

Lecture 6: From the Enlightenment to Romanticism. Polish Literature between 1750 and the middle of the Nineteenth Century

1. Introduction

To understand the evolution of Polish life since 1750 it is crucial to have a good knowledge of Polish literature. For much of this period, Poland was under foreign domination. Literature became the embodiment of the national idea and the way that ideas about how a free Poland should be organized were expressed. The best single account of this issue is to be found in the standard account by the Nobel prize-winning poet, Czesław Miłosz, *A History of Polish Literature*, London, 1969. What I want to do today is briefly to analyze the literature of the Polish Enlightenment and then to examine how the rationalist ideals of the 'Age of Reason' were supplanted in Poland by an extreme version of European romanticism, which, as I explained in my introductory lecture, became the dominant intellectual force shaping the Polish mentality in the nineteenth and early twentieth century. Many of the works I discuss are available in English translations.

II. The Literature of the Polish Enlightenment

There is no space here to give a complete picture of the literature of the Polish Enlightenment, which transformed both the Polish language and the nature of Polish

literature and without which the events of the period between 1764 and 1795 are incomprehensible. I should like briefly to mention four areas of importance:

1. The theatre
2. Prose writing
3. Poetry
4. Political reformers – the ‘Forge’ (Kuźnica) group

1. The Theatre

Theatre was widely used to advance the goals of the Camp of Reform. This was done mostly through comedy. The realistic comedies of **Franciszek Bohomolec**, modeled upon Moliere, castigated both ‘Sarmatism’ and the foppish aping of everything French. Bohomolec found an ally in the person of the king, Stanisław August Poniatowski. At Poniatowski’s inspiration, a magazine, *Monitor* (The Monitor), was founded in 1765, and from that moment, stage and press worked hand in hand. Like his predecessors, the King maintained an Italian opera troupe and performances were given by French and Italian actors for the public at large. The precedent for such a practice had been set by the Saxon kings, August II and August III, but Stanislaw August gave orders to create, in addition, a team of professional Polish actors; the history of the Polish professional theater begins in 1765 with the first performance of that troupe before a paying audience. For several years the King retained ownership of that company, but after many financial complications, the question was debated in the Diet, and the Warsaw Theatre was reorganized as a national enterprise.

Bohomolec, the editor of and a frequent contributor to *Monitor*, introduced on its pages comic figures for satirical purposes. He used these same figures in his comedies. In one of his comedies, entitled *Monitor*, therefore, he applied a curious (almost Pirandello-like) procedure: we see a tavern in a little town where various Bohomolec characters, familiar to the viewers, have gathered upon hearing that the Monitor has come to town. Imagining it to be a person, they decide to take vengeance. Some are for cutting of his fingers, while others advocate more lawful methods. Finally, a man enters who says he is pleased that they take him for the Monitor, but he is only one of its contributors. The man, an alter-ego of Bohomolec, gently disarms his enemies. He tells the character who incarnates drunkenness, for example, that drunkenness in general was being castigated in his satirical articles and he hopes no one recognizes himself in such a picture. To which he receives the reply: 'Of course I drink, but I'm not a drunkard.' In the same way a superstitious character does not concede that he is superstitious, etc. Thus, the author is saved, thanks to the blindness of his antagonists.

Extremely prolific, with a talent for satire, **Franciszek Zabłocki** (1754-1821) wrote some sixty comedies and aimed his invective at representatives of 'Sarmatian' mentality. He borrowed plots from various foreign authors – from Beaumarchais, Diderot, Romagnesi – but he possessed a rare gift for creating purely native types. This is the greatest merit of his best-known comedies in verse, such as *Sarmatism* and the *Fop-Suitor* (Fircyk w zalotach).

Julian Ursyn Niemcewicz (1757-1841) had a long literary career, During the Reform period, he strongly supported the principles of the Enlightenment and as a deputy to the Four-Year Diet, emerged as one of the most vigorous leaders of the Camp

of the Reform. In 1791, he wrote a comedy entitled *The Return of the Deputy* (Powrót posła). The action takes place on the country manor of an average gentry family. The hosts, Mr. and Mrs. Chamberlain, are treated cordially by the author. They represent the reasonable element of the old generation of nobility, not hostile toward the changing world. Their son, Walery, is a progressive deputy to the Diet; he is in love with Teresa, who is a guest of the Chamberlains along with her parents. The latter are the target of the author's malice. In *Mr. Gadulski* (Mr. Talkative), a portrait of a Sarmatian Pole, the audience recognized those deputies to the Four-Year Diet who employed a filibuster tactic to oppose any changes.

Torrents of words pour from Gadulski's mouth; he discusses everything—international politics, laws, strategy – but he is a complete ignoramus. On the other hand, Mrs. Gadulski lives in the world of sentimental literature and weeps over Rousseau's *Nouvelle Heloise* and over a Polish translation of Edward Young's *Nights*. She injects French words into every other sentence, scorns her prosaic husband, and takes advantage of his stupidity by terrorizing him with swooning fits. Because sadness is fashionable, she forces herself into gloomy moods by recalling her first husband. Her stepdaughter, Teresa, has been promised by her to a fop, Mr. Szarmantcki (Mr. Charmer), who dresses in the French manner, takes no interest in public affairs, being preoccupied only with fashionable carriages, hunting, and women. Not long ago he was in France, and when Walery, the deputy, pronounces a speech praising the French Revolution, Szarmantcki answers that he left France precisely because of the disorders. When the deputy expresses his admiration for the English parliamentary system, Szarmantcki replies that he observed their horses, not their system. Unfortunately for himself Szarmantcki unmasks the real

motive behind his sentimental facade (so dear to Mrs. Gadulski) – his greed for a dowry. Thus, Teresa and the young deputy, who are in love with each other, are able to marry and all ends well.

Wojciech Boguslawski (1757-1829) is possibly the most important of the playwrights of this period. He belonged to the political conspiracy which prepared the insurrection of 1794 and he wrote and staged that year an original play in the form of a vaudeville or a comic opera, called *A Supposed Miracle, or Krakovians and Mountaineers* (Cud mniemany czyli Krakowiacy i Gorale). At that moment, the insurrection under the command of Kościuszko was spreading northward from Krakow, and the spectacle itself became a revolutionary event.

The plot is simple. A constant quarrel has marred the relations between a village near Krakow and the mountain folk from the Tatras. The two groups fight each other over a trifle: a love affair which offends the dignity of the mountaineers. They are reconciled thanks to a ‘miracle’ which is nothing but the work of a student who makes use of his knowledge of electricity. For the audience both the Krakovian peasants and the mountaineers represented popular forces and untapped national reserves exactly at the moment Kościuszko was forming his peasant militia and arming it with scythes.

2. Prose Writers

Ignacy Krasicki (1735-1801) was, in many respects, a typical man of the Enlightenment. As a man who believed natural religion to be in accord with that most human of attributes, Reason, he had words of praise for all religions and from his literary

work it would be difficult to guess that he was a priest and became a bishop. He had a large literary output, This included two mock-heroic poems. *The Mouse-iad* (*Myszeidos*, 1775) which describes a war between cats and mice which takes place in a remote time under the rule of the legendary King Popiel, who, because of his misdeeds, was devoured by mice and *Monachomachia, or the War of the Monks* (*Monachomachia albo wojna mnichów*, 1778) which is a satirical portrait of monastic life.

He is perhaps best known for his shorter poems, His *Satires* (*Satyry*, 1779) show him to be an observer and psychologist of human folly, which is presented in the form of human types: drunkards, fops, wives crazy about the latest fashions and so on. Many details of everyday life, revealed through dialogue, verge on the grotesque, and much that is effective in the presentation of various patterns of social behaviour is achieved through the device of parody.

The most durable among Krasicki's poems are those in his *Fables and Parables* (*Bajki i Przypowieści*, 1779). Krasicki's philosophy is dry and sober. His is a world where the strong win and the weak lose in a sort of immutable order recognized as such without protest. A certain cynicism seems to be an ingredient of eighteenth-century thinking and some fables are even cruel. Reason is exalted as the human equivalent of animal strength: the wise survive, the stupid perish. To give a few samples of Krasicki's fables:

The Wagon Driver and the Butterfly

A wagon got stuck in the mud and couldn't move.
The driver was tired and the horses exhausted.
A butterfly then sitting on the wagon
Believing he was a burden, thought: 'Compassion is not a bad

habit.’
He flew away and said to the man: ‘God bless you, go on your way.’

The Lamb and the Wolves

You will always find a reason if you want something enough:
Two wolves suddenly fell upon a lamb in the wood.
They were about to tear it apart;
It asked: ‘By what right?’
‘You are tasty, weak, and in the wood.’ Soon they had eaten it all.

Birds in a Cage

‘Why do you weep?’ a young canary said to an old canary,
‘You are better off now in a cage than you were in the fields.’
‘You were born in it,’ said the old one, ‘so I forgive you;
I was once free but now I’m in a cage and that is why I am weeping.’

Krasicki wrote a great deal in prose as well. Fiction in Poland had not yet begun to develop and what can be called the first Polish novel is due to the pen of Krasicki. *The Adventures of Nicolaus Doświadczyński (Mikolaja Doświadczyńskiego Przypadki, 1776)* combined many varieties of fiction. It may be called a novel of adventure, like Robinson Crusoe, and a philosophical tale in the Voltairian sense where details of life serve a definite satirical aim. It has recently been translated into English with a very useful introduction under the title *The Adventures of Mr. Nicholas Wisdom*.

Another clergyman (the bishop of Smolensk) and a poet, **Adam Naruszewicz** (1733-1796) was one of the closest friends of the king and an assiduous frequenter of the so-called ‘Thursday dinners’ at the court, which brought together the cream of Polish intellectuals.. At the instigation of the king, he undertook the enormous task of writing a

history of Poland based on modern research methods and using available archives in Poland and abroad. The result was his *History of the Polish Nation from the Times of Its Conversion to Christianity* (Historia narodu polskiego od przyjęcia Chrześcijaństwa), which became the second attempt of such broad scope, the first being Jan Długosz's fifteenth-century chronicle.

3. Poets

Together with Krasicki, **Stanisław Trembecki** (1735-1812) is the best poetic exemplar of Polish Classicism. As his wit was highly appreciated, he was a well-received guest at the king's 'Thursday dinners.' He was not however very sophisticated politically and resided for many years on the Ukrainian estate of one of the most reactionary figures among the Polish magnates, Szczęśny (Feliks) Potocki, one of the chief organizers of the Targowica Confederacy.

Present in every line of his poetry is Trembecki's philosophy: materialistic, sensual - a kind of gourmet's enthusiasm which sees the world as something tangible, rich in color, movement, and shapes and which reflects this perception in language. Trembecki's admiration for everything lush, vigorous, abundant, fertile found expression in his longer descriptive poems, above all, *Sofijówka*, a name which referred to the Ukrainian Versailles,

Polish baroque sensibilities still continued to exist and the sentimental lyricists of the Enlightenment are, obviously, the inheritors of the bucolic poetry of the Baroque. The rococo madrigal profited in Poland from the general trend toward purification and

simplification of the language. Its native roots remain, however, clearly perceptible. The best example of this type of poetry is to be found in the work of **Franciszek Karpiński** (1741-1825). He received a very old-fashioned Sarmatian education in Jesuit schools, where he proved himself skillful in theological disputes in Latin and was even tempted by his superiors to enter the Order. Later, he, like Niemcewicz, served at the court of the powerful Czartoryski family. His religious poetry is among the best-known in Poland as in his verse. greeting the morning:

When the morning lights arise,
To you the earth, to you the sea,
To you sing all the elements:
Be praised, great God!

or praying in the evening:

All our daily cares
Mercifully receive, just God,
And as we fall asleep
Let even our sleep glorify you.

Best-known are his Christmas carols (kołędy) One is a particular favourite in Poland. 'Bóg się rodzi':

God is born; power trembles,
The Lord of heaven is naked;
Fire-congeals; glare-darkens;
He who is infinite – has boundaries.
The scorned one – is covered with glory,
The mortal one – is a king for centuries!
And the word became flesh
And dwelled among us.

4. The Reformers

I have already mentioned these writers in connection with the Reform movement and here will only enumerate them for completeness. They include **Hugo Kollataj**, **Franciszek Ksawery Dmochowski** (a famous translator of Homer and author of an Art of Poetry modeled upon Boileau); **Franciszek Salezy Jezierski**, a priest, quite radical in his French-style rationalism, **Jan Dąbrowski** (who was later on to become an officer in the Polish legion in Italy) and **Stanislaw Staszic**

III. Romanticism in Poland

1. Introduction

Romanticism soon became the dominant trend in nineteenth century Polish literature. Contrary to the brand of Romanticism which in many countries was identified with a withdrawal of the individual into his own interior world, Romanticism in Poland acquired an extremely activist character and was clearly a consequence of many ideas of the Enlightenment.

A constant preoccupation with the reconstruction of Poland explains the fondness Polish Romantics displayed for the philosophy of history. Their themes were elaborated sometimes in opposition to, sometimes in agreement with, Hegelian thought. In any case, Polish Romanticism was thoroughly imbued with historicism. Shelley called the poet 'the unacknowledged legislator of mankind' – few people in England took this claim seriously. As a consequence of national misfortunes, the reading public in Poland gave literal acceptance to a similar claim on the part of their own poets. The poet was hailed as

a charismatic leader, the incarnation of the collective strivings of the peoples; thus, his biography, not only his work, entered the legend. The three Polish Romantic poets, Adam Mickiewicz, Juliusz Słowacki, and Zygmunt Krasiński, were acclaimed as national bards (*wieszczowie*), and these greatly magnified figures dominated several literary generations.

A key factor in Polish romanticism was the Napoleonic legend, releasing as it did new forces of feeling and imagination. Viewed in this light, Polish Romanticism came close to resembling that branch of French Romanticism which was represented by Stendhal, particularly in his novel *Le rouge et le noir*.

2. Adam Mickiewicz (1798-1855)

1. His Life

Mickiewicz was born into a minor noble family in Nowogródek. His mother's family may have had Frankist roots, certainly his wife came from a Frankist family and the Frankists tended to inter-marry. As a student at the University of Vilna, he became involved in one of the many patriotic conspiratorial societies there, the *Filomaty*, and was arrested in 1823. After six months imprisonment, he was exiled to Russia, first to St. Petersburg, where he got to know Pushkin and many of the later Decembrists and then to Odessa on the Black sea. In 1829 he was able to travel to Germany where he was when the November uprising broke out. He failed to arrive in Warsaw in time for the Uprising (he never actually saw Warsaw) and after its defeat made his way to Paris, where he was associated with the left wing of the Emigration, which expected the outbreak of a

European-wide revolution which would make possible the resurrection of Poland.

Between 1840 and 1844 he lectured on Slavic literature at the College de France.

In March 1848, he organised in Rome and then in Lombardy a Legion of Volunteers to support the revolution. He returned to Paris, where he co-founded a radical paper *Trybuna Ludów*. During the Crimean war, he attempted to create a Jewish Legion made up of prisoners from the Tsarist Army. He contracted cholera and died in Istanbul

2. His Work

Mickiewicz's first work was classical in style. A good example is his 'Ode to Youth' (Oda do młodości), which was to become popular with the whole young generation, is a kind of Freemasonic song, calling man to push the 'clod of the earth' onto new paths, to join forces in altruistic love, to storm the 'citadel of Fame,' and to prepare for human freedom. The poem is also marked by numerous references to classical mythology.

He announced his allegiance to the romantic movement in poem entitled 'Romanticism' (Romantyczność). This was written partly in response to Jan Śniadecki, a mathematician, an astronomer, and a rationalist, who wrote an essay, 'On Classical and Romantic Writings' (1819), in which he called Romanticism 'a school of treason and plague,' a danger for education and the purity of the language. This is how the poem goes:

'Silly girl, listen!
But she doesn't listen
While the village roofs glisten,
Bright in the sun.
'Silly girl, what do you do there,
As if there were someone to view there,

A face to gaze on and greet there,
When there is no one, none, do you hear!
But she doesn't hear.

Like a dead stone
She stands there alone,
Staring ahead of her, peering around
For something that has to be found
Till, suddenly spying it,
She touches it, clutches it,
Laughing and crying.

'Is it you, my Johnny, my true love, my dear?
I knew you would never forget me,
Even in death! Come with me, let me
Show you the way now! Hold your breath, though,
And tiptoe lest stepmother hear.

'What can she hear? They have made him
A grave, two years ago laid him
Away with the dead.
Save me, Mother of God! I'm afraid.
But why? Why should I flee you now?

'What do I dread?
Not Johnny! I see you now,
Your eyes, your white shirt.

'But it's pale as linen you are,
Cold as winter you are!
Let my lips take the cold from you,
Kiss the chill of the mould from you

'Dearest love, let me die with you,
In the deep earth lie with you,
For this world is dark and dreary,
I am lonely and weary!

'Alone among the unkind ones
Who mock at my vision,
My tears their derision,
.Seeing nothing, the blind ones!

'Dear God! A cock is crowing,
Whitely glimmers the dawn.
Johnny! Where are you going?

Don't leave me! I am forlorn!

So caressing, talking aloud to her
Lover, she stumbles and falls,
And her cry of anguish calls
A pitying crowd to her.

'Cross yourselves! It is surely
Her Johnny come back from the grave:
While he lived, he loved her entirely.
May God his soul now save!'

Hearing what they are saying,
I, too, start praying.

'The girl is out of her senses!'
Shouts a man with a learned air,
'My eye and my lenses
Know there's nothing there.

'Ghosts are a myth
Of ale-wife and blacksmith.
Clodhoppers! This is treason
Against King Reason!'

'Yet the girl loves,' I reply diffidently,
'And the people believe reverently:
Faith and love are more discerning
Than lenses or learning.

'You know the dead truths, not the living,
The world of things, not the world of loving.
Where does any miracle start?
Cold eye, look in your heart!'

(1821)

Translated by W. H. Auden.

Grażyna

Mickiewicz's second volume, published in 1823, contained two longer works in verse:

Grażyna, with the subtitle *A Lithuanian Tale*, and *Parts Two and Four of Forefathers'*

Eve. Grażyna is a Lithuanian woman's name meaning 'graceful.' The poem is marked by a plot and motifs dear to the Romantics: night, the glimmer of armour, a cloudy sky, a moon, the gates of a castle and other romantic clichés. As in many of his other early writings, Mickiewicz situates the action in his native province. The setting for *Grażyna* is the castle of Nowogródek; the time, the end of the fourteenth century, i.e., the Middle Ages. The Lithuanian prince, Litawor, has concluded a pact with the Teutonic Knights, pledging to fight with them against the Grand Duke of Lithuania, against whom he bears a grudge. Grażyna, his wife, learns of her husband's deed, and while he is asleep, she puts on his armour. Disguised as the prince, she leads his warriors against the Teutonic Knights. Grażyna dies from a wound received on the battlefield, but the Teutonic Knights are defeated. Her husband, regretting his action, commits suicide by leaping into the funeral pyre which consumes Grażyna's body. The figure of a heroic woman fascinated the public; she also appeared in Mickiewicz's Ballads and other early works. This is a non-erotic heroine—a wife, a commander.

Forefathers' Eve (Dziady)

The volume also contained parts of one of Mickiewicz's most important works, *Forefathers' Eve* (Dziady). In Kaunas and Vilna, Mickiewicz wrote a sketch of Part One and all of Parts Two and Four, which were published in his volume of 1823. Later on, in Dresden, he wrote Part Three, which comes after Parts Two and Four. The work as a whole draws on the religious traditions of the past, preserved in folklore. In Mickiewicz's lifetime, peasants in the Grand Duchy of Lithuania still gathered on All Souls' Eve in

remote chapels to celebrate the pagan rite of calling on the dead and offering them food. Usually, an elder presided or even a local priest who connived with their centuries-old customs. It was this folk ritual, known as *dziady*, that Mickiewicz chose for the framework of his dramatic poem. Thus, in Part Two we see peasants at night reciting incantations and encountering ghosts. The first to appear are 'light' spirits – two very rococo cherubs who cannot enter heaven because they were too happy on earth. They ask for a mustard seed, and, before leaving the folk gathered in the chapel, they recite the following admonition

For hear and weigh it well
That according to the divine order
He who has never tasted bitterness
Will never taste sweetness in heaven.

A 'heavy' spirit enters next, a version of Tantalus adapted to the peasant imagination, namely, the ghost of a bad landlord. He is surrounded by predatory birds that snatch away any bit of food offered him. Since he maltreated his serfs, no one among the living can help him, and the predatory birds are the souls of those he once tortured:

Yes, I have to endure pain century after century;
The divine sentence is just,
For to him who has never been humane
No human can bring any help.

The third spirit belongs to an intermediate category 'of those who lived neither for man, nor for the world': a young shepherdess, again from a rococo pastoral, who, being too proud, has rejected amorous offers from the lads and now does not want any food offered at the rite. She asks only that young peasants seize her by the hands and draw her to the earth, but in her phantom state she cannot be reached:

So hear and weigh it well
That according to the divine order
He who has never touched earth

Never will enter heaven.

The last spirit to appear (and he is uninvited) is the ghost of a romantic young man. He does not speak at all and only stares silently at one of the girls in the crowd. This figure provides a link between the rite in the chapel and the next part of the drama, to which the ceremony is a kind of overture.

The next part (Part Four) relies even more upon the creation of a certain atmosphere. It is evening. A parish priest sits alone with his children (he is a Greek Catholic priest and a widower). He receives a visit from a bizarre stranger, a young man whose disjointed talk tempts the priest to consider him either a madman or a ghost (perhaps he is the young man of Part 2). After some time, the priest recognizes him as his former pupil, Gustaw. Gustaw then speaks, as if from beyond the grave, and tells the story of unhappy love recounted as if by a creature who might belong just as well to the living as to the dead. Gustaw's story is a judgment pronounced over his own soul: how he discovered 'villainous books' – sentimental literature inclining him to search for his ideal love; how he encountered her; how he was rejected because she preferred worldly riches. The whole speech is punctuated by a clock striking first the hour of love, then the hour of despair, and, finally, the hour of warning. At each stroke, Gustaw stabs himself but does not fall.

The Crimean Sonnets

In Odessa, he wrote a cycle of twenty-two love sonnets, to which the *Crimean Sonnets* proper is the sequel. If Mickiewicz, in many respects, is a poet on the border line of

Classicism and Romanticism, here he transcends those classifications thanks to the calm limpidity of his style and a complete domination of his material. The love sonnets retrace his ideal love for Maryla, pass to sensuous loves in Odessa (having nothing of the ethereal quality connected with the Romantic treatment of love) and end with a bitter rejection of his transitory ties with women.

The Crimean Sonnets are a strongly symbolical presentation of the poet's feelings through corresponding landscapes. He uses two basic symbols: the sea – as an expanse of life, a distance, travel to an unknown destination, storms of passion and the mountains – as a place above the daily turmoil of mortals, as elevation and elation. Mickiewicz was justly called a 'poet of transformations' and the rush to reach forward, beyond the given moment, to a new stage of internal development is visible in the whole sonnet cycle.

When describing a gallop, he says:

As in a broken mirror, so in my torrid eye
Pass phantoms of woods, valleys, and rocks

Jak w rozbitym zwierciadle, tak w mym spiekłym oku
Snują się mary lasów i dolin, i glazów. ('Bajdary')

Or he says, speaking of the sea:

The light in its rustling plays as in the eye of a tiger
W jego szumach gra światło jak w oczach tygrysa.
('Ałushta in Daytime' ['Ałushta w dzień'])

Looking down on the sea from a mountain he sees 'fleets and flocks of swans' and an

'army of whales' i.e., breakers

A na głębinie fala lekko się kolysa
I kąpią się w niej floty i stada labedzi
('Ałushta in Daytime')

Jak wojsko wielorybów zalegając brzegi.

('Ajudah')

The whole Crimean peninsula becomes for him a boat, and he apostrophizes its highest mountain peak:

O mast of the Crimean boat, Great Chatyr Dagh!
Maszcie krymskiego statku, wielki Chatyrdahu!
('Chatyrdah')

Through references to Islamic poetry he introduces local, oriental color into the Crimean Sonnets, and his use of many Turkish words not found in Polish dictionaries aroused the ire of the Warsaw classicists. Thus, Mickiewicz paid tribute to the fashion for oriental motifs in literature, as did Goethe and Byron, not to mention Delacroix in painting. The Orient is very much present in his sonnets on the ruins of the Moslem past in Crimea, where the tomb appears as an important symbol of the transience of human passions, and the image of night, when:

the air is full of scent, that music of flowers
Powietrze tchące wonią, tą muzykę kwiatów)
('Ałushta at Night' ['Ałushta w nocy'])

Konrad Wallenrod

In 1828, Mickiewicz published a long poem, *Konrad Wallenrod*, in St. Petersburg. Completely different from his sonnets and the most 'Byronic' of his works, it is a tale in verse with a subject presumably taken, as in *Grażyna*, from old Lithuanian chronicles. Konrad, the hero, born a pagan Lithuanian, has been raised a Christian by some Teutonic Knights who captured him during one of their raids on Lithuania. By dint of valor, he has climbed to the top of the hierarchy of the Order and has been elected the Grand Master

and Commander-in-Chief. But one day an old Lithuanian minstrel is permitted to entertain the Knights. His singing, in a language incomprehensible to the others, arouses the hero's awareness of his origins. To avenge the misfortune suffered by his native country at the hands of the Order, he conducts a military expedition in such a way that the Teutonic troops suffer utter disaster.

Forefathers' Eve (part 3)

This was written in Dresden – it is both a morality play revived and a Promethean poem, the story of a man surrounded by supernatural powers and struggling for his salvation. In the preceding parts we saw Gustaw with his unhappy love; here we find him in a Tsarist prison, an *alter ego* of Mickiewicz during his half-year imprisonment in Vilna. During a single night the prisoner is transformed from a man preoccupied with his personal problems into one dedicated to the cause of his nation and of humanity. To mark this change, he even alters his name to Konrad – the name Mickiewicz had given earlier to his Lithuanian hero. The problem of the prisoner, Konrad, is that of human suffering, and of God's permitting it. If God is indifferent while he, Konrad, is not, does this mean that he is morally superior to God? Konrad's monologue of defiance addressed to God is known as 'the Great Improvisation.' Prompted by evil spirits, he is ready to insult God: 'You are not the father of the world but a....' He is saved from pronouncing 'Tsar' by the intervention of good spirits. He undergoes one more transformation: from proud rebel into humble fighter for the collective cause, but not in revolt against Providence – a foreshadowing of Mickiewicz's future activity as a Christian Socialist. As befits a

morality play, earth, heaven, and hell are present on the stage. Good is represented by the prisoner's guardian angel, by choruses of night spirits on the right side, by angels, by a humble Roman Catholic priest (Father Peter), by an innocent girl (Eve), by Polish and Russian revolutionary youth; while evil is personified by devils, night spirits on the left side, Tsarist officials, Senator Novosiltsov in person, and Polish 'good society' – collaborationists and opportunists. This is, in a sense, also a poem of the night. In dreams, the veil hiding a deeper, supernatural reality is lifted and man enters into contact with mysterious powers. The main characters – Konrad, Father Peter, Eve – live through their most intense experiences in visions. Into Father Peter's vision, Mickiewicz inserts a messianic prophecy that holds out the hope of a great man who will lead Poland and humanity toward bright destinies. Even a kabbalistic cipher, to designate him – forty-four, an equivalent of the Hebrew letters DM – is introduced. Whatever its meaning, it is an obvious reflection of eighteenth-century Illuminism and cabalism in a new Romantic setting.

When *Forefathers' Eve* appeared in print, it was accompanied by a long descriptive poem entitled *Digression (Ustęp)*, written sometime before Part Three and summing up Mickiewicz's Russian experiences. Logically, it is connected with the drama as a picture of the country to which Gustaw-Konrad (Mickiewicz) is taken after his imprisonment in Vilna and it follows Mickiewicz's itinerary, as the titles of the chapters indicate – 'The Road to Russia', 'The Outskirts of the Capital', 'Petersburg', 'The Monument to Peter the Great', 'Military Review' and 'The Day Before the St. Petersburg Flood of 1824'. The whole poem portrays Tsarist Russia as a huge prison, but is full of pity for the oppressed Russian nation and meditates upon the future of this country frozen

in a despotic system. The imagery is that of winter. Even the inhabitants of that snow-covered land are depicted as bearing in themselves souls like *pupae* awaiting the spring:

But when the sun of freedom will shine,
What insect will fly out from that envelope?
Will it be a bright butterfly soaring over the earth,
Or a moth, dirty tribe of the night?

Ale gdy słońce wolności zaświeci,
Jakiż z powłoki tej owad wyleci?
Czy motyl jasny wzniesie się nad ziemię,
Czy ćma wypadnie, brudne nocy plemię?

The city of St. Petersburg stands as a symbol of despotism for Mickiewicz. Built by order of the Tsar in a most unsuitable place, it rests on the bones of thousands of serfs who perished during the construction. The slow, organic growth of Western European cities is compared with that urban monument to the sheer will of one man. In the section entitled 'The Monument to Peter the Great', Mickiewicz shows two poets under the statue: one is himself; the other, Pushkin. Into the Russian's mouth he puts a long speech similar in content to the Pole's (his own) meditation. The Russian poet compares the Tsar on his horse to a waterfall suddenly frozen solid and suspended over a precipice:

But when the sun of freedom will throw its rays
And the western wind will warm these states,
What will happen to the waterfall of tyranny?

Lecz skoro słońce swobody zabłyśnie
I wiatr zachodni ogrzeje te państwa,
I cóż się stanie z kaskadę tyraństwa?

The chapter called 'Military Review' expresses the horror of army pageants in St. Petersburg, which last for hours and leave in their wake frozen bodies of soldiers on the

enormous, empty squares of the capital. The last chapter, on the flood, bears a second title: 'Oleszkiewicz.' The name refers to a friend of the Polish poet, a painter, a Freemason, and a mystic who introduced him to the works of Saint-Martin and to the kabbala; in the poem, Oleszkiewicz prophesies the doom of the Tsarist empire, that kingdom of evil incarnate. The poem concludes with a great flood, which, with its unleashing of elemental forces brings to completion the symbol of winter present throughout the poem. For Russia, spring will be a calamity, a time of immense suffering.

Pushkin was prompted by it to write a reply to Mickiewicz, and the outcome was his masterpiece, *The Bronze Horseman*, set just at the time of the St. Petersburg flood and centred around the statue of Peter the Great. Pushkin attempted to convey his love for the city and his ambivalence – his feelings of fascination and fear – toward Peter as the epitome of a ruler. The dialogue between the two poets was probably also provoked by the poem placed at the very end of *Forefathers' Eve*, after the *Digression*, and entitled 'To My Muscovite Friends'. In it, Mickiewicz deplores the fate of the Decembrists – Rylejev executed, Beztuzhev condemned to hard labor – and castigates those who dishonour themselves by accepting 'honorary' distinctions and high positions from the Tsar or by singing his triumphs with mercenary pens:

Whoever of you will raise a complaint, for me his complaint
Will be like the barking of a dog, so accustomed
To wearing his collar long and patiently,
That he is ready to bite the hand which tears at it.

Kto z was podniesie skargę, dla mnie jego skarga
Będzie jak psa szczekanie, który tak się wdroży
Do cierpliwie i długo noszonej obrozy,
Ze w koncu gotów kęśać — rękę, co ją targa.

The Books of the Polish Nation and of the Polish Pilgrims (Księgi narodu polskiego i pielgrzymstwa polskiego)

This was written in Paris in 1832. It is an address in simple language to the Polish exiles. The form of the work copies the gospel parables and their sixteenth century Polish imitations by Fr. Piotr Skarga. The *Books* develop the messianic idea put forward in *Forefathers' Eve*. Poland is to redeem the nations through her suffering and the mission of the Polish pilgrims was to announce to the materialistic Western nations a new world spiritually transformed. Rural, patriarchal Poland is contrasted to the West, contaminated by the diabolical forces of money, much as Russian Slavophiles opposed their country to the West. Mickiewicz takes on the mantle of a prophet. He, as a Pole, has been charged to warn Frenchmen and Englishmen of a despotism that will subjugate all Europe if it is tolerated and assisted in eastern Europe:

. . . and you, tradesmen and merchants of two nations, avid for gold and paper with the value of gold, you used to send money for the crushing of freedom, but indeed, the days will come when you will lick your gold and chew your paper and nobody will send you bread and water.

In another passage:

And to the Frenchman and the Englishman the Pole says: If you, children of freedom, do not follow me, then God will reject your tribe and will rouse defenders of freedom out of stones, that is, out of the Muscovites and the Asiatics.

Pan Tadeusz

This, probably Mickiewicz's greatest work, has very little to do with the ideological conflicts of the day. Indeed, when beginning to write it, he saw it as an island to which he could escape, 'closing the door on Europe's noise'. Gradually, it grew into an

imposing whole, divided into twelve books, a sort of novel in verse in which Mickiewicz returns to the country of his childhood and adolescence – Lithuania of 1811-12. Because the world he was describing was gone forever, he could achieve a perfect distance, visible in the kind of humour which permeates the lines.

Pan Tadeusz does not tell the story of a ‘problematic hero’ in conflict with his surroundings and, for that reason, is a long way from nineteenth-century novels. In fact all of its characters are average people immersed in their society and not suffering from alienation. Such perfect harmony between the characters and the world they are destined to live in is an essential trait of the ancient epic, and this is why *Pan Tadeusz* has been called ‘the last epic’ in world literature. Like the *Iliad* and *Jerusalem Delivered*, which begin with an invocation addressed to the Deity, *Pan Tadeusz* begins with an invocation to Lithuania, whose strongly personified nature in all its mornings, sunsets, storms, and serene skies gives to small human affairs a kind of benevolent blessing. On the other hand, there is much of the mock-heroic epic in *Pan Tadeusz*; the poet’s eighteenth-century training comes out in an inclination to literary parody – where Homeric lines are applied to a skirmish between squires and Russian soldiers or a magnificent centerpiece is described in the terms Homer used for Achilles’ shield.

Pan Tadeusz is a vast panorama of a noble society at the moment it is living through its last days. One of Mickiewicz’s contemporaries, Stanislaw Worcell, leader of the most radical Polish emigres, described it as ‘a tombstone laid by the hand of a genius upon our Old Poland.’ The richness of human types, taken as they are, without any bile or moralizing, so conquers our attention that we forget about the limited field of observation. A manor, a village of gentry farmers, a half-ruined aristocratic castle quite

suffice while peasants move somewhere far in the background and tradesmen appear only in the person of wise Jankiel, a Jewish innkeeper famous for his skill in playing the dulcimer. The element of politics is not lacking, for the action takes place on the eve of the Napoleonic expedition against Moscow and is completed by it. But it is politics of a not very complex sort. At the end of the poem the young generation dons the uniform of the Polish Napoleonic army and in response to the spirit of the day proclaims the peasant a free citizen.

After *Pan Tadeusz*, Mickiewicz wrote nothing more in verse, except for a few lyrical poems of rare perfection. His silence has been variously interpreted.

3. Poems

From *The Crimean Sonnets*

Baydary

I whip my horse into the wind and see
Woods, valleys, rocks, tumbling and tussling, a gleam,
Flow on and disappear like the waves of a stream:
I want to be dazed by this whirlpool of scenery.

And when my foaming horse will not obey,
When the world grows colourless caught in a dark beam
Woods, valleys and rocks pass in a bad dream
Across the broken mirror of my parched eye.

Earth sleeps, not me. I jump in the sea's womb.
The big black wave roars as it rushes ashore.
I bend my head, stretch out like a bridegroom

Toward the wave breaking. Surrounded by its roar
I wait till whirlpools drive my thoughts to doom,

A boat capsized and drowned: oblivion's core.

From *Pan Tadeusz*

The Year 1812

O year of wonder for those who saw it in our country! Even now the people call it the year of plenty, and the soldier the year of war; even now the old men love to tell tales of it, even now song weaves its fancy about it. It had long been announced by a wonder in the heavens and was preceded by silent rumour among the people; with the spring sun a strange presentiment took hold of the hearts of the people of Lithuania, as though the end of the world were at hand, a kind of yearning and rapturous expectation.

When the cattle were driven out for the first time in the spring, it was seen that, though starved and thin, they did not run for the grass that already adorned the earth with green, but lay down in the fields and bellowed with lowered, outstretched heads, or chewed the cud of their winter fodder.

Nor do the villagers, as they drive their ploughs for the spring corn, rejoice as usual at the end of the long winter; they sing no songs' but work lazily as though they had forgotten about sowing and the harvest. With every step they rein in their bullocks or the ponies at the harrow and look in alarm towards the west, as if from there were to appear some marvel, and with fear they watch the returning birds. For the stork has already flown back to its native pine and unfolded its white wings, that early standard of spring; and after him the swallows arrived in clamorous regiments and gathered about the waters, and took mud from the frozen earth for their little houses. In the evening the whisper of flitting snipe could be heard in the bushes, while flocks of wild geese whirl over the wood and, tired out, drop noisily down for a halt; and cranes are for ever moaning in the depths of the dark sky. Hearing this the night-watchmen ask in fear, whence all this disturbance in the winged realm, what storm drives these birds forth so soon?

Till, suddenly, like fresh flocks of bullfinches, plovers and starlings, flocks of bright plumes and pennons show bright on the hills, drop down to the pastures. Cavalry! strangely clad, arms not seen before, regiment after regiment, and in their midst, like melted snow, along the roads flow iron-studded files; the black of caps gleams from the woods, glitter the rows of bayonets, the hordes of the infantry are ant-like a-swarm.

All are going north. It was almost as if, at that time, even the peoples were following the birds and themselves migrating to our country, driven by an incomprehensible, instinctive force. Horses, men, guns, eagles, flow along by day and by night, a blaze burns here and there in the sky, the ground shakes, claps of thunder can be heard on either side.

War! War! There was no corner of the land of Lithuania to which its roar would not have reached; in the heart of the dark forests the peasant, whose forefathers and parents had died without looking out beyond the confines of the forest, who knew no other roarings in the heavens than those of the gales, or on the earth than the bellowings of the beasts, nor saw other men than his fellow-forest-dwellers, now sees in the sky a strange blaze burning, hears a crashing in the forest; the ball from some cannon, that, straying from the field of battle, has sought its way in the forest tearing up trunks, cutting off branches. That grey-beard, the bison, trembled in the moss, bristling the long hair of its mane, half getting up, supporting itself on its fore-legs, and, shaking its beard, looked in amazement at the embers suddenly gleaming among the torn trees: it was a stray shell, spinning, seething and sizzling, then bursting with a roar like thunder. For the first time in his life the bison was afraid and fled to take cover in a deeper refuge.

A battle! Where? in what direction? the youths ask as they grasp their weapons; the women raise hands to heaven, and all, sure of victory, cry out with tears in their eyes: God is with
Napoleon, — Napoleon with us!

O memorable spring for him who saw it then in our country, spring of war, spring of plenty, O memorable spring for those who saw it a-flourish with corn and grass, a-glitter with men, rich in happenings, pregnant with hope! I can see it even now, a beautiful dream! Born in captivity, fettered while yet in swaddling bands, I have had but one such spring in my life.

Jankiel's Concert

The fiddler tucked his sleeve up, set his chin,
And sent his bow a-racing o'er the strings.
At this the pipers, as if flapping wings,
Began to work their elbows up and down
And fill the bags with breath from cheeks outblown.
You would have thought they were a chubby pair
Of Boreas' babes about to take the air.
But dulcimer was none.

For none would dare
To play on it in Jankiel's presence there.
(That winter no one knew where he had been;
Now he was suddenly with the generals seen.)
All knew that on that instrument was none
To equal him in skill or taste or tone.
They urged him on to play, but he refused;
His hands were stiff, he said, and little used,
He dared not play before such gentlemen,
And bowing crept away; but Zosia then

Ran up; in one white hand she brought with her
The hammers used to play the dulcimer,
And with the other Jankiel's beard caressed;
She curtsied; 'Jankiel, play for me,' she pressed,
'It 's my betrothal, Jankiel, won't you play,
You said you'd play upon my wedding day!'

Jankiel was very fond of Zosia, so
He bowed his beard his willingness to show.
They brought the dulcimer and fetched a chair,
And sat him in the middle of them.
There He sat and, taking up the instrument,
He looked at it with pride and deep content;
As when a veteran hears his country's call.
Whose grandsons take his sword down from the wall,
And laughs: it's long since he has held the blade,
But yet he feels it will not be betrayed.

Meanwhile two pupils knelt before the Jew,
And tuned the strings and tested them anew.
With half-closed eyes he sat still in his chair,
And held the hammers motionless in air.

At first he beat out a triumphal strain,
Then smote more quickly like a storm of rain.
They were amazed – but this was but a trial,
He suddenly stopped and raised the sticks awhile.

He played again: the hammers on the strings
Trembled as lightly as mosquito's wings
And made a humming sound that was so soft
'Twas hardly heard. The master looked aloft
Waiting for inspiration, then looked down
And eyed his instrument with haughty frown.

He lifts his hands, then both together fall
And smite at once, astonishing them all.
A sudden crash bursts forth from many strings
As when a band of janissaries rings
With cymbals, bells and drums. And now resounds
The Polonaise of May the Third! It bounds
And breathes with joy, its notes with gladness fill;
Girls long to dance and boys can scarce keep still.
But of the old men every one remembers
That Third of May, when Senators and Members
In the assembly hall with joy went wild,

That King and Nation had been reconciled;
'Long live the King, long live the Sejm!' they sang,
'Long live the Nation' through the concourse rang.

The music ever louder grew and faster,
Then suddenly a false chord-from the master!
Like hissing snakes or shattering glass, that chilled
Their hearts and with a dire foreboding filled.
Dismayed and wondering the audience heard:

Was the instrument ill-tuned? or had he erred?
He had not erred ! He struck repeatedly
That treacherous string and broke the melody,
And ever louder smote that sullen wire,
That dared against the melody conspire,
Until the Warden, hiding face in hand,
Cried out, 'I know that sound, I understand;
It 's Targowica! 'Suddenly, as he speaks,
The string with evil-omened hissing breaks;
At once the hammers to the treble race,
Confuse the rhythm, hurry to the bass.

And ever louder grew the music's roar,
And you could hear the tramp of marching, war,
Attack, a storm, the boom of guns, the moans
Of children, and a weeping mother's groans.
So splendidly the master's art resembled
The horror of a storm, the women trembled.
Remembering with tears that tale of grief,
The Massacre of Praga; with relief
They heard the master's final thunder hushed,
As if the voices of the strings were crushed.

They've scarce recovered from their marvelling,
The music changes and a murmuring
Begins: at first a few thin strings complain
Like flies that struggle in the web in vain,
But more and more come up and forming line,
The scattered notes in troops of chords combine;
And now with measured pace they march along
To make the mournful tune of that old song:
*The wandering soldier through the forest goes,
And often faints with hunger and with woes.
At last he falls beside his charger brave,
That with his hoof-heat digs his master's grave.*
A poor old song, to Polish troops so dear!

The soldiers recognised it, crowding near
Around the master; listening, they recall
That dreadful hour when o'er their country's fall
They sang this song, and went to distant climes;
And to their minds came memories of those times,
Of wandering through frosts and burning sands
And seas, when oft in camps in foreign lands
This Polish song had cheered and comforted.
Such were their thoughts, and each man bowed his head.

But soon they lifted up their heads again,
The master raised the pitch and changed the strain.
He, looking down once more, the strings surveyed,
And, joining hands, with both the hammers played:
Each blow was struck so deftly and so hard,
That all the strings like brazen trumpets blared,
And from the trumpets to the heavens sped
That march of triumph: *Poland is not dead!*
Dąbrowski, march to Poland! With one accord
They clapped their hands, and 'March, Dąbrowski!' roared.

The player by his own song seemed amazed;
He dropped the hammers and his arms upraised;
His fox-skin hat upon his shoulders slipped;
His floating beard majestically tipped;
Upon his cheeks two strange red circles showed,
And in his eye a youthful ardour glowed.
And when at last his eyes Dąbrowski met,
He hid them in his hand, for they were wet.
'Our Lithuania has waited long for you,'
He said, 'as Jews for their Messiah do.
Of you the singers long did prophesy,
Of you the portent spoke that filled the sky.
Live and wage war!' He sobbed, the honest Jew,
He loved our country like a patriot true.
Dąbrowski gave the Jew his hand to kiss,
And thanked him kindly for his courtesies.

Epilogue

To think of such things in a Paris street,
Where on my ears the city's noises beat
With lies and curses, and with plans ill-fated,
And fiendish quarrels and regrets belated !

Alas for us who fled in times of pest
And, timid souls, took refuge in the west !
Terror pursued wherever we might go,
In every neighbour we discerned a foe;
At last they bound us up in fetters tight,
And bade us die as quickly as we might.

But if the world will not regard their woe,
If every moment fresh news strikes a blow,
Sounding from Poland like a funeral bell,
If gaolers wish them to an early hell,
And foes like hangmen offer them the rope,
If even in high heaven they see no hope—
No wonder that they hate the world, mankind,
Themselves, and by their torments reft of mind
They spit upon themselves, each other bite.

I longed to fly, a bird of feeble flight,
Beyond the thunder and the stormy zone,
And seek the sunshine and the shade alone
The homely plot and endless childhood days . . .

One happiness remains: when evening greys
-You sit with a few friends and lock the door,
And by the fireside shut out Europe's roar,
Escape in thought to happier time and tide,
And muse and dream of your own countryside . . .

But of those wounds that run so fresh with blood,
And of the tears that over Poland flood,
And of the glory that does yet resound,
The heart to think of these we never found . . .
For in such torments even Valour stands
And gazes, and can only wring her hands.

Those generations black with mourning clothes,
That air so pregnant with so many oaths,
Our thought dared not to wing its passage there,
Where e'en the birds of thunder fear to fare.

O Mother Poland, thou that in this hour
Art laid within the grave--what man hath power
To speak of thee today ? Whose lips would dare
To boast that they will find that word so rare

That it shall melt marmoureal despair,
And lift the gravestone from the hearts of men,
And unlock eyes that brim with tears again,
And shall release the frozen tide of tears ?
Those lips shall not be found in many years.

Sometime when lions of vengeance cease to roar,
And trumpets hush and armies are no more,
When the last enemy shall make his dying cry,
Be dumb and to the world give liberty,
And when our eagles in their lightning flight
On Brave Bolesław's boundaries shall light,
And eat their fill of flesh, and drunk with gore
Shall fold their wings to rest for evermore,
Then, then our knights with oak leaves shall be crowned,
And fling aside their swords, and sit around

Unarmed! The world shall envy them at last
And when they hear us singing of the past,
Then they shall weep upon their fathers' pain,
And on their cheeks the tears shall leave no stain.
For us unbidden guests in every clime
From the beginning to the end of time
There is but one place in this planet whole
Where happiness may be for every Pole—
The land of childhood ! that shall aye endure
As holy as a first love and as pure,
Unshattered by the memory of mistake,
That no deceitful hopes can ever shake,
And that the changing tide of life cannot unmake.
How gladly I would greet in thought those lands,
Where I would seldom weep nor wring my hands,
The lands of childhood; everywhere we roved
As in a meadow, and the flowers we loved
Were sweet and fair; the harmful weed
We flung aside, nor would the useful heed.

That happy country, happy, poor and small
The world is God's but that was ours—ours all.
And all belonged to us that lay around.
How we remember everything we found,
The linden with her crown magnificent,
That to the village children shadow lent,
And every little rivulet and stone.
How every corner of the place was known,
And far as the next house was all our own !

And only those who were its denizens
Remain my sure allies, my faithful friends.
And who were they? My mother, brothers, all
My kin and neighbours. And when one did fall
How often was the name of him still spoken!
How many memories, what grief unbroken—
That land where servants more for masters care
Than wives do for their husbands elsewhere,
And where a soldier mourns his weapons more
Than sons their fathers here; and where they pour
More tears, and grief is longer, more sincere,
For a dead dog than for a hero here.

And in those days my friends would oft afford
Help for my song, and threw me word on word;
As on the desert isle those cranes once heard,
When o'er the fairy palace they were flying,
From the enchanted boy a mournful crying,
And each one threw a single feather down,
And he made wings and flew back to his own.

Would I might live to see the happy day
When under the thatched roofs these books shall stray,
Where country girls with nimble fingers rove
The spinning wheel and sing the songs they love
About that girl, whom music so did please
That through her fiddling she lost all her geese,
Or of that orphan, fair as morning light,
Who went to fetch her geese at fall of night—
Would that some happy chance to them might bring
These books as simple as the songs they sing.

So at their country pleasures in my time
They sometimes read aloud beneath the lime .
Justyna's ballad or Wiesław's fable.
Meanwhile the bailiff dozing at the table,
The steward or the landlord deigned to hear,
And to the young folk made the hard things clear,
And praised the beauties and the faults would blame.

And young men envied then the singer's fame,
Which echoes in their woods and forests still.
To whom the laurel crown on Jove's high hill
Is less dear than the wreaths of cornflower blue,
Twined by the hands of village girls with rue.

To a Polish Mother

If, O Polish mother, in the eyes of your son
there gleams the light of genius;
if there looks from his childish brow
the pride and nobility of former Poles;

if, leaving the circle of his playmates,
he runs to the old, who sing him sad songs;
if he listens with bent head,
when they tell him of the deeds of his fathers—

ill your son amuses himself, Polish mother!
Do you kneel before the picture of the Holy Mother of the Seven Sorrows
and look at the sword that makes her heart bleed;
with such a blow the enemy will pierce your breast.

For though the whole world bloom with peace,
though governments, peoples, minds be in agreement,
your son is yet called to a battle without fame,
and to a martyrdom from which there is no resurrection.

Do you early bid him go to a lonely cavern,
there to meditate, to lie on a mat,
to breathe the damp and putrid air
and share his couch with the poisonous serpent.

There he will learn to hide his anger beneath the ground
and to be as inscrutable as the abyss in his thoughts;
in secret to still his tongue with venom, as might those putrid vapours,
to cut a lowly figure like the cold snake.

Our Redeemer, when He was a child in Nazareth, clasped
a model of the cross on which He saved the world.
O, Polish mother, would give your child
his future toys to play with.

Early wreath his hands with chains,
have him harnessed to a wheelbarrow,
so that he shall not pale before the torturer's pole-axe,
nor flush at the sight of the rope.

For he will not go, like the knights of old,
to plant the victorious cross in Jerusalem,

nor, like the soldiers of the new world,
to plough for freedom, to water the earth with his blood.

An unknown spy shall send him challenge,
wage war with him a perjurious court,
his field of battle will be an unknown hole in the ground,
and a powerful foe shall pass sentence on him.

All his memorial, when he is vanquished,
will be the dry timber of his gallows,
all his fame a woman's short-lived weeping
and the talks far into the night of his brother Poles.

3. Juliusz Słowacki (1809-1849)

1. His Life

Juliusz Słowacki was born in Krzemieniec, Volhynia, where his father, Euzebiusz Słowacki, was professor of literature in the town's famous Lycee. Later the family moved to Vilna when his father received the chair of literature at the university there. After his father's death, the poet's mother married another professor from the university, August Ludwik Becu, a medical doctor; Juliusz, the only child from her first marriage grew up in the company of two stepsisters. Słowacki was a fragile boy with bad health, brilliant, arrogant and filled with immeasurable ambitions. An introvert, well-read in Polish, French, and English literature, he was to be a lonely man all his life, the epitome of a melancholy Romantic. He was very young when he received his diploma in law at the University of Vilna. His biography does not lack an unhappy love: for Ludwika Śniadecka, daughter of an eminent professor of chemistry, Jędrzej Śniadecki. Słowacki's

first love is present throughout practically all of his ethereal poetic work, which is somewhat analogous to Shelley's.

Besides his unrequited love, the other passion running through Słowacki's life was his desire first to equal, then to compete with, Mickiewicz for the position of 'national' poet. During the years 1829-1830 he worked as an employee in the Ministry of Finance in Warsaw and his first poems were published after the outbreak of the 1830 insurrection. He made a trip to London as a diplomatic courier for the revolutionary government and after Poland's defeat joined the Great Emigration in Paris. There, in 1832, he published two volumes of poetry, followed by a third in 1833. His works evoked a slighting remark from Mickiewicz – Słowacki's poems, according to the Mickiewicz, were fine but empty, 'a church without God inside'. The remainder of Słowacki's life was uneventful, dedicated exclusively to creative work. He died at the young age of forty.

2. Plays

Słowacki's plays in verse belong to the main body of Polish Romantic drama and reveal not only the extraordinary breadth of his talent but also its weakness. Contrary to Mickiewicz, he seems to have drawn little from his life experience and much from his reading and hallucinatory dreams. He was a master of what Professor Backvis has called 'amazing literary cocktails,' mixtures of Shakespeare, Calderon, Lope de Vega and old Polish poetry. His was a quite deliberate attempt to compensate for what Polish drama lacked in the past, and in his search for models he did not scorn folklore. A reference to his childhood theatrical experiences in Volhynia is significant in this respect: he speaks

of the *wertep* (the Ukrainian Christmas puppet show) of Krzemieniec ‘to which, perhaps, I am indebted for all my Shakespearean fervour.’

Kordian

Encouraged by his impressions as a theatergoer, Słowacki wrote the drama *Kordian* (1834), which was also an attempt to oppose and rival Mickiewicz’s *Forefathers’ Eve*. Intended as the first part of a trilogy (never completed), it is composed of a series of fragmentary scenes – phases in the evolution of a hero. Kordian cannot find an aim in life and tries to kill himself, since his unhappy love offers no relief. Later on, we meet him in meditation on the cliffs of Dover and in St. James Park in London; we see him in Italy, where he searches in vain for oblivion in the arms of a courtesan, at an audience with the Pope (whose attitude toward the Polish cause is attacked) and on the summit of Mont Blanc, where he discovers his inner vocation: to serve the national cause (and in this way to prove his own ability to act?).

Next, we are transferred to the oppressive climate of Warsaw, ruled by the Grand Duke Constantine. Kordian, as a member of a clandestine organization, is party to a plot to assassinate the Tsar, Nicholas I, who has come to Warsaw for his coronation as king of Poland. Unable to draw other conspirators over to his side, Kordian decides to commit the murder himself. Since he is an officer of the Polish army and has been assigned to stand guard at the door of the Tsar’s bedroom, he has only to make use of the opportunity; but he is inhibited by his moral scruples and faints after a struggle with Fear and Imagination. Kordian is banished to an insane asylum first, then sentenced to death.

But at the personal request of Grand Duke Constantine, he is granted a reprieve after passing a test of valour (a leap on horseback across raised bayonets). Tsar Nicholas, however, issues an order for his execution. At the end, it is uncertain whether an officer bearing a reversal of the Tsar's order will arrive in time to stop the execution.

Balladyna

In *Balladyna* (written 1834, published 1839) Słowacki creates a country of make-believe, something like prehistoric Poland, but he mischievously mixes epochs, employing all sorts of anachronisms. It is a dramatized fairy tale or ballad, with freely invented folklore elements. There is a queen of fairies in love with a peasant drunkard who, when she changes him into a willow, sheds tears of vodka and a young peasant heroine who kills her sister out of rivalry for the affections of a nobleman. Having become the lady of the castle, she commits a series of further murders, aided by a sinister Von Kostryń (even in the old Slavic world a German was synonymous with evil-doing!). There is even a peasant transformed by his disillusioned mistress (the queen of fairies again) into a king...of diamonds!

Fantazy

This is a comedy in verse completed around 1841 and is the most realistic of Słowacki's works, containing a vitriolic satire of contemporary Polish life. The action takes place on an estate in the Ukraine. Count Fantazy, melodramatic and romantic, has returned from a

voyage to Italy. He pays a visit to his neighbours, Count and Countess Respekt, who have two daughters with fine-sounding names: Diana and Stella. Fantazy, who speaks in an inflated, Byronic style, is a poseur and a complex scoundrel. He knows that Diana hates him, he admires her character, her moral purity, but he wants to commit a base act and to buy her. Since he is rich and his neighbours are ruined, he calculates on a successful outcome. The Respekts are extremely dignified members of the Establishment, very lofty in their words, but perfect scoundrels too. They decide to sell their daughter to him, but before the marriage is concluded, a second visitor, an old Russian major, reverses everything. We learn that the Respekt family had been deported to Siberia and there had met the major. Meeting him had been providential for them and he had become their best friend. Also in Siberia, Diana had been betrothed to a deported Polish revolutionary, Jan, and is still in love with him. Accompanying the major now is Jan, disguised as a common soldier. Słowacki confronts the complete artificiality and pretense of the Polish aristocrats with the simple manners and deep humaneness of the Russian major. To help Jan and to foil the marriage between Diana and Fantazy, he maneuvers with great ingenuity.

Maria Stuart

This is a youthful work in the Shakespearian style on the tragic history of Scottish queen, who was a favourite among the romantics.

Mazepa

Mazeppa, a Ukrainian nobleman, educated at a Polish Jesuit college and sent by King Jan Casimir to study artillery in Holland, became, upon his return, a courtier in Warsaw; he then joined the Ukrainian cause and attained the position of Hetman, in which post he was a successor of Bohdan Khmielnitsky. Although he was a vassal of Peter the Great, he turned against him and sided with the Swedes, only to see all his political hopes ruined at the Battle of Poltava. As a young man, famous for his love affairs, he was once punished by an angry husband, who stripped him of his clothes, bound him to his horse, then lashed the beast into a gallop. He was another of the historic figures who frequently appeared in romantic literature and his adventures were related in the eighteenth century by Voltaire, later on, he showed up in the poetry of Byron, Victor Hugo, and others.

In Słowacki's play, however, Mazeppa is neither a savage Cossack (as imagined by Western poets) nor a villain (as in Pushkin's *Poltava*). He is a young, noble-minded courtier and a confidant of King Jan Casimir. To cover up for the King, who aspires to the favors of the beautiful wife (Amelia) of an old governor (Wojewoda), in whose castle the action is placed, he takes the blame upon himself and is about to die at the hand of the jealous old man; meanwhile, the exposure of a real love triangle reveals that Amelia is the mistress of the governor's son (Zbigniew) from his first marriage. The situation is 'resolved' by the deaths of these three.

Lila Veneda

Lilla Veneda is interesting only as an attempt to fill in, by imagination, the details of an epoch unreported in any chronicles – prehistoric Poland. Giving credit to the theory that a

conquest lay at the origin of Polish state, Słowacki invented a desperate war between pure-hearted, peaceful aborigines (the Wenedzi) and vicious conquerors (the Lechici). The former incarnate Poland's 'angelic soul'; the latter embody all the vices of the nobility (including a 'taste for pickled cucumbers and yelling').

Late Plays

Słowacki's last plays were influenced by Calderon (whom he translated). In *Father Marek* (Książd Marek) and *The Silver Dream of Salomea* (Sen srebrny Salomei), both written in 1843, he returned once again to the Ukrainian scene, choosing plots from the political events of the eighteenth century (the Confederacy of Bar, the massacres of Polish nobles by the Ukrainian peasants). The characters, however, and their adventures are bigger than life; their monumentalism has nothing to do with earthly reality.

The unfinished historical drama *Samuel Zborowski* also runs counter to the traditional realism of plays like Pushkin's *Boris Godunov*. The action takes place in a cosmic dimension, beyond time and beyond space. Zborowski, a magnate of the sixteenth century who plotted against King Stefan Batory (1576-1586), appears before the tribunal of Christ, asking to be tried a second time. At his first trial on earth he was sentenced to death, and was beheaded for his rebellious actions. In Słowacki's drama, Zborowski personifies the strength of a spirit struggling against all forces seeking to constrain it, while Chancellor Zamoyski (who sent him to death) represents the obstructing power of the established social order. Songs relating the experiences of spirits in successive

incarnations (beginning in ancient Egypt) parallel in their penetrating beauty the perfection of Słowacki's mystical lyrics from the same period.

3. Poetry

Słowacki did not relinquish his ambitions to become national bard and to surpass Mickiewicz. He travelled widely in Europe and the Near East and his experiences are vividly reflected in his poetry,. His stay in Greece returned later in 'Agamemnon's Grave' ('Grob Agamemnona), a short poem meditating upon the fate of Greece and Poland. He conceived it his patriotic duty to castigate Poland for being 'the peacock and parrot' of other nations, and he searched for her 'angelic soul' imprisoned as it was in the skull of a drunken guffawing nobleman.

His *Anhelli* (published in 1838) parallels Mickiewicz's *Books of the Polish Nation and of the Polish Pilgrims*. The scenery of the poem is the forests and wastelands of Siberia, the home of many Poles deported there by the Tsarist authorities. But it is not a real Siberia; it is a place of exile *per se*, with its symbolic snow, symbolic cold and the splendid lights of the *aurora borealis*. The deportees, who, in the author's intention, stand for the Polish emigres, are not at all pure and sympathetic even though they are martyrs for a cause. They are divided into three political parties – monarchist aristocrats, democrats and a religious sect – which combat each other with vicious hatred. While Mickiewicz was inclined to treat the emigres as apostles, Słowacki attributed to them no effectiveness whatsoever, and in his poem he has them die a sterile death in exile. The hero, Anhelli, also one of the deportees, is singled out by a shaman (from a local Siberian

tribe) and initiated into the mystery of acceptance of his suffering and death; he becomes, in his way, a kind of passive redeemer. In the final scene, a symbolic knight on horseback, illuminated by the fiery glow from the northern lights, announces the hour of universal revolution; but by then Anhelli is dead. Thus the poem suggests the idea of a sacrifice not recompensed by any immediate fulfillment, yet not useless, since in some mysterious way it is spiritually necessary for the sake of a future regeneration.

Beniowski, written in 1841, is a poem of digressions, obviously competing with Byron's *Don Juan*. The plot traces the vicissitudes undergone by a Hungarian-Polish nobleman, an authentic figure who took part in the military campaigns against Russia in the Ukraine during the Confederacy of Bar (1768-1772) and was then deported to Kamchatka. He escaped from there to Japan, in a boat built by himself and some companions, went to France, and ended his life commanding the tribes of Madagascar in a war against the French. But the main character was merely a pretext, and the poet did not get beyond young Beniowski's adventures in the Ukraine. He deals with every topic of the day, settles accounts with his enemies and displays breath-taking acrobatics in passing from lyricism to sarcasm, from sarcasm to fireworks of images. Słowacki had a predilection for the Ukraine and it forms the backdrop of many of his plays, but nowhere is it so alive as in *Beniowski*.

Genesis from the Spirit (Genesis z ducha)

Słowacki now became increasingly preoccupied with mysticism. An extraordinary poem in prose, *Genesis from the Spirit* (Genesis z ducha), written in 1844 in Pornic on the

Atlantic seacoast, is an exposition of his philosophical credo. In it he combined his readings in the natural sciences, especially in the theory of evolution as elaborated by Lamarck, with his spiritualism and his radical democratic sympathies. Meditating on the ocean, the cradle of life, he sees in the evolution of animal forms a travail of the Spirit throughout millions of years:

On the rocks of the ocean you put me, my Lord, in order that I might recollect centuries-old deeds of my spirit, and suddenly I felt a son of God, immortal in the past, creator of the visible things, and one of those who render to you a voluntary tribute of love on garlands of suns and stars....

You, old ocean, tell me how the first mysteries of organisms appeared in your depth. The first developments of nervous flowers into which the spirit was blooming...

I smile today, Lord, seeing an unburied skeleton which does not possess any name in the present language (as it is effaced from among the living forms). I smile seeing the first lizard with the head of a bird, provided with a wing at its foot, starting a flight to explore the world and to find a place for those heavy monsters which were later on to devour whole meadows, whole forests

‘Everything is created by the Spirit and for the Spirit; nothing exists for physical aims.’ Through its own efforts the Spirit (‘to a book filled by You he has affixed the seal of his duration’) moves from lower forms toward higher and higher forms, but when it reaches man, the travail is not over. The Spirit, ‘eternal revolutionary,’ shapes History through revolutions which are spasms of birth, until humanity, transformed, approaches Christ. Notes of messianism are not absent: the Spirit incarnates itself in some exceptional individuals or in whole nations, like Poland for instance, purified by her suffering.

King-Spirit (Król-Duch)

Another poem from this period, *King-Spirit* (Król-Duch) remained unfinished. Though the poem is primarily concerned with the history of Poland, it presents the wandering of the Spirit as it informs the bodies of leaders, kings, and saints throughout the centuries of European civilization. It begins with the story of a certain Her, a heroic soldier mentioned by Plato who, after his death, is resurrected in the body of Poland's legendary first prince, Popiel. Słowacki portrays Popiel as a ruthless ruler with a well-defined goal: to immunize his nation against all future suffering by forcing upon it a system of deliberate cruelty. The scenery is mostly that of the Middle Ages, but it is not an 'authentic' Middle Ages. Słowacki assigned to himself in this poem a special mission. He wanted to conjure up Poland and its history out of his imagination like a God-creator, to postulate it through Słowo, the Word.

What is most characteristic of Słowacki's poetry is his fondness for pure colors – silver, gold, red, blue – and for iridescent, nacreous light. For this reason, he has been compared to such painters as Turner. Or he has been called a 'centrifugal' poet, as opposed to Mickiewicz, whose work is 'centripetal.' While the latter, even in his most Romantic poems, tends toward concreteness and tangibility, Słowacki dissolves every object into a kind of fluid maze of images and sonorities. Słowacki's work, which is extremely abundant, is uneven. It can be sublime in its depth of thought and breath-taking in its virtuosity or irritating in its nearly automatic writing. After his death, his fame grew, but he was still not considered equal to Mickiewicz. Only the generation of the symbolists began to see in Słowacki their master, the number-one poet, a predecessor of

French symbolism and, in some aspects of his thought, a precursor of Friedrich Nietzsche. He was also the beloved poet of Józef Piłsudski.

Poems

If ever in that my Country

If ever in that my country,
where my Ikwa flows in its valleys,
where my mountains grow blue in the twilight
and the town rings above the chattering stream,
where the tree-clad banks a-scent with lily-of-the-valley
run up to cliffs, cottages, and orchards—

If you will be there, soul of my heart,
though given back from the splendour to the body,
you will not forget this my longing,
that stands there like a golden archangel
and from time to time circles the town like an eagle,
then once more rests on the cliffs and shines.

The lighter airs, that will restore you to health,
I have poured from my breast to my country. . .

Hymn

Sad am I, O God! For me you have flooded the West
With a rainbow of flaming splendour;
before me you have quenched the fiery star
in azure waters;
yet, though you thus gild for me the sky and the sea,
sad am I, O God!

Like empty ears on stalk erect I stand
void of pleasures and of plenty.
In my face strangers see but one thing,
The hush of the blue heavens,
yet to you will I open the depths of my heart.
Sad am I, O God!

As a young child is sad at its mother's going,
so am I near to tears
as I gaze at the sun casting me its last beams
from the wave.
Although I know that to-morrow a new dawn will glow,
yet sad am I, O God !

To-day, my way lost in the breadth of the seas,
a hundred miles from land and a hundred miles to shore,
I saw a long wedge of storks in flight.
That I once knew them
on the fallow fields of Poland,
sad am I, O God!

That much have I pondered o'er the graves of man,
that I have all but never known a home,
that I have been like a pilgrim trudging his road
by the flashes of the storm,
that I know not in what grave I shall lay me,
sad am I, O God !

You shall see my bones lying white
with no tall columns to guard them,
yet must I grudge
the ashes their graves.
Therefore, that mine shall be a troubled couch,
sad am I, O God !

At home an innocent child has been told
to pray for me every day, and yet I know
that my ship will not reach home from its
sailing of the world.
That a child's prayers should be of no avail,
sad am I, O God!

A hundred years after I am gone, somewhere other people,
gazing at the rainbow of splendour
which your angels have so magnificently thrown across the heavens,
shall die.
Before I yet bow to my nothingness,
sad am I, O God!

Written at sunset on the sea before Alexandria.

A Carol

Now Jesus visits earth.
The whole world finds rebirth
Et mentes.

File past the manger's stall
Small angels and more small
Ridentes.

Sparrows chase each other
Round the Virgin mother
Cantantes.

Swan stitch the simple air:
Their down shines silver there
Mutantes.

With down she makes a pillow
And puts it in a hollow
For the Child.

With hay she makes his cot
Warm as the smallest thought
That ever smiled.

Give me a mile of land

Give me a mile of land—or even less.
A piece of turf would serve me, friends, if there
You placed a man, one man whose fearlessness
Had freed him, soul and body, from despair.
Within his brain I'd work my spells to show
A statue with two faces, both aglow.

Give me a planet smaller than the moon,
A golden squadron tinkling from its tail,
And let it skim the forests, let its croon
Be hallowed by one patriot's dying wail:
Then shall I fetch unknown angelic things
And stand, wings open, on that star that sings.

When I, my friends, implore my God to grant
Me a poor country and the right to fight,
I seem to see our chivalries aslant

The thunder of our enemies in flight.
Hot in pursuit, I reach the stars: then sleek
Sneers of sharp light ask crudely what I seek.

Stars, you are cold small Satans made of clay,
Intense with disbelief. And I, half-crazed,
Am broken by your hate. Dreams make me say
That Poland burns already: and I have raised
Fountains of flame to prove my country could.
But all that burns is my own heart—like wood.

Farewell

When any poet's brightest glory shines
His words construct a statue from his fears:
Centuries will not wipe away these lines
Nor dry their tears.

While you go off into a distant land
I'm left alone to watch my exile dribble
Slowly away toward death; or, pen in hand,
To sit and scribble.

That Angel burning at my left side

That Angel burning at my left side
Harps on an old string. And I am with you
Among the plains where white seagulls ride,
Locked in a coffin in the Siberian snow.
Hyenas howl out of the wind. Reindeer
Graze on the graves, under your sure care.

The roots of lilies probe my corpse. It shines,
A white goblet wonderfully transformed,
A lantern corpse that fills the night with signs,
—And the music of the soul makes silence alarmed.
You dim the lamp and ask the music to
Keep silent that my spirit may sleep through.

Alone, you say your prayers.

You go on speaking Into the holy sapphire. And from your hair,
Like diamonds, a chain of stars is streaking
Into the heavens—and each star is a prayer.

On the Occasion of Napoleon's Ashes being brought to France

i

And they have torn him, but ashes, from the earth;
they have wrested him from the weeping willow,
where he lay alone with the Angel of glory;
where he was all by himself, not in gleaming purple,
but blanketed in a soldier's coat
and broken on his sword, as on a cross.

ii

Tell me, how did you find him in his grave,
you royal son, commander of those corvettes?
Did he have his two hands crossed at his breast?
Had he laid one of his hands on his sabre as he slept?
And when you raised the stone from the tomb,
tell me, did the corpse tremble, did it start?

iii

He foresaw that an hour would come
which would shatter his tombstone,
but thought that the hand of his son
would raise and lift him in the tomb
and remove from him the murderous chains,
and to his father's dust would cry: 'Father!'

iv

But they came to take him from the grave,
the faces of strangers looked into the vault;
and they began to mock his dust,
began to call to it: 'Rise up, dust!'
Then they took this handful of putrid matter
and asked—did he want to go home to his country?

v

Roar, roar then, you azure of the seas,
when they give you this giant's coffin to bear.
You pyramids! climb on to the mountains

and look at him with the eyes of the ages.
There, out at sea, that grey cloud of seagulls
is the fleet with the ashes of Caesar.

vi

The criminal demons look on from their thrones,
the tsar peeps palely out from behind his ice,
grim eagles sit on the coffin
and from their wings shake the blood of the nations.
These eagles, once conquering and proud,
no longer gaze at the sun, but at the coffin.

vii

Oh, dust! dust! Lie you still,
when you hear trumpets amid the confusion:
for that will not be a call to arms,
but the call to prayer, to lamentation....
For the last time you are commanding your companies
and shall win—the victory of Golgotha.

viii

But never, oh, never, though you had in your hand
sceptre, orb and naked sabre,
never, never have you passed amid groans
with so tremendous a dignity of the immortals,
with countenance so terrible to the future,
as to-day, great one, when you return here as nothing.

The Funeral of Captain Meyzner

i

We took from the hospital the poor coffin
they were to have cast to the paupers' pit.
Without one tear of a mother's grief,
without a stone over the handful of ashes.
Yesterday he was full of youth and strength,
to-morrow there will be not even—a grave.

ii

If only, at least, to martial song
we could have laid a soldier's carbine beneath his head!
That same carbine whose pan
still smokes from the shot he fired at Belvedere ;
if only it had been a sword in his heart, or mortal bullet;
but no !—a hospital bed and shirt.

iii

Did he imagine, on that night of blue
when all Poland rang with the clash of iron armour,
when he lay sadly in the coffin of the Carmelites,
and the coffin burst in the instant of resurrection,
when he clutched his rifle to his breast,
did he imagine then—that such would be his end !

iv

To-day came the alms-greedy doorkeeper,
came the hags that watch the corpses,
and they opened for us the house of charity
and said: 'Do you recognize your brother?
Is he the same who yesterday roamed the town
with you ? Do you recognize him ?'

v

And they drew the hospital shroud from his head,
that was red from the knives of the mortuary butchers.
His eyes he kept opened to the light,
but his face was turned from his brothers.
So we told the hags to close the coffin,
for that was our brother, the one who had died.

vi

The misery appalled us all.
And one of the younger ones asked: 'Where will they bury him?'
A hospital hag answered him:
'In consecrated ground; where in love of God
we lay our abundant dead
in one huge pit, coffin on coffin.'

vii

So the youth, being deeply pained,

took out a small gold coin
and said: 'Let him have a Miserere sung over him.
Let him have a plot of flowers and a cross to himself.'
No more he said: and we bent our heads,
as we poured our tears and our pennies into the plate of tin.

viii

Let him have a plot of flowers, and let him be praised
before the Lord in the words on the cross over his grave:
that he was a captain in the Ninth,
that the company of the knights obeyed him,
and that to-day he owes his country nothing,
although he has a grave to himself. . . but of charity.

ix

But You, O God, who from the heights
cast Your arrows at the defenders of our country,
we beg by this handful of bones,
light up for our death at least—the sun!
Let day emerge from the bright portal of the heavens !
Let us at least be seen—when we die!

My Will and Testament

I have lived with you, suffered and wept with you;
none that was noble did I pass aside.
To-day I leave you and go my way into the shadows in the company of ghosts,
and, as though happiness were here—I go sadly.

Here behind me I leave no heir
to either lute or name.
This name of mine is gone like lightning
and its echo shall ring—but hollowly—in the mouths of future generations.

But you who knew me, pass on this word:
that I squandered my youth for my country,
that while the ship fought I kept to my post in the cross-trees
and, when she sank—went down with her.

Yet some day, honest minds, pondering the sad fate
of my poor country, will admit t
hat this garment of my mind was begged of none,

but was glorious as the glories of my ancestors.

Let my friends gather by night
and burn my poor heart on a pyre of aloes,
rendering it back to her who gave it,
for dust is the coin with which the world repays the mother.

Let my friends sit down to the bowl
and in it drown the taste of my death and of their wretchedness.
Then, if a spirit, they shall see me there,
but, if God free me not from my torment, I shall not come.

But I implore you let not the living lose hope,
but bear the torch of enlightenment before our people,
and, when need be, let them go in turn to their death,
like stones hurled by God at the foe.

As for me—that I leave behind me here some small company of friends,
of those who were able to love my proud heart,
shows that I trod my path in God's hard service
and did not complain at having here—an unwept grave.

What other would be willing to continue thus without the world's acclaim,
would be as indifferent to the world as I,
would be steersman in a boat of crowded ghosts
and depart as quietly as the soul, when it flies away?

Yet I leave behind me that inexorable force
which while I lived served me nought but to grace my brow,
yet when I am dead will unbeknown so knead you,
eaters of bread, as to raise you into—angels.

Agamemnon's Tomb

Let a lyre strung with fantasy
accompany my dark and gloomy thoughts,
for, see, I have descended into Agamemnon's tomb
and sit silent in its subterranean dome,
that is stained with the cruel blood of the Atridae.
My heart has fallen asleep, yet it dreams.—How sad am I !

Oh, how distant sounds that golden harp,
whose eternal echo only I can hear !
A druid's grotto this of great rocks,

whither the wind comes to sigh in the fissures
and has the voice of Electra as she bleaches flax,
and from the laurels sighs: How sad am I !

Here on these stones the breeze quarrels
with industrious Arachne and breaks her thread;
here the sad thyme of sun-scorched mountains scents the air;
here the wind, having girdled the grey hill of ruins,
drives the seeds of the flowers before it, and the bits of down
enter and fly like spirits in the tomb.

Here the field crickets, hidden among the stones
from the sun that shines above the tomb,
hiss, as though wishing to impose silence upon me.
That hissing, which is heard in graves,
is the grim end of Rhapsody, is the revelation, the hymn, the song of silence.

Oh, silent am I, as you, Atridae,
whose ashes sleep under the crickets' guard.
Now, neither does my littleness shame me,
nor do my thoughts like eagles hover.
Profoundly am I humble and quiet
here in this tomb of fame, of crime and of pride.

Above the doorway to the tomb, in the granite frame,
there grows a young oak in the granite of the stone.
The sparrows or the pigeons planted it
and it grows green with black leaves,
nor does it admit the sun into the dark tomb.
I tore a leaf from the black, little tree;

no spirit or phantom forbade me,
nor did any ghost moan from its branches,
only the chink for the sunlight was larger,
and it ran in all golden and fell at my feet.
I thought, at first, that this intruding beam
was a string from Homer's harp,

and I stretched out my hand in the darkness
to catch it and string it and drive it, trembling,
to tears and to song, and to anger
at the great nothingness
of graves and at the silent
handful of ashes: but as my hand
plucked the string, it broke without a groan.

Such then is my fate—to sit on tombstones
and look for griefs that are trivial, slight and frail;
my fate to possess dream-kingdoms,
to have harps that are silent and an audience of the deaf
or dead—and it fills me with disgust....
To horse! I desire sunshine, and great winds and the drumming of hooves.

To horse! Here along the bed of a dry stream,
which, instead of with water, flows with pink flowers of laurel,
I, with tears and lightning in my eye,
fly as though driven by a lightning gale,
and my horse stretches out on the wind;
if it meets with a grave, where knights are buried—it will fall

At Thermopylae? No, at Chaeronea
my horse must come to grief,
for I am from a land where, because hearts are of little faith,
the shadow of hope is like a dream.
So, if my horse shall shy in its course
it will be at that tomb, which is the equal of ours.

The legion of the Spartan dead might well
drive me from the tombs of Thermopylae,
for I am from a sad land of Helots,
from a land where despair builds no memorials to fame,
from a land where, on the morrows of misfortune,
there always remains a melancholy half—of knights—alive.

At Thermopylae I shall not dare
to set my horse on the defile's track,
for there there must be such gazing faces,
that shame would crush the heart of any Pole.
I shall not stand there before the spirit of Greece.
No! Rather will I die before I go there—in my chains.

At Thermopylae, what account would I give,
if men were to be standing on the graves,
who, showing me their bloody breasts,
should bluntly ask: 'You were many?' Forget the long gap of the ages.
If they asked me that, what should I say?

At Thermopylae there lies a body that has no golden belt
or kontusz red,
yet is it the naked corpse of Leonidas;
it is his beautiful soul in marble form;
and long the people wept such a sacrifice,

the fragrant fire and the shattered chalice.

O Poland! as long as you confine your angel's soul
in a rude shell,
so long will the executioner hack your ignoble body,
so long will your sword of vengeance fail to be terrible,
so long will you have the hyena on you,
and a grave, and your eyes open in the grave.

Discard for ever those infamous garments,
that burning shirt of Deianira;
and rise up, like great shameless statues,
naked; bathed in the mire of the Styx—
new; brazen in iron nakedness,
ashamed of nought, immortal!

Let the nation in the north rise up
from its silent grave and set the peoples aghast,
that so large a figure should be of one piece
and so tempered, that it breaks not in the thunder,
but of the thunderbolts has hands and a wreath,
a glance that despises death,—the flush of life.

But, Poland, they fool you with tinsel!
You were the peacock and the parrot of the nations,
and now you are another's handmaid!
Yet I know that these words will not quiver long
in a heart, where no idea lingers even an hour:
I speak because I am sad—and myself filled with guilt.

Ay, curse—but my soul will hound you
like the Furies through the snaky gauntlet!
For you are Prometheus' only son....
The vulture devours not your heart, but your brain....
Though I shall sully my Muse in your blood,
I shall reach to the core of your bowels and wring them.

Howl with pain and curse your son—
you know that the hand of the curser, extended
above me, shall curl up into a bow like a reptile
and snap off from your shoulder—withered;
and black devils shall tear it to pieces in the dusk,
for you have no power to curse—you slave!!!

4. Zygmunt Krasiński (1812-1859)

Krasiński was the most aristocratic of the three great Polish romantic writers and also the most conservative. He is best known for his play *The Undivine Comedy* (Nieboska komedia) written in Switzerland in 1833. It is an anti-revolutionary drama – it was clear to Krasiński that a revolution in Europe had to come and that he and people of his sort would be wiped out by it. This was a view he shared with his father, Wincenty Krasiński, an extreme conservative who had been a Senator in the Kingdom of Poland and had opposed the revolution of 1830. The central problem of the drama is universal and the action takes place in an indefinite country. Krasiński takes up first the personal life of his hero, Count Henry, then shows him as a politically committed man, in command of the reactionary forces defending themselves on the ramparts of the Holy Trinity castle against the atheistic, revolutionary forces led by a professional revolutionist, Pancras, a converted Jew. While Mickiewicz's *Forefathers' Eve*, part 4, is basically optimistic – the hero, through his falls, gropes toward a fuller awareness of the place of the individual in a community; in Krasiński's drama Count Henry tries in vain to become another type of man, but his unhappy marriage, his pursuit of The Maiden (Art), and his political activity reveal only his internal worthlessness. Later, he discovers that his son is touched by blindness (the mark of a seer ever since Homer), while Art, a beautiful maiden, lures him to the edge, of a precipice over the ocean, where she unveils her body – decaying corpse.

The play also rejects optimistic romantic faith in the upheaval of the masses. Count Henry scorns those whom he commands; he knows that they are rotten, that they have to perish and he himself with them; but the assaulting plebeians are also a blind crowd whose passions of hatred and revenge are coolly exploited by Pancras. The exchange of vitriolic remarks during the meeting between Pancras and Count Henry (Pancras feels an irrational attraction for Count Henry) is the most powerful passage in the drama. Pancras' philosophy is nothing other than dialectical materialism. Here, Krasin'ski went beyond the nineteenth-century image of the revolution as a spontaneous movement and approached the twentieth century in that he envisaged a revolution as something organized by professionals and controlled from the top. Pancras is a man of iron will, clear thinking, fanatical, using a new discipline to go straight to his goal, which is the salvation of the oppressed. His total awareness, however, adds a touch of melancholy to Pancras' character. When the fortress of the aristocrats is taken and Count Henry commits suicide (belying once again his role as defender of Christianity), Pancras has a vision; he sees a cross in the sky and exclaims: 'Galilae vicisti!' (Galilean, you have won!) These are his last words. Whether Krasin'ski added such an ending because he could not find a way out of the dilemma is immaterial; actually, he was influenced by Hegel, and his drama, through such an ending, achieves much more than it would have, had Krasin'ski concluded with a prophetic trumpet blast foretelling the *post-mortem* rehabilitation of the aristocratic class. If the traditional Christian (and aristocratic) order is the thesis, and atheistic materialism the antithesis, then a synthesis can only be brought about in the future, after the reactionary order has been abolished.

Another drama of Krasiński's, *Iridion*, was conceived earlier than *The Undivine Comedy* but actually written a little later. Here, too, he is fascinated with the decay of a society. Iridion, the hero, is a Greek who lives in Rome at the time of its decline under the rule of Heliogabalus. His dominating passion is hatred of Rome for having subjugated his native country. To take vengeance he prepares a revolution, enlisting the help of the barbarians (which were then so numerous in Rome), gladiators and proletarians, while counting on the participation of the Christians. His counselor is the demoniac Massinissa, who personifies the principle that the end justifies the means. At the decisive moment, though, the Christians obey their bishop, who advises winning not with arms but with meekness and martyrdom freely accepted. As a result, Iridion fails and must lie for centuries in a lethargic sleep, awaiting a new struggle against the empire of evil. Then, he will be resurrected in, or rather incarnated by, the Polish nation. And in the ensuing struggle with Tsardom, methods other than Massinissa's will be used. Krasiński's attitude toward democratic movements, which he accused of Massinissa-like leanings, is evident here. Iridion (and later Krasiński's poetry) contributed to the Poles' morbid preoccupation with their martyrdom, which they came close to identifying with that of the early Christians. Although a work of considerable talent, especially in its perspicacious analysis of the decadence of Rome, it is inferior to *The Undivine Comedy*.

In his mature age, Krasiński turned to poetry, but he correctly deplored in himself his lack of 'that angelic dimension which is the sign of a poet.' His poems are treatises on his philosophy of history, written in verse and they reflect his preoccupations with Hegel, Schelling, and with those Polish philosophers who, though they stemmed from Hegel, opposed him on many points: August Cieszkowski (a representative of the Hegelian

Right, but having some influence on the Hegelian Left in Germany) and Bronisław Trentowski

5. The Ukrainian School

Antoni Malczewski (1793-1826).

Jozef Bogdan Zaleski (1802-1886)

Seweryn Goszczyński (1801-1876)

6. Aleksander Fredro (1793-1876)

7. Prose in the Romantic Period

Henryk Rzewuski (1791-1866)

Ignacy Chodzko (1794-1861)

Zygmunt Kaczkowski (1825-1896)

Wladyslaw Syrokomla (1825-1863 - pen name of Ludwik Kondratowicz)

Jozef Ignacy Kraszewski (1812-1887)

Józef Korzeniowski (1797-1863)

Wincenty Pol (1807-1872)

Teofil Lenartowicz (1822-1893)

Kornel Ujejski (1823-1897)

8. Cyprian Norwid (1821-1883)

Toward his elders in Polish poetry he defined his attitude as follows:

Laurels, I have not taken, then or now,
A single leaf from you, nor a leaf's notch,
Only perhaps a cool shade on my brow
(And that's not yours but comes with the sun's touch);
Nor did I take from you, giants of stardom,
Anything save your roads all overgrown
With wormwood, and your curse-scorched earth and boredom.
I came alone, I wander on alone.

Dlatego od was...o laury! nie wziąłem
Listka jednego, ni żębeczka w liściu,
Prócz może cieniu chłodnego nad czołem
(Co nie należy wam—lecz słońca przyjęciu . . .);
Nie wziąłem od was nic, o! wielkoludy,
Prócz dróg zarosłych w piołun, mech i szalej,
Procz ziemi klątwą spalonej i nudy . . .
Samotny wszedłem i sam błądzę dalej.

Marionettes

How can one help being bored, when silently
A million stars shine in the silent skies,
Each one glittering quite differently,
And everything stands still—and flies . . .

And the earth stands still like the abyss of time,
Like those who are living at the moment, whose
Last small bone will vanish into slime
Though men will be—as always . . .

How can one help being bored on so restricted
A stage, so amateurishly set,
Where mankind's each ideal has acted,
And life is the price of a seat . . . !

I rack my brains to kill another hour,

For I am wrapped in boredom's deadening curse.
I ask you, madam, what can be the cure?
To write some prose perhaps, or verse?

Or not to write? Just to sit in the sun
And read that interesting romance
The Deluge wrote on grains of sand, for fun,
To amuse mankind, perchance!—

Or better still—I know a manlier way
With boredom: to pass PEOPLE: by
But visit PERSONAGES—and display
An exquisitely knotted tie . . . !

Nerves

They die of hunger in a certain place
Where I went yesterday—behind each door
A coffin-room. I tripped over the staircase
On some uncountable uncounted floor.

It must have been a miracle—it was
A miracle, that I should grasp a splay
And mouldered beam (as on the cross
A nail was stuck in it). I got away.

I got away with half my heart—no more.
Barely a trace of my old gaiety.
The crowd like market cattle bore
Me along. The world was loathsome to me.

Today I must visit the Baroness
Who will be sitting on her satin sofa,
Receiving everyone with such finesse.
What shall I say? What shall I say to her?

The mirror will crack. The candelabra
Will have convulsions at such REALISM.
The painted parrots on the long macabre
Ceiling beak to beak will shriek: SOCIALISM!

So—I shall take a seat, holding my hat
In my hand, putting it down next to me . . .
Then I shall return home—just like that—
After the party—a dumb Pharisee.

IV. Conclusion