Premiere of “(A)pollonia.” In his new, intense production Warlikowski shows that guilt is universal and the war will never end.

“Words are useless”: this phrase is used repeatedly by war criminals and victims alike in Krzysztof Warlikowski’s (A)pollonia. The production, based on ancient tragedy (Iphigenia in Aulis, Oresteia, Hercules Furens and Alcestis), Hanna Krall’s essays, J.M. Coetzee’s prose (Elisabeth Costello) and The Kindly Ones, the celebrated novel by Jonathan Littell, is a poignant treatise on the inability to express: be it pain, traumatic experiences, the feeling of guilt or love. In (A)pollonia, Warlikowski brings together several motifs which have preoccupied him for years. In Dybuk, also based on Hanna Krall’s text, he had confronted the memory of the Holocaust. The motif of the quiet nurturer turning into a mother-monster had repeatedly surfaced in his work ever since his production of Hamlet and The Bacchantes. But his latest work, a co-production of seven European institutions (Stary Teatr from Kracow, Festival d’Avignon, La Comedie de Geneve - Centre Dramatique and Wiener Festwochen, among others), surprises despite those familiar elements. His most eclectic, most fragmented work thus far, pieced together out of texts ancient and modern, the production provides a coherent testimony to the failure of rationality and language in the face of reality which eludes description.

This time Warlikowski is more of a philosopher than an artist. The mass of literary allusions may seem excessive and confusing at times. But in the end, the production turns out to be a moving record of the struggle with the “heart of darkness” we all carry within us, heroes, criminals and artists alike.

The protagonists of Aeschylus’s and Euripides’s drama and those of contemporary prose all desperately seek form they could give to their stories. From puppet theater, fable, and parable, they move to the convention of the interview, talk-show, public speech, lecture, web-chat, interrogation, video conference and recorded confession. All of these attempts at communication fail. What these people want to convey cannot be heard and understood. How are we to take Agamemnon’s pronouncement, when he returns from the war as a criminal, very much like Adolf Eichmann (from Hannah Arendt’s book on the banality of evil), when he says that “you would also have killed had you been in my place; only you were lucky not to be confronted with such a decision”? How are we to understand Alcestis (Magdalena Cielecka) saying to her husband, Admetus (Jacek Poniedziałek): “Yes, I will die for you”? Or Iphigenia (Magdalena Popławska) agreeing to sacrifice her life for her country? Or Apolonia Machczyńska (Cielecka), a pregnant mother of several children giving herself over to the Gestapo in place of her old father?

The play is built around those three female sacrifices. The director, however, does not identify sacrifice with heroism, or see it as a reason for glory. He also points to its stupidity, vanity and egoism. Iphigenia is a spoiled kid in her first communion dress, who will get herself killed partly to spite her mother, partly for the earrings from “dearest daddy.” The tortured Apollonia is no longer unequivocally admirable when her son (Marek Kalita) appears on the other side of the stage, as years later he is accepting on her behalf the title of the Righteous Among the Nations. In the poem he reads by Andrzej Czajkowski (the protagonist of Krall’s essay) there are a number of accusations. “You took your own life and my place at your side (…) and you cheated me like the worst bitch.” Who was Apollonia, then? A bad mother, or a good Polish woman and daughter?
The victims are judged and the criminals are given right to self-defense. Agamemnon (Maciej Stuhr) screams his apology to the microphone until it can no longer endure it and responds with a piercing screech. After his wife’s death, Admetus organizes a press conference. The murderess Clytemnestra (Małgorzata Hajewska-Krzysztofik) imagines scenes of reconciliation between her husband Agamemnon (whom she has killed) and her daughter (whom he has killed).

When Krystian Lupa used cameras and video projections in his recent plays he was showing artists trying to demonstrate their uniqueness. Warlikowski’s protagonists try to prove in front of the cameras that they are average, plain people. They are both guilty and heroic, human and animalistic, like us. This does exceed the realm of political correctness. Do the criminals demanding understanding compromise and manipulate language, or do their words indeed contain something we don’t want to acknowledge?

By introducing Coetzee’s novel (written as the text of a lecture by an elderly woman writer who, instead of speaking of her inspirations, makes a surprisingly emotional speech about animal rights) into Apollonia, Warlikowski shows how language may limit, enslave, and belittle reality. In her lecture, Costello (a coquetish, acerbic Ewa Radwan-Gancarczyk) tries to stick to the rules of academic discourse, but emotions carry her in the direction of scream and violent gesture. Drivel and excessive expressivity turn out to better represent her “truth” than logical argument. But then, who is to decide what counts as drivel? The role models are missing. The Judge of the Supreme Court of Israel (Andrzej Chyra) who awards the title of the Righteous Among the Nations is a trembling clown. The gods who used to accompany human beings vainly attempt to fit into their own cultural representations (Adam Nawojczyk flexes his naked body saying, “I’m the f…ing official Apollo). All that remains from their significant names are the internet nicks: @pollo:), Hercules666.

Only metaphors and music afford the chance for communication. Ranate Jett, who continually wonders between the canopy of light bulbs in Polish national colors, the lit baths and the backstage, introduces with her songs an irrational, magical, emotional element which the formally coherent utterances lack. The musicians present on stage explain more with a few beats than the longest tirade. A chance for communication can also be glimpsed in the images: often brutal (the death of each of the victims is its own performance), provocative, parodic.

Warlikowski created a powerful, at times satirical work about the ambiguity of all definitions: of crime, of justice and of guilt. We all potentially participate in guilt, only some of us were born in luckier circumstances than those who are judged criminals. The war never ends, it lasts in the memory of its participants and their children. Sacrifice is meaningless, even as an example for posterity. The grandson of the righteous Apollonia, as an Israeli soldier, may be one day forced to shoot Palestinians. Nothing can be explicated. When Agamemnon tries to explain to the listeners the fact that during World War II one person died every 4.6 seconds, it sounds more absurd than the hysterical speech on the advantages of sex with dolphins delivered by Alcestis who is about to sacrifice her life.

(A)pollonia rehabilitates the scream, feelings, music and metaphor which are more potent than crippled words. Warlikowski gave many interviews before the premiere. In none of those has he disclosed as much about himself as when dancing throughout the performance by the soundtechnicians’ stand.

“Warlikowski on crippled words”
Joanna Derkaczew
Gazeta Wyborcza No 115
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Inhuman sacrifice

Krzysztof Warlikowski’s "(A)pollonia", prepared for the inauguration of Nowy Teatr, is a story about the sense of life which is not always about living but perhaps sometimes about a dignified death.

Spring this year has been indeed quite beautiful. Every month a new gigantic theatre production - stifling, inconvenient, posing the most fundamental questions. First, there was the “Trilogy” where we saw the Nation in search of the form and sense of existence. Then came “Teoremat” with the incomprehensible and equally rapacious God. Finally, “Marilyn”, describing the paradox of an artist imprisoned in art and life. The lines drawn by Klata (looking into the future), Jarzyna (an upward stroke), and Lupa (a stroke within) cross all thematic areas which are truly worth the attention of the theatre. Warlikowski drafted a theatrical spiral. He set a stage machine into motion which starts from one point only to whirl on into infinity, farther and farther from the center, picking up on the way everything which is of utmost importance: the myth and history, family and fate, war and the Holocaust, love and death, sacrifice and cowardice.

"(A)pollonia" is an attempt at defining the limits of humanity. This personal obsession of the director’s is at the same time most difficult to grasp in contemporary culture. It starts with a clumsy, half-acted and half-animated scene with the use of child dummies from Korczak’s children’s theatre in the Ghetto. Then we move on to follow the histories of three women who willingly sacrificed themselves: Iphigenia, Alcestis, Apolonia Machczyńska. The death of the first one made it possible for the Greek fleet to reach Troy. The second one gave her life in exchange for the life of her husband. The third one was killed for hiding 25 Jews. In the case of each woman there was always someone close right next to them – a cowardly traitor who did nothing to stop them.

It took Warlikowski’s ingenious intuition to juxtapose Hanna Krall’s prose on equal footing with Greek tragedies. Whilst Oresteia was a history of the founding myth of democracy, the Holocaust is the key to contemporariness. Greek myths are illuminated with the glow of the Holocaust, the Holocaust is read through mythical figures whom the heroes from Krall’s prose become.

The space of the play does not create a place. It is more like a frame for acting. A white corridor with metal footlights, like at a concert. Actors and technicians slide the mobile glass bathroom module on stage. The second object, initially hidden on the other side, is the living space module. But the acting space is not the place of the plot. There are only sketches, points of support for the actor – a table, a dummy, metal scaffolding. A rock band plays throughout almost the entire play. Renate Jett sings in English, sounding a bit like Björk and Sigur Rós.

The actors are restrained by the convention of an entertainment show, they are told to speak to a microphone and tell about their character rather than to act. And then all the other characters bring with them the old, coldly beautiful world of Warlikowski. The director creates a spatial collage of a sort with the intermingling dimensions of acting, screens, and music. The plot takes place in all times simultaneously: during the war, in the myth, and in contemporariness. In the true present time of Warlikowski.

"(A)pollonia" is a study on the fear and despair of war, and the post-war grief. But there is nobody to point the finger at absolute evil. Neither is good questioned here, nor is the sense of sacrifice of the three women. Warlikowski always examines both sides of the coin. He looks for specks of the unobvious in the sacrifice of pure good: egoism, depression, lack of imagination, escape from life. Iphigenia, Alcestis, and Apolonia are just as helpless in light
of what is happening as are those for whom they are making the sacrifice. It would be difficult to see them as scapegoats, the innocent victims of collective hatred. They are aware, suspiciously rational, and conscious of the consequences despite the fact that they are faced with decisions much beyond the capabilities of those close to them. Warlikowski knows that a life sacrifice destroys not only the one making the sacrifice but also his or her entire family. Shows made of survival, war, or the Holocaust irritate him. This was no world championship in surviving extreme circumstances, this was no Holocaust survival game. The sense of life is not always about living but perhaps sometimes about dying a dignified death. Like Korczak’s children, who marched on through the gates of Auschwitz.

Coetzee and Littell appear here as commentators. The idea introduced to the play from the book “Elisabeth Costello” is that of placing the Holocaust of Jews on an equal footing with the still continuing holocaust of animals. This is a metaphor of the attitude of man-the-destroyer to the world. It’s not about any single specific evil that has happened but about the entire strategy of humanity.

The last scene is cathartic in nature. The characters from the antique and Nazi family slaughters come inside a room. Renate Jett’s band plays their last song inside. The actors sway to the music. This is the final refuge and the arc of salvation on the stage. It is time to rest, shake off the character, forget about the hell which was played before us. The music lasts longer than the nightmare.

"Inhuman Sacrifice"
Łukasz Drewniak
Przekrój No 20
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(A)pollonia

In (A)pollonia Warlikowski clashes different genre and media: fairy tale with a TV show, myth with virtual on-line reality, lecture with a circus

Sacrifice is an ineffable act. It is a deed, an event, an experience that cannot be told, which cannot be testified. The sacrifice stemming from surrendering oneself to divine law or absolute logic, or being the expression of unconditional devotion is something that cannot be explained, something that goes beyond the reason and imagination. Sacrifice itself is something which also escapes presentation – it is possible to describe the circumstances, its form, appearance; it is possible to give statistics, but the experience which is the essence of sacrifice is elusive. Sacrifice is obscene and if it is not placed in the rigorous frame of a ritual, it jeopardizes the dominating order and undermines the current beliefs and norms. This is exactly why the reason and the language, helpless in light of the scandal of sacrifice, try to attach a trait of indispensability to sacrifice - a historical, religious, ideological, and ethical necessity. Only then can the obscene be considered in the framework of a rational discourse.

In his new production, which is a unique project of the new theatre drawing on the director’s past work and at the same time going beyond it, Krzysztof Warlikowski has taken on board the problem of sacrifice. This attempt is not aimed, however, at solving or explaining the issue, or replying to it and perhaps telling about it in a cohesive and straightforward manner; in other words – at including it within the scope of a defined discourse. On the contrary – Warlikowski confronts the viewer with a set of questions
regarding the fact and phenomenon of sacrifice. These questions proliferate and keep on doing so long after the play is over. The answers can only be partial and never fully adequate.

Warlikowski presents the stories of three women who had sacrificed themselves in the name of different values and as a result of different circumstances: Iphigenia (Magdalena Popławska) – sacrificed by her father Agamemnon (Maciej Stuhr), willingly giving her life for the good of her homeland; Alcestes (Magdalena Cielecka) – sacrificing her life in exchange of the life of her husband Admetus (Jacek Poniedziałek); and finally Apolonia Machczyńska (Magdalena Cielecka), who died for hiding over twenty Jews during the war.

The director appears to assume that sacrifice, when devoid of the rationalizing discourses, is something inconceivable, and it is this incomprehensiveness with which we need to grapple. Warlikowski unmasks the obscenity of sacrifice, which by entering a certain order reveals a potential to subversively undermine it – not by shocking with images of violence and cruelty (be it physical, mental, or logical), so inseparable from sacrifice, but by questioning the discourse which tries to describe and tame sacrifice, giving it a strict sense. No matter what meaning we ascribe to sacrifice or how we try to justify it, it will always remain nonsensical: ambiguous, ambivalent, difficult to accept or to bear. Whenever we fail to find its sense in religion, we turn to the language of science, politics, ethics, philosophy, or art.

Warlikowski does not trust any of those languages. By reaching for the motif of sacrifice he speaks of the unbearable suffering which is not only experienced by the victim but also those who are close, who also have to face it; he talks about the mechanism of violence and power in which the one making the sacrifice, be it willingly or not, is pulled; about the ambivalence of love and hatred; about love with the inseparable and ineffable loss; about the trauma of separation and loneliness in the face of death; about the dark and cruel side of human nature, pushed out of the framework of humanity but brought back within as a result of sacrifice; about harm and guilt which cannot be unambiguously defined.

This is not the first time Warlikowski is confronting his viewers with all that is so atrocious that only the ritual can bear, express, explain, and endure – to paraphrase Sarah Kane’s words from “Crave”. “Cleansed”, by the same author, was a culmination of these efforts, with the explicitly and ruthlessly asked questions about the meaning of sacrifice, and the declaration of love for which we are ready to die. What does it mean to die for somebody and instead of somebody? How and whether at all is it possible to die in exchange of somebody? What is one’s not-one’s death? And what does the death of somebody else do to me? What does the love of somebody else do to me? To answer these questions Warlikowski tried to find an equivalent of a ritual in the poetic and theatrical presentation – one which was cruel but inscribing all that is painful and unbearable in the esthetic and symbolic order metaphorically constructed on the rubble of the world found and the vision of the subject and language it contains.

Continuing to develop his thinking about what theatre can be and how it works, Warlikowski seeks in “(A)pollonia forms which are more narrative, and which are more capable of expressing all that is inexpressible than the illustratory means. The language, the different languages and their juxtaposition, the different modes of speaking and telling, all become a field of experimentation, which takes theatre from the level of staging into the sphere of open contemplation and direct confrontation with the viewer. The audience is faced with a number of questions directly addressed from the stage, and is forced to independently look for and create answers at the intersections of the sometimes contradicting suggestions and trails. The rule which demolishes the unambiguousness and uniformity of narrative and the theatrical discourse is one of montage and fragmentation, which projects certain possible answers, simultaneously undermining or revaluing them by the introduction of a new context.
The courage to pose difficult and painful questions, and to dwell on all, even the inconvenient topics, makes the theatre more a method of exercising philosophy through art. This is not to say that the theatre is exceeded but rather that a certain esthetics is revalued and new means of expression are sought, which can help talk about the issues and problems the director is concerned about in a more straightforward manner. Although Warlikowski uses the words of others, his declaration is very personal and engages viewers forcing them to adopt a critical stance. He succeeds in this endeavor by constantly oscillating between all that is intellectual and what is affective; he gives voice to the spheres of semiotics, the body, chaos, and drive, undermining the symbolic order and the norms of law. At the same time he does not let one to be fully carried away by the feelings of pity and fear, but instead makes one consider the impossible character of sacrifice.

In "(A)pollonia" Warlikowski juxtaposes different texts, traditions, genres, or media: an antique tragedy with reportage; fairy tale with TV show; myth with virtual on-line reality; novel with a rock concert; short story with film, lecture with a circus show; the history of an ancient family with the curse hanging over them, perpetuating the vicious circle of crime and revenge. All that is juxtaposed with the still unprocessed trauma of the Holocaust. The text is composed of fragments of “Iphigenia at Aulis”, “Oresteia”, “Alcestis”, Hanna Krall’s reportage works, Littell’s “The Kindly Ones”, or Coetzee’s “Elizabeth Costello”. Despite the heterogeneity and seeming incompatibility, all the pieces fall into a clear whole, mainly owing to the applied precise method of montage.

The texts used by Warlikowski begin to illuminate and comment each other. This is all happening in the panoramic space of a very wide and relatively shallow stage, enabling a smooth transition from one scene to another, facilitating the oscillation between extreme emotions and the simultaneous presentation of a single situation from two different perspectives, such as the scene of Apolinia, just before her death, accepting the sole responsibility for hiding the Jews vis-à-vis the ceremony of her son receiving her title of “Righteous Among Nations” many years later. Heracles – the Joker (Andrzej Chyra) is the link here – the fallen hero lost in madness, a liminal creature, a conjurer and provocateur, disclosing all absurdities and ambiguities enshrined in this particular tragedy and in sacrifice in general.

The three stories told in "(A)pollonia, when clashed with each other and other contexts, are shifted onto a level of meta-discourse and instilled in the universal and current questions important to us all: about the possibility and sense of sacrifice, about the validity and the mechanisms of sanctioning suffering, about the limits of love and devotion, and finally, about the limits of cruelty. The feeling of injustice and guilt are inseparably intertwined, combining the victim and the executioner, where the victim does not exhaust its dramatic functions in a single act but instigates a whole avalanche of ambiguous attitudes and emotions. The stance of the sacrificed is never completely individual or personal but related to the collective. The one making the sacrifice either supports or destroys the order of culture, depending on the power of the discourse which sanctions or undermines it.

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World with no judge and no justice

In a world where it is impossible to provoke heaven, Warlikowski provokes his viewers. So you didn’t want to seek forgiveness for Jedwabne? Fine, then live now without forgiveness.

The story is a precisely woven composition of texts: the antique “Oresteia” by Aeschylus and Euripides’s “Alcestis”, as well as fragments of short stories by Hanna Krall, “The Lives of Animals” by John Coetzee, and Jonathan Littel’s “The Kindly Ones”. It is especially the fragments from Little that are most telling about the intention of the director. Indeed it is him who pulls all the strings, Warlikowski shares with him his reign over the performance. It is very strange to hear von Aue, the SS officer, to speak through the mouth of Agamemnon, or an Israeli soldier, the grandson of a Holocaust survivor.

Agamemnon says, ”I am not trying to say I am not guilty of this or that. I am guilty, you're not, fine. But you should be able to admit to yourselves that you might also have done what I did. … If you were born in a country or at a time not only when nobody comes to kill your wife and children, but also nobody comes to ask you to kill the wives and children of others, render thanks to God and go in peace. But always keep this thought in mind: you might be luckier than I, but you're not a better person. (Jonathan Little, “The Kindly Ones”)

The son of the sirvivor, an Izraeli soldier, says, „She was lying there, wheezing, she kept looking at me, her pretty mouth was quivering. That gaze pierced through me. It slashed my gut. Sawdust trickled out of me. I was a puppet. I didn't feel a thing. I wanted to wipe the sweat and blood from her brow. To tell her that everything would be alright. Instead, I put a bullet through her head. (Jonathan Little, “The Kindly Ones”)

The departing of intentions from deeds or, in other words, what the not entirely evil and artificial von Aue is crying over, has become the fate of the good and truly Righteous Apolonia Machczyńska (followed after the original character of Hanna Krall’s “Pola” from the volume “Tu już nie ma żadnej rzeki” [There, There Won’t Be another River], Warsaw 1998). The heroine, the metaphorical and literal, the individual and collective “metaphysical subject” of the play, wanted to save 26 Jews but was able to only save one Ryfka. She wanted to save the whole world but instead she lost her own, unborn child, took away another child’s mother, and took away a wife from a husband. We would not be ourselves if we did not enter this all into accounts on the side of “due”. More specifically, it should be thus entered by “one of us”, Apolonia’s son, who received the medal of the Righteous in the name of his mother, and who accused his mother of procuring his lonely childhood because even though “she had us” - she liked Jews better. Just like the many children of the other Righteous who say that all they inherited from their parents was nothing but problems plus the occasional parcel with oranges from Israel.

This ”(A)pollonia” is indeed very telling – a Polonia with alfa-privativum, a Poland negated, a bad mother, or simply an un-true Polish woman. The one who not only wanted the German but also accepted Jews. Whatever happened to this story that it no longer provides consolation but only despair and anger? Let us consider the options. It was a Jewish woman who informed the Germans of the barn hideaway of the 25 Jews. She did so as she herself had been noticed by Polish children and denounced by their parents. She was promised her own children would be saved if she revealed the hiding place of those from the barn. Any lessons learned from
that? We think: "beware of trials" (to follow Adolf Rudnicki’s “Złote okna” [Golden Windows]), as trials are devilish. We think: if one element is weak, the whole edifice starts to shake. Only which element was that? The element called “the Jewish woman”? The element called “the Polish children and their parents”? The element called “Germans”? There are more questions. Who should reward the son for the loss of his mother who had died for somebody else? What would have been the reward had she died for Poles and not for Jews? And one more question: if the Poles had not strength enough to take on the duty, would Ryfka have taken it? Does the collective entity, who benefits from the individual sacrifice, inherit the obligations stemming from that sacrifice? And if so, does the sacrifice change into do ut des, which has been discredited in our eyes a long time ago? But then why do we see do ut des as discredited? Et cetera, et cetera.

A critic from “Gazeta Wyborcza” daily wrote after the performance: Pola sacrificed herself for her father. But maybe it was the father who did not sacrifice himself for his daughter? And further: what leads us to believe that the father should die considering that we have no right to expect such things from humans? And if so – who has such right? The performance takes us onto a trail of unpleasant answers.

Warlikowski’s intention is to throw us into the magic time when words such as “rights”, “measure”, or “plan” really did carry meaning. What was the result? Judging by the names Apothropeios (“the one who reverses evil”), Katharsis (“the one who purifies from guilt or impurity”) – it is god who is the actual trickster leading the play. God Apollo. The one who "does not speak nor hide but who gives a sign". What sign is it? The spectator performs Heracles’s twelfth labor – putting an order to all this, in one’s head.

If this was clear to anybody in Poland today (as it is not), this whole drama could be encapsulated in the one sentence by Mauss/Hubert from their 19th c. masterpiece, the “Essay on the Nature and Function of Sacrifice”. The authors write that the essence of sacrifice is, to paraphrase, a communication between the sacred world and the world which is secular via the human holocaustal sacrifice [burnt offering: żertwa in Polish or korban in Hebrew – from the translator], which means something destroyed in a ceremony. The sacrifice (similar to the punishment imposed by the Erynyes) brings back a balance to the world, regardless of the cause of its distortion. Generally, it is the women who are the human holocaustal sacrifice in this arrangement: Iphigenia, Alcestes, and Apolonia. All others are just ‘sacrificers’ and intermediaries. This is how it was until the beginning of the 20th century. Today, everything has changed. In the post-traumatic era, otherwise known as the times of human rights, everybody is applying for the status of a sacrifice (żertwa somehow got lost on the way): Agamemnon – the ‘sacrificer’, Clytemnestra – the nemesis, her son Orestes – also an avenger; the orphaned Admetus, the second son, who fell into a well when looking for a dog, and finally – most probably the dog too. (Perhaps we should also not forget about Ryfka). Each of them aspires to the role of a sacrifice. Isn’t that why we cease to believe them? Traditionally, surplus transforms into void, inflation brings the end of the figure closer.

The old gods also happened to doubt the ethics of the sacrificed one. Hence the abundance of happy ends, added post fatum to tragic myths. Like the one about Isaac, allegedly saved by an angel in the very last moment. Or the one about Job, a victim of a deal made with Satan, rewarded in his old age with cattle and offspring. But it is also the myth about Iphigenia in Tauris (Euripides writes about her), saved by Artemis from the sacrificial knife and turned
into a priestess. To be saved she had to make an offering of all the foreigners. Never mind such details though.

In brief: the sacrificed and the one making the offering evoke a justified lack of trust. Respect for the only one pure sacrifice, a sacrifice without reciprocation, reserved, as Hubert/Mauss claimed, only to God, lasted a long time. But the progressing secularization has led to questioning also this position. Following humanitarian reasons – and nobody can be forced to be a hero – our emancipated era made martyrdom redundant, to paraphrase Norwid, dismantling the final fortresses of sacrifice. The unnerving “society of the sacrificed” is transferred into a borrowed “society of risk”.

"(A)pollonia” shows how it is to live in a world without sacrifices, be it true ones or surrogate; without saints and those forever condemned, without the feeling of guilt shared by ever new generations, without collective responsibility. ”There will be no trial! There is no judge!” cries Elizabeth Costello, echoing the tsaddik from Kock (H. Krall, ”Narożny dom z wieżyczką” [A Corner House With a Pinnacle], from the volume ”Hipnoza” [Hipnosis], Warsaw 1989, p. 103). One cannot provoke heaven. But one can provoke viewers. So you didn’t want to seek forgiveness for Jedwabne? Fine, then live now without forgiveness.

I do not find everything convincing in this play. However, what I do find convincing is its effectiveness. “(A)pollonia” mocks all positions, discredits every judge, but at the end discredits its own discredit. If we listen closely to the monologue of Heracles-the trickster-judge of the supreme court-of the state of Israel we discover that his clown-like cries subside, and the questions become simpler. ”Let us not blindly conclude about the most important of things”.

We all engage our own stakes in viewing a play. I was most pained by the mocking of the monologue about slaughterhouses, compared to Treblinka, to which I was years ago convinced not by Martin Heidegger by any means, but by Coetzee’s “The Lives of Animals”. Not giving up on my resentment towards the director, after giving it some thought I do have to agree with him. When speaking of suffering, Costello would be so right that no right would be left for the viewer. The spectator would have to rebel. Warlikowski knows his audience. Not until the “sacred right” is detached from the “proper form” can it be heard.

On a final note, I would like to mention the Palestinians. I again find this decision of the director correct, unfortunately. Not only because the audience likes it (which cannot go unnoticed), but also because any soldier can experience what von Aue did – wanted to console a girl but instead shot her in the head. This can also happen to the only army which calls somebody on the cell phone to say it’s planning to bomb this person’s house. However, truth be told, I’d rather these words were said not by an Israeli but, say, a Warsaw insurgent, or a soldier of the Home Army from Kielce region, but I know that for this to happen in Poland we still need to wait a while.


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