

LITUANUS

LITHUANIAN QUARTERLY JOURNAL OF ARTS AND SCIENCES

Volume 14, No.4 - Winter 1968

Editor of this issue: Anatole C. Matulis

ISSN 0024-5089

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THE MANIAC A Tragicomedy in One Act

KAZYS SAJA

EDITORIAL INTRODUCTION

Among the few younger dramatists in contemporary Lithuania, Kazys Saja (b. 1932) has acquitted himself as one of the most perceptive and talented observers of the human condition. One might say that in adopting the techniques of the modern theater and in dealing with universal problems of man, he is among the leading dramatists in the entire Soviet state.

The trilogy of one-act plays — *The Orator* (previously published in *Lituanus*, No. 3, 1967), *Prophet Jona*, and *The Maniac*, published here — is among Saja's best. In certain respects in the trilogy Saja follows contemporary Czech and Polish playwrights, especially S. Mrorzek. He deals exclusively with ideas, feelings, and basic foibles of man, i.e. fear, betrayal, servility, greediness, and treats them on an allegorical and symbolic level.

The trilogy is a grotesque, ironic, and satirical portrait of people. In *The Maniac*, for example, passengers on a train suspect each other. Meanwhile, the train, operated by a mental patient, rushes forward with unusual speed. Finally, the passengers realize that the mental patient and his henchmen have taken control of the train, and the passengers see no alternative than to accept the fact and proceed "singing a brave song". Although the play deals with human foibles in general, it obviously has contemporary significance. *The Maniac* might be viewed as describing a situation in any contemporary society, but especially in societies directed by totalitarian regimes of all shades of ideological persuasion.

THE MANIAC

CAST OF CHARACTERS:

SWITCHMAN
PHYSICIAN
CONDUCTOR
ACTIVIST
OFFICIAL
DOGCATCHER
MADAM
ARTIST
PROFESSOR
OTHER TRAVELERS

The action takes place in a passenger car of an express train.

Stage front — railroad car passageway facing doors, doors, doors. One door is open. Seated in the compartment, a bottle before him, is the glum Switchman. His fellow passenger, the Physician, has apparently just come onto the train. They are not yet acquainted.

SWITCHMAN (*looking at PHYSICIAN*). I wouldn't say you're going to be very pleasant company.

PHYSICIAN. Don't trouble yourself. I'm not planning to force myself on you.

(*Women can be heard giggling in another compartment*).

SWITCHMAN. Hear those tramps laughing? You'd have more fun there.

PHYSICIAN. Maybe. However, I have to sit where my ticket tells me to (*He leafs through a picture magazine*). (*SWITCHMAN fills his glass, drinks. PHYSICIAN'S presence obviously irks him more and more*).

SWITCHMAN. You have the big eyes and long eyelashes of a calf. — I'll bet those eyelashes assure you of a sweet life. (*PHYSICIAN tries to ignore his talk*). I was thinking, I'll admit, that maybe God would put some little décolleté lady in here. At least we could have had a talk. .. (*He glances at PHYSICIAN'S magazine*). Success! . . . The bastards! .. Don't have to be smoked like the end of a sausage.. . nor scrub the rear end of a devil's engine... You've got long eyelashes, just bat them! Tickle the ladies' earlobes and just sweep up all the goodies! Isn't that so ?

PHYSICIAN. Now, listen. I am a physician and can give you a tranquilizer. Do you want one?

SWITCHMAN. A physician! ... So who do you treat? These kind? (*Points to nearly-nude beauty on magazine cover*) Do you make them fat or thin?

PHYSICIAN. As they desire.

SWITCHMAN. And a man's heart, can you heal that? When it hurts here — is there any medicine for it? If you have some, give it to me. ..

PHYSICIAN. Well, now. .. There are all kinds of medicine. But first one must diagnose the ailment.

SWITCHMAN. The ailment... People — are scoundrels! That's the ailment!

PHYSICIAN. You don't mean that they're all scoundrels? That only you are the exception?

SWITCHMAN. Most of them. And first of all — women. All females. If one can call them people.

PHYSICIAN. Your wife deceived you. Is that it?

SWITCHMAN. I fooled myself! Women could never de-cieve us if we considered them for what they really are. But we — love. . . There is no love! Hogwash. Motherhood. . . But just let a different set of eyelashes blink, and motherhood goes to the devil. (*PHYSICIAN remains silent*). Drink up. If I am wrong, prove it.

PHYSICIAN. Alright. (*Drinks*) You say there is no love — yet you love. And very much, even.

SWITCHMAN. Like hell! I want to kill her. That is why I'm traveling, if you want to know.

PHYSICIAN. For what? Kill her for what? Because she fell in love with another man? Suppose you had had your eye on another woman?

SWITCHMAN. Never! I am first of all a father! I have a son and I wouldn't trade him for any skirt. Yes, I respected the woman who gave me a. . . a picture of me. I believed! ... Sacredly! But she ? ! While I gritted my teeth and worked to make money for them. . . when I was not at home! ... In a word, she deprived me of my everything. Wrecked it, dirtied it. . . Even my fatherly feeling for my son! .. . And maybe the boy isn't even my son ? Hah? ! What do I have left? Drink up and keep quiet. You won't convince me with words anyway. There aren't any medicines for it, nor any words.

PHYSICIAN. You aren't being objective.

SWITCHMAN. Ehh. . . You can love your work, your native country, your children ... if they are yours. But women! . . .

PHYSICIAN. You love your work?

SWITCHMAN. Love it! I curse it, but . . . work is work.

PHYSICIAN. But if you were offered another, better job? One more interesting, cleaner — would you go?

SWITCHMAN. Why not? Of course I'd take it.

PHYSICIAN. And you wouldn't call yourself a turncoat, even though your employer was very dissatisfied and wouldn't want to let you go?

SWITCHMAN. What is he to me — my wife?

PHYSICIAN. And even if a wife — your wife — met another man and felt that.. .

SWITCHMAN. Aha! That he was more interesting, neater? Or had longer eyelashes, what?

PHYSICIAN. Wait. . . Wait a minute.. . Medicine is often bitter. Just listen.

(SWITCHMAN starts to turn his back to the PHYSICIAN, but pauses and listens).

For example, I know a certain lady. Her husband works around the clock two, three times a week away from home while she takes care of the children, cleans the rooms and feels how the best years of her life are slipping away! What can she think? What more can she hope for? To wait all her life for a grimy, tired husband whose whole spiritual world is more than miserable!

SWITCHMAN. Yeh-yeh-yeh! And she is not grubby and tired ? She is a parasite on the back of that poor husband.

PHYSICIAN. What of it? But she is unfortunate! She has grown tired of scrubbing that grimy back. Like every living thing she must grow, improve and enjoy life!

SWITCHMAN. Then let her at least explain it decently. I cannot, I no longer want to — excuse me. . . But not this: I come home — there is a note for me: "Dear so and so, I have gone to see my relatives.. ." And she phones that — pardon the expression — stud: "My long-lashed angel, reserve a hotel room, I shall be there tomorrow. .." Eh, is that nice ? ! Pfui!

PHYSICIAN. How did you find out? After all, by telephone. . .

SWITCHMAN. Telephone operators hear things. But that's not important. Anyone in my place would kill him. (He is suddenly struck by the thought that this

PHYSICIAN might be his wife's lover).

PHYSICIAN. Might you be a railroader? Maybe an engineer? (*Sensing that SWITCHMAN is suspicious of him*) I say this because of your hands.

SWITCHMAN. Ah, my hands? Listen, doctor. . . (*Grabs his lapels*) Let's go into the vestibule.

PHYSICIAN. What for? Why?

SWITCHMAN. It's c-cooler and.. . to finish our talk. Man to man.

PHYSICIAN. Let go of me! You're drunk.

SWITCHMAN. No-no-no, it's nothing. We'll sober up. What's your destination ?

PHYSICIAN. I know what you are thinking ..

SWITCHMAN. I too have the same inkling. . .

PHYSICIAN. And without any reason at all.

SWITCHMAN. Just don't do it in your pants or the sight will be. . . sorry indeed. A blind rooster! . . . And imagine finding such a .. a. . . excuse me. . . grain !

PHYSICIAN. Let me out!

SWITCHMAN. Don't worry.. . I won't gobble you up. . . all at once. When did you start "treating"... my wife?

PHYSICIAN. What wife? How was I supposed to have met her ? Don't be funny! Remember where we are. (*Overwrought CONDUCTOR comes through the car, knocking at each door*).

CONDUCTOR. You are all requested to come out into the corridor. Attention, travelers! All of you are asked to come out to hear an important announcement. Into the corridor, please ! Everybody out here, please. . . (*Doors keep opening and the passengers come out, some expressing curiosity, others murmuring, and line up by their compartments. Among them are PHYSICIAN and SWITCHMAN*).

PASSENGERS.

- What happened?
- Bothering people.. .
- Perhaps it's war ? ! . . .
- I'll never travel by train again. I paid for a berth and thought I could take a nap. ..
- Such a terrible racket. . .

CONDUCTOR (*after going through the entire car*). There has been an emergency bulletin! Does everyone hear me ? A dangerous felon — a maniac — has boarded our train.

PASSENGERS.

- God! That's all we needed.. .
- And what does he do, this maniac?
- Then maybe he is not in this car?
- Attention ! Quiet! Let's listen.

CONDUCTOR. No panic, citizens, no panic. As you see, we are taking measures. I repeat: it is suspected that a person, recently escaped from a psychiatric institution, has come aboard our car.

(*Women's frightened voices are heard*).

Ladies, be calm. That maniac is not really dangerous to you.

(*Women's voices register disappointment*). His mania is to make his way — by force if he has to — into the locomotive cab, liquidate the engineer and drive the train himself.

ACTIVIST. A train is piloted, not driven.

CONDUCTOR. Piloted or driven — that's not important.

SWITCHMAN. Oh, but that is important!

CONDUCTOR (*having noticed SWITCHMAN*). His mania is to force his way to any driving control. As a result he could blow up the locomotive or derail the train. Understand ?

(*ACTIVIST sees PHYSICIAN and keeps her eyes fastened upon him. The maniac is of little concern to her*). This is a very dangerous type, and it is the duty of all of us to apprehend him.

PASSENGERS. — Oh, how?

- How will we recognize him ?
- What does he look like?
- Show us his picture!

CONDUCTOR. There is no photograph. The news was received by radio. We were told to scrutinize carefully the passengers and investigate everyone who appears suspect.

PASSENGERS.

- How?
- How will you identify him?
- Maybe I'm that maniac.

CONDUCTOR. Attention! Quiet, please! The safety of the entire train and all the passengers will depend on your own common sense and discipline. Walking from car to car, opening the windows and looking out of them is strictly forbidden ! Understood ?

VOICES (*unenthusiastically*)

- Understood.
- Why shouldn't it be understood?

SWITCHMAN. We'll boil the water and that way catch the fish.

CONDUCTOR. How does this maniac look? We have a verbal description and a brief sketch. Listen: (*glancing at a paper in his hand*) Longish-faced male, medium height, according to our information fifty years of age, but looking younger. Although he favors a mustache, he might have shaved it off. The eyes are of uncertain color — more hazel than blue in the dark, and the reverse in the light. He had a haircut a little while ago, but may have had time for his hair to regrow.

WOMEN'S VOICES.

- Is he blond, brunet?
- Hair can be dyed, too.

CONDUCTOR. Very true. The bulletin says that he can be more easily recognized by his conduct. He is shrewd, argumentative, rarely remains passive, speaks intelligently, but manages to adapt himself to circumstances. Are there any doctors among us?

PHYSICIAN. I'm a doctor. Endocrinologist.

CONDUCTOR. Very good. Acquaint yourself with this information. Is this your compartment?

PHYSICIAN. Yes.

CONDUCTOR. Then this is where we shall set up headquarters. If anyone notices a suspicious person, please come immediately to compartment six. Are there any questions ?

DOGCATCHER. And for the one who uncovers this maniac. will there be some reward ?

CONDUCTOR. Our first concern should be the safety of the train, not a reward. But it is foreseen that there will be some kind of incentive. For example, a free trip to either end of the line. In a first-class de luxe car. Are there any more questions? None. Then I wish you a happy and sensible continuation of your journey.

(Commenting upon the event, the passengers return to their compartments. The doors close. ACTIVIST remains in the passageway, wholly fascinated by PHYSICIAN).

PHYSICIAN *(to CONDUCTOR)*. Here — to clear it out of the way — are my papers.

CONDUCTOR *(glances through the papers)*. Documents can be falsified, that is why we look them over carefully. Oho ! Twice married already !

PHYSICIAN. Unsuccessfully, alas. We are divorcing.
(CONDUCTOR returns the papers to PHYSICIAN and glances at SWITCHMAN).
This maniac, is he married? Did you hear?

CONDUCTOR. No, nothing was said about that

PHYSICIAN. Too bad! That is quite important — from a psychiatric point of view.

CONDUCTOR *(to SWITCHMAN)*. You are a railroader?

SWITCHMAN. Yes, I am. A switchman.

CONDUCTOR. Going far?

SWITCHMAN. Yes, far.

PHYSICIAN. While drunk he boarded the wrong train. He's getting off at the next stop.

SWITCHMAN. I've thought it over. I'm going to the end of the line. Together with you.

CONDUCTOR. Admirable, admirable. . . *(To PHYSICIAN, softly)*. Wouldn't it be wise to check him out?

PHYSICIAN. We'll wait until he sobers up. The symptoms of a drunk are deceptive.

(DOGCATCHER tiptoes up, looking slyly to all sides. He knocks at the door of compartment jive. It is opened for him).

DOGCATCHER *(first looks around)*. Pardon. Wrong room.

CONDUCTOR *(sticks his head out)*. Who is it? Looking for us? Please come in here.

ACTIVIST. It's my turn! I was first in line.

CONDUCTOR. Then why didn't you knock? Enter, please.

ACTIVIST. Because I wasn't yet, you see... *(Enters compartment. Glances bashfully at PHYSICIAN)*.

CONDUCTOR. What is it you wish to tell us?

ACTIVIST. Nothing as yet. . . I haven't had enough time. But I have been and am an activist. And I...

CONDUCTOR. Wait a minute, what do you mean, nothing? You saw that another person was left behind the door. Why did you ? . . .

PHYSICIAN. Let's not scold. . . We may not get any more such pretty ones.

ACTIVIST (*more to PHYSICIAN than to CONDUCTOR*). I wanted to say. . . I ask to be appointed to the most difficult phase! For you I will truly. . . Word of honor! Any duty at all!

CONDUCTOR. Humm . . . What can we assign you to do? Well, observe the people.

ACTIVIST. Alright!

CONDUCTOR. Walk up and down the passageway, maybe you'll hear something. . .

ACTIVIST. Alright!

PHYSICIAN. And stop in occasionally, maybe we'll find something more to do.

ACTIVIST. Fine! I will certainly stop in. (*Darts happily through the doorway and bumps into DOGCATCHER*).

CONDUCTOR. She has a little fire!

SWITCHMAN. At the other end!

CONDUCTOR (*again casting a suspicious look at SWITCHMAN*). Next! Come in, please. (*DOGCATCHER enters*). Well, what are you going to tell us?

DOGCATCHER. It's about that maniac.

CONDUCTOR. And you, what are you?

DOGCATCHER. In public?

CONDUCTOR. Is it some kind of a secret? Where do you work?

DOGCATCHER. I belong to the Public Welfare apparatus.

CONDUCTOR. More definitely?

DOGCATCHER. Ordinary laborer.

CONDUCTOR. You don't look it.

DOGCATCHER. I am, you see, a qualified dogcatcher. Once I caught a. . . what do you call it ?.. . orang-outang. It had escaped from a circus. I received a reward, too.

CONDUCTOR. So what was it you wanted to tell?

DOGCATCHER. Here, in public?

PHYSICIAN. This is headquarters. We are all in this.

DOGCATCHER. Well, in my room there is such a — neither a mister nor a missus. She looks like a woman, but with a mustache! It is plain it was shaved off! And the hair is not hers. She raised her hat and everything lifted with it. I said to myself, this is some kind of hen-cock, or a maniac in disguise. And she is even carrying a d-dog in a basket. And this is not a livestock car. And I told her so. In public yet. Hah!

CONDUCTOR. Let's go, show me.

DOGCATCHER. We may not find her. She's always going somewhere.

(*DOGCATCHER and CONDUCTOR leave*).

PHYSICIAN (*to SWITCHMAN*). Well, how is with you, Switchman ? (*SWITCHMAN remains silent*). Getting off at the next station?

SWITCHMAN. No.

PHYSICIAN. But if you continue threatening me and your wife...

SWITCHMAN. You worry about your own wife.

PHYSICIAN. And I advise you in a friendly way — go back.. . Otherwise she will hate you even more. As it is she is unhappy.

SWITCHMAN. And with you — how happy will she be? A month, two?

PHYSICIAN. Oh. That's a very long time. It's possible for one month. ..

SWITCHMAN. But she was with me ten years!

PHYSICIAN. Old!... And you still haven't had enough? You are really a maniac...

SWITCHMAN. Cad ! Yet you. .. make fun ! . . . Snake ! (*grabs PHYSICIAN by the throat*).

ACTIVIST (*rushes in*). What are you doing! Let him go! I'll holler!... (*Runs out into passageway*) Come here! Hurry! Hurry! We have the maniac! The maniac! (*Rushes to aid PHYSICIAN with her nails, teeth and feet*)

(*CONDUCTOR hurries up, leaving MADAM in passageway*).

CONDUCTOR. What's up? Where's the maniac? !

ACTIVIST. He was choking the Physician. If not for me. ..

SWITCHMAN. Cad! Cannibal! My wife... my son! (*To ACTIVIST*) This kind aren't enough for him!

PHYSICIAN. You see! I thought he was drunk, but it seems it was nothing of the sort! He was only waiting for an opportunity.

CONDUCTOR (*to SWITCHMAN*). Well, which is it — is a train driven or piloted, eh? And wouldn't you want to be the one driving?

SWITCHMAN. I have the right! And I won't ask you.

CONDUCTOR. Oh, so you won't ask?... We won't ask, either.. . Let's go to compartment seven.

SWITCHMAN. I'm not going anywhere.

CONDUCTOR. Help here, doctor.

SWITCHMAN. At least let me take the cognac, beast!

(*CONDUCTOR and PHYSICIAN lead him into compartment seven. ACTIVIST assists them. Gapers appear*).

PASSENGERS.

- They caught the maniac! The maniac!
- Thank God! We'll ride in peace.
- I wonder whether he is the maniac...
- He's drunk, don't they see that? (*The door is closed on SWITCHMAN*).

CONDUCTOR (*to the gapers*). Break it up! Break it up! It's not written on his forehead — he may not be the right man. I warn you — all the directives still stand. Please return to your places.

(*The passengers disperse. CONDUCTOR, PHYSICIAN and ACTIVIST return to "headquarters."*)

ACTIVIST. How good that I... that for me there was some sort of... a sort of feeling.

CONDUCTOR (*to PHYSICIAN*). I told you!... I suspected him from the very beginning.

ACTIVIST. I did, too!

CONDUCTOR. What an obstinate man! You saw how he acted towards us ? ... With such hatred! ...

ACTIVIST. Especially against me. (*To PHYSICIAN*) Did he hurt you badly?

PHYSICIAN. It was nothing, not much at all. Thanks to you.. .

ACTIVIST. You should put some iodine here. (*She touches his neck*).

(*PHYSICIAN seizes her hand and presses it to his lips, making one more woman happy*).

CONDUCTOR (*as always, concerned only with his instructions*). Yes... We already have one. And many of the particulars, I would say, match him. (*MADAM enters. She certainly has many male characteristics*).

MADAM. Then, I trust, I can go? I am not needed anymore?

CONDUCTOR. Wait, wait. Sit down.

MADAM. But... you caught the maniac. It remains only for me to congratulate you.

CONDUCTOR. Thanks. But still all we have to clear this up.

MADAM. Such as what, please?

CONDUCTOR. Tell me, you. . . are you a man or a woman?

MADAM. Listen here!.. . Are you out of your mind? ! Maybe you yourself are the maniac?

CONDUCTOR. No insults, please! We received information that you are — a man in disguise.

MADAM. Me — a man?

CONDUCTOR. Remember, we have a physician here who can, if it should be necessary, verify the facts.

MADAM. How dare you? ! Do you know to whom you are speaking ? I am the chief conductor's wife! The switchman himself kisses my hand! And if you don't apologize and put this dogcatcher in his place!.. .

CONDUCTOR. Just a moment, Madam, just a moment .. .

MADAM. He threatens me with a doctor!.. .

CONDUCTOR. No one is threatening you.

MADAM. Half of the poeple on this train know me, yet these juveniles. . . No, you're not going to get away with this so easily.

CONDUCTOR. Our apologies, Madam. Sorry.

PHYSICIAN. The only person who doesn't make mistakes is the one who doesn't do anything.

CONDUCTOR. Yes. Besides, who would have thought that you would be in any other than the first class car? As for that dogcatcher, we will really isolate him. Maybe you have some other wishes?

MADAM. Turn your attention to the washroom. Who has been sitting in there for a whole hour? Maybe some other character ? .. .

CONDUCTOR. Alright. We'll look into it. Thank you verv much. Immediately. At the other end of the car there is another... uh. .. toilet. For your comfort. Please. Thank you again for your information. (*MADAM leaves. CONDUCTOR is furious*). Straight to compartment seven with the dogcatcher! Careerist! Dogface! (*To ACTIVIST*) Watch that one closely, the one from the toilet! Don't botch it!

ACTIVIST. I obey.
(*CONDUCTOR leaves*).

PHYSICIAN. A nightmare.

ACTIVIST. What are you saying. .. Such a romantic journey ! A maniac, and you.. . God! Only don't look at me that way. .. What are you doing ?... What.. . are ? ...
(*PHYSICIAN kisses her. ACTIVIST, naturally, does not resist*).

God, someone may come in! . . . That one from the toilet. I was told to look out for that one. (*They kiss again*).

My, what long eyelashes you have! . . .

(*SWITCHMAN is knocking on the wall. CONDUCTOR brings up DOGCATCHER, who thinks he is being led to "headquarters"*).

CONDUCTOR. Not here, not here! The next door.

DOGCATCHER. What is this, that I am always losing my way...

(*CONDUCTOR unlocks compartment seven*). They say you have already caught one maniac?

CONDUCTOR. And you will be the second one.

DOGCATCHER. Me? Why? For what?

CONDUCTOR. So that. . . you will learn to better recognize . . . dogs. (*Locks DOGCATCHER in and marches off toward the washroom.*)

PHYSICIAN. The dogcatcher is locked up.

ACTIVIST. Don't think about it now, don't think...

PHYSICIAN. Yes, let's not think. . .

(*The sound of CONDUCTOR rapping on a door is heard, as he tries to get the passenger out of the washroom*).

ACTIVIST. Where are you traveling, if it's not a secret?

PHYSICIAN. Wherever you are going. If I may... I have three days.

ACTIVIST. It's possible, but. . . Better that I go with you.

PHYSICIAN. Call me "you"

ACTIVIST. You! You! You are my maniac. . .

PHYSICIAN. And you are my activist.

(*SWITCHMAN is pounding on the wall*). Tell him to calm down.

ACTIVIST (*bangs her little fist against the wall*). Hey, you in there! Calm down! (*SWITCHMAN stops the pounding*). See! Everyone always listens to me. You listen, too! (*CONDUCTOR brings ARTIST from the washroom where, it is obvious, he had been shaving*).

CONDUCTOR. In here, please.

ARTIST. I'm telling you — I'm an artist. I am on my way to make a movie.

CONDUCTOR. What is the name of the film? Quick!

ARTIST. "The Sacred Duty." Maybe you heard of it? For me — from the train to the pavilion, I have to shine. That's the role I have to play.

CONDUCTOR. And it is our duty to check out the message.

ARTIST. What message?

CONDUCTOR. Doctor, you — it's in your line...

(*ARTIST closes his eyes, puts his feet together and extends his shaking hands in front of him*).

PHYSICIAN. And where did you learn that coordination is tested in this manner?

ARTIST. This is not my first time. I have been treated for alcoholism, and heart trouble, and nervous condition — and for all sorts of things. Only no one has yet told me the message. . .

PHYSICIAN. Please. At my finger. . . (*Waves a finger in the air, observing the movement of Artist's eyes*).

ARTIST. You have a broken nail. I can lend you my scissors.

PHYSICIAN. Yes, well. . . You should be undergoing treatment.

ARTIST. And who of us shouldn't be? Where did you ever find a normal artist? I rested in a psychiatric ward once, and you know, I had never before seen such artistic mastery ! So as our theater begins looking like an insane a-sylum, I can only be glad.

CONDUCTOR. But you heard about the maniac?

ARTIST. I heard, of course.

CONDUCTOR. What do you think — is he unlike an artist?

ARTIST. Maybe, I don't know.

CONDUCTOR. Well, what do you think generally? How do you consider him?

ARTIST. You know, you shouldn't ask an artist for his views or to do some kind of thinking. No matter what, but we shall always see things as they should be seen, and shall act as things should be acted out.

CONDUCTOR. And when needed, you know — how it should be?

ARTIST. Even if we don't know, the director tells us. As for that maniac — I guess he should be condemned. . . If the situation hasn't changed. You see, I was shaving for quite a long time.

(CONDUCTOR looks inquiringly at PHYSICIAN).

PHYSICIAN. Me — I have no claims.

ACTIVIST. I, too.

CONDUCTOR. Alright. You may go.

ACTIVIST *(to ARTIST)*. Preserve your talent. Remember — it belongs to the world.

ARTIST. You too... safeguard yourself... Something that should not belong to everyone! *(He leaves)*

ACTIVIST. I didn't get that.

PHYSICIAN. Don't fret — we didn't either.

(OFFICIAL stands at the door. Having been in pajamas, he has put on a jacket, on which there is a medal).

OFFICIAL *(to ARTIST)*. Would you know — is the doctor receiving ?

ARTIST. This isn't a polyclinic. And it doesn't seem that you wouldn't know that.

OFFICIAL. I have a devilishly splitting headache.

ARTIST. Splitting, but not split open.. . Good people! *(Walks away)*

(OFFICIAL knocks at the compartment door).

CONDUCTOR. Come in! *(OFFICIAL enters, looks about)*. You have some information?

OFFICIAL. If I may, I'd like to keep it confidential.

CONDUCTOR. We're all in this. Feel at home.

PHYSICIAN. Have a seat.

CONDUCTOR. You have seen the maniac?

OFFICIAL. No. That is, yes, but not in quite that way. I only wanted to ask whether it is possible that at one time he was a professor in Renaissance?

CONDUCTOR. Maybe so. We don't know his biography.

OFFICIAL. My suspicions are aroused by the physical and psychological similarity of one such professor to the maniac you so accurately described. Get to look at him some way without his knowing it. He is seated in the third compartment, reading some kind of suspect literature.

CONDUCTOR. Why without letting him know? The extraordinary situation allows us to. . . We have the right.

PHYSICIAN. How do you know that he is a professor?

OFFICIAL. Well, you see, he was my teacher. For a very short time. But imagine such peculiar behavior! He pretends that he doesn't know me. It is obvious he is pretending.

CONDUCTOR. Did you note something else that is suspect?

OFFICIAL. Yes, well, that is. . . you know... from head to toe. Even his clothes are not like yours or mine. And he thinks and talks differently than it is officially accepted among us to speak and think. Somewhere, he is belittling something. . . Addressing something your way, and mine — if I understood him correctly. . .

CONDUCTOR. Alright, call him in.

OFFICIAL. No, no, no! I asked you to keep this confidential. I would even prefer going out through some side door — into the yard.

CONDUCTOR. Into what yard ? ! This is a train!

OFFICIAL. Oh, true, true! . . . The maniac, sclerosis — all the devilish troubles at once. So much for that. I'll call him. (*Leaves*).

CONDUCTOR. Well, let's get ready. I don't fancy all that erudition.

PHYSICIAN. I don't quite understand. . . Here we isolated and locked up that mad switchman — so what more do we need?

CONDUCTOR. But do you know how many we have locked up in the other cars ? . . . Five in one, seven in another. And what do we have here ? One and a half. . .

PHYSICIAN. But after all, there is only one maniac!

ACTIVIST. But we don't know which is the one. They are all so much alike. As it is we're being very humanitarian, aren't we?

CONDUCTOR. Yes. We are still very derelict. We should isolate many more.

(*PROFESSOR enters carrying a briefcase*).

PROFESSOR. I wanted to push him under the wheels, but became afraid. One must be most cautious with idiots.

CONDUCTOR. Please sit down. Since to some you appeared to be somewhat like. . .

PROFESSOR. The maniac? Thanks for the compliment.

CONDUCTOR. I said "to some." And it is our duty to investigate. As far as this is possible under train conditions, of course.

PROFESSOR. And do you examine those who register complaints ?

CONDUCTOR. Sorry, but that is strictly our business.

PROFESSOR. The matter should be a mutual effort. We are all passengers on the same train and none of us wants a maniac to get into the locomotive. And this kind of informing. . .

CONDUCTOR. Do you know who reported you?

PROFESSOR. How can I not know? The poorest students have always betrayed their teachers. And not only the students . . . On every train and in every car a potential renegade will turn up, one who will get pleasure from harming those who, in

his opinion, are superior to him in intellect or in one skill or another.

PHYSICIAN. You think because of envy, yes?

PROFESSOR. The motives are varied — envy, a passion to govern, a compensation for inadequacy. The worst of it is that they find an audience for their peculiarities. They assume their positions and, instilling fear, they collect huge tributes. . . They become powerful.

CONDUCTOR. Do you make something of this, Doctor?

PHYSICIAN. Partly.

ACTIVIST. I too — only partly.

PROFESSOR (*sighs*). See, here is where our calamity lies hidden...

CONDUCTOR (*to PROFESSOR*). Why do you speak about people with such black hatred? Eh?

PROFESSOR. About people? No... I speak of the dolts whose lame-brainedness becomes a profession. These kind of people I consider to be my enemies and the enemies of humanity. But here the loathing is already mutual. We call them fools, are somewhat afraid of them, ridicule them a bit, are sorry for them. . . Meanwhile the dūlinés of the dull-witted ones only makes them even more determined. That is why, as you can see, they are very full of life.

CONDUCTOR. And in your opinion, what are we? Also lame-brains ?

PROFESSOR. A question such as that immediately places me in a dilemma: to lie to save myself, or to tell the damning truth.

CONDUCTOR. Answer the question!

PROFESSOR. You have been given more rights than wisdom — and here is the paradox. To you, what is beyond your comprehension seems to be beyond the law.

CONDUCTOR. Yes... What am I to do with you?... I have a weakness for intellectuals. But the time now is such, alas, that. . . Couldn't you temporarily go to compartment seven?

PROFESSOR. In other words. . .

CONDUCTOR. Why should you quarrel with that, as you said, dim-witted neighbor?

PROFESSOR. Yes, I understood that. As you see, I even have my briefcase. . . I was wondering, take it with me, or not...

PHYSICIAN. Excuse us, Professor. We... Not everything depends upon us.

PROFESSOR. Ah, how naive you still are... You are doing dirty work but want to look like white-collared people.

ACTIVIST. We are not afraid of dirty work!

PROFESSOR. All the more. And wear dark glasses to hide your embarrassment. For starters.

CONDUCTOR. We won't argue anymore. (*Leads PROFESSOR out*) There are already a pair of travelers in there, but I trust they won't bother you.

PROFESSOR. Only a pair? Why, you know, you won't be promoted very quickly.

(*CONDUCTOR lets PROFESSOR into compartment seven*).

SWITCHMAN (*trying to force his way out*). Let me out! I confess! Let them all go! I — the Switchman — I am the maniac!

CONDUCTOR. Very good. Very nice. (*Wants to close the door quickly*).

SWITCHMAN. Let us out! I have thought it over. I want to talk to the doctor! I will prove to him that I am the maniac ! I'll prove it!

CONDUCTOR. Alright, alright. I'll tell those who should know. I'll tell them. (*Closes the door*)

(The passengers meanwhile have become restless, opening and closing doors, murmuring in frightened voices, and looking out the windows).

PASSENGERS.

- What's going on?
- Why did we pass the station?
- Where is the conductor?

CONDUCTOR. What is it? Why are you upset?

ARTIST *(carrying a suitcase)*. Why did we speed past the station? I had to get off there! It didn't even slow down.

PHYSICIAN. Yes, there is something wrong here.. .

CONDUCTOR. We'll soon find out. *(Glances through window)* Apparently it had to be this way, if. . .

ARTIST. What do you mean, had to be? I have to make a movie!

MADAM. Look how fast we're going! It's hard to stay on your feet.

OFFICIAL. Even the cars are rocking.

CONDUCTOR. Now, now, don't panic. Don't panic. We'll soon clear this up. There will be new instructions, I'm sure. *(Exits)*

OFFICIAL. Don't tell me that's really the maniac? I didn't believe and I don't believe that there is one.

MADAM. But I do believe it. It wouldn't take much for that conductor. .. They're all like that.

ACTIVIST. What are you saying? ! What are you saying? !

MADAM. But I'm not afraid! I know them.

(The car continues rocking more violently. The passengers grab for one another, at the walls, unable to find any handhold for support).

ARTIST. Maybe that maniac has been in the locomotive all the time? Eh? Here we are suspecting, searching, while he is in there grinning — ha-ha-ha! *(Demonstrates how the maniac is chortling)* If I were the maniac I would also be... ha-ha-ha-ing...

PHYSICIAN. Quiet! There is an engineer in our car. A real one. There is no need for us to despair.

PASSENGERS.

- Well, then, let him out!
- Try it, let him go. ARTIST. Doctor! I bit my tongue. ..

(CONDUCTOR returns, wearing a uniform shirt with some sort of typically fascist insignia. All become silent).

CONDUCTOR. Everything is in order. All is as it should be. We are increasing our speed and all stations are giving us the green light. We will smash everything that gets in our way on the track or disrupt the order within the train!

OFFICIAL *(timidly)*. And here we were thinking that the maniac had already taken over. ..

CONDUCTOR. Don't be afraid. The train is being piloted by strong iron hands.

PASSENGERS *(timidly)*.

- But you see what is happening? !
- Release the switchman...

CONDUCTOR. Stop moaning! New instructions have been received. It is suggested that you ride happier and be allowed to look out the windows. We are speeding past some very pretty locales. *(Opening compartment seven he releases DOGCATCHER and gives him a friendly pat on the shoulder).*

PASSENGERS *(trying to hide behind one another)*.

- Let the switchman out!
- The switchman.. .
- The engineer. ..

CONDUCTOR. Stop whinnying! We will let the switchman out too. When we reach our goal. Those untrained engineers always interfered and will interfere. ARTIST. Hey! Listen! There are the brakes! If there is trouble, we'll pull the emergency brakes!

PASSENGERS.

- Well, pull it.
- Stop the train.
- Let's stop it before it's too late

CONDUCTOR. No stopping! All the passenger brake controls have been discontinued. And I repeat — whoever tries to interfere in the operation of the train will immediately be considered a maniac!

PHYSICIAN (*to CONDUCTOR*). Are you yourself convinced that there is no danger threatening us?

CONDUCTOR. We are not afraid of perils.

UNIDENTIFIED VOICE. He's the maniac! Don't you see that? !

CONDUCTOR. Who was that? What is your name? (*To DOGCATCHER*) Find him!

(*DOGCATCHER rushes to where the voice came from*).

PHYSICIAN (*to CONDUCTOR*). You can see that the people have cause.. . For the kidneys and heart, such riding is not very...

CONDUCTOR. I have just come from the luxury first-class car. There are heads there which know better.

PHYSICIAN. But they are not slammed around so hard in the first-class car...

CONDUCTOR (*to all*). The doctor is asking what should be done that the car is rocking. Well, here's what we'll do — we'll sing to the tempo of the rocking. I will soon pass out the songsheets. To be in harmony, everyone is ordered to sing. (*Passes out songsheets*).

ARTIST. I bit my tongue, I can't sing.

CONDUCTOR. No matter. You're an artist — you'll sing without a tongue.

ARTIST. We're not soloists. What we know best is how to cry and act the part of drunks.

CONDUCTOR. Anyone who doesn't want to sing had better beat it!

ARTIST. To where?

CONDUCTOR. To compartment seven!

(*The car's rocking and shaking keeps increasing. Everyone tries to hold onto something: some to their suitcases, some to the wall, still others look fearfully out the windows*).

ACTIVIST (*holding on to PHYSICIAN*). Listen, darling... As activists, let's ask for a separate compartment.

PHYSICIAN. Good, as soon as they start singing we'll close ourselves in. We'll forget everything else...

CONDUCTOR. Did everyone get the song texts? As you can see, the train is rushing forward, not backward. So, more courageously, more happily ! Give it all you've got! Ready!... Ah three, ah four!

(*Rocking, quivering and dancing a grotesque Vitus dance with ever increasing madness, all sing a brave song. Odd, but the train has lulled them and in the passengers' faces there is no longer any fright nor desire to protest*).

Curtain