

The decline of Poland as a “pre-figure” of the decline of Europe (on the genesis of Witkacy’s catastrophism)

URSZULA OSYPIUK

Maria Curie-Skłodowska University, Department of Sociology, pl. Marii Curie-Skłodowskiej 4, 20031 Lublin, Poland

STEFAN SYMOTIUK

Maria Curie-Skłodowska University, Department of the Philosophy of Culture, pl. Marii Curie-Skłodowskiej 4, 20031 Lublin, Poland

E-mail: symotiuk@yahoo.com

This subject belongs to the interpretational canon of Witkacy’s philosophy of history to situate him among the numerous families of European catastrophists: Spengler, Ortega-y-Gasset, Simmel, Berdyaev and others. An illusion is created that Polish decadency, which is continued by Witkacy, was a phenomenon accompanying the premonition of the crisis and fall that were outlined in Europe in the twilight of *la belle époque* and became stronger after the upheaval of World War I. However, Poland had been engrossed in pessimism, the feeling of failure and masochist self-flagellation much earlier (and longer) than the culture of the West. The obsession with catastrophe would come back after every failed uprising, every new wave of exile, emigration and disappointment.

Key words: catastrophism, silent catastrophe, historical entropy

The thoughts which appeared in the pessimism of Western Europe as premonitions, in Poland had a trait of a balance, western prognoses were diagnoses here. Western “moods” were festering passions here. In the eyes of the historians of philosophy from the domestic “Krakow school”, “Warsaw school” or “Poznan school”, or of the Paris and London emigration circles, Poland looked like the laboratory of the world crisis. It offered an outline of the fate of all European democracies, liberalism, individualism and pacifism, facing the power of organisation, discipline, beaurocracy and militarism.

A particularly masochist type of Polish catastrophism was revealed in the writings of the “Krakow school” headed by M. Bobrzynski. They also shaped a literary generation of Krakow decadency (Przybyszewski, partly Wyspianski). Indeed, the life and work of Przybyszewski were like an embodiment of “a Pole” from Bobrzynski’s papers. The thesis that the Poles are a nation lost due to their anarchy, thoughtlessness, lack of planning, sentimental emotionality and mad gestures were tried out by Przybyszewski on himself, which he did with the passion of a stigmatist. He replied with the tragedy of his own biography to the tragedy of the nation’s fall, the one that was imposed by Bobrzynski on the collective imagination. Similarly masochist tendencies can be found later in the works by Gombrowicz, though with some elements of grotesque.

The fate of Poland gains a different dimension in Witkacy’s catastrophism. It is not an amorphous individual, not a particular “loser”, but the whole European civilization (or even the whole human race) that should replicate the decline of Poland. One can hear some sneer-

ing consolation for the history of the fallen nation: "You will be followed by the others". Both Przybyszewski and Gombrowicz were masochistic. Witkacy is sadistic. He sneers at the whole civilization created by the white race, which is following the rut of the political and cultural evolution of Poland and which is to expect exactly the same fate. He doesn't write anything on the scale of "Warnings for Poland". What he writes is "Warnings for Europe".

The idea that the history of Poland – for better or worse – is precursory for the fate of Europe made a frequent theme in Polish political journalism of the 19th century. "The Summary" of the arguments confirming this idea was a booklet by Antoni Chołoniewski, entitled "Duch dziejow Polski" (The Spirit of the Polish History). He did not deny that the values and institutions constitutive for the Polish cultural environment had contributed to the future fall. However, he saw the reason for this state in the barbarity and amorality of the neighboring empires. Yet it happened so that the nations of the West followed the track of Polish values and institutions. What happened in the 19th century was diminishing the state's role (to that of a "night watchman"), and the parliamentary system became a copy of the Polish style of carrying out the proceedings (including fights and commotions among the members of parliament). The rules of tolerance, freedom of speech, the election of the executive, the rule of making small property common, women's emancipation, etc. were accepted. Finally, at the end of World War I, Chołoniewski states, a similar confrontation of the democratic and despotic elements took place that had previously took place with the participation of the Poles. Now the empires, which had been "prisons of the nations", were disintegrating. The journalist concludes triumphantly: "The peoples of Europe, overwhelmed by the excess of failures brought about onto their shoulders by the hitherto rules of the force above the law, trying to find permanent security against similar catastrophes occurring again, turn with passionate longing to the principles which make the core and sense of our historical existence. They want to oppose the state understood as an absolute and subjecting living individuals to its abstract purposes with a state organization for which the man makes the aim. Physical superiority seen as the final say in politics should be opposed by the rule of moral principles. The mutual destruction of nations – by coexistence and cooperation [...]. The principles whose profound divine wisdom was understood by the nations of Europe only amongst the horrendous sufferings of World War I, those principles had been applied by us, the Poles, for hundreds of years, within the borders determined for the idea of a society by the development of the epoch. The ideas which are holding the future of the world are ours" (Chołoniewski 1918: 11–12).

As soon as fifteen years later Chołoniewski's optimism could be treated ironically. Indeed, Europe did enter the stage characteristic of the dawn of the Polish civilization: on the one hand, there was unbridled consumerism reminding of "the times of the Saxon kings' reign", the markets flooded with mass production, garish advertising and the cult of pleasure; on the other hand – constant social vibration, anxiety, rising tension with frustrating perspectives. Moreover, despite the fact that the whole Europe seemed to resemble Poland under Saxon rules, there was open renaissance – on the global scale – of the previous political system. Just like previously Poland had been stuck between the occupational and expansive powers of Russia and Germany, now it seemed that a similar system was recreated on the scale of continents. The decomposing cluster of European nations and countries was surrounded again by the ascetic and well-organized Eastern society – China this time. And from the West, industrialized America is emanating its fluids onto Europe which had been "polonised" unawares. China has "taken over" the old traits of Russia from the visions of the Polish carastrophists: its absolutism, demographic and spatial power, organization, discipline, militarism and ex-

pansion, whereas America was a symbol of a different "human anthill", technical, urbanized, absorbing legions of emigrants, an empire of automation ("taylorisation"). It is a symbol of old Germany which was seen by the Poles as a country of advanced technology, frugality, a market absorbing Polish labor force and flooding the country with their products.

In this new epoch, another repetition of the fate of Poland is taking place: all European nations are between a rock and a hard place presented by Asia and America, just like Poland was stuck previously between Russia and Germany. The proportions of power are identical. Can cultural and political autonomy, which has been lost by a particular nation in this case, be maintained by a group of nations?

THE PRINCIPLES OF HISTORICAL "ENTROPY" IN M. BOBRZYŃSKI'S CATASTROPHISM

The major character of Polish catastrophism, M. Bobrzyński, was by no means a fatalist. He was even eager to accept the heuristic value of historical thinking according to the formula "what would happen if...?" He does not claim that the reasons for Poland's fall can be found in the innate temperament or national character of the Poles. The internal reason for Poland's fall is only taking up a wrong strategic decision concerning the development. It was "scattering" human forces along the empty borderland of the East instead of accumulating them in the narrow space of indigenous Poland and strengthening them in the aspects of demography, economy, urbanization and politics. The wrong decision made the first link in a chain of historical mistakes. A system of necessities was accepted as a system of virtues which became interior and fixed in a form of national "personality". Yet if something results from a decision, it can be changed with another decision.

This very fundamental diagnosis by Bobrzyński can be treated as an idea of a more universal significance, as the 19th century Europe had just entered a stage of massive removal of "the excess" of people, a great emigration movement involving a lot of energetic and entrepreneurial individuals, losing thus its social "density" indispensable for stable existence.

The result of the deconcentration of the population, M. Bobrzyński is reasoning on the example of Poland, is a decrease in historical dynamics. Its consequence is, as he writes, tolerance resulting "from the lack of strong religious beliefs" (Bobrzyński 1986: 422):

Talent, character and political wisdom disappear in the whole society [...]. Since this nation has not found in itself the necessary strength of beliefs, it was not convulsed by passions, it did not have great personalities who would be ready to devote their own peace to defend the principles and would face the punishment. All our most prominent celebrities from the last three hundred years: Tarnowski, Zamoyski, Zebrzydowski, Zolkiewski, Lubomirski, Potocki, the Czartoryskis, not to mention others, eventually are bloodless and lifeless characters who did not manage to reach any enormous size or real dramatism, either in good or in bad (Bobrzyński 1986: 449, 451–452).

What is present here is "vain boastfulness placing itself higher in relation to other western nations leading in civilization" (Bobrzyński 1986: 457). And all this due to the fact that Poland had been assigned the enormous task of civilising and colonising the vast regions of Russia and Lithuania. It handled this with pride, yet the assignment absorbed our most vital forces and scattered them across the far East, instead of letting them strengthen and unite within some more limited area and start living amore profound and busier life [...]. However, we couldn't survive without the union, and the very union consumed us internally. Such is the vicious circle of our decline (Bobrzyński 1986: 453). Whereas the exploitation of the common

people by the nobility, or humiliation of the towns, or the moral confusion and dimming of intelligentsia – all these were minor phenomena (Bobrzyński 1986: 450). Social dispersion results in a set of features such as individualism, anti-intellectualism, the cult of mediocrity, egalitarianism, lack of persistence, the role of family life dominating the public sphere, and the feminization of culture.

There is a clear similarity between the social catastrophe outlined in this way and the theory of "entropy" formulated by Clausius. However, since entropy according to the natural science of those times affects the whole universe with its "thermal death", while the process in the social scale according to Bobrzyński affects Poland only, this country becomes a local representation of cosmic processes. The history of other nations was perceived as anti-entropy (state centralization, limiting freedom, intolerance as an expression of strong feelings, rationalism in perceiving the world, the cult of powerful leaders, moderation and persistence, limiting the role of the family and women in the public life). The leader of Krakow catastrophists did not even compare the fall of Poland with similar chronic cases in our history, such as those of Greece, Persia, Rome or the majority of the nations of Central Europe, nor did he create any more general theory of historical fall (though undoubtedly, as an "immanentist", he remained close to Gibbon and Taine). Thus, the local entropy of the Polish nation became even more so a symbol of cosmic rather than historical processes. At the same time, social dispersion acquires a non-human, unfamiliar, material, anonymous character. The same type of perception concerning the process of historical entropy can be discovered later in Witkacy's catastrophism. This function is played here by the inhuman world of technology which interferes violently with the social life and atomizes it. And all this has its political context, since Witkacy would probably subscribe to Gambetta's opinion that "the locomotive votes for democracy". The only problem is that there is a similar situation with the printing house, cinema, cafe, dancing club, cheap building and a number of other factors of this type. Life comfort and "living your life" become common. And these phenomena are quite well known in Poland.

THE MASS CULTURE OF EUROPE – A REPETITION OF "THE SAXON TIMES"

The "democratization", as it is understood on the pages of Witkacy's works, has nothing in common with the system of social representation. This is rather an ostentatious reign of masses that are grouped due to the powers of civilization into large concentrations: on stadiums, in factories, cinemas and public squares. Mass production and mass culture bring with them an excess of bread and games. Everything is subject to impressionist enlarging. Consumption becomes Big Chow-Down ("The pig was gobbling", Witkacy states with hatred in *Nienasycenie*), there comes great theatricalization of life, common "trumpet blowing", with no justification, the level of social awareness molded by papers and gutter literature is close to general stupefaction. Life is going on among glasses of vodka, little snacks, drunkenness and fuckiness, with the background of beguiling sounds, decomposing everything into a mindless hodgepodge of some deadly-cesspit, not regular-brothel any more, music (Witkiewicz 1982: 280).

The European civilization puts on a carnival costume which hides the previous middle-class order. The new pace of life is reflected in jazz music present in public places and the crazy rhythm of the silent movie. To Witkacy, film became a model for a postulate to reform the theatre towards avantgarde. However, what makes the content of the social atmosphere reflected by the silent movie, what sets the funny character played by Chaplin on a pedestal, is the well-known playful lifestyle of the Saxon times in Poland, when, as Kitowicz writes, it

was the highest intention of the treatment and the contentment for the host, to hear on the following day from his servant that none of the gussets had left sober, and one of them, rolling down, got down the stairs head over heels; and that another one had been carried home like a dead body; and someone else had hit the side of his head against a wall; some other two guests, having argued, got it right in the snout; and finally that a gentleman, walking unsteadily, fell down into the mud, and also lost a tooth against a rock (Kitowicz 1970: 364). This is a prototype scene for Witkacy's stage technique.

Similarly to the debauchery of the Saxon times, the excitement of the times of mass culture leads to consuming for show and for testing the limits of the organism. Drunkenness must end in stupor and is accompanied with the atmosphere of "fraternizing" and ostentatious "trumpet blowing". Pride reveals its void. Affluence, comfort and luxury are not aims for their own sake. They are to produce common happiness, and at the same time to destroy the community, often through degrading individuals, as described by Kitowicz. Chaplin, Buster Keaton, Lloyd George seem to enter the screen straight from the pages of *Opis obyczajów za panowania Augusta III* (*Description of Customs during the Reign of King August III*). After several ages of ascetism, hard work, rational organization and order the world entered the road to "polonization". It started living in the atmosphere of condition-dependent prosperity; it became permeated by a feeling of provisional, immediate and passing character. Primitive tastes and mannerism in the literature of baroque, the intellectual level of *Nowe Ateny* (*New Athens*) by Chmielowski, the trivial nature of calendars which made primary reading to noblemen make a beginning for gutter literature and "afternoon press" in contemporary Europe. The rowdiness of noblemen "parties", their noisiness and "rattling the saber" can be found in the policies of European governments and parties, whereas boastful bragging with "power" is seen in radical tendencies, in demagogues looking for cheap popularity. Such a character is Gnebon Puczymorda, a caricature of Mussolini, in one of Witkacy's plays. Mass culture even surpassed "noblemen's vices" in the threat of its consequences: the lack of authenticity or belief in anything, the hopeless flatness of life, the uncertainty of human fate, general apathy and boredom, common ignorance. The terrifying relativity of all those values was to be given the universal status by Witkacy. And all this accompanied by a passion, also known from the Saxon times, to take care of your little affairs, a tendency to "be fine", petty providence, receptivity to gossip and unrefined sensation. Ostentatious consumption and petty selfishness make two sides of the same process of homogenization. They contain graded affirmation towards the world, expressing unwillingness to shape it. Hence, even the religious life of this epoch in the history of Europe resembles the superficial and "tepid" religiousness of the Polish noble class. This is an area of group behavior, giving space for the spiritual penetration of Europe by the Asian civilization whose religiousness was always immanentist, nihilist and affirmative in a strangely superficial way. This penetration of Asian spiritual aspects into the area of European culture is expressed by "mass hypnosis". Everyone was engrossed in admiration for others and thus, without realizing it, they strengthened their own admiration for themselves. Petty hatred would melt in the sauce of common goodness, and even the bigger one slowly became more benign. The happiness of Dzevani supporters, clearly visible, caused such enormous jealousy that whole crowds of people not believing in anything similar to the teachings of Murti Bing, or believing in something completely different, began to gravitate in its direction for quite practical reasons and ended in mass hypnosis and subjected themselves to its not quite comprehensible rules (Witkiewicz 1982: 364). The tendency to "herd activities" was a type of irrationalism which often emerged in the foreground in the analyses of the

history of Poland by the Polish catastrophists. They referred to either macro-philosophy-of-history schemes of "martyrdom" and "pilgrimage" of the nation, as it was in the Bible, or to the popular "psychology of the crowd", as described by Le Bon. Such psychology is not absent, despite the apparent "rationalism", in M. Bobrzyński or Witkacy. They both take it for granted that the demographic "dispersion" (in the former) or "technicization" (in the latter) must lead to the degeneration of culture. Such degeneration, however, is taking place parallel with the pressure of external forces. And it is impossible to decide here: is the paroxysm of "living your life" a method to deaden the fear of the external forces approaching, or is it some independent state which creates a void by "sucking in" the dangerous fluids of those distant forces? The unsettled dispute about the "internal" or "external" reasons of the fall of Poland influences the unclear issues in Witkacy's vision of "the fall of Europe" and the degree determining the influence of technology on that fall.

Nevertheless, the inevitability of Europe's fall is obvious, similar to the fall of Poland. Just like Poland gave in to better organized neighbors, Europe will give in to China. Just like in Poland, there were open supporters of external powers; collectivism spreading here is making the way for distant Chinese armies. And finally, what is meant is not the fall in the sense of physical extermination. This is only a fall in the sense of being embodied into a larger political and civilizational structure. Poland did not "disappear" in the sense of people, cities or language disappearance. It only lost its "soul" which is characteristic of autonomous entities. Similarly, Europe will not "disappear". And as far as the soul of the latter is concerned, hasn't it been lost already? Hasn't Europe become a country "upon-Vistula River" among the continents?

WITKACY'S MODEL OF "SILENT CATASTROPHE"

We were not, M. Bobrzyński wrote, relatively weaker by the area, population, or affluence, or intelligence when we were being partitioned by our neighbours, we even surpassed each of them in this or other respect, and still we were the only ones who fell without a fight, without any genuine fight that we could afford (Bobrzyński 1986: 448).

A clearly unfair judgment, opposing the heroic picture of national resistance, uprisings, rebellions, etc. It was not only M. Bobrzyński in the history of Polish catastrophic thinking who succumbed to "conspiracy theory" of historical development, which stated that there must be some kind of plot, silent or hidden, underlying the flow of history. Wasn't the "passivity" of the nation facing the threats of a kind of a "plot"? Weren't there open plots of destructive forces (e. g., Targowica)? And, finally, there were plots of courts, governments and monarchs, which resulted in military decisions. Such a picture of a fall was reinforced in Poland, especially as the European public opinion, papers, moral and political authorities expressed their opinion about "the Polish case", and at the same time the governments of the western countries, with no exception, washed their hands of any practical, energetic actions in this respect. The terror of the processes of decline lies in the silence of the forces planning intrigues, and doing so in secret, confidentially, silently¹ (Bobrzyński 1986: 282).

¹ The atmosphere of sick suspiciousness and speculation permeates the whole society of *Nienasycenie* (Insatiability): They were talking about secret conferences of Kosmoluchowicz and Dzewani, at four in the morning in the black chamber [...] But who were the gentlemen: the Cyferblatowicz, the Boroeder, the Koldryk? Some mythical characters – and there was someone behind this, like a wall. – "But why? What for?" – the whole Peculiar Republic of Poland was whispering.

A picture of such phenomena was established quite early in the European mentality. To Protestants, such a perverse force was the Jesuits, to nationalists – the Masonic lodge, to the supporters of “law and order” – groups of anarchist “militants”. G. W. F. Hegel put into his philosophy of history an image of the “cunning spirit of history” which is motivated by deceit. E. Gibbon’s vision of “the decline of the Roman Empire” had its climax in the description of the religion which was mildly sneaking into human minds and, acquiring new strength from the fact that it was being fought against, it was rising in silence and in shade, only to put up a triumphant banner on the ruins of the Capitol (Gibbon 1975:11). H. Taine saw the catastrophe of the monarchist system in the lightheartedness of the French elite and in the “decomposing” activities of Enlightenment salons. The disease always starts before the decline. It turns genuine and predictable forces of systems into appearances and illusions, because some of them are paralyzed from inside. Hence, people are always surprised when an apparently strong entity declines dramatically and completely. Such is the fate, Witkacy supposes, of Europe which has just managed to rule the globe, due to its navy, science and the legions of emigrants.

In Polish catastrophism, the idea of a “plot” was present already with the first chroniclers. It was the ambiguous opinion of the Church and western communities concerning the Teutonic Order that almost led to the extermination of the young Christian country. It was treachery that killed Władysław Warnencyk and the flower of knighthood at Varna. It was the silly Succor of Vienna that strengthened the fake Austrians who soon defeated a third of the country. It can also be noticed that in the face of the danger coming from the East, in the story of *Nienasyćenie (Insatiability)* the attitude of the rest of the endangered continent is still unctuous. Indeed, it protects the Polish country by means of credits, yet General Quartermaster Kocmoluchowicz has only Polish troops at his disposal. And, according to his calculations, these are sufficient to eliminate “three quarters” of the Chinese army, so his chances would be much higher with the united resistance of the remaining countries. These, however, are waiting to see the result of the battle at the Polish border, repeating thus the old scheme. Their mistake, after all, is a repetition of Poland’s errors – Poland had never managed to call up all its human and military forces, either. The conclusions are drawn by Kocmoluchowicz himself, who offers the invaders his help in defeating the rest of the world. Here you can hear the multiple voice of Polish historians who *post factum* advised Jan Sobieski to leave Austria to be gorged by the Ottoman Empire.

Witkacy’s catastrophism is grounded, however, in the tradition in which declining values are not accompanied by noise, tremors and external dramatism² (Lempicki 1938). Historical entities are waiting for their end in silence and confusion, without calling for help – they realize that there is no help – and the exhausted individual personality, dying under the weight of egalitarian masses, does not dare produce a final cry of pain and despair, not to disturb that silence which precedes great events. The country changed into one huge waiting room, with such a mad tension of potentials of waiting that had not been noted in history before. It may have been only the Jews who were waiting for Messiah, like here everybody was waiting for something unknown (Witkiewicz 1982: 191–192).

Where should we look for that plot, the sinister intrigue which first put an end to the existence of “the Peculiar Republic of Poland” and is now pushing Europe, so triumphant not long ago, downhill? Can it be found in the chain of circumstances which lead to taking wrong

² A relevant description of such a point of view on history is presented in the work by J. Lempicki *Historiozofia Hipolita Taine’a*. Krakow, 1938.

decisions, is the irrational moment hidden in the psychology of herds and mad leaders or is it the civilisational trend that provokes total pragmatism, utilitarianism and stagnation?

It should be remembered that Witkacy's thoughts concerning this issue were expressed already in the atmosphere of increasing campaigns against the "plot of the international finance" and "world Jewry". The diagnoses put forward by our catastrophist were full of the rigorism of social thinking, typical of Enlightenment and Positivism. To him, catastrophe is not a historical event for which anyone could be regarded "guilty". It is encrypted in "human nature", it is of anthropological character. The future simply belongs to those people who were described by Witkacy-the-father in his letters to his son: Sober people have multiplied here recently, more than any essential need be. [...] [T]hey present their wisdom of daily bread and present day – they cannot see anything in the future and expect only, with hopeless materialism, real values, namely what you can get without an effort, what is the rest of the work and the fight of previous generations, what is there ready for them and satisfies the needs of the common egoism (Kornilowicz 1916: 21). And more: sober people, that is those who are narrow and vulgar, can only experience the ordinariness of their own souls and the shortsightedness of their minds, accepting only the value of what can be calculated into money in the final account (Kornilowicz 1916: 20–21).

The social development had in itself a decline encoded from the beginning, the latter was present in the form of an embryo which was growing along with the growth of mass culture and democratization. Progressive homogenization accelerated the gradual decline. The moment of entering "new social reality" should be such that it is not noticed by anyone. "The silence" of this extermination is guaranteed by the premises of naturalist background. People believed that a little house with a garden, journeys around the world and popular knowledge are the only solution for the happy leisure time of the future man; their own body, own woman or own toothbrush – they will never renounce these (Witkiewicz 1979: 214).

As it can be observed in many plays and novels by Witkacy, after every historical "shock" the group life is brought back to normality instantly, on the basis of ordinary, common everyday life. As if nothing "happened". The revival of human existence around such rudimentary processes as eating, washing, getting dressed, etc. shocked the witnesses of "great historic events" on many occasions. They were surprised by the easiness with which the participants of the events soon accepted them as the "order of the day". The life on this level seems not to undergo any vibrations caused by historical fluctuations, such as wars, revolutions, death. Hence, human race is not threatened by any extermination of apocalyptic character. It only faces a threat of the amputation of a certain dimension of existence (the ability to experience the metaphysics of existence), which is a significant, yet only partial, catastrophe. Such falls do not even inhibit the dynamics of practical activities. On the contrary – they can enable them. The Polish Positivists referred even quite frequently to the example of the Czechs who, after losing their noble class in the battle of Biala Gora, lost completely their previous hastiness of religious life and indulged effectively in creating an affluent and prosperous middle-class society of a high material standard. That was the change that was promoted by the Positivists of Poznan and Warsaw and also by the "realists" of Krakow where as Witkacy puts it, as "inevitable future", into the fate of the whole European culture. However, what was perceived as a miraculous therapy by the Positivists (Boy-Zelenski: "more soap!"), is sneered by Witkacy – and at the same time treated with resignation. A sense of comedy characteristic of Witkacy is related to his belief in the fundamental durability of life which is not threatened with extinction and which, on its elementary level of development, is able to survive all crises and catastrophes. Life is not similar

to reed here, but it has some rough and persistent will to raise from fall, similarly to a Russian doll. It is firmly secured somewhere at the base of its construction, so we can laugh at it, just like we laugh at an individual falling over a banana skin: we know that he cannot be badly hurt. Hence, the history of mankind resembles the atmosphere of Republika Babinska (Women's Republic), something that makes a common denominator between *Szewcy* (*Shoemakers*) and Jerry's *Ubu the King*. On the level of this "baroque spirit" it would be possible to find a wider European context for Witkacy's catastrophism, e. g., in Rabelais' works. The duality of the baroque viewpoint results, on the one hand, from a need for tension, complexity, excitement, but on the other hand from a feeling of stability and having an asylum in the form of "my quiet village" where you can hide away from historical unrest. The dream of a man living in 1999, which is when the story of *Insatiability* is taking place, to have his own "little house with a garden" is a continuation of that "quiet village" from the Polish past days.

J. Lempicki, analyzing the contemporary philosophy of history, wrote about two models of such thinking on the example of Taine: Taine only lacks completely that hysterical cry, hand wringing and that uproar that made Spengler famous everywhere in the world. Taine's cultural types do not have such lushness and aggressiveness like *hallucinationes varies* and Spengler's types. They do not defend themselves, they do not fight for survival or create dramatic situations, but they peacefully retreat to make place for new types. Epochs do not die fighting for survival in convulsions, but they slowly wear out. Some part of Taine's stoicism was passed on the epochs. They do not protest against their own death, trusting vaguely that this is a manifestation of law, and if it is not unfair then at least overwhelming and honorable (Lempicki 1938: 123).

This opinion matches well Bobrzyński's *Dzieje Polski* (*The History of Poland*), with his underlying theme in the form of a vision of entropy as a rule of blurring and decay of Old Polish history. There is also a concurrence with Witkacy, who often uses the formula of "becoming used up", defining it with a young pup word "frittering away", "wyprztykanie" in Polish, (e.g., father Wyprztyk in *Pozegnanie jesieni* (*Farewell to Autumn*) as a representative of a religious epoch dying out). Thus, the following words written by Lempicki can also refer to Witkacy: Tragedy appears only when there is death of something that has a justified reason to live. Yet with Taine, epochs before their death would spend up anything they possessed to the last penny, so they died as paupers. In that way, even death was something like gloomy justice of nature [...] Taine never regretted the fading forms of culture or species condemned to extinction. He valued more the transformism which was the core of "Nature" and the foundation of the existence of the empirical world. It is forbidden to make petty private accusations against nature (Lempicki 1938: 123).

Witkacy's works are dominated by a similar tone, but he differs from Taine, and from Spengler as well, in his note of derision. There seems to be a grain of sadism in Witkacy's treatment of the future of European Civilization, as he eagerly situates it in the place of "pre-decline prime" of old Poland.

The above criticism and emotional disrespect may reveal the same disrelish that was expressed by numerous Polish historical thinkers, especially after the failure of consecutive uprisings, in reference to western countries: "the same will happen to you" and "you will follow the same road".

Received 23 October 2006
Accepted 17 November 2006

References

1. Bobrzynski, M. 1986. *Dzieje Polski w zarysie*. Warszawa: PIW.
2. Chołoniewski, A. 1918. *Duch dziejów Polski*. Kraków: Tow. im. S. Buszczyńskiego.
3. Gibbon, E. 1975. *Zmierzch Cesarstwa Rzymskiego*, transl. Z. Kierszys, vol. 2. Warszawa: PIW.
4. Kitowicz, J. 1970. *Opis obyczajów za panowania Augusta III*, ed. T. Pollak. Wrocław: Ossolineum.
5. Kornilowicz, T. 1916. *O Stanisławie Witkiewiczu*. Kraków.
6. Lempicki, J. 1938. *Historiozofia Hipolita Taine'a*. Kraków: Skład Główny w Kasie im. Mianowskiego.
7. Witkiewicz, S. I. 1979. *Narkotyki. Niemyte dusze*. Warszawa: PIW.
8. Witkiewicz, S. I. 1982. *Nienasylenie*. Warszawa: PIW.

URSZULA OSYPIUK, STEFAN SYMOTIUK

Lenkijos nuosmukis kaip Europos nuosmukio „provaizdis“ (Witkacy'o katastrofizmo analizė)

Santrauka

Straipsnyje analizuojamas Witkacy'o katastrofizmas Europos katastrofistų – Spenglerio, Ortegos y Gasseto, Simmelio, Berdiajevo ir kitų – kontekste. Straipsnių autorių nuomone, lenkų dekadencijos, kurio tęsėjas buvo Witkacy's, pasėjo krizės ir nuopuolio iliuziją, kurią lydėjo karo epochos sutemos. Šios nuotaikos sustiprėjusios po Pirmojo pasaulinio karo neramumų. Lenkijos kultūrą esą buvo apėmęs pesimizmas, savigrauža ir mazochistinė savikritika daug anksčiau nei Vakarų. Katastrofos manija esą grįžta po kiekvieno nepavykusio maišto, naujos tremties bangos, emigracijos ir nusivylimo.

Raktažodžiai: katastrofizmas, tyli katastrofa, istorinė entropija