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*Who's going to be Judas? Should we draw?*¹

*Believe me, I should never have fallen in love with him if I had known he had Judas's face*².

*Judas looking at Judas. Did you see?*³

SUPPER IN MILAN

(COLOURS OF BETRAYAL IN THE VIEW OF LEO PERUTZ)

Contents: 1. Artists love Love; 2. Boccetta; 3. Seventeen ducats; 4. Villon; 5. Three purses; 6. Simoni the victor; Summary.

In Poland, Anno Domini 1506, in Jan Haller's printing house in Kraków, *Łaski's Statute*⁴ is published. At the same time in Milan, Joachim Behaim – a merchant included in the *Last Supper* painting by Leonardo da Vinci – comes to the Three Moors⁵ inn. Young Joachim is as of yet unaware that he's been immortalised in Master Leonardo's painting as Judas. Thus ends the novel in which Leo Perutz gives his own hypothesis of Judas's betrayal. In his version, Joachim Behaim, alias Judas Iscariot, does not regret his crime. Pleased with himself, he travels and wonders that Leonardo chose his face to paint the face of apostle the traitor. And to blame was one 'in-

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¹ P. Huelle, *Ostatnia Wieczerza*, Kraków 2007, p. 194 (own translation).

² L. Perutz, *Leonardo's Judas*, transl. by E. Mosbacher, New York 1988, p. 152.

³ *Ibid*, p. 151.

⁴ The first codification of law published in the Kingdom of Poland (1505). The 1506 publication was the first illustrated printing in Poland.

⁵ Do not mistake with the Three Monkeys Cafe in Philadelphia – city in the USA; do not mistake with a city in the Apocalypse (do not mistake with F. F. Coppola; here: a book in Bible by St John the Apostle (do not mistake with St John the Baptist who baptized people in the Jordan river (do not mistake with Michael Jordan (etc.)))) – where they serve exquisite steaks (and *these* cannot be mistaken with anything).

nocent' meeting with the painter, which lasted for only a moment and took place eight years earlier.

1. Artists love Love

Renaissance Milan is Leonardo's city. In its walls, conversations about painting and music, mathematics and cuisine, God and human affairs do not cease (P, 97-98). However, the street traditionally lives its own life: the carriers wish cholera, paralysis and smallpox on the passers-by (P, 23). Here and there you can hear the street song: "Thieves and robbers prowl at night,/ Good people, hold your purses tight." (P, 3) The Judas from the title (let us pretend for now that we do not know his identity – although it is commonly known the man is Joachim Behaim) visits several Milan inns: the Lamb, Bell, Weaver's Shuttle, Mulberry Tree (P, 96), and in the last, fourteenth chapter of Perutz's novel, "the Three Moors inn, where the best people stayed" (P, 149). He is in his element in the artistic world. Perutz eagerly provides the names of artists the young merchant meets: Marco d'Oggiono, Matteo Bellincioni, Alfonso Sebastiani, Matteo Bandello, Giambattista Simoni (sculptor in the cathedral – his is the figure of Christ as a young man). It seems that Joachim came to love the night life of bohemian artists, and the long debates on love and art. On his return from Venice, Joachim fondly remembers his first visit to Leonardo's city: "I know an inn where they serve you a wine which could awaken the dead. Painters and other artists frequent the place, and I was on very good terms with them." (P, 149) However, a change of opinion about the artists' world once hosting Behaim in Milan is inevitable. When he sees himself as Judas, he is suddenly furious: "What a vile trick to play. Can one imagine a dirtier, more childish prank? Yet he's an old man, fit for nothing but the grave. So that's why he drew my portrait. I let myself in for it by associating with those painters and all that rabble." (P, 151).

That "old man, fit for nothing" is the author of *The Last Supper*, Master – or Messer – Leonardo. Perutz does not mince words, but that we know since the first pages of his novel – when characterising one poet, the author gives him a face "with the melancholy expression of a monkey afflicted with angina" (P, 2). The writer was very much kinder towards Messer Leonardo – in the novel, the painter has a dignified appearance⁶, excellent,

⁶ "You'll never come across anyone like him, nor will anyone else, for to make another like

broad education⁷, intriguing habits⁸ and splendid references⁹. So, “who is this Messer Leonardo?” (P, 38).

Leonardo da Vinci has been hired by the prior of the Santa Maria delle Grazie monastery. His *Last Supper* is supposed to decorate the refectory, that is, the dining room of the Dominican monastery. Meanwhile, the artist’s work has come to a standstill. The mysterious impotence sets out the novel’s background – together with duke Ludovico Sforza and the worried prior, we wait for Master Leonardo to make an appearance. It is in the duke’s palace that the intellectual elite of Milan gathers, which city seems to be the cultural capital of the then world:

at that time it had attracted the best artists and scholars in Italy to its houses and palaces, and everyone from duke to cobbler wrote, rhymed, criticized, painted, sang, played the fiddle or the lyre or, if incapable of any of these things, merely interpreted Dante. (P, 16)

Everyone reacts with alarm to the news of Leonardo’s creative impotence. The secretary sent to seek the artist finds him “bareheaded in the rain, crouching over his sketch-book” (P, 5). In the face of the prior’s accusations of delaying the work, made in the duke’s presence, the artists con-

him is beyond Nature’s power. (...) He’s impressive to look at” (P, 39).

⁷ This is proven by Leonardo’s indignation on hearing that the duke’s physician treats people by bleeding them. The Renaissance genius presents his knowledge of the medical sciences to end it with a maxim: “What knowledge does he possess? Can he explain to me why sleepiness and boredom both induce the strange activity known as yawning? Can he tell me how it is that sorrow, suffering and physical pain seek a little relief by producing drops of a salty liquid from our eyes? Or why fear and cold both cause the human frame to tremble? Ask him; he won’t know what to answer. He can’t tell you the number of muscles needed to maintain the mobility of the tongue, enabling it to speak and praise its Maker, and he doesn’t know the place and the importance of the spleen and the liver in the human system. Can he explain to me the nature of that wonderful instrument, the heart, devised and made by the Supreme Designer? (...) But to be a physician he should try to understand what a human being is and what life is.” (P, 126-127)

⁸ “For a half scudo that had unexpectedly landed in his pocket that morning Messer Leonardo bought several siskins, two thrushes, two chaffinches and a woodpecker which, as was his custom, he wanted to set free in a meadow or wood outside the city. For he enjoyed watching the different ways in which birds behaved when they were released after a long time in confinement. Some fluttered about uncertainly, as if they did not know what to do with their liberty, while others flew up and away and quickly vanished from sight.” (P, 78)

⁹ Giamino talks to Leonardo about the respect with which duke Moro speaks of the latter: “He mentions your name only with the greatest possible respect.” (P, 133)

fesses with disarming honesty: “I am working so hard on this *Last Supper* that I quite forget to eat or sleep.” (P, 6) A hungry and sleepy painter poses a grave danger to art¹⁰. What is more, true art, not only mechanical craft, requires inspiration, a holy spark, which will allow to express the ingenious idea: “But for this *Last Supper* I need heavenly as well as earthly aid if it is to be something great that will live for all eternity and bear witness to me.” (P, 79). The same philosophy of art is given a more laconic form: “I am a painter and not a pack-ass.” (P, 79). On finishing *The Last Supper*, when d’Oggiono announces joyfully that Leonardo will finally satisfy the duke and make the city famous, the painter gives his philosophy: “I serve no duke and no prince (...) I belong to no city, no country, and no kingdom. I serve only my passion for observing, understanding, ordering and creating, and I belong to my work.” (P, 146).

Indeed, Leonardo is unreservedly engrossed in the work on *The Last Supper*. Although he appears in the novel only from time to time, he is its main protagonist. The reader follows him when he sets off to find another model. Leonardo uses a specific method of portraying the apostles:

Sometimes I’m struck by someone’s chin, forehead, hair or beard, and I follow him all day long wherever he goes, so that I can study his character and personality and base Jacob or Simon Peter or another of the twelve disciples on him. (P, 79)

Perutz starts the story in the novel from Leonardo, who desperately seeks Judas the traitor. Is it worth following him? And what if he exclaims: *Eureka, I found it!* when he sees my face? What if I am the apostle with the treacherous heart? Artists love love, hence they stigmatise the betrayal of love with such passion. Beware of Leonardo, all of you who carry emptiness in your hearts!

¹⁰ Most of all, one has to avoid hurry: “‘We are outraged!’ called the monks. ‘Finish your work, Maestro.’/ ‘Do not hurry me. Might I grasp the whole mystery of the *Supper* as quickly as you wish? May I hurry? Not when I want to paint the Master’s thoughts on resignation and sacrifice; not when Judas reaches out a finger, a finger of a hand which has not touched the silver pieces yet, but yearns so much for them... / *Do not hurry me, oh world, you that do not understand me. Do not cry, oh world, you that understand nothing*” (J. Cepik, *Leonardo da Vinci*, Katowice 198, p. 164; own translation).

2. Bocchetta

Leonardo da Vinci's creative impotence lasts for some time. But the problem the artist is facing (like a block preventing him from continuing), is not easy to solve. His answer to the charges of indolence and failure to meet the deadline for finishing the work is very emphatic:

“It is because I do not yet have and have not yet seen the most important thing of all, Judas's face,” Leonardo replied. “Please understand me, gentlemen, it is not any ordinary rogue or villain I seek; *I need the wickedest man in the whole of Milan, he's the one I'm after, so that I may give Judas his features.* I search for him everywhere, wherever I am, day and night, in the streets, the taverns, the markets and even, Your Serene Highness, at your court; and until I find him I cannot go on with the work – unless I paint Judas with his back to the viewer, but that would bring me dishonour. Find me my Judas, Your Serene Highness, and you'll see how I work.” (P, 11-12; italics by SR)¹¹

Leonardo seeks a wretch to match Judas. It would seem that in Milan there lives a man who is the incarnation of apostle the traitor. That is Bernardo Bocchetta, a Florentine from an old family, very rich, but who has his daughter spin wool late into the night and grudges her food. Leonardo's friend, brother Luca, who taught mathematics at Pavia University, claims that “If Bocchetta could save his father from purgatory by paying half a scudo, he wouldn't do it.” (P, 104) Thus the greedy merchant and usurer is the opposite of Leonardo, who frees siskins, thrushes, chaffinches and a woodpecker.

Bocchetta's figure is presented by the Simpach brothers, two merchants of German descent, who have lived in Milan for twenty years. Anselm and Heinrich pick the wicked Florentine to pieces:

¹¹ Leonardo's struggle with a model (or rather lack thereof) are thus described by his biographer: “He sought for Judas for months. The face of this companion of the Master was only a pale outline. *I do not see him yet*, he drove the monks away. He had combed through Milan's districts of the worst reputation before he reportedly found him – the villain living among other villains in a crumbling ruin, dirty and stuffy as the worst *bordello*” (J. Cepik, op. cit., pp. 165-166; own translation).

“– He’s mean, envious, full of lies and deceit (...) He’s thievish, he’s treacherous, he’s a liar and he’s crafty...”

“– A base individual, without shame or honour (...) He’s capable of any kind of villainy (...)

“– Do you call him a person, Anselm?” – the young brother exclaimed indignantly. “– He’s a monster, an abomination, a repulsive worm who succeeded in creeping into a human skin.” (P, 68)

The friendly Simpach brothers “congratulate” Joachim that in his dealings with Bocchetta he lost only seventeen ducats. In their opinion, no amount is too great to get free of such a wretch. That opinion corresponds to what d’Oggiono earlier tells to Behaim, who does not believe that his debt might never be paid:

“– The man who owes me the money is a Florentine now living in Milan. His name is Bernardo Bocchetta. (...) He owes me seventeen ducats. Seventeen ducats, genuine and of full weight.”

(...)

“– Let me tell you about Bocchetta. (...) So far he has cheated everyone with whom he has dealt. He has gone bankrupt twice, and both times the bankruptcy was fraudulent. He has been in prison and got out without accepting any liability. Everyone knows he’s a rogue and a swindler, but nobody can catch him.” (P, 40-41)

Joachim Behaim does not trust the opinions of his ‘preceptors’, who do not expect him to be successful in this endeavour:

When you have told him your name and the purpose of your visit, he’ll explain that he’s far too busy to see you, or he’s just going to have his supper, or has an extremely important appointment that it’s impossible to postpone, or he’s exhausted from the day’s work, or he’s just about to set out on a pilgrimage to procure indulgences, or he has letters to write or feels ill and must rest – unless he prefers simply to slam the door in your face. (P, 49)

but the bitter taste of failure makes him realise that he shall not win the

battle for the seventeen ducats:

So there was nothing for it but to go away, and as he did so he applied to Bocchetta and himself all the epithets that his fury suggested. He called Bocchetta a scoundrelly, thievish and deceitful miser and himself an idiot, a blockhead and a good-for-nothing, who deserved a whipping, and he said these things to himself so loudly that passers-by turned and stared at him. He would like to see Bocchetta rotting on the gallows, he declared (...) (P, 60)

At first Bernardo Bocchetta, the cruel usurer, seems the ideal model for Judas. But Leonardo has doubts – Bocchetta is a thief and a rascal, but Judas's treason is more than that. The artist senses that the apostle's betrayal does not come only out of his thievish nature. And so Bocchetta cannot be the model for Judas in *The Last Supper*.

He's nothing but a contemptible miser. Rather than keep a cat, he uses a stick to chase the mice in his house. He would have pocketed the thirty pieces of silver and not betrayed Christ.. No, Judas's sin was not avarice, and it was not for the sake of money that he kissed Our Lord in the garden of Gethsemane. (P, 12)

So what is Judas's sin, what does his betrayal consist in? Leonardo doesn't know *that* yet, but he is certain that Judas's face in his *Last Supper* will not be Bocchetta's face.

3. Seventeen ducats

Leonardo's Judas named in the title is Joachim Behaim, born and living in the Czech Republic, but he prefers to be believed a German, because it "gained him more respect and prestige in the countries through which he travelled" (P, 16). He trades everything that he can buy at a good price in the countries of the Middle East. His trading philosophy is simple. In a conversation with the artists building the Milan cathedral the Czech-German confesses:

You have your wares just as I have mine: Christ and the apostles and the Blessed Virgin, the Pharisees, Pilate, the publicans, the sick

of the palsy, the lepers and all the womenfolk in the Bible, as well as the holy martyrs and the Three Kings from the East. And I have my wares: Venetian satin and carpets from Alexandria, raisins in pots and saffron and ginger in greased bags. (P, 47)

The unyielding merchant with whom you cannot haggle, seems quite amiable in Perutz's novel. True, he keeps getting back to the seventeen ducats that Bocchetta owes to his father, but the author presents him more like a Don Juan, travelling from one city to another in search of love. Maybe it will be in Milan that he finds the one for him and soothes his heart. The scene of Joachim meeting the beautiful stranger is called by Perutz a miracle witnessed by St. Jacob Street:

They looked at each other. Their lips were closed, the expression on their faces was that of persons who are strangers to each other, but their eyes asked questions: Who are you? Where are you from? Where are you going? Will you love me? (P, 18)

The enamoured merchant endures torment, because the stranger disappeared – he doesn't know who she is or where she lives. It seems that fate has played a trick on the proud Behaim, maybe as punishment for his previous love affairs: "A delightful little Annie, he said to himself, for to him every girl he fancied was a little Annie, even though her name turned out to be Giovanna, Maddalena, Beatrice or, in an eastern country, Fatima or Julmar." (P, 19) But Joachim does not abandon his search for the beautiful stranger. He attempts to get some information about the girl from a wandering minstrel: "if you could just tell me which church she goes to for Mass." (P, 53) However, his endeavours are fruitless: " 'So you don't want just me to pimp for you, you want Almighty God to do it too,' Mancino said sharply."¹²

Joachim keeps asking Mancino about the girl, whom he stubbornly calls Annie (P, 61) and repeats like a chorus: "tell that to my Annie." (P, 53) When her name is finally revealed (Nicola runs into the inn to thank Joachim for returning her handkerchief, which Mancino takes with anger and sorrow), Joachim is at a loss for words (P, 64). After he meets Niccola

¹² P, 53; actually, the lovers first meet in half-darkness behind a pillar in the church of Sant' Eusorgio.

in the inn by the road to Monza – the lovers are served by a boy born mute (P, 73) – one may suppose that this big love will end in marriage and the happily-ever-afters. Yet the ominous shadow of Bocchetta falls upon the love of Joachim and Niccola. Behaim does not want to give up and he is waiting for an opportune moment to strike and regain the seventeen ducats.

Accursed coward, in this world and the next. I wish I could see him in hell, yelling for a glass of water. But while he's in this world is he to go on prospering, enjoying my ducats, holding them in his hands and tossing them up and catching them and hearing them clink? If he came out of the house now, at this moment, if I just happened to catch him as a result, oh, the mere thought of it is delightful. Come out, you rouge! The plague on you! The plague? That's far too mild a punishment for him. Doesn't he deserve a worse death than that? (P, 119)

It might even be supposed that the reader will take the side of Behaim, a young lover, who rightfully demands the mean usurer to return the money. Behaim, who will become Judas, corners Bocchetta, who was supposed to be Judas, ever stronger. The situation thickens with hatred, and drifts towards crime. When Mancino warns Bocchetta of the threat posed by the young merchant, the hidden Behaim watches their conversation. On hearing the warning, Bocchetta reaction shows hysteria, or even a demonic state of being trapped: “He let out a laugh that sounded like a hoarse bark” (P, 119). The time of confrontation – not so much of good and evil as of greed and hatred on one side and anger and vengeance on the other – is near.

4. Villon

Whence Villon in Perutz's novel on Judas Iscariot? The mysterious poet, born in 1431 in Paris, vanished without a trace – no one knows what his life was after 1464, or when he died. In Perutz's commentary, the author states: “Mancino was no other than François Villon, student, poet, vagabond and member of a gang of thieves who, after disappearing in France, turned up again at the end of the century in Milan, where he lived his restless life among the artists who subsisted in the shadow of the Cathedral” (P, 153). Joachim Behaim first meets Niccola when Mancino-Villon sings his *canzone* for her:

[Joachim] had seen her in the Via San Jacopo, which leads past the fruit and vegetable market, at the time when the Angelus is rung, that is, when it was more crowded than usual, with people flocking to the market to buy cabbages, turnips, apples, figs or olives and mingling with worshippers coming from church. (...) he heard a song being sung over in the market place, and he turned and, in the midst of the noise and bustle, the baskets of grapes, the barrows piled with vegetables, the braying donkeys, the swearing porters, the squabbling peasants, the haggling women and the prowling cats, he saw a man standing on a vegetable barrel and singing in a melodious voice, as unperturbed as if he were alone in the market place and all round him was quiet. (P, 17-18)

“It was immediately obvious to [Behaim] that the man’s song was directed at her” (P, 18), at the beautiful stranger. And since the girl vanished in the crowd, the mysterious singer on the barrel of cabbage is the only trace of her existence. Joachim decides to gain all information about the Milan beauty from the singer – Mancino. His interest has likely been awoken also by the singer himself: “Who’s the man (...) He’s a versifier, a poet, and he recites his poems to earn himself a meal. They call him Mancino, because he does everything with his left hand” (P, 32). Over a jug of wine tongues loosen, and soon the merchant learns that the poet is a ‘friend’ of master Leonardo: “We call him Mancino because he doesn’t know his real name himself, and Messer Leonardo says it’s a great miracle anyone could so totally forget his past life because of a brain injury.” (P, 51) It turns out that Behaim has already met Mancino:

now that I’m sitting facing you I have the feeling, or rather I’m almost certain, that I once saw you years ago. Your face is not one that is easily forgotten. I was sitting over a glass of wine outside an inn at which I was staying somewhere in Burgundy or Provence. It was a summer’s day, and I saw a procession coming along the street; there were two pikemen on the right and two on the left, and in the middle was a man they were taking to the gallows, and that man was you. But, so far from looking like an evil-doer, you walked proudly, head up, as if you had been invited to dine at the duke’s table. (P, 100)

Behaim is fascinated by the new acquaintance (it might be caused by the

fact that he is unable to meet the beautiful stranger); Mancino-Villon does indeed arouse much emotion. Perutz has him come into the inn accompanied by Villon's song:

“– There's Mancino. He's kept us waiting a long time this evening. Mancino, come here.”

“– He wouldn't have come sooner even if the Pope had sent for him. He's been with that fat girl he's crazy about.”

“– He walks in like a hero, straight from the battlefield of love...”

“– from the bordel in which they both reside.”¹³

Mancino-Villon is a volcano of various emotions. At first sight, he is haughty and cynical: “The first commandment is: Stay on good terms with those who have the money.” (P, 61) When asked to use his dagger, he agrees despite lack of time, adding the innocent words: “you know what it says in the Bible: one must be ready to leave one's boat and one's nets for a good case.” (P, 101) Yet every now and again the poet's spirit rises in him. He repeats the chorus from Villon: “Only myself I do not know”¹⁴. He is also a prophet. He senses that Niccola's acquaintance with the German merchant will cause a disaster, one that cannot be avoided: “‘You will see her again,’ said Mancino, the grief in his face turning to inner fury. ‘You will see her again, because I can't prevent it. And take note of this: I'm afraid it will turn out badly for the girl. And also for you. And perhaps also for me.’” (P, 53) In fact, the greatest price will indeed be paid by the poet, because

¹³ P, 31; Perutz writes Mancino's song, which is in fact Villon's song, as the singer appears in the Lamb inn: *Say that you love me, and no sooner said/ Than with rekindled passion I replied:/ "Into a paradise I'll turn your bed/ In the bordel in which we both reside."/ Triumphant, like Achilles in his day,/ The battle won, and with a victor's pride,/ I left her sleeping when I came away/ In the bordel in which we both reside.*

¹⁴ See P, 35; *I know the priest by his apparel,/ I know the master by the man;/ The wine by glancing at the barrel/ The vanity of life's brief span./ I know praise and I know blame,/ Stabs in the back, the lightning blow;/ I know honour, vice and shame;/ Only myself I do not know.* In Villon's biography, presented as a novel by Jarmila Loukotková, the poem makes such an impression that after its last words *I know too well brute death's relentless flow/ (...)/ I know it all, myself I do not know*, there is unending silence (J. Loukotková, *Poeta śpiewa na przekór* (orig. *Navzdory básník zpívá*), transl. by A. Bluszcz, Katowice 1978, p. 41).

neither Boccetta nor Behaim truly love Niccola. Only Mancino loves her.

His love to Niccola is purely platonic – Mancino, a regular customer of brothels and paid murderer, carries in his heart a pure affection for a young girl, daughter of Boccetta the usurer. Well aware that Behaim will stop at nothing to regain his seventeen ducats, Mancino warns Boccetta against the young merchant (P, 117-119). The enamoured minstrel does all this for Niccola, whom he is not worthy of:

Look at you and what you are, he began his self-denunciation. Do you still call yourself a scholar? You're a loafer, a pauper, a fool and a clown. You're a stable boy, handy with a knife when occasion arises, chained all your life to this abject poverty; and now you're in the winter of your life, and how long will it be before they carry you away and pronounce over you the ritual words, *De terre vient, en terre tourne*? How did I come to lose my youth? How and when did it happen? It stole away like a thief in the night, and suddenly I saw that it had gone. (P, 114-115)

There is the constant inner fight in the poet: “you're more despicable than a rat. Clear out of here, stupid brute and idiot that you are.” (P, 115) He wants to take care of Niccola, but he knows that he ought to leave, run as far away as he can, because being a drunkard and a brawler he is not worthy of her affection. It might be said that Mancino gives his life for his beloved. The stunning image of love which in the world of the greedy and the vile has come to live in the heart of a poet is given in the scene of Mancino's death. Boccetta comes to the hospital, thinking that the dying Mancino has hidden ‘his’ seventeen ducats. The aim of his visit is not to reconcile. It is the last attempt to get information about the ducats from him:

“– Do you recognise me?” [Boccetta] said. “I came here for the good of your immortal soul, I came here in a spirit of Christian charity to lead you back to the way of honesty. (...) Tell me where you've buried or hidden them [the seventeen ducats], I ask you that for the salvation of your soul.”

“– Just keep looking then,” [Mancino] said. “Creep and crawl and slave and sweat until you've found them. For you know that he who has the money has the honour.”

“– So you won’t tell me?” Bocchetta shouted, pale with fury and struggling vainly to free his hands. “Then go to hell, and may a thousand devils take their pleasure with you, I wish I could...” (P, 136-137)

Earlier, Bocchetta tells Mancino a fictitious story of a devout priest who had given him seventeen ducats for safekeeping. That would sanctify the money in some way, and stealing it would be sacrilegious and would certainly cause some dire punishment. But Bocchetta’s blackmail has no effect – the dying Mancino knows all about his vileness. The drama of Mancino-Villon is the drama of a sensitive conscience and heart. His examination of conscience on the hospital bed is short. Mancino is a severe judge of his own life: “I shall appear before God’s judgement seat just as I am and have been all my life, a drinker, gambler, loafer, brawler, whoremonger...” (P, 135). Mancino-Villon’s defender is his friend: “ ‘The Disposer of our Destinies knows that you are none of those things, but a poet,’ said Leonardo” (P, 135)¹⁵, and the moment of death brings words of reconciliation: “ ‘*Nostre Seigneur se taist tout quoy,*’ Mancino whispered, and those were his last words in this world.” (P, 137)

Mancino is the novels’ most tragic character. Yet Leo Perutz has an exceptional liking to him. As a writer to a writer – and a sinner to another sinner. Mancino’s life reflects the words of Lascaris the Greek, who after the fall of Constantinople escaped to the court of Milan’s duke and became a tutor of his two sons: “What is happiness but having the poison of life wrapped in a golden shawl?” (P, 128) When the world around him is full of greed and lies, Mancino is immersed in poetry. And even his crimes do not erase the readers’ reception – we like Mancino!

5. Three purses

The dying Mancino indicates Joachim Behaim as apostle the traitor in *The Last Supper*: “And if you’re still in need of Judas’s face, my Leonardo, I know the man who has it. Look for your Judas no longer, for I have found him. Except that he did not pocket thirty pieces of silver, but seventeen ducats.” (P, 135). It turns out that it is not the miser and usurer Bocchetta that will serve as a model for the Iscariot. The true Judas is Joachim Be-

¹⁵ Cf. J. Loukotková, op. cit., pp. 594-595.

haim, shown by Leo Perutz thrice when holding a purse with money. Already during the first meeting with Leonardo (Behaim doesn't know that Leonardo is Leonardo, and Leonardo doesn't know that Joachim is Judas) the young merchant holds a *leather purse* in his hand (P, 14), since he has just sold a horse profitably at the duke's court. Judas's emblem identifies Joachim for the second time, when the merchant wakes up in a foreign house after night-time drinking session. He has been sleeping on a pallet, in full clothing, with some bulky tome under his head instead of a pillow. "[H]e suddenly had an alarming thought, which promptly disappeared when he felt his coat pockets and found that his *purse* was still in one of them." (P, 44) The last time that we see the German merchant, he is holding the money taken from Bocchetta. Leonardo is listening to his 'version' of events. Behaim tells the story of the betrayal and is indignant at hearing that he has wasted a great, true love. Master Leonardo calms him down and – certain now that he has finally found the true Judas – admits the merchant is right, and invites him to pose for a sketch with the 'recovered loot': "Hold the *purse* in your hand for a minute" (P, 145).

Actually Perutz's whole novel describes the search for Judas. The true Judas appears in the background of the very first scene (although Leonardo is unaware that his model has already arrived). Young Giomino explains the riddle of Judas's betrayal to Master Leonardo:

“– You said [Bocetta] was only a miser but, believe me, he's also a swindler, and a shameless one at that. I could tell you other things about him too – so many, the fire would have gone out before I finished. But no, he's not a Judas. How could he be a Judas, for there's not a soul in the world whom he loves.”

“– You know Judas's secret? You know what his sin was? You know why he betrayed Christ?”

“– He betrayed Him when he realized he loved Him,” the boy replied. “He could see that he was going to love Him too much, and his pride would not permit that.”

“– Yes, that was the sin of Judas, it was pride that made him betray his love.” (P, 13-14)

The end of chapter one of *Leonardo's Judas* – just after Leonardo's conversation with Giomino – brings a description of Iscariot: "The German horse dealer was still down below in the old courtyard. He had a *leather purse* in his hand (...) He was an unusually handsome man of about forty, tall, with lively eyes and a dark beard, which he wore trimmed in the Levantine fashion. He was in a good mood, pleased with the world as he found it, for he had obtained the price he wanted for the two horses." (P, 14) However, Leonardo does not notice him, because he is busy thinking... about his *Last Supper*.

Judas's true sin – according to Perutz – was not greed, but pride. Judas committed betrayal when he felt that he loved Jesus – when he felt he would have to love Him even more, and his own pride would not allow that. Similarly, Joachim Behaim denies his love to Nicola: "Alas, I'm only too much in love with her; it's shameful that I should still be in love with Boccetta's daughter." (P, 120) The affection dies when he sees with his own eyes that his lover is the daughter of Boccetta the usurer:

the door opened and he saw Nicola. He knew it was she before he saw her (...) Joachim Behaim followed behind her, and his love died, murdered by his will, betrayed by his pride. His love obstructed his plan. It could not be allowed to live. (P, 121)

Yet the cruel traitor does not own up to his crime. "Are you criticizing me for giving back his money and his daughter to a desperate father?" (P, 143) he cries angrily to Mancino's indignant friends. His cynicism and pride do not give room to the slightest remorse. The Judas from the Gospel returned the silver pieces, and then went and hanged himself. Joachim Behaim is pleased with himself and does not acknowledge his guilt. Master Leonardo does not want to scare him away – after all, he is the perfect model for his *Last Supper*. Hence the painter responds according to Behaim's logic of betrayal: "Certainly not, no one's criticizing you (...) I shall show you the honour to which you are entitled by ensuring that you shall be remembered in Milan. For the face of a man like you is worth drawing and being handed down to those who will come after us." (P, 143-144)

6. Simoni the victor

In his novel, Leo Perutz paints the portrait of Judas Iscariot. The Ger-

man merchant, greedy for money and revenge on the usurer from Milan, changes into a monster right before the reader's eyes. "Everyone has his own devil to torment him" (P, 104), says Mancino, and Joachim Behaim's devil was the seventeen ducats that Boccetta owed to Joachim's father. The request by Leonardo: "What I should like you to do is to tell us how you contrived to recover your money, your seventeen ducats, from Boccetta, who is, after all, well known throughout Milan as a scoundrel and a thief" (P, 140), opens the last part of the novel, where Behaim explains his scheme. At first, being in love with Niccola, he does not want to believe she is Boccetta's daughter. The surprised d'Oggiono tells him: "Don't you know, or are you only pretending not to know, that she's Boccetta's daughter?" (P, 105) That is too much for Joachim to bear. He feels deceived, betrayed, ridiculed. He fell in love with the daughter of his greatest enemy!

Job himself suffered nothing worse. What wickedness, what deceit, what treachery. She looked so frank and ingenuous, she acted as if she were devoted to me, she was all smiles, she talked about anything and everything, but kept to herself the fact that she was that infamous rogue's daughter. (P, 106)

But his complaints are insincere. He feigns the grief for his lost love. Towards witnesses of his fall, he poses as the desperate lover, the broken-hearted admirer:

"– To think that of all the thousands of men in Milan Boccetta should be her father. But that was what happened to me. You see, gentlemen, how badly fate can treat an honourable man."

"– Did Judas Iscariot also call himself an honourable man?" the woodcarver whispered to the organist. (P, 141)

Joachim's bitter confession: "I loved her only too much, and my pride and honour would not allow that" (P, 142), is followed by Leo Perutz's commentary that leaves no place for illusion: "'Yes,' said Leonardo, thinking of someone else. 'His pride and honour did not allow that.'" (P, 142) However, Joachim decides to make his defeat into a victory. He disregards the girl's entreaties:

Darling, she muttered, take me with you. Take me away from the strange man who is my father, take me away from this house, which is worse than a prison, take me away from Milan. You ask whether I shall love you always. Take me with you, darling, and if in the next life there's love like earthly love, I'll be yours for all eternity. (P, 93)

and insidiously (promising her to take her away to Venice) he sends her to her father's house to steal the money that makes the famed debt. He uses her love to regain the seventeen ducats. And he does not regret the act – he is a Judas *par excellence*. A Judas who betrays to avoid his pride being threatened by the power of love. Love has to be dealt with before it touches your heart – such could be the motto of Joachim-Judas. Truly, the threat was great: Judas was already thinking about marriage, family happiness, love: “All that's necessary is a priest and two witnesses, and that she should say yes, and that's all.” (P, 92) But pride and greed won. He is still base and despicable, he still is a Judas¹⁶.

The bitter truth about Judas, served by Leo Perutz in a sweet-sour sauce of Joachim and Niccola's romance, with the addition of the adventurous life of the poet Mancino, Leonardo da Vinci's artistic struggles, disputes at the Milan court and quarrels at inns, has a sad epilogue. Judas returns to the crime scene. Eight years later, Joachim Behaim stops in Milan again. He wants to sell some precious stones. “One of the bags contained cut sapphires, emeralds and rubies, a dozen of them altogether, and all fine specimens; the other contained stones of lesser value, amethysts, yellow topazes and hyacinths.” (P, 147) He wonders at the strange behaviour of Milan dwellers: “People looked at him, stared at him, put their heads together and whispered. Others seemed terrified at the sight of him. They stopped, shook their heads, and made the sign of the cross once, twice or even three times, as if to avert an evil.” (P, 148) Finally, as advised by the

¹⁶ Leo Perutz does not share the opinion of Łysiak, who defends apostle the traitor. In the mysterious hand with a knife from da Vinci's painting, Łysiak sees a weapon which is to “defend Judas against all stabs in the back from humanity” (W. Łysiak, *Flet z mandragory*, Warszawa 2009, p. 62; own translation). In Łysiak's opinion, Judas's betrayal had been known by the Providence centuries ago. He was the only intellectual among the apostles and so he understood the mission of Jesus, and became a collaborator in the act of Redemption – and hence he is innocent. “Judas Iscariot (...) sacrificed himself so that all that was decided without him could be fulfilled. When revealing his Lord, he kissed Him to show his love to Him once again. Is that not an act worthy of the highest sympathy and respect” (ibid, p. 59; own translation).

landlord, Joachim goes to see Leonardo's work (it shall explain everything, as he says):

When Behaim went to the monastery refectory the next morning and stood looking at the *Last Supper* and turned his eyes from Christ and Simon Peter to Judas holding his purse in his hand, he felt as if he had received a blow in the face and his head was in a whirl.

Gold help me, he said to himself. Am I dreaming, or what has happened to me? What a disgraceful trick to play on me. How could he dare do such a thing? (P, 151)

While Joachim-Judas stands staring at the painted Judas, all stare at him. There is complete silence like during the Elevation in church. No one makes a sound. A moment later, furious, Behaim rushes outside, but the crowd's murmur follows him: "Judas looking at Judas. Did you see?" (P, 151) Judas's curse has stuck to Joachim Behaim. His despicability made the German merchant's face become the face of apostle the traitor for all times. A man who didn't want to love.

Rushing away from the unfriendly city, Joachim does not notice his 'beloved'. Eight years have passed. Niccola is going towards the Milan Cathedral. Joachim doesn't recognise Niccola, Simoni and their small son. Cursing in Czech, he passes the three without a look. Yet Simoni's heart turns cold with anxiety.

The woodcarver stopped and dropped the boy's hand.

"- It was he," he said, with a beating heart and in a sudden cold sweat. "Did you see him?"

"- Yes," Niccola replied, "I saw him."

"- And... do you still love him?" the woodcarver wanted to know.

"- How can you ask such a silly question?" Niccola replied, putting her arm round his shoulders. "Believe me, I should never have fallen in love with him if I had known he had Judas's face." (P, 152)

These are the last words of Perutz's novel. Simoni's anxiety infects the reader. *If I had known... Had I known...* The mirror gives a mysterious smile.

* * *

Who is Niccola, the beauty from Milan, seduced and betrayed by Joachim-Judas? She is a girl who inspires common awe and adoration. She catches Joachim's fancy. She steals Mancino's heart. Simoni sighs for her without hope of reciprocity. Even Leonardo talks of Niccola appreciatively:

“– Whom did you recognise?” asked d'Oggiono.

“– The girl Niccola,” the woodcarver [Simoni] replied. “You know, the money-lender's daughter. And, though she never even glances at me, I'm always delighted to see her, she's so charming. She goes to Mass at Sant' Eusorgio.”

“– Yes, she's beautiful,” said Messer Leonardo. “God performed a great miracle when he made her face.” (P, 82-3)

It seems that Bocchetta's beautiful daughter is the symbol of a human soul. Beautiful, but naive. Capable of great things, but also fallible. Looking for true love, but also gullible. Devout, but also sinful¹⁷. But mainly, she is destined to win in the end (that is what Niccola means in Greek). Such is the nature of each human. We are called to live in the light, but fall over and over again, enticed with the seductive colours of betrayal. It is thus that I read Leo Perutz's novel's final message: we are like the beautiful Niccola, born to final victory, but always threatened by the looming danger that we may become like the base and despicable traitor, Joachim Behaim. At first he seems likeable, but his end is pride incapable of love. An incurable disease, shall I add.

All that Leo Perutz's Judas wants is to have dinner in some inn in Milan. Nobody wants to open the door to him. People stare at him in terror. They fearfully cross themselves and run at the sight of the traitor – meeting Judas could cause misfortune. Joachim Behaim is surprised, but not really worried by his new role as an anti-hero. He shall set off again, return to his trade and likely quickly forget an unpleasant stay in Leonardo's city. But his face will forever remain the face of Judas the traitor, the biggest villain on earth.

¹⁷ Niccola constantly sits in churches at services, and her favourite saints include: St Catherine, St Cecilia, St Jacob (P, 86).

Supper in Milan (colours of betrayal in the view of Leo Perutz)

Summary

The hero of the novel *Leonardo's Judas* by Leo Perutz travels to the Renaissance Milan, where Master Leonardo da Vinci is seeking the contemporary incarnation of Judas. However, the writer does not use the claim that Leonardo found Judas, who turned out to be ... Jesus (as a young man was painted as Jesus, but then went down the road of vice and evil, he rolled to the bottom and now his face became the face of Judas). Perutz betrayed the Iscariot describes as an escape from true love, as a prideful fear that wants to love only himself. Pride and greed do not allow Joachim-Judas to make his heart truly love.

Key words: *Leo Perutz, betrayal, Judas, Leonardo da Vinci.*

Kolacja w Mediolanie (kolory zdrady w ujęciu Leo Perutza)

Streszczenie

Bohater powieści *Judasz Leonarda* Leo Perutza podróżuje do renesansowego Mediolanu, w którym mistrz Leonardo da Vinci poszukuje współczesnego wcielenia Judasza. Pisarz nie korzysta jednak z podania, jakoby Leonardo odnalazł Judasza, który okazał się ... Jezusem (będąc młodzieńcem został namalowany jako Jezus, ale potem zszedł na drogę występku i zła, stoczył się do rynsztoka i teraz jego oblicze stało się twarzą Judasza). Perutz zdradę Iskarioty opisuje jako ucieczkę przed prawdziwą miłością, jako lęk pychy, która chce kochać tylko siebie. Pycha i chciwość nie pozwalają Joachimowi-Judaszowi, aby jego serce zaczęło kochać prawdę.

Słowa kluczowe: *Leo Perutz, zdrada, Judasz, Leonardo da Vinci.*