Edukacja Filozoficzna 78/2024
ISSN 0860-3839, eISSN 2956-8269
DOI: 10.14394/edufil.2024.0039

Memories and Remarks about Władysław Witwicki*

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Władysław Witwicki was born in Lubaczów, a small town in eastern Lesser Poland [Małopolska]. He attended gymnasium in Lvov. I do not know what the people who taught him Greek were like, but it is certain that later he felt deep gratitude towards them. They enabled him to come into direct contact with the rich world of Greek thought. Subsequently, he studied philosophy at the University of Lvov under Twardowski. From him, he adopted the cult of clarity and substantive knowledge, as well as an aversion to treating philosophical issues in a journalistic manner. He supplemented his studies in Vienna and Leipzig. After returning, he obtained his habilitation in Lvov, specializing in psychology. Between 1900 and 1907, he published a series of psychological studies. They are titled: *Analiza psychologiczna ambicji* [Psychological Analysis of Ambition] ("Przegląd Filozoficzny" [Philosophical Review] 1900), *Analiza psychologiczna pragnień jako podstawa etyki* [Psychological Analysis of Desires as the Basis of Ethics] ("Muzeum" [Museum] 1900), *Analiza psychologiczna objawów woli* [Psychological Analysis of Manifestations of Will] (Lvov 1904), *Z psychologii stosunków osobistych* [On the Psychology of Personal Relationships] ("Przegląd Filozoficzny" 1907). It is noteworthy that Witwicki's first psychological treatise was devoted to ambition. Later, he also explored ambition as the "main spiritual spring" of Socrates (commentary on the translation of *Euthyphro*), ambition, moreover, in a broader and more refined sense, in the sense of "the need for independence, equality, superiority not only in relation to others but above all to the factors within one's own inner self." Great ambition was also one of the main driving forces of Witwicki's mental life, both in the scientific field and in the literary and artistic fields.

Young Witwicki was pulled in various directions. Not only did he write psychological dissertations, but he also drew, painted, practised various graphic tech-

* M. Wallis, *Wspomnienia i uwagi o Władysławie Witwickim*, "Ruch Filozoficzny" 1975, Vol. 33, No. 1, pp. 15–22.

niques, sculpted, photographed and translated from many languages into Polish. In 1909, the first of his masterful translations of Plato appeared: a translation of the *Symposium*, preceded by an extensive introduction and supplemented by an equally extensive commentary. Witwicki was aware that with his pedagogical and popularizing abilities, he would be a great university professor. Meanwhile, he waited for a chair for over a dozen years – in vain. He had to earn a living as a gymnasium teacher, earning extra money by translating and reviewing, writing prefaces, and designing book covers. Hence the externally suppressed bitterness. Add to this difficult family experiences and painful quarrels with the closest and most beloved ones, and we will have an image of the unbearable situation in which Witwicki found himself in his prime years of adulthood.

Witwicki was freed from this situation only when he was appointed professor of psychology at the University of Warsaw in 1919. I met him precisely at that time. He was then a 40-year-old tall, broad-shouldered, very handsome man with soft chestnut hair and a carefully groomed beard, wearing round spectacles in a golden frame, which during conversations he alternately took off and put on. His voice had a very pleasant timbre and rich modulation – a deep baritone. He was dressed with visible care for the coordination of the colours of individual parts of clothing, hair and eyes. In his speech, in his gestures, there was a certain affectation; he spoke slowly, and clearly, emphasizing the more important words with appropriate voice modulation, as if he wanted to make them as clear as possible for the interlocutor. Over time, the chestnut mane first became speckled, then grey. The beard turned into a goatee, and later Witwicki shaved off the facial hair completely. Then the magnificent structure of his head was fully revealed, the great, almost monumental shapes of his forehead, nose and chin appeared in all their glory. Apart from appearance, voice, gestures and attire, a person's apartment speaks volumes about them. Witwicki's study was like Faust's workshop: a room crammed with books, plaster casts, animal skeletons, stuffed birds, vessels for developing photographic plates, painting easels, boxes of paints, canvases and scrolls of drawing. Greek dictionaries with countless bookmarks neighboured artistic publications in various languages; a textbook of psychiatry lay next to a topographic atlas of Athens.

A few more memories. During the interwar period, at the meetings of the Philosophical Society, which were held in the evenings in one of the smaller auditoriums of the University of Warsaw, in the Kazimierzowski Palace on the first

floor, Witwicki always sat – tall, broad-shouldered, massive – in the last row, usually next to Dr Bogdan Zawadzki and a group of his female admirers-students, he smoked a pipe, listened, and sometimes sketched the heads of those present with a fountain pen. He almost always took part in the discussion, usually starting by asking the presenter a question: "Can you summarize this in one sentence?" Discussions with him were not easy. He had his own preconceived views on various matters, and often no arguments could sway him. In theory, he proclaimed that the aim of the discussion should be a common pursuit of truth, but in practice, he treated a discussion as a fight, and he wanted to defeat his opponent in this fight. He did not shy away from using irony and sarcasm as weapons.

In closer contact, Witwicki was often difficult. He had his prejudices and resentments, antipathies and idiosyncrasies. One of them was his aversion to modern art, which he expressed at every opportunity – in private conversations, in public discussions, and in his writings. For him, the history of painting ended with moderate Impressionism. The illusionistic pastels by Wyczółkowski, depicting the regalia of the Wawel Treasury, were for him the "peaks of art." In the works of modern non-realistic artistic movements, he saw only incompetence and ignorance, if not deliberate mystification, blague, humbug. Similarly, he did not recognize non-European arts, "What concern is Chinese or Negro art to me? Am I Chinese or a Negro?" – he used to say.

In closer contact, as I have already mentioned, Witwicki was often difficult. However, when one caught him in a good moment, he could be nice and charming. I came across such a happy moment one evening in 1924. I visited him in his apartment on Brzozowa Street. He was sitting in his study, lost in thought, smoking his pipe. He had just finished translating *Phaedo* and said he would be glad to read me some fragment of it. I asked him to read me the final passages of the dialogue with the account of the last moments of Socrates. Witwicki, with his usual mastery, read these passages, bringing out all the finesse of the piece through changes in tempo and intonation. When he finished, we both remained silent for a long time. We were both deeply moved.

I saw Witwicki for the last time in June 1945. At that time, he lived with his wife in the "Stamary" villa, on the so-called Royal Hill [Królewska Góra] in Konstancin near Warsaw, under the caring supervision of his student and admirer, the novelist and poet Kazimiera Jeżewska (who, after the Warsaw Uprising, at the risk her own life, rescued his manuscripts from burning Warsaw). He was

already very sick, he had cataracts in both eyes, so he could barely recognize objects. He said about me that he saw me as two spots: pink and green (I was still in a military uniform at that time). Outwardly, he had changed little: he still had a luxuriant grey mane. His conversation retained its former liveliness, his voice – its former richness of modulation. He told me that during the war, despite his illness, he had worked a lot. He completed a translation of Plato's *Republic* and a commentary on it. He wrote the essay *Platon jak pedagog* [Plato as Educator]. He translated selected dialogues of Lucian of Samosata and the Gospels according to Matthew and Mark. Rejecting the solemn tone of the Vulgate and translations influenced by it, he attempted to convey the simplicity and liveliness of the original. He said that he was currently working on a translation of the Gospel according to Luke – that "little poem," that "charming idyll" (this translation, it seems, was never completed). At my request for an autograph, he wrote in my notebook with large, crooked letters, which, however, retained something of their former beauty of shape.

From the psychology lectures that Witwicki held over the years at the University of Warsaw, emerged over time a two-volume textbook of this science (Vol. 1, 1925; Vol. 2, 1927; 2nd edition, 1930, supplemented with a chapter on the sources of knowledge of emotions). The versatility of Witwicki's talents and interests, his fascination with both natural sciences and humanities and his drawing and writing talent gave this textbook primary didactic and literary qualities. As a psychologist, Witwicki is an eclectic. He attempts to combine the concepts of descriptive psychology of Brentano (recognition of judgements as a separate class of mental objects) and Twardowski (distinction between act, content, and object of representation, division of representations into images and concepts) with the achievements of Wundt's experimental psychology schools (especially in the field of psychology of the senses) and Kulpe (in the field of the psychology of will) as well as James's concept of the stream of consciousness. He also owes much to Krafft-Ebing (in the field of sexual psychopathology), Bleuler (in the field of psychiatry), and Kretschmer (in the field of characterology).

Particularly interesting in the textbook are the remarks on artistic creativity and aesthetic experiences, as well as the analysis of comedy, jokes, humour, and shame. However, the most original and valuable part of the book is undoubtedly the reflections on interpersonal relationships. Witwicki assumes that "every person avoids the feeling of humiliation and strives to gain a sense of power," and he

divides relationships between people not only into friendly and hostile, but also into relationships with individuals of greater, equal, or lesser power than us. We thus obtain a division of feelings towards other people (heteropathic feelings) into feelings towards stronger friendly people, friendly equals and friendly weaker ones, as well as towards stronger enemies, hostile equals, and hostile weaker individuals. This view, according to which each person strives for advantage over another person, for power, connects Witwicki with Nietzsche and Adler. (One of the forerunners of this view was Hobbes). Witwicki's students maintain that Witwicki expressed and developed his theory independently of Adler.

Young psychologists today shrug their shoulders when one speaks of Witwicki's textbook, claiming it is no longer up to date, that neither the newer methods nor the achievements of experimental research, nor the biological basis of mental life are adequately addressed in it. But that's the usual fate of all textbooks – after a certain time. Even if Witwicki's textbook has aged, it still retains, I believe, its lasting value due to two circumstances. Firstly, thanks to a great number of subtle psychological insights. The wealth of personal transitions and experiences, the abundance of repressions and complexes, proved beneficial for Witwicki as a psychologist, making him sensitive to the similar states and dispositions of others. It has been proven here that a good psychologist can only be someone who has at least once seen life from below, who has been both on the wagon and under it. Witwicki also has a particular ability to observe funny aspects of human nature and present them in a slightly caricatural manner. Secondly, thanks to his style, Witwicki is an artist of words, he has his own writing style – vivid, flexible, varied, enriched with picturesque phrases taken from everyday speech, rich in sensory elements, especially visual ones – sculptural and painterly.

In parallel with developing the psychology textbook, Witwicki was translating Plato. The average level of Polish translations at that time was rather low. But we could boast of a certain number of excellent translations. Antoni Lange's translations of Indian poems, Porębowicz's translation of the *Divine Comedy*, Boy's translations from French literature are among the masterpieces of translation literature. Alongside them, as something equivalent, stood Witwicki's translation of Plato. To fully assess Witwicki's achievement, we must place it against the backdrop of the history of Polish Hellenism. The adoption of Christianity from Rome and the entry into the orbit of Western European civilization resulted

in the fact that, of both ancient cultures, it was primarily Roman culture that operated in Poland and only through it did Greek culture. Polish-Latin literature flourished in the 16th and 17th centuries; Polish Vergilians, such as Janicki and Klonowic, and Polish Horatians, like Kochanowski and Sarbiewski, enjoyed European fame; Poland, alongside Hungary, was a country where Latin remained as a colloquial language longer than elsewhere. However, despite *Odprawa posłów greckich* [The Dismissal of the Greek Envoys], despite the *Grób Agamemnona* [Tomb of Agamemnon], translations of several songs from the *Iliad* and the drama *Agis* by Słowacki, despite Norwid's *Quidam*, Ujejski's *Maraton* [Marathon], and Wyspiański's Greek tragedies, despite Lutosławski's research on Plato's style and Zieliński's on Greek religion, knowledge, love, and enthusiasm for Greek wisdom and beauty were always rather rare and unique in Poland. Witwicki's contribution seems to be even greater – the adaptation of most of Plato's dialogues into beautiful Polish in his translation. There was indeed a Polish translation of most of Plato's dialogues by A. Bronikowski from the second half of the 19th century (*Dzieła Platona* [Works of Plato], Vol. 3, 1858/84), not devoid of certain stylistic merits, but monotonous and linguistically outdated today. There were several more or less correct translations of some of the more important dialogues. But Witwicki's translation surpasses all these translations with a subtle knowledge of the original and the artistry of the Polish word.

The language and style of Witwicki's translations are so lively, fresh, colourful, and straightforward that sometimes he was accused of exaggerating and vulgarizing Plato. Witwicki defended himself against this accusation in the introductions to his translations and in oral discussions. He argued that the solemn, anointed tone of Plato's earlier translator arose from a misunderstanding and that Plato's authentic style was precisely so free, lively and colourful. In the preface to one of the dialogues, he says: "The language of the dialogue has the colour of colloquial speech, not a fluid literary treatise. In the Polish translation, the translator tried to preserve those features of style that constitute the colloquial nature of the language. […] In Socrates' mouth, expressions are often 'juicy.' However, Socrates himself in the first chapter of the *Apology* characterizes his way of speaking as entirely non-literary and common: '…I defend myself with the same words that I usually use both in the market square near the stalls, where many of you have heard me, and wherever else…' […] His language [Socrates'] in the realistic passages of the dialogues is a perfect reflection of everyday, common, living speech

with all its disorder and colorfulness" (commentary on *Eutyphro*). Witwicki also said in oral discussions something like this: "For hundreds of years people repeated *Plato divus*, and translators, influenced by this, gave Plato's style an artificial monumentality. Something similar happened to him as to the marble statues of the Greeks: we got used to seeing them white, whereas once they were vividly coloured." He also compared his work as a translator to making a mosaic: "each word, like a pebble, must be turned over in the hand for a long time, looked at, listened to, smelled." I also remember how once Witwicki defended the translator's right to use words of foreign origin where there is a Polish word with the same meaning, but with a different emotional tone. "In my translation of the *Symposium* there was the following phrase: 'Let's not use solemn words: after all, we are at dinner.' The proofreader, who was none other than Jan Kasprowicz, crossed out the word 'dinner' [*kolacja*] and wrote 'supper' [*wieczerza*]. Please imagine what came out of it." When Witwicki was accused of using provincialisms, especially Lvovianisms, Witwicki replied that he would be grateful for pointing out these Lvovianisms to him, but he would not erase them, because they add colour to the language.

"The written words of Platonic dialogues," Witwicki maintained, "are like notes of musical passages. They must be played with living words: only then do we truly engage with the poet's work" (commentary on *Eutyphro*). Witwicki publicly read Plato's dialogues in his translation (also on the radio), attempting to bring out all the finesse of the original using an appropriate intonation and modulation of voice. For the listeners, these were unforgettable experiences. Witwicki preceded his translations with extensive introductions and commentaries. In them, he interprets, almost sentence by sentence, each dialogue. However, he is mainly concerned with Platonic Socrates in these commentaries. He is interested in him primarily as an artist: as a splendid, picturesque, rich and psychologically complex, and at the same time humanly sympathetic.

However, here several reservations arise. Plato, a student of Socrates, and Aristotle, a student of Plato, painted for us in the darkest colours a picture of the disastrous activities of the sophists, presenting them to us as unscrupulous tricksters and jugglers of ideas, peddlers of pseudo-knowledge, empty orators, pompous conceits, masters of self-promotion, greedy for money and honours, and against this background they placed the radiant figure of Socrates, a poor and selfless man, an untiring seeker of reliable, methodically justified knowledge

and an uncompromising vanquisher of all apparent knowledge, a worshipper of reason and at the same time the most perfect embodiment of reason, a sage whose entire external and internal life was governed and controlled by reason, who even overcame his fear of death through rational arguments. According to them, Socrates was the one who saved Greek science and culture from the disruptive, decadent activity of the sophists, and with his life, he set the example of a complete sage. This is how Plato and Aristotle, the Stoa and the Garden, and after them all the ages that venerate reason saw Socrates. Such an image of Socrates can also be found at the end of the 19th century, for example, in Windelband's *Preludes*. Witwicki also captures Socrates and his role in the history of Greek culture in this way. However, it should be stated that the aforementioned depiction of the sophists is today already an anachronism, and the traditional depiction of Socrates is no longer the only one today. Already in the first half of the 19th century, Hegel and then the English historian of Athenian democracy George Grote (*History of Greece*, 1850) rehabilitated the sophists. Today we know that they made great contributions to the development of Greek philosophy and culture. They initiated several humanistic disciplines – the theory of law and state, grammar, poetics, rhetoric, and were Aristotle's predecessors in the field of logic. They were the creators of the philosophy of culture and pedagogy. Due to their extreme relativism in epistemology and ethics, they had a stimulating effect on later thought. Positivists and pragmatists saw them as their predecessors. Moreover, the sophists were the first fighters for the equal rights of slaves and barbarians and the liberation of women. They were the first socialists. They were the main representatives of the Greek "Enlightenment," which, like the Enlightenment of the 18th century, revised traditional values and sought to rationalize life.

In the second half of the 19th century, the value of reason as a tool of knowledge and as a creator of culture was called into question. "Experience," "drive," "will to power," "instinct," "intuition," and "life momentum" become the watchwords of the day. The wave of irrationalism, beginning with the Romantics and Schopenhauer, reached its peaks in Nietzsche, Bergson, and the pragmatists. Due to these irrational tendencies in European philosophy of the late 19th and early 20th centuries, the role of Socrates in the history of Greek thought and culture was also revisited. The main advocate of this re-evaluation was Nietzsche in *The Birth of Tragedy*, *Twilight of the Idols*, and *The Will to Power*. Nietzsche saw in the early Greek thinkers great bold spirits, true representatives of the Old Hellenic

tradition, while in Socrates – a man with morbid excess of reason and theoretical sense, a representative of Greek "decadence," who through his intellectualism dealt a mortal blow to the Old Hellenic culture, which was based primarily on tradition and instinct. The dispute over Socrates, the "Socrates problem," is still alive in the history of philosophy and culture. But we would look in vain for an echo of these intellectual struggles in Witwicki. He looked at Socrates through the eyes of Plato and those who followed Plato's lead.

One more thing. The dark foundation, not devoid of terrible and cruel features, from which Greek culture emerged and which we are increasingly becoming aware of, did not exist for Witwicki. For him, Greece remained a serene, radiant Hellas of German neohumanism – the Hellas of Winckelmann and Goethe.

Witwicki grew up in an environment deeply attached to the religious beliefs and practices of Catholicism. One of his beloved sisters became a nun. However, while still in school, he experienced his religious crisis and became a staunch rationalist, freethinker, and atheist. However, he was preoccupied by the question of how rationally thinking and scientifically educated people could believe in religious dogmas that were contradictory with each other and experience. He dedicated a book to this topic titled *Wiara oświeconych* [Faith of the Enlightened] written around 1930. During the interwar period, it could not be published in Poland, but it was released in French in 1939 under the title *La foi des eclairés* (it was not published in Polish until 1959).

Masterpieces of popularizing art are three books by Witwicki: *O widzeniu przedmiotów* [On Seeing Objects] – a lecture on the principles of perspective (published in 1954), *Wiadomości o stylach* [Information on Styles] – an outline of the history of art in the Mediterranean-European circle (1934, 2nd edition in 1959), and *Przechadzki ateńskie* [Athenian Strolls] – talks on Athenian monuments and an outline of the history of Greek sculpture (broadcast on Warsaw radio in 1938/39, published in 1947).

Witwicki was also an artist of words of considerable measure in his letters (some of them are cited by Kazimiera Jeżewska in the prefaces to the 19 volumes of the *Zbiorowe wydanie spuścizny piśmienniczej Władysława Witwickiego* [Collective Edition of Władysław Witwicki's Literary Legacy], 1957–1960).

In the introduction to the translation of the *Symposium*, there is one passage that concerns Socrates but, as it seems to me, sheds light on the psyche of Witwicki himself. Witwicki says about Socrates: "A great prototype of souls with an

actor's background, who, wanting to free themselves from some sense of internal humiliation because fate or necessity has cast it upon them, lie to their human nature: they want to reach a certain ideal, gain an indispensable sense of power in the struggle with themselves; they create themselves in their imagination and they play this created ideal more or less skillfully before themselves and before the world. A prototype of souls keeping accounts of their inner life, feeling their own movements, expressions, glances; souls 'working' on themselves." Well, it's hard to resist the impression that Witwicki himself was also a "soul with an actor's background." He created in his imagination an ideal figure of himself, some features of which he took from the Platonic Socrates, and he "played" this character, more or less consciously, before others.

We read the *Symposium*, *Phaedrus*, and *Apology* in Witwicki's translations with pounding hearts and shining eyes. For many of us – I am talking especially about the representatives of the Polish generation that came of age during World War I – Platonic Socrates and Plato himself became, thanks to Witwicki, a profound experience – intellectual, aesthetic, moral. Whoever experienced this will be grateful to Witwicki until death.

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