

Sad Satan's Children: Stanisław Przybyszewski and Esoteric Milieus

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My whole life is summarized in this grand alternative:
all or nothing. I chose all!

Stanisław Przybyszewski (1889)

Along the winded road of his life, Stanisław Przybyszewski (1868–1927) became a living legend; a legend he co-created himself, and of which he also became a victim. Widely known for his literary prose and poems rich in psychological insight, his Satanic sympathies, remarkable self-confidence as a person and an artist, but also for numerous scandals and his alcoholism, Przybyszewski was a colorful contribution to the European *fin-de siècle*. His intensive collaboration with artists from all over Europe made him recognizable outside of Poland, and his return to the country was welcomed as the coming of a prophet. As an author who in his works often referred to mysteries, occultism, and images of Satan, he has been noticed as an important figure in the scholarship of Western Esotericism.¹

“Sad Satan” was how Przybyszewski was called by his contemporaries, among others – Tadeusz Boy Țeleński;² the nickname is used often in Polish literary studies, and is not as controversial as it may seem. The term “Satan’s children” usually refers to the circle of artists around Przybyszewski that was formed in Poland, named after his book *Satanskindler*.³ In the title of this article it is used in a broader meaning, referring to the reception of Przybyszewski’s ideas. Even though he wasn’t personally involved as a member in any group of initiatory character, we need to refer to esoteric milieus of his time in order to understand Przybyszewski’s way of balancing on the blurry line between theorizing about and practicing occultism. They are also very important in the perspective of an important goal of Przybyszewski: founding or leading a journal or magazine that

¹ See Per Faxneld, “Witches, Anarchism, and Evolutionism: Stanisław Przybyszewski’s fin-de-siècle Satanism and the Demonic Feminine,” in *The Devil’s Party. Satanism in Modernity*, ed. Per Faxneld, Jesper Aa. Petersen (New York: Oxford University Press 2013), 53–77, Massimo Introvigne, *Satanism: A Social History* (Leiden/Boston: Brill 2016), 229–234. For a monography on Przybyszewski’s works written in prose see Gabriela Matuszek, *Stanisław Przybyszewski – pisarz nowoczesny. Eseje i proza – próba monografii* (Kraków: Universitas, 2008).

² Tadeusz Țeleński, “Smutny szatan,” in *Reflektorem w mrok*, Tadeusz Țeleński (Warszawa: Państwowy Instytut Wydawniczy, 1985), Țeleński, *Ludzie Żywi*, (Warszawa: Państwowy Instytut Wydawniczy, 1956).

³ The 1st edition was published in Germany, see Stanisław Przybyszewski, *Satanskindler* (Berlin 1897).

would become a forum for valuable ideas, which made him occasionally involved in esoteric circles, press, and publications.

The aim of this paper is to fill to some extent the gaps in literature in the field of Western Esotericism focusing on the author, by looking at Przybyszewski primarily through the lens of his interests in and contacts with contemporary occultism. It is presented in parts including his involvement in search for the perfect platform of his ideas followed by international occult-related collaboration, his contacts with Polish esoteric milieus, and a sketch of his own occult worldview that consisted of elements that he gathered in his own research and the mentioned contacts. The latter had a great impact on Przybyszewski's literary theory and works. The parts are followed by a glance on the examples of the reception of his ideas in literature and visual arts. The paper, besides photographs of the author, is accompanied by paintings of one of "Satan's children," Wojciech Weiss (1875–1950), who especially during his young years was strongly influenced by Przybyszewski.

Genius Pole, or King Stanisław the Drunken

Stanisław Feliks Przybyszewski was a Polish poet, writer, dramatist, publicist (writing in German and Polish), and a social activist in the field of education. He was born on May 7th, 1868 in Łojewo. He attended a German gymnasium in Toruń and completed his education in Wągrowiec. For his studies he moved to Berlin in 1889. In 1893 he married a Norwegian – Dagny Juel, but he already had two children with his partner Marta Foeder, and one more was born after he was already married to Dagny. Marta Foeder committed suicide while being pregnant with their fourth child. In Berlin, he became a part of a circle of artists which included among others Edvard Munch, Richard Dehmel and August Strindberg. From 1894 to 1898, Przybyszewski with his wife lived mostly in Norway; they had two children. In 1898 they moved to Kraków, where Przybyszewski became the editor of the "Życie" [Life] magazine. In 1899 he had an affair with the painter Aniela Pająk;⁴ they had a daughter. In the same year he visited the poet Jan Kasproicz. The latter's wife, Jadwiga, left him and their children to be with Przybyszewski. In 1901 he reunited with Dagny Juel, but in the same year she died after being shot by an admirer of them both, Władysław Emeryk.⁵ In 1905, Przybyszewski moved, because of work, to Warsaw together with Jadwiga, where they were married the same year, and where he underwent

⁴ Note that the basic form of the name is Pająk but she was using also 'Pająkówna,' which was a traditional surname form for unmarried woman; Pająkówna is a daughter of Pająk, his wife would be called Pająkowa etc.

⁵ Władysław Emeryk invited the Przybyszewskis for a trip to Caucasus. However, on the day of departure, Stanisław convinced Dagny to go with Emeryk and their son Zenon; he would join them later (which he did not). Dagny was hoping for a reconciliation with her husband, she went out to the train station every day, hoping that he will arrive, and kept sending him telegrams. Emeryk decided to end her suffering. After taking little Zenon out of the room, he shot Dagny and then himself.

therapy for alcoholism. In 1906, they moved to Munich. In the years 1917–1918, Przybyszewski was involved with the literary group Zdrój [Spring or Well]. In 1919, he came back to Poland, and became engaged in education organization; he was responsible for the establishment of a gymnasium (high school) and a Polish House in Gdańsk. In 1924, he was employed in the Civil Chancellery of the Polish President. He was an active writer until the end of his life, publishing numerous works and giving public lectures and talks. His best known literary work is a poetic manifesto published in *Życie – Confiteor*. He promoted the ideas of art for art's sake and of the naked soul. He was decorated with the Officer's Cross of the Order of Polonia Restituta. He died on November 23rd, 1927 in Jaronty.⁶



Fig. 1. Photograph of Stanisław Przybyszewski printed on postcards (after 1905). Courtesy of the National Library of Poland.

⁶ Cf. Stanisław Helsztyński, *Przybyszewski* (Kraków: Wydawnictwo Literackie, 1966), Henryk I. Rogacki, *Żywot Przybyszewskiego* (Warszawa: Państwowy Instytut Wydawniczy, 1987), Gabriela Matuszek, „Der geniale Pole”? *Niemcy o Stanisławie Przybyszewskim (1892-1992)* (Kraków: Universitas, 1996); Ewa Kossak, *Dagny Przybyszewska. Zbłąkana gwiazda* (Warszawa: Państwowy Instytut Wydawniczy, 1975), Aleksandra Sawicka, “Skandalista Przybyszewski — życiowe i literackie faux-pas młodopolskiego Archicygana,” *Napis* Seria X (2004): 185–196.

The biography of the Sad Satan is a series of high rises and painful falls. He was declared a legend during his lifetime and became the subject of numerous anecdotes and gossip, which he often incited himself. Many of those stories aptly represent his self-image of an adventurous decadent. One of the anecdotes about Przybyszewski's drinking adventures describes his meeting with the very young poet Bolesław Leśmian, who, in an effort to impress the great decadent, confessed during a drinking bout that he had no reason left to live and intended to commit suicide quite soon. Przybyszewski believed that he was serious and was therefore surprised when he saw him on a street a few days later. Leśmian, embarrassed, struggled to explain himself, but finally found a great excuse: he did not have enough money to buy a weapon he could use to take his own life. Przybyszewski immediately ran into a gunsmith's shop and presented Leśmian with a gun. Despite this gift, there was no news of the poet's suicide and after a week the impatient Przybyszewski called on him at home.

- Give me back the gun! - he cried in the doorway, clearly disappointed.

- But I don't have it. I sold it for drinking money... - confessed the embarrassed Leśmian.

- Too bad, then - responded Przybyszewski. - You're still a good poet. Not a suicide, admittedly, but at least an alcoholic!⁷



Fig. 2. Stanisław Przybyszewski, photo by Karol Pęcherski. The courtesy of The National Digital Archives. .

⁷ Many anecdotes about Przybyszewski were collected by T. Boy-Żeleński and Stanisław Brzozowski. This one is cited in Włodzimierz Kowalewski, "Literatura i anegdota," (Radio Olsztyn 2013), <https://ro.com.pl/literatura-i-anegdota/0180163> [10.08.2017]

The Germans found his name difficult to pronounce, so besides calling him by a shortening of his first name – Stachu, they also used many nicknames and descriptions, such as: the genial Pole, the anxious and always intellectually active Pole; a genius with the striking personality of a spider; one of the holy priests of Agni; Jeremiah of degenerating instincts; psychological experimenter; German Satanist; a mystical-ecstatic Slav; new Messiah of literature, or King Stanisław the Drunken.⁸ He called himself the Meteor of Young Poland – and this name was engraved on his tombstone.⁹

A forum for artistic and occult ideas – quest for the ideal magazine

Besides writing and literary criticism, Przybyszewski's interests and professional life are focused around many periodicals, with which he collaborated. Already as a student, he was an editor of "Worker's Newspaper," even though that was merely a way to make ends meet and does not speak to his political sympathies. His experience in the editing profession became useful later, however, and the career of the Sad Satan remained often connected to various publications.

Przybyszewski's ambition was to create a new magazine, or reform an existing one, so that it would become a forum for the artists of the new art, a channel of communication for them. Art magazines were in fashion at the time, but Przybyszewski wanted most of all to focus on the specific topics and issues that fascinated himself, and ideally to combine the fields of art and occultism.

He was a great admirer of the Czech magazine "Moderní revue" published by Arnošt Procházka¹⁰ (1869–1925) in Prague. The two men maintained a lively correspondence; Przybyszewski sent Procházka his new texts for translation and publication, and avidly read Czech authors. In a letter to a friend in Poland, he wrote about them: "It is definitely the strongest literary movement in the whole of Europe and it raises great hopes, because they do not lack in talent and, what is most important, in absolute daring. No one in Poland would have the courage to write such things as are published in «Moderní revue,» or even to translate something as radical as Huysmans' «À rebours.»"¹¹

Przybyszewski's correspondence and collaboration with Procházka and other Czechs was not limited to the literary field, however – on the contrary,

⁸ The nicknames from various biographies were gathered by the editorial of a portal Stachu-Przybyszewski.

⁹ Cemetery in Góra, see Artur Hutnikiewicz, *Młoda Polska* (Warszawa: Wydawnictwo Naukowe PWN, 2000), 214.

¹⁰ In Polish the name can be translated to Ernest, and this is how it is to be found in the edition of Przybyszewski's letters edited by Stanisław Helsztyński. In the text where Procházka is mentioned, the original name in Czech is given.

¹¹ Stanisław Przybyszewski's letter to Maciej Szukiewicz in Kraków, Berlin, 20.03.1897 in Stanisław Przybyszewski, *Listy. T. 1, 1879-1906*, ed. Stanisław Helsztyński (Gdańsk: Towarzystwo Przyjaciół Nauki i Sztuki, Warszawa: Spółka Wydawnicza "Parnas Polski," 1937), 144. Henceforth: *Listy*.

it provided him with an important conduit for the exchange of works of occult and esoteric character, as well as a forum for discussion of such topic. It is from a letter he wrote to Procházka that we learn, among other things, what were some of his esoteric inspirations, which works he was interested in, which ones he criticized and which he sympathized with. Their exchanges concerned not only rediscovered older works, but also contemporary occult periodicals. Przybyszewski was keen to report his progress on “Die Synagoge des Satan” (The Synagogue of Satan) and other writings of similar nature. The “Moderní revue” magazine became an epitome of what Przybyszewski wanted to accomplish as an editor himself. The conjunction of topics in art and occultism became his overarching project, which he tried to implement now and again – with varying results. He discussed his plans numerous times with Procházka and Zenon “Miriam” Przesmycki (1861–1944). The latter was an esteemed poet and literary critic, a representative of Parnassism, and a very influential figure in the Polish artistic world. Przybyszewski dedicated one of his novels, “Im Malstron” (1896),¹² to him.

In 1895, Przybyszewski heard from Miriam about his plans of creating a Polish artistic magazine; he was very enthusiastic about this idea.¹³ Around the same time, he became involved, probably with an important role of one of co-founders,¹⁴ in the magazine “Pan,” important for German Art-Nouveau, published from 1895 to 1900.¹⁵ He himself characterized it as a radical periodical about literature (later he called it boring, compared to what he had planned), but his connection to it suffered after he left Berlin. The fate of the journal hung in the balance, as the editors wanted to push it into a more conservative direction. Przybyszewski opposed them and contacted Arne Garborg, even trying to get him to come to Berlin.¹⁶ “Pan,” strictly connected to a circle of artists hanging out in Zum schwarzen Ferkel (The Black Piglet) was probably the source of the idea of Przybyszewski for establishing his own magazine.¹⁷ In the time of the first series of “Pan,” Przybyszewski was connected to the circle Der Sturm, which played a crucial role in the exchange of ideas about art between Germany and France, and influenced Expressionist movements in Northern and Central Europe.¹⁸

¹² Przybyszewski’s letter to Zenon Miriam Przesmycki in Paris, Stockholm 18.12.1895, *Listy*, 111.

¹³ Przybyszewski’s letter to Przesmycki in Paris, Kongsvinger, May 1895, *Listy*, 100.

¹⁴ George Klim called him the leading co-founder, see George Klim, *Stanisław Przybyszewski. Leben, Werk und Weltanschauung im Rahmen der deutschen Literatur der Jahrhundertwende: Biographie* (Paderborn: Igel Verlag, 1992), 311.

¹⁵ See a digital version of the magazine on the website of the University of Heidelberg: <http://pan.uni-hd.de/>

¹⁶ Przybyszewski’s letter to Arne Garborg, Kongsvinger 20.08.1895, *Listy*, 108–109.

¹⁷ Cf. Per Faxneld, “Esotericism in Modernity, and the Lure of the Occult Elite: The Seekers of the Zum Schwarzen Ferkel circle,” in *Vigeland + Munch: Behind the Myths*, ed. Trine Otte Bak Nielsen (New Haven Conn.: Yale University Press, 2015), 92–105.

¹⁸ Peter Brooker *et al.* ed., *The Oxford Critical and Cultural History of Modernist Magazines. Vol. III: Europe 1880–1940* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 699–701.



Fig. 3 Fig. 3 Wojciech Weiss, *Melancholik (Totenmesse)* 1894, National Museum, Cracow. Courtesy of malarze.com.

His greatest disappointment perhaps was the collaboration with the German periodical devoted to occultism “*Metaphysische Rundschau*.” It was supposed to continue an earlier magazine previously led by a valued expert on occultism – Wilhelm Hübbe-Schleiden (1846–1916)¹⁹, which was mostly dedicated to Theosophy²⁰. Przybyszewski had already left Berlin for Kongsvinger in Norway, when he received a proposal of becoming an editor of this new version of the magazine. It would involve a temporary return to Berlin, a place Przybyszewski hated. However, he received the offer enthusiastically. In many letters he wrote at length that he was not happy with the journal’s new publisher (“Richard” Wrede, that is Ferdinand Christian Wilhelm Wrede 1869–1932) or its quality, but that he will do everything in his power to improve it. He represented the subject matter of the journal differ-

¹⁹ See the digital version of the magazine on the website of the University of Freiburg: http://dl.ub.uni-freiburg.de/diglit/sphinx_ga

²⁰ The journal was run by several different groups, see the entry on the periodical in the Theosophical Society’s sources: [http://theosophy.wiki/w-en/index.php?title=The_Sphinx_\(periodical\)](http://theosophy.wiki/w-en/index.php?title=The_Sphinx_(periodical))

ently to different recipients, but was never able to hide his enthusiasm. Here are several examples, starting with a letter to Emanuel Leszeticki:

Kind Sir, as you can see, I am again in the cursed Berlin. I am taking over as editor of the “Metaphysische Rundschau” which I will steer onto new tracks. (...) The monthly, which I am to edit, is a periodical of German occultists, but it has so far been conducted very poorly. I will attempt to make something of it, but it will be a difficult task, because every publisher is a complete ass, and so my hands are tied. Well, if only I could publish my own magazine, like Prochazka!²¹

To Arnost Prochazka:

[...] a serious change has happened in my life: I have become the editor of “Metaphysische Rundschau.” Ooph, Ooph! It is a horrible journal, but I hope to improve it. Only the publisher is a stupid creature!²²

To Alfred Mombert:

My Dear, I am back in Berlin after two months, during which I was in Norway crying of happiness. I am alone again and have become the editor of a horrible journal, which I am to make better, “Metaphysische Rundschau,” an organ of occultism, magic, Satanism, everything and everything!²³

To Mieczysław Zmigryder, Przybyszewski wrote that the magazine would be devoted to black magic;²⁴ to Alfred Wysocki – that it would be mysticism and magic.²⁵ In the same letters, he writes that he misses his wife terribly (with a longing bordering on mania). He refers to her with terms of religious connotations (as though speaking of the Mother of God): “Ducha, Ducha and Ducha for eternity, only Ducha, the queen of heavens and earth.”²⁶ The most interesting report is certainly the one he wrote to Maciej Szukiewicz:

Finally, it was a time to make a decision and go to the mad Berlin, which I hate, but it is for money. O Lord Christ, I am created to be a Count, and have to live in misery like a worm. Namely, I have accepted here the redaction of a monthly magazine devoted to black magic and other such trinkets. For now, I am doing experiments with ointments that witches used on themselves – I have found marvelous recipes²⁷ – I am trying to

²¹ Przybyszewski's letter to Do Emanuel Leszeticki in Leszehrad, Berlin 5.07.1897, *Listy*, 160. Cf. Przybyszewski, *Moi współcześni. Wśród obcych* (Warszawa: Instytut Wydawniczy Biblioteka Polska, 1926), 276.

²² Przybyszewski's letter to Ernest Prochazka in Prague, Berlin, 5.07.1897, *Listy*, 160–161.

²³ Przybyszewski's letter to Alfred Mombert in Weinheim, Berlin 5.07.1897, *Listy*, 161.

²⁴ Przybyszewski's letter to Mieczysław Zmigryder in Warsaw, Berlin 27.07.1897, *Listy*, 163.

²⁵ Przybyszewski's letter to Alfred Wysocki, Berlin, 10.07.1897, *Listy*, 161.

²⁶ *Ibidem*.

²⁷ Przybyszewski often mentioned recipes for an ointment of which the ingredients were known, but the quantities weren't, in various letters, as well as in *The Synagogue of Satan*, cf. S. Przybyszew-

separate spirit from body and hope that I can separate it properly, so that it won't like to go back into the old flesh.

Because I am longing terribly.

Ciupa, that is Ciula, Ducha, Duch, Dula, Duta, Duluniek – he had to stay in Norway and will only join me in October. – I have, indeed, made a succubus of her (vide chapter 1 of “De Profundis”) – But in a day when the spectres are dissipated, I am going crazy. Only, for God's sake, don't believe anything I write.²⁸

Przybyszewski liked to discuss the topics of his work playfully and joke about them. In the fragment above, he was probably trying to impress the recipient, but he added that nothing he wrote should be believed. Considering, however, that he was to take the steer of an occultist periodical, we can assume that he was familiar with contemporary occultism and its practical aspects. Moreover, in the end of this letter he makes clear that by “God” he means Satan: “[...] Be assured, sir, that I reciprocate with an honest and deep friendship and that God (Satan) sees, that you will make me very unhappy if you do not send me a photograph of yourself and your sister.”²⁹

Quickly, however, more and more problems related to his work as the editor of “*Metaphysische Rundschau*” appeared. Przybyszewski wrote to Procházka that he did not know, when the first issue would appear, because he could not find collaborators. In the same letter, he also revealed his opinion of contemporary occultists:

All contemporary occultist are such fools, that you could tear out your hair. And that disgusting, repulsively plebeian Salvation Army movement: Theosophy – an idiotic and shallow view of God – oh, oh! Brr... I will try, try hopelessly to publish the first issue only on October 1st. I have to wait so long, because I cannot publish the garbage that has been sent to me. But over time, a man folds, ha ha.³⁰

Unfortunately, in September of the same year, it became clear that the issues will not come out and that Przybyszewski had been duped. He has found himself in a disastrous situation, as he had lived this whole time in Berlin taking debts against the pay he was promised. In the meantime, his wife gave birth to a daughter, Ivi, but her health suffered and it was unknown if she would recover. Przybyszewski did not have money to return to Norway. He was both angry and depressed in this situation. Instead of having remained in Norway, a place where he was happy and could work, he had been tempted to go back alone to a city he truly hated; he was in debt and his hard work over three months (he prepared three issues during that time³¹) had not been rewarded. In a letter to Procházka,

ski, *Confiteor. Synagoga Szatana* (Warszawa: Spółdzielnia Wydawnicza Anagram 1999/2000), 107.

²⁸ Przybyszewski's letter to Szukiewicz in Rzeszów, Berlin 27.07.1897, *Listy*, 164.

²⁹ Ibidem.

³⁰ Przybyszewski's letter to Procházka in Prague, Berlin, July 1897, *Listy*, 162.

³¹ Przybyszewski, *Moi współcześni*, 276.

he wrote: “I have sent «Metaphysische Rundschau» to the devil, and I slapped the publisher. Dogs and swine!”³²

One could think that the experience of a failed editor in Berlin was of no benefit at all to Przybyszewski, but from a letter he wrote to his wife (having cooled down after a while) we can learn that his efforts were not all for nothing. He was happy about the sheer amount of knowledge concerning contemporary esotericism that he had acquired from the literature he reviewed preparing to be the editor of the “Metaphysische Rundschau.” He even wrote that everything he knew before was just a “child’s play” in comparison. He was planning to finish his book on Satanism after coming back to Norway – he had evidently recovered his motivation for it. He was also glad to have enriched his personal library with volumes he acquired for the journal. These included ten annals of “Sphinx,” that is the periodical that was to be continued by the “Metaphysische Rundschau.” His opinion of it improved after he had a closer look, and he claimed to have found “real treasures” in it.³³ Other “very valuable and exceedingly good works” included ones by authors such as Karol Kiesewetter and Stanislas de Guaita.

Despite the setbacks, Przybyszewski’s enthusiasm for this kind of work was not diminishing. Already by the end of the same year, he undertook a new challenge. In a letter to Procházka from December 1897, he revealed that he had found a young writer, who desired to invest in creating a journal, in which Przybyszewski would have completely free reign. It was to bear the title “Unterwegs” and use the typographical layout of Przybyszewski’s work “Epipsychidion.”³⁴ From the correspondence we learn nothing more about it, but we can assume the project failed; later, Przybyszewski would publish a novel under the same title.

The long-awaited opportunity finally came – he was invited to come to Poland to take over as editor of the journal “Życie” [Life]. Already in 1897, he wrote to Procházka: “I have begun now to write in Polish. I have found so much support in the young generation, that I can dare to do that. I dream of leaving for Galicia and establishing there, in Lwów or Kraków, a journal like «Moderní revue». I dream that both magazines could then hold hands as brothers in the name of Satan and all the powers of Hell.”³⁵ This dream was finally to come true. At first, Przybyszewski’s hopes were met – considering how he was received – but on the other hand, it quickly turned out that the censor’s office was not going to treat the eccentric author favorably.

³² Przybyszewski’s letter to Procházka in Prague, Berlin 29.09.1897, *Listy*, 166. The magazine under a new publisher Paul Zillmann and title (added New) – *Neue Metaphysische Rundschau* – was published from 1898, see the journal in the IAPSOP Archives: http://www.iapsop.com/archive/materials/neue_metaphysische_rundschau/.

³³ Przybyszewski’s letter to wife Dagny in Kongsvinger, Berlin 13.10.1897, *Listy*, 167.

³⁴ Przybyszewski’s letter to Procházka in Prague, Berlin Dec. 1897, *Listy*, 175–176. According to Helsingforski, this investor could be Alfred Mombert.

³⁵ Przybyszewski’s letter to Procházka in Prague, Kongsvinger May 1897, *Listy*, 155.

Sad Satan's Children: Stanisław Przybyszewski and Esoteric Milieus

Before coming to Poland, Przybyszewski sent Adolf Nowaczyński a kind of a proclamation to Polish artists. Nowaczyński described the reading of this proclamation as follows:

In an extraordinary, solemn and special plenary meeting of the “Literary Circle” in Lesisz’s pub, I have read “Przybysz’s” proclamation with a voice trembling from emotion and alcohol, as loudly as possible, among frenetic applause. Afterwards, his photograph was passed around and met with cries of admiration. The era of fixating on Vienna and looking only to Viennese novelty’s, is over. Enough with Baudelaire and Barbey d’Aureville, and enough with Bahr, their prophet! And enough with secession and coquetry and love-affairs (“Liebelei”). In the beginning there was Lust!... Androgyne enters the stage! We must all be “Satan’s children,” no matter the price! Everything has changed in the image of the authorities: Berlin – Ola Hansson, Paul Scheerbart, Laura Marholm, Edvard Munch, Dehmel, Schlaf, Mombert, and the greatest, the towering Vigeland! In the beginning there was Vigeland!... Kraków must know and bow to Vigeland!... The times of the “The Synagogue of Satan” are coming. We must quickly delve into all the arcana... of occultism and priapism... study “Papus’ Mage”³⁶... have a look into Kabbalah and straighten the lord’s paths, pad the roads before the arrival of the “Truest”! Black masses await us, in which we will be the altar boys and acolytes!³⁷

Interestingly, the shortening of Przybyszewski’s surname as “Przybysz,” used also in the title of this text, is a word meaning “Newcomer” or “He who comes.” Przybyszewski really was greeted like a prophet. Nowaczyński’s testimony not only reveals the excitation among young Polish artists, but is also a manifesto of admiration, as it were, of the informal group that assembled around Przybyszewski and was later known as Satan’s children.



Fig. 4. . Wojciech Weiss, *Opętanie* [Possession] 1899–1900. Museum of Literature, Warsaw. Courtesy of malarze.com.

³⁶ Most probably this refers to Papus, *La science des mages et ses applications théoriques et pratiques: petit résumé de l'occultisme, entièrement inédit* (Paris: Librairie du Merveilleux, 1892).

³⁷ Adolf Nowaczyński, “Przybysz,” *ABC Literacko-Artystyczne*, No. 40 (1933).

Unfortunately, Przybyszewski's tenure as the editor of "Życie" proved to be rather short again. He took over the journal one year after it was established in Kraków and Lwów. In the beginning, "Życie" was not exclusively a literary and artistic magazine, but immediately after his arrival, Przybyszewski started to transform it according to the vision he had thought about for a long time. "Życie" was richly illustrated, including with reproductions of works by symbolists and impressionists. Stanisław Wyspiański, who was responsible for the graphic layout of the magazine, was also one of Satan's children.

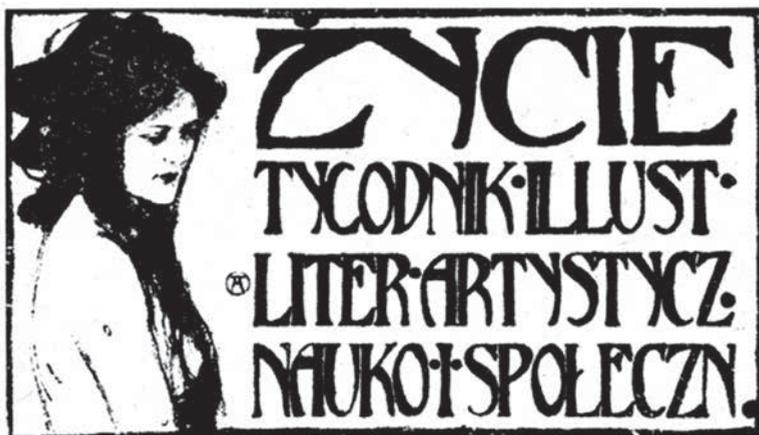


Fig. 5. Headpiece for Polish "Życie" weekly.

It was censorship and resulting confiscation of printed issues that caused the magazine's financial problems and then led first to the change in publication frequency (from weekly to monthly), and after two years to its closing. Nevertheless, Przybyszewski published his most important artistic manifestoes in "Życie."³⁸

Let us add that despite the failure of "Życie," an attempt to create a low-circulation literary magazine of high aesthetic quality was undertaken by Miriam, whom Przybyszewski admired. His "Chimera"³⁹ was a journal devoted to art and literature that appeared monthly in the years 1901–1907 in Warsaw, and Przybyszewski also became involved. Despite a low circulation (only 500 copies compared to other journals with 15–20 thousand copies) and a high price (approximately equal to a manual worker's weekly wage), it played a great role in the shaping of Polish culture at the time. Already at the time of its birth, *Chimera* as an artistic and literary phenomenon in the Polish lands was surrounded by an air of scandal: it was expected that it would destroy moral and esthetic taboos

³⁸ Hutnikiewicz, *Młoda Polska*, 76–83.

³⁹ See the digital version of the journal: <http://www.bilp.uw.edu.pl/chi/chi.htm>.

and corrode academic structures. The reality was different – *Chimera* was very successful in the formation of intellectual elites and became something of a tool for the sublimation of extreme beliefs of its chimeric authors. From a mixture of diverse currents it produced an intellectually and artistically transformed motif *deus est homo*. What is of greatest interest in the story of “Chimera” from the perspective of a researcher of Western esoteric traditions is the collision of different world-views and artistic visions of people who – in part at least – were at the same time engaged in various esoteric institutions or movements, and remained public figures of importance in the cultural life of the nation. The journal brought together the most important writers of the time. It created a space of a struggle and mingling of old ideas and birth of new ones; an extremely dynamic and fertile artistic environment.⁴⁰ A. Lange said once: “To evoke in a young generation of artists a tireless striving for the pursuit of their own truest essence – this is the greatest effect of the ideas proclaimed by «Chimera».” It seems that the pursuit of this truest essence was a multidimensional endeavor that went beyond artistic auto-expression.

In 1917, Przybyszewski will also publish works with a similar artistic milieu of esoteric and anticlerical inclinations in Poznań in the magazine “Zdrój,” being the leader of the literary group of the same name, but in 1919 the collaboration was ended. While still remaining active, after the failure with his own magazine “Życie” Przybyszewski gave up on endeavors to create his own platform for ideas.

Polish esoteric milieus

Above we outlined Przybyszewski’s collaboration with occultists and occult sympathizers in his position as editor and publisher. Now we will have a closer look at his friendships and collaborations that were not directly connected to his professional work.

In both the above mentioned cases of “Chimera” and “Zdrój,” the majority of authors who were interested in Western esotericism were those sympathizing with Theosophy, from which Przybyszewski borrowed extensively in his own worldview. During his stay in Poland, he took part in so called “wild strawberry tea” meetings organized by an initiator of the institutional Theosophical movement in Poland, the painter Kazimierz Stabrowski in his house in Warsaw. Guests of Stabrowski were mostly artists and especially the most important ideologists of the Young Poland artistic movement/current, that is Artur Górski,

⁴⁰ Some of the people who published in “Chimera” were: Waław Berent, Antoni Lange, Bolesław Leśmian, Zofia Nałkowska, Jan Lemański, Feliks Jasiński, Jan Kasprowicz, Stefan Żeromski, Władysław Stanisław Reymont, Stanisław Przybyszewski, Leopold Staff, Stanisław Wyspiański, Maria Komornicka, Stanisław Korab-Brzozowski, Tadeusz Miciński. Its leading illustrators were Edward Okuń, Franciszek Siedlecki (mentioned below), Józef Mehoffer and Ferdynand Ruszczyk who designed the journal covers in the years 1904–1908.

whose series of articles gave name to the current, Przybyszewski, widely known as the Meteor of the Young Poland, and Zenon “Miriam” Przesmycki, whom we have already mentioned several times, as well as many other important writers. There were also colleagues of Stabrowski from the Academy of the Fine Arts, of which he was a director. Among them was a foreign student, later known as one of the most famous Lithuanian painters and composers, Mikalojus Konstantinas Čiurlionis. The meetings were in fact gatherings where esoteric ideas were discussed and Spiritualist séances held.⁴¹

Another participant in the meetings was Tadeusz Miciński, a member of Stabrowski’s Theosophical group who was also a close friend of Przybyszewski for a time. Miciński, whose art was strongly influenced by ancient Gnosticism, and contemporary occultism, was also an inspiration for Przybyszewski, and one of the reasons for his return to Poland.⁴² Przybyszewski also believed that Miciński had a gift of automatic writing:

One hears so much nonsense about writing mediums – an Orinoco of stupidity: I’ve read thousands of “outpourings” of the brains of those mediums – one more idiotic than the other – stupid, nonsensical, flat – one cannot treat them seriously. The only true “writing” medium of great measure, who sometimes reaches the ends of genius, and whose soul was extended so wide that it would constantly tear, shrink and shrivel in painful convolutions, was – Tadeusz Miciński.⁴³

Przybyszewski also corresponded with Eliza Pareńska (1888–1923), later a member of the Polish Theosophical Society, and specifically the Kraków group “Thy Kingdom Come”⁴⁴ (Polish Theosophy was strongly focused on mystical Christianity.)

He remained in contact with the Polish artistic-esoteric bohemia while he was away from the country as well. In Paris he was a guest of a circle of immigrants including Karol Siedlecki (a professor in Kraków), and his brother Franciszek and his wife Jadwiga (Wiga) Siedlecka, who later became one of the leading figures in the Polish Anthroposophical Society, working for a time in Steiner’s famous Goetheanum in Dornach, Switzerland, and preparing stained-glass windows for it. He also befriended Władysław Stanisław Reymont, later a Nobel Prize winner in literature. That Reymont became inspired by Przybyszewski is clearly seen in one of his works, where a dualistic satanic worldview is described next to a pantheistic Theosophical one, and even Baphomet appears in person on the pages of his novel.⁴⁵ Meeting the Siedlecki family led to Przybyszewski’s

⁴¹ Cf. Karolina M. Hess, Małgorzata A. Dulcka, “Kazimierz Stabrowski’s Esoteric Dimensions. Theosophy, Art, and the Vision of Femininity,” *La Rosa di Paracelso*, 1 (2017): 46–51.

⁴² Przybyszewski, *Moi współcześni*, 273.

⁴³ *Ibidem*, 275.

⁴⁴ Katarzyna Wajda, “Eliza Pareńska. Tragiczna muza,” 10.02.2017, <https://kobieta.onet.pl/eliza-parenska-tragiczna-muza/t3tnxgj>.

⁴⁵ See Władysław S. Reymont, *Wampir* (Warszawa: Książka i Wiedza, 1986), e.g. 261.

introduction to the famous pianist, composer, and politician Ignacy Jan Paderewski (1860–1941), who having learned about his financial difficulties sent him money⁴⁶ that allowed Przybyszewski to finally return to Poland.

One of the most intriguing episodes in his collaboration with Polish esoterically-oriented colleagues, was his visit to Wincenty Lutosławski's (1863–1954) house in Spain. It is intriguing because one can hardly imagine two authors (and persons) so different in every way, and the meeting in Spain was very strained. Lutosławski was a proponent of teetotaling, and a founder of the society Eleuteria, which was later transformed into the Eleusis organization. The aim of the society was to bring about a national rebirth and create a new Polish man through religious practice and abstinence from alcohol, gambling, tobacco, and sexual promiscuity. Lutosławski was a professor of philosophy (a scholar of Plato and the inventor of stylometry⁴⁷), a political writer and social activist.⁴⁸ Interestingly, he was also a pioneer of Yoga in Poland. It is worth noting that it was thanks to him that Przybyszewski became familiar with Spanish painting, including his beloved Goya and El Greco. (He even planned to write a big monograph on Goya and collected reproductions of all his works, but never realized this project.)

In this context it should also be added that Przybyszewski greatly admired Julian Ochorowicz (1850–1917), a Polish researcher of hypnosis and medium-related phenomena (which he explained in physical terms), who was a renowned figure, as a scientist and inventor, in Europe at the turn of the century. After the scientist's death, Przybyszewski always referred to him in his memoirs as “the great late Ochorowicz.”⁴⁹

Direct occult inspirations

From Przybyszewski's memoir “Moi współcześni. Wśród obcych” [My contemporaries. Among strangers], an image emerges of a poet intensely involved in occultist studies and strongly opposed to materialism. Alongside materialism, he also criticizes economical socialism, which he describes as a sort of philosophical Talmudism, which suffered a complete failure and ended in absurdity. He writes: “What a childish mania, what a silly arrogance of a megalomaniac human brain, to want to squeeze this stunningly complicated human life, which is shaped by a thousand known and breath-taking billions of less known, barely felt forces,

⁴⁶ Przybyszewski, *Moi współcześni*, 286–287.

⁴⁷ See Wincenty Lutosławski, “Principes de stylometrie,” *Revue des études grecques* 41 (1890), 61–81.

⁴⁸ Cf. Robert Zaborowski, „Wincenty Lutosławski – człowiek i dzieło,” *Kwartalnik Historii Nauki i Techniki* 49/1 (2004): 65–82.

⁴⁹ On Ochorowicz research on medium-related phenomena, see Karolina M. Hess, “The Idea of Ideoplasty and Occult Phenomena in the Theoretical and Empirical Research of Julian Ochorowicz,” *Preternature: Critical and Historical Studies on the Preternatural* Vol. 7, No. 2 (2018): forthcoming.

into the funny little scheme of little theories of «capital» and «labor!»⁵⁰ He explained his own interest in occultism and esotericism in two ways. On the one hand, it was rooted in the personal experiences of his childhood, on the other, in an intellectual engagement with currents of thought that crystallized in the last decades of the 19th century.

Regarding his own experiences, which led him to search for answers to many questions related to sorcery, Przybyszewski considered his most important inspiration – or maybe trauma – to be a person who supposedly cast a spell on him and whose “magical” activities he observed as a child. He recounts that his family took in a mentally disabled girl named Ulicha, who subsequently worked as a housekeeper for them. According to Przybyszewski, she behaved in the strangest ways and was extremely cruel towards animals, which he observed often as a child (with an investigative enthusiasm characteristic of children). His description presents her as a psychopath, secretly engaging in acts that were to bring disastrous consequences for everyone around. In one of his recollections, Ulicha collected a basket-full of toads, cut them into pieces with a huge sickle, poured boiling water over them and fed them to the pigs, which became sick as a result.⁵¹



Fig. 6. Wojciech Weiss, *Strachy* [Fears] 1905. Private collection. Courtesy of malarze.com.

⁵⁰ Przybyszewski, *Moi współcześni*, 137.

⁵¹ *Ibidem*, 223.

Little Stanisław was afraid to talk about what he saw, especially after he was discovered as a silent observer of many of Uliča's actions. She forbade him to tell his family what he had seen, cut his forehead and smeared it with some ointment, which also made him sick. A friend of the family, upon seeing him and conducting some sort of treatment declared that he has been cursed; she was able to bring him back to health, while Uliča became ill and then died in a hospital.⁵² Regardless of what is true in Przybyszewski's recollections, and what is a mythologized narrative about the beginnings of his lifelong interest in magic, it seems that this fascination dated back to his childhood and some practices of superstition or folk medicine that he came in contact with.

Already as an adult, Przybyszewski was keen to familiarize himself with any writings on such topics; he also participated in spiritualist séances. As a result of this interest, he became acquainted with the most influential currents of 19th century Occultism, Spiritualism and Theosophy; he was also interested in Kabbalah and magic. While borrowing heavily from many authors, he did not hesitate to criticize them vehemently. In every intellectual current he found people he despised – the glaring example is Helena Petrovna Blavatsky, the central figure of the Theosophical Society. Przybyszewski attacked her every time he mentioned Theosophy, even if the mention was otherwise favorable to the movement. Other examples include Andrew Jackson Davis (1829–1910) and Hippolyte Léon Denizard Rivail, wider known as Allan Kardec (1804–1869), theoreticians of, respectively, American Spiritualism and French Spiritism, as well as Eliphas Lévi (Alphonse-Louis Constant, 1810–1875), of whom he wrote in a letter: “Do you know this deceiver Elifas Levi, an ignoramus who still uses disgustingly trite forms? I swear that he also could not do any more than we all can, which is to force dumb spirits to knock and lift chairs, and to get insanely moronic answers from them. Libera me Satan!”⁵³ Among people who undoubtedly had influence on Przybyszewski, but became targets of his criticism, we can also count Jules Michelet (1798-1874) and his well-known *La sorcière; the witch of the middle ages*,⁵⁴ which he said was, despite its reputation for a genius, sweetish twaddle.⁵⁵ He compares it to Joseph von Görres' (1776–1848) work *Die christliche Mystik*, which in turn he describes as “one-sided, repulsive – best when it speaks of magic.”⁵⁶ On the other hand, Przybyszewski valued Papus (Gérard Encausse, 1865–1916), Stanislas de Guaita (1861–1897),⁵⁷ Carl Kiesewetter (1854–1895) or Franz Hartmann (1838–1912). He often mentioned the conception of “odic atmospheres” by Baron Carl Ludwig von Reichenbach's (1788–1869).⁵⁸ Regarding

⁵² Ibidem, 222-226.

⁵³ Przybyszewski's letter to Prochazka in Prague, Berlin, March 1897, *Listy*, 141–142.

⁵⁴ Cf. Faxneld, *Witches*, 56.

⁵⁵ Przybyszewski's letter to Prochazka in Prague, Berlin, March 1897, *Listy*, 141–142.

⁵⁶ Ibidem.

⁵⁷ See a chapter devoted to Guaita in Maurice Barrès' (1862-1923), *Amori et dolori sacrum. La mort de Venise* (Paris: Émile-Paul, 1903).

⁵⁸ See e.g. Michael Nahm, “The Sorcerer of Cobenzl and His Legacy: The Life of Baron Karl Lud-

historical sources, he was interested in Gnostic texts such as *Pistis Sofia*, as well as Manicheism, Catharism and Bogomilism; he read Paracelsus (1493–1541), Bodinus (Jean Bodin 1529/30–1596) and Pierre de Rosteguy de Lancre (1553–1631),⁵⁹ and admired *De la démonialité. Et des animaux incubes et succubes* by Louis Marie Sinistrari d’Ameno (1622–1701).⁶⁰ His interest in Kabbalah was mediated through Polish Romanticism, especially the works of Mickiewicz. He considered libraries in Munich and Berlin to be priceless resources for his research. His views on occultism – or rather his sympathy towards and evaluation of its specific aspects – shifted frequently. As with every other topic, he approached this one with alternating dismay and excitement bordering on mania.

Connected interests in Kabbalah and Tarot⁶¹ were rooted in Przybyszewski’s acquaintance with these topics dating back to his school years. His teacher and mentor, Józef Frenzel, who taught him German, Greek, as well as – after school – Hebrew and Sanskrit,⁶² was also interested in occultism and talked about it with young Stanisław.⁶³ Interestingly, Przybyszewski still nurtured his Kabbalistic interests long after his most important works related to occultism were created. While he mostly read on this topic in German and French, at the age of 56 he took – on the recommendation of Abraham Chen⁶⁴ – intensive Hebrew lessons with Saul Blum in Sopot.⁶⁵ He wanted to master the language because he believed that translations cannot represent the essence of Kabbalistic teachings adequately. After several years of studying the original text of the Bible (as his teacher encouraged him to do), Przybyszewski admitted that he was still far from understanding the arcane knowledge. He said about himself that he lacked an Eastern brain, a Semitic spirit. He was interested in the notion of the Golem, which he did not treat as a merely legendary being. He bragged to his teacher,

wig von Reichenbach, His Work and Its Aftermath,” *Journal of Scientific Exploration* 26 (2012): 381–407.

⁵⁹ Przybyszewski’s letter to Prochazka in Prague, Berlin, March 1897, *Listy*, 141–142.

⁶⁰ See also Sinistrari d’Ameno, *De Sodomia tractatus: in quo exponitur doctrina nova de sodomia foeminarum a tribadismo distincta: texte latin et traduction française* (Paris: Bibliotheque Des Curieux, 1921).

⁶¹ I would like to express my gratitude to Jakub Kamiński, who brought to my attention the sources related to Przybyszewski’s interest in Kabbalah and Tarot, and made available to me his unpublished manuscript „Kabalistyczne rozważania smutnego szatana,” which helped me to prepare the section devoted to the Hebrew interests of Przybyszewski.

⁶² See a copy of his Sanskrit notes in Helsztyński, introduction to *Listy*, xii.

⁶³ Kamiński, *ibidem*.

⁶⁴ Stanisław met the rabbi Abraham Chen, known for his philosophical works, accidentally during a trip from Sopot to Gdańsk. He found Chen to be so interesting that he would sometimes wait half an hour on the train platform just to chat with him. He told him about his interest and his old (dating back 30 years) lessons in Hebrew. He wanted to go back to learning the language because of Kabbalah. Chen was too busy to teach him, so he recommended Saul Blum. See Wawrzyniec Przybyszewski, “Przybyszewski uczy się hebrajskiego,” *Opinia* No 6 and 8 (1934), cf. *Listy*.

⁶⁵ Saul Blum, who from 1920 to 1934 was a principal and Hebrew teacher in a school in Gdańsk.

that together with a Czech friend – Jiří Karásek⁶⁶ – he had studied Kabbalah for twenty-five years. As Blum remembered it:

They were both going through a radical spiritual revolution. They noticed suddenly that all positive Doctrines are like barriers, which keep man from the primordial source of the phenomena of life. Knowledge and philosophy approach deep issues only mechanically, and only explain “how?” and not “why?”⁶⁷

Przybyszewski also believed that Tarot was the pinnacle of Kabbalah, a vehicle of esoteric spiritual knowledge. He thought that among the most important works on this topic (which, as he mentioned, was also prized by Blum) were books by a Russian Martinist widely known as G.O.M. – Gregory Ottonovich Mēbes (1868–1930).⁶⁸ In his letters, Przybyszewski also mentioned Papus' works about Tarot.⁶⁹

Przybyszewski had also an interest, among others, in Hatha Yoga, and Astrology. His correspondence indicates that William Frederick Allan (1860–1917), more widely known as Alan Leo, prepared a horoscope for him (probably sent it to him in a letter). The poet wrote: “I'm sad. Doubt and terror are eating away at my heart, and I felt that I will die soon. Mac Allen [i.e. Allan] prepared a horoscope for me in London, saying that I will die in my 35th year, and Mac Allen is rarely wrong.”⁷⁰

He was intrigued by the possibility of influencing people over distance, subjecting them to one's will, which was his understanding of black magic. He was eager to share his interests and searches with others, which did not always end well. An example is his relation with August Strindberg (1849–1912), often mentioned in the memoirs. According to Przybyszewski, Strindberg was only interested in the superficial aspects of mysticism and categorically refused to engage in metaphysical debates. The Sad Satan wanted to familiarize him with black magic (“only theoretically, of course”), told him about magical action at a distance and how in the middle ages people killed their enemies using wax figurines. He also talked of

⁶⁶ Jiří Karásek (1871–1951), a Czech poet and writer, a representative of symbolism and decadentism. Przybyszewski led a lively correspondence with him, discussing among other things the above mentioned work of G.O.M.

⁶⁷ Saul Blum, “Moje wspomnienia o Stanisławie Przybyszewskim,” *Nowy Dziennik* 98 (1936): 16.

⁶⁸ First editions of the books were published in Russian: G. O. M[ebeš], *Kurs entsiklopedii okkul'tizma chitannyi G. O. M. v 1911–1912 akademicheskom godu v gorode Sankt-Peterburge* (A Course in the Encyclopedia of Occultism given by G.O.M. in the academic year 1911–1912 in St Petersburg), (St. Petersburg: A. Goldberg, 1912), and *Meditatsii na Arkany Taro. Dopolneniia k Entsiklopedii okkul'tizma: leksii 1921 goda* (Meditation on the Arcana of Tarot. Supplements to the Encyclopedia of Occultism, 1921), (Moscow: Aenigma, 2007). For details on the author see Konstantin Burmistrov, “Kabbalah and Martinism: Gregory Moebes and the occult Renaissance in Russia of the early 20th century,” *Aliter* 7 (2017): 3–19.

⁶⁹ Cf. Papus' *Clef absolue de la science occulte: Le Tarot des bohémiens, le plus ancien livre du monde, à l'usage exclusif des initiés* (Paris: Ernest Flammarion, 1889), and *Le tarot divinatoire. Clef du tirage des cartes et des sorts* (Paris: Librairie Hermétique, 1909).

⁷⁰ Przybyszewski's letter to Prohazka in Prague, Berlin 7.11.1897, *Listy*, 169–170.

odic currents, which can cause someone the highest suffering.⁷¹ He claimed that it is these conversations that are reflected in the descriptions of infernal torment in Strindberg's *Inferno*, and that they, unfortunately strengthened the Swede's paranoid mania. Already in January 1897, Przybyszewski wrote to his friends: "There's nothing new to tell. Only that Strindberg has gone mad and he constantly thinks that I want to telepathically murder him together with Munch. He has been telling terrible stories about me in Paris. My hair stood on end, when they were repeated to me,"⁷² and "So there's unpleasantness from three sides, but the worst comes from Strindberg. The poor guy has gone mad and tells strange things about me, which only brings me harm. A month ago, he sent me gold which he had distilled from copper, and yesterday he wrote that he discovered nerves in plants, and at the same time, he constantly sends me incredible printed gossip, which he keeps inspiring. What to do about a madman?"⁷³ However, Przybyszewski's relations with artists in Berlin would require a separate study.

In concluding this section, it should be noted that Przybyszewski himself later claimed that his close contacts with Spiritualists, Theosophists, and Rosicrucians greatly influenced his own views.⁷⁴

Meteor among stars

One of the unique features of Przybyszewski's works is that he – as Per Faxneld noted – "more or less openly referred to himself as a Satanist, something he was probably one of the first persons ever to do."⁷⁵ His worldview, which draws heavily from the history of magic and witchcraft, as well as contemporary esotericism, and which he developed in detail over almost three decades, binds together his works of various character – from short novels, dramas to literally critique. He was by all means an elitist, with strong inclinations to see himself as a prophet for those who are ready for a radical change of perspective: on life, on religion, on science, and on art. He went even further than making Satan the main figure of his system, as he thought about overcoming Satan and become one himself. He wrote:

How sad and terrible is all that I wrote. One should finally write something incredibly calm, quiet, one should finally overpower Satan, and become oneself an endlessly quiet and good and deep Satan.

So what? Something like the death of Satan?⁷⁶

Oh to hell with it, one must overcome Satan and become Satan oneself!⁷⁷

⁷¹ Przybyszewski, *Moi współcześni*, 169.

⁷² Przybyszewski's letter to Przesmycki in Warsaw, 10.01.1897, *Listy*, 140.

⁷³ Przybyszewski's letter to Szukiewicz in Kraków, 20.03.97, *Listy*, 145.

⁷⁴ Przybyszewski, *Moi współcześni*, 289.

⁷⁵ Faxneld, *Witches*, 62.

⁷⁶ Przybyszewski's letter to Maciej Szukiewicz w Krakowie, *Listy*, 156.

⁷⁷ Przybyszewski's letter to Ernest Prohazka in Prague, *Listy*, 147.

Sad Satan's Children: Stanisław Przybyszewski and Esoteric Milieus

He borrowed from the gnostic imaginary, often using figures like the alien world and the absolute soul. He saw himself as a creative force that must destroy in order to build. The metaphor that he used to describe himself as a meteor refers to his varied activities, but it also has a metaphysical meaning. In the closing of his memoir, we find these words:

Listen:

I am only a meteor that will shine for an instant, and for an instant scare and terrify mankind, and then disappear suddenly – and I am happy to live this belief.

The path designated for meteors is a billion times longer than the path of ordinary stars. The latter appear at times strictly calculated – I would not want to be a star! To be a meteor, that is my essential longing: destroy several worlds in my journey, melt them inside me, enrich myself with them and come back after billions of years, blazing with a glare a hundred times hotter, to announce new changes and elaborations and disappear again – that is what I live through in my most valuable dreams....

Let me fade away – I will fade away as soon as possible, only to return in greater power...

And I will return – I will!⁷⁸

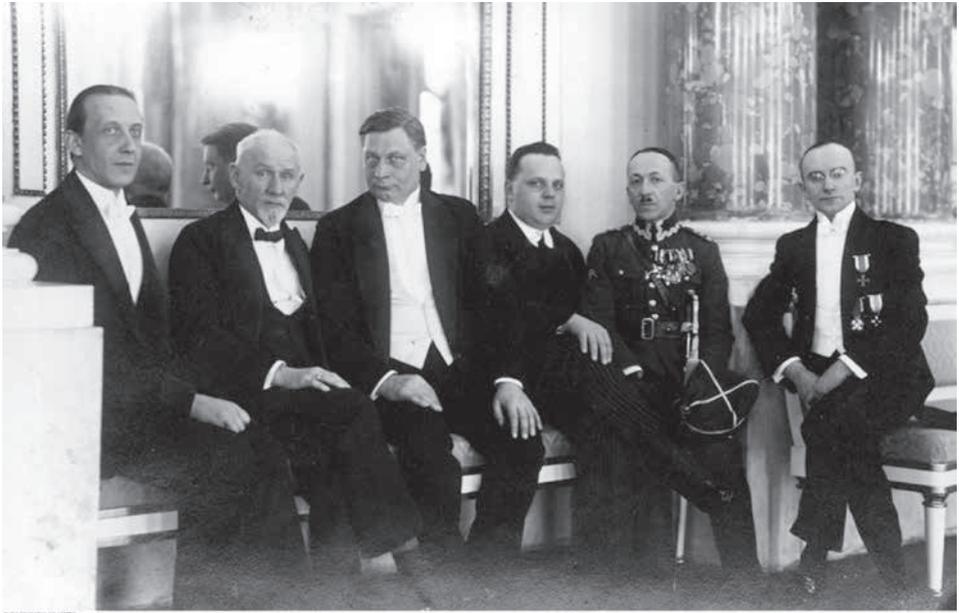


Fig. 7. New Year's Reception at the Polish President Stanisław Wojciechowski at the Royal Castle in Warsaw, January 1926. Przybyszewski (2nd from left) in the company among others of stage designer Wincenty Drabik (3rd from left), and redactor Konrad Olchowicz (4th). At the same party, among others, the famous Polish clairvoyant Stanisław Ossowiecki was present.

The courtesy of The National Digital Archives.

⁷⁸ Przybyszewski, *Moi współcześni*, 295.

There is no place in this text to discuss the system of his beliefs, especially considering that besides presenting it in his artistic works, he also wrote about it extensively on many pages of his previously mentioned memoir. It is also almost impossible to enumerate those who were inspired by him, as he had a great impact not only on a whole generation of Polish artists, but also Czech ones,⁷⁹ as his works were published in most volumes of the “Moderní revue”; he was also influential among German and Scandinavian artistic circles. He had a great impact on interwar Polish esotericism, as his ideas were something widely known not only in circles interested in occultism, but to everyone interested in contemporary art.

Another dimension that was shown here is that Przybyszewski in fact was also a kind of propagator of occult literature. He not only exchanged books with others, but as we saw in the fragment of the text, where young artists were preparing for his visit to Poland, the information that “we must (...) study Papus” appeared among others, which is not that obvious after all. Przybyszewski also attracted people to himself, not only with fresh ideas, but also with his personality and charisma. The young painter Wojciech Weiss after meeting Przybyszewski in 1894 painted the *Melancholic (Totenmesse)*, using in the title Przybyszewski’s work, and became fully concentrated on the Sad Satan and his circle for some time. The paintings presented in the text, beside the *Melancholic*, reflect his interests in witchcraft (see *Fears*). One of the most interesting examples of Przybyszewski’s influence on the painter is however *Possession*. The Dionysian pageant is a vision of Przybyszewski’s coming to Poland. The Sad Satan is depicted in the painting with blue eyes, hold by the woman with eye band. What is leading the pageant aren’t eyes, but it’s driven by inner powers, those known from the inner insight.⁸⁰

Conclusion: The priest of the Absolute Art

Presenting Przybyszewski’s involvement in various artistic activities, we can observe that his need, on the one hand, to explore metaphysical issues and study occultism, and on the other hand, to constantly search for an independent medium to proclaim the new art, go hand in hand and are closely related.

Metaphors used by Przybyszewski, among other texts, in his literary criticism, evoke elements known from his metaphysical views. The idea of art for art’s sake taken from Théophile Gautier and promoted by Przybyszewski, encouraging an individualistic ideal of artistic creation free of, for instance, social engagement, was related to his notion of the “naked soul”. We should remember, however,

⁷⁹ Cf. Introvigne, *Satanism*, 232–233.

⁸⁰ Paulina Klimańska, “Pierwszy krzyk nagiej duszy, czyli narodziny polskiego malarstwa ekspresjonistycznego: próba zdefiniowania, artyści i główna tematyka dzieł,” *Kultura i Historia* 20 (2011), Łukasz Kossowski, *Wojciech Weiss* (Warszawa: Olesiejuk, 2015).

that before the Sad Satan developed his literary-critical conception in detail, he devoted a lot of time and attention to his attempts to separate the soul from the body in a literal sense. He studied both specifics which would allow one to do that, as well as theories that outlined different ways of achieving this separation. For Przybyszewski, the soul was an absolute – there was nothing before it, and everything started with it. In *Confiteor*, art is neither beauty, nor any of the formulas developed by thinkers from Plato to Tolstoy, but a recreation of that which is eternal, independent of any change or contingency, and independent of time and space, a recreation of soul: “art therefore is a recreation of the life of the soul in *all* of its manifestations, regardless of whether they are good or bad, ugly or beautiful.” The naked soul, free of the burden of the mundane, allows man to reach extraordinary moments in which truth is revealed. These moments Przybyszewski calls inspiration.⁸¹ Elsewhere he writes:

If I am turning back the pages of my life, it is only with a fierce desire to break through the narrow gate of this tiny enclosure that is my personal “I” and to break into the enormous realm of my essential “I,” this real soul, divine function, which makes use of such an impotent organ, as is the human brain.⁸²

In this sense, art can be construed as a road to the Absolute. This role – of an uncompromising priest or prophet of absolute art – was one that Stachu Przybyszewski determined for himself, and it is this that he confesses in the *Confiteor*, to the children of Satan and not only to them.

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⁸¹ Przybyszewski, *Moi współcześni*, 28.

⁸² *Ibidem*.

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NARODOWY PROGRAM
ROZWOJU HUMANISTYKI

This research was carried out within the framework of the Minister of Science and Higher Education's programme entitled „National Programme for the Development of Humanities” in the years 2016-2019: Polish Culture in Relations to the Western Esoteric Philosophy in the Years 1890-1939 (0186/NPRH4/H2b/83/2016).

