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## HOW TO GET DIOGENES ON THE STAGE

A number of theatre plays from the 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> century drew inspiration from the history of the European nations;<sup>1</sup> topics from the history of the ancient Greece and Rome were used especially frequently by both scholastic and secular authors. Through depicting the history and the historical figures, the dramatists expressed their opinions about current issues, they presented the audience with moral examples that were meant to be followed, they showed them terrible crimes and the deserved punishments, they flattered the powerful people, etc. However, the history often served only as a material, it was irrelevant how the authors decided to change the information they got from the original sources and the actual choice of the sources was irrelevant as well.

However, there also existed plays in the 17<sup>th</sup> century that wanted to depict the historical events as they had really occurred and the historical figures as they had really lived. Sometimes, the historical event presented on the stage was meant to show a moral about the past times and it could even be a part of schooling. In 1610, the play entitled *Triumphus poetices scholasticus* – which was performed at the Lutheran *gymnasium* in Kwidzyn (Marienwerder; near Danzig) – presented the audience a trial with the poet Archias who was defended by Cicero. The aim of the author – Bartholomäus Wilhelmi – was to show students a trial in ancient Rome and the facts of that time.<sup>2</sup>

The secular play by a German playwright Johann Rist entitled *Die Friedewünschende Deutschland* (written in 1647, published in 1649) included a requirement that several old Germanic heroes wore costumes corresponding to illustrations in an educative book about old Germans.<sup>3</sup>

In the treatise *Panorthosia*, Johannes Amos Comenius (Jan Amos Komenský) – a member of Unity of Brethren, a Czech exile who resided in Polish Leszno in the 1640's – expresses his faith in the educative power of decent public theatre performances. Viewers experienced considerable emotions spurred by the fact that the performed acts seemingly came alive in front of them. The plays were meant to draw from history so that the important deeds of the ancestors were not forgotten. The author maintained the historical fidelity of the performance to be important: "Nihil

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<sup>2</sup> NADOLSKI 1963, 207–210.

<sup>3</sup> BRANDT – HOGENDORN 1993, 42.

rebus affingatur, sed quantum potest, ita ut gesta sunt, simili habitu [the term *habitus* can mean a custom or clothing], ceremoniis – ut ipsa antiquitas in conspectum producat...”<sup>4</sup>

However, it remains to be answered to what extent were the authors able to meet their aims – if researchers can assess it from the fragmentary evidence preserved in the surviving sources. For instance, in the text *Triumphus poetices scholasticus*, the author made serious mistakes. According to an analysis by Bogusław Nadolski, one of the characters of the play was Gaius Sempronius Gracchus who was already dead at the time of the trial with Archias etc.).<sup>5</sup>

On the example of depicting the figure of a Cynic Diogenes of Sinope in several European dramas from the 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> centuries, we will demonstrate what the work with a historical figure could have looked like. In the end, we will focus on the play *Diogenes Cynicus redivivus* by Johannes Amos Comenius.

The character of the Cynic Diogenes probably entered the world of theatre in a dramatic dialogue by Hans Sachs entitled *Ein spiel mit 3 personen: Das Gespräch Alexandri Magni mit den philosopho Diogeni* (1558, 1560). In the dialogue, Diogenes, the teacher of virtues, expresses the opinions of the contemporary urban society in front of Alexander the Great and opposes the ruler.<sup>6</sup>

In a five-act comedy by the Elizabethan author John Lilly entitled *A most excellent Comedy of Alexander, Campaspe and Diogenes* (published in 1584)<sup>7</sup>, Diogenes had the role of a mentor who lectures Alexander (who visits Diogenes at a market place) on how the ruler should behave: especially if he is in love with an unsuitable woman who moreover refuses his affection. Diogenes's acts do not lack a critical, philosophical edge; however the play was meant to be mainly entertaining. The author thus concentrated more on the love plotline and the comic contribution of the character than on Cynic philosophy.

Dyjogenes, a character of the allegoric Polish play entitled *Tragedyja o polskim Scylurusie* (*Tragedy about the Polish Scylurus*) by the otherwise unknown author Jan Jurkowski (published in 1604 in Krakow),<sup>8</sup> represents eloquent wise people or a priest. Jurkowski's religious loner Dyjogenes has university education, he loves virtuous life and serious study and he is able to give wise advice to rulers. Jurkowski's

<sup>4</sup> On the text see e.g. ZAJÍČEK 1987, 12, 13. See KOMENSKÝ 1966, part *Panorthosia*, chap. XXIV, 357, cols. 652, 653 (quotation see col. 653).

<sup>5</sup> NADOLSKI 1963, 207–210.

<sup>6</sup> LARGIER 1997, 34–41, 322–333 (texts). For the character of Diogenes in the texts by Hans Sachs, see also KÜHLMANN 2010.

<sup>7</sup> LILLY 1858; see also *ibid.*, pp. XXVI, XXVII.

<sup>8</sup> For the play, see LEWAŃSKI 1981, 336–341; 396, 397, 404, 405. See also OKOŃ 1970, 138. For the Scylurus story, see PLUTARCHUS – REGIUS 1508, fol. [Biiiv]. See also JURKOWSKI 1961, 78 (*dramatis personae* and explanation of their names) and 79 (a prologue).

figure has traits of character of his historical namesake and partially also acts in the same way. However, the author only took advantage of the renown of the philosopher's name (and of what he represented) and transformed his bearer of the famous name into a representative of the promoted living program.

In the play by the well known Jesuit Jakob Masen entitled *Comedia fabulosa: Bacchi schola eversa* (published in 1657 as a part of the work *Palaestra eloquentiae ligatae*), Diogenes with a lantern unsuccessfully attempts to bring a group of drunkards to the right path.<sup>9</sup>

The Latin-German play by the Jesuit Arnold Engel of Netherland origin entitled *Comoedo-tragicum Bacchanal*<sup>10</sup> (created around 1664 in Czech environment), written on the occasion of Lent, depicts – through two contrasting groups of different personalities – two different approaches to life, namely self-indulgent on one hand and moral and seriously philosophical on the other. Among the serious philosophers and authors, Diogenes with his indispensable lantern and critical messages is also present.

The originally Italian libretto by Nicolò Minato (*La lanterna di Diogene*, music by Antonio Draghi; performed on January 30, 1674 in Vienna) was – for the convenience of the Emperor Leopold I and his wife – translated into German and subsequently published in 1674 under the title of *Die Latern des Diogenes*.<sup>11</sup> Diogenes remains a philosopher with minimal needs, yet he undergoes a transformation from a stubborn man refusing to leave his barrel to a mentor and voluntary henchman of the Macedonian king. For the character of the philosopher, the main mission was to flatter the ruler.<sup>12</sup>

In the works of the 17<sup>th</sup> century dramatists (and not only there), Diogenes was established as a morally perfectly pure character who was known for his aversion to power, wealth and secular position and was thus able to act as an independent moral corrective and mentor on any issue. To a certain extent this also applies to the last mentioned example. However, as we have seen, various authors approached the character very specifically.

<sup>9</sup> MASEN 1657, IV, 1, 2, 313–315.

<sup>10</sup> For the author, see JACKOVÁ 2007, 158, 159. See also ENGEL [1664], fols. 269v, 274v–326v.

<sup>11</sup> See GROVE 1980, 602–604; The Italian text was not available to the author.

<sup>12</sup> See MINATO 1674, III, [16.], fol. [EVIr]. Here Diogenes finishes his long unsuccessful seeking for people and addresses Alexander the Great delivering these flattering words: “Diog. Hoere, du bist Verstaendig, Berecht, Rein, Gnaedig vnd Fromm, begnadest ein jeden, schenckest denen die dich bestehlen, leydest die dich beleydigen, entschuldigest die dich verrathen, vergibest deinen Feinden. Dise sein Tugenden den Goettern nur gemein, Du bist was Himmlisches, so dann kein Mensch, nein, nein. Aber wilt [sic!] du, daß ich es sage. Alex. Ja. Diog. Ich wolte, daß du zu Zeiten mehr ein Mensch waerest.”

In the following passage, we shall see how Comenius managed to fulfill his own requirement from *Panorthosia* in his drama entitled *Diogenes Cynicus redivivus*. This four-act play was performed at the Brethren-Lutheran *gymnasium illustre* in Polish Leszno in 1640. It depicted Diogenes's life from the point when he entered Athens, became a philosopher there living in a barrel, rambling the city with his lantern that helped him to find real people and giving hard moral lessons to members of society that he was meeting. The next part depicted how Diogenes was captured by pirates and sold to slavery, and in the end his calm stay in Corinth where he was a house slave teacher and where he also died.<sup>13</sup>

**Sources.** Comenius took his inspiration mainly from the Latin translation of the treatise *Peri bion gnomon apophthegmaton ton en philosophia eudokimesanton biblia deka* (*Ten Books about the Lives, Opinions and Statements of Eminent Philosophers*)<sup>14</sup> by the Greek author Diogenes Laërtios (the first half of the 3<sup>rd</sup> century AD). The Latin translation by Ambrogio Traversari was published for the first time in 1475.<sup>15</sup>

However, Diogenes Laërtios was not a historian of philosophy in the current meaning of that word; he was a doxographer: yet his information about Diogenes is surely the most complete source available. We can basically consider as sources also some works by other classical authors, especially by Plutarch (*Moralia, Vitae parallelae*) and by Cicero (*Tusculanae disputationes*). Yet besides this, the dramatist also borrowed quotations from other classical authorities. Comenius also used the treatises by Erasmus of Rotterdam as a source for his play. Sometimes, slightly other interpretation of the Greek text of Diogenes Laërtios text can be found in the chapter on Diogenes in *Apophthegmatum ex optimis utriusque linguae scriptoribus... libri octo* by Erasmus of Rotterdam than in Traversari's translation. On the other hand, some of the quotations from Erasmus which Comenius uses in his play, cannot be considered as historical sources either.<sup>16</sup>

**Philosophy.** According to the author, his play introduces the life and opinions of the Cynic Diogenes. Cynicism surely represents a philosophy of great inner human freedom, of clearing oneself of material things, of return to nature and of rejecting all social conventions. However, certain aspects of Cynic teaching appeared as unacceptable in the 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> century. Thus in any of the school plays, including the school play by Comenius, Diogenes was never depicted as a proponent of free love and publically practiced eroticism. Moreover, in his study from 1986, Pavel Floss showed that this modification was not the only one. In Diogenes's simple way of

<sup>13</sup> Generally, on the Comenius's play *Diogenes Cynicus redivivus* see KLOSOVÁ 2016, 63–80, 187–189.

<sup>14</sup> DIOGENES LAERTIUS 1972.

<sup>15</sup> DIOGENES LAERTIUS – TRAVERSARI 1535.

<sup>16</sup> For quotations in Comenius's *Diogenes* see NOVÁKOVÁ 1973, 485–500b. See also ERASMUS OF ROTTERDAM 1558, 199–244 and DIOGENES LAERTIUS – TRAVERSARI 1535, 327–359.

life, Comenius to a certain degree saw the practice of Stoic teaching. Thus in various parts of the play, he attributed to Diogenes statements of Stoic thinkers (often adjusted so that they would better correspond to Christianity). However, according to Floss, this “Stoicisation of Cynicism” did not mean that “Comenius perceived these two schools of thought as identical... he approached the ‘Stoicisation’ and ‘Christianization’ of the legend about Diogenes with remarkable caution and care – he did not go so far as to violate the facticity of information by Diogenes Laërtius and Plutarchos...”. Floss further maintains that the author “clearly understands... certain important aspects of... [Cynicism], identifies with them and uses them”. The Cynicism enabled Comenius to express his critique of Platonic and Aristotelian philosophy. What the dramatist liked about Cynicism was positive attitude to work, aversion to elitism and classical intellectualism (especially to that of Plato and Zeno), which is actually even ridiculed in two scenes of the play (act III, scenes 3–4). He was also impressed by determinedness and thoroughness with which the Cynics (unlike the Stoics) put their teaching into practice.<sup>17</sup> The choice of the topic of the play was surely influenced also by the good example of how to bear a simple life and how to face various life challenges while in exile in a foreign country.

**Properties, costumes, facts.** Some details pertaining to the performance are known to us thanks to the text of the play and to the author’s remarks which detail the actors’ actions and mention the costumes, properties and sometimes also the actors’ masks. Many of the acts depicting Diogenes relate to his dwelling, a barrel (*dolium*) that he repeatedly enters and from which he comes out and with which he manipulates. For example in act II, scene 3, Diogenes comes rolling his barrel with an adjusted entrance, he positions it at a right angle to a wall, enters it and then looks out.<sup>18</sup> When a message reaches Athens that king Philipp is approaching and wants to attack (scene 6 of the same act), panic breaks out. People are rashly running around and chaotically trying to accumulate objects they could use for their defense. Diogenes ridicules this hectic and meaningless activity: and in order to do something as well he starts to roll his barrel back and forth.<sup>19</sup>

The descriptions of the actors’ action correspond to a manipulation with a classical wooden barrel that looked like the majority of people who heard or wrote about Diogenes in the Early Modern Era would have imagined his dwelling. Stefan Schmitt wrote an extensive study about depictions of Diogenes in German and Dutch visual

<sup>17</sup> See FLOSS 1986, p. 9–19.

<sup>18</sup> COMENIUS 1973, II, 3, p. 456 “Hic secedat moxque reversus advolvat sibi dolium ita aptatum, ut erectum relinquat foramen patulum, quâ ei ingredi et egredi liceat. Hoc ergo ad parietem alicubi advolutum statuminet, ingressusque et prospectans gaudentis gestus exhibeat...”

<sup>19</sup> COMENIUS 1973, II, 6, p. 461: “Publicâ hâc omnium occupatione me solum esse otiosum non convenit: cum domuncula quoque mea mihi negotium esto. (*Invadatque dolium suum et illud huc illuc volvat...*)”

materials and he concluded that this image prevailed among artists. Among the depictions he managed to gather is only one that portrays Diogenes coming out of a huge amphora.<sup>20</sup> Yet according to the Greek text by Diogenes Laërtios, Diogenes actually dwelled in such a great bin for wine and corn called *pithos* (the largest of them had the height of an adult).<sup>21</sup> To manipulate with this heavy pottery in the manner described above on stage would thus be highly difficult. In this respect, Comenius succumbed to the influence of the contemporary idea which was connected to the term *dolium*, a wooden barrel.<sup>22</sup>

The role of a prop and partly also of a costume was fulfilled by a fur-lined coat that was not entirely voluntarily given to Diogenes by one of his listeners. Firstly, this piece of clothing is highly un-Greek and secondly, Comenius describes it as “togam pellibus subductam”.<sup>23</sup> Comenius knew that toga was an overgarment of ancient Romans, yet it is not entirely clear how he imagined it. However, with respect to the 17<sup>th</sup> century clothing we can be sure about the meaning of the word. It follows also from language textbooks written by Comenius. At that time, this Latin expression meant a coat with long sleeves reaching down to one’s ankles.<sup>24</sup> Therefore it must be said that the expression *toga* does not fully correspond to a word *tribon* (used in a Greek original); on the other hand, it is not such a absolutely inappropriate expression as it could seem.<sup>25</sup>

The mention of this coat with long sleeves confirms the assumption that the costumes used in the play corresponded to the common clothing of Comenius’s times. A good idea about what Diogenes looked like on stage in the play from Leszno can be derived from a depiction that appeared on the first edition of *Diogenes* in Dutch in 1660. In front of a temple in a vaguely Doric style there are two pitchers and behind them an elegant gentleman, all dressed in the 17<sup>th</sup> century clothing. Diogenes has a beard, the lantern and a solid coat with long sleeves and with a distinctive collar.<sup>26</sup> The usage of such clothing on stage was simply in accordance with the usage of that time.

Comenius adjusted also a number of other facts. Many of his mistakes were already pointed out in various studies. The price for the slave Diogenes – 3 obolos

<sup>20</sup> SCHMITT 1993, pp. XXX–XXX and pictures, pp. XXX–XXX, Nos. XXX–XXX.

<sup>21</sup> DIOGENES LAERTIUS 1972, book VI, para. 23, p. 24 and para. 43, p. 42. See also DESMOND 2008, pp. 21, 83.

<sup>22</sup> See e.g. DIOGENES LAERTIUS – TRAVERSARI 1535, p. 329 and ERASMUS OF ROTTERDAM 1558, p. 200.

<sup>23</sup> COMENIUS 1973, III, 1, p. 463.

<sup>24</sup> Cf. e.g. COMENIUS 2011, p. 384.

<sup>25</sup> DIOGENES LAERTIUS 1972, book VI, para. 62, p. 62. An expression *pallium* is used in Latin texts, see e.g. DIOGENES LAERTIUS – TRAVERSARI 1535, p. 348 and ERASMUS OF ROTTERDAM 1558, p. 234.

<sup>26</sup> COMENIUS – HOOGSTRAATEN 1660. The Dutch edition COMENIUS – HOOGSTRAATEN 1672 included a similar depiction, yet the philosopher is already wearing antique-like clothing.

– is ridiculously low in Comenius's play. Moreover, Zeno of Citium, the founder of the school of Stoicism, was confused with Zeno of Elea, the actual author of the paradoxes about motion that are mentioned in the play. Moreover, the historical Diogenes could not meet any of them, since they lived in different periods, etc.<sup>27</sup> The usage of firearms that appear in one of the scenes (act II, scene 6) also has to be counted among these mistakes.

Thus can it be said that *Diogenes* by Comenius fulfilled the author's postulate that a play has to be done in such a way as to give the audience undistorted lesson about the old times and ancestors' deeds ("ut ipsa antiquitas in conspectum producat")? Surely not. However, the play by Comenius was set apart from the other adaptations, some of which were already mentioned, by the author's serious attempt to portrait the life of Diogenes as a whole, as an educative material about him. This is also the way the play was perceived by author's contemporaries.

In his letter from the period 1639–1640, Comenius's fellow-believer Georg Vechner understood the author's intention as an effort to pass on knowledge – both about the Cynic philosophy and the praiseworthy example of the Cynic's life. Vechner thought that the lives of other important figures should be mediated for the audience in the same way. Vechner saw *Diogenes* as a beginning of a future educative program passed on through theatre plays. Thanks to series of dramas (e.g. on Pythagoras, Socrates, Plato, Aristotle, Alexander the Great, Crassus etc.) students and other people could learn about the ancient history and wise statements of its great figures.<sup>28</sup>

The play *Diogenes* was praised even by the contemporary German scholar and literary historian Daniel Georg Morhoff who was otherwise a stark critique of various other works by Comenius. According to Morhoff's *Polyhistor*, Comenius wanted to lecture his students about the history of philosophy through theatre plays and as his example, he chose Diogenes.<sup>29</sup>

In the Latin edition of *Diogenes Cynicus redivivus* published in Halberstadt (first published 1673), the editor Christoph Heinrich Lauterbach corrected many of expressions used by Comenius (although their usage was documented in the works of various ancient Roman authors) and changed them into pure Ciceronic Latin. Lauterbach also added entertaining sketches between the acts and a complicated musical scene in the end of the play etc.<sup>30</sup> The editor was interested in the language of the play and its entertaining effect but the scenes with the barrel, the firearms and the fur-lined coat remained unchanged.

<sup>27</sup> See and cf. ČERVENKA 1968, pp. 498–502 and NOVÁKOVÁ 1973, pp. 485–500 (on the confusion of the two Zenos, see *ibid.*, p. 497a). DESMOND 2008, p. 21, 83.

<sup>28</sup> COMENIUS 1973, p. 444.

<sup>29</sup> MORHOFF 1708, book II, chap. IV, p. 380. BLEKASTAD [1969], p. 567.

<sup>30</sup> COMENIUS – LAUTERBACH 1673. On Latin language of this edition of the play see DRASTÍKOVÁ 1965, esp. pp. 128–130. See also KLOSOVÁ 2016, pp. 187–189.

Anachronisms and factual mistakes presented no problem for Comenius's contemporaries – or more likely they were not able to perceive what the current researchers inevitably realize. Current researchers certainly have more information on the life of Diogenes of Sinope than a 17<sup>th</sup> century author. Yet would it suffice for writing a truly historically accurate play about Diogenes? Certainly not. Such a recent researcher would only write a biography of Diogenes which would correspond to the contemporary level of our knowledge of ancient Greek culture.