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Password 'Roger'. The Hero of Karol Szymanowski's Opera *King Roger* in Tadeusz Miciński's Theatre of the Soul

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Towards the end of the first act of Szymanowski's opera *King Roger*, the hero of the title, ruler of Sicily, calls to judgment the Shepherd, who is the cause of religious confusion through preaching about an unknown God, with the following words:

When the stars light up in the dark blue sky,
you will come to the gates of my palace.
There the guard will challenge you with 'Shepherd',
and you will answer them: 'Roger'.¹

The challenge is 'Shepherd' and the response is 'Roger'. But when in the second act the Shepherd arrives at Roger's palace, he responds to the guards' challenge, 'Shepherd', by correcting them: 'Challenge: Roger!' Might this be the librettist's mistake? Should the response really be 'Shepherd'? It soon turns out that this is in fact the case, because it is King Roger, wearing a pilgrim's clothes, following the Shepherd who awakens in him a response. That response is the answer, to his own, Roger's, existence, since the King's soul, when challenged by the King as to its own identity, responded with 'Shepherd'.

Roger's name opened the gates of the palace of the King of Sicily to the Shepherd. The challenge 'Roger' opens up the world of Szymanowski's theatrical imagination, created in his opera.² Central to it is the character of King Roger, who exercises absolute rule over Sicily, and over the composer's

imagination (it was the composer himself who changed the original title of the libretto by Iwazkiewicz from *The Shepherd* to *King Roger*). This is a king guarding the threatened integrity of the state, and a man threatened by the disintegration of his own personality – thus a complex character, with internal conflicts and an uncertain sense of identity. A character whose identity remains elusive when we try to put a definitive interpretation to Szymanowski's opera. What exactly is the role of the hero of the opera's title on the theatrical plane: Roger II, King of Sicily, precisely who is he?

Roger II, the first King of Sicily and creator of the united Norman kingdom of Sicily and Naples, who ruled from his court in Palermo in the twelfth century, was a historical figure,³ as was his companion Edrisi, the Arabian wise man. This was the great Arabian geographer Muhammad al-Idrisi, who sought Roger's protection at the court in Palermo from persecution by the Fatimids, and who made for the king a planisphere — a surface plane projection of the map of the Earth, which contained everything known about the geographic shape of the world at that time. However, it would be very risky, or even absurd, to conclude on that basis that *King Roger* is a historical opera, even though a comment in the libretto that the action takes place in twelfth-century Sicily might encourage such a naïve interpretation, and even though stage directions describe in detail the place of the action — the historical landscape of Sicily from the times of Roger II, with the appropriate instructions on stylisation. If this interpretation were correct, *King Roger* would resemble a musical postcard from the composer's trip to Sicily, instead of being what it is — a continually fascinating and dramatically inspiring masterpiece of music theatre.⁴

Tadeusz Miciński gave his drama *W mrokach Złotego Pałacu czyli Bazylissa Teofanu* [*In the gloom of the Golden Palace, or Bazylissa Teofanu*] the subtitle *Tragedia z dziejów Bizancjum X wieku* [*A Tragedy from the History of Tenth-Century Byzantium*] (1909) and moreover called it a 'historical tragedy'.⁵ His descriptions of the interiors of the churches and palaces of Constantinople are written with what might be described as documentary pedantry, and have their own autonomic value within the drama, which appears independent of its content. But the actual meaning of the drama is located somewhere else,

in the spiritual sphere beyond history.⁶ That is why *Bazilissa Teofanu* both is and is not a 'historical tragedy', since it does not respect the historical time. One might say that it is an illusory historical drama, in spite of the fact that the characters appearing in it are historical figures (to a much greater extent than in *King Roger*), and that the events presented in Miciński's plot can be found on the pages of the history of Byzantium in a form which has not been transformed into literature.

When discussing the planned libretto with Iwaszkiewicz, Szymanowski's letters show that he had a similar theatrical form in mind for his opera. Initially he even wanted to divide it into two parts: a prologue (crowd scenes, dances in the Byzantine-Arabic interiors of the palaces) which would dazzle with stage splendour, and which only then would be followed by the drama 'proper' envisaged by Iwaszkiewicz, 'taking place at the right spiritual heights of significant experiences.' The two parts were to be linked by the character of the main hero, assisted by the Arabian magus, a predecessor of Edrisi (letter dated 18 August 1918).⁷ Sending to Iwaszkiewicz the outline of the Sicilian drama, in a letter dated 27 October 1918, the composer said:

I think that the anecdotal content — the factual framework of the drama — is of lesser importance than its inner emotional [~~crossed out: content~~] substance, and for this reason it seems to me that you can take into account this elucubration of mine either in full or in parts without the risk of being constrained or limited in any way.⁸

This demonstrates clearly that Szymanowski introduced a double layer into the theatrical form of *King Roger* on purpose: there is the narrative and the stage plot linked to it as the external layer, and the truly important, spiritual internal layer. The dichotomic character of the theatrical form has a fundamental influence on the rules by which the meaning of Szymanowski's work is constituted, and on its interpretation. This dichotomy should also be applied consistently in defining the staging framework.

Among the sources used by Szymanowski when writing *King Roger* were the stage directions for Miciński's *Bazilissa Teofanu*. Iwaszkiewicz was amazed to discover this when reviewing the second volume of Miciński's *Utwory dramatyczne [Dramas]*, which included that particular work, in an academic edition prepared by Teresa Wróblewska, who was dedicated to the Magus's

cause.⁹ Returning to Miciński's drama after very many years, Iwazkiewicz did not remember anything of the work which he had read in his youth; he was, however, struck by the similarity between *Bazylissa Teofanu* and *King Roger*:

When I started reading *Bazylissa Teofanu* now, I was struck by something familiar about it. I could not have been remembering it, I had read it so long ago. And yet even the very *list of dramatis personae*, with the Prioress, the Patriarch and the Norman royal guard appeared to be more than familiar. More like my own flesh and blood. Miciński's description of the stage set: 'Mother of God Hyperagia, with her head veiled by dusk, and the enormous figure lost in the depth of vaults, glowing with the light of the candelabras, lamps and polycandles. . . '.

What the heck! I always did wonder, where Karol got those 'polycandles' in the description of the set of the first act of *King Roger*, and here it is. A clear trail, leading far and true.

[. . .] But *King Roger*, as envisaged by Szymanowski, descends in a direct line from *Bazylissa Teofanu*. (Notabene, scene directions for *King Roger* where all written by Szymanowski himself).¹⁰

The significance of Miciński in the development of the composer's creative imagination is generally known.¹¹ The 'polycandles' borrowed from Miciński had appeared earlier in *Efebos*, where Szymanowski was already making use of stage directions from *Bazylissa Teofanu* (*Opowieść o cudzie świętego młodzieńszka Inoka Porfirego-Ikonografa* [*The story of the miracle of the holy youth Inok Porfiry-Ikonograf*]) when describing Byzantine architecture.¹² However, the comment by Iwazkiewicz, who was, after all, a co-author of the opera's libretto, demands that the matter be examined more closely. All the more so since Iwazkiewicz claimed that the trail of the author of *W mroku gwiazd* [*In the gloom of the Stars*] 'leads far and true'. It is worth noting in passing that the production of *King Roger* in Warsaw's Grand Theatre in 2000, under the direction of Mariusz Trelński and with stage sets by Boris Kudlička (premiered on 10 March 2000), reached deep into Miciński's poetical idiom, and for the first time placed the plot of Szymanowski's opera in its subterranean world which had been brought to the surface. Activating the deep-meaning structures of *King Roger* in the production, with the aid of Jung's depth psychology, unconsciously revealed genetic link with the world of Miciński's

imagination and his works.¹³ This was also probably, to a large extent, the reason for the success of the production, where the music was so naturally visualised on the stage, and where the images kept referring to Micinski's poetry, which still mystifies and fascinates by the power of its imagination. That poetry is still a test of the imagination for the audience and a challenge in terms of interpretation.

The spirit of the King of the Normans, Roger, unconsolable in 'black torment' and wandering after death, was portrayed by Miciński in the volume *W mroku gwiazd* [*In the Dusk of the Stars*] (1902), in the poem *Msza żałobna* [*Funeral Mass*] (in the *Polar night* cycle). The poem is an example of the 'role' lyric, a form favoured by the poet which objectivises his lyrical 'self' during mystical odysseys. In *Msza żałobna*, the hero of Miciński's poem puts on the mask of the medieval ruler of Sicily, Roger II, the most famous figure of that period, in order to struggle with himself, to fight for his own spirit in the person of Roger. This is its only connection with history.

I – once Roger, the Norman's king –
 famed for his pride and black valour –
 I achieved so much with satans' will,
 built towers and dukedoms on stars –
 I bring absolution to the sick for their sins,
 but who will save me from my soul?
 I hear a mysterious shiver in the depths –
 the sea is cutting through its straitjacket.¹⁴

According to the plan of *King Roger* drafted by Iwaszkiewicz in August 1918, the hero of the opera was to be Emperor Frederick II.¹⁵ In the draft of the Sicilian drama which the composer subsequently sent to Iwaszkiewicz (letter dated 27 October 1918), the hero is referred to as: 'E m p e r o r (perhaps Frederick)'.¹⁶ How then did it come about that Frederick II was replaced by his grandfather or, more precisely, his maternal ancestor, Roger II of Sicily? In *Książka o Sycylii* Iwaszkiewicz provided the following explanation:

Szymanowski probably settled on the character of Roger II of Sicily because of the impression which Capella Palatina made on him, to which he kept returning in his reminiscences and conversations. It was simply instinct. If he had conducted deeper historical studies, he would perhaps have settled on Frederick II, the grandson of

Barbarossa, who influenced the imagination of German poets and whom I suggested at that time.¹⁷

But might it have been the composer's instinct which made him follow the Polish poet whom he adored, as happened more than once in his development, and change the hero of German poetry to a character from a poem by Miciński?

In his essay *Karol Szymanowski i literatura* [*Karol Szymanowski and literature*] (1953), Iwazskiewicz described the idea of *King Roger* as 'bookish', 'literary'.

It was «made up» to such an extent, that nothing entered into its music which could tie it, by however weak a thread, to a territory or to history. [...]

King Roger's Sicily is an abstract Cythera — or, more accurately, the territory is the soul of the composer himself, where influences of diverse cultures fight among each other but, primarily, a bitter conflict is taking place between Christianity, in which Szymanowski had been brought up, with the pagan religion of Dionysus, religion of the joy of life [...].

This inner struggle, this grappling of those gigantic Florestans and Euzebiuses, the significant oppositions within his soul, constitute the whole meaning of that period of Szymanowski's life, throwing their shadow over its further course until the very end. All his artistic achievements at that time are simply a projection of that struggle.¹⁸

Miciński at that time might be described as in a sense an 'expert' on psychomachia. He also proposed artistically innovative forms of conducting such internal struggles in the arts. In the theatre, in view of the religious roots of Melpomene's sphere, this was to be the mystery play. His play *Bazylissa Teofanu* aimed at achieving that form (its third act was even called *Misterium*). It was probably Miciński who provided the subtitle *Misterium na tle życia i śmierci ks. Józefa Poniatowskiego* [*A mystery based on the life and death of Prince Józef Poniatowski*]. It also contains a Dionysian motif as well as being set in Sicily, whose orchards recall Ukraine (*Intermezzo*).¹⁹ And there is also *Królowna Orlica. Misterium — jasełka* [*The Eagle Princess. Mystery — Christmas play*] and the 'mystery' in the poet's reports from the performances he had watched at Hellerau. The mystery play was also the theatrical

genre preferred by the Symbolists, particularly the younger Russian Dionysian symbolists, who tried to break through the aporiae of decadentism. It was a genre directed towards synthesis, which corresponded to the syncretic aims of that era and was able to express its 'new religious consciousness'.²⁰

In his article *Teatr – Świątynia (The Theatre – A Temple)* (1905), in which he supported Wyspiański's attempts to lease the City Theatre in Kraków, Miciński asked the rhetorical question: 'Can the theatre be a temple?'²¹

What the poet had in mind was the theatre as the temple of the soul, a place where the soul was to deepen and to become known; a place of man's spiritual growth. The theatre is viewed as the place in which the soul, pushed into the land of silence by reason, can at last speak. Miciński supported his argument using the authority of the ancient Greeks, for whom the theatre was the place of initiation, an introduction to the mysteries of the soul. 'The Greek theatre arises out of mysteries, or the initiation of man into the depths and the underworld of the soul' — he wrote later on in the same article. It would be useful to add that, in a theatre understood in this way, myths, which reveal the mysteries of the soul, play a vital part. Myths as the projections of the Self; myths as the actual content of the mystery.

Szymanowski clearly followed Miciński's idea of the theatre, and initially called *King Roger* a mystery. His opera indeed fits into the framework designed for this genre by the symbolists, equally in terms of the content, rooted in myth, the role of the chorus, which personifies the myth, and the creation of a hero who travels towards a transformation of personality through individual sacrifice. In his manuscript of the libretto, Szymanowski wrote: 'Mysteryum w 3 aktach [Mystery in 3 acts]'. It was only later that the 'Mysteryum' was crossed out and the word 'Opera' was added at the side in pencil. This is a significant change in interpretation, although probably made for practical reasons. (How do you talk to opera theatre directors about putting on a mystery?). However, the crossed out word 'Mysteryum' in the autograph is a clue which leads straight to Miciński, as do the 'polycandles'²² — to a 'fantasist' dramatist whose writing was for 'stage sets [that would be] too expensive', and who was ignored by the theatres.²³

Miciński's theatre is a theatre of ideas, and that is another important reason why its form might have suited the composer. The character of Miciński's dramaturgy was accurately described by his one-time master and mentor, Wincenty Lutosławski (uncle of Witold) in an introduction to *Walka dusz* [*The battle of the souls*] (1897), which has remained in manuscript form until today: 'The characters in the drama only provide the background for its actual hero, and that is a particular IDEA'. The idea presented in this drama is the 'conflict between the will and reason in the widest range of human beliefs'. Lutosławski also foresaw, with good reason, problems which would arise in trying to stage an enterprise of this kind. 'This subject appears more suited to a philosophical thesis than to a poetic drama – and presents uncommon difficulties in encapsulating a complex conflict in a form suitable for the stage, without doctrinaire declamations or playing with incomprehensible symbols'.²⁴ The concept of theatre contained in Miciński's dramas has indeed proved too difficult for the stage, and his works still await their director. Szymanowski and his *King Roger* have undoubtedly been more fortunate in that respect — but that is achieved by the enlivening force of the music. The composer even wrote to Iwaszkiewicz: '[...] I do not even believe that that theatre without music could last much longer!'.²⁵ And yet, looking at it from another angle, Miciński, as perhaps nobody else, stressed the role of music in the theatre and reserved a special role for it in his dramas. Perhaps then the problem with staging them is to be sought there? After all, a mystery is impossible without music: it is music that gives birth to myth.

The idea behind *Bazylissa Teofanu* is the conflict between striving for power and the power of sex, fed by blind will.²⁶ In other words, between the Nietzschean will to power and Przybyszewski's lust [chuć]. On the other hand, the idea behind *King Roger* is what Szymanowski described as his 'favourite little idea' about the 'secret kinship between Christ and Dionysus' and the conflict between them. For this reason, *King Roger* is sometimes described as a religious-philosophical opera, or simply a philosophical opera. And, as a subject, Szymanowski's idea would probably be much better suited for a dissertation on religious studies (such works have been and are being written) or a book on philosophy (such as the ones modelled on Nietzsche's *Antichrist*),

than an opera. But things turned out differently, and the power of the libretto, as well as the attractiveness of *King Roger* as a piece of theatre, lie precisely there, in Szymanowski's 'little idea'. When he finished work on the opera in 1924, Szymanowski presented the audience with a theatrical work belonging to the Art Nouveau period, whose time seemed to have passed long ago. Yet time has shown that what he created was a work ahead of its era, which eventually would find a director who was the right person to produce it.²⁷

King Roger has also been described as a symbolic opera. That is in fact the case, since each real artistic production is symbolic, as was taught by Nietzsche.²⁸ However, it is worth asking, is it a symbolistic work? The apparently superordinate role of ideas in the meaning structure of the opera would suggest something else. The libretto of *King Roger* is saturated, or perhaps even over-saturated with 'incomprehensible symbols', as Lutosławski might have described it. Using the terms of historic poetics, one might say that we find in it the type of symbolisation characteristic of idealistic symbolism, where the symbolising object stands for something completely different from what it is, while the link between what does the symbolising and what is symbolised is based on cultural convention. Idealistic symbolism, with its origins in Parnassism, came to dominate European literature at the turn of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, including drama. But Vyacheslav Ivanov, Russian poet and theorist of symbolism, as well as a prominent expert on Greek religion and the Dionysian cult (*Ellinskaja rieligija stradajuszczeogo boga* [*The Hellenic religion of the suffering god*, 1904]), with whose works Szymanowski must have been familiar, protested against referring to those kinds of works as symbolistic.²⁹ The reason was that they operated not with symbols, but with allegories. Miciński's dramatic works were decidedly heading towards allegory, while his poetry exemplifies very sophisticated idealistic symbolism. From that point of view, *Bazylissa Teofanu* may be called an allegorical drama.

However, in the case of *King Roger*, the situation is somewhat different. If we confine our attention to the level of the libretto, we might get the impression that we are in fact dealing with an allegorical work. But this impression

only relates to the work's external form, which Szymanowski regarded as 'of lesser importance'. The internal form of the libretto of *King Roger* is a myth and, within its eternal framework, the hero is looking for Grand Totality, which is equivalent to finding in himself, in the opera's finale, the heavenly light, the immortal Self. This is rediscovering Dionysus, the prefiguration of Christ; Dionysus, referred to by Ivanov as 'the heart of the world', always co-present in the human heart'.³⁰ The presence of the Dionysian myth in *King Roger* means that his hero opens up to *sacrum*, and the work takes on the character of a mystery. Within the circle of influence of *sacrum*, a synthesis of symbols takes place in the face of the highest Symbol.³¹ This is what makes the work truly symbolistic; it touches a true spiritual reality. Its deep meaning structure is constituted by myth, and not by an abstract idea, purely a creation of thought. Myth, in one way or another, links art to religion.

The symbolic meaning of the libretto is greatly intensified by the music, which resonates with its inner form. It is the music which is the true form-creating force in the opera, and its superordinate position is generally unquestioned, since the musical object is by its nature a symbol *avant la lettre*. It is a realistic symbol, and thus one which refers directly to the spiritual reality in which it is rooted, to true reality; to harmony and to the Grand Totality, to myth. But then a realistic symbol has in fact a mythical structure, while a myth is a more developed symbol. This is the myth-making function ascribed to music by Nietzsche and the symbolists who listened to him.

King Roger is thus a symbolic and symbolistic work, while the tension between the musical symbol and the allegorical external form of the libretto written into its structure creates an additional interpretive quality. Here music subordinates the words to itself, disregarding their literal meanings; it 'intoxicates' them, as Leśmian might have said. Its symbolising power causes them to mean something more than what is indicated by their dictionary definitions and syntagmatic relations. They go beyond the rules which bind them within the framework of an allegory, and rise to the level of a symbol. This special relationship between the word and the music in *King Roger*, the absence of a direct connection between them, while the link is mediated

by the idea which had been pushed into second place by the myth during the writing of the opera, opens a wide field to the director's imagination. This need not threaten the integrity of the work or its final message. This year's [2007] production of the opera in Wrocław, again directed by Mariusz Treliński, with stage design by Boris Kudlička, confirms this diagnosis.

All the remarks concerning the poetics of *King Roger* obviously apply to the opera's hero as well, to the literary construction and to the character's functioning on the stage. Associations with Miciński's dramaturgy spring to mind immediately, and in particular with *Bazilissa Teofanu* and the way its stage characters are created. This is primarily true of the construction of the hero, who dominates the remaining dramatis personae, which, so to speak, 'contribute' to him. One might even say that, in *King Roger*, the Sicilian ruler is accompanied on stage by emanations of his psyche. Roxana-the Anima, Edrisi-the Wise Old Man, the Shepherd-the Shadow, are all archetypal images of the unconscious, while the Archierey, the Deaconess and the Chorus represent collective consciousness exerting external influence on the hero. With the appearance of the Shepherd both the dramatic and psychical tension rise, suggesting a disturbance in the process of individuation in the area of the Shadow archetype, related to, as it turns out, the sphere of sex. Roxana leaving Roger for the Shepherd is the Anima, insufficiently integrated with the King's consciousness.³² As in Miciński's works, the dramas of the heroes are played out on the stage of their soul, creating a species of theatre of the soul. In *Termopile polskie* [*The Polish Thermopilae*], which Szymanowski had read in manuscript and to which Miciński asked him to write the music, this took the form of the 'theatre of the Dying Head'. (The action of the drama takes place in the head of the drowning Prince Józef Poniatowski). However, that which is closest to the hero of Szymanowski's opera is the mysterium of the soul of the heroine of the title, *Bazilissa Teofanu*, and together they represent a kind of theatrical pair, a King and an Empress. Roger might perhaps have been the fulfilment and the realisation of the love which Teofanu seeks in vain — a ruler with whom she might have created a new world.

Teofanu constantly drills deep into her soul, in the hope that in its depths she will find the absolute truth. Truth about herself, about mankind, and

thus about God and satan. Following the motion of her soul, torn between the desire for power and the force of sexual desire, she is tossed between crime and love, unsure of her destiny. The Ruthenian Prince Svyatoslav calls her 'the only soul' in the decadence-infected, dying Byzantium.³³ She refers to herself as the embodied soul of Byzantium, its immortal Self.³⁴ Since she is able to draw enlivening power out of the depths of her soul, she has been called a female Dionysius with good reason.³⁵ In the first act of the opera, Szymanowski has also surrounded King Roger with the Byzantine splendour of wonderful, but highly ossified forms. The new religion preached by the Shepherd which forces its way into the King's castle is tempting, because even though it threatens the old forms, it also brings the promise of new life. One of the important archaic magical functions attached to a ruler was regeneration of life.

The presence in *Bazilissa Teofanu* of the Dionysian myth as a regenerative myth confirms the influence of Nietzsche's thought on Miciński, and shows that he also embraced the idea of cultural crisis related to the twilight of Christianity, announced by the German philosopher. Dionysus-Zagreus, immersed in the ecstasy of love and illusion, is the rival of the fear-inducing harsh Despot-Christ, depicted on the mosaic. This image also pervades *King Roger*. Dionysus-Life enters into a world which has stultified in a Christian death-like stillness. Teofanu follows Dionysus (who in the finale of the drama appears also as the god of death).³⁶ But the Empress is also able to love Christ, who has not left her soul. More than that, she makes herself into Christ: 'I am alone. This is the only truth: a Self in the desert, tempted by Nothingness!'.³⁷ Thus, in Teofanu's soul, there takes place a meeting between Dionysus, who in another sense is Satan, and Christ. Here, however, they are linked by a different kind of kinship than in Szymanowski's 'favourite little idea'. (In Miciński's mystical idea of 'Christ's Luciferism', Satan appears as Christ's elder brother).³⁸

In creating King Roger, Szymanowski borrowed from *Bazilissa Teofanu* her deep soul, the soul of a ruler-superman, totally isolated in the Cosmos, left alone face-to-face with the mystery of man and the Absolute. However, in the dramatic layer, it is Roxana who resembles *Bazilissa*. It is *Bazilissa* who

leaves Emperor Nikefor for Dionysus (she disappears from the sarcophagus where she was lying deep in lethargy), while her husband follows her into the mountains, begging her to return with him to Byzantium, which is suffering from the plague, to help pacify the frightened townspeople (Act 3). But, since Dionysus was the god of women, it is the gender which explains the kinship.

This is only one, roughly stripped out, thread in the somewhat complicated and tangled plot of Miciński's drama, which is also to be found in *King Roger*, and the prototype in both cases was probably the *Bacchaes* by Euripides. It seems, however, that the character of Bazileus Nikefor, the Christian ruler and defender of the faith, from whom Dionysus takes his adored Teofanu, may have influenced the creation of King Roger in some way. This may have been just at the level of stage directions: Nikefor searches for Teofanu in the mountains, wearing a hermit's brown cloak, while Roger sets off to follow Roxana into the world in a pilgrim's garb. On the other hand, in the *Bacchaes*, Pentheus spies on the women engaged in the Dionysian mysteries disguised in the clothes of a bacchian menade. Perhaps Roger has also shared in the valour of the leader of the army, and then ruler of Byzantium, who, in spite of that, never knew happiness.

It is well known that Szymanowski's attitude to *King Roger* was extremely personal; in a sense, the opera became a keystone on the way to maturity for both the man and the artist. Having put on the mask of the King of Sicily, the composer provided an integrated solution in words and in music to the issues which were tormenting him. He created his own total theatre of the soul, in which reason and feeling challenged each other, where Christ and Dionysus came face to face. Szymanowski did not quite achieve this in his novel *Efebos*, which links directly to *King Roger* as a preparatory work. The novel, quite obviously, engaged the composer's existence only partially. To find the dramatic form for his theatre of the soul, Szymanowski turned to the poet then closest to his heart, with whose work he felt a truly intimate bond, although we know that he drew his inspiration for the opera from a variety of sources.³⁹

Szymanowski has scattered throughout the libretto quite a few more or less apparent pointers to Miciński as the reference for his theatrical imagination.

The ambiguous finale of *King Roger* also seems reminiscent of the poet who wrote *W mroku gwiazd* [*In the gloom of the stars*]. Writing to Iwazskiewicz from America about the third act of the opera which he was revising at the time (letter dated 20 March 1921), the composer said: 'I preferred to drown everything in darkness and night, hide in it the Shepherd and his entourage — so that really the audience should guess for themselves what is happening or, if they are fools, come out of the theatre stupefied, which I wish them with all my heart'.⁴⁰ In Szymanowski's vision, darkness and night covered the place of the action with a cloak of mystery and rubbed out the too bright (and 'childish') symbolism of the last act of *King Roger* envisaged in the first version. It was Miciński who was master in using darkness as a means of artistic expression, a true poet of darkness. Looking back to the early German Romanticism of Novalis, he created poetry which made use of darkness as the source of mystery, a poetry which activated the a-cognitive power inherent in darkness as a source of *sacrum*. (In Miciński's work, darkness as the source of a-cognitive power is above all the ambivalent, dark sense of his 'syncretic' writing, hidden in the potential synthesis). The full title of his drama is, after all, *W mrokach Złotego Pałacu czyli Bazylissa Teofanu* [*In the gloom of the Golden Palace, or Bazylissa Teofanu*]. And Miciński did indeed 'drown' his drama in darkness, in order to then draw out of it particular characters and moments of the action, and to arrange them in the pattern of a mosaic, creating in this manner the mood of a mystery. In the finale of *Bazylissa Teofanu*, the heroine of the title, in a sense, falls back into the darkness. When the dethroned Teofanu, with a hood thrown over her head, is being led in a cortège 'more terrible than a funeral' to the place of her imprisonment, out of the gloom there appears the dark phantom of Lucifer. 'The cross darkens. The phantom envelops Teofanu, leads her in the mist, among the wailing bells and the funeral chorus. Everything becomes similar to a funereal sailing ship, with the stars being extinguished by the darkness of enormous wings'.⁴¹

The finale of *King Roger* is filled with sun. The hero comes out of the darkness and stands at the top of the antique theatre in the light of the morning sun. With his hands stretched out in a gesture of epiphany, he sings

a hymn to the sun. This is a totally different ending from that of *Bazilissa Teofanu*, and yet related to it, like a positive and a negative. Before Teofanu disappears into the dark, she passes on her last will to her children: 'My little sons, love me and the Sun, and if it ever becomes difficult for you — love only the Sun'.⁴² It is the living Sun, with which the Empress identified herself earlier ('I am the living Sun!'⁴³), and with which others identified her too. 'The Sun is here!', says Bazileus Nikefor pointing to Teofanu.⁴⁴ Thus, the Sun is one of the titles of Bazilissa, related to the solar symbolism ascribed to her as a ruler.⁴⁵ The metonymy emphasises her divinity, which guarantees order and cosmic harmony. But it also emphasises her direct link to the solar god, Dionysus, who changes darkness into light. It is a link with the god of indestructible life, the symbol of which is also the Sun.⁴⁶ The Sun, which has never betrayed any of the mornings awaiting the dawn (Lucifer–Dionysius, who leads Teofanu into total darkness, in reality leads her into the Divine light, of which darkness is the synonym).

In the draft of the Sicilian drama which Szymanowski sent to Iwaszkiewicz, in the finale of *King Roger* the Sicilian ruler sees, in the light of the morning sun and among the orgiastic crowd, the Youth as the Greek Dionysus, and the Emperor (then not yet the King) pays homage to him as a god. In the final version, the composer reduced this scene to a minimum of necessary elements, and left in it only Roger with Edrisi and the Sun. The compacted symbol gained in the power of expression, and the sense of the union of the King and the Sun still remained the same. Roger, wanting to offer his heart to the Sun, sees a ship sailing into infinity ('Like the white wings of seagulls on the azure sea it will spread its sails! They sail far into infinity.'). There are also enormous wings ('Edrisi! The wings are growing! They will envelop the whole world!'). Thus, the ending echoes that of *Bazilissa Teofanu*, but with the fundamental difference that in Miciński's drama, 'Dionysus kidnapped his bride to free her from earthly bonds, to restore to her her old divinity and power!', as Bolesław Leśmian put it in his review of the play.⁴⁷ Thus one may suppose that the marriage between Teofanu and Dionysus as a mystical union with the universe can take place only through death, since Miciński ended his drama in the spirit of decadent individualism, with a dose of scepticism cha-

racteristic of him.⁴⁸ For this reason, Vyacheslav Ivanov would probably have refused *Bazilissa Teofanu* the status of a truly symbolistic drama, while Leśmian's optimistic interpretation of that work does not seem to be sufficiently justified. On the other hand, Szymanowski's hero has reached readiness for transformation by himself, through the strength of his own will. His transformation takes place within the framework of myth, where Christ and Dionysus become equal, in the context of neo-Christian religion, promoted by the Russian symbolists as a 'new religious consciousness', in which 'Dionysus defines [...] the sphere of values which supplement christianity and link with the mystical corporality, the joy and beauty of life'.⁴⁹ It has thus become possible for King Roger to affirm the world, and life, here and now.

But the composer's favourite poet, who wandered through some very convoluted paths of the spirit, remained torn. Miciński's Dionysus-Zagreus arrives for his soul as Lucifer. The antinomy Christ-Dionysus/Lucifer has thus not been removed, and it is not known for certain whether Miciński ever achieved a definitive resolution (although he contemplated the salvation of Lucifer to the end of his days). In a sense, the author of *Bazilissa Teofanu* christianised Dionysus, introducing him into the Christian myth as Lucifer. This was justified in so far as Dionysus-Zagreus (the first Dionysus) was linked, and even identified with Hades, the ruler of the underworld, in mythology. However, by doing this, Miciński basically made it impossible to equalise the two myths, since he removed from the Dionysian myth its soteriological dimension, while his Lucifer is not particularly close to Christ, which seems to have been the poet's aim. On the other hand, Dionysian symbolists (closer to the second Dionysus, Bacchus), hellenised Christ and in this way removed the troubling antinomy. Szymanowski faithfully followed their trail, and by the same token also rediscovered his dream of Mediterranean idyll, which teaches us to love the earthly life, to make the most of its delights, and to endure bravely the awareness of the inevitability of death. The composer referred to it clearly towards the very end of his life, planning a ballet about Odysseus.

Climbing the benches to the top of the amphitheatre, Roger also rises to a higher level of consciousness. The brightness of the morning sun lights up an inner light within his soul. The King experiences a moment of illumination;

he comes to know the truth and undergoes an inner transformation. It is a precisely constructed theatrical symbol with a great power of expression, a truly realistic, living symbol.⁵⁰ And if that is the case, what is Edrisi's role in this scene? Edrisi—the Wise Old Man, the archetypal personification of the spiritual element of the psyche, has led King Roger along the path of individuation to the moment of self-knowledge, and now, to use the language of depth psychology, he assists Roger in his experience of his own Self. For Szymanowski, composing *King Roger* also meant reaching psychological maturity, without which he could not have continued functioning as an artist. 'I will not conceal from you,' he wrote to Iwaszkiewicz, 'that the issue of this drama is to an extent the issue of my own continued artistic existence —, that is how far this idea has rooted itself inside me'.⁵¹ Even by then, October 1918, the composer had had his intellectual fill of that 'favourite little idea', sufficiently gone over previously in *Efebos*, and was beginning to live fully within the influence of the Dionysian myth. When writing about the threat to his continued artistic existence, he naturally meant his existence in total — since it is a characteristic of myths that, while initiating one into the mysteries of fate, they demand total existential commitment, and a surrender to its workings as a higher force. Without fulfilling that condition there is no initiation, and therefore no maturity.

Reaching maturity is not an easy process. The process of composing the opera took Szymanowski six years. The composer's transformation, the creative opening to the collective, which took the form of striving for self-realisation in the dimension beyond the individual (a period of participation in national activity), became a reality. And *King Roger* continued to be a work of particular importance to Szymanowski, who concealed himself under the mask of the opera's hero. Under that mask, the composer became King-Dionysus, through the sacrifice of himself which he offered to the nation.

Notes

- 1 Quotations from the libretto of *King Roger* are taken from: K. Szymanowski, *Król Roger (Pasterz)[King Roger (The Shepherd)]* op. 46. Score (Works, vol. 23), text by Jarosław Iwaszkiewicz and Karol Szymanowski, edited by T. Chylińska, editors of the volume Z. Helman, A. Mrygoń, introduction by Z. Helman, PWM, Kraków 1973.

- 2 Although Jarosław Iwaszkiewicz and Karol Szymanowski are the authors of the libretto of *King Roger*, the idea for the opera and the theatrical vision of the whole are undoubtedly the work of Szymanowski, and bear the mark of his individual creativity. Iwaszkiewicz spoke the truth when he wrote “my collaboration was mostly limited to carrying out the ideas of the composer himself” (J. Iwaszkiewicz, ‘Książka o Sycylii’ [‘A book about Sicily’], in: *Podróże [Travels] (Works)*, vol. 1, Warszawa 1981, p. 314).
- 3 Szymanowski’s knowledge of Sicily, its history, and the Norman king who ruled in the twelfth century, Roger II, were mainly based on *Obrazy Włoch [Pictures from Italy]* by Paweł Muratow, as had been confirmed by Iwaszkiewicz on numerous occasions (cf., for example, Iwaszkiewicz, ‘Książka o Sycylii’ [‘A book about Sicily’], *ibidem*, pp. 311–312).
- 4 The longing for a ‘naive’ *King Roger* is still very much alive, as is clear from the review by Józef Kański, following the most recent première of Szymanowski’s opera at the Wrocław Opera on 30 March 2007. The reviewer writes: ‘Karol Szymanowski’s opera *King Roger* was born out of the enchantment wrought on the composer by Sicily, which he visited in the Spring of 1914 [for the second time, as he had visited it for the first time in 1911 – EB]; out of his admiration for the wonderful heritage of that strangest of lands, and the traces of the once great cultures which intertwined there — early Christian, Greco-Byzantine, Arabian... [..] As we learn from various sources, he was looking for a pretext to show at least a reflection of all these marvels on the operatic stage, and with this in mind he suggested the particular threads of the planned libretto to Jarosław Iwaszkiewicz. On the other hand, the complicated philosophical and moral-ethical problems which permeate that libretto appear to be of secondary importance here, although still very significant for the composer’ (J. Kański, ‘*Król Roger* – po powrocie z Wrocławia’ [‘*King Roger* – on returning from Wrocław’], *Ruch Muzyczny* 2007 No. 10, p. 21).
- 5 See T. Miciński, ‘Teatr – Świątynia’ [‘The Theatre – A Temple’] (first published in : *Słowo Polskie* 1905 No. 207), in: *Myśl teatralna Młodej Polski [Theatrical Thought in the Young Poland Movement]*. Anthology, selection by I. Sławińska and S. Kruk, introduction by I. Sławińska, commentary by B. Frankowska, Warszawa 1966, p. 196.
- 6 See B. Danek-Wojnowska, J. Kłossowicz, ‘Tadeusz Miciński’, in: *Literatura okresu Młodej Polski [Literature of the Young Poland period]* (Obraz literatury polskiej XIX i XX wieku. Seria piąta [Polish Literature of the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries, Series 5]), vol. 2, Warszawa 1967, p. 275. Also: E. Rzewuska, *O dramaturgii Tadeusza Micińskiego [On the Dramatic Works of Tadeusz Miciński]*, Wrocław 1977, pp. 148–150.
- 7 See K. Szymanowski, *Korespondencja [Correspondence]*. The full edition of surviving letters from and to the composer, collected and edited by T. Chylińska, vol. 1, Kraków 1982, pp. 542–543.
- 8 As above, p. 561. The composer’s words quoted here should also be regarded as a stage direction. Before the première of *King Roger* in Duisburg, the composer wrote to Saladin Schmitt, the Opera’s manager, on 8 October 1928: ‘However, basically I am of the opinion that the greatest possible freedom should be allowed in interpreting a musical work for the stage [..]. This extends both to the direction and to set design; this is all the more important in the case of *King Roger*, since it has gathered around itself an atmosphere of some historical pedantry in the description of the stage design.

- I am not at all interested in this pedantry, as my work creates a space for the furthest possible flights of imagination' (Szymanowski, *Korespondencja*, op. cit., vol. 3, part. 1, Kraków 1997, p. 342).
- 9 T. Miciński, *W mrokach Złotego Pałacu czyli Bazylissa Teofanu* [*In the gloom of the Golden Palace, or Bazylissa Teofanu*] (Dramatic works, vol. 2), selection and editing T. Wróblewska, Kraków 1978. Miciński mentioned Szymanowski by name in his introduction to the play (*Kilka słów wstępnych* [*A few words of introduction*], p. 7), in a group of Young Poland composers to whom he expressed his deep appreciation and whom he thanked for the music composed to his poems from the volume *In the gloom of the stars*.
 - 10 J. Iwaszkiewicz, 'O Tadeuszu Micińskim' ['About Tadeusz Miciński'] ('Rozmowy o książkach') ['Conversations about books'], *Życie Warszawy* 1979, No. 289, p. 7. Even before Iwaszkiewicz's comments, Teresa Chylińska drew attention to the similarities between *King Roger* and *Bazylissa Teofanu* on the level of stage directions, and emphasised the convergences in their content (T. Chylińska, 'Karol Szymanowski i Tadeusz Miciński' ['Karol Szymanowski and Tadeusz Miciński'], in: *Studia o Tadeuszu Micińskim* [*Tadeusz Miciński studies*], ed. M. Podraza-Kwiatkowska, Kraków 1979, p. 331–336).
 - 11 See T. Chylińska, 'Karol Szymanowski i Tadeusz Miciński', op. cit.; E. Boniecki, 'Miciński Tadeusz' (entry), in: *Encyklopedia Muzyczna PWM* [*PWM Music Encyclopaedia*]. Biographical part, ed. E. Dziebowska, vol. 6, Kraków 2000, pp. 241–242.
 - 12 See K. Szymanowski, *Pisma Literackie* [*Literary works*] (Pisma [Works], vol. 2), collected and edited by T. Chylińska, introduction by J. Błoński, Kraków 1989, p. 169 and the following ones.
 - 13 Employing Jung's depth psychology as interpretive context for Miciński's poetry was suggested many years ago by Jan Prokop. It produced an excellent research result; see J. Prokop, *Żywiot wyzwolony* [*Elemental force unbound*]. Studium o poezji Tadeusza Micińskiego [*A Study of the poetry of Tadeusz Miciński*] Kraków 1978.
 - 14 T. Miciński, *Poezje* [*Poems*] (Biblioteka Poezji Młodej Polski), ed. J. Prokop, Kraków 1980, p. 93.
 - 15 See J. Iwaszkiewicz, *Spotkania z Szymanowskim* [*Encounters with Szymanowski*], 3rd Edition, Kraków 1981, p. 52.
 - 16 K. Szymanowski, *Korespondencja* [*Correspondence*], op. cit., vol. 1, pp. 562–566.
 - 17 J. Iwaszkiewicz, 'Książka o Sycylii' ['A book about Sicily'], in: *Podróże* [*Travels*] (Dzieła [Works]), vol. 1, Warszawa 1981, p. 311.
 - 18 J. Iwaszkiewicz, 'Karol Szymanowski a literatura' ['Karol Szymanowski and Literature'], in: *Pisma muzyczne* [*Writings on music*] (Dzieła [Works]), Warszawa 1983, pp. 128–129. Iwaszkiewicz repeated this opinion in 'Książka o Sycylii' ['A book about Sicily'], in a somewhat changed version; see Iwaszkiewicz, *Książka o Sycylii*, op. cit., p. 310.
 - 19 T. Miciński, *Termopile polskie*. Misterium na tle życia i śmierci ks. Józefa Poniatowskiego [*Polish Thermopiles*]. A mystery based on the life and death of Prince Józef Poniatowski (Utworky dramatyczne [Dramatic Works], vol. 3), selected and edited by T. Wróblewska, Kraków 1980, pp. 193–226. In his *Uwaga dla teatrów* [*Guidelines for the theatre*] which precede the drama, (p. 8), Miciński gave instructions regarding

- musical settings for particular sections: 'Until the drama has its own instrumental music [...]'. In the *Intermezzo* he indicated 'a *Symphony* by Karol Szymanowski'.
- 20 See M. Cymborska-Leboda, *Twórczość w kręgu mitu. Myśl estetyczno-filozoficzna i poetyka gatunków dramatycznych symbolistów rosyjskich* [*Art within myth. Aesthetic and philosophical thought and the poetics of the dramatic genres of Russian symbolists*], Lublin 1997; chapter. 2: *Dramat w cieniu Mnemosyne. Refleksja estetyczna i geneologiczna symbolistów rosyjskich* [*Drama in the shadow of Mnemosyne. Aesthetic and genealogical thought of Russian symbolists*], pp. 43–101.
- 21 T. Miciński, 'Teatr – Świątynia' ['The Theatre – A Temple'], op. cit., p. 195.
- 22 See the manuscript of Szymanowski's libretto of *King Roger* (version II); Archiwum Kompozytorów Polskich XX wieku Biblioteki Uniwersyteckiej w Warszawie [The Archive of Polish Twentieth-Century Composers, Warsaw University Library], Ref. No. Mus CXXV ms 7.
- 23 T. Miciński, 'Teatr – Świątynia' ['The Theatre – A Temple'], op. cit., p. 196.
- 24 W. Lutosławski, TREŚĆ DRAMATU podana przez pierwszego czytelnika [DRAMATIC CONTENT to be supplied by the first reader], in: T. Miciński, *Veni Creator* (or *Walka dusz* [*The battle of the souls*]), drama in four acts, Biblioteka Narodowa, ms. ref. No. II 7241.
- 25 Letter dated 18 August 1918; Szymanowski, *Korespondencja* [*Correspondence*], op. cit., vol. 1, p. 543.
- 26 See Danek-Wojnowska, Kłossowicz, 'Tadeusz Miciński', op. cit., p. 275.
- 27 Szymanowski realised the true value of the music of *King Roger* and its 'futuristic' character at the première of the opera at the Národní Divadlo in Prague. He wrote about it to Zofia Kochańska on 27 October 1932: 'I do not want to boast of the simply unheard of ovation by the audience after the second and third acts. Unfortunately, I know that it is only short-term: those few thousand people who understand anything will be in short supply after a few performances, and I expect it will be taken off the bill again. And there is nothing one can do about it now! This kind of play is out of line with today's affects!' (Szymanowski, *Korespondencja* [*Correspondence*], op. cit., vol. 4, part 1, Kraków 2002, p. 327).
- 28 See for example. F. Nietzsche, *The Birth of Tragedy, or: Hellenism and Pessimism*, transl. L. Staff, Warszawa 1907 [reprint: 1985], pp. 46–51.
- 29 В. Иванов, 'Две стихии в современном символизме', ин: *По звездам. Статьи и афоризмы*. Ст. Петербург 1909, pp. 247–308 [V. Ivanov, 'Two elements in contemporary symbolism', in: *Po zvezdam. Statii i aforizmy*, St. Petersburg 1909].
- 30 See Cymborska-Leboda, *Twórczość w kręgu mitu*, op. cit., p. 37.
- 31 See А. Бельй, *Символизм. Книга статей*, Москва 1910, pp. 104–105 [A. Belyj, *Symbolism*, Moscow 1910].
- 32 See J. Jacobi, *Psychologia C. G. Junga*. Wprowadzenie do całości dzieła, przedm. C. G. Jung [*The Psychology of C.G. Jung*. Introduction to the complete works. Introduction by C. G. Jung] transl. S. Łypacewicz, second edition with addenda, Warszawa 1993.
- 33 T. Miciński, *W mrokach Złotego Pałacu czyli Bazylissa Teofanu* [*In the gloom of the Golden Palace, or Bazylissa Teofanu*], op. cit., p. 157.
- 34 As above, p. 163.
- 35 As above, p. 59.

- 36 In Miciński's drama we have the apparition of Dionysus-Zagreus, which Bazileus Nikefor and his companions unsuccessfully try to capture. But Jan Cymisches, an imprisoned former akritis (a defender of the country's borders) and a famous lover, also disguised as Dionisus-Zagreus, has a secret assignation with Bazilissa Teofanu, who is convinced that she is meeting a god (act III). In *King Roger* we are also dealing with a kind of 'dressing up', although the grotesque element, characteristic of Miciński, is missing. Here the Shepherd, who introduces himself as the prophet of an unknown God, appears in the third act as Dionysus, in an aura of miraculosity appropriate for a mystery.
- 37 T. Miciński, *W mrokach Złotego Pałacu czyli Bazilissa Teofanu*, op. cit., p. 174.
- 38 See H. Floryńska-Lalewicz, 'Lucyferizm chrystusowy Tadeusza Micińskiego (1873–1918)' ['Tadeusz Miciński; *Christ's Luciferism*'], *Euhemer. Przegląd religioznawczy*, 1976, No. 3.
- 39 Primarily the Euripides's *Bacchae* in translation by Tadeusz Zieliński with his introduction, as well as T. Zieliński's *Współzawodnicy chrześcijaństwa* [*Christianity's competitors*], Innokenty Annensky's 'Bacchian' drama *Famira-Kifaried*, which Szymanowski most probably saw at the end of 1916 at Moscow's Chamber Theatre, directed by Alexander Tairov, and probably other readings (see T. Chylińska, 'Karol Szymanowski i Tadeusz Miciński', op. cit., p. 331).
- 40 K. Szymanowski, *Korespondencja*, op. cit., vol. 2, part 1, Kraków 1994, p. 217.
- 41 T. Miciński, *W mrokach Złotego Pałacu czyli Bazilissa Teofanu* [*In the gloom of the Golden Palace, or Bazilissa Teofanu*], op. cit., p. 178.
- 42 As above.
- 43 As above, p. 66.
- 44 As above, p. 141.
- 45 See S. Brzozowska, 'Antynomie dionizyjskości w *Bazilissie Teofanu* Tadeusza Micińskiego' ['The Antinomies of Dionysianity in *Bazilissa Teofanu* by Tadeusz Miciński'], *Pamiętnik Literacki*, 2007, issue. 1, p. 79 and the following.
- 46 'Solem esse omnia — wrote Ivanov in *Dionis i pradionisijstwo*, recalling the solar myth and the primeval folk beliefs, also referring to the Orphic ideas (*Słońce, wsielelnoej otiec. . .*), according to which, Dionysus himself was the Sun for both the living and the dead, understood as the «new form of the original light», as Fanes' (Cymborska-Leboda, *Twórczość w kręgu mitu*, op. cit., p. 197).
- 47 B. Leśmian, *Szkice literackie* [*Literary sketches*] (Z pism Bolesława Leśmiana [Selected writings of Bolesław Leśmian]), edited and with introduction by J. Trznadel, Warszawa 1959, p. 152.
- 48 'You – the Great All – Dionysus – resurrection - !', whispered to the Empress at the last moment her brother, Choerina, an untrustworthy character in the drama (Miciński, *W mrokach Złotego Pałacu czyli Bazilissa Teofanu*, op. cit, p. 178). Thus Teofanu's return as Dionysus's resurrection is not at all certain.
- 49 Cymborska-Leboda, *Twórczość w kręgu mitu*, op. cit., p. 32.
- 50 The symbolism of the last scene of the opera, in which Roger offers his heart to the Sun, refers to the popular modernist solar metaphor, which makes use of the heart motif (see, for example J. Gluziński, 'Hymn do słońca' ['A hymn to the sun'], *Krytyka* 1913, vol. 40, issue VII–VIII, pp. 30–33). Szymanowski's idea is closest to the metaphor of the 'heart of the Sun-Dionysus' from the poetry of Vyacheslav Ivanov (see

V. Ivanov, *Serce Dionizosa* [*The heart of Dionysus*], transl. A. Pomorski, in: V. Ivanov, *Poezje* [*Poems*], selection and introduction by S. Pollak, Warszawa 1985, p. 118).

51 Letter dated 27 October 1918; Szymanowski, *Korespondencja*, op. cit., vol. 1, p. 567.