
Anna Baranowa (Institute of Art History, Jagiellonian University, Crakow) / Metaphor of “ship of fools” in Stanislaw Lem’s writings and other Bosch inspirations

The purpose of this paper is to trace fascination with Hieronymus Bosch, who was one of the most inspiring artists for Stanislaw Lem. Proofs of this can be found especially in writer’s correspondence and his newspaper column. It is known that he had in his library, published in 1975 in Dresden, magnificent album *Bosch* by Wilhelm Fraenger. In the letter to his American translator, Michael Kandel, he wrote (2 September 1976): “It is indeed possible to start doubting the existence of something like human reason. By the way I’ve just looked through a great album of Hieronymus Bosch, with an intelligent commentary on the reproductions of his painting, and I agree in the substance that Bosch was (a genius, but it’s a separate matter) a painter of bottomless human stupidity and miserable, self-tormenting human helplessness (which is transformed into anger) most of all. A horrifying in history [is] a loneliness of those great ghosts...”

Stanislaw Lem was especially moved by *Ship of fools / Ship of madmen* (around 1494-1510). He writes to Kandel: “Are you familiar with Bosch’s *Ship of fools*? It’s specifically about us. Wretched humanity! Quos Deus perdere vult, prius dementat” (31 December 1974). What are the reasons for this update? Can parallels be found between Bosch’s era and Lem’s era? A lot was written about *Narrenschiff* metaphor. In the context of this paper Michael Foucault’s reflections should be mentioned as he devoted a whole chapter to a metaphor *stultifera navis* in his *History of Insanity in the Age of Reason*. It can be read there among others: “Because it symbolised a great disquiet, suddenly dawning on the horizon of European culture at the end of the Middle Ages. Madness and the madman become major figures, in their ambiguity: menace and mockery, the dizzying unreason of the world, and the feeble ridicule of men”. Lem’s writing is full of observations and diagnoses, which describe contemporary to us “the world on the edge”. In his column *In the circle of paranoia* (“Tygodnik Powszechny” 2005) he says: “[...] I have this awful feeling that historical exhausts come to the surface and start to brainwash our brains. We are subject to different aberrations, and a simple division into good and bad seems a bit too easy”. The metaphor of “the ship of fools” is still up-to-date which can be seen not only in subsequent artistic references (for example in the theatre) but also in the character of the reality we live in.