

## In Front of the Room (Stalker)

All truth is ancient. The stimulus of novelty lies only in variety of expression – wrote Novalis.<sup>1</sup> True, it appears that there exist several, perhaps more than ten themes, which from antiquity give man no peace and incessantly return in the form of countless tales and successive transformations. They resemble fruit maturing each summer, whose flavour is familiar but, nonetheless, desirable. Just like the fruit, none of which can satiate our hunger once and for all, these tales never end nor are they capable of satisfying dreams or ultimately putting our anxieties at ease. Those perennially repeated attempts at formulating fundamental questions appear to be a state as natural for man as eating or sleeping and in a similar manner call for constant repetition.

One of the themes are miracles, dreams about the unattainable – an extremely prominent symbolic figure of “the journey beyond the farthest horizon”.

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Miracles are, as a rule, considered to be events transgressing the normal laws and potential of Nature, phenomena independent of natural causes and effects. A similar definition is, however, extremely dubious just as our knowledge of the laws of Nature is uncertain and incomplete.<sup>2</sup> A thus comprehended miracle incessantly awaits to be toppled (“science is still incapable of exploring it, but one day...”) and loses its gravity, thus turning into a mere outlandish trick. At the same time (due to linguistic intuition) we consent without any protest to using the word “miracle” to describe phenomena surrounding us as “enchanted” but not breaking the natural principles ruling the world and explained by science.<sup>3</sup>

Miracles are just like inspiration, which (as the Fathers of the Church from the Antioch school discovered) must be repeated in reading: *Prophecies are mentioned when someone interprets the words of a prophet*, according to the teachings of Diodore of Tarsus.<sup>4</sup> It seems worth noting that the Polish word *cud* is related to the verb: *czuć*, *odczuwać* (to feel, cf. the Slavonic *udo*) and thus also to: *czuwać*, *być czujnym* (to be watchful).<sup>5</sup> *Dziw*, *dziwo* (*divŮ*) denotes something which we all *podziwiamy* (ad-

mire) and *przyglądamy* (observe, *divati*). The same holds true for the Latin *miraculum*, derived from the verb: *miror* (which, in turn, originates from the Hebrew: *mareh*) – to observe, to wonder, to admire.

Miracles – also evangelical ones: *dunameis* (Latin: *virtutes*), *semeia kai terata* (*signa et prodigia*) – are not compelled to clash with the natural order of the world; they struggle for man’s soul and his spiritual senses – the ability to see and hear (*He who has ears...*). This was the situation on Mt. Tabor: in accordance with the tradition of Eastern Christianity: *Christ did not undergo transfiguration but the eyes of the apostles opened for a moment*.<sup>6</sup> St. Gregory Palamas (Greek theologian and mystic from the fourteenth century) wrote: *Christ is transfigured, not by putting on some quality He did not possess previously, nor by changing into something He never was before, but by revealing to His disciples what He truly was, in the opening of their eyes and in giving sight to those who were blind*.<sup>7</sup> Elsewhere, the saint declared: *This light is not sensual; the apostles were deemed worthy of seeing it with their eyes ... thanks to a special power, but not the one that comes from the senses*. This vision – Palamas cited St. Maximus the Confessor – is realised through the transformation of the impact of their senses.<sup>8</sup>

Naturally, not always did the effects of the miracles according to the Gospel performed by Christ call for such unusual sensitivity of the senses (after all, everyone, and not only the chosen, could admire the regained vigour of a person who only a moment ago was blind, crippled or dying). Nonetheless, as a rule, the miraculous event requires specific inner disposition, i.e. “faith” described in the story of the centurion from Capernaum. Like many others, the centurion asked Christ to heal a loyal servant dear to him. In contrast to them, however, he did not demand the Healer to come to his home: *Lord, I am not worthy that thou shouldst come under my roof: but speak the word only, and my servant shall be healed. (...) And Jesus said unto the centurion, Go thy way; and as thou hast believed, so be it done unto thee. And the servant was cured* (see: Matthew 8, 5-13).

A *sui generis* negative of the miracle experienced by the centurion is the story recalled upon a number of occasions by the protagonists of Andrei Tarkovsky’s film *Stalker*.<sup>9</sup> Although in no scene is the story amassed into an entity and we watch only its shreds and fragments it indubitably constitutes a profound backdrop of the film. This is the way the director described it: *...When the characters in the film set out on their journey into the Zone, their destination is a certain room in which, we are told, everybody’s most secret wish will be granted. And while the Writer and the Scientist, led by Stalker, are making their hazardous way over the strange expanse of the Zone, their guide tells them at one point either a true story, or a legend, about another Stalker, nicknamed Diko-obraz. He had gone to the secret place to ask for his brother who had been killed through his fault, to be brought back to life. When Diko-obraz returned home, however, he discovered that he had become fabulously wealthy*.

The Zone had granted what was in reality his most heartfelt desire, and not the wish that he had wanted to imagine was most precious to him. And Diko-obraz had hanged himself.<sup>10</sup>

A miracle thus took place. One could say: So be it done... – but not in the way Porcupine wanted (or rather thought he wanted) although – ...as thou hast believed, even against his will. It is precisely faith, that particular "sense", that is characteristic for the space of the Room.

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What is the Zone, the unusual space of the journey depicted in the film, a journey "beyond the horizon"? It cannot be described in the same categories as the rest of the world, and it is undeniably unusualness that is its essential feature. From the viewpoint of the rest of the world the Zone exists exclusively in negative categories, as a "lack", an undifferentiated chasm devoid of characteristic properties. Stalker describes the Zone: *It is so quiet out here, it is the quietest place in the world*, or elsewhere: *There's no one in the Zone and there can't be*. It belongs to the category of impossible phenomena (*In the Zone, the longer way, the less risk*), but this "impossibility" cannot be understood as banal improbability typical for the majority of science fiction works (Tarkovsky frequently explained that in *Stalker* only the initial anecdote, the pretext of the story, is science fiction).

Impossibility, negativity becomes (as in apophatic theology) a special concept and category evoking that, which in the world is unutterable and cannot be easily enclosed in categories and conceits. It is a condition for abandoning literalness (or habit) while depicting the world. The tension between the probable and the impossible, that "miraculous" innovation introduced into familiar order, endows the Zone with appropriate sense, rendering it a *sui generis* "metaphor" showing a different vision of that world and disclosing other, not always noticeable dependencies occurring between its elements.<sup>11</sup>

The miracle, in the manner of a glittering beacon, is a condition for encounter and dialogue; in a certain sense (and in accordance with what Whitman wrote) we notice only that, which becomes (for us?) a miracle.

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A rather universal conviction, or rather intuition, tells us that apart from that, which can be easily perceived or understood there exists something else, much more important. This reflection has always been an inexhaustible source of spiritual, intellectual and artistic efforts leading, however, towards extremely diverse conclusions. One of the forms of such a dream about transgressing commonplace reality was described with great enthusiasm by Cioran.

*Let us cleanse our consciousness of all that surrounds it, all the universes that it trails behind it, and together with it let us purify also perception so that we would become surrounded by whiteness, that oblivion of colours, apart from the single one,*

*which destroys all others. What tranquillity from the moment when we annul all diversity, when avoiding the Golgotha of nuances we submerge into unity! Consciousness as purified form and subsequently the outright absence of consciousness.*

*In order to set ourselves free from the unbearable let us seek another path, an escape, a region where no sensual impression pines for a name or embodiment, let us discover anew original rest, let us abandon hideous memory and together with it – the past, and, first and foremost, let us ignore consciousness, our eternal foe that destroys and exploits us. By way of contrast, the unconscious is a nourisher that strengthens and allows us to participate in our beginnings, our original integrity, and we once again immerse ourselves in the blessed chaos that precedes individuation.*<sup>12</sup>

This ardent call reflects profound disgust with the concrete of the world and the concrete of oneself, a fear of overpowering feelings, memory, and awareness – embodiment. While expressing the need for abandoning the world Cioran naturally followed the path delineated by the tradition of the Orient but also known in Europe (predominantly thanks to Plato and his legacy); he urged to discover that unique paradise of non-corporeal and dispassionate indifference.

Can we compare this idealised domain of escape to the image of the Zone created by Tarkovsky? The author of *Stalker*, just as critical as Cioran of the contemporary, desecralised world, also shows the Zone as a tempting space of a blessed loss of one's way (the *Stalker* character says about the rest of the world: *Oh God, for me it's prison everywhere!*), which compels to renounce familiar paths, to set oneself free from ordinary knowledge and well-tested habits. Is this, however, the freedom from the world desired by Cioran? Freedom from feelings and senses? Here, all similarity, unquestioned at the point of departure, breaks down – the Zone demands from the travellers (including *Stalker*) special tension and creates a state of constant unrest.<sup>13</sup> Although Tarkovsky remained closer to Christian spirituality he just as readily referred to the tradition of the East.<sup>14</sup>

If the Zone was to be merely a region of refuge, a shelter against the world, and free of all experiences then the travellers would not wish to return home. Even if they did want to stay (*Stalker's* silent dream) they still come back. This recalls the dilemma of the mystics expressed, for example, by William (Guillaume) of Saint-Thierry in the opening paragraph of his treatise *De Contemplando Deo*: *Come, let us climb the mountain of God, the home of the God of Jacob, and He shall teach us His paths. Intentions, efforts, thoughts, predilections and all that is concealed in my interior – come, let us climb the mountain, the place where the Lord sees or is seen. Cares, anxieties, fears, almost slave-like toil - wait here for me with a donkey and this body, until I and the boy, reason together with understanding, go there, pay homage, and then return to you. We shall return rapidly. Love of the truth commands us to leave you, but the truth of love, owing to my brethren, does not permit me to renounce and desert you.*

The closing scene in a bar where the travellers meet Stalker's wife and daughter is suffused with emotion, love and suffering; this is one of the most important scenes and, according to Tarkovsky, full of optimism. The Writer and the Professor see a woman, the director adds, *who suffered so much because of her husband, she gave birth to a sick child through his fault, still loves him with the same limitless generosity she felt for him in the days of her youth. Her love, her devotion – this is exactly the miracle with which one can counter the lack of faith, spiritual emptiness, cynicism – that is, all which the heroes of the film have lived until now.* Elsewhere, Tarkovsky stated: *Human love is this miracle which can defy all the dry theorising about hopelessness of the world* [my emphasis – W. M.].

Cioran expressed an undoubtedly intriguing thought: let us purify also perception so that we would become surrounded by whiteness, that oblivion of colours, apart from the single one, which destroys all others. One of the characteristic features of the Zone is undeniably its unique “whiteness” that has a lot in common with prevailing silence, which not unlike endless variability prevents the temptation to idolise this extraordinary space (I shall return to this theme). But such whiteness is not an oblivion of colours, a destruction of all others (as Cioran saw it). After all, it is the reality of the Zone that makes it possible to apply coloured film tape in contrast to the earlier black-and-white scenes.

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*An image* – Tarkovsky declared – *is indefinite in meaning.* Just as life carries an endless number of meanings. The Zone is also such an image (or more exactly: the image of such an image). I believe, however, that defining it as “ambiguous” would be slightly misleading, a substitute stemming from intuitional hostility and fear of enclosing a complex meaning within an unambiguous conceptual construction.<sup>15</sup> Just like in the case of the symbol the heart of the matter does not concern only, or not so much, a multiplicity of meanings. A variety of meanings always requires their coordination, since – as Aristotle correctly wrote – not signifying one thing is signifying nothing.

A comparison of even the extremely numerous meanings of a certain image does not render it a symbol (nor does it endow it with the properties of an original metaphor). That what is at stake is quite different – the ability to see and hear, that special sense, which opens ears and eyes to the mystery. The countless number of meanings of a symbol originates not from the fact that they come into being in it (simultaneously or one after another) but from the fact that the symbol exists in the dimension of possibility - memory and anticipation.<sup>16</sup>

Motion towards entity stems from absence. This is why one of the metaphors of a thus understood symbol can be also silence. *It is so quiet out here, it is the quietest place in the world,* Stalker says about the Zone. Silence (also a special form of quiet) is something more than a means of ex-

pression: it is rather a word that has just been heard or is anticipated;<sup>17</sup> it is the language of the desert and solitude constituting a condition for an encounter.<sup>18</sup> It is as if a state of readiness – a vigil – making it possible to perceive the emergence of a miracle. Paul Celan offered a similar explanation of the existence of poetry: *the poetic word, in its most evident expressions, appears to be a word rising from silence, transcending that silence, and breaking away from it, but without ceasing to move along its edges.*<sup>19</sup> The Flemish theologian Antoine Vergote wrote: *The revealed meaning can be heard only along the edgings of silence.*<sup>20</sup> The Zone is a place of a meeting, involving (“disturbing”) the traveller, a concrete transformed by means of feeling, memory and dream. It depicts a state of existence most important for the world, albeit delicate, suspended between that, which is and that, which could become, and one that (as Andrei Tarkovsky wrote about the metaphor) *falls apart at any attempt of touching it.*

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Tarkovsky maintained that art (which he identified in a certain sense with poetry) is a form of activity that allows man to express absolute truth. *A poet is someone who can use a single image to send a universal message. A man passes another man by, he looks at him but he cannot see him. Another man will look at the same person and he will smile unexpectedly. The stranger has provoked an explosion of associations in him. It's similar with art. A poet takes a small fragment as a starting point and turns it into a coherent whole. Some consider this process boring. These are people who want to know about everything in minutest detail, like accountants or lawyers. But show a toe sticking out of a hole in a sock to a poet and it is enough to produce an image of the whole world in him* [my emphasis – W.M.].

Tarkovsky's view about the toe sticking out from a sock appears to harmonise with that of another poet:

*To see a World in a grain of sand  
And a Heaven in a wild flower  
Hold Infinity in the palm of your hand,  
And Eternity in an hour.*<sup>21</sup>

Both Tarkovsky and Blake sought the universal, though opening towards it is not by any means the *oblivion of colours* postulated by Cioran but the concrete, although transfigured by the light of dazzling “whiteness”; their objective is mystical “unity”, albeit embodied and producing an “explosion of associations” (“colours”) created out of reminiscences and dreams. “The toe”, similarly to the “grain of sand” can become an image of the world thanks to the poetic ability to see, the power of symbolic imagination (Blake's postulate: *To see...*). The Zone or the “Room” (also the one from Emmaus) is a personification of this light, a “symbol of a symbol” (understood as an existential stand). “Freed from the world”, they become a void, a chasm in current reality. On the other hand, they remain “tied” to the world, i.e. perceived with the “sense of faith” they demonstrate its potential dimension.

Almost two centuries prior to William Blake another English poet, George Herbert, also began his poem (*Elixir*) with a call-prayer-plea for the miraculous gift of seeing:

Teach me, my God and King,  
In all things Thee to see (...).

and went on to say:

A man that looks on glass,  
On it may stay his eye;  
Or it he pleaseth, through it pass,  
And then the heav'n espy.

Can we, therefore, be surprised by Tarkovsky's view: *The Zone is in some sense a result of Stalker's imagination. Our line of reasoning was as follows: it is he who invented that place to bring people there and convince them about the truth of his creation (...)* I completely agree with the suggestion that it was Stalker who had created the Zone's world in order to invent some sort of faith, a faith in that world's existence.

Apparently, the twin scenes in a bar, opening and closing the journey to the Zone, possess an essential connection with this reflection. It is from here that the protagonists set out for their journey and here, at the end, that they suddenly and without any effort find themselves upon their return. They stand around a table just like they did previously, and even (as Seweryn Kuśmierczyk noticed) the amount of beer in their glasses had not changed. Perhaps they actually never went anywhere? Such a solution would be, however, a basically incorrect reduction of their experiences to a psychological level. The heart of the matter is rather granting the journey the expressive features of mystical experience.

This particular ability possessed by Stalker – the skill of seeing, the poetic sense – cannot be rationalised as subjective, excessively abundant fantasy severing all ties with reality. The symbol (e.g. the Zone) is free but not arbitrary. Stalker “kindled” a fire that had been already burning, although in a manner that remained invisible to the Writer and the Professor. His imagination not only devised something (in that case it would have created only idols<sup>22</sup>), but was also a way of touching (discovering) the world.

Poetic sense is required not only by the person who writes poems but also by the one who reads them. Not only Stalker building the Zone thanks to the force of his imagination, but also the travellers guided by him face its message; not only the author of the film but also its spectators (Tarkovsky: *Everything that happens here depends on us, not on the Zone*).

If poetry is experiencing the world, a special attitude towards reality then the Zone should be treated as a written poem that cannot be completed. Stalker describes poetry: *The Zone is a very complicated system... of traps, and they're all deadly. I don't know what's going on here in the absence of people, but the moment someone shows up everything comes into motion. Old traps disappear and new ones emerge. Safe spots become impassible. Now your path is easy, now it is hope-*

*lessly involved. That's the Zone. It may even seem capricious. But it is what we've made with our condition... But everything that's going on here depends not on the Zone, but on us!*

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*Stalker* is a religious work. It is about an encounter with the *sacrum* and its powerful and dangerous although also fascinating force. It is a Christian film, full of more or less transparent allusions to the Biblical text<sup>23</sup> and tradition (especially Russian Orthodox). The titular protagonist is, after all, an Orthodox saint, an imitator of Christ – *yurodivy*, God's fool. This is the way he is called in the film by the Writer, while Stalker's wife recalls their youth: *You've probably noticed already that he's not of this world. All our neighborhood laughed at him. He was such a bungler, he looked so pitiful. (...) But then he approached me and said: "Come with me". And I did, and never regretted it.* I am convinced that the evangelical model contains not only the formula: “Come with me” but also a circumstance basic in the film composition, i.e. the journey – that of the Master teaching the two disciples travelling with him. Naturally, I have in mind pericopies describing the meeting of Jesus and two disciples, and their joint journey from Jerusalem to Emmaus (Luke 24).

The event on the road near Jerusalem appears to be just as improbable as the expedition into the recesses of the Zone. Its pretext is the premise that the disciples were incapable of recognizing their Master, whom they had seen upon so many occasions: *But their eyes were holden...* Stalker says about the Writer and the Professor: *They don't believe in anything! They've got the organ with which one believes atrophied for lack of use. (...) Oh God, what people (...) Haven't you seen them? They've got empty eyes* [my emphasis – W.M]. Is that the reason why they were unable to enter the Room in which they expected to find a miracle? Perhaps it was not the miracle that was missing but eyes capable of noticing it?

Psychological improbability endows the evangelical story with the dimension of an extremely lucid metaphor: he who does not follow the Master on the way to the Room will not learn the Truth (will not “see” it). Note that both Kleopas and his companion end their journey in the Chamber<sup>24</sup> and there, during supper, the Stranger *took bread, and gave thanks, and brake it, and gave unto them.* An only there, in that openly sacramental and thus symbolical situation, *their eyes were opened, and they knew him.*

This situation has undoubtedly much in common with the scene of the Lord's Transfiguration. Here too (just as on Mt. Tabor), the Lord appears to the disciples; more precisely, he is recognised thanks to the “transformation of their senses” (Maxim the Confessor), “cured blindness” (Gregory Palamas). That, which in reference to Mt. Tabor is a theological interpretation here has been already included into the text of the Gospel.

In Chauvet's opinion the story about the disciples on their way to Emmaus is based on a fundamental question:

how to become a believer? How to cross from disbelief to belief? Chauvet wrote: *Jerusalem – Emmaus – Jerusalem: this topographically round trip is for us the symbolic support of the turn-around, the "transformation" that gradually takes place in the disciples' hearts during the telling of the story.*

Compare these words with Tarkovsky's commentary: *It is important for me to create something specifically human in this film, something indecomposable which crystalizes within the soul of each of us and determines our value. Because although the heroes suffer an apparent defeat, each of them gains something incredibly important: faith, discovery within themselves of that which is the most important. This most important is within every human being.*

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Does Stalker also not mention the "most important", the "sense of faith": *You were speaking* [he turns to the Writer and the Professor] *of the meaning of our life, of the unselfishness of art... Take music, for instance. Less than anything else, it is connected to reality, or if connected at all, it's done mechanically, not by way of ideas, just by a sheer sound, devoid of ... any associations. And yet, music, as if by some miracle, gets through to our heart. What is it that resonates in us in response to noise brought to harmony, making it the source of the greatest delight!*<sup>25</sup>

A similarly comprehended "impartiality" of poetry – one could say: its musical qualities ("an empty sound without association") – was considered by Ricoeur: *It is in this sense that poetry is liberated from the world. But if it is liberated in this sense, in another sense it is bound, and it is bound precisely to the extent that it is also liberated.*<sup>26</sup> The void, "liberation from the world", create space for that, which cannot be reduced to a series of empiric gestures and attributes, which transgresses topicality and becomes the dimension of possibility (*posse*).<sup>27</sup> It awakens that inner sense, which on Mt. Tabor and in Emmaus allowed the disciples to see the Master. A sense that makes it possible to notice the wonderful reality of that, which ostensibly does not exist, like the world in the mystical apple described by D.H. Lawrence in *Mystic*:

So an apple becomes mystic when I taste in it  
the summer and the snows, the wild welter of earth  
and the insistence of the sun.

All of which things I can surely taste in a good apple...

This extraordinary ability to savour the "miracle" is a miracle in itself, although not everyone believes in such miracles:

If I say I taste these things in an apple, I am called  
mystic, which  
means a liar.

The controversy concerns the criteria of reality:

*The only way to eat an apple is to hog it down like a pig  
and taste nothing  
that is real.*

The miracle in Emmaus did not last long; to be precise, it did not "last" at all: Christ (recognised by His disciples thanks to sacramental and symbolic gestures, as if in a "clearance") disappeared at the very same moment (*And their eyes were opened and they knew Him. And He vanished out of their sight – Luke 24, 31*). Just as "unreal" is the flavour of the summer and snow in Lawrence's apple.<sup>28</sup>

What does this disappearance signify? The impossibility of endurance in that brief moment of joy, the impossibility of rendering it inedible, almost recalls expulsion from paradise. Can it be really regarded as the defeat of the disciples? Such defeat is just as ostensible as the one experienced by Tarkovsky's protagonists. This was rather that moment, which Kierkegaard described as an atom not of time but of eternity. St. Luke seemed to suggest that the eyes of the disciples *open on an emptiness – "he vanished from their sight" – but an emptiness full of a presence.*<sup>29</sup> Less makes it possible to achieve more.

Christ – "transfigured" on Mt. Tabor and "vanishing" in Emmaus – defends Himself against being enclosed in an idolatric formula of identity, against undertakings reducing His endless transfiguration into the historical Christ.<sup>30</sup> By way of example, He protests when Peter, John and James (in the manner of the Israelites creating the golden calf under Mt. Sinai) wish to erect tents on top of the mountain – signs of an established cult commemorating a moment. Christ compels everyone to make an ethical choice – either we treat Him as an idol, comprising a *fait accompli*, or we perceive in Him a challenge to carry out our transfiguration.

The disappearance of Christ in Emmaus resembles His departure from the world. After all, He instructed his disciples:

*It is expedient for you that I go away: for if I go not away, the Comforter will not come unto you; but if I depart, I will send him unto you. And when he is come, he will reprove the world of sin ... because they believe not in me*

(John 16, 7-11). Due to His very essence (if one may use that term), i.e. permanent transfiguration, the Paraclete cannot be enclosed in a hermetic idolatric cult.

How are we, therefore, to interpret the fact that the Writer and the Professor hesitate to cross the threshold of the Room?<sup>31</sup> It seems that the two *dramatis personae* – who represent different human "types" and who were inclined to set out by different motives – jointly portray the tragedy of disappointment and doubt in the idolatric finity of the world.

If the Writer and the Professor wish to regain that, which they renounced while setting off to the Zone then they contain the sort of *despair* and *infinite resignation* that Kierkegaard described as *the last stage before faith*.<sup>32</sup> In the Zone they renounce the certainty brought from the outside and start to open up to *emptiness full of a presence*. It is precisely their failure (and even the idea of destroying the

Room), which testifies that during their transformation they avoided the trap of idolatric enclosure – the one into which Porcupine fell earlier. They resigned from an attempt at a realisation of that, which can exist exclusively in the dimension of a calling: symbol – sacrament – icon. Their situation resembles the plight of those driven from paradise but, as Antoine Vergote correctly noted: *The loss of paradise is precisely the cipher of the symbolic world.*<sup>33</sup>

The protagonists of *Stalker* experience a dramatic act of doubt, which marks the onset of each true journey-transformation. They resemble the observer on an island in the middle of the ocean in Herzog's film *Heart of Glass*: the first who "doubts" and sets off together with his companions in a boat far too small on an absurd journey to the end of the world (or perhaps they bear a resemblance to those companions?). They are like Gustav Aschenbach from Thomas Mann's novel – an artist whose "sense of order" was replaced by a "sense of mystery" directing him to the ultimate, the ecstatic. The gaze of the travellers standing on the threshold of the Room, directed towards the inner recesses of its impenetrable interior, recalls Aschenbach's last wish to follow Tazio's beckoning gesture into an immensity of richest expectation. The wish that Aschenbach fulfilled by dying and the Writer and the Professor by preserving life remains unfulfilled and thus persists in the dimension of a symbol.

This situation recalls also the puzzling failure of Odysseus, who permitted unfavourable winds to drive him away from the already near-by Ithaca. What steered him? Curiosity of the world, mentioned by Dante? Or rather despair, expressing doubt in Ithaca? Or perhaps loyalty to its essence:

*When you set out for Ithaka  
ask that your way be long,  
full of adventure, full of instruction. [...]  
Have Ithaka always in your mind.  
Your arrival there is what you are destined for.  
But don't in the least hurry the journey. [...]  
Ithaka gave you a splendid journey.  
Without her you would not have set out.  
She hasn't anything else to give you.  
And if you find her poor, Ithaka hasn't deceived you.  
So wise you have become, of such experience,  
that already you'll have understood what these Ithakas  
mean.*

Constantine P. Cavafy, *Ithaca*

## Endnotes

- <sup>1</sup> Novalis, *Uczniowie z Saïs (proza filozoficzna – studia – fragmenty)*, transl. Jerzy Prokopiuk, Warszawa 1984, p. 122.
- <sup>2</sup> Walter Kasper, *Jezus Chrystus*, transl. B. Bialecki, Warszawa 1983, p. 81. On the concept of the miracle in Christianity see: Rev. Marian Rusecki, *Cud jako znak i symbol*, "Roczniki Teologiczno-Kanoniczne", vol. XXVIII, fasc. 2, 1981, pp. 80-95; *Les miracles de Jesus*, X. Léon-Dufour (ed.), Paris

1977. Views of ancient and Early Christian authors about miracles in: Ewa Wipszycka, *Kościół w świecie późnego antyku*, Warszawa 1994, pp. 300-317 (chapter: *Cuda*). See also: Robert Wiśniewski, *Cuda i świętość*, "Mówią wieki", no. 2, 1996, pp. 16-19.

- <sup>3</sup> Mentioned by Walt Whitman in *Miracles*, a poem of great importance for the discussed question:  
*Why, who makes much of a miracle?  
As to me I know of nothing else but miracles,  
Whether I walk the streets of Manhattan,  
Or dart my sight over the roofs of houses toward the sky,  
Or wade with naked feet along the beach just in the edge of the water,  
Or stand under trees in the woods,  
Or talk by day with any one I love, or sleep in the bed at night with any one I love,  
Or sit at table at dinner with the rest,  
Or look at strangers opposite me riding in the car,  
Or watch honey-bees busy around the hive of a summer forenoon,  
Or animals feeding in the fields,  
Or birds, or the wonderfulness of insects in the air,  
Or the wonderfulness of the sundown, or of stars shining so quiet and bright,  
Or the exquisite delicate thin curve of the new moon in spring;  
These with the rest, one and all, are to me miracles,  
The whole referring, yet each distinct and in its place.  
To me every hour of the light and dark is a miracle,  
Every cubic inch of space is a miracle,  
Every square yard of the surface of the earth is spread with the same,  
Every foot of the interior swarms with the same.  
To me the sea is a continual miracle,  
The fishes that swim—the rocks—the motion of the waves—the ships with men in them,  
What stranger miracles are there?*
- <sup>4</sup> Quoted after: Gijs Bouwman, *Czy możemy w dzisiejszych czasach oprzeć nasze życie duchowe na Biblii?*, "Concilium. Międzynarodowy Przegląd Teologiczny" (selected articles, 6 October 1969), Poznań–Warszawa 1970, p. 202.
- <sup>5</sup> In this manner the concept of the "miracle" is also influenced by the symbolic potential of "feeling" as "smell", i.e. a sense, which permeates that, which sight does not reach
- <sup>6</sup> Paul Evdokimov, *Prawosławie*, transl. Jerzy Klinger, Warszawa 1964, p. 115. Matthew 17, 2: *Et transfiguratus est coram ipsis*....
- <sup>7</sup> Quoted after: Georgios I. Mantzaridis, *Przebóstwienie człowieka. Nauka świętego Grzegorza Palamasa w świetle tradycji prawosławnej*, transl. Iga Czaczkowska, Lublin 1997, p. 105.
- <sup>8</sup> Quoted after: Jean Meyendorff, *Introduction à l'étude de Grégoire Palamas*, Paris 1959, pp. 241-242. On the Transfiguration of the Lord see also: R. de Feraudy, *L'icône de la Transfiguration, Etude suivie des Homélies d'Anastase le Sinaïte et de S. Jean Damascène*, transl. M. Coune and K. Rozemond, "Spiritualité Orientale" no. 23, 1978; Georges Habra, *La Transfiguration selon les Pères grecs*, Fontainebleau 1986.
- <sup>9</sup> *Stalker*, screenplay Arkady Strugatsky and Boris Strugatsky based on motifs from the fourth chapter of the novel *The Roadside Picnic*; director: Andrei Tarkovsky; director of photography: Alexandr Kniazhinsky; main production designer: A. Tarkovsky; composer: Eduard Artiemiev. Cast: Alexandr Kaydanovsky – Stalker, Anatoly Solonitsyn – Writer, Nikolai Grinko – Professor, Alisa Freindlikh – Wife, Natasha Abramova – Martishka. Production: USSR – Mosfilm 1979.



- <sup>10</sup> All statements by Andrei Tarkovsky from: *Kompleks Tolstoja, Mysli o życiu sztuce i filmie*, selected, prep. and transl. Seweryn Kuśmierczyk, Warszawa 1989 and: *Czas utrwalaony*, transl. Seweryn Kuśmierczyk, Warszawa 1991.
- <sup>11</sup> I use the word "metaphor" (a strictly linguistic concept) metaphorically in order to express a thought about the surplus of meaning. In doing so, I refer to Ricoeur's reflections about the metaphor, which is not an ornament of discourse. (...) A metaphor does not furnish any new information about reality. The metaphorical twist (...) can be taken as the model for the extension of meaning operative in every symbol – *Metafora i symbol*, transl. Katarzyna Rosner, in: *Język, tekst, interpretacja*, Warszawa 1989, pp. 133, 136. See also Ricoeur's other works on the metaphor, i.a. *La métaphore vive*, Paris 1975.
- <sup>12</sup> E.M. Cioran, *L'indivisible*, in: *Le vide, Expérience spirituelle en Occident et en Orient* ("Hermès" 2, Nouvelle série), Paris 1981, p. 262.
- <sup>13</sup> Cf. Gabriel Marcel on restlessness, anxiety, and anguish.
- <sup>14</sup> Nicolai Berdiaev: *Toutes ces tendances vers une communion avec l'élément cosmique sexuel entraînent le renoncement à la lutte pour l'être personnel, pour les rapports personnels entre l'homme et Dieu et entre les hommes. Et rien ne saurait poser d'une façon plus profonde le problème de la spiritualité chrétienne.* – Nicolas Berdiaeff, *Esprit et réalité*, transl. from the Russian, Paris 1950, p. 192.
- <sup>15</sup> Hence a different declaration made by the author of *Stalker*: When I create my images I use no symbolism of any kind. I want to create an image, not a symbol. That's why I don't believe in interpretations of supposed meanings of my pictures. I'm not interested in narrow political or social issues. I want to create images that would touch the viewer's soul to some degree. It has to be explained that Tarkovsky treated the symbol as an intellectual formula with a strictly defined meaning and contrasted to the poetic metaphor. See: Dariusz Czaja, *Tarkowski i symbol*, "Kwartalnik Filmowy" no. 9-10, 1995, pp. 107-113.
- <sup>16</sup> Cf. Kearney, op. cit.
- <sup>17</sup> Cf. Nancy Jay Crumbine, *On Silence*, "Humanitas. Journal of the Institute of Man Center for the Study of Human Development", vol. XI, no. 2: 1975.
- <sup>18</sup> See: Marie-Madeleine Davy, *Silence et contemplation*, in: *La vie Bénédictine – Les raisons du silence*, no date, pp. 23-31.
- <sup>19</sup> Quoted after: Jean Greisch, *L'âge herméneutique de la raison*, Paris 1985, p. 238.
- <sup>20</sup> A. Vergote, op. cit., p. 8. On "silence" see also: Bernard Dauenhauer, *Silence The Phenomenon and its Ontological Significance*, 1980 (this study was discussed by Bogdan Baran, *Fenomenologia amerykańska, Studium z pogranicza*, Kraków 1990, pp. 115-120). On silence as a spiritual discipline see: Bernard Morel, *Méthode et religion. Essai sur la méthodologie ouvert et l'expérience de la transcendance*, Lausanne, *passim*, especially p. 250 sqq.
- <sup>21</sup> Beginning of the poem: *Auguries of Innocence* by William Blake.
- <sup>22</sup> Cf. Jean-Luc Marion, *Bóg bez bycia*, transl. M. Frankiewicz, Kraków 1996, p. 31: *the idol with its visibility fills the intention of the gaze, which wants nothing other than to see*; p. 40: *The icon, on the contrary, attempts to render visible the invisible as such, hence to allow that the visible not cease to refer to another than itself, without, however, that other ever being reproduced in the visible.*
- <sup>23</sup> Just a single example: in one of the scenes the protagonists climb flooded stairs leading down and then up, and become submerged in water up to their necks. Obviously, this image brings to mind sacramental immersion in a Christian baptistery. In the successive scene they halt in a large interior filled with sand (or a similar substance) designed to resemble dunes characteristic for the landscape of a desert. The "baptistery" from the previous scene should be thus interpreted as an image of the Red Sea, traditionally treated as a prefiguration of baptism.
- <sup>24</sup> This circumstance is accentuated by Louis-Marie Chauvet: *It is not outside, on the road, but inside, around the table, that the two disciples have the decisive experience of their encounter* – *Symbole et sacrement. Une relecture sacramentelle de l'existence chrétienne*, Paris 1987, p. 175.
- <sup>25</sup> At this I point I would like to quote, by way of example, the lyrics of *Czajnik* (Kettle), a song by Wojciech Waglewski:  
Not only in me. In you too  
Lurks the note, the sound,  
Which, God once whispered,  
Would enable us to hear  
Our Psalm...
- <sup>26</sup> *Metafora i symbol*, op. cit., p. 142.
- <sup>27</sup> Similarly, the concept of the "world of text" proposed by Ricoeur contains the sort of distance introduced by literary fiction that eliminates within the text the direct (ostensible) reference to reality, its referential dimension. P. Ricoeur, *Hermeneutyczna funkcja dystansu*, transl. Piotr Graff, in: *Język...*, ed. cit., pp. 224-245.
- <sup>28</sup> This moment of illumination, instantly changing into parting, was depicted by Rembrandt. A penetrating comment on the canvas: *Pilgrims at Emmaus (The Supper at Emmaus)* by Michel Prieur in: *Visage et personne. Contribution à l'établissement du statut ontologique de la représentation*, "Revue de Métaphysique et de Morale" no. 3: 1982, p. 321.
- <sup>29</sup> Chauvet, op. cit. The brilliant French theologian-hermeneutist added: *They open on the emptiness of the invisibility of the Lord each time the Church breaks bread in memory of him; but this emptiness is penetrated by his symbolic presence (...). Jesus the Christ is absent as "the same"; he is no longer present except as "the Other". From now on, it is impossible to touch his real body; we can touch it only as the body symbolized (...).*
- <sup>30</sup> See: Richard Kearney, *Poétique du possible. Phénoménologie herméneutique de la figuration*, Paris 1984, p. 168.
- <sup>31</sup> According to *Stalker* they lacked faith. Meanwhile, Tarkovsky said: *Because although the heroes suffer an apparent defeat, each of them gains something incredibly important: faith...*
- <sup>32</sup> *For the act of resignation faith is not required, but it is needed when it is the case of acquiring the very least thing more than my eternal consciousness, for this is the paradoxical. (...) In resignation I make renunciation of everything, this movement I make by myself.* – Sören Kierkegaard, *Bojaźń i drżenie. Choroba na śmierć*, transl. J. Iwaszkiewicz, Warszawa 1982, p. 49.
- <sup>33</sup> Antoine Vergote, *Interprétation du langage religieux*, Paris 1974, p. 68.