs mixed with contemporary pop music serve the same purpose as dance in the spectacle. They aim at setting the performance in a contemporary reality, which adds a universal dimension to a biblical parable and initiates the process of inner transformation of both the performers and the audience.

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