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Contemporary Fears. Plays that Received Awards in 2023 Drama Competition “Contact Zones” against the Tradition of Romanticism

Abstract: This article presents an analysis of three plays that received awards in the 2023 *Contact Zones* playwriting competition organised by the Wrocław Maria and Edmund Wierciński Contemporary Theatre and the City of Wrocław. These were Ignacy Karpowicz’s *Rozmowy mijane* [Passing Conversations] (the main prize), Zenon Fajfer’s *Uwolnienie* [Release] and Małgorzata Sikorska-Miszczuk’s *Dziennik szatu i chciwości* [Diary of Frenzy and Greed] (which received two out of four prizes, which are the equivalent of the honourable mention). These works differ in how they depict the world, the form of the message, how they construct and objectify anxiety, but also in terms of the game played with the tradition of Romanticism, an epoch of special importance in Polish culture and remembered in many ways in 2022, which the Polish Parliament designated the Year of Polish Romanticism.

Thus, these works feature characters of unclear ontological status, ghosts, phantoms and wraiths (*Dziennik szatu i chciwości*, *Rozmowy mijane*), drawing attention to the uncanny and phenomena that elude human reason, quotations from Romantic works and various allusions. The Romantic context is not always recorded in these plays. Then they are kinds of geological memories of the dramas, reservoirs of specific themes and ways of expressing them, and specific models of the depicted world. Scenic situations are created or the protagonist is constructed as lonely, unhappy, and looking for love and a purpose in life.

The anxieties of the characters are revealed through typical techniques: the frightening closed room (*Dziennik szatu i chciwości*), the characters’ confinement in some space (*Uwolnienie*), their escape from the world and people (*Dziennik szatu i chciwości*), the experience of emptiness (*Uwolnienie*), the search for a purpose in life and the desire to define oneself

(*Rozmowy mijane*). The way the characters are shown and constructed, as well as the world depicted, encourage us to ask questions about the condition of modernity, and, furthermore, in juxtaposition with Romanticism.

Keywords: contemporary Polish drama, Romantic heritage, fears and anxieties in plays, *Contact Zones* drama competition.

The year 2020 seems to have marked one of the caesuras in the history of the world, as everyone regardless of where they live experienced the effects of the pandemic. The sense of uncertainty and rapid economic deterioration led to the release of near-basic fears, hidden under the ideology of consumption, regarding the lives and safety of loved ones. Thus, faith in the capabilities of man, science and medicine was shaken. This state of uncertainty was compounded by the media in Poland (increasingly clearly populist), the war in Ukraine, and the financial and energy crisis. If we add to this the cultural crisis that has been going on for many years, with researchers invalidating successive grand narratives and declaring the “death” of particular figures in it, it should come as no surprise that fear and uncertainty have become a marker of modernity. Interestingly, by creating characters and showing their situation in the world, the authors readily turn to motifs and solutions familiar from the Romantic era, especially its dark current.¹ According to Edward Kasperski, after all, one of the achievements of Romanticism was the discovery and depiction of the “dialectic of anxiety”, which has been used by subsequent generations.² Contemporary artists use pastiche and parody, evoke fragments of old works, build a mood of horror and the uncanny, reach for images of catastrophe, and populate their worlds with

¹ See Jarosław Ławski, “Co to jest czarny romantyzm?” [What is Dark Romanticism?], in Jarosław Ławski, *Bo na tym świecie Śmierć. Studia o czarnym romantyzmie* [Because in this World Death. Studies on Dark Romanticism] (Gdańsk: słowo/ obraz/ terytoria 2008), 7–36; Dorota Dobrzyńska, *Czarny romantyzm we współczesnej literaturze popularnej. Wybrane zagadnienia* [Dark Romanticism in Contemporary Popular Literature. Selected Issues] (Warszawa: Instytut Slawistyki PAN 2020); Kamil Barski, “Korzenie lęku. Katastroficzna historiozofia romantyzmu jako źródło kategorii grozy w literaturze epoki” [Roots of Fear. The Catastrophic Historiosophy of Romanticism as a Source of the Category of Horror in the Literature of the Epoch], *Ruch Literacki* 1, 376 (2023): 63–83; “Wstęp” [Introduction], in *Romantyzm w literaturze i kulturze po 1989 roku. Mapowanie recepcji* [Romanticism in Literature and Culture after 1989. Mapping Reception], eds. Danuta Zawadzka, Krzysztof Andruczyk, Magdalena Dudzińska, and Monika Justyna Roman (Sejny: Fundacja Pogranicze 2019), 6–13.

² Edward Kasperski, “Literatura i lęk. W kręgu poetyki, estetyki i antropologii” [Literature and Anxiety. In the Circle of Poetics, Aesthetics and Anthropology], in *Przestrzenie lęku. Lęk w kulturze i sztuce XIX–XX wieku* [Spaces of Anxiety. Anxiety in Culture and Art of the XIX–XX Century], eds. Dariusz K. Sikorski, and Tadeusz Sucharski (Słupsk: Wydawnictwo Pomorskiej Akademii Pedagogicznej w Słupsku 2006), 15.

wraiths, werewolves or night terrors, thus starting a dialogue with tradition.³ For the legacy of Romanticism turns out to be very diverse, and it cannot be limited to the current of creating or consolidating national identity “around the spiritual values of the collective, such as the homeland, independence, freedom of the nation or national solidarity”.⁴ It is also, among other things, a reservoir of loners, “gallerists of sensitivity”,⁵ who measure themselves against the unexpected, and often the unconscious (along with a disembodied model), quotations or genre allusions.

For this analysis, I have selected three plays that received awards in the 2023 playwriting contest *Strefy kontaktu*⁶ [Contact Zones], organised by the Maria and Edmund Wierciński Contemporary Theatre in Wrocław and the City of Wrocław. They are *Rozmowy mijane* [Passing Conversations] by Ignacy Karpowicz (main prize), *Uwolnienie* [Release] by Zenon Fajfer and *Dziennik szata i chciwości* [Diary of Frenzy and Greed] by Małgorzata Sikorska-Miszczuk (which received two out of four prizes, which are the equivalent of the honourable mention). Of these authors, Sikorska-Miszczuk – a playwright, dramatist and screenwriter – is most strongly associated with drama and theatre, as well as Fajfer, but he is mentioned primarily as a representative of concrete poetry, which exposes the visual aspects of texts. Fajfer has already worked with theatre, and his plays have been successfully staged in Poland and abroad.⁷ It is *Uwolnienie* that was selected for perfor-

³ See, among others, Grzegorz Uzdański, *Wypiór* (Warszawa: Wydawnictwo Filtry 2021); on this topic, Michał Gliński, “Romantyzm – widmowy czy wampiryczny? Paradygmat romantyczny jako przykład współczesnej literatury na przykładzie «Wypioru» Grzegorza Uzdańskiego” [Romanticism – Spectral or Vampiric? The Romantic Paradigm as an Example of Modern Literature on the Example of Grzegorz Uzdański’s “Wypiór”], *Ruch Literacki* 1, 376 (2023): 125–138.

⁴ Maria Janion, “Zmierzch paradygmatu” [Decline of the Paradigm], in Maria Janion, *Czy będziesz wiedział, co przeżyłeś* [Will You Know what You Experienced?] (Warszawa: Wydawnictwo Sic! 1996), 9.

⁵ This term is used by Maria Janion to define misfits and hypersensitive people, those who perceive the world and current events a little differently; Cf. *Galernicy wrażliwości* [Galley Slaves of Sensitivity], eds. Maria Janion, and Stanisław Rosiek (Gdańsk: Wydawnictwo Morskie 1981).

⁶ The drama competition *Contact Zone* has existed as a biennial since 2015. Its concept and programmatic assumptions refer to the achievements of Tadeusz Różewicz (his search for a new form/format of drama), Helmut Kajzar (exploration of the form of the theatrical encounter and theatrical conventions) and Krzysztof Zarębski, Kajzar’s colleague and one of the first performers in Poland – the creator of the term “contact zone” and its meaning, a concept defined as an effort to change human beings. The competition does not have an open format. The organisers extend their invitation to authors not exclusively associated with dramatic works.

⁷ These include *Pieta* (directed by Zenon Fajfer, 2006, 2017) and *Odlot* [Departure] (directed by Anna Augustynowicz, 2021). Of course, it is worth noting that the author gained his first directing experience in 1996.

mance at the Wrocław Contemporary Theatre. The dramas selected present different ways in which the Romantic tradition is exploited, from imitation (perhaps not fully realised) to parody. The authors reach for quotations from Romantic works, evoke recognisable themes, use the model of the depicted world and the model of the hero developed in the 19th century. As for the authors I'm interested in, it was only Karpowicz that had played intertextual games with the era before, including, among the others, *Balladyny i romance* (2010) which is a "treatise on Romanticism".⁸ Interestingly, the action of the plays mostly takes place in the evening and at night, and the stories shown hardly refer to the context of the collective/group (they refer to the stories of individuals, families or show a group of random people). Thus, it will probably not be an abuse to speak of a privatised or "deheroised history".⁹ The main characters experience the incomprehensibility of the world around them, so they find it dangerous and illogical. Two works also deal with the theme of death.¹⁰

It is worth noting that the year 2022, by the decision of the Polish Parliament, was designated the Year of Polish Romanticism.¹¹ Thus, it was a time when the heritage of the era and its creators were recalled in many ways. In the works selected for analysis, some of the references to Romanticism are circumstantial, i.e. the authors reach for themes, such as madness or the lack of general values, which in Polish literature were shaped by the Romantic

⁸ Justyna Sobolewska, "Rozmowa z Ignacym Karpowiczem, pisarzem karkołomnym" [A Conversation with Ignacy Karpowicz, a Difficult Writer], *Polityka* 44 (2010), accessed July 20, 2024, <https://www.polityka.pl/tygodnikpolityka/kultura/1509914,1,rozmowa-z-ignacym-karpowiczem-pisarzem-karkolomnym.read>.

⁹ Ławski, "Co to jest czarny romantyzm?", 13: "Panowanie nocy obejmuje w czarnym romantyzmie dziedzinę podmiotową w momencie aktu twórczego, lecz także ten najwyższy wymiar świata, jakim jest Historia. Dzieła czarnoromantyczne ukazują zazwyczaj historię zdeheroizowaną, bezcelową i zapokalizowaną. W nurcie schyłkowym [...] jest to historia poddana władzy szatana i śmierci, czasem z pewnym odcieniem dążeń rewolucyjnych" [In Dark Romanticism, the reign of the night encompasses the subjective domain at the moment of the creative act, as well as the higher dimension of the world which is history. Dark Romantic works typically show a deheroised, aimless and apocalyptic history. In the declining current [...] this is a story subordinated to the power of Satan and death, sometimes with a certain shade of revolutionary aspirations].

¹⁰ See Agata Bielik-Robson, *Na drugim brzegu nihilizmu. Filozofia współczesna w poszukiwaniu nowego podmiotu* [On the Other Side of Nihilism: Contemporary Philosophy in Search of a New Subject] (Warszawa: Wydawnictwo Instytutu Filozofii i Socjologii PAN 1997), 61–63.

¹¹ In the Year of Polish Romanticism, many cultural events were organised in Poland and abroad; see, among texts, *Podsumowanie Roku Romantyzmu Polskiego i prezentacja projektu muzycznego „Jednego serca”* [Summary of the Year of Polish Romanticism and Presentation of the Musical Project "One Heart"], accessed May 31, 2023, <https://www.gov.pl/web/kultura/podsumowanie-roku-romantyzmu-polskiego-i-prezentacja-projektu-muzycznego-jednego-serca>.

tradition. And even if after 1989, as Janion¹² decreed, this is no longer the dominant discourse, it is still one of the important points of reference, as evidenced by works published today. At most, instead of one paradigm, today we have “many romanticisms”.¹³

Many years ago, Kasperski¹⁴ pointed out that every cultural formation tries to tackle anxiety and fear, basic affects experienced in relations with the world and in interpersonal relations.¹⁵ Spaces are designated for the spontaneous expression of fear, as well as rules and ways of suppressing these emotions. Furthermore, tools and formulae for relieving tension, kinds of “anti-anxiety agents”, are sought, although at the same time a culture can fuel fear in order to justify its existence in society,¹⁶ and even reap benefits, which Adam Regiewicz wrote about in his analysis of the *fear industry*.¹⁷

There are different types of anxiety, which seem to form its layers, as one commentator and researcher of Antoni Kępiński’s theory wrote: biological anxiety, resulting from the mortality of the individual and the species, disintegration anxiety, social anxiety and moral anxiety.¹⁸ They are universal in nature, so they are experienced by the representatives of all generations. The ways in which fear and anxiety are shown, like other affects, and the practices of relieving them (in the form of gestures or behaviours) become a kind of cultural heritage. They record the experiences of their predecessors, but also shape subsequent generations. Art, including theatre, serves as such a conduit and at the same time a machine that produces further images and situations.¹⁹ In addition, showing fearful situations, depicting loss or feelings of lack remind us of the fragility and randomness of human existence, or try to bring oblivion to the unwanted and inconvenient.

¹² Janion, “Zmierzch paradygmatu,” 9.

¹³ Arkadiusz Bałajewski, *Obecność romantyzmu* [The Presence of Romanticism] (Lublin: Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Marii Curie-Skłodowskiej 2015), 13.

¹⁴ Kasperski, “Literatura i lęk. W kręgu poetyki, estetyki i antropologii,” 20–21.

¹⁵ Dariusz S. Sikorski, and Tadeusz Sucharski, “Dlaczego niepokój” [Why Anxiety?], in *Przestrzenie lęku. Lęk w kulturze i sztuce XIX–XX wieku*, 5.

¹⁶ Kasperski, “Literatura i lęk. W kręgu poetyki, estetyki i antropologii,” 20–21.

¹⁷ Adam Regiewicz, “Cywilizacja strachu, czyli Nowe Średniowiecze” [The Civilisation of Fear, or the New Middle Ages], in *Anatomia strachu. Strach, lęk i ich oblicza we współczesnej kulturze* [Anatomy of Fear. Fear, Anxiety, and Their Faces in Contemporary Culture], eds. Bogusława Bodzioch-Bryła, and Lilianna Dorak-Wojakowska (Kraków: Wydawnictwo Naukowe Akademii Ignatianum in Kraków 2017), 468–471.

¹⁸ See Jan Ceklarz, “Warstwowość lęku według Antoniego Kępińskiego” [Layering of Fear According to Antoni Kępiński], in *Anatomia strachu. Strach, lęk i ich oblicza we współczesnej kulturze*, 65–77.

¹⁹ Małgorzata Jarmułowicz, “Teatralne oblicza lęku” [Theatrical Faces of Anxiety], in *Przestrzenie lęku. Lęk w kulturze i sztuce XIX–XX wieku*, 195, 197.

In the dramas analysed, I was interested in both the fears of individuals caused by various aspects of everyday life, and in experiencing the awesomeness of a world that eludes comprehension. The works show situations of anxiety, record the behaviour and mental state of the characters, and sometimes show their causes. Reality here appears to be hostile, mysterious and threatening, and the status of the fear-inducing object is often unclear and undefined. In my readings, I also traced Romantic influences, overt references or allusions, including to the way of talking about the world created in the 19th century and the model of the hero, the (over)sensitive loner, sometimes seeking community at all costs, hungry for love and action.

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Dziennik szata i chciwości [Diary of Frenzy and Greed] by Małgorzata Sikorska-Miszczuk shows the relationship between 'crazy' Ruta and greedy Bartek, the new and ruthless manager of a privatised tenement house in Warsaw. She occupies the apartment left by her parents, is a lonely librarian of indeterminate age and appearance and she is thirsty for love, so at times she is particularly sensitive to the men she meets, but also clumsy towards them. He, on the other hand, is portrayed as an 'invader', a descendant of hungry peasants dreaming of a change in social status, which sounds a bit anachronistic, rather reminiscent of social revolutions and the emancipation of the oppressed classes, while professionally he appears as the heir of the Jews murdered during World War II whose property was nationalised. The tenement is one part of this legacy. However, we do not know the circumstances sanctioning Bartek's representation of the dead. It is worth noting that we are not sure whether Bartek is really a ruthless 'tenement sweeper' or perhaps Ruta is adding stories to the facts that have occurred. Most of the action takes place at night, and dreams and imaginings are mixed with real scenes. Even the characters encourage the reader to consider the conventions of the drama. There are not only real characters, namely Ruta, Bartek, Nina, but also Fate, the Skeleton Crowd, the Warsaw Darkness Crowd (in the sequel, the Darkness Crowd) and those listed in one line: Casper, Melchior and Balthazar, the "magicians of life and death", seeming to function as cultural allusions or allegorical figures. Unreal dramatis personae appear in the dreams or visions of both characters. The convention of the unreal is sustained by the occurrence of inter-titles, which in the theatre can, for example, be displayed on a screen to emphasise the ordering of the story being played out according to the concept of the narrative leader – Fate. It is, after all, the author, as one scene, named with a meaningful title, convinces us: *Los prokrastynuje jak każdy z nas, ale wreszcie bierze się do roboty* [Fate procrastinates like every one of us, but finally gets to work]

nates like everyone else, but it finally gets down to business]. It is not only the driving force, the creator of the story, but also one of the characters observed by the viewer. Perhaps its relationship with the other characters explains to some extent the construction of the world presented.

The first scenes take place in an undefined space, in some dramatic “no-where”. First Ruta appears to complete the story of her life as read from a book by Fate. The dominant third person singular suggests that this is a story about someone else. It feels like a Bertolt Brecht play, when the actor does not want to identify with the character being played, but treats it as an opportunity to rethink the present. The relationship between Ruta and Fate is not equal. The woman is limited to following its/his instructions: she reads, answers questions, falls silent when necessary, and finally leaves. In the context of Ruta’s final death, “with closed eyes and closed mouth” (Sikorska-Miszczuk, 6), this scene can be considered a kind of closure of the woman’s life, some kind of biographical addition or an attempt to put the story in order. Bartek’s relationship with Fate is somewhat different. The man does not enter into dialogue, but is subject to Fate’s observations and comments.

The story goes beyond the biographies of the characters, especially when Fate defines Poland and the Poles. According to it/him, it is a land of hunger, whose inhabitants “had and have so little” (Sikorska-Miszczuk, 4)²⁰ that they have been possessed by the need to own things and the relentless pursuit of a goal. Fate asks questions that perhaps the viewer should take up and make them the starting point for a deeper analysis:

Ludzie musieliby spojrzeć w lustro i powiedzieć: nie mamy współczucia dla innych, nie mamy czasu dla innych i zdarza się, że jesteśmy bezlitośni. A w następnym zdaniu: tacy jesteśmy. Musieliby zapytać: jak to się stało, że tacy jesteśmy? Musieliby poczuć współczucie dla siebie. Wtedy jest szansa, że poczuliby współczucie, które zaczęłoby się rozprzestrzeniać. Może pojawiłaby się myśl: czemu żyjemy w tak strasznym kraju? Co możemy zrobić, żeby tak nie było? Ale to nie jest możliwe. (Sikorska-Miszczuk, 4)

[People would have to look in the mirror and say: we have no compassion for others, we have no time for others and we happen to be merciless. And in the next sentence: this is how we are. They would have to ask: how come we are like this? They would have to feel compassion for themselves. Then there is a chance that they would feel compassion, which would begin to spread. Maybe the thought would arise: why do we live in such a terrible country? What can we do to make it not so? But this is not possible.]

²⁰ Małgorzata Sikorska-Miszczuk, *Dziennik szata i chciwości* [Diary of Frenzy and Greed], https://strefykontaktu.pl/files/docs/sikorskaxmiszczuk_dzienni.pdf, accessed May 26, 2023. I give the page numbers of the file posted on the contest page in brackets.

Even the beginning of the drama exposes the uncanny and can arouse fear in the viewer. In the work we recognise motifs associated with the poetics of horror: a closed room with a tap from which blood drips (Sikorska-Miszczyk, 15), called the “terrible room”, unreal events: a procession of skeletons of hungry villagers, pretenders to prosperity and improvement of social status, mysterious voices emerging from the darkness, talking animals (“wilk grzywiasty” /the maned wolf) and objects (windows). The conversation with the maned wolf (referring to the story of Little Red Riding Hood) centres around Ruta’s future “whining”, which can be seen as a foreshadowing of suffering or a somewhat perverse sexual act, when the wolf becomes the personification of the animal instincts inherent in humans, (in this case, in a man).

Certainly, Ruta is a disturbed individual, having problems with building relationships and experiencing various fears. The protagonist is not interested in the world, which is probably why after the death of her father she transformed her apartment into a shelter from reality. So she installed a massive door, secured by several locks, installed blinds and hung curtains in the windows. All this to make her feel safe. Any intrusion into her life and violation of her habits causes great nervousness. One such situation ends with the statement: “out of fear I am close to madness” (Sikorska-Miszczyk, 7). Meanwhile, the story in the drama begins with a construction crew breaking down a door. This is a sign of a change in the tenement’s owner, but also heralds the end of Ruta’s previous life, which many would consider vegetation.

The centre of the heroine’s apartment is this “terrible” or “forbidden room”. And although we do not learn anything more detailed about it, the opening of this door by Bartek marks a turning point in Ruta’s life. In this way, the Crowd is released from the Darkness. It is also in this space that Bartek and Nina, a woman of unclear status who appears as a whore in the piece, have sex.

Subsequent scenes in the drama confront Ruta with general and personal problems: the reprivatisation of tenements, disturbances in the ecosystem (a lost elephant and an encounter with Darek from the eco-patrol), disturbances in the emotional sphere (a stone as an allegory of her heart), fear of the destruction of her private world and fear of the dead. There is another recorded fear in the urban space of Warsaw – the memory of the demolished city (there is no term “former Jewish property” in the drama). Fate’s description of the city ends with a rhetorical question, a suggestion of possible revenge or an expression of fear of reparations: “Fortunately, this landscape is unreal. The levels of time, shuffled, are drowning in darkness. But what happens if a w o r d or w o r d s open a portal to the present?” (“Na szczęście ten krajobraz jest nierealny. Poziomy czasu, przemieszane, toną w ciemno-

ściach. Co jednak się stanie, jeśli jakieś słowo lub słowa otworzą portal do teraźniejszości?”, Sikorska-Miszczuk, 13).

The characters in the drama speak directly about feeling anxiety and fear, and the atmosphere of anxiety is further heightened by a fragment of a folk song, known both in the Polish and German lands, which supplemented Gottfried August Bürger's translation of *Leonora* by Antoni Edward Odyniec, a friend of Adam Mickiewicz from the Philaret period. It was this song that was to inspire Bürger to write the ballad *Lenora* (the title appears in the play), which influenced the development of European Romanticism:

Księżyc świeci, martwiec leci,
sukienczka szach, szach, szach,
panieneczko czy nie strach?
Szach, szach, szach
Szach, szach, szach

[The moon shines, the dead one flies,
Her dress goes swish, swish, swish,
Young maiden, are you not afraid?
Swish, swish, swish,
Swish, swish, swish.]

These words appear three times in the drama. They are uttered successively: by Ruta at the beginning of the play (Sikorska-Miszczuk, 3), by the Crowd from Darkness in a Terrible Room (Sikorska-Miszczuk, 22), here the passage is supplemented by subsequent stanzas, and once more in the finale after the heroine's suicidal leap (Sikorska-Miszczuk, 34). In the Polish version, the accumulation of sibilant and fricative consonants heightens the mood of eeriness and somehow foreshadows a catastrophe. Ruta, like Lenora, can hear or sense the approaching misfortune.

In addition to evoking the German ballad and building a mood of horror in the drama, we can also point to other ways of referring to the legacy of Romanticism. Allusions to Romanticism also occur in the drama at other levels. The dead play a significant role in the lives of the characters, functioning both as wraiths, demanding sacrifices, and as ancestors, defining the existence of the protagonists. The “frenzy” of the title can be seen as a consequence of the encounter with the mysterious, while the “greed” can be seen as pressure from the dead to get even, as did once the imperative of patriotism, also revealing a “vampiric” face (part III of *Dziady*, engl. *Forefathers' Eve*). It is also the question that arises in the margins, what Warsaw is like and what the people who inhabit it are like. Finally, it is the construction of the main character: hypersensitive, well-read, exposed to the premeditated wounding of Bartek, who devises further tortures for her, only to force her to leave the apartment; his actions lead the woman to suicide.

Dziennik szata i chciwości [Diary of Frenzy and Greed] was constructed on the principle of association and repetition. The most significant phrases grow in meaning in subsequent scenes. This is how an allegory is created about contemporary Poland, culturally still strongly centred around the dead and the legacy of the ancestors, who not only bequeathed to their successors the space/homeland, along with phantasms, but almost literally intervene in the biographies of individuals.

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Zenon Fajfer's *Uwolnienie* [Release] is a text with an unusual form, based on a perversely used topos of the theatre world, and which is also perhaps some kind of biblical reminiscence or reference to Eastern philosophy (a veil hiding what is most essential). This motif is exposed by both the layout of the drama and the first scenes. In the header of all the pages is the word "KURTYNA" [CURTAIN], written in large capital letters. Below it, there are several columns of text separated by lines, which resemble the folds of a curtain (their number changes as the plot unfolds). These are like channels of communication in the space depicted. Both the lines of individuals and stage directions will appear in them. For the reader, the curtain becomes a kind of screen. Perhaps, the proper context for this situation is Plato's cave.

The placement of the stage directions in the first of the columns signals the equality of the dramatic subject with the others. The empty space between the lines makes the silence and the passage of time more apparent, while at the same time heightening the distinctiveness of the individual voices and creating some form of solitude in the crowd. As in concrete poetry, a vocal or stage performance will require a decision as to the order in which these lines are spoken (whether we read "in channels" or across from left to right).

The initial stage directions confirm the fact that we are in a theatre decorated quite traditionally: "*ostatni dzwonek, światła zmrużone, scenę zasłania ciężka purpurowa kurtyna; po upływie kilku minut zniecierpliwione głosy na widowni*" [the final bell rings, the lights are dimmed, the stage is covered by a heavy purple curtain; after a few minutes, impatient voices in the audience] (Fajfer, 1; column 1 of 5).²¹

²¹ Zenon Fajfer, *Uwolnienie* [Release], https://strefykontaktu.pl/files/docs/fajfer_uwolnienie.pdf, accessed May 26, 2023. I give the page numbers of the file posted on the contest organisers' website in parentheses. I quote only the text, without spatial layout; after the page number I give the number of the column in which the words appear, and the current number of columns on the page.

The prolonged waiting for the actual performance attempts to acclimatise the audience (there are adults and children, women and men, as well as foreigners) of an indeterminate number. The audience have masks on their faces, an apparent reference to the COVID-19 pandemic, and outside one can hear planes flying overhead, evoking the context of the war in Ukraine, although it has not been named. The characters come up with various hypotheses: maybe it is a “self-serving spectacle” or maybe “the system crashed”. Such alternatives: something has broken or the audience is the actor, were written in the channels at the extreme ends, 1 and 5 (Fajfer, 4). In the following scenes, the audience wonders about the play’s title and cast, suggesting that it is a “mousetrap” or the somewhat ambiguous “Czekając na wielkie G” [Waiting for the Big G] (Fajfer, 10; columns 1 and 2 of 5), which refer to Shakespeare’s *Hamlet* and Beckett’s *Waiting for Godot*, respectively. They talk about avant-garde art, playing on the emotions of the audience, dividing the audience into real spectators and provocateurs who want to cause a riot or perhaps are actors drawing unsuspecting people into the plot. There are also comments about being in the middle of events, the effect of goggles, immersion, and finally attempts to interpret the event by pointing out metaphorical (or allegorical) meanings – one curtain is associated by someone with a guillotine, so another adds information about a stray bullet (Fajfer, 11). Audiences have different levels of knowledge about theatre, so the quote from Shakespeare: “All the world’s a stage, And all the men and women merely players” (*As you like it*) can serve as a slogan and response for the initiated (Fajfer, 81). Spoken phrases allude to current social events (e.g., the politically marked “reassumption”) and the colloquial way of speaking, shaped by the Internet and advertising.

As I pointed out above, the lines initially appear in five channels, five vertical tunnels, although the author does not resolve how many characters there are. We do not know their names and surnames, we focus only on the spoken words. The lines are usually not addressed to any particular addressee, but to everyone, even if they do not lead to interaction. It is often only a comment, an externalisation of emotions, a remark spoken aloud, as if “on the page” (a part). It is worth noting, however, that the act of saying anything in public transforms the audience into a participant in the drama, and the curtain/page space creates a *quasi-conversation*. After all, characters can respond to the words they hear, or employ a number of consensus-building practices, such as a meaningful tone of voice or appropriate pace of speech. Sometimes the order of the fold/tunnel is disrupted (Fajfer, 44), as if the silence allows the materiality of the curtain and its movements to be perceived.

Viewers bring different levels of sense-making and sign-reading competence, but some basic ontological questions arise (mainly in the first channel): “Jest tam kto? Za tą zimną, głuchą kotarą?” [Who’s there? Behind that cold, deaf curtain?] (Fajfer, 13; 1 of 5), “To kim my właściwie w tej całej intrydze jesteśmy?” [Then who are we actually in all this intrigue?] (Fajfer, 30; 1 of 3), repeated again: “kim my właściwie wszyscy jesteśmy?” [who are we all actually?] (Fajfer, 76; 1 of 2) and finally: “Ile to wszystko może jeszcze potrwać?” [How much longer can all this go on?] (Fajfer, 99; 2 of 2). For the most part, these are rhetorical questions, perhaps also aimed at the spectator. The first one introduced is followed by the following comment, although it is difficult to discern the speaker’s intention: “Aż ciarki przechodzą... Całe życie można przeżyć i nie zadać tak głębokiego pytania” [It sends shivers down your spine... You can live your whole life and not ask such a profound question] (Fajfer, 13; 2 of 5).

Stage directions in drama function as a demarcation markers. After each line of the dramatic subject, the situation in the theatre changes slightly. The conversations gradually cease to be about the unrehearsed performance and the rather unusual situation, but centre around the personal stories of individual spectators. This is accompanied by a reduction in the number of channels/folds and a simultaneous increase in the font of the text. We have the impression that the observer is getting closer to the characters. Thanks to this procedure, we discover the existing relationships between the viewers (their conversations refer to matters from the pre-action, well known to their interlocutors), but also the strangers being familiarised, uncertainties being overcome and some kind of cooperation being built. Some want to fill the waiting time with themselves and present their skills or qualities to others. There are also local occurrences, such as bickering or quarrelling. Someone wants to smoke a cigarette, some woman goes into labour. The desire to leave, however, leads to the realisation that the hall is closed, which intensifies the mood of horror.

On two occasions the conversation in the audience is interrupted by the entrance of new characters. The second time a sedan chair is brought in, in which, as we read in the stage directions, there is perhaps a “High Representative of Artificial Intelligence” (“Wysoki Przedstawiciel Sztucznej Inteligencji”) (Fajfer, 88; 2 of 3). They are privileged spectators, so their entrance and exit is a separate spectacle that takes place with the lights on.

The arrangement of the folds disappears during the utterance of monologues and the establishment of an acquaintance between a man and a woman, which alludes to a typical situation of flirtation (the arrangement of the text on the page shows the emotional closeness of the characters to each other). Love, closeness is, after all, one way of warding off existential

anxieties. The man's monologue, which is a rhyming protest against the clamour that fills the world, is also a search for silence within oneself, against disturbing inner voices. The woman, on the other hand, talks about her theatrical childhood experiences and her not-so-successful life. It is their fears and anxieties that we get to know most thoroughly. The characters speak not only of the fear of a relationship with another person, but also of emptiness, the equal of that after death. The flirtation then turns into a language game of adding words according to a fixed order. The game ends when the partner is unable to find a word beginning with the last letter of the previous word. The dramatic subject calls this activity "word spilling" ("przesypywanie słów") (Fajfer, 143). Here there is no more content, there is only a conative function. Interestingly, the characters do not desire victory, but rather the continuation of the game situation, so they must cooperate. For this reason, the woman, for example, changes the word "słoń" [elephant] to "słońce" [sun] (Fajfer, 131). When the subject moves away a bit and the tunnels/folds reappear, it turns out that these are the only voices in the theatre. The others have already gone behind the curtain. This is the only way out.

The subsequent scenes expose more and more clearly the allegorical nature of the events depicted and the absurdity of existence in this "invisible masquerade" ("niewidzialna maskarada") (Fajfer, 59, 1 of 2) and "perverse tussle" ("perwersyjna ciuciubabka") (Fajfer, 54, 1 of 2). The final passage behind the curtain is explained by stage directions arranged in two columns, although this time the reading order is familiar. First, one has to read the column on the left, then the one on the right. The dramatic subject does not reveal what is behind the curtain, but emphasises that fear is one of the creative factors:

(co znajduje się po drugiej stronie zasłony
jedynie sami Inscenizatorzy wiedzą –
co komu wyobraźnia podpowie, lęk albo pragnienie) (Fajfer, 144)

[(which is on the other side of the veil
only the Stagers themselves know –
What the imagination prompts, fear or desire)]

The sequel is already an *Epilogue & Prologue* that foreshadow Act II, which will take place behind the curtain (so some Act II exists?). There is both a reference to Stanisław Wyspiański, and a somewhat clownish or perhaps more Gombrowicz-like poem: "This is the end of my services/ to others belongs act two" ("Na tym kończą się moje usługi/ do innych należy akt drugi") (Fajfer, 144; 2 of 2).

The drama *Uwolnienie* makes anxiety one of the cornerstones of the world presented. The author uses the motif of confinement in a windowless

room, a model solution that intensifies this emotion. The irrationality of the situation, its incomprehensibility also transfers the fear to the viewer, who receives no additional information or solution to the puzzle being built.

The situation reveals a number of universal fears: fear of loneliness, incomprehensibility of the world, death and passing. The realist convention gradually transforms into allegory, and the motif of the world of theatre allows us to reflect on the existential situation of man, when life is shown as a certain stage, preparation or waiting for the sequel. The drama is at times ostentatiously hypertextual and suggests Maurice Maeterlinck's *The Blind*, in addition to the examples already indicated. Compared to the Maeterlinck's play from the late 19th century, the viewer's uncertainty is much more extensive. Although the work does not evoke Romantic motifs, it does not contain allusions to artists or their works. Instead, it creates an atmosphere of eeriness and uncertainty of cognition built through the senses and uses the poetics of a fragment²² (enough to recall the most significant representations of Romantic drama, Adam Mickiewicz's *Dziady* (*Forefathers' Eve*) or Juliusz Słowacki's *Kordian*, the latter with a significant subtitle *Część pierwsza trylogii: Spisek koronacyjny* [Part One of the Trilogy: The Coronation Conspiracy]). The play offers an interesting point of view. The characters are presumably turned with their backs to the viewer/reader and stare at the curtain, trying to find some sense of their situation. This is reminiscent of the paintings of Caspar David Friedrich, an artist of the Romantic era, and perhaps his most famous canvas *The Wanderer on the Sea of Fog*. Fajfer's anonymous figures "seem to challenge infinity",²³ becoming an allegory of human fate. This is a world threatened and marked by death.

The author uses a specific way of building a relationship between the viewer of the text, the character, and the curtain, which in the play, at most, acts as a frame for the world of illusion and is therefore not an object worth special attention. The characters in Fajfer's drama, taken out of their normal situation – one usually comes to the theatre to watch a performance or some kind of performance – make the viewer think about his or her existential situation.

In *Rozmowy mijane* [Conversations Passed], Ignacy Karpowicz, who has already played games with Romanticism, presents an evening and a night in

²² Anna Kurska, *Romantyczny fragment* [Romantic Fragment] (Wrocław: Zakład Narodowy im. Ossolińskich 1989).

²³ Gerard Legrand, *Sztuka romantyzmu* [The Art of Romanticism], trans. Igor Waleńczak ([Warszawa]: HPS: Rzeczpospolita, [2007]), 54; chapt. "Sztuka wielkości," 41–71.

the lives of high school girls from a humanities subjects class. The girls swear, get drunk, take various intoxicants and dream of having sex while a stripper (a linguistics student) accidentally shows up in their apartment dressed as a priest (however, there is a Priest in the plot, which perpetuates the theatricality of the situation). It is a world filled with evil and violence, as in the current of brutalism. The play reminds us that violence is “an inherent alternative to fear” (“nieodłączna alternatywa lęku”).²⁴ The characters are too young to have experienced any kind of calamity in life. Their families seem to live quite prosperous lives, so the anxiety they feel is more a result of feeling some senselessness of the world and lack of value. The behaviour and talk of adults (parents or the ‘unreliable ethics lady’) intensifies in them the desire to rebel or reject such a world. Could it be that they are experiencing “swallow anxiety” (“jaskółczy niepokój”) familiar from Słowacki’s drama? Instead of travelling to foreign countries (although themes similar to those in Słowacki’s *Kordian* appear in their conversations: love, money, society and even religion) they engage in an ilinx type of behaviour, based on intoxication, bewilderment and the need to test the limits and capabilities of their bodies.

The drama mentions the fear of loneliness (Eve’s decision to marry), and from the information about Janek’s exorcism in Częstochowa, we can also sense some fear of incomprehensible/unacceptable behaviour (his sister, Emilia, does not know whether the reason for the exorcism is her brother’s preaching of communism or his sexual orientation). Satan appears in a statement made by Mother 2. However, he is probably not so much the cause of evil in the world, but rather an excuse by adults to cover their guilt and helplessness in the face of unfolding events. Also, possession in the depicted world seems to be synonymous with incomprehensible behaviour.

As in *Dziennik szatu i chciwości* [Diary of Frenzy and Greed], the characters include non-real characters: The Ghost, reciting excerpts from Part I of Mickiewicz’s *Dziady* (*Forefathers’ Eve*), the Chorus of Boys (also recalling Part I of *Dziady*, a passage on Mickiewicz’s *Romantyczność* [Romanticism], and parodying a passage from Dante’s *Divine Comedy*) and the Chorus of Girls. The Phantoms do not only repeat passages of the literary canon, but also create silly rhymes, which suit the mood of the heroines. Besides, the Ghost interacts with the girls: together with Ewelina he reflects on the situation of the contemporary peers of Romantic heroines including Karusia

²⁴ Katarzyna Sawicka, “Nie ma takiego lęku, który nadałby sens życiu – kondycja ponowoczesna w świetle twórczości Sarah Kane” [There Is no Such Thing as Anxiety to Give Meaning to Life – the Postmodern Condition in Light of Sarah Kane’s Work], in *Przestrzenie lęku. Lęk w kulturze i sztuce XIX–XX wieku*, 191.

from *Romantyczność* (from the volume *Ballads and Romances*); with Emilia he reflects on the patterns of male behaviour, primarily the attitude of patriotism; with Ewa he discusses God and the situation of the family. The ghost is old-fashioned; he does not understand modernity and is scorned by the prevailing customs. Ewa calls him a “pseudo mortician” (“pseudo umarłakiem”) and an “antecedent of fucking hypocrisy” (“antykwarem jebanej hipokryzji”) (Karpowicz, 36),²⁵ and he, in turn, sums up the whole situation: “Bóg źle mówiony, Ojczyzna nie lepsza, honor pochowany z przodkami” [God badly spoken, Homeland no better, honour buried with ancestors] (Karpowicz, 40), thereby appealing to the core values of past eras.

In the finale, we observe violent behaviour and the sexual act of the parents, which intensifies the horror of the world. In the stage directions we read that it is “human pandemonium” (“ludzkie pandemonium”) (Karpowicz, 40). The final line is spoken by Mother 2. Just after the sexual intercourse, she reads a fragment of a poem by Yurii Andrukhovych *Ukraina to kraina baroku?* [Ukraine is a land of baroque?] from a newspaper:

Wszystko na świecie tym można z ruiny
 Podnieść, rzecz jasna, oprócz krwi rozlanej.
 Napisz mi, czy żywi wszyscy, czy zdrowi,
 Czy anioły latają nad Dunajem,
 Czy krwi wystarcza, czy pada we Lwowie. (Karpowicz, 41)

[From ruin everything in this world can be
 Raised, of course, in addition to the blood spilt.
 Write to me if all are alive healthy,
 Do angels fly over the Danube,
 Is there enough blood or is it raining in Lviv.]

In the context of the drama that has just ended, this quotation sounds foreign. This is because it reminds us of the values that either do not exist or have been effectively marginalised in the world depicted. It draws attention to the existence of world other than that just shown. Equally foreign-sounding are the fragments of Romantic works, which we involuntarily compare with the statements of the characters. We also reflect on the image of love, the human condition, based on the behaviour of teenage girls and their families, but also on the structure of the world, in both eras. The Ghost parodies the incantation uttered by the Chorus in Part II of *Dziady* (*Forefathers' Eve*), preserving the metre and fragments of the original (“wszędzie”, “to będzie” [everywhere; it will be]), but at the same time introduces a number of se-

²⁵ Ignacy Karpowicz, *Rozmowy mijane* [Passing Conversations], https://strefykontaktu.pl/files/docs/karpowicz_rozmowy_mijane.pdf, accessed May 26, 2023. The page numbers of the file posted on the contest page are in parentheses.

mantic oppositions: brightness contrasted with darkness, silence replaced with nakedness (although the words are united by the principle of alliteration):

Póki jasno, goło wszędzie,
 Uciekajmy, cóż to będzie!
 Bezeceństwa i sprośności,
 Na podołku niewinności.
 (Karpowicz, 35–36)

[As long as it's bright, bare everywhere,
 Let's run away, what will it be!
 Desecration and bawdiness,
 On the underbelly of innocence.]

This quotation, which refers to a ritual almost fundamental to Polish culture, explains the presence of the Priest in the world depicted in a rather perverse way. It is a false successor to the Guślarz or some celebrant who would help the Spirit return to the afterlife, or perhaps Gustaw-Konrad's interlocutor. In the absence of such a progenitor, the Ghost also appears in Scene 4, although he is not mentioned in the opening stage directions. Perhaps we can only hear a voice-over. Is it, then, an abandoned Spirit? Trapped in reality? This confusion of the worlds and spheres (real and surreal), the lack of clearly defined boundaries and conventions, including the behaviour of the ghosts, contribute to the grotesqueness of the world. Romanticism here is not only an object of parody, but probably also a dream of some kind of design/construction explaining the world and man.

The contemporary plays selected for this analysis differ in the way they create the world they depict, the form of their message, the way they construct and objectify fear, but also in the game they undertake with Romanticism, an era of particular importance in Polish culture. Thus, the works feature characters of unclear ontological status, ghosts, phantoms and wraiths (*Dziennik szału i chciwości; Rozmowy mijane*) [Diary of Frenzy and Greed; Passing Conversations], which draw attention to the uncanny and those that elude human reason, quotations and allusions, as well as loners, (over)sensitive, queer people who do not understand the existing world. The Romantic context does not always exist in these works directly through a recognisable title or literary hero. Sometimes, the intertextual relationship begins as a result of the choice of an appropriately framed theme, a model of the depicted world, stage situations or the construction of the protagonist – lonely, unhappy, looking for love and the purpose of life. The similarity of the situa-

tion then allows the audience to add a Romantic context to the plays. At other times, the work refers to a situation familiar from the drama and theatre of Polish Romanticism, the ritual of forefathers, when the ancestors of the protagonists are evoked (or appear independently), the dead who once inhabited the spaces presented, and fictional characters, but ones that have been present in the communal imaginarium for centuries.

The works encourage one to reflect on the condition of modern times. Current issues: the privatisation of tenements in Warsaw (*Dziennik szat i chciwości*), the COVID-19 pandemic (*Uwolnienie*), Russia's aggression against Ukraine (*Uwolnienie; Rozmowy mijane*), and they create universal themes: the condition of the family, the meaning of love (*Dziennik szat i chciwości; Rozmowy mijane*), the impact of the dead on the lives of the characters (*Dziennik szat i chciwości; Rozmowy mijane*).

The characters' fears are revealed through typical techniques: a scary locked room (*Dziennik szat i chciwości*), the characters' confinement to some space (*Uwolnienie*), their escape from the world and people (*Dziennik szat i chciwości*), and their experience of emptiness (*Uwolnienie*). These plays encourage reflection on the causes of anxiety situations, record the behaviour and mental state of the characters and show the destructive power of anxiety in interpersonal relationships.

The characters of the plays in question are lonely and isolated, as if parcelled out in particular spaces, and often defenceless against ghosts, appearing very often in a group – as choruses, which perhaps alludes, among other things, to the history of the drama, and perhaps also to the cathartic power of the theatrical performance. Such an arrangement: the individual against the group, however, intensifies loneliness, and perhaps even reveals the randomness of the existence of the hero equipped with Romantic qualities. Momentary empathy, some quasi-ritual, only appears in these dramas on one occasion when a game is watched together (with alcohol and in front of the TV; *Dziennik szat i chciwości*, or in the case of a nightly libation (*Rozmowy mijane*) or a shared experience of the uncanny (*Uwolnienie*). The contemporary anxieties, the way the characters are shown and constructed, and the world depicted encourage us to enquire as to the condition of modernity, and, furthermore, in juxtaposition to Romanticism.

The analyses that have been carried out do not allow us to put forward theses either on the contemporary use of the Romantic legacy, or on the construction of a new paradigm, i.e. a model that represents the quintessence of Romanticism for contemporaries. We do not find here a criticism of the era, even in Karpovich's case, but rather a search for ways to depict an insecure and fearful human being in contact with the Other. Familiar motifs and even parodied fragments of works (sometimes it is a memorised passage that, de-

spite processing, does not allow us to forget its origin),²⁶ paradoxically reinforce the conviction that it is possible to understand the situation presented, already familiar, after all, to users of a given literary solution, as well as researchers and their interpretations. For this reason, perhaps, they somewhat weaken the reality of the extreme situation (death, the dissolution of values) experienced by the characters.

Translated by Anna Wylężałek and David Lilley

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²⁶ Bagłajewski, *Obecność romantyzmu*, 16.

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Lęki współczesne. Sztuki nagrodzone w 2023 roku w konkursie dramaturgicznym „Strefy kontaktu” wobec tradycji romantyzmu

Abstrakt: W artykule przedstawiono analizę trzech sztuk nagrodzonych w 2023 roku w konkursie dramaturgicznym „Strefy kontaktu” zorganizowanym przez Wrocławski Teatr Współczesny im. Marii i Edmunda Wiercińskich we Wrocławiu oraz Miasto Wrocław. Były to: *Rozmowy mijane* Ignacego Karpowicza (nagroda główna), *Uwolnienie* Zenona Fajfera oraz *Dziennik szatu i chciwości* Małgorzaty Sikorskiej-Miszczuk (dwa z czterech równorzędnych wyróżnień).

Utwory różnią się sposobem kreowania świata przedstawionego, formą przekazu, sposobem konstruowania i obiektywizacji lęku, ale również grą prowadzoną z tradycją romantyzmu, epoką o szczególnym znaczeniu w polskiej kulturze i przypominaną na wiele sposobów w 2022 roku, który został ustanowiony przez Sejm RP Rokiem Romantyzmu Polskiego.

W utworach pojawiają się więc postacie o niejasnym statusie ontologicznym, duchy, zjawy i upiory (*Dziennik szatu i chciwości*, *Rozmowy mijane*), zwracające uwagę na to, co niesamowite i wymykające się ludzkiemu rozumowi, cytaty dzieł romantycznych i rozmaite aluzje. Kontekst romantyczny nie zawsze jest zapisany w utworze. Stanowi on wówczas swego rodzaju pamięć genologiczną dramatu, rezerwuar określonych tematów, sposobów ich wyrażania, określony model świata przedstawionego, tworzenia sytuacji scenicznych czy konstruowania bohatera – samotnego, nieszczęśliwego, poszukującego miłości i celu życia.

Lęki bohaterów są ujawniane za pomocą typowych technik: zamknięty straszny pokój (*Dziennik szatu i chciwości*), zamknięcie bohaterów w jakiejś przestrzeni (*Uwolnienie*), ich ucieczka przed światem i ludźmi (*Dziennik szatu i chciwości*), doświadczanie pustki (*Uwolnienie*), poszukiwanie celu życia i chęć dookreślenia siebie (*Rozmowy mijane*). Sposób pokazania i skonstruowania postaci oraz świat przedstawiony zachęcają, by zadać pytanie o kondycję współczesności, również w zestawieniu z romantyzmem.

Słowa kluczowe: polski dramat współczesny, dziedzictwo romantyczne, lęki i obawy w sztukach teatralnych, konkurs dramaturgiczny „Strefy kontaktu”.

Zeitgenössische Ängste. Im Dramawettbewerb "Contact Zones" 2023 ausgezeichnete Stücke in Spannungsfeld der romantischen Tradition

Abstract: Im Beitrag werden drei 2023 im Dramawettbewerb *Kontaktzonen*, der vom Wrocławski Teatr Współczesny namens Maria und Edmund Wierciński und der Stadt Wrocław veranstaltet wurde, ausgezeichnete Theaterstücke: Ignacy Karpowicz's *Rozmowy mijane* [Vo-

rübergehende Gespräche] (Hauptpreis), Zenon Fajfers *Uwolnienie* [Loslassen] und Małgorzata Sikorska-Miszczuks *Dziennik szatu i chciwości* [Tagebuch der Raserei und Gier] (zwei der vier gleichwertigen Auszeichnungen) analysiert.

Die Werke unterscheiden sich in der Art und Weise, wie sie die dargestellte Welt erschaffen, in der Form ihrer Botschaft, in der Konstruktion und Objektivisierung der Angst und auch in dem Spiel, das sie mit der Tradition der Romantik treiben, einer Epoche, die in der polnischen Kultur von besonderer Bedeutung ist und an die im Jahr 2022, das vom Sejm der Republik Polen zum Jahr der polnischen Romantik erklärt wurde, auf vielfältige Weise erinnert wird.

So finden sich in den Werken Figuren mit unklarem ontologischem Status, Geister, Phantome und Gespenster (*Dziennik szatu i chciwości*, *Rozmowy mijane*) fokussieren auf das Unheimliche und darauf, was sich der menschlichen Vernunft entzieht, und auch Zitate aus romantischen Werken und verschiedene Anspielungen darauf. Der romantische Kontext ist nicht immer direkt in das Werk eingeschrieben. Manchmal geschieht es durch eine intertextuelle Beziehung (Thema, Modells der dargestellten Welt, Bühnensituation oder der Konstruktion des einsamen, unglücklichen, auf der Suche nach Liebe und dem Sinn des Lebens bleibenden Protagonisten). Andersmal bezieht sich das Stück auf eine Situation, die aus dem Drama und dem Theater der polnischen Romantik bekannt ist, auf das Ritual der Großeltern, wenn die Vorfahren der Helden beschworen werden (oder unabhängig davon erscheinen), auf die Toten, die einst die gezeigten Räume bewohnten, und auf fiktive Figuren, die jedoch seit Jahrhunderten im kollektiven Imaginarium präsent sind.

Die Ängste der Protagonisten werden durch typische Techniken offenbart: einen verschlossenen, unheimlichen Raum (*Dziennik szatu i chciwości*), das Eingesperrtsein der Figuren in einem bestimmten Raum (*Uwolnienie*), ihre Flucht vor der Welt und den Menschen (*Dziennik szatu i chciwości*), das Erleben von Leere (*Uwolnienie*), die Suche nach einem Lebenssinn und der Wunsch, sich selbst zu definieren (*Rozmowy mijane*). Die Tatsache, wie die Figuren gezeigt und konstruiert werden, sowie die dargestellte Welt regen dazu an, Fragen über den Zustand der Moderne zu stellen, auch in Gegenüberstellung mit der Romantik.

Schlüsselwörter: polnisches modernes Drama, das Erbe der Romantik, Ängste und Befürchtungen in Theaterstücken, Dramawettbewerb *Kontaktzonen*.