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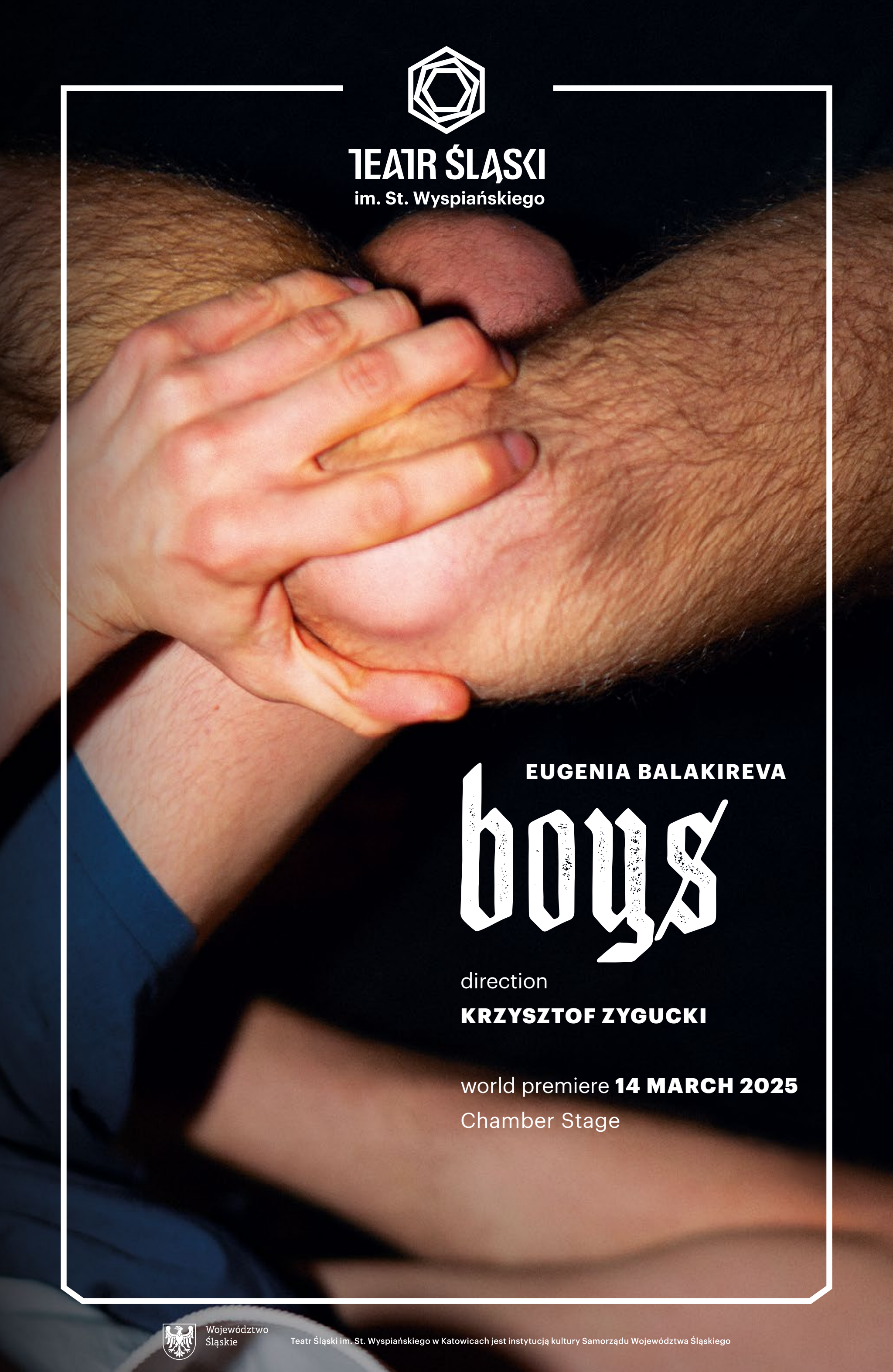

EUGENIA BALAKIREVA

boys

direction

KRZYSZTOF ZYGUCKI

world premiere **14 MARCH 2025**

Chamber Stage

Województwo Śląskie

Teatr Śląski im. St. Wyspiańskiego w Katowicach jest instytucją kultury Samorządu Województwa Śląskiego

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boys

1146th premiere of the Theatre in Katowice

world premiere **14 MARCH 2025** | Chamber Stage

KRZYSZTOF ZYGUCKI
direction

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text and dramaturgy

MAGDALENA KAWECKA
choreography

JOANNA SZCZĘSNOWICZ
music

JERZY BASIURA
set design, costumes
and lighting design

BARBARA DUDEK
assistant director,
stage manager, prompter

MAŁGORZATA DŁUGOWSKA-BŁACH
production manager

MACIEJ ROKITA
technical manager
production

DOROTA DAMEC
production assistant

WALDEMAR JANISZEK
lighting

OSKAR CICHOŃ
sound design

The licence to stage the work was granted by Joanna Szczęsnowicz, Magdalena Kawecka and the ZAiKS Authors' Association.

The performance features the song "Gimme! Gimme! Gimme! (A Man After Midnight)" by ABBA.

CAST

ANNA KADULSKA
Mother/Sister/Neighbour/Shadow from the Underground/
Margaret Thatcher

PAWEŁ KRUSZELNICKI
Mungo

JAN JAKUBIK
James

MACIEJ KAMIŃSKI
Hamish/Gallowgate/Satyr 1/Shepherd 1

MAREK RACHOŃ
Father/Neighbour/St Christopher/Satyr 2/Shepherd 2

Boyhood, or new, better worlds

Boyhood, or new, better worlds

A debut is a significant event for anyone involved in theatre. How does one cope with the challenges that come with it? How does one find an interesting subject, and how does one put together a team? Can women be invited to work on new models of masculinity? Where and in what eras should one look for inspiration? Bartosz Cudak talks to Krzysztof Zygucki, director of the play "Boys", about queer themes, but also about the surprises of institutional theatre, a non-violent working model and the construction of alternative worlds.

You took part in the first edition of the WyspianKiss project, and as the winner of the main prize, you were invited to stage a production at our theatre. "Boys" is your directorial debut. How do you look back on staging the scene sketch at WyspianKiss, and what surprised you about institutional theatre whilst working on the full-scale production?

Taking part in WyspianKiss was a completely new, somewhat difficult experience for me, and therefore a challenge, because I had never worked with an institutional theatre company before. When staging exams at the Theatre Academy, I was used to working with actors I knew or whom I chose myself; I'd meet them beforehand, tell them about the project, and try to convince them to join. Here it was different, because both for WyspianKiss and for the "Boys", I didn't know what sort of people I would meet when I turned up for rehearsals. The very form of the stage sketch, however, wasn't surprising, as I work with similar formats on a daily basis. The Academy teaches you how to efficiently carry out short processes, such as these sketches or performative readings. The lack of time was, of course, stressful, but also motivating and stimulating to creativity. In this context, two months' work on a debut production is surprising, because from a student's perspective it is both a dream and an eternity. Sometimes it seems as though there is so much time that you don't know what to do with it. But it's a

deceptive feeling and it passes quickly, because producing a play is a massive undertaking, which also seriously surprised me at one point. Another novelty for me was coming into contact with the well-oiled machine of institutional theatre. The staff, each in their own area, coordinate the process and help ensure the production moves forward without a hitch. For example, I don't have to worry about coordinating rehearsals, checking the actors' availability or booking the venue, because Basia Dudek, our irreplaceable stage manager, takes care of all that for me. Having her there is a huge comfort and a real help. Basia is simply brilliant!

The concept for the "Boys" was inspired by two books – Douglas Stuart's "Young Mungo" and Jacques de Fontane's "The Beautiful Shepherd". Where did the idea come from to combine a contemporary Scottish coming-of-age story set against a backdrop of violence and the harshness of poverty with a 16th-century French gay pastoral idyll?

"Young Mungo" is a very good, gripping, suspenseful and moving, yet also an extremely difficult novel. It tells of a spiral of violence, poverty, rape, alcoholism, as well as shame and all the difficulties associated with being a non-heteronormative person. I didn't want to focus solely on violence and talk about how awful it is to be gay, because I simply don't agree with such narratives. I tried to find a new language to talk about gay love, which can be hard, but is also beautiful. As the play revolves around masculinity, I read works exploring this category, such as Wojciech Śmieja's "On Masculinity" and all the volumes of "A History of Masculinity". In one of them, I came across Jacques de Fontaine's "The Beautiful Shepherd", who attempted to construct a utopian, idyllic model of a male society. This intriguing project, unknown to the wider public, struck me as the perfect tool for deconstructing Douglas Stuart's world. We also draw on queer, cabaret and ballroom culture, which developed in the US underground between 1960 and 1990, from places brimming with freedom, expression and fantasy, where the traumatic experiences of outsiders were transformed into strength and emancipation. These stories are brilliantly portrayed by Joanna Krakowska in "The Queer Revolution", as well as in the film "Paris Is Burning". We find in them the inspiration to construct a contemporary idyll and the queer relationship between the title characters.

You invited Eugenia Balakireva to write the script. The text of the play is therefore not only inspired by the works mentioned, but also 'written on stage'. How would you describe the creative relationship between you and Zhenya? Do you work together on the whole piece, or do you tend to keep out of each other's way?

I wanted Zhenya not to be merely a playwright for hire, but a co-creator of this process. At the start of the project, I proposed the theme and pointed out the inspirations, and then we came up with the concept for the "Boys" together. I treat this production as our joint project, though I suspect that Zhenya would never have written a text about boyish love had I not invited her to do so. However, I get the impression that she found her own way into this subject and that she discovered moments in our material that were moving and important to her.

Right from the first rehearsal, you emphasised that the agency and comfort of the creators and actors are paramount to you, and that the production is meant to be a collaborative effort. Do these sound ideas, albeit theoretical, hold up in theatrical practice? What advantages and disadvantages do you see in such a working model?

I wanted everyone involved in this process to have a sense of agency and feel empowered, to have the space for their own explorations and suggestions. Theatre is created for satisfaction – not just the director's, but that of all the creators and actors. After all, the latter take to the stage in their own name, so I always want them to find the desire and their own reasons for doing so. Of course, it would be easier if I just turned up at a rehearsal, imposed a theme and directed everyone, but I don't want to work that way. I make no secret of the fact that I am not all-knowing, and for me the theatrical process is also a research project, full of endless puzzles and questions. Can being honest and open be dangerous and turn into a source of discomfort at work? Of course. It can undermine the director's position and their skills, because people won't see them as a demiurge or a leader, but simply as a person who knows as much as they do. Nevertheless, I still believe this is the only correct way to work. An artist who works in a state of crisis and discomfort is not creative, and for me, creativity is inextricably linked to

freedom and security. That is why, at the start of rehearsals, I proposed to everyone involved in the process that we draw up a contract setting out the rules for our collaboration. Admittedly, it currently consists of only two points, as there was no need to create any further ones, but as our first rule we agreed on honest and open communication, and we still stick to that.

Your play moves away from casting gay men as victims; by using fantasy to dismantle a violent system, it highlights the emancipatory power of otherness. In this context, what does the 'boyishness' of the title come to signify? Can boys fight for a better tomorrow without resorting to violence?

Of course – it is possible to fight without fighting, it is possible to free oneself from violence, it is possible to resist without simultaneously hurting others. I believe that violence begets violence, so we should seek ways to resolve problems and conflicts through alternative, non-violent, 'boyish' means. And what is 'boyishness'? It is sensitivity, openness, tenderness, supporting one another, talking about problems, being honest. Boys are ambiguous, queer men who are trying to move away from the violent and patriarchal mechanisms of how the world works, in favour of simplicity, ordinariness, being themselves and not perpetuating stereotypes. They are the men who surround me every day, whom I am not afraid of, and with whom I want to create new, better worlds.


And where's
your ass, sir?

Wojciech Śmieja

And where’s your ass, sir?

Mungo Hamilton, a 15-year-old Scottish teenager, goes on a trip with two men his mother met at an Alcoholics Anonymous meeting. The men take him fishing on a Highland loch to teach him how to be a man. Mungo has no luck in life. In Poland, his family would probably be described with the rather derogatory term ‘degenerates’ [PL: ‘patusy’]. An incompetent and addicted mother, an older brother taking his first steps in a career that will inevitably end with him in prison. Mungo is looked after by his older sister, but the threat of being taken away by social services still hangs over him. Mungo doesn’t fit into this brutal world; he refuses to take part in the fights between Catholics and Protestants, he is repulsed by violence, and his kindness towards everyone might remind one (it reminds me) of Lev Myshkin from Dostoevsky’s “The Idiot”. This kindness seems suspicious: his mother suspects, quite rightly, that her son is gay.

Indeed, one day Mungo meets James, a Catholic boy who lives next door and is keen on pigeon breeding (a hobby well-suited to retired miners). The two become friends and soon begin a romance, the first relationship that will not be marked by violence. For in the world in which Mungo is growing up, violence is omnipresent. It is structural (Thatcherism treats the working class, from which the protagonists hail, ruthlessly), institutional (conflicting churches or football clubs), social, peer-related, familial and, finally, sexual.

Mungo’s mother sends him out fishing with two older men. All over the world, such occasions are an opportunity for fathers and sons to spend time together, for older, experienced men to be with younger ones who are only just learning what it means to be a man. This particular trip, however, has an unpredictable ending. First, Mungo learns that both men have recently been released from prison. The atmosphere grows tense. Whilst out shopping, he calls his mother and asks to go home. To no avail. On the second night, the men get drunk and rape

Mungo. In the aftermath of this incident, Mungo drowns the first of them in the river and stabs the other in self-defence.

Douglas Stuart, author of “Young Mungo” and winner of the Booker Prize for “Shuggie Bain” – which was also very well received in Poland – draws heavily on his own biography in both novels. Like his Mungo, Stuart is gay, the son of a single mother, and comes from a working-class family in Glasgow, where he grew up in the 1990s, when in Britain, as in Poland, the neoliberal direction of economic policy was pushing proud members of the working class into the underclass, with all the social consequences that entailed, turning workers into labourers, into ‘pathology’. And yet it is not economic violence that is most important in Stuart’s story. What matters most is the literal, physical rape committed by two older men against a younger boy.

Stuart himself said in interviews accompanying the premiere of “Young Mungo” that when he was writing the novel, he was interested in the workings of social norms of masculinity, to which, as a gay man and the son raised by a single mother, he had limited access. From today’s perspective, he can speak of his youth without fear and with detachment; after all, his career is so exemplary as to be almost irritating. First the Royal College of Art, fashion design, then a designer flat in New York, marriage to Michael Cary, a figure from the New York art world, and finally a literary debut in which the writer capitalises on his difficult childhood so effectively that he receives the Booker Prize – straight away, without an apprenticeship. All this makes it easy to accuse him of some sort of minority bias, the victims of which in his novel are ‘ordinary blokes’ presented in a distorted light as rapists and violent men.

Consider that a similar mechanism worked brilliantly in the case of Olga Tokarczuk, for instance, who in “The Empusium” (an adaptation of which was staged at the Silesian Theatre not so long ago) took her revenge on patriarchal culture by allowing mysterious empuzes to murder its rather grotesquely depicted representatives. It is easy to portray the writer as a misandrist, simultaneously extreme left-wing, extreme elitist and extreme detached from reality. Such accusations resonated particularly strongly after the Nobel Prize, but in truth they are nothing

new; after all, as early as the 1990s, the literary-critical establishment (which still existed back then) dismissed her writing as 'menstrual literature' or 'literature of moss and ferns'. I am transported back to that decade whilst listening to an interview with Douglas Stuart, who speaks of it as a naive time in which, as a gay man from the provinces, he had no access to any narrative about himself other than a homophobic one, and the political establishment or institutions such as churches remained untouchable, the truths they espoused – unshakeable; minority voices, if they existed, did not reach the provinces.

Allow me, then, to introduce to you Mr Christian Lescole, aged 56, a volunteer firefighter; Mr Nicolas François, a journalist, aged 43; Monsieur Quentin Hennebert, an ambulance driver, aged 34; Monsieur Cédrik Venzin, aged 44, a restaurant manager; Redouan El Farihi, a nurse, aged 55. These are just five gentlemen out of more than seventy whom a certain Dominique Pélicot invited to his home. Ordinary blokes, no pathological fringe elements, no decadent elites. People you pass in the street, exchanging greetings and casual remarks about the nasty weather, politicians stealing, and the children growing up. For several years, the elderly, polite Mr Pélicot invited various men to his home to rape his wife, Gisèle, to whom he had been administering horse-doses of sleeping pills at the time. The long-standing practice was uncovered by chance, and the trial, which began in mid-2023, shocked the whole of France. The evidence gathered by the investigators was overwhelming (Pélicot had documented the sexual abuse committed by his guests). Given the graphic nature of this material, the judge requested – in good faith – that the trial be held in camera. At first glance, we might well agree with him. After all, material so graphic and at the same time so intimate is easy prey for the tabloid media. And yet Gisèle Pélicot, she herself (!), demanded that the proceedings be open, that the public and the media be present in the courtroom, including during the presentation of evidence in which she is shown unconscious and being raped, including anally. I find it hard to imagine the strain she was under when, on 2 September last year, she decided that the hearings would be open to the public. And yet she was right. She decided to reverse the direction of the shame, to expose the full extent of the violence and cruelty she had suffered, and not to accept being victimised a second time in court. For a closed trial would have served, first and foremost, not her, but her tormentors.

It is also worth listening to what she said when the verdict – 50 convicted! – was handed down:

"I speak to you today with deep emotion. This trial has been a very difficult experience, and right now I am thinking above all of my three children, David, Caroline and Florian," she said, adding that she is also "fighting this battle" for her grandchildren, as well as for her daughters-in-law. "I am also thinking of all the other families affected by this tragedy. I am also thinking of the unrecognised victims, whose stories often remain in the shadows. I want you to know that we are fighting the same battle. [...] When I decided to open this trial on 2 September, I wanted society to be able to draw on the debate that took place here. I have never regretted that decision. I now believe in our ability to collectively envision a future in which everyone, both women and men, can live in harmony, mutual respect and understanding."

An unprecedented trial in France reveals how online pornography, male chat rooms, and men's disregard for consent – or their vague understanding of it – fuel rape culture. What is terrifying is not only that Dominique Pélicot, in his own words, arranged for men to rape his wife, but also that he had no difficulty in finding dozens of them to take part. Last year, the French authorities recorded 114,000 victims of sexual violence, including over 25,000 reported rapes. Experts claim, however, that the majority of rapes go unreported due to a lack of tangible evidence: around 80% of women do not press charges (I am referring to French statistics, but it is not difficult to find Polish ones, which are quite similar). Gisèle Pélicot, a mother of three, grandmother and mother-in-law, realised that whilst her case may be exceptional, its scale means it forms part of a certain social landscape on which there is a tacit agreement. She broke this code of silence very effectively. At the end of January, just a few days ago, members of the Assemblée Nationale were presented with a report by women's organisations on the scale of sexual violence in France. The shock is immense, and it is highly likely that, under pressure from public opinion, the French legislature will soon have to amend the legal definition of rape to one that clearly regulates the issue of consent between partners.

72-year-old Pélicot was voted the most influential person of the past year in France.

And here, let me return to the novel “Young Mungo”, on which the play “Boys” is based. Stuart’s story, like that of the aforementioned Olga Tokarczuk, is a minority narrative (even if women make up slightly more than half the population). Until recently, they were completely unheard of; later marginalised; later reviled; and when they entered the cultural mainstream, they are often dismissed as ‘politically correct’, ‘trendy’, ‘left-wing’ (one could probably list a few more epithets).

Pierre Bourdieu, one of the greatest sociologists of the past century, would not have been overly surprised by these reactions. Bourdieu, who authored an excellent study of male domination as a transparent intellectual and social structure – the default ‘hardware’ of our societies – writes of it, among other things, as follows: “The power of the male order stems from the fact that it requires no justification; androcentrism imposes itself as neutral and requiring no discursive legitimisation”. I think that the voices of women and minorities who have entered the mainstream are asking questions about these justifications, and they cannot be dismissed, just as one cannot fail to see that rape, in its transparency, ubiquity and all too frequent impunity, is a pillar of this masculinity.

Is it because I am a white, heterosexual man that I should feel threatened by this? Should I feel uncomfortable or repress these stories from my consciousness? These reactions occur to many people, perhaps men in particular, as a first instinct of defence. Let’s be clear: most of us are not rapists or perpetrators of violence. That is true, yet we often remain unaware of just how deeply our lives are permeated by these elusive structures of violence that minority narratives reveal. Rape and the direct violence associated with it are the paroxysm of this culture, but I am convinced, upon reading a telling scene from Piotr Marecki’s ‘anti-reportage’ entitled “Roadside Poland”, of just how much its less glaring manifestations permeate our everyday lives to a degree that renders them almost invisible. The Kraków-based writer set off ‘across Poland’ along side roads and little-used paths to describe the country beyond the ‘major centres’, with all its charm – peculiar and rather lopsided, if judged from the perspective of prevailing aesthetics. The scene in question takes place in a kebab bar, where a group of local lads pop in

and bump into a ‘stranger’ from the city:

They ask where I’m coming from, so I tell them that from Ziołowy Zakątek [literal meaning ‘Herb Corner’]. They laugh at me, saying I’ve been to Chujowy Zakątek [‘Dick Corner’]. They’re disappointed that I’m driving.

‘You should ride a motorbike,’ they shout over one another.

Among themselves, they talk of nothing but fucking and drinking. I drink this shot with them and listen to who’s had a shag, who’s had a few, who’s going to have a shag and when, and whether it’ll be this weekend. When girls pull up for a kebab, they comment on their arses.

– That one’s a bit flabby.

– That one’s too skinny, but it’ll do in trousers.

They say it out loud – so that both the girls buying the kebabs and their partners can hear these comments.

Finally, they ask me:

– And where’s your girlfriend?

I reply as politely as I can under the circumstances, saying that my fiancée has stayed in Kraków. She has a deadline.

When each of them gets their kebab, they start eating, washing it down with shots [...].

Finally, one of them asks who I voted for. I say the party that had something to say about saving the climate.

‘Oh fuck, a faggot!’ one of them shouted.

I say I’m not a faggot, but I’ve got loads of gay mates. And I’ve even published some faggot books. And that I voted for the climate. [...] The lads aren’t quite sure how to respond. They’ve already eaten their kebabs and had a few drinks. Eventually, they say they all have to go to work in the morning and need to sober up first. A few of them are drivers, after all. They get up and cycle off to the village.

Equality educators often suggest a simple exercise to the groups they work with. They split the group into two halves. Both are given pieces of paper and asked to write down what they associate with a ‘good person’ (one group) and a ‘real man’ (the other group). The listed characteristics are then compared. In fact, there are none that are shared, whilst many can be paired as antonyms. Finally, the group grapples with the question of whether a ‘real man’ can be a ‘good person’. Of course he can, but not in a macho culture that rewards aggression, where he will have to prove his masculinity, most often at the expense of the weaker and the other. In such a culture, the first act of violence is also perpetrated against boys. As the outstanding theorist of Black feminism, bell hooks, writes: “We are constantly told that if men were to start loving, it would lead to the collapse of civilisation, because men who love would not be able to kill on command. But if they were indeed born killers, programmed by biology and predestined to take life, there would be no need for patriarchal socialisation, which turns them into killers. The warrior’s path harms boys and men; it is an arrow that strikes at the very heart of their humanity.”


The queer
proletariat
raises its
head

Tomasz Kaliściak

The queer proletariat raises its head

Society thought nothing of them, treated them as if they had nothing,
but that man had even less
Douglas Stuart

Who hasn't dreamed of a cottage by the lake at least once in their life? Even if it were a rough-and-ready affair, cobbled together from a few planks, with access to a clean lake teeming with fish, over which the song of waterfowl drifts. The 'lake house' is one of the most popular motifs of the imagination, found in art, literature and film. Dozens of examples could be cited. It embodies a desire to escape the hustle and bustle of the world, to return to a lost childhood, to immerse oneself once more in nature from which we have been separated. Contrary to appearances, however, it is not easy to build a house by the lake today. It might seem that nature's gifts are shared by all the inhabitants of the planet; yet, by deifying private property and succumbing to a selfish lust for possession, humanity has carved up the earth like a cake, distributing its slices only amongst a select few members of the privileged class. The shoreline is thus a symbolic dividing line between private property and the public good, between the rich and the poor, between those who possess land and rights, and those who possess nothing at all apart from the value of their own lives and hands to work with. Demarcation, division and isolation form the foundations of the modern world, based on the capitalist pursuit of profit. Mungo, setting off from Glasgow to the loch with two underworld drunks who wanted to 'make' a man of him, experiences for the first time the cleansing power of contact with nature and with himself, as if he had been completely deprived of it before in smog-shrouded Glasgow.

Yet those who experience injustice often replicate it. Finding themselves at the bottom of social hierarchies, they create their own. Their victims are the weakest, the most vulnerable, the different. Most often these are women, 'fags', and also defenceless animals, to which the former are very often reduced.

I would like to write a eulogy to the queer community, the most despised and degraded people ('faggot' remains, after 'Jew', the strongest insult in the lexicon of hate speech), but I fear I would be condemned to a martyr's tale, for I would have to begin with a litany of names – often of teenagers – who have fallen victim to homophobia and transphobia. There is, however, hope that many of these lives, wasted and extinguished senselessly, will not be forgotten.

The word 'queer' shimmers with a multitude of meanings. Old dictionaries trace its long lineage: mysterious, obscure, secretive, dark, suspicious, uncanny, ominous, sick, abnormal, different, cursed, monstrous. It embodied the odium of all evil. Over time, another term joined this list: homosexual. In the panicked imagination of late 19th-century humanity, homosexuality – born in the medical incubators of the time – became inextricably linked with the 'queer', giving voice to homophobia understood as a fear of homosexuality, which was perceived not only as a sin and a crime punishable by imprisonment, but also as a natural anomaly, a deviation from nature. In this way, non-heteronormative people were excluded not only from the human world, but also from nature. They lost their place in the world. Soon, 'queer' took on the weight of an insult: 'faggot' or 'queer' are now common slurs known to every child, even before they understand their meaning. All we know is that no one would want to become one, and every adolescent boy must prove that he is not. In a heteronormative world of men, potentially anyone can be suspect, and this leads to constant drilling to be a man who charges forward like a battering ram, inflicts violence and takes possession. Being a tough and rough man becomes a kind of social mimicry, a mask or a role that men play amongst themselves. To be like the others, to fit in with them and to be careful not to betray any weaknesses. In the brutal world of the working-class estates of Glasgow, Bytom, Wałbrzych and other cities where heavy industry has been shut down, regions afflicted by systemic poverty and unemployment, for many men for whom work was a matter of human dignity,

being tough and resilient also becomes a protective strategy, a kind of school of survival in a world of ruthless exploitation. There are millions of such forgotten ghettos, slums, poverty-stricken towns, and entire pockets of destitution in the world. They rob the good and the wealthy of their sleep, for juvenile crime, violence, smuggling and illegal activities flourish there. Social Darwinism has been taken to absurd extremes here: the struggle for existence and survival overrides all ethics – violence becomes the supreme law of nature, and crime a synonym for dignity and respect in a world of inverted hierarchies. In a capitalist state, the production of misery is a necessary condition for the creation of wealth.

Those who own vast fortunes strive to maintain this unjust order, for they live in constant fear of losing them. In a world dominated by power based on private property, poverty and destitution condemn a person not only to non-existence, but become a reprehensible crime. The lives of the poor and destitute become illegal. Paradoxically, however, only those who have nothing left to lose – for even their dignity has been taken from them – can change the world. Solidarity and cooperation, not rivalry and competition, are the fundamental mechanisms of survival. Poverty restores revolutionary agency. The queer proletariat raises its head and seeks to retell the world to us anew.

As a queer child from a poor working-class family on the remote outskirts of the Zagłębie region, I remember the fear and terror of my parents, who, in the midst of the political transformation of the early 1990s, lost their jobs overnight – jobs that had been their sole source of income. The exploitation they subsequently endured, working long hours for meagre wages, took our parents away from us when we needed them most. The story of my emancipation (and, I believe, that of many others) is, above all, an attempt to rise out of poverty and a challenge to the power that creates it.

At around the same time, mainly in the United States, and somewhat later in Europe too, queer philosophy, theory and practices were taking shape in the humanities and social sciences, growing out of experiences drawn from feminism, as well as gay and lesbian studies, and extending its scope to include related fields of knowledge concerning transsexuality. It challenged entrenched beliefs that the

identities we choose are fixed, unchanging, determined at birth and encoded in our genes. Stemming from emancipatory movements, yet critical of some of their premises, queer theory thus began to describe diverse practices of resisting normative categories that create divisions which discipline societies, subordinating them to various models of political power. Today we know that the construction of identity is mediated not only by culture, language and science, but also, and perhaps above all, by politics and the economic practices integrated with it, in particular capitalism. Queer theory faces far broader challenges today than it did three decades ago.

Today, 'queer' defines a new model of ethics that is sensitive not only to social divisions and exclusion, but also, and perhaps above all, to the model of power that generates and reinforces these divisions, making the world an inhospitable place to live. Global exploitation and the mass plundering of natural resources, as well as discrimination (class, racial, gender-based, etc.), have their roots in neoliberal economies, which have turned the principle of free-market competition into a kind of law of nature. The victims of this system are the weakest beings, though not entirely defenceless. There are many of them, and their strength lies in solidarity and anger, expressed through protest against injustice, exclusion, oppression, exploitation and plundering.

Queer hate speech counters... loving cooperation. Love creates the common good; it opposes the selfish privatisation of life and space. It creates a space that is open and accessible to all. It breaks down divisions and affirms differences. It teaches us how to love those from whom we differ, those we can scarcely even imagine!

It is not without reason that the queer perspective is today linked to the most pressing challenges of environmental ethics. We share one world, and the rivers and lakes, the rain and the air are our common good, which we must learn to share with others who are not human. Those who are different are not an offence against nature, but an integral part of it. Careful observation of the social lives of animals and plants proves that the natural world is far more diverse, richer, changeable and resilient than we might imagine. Queer people, who experience

injustice, are often more attuned to the violence inflicted upon nature. Perhaps we should look for a model of such a queer attitude towards the common good in the story of the life of St Francis, who, according to Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri, challenged official ecclesiastical authority by contrasting it with a joyful life shared with birds, the wind, trees and the moon.

Queer will not save the whole world; it wants to save it.

PROGRAMME

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