

Kamov, Grosz: "It is not Theatre".

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The not very large but, for the history of Croatian dramatic literature, exceptionally important work of Janko Polić Kamov, aroused disapproval and rejection during the author's life that were motivated, above all, by the dramaturgic novelties and the avant-garde spirit of Kamov's work. The young author was not, however, denied a highly striking literary talent.¹ In an approach to the dramatic work of Janko Polić Kamov it is as well to bear in mind a few facts that can serve as guidelines for a dramatic and interpretative, and a historical and comparative, insight into his work. Perhaps most drastically, it is precisely the Kamov case that shows with how much reserve expressionistic poetics were received in the period in which various modernist forms of writing coexisted in the Croatian cultural milieu. What is more, even in the content of the European advances of the expressionist style, the dramatic novelties of Kamov's work came relatively early on when we take into consideration the fact that in 1905 the Dresden group Die Brücke appeared with a common painterly programme, introducing into painting disturbing and convulsive landscapes and deformed portraits of the modern intellect in collapse, for which appropriate painterly concepts were sought. In the Dresden group there were painters like Ludwig Kirchner, Erich Heckel, Karl Smidt-Rottluff, and they were later joined by Emil Nolde and Max Pechstein. In 1906 Mejerhold's direction of Aleksandr Blok's *The Fair Tent* held the idea of the theatre as a display of psychology



and *stimmung* up to ridicule, fighting with the grotesque against the principles of symbolism. Reinhardt's direction too of Wedekind's *Awakening of Spring* at the Berlin Kammerspiel, and in particular, of Ibsen's *Ghosts* with set design by Munch, heralded the onset of expressionism. In 1910 Kokoschka had already shown his expressionist works *Mörder, Hoffnung der Frauen* (in Walden's *Der Sturm*) and *Sphinx und Strohmann*. As early as 1908, representing a programme of expressionism qua direction in artistic expression, the unusually important book *Abstraktion und Einfühlung* by Wilhelm Worringer was published. This introduced the concept of Abstraktionsdrang. Expressionism privileged the evocation of feeling over the presentation of the object, extracting the object from the

real environment as being only an external frame. The desire for the re-spiritualization of the object from inside took the artistic vision ever closer to symbol, abstracting and crystallizing expression. Attraction to abstraction appeared as a result of intensified self-alienation, of the primordial disquiet of man suffering the pressure of a phenomenality that he did not know how to unriddle. In 1908, Karl Sternheim wrote *Die Hose*, a grotesque comedy that criticised the German social structure, Strindberg *Open letters to the Intima Theatre*, Craig founded *The Mask*, Arne Holz finished *Sonnenfinsternis*, and Hauptmann *Kaiser Karls Geisel*. In 1911 there began to be talk about expressionism at the 22nd exhibition of the Berlin Secession, while Kurt Hiller for the first time mentioned the word expressionistically in the foreword to the anthology *Der Kondor* in 1912, while in 1915 in *Das Ziel* he launched the term *activism* in connection with the expressionist aspiration towards the transformation of reality beginning with the individual and his subjectivity. Kurt Pinthus in a piece entitled *Memories of the beginnings of expressionism*, links the first theatrical manifestations of the expressionist style with Hasenclever's drama *Der Sohn* (performances in Prague and Dresden), stressing the direction of Hans Demetz (*Kammerspiele des Deutschen Theatres in Prague*, September 30, 1916). In general, it can be said of the period 1914 to 1920 that it was the most fertile period of literary expressionism, taking 1918 as the year of the appearance of the expressionist

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manifesto with its special implications for drama and the theatre.

If we follow the chronology of events from 1904 to 1910, when the last accessible drama of Kamov appeared, and after a stylistic and dramaturgic analysis of his works, we will be able to establish that what is at issue are works written in a style which to a large extent recalls the style of the expressionist drama which was then beginning to appear, first in artistic and then in dramatic and theatrical circles of the Central European cultural circle, mainly dominated by writing in German. In the European context too, Kamov's very consistently executed poetics comes very early and spontaneously, and with respect to the dramatic oeuvre of this writer it is quite reasonable to talk of stylistic features of proto-expressionism (a term used by Henryk Markiewicz when splitting Polish literature up into periods).

The performances of Kamov's dramas could be the topic of an analysis by itself, and yet, since these came into being after the author's death, and in different literary and theatrical conditions, their analysis would be beyond the terms of reference of this study. In spite of that, the very fact of the rejection of the novelties that Kamov introduced into his dramatic writing in the period in which he was at work, and in particular the reasons given for the rejection of them, are rather important and point to some of the important features of his proto-expressionist dramaturgy, which were, because different, and anti-dramatic as compared with the technique of traditional drama, removed from the repertoire. Ivo Vojnović, after reading Kamov's plays, said: It is not theatre, while nevertheless, in connection with the two lost plays *A farce for our times* and *Oh, women, women* at least, pronounced that the figure of the writer was "a unique one in Croatian literature". It seemed impossible to Vojnović that the author of the works could "know so deeply the psychology of abnormal modern people". Kamov was accused of "technical overloading" and "confused symbolism", contextu-

alising his work with respect to both the domestic and the European literature of the time, which were obviously not in phase with respect to literary and theatrical practice. Croatian drama and theatre, in spite of domestic writers being relatively well acquainted with the new things in the literary and artistic circles of Europe, in practice went its own way, occasionally actually dogmatically resisting some of the models from outside. It is not therefore to be wondered at that Vojnović was aware of what it was really all about and with respect to *A farce* wrote: "If the first drama had been written and printed in German there would have been shouts of approval." Immediately afterwards he concluded: "Extricate it from darkness and wretchedness, it would be a useful work, and one that is generally necessary for our impoverished dramatic literature." Nevertheless, negative opinions prevailed. They make interesting analysis for, mentioning the failings of Kamov's dramaturgy, they often clearly point to some of the stylistic features of expressionist play writing. Branko Drechsler, one of the members of the commission of the Zagreb theatre in the 1909/1910 season, when the drama of Polić was rejected, said: "This drama, in neither content, diction nor technique works within the limits of conventional drama, but wants to go beyond them in everything, but goes too far."

Drechsler in connection with the *content* of Kamov's drama notes "exoticism", "unintelligibility", "lack of pointedness", while for the *diction* he said that it was full of "rough crudities" and that this kind of choice of language would "offend every taste". As far as technique was concerned, Drechsler complained that the dramatic technique made Kamov's dramas unintelligible and abstract, and held that it was absolutely impossible to put them on, explaining this by the statement that they lacked "at least some kind of composition".

Kamov created a dramatic vision that spontaneously and without a programme, but with enormous inner backing and at the right time with re-

spect to kindred European movements in the arts, expressed just that type of sensitivity described and interpreted by Wilhelm Worringer in the already mentioned *Abstraktion und Einfühlung*. In a short period of time the dramatic oeuvre of Janko Polić Kamov appeared, an expression of the necessary feeling of unease that a civilised man, as a modern individual, feels when faced with the structure of society. This type of feeling is compared by Worringer to the fundamental unease felt by primitive man when faced with nature. *Abstraktionsdrang* would accordingly be an expression of the spiritual state of the modern, and modernist, subject who can no longer manage to recognize himself within the framework of the world in which he is submerged. Kamov's figures sense themselves in a trap; their actions are the result of a panicky encounter with the external surroundings; they do not have the consistence of the psychological causality of actions. In general in the centre of his plays there is the figure of a young intellectual who provokes a conflict, probing in long sarcastic monologues below the surface of family and social relations. Kamov does not put the generic designation "dramatized studies" without deep dramatic and poetic reasons. He wishes to emphasize the deliberation and the consciousness of the act in which as author he steps outside the limits of conventional drama. He replaces the realistic and the naturalistic cause and effect motivation of the dramatic action by an action which is overtly the result of a procedure that the expressionist authors called the battle of ideas. Kamov's dramatized study attempts to be a dramatized battle of ideas, while managing to remain dramatic because of the intensity of the inner working. Long expressionistically toned and rhythmical monologues are dominant; from time to time, they are phantasmagoric in the complex of realistic details that are distinguished, skillfully arranged by the author into one whole in such a way as to suggest the troubled state of the psyche of the character. On the other

hand, one other kind of monologue that Kamov made abundant use of should be singled out. This is the functional monologue which had an important role in the composition of the battle of ideas that the author wishes to show within the poetic concept of the dramatized study. In their sermon-like, rather grandiloquent intonation Kamov's functional monologues, important for the development of the expressionist type of dramatic action, do not, from the point of view of conventional dramaturgy, actually have any dramatic quality.

The failure of the surrounding world to recognize the modern subject, the resulting sense of unease and the draw of abstraction, suggests aesthetic implications of Kamov's view on the world qua expressionist world view. Two dramas with the generic designation dramatized studies in the subtitle prove exceptionally suitable for use in a textual and dramatic analysis, stressing stylistic elements, of Kamov's dramatic composition of the expressionist type. These are *On native ground* (a one act play, with the reservation that Kamov avoided terminology that would suggest the classic form of writing for the stage and the psychology of reception it gives rise to, and was more attracted to a division into scenes within which the rhetorical topic of the dramatized study developed) and the two parts of the *Monastery Dramas*. In the *Monastery Dramas* it is actually a matter of two dramatic wholes that by the transfer of three male characters from the first to the second set up a continuity of story about the Sabljak brothers, although each one of them functions as an independent drama, at two levels: on the one hand by the roundedness of the main theme that is brought out directly by the dramatic composition and on the other the by roundedness of the parable which is done indirectly by an allegorical linking of the action shown with the Truth that the author wishes to state.

The main theme of the first part of the play, termed *Monks' Orgy*, is the fall and breakdown of a patriarchal, moralistic family which follow through the

fates of three sons and one daughter. In the centre is the male figure of the young intellectual Vladoje into whom Kamov built traces of his own biography, through whose consciousness all the lines of force of the drama are refracted. The fact of Vladoje's work on a manuscript (towards the end it turns out that it exposes family secrets, de-personalizing the authority of the father), and the very title that is suggested for the book, a family epic that might be called *Truth*, set up a connection between the main and the derived theme of Kamov's drama. However, this drama of Janko Polić would not justify the selected designation of study if it did not allegorically develop one more theme — the problem of modernism in literature. Modernism and current literary problems are mentioned explicitly, and make up a tie between the main and the subsidiary theme of the drama. The link is established in two ways: via the functional monologues, the inserted mini-lectures, tirades on literary themes, and via the parable of the manuscript entitled *Truth*. The main theme of the collapse of the patriarchal organization of the family has its backbone in the dramatic action around the illegitimate child whom one of the sons, Boško, must not acknowledge if he is to preserve the reputation of the family. When he finally decides to act in accord with his own human code of ethics, against bourgeois morality, it turns out that it is too late, infanticide has already taken place. The parable about the manuscript runs in parallel. For during the whole course of the dramatic action that carries the main theme, the second brother, Vladoje, in the solitude of the subplot, is writing a study or perhaps a novel the contents of which are only just sketched in. In the final part of the drama, which compositionally speaking functions as a denouement, in a direct dialogic confrontation of the Father and Vladoje, it becomes clear that the son intends publicly to expose the family secrets and truths, destroying in the book the authority of the family. And yet, like Boško, Vladoje is too late in finding

the courage in himself to be able to make the break with bourgeois morality. The manuscript of *Truth* is burnt, and so there is a parallelism established between the main and the subsidiary theme — the story about the aborted child and the parable about the burnt manuscript.

Vladoje (*hoarsely*): You are in the writings.

Father: I! I!

Vladoje: And it's all in you. Boško, and Mimi (*hoarsely*), your daughter, the concubine of your friend from the café, and Vladoje (*still more hoarsely*) darkened with the thought of incest with your only daughter.

Father (*eyes wide open*): In the writings. (*His lips at once pale. Then he goes up to him, but at once stops like a bull.*)

Vladoje: In the writings, yes. There out of the dualism of your consciences, shames and souls, one consciencelessness is being born, a shamelessness, a mind. (*Breast to breast.*) There, on the cadaver of your life and personality. (*Something clatters outside the door in the half light.*)

Boško: (*tattered, muddy, a caricature, still with the same crushed hat, stands in the door and takes himself by the throat imitating strangling*): Ugh ugh ugh. Like this, ugh ugh ugh.

Vladoje: (*Hurls himself at him, deprived of words*) Strangled! No!

Boško: (*in panic takes him by the throat and pulls him to himself, after him*): Not me! (*In the hall*): Her! Her!

Father: (*Like a ghost, without a sound, his eyebrows trembling, he runs to the table, without a breath, like smoke, takes the writings, and more, bits of papers, excerpts, more... and rushes to the door, left, eyeless. A spirit.*)

(*And here in the empty room a thin "Boško" is to be heard, a deeper "Mimi" and a still thinner crying and a deeper sobbing.*)

(*There is the pealing of bells from far off.*)²

The dualism of conscience, a double morality instead of the ethics of pure spirituality, about which, in connection with the "new man" and his internal

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respiritualization, the expressionists talk, subserves the *Grundmotiv* of Kamov's drama, and, as the deeper essence of the work, is transmitted to the title of this dramatic work. Just precisely why the title, *Monks' Orgy*, is clear in the final, third scene and, not accidentally, from Vladoje's lips: Vladoje:... There was once a family and it is no more: for the brothers became people. (*He walks step by step*): There was once a monastery and they wrote: Peace, Purity and Oblivion. But the defrocked priest said: Orgy, Debauchery and Lust.³

In a dramatic vision like Kamov's, the expressionist, rebellious hero whose dramatic story starts with the moment of the birth of feelings of unease and nausea when he has to face the reality of the social environment undergoes defeat. His defeat, however, is imagined as a cry of warning, which in the case of Janko Polić was not heard by his contemporaries. The epilogue to *Monks' Orgy* brings a denouement at two levels. At the level of the direct performance of the main theme, the child of the extra-marital love of members of two different social classes is strangled. At the level of the allegorical, subsidiary theme, the book of Truth is burnt. Two levels of the same fundamental tragedy, of the unsuccessful attempt to overcome the dualism of the conscience, are linked by the parable of the child of Truth. Although consistently derived by the development of the dramatic action that is experienced in an expressionist way, as a battle of ideas or, if we use the definition used by Georg Kaiser for his own works as a drama of thoughts, the parallelism in Kamov's drama is additionally brought out by the hopeless statement of the third brother, Ivo:

Ivo: And me (*drops his hands, glassily*): Burnt and strangled. (*He shudders.*)

In between secret hoping and disbelief that his dramatic and personal cry of warning would reach the ears of contemporaries and fall upon fertile soil in his own country, Kamov em-

barked on open criticism of conditions in domestic intellectual circles. Croatia is the *terra vergine* of the second part of *Monastery Dramas* entitled *Virgin*. By transferring the three brothers, Boško, Ivo and Vladoje from their family apartment in the city to a country atmosphere among new figures, it achieves a continuity with the first part.

Ivo: Vladoje is a prophet. But it seems to me that all prophets degenerate, and instead of proud, lone, pitiless bearers of the word of the lord become Pharisees and writers. Like Christ in slippers.

Boško: I don't know. I don't talk much to Vladoje. He always waits for me to say the first word.

Ivo: Yes. Who do you instruct then?

Boško: Professor Mosco.

Ivo: (*getting up*): That is, he instructs you. Who is he?

Boško: An Italian anthropologist who has come to our country to convalesce and to study. He says that this country is *terra vergine* for science. He hopes to get some interesting information.

Kamov, disguised as Ivo, concludes:

Ivo: Blessed be the innocent, says the Messiah of Croatian stables, for they are the poor in spirit.

The love plot at one level, in the centre of which is the female figure of Milka, the incarnation of virginal purity and innocence, ends tragically. Vladoje, with the motivation of a disordered consciousness, incapable of once again achieving peace, purity and oblivion, throws himself from the top of a pot-hole. At the other level, which talks via allegory, a not less tragic of individual and society occurs:

Ivo: I went round the house. There was no one. Milka was in the byre. Slave went down the hill. He stood there and looked at the pot-hole. He was maybe thinking how to give that stone a social tendency. Not me. I think: here perhaps Solness would go headfirst, like the lads along the coast, and dive into this pool of our virginal, unregu-

lated land...

Unlike *Monastery Dramas*, in which the emphasis is transferred to the parable that is the link between the two levels in the battle of embodied ideas, Kamov's *drama of thoughts*, the short "dramatized study" *On Native Ground* is a more direct evocation of expressionist sensibility and its cry aloud. The drama takes as its theme a young intellectual who, after his father's death, returns from studying abroad to his native town, where he is at first made very welcome, and afterwards upbraided after he has appalled the townspeople with the severity of his utterances of the Truth. The son of the great father looks at the collective face of the People from the window, rips the portrait of the great man from the wall and throws it down:

Ivo: (*catches hold of the window, hysterically, desperately*): Leave it. I want to see. I came to see — the people. And here they are. (*The shouting becomes a chant of Down, Traitor, Down. And then the mother, calling her son with terrified looks, and God with great wet words, and the maidservant with the heaving tits, and the lightning breath — and Rade, calming them, himself, him, — and Ivo, fixed to the window, transfixed, stiff, hypnotized by the dark, gloomy, muttering scene — And the same: Down! Renegade! Traitor! Ugh! And darkness coming, and night falling, and gloom gathering. It all began to become an accelerating body on a steep, like charms in love.... And Ivo, at once, hastily, tearing himself away from the hands, the prayers, the supplications, showing first a face that is solemn without end,, pale from masterfulness, with eyes staring as if in a fever, lips trembling in delirium, tears the great man from the wall and hurls it down, out of the window, on the heads, hats, sticks. — And just as icy-cold, slipperily, easily, dancingly, he jumps into the other room, taking with him all that astonishment and persuasion — and in a moment leaps out from that room with the crucifix among the growing throats, muscles, himself leav-*

ing there a cry — a single, isolated, condemnatory cry...

If we analyse this excerpt of dramatic writing (just half of the particular piece of stage direction which by its very length, but most of all by its request for the presence on the stage of the swirling mob heralds the conscious expressionism of Krleža's *Legenda*) at a stylistic level, we shall see several recognizably expressionist features. The thematic and poetic, though in Kamov's case not programmatic, opposition of the individual and the mass can be directly seen in the relation between Ivo at the window and his audience underneath where the dynamic element (the muttering scene of the waving mob) is opposed to the static element (the motionlessness of the protagonist who is transfixed, stiff, hypnotized). The most frequent figure of speech is synecdoche. The whole compact human mass is shown through its parts, the heads, hats, muscles, and sticks of the male members of the mass, the great wet words, the tits and breath of the female parts. On the other hand, the exalted state of Ivo's spirit and his feelings is shown by the linkage of individual symptoms of the same expressionist poetic furore with parts of the protagonist's face suffused with the pathetic pallor: the feverish staringness is linked with the eyes, the trembling delirium with the lips. In addition the use of augmentatives is in key with the expressionist vision (the swelling tits, the great arms). The syntagmatic connection of head and hat seemingly extends to the connection between muscles and the sticks the men hold in their hands. However, the muscles can easily be substituted for by sticks, for Kamov's poetic feeling for substitutional associationism between these two nouns in the plural opens up space for a *tertium comparationis* — the concept of Violence. What is more, the stick, as singular, twice repeated and thus by this very fact an additionally stressed noun, can be explicated as a widespread symbol of aggression. The whole scene is imagined as a *mise en scene* of the swirling of the mass that

is supposed to image a vision of foreboding violence. However, for Kamov what is equally important is the literary aspect of the stage directions, which are not just stage directions, but reading in their own right. He placed particular stress (for the taste of traditional dramaturgy too great) on the suggestiveness of language and the stylistic options through which this suggestiveness is attained. The analysis of the style of Kamov's non-dramatic stage directions shows the same result as a dramaturgical analysis of the whole drama. In both cases, a World View (an ethical and aesthetic system of thinking and of perceiving the world) close to the expressionist is revealed behind Kamov's proceedings. Whether as an implicit metaphorical link of two nouns that could both equally well signify the idea of violence, via the transparent symbolism of the sticks, through the grotesque exaggeration of details of femininity or the dynamism of nouns, through the use of adjectives which take upon themselves the function of expansion ("lightning breath", "growing throats") — through all four stylistic devices the significance of the concept of force has been mirrored, as has the forcefulness of the expressive gesture as such. In the example given, the detachment and exaggeration of the selected details of reality are comparable with kindred procedures of expressionist artists with whom the synecdoche is one of the constructional principles of the painter's vision, of course in connection with a pronounced aptness for the grotesque. By reaching for a certain register of favourite figures of speech, the recognizable expressionist rhetoric finds its way also in a pictorial expression of this tendency, the narrativity of which is not exclusively linked with specific procedures of the painter's, sculptor's or graphic artist's medium. Let us consider the elements of the story in the picture of George Grosz from 1916 called *Suicide*. The artist chose as the setting for his action a city crossing which allowed him to organize diverse goings on around several focuses suitable for pictorial narration.

These are the street, a café, a church, a brothel and the terrace of some building that could easily be the balcony of a flat. The perspective is slightly raised, simulating the view from a window. Along the street, from the direction of the church and the local cemetery in the distance (the central upper part of the picture) a double chase is going on: two dogs chasing each other and the flight of one male figure in front of another, of whom only the hand is seen since the chaser is caught at a moment just before he comes round the corner of a building that is hiding his figure. From the lamp post, the body of a man is hanging. In the foreground, on the floor of the terrace or balcony fenced in with an iron railing lies another male figure that has just committed suicide, this time with a pistol. The weapon with which the man has violently taken his own life has fallen out of his hand and rolled from the balcony to the street. The man is dressed in green, with a head which already shows features of the skull with protruding teeth and eyes receding into their sockets, his blue hat has rolled off, and his hand is still holding a stick. There are two dreamlike elements on both sides of the corpse. On the left, in a red semi-circular frame that recalls an aura lies a head of unclear outlines and features, floating like a spirit alongside the corpse; perhaps it is the spirit of the suicide that has split off from the body on the floor. A surreal impression is achieved in another way as well: by the mingling of two perspectives and the appropriate disturbance of the logic of relations between the various levels of events. The element of the lower or street level of events has penetrated to the space of the upper or balcony level of events. Concretely, the bitch being chased by the male dog is on the right hand side of the dead man. Oposite the window, from the brothel window, the goings on are being watched by a semi-naked figure of exaggerated feminine characteristics (protruding breasts and hips sticking out, enormous lips and eyes enhanced by make-up, in green knickers with a green flower in her hand). Behind her is sitting a man

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in a green suit with a deformed face. It seems as if the woman has been shown at the moment when, in a brief moment of time after she has finished her business, she has moved her red curtains aside to look at the street. The green frame of the window delimits and closes the event of the brothel scene in which in a painterly way alienation is thematized, the spiritual emptiness and lack of feeling incarnated in the red-haired female figure that shows double lack of interest, in the events in the room (turning her back on the man), and in the events on the street, for she is looking into space, somewhere at a point above the street goings-on and above the figure who has hanged himself from the lamp-post. The street and all the figures that belong to the street narrative level are painted in red. From the first floor of the café that is located in the left corner of the picture and lit from inside (which can be seen from the red light that comes through the wide entrance doors and the large windows) can be seen the outlines of observers sitting at their table. The dynamic elements of the narration are opposed to the static, which is expressed by the consistent way the painter opposes nuances of red and green. It could even be shown that the red at the level of the painter's treatment of the story is always about a process, something going on, while green is equivalent to stasis, when something exists, but is not doing anything. The symbolic dimension of the picture is a link between the painterly and the literary level in the treatment of the theme of suicide or of its expression. The green light from the lamp-post enshrouds the head of the hanged man, while the other suicide lies clothed in a green suit, not only because of specifically pictorial needs, but because of the rhetorical need of covering the fact of death with one of the dominant colours that has gained the function of symbol and which does not accidentally belong to the cold part of the spectrum. All the active events in which live beings, or perhaps one should say still alive beings, take part, are done with red, the

colour of process. It could be concluded that this is a matter of figures that are still active, but could in themselves just as well be inactive, deadened, if some force stronger than themselves did not force them into movement, make them participate in the action. This force is instinct in one case (which makes the dog run), and fear in the other (which makes the man flee). When in Grosz's oil the bitch appears alongside the suicide, jumping over the logical limits of space that have been ordained for her, in which she is allowed to move, it becomes clear that the showing of the animals is a symbolic display of sexual urge that, wrongly directed and tragically out of step with bourgeois morality, could easily be a motive for the man's suicide (as could be assumed by analogy with the literary themes that have a similar tendency, for example by comparison with the manner in which the motif of suicide is treated in Wedekind's *Spirit of the Earth*, apart from on the basis of the woman from the brothel who figures in the same picture). When the figure of the bitch becomes a rhetorical figure, then in Grosz's picture a leap typical of expressionist art takes place from the aesthetic to the ethical, which in literature sometimes can be seen as a leap from narration to sermon. However, how are the two faces of observers to be interpreted, the face in the café window, and the woman in the window of the brothel? Why is the same type of action shown in pictorial means covered in red in the case of the figure in the café, the colour of process, and why in the case of the woman in the window is it framed in green, the colour of stasis? The answer lies both in the sphere of pictorial art and its own particular necessities as a medium, and in the sphere of the rhetoric of a recognizably expressionist type. The unclothed woman with the red hair and red lips in the green underwear and the green flower in her hand, has turned her back uninterestedly on the man in the green suit whom she has, it would seem, serviced a moment earlier, after which she pulled aside the

red curtain and turned her empty gaze towards the street. According to the proportion of red to green, and if we accept the symbolic link of red/process (for the presentation of active work), green/stasis (for examples that show the fact of death) it would appear that the woman in the picture is half alive, half dead. The passiveness and lack of interest with which the female figure observes the scene of suicide by hanging, the chase on the street, are at an interpretive level indicators of her spiritual and emotional deadness. The figure from the café bathed in red light is an active observer who, it seems, is still interested in the affairs of the street, though he stays behind the glass, in the safety of the space assigned him. Rhetoric competes with art again: the frames of the window implant outlines of crosses on a red base which suggest the light from the interior is preaching about the threats of spiritual death that could overcome those among "modern" people who still seem to be alive. From a rhetorical perspective, then, it is clear that the grotesque seated figure of the man in the brothel is actually a presentation of a spiritual corpse. The symbolism of the cross is clear because the painter directly moves the relations of horizontals and verticals from the space of the church (the crosses on the green base of the cemetery) to other spaces: to the café (window frames), to the balcony (railing), to the brothel (simplified lines of the table). The dreamlike leaning angle of the lamp-post appears in this picture and frequently in the graphics of German set designers of an expressionist bent, from Kaspar Neher to Otto Reigbert, whose view of stage space gives an idea of the inner space of the spirit and the disturbances that arise in it. With Reigbert in addition there is a characteristic interpenetration of exterior and interior, a fusion of room and street. The use of the relations of horizontal and vertical in the symbolism of the cross is also a frequent procedure in expressionist direction and stage setting, in approaches like Babberger's in the Frankfurt performance of *Ein*

Geschlecht of Fritz von Unruh in 1918, directed by Gustav Hartung. It is enough to glance at Rochus Gliese's lithograph, the portrait of the actor Ernst Deutsch in Walter Hasenclever's *Sons* of 1916 to be aware of the significance of the demonic expression on the face of the actor and the spasmodic movement of his hand against the symbolic background of the window as cross.

Going back to the drama of Janko Polić, to the stage directions quoted and the analysis of his stylistic choices, it becomes still clearer why Kamov's expressionist "cry" was bound to bring about his isolation in domestic literary and theatrical circumstances. What is more, through the obsessive autobiography in the treatment of a certain type of dramatic character, such as Ivo in the one act play *On Native Ground*, Kamov shows that he is by all means aware of the separateness of his own position in the context of that moment of the Croatian modern movement and the prematureness of the concept of drama that interested him. Understanding the factors of the story in Grosz's *Suicide*, their isolation and the analysis of the rhetorical means that the author chose in order to show his theme, or rather to portrait the modern state of the spirit that lay behind the theme chosen, proves a useful comparative procedure from the moment we notice the coincidence between the five focuses of the action around which the artist organized his pictorially-told story, on the one hand, and the favourite focuses from which an expressionist dramatic action can be developed on the other. Kamov's literary and dramatic vision of the world as a whole is distributed around several typical points of focus, and, as in Grosz's picture, these are: the church, the café, the church, the brothel and of course the family salon in which the collapse of the naturalistic model and the patriarchal organization of the family takes place. Not only because the German painter brings out from some invisible space (which should be understood as a painter's salon, and a salon of bourgeois good taste) the body of

the man onto the balcony, but together with him also conveys to the eyes of the modern observer a symbol of the animal, destructive urge that brought him to the tragedy of the title. The typical male protagonist of Kamov's dramas, and the strong autobiographical consciousness that always stands behind the persona, is exhausted in the gesture of overthrowing the double morality of the family, in revealing the drawing-room, petit-bourgeois Truth that is covered by the symbolism of the corpse. At the level of one set of stage directions (not chosen at random, but because of the central position it occupies in the composition of *On Native Ground*) the basic line of the dramatic conflict can be illustrated. It is not hard to show that Janko Polić transfers the central conflict of his dramatized battle of ideas to the relation between static and dynamic that is comparable to Grosz's pictorial confrontation of the red of action and the green of paralysis. The contrasting done by Kamov, of course, is realized through means that are specific to the dramatic form of literature, at the level of linguistic choices, and in the space where all the relations set up are relations of the dramatic lines of force. Nevertheless, this does not stop the author from using the relation of black and white, light and shade in a manner that is comparable to the technique of drawing or graphics. After a fierce monologue with a shocking substance, at the moment at which we find him, the central figure of the one act play, Ivo, is found in an isolated and elevated position, that of an observer who is caught in a state of passivity between two breaths, at a window below which the commons are in a turmoil. The spiritual state of the protagonist too is elevated, as can be seen from the face which is solemn and pallid. With Grosz's naked woman at the window, Ivo shares coldness of feelings, insensibility towards what is going on in the street. As was established at the beginning of the analysis, there is an opposition, a confrontation, of the motionless individual in a state of hypnotic stupor and the dynamized mass, the

representatives of which are not given as complete individuals, but through the presentation of certain details of their bodies and clothing. In parallel with the growing tension of the chaotic happenings below, the author presents a nuanced gradation of three nouns (dark, night, darkness) and two adjectives (dark, gloomy). The constant dimming of the scene is in line with the increased density of the points and lines that are the consequences of the previously distinguished elements, the parts of bodies and clothing, being brought closer and merged. In the text it says that dark is approaching, night is falling, darkness is gathering. What is actually happening is the compaction of the human mass which in the end turns into one single dark mass, a single body. That the mass is dark in a figurative sense too can be gathered from the following sentence: *It all began to become an accelerating body on a steep, like charms in love*. The analogy between the dynamics of the compaction of the mass and the rhythm of physical union is set up only on the basis of a conviction of the existence of some powerful motive force, a dark urge that works from the background, some fusion of eros and thanatos. The cohesive principle on the basis of which the body of the crowd is organized is found in its common destructive thanatic urge. At the moment when the initial situation that has placed the individual against the many is turned into the relation of two bodies, of Ivo and the commons as a collective face, the author is able to use the metaphor of an erotic relationship. The dramatic tension set up between the pallid and static and the dark and dynamic element creates relations that could be illustrated by the analogy to relations in drawing where the black obtained by the increasing density of lines enters an aesthetically considered relation with the white surface of the paper. A more detailed consideration of the text of the second part of the stage direction chosen is almost unnecessary for us to see that Kamov in this short dramatized study manages to cast the corpse out of not only the family

m DOSSIER: JANKO POLIĆ KAMOV **o**

dining room but also from the genre of the drawing-room play;

And then, when he has dropped the synthesis, the past, the life, the holiness of his house, hearth and land on the seething, boiling, foaming mouths, hands and minds — something dull, heavy and dead... like a corpse ... like a dry branch... like a log... smashes on the half closed door. But he stays shouting at the top of his throat, until a stone seadsu him back. All that shouting seems to have burned out at once.... He closes the window... And it is as if it were all over... Silence begins to shriek.... Then he closes his eyes...And then from that room — at last, after a long, painful, ominous pause — almost impatiently, a groaning was heard. Like a bell. Like a lost lamb....Like an ingratiating, naive, pleasant bleating. But the silence still shrieks. It is as if it is tearing out its knotted hair, beating its own airy heart. As for Ivo, as if he were being pulled by an invisible, dreadful, transparent, empty hand, no, a long, drawn out, symbolic finger, he goes into that room. And at once, the quiet becomes still. It is unquiet that roars, the damned, Ivo! Oh! And as if you had seen a tooth, that bit into the finger; a short, concise, human tooth ... That long, empty, symbolic finger.

The dead man is of course Ivo's father. The great man from the wall, the shrine of the "house, hearth and ground.." whose symbolic dimension is visible at three levels: the personal and family, the patriarchal and family and the patriotic. The verb to kill is the thematic word of the final dialogue of the two friends. Rade thumps the seething and dumbfounded Ivo, accusing him of a triple sin: towards the family (for with his public appearance and throwing of the portrait of the adored deceased down he had painfully betrayed his mother's expectations), towards the people (who had seen an ideal in him, and then lost their faith), and towards himself (because he had left his revolt but half completed, drawing back from the window and falling silent). Murder happened again

at three levels: the personal ("And in yourself you killed..."), at the familial ("Your mother is dead!") and at the national ("You wanted to kill the faith in her, but you killed it in your own people..."). In Ivo's answer dramatic energy of the expressionist type is spontaneously liberated, from one of the semantic nodes of the drama which is closest to the essential programmatic place of the expressionist trend in art — that which considers the problem of the awakening of the *spiritual man*. Four of Ivo's sentences are symptomatic in this connection;

"For lack of faith has killed the man — you sleep!"

"But I am only just awakening!"

"I alone!"

"For the criminality of the beast summons up the crime of man!"

Mankind that seeks refuge in "establishments, conventions and political reformations" remaining in the sway of politics as "error, mystification and corrupted illusion" was experienced by Paul Kornfeld in 1918 as a collective spiritual corpse.⁴ His *apolitical man* is the result of a direct experience of the bestiality of the first world war (and perhaps a dramatic foreboding of his own end in a Nazi camp), but always kept in close connection with the aesthetic ideal of the *spiritual man* who, awakened and driven by the "demon of conscience," in a permanent state of anger (like some kind of poetic fury) searches for true human existence. Kornfeld exclaims: "Let man be a tyrant to himself in order to liberate himself!" With this kind of man, Kornfeld wants to offer dramatic art the theme of the individual and the fullness of a "pure soul" in exchange for the chaos of the crowd of "empty lives". Of course, the individual is a representative of the species, the "conscience of mankind," an ethical *pars pro toto* whose rhetoric has sometimes been wont to lose its artistic breath as a result of too great vociferousness from the stage. And yet, in a dramatic sense, one of the most stimulating observations of this author is expressed in the

statement that the whole of world history takes place in the human heart. At first sight it would seem that the philosophy of this thought is too abstract, and yet it does have very serious implications for drama. The interest of a dramatic character no longer lies in the psychological hitting of his character, as the expressionist concept of interest in the construction of the dramatic action is not implemented from outside (from the level of dramatic conflict) but from inside (from the ennobled heart of the individual and on the basis of the degree of complexity of the individual conscience of the character that becomes a battlefield for the fight of thoughts and feelings). That faithlessness and criminality of the beast that killed the man and which, behind the persona of Ivo, Kamov talked about in 1907 is completely comparable with Kornfeld's statements in 1918 about the appalling spiritual state of Europe and the world. The idea that the individual and his manifold spirituality is dramatically the most interesting theme, because the whole historical experience of the human race is sifted through the individual, stimulated Kamov to write dramas that could not be accepted in domestic theatrical circles at the time when they were created. Kornfeld insisted on the spiritual renewal of the human race from the individual consciousness that turned into itself and analysed itself, even, when needed, did violence to itself, led by the "ethical instinct". The way that leads a man to himself is the one way to come out of the labyrinth of time. For Kornfeld, as for Kamov, all the group, institutionalized mechanisms of salvation were foreign. Janko Polić privileges the conscience of the soul of the conscience of the law:

Ivo: ... In prayer there is no "morality", for every prayer is unjust. In prayer you say, save me, because I am a sinner. In a prayer for innocence there is no point, no pain, no life. (*Stops for a moment.*) The time comes then when you cannot and will not pray. Like this generation (*waves hand around the room, pointing at the door*

on the left), that is passing. The time comes, when you elevate morality and depress religion and replace the conscience of the soul with the conscience of the law. The tyranny of the father with the rule of the boss — filial love with the duty of the citizen.

If we look once more at those four key sentences spoken by Ivo at the end of Kamov's one act play, we shall notice certain expressionist observations: a) a statement about animalization and the spiritual death of the human race; b) a sharp distinction between internal faith based on spiritual purity and faithlessness (the corruption of political and religious establishments); c) the turning of the subject to himself which is the precondition for spiritual awakening, and hence human crime, a Nietzschean term close to Kornfeld's idea about the tyranny of the individual over himself at the cost of creating a new chaos — a transitional form before the respiritualization of mankind as a whole.

The self-destructive urge of Ivo (and in general all the central characters of Kamov's dramatic oeuvre) gains significance only if we look at it within a poetics that does not separate the ethical from the aesthetic dimension, whose ideal it is to express spirituality dramatically. An excerpt from the one act play *On Native Ground* will bear witness to the power of Polić's proto-expressionism.

IVO: Not important. There was a frightful storm... Look, it's dying down (*He listens.*) Seems that it has dropped....Knocked flat, huddled, curled up like a drunken singer. And then, when it gathers its strength. When it is carried away. When it froths up the great sadist, when it sets its beaten nerves a-playing. And it — the great whoremaster, the sterile stud, the winner of these crags, this hard, stony, beaten skin... When it is carried away. That mane, that rearing, shaken, winnowed, torn up... And hurls itself. Impotent, it kissed and kissed a maiden... And more than that — that other, empty, drawn out, symbolic...

Heaven. Grinds its teeth. It will tear her apart, you think. And then it tears its lips, its very self. Like Leopardi. Is it chortling? There is no laughter in it — roaring, wailing, moaning, cursing. Like the living on the grave of the corpse. ... It is great, human-like, ideal! (emphasis S.P.)

Ivo is, Kornfeldianly put, frenetically obsessed with love and passion. The foam and froth of the great sadist and the enormous whoremaster is the consequence of man's concentration on himself. To be freed, he agrees to be his own tyrant. If we were to move in consistently Kornfeldian categories, then Kamov's one act play would be a dramatic expression of modern spirituality in a state of transition; at the border of two developmental phases, in the no-man's-land between the dramatic space in which psychological man moves and the territory of the spiritual man which opens up on the other side of the border line as a poetic novelty. The modern spirit becomes the battlefield of the struggle between the female and the masculine principle, Anima and Animus, but it is at the same time the confrontation of dynamic and static elements, a polemic between the living and the dead, the travesty of one into the other. The oxymoronic "sterile stud" is appropriate to the state of internal conflict that the author expresses by metaphors of auto-eroticism. Two substances, the stony flesh and hair, one hard and existing like the rock, the other disarrayed and in constant motion like a mane, set up a symbolic relationship. We might recall the analysis of the stylistic choices in the central stage-directions of Kamov's drama, and also the analysis of the elements of painterly narrativity in Grosz's picture, thus seeing the importance that the pairs of static and dynamic, living and dead, male and female have for expressionist artistic utterance. We might ask why the picture of George Grosz bears the abstract noun *Suicide* although there are at least two suicides shown. Why did the author need two corpses? The reason could be compositional, but the

analyzed relation of cold and warm, green for stasis, red for process, has shown that in the picture there are several potential suicides, two spiritual corpses at the very least. The answer to the problem is once again hidden in the zone of expressionist rhetoric which embodies spiritual tendencies within a paradigmatic modern subject, turning the spirit of the subject into the theatre of international events. This is a matter of different illustrations of the same state of the spirit, of the same divided consciousness that carries out violence upon itself. Kamov's great sadist is in fact a great masochist and a great moralist, obsessed with the demon of conscience which is shown in the image of the storm. The conscience of the individual (of the "ideal" representative of humanity) has lorded over itself by self-analysis long enough for it to arrive at a total disintegration, the separation of the inner factors of spirituality, their personification and transformation into *dramatis personae* which are subsequently at play in the space the author has opened up with the assistance of the expanded metaphorical storm. The idea that this rhetorical space is interesting and usable on the stage is typically expressionist. The whole of the dramatic organization of Kamov's one act play is derived from the parallelism of external (in the narrow sense dramatic) and the inner (spiritual) action and is subordinated to the rhythm of gradation. The image of the storm appears at both levels. In the external management of the action it is present in two ways. firstly through the analepsis about the overturning of the train as a result of a powerful wind somewhere abroad:

Once, you remember, when the storm overturned my train. I wrote to you about it.

Then as a background element in the main action, through the sounds that follow the events in the room and the commentary of the characters:

Well, you've come back to your own hearth, to your own storm, to your own bed. Sleep!

The inner action, which the programme of expressionism called spiritual action, and Kamov “the dramatization of a part of one soul” in the letter he wrote to his brother Vladimir from Rome on October 5, 1907, is the real, although not the only stimulus that urged Janko Polić to dramatic writing. At the moment when the author in the stage directions concludes: *And the storm had long since died down. Then the populace gave voice* this is the moment when the spiritual action which, with the symbolic significance of the storm wind, covers the Kornfeldian concept of the demon of conscience, the ethical urge. The culmination of the interior event is there in the stage directions in which there is the confrontation of individual and mass, or perhaps rather the personalized tendencies of dynamic and static, male and female, eros and thanatos. Modern consciousness is in the transitional phase between the psychological and the spiritual man, and Kamov makes a dramatic theme of it and deals with it at the moment when it apparently selfishly retreats into the depths of the individual, contradiction-torn ego. By the creation of a temporary, new chaos, the individual consciousness actually fulfills its ethical purpose, for it manages to create a state of anger which is the intimation of some future, collective awakening for which, in a symbolic sense, the door is wide open. The only question is whether the offer will be used. Kamov’s sensitivity sets up an unexpected kindred with Kranjčević’s cosmic pessimism: opened for a moment, the symbolic door shuts:

That wind... It palliates the dark, the night, the mourning... everything that is dense, deep, blind, everything that is gulped down, defunct, dead.... And it soothes the man that shakes like rubbish in the wind, the living in the frost, blood on the crag... Soothes him, because he whimpers... Because the awakened storm puts him to sleep... Because the sleeping nation has put him to sleep... And he has arisen.. Arisen like a string with a thousand voices in a single tremor... For the wind

has sent him to sleep... He takes his hat, his luggage, his raincoat... And goes out... But because he has left the door of the room open, when he opens the door downstairs, there is a sudden, unlooked for, impatient, angry gust of wind that bangs it violently to. ... As if crying, in anger.

It remains to inquire about the reasons that made the author twice (as can be seen from the excerpts) fasten the attribute “empty” to “symbolic”. The storm is described as “empty, drawn out, symbolic”, and the finger first as “long, drawn out, symbolic”, then as “long, empty, symbolic”. At the level of external events through analepsis we find out that the protagonist lost a part of his thumb in a railway accident in a storm. At the level of inner working the invisible remains invisible in the material sense, but it shows up in the symbolic meaning as an active factor of the spiritual happenings. The part of the finger that is missing is made up, visually actually extending to grotesqueness, first as part of the “invisible, terrible, transparent, empty” hand, and then only as an enormous finger that, once separated from its owner, has turned into an independent, threatening force capable of drawing the main character. It is easier to answer the question why the finger is drawn out than why it is empty. Drawn out not only because it is long (separated from the whole and then grotesquely blown up, not without phallic connotations), but also because it is directly connected with the attribute symbolic. It extends its significance from the concrete to the abstract and is drawn out precisely because it is symbolic. The storm realizes its symbolic function in two phases. Only from the definition “Life is a whoreground” does the metaphorical link between storm and whore become completely transparent. The eros-thanatos principle is there in the ground of Kamov’s interpretation of instinct as the most tempestuous vital energy. But since the power of the opposing life forces is to be shown in the theatre of just the one modern spirit in which Animus comes

into a dramatic debate with Anima, it becomes clear that the symbolic meaning of the storm does not linger on the metaphor of the whore, but because of its link with the definition of human life additionally “draws out” to the Kornfeldian *ethical drive* capable of *awakening* a man, and, from him, the whole of mankind. The oxymoronic links of the debauched virgin and the sterile stud leave a symbolic vacuum in the interspace, sterility as the third term that derives from an unrealizable connection. The symbolic emptiness can be interpreted from the most generalized of ethical premises, as the sterility of human relations, or more narrowly, in accord with the ethical views of the expressionist trend, from the Kornfeldian phrase “empty lives” opposed to the fullness of genuine spirituality. But it is not just a matter of *symbolic emptiness*. It seems that Kamov has wanted, with the doubly repeated coupling of the attribute empty with the attribute symbolic, to say something about the emptiness of symbolism. The grotesquely enlarged finger that waves above the main figure and draws him from the stage bringing Kamov’s one act play to its close is ultimately depleted of all its symbolic fullness and reduced to a pure gesture of demonstration. *On Native Ground* is perhaps the purest example of Croatian dramatic expression which is its own purpose and its own most interesting theme. The expressionist ideal of the interesting action is as it were as a whole derived from stasis, and if the source of it is not precisely at the still point of events, then it is at least in the statement that XY is dead. The spiritual action begins where the dramatic action is supposed to end. Of course, always assuming that XY is “great”, “humanlike” and “ideal”.

Notes:

1 During Kamov’s life he published, at his own expense, only two dramas, in Zagreb in 1907. These were *Tragedija mozgova* (*Tragedy of Brains*), completed on November 29, 1906, in Zagreb, and *Na rodnoj grudi* (*On Native Ground*) completed in Venice, March 11, 1907. These are the

only two of his plays that were performed on the Zagreb stage, put on by the Acting School. *The Tragedy of Brains* was put on in Rijeka, Opatija, and Pula, directed by Leo Tomašić, in 1961 in Osijek directed by Ivan Marton; it was put on by the Split National Theatre directed by 1977 directed by Vlatko Perković. In 1974 Ivica Kunčević amused himself with a "dramatized study" and in 1979 Božidar Vilić too. In 1983 Želimir Mesarić put on the first performance of the tragedy *Mamino srce* (*Mama's Heart*). In 1988 Vlado Vukmirović put on *Iznakaženi* for the first time in Rijeka.

Apart from these two dramas, which were

published during the author's life, Kamov also wrote *Monastery Dramas* in 1907, (generically marked "dramatized studies", including two dramatic wholes, two parts of the study, *Monk's Orgy* and *Virgin*). *Mama's Heart* (tragedy in five acts) was completed in 1910, and there are two lost dramas, *A farce for our times* and *Oh, women, women*. Subsequently an earlier dramatic sketch called *Iznakaženi* was found, dated December 17 and 18, 1904.

2 Kamov, Janko Polić: *Monks' Orgy*, Collected Works of Janko Polić Kamov, III, Rijeka 1980 pp. 113-114.

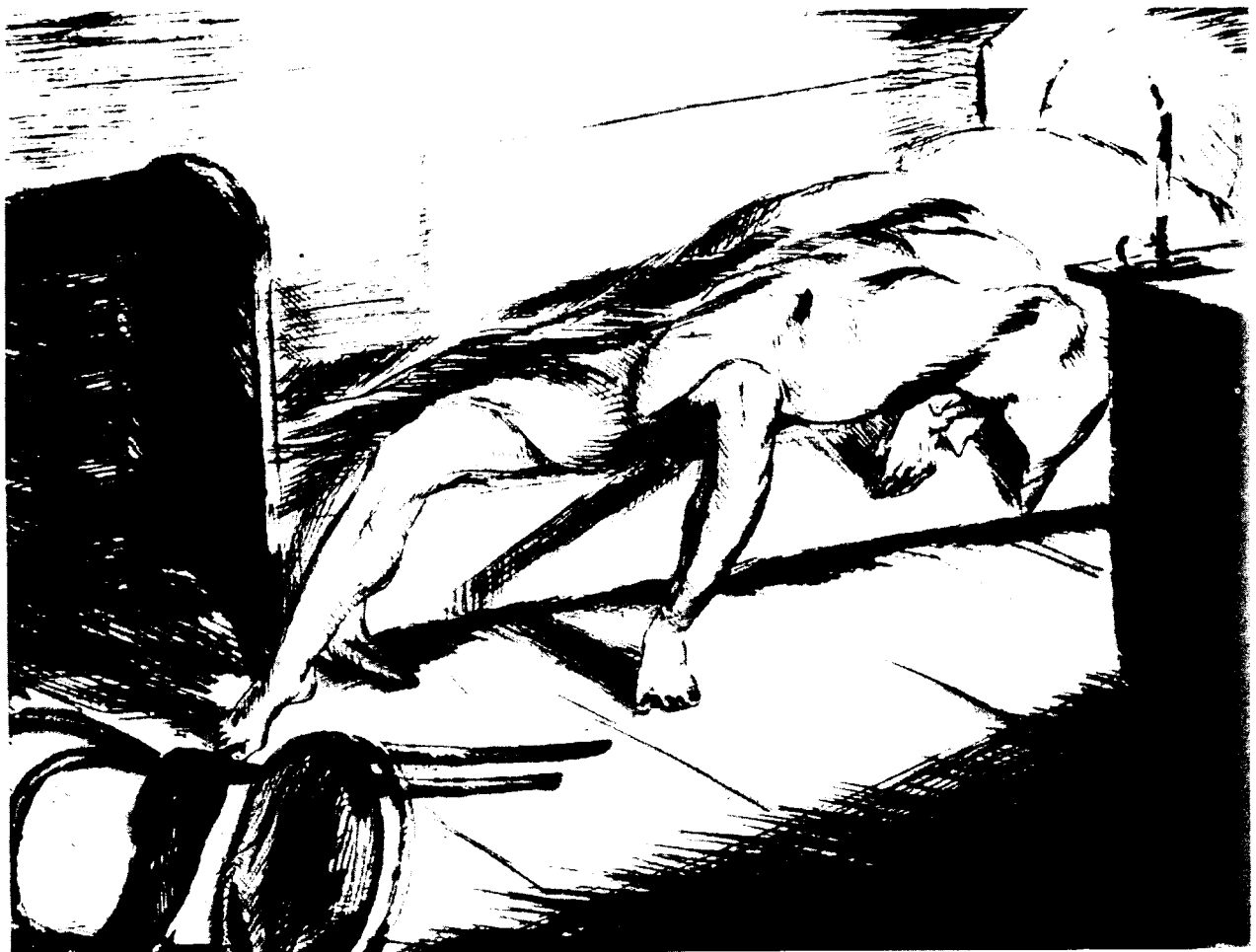
3 CW III, p. 116.

4 From the French translation of the famed

work of Paul Kornfeld, "Der beseelte der psychologische Mensch", "L'homme spirituel e l'homme psychologique," in *L'expressionisme dans le théâtre européen*, ENRS, Paris 1971, p. 353. All terms put in quotation marks mentioned in connection with Kornfeld's programmatic thoughts about the aesthetics of drama and the theatre are Kornfeld's and appear in the same work.

Many of the author's footnotes have been excised for this edition.

*This section translated by
Graham McMaster*



Marijan Trepše: Murder III, 1920