Ryszard Koziolek

Sienkiewicz's Bodies

Studies of Gender and Violence

Polish Studies - Transdisciplinary Perspectives

Edited by Krzysztof Zajas / Jarosław Fazan

PETER LANG
EDITION

Sienkiewicz's Bodies focuses on the work of the most popular Polish writer from the end of the nineteenth and the beginning of the twentieth century. It discusses the surprising success of Sienkiewicz's writing in relation to the dissection of optimistic illusion that takes place during a reading of its cruel prose. Sienkiewicz is seen as something more than a juggler of genius in narrative prose. This conservative writer, like the modernists, knew that there was no longer any way to construct a representation of reality in a morally non-contradictory fictional discourse. The energy of his narratives and his linguistic drive disturb the order of narrative and expose the heteronomy of a superficially unified style, thus generating fissures, but never ruining the architecture of the text.

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Abbreviations

D – Henryk Sienkiewicz, *Dzieła*, collected edition, edited by J. Krzyżanowski, vols 1–60, Warszawa 1948–1955.

BD – *Bez dogmatu*, edited by T. Bujnicki, BN I 301, Wrocław 2002.

Cho – *Chwila obecna I–II*, in: *Dzieła XLIX*, Warszawa 1950.

K – *Krzyżacy I–II*, Warszawa 1990.

Kor – *Korespondencja I–II*, in: *Dzieła LV–LVI*, Warszawa 1951.

L – *Legiony*, in: *Dzieła XXVIII*, Warszawa 1950.

Li – Henryk Sienkiewicz *Listy vol. I. 1–2.* Introduction and biographical details of correspondents by J. Krzyżanowski; letters edited and footnotes prepared by M. Bokszczanin, Warszawa 1977.

Henryk Sienkiewicz *Listy vol. II. 1–3*. Edited and introduced by M. Bokszczanin; footnotes by M. Bokszczanin, Warszawa 1996.

Henryk Sienkiewicz *Listy vol. III. 1–3*. Edited and introduced by M. Bokszczanin; footnotes by M. Bokszczanin, Warszawa 2007.

LPA – *Listy z podróży do Ameryki*, in: *Pisma wybrane I–XVII*, Warszawa 1989.

MLA – *Mieszaniny literacko-artystyczne*, *Dzieła L*, Warszawa 1950.

NPCH – *Na polu chwały*, in: *Pisma wybrane I–XVII*, Warszawa 1989.

OM – *Ogniem i mieczem*, Warszawa 1964.

P – *Potop*, Warszawa 1964.

PW – *Pan Wołodyjowski*, Warszawa 1964.

Q – *Quo vadis. Powieść z czasów Nerona*, edited by T. Żabski, BN I 298, Wrocław 2002.

RP – *Rodzina Połanieckich*, Warszawa 1963.

W – *Wiry*, Warszawa 1993.

Wb – *Wiadomości bieżące I–II*, in: *Dzieła LI*, Warszawa 1950.

Jasienkiewicz[1]

> I was still writing, or with certain interruptions, *Bez tytułu* (Untitled) – now I am conducting *Chwila obecna* (The Present Moment), now already in its second year, thus I am called *Litwos*.
>
> – after all, a writer in one who writes books.
> (Zołzikiewicz in *Szkicach węglem* [Charcoal Sketches])
>
> I was told, honorable Sir, that my original surname could have been Jasienkiewicz.[2]

1. The project

The Jasienkiewicz project began earlier. The rough idea of it buzzed in the head of the initially nameless feuilleton writer, who first appeared under the Appollonian name Musagetes. Subsequently he took the less beautiful-sounding pseudonym Litwos. Despite appearances, this was not a game of faces and masks, but one of better and worse names. A thoughtfully selected pseudonym functioned as the secret emblem of the unknown author, but, it also served, and perhaps more importantly, to protect the author's real name, which was reserved for creative endeavors and was not to be tarnished by the journalistic craft. The literary figures of this generation discovered that they could live by the pen, and that writing for the newspapers provided them with relative independence. Sienkiewicz's correspondence from the International Literary Conference in Paris, which was published in *Nowiny* (The News) on 11 June 1878, quotes extensively from the report made by Alfons Gonzales, the dominant theme of which was the economic question—the growing advantage of the press over books and copyright laws. "Everywhere we see," Gonzales says, "that journalism is the only permanent and sure vocation for men of letters, and he who seeks craft in the pen has before him only the press and nothing more" [*Kongres Międzynarodowy Literacki w Paryżu*, D XLIV 113].[3] The flip side of the pauperization of the writer is the growing

1 The title of the chapter adds the Polish for "I" to Sienkiewicz's surname.
2 Letter to Jan Aleksander Karłowicz of September 8, 1901 [Li III/1, 81].
3 As Wacław Szymanowski, editor of *Kurier Warszawski*, a Polish attendee of the Congress, observed, "le journal a effacé le livre" [*Kongres*…, D XLIV 110].

social significance of the journalistic and *belles-lettres* press, which provided writers with a new, formerly unknown, social position: "there are no more false troubadours, or paid poets, or beggars, or slaves" [*Kongres*… D XLIV 113]. The authors' compensation for this loss of exceptionality was supposed to be profit, fame, and ideological influence over society. Sienkiewicz viewed with skepticism the proclaimed "fourth power" of literary figures. He saw in the Congress debates mainly a defense of the interests of publishers searching for legal means to combat illegal translations and theatrical adaptations. He himself knew well of the none too exalted fate of the lean writer who experiences the impact of the newspaper's triumph over the book.[4] Seven years previously, he suffered the consequences of the failure of the Kraszewski publishing house, which prevented, for a time, the publication of his debut novel *Na marne* (Wasted) (first printed in *Wieniec* in 1872; first book edition in 1876). He wrote of this with sarcastic humor to Konrad Dobrski: "Immortality is greater with the book than the newspaper, but immortality is easier than publishing when there are no printing houses. In any case, I have time for immortality … [Li I/1 334].

The sober evaluation of the writer's new position in a market dominated by the press led to his postponing creative endeavors until that time when the journalist ensured the writer's independence and a relatively good position with readers. The opportunity for and temptation of independence brought to the modern literary figure by the significant split into journalist and writer, with the latter having to wait until the former had fulfilled his duties. Thus, for Sienkiewicz the pseudonym is a name-mask that he dons during his daily work as a writer so as to not tarnish his own name, which he saves for literature. Jettisoning Musagetes and Litwos, the now famous journalist is separated from Sienkiewicz the author, who retains his ties to the press, but who already writes for himself under his "better" name. The creative entity hidden behind the mask returns to "himself," to his proper role, exploiting the capital he has accumulated through his journalistic writing. The pseudonym, thus exploited, turns out to be cleverly a delayed subjectivity that is not implemented prematurely, and giving in return (on trial) the phantom of the false name.

A similar mechanism of splitting the writer's role is seen in many literary careers, with Prus in the lead, but with the difference that he never returned to Aleksander Głowacki.[5] "Sienkiewicz" decided to challenge "Litwos" and won;

---

4 The author of *Stara i młoda prasa* confirms that Sienkiewicz "was then very poor, very modest, and forever in need of money." (*Stara i młoda prasa. Przyczynek do historii literatury ojczystej 1866–1872. Kartki ze wspomnień Eksdziennikarza*, ed. with an afterward by D. Świerczyńska, Warszawa 1998, p. 106).

5 Prus, recalling years later his printed columns in *Opiekun Domowy*, writes, "I signed with the pseudonym out of simple shame that I could write such silliness," cited in *Bolesław Prus 1847–1912. Kalendarz życia i twórczości*, ed. K. Tokarzówna and P. Fit, general editor

"Głowacki" conceded that maybe Prus, the journalist, would better support Prus, the artist, and so it happened that in the reception of *Lalka* (The Doll) an alleged flaw was noted in, among other matters, employing the mannerisms of the feuilleton in the narration of the novel.[6] Prus, the writer, consumed by the name of his column writing *Doppelgänger*, is a more apt representation of the shifts in modern literary life since he embodies the experience and consciousness of this generation of writer in this new position in the cultural system. While the rapid development in the press did not permit the ambitious man of letters to live by the pen (without a patron or additional employ) well, it did allow relative independence.[7] In Poland, this phenomenon did not begin to take shape until the late 1860s and early 1870s, when the generation that recognized the newspapers as a means to implement their ideological artistic and economic goals found their voice. This conjunction is deceptive, as it does not signal the peaceful coexistence of these spheres. One of the significant costs borne by the author-journalist-producer is participation in the economic game in which creativity becomes a commodity. Positivists discover and exploit this new reality , which brings the realization that words and ideas are equally part of the market as goods and services are.

Sienkiewicz quickly appreciated the value of specializing in the literary craft, but, still, his goal, almost from the beginning, becomes that of freeing the

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Zygmunt Szweykowski, Warszawa 1969, p. 103. A discussion of the multiple places where these two authors come into contact and mirror each other is found in a study by Janina Kulczycka-Saloni "Sienkiewicz i Prus," in: *Henryk Sienkiewicz – twórczość i recepcja światowa*, ed. A. Piorunowa and K. Wyka, Kraków 1968.

6 Świętochowski, maintaining that Prus's composition of *Lalka* is faulty, suggests that a journalist and writer whose novels are published serially in the press cannot become a true novelist (A. Świętochowski, *Aleksander Głowacki (Bolesław Prus)*, in: *Polska krytyka literacka (1800–1918). Materiały. Vol. III*, Warszawa 1959, p. 369). The belief that writing for the press spoils talent was widespread, since Chmielowski accused Sienkiewicz of the same: "The novella writer here has yet to transform himself into a perfect novelist" (P. Chmielowski, "*Ogniem i mieczem* w oświetleniu pozytywistycznym," in: *Trylogia Henryka Sienkiewicza. Studia, szkice, polemiki*, selected and edited T. Jodełka, Warszawa 1962, p. 149).

7 This refers to only a small group of writers; the rest write "after hours" as clerks or try to stave off poverty. Janina Kulczycka-Saloni describes the painful birth of the professional man of letters in *Życie literackie Warszawy w latach 1864–1892*, Warszawa 1970 (in the chapter "Sytuacja materialna"). How varied and interesting this service market is, can be seen in the brilliant sketch by Baudelaire devoted to Balzac. To extract himself from debt, the titular "genius,"purchases two articles from young, talented writers (according to Andrzej Kijowski, who names them in his footnotes, they are Edward Ouriliac and Téophile Gautier), and signs them with his name (Ch. Baudelaire, „Jak płacić długi, gdy się jest geniuszem," in: *Sztuka romantyczna. Dzienniki poufne*, trans. with an introduction and annotations by A. Kijowski, Warszawa 1971, pp. 34–37).

artist from the journalist, freeing his own name from the pseudonym. Weaker as a writer of the feuilleton, he builds his position on his correspondence from his American travels (1876–1878). The forms of reportage are closer to his writer's temperament, but they also demand less of his energy, because, as he writes to Julian Horain, they are not as taxing because the material is palpable, while that of the feuilleton is not and "– you have to do the impossible and keep it going as long as you can" [Li I/1, 376].

In truth, it must be clarified that the shift from journalism to literature was not only done in a quest for immortality, but also of a more effective form of engaged discourse, which permitted smuggling ideas outside of the sphere of impermanent journalistic products. Bringing literature into the public sphere, which was made possible by the new medium, also forced undertaking a new theme—that of responding to the experiences and expectations of the newspaper reader. Marshall Berman, who writes convincingly about the creative advantages of the fall of the author, sees in the partial degradation of the artist the primal scene of modern literature, which is a recording of the sudden transformation of the role of art, including of the existing social role of the writer and transformations in literary language. Both of these spheres are increasingly shaped by the expectations of subscribers. Thanks to the rapid pace of press communication, one can test public sensitivity to topics and language, thus strengthening the relationship between the author and the reader.[8] Paradoxically, it is the newspaper that emboldens literature by creating and confirming interest in topics that are trivial, "unpoetic," random, or morally or ideologically controversial. Well aware of the certain privilege available to the feuilleton writer, in contrast to the author of novels, Sienkiewicz confesses with jocular megalomania:

> I have, or at least usurp, the privilege of the *enfant terrible*, in allowing myself to express a variety of truths, which one admittedly feels, but which, for various reasons, one does not allow oneself to utter. [Cho II 206].

The fact that the positivist novel in Poland emerged out of journalism carries with it one more consequence; namely, that it permitted subsequent writers to establish their names with the public, which was significant later when a feuilleton writer began publishing novellas or novels in serial form. This was supported by the insatiable hunger of editors, for whom a widely-read novel, printed in the press, could retain current subscribers and procure new ones, while for writers it was a

8 To bring light to the issue, Berman uses an allegorical sketch by Baudelaire entitled "The Lost Halo." It is the ironic story of a poet who loses his symbol of divine calling while crossing the street. Interestingly, he does not suffer from this at all. Quite to the contrary, he rejoices in his new freedom as an anonymous voyeur into someone else's life, to then assimilate this life into art. (M. Berman, *Wszystko, co stałe, rozpływa się w powietrzu. Rzecz o doświadczeniu nowoczesności*, trans. M. Szuster, Kraków 2006, p. 209).

chance of earning double the fee for one novel. Janina Kulczycka-Saloni draws attention to a social resistance against transforming the artist into a manufacturer, as manifested in the widespread disregard of the material needs of men of letters and the cynical exploitation of them by editors and publishers, while readers were of the curious opinion that artistic endeavors were selfless service, for which artists should accept no payment. The fiery outburst of Świrski in *Rodzina Połanieckich* (The Połaniecki Family), can be seen as an expression of a writer's view in this matter.

> In the service of art! How fine that sounds. Oh, but what a dog's service, when one never has rest, never has peace. Nothing but toil and terror! Is this now the fate of human kind, or is it just we that are such tortured figures? [RP 586].[9]

This specific type of reader reluctance toward the author as manufacturer expecting payment for his product had additional support in the poetics of realism with its authors' varied stylistics and world views, its privileged reference of words masking the production process of the text, its individual style of narration, and above all, the personality of its author, who should disappear behind the illusionary presentation of an objective reality.[10] Sienkiewicz was fully aware that achieving this state was, above all else, a question of working on narrative technique, specifically in the composition of the story material. Merging the text, cloaking its heteronomy, sequencing the story and the poetics of the newspaper "installment" all required effort and concentration. As he confessed to Edward Lubowski, "the transition from scene to scene, and pasting larger things into smaller scenes, are always the most difficult and irritating for me" [L III/1, 551]. The technology of his writing, like that of all of his contemporary novelists, required speed and self-discipline in the face of the accelerated and regular tempo of the printing rhythm of newspapers. In response to a questionnaire from the weekly *Świat* (The World) (1913, No. 23) "O swojej własnej twórczości" (On Your Own Creativity), Sienkiewicz admitted it was a constant element of his work as a writer.

> I wrote most of my novels (almost all of them except the novellas) day by day, sending off the newly-written pages to the printer. But, in general, this method, which requires great vigilance, is inconvenient and dangerous. [D XL 144]

A text that concentrates on the effects of mimicry is verified, in practice, by the experience of reading it. Namely, one of the apparent values of a realistic text is

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9 Sienkiewicz expresses his typically irritating duality. On the one hand, he contends, it is good that the Congress addresses the interests of swindled artists. "But we must also demand, in the strongest terms, that the next Congress comprises only people who value ideas more than money" [*Kongres*…, D XLIV 120].

10 N. Abercombie, P. Lash, B. Longhurst, "Przedstawienie popularne: przerabianie realizmu," in: *Odkrywanie modernizmu*. Translation and commentary edited by R. Nycz, Kraków 1998, p. 388.

found in the reader's forgetting about the author, which is a measure of an absorbed reader, or the intoxication of a perfect *mimesis*. The incomparable suggestiveness of Sienkiewicz's narration became proverbial, and legends have grown up around the faithful allegedly requesting masses for the soul of Podbipięty. A reminder to the absorbed reader about the reality of the author in this situation prompts unwilling confusion, which is captured well by the last lines of a poem by Bronisława Ostrowska, written on the news of the author's death:

> Umarł… umarł… Kto? – Henryk Sienkiewicz.
> – Więc to człowiek był? Więc żył na świecie?
> (So he's dead . . . he's dead . . . Who? – Henryk Śienkiewicz.
> – So he was a man? So he lived in the world?)

When Sienkiewicz quit journalism, he not only changed the discourse serving the dissemination of ideology, but he also extricated his writing from the function it served for the positivist program, and for any other. This was not just a shift in poetics or the choice of the type of novel he felt affinity for, he simply severed artistic links between prose and journalism and science to create an autonomous literature, which, even when implementing specified ideological aims, was not constructed on the conditions of an agreement with the reader; in other words, the author's views became secondary or even insignificant in confrontation with the allure of his works. In effect, he achieved unprecedented success, and his readers came from all spheres of society, which is an indication that he succeeded in creating an alternative literary language that was largely universal, but also one with varied types of novelistic discourse. Thanks to this, he became the first Polish writer who belonged solely to the public, and not to a school or doctrine or current.[11] He was and is nobody's, because his literary works are thoroughly modern and are a game between the writer and society in the form of the literary

11 Świętochowski aptly recognized this: "If the new generation reads *Ogniem i mieczem* or "Hania," it is only for esthetic pleasure." (A. Świętochowski, "Fałszywe arcydzieło,", in: *Trylogia Henryka Sienkiewicza*, op. cit., p. 132). Kazimierz Wyka also recognized in the reactions of readers an energy that fueled the writing of the *Trylogia*, which, in his opinion, was not supposed to be a wide-ranging cycle with such a clear ideological message "*Trylogia* was propelled along by its readers like an impatient gardener with a cold frame." (K. Wyka, "Sprawa Sienkiewicza", in: *Trylogia Henryka Sienkiewicza*, op. cit., p. 443). Andrzej Mencwel called attention to the reminiscences of his father that are significant in this context: "Well, he told me how half of the village came to readings of *Ogniem i mieczem*. Throughout my life I have been unable to conceive of this, because *Ogniem i mieczem* is a book saturated with a genuine disregard for the so-called lower classes. Sienkiewicz charmed those peasants from Wielkopolska" (*Po co Sienkiewicz? Sienkiewicz a tożsamość narodowa: Z kim i przeciw komu,* eds. J. Axer and T. Bujnicki, Warszawa 2007, p. 112).

public. As he wrote, "Art has no obligation to take into account, and never really has done, questions of utility" ["O powieści historycznej," D XLV 121].

Despite his dreams of breaking from the press, Sienkiewicz never did. After the success of the *Trylogia* (The Trilogy), he was able to free himself forever from journalism, to which he had no intention of returning. "He did not just crawl out of the business of the press and journalism, to crawl right back into them," he writes here as an author to Edward Lubowski in a letter dated 18 June 1887, rebuffing editors who were pestering him for new works [Li III/1, 532]. Despite his stunning success, Sienkiewicz did not stop writing in installments, which was another nuisance to the writer in the era of newspapers—"the daily sustenance of the modern man." In addition to economics, there was another reason why Sienkiewicz did not abandon initial printings in newspapers. When the novel implements a realist paradigm, and thus presents itself as reality, the press is the only place where the author can appear, but not now as a feuilleton writer, but as a famous author whose life piques interest because of the popularity of his work. Thanks to the press, the author can fight for his place in a text that is blocked by a poetics that he denies and that reject the absorbed reader.

The modern press, interested in the artist's life as well as his work, committed fortuitously the mocking reversal postulated by radical modernism, which was to abolish the boundary between art and life. Countless rumors and sensational stories from and information about Sienkiewicz's life filled the Polish, and even sometimes the foreign, press, thus confirming the arrival of an era in which the life of the artist begins to compete with his work.[12] The author of *Wiry* (Vortices) also experienced the aggressiveness of the modern press, which was capable of effectively exploiting the public's interest in the real author. A good example is the author's furious response to a reprint in *Kurier Warszawski* (Warsaw Courier) (1902, no. 271) of an article from the French *Le Journal* about a duel between two students who differed in opinion about the author's work. Sienkiewicz attacked by using the invectives allegedly used by one of the duelists, and he canceled his subscription to the newspaper and severed all contact with its editor, Władysław Korotyński. This is an excerpt of the letter from Sienkiewicz to Korotyński:

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12 The newspapers, for example, reported that Sienkiewicz was with his children in Nice or on the Riviera, in this or that hotel, what he was working on, the ailments he was suffering from, who was with him, etc. This intensified incredibly after he was awarded the Nobel Prize, and he would have to register in hotels under an assumed name to ensure peace and quiet. But his life had also interested the European press earlier. Surprised by the absurd content of some reports, Sienkiewicz writes to Kozakiewicz, "Where did those f-ing French journalists learn that I am leaving for the Far East and that I am going to write a novel *'qui mettrait aux prises la civilisation jaune et la civilisation slave'*?" [24 VI 1904, Li III/1, 225].

> The editorial board of the Courier is in no was justified by the fact this article comes from the meretricious gossip rag that is *Le Journal*. No Polish newspaper should have reprinted this, and in doing so, your newspaper has displayed the greatest lack of tact and delicacy. [3 X 1902, Li III/1, 152].[13]

Despite the writer's declared ambivalence to the voices of the press regarding his life and work, Sienkiewicz did read them or at least find out about them, and his reactions as recorded in his correspondence leave no room for doubt that they touched him deeply.[14] Long before the modernist anti-Sienkiewicz campaign began in earnest, his views on the value of literary critics is decidedly negative, which is an indication of deep trauma.

> I didn't read the critics, because, as a rule, one does not read them about one's self or one's friends. I believe that Warsaw critics are the lousiest, most wretched, shallowest of all, and the great literary critics, if they impress with anything, it is with their stupidity, ill will, pettiness, and, once again, their stupidity. [to Edward Lubowski, April 2, 1892, 1892, L III/1, 544]

Sienkiewicz is again inconsistent in his position regarding a series of articles by Stanisław Brzozowski and Wacław Nałkowski. These critics not only found themselves up against the incarnation of Sienkiewicz's hostile esthetic and political views, but they also exploited, to great effect, the resonance from the clash of the voices of the widely unknown critics with the greatest figure of Polish literature.[15] Sienkiewicz's silence did not indicate indifference. After several years, he recalled the campaign against him to reassure his collaborator Antoni

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13 This information is presented by Maria Bokszczanin, the author of the footnotes in the edition cited. The story itself seems to be somewhat unlikely. The characteristic surnames of the students—Nieciengiewicz and Bełcikiewicz—were possibly changed by the editors of the *Kurier Warszawski*, or the whole story, parts of it, could have been fabricated. However, Andrzej Mencwel reminds us that during the *Głos* campaign, the editor-in-chief, Jan Władysław Dawid, was challenged to a duel, but refused on the grounds that it was a cultural anachronism (A. Mencwel, "Sienkiewicz i Brzozowski", in: *Po co Sienkiewicz?*, op. cit., p. 101). These instances illustrate that Sienkiewicz's work provided a symbolic language for the participants in the most serious ideological conflicts of the time, especially those about the model of modern Polish culture.

14 This is also confirmed by his departure twice from the principle of not speaking out about one's own work: the lecture "O powieści historycznej" (On the Historical Novel) (1889), which is partially in response to the study of Prus, and the letter to *Słowo* (Word) regarding *Quo vadis*, *Słowo* 31 VII 1896, no. 173 [D XL 134–136].

15 Andrzej Mencwel reminds us "that although the leader was Brzozowski, it was *Głos's* campaign, the campaign of Wacław Nałkowski, Jan Władysław Dawid, Janusz Korczak, Grzegorz Glass, Adolf Nowaczyński, Benedykt Hertz, Aureli Drogoszewski, Iza Moszczeńska and many others" (A. Mencwel, "Sienkiewicz i Brzozowski," in: *Po co Sienkiewicz?*, op. cit., p. 101).

Osuchowski, who was under attack by representatives of *Narodowa Demokracja* (National Democracy) for being too conciliatory towards Russia.

> And various spiteful journalists conducted against me a real smear campaign. This was led by two ingrates I saved from poverty and starvation—one indirectly and the other directly. […] You are well aware of what a brouhaha it was, and I am sure you know better than I do, as I did not read it, and since I do not use printed paper for other needs, so even in this manner I had nothing to do with it. I only know about the whole incident from friends [6 XI 1907, Li III/2, 373].

Despite the strains of being public property, Sienkiewicz benefited far more from the modern press than he suffered from it. Thanks to his talent and knowledge of how it functioned as a medium for literature, he was able to integrate, without substantial contradiction, the economic and ideological aspects of creating with a degree of success that anyone of his generation even came close to paralleling. He was even able to modify the consciousness of his readership, which, in his case, were not exposed to the contradiction between the "service of art" and the superior business he made of this service. It is not easy to explain the course of this transformation. The link between economics and ideas is constant and surprising in the phenomenon of Sienkiewicz, and this refers not only to the financial success that his novels brought to him and his publishers, but also to another type of profit more from the sphere of divine economy, because this is linked to gaining a certain type of "additional value," which his works produced years later. Behind this, stands a certain mythology of "profit" other than economic, which talent produces, because Sienkiewicz's talent is a scandal that is reflected in the polemics and controversies provoked by his utterly noncontroversial works. Nobody refused. From Orzeszkowa and Prus to Gombrowicz and Błoński[16]—they are all joined in the lament, widespread throughout the profession, that such a talent was largely wasted. The mechanism of this disappointment is unclear, just as the measure of profit and loss that could be used to measure the error of this investment is unclear. What is clear, however, is the conviction that talent is not wholly the property of the individual, but, as a symptom of the unimaginable "divine economy," it is a metaphysical manifestation that promises and expects long-term (eternal) profits from the genius's work. Thus, despite the outward manifestations of talent, Sienkiewicz's writing does not compensate for the excessive investment, which is to say that metaphors of economy express this creativity as squandered and wasted since someone else could have exploited it to incomparably better effect.[17]

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16 In one of his feuilleton essays, Jerzy Pilch recounts how Jan Błoński was once asked who in Polish literature had the greatest talent for narrative. Błonski allegedly replied "Sienkiewicz, unfortunately."

17 This is almost a universal conclusion of the first serious discussions of the *Trylogia*. The sketches and reviews by Tarnowski, Kraszewski, Jeż, Kaczkowski, Świętochowski,

Sienkiewicz's enormous popularity, alongside his ostentatious indifference to the ideological conflicts that occupied his contemporaries, angered or concerned many, which shows how much the phenomenon of this writer complicated his opponents' thinking about the social function of literature. Perhaps Adam Asnyk said it most succinctly in a letter to Orzeszkowa, taking the position that Sienkiewicz is "just an artist without any convictions."[18] The concise formulation "just an artist" from the lips of the engaged artist is invective, or is contemptuous at least. Read in the context of the reflections discussed here, this could be evidence of Sienkiewicz's shrewd intuition that the value of modern literature does not depend on the degree to which it is engaged in ideological or philosophical debate, but that it must find its place among the discourses of politics, press, and entertainment, all increasingly aggressive, absorbing readers, and also because they have seized the social mission and responsibilities of engaged literature, easily making contact with consumers and voters.

The awareness of literature as a commercial commodity, as part of the market of goods and services, on the one hand, shifts the author pragmatically into the economic game, while, on the other, it sharpens the conviction that some part of the social function of art, and perhaps its most important part, is created when it moves

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Krzemiński, Prus, and Chmielowski all sigh characteristically that, if not for the defects numbered by the critics, this would have been a masterpiece. Sienkiewicz mocked himself while still emphasizing the thoroughness of his craft: "Pregnancy in me, like in the elephant, lasts for years. Even more amusingly, I usually give birth to a mouse, at least in terms of size. However, I must boast that, sooner or later, I usually complete all subjects" [To Stanisław Smolki, 6 February 1882, Kor II 132].

18 Cited in: J. Krzyżanowski, *Henryk Sienkiewicz. Kalendarz życia i twórczości*, Warszawa 1956, p. 103. This demonstrates how the literary model was changing and breaking with ideological commitments. Significantly, two of the leading Polish authors of early modernity are referred to dismissively as "just artists," because Świętochowski says the same about Prus: "he is and will remain just a novelist, just an artist" (A. Świętochowski, *Aleksander Głowacki (Bolesław Prus)*, op. cit., p. 377). Remarkably, for a Marxist, Samuel Sandler confirms this, stating that "the failure of Sienkiewicz is hidden precisely in his wayward search for ideology, for a program" (S. Sandler, "Wokół *Trylogii*", in: *Trylogia Henryka Sienkiewicza*, op. cit., p. 502). Sienkiewicz was aware of the distinctiveness of his estimation of the relationship between literature and ideology, which he reveals in his discussion of Piotr Chmielowski's *Zarys literatury polskiej z ostatnich lat szesnastu* [An Outline of the Polish Literature of the Past Sixteen Years]. He refers to Prus *contra* Świętochowski or Okoński, and draws the overriding conclusion that esthetic and technical criteria, as opposed to ideological ones, are more useful in the evaluation of literature [*Szkice literackie I*, D XLV 283–288]. Stanisław Fita notes the tendency of the young Sienkiewicz to distance himself from the ideological disputes of his generation, as he "did not actively participate in the life of the School [*Główna*] avoiding all disputes and conflicts" (S. Fita, *Pokolenie Szkoły Głównej*, Warszawa 1980, p. 80).

outside economics, or even when art questions its own economic object status. Paradoxically, art as market commodity depends on its second dimension being in fundamental conflict with its first, because it contests economic primacy, and fully provokes resistance against market dictates, fueling reflection, imagination, dreams, and affects; in other words, it activates impractical, even asocial, aspects of the human condition and satisfies non-economic human needs.[19] Reading is, after all, a dual expenditure of time (or) money, with unclear promises of benefits. All great literature is a challenge to the exclusive concern of existence; it ostentatiously depreciates this way of existence. The ambiguity of the situation of modern literature as part of the market prompted views of its role in life to polarize, as is shown most clearly in the statements of the young modernists. Elite estheticism does not fully explain the transformation that occurred in literary life at the end of the nineteenth and beginning of the twentieth centuries, because attempting to invalidate one of the social dimensions of literature places the modern writer in a false position, the result of which is either a highbrow attitude or a mercantile pragmatism.

Better than anyone else of his generation, Sienkiewicz integrated the ideological and economic aspects of creating literature with his artistic and financial career, and his seemingly contradictory statements regarding the role of his own work illustrate this duality perfectly. Here are two representative excerpts chosen from among many that litter the writer's correspondence. Having tasted success, he admits unscrupulously to Witkiewicz, in a letter from September 1881, why he writes.

> I want to make a fortune. For God's sake! In summer we go away somewhere, and I make mint coin. I also started a novella entitled "Latarnik" [The Lamplighter]. It is base stuff![20]

But many years later (14 July 1895), in a letter to Konstanty Górski, he tells a different story, one that emphasizes the idealism of his writing. It is worthwhile to pause for a moment with this oft-discussed letter; it represents a type of deception, the aim of which was to ensure that Górski wrote a review of *Rodziny Połanieckich*. As if in passing, Sienkiewicz delivers to the critic a ready view of his writing, the

19 See: L. Althusser, Ē. Balibar, *Czytanie „Kapitału*", trans. W. Dłuski, Warszawa 1975, p. 241.

20 "Listy Sienkiewicza do Stanisława Witkiewicza z lat 1880–1882", ed. Z. Piasecki, in: *Studia Sienkiewiczowskie VI. Cz. I: Henryk Sienkiewicz. Listy i dokumenty*, ed. L. Ludorowski, Lublin 2006, p. 91 (Warszawa, circa 1 November 1881). Several days later he adds: "I, myself, took 50 groszy a line for the vile 'Latarnik'" (Ibid, p. 104). Antoni Chojnacki discusses the economic themes in Sienkiewicz's biography in the article "Interesy pana Sienkiewicza", in: *Henryk Sienkiewicz. Szkice o twórczości, życiu i recepcji*, ed. K. Dybciaka, *Podlaskie Studia Polonistyczne*, v. 1, Siedlce, 1999.

dominant characteristic of which is supposed to be its precursor status in the field of idealistic tendencies.

> Here I am walking in the forest thinking of many different things, sometimes even of myself. Once "in the drizzle" it occurred to me how, in fact, I had neatly turned people in the direction of the ideal. [Li I/1, 292–293]

The perversity of the deception is that Sienkiewicz was not all that interested in a review of *Połanieckich*, but he did want to use Górski in an attempt to manipulate the reception of his work. It would seem that Sienkiewicz wanted it placed in the mainstream of then already fashionable modernism, of which he was partly a forerunner when it comes to his and its anti-positivist turn. Suggesting how Górski read his work was supposed to lead the critic to identify Sienkiewicz as a significant link in the development of modern literature in Poland, because his works, according to the author, beginning with "Stary Sługa" and "Hania" and through to *Quo vadis*, "contributed immensely to a return to not only ideals but also to religion" [Li I/1, 292–293]. Therefore, it is an attempt to use literary criticism to alter the context of reading, so that the new generation would see in his work a reflection of their own ideals. Early modernist symbolism must have been close to him in a certain way, judging from an excerpt of his lecture on naturalism, in which there is a digression on the representatives of young poetry, mainly French. He sees in their work clear signals of an anti-positivist breakthrough, although he evaluates skeptically the chances of this young literature to overcome the crisis, "because two things are necessary to do this: great ideas and great talent, and they have neither great ideas nor great talent" ["O naturalizmie w powieści", D XLV 130].

An impatient commentator on such judgments by the writer usually labels them with the general opinion about the opportunism or superficiality of his statements on art, while drawing support from the clear caesuras in Sienkiewicz's biography that confirm the unambiguous evolution of his views towards conservatism. So, too, were they read by his contemporaries and former comrades in positivist battles.[21] Unfortunately, this approach not only fails to explain sufficiently Sienkiewicz's views, but it also exposes a chronological failure to capture the transformations they underwent.[22] Indeed, in asking who the author Sienkiewicz is, we are unable

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21 Chmielowski's concise statement pinpoints the moment the perspective changed: "[Sienkiewicz] returned from America almost a radical, and in the course of a year's stay in Warsaw, he became increasingly inclined to the conservatives, until he finally became totally aligned with them" (P. Chmielowski, *Zarys najnowszej literatury polskiej*, Kraków–Petersburg 1898, p. 166).

22 This is even more readily described as the effect of the maturing words of one of the protagonists of "Hania". A tutor of young candidates to the Szkoła Główna convinces them that "men are at their most capable between the ages of eighteen and twenty-three, because later they slowly become idiots, that is to say, conservatives." [Hania, D IV 47].

to give a satisfactory answer if we formulate it in a language which is only capable of describing Musagetes or Litwos, and thus a journalist belonging to a press with a distinct ideological profile.

Jasienkiewicz is a signature of literature, thus a specific species of language—complex, ambiguous, perverse—and, above all, one that worships the art of storytelling as a game of language within language. Such a statement is the polar opposite of ideological speech that operates necessarily with forms that are conventional, simple, and vulgarly obvious, even if it is the simplicity of wicked intentions. For the shaky and divided ideological personality that was Sienkiewicz's, the transition from journalism to novel widened the field of utterances and made possible an emancipation from and figuration of the capricious excess of his own emotions and inconsistent beliefs, often contradictory of each other.

2. Dichotomy

In May of 1901, Sienkiewicz was returning from Italy with his seventeen-year-old daughter, Jadwiga, In the compartment in which Jadwiga was to sleep "a woman was traveling—tall, slim, young, with a very dark complexion and southern eyes, obviously a singer or an actress."[23] Sienkiewicz protested loudly insisting his daughter could not travel with a woman "who probably has castanets in her case."[24] In the end, it was Chłędowski who traveled in the compartment with the "Spanish dancer," who was Jadwiga's unwanted traveling companion.

This scene recorded by the diarist says much about the moral standards that stratified society at the end of the nineteenth and beginning of the twentieth century. What is more interesting, however, is the comparison of Sienkiewicz's emotional reaction in statements concerning actresses that we know of from his feuilleton pieces and novels. Above all else, this refers to his numerous, enthusiastic opinions regarding Helena Modrzejewska, to whom he devotes, with the exception of the famine in Silesia, the most space in his feuilletons in the 1879–1880 period.[25] In contrast to the passenger mentioned, Modrzejewska is excluded from the aura of ill repute that weighed upon the profession of actress, and doubly so since Sienkiewicz even forgave her the role of Marguerite in *The Lady of the Camellias*

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23 K. Chłędowski, *Pamiętniki*, v. 1–2, Wrocław 1951, v. 2, p. 373.

24 Ibid.

25 [Wb I 3, 7, 12, 16, 36, 48, 154, 195, 206, 219, 273]; [Wb II 21]; [MLA 17, 44]. As a reviewer for *Gazeta Polska* and *Niwa*, he was quite familiar with the theatrical repertory and its community in Warsaw (see: Żabski, *Poglądy estetyczno-literackie Henryk Sienkiewicza*, Wrocław 1979, p. 17–19).

by Alexandre Dumas *fils*,[26] whose work he warned Poles about with the fervor of a prophet:

> I know of no works that could more readily ruin general taste more, especially where they meet with uneducated and simple minds, and it is easy to delude oneself trailing a gleaming robe of paradoxes, with seemingly noble exaltations and deeds, pseudo-self-sacrifice and pseudo-exculpation of the individual in the name of a deficient social order [Cho I 173].

Somewhat disoriented, we reach for the love "skeleton key" in the form of feelings for Modrzejewska that opens the door to the unknown motivation behind the dual morality of the author of these two opposing utterances. The youthful fascination with Modrzejewska and the shared American adventure, about which we still know so little,[27] apparently suffice to explain the exceptional position of the actress in the face of the widespread low moral estimation of representatives of this profession. It turns out, however, that in no less glowing terms Litwos writes about another great actress, Maria Deryng, who replaces Helena Modrzejewska after her departure for America. The description of Derynżanki's acting is full of metaphoric idealization:

> Where is that blue strength from that peppers the wings to the arms, as powerful as a deity, because it is as creative as a deity? Does it really fly as a blue flame from the clouds? – There is not space enough to discuss it here; suffice it to say the artist in question has great power [Cho II 205].

The split apparent in Sienkiewicz's opinions of actresses is evidenced either by the cynical discourse he employs in his feuilleton articles, or a more complex position symptomized by the cleavage apparent in many of his utterances. Let us not be fooled by their frivolous subject. Sienkiewicz's discourse is remarkably consistent in its multiplication of similar inconsistencies regardless of the topic. Further, the *peripeteia* in the author's statements on actors is an introduction to a much more complex controversy apparent in his prose. A direct reflection of the theatrical feuilletons and the Spanish dancer episode is seen in two short stories: "Ta trzecia" [The Third](1888) and "Na jasnym brzegu" [On the Bright Shore] (1896). The first is in part a concealed tribute to Modrzejewska. The protagonist, Ewa Adami, is perfect, despite living in filth, as the narrator does not leave the reader any illusions with regard to the specifics of the environment.

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26 "After the performance of *La Dame aux camélias* in America, when all the newspapers were full of praise of and very excited for Modrzejewska, clippings of reviews were sent by local editors to Dumas, who wrote a thank-you letter to Modrzejewska. Through Dumas, news of this probably reached Sarah Bernhardt, which is probably why she wanted to see her future rival in England and America" [Wb I 16].

27 Happily, this is changing thanks to the research of J. Krzyżanowski (see, among others: "Na kalifornijskim szlaku Sienkiewicza," *Pamiętnik Literacki* 2003, 3).

> Theater corrupts the soul, especially the female soul. […] Continuous contact with people as corrupted as actors awakens the senses in them. There is no angora cat so white that it would not become filthy under similar conditions. Only a great talent can be victorious, one that is cleansed in the fire of art, or one of a nature so esthetic that the evil cannot seep into it just as water cannot penetrate the swan's feathers. Ewa Adami's nature is one of such *imperméables*. ["Ta Trzecia," D VI 71].[28]

The narrator's judgment indicates that Sienkiewicz's petty-bourgeois prejudices against actresses that Chłędowski witnessed are certainly authentic. Does this mean that in other instances they are hypocritical? In the second story mentioned, the narrator describes females passengers aboard a train to Monte Carlo. The description exposes the artificiality of the women traveling on this train, which is alarmingly similar to that of the actress stigmatized earlier.

> Women crowded the windows, from which wafted the scents of iris and heliotrope. The sun illuminated the artificial flowers on their hats, the velvet, the lace, the false or genuine jewels hanging from their ears, the jets glittering like armor on projecting bosoms increased in size with rubber, the blackened brows, the faces covered in powder or rouge and excited with the hope of fun and games. The most practiced eye could not distinguish between the *demi-monde* masquerading as women of society or women of society masquerading as the *demi-monde* ["Na jasnym brzegu," D VI 190–191].

The cool overview of the narrator leads to skeptical conclusions on the lack of transparency of human beings, who, prepared for the quotidian spectacle, mask themselves so effectively. In the end, the earlier alternative—actress—non-actress—is meaningless. Continuing on this path, we also reject the alternative: the honesty—hypocrisy of the author's views. Conscious of the risk of contradiction, we propose the thesis that both positions appear to be authentic and represent two permanent types of discourse in the work and life of Sienkiewicz: emotional conservatism[29] and intellectual liberalism.

Balancing his literary discourse between these two tones is constant, as is confirmed in the writer's manipulation of his own ideological biography, which was initially modeled on liberal-democracy. In the feuilleton from the cycle *Chwila obecna* (Present Moment) published in *Gazeta Polska* [The Polish Newspaper] (No. 145 of 1875), he boasts about the reactions to his various journalistic campaigns. And thus, regarding his opinions on horse racing he writes "I was called a democrat, and that would be a democrat in bad faith who once and for ever barred me access to aristocratic teas with recitations, with sardines and sandwiches." For drawing attention to the laziness of rural parish priests who declined to support

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28 There is more about this figure in the chapter "Eros in Mourning."

29 Or, as Wyka calls this species of Sienkiewicz's discourse, "vital impetuous conservatism" (K. Wyka, "Sprawa Sienkiewicza," in: *Trylogia Henryka Sienkiewicza*, op. cit., p. 446).

the silk industry “they declared me an atheist.” Sienkiewicz derisively recalls his miserable polemicists, parodies their ignorance, summoning aggressive voices against himself that complain that “heresy . . . and other wickednesses multiply increasingly in our thus far devout society, that they turn people into atheists . . . and positivists, which, all together, lead through Freemasonry and sericulture straight to hell.” He was hit at from the other side, too, for his conflict with the Evangelical Community: “I was called an *Ultramontane* ” [Cho II 33–4].

This ironic self-praise was refuted in 1892 when he took on the editorial helm of the conservative daily *Słowo*; this was, in the opinion of many progressive writers and journalists of the epoch, tantamount to ideological treason.[30] Ultimately, the author of *Quo vadis* himself dispels doubt with his famous comment about only temporarily “shooting the positivist sunflower” that had been truly awful to him. Despite encountering much testimony regarding his former liberal-democratic

30 “In the opinion of the progressive *Słowo*, the organ of ‘young conservatism,’ it soon began to appear as a ‘subsidiary of Time,’ while its ideology was the reverse of Western European backwardness” (J. Krzyżanowski, *Henryk Sienkiewicz. Kalendarz życia i twórczości*, op. cit., p. 98). Piotr Chmielowski, in *Zarys najnowszej literatury polskiej* (Kraków–Petersburg 1898), writes about “modern conservatives” that they are “mostly yesterday’s fugitives from beneath the flag of progressivism, and, like regular neophytes, outdo each other in manifesting outside their new faith to reassure themselves and others that they have, indeed, broken with the former” (p. 163). Despite his reluctance concerning “fugitives,” the author of *Zarys* notes reliably that Sienkiewicz looked after the liberal wing of the journal and not until he was “busy writing novels and dropped the reins of leadership did conservatism at *Niwa* dominate in the number of people running the daily newspaper” (p. 167). Tadeusz Bujnicki, following Stawar, offers intriguing motivation for the move to *Słowo* writing that the decision “to distance himself from the Positivists was most influenced by their increasing agreeableness” (*Sienkiewicz i historia. Studia*, Warszawa 1981, p. 102). This interpretation further complicates reading the situation of the views of the author and the ideology of the novels. Adam Grzymała-Siedlecki uses the same argument regarding excessive agreeableness (but with regard to the conservatives involved with *Słowo*) to explain Sienkiewicz’s break with the conservatives (A. Grzymała-Siedlecki, “Autor Trylogii jako pan Sienkiewicz”, in: *Niepospolici ludzie in dniu swoim powszednim*, Kraków 1974, p. 19). The most compelling diagnosis is that of Ludwik Krzywicki, who credits Dionizy Henkiel with having played a significant role in the “transfer” of Sienkiewicza, because he admitted to having convinced the author to take the position of editor. “It was not because he liked *Słowo*, quite to the contrary, he did not trust it, even hated it, thinking that it was a nest of acceptance and loyalism. In fact, Henkiel, like his close friends, remained an ideologue, of largely relaxed, but still, be it as it may, slogans from 1863. However, he believed that Sienkiewicz required another framework in which to develop fully his talent, that he needed to brush up against spheres in which the forefathers had made Polish history, within the reach of readers who under the spell of his pen would make his name, and, above all else, guarantee him tolerable material circumstances” (L. Krzywicki, *Wspomnienia*, Warszawa 1959, v. III, p. 168–169).

views, Sienkiewicz would continue to claim they were shameful sins of his youth. The seemingly clear evolution of his ideology does not inspire trust. In accepting the biography constructed by the writer, we lose sight of the judgments and behavior that are excluded from poetics of the "ideological turn." Thus, I propose an approach from a different ground that sharpens the contradictions and does not seek, at all costs, a way through the inconsistencies of the author's utterances. Ideological dichotomy and ambiguous views outside of the literary world appear to be a constant in Sienkiewicz's discourse as well as in other more important questions such as his convoluted attitude to religion.

The lack of religious transparency in the author's discourse stems from the experiences of his generation, which, as Jolanta Sztachelska writes, stood "between two extremes: faith and the religiousness of the homes they were raised in and the culture they grew up in, and which came together in everything they perceived as Polish, and the attractiveness of the modern, positivist world view."[31] Beginning with Sienkiewicz's earliest texts—his essays on the poetry of Miaskowski and Sęp Szarzyński—the catalog of motifs the writer used until his last novel are already apparent. Sztachelska maintains that the most important of these is pagan-Christian Baroque eclecticism that appears so distinctly in the *Trylogia* and in the thinking of the writer himself.

Precisely this confusion of atheist with fideist attitudes, as presented by his position, requires a close inspection. The faith of the protagonists of the early novels about peasants and Americans is neither deep nor reflexive. Its unbearable consistency is the passivity with which the protagonists accept their fates. Here faith is divorced from reality; it does not imbue it with sense, nor does it confer wisdom upon people. It does, however, multiply the picture of the helplessness and isolation of characters deceived by other people and by their own condition. This changes radically in the *Trylogia*, in which we observe an armed and fighting religiosity.

The lack of a clear role for religion in the positivist social project is seen in the reluctance of the author toward a historiography based on secular ideas of religion, especially the Romantic messianism he wrote about with distaste: "it fell into mysticism, it was disposed to sick feelings and imaginings, and deified everything; it rejected all responsibility, but closed its eyes to the need to take account of itself and be reborn from its guilt" [*Z Paryża* D XLIV 148]. Undoubtedly, like many Positivists, Sienkiewicz acknowledged the usefulness of religion in its function of creating social order,[32] which does not infer that

31 J. Sztachelska, *Czar i zaklęcie Sienkiewicza*, Białystok 2003, p. 205.

32 But he makes the reservation to not forget about his constant anti-clerical stance. Here is an example of a warning he shared with Stanisław Witkiewicz "When you go to get married in Kraków, prepare your birth certificate and all your other papers. You must get

religion in his work serves only to reinforce the cohesion of the Polish national community. The thought of discarding the religious prosthesis from descriptions of reality terrified Sienkiewicz even as a twenty-year-old as a future without faith appeared to be mad, murky, and without a future, as he wrote in a letter to his friend Konrad Dobrski, describing himself as being of a nature that "could not do without faith" [12 December 1865, Li I/1, 294].[33] It already appears that the subject of such statements is crystallizing and permits capturing the core of the author's views, but ten years later, in the democratic and liberal atmosphere of America, he again embraces positivist skepticism strengthened by an even libertine freedom of expression.

> My skepticism reached such lengths that good and bad appeared to me to be just humbug, and the idea of them as two opposites just a symptom of human stupidity. The universe knows just one type of order—blind logic. This is true philosophical pessimism, which, however, is insufficient as a principle of life. Therefore, I have nothing to cling to—no point of departure, no life axis. […] If I believed in God, I would talk to Him in this solitude of mine, just as Strenclówna did with her fucking brother, but having no such consolation, I can only write letters. [to Julian Horain, circa August 1, 1876, Li I/2, 365]

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permission from the local consistory. I went through all of this: showering gold and punching in faces. Now I mock the clergy, and I wish that a filthy miasma would come take their lungs. Anyway, what do I care what they do. Ah, the scoundrels!" (Listy Sienkiewicza do Stanisława Witkiewicza z lat 1880–1882, op. cit., p. 91). But at the same time, this anti-clerical liberal thundered at Konopnicka for the dark picture of the Church in Fragmenty dramatyczne: Z przeszłości (Hypatia. Vesalius. Galileusz): "There is in it an evident liberal, modern tendency, whereby the author deliberately chooses such temata, in which the Church plays the part of Ahriman trying to put out the light of Ohrmazd. These temata would be very suitable to the taste of, for example, the National Liberals in the Prussian Assembly, and also of liberals from other parts. As far as we go, we recognize that they are highly inappropriate, especially in Orzeszkowa's publishing house" [Wb II 144]. A positive world view, however, did not permit him to accept the irrationality of faith, because – as Aneta Mazur rightly observes – "he desires a metaphysics that rationalizes belief and appeals to the arguments of the intellect" (A. Mazur, Transcendencja realistów. Motywy metafizyczne in polskiej i niemieckiej prozie II połowy XIX wieku, Opole 2001, p. 294).

33 A religious position understood as cultural instinct appears, for example, in this excerpt from *Legiony*: "Kajetan and Marek did not belong among people of deep belief, however both kneeled and began to whisper: 'Eternal rest'" [L 53]. Groński behaves in the same way, of whom Jolanta Sztachelska writes, that once "he looked at praying women, as if he was seeing some idols from another world," and after a moment the narrator "presents the skeptical soul of his character, thinking about religion and the limits of human cognition" (J. Sztachelska, *Czar i zaklęcie*, op. cit., p. 265. See also: the entire, exceptionally instructive, chapter of this book, entitled "Sienkiewicz – pogański i chrześcijański").

Of all Sienkiewicz's American correspondence that is extant, his letters to Horain are absolutely exceptional in their freedom of expression. Where elsewhere he is so aloof and controlling of his "private" texts, here he does not hesitate to be malicious, aggressive, somewhat conceited, and provocative. "Of course, I am as lonely as can be. 'Even a sword has its sheath, and I am always alone' as Deotyma says. Indeed, I do not even have my own vagina-sheath" [9 August 1876, Li I/2, 369], he complains comically about the lonely life of a young man, while giving us the last glimpses of his private life, which, in just a few year's time, will become an institution.

> Because I stopped to think, that a man has sixteen hundred rounds, that therefore I still have five hundred (a supposition proving modesty), that those five hundred, which nature herself seemed to allocate to Matylda, are lying useless growing old fifteen miles from Matylda or, even worse, are being fired in sleep at Max Neblung's bed sheet. [Li I/2, 365–366]

> The farm is running reasonably well, we have a library, so there is something to read, and, in the end, we are of good humor, so there is the will to live. Only, Paprocki and I sometimes gorge ourselves (as the letter says) like fattened horses. It is my intention to found a great society of onanists, I fall asleep at night uneasily with the fear that Paprocki might roar up and throw himself on me. [Li I/2, 381].

We look for the continuation of this style in Sienkiewicz's correspondence or work in vain. The American period is exceptional, and glimpses of the this Rabelaisian tone fall victim to prudish editors. This happened in the example of the letter to Lubowski of 18 June 1897, the original of which was burned; we have just the stripped down version by Miłaszewski (indicated by ellipses), who, according to Maria Bokszczanin, censored the original letter.

> How those ladies neck with Henryk Sienkiewicz, you cannot imagine—it is a pity it is the son, and not the father! After all, who knows, because maybe the son cannot yet... and the father...who knows! I live in such purity that I have already forgotten, what it is all about..." [Li III/1, 533].[34]

In spite of what many scholars suggest is a fundamental evolution in Sienkiewicz's writing and his beliefs (at the beginning of the 1880s), we can readily find statements that show a relative constancy, but also an indecisiveness, a dichotomy, in his world view. Vexingly inconsistent utterances, often contradicting each other, mean that we see that it is not just that he does not have, but that he does not want to have, unambiguous views. He practiced a discourse of contradictions, unaware,

34 These and other examples of a libertine-like joking on Sienkiewicz's part are discussed by Jerzy Kryżanowski, who notes that "this type of humor did not find any reflection in the writing" (J. Krzyżanowski, *O „kawalerskich dowcipach" Sienkiewicza*, in: *W rocznicę Jasnogórski Tryumfu 1655. Recepcja twórczości Sienkiewicza*, ed. L. Ludorowski, H. Ludorowska, Z. Mokranowska, Lublin 2005, Part II, p. 205).

without concern for the consistency of his ideological identity, as if he believed that consistency in this matter does not apply to the artist. He chose a strategy of ducking and diving, not wanting to make an ideological accession, or to allow access to himself or his writing within social or political ideology.

Clearly, from the beginning of the 1880s, he starts to believe that a writer not only does not need to have, but even should not have, any opinions other than those regarding politics of the language;[35] although in 1878, he still writes like an engaged writer who sees the principle of creating in the consistency of ideas and poetics. He does not hesitate to engage in serious conflict with Edward Leo (the editor of *Gazeta Polska*), because of the rejection of a draft of "Znad morza" (From on the Sea), as "radically anti-religious and ultra atheistic, etc." [letter to Erazm Pilz from 18 September 1878, Kor II 38]. The furious Sienkiewicz in a letter, from 24 September 1878, points out to Edward Leo that he unhesitatingly printed the ultra-right wing *Listy z Galicji* (Letters from Galicia) by Stanisław Koźmian.

> I have not came upon a more perfect quintessence of clericalism, nepotism, Stańczyk-like adoration of the various "distinguished counts" etc. in a long time. [...] But evidently what is permitted to the unsigned Koźmian, would not be allowed even to the Litwos that signs his name. [Li II/1,478]

The offended author decides to end his cooperation with the paper; this lasts more or less one year. An improvement in relations is marked by a proposal to publish his short story "Przez stepy" (Through the Steppes) (1879).

With regard to this dispute, one should consider the writer's decision to take the job as editor of *Słowo*, which is completely incompatible with the content of the letter from two years earlier. Knowing how his decision would be received, Sienkiewicz tries to balance its effects, profiling the paper so that it should not seem too much to the "right." This is shown in a letter to Stanisław Smolka, to whom he bluntly makes it clear that the paper will definitely not be a Warsaw version of Kraków's *Czas*.

> I will not write dissertations on my beliefs and principles to you, sir; however I am obliged to note that maybe not everything that comes from my pen, and that will appear in *Słowo*, could find space in *Czas*. [...] I write this because I hear of Kraków's dissatisfaction with the direction that *Słowo* is taking. Ergo, I am obliged to warn you that this direction, in the future, will not be colored in a tone that would be to

35 Here are three of his statements on politics from a period of over thirty years. "The aim of high art should, above all, be beauty, and not, however, above all service in some party" [Wb II 145]. "Applied politics is alien to me, and I would like it, as it it does not suit my inborn abilities, to stay alien to me always" [to Antoni Osuchowski, 28 December 1906, Li III/2, 358]. "I don't want to be anybody's leader, and all the more not to have a leader over me. If I did something for society, I would do on my own initiative, and I believe that all creativity must be individual" [to Wincenty Lutosławski, 27 February 1915, L III/1 574].

> Kraków's liking. There are different relations here, and we, the locals, who know them best, must be careful not to create enemy camps; we rather come together in the name of reasonable progress and the love for our country that unites us all. [18 January 1882, Kor II 130].

If the "beliefs and principles" stay unrevealed, and those known show a lack of unanimity, full of contradictions, does this mean that the one idea that merges the unsettled Sienkiewicz is "love of his country"? It would be banal and offensive to the writer to close the issue that has been complicated here for quite a long time.[36] Little more than a year earlier (3 December 1880), he writes these puzzling words to Stanisław Witkiewicz:

> Any fitting of people and life to a doctrine does not disappoint exclusively those who do this, but it does harm to everyone. It is also the fault of those, ready to doubt everything but their doctrine, because it is their doctrine. Basically, this is great selfishness, stretched to fanaticism. As a fanatical belief, it gives strength, and means that sometimes the weaker-headed impress those of an intelligence incomparably higher, and dominate them to the detriment of all.[37]

Is the writer's declared distance toward any ideology honest, or is it just a dodge to get round the fervently ideological friend? The last sentence deserves special attention; there the author touches on a paradoxical situation, in which an outstanding and critical mind is enslaved by a simple, authoritarian thought, the attractive power of which results from the promise of a transformation of reality.[38]

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36 But neither can this be wholly excluded, since often in Sienkiewicz's prose the idea of "national unity" occurs somehow by itself, or also, which indicates the writer's irony, through the effects of alcohol, which generates a drunken sentimentality in the combatants in, for example, "Toast" (The Toast), in which Sienkiewicz splendidly presents an "anatomy" of a district feud, which after a battle and alcohol give way before Zagłoba's toast:

> – *Komilitoni* mine, children *eiusdem matris*! just two words I'll say, but he's a fool who doesn't repeat after me: Let us love one another!
>
> – Let us love one another! – all mouths repeated. ["Toast," D V 50]

37 *Listy Sienkiewicza do Stanisława Witkiewicza z lat 1880–1882*, *op. cit.*, p. 42. The correspondence with Witkiewicz, invaluable for the scholar, was earlier made partly available by Edward Kiernicki ("Listy Henryka Sienkiewicza do Stanisława Witkiewicza,1880–1882," *Życie Literackie*, 1962, nr 52). The letters to Witkiewicz have long intrigued scholars, but despite that substantial conclusions have not been drawn from them. Krzyżanowski does not quote the most powerful passages, and tadeusz Zabski sees in their contents mainly an expression of Sienkiewicz's dislike of his work as a journalist (see Żabski, *Poglądy estetyczno-literackie Henryka Sienkiewicza*, Wrocław 1979, pp. 25–26).

38 It is not my intention to make of Sienkiewicz a precursor of Czesław Miłosz as the author of *Zniewolniony umysł* (The Captive Mind) or of Mark Lilli (*Lekkomyślny umysł. Intelektualiści w polityce*, trans. J. Margański, Warszawa 2006). He never developed his intuition, but at the same time his whole public existence, first after the success of the

Something more than the idea of the autonomy of the arts stands behind this, something simpler—the fear of politics successfully planted in this generation by the governments of Hurko and Apuchtin.[39]

Sienkiewicz was not a political writer, and apart from one novel (*Wiry*) and very few articles (the most important are "Zjednoczenie narodowe" (National Unity) and "List otwarty do Wilhelma II" (An Open Letter to Wilhelm II)), did not express his political views clearly. However disputes about Sienkiewicz have almost always contained a prominent political element, as if his works were a perfect instrument for polarizing opinions, thanks to the symbolic language of literature that entered the general consciousness of Polish readers. This is proven especially by three important public discussions regarding the "Sienkiewicz case."[40] The first debate (a positivist one) started during the publication of

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Trylogia, and then after winning the Nobel Prize, was based on the principle of "esthetics before politics," or even "esthetics instead of politics."

39 A weariness with following such turns means that the commentator longs for the full-stop, in order at last to pin up the writer's discourse with spins with contradictions. And so he/she chooses "fear" as a powerful motivation for a turning away from liberal-democratic views, and mercenary considerations as a way of explaining the turn toward conservatism. And then, when we put pressure on it, the writer's discourse slips away again. This is a passage from a letter to Karol Potański, in which Sienkiewicz explains to his friend his disinclination to live in Kraków.

As for me, in Krakow I'll find a couple of people whom I can live with. But the city does not really smile on me because of its stifling, lordly-clerical atmosphere. – It is bad if in a society there is more Church than Christ, and more observance than Christianity, and in Kraków that's how it is, and such a mark has been stamped into the thoughts, the culture, the art, in a word, the whole of life. Added to that, the "democracy" there is a rough-hewn rabble, born under a dark star, so I come to the conclusion that an center like that is not over alluring, especially for a permanent stay" [to Karol Potański, 9 April 1898, Li III/3, 113].

The writer's "conservatism" is even more clearly complicated by his commentary on the anonymous piece of writing sent from Kraków, in which some "Wiarus" reproaches him that, since he was at the celebrations for Konopnicka's anniversary, he belongs to the *stańczycy* [jesters].

It seems to this idiot that beyond the Galician parish, the whole world must be divided into *Stańczycy* and their foes. There are no other categories. They get there from little work, and a lot of politics. [to Karol Potkański, 30 October 1902, Li III/3 191]

Thus we must acknowledge that Sienkiewicz says at the same time "yes" and "no," as, for example, in this outline of his positions – pessimistic and optimistic. "If pessimism is a puddle, in which egoism and idleness lounge, then optimism is often like a stupid child, from whom a stupid man may also grow" (H. Sienkiewicz, *Zjednoczenie narodowe*, in *Dwie łąki*, Kraków 1908, p. 211). One would like to cry out like Shakespeare's Cleopatra:

I do not like "But yet," it does allay
The good precedence. . . . (*Anthony and Cleopatra*, Act I, Scene 5)

40 Tadeusz Bujnicki rightly observes that „the ideologization of Sienkiewicz is a long-term process, and to a substantial degree – as it were – quite dissociated from his work" (see:

Ogniem i mieczem, and the tone and the level of the arguments are indicated by the voices of Kaczkowski, Świętochowski, and Prus. The second (a "modernist" one) was particularly aggressive, but also salient, especially thanks to Stanisław Brzozowski's well-publicized texts. The third, relatively speaking the least known, was recently discussed and enriched by an anthology of critical pieces edited by Halina Kosętka.[41] Olgierd Górka's articles were a flash-point in this controversy, first printed in *Pion*, and later published in "*Ogniem i mieczem" a rzeczywistość historyczna* (1934).[42]

All three great debates prove that Sienkiewicz is a political writer, because of the disputes he inspires. When it comes to his own political texts, the most important is the exhortation to unite warring parties in the name of joint efforts to obtain autonomy for the Polish Kingdom. This text may be found under several different titles: "Hej, ramię do ramienia" (Ho! Shoulder to Shoulder) (*Czas*, 10 November 1906), "Obecna chwila polityczna" (The Present Political Moment) (*Dziennik Poznański*, 10 November 1906), and "Zjednoczenie narodowe" (National Unity) (in the collection *Dwie łąki*, Warsaw 1908). There he defends a noble (in his opinion) variation of the nationalistic discourse that is unjustly neglected.

> Polish nationalism never fattened itself with foreign blood and tears, never whipped children in school, never built monuments to torturers. It arose from the pain of the greatest tragedy in history. It spilled blood on its own land and on every other battlefield where the stakes were freedom. It erupted and seethed in captivity, as a revolt towards freedom. On its flags it wrote the most sublime words of love, tolerance, liberation, education, progress, and in the name of these words, along with the entire fatherland,

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Bujnicki, "Plemienna siła" Sienkiewicza," in: Bujnicki, *Pozytywista Sienkiewicz. Linie rozwojowe pisarstwa autora Rodziny Połanieckich*, Kraków 2007, p. 25).

41 *W obronie „Ogniem i mieczem". Polemiki z Olgierdem Górką,* selected, introduced, and edited. H. Kosętka, Kraków 2006. Sienkiewicz's *par ricochet* politics are frequently underlined by Andrzej Stawar in his study *Pisarstwo Henryka Sienkiewicza*, Warszawa 1960. He points to the presence of political reading of the *Trylogia* even in the first reviews of the work (e.g. Ibid., pp. 81-82). Górka's work is the last serious voice of a revisionist in disputes concerning he historicity of the world of the *Trylogia*. Andrzej Mencwel is write to insist that from today's perspective "the entire century of disputes about so-called historical truth in Sienkiewicz is not important" (A. Mencwel, "Antropologia Sienkiewicza," in: *Po co Sienkiewicz?*, op. cit., p. 272).

42 Earlier Stefan M. Kuczyński had carefully refused to engage in controversy with Górka in his article "Sienkiewicz a współczesna historiografia polska," in: *Henryk Sienkiewicz – twórczość i recepcja światowa*, op. cit. The last quarrel about Sienkiewicz, from 2007, that arose around the proposals of the then Minister for Education, Roman Giertych, relating to changes in the school curriculum, does not match the three earlier earlier ones, either in scope or in level of arguments; that is why we do not see this debate as worthy of being placed next to those earlier ones.

> went through such suffering that, since Christianity, no other warriors for any other idea have had to go through. Whoever understands this differently understands this shallowly and poorly, whoever serves it differently, is lost.[43]

Two contexts are crucial for the understanding of the negative argumentation that is used in the excerpt above. The first is Prussian nationalism and Germanization in that partition. Sienkiewicz thought this to be more dangerous than Russification, not to mention the Austrian partition, of which he was almost dismissive. The attempt to recognize nationalism as a synonym of patriotism was unsuccessful, and in his answer Erazm Piltz in *Słowo* accused him of abandoning his (so far) neutral political attitude, and of clear support of Polish nationalism, which he tries to justify as patriotic duty. Piltz hits a delicate spot, when he writes with disapproval of Sienkiewicz as an artist who "comes down from on high, and mixes with the party crowd" [Li III/1, 160]. This is the second time (an earlier example is in the above-mentioned letter to Konstanty Górska) when the stricken Sienkiewicz wanted to use the press to project a reading of an appeal according to his own intentions. Therefore, he tried to influence Bolesław Koskowski (the editor of *Goniec Poranny i Wieczorny*) to publish his anonymous answer as the paper's position on the matter. In a letter from 18 November 1906, he gives the editor a list of five polemical arguments that the editor could use as answers to Piltz. Therefore, he writes the letters in the third person.

> Sienkiewicz, when calling for unity and agreement of all political fractions, does not mean just *Narodowa Demokracja* (National Democracy)—if, however, it concerned just that, it would be unworthy of a serous and honest journal (and it would not agree to do so) to compare it with *hakatyzm* or the *Czarna Sotnia* (the Black Hundreds), for if he is not quite stupid, he cannot be doing this in good faith, and so consciously and through cunning, he speaks with the street voice of the dark mob led astray by socialists. [Li III/1, 162].

Sienkiewicz acting out reading Sienkiewicz is passionate and impulsive; thanks to this, he reveals a second context that is important for capturing his political sympathies. Fresh experiences and reflections on the events of the 1905 Revolution (which turned him into a firm anti-socialist) are in the background of the appeal and the letter. In the correspondence from that period, Sienkiewicz writes about Polish socialists, using such expressions as "bandits" or "plague," and he accuses them of leading the country "to poverty and ruin" [to Teodor Jankowski, January 1906, L III/1, 37]. "Finally his discourse is sharp and clear!" – the reader wants to shout out loud, bored of trying to trace the writer's impossible world view. Unsuccessfully, for when we try to think of the consistency of his anti-socialism, for example, with regard to the political system of the "autonomous" regime that

43 H. Sienkiewicz, "Zjednoczenie narodowe," in *Dwie łąki*, Kraków 1908, pp. 215–216.

Sienkiewicz dreams of, we again fall into an impasse of indecision. The conflict between the political parties of the Kingdom irritates him, but this does not mean that he longs for some monolithic party; on the contrary, he claims that would be a state "that would be possible only when confronted with general thoughtlessness. No one will make effort to lead one shepherd and one sheepfold."[44] Therefore, what is the socialists' place in this pluralism of parties, in the context of the

44 Ibid, p. 205. One must understand just how complicated it was for a Pole of that time to make any political statement. This is why Sienkiewicz's meandering political discourse does not only conceal political opportunism, but also knowledge and life experience in an enslaved society which sometimes bears fruit in the form of brilliant intuitions as those written in *Wiry* criticizing the project of the socialist state:

> I would like to say that your socialist state, if you ever establish it, will be the subjugation of human personalities to social devices akin to packing men into the cogs and wheels of the universal mechanism, with such control and such slavery that, in comparison, the Prussian state of today will seem like a temple of freedom. And, of course, the response will begin immediate. The press, literature, poetry, art will, in the name of the individual and his freedom, wage unrelenting war with you, and do you know who will be carrying the banners of the opposition? Youth! [W 91].

He repeated these beliefs in stronger language in a letter to Charles Potkański.

> Indeed, that savage, still so raw, calls for things and demands reforms that cannot be found in Switzerland, or the United States, or France, or anywhere. And would not life be so nice if all of this was introduced by the criminal gang, the idlers,the dark. And what about us; we are too conservative for them. They already want to console us with the nationalization of land. I do not doubt that, if they come to power, they will console us with the same kind of violence as that of the former government—all in the name of progress" [14 VI 1906, Li III/3, 209–210].

Jan Jakóbczyk calls attention to the fact that fears of the destructive aspect of the revolution were widespread: "The collectivism of worker demonstrations sparked enthusiasm, but also fear of the uncontrollable impulses of the crowds, and, finally the fear of tyranny growing into a destructive, menacing power. . . .This fear grew with each year after 1905." (J. Jakóbczyk, *O tym jak Młoda Polska posiwiała. Proza młodopolska wobec rewolucji 1905 roku*, Katowice 1992, p. 94). See also an explanation of the issue of "socialism" in *Wiry* by Tadeusz Bujnicki ("*Wiry* Sienkiewicza. Rewolucja in oczach dekadenta i pozytywisty," in: *Pozytywista Sienkiewicz,* op. cit., pp. 136–146).

To understand Sienkiewicz's views, one finally has to break with the caricature reception defined by Brzozowski and Nałkowski, according to which Sienkiewicz's ideological "family" appears to be vast. Here is an example in an excerpt of a letter from Flaubert to Turgieniew of 1872, which, thirty years later, could have been written by our author: "I am appalled by the state of society. Yes, such is the case…The stupidity of the public overwhelms me…The bourgeoisie is so bewildered that it has lost all instinct to defend itself; what will succeed it will be worse. I am filled with the sadness that afflicted the Roman patricians of the fourth century: I feel irredeemable barbarism rising from the bowels of the earth." (13 November 1872, *The Letters of Gustave Flaubert, 1857–1880* ed. Francis Steegmuller, Cambridge, Harvard University Press 1982, p.200–201).

earlier insults? The answer is clear, but it only intensifies the experience of a schizophrenic read.

> I must make the reservation that I look at socialism as at a serious evolution, which must give birth to various equally serious social reforms, but I do differentiate socialism from socialists, especially from our socialists, who are politically insane and are a plaything in the hands of Russian Jews and work to the harm of the country, leading it to complete ruin and dissolution—and to the harm of national interests, for which they most likely do not care at all. [to Bronisław Kozakiewicz, 14 August 1905, L III/1, 230]

The contradictions multiply, but juxtaposed they also begin to reveal a consistency that is hidden within them. In the writer's indecisiveness of positions and views we at last see the factor that drives the discourse of turns and escapes. The political Sienkiewicz feels certain only in a world of pure concepts, which, embodied in a social reality that is observed by the writer, become debased and lose their nobility. Andrzej Stawar is correct when he writes that "Sienkiewicz's optimism was always lined with political nihilism."[45] He cannot bear when an idea is made real, he defends it briefly, and then rejects or reduces its value to a "certain world," which is not on the map or in reality. His escapes, not always successful, from politics were a consequence of his departure from the poetics of contemporary realism, which in its tendentious variant was an attempt to make out of literature an instrument of social action. Sienkiewicz rejected the politics of realism for similar reasons as he avoided real politics, and there could only be one direction of escape, because the only discourse that contains within itself a subject that is dispersed over different languages is a literature that is free of doctrinaire obligations. For the multi-layered subject, literature is a chance for escape, for ideological irresponsibility, for speaking for and against at the same time.[46]

3. Just an artist

So let us return – with an awareness provided by the analysis of the varied components of the writer's discourse – to that key moment of seemingly radical change for Sienkiewicz, that is, the departure from the Positivists' camp, taking on the editorship of *Słowo*, and entering the social circle of his wife Maria z Szetkiewiczów. All these are, *inter alia*, ideological events in the writer's life, and as such have been widely interpreted. The series of social gestures, which he

45 A. Stawar, *Pisarstwo Henryka Sienkiewicza*, op. cit., p. 346.

46 Jolanta Sztachelska and Tadeusz Bujnicki, who know the judgments and gestures of the writer well, soften the sharpness of the theory of contradictions in Sienkiewicz's "variety of incarnations."

made, leaves no doubt that a change had occurred in terms of the place hitherto occupied by Sienkiewicz in the system of literary culture of the 1870s. In practice, this resulted in a change of language in both fields, in journalism and in fiction. The hidden content of this metamorphosis is not, however, a change in political views, or even to a minor degree a change in poetics. It is, however, a separation of languages in such a way that journalism appears as extortion, which the writer pays, in order to be able to write literature. There is in this separation something more than the division (discussed at the beginning of this section) of work into literary and journalistic – which journalistic work had been done until recently under the mask of a pseudonym. It is a matter of a growing awareness that journalism and literature do not complement each other, but are moving apart from each other irreversibly. So as long as Sienkiewicz does not give up journalism, he tries to suppress the conflict of languages, and, for a time, to control literature's energy, which it is necessary to block, in order not to affect the homogeneity of the language of ideas. In Sienkiewicz's writer's biography, this state did not last long, only the first few years of the 1880s, and that is why it is so important, because then there comes a crisis in the conflict of languages in favor of writing literature, the only idea and obligation to which Sienkiewicz stayed true. All the rest is façade or superficial utterance, without any greater importance in understanding the writer's identity.

Attempts to reconcile the disorderly discourse of letter-writing and journalism with the author's real views are back-breaking for two reasons: first, because of the unclear status of reference (unexpressed reflections and emotions that are available only as signs); second, because inquiries of this kind assume that the author possessed a, to some degree, coherent system of concepts for the understanding and evaluation of the variety of phenomena about which he wrote. And there was, I believe, no such system. The malicious Świętochowski quotes his conversation with Sienkiewicz , who was late with some text he had commissioned. To Świętochowski's question if by chance the ideological agenda of *Nowiny* does not suit him, Sienkiewicz is said to have replied with relief.

> Thank you – he cried – that you make it easy for me to get out of this difficult plight. That's it. I want and need to sail on the great wave that is conservatism, and you are a small wave that does not lift me up.[47]

So was his joining a conservative environment equally superficial, and even calculatedly mercenary, as his belonging to the Positivists' camp? It was not only not superficial, but was very deep and authentic, except that depth of ideological conviction did not lie behind it, so much as a passion for a woman and the desire to write what he wanted. In order to fulfill these desires, he had to find a stable

47 M. Brykalska, *Aleksander Świętochowski*, Warszawa 1987, vol. 1, p. 246.

source of income and to convince Maria Szetkiewiczówna's parents that he was a serious candidate for their daughter's hand, one that shared the views of his father-in-law and the circles he moved in.

Letters written at the start of the 1880s to Stanisław Witkiewicz confirm this interpretation. The letters are invaluable because they were written with a directness that was unusual for Sienkiewicz, and also in a dazzling style, full of grotesque comic touches. It is there that we find, above all, Sienkiewicz's statement, which demystifies the radical nature of his ideological *volte-face* toward conservatism. Already an editor at *Słowo*, he describes, with blunt cynicism, his attitude to the journal and its intellectual make-up.

> If only they knew, those with whom I'm fighting about *Słowo*, how much I've had my fill of all these things that they think are so great, which they deal with, which they fill their lives with, but I've had it up to there with them, and *Słowo* and *Wiek*, and all that press, which spins around one whole nothing. – And even if it had some import, even if it were important, even if it were to touch on questions of life, God knows that I'm not part of the press. Something else takes up my interest. I go about because I must, because now it's necessary to do something and to put my life on a secure footing. I do how and what I can best, but with a mortal distaste of the soul for the work.[48]

Shocking when compared to the usually moderate tone of his letters, Sienkiewicz's statement here is disorientating, especially when we juxtapose the quoted words with the words from a letter to Górski, written ten years later. The addressee of this controversial letter is unusually important. It is necessary to digress here to make clear why it was to Górski that Sienkiewicz revealed his political indifference.

Very close to Maria Szetkiewiczówna, Witkiewicz became the confidant of Henryk's feelings. Earlier they had been linked by difficult starts to their careers, a fascination with Modrzejewska, disillusion with Positivism, and a growing distaste for conditions in Warsaw. All this led, however, to decidedly different existential and artistic choices. Sienkiewicz went off to America, and subsequently, after marriage and then after his wife's death in 1885, wandered round the hotels and spas of Europe. Witkiewicz, a man in declining health,

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48 *Listy Sienkiewicza do Stanisława Witkiewicza z lat 1880–1882*, op. cit., p. 119 (letter from 12 March 1882). Tadeusz Bujnicki considers this statement credible. "Be it as it may, Sienkiewicz collaborated on creating the journal's program, and nothing indicates that he stood for views radically different from the others" (T. Bujnicki, *Trylogia Sienkiewicza na tle tradycji polskiej powieści historycznej*, Kraków 1973, p. 33). How little the mere belonging, even active belonging, to a journal with a defined ideological message, is demonstrated by the example of Teodor Jeske-Choiński, an original collaborator with *Nowiny*, *Przegląd Tygodniowy*, and *Ateneum*, who subsequently became (publishing in the columns of *Niwa*) one of the most radical young conservatives. And despite that – in Piotr Chmielowski's opinion – "he was just a critic-pessimist" (P. Chmielowski, *Zarys najnowszej literatury polskiej*, op. cit., p. 166).

settled in 1890 in Zakopane. A crisis in their friendship, however, comes around 1882, when Witkiewicz refuses to allow Sienkiewicz to work as one of the editors of *Słowo*. Looking for causes of the rupture between them, it is not possible to separate private from artistic motives, although the latter were from the beginning fundamentally different. It is certain that they were unable to come to an agreement over artistic criticism. Sienkiewicz's judgments of painting, as we know them from reviews and feuilleton pieces, are disappointing. Further, the majority of his literary-critical sketches (with the exception of the carefully prepared lectures on naturalism and on the historical novel) seem superficial and conventional. One can see that these are jobbing texts, most often written out of journalist's duty. In comparison with Witkiewicz, as one of the authors of the conception of the "Wędrowiec" (Wanderer), Sienkiewicz is a dilettante. When we read Sienkiewicz's most important critical sketches, recalling that they appeared in the years 1884-1887, and thus in parallel with successive volumes of the *Trylogia*, we can have no doubt that the differences in views on art between Sienkiewicz and Witkiewicz are fundamental. Published in 1891, in the volume entitled *Sztuka w krytyka u nas* (Our Art and Criticism), Witkiewicz's essays constitute – in the part containing criticism of historical painting – a precursor of Stanisław Brzozowski's attacks, because many of the reproaches directed by him at Matejko were twelve years later aimed at Sienkiewicz.[49]

And yet, despite these differences, the connection endured, although it never attained the level of closeness it had at the end of the 1870s and the beginning of the 1880s. The survival of the relationship was certainly enouraged by Witkiewicz's views on Sienkiewicz's writing. Witkiewicz saw in it – as Brzozowski later did not – an ability to awaken the reader, and not put him/her to sleep, an impulse that could disturb "the mechanism of degradation functioning in enslavement, one that poisons the soul, and violates its internal integrity."[50] This does not alter the fact that they understood completely differently the model of reality that art was supposed to represent.

Sienkiewicz was wearied with the excesses of the representations of reality in the novel; he discovered that more and more he felt the burden of the obligation in positivist realism to subordinate literary narrative to a scientific discourse, or to a commonsense inspection of the contemporary everyday, the understanding of which did not go beyond the *doxa* of the bourgeois intelligentsia. In this he saw a marginalization of literary discourse, an unnecessary self-imposition of limits. The realist novel, which has ambitions to equal scientific discourse, as far as the

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49 At least, the thesis of the writer's servility toward conservative circles. See: S. Witkiewicz, *Sztuka i krytyka u nas*. *Pisma wybrane,* ed. J.Z. Jakubowski, vol. 1, Warszawa 1949, p. 50–51.

50 J. Sztachelska, *Czar i zaklęcie*, op. cit., p. 197.

credibility of representation is concerned, seemed reductionist to Sienkiewicz. The quoted passages from his letters to Stanisław Witkiewicz clearly show that he saw his own fiction as one free from service to any social or political doctrine, but also free from the necessity of verifying literary representation according to the criterion of its agreement with an assumed model of the real world. He avoided in this way obligations toward positivist scientism and the primacy of contemporary subject matter in the novel.

He did this, combining positivist realism with the most ancient property of fiction, which, calling itself "literature," exploits the right to cognitive irresponsibility. On the other hand, informed of this, the receiver does not attempt to falsify cognitive judgments of literature with the aim of establishing the artistic value of the text. From the very beginnings of metaliterary reflection, literature has been conceded the right to this irresponsibility for the status of its own utterances. This, however, has been accompanied by an unease as regards the word's lost influence, the multiple seductive attraction of which is not moderated by the author's self-control or the reader's critical reflection. In the philosophy of art, this problem took on a classic shape thanks to the work of Plato and Aristotle. Plato saw here no room for compromise. The cognitive, and what follows, the social harmfulness of literature was for him beyond doubt; hence, poets were to remain excluded from the philosophers' ideal state. The reason? The poet is just like the painter: "first, inasmuch as his creations have an inferior degree of truth—in this, I say, he is like him; and he is also like him in being concerned with an inferior part of the soul; and therefore we shall be right in refusing to admit him into a well-ordered State, because he awakens and nourishes and strengthens the feelings and impairs the reason."[51]

A less restrictive solution, not based on social exclusion, was proposed by Aristotle. He acknowledged literature's right to improbability, invention, falsehood, and affront to common sense. Thus, the writer, if he wants, may present a horse simultaneously lifting two right legs, or insist that there is such a thing as a hind with horns, on condition, however, that he does this as an "imitator," that is, in keeping with the principles of art.[52] Aristotle, therefore, permits that a literary representation may in certain circumstances have precedence over reality. The redemption of sophistries was to be their "beauty," understood by the continuators of this current of thought about literature in classic or avant-garde form: the most perfect realization of the norms of creation, or creative, original transgression of those norms. But, still, Aristotle, too, subjected art to social exclusion – he questioned its pretentions to truth. Thus, he could make light of Plato's dilemmas,

51 Plato, *The Republic*. trans. Benjamin Jowett, Book X – www.gutenberg.org

52 Aristotle, *The Poetics*, trans. C.H. Butcher, XXV – www.gutenberg.org

because he did not expect art to provide humans with true knowledge. That was what philosophy and science were supposed to do.

From this point, the determinant of literature became its right to irresponsibility: the widespread agreement that the words of a literary utterance are not matched by a real or a cognitively likely designate; it may, but there should be no expectation of this, and, further, the reader who treats the literary utterance thus, is described as naïve, childish, incompetent. He is a “ein Mann vom Lande” (a man from the country) – as Derrida, following Kafka, calls him – and Derrida mocks even the naïve expectation that somewhere there awaits for us a carefully guarded answer to the question: “What is literature?”[53]

The conviction that the independence of literature may be constrained only by esthetic parameters or moral ideas, is recurrent in Sienkiewicz’s statements throughout his career as a writer. This is not a positive project, but rather a fighting for elbow room in the crowded field of discourses, which was dominated by journalism, varieties of fictional realism, and popular literature. In the triangle of symbolic languages, to which Sienkiewicz was certainly bound – the Romantic idiom of the poetic (which was without any rival), modern realism, and French naturalism (and its growing influence in Poland) – he searched for and found his own position.[54] Despite the clear difference in Sienkiewicz’s writing vis-à-vis the prose of Positivism, his poetics are really rather negative ones, that is, they arise in response to one of the forces that are dominant in his contemporary literary field. The defensive nature of this strategy of creation can be called reactive, without our ceasing to admire the escape tricks performed by the writer.

Let us, however, come down to earth – Sienkiewicz is not a writer of ideas, but of narratives of sensuous concreteness. The idea – be it social or esthetic – was not for him a sufficient impulse for the expansion of literary language. Different ideological views or varying conceptions of patriotism are not responsible for the stylistic fireworks in his letters to Witkiewicz. Sienkiewicz’s language reveals there its constant feature, that is, its autotelic nature, the narcissism of the sign, which buds, proliferates, driven not only by a desire for adequacy, but frequently the opposite – by the freedom that the sign independent of the thing can attain.[55]

53 J. Derrida, *Przed prawem*, trans. J. Gutorow, in: *Teorie literatury XX wieku. Antologia*, ed. A. Burzyńska and M.P. Markowski, Kraków 2006, p. 437

54 A symbiosis of Romanticism and realism was, indeed, nothing new in Poland. As Józef Bachórz has shown, “despite differences in esthetic premises, the novel and Roanticism co-existed without conflict in the period before the November Uprising” (J. Bachórz, “Poezja a powieść. Romantyzm a realizm,” in: Bachórz, *Romantyzm a romanse. Studia i szkice o prozie polskiejw pierwszej połowie XIX wieku*, Gdańsk 2005, p. 31).

55 Thus he avails himself contrariwise of Jaques’s line from *as You Like It*: “Nay, I care not for their names; they owe me nothing” (Act II, Scene 5).

The Sienkiewicz's unlucky attempts to try to support Witkiewicz financially (his dislike for such gestures was hysterical and very well known) form a strand in the letters that is of interest to us.[56] Knowing Witkiewicz's sensitivity to any philanthropic gestures made toward him, Sienkiewicz resorts to trickery. He decides to sell to a prosperous acquaintance pictures and sketches that Witkiewicz had once given to him and his wife.He tries to convince his friend that thes chance guests were so impressed by the pictures that they forced Sienkiewicz to sell them. Here is the start of the intrigue:

> Your painting is splendid. Not a pennyworth of politeness. Truth, sincerity, magnificent faces, the girl who is fixing the coat recalls for me a soft caress. I showed it to the Benns today. She complained that you cannot see the face of the wounded figure, but because she turned round to get a better view, I kicked her in the antithesis so hard that she hit the ceiling with the thesis. Her husband got onto the matter, and once he learned what was going on, he gave her what for, after which she agreed that it's good as it is, because otherwise the whole thing would be conventional and would look like a presentation. (Warsaw, 20 September 1881)[57]

At first reading the reader perhaps rubs his/her eyes wondering if this is not by chance a sketch for *Ferdydurke*. Comic mystification feebly masks importunate endeavors to push the pictures on the Benns. The narrative of the letter seems to

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56 Krzyżanowski gives Witkiewicz's irritability as a cause of the rupture ("Sienkiewicz i Witkiewicz (karta z dziejów niezwykłej przyjaźni)," in: Krzyżanowski, *Pokłosie Sienkiewiczowskie*, p. 452). Zdzisław Piasecki, in his analysis of Sienkiewicz's correspondence with Witkiewicz, does not wholly share this view, but he does not deny that there were various causes (Z. Piasecki, "Listy Henryka Sienkiewicza do Stanisława Witkiewicza – ich walory dokumentacyjne i literackie," in: *Studia Sien kiewiczowskie* [vol.. 1]. *Biografia. Twórczość. Recepcja,* ed. L. Ludorowski, H. Ludorowska, Lublin 1998). Jolanta Sztachelska uncovers very complex causes in her chapter "Dandys i oberwaniec" (The Dandy and the Tatterdemalion), which penetratingly discusses the stages and paradoxes of this friendship. Sztachelska points to what, in her opinion, are the two most important reasons for the cooling of relations between Sienkiewicz and Witkiewicz: Witkiewicz's well-known irritability in financial matters, and differing views on art, above all on naturalism. Particularly important was Sienkiewicz's inability to appreciate his friend's painting: "Sienkiewicz favors technically competent, academic painting, which is also intellectually fully worked out; he values Matejko, Siemiradzki, and Brandt, and in his feuilleton articles Krudowski and Czachorski (decidedly secon-rate artists) also stand high" (J. Sztachelska, *Czar i zaklęcie*, op. cit., p. 178). One must agree with Sztachelska here, because although Sienkiewicz said many kind things about Witkiewicz's work in public, in a private letter to Janczewska, from 11 January 1895, he wrote of Witkiewicz that "ultimately, from a creative-artistic point of view he is a mediocrity – with huge resentments. Others can paint better, and he is bitter. A common phenomenon among us Poles" [L II/3, 132].

57 *Listy Sienkiewicza do Stanisława Witkiewicza z lat 1880-1882*, op. cit., p. 88.

praise his own resourcefulness in the field of purse nonsense. This is confirmed by a letter written two weeks later, in which the protagonist changes, but the style stays the same.

> Ludwik Górski, that mighty pagan, saw a photograph of your picture at Wrotnowska's, whom the picture so pleases that she borrowed it from me to photograph it. When he saw your picture, above all he fell to the ground and took to such convulsions in his limbs that he terrified all present, then he recovered – and declared in a now calm voice that he is furnishing his home – that therefore he is buying *objets d'art* wherever such can be had at reasonable prices. (Warsaw, circa 5 October 1881)[58]

The culmination of this philanthropic intrigue follows a few days later. The letter describing it forms the third part of the tale of the "esthetic convulsions" and other shocks, provoked by Witkiewicz's pictures.

> So Wrotnowska talked so much about your American sketches that today around four o'clock she and Górski dropped in on me unexpectedly. Górski began to apologize that he's such an obsessive, that when it comes to the pictures and to me, he "owes" me so many "pleasant moments" etc. Of course, I give one to him in the muscle they call the trumpeter (*buciator*). He turns round, then he stands, then he puts bottle lenses on his glasses, looks through the sketches, once more falls down, has diarrhea and vomiting from joy – then he declares that he's afraid to buy the picture, because various figures from the government office come by his place regularly, but he would buy the sketches, because he'd have a collection then, which means more in a furnished home. Now Marynia comes in, slaps me in the mouth, and declares that I should sell them right away, because you're doing a second set. I refuse, she gives it to me in the mouth from the other side – so I agree to a price of 100 rubles a piece. Then the *Kaufmann für dein Bild* has a second attack of diarrhea and declares that that's too expensive, tho' he doesn't want to insult the sketches, maybe they're worth more – but it's just it would be hard for him to buy them. So he's buying three for himself, and ordering two for his brother Konstanty. I agreed to that. (Warsaw, 10 October 1881)[59]

It is not hard to understand that the intrigue does not succeed and ultimately will be one of the episodes that for many years weaken the two men's friendship. The coda, maintained in a consistent nonsensical tone, contains a shadow of melancholy.

> Be well, my dear, I press you to the left wart on my chest with the force of a wild beast, I kiss your muzzle covered in luxuriant hard hair. I kiss Owidzki in the anus through the mediation of Kazimierz Zalewski. (Warsaw, circa 15 October 1881)[60]

For us who are looking for a common denominator for the scattered, chaotic, internally contradictory statements by the writer, these passages offer hope that

58 Ibid., p. 94.
59 Ibid., p. 96.
60 Ibid., p. 101.

we may understand the mechanism, which governs the shape of his literary language. For I ascribe to them particular meaning, thoroughly emblematic for his "philosophy of literature," and more, they embolden the scholar-researcher to doubt any unambiguous understanding of his work. An inhuman narrative skill is accompanied by a lack of decision s to what it wishes to be. His prose, his journalism, his correspondence demonstrate that he used various styles, both in writing, and public and private discourse. It seems that he changed languages as he became more mature – on the occasion of successive books, prizes, intellectual turns – but yet the succession of languages is on the surface, and they rather all co-exist in his texts, in all his *oeuvre*. Several are invisible, withdrawn, forgotten, most frequently, however, suppressed. Emancipated by the scholar-researcher, they reveal – through their heterogenic co-existence – the striking conflicts that are concealed in Sienkiewicz's work.

The clashes of language, described further, are laid out in series of penetrations, imbrications, and ideological and semantic conflicts, which we usually do not suspect these works of. Controlled by the author only with difficulty, they are responsible for a poetics of indecision, which is concealed behind the seeming monolithic nature of his works. But liberated in the course of reading, they offer an outlet for the semantic dynamic concealed in them, or, to put it differently, they lead the text frequently to semantic controversy, when the intersections of languages take place within the same text.

The contradictions of the story material, the narrative's transformation of historical sources, the suppressed erotic discourse, the subversive power of the comic, the unclear function of irony, and the attractiveness of the representation of violence, all these mean that it is impossible to spin a grand narrative of Sienkiewicz's work that is based on an elucidation as to what external factors made the democrat-writer into a conservative, and of the decadent-esthete an encomiast of bourgeois pleasures. Despite this, each subsequent generation of commentators has borne witness to the invigorating effect of the author's work and image. In the changing rhythm of differences, rivalries, and screenings, the lava of the commentators pours over the work. These rapidly set hard, making a dimension of the work and person that is even more monumental, but also increasingly burying its dynamic and far from obvious shape.

A particular burden of guilt weighs on Sienkiewicz studies, in which, from the pioneering times to today, two major sins have been repeated.[61] The first is

61 Related variants of critical-apologetic reception are noted by Kazimierz Wyka in his study *Sprawa Sienkiewicza* (The Matter of Sienkiewicz), adding further the reading public or the collective consciousness, which Sienkiewicz mastered to a degree unparalleled by any other Polish writer (*Trylogia Henryka Sienkiewicza*, op. cit., pp. 437-438). Jolanta Sztachelska sets out this scheme of reception in a different but interesting manner, reducing it to two

an intellectual favoritism, with which commentators treat both Sienkiewicz himself – man, artist, writer-institution – and his work, irritating in its easy beauty, which has captivated successive generations of readers. The birth or rather the legalization of this position takes place around 1903, when Brzozowski publishes his famous sketches on the author of the *Trylogia*, but its sources lie deeper, at the heart of Positivism, the internal fissure of which was confirmed, *inter alia*, by Sienkiewicz's historical cycle.

The second sin is expressed in a (sincere or seeming) apologetic position and its manifold consequences. From uncritical admiration of the work to superficial understandings, which concentrate on ideology, or on the contrary, exclusively on the stylistics of Sienkiewicz's writing. A scholarly mutation of this position is constituted by a reduction of the existential themes of his writing, and a concentration above all on matters of convention, style, or the function of historical sources. An emphasis on Sienkiewicz's mastery here often mask the scholar's hidden conviction of the intellectual shallowness of the writing.[62] Jolanta Sztachelska draws attention to the fact the reception of the development of Sienkiewicz's prose is governed by a remarkable paradox, to wit, each novel is seen as to soem degree regressive in relation to the preceding one. The *Trylogia* is a step back, in relation to the *Humoreski* and *Szkice*,; *Bez dogmatu* disappoints those who, like Tamowski, expected a panorama of the contemporary; *Rodzina Połanieckich* shocks with the feebleness of its characters after the refined study of the figure of Płoszowski; *Quo vadis* calls on devices already used in the *Trylogia*; and in *Krzyżacy*, epic scope is at war with the novel's anti-Prussian tendentiousness.[63]

For sure – he is a Protean writer, constantly surprising criticism and readership, but just as Sienkiewicz's ideological turns are only on the surface, so, too, the general conception of his fiction does not change. He is a coherent and consistent writer in his conviction of literature's social function; a writer who tries out the various genre variants of the novel that are at his historical disposal, as a result of which we have an unusual combination (perhaps unique in Polish literature)

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variants of mainly emotional reading: hysterical negation or worship of Sienkiewicz ("Dwie legendy Sienkiewicza," in: *Henryk Sienkiewicz w kulturze polskiej*, ed. K. Stępnik, T. Bujnicki, Lublin 2007).

62 An augury of this approach is contained in Świętochowski's diagnosis: "As a thinker Sienkiewicz up to now has not produced anything new; as an artist he has not introduced new principles of artistic creation, but has developed and perfected the technique of his predecssors – Kaczkowski, Rewuski, Kraszewski. [. . .] He is today among the young generation of novelists, the most outstanding talent, but like all derivative talents, he enriches literature quantitively rather than qualitatively" (A. Świętochowski, "Fałszywe arcydzieło," in: *Trylogia Henryka Sienkiewicza,* op. cit., p. 133).

63 J. Sztachelska, *czar i zaklęcie*, op. cit., p. 130.

of realism and Romanticism, the Parnassianism with classicism. Each novel represents another configuration of these elements, although the domination of one of them defines the specificity of a given work: for example, it differentiates *bez dogmatu* from *Rodzina Polanieckich*. Further, the majority of Sienkiewicz's writerly ideas were ready many years before they were written down. A blunt example is the mention in a letter to Witkiewicz, from 31 December 1880, in which Sienkiewicz informs him of his plans to write "a huge novel, with a type of the modern man, with a new Hamlet."[64] There is no doubt that this concerns *Bez dogmatu*, a novel of the decadent Płoszowski, a novel that the writer clearly planned before the *Trylogia* (!).

So there are no breakthroughs, there is one Sienkiewicz. Hence, for sure, antagonists more frequently than supporters drew attention to the writer's coherence. Kazimierz Wyka captures this in a splendid, accurate hypothesis when he writes that if we wish to understand Sienkiewicz, we have to treat all his texts as a whole, along with as much of the writer's life that is accessible to us as a text, for example "Sienkiewicz's amazing travel-mania."[65] In this current, we can place Gombrowicz's famous essay on Sienkiewicz, which is worth reading in its entirety, not stopping only at the first sentences and the catchy formulations about a second-rate writer of genius or his "easy beauty."[66] The warning not to underestimate Sienkiewicz expresses – hidden beneath the pamphlet's rhetoric – recognition for the unmasking power of the *Trylogia*, which reveals or portrays the escapist longings of Polish culture. [67] But this is not just demasking. Sienkiewicz's wisdom and the wisdom of his writing consists in the recognition that a strengthening of the Polish "national spirit," which the Positivists attempted to achieve after the Uprisings, was to a large degree not real in the face of the lack of a Polish state and of the fear of the marginalization of the individual, which a programmatic scientism could give rise to. Sienkiewicz, thus, used literature, directing his readers' eyes to an image of what was their own, to the past formulated as compensatory myth, so that they might have the strength to imagine that it was good to be who they were.

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64 *Listy Sienkiewicza do Stanisława Witkiewicza*, op. cit., p. 58.

65 K. Wyka, "O sztuce pisarskiej Sienkiewicza," in: *Henryk Sienkiewicz – twórczość i recepcja światowa*, op. cit., p. 15.

66 Indeed, it is not in these definitions that the essay's originality lies, for old Jeż says exactly the same thing, emphasizing Sienkiewicz's narrative genius, but denying him the greatness of Homer, Shakespeare, Walter Scott, "or even Mickiewicz" (T. T. Jeż, "*Ogniem i mieczem* – powieść z lat dawnych," in: *Trylogia Henryka Sienkiewicza,*op. cit., p. 93).

67 K. Dybciak has pointed this out in a convincing fashion. See: "Współcześni pisarze o Sienkiewiczu," in: *Henryk Sienkiewicz. Szkice o twórczości, życiu i recepcji*, ed. K. Dybciak, Siedlce, vol. I, 1999.

4. Supplementation as interpretation

Sienkiewicz is a writer of a strangely tangled character and world view whose rationality is constantly led astray by his talent. The author's strong statements, in the shape of literary ideas and arguments, are continually violated by the contradictory texture of his fictional, journalistic, and epistolary narratives. It is a discourse with a complex surface of written signs and symptoms, which the author tries in vain to subordinate to a clear idea or simply to the genre conventions of individual works. What is more, it is surprising how readily his prose subjects itself to a stereotypifying reading, which consumes the differences and subtleties characteristic of his writing.

The reading of Sienkiewicz proposed here derives from a recognition of the constant features of his discourse, in which the stability and consistency of style mask vagaries of meaning. It is this ability to absorb the uncertainty of history and life that appears to be Sienkiewicz's literary idiom. This is reflected in the strong critical trend that emphasizes the superficiality of his work and the ability of it to disperse significant problems on the surfaces of banal love or adventure stories. It is not the depth of reflection or the sublimity of ideas, but the complex superficiality of the texts that challenges the scholar, who constantly stumbles upon textual semantic turning points in which genre restrictions, or the author's arbitrary gestures, disrupt the flow of meaning. One of the reasons for such "semantic jams" is the literary specificity presented in Sienkiewicz's works. Namely, the foundation of this is always the concept of reality constructed within positivist knowledge, and this principle remains valid even with genre shifts (tendentious realism, historical-adventure novel, novel-journal, etc.), at least as a presupposition—the background of the fictional utterance that is not presented.

The memory of the Sienkiewicz text about the path of its self-evolution disturbs the order of presentation. The syncretism of his novelistic discourse does not submit to harmonious orchestration, and its heteronymous elements strive for emancipation: romance, naturalism, adventure, psychology, historiography, plot, messianism, "it will work out somehow"…—continuously endanger narrative order, and, consequently, the author's subject, which breaks down into a number of representations that are mutually alien. In this situation, the subject of Jasienkiewicz, expressed in the gesture of stopping the course of the componential languages of his own narrative, constitutes a gesture of negation that says "– no!" to one of the languages, and, thus, hampers the excessive expansion of one of them.

The commentator on the text, who elicits and fuels the conflict of order and excess, is located in such places. The supplementary, semantic, or fabular impasse of the narrative, of the dialog, and of individual meaning, changes the order of implications or accumulations into an *aporia*, which blocks the illusion of the

necessity of events and meanings, but which, in compensation, opens a space of supplements that could effectuate a crisis in the tension revealed within the text.[68]

The following example is compared to a similar scene from *Popioły* (Ashes) by Żeromski to bring this issue into focus. In *Ogniem i mieczem* the characters encounter Strzyżowski hanging from an oak.

> . . . he hung completely naked, and on his chest he had a horrible necklace of heads strung on a rope. They were the heads of his six children and his wife. [OM I 366].

The laconic narrative scans the horrific object like a spotlight, sweeps it with language, but not for too long, only for a moment, and afterward leaves the silent body, which plunges forever into the undescribed. Accordingly, Krzysztof Cedro in *Popioły* stumbles upon the body of a French Voltigeur, tortured by Spanish partisans:

> The mouth was gagged with a rag rolled into a hard wad, the nose severed, the ears torn from his head. On his bare torso there were thirty black wounds. The entrails, ripped from the stomach, lay on the ground.
> […]
> He moaned at the sight of his blackened leg bones horribly swollen from burns, wrapped in straw soaked in oil.[69]

This image, almost as if taken from Goya's graphic works, provokes a strange reaction in Cedro – "faintly and fast, it escaped in his brain from among the many shudders of sick laughter: Devil take it! suffering isn't always beautiful, not always."[70]

Despite the similarities of the two descriptions, differences prevail. Although everything has already been done and we are reading a description of a body in Żeromski, the accumulation of participles contradicts the finiteness of pain

68 The supplement is like a period, a contractual sign of the end of an utterance, which must always must fall silent at some time, even if it is not yet exhausted. Sometimes the end comes with the relief that accompanies solving the problem, but even then it is worth bearing in mind Husserl's warning that, at times, after prolonged effort, the desired clarity smiles upon us, and we are confident that great results are so close that one only need reach out. He contends that all *aporias* seem to resolve (by themselves), the critical scythe cuts down contradictions sequentially, and what is left is that last step: we reach conclusions, we begin with the obvious "therefore," and suddenly we discover a dark point that begins to swell, growing like some hideous monster that swallows all our arguments, and thus freshly-cut contradictions are given a new life. The corpses come to life again trifling with us with mocking laughter (E. Husserl, *Wykłady z fenomenologii wewnętrznej świadomości czasu*, trans. J. Sidorek, Warszawa 1989, p. 6. The excerpt was deleted from the original edition by E. Stein. It appears in a footnote in the issue cited).

69 68 S. Żeromski, *Popioły*, ed. J. Paszek, intr. I. Maciejewska, commentary by A. Achmatowicz, BN I 289, Wrocław 1996, v. II, pp. 272–273.

70 69 Ibidem.

and transforms the description into action ("gagged," "rolled," "severed," "torn," "bare," "ripped from," "swollen," "wrapped"). The focus of the narrative does not turn away from the object as quickly, but changes it into a study of the mutilated body; in animating the wounds described, it forces thoughts of their recent infliction. It shatters the imposing sublime symbolism of the victim, and the flashy horror of the description, for the sake of bringing into prominence the carnality of man, particularly the experience of pain. This body—similarly to that in Sienkiewicz—has a witness to its defilement, but Cedro's grotesque, hysterical reaction illustrates the paroxysm of a language that collapses while trying to express the indescribable.

While Sienkiewicz's text does not suppress the horrors of war, it does permit the reader to stop thinking about them, because the narrative does not linger in places from which it would be impossible to forget them. Claiming to be real, the text of this novel reassures, at the same time, that it is only a "certain" reality ("once upon a time…"), the laws of which do not apply universally, even in the fictional world. Gombrowicz captured perfectly this feature of Sienkiewicz's writing, noting in his *Dzienniki* (Diaries) that reading his work is to exist "in a certain segment of the world, in a derivative world, which we conceive as the real world, but we lack the desire to learn about the roots that connect it with reality."[71]

The implementation of a similar concept in fictional texts is extremely tedious, as it requires constantly balancing opposites, which are formed at the intersection of a credible narrative and an attractive, readable story. The inevitable reductions (of psychology, politics, body, etc.) leave behind empty spaces, signs of castration, which are dark places of the exhibition, which do not permit forgetting and which mockingly show the grounds upon which the plot order is based. The ghost of the "text's intention" reveals itself in these places, arguing that it does not want anything more than what is written. It also happens that the author himself engages in this. For example, Sienkiewicz explained to his publisher the message of his short story "Pójdźmy za Nim" (Let Us Follow Him), stressing that it was meant to do "nothing more than to show that a skeptical, sick Greco-Roman soul could regain its health and be saved by Christianity" [to Robert Wolff, Kor II 334]. It is impossible, however, to keep a capricious literary text in line with a world

71 W. Gombrowicz, *Dziennik 1953–1956*. *Dzieła,* v. *VII*. Kraków 1986, pp. 240–241. Ryszard Handke, undertaking a similar comparison to that employed here, states that the pleasure of reading Sienkiewicz's battle scenes comes from the fact that "by not becoming the subject of the experience attacking the imagination, the reader relinquishes the illusion of direct contact, staying at a safe distance" (R. Handke, *Style balistyki w polskiej powieści historycznej. Sienkiewicz – Żeromski*, in: *Henryk Sienkiewicz w kulturze polskiej*, op. cit., p. 341). See also: R. Koziołek, "Rana jako tekst wojny. U Sienkiewicza i Żeromskiego," in: *Zamieranie. Interpretacje*, ed. G. Olszański and D. Pawelec, Katowice 2007.

view. Hence, the same problem remains unresolved, or rather suspended, in *Quo vadis*, since otherwise it would develop into a conflict between friends. The author honestly acknowledges his awareness of this insoluble problem in the reflection of Winicjusz, who, having converted to Christianity, discovers an insurmountable impasse in his relationship with Petroniusz: "We can no longer understand each other!" [Q 324].

The place that is not described, but which the text refers to incidentally, is more than the different world view between a Christian and an atheist. It is the profound breakdown in dialog, which shows itself to be impossible because of the fundamental differences that separate the two of them. Having received a letter from Petroniusz, in which he writes that he does not understand Christians, Ligia, or even himself, Winnicjusz realizes that his love for Ligia and the teachings of Christ have separated him from the common meanings of the language he shared with Petroniusz. "He felt that it was useless to reply, that it would do no one any good, and it would not resolve or clarify anything" [Q 307]. Ultimately, Sienkiewicz deals with the skeptical Greek mind-set of Chilon (whom he converts) much more easily than with the subtle melancholy of Petroniusz. So he leads him to the same place he took Winnicjusz before, which is to the point of misunderstanding in which both of them freeze, unable to cross the boundaries of their own discourses.

> I like books that you do not, I like poetry that bores you, I like dishware, gems and many things that you do not look at. [Q 333]

And so he leaves them, leaving the scene to Chilon, who incidentally grows to be a central character of the novel's ideological-religious plane, because it is he who must manifest the revolutionary strength of Christian love without boundaries, which, in Winnicjusz's case, exceeds "his understanding of the human capacity to forgive" [Q 275].

Many places in the texts confirm that the worlds of these novels do not want to know the roots linking them to reality although the author knew them well;[72]

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72 As for the history of early Christianity, he feared its savagery and fanaticism, as is indicated by his unwritten novel about Julian the Apostate. Preliminary studies of the era brought him the realization that historically reliable portraits of the first Christians would violate his closely-held evangelical Christian gentleness. Ignacy Chrzanowski mentions that the author of the unwritten novel explained it as follows: "I will definitely not write a novel about Julian the Apostate. I wanted, like in *Quo vadis*, to exploit the contrast between the pagan and Christian worlds, and yet now, having learned about these times, I see clearly that the morality of the Christians was of no higher standing than that of the pagans. And, moreover, tell me yourself, can I forgive those Christians for having destroyed and burned beautiful Greek temples?" (I. Chrzanowski, "O Sienkiewiczu. Z cudzych opowiadań i własnych wspomnień", in: *Pisma wybrane*, ed. Z.J. Nowak, J. Starnawski, Kraków 2003, p 502).

at the same time, he was convinced that religion and art are supposed to make life bearable, because life itself can be bad enough. Sienkiewicz was faithful to this function of literature in his work until the end of his life, which is one of the arguments that we are dealing with a classicizing novelist, a representative of the great family of the worshipers of *logos*—the word that gives order to chaos.[73]

Especially in his later work, the mature Sienkiewicz knows more than he says, which is why he does not want to make the gesture of negation that is the privilege of approaching modernism, which reminds him of his own positivistic beginnings. After the Darwinian shock brought his generation to an awareness of the loss of nature—the home of humans—the author of *Potop* is incapable in his works (and perhaps also in his life) of regaining religious confidence; hence, in his work, religion is absolutely essential for the continuity of society, the nation, the family, but not for the individual. Thus, Jasienkiewicz first seeks shelter in the heroic past, and subsequently in the timeless kingdom of beauty, as do his hesitant protagonists along with him. Sienkiewicz-Płoszowski writes:

> Those of us in whom the spirit of Hellas churns more than in others admittedly need beauty to live, but even they unknowingly demand that Aspasia have the eyes of Dante's Beatrice. Similar demands linger within me. […] On my Greek altar stands a marble goddess – but my Gothic is empty. [BD 116].

This conservative and sometimes anachronistic author took a path generations of modernists would take (but not necessarily following him), proclaiming, in the desacralized world, the emergence of the religion of art. Like them, he knew perfectly well that one could no longer construct the representation of reality in coherent fictional discourse. He tried to suppress this awareness by choosing varieties of novels in which the story outweighs narrative reflection; passages of dialog do not emancipate themselves too much, and the psychology of the character represents more of a type rather than an individual. And yet the incredible energy of his narrative and the specific impulse of language violate the order of the great figures of the text. He reveals the heteronomy of apparent uniformity of style, leading to fissures, from between which emerge clashes of different discourses (style, genre, tone) that rub against each other, but do not create a new quality, struggling in acts of irony, pastiche, parody, travesty, etc. They shadow, but never ruin, the architecture of the text; held back, they retain their autonomy and tense balance, even at the cost of a rhetorical blockade, which causes meaning to "freeze up" (like a computer), not wanting to mean anything anymore. This is how it is, until

73 Contrary to the biological vitality of the characters, Wyka writes, "Sienkiewicz, in both the construction of single sentences and the composition of entire volumes, is calm, controlled, thoughtful, clear" (K. Wyka, *Sprawa Sienkiewicza*, in: *Trylogia Henryka Sienkiewicza*, op. cit., p. 452). See also: T. Żabski, *Poglądy estetyczno-literackie Henryka Sienkiewicza*, op. cit., pp. 127–128).

the moment a certain instance of reading releases the energy of the text, causing unbearable tension. And this is the birthplace of reading as supplement.[74]

Supplements are not places to be filled in, concretized, interpreted… . Rather, they catch utterances at arbitrary endings and undertake them in spots where they refuse to move forward, or they protect themselves from the consequences of their own potential. Most often we assume that it is the genre convention that justifies the arbitrary suspension of discourse and the semantic blocking of utterances, which, in a different genre, develops further and more widely, beginning from the place where it is suspended, for example, by the narrative of adventure. If, however, the utterances reveal their lack of genre homogeneity, mixing, as Sienkiewicz often does, naturalistic description with adventure story material, then the author's restriction of utterance has no justification in the homogeneity of genre, but stems from other causes, and can be revealed in the analysis of such halted discourse.

This involves identifying the silence of the narrative, unauthorized in the context of other textual elements, or the arbitrary restriction of representation. Then the comment is, in fact, a supplement of elliptical meaning; however, the ellipsis here is not an intentional figure.[75] The supplement, thus recognized, does not analyze the motives for halting the narrative, but satisfies itself with merely the supplement of a suddenly silent utterance—contrary to the metaphor or syntax that predict or allow its continuity.

The rhetoric of modesty which appears in this declaration is deceptive, and we immediately start to track the potential hypocrisy of the modest "addition." In the

74 Grażyna Borkowska writes: "Ideas credited to Sienkiewicz are usually over-interpretations. The author of the *Trilogy* had no definite ideological concept, and what he professes, in many cases, is not worthy of attention. He wrote 'for impression' and nearly always achieved the desired effect" (G. Borkowska, *Pozytywiści i inni*, Warszawa 2007, p 141). Justly so, but it is precisely this gap between the stunted idea and the powerful effect of the language of his authorship that makes it so intriguing. Following the course of his narrative, we feel like we are discovering the autonomy of art, a stand-alone process, without a recognized genealogy, of which only a part is the author who is not fully aware of his role.

75 This commentator's strategy is vividly depicted by Freud's case study of the Rat Man. In one section, the patient recounts with great difficulty a specific form of torture, of which he had heard during military service. Searching for a way to overcome the reluctance that prevents the patient from continuing his narrative, Freud suggests that he might continue "to supplement" something the patient is suggesting. He asks the patient if he is thinking of impalement on a stake, but the patient answers no, that is not it. The patient then tries to explain that the condemned is tied up, but he continues confusedly, and Freud cannot guess in what position this might be. The patient begins to explain that an upturned pot is placed on the seat of the condemned and into it are released rats. The patient then stands up and with utter resistance and terror says that the rats bore into.... and as he was unable to continue, Freud allows himself to supplement: the anus. (Z. Freud, *Charakter a erotyka*, trans. R. Reszke and D. Rogalski, Warszawa 1996, p. 32).

desire for a supplement lurks the arrogant belief that we know how the meaning might mean more, that is: better, deeper, more interesting; and this means—in the words of Roland Barthes—to alter one's desire, desiring not for the work itself, but for our own language.[76] It cannot be otherwise, since we discover the value of literature when our speech feels remorse at being unable to match the words we read with the beauty and efficiency of utterance, and when the unconscious, the murky, the unclear in ourselves, find a linguistic formula that is not our own (social, conventional, etc.), but somehow it reaches our individuality. The admiration of such literature is that of the colonizer practiced by the conquered native.

The beauty and violence of literature, in addition to admiration, also provoke the need to overcome the spell and inspire rational exorcisms—literary criticism. The precarious balance between adoration and criticism prevents potential conflict between text and commentary, a sometimes tantalizing utopia of the Romantic weave of languages. Criticism as an supplement seems to be innocent, consensual, because it is created as the result of surprise, or even of not understanding the text, which gives birth to the desire to overcome the arbitrariness of literary utterance, which, in turn, defends itself from being responsible for the whim of unmotivated meanings. Such a reader (me) wishes to supplement what is unwritten, here, as an example, why "the chamberlain's wife, despite all of her decency, could not stand Krzysia" [PW 111].

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76 R. Barthes, "Krytyka i prawda," trans. W. Błońska, in: *Współczesna teoria badań literackich za granicą. Antologia*, ed. H. Markiewicz, vol. II. Kraków 1972, p 160. Marian Płachecki dispels my conciliatory hopes when he writes of Sienkiewicz that "the literary text is always condemned by the individuality of its author. How then could it resist the subjectivity of its reader?" (M. Płachecki, "Role społeczne Sienkiewicza-pisarza," in: *Sienkiewicz i epoki. Powinowactwa*, ed. E. Ihnatowicz, Warszawa 1999, p. 229).

In Place of the Father

> And that's a wonder: fathers commonly
> Do get their children; but in this case of wooing,
> A child shall get a sire, if I fail not of my cunning.
>
> (W. Shakespeare, *The Taming of the Shrew* II.1)

1. Empty meaning

Three great contemporary novels, *Nad Niemnem* (By the Niemen) (1887), the *Trylogia* (1884–1888), and *Lalka* (The Doll) (1890), offer a picture of a family that is ruined, incomplete, or at least consumed by a deep crisis. It was Prus in *Lalka* who carried out this destruction in the most rigorous fashion; there almost all the characters are spinsters or bachelors, widows or widowers.[77] In *Nad Niemnem*, Orzeszkowa treats the family somewhat more gently. But in Sienkiewicz the family episodes appear especially enigmatic. Short stories follow the example of these most celebrated novels, for example the following classic texts:

> "Katarynka" – There is not a word about the father of the blind protagonist, which is surely why "at that very time the mother joined forces with her friend and moved to the house where Pan Tomasz lived";
>
> "ABC" – The protagonist Joanna Lipska "was in mourning for her father." There is no word of the mother;
>
> "Janko Muzykant" (Janko the Musician) – As in "Katarynka": "no one knew where he came from."

The stubbornly recurring topic of orphanhood, which is present in positivist prose narratives, can be explained simply enough by a need constantly to point to the bitter meaning of Poland's absent sovereignty. The father's empty place usually symbolizes there the lack of one's own state and its institutions, while the absent or suffering mother was often a figuration of the enslaved fatherland.[78]

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77 The few exceptions are Wirski, Wysocki, and the Krzeszowskis (who are separated). However, they do not in any substantial way counterbalance the unmarried characters in the novel.

78 The question of the meaning of this absence in relation to Orzeszkowa's essay "Oblicze Matki" (The Mother's Face) is formulated by Grażyna Borkowska, who asks: "Who *Is* That

This general meaning, which also arises as a result of a game with censorship with the help of different variants of allegory, fortunately does not exhaust the functions of these figures of absence. This is true of Sienkiewicz's writing, for almost all his novels and a significant part of his short fiction can be read without difficulty as narrations that are directly concerned with a search for the father, or as fables on the same topic. An actual search is less common, although an exception is *W pustyni i w puszczy*, in which the protagonists cross Africa to find their fathers (their mothers are dead). The majority of Sienkiewicz's protagonists are genuine orphans, more often women than men. The endurance of this absence is striking and is seductive, because it tempts the reader to make a swift interpretation according to one symbolic matrix. Thus, it suggests, at first glance, a monotonous series of repetitions of a motif that is only subject to at most a few modifications. Fortunately, Sienkiewicz developed the subject of the absent father in a complex symphonic score, in which the main themes exist alongside minor ones, creating a broad landscape of orphaned men and women, both children and adults.

This device is a technical move through which the author of romantic plots makes it possible for himself to forge a path for his protagonists into the hands of a chosen woman. However the comfort of fabularization does not always explain this move. In the short fiction "Z pamiętnika poznańskiego nauczyciela" (From the Journal of a Poznań Teacher), the narrator-protagonist exploits the empty space left after his pupil's father's death in order to adore the beautiful widow.

> For six years I was in her home, I was there at her husband's death, I saw her unhappy, alone, always as good as an angel, loving her children, almost a saint in her widowhood. ["Z pamiętnika poznańskiego nauczyciela" D VI 6]

Sienkiewicz, with a choice of two spaces (left by the father or left by the son), choses the second for his protagonist. The tutor, as he himself writes, will follow in Michaś's steps, as "his cough is getting worse" ["Z pamiętnika poznańskiego

Mother?" Borkowska answers in Orzeszkowa's words: "She is that family earth. Everything on her that forces itself up or runs downward, that grows, blossoms, flows, smells good, sings,, utters in whatever voice – everything that is rooted in her and shines above her or flies over her – that is her face" (E. Orzeszkowa, "Oblicze Matki," intr. B. Hryniewiecki, Jelenia Góra 1946, p. 11.Qtd. in: G. Borkowska, "Wątek Ruskinowski w twórczości Orzeszkowej," in: *Przełom antypozytywistyczny w polskiej świadomości kulturowej końca XIX wieku*, ed.. T. Bujnicki and J. Maciejewski, Wrocław 1986, p. 48). Borkowska defines the function of the family motif as follows: "The metonymization of the history of the nation via a natural-esthetic phraseology indicates as much a device aimed at censorship, as a uniting with all those concerned about the fate of the fatherland" (ibid, p. 58). See also: M. Jonca, *Sierota w literaturze polskiej dla dzieci w XIX w.*, Wrocław 1994, and by the same author, *Enfantes terribles. Dzieci złe, źle wychowane w literaturze polskiej XIX wieku*, Wrocław 2005, pp. 118–125.

nauczyciela" DZ VI 23]. More frequently, however, the protagonists, replacing fathers, step into the role of women's guardians, a relation that quickly transforms into love and desire. That is what happens in the short story "Przez stepy" (Over the Steppes). The father of the female protagonist, a former judge from Boston, who has lost his fortune, falls ill of fever in Sacramento. Ralf makes up for his absence, taking pity on Lilian's youth and isolation. "Since there was no one related to her in the whole wagon train, I performed several small services for the poor girl" ["Przez stepy" D III 41]. Soon these small gestures open the way to desire. Ralf's vitality, strength, and his role as guardian turn out to be a periphrasis of a desire that is able to appear in stages thanks to the absence of Lilian's sick father.

The eponymous protagonist of the short story "Hania" lacks both parents. Her orphaned state is softened by her grandfather Mikołaj, but the young narrator-protagonist tries to do the same. "When old Mikołaj, dying, left Hania to my care and conscience, I was then sixteen; but she, barely a year younger, had also scarcely left the years of childhood" [*Hania* D IV 21]. Not for a moment does Sienkiewicz conceal the ambiguity of this tutelage, and even increases it because the love hidden under the mask of care leads shortly to an altercation and a duel between the friends who both love Hania. The author, in the end, rescues the friendship, disfiguring the female protagonist, whose face after her illness is so changed that from there "That winged bird whose name is love" flies from their hearts ["Hania" 158]. Hania's real guardian will, from now on, be the nunnery which she enters to attain not just peace, but also her former beauty ("the traces of the terrible disease vanished wholly" ["Hania" 158]). With this short story, Sienkiewicz begins a series of modifications of the motif of the absent father, whose rival is God

He fills up the incomplete family structure in yet another way in the novella "Na jasnym brzegu" (On the Bright Shore). At the beginning, the painter Świrski takes the place of the father at the side of Pani Elzen, the thirty-five-year-old mother of two little boys. Disappointed by her character and way of life, he turns toward Maria Cervi. Her father, an Italian, has been dead for five years, but her mother and grandfather, who are Poles, are still alive. From the protagonist's point of view, this family model is perfect: grandfather, mother, and lover create around Maria a triangle of power, one that is not based on rivalry, since the father has been excluded from the structure, and his prerogatives are discreetly taken over by the "guardian" of all three. Świrski, who is in love, begins to function in an ambiguous role in relation to the girl: that of guardian and lover. He helps Maria and her family, but sympathy and responsibility are not the only feelings that she arouses: "he was certain that he had met with a most honest female soul, and at the same time he rejoiced that this soul was contained in such a young and

comely body" ["Na jasnym brzegu" D VI 215]. The narrator supports his desires, for he even makes Świrski younger; earlier he has confessed to Pani Elzenowa that he is forty-eight ["Na jasnym brzegu" 169], but when Maria appears in his life, it turns out that he is "forty-five years old" ["Na jasnym brzegu" 219]. The writer's lack of consistency draws attention to the ambiguity of family relations in his work. Entering into the role of "guardian" masks desire, and, thus, when it is permitted to reveal it, the character rejoices that Maria "does not consider him too old" ["Na jasnym brzegu" 226]. Finally Świrski combines both functions, declaring: "Give me yourself and yours. . . ." ["Na jasnym brzegu" 234], and here the narrative ends.

In Sienkiewicz's shorter fiction, the absence of a father or of both parents can be explained in two ways. First, this is a narrative device, one that permits the author to use a greater degree of freedom in constructing the fates of his characters, especially female one, who, liberated from family authority, are more easily adapted to the structure of romance. They have greater freedom, also in matters of social behavior, as can be seen in "Przez stepy" and "Na jasnym brzegu." At the same time the empty spaces create a dynamic of plot and meaning; these empty spaces draw towards themselves successors, and usurpers who are abetted by the fantastic desires and longings of the orphaned characters. Second, they constitute part of an extensive national-historical symbolism, within which the lack of a father suggests the absence of one's own institutions of state, and points to a general reluctance vis-à-vis strong (absolute) authority.

The novels, like the shorter fiction, also contain this constant ingredient. One should not concentrate only on documenting its repetition. This motif, in somewhat varied form, fulfills various plot and symbolic functions. The majority of the leading characters in the *Trylogia* are orphans. This applies, above all, to the main female characters, but also to male ones. In an adventure story, the orphaning of a female character facilitates the figure's powerlessness, and giving her attributes of passivity and submission moves her in the direction of being an object or, at best, a child. Passed from hand to hand, Helena is Wasyl Kurcewicz's orphaned daughter. Without her father's care, she easily becomes an object of negotiation between the princess and Bohun, and later between her and Skrzetuski. In this context, the phrase used by Helena in her letter to Skrzetuski is important. She compares him to her mother: "I have missed my lord so, as I do my mother, for it is sad for me as an orphan in this world, but not in my lord's company" [OM I 94]. This comparison is both surprising and consistent, for it indicates the place allocated to Skrzetuski in the plot. It is not the place of the dead father; he does not realize the function of defender of his beloved woman, since Zagłoba takes on the role of the "strange guardian."[79] The space left by the father, thus, remains unoccupied,

79 For more on this, see the chapter "Zagłoba's Laughter" in this study.

although there are many usurpers (Bohun, Zagłoba, Pan Potocki, Pan Pełka, and Prince Bogusław). In one of the final scenes of *Pan Wołodyjowski* Sienkiewicz uses a similar designation, when during a pause in the siege the Wołodyjowskis have a moment for themselves, and then "she snuggled up to him like a child to its mother" [PW 568]. The last part of the *Trylogia* is dominated by a particularly fascinating confusion surrounding symbolic meanings connected with the names of "father" and "mother." From the moment they appear, the orphaned Basia and Krzysia already have a guardian, who replaces their father for them. He is Pan Makowiecki, the estate manager in Latyczowa, Pan Michał's brother-in-law. As his sister, who comes to Warsaw with the girls to look for husbands for them, says: "My husband is their guardian and guardian of their property, and they live with us because they are orphans. After all, living alone is not suitable for such young ladies" [PW 53].

Michał is forbidden to succeed his father, and thus loses, for a time, the symbolic context that is axiomatic for a knight. Taken from his *milieu*, which is the world of war, he fits in nowhere. He tries to enter a monastery, hands over the initiative to a woman, cannot have children with Basia, and when there is a threat, his wife herself saves herself from danger. Finally it transpires that he is not fit either to be in charge of a besieged fortress, because – despite fencing ability and experience – "he had in him no majesty or greatness" [PW 553]. In effect, his relations with women are often defined by the narrator as friendly or maternal. Sienkiewicz creates his character in an unusually consistent fashion, condemning him to the torment of repetition – although the women that he likes are orphaned, he cannot take the empty place. Thus it is with Oleńka, of whom the narrator says that "the mourning dress lent her gravity" [P I 14], and with Anusia, who wears mourning for Podbipięta, and, at the end, with Krzysia too, who is also "in mourning for she lost her father not long ago" [PW 56]. None of these places, abandoned by "guardians," is, however, for him. Krzysia even suggests that she will be a sister to him, one who will console him for the loss of the dead Anusia ("'I know, I know!' repeated the maiden, 'I am an orphan too!'" [PW 70]), or his friend. The word "too" points to Borzobohata's death, but we should not forget that Wołodyjowski does not have a living father either [OM II 48].

The same situation holds in *Bez dogmatu* (Without Dogma). The novel begins from the death of the protagonist's father; however, there is nothing at all said about Anielka's father. [80] Further, in *Rodzina Połanieckich* (The Połaniecki Family), Marina's father is a caricature of a father – a doting, vexatious litigant and buffoon, just as repellent as Orzelski in *Nad Niemnem*.

80 "An insurgent?" – asks Tadeusz Bujnicki ("O 'newrozie pieniężnej.' Kromicki i Płoszowski w 'Bez dogmatu'" in: *Pozytywista Sienkiewicz*, op. cit., p. 91), pointing out the above mentioned possibility of reading allegorically the motif of orphanhood.

In a manner dissimilar to what we have observed in the shorter fiction, orphaned women in the *Trylogia* are not helpless and passive (apart from Helena). Dead fathers (and the momentary lack of legal guardians) permit the author to emancipate the figures of Anusia, Oleńka, Krzysia, and Baśka. They become more independent, strong, and often dominate the men that are close to them. Despite the differences I have mentioned, it is hard not to note the excessive exploitation of this motif, as if Sienkiewicz's texts were suffering from a kind of obsession, a symptom of which is the repeated motif of characters' orphanhood.[81] If we are to seek the sources of this thematic obsession beyond genre rules and the composition of the individual text, we can find these by following traces in the writer's letters that speak of the difficulty of winning the hand of Maria Szetkiewiczówna.[82] Sienkiewicz had to prove to his future in-laws that he was something more than a godless, positivist writer. Literature permitted compensation for complexes: the shame of a poor writer and the hypocrisy of the views he had declared in the presence of his father-in-law. His love for a woman from a traditional gentry family must have occasioned the democratic publicist quite a few humiliations. Perhaps they were one of the impulses behind "exterminating" fathers from his prose, which consistently presents a world without fathers, and those few that are presented arouse antipathy or laughter.

In *Potop*, similarily, the absent father leaves a huge gap, and the dead grandfather Billewicz, patriarch of the family and Lauda's guardian, has all the features of the symbolic father (the dead family patriarch, possessing a legendary position among the magnates, able "to call on a thousand sabers," Lauda's benefactor, he has taken individual decisions about the lives of others).

From the start, an immediate succession to the father's power is impossible, for no such succession is described in the novel. Kmicic cannot, in relation to Oleńka, assume the role of a powerful heir to the grandfather, because both are part of a legal agreement, devised by him, one which, in any case, only gives an appearance of turning Oleńka into an object. In practice, in fact, it gives her

81 In this context, the farewell scene in "Hania" is striking: "Having stepped off the road, I looked around: father still stood on the bridge and bade me farewell from far off with the holy cross. The first rays of the rising sun, falling on his proud figure, surrounded him as if with a glittering aureole. And so in the light, with his raised hands, this graying veteran seemed to me to be like an old eagle, blessing from afar his young progeny as he entered into a life stormy and winged that he himself had once loved" ["Hania," D IV 146]. The father is bidding him farewell as he departs to fight a duel with a friend, against whom his son has intrigued, destroying his and his own life. But now that is of no importance. The context is changed. The new, paternal context elevates the act of killing, and gives meaning to an absurd duel.

82 The best source of information in this matter are the already mentioned letters to Stanisław Witkiewicz.

from the beginning a considerable degree of independence and ascendancy over Kmicic. It is all the more interesting that Kmicic is, besides Bohun, the wildest and most defiant of the characters in the *Trylogia*. Such exceptionality is confirmed by Billewiczówna who says of him that "he's no namby-pamby, he's a real man!" [P I 28]. But his comrades have doubts about his dominance, observing how he changes under the young girl's influence. "I see it already, I see how you'll be on a leash," says Kokoszko [P I 40].

This state of the father's symbolic absence, linked with a blockage of legal succession to him, is unusually productive semantically, but is also enigmatic. It prompts questions concerning the novelistic project of an ideal ruler and father, and also as to what the basis is of the clear balance in the novel of political, military, and even erotic forces. To put it differently, who apart from the "father" is the source of authority in the world of *Potop*. Zagłoba's famous answer to this question does not, it seems, deserve any analysis that goes beyond the description of a piece of comic sophistry, by which he hoodwinks Roch Kowalski. However, when we read this excerpt in the context of our reflections on the symbolic status of the father, then the comic monolog reveals Sienkiewicz's astonishing consistency in using a symbolic language. Zagłoba insists that:

> where there is no father, there, Scripture declares, you will obey the uncle. It is a kind of family authority, which it is a sin, Roch, to oppose. . . . For make note of this, that whosoever marries, he may easily be a father; but in the uncle the same blood flows as in the mother. [P I 316]

An uncle put in the place of a father – this is not just an impertinent inveigling of himself into the Kowalski family on the part of Zagłoba, but it is also a symbolic change in the genealogy of authority, one that differentiates the state (father) from the nation (mother), to the advantage of the latter. Anyone can be a father, Zagłoba suggests, but the uncle represents the mother's blood, or a real, biological link with one's ancestors.

This is one of the many points on the map of symbolic figures in the *Trylogia*, in which the model and attributes of motherhood are another choice, as opposed to the absent father or the usurper (the Partitioning Powers). The necessity for the character to pass through an attempt at voluntary renunciation of force clearly shows that Kmicic's alteration consists in controlling the impulse to tyrannize over others, and in renouncing the joy that is given by the removal of obstacles (moral, legal, and political) by force. The paradigm of authority is thus transformed: authority is represented very frequently indeed by women in these novels. The moral patterns suggested by male characters are based on typically female cultural features. In *Potop*, particularly, the function of a man that is recognized by the characters is a matter of embodying maternal virtues such as sacrifice, fidelity,

loyalty, penitence, the renunciation of egoism, and self-sacrifice for those weaker than oneself.

The political shrewdness of this conception is based on symbolic blackmail. For if the pattern of political virtue in *Potop* is a woman, then imitating her must lead above all to controlling the drive to power, and to renouncing the dream of succeeding the absent "father." This does not mean that the space must remain empty, but it is possible to take it only as a representative of the Mother (hidden under synonymous names: fatherland, Mother of God, the nation); otherwise, it is usurpation or – worse – a desire for *absolutum dominium*. This bizarre, but fascinating, mythology of maternal authority functions in the novel as an alternative in relation to real political and military authority, but – as Zagłoba puts it – "neither that of hetman or king can negate it, nor force anyone to control it. And in truth, that is splendid! Did the great hetman, or, let's add, the field hetman, have the right to order a noble or a companion, or even any camp-follower, to fall on father, mother, grandfather ,or old blind grandmother? Answer that, Roch! Did they have the right?" [P I 316].[83]

On all levels in the novels, the narrative suppresses the primacy of the powerful "father" who possesses individual absolute power. This takes place both in domestic, family plot lines, and in the main love plots, and within the political-military story material. The messianic longings for a "warlord," scattered throughout the *Trylogia*, are deceptive. None of the outstanding leaders presented in the historical cycle is shown as a candidate for the role of good ruler. Not Jeremi, not Czarniecki, not Sobieski (despite the comforting epilog in *Pan Wołodoyjowski*) – none of these is seen by the writer as the ideal king. Sienkiewicz does not trust authority that gives itself the name of a severe but just father; he does not trust its promise that it only wishes to put a chaotic world to rights with the aid of a dose of enlightened tyranny.[84] The military effectiveness of these figures is impressive, but, in the novels, war and its laws do not breed universal features of good authority.

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83 Zagłoba repeats his conviction in *Pan Wołodyjowski*, explaining to Michał why he will not vote for Kondeusz.

" – I will not vote for a Frenchman.

– Why not?

– That would be *absolutum dominium*." [PW 86]

84 This is shown by the splendid literary way in which Sienkiewicz dealt with the philosophy of civic freedom as practiced by the gentry and nobility. Anna Grześkowiak-Krwawicz points out that despite recognizing the king as an essential element of government, political thinkers and a large part of the gentry and nobility treated the "monarch as a factor that constantly threatened the republic and freedom. By his very nature, the king constituted a competitor to the Commonwealth, and aimed to introduce *absolutum dominium*" (A. Grześkowiak-Krwawicz, *Regina libertas. Wolność w polskiej myśli politycznej XVIII wieku*, Gdańsk 2006, p. 30).

At first glance, *Krzyżacy* is an exception. It is true that here, too, the collective issue applies to the house of Grad, but the structure in the main female protagonist's family is different, because Danusia has no mother. Instead she has a powerful father who, from the start, fulfills the function of an obstacle separating Zbyszko from his beloved. The text uncovers two chains of meanings. The first points to an acceptance of the tradition of the knightly romance, understood as a story of love with obstacles, in which the father's prohibition and differences in the protagonists' origins further increase a desire that is difficult to satisfy. The second, however, leads to a breaking of the father's power through showing Jurand's passion, full of torment, which transforms him into a saint, eyeless, handless, and tongueless. The symbolic triangle – father-daughter-lover – is broken, but differently than in the *Trylogia*, because here the daughter consumes the father, drawing him after her into martyrdom. The father, deprived of women ((wife and daughter), loses the objects of his power; he has no one to protect. In a drastically realized shape, the idea of "the weak power of the father" returns. A triple symbolic castration does not take away Jurand's strength, but sublimates it in the tyranny of the forgiveness that he offers Zygfryd. Father Kaleb confirms the transformation of paternal power: "Who dares to contradict a saint? On you knees!" [K IV 35].[85]

The absolute nature of symbolic castration can be seen even more clearly in *Pan Wołodyjowski*, in which the harsh and proud Nowowiejski is cruelly and humiliatingly butchered by his former ward. Azja takes on the role of the despised "son," who wreaks his vengeance on the father for past humiliations – "as if symbolically he wanted to cancel out a past that was humiliating for him, the son of Tuhaj-bej."[86] The actuality and symbolism of revenge also includes the defilement of the women from whom his father's prohibition had kept him.

Thus, the lack of a father does not mean that it is possible to take his place without meeting obstacles. The static nature of the world of Sienkiewicz's novels is, in this respect, intriguing. In *Potop*, Kmicic and Oleńka are doubly orphaned – through their parents' deaths and the flight of the King to Silesia. The text, however, leaves no doubt that the person who wishes to take the place of the father/king is a usurper without any right to do so. In the novel, this role is played

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85 In this novel, too, God is man's rival, but the obstacle is hastily set aside, when elevated by Zbyszko's love and devotion, Jurand withdraws his prohibition.
" – I was against you because I had offered her in my soul to God.
– You had all offered her to God, but God had offered me. His Will be done!" [K I 326]
Ultimately, God's law triumphs; what is "living" and what is "dead" are separated; Danusia and Jurand are consumed by the actuality and symbolism of martyrdom, and Zbyszko is thrust back toward life, in other words, toward Jagienka.

86 A. Stoff, "Sienkiewiczowskie studium zemsty. Wątek Adama Nowowiejskiego w *Panu Wołodyjowskim*," in: *Jeszcze o Trylogii*, Radom 2004, p. 31.

not just by the Swedish king, but even more clearly by Prince Janusz Radziwiłł. The novel shows him as a "son" who has raised rebellion against his "father." Janusz himself uses this allegory in his words to Kmicic.

> Around me there was none who would dare to look at the sun with a fearless eye. . . . They were people of little spirit and little fantasy. Such you will never show any other road than the one on which they and their fathers are used to travel, for they will say of you that you are leading them into the wilderness. [P I 281]

Janusz does not wish to walk the ways of his fathers; however, he must mask his treachery with the rhetoric of paternal care for the fatherland's fate.[87] Interwoven with this falsehood is the duped Kmicic's action. Not recognizing the usurper, he acknowledges his guilt to the prince and gives himself into his power. The prince – Andrzej relates – "promised to make all well and protect me from human unkindness. God bless him" [P I 258]. The father-usurper also attempts to take on the prerogatives of Billewicz's grandfather, undermining the words of his will. He tries to unite Kmicic with Oleńka – "May the work of Pan Herakliusz be cured where it has gone wrong" [P I 256]. He also makes it clear to Kmicic that he will have nothing against it, if he compels the lady to marry by force. Neither the narrator nor the character accepts the power of a liberated will, which Janusz Radziwiłł personifies. It rather arouses fear and the need to suppress the spirit of rebellion, in oneself as well, which leads *inter alia* to Kmicic's conversion. The father's place is empty, but it is a measure of the moral and patriotic value of the character not to wish to take it.

The father driven from the plot, or taking in it a "weak" place, makes it possible to show the authoritative subject dispersed, but also makes it possible to create a tempting picture of a society that (lacking father/king/state) does not bear full responsibility for its own history. This was intended to help the reader of the *Trylogia* to absolve him/herself from a sense of guilt for the renunciation of rebellion, and by the same token justify the Positivists' argument concerning the senselessness of further uprisings. This absolutely did not mean the renunciation of power in general, but only meant its symbolic transformation. The space abandoned by the dead father must be taken, but not through a conflict with his baleful shade, but through a shifting of values or virtues. The father's authority is transformed and shifted beyond law and power – into the sphere of spiritual and biological power, but of a clear female, indeed maternal, provenance. This is particularly clear in *Potop*, in which the symbolism of the female has a double chain of meanings. One is created by the figures of Oleńka-Częstochowa-the Mother of God. The second, however, comprises Kmicic-the gentry/nobility-the

87 The occupiers do the same. "Even the Swedes themselves promised that, but let the king once control the whole land, and he would begin to rule like a father" [P II 134].

nation. The first symbolic strand represents a moral pattern. The second represents a capricious femininity, which is easily duped by a strong man, both Polish (Jeremi in *Ogniem i mieczem*) and a foreign usurper (Karol Gustaw). In the *Trylogia*, it is not the powerful leader that brings the unruly nobles under control, but it is the conversion plot that always triumphs, in which character and nation rehabilitate themselves: duped femininity returns to the model it has abandoned. The converted male character, thus, becomes a representative of the "female" forces of history.

2. In the power of performatives

In order to maintain the verisimilitude of novelistic events in connection with such a high degree of conventionalization of the story material in the *Trylogia*, Sienkiewicz often reaches for what are a kind of guarantees of novelistic order, ones that are ensured by the obligations that his protagonists undertake. They usually take the shape of performative utterances. They are promises of marriage (Helena, Krzysia, Baśka), knightly oaths (Podbipięta, Zbyszko z Bogdańca, Michał, and Ketling), Jeremi's oaths, and the "Lwów" oaths of Jan Kazimierz, the last will and testament of Colonel Billewicz, and Jan Kazimierz's letter exonerating Kmicic. From the point of view of the theme of the "absent father," here under discussion, the most important obligation is the note in the will of Colonel Herakliusz Billewicz. Aleksandra's grandfather dies at the news that his company of troops was "almost wiped out in an attack on French mercenary foot soldiers" [P I 7]. Before he dies, however, he manages to plan the fate of his granddaughter and Kmicic, whom he knew from shared campaigns. On the strength of an agreement made years previously between Herakliusz and Kmicic's father, and on the basis of Billewicz's will, Kmicic and Oleńka are to be married.

> Jointly we have determined by ancient noble and Christian custom that our children, and specifically his son Andrzej along with my granddaughter Aleksandra, daughter of the Master of the Hunt, are to be a couple. This I wish most strongly, and I oblige my granddaughter Aleksandra to follow this my recorded will, unless the Ensign of your suite (which God avert) by foul deeds should stain his fame and be pronounced infamous. . . .
>
> Notwithstanding, if by the special grace of God my granddaughter should wish for His glory to offer up her maidenhood and take a nun's habit, then she is free to do so, although the praise of God should pass through the human. [P I 9]

The word "of the father," "of the patriarch of all the Billewiczes" [P I 5], is of primary force in relation to the real encounter of the characters. His utterance, announced in a situation that constitutes the law (the declaration of a will), determines their future. For ten years, Oleńka wonders who and what is hidden

under the name "Andrzej Kmicic." Kmicic himself knows more, for he carries her portrait in miniature, but he does not hurry to see the original. "I have time! this marriage will not come to nought; maidens do not go to war and do not die there" [P I 19]. The reader is quickly convinced that this is almost wholly empty rationalization. Kmicic's predominanace is on the surface, and the performative clause of Billewicz's will, despite its severity, does not appear to be unchangeable. The executors and interpreters of the will, in other words the Lauda region gentry/nobility, are altogether too subject to Oleńka for the only alternative to Kmicic in her life to be the nunnery.[88] The manner in which she speaks with Pakosz, Kasjan, and Józwa, when these characters try to discover what she thinks about Kmicic, clearly shows who will decide in this matter. In addition, the narrator reminds the reader that the nobility is in the habit of "taking for gospel" everything "that comes from the lips of a Billewicz'" [P I 90].

The republican community of equal representatives of the noble estate is revealed as a utopian ideal, and the Lauda region gentry/nobility appears in this context as a purely symbolic guarantor of any fulfillment of the terms of the will. We see this again in the scene in which "Oleńka's guardians" have the idea of putting Wołodyjowski in Kmicic's place, since "that traitor has stained himself so with infamous deeds" [P I 98]. Aleksandra cuts short any such speculations, giving them clearly to understand who interprets the law: "that gentleman [Pan Michał], though he was the most worthy, do not bring him here, for I will certainly not meet with him" [P I 98].

Although he was conscious of the realities of the epoch he was describing, Sienkiewicz is not transcribing history, but is creating its fictional apocrypha. A demystification of the utopian idea of equality within a social estate does not by any means lead to a cynical acknowledgement of the domination of property and family. From the start, the author introduces Kmicic into the novel as a rebel who does not understand the structure of power in the world to which he is meant to belong. It seems to him that since grandfather and father are not alive, he has come to take up his property, to fetch his legacy. The confirmation of his succession, but in reality the confirmation of the character's error, is the scene in which he shoots at the portraits of Oleńka's ancestors – the symbolic murder of her fathers. Shaken by

88 Ewa Kosowska, in her discussion of the broadly anthropological grounding of the characters in the text within noble/gentry culture, confirms this interpretation. "In practical terms her relation to Kmicic in the matter of her betrothal shows a considerable degree of independence" (E. Kosowska, *Postać literacka jako tekst kultury*, Katowice 1990, p. 145). A continuation of this set of issues is constituted by an analysis of the normative function of shame in the relations of characters in *Potop*, particularly Kmicic and Oleńka (E. Kosowska, *Negocjacje i kompromisy. Antropologia polskości Henryka Sienkiewicza*, Katowice 2002, pp. 113–137).

this, “father Kasjan” informs Oleńka that “on the first day in Lubicz they shot from their side arms – and at whom? – at the portraits of the Billewicz dead” [P I 53].

This spectacular gesture does not lead to Kmicic’s taking a symbolic place in the structure of the family and locality. Quite the reverse, Kmicic slowly begins to discover that here there is no chance symbolically to rival the “father,” for there is no father, and thus the nature of his power has changed, being transformed and dispersed. When Oleńka tells Kmicic that she values the opinion of her yeomen guardians, Kmicic feels resentful: “if I were once established here, there would be no other guardian except me” [P I 25]. He is mistaken, because he does not understand that it is a test of humility, a screen behind which lurks the girl’s will that, in fact, decides everything. Indeed, she herself says that “it will be a guardianship, as if there were none. . .” [P I 25]. The will and the nobility/gentry’s care are, in essence, guarantees, but not of Kmicic’s rights, rather of the freedom of Aleksandra’s decisions. They constitute a way out for her, in the event that she does not care for Kmicic. In addition, the author behaves as if he had forgotten that the will allows Oleńka free choice of husband, if Kmicic “by foul deeds should stain his fame,” since Oleńka not only does not avail herself of this possibility, but several times “plays” the will against unwelcome suitors. This happens in her answers to the marriage proposals of Wołodyjowski and Bogusław Radziwiłł. Aleksandra’s uncle, Pan Tomasz, dazed by the magnificent proposition from the great prince, would support this marriage, if it were not for Aleksandra’s remark about the will: “One must either accept all the conditions laid down by my late lamented grandfather, or reject them all” [P I 25]. Also in the novel’s finale, her decision to enter a nunnery is rather an expression of mourning for an unfortunate love, than a fulfillment of the dead Billewicz’s purpose.

The superficial authority of the will is shown most explicitly in the scene in which Wołodyjowski asks Billewiczówna for her hand, knowing that through his deeds Kmicic has forfeited his rights to her.

> – It depends on your will. . . .
> – And that is precisely why I answer my lord: no! [P I 135]

Unintentionally, Wołodyjowski demystifies the performative weakness of the will, and indeed its seeming lack of ambiguity. It is all the more interesting that Oleńka exploits the will, not so much weakening its power, but, on the contrary, radicalizing its performative quality, giving it a force that it does not, in fact, possess. At the same time, it is not the word of the “patriarch,” but her own will that says “no!” to Wołodyjowski.[89] Neither conventions of law or custom, nor

89 Michał understands perfectly what the cause of the refusal is, but he does not understand the nature of love. “But by what means did he so win her? Guess who may. Others are so fortunate that with just a mere glance at a woman, and she’s ready to leap into the fire

the situational context of the utterance (the guardians' agreement) govern the meaning and force of an utterance that is subject now to the will of a woman in love. This means that we are not dealing with an infelicitous performative, one that is ineffective for rule-governed or fortuitous reasons.[90] It is the bad faith of the interpreter (Oleńka) that adds the flexibility of its meaning, one that is not inhibited by the changing contexts of the uttered context. Austin, with a note of resignation, describes such an infelicity that is impossible to classify.

> . . . but suppose I say "I promise to send you to a nunnery" – when I think, but you do not, that this will be for your good, or again when you think it will but I do not, or even when we both think it will, but in fact, as may transpire, it will not? Have I invoked a non-existent convention in inappropriate circumstances? Needless to say, and as a matter of general principle, there can be no satisfactory choice between between these alternatives, which are too unsubtle to fit subtle cases. There is no short cut to expounding simply the full complexity of the situation which does not exactly fit any common classification.[91]

The "full complexity of the situation" in the novel means that the performativity of Billewicz's will is a sham if it is not supported by the executive force of the law or pure force. As Austin puts it, beside the question of what a given utterance *means*, there also exists the different question as to what is the *force* of the utterance.[92] In the novel there is not sufficient information to define the legal force of Billewicz's will; however there are many signs that the strength of Oleńka's will determines this. However, she seldom reveals her subject role in interpreting her grandfather's testament, restricting herself to the change of contexts in which its content can be cited.

The circumstances of the utterance relativize the meaning of the grandfather's decision, although the utterance's context was supposed actually to enhance its lack of ambiguity. Austin remarks that the situation in which an utterance occurs has substantial meaning, and one must elucidate the words used via the context in which were supposed to be uttered or in fact were uttered within the framework of a linguistic exchange.[93]

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with him. . . . To know how that works and get some hidden power, maybe a fellow would accomplish something. You'll get nowhere by your merits with a woman!" [P I 136].

90 J. L. Austin, *Mówienie i poznawanie. Rozprawy i wykłady filozoficzne*, trans. and ed. B. Chwedeńczuk, Warszawa 1993, p. 567.

91 Ibid, p. 585. *How to Do Things with Words*, Oxford 1962, pp. 37-38.

92 Ibid, p. 333.

93 Ibid., p. 646. M.H. Abrams, commenting on Derrida's view of the stabilizing function of context, writes that Derrida notes right away that we will never find an absolutely pure example, and thus we can never be sure that all necessary and sufficient conditions have been fulfilled to establish a defined and felicitous performative (M. H. Abrams, "Ustalanie

In the novel, it is Billewiczówna who establishes the context that defines the meaning of the text of the will, especially since – as the narrator informs us – she has outstanding intelligence and legal talent, "amazing all by her absolutely non-feminine mind and a judgment so sound that many a *lawyer* [my italics – R.K.] might envy her it" [P I 89-90]. Kmicic's predominance was, thus, always illusory. Also his fortune is substantially smaller than that inherited by Oleńka. In Herakliusz's annotation, Kmicic gets Lubicz perhaps because he himself does not possess too much, for "the Smolensk voivodeship, in which the Kmicic fortunes lay, was considered to be lost" [P I 10].

The basic cause of Oleńka's dominance over Kmicic lies, however, in her intellect. No other character in *Trylogia* loves a woman with a love that is so full of regard for her power of understanding, something that even provokes sneers.

> Those who did not admire him (and who does not have those) said in truth that he listened to his wife too much in all matters, but he was not ashamed of that, and, indeed, confessed himself that in every matter of greater importance he always called on her advice. [P III 423]

From the start, Kmicic feels Oleńka's intellectual dominance, and even in the opening scene he predicts the novel's final words (quoted earlier). "My lady will lead me by a thread" [P I 20]. However, he erroneously grasps this power in the image of an emancipated noblewoman: "Among us the fair ones wear boots and carry sabers, and command the troops" [P I 26].[94] Readers rather too swiftly attribute Pan Andrzej's alteration to a moral and patriotic conversion. The character has first to become wise, and the pattern of political and ethical wisdom is Billewiczówna. Her disdain for Kmicic's deeds highlights in his actions an uncomprehending dominance of instinct over reflection and a lack of awareness of who he is and what he is doing

> Even if he is guiltless, I wonder if it is not right to disdain one who lacks the understanding to distinguish good from bad, vice from virtue? . . . [P I 398]

As one can see, the author allows Aleksandra to question even the sacred sarmatian right to sincere irresponsibility, to mistakes committed out of stupidity. Here we have a woman who deprecates the virtues of a Polish nobleman: an exuberance of temperament, a sincere thoughtlessness, and a fidelity toward "company." She says to him: "Think on this." The change of position among the characters means that Kmicic no longer demands, but rather begs despairingly

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i dekonstrukcja," trans. T. Kunz, in: *Dekonstrukcja w badaniach literackich*, ed. R. Nycza, Gdańsk 2000, p. 225).

94 Sienkiewicz, quite averse to emancipation, is convinced that male domination of women is predetermined, and its reversal through rivalry with men is unnecessary. This is illustrated, for example, by his "Nietzschean" aphorism: "Women can be not only Overmaidens and Overwives, but also over . . . their husbands" [DZ XL 64].

that she keep faith with him ("as your late grandfather from the other world commands" [P I 91]). The performativity of the grandfather's will, by which he seeks to control the future by the letter of a noble, patriarchal instruction, is anachronous as far as Sienkiewicz is concerned. The law is secondary here in relation to human will, to love and desire, which the narrator clearly expresses in the sentence that Billewiczówna, if she had a less severe character, could fall in love with Prince Bogusław "against the testament of the old Colonel, who left her a choice only between the nunnery and Kmicic" [P III 216].

This flirting with meanings, provoking fantasies concerning the female will to power, must be restrained "in the name of the father," but how is the father's power to return? To put the question differently: how can it be achieved that the figure of Kmicic, representing the strong "male" discourse of noble/gentry culture, does not lose his "phallic" primacy when he humbles himself before a woman's wisdom and knowledge? The solution is, in part, typical for Sienkiewicz's struggles with the controversial nature of his own fictions. The meanings that threaten the coherence of the great tropes of the narrative, are separated off from each other. One such point of potential conflict is the disruption of Billewiczówna's status: she oscillates between being an object of desire and the subject that brings about the change in Kmicic. The author splits the forces of femininity in order to avoid conflict between honor and desire, between Kmicic's regard for his wife's power of reason and male dominance, which is a result of his cultural position, that of soldier-husband-father. As a result of this separation, Kmicic loves Oleńka-the woman, but worships Oleńka-the mother. However, not the mother of a future child, but his own mother, who "gives birth" to Babinicz, so that Kmicic may be reborn. The author earlier prepares the connection of symbolic motherhood between this pair of characters from *Potop* – in minor but important phrases and images, for example, in Andrzej's sad complaint. "'Oleńka! . . . Oleńka! . . . , ' he repeated with a sorry groan, like a child who meets with some harm" [P I 272]. Kmicic starts to behave rationally when he realizes that his opponent is neither a man, nor Oleńka herself, but God. The woman he loves tries to make him aware of this.

> – I want nothing else than that you repeat to me once more that you will wait and not marry any other! . . .
> – My lord knows that according to the will it is forbidden to do that. I can only seek refuge in a nunnery.
> – Oh, spare me that! By the living God, enough of the nunnery. At the very thought my skin creeps. [P I 259]

God, whose representative in the novel is the narrator, guarantees a certainty that the world of the novel has an order, which must only be recognized, and all will end well. The laws of the real world give no such guarantee. Wołodyjowski soberly convinces Oleńka that "There's more of those Kmicices in the world; you

will enflame more; you will expose your virtue to more adventures" [P I 134]. In such a world, the will is a haggling with God about a woman. Grandfather Billewicz's agreement tricks God, luring him with the thought that if he protects Oleńka from other men, and she does not choose Kmicic, she will belong to Him. Thus, within the interpenetration of the erotic and power, Kmicic is an instrument of the "father," serving him to exercise control over his "daughter's" body. Albert Camus once commented spitefully on Hamlet's famous line "Ophelia, get thee to a nunnery!" There was no other way, he remarked, to possess her than to make it so that no one possessed her. God and His supremacy, perhaps, he went on, can be easily borne: neither touches the body.[95]

The motif of nuns' vows appears in all the parts of the *Trylogia*; they form a cycle of fictions about three battles with the cloister over a woman.[96] In *Ogniem i mieczem*, this is merely a brief episode, which characterizes Skrzetuski's state after Helena's seeming death. Drowned in sorrow, he seriously considers entering an order, and for the moment "he avoided hubbub, crowds, and binges, pleasing to spend his time with monks, to whose tales of life in the cloisters and of a future life he greedily, more than once, listened" [OM II 292]. There is, however, no contract with God here, but only a "civil" contract with Princess Kurcewiczowa. Skrzetuski buys Helena, offering her guardian the right to the property of Rozłogi, and threatening her at the same time with Jeremi's revenge for the illegal seizure of goods belonging to Helena. More important are Podbipieta's pledges to remain a virgin until he has cut off three pagan heads simultaneously. It is an oath that guarantees a balance between inflicting death and begetting life. The fulfillment of the oath "unblocks" the repressed forces of desire and procreation. The shameful background to Podbipięta's heroism is perfectly exposed by Zagłoba when he says: "my lord, you're just a whore who trades in virtue! . . . You're in no hurry to get to the king, but you'd whinny out advice round the villages like a horse in pasture" [OM II 367].

In *Pan Wołodyjowski* this motif returns and in doubled form. This repetition also demonstrates how many of Sienkiewicz's decisions were based on thinking about the cycle as a whole. In a seemingly unimportant scene in *Potop*, the writer announces the cloister episode in *Pan Wołodyjowski*. In the banquet given by Janusz Radziwiłł, Michał sits between two ladies, Elżbieta Sielawska, "in years around forty," and Oleńka, who is Kmicic's companion. He is still pained by his recent rejection; in his thoughts he feels sorry for his fate as an "orphan" and

95 A. Camus, "Notatniki," in: *Eseje*, ed. J. Guze, Warszawa 1974, p. 548.

96 Perhaps even four. As Anna Leo notes, the author also decides to send Baśka to a nunnery. "I remember when, moved by the funeral of the little knight, I asked Sienkiewicz: 'Tell me, sir, what does Basia do?' He answered quickly: 'But of course, she enters a nunnery'" (A. Leo, *Wczoraj. Gawęda z niedawnej przeszłości*, Warszawa 1929, p. 149).

an emotional failure. He sees that by every beautiful woman “already someone else has set up his quarters” [P I 264]. While the old maid is flirting with him, he mutters prophetically to himself.

> – And after the war, what does my lord think to do? – Pani Elżbieta Sielawska asked suddenly, a prim expression on her lips and fanning herself powerfully.
> – Go into a monastery – the little knight answered harshly. [P I 264]

In the next part, Michał, after Anusia’s death, takes up Skrzetuski’s unrealized intention and enters the Cameldolite Order, from which Zagłoba saves him by trickery. The series of repetitions of this motif does not stop here, because when Krzysia gets involved in the conflict between the promise made to Michał and her love for Ketling, she realizes that the way out of this impasse is to enter a nunnery. As in *Potop*, the nunnery is for the character an opportunity to escape a man she does not want and to maintain a mutual love. She reassures Ketling that it is certainly true that she cannot reveal to him the causes of her decision, but

> Perhaps you will have some relief if I say that I will be no one’s. . . . I go behind bars . . . . You surrender me to God, to no one else . . . remember that! [PW 147]

Here Sienkiewicz does something intriguing, mixing his characters’ perspectives. Krzysia’s decision touches both male characters. Ketling receives her in silence, but Michał bursts out in grief, answering unintentionally for his friend as well. The author expresses this grief in metaphors of trade, an emotional exchange, in which God draws an illegal profit from human suffering.

> Just look what you give Him – yourself? But you are mine, for you swore that to me yourself. So you give Him what is another’s, not your own; you give him my weeping, my suffering, my death. Do you really have a right to do that? [PW 180]

Once more the motif of right returns, but the lack of right gives Michał a basis for his claims. Since there was no contract with God, there is no reason to give way to him, especially if, as far as Michał is concerned, this is happening for the second time. The first time was the death of Anusia Borzobohata. Since God guarantees nothing, Michał tries to appeal to human rectitude. “You gave me the right yourself – do not make an outlaw of me!” [PW 180]. The language of right, by which Sienkiewicz describes the actions of disappointed feeling, splendidly realizes the weakness of utterances that pretend to have the power to change reality, to control history, the body’s drives, and chance. The narrator – by virtue of his omniscience – is gentle with the answer and explains that Wołodyjowski’s expectations are childish.

> The unhappy Pan Michał did not know that there is a right greater and older than all human ones. By force of it, the heart can only follow, and does only follow, love. Should it cease to love, it permits itself the deepest breach of faith, though often so guiltlessly, just as the lamp goes out guiltlessly, when its oil is done. [PW 180]

Since, however, history is only a human matter, that means agreements, obligations, and promises, recorded in its language, deceive, evoking as they do guarantees other than human ones. The ultimate demystification of the weakness of Billewicz's performative is carried out in *Pan Wołodyjowski*, a novel permeated by the spirit of skepticism. In the third struggle with the cloister over a woman, parody follows parody, love scenes are bitterly comic, and the seriousness of the romance is turned upside down. Michał tries to give meaning to his biography, arguing that for his years of service to the fatherland God should grant him a reward in the shape of the woman he loves, of a home etc. Here, however, there is a lack of a regulatory factor in the form of a written record, such as waited for Kmicic, or in the shape of Skrzetuski's agreement with the Princess Kurcewiczowa. When Anusia dies, Michał enters a monastery, entering into Skrzetuski's role, one that Skrzetuski himself could not fulfill. He is also enters into Oleńka's role, for whom the cloister was a weapon of defense. He also anticipates the role of Krzysia, who, thanks to the cloister, will want to avoid a difficult moral choice. Here and here again, Michał is like a player in a one-person game of tennis. He relinquishes his knightly attributes, reduces his male desires, becomes a monk, behaving as if the performative of his forebears weighed on him – as on Podbipięcie, Kmicic, and Oleńka. Giving way to his friend Krzysia, he changes roles with her, taking on her obligations toward God, the observance of which, however, no one demands. Besides that, Michał does not have to change his ways, nor do penance, for he does not, after all, bear responsibility for Andrzej's sins; so the victory over the monastery does not end in an equally spectacular fashion, as it does in the case of other characters. Kmicic, changed for the better into Babinicz, removing Oleńka from the nunnery, won an intelligent woman, a wife, the mother of his son. Wołodyjowski is also removed from the monastery, but by Zagłoba, who arrives to take him away as a lover would his imprisoned beloved. Zagłoba's guile returns the character to the story material of war and love, but the gains from this victory for Michał are uncertain. Zagłoba wins Wołodyjowski from the monastery for himself (friendship), for Baśka's husband (no successors, widowhood), and for the fatherland (defeat, death by suicide, the breaking of agreements).

From the perspective of the plot, the character's private history becomes equally contingent and incomprehensible as the greater history of war and politics. Behind the comic aspects of *Pan Wołodyjowski*, there is a serious note of doubt in the hope of hiding away from history in the home and in a woman's arms. For Wołodyjowski, who does not understand politics, law, and history, femininity and home constitute a reward that can be expected for faith and good service.[97]

97 "What have I done! What sins weigh on me, that the wrath of God pursues me, that the wind weds me as if I were a dry and fallen leaf? One is dead; the other has gone to a nunnery; God has cut them both off from me. I am accursed, and for each there is love, for each grace,

But expected from whom? –Sienkiewicz the widower seems to ask his character, leading him from one crisis to the next, right on to the culmination that is death by suicide. The irony of a silent and indifferent providence touches, in the final part of the *Trylogia*, women for the first time. The fates of the female figures in *Pan Wołodyjowski* (Basia, Zosia, and Ewka) are tragic and muddy their trust in a purposeful course of things. Femininity, which in Sienkiewicz's world usually promises healing, the endurance of moral truths, and the order of home and family, here itself loses that certainty.

When Basia frees herself from Azja's hands and flees over the snowy plain, she loses faith not only in her own strength, but also in something more.

> Everything was against her now: the treachery of the roads, darkness, the elements, mankind, the animals; only the single hand of God seemed to watch over her. In that good, sweet, fatherly care she had placed all her child-like trust, and now even it had failed her. [PW 418]

This is no empty phrase or the conventional discourse of despair, but a clear decline of the vitality and optimism so typical of the two earlier parts of the cycle. We find the same doubt with Zosia Boska, whom the author makes a slave of Azja. Beaten, raped, and humiliated in every possible way by a sadist, she finds no consolation nor explanation of her fate. The picture of her torment shakes the order of the fictional world; it is a scandal of unmerited suffering that is not explained (and should not be explained) by either religion or the philosophy of history.

> Before she had always been a girl like a lamb without stain, gentle as a dove, trusting as a child, simple, loving – so she did not understand why such a terrible wrong was taking place, one that could not be put right, and why the implacable wrath of God so lay on her – and this indecision of the soul increased her pain, her despair. [PW 470]

The word "God" – although it often appears in the language of the *Trylogia* – does not mean for the characters a power that rationally guides the world. It rather functions in the novel as a word that serves to conjure up human isolation in the universe. Performatvity – of the contract, the will, the promise of love or marriage – requires a power that will allow the accomplishment of the promises of utterances, that will permit reality to recognize its provisions. The performative is

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but not for me! . . ." [PW 175]. (If it was not for the the discrepancy in time, we could be certain that Sienkiewicz is speaking here about his first two wives, but Marynuszka, who will throw him over, has not yet appeared in the writer's life.). "One thought like a soldier that it was a matter of dessert, and this was his reward! Ha! God knows best what He does, though that cannot be grasped by human understanding, nor measured by human justice" [PW 13]. Michał does not want to hear Zagłoba's confused explanations that it is God and not man that has taken his woman from him. ". . . a rasping sound came from his teeth, and he cried in a choked and broken voice: 'If that was a living man? . . . ha! . . . if there were such a one! I wish there were! . . . There would be vengeance'" [PW 175].

the conjuring of history so that it submits itself to the human desire to control his/her fate. It summons, therefore, the authority of a "father" (God, king, patriarch, or the law), in order to demonstrate externally in relation to language the foundation of its meaning, knowing that no word on its own can provide assurance of itself. Sienkiewicz gave the great powers of literature to serve this dream, and at the same time he scattered throughout the novel signals that these are exclusively the powers of language, and that their force only operates within the scope of words. So ultimately, the only guarantee of the happy outcome of Colonel Billewicz's testament (and of any other performative in the text) is the law of fiction. The historical romance that is the *Trylogia* is a genre in which love, the erotic, and motherhood struggle with the institutions of law and violence, and with politics and war – for the possession of history.

3. The son that hesitates

In *Potop* Sienkiewicz laid unusually high value on the political sense and moral consciousness of his characters. Kmicic is an exceptional character because he gains not only military experiences, but also has to learn about politics. With a fine perverseness, Sienkiewicz has him create a diabolic duet of teachers. Oleńka, who is responsible for lessons in ethics, is accompanied by Bogusław Radziwiłł – a master in the area of *realpolitik*. Before he gets as far as a lesson with the master, his brother gives the character hellish counsel, with regard to the order that ought to mark the world and the heroes of an epic: "Learn the arcana of politics" [P I 409]. Politics is a world of values antagonistic to military virtues. The world of *Ogniem i mieczem* is filled with contempt for political dealing, procrastination, and hidden agreements. The narrator, along with the protagonists, expresses impatient expectations with regard to the war-time policy of the iron hand (Prince Jeremi's main political method), by which it is ultimately necessary to resolve all questions, political, religious, and social. In *Potop*, we can observe a fundamental change in the relationship of politics and military force. They are more tightly linked, and politics is not condemned, but rather valued. The narrator underlines, for example, the source of Karol Gustaw's success is a matter of both the efficiency of his army and his talent as a leader, and the art of negotiation practiced by the chancellor Benedykt Oxenstierna.[98] The narration of *Potop* does not contain such a clear apologia for pure violence; the story leads the initially lost hero through

98 On the level of the fictional characters, a creditable example of politics is Zagłoba's success when in words full of flattery he persuades Field-Marshall Lubomirski to work together with Czarniecki.

the intricate maneuvers of great politics, subtly and maliciously portraying the trumpery of the nobles' consciousness as citizens of the Commonwealth, and the pretence of individual participation in estate democracy. Listening to the political visions of Janusz Radziwiłł, Kmicic is not in a state to judge either what they mean for Poland or what the Prince's interests actually are.

> Pan Andrzej stopped snorting through his nostrils, but struck his hand to his forehead and called out:
> – I'm a fool! A fool!
> – I will not say you're wrong in that, said the Prince. [P I 411]

Only when Prince Bogusław lays out for the character, with no pretences, the interests of the Radziwiłłs, only then does Kmicic understand that the actual war is only a small part of political conflicts that never stop for a moment. The outstanding didactic quality of Bogusław's monolog appears in his use of a suggestive allegory that visually explains to the "foolish one" in what kind of world it is that he wields his saber ("The Commonwealth is a warp of red cloth. . . ." [P I 450]). The Prince's monolog creates a perverse parallel with the motif of Billewicz's will. We can see a precise use of symbolic language in this scene, a use in accordance with the motif discussed earlier of the expected renunciation of succession to the absent "father." Now, before our eyes, we have the menacing alternative.

> It is, sir knight, the custom in this country that when someone is dying, his relatives in the last moments jerk the pillow from under his head so that he suffers no longer. I and the Prince Voivode of Wilno have decided to do this service to the Commonwealth. But as the power of the predators lurks in wait for the inheritance and as we are not able to gather it all ourselves, we therefore wish that a part at least, and that not a small one, should fall to us. As relatives, that is our right. [P I 450].

The devilish nature of this education lies in the fact that it is traitors who teach Kmicic political understanding – usurpers, and political cynics. And it is their instruction, linked with his love of Billewiczówna, that turns him into a conscious patriot. Unlike Skrzetuski and Wołodyjowski, Kmicic is given by Sienkiewicz an intelligence that is not just military, but also political. Bogusław's lesson is a summation of Polish history, a record of the experience of generations betrayed many times politically, an experience that endured into the author's own generation. This consciousness does not, however, lead to the suggestion that it is necessary to adopt the enemy's methods of "doing politics." At this point Sienkiewicz makes a sudden about-face and does not draw the consequence of such a suggestively pictured image of conspiracies and plotting. This withdrawal is characteristic and is linked with the consciousness that to adopt such an absolute vision of politics would justify Poland's historical catastrophe and would deprive a nation without its state of the moral rights belonging to the defeated. The social Darwinism implanted in the theory of history by Henry Buckle must have even

more strongly filled the author of *Bez dogmatu* with a fear of a Darwinian vision of history, in which the principal function of individuals and of nations is survival by eliminating competitors.[99]

The beginning of the positivist rebellion is a typically "oedipal" generational conflict. Sienkiewicz himself was part of the "horde," that wanted to sweep away the post-feudal mentality of the Polish intelligentsia in order to make room for a modern civic mentality: practical, sober, and positive.[100] "Positivism is, thus,

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99 A huge role in the spreading of Darwinism in the field of the philosophy of history was played by Henry Buckle's historical evolutionism. This was set out in his *History of Civilization in England* (1857-1866), which was published quite quickly in Poland, in a translation by Władysław Zawadzki (1862-1868). See the splendid, if by necessity not fully developed, study of Buckle's reception, written by Andrzej Feliks Grabski, entitled *Spór o prawa dziejowe. Kontrowersje wokół Henry'ego Thomasa Buckle'a w Polsce w dobie pozytywizmu*, Lublin 2002. See also: S. Fita, "Młodzieńcze lektury pokolenia pozytywistów," in: *Książka pokolenia. W kręgu lektur polskich doby postyczniowej*, ed. E. Paczoska and J. Sztachelska, Białystok 1994, p. 15; and *Stara i młoda prasa. Przyczynek do historii literatury ojczystej 1866–1872*, op. cit., pp. 8–11). One cannot see any fascination with Buckle's work in Sienkiewicz's. It is different, however, with the work of Orzeszkowa who made her debut in *Gazeta Polska* (Nr. 157) in 1866, with an enthusiastic article entitled "O historii cywilizacji angielskiej przez Henryka Tomasza Buckl[e]'a" (On the History of English Civilization by Henry Thomas Buckle). The same fascination can be seen in Prus, who apparently "spent whole days in the window of his apartment (on Gołęba Street) to convince the incredulous that the number of people passing by on the street in certain periods of time must be the same" (*Stara i młoda prasa. Przyczynek do historii literatury ojczystej 1866–1872*, op.cit., p. 10). This answers Buckle's conviction concerning the perfect functionality of historical laws, which determine even that in a certain state of society a certain number of people will of necessity take their own lives (see: A. F. Grabski, *Spór o prawa dziejowe*, p. 37). This is a characteristic example that shows the metaphysical substitution of "Law" in place of "Providence." In another language, Buckle repeats St. Matthew's warning: "Are not two sparrows sold for a farthing? and one of them shall not fall on the ground without your Father. But the very hairs of your head are all numbered" (Matt. 10.29-30). Despite the lack of admiration and of any clear criticism in his journalism and essays, the philosophy of history embodied in Sienkiewicz's fiction is decidedly anti-Buckle. On one hand, Sienkiewicz absolutely did not share Buckle's conviction about the complete determination of history by unalterable laws, laws that minimalize the meaning of the individual and that determine his/her fate; on the other, a rejection of Romantic messianism did not lead Sienkiewicz to the obvious conclusion that "a recognition of the existence of evolution in the world of nature, and also naturalistic determinism in history, leads inevitably to a denial of the fundamental teleological thesis of the rule of Providence in the world" (Grabski, op. cit, s. 148).

100 "The author of *Bez dogmatu* was able to develop these qualities, just as Śniatyński, Chwastowski, and Połaniecki did. Having quit the environment of a gentry/nobility that was bankrupt and no longer in the saddle, they took afresh leading positions in society, but now not by the grace of their fathers, but by their own efforts" (A. Stawar, *Pisarstwo Henryka Sienkiewicza*, op.cit., p. 192).

security against a disease of the intellect" is how he advertised the new vision of the world in issue 50 of *Przegląd Tygodniowy* on 30 November 1873. He did not even hesitate to instruct village rectors that they should take up some useful pursuit, for example silk cultivation and production.

> Instead of playing cards after vespers with the local vicar, instead of having political discussions about what the French are going to do in the spring, instead of finally falling asleep after dinner and snoring away under a colored cloth that you spread over your face to keep the flies off – wouldn't it be much better to take up sericulture, to shade the rectory with mulberry bushes, to ensure the country of millions in the future, to reconcile the gratitude of one's successors with the sweet persuasion, in one's own time, that one's working for the good of those close to one? [Cho II 6]

Despite this impulse toward democratization, the early positivist rebellion against its "fathers" is from the beginning layered with a feeling of guilt. For the "fathers" are dead already; killed, exiled, forced into emigration, deprived of their fortunes, degraded to the level of the bourgeoisie. A revolt against such "fathers" seemed somehow unworthy to Sienkiewicz. But when we look at others – Orzeszkowa, Prus, Konopnicka, even Świętochowski – we see how the radicalism of the new is mixed in their writings, too, with a tenderness toward the generation of the defeated. In Sienkiewicz's work, this impetus toward rebellion against "the father" is hesitant from the start; he is the first to abandon the discourse of the rebellious "son," also giving up direct involvement in it in his writing.

Restraining in his novels Positivism's critical tendencies, visible, for example, still in *Szkice węglem* (Charcoal Sketches), Sienkiewicz also abandons positivist realism's declared minimalism. To formulate this change crudely, but without dodging the issue, one can say that Sienkiewicz projects a literature that speaks in the name of the absent father – authority, meaning, history, law – and restores the continuity of an interrupted discourse. In other words, he is the son who begets "another father," and not one that triumphantly takes a deserted place. Lacan tells us that it is impossible to fill the function of the father without the *signifiants* by which the father names the child. As E. Roudinesco puts it, the father appears in relation to it (the child) as the one who has stolen the mother from it, and has thus made it possible for his ideal "I" to emerge.[101]

But what if – we ask skeptically – the father is dead, and the law comes from a father-usurper? That is how the simple symbolism of generational succession becomes complicated when applied to nineteenth-century Polish history. From the 1880s on, Sienkiewicz's prose emerges into a consciousness of this complication, and that is why in it there is none of the "oedipal" discourse with the past that is typical of early Positivism. In place of the humiliated "father," weakened

101 E. Roudinesco, *Jacques Lacan. Jego życie i myśl*, trans. R. Reszke, Warszawa 2005, p. 407.

by history and the partitions, Sienkiewicz introduces his other *name* – that is a literature that decomposes the image of Poland's past shaped in the ideological polemics of the young with the old. Thus, it rejects the caricature-like picture of the "father" constructed by revolting sons. The change of historical tradition takes place through its own kind of simulation, which in the historical novels imitate "the voice of the father." By this strategy of ventriloquism, the son names himself by himself, and he restores to himself the disrupted, positive continuity of language, tradition, and history, a continuity that the usurper has robbed him of. Thus, his generational experience achieves a different genealogy, one that is easier to accept, via the gesture of passing through "the dead father" in the direction of "the strong father."

The *Trylogia* is, after all, also a kind of myth of state power, an oppositional one in relation to the absolutist monarchies that emerged in seventeenth-century Europe. In Polish gentry/noble democracy, Sienkiewicz sees an unachieved alternative to the ideology of the powerful states that triumphed over Poland in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Among the essays from the cycle *Wiadomości bieżace* (1880), Sienkiewicz places a discussion of Michał Bobrzyński's *Dzieje Polski w zarysie* (An Outline of Polish History), an essay that is very important for an understanding of the function that Sienkiewicz ascribed to historiography.

> According to this school, we should look for the causes of the fall mainly in ourselves and in the institutions that, having become warped, or having grown wrongly into monstrosities, dislocated the nation's tasks, alienated it from its real aims, and condemned it to an indolent quietism, one that inevitably led to ruin. [Wb II 8]

> We were not able to form a state, and thus power, and thus we could not perform the tasks that lay before us – and we fell. This is the quintessence of the views of the latest school. [Wb II 8]

One can see that Sienkiewicz is in no doubt that the effect of this school on the life of the contemporary Pole is a harmful one, for its result is "to deprive him of uplift and to undercut moral positions. Indeed, is such activity not harmful in practical terms, and in its blinded lack of relativity, does it not produce bitter fruit, on which we see no need to reflect?" [Wb II 61]. Despite these words, the writer's own studies in the history of the seventeenth century did not allow him simply to reverse Bobrzyński's arguments, and the critical opinions on the historical philosophy of *Dzieje Polski w zarysie* prefigure the fascinating fissuring of author's views that is revealed in the *Trylogia*. What is the relationship of the longing for the "martial lord," or of the apologia for the harsh ruler that is Jeremi Wiśniowiecki in *Ogniem i mieczem*, to Sienkiewicz's conviction "that between the state that for the principle of the state consumes a thousand generations like

Moloch, and impotent anarchy, perhaps there is a third possibility, some higher principle that history should, indeed, be able to work out" [Wb II 10]?[102]

A despotic and charismatic leader (Wiśniowecki or Czarnecki) has an ambiguous position in the story, as he constitutes the personification of the absolutist monarchies of the seventeenth century, something that is confirmed in the narrator's indecisiveness concerning their activities. It is true that he glorifies – along with other characters – the military genius of these leaders, only suddenly to repress his enthusiasm, recalling something about an armed foray against the *sejm* (parliament) or about incompetent diplomacy. The narrator's indecisiveness is understandable; despite the simulation of the genre, he is speaking from a position at the end of the nineteenth century. His author is a victim of Prussia's and Russia's historical success and of the defeat of his own state; thus, he is in search of an alternative which would confirm that things did not have to be that way. Therefore, he is not convinced that it was a defective systemic construction that was the cause of the fall of the Polish state. In proof, he offers the fall of two fundamentally different states: "one is Spain with its strong government; the second is the former Commonwealth – without a government" [Wb II 64].

It is impossible to define the author's clear position on the basis of his demonstration of historical processes in the *Trylogia*. In *Ogniem i mieczem*, the narrator, disputing Jerzy Ossoliński's views on the causes of Chmielnicki's rebellion, says that guilt for this is borne by "the entire Commonwealth and all the estates, its past and its state system" [OM II 412]. At the same time, there is apparent in the text a distaste for strong state institutions, and series of synonymous categories – court of justice, state, law, partitioning state, power, order – creates for him, a nineteenth-century Pole, a chain of meaning-filled, negative connotations. This is a distaste resulting from a liberal vision of the world and from the experience of a defeated people; its effect is the conviction that the better a state is organized, the more threatened becomes the freedom of the individual. Sienkiewicz does not care for a state like that in the past, and does not wish it for a future Poland.[103]

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102 These views diverge from Herbert Spencer's judgments in *The Man versus the State* (1884). The Polish edition, *Jednostka wobec państwa*, was published in Warsaw in 1886.

103 The subtlety of this contradiction is visible only after a careful analysis of the vision of power in the *Trylogia*. Therefore, Adam Kersten is wrong when he writes, "Sienkiewicz shared the views of the 'new school' on the monarchy" (A. Kersten *Potop – historia*, Warszawa 1970, p. 51). A strong royal authority is a boon for the institutions of the state, but it means the citizen's enslavement. For Sienkiewicz the complete difference between Poles and Russians results from a typically liberal relationship to power, as "for us, a nation with a Latin culture, it is almost a complete improbability that we may come to an understanding with today's Russians, above all because in the depths of their souls they are nomads, to whom, for example, the transfer of Polish peasants to Siberia, and Siberian peasants to Poland seems an utterly simple matter. Furthermore, they are people with no

In the context of this dilemma, it is worth recalling the popularity of *Hamlet* among nineteenth-century readers. How important this text was for Sienkiewicz himself is demonstrated in a complex fashion by Jolanta Szlachelska .[104] For Positivists, Hamlet can serve as patron saint of the double interdiction of revolt – against the generation of "weak fathers," but also (which is expressed in the Positivists' reluctance to engage in armed struggle) against the father-usurpers, that is the partitioning states. Sienkiewicz did not agree with the ideology of struggle, partly in fear of the dangerous *mimesis* of revolution, which, in his opinion, imitates what it has overthrown.[105] This can be seen in the writer's response to the revolutionary events of 1905.

In relation to the above, what does it look like, this more conciliatory vision of history, a "third way" between aristocratic anarchy and absolutism; between the nineteenth-century dilemma, "to fight or not to fight?" and what Jeremi's words meant to the contemporary reader, when he declares that "it was better for a chivalrous people to die than to become base and awaken the contempt of the whole world" [OM I 382]? Does the author share this view? As usual, we find in his work proof of diametrically opposed answers. The lack of a strong state and its effective institutions are replaced in the *Trylogia* by the social functionality of war. This is based on the conviction that only a military shock can summon from aristocratic/gentry society its best features, energy and a will to put its house in order. Writing about Kubala's *Szkice* in 1880 in *Niwa*, Sienkiewicz creates what is by then a characteristic opposition between the paralysis of the state and the military energy of the Poland of the past.

> The state did indeed become rotten within, and was unable to achieve control and internal order; it lacked flexibility and durable means by which to live in peace; but the martial spirit was not extinguished – the sense of duty to do battle and face death for the fatherland was alive, and that is why that harlot Commonwealth could still be terrible in time of war, all the more so because it really did possess vast powers. [MLA 138]

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sense of fatherland. For them, this was only the state, in other words, the government – and now it will be this or that social doctrine" [Do Antoniego Osuchowskiego, 21 VI 1906 Li III/2, 330].

104 Sienkiewicz himself acknowledged years later: "Personally I know few people with whom I would so willingly speak as with Hamlet" [*Dlaczego mogłem czytać Szekspira* D XL 149].

105 In his classic interpretation of *Hamlet*, Freud wrote that Hamlet is capable of anything, except taking revenge on the man who has murdered his father and taken his place at Hamlet's mother's side, on the man who shows him the realization of his own repressed childhood wishes. The aversion that should drive him on to revenge is turned to reproaches toward himself, to pangs of a conscience that whispers to him that, in the literal sense of the word, he is by no means better than the sinner whom he wishes to punish (S. Freud, *Objaśnianie marzeń sennych*, trans. R. Reszke, Warszawa 1996, p. 234).

As opposed to Bobrzyński's diagnoses of the causes of the decay of the state, Sienkiewicz rejects an absolutist therapy for the pathology of aristocratic/gentry society. In the novels, descriptions of royal power offer pictures of "weak power," one that does not build its position on negation, exclusion, and discipline. The idea of "weak power" in Sienkiewicz's writing corresponds quite well with Gianni Vattimo's concept of "weak thought." Vattimo writes that the arrival of the new is not an attempt to create new – in other words, better – languages, projects, or visions, which could replace old and used-up languages, projects, and visions, now no longer up-to-date, nor is it even a nostalgia for what is new, but it is rather a specific relation to what is existent, consisting of an inevitable entanglement in what it leaves behind, and of reconciling oneself with that condition.[106] This matches Sienkiewicz's attitude toward the past, which he does not reject, nor does he distance himself from it, showing how he is inevitably entangled in it, an entanglement that cannot be explained in a linear plot of acceptance or rejection.

The narration's hesitance and uncertainty in relation to the forces of history are particularly evident on the level of the father-son relationship. Only two are related at length: that of the Kiemlicze and the Nowowiejscy. The former constitute a model relationship of sons to a father, one based on identification and rivalry. The two sons are twins, completely subject to the father, blindly following him, but at the same time timidly trying to struggle for their part of the loot.

> The father fought no worse than his twin sons, but after every battle he extorted from them the largest share of the booty, all the time complaining and grumbling that they were doing him wrong, threatening them with their father's curse, moaning and complaining. The sons snarled at him, but somewhat unwise by nature, they allowed themselves to be tyrannized. [P II 26]

Only when the old Kiemlicz dies in a skirmish with a Swedish raiding party, do the sons start to gather lavish amounts of booty, fighting alongside Kmicic and his Tatars. However, then Kmicic takes the place of the father, assuming his function in the distribution of the wealth they have obtained.

But we observe an open conflict between father and son in *Pan Wołodyjowski*, despite the narrator's pronouncement that the action takes place in times of "great family power, which in the future grew to a limitless predominance" [PW 331]. This time it is the son who has absolute dominance over the father: he ran away from home, has served eleven years in the army, has gathered a modest fortune, and now wishing to marry, he asks his father for his blessing, but he gives his father to understand that if he does not receive it, he will marry anyway [PW 344-346]. The young Nowowiejski does not undervalue only his own father; his autonomy

106 A. Zawadzki, "Noica, Vattimo: 'myśl słaba' i jej konsekwencje," *Teksty Drugie* 2003, Nr 6, p. 175.

is exceptional in the entire cycle, because no other character no ostentatiously avoids "fathers." When he learns that Zosia's father has been captured and cannot decide about his daughter's marriage, he suspects some game.

> Because when I slide up to the mother, she says: "My husband is in captivity." When I get to the daughter, she murmurs: "My dear father is in captivity." And what's all this about? Am I the one keeping her dear father in bondage? [PW 346]

Filial conceit is dreadfully punished. The despised father is butchered by Azja, and the son's sister and his beautiful betrothed become the killer's slaves. In this way, the son, who has just freed himself from his father, is robbed of his independence and autonomy, because he is compelled to seek revenge, which he accomplishes with exceptional cruelty, paralleling that of Azja himself. Revenge, however, does not establish a new order, and only strengthens the chaos of crime. Finally Sienkiewicz abandons his character, losing him without trace in the world of the novel. The despised and then desecrated father consumes the son.

These two examples of serious conflict with a father show that a relationship with the past based on negation ends badly, brings the present to ruin, and infects it with the guilt of the fathers.[107] The negative dimension of open rivalry with the father is confirmed in *Potop* by summoning up of the taboo of Polish political history: the prohibition of regicide. This is the worst accusation that weighs on Kmicic; it is the most perfidious wound that Prince Bogusław can inflict on him. According to the words of Radziwiłł, Kmicic was supposed to agree "to go to Silesia and take Jan Kazimierz alive or dead and deliver him to the Swedes" [P II 122]. The murder of the "royal father" is the greatest crime that a Polish nobleman can commit. Bogusław himself confirms the endurance of this prohibition, privately complaining that it is impossible in Poland to find a candidate for the secret assassination of the king. "In Paris, or even in Germany, I would find in one day a hundred volunteers, but in this country I will not find anything of the kind" [P II 113].

Readers may, thus, find it surprising that both narrator and characters speak with approval of the endeavors of Roch Kowalski, who baldly confesses his desire to kill the king: "I am Kowalski! Thus in the first battle Ill simply jump on the Swedish king!" [P ii 447]. These attempts not only arouse the approval of the narrator and Roch's companions, but even of the intended victim, King Karol Gustaw, who is amused by the "gentleman's imagination." On the face of it, behind this stands "Kali's cynicism": it is permissible to kill a foreign king; it's a sin to kill your own one; but the reasons for this contradiction are more complicated.

107 The name of Azja's (Tuhaj-bej's) father evokes terror and respect, and he himself "grew in their eyes, as if he took his father's greatness into himself" [PW 291]. The father's greatness, however, is not assumed by the son, but degraded in his cruel acts.

In the occult symbolism of exclusion, Karol Gustaw loses his untouchability. He is a king, but by wanting to be Polish king, not elected, but seizing the throne, he becomes a usurper, joining in this way the horde of revolted sons. His strength and independence impress the Polish knights, and the narrator goes so far as to compare him with the greatest leader shown in the *Trylogia*. "In the gleam and color of his eyes he recalled Jeremi Wiśniowecki" [P III 111]. Paradoxically, the similarity to Jeremi does not strengthen Karol's importance, but rather thrusts him out of the circle of untouchability. Many times in *Ogniem i mieczem* Sienkiewicz underlines Jeremi's anarchic actions. The very beginning of the novel shows Skrzetuski, who is returning from a mission to the Crimea. The governor is on a private embassy to the Khan on behalf of the Prince, and not on behalf of the Commonwealth: "it was a matter of punishing several dark-skinned Tatars" [OM I 20].

Ruthlessness, strength, authoritarian governance are not seen in the *Trylogia* as desirable features for a king.[108] Quite the reverse, the attributes of royal power contain, particularly in *Potop*, elements of helplessness, female or childish

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108 The basis for this distaste for the idea of absolutism is a local and historical problem for a Pole of the time of the Partitions, but Sienkiewicz's distaste for a war of states and not a people's war is not an individual matter. In *Thoughts for the Time of War and Death* (1915), Freud writes with distaste of the state that has monopolized illegality, just as it does with salt and tobacco. A state at war, he argues, permits itself illegality, and acts of violence that it would forbid the individual (S. Freud, *Aktualne uwagi o wojnie i śmierci*, in *Pisma społeczne*, trans. A. Ochocki, M. Poręba, and R. Reszke, Warszawa 1998, p. 30). In this matter, the characters of *Potop* conduct a characteristic dialog on the subject of Janusz Radziwiłł's establishing a military dictatorship.

– Let him be a dictator, as long as he beats the Swedes – answered Zagłoba – I'll be the first to vote for giving him the dictatorship.

Skrzetuski thought and said after a moment:

– As long as he didn't want to become protector like that Englishman Cromwell, who didn't hesitate to raise his blaspheming hand against his own lord.

– Bah, Cromwell! Cromwell is a heretic! – cried Zagłoba.

– And the Prince Voivode? – Jan Skrzetuski asked seriously.

All were silent to that, and with fear for a moment they all looked into the dark future. [P I 222-223]

Even in *Ogniem i mieczem*, the narrator does not welcome the soldiers' joining Wiśniowiecki's banner *en masse*.

It was one of the saddest, if in that time more and more frequent, examples of military insubordination, created simultaneously by the incapability of leaders, discord among themselves, the unexampled threat of Chmielnicki's power, and the hitherto unseen defeats, and especially that at the Battle of Piławce. [OM II 290]

So one can see clearly that Sienkiewicz does not create an image of the ideal leader in the figure of Jeremi, as is pointed out by Henryk Markiewicz in his essay "Wizja państwa w kulturze polskiej drugiej połowy XIX w.," in: *Literatura i historia*, Kraków 1994, p. 10.

weakness, and a deep dependence on the noble/gentry electoral community. Indeed, this weakness of the king seems to evoke the author's approval. The cult of "weak" power is most fully expressed in *Potop*. Apart from the above-mentioned transference of moral and political authority to the sphere of femininity, the effectiveness of soft power is represented by two figures of "fathers": King Jan Kazimierz and Prior Kordecki. A synthesis of these two offers a fantasy of the ideal Polish king. Zagłoba insists ironically that "if a dog bit the king, he would forgive him immediately and would order he be given a bit of smoked lard. What a heart he has!" [P II 444]. But the operations of such a "warm-hearted" authority – Sienkiewicz argues – are much more effective than the severity and discipline of governments.

Kmicic, seeing the king's emaciated face ("gaunt, yellow, and translucent as church wax. The king's eyes were moist, and his cheeks were red" [P II 350]), experiences an immediate transformation. "The nobleman, the brash brawler, died in him in an instance, and a royalist was born, given in his whole soul to his king" [P II 350]. In this fictional dream, the weak king lays bare his weakness (he weeps, is moved, takes pity, forgives, etc.), by which he compels the awakening of an answering force on the part of the citizen; the weakness of authority blackmails the citizen by its own weakness. The "weak" father employs gentle persuasion rather than demands and commands. The birth of this ethics of civic duty based on a feeling of guilt is explained by Zagłoba:

> With the gentry, my lords, it has to be done like a father, not like a dragoon. . . . Tell him, "Sir, dear brother, be so kind as to go," and you touch his feelings; recalling fatherland and reputation, you go further than a dragoon who serves for specie. [P III 21]

In the contrary case, a powerful king provokes rebellion, and a tyrant's regime justifies even his murder. The flight of the king to Silesia, and the departure of a section of the nobility from his cause, is, in the narrator's opinion, the result of a false understanding of the nature of his authority. This error means that the nobility "called good Jan Kazimierz a tyrant, charging that he is aiming at *absolutum dominium*" [P II 134]. The *Trylogia* shows the endurance of the noble/gentry fear of tyranny, something that Sienkiewicz's generation inherited from their forebears. As Anna Greśkowiak-Krwawic writes, "Polish political practice, but also theory, never accepted the Hobbesian concept of a powerful authority as a guarantor and guardian of the individual freedom of its subjects."[109] Since, therefore, it is not fear of strong authority or law (the operations of which are suspended in time of war) that is the basis of the citizen's loyalty to the state, that foundation stone is the voluntary obligation of the citizen to limit his/her own freedom and to assume

109 A. Grześkowiak-Krwawicz, *Regina Libertas. Wolność w polskiej myśli politycznej XVIII wieku.* Gdańsk 2006, p. 26.

responsibilities toward the state.[110] The king's weakness results in the virtue of the citizen, and together they create a delicate balance of power, one that protects the country's internal sovereignty.[111]

One can ask what the point of having a king is, particularly since the majority of events in the *Trylogia* happens without him. The answer shows how clearly Sienkiewicz understands the political *episteme* of the time. In the world of the *Trylogia*, the king is the representation of the nobility's freedom, a confirmation of its political subject status. He is king because he was elected. He is necessary in order to be able to elect him, and at the same time to confirm the political sovereignty of the citizens, a sovereignty that a hereditary king or a tyrant could limit.

Jan Kazimierz returns when he is permitted to, and this is made possible for him by one nobleman, thus embodying the perfect myth; one nobleman's vote (one saber) makes possible and permits the return of the king, who himself is incapable of making the decision to return. It is Kmicic, together with the queen, who convinces him that he can now return. "Trust them, my lord, for they do so long for the blood of the Jagellonians and for your fatherly governance. . . . Go among them" [P II 365]. The novel consistently sets out the idea of weak power; as a result the king's influence over the defeats suffered at the hands of the Swedes is completely marginal, because – as Kmicic puts it – it is not the king's fault that "the entire Commonwealth is become a Swedish province. We caused this, and I more than any other!" [P II 139]. Taking responsibility here is not just a matter of expiation, but a sober estimate of the political reality of the time.

Despite such manifold virtues, Jan Kazimierz in the novel is not a perfect ruler. The softness of his character manifests itself in recklessness and inconstancy. "For Jan Kazimierz possessed this in his nature – that his thought easily passed from earnestness to near vacuity, and from hard work to light diversions, to which, when such moments came, he gave over his whole soul, as if no care, no worry ever weighed upon him" [P II 380].

The royal father's defects are compensated for via the character of Father Kordecki. As a monk, the Prior of Częstochowa represents a type of official

110 "I impose responsibilities on myself and meet them myself, I consider my own state, I weigh up my forces, and I am self-determining," writes the anonymous author of *Uwagi po roku 1790* [1790 – no month given], p. 40. In A. Grześkowiak-Krwawicz, *Regina Libertas*, op.cit., p. 108.

111 "In the period of state crisis and of political thought at the turn of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, there was a widespread conviction popular among the nobility/gentry that although Polish freedom was still ideal, the citizens had departed from the virtues of their ancestors, and that was the source of all the Commonwealth's defeats" (A. Grześkowiak-Krwawicz, *Regina Libertas*, op.cit., p. 32). "Who cares about a pact, if someone lacks honesty!" [PW 86] exclaims Zagłoba, and this statement shows how ell Sienkiewicz understood the systemic mechanism of Polish noble democracy.

weakness, but the operations of this weakness constitute one of the miracles of that sacred place. The Catholicism embodied in the prior of Jasna Góra means that "differences in rank vanished: peasant roughspun coats mixed with long robes, soldiers' jackets with the gold capotes of burgers" [P II 172]. The prior fulfills the novel's ideal of a ruler: he is a safe "father," not oppressive, not phallic. He permits people to be different, not compelling them to be politically active. He himself seems to exist beyond difference and conflict; he is not a politician because he does not allow them to be hostile. The territory of his authority has no borders. As the narrator points out, "Whoever wished came in; who ever wished, left; on the walls by the cannon there were simply no soldiers at all" [P II 170]. The fortress is transformed into a Christian mission, changed thus by the very presence of Father Kordecki, who "smiled like the dawn and passed on, and around him, above him, and before him passed trust and buoyancy" [P II 204]. Sienkiewicz does not abandon this vision, even in a confrontation with the reality of siege, death, and suffering. Everything that lies within the beams of the symbolic emanation of the weaponless "father,"[112] loses its threatening dimension, and the drama of war turns into a passion play.

> Thus he blessed the people, the army, the banners blossoming like flowers and sparkling like a rainbow; then he blessed the walls and the hills that looked out over the place; then he blessed the canon small and large, the lead and iron balls, the powder holders, the flooring by the heavy guns, the piles of fierce implements for repelling assaults; then he gave his blessing to the outlying villages, and he gave his blessing to the north, south, east, and west, as if he wished to extend the power of God over all the surroundings, and all the land. The second hour of the afternoon struck, and the procession was still on the walls. [P II 209]

The symbolic coherence of the *Trlogia* is exceptional. The model of the perfect ruler, the symbolic "father," lacking the will to power, sets the pattern of the story material for the characters in the love-adventure plots. Both – Jan Kazimierz and Augustyn Kordecki – symbolically adopt Kmicic, and thus on a higher level the entire converted nobility.

> – Jędrek! You are as dear to me as my own son. [. . .] I let everything go from off my heart, for you have wiped out all the guilt. [P II 429]
>
> – Father Kordecki is happy! A father could not love his son, as he loved him. [P II 440]

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112 Małgorzata Gorzelak points to two portraits of a prior that could be inspirations for the figure in the novel. It is striking that in the second of these the prior has a black beard (as in the novel) and a severe face. "It is a soldier's face, which is underlined by the saber that lies at his feet" (M. Gorzelak, "Sienkiewiczowski 'Potop' a ikonografia Jasnej Góry," in: *W rocznicę Jasnogórskiego Tryumfu 1655. Recepcja twórczości Sienkiewicza*, op. cit., p. 79). Sienkiewicz omits both these military attributes.

Adoption involves the son in the "debt" of atonement, a debt that must be paid in the same currency – in sacrifice and not in the triumph of power. The culminating scenes of individual parts are rigorously based on models of the passion. The pattern of the conversion plot is already present in the words of the protagonist of "Niewola tatarska (Tatar Captivity), who says of himself that "I was more like a dying man or Lazarus than a knight" ["Niewola tatarska" D5 31]. The protagonist of O*gniem i mieczem* is at the moment of his triumph so crowned with illness that "Kuszel and Wołodyjowski led, or rather dragged Skrzetuski to the hospital cart; he became completely weak and weighed heavier and heavier on them. His head hung on his breast, he could no longer walk, and he fell on his knees by the cart" [OM II 432]. The same is true of Kmicic, who "like Lazarus" draws near Oleńka [P III 422], and also of Wołodyjowski who is "taken up to heaven" by a suicidal explosion of gunpowder. So in the novel's finales there is no simple triumph, but rather the culmination of the passion – an apogee of physical and spiritual exhaustion. Only after completing this sacrifice, can one receive the prize: "the strong and sweet arms of Kurcewiczówna," Oleńka's kisses to the sufferer's wounds, and Basia lying on the floor, her arms out in the shape of the cross.

So that an individual sacrifice may acquire a general meaning, known to all and beyond any doubt, it must be confirmed by the voice of the "father." It seems to Kmicic that he himself can inform Oleńka and all others who he really is – "They know nothing yet, but they will learn it from me myself" [P III 410-411]. The narrator, however, does not confirm the character's declaration, for that would be the gesture of a Baron Münchhausen – pulling oneself out of a quagmire by one's own hair. An individual utterance cannot, after all, be a witness in the matter of one's own authenticity.

In this way, we reach the place where the voices of the "fathers" – Billewicz, Jan Kazimierz, and Prior Kordecki – meet. Each of those confirms Kmicic's actions, guarantees the performativity of elements in wills, and legitimatizes the reality of the change from Kmicic into Babinicz, and the return to his own name, in a blaze of praise. The royal letter read out in the church is a necessary annex to the codicils of the will. According to its tenor, Kmicic is supposed to fight for Oleńka with God, and therefore he can defeat his divine rival only as a "saint." In this way, the romance story and the story of redemption run together. However, in order for the parallel to be fully achieved, there has to be a confirmation that the hindrance in the form of the "shameful deeds" mentioned in the will has been put aside. Only the "word of the father" – the lawgiver – can do this. It is not a matter of the real presence of the speaking "father." The place of the king remains empty, just as grandfather Billewicz was absent from the start.[113] The letter rehabilitating

113 The author's bitter irony is apparent in the finale of *Pan Wołodyjowski*. There the "father" arrives personally, and with the aura of a savior, but at that point the protagonist is dead, so

Kmicic is a summary of his experiences in the novel; repeated in the king’s words, they restore a correct interpretation of the will. This is the triumphal return of “the name of the father” in its full symbolic force. “We, Jan Kazimierz, King of Poland, Great Prince of Lithuania, Mazowia, Prussia *etc., etc., etc.* In the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, amen” [P III 413]. In the phrase “the name of the Father” are united the father (the king) and the mother (the fatherland). “The king’s name” speaks with the voice of the priest in the church, and this voice mentions Kmicic’s “so exceptional services to the [King’s] majesty and the fatherland that no son could do greater for his father or his mother” [PIII 416]. First of all, the “father’s” voice frees Kmicic from Babinicz, and returns him his hereditary identity. Second, it removes any contiguity to “that” Kmicic (traitor and rebel), settling all the listeners’ speculations and doubts – “This is my beloved son, in whom I am well pleased” [Matt. 17.5].

The will and the letter form a whole; read aloud, they order, objectify, and finally elucidate the history of an individual. The voice of King Jan Kazimierz, the voice that settles all, is a fantasy of the end of interpretation. At last, there is an end to intrigues, lies, errors, games; unambiguous order is restored. Of course, it is not the voice, but the letter, literature, a summary of what the reader already knows, since he/she has read the novel up to that point. Despite that knowledge, we listen once more in order to see “how it works,” to sate ourselves with the joy of meaning, and to dream of the word of the Father, which illuminates history and makes it have meaning, and does the same for our individual fate in that history. We are surprised by what has been already read, because the subject of the utterance has changed, and literature so beautifully simulates the *logos*.

4. “*and*”?

In 1912, Sienkiewicz wrote a novella with the title “Autorki. Humoreska o dzieciach, nie dla dzieci” (The Authoresses: A Homoresque of Children, But Not for Children)[114] The protagonists are two eleven-year-old girls, Marynia and Irka. Irka has parents, but Marynia was orphaned at the age of three, and she is looked after by her aunt “Aniela Ocieska, a pensionless widow, and at the same time a rather beautiful and youthful aunt, in her twenty-eighth year of life, and the sixth of her widowhood” [“Autorki” D VI 255]. So Sienkiewicz is doubling the father’s absence. Marynia does not have her own father; he is also not replaced

one can only pray for his soul. “Hetman Sobieski entered the church. [. . .] – S*alvator!* – the priest cried out in prophet-like exaltation” [PW 603].

114 There exists a stage adaptation of the novella, entitled *Autorki. Obrazek sceniczny w 1 akcie*. It is doubtful, however, that Sienkiewicz wrote this himself, so weak a piece of work is it.

by her aunt's dead husband. The aunt's admirer is the poet Stefan Okniński, who "signed the pseudonym 'Lemiesz' under sonnets" ["Autorki" 255]. In response to Stefan's overtures, the aunt declares that she cannot leave Marynia, but "Lemiesz" (plough-share) insists that "he loved her *and* Marynia with all his heart. The aunt blushed fiercely as a result of that '*and*,' but Stefan, placing an unusual stress on that word, was really speaking the truth, for he genuinely loved the aunt and the charming Marynia, and even Irka too" ["Autorki 255].

The word "and" ("*i*" in Polish) is put in italics by the author, who thereby lays a meaningful emphasis on the conjunction, giving as it were a nudge and a wink to the reader. And even if the reader missed the graphic *signifiant*, the text of the novella gives the narrator's commentary confirming that the "*and*" has a more important function in than just that of a linking word in the sentence. Its exceptional meaning is witnessed to by the aunt's blushes, although by themselves they do not reveal the meaning of the emphasized single-syllable, (in English) three-letter word. However, they form another meaningful element, of the meaning of which we cannot be certain. There is no way to determine if the blushes indicate embarrassment because of Stefan's declaration of love for her, or if they are caused by his frivolous joke about having feelings simultaneously for her and for Marynia. In a desire to lessen the controversies arising from such a reading, one could attempt to undermine the equality of these feelings (since Stefan "truly loved both the aunt and the charming Marynia"), assuming that the words are spoken by Marynia's future "guardian" (as her aunt's husband). The text, however, will have none of this, and this humoresque even defends its perversity by insisting that Stefan's feelings apply to "even Irka."

Nothing is revealed here or interpreted, and is only set out in amazement. The joke is this – a grown-up man simultaneously (desires) loves a mature woman and two eleven-year-old girls – and it is disturbingly open. Unease is not sufficiently banished by laughter. Indeed, the question is: what does that openness conceal? Why does Sienkiewicz want to joke with us about it?

There is no agenda behind arousing laughter. The humoresque is a witty game, in which the writer attempts to win the reader over to a controversial subject, that is the confrontation of a grown-up person with childhood sexuality. According to Freud's argument, the comic with an erotic content is a form of evasion of a cultural prohibition that does not permit a man directly to reveal his erotic intention. A substitute source of the forbidden pleasure is, thus, the laughter that is produced by the erotic joke. In an ideal structure of communication, the comic-erotic man tells an improper joke, the object of which (Freud is writing of erotic aggression) is a woman. None of them, however, can laugh: the woman because by her laughter she would confirm the erotic situation; the man because we do not laugh at our own jokes, which in this case would be a sublimation of autoeroticism. So an intermediary is necessary, an observer created via the comic nature and laughter

of the erotic relation. Because of the observer, the laughter returns to the author, making him laugh himself.[115] The narrator of "Autorki" is ironic from the start, and he constructs a comic story that it is for the reader to recognize. Then the reader confirms his/her own merriment and justifies the fantasy in which the object of desire is a mature woman and two little girls.

The novella "Autorki," however, is a semantically much richer *jeu d'ésprit*, and it cannot be reduced to a simple illustration of a Freudian schema of erotic joke-telling. The concept of the two female protagonists of the same age produces a symmetry of plots in this mini-story material. For both desire forbidden knowledge. Irka tells her friend that she once participated in a scene of reading in which "Daddy was reading Mummy some novel, and I was sitting in the other room and I clearly heard this sentence, 'After the unhappy day on which Edward seduced Magdalena. . . .' Mummy immediately stopped the reading and says, '

'Careful, Irka's next door'" ["Autorki" 264]. Similarly, Marynia is caught reading the novel *Syn naturalny* (The Natural Son); her aunt takes it away from her and forbids her to read it again. In each of these triangular relationships (man, woman, girl), the mature woman represents a prohibition to read, whereby she reveals herself as the girl's rival. The father is passive (Irka's father is reading) or absent (Marynia's father is dead).

Let us emphasize here that in the text the only clear criterion of maturity is the right to knowledge. It is not a matter of just any knowledge, but of erotic knowledge, and therefore of knowledge in the Biblical sense (Polish "*poznanie*").[116] In a way that is different from myths of Faustian provenance, knowledge here is not connected with a desire for power, but becomes an object of desire via a prohibition that envelopes it. The prohibition liberates initiative in the girls, initiative worked up both humorously and paradoxically by the author. Sienkiewicz illustrates how the place of the father as an object of fascination precedes language, but it is a place that is meaningful, sheathed in mystery, but nonetheless important, because uttered by the father. The father's place is marked by an enigmatic language, one that is to be explicated by another man. In the symbolic story material, the place of the father and the man is first taken by language that enunciates the body, in relation to which the word is always prior, representing desire, power, law, and other attributes of the strong father – the father that in Sienkiewicz's work ultimately never appears. Instead of him, a man appears too early, a man who enters the abandoned place, but who does not intend to take on the relinquished

115 S. Freud, *Dowcip i jego stosunek do nieświadomości*, trans. R. Reszke. Warszawa 1993, pp. 126–128.

116 In the word *poznanie*, Polish maintains two meanings: the acquisition of knowledge, and sexual initiation. This derives from Wujek's translation of the Bible (Gen. 4.1; Judges 11.39; Matt. 1.34). The situation in English is, of course, the same.

function, and who rather exploits the increased sphere of freedom, just as the little girls do. Since they cannot read forbidden novels, they decide to write an improper novel with the title *Julisz i Idalia*.[117]

> Let's write: "Juliusz and Idalia first met and fell in love, then they started to be improper, and next he seduced her." ["Autorki" 264]

Unfortunately neither of them knows what seduction consists of. "He seduced" is for them a *signifier* overheard by Irka as her father reads to her mother. The father's voice utters a word of unknown meaning, but of suspiciously improper connotations, which the mother's reaction confirms. The attempts undertaken by the protagonists to penetrate the meaning of the word "seduced" are ineffective and comic. Finally, Marynia takes the initiative. Since there is no father, who could embody the desired knowledge, he is replaced by another man. So she asks Stefan (whose pseudonym is "Lemiesz"[118]) what "seduce" means. "Both I and Irka would like to know what it is when some gentleman seduces some lady?" ["Autorki" 266]. The perplexed Stefan refuses to answer.

> To which Irka contemptuously pouts.
> – I said that poets didn't know things like that.
> – Evidently – adds Marynia – but every novelist knows. ["Autorki" 267]

As a poet, Stefan is disqualified by the girls because his writing is not in their eyes a representation of knowledge of the material world. The mocking Sienkiewicz maliciously demonstrates the authority that is enjoyed by the kind of writing developed in Poland by his generation and epoch, the one in which he wrote

117 The first name of the famous Polish writer (Janusz) combined with the name of one of his drama's heroines, is one of many allusions to the work of Słowacki. In the drama *Fantazy*, there appears the figure of the countess Idalia, of whom the eponymous protagonist says that her eyes recall "Two black stains of ink / On a white sheet." This original comparison opens a chain of perverse connotations: "Who with a dagger stains this sheet, commits . . . great poetry. . . ." (J. Słowacki, *Dzieła wybrane*, Warszawa 1987, vol. 5, Act I, Scene13). Out of a concern for the compositional balance of the present chapter, I resist the temptation to discuss this interplay of texts. The same goes for the play of the surnames of Stefan and Aniela – Okniński and Ocieska. These are anagrams that contain the adjectives "koński" (horse-like) and "kocia" (cat-like).

118 Stefan's poetic pseudonym, "Lemiesz," completes a play of phallic allusions, the center of which is the graphic representation of the vowel "i," multiplied as a conjugation ("i" means "and" in Polish) in the names of characters and the initial letters of those names (Irka, [I]uliusz, Idalia). Stefan's pseudonym also shows that he is the heir of knightly heroes, desiring women with the same passion as territory taken by the enemy. The author himself provides the context. In one of his journalistic pieces he uses the word "lemiesz" – "Cincinnatus, as a decent citizen, changed his sword for a plough-share, and, unable to fight for his country, cultivated it" [Cho I 6].

his best books. In this mocking gesture there is also a note of self-irony. The model of the world described by the positivists, at first, joyously took away from "fathers" their power over knowledge and its distribution. In an egalitarian model of society, there were to be no limits to access to knowledge. It turned out, however, that knowledge separated from the subject that possesses a supply of it and consciously distributes it, becomes a space for the operation of seductive and unsettling cognitive forces, less and less under the control of adult men and women. In the interest of greater and greater freedom of flow of information, the worlds of women, men, and children begin to intersect, blurring any sharp distinction between the identity of the adult and the child.

The theme and tool of this humoresque is the word "and" (in Polish the letter/vowel "i"), the double function of which the girls do not understand. If Stefan loves both the aunt and Marynia, and Irka too, with the same love, then it is only through humor that the author can link the desire for a mature woman with a sick fascination for an under-age girl. To add to all this – it is a mutual relation: Stefan is also an object of coquetry and provocation on the part of the immature female protagonists. In this way, a clear sketch of the "oedipal plot" emerges. As I have already noted, in this text, mature women are rivals of the young girls. Even Irka's mother is accordingly pushed into the background. When Marynia says that, despite everything, she cannot hate her aunt, because she is not just sweet and pretty, "but in other things very good," Irka adds, "Like my Daddy" ["Autorki" 259]. Both girls also fantasize that when their "novel first comes out, your aunt and my daddies [emphasis mine – R.K.] will say that it's not a book for us, and they won't let us read it. But then we'll step out and declare that we are the authors" ["Autorki" 260]. Finally the novel ceases to be necessary, because the meaning of the mysterious "seduced" flashes suddenly into the girls' eyes when they see Stefan embrace Aniela (who has pretended to faint), and his moustaches "get closer and closer to the aunt's face" ["Autorki" 267].

Both adults are comically helpless in the face of the resolute girls, whose erotic curiosity lays bare the hypocrisy of their seniors. Consistently, in the light of the texts discussed above, men lose their symbolic primacy to younger and younger female characters. This shows how much Sienkiewicz's work belongs within the imaginative transformations of symbolic depictions of sex that we find in modernist prose (for example, in the work of Lewis Carroll, Franz Kafka, James Joyce, and Marcel Proust).[119]

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119 The sources of this theme are hidden in the mists of the past. One source, however, is certainly the theater, which for Sienkiewicz's generation played a colossal role in generating phantasms within its audiences, and in generating scenes in novels. (See K. Kłosiński, *Mimesis w chłopskich powieściach Orzeszkowej*, Katowice 1990, pp. 121–142.) Sienkiewicz admired Romana Popiel, and praised her in *Niwa* and in *Gazeta polska*.

Sienkiewicz's polymorphic joke that is "Autorki" has, however, strong private roots, deriving from the last decade of the author's life. Much points toward the possibility that inspiration for this novella may be the person of Wandzia, the Ulanowski family's foster daughter. Sienkiewicz met Wandzia at Christmas in 1905, on his return from receiving the Nobel Prize. He was at that time sixty years old; she was nine. The correspondence begun at that time lasted to the writer's death. It is impossible to determine what this exchange of letters and meeting with this world-famous author meant for the intelligent young girl. We know that it gave him pleasure, and, indeed, in time writing a letter to her became a priority for Sienkiewicz. "All are waiting for an answer except Wandzia," he writes in a letter of 28 June 1909 [Kor II 174]. The contents of published letters contain nothing controversial. However, if we forget the addresse's age, what Sienkiewicz writes to a young girl could equally well be meant for an adult woman. Here are a few excerpts.

> In the final analysis, my stay here is pleasant and peaceful, if a little dull, particularly because no white little miss is going to drop by at noon with the newspapers. [11 September 1906, Kor II 165]
>
> The only thing that pleases me is the sight of your photograph from Venice that stands on my desk – and the thought, or rather the hope, that we'll see each other before the Easter holidays. [1 February 1909, Kor II 166–167]
>
> My dear, sweet Little Cat,
> I looked for you yesterday after the ceremonies in the hall, on the stairs, and in the porch – in vain. [26 May 1909, Kor II 173]
>
> He is thinking of a long-ago stay in Venice and "of the dear young miss" who while coming back from an excursion fell asleep on my shoulder. [27 June 1911, Kor II 209]
>
> It would be the nicest thing for me to go to the Lido, if I found such company as before and my beloved Little Cat, although not so little as once. [23 June 1912, Kor II 216]
>
> The elderly gentleman clearly wishes to give an impression of activity and physical vigor.
>
> It is true that I was hit by two grains of buckshot, one in the knee, the other on my forehead over my right eyebrow. [. . .] It turned out in all this that above the knee the buckshot only broke the skin and had fallen out, and the one in the forehead was cut out with a knife. There's only a little wound, which they've covered up with a plaster. That's all. [17 November1911, Kor II 214]
>
> In *Quo Vadis*, Petroniusz says to Winicjiusz that since morning he's felt a bit of a duffer. Something much the same is happening with me. It doesn't stop me working,

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According to Józef Kotarbiński, she was a mistress in creating "the figures of the innocent and the minx" (*Dzieje teatru polskiego,* ed. T. Siverta, vol. III: *Teatr polski od 1863 roku do schyłku XIX wieku,* Warszawa 1982, p. 146).

> though, and a week ago it didn't stop me catching, and catching by the collar, a rather elegant young man who had stolen my watch. Fortunately, he wasn't carrying a knife or a revolver, as Warsaw thieves usually do. [1 VI 1913, Kor II]

One has the impression that the correspondence with Wandzia is a substitute for the now looser ties with Jadwiga Janczewska. Sienkiewicz even employs the literary game that we know from earlier correspondence. First he confesses to Wandzia that she has been the inspiration for a figure he has invented: "I've been working on Staś and Nel, who has borrowed her eyes from a certain Little Cat" [8 October 1910 Kor II 198]. And when the novel is finished, he writes for her a private epilog, the first-person narration of which, given by Sienkiewicz-Staś, suggests a dangerous proximity of fiction and life.

> After returning from my African travels and after handing Nel over into the hands of Mr Rowlinson [!], I finished up naval college in Southampton. Recently I was made captain of the battleship *Redbreast*. Before that, however, I decided to visit my native land. During my stay in Warsaw, I learned from Mr. Sienkiewicz, your personal friend, Madam, that you have begun to evince sympathy toward both the person of Nel and my person. For that reason, I make so bold as to lay at Madam's feet a box of chocolates accompanied by expressions of the deepest gratitude and of high regard.
> Stanisław Tarkowski
> Captain of the battleship *Redbreast*
> PS: On the way to Poland, I left in Vienna twelve small Egyptian hounds, thirty-six parrots with tuneful voices, and a young hippopotamus. If you, Esteemed Madam, were willing to accept from me these charming creatures as a souvenir, I would consider myself exceptionally fortunate. *S.T.* [1912, Kor II 226]

This epistolary game becomes more and more risky, and soon Sienkiewicz begins to realize this. An invaluable source would be Wandzia's letters, unfortunately unavailable to us. We can find traces of them in the writer's correspondence. For example, it appears that his thirteen-year-old correspondent writes of herself that she is "old," as if she wanted to compensate for his agedness. Sienkiewicz pretends not to see the sense of this game, and heads his letter with "My Beloved and my dear Old Kitty. Since you call yourself 'old,' there you have it!" [18 July 1910, Kor II 166]. But nothing helps in this matter, and her growing up probably becomes more and more bothersome for both.

> So be for me simply healthy and grow prettily, but do not change too quickly from my little Wandzia into grown-up Miss Wanda. There will always be time for that. [18 II 1909, Kor II 169]

Some months later he repeats:

> So grow and grow up to bring joy to people and happiness. I proclaim to you, however, that for me you will always be little Wandzia, because I loved that little girl very much and I don't want that to change. [25 December 1909, Kor II 186]

Sienkiewicz invented Wandzia for himself, just as he had earlier invented Janczewska. His wandering way of life favored his strategy of building up relationships with living people on the scaffolding of narratives in letters. This allowed him to immobilize the form of this link, to shape the image of the (female) addressee, and to maintain his dominance in a discourse composed of suggestions, subtexts, and masks. It allowed him to sublimate the changes (independent of the word) taking place in real life, for example a young girl's changing into a woman. Even if he tried to keep her unchanged in discourse, like a fly in amber, he was more and more conscious that on the other side of the letters a femininity was emerging that also had its desires. The tone of his letters begins to be cooler, more protective, and meetings become rarer.

> You say in your last letter that you are not certain whether I have the same desire to see you as you have to see me. O the cunning of woman! From the start, you yourself well know that to see you and look on you is not such a great vexation for the eyes that one would run away from it. There are much worse things in the world. Second, you should be – and I think you are – convinced that I have such feelings for you that one has for the closest persons in one's family. And it cannot be otherwise, because I have known you since you were a small child, and my friendship has never wavered. Always Wandzia and Wandzia – that was something close and my own, something with which I grew familiar to such a degree that that friendship and sincere interest seemed quite natural. In a way, I am grateful to you for this willingness to meet me. When that will actually happen, I do not know, for I am and will be very busy. But I think that Kraków is not so distant, and that it may happen if not in a month, then in two. [17 November 1911, Kor II 234]

Wandzia's growing up did not fundamentally change anything in their relationship, but only meant that feeling more and more disappears behind the veil of the innocent sympathy of an old man and a young girl. A great deal indicates that her fascination with Sienkiewicz was not purely child-like. He should have known about such matters; after all, he described a love like this in *Rodzina Połanieckich* (The Połaniecka Family), in which Stach does not want to acknowledge to himself "that Litka loved him like an adult woman" [RP 196]. Even if Sienkiewicz was aware of this, he made an effort in the letters to treat the young girl's feelings as the sweet (to him), innocent affection of a child. This is confirmed, *inter alia*, by a letter in which he recalls her as a grande dame to whom people bowed "with great respect on the Lido, when she was dressed in trailing robe reaching right down to the ground" [1910, Kor II 200].

From a letter of 21 May 1912, "Kotek" (Little Cat/Kitten) is replaced more and more frequently by "Droga Pani" (Dear Lady/Madam). Something or someone must have made Sienkiewicz aware that he was writing to a sixteen-year-old girl, whose letters to him are full of exaltation, of coquetry, and, in short, of an absolutely un-childlike rhetoric. From this point, in his letters the place of sentimental recollections

is taken by a rough-but-tender irony, which is supposed to push aside or mask their mutual emotional entanglement, to create a distance between them, and to put in order the unclear relations that he himself has made more complex.

> I must only protest against one thing, and that is that you end your letter with expressions like "I kiss your hand" etc. That was acceptable when you were twelve or even younger – but now, when you bear on your shoulders the majesty of sixteen years, I think it is rather my part to end letters so.
>
> So I kiss your hands, Esteemed Madam – who has, however, never ceased to be my beloved and most sweet Kitten, and I will remain forever that Kitten's faithful and sincere friend. [4 November 1913, Kor II 236-237][120]

The novella "Autorki" dates from that time when Sienkiewicz could no longer hide from the knowledge that his sweet addressee, leaving childhood behind her, had changed her position vis-à-vis the writer. And as a consequence, she forced him to change his position toward someone who was now a young woman. Sienkiewicz is probably speaking of himself when he writes of Stefan Okniński's confusion, who indulging in ambiguous professions directed to a woman and to two mischevious young girls, misses the moment in which a girl suddenly transforms into a woman. Sienkiewicz speaks of this ironically, behind the mask of the authorial narrator, who mocks Stefan, but thus, in fact, mocks his own creator. Perhaps this is the author's way of exorcising his fantasies by means of literature, gaining absolution for them and banishing their dark implications.

Once more we have reached the same point to which Sienkiewicz's texts stubbornly return, as if the author did not want to say anything new, but to repeat in various formulations a question that had never been resolved. Does there stand behind this fascination a simple desire for contact with a life that is beginning, while his own one is moving to a close? He himself had defined this state, writing many years earlier of the poem by Asnyk "Gdybym był młodszy" (If I Were Younger). He noted that in it "a man's autumn calls to a girl's spring" [MLA 8]. In the writer's late work a similar calling is apparent, not just in the notes of a humoresque. An old man's longing appears in two of his late novels. Here it is not just a matter of mature men, but of old men – the same age as the writer himself – who desire much younger women.

The female protagonist of *Na polu chwały* (On the Field of Glory) (1905), Panna (Miss) Sienińska, is an orphan, who is in the care of Gideon Pągowski. Despite his sixty years and lack of a hand, "that which he had never thought of

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120 Krzyżanowski writes that the relationship between the writer and the young girl gave rise to gossip. This gossip meant, among other things, that parts of Sienkiewicz's correspondence were closed, and subject to a clause that they could only be made available after 1950 (J. Krzyżanowski, "Pół tysiąca listów Henryka Sienkiewicza," in: *Pokłosie Sienkiewiczowskie*, op.cit., p. 415).

before, seemed [. . .] suddenly possible, and at the same time tempting. When he thought of the charms of the young girl beauteous as a rose, his soul grew warm, and even more strongly his pride resounded" [NPCH 67]. In order to put an end to this old man's desire, the author kills him off the night before his wedding.

In *Legiony* (Legions) (1914), old August "fell in love with an older lady, with a lusty love, which does not trust itself when it concerns woman in general, but deludes itself that it will find the flame of youth when it concerns one chosen woman" [L 31]. If the author's own experiences form a background to these passions, the fate of these lusty old men offers a spectacle of the author's own self-degradation, particularly since in both these novels they are harassed by priests, who deride their old men's lusts: in *Legiony* this is done by Bishop Krasicki; in *Na Polu chwały* it is Father Tworkowski. The latter says to Pągowski that fear is his matchmaker. This small episode, a minor crack in the novelistic farce that is *Na polu chwały* allows Sienkiewicz's old greatness to glitter for a moment, who was always able, in some unbearably conventional formulation, to smuggle into his work the existential particularity of life. Such an ability permits the writer to succeed in showing something deeply human in the figure of Pągowski.

> Mr Pągowski felt, however, that if this young girl, at the same time like a flower and an angel, passed him by, then in his life there would fall a twilight lasting to the hour in which his death night came. . . . [NNPCH 132]

It is characteristic that in his novels Sienkiewicz rarely describes father-son relations, but if he does, it is not a key relation in the dynamics of the characters' fates. The father-daughter relationship is more important, irrespective of whether it is a real relationship or a symbolic one. In his work there are almost no typical oedipal conflicts, in which father and son fight over the mother. In Sienkiewicz's work, sons do not suffer from a father complex; the model of their transformation is a woman, and not rivalry or self-identification with the father. Robert Polhemus calls this transformation of the complex the Lot complex.[121] For Polhemus, the Biblical story of a father sexually exploited by his daughters constitutes one of the typical relations between the sexes in the contemporary world. The primacy of the mother-son relation is replaced by the father-daughter relation, something that is apparent in the texts that Polhemus analyzes. Among the thirteen features of the Lot complex, one is particularly useful when we try to elucidate the ambiguous twists of the motif in Sienkiewicz's work. According to Polhemus, the narrative of the father exploited by his daughters is an allegory of male projection, the contents of which is made up of a man's being desired by a much younger woman. In order that a dream like this not produce feelings of guilt, it is transferred to a

121 R. M. Polhemus, *Lot's Daughters. Sex, Redemption, and Women's Quest for Authority*, Stanford 2005, pp. 9–15.

desired object so that he himself is the object of a desire aimed at an older man. The words and deeds of Lot's daughters are in reality desires transferred from their father to them.[122] Explicated thus, "Autorki" becomes an allegorical narrative of transference. Marynia and Irka say to Stefan what an adult man would perhaps wish to talk about with a woman who is rather too young for him. He cannot do this, however, without the risk of breaking the law, arousing scandal, or making himself ridiculous.[123] Sienkiewicz does not hesitate to expose this hypocrisy when he shows Stefan's embarrassment at the words of an eleven-year-old who speaks of seduction. It is not the word that embarrasses him, but the fulfillment of his own fantasy brought into the light of day. In the novella, the instrument of transference is the word of the father, for there is no other. The words of the novel read by Irka's father are picked up by the young girls, and they start to use them unknowingly, that is, without any knowledge of their meaning.[124] This lack of knowledge is essential to protect the author from feeling guilt for prematurely corrupting childhood.

By means of literature, Sienkiewicz can transfer his phantasms onto any fictional figure, and, as his correspondence reveals, onto real addressees as well.[125] As long as the space in which these transfers of phantasms take place is a discourse controlled by the writer, they continue without hindrance. The end of this transference game comes when the feelings of his female addressees do not fit in with the word tossed to them, as if by chance. Then the simulated dialog breaks down, and the word of desire returns to its "father" – with its agenda, conscious of its meaning, stripped of the unknowing naivety of the child that utters it.

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122 Ibid, p. 10.

123 Although it can happen that his discourse of tender concern turns into its opposite. This is what happens when Sienkiewicz writes of Sewer's novel *Bratnie dusze*. "Every reader will love Karolek and little Jess, because Sewer loved them. Jess was even the author's favorite. He dressed her, combed her hair, washed her, bought her stockings and gloves, led her out to the boarding school and to the theater, just as a mother would do who loved her daughter. So he immediately purchased the sympathy of all who observed this heartfelt relationship, and he was able to pass on to the readers his loving care for the young girl" [MLA 40]. Sienkiewicz's own creations require similar loving care, for example, the blind Nelly ("W krainie złota") and Nel Rawlinson (*W pustyni i w puszczy*). He clearly formulates this tendency in an aphorism: "Hygiene and love will never agree, for the former recommends ripe fruit, and the latter cannot bear it" [XL 64].

124 Analyzing the case of Little Hans, Freud writes that this is how it happens when an utterance is divided into the drive of narcissistic conversation and the sexual drive. Then the unknown, repeated word tempts with an open field of meaning, but does not yet mean anything (see: J. Kristeva, *Potęga obrzydzenia. Esej o wstręcie*, trans. M. Falski, Kraków 2008, p. 37).

125 To Witkiewicz, Sienkiewicz explained his love for Maria Szetkiewiczówna as follows: it is love "of a dear child, that I would simply pick up in my hands," and he also declares that "the most loving father could not be more caring of an only child than I of her" (*Listy do Stanisława Witkiewicza,* op.cit., p. 71 [Warszawa, 27 January1881]).

The Gender of an Idea

1. Allegory and losses

– What did I have, and what have I lost? How close she was, but now how far off! [P I 253].

The *Trylogia* tells of what was got, then lost, and subsequently recovered once more. So formulated, the topic of the narrative has many names, but the one that allows the writer to integrate the others within one story material is “woman.” This simple schema does not exhaust its function in the service of the adventure-story material. The principal male characters get, lose, and recover the women they love, but at the same time – on an allegorical level – their fates represent the dramas of Polish history, and the hope that Sienkiewicz inscribes in his picture of the history of an enslaved Poland. His intention is clear; he places the analogy woman-fatherland in the mouth of Kmicic, to whom “it appeared that Oleńka and the fatherland were the same, and that he had lost both, and had freely given them up to the Swedes” [P II 168].

In Sienkiewicz’s work, the female constitutes a broad and complex sphere of symbolization.[126] In an introductory, simplified reading, it means: “You have received a gift; you have lost it, or you have allowed it to be taken from you; so now you must get it back, proving all the while that you deserve it.” This last condition is essential in order to understand the historical-philosophical fantasy inscribed in the plots of the romances of the *Tylogia.*[127] The essence of the struggles described in the historical cycle is not victory, but sacrifice, either individual or collective. Each of the battles that are central to the story material of the *Trylogia* (Zbaraż,

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126 Contrary to this argument, Sienkiewicz’s female figures have met with the largest number of critical opinions. Stanisław Mackiewicz expressed this in the most lapidary fashion: “they are dressmaker’s dummies wound up by the author’s hand” (“Henryk Sienkiewicz. Studium literackie,” in: op. cit., p. 18).

127 Zygmunt Kaczkowski argues that we must acknowledge that “it is an artistic mistake that cannot be justified, and at the same time a piece of outrageous clumsiness, because the reader cannot awaken in himself any sympathy for the hapless characters” (Z. Kaczkowski, “Rozprawa z *Ogniem i mieczem*”, in: *Trylogia Henryka Sienkiewicza,* op. cit., p. 99). Kaczkowski is consistent, for he apparently cannot grasp why Sienkiewicz does not finish the novels with a description of the Battle of Beresteczek (ibid., pp. 121–122).

Częstochowa, Kamieniec) is a defense that does not end with a spectacular victory, but finally is a kind of defeat. This pattern in the military plot spreads to the level of the love plots. None of the protagonists saves the woman whom he loves on his own. Friends do this for him (*Ogniem i mieczem*); it happens by chance (*Potop*); or the woman frees herself (*Pan Wołodyjowski*). The action develops in a similar way in *Quo Vadis* (Ursus) and in *Krzyżacy*, and so on right up to the final works – in the novel *Na polu chwały*. Anula is saved not by Jacek, but by Wilczopolski, who is helped by Pągowski's forester, and later by the elderly Cypranowicz. Even the half-wild Bukojemski brothers take Jacek's place, and the girl trusts them, despite their simplicity, because "she could not even imagine that anyone would not be afraid of them" [NPCH 202].

The strangeness of the writer's moves also applies to his antagonists. Bohun constantly fights with someone else (Kurcewicze, Zagłoba, Rzędzian, Wołodyjowski) instead of with Skrzetuski. Similarly, Azja does not fight a duel with Michał for Baśka. Sienkiewicz permits Kmicic alone to have several set-tos with Bogusław, but it is not victory over the latter that brings Oleńka back to him. One can see a clear difference in the consequences of feelings, because the negative characters sacrifice public affairs for women, while the positive ones become conscious citizens by virtue of love. Sienkiewicz opens up these ambiguities, when, for example, he has Ketling accuse Oleńka that it is because of her that Prince Bogusław does not support her brother, although that is of benefit to the forces of those faithful to Jan Kazimierz – "You are the cause of the fall and death of the prince voivode" [P III 218]. Even if it works in favor of the royal forces, objectively it is bad.

Substantially more important than defeating an opponent is his characters' profound experience of loss, repeatedly returned to by the writer. For what is of value is the sacrifice of that which is most loved. That is why Skrzetuski is thrice convinced that he has lost Helena for ever: in Rozłogi after Bohun's attack; after the fortress of Bar is taken by the Cossacks; and when he receives the false information that she has died in a nunnery in Kiev. Thus he weeps three times for her death. One can see in these repetitions the tripling of events typical of folk tales or myths, but one can also see one of the manifestations of the symbolic allusions to the thrice divided fatherland, allusions that are frequent in the literature of an unfree Poland.

The organization of the text noted above does not by any means conclude reflections on the function of female characters, but rather raises the question of the basis for the relations between levels of the story material set out above. Is it really the case that Sienkiewicz constructs a precise historical-philosophical

symbolism, demonstrated by the parallel fates of the individual and the collective? Does he solve the problem in a purely literary fashion?[128]

When Sienkiewicz restrains one of his male protagonists from searching for the woman he loves, he keeps him in this way on the main stage of military events, and the abducted and imprisoned female protagonists are placed outside the main circle of events, in well-hidden and guarded places (Horpyna's ravine, Taurogi etc.) Contrary to stereotypical judgments, the levels of individual histories and of general history are not in the *Trylogia* mutually penetrable, and demand from the author the division of a principal protagonist's fate into two plot strands, a division achieved by the deployment of other characters. Any awkwardness in the construction of the story material, however, gives the author an opportunity to enrich the narrative. Each of the protagonists must make a choice between what he owes to the fatherland and to the woman he loves. This necessity gives the characters a tragic element. This purely technical problem disappears in the world of the novel behind conceptual and ethical justifications, which do not however sufficiently explain the author's actions, and which certainly – despite frequent commentaries – are not sufficient in order to understand the characters.[129] The dilemma that lies between the desire for individual happiness and patriotic obligation allows us to move on to the level of character psychology, one that has been particularly underrated in Sienkiewicz's work.

One of the psychologically least complicated protagonists in the *Trylogia* is Michał Wołodyjowski. He is a character built of two elements: martial skill and desire for a wife. If we consider his experiences in love, we might conclude that Wołodyjowski has bad luck, since he falls in love with women three times without his feelings' being reciprocated – women who, in fact, choose his friends instead. But we quickly recognize that the author is simply blocking the development of a love plot that involves this protagonist, in order to keep him in the material of the entire cycle. That is why he is drawn to "higher" women:

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128 Andrzej Stawar does not perceive the symbolic function of the characters' acts of renunciation. He sees in this a neglect of psychological verisimilitude and an instrumentalization of story events to enable a descriptive narrative, for example, the relation from Sicza (*Pisarstwo Henryka Sienkiewicza*, op. cit., pp. 124–125).

129 Denis de Rougement's question is an excellent one: Why does happy love have no history? But there may be a prosaic (technical) answer: because romance is still the most popular component of all types of story material that have appeared in European culture up to the very present. This has not been changed by changes in the poetics of narrative, nor by the emergence of new narrative media, nor by revolutions in manners and customs , which were supposed to destroy the essence of the dramaturgy of love (Baudrillard asked whether love was possible after an orgy). The narrative of love is still the most eagerly listened to tale of all times, and the conventionality of these story materials still feeds that longing, something clearly shown by the enormous multiplication of romances offered by film narratives.

Anusia Borzobohata (beautiful), Helena (from a princely family), Aniela Leńska (married to Staniszewski), Anna and Barbara (princesses), Oleńka (who looks on him "as on a flunkey"), Kachna Schylling (who sees him as Wołodyjowski's own henchman), and Krzysia (the same as Billewiczówna). He realizes this when "there passed through [his] memory the whole line of ladies for whom he had sighed in his life. Among them were ones of great beauty, and those whose blood was of the highest" [P I 126]. That does not at all mean that there are no women in the novel that like him. When he is a guest of Pakosz Gasztowt, he enjoys the constant adoration of his daughters Terka, Maryśka, and Zona [P I 98]. The girls are pretty and can read and sing, and Terka even plays the lute. As Zagłoba points out, if he was really mainly concerned to get a wife, he would take one of these charming girls, for instance Marysia who is in love with him [P I 130].

The speeding up and slowing down of the pace of events in the romance plot, without altering the fabular conventions of the novel, is a relatively simple procedure, and does not exhaust the author's repertoire of devices. Sienkiewicz is able delicately to frustrate conventional formulations so that a fracture emerges for divergent signs, pointing to other genres, with concealed autobiographical aspects. This latter possibility is put forward by Maria Korniłowiczowa when she characterizes the types of women that Sienkiewicz prefers. Apparently, he did not favor simple-souled, virtuous "geese."

> He had, however, have a genuine passion for women who could match him in the strength of their individuality. But he never understood women like that, was never tempted to write about them, and cringed at their feet like a tame bear. In his novels, he reproduced a stereotype which he avoided in life.[130]

Femininity as a collection of erotic and social stereotypes organizes the world of these fictions to the same degree that politics and war do. Contrary to the schematic models used by the author when creating his female characters, and contrary to their modest function in the story material, this sphere of Sienkiewicz's writing is exceptionally important for understanding the discreet oscillation of his symbolic language.

In all Sienkiewicz's work, the aim in life of his male characters is a relationship with a beloved woman. "The greatest reward of work and efforts," says Augustinowicz of women in the novel that marks Sienkiewicz's debut.[131] The author remains true to this conviction to his very last works, and his personal, at times tragicomic, adventures in marriage show he saw the promise of an existential

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130 M. Korniłowiczowa, *Onegdaj. Opowieść o Henryku Sienkiewiczu i ludziach mu bliskich*, Szczecin 1985, p. 36.

131 H. Sienkiewicz, *Na marne. Szkic powieściowy*, in: *Pisma wybrane*, vol. 1, Warszawa 1989, p. 48.

plenitude in the happy bond between a man and a woman. This fullness is sought after by his contemporary protagonists, but the protagonists of his historical fiction find it at once, at the start of their adventures (Skrzetuski, Kmicic, Winicjusz, Zbyszko), or they receive it as a reward for being a true soldier (Wołodyjowski). In this apologia for marriage, Sienkiewicz is going against the grain of the Romantic tradition, otherwise so close to him, and in particular its anti-matrimonial strand. In the *Trylogia*, the protagonists' marriages are still (*Pan Wołodyjowski* is an exception here) conventional closures to an erotic-adventure plot, and femininity seems to promise the protagonists a life freed from warfare that destroys and nullifies everything. The differences are actually more interesting than the repetitions mentioned here. Each succeeding part of the cycle, with decreasing conviction, sets out the ideal of family happiness; idyllic images are provided usually with a bitter counterpoint.

In the contemporary novels, too, marriage is really the author's central concern and the aim of his protagonists. When attacked by modernists for what were said to be his pitiful, bourgeois longings, Sienkiewicz gave no response, but his books demonstrate that he saw the issue of marriage as very important and far from banal. Paradoxically, his most extensive reflection on the metaphysics of marriage is his most criticized and underrated novel, *Rodzina Połanieckich*.

The necessity of marriage felt by Połaniecki, and his, as it were, family instinct are not at all a result of the realization of some custom-based or religious pattern, but are based mainly on existential premises..

> He was thirty-something, and so was at an age in which instinct with a nearly relentless force thrusts a man toward laying a domestic hearth, toward the idea of a wife, and toward starting a family. The greatest pessimism is powerless against this instinct; there is no protection against it in art or in any of life's tasks. As a result of this, misanthropes marry despite their philosophy, artists despite their art, and even all those persons who maintain that they devote not half, but all, their soul to their life's aim. The exceptions only prove the rule that the generality cannot live by a conventional lie or swim against nature's currents. In a greater part, those alone do not marry for whom the same force that creates marriages is a hindrance, that is those whom love has disappointed. Hence old bachelordom – if not always – is most frequently a hidden tragedy. [RP 11]

Sienkiewicz supplements this thought elsewhere: "The most energetic person needs someone to love him. Otherwise he feels death in himself, and his energy turns against life" [RP 188]. That is a reflection common to completely different figures, inasmuch as Podbipięta expresses the same conviction: "For forty-five years I've been on the move, my heart torn apart by emotions, my line is dying out, and no three heads, no three heads!" [OM I 43].

Femininity as a power that stabilizes the world is a component of Sienkiewicz's own world-view. In both the historical and contemporary novels, the end of history

is a woman, because femininity crowns the order that must embrace all the levels of the fiction. Just before Skrzetuski's meeting with Helena, we can observe this kind of primary order. "Deputy Skrzetuski was travelling thither happily and without haste, as if on his own territory, having all his resting spots on the road assured" [OM I 38]. It is January 1648, but a strangely early spring already signals its coming. All the world's levels are in concord, mutually condition each other, and maintain all in balance: nature, power, body, feelings. The characters ride through a country made secure by the Prince's policies, and in a moment Helena appears as the longed-for culmination of this harmonious picture. Of course, it is the order of romance, a dream of literature, one which – despite its simplifications – in Sienkiewicz's work is sufficiently rational that it does not transfer its principles to all reality. Femininity is, above all, a value for the heroes of adventure, but not for politicians. None of the great historical figures depicted in the *Trylogia* fights for a desired woman. At most he uses her as an instrument in a political game. Zaćwilichowski points out that, for Chmielnicki, Czaplińska is a common "light woman. But those are only shows behind which some deeper practical purposes are hidden" [OM I 21].

Thus, femininity is a component of the allegory of the noble nation. The allegory sees the Commonwealth as "powerless, ill unified, torn apart, insubordinate, disorderly" [OM I 212], and for that reason in need of a strong man: "it's just a leader that they need" [OM I 212]. And here, suddenly, Sienkiewicz muddies the clarity of the fable. A powerful leader is not in this world an absolute value; if soldiers do not serve him consciously, out of good will and a sense of virtue, he becomes a tyrant. This is a general principle of the world of the *Trylogia*, one that means that characters, even when they have force at their disposal, quickly withdraw from such dominance. The relation to a woman is, thus, a test of political views. He who proposes the imprisonment of a woman represents human and historical evil in the novel. In a symbolic parallel, such a relation to a woman is an allegory of despotism. This is Janusz Radziwiłł's advice to Kmicic.

> Capture yourself a girl when you can. When I persuade the swordbearer, he'll help you persuade the girl. When she agrees, I will arrange a wedding feast without delay. . . . If she doesn't agree, take her anyway. Once you've used the riding whip, it will all be over. . . . With women it's the best way. She weeps, she despairs when they drag her to the altar, but the next day she reflects that he's not such a dreadful devil as they paint him, and the third day she'll be happy. [P I 303]

The renunciation of violence toward women, and even hindering an attempt to seize one, are, on another level, a sign of a praiseworthy rejection of despotism. The text powerfully valorizes the virtue of moderating force, even if one possesses the means and the right to employ it. In order that such a project of sexual politics can be fulfilled, to the gesture of renouncing violence there must be added the

answer that is constituted by female gestures, that is faithfulness and dedication. Particularly the virtue of faithfulness toward betrothed and husband, made secure against compulsion by the author's power, is meant to be a model of civic virtue – faithfulness toward the king and the Commonwealth. The closeness of literal and allegorical content does not work however. A collective subject – the nobility – is not morally homogeneous; it is virtuous, but also seduced, ravished, treacherous; it does not match the female model, all the less because the author does not play fair. The purity of his female characters – the purity of his fiction – is maintained at the cost of divesting it of history. So it appears that "femininity" as political allegory is only a postulate and is not actually realized in the novel.

And then Sienkiewicz achieves a lightning modification of the allegory, that is, he divides the figure of femininity into the seduced and the virtuous, gathering up into this figure both male and female characters. Seduced by the enemy and its own vices, the nobility is a sick and fallen woman, just as "the whole Commonwealth was slack, tugged about by parties, sick, and in a fever" [P I 94], and in this state she is seduced or won by force by the Swedes. The narrative builds up the fate of the main protagonist according to the same model. "He is not such a traitor as they say, but rather seduced" [P II 34]. A seduced masculinity loses its name, and has no right to it. Shame at his own sins and stupidities requires concealment, a mask in the shape of a false (female) name. "Thus, I am not called Kmicic, but rather Babinicz" [P II 42]. Babinicz, which suggests "*baba*" (woman), is a name that contains an insult to masculinity (don't be a woman ("*baba*")!). With this gesture Kmicic renounces his predominance over Oleńka, not only a moral predominance, but also a cultural one. He only had it for a short time, anyway, at the start of their courtship, when the symbolic pole of masculinity still belonged to him. Then he was the one man who did not fear Oleńka: "at one time he was not subject to that influence nor did he care for it, but boldly rallied to kiss those severe eyes and proud lips" [P III 216]. Seduced by Radziwiłł, Kmicic loses virtue (*virtus*), and, in Oleńka's eyes, he ceases to be a man worthy of a woman like her. The device is conventional, but only if we close our eyes to the shift of symbolic meanings. Sienkiewicz's world must remain in balance; the virtue of faithfulness to the king which Kmicic has lost does not disappear, but is embodied in Oleńka, for whom faithfulness and masculinity stand at the head of the hierarchy of values.[132] "Brought up by an old soldier who placed contempt for death at the summit of all other virtues, she adored manliness with all her heart" [P I 397]. From that point, through the whole novel, two virtues merge in her character: virginity and

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132 He is Babinicz, but he's no woman [*baba*]!" – Piotr Czarniecki rejects the insulting connotations of the name [P II 243]. One can find the most exhaustive analysis of this character in Ewa Kosowska's *Postać literacka jako tekst kultury. Rekonstrukcja antropologicznego modelu szlachcianki na podstawie* *Potopu* *Henryka Sienkiewicza*, Katowice 1990.

masculinity – *virginitas* and *virtus* – and the boundaries between them are effaced as the story proceeds. The consequences of this merging of virtues are fascinating. Kmicic becomes a victim, a weak subject, "maltreated like a dog" and complains about the cruelty of the increasingly powerful object of his love.

> God gave you beauty, but also a heart fierce and relentless. You would suffer yourself in order to cause another greater pain. You go beyond the measure, miss, as you live and breathe, you go beyond the measure, and there is nothing beyond that! [P I 372]

His words partly belong to the *topos* of the complaint about the cruelty of a beautiful, unfeeling lady (for example, Keats's "La belle dame sans merci"). "You relish human pain – he continued to Oleńka" [P I 373]. The lover's wallowing in his own anguish also belongs to this tradition: the masochistic celebration of the pain caused by the beloved woman's rejection. "His ears sought for the rustle of her dress; he watched, pretending not to watch, for each of her movements; he felt the warmth that came from her; and all that together brought him some kind of painful joy" [P I 396].

But those stylistic-genre connections, which are isolated from the story material, do not sufficiently explain the allegorization of femininity in *Potop*. Female masculinity is here the model, but it is not exclusively an instrument used to reveal male weakness; that is why Oleńka's predominance attains (besides both dimensions of virtue) another equivalent – that is, wisdom.[133] Kmicic, who is after all one of the most intelligent protagonists in the *Trylogia*, frequently (as was pointed out in the previous chapter) confesses his stupidity. In a monolog to God and his conscience, he acknowledges straightforwardly: he would like "to serve his country well, but I do not know how, for I am foolish. I have served those traitors, Lord, not so much from wickedness, as rather from foolishness" [P II 36]. Nor does he have any doubt which among the corrupt companions and deceiving politicians he should have trusted.

> If only he had listened to her, if only he had listened to her! . . . She knew what to do, what side to take; she knew where there was virtue, honesty, duty – and she would have simply taken him by the hand and led him, if he had only wanted to listen to her. [P II 57]

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133 The first critics of the *Trylogia* drew attention to Oleńka's spiritual and moral predominance over Kmicic. Julian Klaczki's somewhat emotional comment is representative of their positions. "Female instinct sees clearly among the clouds of political passions and intrigues; by instinct she works out where truth is, where duty, where holiness. Only eloquent in silence, she strikes that lion Kmicic with her eyes, in which all the moral light of heaven shines. [. . .] in *Ogniem i mieczem* it is a matter only of the material fact whether Skrzetuski will find his princess; in *Potop* the material fact concerns the purification of Kmicic, to whose soul Oleńka offers confession with her eyes" (J. Klaczko, "Różne piękności *Ogniem i mieczem* i *Potopu*," in: *Trylogia Henryka Sienkiewicza*, op. cit*.*, p. 236).

The gospel of the woman, man's redeemer, the human incarnation of *Sophia* is proclaimed by Kmicic even to the king.

> O! she, my beloved Lord, though a woman, would put a man to shame with her intelligence, and in her loyalty you, Your Majesty, there is none greater than she. [P II 426]

But that is only the beginning, because in the text of *Potop*, an allegorical femininity takes in wider and wider circles of the fictional world. The relation wisdom-foolishness passes from a couple of protagonists to a royal couple, so that "when the Queen expresses her opinion, it would be in vain to appeal against it to the King, so greatly did Jan Kazimierz put trust in her shrewdness and intelligence" [P II 377]. By virtue of ancient symbolism, the body of the ruler is identified with the body of the nation; a female collectivity takes on the features of the queen.

> Women with their hair let down, with flushed faces, offered examples of courage, and it was observed how such women raced with watering cans after still bouncing grenades that were just about to explode. [P II 279]

Finally we reach the broadest circle of allegory, the one that ultimately orders all the spheres of the symbolic world in *Potop*. Virginal virtue transformed into military virtue becomes a decisive force in history. Terrified by Prince Bogusław's successes, Oleńka doubts whether anyone is able to stop him. Then the news of the defense of Częstochowa arrives.

> – Who will defeat him? – said the sword-bearer to the girl – who will match him? Now you know who? The Holy Virgin! [P III 268][134]

So on the symbolic level of history a woman is victorious, and her instrument is a man with a female pseudonym (Kmicic-Babinicz). One cannot go any further in this process of idealizing femininity as the force that regulates history. Now Sienkiewicz must return from heaven to earth, that is return Oleńka the woman to Kmicic. He must separate, for this return, *virginitas* and *virtus*, recover the biological and cultural sex of his characters, and – what is most difficult – restore the man's moral and sexual predominance.

He does this with a double *coup de force*. With the first, he undermines virtue's absolute rightness. Isolating Oleńka from any knowledge of Babinicz's deeds, he creates a picture of an excessive absorption in adherence to principles, whereby

134 The source of the allegory of "feminized power" may be the sculpture of which Sienkiewicz wrote to Father Euzebiusz Rejman, thanking him for the present of an old Swedish musket ball. "Incidentally, it happened that the sculptor Godebski was intending to offer me a relief presenting the Holy Mother of Częstochowa, and under her, at the base, an overthrown Swede. Seeing the musket ball, he could not contain himself for satisfaction and asserted that it would be impossible to invent a more beautiful piece of ornamentation for the top of the relief" [14 December 1898, Kor II 120].

the reader, without willing it, loses patience, seeing only her stubbornness. The tyranny of virtue reaches its culmination in the scene in which Oleńka by chance meets the unconscious Kmicic. Soroka is taking him to Wołmontowicze where Kmicic wishes to die. Despite Kmicic's state, there is no forgiveness. The lady is certain that his conversion is recent. She also cannot forget Bogusław's words about how Kmicic offered to abduct the king for him. She assumes that God will forgive; she cannot do so herself. The narrator's knowledge, which he shares with the reader, creates our distance toward such an irreproachable position. Dogmatic faithfulness toward the king, or rather to the idea of faithfulness, threatens blindness toward what is near. It is easier for the narrator to forgive Kmicic's treachery than Oleńka's tyranny of virtue.

Sienkiewicz learned from Shakespeare that conflicts of values can be not only productive in terms of the story material, but can also be as profound and complex as psychological conflicts. Criticisms concerning the lack of psychological portraits in the *Trylogia* are unfounded because of the trilogy's genre conventions, but also because Sienkiewicz thinks through action and renders autonomous a situation which concentrates in itself varied meanings external to the story material. Unshakable principles in conflict with an impulsive and passionate character make-up enrich both figures psychologically. The prototype of Oleńka is perhaps Isabella from Shakespeare's *Measure for Measure*. She also wishes to enter a nunnery, but she has not yet taken her vows. Her brother Claudio has been condemned to death. She can save him if she gives herself to the Duke's deputy, who exercises power in Vienna in the Duke's absence. The beautiful and virtuous nun does not even for a moment entertain the idea, and when she perceives that her brother wishes to exploit the judge's inclination, she bursts out with hatred.

> Isabella:
> I'll pray a thousand prayers for thy death,
> No word to save thee.
> Claudio:
> Nay, hear me, Isabel.
> Isabella:
> O, fie, fie, fie!
> Thy sin's not accidental, but a trade.
> Mercy to thee would prove itself a bawd:
> 'Tis best thou diest quickly. (Act 111, Scene 1)

Finally both women (Isabella and Oleńka) are taught a lesson concerning the danger that absolute fidelity to principles brings, but Sienkiewicz has a harder task than Shakespeare. Kmicic must regain his old name, in other words his "cultural gender," and thus everything that is bound up with that in noble patriarchal culture and to which he was entitled before his fall and unjust accusation. The story, however, cannot turn full circle and return to the opening situation of the novel.

The transformation of both characters is irreversible, and therefore they need new allegorical forms to make this transformation probable.

Here Sienkiewicz performs a second masterful stroke. He chooses for Kmicic a pattern of masculinity that lies outside the heroic-military repertoire. The king's letter, read in church, casts his actions in the hagiographic scheme of the passion. We can see a prefiguration, for example, in the scene with the king, when at first no one is prepared to believe his account from Częstochowa. Outraged, he cries out: "I want to be believed. Let the doubting Thomases feel my wounds" [P II 359]. Frequently near to death, he really dies and is resurrected morally. Compared by the narrator to Lazarus ("he approached like Lazarus"), he triumphs over Oleńka by the grandeur of his sacrifice. In effect, it is she (although she is the cause of Kmicic's conversion) who gives up moral predominance and acknowledges herself guilty of doubt and lack of faith, making public expiation.

> However she suddenly fell to her knees before him.
> Jędruś! I am unworthy to kiss your wounds! [P III 422]

Her withdrawal from a position of moral domination over Kmicic is a culminating moment of the story material, and marks a genuine return of lost masculinity (*virtus*). A moment ago, he was Lazarus; now "his exhausted powers returned to the knight, so he raised her from the ground and pressed her like a feather to his bosom" [P III 422]. Sienkiewicz succeeds in keeping control of his heroine's emancipation by placing her within a chain of symbolic meanings: one name, two persons, and three iconic scenes.[135] It is Mary who made the correct choice ("hath chosen the good part"). It is Mary, Lazarus's sister, who anointed Christ and wiped his feet with her hair. Soon Mary will be in a blessed state ("she was full of earnestness and blessing" [PW 7]). Playing with symbolic matrices, the text suppresses the real consequences of Oleńka's predominance over Kmicic. The Biblical patterns involving Mary mean that the tyranny of inflexible virtue is weakened by the Christian pattern of motherhood full of humility and self-sacrifice.[136] Simone de Beauvoir's commentary nicely captures the heart of this

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135 "Mary hath chosen that good part, which shall not be taken away from her" [Luke 10.42]. "It was *that* Mary which anointed the Lord with ointment, and wiped his feet with her hair, whose brother Lazarus was sick" [John 11.2]. "Then when Mary was come where Jesus was, and saw him, she fell down at his feet. . . ." [John 11.32]. "Lazarus was which had been dead, whom he raised from the dead" [John 12.1]. Józef Bocheński notes that "Mother of God" is the most frequently used name of the divine in *Potop*, and it occurs thirty-four times. In comparison, God occurs twenty-nine times, and Christ twelve times. On the other hand, in *Ogniem i mieczem* and *Pan Wołodyjowski*, Mother of God only occurs four times in each (J. Bocheński, "Religia w *Trylogii*". *Dzieła zebrane.* vol. 6, Kraków 1995, p. 137).

136 See: S. de Beauvoir, *Druga płeć*, trans. G. Mycielska, Kraków 1972, p. 225.

paradoxical scene. It is, she argues, the first time in human history when a mother kneels before her son. Of her own free will, she recognizes her own lowliness. Men's greatest victory lies in the cult of Mary: it is a rehabilitation of woman through the completeness of her defeat. The woman is subject to the man as his mother, and it is in that role that she will be loved and respected.

Kmicic's victory in the symbolic conflict does not stop the progress of the ideal Oleńka's symbolic transformation ("a creature from beyond the earth," Ketling says of her) into a real woman, which in Sienkiewicz's work means a woman that gives birth to children. So that a secondary idealization (woman-mother) can take place, Billewiczówna has to regain the body that Kmicic once possessed, and that he should possess anew, so that there may be a real end to the deification of the female, a deification that is hostile to life.

2. Do sarmatian women have bodies?

This question was put years ago by Tadeusz Chrzanowski ("Czy 'grubi Sarmatowie' mieli w ogóle ciało?" [Did "Fat Sarmatians" Have Bodies at All?]). His answer was that instead of pictures of their bodies "we have a unique gallery of sarmatian heads [. . .] their hands were conventional possessors of attributes, but the rest? Women do not have the rest at all: their bodies are hidden behind the secure ramparts of their clothes. The men? It seems that they had bodies. [. . .] It is just that they were puffed up. And actually just one part: the belly."[137]

Let us repeat the question: do the women in Sienkiewicz's works have bodies?

The answer seems obvious – of course, they do! His work, after all, seethes with sensuality; the author recognizes corporeality as a fundamental component of love. "If women were loved for their mental qualities, not one single occurrence of love would have taken place from the time of Adam," he states baldly [D XL 72]. All his stories feed on the concreteness and speed of the desire that always precedes the development of spiritual ties among the characters. The tempo of sensual events goes very well with the economy of a narrative of adventure that prefers situations to studies of feelings. All his principal male characters experience the sudden coming on of passion, the source of which is the sensual attractiveness of the women they choose. The author does not even give them time to deepen their relationships, since the demands of the genre call – military adventures. So desire is dominant, desire ennobled by a range of duties undertaken by the characters, or desire that is tamed by the implacable laws

137 T. Chrzanowski, "Ciało sarmackie," in: *Wędrówki po Sarmacji europejskiej. Eseje o sztuce i kulturze staropolskiej,* Kraków, 1988, p. 233.

of the moral physics of their worlds. The author helps his aim by deliberately constructing his female protagonists' beauty so that their corporality becomes the center of the world in which they live, an incidental result of the natural environment, of the surrounding people and objects, in a word of their *milieu*.

Sienkiewicz proposed a genetic-naturalistic typology of women in one of his feuilleton pieces devoted to *Kasia and Marynka* by Narcyza Żmichowska, a book that he described as "a collection of reflections on various issues of life, mostly on marriage and love" [MLA 53]. Like an observer-naturalist he classifies the world of female individuals according to the natural order.

> As there exist three kingdoms, animals, plants, and minerals, so there are three main types of women. The first are those for whom choice is unimportant, for each man and all of them together seem good; a second group is plant-like women, without volition, who must be taken in hand and cared for in hot houses like flowers, or in the harem like Turkish women; the third and final group is a type of Christian woman, a diamond woman, who needs exclusivity and choice. [MLA 55]

Closest to the type of "plant-like woman" is Helena; more frequently than other heroines she is presented against a natural background, with which she is linked by a deep similarity. During her flight with Zagłoba, the blossoming steppe soothes and intoxicates Helena. Flowers "leant toward her, as if in this disguised Cossack, with long plaits, a milky face, and bright red lips, they recognized a sister. They bowed toward her as if they wanted to say: "Do not weep, o my pretty one, we too are in God's care" [OM I 268]. Helena never finds herself in a situation in which she can make a choice, even when Skrzetuski stands in her path. Locked up, looked after, ferried from place to place, she is, above all, the body of a mother, a queen immobilized in the recesses of out-of-the-way estates, behind the walls of fortresses, in deep valleys, so as not to lose any of her reproductive function. From the start, she is conceived as a static figure, "heavy" with functional attributes, which stabilize her place in the story material and her cultural function. Her physicality does not escape the protagonist's glance, and she even allows herself to be contemplated. Sienkiewicz often shows Helena immobilized in space, as if she were her own statue. This is how we see her through Skrzetuski's eyes, and through those of Zagłoba, Wołodyjowski, and the narrator.

Do they look at her body? Yes, but their gaze is selective; it cuts her silhouette so that it finishes at the line of her bosom. So, along with Wołodyjowski, we look "at those velvet eyes, sweet and swooning, at their silken shades, the shadow of which fell as far as those berries, at her hair scattered like the flowers of the hyacinth over her back and shoulders, at her soaring figure, at her swelling bosom lightly rocked by her breathing, from which beat out beloved warmth, at all that lily-white and pink, and the raspberries of her lips" [OM II 265]. But what of the rest of her? Nakedness cannot be presented – at most by a general term, but

not in a concrete body. Despite this absence, Sienkiewicz lets us know that his characters think of the body, even if it remains unpresented. Michael acknowledges to Zagłoba that "even those figures of goddesses, made so finely out of marble, as if they were alive, which we saw in the Kazanowski palace, cannot hold their own with her" [OM II 266]. The comparison to a naked statue reveals the elliptical nature of the presentation of Helena's body; it points to the "divinity" of her figure. This is the way she returns in *Potop*, shown in front of her own house, in the company of a trio of sons and Zagłoba, who is witness that the prophesy of the hawk and the cuckoo has come true. Her picture is completely harmonized with the environment, cut off from the time of events, independent even of the narrator, who adds nothing new to her portrait and function.[138] Helena is complete from the start, and she remains so when we see her as she goes out into the garden in the heat of an August afternoon – "beautiful as the afternoon sun, tall, strong, black-haired, with a dark glowing face and eyes like velvet" [P I 195].

Krzysia also belongs to the family of "plant-like women." She "had it in her nature that she liked to be loved" [PW 93]. She is linked with Helena by other common features: she is dark-haired, sensual, and quickly provides Ketling with heirs.

> She was a hot-blooded Ruthenian, so some unknown fires arose in her breast, fires of which she did not know hitherto that they could exist. In the heat of those fires, she was seized all at once by fear, and shame, and a great impotence, and some kind of lassitude, both painful and dear. [PW 128-129]

Despite her physical similarity, Krzysia differs from Helena because of her decided inclination toward dreaming of a courtly lover, dreams that are fulfilled in the person of Ketling. In her figure there is some disharmony, which is not appreciated by the narrator, for he points to the lack of homogeneity of Krzysia's character, saying that "knights compared her – some to Juno, some to Diana" [PW 130]. These are the names of the goddesses earlier associated with Helena and Oleńka respectively. Finally the narrator's reserve is affirmed by Zagłoba when he knowingly praises her to Ketling.

> Drohojowska something recalls the former Billewiczówna, only that one has hair like hemp and does not have that swollen part above her mouth; but there are those who see greater beauty in that and deem it a rarity. [PW 124]

This change may surprise us when we realize Helena's high position in the esthetic and moral ranking of the *Trylogia*, but from the time of Sienkiewicz's work on *Ogniem i mieczem* much had changed. Sienkiewicz had lost his beloved wife, had

138 "Um sie kein Ort, noch weniger eine Zeit;
Von ihnen sprechen ist Verlegenheit.
Die Mütter sind es!" (J.W. v. Goethe, *Faust II, "Finstere Galerie"*)

modified in *Potop* the shape of the first part of the cycle, and one of the victims of those changes is the "plant-like woman." From now on, passivity will be a feature of secondary characters, and a greater and greater degree of activity will characterize the male protagonists' life partners.

This step-by-step distancing from a static femininity conceals the evident influence of misogynist modernist ideas, although Sienkiewicz himself would never have acknowledged this. One can see clearly, however, that in many of his female portraits he touches on the terrible, parasite-like power of femininity. In his work, we meet a series of dying women (including Danusia, Litka, and Marynia in *Wiry* (Whirlpools), Nel, Jenny, and Marysia in "Jamioł" (The Angel), Marysia Toporczykówna – I will write more on this in the chapter "Eros in Mourning"). Their deaths are contagious, or produce in men a distaste for life. The function of these deaths is puzzling. We can see this most clearly in the novella "Za chlebem." Marysia's passive haplessness is a powerful force, which wastes men's energies and destroys the men themselves. Orlik who is in love with her (a first draft for Bohun) loses his life in a senseless attempt to save her.

> I walked like a wolf alone through the world and folks feared me, but I was afraid of you, and so, Maryś, you must have set me something to do. . . . But you are not to marry me: death would be better! I will save you or die; but if I die, mourn me sincerely and say the rosary for me. What have I done to you? I have done you no wrong. Oh, Maryś, Maryś! Be sensible, my darling, my sunlight. . . . ["Za chlebem," D II 181]

Sienkiewicz splendidly complicates the picture of the world created by social Darwinists. The power of endurance possessed by men gives way to what is weak, awkward, without the values ascribed to women by the operation of cultural myths that render them sublime. The best study of the operation of female passivity is Pani Maszkowa, with whom Połaniecki betrays his wife. She recalls Gombrowicz's Iwona: she says little, she is static, she does not choose her husband, and despite her passivity she has for Stanisław an irresistable attraction, which in the end means that "the animal yielded [not] to the spirit" [RP 568]. This is, indeed, the only example in all Sienkiewicz's work of a "feminine animality," which indifferently gives itself to each "gentleman."

> Pani Maszkowa however stood before him, her head a little bowed, her eyes cast down, confused, full of evident fear, and in her stance and the expression on her face was something of the resigned victim who sees that the stern hour has come – and that misfortune must occur. [RP 572]

Marynia Połaniecka belongs to the second type.

> Because she was rather short-sighted, she held her head bent over the book, but when she raised her head at times, Polaniecki saw a face so cheerful, so full of almost <u>plant-like</u> [my underlining – R.K.] peace, and so soothing that it was almost angelic. [RP 316]

Sienkiewicz had a difficult task because, while creating images of sensual, animal- and plant-like women, he had to make at least some of these figures morally beyond reproach. As a realist, he knew that without the author's firm intervention in a world that is supposed to be probable, these cannot be reconciled.[139] His female characters' attractive bodies continually involve them in erotic relations with the male world, therefore endangering the moral order that has to govern the novel. It is possible to maintain an artificial balance between sensuality and morality, at the cost of reducing the reality of the body. In this context, we see what an effective move it was to create Zagłoba, who reminds the heroic protagonists that virtuous sarmatian women also have bodies. So he scares Skrzetuski that if he does not set off to Bar to find Helena, he may lose her: "My God! I'll be the first to persuade the princess to give you a set of horns, and there Jędrzej Potocki, when he sees her, he'll snort fire: just wait till he starts neighing like a horse" [OM I 432]. He deals, equally unceremoniously, even brutally, with Michał's feelings toward Anna Borzobohata, creating a mocking metaphor, laughing at the comparison of woman and plant, eroticism and fertility.

> I couldn't know that you were concerned with the one Prince Bogusław planted in his garden. He's a zealous gardener, do not fear! He didn't have to wait a year to get hold of the fruit. [P III 164]

It is true that the author does not permit any "gardening practices," either in relation to Anusia or to Oleńka, but to achieve this he has to resort to the support of other-worldly entities like the ghost of Billewicz. He appears to Bogusław and effectively discourages him from molesting Oleńka. Sienkiewicz keeps his protagonists far away from characters like Anusia or Maszkowa, however subjecting them the test of choice, as he does with Michał Wołodyjowski and Zbyszek from *Krzyżacy*. *Potop* clearly signals a change in the type of principal female figure. "The diamond woman," such as Oleńka undoubtedly is, is subject to idealization to a greater degree than Helena, becoming the pattern of a virtuous royalist. This does not, however, mean that the narrative omits this character's sensuous side. We more frequently observe her in motion, in action, including erotic action. The composition of the scene in the fast-moving sleigh shows that

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139 In his *Listy z podróży* (Travel Letters), Sienkiewicz gives a trenchant description of a Polish female peasant, an "animal woman," without any esthetic retouching. "This Chloe with red legs goes barefoot over the stubble, and that's why she has a rose on her ankle. Wrapped in a rug, she drinks vodka, and to all questions she answers always the same: 'Repent your shames!' This idyllic modesty does not of course stand in the way of various equally idyll-like activities in the fresh hay. At the same time, Chloe cannot either read or write, and has absolutely no understanding of what is going on around her, and the world in her eyes reflects only externally, like the sky in water. Nothing gets into her brain" [LPA 156].

Sienkiewicz, via the parallel of the dashing team and rising passion, suggestively indicates the presence of unpresented bodies in which desire swells.

> Leaning back she closed her eyes, giving herself over entirely to the onward rush. She felt a sweet powerlessness, and it seemed to her that the boyar from Orsha had kidnapped her and was traveling with the wind, and she weak as she was, had not the strength to resist or cry out. . . . And they fly forward, faster, faster. . . . Oleńka feels as if she were in someone's hands . . . she feels at last on her cheeks something like an inflamed and burning brand . . . her eyes seemed not to want to unlock, as in a dream. [P I 38]

It would be too easy to ascribe to the author an open attempt to make the readers' hearts beat faster, whereas he often plays a similar game with the censor of manners as scandalous "naturalists" like Flaubert do. Flaubert, after all, completely hides from the reader's eyes the famous scene in the carriage in which Emma is seduced, presenting it (apart from a bared shoulder) only through the more and more wearied team of horses and the increasingly thirsty coachman.

Sienkiewicz does the same thing in scene of the fencing lesson that Michał gives Basia. Płoszowski calls the fencing lessons exercises in the game of love, but even outside the context of *Bez dogmatu* the reader receives indications from the narrator how to understand this playing at having a duel. The narrator takes the perspective of a character and informs us that Michał while fencing with Basia "noticed, for the first time for sure, that she drew your eyes to her, so beautiful was she with her flared nostrils and her heaving bosom" [PW 90].

Sienkiewicz creates his own language of erotic signs. We see this in the repetition of specific scenes, motifs, and linguistic formulations. Ellipsis, allegory, and metonymy play a special role in his discourse. Metonymy is a figure of transference that Sienkiewicz likes to use when he wishes to communicate something that is morally dubious. The amatory symbolism of fencing is continued in the scene in which Basia, in love, strokes the dangerous horse that Michał has received from the hetman.

> – God! he's ready to kill you, my lady! – shouted Wołodyjowski pointing to her.
> But Basia commenced stroking with her open hand the neck of the blood horse, repeating:
> – Let him kill me! Let him kill me! Let him kill me! . . .
> And the horse turned toward her his steaming nostrils and snorted quietly, as if he were glad of the caresses. [PW 98]

By engaging in this game of transference, Sienkiewicz avoids the limits of representation that he has himself created. Basia's body, like that of Wołodyjowski, remains untouched by language, but the caress that she gives the horse makes it impossible for one to forget the corporeality of both protagonists. Sienkiewicz uses the same device in "Hania." There the protagonist experiences monstrous jealousy, when he sees the eponymous heroine touch his friend's horse.

> [Why does] Helena hold her hand on the mane of Selim's horse, and not on my horse's? Sometimes she embraced his neck, or, patting him, repeated: "My horsey, mine!" And the beast snorted gently and stretched its flared, snorting nostrils toward her hand as if it were seeking sugar there. All that meant that I became sad once more and looked at nothing, only at that hand, that all the time lay on the horse's mane. ["Hania," D IV 81-82]

A further example of the motif of the petted horse occurs in the novel *Na polu chwały*. There "by the well in the courtyard the chestnut stallion held his nostrils hidden in Miss Sienińska's white hands." Seeing this, Łukasz Bukojemski declares: "Even the beasts know what's really special" [NPCH 205].

The extended discourse of the novel splendidly operates with a poetics of gagged eroticism, a poetics that has to find expressions in figures of intermediacy – jokes, allusions, periphrases, metonymies etc. The bodily dimension of Sienkiewicz's characters is essential to him as the author of historical novels, of a genre in which the image of the body is an instrument for presenting time. He attempts, however, when presenting women's bodies, to avoid the extreme discourses of metaphysics and biology. He skillfully avoids modernism's trap. When modernism sets out the biological nature of love, it loses in hyperbole the concreteness of the love relation that is so defended by realism. The demons of sex permeate the literature of *Młoda Polska* (Young Poland), and not real women.

On the other hand, avoiding the excessive emotionality of a love narrative, he resisted the idealizing reductiveness of Romanticism and modernism's Parnassian tendencies. He knew or instinctively felt that by creating sensual pictures of his female protagonists, by promising fertility and motherhood, he was falling into Schopenhauer's trap. Schopenhauer skeptically remarked that beautiful love stories are embodied in concrete bodies, masking the dark energy of the instincts, which play with individuals, intoxicating them, and concealing the deadly horizon of eroticism. For Sienkiewicz's generation, the essay entitled "The Metaphysics of Sexual Love" seemed even more credible thanks to the discoveries of Darwin. Before a mature modernism reacted with hysterical misogyny to the truth about the biological underpinnings of love, the positive modernity of the second half of the nineteenth century tried to rationalize the relations between woman and man. It quickly, however, discovered the trap into which positivist literary romance falls by two means: tendentiousness (*Nad Niemnem*) or a return to Romanticism (*Lalka*). The Positivists' intellectual courage is impressive. They compel themselves to affirm life, but they do not permit that affirmation to mask death, which is the cause of that affirmation. Heroically, they stand opposed to that long tradition of disdain, the object of which is

> "The body" – everything that connects us with destructive change, and with the diverse forces that undermine harmony: pain and the senses, intercourse,

> fertilization, birth, filth, the breast that feeds, eating, defecating . . . age, illness, death – it threatens that perspective. So one must reject it, negate it, vanquish it – that is, pacify the change, tame those diverse forces. One must get rid of its dangerous character, get rid of its sting: break its connection with death.[140]

Such an operation can, however, only be a simulation, best accomplished in language. If we wish to understand the specificity of the discourse of life in Sienkiewicz's novels, we have to watch him as he builds the language of a love story within the dichotomy of Romanticism and Darwinism. Between Słowacki and Darwin, he looks for a place for his conception of love, perversely, even cynically drawing near to one or the other extreme view. In *Bez dogmatu* (1890), he equips his protagonist with Słowacki's still credible language of love.

> No one in the world feels it more than I that the words "Your spell over me endures" may not belong to poetic delusions, but are rather a weighty reality. Her spell over me endures. I don't just love her, I don't just desire her, but I like her most powerfully. She completely fulfills all my preferences, all my imaginings of a woman's charm and beauty. She draws me toward her with such an inexplicable force, as the magnet draws iron. [BD 367]

In *The Połaniecki Family*, in a description of a similar state in a character, Sienkiewicz changes the language of poetry to the jargon of an evolutionist.

> This purely physical attraction, which was strange to Połaniecki himself, was something he had long fought against. He lived through it now with an unrestrained force. In the blink of an eye, the wild instincts of early man awoke in him – early man who at the sight of the woman he desired in the arms of another, would fall into rage and was ready to wrestle for her with his lucky competitor. [RP 552-553]

In *Wiry*, however, he shows that both languages are available, but that neither changes nor explains the facticity of the "inexplicable force" of desire. Krzycki has fallen for the mysterious Anney, and does not realize the source of his fascination. The narrator, however, gives them.

> If he were Groński and read at some point in his life Lucretius's hymn to Venus, he would be able to become aware of that strength and to give it a name. But since he was only a healthy twenty-year-old country gentleman, he just thought that for the moment when he would be permitted to take all of such girl to his breast, it would be worth giving up Jastrząb, Rześlewo – and perhaps even his life. [W 65]

Sienkiewicz seems to mock the freedom of the subject that expresses itself, *inter alia*, in the possibility of choosing a language, as if that which one wants to say

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140 K. Michalski, "Wieczna miłość," *Tygodnik Powszechny* 41, 10 October 2004, p. 8. Such is the experience of such different figures as Połaniecki and Płoszowski,whose problems constitute – as Jolanta Sztachelska writes – "the internalized need of affirmation of life contrary to the dominant experience of death, decay, nothingness" (J. Sztachelska, *Czar i zaklęcie*, op. cit., p. 133).

or to read is always beyond utterance and threatens with dumbness. The positive features of the unpresented depend, however, on the fact that it compels the movement of speech, the game of transferences, substitutions, insistent pointers to those places of representation, where something else should be. This is the rhetorical key to Sienkiewicz's demonstration of the erotic, the key that opens the mechanism of many scenes of this type. When Krzycki studies Anney's hand, the description functions as a synecdoche of her whole body: "[the hand] though shapely, was far from small, and he thought that the cause of this was English sports: tennis, rowing, archery, and such like" [W 15-16].[141]

The bodies of female characters are presented selectively. The motivations for these selections are, however, ambiguous. A too simple interpretation is that behind them stands the author's moral self-censorship. An analysis of erotic scenes, however, demonstrates the perverseness of this reduction. For Sienkiewicz is able to employ limited poles of representation to create a dialectic of the visual, which because of its irritating modesty performs the function of an ellipsis that provokes thought about what is hidden, but suggested in the frame of representation. In other words, this technique of erotic description implements a dialectic of perversion,[142] stimulating in the reader a desire to add what is not presented. The reader's imagination absorbs the text's shy transgressions, while the factual description does not exceed the limits of the moral norm assumed by the author.

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141 A fascinating exception is the scene in *Wiry* in which Laskowicz, a socialist, looks at Marynia playing the violin and strives to struggle against enchantment "by the class enemy." In order to fight off desire, he imagines the anatomy of her entire body: "So when she bent her head to tune the violin, he said to himself in his soul the names of her parietal bones in Latin, thrusting aside the thought that despite his will came into his head, the thought that it was nonetheless an unusually noble skull. Next in the first moments after the concert began, he devoted himself to the nomenclature of the muscles of her hands, shoulders, breasts, the legs that could be seen under the materials of her dress, and her whole body. But because he was not just a student of medicine and a socialist, but also a young man, that anatomical survey ended with the unexpected conclusion that she was not wholly developed yet, but an exceptional pretty and attractive girl, just like a spring flower" [W 33]

142 Stanisław Mackiewicz was not seduced when he wrote: "Przybyszewski's unbridled eroticism is child's play in comparison to the cultured, artistic, refined eroticism of Sienkiewicz" (*Muchy łażą po ścianie*, Kraków 1992, p. 81.) See also: the same author's *Henryk Sienkiewicz. Studium literackie,*op. cit., pp. 19–26. The place of female figures in the *Trylogia* has aroused more and more scholarly interest. Ewa Kosowska demonstrates and discusses an interesting parallel between Helena and Horpyna ("Inwarianty kobiecości: wiedźma z Czortowego Jaru," in: *Negocjacje i kompromisy*, op. cit.., pp. 81–83). On the basis of a comparative analysis of both figures, Kosowska advances the thesis that "Horpyna constitutes . . . an obvious opposition to Helena; she is her opposite, but also . . . a sort of alter ego" (ibid., p. 83).

The problem appears even more complex when we ask about the social functions of eroticism in the world of the novel, since we see how they clearly change in successive novels. Initially, eroticism in relations between characters it is, above all, functional in a family and demographic way (as an impulse toward marriage and progeny). Beginning, however, from *Pan Wołodyjowski*, there appears the parallel strand of autonomous eroticism, freed from the obligation of procreation. In Sienkiewicz's work, a man is a being that gives death; a woman, however, gives life. So what function in the story material of uplifting romance does the author assign to the bodies of women who bring no offspring into the world?

3. "The world must be peopled!"

> Wife and mother is the complete woman, a wife who does not know the happiness of motherhood is only three quarters of a woman, and a beginning or an actual old maid is only half a woman.[143]

On 7 April 1887, Sienkiewicz wrote in a letter to his sister-in-law Jadwiga Janczewska the following mysterious sentence:

> Wołodyjowski is already begun with a scene that will for sure not please Dzinka, but which – God will witness – in certain circumstances might be good and in life full of a poetry – how to put it . . . – of a family kind. At the same time less.

Let us recall that the first chapter of *Pan Wołodyjowski* begins with an image of the splendor of fertile nature: "It was an exceptionally fertile year" [PW 6]. The first chapter makes this statement concrete with its image of the Kmicic manor house, before which Pan Andrzej sits in the shade, sipping mead, and looking at the pregnant Oleńka as she draws near. His gaze, which he shares with the narrator, expresses the happy satiety of a proprietor, who confidently awaits the fruits of his labors. Oleńka's body has a metaphorical similarity to the description of the orchard, in which the trees bow under an excess of fruit.

> Brightly gleaming, the red apples shone among the grey leaves. They were so plentiful that the trees seemed to be plastered with them. The branches of plum trees bent under their fruit, which was covered with a pale wax. [PW 7]

Oleńka is separated from this background, but not opposed to it; she is rather drawn out from the background as an integral component of it. The permeation of this scene with equivalents of sensuality is very strong, and this draws the reader not only toward a symbolism of fertility, but also of the eroticism borne by the figure of Kmicic. The narrator reminds us that "the soldier was jocular by nature,

143 E. Reich, *Studia nad kobietą*, trans. S. Kramsztyk, Warszawa 1976, p. 256.

and in his bachelor days must have got up to all sorts of mischief" [PW 7]. In a moment the two characters begin a conversation about their future son's name.

Why is Sienkiewicz convinced that this scene will displease Janczewska? From the writer's letters and from Maria Korniłowiczowa's recollections, we know that Janczewska shook "with loathing at the sight of little children, and even just at the mention of them, but with children just a little older she could spend hours in conversation."[144] In addition, his sister-in-law was plagued by fear and horror of the biological aspects of pregnancy and motherhood.[145] Sienkiewicz tried to change her attitude toward her own new born son. In one letter he mentions and attempts to make light of the origins of this distaste, but – despite the humorous tone of the letter – the matter must have been serious.

> As regards your little Roch (I call him Roch, because he will call me Uncle!). Wait, my little frog, I have your attention and I am not going to give up the chance of grousing. Why do you write, "I'm surprised I like him!"? For me that is a cause of amazement! I like him because he is yours, and for the sarmatian fantasy with which he reacted to his christening, and you shouldn't like him? Of course, you like him, for however much I agree with you that you are not, for a multitude of reasons, like those two-legged geese and chickens, sometimes different and strange, and vague, and worth most, not for your good attributes, but for your faults – but you have a worthy and loving and very normal nature, one that can control immature doctrines. [. . .] Are you trying to surprise me that you like the little kid, such a "funny little gourd," which it would be against nature not to love? Are you going to argue with me about how "a woman ought to be a human being!" [Abazzia, 16 April 1887, Li II/2, 361-362]

Sienkiewicz ties to make light of the problem, blaming it on "immature doctrines" and the influence of Maria Dembowska. Janczewska was fascinated by the art of early Polish and international modernism; its parnassian strand was particularly close to her. The cult of art, joined with physical aversions, led to her rejecting

144 M. Korniłowiczowa, *Onegdaj*, op. cit., p. 88. Do not let the light tone of the letter deceive us. It must have caused a powerful reaction, since in the next letter Sienkiewicz confesses repentantly: "I should have answered your last letter. Why did you want to quarrel over that long piece of writing from Abazzia? I imagined it is because of my historical view on the influences of Mara D[ębowska], and maybe because I had in general touched on matter that surprised you. If anything at all touched you even by a tiny grain of sand, or did not please you – I apologize. Dick always has the best intentions, but is sometimes clumsy, perhaps because of an excess of good intentions. You always have to consider the poor head into which Karol I or something similar has entered. Dick tries to soothe you and apologizes once more. In any case, he has been punished because right away he vexed himself with 'And what was that? And what have I written? Why does She want to quarrel?' etc. I could go on about this for a long time! . . " [Vienna, 24 April 1887, Li II/1, 380].

145 M. Bokszczanin, "Listy Sienkiewicza do Jadwigi Janczewskiej," in: H. Sienkiewicz, *Listy* vol. 2. Part I, op.cit., p. 8.

her own child and her own physiology of maternity. The effect – Korniłowiczowa writes – was that her own son, whom – when he grew up – she loved, bore within him, throughout his whole life, a set of terrible wounds from his early childhood. His mother, in whom esthetic sensibility predominated over maternal instinct, made every effort to avoid him, and his father, caught in a "spider's web," also did not concern himself with him.[146]

We are less interested here in analyzing Janczewska's complexes, much more in the literary text in which the lives of those close to Sienkiewicz were woven. So we ask whether the sister-in-law's complexes, linked with her influence on her sister's husband, were so strong that they were able to determine in some part the shape of the text of *Pan Wołodyjowski*. Let us recall that Sienkiewicz warns in advance in the letter quoted above that she will not like the beginning of the novel.

But what beginning?

Tadeusz Bujnicki published excerpts of the *Trylogia* that the writer had cut out at the last moment. Among those we can find a part that is of interest to us of the first chapter of *Pan Woodyjowski*. It is quite different from the version retained by the writer. The description of the orchard filled with a mass of fruit is almost identical, just like the idyllic image of Kmicic, drinking mead, watching the wife whom he loves walking nearby. From this point, the text becomes fundamentally different in its relation to the version abandoned by the writer. There Kmicic says to Oleńka:

> – Patter up and down for another hour yet; they say it's good for you.
> Then he twisted his mustache again and added:
> – As God is good to me, you walk like those "korabiki" boats that I saw in Gdańsk under sail.
> To that she placed her sweet face against the trellis work.
> – Traitor, she said. Whose fault is that?
> – Mine! mine! answered Pan Andrzej – but somehow I cannot bring myself to regret or amend my ways, Oleńka![147]

In the edition we know this dialog is missing, and the one Sienkiewicz put in relates to the name of their future son.

> – Oleńka, come over here! I want to tell you something.
> – As long as it's not something that won't make me happy. [PW 8][148]

146 M. Korniłowiczowa, *Onegdaj*, op. cit.., p. 96

147 *Zaniechane stronice „Trylogii" czyli Sienkiewicza skreślenia ostatniej chwili*, edited and introduced by T. Bujnicki, Kraków 1999, p. 50

148 In one element, the scene recalls another, well-known one from *Ogniem i mieczem*. There Horpyna whispers into Helena's ear:
– That hawk, that famous young mannie, he'll . . . .

Kmicic, whose expression promises the possibility of an erotic subject, is at once rebuked and even though he is only speaking of a name for the child, he calls up a blush of shame on his wife's face. The frivolous freedom of the first version of the dialog has vanished, and in particular its content has changed. In the earlier version was openly erotic (the pregnant body and the cause of that state). But the erotic discourse, natural in respect of Kmicic's adoration of Miss Aleksandra, is driven from their marital relations by her pregnancy. The pregnancy, indeed, becomes a third element complicating the characters' erotic attraction. In both variants, the description of Oleńka does not contain any physical details regarding the state in which she finds herself.

> The woman was comely beyond measure, light haired, with a serene, almost angelic face. She walked slowly and with care, for within she was all earnestness and blessing. [PW 7]

The lack of a realistic description of the female protagonist's appearance is compensated for by the idealizing outline, suggesting the metaphysical provenance of her pregnancy and maternity. Made unreal in this way, the pregnant body becomes a hypostasis of "earnestness and blessing." These qualities have annihilated not only the erotic, but also the physical dimension of the figure of Oleńka. The sexuality of the wife, of the woman desired by Kmicic, is suppressed and provided with a prohibition resulting from the Christian metaphysics of procreation, a metaphysics jealously maintained by Oleńka herself. As a consequence, the heroine of *Potop* represents the most ideal type of the woman-mother – maternity without sex.

If we analyze the textual variants and note the decision of the writer that lies behind them, we see how great must have been Janczewska's role in Sienkiewicz's life after his wife's death (Maria – Jadwiga Janczewska's sister). It is visible that *Pan Wołodyjowski* is an axial moment, as far as "the politics of procreation" in the *Trylogia* is concerned. In order to see how radical this change is, one must look carefully at the ups-and-downs of the love-story material in *Ogniem i mieczem*, which begins, *inter alia*, with an announcement of the Skrzetuskis' progeny.

> There are twelve boys, and now there is the fair sex – said Ketling. [PW 446]

The progeny of the Kmicic family is much more modest; as the narrator puts it, for a long time "Providence had denied them children" [PW 6]. Wołodyjowski, however, dies without issue.

Ogniem i mieczem was written during the happiest period of the writer's life. There the narration pulsates with the vitality of its images, with optimistic predictions, and an "elemental racial force" – as Stanisław Witkiewicz

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> Here the witch leant toward Helena's ear and began to whisper something to her, and at last burst into laughter.
> – Get away from me! – cried the princess. [OM II 23]

defines it.[149] That tone of the elemental affirmation of life is not repeated in any of Sienkiewicz’s novels; and the figure of Helena Kurcewiczówna remains exceptional. The cultural-biological function of the protagonist of *Ogniem i mieczem*, together with her function within the story material, is definitively set out in the novel’s opening chapters. The events that begin the series of erotic plots in the *Trylogia* include the meeting of Skrzetuski and Helena, their violent love, and the promise of marriage. This sub-plot can be seen, indeed, as a novella introduced into the novel. Let us call it “The Story of the Two Birds.” The outline of its story material reveals the process, intriguing in its coherence and speed, of the transformation of the anarchy of erotic desire into the order of maternity. Skrzetuski meets Helena in the fourth chapter of the novel. In that same chapter (that same day) he confesses his love to her and kisses her. In these scenes an atmosphere of dense sensuality dominates, indicated by periphrases of desire: warmly, hotly, heat.

> At that a scarlet blush poured over the princess’s face; her breasts began to rise and fall more strongly. [OM I 67]

> He felt that Helena was sitting so close to him that his shoulder almost touched hers; he saw that the blushes did not leave her face, which glowed with heat, and he saw her breast rise and fall, and her eyes, modestly cast downwards and covered with her lashes, were gleaming like two stars. [OM I 68]

Quickly, however, there ensues a sequence of events that disarms that eroticism. In the same chapter, Skrzetuski asks Helena for her hand, but that is not enough. Because it is impossible to set a date right away, another sanction for the explosion of sensuality is required. Instead of their union being blessed by the church, it is blessed by divination of procreation.

> And he asked:
> Poor gowk, tell me will I have sons?
> The cuckoo, as if by order, immediately began to answer and called out no less, and no more, than twelve times. [OM I 110]

This guarantee is enough. Now Skrzetuski can let Helena go, because her functional matrix has been called up. From now on she will simply be an object cast from one set of (male) hands to another.[150] The nineteenth-century physiologist Edward Reich advanced the thesis that the type of woman represented by Helena is subject to partial exclusion from the changes of modern life.

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149 J. Krzyżanowski, *Kalendarium* . . ., p. 116.

150 Her status as a passive object is underlined by the impressive list of persons who either guard or abduct Helena: Princess Kurcewiczowa – Skrzetuski – Bohun – Zagłoba – Pani Sławoszewska in Bar – Bohun – Horpyna – Zagłoba/Wołodyjowski/Rzędzian – Rzędzian (Horpyna’s brother – Pan Pełka) – Father Cieciszowski/Chatelaine Witowska – Skrzetuski.

> The woman, more rapidly developing, less touched by the influences of public and economic life, possessing a center of balance in acts of procreation, circulates in the haze of passing time considerably more briefly than the man.[151]

The determinism of her cultural function directly influences her place in the story material. This is noted rather harshly by Tomasz Jeż, who writes that "the foreground is for active figures, but not for the led, the carried, in short the pushed around."[152] "The haze of passing time" is very brief.

The bracket that closes and sets off the interpolated story mentioned above consists of two episodes with birds. The first contains the part of the meeting of the protagonists in which a white falcon unites their hands. The second episode is the one quoted earlier concerning the cuckoo's prediction. Within the created world of the text, both episodes are ascribed a symbolic function. In the first scene, Skrzetuski, on seeing Helena with a white falcon on her arm, attempts in his thoughts to name his delight and enchantment. In keeping with the rhetorical canon, he uses language and images that represent a high style. "Is it Juno in person, or some other divinity?" [OM I 45]. He even begins an artificial figure of compliment: "If you should be a mortal being, and not divine" [OM I 45].[153] This is not uttered, however, for Longinus arrives with the falconer. Silence and the attitude that precede these unuttered words are somewhat at odds with classical rhetoric and rather belong to ritual behavior in relation to Christian sacred objects. "Our lieutenant stood hatless and stared at the marvelous picture, and only his eyes sparkled, but something like a hand closed round his heart" [OM I 45].

It is worth underlining here the ideological harmonization of contrary rhetorical codes (pagan and Christian). The announcement of marriage justifies the protagonists' erotic relationship, and also puts aside the conflict of rhetorical traditions. Now metaphysics and the erotic co-exist without contradiction in the scope of the same utterance.

> [She looked] like those images of holy virgins in dark chapels. But simultaneously there throbbed from her such warmth and life; so many feminine allurements and charms were sketched on her face and all her figure, that you could lose your head, falling fatally in love, but falling eternally in love. [OM I 90]

This exceptional harmonization of one of the antinomies beloved of the literary Baroque shatters for a moment the "inhuman" idealization of the protagonists, revealing the realistic, suppressed element of the construction of these figures. At the same time, it uncovers the similarity of Sienkiewicz's novels irrespective

151 E. Reich, *Studia nad kobietą*, op. cit., p. 27.

152 T.T. Jeż, "*Ogniem i mieczem* – powieść z lat dawnych przez Henryka Sienkiewicza," in: Trylogia Henryka Sienkiewicza, op. cit., p. 83.

153 Compare: "But are you some goddess or a mortal woman?" (Homer, *Odyssey*, Book 6 – trans. E.V. Rieu, 1946).

of their genre differences. A reflection of the above description is found in Leon Płoszowski's words.

> The separation of desire from love is the same dissimilarity as the separation of thought from being. I can think only as a human being, and I can similarly only love as a human being. Even religious feelings, the most ideal of all feelings, manifest themselves through words, kneeling, the kissing of holy objects; but I wish that love of woman renounced all embodiment, all connection with the earth, and existed in the world in an unworldly manner. What is that love? – desire and aspiration. What would I take from it? – desire and aspiration. In the same way, I could go to Anielka and tell her: Because I love you above all else, I pledge that I will not love you. [BD 36 6]

The scene that commences the protagonists' love in *Ogniem i mieczem* is based on a intermingling of literary motifs adopted by Sienkiewicz from the writers who were most important to him: Homer and Shakespeare. Skrzetuski's unspoken words belong to Odysseus, who encourages the princess Nausicaa with them, when he meets her by the seashore.[154] Sienkiewicz probably took the scene with the falcon from Shakespeare's *The Winter's Tale*. In that play, while falconing, Florizel, the Czech duke, falls in love with Perdita, daughter of the King of Sicily, brought up by the Old Shepherd.

> I bless the time
> When my good falcon made her flight across
> Thy father's ground.[155]

In the novel, the figure of the falcon is immediately interpreted symbolically ("it became a strange omen" [OM I 45]). If, however, we try to make the meaning of this symbol concrete, we encounter a troublesome multiplicity of meanings. Accordingly, I will chose two that are clearly grounded in the text of the novel. Since Skrzetuski has hawkweed in his coat of arms, one can see the bird, aside

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154 Tadeusz Żabski is right to address the voices of critics that reproach Sienkiewicz with reproducing the same devices. "In general it is not the case that Sienkiewicz passively reproduced a well tried and universally admired scheme" (T. Żabski, "Twórczość Sienkiewicza a literatura popularna i kultura masowa," in: *Po co Sienkiewicz?*,op. cit., p. 58). Let us put it more precisely: Sienkiewicz often plays with the same devices , but he always does this differently, applying them to new contexts. He repeats the motif from the *Odyssey* in *Quo Vadis*, but subjects it to substantial modification. For there the phrase is spoken aloud by Petroniusz in Greek, and Ligia – to his amazement – takes up this game of quotations, and "answered him in the words of Nausicaa herself, quoting them in one breath and a little like a lesson repeated: 'You are no rascal and no fool'" [Q 44].
Winicjiusz, however, repeats Skrzetuski's gesture, confessing to Ligia that unlike Petroniusz he cannot "speak verse when the understanding falls silent in admiration and he cannot find words of his own" [Q 47]. See, too: T. Żabski, Introduction, H. Sienkiewicz*, Quo vadis,* Wrocław 2002, BN I 298, pp. lxxxvi-lxxxvii.

155 *The Winter's Tale* IV.4.

from its role as an instrument of prophecy, as a prefiguration of the protagonist's type and fate. From this time forward, he will be a fortunate knight, always returning from battle to the falconer's wrist. The second bird, the cuckoo, closes this stage of love-related events, and at the same time anticipates the change in the function of the figure of Helena. Compared by Skrzetuski to Juno, she remains frozen within the allegorical meanings opened by this comparison and closed by the cuckoo's fortune-telling, the cuckoo being an attribute of the goddess.

> Thus Polycleites carved her in the colossal monument that stood in the temple of Hera in Argos. The Goddess sat on a throne holding in one hand a pomegranate, a symbol of fertility, and in the other a scepter with a cuckoo, a bird that was dedicated to her. [156]

As part of the argument for the exclusion of this female figure from the novel's foreground, we can note the old *topos* of mother-Earth, which is familiar to all agrarian, settled cultures, which value stability and fertility. From being a protagonist of an erotic plot strand, in the further parts of the *Trylogia* Helena becomes a procreative element, absent from the level of events. With a minor exception – for in the next part of the novel we find an extract that returns an erotic dimension to Helena's character. However, it is not the content of the utterance, but its author, that is most important here. It concerns Prince Bogusław, who speaks thus of Helena in a conversation with Kmicic.

> – Rumors have come to me that near Luków there is a gentleman called Skrzetuski who has a wife of wondrous beauty. That's far off! . . . . But I sent people to abduct her and bring her here. . . . But can you believe it, Pan Kmicic, she wasn't to be found at home!
> – That's fortunate – said Pan Andrzej– because she is the wife of an important cavalier, a famous man of Zbaraż, one of those that made it out of Zbaraż through all of Chmielnicki's forces.
> – The husband was besieged in Zbaraż; I'd have besieged the wife in Tycocin. . . . Do you think, sir, she would have defended herself so stubbornly? [P I 438]

A further involvement of Helena, the mother, in an erotic relationship (marginal and without any consequences in the novel) can only take place via a rape. Here this is a verbal rape, which confirms – as Ewa Kosowska writes – that "a military stylistics splendidly fits in with a problematics of love."[157] An example of this sort of double rape (physical and linguistic) is Ewa Nowowiejska. We meet her in Adurowicz's camp, pregnant and captive, given to him by Azja. In addition, for the only time in the *Trylogia*, her pregnancy is mentioned literally ("the pregnant woman walked" [PW 404]). This- for the *Trylogia* – shocking directness in mentioning the character's pregnancy is balanced by a deprecation of the author

156 J. Parandowski, *Mitologia. Wierzenia i podania Greków i Rzymian*, Warszawa 1960, p. 71.
157 E. Kosowska, "Z poetyki oblężenia," in: *W rocznicę Jasnogórskiego Tryumfu 1655*, op. cit., p. 63.

of the utterance – Lipek Eliaszewicz, who is a figure who is culturally alien and an enemy in war. Similarly, the words of Bogusław mentioned earlier recall the existence of a cultural-moral prohibition that protects the separateness of the erotic and pregnant-maternal discourses. This prohibition can only be breached by someone who is wicked or from another culture. In this case, we are dealing with both possibilities. After all, Bogusław cultivates an open contempt for national-gentry values, calling out to the Rosieński swordsman: “I sneer at your gentry wills! . . . . I spit on your gentry wills! do you understand! . . . .” [P III 251]

Frequent praise of Helena and, especially, praise of her continuous procreational potential, comes from Zagłoba. The character and function of Zagłoba in *Pan Wołodyjowski* make it impossible to doubt the positive connotations of his utterances.

> Bah, bah! you won’t find another such woman in the world! What would it be to her if I were to say to her “Halszka! the little brats are growing up, I need some new babies” – she’d just breathe on me, and it’s there on time! as if someone had ordered it! Just imagine: it happened once that some poor woman in the neighborhood couldn’t wait to have a little consolation, so she borrowed some clothes from Halszka – and it helped, as God’s my witness! . . . . [PW 447]

This extraordinary procreative element (predicted by the cuckoo), which is Helena, is, in the quoted passage, brought into the economy of demographic demand. Pregnancy is related in a discourse that evokes the reproductive function of maternity.[158] The fruit of reproduction, especially in time of war, is expressed in the framework of an economic contract (“it’s there on time! as if someone had ordered it!”). This is a peculiar system of exchange, paradoxically, set without the obvious participation of the man (husband), in whose name the old man, then around ninety years old, is speaking. Pregnancy, from which speech and body have been eliminated, and thus traces of the experience of the woman-mother –

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158 See Zagłoba’s toast at the end of *Potop*: “To you I address myself, noble Pan Andrzej, and to you, my old comrade, Pan Michał! Your hardships are not over, for the people’s strength has not survived this time of cruel war, and so you must make new citizens, new defenders of this our beloved Commonwealth, to which task, I wager, you do not lack either manliness or desire. Mighty lords! To the health of those future generations! may God bless them, and allow them to guard this inheritance that has been restored by our hard efforts, and the sweat and blood we have shed. Let them, when hard times come, remember us and never despair, being attentive to the fact there are never such conditions from which it is impossible to raise oneself by *viribus unitis* and the help of God” [P III 347].
The King’s words also belong to the same order of ideas: “Well, well! Don’t worry, my dear royalist, because I am sure that your royalist lady will not pass you by, and God willing, you will both soon provide me with still more royalists” [P II 431]. Also Zagłoba’s words to Michał are relevant here: “Such venomous soldiers, such as you have brought into the world, have probably never walked the earth before. . . .” [PW 87].

pregnancy torn from its source, becomes an anonymous, borrowed costume, a sign subject to economic distribution.[159] Any manifestation of pregnancy's concrete physicality, as an element of character presentation, would be a hindrance here, complicating the functional anonymity of a "pregnancy garment." This garment, understood as a function ascribed to the figure by her culture, situates Helena in a symbolic sphere, beyond history. Her pregnancy and motherhood are not objects of representation, but constitute the realization of a symbolic scheme: an endless cycle of births and deaths.

Zagłoba's toast in *Potop* is no exception. It is preceded, at the end of volume 1 of *Ogniem i mieczem*, by Father Jeremi's toast. It is given during the meal given by Jeremi for the senior ranks, when they also bid farewell to Skrzetuski who is setting off to find Helena.

> Honored sirs! – said the priest – may this third glass be for our future consolations. The nest is important above all. God grant that the apples do not fall far from the tree. From this Hawkweed may there come worthy parents of young Hawks! [OM I 462]

Old Zaćwilichowski adds that Skrzetuski "ought to set up half a troop" [OM I 463]. "The Skrzetuski will set up a whole army! I know him! – called out Pan Zagłoba," to which Skrzetuski replies by telling of the cuckoo's prediction concerning twelve boys. All seem united in these ambiguous references to procreation. "No, the world must be peopled," declares Benedick, now in love, after his return from the war, in Shakespeare's *Much Ado about Nothing*.[160] Sienkiewicz cuts through the growing merriment of the feasting soldiers on the subject of predictions of

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159 Against the motif of borrowing Helena's garments of pregnancy, we can place the symbolic scene deconstructing the phallic myth from Herman Melville's *Moby Dick*. "Look at the sailor, called the mincer, who now comes along, and assisted by two allies, heavily backs the grandissimus, as the mariners call it, and with bowed shoulders, staggers off with it as if he were a grenadier carrying a dead comrade from the field. Extending it upon the forecastle deck, he now proceeds cylindrically to remove its dark pelt, as an African hunter the pelt of a boa. This done he turns the pelt inside out, like a pantaloon leg; gives it a good stretching, so as almost to double its diameter; and at last hangs it, well spread, in the rigging, to dry. Ere long, it is taken down; when removing some three feet of it, towards the pointed extremity, and then cutting two slits for arm-holes at the other end, he lengthwise slips himself bodily into it" (Chapter 95).

160 *Much Ado about Nothing* II.3. Shakespeare's comedy does not appear here by chance. Sienkiewicz, as we know from many sources (see, for example, J. Sztachelska, "Szekspiriady Sienkiewiczowskie," in: *Czar i zaklęcie*, op.cit., pp. 138–167), was an admirer of Shakespeare. Many Shakespearean quotations, scenes, and story materials are woven into the texts of his novels, and this subject awaits scholarly treatment. In *Pan Wołodyjowski*, the author places the following dialog between Wołodyjowski and the old Nowowiejski, the source of which is *Much Ado about Nothing*:
"Please, he is your son, sir! . . . .

fertility by the capital introduction of the figure of Kuszel, who brings news of the taking of the fortress of Bar by the Cossacks. “Then at the hall’s threshold appeared a dark vision covered in dust” [OM I 463].

In the world of the *Trylogia* war and procreation, sexuality and death remain in a constant circuit, whereby maternity does not only appear as a moral idea, but also as an economic one. In the simple, binary economy of early capitalism (profit-loss), progeny are a profit impatiently expected, especially after wars. Outlay and investment (sex, the erotic) are suppressed or hidden, and one must confess that Sienkiewicz is in this respect remarkably consistent. Skrzetuski, who most fully represents the heroic type, is almost completely excluded from the adventure-erotic strand of the story. This is the price for being “Christ in the role of a cavalry officer,” although in *Potop* we learn from Wołodyjowski that he and Helena “right after Zbaraż married and have already had three children, even though he did not cease to be on active service” [P I 148].

Death and procreation come even closer together in later novels. *Na polu chwały* contains an episode, in which the would-be husband of Anula Sienińska, old Gideon Pągowski, dies on the day of the betrothal, and her real choice, Jacek Taczewski, marries her in haste right before a setting off to war. “Before the war! before the war, even though he might die an hour after” [NPCH 232]. In the short story “Na jasnym brzegu,” there is a conversation about women in literature. The main protagonist, clearly the author’s alter ego, says the following:

> I have always been struck by something different in French novels – he said – and to be precise, that it is a world of infertile women. Elsewhere, when two people are in love, either according to the law or not, a child is always the result of the liaison, but here no one has children. Now that is strange! [“Na jasnym brzegu” D VI 175]

This amazement seems simply to be a moralist’s disapproval, but let us not forget that Sienkiewicz is a modern writer, at home in modernity and well-acquainted with its obsessions. As a reader of Schopenhauer, Darwin, Huysmans, and Bourget, he is aware of male fears connected with maternity. Veiling the erotic dimension of the female body by an overlay of maternity, the male subject exposes the instrumental function of phallic eroticism, which in addition is suppressed by a religious discourse that promotes motherhood. An old woman teaches Zarathustra of this, saying: “everything in woman hath one solution—it is called pregnancy. Man is for woman a means: the purpose is always the child.”[161] So Sienkiewicz –

– So the poor devil’s mother assured me, and she was a virtuous woman, and so we have no cause to doubt it.” [PW 284]

The passage in I.1 of *Much Ado about Nothing* is as follows:

Don Pedro: You embrace your charge too willingly. I think this is your daughter.

Leonato: Her mother hath many times told me so.

161 Friedrich Nietzsche, *Thus Spake Zarathustra*, xviii.

a paradoxical writer – in his novels expresses this consciousness. He knows that announcements, prophesies and wishes for progeny are a risky consolation for the mortal individual, based as they are on a vision of the family's biological endurance. That is why, from volume to volume, he does it with reduced enthusiasm. In *Pan Wołodyjowski*, from which we began our discussion of the complications of the female world in the *Trylogia*, the problem of describing the presentations and symbolism of maternity becomes more complex than in the two earlier parts.

Baśka is also fundamentally different from the other female protagonists in the cycle. In her figure, the author combines two contradictory tendencies that make up the figure's conscious desires.

> From the moment she became married, her two greatest desires in life were: one, to give Michał a son; and two, to live with her little knight, even just for a year, in some watchtower by the Wild Steppes, and there at the edge of the waste to live a soldier's life, to live through wars and adventures, to go stalking for game, to see with her own eyes those steppes, and to experience the dangers of which she had heard so much from her earliest years. [PW 210]

Her second dream is fulfilled, but the first is not, and here we have the history of a woman without children, as in a French novel, because "although they had lived together for four years – they had no children" [PW 198]. This is not all, for despite this "dysfunction," the figure of Wołodyjowski's wife remains (in a way incompatible with this lack) valued, as if the lack of progeny was to her advantage – "she dazzled both eyes and hearts with her beauty, which was that of a child, a woman, and a flower" [PW 336]. A lack of children, male inclinations, and a way of life that belongs to the military encampment may suggest to someone who does not know Basia that she is a new embodiment of Horpyna. The narrator confirms this, saying that the women who come to Chreptiów imagined her:

> as a giantess, with eternally wrinkled brows and a thick nose. But now they saw before them [. . .] a slight woman, rosy as a tiny doll, who in her wide galligaskins and with a saber in her hand looked more like an excessively pretty lad than a grown-up person. [PW 275]

The surprise effect of her appearance returns in the scene of the arrival in Kamieniec. As they wait for the Wołodyjowskis, the burghers and the soldiers "imagined that she must be some sort of giantess, bending horseshoes and tearing armor asunder. So what was their surprise when they saw inclined towards them a tiny, rosy, half child-like face" [PW 514]. Not just Basia's appearance shows how Sienkiewicz makes a radical change in the construction of the main female character. Her activity, too, in the love plot is decidedly greater. It is she who first confesses her love, and as a result her desire to possess Michał is fulfilled. The stereotype of female passivity is overthrown, the stereotype that Nietzsche describes in lapidary fashion: "The happiness of man is, 'I will.' The happiness

of woman is, ‘He will.’”[162] At the same time, the final of the love plot that fills the first 20 chapters, sounds the other way round.

> – Basia! – do you want me? – said the little knight.
> – Yes! Yes! Yes! – answered Basia. [PW 194]

The congruity of esthetics and morality finally falls apart, when the two women whom Michał desires stand side by side. Krzysia, his love until recently, is once more pregnant (“. . . God gave us a son! – cried Ketling – a now once more. . .” [PW 444]). The woman who once fascinated him now seems ugly to him. Pregnancy takes away her beauty to the degree that Wołodyjowski, looking at her and “comparing her with his Baśka, inspite of himself, said to himself: ‘For God’s sake! how could I fall in love with that one, where both were together? Where were my eyes?’” [PW 445]. Sienkiewicz makes two moves here that are without precedence in earlier parts of the *Trylogia*: he gives us a realistic portrait of a pregnant protagonist, but her unattractive appearance is not elevated by the sublime state that she finds herself in. (Compare the portrait of Oleńka Billewiczówna in an analogical state.) What is more, Krzysia’s ugliness is confirmed by both the men who are looking at her.

> Ketling had barely changed. Only his hair was cut short and that made him look younger. However, Krzysia was changed, at least at that time, beyond measure. She was not as graceful and slender as before, and in her face she was paler, so that the down over her lips seemed darker. All that remained were her beautiful eyes with their exceptionally long lashes and the happiness that was formerly in her face. But her features, once so marvelous, had lost their old subtlety. All this might only be for the moment, but Wołodyjowski, looking at her and comparing her with his Baśka, inspite of himself, said to himself:
> – For God’s sake! how could I fall in love with that one, where both were together? Where were my eyes?
> But to Ketling, Baśka appeared very beautiful. For she was beautiful, with her flaxen, tousled head of hair pulled down over her brow, with her complexion, which though it had lost some of its rosiness, had since her illness become like the petals of a white rose. But now her dear face was blushing with joy and her delicate nostrils moved rapidly. She seemed so young as to be under-age, and at first glance one could think that she was ten years younger than Ketling’s wife.
> But her beauty only worked so far on the sensitive Ketling that he began to think with even greater affection of his wife, for he felt guilty toward her. [PW 444-445]

Of the three figures described here, two have the unusual gift of resisting alteration. Only Krzysia remains caught in the bonds of time, as a result of which her figure is for a moment torn from the adventure-erotic plot of the epic, and is marked with the features of physical alteration (“changed . . . beyond measure”). The

162 Nietzsche, ibid.

obviousness of the changes in her appearance seems to shock even the narrator ("She was not as graceful and slender as before"). From the former Krzysia, who aroused desire, remain only her eyes and her happy face (compare Oleńka, who possesses "a happy and not only nearly angelic face") – a modest relict of her former beauty.

This is the only occasion when we see the transgressive power of female physiology, disturbing the hermetic nature of the novels' erotic discourse. Krzysia's body suspends for a moment the laws of the novels' conventions, revealing the hidden aspect of the erotic and of procreation – that is, death. A temporary expansion of reduced physicality restores Krzysia to real observation, and compels a new type of perception, the expression of which is Wołodyjowski's rhetorical question: "Where did I have my eyes?" Krzysia's pregnancy "restored sight to him," but simultaneously invalidates his former erotic fascination. Consciousness of the identity of the former and present Krzysia is unbearable. Pregnancy has performed an objective destruction of an ideal of female beauty, for even Ketling shares Michał's point of view. Enchanted by Basia's beauty, he feels guilty toward his wife; as opposed to Michał, he is not surprised by his feeling toward Krzysia, because, in advance, he performs an operation that weakens the force of the body's message – "when he took Krzysia, he knew perfectly well that he was taking 'an unearthly being,' and he had not changed his opinion up to now" [PW 444]. The narrator pitilessly lays bare the banality of this act of self-censorship, providing the expression "an unearthly being" with ironic quotation marks. The irony inheres in the making of a novel-internal citation, because Ketling had already used this definition, but in relation to Billewiczówna. This is simply empty courtly speech that is mocked at that time by Zagłoba.

> What do you mean unearthly? Man what are you blethering about? She's made of clay and she'll break just like any piece of china. [PW 28]

But now he asks mockingly – "it's a shame about that unearthly being that she didn't run into some earthly *casus* that could have kicked her with its legs and poked around in her mouth for her teeth?" [PW 444].

In the passage analyzed above, it is intriguing to notice the similarity in the structure of the descriptions of the heroines' appearances. Both are pale. But it is not a natural paleness, but – one might say – an accidental one. The causes of the change of complexion in both women are indirectly men. Abducted by Azja, Basia is made ill by the difficulties she endures in escaping; her paleness is a trace of that illness. In Krzysia's case the cause is her pregnancy, and, therefore, Ketling as the cause of that pregnancy. The narrative connotations of these occurrences of pallor are, however, markedly different. Paleness formerly gave

Krzysia sensual attractiveness,[163] setting off her "little mustache," formerly a sign of sensuality. Now the mustache loses its erotic provenance, and becomes neutral, and even as a male feature contributes to Krzysia's loss of her "former subtlety."

Although only for a moment, the manifestation of the physiology of pregnancy in this scene bears an excess of meaning, going beyond the historical-adventure story convention. Thus – in order to maintain the coherence of the novel's figures – it demands an operation separating what is erotically attractive from what is socially approved of. Ketling and Wołodyjowski are here personifications of a suppressed sexual discourse, the subject of which falls victim to his own evaluative stratification of gender. The above-mentioned strategy of splitting esthetics and morality involves him in a conflict between erotic fantasy and consciousness of sexual physiology, between a fascination with the beauty of the female body and the cultural requirement to affirm pregnancy – pregnancy that he does not like and that he fears.

This topic is taken up by *Rodzina Polanieckich*, a novel that, like *Pan Wołodyjowski*, was written during an unfortunate period in Sienkiewicz's life.[164] There we find a scene very similar to the one from Part I of *Potop*, extended here by the narrator's commentary. In this scene, Stach – similarly to Kmicic – takes the liberty of having a relaxed conversation about having children, which offends Marynia. The narrator explains the process whereby this subject is displaced via the female character's consciousness.

> She also knew that with marriage there come children, but it presented itself to her as something indefinite, of which one did not speak, and if one did speak of it, then in an allusion as delicate as lace, or in a moment of some high emotion, with a beating heart, with loved lips close to another's ear, in a mood that was rather solemn, as if about some *sanctissimum* of a shared past. So the easy tone in which Połaniecki spoke of it both wounded her and outraged her. Against her will, the thought came to her: "Why does he not comprehend this?" And she went on to behave against her nature, for, as often happens to persons who are not bold in moments of distress and confusion, she pretended to a greater anger than she really felt.

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163 "[A] barely perceptible dark fuzz covered her upper lip, bringing out the sweetness and the allure of her lips, as if they were made for kissing" [PW 47]. "Ha! Traitor! So much did they whimper of amours, that on the third day Krzysia went so pale around the mouth as if she'd taken medicine" [PW 124]. "The girl's face was white like canvas, so that the light down above her lips seemed darker than usual; her bosom rose and fell violently" [PW 191]. "[T]hen he felt that so delicate feathery down above her lips; then their lips met and pressed together long and with all their might" [PW 96].

164 The failed, annulled marriage with Maria Włodkowiczówna had an impact on the construction of the female protagonists.

> – Sir, you should not conduct yourself with me in this manner! – she called out in anger. – You should not speak to me in that way! [RP 296]

Contrary to the words in Sienkiewicz's letter to Janczewska, which we have quoted, that the depiction of a pregnant woman and talk about pregnancy may be "full of poetry – how can one put it . . . that is domestic and connected with the family," in *Rodzina Połanieckich* Sienkiewicz does everything so that the reader feels the opposite. The poet Kazimierz Zawiłowski (his first name is perhaps an allusion to Tetmajer, whom Janczewska adored), who falls in love with Marynia is shaken (as Wołodyjowski is) when he sees her pregnant for the first time.

> She seemed almost ugly to him. It was not just his prejudice; although it was still difficult to perceive any difference, she had changed greatly. Her lips were swollen, she had a rash on the forehead, and her skin had lost its freshness. With that, she was calm, but somewhat sad, as if she had met with some disappointment. Her ugliness moved Zawiłowski, who essentially had a good heart. [RP 455]

In the same way as in *Pan Wołodyjowski*, Sienkiewicz objectifies this ugliness, because Połaniecki, too, notices these unfortunate changes in Marynia's appearance.

> With each day she became uglier and at times offended his esthetic sense; he, however, thought that by concealing it from her and attempting to show sympathy with her he was being as delicate as a man can be toward a woman. [RP 457]

He does it differently from Ketling. Stanisław does not tame the changes in his wife's appearance with metaphysical phrases, but simply tries not to hurt her. This is not the end, however, because the narrative returns to the same point of presentation – to the double portrait of a woman, keeping the structure that we know from *Pan Wołodyjowski*. It is as if the author were using literature to touch an obsession that was painful for him, and the nature of which we can only imagine.[165] At the same time, it is with Marynia and Mademoiselle Krasławska (at present Maszkowa) that Połaniecki commits adultery. Both are married, and Maszkowa, although she is older than Marynia, also grows younger, and that for the same reason as Baśka, because, as we know, "up till now there had been no indication that Pani Maszkowa should become a mother, and even more, the trusted doctor who had known her from childhood began to doubt that she ever would" [RP 549]. Despite his open apology for pregnancy, the narrator underlines the growing attraction of childless women.

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165 Compare, in *Legiony*, the passage containing the malicious little poem written by Krasicki for the chamberlain concerning a matrimonial dispensation:
"For the game of fate deals bitter blows
When desire remains, and potency goes." [L90]
Perhaps this is the key to the enigma of Maria Włodkowiczówna's flight.

> The former Mademoiselle Krasławska was older by around five years than Marynia, and as a maiden had looked older. Now, however, it seemed that she had grown younger. Slender and really excessively well-shaped, her figure in its close-fitting dress seemed child-like. [RP 397]

> However she retained the whole slenderness of maidenly shapes, and now particularly, in a pearl-colored summer dress, next to the deeply changed and pregnant Marynia, she looked not just like a young girl, but like someone several years younger. [RP 549]

Beginning with *Pan Wołodyjowski*, the male protagonists of Sienkiewicz's novels dream of offspring, but once the desire is fulfilled with the women they wish for, this does not make them happy. At most they make a compromise with life, and their marriage is protected from the destructive operation of the myth of love by the stability and order of their relation. Instead of leading them to the myth, the characters' evolution lies in the direction of "a woman with bones." The colloquial saying does not exhaust the meanings of this description. Bones are a skeleton without flesh, our materiality without the illusion of the charming surfaces of the skin, the hard concrete substance. It inspires fear with the phantom of death, but also suspends the opposition of spirit and body, offering hope for a sober (positive) union with the unfathomable nature of an individual existence.

Despite seeking compromises with reality, Sienkiewicz does not pretend that one can use them to banish painful reflections on the duties of the species and the dreams of the individual. That is why he constantly leaves his protagonists with unrevealed (to all but the narrator) phantasms. These promise complete healing to the mind tormented by drives and fears. These are dreams of women who love a man, but do not desire him. This is not – as one might hastily conclude – a fantasy of the ideal mother. Sienkiewicz gives clearest shape to this dream in *Rodzina Połanieckich*. Połaniecki, tossed between desire for Maszkowa and a longing for stability with Marynia, feels most comfortable in the company of Emilia Chwastowska and her daughter Litka.

> The first, with her spiritual, angelic face, was like an embodiment of love and motherly constancy, and at the same time of an exaltation; the second, with her great cloudy eyes, light brown head of hair, and such delicate features that they seemed almost too delicate, looked rather like some artist's imagining than a living girl. [RP 79]

From their external descriptions, the author places both these figures beyond life. After Litka's death, Emilia moves even further in the direction of unreality. Both represent the temptation to evade life's duties, a temptation that Sienkiewicz constantly exposes his characters to.[166]

The dazzlingly attractive picture of patriarchal gentry culture that we find in the *Trylogia* is placed within a modern discourse that constantly breaks through from

166 This topic is developed in the chapter of this study entitled "Eros in Mourning."

beneath a stylized presentation. This is demonstrated by the stylistic and thematic recurrences that we can see in the novels with a contemporary theme. The vim and vigor of the procreating protagonists lose their simple interpretation, when we recall the time and place in which this literature occurred. In Sienkiewicz's time, the topic of female gender belongs to the permanent repertoire of modernist literature, but Sienkiewicz – though he distances himself from new tendencies – was himself subject to them too. This is shown by the considerable ambiguity of his presentation of maternity.

The key to untangling that ambiguity is, perhaps, an analysis of the meanings of the words uttered by Zagłoba in his *apologia* for Helena. The word "consolation" that he uses to talk about offspring is an example of a semantic "insolvable." A competing meaning is "stypa" (wake), that is a "consolation after someone's death." Departing and emergent life are expressed by the same word. A consciousness of the double meaning of "consolation" complicates the conventional, patriarchal sense of Zagłoba's words, and introduces an existential import that one would have thought impossible in this type of novel. Thus, the praise of Helena that Zagłoba makes on the basis of her multiple consolations becomes, in terms of the second meaning of this word, a "funereal" solace for the heroine and her husband, for their consolation (that is, offspring) will "kill them off" as active participants in the novel's action.[167] That is why maternity and family, in the light of Zagłoba's toast in *Potop*, seem terrifyingly grotesque, because they appear there as a duty to fill the demographic hole left after war. Indeed, we might notice a distant paraphrase of the words of the mad Lear – "To 't, luxury, pell-mell! for I lack soldiers" (IV.6).

The other novels, after *Ogniem i mieczem*, with somewhat less conviction, realize the utopian aim of healing the subject's dilemmas in maternal femininity. This appears to be a genre function that is rather weakly concealed by hasty feelings. The function does not free anyone from the pressure of history, but even unmasks the human side of heroic knights, who – born of woman – seem, by the power of fiction, elevated beyond the laws of time and biology. The fertility of wives annihilates their husbands: Skrzetuski, Kmicic, and Zbyszek. Femininity promises an alternative to war that destroys and devastates everything. However, each successive part of the *Trylogia* realizes this vision with less conviction. The procreational impulse bogs down; more and more heroines appear who possess a child-like beauty, as if the author wished rather to efface any sharp difference between the sexes.[168] The encounter between metaphysics and biology within one

167 Skrzetuski turns up again in *Potop*, but in an episodic role. One recalls Hegel's words here that "the birth of children is simultaneously the death of the parents."

168 "For sexual difference attests to the necessity of reproduction, to the necessity of progeny – a necessity since children are our only chance to extend our lives beyond death. The only

representation shakes language. More and more in narratives about women there appear clearly misogynist passages, and the very idea of "femininity" ceases to be a value to counterbalance history's chaos. Hence a crisis of belief in the redemptive force of family and procreation is present in every work by Sienkiewicz.[169] Even if the main characters voice their uncompromising conviction of the rightness of this model of existence, the author usually provides them with a figure that is skeptical, one whose voice neither lets up nor is silenced by the narrator or by other characters.

4. In a fog

> *I owszem, niewiasta może być rzeczona: miękki błąd*
> (And of course, a woman may be spoken of: a gentle error)
> (*Rozmowy, które miał król Salomon mądry z Marchołtem grubym a sprosnym, a wszakoż, jako o nim powiedają barzo wymownym, z figurami i z gadkami śmiesznymi* [Conversations held by wise King Solomon with Marchołt the fat and vulgar, of whom however they say he was also very eloquent, with comic figures and talk], translated by Jan z Koszyczek)

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chance for us mortals. If death were not our fate, if human live were not a river flowing through the body's decay toward death, there would be no need to hold back this river – and, as a result, there would be no necessity to produce children and to engage in all the activities that lead to that" (K. Michalski, "Wieczna miłość," *Tygodnik Powszechny* 2004, nr 41, p. 8). Zagłoba who was so enamored of Helena's fertility now compliments the unclear identity of Basia's beauty. "My divine lady said yesterday that when she saw you coming back in your gallygaskins, she thought she saw the little son of Madame Wołodyjowska who was taking a ride round the fences" [PW 305]. It is striking how frequently in *Pan Wołodyjowski* love turns into friendship. "You are my friend true to death, you are!" says Michał do Basia, an attitude that Zagłoba has mocked in another situation.
– Krzysia is my friend.
– Man friend, not female friend! That must be because she has a mustache! [. . .] Beware, Michal, of a male friend of the female kind, even though she has a little mustache – either you'll betray him or he'll betray you. [PW 89]

169 The vigor of *Krzyżacy* is an effect of the fairy-tale convention, which explains the shamelessness of its harmonization of previously disjointed meanings of femininity. On one hand, Maćko is an improved Zagłoba, who has had grandchildren. "Jagienka had twins. The heavens opened then before the old knight. He now had someone to work for, to do things for, and he knew that the Grady family would not die out:" [K II 348]. On the other hand, however, Jagienka has none of Basia's delicacy. "It was nothing to her to get up a few days after her confinement and go out to the farm, and then set out hunting with her husband or to ride from Moczydoły to Bogdaniec in the morning and to return before noon to Jasiek and Maciek" [K II 349]. This is a world of original, primitive vitality, a piece of fantasy of a modern man, who has invented a past that is predicated on its dissimilarity to the present.

> Macamy, gdzie miękcej w rzeczy
> A ono wszędy ciśnie! Błąd – wiek człowieczy!
> (We feel for where it's softer
> But everywhere it presses! Man's age is error!)
> (J. Kochanowski, *Tren I*)

Sienkiewicz invented Jadwiga Janczewska in the summer of 1886,[170] more or less six months after the death of his wife Maria (she died on 19 October 1885). She is one of the most successful of his literary creations. She is an artist, bored with her husband, a professor of Botany, who is principally interested in his scholarly-scientific work and in his correct public image. She is full of various phobias, a distaste for motherhood at their head.[171] For years, she agreed to conduct an epistolary game with the famous writer. Captured for literature by her brother-in-law, Jadwiga first loses her real identity to disperse into many figures, who become the protagonists of varied plots of the writer's fantasy. So she will be Dzinka, Dży, Kot (cat), Jankul, Betsy, Sowietnik, Salomon, and Żaba (frog), but most frequently Nephele, or Fog. The real action of this tale in letters begins with this pseudonym: "may the winter blasts not scatter your figures; may the dawns fill your transparency with a rosy gleam" [Kraków 1886, Li II/1 140].

The writer-hero falls into a Fog after his wife's death. The illusory nature of this state was later described by Sienkiewicz in *Rodzina Polanieckich*, in Stach's bitter conversation with Professor Waskowski after the death of Litka.

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170 Jadwiga Szetkiewzówna (married name Janczewska; the sister of Maria Szetkiewiczówna, the writer's first wife), was constructed in Sienkiewicz's epistolary formulations, in other words, in his three-volume autobiographical epistolary novel *Listy Sienkiewicza do Janczewskiej* (Sienkiewicz's Letters to Janczewska) (Warsaw, 1996). Life is scarcely transparent when it is being lived, and the situation is even worse after the protagonists' deaths. Irrespective of the real shape of Sienkiewicz's relationship with Janczewska – notes Maria Bokszczanin in her Introduction – "literature has profited by gaining one of the most beautiful collection of letters" [L II/1 14]. Janczewska had no existence other than that given her by Sienkiewicz, who was conscious of the charm of such virtual feelings. "I know people who have fallen in love with Miranda, and I myself am a little in love with Rosalind" [*Dlaczego mogłem czytać Szekspira* XL 149]. It is, however, worth remembering that the writer's imagination did not have to exert itself greatly, as Modrzejewska, to whom he was devoted, played the part of Rosalind frequently in the years 1882-1892 (*Dzieje teatru polskiego,* ed. T. Sivert, vol. III: *Teatr polski od 1863 roku do schyłku XIX wieku*, Warszawa 1982, p. 122).

171 This is one of the writer's observations: "It's not that I didn't like him [Janczewski] – except in the way he made such a principle of *comme il faut* and *comme tout le monde*, by which he added his own kind of local color to Kraków. But he's devoted to Jadwiga, and that is his sincere, good side. Dzinia, the poor thing, is continually in a feeble state, despite not being ill – and up to now they have no children" (*Listy do Stanisława Witkiewicza z lat 1880–1882*, op. cit., p. 121).

> For both of us live in a fog, and in it the devil knows what is what. Everything that you say gives the impression that someone is cracking dry twigs, throwing them in a stream, and saying that they'll become flowers. It will be decay and nothing more. . . . That stream took something from me that I thought would become a flower. Stupidity! . . . [RP 203]

For the moment, however, Nephele covers him with the mantle of her care, protecting him from a sharp vision of reality. She allows him to sink into a safe present, into a celebration of a tender closeness that seems slight and without consequences, but it is without doubt a love relationship, and scholars' hesitations are unjustified.[172] For several years, both sacrificed their real relationships (Janczewska with her husband, Sienkiewicz with Maria Babska) in order to give themselves over to a dream, one that Sienkiewicz vigorously kept safe from any realization. The writer knows that even love cannot be protected from "the stream of decay," and so he invents a woman beyond time, whom one can always tear away from reality and turn into one of the many names of literature. Nor does he write in his own name; his pseudonymous inventiveness with regard to his own name is equally great to that in relation to Janczewska. For himself he uses the names of literary figures created by his favorite authors. Two are repeated, Dick from *David Copperfield* and Poor Tom from *King Lear*, and one recurs, but less frequently – Quilp, from Dickens's *The Old Curiosity Shop*. He plays this game of pseudonyms with his wife as well, employing the same rhetorical-onomastic techniques. Here is an extract from a letter to Witkiewicz from January 1881: "I am Caliban, but not a bad one, a good Caliban, who swears sincerely that he will be true to the fair-haired Miranda, and who says to her:

> And I with my long nails will dig thee pignuts;
> Show thee a jay's nest and instruct thee how
> To snare the nimble marmoset; I'll bring thee
> To clustering filberts and sometimes I'll get thee
> Young scamels from the rock."[173]

But here pseudonyms have a different function. In the dangerous game in which living people work on each other through literature, these name-masks banish the closeness between the writing and the reading person, on one hand, and his/her literary phantom, on the other. The screens of names are never fortuitous here; after all, a master is playing. Four name-masks combine in clear pairs: Caliban and Quilp are grotesque monsters, threats to young, beautiful women, and so their names serve in a game with the plot of "Beauty and the Beast." The writer's comic

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172 M. Korniłowiczowa, *Onegdaj*, op. cit., p. 88; J. Sztachelska, *Czar i zaklęcie Sienkie wicz*a, op. cit. pp. 68–83; M. Bokszczanin [Li II/1, 14].

173 *Listy do Stanisława Witkiewicza z lat 1880–1882*, op. cit., p. 65. The Shakespeare quotation is from Act II, Scene 2 of *The Tempest*.

self-denigration permits him to make compliments that are the names of beautiful heroines – Miranda and Nell. In his games with Janczewska, he principally uses the names of "Dick" and "Poor Tom." Thus the play of allusions and connotations becomes more complicated. When he writes, "You, after all, are Betsy [sic], and I am Dick" [Li II/1 520], he is thinking of Betsey Trotwood and Mr. Dick from *David Copperfield*. An adult with the mind of a child, Mr. Dick falls in love with David's aunt Betsey Trotwood, who is looking after him. The names and the relation between the figures, once transferred to Sienkiewicz's letters, disarm the words of his confession; an intertextual fog happily covers over the real state of both characters' feelings.

But something else seems to me to be more important. Sienkiewicz does not only borrow a name from Dick. Dickens's character has two characteristics that are important for Sienkiewicz: he thinks he lives in the time of Charles I, and he likes flying kites.

> It was quite an affecting sight, I used to think, to see him with the kite when it was up a great height in the air. What he had told me, in his room, about his belief in its disseminating the statements pasted on it, which were nothing but old leaves of abortive Memorials, might have been a fancy with him sometimes; but not when he was out, looking up at the kite in the sky, and feeling it pull and tug at his hand. He never looked so serene as he did then. I used to fancy, as I sat by him of an evening, on a green slope, and saw him watch the kite high in the quiet air, that it lifted his mind out of its confusion, and bore it (such was my boyish thought) into the skies. As he wound the string in and it came lower and lower down out of the beautiful light, until it fluttered to the ground, and lay there like a dead thing, he seemed to wake gradually out of a dream; and I remember to have seen him take it up, and look about him in a lost way, as if they had both come down together, so that I pitied him with all my heart.[174]

In his letters, Sienkiewicz often describes his writing as "kite-flying." The image of a saddened Dick is one of the small number of fissures through which one can begin to suspect the writer's attitude to the course of the reception of his own work. The second epistolary pseudonym does not just refer to the writer whom Sienkiewicz valued most highly, but exposes the surprising consequence of giving oneself names. "Poor Tom," who is always cold, is Edgar, the son of the blinded Gloucester. Chased off, he pretends to be a madman. Dick, too, is mildly crazy, but aware of it.[175] These two name-masks are not only part of an artistic flirting. Moderate and coy when it comes to confessions, the author is playing "for serious." He is using lying masks to communicate what is painful and terrifies him more than the somatic ailments that plagued Sienkiewicz the hypochondriac. In

174 Charles Dickens, *David Copperfield*, chapter 15.
175 Ibid.

none of the texts, is there any way to catch sight of the naked Sienkiewicz. There is no way to see him as only a few visionaries were able to see him – for example, Olga Boznańska who saw “that” and showed it in the portrait of the writer that she painted in 1916 – in his terrifying hands and his absent eyes.

But let us return to the epistolary romance. The vehicles of confession are not only the meaning-filled names in which the writer disguises himself and Jadwiga. Sometimes there is an extensive narration from which unexpectedly an almost directly expressed emotion emerges. Such a coded confession appears in an extract from a letter written on 8 July 1888 from Dresden, in which Sienkiewicz tells his Fog of his fascination with Raphael’s *Sistine Madonna*.

> It is a work of artistic inspiration, in the highest sense of that phrase. Add to that my personal fondness for Raphael’s faces, for those foreheads and the set of those eyebrows, for those eyes a little further apart from each other than generally people have, and you’ll understand what good times I spent there; how I stared at that beauty, which, beside the fact that it is beautiful, is the beauty that I admire above all other beauties. You’ll understand how much consolation I felt there, how much calming influence – and why, however tired I am, instead of going to sleep – I’m writing to you. [Li II/1 552]

Nothing here is innocent, and especially not the hour of writing the letter, the painter, or the picture. The Madonna with her widely-set eyes is an allusion to the addressee’s own beauty, for Janczewska had eyes widely set apart from each other, which is why Sienkiewicz called her “Frog.” In *Wiry*, he pays an indirect compliment to his Frog’s eyes, in the scene in which Dołhański says of Laskowicz that “he has eyes set close one to the other like a baboon. In man that indicates fanaticism and stupidity” [W 68]. The letter’s finale is not particularly refined, but rather a suggestive set of ellipsis points suggests what name one can substitute for that of Raphael.

> It’s late, Dży, and my paper is done – otherwise, I’d write more, for I’m beyond sleeping. If I drop off perhaps I’ll dream of my *Sistine Madonna*, face, eyes, brows, and that beauty, to value which one must oneself be an artist and sincerely love . . . Raphael. [Li II/1 555]

That name he borrowed from his own work. Dży is little Jenny, the juvenile circus artiste from the novella “Orso.” The license of fiction is considerable; so the eponymous hero can say directly: “It’s true, Dży: I love you very much” [“Orso” D III 166]. In the game of texts, one move is forbidden: that of reference to real life. In this huge narrative, numbering more than 600 letters, there is no way to avoid that. Literature and what it is not, which we call life, sometimes rub against each other painfully. Most forcefully at the time of Sienkiewicz’s planned wedding with Maria Babska. A foreign element spoils the game, although, in fact, both want it to continue. So he checks: “I just want to be sure that you retain for

me all the friendship that has become my soul's need in the last several years. I do not foresee and I do not wish it that this need should ever diminish. I think quite the opposite that as at this moment, so always in the future, I will depend on it more and more. You know I am not writing empty words, but the honest truth" [Warszawa, 30 May 1888, Li II/1 515].

She wishes for certainty, so she receives the assurance "I do not love MB" [Vienna, 4 June 1888, Li II/1 517]. But that is not enough; she needs a decision, not words. Just a few days later, "Betsy" [sic] needs "Dick" to change his decision and break off the engagement.[176]

> The answer came – calm, sad, and very sincere. "Let's consider that nothing has happened, that nothing was said" – that was the content, with this addition that, because the future may remove obstacles, it is therefore unnecessary to renounce forever what for one person may still be sweet and longed for, but for the other, however, is a matter of the dearest hope. This letter, well written, with considerable tact, resignation, and warmth, I received yesterday. I answered right away to the effect that I could not consent that such a fine creature should waste its best years in an expectation that could prove a delusion. [Kalten, 14 June 1888, Li II/1 533]

From now on, nothing will be the same. Although the plot in the letters only ends with the writer's death, the intimate and tender tone of 1888 never returns. The writer learns that words are two-edged. Writing love-letters to Janczewska gets him out of his depression after the death of his beloved wife, offering him a continuation of that feeling in a convoluted relationship with the dead woman's sister. For her, Sienkiewicz's words are a net into which she falls, cordoning herself off more and more from her husband and her son, and even from the reality of her life. For him, writing is a work of mourning, mourning that will soon cease; her, however, it pushes into permanent mourning , because the object of the mourning is himself, the living writer. The consciousness that their fantasies diverge, comes – as always – too late. But if the writer had read his own work with attention, he would have recalled still another division of types of women, which he had made in a magazine piece in 1880. Among the three varieties of women with whom the artist may fall in love, only two interest us (the third consists of promiscuous and vain women).

> A loving woman's simple and honest heart supports then the work and energy of a man; she is for him a source of strength, of a desire to live, of inspiration, of

176 "Listen, Dży. I have got involved in a lie, which you must forgive me for. Thus, writing to Guzów a long while ago, I wrote that I'd received a letter from you with good wishes for me and compliments for MB. I wrioe that by way of digression – and I couldn't do otherwise, for I feared suspicions that your influence over me might play some sort of role. It would not be good if there were any such suspicions, because there would immediately arise a horde of misgivings – so, really, I had to mention that" [Li II/1 535].

> calm, of moral health. . . . The second type consists of women who themselves are too luxuriant individuals, and swallow up into themselves that artistic strength that should go in external creation. These do not give, but exhaust. [. . .] They themselves do not know what they want, and those who give their hearts to them do not know either what they want of them – they exhaust themselves in a battle with nothing, spend their energy to the last drop in some ill-defined and nevertheless painful struggle – and, at the ned, they enter the category of the "wasted," that is, people not suited to any work. [. . .] Love of the first kind is usually very strong, calm – and becomes faith; love of the second may be sublime; of the third kind, it is very sensual and with regard to one's professional life, this love can keep a man sane. The moral measure of a woman may be a man's work. Simple and sublime souls support it – others break it. [MLA 167-168]

The division is arbitrary and speaks of what kind of woman Sienkiewicz the writer desires. He writes even more clearly about what the ideal wife for an artist is in a letter to Stanisław Witkiewicz. "Of the three types of woman of whom I speak in the new year number of *Mieszaniny noworoczne*, she belongs to the first group. A simple soul and she thinks, but good with it!"[177] He is thinking, of course, of Maria Szetkiewiczówna. In his epistolary narrative, her sister, however, represents the second type. Fortunately for himself, the writer never lost control of the game, and his turning toward other women (Maria Włodkowiczowa and Maria Radziejowska, and his return to Maria Babska, whom he married in 1904) finished the game off.

The narrative concerning the writer and Fog is important for the evolution of female topics in Sienkiewicz's writing. It is clear how he tries to balance in them two forces: an affirmation of existential vitality and of Christian morality. His dispute with Romanticism, on one hand, and naturalism, on the other, is conducted in the name of rescuing "life" as an independent value. He knows at the same time that ethics is an antagonistic force in relation to a position like his. So he performs a piece of virtuoso gymnastics, making it possible to unite these elements. In this, he does not trust the sublimating power of Christianity, for he knows that the problem is still more serious because Christianity strengthened pagan *eros* by idealizing the union of man and woman. Thus, in the sanctified love between individuals, the power of natural desire undergoes a shameful ennobling. But the author acknowledges many times that this is a power that operates beyond morality. We see an example in the magazine article in which he writes that love "is not an idea – it is a force; it is not a doctrine – it is pain or happiness; it is not dogma, which one is free to believe or disbelieve in – it is a law of nature; it is intoxication, forgetfulness of life, joy, delight, redemption" [MLA 25].

177 *Listy do Stanisława Witkiewicza z lat 1880–1882*, op. cit., p. 61.

The ecstatic intoxication of love is not an alternative to reflection, but only its reversal. The mature author knows that it is impossible for the idea and the reality of an erotic bond to co-exist, without at least the partial reduction of one of the forces. A radical way out, one that Sienkiewicz frequently employs, is to kill off the heroine before love openly attains the erotic difference that destroys illusion (more of this in the chapter "Eros in Mourning"). Equally frequently, however, he chooses a gentler variant, that is a gradual extinguishing of sensuality in the protagonists' relationships – a process that he himself called "turning it bright blue." Thus, in the eyes of his protagonists, reality vanishes, things lose their outlines, people no longer hurt so much with their absences, and in the hero's consciousness there ensues a gentle dying-off of reality. This process is well illustrated by Płoszowski's monolog.

> Mountains, cliffs, and towers, the more we distance ourselves from them, the more they are veiled in a bright blue fog. I have noticed that there exists a certain kind of *psychological fog* [my emphasis – R.K.], which also in the same way veils people who are far away from us. Death is nothing else but distance, but such immeasurable distance that beings , even the most beloved, when sunk in it, progressively lose their reality, they go bright blue, and become only dear shadows. [BD 64]

The stubbornness of this metaphorization is striking. In the novel *Na polu chwały*, we find a description of a world sunk in fog, one that has "lost its usual reality and has turned into some uncertain land, crazy, with an effaced and insane proximity and a completely invisible distance" [NPCH 53].[178] Just as for Leon, for Jack, too, this is material that serves to describe the specific nature of his own feelings. He brings this forth in a song-like monolog: "but everything is so like a fog . . . and you yourself somehow in a fog, and I know nothing, not what is, and I don't know what will be nor what I'll meet with, nor what will happen – I know nothing" [ibid.]. A foggy blueness deprives an object of reality, transports it into the sphere of higher senses, more frequently sight than touch. Sienkiewicz suppresses, in this way, via his technique of description, the sensuousness of the world, the sensuousness that is a threat to the moral idea, but also granting his male protagonists reductive tendencies. In *Wiry*, Groński's self-limitation takes on, in addition, a brotherly or family character.

> In the area of personal feelings, he loved Marynia Zbyłtowska as a man and an esthete, but he loved her, as he said himself, in bright blue, not in scarlet. From the start, he admired in her "the music and the dove," and then, not possessing any closer family,

178 In Lech Ludorowski's opinion, the construction of space in *Na polu chwały* is its greatest merit. Above all, the vision of the *puszcza* (wilderness) in winter saves the novel from critical contempt (L. Ludorowski, "Ostatnia powieść Sienkiewicza – *Na polu chwały*," in: *Wizjoner przeszłości. Powieści historyczne Henryka Sienkiewicza*, Lublin 1999, p. 242 ff.).

> he committed himself to her as an elder brother to a little sister, or as a father to a child. [W 87]

In *Quo Vadis*, the closer Winicjiusz comes to Ligia, the less real she seems to him. The Christians seen in the cemetery "looked in that fog like ghosts. Winicjiusz he stared at the slim figure of Ligia, who as the light of dawn increased, became more and more silvery" [Q 239]. When sorrows cease and the protagonists' love can blossom, the cautious author draws love's teeth. He takes from Ligia the beauty of her body, which had so captivated Winicjiusz and Petroniusz. "Somehow prison and disease had in part extinguished her beauty" [Q 654].

"Turning bright blue" means a weakening of the world's aggressive reality, and a slow transference of it into the sphere of imagination, recollection, or literature. Recollection deprived of pain or a fictional picture of the dead are only an act of helpless resistance in the face of nothingness. Writing itself, which preserves a similar experience, puts a seal on the transience that it opposes, but, at the same time, constitutes this transience, for it makes conscious the non-presence of the sensuous world, confirms its loss, and transforms remembered components into wretched, scattered fragments – into signs. Taking sensuous concreteness away from his protagonists, the author can save them for a plot with a happy ending, but he challenges in this way the forces of loss, from which the word was supposed to protect or at least invigorate one. But Sienkiewicz does not give up – "turning bright blue" the object of love (annihilation) does not mean a weakening of the subject; quite the opposite, it increases the energy of desire, the object of which is now not only a transient body. No, no it is also a soul.

5. The gender of an idea

> . . . he does not acknowledge a dry idea; he acknowledges a woman
> [MLA 41]

In the novella "Pójdżmy za Nim" (Let us Follow Him), Antea – the beloved of Cynna – falls victim to an incurable illness, which has physical symptoms, but which is without any doubt an illness of the spirit. He is a Roman patrician, a government official in Alexandria; she is Greek, the daughter of a Roman citizen, Tymon the Athenian. Together they represent what is best in both cultures; they are allegories of historical success. Sienkiewicz intends that the protagonists' fates mark together a critical point in classical reflection on the meaning of the individual life, an impasse from which only Christianity can free them. The desperate Cynna, who believes neither in the gods nor in philosophers, reaches out for the banality of hope.

– Time will heal you – said Cynna when he saw the sadness that was reflected in her face.
– Time is at the service of death, not of life – she replied slowly. [Pójdźmy za Nim," D V 104]

Only an encounter with Christ and his teachings gives them hope, if not for Antea's recovery, then for an understanding of the meaning of her illness and death. Similarly as in *Quo Vadis*, Sienkiewicz is trying to show Christianity's success through the crisis in Greek philosophy and the polytheism of the Roman Empire. "Belief in Olympus and philosophy have died, but health may lie in a new truth, which I do not know," declares Tymon prophetically ["Pójdźmy za Nim" 98]. On the surface it seems that Sienkiewicz offers his protagonists a simplified version of "Pascal's wager," but another aspect of the novella is, in fact, more interesting. The novella's narrative shows that Christianity becomes attractive via *eros*. This is a consistent element in all the formulations of this issue in Sienkiewicz's works. In his writing, the idea is first of all a woman. Sienkiewicz adapts St Paul's conviction that "There is a natural body, and there is a spiritual body. [. . .] Howbeit that was not first which is spiritual, but that which is natural; and afterward that which is spiritual" [1 Corinthians 15.44-46].

For love for an individual being is a feeling that in the mind of the protagonist in love sharpens the conviction of the scandalousness of death, not of death in general, but of one concrete death; love isolates one existence whose loss seems more unjust than any other. This is a principle that in Sienkiewicz's writing defines the world of women and – surprise, indeed! – is most clearly expressed in the novel in which we find the most venomous portraits of foolish, passive, and self-serving women. This principle of the female world is discovered by Połaniecki – "a positive man and a merchant" – whose skeptical and practical intelligence finds no support in any system, lay or religious, that explains the world. Positive modernity shows the individual in the power of forces that he/she does not understand, but that have marginalized his/her value. Połaniecki does not wish to accept that the meaning of his life is a result of the collective function that he is compelled to fulfill (as part of society, the market, religion, nature, progress, history, etc.), whereas – he insists – "man must have someone to recognize and accept him. And I think to myself: who will recognize and accept me, if not a woman" [RP 38].

This is, of course, a phantasm about woman from before the era of emancipation, in which she is seen as a being untouched by the ruinous force of a disenchanted world, a woman isolated from male instincts and doubts. Behind this phantasm stands a male desire to keep in human life some enclave amid a forward-rushing modernity, one that is untouched by intellectual and social revolt, to which Sienkiewicz himself had made a hesitant contribution. Thus, he wanted to exclude femininity from a violently onward-rushing history, which he reserves

for men, the proper inhabitants of a Darwinian world that is "full of competition, struggle, bickering, anger, duels, effort to make a fortune, and fatigue. And he recognized at this moment, something that he had not felt for a long time, that if in the world there was rest, happiness, healing, one had to look for it with a loving woman. This was simply a feeling that contradicted his philosophy from recent times, and therefore it made him uneasy. But if he kept on comparing these two worlds, he could not resist the sense that the woman's one, that loving one, had its own validity and *raison d'être*" [RP 246-247].

When we begin to frown at the banality of this "gospel for positive skeptics," but at the same time not lose track of the text, we fall into some confusion. Here are men who do not at all abandon their skepticism through an encounter with the world of women, and do not fully share its values. Contact with a loved woman is an effective regressive therapy; it allows one for a moment to return to a state of mind before the fall into knowledge, history, and nature. Anielka, Marynia, and Ligia constitute foreign lands for their male protagonists, lands that are marvelously exotic, to which one journeys as to tribes uninfected with civilization, since by a caprice of history they have been cut off from its main course. The high point of such praise of femininity are the words of another positive merchant in *Rodzina Połanieckich*, Bigiela. Certainly the author shares his opinion. Here the effects of the world of women are a Polish natural good, our contribution to civilization.

> You have to stand for something in the world, and what do we have? We don't have money. Not that much sense. Not a lot of ability to work out which direction to go in. Enterprise – not very much. But what we do have is that here, almost despite ourselves, because of some general inclination, we love something or somebody, and even if we don't love anything or anybody, we feel the need to. You know I'm a rational man and a merchant, so I speak advisedly. [. . .] That Maszko, for example, anywhere else he'd be a scoundrel born under some dark star. And I know lots like him. But here, even under a rogue's skin you can find a human being – and it's simple! Finally, as long as he has some spark in his belly, he isn't a complete beast – and this is what it's all about – it's because he loves something. [RP 311-312]

So it is not a matter of woman herself, but of what happens to a man thanks to her.

This a positive gospel, according to which femininity is a causal force in history if it evokes love. Thanks to a woman, the male hero learns who he is, both as a seat of drives and noble impulses. An idealization of femininity is, in these texts, mixed with a cynical approach that appears in a lack of differentiation in love's objects. The Mazko, whom Bigiel mentions, is, after all, in love with a woman who is of no substance, submissive, and who betrays him, but that does not matter, because through his love for her he becomes a better man.[179] Femininity

179 In Sienkiewicz's work, this view never varies, irrespective of the stage of his writing. In his discussion of Sewer's novel *Bratnie dusze* (Brother Souls) (modeled on Dickens's fiction),

is a force that counteracts the bestialization of man, even when the woman herself does not deserve regard.[180]

Such female figures and the plots in which they are protagonists become isolated positions in the text, in which the general rules relating to the rest of the fictional world do not apply. Contact with this sphere immediately is something of a test of the truth, a test that exacts from the male protagonists authentic personality and ethnic determinism. What antagonists want from a woman conceals within itself important social and political questions: Bohun desires love and regard; Bogusław wants compliance and satisfaction of his desire; Azja looks for revenge for humiliation and compensation for his *mestizo* complexes.

The function of a woman as a catalyst of male desires requires that one condition be fulfilled: the female protagonist must remain a virgin; only then does she become a hostage of competing parties; she stands out, always outside or above the main oppositions of the novels' conflicts. Thanks to the physical inviolateness of the female protagonists, events can be turned round.[181] The loss

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Sienkiewicz writes: "Some 'She' taught him to love society. This 'She' said to him once: 'Samuel' – she was pleased when he did something right; she ennobled his heart and mind; she was his good angel for life, then a signpost toward nobility, simplicity, and a virtuous life. It is easy to understand Smaił. Whoever has a 'She' like this, his heart will be free of rancor; in 'Her' and through 'Her' he is able to love all that she loves. Mr Smaił does not acknowledge a dry ideal: he acknowledges a woman" [MLA 41].

180 Here Sienkiewicz seems cynical, when he writes of Heine's love poetry and asks:
Are you not that common girl, thousands of whom sit in the windows and on the balconies of the city streets?
No you are not – for Prometheus with the light that he took from heaven has made a halo round your temples; he has placed a skein of clouds and a crescent moon at your feet; he has given to you his strength; he has won fame for you; and now you are immortal like Aspasia, like Beatrice, like laura, like Maryla, like Ludka. . . . [MLA 29]
Sienkiewicz goes on to ask:
So who and what were you, you for whom the symphony was sung? Nothing. – What was there in you? Nothing – Flowers like you grow in their hundreds on every meadow. [MLA 30]
These are not just paraphrases of Heine's poetic irony, because in *Rodzina Połanieckich* he writes directly that "More powerful male souls make such unfortunate errors in love because the dress up their loved women in all their own rays, not then realizing that the glow that dazzles them is their own" [RP 593].

181 In order to maintain this state, Sienkiewicz must resort to improbable motivations, such as Bogusław's epileptic fit or his visions. In the visions, there appears "in the dream old Colonel Billewicz, Oleńka's grandfather, and standing at the bed head, he stared at him" [P III 209]. Writing of Hebbel's *Judith und Holofernes*, Freud notes that "Judith is one of those women whose virginity is protected by a taboo. Her first husband was paralyzed on the bridal night by a mysterious anxiety, and never again dared to touch her" ("The Taboo of Virginity," 1913; *Contributions to the Psychology of Love* III). In Sienkiewicz's work, the protagonist-virgin transforms the male collectivity of struggling individuals into

of virginity cuts a character off not only from the sphere of inviolateness, but deprives her of the magical ability to transform the male animal into a social being. We see this degradation in *Pan Wołodyjowski* in the fates of Ewka and Zosia. The breach of the taboo of virginity leads to their irreversible exclusion. For Nowowiejski, there is no doubt that it would have been better if his "sister and that sweet, beloved girl had died; I would prefer they had died by knife and flame" [PW 477]. The norms are not so restrictive in Sienkiewicz's novels of contemporary life. Helena David (*Bez dogmatu*) and Maszkowa are not subject to social exclusion for their sexual misconduct; seduced or adulterous, they are no longer virgins, and, further, marriage has removed them earlier from the circle of inviolateness. Once more the text is awash with contradictions, well illustrating the difficulties that the author has in maintaining the normative separation of male and female worlds.

In an almost childish attempt to exclude women from the changes that are part of nineteenth-century society, Sienkiewicz is not alone. Joseph Conrad, in "Heart of Darkness," written only a few years later, offers a radical accounting with the idea of progress as embodied in the reality of colonialization. Marlowe returns from the Congo with the terrible knowledge of Kurtz's deeds, a knowledge that he does not pass on to Kurtz's betrothed.[182] Why? Because he needs her delusion to know that there is another world than the one he knows. He desires self-deception to contradict the universality of his own experience. He confesses to "bowing my head before the faith that was in her, before that great and saving illusion that shone with an unearthly glow in the darkness, in the triumphant darkness from which I could not have defended her – from which I could not even defend myself."[183] Why do we laugh at Sienkiewicz, but are not surprised by Conrad's childish longing? Both represent the same tradition, in which a man believes in his metaphysical redemption through a connection with a loved woman. For Sienkiewicz's characters, it is the last metaphysics of the West that is worth adhering to.

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a civilized society. He was enraptured by the regard shown toward women that he observed among American pioneers, and expresses this in the novella "W krainie złota" (In the Land of Gold). "Nothing softened their customs; everything however aroused their blood. They lived almost exclusively on meat and drank strong spirits. They never met anything weak and defenseless, which of itself called for pity, gentleness, and care. Among them there was not a single woman" ["W krainie złota," D III 124]. "The mere appearance of a woman immediately softened the usual brutal custom" [ibid].

182 Kurtz's betrothed recalls Oleńka. "This fair hair, this pale visage, this pure brow, seemed surrounded by an ashy halo from which the dark eyes looked out at me. Their glance was guileless, profound, confident, and trustful" ("Heart of Darkness," 1902).

183 Ibid.

Eros in Mourning

> I love her for what divides us
> (H. Sienkiewicz, *Quo vadis*)
>
> The dream of death begins. It is woman.
> (J. Derrida, *Spurs*)

Sienkiewicz was inclined to kill off many of his female characters. It is as if he had decided to apply Edgar Allan Poe's assertion in "The Philosophy of Composition" that "the death then of a beautiful woman is unquestionably the most poetical topic in the world."[184] Against the thousand male deaths in his historical novels, that does not, at first glance, make much of an impression. But the dying women in Sienkiewicz's work belong among the main characters, and their deaths are shown independently, in developed plot lines and with complex meanings in separate episodes and images. In the hitherto only study of themes of death in Sienkiewicz's work, Wanda Dobrowolska long ago drew attention to Sienkiewicz's tendency.

> Sienkiewicz reveled also in presenting the male deaths of innocent children – victims, tormented by envious fate or incurable illnesses. He is especially drawn to dramatic scenes in which the protagonists are children, indeed child-women. In Sienkiewicz's work, those little girls, sweet, delicate, subtle, emotionally developed, delightful and

184 "The Philosophy of Composition" (1846). See: E. Bronfen, *Over Her Dead Body: Femininity and the Aesthetic*, Manchester 1992, p. 59. Even if it was not the nineteenth century that discovered the attractiveness of female death for art, it certainly made that topic remarkably popular. In nineteenth-century art, the death of a woman is as attractive as the death of male characters in the epics of earlier times. It is not just a matter of melodramatic effect as, for example, in *La dame aux camélias*. Novels like *Madame Bovary*, *Anna Karenina*, and *Nana* demonstrate that it is an independent theme, in which new techniques, characteristic for realism, are involved, including presentation, complex moral, social, and emotional issues. Literature is not exceptional in this. Catherine Clément, analyzing the semiotics and ideology of female defeat in nineteenth-century opera, mentions a whole series of the deaths of such beautiful female characters: Butterfly, Violetta, Mimi, Carmen, Gilda, Norma, Brunhilda, Antonia, and Marfa (C. Clément, *L'opéra ou la défa ite des femmes*, Paris 1979, p. 88). It is clear that the repetitive nature of this motif in Sienkiewicz's work points to the inspiration of Romanticism present in his writing, a Romanticism that placed rapture and death in close proximity. (See, for example, Mario Praz's *The Romantic Agony*, especially the chapter on "La belle dame sans merci.")

> fragile as spider's web, but delectable and lovely, have their guardian and advocate (Danusia, Litka, Marynia from *Wiry*, Nel, Jenny, Marysia from "Jamioł," and Marysia Toporczykówna.)[185]

The depictions of these deaths, and their intense presence throughout the whole *œuvre*, make one suspect that they are not only depictions of the dying body, calculated to move the reader, but rather direct the gaze toward matters that the matter of the death of beautiful and young women sheds a powerful light upon: ambivalence vis-à-vis the body, the metaphysics and biology of death, sexuality, religion, and finally art. The literary economy of these presentations is also intriguing, suggesting the question of what Sienkiewicz and the readers gain from the repeated scenes of female death, and the depictions of mainly male mourning. Is it an unconsciously realized obsession, an intrusion resulting from not yet worked-through mourning after the death of his wife? One thing seems certain: the function of dying and dead female figures does not stop with a description of their deaths. The dead keep on functioning, marking various components of the novels' worlds with their presence.

An introduction to the subject is most frequently the passivity of female characters. By the author's decision, they are immobilized in their functions as objects of care, desire, and love. A lack of activity in the plot does not, however, mean objectification; on the contrary, they concentrate and integrate various plot strands; they make more dense extensive areas of meaning. The female figure's passivity generates a heightened activity among male characters, which in terms of the adventure plot has a basic meaning. Sienkiewicz also saw the artistic value of this type of figure in its ability to concentrate the reader's attention on his/her own emotions, and not just on actions. This is confirmed by his polemic with Spasowicz, who in his lectures on Shakespeare criticized Ophelia's passivity. Sienkiewicz questioned this reproach.

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185 W. Dobrowolska, *Sienkiewicz jako malarz śmierci*, Tarnów 1927, p. 19. Swiętochowski even asserts that Sienkiewicz is the ideal author for women. "Sienkiewicz by the very nature of his talent is a woman's author. As if he is sitting among them, he tells his stories in a soft, feeling, poetic manner. He can move with small things, smooth out rougher character traits and soften shadows that are too dark, He continually plays either pastoral or chivalric melodies. He does not throw off deeper thoughts; he does not touch on the great human enigmas; but having put to sleep the listener's thought, he squeezes a few tears from him, or rouses him to gentle laughter. His fiction sometimes whispers like pure, tumbling, babbling water, which does not intoxicate the senses, but rocks them to sweet dreams" (A. Świętochowski, "Henryk Sienkiewicz(Litwos)," in his *Polska krytyka literacka(1800–1918).Materiały.*Vol. 3, Warszawa 1959, p. 338). Prus provides a humorous picture of one of Sienkiewicz's readings after his return from America in the *Kronika Tygodniowa* of 21 February 1880. One of the topics of this piece is "What is Pan Sienkiewicz up to with the pretty half of Warsaw?"

> Ophelia arouses dramatic pity the more she is defenseless, the more she is sweet, the more she has tears in her eyes (and not lightening bolts). She is a loved girl, the personification of femininity; she suffers humbly, and her fate is tragically cruel. These features stem from her passivity, for which she receives no mercy in the lecturer's eyes. [MLA 161]

Ophelia's sister is "Lilian Morris, a native of Boston, Massachusetts. She was a delicate being, slender, small-featured, and with a sad face, for all that it was nearly that of a child" ["Przez stepy," D III 41]. The child's innocence and defenselessness change the balance of forces in the world of the novella. Capitain R (called Ralf) is the leader of a wagon train of emigrants, whom he is supposed to lead from the East Coast to California. At the beginning, he is entirely devoted to his work; later he begins in stages to divide his energy between his duties and a girl, whose sadness has drawn his attention from the start. Love between the protagonists takes the girl out of her melancholy, and it forcibly drives her toward a death, the signs of which become the more intense, the greater is her passion. To start with, love does not bring about any radical change in the figure, but rather increases her passivity, which is now accompanied by resignation. "This was the prophecy – that there is no help for it and that sooner or later she would come to weaken and surrender to the will of that power and to forget about everything and just to love" ["Przez stepy" 56]. The text plays with the ambiguity of that "force," which simultaneously means death and desire. Tenderness and kisses fill a man with joy. However, they assail Lilian "with fear and sadness." Together with her growing sensuality, there appear the first signs of disease, and sexual initiation anticipates death. The sexual act, symbolically identical to death, causes the character suddenly to lose her sensuous dimension.

> When we emerged from under the weeping willows, I looked at Lilian; on her face there was neither sadness nor unease; in her eyes, raised to heaven, there burned a silent resignation; and her blessed head was surrounded, as it were, by the bright glory of sacrifice and earnestness. ["Przez stepy" 77]

The conventional narrative of emotion unexpectedly exposes its Gnostic dimension. On the surface, there is nothing reprehensible in this feeling: the love is returned, sincere, accepted by the community of severe and legalistic pioneers, and nevertheless it is metaphysically wrong. Like a memento, appears the quotation from the Epistle to the Romans (1.25), which is repeated several times in the story, and which Lilian shows to Ralf in the Bible she reads every day. "Who changed the truth of God into a lie, and worshipped and served the creature more than the Creator" ["Przez stepy" 82, 99, 106, 107]. The punishment for this love is Lilian's death, because – in the context of the above quotation – both are creatures who adored each other more than they adore their Creator. The purpose of introducing this quotation into the story is not clear, and it complicates the symbolic meanings

of the characters' love and death. In the context of the Epistle to the Romans, passionate love is a punishment for the pagan adoration of the human. Here is the above sentence in the context of three other verses.

> Wherefore God also gave them up to uncleanness through the lusts of their own hearts, to dishonour their own bodies between themselves:
>
> Who changed the truth of God into a lie, and worshipped and served the creature more than the Creator, who is blessed for ever. Amen.
>
> For this cause God gave them up unto vile affections: for even their women did change the natural use into that which is against nature:
>
> And likewise also the men, leaving the natural use of the woman, burned in their lust one toward another; men with men working that which is unseemly, and receiving in themselves that recompense of their error which was meet. (Romans 1.24-27)

The function of the Biblical quotation in the story is far from obvious. In Ralf's inset narration, the quotation is word from beyond the characters' world. To this word the author has given the right to judge and elucidate Lilian's and Ralf's drama, but only in the characters' own interpretation. Neither the author, nor the primary narrator who represents him, recommends this fatalism; Lilian does this and behind her Ralf, and thus they become characters in a further variant of the proverb of original sin, but one enriched with specific meanings, brought into the text from the author's world.

The physical shape of love turns out to be a pagan inheritance of Eros, a pleasant but a sad necessity of the biological make-up of the characters that are in love. Exorcized by death, Eros is disarmed, and passion, deprived of a real object, is transformed into a purely spiritual longing. The text's final sentences present a picture of a humbled Ralf, who now only desires "to find on those blue steppes my blue one – and never to part from her ever again" ["Przez stepy" 108].

However, if we return the analyzed quotation to its Biblical context, it attains a shape that goes far beyond the antimony of the spiritual vs. the bodily dimension of love. St Paul writes that the punishment for an anthropocentric pride of love is the curse of the homoerotic: a pathology of desire that is ostentatiously non-procreative, and that disdains sexual/gender difference and its duties toward the species. The story's text bears within it a memory of the context of the Biblical quotation, and that means that one can renew the question of the nature of Ralf's and Lilian's wrongful love. In the story, no one recommends this judgment. It rather belongs only to the author. Or rather, it is a "cuckoo phrase," a quote from culture, no one's opinion, tossed into the story to strengthen one's sense of the determinacy of fate.

This sentence, bearing the weight of its neighboring verses, allows one to reflect differently on the meanings of the repeated deaths of women. Shortly after writing the story, Sienkiewicz began to use the name "Lilian" in relation to the woman

who later became his wife, Maria Szetkiewiczówna.[186] And not only he. Stanisław Witkiewicz, who knew both the Szetkiewiczówna women, wrote in a letter of 6 March 1881 to the mother and sister that "Mademoiselle Maria, as I told you, is very simple, good, intelligent, and in addition clear in the same way that Henryk is clear, and so similar to Lilian that I thought he wrote it ["Przez stepy"] after meeting her – but it appears – he did so before."[187] Maria's death, four years later, links life and text even more, and henceforward we find that interweaving repeated in almost all Sienkiewicz's works. One could even think that the frequency of these repetitions is a result of linking creativity with mourning after his wife's death.

A failure to notice the endurance of this motif leads to incautious judgments even among Sienkiewicz experts. Julian Krzyżanowski explains the cause of Anusia Borzobohata's death thus:

> [The writer], however, came to the conclusion that marriage to a coquette would not bring Wołodyjowski happiness; so he condemned Anusia to die in Częstochowa, but for her distraught fiancé, he found the appropriate candidate in the person of the "*hajduczka*," Basia Jeziorowska, a youthful version of the deceased Anusia.[188]

Anusia's death is not a way of getting rid of a character who is bothersome for the intended story material of the last part of the *Trylogia*, but an independent and considered episode, the consequences of which we can follow for a long time in the action of *Pan Wołodyjowski*. After her death, the eponymous hero remains in a state of mental confusion, caused by his on-going mourning and the charms of the two young women whom he has got to know at Ketling's country house. At the beginning, the memory of the dead woman does not seem threatened. "Both of these were younger, but after all she had been a hundred times dearer than all young women" [PW 64]. His rapidly developing feelings for Krzysia mean that images of the dead woman haunt Michał's mind – "dressed in white and she herself pale white as if of wax, [. . .] she stood before the knight's eyes just as he had laid her in her coffin" [PW 100].

However, his feeling of guilt loses out to a new phantasm of a living woman. This phantasm means that the figure of Anusia disappears "dissolving like a light mist, and instead in the knight's imagination there appeared Krzysia's eyes and her mouth covered in soft down" [PW 100]. Mourning not only does not contradict the birth of a new passion, but even promotes it. Anticipating the analysis of later works, we can advance the thesis that, in Sienkiewicz's works, desire feeds on

186 "I also escaped to Marly and wrote 'Przez stepy' . . . and the 'flies and the mosquitoes whispered in my ear: Lilian, Lilian' etc. . . ." (*Listy Sienkiewicza do Stanisława Witkiewicza z lat 1880–1882,*op. cit., p. 43).

187 A note by Zdzisław Piasecki in: *Listy Sienkiewicza do Stanisława Witkiewicza z lat 1880–1882*, op. cit. p. 44.

188 J. Krzyżanowski, *Twórczość Henryka Sienkiewicza*, Warszawa 1973, p. 140

grief, and grief is the horizon of desire. Aware of this co-existence, the narrator abruptly dismisses Michał's dilemmas.

> However, this was indeed a vain fear. Krzysia was indifferent to Pan Michał's mourning, and if he spoke too much of it, not only did that not awaken any sympathy in the young lady, but it irritated her own love. Did the living woman regret that she was not the equal of the one who had died? Or was she in general worth so little that the dead Anusia could be her rival? [PW 109-110].

The closeness of death and love is also confirmed by the female characters' state when we see them for the first time. The neighborhood of death gives the female characters' beauty an almost persuasive dimension. Oleńka in *Potop* is "that enchanting girl with her bright hair, pale skin, and delicate features. She had the beauty of a white flower. The mourning dress gave her seriousness" [P I 14]. Since she exerts such an influence on Michał, we are not surprised that Krzysia affects him too; she "was in mourning, because she had lost her father not long ago, and the color of her clothes, combined with the delicacy of her skin and her black hair, gave her a certain appearance of sadness and severity" [PW 56]. The touch of death comes to Basia too, who succumbs to a severe illness after all the difficulties of her escape from the hands of Azja. Once more, the writer forces the character that is closest to him to experience the death of a beloved woman.

> The livid head hung lifelessly on his shoulder, so thinking it was only a corpse that he was holding in his embrace, he began to call with a terrible voice:
> – Baśka is dead! . . . dead! . . . oh! . . . [PW 424]

This is also a place in the text that functions beyond genre or across genres.

Convention, date, and historical color do not determine the depiction of the fatally ill Basia. The described body detaches itself from the matrix of type and becomes an object of reflection on the narrator's part, the scrupulousness and precision of which forces one to think of the author's observation that precedes the description, in particular the section about "pupils dissolved in the white of the eyes."

> Basia's cheeks were blooming with bright blushes; on the surface, she seemed healthy, but her eyes, although they gleamed, were cloudy, as if the pupils were dissolved in their whites; her poor hands sought for something with a repeated movement on the quilt. Wołodyjowski lay half-alive at her feet. [. . .] Pan Wołodyjowski was particularly disturbed by that movement of her hands on the quilt, because he saw in its unconscious uniformity a sign of the death that was drawing nigh. [PW 432]

A return to life takes place under compulsion, and Sienkiewicz suppresses the spectacular nature of the temporary triumph of Eros over death. The parallel between Baśka's recovery and the coming of spring brings an immediate counter-statement from the narrator, who announces that "for those unhappy lands, spring brought mourning, not joy – and death, not life" [PW 451]. Thus, the shared

horizon of rebirth and death appears on both levels of the text: the individual history of the character and the general history of people and nature – but the plot of *Pan Wołodyjowski* tears apart the symbolic community of the human being and nature. Basia's recovery does not serve to extend life, but rather grieving for death. As we recall, the Wołodyjowskis cannot have children, so Basia's function as a woman is totally defined by Michał's death.

The male subject's fantasy of his own death has a therapeutic dimension, and the preparation for the scene of Michał's departure is the blessing of death, such as Baśka offers to Nowowiejski: "having placed her hand on the unfortunate man's head, she said: – May God give it to you at Kamieniec, because you are telling the truth – it is the only consolation!" [PW 509]. The novel's conclusion reverses roles in the theater of mourning – now it is Michał who is wept for. Up to now, each of his loves has ended in a fiasco, and the culmination of the catastrophes was the death of Anusia. The author condemns his hero to endless mourning, the object of which is they themselves: the character and the author. Literature permits the symbolic revenge of what was hitherto only the subject of loss. Now the beloved object, whose death earlier evoked despair and shock, is himself compelled to mourn. Sienkiewicz at last grants Michał a woman's love (who in addition confesses it first) in order to steep her in endless mourning , such, indeed, as Baśka is trapped by in the closing scene of *Pan Wolodyjowski*. There can no longer be anything more, no consolation from another, living body – of a child or a man. That is why we do not observe Krzysia's morning; after all, her husband dies with Michał, but, we will recall, the Ketlings have two children. Thus, Krzysia is not suitable as the ideal subject of mourning for a hero.

The nearly two years of dealing with his wife Maria z Szetkiwiczów Sienkiewiczowa's incurable illness left their mark on the writing of *Pan Wołodyjowski*. The illness appeared strongly when their second child Jadwiga was born (December 13, 1883), and led to Maria's death in 1885. Does the lack of children in the Wołodyjowski marriage result from Sienkiewicz's subconsciously blaming the birth of their child for the decline in Maria's health? That is a question that cannot be answered. But from this point onwards we can observe an enduring ambivalence in his work when he presents female fertility, and a clear fascination with the characters of girls or women without children who are, thus, free from procreation's fatal consequences.

Therefore it may seem that Sienkiewicz in *Pan Wołodyjowski* built a splendid chamber for self-mourning, the totality of which cannot now be modified. However this motif can be observed also in other, more modest, but still more controversial, embodiments.[189] Let us consider two such motifs, which are especially close to

189 I omit the stigma of name, a stigma that weighs on the real women whom Sienkiewicz loved, and that points to the continuing influence of his first love on his later relationships.

each other. In the story "Na jasnym brzegu" (On the Clear Shore), the protagonist is the author of a picture entitled "Sleep and Dream," the allegorical meaning of which expresses dissent from the demonism of the Christian iconography of death.

> Somehow in Świrski's picture the genius of sleep silently and gently released the body of a girl to the genius of death, which, bending over her, at the same time delicately extinguished the flame of a lamp that burned by her head. As he painted, Świrski repeated to himself: "It has to be so that that whoever looks at this says to himself, above all: Ach, how enormously silent it is!" ["Na jasnym brzegu," D VI 186]

The dispute with the tradition of the theme turns out, however, to be a mask for the aging painter's own fears. Art as an allegory of one's own problems reveals its function when Świrski employs as a model the very young and beautiful Maria Cervi, with whom he falls in love. Fantasy becomes embodied; the dead woman steps down from the painting, becomes alive and desired, but she always has within her the brand of her mortal origins.[190] Sienkiewicz did not allow his characters to forget this. The narrator of "Selim Mirza," looking at Selim and Lidia kissing each other, says to himself:

> So at this moment he had bid farewell there to the delightful young lady, and in kisses has forgotten about the whole world. In his place, I would feel, alas, that I was kissing lips that sooner or later must be dead ones. ["Selim Mirza" D IV 204]

The obsession with the anticipated loss of the object of love attains its highest level in a novel that is widely regarded as an anodyne piece of work. At the same time, in the matter of the subject under discussion, it is Sienkiewicz's most enigmatic text. This is so because of Litka – one of the most fascinating characters created by Sienkiewicz, not so much because she is an independent heroine, as because she is an object that can release the text's complex meanings. This fourteen-year-old, mortally ill girl (without a father, of course) is in love with a mature man, Stanisław Połaniecki. This is no secret to him or to the girl's mother. Stach reciprocates the child's feelings in a manner appropriate to Litka's age and condition. As he himself acknowledges, Litka is the person who is dearest to him in his life.

Indeed, he confesses this directly in a letter to Maria Radziejewska (March 3, 1903): "From the first moment of meeting you, madam, I felt an exceptional sympathy for you, for you reminded me – perhaps not only in your face's features – as much as in your figure and your voice – greatly of someone who is dear to me and dead" [Li III/3 280-281].

190 Zofia Mocarska-Tycowa points to what in her opinion is the clear influence in this story of the paintings of the Pre-Raphaelites, greatly valued by the author, and in particular of George Frederick Watts, who was closely linked to their aesthetics and who was the author of paintings such as "Love and Death," "Death Crowning Innocence," and "The Court of Death" (Z. Mocarska-Tycowa, *Tropy przymierzy. O literaturze dziewiętnastowiecznej i miejscach jej zbliżeń z malarstwem*, Toruń 2005, pp. 166–167).

Symbolically she is dead from the beginning. She focuses on herself Stach's feelings of which he is unaware. He is attracted by the beauty of her crisis, intense as it is in a beautiful and ill body, one that oscillates between initiation into maturity and death. The man's loving eyes sate themselves on the sight of this beautiful corpse, but when the cunning device of love becomes known, the character experiences a shock resulting from an anticipation of loss.

> This child must die! She must, all the more that she is so dear, so sweet, so loved! After her, Pani Emilia will go – and then there will be an utterly hopeless emptiness! What is this life! Here Połaniecki has the only two beings on earth who love him, for whom he means something, so, of course, he must lose them! With them there would be something to cling to in life, without them – there remains one nothingness and some blind future, deaf, without mind, with the face of an idiot. . . . [RP 188]

Leon Płoszowski had the same certainty with regard to Marynia. "Now I know. No one has told me, but I know for certain: she will die" [BD 358].[191] All these deaths (Lilian, Anusia, Anielka, Litka, Danusia, and Marynia), although they result directly from the body's illness, are in essence love deaths, that type of literary death called *Liebestod* ("la morte d'amour") after that in Wagner's *Tristan und Isolde*.[192] The doubling of love and death enriches feeling, gives it a greater intensity, and prolongs it beyond death. And, indeed, Sienkiewicz commits Litka to a fascinating post mortem life. It begins during her funeral.

> So it happened that that one strand of Litka's bright, exceptionally abundant hair was left outside the coffin. Pani Emilia did not take her eye from it the whole way, repeating every so often: "Oh, God, God! They cut the child's hair!" [RP 195]

The hair that slips out of the coffin is not just a sign of the undertaker's carelessness, but a factor in Sienkiewicz's heroines' sensuality. Braids, lip fuzz, let-down hair extend the body, permitting the author to construct "soft" erotic scenes.[193] Litka's

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191 Sienkiewicz gave to his characters his own experience of growing certainty that his wife's illness, lasting from the end of 1883, would lead to her death, which occurred on 19 October 1885. During that time, the author was working on *Potop*, but it is in *Pan Wołodyjowski* that one finds the most traces of her death. Writing during the entire course of his wife's illness, he tried to fulfill his obligations in relation to *Czas*, in which *Potop* was appearing. A letter to Stanisław Smolka offers a suggestive scrap of the writer's experiences. "The doctors give my wife up, and her life can be counted in days. [. . .] I will do what is in my power, but it is better if there is a break between volumes than in the midst of things. Up to now I have been working and my reserve of material is increasing. What I am sending to you should be enough for some two weeks. Wait until there is enough for a month, because even so the cross will be a real one for me to bear" (October 12, 1885 Kor II 141-142).

192 See, for example: M.C. Bijvoet, *Liebestod: The Function and Meaning of the Double Love-Death*, London 1988.

193 Here are two rather less well known quotations: "she draws near, the pupil of my soul, my beloved girl, and the morning breeze lifts her hair behind her. It seemed to have come loose

death does not end the love relation, and the body, though dead, continues to incline toward life and draw toward itself the living. At the same time, however, it does not terrify with the reality of decay because we only see a strand of hair. The text spares us, and the synecdoche falsifies the invisible whole in the coffin. Pani Cywińska explains this in the novel *Legiony*: “The coffin – you already know it’s death; but while the body is on the bed, then it is most terrible to look at it” [L 54].

Litka’s after-death activity is more seriously indicated through the girl’s extracting a promise that Stach and Marynia will be together. Through her death – as Janina Kulczycka Saloni notes – “From being an idly desired being, Marynia became [. . .] a possessed being.”[194] Both make this promise to the dying child-woman, who in this scene becomes a figure of transference, because she utters the words that the embarrassed man wants to hear, experiencing as he is the duality between mourning and a new desire. Litka’s appeal before her death overcomes the amorality of new desire. Differently from Anusia, who fuels Michał’s feeling of guilt, Litka’s influence is constructive. Her death makes room for Marynia, and the body buried in the earth becomes completely invisible, and in stages ceases to entice or frighten off anyone.

This change is demonstrated by Połaniecki’s visits to the cemetery. One visit seems to suggest enduring despair and a deep crisis, because to Stach “it appeared [. . .] simply terrible to love Litka and to reconcile loving her with a consciousness that a few feet down there she lay, black and decaying. ‘I shouldn’t come here,’ he said to himself, ‘because here I rage, lose my head and all that makes my life stable [. . .]. Here I care about more than just mere existence, but I can only answer myself with commonplaces. A completely vicious circle! [. . .] Because if the one aim of all human efforts is life, but the one result is death, then this lack of sense exceeds all measure, and it would simply be impossible to imagine, if it were not for that odious and pitiless patency that changes living and loved beings into a rotten thing’” [RP 286].

But when we take the narrator’s perspective and look at the details of the scene in the cemetery, we note a mystic, ironic counterpoint to Stanisław’s nihilistic thoughts. Even though “here everything was wet, slimy, sullen, half-uncovered in the melting snow” [RP 286], puffs of wind fling some drops of warm rain in his face and lift Marynia’s dress “so that she had to push it down.” And, in a moment,

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from movement, but it had been deliberately badly tied up, for the little minx knew that she looked lovely so, that I liked her so, and that when the breeze blew her braid in my face, I would press it to my lips” [“Przez stepy” D III 60]. Ligia “with her lips touched his hair, and for a short time the struggled in intoxication with each other and with a love that thrust one toward the other” [Q 300].

194 J. Kulczycka-Saloni, “Henryk Sienkiewicz,” in: *Na polskich i europejskich szlakach literackich. Z pism rozproszonych 1985–1998*, Warszawa 2000, p. 32

Sienkiewicz will sneer at the hero's grief, pitilessly showing how life in its vulgar splendor turns both away from the dead girl, from the still fresh experience of loss, and brings them toward itself, as if urging them to undertake the duties suspended by death and mourning. Already at the cemetery, a gust of wind "wrapped her veil around Połaniecki's neck. Reality started to summon him. So he pressed the arm of the beloved woman to his side, and felt that loving, if it cannot overrule death, at least reconciles one to life" [RP 289]. This sudden turn toward life awakens a feeling of guilt in the protagonist; it could have awoken the same in Sienkiewicz, for in *Wiry* he almost exactly transcribes that scene.

> They were not far from the cemetery gates. But meantime there came a wind stronger than the earlier breezes; it ran over the young corn, raised a cloud of dust on the road, put out the brotherly candles that had not gone out before, and wrapped Miss Anney's long veil round Krzycki's neck. [W 16][195]

Life, not death, always has the decisive and ultimate say. Neither the irony of the narrators, nor the protagonists' light self-reproaches put aside this principle of the world of the novels. Although, after his return from the funeral, "Połaniecki seemed to himself at this moment to be vile" [RP 199], very soon the pang of conscience of the living toward the dead girl disappears in the presence of a new desire. "We have to start a new life; let's start it quickly," he decides after a further visit to the cemetery, and hearing Marynia's assent, "he drew her to him as on the first day, and, after a moment, once more his lips began to seek out hers; but she, whether under the influence of the thought that today his rights were greater, or whether under the influence of her awakening senses, did not turn away her head this time, but closing her eyes, herself gave her lips to him as if they had been thirsty forever" [RP 290].

Both experiences – that of mourning and that of desire – have a common *nidus*, just as they have a common territory of life and death – that is the body. Sienkiewicz, even if he lets his characters forget this, never allows the reader to do so, uncovering before his/her eyes that almost macabre continuity, through which Sienkiewicz's child heroine, though killed off, nonetheless lives on in mature femininity, her diametrically opposed incarnation. It is clear how Sienkiewicz, facing the problem of the egoistic anarchy of desire, creates a counterbalance for it in the shape of images of desire socialized through marriage and family. The breach after death is thus filled in; the territory devastated by death is permeated by an exuberant eroticism, promising fertility, the expansion of which takes in

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195 Another congruence of character and author is striking. Krzycki, walking in the funeral procession beside Anney, "feels the warmth of her arm and hand. He noticed too now that that hand, snug in the glove, though shapely, was far from small, and he reflected that the cause of that was English sports, tennis, rowing, archery, and such like" (W 15-16).

even the space of the cemetery that is such a threat to character consciousness. The cemetery – visited after the wedding – now seethes with plant life and finally ceases to frighten the hero.

> The cemetery looked completely different from how it had on Połaniecki's previous visits there. Great trees in leaf made something like a dense, thick curtain, composed of darker and lighter leaves, covering with deep green shadow the white and gray memorials. In places, the cemetery seemed simply to be a forest full of shade and coolness. On several graves there twinkled a bright network of sun beams, filtered through the leaves of acacia, poplar, hornbeam, lilac, and limes. Other crosses, clasped in undergrowth seemed to doze in the coolness over the graves. In the branches and among the leaves, little birds bustled. They made their presence known with constant chirping, soothing and it seemed deliberately quiet, so as not to wake the sleepers. [RP 514]

The narrator exchanges the nihilistic discourse of despair for the soothing tone of elegy, and the change in style answers a change in objects: Marynia takes Litka's place. It is, indeed, an exchange of objects, and not a replacement of the dead with the living. Stach's feelings toward Marynia are different, not just because of his wife's age, but because "he lacked that, for example, tender and caressing sensitivity that was in his feelings for Litka" [RP 427]. The crisis that follows her death is, thus, only put aside, and the linear succession of feeling deceives the reader with its suggestion that despair after loss has been overcome.

An immature femininity fascinates many of Sienkiewicz's male protagonists, and a plot line involving the overcoming of childish enchantment returns with suggestive frequency. At first, it seems that Litka's death is an effect of the writer's self-censorship, which cannot allow that feeling to develop into a self-conscious passion. As we read, we discover that the problem, which occupies the author more than moral transgressions, is love itself as a force that prematurely tears his very young heroines from a state of sexuality that is not fully conscious of itself.

In Sienkiewicz's work, the outcome of the symbolic conflict between two objects of male feelings is often a doubling of female figures, conceived as oppositional types of heroine: the androgynous versus the fertile. This is clearly illustrated by the novella "Orso." Before the narrator introduces the main female protagonist, he presents two sisters, Spaniards, seething with mature sensuality, whose bodies are "almost sluggish, and so delightful that if some youth approached them, his heart thumped in his breast from an unconfessed and unconscious love. From Donna Refugio and Donna Mercedes pulses an enchantment, as scent pulses from magnolia and calycanthus" ["Orso" D III 159]. But, nonetheless, it is the child-like Jenny that arouses the greatest degree of fascination among the visitors to the circus, whose "eyes, and their hearts too, followed with palpitations every movement of the wondrous child" ["Orso" D III 159]. Her beauty does not only attract familial care. This is attested by the desire that Jenny arouses in the circus

director. Also Orso's care for her is a mask for an avowal of love, one that the narrator attempts to delay, warning the reader that "the embracing figures could be taken for a loving couple, but for the fact that Jenny's thin legs, clothed in pale pink tights, did not reach the ground and swung backward and forward in an utterly childish movement that is called pot-making."[196] After this, contrary to his warning, he underlines that "her figure was taking on only the first outlines of female forms" ["Orso" D III 162].

The persistence of this pattern in Sienkiewicz's work is pointed out by Aneta Mazur, who writes that "he did not avoid a dualistic, moralizing division of his female characters into Mary and Mary Magdalene."[197] But in Sienkiewicz's work that almost obsessionally repeated ambivalence of the erotic is apparent not only in the opposed pairs of female figures (Baśka – Krzysia, Litka – Marynia, Danusia – Jagienka), but also – let us emphasize this strongly – within the same figure, for example in Jenny's "female forms" and the history of Lilian.

Let us take a look at *Krzyżacy*. On the surface, we are dealing there with a somewhat schematic contrast: Danusia, a "heavenly soul," a "figure from the church," "transparent," and "angelic" [K I 17], is opposed to Jagienka, a forest goddess of the senses and of fertility.[198] It seems that the latter exclusively symbolizes a vitalistic biologism, which must triumph over the frail, childish Danusia. The splendid introduction of the figure of Jagienka means that the image of Danusia is swept away before the eyes of Zbyszek and the reader.

> Sitting astride a fleet piebald horse there came toward him, a girl with a crossbow in her hand and a spear at her back. In her hair, loose from her onward movement, were woven hop cones; her face was rosy as the dawn, over her breasts an open shirt, and over the shirt a wool vest. [K I 141]

Because "from Jagienka there simply pulsed the gleam of health, youth, and strength" [K I 140], Zbyszko, not thinking of Danusia, fantasizes "that he could

196 The phrase "pot making" appears also in reference to female characters of the previously discussed novella "Autorki," and means a waving about of legs that do not reach the ground. It recalls the movement made by a potter as he/she turns the potter's wheel.

197 A. Mazur, "*Rodzina Połanieckich* – powieść rozwojowa?" in: *Henryk Sienkiewicz – twórca i obywatel*, ed. W. Hendzel and Z. Piasecki, Opole 2002, p. 290.

198 The contrast is also underlined by Tadeusz Bujnicki. "In the portrait of Danusia elements of a 'dream-like' esthetic beauty dominate above all; the beauty of Jagienka is sensual, with unambiguously erotic features that are stressed by the narrator" (T. Bujnicki, Introduction to H. Sienkiewicz, *Krzyżacy*, BN I 270, Wrocław 1990, p. xciii). Lech Ludorowski also discusses this typological opposition ("Antropologia urody Sienkiewiczowskich heroin. Portret wprowadzający," in: *Wizjoner przeszłości*, pp. 282–284). With reference to *Bez dogmatu* see: M. Rabikowska, "Trzy typy seksualizmu kobiecego w *Bez dogmatu* Sienkiewicza," in: *Henryk Sienkiewicz i jego twórczość. Materiały z konferencji naukowej w WSP w Częstochowie, 5–7 maja 1996 r.,* ed. Z. Przybyły, Częstochowa 1996, p. 164.

do with her what he wanted, and so was she drawn to him, so did she gaze into his eyes, and so was she attracted to him that he could barely sit on his horse" [K I 206].[199]

However the careful reader will note that the writer places descriptive passages in the novel that confuse the clarity of the contrast of the two female protagonists. The figure of Danusia undegoes a change that takes place at the rapid pace of her developing feelings for Zbyszko. Love marks her body, the description of which surprisingly swells with a sensuality that hitherto belonged exclusively to Jagienka. It is as if Zbyszko's marriage and the announcement that she will be a wife and mother had drawn her over to the side of the body and desire. The description moves her position within the symbolic field and distances her from the pattern of a holy virgin. Ofka the housekeeper predicts this to Zbyszek. "You won't recognize her. . . . The girl is growing and the seams of her dresses are already beginning to go under her neck, because everything is swelling up in her" [K I 230-231]. The narrator confirms the character's judgment. Flying in the face of probability, the narrator objectifies the changes that have occurred in Danusia's body and temperament. As a result, the same happens with Zbyszko "as what sometimes happened when he was with Jagienka: he was taken by impulses and seized with bouts of faintness [. . .] there was something in her now that was not there previously – some beauty, now no longer childish, and some allurement, strong, intoxicating, pulsing from her as heat pulses from a flame or scent from a rose" [K I 240]. The figures of the imagination are here concrete ones, factual and material. The surge of love is not an intangible movement of the soul, but energy made material, something that fills the loving body. The episode with Ofka is a reprise of the scene in *Ogniem i mieczem*, in which Skrzetulski, once more back at Rozłogy, asks about Helena's health. The countess replies: "Healthy, she's healthy; the girl has even put on some weight from all those amours" [OM I 107]. The abducted, rescued, and dead Danusia once more returns to the church window, where after her death Zbyszek imagines her afterlife along the lines of that of the holy maidens in the stained glass windows in Kraków. There is no way, however, to reduce her temporary explosion of sensuality to a moment of authorial inadvertence.

In Sienkiewicz's works, the dynamics of female eroticism are not connected with the physical maturity of female protagonists. The author's intention locates them in an opposition: ideal – sensual/fertile – an opposition that simultaneously underlines the closeness of desire and death. This is further indicated by the song sung by the women during Danusia's funeral. As Krzyżanowski points out, "it is

199 Despite possessing the splendor of mature femininity, Jagienka cries out "with an almost childish voice" [K I 141].

ritual wailing; in keeping with the situation, they mark a ‘relocation’ of the bride from her parents’ home to that of her husband; they are not cheerful, however, so much as unconsciously mournful.”[200]

An even more ostentatiously improbable relocation of a figure within the sensual-ideal opposition can be seen very clearly in *Quo vadis*. There the narrator, at the beginning, describes Ligia principally as an object of desire, for that is how Winicjusz sees her.

> His gaze slipped from her face to her neck and to her naked arms, caressed her charming shape, delighted in her, embraced her, consumed her, but beyond hiss lust, he glowed with happiness and infatuation, and boundless rapture. [Q 87-88]

The picture of male passion intoxicates the woman, who recognizes within herself the source of this desire; thus, Ligia boldly begins to answer. “Her cheeks began to glow, her heart to beat, and her lips opened wide as if in amazement” [Q 89]. Sienkiewicz delineates love’s first stage in extreme terms. To express the sudden access of passion, he employs suggestive reference to animal life. Winicjusz’s face “went pale. His nostrils flared as they do in a horse from the east [. . .], his breath came short, and his lips twitched expressively” [Q 89]. The narrator’s language relating to love will be transformed along with Winicjusz’s feelings. This is the first stage of an education in love: pagan *eros* reveals its helplessness vis-à-vis an object that it cannot possess. It is also unable to name the feelings that it experiences. It relieves itself, thus, in sadistic fantasies.

> He wanted to have her in order to beat her, to drag her by the hair around the *cubiculum* and to torment her. Once more he was seized by a terrible longing for her voice, figure, eyes, and he felt that he was ready to lie at her feet. [Q 129]

> But he also had moments in which he went pale with rage and delighted in thoughts of the debasement and torments that he would inflict on Ligia when he found her. [. . .] There were days in which he thought of the marks that a lash would leave on her rosy body, and at the same time he wanted to kiss the traces. It also came to him that he would be happy if he could kill her. [Q 185]

The history of Winicjusz’s and Ligia’s love is simultaneously an allegoric genealogy of the concept of love that is created by Christian culture, in order to give passion another language of words and gestures. Bohun is a victim of a Christian-courtly culture of repression. He is conscious that contact with the gentry has prepared a form for his feelings toward Helena. “Oy, if only I were a peasant, I would teach you reason with a whip to your white shoulders, and I would take my fill of your pulchritude without a priest” [OM II 21]. This invisible prohibition works, because Helena is, after all, at his mercy, but as he himself acknowledges: “Ne

200 J. Krzyżanowski, *Twórczość Henryka Sienkiewicza,* Warszawa 1973, p. 236.

choczu, ne mohu, ne zmiju!" (I don't want to, I can't, I'm no snake) [OM II 24].[201] Freud calls the ambivalence between a violent and an affectionate attitude the "affectionate current and the sensual current" in love, and he claims skeptically:

> There are only a very few educated people in whom the two currents of affection and sensuality have become properly fused; the man almost always feels his respect for the woman acting as a restriction on his sexual activity, and only develops full potency when he is with a debased sexual object.[202]

The path to resolving this dichotomy in *Quo Vadis* are lessons in the esthetics of love, which Petroniusz gives to Winicjusz. "'Be calm,' said Petroniusz, 'You have the cravings of a carpenter from Subura'" [Q 54]. Then he goes on to explain to him that one must create for oneself the love object in one's mind, irrespective of whether she really exists: "It is not enough to love; one must be able to love and one must be able to teach love" [Q 177]. Finally, in the letter in Chapter 15, he explains the difference between love and rapture, demonstrating that what Winicjusz's mind has created, is little more than a passive object of delight, a thing that evokes simple desire. But Petroniusz's lessons in the art of love are only partly effective. It is only Christian teaching that can accomplish true sublimation. Its operations begin the step-by-step transformation of desire so that Winicjusz's longings become "less blind and wild, and more joyous and affectionate. He felt in himself a boundless energy" [Q 212].

Sienkiewicz shows that the teaching of the soul's immortality does not by any means kill Eros, but, on the contrary, awakens him.[203] The object of love

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201 A portrait of pure desire appears seldom in Sienkiewicz's fiction. It does come up in an interesting form in *Na polu chwały*. In it, the author creates the figure of Marcjan Krzepecki, a grotesque, sarmatian Quasimodo crossed with Caliban. He represents a pure "capric" desire. "Sleepless nights, debauchery, drunkenness, and burning desires stamped their mark on him: he became thin; his shoulders bent, which made his already naturally long arms longer yet, so that his hands, quite beyond normal human proportions, hung right down to his knees. His huge body became like a gnarled block, and his short, bandy legs became even more bent from his wild horse riding. At the same time, the skin on his face took on a greenish paleness, and as a result of his falling cheeks, his bulging eyes and lips thrust out from the rest of it" [NPCH 170]. This Marcjan falls in love with a typical Sienkiewicz woman, Anuka – "in its own way, it is a passionate and beast-like love" [NPCH 168]. However, unlike Winicjusz, Marcjan fantasizes about his feelings' being reciprocated: "he delighted in the thought of that happy moment in which the young lady herself, all aflame and eager, would nestle in his embrace" [NPCH 168]. Unable to wait for that moment, he gives her a thorough beating.

202 S. Freud, "On the Universal Tendency to Debasement in the Sphere of Love," *Contributions to the Psychology of Love* (1912/1922).

203 In this, he to some extent shares Freud's view when he writes: "In times in which there were no difficulties standing in the way of sexual satisfaction, such as perhaps during the decline

now appears, to a large measure independent of desire, and therefore even more desired.

> it [the teaching] clad Ligia in some exceptional, ineffable beauty that in his heart gave birth to – besides love – respect, and to devotion – besides desire. [Q 298-299]

However, the co-existence of both states – desire and adoration – turns out to be risky. Winicjusz has not the verbal skill to express his honor and adoration; thus, in the face of linguistic impotence, he expresses Ligia's beauty by explaining the effects it has on his desire. Petroniusz, in turn, does not seem to desire Ligia at all, and only contemplates the beauty of her body. In this way, he kills her, not desiring her. He makes of her body a dead monument, which, in any case, the writer has created for it, since only he is able to recognize and name Ligia's beauty.

> [Petroniusz} noticed everything and appreciated everything: so, the rosy and clear face, and the fresh lips, as if made for kissing, and eyes blue as the azure of the oceans, and the alabaster of her brow, and the luxuriance of her dark hair with its gleams of amber or Corinthian copper in its waves, and the light neck, and the "divine" slope of her arms, and the whole figure that was lithe, slim, young with the youth of May and freshly blooming flowers. [Q 45]

Nothing results from this contemplation; it does not create an erotic relation between the characters, remaining only an act of esthetic reading without consequences. Petroniusz's estheticism is no competition for Winicjusz's growing idealism. The latter grows directly out of passion; it is a transformation of desire without which – in Sienkiewicz's view – no loving feeling can be born. The sensual origins of love are also experienced by Ligia when "she understood that the time might come in which his love would seize her and carry her off like a gale" [Q 293]. This is what happens because "to the heart of the flower entered in a venomous worm and began to roar" [Q 294]. Giving way to passion, she begins to dream of Winicjusz's kisses. These fantasies cause the Christian girl to have feelings of guilt; so "terrified by that thought and full of contempt for herself, she wept away the next night" [Q 295].

The erotic plot of *Quo Vadis* reflects the birth of a new discourse of love in Mediterranean culture. Christianity in its struggle with pagan dissoluteness paradoxically arrives to help the subject that is wearied with erotic liberty,

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of the ancient civilizations, love became worthless and life empty, and strong reaction-formations were required to re store indispensable affective values. In this connection it may be claimed that the ascetic current in Christianity created psychical values for love which pagan antiquity was never able to confer on it" ("On the Universal Tendency to Debasement in the Sphere of Love"). In his sufferings for love, Winicjusz becomes so beautiful that neither the dissolute Poppea not the vestal Rubia can take their eyes off him: "the cares and physical pain through which he had passed, had carved his features as if the delicate hand of a master sculptor had passed over them" [Q 337].

although at the start the character does not know what to do with this experience. It is striking that Sienkiewicz does not valorize returning desire with a procreative function. Differently from in the novellas, in *Pan Wołodyjowski*, *Bez dogmatu*, and *Rodzina Połanieckich*, he does not kill off one of the characters, but also does not allow their union to result in progeny. In that case, what happens with the desire that Winicjusz and Ligia feel for each other?

In this novel about the beginnings of Christianity, Sienkiewicz vigorously confronts religious doctrine with the reality of the earthly desires that, in the author's view, were recognized and incorporated by Christianity. Among other factors, this helped to secure its historical success. The dilemma of Christian teaching in relation to the pagan erotic tradition can be seen in the Kryspus story material. Kryspus represents the ascetic current hostile to life that is so strong and influential that only the authority of the apostle Paul can solve the question of whether it is possible to reconcile the love of Winicjusz and Ligia with the teaching and sacrifice of Christ. This is one of the central issues of the novel, and the author devoted a separate novella, "Na Olimpie" (On Olympus), to it. In this allegorical minor work, which recalls Herbert's *Rozwiązanie mitologii* (The Solution of Mythology), Sienkiewicz tells of the judgment passed by Peter and Paul on the old gods of Greece – "the gray hair, frowning brows, and the severe eyes" of the apostles do not promise anything good for the collection "of abandoned deities, forgotten, fearful, and awaiting a verdict of doom" ["Na Olimpie" D V 141]. Only two escape symbolic annihilation – Apollo and Aphrodite, that is art and love. Paul saves the latter. He "inclined toward a clump of lilies of the field, nipped off one of the chalices, and, touching her with it, said: 'Be henceforward as this flower – but live, o human Happiness!'" ["Na Olimpie" 144].

The touch of the lily, the symbolic flower of purity, stigmatizes erotic love and condemns it to infinite sublimations, to the life of an outlaw hiding in the guises of *agape* and *caritas*. This order of symbolic transformation governs the love story in *Quo vadis*, declaring that the aim of this love is death. Wincjusz's visions and dreams are permeated with emblems of death. "So it seemed to him that on some old, abandoned cemetery there arises a temple in the shape of a tower, in which Ligia is the priestess" [Q 278].

Despite differences, the logic of love in Sienkiewicz's works is the same irrespective of the text in question: love is a hostage to death; love is born and endures driven by fear of its own end, an end that tempts with the desire, so dangerous to life, that death (and not, for example, progeny) protect love from the brevity, the chaos, and the mutability of life. This vision of love, contrary perhaps to the author's intention, is shown to be beyond religion. Wincjusz and Ligia, provided with the promise of eternity that Christian teaching gives to their feelings, recall while still alive "Elysian shades." The narrator describes them

thus: “among the cypresses in Linus’s garden they grew pale like two statues. Not even the slightest wind moved their clothes” [Q 394].

But the double-dealing Sienkiewicz, recounting the death of Petroniusz and Eunice, reaches for almost identical formulae. So we see them, “leaning on each other, beautiful like two gods, they listened smiling and fading” [Q 688]. Disturbingly common to both pairs is their fantasy about death, which protects them from the world’s madness, but also from its even more terrifying, common run of things: birth and the loss of everything. The beginning and end of this dream is love – a feeling that concentrates in a sudden experience the painful constituents of life, which, suddenly recognized, result in a desire for death. The similarity of the linguistic means employed in both scenes does not elide the differences between the formulations of the theme discussed earlier. Describing Winicjusz’s and Ligia’s death-infected love, the author suppresses the girl’s beauty, blunts its appearance of metaphysical permanence, in other words, the body’s beauty which pretends to an eternal beauty. Already in the cemetery, when Marek watches her from hiding, Ligia, attending to the words of the apostle Paul, “seemed to him smaller than she was before, almost a child; he noticed too that she had become thinner. Her complexion was almost transparent; she seemed to him as a flower or a spirit” [Q 233-234]. At the end, however, “prison and illness extinguished in part her loveliness” [Q 655].

Quo Vadis is not the first Sienkiewicz text to engineer the suppression of the beauty of a beloved female protagonist. In the long short story “Hania” (1875), we trace three phases of the symbolic (although on the surface actual) transformation of the eponymous protagonist’s beauty. At the beginning she is a child, the narrator’s contemporary; he promises to look after her on the death of her parents. Imperceptibly, in the course of six months, a woman emerges out of the child. This stuns the male protagonist. “I looked at her, and my God! what had happened to this sixteen-year-old, frail, slim orphan in half a year. Before me stood an almost grown, or at least growing young woman. Her shape had filled out and curved wonderfully” [“Hania” D IV 64]. The arbitrary nature of this change points to other than realistic motivations in her presentation, although the narrator attempts to play down the surprising tempo of this change, explaining that it is typical of growing young women, of whom “several go to sleep in the evening a child, and wake up in the morning a maiden” [“Hania” D IV 64].

Love, jealousy, leaving home – in short, expressed and achieved passion is punished by the narrator. After an illness, Hania loses her beauty. The shock of the male protagonist at her beauty’s explosion is now repeated. Seeing her ugliness, “he suddenly felt weak and fainted like someone dead. Oh, how terribly disfigured she was!” [“Hania” 156]. After years spent in a nunnery, Hania regains her beauty, or, rather, obtains a new beauty: “in a black dress and in a white nunnery hat, she

was beautiful as never before, but already with the unearthly beauty that is more angelic than human" ["Hania" 158].

We can accept the improbability of the plot turns in "Hania" by pointing to the novella's moralizing tendency. But the continued presence of similar moves on the part of the author, and that in considerably more subtle and complex plot configurations, allows us to see in this something much more than conventional moralizing on the subject of "bad love." Ligia's progressive loss of beauty is a replica of the motif in "Hania." Here the loss of beauty is compensated for by religion, which reminds the protagonists that it is only through love and faith that they can become independent of the now and of nothingness. In tragic love, Winicjusz discovers an ability to tame his fear of death, a gentle forerunner of non-existence, through which he even begins to crave that death. Because of love, "he had already had a foretaste of life beyond the grave [. . .] and he smiled at that thought as if at happiness" [Q 628-629]. Winicjusz, a soldier of scarcely complicated intellect, experiences amazement that through love it is possible while still alive "to feel such sweet and unearthly peace, as if already Sleep and Death were healing the soul" [Q 395]. This echoes Ligia's dream of love; in Ligia "there were also no desires nor hope apart from the hope of life beyond the grave" {Q 629]. The love that tugs toward death expresses a hunger for eternity, a hunger that is also experienced by Leon Płoszowski, who, holding the dying Ania by the hand, has the feeling that he is united with her in "a marriage more enduring than all worldly ones" [BD 430].

The idealization of feelings and the desire for eternity do not mean that sensuality falls silent. The very passion with which the characters speak of their longing for death seems to smack of a perverse necrophilia, since the love object attains its greatest value for the lover only when it is dying or dead. Winicjusz, when he hears of the plan to free Ligia from prison by simulating her death, insists: "I must be there. I will take her from the tomb myself" [Q 580]. In Sienkiewicz, a fantasy of death is almost always accompanied by the increasing sensuality of the world that is being rejected. Above all, as an unconscious desire to negate the knowledge that is borne for the living by the surveyed body. Płoszowski acknowledges the parallelism of mourning and desire, when he writes of his fantasies regarding the Davis woman.

> . . . despite fresh pain, I felt that between me and that woman it was coming to some change in our relationship. I became angry with myself that but the day after my father's death I could find space in my thoughts for such a consciousness. But I had it. [BD 87]

Earlier Michał Wołodyjowski experiences the inappropriate closeness of mourning and fresh desire. In the contemporary novel, which has as its protagonist a semi-

decadent,[204] there is no longer any space for pangs of conscience. The difference is marginal, for it is exclusively a result of a change in genre convention between the two novels. It is still the same knot that Sienkiewicz always twists out of desire and death, a knot that his protagonists always attempt to defeat in vain. Those who are in love with a child discover that its maturation is unavoidable; this means that little girls share the fate of women who are touched by the death that is at the very center of every erotic relation. Hysteria creeps into the work of male grief, and that hysteria exposes the real object of regret – the man who feels himself deceived by the dead woman. He experiences her death as if it were betrayal, a final abandonment, one that seems to him – as Połaniecki puts it sharply after Litka's death – "a heart-felt wrong done by that dead body, which remains deaf to our anguish, to our calling out" [RP 197]. The anticipation of these deaths has, however, another rather depressing backdrop. The mortality of the adored and desired body increases its attractiveness even further. Mourning begins even before real death comes, and instead of the sequence of death-consolation, there remains the excruciating co-existence of two experiences, neither of which wants to leave the figure's thoughts.

Eroticism and death reveal their proximity at the least expected moments, as if the text thickens in those scenes that especially depict the powerful operation of nature in the human body. Sienkiewicz most suggestively constructs this closeness in the picture of the dying Litka. "The young girl's body became taut in a convulsion and her eyes turned up into her head" [RP 164]. The connotations of this movement point in two directions, as meanings do in a homonym. Death takes possession of Litka, giving her body a spasmodic shape, as in Manuel Niklaus's famous engraving *Death and the Maiden*, in which in a lustful gesture a skeleton embraces a young girl, placing its hand on her thigh.[205]

In *Krzyżacy*, an anonymous crowd of witnesses watches Zbyszko's abortive execution. The passion of men and women is fed by the picture of love that has had a brush with death and draws from that a dark energy that works like a powerful aphrodisiac. On the street, there is an explosion of loving enthusiasm because "the sight so emotionally enflamed the townswomen that several threw themselves into the embraces of their lovers, declaring that if only they should deserve death, they would also be set free" [K I 110]. Ligia is affected in a similar way by the thought of the death and condemnation that await Winicjusz as a pagan; "that judgment of doom that hangs over him, instead of making him repellent to her, through compassion itself makes him still dearer to her" [Q 299]. In *Potop*, Krzych

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204 See: A. Rozpłochowska, "Dekadentyzm utracony," *Pamiętnik Literacki* 2006, 4, pp. 128–129.

205 In the drawing by Munch with the same title (1893), it is the girl who is dominant, passionately embracing the skeleton.

Domaszewicz, when he looks at the wounded Kmicic, is amazed that Oleńka was not afraid to bleed, and ascribes that to her merciful heart, whereas when she sees Andrzej's blood "she grew pale and her eyes shimmered" [P I 123]. The woman's senses feed on imaginings of war, wounds, and even death, which may be her beloved's portion. As the thought of male death in war or in a duel, the fear of loss is mixed with arousal. When in *Legiony*, Marek confesses to Klarybella his decision to join Dąbrowski's troops, the girl is seized by a wave of excitation that rather discountenances her.

> "I am young, but I wish to sacrifice my blood for my country." The young woman's breasts began to heave more vigorously. [L 43]

With barely suppressed irony, the narrator in *Legiony* tells how Pani Cywińska hastens to tell the protagonists of Plichta's sudden death: "with tears in her eyes, but at the same time with that certain eagerness which is always shown by women who look after the sick, when they can announce good or bad news, she began to whisper, 'It's bad! perhaps he won't live till evening'" [L 39].

The discovery that the source of the fear of death is femininity itself, is located by Sienkiewicz in the trap of eroticism. He expresses it most clearly in the seemingly comic novella "Ta Trzecia" (That Third One). One of the three women who fascinate the protagonist is the beautiful Helena. When Władek sees her for the first time, it seems to him that "with her goes poetry, goes music, goes the spring, goes delight and love" ["Ta trzecia" D VI 69]. Very soon he learns that this beauty has a nickname, "Miss-Widow," because her husband "died at their sugar supper" ["Ta trzecia" 69]. "The sugar supper" – according to Linde – is a "supper laid out in the bride and groom's bed for the matchmakers and guests who conduct them to their bedding."[206] The old Kołczanowski meets his death before it comes to the "bedding," but there is no doubt that we are dealing here with a "sweet death," in the lap of a beautiful twenty-two-year-old woman. This motif is extended in a picture by Światecki, a friend of Władek's, who obsessively paints "corpses." His picture, "The Last Meeting," "presents a young man and a young woman lying on a dissecting-room table" ["Ta trzecia" 66]. The dissecting-room table suggests the nakedness of the dead, which is not depicted, and thus once again integrates eroticism and death.[207]

When we trace the series of interweaving images of eroticism and death, we can suggest that Sienkiewicz is trying to disarm that dangerous fantasy of

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206 S.B. Linde, *Słownik języka polskiego*, Warszawa 1951, vol. I (A–F), p. 331.

207 If it were not for the date of the novel's writing (1888), one could suspect inspiration for this motif was the famous picture by Gabriel von Max, "The Anatomist" (1896), which depicts the body of a beautiful woman on a dissecting table and the anatomist of the title, who, deep in thought, is uncovering her breast.

Romanticism, taken over and fanned higher by modernist literature. Thus his main characters react in two ways: with a violent turn toward another object (Krysia, Davisowa, Marynia, Jagienka, Anney), or they seek escape in a regressive fantasy of desire-free feelings for young girls (Lilian, Baśka, Litka, Danusia, Nel).

The first strategy, although it usually closes his plots, does not bring complete relief. Later feelings cannot completely put to rest the painful knowledge that the earlier loss has brought. On the contrary, those who have learned that love makes the lover sensitive to the fragile condition of its object do not naively give themselves over to the force of their feelings, but wish to use them for at least a temporary "gain" of time. The author, who lays his own problems on his characters, often lends them the support of the narrator, who confirms the reality of their dreams and obsessions. The protagonists in love in alliance with the narrator try hard to reverse the direction of their feelings, so that they are not identical with the direction of everything that is material. To put it differently, they turn already mature, beloved women from the road to death. This happens in scenes that seemingly contain nothing dramatic, such as, for example, the dream of Połaniecki who "imagined that Marynia is listening along with him to *Träumerei* with her hands in his, with her head on his chest, loving deeply and beloved above all else in the world" [RP 114]. To the already well-known motif of love's endurance, which suspends the laws of the real world, there is added a musical motif: the *Träumerei*, the most famous among Schumann's *Kinderszenen*, of which the composer wrote to Clara that they are "scenes of childhood, short, affectionate, and happy – like our future".[208]

The dream bursts that love will restore to the loved one the innocence of childhood. The scene of the fantasy's crisis is usually a wedding, which is, in fact, a metonym of the wedding night – of the sexual act that forcibly tears off the "childish masks" from the adult male protagonists, and then the female protagonists arouse nothing less than abhorrence in them. (Let us recall here Wołodyjowski's reflection – "where did I have my eyes?" – at the sight of the pregnant Krzysia.) Marynia's appearance on her wedding day reminds Stach of the dead Litka. However, in this observation, his amazement at Marynia's sudden ugliness dominates. "She seemed to him moreover more ugly than usual, because the wedding garland only exceptionally suits a woman's face, and, in addition, unease and high emotion had reddened her face, which against the white looked even redder than it really was" [RP 280].

But this is nothing new: Marynia joins Hania, Krzysia, and Ligia, but suddenly time accelerates, too, for the heroine of *Na polu chwały*. On the very day of her engagement to Pągowski, Anulka Sienińska "became suddenly, it seemed, several

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208 Quoted in H. Swolkień, *Robert Schumann*, Warszawa 1973, p. 120.

years older, and had in her some kind of silent seriousness" [NPCH 242]. The touch of a fulfilled eroticism also destroys the beauty of the heroine of *Legiony*; thus, the nearer Klarybella comes to her marriage, the uglier she becomes.

> In the first moment, she seemed to Marek older and less beautiful, because the air of early spring has brought her forehead out in spots, and the whitening powder was not able to cover them up properly. [L 41][209]

It is not the most important thing whose wife a woman is, but the very fact of marriage, which symbolizes death in life, or at least an affiliation to death, which is entailed in consent to taking on the social and biological function of a wife and mother. The terror of this self-abandonment fills the beloved husband, who anticipates loss, discovering the deceit of love that plays with the bodies of individuals who dream of eternity. So the age of the heroines is irrelevant: children may become in an instant mature women, and mature heroines regress suddenly into childhood. In the novel *Legiony*, Ania gets married right after her father's death, kneeling "in a garland twisted from rue taken from a plant pot, but in a black, mourning dress" [L 93]. Her description mixes emblems of affirmation and mourning. It is a critical point, a border between worlds, at which her father's death keeps her for a moment. Detained at the edge, she bids farewell to childhood, in the overlapping rituals of wedding and mourning. The hesitation in the significance of her clothing means that her betrothed looks at her "with such a friendly glance as one bestows on a beloved but troublesome child" [L 93]. As he did earlier, Sienkiewicz objectifies this state, and makes sure we do not think that a man's loving gaze is falsifying this image. Thus, Marek confirms Anusia's childishness.

> She is still a child. After supper Stanisław took her in his arms and carried her round the room; she seemed to me then like a thirteen-year-old girl, although I know she's sixteen. [L95]

The subject defends himself against loss, trying to deny the biological reality of the body, the expansion of eroticism, which attempts as quickly as possible to achieve the procreational function of the species. Hence the opposition between mature and childish femininity is frequently interiorized in descriptions of the same figure. Hysterical fear of the mortal basis of eroticism means that even such a daemon of fertility as Helena is transformed – after changing clothes and cutting her hair – into her own opposite. "A very shapely and maidenly young Cossack," says Zagoba of her [OM I 259]. adding: "In Istanbul I saw some very pretty boys, but never one like this" [OM I 281].

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209 In his strange, anti-matrimonial passion, Sienkiewicz seems to be the heir to the view of the hermit in Mickiewicz's *Dziady*, Part IV. "When they cry out to the girl: wife, / She's already buried alive."

In Sienkiewicz's writing, the general division into sensual and ideal femininity seems a simplification. Although the characteristic types of beauty of his heroines are very obvious, nonetheless sensuality is their common feature, which in certain circumstances is arbitrarily displaced or suppressed by the author. Thanks to the narrator's use of indirect speech, the depictions of female figures who suddenly look like little girls appear to the reader as a result of the desires and fears of the male protagonists. They displace the heroines' expansive sensuality by trying to force them back into the figures of little girls – to a sexual phase that is non-functional from the point of view of the species. These longings, however, remain unsatisfied and are finally abandoned. Conscious of the dangers of "Gnostic heresy," Sienkiewicz finally forces his heroes to choose between the egoistic desire for eternal love and the duties owed to family and nation.

In accordance with this framework, love for Litka and Danusia constitutes the subjectivity of the heroes who love them, for it allows them to define their particularity in the world of the novel, and also to realize that beyond history they too have their fates. The fatalism of their love is nonetheless destructive in relation to the social bonds that they should forge. The endurance and indulgence in feelings for child-like heroines is connected with a crossing of boundaries: of customs, law, politics, morality, and family. And not only by Połaniecki. Zbyszko, for love of Danusia, is prepared to despise the laws of knighthood and family.

> I would go after her beyond all the rivers and all the mountains, to the Germans and to the Tartars, for there is no other like her in the wide world. Let my uncle stay in Bogdaniec, but I will take the road toward her. . . . [K I 165]

"The temptation of Tristan" that Zbyszko gives in to is – in terms of the novel's ideology – dangerous individualism, an egoistic desire for his own happiness, even at the cost of forgetting his duties to his family, his lands, and the state; it is a lack of care for the future.

Sienkiewicz splendidly plays out the conflict between literary and tribal myth through the conventional deployment, it seems, of a love plot. Placing the novel's action against a background of the nation's genealogy, he does not conceal how important the function of myths is for the gentry's on-going creation of a community.[210] That is why Jagienka does not triumph over Danusia exclusively because of her body's sensual splendor (a body like that rather terrifies, as it is a sensual mask of death), but she receives support from a powerful symbolic discourse, into which images of her fertile body are harmoniously woven. It

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210 Lech Ludorowski noted, but did not discuss, this paradox: "in the center of the family configuration is situated a figure in the role of a senior: father, grandfather, and patriarch" ("Saga rycerzy bogdanieckich," w: *W stulecie „Krzyżaków" Henryka Sienkiewicza,* ed. L. Ludorowski and H. Ludorowska, Kielce 2000, p. 228).

is a discourse of the earth, vegetation, family, and nation. As if the power of these symbols were not enough, the author gives them further allies, masters of persuasion: Zagłoba in *Pan Wołodyjowski*, Maciek and the abbot in *Krzyżacy*. The abbot, furious with Zbyszko that he will not break his vows to Danusia, cries out: "Your vows are chaff, and I am the wind – do you understand!" [K I 185].[211]

This is an unusually suggestive passage for an understanding of the symbolism of gender in Sienkiewicz's writing. It shows clearly a conviction of the overriding principle that is the necessity of perpetuating biological life, even if that entails the contravention of other rights. All actions are permissible to achieve the grim symmetry of both phantasms. In the symbolic war that we observe in *Krzyżacy*, impulse finally overrides desire, integrating the characters with the main symbol of the novel, that is earth, a breeding and vegetating indifference. Konopnicka understood this in a brilliant fashion, pointing out that the most important symbol and, at the same time, the concealed protagonist of *Krzyżacy*, is the earth[212] – "in Sienkiewicz's work it is, above all, the ground under the feet of life, it is the source of life, and the right to life. What holds to the earth and abides in it – that is life."[213] In her formulation, the power of the "earth" is only a hypostasis of a symbol that has been made banal by a hundred repetitions. This amoral "principle of life" does not call up a naïve affirmation of "life in accordance with the laws of nature," but it signals the difficulty of a reflection that tries to reconcile the desire for individual happiness with the bitter experience of the dissolution of the individual unit within the general law of nature.[214]

In the language of literature, this is a conflict between two narratives of death. That of the first death, which is the final one, the only one, one's own, and which is the scandal of the end of a unique existence. The second constitutes an augury of the birth of new life, which takes the space abandoned by the dead person. Two fears – simultaneously historical and universal – are in dispute in the novel, the

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211 It is interesting to note that Bogusław says the same of Grandfather Billewicz's will. "– I mock your noble wills! – said the Duke. – I spit on your noble wills! do you understand! . . ." [P III 205].

212 M. Konopnicka, "O *Krzyżakach*," in: *O „Krzyżakach" Henryka Sienkiewicza*, ed. T. Jodełka, Warszawa 1958, p. 8.

213 Ibid, p. 10.

214 After the death of her son Tadeusz, Konopnicka wrote movingly in a letter to Teofil Lenartowicz: "And all this together – that unquiet road, that illness, from the beginning of which one knows that it will end dreadfully, that serious operation that keeps your son for three hours under the knife – and that immeasurably silent death – and those tears in your eyes that already stare into eternity – that earth that takes your child by the older, better law of the universal mother – and that grave mound, very dear and very far off – and those nights without sleep – and that sadness without consolation – everything that is called life" (qtd. in M. Szypowska, *Konopnicka jakiej nie znamy*, Warszawa 1990, p. 346).

hidden, liberated, modern fear of annihilation, the melting of the individual into species duty, and the fear of the nation's demographic catastrophe, symbolized in the novel by Maciek's fear of the extinction of the Grady family.

Abandoning his mourning, Zbyszko abandons himself, giving himself over to the course of life. Slavoj Žižek writes that impulse demands another body, one that is not dead.[215] By force of this law, Zbyszko is returned to Jagienka, to whom in the order of the real he has always belonged. Symbolically, he returns "to his place": from a knightly heaven (death as a result of dream, love, vengeance) to earth (death is the endurance of the family, a settled life, breeding, age). Giving up "oneself" occurs at the moment of overcoming the experience of loss; the triumph over despair is a seeming one because the turn to a new love is an action undertaken against one's own life in the name of life as a whole.

Płoszowski accurately expresses this paradox in two seemingly contradictory judgments. "Love firmly brings back childhood to us," he says of men who have fallen in love a second time [BD 58]. However, a little later he adds sarcastically that "Love even conquers death, but it is the species alone that it protects from it" [BD 65]. He points out here how a man, possessed by fear of death, desires the happiness promised by the great myths of the West. In love for an ideal woman he sees his own exceptionality, but when he experiences desire for her, he sees himself as a component of instincts and wants that are, at bottom, not his own. Union with a woman, children – Sienkiewicz seems to assert – is a bother of speaking for life, a bother compelled by some compromise in relation to reality and his own skepticism; it is an attempt practically to reconcile his own fate with the course of things.

The encounter of these two erotic plots is openly ideological, its driving force is constituted by the existential consciousness of the mortality of the individual. Although in the historical novels it is fear of losing family that dominates, and in the contemporary novels it is that of losing the individual, nonetheless each of the erotic relations that fall to the share of Sienkiewicz's characters internalizes the presence of both ideas. There is no way, for sure, to delineate which idea is victorious in the writer's mind. *Połaniecki* can be set against *Bez dogmatu*, *Ogniem i mieczem* against *Pan Wołodyjowski*, and *Krzyżcy* against *Quo Vadis*. However, one must acknowledge that – irrespective of the option – Sienkiewicz is attempting to exorcize from death the terror of nothingness, not so much by building bridges to other worlds, but by a tight coupling of life and death, as a result of which death is in his work almost always productive, and gives an impulse toward a more powerful desire for life.

215 S. Žižek, *Przekleństwo fantazji*, trans. A. Chmielewski, Wrocław 2001, p. 49.

Sienkiewicz never renounced his positivist education, especially its anti-metaphysical orientation.[216] Therefore he does not believe that an antidote for "death sickness" can be found outside reality. There awaits for us there "religion or the banality of death" – as Połaniecki sums up his own existential dilemmas. As opposed to his average hero, the writer has something else at his disposal – literary talent. Literature, as Julia Kristeva writes, may perhaps replace prayer in its critical and dangerous place: there where nonsense acquires meaning, but death still seems visible and alive.[217] This is the key to Sienkiewicz's esthetics – his rarely expressed conviction that beauty has the ability to reconcile the human being to existence. That is why he draws images of women's deaths, making the reader tremble, both with terror and pleasure. Death is transformed into an image, for otherwise it would be unbearable, as something exclusively experienced. Régis Debray notes that the sight of death is shocking to such a degree that it evokes an immediate reaction and forces human beings to shape an image of the unnameable, to create a double of a dead one in order to keep him/her alive, and thus not to see this "unknown something," not to see oneself as "almost nothing." He calls this a meaningful inscription, a ritualization of the abyss in front of a mirrored reflection.[218]

Through literature, Sienkiewicz creates an image of a dead woman, who does not frighten us, for although we have her before our eyes, the medium of language sets us apart from her reality, and thus she becomes possible to bear. A text about death protects us from images of the devastation of the female body through death, which turns her into a "rotten thing" [RP 286]. The beauty of those figures is enhanced because the author keeps the young female body at the threshold of decomposition and decay, which have power over real bodies. This is it indeed (for what else?) that the author has at his disposal: literature – the creation of images of the dead, "inscriptions of the abyss." He belongs to the generation that discovered that for modern human beings it is not religion, but technology and beauty that take on the task of bidding farewell to fear of death.

At this point, we fall into the trap of the interpretative circle. It is not the man's death that most powerfully calls up metaphysical fears, but the dead young woman. In Sienkiewicz's work, the man is primarily the being that brings death. He uses the woman, as his opposite, to stave off death. In the meantime, that which was supposed to provide temporary respite in the despairing dream of permanence,

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216 Tadeusz Bujnicki is right when in the title of his book (*Pozytywista Sienkiewicz* [Sienkiewicz, the Positivist], Kraków 2007) he emphasizes that there is no way to eliminate from Sienkiewicz's world view a Positivist position in relation to knowledge.

217 J. Kristeva, "'Martwy Chrystus' Holbeina," trans. R. Lis, in: *Wymiary śmierci*, ed. S. Rosiek, Gdańsk 2002, p. 307.

218 R. Debray, "Narodziny przez śmierć," trans. M. Ochab, in: *Wymiary śmierci*, pp. 250–251.

is dead itself. In Sienkiewicz's works, death and the woman belong to the same paradigm, irrespective of whether it is a femininity idealized to the point of incorporeality, or – on the contrary – idealized in terms of the senses and fertility. Since, therefore, the creation of an image, that is simply art, is simultaneously a defense against and a revelation of the mortal content of eroticism, that means that what was supposed to dismiss fear becomes itself the source of fear, and so forever, or at least throughout Sienkiewicz's entire output. So what is it all about? Where is this consolation that lies in art, which, it is true, estheticizes death, but simultaneously does not allow us to forget it?

A circle, yes – but not a vicious one. The stubborn presence of female death in Sienkiewicz's work, which becomes even more prominent after the death of his wife (19 October 1885), recalls the famous *fort-da* game described by Freud in "Beyond the Pleasure Principle." Here the game of losing the mother reconciles the child to traumatic experience, and – which is equally important – makes the child the subject of this loss; for it is the child that throws away and pulls back the reel of thread, symbolizing the departing mother.[219]

Sienkiewicz stubbornly calls into existence young or even child-like female figures, whom he then kills off. He is using literature in its double function: he creates the image of the dead body, and thus in the creative act, he triumphs for a moment both over death as well as the femininity that is the cause of this death. In this simulation, it is he that takes on the decisive role – as an author, narrator, and figure suffering after the death of these female characters (Włodyjowski, Płoszowski, Połaniecki, etc.). However, on another level, he is conducting a peculiar "training program for loss," in the final analysis, not just for the death of a woman whom he loved, but for his own death too. Literature is here something like a Stoic exercise in dying. In this way, the dream of death, the Freudian death instinct, the fear and the temptation of non-existence – these take on the shape of the female.

A reading of the symbolism of these repetitions leads to Sienkiewicz's realism, understood not only in terms of the mimetic effectiveness of an image, but in the Lacanian understanding of reality as that which returns to its place. After military and sentimental ups-and-downs, Sienkiewicz's characters end up in a woman's lap. This reconciliation with femininity is finally an acceptance of one's own mortality, even in the case of heroic protagonists like Skrzetulski and Wołodyjowski. In this context, Sienkiewicz seems wiser than many modernist mythographers of femininity. In his works, the two idealized types of female figures are revealed as products of male self-deception, and even of the self-deception of

219 We know that the child was Freud's oldest grandson, Ernest, but the essay was written in 1919, a few months before the death of his beloved daughter, the twenty-year-old Sophie. See, for example: E. Bronfen, *Over Her Dead Body*, op. cit., p. 18.

culture in general. For they are – as great art and great psychoanalysis demonstrate – death's masks. The first promises the fulfillment of the dream of one's own individuality and subjectivity, an eternal love despite and counter to the body. The second promises – through fertility and progeny – extensive endurance on the earth, liberation from the torments of individuality in the continuity of family and nation, both integrated with one's native soil. Sienkiewicz's phantasms of femininity are revealed as a human longing to survive in the other, to transcend oneself, to create a whole. Both phantasms of femininity are creations of what the subject – let us call him/her for the moment the Sienkiewiczian subject – wants to conceal, that is the recognition that he/she is simultaneously the subject of desire and the object of impulse.[220] Throughout his output Sienkiewicz fantasizes about the possibility of avoiding this dichotomy; he creates the illusion of a "third sex," an impossible figure, "with a young girl's face and the allures of a woman" [BD 305].[221]

* * *

There are many reasons to conclude our discussion of the symbolism of dead women here. Like all writers, Sienkiewicz makes literature out of what is gone forever, and of what is fabricated (Eco). In his own way, he makes women an imponderable ("with a young girl's face and the allures of a woman"). However I am made uneasy by the thought that I am using analytical rhetoric to mask my own helplessness. Does this imponderable not constitute a pathetic attempt to put aside explanations that are too simple or too vulgar? Unreconciled, I return once more to this key point in my argument in the company of an artist who is surprisingly close to Sienkiewicz. I mean here Balthus. Despite huge differences, they are joined by a traditionally understood beauty – that specific "classicism" of their work – but also by their gentry background, that peculiar cult of Pasek and Słowacki in the Kłossowscy family (Balthus's mother's given name was Baladine). This is not, however, the most important; more important is the motif, constant in Balthus's pictures, of perverse little girls, whose controversial erotic nature provoked questions among critics as to the painter's intentions. Balthus responded:

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220 See: S. Žižek, *Przekleństwo fantazji*, op. cit., p. 54.

221 This is not, however, a synthesis that brings together such distant qualities, as Bogdan Mazan suggests: "For Hajduczek was a creation spun out of the longings of the writer and the man for a woman who could combine the features of Helena, Oleńka, and Anusia Borzobohata with an eternal girlishness or even childishness" (B. Mazan, "*Impresjonizm" Trylogii Henryka Sienkiewicza*, Łódź 1993, p. 85).

> I think that the eroticism that one can find in my pictures is in the eye, the thoughts, or the imagination of the person who looks at those pictures. Saint Paul said that to the pure all things are pure.[222]

Balthus, because of the timelessness of the picture, holds these figures forever. Sienkiewicz cannot hold them without interrupting the narrative; so he kills them off at the last moment, in a state of perfection that – according to both Balthus and Sienkiewicz – is female maturation, that ideal stage of existence, which is not solely a result of physical beauty, but also of the fact that the bodies of these young girls do not yet require the male eye, and that they are not burdened with responsibility for their own attractiveness. Eroticism is in the eye of the beholding man, and does not touch the object that is independent of him, because there is no exchange of glances. The male eye is not yet a mirror for young girls. "My Alice does not go through the looking glass" is how Balthus defines this state.

So perhaps it is really so, as Kristeva puts it, that – let us repeat here – literature replaces prayer in its critical and dangerous place: there where nonsense takes on meaning, and death seems visible and alive. Art strengthened by a religious concept of creation is no longer a litany of helplessness or a plea for delay or reversal of fate. On the contrary, it is a splendid gesture of holding back change by presenting its culmination, in the place from which the real fall into time begins. In Sienkiewicz's writing, this function of literature may appear as an assertion of the right to death, which is expressed in maintaining life in a shape or form in which biology is no longer dominant (although its pitiless operation is borne witness to and presented), but in which, rather, the principles of art are dominant. Art – differently from religion – does not turn away from the body, but constantly knowing its beauty and poverty, extracts permanence from the very heart of the element of transience. Even if it is a delusion, so what? – declares Sienkiewicz in the words of his average protagonist – "since even from the cellar of the grave they are able to draw juices for life" [RP 179].[223]

Held in the culmination of childhood, the girl figures of Sienkiewicz and Balthus represent a dream of love for a being that, though human, for a moment is not subject to the body's laws and time's operation. This is a fantasy of the real

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222 Balthus, *Pod prąd. Rozmowy z Constanzem Constantinim*, trans. J.M. Kłoczowski, Warszawa 2004, p. 70.

223 We mistrust the rhetoric of the conclusion of this argument. In the novella "Lux in tenebris lucet" we find the contrary opinion. The novella's hero, the sculptor Kamionka, cannot free himself from memories of his dead wife. From these musings, his thoughts draw "nourishment, just as a parasitic plant draws nourishment from the trunk on which it lives. But from this kind of recollection, the human plant can only take poisoned juices, composed of regret and great worry" [DZ VI 106]. And that reflection of the commentator bites its own tail.

end of the love's mourning, an ending that would come with the removal of the difference between a living body and a dead one. Is such a state to be thought of other than as the death of both lovers, the death that crowns classic love stories? Yes, on condition that this will be an eroticism beyond sex, "a procreation in beauty."

> – According to a French journal, you are supposed to have said that you always painted only angels. Is that true?
> – Yes, I think that's true.
> – Angels who are just a little perverse?
> – Why? It's you who are perverse! Why should angels be perverse just because they're angels? Whatever may be said – in the past and today – about my pictures, I am a religious painter.[224]

With Sienkiewicz too, women-angels fill the worlds of the stories and novels, not only literally, like the female protagonists who are called thus in *Bez dogmatu* and *Na polu chwały*. Lilian "had eyes that were strangely shining, hair that was a little disorderly, and when she sang piously, she was so like an angel that you could almost want to pray to her" ["Przez stepy" D III 95]. Marysia, who has been left behind in Poland, visits Zdanoborski in his dreams – "all in white with angel's wings on her back with which she kept the sweltering heat from my head" ["Niewola tatarska" D V 29]. Jenny's face "is simply angelic" ["Orso" D III 162]. Met again after several years, Hania seems to the narrator "more angelic than human" ["Hania" 158]. Kamionka's dead wife, who has come from the other world to seek the sculptor's soul. "smiled at him with an angelic smile" ["Lux in tenebris lucet" D VI 113]. The basis of this signification is a straightforward and conventional idealization. The name "angel" given by Sienkiewicz to his female characters fails to cast a spell over their sex, attempting to liberate them (for the purposes of male fantasy) from the threat of erotic difference.

This strategy is revealed by a figure whose name seems to call up femininity in its sexual and sinful symbolism. This is the protagonist of "Ta trzecia," the actress Ewa Adami. The male protagonist, who is in love with her, assures us, despite the five years she has spent in the demoralizing atmosphere of the theater, that "she remained pure in the entire meaning of that word" ["Ta trzecia" D VI 71]. The "entire meaning of that word" also encompasses her given name and her family name, a simple, inverted anagram containing the names "Adam i [and] Ewa." Choosing "that third," instead of Kazia or Helena, the protagonist of the story chooses the "third gender," of which Plato writes in the *Symposium* that "The sexes were not two as they are now, but originally three in number; there was man, woman, and the union of the two, having a name corresponding to this

224 Balthus, *Pod prąd*, op. cit., pp. 148-149.

double nature, which had once a real existence, but is now lost, and the word 'Androgynous' is only preserved as a term of reproach."[225]

The harmony of this allusion is dazzling. The dream of love for a perfect being (angelic, existing beyond the dualism of gender), drawn from Plato's classical dialog on the origins of love, is embodied in the love of a painter for an actress. The idea, thus, acquires an ironic counterpoint, which makes it possible to reflect on the subject and to present the philosophical abstraction incomparably better than Plato did when he created a peculiar, limping creature with two faces and as many pairs of hands and feet.[226] The "third gender" is in Sienkiewicz's work the name of an actress, and therefore a synonym for his literary games with the faces of gender: dislocations, transgressions, masks, disguises, through which art is able to compensate for the hindrances that reality imposes on the dream.

"Ta trzecia," written in the same year in which the *Trylogia* was completed, constitutes a supplement to Michał Wołodyjowski's mournful narrative of love and death. Joined they create a whole: the fantasy of the subject who experiences the loss of a loved object and sees the source of his sufferings in the very being of love. The gift of fiction allows Sienkiewicz to bring back what has been lost forever and to think the unreal: his own death in the eyes of a loved woman, and a love for an angel freed from the trap of erotic difference.

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225 Plato, *Symposium*, trans. Benjamin Jowett (1871).
226 Ibid.

Zagłoba's Laughter

– Is it possible that *in universo* I alone am not drunk?
(*Ogniem i mieczem*)

1. "An unfamiliar man with the brazen face of a brawler and a drunk"

Sienkiewicz designed an attentive reader. The essential introduction of Zagłoba into the plot of the novel takes place when he decides to be a part of Bohun's campaign against the Kurcewiczes. The author knew that Zagłoba's decision to accompany Bohun to Rozłogi might seem strange and incomprehensible to the reader. Chmielnicki's rebellion is rising behind his back, the slaughter of the nobles and gentry, from which not even Bohun's company could save him, had started, and he, instead of fleeing to the safety of the hetman's armies, sets off with the Cossacks on a foray. And a bold one indeed! Their target is after all Helena Kurcewiczówna, cousin of the terrible Prince Jeremi.

Right from the very start the author provides us with an inconsistency in the doings of the character, whose nature does not fit in with his actions. Not only that, the narrator himself, who in such cases should explain to the reader the motives behind the characters' decisions, confesses ignorance in this matter; it even seems that he is surprised by the author when trying to "guess" the enigmatic motives for the character's undertakings.[227]

> Pan Zagłoba could indeed take shelter in the hetmans' camp, but he had his reasons, for which he did not do so. Was it a condemnation for some murder, or maybe an irregularity in the accounts, he alone knew; enough that he did not want to show his face. He felt so sorry to leave Czehryn! He felt so good there, no one asked any questions there. [OM I 234]

227 Marcel Muller in his book dedicated to Proust's narrative defines this case of the narrator's "ignorance" as the "alibi of a novelist." The temporary autonomy of the character is testimony to the creator's ignoring the narrator, but also allows the writer to evade the unwelcome consequences of certain creative moves (M. Muller, *Les voix narratives dans La recherche du temps perdu*, Genéve 1983, pp. 123–124).

Zagłoba predicts Bohun's destination and intentions as well as the risk of raiding a gentry house and of kidnapping a relative of Prince Jeremi: "If I go with Bohun, then Wiśniowiecki will skin me; if I leave Bohun, then the peasants will kill me" [OM I 239].

Witnessing how Skrzetuski deals with Czapliński, he probably would not want him as an enemy. Therefore, on his way he devises a plan to evade the trap, as the narrator informs the reader briefly, assuming the position of someone bound to the guesses of an observer who sees that Zagłoba "was thinking hard; maybe he was putting together a way out of this whole situation" [OM I 239]. A few signs in the behaviour of the character suggest that in the end he has to make a decision, because he repeats over and over again: "Yes, yes, there is no other way!" [OM I 240]. As one might guess, Zagłoba then decides to kidnap Helena. The decision is not the result of sympathy for her fate (he has not even seen the girl), but only out of concern for his own life. Helena is a gift from heaven, giving him a chance to avoid punishment. As the relative of Jeremi and the lover of the most loyal soldier of the prince, Helena is to Zagłoba a kind of safe-conduct, which can save his skin from past and recent transgressions (probably, unenforced sentences that hang over him, this current participation in the raid on a noble house). Helena herself thinks that he was "sent by God for her protection" [OM I 259]. A perusal of this very well-known scene from *Ogniem i mieczem* protects us from a tendency toward sentimental interpretations of the characters' actions, and in relation to the character of Zagłoba gives a strong argument against criticisms of the inconsistent and contradictory creation of this character.[228] The narrative turns out to be "vigilant" to the danger of contradiction, which would contravene the readability of the text.

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228 A contradiction in the creation of the character takes place when we recognize in it a "selfless intervention on behalf of Helena Kurcewiczówna" (L. Ludorowski, "Requiem finalne *Pana Wołodyjowskiego*," in: *Wizjoner przeszłości*, p. 340). Andrzej Stoff, in his impressive work: *"Zagłoba sum!" Studium postaci literackiej* (Toruń 2006), evokes the exaggerated and inaccurate – according to the author – statement by Kraszewski, who argues that Zagłoba "with his cynical derision, is repulsive and becomes odious" (p. 66). However, Kraszewski is right, because Zagłoba, especially in the first part of *Ogniem i mieczem*, does not necessarily have to arouse sympathy, and certainly cares only about himself. Samuel Sandler sees this character in a similar way; he writes that on a closer inspection "we can see in him a cluster of the worst flaws of the decaying seventeenth-century nobility" which we forget, because of the humor which "emanates from this character" (S. Sandler, *Wokół „Trylogii"*, Wrocław 1952, pp. 79–80). The Ukraine for Zagłoba is a place beyond the law. Sienkiewicz in *Letters from America* indicated the analogy between the Borderlands and the Wild West, as well as the people who sought shelter there: "On the Borderlands there exists no social organization: there are no cities, institutions, laws: in a word, they are wild lands, in which an individual left alone with himself and his rifle, does not live socially. No common good or public order limits his arbitrariness or his passion, which also develop

To maintain this adaptive talent of Zagłoba, the author has to perform an exceptional move, because of which Zagłoba is the only character of the *Trylogia* who is subject to significant mental and physical change. Sienkiewicz – a Homer enthusiast – pinned most of his characters in the timelessness of epic. They do not age noticeably; they do not change their personality traits, remaining unaffected by the passing of time. As Erich Auerbach shows, this is a characteristic trait of the heroes in Homer’s epics, who are deprived of the element of becoming.[229] Zagłoba is different, who in the beginning of the series is a type-character with an intricate and mysterious biography, to turn, in *Potop* and *Pan Wołodyjowski*, into a character with a well-known fictional biography, enigmatic psyche, and complex novelistic functions. If we combine this uniqueness with his presence in the entire series, we can formulate the thesis that Zagłoba is one of the foundations of the structure of the *Trylogia.*

Based on the author’s confession, we know that it was not his intention. Sienkiewicz’s response to the survey by the Warsaw weekly *Świat* (1913, No. 23) discomfits any researcher who wants to give a rational picture of the writer’s creative process.

> Every idea resides within me for a long time, and so to say, ferments before I set about it. An example: I introduced Zagłoba into *Ogniem i mieczem*, for the whole picture to be less gloomy; meanwhile he grew into one of the main characters and travelled through thirteen volumes. [“O swojej własnej twórczości,” D XL 144]

Due to this expansiveness, Zagłoba must have been a serious problem for Sienkiewicz as a writer. His attractiveness and richness of expression, already in *Ogniem i mieczem*, is a threat to the historical and heroic theme of the novel. Based on personality models contemporary to the author and much literary inspiration, Zagłoba, from the beginning, strikes readers with a fascinating but also irritating heteronomy, which tests the limits of the comic costume of the sarmatian. When the documented characters of Skrzetuski or Wołodyjowski congeal in their heroic forms, the character of Zagłoba pulsates with surprising ambiguity, drifting dangerously, as far as the author is concerned, into the position of becoming the protagonist of the cycle.

Julian Krzyżanowski, who noticed this problem, emphasizes that Wołodyjowski is the main character of the *Trylogia*, while Zagłoba is an “indispensable observer

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to enormous size. But also it can be no other way. Let us only recall the former borderers settled on the peripheries and Tartar routes, and a similar picture is painted” [LFA 144].

229 E. Auerbach, “Blizna Odyseusza,” in: *Mimesis. Rzeczywistość przedstawiona w literaturze Zachodu*, Warszawa 1968, v. I, p. 68. The constancy of character in the cycle is discussed by, *inter alia*: Kazimierz Wyka, “O postaciach Sienkiewiczowskich,” in: *Sienkiewicz. Odczyty*, Warszawa 1960, p. 107; and Tadeusz Bujnicki, *Trylogia Sienkiewicza na tle tradycji polskiej powieści historycznej*, op. cit., p. 99.

and commentator on historical events and human feats shown in the *Trylogia*."[230] Without solving this dilemma, it is worth following Krzyżanowski's train of thought, which equates the compositional value of both characters. In accordance with this premise, Zagłoba is not only an independent character, but always an element of a character-pair. He and Wołodyjowski create a doublet, known in the tradition of epic (Cervantes, Diderot, Dickens). In this context the thesis that Sienkiewicz borrows the structure of relations between characters from Alexander Dumas's *Three Musketeers* is questionable. Podbipięta and Skrzetuski are in Zagłoba's biography episodic characters. A pattern much more comparable is that in *Don Quixote*, also because of the humorous reversal which reduces Pan Michał in comparison to the tall knight of La Mancha. Zagłoba and Wołodyjowski are two characters linked structurally, rather than emotionally. Neither of them has a home, family land, property, or women. Sienkiewicz, by blocking their social development, keeps in his grasp the novelistic potential of the duo.

Zagłoba, as a character, is based not only on this one novelistic relation; he also creates many situational connections, mainly rhetorical. The extremely high linguistic competence granted to him by the author makes Zagłoba function primarily through discursive *agon*. His element is sophistic dialog, a mocking duel in which none of the characters of the *Trylogia* can match him, not even Karol Gustav or Prince Bogusław. Zagłoba's rhetoric is, at the same time, inconsistent, held together by style and genre, being sometimes a carbon copy of sarmatian ideology and "calendar" knowledge, but sometimes able suddenly to reveal a depth and perspicacity in perceiving the world; his gestures, actions, and hidden intentions are closer to the reality of the readers than to that of the characters of the *Trylogia*.

Zagłoba's anachronism repeatedly strikes one; he does not belong in the chivalric and noble world of the *Trylogia*. Stefan Szymutko rightly recognizes this aspect of the character as camouflage, through which Sienkiewicz introduces into a historical novel positivist scepticism, pragmatism, a rationality of perspective on ordinary affairs, elevated to the level of the actions and emotions of the main characters – the heroes of romance and adventure.[231] It is worth, in this context,

230 J. Krzyżanowski, *Pokłosie Sienkiewiczowskie*, op. cit., p 242. Zagłoba freed from the nosy narrator will be able to keep the secret of his past. Thanks to that, individuality will shine through character-type. The suggestions about his past will not be resolved, thanks to which the character does not lose the reader's sympathy and is able smoothly to take his place among the leading heroic figures.

231 S. Szymutko, "Trud pokrzepiania serc albo samotność pozytywisty," in: *Przeciw marzeniu? Jedenaście przykładów, ośmioro pisarzy*. Katowice 2006, p 51. Andrzej Stawar makes a similar claim, writing that the character of Zagłoba "as a spokesperson for 'quasi-realism' is a positivistic contribution" (A. Stawar, op. cit., p 161), while Ewa Kosowska compares

bringing up the famous invective of Stanisław Brzozowski, who called Sienkiewicz a bourgeois writer.[232] Treated as a factual diagnosis, Brzozowski’s allegation can be considered as an excellent starting point for analysis of the phenomenon of Zagłoba, who appears to be a “character-mask,” so perfect, that it is the most “authentic” among others, which are, in fact, fictional reconstructions of history. Bourgeois mockery entered the novel along with Zagłoba – modern, intelligent, and suspicious of heroic rhetoric. Zagłoba incorporates a both a ludic and an intellectual dimension of humor. Concerned about his stomach, he expresses the “peasant” pragmatism of a “sponger”; ridiculing Skrzetuski, Podbipięta, Wołodyjowski, and Sapieha, he exposes in them an unheroic, human, carnal “background.” An exemplary – according to Brzozowski – *Trylogia* reader admires in this character his virtues and pleasures, given that a large part of the bourgeois intelligentsia of the second half of the nineteenth century had noble origins. The unheroic reader finds in the text attractive justification for his conduct. Zagłoba becomes, through this function, the most important intermediary, besides the author, between the described world and the world of the author and the recipients of the novel.

In his suspect inconsistency, the character of Zagłoba announces a modern text, which does not mask its incoherence, does not claim ownership of the referential illusion. Scholars have reconstructed a broad catalog of literary and real-life inspirations for the character of Zagłoba, which resembles an intertextual patchwork.[233] Sienkiewicz, who first questioned the dominance of positivist realism

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his function to that of “a Trojan horse, with which Sienkiewicz introduces into Polish culture the characteristic topic of reflection on identity, and particularly reflection on the charm of vice” (*Negocjacje i kompromisy*, op. cit., p. 253).

232 S. Brzozowski, “Henryk Sienkiewicz i jego stanowisko w literaturze współczesnej,” in: S. Brzozowski, *Eseje i studia o literaturze*, vol. 1–2, ed. H. Markiewicz, Wrocław 1990, BN I 258, p. 31. Brzozowski took over this thesis from Hegel, who described the novel as the unheroic epic of the bourgeoisie. See a discussion of this topic by Michał Głowiński in “Wokół ‘Powieści’ Norwida,” in: his *Gry powieściowe. Szkice z teorii i historii form narra cyjnych*, Warszawa 1973.

233 L. Straszewicz, “Zagłoba,” *Kraj* 1901, no. 50; K. Wojciechowski, “Protoplasta Zagłoby,” *Pamiętnik Literacki* 1916; S. Pigoń, “Jeszcze jeden protoplasta imć pana Zagłoby,” in: *Wśród twórców*, Kraków 1947; W. Studencki, “Kazimierz Szetkiewicz i Zagłoba,” *Przegląd Humanistyczny*, XIV, 1970, no 6; M. Jankowiak, “Zagłoba – bohater wielostylowy,” in: *Trylogia. Sobieski. Victoria wiedeńska,* pt. I, Lublin 1985; M. Kosman, *Na tropach bohaterów Trylogii*; J. Krzyżanowski, “Regimentarz Zagłoba,” in: *Pokłosie Sienkiewiczowskie*, op. cit.; J. Kleiner, *Ogniem i mieczem Henryka Sienkiewicza*, Lublin 1946; S. Papée, *Sienkiewicz humorysta*, Poznań 1922; T. Bujnicki, “Sienkiewicza ‘Powieści z lat dawnych,’”. *Studia*, Kraków 1996; B. Kosmanowa, “Zagłoba z Lublina. Rudolf Korwin-Piotrowski i Józef Ignacy Kraszewski,” in: *Studia Sienkiewiczowskie* [vol. 1]*, Biografia. Twórczość. Recepcja,* ed. L. Ludorowski, H. Ludorowska, Lublin 1998; A. Stoff, “Zagłoba sum!” *Studium postaci literackiej*, op. cit.

among writers of his generation, did not go so far, however, as to reject the principle of cohesion of the work, i.e. the need for the integration in plot and style of the multi-discursive elements of realistic narration.

Without contesting the findings of researchers regarding the intertextual background for the character of Zagłoba, I doubt the value of the accumulation of texts and testimonies which are supposedly the inspiration for the creation of this character, because they do not compose themselves into a whole, but merely indicate the mediation of individual elements of the character. It should also be stressed that Sienkiewicz, had already circled around a similar type of character. Pan Strączek, a typical sponger, who lives with the Hoszczyński family appears in *Humoreski z teki Worszyłły* (Humoresques from Worszyłła's Briefcase) (1872).

> He was a man of fifty years, short, round and red, with a film over one eye [underlining mine – R.K.]. He, liked to eat well, had lost his fortune, and played cards, supposedly even committing embezzlement during the game, especially when he was drunk, which happened quite often. He was accused of insolence, but was accepted everywhere, because he was well-born and, as I mentioned, he was entertaining. ["Nikt nie jest prorokiem między swymi" (No One Is a Prophet in His Own Country), D I 167]

This figure, perhaps the vilest character in the *Humoreski,* despite similar features (film on the eye, mocking wit), has actually little in common with Zagloba. Mikołaj Suchowolski, the title character of "Stary sługa" (The Old Servant) also surely belongs to the "inner" family of Zagłoba. He,

> in special moments of being in a good mood, when he would start to ramble, would lie through his teeth. He did not do this in bad faith; maybe in his old mind facts mingled with one another and grew into fantasy. Whatever and wherever he heard of the adventures of war in the times of his youth, he applied these to himself and to the grandfather of my colonel, and he firmly believed in his own stories. ["Stary sługa" D IV 7]

Zagłoba's bragging, which is an integral part of his rhetorical toolkit, is parasitic on the ignorance of the audience, the uncertainty of sources, and the suggestiveness of his own fabrications. He also lives to an old age, like Suchowolski, who "having reached nearly ninety years of age, became completely childish" [D IV 16]. These two characters can join the gallery of the already identified, without our changing our views on the type of community to which Zagłoba belongs. Yet most of the texts mentioned by scholars are characterized by typological or genre cohesion, while Zagłoba's character is constantly split, both within plot and style of expression (his own, the primary narrator's, and the supporting narrators'). This feature constitutes also his distinctiveness in relation to both the source texts, as well as to other characters of the *Trilogy*.

Is also worthwhile enriching Zagłoba's genealogy by the work of the writer who is almost completely ignored by the literature on the subject, despite the fact that Sienkiewicz spoke about him many times, wrote a review of his fiction,

while privately having a love for him as great (albeit a somewhat timid one) as for Homer, Shakespeare, Słowacki, or Dickens. The writer is Alphonse Daudet, the creator of the trilogy about Tartarin of Tarascon – a Provençal nineteenth century burgher, whose stature, love of lies and feasting is very much like that of the character from the *Trylogia*.[234] Zagłoba, stripped of his sarmatian costume, could look just like Tartarin.

> Lastly, beside the table sat a man of between forty and forty-five, short, stout, thick-set, ruddy, with flaming eyes and a strong stubbly beard; he wore flannel tights, and was in his shirt sleeves; one hand held a book, and the other brandished a very large pipe with an iron bowl-cap. Whilst reading heaven only knows what startling adventure of scalp-hunters, he pouted out his lower lip in a terrifying way, which gave the honest phiz of the man living placidly on his means the same impression of kindly ferocity which abounded throughout the house.[235]

The analogies can go on. Zagłoba, telling his companions about his advantages in war, is a nineteenth-century *rentier* immersed in adventurous romances, maybe even in the *Trylogia*.

> Oh, how many times did Tartarin with a howl spring up on the sultry summer afternoons, when he was reading alone amidst his blades, points, and edges; how many times did he dash down his book and rush to the wall to unhook a deadly arm! The poor man forgot he was at home in Tarascon, in his underclothes, and with a handkerchief round his head. He would translate his readings into action, and, goading himself with his own voice, shout out whilst swinging a battle-axe or tomahawk:
>
> "Now, only let 'em come!"[236]

Following Boleslaw Prus's excellent study,[237] we are accustomed to see a writer's error in the typological heterogeneity of Zagłoba, of course an error form the point of view of the poetics of realism, in which the principle of verisimilitude was one of the most important criteria for credible presentation. However, when we change the configuration for Zagłoba's character from a positivistic model of reality to literary tradition, then the contradictions indicated by Prus disappear. Daudet's comical protagonist suffers from a similar duality, admittedly, easier to elaborate from a novelistic point of view, because Tartarin lives in nineteenth-century

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234 It is worth comparing the depictions of Tartarin and Zagłoba by John Martin Szancer (e.g. in the edition of the *Trylogia* published by PIW, Warszawa, 1964). The drawings of the two figures are so similar that if you exchange the characters' costumes, you could also replace the illustrations in both novels.

235 Alphone Daudet, *Tartarin of Tarascon* (1872) Episode the First, in Tarascon, I – www.gutenberg.org

236 Ibid, IV

237 B. Prus, "*Ogniem i mieczem* – powieść z lat dawnych przez Henryka Sienkiewicza," in: *Trylogia Henryka Sienkiewicza*, op. cit., pp. 177-178.

Provence, not in war-torn seventeenth-century Poland. Mutual to both figures is the tormenting struggle between the desire for peace, satiety, and comfort, and the propensity for adventure. To illustrate this dichotomy, Daudet reaches for a model that is close to Sienkiewicz too.

> We are afraid we must make a clean breast of it: in our hero there were two very distinct characters. Some Father of the Church has said: "I feel there are two men in me." He would have spoken truly in saying this about Tartarin, who carried in his frame the soul of Don Quixote, the same chivalric impulses, heroic ideal, and crankiness for the grandiose and romantic; but, worse is the luck! he had not the body of the celebrated hidalgo, that thin and meager apology for a body, on which material life failed to take a hold; one that could get through twenty nights without its breast-plate being unbuckled off, and forty-eight hours on a handful of rice. On the contrary, Tartarin's body was a stout honest bully of a body, very fat, very weighty, most sensual and fond of coddling, highly touchy, full of low-class appetite and homely requirements—the short, paunchy body on stumps of the immortal Sancho Panza.
>
> Don Quixote and Sancho Panza in the one same man! you will readily comprehend what a cat-and-dog couple they made! what strife! what clapper-clawing![238]

The difference between these two character results from the genre of the novel in which each one appears. But it is Zagłoba who has "more" body than the other characters of the series; that is why he "needs to eat and drink as a man" [OM II 355]. Should one settle for a single angle, it is possible to not notice this dissimilarity. In *Potop* he looks, in fact, even better than in *Ogniem i mieczem*.

> The old man still robustly looked like a bull as well. Age had not bent his wide shoulders; you could see health and good spirits in his eyes, or rather eye, because one was covered with a film; he had a white beard, but a compact mouth and a red face, adorned with a wide scar on the forehead, through which you could see the bone of the skull. [P I 193].

The differences become apparent when one considers that the corporeality of Zagłoba is functionalized differently. Unlike the body of Podbipięta, Kmicic, or Azja, it is not a tool for war. It is an unheroic body, ordinary, human, hungry, and tired. When he runs to aid Wołodyjowski and Podbipięta, he "limped, fell over, got up, groaning, yelling, shaking all over and running with the last strain of his legs and his last breath" [OM II 344]. Sienkiewicz brilliantly exploits that excess of carnality assigned to his character, as an instrument to expose the mundane carnality of the other characters. Zagłoba, who does not forget about his body, does not allow others to forget about it either.[239] As the only one, for example, he does

238 Daudet, ibid, VI.

239 Julian Krzyżanowski, commenting on Jan Gorski's book on the *Trylogia*, wrote that the most important purpose for which the writer introduces such a character was to lower the heroic tone of the novel: "Zagłoba namely, is something of an artistic lightning rod,

not give in to the enthusiasm of his friends about the news of Podbipięta's planned mission, whom he suspects of fleeing to Anusia Borzobohata, after fulfilling his vows (the three severed heads). Consistently the body of Zagłoba ages in each successive volume of the cycle, and in *Pan Wołodyjowski* the end comes of his indestructible vitality. It happens so radically that the character arouses pity, with its last fictional image, standing next to Basia during Wołodyjowski's symbolic funeral: "old, decrepit, broken and trembling" [PW 601].

Accompanying each other throughout the entire *Trylogia*, Michał and Zagłoba – myth and reality – eventually diverge: "Hektor Kamieniecki" departs undefeated and unseen into the fictional otherworld, leaving in the real world his real complement – a decrepit old man. The author also subjects him to mental aging, which for example shows itself – according to the narrator – by his obsession to bring Michał and Basia together, whom he "with the persistence particular to old people, decided to bind together" [PW 155].

Zagłoba's difference is not only visible in confrontation with the main characters of the cycle, but also when we compare him with dozens of mundane portraits of nobility/gentry created by the author of the *Trylogia*. It is enough to recall Kmicic's troops, to which Zagłoba could have easily belonged ("insolent faces, on which tomfoolery, viciousness, and crime stamped their collective marks" [P I 55]). But Sienkiewicz does not give him the triviality of the average nobleman, and protects him against complete degeneration so that the reader does not lose sympathy for the character. At the same time, he does not conceal the world from which he draws Zagłoba, characterizing him indirectly through the environment in which he likes most to live.

> *Szałapuci*, dicers, and brawlers felt rather in their element; they believed that this was their time, their harvest time – and so all the more boldly they perpetrated different kinds of wickedness.
>
> One does not need to say that, among them, Pan Zagłoba held sway. [OM II 130].

This says a lot about Zagłoba's way of life in the *Vorgeschichte* of the novel, but also later as a companion of Wołodyjowski and a volunteer in the service of Wiśniowiecki, Zagłoba does not significantly alter his preferences. During his stay in Warsaw he "spent his time under inn signs, accompanied by the biggest drunks and the local tavern wenches, in which activities Pan Michał faithfully kept him company, […] for he was to him master of such revels" [OM II 131].

Almost every study of this character mentions Sienkiewicz's borrowings from Shakespeare and his Falstaff. Despite clear and detailed connections, the

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bringing down to earth the uniqueness of his heroic companions, showing them not in the light of epic processes, but of everyday mundane experience" (J. Krzyżanowski, "Bohater *Trylogii*", in: *Pokłosie Sienkiewiczowskie*, op. cit., p. 241).

differences are more important. Sienkiewicz rids Zagłoba of the costume of Falstaff when his hero decides to kidnap Helena and join Wiśniowiecki's troops. It is not a matter of the motivations that are as shown above – mainly selfish – but about the storyline consequences of this action. Sienkiewicz must have been equally strongly influenced by reading Hippolyte Taine's study of Falstaff, as he was by reading *Henry IV* itself. In the *History of English Literature*, compulsory reading for positivists, we learn that

> Falstaff has the passion of an animal and the imagination of a wit. In none of the characters created by Shakespeare are both creative liveliness and lack of morality, representing the poet himself, manifested in such a lively fashion. Falstaff is a pillar of shameful public places; he curses, he farts, a pitcher never leaves his hand, and he is what is called disgusting. He has a huge belly, bloodshot eyes, a flushed mouth, and legs that tremble. He spends his days sprawled out on tavern tables, or sleeping on the ground behind the curtains of taverns, and it seems that the only reason for him to wake up is to blaspheme, lie, steal, and brag. In the art of deception he is a match for Panurge who knew sixty-three ways to extort money, of which the "most honest was to secretly steal it." In addition, besides all the features mentioned above, Falstaff is old, he is a courtier and a knight, and he has received a good education. Should he not, then, make an off-putting, disgusting impression? Well, he does not make such an impression and it is even impossible to dislike him![240]

Such is Zagłoba in the first volume of *Ogniem i mieczem*, and yet the reader likes him even before his redemptive act of saving Helena.[241] Taine argues that Falstaff does not fit within moral terms, for he is not aware of them; he acts instinctively, trying to survive the reality of war and conspiracy. He has nothing to hide because he is a purely superficial concern for the biological continuance of his body; he is the human incarnation of pure nature.

> Falstaff's immorality is so sincere and oblivious to itself that it ceases to be immorality. There is a certain level of humanity, on which conscience disappears, its place taken over by pure nature, and then an individual seizes anything he desires, thinking about justice and injustice as much as the beast from the nearby forest does.[242]

The author of the *Trylogia* had to break his character free from Shakespeare's model, as, otherwise, Zagłoba would be doomed to failure. Unlike Zagłoba, Falstaff dies unchanged. The law of fiction allows the author of the *Trylogia* to stop the downfall of his hero, but Sienkiewicz, a realist, repeatedly gives the reader to

240 H. Taine, *Historia literatury angielskiej,* trans. Eliza Orzeszkowa, Part I, Warszawa 1900, p.380. Translator's note: I have translated the Polish text into English. Thus, it is a translation of a translation. But this is what Polish writers of Sienkiewicz's read.

241 Stephen Greenblatt writes in a similar fashion about Falstaff. See: S. Greenblatt, *Shakespeare. Stwarzanie świata*, trans. B. Kopeć-Umiastowska, Warszawa 2007, p. 65.

242 Taine, op. cit., p. 381.

understand what kind of type his hero is. He does this most bluntly by describing Pan Łaszcz – brawler, gambler, murderer, rapist and drunk, convicted for multiple crimes[243]– with whom Zagłoba loves to spend time. “They fell in love with each other, he and the royal guard, back near Konstantynowo in fact, for the reason that in some respects they had natures as similar as two drops of water” [OM II 40–41]. Only when Łaszcz provokes Skrzetuski with comments regarding the kidnapped Helena – “as a man of an unbridled nature, and, in addition, drunk at the moment” [OM II 41] – does Zagłoba turn his back on his old companion. But it is most likely that the author is protecting his hero; saving him for the novel’s history, and taking him away from a probable one. He does not do this purely arbitrarily – Zagłoba is superior to Falstaff with his exceptional intelligence and his tangible recognition of his own situation. Zagłoba tempers the danger coming from unfettered sybaritism with cowardice, which prevents him from committing the same transgressions as Łaszcz.

More jovial than aggressive, he becomes, in the second part of *Ogniem i mieczem,* a hyperbole of the human bodily condition, equally in his fatness and gluttony, drunkenness, and passion for women. These features however do not disappear, but become subdued by new ones, which by no means eliminate the old passions of Jan Onurfy. Now the creation begins to threaten its creator, who becomes a victim of his own literary decisions. Sienkiewicz initially based his character on the foundations of narcissism and sensuality, not anticipating perhaps numerous, disturbing consequences of this move.

2. Old Don Juan

Who would Don Juan be, were it not for the supper with the Commander? If the revenge of over two thousand women had not indirectly reached him, and he had

243 “Pan Łaszcz, though a frightful knight, for paganism as dreadful an enemy as few others, was at the same time a renowned reveller, feast-goer, gambler, whose time free from battles, prayers, inns, and murdering, he liked most of all to spend in the company of people such as Zagłoba, drinking himself into a stupor and listening to entertainments. He was a brawler on such a scale, that alone he would stir up so much trouble; so many times had he stood against the law that he would have paid with his head in every country. Many convictions burdened him also, but even in times of peace he did not have much concern for them, and now in the time of war, all the more did they pass into oblivion” [OM II 40–41]. Following Joachim Jerlicz, Janusz Tazbir characterizes him even more bluntly: “Łaszcz murdered, severed ears and noses”, and along with his comrades, he raped “girls and widows”, which resulted in “236 banishment sentences and 37 verdicts of infamy” (J. Tazbir, *Okrucieństwo w nowożytnej Europie*, Warszawa 1999, p. 171).

lived into old age? An old, disgusting seducer who rapes or buys his women? He would then become his own negation, since he would no longer provoke desire. Zagłoba is old from the beginning of the *Trylogia*, and yet none of the other characters speak about love and eroticism as openly and frequently. With the humor that envelopes Zagłoba's statements of an erotic nature, the author frees him from any association with the type of the lascivious old man, but the measure taken by the writer is, in fact, more subtle, perverse, and ambiguous. The character himself voices them straightforwardly.

> Many a time women still glance at a person, as happened in Warsaw at the time of the election. Wołodyjowski be my witness! But there is nothing here for me as far as love affairs go, and in spite of my warm blood, I will be content to settle for fatherly sentiment. [OM II 262–263].

The seducer is hidden behind the mask of a father. Not of a specific, biological, or adoptive one, but the father of every woman. He does so knowingly, in spite of his still lively passions – "in spite of my warm blood" – symbolizing the undying desire of an old man, for whom Sienkiewicz chooses another figure of affect. Spoken in the word and gesture of the seducer, desire would expose him to ridicule, rejection, humiliation. This is experienced by Pan Gedeon – a character from the novel *Na polu chwały* (On the Field of Glory) – the guardian of Anulka Sienińska. She treats him as the successor to her late father, when in desperation "she fell on his chest […], like a daughter would on her father, who in time of distress comforts her" [NPCH 109]. But this "father" does not share her feelings and does not intend to settle for fatherly affection, as "the heat of the girlish body penetrated Pan Gedeon's heart, which began to beat in a more lively fashion" [NPCH 109]. The author does not allow this relationship and kills him during the engagement. In *Legiony*, the chamberlain August "loved a beautiful miss with that senile, lustful love, which does not trust itself when it comes to woman in general, but deceives itself that it will find the ardor of youth when it comes to one chosen one" [L 31]. Zagłoba touches many young women, but the narrator does not say what the ninety-year-old man feels, for example, in the presence of Krzysia, when "using the privilege given to him by old age and grey hair, he walked toward her after supper and began stroking her silky black hair" [PW 91].

In the description of situations that are erotic or close to that, in which Zagłoba finds himself, the author changes the language, differently describing his relations with desirable women, but the essence of these relations is unchanged. The goal is maintained, for, as a "father," Zagłoba remains loved, while he himself can channel his desires in dozens of socially acceptable situations. This does not happen right away. Zagłoba boasts of his erotic accomplishments as openly as he does of his military ones, emphasizing his fascination with women without embarrassment.

> – To Lublin I will willingly go, because there the women are exceptionally smooth and abundant. When one of them, while cutting a loaf of bread, leans against it, then even the skin on the senseless loaf blushes with contentment. [P III 145]

Sometimes he does so in an allusive way, when he says that he spent seven years as prisoner of the khan, which resembles the seven years Odysseus spent in the captivity of the nymph Calypso. The details of his erotic adventures are known only to Michał, to whom he whispers them in his ear [OM II 120], but numerous references throughout the *Trylogia* together create a significant part of the character's nature and biography. Let us add, an unchangeable one, for even the ninety-year-old Zagłoba draws Wolodyjowski's attention to passing women.

> Smooth as well, these creatures, a fellow is sometimes tempted to beat his hands on his sides, like a cock does with his wings, and crow. Look at that! Look at that dark one, followed by that *hajduk* wearing the green caftan; is she not fair? Eh? [PW 44].

Unscrupulously he informs Baśka, that along with Michał they have accomplished a great deal in this matter.

> My dear, if we wished, Michał and I, to marry whomever we chanced to kiss, then we would have to accept the Mahometan faith, I would have to be the Padishah, and he the Crimean Khan, eh, Michał, eh? [PW 306–307].

This voluptuous tone does not exhaust the function of the character's words. The author allows Zagłoba consistently to shatter the over-heroization of characters from the series; in a way, by using him the author mocked his own creations. Women – the heroines of adventure stories, idealized in the amorous sighs of lovers – Zagłoba turns back into real women. When Ketling tries, with the use of conventional Petrarchan language, to tell Zagłoba about his love for Krzysia, Zagłoba ruins the tinsel of his speech by a brutal exchange of imagery.

> – Is it love, or something different, I do not know!
> – But you know that it is not a hat or three cubits of cloth for breeches, nor a bellyband, or crupper, or a sausage with scrambled eggs. Neither a flask of vodka. If you are sure of that, then ask Krzysia about the rest, or do you want me to ask? [PW 126].

Thanks to Zagłoba, the author – without compromising the principles of the historical-adventure novel genre – can allow his heroines to exist tangibly, realistically, physically.

> I do not use such reasons when I do battle; all I know is that this girl sits three rooms away from here, that she eats and drinks, that when she walks she has to move her feet; that her nose gets red from the cold, and she gets hot in sweltering heat; that if a mosquito bites her, she gets itchy, and that to the moon she is similar in this that she does not have a beard. [PW 158]

This is something more serious than the clownish trivialization of an idea. We see Sienkiewicz, who by changing the genre of the prose, does not discard sharpness

of vision or realistic craftsmanship. In his relations with heroines the motif also returns of a fascination with a younger, almost childlike woman, who is admired, adored, loved by someone older than herself, or even just an old man. Zagłoba's tomfoolery releases the seducer's words from the burden of meaning; they allow themselves to be taken lightly, because if devoid of ambiguity, they would distort the order of relations between the novel's heroes. Sienkiewicz, nonetheless, never ceases to give the reader signs, peeps of other storyline possibilities – more dramatic, psychologically and morally complicated.

There is no way to determine the authenticity of Zagłoba's stories about his conquests in love. However, his relations with the female characters of the novel are real, especially with the loved ones of his friends. Zagłoba speaks of Helena as an object of desire, even before seeing her. Unaware of the context, he carelessly reveals his intentions; he does not even know her name, but predicts that "if she gives Bohun a set of horns, she will be known as Lady Deer" [OM I 116]. He even allows himself a similar freedom in the presence of the enamored Cossack, but seeing his expression, "the witticism he had begun died on the lips of Pan Zagłoba" [OM I 231]. From then, in the presence of both Bohun and Skrzetuski, Zagłoba is careful. But while escaping with Helena dressed as a menial, he returns to the suppressed discourse of a seducer.

> Ho! Ho! You would not believe, my lady, what a wild fellow I used to be. It was enough for me to look at some woman, and it was as if lightning had struck her. If only I was twenty years younger, Skrzetuski would get it for his pride. Madam makes a very shapely Cossack. [OM I 265]

The narrator favors the boasts of the former "wild fellow," pointing to the robustness of his body.

> Sometimes the old man would carry the menial in his arms, with a strength odd in a person who begged for bread. But he was a broad-shouldered old man indeed! [OM I 284]

Fatherly gestures inextricably and ambiguously mix with their erotic content. This "strange, unknown guardian" [OM I 268] surrounds Helena with care and affection, who out of necessity, but also willingly, surrenders to him, although Zagłoba "three days past would have awoken in her disgust and distrust" [OM I 267]. Seducing, that is making her fall in love with him, takes Zagłoba no more than three days! Sienkiewicz plays with ambiguous meanings, attacking the borders of demystification. Zagłoba is not only a jester disguised as an old man, but also a poet in the guise of a beggar, who – as he says – "writes very beautiful poems" [OM II 221].[244] He sings songs for the peasants he meets, but is it only for them?

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244 He will repeat this in *Potop*: "I myself used to put rhymes together when I was young, to capture the hearts of maidens, and I would have knocked Pan Kochanowski and his epigrams into a cocked hat, but then the soldier's nature took over" [P I 208].

> – What would the lady prefer? Maybe about Marusia Bohusławka, about Bondariwna, or of the Sierpiahowo's death? This I can also do. [OM I 279]

And a good singer Zagłoba must be, since Skrzetuski, engrossed in his song, enchanted, delays the order to attack the peasant unit that Zagłoba is with.

> This quiet night, the blazing fires, the wild figures, and the song of Mikołaj Potocki, not yet finished, awoke in the knight strange thoughts, some feelings, and a longing, all of which he himself was not able to understand. [OM I 389]

Zagloba's disguise is a wonderful juggling act between a need for camouflage and a parody of the conventions of the idyllic lover dressed in the costume of a shepherd.

And yet again we fall into confusion: is this is a self-parody on the part of the character, or a mask for passion? It is not Prince Bogusław, dressed as a shepherd, singing under Oleńka's window, but Zagłoba that makes us laugh. Does Sienkiewicz not cheat us with this laughter? Freud wrote in his paper on humor, that laughter provides pleasure for the one who causes it, pleasure, to which one has no direct access[245]; and so he/she tells jokes, which are the most social feat of all the mental activities directed at gaining pleasure.[246] Many of Zagłoba's jokes have an erotic content. The joke allows him to not only exceed the boundaries of status (the privilege of a jester), but also of custom and morality. The content of the joke is funny, but its function is absolutely serious, says Freud. The mysteriousness of the character grows. Zagłoba, by an unknown intention of the author, mimics, in a strange way, the deeds and feelings of the main characters: he fights, steals beloved women, loves them, suffers after their loss. Sometimes even more than they do. This peculiar mimicry within the storyline makes sense, given that we see in it a somewhat parodic gesture, but there are scenes where this doubling really happens.

That is why, despite its remarkable accuracy, Freud's theory of the social function of the joke does not settle the complex enigmas of Sienkiewicz's text. Better help is provided by other works of the writer, which allow us to learn his symbolic language, or at least reassure the commentator on the text that the specific meaning, assigned by him to a fragment of the text, is not too arbitrary. The motif of the disguised old man-minstrel returns in the novella "Ta trzecia" (That Third One) and has there solely erotic grounds. Sienkiewicz dresses his hero, Władysław Nagórski, in Zagłoba's costume, so that the painter can deceitfully sneak into the house of Hela (sic!).

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245 In *Potop* we find an astonishing inversion. Here Anusia, who is vainly trying to charm Kmicic, tells Oleńka, what pleasure Andrzej's laughter gave her: "and when he laughed, then I too felt joyful all over, as if I were some sort of a slave…" [P III 277].

246 S.Freud, *Dowcip i jego stosunek do nieświadomości*, op. cit., p. 226.

> [I will disguise] myself as a minstrel. I have the costume and lyre, I have been to the Ukraine, I know how to sing songs… . Pani Koczanowska is Ukrainian so she will most certainly take me in. [*Ta trzecia*, D VI 76][247]

It is a mistake to undervalue Sienkiewicz's wordplay. The lonely Mrs Kołczanowska bears a significant surname – "*kołczan*" is a quiver in English, a holster for arrows. The author himself implies perverse meanings. In one of his letters to Horain he comically complains about the struggles of a single man in California, writing that he is as lonely as a stone. "'Even a sword has its own sheath, and I am always alone' – as Deotyma would say. Indeed, I do not even have my own sheath" [Li I/2, 369].

The perverse symbolic meanings hidden behind the mask of storyline necessity are most visible in the scene of the cutting of Helena's hair. Antoni Potocki noted this specific feature of Sienkiewicz's literary eroticism, which resides in the hair and "locks" of the heroines.[248] Even if the reader had not noticed a series of similar themes in the works of the writer, the narrator eagerly explains to us the meaning of Zagłoba's deed, which for Helena is a social sign of losing one's virginity out of wedlock, or the stigma of the prostitute.

> Helena sat near the log, and throwing her heavy dark hair across it, raised her dark eyes to Zagłoba.
> – I am ready – said she – cut it, sir!
> She smiled a little sadly; for she was sorry for her hair, which near the head could barely be clasped by two hands. Zagłoba felt somewhat awkward. He went around the trunk to cut more conveniently, and muttered:
> – Pah! Pah! I would rather be a barber and shear off Cossack head-tufts. I feel like an executioner going to his work; for, as madam knows, they cut the hair of witches, so that devils cannot hide in it and so spoil the pains of the torture with his power. But madam is no witch, and I am ashamed of this deed, for which, if Skrzetuski does not cut off my ears, then I'll pay him out for it. Goodness, <u>my arm is all aquiver</u> [my underlining – R.K.].Close your eyes at least, madam!
> – Now! – said Helena.

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247 Julian Krzyżanowski points to the inspiration drawn from the adventures of Józef Chełmoński, who, during his stay in Kiev, was to supposed have dressed up as a minstrel in order to gain the sympathy of Maria Moszczeńska (J. Krzyżanowski, "Sienkiewicz i Witkiewicz (karta z dziejów niezwykłej przyjaźni)," in: *Pokłosie Sienkiewiczowskie*, op. cit., p 467)

248 A. Potocki, "Szlachetczyzna – bohater *Trylogii*," in: *Trylogia Henryka Sienkiewicza*, op. cit., p. 308. Here is an example from *Bez dogmatu*: "A characteristic feature of this tiny head with a low forehead is that exuberance of the hair, eyebrows, eyelashes, and the fluff, which on the side of the face becomes as soft as down and completely light. All this together in time may work to the disadvantage of her beauty, but now she is so young that it means only a kind of vitality and exuberance of the body and makes the girl not a cold doll, but a woman, warm, lively, and full of allurements" [BD 33].

> Zagłoba straightened up, as if rising in his stirrups to deliver a blow. The smooth iron whistled in the air, and immediately the dark tresses slipped down along the smooth bark to the ground.
> – Now! – said Zagłoba, in his turn.
> Helena sprang up, and immediately the short-cut hair fell in a dark circle around her face, on which blushes of shame glowed, for at that period the cutting of a girl's hair was considered a great disgrace; therefore it was a great sacrifice to be borne only in extreme necessity.
> And tears came to her eyes; and Zagłoba, angry at himself, did not comfort her.
> I feel as if I've done something dishonorable, and I tell you again that Skrzetuski, if he is a worthy cavalier, ought to cut my ears off for it. But it could not be avoided, for madam's sex would have been guessed at once. [OM I 281-281]

Zagłoba deprives Helena of the braids which wrapped around Skrzetuski's neck; thus he rightly invokes his name. Hiding Helena's "sex", he becomes the sole trustee of her sex. The heroine's beauty, her erotic attractiveness, which is so often discussed in the novel, becomes disarmed through the cutting of her hair, but only for a moment, because now her sex, known to the character and the reader, means much more intensively – it becomes phantasmal, because it is impossible to achieve it in reality; thus the imagination is her home.[249] When Zagłoba rushes once more to her rescue, he gives in to fantasizing.

> In addition yet other questions also bothered his mind: what will she say when she sees him? will she not drown in tears? [OM II 255]

> Oy! and she'll be so grateful, and she'll hold out her hands! and say thank you! [OM II 255]

By transposing the discourse of the seducer into the discourse of the father, Sienkiewicz normalizes the social pathology of an old man's lust. It is also necessary to reverse the perverse deed of cutting the hair, it is necessary to contradict it, in order for Skrzetuski to be able to regain Helena in the state in which he fell in love with her. Sienkiewicz does just so, and Helena freed again, this time from Horpyna, gradually regains her hair and her sexual distinctiveness. Since this is so, then the game of lust becomes visible and begins anew. Many scenes from Sienkiewicz's works return in modified embodiments; it is as if the writer could not part with them. This resembles a musical phrase, the beauty of which does not allow for it to be forgotten, and so it returns in adaptations of the theme. If in the first variant the erotic meanings of cutting Helena's hair are balanced by the novelistic function of this move, then the second approach with the motif,

249 Not even the conservative Dzieduszczycki could be fooled, and without any effort he recognized that in these scenes the author makes an effort so that the "carnal side of the virgin appeared most" (W. Dzieduszycki, "O powieści *Ogniem i mieczem*," in: *Trylogia Henryka Sienkiewicza*, op. cit., p 30).

in which Wołodyjowski takes Zagłoba's place, no longer has a functional cover. After the freeing of Helena from the clutches of Horpyna, comes a moment of rest before the next adventure, so the empty space is instantaneously filled with words of love. The small knight and Helena flirt with each other.

> Sometimes, too, he teased her, saying:
> – Bohun is a friend, and I will bring you to him.
> But she held out her hands as if in great fear and she fell to begging in a sweet voice:
> – Do not do that, o harsh knight, better at once to cut my throat.
> – O, this cannot be! I will do it now! – answered the fierce knight.
> – Cut it! – repeated the princess, squinting with her charming eyes and stretching out her neck toward him
> Then <u>the goosebumps began to run over the small knight's back</u>. [My underlining – R.K.]
>
> "She goes to the head like wine, that girl! – he thought to himself – but I won't drink from her because she belongs to someone else" – and the honest Pan Michał just gave himself a shake, and rode on. [OM II 270]

The metaphor of desire is common to both fragments (physical shaking), and if this is not enough, the vigilant Zagłoba immediately exposes his friend's nascent passion: "someone would wager that you desire a bite, but sausage is not for the dog" [OM II 266]. Michał loyally controls his desire, but Zagłoba stays with the Skrzetuskis for many years. His relationship with Helena does not lose its intensiveness, and even becomes stronger. When he finally leaves their home, to live with Michał and Baśka, he sings the praises of Helena's continuous procreative potency. Strangely, it is he, not Skrzetuski, who claims to be the agent behind the subsequent births of Helena's children.

> I would only say to her: "Halszka! the brats are growing up. I need a new consolation" – she would, as it were, snort at me, and she comes to term! just as if someone had ordered it! [PW 369]

Sienkiewicz is a master of the fictionalization of desire in a world of clear moral norms. Desires, to which there are no obstacles, emotional or social, end in marriage and at the same time the tale of adventure ends. Desires satisfied in spite of an obstacle, destroy the moral and, thus, also the fictional order of the novel. What is left is fantasy or "soft" eroticism, epidermal, socially accepted, and in this Sienkiewicz is unmatched. That unspoken eroticism means that suddenly we are surprised to notice how upon hearing the news of Helena's death, Zagłoba is in more despair than Skrzetuski. There is no justification for such pain in the novel; we did not see the birth and growth of this feeling; we do not understand, then, what happened to Zagłoba's cynicism, egoism, his care for himself, as if Sienkiewicz suddenly decided to plunge him into despair almost without any grounds. That is to say, we have seen it, but the discourse of frivolity in which it was formulated,

transformed the reality of the feeling into an unbelievable, rhetorical excess. The intoxicated reader must be satisfied with the narrator's assertions that Zagłoba "came to love [Helena] so much, that when the news of her death arrived, he did not know what to do with his life and old age" [OM II 255].

The culmination of the fatherly sublimation of lust is the relation between Zagłoba and Barbara Jeziorkowska in *Pan Wołodyjowski*. He alone adores Baśka from the start, and he (not Michał) confesses his love for her ("I am going to Chreptiowo with you, because I'm in love with Baśka!" [PW 204]). In a different extract, we see him looking at her with "infatuated eyes, or rather, an infatuated eye" [PW 202]. Also from the beginning he struggles to get them to be together.

> Ultimately Skrzetuski's persuasions were of no use, nor were the ones which he would try upon himself from time to time. At times, he would promise himself not to interfere in anything, and then he would return with a new passion to the thought of getting them together. He thought for days how to lay his hand to the matter; he created plans, devised stratagems. And he troubled himself with this so much, that if it seemed to him that he had found a solution, he would shout aloud, as if it were already done: – May God bless you! [PW 155].

Baśka is Zagłoba's obsession. He loves her from the first meeting and persistently, for a long time to no avail, tries to convince everyone, especially Michał, of her grace, beauty, and the merits of her character. The author even flatters his tastes by giving Baśka short hair, in resemblance to Helena, because when he meets her "her hair was, clearly recovering from illness, short and stuffed under a gold net" [PW 56]. Michał, however, does not share Zagłoba's enthusiasm. The solution to the impasse of the vicissitudes of love in *Pan Wołodyjowski* is curious and actually incomprehensible.[250] Michał's turn to Baśka is accidental, caused by her proposal and his suffering. And again the author entrusts Zagłoba with an astute diagnosis of Michał's expectations regarding women. He delivers it when his friend loses Anusia Borzbohata.

> I have come to know Michał through and through, and as God is my witness, I would not reproach him here, but as I see it, he regrets the marriage more than the girl. [PW 19]

The desire for marriage, not love, prompts Michał to turn from Krzysia to Bogusia. The narrator assures us that they soon fell deeply in love with each other, but the reader observes Zagłoba's, not Michał's, manifestations and declarations of love. The seducer disguised as a father, or simply just in love – Zagłoba needs Michał. It is through him that he will be close to Baśka, as he was to Helena. The game ends when Wołodyjowski dies. Zagłoba then becomes "a character without

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250 Stefan Szymutko even calls it a "phantasmal abomination" (S. Szymutko, *Trud pokrzepiania serc*, op. cit., p 50).

steam," a cripple, "like Flip after the death of Flap,"[251] like Sancho after the death of Don Quixote. Then also Zagłoba changes from a "strange guardian," "father seducer," and he becomes a real father, which means a dead one. He suffers and gets closer to death, because in the timeless world of the epic an emotion ties him to a fragment of an unsteady world. Twice Sienkiewicz stops his narcissistic hedonism: in his love for Helena and Baśka. It is thanks to the love for something which is not himself, that the character of Zagłoba reveals an existential depth. The women he loves pull him out of the carnival drunkenness and taint him with a destructive transformation. The image of Zagłoba standing over Wołodyjowski's casket is the actual death of old Don Juan.

Da capo. Of the many women in the *Trylogia*, Zagłoba is really attracted to only two: Helena and Baśka. Everything separates them: beauty, maternity, temperament. As an analysis of the symbolism of the female portrait in the whole output of Sienkiewicz demonstrates, the differences are in fact complementary points. Combined together, Helena and Baśka create a phantasm already known to us, described most clearly by Płoszowski in *Bez dogmatu*: one with "the face of a girl with the allurements of a woman" [BD 367].

3. "– No one is laughing! No one is laughing!"

When and at what does Zagłoba laugh in the *Trylogia*? Does the laughter that he stirs in readers return to him, and is it reflected in his own laughter? Zagłoba is not only a comic character, but also, in the world of the novel, the instigator of comedy.

Passing through Sienkiewicz's cycle in the search for a laughing Zagłoba, we find just two scenes and both relate to Wołodyjowski. The first one takes place in *Potop*, when Wołodyjowski tells him the story of how he tried to free himself of Oleńka's charms.

> So I see that she pierced you like a thorn? – said Zagłoba.
> – Certainly, that's how I recall it, and though I'm just passing through, and I see Wodokty, I still feel regret. . . . I wanted to drive one nail out with another, and I went to Pan Schylling, who has a very lovely daughter. I saw her once on the road from far off, and she struck me hard with her charms. I went there – and what do you say, sirs? – the father wasn't at home, and Mademoiselle Kachna thought that this is not Pan Wołodyjowski, but only Pan Wołodyjowski's menial. . . . I so took that affront to heart that I never showed myself there again.
> Zagłoba began to laugh. [My underlining – R.K.]

251 I paraphrase here a passage from a poem by Tadeusz Sławek from the collection *Rozmowa*, Katowice 1985, p. 44.

> – God bless us, Pan Michał! The whole thing is that you have to find a wife with the same evil beauty that you have. [P I 214]

Wołodyjowski’s self-deprecating humor makes Zagłoba laugh. He could come up with a similar joke; it is precisely within his poetics. We observe a temporary exchange of roles, as if the author wanted to make Zagłoba, for once, be able to laugh at his own joke. There is, admittedly, another scene where we see him laughing, but the sincerity of this laughter is questionable; he rather uses it to ward off the unpleasant contents of his own words.

> How different now are the women in the world! In my time, when a married woman sat down on a bench, it squeaked, as if someone had stepped on a dog’s tail, and you could ride bareback on a cat, without much bother for the said beast…. Some also say that women who start matchmaking will not have any offspring.
> – Do they truly say that? – asked the little knight, concerned. However Pan Zagłoba began to laugh. [My underlining – R.K.] [PW 305]

Zagłoba would probably also have laughed, listening to Rössel’s story of how Bogusław ordered them to toss the doctor on sheets, but he does not appear in the scene.[252] Wołodyjowski, admittedly, says that “– We need to tell Mr Zagłoba about this remedy,” but his reaction is unknown. And that is all. Zagłoba smiles often, he tends to be joyful, content, but he laughs sincerely only once. Perhaps this lack of laughter is nothing significant, but merely a result of an old rule, that one should not laugh at one’s own joke, what Freud, in his work on jokes, considers as the basis for this type of communication. Freud writes there that it is not the author, but someone who is a passive listener who laughs at the joke.[253] The person who laughs at his/her own joke, shows a lack of faith in the effectiveness of its comic humor and persistently tries to impose on the recipient the teller’s own laughter. One of the grimmest characters from a book, by Sienkiewicz’s favorite Dickens, laughs only once, and that at his own joke.

> Nor do I recollect that Mr. Murdstone laughed at all that day, except at the Sheffield joke—and that, by the by, was his own.[254]

Pleasure for the witty narrator does not, therefore, come solely from the relating of comical content, because this, after all, he already knows. He desires, in turn, explosions of laughter from his listeners. Zagłoba cannot play with the content of his own jokes, not only because he already knows them, but also because their content touches painful aspects of life, including his own. This is the other face of

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252 This is also Nero’s favorite game in *Quo Vadis*: “catching women, and tossing them on a soldier’s coat until they passed out”[Q 130]. We find a similar scene in *Don Quixote*, when Sancho soars in the air, tossed high by the muleteers.

253 S. Freud, *Dowcip i jego stosunek do nieświadomości*, op. cit., p. 126.

254 Charles Dickens, *David Copperfield*, ch. 2.

comedy in the novel. In Zagłoba's jokes, as with any great humorist, contradictory qualities meet: hurtful or embarrassing content captured in a joke and for a moment deprived of importance, and the laughter of the listeners affirming this transformation. War, death, the incompetence of leaders, disappointed feelings, complexes, incomprehensible times, the dark future – for a while, all this becomes un-real in a comic picture, which gives relief to anyone who reacts to it with laughter.

> In this way humor becomes the best indicator of a philosophy of life. Thus, great humor sees life as huge and small, precious and worthless, tragic and, at the same time, comic. It tries to combine the tragedy of life with its comedy; it combines the grandness of an idea with the smallness of an act, the irony of limitations with an admiration for faultless things. […]
>
> A great humorist, therefore, does not lose faith in greatness and good, even though life holds so much vileness and suffering, while, at the same time, a belief in the value of life does not cloud for him the smallness of the world and its filthiness.[255]

Stefan Papée wrote so in the only monograph, up to now, dedicated to Sienkiewicz's comedy. Tadeusz Bujnicki follows this lead, recognizing laughter in the *Trylogia* as a fundamental component of the therapeutic vision of history presented there.

> In the dramatic picture of defeats and victories, of the state's being in grave danger, and among the dangers to which the heroes of the *Trylogia* are constantly exposed, laughter covers extensive areas of the novel; it releases tensions; it creates an optimistic perspective.[256]

Is it indeed possible to base some sort of historico-philosophical optimism on Zagłoba's humor? His jokes anarchize the discourse that tries to explain history; they create an illusion of the supposed advantage of the poor over the wealthy and over the fear-inspiring "extras" of history. The are, in truth, a brief holiday composed of intelligent, and sometimes wise, tomfoolery, but they cannot free the readers of the *Trylogia* from the burden of history. On what grounds would the optimism of the laughing characters and readers of Sienkiewicz's novel be based? Would it be nothing more than the deception of language, which would cause the pleasure of a laughing body, while the mind – for the moment unaware of its historical and existential condition – experiences a short break from history? If so, it is a very brief deception, a ruse successful for just little while, contrary to Tadeusz Bujnicki who claims that in the militarized world of the *Trylogia*,

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255 S. Papée, *Sienkiewicz jako humorysta*, op. cit., p. 142.

256 T. Bujnicki, "Sienkiewicza 'powieści z lat dawnych,'" *Studia*, Kraków 1999, p 63. This is a thesis borrowed from Krzyżanowski, who argued that Zagłoba's humor was "to lighten […] the gloomy atmosphere of *Ogniem i mieczem*, while at the same time to bring down to a level of human affairs the heroic dimension of deeds and people" (J. Krzyżanowski, *Twórczość Henryka Sienkiewicza*, Warszawa 1973, p 368).

"Zagłoba's laughter is an effective weapon for overwhelming his opponent."[257] Zagłoba's jokes are merely interludes in the abattoirs of war, from which for a moment laughter takes away the seriousness and the dread.

One would want to ask, however: whose laughter? Because we perceive the role of humor differently, when we reach the level of the reader. Without the ballast of reality, the laughter called up by Zagłoba does seem to triumph over serious reflection on the fictional pictures of the seventeenth century. It even seems that he corresponds to and tends to promote an intolerable sarmatian social and political recklessness, that he justifies and condones it. Alongside the sometimes ironic narration, inspired most assuredly by *Beniowski*, the laughter caused by Zagłoba is a primary measure which Sienkiewicz uses as a way to complicate and even to demystify the pathos of pictures of characters and situations seen in the *Trylogia*. This is not, however, done in an aggressive and direct way, because Zagłoba – the instrument of these literary practices – is also the incarnation of sarmatian charm, as well as a figure who reveals its worst faults. This ambiguity is not – as Prus put it – an unreal excess in which the author dresses his hero, but results from the ambivalence of humor, described above in the words of Stefan Papée. The mind, and its momentary evasion of the weight of history are, therefore, a result of the surprise by a word or image, which envelop and charm the reader, stimulating his body into laughter. The lost heavenly state of children playing outside the consciousness of time is, therefore, possible to recover by experiencing humor. In the famous essay "Laughter," Henri Bergson points, that in the laughter of an adult, appears the restitution of childhood fun.

> Indeed, it seems possible that, after a certain age, we become impervious to all fresh or novel forms of joy, and the sweetest pleasures of the middle-aged man are perhaps nothing more than a revival of the sensations of childhood, a balmy zephyr wafted in fainter and fainter breaths by a past that is ever receding. In any case, whatever reply we give to this broad question, one thing is certain: there can be no break in continuity between the child's delight in games and that of the grown-up person. Now, comedy is a game, a game that imitates life. And since, in the games of the child when working its dolls and puppets, many of the movements are produced by strings, ought we not to find those same strings, somewhat frayed by wear, reappearing as the threads that knot together the situations in a comedy?[258]

But who is this grown-up Pole, who – deprived of a state for over a century – laughs at the jokes of a fat, noble volunteer, a crook, and a drunk, when he, contrary to the reality of his world, insulting the knowledge and experience of the reader of

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257 T. Bujnicki, "Sarmacko-barokowy świat pana Zagłoby," in: *Sienkiewicza 'powieści z lat dawnych,'"* op. cit., p. 186.

258 Henri Bergson, *Laughter: An Essay on the Meaning of the Comic*, Chapter 2 – www.gutenberg.org

the *Trylogia*, states that it will all work itself out, because "there is no kind of oppression from which a force united, with divine help, would not be able to get up again"? Only a stupid person, as Łazarz Baranowicz calls the people prone to laughter in his poem "On Laughter: Guard against Laughter, Sign of Sin."

> *Śmiać się na świecie nie radzę nikomu,*
> *Świat jest wygnaniem, śmiać się chyba w domu. […]*
> *Głupi się śmieje, choć się nic nie dzieje,*
> *Śmiech, jak ślad głupich, niech się nam nie leje.*
>
> (To smile in the world I recommend to none,
> The world is exile, best smile at home. [. . .]
> The foolish man smiles, though at nought,
> By laughter, fools' sign, let us not be caught.)

The laughter of an adult is an unauthorized illusion of not remembering about one's condition. This usurpation of freedom from history and one's place in it, which the laughing body suggests, has, according to Baudelaire, a diabolical and insane provenance, in the respect in which it is an expression of superiority over who (or what) is the subject of laughter.

> Laughter is satanic; it is therefore profoundly human. In man it is the consequence of the idea of his own superiority; and, in effect, as laughter is essentially human, it is essentially contradictory. That is it is at once the sign of an infinite grandeur and of an infinite misery, a misery infinite relative to the absolute Being of which he has a conception, a grandeur infinite relative to the animals. It is from the perpetual shock of these two infinities that laughter emerges. The comic, the power of laughter is in the person who laughs and nowhere in the object of laughter.[259]

Therefore, a laughing adult is not an innocent child, mired in a game affirming its own existence "fettered to the moment" (Nietzsche), but a "devilish child," which in laughter satiates itself with an advantage over its neighbor to which it has no right. The cheerfulness of an adult can only be the effect of temporarily forgetting about one's existential and historical misery, about being entombed in flesh and history. The condition for laughter is the suspension of knowledge of reality enshrouding the subject of humor, and therefore ignorance, *non-savoir*.

Knowledge of the object of laughter is not needed for laughter to ensue. Do we therefore know (do we have to know?) what we are laughing at? Bergson, questioned on this matter, suddenly reveals a contradiction in his argumentation. He claims earlier that "Its [humor's] appeal is to intelligence, pure and simple."[260] If so, then this means that laughter deceives the mind; the foolish body uses

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259 Charles Baudelaire, *L'essence du rire* (1855). The translation given here is from the French text and is by me – DM.

260 Bergson, *Laughter*, Chapter 1 – www.gutenberg.org.

the mind to give itself pleasure. The mind does not study the comic object; its actions should be limited to recognizing a humorous figure. Laughter and the mind do not join in the lust for knowledge, but in the lust for pleasure, given by a temporary superiority over the object of laughter and a sense of community with others laughing. Laughter blocks understanding and empathy for the situation of the ridiculed, and thus – Bergson writes – "Instinctively, and because one would rather be a cheat than be cheated, in imagination at all events, the spectator sides with the knaves."[261]

We suddenly become aware of a kind of amorality in laughter. The identity of the comic object is of no relevance, and laughter belongs to those who are not funny. It seems that once even Zagłoba himself becomes a humorous object for other characters, when he fights off the monkeys in the Kazanowski Palace. At sight of this his comrades in arms

> suddenly stood in amazement, looked at one another, and as if under a spell they roared all together in laughter. More soldiers came running up, a whole crowd, but laughter, like the plague, came upon everyone. So they staggered as if drunk, held their sides, faces smeared with human blood grimaced spasmodically, and the more Zagłoba threw himself about, the more they laughed. [P III 196]

Cheerfulness has in this scene monstrous attributes: blood, intoxication, spasms, roars, plague. Laughter seems to govern itself, making the body an instrument for its continuance; at the same time it creates an enigmatic unity among subjects, which must succumb to it "as if under a spell." The horror of laughter, which is revealed for a brief moment by the humorous text, also manifests itself in the loss of good sense, in doing dangerous things against one's better judgment. This is what happens in a scene from *Potop*, when the drunk nobleman Szczaniecki makes a toast to the health of Janusz Radziwiłł, calling him the future king of Poland and Holy Roman Emperor.

> Again there was a moment of silence – suddenly the revelers burst out laughing all at once. Their eyes bulged, their moustaches moved around their reddened faces, and laughter shook their bodies, echoing off the vaulting of the room and lasting for a long time, and as suddenly as it happened, equally it ended and faded from all the faces at the sight of the hetman's face, which shone with all the colors of the rainbow. [P I 400]

It is not until they see of the hetman's face, who is struggling to control his anger, that the laughter stops.

The reader finds him/herself in a different position in relation to the comedy displayed in the novel. Firstly, he/she does not need to know exactly what the characters of the novel are laughing at, and even if he/she does, the comedy internal to the novel does not need to affect him. However, if the reader is laughing with

261 Bergson, ibid, Chapter 2.

the characters, is he/she laughing at the same things? Clearly not, because he/she encounters presented comedy, the identification of which follows a different path from those described in the world of the novel. There the characters cannot but laugh at these scenes. We are allowed to find them un-amusing. And this is not their sole function: reading the text engages reflection to a much greater extent than does listening to jokes, and literary comedy is rarely used solely to amuse an audience.

Zagłoba experiences his greatest triumph in *Potop* when he suggests to Zamojski a riposte to the shameless bribe that the Swedish delegate offers to Sobiepan, i.e. the "Lublin Voivodeship in hereditary possession." Then

> Suddenly, in the deafening silence, Zagłoba spoke in Polish from behind the governor's back.
> – Your eminence, offer the king of Sweden the Low Countries in return. [P III 31]

In this scene, the utopia of the perfect word is achieved: the statement is perfectly timed, it is anticipated, adequate, brilliant, public, understood, despite irony and allusion. Its comic perfection is confirmed by the laughter of the listeners. When Zamojski, without hesitation, repeats Zagłoba's phrase in Latin, "the room responded in unison with a great burst of laughter. Bellies, and the belts on them, began to shake; some clapped their hands, others staggered around like drunks, some leant on their neighbors, and laughter sounded continually" [P III 32].

Laughter is gregarious – "it requires an echo" – and because of this, it provokes mindless participation, based on the solidarity of aggressive bodies. Instinctively or through calculation, we press our shaking bodies to the grotesquely reduced bodies of the listeners (bellies, belts, hands). By joining those already laughing, we place ourselves opposite the one who is not laughing. In this scene, three characters do not laugh – Zagłoba, Forgell, and Zamojski – but the actual structure of the joke, however, is laid out differently. It is created by a triangle: Zagłoba, King Karl Gustaw, and the audience of the joke. Forgell and Zamojski are merely the representatives of the equivalent actors of this scene. The listeners, therefore, laugh at the king, which is a comic *topos*: the jester mocks the king. The boundaries of clownish freedom of speech are strictly defined,[262] one of its conditions being a function of the jester's character, his low social status, often his disability. Within these social frames, "there is no slander in an allowed fool, though he do nothing but rail; nor no railing in a known discreet man, though he do nothing but

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262 "It should be remembered that no scenario specifying the actions of a jester allows him to say anything he wants; he also has his orders; he is never allowed to tell full truths; boundaries exist which he is not allowed to cross" (M. Głowiński, "Portret Marchołta," *Twórczość* 1974, no 8, p 80).

reprove."[263] But Zagłoba is not a jester, though the author sets out much pejorative foolish behavior on his part at the beginning of *Ogniem i mieczem*. Before the legend of Stańczyk flourished in Polish culture, a jester – as Mirosław Słowiński writes in his splendid monograph – "means human stupidity, physical or mental handicap, or the symbol of sin, debauchery, pursuit of sensual pleasures. Given to someone 'for company,' the jester fulfills a degrading, defamatory, and mocking function."[264] To strengthen the difference between the fool's/jester's humor and the type which Zagłoba creates and represents, the author introduces a real jester into *Potop*.

> Among groups of nobles walked Ostróżka, clothed in motley sewn from colorful rags, holding a scepter decorated with bells, and with the face of a silly dodger. Wherever he appeared, a circle formed around him, and he added fuel to the fire; he helped denigrate dignitaries and told riddles, and the more scathing they were, the more the nobles laughed. [P I 162–166]

Zagłoba in Zamojski's court is very close to the function of a jester. However, he is not socially degraded. He is free and aware that he may not speak the truth with impunity. Hence his jokes are not limited to ridiculing someone. Let us go back to the scene of offering the King of Sweden the Low Countries. What does it mean in the novel, and what does it mean for the reader?

When telling a joke we assume that a unity of laughter exists,[265] to which the participants in the communication belong, and even if the joke is not understood, we assume that in this community there is a custom of telling jokes. Similarly when we laugh, each time we confirm and we establish anew such a community. We confirm, in this way, an un-concluded, but existing agreement with the others who are laughing. We are also experts in laughter. We "know" what is funny, and our laughter, or its lack, falsifies the comic. A lack of response to the comic unmasks its flaws or is evidence of the termination of the community of laughter, when we do not know or do not understand the sense of comic signs.

The obviousness of laughter obscures its complex mechanics. Understanding them is an old dream of philosophy. Simon Critchley, drawing on the anthology of John Morrell,[266] points out in the philosophical tradition three varieties of

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263 William Shakespeare, *Twelfth Night*, Act I, Scene 5.

264 M. Słowiński, *Błazen. Dzieje postaci i motywu*, Poznań 1990, p 247.

265 K. Żygulski, *Wspólnota śmiechu. Studium socjologiczne komizmu*, Warszawa 1985, p 21.

266 *The Philosophy of Laughter and Humor*, Albany 1987. Among Polish works, compare the following: D. Buttler, *Polski dowcip językowy*, Warszawa 1968; K. Żygulski, *Wspólnota śmiechu*, Warszawa 1985; M. Gołaszewska, *Śmieszność i komizm*, Wrocław–Warszawa 1987; A. Główczewski, "O głównych terminach teorii komizmu," *Acta Universitatis Nicolai Copernici* 1994, 276; W. Chłopicki, *O humorze poważnie*, Kraków 1995; *Stylistyka* X, 2001.

reflection on laughter and the comic. Thus, according to Plato, Aristotle, Hobbes, and Quintilian, we laugh because of a momentary feeling of superiority over others, who are characters in comic situations or performances. According to Spencer and Freud, laughter is the energy of the subconscious released after prior suppression, and thus providing pleasure. However, according to Kant, Schopenhauer, and Kierkegaard, humor is the result of experiencing the conflict between what we know and expect and what takes place in the joke, gag, piece of nonsense, etc.[267]

Despite the differences, a common element of these ideas is clearly distinguished. Humor is created through conflict or contrast between how things really are, and how they have been presented; between reality and expectations. We lose the sense of comedy when one of the pieces, or both, is alien to us.

Karl Gustaw offers the governor a part of the Polish kingdom. The cynical audacity of this proposal lies in the fact that the Swedish king is giving away something that does not belong to him, and appeals to the pride of Polish aristocrats who think themselves equal to kings. But what does Zagłoba's answer mean, and what is funny in it? Why the Low Countries, and not some other land? Is it a symmetrical riposte, which causes the audacious proposal of a bribe to become its own derisory opposite? Zagłoba offers the Swedish king another country – as it seems – the Seventeen Provinces. A comic contiguity of Protestant Sweden and the confessionally related Low Countries is formed, but this closeness does not give the King any authority, and so, Zagłoba also generously gives away what is not his to give. It should be remembered that in Europe of that time, the so-called Spanish Netherlands, which belonged to Spain, existed (in the region of today's Belgium), and the dominant religion there was Catholicism. Does Zagłoba not spitefully offer the Swedish King this country – spitefully, because it would result in war with the still powerful Spain? Is comedy therefore based on metonymy or on anti-thesis, and means: I give you a different Catholic country, which is part of a great power similar in some respects to Poland? Is this distinction significant for the person laughing? Probably not, because laughter is meant to dismiss reflection for a time. But for us who ask about the function of the comic text in the novel, definitely.

Freud, many years after writing his book on the subject of the joke, wrote a paper entitled "Humor," in which he returned to the issue of laughter, this time inquiring about the relation between ego and superego in the process of creating humor. He suggested the idea that perhaps it was a matter of the super-ego, like a gracious lord, allowing the ego to rest in its struggles with the real world.[268]

This is a surprising hypothesis. The harsh mental instance, the internalized ideal, which produces a constant sense of guilt in the imperfect "I," suddenly gives it the grace of laughter, laughter at what it represents itself. This mechanism,

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267 S. Critchley, *On Humor*, London and New York, 2002, p. 3.

268 S. Freud, "Humor," in *Pisma psychologiczne*, trans. R. Reszke, Warszawa 1997, p. 269.

transferred to the narrative of history, would allow one to perceive Zagłoba as an act of grace offered to the participant in and reader of history, a history "giving the impression of being so dangerous." Reality does not change; there is reconciliation of man and the world through comic mediation. A triumph occurs on the stage of consciousness, on which a comic picture is created causing the rejection of the claims of reality and the realization of the pleasure principle.[269]

Freud consistently avoids the aggressive and purely reactive dimension of laughter at a joke or a comedian. Zagłoba rarely uses a joke to humiliate somebody; he feeds on the laughter that he stirs up, but the greatest pleasure is given him by the laughter of women, and not only young ones. For example, Auntie Makowiecka "had a strange laugh, because firstly she began to shake and tremble and then she gave a high-pitched cry. Everyone was exhilarated. Zagłoba was delighted" [PW 58].[270] Femininity and laughter form an interactive couple, in which joy is a sublimation of erotic pleasure, at its purest, if the man observes and hears female laughter. Zagłoba constantly yells that (despite being ninety) he could…, if only he wanted to… He does not allow the sorrows of a lonely old man to affect him, he does not reveal his ridiculous (in the eyes of the world) love for a younger woman, and he satisfies himself with her laughter, which he can prompt as no other:

> Even more I liked this *hajduk*, because this creature could chase off sadness so well, that a weasel could not scatter mice any better. Because what are sorrows if not mice, which eat up the grains of happiness that lie in our hearts? [PW 59].

And although, at times, Zagłoba reveals a propensity to melancholy, he openly declares a distaste for nurturing one's own grief: "He's a fool who feeds his own sorrows instead of starving them so the creatures die as quickly as possible!" [PW 45]. This is one of the last cocky rodomontades of the hero, who – as we remember – suffers repeatedly and deeply. But once again he transforms himself into the opposite of himself, by laughing at his own pain. The success of such a stance – Freud writes – depends on the triumph of narcissism, on the victoriously underlined inviolability of the "I". The "I" refuses, does not allow, for reality to deliver it to suffering; it insists on keeping away from itself the traumas of the outside world. Indeed, it shows that they are only an opportunity for it to gain the profit of pleasure."[271]

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269 Ibid., p. 266.

270 "Sophy tripped away, and we heard her received in the adjoining room with a peal of laughter. 'Really musical, isn't it, my dear Copperfield?' said Traddles. 'It's very agreeable to hear. It quite lights up these old rooms. To an unfortunate bachelor of a fellow who has lived alone all his life, you know, it's positively delicious'" – Charles Dickens, *David Copperfield*, Ch. 59 – www.gutenberg.org.

271 Freud, "Humor," op. cit., p. 266.

4. "And being thus frighted swears a prayer or two"

Contrary to Bergson, the laughter that Zagłoba causes is not childish. It is the laughter of an adult, who, aware of the existential necessities of human fate, defends his consciousness from becoming indifferent to the cruelty and absurdity of war. The splendor of fictional battle scenes often has, in Sienkiewicz's works, a bitter counterpoint in the form of the perspective of an individual, who does not comprehend the sense of this fratricidal carnage. Cracks in the comic convention in the character of Zagłoba are justified, when underneath the mask of flippancy there lurks the knowledge of a person who knows perfectly well how few reasons to laugh there are in the historical world of the *Trylogia*. The narrative of adventure tries to marginalize this knowledge or cover up the troublesome subtleties of the text with the machinery of an interesting story. But when we master the drive for fabularization and allow an event to disperse into non-functional fabular meanings, then the text loses its clarity, meanings thicken, and we stop following the simple path of recognition, compelled to interpret it. This practice is particularly notable in the scene where Zagłoba awaits the start of battle at the side of Skrzetuski.

> Pan Zagłoba, standing steadily at Skrzetuski's side, looked at that human sea and muttered:
> – O Christ, for what did you create so much of this rabble! It must be Chmielnicki himself with darkness and all its vermin! Is this not license indeed, my lord? With their hats they'll cover us up. And it used to be so fine in the Ukraine! Down they fall and down they cast! God grant, the devils cast you down to hell. And it's all on our backs. God grant, may the farcy take them!
> – Do not swear, sir. Today is Sunday.
> – Ah, true. Today is Sunday; it would be better to think of God. . . . *Pater noster qui es in coelis*. . . . You can't expect any respect from those scoundrels. . . . *Sanctificetur nomen Tuum*. . . . But think what is going to happen on that causeway! . . . . *Adveniat regnuum Tuum*. . . . It takes my breath away. . . . *Fiat voluntas Tua*. . . . May you perish, you murderous savages! . . . Look, sir! What's that?
> A unit made up of a few hundred men separated from the black mass and made for the causeway in a disorderly manner.
> – Those are skirmishers – said Skrzetuski – Soon our men will go out toward them.
> – So the battle must of necessity start now?
> – As there is a God in Heaven.
> – May the devils take them! – (Pan Zagłoba's ill humor was now measureless.)
> – And you, sir, you look on as at a theater show in carnival time! – he called out in anger at Skrzetulski – as if it wasn't about your own skin! [OM I 414]

The construction of the scene is based on two tricks. The first is realized by the bizarre rhetoric of stylistic entwinement, in which Zagłoba combines phrases from the Lord's Prayer with curses hurled at the enemy. However, when the laughter at the typical juxtaposition of "high" and "low" dies out, then each recurrence of

seriousness reveals the poly-semantic background to Zagłoba's humor. First of all, the prayer and the curse become equated rhetorically. Are we dealing with a sharpening of contrast, or on the contrary – a blasphemous leveling of the difference between fundamentally different utterances? A lot depends on the question we ask. If the question concerns comedy, then we discover the confrontation of styles within traditional decorum. However, if we consider that the meanings of the scene go far beyond comic convention? Let us not hurry to answer the question. As we mentioned earlier, Sienkiewicz enjoys repeating his favorite tricks.

In the novel *Na polu chwały* he reaches twice for such a compositional solution, though they both involve the same character. Father Woynowski, a former soldier, feeds his poultry reciting the Lord's Prayer. At the same time he also scolds a domesticated vixen, which trembles with desire at the sight of the birds.

> *Pater noster*. [. . .]
> – And your skin quivers when you see it. . . . Every day the same. . . . Learn to control your natural desires, for your victuals are good and you do not know hunger. [NPCH 48-49]
>
> . . . he began from the beginning:
> – *Pater noster*. . . . [. . .] And again he stopped.
> – You wriggle, you wriggle – he said, placing a hand on the vixen's back. – That's your vile nature, that you do not just have to eat, but to kill too. [NPCH 49]
>
> *Adveniat regnum tuum*… . O daughter mine! I know what you would say, that man *libenter perdices manducat*, but know that man even in fasting leaves them in peace, but in you I think the spirit of that filthy Luther sits, for even on Good Friday you would eat meat. *Fiat voluntas Tua*. . . . Tut, tut, tut! . . . *sicut in coelo* – there you go, each one after the corn! . . . *et in terra*. . . . [NPCH 49]

Similarly he complains about the pigeons, which, despite the fact that spring is far off, "circle round each other excessively and copulate and coo" [NPCH 49]. He is a former soldier, an old companion of Wołodyjowski who, having renounced his murderous habits and "because of a certain horrible adventure, donned the cassock of a priest," despite this, sometimes feels the old urges of war. The humor of the scene stems from showing the troublesome proximity of ideals and of body. Sienkiewicz cannot part with this concept, because he uses it again at the end, when Woynowski joins Sobieski's expedition to Vienna. He recites the rosary, but the thought of being able to show off his former skills in killing means

> that he began to confuse the rosary: "Hail Mary… fight! kill!... Full of grace – at them!... The Lord is with thee – butcher them!" Until he finally came to his senses: "Pah! damnation! fame is but smoke. . . . Has this gadfly stung me? *Non nobis! non nobis, sed nomini tuo.*… " And began to move the beads more carefully. [NPCH 210]

In this seemingly jovial scene, we discover the shadowy echo of a menacing scene, one that is unfathomable even, when Andrzej Kmicic says the rosary to

the sound of the screams of electoral subjects being murdered by Tatars. Then his only concern was also faithfully to recite the prayer.

The other textual component of the conversation prior to the battle contains a suggestively specified motif of *theatrum mundi*. Zagłoba does not understand Skrzetuski, his routine, the feeling of ordinariness, where he sees the horror of impending death, and especially he does not understand his passivity in relation to misfortune: "I do not ask, I do no whine, I do not curse, I do not hit my head against a wall, I only want to do what I am meant to do" [OM II 191]. Zagłoba is the absolute opposite of Skrzetuski. Not only in this scene. As a volunteer, he does not share Skrzetuski's attitude toward military service, and he suspects him of emotional coldness; above all, he does not understand his attitude regarding Helena's kidnapping.

> . . . rage seized Pan Zagłoba. " – Did he intend to forsake her? – he thought – If so, may God assist him! [. . .] But there are those who will save her still, unless I had already sent out the last pair!" [OM II 39]

> . . . I think I must let this thought flow free before your lordships, for I cannot bear it longer: it is this – have you not noticed, sirs, that for some time Skrzetuski – I do not know – perhaps he dissimulates – but he seems such that among you all he thinks least of saving that poor lady? [OM II 48]

For a long time they do not respect each other. "This nobleman [. . .] would gladly tell a lie. He is not to be trusted! No! No!" [OM II 190], Skrzetuski says, despite the fact that Zagłoba had already once saved Helena for him. Zagłoba, in turn, outraged by Skrzetuski's calm, which may be thoughtless or simply something that comes with routine, bursts out:

> – And you, sir, you look on as at a theater show in carnival time! – he called out in anger at Skrzetulski – as if it wasn't about your own skin! [OM I 414]

The sarcastic reminder that this is really happening seems to be a loose paraphrase of a well-known epigram by Kochanowski, "O żywocie ludzkim" (On Human Life), in which similar words can be found.

> Wierzę, że tam na niebie masz mięsopust prawy,
> Patrząc na rozmaite świata tego sprawy.

> (I believe in heaven a true carnival awaits one,
> Seeing how matters in this world do run.)

Zagłoba's anger is full of disapproval, and it results from an awareness that the position, which the speaker of the epigram desires to hold – an extramundane observer – is not available to humans. There is nothing to laugh about here, because, in the reality involving the character, no position exists from which he could safely look at the world, or even allow himself the laughter full of distance

of a wise old man.[272] The only thing that can allow itself to laugh is the "Eternal Thought" – a periphrasis of the "God of philosophers" – from the cited epigram. About this, after all, Kochanowski wrote in another epigram of the same title:

> Naśmiawszy się nam i naszym porządkom
> Wemkną nas w mieszek, jako czynią łątkom.

> (Having laughed at us and our dispositions,
> They bag us, as they do the villains.)

In the world of the *Trylogia*, there is no functioning God, his prerogatives taken over by the narrator, and it is he who represents the viewer's perspective of the carnivalesque comedy.

> You would have thought, looking from afar, that it was a tournament of some sort, or a game. [OM I 417]

The human being – "a finite thought" – should not be subject to a similar illusion or thoughtlessness, of the kind which outrages Zagłoba in Skrzetuski's neutral attitude. It is seriousness and calm that seem strange to him, maybe even crazy. Brzozowski wrote: "when we feel full of magnificence in ourselves, a fear always arises, that something out of our reach is playing a cynical game with us."[273] Skrzetuski's lack of this fear irritates Zagłoba. The character's ambivalence reaches its highest point in the scene mentioned earlier. We would like to avert it by saying that it is only a braggart's fear that gives his words philosophical wisdom. This, however, is not an isolated motif in the works of Sienkiewicz. The author had already reached for the topic of *theatrum mundi* in *Niewola tatarska*, when Zdanoborski speaks of the sad history of the Wild Fields.

> This land is one of brave men, trampled by the hoofs of Polish, Cossack, Tartar horses, in constant struggle, chasing one after the other in war. And so for generations, like the figures in a paper carnival *theatrum* show up and disappear. [*Niewola tatarska* DV 9]

The bitter vision of unstable human generations does not arouse any disquiet in the martyr-knight, but in another work from before the *Trylogia* – "Selim Mirza" – the old poacher, Mathieu, says of the fighting Frenchmen and Prussians that "they kill one another. Burning villages at the same time, and the Lord looks

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272 Contrary to Zagłoba, a subtle estheticizing stoicism was close to Sienkiewicz himself. He made this part of the character that was closest to him in *Wiry*. Groński "was more of a spectator rather than an actor on the world's stage, but a kind spectator, lively in his feelings and exceptionally curious. He would also sometimes liken himself to a man, who while sitting by the river and eyeing its course, knows that it must flow into the sea and disappear in it, but he is nevertheless interested in the motions of waves, and the current, and the whirlpools, and the fog rising from its surface, and the way light dances on the water" [W 86].

273 S. Brzozowski, "Legenda Młodej Polski," in: *Eseje i studia o literaturze*, op. cit., v 2, p. 885.

down at this and does not thunder" ["Selim Mirza," D IV 183]. Other characters do not try to understand what is happening, expressing only their confusion in the nightmare of war. Therefore the helpless mind reaches out towards allegories which seemingly clarify reality.

> For a thinking man, military service has also this disgusting side, that you never know what is happening to you. Some hand moves you like a pawn, and that is all. ["Selim Mirza," D IV 212].

Aware of the variants of this motif in the works of Sienkiewicz, we see how intricate the levels of comicality are in this scene. Funny is the rhetoric of the mixed styles of prayer and curses masking Zagłoba's fear; bitter-funny is the allusion to Kochanowski's epigrams; but put together they make, in the context of the plot, a statement which destroys the comic quality of the component texts. Similarly they destroy their distinctiveness: prayer and curse coming from Zagłoba's mouth – both discourses are equally helpless spells of a character who knows that on this stage intellect can not accomplish much, because "this is no time for deception. Not the mind but hands win battles. Here I am, stupid, standing by Podbipięta" [OM I 413]. "No use for deceit! No use for deceit! the fool wins, the wise man dies!" [OM I 422].

One can see how this motif, with slight alterations, travels through the works of Sienkiewicz. The individual fate and common history are not interpenetrative; they do not make any deals nor do they explain themselves. The body kicks in resistance to the idea, which makes it forget about the bestial condition of man. The dichotomy between the human and the animal in man is, for the generation of positivists, stunned by the "Darwinian shock," particularly severe. By the grace of literature, the individual mind and the ability to cause laughter sometimes fool brutal force in the fictional world. Laughter takes away, for a moment, the gravity of history, transforming it into a carnival, into "God's playground." By introducing Zagłoba into a historical novel about military and political disaster, where quite literarily thousands of people are fighting for biological survival, the writer alleviates the image of a carnage performed by human figures, but also exposes the unfathomable absurdity of history.

In his essay Śmiech" (Laughter) Tadeusz Żeleński (Boy) expresses a belief much like Sienkiewicz's that laughter has a bizarre power, both individualizing the person laughing and integrating him/her with the world of other laughing people and him/herself. Laughter "is a sort of ecstatic state of perceiving the world, maybe a joyful and astonished tracing of the border between one's own 'I' and 'not I,' between the inner and outer world, and also the release of this state combined with pleasure."[274] Helmuth Plessner draws attention to a similar phenomenon of laughter

274 T. Żeleński (Boy), "Śmiech," in: *Pisma*, ed. H. Markiewicz, Warszawa 1956–1958, v. XVIII (*Felietony* III), p. 23.

when he states that the most unusual aspect of the laughing man is “his eccentric position, [which] allows him to perceive himself and the surrounding world, in which he is at home and in which he recognizes himself to be restricted and open, familiar and foreign, sensible and absurd.”[275] “Eccentric” means here: aware of one’s isolation both from nature and from language; one perceives, therefore, a mutual “deadlocking” of two spheres of existence.

Zagłoba, being a source of constant rhetorical performance, himself resides somewhere outside rhetoric. This “being outside” manifests itself primarily in his sudden emotional changes (news of Helena’s death, rescuing Wołodyjowski and Podbipięta, Podbipięta’s death, the death of Roch, Wołodyjowski’s death), when Sienkiewicz displays to the reader his apathy, hysterical happiness, desperate sobs, and trembling body. One image of Zagłoba has the power of expression that sweeps away historical color. This happens in the scene cited below, when we look through the eyes of his friends at the man shaken by Helena’s death.

> They even thought that maybe, tired by pain, he had fallen asleep on his knees, but after some time he stood up and sat down on the sofa; but it seemed that it was not the same person: his eyes were red and clouded, his head lowered, his lower lip hung down to his chin, on his face had settled infirmity and unthinkable decrepitude – so much so that it really seemed that the old Zagłoba, supercilious, jovial, full of fantasy, had died, and a tired old man burdened with old age was left in his place. [OM II 227]

This is one of many wonderful fractures in the seemingly homogeneous text. There is no trace of historical distance. A strange pose, facial details, the physiology of mental shock, cut the character loose from the costume and the limits of typology or genre. This scene is remarkable in that shows how Sienkiewicz’s imagination is not confined within the conventional framework of an adventure narrative and, as if by a wonderful absentmindedness, reaches for the methods of psychological realism. The spasm of despair is soon reversed, however, and good news means that “the old man stamped his feet, he laughed, he cried, and at the end he grabbed Rzędzian by the head, hugged him to his chest, and began to kiss him so hard that the servant completely lost his wits” [OM II 234]. But soon, saying goodbye to Skrzetuski (who was leaving Zbaraż), “he laid, however, his grey, troubled head on the chest of the knight and hugged him like an infirm child” [OM II 395].

The character of Zagłoba, unrestricted by rigid convention, displays ecstatic states of body and mind, wandering freely between the poles of despair and wild joy. It is thanks to this elasticity that he is the most human character of the *Trylogia*, which the narrator confirms, *inter alia*, when Zagłoba recounts the funeral of Podbipięta. When the famous preacher, Father Muchowiecki, “began

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275 H. Plessner, *Śmiech i płacz. Badania nad granicami ludzkiego zachowania*, trans. and ed. A. Zwolińska and Z. Nerczuk, Kęty 2004, p. 94.

telling of the departure and martyrdom of Pan Longin, he completely forgot about rhetoric and quotations, and when he began to bid goodbye to the lifeless body in the name of the clergy, the leader, and the army, he himself began to cry and spoke bawling like Zagłoba" [OM II 392].

Yet again we ask, like Prus, if this is not a contradiction, that a comical character, creating comedy itself, appears to us in states of extreme despair, groaning and sobbing most seriously. Sharp contrasts of the narrative lead us to the enigmatic union of laughter and tears, to their common corporeal source. Michel Montaigne, reflecting on the affinity of laughter and tears, explained that the difference does not lie in the very object of sorrow or laughter; "there is nothing altered in that but the soul looks upon things with another eye and represents them to itself with another kind of face."[276] Plessner, cited above, states that both laughter and tears are human reactions to borderline situations, which disorganize our expectations and what we are accustomed to. They are "reactions to the crisis of human behavior in general."[277]

With Zagłoba, they are reactions to death, although not each death, but the kind which affects the people he loves. In the vastness of death, which unfolds before the eyes of the reader of the *Trylogia*, Zagłoba declares his opposition five times to the death of characters particularly close to him: Helena, Podbipięta, Roch, Basia, and Wołodyjowski. Of the five, the three male character really die, according to Zagłoba's counting rhyme and the number of parts of the cycle.

> Whomso you love – one, two, three – and then he's gone, and you – go sit, worry, be sad, gnaw at it all, reflect. [OM II 387]

The world of the *Trylogia* is a world of intoxication: with war, power, love, revenge, indulgence, alcohol, speech. Drinking the most, Zagłoba is simultaneously furthest in this intoxication, though he eagerly takes advantage of others' tendency for it. The secret to his famous "stratagems" is incredibly trivial – it relies on getting his opponent drunk – with alcohol and speech. Based on this, after all, are his most famous deceptions: freeing Helena (getting Bohun's Cossacks drunk) and freeing the imprisoned officers in *Potop* (getting Roch drunk). So frequently drunk, he never gets intoxicated by war, he does not fantasize about battles, he does not seek glory, he does not underestimate death. He is a character who does not dream of war, but stays awake impervious to the spells of Queen Mab; for she – in Mercutio's words – tantalizes men with deceptive phantasmagoria.

> Sometime she driveth o'er a soldier's neck,
> And then dreams he of cutting foreign throats,

276 Michel de Montaigne, "That We laugh and Cry for the Same Thing," trans. Charles Cotton (1685-1686) – www.gutenberg.org.

277 H. Plessmer, *Śmiech i płacz*, op. cit., p. 162.

Of breaches, ambuscadoes, Spanish blades,
Of healths five-fathom deep; and then anon
Drums in his ear, at which he starts and wakes,
And being thus frighted swears a prayer or two
And sleeps again.[278]

5. The counter-narrator

Zagłoba's comic and rhetorical talent was not summoned up to fill in or to tell the story more suggestively. He is there for our – the readers' – pleasure. He is a character woven from the fantasy of a subject that dreams of bringing into play a force that is incomprehensible and brutal. This is why his jesting touches, above all, those stronger than himself: Podbipięta, Wołodyjowski, Bohun, Jeremi, Sapieha, Czarniecki, Radziwiłł, Lubomirski, and many more. He lets his companions and us – the readers – laugh at events and people that rouse fear or respect. Using the advantage of his eloquence, not interested in the truth, determined not by cause but by situation, Zagłoba unscrupulously manipulates many characters of the *Trylogia*: Bohun, Burłaj, Roch, Lubomirski, Sapieha, Forgell, Jan Kazimierz, Radziwiłł. His word succeeds – it intoxicates and stupefies its listeners, because it appeals to their flaws: vanity, ignorance, stupidity, pride, recklessness, laziness. Stanley Fish reminds us that the whole art [of rhetoric], as Aristotle explains with great sorrow, is based on spoiling the listener.[279]

Zagłoba is an endless praise of rhetoric in its ethical ambiguity. In accordance with Richard Lenham's distinction, you can describe him as "rhetorical man", because he is an actor, his reality is the audience, the play. His sense of identity depends on establishing everyday theatrical decisions. So he is focused on time and the specific local situation. The rhetorical man learns not to explore reality, but to manipulate it. Reality is what is accepted as reality, that which is useful.[280]

Zagłoba is the charlatan of speech, the master of creating simulations of the truth by constantly stimulating the false word, propelling it to avoid any reflection, and distracting the listener's attention from its meaning. Sienkiewicz occasionally slows down the speed and the threatening effectiveness of the character's linguistic freedom. When this happens, Zagłoba invalidates the weight of his own statements, indicating their self-reflexive character and lack of meaning.

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278 W. Shakespeare, *Romeo and Juliet*, Act I, Scene 4.

279 S. Fish, "Retoryka," in: *Interpretacja, retoryka, polityka. Eseje wybrane*, ed. A. Szahaj, Kraków 2002, p. 428.

280 See: R. Lanham, *The Motives of Eloquence*, New Haven 1976, p. 4, S. Fish, "Interpretacja, retoryka, polityka," op. cit., p. 437.

> – And!... this is how one would say it, to not heat up the steam in the mouth or soften the tongue, which could easily happen from overlong silence [P III 62].

This statement takes place on the way to meet Jerzy Lubomirski, to whom, together with Skrzetuski, he is carrying Czarniecki's letter, a letter that seeks to persuade the proud marshal to join forces with Czarniecki. Zagłoba not only does not hand over the letter, but even takes over the negotiations. He delivers a fiery laudation of Lubomirski's virtues, dazzling him with a vision of the royal crown:

> But – God give our Kazimierz a long life – for a king we are ready to choose!... and... we will choose!
> Here Pan Zagłoba started to worry, could he have overdone it? [P III 66].

The delighted and intoxicated marshal places himself under Czarniecki's leadership. Zagłoba later cynically recounts this to Czarniecki.

> He swallowed everything that I stuffed in his mug, as into a feeding gander's knob, nothing but the sound of swallowing and fog before his eyes [P III 73].

Zagłoba's speech does not serve the thing, but power. Its shape is not directed by care for the adequacy of the statement; it blooms from the "power of the will." Zagłoba's sophistry seems to be justified because it does not serve his own purpose, but the public good. Good (unity in the fight against the Swedes) needs evil (Zagłoba's deceitful speech), for it to triumph. In this case, he who corrupts language with noble intentions is not a sophist. This is clear, and thanks to a truthful narrator, we know the protagonists' intentions, and we know who uses speech in his own interest, and who uses it for the public good. Sienkiewicz uses Zagłoba's character also as a tool to demystify, in this case, other people's betrayals. He will throw charges of treason straight at Janusz Radziwiłł, but will also indirectly point out to the reader that Skrzetuski, who is "of a Roman soul," persuades Kurcewiczowa to betray Bohun, and because of this becomes the author of his own misfortunes. As Zagłoba wisely notices: "You shouldn't have betrayed the Cossack after promising your hand to him" [OM I 260]

The characters' multifunctionality complicates the interpretation of certain scenes, especially those disturbing repetitions, thanks to which some motifs reappear in slightly changed shapes, violating their simple interpretation. In the beginning of *Potop*, we watch a nearly identical scene involving Janusz Radziwiłł, with the drunken Szczaniecki as the flatterer [P I 400]. There, however, after the mention of Radziwiłł's getting the crown, laughter breaks out from the gathered nobility. Why do the listeners not laugh at Zagłoba's speech, when even Lubomirski reacts similarly to Janusz, with his face all the colors of the rainbow.

The difference lies exclusively in the language, which Zagłoba handles so much more efficiently than Szczaniecki. Let us repeat: not the intention, but the effectiveness of the statement proves to be decisive. Zagłoba puts all the magnates

on the same level with the same device: “Show anyone a crown and the corner of an ermine mantle, and you can stroke him against the grain like a greyhound puppy; he will even arch and give you his back...” [P III 68]. Szczaniecki “went too far,” because he flatters Radziwiłł with not only the crown of Poland but an emperor’s crown as well. This creates a hyperbole which transforms the laudation into ironic mockery. In the light of these scenes, the language of politics turns out to be an immoral tool of manipulation, and the fact that Sienkiewicz hands this “tool” to a character that stands on the good side within the novel’s axiology does not change anything. But that is not all, because the sophistic play with the motif of the crown returns for a third time, but now Zagłoba places himself there.

> For if any of them thinks less of me than himself, then let his own pride break his life... The righteous Zagłoba just like Lubomirski, in fortune their only difference... [...]. God give our king the longest of lives, but in the event of election, I’d rather give myself my vote than him... Roch Kowalski would give me a second one, and Pan Michał would mow down the opponents... [P III 68]

What does this tripling mean that equates the two magnates (the traitor and the defender of the motherland) with the ordinary nobleman? The easiest way to clarify the third installment is with the explanation that Zagłoba ceases to be the cunning diplomat, and returns to his old self, to his typological group – a world of buffoonery and fables of the “from peasant to king” sort. However we know that this character is always “something more,” and one must remember that in *Potop* Zagłoba is a representative of dangerous gentry anarchy, when he incites riots against the king’s decision to free Wittenberg.[281]

Sienkiewicz’s consistency goes further, and in *Pan Wołodyjowski* Zagłoba’s fantasy fulfills itself – he takes Radziwiłł’s and Lubomirski’s place. And even though no one tempts him with the crown, the author makes him an important tool in the game of thrones. The authority that he has amongst the noblemen causes him to be a tasty morsel for the elective parties. And so he is paid a visit by an experienced politician – priest vice-chancellor Olszowski, who uses well-known rhetorical devices on Zagłoba. It turns out that they work splendidly in the mouths of others besides Zagłoba, for fed with them he “puffed up [...] immeasurably, he went red, he sweated” [PW 148]. Olszowski’s speech fills his head to such a point, that he loses the ability to think for himself, “but he did not have these thoughts that the priest vice-chancellor put in his head. Anyway he knew of it himself and

281 “What is there greater than the word which persuades the judges in the courts, or the senators in the council, or the citizens in the assembly, or at any other political meeting?— if you have the power of uttering this word, you will have the physician your slave, and the trainer your slave, and the money-maker of whom you talk will be found to gather treasures, not for himself, but for you who are able to speak and to persuade the multitude” (Plato, *Gorgias*, trans. Benjamin Jowett – www.guetnberg.org).

understood that the vice-chancellor was pulling him in some direction, but he was letting himself be pulled, because this flattered him greatly" [PW 15].

Here the situation, which we remember from *Potop*, repeats itself. There Zagłoba by flattery and cunning persuasion induces Lubomirski to cooperate with Czarniecki. Here he finds himself in the role of Lubomirski, and the vice-chancellor attempts by bribery and flattery to incline him to support Michał Korybut. Finally, Zagłoba defies the corrupt proposal and reveals Father Olszowski's game, and although he supports the candidate close to the vice-chancellor, he attaches this justification to his decision.

> I will vote because of the Prince's widow, because of my friends, because of the confidence I have in the good sense (here Pan Zagłoba inclined his head) from which this Minerva sprang, but not because I have let myself be persuaded like a little child that this is my invention; finally, not because I am a simpleton, but because if someone wise tells me something wise, then old Zagłoba says: Agreed! [PW 152]

In this way the writer protects his favorite character's political independence; he demonstrates, however, that language does not belong to anyone in particular, and that there is no one who is free of its spell. Bringing together four variants of the same motif, we see how, *en passant*, Sienkiewicz illustrates the process in which the same utterance cancels out the separateness of objects, how the incorporeality of language permits one without hindrance to plant with it the fantasies and desires of significantly different characters.

Finally, Zagłoba experiences most strongly for himself the effects of his own subversive attitude toward language. Among all the characters in the *Trylogia*, he most frequently pretends to be someone else. Betrayal, deceit, disguise, sneaking around, lying speech – this is his semantic aura. Zagłoba uses language like a veil; it is his form of defense, much less frequently of attack; such an utterance is not interested in the thing, but in eluding force; it is a strategy that he vividly describes himself: "It's a stupid hound that grabs its own tail, because it can't possibly catch up and will certainly not smell anything very pleasant, and in the end it will lose its wind" [OM II 92]. The hunting metaphor illustrates the rules of an attitude to language in which meaning is not the aim of the utterance, but bait thrown to one's opponent. The majority of Zagloba's utterances are non-assertions, especially when they refer to his past. It is impossible to trace the real meanings of his words; it is necessary rather to look for them in the relations between the utterance and the situation in which it arises.

Arising, as it does, under the pressure of often threatening occurrences, Zagłoba's speech rarely has time or space to develop. Sienkiewicz does not let him babble; he compels him to engage in incisive pieces of dialog, lying genealogies, raillery, and when there is no longer any space for prevarication, he employs aphorism. Aphorism, which also usually arises under the pressure of a situation, is

its own kind of speech subterfuge, one which pretends to reflection; it pretends that it can replace reflection, wriggling out of problems with "short cut" arguments.[282]

Zagłoba's speech, shaped by the demands of the plot, only very rarely takes the form of supplementary narration. It is undeniably this at the end of *Ogniem i mieczem*, when Zagłoba first relates to Pani Witowska the sequence of events subsequent to Skrzetuski's departure from Zbaraż. He predicts the continuation of the war with Chmielnicki, which we do not see in *Ogniem i mieczem*. However the finale is most unusual, in which he speaks of the siege of Zbaraż. Before the reader's eyes, the war once more thickens into song. In this intra-novelistic lesson in narratology, Sienkiewicz compels Zagłoba to relate once more what the narrator has already told of over five chapters. Zagłoba's tale calls on "the memory or imagination" of the listeners. But since they already know the content, for they were there, and we know, because we have read the novel, what is the point of this abbreviated repetition at the end of the novel? Andrzej Stoff argues that this kind of narrative by Zagłoba does not supplement the main narrative, but is an autonomous "yarn-teller's display"[283] on the part of the old soldier. However, the narrator's commentary goes against this; he draws attention to another function of the story.

Zagłoba "told to those, who were only at Zborów" [OM II 440]. He appears (hatless) on the carefully prepared stage (a circle of knights at the forefront, with Pani Witkowska, the Princess, and Skrzetuski). But neither he nor even his immediate words are actors; only the speech of the main narrator is, who presents in outline Zagłoba's relation, and presents the listener's reactions. For us there is a presentation of the narrative. The function of telling is, first, to arouse amazement and noble jealousy, so that "those who weren't there, thought with regret that they hadn't been" [OM II 440]. Second, however, those who were there, can grasp the meaning of their own experience, which is threatened by dumbness, forgetting, or rhetorical helplessness.

> Fresh memory or imagination brought those bloody deeds before the knights' eyes: so they saw the trench surrounded as if by the sea, and the mad attacks; they heard the screams and howls, and the banging of the big guns and firearms; they saw the prince in silver armor on the trench wall – amid a hail of balls. . . . Then they saw the

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282 Here is an example of the specific poetics of Zagłoba's aphorism, an analysis of which goes beyond the scope of this chapter.
"I prefer death – the princess interrupted.
But I prefer life, for death is a one-off art, which no joke gets you out of" [OM I 280].
The meaning of this utterance is banal: "I want to live." The situation of the utterance gives it an aphoristic brilliance – a riposte to Helena's bandying a desire for death before any attempt has been made to survive.

283 A. Stoff, *Zagłoba sum!*, op. cit., p. 300.

> misery, the hunger, those red nights in which death circled like a malign bird over the trench . . . the departure of Pan Podbipięta and of Skrzetuski. . . . And they all listened. [OM II 440]

We know this style, these comparisons, these rhetorical images, but they do not. Sienkiewicz grants his characters the grace of meaning, a grace that perhaps their historical models were ignorant of. Thanks to this scene, the reader of *Ogniem i mieczem* can see directly the compensatory operation of narrative. He/she sees the beauty and the horror of history, its collective, community subject, and the meaning of individual heroism that grows out of it. " – . . . he did it! So saying, Pan Zagłoba pointed at Skrzetuski" [OM II 440]. Before our eyes, through literature, a miracle of transformation occurs: the ruined world of a civil war is transformed into an order that opposes reality, history, and, indeed, further information in the novel. Despite this, we listened enraptured; not only we – "Skrzetuski also listened – as if he were hearing something new to him" [OM II 440].

Does the scoffer ally himself with his opponent – the narrator? There is an unusually interesting moment in the novel's action, in which Zagłoba is serious and emotional – he does not laugh, not does he provoke laughter, but his position toward language changes from the comic-subversive to the serious, because the aim of that position is the elevated presentation of heroic deeds. This change, however, does not take the form of Zagłoba's own utterance, but is related in the narrator's language. To put it in other words, Zagłoba is gagged by the narrator's language. In this way, we get to the limits of the character, a limit that it, the character, by the author's decision, cannot cross. The wag and sophist, who has questioned the stability of meaning and the order of an utterance's style, cannot suddenly start to speak seriously, without any of his own waggish shading. So for the time of this tale, Zagłoba loses his linguistic autonomy, and is swallowed up by the main narrator.

Nor does Sienkiewicz allow us to leave the novel in a state of joyful intoxication at the wonderful image of the tale's inspiring operation. In the epilog, the narrator's realistic gaze returns, and he pitilessly reminds us that the end of a piece of literature is not the end of history, that "even its first act does not stop there" [OM 442]. Also the precise date of the end of the Battle of Beresteczko ("Monday, 7 July 1651" [OM II 449]) does not weaken the harsh truth recalled by the author in the final sentences: "Civil wars [. . .] went on for a long time" [OM II 449]. [284] Literature leaves the stage, leaving the place for history; characters lose

284 Contrary to appearances, the endings of individual parts of the *Trylogia* are far from unambiguously optimistic, although the author does not draw back – as Henry James remarked – from "a distribution at the last of prizes, pensions, husbands, wives, babies, millions, appended paragraphs and cheerful remarks" ("The Art of Fiction" (1884)). Wojciech Dzieduszycki wrote, indeed, that: "After reading the book there remains only

clarity, return where they came from, as it were, sucked back by the parsimonious narrative of the sources, leveling the figures' individuality; once more they recall "little figures in a paper carnival *teatrum*, [which] appear and vanish" ("the little knight holding his saber high" [OM II 448], and "a certain well-known knight" [OM II 449]).

Thus, there is no spectacular ending to *Ogniem i mieczem* (just like in the other parts of the cycle), apart from Zagłoba's presented narrative, which – even despite the narrator's support – it is necessary to recognize as one of his splendid pieces of braggadocio. It does not express the idea of the novel; it does not present a credible picture of history; and so the narrator does not wholeheartedly recommend this version. So why then does the author console us with this image, turning us into children listening intently, in order to waken us up later brutally in the epilog?

The task of consoling the reader is given by the author to the figure of the fool, who embodies both the grandeur and the poverty of language. Laughter at his facetious jests transforms us into children spellbound by their reading, to whom for a moment it seems that history is our home, and not a game of powers and processes that we cannot understand, but only experience their force. These are only droll anecdotes after all, and the sayings of a mischievous liar, who does not even allow us the illusion that laughter is the weapon of the weak and aware, and that they deceive with it power, power held attentive for a moment by a swift course of speech – but when that speech falls silent, power awakened once more reclaims the field. Despite this awareness, without the respite that laughter gives, the mind of "historical man" knows only the pressure of the past, pushing him toward an unclear future. And of that future, too, nothing sensible can be said apart from that it drives us "whither those went, to the dark bourn." The reader of the *Trylogia*, who already is not laughing, does not receive in consolation words as elevated as Herbert's, but only the dark and uneasy prophecy (that always comes true) of Chmielnicki: "Tomorrow's corpses are feasting."

In the human ability to laugh, Baudelaire saw a witness to our existentially torn nature. Sienkiewicz wrote about that torn nature in the dazzling spirals of meaning that Zagłoba spins. The creating of such a character is itself an example of the wise folly of literature, which brings respite to those real beings who listen to its words, beings tormented by their historical necessity and finitude. Sienkiewicz, author and wise man, did not wish to use literature to perform vivisection on our despair; he saw the role of fiction in offering relief rather than in the painful penetration

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despair and a terrible awkwardness. And such should never ever be the spirit of a Polish book" (W. Dzieduszycki, "O powieści *Ogniem i mieczem*," in: *Trylogia Henryka Sienkiewicza*, op. cit., p. 37). Wilhelm Feldman called it "sad inspiration" ("Prorok smutnej przeszłości," in: *Trylogia Henryka Sienkiewicza*, op. cit., p. 278).

of what there is in any case no help for.[285] The unlaughing Zagłoba, a completely fictional character, made out of literature, brings laughter to those who struggle with the image of their own future historicity, which in the best case will be a posthumous theatricalization of a corpse speaking with the voice of a historian.

Laughing at the comic scenes of the *Trylogia*, the modern reader knows a pleasure that is built on illusion, that he/she is laughing at a world different from his/her own, laughs at history, which through that laughter seems comprehensible and has human dimensions. That laughter should be a little hysterical, because it is accompanied by the presentiment that the mockery of history can only be an escape from consciousness and not an opportunity for understanding. The author's historical knowledge means that the fictionalization of history in subsequent volumes of the *Trylogia* gets more and more complicated for him and indeed escapes him, becoming unattainable even for the most knowledgeable narrator. Zagłoba gives Sienkiewicz the opportunity of a joke against history, or an undermining and denial – through laughter – of the sublimity and exclusivity of the history which the narrator is in control of, and to which neither the author, nor we – the readers – have access to apart from in fiction. Zagłoba's position does not bring consolation, because, after all, he who jokes about history, cannot laugh himself. The profit is ours, if we accept that laughter is a spasm of awareness, a spasm granted by seriousness as an antidote to the concealed despair of a common endurance.

285 In this context, he wrote of the planned story material for *Quo Vadis*: "Wincjusz, who is a violent man, I will convert – I will show Lygia on the horns of a bull, but I will unite both the converted, because you must, so that at least in literature there is more pity and happiness than in reality. In this way, books can be a consolation for life, as philosophy once was" (to Kazimie rz Morawski, circa 1 April 1905 [Li III/2, 128]).

The Shows of Violence

swords and spears are pens
Ogniem i mieczem

Vulnera inflicted with the pen hurt no less than those from the sword or the bullet.
Na polu chwały

1. Text in affect

After *Krzyżacy*, Sienkiewicz did not write any more colorful tales of war. He announced this in a letter to Karol Potkański of 21 June 1896. "After *Krzyżacy* I intend to get out of harness – if not entirely, then at least from wagons that are too big" [Li III/3 50]. He confirmed this, after finishing the novel, in a letter to Ignacy Baliński on 5 December 1900.

> Although in my novels I've wiped off the face of the earth no fewer people than Napoleon or Moltke, at present no one in Europe is at risk from my sword. [Kor D XL 130][286]

The author – a veteran of fictional wars – keeps his word. But his following novels will be weaker and weaker, as if he has lost energy. Narrative power and drive vanish from them along with the divine nonsense of fictional carnage, duels, and military violence that had hitherto filled his prose about the past. Sienkiewicz is an absolutely exceptional writer in Polish literature, as far as an ability to present violence is concerned, violence which – although frequently macabre and naturalistically presented – produces in the reader an impression of horror mixed with pleasure.[287] This admirer of Homer knew that a narrative of war, like no

286 *Pan Wołodyjowski* was first intended by the author to be less full of war scenes. "Part II will unfold with martial trumpets and canons' roar – in the first, there will not be a single clash of sabers, unless in jest. I don't know if this will work out well for the tale or its teller, but those who have complained of excessive bloodshed will have what they wanted" [Li III/1 530].

287 David Hume wrote of this as follows: "It seems an unaccountable pleasure, which the spectators of a well-written tragedy receive from sorrow, terror, anxiety, and other passions, that are in themselves disagreeable and uneasy. The more they are touched and affected, the more are they delighted with the spectacle; and as soon as the uneasy passions cease

other, weakens the scandalous nature of the individual death, allows the writer to operate with great numbers of killed and wounded, and to exploit without penalty the rhetoric of spectacle for descriptions of killing.

The writer is fascinated by war as a catalyzer of plots and liminal experiences, which the realist would look for in vain in the safe world. For the author, seething with the energy of the story, the attraction of a war narrative rests in the motivated excess of events that marks this type of story material. Omnipresent violence allows the writer to finish or begin episodes and plot lines without any need to construct a complex motivation for them. It is enough that there hangs over this world an overriding narrative to which all others are subordinated: that is, the account of ways of killing and of avoiding death.

On the first page of the cycle, the narrator opens the main narrative, which is simultaneously the beginning of a new cosmogony: "a range of signs in the sky and on earth told of various defeats and extraordinary occurrences" [OM I 5]. The tale of war will from now on be a frame for all the events of the novel. The representation of war in the novel supplies languages also for occurrences and experiences that are not part of the military narrative. For war forms the natural world for the characters of the *Trylogia*; it is the nature of the epic for the human figures involved; even more, the history of war belongs to the group of original and basic tales as one of the most widespread narratives in many cultures.

> From Troy and Waterloo to Verdun and Normandy, from Saigon and Algiers to Fallujah and Baghdad, literary and cinematic representations provide a horrifying record of violent adaptation. Military technologies and instruments of violence change, but the narratives of bodily mutilation, military carnage, and veteran rejection remain the same. In war discourse, the very notion of "adaptation" thus signifies in multiple ways: as a repeating cycle of human violence (adapted to new ages, contexts, and deadly technologies), as a technique for survival (for those soldiers and civilians who must adapt in order to survive and live amid mass death), and as a means of representation (through literature, poetry, art, film, and other forms of cultural testimony).[288]

The literary adaptation of knowledge of war brings an uncounted number of varieties of its representation, all of which have one common object – that is, the body maimed by the violence of war, which together with the objects of civilization and material culture create a territory in which the violence of warfare can be observed. The esthetics of violence produces images of decomposed

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to operate, the piece is at an end. One scene of full joy and contentment and security is the utmost, that any composition of this kind can bear; and it is sure always to be the concluding one" (*Essays Moral, Political and Literary* (1742-1754) – Essay XXII: "Of Tragedy")

288 B. Martin, "From Balzac to Iraq. Soldiers, Veterans, and Military Adaptation," *The Comparatist* 2006, nr 30, p. 68.

bodies, which fill hundreds of pages of the *Trylogia*, *Quo vadis*, and *Krzyżacy*. The secret pleasure that the reading of Sienkiewicz's narratives of violence and cruelty brings, reveals him as the greatest master of presented violence in Polish literature.

He never gives a recipe for such scenes, but in one place he writes how not to do them. The pretext for his modest observations on the poetics of violence was Maria Konopnicka's dramatic fragment entitled *Elisza*, a volume which Litwos reviewed in volume XIX of *Niwa* (1881).[289] In his discussion of *Elisza*, he blames the author for having written the scene of the torture of the eponymous heroine badly. Her torturers tear out all her teeth, wishing to force her father to confess to where he has hidden some treasure. Sienkiewicz pretends to adopt the pose of a disgusted esthete who does not wish to read about torture. However, if we follow his argument closely, we see that alongside ideological points there are also esthetic or even technical comments. He writes that the most important fault of this scene is its ridiculous quality. "Pulling teeth out on stage is at once horrible and ridiculous" [MLA 173]. This comes from a future master of cruelty and the macabre, so it is worth listening when he warns that if "the reader has to divide his sensitivity between horror and disgust, he only feels half the horror. That much is clear" [MLA 173].[290] In this extract, it is not just a matter of condescending instruction to the lady author, but a writer's advice to use cruelty carefully as an instrument of the ideologization of the text. Too great a faith in the power of scenes of violence stems from an unsubstantiated conviction that they are less "bookish," and that the receiver will more easily forget language, when he/she reads about

289 Lena Magnone ("Konopnicka po drugiej stronie (sienkiewiczowskiego) lustra," in: *Henryk Sienkiewicz w kulturze polskiej* op. cit., p. 366) pitilessly unmasks the superficiality of Sienkiewicz's discussions of Konopnicka's work, accusing him (rightly) of condescension and of superficial reading. The review of *Elisza* – in her opinion – does not differ from the style of his observations on Konopnicka generally. I do not, however, think that these judgments are exclusively based on the opposition: "the desire of nightingale-like trillings of very young poetesses" (Sienkiewicz) and "discursive fragments, positive ideas, a weighing up of the social situation" (Konopnicka). I will attempt to show this in what follows.

290 But Konopnicka had her reasons. In the story "Anusia" she points to the very important context of the Polish tradition of the poetics of the macabre. The eponymous protagonist – a governess in a poorly paid position – tells her charges bedtime stories of the lives of saints. The children's systematic encounter with the martyrological horrors related by Anusia makes it familiar to them. "After Anusia had been a year with us, we were so accustomed to the entire martyrology that torn-out tongues, heated pincers, flayed backs, and bodies sawn apart were bread and butter to us, and if one of us had met St. Dionysius walking with his chopped-off head under his arm, I think none of us would have been surprised" (M. Konopnicka, *Anusia*. *Pisma zebrane,* ed. A. Brodzka, *Nowele*, vol. II, Warszawa 1974, p. 180).

what is feared in reality. The poetics of similar scenes aims to induce a state of horror in the receiver, even abhorrence, which is nonetheless accompanied by a desire to go on reading. The reader should be terrified, but at the same time unable to tear him/herself away from the text. How is such ambivalence created?

> To create something like this, first, you have to understand deeply, second, you have to see your work of imagination and reality itself with the eyes of your soul, third, you have to feel, fourth, you have to have means to hand that are adequate for creating everything that you understand, imagine, and feel. [Wb I 194]

This comment comes at the end of an account of the exhibition in Unger's salon of Henryk Siemiradzki's *Taniec wśród mieczów* (Dance among Swords) (*Gazeta Polska* 25 May 1880). Sienkiewicz's review does not, it is true, relate to the means of showing violence, but it demonstrates what high demands he placed on the presentation of history. Only the joining of knowledge, sensitivity, and talent offers a chance of achieving a successful adaptation of source material about the past.

It is characteristic that this comment appears in connection with writing about painting and not about literature. Sienkiewicz, as an on-going commentator on artistic life, devotes as much attention to painting as to literature. The influence of his fascination with painting on the shape of the novel has not been thoroughly researched, even though scholars have frequently pointed to the numerous traces of the transposition of pictures that Sienkiewicz admired into concrete motifs in his fiction. As is generally known, it is easiest to show this affinity with Brandt's paintings, which were particularly important for Sienkiewicz.[291] This does not, however, mean that it is easy to refer to obvious examples of the adaptation of a specific painting. Zofia Mocarska-Tycowa confirms that, despite closeness of theme and mood, "similarity does not consist in a simple transferability of image

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291 Among those to have have written on the subject of the contacts between writer and painter are: B. Zakrzewski, *Sienkiewicz i Brandt*, "Sprawozdania Poznańskiego Towarzystwa Przyjaciół Nauk," Poznań 1948; A. Apanowicz, *W kręgu Brandta. W siedemdziesiątą rocznicę śmierci malarza*, Radom 1985, p. 11; W. Okoń, *Stygnąca planeta. Polska krytyka artystyczna wobec malarstwa historycznego i historii*, Wrocław 2002, p. 108. They are most extensively examined by Zofia Mocarska-Tycowa in her book *Tropy przymierzy. O literaturze dziewiętnastowiecznej i miejscach jej zbliżeń z malarstwem*, Toruń 2005. Mocarska-Tycowa presents an extensive list of painters whose work was followed by Sienkiewicz and many of whom he was friends with (p. 148). She advances the hypothesis that historical illustration may have exerted considerable influence on the writer's imagination: "Knowing Sienkiewicz's thoroughness, one might suggest that the ample seventeenth-century graphic material was – just as was the case with historiography and memoirs –a source of his knowledge of the period" (p. 149). In this context, see too: P. Horodyński, "Między retoryką a horrorem. Obraz wydarzenia historycznego w grafice europejskiej XVI–XVII wieku," in: *Sztuka i historia*, ed. M. Bielska--Łach, Warszawa 1992, pp. 167–180.

into description, but in a relation common to both artists towards the material, in a shared mythopoetic way of looking at the seventeenth century, and in a foregrounding of the romance of adventure and landscape."[292]

A mediation between picture and text is constituted by the feuilleton articles, which show how Sienkiewicz reads Brandt's paintings. His reading of pictures concentrates not only on the theme and on formal qualities, but also emphasizes the painter's artistic autonomy. Brandt, as the author of works about the steppes, may have inspired Sienkiewicz in his creation of scenes of violence. In these pictures, violence is presented unmarked by moralizing or ideological simplicity. In other words, historical painting confirmed the writer in his conviction that the law of art is to serve itself, and duel, battle, pogrom, and torture are for the artist of esthetic value irrespective of their controversial content. Sienkiewicz is pleased in these pictures by the peculiar amorality of the anecdote, or, more broadly, the autonomy of subject matter, which regardless of its harshness, wildness, or moral controversy, is attractive to the writer for its narrative potential.

When we read Sienkiewicz's discussion of the picture *Lisowczycy*, we are struck by the similarity to the scene in which Chmielnicki is caught with a lariat in the opening pages of *Ogniem i mieczem*. But even more interesting is the rhetoric of Sienkiewicz's précis, the tone of his argument, and the elements of the picture that he describes.

> Among the thistles and in the gloom the Lisowczycy lay like wolves lying in wait, with the patience and calm that long practice in a craft brings. So the face of the one who brings the Tatar down is calm, which creates an even greater impression. The movement of his body is violent, but his eyes are not animated. That means he was accustomed to such attacks and does not engage in them with any enthusiasm, but simply that is what he does. Yesterday he did the same and tomorrow he'll do the same. [Wb II 23]

Sienkiewicz is fascinated by the painter's capturing of the routine of warfare, apparent in the contrast between the violence of the movements and the calmness of the mind of the rider. Here the writer does not offer considerations on the cruelty of long-past times, he does not study the portrait of the victim, but he is attracted by the commonplace nature of violence, the decorative quality of the anecdote, the terrible colors. And also by something that will be a fundamental aspect of his historical writing: despite the historical distance of the spectator in relation to the figures presented in the picture, "there is a tragic realism in this brutal attack" [Wb II 24].

The value of the representation does not therefore consist in making history come alive, in reaching its allegorical quality, symbolism, or some timeless moral,

292 Z. Mocarska-Tycowa, *Tropy przymierzy*, op. cit., p. 150.

but it rather lies in the effective realization of an esthetic intention. Quite simply, the artist does not pretend to be a historian, but, in fact, moves in a direction opposed to naïve reference. His aim is the "poetic quality" of history, and thus its independent, particular existence in word or image. Thanks to this – Sienkiewicz writes – "Brandt is simply the poet of the steppes, just as Goszczyński, Zaleski, or even Słowacki in *Beniowski* were. Dead times are resurrected under his brush, and the viewer at the sight of one episode, against his will recreates for himself in spirit an entire world of knights and Cossacks" [Wb II 24]. The influence of the "poetic" presentation of history is a matter of its effect on the receiver's imagination, a receiver who – despite or even without historical knowledge – succumbs to the illusion of a sudden insight into some fragment of the distant past. Here Sienkiewicz does not perceive any difference between historical and contemporary realism. In the feuilleton printed in *Gazeta Polska* (5 November 1880), he writes of a novella by Hajota, "Zaduszny dzień Adamka" (Adamek's All Souls' Day). Contrary to the positivist demand for social engagement in literature, Sienkiewicz criticizes, above all, the novella's short-term journalistic quality, the maudlin sentimentalism of its subject matter, and the tendentious manipulation of the reader by the theme of the illness and death of a child. He, however, counsels the author not to trust the power of an innocent's suffering alone, but to try to create "an execution full of artistic qualities, that is the kind of style in which a realism of telling that is striking in its truth is interwoven in a whole that is shot through with poetry" [Wb II 46]. "Realism" and "poetic quality" do not exclude each other, but rather, in Sienkiewicz's view, should be allied in a work. The first is responsible for the credibility of representation; the second is responsible for the universality of its meanings.[293]

The effect of such a conception of the representation of history is the esthetic alignment of all its elements, and to differentiate and valorize them, above all, on the basis of their functionality for narrative and story material. Before looking more closely at relevant scenes from the novel, it is worth discussing one more extract from a feuilleton piece, one devoted to history painting. In it, he writes of a picture by Magdalena Andrzejkowicz entitled *Tatarzy grający w kości* (Tatars Dicing).

> At first glance, it is difficult to believe that this picture, full as it is of energetic realism and a roughness that is absolutely appropriate to the subject, was the work of a woman. Its subject is as wild as life on the steppes. By the tent, a captive girl is bound to a stake. At her feet is an old woman, certainly her mother. Lower down

293 The "poetic quality" of this realism was clearly recognized by Ignacy Matuszewski, who called Sienkiewicz (along with Prus) "a poet of the first water" (I. Matuszewski, *Swoi i obcy. Pokrewieństwa i różnice. Zarysy literacko-estetyczne*, Warszawa 1903. Qtd in: *Henryk Sienkiewicz*, edited with an introduction by J. Kulczycka-Saloni, Warszawa 1966, p. 249).

> several Tartars watch two others throwing dice from a church goblet. The game is, of course, for the captured girl. In the whole, you have nothing forced, nothing artificial, nothing conventional. The Tartars do not look like Tartars out of a book, but like wild and cruel barbarians, as they were in reality. The drawing of them is bold; the poses are distinctive. The whole thing has about it some quality that is purely eastern. [Wb II 127-128]

Although there is a change of roles – here Tartars are inflicting violence – Sienkiewicz is not interested in the picture's political or moral ideas, but rather in the execution "of a study from history." Neither the anecdote, nor the identity of the figures attract his attention as powerfully as the picture's "naturalness," the effective illusion of the autonomy of the painted scene.[294] He admires the painter's technique; she is able to hide the iconicity and textuality of the representation, whereby "The Tartars do not look like Tartars out of a book." This is said by a born realist, convinced that his duty is to create – as Wiktor Weintraub has it – literature that pretends that it is not literature.[295] The representation deserves recognition, if it can deny its own condition, transgress the limitation of being a linguistic sign or a painted one, and compel (through delight) the receiver to move, via imagination, the linguistic simulation of a world towards a wholeness that is inaccessible to the text.

Among many elements of presentation, it is images of violence, inflicted and experienced, that seem to serve particularly well to create the effect of forgetting about the textuality of the world of the novel. Such scenes fulfill – alongside the representation of historical knowledge – an independent function, as an essential component in producing illusion in reception. The image of a body experiencing violence presented in a work of literature is a text, just as other parts of literature. But it is subject to a distinction among other narrative sequences because of its specific saturation with "affect." The word "affect" sounds an alien note, an anachronism of sorts, although a welcome one since we are analyzing a text that is more than a century old. In "his," that is Sienkiewicz's, lexicon, affect is "a moving or touching of the mind, expressed in passion, infatuation, love, inclination, affection, desire toward something, in favor."[296] The ambiguity of this concept is striking. This state

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294 This arouses the jealousy of a writer who is wrestling with the difficulties of making history visible in language. As he himself acknowledges of his rapture over Siemiradzki's picture *Kaprea za Tyberiusza* (Capri in the Times of Tiberius): "the pen despite itself feels its clumsiness against the brush, when it comes to describing that splendid juxtaposition of wild life with death, the horror and tragedy that emanate from the whole picture" [Wb II 241].

295 "The style of a realist work is a style that pretends it does not belong to literature" (W. Weintraub, "Wyznaczniki stylu realistycznego," in: *Problemy teorii literatury. Seria 1*, ed. H. Markiewicz, Wrocław 1987, p. 275).

296 M.S.B. Linde, *Słownik języka polskiego*, 3rd ed., fotoofsetowe, vol. 1, A–F, Warszawa 1951, p. 6.

fits women better, because it is near to unhealthy affectation: “to being profuse in invention and pretense.”[297] Despite the entry being far from one’s own position, “my” contemporary dictionary copies such explanations, adding however that it is “a state of feeling of great intensity, usually short-lived, which is accompanied by clear physiological symptoms and a weakening of the authority of reason over conduct; powerful excitement, arousal.”[298]

I use the word “affect” in the context that Freud gave it in a letter to Wilhelm Fliess. He writes there of “the certain insight that there are no indications of reality in the unconscious, so that one cannot distinguish between truth and fiction that has been cathected with affect.”[299] Affect, of which I will speak here, results from repression and from the sudden emergence of the repressed content which is called a “wound.” Writing and reading a wound-text, a text filled with affect, leads to a situation in which the peace of reading is suspended, and intellectual distance or indifference toward the text is shattered. Thus, it is a matter in such places of an especial increase in the illusion of realism.

Images of bodies opened up by violence lead the mind of the reader toward a disturbing experience. Enrapture, emotion, fascination vis-à-vis THIS text contains an element of transgression beyond the sign. It is an illusory transgression, for the mind never leaves, even for a moment, the safe circle of fiction. But, still, the experience of illusion becomes more powerful “than it should.” This happens when what the text tells me of is not given to me either as an object (of experience, memory, or cognition), or as a sign, and despite that, I feel the effects of an encounter with “that something” (not a thing, not a concept, and not an experience).

This object of representation, which arouses equally abhorrence and fascination, is called “the abject” by Julia Kristeva.[300] Here she is thinking of the experience of the confrontation of the mind with “something” that cannot be described as an object, and, thus, the integrity of the subject experiencing of this state is compromised. He/she becomes alien to him/herself, as, for example, he/she experiences rapture over images of tortured bodies. The French word “abject” indicates someone or something that is deserving of contempt, someone

297 Ibid.

298 *Słownik języka polskiego* PWN, vol. 1, A–K, Warszawa 1988, p. 12.

299 21 September 1897. The usefulness of the concept of “affect” when considering the reception of fiction is discussed by Mieke Bal, who takes the term from Deleuze. He defines thus the feelings of the receiver that cause the merging of object and subject. (See: M. Bal, “A gdyby tak? Język afektu,” trans. M. Maryl, *Teksty Drugie* 2007, nr 1/2, p. 167).

300 J. Kristeva, *Potęga obrzydzenia. Esej o wstręcie*, trans. M. Falski, Kraków 2008, p. 7. Despite the translator’s inventive attempt to find a Polish-language substitute for “abject,” Polish scholars are compelled to use the borrowing from another language.

or something that is odious, low. Paweł Leszkowicz, discussing the genealogy of this term in Kristeva's work, points to older Latin meanings that speak of rejection as a result of revulsion.[301] Kristeva herself refers to the experience of vomiting, as the rejection of food caused by repulsion.[302]

A similar reaction means that the receiver makes differentiations within the text, awarding extracts that contain "abjects" a different status. This happens as a result of a rhetorical doubling, as if the text spoke simultaneously in two ways, as a sign and as an indefinable thing, a "something," which irresistibly draws our unhealthy attention or which we would like to avoid as repulsive. The joining of the rhetoric of narrative and of the psychology of reception means that in certain parts of the text there appears a special "thickening" of the illusion of representation. The style of narration does not change; the reader identifies the form as one known already; but the image suddenly becomes alien – threatening, repulsive, evoking fear and disgust. However the very radical and alien quality of this spectacle means that we forget for a moment about language, despite the fact that the horror does not exceed language. The text, for a moment, tells us to think about something that we cannot watch, nor summon from memory as an analogical image. The very inadequacy, the uncertainty of what is designated can give birth to a strange pleasure in reading a text about violence and suffering.

Creating bravura scenes of violence, Sienkiewicz plans to offer a pleasure in reading, which is supposed to be aroused by what is, right from the start, ambiguous: an image of violence and suffering. This is an ironic procedure; it is based on a play of desire and disappointment with the text's inadequacy; but at the same time that inadequacy is the condition of pleasure, since it emerges thanks to the safe limits of the reader's encounter with fiction.

The essence of a text of violence is the promise of vivisection, which it fortunately cannot fulfill, but such a text vexes the reader with suggestive and shocking images, so that he/she forgets that this is the illusion of literature. That is why Sienkiewicz so envied painting its power of illusion, which, soothing the eyes, deceives the mind.[303] He also tries to imitate painting techniques, even at the

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301 P. Leszkowicz, *Helen Chadwick: ikonografia podmiotowości*, Kraków 2001, pp. 185–186. Leszkowicz is quoted in: K. Kłosińska, *Fantazmaty. Grabiński – Prus – Zapolska*, Katowice 2004, p. 119.

302 J. Kristeva, *Potęga obrzydzenia*, op. cit., p. 9.

303 "Despite his will, a fellow is sad not to be a painter" ["Walka byków" 221]. An understanding of painting as a matchless model for the illusory quality of literary realism seems common to many writers of this time. The degree to which this commonality is deceptive is seen in the different views of realism held by Sienkiewicz and by Orzeszkowa, although it was she who wrote that the novel, "belonging to the field of poetry by virtue of the very genesis of its creation, is closely related to painting and sculpture, because of the necessity, for the sake of form, of its vivid colors in images and its highlighting figures" (E. Orzeszkowa,

cost of limiting the realism of his own narrative. This is attested by the narrational technique that is typical for him, one in which the narrator describes an event from the perspective of another character. Brzozowski made a phenomenological reproach out of this, writing that "Sienkiewicz is connected to the world only by his eye."[304] Brzozowski touched here upon a serious and dark matter, which is embodied in Sienkiewicz's novels. For in multiplying scenes in which human bodies are made to suffer, the author serves our inclination, which we are unwilling to confess, but this is – and here Nietzsche unmasks us –the "tartuffery of tame house-pets (meaning modern man, meaning us)."[305] A novel about violence is a concealed demonstration of knowledge that looking at suffering does one good.[306] Demystification occurs gently as an effect of accidental reading, but the contents have accompanied human beings for ages. Our ambivalence toward the dead body reveals it, when we –looking at the body – experience a mixture of repulsion and curiosity.

This mixture is very old, as is noted by Jacek Leociak, who quotes an extract from Plato's *Republic*, in which one Leontius confesses to mixed feelings at the sight of corpses. "He felt a desire to see them, and also a dread and abhorrence of them; for a time he struggled and covered his eyes, but at length the desire got the better of him; and forcing them open, he ran up to the dead bodies, saying, 'Look, ye wretches, take your fill of the fair sight'."[307] Leontius isolates his sight from his body as a separate organ of desire, one that, more than the other senses, desires contact with a repellent object. The construction of the narrative in Sienkiewicz's novels is done most frequently from the points of view of concrete figures. A similar strategy of representation means that a scene and its characters are rendered, above all, through the eye.

The reader's hypocrisy (which desires these images and is ashamed of this desire) is expressed and repressed simultaneously by the narrative, which avoids pure, unmediated relation. Here almost always someone is looking at violence, or sometimes the narrator's sighs remind the reader that one is looking at something visual: "That sight was amazing!" [OM II 300]; or, "The sight was horrifying, but beautiful" [P II 210]. These expressions recall why and for whom those sights come into being. We are presented with someone else's gaze, as if the narrator did

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"O powieściach T.T. Jeża z rzutem oka na powieść w ogóle," in: *Programy i dyskusje literackie okresu pozytywizmu*, ed. J. Kulczycka-Saloni, Wrocław 1985, p. 320).

304 S. Brzozowski, „Henryk Sienkiewicz i jego stanowisko w literaturze współczesnej," in: Brzozowski, *Eseje i studia o literaturze* vol. 1–2, op. cit., vol. 1, p. 37.

305 Friedrich Nietzsche, *On the Genealogy of Morals* (1887). F. Nietzsche, *Z genealogii moralności. Pismo polemiczne*, trans. G. Sowiński, Kraków 1997, p. 72.

306 Ibid.

307 Plato, *The Republic*, Book IV, trans. Benjamin Jowettt. Leociak cites the quoted passage in *Tekst wobec Zagłady (O relacjach z getta warszawskiego)*, Wrocław 1997, p. 217

not wish to leave the reader on his/her own with the object of gory events. In this way, the narration suppresses the suggestiveness of its representation.

> Many of the defenders saw the bloody face of war for the first time, and their hearts became numb with terror at the sight of women dragged around the *maidan* by their hair. And, by the bloody glare of firelight, you could see everything as if it were right before you. Screams and even individual words reached the ears of the besieged. [P II 201]

The text-internal spectator at violence's spectacle registers even more details than the reader (a well-lit scene, clearly audible screams and words). A character's perception becomes thus a kind of filter, one that casts a protective veil over the reading, occluding some of the more extreme details, and stressing that these are events at which someone is looking – for example, the Swedish soldiers in *Potop* who "all gaze at" the death of their comrades "as if they were at a spectacle in the Circus in Rome; only they watched with their lips pressed together, with despair in their breasts, in terror, and with a feeling of powerlessness" [P III 50].[308] Kanenberg, who shortly afterwards dies at Wołodyjowski's hands, is also the center of a spectacle within the novel ("So all eyes were fixed on him" [P III 51]). The same is true of Skrzetulski and Burdabut, whose duel makes "everyone catch their breath and stop the battle to watch the struggle of these two most terrible knights" [OM I 375]. The narrator is not content with the information that violence is observed, but also describes what emotions this arouses in the viewers. Seeing Wołodyjowski's masterful attack, "Pan Zagłoba began to stamp his feet on the roof boards, so that clouds of dust rose, and he began to clap his hands and shout out" [OM II 85]. We can observe identical reactions among the soldiers cheering on Wierszułł's skirmish from the walls of Zbaraż. "As they looked from the walls, the old hands clapped their armored hands on their thighs and shouted out: – May the bullets go home! Only our princely captains lead that way!" [OM II 300].

The attenuation of the mimetic quality of scenes of violence is not only (and maybe not even to any large extent) motivated by a concern for the reader's sensibility. It is a matter, above all, of the subjectivity of the victim, who has no opportunity to express his/her suffering because of the distance that separates the victim from the reader, and because of the subordinate place that the victim takes in the structure of the conflict.[309] The narration blocks or weakens the message of

308 This is also how it goes in the Roman Circus in *Quo vadis*: "Terrible things were seen then: heads disappearing into the depths of jaws, breasts opened up with a single blow of the claws, hearts and lungs torn out. The cracking of bones in fangs was heard. Several lions, having seized their victims by the side or round the neck, ran in mad leaps about the arena as if seeking a concealed spot where they could consume them" [Q 564].

309 An outstanding section of Horkheimer's and Adorno's *Dialectic of the Enlightenment* prompts an analysis not only of the stylistic connections of the *Trylogia* with Homeric

death or talk of wounds, and is concerned with the attractiveness and "usefulness" of violence and cruelty. This is revealed with disarming frankness by another novel, which deserves close attention because of its "chaotic" frankness and the insouciance with which Sienkiewicz presents the sarmatian mediocrity and limitation of his characters. *Na polu chwały* is an unfinished novel, a failure, of which the author himself was ashamed. Despite this, it contains several episodes that are splendid for their narrational verisimilitude. I mean here, *inter alia*, Father Woynowski's sermon, which is a call for a crusade against the Turks, which depicts future victories for its listeners. Once more the topic of the theater of war returns,[310] but this time it is not people who sit in the audience, but divine beings, who cheer on the Polish cavalry's attack.

> At every breath the Holy Mother runs to the window and calls: "Come, son! See how the Poles attack!" The Lord Jesus greets them with the Holy Cross. "By the wounds of God," he calls, "that is my nobility! that is my soldiery! and their pay is ready for them here!" And the holy Archangel Michael beats his hands on his thighs: "Up and at those brothers of dogs! Strike home!" How they rejoice there, and the soldiers strike and strike, and cut down people, horses, banners, they ride over the bellies of the janissaries, over captured cannon, over lost crescent moons – they ride toward fame, toward merit, toward an accomplished mission, toward salvation, toward immortality. [NPCH 121][311]

This fine image of sarmatian devotion is not only a jibe of a modern writer against his unenlightened ancestors, but an ultimate sanction for a disproportion in representing the horrors of war. Showing delighted people and gods, the author takes away the seriousness of war and the irreversibility of the destruction it

epic. I mean the discussion of the scene in Book XXII of *The Odyssey* in which Penelope's faithless maids are executed. See: M. Horkheimer, T.W. Adorno, *Dialektyka oświecenia. Fragmenty filozoficzne*, trans. M. Łukasiewicz, with an afterwod by M.J. Siemek, Warszawa 1994, pp. 95–97.

310 This is discussed in this study in the chapter entitled "Zagłoba's Smile."

311 The narrator does not lend any authority to these words, but that does not mean that he distances himself decisively from them. The ideological language of the sermon is identical with what is so terrifying in the scene in which Kmicic tells his rosary to the accompaniment of the screams of the Prussians whom his Tartars have murdered: "each evening he calmly told his rosary by the light of burning German settlements, and when the screams of the murdered made him miss his count, then he began from the beginning again, so as not to burden his soul with the sin of carelessness in the service of God" [P III 325]. It is difficult to agree with Lech Ludorowski, who calls Woynowski's sermon "rousing," suggesting that the author is ennobling this tone of Christian conquest. It is similarly impossible to reduce the amount of irony in the seemingly "pathetic declaration full of emotion of the lame Pagowski," who burns with senile passion for a young girl and at the same time pronounces patriotic sentiments about the war with the pagans (L. Ludorowski, *Ostatnia powieść Sienkiewicza*, op. cit. p. 250).

brings. The reader of a scene of killing may see it “from afar as something of a game” [OM I 191], or may have the impression of looking “at those pictures in the Royal Castle in Warsaw, on which the many Polish battles and victories were painted as if they had come alive” [NPCH 121]. This confession of the artificiality of the representation of war is exceptionally sincere, for it does not conceal that violence shown in a historical-adventure story does not aim at a representation of suffering, but at the stimulation of pleasure in the reader, who sees how many characters look excitedly at what he/she reads about. With a certain relief, he/she may discover a way of looking that is close to that of other characters, whose unhealthy affect partly justifies his/her own delight.

It is different in scenes in which closely described violence and suffering serve to uncover the pathological inclinations of negative characters. Here it is not sufficient that the distance between the reader and the study of the victim is considerably reduced, but the figure of the viewer-intermediary becomes a lens that brings the image near and sharpens it. To such scenes belong the visions of Janusz Radziwiłł, who delights in images of the tortures that he metes out to the bodies of rebels.

> And he saw their blood running from the executioners’ axes, he heard the crunch of bones of those broken on the wheel, and he bathed in and delighted in and took his fill of bloody visions. [P I 275]

In Sienkiewicz’s writing, Nero is the embodiment of the ideal receiver of a pornography of cruelty and suffering. His sadistic tendencies described in the novel are a trap laid for the reader. Led on the narrator’s leash, he/she accompanies vileness, sharing a glance with the emperor, who “did not now, even for a moment, take the emerald from his eye, staring at white bodies torn by iron, and at the convulsive twitchings of the victims” [Q 588]. Suddenly we are close to a shameless notation of cruelty, and the symbol of this closeness is the emerald before Nero’s eye – the equivalent of the narrator’s close-up by which one can scrupulously observe “young girls, not yet grown, torn apart by wild horses” [Q 587-588]. The narrator avoids being caught and plays on the double function of such scenes, suggesting that their monstrosity is an indictment of Nero. We know this, and yet, as our gaze follows the letters of the text, it stops together with the abuser “to look closely, whether at some virgin whose womb had begun to sizzle in the flames, or at the face of a child twisted in convulsions” [Q 613].

The stopping of the gaze at the word that arouses the imagination, unmasks the receiver’s tendency to study representations of perverse cruelty. It justifies this because the text is not the equivalent of a picture, does not imitate the object, but only names a fragment of an action. The text’s lack of transparency comes to the aid of the uneasy reader, reminding him/her not to mix levels of reading: not to confuse the world of the characters with the world of the real reader of the book.

Unease, however, does not wholly vanish, because we know that Sienkiewicz likes to confuse these levels, that he is aware of the reader's tendency to break through the limits of fiction. The affect with which the receiver furnishes such scenes means that the text of violence seems to him/her "less written," and the textual signs better conceal their own self-referentiality in these places. Finally, is it not so that the indifference of the degenerate Nero matches that of the reader toward fictional cruelty? For who is the person who reads such scenes over again? A scholar or a crypto-sadist?

2. The document of violence

> In this, the whole beauty of sleep – the blood does not flow,
> but congeals in the sign where the sword touches.
> (Czesław Miłosz, "Sienna")

Violence leaves its mark on the body, the mark whereby it enters into possession of it, in the sense that we speak, for example, of the branding of cattle. The story of adventure adores activity not passivity, and so the sign of a wound almost always indicates the force that inflicted it, but only to a lesser degree, if at all, the body that violence has marked. The slain or wounded body is, above all, a space for the exhibition of power and skill in killing. The victim nearly always points to his/her assailant/torturer; he/she is rarely the subject of such scenes. Almost without exception, the narratives of the *Trylogia*, *Krzyżacy*, and *Quo vadis*, when they tell of the destruction of bodies, in reality speak of the objects of such destruction. They direct the reader's attention toward the active violence that has caused the wound, and do not give much attention to the victim him/herself and the wounded body. Thanks to an "objectivization" of the wounded body, figures that are subject to violence almost immediately lose their human dimension, turning into disintegrated objects in the course of battles and duels. The more lurid the scenes of violence are, the more the author is careful to suppress the affinity of aggressor and victim. This technique allows Sienkiewicz to hold the reader at a distance, to protect him/her from sympathy, and, in consequence, he makes it pleasurable to observe military violence. Along with the characters we study the document of the wound, admiring the power and skill of the one who brought it into being.

The narration that represents acts of violence allies itself with that violence in the act of signification. Thus, it hands the victim's body over to power, allowing that power to "show off" with it. So that the text of violence may be clear, the body has no voice, and images of its disintegration do not serve the expression of the feelings of wounded and killed people, but they constitute at most an additional expression of the demonstration of violence. This is suggestively figured in one

of the scenes from the siege of Zbaraż. In it the attacking Cossacks drive before them prisoners to provide shields from enemy bullets. Defenseless bodies fill the space between the opposing forces, who for this moment are united in a pure manifestation of destruction.

> On one hand, the Cossack lances thrust into their backs; on the other, Wurcel's cannonballs crushed the unfortunate; grapeshot tore them to shreds and cut furrows in them. So they ran, streaming with blood. They fell, picked themselves up, and ran again, for the Cossack wave pushed them on, the Cossack Turkish wave, the Tartar one. . . . [OM II 311]

The narrator's perspective in this tiny excerpt undergoes substantial modifications, showing the destroyed bodies in different ways: from a position, near to the participants, of an invisible observer (the lances thrust in backs, cannonballs crushing their bodies, grapeshot tearing them to pieces, streams of blood), and on a general level, the point of view of which is placed "above" the world, and whereby the slain are transformed into a fluid mass, into which bullets "cut furrows," and the mass of the besiegers recalls waves driving each other forward. This is a repeated component of Sienkiewicz's rhetoric of battle-writing. In *Potop*, a novel that is, in many ways, different from the first part of the *Trylogia*, we find a similar passage.

> The cannonballs churned the human throng, plowed long furrows in it, but still it ran forward, and made for the fortress, ignoring fire and death. [P III 191]

Sienkiewicz appears to feel instinctively that this terrifying description of the slain body will create in the reader's mind an equivalent in the form of some sort of mutilated body. Because the text has no real reference, part of the imagining becomes the reader's own body. So as not to interrupt the flow of the reading, this cannot last long. The modulation of the narration alone, however, is not enough to suppress a reaction of distaste, which is aroused by the placing together of naturalistic descriptions with the convention of the adventure story. So the narration reaches for other means, including, *inter alia*, metaphors that ideologize the conflict. Here it is, above all, a matter of substitution, via which in place of the human body, the image of an animal is presented.[312]

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312 How one can successfully employ such substitutions is shown by the first great treatise on extermination, the *Short Account of the Destruction of the Indies* written by Bartolomé de las Casas. At the very beginning, the author creates a naïve but suggestive opposition between the invaders and their victims. "Among these gentle lambs, blessed by their creator with the above-mentioned advantages, the Spaniards came, and as soon as they came to know them, they became as wolves and tigers, and the fiercest lions, famished for many days. And from forty years past till today – and today, too, they do nothing else – they quarter them, kill them. disturb them, torment them, torture them, and destroy them with a

The metaphor effectively ideologizes the presentation, turning the conflict from a human one to a human-animal one, which, in an obvious manner, reduces the importance of the opponent's death. The bodies of aggressor and victim are not symmetrical, but are understood in a qualitative disproportion. For example, Wołodyjowski consoles Podbipięta, who is longing to fight, that at Zbaraż he will have so many pagans to chop down, "like those mosquitoes above your head" [OM I 343]. The promise is fulfilled in that language, by means of the same metaphors, when the narrator describes the defeat of the Cossacks, who are "speared, beaten, crushed like poisonous worms" [OM II 315]. The war with the Swedes in *Potop* is more frequently expressed in rhetorical images of massacre or hunting. The impatient narrator condemns to death Kanenber's division even before it joins battle" "Fools! They did not know that they went to slaughter as cattle go to the abattoir!" [P III 41]. A battle so announced becomes an unfortunate, but necessary operation on stupid beasts, and so the Swedes "ran like a lost flock of sheep over the wide pasture before them, dying like sheep under the slaughterhouse man's knife" [P III 51].

By virtue of a changing narrational perspective and animal substitutes for the human body, the dangerous contiguity of the reader's body and the imagined body of a suffering character is broken before it can destroy the pleasure of reading. The image of a concrete body (one's own) is removed from before the eyes of the reader, and in its place a metaphor is introduced (a flowing mass, a wave, corn, grass, worms etc.). And so, alternately, in the interweaving of the concrete and the metaphorical, the narration removes and brings close to the reader's perception contents that might arouse in him fascination and repulsion, desire and fear.[313] It may seem that the radical depersonalization of the victim that arises through these procedures, and which we can observe in many of the mass scenes in the *Trylogia*, results from the fact of operating with large anonymous masses of characters, which means that their terrible fate does not manage to move the reader other than by a brief shock of horror. When, however, we look at scenes in which the victims are individual figures known to the reader, one can see that the principles governing their presentation are identical to those in scenes involving a collection of anonymous victims.

An episode full of a cruelty that is unusual even for Sienkiewicz is that of the death of Tatarczuk and young Barabas, accused of conspiring against the Cossack

mass of strange means and cruelties, new, various, never before seen or heard" (B. de Las Casas, *Krótka relacja o wyniszczeniu Indian*, trans. K. Niklewiczówna, Poznań 1988, p. 38).

313 Hume, whom I have already mentioned, also draws attention to the connection between speed of observation and the pleasure that the spectator feels watching a tragic scene (D. Hume, *O tragedii*, op.cit., p. 109).

brotherhood. Both are given over by Chmielnicki to a crowd, which forthwith executes them.

> Several thousand people threw themselves at the condemned men and tore them apart, howling and struggling with each other to get to their victims. They were trampled underfoot; parts of their bodies were torn off. The throng heaved around them with that terrible, convulsive movement of enraged masses. At times bloody hands lifted up two shapeless lumps, no longer like human figures, and then cast them down on the ground. Those standing further off yelled at the top of their voices; some to throw the victims into the water, others to thrust them into barrels of burning pitch. Those who were drunk began to fight amongst themselves. [OM I 151]

Activity here is completely on the part of violence and is not matched in the least degree by the activity of suffering. Violence possesses a complete freedom from the restraints that might be laid on it by an awareness of the pain of the human being who is being torn to pieces. As far as the victim is concerned, not only is he dumb, but in the text he possesses no intermediary who would translate his experience; even after a time he loses his anthropomorphic dimension, becoming a “shapeless lump.” Once more the concreteness of individual suffering appears briefly before the reader’s eyes. The abused Tatarczuk and Barabasz suddenly change from being human figures into pure objects, which have only one function – to permit the materialization of violence, for this is the fundamental content of this scene.

The reader may follow this orgiastic execution with pleasure mixed with horror, because the author has freed him/her from any disturbing identification, any apprehensive empathy that the imagination might suggest if the victim and his suffering were more accessible. This episode is closed by the death of old Barabas, who does not want to go over to Chmielnicki’s side. His courage and authority among the Cossacks intimidates his opponents. It is only when he falls, having slipped on a puddle of blood, that “several dozen blades plunged into his body” [OM I 183]. Immediately a symbolic change takes place. His body, human only a moment previously (“he was seen at the front, truncheon in hand, with his streaming white hair, issuing commands in a thunderous voice and with youthful energy”), is now no longer even animal; he enters the power of violence as a pure object, the identity of which is of no importance.

> As he lay there they began to chop at him and he was cut up into pieces. The chopped off head was thrown from boat to boat, and played with like a ball until it fell into the water. [OM I 183]

The protagonists of the scenes discussed above are Cossacks, but moving the narrator’s perspective to the other side does not lead to any change in the strategy of presenting violence. Podbipięta’s oath will be fulfilled if he cuts off three heads at once. This figure’s anachronicity is, from this point of view, deceptive, for

he is looking for bodies that would attest by their decapitation to his right to have children. When he finally, in ecstatic rapture, cuts off the heads of three Turks, they are from the start not human beings. The narrator speaks of "three pairs of hands" and "three helmet points," but before the synecdoche changes in the reader's imagination to complete bodies, the heads are already rolling at the knight's feet. They do not stop being a sign, but now not of themselves, of their own individual slaughtered beings, but of Longiniusz's tremendous blow. After the siege has been raise, the three cut off heads lie before Podbipięta's tent, where his comrades inspect them, unable to shake off their amazement, "for they were so evenly cut off, along with the pointed steel helmets, as if someone had cut them off with a pair of scissors" [OM I 360].

> – You are a terrible *sartor* – the gentlemen said. [OM II 361]

The narrator situates himself unambiguously on the side of the "terrible tailor," and the reader must go along with him to study the beauty of the cut. The material – three human heads – briefly draws the narrator's attention, but he only notes that "they had already turned black in the air," and then he goes on to recount the praise and expressions of amazement for Podbipięta's hand and sword.

The representation of violence consistently maintains a disproportion between act and experience, so that the victim's experience does not, in the slightest, offer any competition in the field of presentation. The absent reality of the victim's suffering and death, however, applies also to those very acts of violence that become more and more unimportant as metaphors swallow up their suggestive materiality. The irreversibility of killing loses "that" meaning in favor of the unimportant acts of a "tailor," who cuts his amazing patterns in the material of bodies. So, thus, the horror that the reader is to experience does not result from sympathy with the victim, but from the excess of violence, and, therefore, this violence must be multiplied all the more, the more it loses importance. The excess of dead and wounded bodies leads to an inflation of the topic. It reduces images of death to elements of a stage design of horror, or points indirectly to the indifference of men of war to death and the macabre. In Korsunie, in the market place, beside drums of cereals "were piled pyramids of heads cut off after the battle from dead and wounded soldiers" [OM I 217]. Differently from the heads cut off by Longin, these mean even less, separated equally from the victims' bodies, as from the perpetrators of the violence. This piece of macabre is decorative, but non-functional in terms of plot.

The value of the scenes of violence in the system of narrative economy consists in the fact that they generate consistent chains of events: revenge, forgiveness, search, defeat. . . . From this point of view, it is more effective in plot terms to present the violence and cruelty of an antagonist than that of a positive character,

because the former destroys the initial order of the epic world, tears the protagonist out of it, and offers justifications for his acts of violence. But on the narrative level, he provides a warrant for the purposefulness of the narrative.

The tempting fabular functionality of scenes of violence disturbs, however, the legibility of moral or principled conflicts, which force both expresses and represents. Acts of violence that become autonomous become thus amoral or neutral in terms of principles, so powerful in them does a pure affirmation of destructive power become. This is the character of the episode of the battle at Machnówka, one of the major figures in which is the Cossack Iwan Burdabut. He sows havoc among the Polish knights and the splendor of destruction is carefully recorded in the cool accountancy of the narration, which does not here mark clearly the basic difference, whereby here "Polish bodies" take on the function of material cut to measure by a "terrible tailor." These are Burdabut's deeds [OM I 371-375]: his horse seizes Andrzej Sienut "by the face with his teeth and crushed it in the blink of an eye"; Burdabut thrusts "his blade under the chin" of Rafał; from the sixteen-year-old duke Połubiński "he cut off the right arm along with the hand"; "he cut off the head" of Urbański, "like an executioner in one sweep"; Dzik "he stabbed in the belly"; "he hacked off the head with the helmet" of Sokolski; and "hitting" Zenobiusz Skalski "with all his might, he killed him on the spot."

Further, during the siege of Zbaraż, Burłaj "cut down Dąbek and Rusiecki, and the young lad Aksak [. . .]; then he swept away Sawicki, and then he pulled down to their native earth two winged hussars at once" [OM II 321].

We are struck by an important feature of these two presentations of violence – each of the victims is mentioned by name, whereby the slain body has two distinctive features: a particularity of name and the means by which he is deprived of life. But this difference is nugatory, and the names of the victims deceive with the appearance of individual victimhood, because in the foreground is force and its name. Burdabut's blows lead to a presentation of those body parts that encounter them (face, neck, right arm, head, belly, head with helmet, temple). In addition, the narrative's tempo means that the further histories of wounded or killed victims are not presented. A densely arranged set of victims directs the reader quickly towards the next victim, and we lose sight of the preceding one. We note the violence and the skill of the blow, but curiosity pushes us onward, although it is not easy to get rid of the image of a face crushed by a horse's teeth.[314]

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314 The Homeric templates of these scenes, described by Lech Ludorowski ("Arysteje bohaterskie i heroikomiczne," in: *Wizjoner przeszłości*, op. cit., pp. 76–81) makes clear how well Sienkiewicz adapted what was already for the nineteenth century an archaic epic tradition from antiquity, for a new sensitivity shaped by modern literature, principally by the realism of the novel.

In *Ogniem i mieczem*, only Podpipięta's deeds are similar to Burdabut's; thus it is that we are aware that Sienkiewicz suppresses the vigorous dash of the violence done by the cycle's protagonists. In *Potop*, this grandiose energy in destruction is represented by Roch Kowalski, who, for example, "unable to cut with his saber, put out his fist and drove into him en passant, and he took a nose dive under his horse, just as if he had been struck by a thunderbolt" [P III 48]. While in pursuit of the Swedish king, Kowalski catches up with a Swedish rider – "he stood up in his stirrups to get a better momentum and he cut down fiercely; he cut off the arm along with the shoulder blade in one terrible sweep" [P III 81]. One of the last duels described by Sienkiewicz, which we find in *Na polu chwały*, repeats the principle of the catalog of cuts, seen in the episode with Burdabut. Jacek duels one by one with five opponents – with the four brothers Bukojemski and with Cyprianowicz. Each of the brothers, with their names of the Evangelists, receives a different blow: Mateusz receives his in the face, "which all at once poured blood"; Marek takes it in the "right clavicle; he cut through the bone and overpowered him"; Łukasz is hit "through the cheek right to the gums"; and as regards Jan, his "saber dropped together with his finger" [NPCH 57-58].

But the thrusts and cuts dealt out by Wołodyjowski are most frequently, in general, invisible. It is true that when it comes to Bohun, "he cut terribly into his breast with almost the whole length of his blade," and then "two times in his bowed head" [OM II 150]. But during the duel with Kmicic, all we learn is that "there was heard a short, terrible whistle, and then a stifled cry . . . at the same time Kmicic opened his hands and the saber fell from them to the ground . . . and he crashed down with his face at the Colonel's feet. . . " [P I 119]. Wołodyjowski's killing in battle is restrained, almost discreet – "he only moved his hand alone, making a movement so light and gentle that it was almost invisible, but Zaporożec's saber flew up into the air" [OM I 417]. On other occasions, "having caught up [with his victim], he extinguished him as fast as he would a candle" [P III 39], and passing by his opponent, "he did not even stop over him, but thrusting the blade of his saber there where the neck meets the breast, he gave a light blow, an insignificant one, and that man spread out his arms, spoke with pale lips one or two words, after which he plunged into the darkness of death" [P III 47]. An exception to this is his duel with Kanenberg, when the tip of Michał's saber cuts through "a part of his nose, lips, and chin, went through to his collarbone, smashed it, and stopped only at the baldric that ran over the shoulder" [P II 44].

A certain regularity emerges from this set of examples: figures that are close to the writer, or who have the function of being a moral, patriotic, or heroic model, kill elegantly, almost discreetly. Even Petroniusz kills, for which the narrator prepares us with the information that despite his declared laziness and fondness for art, he is a splendid fencer and wrestler. Murdering the drunk gladiator who

wants to force him to call out against the Christians, he does this with the elegance of a court dancer.

> – My friend – he said – you stink of wine and you are in my way. And so speaking he thrust a short sword into his chest right up to the hilt. [Q 514]

The variants and techniques of violence do not alter the victims' passive status. Sliced, cut through, or shot to pieces, these figures disappear from the reader's view like targets in a shooting gallery. Józwa Butrym vanishes when, in the inn, Kmicic "with full force smashed through his face with his saber" [P II 61], as does the Swedish officer, whom "he cut with his saber between the eyes until the steel grated on bone" [P II 233], and also the captain of the Swedish raid whom "he shot right in the ear with his pistol" [P II 399]. Only the wound that he inflicts on Bogusław with the tip of his saber is presented – "more and more blood flowed from his forehead, until the whole surface of his head seemed as if it were dipped in a puddle" [P III 295]. In *Pan Wołodyjowski*, the most enigmatic part of the *Trylogia*, we see for the first time a woman who kills with playful ease, as if the author were protecting her from the reality of her own action.

> Basia gave a sweeping slash and the face suddenly disappeared, as if it were a phantom. [. . .] Then once again in front of her she saw the grinning teeth of some terrible head with a flat nose and sticking-out cheekbones – Basia went swish and it was gone! . . . There again a hand and a wrist rose up – Basia went swish and it was gone. She sees a back dressed in furs – her blade goes into it; then she cuts to the right and the left, straight, and at whatever she cuts, a man falls to the earth clutching at his horse's bridle. [PW 265]

Despite this clear homogeneity in descriptions of scenes of violence, in the *Trylogia* there is, however, in this respect some internal differentiation. Among the protagonists of the war novels, Kmicic clearly stands out. His wild temperament appears, *inter alia*, in a certain chaotic and uncontrolled quality in his fighting and also in an inclination toward cruelty, which in earlier parts had been a feature of the Cossacks. Furthermore, the scenes showing acts of violence in *Potop* are "cramped," as if the author, transferring the novel's action from the steppes of the Ukraine to Żmudź and within the borders of today's Poland, removed from the novel's spatial settings the sweep that the setting in the steppes gave them. This thickening of space, comprehensible because of the topographical and administrative difference of the Polish Kingdom, also comes through in the construction of the presentation of battles, skirmishes, and duels. Sienkiewicz takes us nearer the fighting bodies, which are separated by an increasingly smaller distance. This allows him often to achieve splendid dramatic effects, like in the scene in the ravine when Andrzej rides out to meet the officer leading the Swedish attack.

> Kmicic rode so close to him that their stirrups almost became mixed up, and without uttering a single word, he shot him right in the ear with his pistol. [P II 399]

Sometimes the author may give up certain phrases or dramatic devices, or, at times, he is directed by a desire to maintain compositional balance, but it is enough that he repeats this motif in the scene depicting Roch Kowalski's death. Roch is a step away from assassinating the Swedish king, but at that moment Prince "Bogusław rose as if from out of the earth and shot Kowalski right in the ear, so that he blew off his head along with his helmet" [P III 335].

On a larger scale, the qualities of such "cramped" presentation of violence is illustrated by the description of the skirmish at Rudnik. There the Polish soldiers are attacking the Swedish horsemen who are defending themselves desperately, "girdling them in an ever tightening ring" [P III 84]. Sienkiewicz does not give this struggle any clear features of battle strategy; instead, he builds up an image of a vibrating whirl of animals and people killing each other, which takes on the shape of a vortex pressing out streams of blood from bodies.

> They fought with shards of sabers and rapiers; some leaped on others like falcons; they grabbed each other by the hair, the mustaches; they bit each other; those who fell from their horses and could stay on their feet stabbed their knives into horses' bellies, into the calves of riders. In the smoke, in the horses' reeking steam, in the terrible exaltation of battle, people turned into giants and gave giants' blows; arms turned to clubs, sabers to lightning bolts. In a single sweep steel helmets were split like pots, heads were smashed, and hands were severed by swords. Men slashed at each other without respite, men slashed at each other without quarter, without pity. Under the vortex of people and horses blood started to flow in streams over the *maidan*. [P III 84]

Here one can see no idealization of war; quite the opposite, one sees, rather, how easily war exceeds the frame of strategy or code. The majority of conflicts shown in *Potop* are guerrilla actions – forays, mayhem, kidnappings, lynchings, actions against civilians. Sienkiewiz shows, in an unusually credible fashion, the problematic pugnacity of parts of the Polish gentry/nobility, when it turns out that the skills won in duels, *mêlées* during meetings of the *Sejm* (Parliament), or brawls in inns, are also of value when defending Jasna Góra or the King. He very credibly shows the range of Kmicic's and his people's soldierly skills in the scene where Kmicic, the Kiemlicze, and Soroka brawl with Józwa Butryn and his men in an inn. Soroka shows himself to be a master of this kind of fighting.

> He got in so close to his opponents that they could not get at him with their blades, and they had already fired their pistols into the crowd; so he hit them about the heads with his sword hilts, smashed noses, and knocked out teeth and eyes. [P II 61]

Just as in the passage quoted earlier, "in their struggles they beat each other in a heap that was so tight that they could only whack each other with their fists" [P II 62]. Here there is no space for beautiful slashing blows and for admiring the

fencer's art. The narrator has no distant perspective and gives up going into detail. War in *Potop* often recalls a domestic *mêlée*, with no nobility and no rules of engagement.[315]

Although Sienkiewicz promised to abandon the theme of war after *Krzyżacy*, he left a foretaste of unexplored possibilities. For a moment, in that unsuccessful novel *Legiony*, one sees clearly the talent of the Sienkiewicz of old, who is able to spin such dark fantasies of pure violence, cool and lovely, because they are quite devoid of personal enmity, vengeance, or victims. The only value that remains to the defeated and for which one can die, is honor. Thus, "whoever insults a Polish officer, he must kill him or himself pay for the insult with his own blood" [L 125]. He made the embodiment of this desperate and decadent position Captain Jakub Bogusławski, who somewhat recalls another figure of a tragic desperado – Captain Wyganowski from Żeromski's *Popioły* (Ashes). But something else fixes one attention on Bogusławski – Sienkiewicz cunningly links in this figure the dark magic of defeat (defeated soldier and thrown-over lover) with the face of a modern bully-boy, an artist of violence, whose basic instrument is a firearm, and not sword or saber. He is a figure so different from the characters in the *Trylogia* that the author, from the start, gives him a foreign aura. Carefully shaved, serious, and silent, dressed in a dark walnut-colored *surtout* and black stockings, he recalls an "English chaplain." The scene I have in mind takes place in Padua. We see him together with the protagonists, who do not know his name or profession yet. Bogusławski goes into a *trattoria*, where he is provoked by French officers who throw balls of bread at him. At first, he does not react, and it is only when he is hit in he forehead that he moves toward them to challenge all four officers to a duel.

> He did not hurry, but walked on with a slow step, when something strange happened. Some shapeless, weighty sense of unease seized not only Marek and Cywiński, but also the officers who had all been merry but a moment earlier. Conversations and laughter fell silent. In the silence that fell, one could hear only the quiet footsteps of the unknown man, like the steps of destiny. [L 119]

Sienkiewicz is a step away from parody here, recreating in template the famous scene from Dumas's *The Three Musketeers*, when d'Artagnan on the same day challenges Athos, Porthos, and Aramis to duels. But the author avoids the lack of seriousness of the historical romance and maintains the disturbing mood of this

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315 In *Ogniem i mieczem*, too, we find a similar descriptive technique, but it describes a "density" in battle, and is not a result of a limited space of conflict. This is an example: "There was a confused struggle, disorderly, wild, with no quarter; the struggle seethed in a crowd, in yells, in heat, amongst the reek and steam of horses and men. Corpse fell on corpse. Horses' hoofs sank into heaving bodies. In places, the masses were so thick that there was no room to swing a saber; there men fought with their heads, with knives and fists, and the horses began to scream" [OM I 374].

scene. His narrator resists the temptation to make available complete knowledge of characters' motivations, and even increases the lack of transparency that lies in its strange and cruel events: "on his forehead there was not even one line of anger, [. . .] even on his opponents he looked almost indifferently" [L 127]. We do not see this duel, but, along with the protagonists, we stay outside the gate of the fort where it takes place. We follow only the sounds of a series of shots, eight in all, after which the gate opens and Bogusławski comes out. On the square lie two corpses, the third officer is dying, and the fourth is shot through the leg. The symbolism of the balls of bread is fulfilled here, as they return as pistol balls. In keeping with a system of honor-related norms, there is a mad asymmetry of exchange: a harmless teasing gesture is imitated, or rather transformed, in a gesture of actual murder, which thus "cannot be reproached with anything – nothing at all!" [L 132].

The death that Bogusławski deals is violence that is not seen; it is not a matter of impulse, it is not purchased, and it is not routine, and thus it becomes almost absolute. It is inhuman, because it is free of impulse, of anger, fear, and the pathology of sadism. It is not presented and without the emblems of horror, recognizable only by its consequences; without any desire to inflict suffering, it appears purely functional, and so its form, expression, and technology become meaningless. One can have the impression that the author is playing a game with us, not showing the very core of a text of violence – an image of the power of the body and of its extensions. But, indeed, by not recounting the course of the duel, the text reveals the essence of the violence presented, that is an image of the body's destruction. Now nothing takes any attention away from the dead and wounded; the bodies of victims can, at last, bear meaning for themselves, not speak or at least not speak much of the force that has disfigured them. "That is not a duel, that is execution" [L 130], says one of the officers of such violence. It appears, however, that the horror of invisible violence is no less, and it means that Marek and Cywinski "are seized [. . .] by a loathing of that bloody, silent man, who walking at their side, looked ahead with a pensive gaze, as if he had forgotten already what had happened" [L 133]. His lack of passion makes them feel that they are walking in the company of an executioner.

If we recognize this scene from *Legiony* as a sort of coda in the symphony of violence created from the moment of the writing of "Niewola tatarska" (Tartar Captivity), we may advance the thesis that the author of *Potop* demystified the false glamour of death, which suppresses and gags the subject of history. Does that mean that, by virtue of such scenes, the narrative urges the reader to think of the content of the signs inscribed on the bodies of thousands of victims "by the pens of violence"? One scene, however, is too little to emancipate the object, and to reduce the presentation of triumphant violence. That is why the hermeneutics of implication do not give the specificity of the evolution of images of war in

Sienkiewicz's writing. The signs of violence composed in series do not encourage detailed reading that would "supplement" what they do not wish to say. The narrative is governed rather by a logic of recurrence than by one of consequences.

The specific nature of Sienkiewicz's classicism does not consist in avoiding extremes, nor in suppressing the disturbing transgressive quality of the text that describes violence. He is searching for a counter-balance to such scenes of violence; his search for order is always a search for an antidote, the other side, the lost element in the opposition, the impossible riposte. He is a writer of indecision; he thinks in metaphor, scene, situation, but he does not want to think about the coherence of his own formulation. Thus he performs a violent reversal, escaping into the opposite.

For Bogusławski's four-handed duel, the counter-weight is a surprising and inconsistent scene in *Ogniem i mieczem* involving Zagłoba. In this particular scene Zagłoba completely sheds his fool's costume and arouses fear, as if he had escaped from Sienkiewicz, who is guilty here of an "error in affect": "it was terrifying to look at him: he had foam on his lips, his face was livid, and his eyes stood out of his head. 'Blood! Blood!,' he bellowed in such a terrible voice that a shiver passed through those standing near. And he jumped into the fosse" [OM II 389]. The sight of Podbipięta's naked body hanging on a Cossack siege tower means that "Pan Zagłoba went crazy; he threw himself at the thickest crowd like a lioness that has lost her cubs; he laid about, he snorted, he slashed, he slew, he trampled!" [OM II 390].

The beauty of this scene, which is not expressed in any commentary, consists in the insanity of disproportion between Podbipięta's death and the death meted out in return by Zagłoba, Wołodyjowski, and the others. Excess in vengeance is, however, accepted by the reader; even more, he/she is filled with an ecstatic shudder. For, at base, there is no disproportion, because friendship, that is the love of men at war, abolishes it. Since – as the narrator insists – there is no way to draw Zagłoba away from Longin's coffin, "as if his brother or father had died" [OM II 392], that is, the loss cannot be made good – thus, vengeance, too, is infinite. The economy of revenge is not based on a balancing of accounts, but on limitless expenditure, which is a manifestation of love for the slain friend.

The perverse connection in Sienkiewicz's narrative of violence between the tradition of ancient epic and cool, naturalistic description, brought to perfection by nineteenth-century realism, produces a text with a fascinating and dangerous dynamic. This is created by two drives in the language of violence, one of which wishes to master the body as the individual unit of action, while the second of them wishes to make the body an object of semiotic vivisection. Although they are mingled within one narrative, each of them attempts to take charge of representation, and the tension between them maintains a fragile balance.

There is no way to follow through the thesis of sadism that lurks in Sienkiewicz's imaging of violence,[316] above all, because of the striking absence of suffering in it. Violence here does not feed on the victim's pain, but on its own predominance; it is, in fact, narcissistic. The utterance of the suffering body should be the victim's voice and the interpreting of the victim's wounds, but the narrator rarely lets the victim speak, and the reading of the wound points proclaims the triumph of violence, rather than suffering's complaint. In the situation of a war, in which the functions of aggressor and victim are interchangeable, there exists a danger of making acts of violence uniform beyond the purposes that they serve. In order to ennoble "appropriate" violence, the narrative does not reach for moral, legal, or religious justifications; violence is redeemed through metaphor.

3. Reading the wound

> . . . come back with my document, which I charge each of you to inscribe on your skin. (*Potop*)

> . . . so the Swedes started to jump from the high bank on to the ice, falling dead so thickly that they were black on the snowy field like letters on a white sheet of paper. (*Potop*)

The wound opens the body. This means, as Jean-Luc Nancy notes, that the body is laid out for the living body.[317] However, nothing needs to result from this, besides the horror of the panopticum that we visit with our narrator-guide. At that moment, the narrative governs the body of the corpse, staging it in the performance of horror, or, on the contrary, composing dead bodies into scenes full of a macabre lyricism, as for example at Zbaraż, where "on the field after the battle, knights slept the sleep of eternity from which none wakes, run through by spears, cut down

316 See: U. Benka, "Święty sadyzm Sienkiewicza," *Na Głos* 1994, nr. 14. A sense of the sadism of these representations runs through the whole reception of the work. Antoni Słonimski wrote in a feuilleton from 19 January 1930: "It's difficult to give an intelligent little kid Sienkiewicz's *Trylogia*. In the past, one could argue that it aroused national vigor, but today no one, I think, would dare to call these sadistic tales of slaughtering the peasants healthy food for young persons" (*Kroniki tygodniowe 1927–1937*, Warszawa 2003, p. 181). recently Ewa Wipszycka has written in answer to a survey entitled "Our opinion of the position of Sienkiewicz's work today," of the violence shown in it, alongside other qualities of his prose: "The worst aspect of Sienkiewcz's writing is for me its crypto-sadism (not just in *Ogniem i mieczem*, but also in *W pustyni i w puszczy*, not to mention "Janko Muzykant" [Janko the Musician]. For these reasons the writer should not figure in the canon of reading for children and youth" (quoted in *Po co Sienkiewicz?*, op. cit., p. 403).

317 J.–L. Nancy, *Corpus*, trans.. M. Kwietniewska, Gdańsk 2002, p. 70.

by the sword, pierced by arrows and balls" [OM II 328]. The dead body does not arouse fear, because in it pain has died, but even figures who certainly suffer are described by the narrator with such considerable distance that he barely registers the movements of their death throes. We see, for example, how the Tartars amuse themselves by shooting arrows at the weaker prisoners, and as a consequence of this "game," "several dozen bodies lay scattered on the road and pierced through like colanders: several of them were still jerking convulsively. Those they were shooting at hung tied by their hands to roadside trees. Among them were old women" [OM I 219]. Their bodies do not, however, have their own story other than as material upon which violence renders itself visible. At times, it seems that the wound of an individual figure transforms a body from an object into a subject of suffering, but the text more frequently teases the reader with the possibility of this, than it actually achieves it.

Frequently, the narrative is interrupted at the moment when it seems to be opening another tale about war. Such a harbinger of something new is the mention of young Potocki, who "with his throat pierced by an arrow lived only a few hours after the battle" [OM I 99], or the announcement of the sufferings of the Swedish officer Horn, who at Częstochowa receives a blow from a scythe. "The peasant who cut at him, hit him with the very end of the scythe, but the blow was so terrible that it opened his whole chest" [P II 237]. We learn that Horn has before him long hours of dying, but the narrator does not accompany him there. A softer version of this blow returns in *Na polu chwały*. Jacek is hacked at by a scythe, the end of which "cuts quite deep into his arm from his shoulder to his elbow" [NPCH 223]. These wounds are for the reader; the characters pay them no heed, for they belong to the general reality of war. They arouse interest only when they are not general, when they are different, when the signatures of violence indicate the above-average skill and strength of a "writer of violence." Such is Podbipięty's "writing."

> On the day following the battle the knights with amazement looked at these places, and showing each other hands torn off with arms, heads cut through from forehead to chin, bodies hideously cut into two halves, a whole road of human and equine dead, they whispered to each other: "Look, Podbipięta was fighting here!" The priest himself looked at the bodies and [. . .] deigned to wonder, for such lacerations he had never seen in his life before. [OM I 376]

Despite the narration's momentary concentration on the wounded body, these wounds are "flat"; despite the blustering lexis, they do not open bodies to demonstrate their uniqueness, to lay bare the defenseless interiors, to show the unstaunched flow of blood, and, above all, they do not give these images even a minimal representation of the pandemonium of pain, which should fill the scenes of battle and duels. The images of people in war who are suffering from wounds recall a film, the sound track of which suddenly becomes silent, and the lips of the

screaming and howling characters move only in fish-like contortions. This does not mean, however, that Sienkiewicz completely abandons the music of the text. There are frequently recurring examples of onomatopoeia representing the sounds emitted by bodies that are being destroyed, but this is exclusively the music of violence, the splendor of which grows even more as a result. Furthermore, when the image becomes blurred, not transparent, when the narrative imitates the chaos of battle, then sound takes on the function of representing what is disturbed. This strategy means that though we do not see images, we see sounds that the narrative carefully and clearly elucidates.

> You could hear only the crash of breaking muskets, the scrape of bayonets, the grunting and the panting breath of the fighters, who rolled on the ground, dragged each other by the hair, and bit each other. [“Selim Mirza” D IV 212]

> Soon there spread wide groans, howls, calls for aid, the swish of swords, the splutterings of the beaten, the neighing of terrified horses, the clash of broken Tartar blades. The peaceful meadow rang with all the wild voices that can find a place in human throats. [OM II 381]

> There was a sudden silence in the church. All that could be heard was the animal gasps of those fighting, the grating of iron on bone, on the stone floor, groans, the slopping of blood – sometimes some voice in which there was nothing human cries out: “Pardon! Pardon!” [P III 198]

The voice and more frequently sound do not express pain. They recall the materiality of the body (soft flesh, hard bones) and attest to the animality of fighting bodies (spluttering, grunting, panting, gasping). The text breaks the usual relation between body and voice; the voice no longer belongs to the victim, but to the writer, who integrates sound into a total composition that presents violence, for example, creating a duet for two voices in which the first voice sings a lament, “Have mercy, lady! – [. . .] more and more piteously,” and the second, in counterpoint, sings of “the grating of iron on bone, the grunts and terrible choking sounds of the dying” [OM I 374].[318] The content of this music inspires quivers of horror, as

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318 As a faithful reader of Shakespeare, Sienkiewicz could not but have noted in one of his favorite plays (he even fell in love with its heroine a little) a dialog on the music of breaking bones.
TOUCHSTONE:
Thus men may grow wiser every day: it is the first time that ever I heard breaking of ribs was sport for ladies.
CELIA :
Or I, I promise thee.
ROSALIND:
But is there any else longs to see this broken music in his sides? is there yet another dotes upon rib-breaking? Shall we see this wrestling, cousin? (*As You Like It*, Act I, Scene 2)

does the regularity of the composition, the care for the order and harmony of those voices. Their "fearful symmetry" terrifies: "the scream of the murdered prisoner," "the children's cries of pain and their squeals," combined "with the roaring of the bull and the neighing of horses." And all this is against the background of a choir of women, who "sobbed and wailed loudly" [OM 219]. The most terrifying are the collective groans of the Cossacks who die in the ravine at Berestecko.

> From the bottom came appalling groans. Bodies twitched convulsively, kicking each other or scoring each other with their nails in the spasms of their dying. On into the evening, these groans sounded loud, and on into the evening, the mass of bodies moved, but slower and slower, less and less noticeably, until, at first dusk, it fell silent. [PW 619][319]

Irrespective of the type of discourse of violence, the suffering body that it shows is always a projection, never an imitation, because here there is no legible exchange of the sign and its referent. Real suffering is not to be written, because even when it speaks out in reality, its speech is not representation but pure expression of pain. Sienkiewicz never deals with this issue, but yet he must have been aware that his images of the body suffering in war are falsified not just by virtue of the impossibility of representing pain, but also because the poetics of the novel, which he had adopted, favor the marginalization of such experience.

One can recognize three episodes as an attempt at redemption (one in each part of the *Trylogia*), which for a moment emancipate the suffering body. These are passages that are all the more intriguing, as it is protagonists of the novels who here inflict dreadful suffering on their enemies: Duke Jeremi, Kmicic, and Nowowiejski.

In *Ogniem i mieczem*, this function is fulfilled by the execution scene, the victim of which is Ataman Sucharuka. He is an ambassador of Chmielnicki, but nonetheless Jeremi orders that he be impaled on a stake. The exceptional nature of this scene does not reside in the type of death, but in the fact that its subject is the suffering victim who exchanges glances with the soldiers of Duke Jeremi as they pass by him ("the bloody spectacle struck the soldiers' eyes" [OM I 317]). The author highlights this one body out of thousands of others and presents it not just to the readers, but also to other characters.[320] Above all, the suffering victim is

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319 Sienkiewicz thought of this scene much earlier, which is clear from an excerpt of a feuilleton devoted to Kubala's *Szkice* (Sketches). "There is nothing as terrible and terrifying as a brief history of this swarm of people, whom fate condemned to perdition" [MLA 143].

320 Despite the individual quality of this scene, one must remember that those same soldiers who are shaken by the sight of an impaled ambassador meet Skrzetulski, who tells of his stay with Chmielnicki.
– They've wounded him! – called out Pan Dzik.
– They wounded him though he was an ambassador – answered Pan Śleszyński. [OM I 321]

active; the violence has been done and does not matter. It is important that "long hours of dying came to the unfortunate ataman, and until evening he quivered until death brought him peace" [OM I 317]. A completely separate component of this scene of violence consists in the presence of the face and glance of the victim, which communicate silently the boundlessness of his suffering.

> [That] agony of his, that death encircling his head arrayed him in a seriousness; they brought such strength to his gaze, such a sea of hatred to his eyes, that all understood well what he wished to say. [OM I 317]

The restraint of the text achieves outstanding effects. The victim's silence becomes eloquent, also because there is no language adequate to the expression of pain, and, even more, because pain destroys language, language shatters on pain, and vowels triumph – the value of which results from their natural closeness to the body that screams or groans.

When Azja is impaled, "from his throat came a scream A! a! a!" [PW 504]. This is an unprecedented scene in the whole of Polish literature.[321] The passionless description of a terrifying act of torture, which we follow from close up. The narrator's changing perspective "seeks" the best place precisely to capture the key components of the presentation. Despite the closeness and detail of the description, the narration concentrates on the process of the deformation of a body without consciousness, in which there is less and less of a being that is similar to the reader – in Azja's body "something terrible began to happen, something contrary to nature and human feelings! The bones of the unhappy man came apart, and his body moved in two different directions" [PW 504].

The narration does not even attempt to give utterance to "unuttered pain," because there is no referent for it, no object known to the reader to which he/she might compare such pain.[322] Seeking an equivalent for the unspeakable, the author reaches for a scandalous context. He sends the reader to the experience of

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321 Strangely, it is never juxtaposed to the scream of Zbigniew Herbert's Marsyas, to whom it serves as a splendid introduction, if only because of the Homeric tradition ("Apollonian," according to Nietzsche) from which Sienkiewicz's writing derives. Herbert himself provokes such a joint reading in his poem "Podróż do Krakowa" (Journey to Kraków): "The Deluge is something else / you read it and it's like you knew / a good – he says – thing / almost as good as a film"), and also indirectly through the poem "Pa!" [Bye] (from *Epilog burzy* [The Storm's Epilogue]): "so why these paroxysms, cold shakes of youth / howling under a low dark sky / impaled on a stake."

322 Elaine Scurry writes of the lack of referentiality in pain, which makes it impossible to grasp it in language. In fact, she argues, no discourse, material or verbal, can capture pain. However, at the same time, the very lack of object in pain provokes the imagination to create an array of artifacts and symbols. (See: E. Scurry, *The Body in Pain. The Making and Unmaking of the World*, New York 1985, p. 162.)

pleasure: “an unuttered pain, so terrible that it bordered almost on a terrible joy, filled his being. The stake went in deeper and deeper” [PW 504]. The perverse connotations here unleashed immediately begin to flourish around the description of the specialist in torture, Luśnia, the master of the watch.

> Luśnia bent down and taking in both hands Azja’s hips, so that he could move them, called out to the people holding the horses:
> – Move! But slowly, together!

Macabre perversion is transferred next to a second sequence of torture, the blinding of Azja with an auger. Luśnia “placed the blade in the pupil, turned it once and a second time, and when the eyelid and the delicate skin around the eye were wrapped round the auger – he gave it a jerk. Then from both of Azja’s eye sockets there flowed, as it were, two streams of tears down his face” [PW 505].

We are too close to this, and the pornography of this suffering even embarrasses men of war, “who began in silence to douse their torches, as if ashamed that the light should illumine a deed so dreadful” [PW 505]. But the text helps to remove the one-dimensionality of the scene, and the possibility of its mimetic referentiality. The macabre eroticism of the linked phallic figures – the stake and the auger – brings relief in the form of a literary context for this monstrosity, and, thus, recalls the textuality of the presented world. For Azja is guilty of an “Oedipal” crime: with exceptional cruelty he has slain his future father-in-law,[323]

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323 Azja does not just murder his future father-in-law, but also his master (and, in a sense, his adoptive father), for Nowowiejski – as he acknowledges – found him on the steppe: “He was kept for twenty years in my house and learned his lessons together with my son. When my son ran off, he helped me on the estate, as long as he wasn’t busy making love to Ewuchna, which when I saw it I ordered him whipped; then he ran off too” [PW 288-289]. In this context, the murder that Azja commits has complex motivation.
The sight was so terrible that even Lipka’s decurions felt their hearts grow cold. For Azja with refined cruelty slowly drew the knife across the throat of the unfortunate nobleman, and he wheezed and groaned most awfully. From his opened veins the blood gushed ever faster onto the hands of his murderer and in a stream it fell on the floor. At last the wheezing and groaning stopped by degrees; only the air began to whistle in the slit throat, and the legs of the dying man, twistching convulsively, struck the earth. [PW 400]
Tarnowski, horrified by the scale of the cruelty in *Pan Wołodyjowski*, could never understand why the author wrote the scene of Azja’s impaling. At the same time, however, he repeats that scene in his discussion, and the Professor’s added details, which do not exist in the novel, develop even further Sienkiewicz’s sadistic fantasies: “the unfortunate body is held by the splintered and abrasive surface of the stake and it tears apart even more. Eventually the point of the stake went somewhere deep, under the breast. . . .” Tarnowski imagines, too, a “better” vengeance. One could “long and lovingly” think of torments for Azja, but it would be better to torture him psychologically, showing him a happy Basia in Chreptiowa (S. Tarnowski, “*Pan Wołodyjowski*,” in: *Trylogia Henryka Sienkiewicza,* op. cit., p. 227, 229).

and carried off Baśka Wołodyjowska, who is the wife of his commander, and hence for Azja fulfills a maternal function – she treats wounds and tries to make a match for Ewka. Sienkiewicz, however, takes care, above all, to achieve a balance within the events of the story; hence, there is the strong motivation of this scene in the shape of the sufferings of young Nowowiejski, who avenges the dreadful death of his father and the fate of his sister.[324] The script of revenge is based on the symbolic repetition of Azja's intentions toward Baśka and his deeds toward Zosia, and then his exclusion from the community of persons by the shaming of the body that dared to perform such an act.[325]

The mildest of these three expiatory scenes is in *Potop*. We return to the motif of the loud silence of the victim in a scene that shows the mutual burning of each other by Kuklinowski and Kmicic. Before this happens, the bodies are laid bare. "Strip this little rabbit bare – said Kuklinowski" [P II 300]. With the exception of the pagan world in *Quo vadis*, this is an unusual situation, in which nakedness becomes socially acceptable, and it is because of the wound that the body becomes public,[326] although it is not so for the reader. Without Kuklinowski's order, we would not know whether Kmicic is completely naked, or, for example, only his top half. But the author wishes us to know that when "he touched Kmicic's side with the burning swab" [P II 301], he has at his disposal Kmicic's entire defenseless body. The aid of the Kiemlicze saves the character from further suffering and from death, which the victim now deals out to the perpetrator.

> Kmicic raised the swab and laid it to the side of the unfortunate hanging man, but he held it there longer until the stench of the burned body began to spread through the barn. Kuklinowski twisted until the rope began to sway with him. His eyes, fixed on

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Tarnowski, however, forgets that Nowowiejski is taking his revenge not for Basia, who has been saved, but for those lost forever – his sister and his fiancée. Tarnowski also does not understand the deep symbolism of this scene, the meaning of which is clearly given in Michel Foucault's discussion of the symbolism of execution in Discipline and Punish. (See: M. Foucault, *Nadzorować i karać. Narodziny więzienia*, trans. with an afterword by T. Komendant, Warszawa 1993, p. 67)

324 A change in the language of description often opens new possibilities of reading. P. Leszkiewicz and T. Kitliński (*Miłość i demokracja. Rozważania o kwestii homoseksualnej w Polsce*, Warszawa 2005) see in this scene an allegory of the degradation of sexual otherness.

325 In *Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection*, Julia Kristeva writes of Oedipus's blinding and symbolic castration as a symbolic substitute marking clearly the line that separates from shame, shame which is not negated but is defined as alien. (See: J. Kristeva, *Potęga obrzydzenia*, op. cit., p. 82).

326 Podbipięta's body is also naked when it is suspended by the Cossacks on their siege machinery: "the sun lit up the human corpse, swaying on the cordage in time to the movement of the bulwark like a great pendulum" [OM II 389].

> Kmicic, expressed terrible pain and dumbly begged for mercy, from his clenched lips there came piteous groans. [P II 305]

The exchange is not symmetrical.[327] Kuklinowski is tortured cruelly because besides scorching his side, Kmicic sears his whiskers, his eyelashes, and his eyebrows. The asymmetry of revenge seems to be justified only in Kmicic's wildness, who is driven by a desire to see excessive pain, that is pain that goes far beyond pain as an effect of inflicting wounds. In torture, pain is the aim. The trace of pain is the wound, which for Kmicic soon becomes a text that is necessary to ensure the credibility of his words in the King's presence. Through this asymmetry of torture, the author involves his character in a relationship with an unwelcome double, which Kuklinowski is for Kmicic.

The piece of writing, which is constituted by their scorched sides, is far from easy to decipher. Kmicic's side will be warranty of his credibility in the King's eyes – the truth of the body as opposed to the lie of a name (Babinicz). The reader is in a better situation than the King, for he/she knows the provenance of this wound.[328] Without the narrator's guarantee, the burned side of Kuklinowski (if he had lived) would be far more credible, especially in view of Kmicic's false name and past offences. Kmicic's burned side does not differ from that of Kuklinowski;

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327 Once more disturbed, Tarnowski wrote that Kmicic "should not be cruel; he should restrain himself, although he desires cruelty. And more, the writer, the artist, should never desire dreadfulness and cruelties" (S. Tarnowski, "O *Potopie* z uczuciem zawodu," in: *Trylogia Henryka Sienkiewicza*, op. cit., p. 217).

328 Without the narrator's backing, Kmicic's burned side communicates nothing clearly. The sign of a victim's wound demands not just presentation, but also commentary to convince doubters. Here, for example, is an extract from an explication of the function of Christ's wounds written by Father Jakub Wujek. "But if someone asked here: Why did Christ the Lord deign to leave wounds, or the signs of wounds, in His side, in His hands, and in His feet? I answer that it is not because he could not heal them adequately (as once the pagans often claimed), but, foremost, so that by these signs he might confirm the truth of his resurrection, in that very body, and by these signs of bodily wounds He healed the spiritual wounds in His disciples. Second, so that now, sitting at the right hand of God, He might grant His faithful greater confidence and hope that He, standing before the face of God and interceding for us with God, demonstrates forever what a death he deigned to suffer for us. Third, that he might shame the godless Jews on the Day of Judgment, when they see whom they wounded and killed, and that He may manifest the just condemnation of all people, demonstrating what he suffered for all" (*Postylla Katolicka Mniejsza to jest krótkie kazania, albo wykłady świętych Ewangelii na każdą niedzielę i na każde święto wedle nauki prawdziwej Kościoła św. Powszechnego dla ubogich kapłanów i gospodarzów i pospolitego człowieka teraz znowu z pilnością napisana przez o. Jakuba Wujka theologa Societatis Jesu. Na Wtorek Wielkanocny Ewangelia jako się Pan Jezus ukazał Apostołom, u św. Łukasza w rozdziale 24*). The entire text is available in Polish at: http://www.ultramontes.pl/Postylla_26.htm.

it the same sign of torture and suffering. If it becomes something else, that is, as a result of the different histories of these wounds. Kmicic's sacrifice allows him to suggest a similarity to Christ's wounds, and this is part of the entire symbolism of moral resurrection that falls to this character's share. It is true that Kmicic himself wraps himself in the robes of Christ, calling out in the King's presence: "I want to be believed; may those doubting Thomases touch my wounds" [P II 359].

A wound sustained in war frees the body from the scope of cultural prohibitions; it allows one to make them public, set them out for show, render the body historical and political. But reading wounds and scars is not simple. When the context is gone, in other words the history of violence, of which the wound is a result, then it is far from easy to decipher the narrative encoded in those wounds. The protagonist of "Hania" looks many times at the portrait of Colonel Mirza.

> I remember that the portrait made an odd impression on me. Colonel Mirza was a terrible man; his face was written over by God knows what sabres, as if in the mysterious letters of the Koran. ["Hania" D VI 30]

One can see that the issue of reading wounds and scars demands interpretation – and this interpretation may frequently be misleading. For example, we do not know where the "terrible scar over the forehead and cheek" [P I 30] comes from that marks Jaromir Kokosiński, Kmicic's colonel. The same is true of Jan Skrzetuski's brother Stanisław – "with a man's face, threatening and decorated by a long, slanting scar left by the slash of a sword" [P I 181]. Not much is said about the genealogy of Nowowiejski's scar, which runs "from ear to nose," while his nose "from a cut was on one side thinner than on the other" [PW 73]. Above all, the origin of Zagłoba's wounds is not made clear. He "had a film over one eye, and on his forehead a hole the size of a thaler, through which bare bone shone" [OM I 26]. Of course, he exploits this mystery, constantly altering his versions of the provenance of the wound on his forehead and the film over his eye. Simple explanations are ineffective, too, even during the inspection of Kmicic's wounds, although he himself explains them to the King. As we recall, the bullet shot by Bogusław "ploughed deep into Kmicic's left cheek and carried off the whole of the tip of his ear" [P I 473]. To the King's question as to where he got "that slash across the mouth," Kmicic answers evasively.

> – Someone shot at me and stuck the barrel in my mouth.
> – An enemy or one of your own?
> – My own, but an enemy. [P II 381]

Even old Kiemlicz, who is able to read much out of it, cannot discover its content.

> – Someone must have been cruelly close to Your Worship when he shot.
> – And how do reckon that?

> – Because all the powder did not burn off, and the grains, like black seeds, sit under your skin. [P II 29]

Kmicic knows that only those involved in abducting Bogusław can decipher the text of the wound, just like the writing that is the wound given him by Wołodyjowski. “Kmicic took off his hat and showed the King the deep furrow, the whitish sides of which were perfectly visible” [P II 381]. Only when the man who caused the wound sees it does recognition follow: “ – My hand! – he called out” [P II 483].

The body, by virtue of its scars and wounds, attains a difference from other bodies, and, above all, has a social history, and not just a biological existence. Without knowledge of this history, the sign of the wound refers only to itself or to the implement that inflicted it. The text of the wound, however, does not have a clear designate or concept that it could evoke. Wounds and scars on the bodies of protagonists are a record of individual history that also belongs to more general history. “Written over” bodies are a testimony that these figures have a history. At the same time, that text of wound and scar, a deeply private trace of a painful event (war, duel, torture), is subject to the fatal nature of every sign that has irreversibly separated itself from its reference and from the situation in which it arose. What may the helpless reader of wounds decipher from the texts inscribed on the faces of the soldiers from the Lauda region, who enter the church in the closing scene of *Potop*? Even the narrator stays clear, adopting the point of view of an anonymous participant in the mass, helpless in the face of the multiplicity of signs that demand elucidation.

> Ach, what a sight! Fierce faces, burned by the winds, made lean by the trials of battle, slashed by the sabers of Swedes, Germans, Hungarians, Wallachians. The whole history of the war and the fame of the pious Lauda region was written on them by the sword. [P III 340]

A history of the body that cannot be read is marked on it as a trace, to which there is no way to restore an inaccessible whole, and thus it begins to serve the body in a general martyrological discourse. Since the text of the wound is illegible, that means that it draws the attention of its reader on itself, that is, on the body that bears the wound. The wound allows one to think of the body, even within the framework of a discourse that disdains the body. The relationship of Michał and Krzysia, which is full of sensuality, expresses itself by finding a gateway in the symbolic language of wounds. The narrator says that “sweet and friendly hands, [. . .] began to bind his wounds” [PW 76].[329] And although Wolodyjowski speaks

329 This symbolism is consistent. The contact of a woman with male wounds is an allegory of love and desire. Michał expresses this clearly: “ – Indeed I fell in love with you so quickly, because, from the first day, you began to dress my wounds for me” [PW 105]. The eruption of love on the part of Azja for Baśka takes place when she nurses his body: “From now on

of the wounds of the soul, there is no doubt that it is a matter of the body; indeed in *Potop*, he complains of a lack of compensation for faithful service – “apart from wounds in my skin, I had no other reward” [P II 450]. Of course, the expected reward is a woman. Thanks to the equivalence of violence and eroticism, not just war is expressed through the wound, but also love, although sometimes in contexts that give one pause for thought.

In *Quo vadis*, Sienkiewicz several times touches on a sphere of experience that one could designate as desire for suffering. The desire to inflict and the desire to experience suffering are bound together in a perverse tangle when “that chosen measure of cruelty is answered by a chosen measure of the desire for martyrdom” [Q 517]. Ligia, for example, spins fantasies about her own martyrdom.

> She saw herself a martyr, with wounds in her hands and her feet, white like the snows, beautiful with an unearthly beauty, borne by equally white angels up into the blue, and in such visions her imagination delighted. [Q 77]

Fantasies of one’s own martyred body do not disappear with the threat of their becoming real, but rather become stronger, enriched by a note of perversion when “to the beautiful visions, to the delights, there was joined, mixed with fear, a curiosity as to what they would accuse her of, and what kind of torments they would devise for her” [Q 78]. This is something considerably more important and enigmatic than an inclination toward perusing images of others’ suffering. The text here takes both perspectives (that of observer and of victim) and places them in the same body. Lidia’s consciousness that projects these images excites itself by imagining her own tortured body; both the wound, and the suffering it causes, become an exciting phantasm for the subject, who draws strange pleasure from thinking about itself as an object of torture.

Sienkiewicz very infrequently presents women’s wounds. Apart from schematic collective scenes, mainly in *Ogniem i mieczem* and *Quo vadis*, only once in his work does there appear a narrative of a wounded female body. These are not wounds of war, but the effects of a beating. In his novel *Na polu chwały*, Pani Dzwonkowska dresses Anula’s wounds after she has been beaten up by Marcjan Krzepecki.[330] Uncovering her body, she cries out: “For God’s sake! her

at every spring she stopped the procession and with her own hands she wrapped his head in cloths soaked in cold spring water” [PW 217]. Only the wounded body of a man deserves a woman’s caress. This exchange, of course, has a clear economic sense, because dressing wounds makes the man ready for another war.

330 In this strange, almost self-parodying, novel, the Krzepeckis inflict physical violence on women – both father and son. Old Krzepecki, trivializing Marcjan’s beating of Anula, gives, as an example, his relationship with his daughter: “I sincerely love my youngest Tećka, but sometimes I take my belt to her. [. . .] Just think, sir. . . . What kind of order would there be in the world if the girls wanted to have their own way? Even one who’s

little shoulders all bruised, her beautiful white shoulders like holy wafers . . . her hair torn out in handfuls, her golden hair" [NPCH 183]. The circulation of the phantasm starts. Informed of this, the Bukojemski brothers in their turn tell the priest of their reaction to the beating of Sienińska.

> Because when we learned from Pani Dzwonkowska that the poor girl has all her little body covered in bruises, we came here to your office in such sorrow that [. . .] we drinked and we cry, we drinked and we cry! . . . And we had it in our memory that that this wasn't just a girl, but a young lady from a senator's family. . . . Everyone knows that, for example, a horse – the higher the blood, the thinner the skin on him. Take a whip to an ordinary cart horse, he barely feels it, but on a high-class beast there will be marks right away. . . . Good Father just think what her skin must look like and on her shoulders, and all over a young lady like that? isn't it like a holy wafer – what do you say? [NPCH 197]

Parody and perversion dominate the style of this passage. The comic sympathy of these coarse and cruel brothers goes beyond an innocent, anti-sarmatian joke, when we see how the account of Anula's beating liberates a repressed discourse about the female body – looked at, touched, or only imagined by other characters. The addressee of this story is ambiguous, and the comparison of a woman's skin to the host is somewhat blasphemous (in the priest's presence). Paradoxically, it turns out that violence emancipates the body more effectively than eroticism, and Sienkiewicz, perhaps unconsciously, is playing with the hypocrisy of bourgeois culture, which does not permit openness in erotic discourse, but accepts cruelty and the macabre.

The image of the wound not only opens the body, but also opens a discourse about the body.[331] The point of this opening is almost immediately concealed in Sienkiewicz's work, because it would destroy the primacy of an "interesting story" over a study of the physical mutilations in which war abounds. The text of violence in this genre variant of the novel should not excessively draw the reader's attention to itself, but should project his/her curiosity about the next sequence of events. Despite the dominance of this principle, in some cases (already analyzed) the text

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married, although she's older, has to give in to her husband and follow his orders. So what can we say about a immature little girl and the orders of her father or her guardian" [NPCH 190]. *Na polu chwały* should be valued for this oddity, since Sienkiewicz excluded from his other novels any trace of the widespread violence against women in the nineteenth century. As Janusz Tabir writes: "The beating of wives, breaking their ribs and noses, did not at all conflict with gallantry toward women" (*Okrucieństwo w nowożytnej Europeie*, op. cit., p. 220).

331 Among the hundreds of wounds described in the war novels, one perfectly symbolizes this duality. This is Ketling's wound, which he himself inflicts with his own sword. This text cannot be read by anyone. No one, that is, apart from Oleńka, who knows "he wounded himself to stay by her side" [P III 213].

clearly holds our attention on the tortured body. What is the function of this fixing of the reader's attention, of the momentary transformation of the fabular into a meditation and reflection? Two narratives inserted in the main narrative of *Pan Wołodyjowski* suggest two functions of the reflection on suffering. The first episode, to which, for the purposes of our discussion, we ascribe a metatextual function, points to the narrator's sadism, whose pleasure derives from the consciousness of the pain created by his words. This is the tale of Azja, who, when captured by Nowowiejski, torments him with tales of his cruel deeds.

> He told how he knifed old Nowowiejski, how he took Zosia Boska in his tent, how he sated himself on her innocence, and how at last he tore her white body with a whip and kicked her. [PW 500]

Next Nowowiejski, after carrying out the execution, gives an account of it in Chreptiowa. This tale of exceptionally cruel violence closes the Azja story line, constituting, at the same time, the meaning of revenge, which does not, it is true, bring relief, but contains the conflict of violence within a structural order.

> Here he told what death Azja Tuhaj-bejowicz died, and they listened in horror, but without pity. [PW 508]

The characters' reactions here are secondary to those of the reader, to whom the narrator has earlier told in detail both histories of violence. Thus Azja and Nowowiejski merely repeat after the narrator, who includes their accounts in his tale, concentrating, however, on presenting the very word of narration itself and the impression it exerts on the listeners. Can one recognize this as the accepted style of reception of a novel text? The answer is not simple, especially because the "flatness" of presentation, the ephemeral impact of the text of violence, was something we recognized as the author's basic strategy in building up an "interesting story material." The suggestion that representation is not governed by the poetics of a series of "moments," driving on curiosity as to "what happens next?", but rather a poetics of reflection, leads to the conclusion that the text demands of us a return to the place where body and violence meet, so as not to leave this place too quickly in order to supplement what emerges in the cracks within representation. In that case, we "supply" the text with a memory of the history of violence and its meanings, which are subject to forgetting as a result of the amnesia from which an adventure plot suffers.

The problem seems insoluble. For how is it "appropriate" to read the scene in *Ogniem i mieczem* in which the characters encounter Stryżowski hanging from an oak? He "hung there completely naked, and on his chest he bore a terrible necklace composed of heads strung on a rope. They were the heads of his six children and his wife" [OM I 366]. Should we see this as a component of some macabre coloring, one of the images of war? Or as an allusion to Dantyszek's

walk through hell, who also discovers in a pot the heads of his children; or as a last sequence of horror, the course of which orders us to think "something," and at the same time hysterically to drive "that" from our consciousness? Each of these readerly paths is possible thanks the game of literature, which distances the signs of a mutilated character far from any connection with the reader's own body, and thus blocks the impulse to supplement, which would push toward extracting a history of the body from the text of wound and scar.

What mighty powers of language are at the writer's disposal are shown by the extraordinarily strange, comic-macabre scene from *Na polu chwały*, in which the Bukojemski brothers (mentioned above) bring a macabre wedding present for Jacek Taczewski.

> – Accept it , Jacek! accept it! accept it!
> – I accept it and may God reward you! – answered Jacek.
> So saying he laid the object on the table and commenced to unwind the velvet. Suddenly he drew back and cried:
> – For God's sake! a human ear!
> – And do you know whose? Marcjan Krzepecki's! – roared the brothers. [NPCH 237]

Marcjan's chopped off ear is not a sign (a part) of an entire mutilated body, but only a prop in a piece of comic macabre. The sign of its suffering, "stolen" from the body, is assembled in another semantic configuration: now the ear "speaks" of a sarmatian confusion of values, which means that the brothers' maudlin sensitivity seamlessly adjoins their cruelty. This episode's black humor effectively protects us from either sympathy or disgust.[332]

On one hand, the narrative is completely in control of the object of violence, but also of our perception, in which it tries hard to block critical reflection, maintaining the reader's mind on the level of impression (horror, laughter, fear etc.). The means

332 – Well! – said the priest – [. . .] but that's certainly a tasteless *donum*.
The brothers began to look at each other in amazement.
– How so, tasteless? – asked Marek – we didn't bring the ear for Jacek to eat it.
– Thank you for your kindness – answered Taczewski – since I don't suppose you brought it just to hide it away.
– But if it hung for a bit; we could smoke it!
– Let the servant bury it right away – the priest said in a harsh voice – for after all it is a Christian ear. [NPCH 239]
The cruel and comic brothers with the names of the Evangelists (Jan, Łukasz, Mateusz, and Marek) derive their lineage from Saint Peter through being related to the Przegonowskis and the Uświaty "and so on to the birth of Christ the Lord" [NPCH 15]. Sienkiewicz does not limit himself to comic genealogy to demonstrate the brothers' ignorance. Saint Peter returns, although unmentioned, in the novel's "finale" as "patron" of the idea of the present, in keeping with the Biblical episode in which Peter chops off the ear of one of the guards that has come to take Jesus.

whereby Sienkiewicz constructs this impression are rather modest in comparison with those of painting, which he so admired. For example, the lack of extended use of color in his descriptions is striking; instead, comparisons based on figurative forms, or more precisely, spatial ones, dominate. The limited use of color means that the image becomes legible, but one-dimensional; we see clearly, but "flatly." Does the dialectic of Sienkiewicz's presentation of violence reside in this – to see clearly, but not too much? Increased visibility would entail more knowledge of the object of violence, which matches the fundamental conviction of the nineteenth-century realist that knowledge is based on thorough observation.[333] Contrary to his declared jealousy of painting's illusionism, Sienkiewicz remains an advocate of representation, the basis of which is a rhetoric of action and dialog, and not the colors and musicality of descriptive narrative.

In reference to the issue just discussed, that of "the representation of violence," doubts, however, remain. When we attempt to compel the text to make clear its intentions toward the reader, perhaps we are raising the wrong issue. This is not only because of the problematic nature of the concept of "the intention of the text," but also because the specific quality of the narrative here is its indecisiveness with regard to the function of presenting violence. The best proof of this is the divergence in Sienkiewicz's reception, apparent in voices recognizing him as a writer for young people, or as the opposite, as a cruel, textual sadist. Let us not, therefore, abandon any of the described intentions underlying representation, seeing in this lack of decision the most appropriate record of our confused position vis-à-vis literary images of violence. It is a position that contains within it horror, disgust, habituation, and even laughter.

4. The work of killing

Among the various languages spoken by the discourse of war (including, freedom, necessity, sovereignty, revenge, rivalry), the *Trylogia* is especially fond of highlighting the lexicon of work. This does not constitute a proof of the positivist

333 But even Prus, the great spokesman for observation had doubts as to whether it is the one sufficient source of knowledge for literature: "Life supplies us with facts that are fragmentary, which, for example, operate on the senses, and not on the spirit; they work on the mind, and not on the feelings; on the memory, and not on observation, and so on. So composition consists in filling out those lacks" (B. Prus, "Teoria czynu – idee – twórczość artystyczna," in: *Polskie koncepcje teo retycznoliterackie w wieku XIX. Antologia*,ed. E. Czaplejewicz and K. Rutkowski, Warszawa 1982). See also: M. Jay, "Kryzys tradycyjnej władzy wzroku. Od impresjonistów do Bergsona," trans. J. Przeźmiński, in: *Odkrywanie modernizmu. Przekłady i komentarze*, ed. R. Nycz, Kraków 1998, pp. 317-39.

skeleton that underpins the author's world view. Killing, formulated in the metaphor of work, allows Sienkiewicz to divide representation into realistic descriptions of killing and inflicting wounds, and into the sphere of violence shown as a political and economic idea. The idea of violence, understood in this way, is served by the novel's images of killing as compared to the work of a craftsman or a farmer, who are conscientiously fulfilling their professional obligations.[334] The metaphorization of violence is, thus, something more than a substitution that weakens its horror; this discourse aims directly at rendering representation ideological.

In the tradition of describing the violence of warfare, from the very beginning, one can recognize two distinct languages of representation. The first expresses violence in images of animal-like instincts, ferocity, and savagery. The second presents killing as an inseparable element of war, a planned course of action, a strategy, a handicraft far removed from individual hatred. Killing in war is described in categories of the economy of work, thus socializing war, and drawing it into known social categories. When Marshall Lubomirski promises the peasants freedom from serfdom for fighting against the Swedes "all scythes were held upright and every day Swedish heads began to be carried into camp" [P III 75].

In such a transaction, the enemy's wounded or dead body becomes a commercial article produced by the war. Both sides, however, produce similar articles (dead or wounded bodies). In this way, the neutrality of violence becomes controversial; and, what is more unsettling, there are signs that this work even offers pleasure to its expert practitioners. Father Woynowski recalls, for example, that during Lubomirski's Prussian campaign, there was work "every day from morning to evening. If you stick your spear in the chest or in the back, you still get tired out. Hey, that was a great expedition, because it was – as they say – hard-work" [NPCH 95]. This is how one of Sienkiewicz's last military protagonists puts it, not any differently from the first, the knight-martyr of "Niewola tatarska."

> There were great joys then in the Ukraine for all knightly spirits. Every night you could see the glow of fires and hear the roar of battle. ["Niewola tatarska," D V 39]

334 Lech Ludorowski insists that such comparisons make the scandal of violence more palatable for the reader, "wiping clear or perhaps rather softening the drastic nature of battle description by referring to the image of the farmer's peaceful work" (L. Ludorowski, *Sztuka opowiadania. . .*, p. 117). In his turn, Konrad Górski considered that the basic purpose of this type of comparison is to render the presentation of war sublime (K. Górski, "Sienkiewicz – klasyk języka polskiego," in: *Henryk Sienkiewicz – twórczość i recepcja światowa*, op. cit., p. 71). Zdzisława Mokranowska also points to this function of softening war and rendering it sublime that belongs to these comparisons ("Porównania w *Ogniem i mieczem* Henryka Sienkiewicza," in: *W świecie prozy Henryka Sienkiewicza*, Lublin 2002, p. 60).

This appears to be an effect of imitating the style of the epoch, the model of the rhetoric of seventeenth-century memoirs and knightly poetic narratives, as Tadeusz Bujnicki shows in his classic studies on the subject.[335] The poetics of the realist historical novel is creatively parasitic on a source text to a greater extent than on observation or imagination; thus, the operation of the alien quality of the style of the source document is a type of supplementary veil separating the reader from the object presented in this manner. At the same time, it does not deprive the reader of pleasant excitation, since represented violence implies, to some degree, a transference of its affect onto the receiver. From this point of view, the mimetic verisimilitude of the historical color of the wars in the *Trylogia* is simultaneously camouflage for their contemporary attraction – to put it differently, for the fact that they have been adapted for the reader who is the author's contemporary – and for his/her reading "delight."

Before we discuss examples of such strategies, it is necessary to underline that the world of the *Trylogia* is filled by a deep affirmation of war, and characters, along with the narrator, frequently sigh for a speedy outbreak or renewal of hostilities. "War! war!" call out all the participants in the council at Machnówka, and we, along with them, also want it, because a distaste for politics and peaceful negotiation fills this whole world, which is based on the foundation of military values. Several times, Sienkiewicz humiliates politicians,[336] chief among them the Voivode Kisiel, whose dedication and patriotism do not lessen the humiliation he experiences at the hands of Chmielnicki. Every alternative to violence and straightforward conflict is a synonym for treachery or, at the very least, cowardice. Even the cautious Zagłoba shouts out with delight after the meeting with Janusz Radziwiłł – "nothing of pacts, nothing of parchments, but war and war again! – War! War! – the voices of the listeners repeated like echoes" [P I 238]. War excites, because it

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335 These are principally collected in the following volumes: *Trylogia Sienkiewicza na tle tradycji polskiej powieści historycznej*, Kraków 1973; *Sienkiewicz i historia. Studia*, Warszawa 1981 and *Sienkiewicza „powieści z lat dawnych". Studia,* Kraków 1996. Piotr Bork's works are also exceptionally useful for research into sources used by Sienkiewicz. See: *Ukraina w dawnych diariuszach i pamiętnikach*, Kraków 2001 and *Szlakami dawnej Ukrainy*, Kraków 2002. He is also the editor of *Poematy rycerskie* by Jan Białobocki (Karków 2004) – which Sienkiewicz used in his descriptions of the siege of Zbaraż.

336 For example, from the lips of Zagłoba who mocks Opaliński.

Pan Opaliski is a scribbler, and it soon emerged what he was fit for. . . . The human species is vile! Every one of them, once he pulls the ass out of a goose, he thinks he's eaten up all the wisdom in the world. . . . And a fellow like that persuades others, but when the time comes to draw sabers, he's gone. [P I 208]

War invigorates, as opposed to the study of politics. Sienkiewicz gives a specimen of the kind of narrative that is fatal for the epos of war – namely the sterile debates, shown in Chapter 19, at the court of Jan Kazimierz, debates that delay the relief of Zbaraż.

offers the relief of knowing one's role, one that is not sufficiently explained by the logic of political and religious reasons. In this context, the privilege of having an enemy allows one continually to reinvent one's national and class identity. Thanks to the war – says Pągowski in *Na polu chwały* – "I know what God created us for and what duty he laid upon us" [NPCH 36]. Kmicic, lost in the stratagems of Radziwiłł's policies, dreams of war as a binary structure of order, one that will put straight even his emotional life.

> And regret carried him off like a high wind. Hey ho! He could say to himself: the Swedes against the fatherland, and me against them; Radziwiłł against the King – and me against him! Only then was it all clear and transparent in his soul. [P II 20][337]

The value of war resides principally in its constructive influence on aristocratic/gentry mores: individualism, self-interest, and self-indulgence.[338] The longing for war thus appears as a desire for a utopia in which control, discipline, and dedication dominate. The utopian source of this longing lies in the dream that

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337 The same is the case with Wołodyjowski after he has been rejected by Oleńka. He looks forward to the prospect of military work. "How the news from the hetman and the prospect of hard work brought Pan Wołodyjowski great relief, and before he set off to Pacunele, he scarcely gave a thought to the confusion that he had met with only an hour before" [P I 142]. When he is put in charge of the keep in Chreptiowa, he will repeat Jeremi's work on a more modest scale. "He introduced order and rigor to the estates, brought its alarmed folk together, raised the huts that had been burned down, and he built 'fortalices,' that is protective courtyards, in which he positioned temporary groups of soldiers; in brief, as he had formerly vigorously defended the country, so now, too, did he act with vigor, never letting his saber leave his hand" [PW 198].

338 The thirty-year-old Jeremi, before he takes over the leadership in Zbaraż, confesses to Skrzetuski in the tone of an old man: "I desire death more, for I am already much wearied, and I tell you – soon I will be gone. My spirit strains toward the war, but my body lacks strength" [OM I 400]. Soon it transpires that a cure for this crisis is "days of superhuman effort and heroic struggle, which are the best salve for the heart and thrust painful memory further down to the bottom of the soul" [OM II 296]. War, too, is therapy for emotional perplexities, because it means that "the *animus* at once turns from the woman, and is held in handsomer arms – and it assures the heart relief as well" [NPCH].
Those same Bukojemski brothers, who in the novel represent the worst sort of sarmatian anarchy, undergo a purifying transformation as a result of the coming war with Turkey: "when they went to war with the whole measureless might of the Turks, they felt that that was their true destiny, that their previous life was vain and shabby, and that now began a real and worthy life, and in essence that life for which God had created the Polish gentry, the Son of God redeemed them, and the Holy Spirit blessed them" [NPCH 208]. "Somehow they felt more noble, cleaner, more important, and even more noble in their nobility. Of Marcjan Krzepecki and his rouguish company, of the hindrances and obstacles on the road, they scarcely thought. They seemed to them trivial, feeble, and unworthy of their attention" [NPCH 209].

desirable social virtues will arise in answer to a threat, and are not imposed by a tyrant's (or leader's or lord's) will. The socially benign value of war resides in the very structure of the conflict, which polarizes the chaotic world of the politics and private interests of the nobility and gentry, and extracts their finest qualities from individuals. For the militarized community to which the characters of the cycle belong, it is peace that brings an end to order and that threatens society with dissolution, for a soldier without work "is trained only for wanton behavior and to oppress the peaceable inhabitants of the voivodeship" [P II 77] until finally "idleness destroyed the soldiers themselves" [P II 78]. War is revealed as a far lesser evil than military idleness replete with political disputes.

The concept of war as work in the service of order is most fully expressed by the figure of Jeremi – "Wherefore must I alone work?" – he says, irritated by lack of support for his military actions, which the narrator closely links to the Prince's thrifty home economics. On his lands, " there obtained everywhere a model order and a discipline unknown elsewhere" [OM I 79]. True, there is violence, but necessary violence, because "in those times and in those lands only such severity permitted human life and work to flourish and grow" [OM I 83]. The narrator reaches for traditional organic allegory, according to which the ruler's body and person gathers together his subjects; thus, their work is his work. Jeremi has created the might of Zadnieprze: he has "built," "linked," "chopped down," "drained," "raised," "founded," "introduced," "fought," "defended," "brought in," and "maintained" [OM I 332]. He knows that with his death "the work of so many years will be destroyed at once, that my efforts will have gone for naught, and savagery will break forth" [OM I 322], because "Zaporoże is only recently tamed and held in submission up to Masłowy Staw, but it champs impatiently on the bit" [OM I 33]. From the moment when the Prince finally appears in Zbaraż, "you saw everywhere order and efficiency" [OM II 298]. The ordering structure of war spreads also to the Cossack community, since "as soon as the drum beat for an expedition, the 'community' became an army, subject to military discipline, the heads of the *stanitsa* became officers, and the hetman became a chief, a dictator" [OM I 156]. The oncoming war means that Chmielnicki "brought order to his countless multitudes" [OM I 310].

Contrary to appearances, behind this utopia of war that brings order, no affirmation of militarism lies concealed. The utopia rather points to an impasse in thinking about what might be the force regulating the gentry's social responsibilities. In the face of a lack of strong royal authority and of an efficient administration, the threat of war has the role of transforming a capricious nation into an organized society. This is clearly shown by the *psychomachia* that takes place in Jeremi's mind. In him, there is a conflict between a desire to conduct the war on his own and a fear of breaking the law. The discipline of Jeremi's army is, as the narrator

understands it, something of great value, as is the colonization of Zaporoże, but that same force that the Prince wishes to use against the rebels is an evil, if it is done contrary to the will of the *Sejm* (parliament) and the rest of the leaders. The solution to the Prince's dilemma comes along with his recognition of the actual structure of the conflict. The most important enemy is "not Chmielnicki, but internal disorder, the gentry's antics, the army's small size and its lack of discipline, the volatility of parliament, strife, perplexities, confusion, incompetence, self-interest, and indiscipline – indiscipline above all" [OM I 461]. The text here is full of contradiction. How is it possible to achieve discipline without a strong authority, one that enforces on the gentry its duties toward the state?

Logical contradiction can be solved through metaphor. Military violence expressed in metaphors of work loses it scandalous exceptionality and comes down to the level of other social and professional activities. Through metaphor, the work of killing becomes a transitive form of work in general. Jeremi's efficiency in war and his efficiency in farming are the two faces of his severe regime. He sows violence in the same way and to the same end, as when "he brought in people, planted desert places, assured peace for up to thirty years, built monasteries, and introduced his law into his fiefdom." Sienkiewicz emphasizes the economic advantages that stem from combining the economy of war and peace, as if he were attempting to clear Jeremi of the suspicion that behind all that lay the Prince's cruel passions for war and slaughter.

A war in which economy is more important than passions is best represented by the professional soldier. Hence foreigners are the pattern of military handicraft,[339] and especially German mercenaries.[340] A characteristic example is the scene in *Ogniem i mieczem* in which a regiment of German mercenaries under the command of Lieutenant-Colonel Johan Werner is unwilling to go over to the Cossack side

339 An exception are the French officers of Prince Bogusław's dragoons, whose unquestionable valor takes a grotesque form of politeness. "All was foppery. They gave off the scent of so many fragrances, as if from an apothecary's. In battle they stabbed cruelly with their rapiers, but it was said of them that when they ran someone through, they said to him *Pardonnez-moi!* – they even observed this procedure with low ruffianly enemies" [PI 419].

340 Even Wołodyjowski, surrounding Kmicic in Lubicz, gives an order in German to his Lauda region troops. " – *Alt!* – shouted Pan Wołodyjowski. – Fire!" [P I 110]. This is one of the many traces of Sienkiewicz's admiration for foreign professional reliability, and is similar to the praises and complaints from his time of writing feuilleton pieces. An example is this extract from an article about the fire-brigade in Konin. "Who would believe that of the hundred volunteers who feel it part of their duty to serve, there are ninety-eight Jews and Germans, and only two (Where is my satirist's whip? Give me my whip!), two clear non-Jews and non-Germans. A pretty proportion, no? And prettily it demonstrates the patriotism and courage of the non-Jewish and non-German youth who inhabit the aforementioned town" [Cho II 37].

before June, when their contract with the Commonwealth ends.[341] The author does not conceal his admiration for such a professional ethos.

> The sight of that calm was really impressive among the stronger and stronger explosions of rage among the Cossacks, who brandishing lances and "tubes," gritting their teeth and cursing, impatiently awaited the order to start fighting. [OM I 185]

The Germans all die, defending only their honor as professional soldiers, just as their mercenary comrades do in Machnówka [OM I 368]. Sienkiewicz does not conceal from the reader that this mercenary ethos works in two directions, when a unit of Germans under the command of Korycki cannot join Wiśniowiecki's troops because they are bound by a contract with Prince Dominik [OM I 386]. This does not, however, undermine in any way the honor and reliability of the mercenary soldier. When at last they go over to Jeremi's side, all are delighted with their efficiency, experience, and discipline. "It was a soldiery so terrible and skilled that in the colonel's hand they operated like one sword" [OM I 385]. We encounter them, too, at Zbaraż, where with mechanical efficiency they sow devastation among the Cossacks.

> . . . neither the contempt for death with which the Cossacks fought, nor their endurance could hold back the relentless Germans, who going forward in a wall, hit them so hard that they swept them right out of the spot, drove them into the trenches, decimated them, and after half an hour's fighting threw them back beyond the defensive fortifications. [OM II 320]

The Germans represent war that is an integral part of society, irrespective of the stage of history. They are workers in the war, who always perform the necessary service. The narrator sets their work both against the chaotic savagery of the Cossacks and the Tartars, and against the capriciousness of the common mass levy of the gentry. Mercenaries are without the uncontrolled impulses of warfare, and the passions for killing are, as it were, suppressed among them. As they embody it, the work of killing is connected not just with the necessity of harnessing powers that are hostile to themselves, but also of mastering their own passion for slaughter.[342] This is why in the historical cycle, the narrator adores a professional army – as the only force capable of rendering rational, if only partially, the insanity

341 Ketling, too, shows the solid reliability of the mercenary when he refuses to help Oleńka. "– Very well. . . . In six months my service is over! . . . In six months my oath is void! . . ." [P III 280].

342 This is also how the Swedes are, whose inhuman precision fills the narrator with admiration, when he describes how "they marched in terrible, silent rectangles, at a single nod of their commanders, spreading out in lines and circles with the regularity of machines; they closed up in wedges and triangles as smoothly as the sword in a fencer's hand; bristling with the barrels of muskets and spears, they were real men of war, cold, calm, real craftsmen, who had brought their craft to a masterful level" [P I 160-161].

of war. Thus, he accentuates, without concealing its violent aspect, the rationality of Jermei's actions. If he compares him to a lion, Jeremi's anger is not directed at "the sheep," but at the smaller predators that he changes "into peaceful settlers" [OM I 83]. The result is that "the largest part of his life he had passed in working in military camps" [OM I 83].

If foreigners are war's craftsmen, Poles are most frequently compared to farmers. The impact of the hussars "pounds," "cuts up," "drives," "cuts," and their opponents fall "like standing corn under the sweep of the storm" [OM I 192], or like "the rich grass" where it is cut by "a line of mowers" [OM I 370]. The dragoons commence "a bloody harvest" [OM 193], and the hussars, who are in a good position to attack, "cut down all, as mowers do the grass" [NPCH 248].

The shamelessness of metaphorization means that war, so described, takes on an almost idyllic innocence. When he gives orders, Czarniecki is "a farmer in charge of the harvesters, distributing jobs among them" [P III 46], and after the battle he looks "with such a look at those human bodies as the squire looks at the bound corn sheaves which will go to build the haystack. Satisfaction was reflected on his face" [P III 86]. On another occasion, the narrator even uses a Biblical pattern of phrasing,[343] when he informs the reader that the castellan had listened to an account from a victorious battle "and was overjoyed in his heart at the great harvest" [P III 393].

The soldier-farmer is sometimes tired, which is clear from the frequent expression "his hands were weak from cutting" [OM I 374], or elsewhere: "It was necessary to rest when the hands of the mowers became weak from the bloody mowing." Voivode Tyszkiewicz confirms this when he says of the soldiers "that they have worked hard, the poor devils" [OM I 362, 363]. He himself "worked in the sweat of his brow, wheezing like a blacksmith's bellows." Afterwards he begs "rest after work" [OM I 379]. When the Prince comes to Zbaraż, an army of drones is transformed into worker bees: "the regiments began to move and emerge like bees from the hive" [OM II 299]. During the siege "one could see ranks of red and yellow soldiers working hard against the nearest enemy entrenchments" [OM II 367]. On the other hand, a lack of enthusiasm for battle recalls the conduct of a lazy worker, who "does not strike, does not crush, does not sweep clear the field" [OM I 197]. Occasionally, besides the narrator's exaltation, a tone of weariness with the monotony of the work comes through: "once more it was necessary to raise new defensive walls and secure the camp" [OM 346]. Sometimes the work of war never seems to end: "The royal armies were in the Ukraine and engaged in hard work against Chmielnicki, Szeremetow, and Buturlinow" [P I 95].

343 "And another angel came out of the temple, crying with a loud voice to him that sat on the cloud, Thrust in thy sickle and reap: for the time is come for thee to reap: for the harvest of the earth is ripe" (Revelation 14.15)

Killing tamed by metaphors of work loses, however, its horror in the repetition and routine of the actions of professionals. That is why, although the text speaks with approval of how violence is under control thanks to a modern mercenary army, that controlled violence is marginal to the story material. For perfection of military organization is more than matched by a central component of the plot: the heroism of a character's individual deed. Thus, finally, despite the admiration for the reliability and ethos of the Germans, they do not constitute an example for the Polish soldiers. The best of them, besides a mastery of the craft of war, have something else: a battle frenzy that comes from fighting in a good cause. Skrzetuski is the most conscientious among the princely workers; on a raid, "for five days he burnt and cut down until he had cleansed the area" [OM I 436]. However, having heroically made his way through the Cossack camp to come to the King's aid, he reports to his majesty, as if he were an accountant – "Twenty attacks repelled, sixteen battles won in the field, seventy-five expeditions. . ." [OM II 417]. The converted Kmicic is Skrzetulski's equal in this: during his Prussian expedition, "an admirer of conscientious work, sometimes, despite necessary haste, he stayed in some particular area until he had destroyed several miles around by sword and fire" [P III 327]. However, earlier during the siege of Częstochowa, he arouses admiration by his work.

> [He moved out] the less skilled gunsmith and began to work himself. And he worked so well that shortly, although it was November and a cool day, he threw off his fox furs, threw off his lined coat, and worked on in only his galligaskins and his shirt. [P II 214]

But neither of these matches the absolute master in killing, that is, Pan Michał, who after one skirmish "was so exhausted that he could not utter a single word, but with open mouth gasped for air time after time, until his breast grew warm. [. . .]. – That one's been hard at work! [. . .] – ones like that are born of stone" [P III 133], declares Czarniecki, delighted that Wołodyjowski has let no one escape alive. The continuation of a rhetoric of substitution is apparent in the whole cycle. In its final part, it is less common, but that may be because there are fewer battle scenes. But there too, Wołodyjowski's soldiers "hacked and stabbed with the remorseless and terrible skill that only a soldier of the craft possesses" [PW 263].[344] Wołodyjowski himself, despite age and rank, "leaped into the heat of battle, and having caught up with the dragoons, began to work" [PW 532]. Leading the defense of Kamieniec, he manages the artillery himself, "and was delighted in his heart that he could work so usefully" [PW 554].

344 He also carries out with the scrupulousness of a miser less effective duties, of which he informs Basia in a letter: "Of the robbers that we seized in the ravines, I ordered nineteen to be hanged, and before you arrive, I'll get it up to about thirty" [PW 207].

Weakened in one place the contradiction looms large elsewhere. War disciplines both sides in the same way, and diligence is not just an attribute of Germans and Poles. Sienkiewicz praises the skilled abilities of the Niżowy Cossacks, who in their resourcefulness recall American Quakers, but who at the signal for a military expedition "soon those wheelwrights, blacksmiths, gravediggers, candle-makers abandon their peaceful occupations" [OM I 98] and drink themselves into a stupor. Depending on the relationship to war, Sienkiewicz's Ukraine is divided into two halves: "one opted for the existing order, the other for a wild freedom; one desired to keep what was the fruit of a century's work, the other desired to take that good from it" [OM I 111]. The narrator seems surprised at the fact that the revolting populace does not want to work under the guidance of a harsh but just prince. "Those people, not long turned from robbers into farmers, were weary of law, the rigor of government, and order" [OM I 300].

In the eyes of the "workers" of war, they are destroyers. Jeremi's soldiers, looking at the effects of their enemies' actions, do not see there the fruits of labor; instead they confess that "they had never seen such fury of destruction in their lives" [OM I 367]. "All that together was wild and raging" [OM II 32], the narrator confirms. The narrator lets the reader know that, for the rebels, the war is a carnival in which "madness replaced work" [OM I 209]. This ghastly carnival is prefigured in the novel's first sentences that speak of the order of nature being turned topsy-turvey: "the order of nature seemed utterly overthrown" [OM I 5]. That is why Zagłoba rightly tells Skrzetuski that by not worrying before battle, he is behaving as if he were in a carnival show, as if it were all "make believe." In keeping with the philosophy of the carnivalesque, of "the world turned upside-down," this is a festival for those who have to work every day, while work for the gentry is free of this duty. As the bitterness of the conflict increases, difference become less. Chmielnicki's troops burn "grain on the stalk, forests and orchards, and the Prince at the same time wrought destruction with his own hand" [OM I 362].

The text, however, resists making both images of violence equal. Despite the use of a similar rhetoric of description "of the work of war," the difference between them results from the different economic values present in the opponents' operations. The Cossacks' activities are work of waste, expense, destruction, and not accumulation. Even Bohun's celebrated military undertakings are presented by the narrator within a network of chaotic verbs: "went," "banged," "floundered," "spent," "led," "burned," "cut off," "tore apart," "fell," "crossed," "threw himself," "hazarded," "crawled," "trampled," and "bathed" (these are taken from a section of barely half a page). Chmielnicki himself is a "avalanche," a "revenger," a "dragon" [OM I 202]. On the Polish side, it is otherwise; here effective struggle recalls a well-conducted economy.

Metaphor uproots a word from its usual semantic soil, which results in its forgetting part of its inheritance. Words that signify the running through and the cutting through of bodies, inflicting pain, taking people's lives, become, by virtue of arbitrarily designated similarities, brought into contact with words the meanings of which refer to the rhythms of peaceful everyday life: work, abundance, harvests, the care of plants. A new quality does not arise, but rather a semantic mixture of components, which now cannot be separated. It appears that the current of meanings in this case flows in one direction – that is, work covers up the reality of killing. The sinister beauty of this trans-semantic process is shown by the scene in which Baśka becomes an apprentice of the craft of killing, Baśka that "half-child, hot-headed and irresponsible," as she is described by Andrzej Stawar. The practical exercises prepared for her ("you can cut down two or three" [PW 255]) are performed under the eyes of her husband and Pan Motowidło, the phlegmatic bravo whom the narrator compares to "diligent orchard man" [PW 265]. This irreal situation means that even Basia (and the reader even more so) is "surprised that it's so easy" [PW 265].

It does not appear that Sienkiewicz wishes to justify himself by adducing the realities of the age, which would completely motivate the introduction of a fighting woman. The *Trylogia* is not an antiquarian novel, the author of which is at pains – like a good schoolboy – to obtain a good grade from the history teacher.[345] Writing of Wołodyjowski that "economy, war, and love – these were the three pillars of his life" [PW 198], Sienkiewicz not only defines in lapidary fashion the type of a valiant settler from the Eastern Borderlands. In the context of the extraordinary consistency that he shows in using metaphors of work to describe violence, I see a reflection on war, the author of which does not wish to hand war over to what in human beings is exclusively "inhuman." The cruel duty of killing is in the light of this always better than immoderate, as it were passionate, killing.[346] Although

345 Stanisław Tarnowski points this out as one of the novels' greatest merits, counting up the happy signs of the author's moderation: "no archaeology," "no descriptions of how someone is dressed, what kind of equipment he/she has, nothing that could recall an exhibition of antiquities or antiquarians' shops (S. Tarnowski, "Pierwsza pochwała *Ogniem i mieczem*," in: *Trylogia Henryka Sienkiewicza,* op. cit., s. 64–65).

346 Sienkiewicz is true to this opposition between the rationalization of violence and wild, sadistic mastery of the enemy's body, from the very start of his career as a writer about battles. In "Niewola tatarska" he describes the Cossacks' terrifying game with Tartar prisoners. "But these were, indeed, Cossacks from the *stanitsa*, who having cruelly set a tree alight on the step, threw the bound Tartars alive into the fire, swinging each one like a sack. The Tatars called on their Allah in vain; from those, however, who were burned already, the stench spread over the steppe, and the Cossacks, leaping like evil spirits through the fire, gave themselves over to pleasure" ["Niewola tatarska," D V 12].

Sienkiewicz does not show this, life beyond war is no longer possible in any "innocence." The discourse of peace is soiled by the war that it services.

In *Potop*, the frightful symmetry is even more perfect, for it is embodied in the figure of Kmicic, when it turns out that "the very same hand saved the village from fire and its people from the sword, which two years ago brought fire and sword to the very same village!" [P III 389]. Then, in Kmicic there takes place the transformation of his hedonistic practices of killing (it is unimportant whether it is in a good cause, for example the partisan campaign against Chowański) into a sacrificial work of violence. The turning point, which is his unconscious saving of Oleńka, opens the symbolic finale of his *peripeteia*, formulated in the symbolism of the days of the week and Sunday. Kmicic's unit does not halt, which makes Anusia most sad of all, as she is convinced that Kmicic has come to save her. "But afternoon came; then the sun covered the second half of his road and began to sink, but Babinicz did not return" [P III 390]. Waiting continues and thus "once more the day went by" [my underlining – R.K.] [P III 391]. "On the third day, Pan Tomasz sent several dozen people out to reconnoiter. They returned on the fourth day" [P III 390]. A disappointed and sulky Anusia does not intend to stay longer. "On the fifth day following she said to Oleńka: – Pan Wołodyjowski is just as good a soldier, but less of a boor" [P III 390]. After these five days real time is suspended and its place is taken by symbolic time. Kmicic learns from intercepted letters that he has saved Oleńka, and he sees in this the mark of Providence, a sign that his guilt will be forgiven, and his work done. At the same time, however, the real test begins, for, at the moment when he wishes to saddle his horse and rush to Oleńka, Wierszułł arrives with the levy for a new war. Kmicic's rage gives way to humility, and his shout changes to a complaint: "You, my Lord, do not be amazed that I am sad, because I was on the eve of my happiness" [P III 400]. Only then, the narrator tells us, "was he a man completely restored" [P III 400]. "The eve of happiness" is the sixth day, which extends through time that is not described ("No volume wrote it out . . . ." [P III 401]) and it lasts right up to the Sunday mass, during which he meets Oleńka. "Kmicic had already stood up and was walking on crutches, and the following Sunday he insisted on going to church" [P III 411]. Reward and rest come on a Sunday, which means that the economy that defines the value of the work of war is not of this world.

5. *Folga* (self-indulgence)

In contrast to violence formulated in metaphors of work, there stand series of images demonstrating the pleasure or, indeed, the delight, of killing. They show Sienkiewicz as a poet of noble/gentry *folga* (self-indulgence). According to

Linde, *folga* is "relief, relieving oneself," and also "not watching out, not paying attention." The connected verb *folgować* can be used to mean "to cut oneself/someone slack, to give oneself/someone rest," "to protect," "to accommodate, to fit in, to take into consideration." Thus, *folga* is consent to the liberation of a hitherto controlled impulse, one's own or someone else's. Understood in this way, it is synonymous with "freedom from something," and indicates a state of breaking free from a yoke, of rejecting limitations. It is a state that pertains more to the individual than the group, and that is why strong individuals permit themselves it, individuals whose powerful venting of passions explodes social norms and duties.

For this self-indulgence as a driving force, Sienkiewicz found an esthetic equivalent, subdued it in images of fictional conflicts, and made it a moving force in his narratives. However not right away. In *Ogniem i mieczem* self-indulgence is still dormant, barely apparent in the figure of Pan Łaszcz, or it is diffused in dreams of freedom for all, or in collective ecstasies of cruelty.[347]

It is only in *Potop* that we meet figures that embody self-indulgence, and through their impulsive energy they tyrannize others. Two of the protagonists are filled with contempt for the communities in which they find themselves. In Kmicic's eyes the gentry of the Lauda region do not differ greatly from the peasants.[348] But for Oleńka, his companions are just common bandits. Moral difference does not, however, determine social difference – both groups belong to the same world and are a product of it. This is shown clearly in Kmicic's reaction to the news that Oleńka has driven off his companions from before her home. He is impressed by her strength, and her ability to impose her will on a group of half-wild men. This is especially so as Kmicic's unit is made up of characters who represent an element that cannot be socialized – "it was hard to find a worse class in the whole of the Commonwealth" [P I 67]. They cannot be tamed as they are landless; their world is war, because that is a time in which the law is suspended, law which should pursue them for the crimes they have committed. These are the crimes that are mentioned:

> Jaromir Kokosiński: "he burned down Pan Orpiszewski's house, carried off a young girl, and cut up his people";

347 "On the steppes, the peasantry had 'no state, but robbery, and unfettered will'" [OM I 33], declares the narrator, but the peasants themselves confess their dreams of a utopia of freedom to Grandfather Zagłoba disguised as an itinerant: "neither masters, not princes, only Cossacks, free people – and there'll be no rent, no liquor tax, no tax on mill and cartage, and there'll be no Jews, because that's the way it is in the writings about Christ, which you talked about yourself" [OM I 291].

348 "What do I care for your citizenship! One dog guards ten huts and still he doesn't have much to do" [P I 72].

> Ranicki: the murder of two noblemen (one in a duel, the second with a shot from an arquebus);
> Rekuć: drank away his own property;
> Uhlik: condemned to death for breaking up a tribunal;
> Zend: pretends to be nobleman;
> Kmicic: he dragged Pan Tumgrat by horse through the snow, he cut up a royal messenger, he wounded Wyziński (father and son), he broke up a local assembly, he ordered a hundred lashes for the mayor and councilors, and he ordered officers "to be whipped naked through the snow."

In the prolog to a plot concerning guilt, humility, and redemption, they are a personification of self-indulgence as an orgiastic state, the result of which is to place a person permanently outside the law. Kmicic is their synthesis; he an exemplification of the accuracy of the organic allegory according to which the ruler's body represents the nation that is subject to him. Kmicic does not only take part in all his people's vicious excesses, but he goes far beyond them. A distaste for functioning within structures of authority, discipline, and military rules is decisive. As Kmicic himself acknowledges: "I would prefer to march holding my own banner than bow to the hetmans" [P I 26].[349] Even the partisan war against Chowański does not come from a sense of public duty: "he did it on his own initiative, aroused more by knightly imagination than by patriotism" [P I 67]. The narrator unmasks him clearly. This is a very important excerpt, because it shows that Sienkiewicz does not conceal the stratification of gentry society, and even more clearly shows the dislike of the middle gentry for the great lords, and also the contempt of both for the minor gentry. Civil war is not only high drama, but also a chance for revenge: a compensation for the suppressed political freedom of the middle and minor gentry. Zagłoba reveals this when he relishes the expected robberies on Janusz Radziwiłł's properties.

> Let's avoid a battle with him, but rather the properties that lie along the road, let's rinse those out for him. Let's go to the Witebsk voivode to get some protection, to get some lord behind us, and on the way let's take what we can from storerooms, stables, sheds, barns, and cellars. How my spirit laughs, and it's for sure that no one will go further than me in this. Whatever money we can find, let's take it too. [P I 338]

Uncovering these motifs allows one better to grasp the ambiguous structure of the *apologia* for the gentry in the historical cycle. Kmicic's lawlessness is a clear

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349 "The conviction, reaching back to the mid-sixteenth century, that the basis of freedom is the possibility of determining one's own life, was deep and general. In 1573, an anonymous clerk wrote: 'Great is that common freedom that the master does not command me to do what he wants and how the fancy takes him, nor any other light person, but my brother [. . .], and it is sweeter for me as a free person to bear what I and my brother consent to and what has been chosen by me'" (A. Grześkowiak-Krwawicz, *Regina libertas. Wolność w polskiej myśli politycznej XVIII wieku*, Gdańsk 2006, p. 25).

representation of the gentry's social faults, which, indeed, led to the collapse of the state. Understood thus, self-indulgence is a definition of the dangerous political freedom that emerges in relation to weak royal power and to its peculiar jurisdiction, which largely fosters rather than degrades the gentry, guaranteeing them, above all, the right to a variety of freedoms.[350] Kmicic's dislike for functioning within rigid military structures reflects the fear of the gentry, general in the novel, of tyranny either of an individual or an administration. The narrator points to the fact that these are factors in a collapse that has been going on for a long time. "For already since the times of the Cossack War, all the bonds were rending in the powerful edifice of this Commonwealth" [P I 89]. But a simple recognition of the processes of the state's erosion does not lead the narrator to give a verdict condemning gentry freedom.[351]

Self-indulgence is something more than a pathological result of political freedom. It is a manifestation of vigor and vitality, which the narrator admires, and which, like accumulated energy, are useful especially in war. Kmicic's band, which provokes general disapproval, turns out in such fine order that the narrator suddenly forgets about moralizing, as he watches the unit setting out for Wołmontowicze.

> [They rode] proudly, in fine soldierly posture, in long ornamented velvet coats, in tall hats of lynx fur, and on fine horses. One could see that they were professional soldiers: lively and haughty features, right hands pressed to their sides, heads raised high. Riding in column, they made way for none. [P I 62]

Seeking a path between condemnation of indulgence and a perception of the military advantages stemming from impulse, the text offers a vision of the individual, in whom self-indulgence may be separated from the rest of his personality, becoming autonomous in the shape of "deeds" that do not constitute an integral part of that person. It is always possible to separate it in an act of redemption, but the impulse that causes it must not disappear, because it is the source not just of lawlessness, but also of military efficiency. For this to occur, it is enough to change "vices" into "deeds," which takes place when a character finally recognizes the enemy who permits him to integrate his etiolated identity.

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350 In the general opinion of the gentry – writes A. Grześkowiak-Krwawicz – "it was a natural right of man, with which he came into the world, and positive rights were supposed to secure him freedom, on one hand, and, on the other, to limit him so that his freedom did not collide with that of others" (A. Grześkowiak-Krwawicz, *Regina libertas*, op. cit., p. 76).

351 The words of the Primate in *Potop* on the necessity of distinguishing self-will from freedom remain without an echo. "I do not oppose ancient freedoms – said the Primate – but that willfulness, for there is a difference between freedom and willfulness in this land, and just as too much joy can end in pain, so a promiscuous freedom has ended in slavery" [P II 370].

> For, of course, as deeds he understood war and striking at Swedes from morning to evening without rest or pity. Indeed, how beautiful, how splendid was the road that opened thus. [P II 189]

When he kills off Kmicic's companions, Sienkiewicz is helping his protagonist, fearing whether he would find enough strength to reject them. They have to die, as Shakespeare's Falstaff must, abandoned by Hal, who like Kmicic renounces his former life, along with his name.[352] Oleńka begins the process of separation, reproaching them that "it's you who like ill spirits tempt him to sin, you who persuade him to it!" [P I 59]. The narrator confirms her words, like a witness in court, stating that "they had persuaded the young leader to more and more slacken the reins of his exuberant nature" [P I 68]. Kmicic personifies an excess of vitality, which excess is a decisive feature of his character. His "exuberant nature" denotes an amoral element of his character, a vital impulse that seeks its object (love or violence), in order to bring itself relief.[353]

This shows that the conception of the character is based on a powerful biological determinism, and not exclusively on a conventional esthetic type. Kmicic, even once he has met Oleńka, does not give up his old ways; he indulges himself with young girls, and though he later reproaches himself for it ("The worst thing was those girls! . . ." [P I 41]), his pangs of conscience do not last long, because when Kokoszko recommends to him the beauty of the local ladies, he proposes: " – We will go, Kokoszko, when it's evening, as if we had lost our way – shall we?" [P I 41]. Shaken, Billewiczówna realizes that after visiting her, he returns "to the servant girls!" [P I 55]. The improved Kmicic stops "engaging in public debauchery" [P I 53], but repressed self-indulgence is transferred to other objects and is transformed into even greater violence, if it only finds an opportunity. For example, during the expedition with the Tartars in Prussia, "Pan Kmicic, having in his heart no small dose of wildness, indulged it fully."

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352 The sentence was already passed on them, although the narrator does not explain in what court. When a flock of crows gathers above Kmicic's companions, most of them do not take their croaking seriously. The narrator comments: "Fools! they could not see the ill omen" [P I 62].

353 Sienkiewicz depicts a similar gentry type in one of his feuilleton pieces. "The true gilded youth went crazy, caroused, drank, played cards, squandered money, ogled women, in short he perpetrated a mass of idiocies and absurdities, but he had one good side: he possessed a living sense of honor, which for him was what a torch is for one lost in darkness, what a fragment of mast is for one shipwrecked on the sea's wild waves. [. . .] Thus, as a good citizen of the country, he was not worth much, he wasted his inheritance, but he erred with his head, not with his heart. The source of his faults, but at the same time of some of his qualities, was as the poet has it: 'Exuberantly he felt for three persons, so he lived too in triplicate.' So, too, he seethes with an excess of life" [Cho I 148].

In the phrase "exuberant nature," there is hidden something more than some kind of leniency toward the frank thoughtlessness of a soldier; there lurks here some pessimism, which grows out of an awareness that, since nature in a human being cannot be rationally controlled, the effective sources of morality can only be fear or love. The impotence of reason applies to Oleńka, when she realizes that "what she had said to him about people's opinions, about the need for sobriety, about ill fame, bounced off him like a blunt arrow point off armor" [P I 74]. She also cannot grasp "that one man could do so much ill in such a small space of time, and that a man not completely evil, not completely ruined" [P I 88]. This is an excellent observation on the subject of the evil done by Kmicic. The lack of a state, or the existence of a state that is insufficiently oppressive, permits the squandering of the individual's energy, which must somehow find an outlet. This means that the circulation of violence cannot be suppressed, but only changes its object.

The novels' "economy of self-indulgence" shows that Sienkiewicz often thinks of the human being as a biological machine, the operation of which is a necessity beyond morality, regulated by its own law of the conservation of energy. Oleńka discovers this law, when she expresses amazement about "how quickly this man whom she loved so much passed from wantonness to vice, from vice to greater and greater crimes, from hacking at people's faces to debauchery, from burning Upita and Wołmontowicze to kidnapping herself from Wodoktowe, and then on to service with Radziwiłł, to treachery crowned with the promise of laying hands on the King, on the father of the whole Commonwealth" [P III 374]. The world of the *Trylogia* seethes with excess of violence, which – if it loses a functional (patriotic or moral) vector – becomes pure destruction. Babinicz, piqued by Piotr Czarniecki's mistrust, releases his suppressed energy like lightning: "anger tore at him, his inborn impetuosity awoke in him, slighted ambition played on him, and the old, half-wild Kmicic awoke" [P II 180]. "The mad, insurmountable desire took him to tear down that bell and to ram it into Pan Czarniecki's skull" [P II 181].

The positive functionalization of impulses to violence is promoted by the war with an external enemy and a relationship with a woman. The structure of war and the family socialize the dangerous instincts of self-indulgence, directing them at enemies' bodies, but – which is equally important in the novel – they wrap this energy in the order of discipline and the technology of work, because it is not enough to be on the right side. After he fails to carry off Bogusław, Kmicic has the idea of raising a new troop to fight on his own against the Swedes. "And he was so seized by a burning desire for this bloody work that he wanted to rush from the room, to order the Kiemlicze to saddle up, along with their servants and his, and to set off" [P II 36]. The sudden access of this impulse is on this occasion rebuked by the character's own thoughts. He repeats the lesson of his positivist author, tracing in this thought the elements of indulgence.

> Do you not desire this because you love the scent of slaughter as a dog does that of a roast? This is a game, not service; a sleigh ride not war! Brigandage, not defense of the fatherland? [P II 36]

Let us not trust the character's self-flagellation, nor the suggestion that here the narrator as superego has spoken. The opposition of the game of killing to the work of killing is unjustified, and the narrator does not authorize this. On the contrary, he underlines the propinquity of both forms of realizing self-indulgence: the ritualization, common to war and peace, of violence in the collective life of the nobility/gentry.[354]

> Often the gentry, gathered at a neighbor's for a christening, name day, wedding, or sleigh-ride party, without having war-like intentions, ended the festivities and, inebriated, struck like a thunderbolt and wiped out the nearby Swedish command post. After which there would be a sleigh ride with songs and shouts, and picking up those who wanted to "volunteer," it would transform itself into a crowd out for blood, and from a crowd into a "unit" that began the continuing war. Subject peasants and servants in crowds joined in the fun; [. . .] Merriness and imagination, particular to the nation, mingled to form blood-soaked games. [P II 345-346]

Violence and play are interchangeable, thanks to which the victims' suffering loses importance. Military obligations are inseparably linked to the freedom of any act of violence; both release excess of energy. As Kmicic confesses to the King: "partly I did it out of wantonness, for the blood rose in me" [P II 423]. And the King, hearing this confession, like a spectator in a theater laughs, is moved, is terrified, and in the end forgives, and tries to find a positive structure for the realization of Kmicic's impulses. There is no doubt in the text that it is not a matter of support in any court cases, because in these Kmicic will look after himself: "I won't give in as long as I have breath in my nostrils and a saber in my fist" [P II 430]. It is a matter of returning the lost objects of desire: Oleńka and the Swedes.

Command of the Tartar unit allows Kmicic not only to thrash the Swedes, but also to release his exuberant nature on the bodies of the barbarians that have

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354 The similarity is perfectly expressed by Kmicic's ironic answer to Pan Tomasz, who does not want to go to Kiejdany. "Among neighbors compulsion frequently takes its *initium* in the emotions. And when you, sir, order a beloved guest to remove the wheels from the treasurer's carriage and to shut the cart up in the granary, is that not compulsion? And when you order him to drink, though wine is running out his nose, is that not compulsion? And here, sir, know that although it has come to me that I should bind you and take you bound among the dragoons to Kiejdany, it will still be for your own good" [P I 371]. Jolanta Sztachelska is correct when she writes of *Wiry* about "self-indulgence as the basis of gentry (read Polish) mentality. Self-indulgence, in other words, permitting oneself to be passive, to give in to instincts, to allow those instincts to dominate the intellect, prudence, and rationally directed activity" (J. Sztachelska, "Dwie legendy Sienkiewicza," in: *Henryk Sienkiewicz w kulturze polskiej*, op. cit., p. 39).

been given to him as his own property. This happens in the scene that initiates this storyline, when Akbah-Ułan does not want to recognize him as leader. Then "Pan Andrzej, though he had promised himself to be politic, had had enough, for he was hasty by nature. So in a moment he was overcome by something as if a serpent had bitten him, and with his open hand he seized the Tartar by his sparse beard and he pulled his head upwards as if he wanted to show him something on the ceiling" [P II 504-505].

The text offers the reader, wearied by politics and law, a fantasy of efficient and functional violence, which occurs without negotiation, but in the right cause, and with force implements an order that is necessary to everyone. The Tartars receive another similar lesson when they want to "indulge themselves" in Chmielewsko. Kmicic "ordered the guilty to hang each other" [P II 510]. The narrator convinces and calms the reader that with this kind of people one can do nothing else, and the proof that this works splendidly is the Tartars' devotion to their leader. Seeing in him an image of their desires for slaughter and plunder, they go "willingly, with music and song" [P II 505]. The narrative reveals something more than the relation of a lord to a hireling, whose status does not differ from that of "a dog or a falcon" that has been given to him as a present [P II 504]. This means that their wild instincts are also the property of their lord (the state, their leader etc.). The Tartar and the Polish gentleman reflect each other. Both pass through a process of socializing their impulses to kill. Indeed, the processes go on parallel to each other, for the temptation to abandon military discipline does not immediately leave Kmicic. Once he joins Sapieha's troops, "already on the third day, he had to struggle with his old addiction to following his own will, not to go forward without an order" [P II 545]. Kmicic's Tartars are no different from his old company, and, if anything, they go beyond them in wildness and their desire for slaughter.[355] But now, together with their commander, they find themselves in the service of the Commonwealth, and concretely are part of the structure of a war, which adapts their desire to kill and loot. Henceforward, "inborn instincts" are not their own property, but become the property of the state, which aims at a monopoly on the right to kill.[356]

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355 A fascination with violence unites enemies in the scene of Kmicic's duel with Wołodyjowski. Observing the fight, "Kmicic's Cossacks thrust their heads between the shoulders of the nobles, as if they had lived their whole lives on the best of friendly terms with them" [P I 119].

356 In *Ogniem i mieczem* the disciplined workers of war that are Wiśniowiecki's soldiers may also indulge in cruelty, but only on the Prince's command, for he is the one who has this indulgence at his disposal. Once it is liberated at his order, the result is that "seven hundred prisoners were hanged, and two hundred impaled. There was talk to of gouging out eyes with augers, and of burning captives alive" [OM 351].

The figure of Kmicic and the strands of the plot spun around him are not exceptional as far as demonstrating the physiological basis of gentry freedom. The suppression or transference of impulses to self-indulgence can be seen in other places in the text. The strategy of sublimating blocked passions in acts of violence is clear. Kmicic, now part of Czarniecki's troops, subordinates himself only with difficulty to the discipline of a regular army. Before he get rids of his rage on the bodies of the Swedes, he uses his own Tartars for this, whom "during the campaign he so severely oppressed, and, bursting into anger over almost anything, he struck them with his truncheon so that the very bones shook" [P III 163].

Cast off by Anusia, Sakowicz operates according to the same law of transference. "If Anusia had known how the terrible results of Sakowicz's vexation would fall on the whole district, perhaps she would not have irritated him" [P III 298]. Blocked self-indulgence seeks an outlet in violence; so the governor "punished hard and quite without guilt, above all measure. Prisoners died of hunger in chains or scorched with hot irons. Sometimes it seemed that the wild governor wanted to cool his soul, aroused and burnt by the fire of love, in human blood, for he tore himself away and himself went on campaign" [P III 298].

When Kmicic is fighting a guerrilla war against the troops of Prince Bogusław, he does not act as a soldier, but as a deceived and jealous lover seeking to take revenge on his rival. "At times, you would say, an unbridled rage seized him, for with blind bravado he threw himself at superior forces" [P III 312]. But when he must leave off harassing the Prince and his troops, and he cannot "renounce vengeance on the person of the traitor for the wrongs done to the Commonwealth and himself, he took it in a terrible manner on the electoral possessions" [P III 324]. Violence is a compensation for unsatisfied desires also in the case of young Nowowiejski, who – rejected by Basia – seeks relief in killing. As Pan Michał writes in a letter, "several times he worked out his rage at the rejection he had received in Mokotów on the backs of his retainers, but he was able unable to forget; that means he took no relief from it all" [PW 141]. The author fills this character with an excess of vitality, even beyond his emotional crisis. As the narrator puts it:

> . . . he was a real peasant, in whom life, health, courage, and force seethed as water bubbles in a great *sagan*, unable to fit even in such a huge body. [. . .] He went into battle with a laugh that recalled a horse's neigh, and he struck with such violence that after every encounter the soldiers purposely inspected the bodies of those he had killed, in order to admire the extraordinary cuts. [PW 329]

The butchery in Prussia brings Kmicic temporary relief; at last he knows that he is doing good and is at peace with himself, since his passionate violence can be legally set free. Self-indulgence at last finds its mastering structure, thanks to the war that links personal interest with the patriotic.

> – All of them, except perhaps that one Rekuć, are burning in hell now – and there you are! If only they were alive now, eh!, so that they could splash around in blood without bringing sin down on their souls and be of use to the Commonwealth! . . .
> Pan Andrzej sighed thus at the thought of what a pernicious thing self-indulgence was, since at the dawn of youth it closed the path to fine deeds for ever and ever.
> But most of all he sighed for Oleńka. The further he pushed on over the Prussian border, the worse the wounds in his heart burned him, like those fires he laid and which at the same time fanned the flames of an old love. [P III 326]

The novel's economy of self-indulgence allows one to see in Kmicic's Prussian expedition the greatest profit that properly directed violence can bring. Above all it provides lost heroes with an intellectual order, and allows them to sublimate instincts and impulses that are difficult to satisfy in peace time, especially in the case of characters with anarchic inclinations. This is almost an idyll of war; hence surely Wołodyjowski's jealousy, when he acknowledges to Kmicic that he would set off for Prussia with him "with such willingness as for paradise!" [P III 369]. For Kmicic is also not the only character, who draws the profit of pleasure from the work of killing. Indeed, Pan Michał is the master and aficionado of guerrilla warfare. Of him, the narrator in *Ogniem i mieczem* says that "no one could come down so unexpectedly on the enemy, smash him with a mad attack, scatter him to the four winds, hunt him down, cut him out, and hang him high" [OM II 224-225]. "It's his favorite handicraft," Zagłoba confirms [OM II 58]. Michał's talent, however, goes beyond handicraft, and his satisfaction does not come only from victory, because the act itself provides him with pleasure. That is why "he did not pause in his work, and more and more showed an eagerness, as if drawing that from spilled blood" [OM II 225]. And since "Pan Michał in his soul loved such things" [OM II 123], in Warsaw Zagłoba for fun provokes duels in which Wołodyjowski "after a few passes, usually laid out his opponent. Such was the fun he and Zagłoba thought up together" [OM II 132].

The text does not conceal for a moment, and rather emphasizes many times, that under the routine of the craft of war there lie concealed passions that are independent of duty and discipline. So we leave the discourse of passionless craft, with which the narrator tells of the military actions of the Germans and the Swedes. The real economy of war does not operate with the measure of money, but formulates profit and loss in categories of satisfaction or suppression of impulses to violence. When Wołodyjowski listens to Podbipięta's tales of the fighting at Zamość, he sighs: "Ach, I regret I missed that party" [OM II 169]. The character of the little knight embodies – especially in *Ogniem i mieczem* – the discourse of war as game and rivalry. At Zbaraż he was commonly "merry as a goldfinch on a fine morning" [OM II 331]. He also cannot have enough of the game of war: "though all over he was as red as a crab with blood, he was not yet quite satisfied" [OM II 301]. Efficiency is not enough for him. When he prepares an attack on a

Swedish unit, he does not want to hit them unexpectedly, not out of a sense of knightly honor, but because "he had decided 'to taste the Swedes' in battle open and complete, and so he deliberately acted so as to be seen" [P I 343]. This is a feature that is common to protagonists in all parts of the *Trylogia*: killing in war or in a duel brings them pleasure. This does not change even when Michał attains a fine old age and social position. In the skirmish in which Basia makes her debut as a killer, "Pan Michał and Pan Motowidło, free from having to look after her, could at last completely indulge themselves in their soldierly desires" [PW 266].

Zagłoba, whose function in the novels is, *inter alia*, to demystify the hidden motivations that drive the heroic characters, reproaches even such a perfect knight as Podbipięta that he is seeking "in the war not the advantage of the fatherland, but three heads" [OM II 173], the cutting off of which will at last free the forty-five-year-old man from the embarrassing requirement of his vow of chastity. That is why he speaks tenderly of war and of killing, as of a planned tryst. " – When we storm their defenses, it is easier to cut them up than in the field – Pan Longinus answered sweetly" [OM II 304]. In this context, Longin's superhuman power acquires a comic basis, in the figure of the transference of repressed impulses into quartering his enemies' bodies. The symbolic consistency of this transference is striking; praised for his mighty cutting blows, "he stood with downcast eyes, blushing, sweet – shy as a maid before her wedding" [OM II 361]. Nowhere else in the *Trylogia* does the text with such disarming directness reveal the common source of violence and desire. In the siege of Zbaraż, there is also such a moment when this experience becomes general for all the defenders, and then "dreadfulness become a joy to them" [OM II 347].

The text does not explain where this non-functional surplus of delight comes from, which arises during the work of killing. I would not, however, wish to pass over an explanation in terms of the convention of showing war as an adventure. This convention, by virtue of genre rules, would liberate the author from the duty of deeper reflection on the psychology of characters in extreme situations. This does not mean that the author does not suggest the genealogy of similar experiences, but, in accordance with the spirit of his times, he explains them rather by humans' physiological affinity to animals. The "Darwinian shock," which is common to the whole generation of Positivists, was a result not just of a recognition that adaptive processes are common to all living organisms, but also of the discovery in animal habits of behaviors that cannot be reconciled either with the teleology of creation, nor with the pure functionality of killing for the purpose of maintaining the species.[357] Human

357 Shaken by the consequences of his observations, Darwin wrote to Asa Gray: "I cannot persuade myself that a beneficent & omnipotent God would have designedly created the Ichneumonidæ with the express intention of their feeding within the living bodies of

cruelty is, thus, "natural" also in its irrationality, as one of the features developed in the process of evolution. Sienkiewicz is not completely unambiguous here – characters are subject to killing impulses without regard to what side they are on in the military conflict. A carefully thought-out strategy or chaotic murder do not differ from each other in this respect, because the same ability to kill is common to both. In *Potop*, in which both sides represent a civilized war, this quickly reaches a stage in which "they began not to fight, but to exterminate one another without pity" [P II 347].

Despite differences in language, the physiological core of violence is one. Animal or craft metaphors only remove from the reader's eyes a concealed community of violence, more disturbing than the animality (set out by Darwin) of every conflict, even cultural ones. Both discourses of war are shown to be close to each other, and even as mutually conditioning each other. A wild cruelty willingly employs strategy and technology, and the rationality of war must embody itself in the individual and in the collective, that is, in concrete bodies and thoughts, which confirm that rationality and implement it in acts of killing. Nature, with its amoral instincts, is an inalienable component in the construction of characters in all Sienkiewicz's works. But nature's determinism is limited by the author's will. The laws of nature do not operate absolutely in the world of his novels, but nor does Sienkiewicz, apart from in his early journalism, ever declare himself an adherent of social Darwinism. While describing individuals and masses tugged about by amoral "impulses of self-indulgence," he is at the same time convinced that these forces should be used constructively or controlled through non-natural, "artificial" cultural processes: work, morality, religion, law. The revelation of life itself as amoral does not lead Sienkiewicz to some naturalist hysteria; he reconciles himself with it surprisingly easily because he sees there the energy of life's grit, the "fuel" of civilization, which he so admired in the English – who for him were proof that it was possible to reconcile a vital expansiveness with good manners.

The novels' images of self-indulgence, or the delight that flows from the relief of repressed impulses, do not frighten us with their sadism, because with exceptional skill the author adapts them into the plot strands, story materials, and historical philosophy of novels, in which they fulfill the function of impulsive energy that is essential for the survival of ideas and values in history. The pleasure of reading about the pleasure of killing is in this manner esthetically justified.

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caterpillars, or that a cat should play with mice" (Letter to Asa Gray, 22 May 1860) – www.darwinproject.ac.uk

6. “The maker of the mirror”

In autumn 1888 Sienkiewicz visited Spain. Nearly a year later in *Słowo* (9-15 July 1889) he published the literary effects of his stay, namely his piece of reportage “Walka byków. Wspomnienie z Hiszpanii” (Bullfighting: A Recollection from Spain). The report from the bullfights that the writer saw in Barcelona, Valencia and Madrid is a text that is fascinating from many points of view: theme, style, insight into human customs and psychology at the end of the twentieth century. But most of all, it is a study of the pleasure that comes from watching scenes of violence and suffering. “Walka byków” describes a bullfight that the writer saw in Madrid, on a Sunday, 7 October 1888. Its protagonists were three *espadas*: “Cara-Ancha, Lagartijo, and the most celebrated Fascuello” [“Walka byków,” D XLIV 213]. However, the letters to Janczewska, written during his stay in Spain [Li II/1, 574-575] show that the author made a compilation of the events from all the bullfights he saw in the three cities named above. Despite the long time that had passed since the publication in *Słowo*, most of the text was written that very same day or the next after the bullfight was over. The still available photographs taken by Salvador Sánchez “Frascuelo” show the precision of Sienkiewicz’s observations.[358]

> His legs in pink silk stockings, held carelessly crossed in the front seat, and such calves as the best of the Paris hippodrome gymnasts might envy. Madrid takes pride in these calves – and indeed they are something to be proud of. [...] His black hair, combed up, combines in the back of the head in a small twist, out of which a tiny pig tail sticks out. Because of this hairstyle and his shaven face he looks like a woman. He is like a provincial actor; generally speaking his face shows no sign of intelligence, some of which, of course would not be an obstacle, but probably would turn out to be of not much use in his profession. [“Walka byków” 218]

The true protagonists of Sienkiewicz’s essay are not the matadors, but the animals and the audience. When describing the bullfight he is precise and cold, but also tries to show the bullfight as something more than ritualized slaughter. He does not use the irony or the patronizing tone of a superior civilization, he focuses on an accurate account of the people and events. He also asks about the esthetic form of this theater of cruelty. He shows this with stylistic excellence in the excerpt that explains the area of light and shadow that divide the arena from the audience. The arena is symbolically divided into zones, *sombra* and *sol*, between which “the border cuts itself of with a hard black line, without any passages. In the illuminated half the sand seems to burn, and people’s faces and their clothes are on fire. Eyes squint from the excess of light; it is some kind of radiant abyss, filled with flame, in which everything sparkles and shines excessively, and every color is intensified ten times over. But the shadowed half looks as if it were covered

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358 See http://commons.wikimedi.org/wiki/Image:Frascuelo.jpg

by some transparent veil woven from the darkness of the night. Every man who crosses from the light into darkness, makes the impression of a candle being put out" ["Walka byków" 219].

Despite the aura of tragedy that is sometimes created, the text does not fall into pathos. The archaic spectacle in the eyes of Sienkiewicz is part of a popular bourgeois culture, and this just gives his observations strength and perspicacity; they are proof of the permeation by primary drives of cruelty of the customs of the modern bourgeoisie, in which passions "are tamed by upbringing, knowledge, and law" [MLA 229]. Thus, the most interesting parts of "Walka byków" are the descriptions of the audience's behavior, in which, to start with, the author exposes the driving curiosity that leads people to watch such spectacles. Even before the show starts, "the townsman or townswoman of Madrid must touch the sand with their foot, for on this sand in just a moment a drama bloodshed is about to begin" ["Walka byków" 219].[359] This fetishism is begot by the pleasure of anticipation, and because "everybody grasps that in a moment blood must be spilled" ["Walka byków" 225]. Next he reports on three stages of the bullfight, focusing mostly on the first *terce*, which is to the bull's advantage, with it unloading of its fury on the picadors' horses. Depicting scenes in which the bull tears the horses' stomachs, he reaches for orgiastic formulas, earlier used in *Ogniem i mieczem.* Without hesitation he dazzles the reader with images of the bull gutting the horses with brutal strength. He forces us to look into a horse's torn flesh, and to study the colors of its inside, taking care that we do not miss the horse's agony and chaotic movements.

> Here, from its torn abdomen a bag of guts falls out, with a pink spleen, a pale liver, and a greenish stomach. The poor animal tries to move a few steps, but its shaking legs get tangled in its own intestines. So it falls, kicks the ground with its feet, twitches; meanwhile the servants come, take off the saddle and bridle, and end the horse's suffering with a knives blow between the horses head and neck.
>
> A still corpse in the arena, lying on its side, seems weirdly flat. Its insides are taken away in a tub-like basket, and the audience fervently applauds, overwhelmed with enthusiasm: "*Bravo el toro! Bravo picador!*" – eyes are sparkling, faces blushing. ["Walka byków" 226][360]

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359 Many of these observations can be found in *Quo vadis.* For example, there, too, some of the audience show a fetishist urge to touch the sand, on which the scenes of cruelty have taken place. This is why "after leaving their seats, they came down to the arena and with their fingers touched the sand all sticky with blood, and debated as experts and aficionados about what just happened and what is to come" [Q 588]. This perversity of Sienkiewicz's style was noticed by Prus, when he wrote "in the ugliest subject he will find a quality of prettiness" (B. Prus, "*Ogniem i mieczem – powieść z lat dawnych przez Henryka Sienkiwicza*," in*: Trylogia Henryka Sienkiewicza,* op. cit., p. 196).

360 As a socially engaged feuilleton writer, Sienkiewicz praised, in *Gazeta Polska* (1879, Nr 277), the idea of humanizing the killing of animals for slaughter: "We read in 'Opiekun

Sienkiewicz is not only someone who watches and then recounts to those who have notseen what he has. He is also an observer of what others see, and it is this insight that emboldens and drives his naturalistic narration. The audience’s enthusiasm (the applause, cheers, sparkling eyes, blushes) anticipates the reader’s curiosity, looking for ambiguous passion in the cruel text. That is a passion in witnessing slaughter, and even physical contact with it, when for example the bull, after killing the horse, runs “scattering clotted drops of blood on the first row audience” [“Walka byków” 228].

The climax of Sienkiwicz’s story is not the third *terce* (the duel between the *torero* and the bull), but a variant of the second *terce*. Usually in this part short colorful harpoons (from two to six) are thrust into the bull’s neck, but the narration focuses on the rare situation when the bull does not want to fight. Then the audience yells out “*Fuego!*” and with this they demand further agitation of the animal. If the audience’s demands are met, fiery lances exploding with fireworks are inserted into the bull’s neck, and Sienkiewicz scrupulously tells us what the wounded and scalded animal might feel.

> On one hand, the blades hurt, on the other hand, clouds of smoke surround the animal’s head; the fireworks’ thunder stuns it; great sparks fall into its wounds; small congreve rockets will explode under its skin; the smell of sizzling meat and burned hide fills the arena [“Walka byków” 230].

There is a change of perspective in this paroxysm of cruelty, and suddenly a terrifying bond between the victim’s suffering and the viewers’ delight appears before our eyes.

> Indeed, cruelty can not go any further, but also the audience’s joy comes to an end. Women’s eyes become clouded over with intoxication, every breast pants with delight, heads falling back, white teeth shining from their open moist lips. You would say: the animal’s suffering is reflected in these women’s nerves intensified by the expression of delight. Only in Spain could one see anything like it. There is something hysterical in this memory, something that reminds me of some Phoenician mysteries from the altar of Melitta. [“Walka byków” 230]

The recognition that the bullfight is the structural equivalent of erotisism is shocking in this description.[361] The perverse image of women on the verge of sexual fulfillment shocks when placed against the anything but sensual portraits

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Domowych i Pożytecznych Zwierząt’ that the Animal Care Society are trying out a method of killing cattle with a masking device. This mask is put on the animal’s head, and pointing at its forehead, there is a sharpened pipe, held in an iron case. With the blow of a wooden hammer the pipe pierces through the animal’s bone and brain, bringing death to it in an instant. This device was invented by a Frenchman named Bruneau” [Wb I 160-161].

361 M. Delgado Ruiz, “Tauromachia Leirisa wcielona w nas,” trans. A. Franas, *Polska Sztu ka Ludowa. Konteksty* 2007, Nr 3–4, p. 195.

of heroines in Sienkiewicz's other work. And even more, because he here attributes to the excessively angelic beings in his writing a capability for sadistic pleasures. "Good old" Sienkiwicz delivered a thesis about the erotic character of bullfights much earlier than the famous *Lustro tauromachii* by Michel Leiris, who writes in his fantasy-essay about bullfights that they give the audience the chance, uncommon in our times, of a release for the underground vibrations of our bodies and minds. Leiris argues that the art of bullfighting, analyzed in terms of its relation with erotic activity, seems to be one of those revelations that enlighten us about our own selves, because they work on the basis of some sort of empathy or similarity, and their emotional force resides in the fact that they are mirrors, where an objectified and foreseen picture of our emotions is hidden.[362]

Leiris does not emphasize the uniqueness of the emotions of the female part of the audience. Could it be that Sienkiewicz's eye enhanced this reaction, creating a projection of female eroticism, specific to the later decades of the nineteenth century?[363] Despite the author's qualifications that the ecstatic reaction is specific for Spanish women, much suggests that he was convinced of the universal effect such scenes would have on female sensitivity. He did not hesitate in the letter to Jadwiga Janczewska (knowing just of her disgust for the physiology of maternity!) to describe only this part of the spectacle,[364] explaining that the rest she can read in *Słowo*.

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362 Ibid., p. 23. At the sight of repeated coming together of man and bull, Leiris writes that we are overwhelmed by an intoxication, very similar to an erotic bewilderment. As in the sexual act, before the final climax, he argues, we hold our breath in fear that it will end, filled with joy that it is still going on (Ibid., p.37).

363 In his celebrated pamphlet on femininity, Otto Weinberger hysterically exaggerates these features of female eroticism, but he renders male fears vivid in this way. He argues that in their unconscious lives women certainly stand closer to nature. Flowers, he declares, are their sisters, and that women are less distant than men from animals is unerringly illustrated by the act that they manifest a much greater inclination toward sodomy than men do. He draws our attention here to the myths of Pasiphae and Leda. (O. Weininger, *Płeć i charakter*, trans. O. Ortwin, Warszawa 1994, p. 202.)

364 "I will only say that everything would have been lovely if not for that slaughter of those decent horses, defenseless against the bull. They cover the arena in their blood, get their legs entangled in their own insides, and die twitching their legs and heads. Wih my own eyes I saw how the insides (and you would not believe how many of them ther are in a horse) were carried out in baskets. Sometimes the horse stands for a few minutes, and everything that was inside him is lying on the ground. [. . .] O saw myself one bull kill four – the feeblest of them disemboweled two. The horses are not worth anything – but one of them was very pretty, lively, and nimble. I had some hopes for him, temporaryily of course, and that's why perhaps the bull hit him under the shoulder so that the whole horn, not much smaller than the horns of Ukrainian oxen, went right into him. In any case, it was

In connecting animal suffering with the audience’s delight, especially that of the women present, Sienkiewicz is amazingly bold, and at the same time disappoints us with the subject he raises here, to which he never returns. But, in fact he touches on an issue that his *epos* embodies, that is, the ecstatic reaction that it provoked. What he shrewdly grasps as the role of the spectators of the *corrida* – the third partner in a genuine orgy[365] – is the foundation of any reflections on the function of his own representations of violence. Emboldened by this citation, let us began to look carefully at the small and discreet signs of similar experiences described in his novels. Thanks to the ecstatic Spanish ladies in “Walka byków,” we can see a slight, perverse fissure even in the exemplary figure of Oleńka. This occurs in the scene depicting a skirmish between Sakowicz’s unit and troops of the sword bearer. For the first time, Billewiczówna is a witness to war, and she clearly likes it.

> Her flared nostrils breathed in the smell of powder [my underlining – R.K]. But the twirling smoke became greater and obscured the view, so that the officers went forward in order to follow the course of battle more closely. She went with them, not even thinking about what she was doing. [P III 385]

The spectacle of the violence that is war stimulates the senses of the woman watching it. What is the text getting at here, even despite itself? The question becomes even more insistent when we recall that the author has already used that same expression, “flared nostrils,” when he describes Chmielnicki’s reaction to the sight of the dead German mercenaries, killed because they will not go over to the Cossack side.

> His flared nostrils breathed in the smell of powder [my underlining – R.K.], and his ears gloated with pleasure at the clamor of the drowning and massacred Germans. [OM I 186]

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all lovely – and the moment the moment when the *espada* thrusts his sword up to the hilt in the bull’s neck even brings relief [Valencia, 26 September 1888, Li II/1 579].

Further clearly to supplement Sienkiewicz’s narration, let us recall that the female protagonist of Georges Bataille’s *L’histoire de l’oeil* (1928). Simone loves the *corrida*. “There were actually three things about bullfights that fascinated her: the first, when the bull comes hurtling out of the bullpen like a big rat; the second, when its horns plunge all the way into the flank of a mare; the third, when that ludicrous, raw-boned mare gallops across the arena, lashing out unseasonably and dragging a huge, vile bundle of bowels between her thighs in the most dreadful wan colors, a pearly white, pink, and gray. Simone’s heart throbbed fastest when the exploding bladder dropped its mass of mare’s urine on the sand in one quick plop” (Part I, Chapter 9, trans. Joachim Neugroshal).

365 M.Leiris, *Lustro tauromachii*, trans. M. Ochab, Gdańsk 1999, p. 36. Sienkiewicz seems to echo Leiris when he asserts that “that audience never is bored of the sight of blood and death” [“Walka byków” 234].

It is doubtful whether the repetition was deliberate on the author's part, but the unconscious use of the same expression with regard to two radically differing characters, who find themselves in similar situations, is equally controversial. Delight in watching violence makes equal, as far as feelings are concerned, extremely different figures, and it means that this turns human beings into some kind of dreadful, amoral community. "Walka byków" is the only text in which Sienkiewicz attempts to think through this similarity in a consistent fashion. Thus, he asks whether this is a relict of barbarism, "or if it is that impulse that is aroused in many people by the sight of an abyss. To go as close as one can, to the heroes' very edge, to touch the veil beyond which lie the mystery and the chasm – that is the strange passion that becomes irresistible to certain souls" ["Walka byków" 235]. Seeking for an answer, Sienkiewicz rejects the analogy with hunting, for, after all, "hunting is an entertainment, not a profession; in hunting one has no spectators, only actors; there are no crowds of women, half faint with delight at the sight of torment and death" ["Walka byków" 234]. A final explanation as to why that is never comes, although perhaps it is more important that the question is raised by the writer at all.

The technique and socio-technique of representing violence, applied in the *Trylogia* and in "Walka byków," return in scenes depicting gladiatorial combats and Christian martyrdom in *Quo vadis*. But two motifs are new here in relation to the richness of the scenes of violence in the *Trylogia*: the images of the crowd mad with excitement, and the scene with the bull. The people gathered in the audience, under the influence of the macabre spectacle, lose their individual separateness. Sienkiewicz turns them over in their entirety to the hypnotic force of cruel images, which transform the spectators into a homogeneous organism.

> The populace took part in it with soul, heart, and eyes; it howled, roared, whistled, clapped, laughed, urged on the fighters, went mad. [Q 557]
>
> The populace could not contain its joy; it was drunk on death, breathed it in, satiated its eyes looking at it, and with delight drew its fumes into its lungs. (Q 557]
>
> It happened that the exalted crowds threw themselves at the end into the arena itself and began to tear the victims apart along with the lions. [Q 565]
>
> . . . for the populace, the entire pleasure lay in watching a slow dying. [Q 592]

The orgiastic reactions of women to the *corrida* can be seen in the audience of the Roman circus during the apogee of the spectacle, which is the moment when the wild beasts tear living people apart. Then "among the roars, the howling, and whining, there could be heard from the spectators' benches the terrifying, spasmodic laughter of women, whose strength had finally given way" [Q 566]. Differently, however, from his descriptions of the *corrida*, Sienkiewicz here reaches for a poetics of excess, emphasizing in these scenes of violence its chaos,

the confusion, the twisting shapes. Here the narration does not attempt to bring the reader closer to the perspective of the spectator to the circus, but bears witness to the lack of transparency in events. This allows us to see the difference in the representation of violence in both texts. The praise of the *corrida* is a result of respect for a ritual that moderates the cruelty of the spectacle and sets limits to the spectators’ passions. Sienkiewicz shows that passion that does not struggle with some prohibition destroys itself. The unlimited cruelty of Nero’s spectacle means that “it lost the appearance of reality, and turned into something like an orgy of blood, into something like a terrible dream, into something like the monstrous hallucination of a crazed mind” [Q 566]. We can see the exhausted excess of this macabre delight when the unity of the spectacle and the crowd disintegrates. The presentation becomes beyond representation, and the narrator acknowledges his own inadequacy in a series of failed comparisons (“something like,” “something like,” “something like”).

The perverse linking of spectator and object, noted in “Walka byków,” connects the observer’s delight with the maintenance of the order of cruelty. The chain of delight disintegrates when the object loses its integrity (defined function, material shape, will of action). A premature or chaotic disintegration of the object destroys the spectator’s pleasure, just like an excess of suffering, which through its repetition and ungraspable nature “ceases to stimulate the senses” [Q 592]. The community of pleasure and suffering, destroyed for a moment, returns, however, triumphantly in the duel, in the finale, between Ursus and the bull.

Let us block the semantic energy of this scene (“into the arena entered [. . .] a monstrous Germanic bull, bearing on its head a naked female body” [Q 643]), which draws it toward a political, anti-Prussian allegory.[366] For if the duel is a performance of the “rape of Europa,” that means that Milan Kundera’s famous formulation has an earlier Polish variant. However, differently from Kindera and from a substantial number of Sienkiewicz’s contemporaries, Sienkiewicz did not

366 Krzyżanowski cautiously suggests that Ursus, our Polish bear (his name *miś* (the bear) in Polish reflects Mieszko, a name popular among Poland’s early medieval Piast kings), and the developed symbolism of this name, allow an allegorical interpretation, whereby an ur-Polish Piast peasant twists the neck of a Prusssian, just as earlier Orso (once more the bear) saves little Jenny from the circus director, who is a Prussian (J. Krzyżanowski, “Najsławniejsza powieść polska,” in: *Pokłosie Sienkiewiczowskie*, op. cit., pp. 339–340). See also: J. Krzyżanowski, *Twórczość Henryka Sienkiewicza*, Warszawa 1973, p. 163. This motif is frequently commented on, for example in: T. Zieliński, “Idea Polski w dziełach Sienkiewicza,” in: *Z ojczystej niwy. Studia i szkice*, Zamość 1923; T. Świętosławska “*Quo vadis Henryka Sienkiewicza. Od legendy do arcydzieła*, Łódź 1997; J. Kolendo, “Czy Ligia była Polką? Wątek patriotyczny w *Quo vadis*,” in: *Wokół Quo vadis. Sztuka i kultura Rzymu czasów Nerona*, ed. W. Dobrowolski, Warszawa 2001; J. Axer, “Polska w *Quo vadis*,” in: *Z Rzymu do Rzymu*, ed. J. Axer, M. Bokszczanin, Warszawa 2002.

see in Russia the greatest threat to Poland, but rather in the Prussians. In the light of the allegory in *Quo vadis*, Poland carried off by the partitions is more threatened by the West than by the East. A stranger interpretation would see in the struggle of Ursus (the bear) with the "Germanic bull" the conflict between Russia and Germany. The victory of the barbarian from the East disposes of a greater danger, but Ligia/Poland can only attain freedom through the whim of history, which, like the Roman populace, has the face of a capricious child.[367]

The theme of the equivalence of violence and eroticism, which we abandoned for a moment, is more interesting. The scene of violence, disrupted above all by an excess of cruelty, becomes transparent when a classical order, symbolized by Ursus's naked body, returns in place of an unbounded orgy.

> . . . he stood in the middle of the amphitheater, naked, more like a stone colossus than a man, with the concentrated and, at the same time, sad face of a barbarian. [Q 642]

Let us return to the ideal situation of the *corrida*, when – as Leiris writes – both protagonists, the man and the bull, stand opposite each other completely naked.[368] But Sienkiewicz is telling another story of struggling bodies than that of the *corrida*. Nakedness is tripled, since the naked Ligia lies between the horns of the bull. The bull symbolizes a brutal, bestial biologism, to which the woman's body is subject,[369] and Ursus's task is to separate these bodies (breaking the symbolic link). But Ursus in his struggle with the bull belongs to the same symbolic order. He is a naked barbarian, and a discreet animalization ("having lowered his back") underlines this similarity.

> Lig, having perceived his princess on the horns of the wild beast, tore himself away as if burned by living fire, and having lowered his back, he began to run at an angle toward the enraged beast. [Q 643]

Ursus's and the bull's powerful bodies are synonymous in this context; they mirror each other.[370] The dilemma hidden in this scene lies in the problematic nature of the difference between animal violence and civilized violence. Ligia's and Ursus'

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367 "The populace now not only took up the cause of the athlete, but also defended the maiden, the soldier, and their love" [Q 646]. "The populace was omnipotent master in the circus" [Q 647].

368 M. Leiris, *Lustro tauromachii*, op. cit., p. 47.

369 As Leiris shows, the eroticism of the *corrda* is trans-sexual. The toreador's costume makes him, in part, like a woman, and the changing positions in the conflict symbolize changes in sexual roles. The horns directed at the cape and the toreador's body match in this symbolic exchange the sword thrust into the bull's body. Ligia on the bull's horns and a naked Lig are a variant of this symbolism.

370 Even Ursus's movement is some kind of concentrated fury. Ortega y Gasset wrote in this way of the movements of a bull (J. Ortega y Gasset, "Szkic epilogu dla Domingo Ortegi," trans. J. Myszkowska, *Polska sztuka ludowa. Konteksty* 2007, Nr. 3-4, p. 178).

bodies are "Christian," but their nakedness evokes a bestiality, which, in addition, is necessary to both of them in order to avoid death. Thanks to Ursus's animal strength "the bull's head began to turn in the iron hands of the barbarian" [Q 645]. Sienkiewicz, wishing to place the characters' nakedness beyond the animal, deprives them of desire. Ursus does not fight the bull for Ligia for himself, and the use of a common name for both (Lig/Ligia) removes the threatening sexual difference of their bodies in the cause of ethnic community, which overcomes the fortuitousness of desire.[371] The fusion of their names, the intensified mutual nakedness of their bodies, encloses both in a mutual symbolic circle of femininity, which struggles with male desire (the bull/Winicjusz). Victory over the bull means the defeat of pagan desire, of amoral passion, but it cannot be concealed that this elevated idea also requires primitive strength in order to triumph. Contrary to appearances, Sienkiewicz leaves us no illusion that Christian thought can avoid the question of the attractiveness of the body. This is perfectly illustrated in the next part of the scene we are considering, when Winicjusz leaps into the arena and covers Ligia's body with his toga. At the same time, however, he uncovers his own body with its scars from the wars. In this transference of bodies, however, we are concerned the whole time with the spectator, who does not cease to desire the spectacle of violence, and also watches it to the end, inscribed now, as it is, on the body of a soldier who has fought for Rome in its wars.

So, ultimately, the characters' fates do not depend on action, which is only a delay of death. Sienkiewicz suppresses this painful message of many of his works. Violence, repelled or implemented, always in his works has a meaning that goes beyond the function of survival in a conflict. The author's grace disengages the characters from the determinism of human fate, maintaining them in the unchanging present of the happy ending.

That is why "Walka byków" is such an unusual text. We find there a reflection on violence that we would search for in vain in any of the novels. I am thinking here of the tragic quality of anticipated death, which Sienkiewicz here reads into not man, but animal, one that is conscious, according to the author, of its imminent end.

> That animal psychology is so clear that everyone guesses at it. It may even be that, by virtue of its tragic quality, it constitutes the charm of the spectacle. This mighty organism, quite simply seething with an excess of life, zeal, strength – it does not wish to die, not for anything in the world! And here death comes, inevitable, irresistible

371 Stanisław Mackiewicz understands this paradox, but he limits himself to a splendid question. "Are you never struck by the relationship of Ligia to Ursus, and Ursus to Ligia? Such relations can only really exist between father and daughter. The strongman, continually bearing his princess in his arms, is so strangely asexual" (S. Mackiewicz, "*Quo vadis*," in: *Odeszli w zmierzch. Wybór pism 1916-1966*, Warszawa 1968, p. 59).

> – so regret, indescribable despair show through in every movement of the animal. [“Walka byków” 232][372]

None of the narrators in Sienkiewicz’s novels of military violence offers a similar reflection to any of the characters. Does this mean that the animal arouses more sympathy in the author than his human figures, whose deaths are not provided with a trace of existential commentary? If it were not for “Walka byków,” we might dismiss this question with an assertion of the popular nature (superficial, lacking in reflection) of Sienkiewicz’s writing. But the sketch we have discussed shows the writer as one who knows more than he tells. In Gombrowicz’s view, Polish literature gives neither pleasure or delight, but awakens a constant sense of guilt. Sienkiewicz was for him the only Polish writer of pleasure, “truly read and read with delight.”[373]

Sienkiewicz’s cunning ruse lies in this, that he deceives his contemporaries with the historical costumes of the most celebrated novels – which are really mirrors for our shameful delights. These delights, however, are not – as his Young Poland critics would have it – an easy and philistine hedonism, but dangerous passions lurking in ordinary people who take their seats at a *corrida*, or with a flush on their cheeks follow the torment of Azja when he is impaled. Sienkiewicz does not exorcize these delights, but allows them to exist through his cruel fiction. If this is so, it means that he succeeds in embodying death in life, and in making it so that it somehow becomes delightful. This is what the activity of the maker of mirrors consists in – all those whose most urgent aim is the composing of those facts which emerge in places where we feel that we belong to the world and to ourselves, because they offer us the sense of fullness, a fullness that conceals in itself our own suffering and our own ridiculousness.[374]

Sienkiewicz was himself an embodiment of what Leiris writes of – of that belonging and that laceration: delight drawn from watching the representations of

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372 “The bull is a Greek hero led on by *pathos*, whose destiny is death” (M. Barbaruk, “Torreros umierają młodo. Corrida w filmach Pedro Almodóvara,” *Polska Sztuka Ludowa. Konteksty* 2007, Nr 3–4, p. 201). Thus, Sienkiewicz’s bull is a tragic creature, just like the goat – the *tragos* character, of which Karl Kerényi writes that he is unconscious of his sin, and has not even committed it yet. His part is the fate that in the future will be called “tragic” fate, from the fate of this goat (this *tragos*), who during a traditional ceremony delineates the pain of life, life that cruelly toys with living beings (K. Kerérenyi, *Dionizos. Archetyp życia niezniszczalnego*, trans. I. Kania, Kraków 1997, p. 269).

373 W. Gombrowicz, *Dziennik 1953–1956. Dzieła,* vol. VII, Kraków 1986, p. 239.

374 M. Leiris, *Lustro tauromachii*, op. cit., pp. 51-52. Ludwik Stomma expresses this less metaphorically, but also suggestively: “And we poor spectators of the *corrida*, seeing the evident nothingness of death in relation to the greatness of honor, also cease, little by little, to fear the end of our own days” (“Antropolog i corrida,” *Rocznik Muzealny*, vol. IV, Włocławek 1991. Reprinted: *Polska Sztuka Ludowa. Konteksty* 2007, Nr 3–4, p. 177).

violence and the ridiculousness that they expose their viewer to. At the close of his discussion of the *corrida,* Sienkiewicz expresses his surprise: “what a strange people, for whom the greatest entertainment and delight is the sight of something so terrible, absolute, and irreversible as death” [XLVI 235]. But a year earlier, evidently in some excitement, he had written from Vienna to Jadwiga Janczewska that “on Saturday in the Rotunda, there is a dachshund competition, that is a fight between them and foxes and badgers in glass tubes, so that everything can be clearly seen. I cannot bear that – and I’m going to go to it” [Li II/1, 391].

Vigor

I have introduced into our fiction a whole series of healthy and unusually strong people – and I have done it deliberately.

Henryk Sienkiewicz

1. The enemies of life

. . . how all that spoils life
Quo vadis

The most outstanding prose writers of the generation that entered on the literary scene at the turn of the 1860s into the 1870s, if we ignore the differences that separate them, embody a fear of being defined as "realists." They more readily accept the label "positivist" than "realist."[375] A dislike for this identification comes from fears that the opening up of a realist poetics to new themes and spheres of life threatens to bring with it doctrinal limitations, and also a reduction of the esthetics of fiction to the subordinate role of representing a materialist world view, and even more to a tendentious outraging of the reader with ugliness, misery, and despair, which emerge from the descriptions, types of character, and plots of realist prose.

Sienkiewicz's involvement in realizing the program of the new prose was uncertain from the start; and there is no doubt that the radical realism that is often identified with naturalism was alien to him as a program. However, this does not mean that he did not exploit elements of this poetics in texts that are quite distant in terms of genre from the contemporary realist novel. Contrary to the common view that the young democrat and the writer of realist fiction suddenly

375 "In Polish literary opinion, however, the conviction was rife for a long time [. . .] that realism, which does not go beyond observation, leans toward only the negative sides of life. It cannot satisfy man's longing for moral ideals. Thus, it can create a literary work that is fully valuable only when it is joined to idealism" " (H. Markiewicz, "Realizm, naturalizm, typowość," in: Markiewicz, *Główne problemy wiedzy o literaturze*, Kraków 1976, pp. 230–233; A. Bartoszewicz, *O głównych terminach i pojęciach w polskiej krytyce literackiej w pierwszej połowie XIX wieku*, Warszawa–Poznań 1973, pp. 130–134; J. Bachórz, *Poezja a powieść*, op. cit., pp. 58–64).

(around 1880) changed the appearance of his ideas and poetics, his reviews and feuilleton pieces from the 1870s already demonstrate a clear hesitation as to what creative world view is close to him. More importantly, he does not differ at all in these doubts from the other outstanding figures of the epoch. Positivism, even in its enthusiastic phase, was dominated by uncertainties regarding realism's most important concepts and slogans. All this involved: a questioning of the exclusivity of a scientific world view (Świętochowski, *Dumania pesymysty* (Musings of a Pessimist) 1876)); doubts whether universal education leads to the moral improvement of society (Prus)[376]; and idealistic and religious longings, which began to take precedence over materialist description of reality (see, for example, Orzeszkowa's letters, and especially her fascination with the works of Zygmunt Krasiński).[377] Sienkiewicz when he was admiring, in 1878, the Exposition in Paris and the people visiting it, felt how a wind blew "over these people from his head, a wind full of Schopenhauer and Hartmann" [*Listy Litwosa z Wystawy Paryskiej*, 2 May 1878, D XLVI 36]. This last indicates a sudden consciousness of the contradiction between the economic and technical development documented by the exhibition and social improvement, which was sinking into an immiseration and pathology produced by an unfettered capitalism.[378]

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376 In his discussion of this paradox, Stanisław Fita quotes Prus's bitter judgment: "Of the positivist philosophy, little content and much rubbish remains behind in Warsaw" ("Kronika tygodniowa," *Kurier Codzienny* 1891, Nr 313 – quoted in: S. Fita, "*Wstęp*," *Publicystyka okresu pozytywizmu 1860–1900*, ed. S. Fita, Warszawa 2002, p. 15).

377 The beginnings do not presage this. In the story "Z życia realisty" (From the Life of a Realist) (1868), the protagonist's disappointed feelings do not ruin his life, but are mocked as sentimental and give way to real issues: "we both laughed, and taking our hats, we went quickly into the city, because on that day the activity on the bourse was huge. Stocks fell in a terrifying fashion, and in two days they went down from 97 to 93. So we hastened to get rid of shares that could expose us to substantial losses, and to buy immediately from the Direction of the Steam Ship Co., which was doing splendid business, shares that alone stayed '*al pari*,' and last year had given shareholders a dividend of nine percent" (E. Orzeszkowa, "W klatce" *Z życia realisty,* in: *Pisma*, collected edition, with an introduction by Aureli Drogoszewski, Kraków 1913, vol. XII, pp. 376–377).

378 The same doubt overcomes Sienkiewicz when he observes the relentless extermination of the American Indians. "On the Indians' graves a scholarly professor lectures on the law of nations; in the fox's den, the lawyer sets up his office; where the wolf once lived, a pastor cares for his sheep – and hey ho! that human pursuit of everything that brings happiness, a pursuit as effective as a dog's chasing its own tail. But before all these Schopenhauerian and Hartmannesque thoughts had gone through my head, it became full daylight" [LPA 107]. As Jerzy Jedlicki points out, a crisis in the idea of progress is a general phenomenon in Europe in the second half of the nineteenth century. "The old liberal dream of enabling the masses to participate in culture and civil rights through education and improved conditions came true in an ironic form – that of a culture degraded by commerce, and of a politics

John Gray, in his writing on the idea of progress, points to the specific adoption of Christian ideas by positivist philosophers of progress from Comte and Mill to Dewey and Russell, who all fuelled an ambiguous relation to knowledge as the source of human success and collapse. He writes that the idea of progress reflects the belief, and it is a matter of belief and not an effect of empirical experience, that what we are dealing with in science can be extended to ethics and politics. The thinking is this: science is cumulative, since we know more today than previous generations, and there is no end in sight to our knowing; therefore, in the same way, we can improve the human condition on into infinity.[379]

This belief was declared by, for example, Orzeszkowa – it appears, without any doubts to the end of her life.

> But I know and believe that I am an atom in a link in the chain that climbs toward the Truth of truths, toward the Good of good, toward the Hope of hopes, toward the Beauty above all beauty, and that working on the strength and shine of this link, I am working in the cause of the whole chain.[380]

And yet, Gray argues, this creation of a metaphysics of progress was accompanied by a piece of minor intellectual chicanery, based on blurring the separateness of knowledge and moral progress. Gray points out that we owe to Greek philosophy the conviction that knowledge sets us free, but, he argues, the Biblical myth of the Fall is nearer the truth. The spread of knowledge brings many benefits, but not all constitute the good. We tempt humanity with the promise of increasing its power, and it all ends in slavery. In our times, it is difficult to think of a greater heresy than that knowledge might be a sin. At the heart of liberal humanism, Gray suggests, lies the conviction that humanity progresses in proportion to the development of knowledge. In many respects, humanism is only secular Christianity, but nevertheless it has reservations about and rejects profound ideas that stem from Christian tradition, but that touch on the contradictions by which human nature is tormented and on the ambiguous nature of knowledge.[381]

Sienkiewicz's feuilleton pieces and lectures show that he quickly realized the ambiguous nature of knowledge, knowledge that was the foundation of positive realism. He had sensed and expressed earlier thoughts, common to the first generation of modern Polish fiction writers, concerning the limitations of realist poetics, and the difficulty of affirming a reductionist positivist scientism.

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corrupted by demagoguery" (J. Jedlicki, *Leki i wyroki krytyków nowoczesności*, Warszawa 2000, p. 239).

379 J. Gray, "Postęp – złudzenie z przyszłością," trans. S. Kowalski. *Gazeta Wyborcza* 19–20 February 2005, p. 22.

380 E. Orzeszkowa, *Ad astra*, Kraków 2003, p. 92.

381 "Złudzenia postępu i inne formy naszych złudzeń. Z Johnem Grayem rozmawia Marcin Król*," EUROPA*. *Dodatek do Faktu* 2004, Nr 22, 205/04, p. 2.

"That path did not interest Sienkiewicz at all: it lacked literary taste" – thus Grażyna Borkowska laconically judges his position.[382] The causes of Sienkiewicz's ideological-esthetic about-face are, however, more complex, and go far beyond pure esthetics.

Before he formulates his criticisms in the lecture "O naturalizmie" (On Naturalism), Sienkiewicz undertakes a whole series of partial attacks, especially on the variant of realism that he saw in Orzeszkowa's work. His intuitive diagnoses of the philosophy of realism as fundamental exhaustion are excellent and insightful. They expose the nihilistic consequences of the doctrine and the poetics, which, out of embarrassment, conceal the contradiction that – contrary to the proclaimed need to subordinate art to reality – the form of art, or, on a broader level, a metaphysics of creation, can save the individual from the operations of nature and modern civilization that flatten out individuality. Sienkiewicz's comments nowhere take the form of an alternative program, and do not conduct a dispute about the shape of modern, post-Romantic fiction. His grumbles about the excessively long and elaborate descriptions in the novellas of the author of *Pamiętnik Wacława* (Wacław's Diary), or his clearly expressed distaste for the topics of Konopicka's novellas and plays are more often a result of extra-literary motives, although not ideological ones, as is generally thought.

The beginning is innocent – journalistic fatigue with the banality of the everyday, to which the feuilleton writer must give the status of an event: weariness with prosaic themes that a chronicler of the quotidian must deal with. To express the substance of this distaste, Sienkiewicz uses his favorite formulation from Shakespeare's *King Lear*.

> Nor do I have any causes for good humor; I am rather like Poor Tom in *King Lear*, because I am cold in every respect. The reality with which the chronicler must concern himself is as it usually is: gray, colorless, sad, often sterile – so let him who wishes, cultivate this role; I do not have the strength or the desire, and I will speak of something else. [MLA 4]

Differently from Flaubert, who, against his wishes, renounced idealism and the exotic, to immerse himself with repugnance in the trivial world of Yonville l'Abbaye, Sienkiewicz rejects forever the village of Baranina Głowa (Ram's Head) and its characters, although he proves here how perfectly he is able artistically to work up a banal subject.[383] The praxis of tendentious realism was a capital experience for the writer, one that gave a solid foundation to the romance plots of the *Trylogia*, and also allowed Sienkiewicz better to understand his opponent, when

382 G. Borkowska, *Pozytywiści i inni*, Warszawa 2007, p. 138.

383 The opening scene with the flies circling over Zołzikiewicz's head as he tries to kill them and picks the corpses out of his hair, is a masterpiece of allegory (Barania Głowa – Ram's Head/the head of the village writer) concerning the disintegration of village society.

the time came for the polemic with naturalism. However still before he produced his polemic concerning Zola's writing, Sienkiewicz accuses native realism of the same faults that he sees in the French author's books. The attacks become stronger in 1880, and they contain arguments that are not exclusively esthetic, but rather physiological. It is possible to express them in the simple thesis that positivist realism does not give backbone to the vital forces of the reader, who is, in any case, sufficiently tormented by reality, a reality that is severely felt in real life and that returns like a phantom, with an illusory exactitude, in literary representation.

> We have had our fill of life: it torments us; in addition, we have lost belief in it along with any enthusiasm for it. Let at least literature create for us other worlds, where all is not so dwarfish, but rather great, not so flat, but sublime, not sickly and deathly, but healthy and immortal, not decrepit, but young. [MLA 93]

Here he places no credence in the realist alibi that is produced by the defenders of such themes. In it, he penetratingly sniffs out business and not a mission. "They say [. . .] that it is a deliberate placing of the finger on the social wound. Not true! It is taking a delight in the issue" ["Z Paryża," D XLIV 154]. He does not change his opinion, for, several years later, in the sketch "Listy o Zoli (Le Docteur Pascal)" (Letters on Zola (Le Docteur Pascal)), printed in *Słowo* (31 July-1 August 1893) he develops the diagnosis mentioned above.

> No one has noticed that this pseudo-analysis ceases to be an objective analysis, and becomes a sick fondness for rotten things [. . .]. A certain kind of commercial trade in rottenness has arisen; with the rapid using up of materials, it has been a matter of finding something new, which one can still deal in. [SZ I 129][384]

Because it draws economic benefit from changes in representation in art, Sienkiewicz accuses the naturalist novel of commercialism. He scents in this a device, a kind of moral blackmail, which aims to compel the reader to deal with issues that he/she avoids in real life. Discussing a volume of novellas by Orzeszkowa, *Z różnych sfer* (From Different Spheres), he writes in an irritated way, like a bourgeois awoken from his afternoon nap.

> He became a thief, she drank herself to death – What is this? what is it supposed to mean? what is the author up to? – asks the reader. And he has a right to ask, – why has an attempt been made to grab at him, why has he been told this horrid tale? why

384 In a letter to Konstancja Morawska, 19 November 1894, Sienkiewicz writes of his difficulties with the construction of positive characters, basing his words on the example of Marynia Połanecka. "In literature, as in everything, what is most beautiful and most noble is difficult to do. Yes, it is much easier to present ugliness authentically – it is more enticing, and on top of that for ordinary readers it is a more readily graspable measure of talent" [L III/2 105]. Sienkiewicz would probably have concurred with Nietzsche's laconic words on Zola: "Zola, or 'the delight in stinking'" (*Twilight of the Idols* (18885) – trans. Walter Kaufmann and R.J. Hollingdale – www.handprint.com).

> has he been left with a sense of tastelessness, doubt, and an absence of the slightest uplift? [MLA 214]

The brutality of urban life as described by Orzeszkowa irritates Sienkiewicz with its social generalizations. He denies naturalism the bases for formulating general human laws of life. He insists of the characters described by the author in *Widma* (Ghosts), "either we have not seen [them] at all, or we have seen [them] in exceptional circumstances, just as we see people suffering from a confusion of the senses or St. Vitus's Dance" [MLA 170]. He compared reading *Widma* to a nightmare from which we awake in anguish, "but seeing a different reality, and in many respects a completely opposite one, we shake it off with some kind of feeling of inner relief, and we proceed to get on with our day" [MLA 171]. It is not difficult to understand that Orzeszkowa, vexed by the annoying style of the review, called him a fool in a letter to Jeż. It is, however, difficult to understand of Sienkiewicz whether, when he flinches at Orzeszkowa's work, he does so as an intellectual opportunist, or also as an artist who suspects Orzeszkowa of being doctrinaire. Probably the second motivation is dominant, which is attested by an extract from a letter to Stanisław Witkiewicz from 2 January 1881.

> And you, do you read *Widma*? What a tasty subject. It's a shame that woman spoiled it with a lack of strength and real life.[385]

Sienkiewicz's position, then, is not of an exclusively moral provenance, but touches the heart of the problem for positivist artists, that is, their declared conviction of the priority of doctrine over esthetics, of usefulness over contemplation.[386] The lack of interest in the representation of "reality," which emphasizes biologically and socially determined individuals, is a clear declaration of a rejection of the directives of positivist realism. Openly, Sienkiewicz announces his surfeit with the excess of realist discourse, a discourse that threatens – in his opinion – to give rise to artistic inflation.

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385 *Listy Sienkiewicza do Stanisława Witkiewicza z lat 1880–1882*, op. cit., p. 61.

386 Differently from Prus – the artist who stubbornly repeats that "more important for society are cheap restaurants than a concert by Patti, public baths than new decorations, a craft school than a monument to Mickiewicz" (B. Prus, "Słówko o krytyce pozytywnej," in: *Polska krytyka literacka (1800–1918). Materiały.* Vol. III, Warszawa 1959, p. 387). And elsewhere Prus vents his sarcasm: "Somewhere else the 'thinking generality' is concerned equally with a variety of matters. Farming, handicraft, business, science, art, village economy – usually as proletarians or parvenus. We are the only ones who devote more than half our time, money, feelings, and thoughts – to art! Our excellences are only – priests of art. Journalism is the gospel of art. The thinking generality is composed of nothing but the parishes of art – and our country – it is the fatherland of art" (B. Prus, *Kroniki*, vol. I–XX, ed. Z. Szweykowski, Warszawa 1953, vol. II, p. 306).

> Only this is sure – that the dominant direction today, today's naturalism or realism, or whatever you want to call it, today's minutely detailed and faithful painting of the commonplace, the major merit of which is accuracy, today's supposed sobriety, which is ashamed of the more elevated word and exaltation, and of the higher flight, begins to sit heavy on the stomach – and provokes a reaction. [MLA 94]

Sienkiewicz's distaste – which grows at the turn of the 1870s and 1880s – for realism as a philosophy of the representation of reality in literature cannot be described only in terms of esthetic categories. Despite appearances, the language of his critique is a mixture of esthetic and physiological categories, but only to a lesser degree of moral ones. That is most likely why Tadeusz Żabski, in his study of Sienkiewicz's esthetic views, draws attention to the difficulties of understanding the meaning of the most famous idea of his creative work, that is "*popkrzepianie serc*" (the invigorating of hearts).[387]

In his struggle with naturalism, Sienkiewicz is, at the same time, bound to the concept of representation, since like the naturalists he saw the foundation of human spirituality in the biological human being. The only value that invariably appears at all stages of his creative work is "life"; the one criterion that links his various polemical pieces, the quality ascribed to his opponents, is a hostility toward "life." The lack of clarity of this concept in Sienkiewicz's writing, alongside a simultaneous wealth – which erupted at the turn of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries[388] – of philosophical reflection on the subject of life, does not allow one easily to describe the meaning of this term in Sienkiewicz's work. To impose coherence on the concept is to create a false order in the context of the writer's rather free and easy discourse. The "life" that he wants to defend with the help of his own writing is certainly not the same "life" that Zola or Maupassant describe. They depict "fantastic pathologies," fostering in the receiver a dislike of or enmity toward life, because they preserve in literature what is weak, ill, exhausted, according these aspects of life a dominant meaning. Sienkiewicz does not question the literary desserts of these writers; he even considers them outstanding creators, although he unambiguously insists that

387 Therefore, he proposes different possible meanings of this formula: avoidance of pessimism, assuaging suffering, strengthening the joy of life, the integration of society (T. Żabski, *Poglądy estetyczno-literackie Henryk*a *Sienkiewicza*, op. cit., pp. 101–102).

388 I am thinking here of the current in German philosophy called *Lebensphilosophie*, which is scarcely homogenous, since it includes Wilhelm Dilthey, Friedrich Nietzsche, and Georg Simmel. I also do not exclude the possibility that the lack of clarity in the concept of "life" in Sienkiewicz's writings would allow one to place it beside the views of Bergson or even Brzozowski. See, on this matter: E. Paczkowska-Łagowska, "Lebensphilosophie (filozofia życia)" in: P. Pienądzek, *Brzozowski*, Warszawa 2004, pp. 203-222.

they are dangerous to wider circles of readers, whom they cast into pessimism and bitterness ["O naturalizmie" D XLV 99].[389]

But naturalism was not the only type of literature hostile to life. The list of varieties of discourse destructive of the reader's vital powers is longer. Sienkiewicz had earlier recognized in modernist poetry a continuation of naturalism in terms of theme and world-view. He was not shocked by its declared immorality or instinctual license. In it he perceives "neither sincerity nor force. Souls were indeed rather empty, though not extensive, but the supposedly wild hordes were more like bugs writhing in fertilizer than unbridled steeds." He is more disquieted by the fact that out of these supposedly ecstatic and exhibitionist confessions "blew something cold and senile" ["Maria Konopnicka," D XLV 153]. Concerned about the state of contemporary Polish literature, he sees in the stylistics of *Młoda Polska* (Young Poland) a sickly form of speech, a paroxysm of style, which, losing its functionality and simplicity, "is – part of it – rolling down a steep slope toward an unbearable baroque" ["Słowacki-Helios," D XLV 170]. He sarcastically predicts catastrophe for Adam Krzechowiecki's play *O jeden dzień* (By One Day) if "in it there is no paralysis of progress, sensual perversions, the sin of Sodom, poems forbidden under a dark star, Egyptian darkness, but there is, instead, God save us, logic, clarity, regularity, health, transparent language, and some poetic inspiration" [7 September 1902, L III/1, 341]. After an exhibition of Jacek Malczewski's paintings, he writes that Malczewski's work is killed by "disgusting impressionist technique" [Li III/3, 139-140].

These judgments, which often irritate in their superficiality, become interesting when we perceive in them an attempt to transfer literary esthetics to the territory of social and individual life. In considering this direction of thought, Sienkiewicz remains a true Positivist, but the answer that he gives makes of him an intellectual renegade. He shares the positivist idea of the social function of literature, which would join a high level of artistry with a clearly communicated message. The projected egalitarianism of reception now has a modern shape, when it successfully combines – in the particular case of his work – social message with economic

389 Sienkiewicz's public interventions against naturalism place him alongside many similar voices coming from French and English considerations on the future of the novel. The Anglo-Saxon criticism, which is closest to Sienkiewicz, makes, more or less from the 1880s onward, a clear protest against realism in fiction, summoning almost the same arguments as we find in the Polish author's criticism. Compare the reconstruction of this kind of discussion in French and English in: H. Markiewicz, *Teorie powieści za granicą. Od początków do schyłku XX wieku*, Warszawa 1995, pp. 185–188; 207–211. See also: T. Bujnicki, *Między naturalizmem a powieścią historyczną (Z problemów świadomości pisarskiej Sienkiewicza)*, in: *Problemy literatury polskiej okresu pozytywizmu*, Series III, Wrocław 1984.

success. But there is still something else in this position, that is, the renewed question as to what the role of art is supposed to be in the life of a non-artist.

Conducting his *sub rosa* dispute with Romanticism, Sienkiewicz recognizes a further mutation of Romanticism in the modernist alienation of the artist from society, and in its transferring the experience of art into a sphere of para-religious contemplation. At the same time, Sienkiewicz is true to the conviction that art's role is to make sure that the receiver accepts life through an art that offers him/her an image of reality, which can be thought of as a meaningful and purposeful whole, in which the individual recognizes his/her place. This recognition should invigorate, without at the same time distorting the real human condition – the biological finitude of life, undeserved suffering, and limited knowledge. The directness that is demanded of art does not mean a simplification of form, a dumbing-down of language. As a feuilleton writer, Sienkiewicz had criticized so-called "literature for the people" for its infantile quality. "Our peasant is a positive fellow and cannot be treated as a child. When he meets in a book with childish naïveté, which is supposed to replace directness, he loses faith in the book, and accustoms himself not to see it as anything serious and useful" [Wb II 253-254].

Thus literature is either something positive in life, or there is no point in fighting for its position among other discourses. At the same time, Sienkiewicz is unwilling to accept that it should be important only for a small group of artists. He realizes that a site in the space of social discourse that is abandoned by serious literature will be immediately taken by pure entertainment. One of the scenes illustrating this position is Połaniecki's monolog about critics, refined esthetes, who through "satiety, abuse, and over-refinement" are wearied with dealing with great works, and concentrate instead on details, marginalia, and local or familiar phenomena [RP 320]. Modeled on the conversation of the Count and Tadeusz on painting, this scene has a different content than a dispute about foreign influences. It points to the complex of the classic work that can bear contemporary literature.

The dynamic of change in the art of early modernity results in an uncertainty as to the value of new literature, and makes of its changes an internal contest of competing poetics. In consequence, the position of the receiver of art becomes more and more problematic. As Walter Benjamin notes, it recalls that of a helpless customer hemmed in by an excess of goods.[390] Sienkiewicz blames current literature for this regression of the reader to an epicure-dilettante who has lost sight of the function of art in his/her life. This was a literature that had, in his eyes,

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390 See: W. Benjamin, "Paryż II Cesarstwa według Baudelaire'a," trans.. H. Orłowski, in: *Twórca jako wytwórca*, trans. H. Orłowski and J. Sikorski, Poznań 1975, p. 183. Benjamin directly compares the situation of the customer surrounded by luxury goods to that of the reader in a world of the literature of *l'art pour l'art*. The consumer's taste is emphasized in both cases.

displaced both the novel of positivist realism and his own historical novels. He perceived contents in modernism, the genealogy of which he traced from, *inter alia*, the naturalist novel. He did not trust the credibility of these representations; he insisted that they take away "courage and desire for life," since they are drawn from the discourse of the precise sciences. As these are driven by a cognitive minimalism, they are not interested in constructing any general reflection about life, and, therefore, for art to do this on such a fragmentary foundation is untenable. "Life, both individual and collective, must be taken more *en bloc* – otherwise it is always represented as abominable," he wrote to Maria Radziejewska on 11 May 1903 [Kor II 107-108].

We may suspect him here of evasion, of an attempt to avoid the social responsibilities of the writer, which he had abandoned. It does not seem, however, that he is driven here exclusively by opportunism; his skirmishes with naturalism and decadence recall, in this isolated excerpt, Nietzsche's angry anathemas, which cast doubt on the Spencerian adaptation of Darwinism to describe human beings in society. Natural life appeared to Nietzsche rather in an exuberant excess, and not in a despairing struggle for survival. In *The Twilight of the Idols*, he wrote: "As for the famous 'struggle for existence,' so far it seems to me to be asserted rather than proved. It occurs, but as an exception; the total appearance of life is not the extremity, not starvation, but rather riches, profusion, even absurd squandering."[391] Naturalistic hysteria begets and fans fear of this excess, passing over into decadence. "Sometimes the poisonous vegetation which has grown out of such decomposition poisons life itself for millennia with its fumes."[392] According to Nietzsche, the main source of the displacement of life (apart from Schopenhauer's philosophy) lies in Christianity.

In this context, Petroniusz's memorable words demonstrate the unjustly underestimated depths of many sites in Sienkiewicz's narrative. In *Quo vadis*, Christianity is accused, above all, of a hostility toward life, and not just by Petroniusz. The pathological aspect of early Christian hostility to the sensuous beauty of the world is represented in the novel by Kryspus, and particularly by his misogyny. ". . . Ligia's guilt filled him not just with anger, but also disgust and contempt for human nature in general, but especially for that of women" [Q 301]. It is no other than Piotr (St. Peter) who calls him to order, drawing down to earth and blessing the human sexual condition. " – O Kryspus, have you not heard that our beloved Master was at the wedding at Cana and blessed love between woman and man?" [Q 302]. But Piotr falls into a trap here – condemning Kryspus's attitude, he give an advantage despite himself to Petroniusz, who has

391 F. Nietzsche, *Twilight of the Idols*, trans. Walter Kaufmann and R.J. Hollingdale – www.handprint.com

392 Ibid.

attacked Christian teaching, explaining to Wincjusz that "all that spoils life! You admire the goodness and virtue of those people, but I say to you that they are bad, because they are enemies of life, like illnesses, like death itself" [Q 320].

So Piotr's words are not enough, since an affirmation of the sensuous beauty of earthly life blocks the longing for another world, as a result of which the cautious Sienkiewicz considerably reduces Ligia's beauty, and at the end of the novel – as we recall – both lovers resemble shadows. " . . . among the cypresses in Linus's garden, they grew pale as two statues. Not even the lightest wind moved their clothes" [Q 394]. The author, in his despairing desire to strike a balance, takes away the lovers' bodies from them, and surrenders the field to Petroniusz, who does not wish to choose the new teaching, and sees no chance for an understanding between Athens and Jerusalem.

Alongside Zola's naturalism and modernist decadence, ascetic Christianity is the third – and best hidden – link in Sienkiewicz's dispute with "the enemies of life." Winicjusz's sadness and passivity is a transposition of modern exhaustion, concealed in Christian spirituality. Wearing a pagan mask, Sienkiewicz is able to diagnose this state: "They have filled you with unease and they have destroyed the sensual side of life" [Q 324]. In one contemporary novel, maybe through inadvertence, Sienkiewicz repeats these words, constructing a parallel, which is risky for his writing, between Christianity and modern decadence. The narrator says of Bukacki, esthete and decadent, that the cause of his exhaustion and spiritual crisis is the fact that "in him the sensuous side of life was lacking" [W 383].[393]

2. Sick of France

Tracing the time span of Sienkiewicz's dispute with realism, one may notice that its core is a dialog with French culture, which penetrates every work of the author of *Krzyżacy,* and suggestively captures the writer's complicated attitude towards the relations between esthetics and life. On no other (including his own native) literature does Sienkiewicz focus as much in his literary sketches and his correspondence as he does on French literature. In the discourse of contemporary literature, he recognizes France as the greatest power and at the same time the biggest threat to Polish literary culture. "The French have become masters when it comes to technique, and they have evolved it to such a level that often the work in an artistic sense outweighs the idea itself" [MLA 178]. What idea is he thinking

393 We do not know how this process arises in the minds of characters. Jolanta Sztachelska claims that behind it stands "a never extinguished passion for life, which covers up the evil that awaits humans; from this follows an admiration for primordial force, for masculinity and energy, and a distaste for suffering" (J. Sztachelska, *Czar i zaklęcie*, op. cit., p. 266).

of? A hint may be found in the excerpt of the short story "Na jasnym brzegu" (On the Bright Shore) where the painter Świrski offers a thematic criticism of French literature, surprised that in these novels "no one has children" ["Na jasnym brzegu," D VI 175].

> – Every society gets the literature it deserves – old Kładzki answered. – Everyone knows that the population of France is in decline. Children in the upper classes – how peculiar! ["Na jasnym brzegu" 175].

This strange assessment of literary value of the French novel points to Sienkiewicz's consistency in using physiological categories in estimating literary value. Expecting art to invigorate life, at the same time, he warns of the naturalistic revelation of the biological exclusivity of being, because the consequence of such images is existential nonsense. Honesty of observation in literature is not enough for him; science or journalism serve this purpose better. "A novel must invigorate life" – he will openly say [*Listy do Zoli,* D XLV 146-7], and he does not mean this in a metaphorical sense, but he means by it the rational visible impact that art has on a specific being. – To invigorate life or the heart? – he will ask with the *Trylogia*, because there he understands invigoration in an pre-Freudian way, as a lust for life, the desire of Eros, who defeats the decadence that lurks on the horizon of realism. This early recognition of the decadent, physiological consequences of the positive observation of life deserves appreciation; after all – as Kazimierz Wyka proves in his classic studies – in Polish modernists, with Przybyszewski at their head, we find "all the typical naturalistic beliefs."[394] This is why Sienkiewicz has no doubts that, in the process of stimulating human progress, "*The Illiad* nourishes you better than Zola."[395]

Sienkiewicz's initial and short-term fascination with French realism and positivist philosophy quickly transforms itself into negation, which does not leave him through all his work, and the place of the French model of society is taken over by the English one.[396] According to Sienkiewicz, somewhere around the 1880s, modern French culture represents a negative trend in European modernization, while literature that is created there (with a few exceptions), is not suited to be read by the Polish recipient. This harsh evaluation of the works of Émile Zola crystallizes the arguments of this polemic, but the two famous studies about the

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394 K. Wyka, *Młoda Polska,* Kraków 1987, vol. 1, p. 43.

395 *Listy do Stanisława Witkiewicza*, op. cit., p. 41.

396 There "aristocracy has reason, public order has sympathy, parliamentarianism is not a crooked tree, which all the goats jump upon; the good of the people is not a journalistic phrase, and time is not an enemy to be killed. A strange country, indeed. Here, a woman has no rights, but uses them all; progress is as fast as the local locomotives, but dressed in a medieval costume; *habeas corpus* is not translated from Latin as 'believe it if you will!'" (LPA 28) .

author of *Nana* do not exhaust the problem, which has a much wider presence in the whole of Sienkiewicz's work.

We are accustomed to view this dispute based on the author's extensive statements, such as "Naturalizm w powieści" (1880) (Naturalism in the Novel), "O powieści historycznej" (1889) (On the Historical Novel), and *Listy o Zoli* (1893) (Letters about Zola). But the foundation of Sienkiewicz's judgments on French literature was concrete and resulted from his close acquaintance with the contemporary output of literature in this language. From the writer's letters we know that amongst the many he read were: Flaubert, Maupassant, Loti, Huysmans, France, Bourget, Dujardin, Dumas, Hugo, Taine, the Goncourt brothers, Rolland, and, of course, Balzac. Despite the range of his reading, his judgments of the concerns of contemporary French literature seem quite consistent. The picture of France and the French, which Sienkiewicz derives from the French novel of that time, is exceptionally averse, or to be precise – as Jean Neveux writes – "beyond dark: brave words – but miserable deeds, fawning politeness – but moral rottenness, vanity, and shame."[397] The biggest issue for the scholar, who is trying to explain the mechanism of this cultural aversion, lies in the fact that we do not know its origin. Neveux tries to point to political reasons, especially France's and Russia's being close, at the turn of the nineteenth and twentieth century; this could have confirmed the writer's disappointment,[398] but, as we mentioned, these negative statements about France can be found at least two decades earlier in Sienkiewicz's work. Interestingly, French characters appear only episodically in his early works (*Na marne*, *Humoreski z teki Worszyłły*, "Selim Mirza"), but they are not negative characters. Moreover, his first stay in Paris went beyond his wildest expectations and dazzled him with "splendor, wild gaiety, genuine character, and curiosities" – as he writes in a letter to Maria Keller [Li III/1, 113].

The essential change in his attitude towards France falls at the turn of the 1870s and the 1880s, because his correspondence from Paris (1878 and 1879) is still filled with praise for France's scientific and economic progress. Furthermore, he shows sympathy for France, as a victim in the war with Prussia. Sienkiewicz's reports on the Paris Exposition (1878) are filled with admiration; they express solidarity with a country that has risen after a recent defeat in war and the imposition of gigantic reparations. To Sienkiewicz, the Positivist, this is proof that a military defeat does not have to mean a final defeat, and with hard work the defeated may economically surpass those who beat them.[399]

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397 J.B. Neveux, "Sienkiewicz a Francja," in: *Henryk Sienkiewicz. Twórczość i recepcja światowa*, op. cit. p. 451.

398 Ibid., p. 458.

399 He does not change this notion: "The strongest ally of a oppressed nation is King Progress itself" [D XL 67]. This shows the constancy of Sienkiewicz's positivistic backbone;

> The Exposition was the great voice of France, which called out “I am! I live,” and that voice returned from all the ends of the earth with the echo: “Live!” [*Z Paryża*, D XLIV 139]

Earlier, however, as if anticipating the reader’s notion of French temperament and inclination to have a good time, he spoke calmly.

> The Exposition was a celebration, not an orgy. Today’s god of progress does not get drunk like Bacchus, and his festivals are rather a matter of reflection and examining one’s conscience, which, if it turns out positively, brings, in place of surfeit and weariness, greater confidence and a new, well-founded desire to work. [“Z Paryża,” D XLIV 138]

French literature, that garners so many negative comments from Sienkiewicz, is presented here as an example of literature that is committed and involved, such as one could wish for in Poland.

> French poets, scholars and writers are no scribblers, no office moles, nor some transcendental wise men that understand no one but themselves; they are agitators, people of life, of struggle, and of action. This explains the human nature of French civilization. Action is something tangible. [*Z Paryża,* D XLIV 83]

One cannot find anywhere any reason for further disappointment, especially because Sienkiewicz implies that he is conscious of the flaws of the French, but these are of no importance and should not overshadow the beauty and greatness of France; the culmination of his praise is the comparison of seeing the Venus de Milo up close. Wanting to understand modern France, one must look from a distance, in order to forget the sad details of the destructiveness of time, and to be able to embrace the impressiveness of it all. “Looking from up close, and too close, I couldn’t comprehend it all, all I saw were stains, defects and ugliness, but when I went back a bit, a lovely form as a whole spoke to me once again” [“Z Paryża,” D XLIV 85].

So what happened to the tangible beauty of civilization and artistic achievements? Trying to understand the motives behind such a radical change of judgment about French literature, one could place them against Sienkiewicz’s other statements about other projects of modern civilization. His views on society are constructed between three important models: French, English, and American. In his opinion, neither the first nor the last are suitable to be implanted in Polish ground. Both represent a destructive momentum against the post-feudal world, and the origins of this lie in the French Revolution and the rapid development of

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but it does complicate a straightforward interpretation of the shuffling of conservative and democratic ideas in his work. *Listy z Paryża* – as Tadeusz Bujnicki rightly notices – are one of the best sources to use to study this problem (T. Bujnicki, “Pozytywista – neokonserwatysta,” in: *Pozytywista Sienkiewicz*, op. cit., p. 33).

capitalism. The writer's declared admiration for America does not contradict this. In *Listy z podróży* (Letters from a Journey), we find dozens of excerpts expressing the author's unfeigned admiration for that society's egalitarianism. According to him, the uniqueness of American society is determined by three conditions. One can grasp American democracy and American life only when one understands these three conditions; that is, 1) respect for work, 2) lack of major differences in education, and 3) lack of major differences in mores [LPA 140]. Out of these, the decisive one for America's development would be its "respect and great fondness of work – here lies invincible power, here lies the Yankees' great future in which they will rule the world" [LPA 238].

Why does not Sienkiewicz see both (French and American) cultures of work and education as examples for Polish society? This is hard to grasp, especially since we cannot find any incident that brought on his change of mind and way of writing about France. Suddenly it turns out that the economic and cultural richness, which once seemed invigorating to him, now impoverish and weary his soul. In a letter to Witkiewicz, he reluctantly states that he does not favor the French cultural climate, and "of all the cities, in which I've been, the worst I felt was in Paris, and there I was in the greatest of dangers – a dryness of the soul".[400]

Fully to understand the paradox of rejecting these models, whilst deeply admiring them at the same time, it is worth comparing Sienkiewicz with Prus and Orzeszkowa. In *Lalka* Prus sends Wokulski to Paris, and makes him admire the city's panache, and the energy of France's development. This he places in painful contrast to Polish backwardness, and he forces the protagonist to search for their success and our failure. Wokulski finally finds the answer.

> And what are they doing?... Most of all – they work extremely hard, sixteen hours a day, forgetting about Sundays or holidays. Because of this, natural selection takes place; according to this, only the strongest have the right to live.[401]

To do what others do – this means to let the self-regulating mechanism work of a society expressed in Darwinist metaphor. The egalitarianism of common work should put an end to individual anguish of the subject, and cause Wokulski to become "an ordinary drop in the ocean of Paris."[402] In the specific "moral theology"

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400 Letter to Stanisław Witkiewicz from 3 December 1880, in: *Listy Sienkiewicza do Stanisława Witkiewicza z lat 1880–1882*, op. cit., p. 41.

401 B. Prus, *Lalka*, ed.. J. Bachórz, BN I 262, Wrocław 1991, vol. 2, p. 129.

402 Ibid., p. 96. Sienkiewicz also advises a positive therapy for the post-romantic, maximalist claims of reason, but he writes this in *Przegląd Tygodniowy* on 30 November 1873 (!), in a review of *Pamiętnik Daniela* by Józef Tretiak. in which he constructs a dialog between a idealist and a Positivist:
– But it's sad to relinquish such questions, which have been asked by the human race since the most distant times!

of Positivism, work is the essential tool for redeeming our individual and national sins. Positivists enthusiastically attribute "work" with (non-exclusive) moral, national, and economic values. Thanks to work, humans can become independent of nature or feudal social relations; work can expand the realm of human liberty. It is no surprise that work is the core of the emancipatory storylines of many novels and short stories of that time. Thanks to work, individuals and social groups can have a chance to leave their hitherto fixed place in life and move up in the social world. This movement of freeing one's self from the determinism of birth and poverty, worked within every social stratum, and did not mean merely a one-way advance in society. Positivists radically cut themselves off from the sarmatian and romantic past; they adopted a new belief: that the increase of knowledge and the technical progress that follows, will cause people to be more rational and happy. In other words, they believed that knowledge and work will make us better, and redeem us, here on earth. The domain that would harmonize these three elements was meant to be work – work reliably performed and well paid.

Orzeszkowa, in a continued affirmation of work, points to its necessity for the constitution of the subject, who, because of it, practices his/her civil freedom, explores and affirms his/her corporeality. In *Nad Niemnem*, work prevents alienation that (incidentally) touches the master, or to be precise the mistress, and not the worker. If it were not for work, Justyna would be a social orphan, kindly rescued by Janek. When she marries Bohatyrowicz, she frees herself from the limitations and humiliation of being a poor gentle lady, a resident at the mercy of the Korczyńskis, but also from the constraints of class convention. In the Positivists' fantasies, "work" ensured the social dynamic; this of course promised conflicts, but the working society's ultimate goal was meant to be a harmony among dramatically changing social configurations. Comte's ideal order is not based on the dialectics of value, or the balance of social power, but on unveiling the shared similarities of the individual and the community. According to the author of *Nad Niemnem,* "work" draws out from people their shared condition, obscured by appearances of birth and education.[403]

– Maybe it's sad but . . . one must. You are surrounded by many things you should learn sooner and most accurately, but haven't yet got to know them. Take to them. . . .

– And this person either takes to them or does not – it's his business; whether this advice cramps him or sets him fee – that's also his business; enough that he takes it; he ensures himself against the bankruptcy of the mind. Thus, Positivism is a condom against the sickness of the mind. [D XLV 236]

403 According to Justyna, amongst people,

The only difference is in form . . . that is, that all kinds of characters are still being revealed: in some cases beautifully, and others in an unsightly way . . . but this is a form, that is a superficiality and of no consequence, but the true value of man is in what he is within. . . .

In its enthusiastic faze, Polish positivism would represent (using Agata Bielik-Robson's expression) "modernity without fear."[404] Human thought and the work that embodies it fearlessly free the world from enchantment of the mystery of transcendence. A fear of the modern world, which changes so rapidly, is a symptom of savagery, while bravery is a feature of the civilized man, who, armed with reason and work, may free from enchantment and transform this seemingly menacing world. This is how Wokulski diagnoses his biography. When he arrives in Paris, disappointed with the anachronistic social relations in his country, and with his love for Izabela, he revels in the city's rational urban and economic power: "I am a savage man – he says to himself – so I fell into madness, but civilization will cure me."[405] One must notice that the whole long excerpt, describing the urban-economic utopia of Paris, is undermined by irony. When writing *Lalka*, Prus did not have a clear view about the unambiguously positive function that work has in a modern society. With a self ironic overstatement, Prus in *Lalka* reconstructs the hagiographic image of the collective hero, that is the people of France, working sixteen hours a day. The stay in Paris does not cure the "savage man" of his madness; on the contrary, it deepens the illness that is his love.

Sienkiewicz, when compared to his ideological colleagues, seems outdated and at the same time unusually modern. Even when he shares their Positivist enthusiasm, he speaks of his doubts whether harmony between an individual and the interests of a modern country is possible, since "despite having such great carriages, social progress is so far behind our technical progression, and there is so little happiness, and so much misery in life" [*Listy Litwosa z Wystawy Paryskiej*, D XLIV 36]. One may find this an esthete's sigh, but I suggest we do not take this cliché too lightly.

In his studies about the experience of modernity, Marshall Berman suggests taking a look at early modernist literature as at a paraphrase of Marx's *Manifesto of the Communist Party*.[406] That is, of the well-known excerpt, in which the authors of the *Manifesto* describe how the dynamics of capitalism cause the site of fixed social relations to be torn by shocks, uncertainty, and change that will destroy the

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They understood Justyna's thought, they both perfectly understood it: the son, and the mother. Antolka lifted her unspoiled pigeon-like eyes towards Justyna with great interest and sweet fondness.

– If Justynka came on Monday, without her corset and said the same thing, we would probably chatter all day... – she whispered. (E. Orzeszkowa, *Nad Niemnem,* Warszawa 1957, vol. 2, p 104)

404 A. Bielik-Robson, *Duch powierzchni. Rewizja romantyczna i filozofia*, Kraków 2004, pp. 54–106.

405 Prus, *Lalka*, op. cit.., vol. 2, p. 127.

406 M. Berman, *"Wszystko, co stałe, rozpływa się w powietrzu,"* op. cit., p. 123.

social order. In effect, "all that is solid melts into air." The movements of capital ruin the stability of the social system and the hermetic nature of its layers.

But this was not Sienkiewicz's regret. He was more afraid of life's falling completely into economics: a situation in which money would strip (as Marx writes) "of its halo every occupation hitherto honored and looked up to with reverent awe. It has converted the physician, the lawyer, the priest, the poet, the man of science, into its paid wage laborers."[407] This fear of the leveling effect of work and economics, and the fear of the violation of non-economic social differences, quickly penetrated the consciousness of the writers and publicists of the nineteenth century, and became the reason why the positivist propaganda of work could not find any support in a strong and influential ideological discourse – religion, philosophy, or literature. I mean here one that could build a positive and socially ennobling portrait of a hard-earning peasant, bourgeois, or, most of all, an "unsaddled" intellectual nobleman. Wokulski's financial carreer is effective, rapid, but (most importantly) seasoned with the perfect element that eliminates the triviality of pure interest. What difference does it make that the rhetoric of work drives the emancipatory spirit of the novel, when it turns out that Wokulski, when he finally leaves the determinism of his class, finds himself in a social abyss – a stranger to the gentry, and to the bourgeoisie? Faced with this alienation, he performs a strange regression – he puts on an anachronistic and overly tight Byronic costume.[408] This was not only Prus's problem. Long before Prus, Józef Ignacy Kraszewski expressed this apprehensive enthusiasm about modern work, in his feuilleton piece, from 1859, that is full of contradictions:

> Work – we've said this hundreds of times, it is life's necessary condition; according to us it is not the damnation of human kind; it is God's blessing. God gave work to us, those banished from Eden, as comfort, as a treasure to the soul, as a sojourn from our parental home. Idleness brings all that is bad; work brings all the best in the world; loafers are rotten in their souls; the working man is the future.[409]

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407 K. Marks, F. Engels, *Manifesto of the Communist Party* (1848), trans. Frederick Engels and Samuel Moore (1888) – www.marxists.org.

408 This is less odd than it might seem to us. Jerzy Jedlicki has shown how nineteenth-century Polish liberals, looking for a native tradition for the idea of modernizing the national consciousness, passed by the critical and radical discourse of the Enlightenment, and chose instead a mythologized sarmatianism, in the hope that would offer a native socio-political model. "Thus it was Poland that took from the English, the French, and the Americans, the sceptre of priority in establishing the rights of man and the citizen" (J. Jedlicki, *Jakiej cywilizacji Polacy potrzebują*, Warszawa 2002, pp. 72-73). Polish gentry/noble freedom was supposed to accord with the idea of the freedom of the citizen in Europe after the French Revolution and Napoleon. Odd? Maybe, but this is a constant in Polish social discourse to this very day.

409 *Gazeta Codzienna* 1859, Nr 219, quoted in: W. Danek, *Józef Ignacy Kraszewski*, Warszawa 1973, p. 61.

It seems everything is clear, but in the same text there appear sentences that could be taken from the utterances of Kraszewski's antagonist, although, at the same time, it is the same author.

> [I repeat]: "Do not extinguish the soul" – crying out that we should not become Germans, giving ourselves to industry, trade, speculation, and foreign phraseology. [. . .] But we are neither against work, nor for seeking material gains without any higher thoughts; we see clearly the mean between both. We would like and we want all possible reforms and improvements, as long as they do not affect the timbre of our thoughts and our character, and do not denature us, as long as they do not have material profit as their end, but rather the uplift of the soul.[410]

So, thus, work not for profit, but for "the uplift of the soul"! And these are the words of an exceptionally fertile writer, whose caricatures showed how with a hammer he beats out successive volumes, piling them up at his feet. We find almost identical reservations in Sienkiewicz's writing, and that in *Letters from America*, the writer's most democratic work. There he writes, *inter alia*, about the salutary influence of the Irish on American society. For the Irish

> bring a certain ideal element into this through and through materialistic society, keeping, thus, the balance of those ideal and material elements in some kind of desirable equilibrium. I see how my Positivist friends smile at this moment, but I will not cease to maintain what I have said. An excessive domination of ideal dispositions is harmful to our society: it creates foolish dreams, quixotic politics, a reliance on divine intervention, sighing in winter, in spring idleness, poverty, and feebleness. All this is undeniably true, but it is also true that all one-sidedness is harmful. If you want a nation without ideal elements, well, you have the Chinese. [LPA 71]

Sienkiewicz expresses his view on the idea of the economization of life most bluntly in a review of Edward Lubowski's comedy *Sąd honrowy* (Court of Honor) in 1880 in *Niwa*.

> Be careful that the whole direction, the whole of that current with which you swim does not lead you too far. . . . From a society of knights, you may descend to one of publicans, stockbrokers, tenement landlords, shopkeepers, and all that sort of money-grubbers, who as long as business goes well, will not care for anything else. [. . .] Prosperity! industry! trade! wealth! all you want! all good, all desirable, all should be supported, above all, work – of course, under one condition, that all will be a means, and not an end. [MLA 77][411]

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410 Ibid., p. 62.

411 And yet, Sienkiewicz had no hesitation castigating the idleness of village rectors, making it clear that they should get to work. "Instead of playing cards for long hours after vespers with the local vicar, instead of talking politics about what the French will do in spring, instead of falling asleep after dinner and snoring under a colored handkerchief, which keeps flies off the face" [Cho II 6].

There is a striking unanimity between such different writers, from different generations too,[412] although, not long before, Sienkiewicz had no doubt that work is the main source of social vigor, even for the handicapped. This is shown in his account of a visit to the Institute of the Deaf and Dumb, and the Blind. He is delighted there by the hard-working inmates, torn from the illness that nature had imposed on them.[413] Of the agricultural settlement in Studzieniec, established for the re-socialization of young criminals, Sienkiewicz creates an idyllic picture, a Positivist social dream of how "work and nature" improve bad people [Cho I 189].[414]

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412 As Henryk Markiewicz has shown, the kind of inconsistency, which we have noted in judgments on the social and individual value of work, is widespread in the journalism and literature of this time. It is a result of a recognition of the key antinomy of capitalism, which lies in the compulsion to work, and in the exploitation to which that compulsion leads (H. Markiewicz, "Pozytywizm polski wobec antynomii pracy," in: Markiewicz, *Literatura i historia*, Kraków 1994).

413 "When you look at her charges, it seems that the testimony to the outstanding quality of the workshops is engraved on their faces. Nature created them sad – work has made them merry; nature, having taken from them the mighty sense of sight or hearing, and deprived them of impressions, has condemned them to inanity – intelligence illuminated them, awoken by pity and a skilled hand, as the spark waned in the fire; they enter there as a charge on society, they leave as diligent and honest workers in society's field, and hence, for sure, comes that resignation, and even silent joy that glows on their brows" [Cho II 28].
There is a similar kitschy image in an excerpt from Sienkiewicz's correspondence from London, in which he tells of the "yellow house" – a refuge for prostitutes.
Prayer, manual work, studies, interwoven with entertainments: that is how the time passes for the inmates of the "Yellow House." They do not order them to do penance for the past, but they order them to forget. A pure atmosphere surrounds them: one of work, hopefulness, peace, and innocence, and that atmosphere envelops them and sinks into even the most polluted heart. Afterwards, they instruct them, give them the ability to earn a living; then they find a paying job and let them out into the world.
The best female workers, the best servants come from this house. The younger ones often later get married, and are good wives and mothers. [LPA 38]
Knowledge and work were supposed to save people not only from physical handicap, but also from "bad race." Here is the advice of Sienkiewicz, the feuilleton writer, to a Jewish peasant, who complains of his alienation among Poles:
In the meantime, study, and when science lights up the inside of your head, when you grow to be a useful worker in the society of which you are a member, when you learn to read and write Polish correctly, then you will be as good as everyone else, then (do not be afraid too early) no one will attack you and each will willingly reach out his hand to you, without regard to your origin and faith. [Cho II 160]

414 "Life is broken down here exclusively into work and prayer, and passes governed by these sources of calm. Caring, indeed parental supervision facilitates, achieves an almost inevitable improvement, and, in the end, the benign influence of nature ennobles these young, wild souls, too early bought in touch with the burning breath of vice" [Cho I 189].

Soon, however, he will forget of the benign influence of work, seeing in it a threat to, and not only a foundation of, social development. Years later, summing up his own writing and the fate of his generation, in a letter to Karol Górski of 14 July 1895, he expresses his conviction that "rationalism would have turned us all into Jews (forgive me), would have dried us out, and turned us into Chinese" [Li I/2, 292-293]. The image of the Chinese as a nation without spiritual values was a powerful stereotype of the times. Sienkiewicz took this view partly from Bronisław Rejchman's book *Z dalekiego Wschodu* (From the Far East), which he discussed in 1881.

> In keeping with almost all travelers, he regards the Chinese as people without imagination, detailed and practical. This practicality, that utilitarianism in life, has entirely killed imagination in them, and the ability to feel any ideal at all, and all loftiness – and for that reason it has slowed down progress.
>
> The Chinese have lost independence of thought and the gift of initiative – but they are patient, dexterous, and hard-working. [Wb II 192]

Work as an end and a source of profit may be the enemy of progress, Sienkiewicz foresees. Irrespective of what lies behind the author's gradual withdrawal from a discourse that affirms work, Sienkiewicz was one of the first Positivists to foresee the consequences of modernization, what Berman calls "the tragedy of development." Its essence is a realization that modernization is always based on a two-fold destruction: of the old world (here of gentry/noble culture), and one whereby "all individuals, groups, and communities are subject to constant, never diminishing pressure, which compels them to self-reconstruction; if they stop to rest, to be what they are already, they will be blown off the face of the earth."[415]

In the consciousness of Positivists, the tragedy of development had a yet more monstrous image, because with the forces of modernization were allied the political power of the partitioning states. Positivists, thus, fell into a double trap: promoting the idea of a modern society with its rational, mainly economic, relations, they hastened the demise of the world of gentry/noble culture; at the same time, however, they discovered that they were, thus, advancing the destruction of native Polish culture, a destruction that was being systematically pursued by the partitioning states.

When one looks at literary images of work, one can see that the Positivists fueled the fears of modernity, and added to anxieties about society's "turning into Chinese" and "turning into Jews," which for Sienkiewicz means to have no ideals other than work and profit.[416] The result was that they discovered the pessimism

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415 M. Berman, *"Wszystko, co stałe, rozpływa się w powietrzu"*, op. cit., p. 100.

416 In a letter to Stanisław Witkiewicz from 7 December 1880, Sienkiewicz writes a characteristic sentence about a well-known painter: "In Chełmoński there are two people: an artist and a businessman. So for him Paris is good. You are not a businessman – or at

residing in an idea of progress that is based solely on economic development, and we – the readers – discover the genealogy of our postmodernist "end of history," that is "the point at which prosperity is treated as a given, and there is now nothing important to do."[417]

The Positivists' uncertainty as to the invigorating idea of progress is settled by their successors. Critical modernism, which is how one may look at *Młoda Polska* (Young Poland), begins, *inter alia*, from a questioning of the exclusively positive function of work. In his debut novel *Fachowiec* (The Workman), Wacław Berent filled out Prus's and Sienkiewicz's skepticism with a radical and bitter tale of the destructive fiction of positivist slogans concerning "organic work." Kazimierz Zaliwski, the novel's protagonist, under the influence of fictional ideologues of work, abandons the idea of studies and becomes a locksmith. His initial enthusiasm turns into frustration. It is not enough that Berent's protagonist loses his sense of social separateness; as an intellectual and a worker, he feels that in society he is an equally weird hybrid to the gentleman-merchant. Just as in Prus, Berent does not spare his character the humiliations of his apprenticeship, the embarrassment of being a dilettante, and of walking around in a tile-hat. Berent knows that the first victim of the division of labor integral to large-scale industry is the worker's individuality, but the ideal, from the point of view of the employer, is a specialized and cheap worker, who is easy to replace with someone else after a brief training period.

> Although I am now a producer of so-called material riches, there are many that could replace me in this job (and many do replace others so).[418]

A separate strand in Sienkiewicz's dialog with French culture is his position vis-à-vis modernist tendencies in literature and painting. Although he did not rate very highly modernist symbolism, he saw in the new wave of poetry debuts a sign of

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least no better a one than I" (*Listy Sienkiewicza do Stanisława Witkiewicza z lat 1880–1882*, op. cit., p. 46).

For Sienkiewicz, the French were a nation particularly corrupted by the cult of money. In his account in 1878 of the deliberations of the Literary Congress, he wrote maliciously: "A motion prohibiting translations for free was supported by the French with particular vigor, for really less noble reasons, for they were principally concerned with francs, which, as it seems to them, the whole world is robbing them of without being punished for it" ["Kongres Międzynarodowy Literacki w Paryu," D XLIV 115]. In these views about the determining influence of national character, Sienkiewicz is a true Positivist. This was, of course, also Taine's view of the decisive influence of collectivities (race, culture, milieu) on human spirituality (T. Żabski, *Poglądy estetyczno-literackie Henryka Sienkiewicza*, Wrocław 1979, p. 44).

417 M. Berman, *"Wszystko, co stałe, rozpływa się w powietrzu"*, op. cit., p. 100.

418 W. Berent, *Fachowiec*, Warszawa 1956, p. 98.

the overcoming of the naturalist paradigm, and, thus, a certain closeness to "the ideal current" in his own writing.[419] Impressionist painting arouses similar doubts in him. Sienkiewicz, who valued the plastic arts, maintains a distance in relation to the changes in the technique of landscape that Impressionism brought. He accurately identifies this movement as the culmination of a realist poetics, but he is irritated by the reduction of artistic activities to the registering of physiological processes of perception. In the novella "Na jasnym brzegu," the painter Świrski most likely gives utterance to the author's own views on the latest trends in painting: a distaste for Impressionism, an admiration for English painting, and a disapproval of the imitativeness of Polish artists.

> With the exception of a few, or at best a few dozen – it was generally made up of gifted people, but thoughtless, unusually underdeveloped and lacking in any education. They had lived off the now somewhat stale crumbs of doctrines fallen from the French table, never suspecting even for a moment that they could think something independent about art, and all the less that they could create something independently, something in a Polish idiom. ["Na jasnym brzegu," D VI 186-187]

Sienkiewicz's esthetic reflections constantly expand here to include social and national questions, and also those concerning tradition. The Pole is shown standing between England and France, and bitterly described as a dog eating crumbs from its master's table – an allegory of the inauthenticity of Polish culture. Sensitive as he is to this foreign cuisine, Sienkiewicz does not want to perceive any affinities of his with Huysmans's work. As the author of *A rebours*, Huysmans could suggest a parallel to the story of Leon Płoszowski in *Bez dogmatu*. Sienkiewicz describes Huysmans as a disciple of Zola, and his book seems to him "peculiar – to the point of being Chinese or monstrous. It is not interesting for itself, but as a symptom. [. . .] That gentleman is so over-refined that he is depraved – but there's nothing to him" [Li II/2, 223]. Thus Sienkiewicz characterizes the book in a letter to Janczewska.

"A disciple of Zola" – this expression disqualifies any possible links with the concerns of his own writing. At the same time, none of the modernists seemed as important as Zola to Sienkiewicz. On the subject of his judgments on Zola much has been written, and there is no need to rehearse the story here.[420] However, those

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419 "Look at the last few books by Bourget, Rod, Barrès, Desjardin, at the poetry of Rimbaud, Verlaine, Heredia, Mallarmé, and, indeed, Maeterlinck and his school. What is there there? A search for new content and new forms, a feverish searching for some way out, an uncertainty where to turn and where to seek salvation; whether in mysticism, whether in belief, whether in duties beyond belief, whether in patriotism, whether in humanity? Above all, however, one sees in them a great unease" [*Listy do Zoli*, D XLV 130].

420 See, for example: J. Krzyżanowski, *Twórczość Henryka Sienkiewicza*, Warszawa 1973, pp. 22–30; T. Żabski, *Poglądy estetyczno-literackie Henryka Sienkiewicza*, op. cit., Wrocław

comments, scattered throughout all his journalism and letters, show that Zola is not the only threat that French literature offers Poles. Sienkiewicz admires his talent, mocks his feeble opponents; he is even impressed by the vulgar vigor of his writing ("from his works there shines some kind of brutal and cold force" [MLA 89]),[421] because – let us repeat – his conflict with Zola is not just esthetic, but also physiological.

For variety's sake, therefore, it is worth looking at those texts, putting them in the context of Sienkiewicz's entire journalism and output of letters. These pieces demonstrate that Sienkiewicz's attack on French culture does not begin with Zola, but with the novels of Paul de Kock and the operettas of Offenbach. Both are examples for Sienkiewicz of the pernicious influence of French popular culture on two groups of receivers: youth of both sexes, and uneducated adults. In the feuilleton pieces printed in *Gazeta Polska* in 1875, he sets out the main types of readers of such literature.

> Who will read this?
> The younger generation. Junior high-school pupils in the first instance, and then the contraband will sneak its way into one or two girls' boarding schools – and there you have your ready readers. And this changes things. In the hands of such readers, Monsieur Paul [de Kock] is again a super-immoral and harmful writer. He is in his own time what today Offenbach is in music. If you look well, you will find there a certain morality, and satire, and a little poetry – but at first glance, you see, above all, tucked-up skirts. [Cho II 51]

A more dangerous competitor to the serious discourse of Positivism are Offenbach's operettas and their imitators. Presaging the pernicious effect of these productions, Sienkiewicz reveals the double-edged nature of skeptical discourse, which frees the world not just from superstition, ignorance, and idealistic cognitive longings, but – allied here to the joke – derides every ideal, even scholarly/scientific ones.

> Offenbachiades are a hundred times more harmful from the point of view of a general skepticism as regards life, with which all of them are filled. For the educated person, they are only a result of this skepticism, but for the simple man they are an ABC, from which one learns to read that all ideals, all powerful ideas (which constitute society's spiritual bread), are things that one can only laugh at, and that it is not good form to believe in them. The simple person learns from them that you must only eat, drink, use and make love to pretty girls, and that it is stupidity and ridiculous

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1979; I. Gorski, *O Sienkiewiczu i Wiesiełowskim*, Warszawa 1986, pp. 66–74; J. Kulczycka-Saloni, *Literatura polska lat 1876–1902 a inspiracja Emila Zoli*. *Studia*, Warszawa 1974.

421 Even in his invectives against Zola's writings Sienkiewicz's admiration for the French writer's talent comes through: "I am coming to the opinion that he is a really talented, but even more stupid, doctrinaire, full-square stupid, heavy, and unfeeling as a block of stone. This very massiveness of his stupidity impresses people. That he is shameless with it, that comes from the same thing" [Li II/2, 234].

> folly to respect what he respected till now, to believe in what he believed in till now, to desire what he desired till now, and to expect what he longed for till now. This teaching can be expressed differently: be the person that in the given circumstances it is most convenient to be; enjoy yourself and don't vex your head with anything more important.
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> This is dangerous teaching, pernicious, neutralizing the masses, and turning them into beasts. [Cho II 121]

So Positivism meets its mocking shadow – an anti-metaphysical skepticism in a "pop" version. Sienkiewicz had no doubt that this is an inheritance of the French Enlightenment, especially after the Revolution. In the late, unfinished novel *Legiony*, the old chamberlain – a Francophile – asserts cynically:

> We stopped believing and we were allowed to, but when the mob stops believing, nothing can stand. It is not our fault that we read the philosophers, but that we allowed them to be read. [L 26]

To the ranks of the evil spirits of French literature, Sienkiewicz adds Dumas *fils*,[422] mainly as the author of *La dame aux camélias* – which is odd when we recall how Sienkiewicz adored Helena Modrzejewska, above all, in the role of Marguerite Gautier.[423] Despite the clear moralizing about the depravation of mores shown in this type of literature, Sienkiewicz is not so much concerned about bringing up youth well, but rather fears that a real piece of literature or journalism must lose in a battle for the souls of immature readers. Polish society, in his view, cannot afford the "divine stupidity" of the operetta or the spicy boulevard farce. "War, sword, fire rages over the country, and in the novel, someone leads his friend's wife astray; the republic arises, there is a struggle of parties, the ark of the nation, beaten by storms, rocks, tilts, creaks, and the friend leads the wife astray" [*Z Paryża*, D XLIV 154] – Sienkiewicz writes from Paris in 1879.

Sienkiewicz does not only protect the Polish reader from the sweet poison of French mass culture and the venom of naturalism, but he also looks for allies there. He quickly recognizes the anti-Zola tendency of Edmond About's novel *Le roman*

422 "Most of all we warn against Dumas *fils*. I know of no works that could more readily ruin general taste more, especially where they meet with uneducated and simple minds, and it is easy to delude oneself trailing a gleaming robe of paradoxes, with seemingly noble exaltations and deeds, pseudo-self-sacrifice and pseudo-exculpation of the individual in the name of a deficient social order" [Cho I 173].

423 In his feuilleton pieces from the years 1879-1880, Modrzejewska takes up, along with the famine in Silesia, the greatest amount of space. This is one example: "After the performance of *The Lady of the Camelias* in America, when all the dailies were full of praises and raptures for Modrzejewska, cuttings with the reviews were sent by the American editors to Dumas, who wrote in turn a letter of thanks to Modrzejewska. Via Dumas this news probably reached Sara Bernhardt. Hence her desire to see her future rival in England and America" [Wb I 16].

d'un brave homme (The Novel of a Fine Man), but he cannot see an ally in him because of the novel's artistic weakness. The author "has written a moral book, even a very moral one – but . . . a boring one" [MLA 89]. The literary weakness, the reviewer claims, is confirmed in Zola's physiological dominance over About.

> When I recall About's face, plump, round, rosy, with dark eyes gleaming with mirth – the face of a solid *bourgeois* – and when I compare it to Zola's face, from which, as from his works, there glows some kind of force, brutal and cold, I cannot resist thinking that About will lose the war of the novels with Zola. [MLA 89]

However, his closest ally is Alfonse Daudet, of whom he writes that "he stands not only higher than the hobbledehoys of naturalism, but than the genuinely talented Zola. Zola sees, above all, the material, thick, and lurid side of nature – Daudet feels her soul" [MLA 202].[424] To use Daudet against Zola seems a piece of literary-critical quixotism. In this fight, Zola is a heavyweight, while Daudet is at best middleweight. But when we reflect longer about this confrontation, it becomes clear that Sienkiewicz chose his ally well.

This contemporary of Zola (both were born in 1840) had the experience of life among the poor and the petty bourgeoisie, powers of observation, and full notebooks (as becomes a naturalist), but at the same time, he was sensitive, poetic, and witty. His realistic, often pessimistic plots (*Jack*, 1876; *The Nabob*, 1877; *The Evangelist*, 1883) are marked by a powerful stylistic counterpoint, which relieves these tales of their hopeless negativity. Gustave Lanson wrote of Daudet's style that his prose is always clear, natural, and full of charm. It is, he wrote, the prose of a painter who is also a poet; a painter who can look and show, an ironic poet, and at the same time a very sensitive one. Daudet uses the most varied registers: from clownish exaggeration to flights of the most delicate fantasy; his writing is marked, too, by a charming freshness of feeling and a profound solidarity with those who suffer.[425]

Lanson's quietistic description corresponds well with Sienkiewicz's enthusiasm. His classic desire for balance recognizes in Daudet a member of the same writers' clan, writers who, like the English, "have developed for themselves a way of writing that is immeasurably objective, in the face of which the author with his postulates disappears completely, and the characters described in the novel

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424 Sienkiewicz's admiration for Daudet was the cause of comic clashes between the writer and his sister-in-law Jadwiga Janczewska, who mocked his taste. In particular, she reproached him for being enchanted by the novel *L'immortel*, which is a sharp satire on the *Académie Française*. "Dick apologizes that Daudet wrote *L'immortel*" [Paris, 25 October 1888, Li II/1, 595].

425 G. Lanson, P. Tuffrau, *Historia literatury francuskiej w zarysie* (1st ed. 1894), trans.. W. Bieńkowska, Warszawa 1971, p. 568. (The above passage is a paraphrase of the Polish translation – Translator's note.)

thrust themselves to the foreground with such typical and individual clarity that they nearly become real people" [MLA 178]. Admiration for Daudet, therefore, results from his conception of the language of fiction, of a method that "is so perfect that it cannot be seen, and indeed it seems to be a matter of the greatest simplicity, naturalness, and consistency" [MLA 201]. Sienkiewicz values in Daudet also a thematic equilibrium, which means that this prose highlights the sensual beauty of the world, but without showing the monstrous pathologies of a human being's animal nature. The reader draws pleasure from tasting the language, which does not assail one with horror, but regales one with delight. Wearied of Orzeszkowa's realism, Sienkiewicz attains a vigor when writing of Daudet, and his style throbs with a reflection of the joy in reading given him by the novel *Numa Roumestan: or, Joy Abroad and Grief at Home*.

> Everywhere there is movement, life, merriness, light, air, bright blue. [. . .] Everything there comes together in a unity, in some connection of sky, earth, sun, and people, in some genuinely southern soul. This connection, this feeling of wholeness, comes to each reader from the descriptions, the impression, however – that is the secret of the author's work. [MLA 202]

Sienkiewicz's favorite book by Daudet was the trilogy about Tartarin de Tarascon[426] – a nineteenth-century, Provençal city-dweller, whose posture and fondness for being idle and feasting closely recall Zagłoba.[427] Sienkiewicz somewhat hid his very high regard for Daudet's writing, but it gives an insight into the expectations that Sienkiewicz had of literature, as a reader and as a writer. When he asks the question what is the role of literature to be in individual and social life, Sienkiewicz answers: it has to make sure that we say "yes" to life; not from a sense of duty, or a feeling of guilt, or under the influence of illusion, but because art gives us an opportunity to see the individual, nature, and history as allied. His conception of art is clearly derived from the classics, and is meant as a counter-weight to a life permeated with the element of nature, a nature taken from humanity by Darwin. As he writes in *Listy z Rzymu* (Letters from Rome), the order of classical architecture attracts him and heals him, because in it "there is no particular thought [. . .] in literary terms, which could subjugate the others and start to speak out alone; there is only one general thought of divine order in relation to man and nature" [*Listy z Rzymu*, D XLIV 168-169]. Sienkiewicz never rejected the skeptical foundations of his intellectual biography, but he opposed them with child-like stubbornness, making of literature a weapon against the cold description of nature and history.

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426 *Aventures prodigieuses de Tartarin de Tarascon* (1873); *Tartarin sur les Alpes* (1886); and *Port-Tarascon* (1890).

427 See the chapter of this study entitled "Zagłoba's Laughter."

Brzozowski sensed this very clearly, when he wrote of the common features of the classics of Polish literature.

> Perhaps the most profound of these features is a strange trusting quality. It is an unassailable and fundamental belief in the good of the world and in hopefulness.[428]

It is characteristic that Czesław Miłosz writes almost the same, in one of his last interviews. "I would not mock good Polish honesty. Something very profound is hidden in it: a feeling that the world is fundamentally good, because God created it so. Russians, on the other hand, have always been fascinated by evil."[429] Yes, yes – Sienkiewicz would have nodded in agreement – "evil lies not in particular instances, but in what pours an awful pessimism and affliction into human souls, so that the beauty of life is lost to them, along with hope, energy, a desire for life, and, therefore, for all efforts in the direction of the good" [*Listy o Zoli*, D XLV 135-136]. This is Positivism reduced to a hybrid project of life and work, in which it would be possible to reconcile two positions that are close to the writer: intellectual liberalism and emotional conservatism. Sienkiewicz recalls with this one of his first protagonists – Iwaszkiewicz from *Humoreski*, a man of progress, but the stance of a modern cosmopolitan threatens his national identity, and at that point the heart speaks and "held on to the anchor of the past" ["Dwie drogi," D I 264].

No one represents as suggestively as the author of the *Trylogia* the hesitation, so characteristic for Polish culture, between a desire to pursue the civilization of the West, and the fear that modernity, too hastily grafted on to Poland, will lead us culturally astray and tempt us to abandon the rich inheritance of our ancestors. Sienkiewicz – a modern man, valuing comfort, technical culture, respect for the law – fears for the Poland of a belated modernity. He is also convinced that the source of the greatest threat and the greatest temptation for us is France, but not the real France, rather one internalized in the minds of his contemporary Poles, because of their lack of independence, their complexes, and their lack of faith in their own past and future greatness. In other words, Sienkiewicz fights against a France that is the fault of his contemporary Poles.[430]

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428 S. Brzozowski, "Henryk Sienkiewicz," in: *Dzieła*, ed. M. Sroki, *Współczesna po wieść i krytyka*, introduction by T. Burek, Kraków–Wrocław 1984, p. 85.

429 "Nie wolno mi brata mego zasmucać. Z Czesławem Miłoszem rozmawiają Katarzyna Janowska i Piotr Mucharski," *Tygodnik Powszechny* 2004, Nr 34, p. 13.

430 Sienkiewicz's distaste for France has also a wholly personal dimension, which appears in his correspondence with the translators Antoni Wodziński and Bronisław Kozakiewicz. Vexed by suggestions that he make cuts in the text of *Rodzina Połanieckich* to meet the needs of the French reader, he writes to Wodziński thus:

3. The muscles of thought

Sienkiewicz's turning away from France coincides with a change in the form of his novels. His criticism of naturalism had left him no way out, since he had rejected literary modernity in its French version, and clearly declared his departure from contemporary realism, which, beginning from Balzac and running through the work of Stendhal and Flaubert through to the fiction of Zola, marked out for the rest of the literary world the development of the novel. Thoroughly familiar with the French novel, Sienkiewicz did not value the universality of its esthetic achievements. He is aware of them, but he plays down the outstanding nature of these achievements, referring these to what he imagines are the needs and expectations of the Polish reader. With a manic stubbornness, he insists that a weak and exhausted Polish life is in no condition to digest this kind of fare; he fears that the radical quality of naturalistic representation will be seen as an accurate perception of the nature of reality.

In his feuilleton articles and pieces of reportage from the 1870s, Sienkiewicz traces the manifestations of the weakness of Polish social life. His obsession in the matter of biological vigor, or rather the lack of it among his contemporary Poles, constitutes a key to understanding his project for reform through literature. That is why, attempting to trace the genealogy of the idea of "invigorating hearts," our commentary must constantly leave the realm of literature, because Sienkiewicz's letters and journalism contain many useful traces, which lead to an understanding of the principal idea underlying his writing. Long before his return to history, figures of "vigor" proliferate in his work. For example, he battles with the prejudice that horse-riding is not for women, because it is harmful and indecorous. In order to show the nonsense of this superstition, he gives the example of his beloved England, where women "from almost their childhood race each other on

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I confess that I am irritated by the very thought that it may seem to some French publisher or editor that for me or any other Polish writer it is absolutely essential to our happiness that the French read us" [12 April 1898. Ko II 292].

Two years later his distaste has become even more marked.

The translation of every one of my novels makes such an impression on me as if an honest Polish girl of gentle stock made a public appearance before the Parisian crowds – and wanted to please them. And how far I am from caring for that, I cannot even tell you. It is for me vile. [to Antoni Wodziński, 6 August 1900, Ko 310-311]

To Kozakiewicz he confesses a general prejudice against the translation of his novels, although the cause was actually some critical reviews of *Quo vadis*.

Most sincerely let me say to you – that personally the sight of a book of mine translated into whatever language gives me no pleasure – and as far as Polish literature is concerned, it too does not have to cut its cloth to foreign tastes – or to seek ways by which it may please. It is the kind of lady to whom that is all one. [26 September 1900, Li III/1, 193]

huge hunters around Hyde Park, and then, once married, bring more and, indeed, healthier children into the world than our anemic women" [Wb I 213]. Lauded in the *Trylogia*, the art of Polish riding appears already in his feuilleton piece about a horse show, in which the best rider turned out to be Stanisław Niemojewski, who rode "exquisitely, not in an English or any foreign manner, but in gentry style, with an imagination and prowess that recalled long-gone times. The power of such riding and its knightly qualities place it above all other methods, and proves that once, when it was in addition generally recognized, we had it best of all" [Wb I 222].[431]

The fertility of women and the vital strength of men belong to the same symbolic sphere that is supposed to express a metaphysics of biological vigor – a neglected foundation of national survival during the period of enslavement. In this project, the mixture of orders is striking: the symbolic with the real. The centuries-long superiority of the Polish school of riding encounters a trivial obstacle in the shape of the collapse of breeding, which the reporter observes at the horse show. He is pained, but not surprised, that the prizes are won by foreign-bred horses; he even hopes that by importing these splendid exhibits "the breed of our little peasant horses will begin to disappear more quickly, those so-called runts, weak, wretched, and of little use" [Wb I 222]. The discourse of economic patriotism only partly motivates the writer's concerns. Observing an agricultural and industrial exhibition in Kalisz, he is ashamed when he sees the German exhibits, which are "testimonies of intelligence, wealth, and labor," and which overwhelm Polish products – "miserable, poor, feeble, also real testimonies of poverty and of a stagnation that calculates only from one day to the next" [Cho II 16-17]. Contrary to appearances, he does not see in this manifestations of a dangerous colonializing expansion on the part of Prussia, but of something more primordial than state and politics. After all, he explains in one of his pieces of correspondence from America, "that struggle for existence, that diligence in maintaining life, that strange energy has nothing individual in it: [. . .] it is a symptom of some general principle, conscious or unconscious of itself, but constituting the essence of universal life" [LPA 170]. One can thus fear defeat in the cosmic process of evolution, which also embraces nations – the ethnic variants of the human species. The "Darwinian sting" is, for Sienkiewicz's generation, beyond cure. In this discourse, biological vitality translates into direct economic advantage. Human, or, in other words, artificial, it feeds on and uses what is natural. The theory of evolution, which tore apart the positive oneness of nature and the human, makes us even more sensitive to that link, now a very intense one. Sienkiewicz's private views are identical in this respect. This is shown by a passage in a letter to Karol Potkański, whom

431 "Apart from riding, haven't you anything that's good in us?" [P II 168].

Sienkiewicz admonishes, asserting that "health is the greatest share capital in relation to the future, and an economic value of the first importance" [11 October 1899, Li III/3, 149].

Other than in nature, however, human spiritual and physical vigor is not natural in modern society, but it is artificial, demanding care, exercise, and shaping. The condition of the modern human being is inclined to weakness and atrophy. Activity, productivity, social engagement are something forced, more rarely a natural inclination of the individual. When, in December 1880, he informs Stanisław Witkiewicz of his plans for a new novel, he writes that its protagonist will be "a type of modern man," "a new Hamlet."[432] Ultimately, *Bez dogmatu* was only published in 1891, but it is very important that the plan for the novel was formulated before the writing of the *Trylogia*, which was to be an antidote to the "skepticism and pessimism of life," because – in the writer's opinion – the increasingly widespread nature of these attitudes means that "the more reflection dominates over impetuosity, the more understandable Hamlet becomes, and the more psychological threads of testimony connect this introspective and pained figure with modern persons" [MLA 164]. Goethe's classic interpretation in *Wilhelm Meister's Apprenticeship*, is repeated by Spasowicz and Sienkiewicz. That is where the assertion comes from that *Hamlet* demonstrates "the effects of a great action laid upon a soul unfit for the performance of it."[433] A contemporary type of Hamlet, so defined, was Sienkiewicz's friend Karol Potkański, to whom we have already referred. Of him, Sienkiewicz wrote to Janczewska:

> Yesterday I told him that his pessimism comes from the fact that he does not have any concrete duties or any concrete life. Therefore, although not an egoist, he must, nonetheless, contemplate himself. – He's a very good lad, but his thinking is all nerves, and no muscles. [Li II/2, 298]

In his diagnosis of Potkański's mentality, Sienkiewicz uses the surprising metaphor of "the muscles of thought," or to put it differently "brain vigor." His disapproval of his friend's feebleness questions the division into body and spirit, and even more a state in which reflection sets itself against life, and does not support the body in its struggle with being. Feebleness of thought, a lack of intellectual muscle power, results in an atrophy of the will to live, and that means there is no point in undertaking any kind of thought or art. This is a conviction that does not change over the whole life of the author. Discussing Spasowicz's above-mentioned lecture

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432 *Listy Sienkiewicza do Stanisława Witkiewicza z lat 1880–1882*,op. cit., p. 58. Sienkiewicz had the idea for this novel now, and not in 1889 (see: T. Bujnicki, *Wstęp*, *Bez dogmatu*, "Biblioteka Narodowa" edition, Nr 301, series I, Wrocław 2002, p. XI). In fact, Spasowicz's lectures on *Hamlet*, discussed in *Niwa*, vol XIX (1881), must be seen as one of the main inspirations for writing *Bez dogmatu*.

433 J.W. von Goethe, *Wilhelm Meister's Apprenticeship* IV.13, trans. Thomas Carlyle (1824).

on *Hamlet*, Sienkiewicz writes that "reflection stemming from developed thought overwhelms in him the deed that stems from temperament. Nerves overwhelm muscles" [Wb II 1 19]. Years later he repeats the same arguments in a letter to his friend, explaining to him that if thought turns against life, one must seek the source of defense in the body: "The person that doesn't defend himself, surrenders, and the person who shoots himself in the head, crosses a border. But defense requires strength, and strength lies in health – so the first thing is a battle for health" (to Karol Potkański, 10 November 1897 [Li III/3, 100].

Looking about for an antidote, Sienkiewicz starts to turn away from modern figures toward the past, toward figures "so great, so solid" that they are almost impossible for contemporaries – "stunted and not living such a life, or not one similar to that of the past" [MLA 209] – to comprehend. Sienkiewicz chooses a past that is discontinuous with and without analogy to the present. Positivist realism, with its scrupulous and often wearisome reporting, had prepared a splendid basis for the *Trylogia*, a negative point of reference, which shaped the enthusiastic reception of the novels in it. Before these came into being, Sienkiewicz wrote a passage about Matejko's painting, which constitutes more a program for his writing than a discussion of the painting *Śmierć Leszka* (Leszek's Death), especially since he compares it to Orzeszkowa's novellas, "from which speaks a diminutive, hideous present" [MLA 213].

> It is simply an illustrated page from an old chronicle, making such a powerful impression, almost a barbaric one, that it almost crushes modern nerves. That is why in today's French world, exhausted physically and spiritually, Matejko does not please. He is simply too huge for their elegance and feminine sensitivity, just as Michaelangelo would be too huge. [Wb I 176-177]

The powerful effect of this kind of representation of the past is intended to be a shock for modern nerves, especially Parisian ones, "exhausted physically and spiritually," but not, of course, for the "manly English," who liked the *Bitwa pod Grunwaldem* (The Battle of Grunwald) [Wb I 233]. As one can see, at the beginning the project of invigorating weary minds by pictures from history seems simple and unambiguous. It is to recall an irredeemably lost greatness, and to provoke shame at one's own smallness and a desire to reprise the past. Above all, however, it is supposed to deliver a jarring shock to a society "in which all has shrunk, energy and work are empty words, men are ailing from nerves and anemia" [LPA 218]. However, by degrees, alongside this affirmation of a monumental conception of history, there appears a note that is intimate, lyric, and conciliatory. The literary value of the documented past lies, most importantly, in the fact that is was, and, thus, is accessible as complete and lasting. Trying to persuade Witkiewicz to make a journey, Sienkiewicz suggests that in Rome he should surrender himself to "the

ancient world, for it has this advantage, that, dead, it is unchanging, it will never let you down."[434]

Sienkiewicz's discovery is remarkable in its simplicity: since the life of his generation has been robbed of political and ethnic sovereignty, literature may accomplish a symbolic substitution, and put in its place, for the mind of the contemporary Pole, a mind made jaded by memory and current experience, an image of its own better past, lost, and yet never to be lost, and which thanks to this double nature "will shine for all times with the glow of Milton's lost paradise, both for the whole of society, and for the poets" [MLA 189]. Since life's reality in an enslaved world constantly makes one conscious of a lack of basic freedoms, and alienates one from the state and from an alien culture imposed by force, then – Sienkiewicz claims – "it is a fact that only this past is left us; it is the one thing that is only and completely ours" [MLA 195]. So that this consciousness might give spiritual strength, something more is needed, namely a tale of history so construed that it may compete with knowledge, and so that its representation so gives the illusion of the real and is so suggestive, that the feeling arises in the reader that he/she is experiencing this other history, that it is really his/her own, because he/she experiences it as such.

We can see at least one exerpt from *Ogniem i mieczem* as a model example of this kind of invigorating experience. Skrzetuski is wounded and weakened, and a captive of the Cossacks. Before him, he has the spectacle of the Battle of Żółta Woda. He is proud when he sees the first victorious encounter, which invigorates his vanished powers, because "his hussars had shown what they were capable of, and his Commonwealth had resisted in a manner worthy of its grandeur" [OM I 196]. The narrator is even slightly ironic when he says that the sick and weak Skrzetuski feels "as if all that power was in him now" [OM I 196]. Despite irony, there is, in fact, some symbolic transfusion of strength, which Czarniecki, too, in *Potop* experiences bodily when he sees his soldiers, for " a terrible power came from them, and the castellan felt this power in him" [P III 120]. The same is true of Kmicic, when he feels what an "unconquerable power " resides in the monastery in Częstochowa. "In him, there arose something like a new life and it began to course through his veins with his blood" [P II 170]. As the narrator points out, the protection of "the Lady of Częstochowa" means that Kmicic feels "how a great hope entered his soul, so that an extraordinary power came over his members, such a power before which all things must fall to dust" [P III 343].

The regaining of lost power is not connected directly with military victory. It is not exclusively a force necessary for struggle, but more for survival. Immediately after the moment of exultation, Skrzetuski witnesses the defeat of "his hussars,"

434 *Listy Sienkiewicza do Stanisława Witkiewicza z lat 1880–1882*,op. cit., p. 57.

and next he attends young Potocki, dying in Czerniecki's hands. Through this the reader sees history and its witness, alternately triumphing and humiliated. But the impatient narrator does not allow the reader to share for too long the characters' despair, and rushes to reassure us that Czarniecki, who has pledged to avenge Potocki, "fulfilled his oath. Now instead of giving himself over to desperation, he was the first to impart vigor to Skrzetuski" [OM I 199].

The narrator's promise that bad history will end, does not apply exclusively to characters, but even more to the reader, who must not lose hope seeing the ups and downs of a character's fate. It even seems that the author is playing with Skrzetuski, tormenting him with history's caprices. The Battle of Kruta Białka is supposed to be a certain victory, and so "the one-time prisoner [Skrzetuski] healed after his time in the Cossack camp" once more feels "proud as a gentleman-patriot, that he was refresh'd in doubt, and in faith not deceiv'd" [OM I 206]. But all this is premature. This is signaled already in the style of the narration, which plays with the inflected forms of the verbs taken from this *credo*: "crucifi'd," "enterr'd" (see "refresh'd" and "deceiv'd" above). Triumph is only a seeming one, and after a while Skrzetuski sees the victorious Cossack units, and this picture puts him in a faint, which the author compares to death: "his eyes sunk, and his face hardened and congealed as it does with dead people" [OM I 208]. This pattern is repeated a third time, when Skrzetuski is confronted with news of Helena's death (Rozłogi, Bar, Kiev). These triumphs and humiliations reflect the mad rhythm of Polish history, in the face of which one can only steel oneself spiritually and biologically, in order to survive. A temporary defeat with concrete military forces does not alter this, because victory and defeat are only the different signals of the one rhythm of history, a rhythm that we ourselves cannot tame.

What reflection on history lies behind this disturbing allegory? Is it a stunted messianism, cut to measure for the modern reader? Is it based on a link between the laws of history and the rhythms of nature? This second possibility would be indicated by Skrzetuski's ponderings on the sudden end of the Cossack uprising.

> A storm cannot last long, and so there comes, too – the advent of good weather. – That thought invigorated Pan Skrzetuski, and one could say it kept him on his feet, for, indeed, there weighed on him a burden so heavy, greater than he had ever borne in his life before. [. . .] So, because of this storm, he had all but lost his life, exhausted his strength, and fallen into bitter captivity, just when freedom was almost as dear to him as life itself. [OM I 188]

Political or military defeat would, thus, be a result of the natural, although unforeseeable, caprice of history. This is an example of Aesopian language, of which there are many in the *Trylogia*. Here, however, we have a direct aside to the reader, who shares with the author the experience of national enslavement. In *Potop*, Sienkiewicz goes a step further, and strengthens the biological parameter

of survival in history. The author places an optimistic vision of the future in Zagłoba's mouth. He insists that a happy conclusion of the war for the Poles is simply a necessity.

> – Listen, because you won't hear this from hardly anyone's lips, because not everyone can look at things generally. [. . .] And I'll say this to you: Do you know what awaits those vandals? – destruction! Do you know what awaits us? – victory! So they beat us another hundred times . . . that's fine . . . but we'll beat them the hundred-and-first, and that will be how it ends. [P III 322-323]

It is dangerous to identify a drunken prophecy made by a comic character with the author's views, but yet this optimistic diagnosis returns in *Legiony*, and that twice. In addition, it is uttered by serious figures, representing knowledge and experience. First, Kajetan, giving himself over to his studies, comes to the conviction "that the partition of the country, further, is contrary to all the laws of God and man, and cannot be changed into a lasting state of affairs. There will come wars, accidents, an awakening of conscience, and great movements of the peoples, which will sweep away like a hurricane the crimes and back-door deals of governments" [L 29]. Next Captain Bogusławski repeats this, explaining to Cywiński and Marek, that even death is a constructive force of history, if it is part of a strategy of survival.

> So if the two of you die, if I die, if hundreds of us die, or thousands, others will come to take our place, and Polish power will stand, and the legion will survive us. In the world they say: you have no Poland any longer! but Poland is here. [L 123][435]

When defining a similar message for his contemporaries, Sienkiewicz put a brake on the allegorical impetus of his own story, in which those contemporaries might discover a summons to another uprising. Indeed, in the *Trylogia*, a general spirit of militarism rears its head, and yet the novels were blamed rather for putting their reader into a slumber, than for awakening in him/her a willingness to take up the inheritance of heroic forebears.

Sienkiewicz did something quite unusual by blocking, or channeling in a safe manner, the message of his war novels. The history related in them is no longer a model for the contemporary world, and cannot be imitated; in its sublimity, it is archaic – something indicated in the domination of the heroic narrative by irony. Modern life, more and more trivial and urban, awakens at the history told in the novels, dreams according to Sienkiewicz's screenplay, but it sees its future more

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435 We come across an identical reflection in *Popioły*. According to the old veteran Ojrzyński, Polish soldiers sent to the Antilles, mitigate the absurdity of their fate by telling themselves: "If a thousand of us die, or two, or three – we will still endure! A tenth thousand, and still no, a twentieth thousand will come in its turn to take its place" (B. Żeromski, *Popioły*, op. cit., vol. II, p. 86).

through the growing tempo of changes than in a fantasy of reprising the past. The author, along with his generation, deprived of any dreams of the military success of any new uprising, writes literature, the invigorating role of which results from the writer's conviction that, since others make our history for us, we have to survive in it.[436]

4. Why modern life needs the *Trylogia*

> Happy is your grace,
> That can translate the stubbornness of fortune
> Into so quiet and so sweet a style.
>
> (William Shakespeare, *As You Like It*, Act II, Scene 1)

If someone reads, he will always either learn something, or forget about what troubles him, or he'll fall asleep – in any case, he wins. (MLA 5)

Literally, "invigorate" means to strengthen, to give nourishment to what is sick or weak: body and mind. It is really not easy to understand how the historical consciousness of Sienkiewicz's generation, shaped by the events of the previous one hundred years, could be replaced by a competing vision of history, which might become a source of spiritual strength and optimism for the future. For any future reader of the *Trylogia*, history must have appeared for a century as a dark force, unjustly ruining state and nation.

The choice of the historical novel as a royal genre pushed Sienkiewicz not only to come close to the historical experience of his own generation, but it also compelled him to confront two mighty contradictions: Romantic historicism and the Positivists' negative attitude to historical writing. Both discourses on history produced a feeling of guilt, forcing contemporaries to take responsibility for Polish historical catastrophe.[437] In accordance with the idea of the transference of guilt

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436 The perceptive Brzozowski supplemented the genealogy of this position, but he pretended he did not see its different justification in a post-partition Poland: "From the sixteenth century, we have been gaping spectators in Europe, observing from our paralysis the great drama of the world. [. . .] Sienkiewicz codified, and gave esthetic shape to this position of ours" (S. Brzozowski, "Sienkiewicz – pocieszyciel burżuazji," in: *Trylogia Henryka Sienkiewicza*, op. cit., p. 271).

437 In this regard, the exchange between Muszalski and Zagłoba is characteristic. In it, the latter emphasizes the link between memory and a feeling of guilt.
– It would be many times better for man if he possessed no memory – observed Pan Muszalski – but even the *animalia* are not free of it.

from father to son, that guilt never vanishes, but builds up in future generations, which is shown, certainly at least, by Wyspiański's and Żeromski's work.

Despite declared differences, the Positivist attitude to history is a result, in significant measure, of the inheritance left by Romantic historiography, both native Polish, and that written by the historians of the partitioning states. The former had a tendency to glorify the Polish national character and to cast the defeats of the Polish state in a heroic light. "In this way," observes Andrzej Wierzbicki, "characterology became one of the most far-reaching tools used to synthesize national history. This could not do without metaphysical elements, without 'leading ideas' and 'national spirit,' seen as kinds of genetic matrices, defining the 'earthly' attributes of individual nations."[438] Skeptics, doubting in the Polish and Slavic historical mission, not to speak of immediate critics, exposed themselves to the charge that they represented the same "historical characterology" that was inverted and exploited by "the official history writing of the partitioning states, attempting to clear their regimes of the odium of partition, and to show that Poland fell 'of and through herself.' A stupid people and a ridiculous system were meant to prove that the partitioning powers were only the executors of 'the judgment of history,' and indeed that this judgment executed itself."[439] In this way, Positivism's economic and social patriots, pointing to the faults of gentry/noble society in centuries past, set a double trap for themselves: they placed themselves on the side of history writing that was hostile to Poland, and they lost a clear interpretation of Polish history, when they abandoned Romantic literary historical philosophy, with messianism at the forefront.

A bitter rational approach to Polish history was absolutely no protection against metaphysical horror. When they changed the direction of their reflections to the future, the Positivists attempted to cut themselves off from the past as from some ballast that hampered social development. The fault of Polish history was the immaturity of noble/gentry society. Thus, if it was to get back on track toward development, it was necessary to overcome this immaturity. As one might think, the inspiration for this reflection is Kant's famous dictum that "Enlightenment is man's emergence from his self-imposed immaturity." Unfortunately, the Positivists very quickly realized that there is no direct link between the progressive enlightenment

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But the old man rebuked the famous archer for this comment.

– If the honorable gentleman did not possess memory, then he could not go to confession – he said – and then you would be the equal of the Lutherans and worthy of the fires of hell. [PW 516]

438 A. Wierzbicki, *Historiografia polska doby romantyzmu*, Wrocław 1999, p. 479.

439 Ibid. In *Potop*, Wrzeszczowicz gives utterance to this diagnosis, explaining to the Austrian delegate why the Poles deserve to lose their sovereignty: "First of all, because they themselves want to; second, because they deserve to" [P II 165].

of the individual and the political progress of societies. Helmuth Plessner, writing of the adaptation of Kant's definition to his thinking about history,[440] laconically notes that in the Kantian project of history the concern is with the happy ending, not with any anthropological grounding.[441]

Romantic historicism created in the general consciousness of the nineteenth-century intelligentsia a syndrome of "no exit." This besets Romantic epigones, gentry traditionalists, and – which is very strange – young Positivists. In Sienkiewicz's work, the trace of this is his "Latarnik" (The Lamplighter), the protagonist of which "became something of a maniac. He believed that some mighty and vengeful power was pursuing him everywhere, everywhere on land and sea" ["Latarnik," D III 8].

According to Jerzy Jedlicki, helplessness in the face of one's own past was completely understandable.

> The generation that followed the January Uprising had, nonetheless, a choice of three different canons of national tradition, which claimed to fulfill this protective role. The first, and one may say the classic one, was [. . .] the canon of unmovable gentry tradition. The second was created by the *stańczycy* [jesters], who revalued the historical inheritance according their criteria of political rationality. The third was Romantic. There were no others.[442]

The popularity of historicism does not end with Romanticism, but percolates into the general consciousness of educated Poles in the second half of the nineteenth century. This is attested not only by the popularity of historical fiction, but also that of painting and various forms of communal life (festivals, funeral-demonstrations, "tableaux," etc.). Hence those strange hybrid ideas of the Polish Positivists, in which demands to turn to the analysis of current reality and visions of the future mingle with a cult of the past and the promulgation of Romantic poetry. The problem of the preliminary modernization of social consciousness, which the Positivists could not handle, did not lie in this or that interpretation of history, but in how to tear Poles away from the cult of tradition. Even the radical Świętochowski could not bring himself to make the gesture of rejecting the past, a past that blocked the chances of Polish society's linking with the intellectual and

440 I. Kant, "An Answer to the Question: What Is Enlightenment?" (1784). For the Polish Kantian – which Brzozowski is in a certain sense – it was a fundamental problem: how to get out off this catastrophic immaturity. Hence, if we recall his well-known charges relating to Sienkiewicz's work, it is easy for us to see their philosophical pedigree.

441 H. Plessner, "Aspołeczna towarzyskość. Uwagi do pewnego pojęcia u Kanta," trans. Z. Krasnodębski, in: *Pytanie o conditio humana*, Warszawa 1988, p. 287.

442 J. Jedlicki, Jakiej cywilizacji Polacy potrzebują. Studia z dziejów idei i wyobraźni XIX wieku, op. cit., pp. 315–316.

civilizational achievements of the West. In his article "Tradycja i historja wobec postępu" (Tradition and History in Relation to Progress), he writes:

> Could we reject everything that the past has done up to now, and begin to do it anew? Never. History is a path down which a thousand generations have passed; each new one, on its arrival, ought to get to know the whole course of the path and stand on the spot where the last people stopped, and go on to point out the highroad of science and life.[443]

It is difficult to be surprised at Świętochowski here. An unambiguous rejection even if only of a pre-Enlightenment tradition would be the equivalent of agreeing to ascribe to him the position of a traitor to the heroic Polish inheritance, which in those times was a synonym for support of the Germanization or Russification of society. This complex of betrayal of the Polish patriotic tradition devours the whole of Positivism, and is responsible for the ideological split in modern social and philosophical thinking of the time.

In my opinion, we locate Sienkiewicz somewhat too unambiguously within the scope of these problems, when we allocate him (as the first polemicists with the *Trylogia* wished to do) the most conservative and obscurantist of positions. That is, the position of a writer who fans, on an unparalleled scale, a delight in the gentry/noble Poland of the seventeenth century. It is true that Sienkiewicz quickly started to doubt the effectiveness of positivist, neo-Enlightenment therapy, which consisted in a maximum rationalization of social discourse. And when the Positivists blackmail society with a still living memory of the historical catastrophes of the nineteenth century, he not only does not join the choir, but ostentatiously rejects the question.[444]

Sienkiewicz must have clearly realized the dilemmas of writing about Polish history in the 1880s. In this he made an unusual and provocative move when he chose seventeenth-century Poland as the subject of his writing, and Słowacki as his Romantic patron, who most fully represents the Romantic critical attitude towards the noble/gentry tradition. With some prescience, Sienkiewicz, as it were, in advance undermined the expected cult of this controversial past. He himself, as a "modern optimist," had an ambivalent attitude toward sarmatism and he was no apologist for it. When we read the writer's letters, there emerges from them a man

443 A. Świętochowski, "Tradycja i historja wobec postępu," *Przegląd Tygodniowy* 1872, p. 147, quoted in J. Jedlicki, *Jakiej cywilizacji Polacy potrzebują*, op. cit., p. 319.

444 "My battle is one of honor. The Scytows and Wiślickis have gone too far in denigrating the past, so I have dressed myself in moderation, and answered: Since God has denied honor to the unborn etc. There is something that is dead in the antics of these monkeys, and there is no help for it. It is just mean mindedness to take a lease on progress" [to S. Witkiewicz, Warsaw, after 20 December 1880; in: *Listy Sienkiewicza do Stanisława Witkiewicza z lat 1880–1882*, *dz. cyt.*, s. 54].

of the world, valuing the comforts of civilization, law, technical culture, hygiene, health. He would have acknowledged the appropriateness of Ślaz's words from *Lilia Weneda*.

> Am I a Lechita? What of it? Does from my eyes
> Stare boorishness, drunkenness, gluttony,
> Seven deadly sins, a taste for screaming,
> For sour pickles, for coats of arms?

The culture of everyday life in the nineteenth century offered increasing comfort, which even the lovers of ancient times appreciated. Walter Scott, the greatest nineteenth-century laudator of the past, himself valued the advantages of contemporary life. His Abbotsford was the first building in Scotland to have gas lighting.[445] Despite a fondness for comfort, Sienkiewicz is, at the same time, no worshiper of modernity, with its economic and, especially, political, accelerated velocity. This hesitation in his world view between an emotional conservatism and an intellectual liberalism allows one to see in all his writing – both the historical and the contemporary texts – one common diagnostic-therapeutic project. It is meant to offer to the reader ways whereby one may secure oneself in advance in the modern world, how one may put a brake on the threatening impetus of the effects of progress, how one may establish something to stabilize the knowledge that is devastating faith; and all this in order to supply the average, non-philosophizing individual with the rudiments of good sense – of history, and, above all, of individual life and death.[446]

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445 D. Lowenthal, *The Past Is a Foreign Country*, Cambridge 1985, p. 99.

446 Subtleties were of no avail, and he became – knowing no rest – the perpetrator and most visible representative of an infantile and archaic bent within Polish culture. This is freshly shown in the debate about contemporary neo-sarmatism, published in Nr 87 (2008) of *Przegląd Polityczny*. Here even such an insightful text as Przemysław Czapliński's "Konstruowanie tradycji" (The Constructing of Tradition) does not undertake any serious reflection on Sienkiewicz's project and its reception in modern Poland. Otherwise telling comments on the strange functioning of the *Trylogia* in the PRL (People's Republic of Poland) (p. 68) show the effectiveness of Sienkiewicz's idea to tear, with the help of past history, his contemporaries away from recent history. The stereotype of Sienkiewicz as an obscurantist mythographer is even more forcefully confirmed by Daniel Beauvois's intemperate text, which makes Sienkiewicz into the symbol of a country with a mendacious history. The problem with this is that Sienkiewicz perfectly understood the pretence of general gentry freedom, which Beauvois exposes in his article. A careful reading of the *Trylogia* clearly shows how great is the dependence of the novel's characters on the magnates. One of the final examples is Sobieski's indignation when he questions Michał: "– Have you heard of the candidates? What do they say among the gentry?" [PW 79].
And if this is not enough, let us quote an excerpt from a feuilleton piece devoted to Syrokomla, in which Sienkiewicz clearly expresses his view on the actual practice of that

However, first he had to exorcise he ghosts of native philosophy of history. His greatest achievement as a writer in this field is to turn around or to blunt the blade of Romantic historicism. This showed the past as a debt, into which history has plunged the present. In Romantic images, the heroic past (the Greeks, medieval chivalry, rebels from the Uprisings), like a specter, haunts its unheroic grandchildren, evoking a feeling of guilt, which – impossible to efface through action – is transformed into a blind cult of tradition, an atrophy of the will, the complexes of loyalism etc. This enduring problem in Polish literature belongs to Polish writers of subsequent generations – from Wyspiański and Żeromski through to, for example, Konwicki. The problem that Sienkiewicz faced consisted in the question of how to construct an image of the past that could strengthen the contemporary life of a reader from the end of the nineteenth century, an image that was not at the same time a rejection of that past.

In Sienkiewicz's novels history does not serve to maintain the memory of the recent past. This is, after all, still alive; it is not necessary to recall it, and even more, it is necessary to forget it, or at least to put it aside. Along with the nineteenth century, history comes into the home, marking with its brand the private life of almost every Pole. To this history-specter Sienkiewicz opposes his own images. History in the *Tylogia*, its aggressive beauty, is meant to be the rival of a history that is "still warm," to push it away, if only for the moment of reading, from consciousness.

So that the past might invigorate, it was necessary to tear it away from memory, and to transfer it into the sphere of history based on myth. It was necessary to forget it, as Nietzsche urged in his classic essay "On the Advantage and Disadvantage of History for Life," [447] which is a radical critique of Romantic historicism. Above all, Nietzsche questions in it the assertion, at that time unquestionable, that a historical consciousness was the foundation of the civic education of a European. Nietzsche does not, however, suggest that historical ignorance is a condition of happiness; he only notes that a consciousness of history is not a matter of our choice. The human being is, in any case, condemned to the experience of the historical nature of him/herself or of the world, in which it has fallen to his/her lot to live. The past, inculcated in the young person by general education as history, crushes and

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freedom. "He was a gentleman of the lower rank, from the yeomanry – and thus in his very traditions, which he took from home and family, there lay the ideas of equality and of a certain gentry democracy, which, though little applied in practice, existed nonetheless in theory, in ideas, and this was crystallized in the saying about the gentleman on the farm. <u>There is no question that the saying never had any real existence</u> [my underlining – R.K.], but nevertheless it points to a shining ideal for the old gentry" [MLA 188].

447 F. Nietzsche, *O pożytkach i szkodliwości historii dla życia*, in: *Niewczesne rozważania*, trans. M. Łukasiewicz, afterword by Michalski, Kraków 1996.

frustrates him. "And so it moves him," writes Nietzsche, "as if he imagined a lost paradise, to see the grazing herd or, something more closely familiar, the child, which does not yet have a past to deny and plays in blissful blindness between the fences of the past and future. Nonetheless, this game must be upset for the child. It will be summoned all too soon out of its forgetfulness. For it learns to understand the expression "It was," that password with which struggle, suffering, and weariness come over human beings, so as to remind him what his existence basically is—a past tense that is never over and done with."[448] Krzysztof Michalski comments on these words as follows:

> That non-memory necessary for life, that non-memory without which memory would not be possible, that return to the lost paradise of a childhood game.[449]

Later he sums up:

> The happiness of the child or the cow, and the suffering of the adult, the childhood game and the struggles of the adults' days, the blessing of forgetting and the specter, weight, and chain of memory – these are two sides of the same thing, two dimensions of the *conditio humana*.[450]

The primacy of remembering – an educational paradigm that is still current today – casts us, however, into a state of torment in the face of the weight of the past, for which and in relation to which we are responsible.

However, like the consciousness of historicity, forgetting is also not the domain of our free will. It arises as an effect of our current activity, which in a natural manner speaks on behalf of the present. This positive "non-memory" arises in the consciousness of the subject engaged in the current actuality of his/her own life. Sienkiewicz, who was never drawn to Kraszewski's antiquarianism, and who reproached Orzeszkowa with having too many detailed passages of description,[451] intuitively felt the danger of an excessive burdening with the past. Literature about history, such as the *Trylogia*, offers a game of memory and knowledge. It pretends to study the past, but that past is so constructed to offer the reader a chance to leap "beyond history." The masterly fabularization of sources leads one to forget change that destroys all, that "time is in the service of death, not life," as Antea says in the novella "Pójdźmy za Nim" (Let Us Go with Him) [D V 104]. So that the image

448 Ibid., p. 87. This translation from "On the Use and Abuse of History for Life" is by Ian Johnston (2010) and can be found on www.records.viu.ca

449 K. Michalski, Afterword to: F. Nietzsche, *O pożytkach i szkodliwości historii dla życia*, op. cit., p. 339.

450 Ibid., p. 335.

451 He called it "an upholsterer's skill": "In reality, no one furnishes rooms that way, no one dresses her female characters in such splendor, and no one combs their hair, as Pani Orzeszkowa does" ["Pan Graba. Powieść p. Elizy Orzeszkowej," D XLV 179].

of history does not cause pain, a double disavowal is necessary: of the negative effect of the past on the present, and a forgetting that death is the condition of the emergence of history. To meet this demand, the historical novel's narrative makes theater of the corpse of the past, making it alien, but unthreatening; active but not in our world; ours, but for which we are not responsible. Such contact with the past cause an "infantilization" of the reader, which contact, so understood, is not, however, ignorance or lack of thought, but a momentary forgetting of the yoke of historical determinism; a forgetting that whether we wish it or not, we always have some sort of past.

In his private quarrel with Romantic historicism, Sienkiewicz "uses" the *Trylogia* as a weapon in the face of the trauma of Polish history of the previous one hundred years. Transporting the reader back to the seventeenth century, he brackets that trauma. Invigoration via literature is undertaken here vis-à-vis the pressure of a past that is still fresh, which the author wishes to deny a role in the genealogy of the future, as yet unknown, history of Poland, because that fresh nineteenth-century history offers no ammunition for the future. Poland's future independence has another prolog, based on a restoration of an interrupted chronological link with the nation's grand history. In this way, the prehistory of the first readers of the *Trylogia* became a distant epoch, and not that immediately adjacent to the contemporary times of the author and the readers of his work. The transference of the genealogy of the future to the seventeenth century freed contemporary readers of Sienkiewicz's fiction from the irreversible determinism of current history, and also from responsibility for it. On another level, before the reader's eyes, there took place a liberation of his/her seventeenth-century forebears from a responsibility for their accomplished future – the catastrophe of the loss of the state.

Reading historical fiction, reading the *Trylogia* quite simply, offers, thus, the illusion of an exchange of historical experience – in place of an accomplished defeat, the reader is dealing with images of a defeat overcome, which is also his/her "property," as was responsibility for the catastrophe that destroyed the Polish state. Differently from Wyspiański in *Wesele* (The Wedding), Sienkiewicz wants and is able to recover the affirmative and motivating force of Polish history as a source of vigor for the consciousness, exhausted by his/her own history, of the late nineteenth-century Pole. Sienkiewicz offers his readers an image of their awoken drives, and uses literature to administer an entrancing stimulant and to set in motion imaginations stunted by a life in enslavement. The receiver who is subjected to an narrative that creates powerful illusions discovers in him/herself heir of the triumph or constructive sacrifice of characters who defend their fatherland, free citizens of a sovereign state. The *Trylogia* proposed a change in the collective memory of Poles living in the second half of the nineteenth century, offering

that memory another, more distant, and above all happier element. Thus, history invigorates as a promise of the return of a positive state of affairs. If the past is active and recoverable, as the Romantics held it to be, then better that it is renewed in sarmatian form, sure of itself, and politically sovereign. The presentation of history in the *Trylogia* partly echoes what Nietzsche calls "monumental" history, which gives its follower the feeling that "the greatness which was once there at all events once was *possible* and therefore really will be possible once again."[452] In Sienkiewicz's work, however, this optimism is not based on any credible premises, but rather on the strangely dwarfish idea of "the eternal return."

> An even brighter light may be thrown by a reckoning with the past which is concerned with the whole of society. What is, in general terms, the history of humankind and of its particular branches? A history of falls and renewals. It would be too much to say how much encouragement may flow from prudence on these heaving waves of life. You can add a narcotic to any drink, but it does not follow from that that there are no invigorating drinks. ["O powieści historycznej" 122-123]

Does this mean that this project is infantile and naïve, as Sienkiewicz's many critics argued? On the surface, this is a passive and defensive vision of the road to an independent Poland, a vision based on the principle "It will all work out somehow," according to which others "do" the history for us. But in Sienkiewicz's writing, the context of this position is more complex.[453]

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452 F. Nietzsche, "On the Use and Abuse of History for Life" – see footnote 74 above. This conviction is echoed in the dialog of Skrzetuski and Zagłoba.
– God is merciful! Evil passes! God is merciful! – said Jan Skrzetuski.
– Beware you do not blaspheme! – Zagłoba answered – all evil must pass, because if it lasted for ever, that would be proof that the devil rules the world, and not the Lord Jesus, whose mercy is infinite. [P III 95]

453 This context is also reflected in Sienkiewicz's political views. In an article entitled "Zjednoczenie narodowe" (National Unity), Sienkiewicz clearly expresses his conviction that the only thing that Poles can count on in the Russian Partition is growing autonomy within the borders of Russia. ". . . if the two greatest Slavic nations have to live together under a common state roof, then they will only live successfully if one does not crush the other's breast with his knee. For this reason, we can count more on the force of history [my underlining – R.K.], which demonstrates the senselessness of any other relation, than on an understanding of matters and good will, be it of the government, or particular parties in the Russian State Duma" (H. Sienkiewicz, "Zjednoczenie narodowe," in: *Dwie łąki*, Kraków 1908, p. 207).
But yet when he had seen the operation of this "force of history," which had brought Poland independence, he saw in it only an augury of new catastrophes. The relationship of the writer to Piłsudski's legions was a mixture of disapproval and admiration.
I agree that the majority is made up of people of good faith, but I cannot forgive them that they have lead astray and seduced thousands of the most noble of our youth, who wishing to fight for Poland, have grasped the first means to intervene and at present are

In the light of the displacements of historical traditions that the *Trylogia* makes, it is clear that, for Sienkiewicz, not knowledge but life is the most important arbiter of history. That is why, if the tale of the past does not stimulate the will to live, perhaps it is better to forget about it for a time (although that might be only the time of reading). Giving this other past shape as a story, order, beauty, and a happy conclusion, Sienkiewicz freed, for a while, the mind of the reader from the burden of recent history, of course his/her consciousness and imagination, but not his/her existence beyond literature. And this, indeed, is what Brzozowski accused him of – an unauthorized unburdening of the Polish historical imagination. The reproaches were justified. They provoked the question as to what connects us with such a past, the direct influence of which on contemporaneity is denied; or, in other words, what sort of past is it that cannot be recognized as the immediate cause of the contemporary? Is it still somehow close to us and important for life? But Sienkiewicz had defended himself earlier, anticipating the reproaches mentioned above. In his well-known lecture "O powieści historycznej," he insisted that what links us to such a history is, above all, its human, existential dimension.

> Here one could repeat Shylock's words: "Hath not a Jew eyes? hath not a Jew hands, organs, dimensions, senses, affections, passions? fed with the same food, hurt with the same weapons, subject to the same diseases, healed by the same means, warmed and cooled by the same winter and summer, as a Christian is? If you prick us, do we not bleed? if you tickle us, do we not laugh? if you poison us, do we not die? and if you wrong us, shall we not revenge?" ["O powieści historycznej," D XLV 117]

> A man of ancient times, an Italian from the Renaissance, an English Puritan, a Jacobin from the French Revolution, and a contemporary man are beings that are really different as far as the scope and quality of their concepts is concerned. But psychologically they are constructed alike, and as a result of that can perfectly well understand each other's feelings. ["O powieści historycznej" D XLV 118]

An anthropological similarity of history and contemporary experience does not, in Sienkiewicz's work, lead any concrete philosophy of history, the indication of some laws of history, by the force of which the acquaintance with the past gives us an understanding of our current and future fates. It allows him, however, to mention the genealogy of contemporaneity, while abandoning any chronology of

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fighting alongside the Prussians against civilization, against the freedom of the nations, and unwittingly are laying their hands to a fourth, and perhaps the most calamitous, partition of Poland.

Their intervention is political madness, but my heart is with them, and even with their military leaders, of whom one can at least say than instead of constantly deliberating safely and bowing down to the Austrians in Vienna, they are showing their faces in the field and holding up the fame of Polish manhood. [to Stanisław Osada, 12 February 1915, Li III/2, 163]

historical influence. To put it differently, Sienkiewicz does not question the fact that the past has determined the shape of current (also already historical) reality; but he asks which past has the greater meaning for the present?

In answer, he offered his contemporary readers their other history, but he concealed its accomplished future. Breaking off the continuity of the historical plot at the seventeenth century, he suspended any thought of history as an irreversible whole. He drew the reader into the seventeenth century, and in this way avoided the catastrophe of the Polish state in the eighteenth. He created an illusion of rapport beyond and above the break, so that the radically differing worlds of the seventeenth and the nineteenth centuries could reach out their hands to each other above the horror of the partitions. In this way, he permitted his readers to forget, for the time of their reading, that the future told to them in the novel of history also belongs to them, and is, in fact, the reality of the readers of the *Trylogia*. He was not the only one, but no one did it as effectively as he. The success of the *Trylogia* shows how great the social need was for a tale that elevated Poland's history, a history that appeared stunted to Sienkiewicz's Polish contemporaries. Humiliated by the partitions, and then by early capitalist modernization, society received from Sienkiewicz something quite splendid – a credible myth – but also something dangerous – support in its distaste for modernity, an alibi for an anachronicity of customs and civilization, which that same Sienkiewicz points out to his contemporaries in his feuilleton pieces and letters. Sienkiewicz never abandoned the positivist foundations of his world view, but he doubted in social salvation through knowledge. So he turned to Słowacki – to redemption through poetry, except that he reduced the demands laid of the "eaters of bread." He does not demand that people be turned into angels; spiritual and physical vigor are enough for him, in order to survive. Vigor must replace the lack of a state.

Unfortunately, both novel therapy, and the scholarly calm of the historian cannot remove the dissonance between the cognition and the experience of history's operations. The cognition of history entails that – as Nietzsche puts it with irony – the person who achieves such cognition "has perceived the delusion, the injustice, the blind passion, and in general the entire dark temporal horizon of that phenomenon and, at the same time, in the process he perceives its historical power. This power has now become for him, as a knower, powerless, but perhaps not yet for him as a living person."[454]

Sienkiewicz was neither naïve nor cynical. He realized perfectly that there is in history as much material to invigorate hearts and minds as there is to paralyze them – that is, the danger of passivity, of being frozen in expectation, of traditionalism, which prepares for the advent of the new by opposing it with

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454 F. Nietzsche, "On the Use and Abuse of History for Life" – see footnote 74 above.

what is already known and possessed. The vigor of heart and mind turns then into paralysis, stagnation, torpor, inertia. History may operate allegorically speaking like the gaze of Medusa.[455] This is history's double-edged blade, its *pharmakos*.

Rejecting the emancipatory narratives of Positivism, Sienkiewicz chose the historical novel based on epic and myth. He opposed the treatment of the historical novel as a second-rate genre, recalling *en passant*, that the historical novel of the first half of the nineteenth century (above all, the cycle of twenty-three *Waverly* novels by Walter Scott) was a link in the development of the novel as a whole, after which there came Balzac and the realists of the second half of the nineteenth century, and it was not a completely separate genre variety.[456] The fully realized, modern realist novel had to be a political novel in Poland in the nineteenth century, and no one from Sienkiewicz's generation dared to attempt that, since to do so would have required emigration, or the existence of a "second circuit" for literature. In successive historical novels, Sienkiewicz drew further and further away from his own times. However, I have the impression that he did this conscious that history, if it is to encourage, is at the same time helpless in any attempt to explain the increasingly complicated reality of the new age. To put it differently, for modern people a new, additional source of vigor was needed.

The characters in Sienkiewicz's contemporary novels do not read the *Trylogia*, nor do they read any other historical novels. Nonetheless, the operation of history goes on, *inter alia*, through the effects of "national character." This is visible in the scene in *Wiry*, in which Groński muses on Krzycki's gentry temperament.

> He certainly did not read Nietzsche, and yet in his veins there flowed along with his blood some kind of gentry superhuman element. If someone had seduced his sister, he would shoot him in the head like a dog, but since this was about a village girl, he did not give a fig. [W 55]

Not invigorating literature, but an unreflective, biological vitality has the power of life within it. Sienkiewicz does not recommend to Karol Potkański, who suffers

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455 "Perseus's limbs would have frozen at the sight of Medusa's head, had it not been for Pallas" – Linde gives this example from Lucan's *Pharsalia* (in Jan Bardziński's translation, Oliwa 1691).

456 See, for example: A. Welsh, *The Hero of the Waverley Novels*, New Haven & London 1963.
– A. Fleishman, *The English Historical Novel: Walter Scott to Virginia Woolf*, Baltimore 1971. – H. Orel, *The Historical Novel from Scott to Sabatini. Changing Attitudes toward a Literary Genre, 1814–1920*, New York 1995. – C. Bernard, *Le passé recomposé. Le roman historique français du dix-neuvième siècle*, Paris 1996. A similar distinction of contemporary and historical novels does not seem useful either in reference to postmodern literature, as has been shown by Elizabeth Wesseling in *Writing History as a Prophet. Postmodernist Innovations of the Historical Novel*, Amsterdam–Philadelphia 1991.

according to the writer from a weakness of the intellectual muscles, that he read historical novels, nor that he study history itself. Just as history does not strengthen his characters – Płoszowski, Bukacki, or Groński, and even the admirable Połaniecki, for whom – on the contrary – life appears full of Shakespearean "sound and fury."

> Nothing but the ridiculous human comedy, in which some deceive others, and the others deceive themselves; nothing, only the deceived and the deceivers; nothing, only errors, blindness, mistakes, lies about life, the victims of errors, the victims of deception, the victims of delusions, entanglements with no exit; the consoling and at the same time despairing irony that covers people's feelings, passions, hopes, as the snow covers a winter field – and that is life! [RP 647-648]

They do not need an "invigorating of their hearts," but an "invigorating of their brains," as Parnicki put in many years later, saying polemically about Sienkiewicz: "I am no opponent of invigorating hearts. But I think that it is necessary rather to invigorate brains."[457] When Sienkiewicz wrote three novels about "new people," he did not, therefore, perform another *volte-face* in terms of his literary world view, but directed himself toward the experience of the contemporary that has no analogy in the past, and that avoids difficult social topics. Already *Krzyżacy* and *Quo vadis* do not have any clear therapeutic function. What, if not history, is to be the energy that strengthens modern Polish thinking? Here Sienkiewicz has no clear project.

The early decades of the twentieth century bring with them two of the most influential projects for the modernization of Polish intellectual life – by Brzozowski and Boy. Both are founded, among other things, on a contestation of Sienkiewicz's model of literature. Brzozowski will emphasize that if Polish thought is to be modern, it must face up to the ethnic and social consequences of Darwinism and Marxism, but in politics it reckon with the permanent presence of Russia in Poland's future. In a free Poland, however, it is Boy, with his project of egalitarian enlightenment, who became the ideologue of a "normal," modern society. Despite differences, all three (Sienkiewicz, Brzozowski, and Boy) represent the energy and potential of a positive modernity, although the ageing Sienkiewicz seems lost among the radical tendencies of modernism, attempting ineffectively to balance the new and the old. He wishes for a compromise between tradition and the powerful changes of modernity, but he himself probably does not believe in that, realizing the unreality of the dreams of his final literary embodiment – Groński.

> He loved very dearly a Poland as he would have her be, that is noble, enlightened, cultured, certainly European, but yet not having lost its primeval features, and holding in her hand the banner with the white eagle. That eagle seemed to him one of the most noble symbols on earth. [W 87]

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457 T. Parnicki, *Historia w literaturę przekuwana,* Warszawa 1980, p. 415

Underrated by modernity, Sienkiewicz was, however, the writer who tried to make sure that history remained a home for humans, since – through Darwin – we had lost nature.

5. The weakening hand

> A hand, since I have taken that example, is not only a part of a body, it is the expression and extension of a thought that must be grasped and rendered.
> (H. Balzac, *The Unknown Masterpiece* I)

Sienkiewicz's letters bear witness to his continual ill health. The most frequently mentioned afflictions include complaints of the throat, hand, and – less often – teeth. Constant journeys, which ate up half of his creative life, are mostly pilgrimages to clinics, sanatoriums, and spas, where he went through a series of, probably, ineffective cures. In keeping with positivist rationality, he sees his ailing body as a mechanism, one that operates defectively for defined reasons. Therefore, he seeks for it an optimal climate, takes the advice of physicians, experiments on his own, above all with curative baths, in which he indulges whenever he can. Differently from the author, none of the characters of his most important fictions suffers from any complaint, if we exclude war wounds and the wounds of love. Health is a constant attribute of the characters, and this hegemony seems to be a sort of compensation for the writer's own ailments. Maria Korniłowiczowa asserts that its source should be looked for in an episode from the writer's early youth, when he was not accepted into a rebel unit during the 1863 Uprising.

> [His] silent tragedy was his small stature and his desperately child-like appearance. No one who did not know such sufferings would be able to grasp them. But each, most likely, will understand the blow that it was for a seventeen-year-old boy not to be accepted to go "to the forest" in 1863. To the end of his life, Sienkiewicz never got rid of the complexes connected to his wretched posture and lack of physical vigor. Of the curt refusal that he was given – "Children are not needed here" – only those closest to him knew anything. It was those very sufferings that made him make the diminutive Pan Michał the first sword of the Commonwealth, and to bestow superhuman strength on his favorite characters.[458]

Physical efficiency, activity of body and mind, finally pure strength, these are old virtues possessed even by Płoszowski or Petroniusz, and, thus, characters who appear to underrate the importance of this sphere of life are given over rather to reflection on the state of their minds or to esthetic contemplation.

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458 M. Korniłłowiczowa, *Onegdaj*, op. cit., pp. 25–26.

Among a whole series of such figures, Sienkiewicz created several others, whose common feature are delicate, somewhat feminine good looks. Although it is connected with power and activity, the softness that he gives these characters calls forth care and tenderness in their male friends and companions. Placed next to each other, they reveal a discreet trace of self-affirmation; as if the author were paying tribute to himself from the time of his early youth. The first clear realization of this move is Selim Mirza, the friend of the narrator in the short story "Hania" – "the son of Mirza-Dawidowicz, friend and neighbor of my father, by ancestry a Tartar and a Muslim, but from his grandfather's great grandfather's time settled among us, and from a quite distant time possessing citizenship and gentry status in these parts" ["Hania," D IV 29].

It may be that the Tartar roots of Sienkiewicz's family and the delicate looks of the young author of the *Trylogia* receive in this figure their first, allusive self-portrait. This is all the more interesting, because the portrait is split between Selim and the protagonist-narrator, called Henryk, who admires Selim and competes with him. In this way, the image of the friend is a projection of Henryk's better "I."[459] This understanding is strengthened by the narrator's comment that Selim arouses a general sympathy, with the exception of his father, who is vexed that the young Tartar is a better marksman and fencer than his son. The son, however, does not share the father's dislike, and as long as love for Hania does not cross their path, both young men love each other – "like brothers, they squabbled frequently, made up equally frequently, and their friendship remained indestructible" ["Hania" 31].

Not just Selim's temperament, wit, and chivalrous accomplishments impress the narrator, but his good looks do too. He watches him as in the moonlight in the bedroom he parodies an Arab prayer – "dressed now only in underwear, with those eyes raised to heaven, he was so lovely that I could not take my eyes from him" ["Hania" 36]. Descriptions of Selim's beauty outweigh even the description of Hania's character. Especially his eyes ("great, black, sad, and tearful eyes, which they say are often a feature of Georgian girls" ["Hania" 31]) arouse such rapture that the narrator does not hesitate to confess that "such eyes, gifted with such an understated sweetness when they were calm, I have never seen as long as I have lived, and I will never see more" ["Hania" 31]. In these exalted descriptions the narrator torments himself, for his account integrates the perspective of friend and lover, and the symmetry of rapture, with which he inspects one and the other,

459 Julian Krzyżanowski gives a different biographical inspiration. "For if his Polish model was one of the Dmochowski brothers, his cousins, one of whom was killed in the Uprising, a second model was , to some degree, also Kazimierz Sienkiewicz, the writer's older brother, who died at Orleans from a Prussian bullet" (J. Krzyanowski, *Pokłosie Sienkiewiczowskie*, op. cit., p. 172).

makes it impossible unambiguously to untangle who is the real object of the lover's gaze.

> Lovely black hair fell to on his brow, and he had cheeks that glowed with quick movement, and shining eyes from which gleamed merriment and joy. When he stood now by Hania, looking with curiosity in her eyes, a more beautiful pair of people no artist could have ever dreamed of. ["Hania" 72]

Through this motif, some kind of "unmanly" affectation creeps into the one-dimensional pictures of male brawn. It goes beyond the repertoire in Sienkiewicz's prose of the symptoms of male adoration for another man. In order to maintain the relationship of the estranged friends, the author removes the obstacle, disfiguring Hania and packing her off to a nunnery. In the continuation, that is in the story "Selim Mirza," "the young Tartar with an angel's features, the strength of an athlete, the courage of a lion, and a knight's coat of arms on his shield" returns ["Selim Mirza," D IV 166]. Caught up in the Franco-Prussian War , the long-time friends enjoy Parisian life, which however does not affect Selim though he welters in orgies, as if "the dregs lying at the bottom of the glass never clung to his lips, evil fell from that noble nature like dry sand from a rock face. [. . .] He was the same Selim from his childhood years, only more so" ["Selim Mirza" 166]. Selim's beauty is also seen by the soldiers under him. "The common soldiers called him 'Miss' because of his remarkable beauty" ["Selim Mirza" 220]. Henryk, too, constantly confesses his rapture at the perfection of Selim's body.

> Ah, for that lad was beautiful too, as beautiful as an artist's conception, with his angelic eyes that took you straight by the heart, with his head that had lines worthy of the sculptor's chisel, with his sublime, graceful figure, with winged youth and a wealth of life so boundless that the more he spent himself on all sides, the more he seemed to possess. ["Selim Mirza" 165]

This synthesis, which is Greek in origin, of beauty and physical accomplishment appears from now on irregularly in Sienkiewicz's prose. The figure closest to Selim is Bohun – "a warlord with a woman's face" [OM I 238] – but the delicacy of his looks vanishes under the influence of the expressive manifestations of the wildness of his character. Ketling's good looks, too, certainly possess feminine features: golden haired, with bright blue eyes, "he had a face that was delightful and still half child-like" [P III 183]. These looks last into the next part of the cycle, and the exceptional beauty of his features amazes even the narrator, because they seem to him "for a man – too beautiful" [PW 25]. With no fear of homosexual connotations (or deliberately summoning them up), the narrator quotes the soldiers' jokes about the friendship of Michał and Ketling, whom "because he was so clean shaven, they called Wołodyjowski's wife" [PW 187]. The model from "Hania" becomes even more obvious when we see that an obstacle to their friendship is Michał's relationship with Anusia; hence, "when he rode to Żmudź

for Mademoiselle Borzobohata, there came a time of *separatio*" [PW 187]. But Anusia's death, like Hania's illness, unites the characters once more.

The motif of the soldier-maiden appears in a minor form in *Na polu chwały*, when Łukasz Bukojemski says of the beautiful Jacek Taczewski that "he looks like a girl, and stabs like a reptile" [NPCH 58].

This theme is most extensively developed in *Legiony*, and here there are, also, the most repetitions and autobiographical allusions. The principle protagonist is described thus: "Marek Kwiatowski, a sixteen-year-old boy with a delicate, almost girlish, face and sad eyes, slender as a reed, looked a little like a page, a little like a poet" [L 3]. Just like Sienkiewicz, he does not succeed in joining an Uprising because he is too young – "he ran off, too, to Kościuszko's troops, but from there, too, they sent him back, as underage, to home" [L 14]. When at last he manages to join up with the Italian legions, he gains a nickname that we have already heard elsewhere.

> It spread abroad that General Kniaziewicz called him "Miss," so they too called him "Miss," but that only won him their certain care. [L 154]

Before that happens, Sienkiewicz once more spins a tale of an ambiguous friendship between two young men. The place of Henryk from "Hania" is taken in *Legiony* by Kajetan – Marek's half-brother – "at base, a not bad fellow, just a recluse, a book worm, and a quiet one. . ." [L 5]. The text multiplies discreet homoerotic allusions relating to this figure. So Klarybella, with whom Marek falls in love, makes no sensual impression on Kajetan. Kajetan's father, who wants to win her for himself, does not see a rival in his son, but only in Marek. The narrator somewhat smoothes over this lack of interest in a beautiful woman with the statement that Kajetan "told himself and persuaded himself that he did not like women" [L 29]. These are barely specks of the meanings that presage a scene which has no precedent in all Sienkiewicz's work. It is the relation of Marek's farewell, when he goes off to war. The participants in the scene are not, however, the hero and a woman bidding him farewell, or his parents, but a man who is not directly related to him. The remaining elements in the *topos* of the soldier's farewell remain unchanged.

> Kajetan, holding his brother's hand and blinking his eyes, stared at him for the last time. Once indifferent to his relative, now he loved him with all his soul. With his father his relations had always been distant, and as a result of his father's marriage plans they were destined to become yet more distant. So up to the moment when he drew close to Marek, the lonely misanthrope had loved him deeply, not just with a brother's heart, but with that of a parent. The young fellow had become for him the being that alone linked him to life. He felt that after his departure, he would remain still more solitary, and would simply have no one with whom he could share a single thought. Perhaps for the first time, he felt that learning could not be a substitute for

> everything, and that if his mind wound round knowledge as hops or ivy do around the trunks of trees, so, too, love must also find some such support.
>
> He looked, also, with a vast attachment into Marek's eyes, he looked into his almost girlish, clear face, and with a tightening of the heart, he thought that maybe the saber of some Croatian *pandour* would tear it deeply and disfigure those noble features. With his hand he stroked the lad's flowing hair and saw in imagination how the army's scissors would cut it. With every moment his grief swelled more and more within him, so that finally he took Marek in his arms and pressing him to his heart, he said in a broken voice:
>
> – You are too young for camp life. If only you had someone close to you there. . . . If only Cywiński! . . . Or if I could go, and you stay.
>
> But Marek returned his warm embrace and answered:
>
> – I cannot, Kajetan. You know I cannot. There lies duty, there service to the country, there the field of deeds, and the field of the blood debt. . . .
>
> – That debt is my duty.
>
> – No. Here learning shines to you like a torch, and with that torch you will bring light to our countrymen, and I, tell me yourself, what is my work here? Only looking for some purpose in life, only some falsity of phantasms and dreams, and nothing more, and all around emptiness. [. . .] O Kajetan, I will be eternally grateful to you for this heart, which you have shown to me of late. . . .
>
> – It will follow you everywhere. . . . [L 98][460]

This couple is interesting, built as it is out mixed stereotypes. These are mixed because the man who is going to war is characterized here by female adjectives and figures (page, poet, girlish face, long hair, the nickname "Miss," a fondness for phantasms and dreams). Kajetan, however is surrounded by "hard" descriptions and figures (dislike and love for his father, misanthropy, knowledge, tree trunk, support, torch). In effect, we have an opposition which becomes invalid before our eyes. Taking part in the war is already not the only criterion of manliness, and "the man of books" does not recall a limp-wristed effeminate. Manliness loses its obvious representations (well-known in the *Trylogia*). Perhaps this is

460 An error in pronoun use offers an outstanding sign in the edition quoted from. This is in the excerpt in which Kalrybella passes the enchanted Marek, who cannot get out a single word: "But before he recovered – she passed by, and following her the indifferent and cold Kajetan, who after a moment began to wrap him [my underlining – R.K.] in warm shawls and a thick fox-fur cape" [L 17]. The wrongly-used pronoun "him" (instead of "her") suggests that it is Marek whom Kajetan wraps in a cape and in shawls. In the context of the character's masked homosexuality, this error is meaningful, but it is necessary to correct it, for a further passage reads: "A servant next pulled on her short boots and cross-tied stocking-like warm overshoes – and both ladies along with the old chamberlain and with Kajetan disappeared beyond the glass doors of the hallway" [L 17]. Zdzisław Piasecki, rightly grumbling about the lack of interest in *Legiony*, sees in this scene only "sincere brotherly love" (Z. Piasecki, "Wokół *Legionów* Henryka Sienkiewicza," in: *H. Sienkiewicz – twórca i obywatel*, ed. W. Hendzel and Z. Piasecki, Opole 2002, p.313).

so because the worlds of "Hania" and *Legiony* are nineteenth-century ones, and, thus, close to the writer's own times. The transference of images of manliness and male friendship into a world that is closer to the author gives a completely different context to these phenomena and relationships. Externally the characters are the same – hunting, horse riding, duels, war; but internally they are decidedly different – a dose of melancholy, a lack of ideas for the future, a softness that is the result of reflection, of a different education, of a strange mixture of desire for war and tenderness, embraces, spasmodic confession. For Marek, the entry into the legions is an attempt to tear himself away from phantasms, dreams, and emptiness, an escape from his own weakness. War is for him a search for a purpose, for authenticity, and thus a spiritual matter in equal measure as it is a manifestation of violence. After all, Sienkiewicz by war cures Kmicic's anarchy, the Bukjemskis' stupidity and cruelty, Marek's destructive dreams, but the wars predicted in *Legiony* do not promise liberation, self-indulgence, but only a vague "fulfilling of sacrifice," "a payment of the debt." When history in the novel draws near the reader's memory, this weakens fiction's impetus, as if Sienkiewicz were embarrassed that art might become more important than the history that was still reality only a short time previously. Neither in *Na polu chwały*, nor in *Legiony*, does the plot get to the stage of a battle; war remains on the horizon, and the narrative, as it were, minces around in the prolog, delayed by a hesitant hand, until it dies without getting there.[461]

Irrespective of the complex and obscure reasons for his growing lack of faith in the literature of military adventure, Sienkiewicz was simply tired of writing. Terrified by his own decision to write *Krzyżacy*, he confesses to Karol Potkański (3 March 1897): "even more than the work itself, the thought afflicts me that this means again at least a year of torture. Every day I swear to myself that this is the last thing, and this time I will keep my word" [Li III/3, 68]. But he begins to doubt even in this, for a month later he writes to him: "often, however, I think that this just will not work. Everything has to have an end. For sure, too, I will stop at two volumes, because I feel I lack the strength. But what is strange in all that, is that it doesn't spoil my humor too much" [Li III/3, 74]. Finally, he completes the novel, and he even goes on to write four more (*Na polu chwały*, *Wiry*, *W pustyni i w puszczy*, *Legiony*), the comedy *Zagłoba swatem* (Zagłoba, the Matchmaker), and several shorter pieces of fiction. Adding to this a huge number of letters, occasional writings and journalism, one could doubt his declarations of being wearied with writing. Nonetheless, when we compare the quality of his prose

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461 "As far as *Na polu chwały* is concerned – I would prefer that the novel were not translated, because I believe it is defective. [. . .] In any case, I am so critical of *Na polu chwały* that most probably I will not write either a second or a third novel of the intended trilogy." To Kozakiewicz, 14 August 1905 [Li III/1, 229].

from the early twentieth century with that from the nineteenth, we cannot but notice a clear falling off, as if he were writing them with another hand, a worse one, the "left" one, which clumsily reproduces what the "right" one has learned.

Physiological metaphors that describe the progressive crisis of the creator are well justified. The writer laid great store by health. One can see this in his way of life, in the care (bordering on hypochondria) he paid to his health, and also in the countless pieces of advice that he gave to family and friends.[462] Illness meant something to him. It was something more than absence of health. It provoked fear as something that destroyed the active life, something that could tear itself out of any control, subordinating to itself the sphere of the soul too.

From a certain moment, Sienkiewicz's right hand was a particular cause of concern. In October 1895, he sustained a powerful contusion during a piece of comic competitiveness with a woman. As Maria Bokszanin informs us, Róża Raczyńska had introduced her sons to the author, at the same time showing off the strength of her hand. So she lifted up her elder son by a strap in his clothing. Sienkiewicz tried to imitate her feat, but the exertion caused a sudden palsy of the hand and a severe, long-lasting pain, which grew into a fear, lasting several months, that his right hand might be paralyzed.[463] Fear for the hand is also connected with

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462 He asks, for example, Karol Potkanski, who was looking after his son to pay attention to young Henryk's physical exercises – "Otherwise Latin and Greek will quickly exhaust him, especially when in later years a woman will help them" [29 March 1898, Li III/3, 114].

463 A note added by Maria Bokszczanin to the writer's letter to Jadwiga Janczewska, on the basis of the article by S. Wasylewski, "Bilotyny pana Sienkiewicza," *Gazeta Polska* 7 November 1937, p. 5 [Li II/3, 167].

Sienkiewicz himself writes to Karol Potkański that the palsy only appeared on the second day, but nonetheless a huge pain was plaguing him and he took morphine to relieve it.

I am writing with the greatest effort. This is the fourth day that I am almost fainting with pain in my right hand. I picked up little Roger with it, just as I picked up my own children – and on the second day it arrived. – It is a pain like sciatica in the leg; I can move it with difficulty. I put on compresses and I took medicine, antipirina, phenalicine – nothing helps. The doctor has been here every day. Only morphine brings relief, but also faintness. I am not writing *Quo vadis*" [12 October 1895, Li III/3, 28].

For the next ten years, pain and fear return in the letters, and, in reality, certainly do not leave the writer until his death.

For two days now, my arm and hand have made my life a misery, stopping me sleeping, and it is worrying that it is the right one. [to Karol Potkański, 17 September 1897, Li III/3, 90]

In my hand, I have an old neuralgia, which from time to time reminds me that it is there in a most painful way, and which after the funeral of my old friend came back to such a degree that until this moment I was unable to take pen in hand. [. . .] The doctors say that I must have pinched a nerve when carrying the coffin along with the others. [to Józef and Maria Kościelscy, 16 September 1900, Li III/1, 170]

concern for his health, and for the future of his writing. The contusion, although painful, appears to be episodic; but Sienkiewicz saw in it something more, and the stubborn return of the "subject of the hand" in his correspondence lets one see in this unfortunate occurrence the notation of a general fear of creative impotence. Six months later, although the pain had gone, he recalls to Adam Krechowiecki that it nevertheless comes back when he lifts heavy objects, and so he must be careful, given that he has to "defeat such a power with that hand, as is the Order of Teutonic Knights" [Li III/1, 319].[464] In Sienkiewicz's joke, the writer's hand is like that of a swordsman. But is this a joke for sure? For him, writing was a physical act, which invigorates the reader's mind, so that in literature he/she may find a strengthening of the will to live. Not long ago, Sienkiewicz had cured himself after the catastrophe of his second marriage by writing,[465] and now some months later, in November 1894, he had a crash, riding a bicycle without brakes, which led to a cut head and bruised shoulders. The closing years of the nineteenth century bring a mixture in the author's life of painful emotional and physical experiences, making him sensitive, for sure, to the particular doubleness of the human condition. His hand, mobile or palsied, becomes in this context a figure of the body-spirit genealogy of his writing, of the conviction that spiritual vigor has a strictly material base.

The first symptoms of a fear of loss of creative vigor appear after finishing *Potop*, written in the circumstances of the illness and death of his wife. In a letter to Janczewska, from 21 August 1886, he writes: "Before me lie several of the final pages – tomorrow all that has to be done is to look through and correct them. The whole work of many years is now behind me, and before me? – but I know what" [Li II/1, 170]. This was not just a conventional sigh accompanying the finale of an exhausting piece of work. Sienkiewicz scattered traces of this experience also in later works. Written in 1890, the novella "Lux in tenebris lucet" contains a passage that may refer to this exhaustion and to the birth of fear for the future of his writing. The author ascribes to the novella's protagonist, the widowed sculptor Kamionka, what may be his own previous experience of a double emptiness.

Prussia did neither of us any favors. You caught influenza, and I got neuralgia in my hands, which, to a greater or lesser degree, has not left me yet. [to Bronisław Kozakiewicz, 30 December 1905, Li III/1, 232]

464 But in a letter to Karol Potkanski, from 21 June 1896, he announces: "After *Krzyżacy* I intend to get out of harness – if not entirely, then at least from wagons that are too big" [Li III/3 50].

465 "I am writing hard at the *Połanieckis*. On walks, I lay out scenes from *Quo vadis* – and the *Krzyżacy* are outlined on the nearby horizon. From this moment I have decided not to abandon the epic, because this, and only this, torments least, and renews the soul best" [To Mścisław Godlewski, 7 April 1894, Li I/2, 211].

> There are no worse moments in the world than those in which a man feels that what he was supposed to do, he has done, that what he was supposed to experience, he has experienced, and that there is nothing more coming to him in life. For almost fifteen years, Kamionka had lived in the constant inner disquiet that his talent was becoming exhausted. [“Lux in tenebris lucet,” D VI 108]

The story of the weakening hand only superficially has an inciting event that opens the narrative. The anecdote about lifting the boy up is attractive, but its position in the biographical plot is contradicted by earlier references to problems with the hand. Already in 1876, during his stay in America, there was a hunting accident that held back sending the ninth installment of his correspondence for *Gazeta Polska*. The writer explained to the editor, Edward Leo, that he had had “an accident with his hand,” which was bitten and clawed by a cat he shot, and therefore he could not – he claimed – “write well for some time, and still and now my calligraphy leaves much to be desired – although everything has healed up” [Li III/1, 448]. This accident must have frightened him even more. He was, after all, only a rising star of journalism then, a literary intellectual living by the work of his hand, who dreamed of being a great writer.[466] But, of course, his worries were unnecessary, because in the following years he began one of the greatest careers in Polish literature.

Despite this, in the middle part of the cycle, we find a discreet notation of the return of “the problem of the hand,” in an enigmatic episode in *Potop*, when Michał Wołodyjowski is convalescing in the house of Pakosz Gasztowt. When, as a result of events that are not described, “he became bedridden: first there came bad fevers, then from the blow he had received at Cybichów, his right hand was out of action” [P I 8]. The silence of the text about the causes of this blow opens up a space of extratextual relations. The writer’s favorite character, compensating him (according to Maria Korniłowiczowa) for his youthful complexes, has problems with his hand identical to those that will bother the writer, some ten years later. I am not in the least concerned to trace here a prophetic dimension in the *Trylogia*, but to reveal the text’s symbolic language. For a short time, Wołodyjowski’s hand consumes his character, becomes a whole standing for the part that in this reversal is the remainder of the character.

> . . . the hand returned to health, but it would go numb again when there was bad weather in the world. All the Lauda folk were greatly worried about the hand, for they

466 He held pen and weapon with the same hand. “So shooting took up most of my day, but writing, too, was part of my usual activities. Some irresistible force compelled me constantly to share with readers this mountain idyll, so original that it seemed to me a fantasy and, as it were, some dream, but one that people of my profession so rarely came across, and one so healthy that it was a great calming force for me after my life in the city, and like the beginning of a second youth before the first had passed” [LPA 210-211].

> had seen it at work in Szkłowo and Sepielów, and there was a general opinion that it would be hard to find a better one in all Lithuania. [P I 97]

That the swordsman, immobilized by the author, with a doubly disarmed hand (without saber and without strength), is directed toward problematic matters, would seem absurd in the world of the *Trylogia*. Cut off from his “hand,” Michał turns out to be an amateur of the opera, which he saw during his stay at the royal court in Warsaw. Like a man of the world he tells Gasztowt’s provincial daughters of famous musicians and singers.

> For there in the choir women don’t sing, but men and young boys; some with thick voices, such as no bull will ever bellow with; others with thin voices so that even on the fiddle it couldn’t be thinner. [. . .] There’s serious musicians there: there’s Forster, famous for his subtle coloraturas, and Kapuła, and Dżan Batysta, and Elert, foremost with the lute, and Marek, and Milczewski with his fine compositions. All those when they strike up in the church, it’s as if you heard choirs of seraphim while you’re still awake. [P I 101]

Sienkiewicz owes Pan Michał’s outstanding acquaintance with the names of the famous artists in Władysław IV’s royal orchestra to Adam Jarzębski’s narrative poem *Gościniec abo krótkie opisanie Warszawy* (The Highway; or, A Short Description of Warsaw) (1643), parts of which, rendered as prose, served the Sienkiewicz to create Pan Michał’s monolog. The relevant excerpt, entitled “Musica abo capella Króla J.M” (Music; or, the Orchestra of His Majesty), is as follows in poetic form.

> *Włoszy nadobnie śpiewają,*
> *Jedni basem, także altem,*
> *Drudzy tenor i dyszkantem.*
> *Trudno przybrać BALTASARO,*
> *W Rzymie taki sopran raro.*
> *Masz tam z FORSZTERA altystę,*
> *W bas i tenor, dyszkatystę*
> *Gdy chce, wzgórę wyprawuje,*
> *Potym nadół wyśpiewuje*
> *Kilka oktaw, to nowina!*
> *Virtuoso, godzien wina!*
> *I COPULA z DZIAN MARYJĄ*
> *Gorgami subtelno ryją*
> *[. . .]*
> *Tam i ELERT wijolista*
> *Przedni, a GALOT lutnista.*
> *Skrzypkowie są, cud powiedzieć,*
> *Trzeba to każdemu wiedzieć!*
> *SIMONIDES kornecista,*
> *Dobry GRANICZNY sztorcista.*

[. . .]
MAREK Capellae magistrem
SKAKI, a wicemagistrem
PEKIEL, zacny organista,
Dobry z nimże komponista;
I MIELCZEWSKIEGO też rzeczy
Do grania, śpiewania grzeczy.
Włochów, Niemców, wokalistów
Dość i instrumentalistów.

(Italians sing the best of all,
Some sing bass, some alto warble
Others come in tenor and treble.
It's hard to surpass BALTASARO,
Even in Rome a soprano raro.
And, tho' he sings alto, FORSZTER,
Does bass, tenor, treble without a falter.
When he wants, to the top he'll go,
And then he likes to sing down low,
Lots of octaves, it's new to do so!
Worthy of wine, a virtuoso!
And COPULA with DZIAN MARIA
With coloraturos subtly please you.
[. . .]
There's ELERT, too, the foremost
On viol, and GALOT the lutist.
Violinists too, a wonder to tell –
Everyone should know this well!
[. . .]
On the horn SIMONIDES,
And GRANICZNY well the trumpet plays.
[. . .]
MAREK Capellae magister,
SKAKI vice-magister,
PEKIEL worthy organist
And a composer of the best;
And MIELCZEWSKI'S things
Just right to play and to sing.
Italians, Germans, vocalists,
Lots of instrumentalists.)[467]

467 A. Jarzębski, *Gościniec abo krótkie opisanie Warszawy*, ed. W. Tomkiewicz, Warszawa 1974, pp. 91–93. See also: K. Targosz-Kretowa, *Teatr dworski Władysława IV*, Kraków 1965.

It does not end here because Wołodyjowski takes his tale further, sharing with the girls his impressions of the opera *Dafne* (by Jacopo Peri or Marco da Gagliano), presented at court in 1683. Unfortunately, the Gasztowt girls recall Borges's Averroës, who labored over the translation of an extract from Aristotles's *Poetics* that deals with tragedy and comedy. In the short story, the famous philosopher, unable to find the equivalent words in his language, lays aside his work and sets off for a meeting with his friend Abul-Qasim, who tells him how he was witness to a theatrical performance in China. In the account, the word "theater" is not used, because it does not exist in the lexicon or cultural experience of the Moslem characters. So Abul-Qasim talks of the theater to listeners, who just like him, do not know the word "theater."

> It is not possible to describe that house, which was more like a single room, with rows of cabinet-like contrivances, or balconies, one atop another. In these niches there were people eating and drinking; there were people sitting on the floor as well, and also on a raised terrace. The people on this terrace were playing the tambour and the lute-all, that is, save some fifteen or twenty who wore crimson masks and prayed and sang and conversed among themselves. These masked ones suffered imprisonment, but no one could see the jail; they rode upon horses, but the horse was not to be seen; they waged battle, but the swords were of bamboo; they died, and then they walked again.[468]

Pan Michał gives his account in a remarkably similar manner. Unable to deal in concepts, he presents their content referring to a lexicon that his listeners know, such as, "church," "chamber."

> – What is that kind of theater?
> – How can I put it to you, *mesdames* . . . . It is the kind of place where they perform comedies and do mysterious Italian jumps. The chamber is so big, like many churches, full of noble columns. On one side sit those who wish to be amazed, and on the other they do all kinds of artistic things. Some machines go up and go down; others on screws go round in various directions; now they show darkness with clouds, and now pleasant brightness; on the top is the sky with the sun or with stars; underneath you sometimes get a glimpse of a terrible hell. . . .
> – O Jesus! – cried out the ladies from Pacunele.
> – . . .with devils. Sometimes there's the measureless sea, and on it ships and mermaids. Some of the persons let themselves down from the sky, others come up out of the ground. [. . .] it's all pretend, not real, and does not vanish if you cross yourself. You don't have anything of the evil spirit in it, but human invention. [P I 102][469]

This breach in the military-adventure narrative that normally totalizes representation is not to be underestimated, for it introduces the question as to whether the world of the *Trylogia* needs art. Or, to put in differently, what is the place of art in

468 Jorge Luis Borges, "Averroë's Search" (1947) from the volume *El Aleph*.

469 This part of Wołodyjowski's monolog is also a paraphrase of Jarzębski's text. Ibid., pp. 97-98. See footnote 467.

fictional history? Because by no means does this minor episode alter the fact that the tale of war has no competition, that nothing substantial apart from it happens in this world. Art comes when the heavy guns fall silent, but not only. The hand disarmed of its saber must be palsied, and then there emerges a space for art. In this there is the bitterness of recognition that violence constitutes one of the main mechanisms of history; that it is brutal and primitive force that shapes history more effectively than word or image. And thus the conversations about "artistic things" come to an end, because health returns ("already his hand moved better in the joints" [P I 103]), and with health war. However, something filters from one sphere to the other, and we note now the earlier traces that art impressed on the language of war, as if the distracted narrator forgot to change style and spoke of war in the language of a narrative on music. Thanks to the musical scene in *Potop*, we see that already in *Ogniem i mieczem*, Wołodyjowski was a "conductor of a concert of killing."

> He did not let [the battle] out of his sight, but having made fresh dispositions here and there, returned once more – and looked and reorganized, indeed just like the man who, directing an orchestra, sometimes plays himself, sometimes stops playing, and watches over everything constantly, so that each plays his own part. [OM II 85]

The contraband of male sensitivity within military discourse, or a parlor interlude in the shape of Wołodyjowski's monolog on the theater – these are ironic games. Connecting the hand of the soldier with that of the artist, Sienkiewicz is playing with the thought of the affinity of the impulses to create and to kill. The idea that those same instincts that drive war also inspire creativity establishes a community of culture and civilization. By directing literature toward life, and not only toward representation, Sienkiewicz spins a fantasy of literature as an equal partner in progress; of art that modifies the brutality of capitalist development, but that does not bow to that development in terms of dynamism, and in terms of a browniness of thought and feeling. In the rivalry of art with civilization and with nature, the author does not want to leave the field to the critical modern, which in weakness, death, and decadence sees the chance of getting off the Darwinian evolutionary road, or its sociological bastard development, social Darwinism. Contrary to this, he will insist that art is useless if it offers no succor in life. This is not a matter of simple compensation, the intoxication of fiction, which leads the engrossed mind to forget its duties to the real world. On the contrary, the end of art should be the stimulation of the reader's activity beyond reading, indeed, the stimulation of life itself, which as "lived" in Poland is inclined to a dangerous marasmus. "We are not born weaker, so nature is not to blame; we die weaker – that's our fault," asserts the not quite thirty-year-old Sienkiewicz [Cho I 194]. "Invigorating hearts" is the formula that most fully expresses his conviction that the ultimate

verification of the esthetic value of literature is its effects beyond esthetics in the life of the reader.

Despite the persistence of this element in Sienkiewicz's novels and journalism, the powerful "discourse of vigor" weakens by degrees. I would be reluctant to see the sources of this weakness in the simple exhaustion of the ageing writer's body, but rather in the melancholy consistency of his most famous concept of creation. Worked up in literary terms for a reader without a country, it quickly turned out to be something more. The more than a century-long popularity of his writing shows that this goes beyond the historical horizon of expectations of its contemporary readers. That means that it is literature itself – a variety of language that has the ability to overcome the contingency of its historical moment of utterance and to enter into the circle of subsequent contemporaneities. The melancholy inscribed in Sienkiewicz's conception of the operation of art is revealed in the recognition that it feeds on the weakness of its receiver, who lacks other impulses to life. Then, if it is what is weak that needs art in order to invigorate itself, what will happen when art has fulfilled its mission?

"Whoever has strength dispenses with the spirit," Nietzsche declares.[470] Sienkiewicz's writing belongs entirely to the nineteenth century, and especially to that part of it permeated by the idea of the unity of knowledge and art, so that allied they can describe modern reality and point out the paths of its further modernization. The impetus and energy of modern capitalism were to find an answer in spiritual and physical vigor, which would allow the individual, who was living through the accelerating tempo of the modern, to maintain an identity, assailed as that identity was by the forces of the market and the state. The Positivists' attempt to describe this process ends in fiasco, when the consciousness arises that modern society does not need art to develop economically and politically. Art and the modern state part company, as soon as they leave the territory that integrates them, that is the field of economy, cultural politics, and education, and they become indifferent to each other or antagonistic. Realizing this, Sienkiewicz stubbornly insisted that if literature is to be a social value, and not just an individual one, it must be the instrument of the will to live.

470 F. Nietzsche, *Twilight of the Idols*, op. cit. – "Skirmishes of an Untimely Man" 14.

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