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Polish Interpretations of the Theosophical Concept of Evolution

ABSTRACT

This article presents selected examples how the theosophical idea of evolution was received in Poland. The first of these is the book entitled *The Evolution of Man* by Kazimierz Chodkiewicz, published before World War II and constituting a direct link to this very concept which he tries to prove scientifically. Adam Okrzeński, in his unpublished *The Primer of Human Evolution* written in the fifties, interprets this esoteric idea as a kind of returning creation back to God. In contrast, Janina Kraupe's *Metamorphoses* are an artistic and most individualistic take in which evolution becomes the principle of a whole manner of changes – both universal and individual.

KEYWORDS

Theosophy, “root races” myth, evolution, involution, history

In 1888 Helena P. Blavatsky (1831–1891) published *The Secret Doctrine*,¹ considered to be the most important work of her life. It contains the mysterious *Book of Dzyan*, consisting of verses (*Stanzas*) proclaiming esoteric knowledge that she had received from masters living in monasteries in the Himalayas. One of the main inspirations for this work was not only the basis of Theo-

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¹ H. P. Blavatsky, *The Secret Doctrine. The Synthesis of Science, Religion, and Philosophy*, [online] <http://www.holybooks.com/wp-content/uploads/The-Secret-Doctrine-by-H.P.-Blavatsky.pdf> [access: 18.01.2015].

sophy, but also the “root races” myth which the author divided according to her favourite system of seven. The concept of racial development was championed by successive theosophists, mainly Annie Besant (1847–1933) and Charles W. Leadbeater (1854–1934).² It was also adopted by authors of other esoteric fields, among whom a special mention should be made of Rudolf Steiner (1861–1925).³ According to their beliefs, four races – Ethereal, Hyperborean, Lemurian, Atlantean – had already been and come and gone. The present – Aryan – is the fifth, while two more are yet to come: one that will appear in what is now North America and a final one in Pushkara, a continent which does not yet exist. Within each of these root races there are seven sub-races, treated as a closed life cycle of each system. This process of deliberate human development was defined as evolution.

Regardless of any associations with the concept introduced by Charles Darwin (1809–1892), the theosophical approach to this issue deviated wildly from its original scientific meaning. This difference is mainly due to the fact the theosophists wanted to explain in this way the emergence of humanity as a consequence of the existence of involution, which is a kind of *katabasis* of spiritual reality.⁴ In their understanding, evolution was a reversal of this descent and a return to the original perfection.

The idea of deliberate human development was not an entirely new concept, of course, since it was the central premise of the Judeo-Christian theology of sacred history, which was supposed to have begun at the moment of creation, evolve over the centuries and then find fulfilment in an eschatological climax. The imagination of history understood in this way often spilled into mythological interpretation. Today, the most well-known and popular variant of this is the apocalyptic exegesis of Joachim of Fiore (1135–1202), which presented history as a series of successive eras – the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. Regardless of the fact that the works of Joachim were finally condemned by the Church, his views have stood the test of time to this day, including his vision of a “collective Messiah” and his inspirational

² Reference should be made here to the book by A. Besant, C. W. Leadbeater, *Man: Whence, How and whither. A record of clairvoyant investigation*, Adyar, Madras, Benares 1913, [online] <http://ebook.lib.hku.hk/CADAL/B31426815/> [access: 23.01.2015].

³ See: R. Steiner, *Aus der Akasha-Chronik*, Herausgegeben von Marie Steiner, Dornach 1939; P. Staudenmaier, *Race and Redemption. Racial and Ethnic Evolution in Rudolf Steiner's Anthroposophy*, “Nova Religio: The Journal of Alternative and Emergent Religions” 2008, Vol. 11, Issue 3, pp. 4–36.

⁴ This idea is particularly apparent also in the work of G. I. Gurdjieff, *Beelzebub's Tales to His Grandson – An Impartially Objective Criticism of the Life of Man*, London and New York 1999.

conviction that the end of the world does not have to spell disaster but is instead a form of eschatological fulfilment.⁵ The general message, associated with the idea of progress and programmed human development and determined by access to information, has remained in theosophical terms analogous to the concept of Joachim and was based upon legends and myths already existing in the Western tradition, but arranged in a new sequence. The innovative element of this interpretation derives from shifting the focus of biblical tradition towards numerous references to esoteric knowledge from the East, including in particular the Kalachakra sciences.⁶

This shift, which may be referred to as the consequence of establishing a new source of authority which, for Blavatsky, was primarily the previously-mentioned *Book of Dzyan*. The author was aware that its message was unreliable for scholars. However, she highlighted the truth of the mysterious manuscript, pointing to the convergence of its teachings with the ancient religion and philosophy of the East:

The Book of Dzyan (or “Dzan”) is utterly unknown to our Philologists, or at any rate was never heard of by them under its present name. This is, of course, a great drawback to those who follow the methods of research prescribed by official Science; but to the students of Occultism, and to every genuine Occultist, this will be of little moment. The main body of the Doctrines given is found scattered throughout hundreds and thousands of Sanskrit MSS., some already translated – disfigured in their interpretations, as usual, – others still awaiting their turn. Every scholar, therefore, has an opportunity of verifying the statements herein made, and of checking most of the quotations. A few new facts (new to the profane Orientalist, only) and passages quoted from the Commentaries will be found difficult to trace. Several of the teachings, also, have hitherto been transmitted orally: yet even those are in every instance hinted at in the almost countless volumes of Brahminical, Chinese and Tibetan temple-literature.⁷

Backing up the beliefs of Blavatsky was, so to speak, the fact that many of her citations seemed familiar, so it could be assumed that they formed part of the composition of some original, archetypal work on spirituality. This is not the place for a detailed analysis of the form and content of the *Stanzas*. How-

⁵ M. Riedl, *Joachim von Fiore – Denker der Vollendeten Menschheit*, Würzburg 2004, pp. 314–334 (Polish version: *Mesjasz zbiorowy. Konstytucja społeczeństwa przyszłości według Joachima da Fiore*, tłum. I. Michalska, “Kronos” 2014, nr 2, pp. 105–121).

⁶ See: A. Berzin, *Mistaken Foreign Myths about Shambhala*, [online] http://www.berzinarchives.com/web/en/archives/advanced/kalachakra/shambhala/mistaken_foreign_myths_shambhala.html [access: 2.02.2015].

⁷ H. P. Blavatsky, *The Secret Doctrine, Introduction*, Vol. 1. P. XXIII, [online] <http://www.holybooks.com/wp-content/uploads/The-Secret-Doctrine-by-H.P.-Blavatsky.pdf> [access: 28.01.2015]

ever, I would like to just mention that in this way a new understanding of the spiritual masters was constructed, which found its extension primarily in the New Age movement.⁸

The concept of race was one of the most weighty, yet controversial elements of Theosophy, as the mythological take on human history turned out to be incredibly inspiring for twentieth-century ideology, especially Nazi Germany.⁹ That is why in time the theosophists themselves chose to replace the category race with era, especially since in their environment the idea of the evolution remained a key belief, aimed at emphasising the unity and brotherhood of man.¹⁰ Interest in the concept of evolution was also alive in the views of Polish supporters of esoteric ideas. In this article I present only three examples of this approach, which may serve to illustrate the particularities of Polish adaptations of this line of thought.

The first of these is a book by Kazimierz Chodkiewicz (1892–1980) entitled *Ewolucja człowieka* (*The Evolution of Man*) first published in 1936 within a series of publications of the monthly “Lotos.”¹¹ A supporter of Marshal Józef Piłsudski (1867–1935) and an officer of the Polish Army, his biography reads like that of many Poles forced into exile after the war. At the same time, Chodkiewicz had a keen interest in esotericism and engaged in Theosophy firstly in pre-war Poland, and later in London. He intended his book to famil-

⁸ These issues were painstakingly described by N. Goodrick-Clarke, *The Coming of the Masters: the Evolutionary Reformulation of Spiritual Intermediaries in Modern Theosophy*, [in:] A. B. Kilcher, *Constructing Tradition: Means and Myths of Transmission in Western Esotericism*, Leiden 2010, pp. 113–160. See also: W. J. Hanegraaff, *New Age Religion and Western Culture: Esotericism in the Mirror of Secular Thought*, Leiden 1998, pp. 454–455.

⁹ N. Goodrick-Clarke, *The Occult Roots of Nazism. Secret Aryan Cults and their Influence on Nazi Ideology*, London–New York, 2004; J. Godwin, *Arktos. The Polar Myth in Science, Symbolism and Nazi Survival*, Kempton 1996; N. Goodrick-Clarke, *Black Sun: Aryan Cults, Esoteric Nazism, and the Politics of Identity*, New York and London, 2001, pp. 72–87. The myth of Atlantis was also discussed in the context of the idea of temporal changes by J. Godwin, *Atlantis and the Cycles of Time Prophecies, Traditions, and Occult Revelations*, Rochester 2011.

¹⁰ J. A. Santucci, *The Notion of Race in Theosophy*, “Nova Religio: The Journal of Alternative and Emergent Religions” 2008, Vol. 11, No. 3, pp. 37–63.

¹¹ In this article, I used the second edition of this book, K. Chodkiewicz, *Ewolucja ludzkości. Zarys antropogenezy okultystycznej* [*The Evolution of Man. An outline of the occult anthropogenesis*], Wrocław 1995. The author also published in “Lotos” articles related to the issues raised. One of his most interesting materials was dedicated to the concept of a superman, in which he emphasised the necessity for strict rules of moral behaviour. See: K. Chodkiewicz, *Człowiek a nadczłowiek* [*Man and Superman*], “Lotos” 1935, z. 1, pp. 4–5. In the magazine can also be found materials that are used later in his book. See: idem, *Toddowie i Kurumbowie*, “Lotos” 1935, z. 6, pp. 219–220.

iarise Polish readers with perspectives on the history of the world, and above all, of man. The main inspiration for Chodkiewicz was the *Book of Dzyan*. However, he also drew on a number of other writers of esoteric studies. In particular, he repeatedly cited William Scott-Elliot¹² (?–1930) and Michel Manzi (1849–1915),¹³ as well as the works of Rudolf Steiner. He emphasised that he intended to present this fascinating issue in a manner as consistent and scientifically-based as possible. For this purpose, he indicated two types of sources on evolution as he presented it: esoteric (that is, according to his nomenclature: the occult)¹⁴ and scientific. For obvious reasons, he devoted a lot of space to the first, emphasising its importance and persuading readers not to disregard it. At the same time he appealed to contemporary research in many scientific disciplines such as geology, botany, anthropology and linguistics, in which he found attestation for his theses. He also pointed to the existence of many converging points of scientific research on esoteric teachings, which stemmed from a clear suggestion that they complemented each other.

His treatise began after an establishment of the meaning of basic esoteric definitions, above all – involution and evolution:

Occultism [...] argues that in fact there exists an evolution of all elements throughout the cosmos, not mechanical, but heavily influenced by a divine or human spirit. This evolution takes place in phases. The first phase is involution, that is the descent of the spirit into matter, and the other is evolution, or the return from matter to the spirit world after acquiring from amongst this matter a range of experience along the immeasurable ladder of improvement.¹⁵

Blavatsky conducted a systematic mythography of the history of the world, while in the course of reading books by Chodkiewicz, it seems paradoxically that his goal was to enter the maximum historical and rational thought of the concept. Perhaps for this reason, the first races – the Astral and Etheric, which were supposed to have developed 300 000 000 years ago –

¹² W. Scott-Elliot, *The Story of Atlantis and the Lost Lemuria*, The Project Gutenberg eBook, [online] <http://www.gutenberg.org/files/21796/21796-h/21796-h.htm> [access: 28.01.2015]. It is worth noting that in the “Lotos” volume from 1935 was a printed map of Atlantis by Scott-Elliot, pp. 89–90.

¹³ Chodkiewicz mentions the work of this author devoted to the issue of Lemuria and published in Polish. The main work of this author refers to Atlantis, see: M. Manzi, *Le Livre de l'Atlantide*, Paris 1922.

¹⁴ For Chodkiewicz, the term “occult” referred to the broad category of interest that today is referred to in literature as “esotericism.” Without going into all the different meanings that characterise the two terms, I treat them within this article as synonymous concepts.

¹⁵ K. Chodkiewicz, *Ewolucja ludzkości...*, op. cit., p. 29.

barely receive a mention in the pages of his book. He justified this as follows: “Being only astral phantoms, and then ethereal and ethereal-physical, without any intelligence, they have no history. They are, so to speak, an introduction to the physical evolution of man.”¹⁶ An important prerequisite for addressing the issue of evolution was for him not so much the appearance of the original spiritual form, but its entry into history, which was to have taken place with the advent of materialised beings on the continent of Lemuria and Atlantis. These mythical peoples, and a presentation of the achievements of the Aryan race also became a major focus of Chodkiewicz’s work. While adopting a historical perspective, the book also lacks information on the future époques of man, although the author pointed out that the esoteric vision of anthropogenesis includes seven races corresponding to the biblical week of creation.

The theosophical concept of history presented by Chodkiewicz is most specific. According to its message, the declining sub-races representing the Lemurian and Atlantean era can be found in quite recent, or even contemporary, history. For example, the final seventh stage in the development of Atlantis were to be Mongoloid peoples. Thus Chodkiewicz rather looked for different types of civilisations which he linked with the dominant characteristics of a particular race. At the same time he emphasised that between societies belonging to different races living at the same time, there was no mutual exchange of elements of civilisation because their existence was determined by a process – largely preordained – of disclosing certain powers and capabilities which were reserved for each of them alone. Paradoxically, in line with this approach, a younger race could represent a much higher level of development than an older one, for whom their declining emanations were just the closure of a specific structure.

It is difficult to overcome the impression that in this typological perception of civilisation Chodkiewicz stays close to the considerations of Feliks Koneczny (1862–1949), who in his most famous historiosophical work *O wielości cywilizacji*, published in the 1930s, also singled out seven basic cultures.¹⁷ The initial assumptions of both authors are divergent because Koneczny represented a Christian and national point of view; he was also a declared opponent of Piłsudski. However, their conclusions on the impermeability of coexisting civilisations are surprisingly similar, although the opinions of the theosophists, and therefore of Chodkiewicz as well were in this respect less radical. Koneczny also argued that the definition of a civilisation is not so much

¹⁶ Ibidem, p. 52.

¹⁷ F. Koneczny, *O wielości cywilizacji* [About The Multiplicity of Civilisation], Kraków 1935.

due to the designation of its chronological framework, revealing certain tendencies specific to the social behavioural code of a particular culture. Thus, for example, according to Koneczny, the origin of a Byzantine type of civilisation can be traced far back as ancient Egypt, with its continuation in the Prussian state.¹⁸ He recognised the superiority of the Christian Western culture, although he also stressed the importance of religion in all cultures. Certainly Koneczny's belief could not be a deliberate borrowing of esoteric ideas that contradicted his personal worldview. However, maybe some distant inspiration, can be found in them or perhaps a hidden polemic with esoteric views.

At the end of his book, Chodkiewicz indicated the Slavs' place in the evolutionary process of human development:

A wonderful Slavic culture will arise, which in harmony, rhythm and music will raise souls to God, in the Spirit world. This culture will change the face of central Europe, introducing new forms of governance and social structure. Poland will play a dominant role. She is a true 'Christ of Slavic' nations and will be the leader and teacher, and it will be given to her because she suffered much in humiliation and slavery and she deserved to take a leading position. The Polish resurrection after the World War was the beginning of a new era for the Slavic peoples.¹⁹

This theme regarding the importance of the Slavs and, above all, the Poles is combined with a belief in the existence of the Wawel chakram, as conceived by Chodkiewicz²⁰ and which in Poland ended up outliving the concept of the seven races or époques of esoteric evolution and also enjoyed great popularity especially among followers of New Age spirituality.

In Poland after World War II the activities of esoteric societies was suspended, and all informal groups were kept under constant surveillance. The Catholic Church, which became a focal point for the search for personal and national freedom, was particularly significant in the struggle against communism. Consequently, many esoteric ideas lost their bearing or underwent significant changes, particularly since contact with Western Europe was almost impossible. It seems that the reception of esoteric concepts in Poland at that time was significantly influenced by Wanda Dynowska (1888–1971), whose publishing and charity work in India was held in high esteem even among people who were not willing to accept theosophical ideas in their en-

¹⁸ Idem, *Cywilizacja bizantyńska [The Byzantine Civilisation]*, Komorów 1996.

¹⁹ K. Chodkiewicz, *Ewolucja człowieka...*, op. cit., p. 295.

²⁰ Idem, *The Cracow Occult Center*, London 1966. It is worth mentioning that the interest in lands strongly characteristic of Theosophy can already be seen in the pre-war editions of "Lotos", see: Tomira Zori about *Shambhala* by Nicholas Roerich, "Lotos" 1935, z. 7–8, p. 287.

tirety. The Polish-Indian Library, initiated by her in collaboration with Maurycy Frydman (1901–1977), became an important supplement for source publications to which there was limited access in communist Poland. Moreover, Dynowska looked at theosophical issues in the context of perennialism and also Polish romantic patriotism, which is why her beliefs were perceived as being close to the Poles, including those emphasising their relationship with the Catholic Church.²¹

The influence of Dynowska's convictions and publications, however, was especially visible in environments interested in esotericism, and one example of this state of affairs could be the unpublished reflections on the evolution of mankind by Adam Okrzeński (1899–1972).²² The author was a doctor by profession and in practice even before World War II in Kraków. During the war, he worked in a military hospital. He was interned in Romania, but was able to return to his country. Next to the medicine, his great passion was mechanics – he was involved in the successful design of a variety of structures and even patented a prototype engine that uses the force of inertia. He was also a very gifted artist. Unfortunately, his paintings have not survived.

In the fifties and sixties, along with a friend from medical school – Stanisław Komorowski – he took part in meetings organised in Kraków by

²¹ Extremely patriotic, while highlighting the role of religious values, Dynowska's way of thinking was characteristic of her many texts. I would like to quote one of her first theosophical manifestos, which she entered in the report of the first International Theosophical Congress which took place in Paris in 1920. Because its content also proved to be very important for understanding esoteric issues in post-war Poland: "It has been in existence for the last ten years, unites all people indiscriminately, believing in the rebirth of humanity, in the imminent coming of the Great Spiritual World, the superhuman power that will give new impetus to the world and a new power to bring the Ideal to life. Each member has complete freedom to imagine the Light of the Spirit, as he wants, believes and feels. Many of us believe that it will be the highest divine Master, who in his love for humans often returns to earth in the periods designated as the Great Law of the Father. Others believe in the coming of the Great Individuality of Man, the Prophet, the Restorer, the Paraclete. And still others in the rebirth of the world by the Spirit of Christ coming from above. But these differences do not matter. We all share the unwavering confidence that God's love is more vivid than ever, that it can and must coincide with the history of the world that the Light is coming." W. Dynowska, *Pierwszy Wszechświatowy Kongres Sekcji Towarzystwa Teozoficznego* [*The First World Congress of the Theosophical Society*], "Przegląd Teozoficzny" 1921, nr 2, pp. 59–65. See also: idem, *O celach Towarzystwa Teozoficznego* [*The Aims of the Theosophical Society*], "Przegląd Teozoficzny" 1921, nr 2, pp. 65–66.

²² I could familiarise myself with the content of the manuscript containing Adam Okrzeński's considerations courtesy of Mrs. Maria Metzler, his daughter, for which I am truly grateful. Okrzeński's sketches were collected by P. Piekarski and M. Metzler. In the footnotes I keep the pagination from this particular text.

Jan Hadyna (1899–1971). As a testimony to Okrzeński's esoteric fascination stand his ponderings, preserved in typescripts, entitled *Elementarz ewolucji człowieka* [*The Primer of Human Evolution*], which is a kind of extended commentary on selected areas of Dynowska's translation of the *Bhagavad Gita*.²³ The first part of *Elementarz* was dated by the author as July 1955 and he finished the second part in December 1958, although, the original layout of the sketches has not been preserved. For the purposes of his study, the author made an independent series of black and white as well as colour prints which were designed to supplement the text. The primary assignment of these works is not known. What is noteworthy is the excellent standard particularly of the black and white illustrations that can be associated with works by Robert Fludd, and at the same time with geometric images of the structure of matter, which could be found in some theosophical publications, for example: in *Occult Chemistry* by Annie Besant and Charles W. Leadbeater.²⁴

Okrzeński wrote with great conviction and passion, freely constructing a vision of a world in which motifs of Eastern thought intermingle in an eclectic symbiosis with theosophical beliefs, as well as biblical quotations and elements of Christian doctrine and the basic laws of mechanics. The various parts do not always constitute a coherent whole. The extremely elaborate cosmology and anthropology,²⁵ to which the author devoted a lot of space stand as an excellent example of syncretism, in which important motifs in esoteric environments can be found. All reflections were written in a very specific style of language, referring directly to romantic poetry and Young Poland, which were based on pre-war Polish esoteric sources. For this reason, the *Elementarz* with its high-sounding phrases is not an easy read for today's audience, although it says a lot about the patriotic upbringing of that generation.

When Okrzeński uses concepts derived from the religious systems of the East, he does so through their theosophical interpretation, which he found in both the explanations of the *Bhagavad Gita* written by Dynowska, as well as

²³ For example: II, 46; VII, 1–6; IX, 4; XIV, 24. See: *Bhagawatgita. Pieśń Pana* [*The Bhagavat Gita. Song of the Lord*], tłum. W. Dynowska, Biblioteka Polsko-Indyjska [Polish-Indian Library], Madras 1947. One might also add as a footnote that Besant and Leadbeater at the very beginning of their work on evolution also appealed to the *Bhagavad Gita* XV, 7; see: A. Besant, C. W. Leadbeater, *Man...*, op. cit., p. 1.

²⁴ Eidem, *Occult Chemistry*, London 1919.

²⁵ Following esoteric concepts, Okrzeński wrote an anthropology which listed the 10 senses, the mind and the "Self", A. Okrzeński, *Elementarz ewolucji człowieka*, typescript, private collection, p. 15. He also described the mind as consisting of intelligence and imagination.

in other works published within the Polish-Indian Library, which he collected.²⁶ Interpretations of the key categories which appear in the study are also theosophical in character, for example the descriptions of the various bodies – mental, astral and causal – that play an important role within the whole topic. However, the author did not ditch Christianity, whose various concepts and ideas he tried to match with elements of Eastern thought. This synthetic approach to religion arose as a result of the author's beliefs, who also saw in the history of religion the operation of evolution, progressing from faith to the esoteric teachings defined by Okrzeński as the "hermetic band," and ultimately leading to universal knowledge, or the "cosmic band."²⁷ The author of *Elementarz* was not interested in the reconstruction of history, in which Chodkiewicz indulged, and so he merely made mention of the existence of Lemuria and Atlantis. Evolution involved Okrzeński primarily as a cognitive problem relating to the clarification of involutory cosmology finding expression in religious terms: "So the evolution of man is a process of cognition merely for discovering its own opportunities created long ago in the band of involution, and waiting for a very long time until the action of man finally catches up with them."²⁸

In the opinion of the author, the purpose of this complicated process was a union with Brahman, tantamount to attaining a profound experience of oneself, arising from inner transformation, identified with a return to the original nature and the realisation of the individual self. In Okrzeński's vision of the Absolute, a decisive role is played by specific dualism, since in the "Elementarz" it was described as devoid of any "Perpetual," "Immoveable," "Immutable" and also as "Another" Creator of the world – the most complete implementation of the self on the structure of monads. At the same time Okrzeński uses the names of God, which he found in the *Bhagavad Gita*, for example, calling him "The Knower of Fields." The supreme category was the concept of the Spirit, with Christian connotations, while referring to the tradition of Polish romanticism, particularly Juliusz Słowacki's poetry, considered by many Poles to be prophetic. Okrzeński identifies the space of the Spirit with the Idea in which lies a transcendent pattern of things.²⁹

²⁶ This happens, for example, with regard to "adi", understood here as the idea of the world, or "Buddhi" identified with intuition. The repeatedly appear in the text as the concept of "atma", "kundalini", "manas" or "soma", *ibidem*, pp. 13–14.

²⁷ *Ibidem*, p. 8.

²⁸ *Ibidem*, p. 88.

²⁹ Note the remarkable permanence of the Spirit concept derived from Juliusz Słowacki's poetry in Polish esoteric thinking. Dynowska also referred to it in her notes on the *Bhagavad Gita*: "Beyond Dharma there is a common, collective Dharma of social groups,

Okrzański also raises a fundamental question at this point: under what conditions does an absolute reality begin to differentiate. He responds to this most fundamental issue in various conventions. He points to the workings of Truth and Logos, with the latter in particular supposedly having a universal significance according to the author, because it is the “source, action and effect” of things, and although the first two levels remained elusive, the effect manifests itself as a kind of energy of existence.³⁰ The author also identified involution with the biblical act of creation, writing: “It is therefore a process called involution, characterised by the creation, this famous ‘Stand up’ according to the old bible or ‘Word’ or the Greek ‘Logos’ which becomes the body as a shape visible in the abyss of the ‘nothing.’”³¹ Paradoxically, this line seems to be much more theosophic or even Gnostic than Christian, because Okrzański recognises the multiplicity of logos.³² The Gnostic interpretation is also reflected in Okrzański’s text as clearly connecting involution with a collapse that was the result of the spirits acting against the hierarchy of being and cognition, in the universal meaning of the sufferings of Christ, as well as the evolution of the concept of the Church itself which, as “Peter’s” becomes a metaphor for life in a “sea of chaos,” while “the church of John” now denotes an era of full cognition.³³ The community aspect of evolution did not diminish in the author’s eyes the importance of an individual’s suffering or sacrifice, or the role of purgatory. The recognition of the latter, moreover, does not contradict a belief in reincarnation, which is a condition for the self-development of all beings.³⁴

families, classes, religions and nations. They most strongly feel the Dharma of their nation and in their faithful execution they become true champions, since they express the quintessential Spirit of the Nation/ King of Spirits. It is not a beautiful fantasy of the genius Słowacki, but a strict devotion to the truth / and is an aid in one’s own development path,” *Bhagawadgita...*, op. cit., p. 210. Chodkiewicz published in London a work by Słowacki with his own comments, J. Słowacki, *Genesis z Ducha [Genesis from the Spirit]*, London 1957.

³⁰ A. Okrzański, op. cit., p. 4.

³¹ Ibidem.

³² “There are more Sons of Fire (logos), still coming with the passage of cosmic days and centuries, but beyond them one most important point in God’s Creation continues unchanging and eternal beyond all acts, with no beginning or end, not based on anything, smaller than the smallest crumbs in His infinity never understood”, ibidem, p. 106. It seems that the formation of the concept of Logos based directly on this could affect the concepts of world hierarchy introduced by the World Besant and Leadbetera, cf. N. Goodrick-Clarke, *The Coming of the Masters...*, op. cit., pp. 151–153.

³³ A. Okrzański, op. cit., pp. 49–50.

³⁴ Ibidem, pp. 73–74. The relationship of reincarnation with the process of evolution is also explained by the author in another place: “The personality does not die so much as

Chodkiewicz wrote about the evolutionary continuity of “waves of life,” which he identified with minerals, plants, animals and humanity, whose order of appearance was preordained,³⁵ and therefore it is impossible to determine the intermediary evolutionary forms. However, according to Okrzański these transitions between and within the four “life groups” were particularly interesting, as they characterised the very process of change. In his view, a higher form of life is created by adapting the lower. One such intermediary link were the apes, as well as the “cavemen” who, like wild animals, were “living robots” and began to gain self-awareness and open the path of liberation.³⁶

The comparison of living beings to robots is highly significant here. For Okrzański the structure of reality was a great cosmic mechanism whose operation can be described with reference to particular laws of physics. This specific approach is noted from the first pages of his treatise, when considering the origin of the world:

Any construction is created on the physical plane according to the principle of energy-system. [...] This mechanical system, energy and derivative force, was founded in moments of energy release. For example, in a thermal system the burning of fuel provides energy that heats the exhaust gases, increasing their resilience and this is a derivative force which meets the intended effect, but under the condition that the mechanical system can provide the robustness required.³⁷

In a similar way he also describes the emergence of the self, stating: “I and the reason created from praenergy is a mechanical system of the pseudo-self.”³⁸ Note that the construction of the image of the world as a mechanical universe combines ambivalent perspectives – the biblical creation and a de-

transform and adapt to the plan of the new incarnation which, together with the repeal of memory and with new robes, blurs the image of the past and along with the influence of the environment creates in a new incarnation a new ‘identity’”, *ibidem*, p. 132.

³⁵ It is worth noting that Chodkiewicz agreed with the theosophical principle that it was humanity that first appeared in the process of evolution: “Human spirits create, as defined in occultism, the first ‘waves of life,’ which millions of centuries ago came to the Earth [...] however, they manifested themselves and others ‘waves of life,’ which started to work when the first wave appeared in some form, and these waves now stand on various rungs of the evolutionary ladder. Four great kingdoms of nature are the four ‘waves of life,’ which at various times began their involution [...] and accordingly today are at different stages of evolution. These are the kingdoms of minerals, plants, animals and humanity. Evolutionarily, the oldest is the kingdom of humanity”, K. Chodkiewicz, *Dusza zbiorowa [Collective Soul]*, “Lotos” 1935, z. 10, p. 328.

³⁶ A Okrzański, *op. cit.*, pp. 31–33.

³⁷ *Ibidem*, p. 6.

³⁸ *Ibidem*, p. 7.

terminated system, and is rather pessimistic. The specific soteriology of Logos, referred to by Okrzeński, reinforces this impression: “And we know the white Logos as a full key of creation, empowered with the Light and Love, so if we see them operating in cold and hard modes of the Mechanism, we get a full and true picture of Karma-Transmutation, in other words an evolution condemned to error.”³⁹ From this perspective, technological civilisation turns out to be a trap and to be renounced in order to proceed down the esoteric path of development:

To understand this, you need to see clearly in the imagination a state in which the possibilities of life created by civilisation would become available without the material resources on which civilisation is based, so that the man could be free to discard it just like a large heavy prosthesis, but without losing old possibilities and gaining, as in a fairy tale, new and much greater ones which he had never even seen in his wildest dreams.⁴⁰

According to Okrzeński, the right evolution largely depends on the choices of people and should open “the whole creative process by which a microcosm is created ‘because’ from here it is easy to reach the essence of the universe.”⁴¹ Its effect may be universal access to cosmic Akashic books with their an angelic origin and the entrance to the White Brotherhood.⁴²

The concept of esoteric evolution according to Okrzeński is a specific escape from history, which is not surprising when you consider the author’s experience of war and the fact that he wrote his reflections in the Stalinist era. It also stands as an important testimony to the fact that this idea after the war was an important element of esoteric research, although there was a break with historiosophy, which was its original expression, and its great optimism.

In conclusion, I would like to appeal to the artistic vision of evolution, which can be found in the works of Janina Kraupe-Świdorska (1921–), the Krakowian painter and professor from the Academy of Fine Arts. Let us recall briefly that her esoteric interests date back to her early youth and cover the entire spectrum of alternative currents of spirituality. Among them, it is worth mentioning Theosophy, Anthroposophy, astrology and Buddhism, as well as Gurdjieff and Jung. Kraupe also participated in lectures organised by the Kraków Polish-Indian Friendship Society, whose Secretary General was Hadyňa, where she met, among others, Dynowska during her visit to Poland. All of these esoteric influences are reflected in the works of Kraupe.

³⁹ *Ibidem*, p. 113.

⁴⁰ *Ibidem*, p. 14.

⁴¹ *Ibidem*, p. 18.

⁴² *Ibidem*, pp. 43–44, 51.

The idea of evolution gained particular importance in a series of abstract representations originally titled *Metamorphoses*. The inspiration for their creation was an anthroposophical meditation on a flower, symbolising life changes.⁴³ Kraupe drew on these experiences using the automatic drawing method by creating eighteen sketches to form the foundation of the *Metamorphoses*. As she recalls, she entered a trance state in which she received direct contact with another dimension, and heard a voice explaining the nature of reality changes. Therefore, in the abstract form of these unusual compositions can be found many signs that serve as a formal reference to a symbolism important not only for Western esotericism. In 1955, on the canvas of these drawings the painter prepared some black and white monotypes, which was the first “incarnation” of the cycle. With time, the *Metamorphoses* turned into *Transmutations* and then into *The Book of Changes*. The change in title is associated with the appearance of colour and the introduction of different techniques with which Kraupe experimented in the next set of works.⁴⁴ However, the essential composition of all the paintings remained unchanged, just as the verses that from the outset stood as the author’s description of each presentation.

The content of each piece tells the story of the emergence of life, its transformations, and finally the fundamental transformation of death, and one of the key words within them is the concept of evolution. In this perspective, there is no word about a fall, though, as Kraupe writes, “the black sign of material power indicates to us the direction of the involuntional process.”⁴⁵ Throughout the cycle, both in the painting as well as in the texts there is a strongly marked duality – the top and bottom, luminous white and infinite darkness, whose existence Kraupe indicates in a space full of dynamic and colourful transformations. However, this opposition is not subject to valuation and is rather a representation of a Jungian perception of the world, in which the combination of yin and yang refers to the nature of things, in which everything has its rightful place.

The process of evolution takes place as a consequence of the interpenetration of two forces: “pure spirituality” and “full materiality.”⁴⁶ Their action is best described in poem VIII (Fig. 1):

⁴³ See: R. Steiner, *Wie erlangt man Erkenntnisse der höheren Welten?* (GA 10), pp. 24–32, [online] <http://anthroposophie.byu.edu/schriften/010.pdf> [access: 20 March 2015].

⁴⁴ In succession there were monotypes, oil paintings, and finally colour linocuts.

⁴⁵ J. Kraupe, *Book of Changes III*, [in:] eadem, *Malarstwo, grafika 1983–2014 [Paintings Prints 1983–2014]*, Kraków 2014, p. 75. All fragments of *The Book of Changes* translated by C. Thornton.

⁴⁶ Eadem, *Book of Changes IV*, [in:] eadem, *Malarstwo...*, op. cit., p. 77.

The fusion
 Of two powers full of ardor
 In the milky veil of the ethereal frontier
 The descent
 Into a world of dense matter
 And formation of shapes
 Which
 Will someday open themselves
 To receive impulses
 From planes
 Higher
 And lighter
 In the process
 Of continual evolution.⁴⁷



Fig. 1. *Metamorphoses VIII*, monotype
 Courtesy of Janina Kraupe

About the ways in which the unitary transformation decides “Fate” and “Karma,” which connect chosen beings:

who together
 must manifest
 in the material plane
 and fulfill
 their evolutionary
 purpose⁴⁸

The concept of evolution in the painted visions of Kraupe are not the result of studies and analysis, but from personal experience. The painter reveals a lively space full of magic, part of which is each person. At the same time the alchemy of the evolutionary process means that none of the systems is definitive, nor unambiguously determined, and the achievement of transcend-

⁴⁷ Eadem, *Book of Changes VII*, [in:] eadem, *Malarstwo...*, op. cit., p. 85.

⁴⁸ Eadem, *Book of Changes XVI*, [in:] eadem, *Malarstwo...*, op. cit., p. 101.

ent light becomes possible thanks to the experience of the infinite forms of writing the *signatura rerum*. In this perspective, the incarnational cycle belongs to the transformation of the order of creation, thanks to which man participates in the universal transformation in which no step is random or chaotic:

A five-pointed star
Accompanies
The stage of evolution
And an emerald lights
watches
over alchemical
change⁴⁹ (Fig. 2)



Fig. 2. *Metamorphoses XI*, monotype
Courtesy of Janina Kraupe

In this interpretation, evolution seems to be a kind of epiphany, enabling a process of a deep realisation of the world and man. The descent and evolutionary return are repeated many times and constitutes a consistent path of improvement. Importantly, it characterises plant life, the individual and the entire universe.

The concept of evolution was a very important message in Polish communities interested in Theosophy. Initially, its interpretation was concurrent with the specific historiosophy of this esoteric movement, as shown by the work of Chodkiewicz. However, after World War II, this understanding underwent many changes. The idea of evolution was in fact separated from the history of humanity and transferred primarily to the universal transformation of man that takes place in the spiritual realm and beyond the course of history.

⁴⁹ Eadem, *Book of Changes XI*, [in:] eadem, *Malarstwo...*, op. cit., p. 91.

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