

Theatre in the Country

The Węgajty Village Theatre and Theatre Centre is part of Jerzy Grotowski's large theatre offspring. The linking factor all through the family, now scattered all over the world, and not always ready to acknowledge the kinship or affinity, is the treatment of theatre as a way of living and a recipe for life. This implies metaphysical leanings with an equally strong and in-depth link with reality; and a pursuit of form combined with readiness for theatrical apostleship, i.e. sharing theatre with others.

I found all this at Węgajty, first two years ago, when the production *Inn for Eternal Peace* (*Gospoda ku wiecznemu pokojowi*) was presented. The *Inn* was based on motifs from Czesław Miłosz's *The Issa Valley* (*Dolina Issy*) enriched with texts by Johannes Bobrowski, and a sixteenth-century author Mikołaj of Wilkowiecko. The protagonists appeared in a sequence of interrelated scenes in which the word, though originating in outstanding authors, was apparently subordinated to motion, musical instruments, and especially singing. The production continues to be elaborated on and changed; rather than merely as a product, the ensemble treats it also (or perhaps primarily) as a theatre workshop.

I visited Węgajty for a second time in the autumn of 1993 during the eighth theatre seminar closing a series of seminars on "Closer Homelands". The programme included lectures, demonstrations, vocal and movement training, and teaching of dances and songs to one another. The participants included Ukrainians, Hungarians, Russians and Lithuanians, in addition to Węgajty's friends from all over the country. The latter were more numerous than one could imagine: there is evidently enough room for "closer homelands" in our apparently homogeneous country. "Small homelands" is understood here as it was by the borderland writer Stanisław

Vincenz, i.e. as local culture which sees its evidently distinct qualities as a chance of developing mutual interest, recognition, understanding and rapprochement. During the meetings at the Village Theatre, this noble and just ideology, though often lapsing into sentimental banality, is expressed in the simplest and aptest way through spontaneous arts which can perfectly well do without comments and additional explanation, and rely on singing, dance, and music. Incidentally, the Teatr Wiejski's "homeland" is not at all modest, self-sufficient and self-centred; on the contrary, it is open, hospitable and ready to accept and return interesting visits, the latter not just in the familiar neighbouring or more distant areas. The Teatr Wiejski has organised expeditions to the Lower Beskid Mts, to Slovakia and Podolya, and dreams of going in exotic directions. From its expeditions, the ensemble has brought back to Węgajty rich trophies: songs, dances, records of customs but especially ample evidence to the effect that people can understand one another in all places through playing and singing together in the universal language of musical scores. This could be achieved not by laying stress on the worldwide, multiplied, adapted and seasoned for easier mass consumption, but through the profoundly provincial in the ennobling sense meaning "traditional" and hence going back to the sources. Genuine musical or theatrical folklore (if it is not politically used or abused) could well cure quite a few artists of the fashionable, but rather unpleasant and uncomfortable sense of loss in contemporary art. This could be the result of a moment of play and joy at touching the beauty of the world.

The seminars at the Teatr Wiejski are held in a high room adapted from an old farm building. Artists of a varying degree of professional standing and amateurs, mix with the public and with one another, and

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for the most part appear in both roles at a time. The voices carry high and blend under the ceiling; the wooden boards of the floor faultlessly reproduce the rhythm of the feet. A great deal happens outside the windows: the clouds are never the same in different places, there is the wind, the sun and mist, leaves or just branches; at times a bird or a dog passes by. The local neighbourhood is full of myths and mysteries; it is the native soil of extinct, exterminated or dislodged peoples, the "Atlantis of the North", as a poet calls it. The building of the Teatr Wiejski rises at the foot of a hill with a pine forest, less than a mile away from a bus stop. Early in the spring or late in the autumn, in order to see the *Inn*, the public has to

walk to the theatre after nightfall. This is not a discomfort invented specially pour "épater le bourgeois" but such are the realities of the local transport. The vestibule leading to the auditorium, with a fire burning, is at the same time a foyer, a cloakroom proper, and a passage to a different world where the members of the Teatr Wiejski ensemble and their guests live during rehearsals, performances and activities called seminars.

Who are the hosts of the Węgajty? Wacław and Erdmute Sobaszek, and Wolfgang and Małgorzata Niklaus, Polish-German and German-Polish couples, and their co-workers, people connected with ethnography, music and the fine arts. To date, they have withstood the ebbs and flows of interest in the Teatr Wiejski, the hardships of rural existence and a foretaste of success (of little help to them) for eight years now. I think that if it had not been for the concord with themselves, they would have long lost the strength to continue work intended in equal shares for themselves and others.

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WYPRAWA WIELKANOCNA (*Expédition pascale*). Dziadówek. Teatr Węgajty.

Photo Marcin Papieński