

| Czesław Tański's *Solitaire*. The Reality of the Great War¹

“Oh yes, I am very busy doing the only thing left to me, which is unveiling monuments.”² This sentence, spoken in July 1931 by the Belgian King Albert, perfectly illustrates the post-war reality. Several years after the First World War, the wounds inflicted by it had still not healed, the fallen were still being honoured and the missing remembered. Thousands of veterans from both sides of the conflict fought between the Entente and the Central Powers remained forever unable to function normally.

The Great War was reflected in works of art, which, alongside photography, became a visual repository of memories about the conflict. They took the form of either a terrifying testimony, especially if their authors had participated in the fighting and seen the Western Front up close (e.g., Percy Wyndham Lewis, *A Battery Shelled*, 1919, Imperial War Museum, London), or a realistic document showing mutilated human bodies in an emotionally moving way (e.g., drawings by Henry Tonks). On the other hand, the war would also inspire picturesque horse depictions of soldiers (as in the works of Wojciech Kossak). Czesław Tański's *Solitaire* is a kind of monument of those times too.

Artist's Biography

Czesław Tański was recognized in artistic circles, especially in Warsaw, but after his death his oeuvre was forgotten. Currently, his name is mentioned more often in the context of his achievements in the field of aviation and machine design rather than artistic work. The bibliography of Tański is not very extensive. The information provided below has been sourced primarily from his private, previously unpublished notes, from press articles, and from several contemporary publications.³ Czesław Tański⁴ was probably born in 1863 (exact date unknown) in Pieczyska near Grójec, “in the post-uprising era,” as he himself noted,

¹ This paper is based on a master's thesis defended by the author at the Institute of Art History of the University of Warsaw in 2020.

² King Albert's reply to the question whether he was busy, asked by General Hubert Gough, commander of the British Fifth Army in 1914; quoted in Martin Gilbert, *Pierwsza wojna światowa*, translated by Stefan Amsterdamski (Poznań, 2003), p. 536.

³ See, i.a., Paweł Elsztein, *Modelarstwo lotnicze w Polsce od zarania do 1944 roku* (Warsaw, 1986), Halina Stępień, *Artyści polscy w środowisku monachijskim w latach 1856–1914* (Warsaw, 2003), Lucyna Smolińska, Mieczysław Sroka, “Polski Ikar. Czesław Tański (1863–1942),” in Lucyna Smolińska, Mieczysław Sroka, *Wielcy znani i nieznani* (Warsaw, 1988), pp. 166–72.

⁴ *Polski Słownik Biograficzny*, vol. 52 (Kraków, 2017–2019), pp. 165–68.

referring to the anti-Russian January Uprising of that year.⁵ His father was sentenced to pay a high contribution for joining the insurgents, which weighed heavily on the family's finances. This is probably why the aspiring painter could not afford artistic education abroad. He wrote that he owed his interest in art primarily to his mother, Celina, née Żołodowicz, a graduate of the Mariinsky Institute⁶ and later a student of Alexander Lesser's. After graduating from junior high school, Tański was placed by his mother in the Drawing Class in Warsaw, where he studied under the tutelage of Wojciech Gerson and Aleksander Kamiński. The information about studying with Gerson is confirmed by an article published in *Tygodnik Ilustrowany* in 1890.⁷ The painter was first mentioned by the press in *Biesiada Literacka* in 1879, as a promising student of the Warsaw Drawing Class and the winner of a prize worth 45 roubles.⁸

After nearly four years at the school, in the years 1879–83, Tański received an annual scholarship, which enabled him to go to Munich. The painter enrolled at the Royal Academy of Fine Arts in the class of Otto Seitz. This fact is confirmed by an entry in one of the *Matrikelbücher* (academy matriculation books), which contains the artist's name with an annotation indicating that he was admitted to the painting class. The enrolment date is 8 February 1882, which indicates that Tański was already in Munich at that time.⁹ Perhaps he made a mistake in his memories by a year, claiming that he studied with Kamiński and Gerson from 1879 through 1883. This is not very important for tracing his creative path; what matters is that Tański's stay in Munich did not last too long. As he himself admits, his studies there lasted about three semesters, because thereafter he ran out of money (although already at this stage of his painting career he was trying to earn income from the sale of small paintings). In 1883, Tański showed his works at the exhibition of the Society of Friends of Fine Arts in the Cloth Hall in Krakow, but he was not successful. In a text titled *From under the Wawel*, which also included a review of the exhibition, an unknown critic wrote about Tański's technical difficulties in combining genre themes with landscape. He stated that the painter's concept was better than its execution, because the landscape "lacks air and is too much gilded by the sun."¹⁰

In 1885, Tański went to Moscow to visit relatives. There he became a member of an unspecified society of Moscow painters and took part in the exhibitions it organized. For about two years he worked as an illustrator for the *Russkiy Sport* magazine, and also painted oil paintings of horses for the Horse Racing Society and private clients. He joined illegal political associations. In 1893, he received the first in a series of commissions from the Management Board of the State Horse Stud in Janów Podlaski. His several-year stay in Janów enabled him, as he noted, to paint landscapes and genre scenes, as well as to conduct what were the first larger-scale aviation experiments in Poland.

He returned to Warsaw briefly in 1899. In 1901 he went to Paris, where he studied at the Académie Julian under William Adolphe Bouguereau. Due to financial constraints, his stay there lasted only a year. After returning from Paris, he settled in Warsaw, where he would run

⁵ Czesław Tański's unpublished notes, quoted in Elsztain, *Modelarstwo lotnicze...*, op. cit., p. 16.

⁶ Probably the Mariinsky-Alexandrinsky Institute for Maidens, housed at Wiejska Street until 1915.

⁷ Władysław Bogusławski, "Wojciech Gerson," *Tygodnik Ilustrowany*, no. 5 (1890), p. 66.

⁸ "Z Warszawy," *Biesiada Literacka*, no. 165 (1879), p. 131.

⁹ Matriculation records of the Royal Academy of Fine Arts in Munich available online: <https://matrikel.adbk.de/matrikel/mb_1841-1884/jahr_1882/matrikel-04108>, [retrieved: 26 September 2022].

¹⁰ "Z pod Wawelu," *Biblioteka Warszawska*, vol. 3 (1883) p. 248.

a studio until 1939. According to the artist's notes, in June 1936 he moved with his family to Olszanka, to a newly built house called Małe Pieczyska – in memory of the painter's family estate. Tański died there in 1942. He rests in the cemetery in Puszcza Mariańska.¹¹

Information about this over forty-year period in the painter's life can be obtained primarily from the press, as well as from exhibition catalogues and reports of the Society for the Encouragement of Fine Arts in Warsaw. Tański's diaries from that time, as well as some of his works, burned in a fire in the artist's studio at 2 Mazowiecka Street in September 1939.¹² Most of the preserved notes concern the end of his life as he partly tried to recall the old years, but it was clearly the events of the Second World War that preoccupied him and a significant part of the preserved diaries is devoted to direct accounts of this tragic period.

Why *Solitaire*?

Solitaire. Playing Cards from the First Two Years of the European War consists of 53 playing-card designs made in watercolour and drawing using pencil, crayons, pen, and ink on cardboard. The dimensions of each are 11.4 cm long and 7.4 cm wide (within the passe-partout). The artist assigned a different suit to each of the countries presented. Spades should therefore be associated with Germany, Hearts with Belgium and France, Diamonds with Russia, and Clubs with England. The cards were exhibited at the Salon organized by the Society for the Encouragement of Fine Arts in Warsaw in 1918.¹³

The work is currently kept in an album in the Department of Prints and Drawings of the National Museum in Warsaw (having been acquired from the collection of Dominik Witke-Jeżewski) (**figs. 1-2**). It was presented to a wider audience during the exhibition *Shouting: Poland! Independence 1918* in the National Museum in Warsaw in 2019.¹⁴ Part of the programme of celebrations of the centenary of Poland regaining her independence, the exhibition's main goal was to confront "artistic representations of historical and political events with the transformations of Polish art on the threshold of the reborn state."¹⁵

The publication accompanying the exhibition included a short description of Czesław Tański's work entitled *A National Democrat's Solitaire*.¹⁶ Its author, Łukasz Mieszkowski, did not devote much attention to the objects themselves, but rather to the geopolitical situation during the war, which informed the specific perception of the Prussians as invaders and oppressors, and, above all, initiators of the conflict.

While the comments regarding Tański's characteristic way of presenting the representatives of the Triple Alliance, revealing his clear reluctance towards at least some of the portrayed characters, can be considered accurate, a categorical description of Tański's political

¹¹ Smolińska, Sroka, *Polski Ikar...*, op. cit., p. 172.

¹² Some of Tański's works are in the collection of the National Museum in Warsaw, e.g., *Self-Portrait* (before 1924) and *Self-Portrait* (1927). Occasionally, they appear at auctions, ending up in private collections, see <<https://onebid.pl/pl/artist/auctions/Czeslaw-Tanski>>, [retrieved: 26 September 2022].

¹³ *Towarzystwo Zachęty Sztuk Pięknych w Królestwie Polskim. Salon 1918* (Warsaw, 1918), p. 23.

¹⁴ On view from 28 October 2018 through 17 March 2019.

¹⁵ Website of the National Museum in Warsaw <<http://www.mnw.art.pl/en/temporary-exhibitions/shouting-poland-independence-1918,35.html>>, [retrieved: 9 August 2020].

¹⁶ Łukasz Mieszkowski, "Pasjans endeka," in *Krzycząc: Polska! Niepodległa 1918*, Piotr Rypson, ed., exh. cat., The National Museum in Warsaw, 2018–2019 (Warsaw, 2018), pp. 117–19, cat. no. 1.

views as national-democratic is not justified. His notes hardly contain any trace of such views. Not surprisingly, nor do press articles devoted to Tański bring up such issues. Other sources regarding his biography do not exist or they are of marginal importance. When interpreting the artist's work, one can of course draw conclusions regarding his perception of social and political reality, but they should not be treated uncritically.

Tański's reluctance towards Prussia can be easily explained, as the author of the study already pointed out: an efficient propaganda apparatus was used by the countries involved in the First World War. Moreover, Tański created the *Solitaire* while staying in or near Warsaw, so it is not surprising that he perceived the war events from the perspective of a resident of the Kingdom of Poland, which, although under Russian rule, had already somehow tamed and normalized the foreignness of the invader, which in turn cannot be said about the otherness of the "barbaric" Germans strongly felt by the inhabitants of Congress Poland. Finally, a specific attitude towards Prussia as the ringleaders of the war was shaped by the press. *Tygodnik Ilustrowany* and other magazines published photographs of war destruction, often titled *After They Passed*, where "they" were by no means soldiers of the troops gathered under the Russian emperor's sceptre – the pronoun referred to these "others," "strangers," enemies: the Germans. As opposed to Mieszkowski's interpretation, it seems more justified to consider the cards designed by Tański as a war testimony of artistic nature.

While in Warsaw, the artist commented on current events, including those related to the Great War. Tański took part in the 1916 War Exhibition, presenting works such as *Cossacks in the Forest* and *Wagons on the Road to the Camp*. The artist was praised for the "movement and truth" captured in pastels.¹⁷ At the Spring Salon in 1917, he showed *The Entry of the Legions into Warsaw*.¹⁸ Therefore, the *Solitaire* is not an isolated work in terms of subject matter in his oeuvre.¹⁹

It is worth noting that the cards from the first two years of the Great War depict events other than those taking place on the Eastern Front, although it was precisely these episodes of the fighting that the painter could observe directly by making trips to the vicinity of the front. The decision to show the battles taking place in Western Europe does not seem surprising, however, considering that the artist probably drew inspiration, and sometimes even formal patterns, from illustrations appearing in the European press. Possible iconographic sources will be discussed later on. First of all, it is worth looking for an answer to the question why Tański decided to present the war story in the form of a solitaire game, as such is the title he gave to a collection of playing-card designs.

Based on the materials left by the painter himself, this issue cannot be fully resolved. The preserved notes lack information about this work. There are virtually no mentions of the First World War in Tański's notes; one indirect reference is to the possessions he lost in a fire at his studio. From his inventory of losses, we learn only that Tański had a folder with war photographs, which could have been an inspiration for the representations on the cards, which will be discussed later.

¹⁷ Władysław Wankie's favourable review appeared in the article "Wojna w sztuce naszej," *Świat*, no. 15 (1916), p. 4.

¹⁸ Władysław Wankie mentions this work in his review: "Salon Wiosenny w Towarzystwie Zachęty," *Świat*, no. 20 (1917), p. 1.

¹⁹ The works by Tański, presented in the War Exhibition, were inferior neither in terms of artistic quality nor of the means of expression from those by Jan Kotowski, Bronisław Kopczyński, or Józef Ryszkiewicz.

Let us briefly recall the history of *solitaire* as a social entertainment. *Solitaire* (from the French *patience*, 'patience') developed from the ancient custom of card fortune-telling. The origin of *solitaire* is uncertain. Perhaps the game was born in France, as suggested by Lech Pijanowski in his *Przewodnik gier* [The game guide].²⁰ David Parlett, in turn, claims that it has northern roots: German or Scandinavian.²¹ In France, *solitaire* was already known in the 17th century, during the times of Louis XIII, where *solitaire* playing gained wider popularity just before the French Revolution. Another country where it was widely played was Great Britain. According to Pijanowski, *solitaire* had been previously popular in two very different environments, namely in the court (especially among ladies) and among prisoners.²² Throughout Europe, including Poland, *solitaire* became popular in the 19th century.²³ The first guides presenting the game's variants were published at that time. Contrary to its English name (from the French for 'solitary'), *solitaire* did not have to be played alone. The oldest *solitaire* games were played by two people: whoever first arranged the cards in proper order, won.²⁴

Tański's interest in games and fortune-telling is confirmed by a board game he made and illustrated, kept in the family collection, which involves reading "signs" from square cards divided into several fields, which, when placed next to each other, could create a specific symbol. However, there is no clear answer as to why the artist used the cards to illustrate the events of the First World War.

Tański's *Solitaire* is an expression of the artist's interest in card games. However, this is probably not the only reason he undertook this project. In his works, he focused primarily on representations drawing mainly on national identity, by showing the local landscape, village inhabitants, and regulars of Warsaw salons. In this sense, Tański's *emploi* was not cosmopolitan, which his involvement in promoting domestic art seemed to confirm. Looking at the cards, however, one can get the impression that the artist did not focus on illustrating war events observed from the perspective of a resident of Poland or an Eastern-Front soldier, as we find here images of soldiers from both sides of the conflict.

Tański's *Solitaire* and Playing-Card Designs

Was Tański's artistic endeavour an original project, or had the idea of immortalizing war events on playing cards been materialized earlier? While it is difficult to find similar attempts in Polish art, they can certainly be identified in European art. Custom card sets came into circulation relatively early. One example is the period of the reign of Louis XIV (1643–1715), when playing cards featured images of Julius Caesar, Ninus, Alexander the Great, Semiramis, Roxana, and Helen. During the Enlightenment, monarchs were replaced by philosophers, such as Voltaire and Rousseau. Under the Empire, Napoleon was depicted on cards as the King of Hearts and Josephine as the Queen of Hearts.²⁵ It is also worth mentioning that the collection of the Department of Prints and Drawings of the National Museum in Warsaw

²⁰ Lech Pijanowski, *Przewodnik gier* (Warsaw, 1973), p. 465.

²¹ David Parlett, *The Oxford Guide to Card Games* (Oxford, 1990), p. 158.

²² Pijanowski, op. cit., p. 465.

²³ Ibid., p. 466.

²⁴ Parlett, op. cit., p. 161.

²⁵ *Encyklopedia powszechna*, vol. 14 (Warsaw, 1863), p. 288.

includes, for example, geography-teaching cards, enriched with descriptions of the geographical regions of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth and neighbouring countries, dating back to the 18th century.²⁶ It follows that cards could serve many purposes beyond just providing entertainment. They could propagandize, inform, and commemorate. It is possible that the card designs made by Tański also corresponded to these functions.

It should be added that the First World War was also shown on cards issued by the Belgian publisher Brepols in 1919 to commemorate the hardships of the war and the Triple Entente's contribution to saving Belgium.²⁷ The illustrations on the cards, made by an unknown artist, depict the leaders of the Entente countries (monarchs, politicians, generals), an allegory of the United States, and the war colours of the allied armies along with the major battle sites. Clearly, the Brepols deck had a predefined agenda, which was developed only after the end of hostilities with the aim of commemorating them and expressing gratitude to the allied armies. These factors distinguish Tański's solitaire from its Belgian counterpart – it is clearly stated that the cards made by the Polish artist come from the first two years of the war, and therefore refer to a specific period in its history. Another difference is that they do not contain an easily identifiable iconographic programme. The images were certainly not selected to show the major battles and skirmishes, since most of the drawings showing the front lack explanatory comments. Moreover, Tański focused not only on the frontline reality, but also devoted attention to the broadly understood effects of the war, including the migration of large groups of civilians, destruction of monuments, degradation of nature, etc. Therefore, Tański's work focused on the information and documentation function, rather than the propaganda function.

War on Playing Cards: Selected Representations from Tański's Deck

Among the portraits of rulers placed on the cards is a depiction of the German Emperor and King of Prussia, Wilhelm II Hohenzollern (signed by the artist himself as "Wilhelm II, King of Prussia") (**fig. 3**). The image of the monarch is far from its official, dignified version. Despite the ceremonial uniform and the *pickelhaube* decorated with the imperial eagle, Wilhelm II Hohenzollern does not look august, but rather demonic. There is a grimace-like smile on his face. There are many indications to believe that such a representation of Wilhelm II was not merely a result of Tański's fancy; he probably got this vision of the character from the illustrated press. *Tygodnik Ilustrowany* had published an image of the smiling emperor, juxtaposed with another, showing him in the presence of his officers and wearing a gloomy expression.²⁸ Among the many images of Wilhelm II featured in the European press of that time, it is the photo of him greeting Tsar Nicholas II, published in the 8 August 1914 issue of the French weekly *L'Illustration*,²⁹ that should be considered the prototype of Tański's

²⁶ The collection includes two geography playing-card decks (122 cards) by an unknown author, originating from France, dated to 1760–1800, inv. no. 35726/1–112 MNW.

²⁷ Simon Wintle, *WW1 Commemorative* [online], <www.wopcc.co.uk/belgium/brepols/ww1-commemorative>, [retrieved: 9 August 2020].

²⁸ Both photographs by unknown authors, see *Tygodnik Ilustrowany*, no. 38 (1914), p. 674.

²⁹ On photography's role in shaping the visual narrative of the Great War see, e.g., Przemysław Strożek, "Gina Severiniego Pociąg pancerny w akcji," *Rocznik Historii Sztuki*, vol. 40 (2015), pp. 119–27; Wojciech Szymański, "Żywnienie urazy. Wielka Wojna, fotografia traumatyczna i efekt traumy," *Teksty Drugie*, no. 4 (2018), pp. 37–55.

rendition.³⁰ In this picture, the German emperor is dressed in a different uniform, and he doesn't wear any headgear, but he smiles almost exactly the same. He also makes a similar gesture with his hand as he offers it in greeting. It is therefore possible that the artist dressed the hero of his performance in a uniform reflecting the gravity of the moment, but took his facial expressions and gestures from a press photo. This scenario seems probable because in at least a few other cases the inspiration from photographs is clear in Tański's drawings. The painter himself admitted in his notes that he had photographs related to the First World War in his collection, so perhaps he also collected images of rulers.

The card marked as the Jack of Spades shows the image of Wilhelm Hohenzollern, heir to the throne of Prussia and Germany, observing the battlefield (**fig. 4**). During the war, the eldest son of Emperor Wilhelm II Hohenzollern took formal command of the Fifth Army. He took part in the Battle of Verdun and was accused of being responsible for the defeat there. As he himself points out in his written memoirs, the unfavourable German press called him the "laughing murderer of Verdun."³¹ His image rendered by Tański on the playing card is consistent with this picture. The prince, dressed in a German officer's uniform, holds his arms akimbo and looks to his right, clearly smiling. However, it is not as disturbing an expression as can be seen on his father's face. The prince's grimace rather expresses satisfaction, perhaps even slight excitement at the spectacle he is watching.

The image of Prince Wilhelm can be contrasted with the representation of the King of Belgium, Albert (**fig. 5**). It is significant that the latter's face expresses determination and concentration. In his right hand, the monarch holds a raised sword. A festive uniform with a sash emphasizes the representation's serious atmosphere. This way of presenting the Belgian ruler should not be surprising, considering what the press of the Entente countries wrote about the heroism of the Belgians. This also applies to periodicals published in the Kingdom of Poland. Newspapers featured images of King Albert and reported on the fighting in Belgium. One such image of the Belgian monarch appeared in the weekly *Świat* in 1914 as an illustration for the feature *Diary of the Last Days. From Impressions and Conversations*, which said, among other things, that "the Belgians are fighting heroically against the German invasion."³² *Biesiada Literacka* went even further in its admiration for the Belgians and their king, publishing, in 1915, an article with the significant title "Of the Brave and Noble King Albert of the Belgians." The author of the text focused not only on the Belgian war of defense, but also on the monarch's successful reign, his enlightened position on colonialism, etc. The article was accompanied by illustrations showing King Albert in various attires indicating the functions he performed.³³ Also in 1915, the same weekly recognized the heroic Belgians, or more precisely, Belgian women telephone operators who, during the siege of Lovanium, remained at their posts until the last moment to maintain communications with the General Staff.³⁴

It is therefore not surprising that, given so many reports published in the domestic press, Tański decided to immortalize the image of King Albert of Belgium as an allegory – dictated by the circumstances – of steadfastness and faith in victory, even against the odds. Although

³⁰ Photograph by an unknown author in *L'Illustration*, no. 3728 (1914), p. 113.

³¹ Wilhelm Hohenzollern, *The Memoirs of the Crown Prince of Germany* (London, 1922), p. 177–78.

³² [s.a.], "Diariusz dni ostatnich. Z wrażeń i rozmów," *Świat*, no. 33 (1914), p. 1.

³³ Marian Skrzetuski, "O dzielnym i szlachetnym królu Belgów Albercie," *Biesiada Literacka*, no. 6 (1915), pp. 86–88.

³⁴ "Kartki ilustrowane. Bohaterstwo Belgów," *Biesiada Literacka*, no. 4 (1915), pp. 62–63.

relatively rich illustrative material was available in magazines published in the Kingdom of Poland, Tański probably used the photograph of King Albert that appeared in the French magazine *L'Illustration*. In both images – Tański's card and the *L'Illustration* picture – the ruler is shown in exactly the same pose, in both images he also has the same facial expression and wears the same uniform. The only difference is the raised sword visible in the drawing, which was a kind of image update on the artist's part, resulting from the circumstances of the war.³⁵ As a side note, it is worth adding that King Albert appears in Tański's *Solitaire* as the King of Hearts. The Ace of this suit is a representation of a destroyed Belgian or French town (the artist himself titled the card *Belgium, France*). It is therefore possible that Tański wanted to show the devastation wreaked by enemy armies on the Western Front in general, rather than pointing to a specific place or famous people. Against the background of a deserted landscape with frightening ruins, a dead man lying next to a horse carcass can be seen. The artist inscribes here the death of people and animals in the broader context of the destruction of space, infrastructure, and architecture by warfare. In this version, the war in Tański's eyes turned out to be something much more moving than the picturesque charges or battle scenes that some critics had impatiently expected.³⁶

The cards in the suit of Diamonds were chosen for Russia. Nicholas II is depicted in a frontal position, waist-length (**fig. 6**). In the background, behind the ruler's head, we see a fragment of the black eagle, the coat of arms of the Russian Empire. The depiction of the emperor's robes is also interesting: his shoulders are covered with a sable-fur-collar coat, which brings to mind coronation robes. This interpretation could also be confirmed by the gold chain around the ruler's neck, as well as the apple and sceptre held by the monarch. It should be emphasized that in the coronation portraits from 1896, Nicholas II wore a completely different crown, namely the Russian Imperial Crown. The image created by Tański cannot therefore be considered a coronation portrait of the Russian emperor. It is worth noting, however, that the monarch's headgear alludes to the costume he wore in 1903 at a ball organized in the Winter Palace in Petersburg on the occasion of the 290th anniversary of the Romanov dynasty.³⁷ The guests invited to the reception were dressed in costumes modelled on 16th- and 17th-century Russian costumes. The emperor, in addition to his richly decorated outer robe, also wore a jewelled headdress trimmed with fur. It is possible that Tański, when deciding to present Nicholas II in such an eclectic outfit, wanted to emphasize the continuity of the dynasty and the duality of Russia's identity: on the one hand, its adherence to tradition, and on the other, the country's position at that time, including its alliance with England and France. The books on which Nicholas II rests his hands are also an interesting element of the composition; written in Cyrillic, the words "autocracy" and "orthodoxy," referring to the two pillars of power in imperial Russia, are visible on their spines. Tański thus included in the design various references to both the position of the Russian Empire in history and its contemporary situation; one can venture to say that in the image of the emperor he created an allegory of the Russian Empire as a whole.

³⁵ The photograph in question was published in *L'Illustration*, no. 3728 (1914), p. 117.

³⁶ Władysław Wankie expressed a similar view in his review of the War Exhibition organized by the Society for the Encouragement of Fine Arts in Warsaw in 1916; see Władysław Wankie, "Wojna w sztuce naszej," *Świat*, no. 15 (1916), p. 4.

³⁷ Aleksandra Shilovskaia, *The Most Famous Ball of the Last Russian Emperor, 1903* [online], <<https://meet-russia.online/the-most-famous-ball-of-the-last-russian-emperor-1903>>, [retrieved: 15 August 2020].

The artist reserved the suit of Clubs for the British Empire. Accordingly, George V was chosen as the King of Clubs (**fig. 7**). The ruler is depicted in coronation robes. He wears an ermine-fur cloak over his shoulders, and his chest is decorated with chains and orders. On the monarch's head is probably the crown of Saint Edward, first used to crown a British monarch in 1661, when it was placed on the head of Charles II.³⁸ George V was coronated in 1911.³⁹ The depiction of the British king corresponds to the image of Tsar Nicholas II. In both cases, the rulers are shown in full majesty, with regalia. In the background of the depiction of George V, the faint outline of the coat of arms of the United Kingdom can be discerned; on the left there is a sketch of a lion symbolizing England, and on the right a silver unicorn with a gold crown around its neck representing Scotland. Tański also included the motto on the coat of arms of the British monarchy, *Dieu et mon droit* (from French: 'God and my right'), which was the cry of King Richard the Lionheart in the battle against the French at Gisors in 1198.

Depicting a warship – a token of Britain's superpower status – the Ace of Clubs comes as the allegory of the United Kingdom (**fig. 8**).⁴⁰ In the last years of the 19th century, the need to build a strong navy was also recognized by the relatively recently unified Germany, which could not allow itself to fall far behind the European naval powers. It is worth noting that images of English vessels appeared quite often in the press published in the Kingdom of Poland. In 1914, the weekly *Świat* wrote about exchanges of fire between the English and German fleets, carefully counting losses and assessing the chances of victory for either side.⁴¹

When discussing Czesław Tański's *Solitaire*, we must not forget that the artist did not only present episodes closely related to the war, nor did he even focus on showing the more famous battles. He was more interested in the everyday reality of the conflict seen as a whole and its protagonists, not necessarily those fighting on the front. The card marked as the Nine of Hearts depicts the fire at Reims Cathedral (**fig. 9**). It broke out on 19 September 1914 as a result of bombing, but was preceded by earlier attacks on the city, lasting from 4 September, which also damaged the temple.⁴² This event was widely commented on throughout Europe, including in the Polish press. It was covered, for example, by *Tygodnik Ilustrowany* in an article concerning the "barbarity of the Germans." The report was accompanied by photographs of the cathedral's destroyed interior. The author wrote: "The worshipers of spiritual creativity, science, and art, German professors and doctors of philosophy, of whom there are at least ten out of a hundred Germans, destroy with refined malice the scientific and artistic treasures from which they themselves sometimes drew the content of their spiritual work. And all this not because there was an inexorable necessity for war, but so that the university and library in Lovanium, the cathedral in Reims, etc. did not exist at all, did not highlight the essential value of foreign culture and did not hinder the spread and dominance of German culture."⁴³

³⁸ *St. Edward's Crown 1661 with Later Alterations and Additions* [online], <<https://www.rct.uk/collection/31700/st-edwards-crown>>, [retrieved: 15 August 2020].

³⁹ *Ibid.*

⁴⁰ Peter Hart, *I wojna światowa 1914–1918. Historia militarna*, translated by Jan Szkudliński (Poznań, 2014), pp. 129–130.

⁴¹ Stanisław Hłasko, "Anglia i Niemcy na morzu," *Świat*, no. 52 (1914), pp. 5–7.

⁴² [s.a.], *L'incendie de la cathédrale de Reims (19 septembre 1914)* [online], <<https://www.reims.fr/culture-patrimoine/archives-municipales-et-communautaires/guerre-1914-1918/exposition-virtuelle-reims-dans-la-guerre-1914-1918/5-1-incendie-de-la-cathedrale-de-reims-19-septembre-1914-7633.html>>, [retrieved: 17 August 2020].

⁴³ Władysław Jabłonowski, "Okrucieństwo Niemców w świetle pierwszeństwa ich rasy i cywilizacji," *Tygodnik Ilustrowany*, no. 43 (1914), p. 718.

Biesiada Literacka wrote in a similar tone about the destruction of the cathedral in Reims, as an absolutely barbaric act: "It was rightly said that [it] is one more challenge, one more slap in the face of civilized humanity struck by the brutal fist of barbarian Prussianism. This act removes the Germans from the list of civilized nations, and puts Wilhelm II among the wildest monsters of the world and history."⁴⁴ The subject was also taken up by the weekly *L'Illustration*, which in 1914 featured drawings and photographs illustrating the extent of the damage.⁴⁵ One of the photos particularly attracts attention due to its similarity to a drawing by Czesław Tański. The artist did not depict the degradation of the interior of the cathedral, but showed it at the moment of the fire, with clouds of smoke almost completely obscuring the silhouette of the church and the houses visible in the foreground slightly limiting the view. The photograph shows the temple fire from a similar perspective. The photo shows a fragment of the nave of the building, but part of it has already been consumed by flames or remains shrouded in clouds of thick smoke. As in the drawing, the city's buildings are visible in the foreground. Perhaps the artist was inspired by this photograph.⁴⁶ It is possible that the outcome was also influenced by other press photos he saw, which were abundant in publications appearing in Poland at that time.

The card in the deck as the Six of Spades represents German bombers over Warsaw (**fig. 10**). It is significant that both the airplane and the figures in it are shown in dark colours, against a gray-blue sky, the tonal quality highlighting the horror of the scene. German planes and airships had been appearing over Warsaw since as early as the autumn of 1914. Following the occupation of Warsaw by the Germans on 5 August 1915, the Russians would also organize bombing raids on the city.⁴⁷

As already mentioned, in his works Tański did not focus only on the events at the front, but also noticed the impact the war had on the civilian population. The image on the card marked as the Six of Diamonds should be read in this context. Titled *Wandering Polish Peasants* (**fig. 11**), it shows a group of people riding in wagons filled with belongings. Behind them another cart can be seen, and further vehicles can be surmised in the background; obviously, the refugees occupy the whole road. In the foreground, on the right, we see a woman walking behind the wagons, leading a cow and accompanied by a dog. An important element of the illustration, often recurring in artworks related to Polish lands, is the roadside cross, towering over the entire representation. Tański's work, although it took the inconspicuous form of a drawing placed on a playing card, raises the important issue of forced migration of people during the First World War.

The situation relating to the Kingdom of Poland and Galicia was analyzed by Mariusz Korzeniowski in an article entitled "Refugees from the Kingdom of Poland and Galicia in the Years of the Great War."⁴⁸ According to the data he collected, refugees were often forced

⁴⁴ [s.a.], "Kartki ilustrowane. Katedra w Reims," *Biesiada Literacka*, no. 41 (1914), pp. 260–61.

⁴⁵ The photographs were published in *L'Illustration*, no. 3735 (1914), pp. 240–42 and in *L'Illustration*, no. 3736 (1914), pp. 268–70.

⁴⁶ The photograph, by Jules Matot, was published in *L'Illustration*, no. 3736 (1914), p. 269.

⁴⁷ Krzysztof Jaszczyński, *Ostatni bilet wizytowy, czyli naloty na Warszawę w latach 1914–1915* [online], *Stolica*, no. 8–9 (2015), <<http://warszawa-stolica.pl/ostatni-bilet-wizytowy-czyli-naloty-na-warszawe-w-latach-1914-1915/>>, [retrieved: 18 August 2020].

⁴⁸ Mariusz Korzeniowski, "Uchodźcy z Królestwa Polskiego i Galicji w latach Wielkiej Wojny," in *Metamorfozy społeczne*, vol. 12: *Studia nad historią społeczną ziem polskich 1914–1918*, Włodzimierz Mędrzecki, ed. (Warsaw, 2018), pp. 202–39.

to travel in very difficult conditions, due not only to the elements, but also the lack of interest shown by the authorities in their plight and the lack of information about where they could find shelter. It was often the case, at least in the Kingdom of Poland, that the rural population did not want to leave their homes voluntarily, but the Russian troops forced them to do so by beating them and driving them out of their homes. The refugees complained about the loss of dignity in the eyes of the authorities and the contempt with which they were treated. The tragedy of their situation was made worse by the high mortality rate, especially among children. Infectious diseases and hunger spread among the population. The saturated colours in the illustration bring to mind the aura of late summer or early autumn. The colourful scarves of the women on the wagons or the pink jacket of the walking figure catch the eye. These vivid pieces of clothing contrast with the tragedy of the scene. The work reflects Tański's social awareness, his preoccupation with the hardships faced by rural refugees, often depicted in Polish art at the time (e.g., Jerzy Hulewicz's *Refugees*, 1915, private collection).

Wandering Polish Peasants is not the only "folk" illustration in Tański's deck. On the card marked as the Five of Diamonds, the artist placed a picture entitled *In a Polish Village* (fig. 12). This illustration, primarily due to the colours used, looks lively and cheerful compared to the other cards in the deck. It is clearly visible that the artist drew on the experience he had gained by showing "folk types." The drawing represents two women wearing clothes perhaps inspired by the Łowicz folk costume (which Tański showed in his other works) and a soldier (a uniform cap lying next to him) probably being bandaged by a girl, perhaps even his beloved. The second woman is watching this scene, holding a horse with bundles on its back, probably ready to set off soon. In the background, a thatched cottage, green tree crowns, and a low blue fence can be seen. Due to the colour contrasts and the theme itself, this picture could be considered an example of the so-called "Legion art," the perfect exemplification of which is Wojciech Kossak's painting *An Uhlan and a Girl*, for example in the version from 1915 (private collection). The illustration idealizes and aestheticizes life in the countryside, presenting it as a peaceful, prosperous realm that becomes uninhabitable only when intruders invade it. Compared with *In a Polish Village*, the Five of Diamonds image certainly takes on a deeper and more tragic meaning.

The telling picture the Four of Diamonds, entitled *The Executed Altar* (fig. 13), should be interpreted in this context of Tański's interest in the everyday life of war. The illustration shows the destroyed interior of a church. In the middle stands an altar with a figure of the crucified Christ, tilted probably as a result of having been hit by a bullet. Above it hovers a radiant nimbus with a cloud in the middle, serving as a background for a golden triangle symbolizing God. The whole picture therefore takes on a metaphorical meaning, which can probably be combined with the narrative about the barbarism of the Germans, for whom nothing is sacred. Photographs of destroyed churches were often reproduced in this context, especially in *Tygodnik Ilustrowany*.⁴⁹ It is worth recalling the emotions aroused by the bombing of Reims Cathedral. Outraged commentators emphasized not only the destruction of the temple as a landmark, but also the desecration of a place of worship. The war therefore also entered sacred space, destroying it with the same impetus with which it reduced other areas to rubble. This is the meaning of Marian Trzebiński's drawing depicting a crucifix damaged by bullets, which was presented at the 1916 War Exhibition. Entitled *A Victim of War*, it was

⁴⁹ E.g., an interior shot from the church in Rokitno published on the cover: *Tygodnik Ilustrowany*, no. 45 (1914).

reproduced in both *Tygodnik Ilustrowany* and the weekly *Świat*,⁵⁰ which may indicate the public's interest in the work's symbolic meaning. Tański's work can be interpreted similarly, which – although we do not know how it was received at the time of exhibition – also conveyed a moving message. It is also possible that Tański was inspired by Artur Grottger's drawing *Sacrilege* from the *War* portfolio (The National Museum in Wrocław), with its universal moral about the destruction of war.

The need to take care of the wounded is an indispensable element of warfare, and Tański did not omit it either in his *Solitaire* deck. The sick and wounded were usually cared for by women. Tański placed an image of nurses treating the wounded on the Three of Hearts (**fig. 14**). Two nurses, in white smocks marked with a Red Cross, bustle about a bed "in a Belgian church," as the caption explains, struggling to save a soldier's life. An altar can be seen in the background. The women shown by Tański are anonymous protagonists of the scene. However, it is worth recalling in this context the perhaps most famous British nurse who cared for the wounded in Belgium, Edith Cavell. Executed by the Germans for helping British and French POWs and Belgian citizens escape to neutral Netherlands, she was considered by Germany's opponents as almost a saint, and many legends arose around her death.⁵¹ Presenting the army of Wilhelm II as torturers who had murdered a noble woman, images showing the moment of Cavell's execution became a tool of anti-German propaganda in the Entente countries. While this overtone is missing in Tański's work, it concerns equally tragic and painful events.

The deck's closing card has no numerical marking (**fig. 15**). As such, it cannot be considered an element of the deck from the point of view of the rules of solitaire. Rather, it is a peaceful manifesto. It depicts a mysterious figure, perhaps an allegory of peace, destroying a cannon. In its left hand, the enigmatic creature holds a twig that could be interpreted as an olive branch – a symbol of peace and reconciliation. The illustration is titled *The Future* and from the perspective of the further history of the world, it is a touching but ineffective appeal for a world without wars. The iconographic sources of this representation, or at least of its central figure, can be found in a reproduction of Georges Scott's work published in *L'Illustration* in 1915.⁵² The illustration shows a dying French soldier with a woman leaning over him and a heavenly figure holding a twig in its hand hovering over the scene. The way it is presented is consistent with how Tański showed the mysterious being on the last card of his *Solitaire*. In both cases, the figure hovers above the ground, wearing airy, almost transparent clothes that emphasize its incorporeality. In Tański's illustration, this effect was achieved by means of delicate short lines rendered in colours that look pale compared to the deep dark hue of the cannon, emphasizing its materiality. The silhouette shown by Tański was also captured in a more dynamic pose. The character in Scott's illustration seems quieter, which is also indicated by its facial expression.

Conclusion

The card set, actually a series, proves Tański's technical skill. In fact, in all the images, the artist used a relatively inexpressive, interrupted outline, which made the illustrations more vivid. At the same time, he abstained from precisely depicting all the details of the scenes,

⁵⁰ Marian Trzebiński, *Ofiara wojny*, cover image, *Tygodnik Ilustrowany*, no. 46 (1914); *Świat*, no. 12 (1916), p. 3.

⁵¹ Gilbert, *Pierwsza wojna światowa...*, op. cit., p. 218.

⁵² Georges Scott, *Dernière vision*, cover image, *L'Illustration*, no. 3755 (1915), pp. 190–91.

making them easier to understand. However, apart from technical and stylistic issues, attention should be paid to the work's almost documentary nature. It can be considered a relatively bold and coherent visual narrative of the Great War. There is no glorification of the fighting in these illustrations. Of course, the drawings certainly aestheticize the armed conflict, presenting it in a form acceptable to conservative recipients, but at the same time they present its painful aspects, noticeable in every sphere of human life. Fascination with modern weapons is combined in them with a sense of terror caused by the omnipresent death, destruction of cities, and degradation of nature. Nor did Tański remain indifferent to the fate of the civilian population, who lost their property and often their homes and were forced to set off on a long and dangerous journey. An equally complete testimony of the First World War is nowhere to be found in Polish art. In the domestic historical narrative, the drama of this conflict is somehow obscured by the happy date of 11 November 1918, when Poland regained her independence. It is worth noting, however, that Tański did not perceive the armed conflict solely through the prism of the "Polish issue," but interpreted it as an international conflict, or rather a "European war." While depictions of other battle fronts, for example the southern one, are missing from Tański's deck, the attempt to broadly present the course of the war and its consequences should be appreciated. One can accuse Tański of bias in the way he shows the opponents of the Entente countries, but it is obvious that the artist took a side, and his choice was not surprising. Tański avoided creating caricatural representations of the enemy, typical of the propaganda machine that functioned so well during the First World War. Taking these factors into account, Tański deserves credit for social sensitivity and his orientation in current events. It should only be regretted that Tański's cards were never published and remained in the design phase. Had they entered into use, they would perhaps have had a chance to consolidate the Great War in the Polish collective consciousness as the first armed conflict with tragic consequences in the history of the world, and not only as a march for independence.

Translated by Marcin Wawrzyńczak