

*“Ledwosz, where is the key?”,
or people and animals
in Iwona Siekierzyńska’s
short student film “Missy”*

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Iwona Siekierzyńska school film *Missy* takes up the theme of a girl’s unfulfilled love for a priest. Her dog named Ledwosz not only accompanies her in the experience of encountering the man in cassock, while his anointing of a sick neighbor, but also triggers the situation that caused her infatuation. This brief and accidental contact with the priest turns out to be a breakthrough experience for the teenage girl looking for love and attention. It means her entering the adult world in which it is easy to miss a crucial moment, or hurt somebody’s feelings quite unconsciously. The young girl’s experience of the brief encounter will remain in her forever. The relation between the female character and her dog from the short film was the inspiration to consider the similarities between *Missy* and *Three Colors: Red*, by Krzysztof Kieślowski, who was the artistic supervisor of Siekierzyńska’s film. In both films it is a dog that initiates the process resulting in metaphysical experience for the main characters.

KEYWORDS: Iwona Siekierzyńska, Krzysztof Kieślowski, *Missy*, *Three Colours: Red*, Lodz Film School, school movie, artistic supervisor, animals, dog, Student Academy Award, Sylwia Karczmarczyk, girl, priest, growing up, love, loneliness, anointing of the sick, spirituality, sacrum

“(…) O Lord, thou preservest man and beast”^[1]

The student film *Missy (Pańcia, 1995)* by Iwona Siekierzyńska is worthy of special attention for many reasons. I would like to take a look at what distinguishes *Missy* and why it is worth remembering and returning to. However, in spite of the requirements of a typical filmographic analysis, I do not intend to start by stressing the strictly cinematic values of *Missy* but with circumstances related to this work which can only indirectly be considered the merits of the film’s author. My aim will be to outline the background to the creation and reception of this student film.

One of the reasons for the special treatment of this student film (by myself, as well as by reviewers and the media) is its artistic supervisor, Krzysztof Kieślowski, who performed this role for only three short

[1] Original quote from *Biblia Jerozolimska* (Poznań 2006). Translation taken from *King James Bible*, Psalm 36:6.

student films at the Łódź Film School.[2] Of these, *Missy* is probably the best known because of the rewards it received.[3] This cooperation with one of the most outstanding Polish directors left a mark not only in the content and style of Siekierzyńska's film, but – as the director's testimony shows – in some strange way it is also revealed in the life experiences of both artists, who at the time were at very different points in their lives and careers. Iwona Siekierzyńska was expecting a child during filming, while Krzysztof Kieślowski had announced after *Three Colours: Red (Trois couleurs: Rouge, 1994)* the end of his director's career, and died due to complications after heart surgery (March 1996) shortly after the premiere of his student's film.

The beginning of work on the student film did not portend fruitful cooperation. I'll let the director speak for herself:

And it was exactly like this: at the beginning *Missy* was a story of the feelings of two teenage girls, and when Kieślowski came to school for the first time, I talked to him about it. I said it was supposed to be a story about the fact that "you would like to sit on one's knees, but you should sit politely in a chair" – a story about an impossible feeling. Kieślowski then referred to this coldly, so later, during exams I was surprised that he remembered that it made sense and it was not stupid! One has different thoughts when they are unsure.[4]

Iwona Siekierzyńska never concealed the difficulties accompanying her work on the film. Shortly after the premiere she confessed in an interview:

At home I was afraid of my father[5], then at school I was afraid of [Wojciech Jerzy] Has, and now I could meet a man with whom I simply felt at ease. No one has ever given me the comfort that he did when I was making the film *Missy* about a girl with a dog who is in love with a priest. I had enough of this film, everything in it seemed to me just sloppy. "How is it?", he asked. "Well, it's mediocre". "How is the little one (the director's daughter – K.P.)?". "The little one is very good". "It's not mediocre anymore!". He told me that "I do not have to do anything". I do not have to make a masterpiece. In general, it may be unsuccessful. Much more important is my day-to-day life than the entire film project (...).[6]

The influence of Krzysztof Kieślowski on *Missy* – his direct influence as a person (personality) and that of his film output – went beyond a rigidly understood mentor-student relationship. Maybe this

[2] The others are: *Before Sunset (Przed zmierzchem, 1995)* by Greg Zgliński (worth noting: the author of the music for *Pańcia*) and *Late Afternoon (Późne popołudnie, 1996)* by Gilles Renard – see: S. Zawiliński, *Kieślowski. Życie po życiu. Pamięć*, Warszawa 2007, p. 366.

[3] The film received awards at numerous festivals: Bornholm, Ebeltoft, Gdynia, Karlove Vary, Ludwigsburg, Monachium, Montecatini Terme, Turek. In addition, the nomination for the student Oscar, as discussed below.

[4] Author's own materials.

[5] Interestingly, we can hear a similar confession – about fear of his father – from Krzysztof Kieślowski in the film interview *Krzysztof Kieślowski: I'm So-So...* (1995) directed by Krzysztof Wierzbicki.

[6] I. Siekierzyńska, "Dziewczyna z psem", *Magazyn Kulturalny »Tygodnika Powszechnego«* 1996, no. 8, <http://www.tygodnik.com.pl/kontrapunkt/08/siekier.html> (accessed 20.06.2018).

[7] "Nitka [rozmowa K. Bielas z I. Siekierzyńską]", "Wysokie Obcasy" 2003, no. 27, <http://www.wysokieobcasy.pl/wysokie-obcasy/1,96856,1550927.html> (accessed 10.06.2018).

is the reason why the story is so interesting: for some it offers proof, and for others it raises or resurrects a vision, one based on knowledge, but also on wisdom, trust and freedom, on the student's inspiration by her professor. This vision is based on sharing not only rich film experience but also ordinary life experience. It is also based on suggesting and talking about what is important, and what only seems important – without avoiding pathos, one could say: like a parent to a child. It is also worth remembering that Kiesłowski's message was ambiguous and complicated, as Siekierzyńska herself called it – “double”. In an interview for “Wysokie Obcasy” in 2003, she confessed:

First he said that I had to get down to work and not hide behind my life. Then, that films are not important at all. Daily life here and now is important. (...) Meeting a man like Kiesłowski, at the moment when one starts, does not make life easier. I was then thirsty for an unequivocal father's voice: “My daughter, do it and that's it”. And here is none of this. I think Kiesłowski has sold us something with which it is difficult to be a filmmaker.[7]

Was the baggage of experience and a feeling of transience urging the experienced director to share his reflections with those who are just entering this world?

When Kiesłowski took up pedagogical work at his Alma Mater in Łódź, he had announced not long before that he was giving up film-making. Jacek Wakar writes: “During the first meeting he announced to a group of listeners that he would visit them, but on one condition – he also wants to get something during these meetings”.[8] He did not stop being a filmmaker – he still drew upon, wrote and created even for the needs of others.

Talking to him felt like there was nothing that we had gone through which he would not have experienced. A wide spectrum. Hence our agreement – even without words. My colleague from Łódź thinks he is similar to him. I tell him: – You are not! But I think: yes, he is similar. And I am similar. And the editor who edited *Missy* is similar to him. It comes to the fact that this priest, in whom the girl with a dog from my film is in love and who is played by Piotr Dumała, seems to people to be similar to Kiesłowski.[9]

Similarities, repetitions, and dualities became the trademark of Kiesłowski, even after his departure.

Another reason why one should reflect on Iwona Siekierzyńska's film is the perhaps not well-known fact that it was nominated in 1996 for the so-called student Oscar. Before *Missy* only two Polish student-directors had been granted that honour.[10] The Student Academy Award

[8] J. Wakar, *Gildia reżyserów polskich. Członkowie* – http://polishdirectors.com/member_post/siekierzyńska-iwona/ (accessed 20.06.2018). This is also confirmed by the director's confession in the finale of the film *Krzysztof Kiesłowski: I'm So-So...*

[9] I. Siekierzyńska, op. cit.

[10] The first to be nominated for this award were Dorota Kędzierzawska for the film *The Egg (Jajko,*

1982), Łukasz Wylężałek for *The Peddler (Domokrążca,* 1984) and Iwona Siekierzyńska for *Missy*. Later, nominations were received: in 2001 by Sławomir Fabicki for *Man Stuff (Męska sprawa)* and in 2006 by Filip Marczewski for *Melodrama (Melodramat)*, while *Tenants (Lokatorki)* by Klara Kochańska reached the final, receiving the Bronze Medal of the Students Academy Awards 2016.

has existed since 1972, and student prizes began to be awarded by the Film Academy a year later. Every year, they are awarded in four categories: animated film, documentary film, feature film and alternative film (parallel to the categories for film school students from the USA, there are analogous for foreign students). The story seems like a fairy tale – an obvious guarantee of an open door to an international film career. The reality turned out to be much more prosaic, in a “disappointing” way it was “just like in a film”:

I received the nomination in the porter’s lodge of the Film School dormitory where I lived – the director recalls. If it were today the firepower would be much bigger, it would be big news, etc. I was asked then if offers were flooding in. They were not. Polish cinema was in a disarray. And I had a little daughter and my attention was focused on her. Thanks to the nomination, my relationship with Krzysztof Kieślowski was definitely “strengthened”.^[11]

Only as much, and yet so much.

But if in our analysis of *Missy* we were to limit ourselves to the circumstances of its creation, to the awards, or even to – let’s call it “the existential context” of its creators – it would be a great injustice to the film, a serious over-simplification. One could say: for some reason, the diploma film of a student who came from the Gdańsk area and who was under the artistic care of Kieślowski was appreciated at festivals and competitions. Something concrete, something special was noticed in it. However, in my opinion, there is more truth in saying that it is simply an inspiring story. Siekierzyńska succeeded in (I admit that I am still not sure here: consciously or not) creating some very impressive symbolism, allowing for a deep and multidimensional interpretation. I will try to touch upon some of the most important threads.

Let’s start from the beginning, that is, from the opening scene in the bathroom. We can see the back of a 13-year-old girl sitting in a bathtub filled with water. She is touching a dripping tap. The bathroom is simple, as in a block of flats – with the walls painted black, it looks quite depressing. The girl is holding a nibbled apple in her hand, but the viewer’s attention is drawn to the cores lying on the edge of the tub. Perhaps she is just likes the apples: the fruit is already ripe, but has it been picked and tasted?. After a while, a dog barking behind the door is heard, and the bathing *Missy* (the film’s main character) reacts to this by taking an anxious look in its direction. Someone or something is coming – but someone is watching too. However, *Missy* is not a thriller or a horror – the adolescent girl is fine, and in the next scene, she is lying on the couch, humming something cheerfully, and as if for fun she is stroking the wall of the room with her feet.

It is worth noting how subtly the innocent and discrete eroticism of these scenes has been shown – this also applies to later takes of her dancing or washing before a planned meeting – emphasizing the maturation of *Missy*, her probably not fully conscious desires and

[11] Author’s own materials.

feelings – the disposition of her heart (surely the young actress Sylwia Karczmarczyk is due credit for this). During the bath, only the girl’s naked back is visible, while in the next scene the author tries to tell us a little more through grey tights stretched over bare legs (evoking associations with a woman rather than with a child) and the girlish joy of waving them along with the ticking clock. Time passes and time comes at the same time. Finally, a decision: to leave the house to walk the dog.

It would not be an exaggeration to say that the dog as a character is no less important in Siekierzyńska’s film than the man. It is even possible that the dog is the key to reading this story. Before going for a walk, Missy calls to her pet: “Ledwosz, where is the key?”, as if the animal could really help find it and solve the problem. Missy herself is reminiscent of a modern version of Dorothy from *The Wizard of Oz*[12], she is likewise drawn into a whirlwind of unexpected events because of her unruly dog. As a matter of fact, both Dorothy’s inseparable favourite, Toto, and Ledwosz accompany their owners in entering a new stage in life, in learning the charms and dangers of conscious, mature life – the dream “land on the other side of the rainbow”. Let’s try to follow the trail of the dog.

The presence of the dog in the film, as well as its name Ledwosz is explained by Iwona Siekierzyńska as follows:

In the second year of study someone left a small puppy at the film school lodge and it unexpectedly grew into a DOG instead of a doggy. I took him in, I always went to classes with him. When Krzysztof Kieślowski appeared in the third year and work on the film started, Ledwosz (that’s what I called him, because he barely survived[13]) reminded me of my childhood situation with my dog, which barged in my neighbours’ house during a priest’s visit. This real story was placed in the film when I was looking for an idea for the meeting of the main characters. Obviously, I did not arrange it in my head, but I felt intuitively that a dog, a priest and a little girl is a good mix. As Kieślowski said: “they’re a good couple” and I added that they’re a good trio... Kieślowski certainly saw potential in the dog – before shooting, he “comforted” me that if this film was unsuccessful, it would at least show some nature. Such is his sense of humour”.[14]

Devotees of Krzysztof Kieślowski’s work will surely also notice similarities between *Missy* and *Red*, the director’s last film, especially the very distinct affinity in the dog motif. Of course, because of the differences in size, these threads differ in dramaturgical significance and the role they play in the story (despite the notable similarities in the meaning of these films[15]). However, in both films the dog is a clear “link” between

[12] *The Wizard of Oz* (1900) is a classic novel for children by Frank L. Baum, filmed by (among others) Victor Fleming in 1939 with Judy Garland in the role of Dorothy.

[13] *Ledwosz* derives from the Polish equivalent of *barely* [translator’s note].

[14] Author’s own materials.

[15] “More and more often, I feel that we are really only interested in ourselves. Even when we pay attention to others, we constantly think about ourselves. This, among other things, is the subject of the third film. *Red* – brotherhood. (...) *Red* is in essence a film about people passing by one another” – K. Kieślowski, *Autobiografia*, ed. D. Stok, Kraków 2012, p. 186.

the characters, who, due to the dog's "intervention", henceforth begin to develop a close bond – it is the dog which is to "blame for" a relationship between Missy and the priest and between Valentine (Irene Jacob) and the old judge (Jean-Louis Trintignant) and, as a consequence, Auguste (Jean-Pierre Lorit). Let's also add now – and in a sense, also between Iwona Siekierzyńska and Krzysztof Kieślowski.[16]

The director recalls an event from the past:

I remember that I was terribly worried when I saw materials from *Missy* for the first time, in which Sylwia Karczmarczyk performed beautifully. Everything seemed to me somehow "Kieślowski-like". I did not want that. And suddenly, I realised that in my film, like in *Red*, the heroine meets someone important to her because of the dog. How could I not have noticed it before! It pissed me off, especially since I did not like *Red*. It's interesting that it overwhelmed me then, and now I'm happy about it. I am glad that there are people you can be similar to. You live completely independently and suddenly you find out that you have somebody else in you. It creates a sense of community, sometimes it comforts us.[17]

The director of *Red* even described the role of a dog in his film as a "magnet" that "pulls the characters to each other".[18] This is also the mission of Ledwosz in Siekierzyńska's film – it is the dog that makes the characters in *Missy* meet and establish a special, though disproportionately felt, relationship between them.

But the dog itself is also the recipient of specific feelings from its owner, the "brotherhood" between a guardian and a charge (we can even treat these traditional roles interchangeably), between a man and an animal. Considered to be the most faithful friend of mankind, the dog becomes something of a confidant of human mysteries, weaknesses and longings. It is the dog that listens to Missy, it is with he that she spends the most time and talks with her, he "helps" the man and, freeing himself from his leash, triggers a cascade of events that will become an important turning point in the lives of our characters. He also pays a price for this. [19] In Kieślowski's film, a wounded German shepherd "forces" Valentine to find its owner – a retired judge. In Siekierzyńska's film, while returning from a walk, Ledwosz breaks free and runs into an apartment in which a priest is giving the sacrament of the anointing of the sick.[20] There

[16] "Nitka [rozmowa K. Bielas z I. Siekierzyńską]", op. cit.

[17] Ibidem.

[18] This intention is clearly seen in the scene after Rita's escape from the church, when the dog, found by Valentine in the judge's house, standing between them, looks at his "old" master, and then his "new" mistress. Kieślowski explains the meaning of these scenes in his commentary on *Red*, which is included in the appendices to the DVD edition of the *Three Colours* trilogy.

[19] In the next scene, Missy, shouting at her dog that she hates him, punishes him for the confusion he has caused, but we sense that also for the feeling that was suddenly born in her, and of which Ledwosz was indirectly the "perpetrator".

[20] The Epistle of St. James: "Is any sick among you? Let him call for the elders of the church; and let them pray over him, anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord. And the prayer of faith shall save the sick, and the Lord shall raise him up; and if he have committed sins, they shall be forgiven him" (original quote from *Biblia Jerozolimska*, op. cit.; translation taken from *King James Bible*, Jm. 5, 14–15).

is an eye-to-eye meeting with the hosts' dog. The priest interrupts the prayer and separates the struggling animals, and then returns Ledwosz to the embarrassed owner by carrying him in his arms like the good shepherd carrying the lost sheep from the biblical parable.[21]

How can we explain the fact that two closely cooperating filmmakers, almost at the same time, independently entrusted dogs with such a special role in their films? Maybe an animal “decides” about the turning point of both stories only because of the personal sympathies or memories of the authors?[22] These questions provoke reflection on the issue of differences and similarities in the behaviour of man and animal. General knowledge on this subject, which most of us probably have, allows us to distinguish here between free will and instinct, i.e. that while we make conscious choices as humans, animals just have reflexes. But are animals led by instincts and reflexes only? This is not the place for a detailed analysis of this issue, but one opinion is worth considering. It was expressed by Andrzej Kłosiński, a behaviourist and animal psychologist, and director of COAPE Poland, an organisation that educates animal behaviourists, trainers, veterinarians and professional animal carers. He points out that

from the 1940s to the end of the 1970s psychology was dominated by the trend that draws a clear boundary between human and animal emotions. Today we look at it differently. However, we will always have a problem with the evaluation of animal emotions. We can determine how animals react, but we do not know what they think about.[23]

Meanwhile, as Kłosiński states, according to the latest state of knowledge,

animals also have mirror neurons in the brain responsible for empathy. We have been able to study brain processes for many years. They can be followed, for example, by computed tomography to find out which brain structures work during different stimuli. This allows us to clearly state that animals use emotions. They feel fear, excitement, joy, sadness, they have behaviours related to taking care of their offspring, they like something or do not like.[24]

In addition, “animals are the masters of associations, also because they do not speak a language, which substitutes for many other ways of expressing concepts and emotions”.[25]

One of the most characteristic common elements we can find in the two films by Kieślowski and Siekierzyńska is the scene of the dog entering the church. In *Red*, the Eucharist is being celebrated, and the

[21] See: *ibidem*, Lk 15, 1–7; Jn 10, 1–16.

[22] Iwona Siekierzyńska based her story on childhood memories, while in the book by Stanisław Zawiśliński *Kieślowski. Życie po życiu. Pamięć* (op. cit., p. 215), there is a photo of Krzysztof Kieślowski from the time of filming *Blind Chance (Przypadek, 1981, prem. 1987)*, sitting between actor Bogusław Linda and his dog, Frakie... wearing a shirt.

[23] R. Nawrot, A. Kłosiński, “Dlaczego mój pies płacze”, “W drodze” 2017, no. 6, https://opoka.org.pl/biblioteka/1/1E/wdrodze201706_zwierzeta.html (accessed 20.06.2018).

[24] *Ibidem*.

[25] *Ibidem*.

priest is standing behind the altar; in response to a question, he directs Valentine's sight to the sought-for "intruder", who is running out of the church. In *Missy* the dog is led into the church by Missy, following in the footsteps of the priest, but they both withdraw under pressure from an elderly woman shocked by the incident. Iwona Siekierzyńska describes her reception of Kieślowski as follows: "I was critical of his films (...). I walked out of *Red*. Then I went to watch it again and my heart pounded. Because I saw that there is a dog in a church. Almost like in my student film. I did not know that when I was writing my screenplay. And he could think that I had seen this film".[26] The issue of the supervisor's possible perception of the similarity with his own film is commented on by her:

He must have noticed. I'm just curious about what he was thinking, but I did not ask him. Krzysztof Kieślowski was very reserved. He mentioned *Red* only once in a conversation with me, he talked about being pretentious – he said that he "unfortunately was" (pretentious – K.P.) in *Red*. And I was affected by this similarity: our meeting and his film. Maybe because of the dog with which I came to the classes.[27]

It can be stated that in both films, the dog initiates some indefinite, but at the same time, concrete, metaphysical experience of the characters. An involuntary encounter with the sacrum, which begins to affect the situation and the attitude of the protagonists. Seemingly, it is only a temporary loss of control over the animal, but it is from this moment – a visit to the church and a meeting with the priest – that there is a turn in the action, events take on a different dimension and the plot gains dynamics.[28] A new reality opens up before the surprised Valentine and Missy, a feeling, an experience they have not expected, and certainly, one they do not know what to do with. The visit of a model from Geneva to a retired judge who turns out to be a cynical eavesdropper will change the fate of both (and even three) of them, while the "accidental" meeting of a girl and a priest will result in an unexpected feeling that is difficult to conceal: "impossible love".

I cannot judge whether animals have any special gift of sensing the presence of "supernatural forces", and whether Rita in *Red* and Ledwoszcz in *Missy* are consciously heading towards the Sacred. I am also aware that in order to accept such a possibility, a theological and Christian perspective is needed – Kieślowski never denied this. He consistently searched, even if in his own way, "in a layman's way", and it seems that, despite his critical attitude towards the Church, he found

[26] I. Siekierzyńska, op. cit.

[27] Author's own materials.

[28] "When Valentine goes to the judge, after the dog has escaped from the church – we can see it in the yard; it is looking once at him and once at her; it is torn apart ... it brings the characters closer together and this scene is referred to by Kieślowski

as the so-called 'plot point' or turning point in the story of the film" – http://www.filmweb.pl/user/Cookie_VT/blog/479892-%22Trzy+kolory%22+-+re%C5%BC.+K.+Kie+%C5%9Bowski+%281993-1994%29+%E2%99%A5 (accessed 20.06.2018).

something.[29] Religious issues must have also intrigued Iwona Siekieryńska, since in the document *Encounter (Spotkanie, 1999)* she tried to answer the question “how meetings with Pope John Paul II during his pilgrimage in 1997 changed Polish youth, and she allowed each of those asked to tell their history”.[30] It is also a fact that the sacral and spiritual themes present in *Missy*, which cannot be omitted in an analysis, justify this dimension of the interpretation. Apart from the clergyman with whom the young Missy falls in love, in my opinion, it is easy to disregard an extremely important element of the story: the circumstances of the priest’s meeting with the girl. This takes place, as we have already mentioned, during an intimate spiritual event: while giving the sacrament of the anointing of the sick.[31]

As the Jesuit Stanisław Biel reminds us:

the sacrament of the sick is a rite of passage. It allows for a crossing in borderline situations: from illness to healing, from death to eternal life. Borderline situations relate to the experience of pain and suffering and are usually accompanied by fright, anxiety and even fear and unpleasant feelings of helplessness, loneliness, misunderstandings, rejection. [...] In such situations, when all human forces and possibilities of medicine fail, there is the grace of meeting Jesus the Healer. Jesus in the sacrament of the sick heals above all the spirit and the psyche.[32]

From the author’s statement, we know that initially the priest “was not planned”, but since he appeared, it entails certain associations. We no longer have to deal only with the “earthly order” – an unfulfilled love – but somehow the “the order of grace” comes into play, the birth of something spiritual. Such meaning can be attributed to the student film by the sacrament of the anointing of the sick that is given by the priest. Because of the dog, the girl becomes a witness, but also to some extent a participant in the sacrament, which is a rite of passage: from illness to healing, from death to life.[33] Here it takes on additional meaning; it becomes a moment of transition from childhood to maturity, from innocence to love. The child enters the adult world, a universe that requires re-evaluation, in which now and then a person – sometimes for themselves or sometimes for someone else – becomes like God.[34]

In this difficult journey through the world of adults, it is good to have a trustworthy companion at the start. Probably there is more

[29] In the aforementioned film by Wierzbicki, Kieślowski reveals the metaphysical dimension of his life admitting that he has a good relationship with God, talks to him, often asks him for something – “sometimes he receives, and sometimes not”.

[30] J. Wakar, op. cit.

[31] Other well-known terms: the sacrament of the sick, the anointing of the sick, the last anointing (the most misleading, because it is a sacrament not only for the sick and dying, and certainly can be given to the same person several times).

[32] S. Biel, *Ksiądz z “namaszczaniem” – pewna śmierć?* – <https://www.deon.pl/religia/duchowosc-i-wiara/zycie-i-wiara/art,1608,ksiazdz-z-namaszczaniem-pewna-smierc.html> (accessed 20.06.2018).

[33] It is worth recalling a dog, completely unexpectedly running through the frame of the take of the car accident with tragic consequences in *Three colours: Blue (Trois couleurs: Bleu, 1993)* by Kieślowski.

[34] In one of the scenes, while sitting in a bathtub and preparing for a confession of love, Missy says: “The priest is more important than the mother, than the father, than the dog... and God”.

of a poetics than strict scholasticism here, but one would like to say about the mysterious activity of “unruly” grace – seemingly intended for someone else but resting on someone who is not physically ill but needs help and has a ready heart for it. This person, even without realizing it, expects support while facing a difficult experience and challenge.

A sensitive anointing with holy oil deprives death of its cruelty. There is something tender, feminine and maternal about it. While accepting the sacrament of the anointing of the sick, we meet Jesus as the Father and the Mother, who supports us with his male strength, and at the same time takes us in the motherly arms. Meeting with Him gives us the certainty that when we move from earth to heaven, we will feel the motherly love with which God embraces us (A. Grün).[35]

This is where the resemblances between *Red* and *Missy* seem to run out, as the two stories continue in different directions. The story of Valentine clearly ends happily in “stormy” (the word being meaningful here[36]) circumstances: the young woman faces the man she has been passing by up to this moment without noticing him. We are convinced that two “right” people find each other, love is possible, and the tear of emotion on the judge’s cheek and his smile also heralds his happiness. In the case of *Missy*, we no longer have the comfort of such a statement: struggling with shyness, perseveringly looking for an opportunity to meet with the priest, she finally gets her (last?) chance. However, the circumstances of the conversation, deprived of any intimacy (which in the case of the clergyman is understandable) and the chance of maintaining discretion, as well as the constant rush of the priest, deprive *Missy* of the opportunity to express the truth. They make the confession of their “impossible love” an impossible thing. And although there are no grounds to claim that another meeting will not happen (both say goodbye and express the hope that they will return to the conversation another time), we remain convinced that this feeling has become the sole secret of the young girl. We are led to this conclusion by the last scene in which the story of *Missy*, now about a thirty-year-old woman, closes with the framing device. She is again sitting in a bathtub in reverie, but at another time, in a different place.

It must be admitted here that the bathtub became an unusual prop in Siekierzyńska’s film: it is a “time machine” that carries us to the finale from the time of the young to the adult *Missy*. The bathroom is different, more modern, brighter, but the young woman’s hunched back and the dripping water are still unchanged.

I invented the bath later – says Siekierzyńska. I understood that it is also a film about stories which drag behind us, from which we cannot free ourselves. The protagonist is an adult, she has a decent, well-looking house, but inside she is still a girl.[37]

[35] S. Biel, op. cit.

[36] The ferry on which Valentine and Auguste are travelling crashes as the result of a storm, and they both meet during the rescue operation.

[37] “Nitka [rozmowa K. Bielas z I. Siekierzyńską]”, op. cit.

There is also a more mundane function of this bathroom furniture: “I grew up in a small apartment,” says the director, “and the bathroom was the only place where you could hide from other household members”.[38] Just like that.

But does all this mean that the story ends badly? Although the film does not seem to have an apparent optimistic overtone, in the finale the adult lady is a beautiful woman, living in prosperous conditions (a slow panoramic shot across an attractive looking flat), so one can assume that her life has gone “normally”, successfully. We can see children’s toys scattered on the floor, but we cannot not see a trace of trauma here. Despite everything, in this “normality”, the heroine is not free from what happened in her childhood; it surely keeps coming back. The woman is still sitting in a bathtub, but the attempt made years ago is priceless capital that reminds (us and probably her, too) about courage and maturity. About the fact that, although perhaps involuntarily wounded, the heroine survived this experience. And therefore, she is so close to us.

My Missy (...) is alone, and she shows her feelings to a dog – says Siekierzyńska. When the first chance to reveal herself appears, she places her feelings completely blindly. Missy is in a dead-end situation: either these feelings will get outside and she will be held up to ridicule or she will hide them, but then, out of love, she will fall ill with anorexia, heart problems, or she will start taking drugs. She will never know who she is. In this respect, my film is optimistic – Missy takes the risk of revealing her feelings.[39]

I support this view, and in my opinion this is strengthened by the unobtrusive presence (accidental or not) of a mystery – one deeply immersed in ordinariness – in everyday life. After a long journey to the mysterious “land on the other side of the rainbow”, Dorothy joyfully announces to Toto: “But anyway, Toto, we’re home”. In Missy’s house, the walls of the bathroom change in the end from black to bright, but there is no Ledwosz anymore.

To a question addressed years later to Iwona Siekierzyńska: “Have you got over Kieślowski’s ‘double message’, over the loss of professional motivation?”, the director replied:

Only when I was filming *My Roast Chickens* (*Moje pieczone kurczaki*, 2002) [40] did a flash, a thought come: “If you have a knack for making films, do not resist it, just give it to people. Everyone has stories to tell, but not everyone can tell them to the world. Appreciate it”.[41]

[38] Author’s own materials.

[39] “Nitka [rozmowa K. Bielas z I. Siekierzyńską]”, op. cit.

[40] *My Roast Chickens* – a film made by Iwona Siekierzyńska seven years after *Missy*, after the director’s return to Poland from a longer stay in Canada.

[41] “Nitka [rozmowa K. Bielas z I. Siekierzyńską]”, op. cit.

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