

Romanticism

The Polish state ceased to exist in 1795. The events that brought this about are usually termed the “partitions of Poland,” as the territory of the Republic was successively divided up, or “partitioned,” by its three neighbors: Russia, Prussia, and Austria. This destruction of the Polish state, which had previously held vast territories in the middle of Europe, encompassing present-day Lithuania, Belarus, and part of Ukraine, had a significant impact on the balance of political forces on the continent, as well as on the legal principles in force in international relations. The partitions of Poland legitimized unlicensed violence and aggression as generally tolerated methods of action.

Regardless of its wider ramifications, however, the partitioning of Poland chiefly dealt a mental blow to Poles themselves. This manifested itself in an emotional outpouring, an explosion of desperate feelings, a yearning for what had been lost, and expressions of filial devotion to Poland – viewed as Poles’ wronged, or even murdered, Motherland. Polish culture witnessed a surge in symbolism involving the grave, portraying Poland as a woman in chains or being lowered into the grave, while in the realm of ideas there was an urge to regain independence, one might even say a cult of freedom, concurrent with a desire to exact revenge upon the nation’s enemies. Because the homeland is portrayed as the nation’s “Mother,” all Polish citizens thus become the children of a murdered mother, i.e. orphans bound to avenge her demise. The post-partition ethos of Poles is dominated by notions of free-

dom, the obligation to fight for Poland, and filial duty to the homeland. In the 19th century, when the theory of the state and its relations with citizens was developing in Europe, Poles remained quite indifferent to such issues. For them, the concept of “state” symbolized a foreign, imposed force, one that was furthermore – in the case of Russia – based on a despotic system, something Poles had never before known in their thousand-year history. Instead, the concept of “state” became supplanted in Polish culture, in Poles’ mentality and behavior, by the concept of “homeland.” It was the latter that formed the spiritual keystone of national unity and identity.

The role of chief guarantor for this community spirit was vested in literature. Moreover, literature had played a special role in shaping Poles’ national awareness, and occupied a prominent place amongst the most authoritative cultural values. The literature of the Romanticism period, indeed, is described in terms of a kind of spiritual dominance. This stemmed from several causes. Firstly, because the literature of the period, especially poetry, was deeply immersed in the contemporary historical era, and thus addressed the fundamental questions that plagued the generation of Poles who grew up in the wake of lost independence: questions about the role of evil in the divine plan of the world, about the struggle between freedom and despotism, as two principles guiding history in the past and future, and about the legitimacy of rebellion against coercion and captivity. Secondly, because Romanticism abounded in such poetic geniuses as Adam Mickiewicz and Juliusz Słowacki, in figures blessed with greatness like Zygmunt Krasiński and Cyprian Norwid, and in many lesser individuals who would have been an asset to any European literature. And thirdly, because Polish literature discovered a realm of liberty, permitting an expressive freedom unconstrained by the repressive system of the public authorities.

After 1831, literature came to be divided in two, into works produced in Poland and those penned in emigration, especially in France. It was there that the preeminent Polish writers, Mickiewicz and Słowacki chief among them, would live and work, and despite censorship measures their works would indeed be read in the Polish lands under partition, something that had a fundamental impact on readers’ mentality and sensibilities and on the level of domestic literature.

This year, 1831, marks the date of the first of the great independence-minded uprisings directed against Russia. The cradle and primary area of this uprising, which erupted in autumn of 1830, was the Congress Kingdom of Poland, a quasi-independent statelet that had been called into existence by the Congress of Vienna (1815), when it set forth the political order of Europe after the demise of Napoleon. Having been carved out of the lands of the Russian partition, this statelet was bound to Russia by a personal union (meaning that the Polish crown was held by the Russian tsar), yet it possessed its own army (albeit commanded by the tsar's ill-reputed brother), a Polish schooling system all the way up to the university level, and – something unheard-of in Europe in those times – a liberal constitution.

Paradoxically, it was the considerable liberties granted to the Congress Kingdom of Poland by its Constitution that led to the outbreak of the uprising. They had facilitated a certain freedom of thinking and expression, and stimulated a yearning for rebuilding independent Polish statehood, encompassing at least the lands of the Russian partition. At the same time, the considerable swath of such freedom forced the authorities to encroach drastically upon the civil liberties guaranteed by the constitution, something that generated constant tension between the authorities and the public.

In view of the date it erupted (29 November), this rebellion is termed the November Uprising. Its demise led to a great exodus of emigration: some 9,000 military servicemen and civilians, chiefly from the intelligentsia, left the country. This division between the home country and the émigré community would determine the specific nature of Polish history in the 19th century.

The period of Romanticism would see two more flare-ups of a social, independence-minded nature. The first was the Springtime of Nations in 1848, affiliated with other revolutionary movements throughout Europe (a phenomenon that did not, however, appear in the Russian partition), while the second was the January Uprising of 1863, again named after the date of its outbreak (22 January). The latter uprising chiefly encompassed the Russian partition, and took a tragic course. Poorly armed civilians waged partisan warfare against regular Russian troops, furthermore in the middle of winter.

The January Uprising and its vast number of victims marked a turning point, away from the philosophy of gaining independence through armed movements. Poles would later return to this idea, drawing upon the ethical code established by Romantic literature, during the more auspicious times of WWI.

Yet the Polish émigré community, which was highly active in 1848, less so during the January Uprising, did have one more opportunity to participate in armed activity with the aim of restoring Polish statehood: this was the Crimean War (1853-56), which pitted Turkey against Russia. Many émigrés traveled to the Bosphorus in order to fight on the Turkish side – Adam Mickiewicz among them, somewhat on a diplomatic mission, somewhat in hope of military service. It was there that the poet died on 26 November 1855, for reasons that are not fully clear. Ultimately, however, the Turkish-Russian peace treaty did not address the Polish issue at all. And so, this Polish effort proved to have been in vain.

Romanticism was an epoch of crucial significance for the character of Polish literature. It ushered in a revolution in the literary language, imparting it with the maturity to express myriad existential and metaphysical experiences; it enriched the multiplicity of literary genres to include ones that had previously been wholly unknown, such as the novel in verse and the so-called open drama; it forayed into history and turned to face the challenges of the future. This was a national and universal literature, which fostered a spiritual portrait of the Polish “man of the age,” and at the same time reflected upon ideas fundamental to the existence of humanity, such as freedom and the antitheses of freedom to be found in history. Romanticism was also an epoch of literary geniuses, thanks to which poetry in particular attained the highest caliber. Such an era would never come again.

In the literature of Romanticism, Poles created a means of expressing the dramatic experience of losing their independence, through which they established a channel of concord with others suffering from a deprivation of liberty. And, more importantly, they participated in European discourse on the notions of freedom, especially political freedom as a right of nations and a binding agent of ethnic

communities. Moreover, to this great European debate they contributed a historical and emotional view of freedom, perceived as a lost gift and a marred collective existence. The most imminent Polish works in the partition era are committed to these ideas.

Indeed, the above applies to more than just Romanticism, the beginning of which is traditionally set at the year 1822, with the appearance of Adam Mickiewicz's *Ballads and Romances* (*Ballady i romansy*). In terms of the ideas that informed Polish spirituality in the era of partitioned Poland – such as freedom and above all nationality, the continued existence of ethnic unity despite the loss of statehood – all of literature written after 1795 constitutes a cohesive whole that cannot be separated from Romanticism. This is true despite differences in poetics, despite preferences for specific types and literary genres, and despite the battle roar of aesthetic arguments raised in the struggle between the Romantics and Classicists.

This is because the discovery of the notion of “nation” was a defining point of the entire century. It was here, in the concepts of “nation” and “nationality,” that Poland's status as an active, independent entity was indeed recovered. These notions, which also constituted values, not only cultivated a new spirituality for Poles, they also removed the issues of the state and “etatist” thought from Poles' field of vision for many years. Instead, such issues were supplanted by the notion of homeland, by spiritual existence, comprised of emotions, desires, and symbols.

The ideas of homeland and nationality are tied to the exceptionally strong literary prominence of Sentimentalism in Poland, chiefly underwritten by Kazimierz Brodziński, the most prominent poet and critic of this current. His work and that of many other more mediocre belletrists engendered an image of the Pole as a lover of the countryside, a farmer busy cultivating his land, valuing serenity, order, and the harmony of life. The leading literary genre that sang the praises of these values and models of life was the *sielanka* (idyll), clearly inspired by both ancient (Theocritus) and contemporary models (chiefly German: Salomon Gessner, Goethe's *Hermann and Dorothea*, the theoretical arguments of J. P. Richter), as well as by the Polish traditions of 16th- and 17th-century gentry literature. This made it

possible to seek an indigenous identity and roots, thanks to the continuation of rustic models and ideals, now being enriched by the discovery of plebian culture, especially folklore viewed as a source of indigenous Polishness untainted by foreign influences.

Similar ideals and a similar vision of contented life can also be found in the Classicist current of partition-era literature, whose most outstanding achievement is Kajetan Koźmian's *Polish Gentry (Ziemiaństwo polskie)*, which drew upon the antique, chiefly Virgil's *Georgics*, but also upon the same national gentry literature as Sentimentalism. Generally speaking, both Sentimentalism and Classicism posed the same question, addressing the Pole's civil and national identity. Who was the Pole? A man of the sword or the plow, of battle or labor? And they definitely promoted labor, above all working the land, the place where they sought the sources of both identity and salvation. The rural dimension of the world, the beating of swords into ploughshares, was supposed to set forth a new identity for Poles, divested of one of the important attributes of national identification – swords.

The long-lived prominence of Sentimentalism in Poland, and its close ties to Romanticism, especially to its popular variety, stemmed not only from aesthetic, but also from ideological-political causes. Those affected by calamity found here the language to express their distress – hence the development of such genres as the lament, the threnody, of mourning viewed as a shedding of tears over one's own fate. We might say that in Sentimentalism, such crying did not befit just women. Waxing melancholy and a lyrical wistfulness became the staple of Polish literature and, more widely, of Polish spirituality. And so, Romanticism availed itself of many of Sentimentalism's traits and discoveries. Owing to the nurtured ideals of living close to nature, Romantic literature retained a clearly audible idyllic tone and respect for simple forms of life. Rusticity, simplicity, nature, man living in harmony within the natural world, close to the land and to the animals – this was an ethical and aesthetic proposal that combined the traditions of the antique idyll, old-Polish gentry poetry, and the myth of the "good Slav." Literature of this sort might take on refined artistic forms, such as Mickiewicz's *Pan Tadeusz* or fragments of Słowacki's

King Sprit (Król-Duch), or might also employ the simple lyrical statement, especially the tale of the simple world of good people. This once-overlooked current of Polish Romantic literature deserves attention and recognition for the glimpse it preserves of an irrevocably lost lifestyle, one that is not just Polish. Herein lie the roots of a common European spiritual past, which needs to set a counter-balance to the community of modern technical civilization.

Polish Romanticism participated in making the great discoveries of the epoch: Slavs and Slavdom. J. G. Herder had admittedly brought “Slavicness” into focus as a cultural phenomenon, but Polish Romanticism treated this phenomenon in varied aspects, pointing out first and foremost two different entities that gave rise to the concept of Slavdom: Poland and Russia. Mickiewicz’s lectures on Slavic literature at the Collège de France in 1840-1844 constituted the fullest attempt at that time to outline the spiritual distinctiveness of the many entities that comprised the notion of Slavdom, above all Poland and Russia. Mickiewicz held that this distinctiveness was demonstrated by their attitude towards freedom: Russia personified the “tsarist system,” the most extreme form of existence without freedom, while Poland was not just the champion of freedom, it even tied its own autonomous existence to the triumph of liberty in Europe.

Both Mickiewicz and a significant portion of Romantic writers took it upon themselves to act as interpreters of Russia, a quite exotic country in the eyes of the West, one that aroused a humble apprehension. Hence the success of Astolphe de Custine’s *Letters From Russia*, which lifted the veil of secrecy to this little-known but still active power in the East. The literature of Romanticism contributed, in various ways, to the cause of gleaning a better understanding of the tsarist state. Such an understanding was also sought through the factual literature of the time, as we might describe the well-developed memoir writings, chiefly as produced by Poles exiled to Siberia: Józef Kopeć’s *Journal of a Journey to Siberia (Dziennik podróży po Kamczatce)*, Rufin Piotrowski’s *Memoirs From Siberia (Pamiętniki z pobytu na Syberii)*, and others. These memoirs were read not only by Poles, but also by a wide European audience: the Piotrowski’s memoirs had a fundamental impact as a vehicle of discovery and were translated into many

languages (including an English version entitled *My Escape From Siberia*).

Another achievement of Romantic literature, perhaps more important than this informative and window-opening role, lay in its historical and philosophical view of Russia, construed as a study in modern despotism. This type of reflection should be seen as a common contribution, made by Mickiewicz's lectures at the Collège de France and by other Polish political and historiographic writings, to the European bank of ideas and knowledge about contemporary historical reality.

But Slaviness was for the Romantics something more than a set of political ideas concerning Poland and Russia. It also entailed a tribal myth that manifested the spiritual distinctness, the role and destiny of these peoples in the center and east of Europe. The patron of this myth is considered to be J. G. Herder and his *Outlines of a Philosophy of the History of Man*, read with rapture in Poland (by the poet Kazimierz Brodziński for example), specifically owing to its myth of the good Slav, devoid of aggressive instincts, cherishing calm existence close to nature. For the Romantics, in love as they were with primordial states, with life unbranded by the advance of civilization, this notion of the Slavs became a discovery befitting the great utopias of the age and dreams of an untainted human nature. The Slavs' junior status in terms of civilization was in fact their advantage. They could offer the West gifts and truths that had become lost in the forward rush of civilization, industry, and the dominance of money. The Slavs were to imbue an arousing energy into the "old" Europe, showing the way to, as it was called, "the Father's house," to the common roots of humanity, nature, and God. And thus Russia, Poland, and other Slavic peoples were portrayed as a tribal community of younger brothers, with a great therapeutic mission to perform with respect to the West. Several of the fundamental links in this myth were included by Mickiewicz in his lectures at Collège de France (especially lecture XI dated 21 Feb 1843, XXV dated 27 July 1843, XII dated 3 March 1843, XIV dated 14 March 1843, and many lectures from course IV). This contributed to its proliferation in Europe, especially since Mickiewicz imparted a poetic élan and suggestive visionary power to his statements.

In Romantic literature, the Slavic myth became embodied in a considerable number of works, especially poetic ones, attempting to recover from historical oblivion this lost world of other gods destroyed by Christianity, and people lovingly tied to nature. These were not works of great value – such forging of poetry into myth required a more powerful imagination. Such was the imagination of Juliusz Słowacki, and in his *King Spirit* the Slavdom of olden days describes itself in a language of true poetry; this work itself can be treated as a Slavic épopée.

Polish Romanticism was greatly fascinated by alternative cultures lingering on the fringes, beyond the scope of high culture. Peasant culture, dubbed folk culture, and rusticity were the mainstays of the entire current. This was coupled with an ethnographic passion – a studying of the unknown that sometimes bore fruit in wholly professional collections of folk songs, but above all in the discovery of a new kind of hero: the Polish peasant and his lot, customs, and emotional reactions. This socio-spiritual portrait of the villager drew the attention of many writers, and dominated lyrical forms of expression. The supreme example of this is to be found in Teofil Lenartowicz, the poet-singer of Mazowsze (Mazovia) and of its folk people.

This is because rusticity is at the same time regionalism, a perception of common people in their diversity of lands, habits, and traditions. A country as large as Poland, which prior to the partitions had likewise encompassed Lithuania, Belarus, and part of Ukraine, offered great research opportunities for discovering the diversity of regional essence and spiritual culture. Thanks to Mickiewicz and his drama *Forefathers' Eve (Dziady)*, the folk character of Lithuania and Belarus rose to particular prominence, although it was the Ukraine that beat out all the other regions in quantitative terms. The steppes, horses, wildness, beauty, and freedom all combined into a literary image of the lands along the Dnepr River, and of the sons of these lands – the Cossacks. This seems to have been the cultural realm most thoroughly penetrated by literature, most present in poetry, in popular songs (the *dumka* songs of the poets of this age are still sung today), in the poetic novel – here there are two outstanding works, A. Malczewski's *Maria* (1824) and S. Goszczyński's *The Castle of Kaniów (Zamek kaniowski – 1828)*, as

well as in prose, chiefly historical prose. The Ukrainian theme even inspired monothematic authors who wrote exclusively about the Ukraine, such as Michał Czajkowski in prose and Bohdan Zaleski in poetry.

All the same, the image of Ukraine did not correspond exactly to the traits of the Slavic tribal myth: it could at times be bloody, bleak, and full of cruelty. To a certain extent this was caused by real events in Polish-Ukrainian relations, such as the Cossack rebellions against the Polish gentry. But a considerable role was also played here by the Romantic need for an aesthetics of the atrocious, the frenzied, and the horrendous. Such effects were indeed to be found in the Ukrainian lands, and so it was there that the works of so-called dark Romanticism were set, such as Seweryn Goszczyński's *The Castle of Kaniów* and Slowacki's mystic dramas: *Father Mark* (*Książ Marek* – 1843) and *The Silver Dream of Salomea* (*Sen srebrny Salomei* – 1844).

Through such regionalism, the spectrum of customs and landscapes available to Romanticism expanded impressively, as did the native symbolism: the Kraków inhabitant as a representative of human spryness and charm, the mountaineer as a personification of boldness and the fantasy of the Tatra Mountain highlander, the Cossack as a coupling of the familiar and the unknown, a son of the free expanses of the steppes. As Antoni Malczewski wrote in the poem *Maria*: “And the steppe, the horse, the Cossack, the darkness – a single wild spirit.” (“*A step – koń – kozak – ciemność – jedna dzika dusza*”). And so, Romanticism created poetic genres that described the beauty and diversity of the Polish lands, stressing the characteristic aspects of the landscape, the customs, the people. Wincenty Pol's *Song of our Land* (*Pieśń o ziemi naszej*) then enjoyed well-deserved popularity.

Romantic literature found a common denominator, arching in a sense across literary genres, in its heroes. Similar to each other in an evident way, such protagonists shared a kinship of ideas and style. Above all, they are young people – an age group that had never before achieved the status of representative heroes. In Romanticism, they became a dominant force. This was a tendency in European culture, but in Poland it was sanctioned first and foremost by Adam Mickiewicz, as the author of the poetic manifesto *Ode to Youth* (*Oda*

do młodości – 1820). Despite the varying roles, costumes, and literary masks they donned, such heroes remained youths, at least in terms of their years. The names of some of them – Gustaw, Konrad – became symbolic appellations that carried great currency among society. Gustaw was the name of an ill-starred lover, adopted by Mickiewicz from a romance novel then highly popular, *Valérie* by the Baroness Krüdener. Konrad, the protagonist of *Forefathers' Eve* part III, was a touchstone for rebels and sacrificers alike, with a volcanic heart that harbored mutually contradictory passions. Kordian, the title protagonist from a drama by Słowacki, personified the aching soul, boredom with the world, and a fondness for death – these being traits of Romantic decadentism. The youths of Polish literature were obviously akin to their European predecessors, and had much in common with Goethe's Werter, Chateaubriand's René, and above all with the heroes offered by Byron (who become for a certain period a dictator of literary fashions in Europe).

In Poland, however, due to the specific nature of historical events, there was a kind of local mutation of world literary models. The patriotic model of the hero appeared and proliferated rapidly and profusely. Such a hero could take on different forms and social roles, while all the time remaining, in the depth of his being, the same emotional romantic with a sensitive conscience and a big heart. Such qualities made him suffer the Polish misery all the more fervently, to absorb the religion of patriotism and to grow up with a dream of exacting revenge, even at the expense of his own life. This protagonist might be a thinker, a conspirer, a rebel, a prisoner, or an exile, but he always sacrificed himself “for the cause,” meaning for the sake of his homeland's freedom. Such youths thus have literary biographies based on the moral code of the rigorist patriot, and their senses are dulled to the other values, virtues, or charms of the world. From today's perspective, this imparts these Romantic heroes with – if one might say so – traits of spiritual fundamentalism.

This type of hero took hold above all in lyric poetry, one significant trend of which can be termed Tyrtæan poetry, which appealed for armed struggle and the performance of patriotic duties. This current chiefly rose to the fore in popular poetry, in soldier's songs asso-

ciated with the November Uprising, variously praising love for one's homeland, seen as a higher priority than relations with women. Indeed, women had their only rival in the Polish homeland, as in this anonymous song sung during the November Uprising: "Recall, Polish woman, our land fights for survival // Poland's independence – here you have your rival." ("Pamiętaj, żeś Polka, że to za kraj walka, / / Niepodległość Polski to twoja rywalka").

Many noteworthy works were written in this trend of lyric poetry, but the masterpiece of verse that addressed the fate of the Poles, which was marked by suffering and sacrifice and destined young men to do treacherous battle against the enemy, is Mickiewicz's poem *To the Polish Mother* (*Do matki Polki* – 1830), which in fact antedated the historical experience of Poland's fate in the wake of the November Uprising.

At the same time, Mickiewicz is the author of verses that blazed a new path for romantic lyric poetry. These are his religious-moral poems – the so-called Rome and Dresden lyrics, including *Reason and Faith* (*Rozum i wiara*), *An Evening Talk* (*Rozmowa wieczorna*) and *Opinions and Observations* (*Zdania i uwagi*) from 1836 – and above all the Lausanne lyrics. The latter moniker, invented by publishers, encompasses several poems written in 1839-1840 during Mickiewicz's stay in Lausanne, and which were not published in his lifetime. These include: *Spin Love* (*Snuć miłość*), *Over the Great, Pure Water* (*Nad wodą wielką i czystą*), *My Corpse* (*Gdy tu mój trup*), *The Tears Flowed* (*Polaty się łzy*) plus two fragments: *Oh, in the Family Home at Last* (*Ach, już i w rodzicielskim domu*) and *To Flee With My Love to a Leaf* (*Uciec z duszą na listek*). This group of poems is considered to have opened up new prospects in their author's literary development, at the same time signaling a transformation in Romantic lyric poetry itself. These changes are evidenced by a departure from rhetoric, from descriptiveness, which was strongly audible in Mickiewicz's lyric poetry as well, and by conciseness – the negation of Romantic verbosity. The means whereby the poet achieves this literary effect include highlighting the functions of the word, as opposed to those of sentence constructions, and expanding the sense of words to include allegorical and symbolic meanings.

The writer who brought about the “necessary turn” in lyric poetry was nevertheless Cyprian Norwid, a poet very much aware of the aesthetic goals he was striving to achieve, and equally certain of his negative assessment of Polish Romantic poetry – both patriotic/martyrological poetry, and lamenting, wistful poetry, expressing awe at the beauties of the Polish landscape.

It was in his cycle *Vade-mecum* that Norwid most fully realized his lyric style, based in large part upon the parable, upon the simplicity of the situations, words and artistic techniques he employed, which radiate hidden senses based upon insinuations and hints that also constitute a system of meaning. This cycle consists of 100 small poetic works that were written at various times, but were set into a composed whole in the years 1865-1866. For many reasons, the poet did not manage to have the cycle published, either then or later, and the organization of the manuscript itself underwent irreversible damage; it is this impaired version that we are familiar with today.

Norwid attached great import to the cycle *Vade-mecum* and felt that it would hold a special place in the development of Polish poetry. In a letter to the novelist J. I. Kraszewski, he wrote unabashedly: “Polish poetry will follow where the main portion of *Vade-mecum* leads, in terms of its sense, flow, rhyme, and example. Will they want to or not? – it is all the same.” The title *Vade-mecum* itself (Latin for “go with me”) undoubtedly has more than one meaning, but one of its senses refers to the cycle’s role as a watershed in the history of Polish poetry, calling upon Polish poets to follow.

Norwid’s poetic agenda was evident not only in the cycle *Vade-mecum*, unknown to readers, but also in the poet’s other verses, which can be said to have participated in the transformation of Polish lyric poetry. Chiefly because they embraced realms of reality previously unknown to Polish poetry; they addressed the historical and ethical problems of the latter half of the 19th century, and above all spoke of the human condition in the era of steam and iron rails, the triumphs of civilization and the poverty of the masses, and the duality of the concept of labor, which represents both Promethean creativity and yet the scourge of slaves. Like no other Polish Romantic, Norwid understood the new industrial spirit of the age and was able to per-

ceive the extensive range of its values: from the misery of existence to civilization's successes pointing the way to the future. This duality in the writer's stance towards modernity was most fully expressed through irony, which imparted to the image of the world being portrayed a comprehending closeness, yet at the same time a certain distance.

Norwid's great reformist or even iconoclastic plans could not be realized in his contemporary times, due to the minimal awareness of his works amongst the literary audience, and even worse, the scorn for his achievements shown by leading figures of Polish culture. Indeed, we can say that Norwid was rejected by his contemporaries. Why? The poet behaved like an avant-garde artist, pursuing his own agenda without reckoning with the so-called real audience, sometimes even expressly going against it. He addressed his works to a virtual, "desired" reader, while his authentic reader was nevertheless poorly prepared for what this innovator had to offer, something that exceeded his perceptual capacity. Norwid would only establish a link of understanding with his "late grandchild," to cite the author's own term, i.e. readers and interpreters capable of comprehending his achievements and discovering his artistic uniqueness – this would occur during the Young Poland period, a time of great triumph for Norwid.

Among the artistic achievements of Polish Romanticism, we should note certain literary genres that had not previously appeared in our literature, and therefore constitute something of a hallmark of Romanticism and a measure of its innovativeness. These are the *gawęda* (the "yarn" or chatty tale), and the metaphysical poetic drama.

The *gawęda* was written in both prose and verse. The most outstanding prose implementation is to be found in Henryk Rzewulski's *Memoirs of Mr Seweryn Soplica (Pamiętki imć pana Seweryna Soplicy – 1839)*. This work marked the start of the genre's history, and at the same time represents its most magnificent achievement. Amongst the many poetic masters of the *gawęda*, on the other hand, the greatest popularity was achieved by Władysław Syrokomla, perhaps indeed an overly dexterous versifier.

The roots of the *gawęda* lay in the portrayed world of noble society, its morals and mentality, in the reality of daily and public life. But

above all these roots lay in language, in a means of expression modeled after colloquial chatting or after the vocabularies of professional groups then on the verge of disappearing, such as the noble *palestra*. Characteristic scenes, good anecdotes, and the noble philosophy of life, whereby revelry in good company constituted a virtue and charm of life, comprise the moral pith and marrow of the *gawęda*, which the nobility identified with and delighted in. Because most of the *gawęda* tales were set in the times of the Polish-Lithuanian Republic's downfall, they were deemed to be a treasure-trove of tradition and a faithful image of the nobility, as the depository of national characteristics – although we must admit that a portion of the audience considered this image to be morally compromising.

The *gawęda* style remains an easily recognizable trait of Polish prose to the present day – such as in Witold Gombrowicz's *Trans-Atlantic* (*Trans-Atlantyka*).

In close proximity to the *gawęda* style is the historical novel of the epoch. Novelistic prose was not a strong point of Polish Romanticism, yet it draws attention to itself as an important attestation of Romantic historicism, a penchant for long-gone epochs of the distant past. We might perceive this trend as a desire to return to literary roots, to bury oneself in the national tradition, or as a fondness for the colorful past, in the hues of life and figures, especially ones as characteristic as the Polish nobility during its times of splendor. The undoubted master of the historical novel is the Polish equivalent of England's Walter Scott: Józef Ignacy Kraszewski, with his *In the Times of Sigismund* (*Zygmuntowskie czasy*), *Countess Cosel* (*Hrabina Cosel*), and *An Old Tale* (*Stara baśń*).

A genre that enjoyed great fame, and exerted a great impact upon Polish culture, was the Romantic drama – above all Adam Mickiewicz's *Forefathers' Eve*. Parts II and IV appeared in 1823, and part III only in 1833. The first part has survived only as a fragment, and was probably never written in full. The third part is also not a completed whole, as it consists of 9 scenes of a first act. *Forefathers' Eve* can be treated as a consciously composed open-ended construction. Following Classicism, which strictly adhered to the rules of dramatic construction, the open form of *Forefathers' Eve* constituted an aesthetic provoca-

tion, received by some with indignation, by others with rapture, as an innovative characteristic and – let’s add – a distinctive feature of Romantic dramaturgy. It was in *Forefathers’ Eve* that the aesthetics of the fragment, something very widespread in Romanticism, found encouragement and inspiration.

This work was not only fragmentary and violated the principle of chronologically appearing parts, it also completely disregarded the continuity of other construction elements, for example such important aspects as the fates of its protagonists. They are also open to many possibilities of plot. The famous ending of scene 8 of the drama, the culmination of its historical portion, draws to a close with a telling line uttered by a soldier escorting the hero: “let each take his own path” (“*każdy w swoje drogę*”), which opens up many possibilities for an unclear future, and for the continuation of Konrad’s literary biography.

Essentially the only cohesive element linking the almost autonomous parts of this drama is their title, *Forefathers’ Eve*. This was again something sensational, because it refers to a folk ritual of pagan origin, associated with All Soul’s Day. In part II of *Forefathers’ Eve*, this rite plays a decisive role, essentially setting forth the build and sense of the work. This is not an ethnographic oddity, but rather a ritual archetype that is as folk-based as it is universal, stretching back to the origins of human culture. This ritual archetype plays out in a shed near a cemetery: the living commune with the spirits of the dead, metaphysics comes into play, the secrets of existence lay open, and out of this intermingling of reality and miracles a new form of Romantic drama is born.

The contact between the two dimensions of existence, the real and the metaphysical, is fundamental to all of the parts of *Forefathers’ Eve*, including those in which the ritualistic rite itself plays a lesser role. In the third part, for example, we have expressively portrayed historical and moral scenes, which can be described as striving for realistic means of expression. But at the same time the author brings the forces of good and evil onto the stage, devils and angels that actively intervene in the course of events, even though they come from a different realm of existence. Because these two dimensions

intermingle, they are present jointly, perceived via signs, supernatural interventions, and their envoys even appear in figural form.

The figure of the central hero of the work, Konrad, also fits into this rhythm of eternity and history – being very much a concrete prisoner in a political trial, he is at the same time a figure from the metaphysical realm, where he wages a great dispute with God over the moral order of the world, over the cruelty and vileness he sanctions in it. Konrad is, therefore, a metaphysical rebel, with ambitions as a social renewer. With such moral and philosophical underpinnings, Konrad became an archetypical figure in Polish Romantic culture: a great individualist gifted with poetic genius, who throws down the gauntlet to the highest authority of all – the Creator himself. Depending on one’s choice of worldview, he is also sometimes seen as a personification of moral vice and equally sinful vainglory.

Another eminent dramatist, the most universal dramatist of the epoch of Romanticism, was Juliusz Słowacki. Exceptionally sensitive to inspirations from Shakespeare and from Dante’s *Divine Comedy*, he poured them into his dramas, which were chiefly historical, stretching back into Poland’s tribal history (*Balladyna* 1834, *Lilla Weneda* 1840). He thus became the creator of an originally construed origin myth, and at the same time took great liberty with his literary inspirations, combining for example Shakespearean tragedy and the grotesque into a single work – as evidenced in both *Balladyna* and *Lilla Weneda* – while Dante’s *Inferno* served him as inspiration for developing a Romantic aesthetics of the hideous, which accompanied the frenetic descriptions of cruelty, blood, and murders to be found in his dramas.

He honed the rules of this “bloody” theater to perfection in works that bear the hallmark of originality and aesthetic boldness – the dramas written by Słowacki following his so-called mystic epiphany, above all *Father Mark* and *The Silver Dream of Salomea*, which are aptly termed mystic dramas. The action of both these works is set during the final moments of the Polish state, during the Confederation of Bar and the Cossack rebellion against the Polish nobility, called the Massacre of Humań, i.e. during times that were cruel and bloody by nature. Słowacki found a counterpart to this historical material in

the aesthetics of the Baroque macabre theater, full of harsh means of expression that reflected the death throes of the old world. History is portrayed here as chaos that is bloody, but at the same time mysterious, with a metaphysical depth that shines through “signs,” which are legible to the chosen few. Human reality proves to be a domain of struggle amongst spirits, revealing the existence of a concealed plan for the world, signals of which reach the earthly realm in the form of hard-to-decipher symbols, dreams, and signs. And so, in mystical dramas there is an intense proximity between metaphysics and history, dream and reality; between a person who acts, and one who is acted upon by independent forces. This is a great historical theater, which is at the same time universal.

The third pillar upon which Polish Romantic drama rested was Zygmunt Krasiński, above all as the author of *The Undivine Comedy* (*Nie-Boskiej komedii* – 1835). This was also a historical and metaphysical work, which was nothing new, but on the other hand the third part of the drama, devoted to earthly manifestations of the idea of social revolution, was a complete innovation. Observations, readings, and the author’s own aristocratic social origins sensitized him to the tragedy of those expelled from the historical arena. This was why he managed in the third part of *The Undivine Comedy* to capture so effectively the ideas of the 19th century, conveyed through the voices of separate social groups, and to summon to the stage a menacing collective hero, whose presence had been witnessed in the French revolution: the rebellious masses of the hungry and the exploited. In this sense, as a work about an oncoming era of social revolutions, *The Undivine Comedy* is a wholly innovative work, one unparalleled in any contemporary European literature.

Polish Romanticism was characterized by a division into the homeland and the émigré community. No other national culture was then faced with such extreme conditions of existence. This division was a consequence of the national uprising against Russia in 1830-1831, called the November Uprising. This insurrection, sometimes treated as a Polish-Russian war in light of the existence of Polish military forces then involved in the insurgent movement, ended in disaster. Repressive measures were imposed in the territory of the Russian-ruled King-

dom of Poland, and those who had participated in the uprising faced military courts and harsh sentences, including the death penalty. For many insurrectionists, leaving the country therefore meant a way of avoiding punishment. But an equally important cause for such emigration lay in the emigrants' psychological inability to reconcile themselves to the loss of liberty and to the return of the Russian yoke, now a hundred times more severe. People who had "breathed the air of freedom," as it was said, for the nine months the uprising had lasted, were unable to consent to an existence politically reduced to a minimum, with attenuated civil and national rights. For people of this sort, emigration proved to be the only possible way out of historical oppression. *Émigrés* chiefly traveled to France, which opened up its borders to Polish refugees, as well as to England and other European countries, and even to North America.

Historians believe that 9,000 individuals left Poland following the November Uprising – a figure that does not seem great, yet this group was in large part comprised of the country's elite and of young men who had frequently received higher education. These facts bore upon the character of this wave of emigration, later termed the Great Emigration.

Its greatness was also determined by the fact that all the most imminent Polish poets were among the *émigrés*: Adam Mickiewicz, Juliusz Słowacki, Zygmunt Krasiński, Cyprian Norwid, Bohdan Zaleski, and Seweryn Goszczyński. The great Polish era of Romanticism, therefore, took shape abroad. It was there, too, under natural conditions ensuring freedom of speech, that publicist writing flourished, especially on social and political affairs, as well as such genres of publicist expression as the worldview debate, the political essay, the pamphlet, etc. It was also in emigration that modern political organizations arose, and where their characteristic language of expression and style of action emerged. The Polish Democratic Society and the camp of Prince Adam Czartoryski laid the foundations for the traditions of the modern left wing and of enlightened conservatism. Unfortunately, the *émigré* community also entailed relations based on hypertrophic discussion and wordy battles, easy slander, judgments and allegations, envy and hatred. Such was the unfortu-

nate legacy of the self-destructive energies that emigration had instilled into the Polish mentality and style of public affairs.

But emigration also brought modern experiences, such as labor. Émigrés experienced a shock of *déclassement*. Almost no one managed to retain the social position they had held in Poland. Many of them had to take up poorly paid employment, others to learn practical professions that were not practiced in Poland. This experience had its social and mental dimensions, but it also found reflection in literature, especially in the work of Cyprian Norwid, sometimes called a writer of the mercantile and industrial age.

The phenomenon known as messianism, important for and characteristic of Polish Romanticism, is also chiefly associated with the émigré community. This was a philosophical and moral attitude whose roots lay in the concept of nation, and of Poland as a nation chosen to perform a historical mission – a mission of salvation not only with regards to the Polish people itself, but also with regards to other peoples of Europe. This mission chiefly envisaged freedom as the most highly prized commodity in the historical world, and was thus of a universal nature, encompassing all the national communities of the age. Poland had been chosen for such a role in light of the course its history had taken, marked by suffering and sacrifices to freedom – as the November Uprising had clearly evidenced. Freedom was understood not only in terms of the Polish lands, but also as freedom of the “peoples of Europe.”

In this way messianism made an apology of certain attitudes and behaviors, but at the same time transformed the national calamity into a moral victory (something Poles would repeatedly practice later); it rendered suffering sacred, and imparted a holy and eternal sense to sacrifice. It was able to do so by right of a bold analogy drawn between Poland and the torment of Christ. Voluntary sacrifice and suffering on the part of the innocent represented more than just a symbolic link between such different entities as Christ and Poland, it derived a redemptive significance from this analogy. Poland would redeem the sins of the world, and save it by giving nations back their freedom. In short, these ideas were concisely expressed in the slogan of Poland as “the Christ of nations.”

Messianism and its vision of Poland's role is chiefly associated with Mickiewicz and two of his greatly famed works: *The Books of the Polish Nation and of the Polish Pilgrimage* (*Księgi narodu polskiego i pielgrzymstwa polskiego* – 1832) and *Forefathers' Eve* part III (1833). The former work, written in stylized biblical prose and swiftly translated into the leading European languages (a French translation by Charles Montalambert coming in 1833), not only bolstered Mickiewicz's literary stature, it also popularized biblical stylization as a form of artistic expression, as well as the ideological message of the work itself. Evidence of this can be found in *Les paroles d'un croyant* by Félicité Lamennais, which was indeed found by the Church to be in violation of Catholic orthodoxy.

Messianism, defending the universalism of liberty and the commonality of European peoples, was nevertheless not devoid of an apology of the nation that had been chosen to be the bearer of these ideas, to be a spiritual leader in the historical world. Such was the role messianism ascribed to Poland, which could lead to national idolatry and sow the seeds for later nationalism. Of the great works of Romanticism, such allegations are chiefly leveled against *The Books of the Polish Nation and of the Polish Pilgrimage*.

The sense of mission harbored by the émigré community towards the homeland itself was more of a historical nature than it was rooted in the philosophy of history or metaphysics. The émigrés deemed themselves to be representatives of the nation as a whole, and thus harbored leadership ambitions with respect to the country. Such ambitions were not limited to a kind of "spiritual leadership," but rather involved very concrete political decisions, such as plots, conspiracies, and new insurgent movements – which as a rule ended in further disasters, and to which the domestic population, maltreated by repression, was opposed.

As time passed, the country came to increasingly question such émigré patronage, formed its own decision-making centers and brought forth its own conspirator political figures, who supplanted the emissaries sent in from abroad. The next great independence movement, the uprising of 1863, called the January Uprising, was chiefly a sovereign decision by those in the Polish lands themselves,

involving chiefly their own forces and means, as meager as they were. The struggle took on a partisan character, the combatants being poorly armed – as underscored by the poetic line “to battle went our men unarmed” (*”poszli nasi w bój bez broni”*) – and the uprising would indeed end in yet another calamity, followed by especially cruel repression by the Russian authorities. These involved not just executing leaders and expelling individuals to Siberia, but also the large-scale confiscation of property, dealing a serious blow to the estates of the nobility and aristocracy.

The January Uprising left a traumatic mark upon the awareness and emotional state of society. The experience of this calamity affected both the graphic imaginations of painters, such as Artur Grottger, and the literary imagination of writers, including Stefan Żeromski. The uprising itself, in turn, is considered to be the most romantic independence movement in the history of Poland, inspired by the models and values of Romanticism literature: an absolutist notion of homeland and a maximalist concept of patriotic duty, chiefly involving sacrifice “for the cause,” even including the sacrifice of one’s own life.

To a certain extent this historical event of great import marks the end of Romanticism’s dominance in Polish culture. Among the many reasons for the subsequent change in cultural models, social ideas, and philosophy of existence, one of the most important was a protest against the dominance of Romanticism and the destructive consequences it wrought. Because Romanticism was, in a certain sense, an era of insurgencies, within which – as Norwid poetically expressed it in *Five Outlines (Pięć zarysów)* – successive generations grew up “among bluish blood, as in cornflower field: from former events, to those only just now sealed” *“wśród sinej krwi, jak wśród bławatków: od ostatnich do tylko co zaszytych wypadków”*.

Out of this questioning of Romanticism’s dominance, Positivism would emerge. This does not mean, however, that Romanticism had no continuation in Polish literature and art. It did indeed, and its lingering was quite intense, stoked by historical events such as the two World Wars, the Warsaw uprising, and the Solidarity movement that overthrew the Socialist system in Poland. Polish spiritual culture, especially its popular varieties, has rested upon the symbolism of

Romanticism and the models of patriotic action then developed. Elite art and the social perception of great romantics manifest a direct link to the vitality of Romanticism, which has not allowed itself to be relegated as a phenomenon known from chapters of history now closed.

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