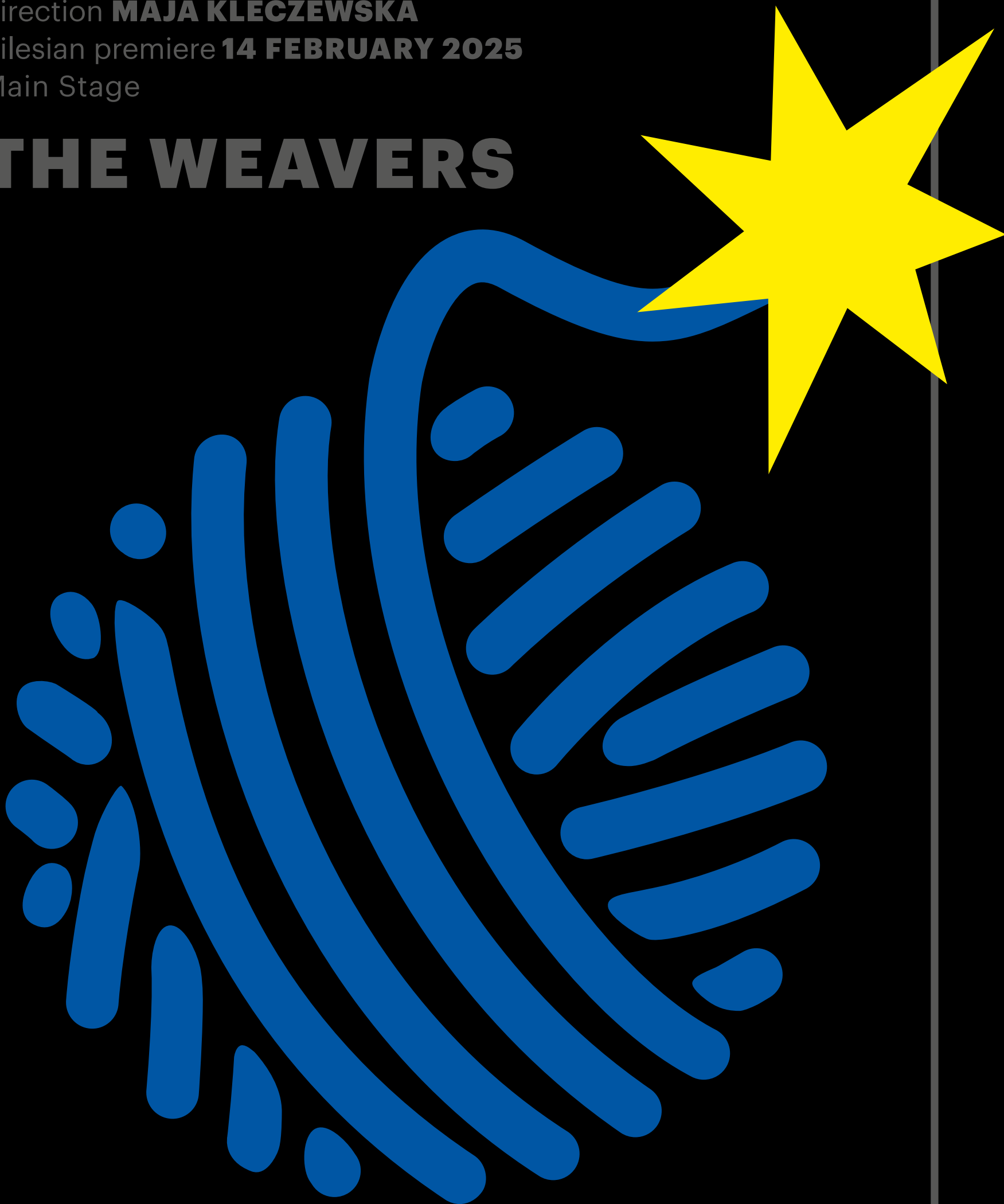




TEATR ŚLĄSKI
im. St. Wyspiańskiego

direction **MAJA KLECZEWSKA**
Silesian premiere **14 FEBRUARY 2025**
Main Stage

THE WEAVERS



GERHART HAUPTMANN
translation
MIROSŁAW SYNIAWA



**RADA
MECENASÓW**
Teatru Śląskiego



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LEX DREWINSKI

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Gerhart Hauptmann

THE WEAVERS

1145th premiere of the Theatre in Katowice

Silesian premiere **14 FEBRUARY 2025** | Main Stage

MAJA KLECZEWSKA

adaptation and direction

MIROSŁAW SYNIAWA

translation

GRZEGORZ NIZIOŁEK

adaptation and dramaturgy

ZBIGNIEW ROKITA

dramaturgical collaboration

JUSTYNA ŁAGOWSKA

set design and lighting design

KONRAD PAROL

costumes

CEZARY DUCHNOWSKI

music

MAĆKO PRUSAK

choreography

**KRZYSZTOF
GARBACZEWSKI**

projections

EWA ZUG

vocal preparation

ZBIGNIEW WRÓBEL

assistant director

**KAROLINA
WIECZOREK**

stage manager

**DAGMARA
HABRYKA-BIAŁAS**

prompter

**MAŁGORZATA
DŁUGOWSKA-BŁACH**

production manager

MACIEJ ROKITA

technical manager production

DOROTA DAMEC

production assistant

LEX DREWINSKI

poster design

**ROBERT PILARCZYK,
TOMASZ MOTYL
(JURA MOUNTAIN
RESCUE GROUP)**

mountaineering safety equipment

TOMASZ PAŁASZ

pyrotechnic effects

**MARIA MACHOWSKA,
SZYMON SUCHON,
PIOTR ROSZCZENKO**

lighting design

**KRZYSZTOF WOŹNIAK,
MATEUSZ MANIEWSKI**

projection design

VALERIIA PRIADKA

subtitling

**MARCIN ŁYCZKOWSKI,
MACIEJ BARANOWSKI**

sound production

**BARTŁOMIEJ SOWA,
ALEKSANDRA
KASPRZYKIEWICZ,
BARTŁOMIEJ
WUSTRAU**

camera operators

The licence to stage the play was issued by Mirosław Syniawa and the ZAiKS Authors' Association.

The script of the performance uses excerpts from Martín Caparrós's "Głód" ["Hunger"] translated by Marta Szafrńska-Brandt (Wydawnictwo Literackie, Kraków 2016).

CAST

NINA BATOVSKA Berta, Anna Welzel

ALEKSANDRA BERNATEK Luiza

KATARZYNA BRZOSKA Mrs Kittelhaus

GRAŻYNA BUŁKA Mother Baumert

PIOTR BUŁKA Wittich

DARIUSZ CHOJNACKI Bäcker

JAKUB FRET Weinhold

MARCIN GAWĘŁ Anton Ansorge

PAWEŁ KEMPA Pfeifer

WIESŁAW KUPCZAK Commercial Traveller

EWA LEŚNIAK Mrs Heinrich

BARBARA LUBOS Mrs Welzel

ARKADIUSZ MACHEL Alojz, a weaver

MICHAŁ PIOTROWSKI Moritz Jäger

GRZEGORZ PRZYBYŁ Robert Baumert

WIESŁAW SŁAWIK Old Hilse

MARCIN SZAFORZ Fritz, Pastor Kittelhaus

KATERYNA VASIUKOVA Mrs Dreissiger

ZBIGNIEW WRÓBEL Kutsche

MATEUSZ ZNANIECKI Dreissiger

and

BORYS and LEON PONIATOWSCY

Markus and Johann Dreissiger

LEONARD DZIUROSZ Józik, the weavers' child

and

DAGMARA HABRYKA-BIAŁAS, MARIUSZ

KONIECZNY, ANDRZEJ KOZAK, SEBASTIAN

KRYSIK, WIOLETA KRYSIK, JOLANTA

MACIASZCZYK, JANUSZ MICHNIK, PIOTR

SOBOTA, PIOTR STANUSZ, JERZY ŚPIEWAKOWSKI,

KAROLINA WIECZOREK, MIROSŁAW WITEK,

ROBERT WITKOWSKI, SEBASTIAN ZASTRÓŻNY

and **ABRA THE DOG**





Time for rebellion,

or three questions for Maja Kleczewska

Gerhart Hauptmann's "The Weavers" has been staged three times in Poland so far: in 1904 in Lviv, in 1968 in Łódź and in 1990 in Wałbrzych, always as a response to turbulent socio-political moods. What is the reason why you are reaching for this timeless text about rebellion and its consequences today?

The initial impulse was the news that "The Weavers" had been translated into Silesian by Mirosław Syniawa. Hauptmann is an author who is absent from Polish theatre, which is a pity, because his plays are naturalistic and require creators to find a theatrical form, which is an interesting challenge. He is a modern, rapacious writer. His play "The Weavers" deals with social inequalities – today's reality is reflected in Hauptmann's drama as if in a mirror. We are approaching a critical moment when, as a result of inflation, people earning the minimum wage will not be able to support their families. For many people, the cheapest fast food is the only hot meal they get during the day. People work, but they already know that their wages are too low to take out a mortgage. Multibillionaires such as Elon Musk and Donald Trump are coming to power, and they make no secret of the fact that their money will give them real influence over world politics. European politics too. Do we agree with this? Is this the world we want? Is it ethical to get rich at the expense of common goods such as clean water and air? Can the state keep the poorest social group in a state of constant deprivation? These questions are pulsating beneath the surface of society today and, like the characters in "The Weavers", we are beginning to feel discontent with these injustices.

This year also marks 20 years of the struggle for the recognition of the Silesian language. By staging Hauptmann's play in a Silesian translation, you are symbolically joining these efforts, while at the same time telling a story about class injustice. Does a regional language have the potential to convey universal meanings?

I don't understand why there is resistance to recognising the Silesian language as a regional language, why Silesians have to fight for it, why it takes so long. I hope that this year the law on the Silesian regional language will come into force, and that the staging of "The Weavers" will contribute to the understanding that it is a language of high culture, into which we can translate world literature. In his drama, Hauptmann describes the local rebellion of the Bielawa weavers using the Silesian dialect of German. He was convinced of the universality of this theme, so he was not afraid to use the language in its regional form. This local uprising later spread throughout Europe and became one of the impulses for the Spring of Nations. A local spark ignites a global fire – factory workers and serfs, who are also tormented by inhuman working conditions, see themselves reflected in the Bielawa weavers. A sense of community gives them the right and strength to rebel, makes them realise that reality can be changed, triggers anger that restores vitality, breaks them out of their lethargy and gives them hope.

Hauptmann's drama has an open ending and does not predetermine the outcome of the revolution, but we know that you do not always stick to the original. In what direction are you leading the weavers' revolt?

The fifth act of "The Weavers" is the moment when the revolution begins. It is an explosion, after which we ask ourselves what happens next. Hauptmann explains nothing, he does not talk about the effects and consequences. There is a need to reformulate values in order to turn rebellion into action and start killing. The radical nature of the revolution is particularly important to me. Old Hilse, the core of the Bielawa weavers' community and the last opponent of the revolution, must die in order for the world to change. Since negotiations have failed, it is time for radical gestures. It is time for rebellion.





Silesian Nobel Prize winner in Silesian,

or three questions for Mirosław Syniawa

You are one of the few people who consistently research and promote the Silesian language. Your achievements include both linguistic works, such as the first Silesian primer, and translations of world literature, including Shakespeare, into the local language. Where did the idea to translate Hauptmann's "The Weavers" into Silesian come from?

Hauptmann was the only Silesian Nobel Prize winner in literature, and "The Weavers" is his most famous work, so it was an obvious choice. The idea was born back in 2005. At the time, I spoke with Tadeusz Bradecki, then director of the Silesian Theatre, about translating the text for him. Unfortunately, it didn't happen then. Later, Piotr Długosz, head of the Silesia Progress publishing house, and I decided that I would translate "The Weavers" for the anniversary of Hauptmann's death or birthday. That didn't work out either. Finally, we managed to publish the drama in Silesian translation last year, on the 180th anniversary of the outbreak of the Silesian weavers' uprising.

Hauptmann wrote "The Weavers" in a Silesian dialect of German that is no longer spoken today. Did you use this original version in your translation work? What was the translation process like, step by step?

I used both the literary original and its stage version. In hindsight, I can say that translating from the original is certainly easier, because in the stage version, the Silesian dialect of German is diluted and weakened. I also looked at other translations, including Czech, Japanese and Scottish, to see how they convey the linguistic structure of the original. The biggest problems for me were idioms, for which I had to find Upper Silesian equivalents, and specialist weaving vocabulary

from those years. Dialectological materials proved useful, such as the monograph “Polish weaving vocabulary in the Slavic context”, weaving dictionaries in five languages from the turn of the 19th and 20th centuries, and a Silesian dictionary from the 1960s. I must admit that every dictionary is very helpful at first glance, but in practice it is a source of much frustration. However, my translation work took on a new dimension with my theatre adventure, where I provide language consultation to creators and actors. In many places in the play, the actors and I changed the words to make them more contemporary for them, in order to increase the authenticity of the message. In my opinion, spoken language does not have to be identical to literary language.

The subject of Hauptmann’s drama is the uprising of Silesian weavers from the Owl Mountains region. The author shows in a very naturalistic way the problem of economic inequality, which leads to social rebellion. To what extent can a story from the end of the 19th century be relevant today? Do you see any analogies between “The Weavers” and today’s reality?

I think this play is relevant in every era, especially today. After all, it shows an unchanging picture of the world and the social processes taking place in it: poverty, rebellion and hope. Here in Silesia, it takes on a whole new dimension. We all remember the successive attempts to restructure the mining industry, which each time ended in layoffs and increasing poverty. I think that many people can still see themselves in this story.



Zbigniew Kadłubek

Penelope mechanised, without lipstick

Nothing has ever been done in such a way that someone else hasn't done it first.

John Stuart Mill

But it is so, ladies and gentlemen, that we, simple weavers, as is well known, do not have extensive knowledge, we do not know the secrets of eloquence and we are unable to portray ourselves in an ornate manner. We weave every day and our tongues get tangled from this weaving, our words get tangled, our lives get tangled, this bloody sheet. Ladies and gentlemen, listen to this: There was a famous weaver long ago. Her name was Penelope, she was from Ithaca and she had a loom. Ithaca is not in Silesia, but on the Ionian Sea. Penelope got used to waiting, they said, she was a patient woman. She passed the time weaving, much like us, only we seem to have less time than Penelope, because we have no money, we have to make do with what we have (Quargschiite). What Penelope wove became a wistful texture, as if a map of days gone by and nostalgia. Or a love letter to Odysseus. Silesia, similar to Penelope in its persistent precision, in its madness of immobility, still waits at the looms; it weaves itself a great shroud.

This Silesia, seeming to many a sluggish, loathsome, sleepy land, was very similar to her, to this Penelope, working on the realisation of something as hopeless as her husband's return from war. Weaving is life in another dimension. Threadseconds mean nothing. But Silesia patiently wove, waited, bowed, bowed lower and lower, welcomed guests, intruders, wanderers, penny-pinchers, without being picky. Both Penelope and Silesia duly respected, honoured and revered the sacred law of hospitality. They opened their arms wide, took them in, called out: *Herzlich willkommen, mōmy wōs sam radzi*, uttering these polite phrases naively and sincerely, and returned to work, Silesia and Penelope, to the craft of weaving, digging, mining or other activities, trembling. This Silesian mixture of hospitality



and childishness (as a privilege of the Immaculate) has always delighted travellers and researchers who happened to reach this sinless corner of Europe. “We give you a clean canvas,” some imaginary Silesians I am telling you about might say, “snow-white, ready to be written on, painted over. We are a tabula rasa for you.”

Gerhart Hauptmann was a Silesian and the grandson of a weaver. His dramatic works were honoured three times with the Grillparzer Prize, and also with the Nobel Prize in Literature. Not long after writing “The Weavers”, perhaps ten years, Hauptmann began publishing a novel in instalments, which would later be titled “The Fool in Christ, Emanuel Quint: A Novel” (it was published as a book in 1910). It is a difficult parable to read, a deception. Professor Frank Wedekind reportedly stated that only a professor of literature could get through this prose to the end. Maybe so – or maybe not. Who knows what professors of literature read¹. One thing is certain, if “The Weavers” try to shout in unison: “Hey, machine world, wake up! World, don’t be so unfair!”, the bizarre Christ-like orator Quint speaks alone, on the sidelines. Quint preaches to no one, he preaches to the wilderness. Perhaps only some towering mountains could listen to the voice of reason, some

¹ P. Knapik, Afterword, in: G. Hauptmann, *Szaleniec boży Emanuel Quint. Atlantyda* [The Fool in Christ, Emanuel Quint: A Novel. Atlantis], selected and edited by P. Knapik, Wrocław 1997, p. 544.

icy Alps? Perhaps sobriety will come from the harshest of nature. Will the ridges and granite of the defeated, inspired Quint understand him, will only they take him seriously? And there, on the rocks, Quint dies.

Hauptmann seems to present two models of revolution: collective and solitary, Marxist and mystical. The story of Emanuel Quint is a different model of revolution than the one we know from "The Weavers". Every revolution needs a miracle. There are no miracles without faith. Emanuel Quint and the weavers of Pieszyce speak of the same difficult situation of a man who has only his hands to work with. Hauptmann admonishes employers in two different ways, with great and, unfortunately, vain hope that someone will take it to heart. I no longer believe Heidegger, I no longer believe anyone who says that technology and lack of meditation are the same thing. That is nonsense. On the contrary: when the cycle of the seasons is replaced by the spiral of the market, when the boundless sky is replaced by graphs, it is with redoubled curiosity, not at all metaphysical, that questions about being are asked; the weaver expelled from the agrarian farmstead asks – who am I? Who am I in the world of technology? What is this machine that is better than me in everything? What is the plan? Why is the system of which my life is a part completely opaque, while a cardiogram is completely legible?

Ladies and gentlemen, please note that "The Weavers" is not a theatrical, noble monument, regardless of the languages we use here. "The Weavers" is the song of songs of the Silesian rebellion. In every rebellion, as an act of critical enlightenment, one sets off with a brisk step and a song on one's lips towards forks and crossroads. And there are signposts there. One says: Towards autocracy: Green Housing Estate We Are Here – and the other: Towards servitude (Controllable People Avenue). The point is not to recognise ourselves virtuously and lovingly in sentimental Silesianism, whatever the abstract term "Silesianism" that I have used and that you abuse might mean, but to meet in friendly disobedience and proud disagreement. Believe me, rebellion is not necessary to bring about a revolution. Revolution is already in every drop of our blood as citizens. We do not want to be feared, we demand respect, sisters and brothers, we want respect! Immanuel Kant tells us that in order to act in an enlightened manner, we must go



out. Enlightenment is Ausgang, exodus, leaving behind what we knew, what we did, what we thought, what we, what we, what we... Michel Foucault supports our project. I suspect that Foucault would also agree with the second thesis, the original and autonomous thesis of Silesian weavers, or indeed of all Silesians, that enlightenment and independence are “the strength to stand up for oneself”.

Ladies and gentlemen, let us not be under any illusions. The march of angry textile workers, which fills us with pride, the way of our weavers, is nevertheless a funeral procession. It is a sad procession of disappointed, helpless people. They are going to lay to rest their closest brother, whose name was Rhythm of Nature. After his death, a state of emergency of the Iron Age will begin throughout the world – the seasons will be counted in hours of work, forest glades in square metres. In the Owl Mountains, too, everything will be measured and quantified; surveyors have lifted the veil from the Bielawica River, which flows so kindly. Henryk Waniek taught me about the Owl Mountains: Eulengebirge as the mystery of existence. That is how I understood the subject. The Dzierżoniów County is not a miracle of mountain tourist attractions. I cannot explain the beauty and personal affinity I feel with the Owl Mountains (My Own Mountains). These are low hills that still whisper the echoes of weavers’ conversations, hour after hour after hour. I heard it with my own ears in the weavers’ house, where Marek Janicki took me

(this magical place is now called Dworek Mniszków).

In 1788, a year before the French Revolution, a powerful revolution had already begun in Silesia. In 1788, in January to be precise, a steam engine began to whistle and hiss in Tarnowskie Góry. It was a great event. In that year, 1788, as if in defiance of the clatter of the steam engine, Joseph von Eichendorff, a poet who wrote rhymes about forests and Silesian idylls, was born in Łubowice. And in distant Riga, Immanuel Kant published a work devoted to enlightened action, namely “Critique of Practical Reason”, which primarily discusses how man enters reality *durch die Tat* (through action). In the second half of the 18th century, when nature began to be destroyed on an unprecedented scale, people in Europe longed for a return to the pristine state of nature. “Adam Smith, like everyone else, started from nature. He also claimed that it was enough for man to submit to the Code of Nature. Only in his case, the Code of Nature spoke a different language. Work became the highest value. The noise of the weaving mill was already resounding; the basic unit was no longer the family, but the factory.”² The expansion of the family to include the manufactory, and later the factory, had a wonderful social effect in Silesia. Silesian pedigree identities are woven from thin threads.

Ladies and gentlemen, I understand, of course, that we may not all identify with the characters in “The Weavers”. The Silesians from Hauptmann’s play and today’s Silesians are completely different tribes. The only thing we would have in common is the same place of residence, real or somewhat imagined Silesia, as well as our feelings and emotions. To make it clearer, I will use an example from Hegel’s book. The event took place on 17 March 1804 in Jena. Hegel presents an interesting and noteworthy reaction of the Swiss to the staging of *Wilhelm Tell* by Friedrich Schiller, a drama that is, after all, quintessentially Swiss: “They did not like the play. Although Schiller put so much effort into depicting everything in detail,

² P. Hazard, *Myśl europejska w XVIII wieku. Od Monteskiusza do Lessinga* [European Thought in the 18th Century. From Montesquieu to Lessing], trans. H. Suwała, with an introduction by S. Pietraszko, Warsaw 1972, p. 334.



the Swiss did not find any truly noble Swiss characters in it.”³ Did Hauptmann fail to show the Silesians on stage? The most significant ones? In theatre, which exists to change our opinions, we have the right to individuality. Silesia – perhaps it is a singular matter altogether. It is futile to write it out for voices!

Silesia, whatever it was or will be in your reasonable minds, ladies and gentlemen, is a great beast, a body made of many bodies, a roar made of roars, pressure, battle, storm and struggle. Let us give shape to this enormous body, for example, striking, bristling weavers. Let us give it the shape of angry miners. Or, let it become a bald slag heap. Let it be the entrails of Bierawka dragged out from the bowels of the earth. Let it shimmer, let it writhe; let it stink of Silesian rubbish. Or let it be a procession, this beast I keep talking about, of surprised, incredulous, later saddened people, their faces black with grief. The developer took away their park for the glory of Rousseau and paradise in Katowice. I take no responsibility for the anger of the Silesian giant. Let him do what he wants, for the time for negotiations is irretrievably gone. The Silesian fabric, Penelope’s beautifully woven work, is torn. The hour of reckoning has come. “Come on! Quickly! Everyone! To Franconia!”⁴ To Bielawa, to Katowice, to the Silesian Theatre!

³ G.W.F. Hegel, *Filozofia sztuki albo estetyka. Wykłady z semestru letniego 1826 roku w transkrypcji Friedricha Carla Hermanna Victora von Kehlera* [Philosophy of Art or Aesthetics. Lectures from the summer semester of 1826, transcribed by Friedrich Carl Hermann Victor von Kehler], trans. M. Pańków, Warsaw 2020, p. 83.

⁴ F. Schiller, *Zbójcy* [The Robbers], trans. F. Konopka, Warsaw 1986, p. 136.



Dariusz Zalega

“Without their labour, the earth yields none of its riches...”

It was a different world. A world of drudgery, eternal poverty, and the arrogance of local lords – the decision-makers of life and death for the people who depended on them. Barely two centuries ago. The world of Silesian weavers.

1844

“I don’t care if she dies of hunger at the loom or in the barn,” said the weaver Bäcker bitterly in Gerhart Hauptmann’s poem. Mrs Heinrich echoed him: “You try as hard as you can, you work until you drop. It’s already more dead than alive, and yet nothing has changed. Nine hungry mouths need to be fed. But with what?”

“In the mid-1840s, as the misery of the masses grew, a wave of riots and violence rose. These were hunger uprisings, erupting without plan or purpose, acts of black despair that could not lead to anything and did not lead to anything except the destruction of their leaders and participants. For the Christian state had two kinds of arguments in response to the cry for bread: firstly, infantry, cavalry and artillery, and secondly, hard labour, imprisonment and flogging (...) The largest of these hunger uprisings broke out in June 1844 in the Silesian villages of Peterswaldau and Langenbielau, inhabited by weavers, at the foot of the Owl Mountains”. This was written by Franz Mehring, a historian close to the rebellious workers, who was born barely two years after the events described.



At that time, the Sudeten Foothills were one of the centres of weaving in Prussia. There were no factories as we know them today. The system of small manufacturing dominated, and above all, subcontracting, or rather self-employment. The entrepreneur provided materials on credit, the whole family wove, and then gave him their product. However, at that time, the world was already flooded with mechanised English textile production. Unlike a weaver, a machine does not need to eat... Rebellions of desperate workers protesting against the machines that were taking their jobs began to sweep across Europe – from the English Luddites to the participants of the Canuts rebellion, i.e. the weavers in Lyon. In 1844, as a result of the crisis in textile sales, mass layoffs began in the textile industry in Lower Silesia, and wages were drastically reduced. On 4 June of that year, one of the demonstrators gathered outside a factory owned by a certain Zwangiger in Peterswaldau (now Pieszyce) was arrested. Discontent grew, and a desperate crowd vandalised several houses belonging to local factory owners. A day later, riots broke out in Langenbielau (Bielawa), the house of local prominent figure Friedrich Dierig was burned down, and the Hillbert and Andretzki factories were also damaged. However, as the journalist Wilhelm Wolff pointed out at the time, “it should be emphasised that during those three days of riots, there were no personal attacks or physical injuries to factory owners, no fires were set, and bakeries, which were not particularly popular, were completely spared”. The

first Prussian army units arrived on the scene and began to pacify the situation. A day later, on 6 June, it was all over. The use of “state force” led to the deaths of 12 people and a hundred were injured. The courts began their work, handing down harsh sentences.

However, similar social unrest was taking place throughout Germany and Europe in general at that time. Why did the rebellion of the Silesian weavers remain so strongly in the public consciousness?

A certain answer is provided by the words of the manufacturer Dreissiger from Hauptmann’s poem: “Of course [the weavers] were patient and obedient, of course they were polite and decent before. That is, as long as everyone, intoxicated by humanitarianism, kept their distance from them. After all, these people had been told long enough how terrible their poverty was. [...] In the end, the weaver believes it and goes crazy from it.” In a nutshell, if no one had told the weavers that they were living in poverty, they would not have known it themselves – and would have continued to kiss their masters’ hands.

However, a new phenomenon emerged among democratically minded circles in divided Germany: public opinion. The press revolution was taking root ever deeper in society. This made it easier for the weavers’ rebellion to gain mass support. And Wolff’s correspondence from the Owl Mountains reached his friends: Marx and Engels.

Wolff recalled the period after the suppression of the rebellion: “During a short trip I took on 7 June, I heard everywhere in the villages and towns that the weavers were right, that everyone should do the same, that only then would everything change. I heard statements full of threats against the big factory owners, against the nobility and landowners.”

Mehring recognised the futility and desperation of the weavers’ rebellion, but emphasised that “it was a clear sign that the masses were beginning to realise their right to a human existence”.



A song by Silesian weavers, set to the melody of the folk song “W Austrii zamek piękny stoi” (“There is a beautiful castle in Austria”), began to circulate throughout Europe. It became a kind of “Marseillaise” for the poor and rebels of the time.

*Each of you is a devilish foetus
and a devilish tool.
May a curse for our hunger
be your reward.*

As Marx wrote, this song “expresses in an apt, sharp, violent and ruthless way hostility towards a system based on private property”.

The song itself and the history of the weavers’ uprising were part of the imagery of the emerging working-class counterculture. They were propagated by events that took place four years later – the Spring of Nations in 1848. Throughout Europe, there were riots in cities and peasant uprisings. During the riots in Bytom, workers were noticed participating in them for the first time. It was also the first time that Silesian peasants were elected to parliaments: the All-German Parliament in Frankfurt and the Prussian Parliament in Berlin. The Olesno Landrat Schemmel wrote at the time about “the great demoralisation and debauchery of the people

and their descent into open resistance against authority and the law". A new giant was awakening, one that would shake the social system not only in Germany, and one of its predecessors was precisely the rebellious weavers.

1870

Just as the weavers' rebellion had a wide resonance, so did another great explosion in the region more than two decades later. However, the descendants of the weaver Bäcker went underground to mine black gold. "And since [the workers] wanted to earn a few more pennies, they had to speak the same language as the owners, or use a new word that had just been coined – strike – which proved to the barefoot workers that without their labour, the earth would yield none of its riches," as Horst Bienek vividly wrote.

However, the editors of the Silesian newspaper *Katolik* ("The Catholic") warned: "To stop work, as long as you behave calmly, is not reprehensible; it is called a 'strike'. But we do not advise workers to use this measure, because it rarely succeeded in England and America, and it would be even less successful here".

From 1 December 1869 to 24 January 1870, several thousand miners went on strike in the Wałbrzych Basin. It was the first mass strike in the whole of Germany. However, the days of spontaneous rebellions, such as in Pieszyce, were already a thing of the past. This time, the protesting workers were organised within trade unions. They lost: they failed to secure pay rises and improved working conditions.

"The protracted struggle near Waldenburg [Wałbrzych] had long-term consequences for Silesia. Miners' wages set the standard for other professions. When the miners' resistance was broken, the wages and working conditions of thousands of other Silesian workers were condemned to remain well below their potential," according to Richard W. Reichard, author of a work on the history of strikes in Germany. However, this experience also had an impact on Upper Silesia. As early as October 1869, the first trade union cell was established at the König mine in Królewska Huta, with over two hundred miners signing up. After the outbreak of the Wałbrzych strike, the mine management even began distributing a



pamphlet in the form of a letter from a supposed Upper Silesian miner condemning the strike. However, this did not work. For the first time in history, workers in Upper Silesia organised a collection for striking miners from the neighbouring mining area. In 1871, the first major workers' revolt in the region took place at the aforementioned mine. As historian Dariusz Łukasiewicz wrote, "on the wave of progress and rapid change, the mindset of the workers changed; they became convinced that it was possible to change their situation and were less and less willing to accept poverty and inequality". The successors of the weavers were now able to organise themselves...

1892

On 3 March 1892, the Berlin police presidium banned the staging of Gerhart Hauptmann's latest play on the official stage. His "The Weavers", perceived as harsh social criticism, caused a real earthquake. A year later, however, the ban was lifted for serious reasons. At that time, Chancellor Bismarck's anti-socialist laws, which he had used as a stick in his fight against organising workers, were abolished – and social insurance was introduced as a carrot.

In the pages of *Katolik* magazine, Karol Miarka warned: "Socialists are enemies of the state because they do not want any authority over themselves, they want everyone to be equal, and this is contrary to the will of God, who wants there to be lower and higher, rich and poor, rulers and subjects." However, even in Upper Silesia, which seemed to be conservative, this began to change.

The great strike of Upper Silesian miners in 1889 was bluntly described by the *Schlesische Zeitung* as "Revolte – Rothe Fahne" ("Revolt – Red Banner"). A year later, the *Arbeiter-Verein für Ratibor und Umgegend* (Workers' Union for Racibórz and the Surrounding Area) was established, and in 1898, despite fierce opposition from the authorities and the church, Social Democratic candidates won a third of the votes in the heart of industrial Silesia. And in this world of working-class counterculture, more amateur theatres began to stage "The Weavers". They could relate to Jäger's words from the play: "If only we could get together, we would give the factory owners such a hard time... We wouldn't need any king or any region, we could just say: we want this and that, and we don't want this and that. And immediately things would start to change. When they see that we have power, they'll be so scared that they'll just disappear."

What if the world of Silesian weavers is not so different from the one we know? It's just described in different words...





The City of Poverty

Is it possible to overlook the existence of the largest city in Poland? How can you explain that you haven't noticed it – the rush of life, responsibilities? Its streets intersect with our routes to work and shopping; its buildings obscure our favourite views. However, we turn our eyes away from it because unknown things frighten us. Or maybe we only see what concerns us, and until we are forced to move there, it will not become a real phenomenon for us. The more we hide its existence, the faster it grows. This city is fuelled by our indifference.

The last census brought a surprising conclusion. Nearly 2.5 million people in Poland declared “Biedańsk” (“The Poor’s Town”) as their place of residence. What do we know about it? Who are its inhabitants, do they have anything in common? Is life there different from what we know? These questions demand answers that neither historians, geographers, sociologists, urban planners nor researchers of future city development have been able to provide so far. There are as many theories as there are experts. In order to be able to say anything about this city, you have to feel it deeply. That is why we decided to meet people who have this experience.

At first glance, Biedańsk does not differ from the cities we know. It is perhaps a little paler, colourless, apathetic, hidden behind a slowly descending fog. The first encounter with it gives the impression of meeting a tired person who, due to a lack of strength, even finds the air resistant. The buildings in Biedańsk are generally grey, which fits in with the current minimalist fashion. This colour harmonises perfectly with every other colour, which is particularly beautiful in autumn when combined with the burning colours of the trees. Many Instagram creators would find the perfect setting for their photos here, all they need to do is apply a good filter to mask any imperfections. It is worse in winter, but then the pastel-coloured houses come to the fore. The subdued colour palette is maintained by the passage of time, which repaints the formerly yellow plaster of the tenement



houses in cream, orange in peach, and green in pea and mint. Unfortunately, it also shatters windows, warps window seals and punctures roofs. The streets and parks have their patrons, and the squares and monuments honour causes important to the residents.

Biedańsk is bustling with life, albeit a forced one. Early in the morning, some people return from work, while others go to work. For most of them, it is one and the same route, because they earn extra money in several places. However, the most demanding employer here is the Household – a company with full responsibility. Everyone who cares for the elderly, children and the sick in the comfort of their own homes without remuneration knows this. They receive their payment in gratitude. It may not be suitable for soup, but it satisfies the heart.

The people of Biedańszczyzna (“The Poor’s Country”) are very resourceful, they have to be. The most useful qualities in the local labour market are flexibility and multitasking. Thanks to this, each season brings them new jobs. Seasonality does not allow for stagnation. In summer, they work in orchards, in autumn in small trade, and in winter in recycling. The most respected profession here is that of a handyman, useful all year round. Education in Biedańsk rarely ends with a secondary school leaving certificate. Instead of going to university, young people go



straight to the school of life so as not to be a burden on their families. The town has prepared vocational courses and training at the University of Resourcefulness for them.

Biedańsk is a real reserve of dying professions. You will no longer find a hatter, knitter, leatherworker, watchmaker or stove fitter in many other places. The master-apprentice relationship, which is rare in other academic centres, is cultivated here. Thanks to this approach, young people can learn their trade from practitioners. The Interdepartmental Individual Self-Study Programme also opens its doors to the most talented students, where they can acquire skills in various fields and obtain the aforementioned title of Handyman. The survival course “How to make ends meet” is also very popular. As part of this seminar, the participants themselves become lecturers, sharing their experiences. In Biedańsk, age is no barrier to further education. The oldest students are over 90, while the youngest are not even 15. Recruitment is ongoing here, because you never know when life will present you with a new challenge.

Cultural life in Biedańsk at the institutional level is virtually non-existent. The development of the town has been dominated by a practical approach. Having free time is a form of relaxation in itself, which residents mainly use to spend time with their loved ones, if they have any. They usually pursue their passions at home. To this end, they can use the town library or crossword puzzle rental service. Single people also like to visit former community centres, which now serve mainly as common rooms and warming centres. For them, every person they meet here is a gift and a work of art, and the creative process is what they can do together. Small handicrafts, greeting cards, homemade preserves, decorations, bouquets, Christmas decorations made of tissue paper, crepe paper and straw. Upcycling and neighbourhood repair cafés reign supreme here. Expired warranties or expiry dates are catalysts for extraordinary creativity.

The city’s sports facilities are also noteworthy. Despite the lack of roofing, “Orlik” sports fields and neighbourhood pitches are open all year round, regardless of weather conditions, which is a nationwide phenomenon. Each facility of this type has a secret hole in the fence, in addition to the official entrance,



through which you can access the playing field. This innovative solution allows the youngest residents to escape from their difficult everyday lives at any time. The local sports club Nadzieja Biedańsk [“Hope Biedańsk”] is a dream factory where children can devote themselves to planning their sporting careers. Their determination to achieve their goals is evidenced by the worn soles of their trainers and patched-up balls. If only a talent scout were to appear here, they would find players ready to compete regardless of the odds. Life has taught them to deal with foul play. The simple phrase “you can do it” fuels them to overcome the obstacles that accumulate. Unfortunately, it only works until you have to break through the glass ceiling. In Biedańsk, this is impossible. Dreams end there, and head-hunters don’t come here.

Adults rarely engage in sports activities. Unless you consider the physical labour performed by the vast majority to be a sport. The main discipline practised here is self-discipline. Making life plans in such unfavourable conditions deserves to be called a competitive sport.

According to data from the Central Statistical Office, the community of Biedańsk had a population of almost 2.5 million in 2023, which represents 6.6% of the population of Poland and 140% of the population of Warsaw. Among them, more

than half a million are children and about 400,000 are seniors. Biedańsk is therefore one of the few places in Poland where the population growth was positive last year. However, this result is influenced by migration – in 2023, the population of Biedańsk increased by 47%. The last time Biedańsk had this many inhabitants was in 2015. These are often newcomers who, for various reasons, come to the city temporarily but stay for longer. Some stay forever.

Although these figures are impressive, it is difficult to say that the city is “developing” and “proud” of its results. The residents of Biedańsk are people experiencing extreme poverty in Poland. Each new tenant has a story of extreme poverty, hopelessness and exclusion.

Poverty scattered throughout Poland is not conspicuous; it can be overlooked in the form of a single person on the street. However, when we walk a kilometre, it turns out that we are slaloming. This is why Biedańsk was created – to highlight a problem that can no longer be ignored. We should not accept a world in which almost 2,500,000 people can disappear from view.

The poor living in various localities carry the truth about the existence of this city in their lives. Few of them are affected by only one dimension of poverty. They fall on them in a cascade, accumulate and loop. Loss of health, loss of work, unpaid bills, lack of food – which of these problems would you solve first if you were faced with all of them at once? You get sick, you lose your job, you don't get treatment, you don't eat, you don't get better, you don't earn money. Is there such a thing as respite care from life? To swap places for a moment with someone who doesn't have to worry about everything and sleeps the night in a warm bed.

Indifference contributes to the expansion and continuation of poverty. However, we can counteract this process with our awareness. Every single changed story of a person in need is a gradual dismantling of the city of poverty.

The excerpt comes from the “Raport o biedzie 2024. Biedańsk” [“Poverty Report 2024. Biedańsk”] published by Szlachetna Paczka association. The publication is available at: <https://www.szlachetnapaczka.pl/raport-o-biedzie/>, accessed on 31 January 2025.



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