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**“BUT IT SOMETIMES HAPPENS THAT SOMETHING
IS NOT AND IS, AND IS MORE REAL THAN IT WOULD BE”.
CONCEPTS OF HOPE IN “DRZEWO” BY WIESŁAW MYŚLIWSKI**

Jarosz A.

“Drzewo” (“The Tree”) – a play by Wiesław Myśliwski, the outstanding Polish contemporary writer – is one of his four dramas (apart from “Złodziej”, 1973; “Klucznik”, 1978 and “Requiem dla gospodyni”, 2000). In “Drzewo”, Myśliwski presented the Polish village of the second half of the 20th century and, at the same time, created a metaphoric, symbolic reality. Defended by an old peasant Marcin Duda from being cut down, the title tree becomes embers of dramatic conflict and is a very complex symbol and the greatest carrier of hope, the endangered hope. The writer leaves us with confidence that the values symbolized with the tree will be protected and preserved by Duda’s daughter and grandson. The hope also manifests itself in supernatural reality which, together with the earthly dimension, exists in the poetic world of the drama as a harmonious whole. Deriving from the circle of the village culture, the motifs and beliefs presented in Myśliwski’s “Drzewo” seem to be universal and show the truth about human life.

Keywords: hope, tree, road, tempter, village, universal values, drama of the 20th century, symbol.

**«НО ИНОГДА ТАК БЫВАЕТ, ЧТО ЧТО-ТО ОТСУТСТВУЕТ И
ПРИСУТСТВУЕТ, ПРИСУТСТВУЕТ НАМНОГО УБЕДИТЕЛЬНЕЕ,
ЧЕМ МОЖНО ПОДУМАТЬ». КОНЦЕПТ «НАДЕЖДА» В ПЬЕСЕ
ВЕСЛАВА МЫСЛИВСКОГО «ДЕРЕВО»**

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«Дерево» (“Drzewo”, 1989) – пьеса Веслава Мысливского, выдающегося польского писателя – представляет собой одну из его четырех драм. В пьесе «Дерево» Мысливский изображает польскую деревню второй половины 20-го века и при этом создает метафорическую символическую реальность. Пожилой

крестьянин Мартин Дуда спасает от гибели дерево, давшее название пьесе. Дерево оказывается в центре конфликта произведения, является сложным символом и воплощением надежд героев. Автор вселяет в читателя веру в то, что ценности, олицетворяемые деревом, сохраняют дочь и внук Дуды. Ощущение надежды также проявляется в сверхъестественном, которое в поэтике драмы тесно переплетается с земным. Уходя корнями в сельскую культуру, мотивы и верования, представленные в пьесе В. Мысливского «Дерево» кажутся универсальными и общечеловеческими.

Ключевые слова: надежда, дерево, дорога, искушение, деревня, общечеловеческие ценности, драма 20-го века, символ.

Wiesław Myśliwski was born on 25 March 1932 in Dwikozy, near Sandomierz. He graduated in Polish studies from the Catholic University of Lublin. He has written six novels and four dramas, for which he has received many literary awards and decorations. There have been many film adaptations of his works, which have been readily translated into foreign languages.

Wiesław Myśliwski's play *Drzewo* ("The Tree") has been classified by some scholars, in terms of genre, as a morality play [1, s. 36; 9, s. 118; 25, s. 125, 127] and by others as a mystery play [19, s. 110; 26, s. 108-111]. It is claimed that it is a part of a basic trend in our dramatic tradition which is determined by *Dziady* ("Forefathers' Eve") and *Wesele* ("The Wedding") [11, s. 121; 12, s. 110; 26, s. 111]. It is worth mentioning here one more proposal to classify *Drzewo* into a genre. M. Siedlecki stated that this work could be perceived as "... metaphysical narrative drama. For the characters in the play, the order of the rural universe has nearly sacred dimension" [22, s. 95]. Genre-related debate on *Drzewo* is one of multiple issues discussed by researchers of Wiesław Myśliwski's works, which are quite popular.

Magdalena Legendź in her article *Okruch wieczności* [12] juxtaposed a motif of a tree contained in the Myśliwski's drama with the same motif appearing in a work by Andrzej Niedoba *Rajska jabłonka*. Wide, in-depth analyses of *Drzewo* can be found, for example, in publications by such scholars as: B. Kaniewska [9, s. 110-

118], J. Ablewicz [1, s. 34-38], M. Lewko [13], J. Paćłowski [19, s. 110-115]. Myśliwski's text was mentioned by: H. Bereza [3], J. Paćłowski [20, s. 196], M. Siedlecki [22, s. 95], D. Kulesza [11, s. 107-123].

Wiesław Myśliwski's play *Drzewo* was published in 1988 to everyone's great surprise. The outstanding novelist who received the Nike Literary Award twice (for *Widnokrąg* ("Horizon") in 1996 and for *Traktat o łuskaniu fasoli* ("Treatise on Shelling Beans" in 2007) decided to write *Drzewo* after much persuasion by the director of the Polish Theatre:

"Kazimierz Dejmek suggested that I should write something for the stage. I said that I even had an idea... there is a tree. An old peasant seats in the tree. Beneath the tree Poland happens. Everything happens. So write about it – said Dejmek and I felt encouraged. I typed 250 pages. I knew I acted against myself, but it was even funny. Dejmek read the typescript and said it was great but impossible to stage. Too long, too many characters, too many issues, no stage would handle it. I gave him *carte blanche*, let him do whatever he wants..." (Translator's remark: suspension points in original) [28].

The same year Myśliwski wrote the play (1988), Kazimierz Dejmek staged it in the Polish Theatre in Warsaw [1, s. 34-35; 25, s. 126-128; 27]. Next year (1989), *Drzewo* was directed by Krzysztof Nazar and performed in the New Theatre in Poznań, managed by Izabella Cywińska [27]. Four years after the play was written, Joanna Szwedowska made its adaptation. Directed by Janusz Kukuła, the radio drama premiered on 1 January 1993. In 1998, Izabella Cywińska adapted the drama and directed the play for the Polish Television Theatre, making *Drzewo*'s setting more contemporary. It needs to be highlighted that, shot on location and directed by Stefan Szmidt who personates Marcin Duda, *Drzewo* is accompanied with a field stage from Dom Służebny Polskiej Sztuce Słowa Muzyki i Obrazu (Centre for Polish Literature, Music, and Visual Arts) in Nadrzecze, which goes on a theatre pilgrimage from one tree to another and is staged in various locations (i.e., in Sandomierz, Wilanów Park, Gołąb, Nidzica-Kamionka, Mielec, Cmolos, Nisko, and Lublin).

Zdzisław Jerzy Adamczyk [2, s. 184, 185] wrote:

“In all his works Myśliwski... talks about lives of inhabitants of the Polish country in the 20th century, who are subject to extensive and violent economic and social changes. Similarly to a tidal wave, there is neither escape nor rescue from this process which changed the fates of the characters, remodelled and thwarted long-established norms and ritual behaviours, rules and practical habits, severed family, neighbourly and communal links. There is no other equally sensitive witness and chronicler of this immense historical process that engulfed millions of Poles and changed the Polish countryside in the second half of the 20th century.... The second source, a richer one, of the universal experiences by Myśliwski’s characters can be found in intellectual, philosophic and moral limits of narration. The characters think and talk about life and death, about love and old age, about crib and grave, about land and bread, about fears and hopes, about many such issues – the most fundamental and final ones. Their fates are determined not only by history, but also by immemorial rights of existence, moral imperatives and necessities of life”.

In his drama *Drzewo*, Wiesław Myśliwski presents the Polish village of the second half of the 20th century viewed from the vertical perspective of Marcin Duda – one of its inhabitants. As logging related to road construction is progressing in his village, this aged peasant decides to defend a tree growing next to his house. He climbs into the tree (putting a noose round his neck) and categorically resists persuasion to leave his post by saying: “I won’t get down.” Such a vantage point of one of the villagers creates a unique perspective from which to capture other characters who appear under the tree. All of them are subject to grotesque distortions. People who pass by or stop under the tree are the inhabitants of the village: Duda’s loved ones – his daughter Zofia, son-in-law Franek and grandson Jędrek, neighbours, Old Woman, Teenager, a Woman, Woman I, II, III, Young Lass, Irka Szymulanka, and representatives of the authorities, including: the Director, Head of the Commune Office, Policeman Florian Kapusta, an Engineer and his subordinates.

The author makes each character appearing under the tree the carrier of a given situation, present event or event from the more or less distant past, sketching in this way a complex portrait of the world with its existential, sociological (the threat to the

value of folk culture) and ideological problems (related to points of view presented by individual characters, such as views on the socialist system, religious values, and faith).

On the one hand, people appearing under the tree who belong to the earthly dimension seem to be confused. They cannot pull themselves together in the new reality, are determined by it, and try to manage in it as well as they can. On the other hand, observations made by the Engineer seem to be accurate. He carries out a top-down plan of priorities and in an act of despair, expressing powerlessness against the situation provoked by Duda, characterizes the Polish mentality as follows:

“In this country there aren’t any ordinary trees. And if it isn’t a tree, it’s a shrine, a cross, a statue. Jesus, Our Lady, St. Florian, St. Isidore, St. Anthony, saint this, saint that, the roads are so crawling with saints you’d think they bred them! Leave him – he’s invoked for putting out fires or finding things or crops or for whatever there’s no other patron saint for. Who’ll protect us if you move them? They make you feel like you’re a heathen. Though you want to believe like everyone else, except you have to build a road.... And that’s not the half of it, my God no! Sometimes it’s a mystery where it all came from. As though everything that’s ever happened for thousands of years past, happened here, by this one road. Beyond, there was nothing but wailing winds, howling wolves and pitch darkness. Strung like beads on a rosary. Because every road here is more a rosary than a road, weaving in prayer to its memory. Here even objects aren’t satisfied being objects. The earth being the earth, a road a road, a tree a tree. Everything aspires to the heights of a sign. Everything dresses up as a sign. You want to press on forward in the midst of so many signs? Wherever you look, a sign! Whatever you touch, a sign! Signs! Signs! Signs!” [18, p. 38-39].

That is a folk, religious and national tradition, an eternal moral order. Those who want to change the world according to some newly designed order must encounter and contend with them. In the play, the new order is the socialist system, but, as is proven through the outdoor performances and dramatic adaptation for the

Polish Television Theatre, this system can easily be replaced with whichever one is presently threatening the traditional order.

Among the living appearing under the tree, Duda's daughter Zofia seems to be the one who demonstrates the most common sense. Anna Tatarkiewicz believed that she would carry on the fight initiated by Marcin Duda to defend universal values that – as exemplified in the past – are threatened by systems made by a man:

“My impression is – wrote the scholar in *Gra o inteligencję* – that Duda wins dying. I mean that those who remained alive will continue their struggle for values and Duda's attitude, actions and sacrifice (after all he starves himself at his “post”) complete a spiritual transformation which has already appeared. It applies mainly to Marcin's relatives – his daughter Zośka and grandson Jędrrek. Such names are not accidental and even if they are, this accident was controlled by a mythmaking subconsciousness. Zośka, the one who chose a poor “vagrant” over a local rich man, is reminiscent of *Pan Tadeusz* (“Sir Thaddeus”) and all the “misalliance” issues, so vital in our culture. Her son, Jędrrek, the best student in the class, inherited the name from his literary progenitors – Jędrrek Ślimak and Jędrrek Radek. Jędrrek is the one to whom the future belongs. Even if Marcin Duda's grandson becomes an engineer, he certainly will not specialize in hasty logging” [26, s. 110-111].

In one of the scenes performed beneath the tree, the issue is imagined activities by Duda's grandson as an engineer. The scene is participated by Jędrrek as well. His hypothetical future is created from various perspectives. From the point of view by the Engineer, who supervises construction of the road in the drama's action, this profession is achievable by the boy and will come as a reward for solid studying. Zośka would be proud of her son's achievements, Franek strongly opposes against such an idea for the boy's future, and the grandfather – aware of his grandson's abilities – is convinced that he would finish cutting the trees which Engineer did not manage to log. Ignoring the grandson's ardent reassurance on not cutting the tree defended by the grandfather, Duda makes Jędrrek cry violently and desperately. As a result the boy escapes to the cottage. Such Jędrrek's reaction raises hope that he will defend what his grandfather defends. This idea is additionally reinforced by a

conversation on the *Bible* which precedes this scene. The peasant, who defends the tree, asks his grandson to bring the Holy Scripture, because the TV message is, according to Duda, "... at variance with our faith" [16, s. 45]. The boy knows very well where to find the book and is not surprised that his grandfather keeps it behind a painting. He is willing to carry out the grandfather's order and wants him to read the *Bible*. Duda promises his grandson reading together and perceives him as a direct heir to the *Bible*: "When I am dead, it will remain yours forever." [16, s. 45].

The reality of a s u p e r n a t u r a l w o r l d is the second crucial sign of hope in Myśliwski's drama, since next to living characters the dead also appear under the tree. They mix with the living people and it is sometimes hard to tell them apart. Almost each character is marked with an aspect of the complicated history of Poland. There comes, among many others, a dekulakized peasant, rich peasant Sebastian, Reaper I, Informer Poldek who was shot by a partisan, and Partisan who executed Poldek. There is Firefighter Gabriel who died in a fire as he was saving a child, Brewer Stach who was torn by a mine, Old-fashioned Official and Leader, Pedlar, Count and Countess who "cannot go off form", Parish Priest of 17th century, Scythe-Bearing Peasant Recruit, Marshal and Duda's long since gone wife. From their perspective: "The world is neither high nor wide. It is as flat as a pancake". The dead characters are aware of their status, as proven by the Count's statement:

"Our words are no longer current. And these our bodies, you see, they aren't ours. And these our outfits, smiles, thoughts – all of them aren't ours. You might say they were borrowed from the dressing room of history on today's occasion. The occasion is special indeed. Maybe even the most important one. Something a bit like great celebration at the cemetery. The dead invite the living or the other way round. But you won't distinguish between them, because they are equally sad" [16, s. 151-152].

The dead that appear in the village feel comfortable under Duda's tree, as expressed by Firefighter, who responds to Policeman's accusations: "Where's the ghosts' place? They feel at home here" [16, s. 131]. Sometimes the deceased expose limited horizons of the real characters, as exemplified by the Pedlar who describes

the Engineer as follows: “We will discuss serious matters when he dies. He’s a fool now.... Look, he is hollow, just an echo” [16, s. 37]. Sometimes the dead, as Duda’s wife or Firefighter Gabriel, complete the picture of the main protagonist. The acoustics maintain an essential function in creating the supernatural sphere. It has been emphasized especially in the radio drama, where the choir of the “dead” attracts much attention. Acoustic blending and diversifying the worlds of the living and of the dead play an important role here. “The voices of the dead are here respectively stripped of >>vivid acoustics<< and thrown in a vacuum” [15]. The action played to the music of angelic choirs creates the world of symbolic reality.

Mixing the living people with the dead and blurring the boundary between these worlds in a poetic world created by Myśliwski in his *Drzewo* demonstrates the obviousness of supernatural reality even against the man-made systems, like the one (that was) served by those constructing the road. “The great speech of the world in *Drzewo* – the speech of the living and the dead, saint and cursed speech – expresses and justifies moral opposition against destruction and extinction of spiritual and physical preconditions for existence” [3, s. 38].

It is worth mentioning one more character situated by Myśliwski among those in *Drzewo* – the Man in a Straw Hat. Stage directions give us the following idea about his appearance: “... *Man in a Straw Hat enters, he’s out of his breath; he wears a threadbare, tattered suit and contorted shoes. At the same time he has a bow tie at his collar, a walking stick with a carved cane, well, and this hat. He even might be dressed slightly different, but the requisites of the erstwhile elegance stand out in his outfit*” [16, s. 165].

Let’s analyze his self-presentation that can be heard in an interview led by the Policeman:

“POLICEMAN: ... At first, say who you are?”

MAN IN A STRAW HAT: I t’ s m e. [spaced out by A.J.] Who else?

POLICEMAN: Who me? Y o u m a y b e e i t h e r o n e o r o t h e r. A n y b o d y. A m a n w i t h n o n a m e. A m a n w h o d o e s n’ t e x i s t [spaced out by A.J.].

MAN IN A STRAW HAT: Just so! That's who I am. You deigned to define me accurately.

POLICEMAN: Who, exactly?

MAN IN A STRAW HAT: It's hard to say, exactly. I would even dare to say that I don't exist, exactly. I exist only in generality. In generality itself, to be more precise. This generality is freed from any attribution, ascertainment, judgement and similar trivial measures. From anything what underlies the ill human thinking and torments resulting from it. In short, I don't copy any patterns.... You were thinking, as the others, that I'm a person from my own imagination, a person from the world of metaphysics – a ghost, in short. No, I'm not. I'm not a ghost. I am, simply [spaced out by A.J.]. Ghost and generality [spaced out by A.J.] are two various spheres. The ghost, if I may say so, arises from suffering, transforms into the idea of suffering, to finally become a pattern or, if you wish, a symbol of suffering. But I'm neither a pattern nor a symbol of anything. I've never aspired to none of them. Today I don't aspire much less. But I can assure you that I have quite a good life. Moreover, almost nothing annoys me. Since I've become a, so to say, general personality [spaced out by A.J.] I got rid of sciatica, angina pectoris, cirrhosis, duodenal ulcer and a few other human flaws, which are nothing but symptoms of the existence. What annoys me the most are the ideas [spaced out by A.J.] This ivy greedily entwines the self – from the birth to death and through the eternal memory of us. We grow this ivy inside us and never get to know ourselves. As a result no duties plague us” [16, s. 166-167].

Father Marian Lewko interprets the character of the Man in a Straw Hat as follows: “... (he – A.J.) seems to be a symbol of freedom, i.e. emancipation from all forms which squeeze a man into official registers, and freedom is a right to live” [13, s. 99]. However, views of the Man in a Straw Hat and theories which can be heard in them seem to opalesce with i.a. relativism, existentialism, nihilism and Eastern philosophy. This character promotes an idea of complete freedom, with no ideas or ideals. His palpable destructive and treacherous power is not aggressive; it is rather disguised. After all, the straw hat and the character's calmness suggest positive

connotations. However, the attitudes he “plants” and promotes are very misleading. What is the concept of “general personality” subtly propagated by the Man in a Straw Hat? It is “a man with no characteristic”, a pawn in the hands of a collective, a part of the masses, an individual with no face, voice, character, identity, who “does not worry about ... any ideas” or “any obligations”.

Who is the Man in a Straw Hat? As we listen to his self-presentation and views included, he seems to be in opposition to Marcin Duda who defends values and the whole world order represented with the symbol of the tree. Man in a Straw Hat turns out to be an enigmatic, reversal of Duda’s tree. The way of living or existing as a man propagated by the Man in a Straw Hat stands in contradiction to the being represented by Duda.

“... what I mean is a relief understood as a state of permanency – spins the Man in a Straw Hat – as a bliss of existence, randomness of existence and freedom of existence. An existence with no attributes which would define or even condition this existence and decide, if I may say so, on its physiognomy, especially on its fulfilment or unfulfilment. In accordance with a priori set criteria. But that’s nonsense! ... You could assume that it’s a pleasure to exist in generality. That’s true. But it’s a despair at the same time. It’s all the same. There are no such opposing notions in generality. There aren’t any” [16, s. 167].

It is impossible to classify the Man in a Straw Hat into any of the worlds distinguished in the drama. He is the most intelligent character among those created in *Drzewo*. From the disquisition he offers in a response to short Policeman’s questions, it can be inferred that he is an intellectual. When the Informer shows knowledge of philosophy and awareness of multiple perspectives with which to look at the world and life resulting from it, Man in a Straw Hat identifies him as an equal interlocutor:

“MAN IN A STRAW HAT: Don’t you believe that there is actually no problem whether to fell or not to fell? There is a problem how to tear the world away from the tree. And it has a double meaning. The world means the globe and, metaphorically, madness.

INFORMER: According to Berkeley, the tree doesn't exist at all and it just seems to us that there is one. According to Plato, the tree reflects the idea. And according to God, it is a sign of fate. May God take care of it" [16, s. 171].

The Man in a Straw Hat appears in the setting of the drama in its final part. Inferring from the quoted line answered by the Informer and from the last sentence he utters, which simultaneously are the last words in the drama, his appearance is neither accidental nor pointless. Along with other characters in the drama, he witnesses Duda's departing conveyed in the drama with subtle and very simple theatrical tools. His one-sentence-long commentary leaves no doubt that the protagonist who had defended the tree met his end: "Well, it didn't work out. But at least one of them will free himself" [16, s. 186]. These words indicate that an ulterior intention of the Man in a Straw Hat was to dissuade Duda from the tree he defended and from all values symbolized by the tree. Considering the stranger's intentions and views, it can be found that his features are devilish and his aim is being achieved subtly, cleverly and in disguise as if he were the Tempter from the Book of Genesis. The demonic nature of this character is additionally implied with his short exchange with the Head of the Commune Office:

"HEAD OF THE COMMUNE OFFICE: Are you taking part in our nativity play?

MAN IN A STRAW HAT: I'd say that my play has a little bit bigger scale. The whole globe is my scene. Not only.

HEAD OF THE COMMUNE OFFICE: Is it your first time to these parts?

MAN IN A STRAW HAT: Not really. I've been here before" [16, s. 178].

J. Pałowski perceives the above conversation as the author's record proving that this work relates to a nativity play – a performance categorized as the folk culture [19, s. 110]. The scholar similarly perceives the Man in a Straw Hat. In his work *A jeśli chodzi o moje pisanie...* one can read: "We do not know who is the Man in a Straw Hat that does not kneel before the Death ... Concerning elaborateness of his language, one can conclude that he is the devil" [19, s. 111].

Although Myśliwski's *Drzewo* does not even contain the dialogue between Duda and the Man in a Straw Hat, the latter arrives to delude Duda, to separate him from his roots, from everything he defends, to deprive him of his traditional heritage, mission in life, meaning of life, identity and memory. The Man in a Straw Hat indeed seeks to disinherit him, as the snake from Eden did with biblical Eve, mother of all the living, condemning her offspring to a quality of life differing from the one included in the initial divine plan. Man in a Straw Hat's ulterior intention, hidden behind the lines he utters and heard by the one defending the tree, is to cast doubt on everything that dying Duda believed in and was faithful to through his whole life and on everything he defends departing this life. This analogy is only seemingly distant, because the aims of both tempting characters are common: to dissuade a man from faithfulness to the Creator. The efforts by the biblical Tempter were successful – the tempter created by Myśliwski fails. It seems this failure is one aspect of the concealed hope emanating from the drama.

A n d t h e l a s t c o n c e p t o f h o p e : e m b e r s o f c o n f l i c t – t h e t i t l e t r e e. In Myśliwski's drama it is a sign with a very complex symbolism [5, p. 114-115; 7, p. 29-32; 8, s. 151-183; 10, s. 67-70; 14, p. 48-50; 24, p. 222-224], which has already been very accurately interpreted by scholars.

It is worth noting here the conclusions on this sign which result from the link, highlighted by researchers of his works, between Myśliwski's dramas and novels. Already H. Bereza noted that "*Drzewo* is an epilogue of the peasant epic poem *Kamień na kamieniu* (1984) and a prologue to his major work – taking into account its social recognition – the novel entitled *Widnokrąg* (1996) containing the vision of family foundations, i.e. the deep-sea vision of foundations underlying all social links of a human" [3, s. 36]. Proving his theory on the sequence of literary works written by Myśliwski at the beginning of his career, D. Kulesza noted "... to what extent the third novel (*Kamień...*) and the drama (*Drzewo*) differ from the earlier works. They are different but retain some similarities which make them >>dependant<< on each other. *Kamień...* and *Drzewo* represent literature of great metaphors. Their greatness should not be measured with their originality, but their extent, i.e. functionality which

enables to describe the whole world – the rural universe. The key metaphor in *Kamień...* is a grave. The key metaphor in *Drzewo* can be found in the drama's title" [11, s. 117].

Referring to a mythical way of thinking (as proven by Eliade), the tree was recognized as a symbol of the universe, "... a former, natural order of the world, constancy, connection with nature.... Indeed, Duda is the owner of the soaring tree into which he climbed, but in fact it belongs to the universe" – wrote B. Kaniewska [9, s. 112]. "A peasant tree becomes the symbol of life connecting the past with the eternity..." – noticed Fr. M. Lewko [13, s. 98]. R.K. Przybylski recognized that Duda's tree grows on the edge of a precipice. "... it is also related to the human experience. As a result of its lack the world ceases to be the human world" [21, s. 15]. J. Ablewicz called it "... the last bastion of the old order,... a sign of tradition," a vertical axis "... linking two dimensions – real one and metaphysical one" [1, s. 35]. Within the meaning of this universal, cosmic, religious symbol, stressed D. Kulesza the Judeo-Christian context which – according to the scholar – seems to be the closest one to the poetic world created by W. Myśliwski. In accordance with this context, the tree in Myśliwski's play is both the tree of life and the tree of the knowledge of good and evil [11, s. 118].

Significantly, the species of tree is, in principle, in the drama not determined:

“OFFICIAL I (*to the Head of the Commune Office*): And what if we nail a plate reading that it's a natural monument? In accordance with the rule of law, a natural monument is inviolable. Duda's first name is Marcin, right? We could engrave an inscription: „Marcin Oak Tree, natural monument.”

HEAD OF THE COMMUNE OFFICE: You talk rubbish. It's not an oak.

OFFICIAL I: Not an oak? Then what?

HEAD OF THE COMMUNE OFFICE: Who the hell knows. S o m e t h i n g s t r a n g e. (spaced out by A.J.) (*to Duda*) What kind of tree is this, Mr. Duda?!

DUDA: The tree" [16, s. 96].

Complex and deep meanings of this symbol have found interesting stage designs. It is worth quoting two fragments of reviews concerning the stage adaptation

of *Drzewo* directed by K. Dejmek in the Polish Theatre in Warsaw in 1988. The critics had nothing but admiration for the stage design of the title symbol. Jacek Sieradzki described it as follows:

“When the curtain is being raised, the silhouette of a gigantic tree emerges from semi-darkness and nearly stretches the framework of the stage in the Warsaw Polish Theatre. After a while it can be seen that Jan Polewka wove the crown of this giant of wide strips of decorative fabric hanging from the flytower: they are light, shimmer as leafage – metaphorically, illiterally. In reality just a heavy, thick trunk stands on the stage, and there are a bench and a pair of boots under it. Round them there is just empty space – stretching away to the skyline, golden and green in the daytime and violetish over the night. To make a long story short: there is a lot of air in this stage design” [23, s. 8].

Małgorzata Szpakowska’s opinion harmonized with the above description: “... stunningly simple idea by Myśliwski... comes as a surprise at the beginning of the reading, and, as a result of brilliant stage design, almost holds your breath in the Polish Theatre: the dark crown of the tree was designed by Jan Polewka of initially invisible kilims, after a while sort of icons can be seen on them in the light, as if the tree linked the earth and the heavens indeed” [25, s. 126].

From the outer perspective, the tree created by Myśliwski grows into the axis of the world. “The whole earth clings to its roots, but for which it would have fallen in upon itself long ago – explains the peasant to his daughter. The whole sky balances on its crown, but for which it would have come tumbling down long ago. And thanks to that there’s somewhere to live” [18, p. 43-44]. From the inner perspective, the tree is inseparably joined with its defender. Duda says to the Leader: “Don’t climb here, because you want take me down. Unless I’m dead. But then this tree and we all will be dead as well.” [16, s. 56]. Marcin Duda finds defending the tree, resembling the indomitable struggle of the *Placówka* (“The Outpost”) protagonist, his mission in life: “What answer could I give to God if He said to me, I planted a tree here in the beginning, and it was your destiny, Marcin, to guard it, but instead you have allowed

it to be cut down. On what are they now crucifying me? What would I say?" [18, p. 44].

Direct reference to the cross suggests that the fact of crucifying God repeats in the world each time the line of human concepts, actions and plans goes beyond the vertical divine axis and starts crossing it when reaching the horizontal level. In the drama both axes are clearly defined with the tree and the road. It was artistically executed in the stage design of the play directed by K. Nazar (in the New Theatre in Poznań in 1989). The tree, centrally located on the stage, was in its central part crossed with a fragment of a concrete road hanging over the stage. The road hovers in the background, just above the heads of actors playing on the stage. Such a location of two superior elements in the stage design makes them assume the shape of the cross.

Two axes which cross in the drama *Drzewo*: the horizontal one – the road related in general to the real characters, and the vertical one – the tree penetrated with the characters from the beyond, allude to one more meaning explained by Myśliwski in his essay *Kres kultury chłopskiej* ("The End of Peasant Culture"): "Experience was a foundation of this culture: vertical experience – if one may say so – that is experience of generations, and horizontal experience that is experience of a community where one used to live. It meant mainly experiencing the pain of existence and it will be no overstatement to call it existential fullness. In this experience lacks nothing what in this world might have happened to a man perceived as an individual or as a community" [17, s. 16].

It is worth noting the moment of decorating the tree in imitation of a Christmas tree. This process is supposed to defend the tree from being cut down and is an initiative by Marcin's grandson Jędrek [16, s. 119], supported by his son-in-law Franek. Jędrek believes that Christmas tradition has to be respected by the all and it will secure the tree when his grandfather stops to protect it for a moment. Superimposing the title sign with the image of a Christmas tree, including its deep symbolism [6], additionally lays particular stress on the meanings connoted with the tree. On the other hand it seems that a nativity play [19, s. 110-115; 20, s. 196] starts

to be highlighted in the drama from this moment on; its elements are getting more and more highlighted and they reach their culmination when the Head of the Commune Office literally asks the Man in a Straw Hat: “Are you taking part in our nativity play?” [16, s. 178].

Marcin Duda warns against a world deprived of trees. With such a vision lure those who strive to change the eternal order: “... everyone would be able to build his own tree according to a plan from the commune office. If you wish an oak, you will write oak on it, if you wish an ash, you will write ash, if an elm, you will write elm, if an acacia, you will write acacia. But when you sit under such a brick tree, you will feel as if you sit under a cross.” A static character of *Drzewo* – being a point of criticism for some, referred to as “monumental” by B. Kaniewska [9, s. 123] – warns against mindless changes (concerning their mechanism) and their consequences, slightly similar to those introduced in *Tango* by Edek who dances with characters created by S. Mrożek. Static equilibrium of reflexive Duda is juxtaposed with the *Tango* protagonist’s whirl of dancing. D. Kulesza, highlighting that it is impossible to limit *Drzewo* to the current of Polish peasant literature, notes: “As a country drama, *Drzewo*... is condemned to be a national drama, a drama which does not solely refer to particularistic Polish issues, but also to universal issues of civilization, related to the transformation of rural culture into urban culture. Actually, I should rather write about deterioration, death of rural culture as a result of everything but this culture” [11, s. 119].

When he visits a site familiar to him, Count – one of the characters in Myśliwski’s drama that comes from the beyond – says: “At Marcin Duda’s the tree stands as it used to” [16, s. 146]. Duda answers him after a while: “... the problem is always the same. They want to fell my tree” [16, s. 148]. A bit earlier it can be heard in the conversation of the Informer and the Partisan – both former residents of the village where the drama is set: “We can’t help it that we all come from the same trunk. Why, we’re even going to sing side by side” [18, p. 47]. In Myśliwski’s drama, the tree is an archaic, mythical image of the foundations of culture underlying the peasant tradition. Memory takes on a dimension of a myth, legend. In fact, in all his

works, the author reveals the meaning of archaic reserves of this culture. These issues were discussed in further details by S. Żak in *Mit kultury chłopskiej w twórczości Wiesława Myśliwskiego* [29]. It is worth noting here Myśliwski's reflection on this complex issue that was covered in two sources: essay *Kres kultury chłopskiej* and an interview given to "Polityka":

"In many countries, where peasant cultures used to be natural, permanent basins feeding national cultures and determining the character of these cultures, peasant heritage participated in intellectual awareness as its natural component. Chopin, Mickiewicz, Norwid, Wyspiański, Leśmian or Szymanowski notwithstanding, who were signposts pointing to the peasant culture and signs of its infinite wealth, this culture stayed on the sidelines in Poland until the rest of its days, unrecognized, depreciated, often falsified or ideologized, for many exotic, for some even non-existent.

Therefore, it is worthwhile to remind that – according to *Rocznik statystyczny* ("Statistical Yearbook") – only in 1939 these sidelines were inhabited by about 70% of Polish society. If we also consider a remark that today's Polish intelligentsia traces its origins in peasantry – which they unfortunately sometimes disown – the paradox of a gap between intellectual awareness and cultural heritage of peasants starts to be – generally speaking – incomprehensible and – to be more vocal – turns into cultural drama. One may, based on a very general presupposition, become conscious of what we have lost, what was squandered in the national culture. It was not without reason that Henryk Bereza called peasant culture a mother culture" [17, s. 5-6].

The category of a peasant fate is to me the most important and fundamental category of the folk cultural tradition. Being a peasant means to have a given fate and not a given profession. Already a modern farmer is a profession. It is at the same time one of the richest Polish fates. This fate includes a synthesis of multigenerational experience of the peasant class which accumulates universal practical wisdom. It includes nearly the whole system of social, existential, and philosophic values. These values, which were tested out by generations and exceeded historicity, became values for today and tomorrow, i.e. universal human values. Additionally, this culture

reflects great imagination, the most creative one, which was not a surplus human life, but a possibility to maintain dignity and freedom, i.e. a human defense system [4, s. 149].

Quoted at the beginning of this article, extensive tirades by the frustrated Engineer refer [18, p. 38-39] to the power of this culture, tradition and memory. “This memory is included in the national culture, it sets this culture in the history. At the same time, however, due to common roots, the memory reminds of being a member of Europe. This tradition, understood as a system of values eminent in the collective awareness, plays the role of remembering and transferring” [29, s. 43].

In conclusion, let's take a look at the first sentence which – as Wiesław Myśliwski always says when he comments on his own works – is the most important one. In *Drzewo* it reads: “L o o k, s o m e b o d y ' s l e f t a p a i r o f b o o t s” [18, p. 33] (spaced out by A.J). This remark by a Workman with Saw may be a sign of what is going to happen in the drama's rising action. It seems this situation is completely normal – one climbs into the tree and takes off his boots to first of all remove an unnecessary burden. This gesture is very pragmatic as is going to be proven with a small piece of paper found in the boots: “if the worst comes to the worst, pray to God to forgive me and my boots are left to Franek” [18, p. 33]. When the symbolism of the title tree and reality of the poetic world in the drama is being revealed and we recall the first sentence, we have an impression that the left boots conceal a deeper meaning. Marcin Duda is convinced of the sanctity of the area he enters when he makes this gesture of humility. He takes off his boots like Moses, who takes off sandals when he steps over the place where the burning bush appeared. The gesture made by the aged Polish peasant may express that he perceives the values he defends as the sanctity of the One who established them, the sanctity of His eternal wisdom.

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